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COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE ENGAGEMENT RATE ON FACEBOOK AND GOOGLE PLUS SOCIAL NETWORKS

Abstract:

An inexperienced online marketer or a company which is new to social media marketing may just be very happy if their business page is getting many likes. This is one of the biggest mistakes that can be made when using Facebook. The world's biggest social media platform provides countless tools for businesses to assess their performances; despite this, few marketers actually use them.

The best way to be successful on Facebook is to focus on the engagement rate, which is calculated as the number users that have interacted with a post (whether they liked, shared, commented or clicked on the photo or link) divided by the total number of the page's followers.

Most people like a page because they saw their friends did so or because they were interested in a particular brand at a certain point in time. Consequently, even with an impressive number of likes, many business pages do not get much interaction with fans, thus their content mostly goes unnoticed.

Meanwhile, when a high number of people are interacting with a brand, even if the number of followers is small, it means they are liking it, sharing its content and recommending the page to others. This means that the potential reach of that brand is much higher.

So which social media platform provides the best engaged audience? Where can companies find the best quality-driven users?

The purpose of this study is to answer these questions, by comparing the engagement rates on Facebook and Google Plus, using the social media pages of the YouSign.org petition platform. The study looks to analyze three major aspects. First of all, the post level engagement - how many likes, shares or comments a posts receives, on average. Secondly, the page level engagement, which assesses the number of people engaged as a share of the total number of followers. Third of all, we will have a look at the user's behaviour once they have accessed the YouSign.org website, in terms of the average duration of a visit, pageviews per visit and bounce rate (the percentage of single-page visits). With the help of these indicators, we will essentially determine which social network generates more quality to the above mentioned website.

Keywords:

social media marketing, social networks, Facebook, Google Plus, engagement rate

JEL Classification: M31, M37

1. Introduction

A page engagement rate is defined as the total number of users who interacted with that page – by clicking, liking, sharing or leaving a comment on any given post – as a share of the total number of followers of that page¹. This indicator offers a much clearer picture of what is happening on Facebook. Here is why. Most people like a page because they see their friends do so or because they enjoyed a specific brand at a certain point in time. Most people tend to forget about the pages they like, so a company with lots of likes doesn't necessarily reflect its degree of success on social media. This is because even if they have a high number of likes, they experience small interaction with their followers, thus their content goes mostly ignored. However, when many people are connecting with a certain brand, even with a small number of likes, it shows that more people are talking about that brand on Facebook, by liking and sharing its content and, generally speaking, recommending the page to friends and family². This is why brands should focus more on engagement rates as opposed to the number of likes. The higher the engagement, the more people are promoting a brand on social media.

2. Studies regarding the engagement rate on Facebook and Google Plus

A recent study carried out by Forrester Research, a consultancy, has revealed that fan engagement on Google Plus narrowly trails Facebook and is nearly twice as much as Twitter³. The company analyzed more than 3 million user interactions with more than 2,500 brand posts during the first quarter of 2013. Facebook's average engagement rate was .073%, Google Plus .069% and Twitter .035%.

Another Forrester survey determined that 22 percent of more than 60,000 US online adults stated they logged in on Google Plus at least once a month – a huge gap compared to Facebook's 72% but the same as Twitter. When combining these two statistics, it is clear that Google Plus should be in the social media marketing mix. Actually, the author of the report, Forrester Research vice president Nate Elliott, advises brands to try to mimic their Facebook efforts on Google Plus as well.

Another study by tech blog Shareaholic⁴ reveals that YouTube and Google Plus drive the most engaged users of all the top social media platforms. The study compels data from a six-month period across 200,000 websites with more than 250 million unique monthly visitors.

¹ <https://www.facebook.com/help/178043462360087>

² <http://www.socialmediatoday.com/content/why-engagement-rate-more-important-likes-your-facebook>

³ http://marketingland.com/dont-neglect-google-79228?utm_campaign=socialflow&utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=social

⁴ <https://blog.shareaholic.com/social-media-traffic-engagement-03-2014/>

3. Objectives and research methodology

In order to put these theories to the test, we compared the engagement rate on Facebook and Google Plus. To do so, we have used the social media pages belonging to YouSign.org, an online petition platform. 25 posts from both social networks were analyzed to conduct this study.

The research encompasses a three-dimensional level. First of all, the post level engagement – the way in which users interact with the posts on both Facebook and Google Plus, taking into account the specific actions undergone by users, such as liking, sharing, commenting or clicking on a certain post. Secondly, the page level engagement: the total number of people who engaged with the posts as a percentage of the total number of followers. To determine this, we have looked at the total number of comments, shares and likes per 1.000 followers for each social network. Thirdly, we will assess the engagement of the users once they have accessed the YouSign.org website, in order to establish which social network provides more quality-driven users to the above mentioned website. We looked at the average visit duration, pages per visit, bounce rate (the percentage of single paged visits) and the percentage of users that have completed a certain goal (i.e. signing an online petition).

4. Comparing the engagement rate on YouSign.org's Facebook and Google Plus pages

For the first part of the research, we have determined the total number of likes, shares and comments for the 25 posts analyzed on Facebook and Google Plus. In addition, we have calculated the conversion rate (the number of comments per post), the applause rate (the number of likes / +1's per post) and the amplification rate (the number of shares per post).

The data has been compiled in the following table:

Table 1 The total and average number of likes, shares and comments on Facebook and Google Plus

Metric	Facebook	Google Plus
Total number of likes / +1's	1,611	2,478
Average number of likes / +1's (applause rate)	64.44	99.12
Total number of shares	467	763
Average number of shares (amplification rate)	18.88	30.52
Total number of comments	299	1,205
Average number of comments (conversion rate)	11.96	48.2

Source: Google Analytics; Facebook Insights

The statistics indicate a clear advantage in favour of Google Plus at every category. For instance, the total number of shares and +1's is 1,5 higher than on Facebook, while the total number of comments is four times higher. This means that Google Plus users show more interest in YouSign.org's posts than Facebook users.

However, a new set of metrics needs to be calculated, due to the fact that the total number of YouSign.org's followers differs on Facebook and Google Plus. At the time of this study, YouSign.org had 205,000 followers on Facebook and 21,000 followers on Google Plus. In addition, followers on each social media network have unique characteristics⁵, which need to be taken into account when comparing the two platforms. The relative applause rate measures the number of likes or +s per 1,000 followers⁶; the relative amplification rate shows the number of shares per 1,000 followers⁷ while the relative conversion rate shows the number of comments per 1,000 followers⁸

Table 2 The number of likes / +s, shares or comments per 1,000 followers on Facebook and Google Plus

Metric	Facebook	Google Plus
Relative applause rate	0.31 likes / 1,000 followers	4.72 +s / 1,000 followers
Relative amplification rate	0.09 shares / 1,000 followers	1.45 shares / 1,000 followers
Relative conversion rate	0.05 comments / 1,000 followers	2.29 comments / 1,000 followers

Source: Google Analytics; Facebook Insights

Note: The number of Facebook followers = 205,000

The number of Google Plus followers = 21,000

Although the YouSign.org petition platform has fewer fans on Google Plus than on Facebook, the users are more engaged and relate significantly better with the content they are provided. The relative applause rate is 15 times higher on Google Plus; the relative amplification rate 16 times bigger, while the relative conversion rate, a staggering 45 times higher when compared to Facebook.

Until now, we have analyzed the engagement on social media. In the final part of the study, we are looking to determine the engagement and the quality of the users once they

⁵ <http://www.truesocialmetrics.com/support/how-to-interpret-results>

⁶ Relative applause rate = # of likes or +s / (# of Posts * # of Fans) * 1000

⁷ Relative amplification rate = # of shares / (# of Posts * # of Fans) * 1000

⁸ Relative conversion rate = # of shares / (# of Posts * # of Fans) * 1000

have entered the YouSign.org website. In order to establish which social network brings the best engaged users to the above mentioned website, we have considered metrics such as average session duration, pages per visit, bounce rate (people that have left the website after viewing a single page) and the goal completion percentage (the share of people that have signed an online petition). The study was conducted between April and June 2014 and encompasses over 1.8 million users.

The data is compiled in the following table:

Table 3 Social media post click engagement on YouSign.org's website

Metric	Facebook	Google Plus
Number of users	1,735,182 (94.81% of total visits)	21,213 (1.16% of total visits)
Bounce rate	54.87%	28.47%
Page views / visit	2.21	3.98
Average session duration	1:49	4:41
Signed a petition	549,971 (31.7% of Facebook visitors)	12,377 (58.35% of Google Plus visitors)

Source: YouSign.org database

Facebook has managed to drive the most social referrals to the YouSign.org website – a whopping 94.81 per cent. Even though the number of Google Plus users is significantly lower, these users are more engaged when compared to the ones on Facebook. For instance, the number of page views per visit is almost double; the average duration of a Google Plus user is 4 minutes and 41 seconds, while Facebook users spent, on average, just 1 minute and 49 seconds surfing the website; 58.35 per cent of Google Plus users have signed a petition, as opposed to only 31.7 per cent of Facebook users.

5. Conclusion

After analyzing 25 posts from each social network, we have determined that Google Plus users are more engaged with YouSign.org's social media content than Facebook users. The average number of comments, likes and shares are all in favour of Google Plus. As a result, in 18 of the 25 posts studied, the total reach (the number of people who have seen a post) has been higher on Google Plus, despite the fact that YouSign.org had almost ten times more followers on Facebook.

We have also determined user behaviour once they enter the YouSign.org website. Although Google Plus has driven 80 times less referrals than Facebook, it has provided more engaged and quality-based users: the people that entered the website through Google Plus spent more time on the website, visited more pages and signed more petitions.

All in all, Google Plus users identify themselves better and are more interested in interacting with the content provided by YouSign.org when compared to the users on Facebook.

6. References

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6. Google Analytics, Facebook Insights

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