
A STUDY ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ORGANIC VS. PAID SOCIAL MEDIA FOR NEW BRANDS

Dr. Vaneeta Raney**ABSTRACT**

Today, with the advent and overall presence of social media in the industry and the minds of people alike, the fundamental manner in which new or upcoming brands place themselves in the market has evolved. So, irrespective of the size or budget of a brand per se, each has access to the exact same platform as the largest or most well-established companies. However, it is essential to highlight that access alone does not equate to optimal results. Therefore, with this paper, the author seeks to uncover the answer to a question that most debutante brands must confront, i.e., which is a more effective path when it comes to brand awareness and visibility between organic and paid social media. This paper seeks to analyze the same by means of secondary research; here, we delve into a review of existing literature and brand experiences in order to evaluate the limitations and strengths of both paths. Here, the findings draw attention to how both strategies have a key role in their own respect. However, their effectiveness is drawn from factors like how, when, and with what purpose they are being used by a certain brand.

Keywords: paid social media, organic social media, new brands, effectiveness, brand visibility, awareness.

INTRODUCTION

The first order of business when a new brand is launched is that it is tasked with its most basic yet fundamentally urgent challenge: visibility. Given the current media scenario and its digital nature, social media naturally becomes the first battleground where the challenge is meant to be fought. Thus, social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, and LinkedIn present new brands with a vast scope of opportunity to connect with a huge number of audiences in a short amount of time while conveying the means to build a community as well as to make a distinct identity for themselves, and all this is a significantly lower cost than traditional advertising would have offered.

So, within the scope of social media marketing, there are two paths to take here: organic marketing that includes all non-paid efforts, such as general content posting efforts, influencer partnerships, community posting, and platform-native engagement (platform-native formats, i.e., stories or reels), or the other, i.e., paid marketing that includes targeted advertisements, sponsored content, and also boosted posts that are offered by the platform for a fee. With both strategies, the aim is to increase the brand's presence, but their core differences mean their speed varies.

Now, considering these factors for a new brand, it is paramount to decide when and where to spend their money and time when it comes to choosing between these two paths. It is a detrimental early decision that could make a huge difference. Thus, this paper seeks to examine both strategies, with the purpose of understanding which of them provides more effective results when it comes to visibility and brand awareness.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Existing literature highlights the evolving role of digital marketing in brand building.

Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2022) emphasize the importance of integrated digital strategies, while Tuten and Solomon (2021) discuss how social media enables direct consumer engagement.

Aaker (2014) highlights the importance of consistent brand identity, which is often nurtured through organic content. Industry reports from HubSpot (2024) and Hootsuite (2024) suggest that paid media drives faster reach, whereas organic content builds deeper engagement over time.

Nielsen (2022) indicates that consumers trust earned and organic content more than paid advertising. Similarly, Zajonc's (1968) theory of mere exposure supports the idea that repeated organic interactions strengthen brand recall.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

It is essential to note that the current study is completely based on secondary research. All insights and data have been derived from published industry reports and preexisting academic literature; this further includes previously released brand case studies and digital marketing studies available in the public domain. Thus, primary data collection was not done. Secondary research, as a method, was chosen since it allows for a wider analysis of existing research or evidence on the topic, ensuring that it is ideal for the purpose of this exploratory research paper.

Understanding Organic Social Media:

Organic social media marketing is built on the premise of earning attention as opposed to paying for it. The journey here goes something like this: a particular brand creates content in whichever form it be, static images, videos or reels, stories or posts, which then go on to be published on a social platform, from where they are distributed to one's followers or, in the instance that they do well in their performance, they also reach a wider audience by means of algorithmic promotion or sharing.

So, for fresh or new brands, organic marketing presents an array of smart advantages. One, it costs nothing, direct media spends, and also makes it accessible to brands with a limited budget. It further gives room to a brand to develop and, as a result, communicate its identity in time, thus allowing it to nurture a consistent voice, aesthetic look, and presence that its audience might come to associate or recognize, making room for trust further. When organic content is resonated with by means of comments, shares, or saves, it has the scope to reach audiences that are much larger than the brand's current follower base, and all of it at no added charge.

However, it is also essential to note that with organic marketing for a new brand, one of the most daunting limitations is reach. This is because social media is primarily algorithm-based, and this means that content released from established engagement histories tends to be prioritized more. As a result, brands starting from zero, at least in the beginning stage, are likely to reach only a limited audience, irrespective of the fact that maybe the content they are putting out is top-tier in quality. When it comes to curating a meaningful organic reach, it is important to be consistent and patient and go in with the understanding that it's going to take time, and none of this is something that comes easily when the brand is under pressure to grow and prove itself at the early stage.

Understanding Paid Social Media:

As opposed to organic, paid social media is fundamentally direct. It allows brands to place their content right in front of the audience they specifically want to reach. This is done by paying the platform where they are marketing for distribution. A number of paid social media marketing tools are used here; this includes Meta Ads, Instagram promotions, and even YouTube pre-roll campaigns. With such tools in their arsenal, brands can very well target specific types of audiences with filters in place like location, age, interests, and behavior, thus ensuring that the content or messaging that they are putting out is actually reaching the right audience, an audience that is most likely to be interested and actually take action that would benefit them as a brand.

This is one of the very, if not the most, compelling advantages that paid media can offer, i.e., speed. While organic marketing is both tedious and might take months for the content to gain any traction, if it does at all, a well-structured paid campaign is capable of yielding thousands of impressions within days or even hours sometimes. Thus, making paid media increasingly valuable at the time of critical moments for a brand. For example, if they have a new product launch, or at the time of a seasonal campaign, or other such crucial point moments, where a few extra eyeballs at the right time in terms of visibility would go a long way.

However, one limitation that comes with paid media would be sustainability. This is because when the brand is dependent on paid media, the moment the brand stops putting money into the marketing effort, the visibility that came with the payment disappears. This is because, as opposed to organic content, where the traction to be seen was always there, irrespective of the paid content, paid ads only exist as long as the brand has the budget to spend on ads. And if the brand is new, it likely has a limited set of financial budget and resources. Thus, creating a dependency that can be tough to maintain in the long run.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

When it comes to evaluation of organic and paid social media on the basis of visibility and brand awareness, each of them creates a compelling yet an incomplete case on its own. As per preexisting research, it is often seen that paid media tends to overshadow organic in terms of performance in the short term as a result, generating prompter awareness and enhanced initial reach. Thus, when it comes to a brand that wants to make themselves a common name, paid advertising takes up the top spot in terms of available reliable tools.

Research consistently shows that paid media outperforms organic in the short term, generating faster awareness and broader initial reach. For a brand that needs to make itself known quickly, paid advertising remains one of the most reliable tools available.

On the other hand, when it comes to long-term brand presence, the script tends to flip. Here, organic content that is consistent, authentic, and community-driven is more inclined to generate stronger brand associations over time. This is especially true when it comes to audience experiences, i.e., in the case of an audience that is made aware of a brand organically, whether it is via a recommendation, a shared post, or even an algorithm-surfaced

content piece, they tend to engage with it on a deep level as a result, retaining this information more durably as compared to an audience to whom it might have reached via a paid promotion. Such a level of deeper engagement paves the way to stronger brand recall and a more persistent brand presence in the minds of consumers.

This reasoning also directs attention towards an important behavioral shift that is dominant among social media users, i.e., the increasing resistance to paid advertising. Consumers, especially those of the current generation, i.e., Gen Z and Gen Alpha, are highly tuned in to identifying and recognizing sponsored content and promptly choose to ignore it in most cases. This is due to ad fatigue, which in turn diminishes the effectiveness of paid social media or ad campaigns. This places the onus on content that is more genuine in comparison to promotional content.

Considering all this, the evidence signifies that just one of these strategies is not enough or sufficient for a new brand. While paid media is quite effective as a tool for creating initial reach and awareness, organic media is equally important for the brand to build sustainable brand depth and visibility that will eventually snowball into a lasting presence for them.

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

1. While organic and paid social media are both effective tools for new brands, they tend to function on different timelines and deliver varied results. While paid media builds prompt awareness, organic media builds presence on an eventual and durable level.
2. Furthermore, paid social media delivers faster and increasingly measurable initial visibility, as a result making it a valuable tool, especially at the time of a brand's initial launch phase. But it is crucial to note that this impact is directly associated with certain expenses and is bound to stop as soon as the investment stops.
3. Another noteworthy factor is that organic social media curates a stronger and relatively lasting brand association over a period of time. This is possible only with a consistent effort and substantial commitment over a longer period in order for it to yield meaningful results.
4. Moreover, the concept called 'ad fatigue' is a real and increasingly relevant challenge for paid media marketing. This is especially the case with consumers under the age of 35, since they are known to be actively disengaging from content they identify and recognize as sponsored. Given this understanding and cognizance of the consumer, the authenticity and the content quality of paid marketing efforts are just as crucial as their targeting.
5. It is often witnessed that new brands that simultaneously deploy both strategies, i.e., paid media, intending to generate initial reach, and organic content, with the aim to sustain and enhance brand presence, tend to frequently outperform those that rely on simply one of the said strategies.

CONCLUSION

The question here of which of the two, i.e., organic or paid social media, is better for new or up-and-coming brands does not have a yes-or-no answer. This is because, in order for the two strategies to yield any substantial results, it needs to be understood that these are not competing alternatives, but rather they are complementary tools. While paid media solves a new brand's most pressing problem, which is being seen, organic media doubles down on its most enduring one, i.e., being remembered.

Here, it is crucial to note that since this research is limited in its reliance on secondary sources, supplementary or follow-up research involving primary data would provide a more enhanced and detailed insight into the topic. This can be executed by interviewing new brand founders or conducting surveys with audiences to gauge their perspective to study the other side of this study. Moreover, as social media platforms continue to evolve rapidly, the relationship between paid and organic strategies is likely to shift, making this a valuable subject of research.

So, to conclude, the most authentic guidance for new brands that are currently tossing between a decision on where to invest is to use paid media to nudge the door open while at the same time using organic media to set up the room once they are in. Here, the most crucial role, on the part of the brand, would be to understand that each strategy plays a unique and distinct role; it is on them that they deploy the necessary use of both tools to their advantage effectively and proportionately. With consistency and intention, they can better position themselves to gain early visibility and subsequently turn this into a lasting presence that makes the best of both approaches as opposed to relying on just one.

SUGGESTIONS/ RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Establish a clear brand identity before deciding on paid media:** A brand needs to recognize that paid media is a tool that will amplify what a brand already is, nothing more, nothing less. Thus, new brands must first and foremost work on establishing a consistent and clear identity by means of organic content. This is because while paid content campaigns are run, eventually they can be used to reinforce a brand that is recognizable as opposed to an undefined one.
2. **Make use of paid media deliberately, not permanently:** When it comes to paid media, it must be used as a tactical tool and with clear intent, best reserved for key moments for high impact. This can be in the time of major campaigns, launches, or product releases, as opposed to keeping them running on a continuous basis. By doing this, brands can keep a tab on their finances and persevere with budgets at the same time, making sure visibility is still possible when it is needed most.
3. **Treat organic content like a long-term asset investment:** This is because, as opposed to paid marketing or advertising, organic content tends to accumulate with time. It is similar to a repository of consistent and high-quality posts that work to build a brand's online presence on a platform while constantly reaching varied audiences, even long after it was originally published. So, new brands must treat organic content creation not as an afterthought but as a primary and necessary business function.
4. **Recognize and measure the right metrics:** When it comes to measuring the results of a paid campaign, new brands tend to focus predominantly on metrics like click-through rate and impressions. While these are important, brands must also ensure they track indicators of organic variety that are indicators of brand health, i.e., engagement rate, follower growth, direct searches, and brand mentions. These metrics help one see a more complete picture of real visibility and awareness quotient among the consumer and track authentic brand image development.

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