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# **The effects of social media marketing on brand awareness through Facebook and Instagram**

Case: Company X

Thesis

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SeAMK School of Business and Culture  
Bachelor's Degree in International Business



SEINÄJOKI UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

## Thesis abstract

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The aim of this research is to investigate the effects of social media marketing on brand awareness, through Facebook and Instagram networks. Company X as the case company, who desires to leverage social media networks to develop online presence in a cost-effective way. During the working time at company X, the author is encouraged to address and deliver in-depth insights about social media marketing, along with its current trends, impacts and opportunities. Furthermore, by incorporating theories with practical study, the author could enhance her competency in such field, which is beneficial for her career path.

The main question in this research is: "How social media marketing impacts on brand awareness?" To answer the question, theoretical and empirical research are presented. Previous studies provide a based understanding about the concepts of branding, brand awareness, social media marketing and their applications in business perspectives. Main secondary sources include textbooks, e-books, academic journals, theses, government publications, other Internet references.

The impact of social media zones on community creation, engagement, content interaction, and website traffic are examined empirically. A quantitative method is implemented to gather statistical data from social media outcomes of the case company, from October 2020 to March 2021. For data collection and analysis, secondary and primary research are employed, with a deductive approach.

The results help the company to map out the audience insights, see what works and what does not during social marketing campaigns. The conclusions are made based on literature reviews and the metrics which were retrieved. The findings indicated that social media zones and their usage in marketing might help a company gain significant brand exposure.

<sup>1</sup> Keywords: social media, social media marketing, brand awareness, social networks, Facebook, Instagram

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## Terms and Abbreviations

**MGC** Marketer-generated content (MGC)

**UCG** User-generated content (UGC)

**US** United States

**&** and

**/** or

**%** percent

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Thesis background

The current trend of social media usage in today's twenty-first century has been tremendously increased. In January 2021, over 4.66 billion internet users exist of which more than 4.2 billion users are active in social media. (We Are Social; Hootsuite, 2021) The rise of social media also affected consumer behaviors with a retailer brand. For example, out of 100 consumers who follow a brand on social, 87 visit the brand's website, 78 recommend that brand to family or friends, 67 increase spending with that brand, and 53 engage with that brand on social (Barnhart, 2019). In fact, the development of mobile technologies has driven the social media usage in the last decades. As of the year, more than 3.6 billion users have been active in social media. (Statista, 2021) Hence, it is critical for brands to leverage social media networks to boost visibility and enhance brand communication with target customers. It can be said that mobile devices and digital means have played an indispensable role in human life. (Kemp; We Are Social; Hootsuite, 2020)

The emerging of Internet and social media usage encourages the author to do research about its impacts on the business development. Moreover, the author of this research could also enhance her knowledge within the social media marketing field by linking theories with practical situation. Regarding the case company X, owned by a Vietnamese entrepreneur, has just entered the US e-commerce markets as an online retailer. The company desires to leverage social media networks as part of their marketing strategy for increasing brand visibility and engagement. The case company has been active on Facebook and Instagram channels since October of 2020, but there is not yet a comprehensive social media report. As well as the resources spending on its social media marketing was limited, the company also needs an up-to-date marketing analysis and strategy. Addressing the need for social media enhancement, the author took the opportunity to study the gaps between company's performance and social trends during her practical training in the case company. As part of their marketing team, the author can address the current issue and gather every aspect of company internal insight. By investigating the impacts of social media on brand awareness, analyzing its social accounts between October 2020 and March 2021. Hence, the company can map out the audience



insights, see what works and what does not during previous campaigns. As a result, delivering practical and useful information for the case company to achieve its business goals in a cost-effective way. On the other hand, the author can acquire deeper understanding about the social media aspects, as well as figure out how to apply them into practices, which is beneficial for her career path.

The thesis aims to investigate the impacts of social media marketing on brand awareness through a case study. Both secondary and primary data will be used to provide in-depth information for this research. It is crucial to collect previous studies to gain a general knowledge in the field of social media marketing which will be reflected through a case study. Main secondary sources used in this research include textbooks, e-books, academic journals, theses, government publications, other Internet references. This research focuses on the analyzing results from case company's Instagram and Facebook accounts as a primary data. The quantitative research method will be used to gather statistical data, along with the deductive approach to structural data analysis. Targeted research involved the case company's audiences on Facebook and Instagram accounts. The findings related to the effects of community building, social engagement, content interaction, brand awareness on these two platforms. To obtain the results, analytical tools are employed to gather necessary data, such as Google Analytics, Later Tool, Instagram Insights and Facebook Business Suits. The outcome of this research is essential for start-up companies with limited resources to gain customer insights as the case study.

These findings will be beneficial for the company to explore the opportunities to build online social networks, which platforms are best used for building brand awareness and interaction, as well as increase website traffic and sales.

## **1.2 Research objectives and research questions**

The research's objectives are to provide the information about the impacts of social media in marketing on brand awareness via most popular social platforms, particularly Facebook and Instagram. Hence, the outcome of this research is essential for start-up companies with limited resources to gain valuable customer insights through a case study. In other words, this

research will be beneficial for the case company who has just been entered the US e-commerce market. Internationalization and social media always encourage the author to do this research and enhance her knowledge in this field. Afterwards, the concepts of social media marketing will be clarified, followed by the effects of social media on brand awareness, giving out a broader picture with the case study investigation.

The main research question is: How social media marketing impacts on brand awareness?

Sub-questions for the main question are:

- What are the main characteristics of social media, current trends and usage of social media in marketing?
- How do social media zones impact company X's brand building through Facebook and Instagram channels?

### 1.3 Thesis structure

The thesis consists of four main sections, the introduction, the theoretical part, the experimental research part, and the conclusion.

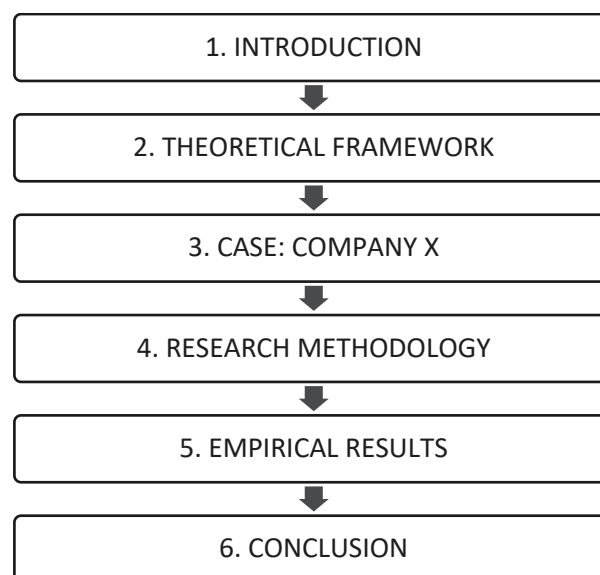


Figure 1. Thesis structure

There are six main parts in this thesis, including the introduction, theoretical framework, case company, research methodology, empirical part, and conclusion. (Figure 1) The first chapter introduces the thesis background, research objectives, and structure of the thesis. Next, the theories focus on exploring the concept of branding, social media, and the usage of social media marketing through Facebook and Instagram channels. This part serves as a preparation for a more in-depth examination with real-life situation. The third chapter gives information about the case company's background, who desires to investigate its social media effectiveness. Chapter four demonstrates information about chosen methodologies for the research, along with data collection method. Followed by chapter five, the important results gathered from case company's social media accounts will be analyzed in statistical manner. In the last chapter, a discussion about how previous studies and empirical findings linked to support the research objectives. Besides, the research limitation and recommendations for future research are also mentioned in this chapter.

## **2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

On this section, literature reviews for the following concepts will be clarified: brand, branding, brand awareness, social media, and social media marketing. With preliminary literature reviews, the researcher will get a sense of the research problem and challenges at hand, as well as how the proposed research would fit into them. (Goddard & Melville, 2007) This part provides beneficial information from previous studies serves as a foundation for further experimentation.

### **2.1 Branding**

#### **2.1.1 Brand and branding**

Brand is “a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of these, that identifies the products or services of one seller or group of sellers and differentiates them from those of competitors.” (Kotler & Armstrong 2018, 250) Moreover, a brand is the company’s promise to offer its consumers a simple, precise, and honest experiences.

A brand is more than a name, or a logo. (Farhana, 2012) Hobkirk (2012) stated that a brand represents who you are, how people identify and remember you through your “visual identity, verbal dialogue and tone of actions.” Simply put, a brand is an intangible marketing concept that assists consumers in distinguishing a company, a product, or individual out of its competitors. (Hobkirk, 2012) In fact, Apple, Google, Microsoft, the Amazon, and Facebook were the most valuable brands in 2020, according to Forbes (2020). For that reason, Kenton (2018) concludes “brand” as one of the company’s most essential and valuable assets.

Most products and services are now branded. (Kotler & Armstrong 2018, 251) For instance, salt has a label, and common bolts and nuts have a distributor's label. Horizon Organic milk, Dole Classic salads, and Perdue poultry are all brands of grocery products such as vegetables, dairy goods, and meats. They also noted that one of the most crucial aspects driving a consumer's purchase intention is a brand. As stated in the study of Kotler and Armstrong (2018), brands should add desirable features to their offerings in order to stand out within a

competitive marketplace. Other famous brands giving positioning benefits are Walmart (save money), Instagram (capture and share moments), and FedEx are among the other well-known corporations that offer positioning benefits (guaranteed on-time delivery). (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018) They emphasized that branding brings numerous benefits for both organizations and consumers. Whereas customers play an important role in brand communication and development, something that organizations should not neglect. When a consumer is undecided between two similar products from different companies, a brand provides a shortcut for the decision-making process. (The Branding Journal, 2015) As a result, a buyer can quickly assess the quality and information of a product based on its brand name and message.

It is critical to distinguish between the terms brand and branding. Hobkirk (2012) clarified that, a brand is a solely marketing tool while branding is the process of building a brand. In other words, brand refers to a company's image where customers are more willing to choose its items over those of competitors. (Hobkirk, 2012) While branding refers to a company's ability to stand out in the field by highlighting its advantages over competing products. (McCartney, 2012)

### **2.1.2 Brand awareness**

The customer's perception of a brand or a product is defined by its brand image. (Management Study Guide, 2019) The mentioned study also emphasizes that this involves associations such as reputation, benefits, and qualities. To make brands more visible, online networking activities or building relationships are being associated with brand awareness, which is perceived as a business or personal brand. (Coles, 2015) Keller (2001) assumed that brand awareness is the ability of a consumer to recognize and recall a brand under related elements. Customers can, for example, identify the brand name, image, style, and logo with distinct memories, indicating that the brand has obtained customer awareness. (Management Study Guide, 2019) Packaging, advertising, and public relations are examples of ways to enhance a brand's image. In general, consumers are likely to consider a brand when making a purchase if it has a positive image. (Management Study Guide, 2019)

In recent research from Spacey (2017), the aspect of brand awareness has taken a slight shift. She underlines various connected elements, such as emotional, physical, and cultural values, influence one's level of awareness. In this scenario, brand awareness refers to all information about a brand, including a customer's ability to recall emotion, information, or impressions formed in their thoughts. Simply put, new and niche brands are more focused on establishing brand awareness, while dominant brands benefit from brand recall. (2017, Spacey)

## **2.2 Social media**

### **2.2.1 The concept of social media**

Social media is a website or application that allows its users to create and share content while engaging with other users (Hudson, 2020). Kotler and Armstrong (2018, 521) defined the concept of "social media" as, independent and commercial online social networks where individuals gather to interact and share messages, ideas, images, videos, and other content.

The phrase "social media" is divided into two parts: "social" since we are social beings, and "media" though it is published on the Internet. (Coles 2015, 4) In other words, it is a communication platform that allows people to communicate with a large number of individuals at once, and the internet has accelerated the process. Social media consists of Web 2.0 Internet-based software that promotes the creation and sharing of user-generated content and is developed on ideological and technological rudiments. (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010, 61). Blogs, Microblogs, Social Networks, Media-Sharing Sites, Social Bookmarking and Selection Sites, Analysis Sites, Forums, and Effective Worlds are some of the most common examples of social media. (Saravanakumar & SuganthaLakshmi, 2012) To put it simply, social media allows individuals and organizations to share personal messages, ideas, and other media such as videos. (Merriam-Webster, 2018; Tuten & Solomon, 2018). Social networking, photo sharing, blogging, reviewing, and online communities featuring user-generated content are examples of social media activities. (Charlesworth 2018, 7; Investopedia, 2018)

Hajli (2015, 361) regards the concept of social media based on a study of Borgan (2010) as, “the online content developed by a variety of people who are open for access over the internet. In other words, social media is the shift of people’s attention on the online platforms where people share, discover and read information and gain knowledge”. According to Ahmad (2011) and Hajli (2015, 361), social media can be grouped into three types.

### **Publishing Technology for everyone**

In the advancement of technology, social media is considered as a free, open space for internet users; it is not restricted to any physical location. Everyone can create or share information and connect with one another on online social platforms; (Hajli 2015, 361, according to Ahmad 2011)

### **Information Diffusion**

When compared with traditional media such as newspapers, television, and magazines, the rate of diffusion of social media is relatively high, meaning that social media spreads information more quickly. (Hajli 2015, 361) According to Ahmad (2011), online social media outlets such as Facebook and Twitter transfer data more rapidly at low cost than other media. Traditional firms prefer to promote their products or services on television and in newspapers, according to Barefoot and Szabo (2010), which is a one-way conversation. However, the rise of online social media has enabled firms to interact with their customers in real time, collecting input for business improvement. Furthermore, in terms of sharing knowledge, social media provides an open and equally accessible setting for everyone; (Hajli 2015, 361, according to Ahmad 2011)

### **Relationship building**

Users usually access social media to interact with individuals all around the globe, exchange vital information, and collect unique ideas. For example, thanks to online social media, a user in the United Kingdom can contact and exchange information with a member in New Zealand. (Hajli 2015, 361) According to Mayfield (2008), the main characteristics of social media are

openness, participation and engagement, discussion, community, and connectedness. He also mentioned that the main reason people join social media sites is to create a profile and then socialize with peers in both the online and offline. Rather than being a one-way communication route, it is a two-way communication channel. (Mayfield 2008)

### 2.2.2 The zones of social media



Figure 2. Social media zones and exemplar vehicles (Tuten & Solomon, 2021)

Individuals may communicate with an infinite number of people at any time via social media, which bridges the gap within mass and personal media. (Tuten & Solomon, 2021) From their research, similar channels are categorized into four within a narrow area due to the rise of various social channels and vehicles. Figure 2 indicates four social media zones, which include social community, social publishing, social commerce, and social entertainment. (Tuten & Solomon, 2021)

**Zone 1: Social communities** refers to social media platforms that strive to improve relationships and interaction between people with a common interest or background. Online users engage in two-way communication, with the most common activities being sharing,



socializing, and talking. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Reddit are some of the most popular social networks. (Tuten & Solomon, 2021)

**Zone 2: Social publishing** is the creation and distribution of content used on social publishing sites. (Tuten & Solomon, 2021) The key activities include editorial, commercial, and user-generated content. In which, blogs (bloggers, Tumblr), media-sharing sites (photo, video contents like Instagram, Flickr), music and audio sharing (Soundcloud), or presentation sites (SlideShare, Scribd) are examples of content types. Social publishers stimulate the communication between individuals, professionals, brands, and media businesses. (Tuten & Solomon, 2021)

According to Influencer Marketing Hub (2021), media - sharing networks, which refer to social media platforms where users exchange photos, videos, and other sorts of content. Compared with other networks, these sharing sites tend to capitalize on the creativity of published content. Furthermore, various forms of social media are processed to generate positive results in terms of Return on Investment (ROI) and brand engagement. Visuals are processed 60,000 times faster than texts by the human brain, and 90 percent of information transmitted to the brain is visual. (Thermopylar Sciences + Technology, 2014) Thus, brands gain benefits from media-sharing sites, whether they want to gain exposure, grow networks to promote a product, or collect valuable feedback and visual user-generated materials as social proof to strengthen brand trust and equity. (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2021)

**Zone 3: Social entertainment** comprises performances, activities, and events which provide engaging environment for internet users to entertain themselves. Several social media vehicles are integrated to support this zone, such as communities and entertainment like Spotify and Tiktok; or multi-zone online networks like Instagram and YouTube. (Tuten & Solomon, 2021)

**Zone 4: Social commerce** allows the adoption of social networks in the online purchasing, shopping, and selling of products and services. (Tuten & Solomon, 2021) In the form of shared experiences, recommendations, and opinions, social media outlets can influence buying decision. From community markets (Facebook or online retail stores that operate on a social site) to community marketplaces (peer-to-peer channels as Etsy), and social networks lead to

sales conversion. As a result, businesses might make use of social shopping, which has a direct impact on a customer's decision-making process. (Tuten & Solomon, 2021)

As a newly established company entering the online markets in the US with limited resources, company X currently focuses on leveraging these two fundamental zones, include social communities and social publishing. While gradually exploring the opportunities for social commerce in business leads. With the findings, the company could modify their marketing strategy by investigating the applications of social media in marketing and branding enhancement.

### **2.2.3 Types of content on social media**

It is important to consider the different forms of online content on social media. Marketer-generated content and user-generated content are the two primary types of social media content, both of which are significant for brand recognition. (Jelyta 2015)

#### **Marketer-generated content**

Marketer-generated content (MGC) is a form of marketing that is entirely produced and managed by the brand, to strengthen its communication on social media. (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016) Nearly 90% of brands use social media to promote their products or services. (ElAydi, 2018) Social media updates by a brand, such as text, images, videos, and other promotions to inform its customers about brand offerings considered as brand-generated contents. These types of content are commonly found on company-owned websites, corporate blogs, and social networking sites, such as brand posts on its Facebook page. (Jelyta 2015)

According to Martínez-Navarro & Bigné (2017), marketers can deliver messages to customers through various social networking sites. For example, Facebook fan page is commonly used as a hub for brand communication due to some advantages. Firstly, social networking sites is relatively free access to online users regardless boundaries and time differences. Thus, this is one of the most crucial ways to leverage social media sites to reach the potential consumers and enhance brand exposure. Secondly, businesses can improve the interaction with

customers by publishing more contents on these online communities. More important, immediate transactions can be done by loyal consumers if relevant offerings are promoted by their favorite brand. (Martínez-Navarro & Bigné, 2017) In general, MGC tends to be favorable to a company's existing customers who are already fans of the brand and actively seek more information about its offerings. (Jelyta, 2015)

### **User-generated content**

User-generated content (UGC) refers to content created by customers or users rather than by the company. (Scott, 2015) Volunteers often contribute content in the form of blogs, wikis, tweets, images, videos, or audio files, along with testimonials, to promote enterprises that customers follow on social media. (Rodgers & Thorson, 2017) On another study, the OECD (2006) describes qualified UGC as a) content that is released online over the Internet, b) displays a certain level of creativity, and c) generated as a personal invention rather than professional practices.

Compared with marker-generated content, consumer-generated material has been shown to have a greater impact on brand experiences. (Goh, Heng & Lin, 2013). They discovered that online community activities and social media participation in general lead to more positive purchasing decisions. According to Datawords Group (2020), visual UGC on social media sites is more influential than brand-generated posts for 85 percent of consumers, with roughly 60 percent of users admitting that peers affect their buying decisions. For instance, by including UGC as a major part of their content strategy, Lush fresh handmade cosmetics encourage even more followers to contribute their photos, creating in a powerful advertising effect. Moreover, consumers nowadays want consistent brand experiences and visual content for inspiration and validation, initiating with brand awareness and consideration. (Datawords Group, 2020) As a result, businesses should incorporate user-generated content as a crucial part to boost brand awareness on social networks.

For the case company, visual user-generated content plays a significant part in their social marketing strategy. Aiming to create an engaging and trusted communities for its participants, the company often promote images, product reviews generated by online users and their

customers. To avoid copyright issues, credits to the owners must be given in every post through tagging, mentioning the original creators over Facebook and Instagram channels. Besides, the content publication must be consistent and relevant to the desired niche, such as publishing plant-related photos to engage plant lovers around the world. Through this research, the company desires to investigate whether visual user-generated contents bring more value than branded posts.

## 2.3 Social media marketing

### 2.3.1 Social media networks

This thesis mainly focusses on studying the Facebook and Instagram channels due to the fact that these are the most popular social media platforms used by international brands. (Hootsuite, 2020). Most importantly, case company is being active in these two platforms, which are Facebook and Instagram.



Figure 3. Digital around the world (We Are Social, 2021)

Kotler and Armstrong (2018, 521) discussed about the surge in internet usage has resulted in a rash of online social media and other digital communities. Nearly 45 percent of internet users said that they use social media networks to search for brand information about products or services. (We Are Social, 2021) These smaller communities are made of like-minded individuals who have at least one similar interest, opinion, or background. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018; Hajli 2015, 361) They also pointed out that there are more beneficial for brands to target specific groups. An example of niche site, Goodreads is an online community where 55 million readers can “Meet your next favorite book” and share their thoughts. (goodreads.com) FarmersOnly.com offers online dating services for “country folks” who enjoy nature, peace, and countryside life, “because city folks just don’t get it.” (farmersonly.com) (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018) With a proper marketing strategy, social media can benefit both brands and users in an interactive way.

There are several social media platforms are continuing used and developed among different ages, preferences, and geography. Social media is part of daily routines of many users. Regarding the Americans, with seven-in-ten Facebook users, about six-in-ten Instagram and Snapchat users visit these sites at least once a day. (Pew Research Center, 2021) Evans (2012, 168) proposed that, each of the social media sites has a potential effect, for example, Facebook is commonly used for a personal network, while LinkedIn is used for professional purposes. Nowadays, almost everyone is being active on Facebook, checking out photos on Pinterest or Instagram, or videos on Youtube as a part of their daily lives. According to We are social (2021), as shown in figure 3, the number of global social media users reached approximately 4.2 billion at the start of 2021, an increase of 13% over the previous year. In 2020, the typical person spent 2 hours and 25 minutes per day on social media, a significant increase due to the COVID-19 epidemic. (Hootsuite, We are social, 2021) Undoubtedly, marketers will not ignore this opportunity to follow their customers and ride an enormous social wave. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018)

For businesses, social networks can strengthen their online presence to reach their target audience. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018) There are two methods for such participation: entering current social sites or creating their own. However, networking on existing social media platforms usually requires less effort but has certain drawbacks. First, results are difficult to

measure since most brands are still learning how to use them efficiently. Another reason is that brands cannot control over such social networks, which negative information will quickly spread. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018) Hence, rather than counting on one-way communication, marketers may learn to become more involved in their customers' conversions and treat them as friends. Popular brands such as Coca-Cola, Nike, and Dunkin' Donuts, for example, have established their own online communities on Facebook, Google+, Twitter, Instagram, and other social media platforms. Social media marketing helps brands grow because of its efficiency and low cost. (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2021)

## **Facebook**

Established by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004, Facebook remains the largest social network with 2.8 billion monthly active users. (Figure 4) When it comes to social media platforms, Facebook is a great way for businesses to reach out to a big number of potential consumers. Its success is due to its accessibility via multiple mobile apps and a mobile website (Statista, 2021) As stated, Facebook's mission is "Giving people the power to share." It is a virtual home where friends can meet, share their photos and stories or even to preferable brands. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018) On Facebook, anyone can follow famous people and pages or react to other posts in a real-time. (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2021)

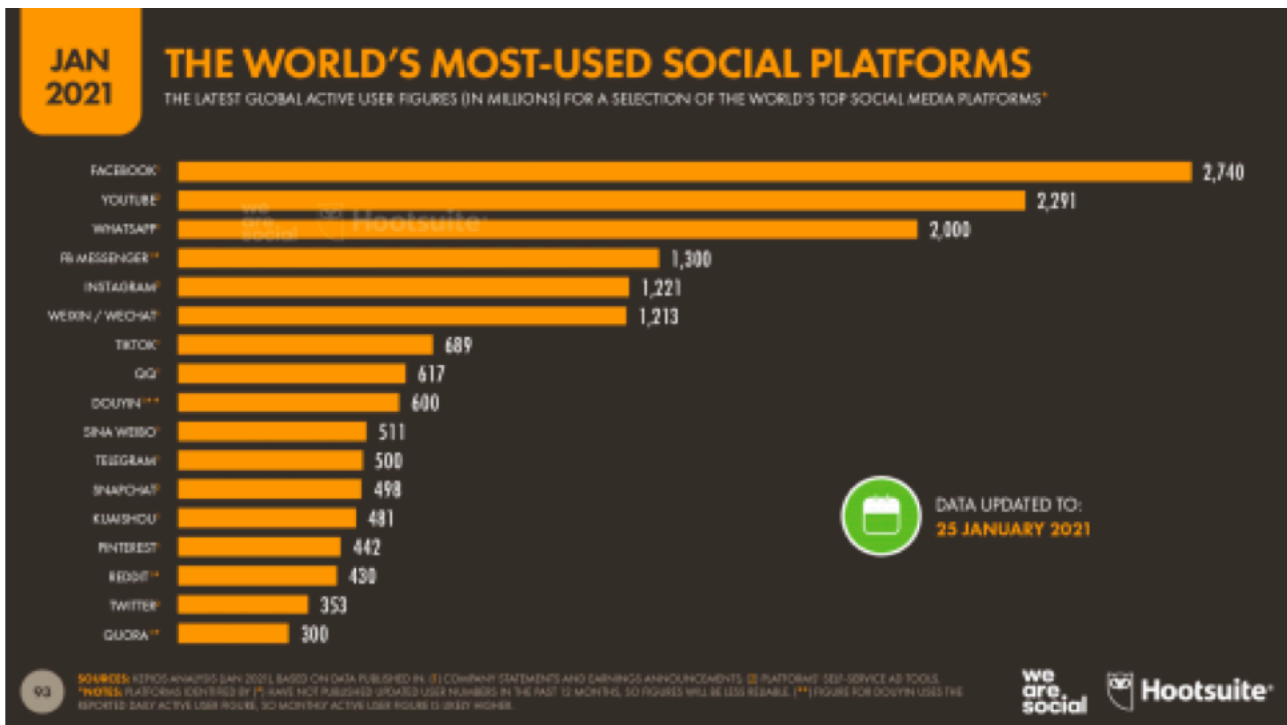


Figure 4. The world's most-used social platforms (We Are Social, 2021)

In the data reported by We Are Social, Hootsuite and Statista (2021), at least 6 platforms currently have more than 1 billion monthly active users. (Figure 4) A study from GWI indicates that at least 98 percent of users on any social media platform also being active on at least one other social site. Interestingly, 85 percent of TikTok users aged between 16 and 64 years old saying that they use Facebook, while nearly 95 percent of Instagram users also use Youtube. (We Are Social, 2021) This concept of audience overlaps has excellent opportunities for marketers. In fact, brands can present on one or two largest platforms, which potentially reach almost social media users rather than participate in all platforms. Hence, many businesses focus their marketing efforts on the most suitable “niche” platforms. This strategy will not only strengthen the brand performance on social media sites but also reduce costs and risks. For brands, it is reported by Hootsuite (2021) that 66 percent of Facebook users visit a business page at least once a week. While there are 18.3 percent of users made a transaction through this platform in 2020. (Cooper, 2021) Such data provides useful insights for marketers to select the most preferable platforms to build online presence and gain highest effectiveness.

## Instagram

With more than 1.2 billion monthly active users, Instagram ranked 5th among the most popular social networks worldwide, as of January 2021. (Statista, 2021) (Figure 4) Owned by Facebook since 2012, Instagram is a mobile photo and video sharing network. (Forsey, 2021) Due to Instagram's mobile phone phenomenon, and the surge of internet and mobile usage, there has been a significant growth in online users. In 2018, 99.2 million online users in the United States solely accessed social media networks via mobile devices. (Tankovska, 2021; Statista, 2021)

According to (Forsey 2021; Hubspot 2021), Instagram's demographics were reported as,

- "49.2% of Instagram users identify as men; 50.8% as women
- 63% of Instagram users are between 18 and 34 years old
- Only 30% of Instagram users are above the age of 35
- Worldwide, the largest Instagram audiences are in the USA, India, (140 million each) Brazil (99 million), Indonesia (85 million), and Russia (56 million)" (Forsey, 2021; Hubspot, 2021)

Such image-based platform is a fascinating tool for generating a storyline through shared visuals. (Squires, 2016) Users' picture posts, for example, would feature in the Instagram news feed, everyone who follows them will be able to follow, like, or comment on those images. Hashtags, photo tags, and shareable content on stories and feeds are all powerful tools for increasing visibility. (Squires, 2016) In which, Instagram story enables users to share pictures that will be deleted after 24 hours. These archived stories, on the other hand, can be viewed in an account's highlights. (Sanchez, 2018) As of the year 2020, there is a competition between these two popular pet hashtags on Instagram, that can attract a great attention. On this platform, #TeamDog generated 44 million #dog posts, whereas #TeamCat only obtained 33 million updated #cat posts. There is a battle between these two trending hashtags of pets on Instagram, which gain extensive exposure. The #TeamDog accounted for 44 million #dog posts



on this platform, while #TeamCat is only contributed with 33 million updated #cat posts. (Statista, 2021) Hence, businesses may catch up with the latest trends in social media to get involved in their customer's conversation, then adjusting offerings from these insights.

Instagram can be used as a marketing tool to develop a brand presence in the most exclusive possible way. (Sanchez, 56, 2018) Instagram users like being inspired, entertained, and connect with businesses and other users. Most significantly, Instagram's visual nature allows firms to reach a broad number of customers. According to a recent report by Hootsuite (2021), there are 200 million Instagram users visit a brand profile at least once per day. The average engagement rate for a post from a business account is 0.96 percent. In addition, 81 percent of Instagram users usually find information about products or services on the platform before making purchase decision. (Hootsuite, 2021) According to Katie Keating, an IBM Social Content & Engagement Strategist, Instagram is an optimal choice for small and non-profit enterprises since it is the best story telling venue to raise brand awareness and get connected to your audience, which is vital for a company.

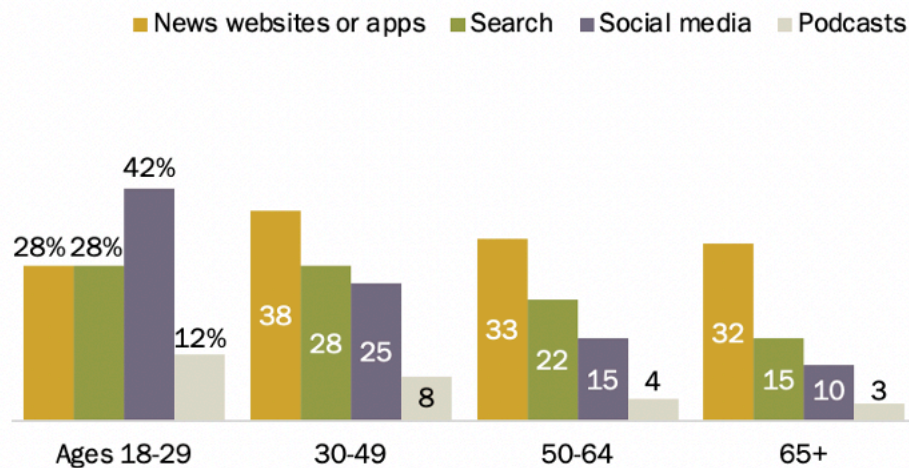
### **2.3.2 Social media in marketing**

Marketing, according to the American Marketing Association (n.d.), is the activity, set of institutions, and methods for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging value-added offerings to consumers, partners, and public at large. Whereas social media is a significant setting for marketing due to its accessibility to people and functionality. (Tuten, 2021, 19) She also underlines that "social media marketing" is the use of social media technologies to create, communicate, deliver, and trade value-added offerings to company's stakeholders. In the digitalization age, the concept of social media marketing is diverse and constantly updated. Some authors propose social media marketing as an effective tool for networking and interactions between brands and their customers. (Vinerean, 2017; Yadav & Rahman, 2017; Tuten & Solomon, 2016). Furthermore, they also emphasize the importance of using social media platforms to achieve business objectives, such as increase customer engagement, loyalty, and purchase intention.

Digital advancement and its impact steadily emerge. According to current trends, more and more people are becoming actively on social media, and businesses should not neglect this fact. According to a Pew Research Center survey (2020), due to the impacts of the COVID-19 epidemic, a vast majority of Americans are more likely to get news via digital media. As shown in figure 5, about two-thirds of U.S. adults stated that they acquire news occasionally from websites or apps (68%) or search engines like Google (65%). More than 53% of respondents in the United States said they get news from social media "often" or "sometimes," while only 22% said they acquire news from podcasts "at least sometimes." (Shearer, 2021; Pew Research Center survey, 2021) Facebook comes out on top of a list of 11 social media sites when it comes to being a frequent source of news, with about a third (36%) of Americans using it on a regular basis. While Instagram (11%), Reddit (6%), Snapchat (4%), LinkedIn (4%), TikTok (3%), and other social media sites are less likely to be regular news sources. (Shearer, 2021)

**Online, most turn to news websites except for the youngest, who are more likely to use social media**

*% of U.S. adults who get news often from ...*



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 31-Sept. 7, 2020.

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER**

Figure 5. % of U.S. adults who get news from digital platforms (Pew Research Center, 2020)

In the digital age, individuals can interact virtually with information, people, and businesses across the globe at almost any time. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018) The "Internet of Things" facilitates this connectivity through various digital platforms in terms of speed, convenience, cost-effectiveness, services, and brand engagements. The rise of the internet and digital technologies, according to Kotler and Armstrong (2018), has a significant impact on both marketers and shoppers in the market. As a result, during COVID-19 lockdowns, new online shopping trends have increased substantially. In 2020, around 77 percent of internet users aged 16 to 64 reported they make at least one monthly online purchase. (We Are Social, 2021) According to Statista (2021), the Fashion & Beauty market accounted for the largest share of global B2C e-commerce revenues, with over US\$665 billion.

### 2.3.3 The effects of social media on brand awareness

According to Kotler and Armstrong (2018), using social media in marketing indicates both advantages and challenges.

Social media marketing may benefit a company in a number of ways. A firm can reach millions of people by conducting marketing campaigns. The beneficial aspects of social media can be described as below.

- **Targeted and personal** – social media enable the creation and exchange unique content with specific individuals and customer communities. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018)
- **Interactive** – it is critical for marketers to be active in customer conversations and attain valuable feedbacks for business enhancement through social media sites. As an ideal platform for two-way communication, social media helps businesses in relationship building with customers. (Kotler & Armstrong 2018, 523) For instance, TOMS shoes run a two-week #withoutshoes campaign in 2015 and got positive results. The company donated one free pair of shoes for every person who posted a bare feet picture on Instagram. As a result, over 296,000 pair of shoes gifted, brand's amiable message spreading to millions in every corner of the world. (Shorty Awards, 2015)

- **Immediate and timely** – People can quickly reach the other users around the globe and engage in relevant marketing content. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018) In other words, the “real-time communication” helps marketers to get trending customer insights at any time, thus making brand messages more relevant. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018) stated that social media is a tool, which is commonly used for collecting the most relevant and frequent “customer feedback”. Whether a user likes the content posted by a brand or not, it will be reflected through their interaction on social media posts. (Dahl 2015, 154) In simple words, the real-time communication on social media helps businesses to attract new customers while retaining existing ones.
  
- **Cost-effective** – marketing through social media is much cheaper than the traditional media such as newspapers or TV. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018) Since not all firms can afford big-budget marketing expenses, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Depends on firm’s ability and objectives, social media can be achieved with low cost but highly effective outcomes. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018)
  
- **Engagement and social sharing capabilities** – which is one of the primary goals in marketing. On social media channels, brand can create a virtual community for its members to communicate, share information, experiences, and boost brand visibility. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018) Users share the contents they like, and these shares bring several benefits for brands such as increase awareness. (Caruth, 2016) An example of Etsy, which is an online marketplace stated as “Your place to buy and sell all things handmade”. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018) Etsy community is created for people to learn, contribute, and exchange ideas about handmade and vintage merchandises. Through digital platforms, Etsy engages 780,000 brand followers in Instagram, with active networks of 24 million buyers and 1.6 million sellers around the world. (Kotler & Armstrong 2018, 524)
  
- **Track and measure:** Another strength of social media marketing is that marketers can listen to, track, and measure what is shared on social media sites and analyze the data to enhance service delivery thereby adjusting it all to the demands of customers. (Kotler

& Armstrong, 2018) The impact of social media on a company's marketing plan can be measured very quickly using social media analytics and metrics. (Sánchez Abril, 2012)

In branding perspective, brands may build brand awareness by maintaining an active presence in the social spaces where target customers "dwell" and incorporating social media into the marketing mix. (Tuten, 2021) According to a research from Stelzner (2019), 93 percent of marketers said that "increased exposure" is top of their goal to achieve through social media. Followed by "increased traffic", "generated leads", which accounted for 87 percent and 74 percent respectively. Statista (2021) also reported that, by the end of 2020, "increased exposure" (94 percent) is a primary reason of applying social media marketing among worldwide professional marketers. Whereas "Improved traffic", "lead generation" and "growing fan loyalty" are following reasons why marketers leveraging social media platforms to achieve business's goals. (Statista, 2021; Stelzner, 2019) These studies illustrate the relationship between social media and brand awareness enhancement.

However, social media marketing has challenges, according to Kotler and Armstrong (2018). To begin with, many businesses are uncertain how to use social media in a way that is effective and measurable. Secondly, brands do not have power to control over social media content, users likely take the notions. In many cases, the negative information about business is transmitted faster than the positive words. Rather than interfering, marketers should become part of customer's conversations to create valuable community. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018) For instance, in 2016, Aldi Australia urged fans to "#tellus when they became an Aldi fan." on Twitter. Nonetheless, when the brand's hashtag was substituted with a bashtag, the campaign had a negative impact. "You are going into the consumer's backyard" on social media. One marketer says, "This is their place." Another argues, "Social media is a pressure cooker." (Bourne 2012, Kotler & Armstrong 2018) For that reason, it is crucial for marketers to be conscious of these unexpected situations and to have planned solutions in place before involving in social media marketing.

### 2.3.4 Key social media metrics

According to Solomon and Tuten (2018), marketers use metrics to examine and compare results that are aligned to certain goals. Using metrics, a marketer can measure the performance of a marketing strategy. Without using metrics, it is challenging for marketers to evaluate the effectiveness of their marketing campaigns. Activity metrics, interaction metrics, and return metrics are the three types of metrics typically utilized in social media marketing. (Solomon & Tuten, 2018)

First, "activity metrics" track the actions taken and the amount of effort put into social media marketing by the marketer. This helps the marketer to see how the marketing approaches have performed and how they might be used in the future. Quantitative statistics such as summary views of content type mix and post rates, and qualitative assessments, are examples of activity metrics. Activity metrics can be used to examine the effectiveness of sponsored media in comparison to organic brand activity. (Solomon & Tuten, 2018)

Second, "interaction metrics" reflect how the target market reacts with the social media content that has been published. This indicator analyzes how social media users connect with the marketed brand, form relationships, and retain them. Quantitative measures of interaction include the number of followers, comments, "likes," and shared posts or content. Engagement, brand buzz, and referral are examples of qualitative criteria. (Solomon & Tuten, 2018)

Third, "return metrics," like return on investment, average new revenue per customer, and earned media values, are focused on the performing outcomes and results which support the brand's success. (Solomon & Tuten, 2018)

According to Atherton (2020, 138), the most common social media metrics are as follows:

- Impressions: the number of times created content has been displayed
- Reach: the number of users that have seen the content
- Engagement: user interactions such as views, comments, shares, and likes

- Click-through rate (CTR): the number of times a user clicks a link to visit a website or download other content.
- Conversions: the total number of users that have completed the specific actions (following a page, subscribing, or buying a product or service) (Atherton 2020, 138)

### 2.3.5 Theoretical framework

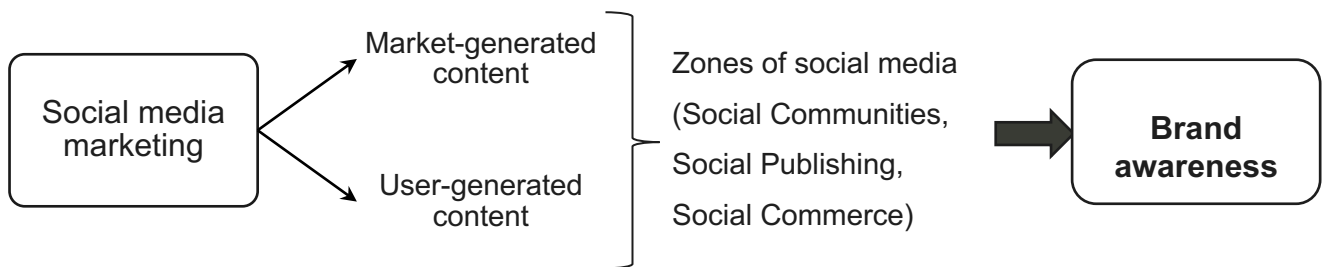


Figure 6. Theoretical framework (Social media marketing and brand awareness)

The figure 6 illustrates the theoretical framework for this thesis in terms of social media components and brand awareness. The main research question is: “How social media marketing impacts on brand awareness?”

Hypothesis 1: The zones of social media impacts on brand enhancement.

Hypothesis 2: User-generated content is more influential than marketer-generated content in brand engagement.

Hypothesis 3: Social media marketing helps in increasing brand visibility and engagement.

### 3 CASE: COMPANY X

#### 3.1 Background of company X

The case company X, founded in 2020 by Thomas, H. - a Vietnamese entrepreneur who has a passion to connect plant lovers around the world through social networks. The company has entered the US e-commerce markets in 2020, regarding as an online retailer. Using its Business to Customer (B2C) model, the company offers customized plant-related designs (such as mugs, shirts, canvas, customized items) for like-minded people. The development of the Internet and social technologies helps the company to reach out to target customers in different demographics within houseplant niche. Figure 7 presents the general information about case company.

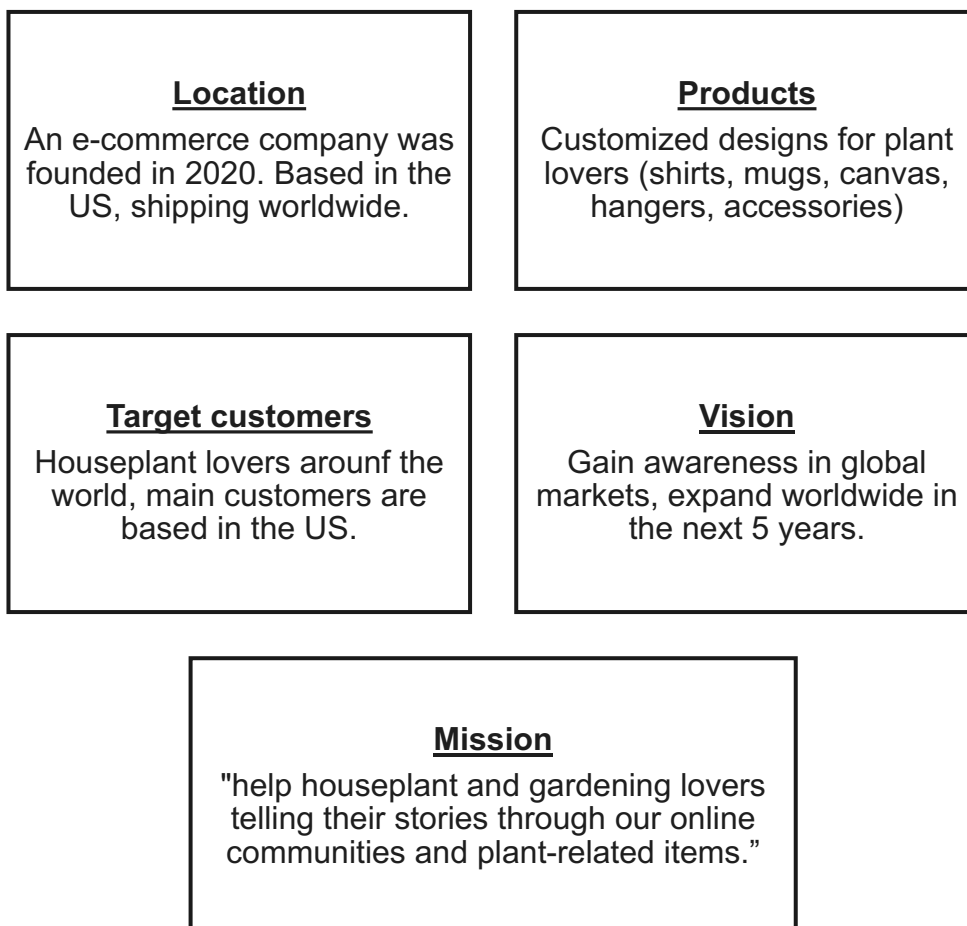


Figure 7. Background of company X



### 3.2 Mission and vision

“Welcome to company X,

We are a young, dedicated, and creative family that always trying our very best to bring customers the most excellent and unique shopping experience.

Personalization is what sets us apart from other competitors. At company X, we believe that personalization is the most powerful way to express your love for the person (or your beloved pets) you honor, and your personal characteristics as well. From birthdays and anniversaries to holiday gifts, our family is your number one personalization destination where you can find one-of-a-kind products in high quality with unique designs.

Your happiness is our top priority for every gift we deliver. We love knowing that we play a role in putting smiles at the faces of your loved ones when they receive a special gift made just for them. We are proud to be the pioneer store in the market where you can immediately see a preview of your custom product as you select the specifications.

With our customer-centric core value, we strongly believe that you will receive high-quality products and only the best customer service. “Your orders will be shipped with love and care. These are made-to-order products, which will reflect your style perfectly.

Our family has had the opportunity to be the destination for more than 100,000 customers across America. We have received a lot of wonderful feedback, demonstrating firmly our products are loved by customers. Each of feedback gives us more motivation to continue to create new products and bringing you the best shopping experience.” (Company X, 2021)

The company mission is to “help houseplant and gardening lovers telling their stories” through social networks and plant-related designs. However, as a start-up company in a foreign market, there are certain challenges such as limited in resources, barriers in geographical and cultural differences, lack of experiences and knowledge about potential markets. To overcome these shortages, digital and social media tools are the most crucial elements to run an online business.

### **3.3 Current social media marketing situation of Case company**

The case company has been active on Facebook and Instagram channels since October of 2020, but there is not yet a comprehensive social media report. There was little emphasis on social media marketing before because the company has no experience in the foreign markets. As well as the resources spending on its social media marketing was limited, the company also needs an up-to-date marketing analysis and strategy. Addressing the need for a social media enhancement, the author took the opportunity to study the gaps between company's performance and social trends during her practical training at the case company. As part of their marketing team, the author can address the current issue and gather every aspect of internal insights.

desires to leverage social media networks as part of their marketing strategy for increasing brand visibility and engagement. By investigating the impacts of social media on brand awareness from previous studies, analyzing its social accounts during the 6-month period, between October 2020 and March 2021. The company can map out the audience insights, see what works and what does not during previous campaigns. As a result, delivering practical and useful information for the case company to achieve its business goals in a cost-effective way. The outcomes of this thesis help the case company in addressing the opportunities to enhance its social media strategies. If the business goes well, the company aims at dominating not only the US markets but also other potential markets such as European and Asian markets within the next five years. Though the company is still on its way to figure out the best method to improve marketing plan with a product-market fit.

## 4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The term “research” has been defined in various ways, but there are similarities. The concept of research comprises strategic basic research, experimental development, and applied research. (Western Sydney University, 2019) In which, applied research is primarily done to gain new knowledge that responds towards a particular and practical research topic. According to the Department of Education and Training, research is described as a means of generating new concepts, techniques, and understandings in a systematic and structured manner. In simple words, this creation includes synthesis and analysis of existing knowledge to produce creative or new outcomes. (Western Sydney University, 2019) It encompasses three stages: define a question, gather information for the question, and form an answer. (Creswell, 2012) In marketing, research plays a crucial part in the business development. Sachdeva (2008, 2) argued that business research is carried out using a data collection process that aimed at low-risk decision-making.

Researchers could use either a quantitative or qualitative research method, or a combination of both, depending on the nature of the study problem. (Creswell, 2012) In quantitative research, a research topic can be explained by establishing the overall relations between variables or individuals. In which variables are individual characteristics (e.g., age) or a viewpoint (e.g., opinion about the school bond issue). As a result, the findings of this study will disclose if one or more variables influence the others. (Creswell, 2012) According to Pritha (2021), quantitative research is the process of collecting and analyzing numerical data. The conclusions of the research are then presented using statistical analysis. The qualitative research approach, on the other hand, concentrates on collecting and interpreting non-numerical data such as photos, text, and audio. To choose an effective research methodology, different elements should be clarified: research purpose, the characteristics of the topic, and the research questions. (Nikolaos & Yannis, 2018)

The thesis aims to investigate the impacts of social media marketing on brand awareness through a case study. As primary data, this study examines the results from the case company's Instagram and Facebook accounts. To collect statistical data, a quantitative research method will be used, and a deductive approach for structural data analysis. The case

company's Facebook and Instagram audiences have been used in targeted research. On these two platforms, the findings focused on the effects of social community building, engagement, content interaction, and brand awareness. Analytical tools such as Google Analytics, Later Tool, Instagram Insights, and Facebook Business Suits are used to gather data for the output.

#### **4.1.1 Quantitative research**

In this research, the quantitative numerical method will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of building awareness through social media networks. The capabilities of the case study's marketing resources, as well as the advantages of quantitative methods that match the research's objectives, are the two key reasons for the method's selection. Firstly, the case company has been active on two of the most popular platforms, Facebook and Instagram. This is a cost-effective way to study its social networks with a wide potential audience reach. To begin with, the example company has been active on two of the most popular platforms, Facebook and Instagram. This is a cost-effective technique to investigate its social networks with a wide potential audience reach. Furthermore, many free analytical tools are currently utilized by the case company, including as Google Analytics, Later Tool, Facebook Business Suit, Instagram. Second, quantitative methods are widely used to analyze trends by performing statistical analysis to correlate variables and report discoveries by comparing them with prior studies or predictions. (Creswell, 2012) These findings are consistent with the study goals, laying the groundwork for future corporate strategic planning. Furthermore, compared with qualitative data, reporting a quantitative research using fixed structures and evaluation standards ensure an objective and unbiased approach. Due to time, expense, and importance limitations, the qualitative methodology is not used in this study. Because this method obtains word data from a limited number of people using flexible structures that may contain the researcher's subjectivity and bias, it is not best suited for large groups. (Creswell, 2012)

#### **4.1.2 Data collection and analysis**

According to Lalehzari (2021), data collection is the process of gathering and analyzing data from a variety of groups to find answers to specific queries and obtain valuable insights. Data collecting, for example, might be used to examine current trends and how consumer behavior

is altering during the research period. (Lalehzari, 2021) To put it simply, every organization can be made more profitable and effective by adopting data collected ideas. However, the data collected should be relevant, precise, and used in context; otherwise, it can lead to misinformation or have a negative impact on a firm. (Lalehzari, 2021)

It is essential to distinguish the concepts of secondary and primary data, as two main types of data collection. Secondary data, according to Kotler et al. (2005), is material that already exists and was obtained for another purpose. Primary data, on the other hand, is regarded first-hand information that is generated for a specific reason. They also suggested that it is critical to collect secondary data from company's internal database as a starting point. However, the company should incorporate the primary data to attain sufficient information for strategic decision-making. (Kotler et al., 2005) To ensure the quality of primary and secondary data, researchers must carefully select the most relevant, current, accurate, and impartial information. (Kotler et al., 2005) This could be done by qualitative research, which investigates at the opinions of a focus group, or quantitative research, which collect statistical results from a broad sample size.

In this research, both secondary and primary data will be used to acquire in-depth information for research objectives. Secondary data will be used to explore theories and prior discoveries in the field of social media marketing. Textbooks, e-books, academic journals, theses, government publications, and other Internet sites are major secondary sources adopted to meet research objectives. On the other hand, the primary method for this research is quantitative, as the collected data is numerical. The empirical findings are gathered from the outcomes of company X's social media accounts, between October 2020 and March 2021. During the study process, the author is also a researcher who has been in charge of the company's social media implementation and evaluation. To obtain empirical results, different analytical tools are utilized such as Google Analytics, Later Tool, Instagram Insights and Facebook Business Suits. The conclusions are made based on the literature reviews and the retrieved metrics.

The Internet data collection will soon become the key marketing research tool, due to its fast, simple, and low-cost solution. (Kotler et al., 2005) He also stated that small businesses are

more likely to benefit from secondary data than big enterprises. Because governments and many organizations prefer to help small businesses intensively. Kotler et al. (2005) stated as, the online quantitative studies and timely responses can be obtained in a couple of days, diminishing the traveling and facility expenses. As a result, while executing international or domestic research, online businesses could attain the most cost-effective solutions. (Kotler et al., 2005)

Alternatives to quantitative methods comprise descriptive analysis, correlational research, and experimental research. (Blackstone, 2012) Since there are various existing theories on social media marketing and its impacts on business brand awareness, the author will adopt a descriptive method for data analysis. In which, a descriptive or case-study study is one where a particular aspect is explored to see whether any general hypotheses are generated or if existing terms concepts are validated by the specific situation. (Goddard & Melville, 2007; Igwenagu, 2016) The empirical results will cover the impacts of social media on community building, awareness, engagement, content interaction and website traffic. Therefore, we may learn more about the importance of incorporating social media tactics into business's growth. These findings will be beneficial for the company to explore the opportunities to build online social networks, which platforms are best for building brand awareness and interaction, as well as increasing website traffic and sales.

#### **4.1.3 Reliability and validity**

The terms of reliability and validity are used to assess the consistency of study. (Middleton, 2019) They classify the quality of which a process, methodology, or test evaluates something. In particular, validity refers with an authenticity whereas reliability is associated with its consistency.

In a good research, both reliability and validity are carefully taken into account during the studying processes. For ensuring the validity of this research, the collection of data and methods of measurement are considered from early stages. The secondary sources about social media statistics are up to date, which are published no earlier than the year 2019. The empirical findings are collected within the latest 6-month reports, between October 2020 and

March 2021. To attain results, authorized analytical tools are used to provide real-time data, such as Google Analytics, Later Tool, Facebook Business Suit, Instagram Insights. To ensure this research's reliability, secondary and primary data are utilized in the process of gathering, analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating information. Secondary data is mainly collected from authorized sources, such as of books, websites, government publications, academic articles, dissertations, and other official publications. On the other hand, primary data is collected from the company's social accounts with statistical information. The author of this thesis is also a researcher, who is responsible for the company's social media implementation and evaluation during the research period. Therefore, the author has thorough capabilities to access all necessary insights from the company. Moreover, the researcher and the representative of the case company has worked closely during the research processes to deliver the most practical outcomes.

Furthermore, reporting a quantitative research using fixed structures and evaluation ensures an objective and unbiased approach, when compared with qualitative data that may contain the researcher's subjectivity and bias. (Creswell, 2012) During the research period of six months, the data is gathered from its Facebook page of 56,000 fans from Facebook page and at least 61,000 followers on Instagram account. The number of participants provides more than enough data to represent the results of the case company's marketing means. The argument for enlarging the findings to a larger group of people becomes stronger as the number of people studied rises, according to Creswell (2012). Due to the quality of research method and data collection, the concern about reliability and validity of the research are avoided in this research.

## 5 EMPIRICAL RESULTS

In the following, the current situation of company X's Facebook and Instagram accounts will be analyzed. This part illustrates the results of social media marketing that the company has been utilized to construct its online presence. The goal is to reach out to new customers while retaining existing ones. In addition, the relationship between the company and its audience will be enhanced through these social networks of houseplant lovers. Overall, there are boundless opportunities for the company to be active in social networks in order to gain brand exposure and generate more leads. Nevertheless, the measurement and control steps are crucial in every successful marketing plan. For startup company like the case company, the measurement should be taken more frequent, for instance, once a week or once every month.

This section of the research illustrates the effectiveness of case company's social activities during the 6-month period, from October 2020 to March 2021, followed by research reflection and discussion. There is in-depth investigation about the community, engagement, content creation, and awareness analysis.



## 5.1 Community

### 5.1.1 Demographics

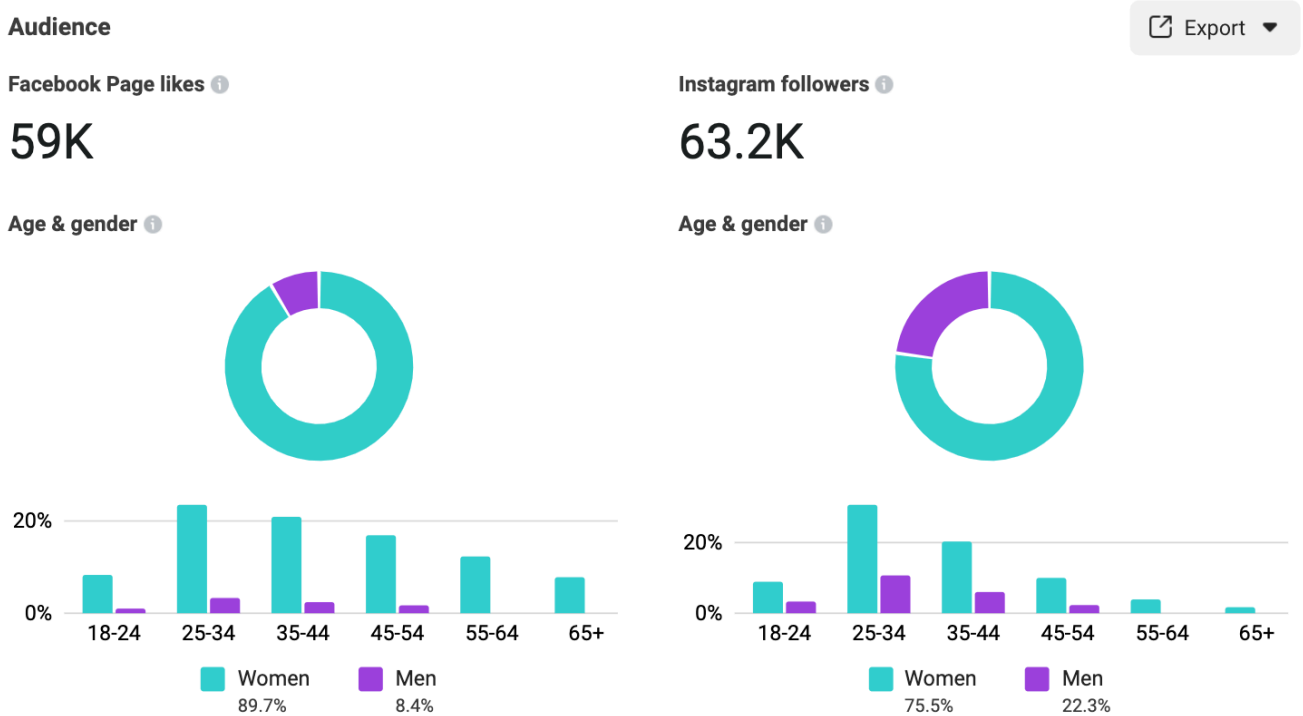


Figure 8. Age and gender structure of Facebook Page Likes and Instagram followers (company X, 2021)

- **Age**

#### Facebook page

As shown in figure 8, company X’s Facebook page reached audience in different age ranges, between 18 years old and above. Hence, people under 18 years old are not taking part in this study. The largest proportion of audience aged from 25 to 34 years, with roughly 22 percent (women) and less than 10 percent (men) in total. Followed by the percentage of people aged from 35 to 64 years old, which accounted for about 15 – 20 percent (women) and less than 5 percent (men). The smallest proportion aged under 18 and above 65 years old, which made of nearly 10 percent (women) and less than 3 percent (men). In general, their Facebook fan page reached a considerable number of audiences in all ages, especially from 25 to 64 years old.

## **Instagram account**

The figure 8 demonstrates that there is younger audience on its Instagram account, which concentrated on people aged from 25 to 44 years old. People aged between 25 to 34 held the highest place, with made of 28 (female) and 10 (male). Followed by people aged between 35 to 44 years old, which occupied 20 percent (female) and 8 percent (male). On the other hand, audience aged between 18 to 25 years old and above 45 years old made up an inconsiderable proportion.

In comparison, both platforms have the largest proportion of audience aged from 25 to 34 years old. However, Facebook page has an older age structure compared with Instagram's. In particular, Instagram engaged a younger audience aged from 25 to 44 years old. While Facebook has attracted a broad number of audiences representing in most age ranges, between 25 and 64 years old. The other ranges seem less important on these social accounts.

### **- Gender**

The gender distribution on two social networks of the case company is tremendously different, with more women than men on both social accounts. On the Facebook page, women accounted for nearly 90 percent in total audience, only roughly 8 percent of audience are men. On the other hand, Instagram has approximately 75 percent (women) and 22 percent (men) in the total number of audiences. Overall, there are slightly more men audience on Instagram than on Facebook page of the case company, with a percentage of 22 and 8 percent respectively. (Figure 8)

### **- Gender**

The gender distribution on two social networks of the case company is tremendously different, with more women than men on both social accounts. On the Facebook page, women accounted for nearly 90 percent in total audience, only roughly 8 percent of audience are men. On the other hand, Instagram has approximately 75 percent (women) and 22 percent (men) in the total number of audiences. Overall, there are slightly more men audience on Instagram

than on Facebook page of the case company, with a percentage of 22 and 8 percent respectively. (Figure 8)

### 5.1.2 Geographics

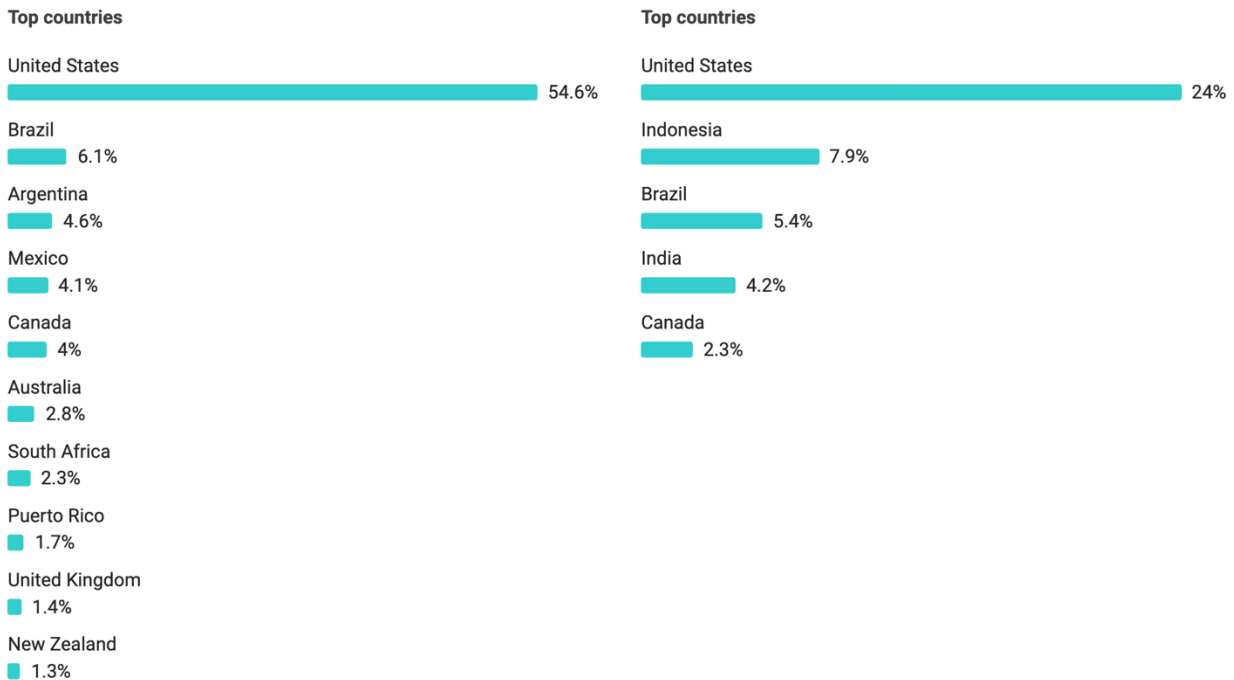


Figure 9. Top countries on Facebook Page and Instagram, from left to right (Company X, 2021)

#### Facebook page

On Facebook page, the case company has engaged users in various countries. As shown in figure 9, audience in the United States accounted for the largest proportion, with more than 54 percent or half of total audience. (Figure 9) Followed by audience in Brazil (6.1%), Argentina (4.6 %), Mexico (4.1%), Canada (4 %) and others.

#### Instagram account

The figure 9 illustrates that there are 24 percent of Instagram's audience living in the United States, held the highest place among other countries. The least countries are Indonesia (7.9 %), Brazil (5.4 %), India (4.2 %) and Canada (2.3 %).

In general, both social networks of the case company attracted most residents in the U.S. In which, there is roughly double proportion of audience in the United States on Facebook page compared with Instagram's, with 54 and 24 percent respectively. (Figure 9) Both accounts have engaged a slight number of Canadian residences.

## 5.2 Awareness

### 5.2.1 Reach

Reach is measured by “the number of people who saw your post at least once. Reach is different from impressions, which may include multiple views of your post by the same people.” (business.facebook.com)

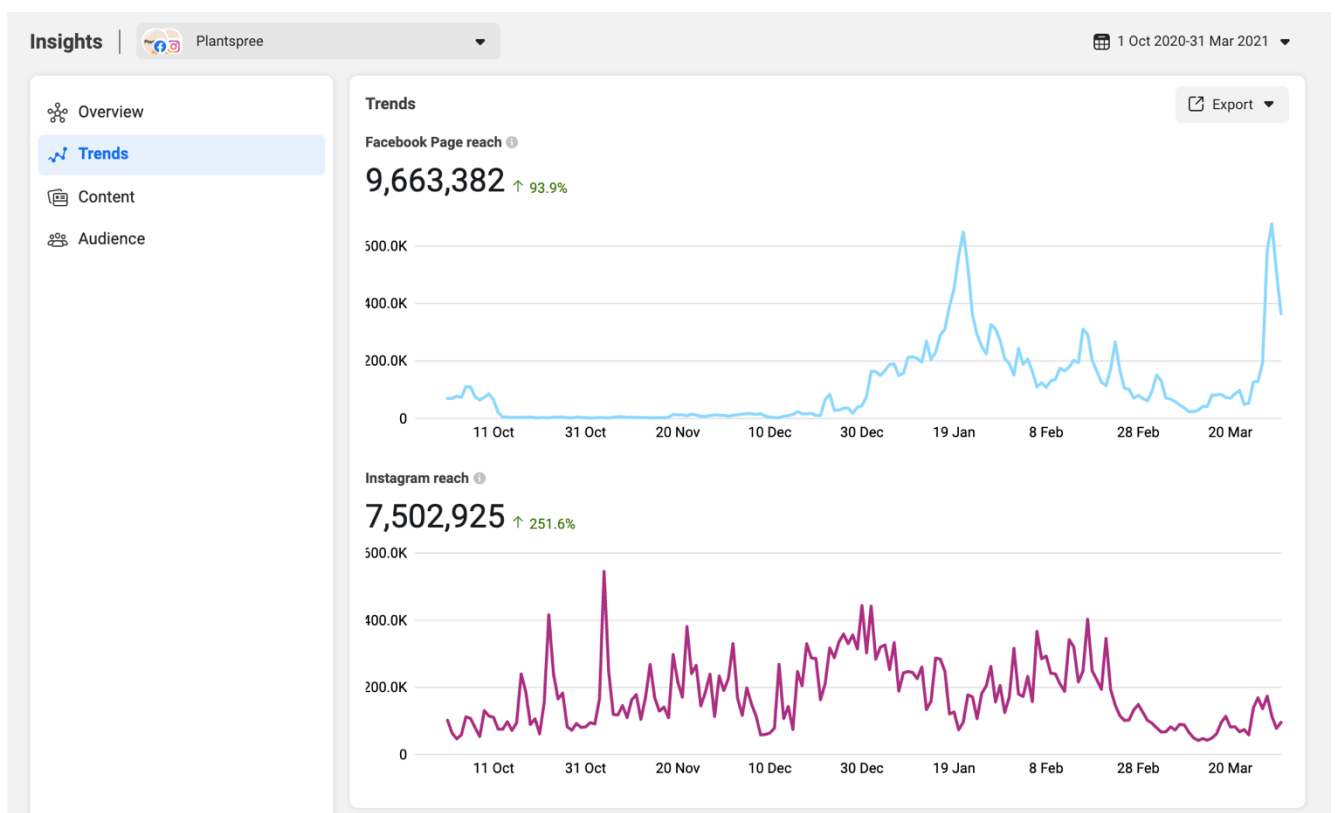


Figure 10. Facebook Page reach and Instagram reach from October 2020 to March 2021 (Company X, 2021)

During the 6-month period of the study, both social accounts of the case company reflected an unstable growth, between October 2020 and March 2021. (Figure 10) The company has put more efforts on publishing contents on its Instagram account than on Facebook page due to two main reasons. First, the company was lacking marketing personnel to implement marketing on different social platforms. Thus, the initial marketing action was taken on Instagram, which is ideal to generate visual contents for plant lovers. Getting a positive result on its Instagram profile, the case company has started building its network on Facebook since mid of December 2020. The second reason, because of the nature of each platform, marketing on Instagram is an inexpensive way to reach target customers with visual and organic contents. While on Facebook, it is crucial for marketers to incorporate paid advertising to reach a desirable number of users. Though this research, the company could have a broader view about its social marketing activities and decide to adjust its marketing strategy at the minimum risks and costs.

### **Facebook Page**

During the research period, the Facebook Page of the company has reached more than 9,600,000 online users. As shown in the figure 10, the fan page has stated an unsteady growth since the beginning of December 2020. It gained the most traffic during January 2021, with the highest reach of over 600,000 users per day on 22<sup>nd</sup> January, 2021 and 27<sup>th</sup> March, 2021. The remaining points stayed under 300,000 users of reach.

### **Instagram account**

In the same period, Instagram account has reached approximately 7,500,000 online users. The growing trend on Instagram account is steadier than on its Facebook, but still in an unstable growth. From December 2020 to February 2021, the account gained the highest reach with an average of 250,000 users per day. (Figure 10)

In general, the social media platforms have the case company reaching out to its target audience in the houseplant niche. Most importantly, there are great opportunities for the case company to gain awareness from its potential customers in the targeted markets. By implementing a comprehensive social media marketing plan, the company can not only attract

new audience but also enhance relationships with existing customers. Through social media channels, the company could understand their customer's preferences and insights by an up-to-date marketing strategy.

### 5.2.2 Page likes and Followers

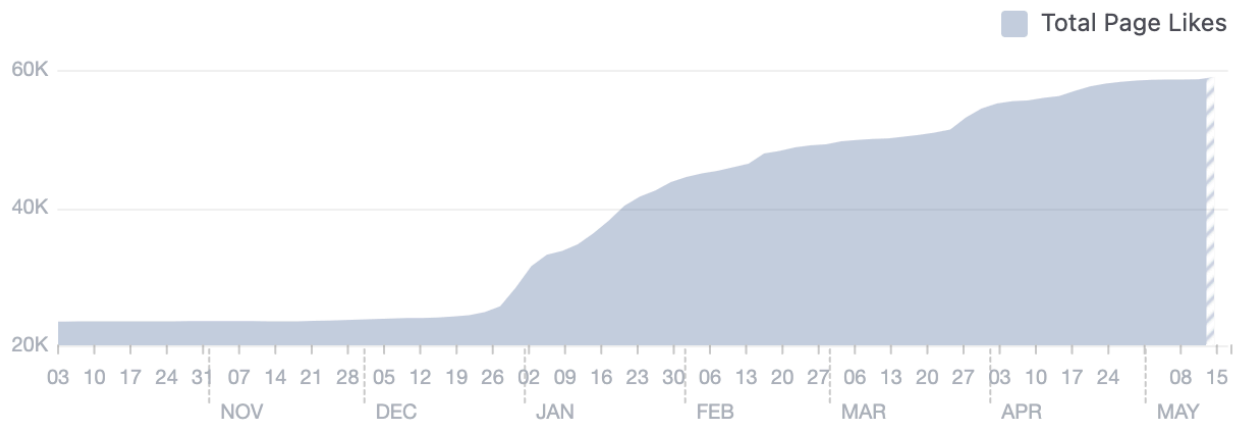


Figure 11. Facebook page likes of company X (Facebook Insights, 2021)

The data about page likes activity was collected from Facebook Insights, which allows businesses to track their performance. In this research period, the Facebook page of company X attracted nearly 60,000 fans, with a considerable growth. (Figure 11) The most effective period started from the beginning of January 2021, which generated the greatest number of new audiences. The reason for this later growth is because the company were not consistent in publishing its content on Facebook before the time. Their previous social marketing focus is on Instagram channel. Hence, it is critical to do an in-depth analysis of the effectiveness and opportunities for these social media activities in marketing. These insights will provide beneficial data for the case company to adjust its social strategy and achieve desirable goals.

## Profile Growth & Discovery

Followers

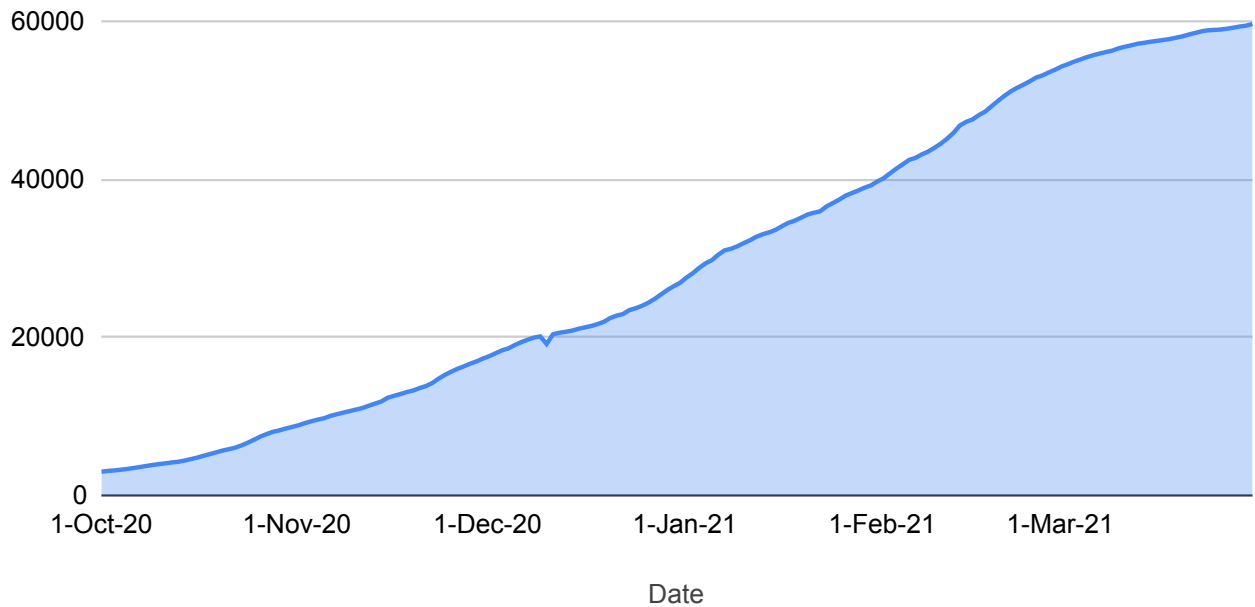


Figure 12. Followers on Instagram account of company X (Later, 2021)

Figure 12 demonstrates that company X had a steady and notable growth in its Instagram profile. Attracting more than 60,000 followers to its profile within only six months, during October 2020 and March 2021. Since the case company focused its marketing resources on Instagram, aiming to gain valuable leads from this network. For example, the scheduling contents were more frequent with 3 posts per day with few other branding activities such as influencer marketing, mini games, giveaways, promotional programs. As a result, it was shown that the company has gain exposure on Instagram at speed and effectiveness.

### 5.2.3 Engagement

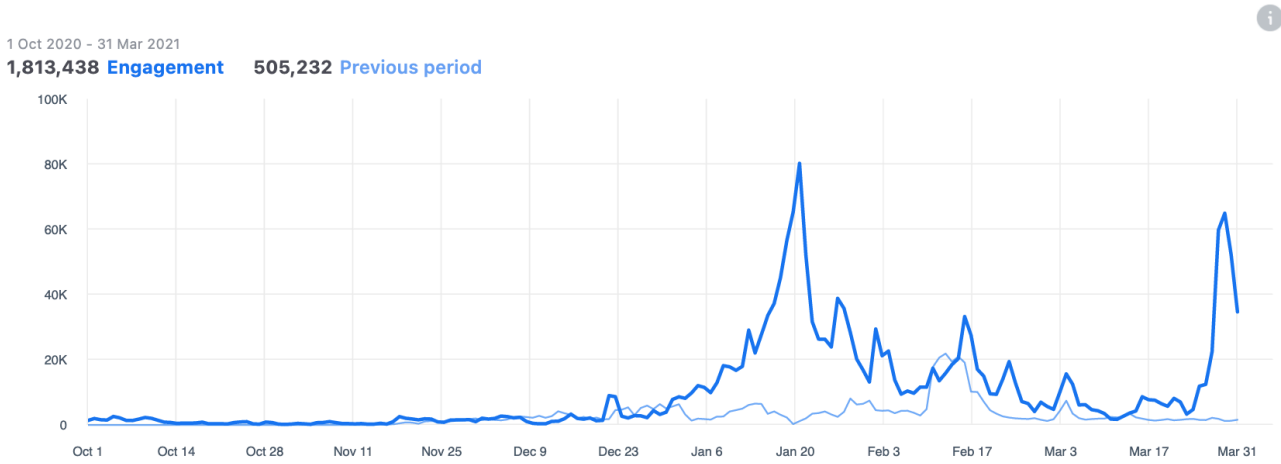


Figure 13. Engagement on Facebook Page of company X (Studio Creator, 2021)

### Impressions

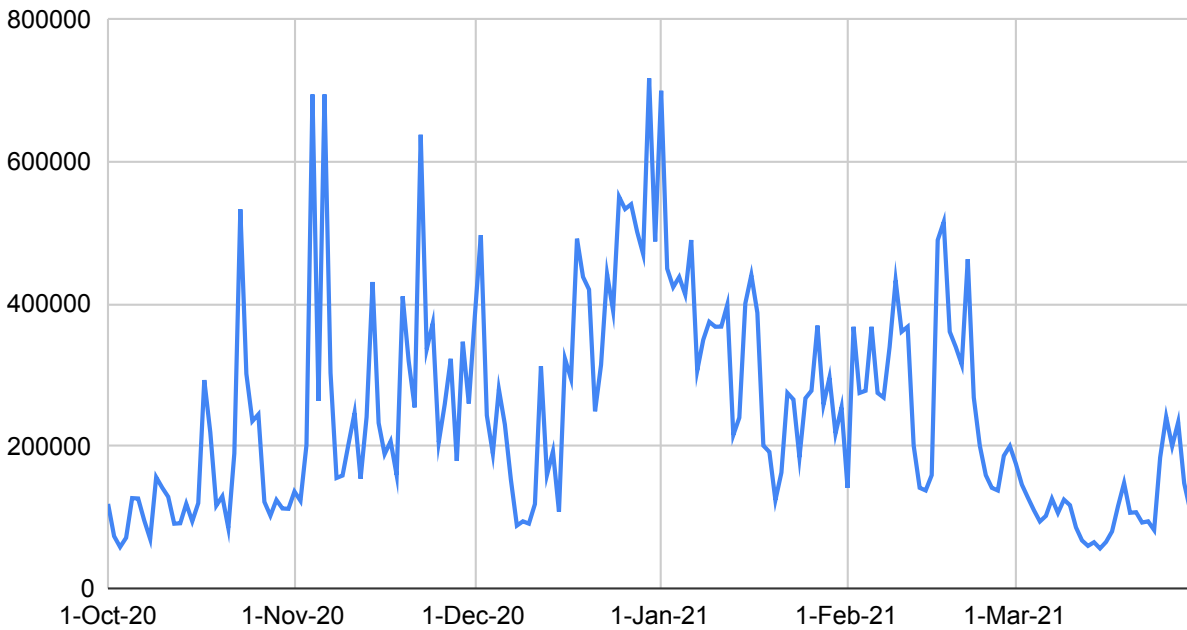


Figure 14. Impressions on Instagram account of company X (Adapted from Later Tool, 2021)

On Facebook Page, the engagement trend has shown an inconsistent trend, which correlates to the “reach” trend. (Figure 14) The most engaging periods were ranging from the beginning



of January 2021 to the end of February 2021, as well as from 20<sup>th</sup> March to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021. The remaining points accounted for a relatively low engagement.

In contrast, Instagram hold dramatical changes in user’s impressions. Reaching the peaks at 700,000 impressions per day on the early November 2020 and January 2021, shown in figure 14. The remained points have significant changes over the research period, but still retain in the range of 100,000 and 500,000 impressions per day. From the statistics, company X has gained a tremendous engagement on its Instagram account. (Figure 14)

### 5.3 Content

#### 5.3.1 Top post performance (by reach)

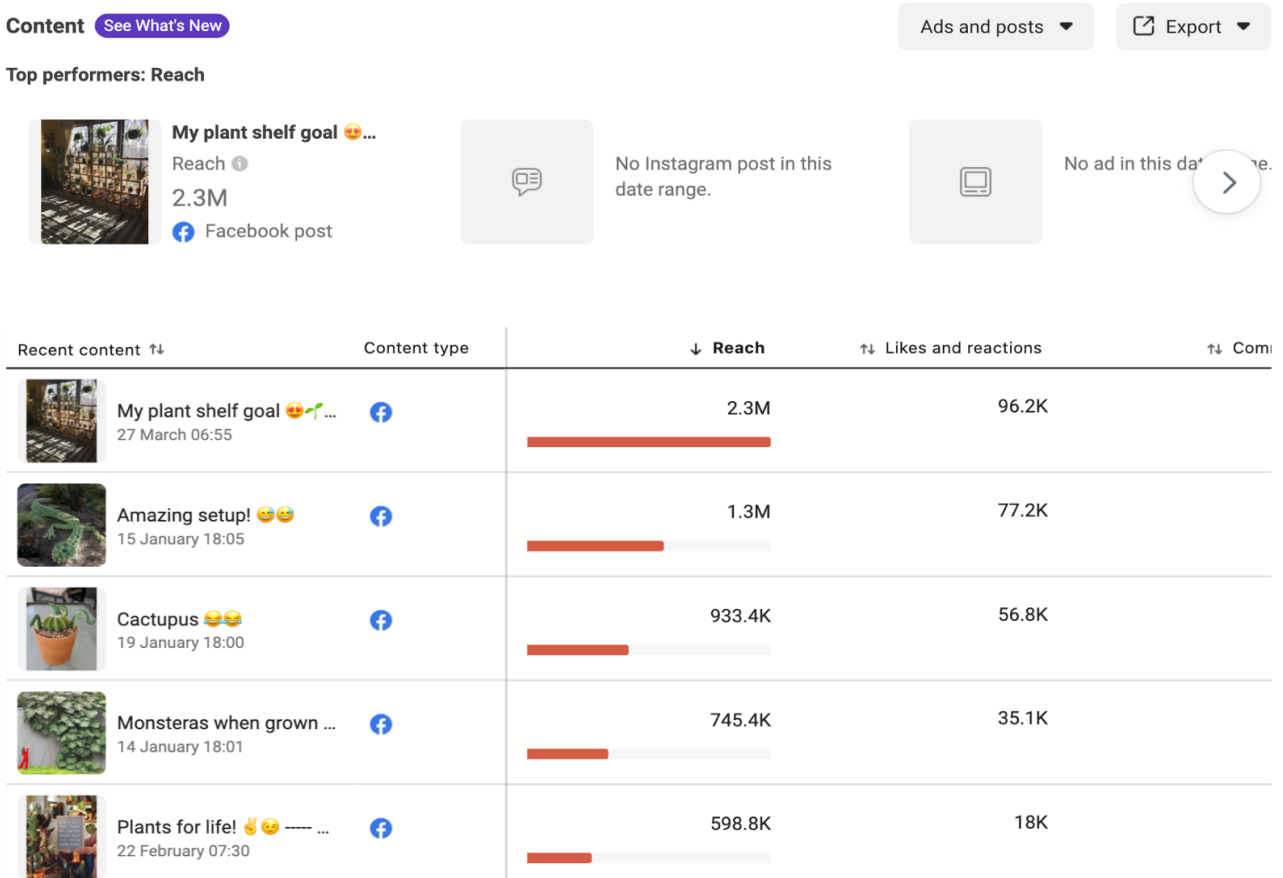


Figure 15. Top post performance on Facebook, by reach (Company X, 2021)

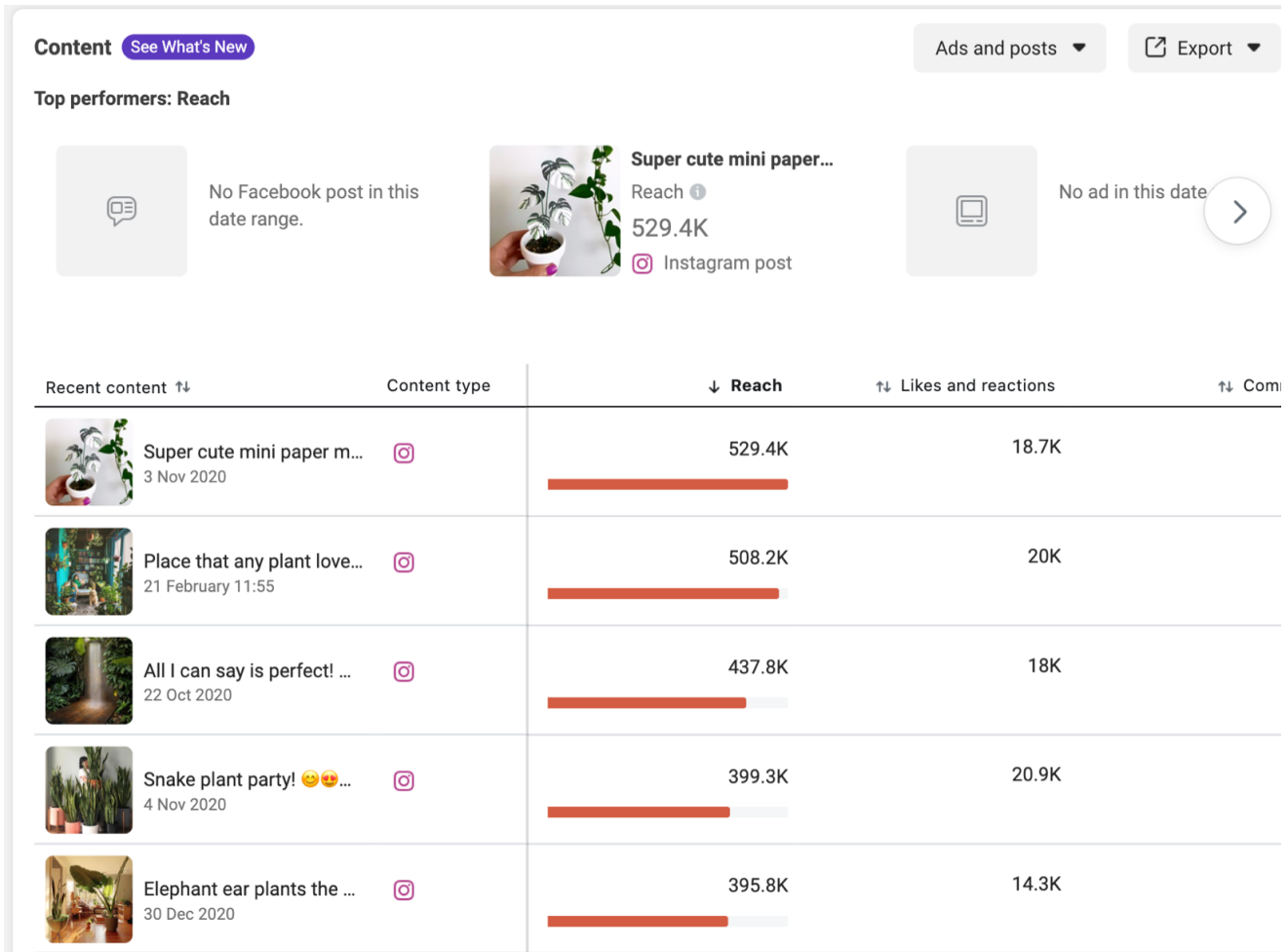


Figure 16. Best performing posts on Instagram, by reach (Company X, 2021)

On both Facebook and Instagram, the top performer posts are user-generated contents used by the company. In which, the company has re-shared the pictures from other users to its networks by giving the right credits to the original owner. None of these posts is promotional content or created posts by the company.

As illustrated in figure 15, the top 5 best performing posts on Facebook have reached more than 590,000 users, during the research period. In which, the highest performer reached out to at least 2,300,000 online users. Top Instagram posts of company X accounted for a lower number in reach, compared with Facebook posts. The range of highest reach is from 390,000 to approximately 530,000 online users. (Figure 16) In other words, Facebook has gained a greater reach regarding post performance by reach compared with Instagram.

5.3.2 Lowest post performance (by reach)

Recent content ↕	Content type	↑ Reach	↕ Likes and reactions
10 Nov 2020		854	7
14 Oct 2020		898	26
12 Nov 2020		951	21
20 Nov 2020		959	3
14 Nov 2020		982	5

Figure 17. Lowest post performance on Facebook, by reach (Company X, 2021)

Recent content ↕	Content type	↑ Reach	↕ Likes and reactions
30 January 08:01		6.7K	108
24 Nov 2020		6.7K	324
27 Oct 2020		6.7K	274
3 Nov 2020		6.8K	252
2 Dec 2020		6.8K	263

Figure 18. Lowest post performance on Instagram, by reach (Company X, 2021)

The lowest post performers on Facebook and Instagram are branded contents or promotional contents of the products. (Figure 17; Figure 18) The company aims to promote its products (such as t-shirts, mug, canvas) through these social networks of houseplant lovers. These promotional contents account for only 20 percent of its total posts, in order to avoid any negative effects.

In comparison, branded contents on Instagram account gained greater performance by reach and interaction compared with Facebook page. On Facebook page, the five lowest performing posts reached out to 900 users on an average, the number is far from its highest performer of 2,300,000 reach. (Figure 17) While on Instagram account, the lowest posts still reached out to about 6,700 users on an average. (Figure 18) In terms of likes and reactions, branded contents on Instagram also performed better compared to Facebook's.

In general, publishing contents on Facebook gained greater exposure in reach when it comes to user-generated contents. On the other hand, Instagram is preferable for the case company to promote its products. However, both platforms are important for the company to build its social networks and generate leads across the platforms and website.

### 5.3.3 Follower online activity

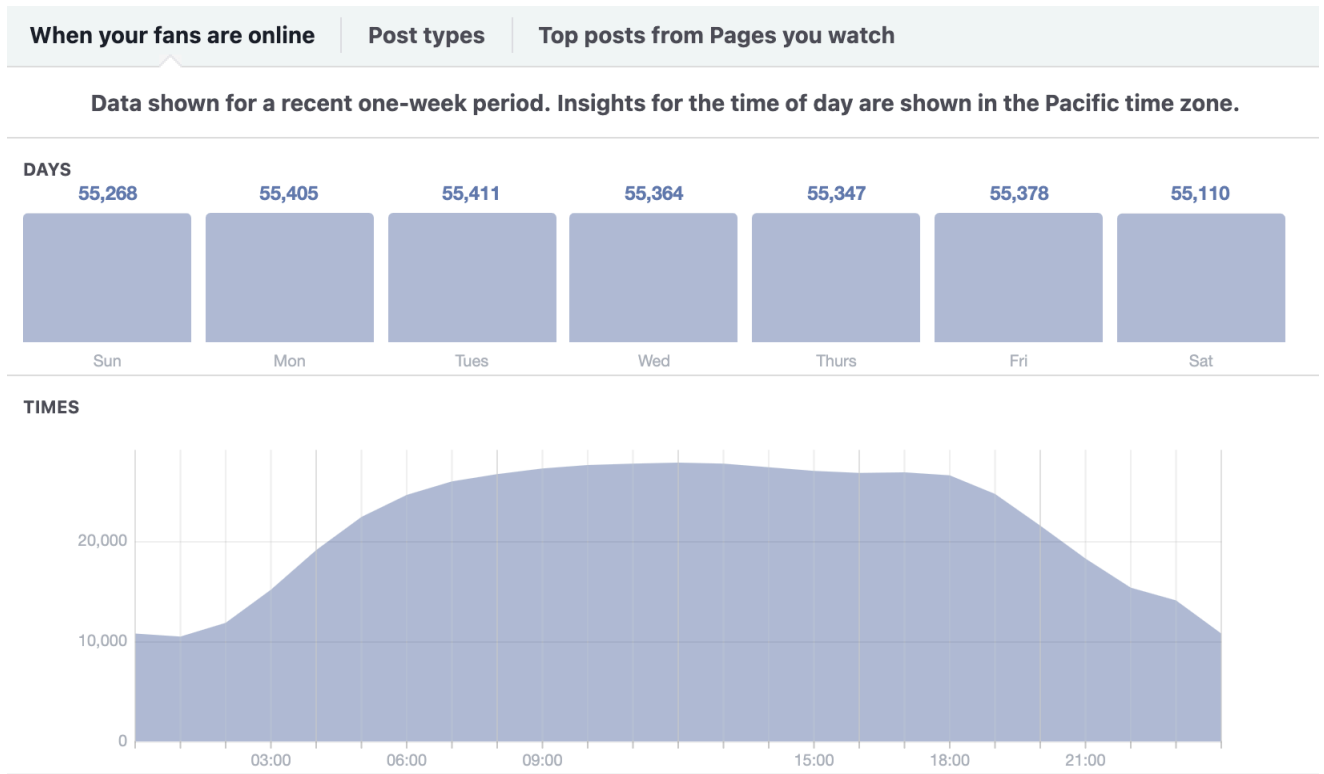


Figure 19. When company X’s fans are online (Facebook Insights, 2021)

On Facebook, fans are most active from 3 am till 9 pm in the Pacific time zone, as shown in figure 19. The company can consider scheduling posts on this preferable period to gain the most engagement.

**FOLLOWERS ONLINE ACTIVITY**



Figure 20. When followers on Instagram are online (Later, 2021)

On Instagram account, audiences are most active from 4 pm till 2 am the next day. (ETC/GMT-4). (Figure 20) According to the scheduling plan, the marketing personnel could schedule 3 posts per day between this engaging time. For example, posts can be scheduled at 4 pm, 8 pm and 12 am, with 4 hour-difference.

Understand when the followers are on a particular platform to better plan the posting schedule. It is critical to post contents at the most engaging times to gain the better interactions. The active time is varied from platform to platform, account to account.

**5.4 Social Network Referrals**

Monitoring social network referrals indicate which social platforms are driving the most traffic to the case company's website. There is no single tool or method of measuring Return on

Investment (ROI). However, Google Analytics offers useful metrics to professional marketers to connect with customer insights and measure success. (Glenn, 2020) This is a reason why the case company has utilized Google Analytical Tool tracking its returns from social networks in real-time performance.





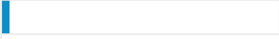


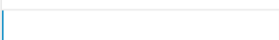
		Acquisition		
		Users	New Users	Sessions
		59,671	57,985	73,428
1	Social	27,654		
2	(Other)	15,057		
3	Direct	12,407		
4	Paid Search	3,563		
5	Organic Search	1,439		
6	Referral	169		
7	Email	137		
8	Affiliates	16		

Figure 21. Social Network Referrals of company X (Google Analytics, 2021)

Among different digital marketing tools that company X is using, social media generated most numbers of users for its website, with about 57,985 new users. (Figure 21) It indicated that social media is one of the most effective marketing tools for the case company in building brand awareness and increase engagement.

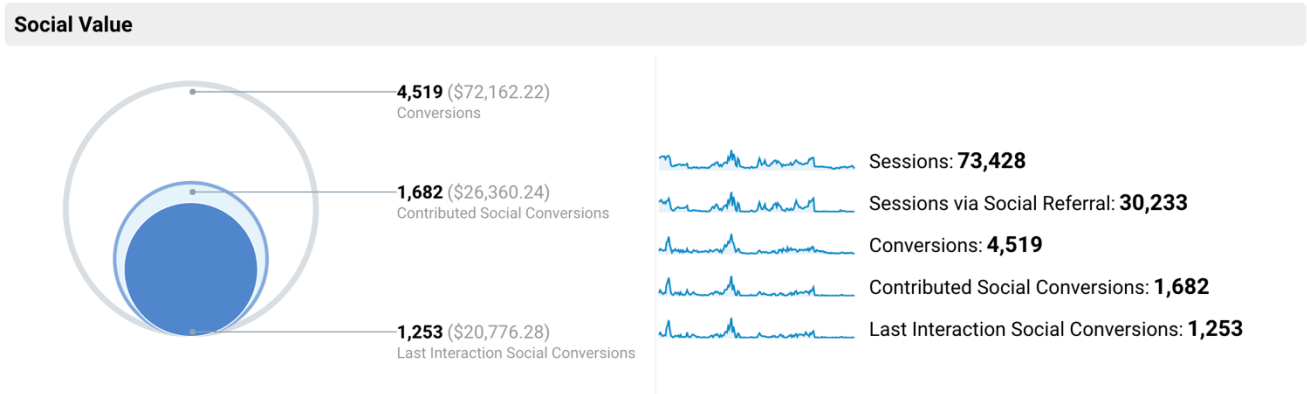


Figure 22. Sessions via Social Referral on company X’s e-commerce (Google Analytics, 2021)

During the studying period, social networks play a crucial role in driving traffic to the case company’s website. As reported through figure 22, there were 30,233 sessions on the website via social referral, which accounted for about 41 percent of total sessions. In addition, the contributed social conversions were 1,682 times, generating up to \$US26,360 in revenues. (Figure 22)

Social Network	Sessions	% Sessions
1. Facebook	25,954	85.85%
2. Instagram Stories	1,481	4.90%
3. Pinterest	1,424	4.71%
4. Instagram	1,368	4.52%
5. YouTube	4	0.01%
6. Pocket	1	0.00%
7. Snapchat	1	0.00%

Figure 23. Referral from Social Networks on company X’s e-commerce (Google Analytics, 2021)

In particular, Facebook accounted for the largest proportion with roughly 85 percent in total referrals from social networks, with 25,954 sessions. (Figure 23) While Instagram Stories and Instagram made up 4.9 percent and 4.71 percent respectively. In total, about 9.61 percent of total social referrals on its online store came from Instagram networks. In this research, Facebook and Instagram networks will be examined. The other social networks will not be



mentioned. Thus, social networks have brought valuable traffic to the main website for the case company. It is essential to track those referral sources in order to evaluate its social marketing outcomes. Most importantly, the company could investigate whether social media is a great tool for building brand awareness for online business.

## 6 CONCLUSION

### 6.1 Discussions and assessment

The research aims to investigate the impact of social media marketing on brand awareness. The author has studied the characteristics of social media, social media zones in marketing and their influence on brand awareness, through the case company X.

According to the findings, the positive impacts of social media zones on building brand visibility have been proven. In this research, the application of social communities, social publishing and a small part of social commerce through social media channels helps in brand exposure. Although each channel has its own features and followings, there are considerable overlaps in user profiles among different channels. Thus, it is critical for businesses with limited resources to be active in the most famous social media networks and reach all types of user demographics. (Nagy, 2017) Depending on the objectives and target personas of business, certain platforms are considered. In the case of company X, it has reached younger demographics on Instagram accounts and broaden age ranges on its Facebook fan page. The company likely to adjust its social strategies that fit the targeted market and brings the most value to its customers.

Social communities like Facebook and Instagram where company X is using, aims to create an engaging environment for those sharing the same interest or opinion. Through the findings, their social networks have reached and engaged a large number of online users, who have a passion for houseplants. In particular, its Instagram account has over 63,000 followers, 24 percent residing in the US, with 75.5 percent of their audiences are women. On the other hand, Facebook has engaged about 59,000 fans, approximately 55 percent living in the US, with nearly 90 percent of total audience are women. Instagram seems as the most stable and active platform of company X, followed by Facebook. With limited resources, the case company initially focus on delivering more consistent content on Instagram, compared with Facebook. However, Facebook is still considered as a potential platform for the case company to allocate their resources and gain brand exposure. Due to the fact that Facebook is the largest social

platform, with 2.8 billion monthly active users. (We Are Social, 2021) Evidently, the company can easily expand its awareness to millions of potential customers, through social communities.

Regarding social publishing, these platforms generate mostly visual user-generated content as an effective marketing means. This is where the company repost user's creation such as images, product reviews on their main profile with credits to the owners. This way, firm can gain greater trust and interaction while reducing gaps between marketers and consumers. On the other hand, marketer-generated posts in form of promotions, product advertising posts seems less engaged than user-generated media. By evaluating the top and lowest performance posts, the company can get a sense of preferred types of media. Consistency in publishing contents is also an important factor that affects the growth and engagement of social networks. For the case company, it is strategic to maintain the publishing schedule of 3-4 posts per day on each social platform, during the period where its fans are online. Hashtags, tag photos, shareable contents on stories and feeds are essential tools to gain better visibility. (Squires, 2016) It is recommended that the company should develop more types of contents in different channels, such as videos, infographics. For instance, publishing tutorial videos of how to propagate a famous plant on its YouTube channel and sharing across social platforms. In general, the company should invest more efforts in the process of creating and exchanging content to consistently engage target customers.

Social commerce enables the online transactions via the activities of sharing, promoting, and buying of products and services. (Tuten & Solomon, 2021) As stated, social commerce stimulates the active participation and impact on buying decisions, via the networks of businesses and customers. In which, peer reviews and recommendations on social networks strongly affect customer's purchasing decisions. Social networks have brought valuable traffic to the main website for the case company. For instance, social media provides a distribution venue for a variety of sales promotion incentives, such as coupons and group specials. In which, many people "like" or "follow" firms on social sites to be eligible for these offers. (Tuten, 2021) Whereas Facebook accounted for the largest proportion with roughly 85 percent in total referrals from social networks, while Instagram Stories and Instagram made up 4.9 percent and 4.71 percent respectively. It is crucial to track those referral sources on a regular basis to

evaluate its social marketing means. In addition, the company could examine whether a certain social campaign is successful or not, then adjusting its strategy at the minimum risks and costs.

## **6.2 Summary**

After incorporating the previous studies and empirical results, the effectiveness of applying social media in marketing and branding are relevant and recognized. In other words, social media is a powerful tool for businesses to boost brand awareness and business growth, especially e-commerce companies with limited resources. Understanding the components of different social media zones and their applications in marketing help firms to reach the most valuable customers.

The outcome of this research is not only beneficial for the case study but also in the personal perspective of the author. These findings deliver up-to-date information that helps the company to map out their audience insights, current social media opportunities and the practical usage of social media in marketing. Since there is lack of personnel who have ability to explore loads of material in the social marketing field, where they are constantly updated. Hence, firm can save their researching efforts and learn from the market insights to improve its marketing strategies in the upcoming stages. On the other hand, it is great opportunity for the author to gain better understanding about social media marketing, which is her interested field. After this research, the author is able to apply theories into practices with a comprehensive evaluation. Although there are other aspects of social media marketing should be further explored and applied. The author desires to constantly update her knowledge in terms of digital marketing, which is beneficial for her career path.

Both secondary and primary data collection are used in this research to provide in-depth answers to the research questions. The literature reviews about branding, social media marketing, social media trends and their impacts on marketing offer beneficial secondary data for the research. The author used the quantitative research method to gather empirical results from the case company's social media accounts. It is proposed by Kotler et al. (2005) that, Internet data collection will soon become the primary marketing research tool, due to its fast, simple, and low-cost solution. The deductive data approach is applied throughout the research

processes. Business can attain real-time insights about its target audiences and marketing performance through social marketing tools via the Internet. For example, free online measurement tools are offered by social media platforms such as Facebook Business Suits, Instagram Insights, Facebook Insights, Google Analytics. Such tools provide useful statistical data during the 6-month research period, as shown in the empirical part. All in all, the theories and empirical results are linked, and the research objectives are achieved with the chosen method.

There are several reasons for businesses to build online presence, for example, the easy of entry, accessibility, low operating costs and risks with higher reach, compared with the traditional business. Nearly half of internet users indicated they use social media networks to look for product or service brand information. (We Are Social, 2021) Brand awareness, which is regarded as a business or personal brand, is being linked with networking activities to make brands more visible. (Coles, 2015) The "Internet of Things" facilitates this connectivity through various digital platforms in terms of speed, convenience, cost-effectiveness, services, and brand engagements. Furthermore, the organization can learn about their audience's needs, wants, and preferences. (Coles, 2015) Any kinds of businesses - from small, medium to large-sized businesses, social media has a notable impact on increasing brand awareness along with their valuable customers. With a proper social marketing strategy, the business can adjust their strategies with minimum risks and costs.

In terms of branding, social media platforms are great vehicles for promoting public connections. They assist businesses in responding to customer preferences through valuable interaction and engaging with customers at any time. Evidently, social media assists firms in gaining exposure, fostering relationships with clients, and increasing website traffic.

### **6.3 Limitations of the research**

There are certain limitations need to be mentioned in this research. First, the thesis focuses on studying the effects of two main social media platforms that the company has been active on, including Facebook and Instagram, among other social sites. As the case company aims to master these two channels before expanding towards other channels. Secondly, due the time

and budget limitation for doing this research, only quantitative research method was used. The other type of research method known as qualitative research is not applied in this research. Instead, the exploratory information was identified during the author's working period in the case company. Thus, the collected statistical data is sufficient to support this research objective. Since the case company has been in the early stages of building online businesses, the outcome of this research meets their expectations in terms of exploring social media opportunities. Besides, previous studies about the field of social media marketing are explained thoroughly to provide useful insights for the case company, rather than mentioning its marketing activities. Lastly, in personal perspective, the time schedule spending on this research is strict and relatively pressured, along with the disruption of COVID-19 pandemic. It was impossible for the author to access the textbooks in the school libraries. However, the author managed to complete this research at the given time and found out necessary secondary data from different sources. While working closely with the representative of the case company in different research stages, the issues are addressed and tackled in the right manner. As it is essential to deliver a trustworthy and beneficial information related to social media marketing for a start-up company like case company.

Despite the limitations, the research is able to deliver an overall understanding about whether social media is an effective marketing tool for the case company in global markets.

#### **6.4 Recommendations for future research**

Regarding some limitations in the research, the author suggests to further investigate the usage of social media marketing on other channels, besides Facebook and Instagram. There are great opportunities for companies to present on the platforms where their target customers are active on. Since social media is one of the most optimal marketing tools for businesses to leverage the customer relationship, increase brand loyalty along with other business incentives. Next, if desired, a mix research method of quantitative and quality data could be applied to deliver a deeper understanding of a particular issue. It is critical for the company to apply these two methods when they have reach certain levels of business development. As some aspects are uncovered behind the numeric data, whereas personalized data collection is advantageous. However, the more complex of a research, the more expensive and

challenging resources are considered. All in all, depends on objectives of specific research, different ways of data collection, implementation and evaluation will be taken into account.

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## APPENDICES

No appendix

