



A Study of Using Instagram as a Marketing Tool to Promote Trading for Online Sellers in Thailand

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Abstract

In recent years, Instagram has become the most popular platform to promote the products and services. Some studies suggest because of the smaller number of advertisers in Instagram which produce less competitions thus offering greater opportunity for online sellers to use Instagram as a marketing channel. However, this does not necessarily represent the view of all the online sellers. Thus, this research paper venture on two main questions; 1) What are the reasons of online sellers choosing Instagram as a marketing tools? And 2) What are the effective features of Instagram which help online sellers to increase brand awareness and boost up their sales? To answer these 2 questions, this paper has conducted semi-structured interview with 10 online sellers. According to the findings, respondents or interviewees chose Instagram as a marketing channel or tools because of target group base (large number of active users), familiarity with the platform (easy to use), interface of the platform (engaging platform and visual advantage), and effective algorithm (availability of many marketing tools). Subsequently, respondents employed 5 main Instagram features to promote and boost their sales namely, post feature (the most popular feature), story feature, reels, hashtag, and ads. In addition to these Instagram features, they also have adopted 5 more marketing strategies or methods such as hiring influencers, adopting promotional campaigns, posting pictures at the right time, constantly updating the content and uploading unlimited story contents and changing content patterns. However, among all these features and marketing strategies, post feature is the most popular tool used for promoting products and services. All the respondents post pictures every day to keep their audiences active and in touch.

Keywords: *Instagram, Marketing channel, Online marketing, Digital marketing, Features, Marketing strategies*

1. Introduction

Over the past 5 years, many businesses and entrepreneurs have given their interests to an online commerce. There are many outstanding online network platforms that have also turned themselves into marketplace platforms, for example, Facebook and Instagram. The number of Thai internet users have been reported at 57 million accounted for 82.48% of all Thai population where 46 million are on their smart phones (Kraiwanit, and Srijaem, 2021). The growth of internet and number of users are driving many entrepreneurs to an opportunity of generating more sale revenues.

Instagram was launched in October 2010 as a mobile photo and video sharing service which allow users to share their life moments with their networks (Hu et al., 2014). In 2014, Instagram has been perceived as a “*face*” of online sociality and subjectivity” (Fallon, 2014, p. 54). This can be related to the reason that many entrepreneurs using Instagram as their marketing tool. The perceive of the application’s function as an individual has led to the perceive of its function as a business because it contains numbers of active users (Buinac, and Lundberg, 2015). This perception of users led to the development of social media platform including Facebook, Tiktok, and Instagram to make it easier for people to “transact online” (Yuliana, Marginingsih, and Alamsyah, 2021, p. 61).

Before the COVID-19 pandemic situation, Instagram was the fastest growing social media platforms on the internet (Suciati, 2018). Interaction between users on the application, in 2010, were only like, follow, and comment. To discover other users, there is a Search tab allowing users to find each other in order to connect. A year later, Instagram involved hashtag (#) which helping their users to find other people easier (Suciati, 2018). Since Instagram was immensely growing within social media industry, it has been bought by Facebook in 2012 for 1 billion US dollar (Upbin, 2012). This evolution of Instagram has changed the mechanisms of social media usage since then. After being bought by Facebook, Instagram is allowing its users to expand their online network by sharing their photos to their Facebook feed. This connection between Facebook and Instagram then evolved a further marketing tool called, social media influencers. These influencers refer to those who have numbers of followers on social media specifically around 10,000 and

more. According to Fuciu (2019), claimed that US developed companies spend 70% of their budget on influencers and 30% on Instagram stories.

Recently, Instagram provides a kind of marketplace feature called, Instagram Shopping since many entertained applications have also expanded themselves to a commercial application like Tiktok (Yuliana, Marginingsih, and Alamsyah, 2021). Eventually, Instagram start the feature Instagram Shopping in 2017 where “the shopping posts look like organic posts, with the exception that the “tap to view products” button would reveal product names and prices”, claimed by Donnelly 2021. The application has evolved quickly throughout this period of time since it has become one of the marketplace platforms on social media. Instagram features have been added a lot more dimension including IGTV, Story Highlight, and Reels where users can upload their longer video, edited filtered video, and live-streaming records (Yuliana et al., 2021). These features on the application are not only creating a better user experience but they are also giving those entrepreneurs more channels to communicate with their prospected customers.

Today, there are numbers of small business owners who have chosen Instagram to be their front-stores and channel of communication. Bohra and Bishnoi (2016) suggested that “shopping on Instagram has a charming community feel — the sellers communicate with customers in the comment sections, making the online experience feel close and personal”, p. 43. This can be anticipated as a reason why many sellers join the Instagram community even though; they don’t use it for direct selling. Despite, Instagram has its own shopping feature, it doesn’t provide the sellers a channel to close their deals but link people to their website. Handayani, Purwandari, Solichah, and Prima (2018) mentioned this function on Instagram as a Call-to-Action (CTA) to impulse buying. However, this research is going to explore insight perspectives of the sellers/companies towards Instagram business features.

Traditional marketing through offline channels such as broadcasting through TV and radio, printing magazines and newspapers, direct mail, telemarketing through text and outdoor billboards, bus and posters and so on are outdated. The traditional marketing is outdated because it is harder to reach wider audiences and it is very expensive and there is no direct interaction with the customers. In addition, any online disruption may cause an unstable communication environment to certain businesses that have been using traditional offline medias to market their products. With modern technology and development, most people spend time with their smartphones and often spend time browsing social networks such as Facebook, Instagram and to name few. So, with this transition, businesses needed to adapt to this change and attune to modern mode of marketing. Thus, most businesses have turned to make use of modern technology as their core channel advertising their brands and products. The digital marketing such as websites, social media, search engines, and mobile devices have helped many businesses to reach wider audiences. In particular, social media such as Instagram became the most effective channel to market the product and services. The reasons are because the digital marketing reach wider audiences and it has the platform to engage with customers and market segmentation (customer target).

However, adjusting to the digital marketing does not guarantee the effectiveness of marketing and survival of businesses. The effectiveness and growth of the business depends on their unique method of marketing through social networks. Thus, it is the matter of choosing the best content to market the products and services. Particularly, not everyone is successful in making use of Instagram as their marketing channel. There are many businesses that did not create appealing contents and could not cope up with the function and features of the Instagram. As a consequence, many failed to best use of the marketing tools of Instagram to market their products and services. For that reason, not all businesses who use Instagram as a marketing channel will be successful. Based on this proposition, this research will solely focus on the study of what are effective methods using by online seller in Thailand to accomplish their marketing and sales target.



2. Objectives

- 1) To recognize reasons of online sellers selecting Instagram as a marketing tool for their business
- 2) To identify effective features of Instagram which help online sellers increasing brand awareness and boosting up their sales
- 3) To provide recommendations on the effective methods to promote online shop's brand awareness and sale through Instagram

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Types of Research

The research is exploratory research that primarily aims to understand reasons of online sellers selecting Instagram as a marketing tool for their business. The success and challenge of the selection will be shared through online sellers' experiences as well as the adaptive method to overcome that challenge. Moreover, the researcher attempts to identify effective features of Instagram which help online sellers increasing brand awareness and boosting up their sales. Ultimately, the research will provide recommendations on the effective methods to promote online shop's brand awareness and sale through Instagram.

3.2 Data Collection

This research is attempted to collect a primary data by conducting through face-to-face and online face-to-face interview with 10 participants. The participants will be requested to share their online shop information (e.g. the commencement date, products, selling channels, etc.), experiences of online selling and perception towards Instagram as a marketing tools for online selling. According to the approach of other researchers [e.g. Kraivanit and Srijaem, 2021; Yuliana, Marginingsih, and Alamsyah, 2021; Rojrungreangkit, 2017], the setting location of participants are in Thailand especially Bangkok and metropolitan area where contains a high number of active users (Chen, 2018; Muangtum, 2021). The participants need to contain these attributes including:

- 1) aged 20 – 39 years old
- 2) currently owning a shop on Instagram
- 3) experience in making money from using Instagram as a shop.

The interview lasts approximately 45 minutes. The data are collected through voice memo which is kept confidential to the author and replaced by code numbers in the results. The answers are analyzed and summarized to highlight the key finding using content analysis.

3.3 Interview Questions

Demographic Information

- 1) Would you mind to tell your age?
- 2) What is the online business that you are currently running?
- 3) Can you describe the size of your online business?
- 4) Could you please tell me your approximate monthly cash inflow of your online business?
- 5) How much budget or percentage have you set for marketing activities online? and Instagram?
- 6) How many marketing platforms (offline/online) are you currently using? What are they? and Is Instagram the main platform of your marketing?
- 7) How long have you been using Instagram for your online business?

Open-ended Questions

- 8) When did you start using Instagram as a platform to market your products? Why did you choose Instagram as a platform to advertise your products? Or What was your reason for choosing Instagram as a tool to sell your products?
- 9) Initially, how was your experience with Instagram? What kind of marketing methods did you use it?
- 10) Did you face any challenges? How was the reaction of your prospective customers toward your marketing? Did you receive enough attention from customers in the beginning? Or did you get sufficient customers to buy your products? If not, how and what did you change with your marketing methods to increase your sales?



- 11) When was the time that your marketing methods worked efficiently and you confidently thought that you should use these methods to maintain and enhance further growth (sales)? Please, can you give a brief account of the marketing tools (features) that worked efficiently.
- 12) Can you share with us the contents you upload on Instagram to promote your business? Do you think it is necessary to have a specific content to use with each feature in order to be effective? If yes, can you provide us some examples?
- 13) How is your Instagram marketing different from other competitors? Or what is so unique about your marketing methods from others?
- 14) What would you say to young entrepreneurs who do not have any or little experience with marketing on Instagram? Or after experiencing many challenges, what would you say about Instagram as a marketing tool to reach out to wider customers and increase your sales.

3.4) Data Analysis

According to Miles & Huberman (1994) qualitative data is analysed through three steps:

- 1) Data reduction: First step is to select, focus, shorten and organize the data to make it possible to draw conclusions.
- 2) Data display: Second step, after the reduction, is to organize and in a neat way present the data so further conclusions can be drawn.
- 3) Conclusion Drawing and Verification: third and last step is when the researchers determine patterns, explanations and occurrences.

The data is collected through semi-structured interviews with online sellers from different backgrounds. All the online sellers were asked the same questions as this will help to assemble the consistent information. This will also give audience the accurate and reliable information. However, to make the result and conclusion precise, this paper used data reduction by selecting and focusing on the core data needed to answer the main research questions. Subsequently, the data were compressed and organized according to the specific research questions to narrow down the raw data to data processing. And finally, after cleaning and processing the raw data, the processed data was further compressed to draw and verify the information needed to fulfill for the intended aim of this research paper.

4. Results and Discussion

This chapter will demonstrate the collection of data obtained from in-depth interviews with online sellers, analysis of the data and cohesive discussion. As the research was conducted in the form of in-depth interview, the data will be presented in a descriptive and narrative manner, in which speeches of interviewees will often be referred. Moreover, the data will be studied and developed through an analytical process scoped by the objectives of the study.

4.1 Online Seller's Profile Summary

Online sellers who were selected for an interview are owners and/or co-founders of an online shop. They have been involved in marketing strategies since their inception. The majority has been using Instagram on a private account; therefore, they are familiar with the basic features and the nature of this application. There are less or no similarity in the products and services of the respondents such as 2nd hand film camera, women clothing, gummy supplement, Prophecy contents and services, Cannabis shaped chocolate, etc. Most of them have shifted completely from offline marketing to online platforms and use Instagram for business as their main marketing tools. A range of business age is between 2 – 3 years, matching the booming era of online selling platform during the covid 19 pandemic. Marketing approaches used by respondents are diverse with the features and objectives. All of the online shops are considered as small size business which mainly organized by a person or less than 5 persons for a group of co-founders.



Table 1 Characteristics of Online Shop

Respondents	Ownership Status	Products & Services	Shop	Ages (Business)
Respondent 1	Owner	Second Hand film cameras	Online	3 years
Respondent 2	Owner	Female clothes / Handcrafted bikini	Online	2 years
Respondent 3	Owner	Jelly gummy supplements	Online	1 year
Respondent 4	Owner	Prophecy contents and services	Online	3 years
Respondent 5	Co-founder	Unisex shoes / bags / clothes	Online	3 years
Respondent 6	Owner	Cannabis shaped chocolate	Hybrid	2.5 years
Respondent 7	Co-founder	Car perfume & Clothing Brand	Online	3 years
Respondent 8	Owner	Accessory and Jewelry	Online	4 years
Respondent 9	Owner	Accessories & Trend Products	Online	4 years
Respondent 10	Owner	Fake eyelashes	Online	2 years

Table 1 summarizes the key characteristics of an online shop. The most common age of the businesses is 3 years, representing 40% of the sample, while the most prevalent age of the owners is 26 years, accounting for 30% of the total. The majority of the businesses are small-sized (80%), and 90% of them operate as online shops. Overall, the table provides an overview of the age of the businesses and owners, as well as the size and type of shop in the sample.

4.2 The reason of choosing Instagram as an online marketing tool

The qualitative data that we have collected demonstrates to us the way online sellers thought about how they perceive to begin their business online. Definitely, to become online sellers that their shops only appeared on online platforms. Different strategies and tactics to attract customers and retain their loyalty are used from a traditional offline platform. It requires an observation of customer behaviors, thoughts and interests along with familiarity of an online platform. It means that the online sellers have to know who their target customers are, normally which online platforms these customers spend time with, and absolute how to attract these customers to have a glance at their shops and products. Moreover, the trend of online products selling is rapid, which we can see the change of online selling platforms from one to another through time. Online platforms play a role as a marketplace for sellers and buyers. When their target customers move their interest from one platform to another platform, the marketplace tends to shift in the same direction. Instagram is one of the most used online platforms by sellers. It is mainly used as a marketing channel for the brand. The majority of respondents have selected Instagram as the main platform for their online shop. Some of them even open more than one account to sell their products.

One reason why Instagram is used as a marketing channel over other social medias is because it has over 2 million advertisers in comparison to Facebook with 2.5 billion advertisers. Which means there is a less competition on Instagram thus, providing greater leeway to marketing success (Sharma, 2023). Nonetheless, in order to know the actual reasons from the respondents on why they chose Instagram over other social networks as a platform to promote or market their products and services, this paper has categorized four attributes namely, Target group base, familiarity with the platform, interface of the platform and algorithm of the platform to understand their decisions. In fact, the interviewees emphasized essential attributes that make Instagram distinct from other platforms and is the best choice in terms of marketing channel for online selling.

a. Target group base

From sellers' perspective, social media are considered as a marketplace where they can advertise their products virtually and it is a channel to create an interaction with their potential clients. Most of the respondents select Instagram to be their main online channel due to their main target customers using Instagram and familiar with the application. Between 2020 and 2022, there were 16.29 million (average) Instagram users in Thailand. Out of 16.29 million users, the largest user group were aged between 18 to 34, representing 67.89 percent of total users (11.06 million users). Rightly so, the respondents have capitalized the market as their main customer targets are aged between 18 and working age (perhaps 30s). One respondent quote "my target groups are university students and working people as they are often using Instagram." In a similar manner, another respondent affirmed, "my target customer is teenager because they use Instagram more than Facebook platform." Thus, this clearly imply that one of the main reasons for online sellers to select Instagram is because of the largest user group who are the prospective buyers. In addition, with relatively lesser competition (to Facebook) and more usage, it automatically drives their motivation to use Instagram as their main platform to promote their products and services.

b. Familiarity with the platform

The second attribute is the familiarity with the platform which dictates the cognizance of usage and management of the account. It is fairly easy to create an online business account on Instagram as they just have to create a personal account and make the account public to sell their products and services. And creating online business account is free and simple for the sellers. All the respondents affirm that they have vast experiences of using the platform and its features. Initially, they have been using personal (private) account to socialize with friends and buy products from the sellers. One interviewee professed that she used to buy clothes from other sellers on Instagram. In addition, the familiarity among customers in the usage of Instagram has helped online sellers to directly connect with the customers. This is evident as the majority of the respondents' customers are between 20 – 40 years old. Being in the environment of technology and fast communication, the young generation grew up using the Instagram platform. These people browse the online sellers' profile through feed and stories. Thereafter, they can check the products and explore for more business' Instagram profile to get varieties of products and services. With these experiences, they are familiar with the features and basic algorithm of the platform.

c. Interface of the platform

Visualization is essential for the brand advertising online, especially with the businesses that do not have a physical shop for customers to go and check products before purchasing. Photos and videos that could convey brand's message and identity to customer, also increase wants and needs on their products and services can boost up sale growth and customer pool. According to the research, the majority of interviewee demonstrates their interest towards Instagram because of its main character, the grid photo layout. This layout displays photos in well-structured and organized way.

Visualization is essential for the brand advertising online, especially with the businesses that do not have a physical shop for customers to go and check products before purchasing. Photos and videos that could convey brand's message and identity to customer, also increase wants and needs on their products and services which can boost up sale growth and customer pool. The data shows that the reason behind all interviewees opting for Instagram is because of its main character, the grid photo layout. This layout displays photos in well-structured and organized way and it transforms the photos into good-looking grids. With brighter and good-looking pictures, prospective customers can discovery the products through feed, stories and videos on Instagram. One respondent replied, "interface of Instagram is more understandable and reachable for audiences with beauty, fashion, lifestyle contents than other platforms like Facebook. Trend of marketing fashion brand is to deliver lifestyle wearing actual products and taking photo at café and other travelling destinations. So, Instagram has interface to deliver better than others." In a similar manner, another respondent also argued, "the profile interface of Instagram is simple with grid layout which helps customers to search products very easily whereas Facebook has a complicated interface where customers need to click to album to check the products. Thus, with better grid photo layout, it will help online sellers to sell their products and services and boost their brand with presentable and decorative photos. In other words, with appealing pictures, it will allow prospective customers to browse and learn more about owner's products and services in feed and stories.



d. Effective algorithm

The last attribute of choosing Instagram as a marketing platform is because of effective Instagram algorithm. Before explaining the effectiveness, one need to understand what is Instagram algorithm. In simple words, “it is a set of rules that rank content on the platform. It decides what content shows up, and in what order, on all Instagram user’s feeds, the Explore page, the Reels feed, hashtag pages and so on” (McLachlan & Mikolajczyk, 2022). Each of these feeds, reel and explore page uses its own algorithm which means all these parts work differently. The main idea of the algorithm is to personalize the user experiences by showing only the relevant content that the users most likely to engage with. For instance,

i. Feed and stories algorithm

In this algorithm, users will see content in their feed and stories and often, they will see the display of content from the people that they follow. The content will present the information about the post, information about the poster and the interaction and user activity.

ii. Explore page algorithm

The explore page will update the fresh and new content which will mostly be posts from accounts that one does not follow. The posts will be presented based on the rankings.

iii. Reels

In a similar manner to aforementioned algorithm, the reels will upload entertaining posts and like explore page, many videos will come from an account that users do not follow.

Therefore, with effective algorithm, online sellers can straightforwardly reach out to the existing and prospective customers (further reaching to a new potential target). All the respondents have highly credited the effectiveness of Instagram algorithm as they emphasize on how algorithm provides users with updates without setting the notification like Facebook. Some respondents also believes that algorithms lure larger potential customers as they carry high conversation rate in comparison to Facebook.

4.3 The effective features of Instagram that help boosting up brand awareness and sale

Like the interviewees, many other online business owners are using Instagram to grow their business simply because it is an easy, multifaceted and effective marketing channel to reach out to wider existing and prospective customers. Hence, Instagram became an attractive platform for many online sellers to market their goods and services.

However, the success of their marketing and business differs according to their strategy and methods. The common features that Instagram offers are post, story, reels, ads, and hashtag. These properties assist online sellers to introduce, entice, engage, create brand awareness and boost their sales. Thus, this section will discuss their strategy in increasing brand awareness and boosting their sales.

a. Post

The most popular usage of Instagram feature is the post feature as all the interviewees unanimously acknowledge that sharing a visually appealing photo help to entice and reach wider target customers who may have direct or indirect interest in the products. As mentioned earlier in the interface of the platform, uploading professional visual photos on Instagram, especially in the grid-photo layout form (well-structured and organized) increases the brand awareness and favorably reachable to broader audiences. In addition, with professional and visually luring photos, if the post gets more likes and comments, it uncovers the post to more audiences (algorithm of Instagram). The following figures 1 and 2 are the example of post features of respondents (Their names are not mentioned due to their request for privacy, so for this purpose, it is anonymous).

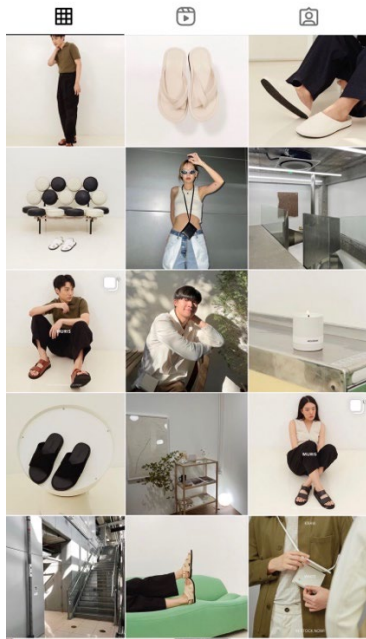


Figure 1 Post of clothing brand
(Source: Interviewees)

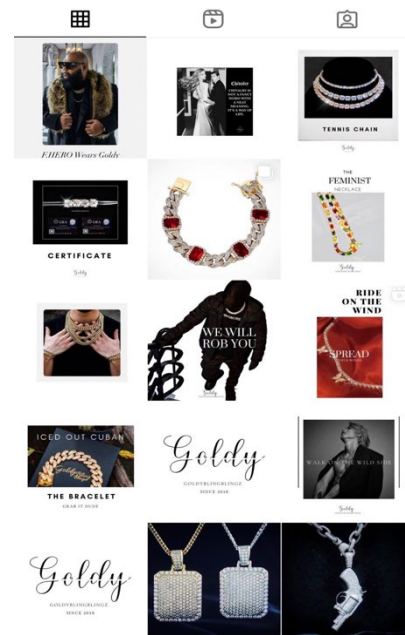


Figure 2 Post of Jewelry products
(Source: Interviewees)

b. Story

Instagram story feature is also one of the most popular features among users. Same as post features, all the respondents unanimously agreed that they all use story feature to advertise their products. Research also suggest that 50 percent of Instagram users have purchased products after seeing the products in stories. Story feature is very versatile as it allows users to share photos, live and recorded videos, boomerangs and texts. In addition, while posting photos, videos, boomerangs and texts, users can also incorporate stickers such as time, music, location, temperature, user tags, polls, questions and many more. The users also have the options to save the story highlights in their profile for the future reference.

c. Reels/Video

Reels provide users a sense of creator as they allow them to create their own reels. In other words, reels allow users to create a short and entertaining video of their own preference. The new reels features allow users to create video up to 60 seconds and can search for audio or song. They provide creative tools and effect to edit and make it fun and enthralling. For instance, creative tools include audio (music or song from the Instagram music library), effects (multiple clips with different effects), orient (align the videos or photos to make a smooth transition) and speed (users can choose to slow down or speed up the play). Upon the completion of reels, users can share to their followers or wider audiences (if public account) on Feed.

However, reel is not very popular feature for marketing among respondents as half of the interviewees do not use the reels to advertiser their goods and services but this does not discredit the reels. The reason behind not choosing reels is because of the nature of the product and it is also about personal preference over other features. In contrast, other half of the respondents uses reels to promote their products. For instance, one respondent assert, "Reel is a good feature to help online shopping. The feature is similar to TikTok platform. Reels has maximum limit of 60 minutes long per content. I think it is a good amount of time to capture audiences' attention. Our content can get viral easily if we use catchy theme song, thus increasing the content visibility and creating brand awareness faster." In a similar manner, another respondent also defended that reel is one of the most effective features to help him promote his product because uploading short videos on reel attract and widespread to many audiences. He gave an example of his reel video where one of his reel videos got 30,000 views and likes. Simultaneously, he used to sell his products through live video but later he stopped because his audiences were not the one that normally buy from the live videos. The following figures show some of the interviewees' reels.



Figure 3 Reels of prophesy content and services
(Source: Respondents' Instagram reels)

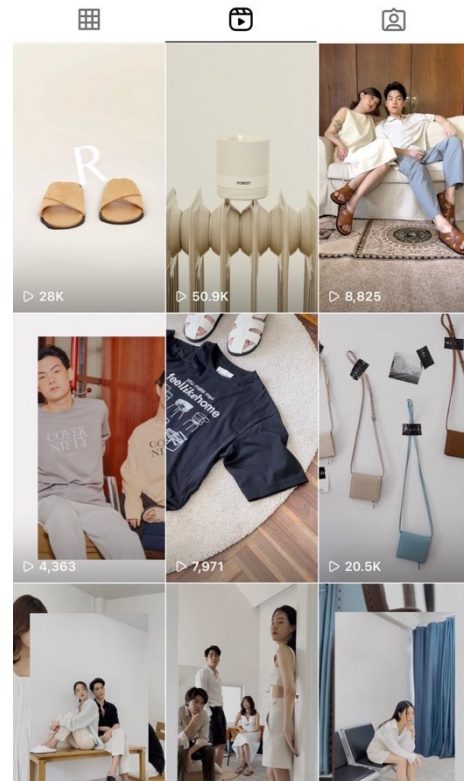


Figure 4 Reels of Clothing
(Source: Respondents' Instagram reels)

The above figure 3 and 4 shows respondents' short video with viewers' number in the reels page. The highest view by a single reel is fifty thousand and nine hundred views and the second highest view is thirty-one thousand and one hundred views. This suggest that, with an entertaining reel, online sellers can reach out to wider audiences to both followers and non-followers. In fact, one of the interviewees confidently declared that after promoting her products through reel, the number of viewers increased sharply and hence she was able to sell more products.

d. Hashtag

Another feature of Instagram is hashtag where online seller uses hashtags to get to new audiences and expand their businesses. Hashtag help audiences to identify and filter similar posts that they are interested in or to know about. Once audiences click the hashtags search, it will lead to the account and the content that they are interested to see and engage with. Hashtag also personalize the user's uniqueness and thus create brand. The main purpose of hashtag is to reach wider audiences by directing them to select the relevant products and interact with the them. In a similar manner to reels, not all of the respondents opt for hashtag to market or promote their products and services. One reason why they don't use hashtag is because of the new feature of algorithm where it automatically displays or share the posts of similar interest. So, that means you don't have to rely on hashtag to reach to wider audiences because new feature of algorithm provides the facility. However, this does not suggest that hashtag is obsolete or not important feature for promoting. In fact, one of the respondents affirmed that he uses many hashtags per post such as 30-40 hashtags. This helps to increase "like" in his post thus creating credibility in the products and increasing the sales. However, he emphasizes that hashtag is mostly effective for foreign customers. The figure 5 and 6 shows the sample of hashtag of respondents.

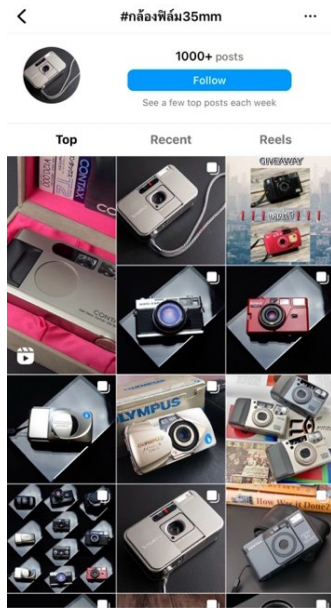


Figure 5 Different types of cameras
(Source: Respondents' Instagram page)



Figure 6 Hashtags in the caption section
(Source: Respondents' Instagram reels)

e. Instagram Ads

Instagram ads is one of the most popular features to promote online sellers' brand by reaching out to broader audiences. Instagramads has allowed users to turn their posts into ads by using Ads manager tools. This feature allows users to select the best-performing posts and convert it to ads thus reaching out to new targets. This is evident as all the respondents uses Instagram ads to promote and boost their products and services. In fact, respondents expressed that most of their clients or audiences come from Instagram ads. which means Instagram ads is effective and helps them to boost their sales.

4.4 Other marketing strategies to promote and boost the sales

In addition to the Instagram features, there are other strategies or approaches used by respondents to promote and boost their sales.

a. Influencer

The other strategy that respondents use to promote their product is through influencer. Influencers are Instagram users who has the power to persuade and influence potential customers to buy the products and services. They are well known by many audiences as they have large number of followers and high interaction or engagement rates. Many large companies have hired them to promote their products and services to reach out to wider target of customers. In the current market, influencer marketing is in trend as consumers tend to trust and buy products and services presented by them. According to the respondents, they use two methods to promote their products through influencers and they are,

i. Pay sum

For some respondents, they pay sum to influencers promote their products.

ii. Provide Free Products

Whereas for some respondents, they provide free products to their influencers and let the influencer judge the products. In other words, they give free products to review for them. The figure 7 shows the picture of influencer reviewing and promoting one of the respondents' products.



Figure 7 Influencer promoting the products
(Source: Respondents' Instagram page)

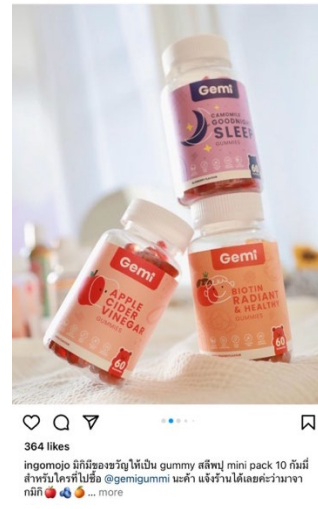


Figure 8 Influencer promoting the products
(Source: Respondents' Instagram page)

b. Marketing campaign

Respondents express that one way to promote and boost the sales of the product is through marketing campaigns such as conducting lucky draw, giving free products (give away), promotional campaign, and discount during 11/11. Evidently, the result of these campaigns was positive as the owners were able to gain more followers and simultaneously there was a sharp increase in sales as well.

c. Right timing

Another marketing strategy is to post picture at the right time. Respondents argue that the prime time to post pictures on weekdays is at evening after 6 PM. The reason is because people usually browse Instagram after their work or studies. So, when respondents post pictures around evening, they gain more LIKE on their photos which indicates that audiences have viewed their products.

d. Constant updates and unlimited story contents

The online sellers post pictures every day to keep their audiences active and keep in touch. Furthermore, they also post unlimited story contents every day. In average, they post 4 to 8 stories per day to let audiences see their products and services constantly.

e. Change content patterns

Respondents suggest that it is best to change the content patterns such as uploading review pictures in order to create transparency and build credibility of the products and services

The aforementioned Instagram features and other marketing strategies are used by respondents to promote and boost their sales of products and services. According to the respondents the most effective marketing feature is the post feature as majority of them unanimously credit this feature for boosting up their sales. They proclaim that they post pictures every day to keep their audiences active and in touch. Other research also suggests that the reason behind Instagram being used as a marketing channel for online business is because of its visual nature. In other words, Instagram provide users an opportunity to use different tools to market their products in the form of visual photos, videos and stories. In recent study, 72 percent of Instagram users report making a purchase decision after seeing something on Instagram and the most popular products were clothing, makeup, shoes and jewelry (Later, 2022). Aside from post feature, reels, ads and influencer are also effective for the online sellers to promote their products and increase the sales.



5. Conclusion

In the era of digitalization, social medias have been consumed by billions of people around the world. People living far for each other can now communicate and see what the other people in other parts of the world doing within seconds. However, social medias are now being used as the marketing tools by online sellers to promote and boost their products. In particular, Instagram has become the most popular platform to market the products and services. According to the data, the respondents chose Instagram as a marketing channel because of the target group base, familiarity with the platform, interface of the platform (visualization) and effective algorithm. Subsequently, to promote their products and services and boost the sales, they employ different kinds of features such as post features, story features, reels, hashtag, and Instagram ads. In addition, they also use other marketing strategies and methods such as hiring influencers, adopting promotional campaign, posting pictures at the right time, constantly updating of posts and unlimited story contents and changing content patterns.

The respondents have also offered suggestion to use Instagram as a marketing channel and employ marketing strategies to promote and boost the sales. The first suggestion is to be more interactive and engaging and often give an instant response to the existing or prospective customers. The reason behind this suggestion is because they believe that there are many other online shops that offer similar products and if one is not active enough, the customers might buy from other shops. Secondly, they suggest starters to focus on the products that are related to the Instagram users. For example, product like water filter is not attractive for Instagram users. So, the starters need to focus on selling fashion related products. And lastly, the visual post should have a professional and enticing photo. With professional and attractive photos, the post will have more likes and views and consequently, it will reach to a wider audience.

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