

# THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL GROUP ACTIVITY ON THE MANAGEMENT OF STUDENTS' LOYALTY TO THE PRODUCT: FEATURES AND PROBLEMS OF PROMOTION

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## Abstract

In the modern world of digital technologies, a new alternative consciousness has emerged. It focused on the universal values. In the digital world, companies can win over consumers by demonstrating the social orientation of their activities on the Internet. Many of them began to focus on value-oriented branding and to pay more attention to solving socially significant issues and to interact more actively with consumers, attracting them to participate in good deeds through digital group activity. The article analyzes the peculiarities of the influence of digital group activity on the management of students' loyalty to the product and to the company. As a research method, the questionnaire method was used, which allows to effectively identify the features of the influence of digital group activity on the students' attitude towards the company. The authors describe the peculiarity of digital transformation on the development of practices for the use of group Internet promotions by Internet marketers. For the first time, the influence of digital group activity on the management of students' loyalty to the product and to the companies in general is analyzed. The reasons for the influence of digital group activity on the students' loyalty management are proved: virality, speed of distribution, ideological orientation, breadth of audience coverage. It is revealed that a successful scenario of digital group activity, taken from life and close to the majority of the student audience, reflecting their values and intentions, causes loyalty to the company among student youth to a greater extent. It is determined that in order to effectively conduct digital group activity to form loyalty to the product and to the company, a scenario is needed that is not time-consuming for the user and does not require a large number of actions, otherwise it will not be attractive for students. It is shown for the first time that the disadvantages of digital group activity include: cost for conducting; availability only to large companies; rapid fading of interest. It is proved that the digital group activity in order to form loyalty to the product and to the company is focused on quick results. It is considered that in digital group activities students are attracted by simple rules.

**Keywords:** digital group activity, loyalty, Internet marketers, students.

## INTRODUCTION

At the present stage of digitalization of various spheres of life, companies are forced to look for new approaches to managing their own brands in order to remain competitive and maximally use market opportunities in the dynamic environment. In this regard, there is a change in value attitudes and business strategy patterns (Avdeeva, 2017; Babakin, 2017; Konstantinov, 2013; Yakushenko, 2017).

Instead of strength and power as tools to influence competitors, companies are increasingly focusing on flexibility, uniqueness of the offer for the consumer and speed of the innovations as a new strategy for the development of the company. As a rule, they are based on fundamentally new thinking and a modern system of values. Any company in the digital age forms a competitive advantage based on the differentiation of its marketing offer (Nosova, 2009; Gugueva, 2012; Zaitsev, 2008; Fartash et al., 2018; Shaidullina et al., 2018; Davoudi et al., 2018).

The growth of competition has forced manufacturers not only to face consumers, but also to constantly look for new ways to interact with them. According to numerous studies, it is clear that people expect companies to demonstrate a greater sense of responsibility for the society in which they work and for solving certain issues, for example, related to the environment (Cherdymova, 2013; Martysenko, 2014; Kvon et al., 2019; Sorokoumova, 2021; Qarkaxhja et al., 2021). As for small and medium businesses, they also use digital group activities to promote their business. But, in this case, since they, unlike large corporations, do not have marketing companies to broadcast certain values and missions, they conduct small group interactive Internet promotions in which they most often play their products. This also works quite successfully to promote and increase their brand awareness (Zotova, 2017; Butcher, 2004). Leading corporations have “caught” this trend well and realized that goodness and virtue are rational and economically profitable. They promote their product through various social programs, and in return receive a loyal consumer and an increase in sales. Modern companies actively use this fact and compete with each other - who has a cooler concept of goodness. For a beautiful filling of this concept with the brand content, a good

legend is needed (Proskura, 2013; Bayanova et al., 2019; Tugun et al., 2020; Khanmurzina, 2020; Usak et al., 2020; Ilyin, 2002). Therefore, companies conduct expensive marketing campaigns, buying stories for their products and making these stories clearly associated with their product. Such stories form a social utility in the eyes of the consumer and become the basis of advertising Internet activities of companies (Karpova, 2013; Vasilenko, 2017; Kotler, 2003). Of course, Internet marketers have not ignored the virtual way of attracting consumers through group interactive promotions and have begun to actively use these virtual promotions as the brand promotion on the Internet. Internet experts say that the secret of the success of brand information dissemination lies in the virality of the published content. Virality is a publication that has the potential for self-replication - natural replication of the materials of users of social networks (Grigoriev, 2018; Pirogova, 2018).

The Internet is one of the most dynamically developing phenomena in the world, at the moment more than three billion people are users of the global network. The Internet has raised to a new level the ways of exchanging information not only for human activity in general, but also for economic activity in particular. The number of network users, their activity, as well as the increase in trust and interest in obtaining information via the Internet are rapidly increasing. All this necessitates the presence of companies on social networks. The Internet, replacing the old ways of interaction between the participants of commercial activity, becomes the main source of information about the company, its goods and various services. The Internet through social networks helps to build a two-way connection between the producer and the consumer (Nizamutdinova, 2003; Romanov, 2003).

The content created by the consumer, the opinion about companies and their products in the form of blogs, videos and photos with comments, confidently outstrips professional sources. Besides the value of trust in each other, students also have a viral value - by distributing this or that brand content on social networks, they increase its recognition (Reicheld, 2005; Izzard, 2002; Ilyin, 2001).

And it can be both positive and negative. Therefore, companies are forced not only to look for new ways to interact with consumers, but

also to look for ways to involve them in promoting their brand. One of these methods is a group interactive action on the Web, which connects a group of people with one idea through a single hashtag (Philippova, 2006; Chernykh, 2007).

Its essence lies in the fact that the company offers the idea of a group interactive campaign, and users, picking it up, publish branded content, thereby automatically starting to promote the company on the Internet. Basically, companies launch such group interactive promotions during the launch of new products on the market or as part of charity events. This method has appeared recently and at the moment has been used by only a few large companies, so Internet marketers have not yet formed a clear attitude to this method of brand promotion.

### Objectives and Structure of the Research

In the research devoted to the analysis of the expert opinion of Internet marketers, they sought to identify the features of using the digital group activity to manage students' loyalty to the product and to the company.

To achieve this goal, the following tasks can be identified:

- to study the experience of companies using the digital group activity in order to form the students' loyalty to the product and to the company as a whole;
- to find out the reasons for the use of the digital group activity by companies;
- to determine the advantages and disadvantages of using the digital group activity in order to form the students' loyalty to the product and to the company as a whole.

During the expert survey, six interviews were taken with managers who are directly engaged in social Internet marketing, that is, the promotion of the company on the Internet.

Questions suggested in the questionnaire:

- How long have you been working in the field of Internet marketing?
- What channels and methods of promoting the company on the Internet do you use?

- Are you familiar with the phenomenon of the digital group activity?
- Have you used the digital group activity in your practice?
- Can you give examples of implemented projects using the digital group activity?
- How long ago did companies start organizing digital group actions?
- In your opinion, why do companies organize the digital group activity?
- For what reasons do companies launch the digital group activity?
- In which social media companies conduct the digital group activity?

The phenomenon of the digital group activity implies the two-way communication between the producer and the consumer. It was important to identify why companies use digital group activities and to understand how successfully they help to implement their plans. And in order to evaluate the effectiveness of this method, it was also necessary to study the opinion of students youth about virtual group interactive actions - their attitude to this phenomenon.

### Results

During the research, the interviewed experts said that a virtual group interactive action is a media, not a marketing term (91%). Many even talked about the speculative nature of this concept, invented by representatives of the media, since initially the digital group activity was not used for commercial purposes. As for the phenomenon of the digital group activity itself, Internet marketers agree that it can still be attributed to promotions, since it has a viral characteristic and is able to gather users around one event very quickly. The interviewed experts said that in marketing there is a more correct term – “advertising company” - aimed at solving a problem. Internet managers, speaking about the reasons for launching the digital group activity, identify two reasons. The first and main goal of the digital group activity is to increase brand awareness (100%). All the experts note that the brand awareness is one of the key metrics in the life cycle of any company. It is the brand awareness that affects the competitiveness

of the product and the possibility of the long-term growth of the company. The digital group activity is also used to bring new products of well-known brands or sub-brands to the market.

Internet managers (89%) say that the digital group activity as a method of brand promotion is fully justified by its advantages over other methods. The main advantage of the digital group activity is its ability to involve the user in active communication with the brand (87%). The need to involve the consumer in two-way communication with the company is formed by the needs of the market. Experts (73%) noted the fact that customers' marketing strategies are being adapted now, they have become more aware of the degree of the influence on them through advertising, and now they are distrustful of all the tricks of marketers. Many experts (73%) say that companies note a drop in the loyalty of their consumers, despite the fact that such important metrics as brand awareness and satisfaction with goods and services remain at a high level.

Thus, all the specialists (100%) note the need to include students more deeply in the brand development scenario managed by the company, thereby creating impressions among customers and causing their attachment to the brand. And it is through the digital group activity that these tasks can be achieved.

Other equally important advantages of the digital group activity are related to its direct implementation mechanism, which, among other things, reflected the latest trends of the Internet. Managers note the fact of the predominance of user content on the Internet. Experts (81%) say that students have long been indirectly and chaotically involved in the process of promoting companies - they create a variety of content, leave comments, reviews, exhibit photos related to the brands. Now, by their task, managers understand the active involvement of users in the process of brand promotion, but in the direction they need. The mechanism of the digital group activity is perfect for its implementation, because it is entirely based on the user content and has a certain ideological orientation (Figure 1).

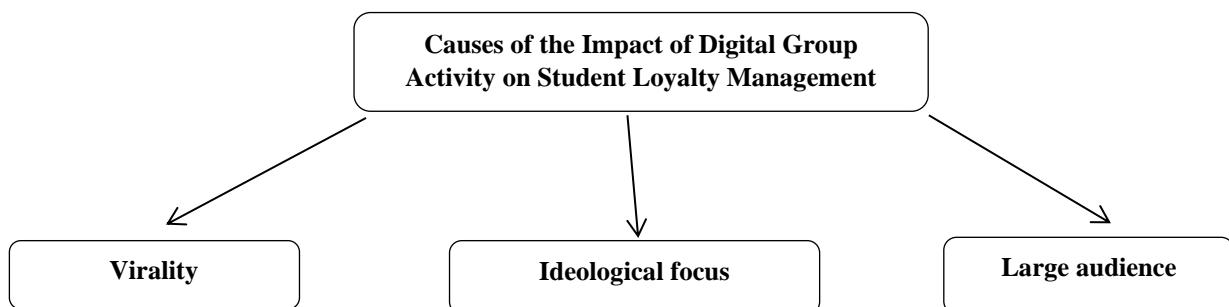


Figure 1. *Causes of the Impact of Digital Group Activity on Student Loyalty Management*

Another significant advantage of the digital group activity is its virality. By virality marketers understand the distribution of the content through its distribution on social networks. Virality is a necessary element in brand promotion, with the help of it brand information is distributed on the Internet, covering a large number of users. This is a key factor for specialists when choosing the digital group activity. The virality of the digital group activity is realized by using the mechanisms proposed by social networks, hashtags and reposts (100%). Another advantage of the digital group activity is the rapidity of information dissemination. With the help of it, information about the brand is scattered across the Network

very quickly. Its mechanism resembles a snowball: the more people learn about information, the faster it spreads. This is a great advantage for any company, because each of them expects that their advertising company will give a quick result. But, despite all the advantages, the digital group activity has quite significant disadvantages. It is difficult to organize. Before launching a virtual group interactive campaign, an advertising campaign strategy should be developed, since the digital group activity should work specifically for a certain group of potential buyers. Therefore, for a successful launch a specialist needs to have all the information about the target audience - gender, age, regions, an approximate social

portrait and so on. In fact, already at the initial stage of launching a digital group activity, a lot of work has been done by the whole team of marketers and PR specialists who transmit all the data to Internet marketers. Also, the digital group activity for the purpose of forming loyalty among students is not simple in terms of its ideological content. Its complexity consists of developing a scenario that will resonate with the student audience and will tacitly motivate them to take part in an interactive group action. Experts (83%) say that a successful scenario taken from life is close to the majority of the audience, reflecting their values and intentions. Also, for the successful launch of the digital group activity, a scenario is needed that is not time-consuming for the user and does not require a large number of actions, otherwise it will not be attractive for participation.

Another significant disadvantage of the digital group activity is its price. But this, according to the experts, is relevant only to large brands conducting large-scale group interactive promotions. Quite a lot of money is spent on its elaboration, strategy development, various marketing research to identify the target audience and, finally, to pay for the services of the specialists themselves. But, most importantly, a large flow of funds goes to pay for the services of opinion leaders, through whom group interactive actions are launched. The experts could not name the exact amount of total costs, but as for the block of work with opinion leaders, here they definitely answered that everything depends on the scale of the digital group activity. As for small companies, their digital group activities, indeed, may not be costly from a financial point of view, many negotiate by barter, and many specialists make an information post through the groups on social networks. But it is worth noting that such group interactive actions are, as a rule, competitive in nature and play a specific prize, and do not promote any idea or values. The study revealed that only large companies with well-known brands launch digital group activities. This is due to the factors listed above: the complexity of preparation and the need for additional marketing research, a fairly high price and so on. But there is another important factor, such as the specifics of the business. As for the specifics of Russian business, experts unanimously noted the fact that it is focused on quick results. And the creation of a new brand is a long-term

investment: it requires large financial investments not only in production, but also in advertising companies. There are great risks associated with the creation of a new brand, since its launch is not always successful. In fact, the brand begins to make a profit only after a few years. In Russia, the main goal of online promotion (considered by businesses) is to increase sales, so it chooses other methods of promotion, rather than a virtual group interactive campaign.

From the point of view of terminology, there was no misunderstanding when communicating with the consumers. All of them were aware of the terminology used by the media to cover these actions. The respondents used the term “virtual group interactive action” as the name of this phenomenon.

## Discussion

The digital group activity is one of the methods of the set of measures to use social media as channels for promoting companies. Also group interactive online promotions are attractive not only for companies, but, according to the experts, for users themselves. The Internet experts believe that with the help of group interactive Internet campaigns, they satisfy the need of users to create content and direct it in the right direction for them, the formation of a positive image of the company and brand promotion. But, according to the experts, users participate only in those group interactive Internet actions that coincide with their values or intentions. This significantly complicates its organization, since the company needs to choose the only true life scenario.

To sum up, we can say that for many decades the value of companies has been estimated from the point of view of tangible assets, but recently business representatives have revised their views and realized that the real value lies beyond it, in the minds of potential buyers. Therefore, now companies are placing special emphasis on the development of their brand, which is a connecting element between it and the consumer. All the marketers say that now a loyal consumer chooses only that brand whose policy corresponds to his values. This fact has forced companies to look at their relationships with consumers in a different way and to look for new ways to interact with them. In this day and age,

a promising type of relationship is considered to be a relationship when the buyer passes into the category of actively interacting partners. Therefore, active marketing began to flow smoothly into the Internet.

The Internet is not only a place where people began to spend most of their time, but also the most convenient platform for interaction between a producer and a consumer. Various branded pages on social networks allow customers to speak out quickly on a particular topic related to the brand, and companies to react quickly to changes in customer preferences. Marketers believe that buyers, living a certain event together with the brand, form a special attitude to the company and in the future, when buying, they will give preference to this brand. This is confirmed by the students we have interviewed. They say that after participating in a virtual group interactive campaign, they have formed brand loyalty, and they are more likely to purchase the goods of this particular company.

## Conclusions

The digital group activity is a really effective method of promoting a company on the Internet. Basically, it works to increase brand awareness. Thanks to its mechanism, it actively distributes information about it on social networks, increasing the reach of the audience. The reach of the audience in this case is really huge. The digital group activity is launched through opinion leaders of famous people or famous bloggers, who are viewed by thousands and even millions of people. Then ordinary users begin to take part in it, so their friends find out about it, and thus, the virtual group interactive action spreads over the Internet. As a result, not only participants of the digital group activity, but also those who follow their page. In fact, a multi-million audience can learn about the brand.

Such a spread is very rapid and takes small periods of time. At its core, a virtual group promotion is a short-term action, the interest of users quickly wakes up to it, but also quickly fades away. But due to the speed of information dissemination, the digital group activity method is able to reduce the introduction of a new brand or product to the market, and this is a huge advantage in a competitive market situation.

Thus, we can say that students are clearly aware that digital group activities are organized by companies to promote their product and brand. Such a new way of advertising a company is very impressive to consumers not only for its originality, but also for the fact that they actively participate in the process of brand promotion.

The very idea of the digital group activity is important for students. They participate only in those group interactive actions which are combined with their values.

The experts have well perceived the trend that now, for buyers, not the physical pleasure of using the product, but moral satisfaction has begun to play a big role. Therefore, all the marketing strategies of the most successful companies are aimed at creating an emotional connection between the consumer and the brand. This leads, in their opinion, to the formation of customer loyalty to the company. This is achieved by marketers through the active inclusion of buyers in the brand development scenario through the launch of the digital group activity.

From the point of view of Internet marketers, the digital group activity has a number of advantages over other methods of brand promotion, and the main one is the involvement of students in active communication with the company.

According to the marketers, the scenario of the successful digital group activity should be as simple and understandable as possible. It should not be time-consuming and imply a large number of actions from the user. This is also said by the students themselves, who were disappointed in virtual group interactive actions, the rules of which were too complicated. For them, the ease of perception of the rules and actions is now one of the essential factors in making a decision about participation. Students say that the digital group activity on the Internet for them should represent a momentary action, creating a post with a comment, for which they will not need to put too much effort.

Another advantage of the digital group activity as a method of brand promotion on the Web is its vitality, the distribution of the content through its publication by many users on social networks. An interesting idea of the digital group activity encourages users to spread the information about the brand. Thus, a large

number of users will learn about it, and this is an important advantage in social media marketing. The users themselves confirm the principle of this mechanism. They say that they learn about the launch of the digital group activity from famous people or from their friends, and then, by publishing a post, they pass the baton to their friends. It is worth noting that many students not only made a publication with the information about the group interactive action, but also talked about it in personal conversations with their friends and families. Thus, the information about the brand goes beyond the social network, and even more people learn about it.

The marketers say that through the digital group activity they can spread the brand information specifically to the target audience that they consider the most attractive for the company. Therefore, to launch it they choose those opinion leaders whose opinion is important for potential buyers. They also believe that the circle of students' communication is also formed by interests, so the information will continue to be distributed also in a substantive and point-by-point manner. In fact, this is confirmed by the students themselves. They say that they have met only a small number of virtual group interactive actions on the Internet.

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