

Blog Assignment 1 _ Runze Tang

As I type out these words, it's already half past nine the night before this home work is due, and I'm scratching my head and going crazy. I mean, 1000 words are a lot (or not?), and I concede that I'm not very good at English writing in the first place, so writing an article full of jargons and pretending I know what I'm doing just kills me. Then it occurred to me that this is supposed to be a blog! Great! Now I'll just sweep that out of the way and simply share some of my thoughts.

So, the topic is: draw on the understanding of "uses and gratification" theory and social media to give advice to the brands looking to use social media to meet the needs of their clients. To directly answer the questions, I would say the selection and uses of specific social media platforms in specific campaigns are ultimately irrelevant, but what you do with them really matters. And what should brands do with social media? Facilitate and be responsive to the client feedbacks! This seems to be a no-brainer. However, I'm under the impression that many commercial companies or non-profit organizations primarily use social media as a way to extend their influences, as social media nowadays have a wide reach to almost all demographical groups. This is actually not at all a bad idea. I think social media may have significantly accelerated the two-step flow process, since we constantly receive forwarded advertising messages from our friends. I cannot pass a day without receive a message like "XXX restaurant is on discount!" from my WeChat. But this might just misses the point of social media.

First, let's take a look "uses and gratification" theory. In a nutshell, this theory considers media audiences to be active communicators, rather than passive recipients of messages. Unlike in many previous theories, we as uses of media are no longer targets waiting to be shot at by magic bullets. Instead, we are individuals who have desires and needs to be satisfied, and we can be rather picky about the messages we receive and media we use because of that. Now, with this model in mind, the questions is: what needs do social media satisfy in general? Or rather, what has made social media so popular in the first place? In my opinion, the answer is rather clear: it's the interactive nature of them. It is a well-accepted psychological opinion that in any human interaction, two of the most fundamental needs we seek are attention and acknowledgement. Social media are well suited to meet these needs. There are individuals like me, who primary read and watch all day without actually writing or forwarding something. (BTW, we call this kind of people "submarines" in China.) However, it's a safe bet most people actively engaged in social media want to produce and contribute to the contents of information. Having seen so many people would spend the time and energy to write product reviews on Amazon or Steam, it is quite a shame not to use social media as a channel of feedback, isn't it? After all, with social media in the picture, companies no longer need to rely on the kick when customers vote by feet to know how their brands are perceived.

Speaking of Steam, I would like to talk a little about the video game industry. I used to be a "heavy game

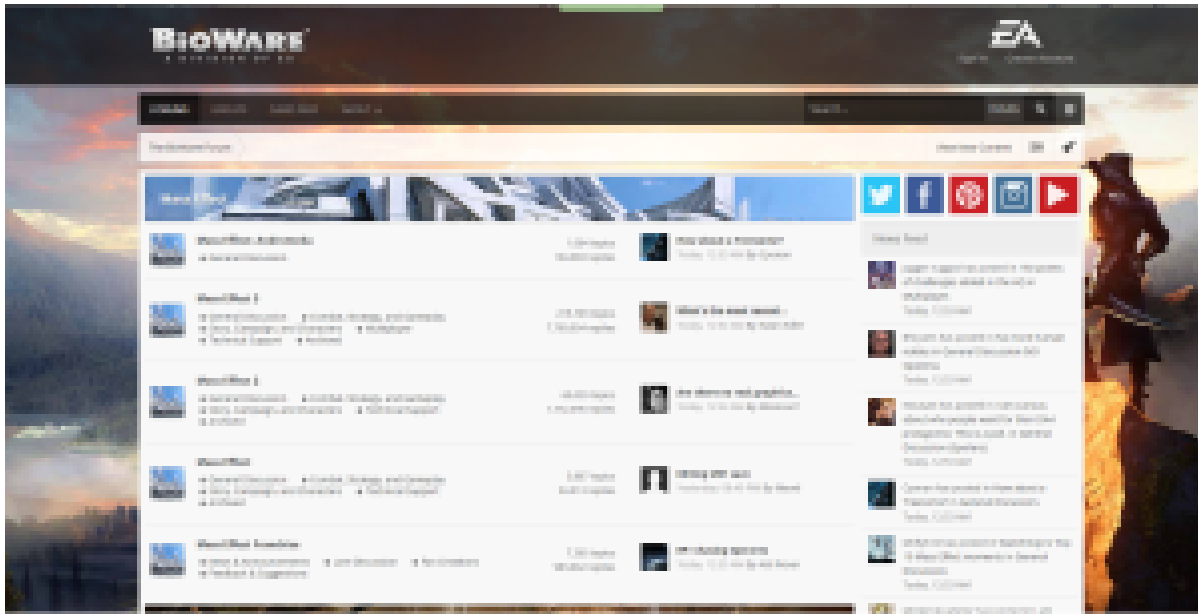


r" in the first two of my college years. Back in 2012, I played this great role playing game (RPG) called *Mass Effect 3*, which was the end of a trilogy. The game was produced by a Canadian based studio with an extensive yet solid fan base called Bioware, and it was published by Electronic Arts (EA). Even though generally considered a good game, *Mass Effect 3* had a controversial ending: it was sloppily produced, it did not quite fit the theme of the game, and ultimately it did not make fans happy. As the outrage about the game went on, EA managed to defeat tough opponents like Bank of America and won a troll prize called "Gold Poo: The Worst Company in America" (which they somehow managed to win it again in the next year). I would say this really says something about video gamers. In the face of this disgrace, Bioware soon released an expansion cut to "fix" the game.

This is just a more dramatic illustration of the constant dynamic in the video game industry. Gamers complain, and producers fix it. Of course, almost all culture products, no matter books, movies, or TV shows, will receive similar level of critiques. That's why we have IMDb. However, an inherent advantage of video games is that they are essentially software. It's common knowledge that the cost of maintaining software is generally higher than developing them. For video games, a strong initial release would certainly earn favors from consumers, but developers can always release patches based on consumer feedbacks later. Not that every company cares enough to do that, but they definitely should.

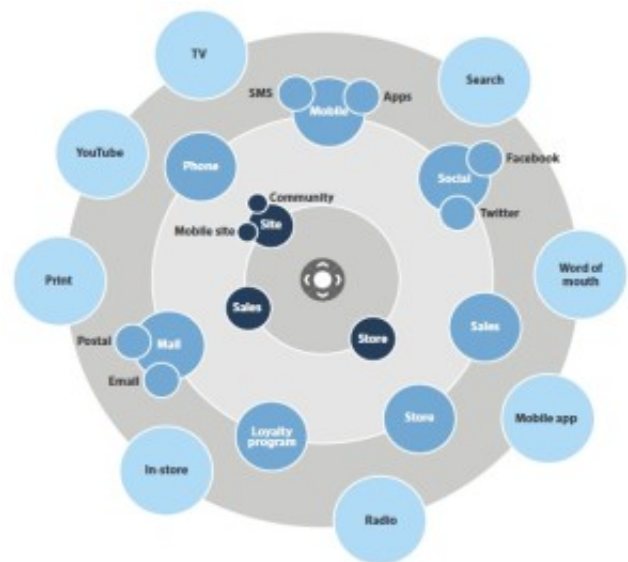
Probably as a result of this feature, many video game companies consciously promote feedbacks and actively respond to them. Ironically, Bioware, the company that helped EA win the Golden Poo, is one of them. Bioware actually has a multilingual online forum with tens of thousands of active users. The forum doesn't merely serve as a means of feedback. It constantly generates topics about their games, keeping the fan base active even they don't have any title recently

released game.



For branding in general, although the mechanism in the video industry may not be replicable in others, the practice of using social media to collect and respond client feedbacks is certainly advisable. I'm not saying each company or organization should have their own forums or some other form social media platforms. That would be impractical and unnecessary. The point is, there is hardly any better way for a brand to utilize social media than letting clients express their opinions and then showing them that their reviews have been duly noted and heard results.

To extent this a little bit, I think, ideally, brands should combine multiple social media platforms



as a public relation tool to cultivate a loyal fan base. Or, putting this in a fancy fashionable words, to cultivate a brand ecosystem. If there's one thing about marketing I've learned in my short experience in a culture & communication company, that would be: advertising is a secondary concern, PR is the king. With social media at disposal, it is possible for companies to not only constantly listen to their fans, but also constantly energize topics, thus establishing a dynamic and interactive relation with their fans. Apple is a great example of this. They have a complete product line, including Mac, iPad, iPhone, etc., they have their own commentary system within App Store and iTunes, and they have official accounts in major social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. All contributing to a unified brand image. But this is a topic for another time.