

**HOW TO
MANAGE**

SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

IN 2020

BRANDBASTION

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Social media has become an alternate universe – a world as real as the brick and mortar world. For brands, social media **provides an opportunity to reach new customers, drive sales, and engage with existing customers.** While brands have many advertising options to reach users on social media, they have far less control over the volume and type of social media comments that their ads receive. These comments become a part of the ad, shape viewers' perception, and can make or mar brands.

In our experience working with Fortune 500 companies and emerging disruptor brands, we have found that there are some key competencies brands need in order to manage social media comments effectively. Brands need to be able to detect, classify, assign, and take actions (such as hiding, replying, or escalating) on comments at scale in line with the business goals.

However, the effort required to manage massive amounts of social media comments tends to become humanly unmanageable for even the best in-house teams. When there are undetected and unattended comments, it leads to a poorer user experience for those viewing the ads, missed sales opportunities, and potential PR crises that can quickly escalate. In essence, leaving comments unattended puts your brand at a disadvantage, especially if your competitors have faster response times to social media comments.

83 percent of global users expect an answer from the brand on social within 24 hours.

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-Microsoft's 2018 State of Global Customer Service Report

4 Reasons Brands Can't Afford to Ignore Social Media Comments

1. People want to engage with brands
2. Spam and trolling can hurt reputation and ad performance
3. The comment feed is a goldmine of information - tapping into this information can drive customers further along the buying path
4. Comments hold valuable insights into brand perception and product feedback

1. People want to engage with brands

For brands, social media is the new battlefield for the attention of consumers and it's not surprising that a significant portion of ad spend goes to digital channels. The [2019 Global Digital Report](#) published by We are Social and Hootsuite shows that the median number of times each month that typical Facebook users (worldwide) comment on organic posts is four. However, the median number of times each month that Facebook users comment on Ads is eight - double the median number of comments on organic posts.

In our experience helping brands manage their engagement effectively, we see that highly engaged brands can receive comment volumes that run into the hundreds of thousands every month. The most highly engaged brands advertising globally in multiple languages can get millions of comments in a month.

To put that into context, the average processing speed for a human moderator is up to 1,000 comments an hour, according to [LiveWorld](#). To manage around 33,000 comments daily (assuming the brand receives a million comments a month), it would require 33 human hours or at least four people working 8-hour shifts every single day, including on holidays and weekends.

Sports footwear brand, Nike is one of the most followed brands on Instagram with more than [98.8 million followers](#). In December 2019, the brand got an average of 2,651 comments per post. Similarly, Samsung's ad which was used to [introduce the Galaxy S10](#) has garnered almost 6,000 comments since March 2019 when it started running on Facebook.

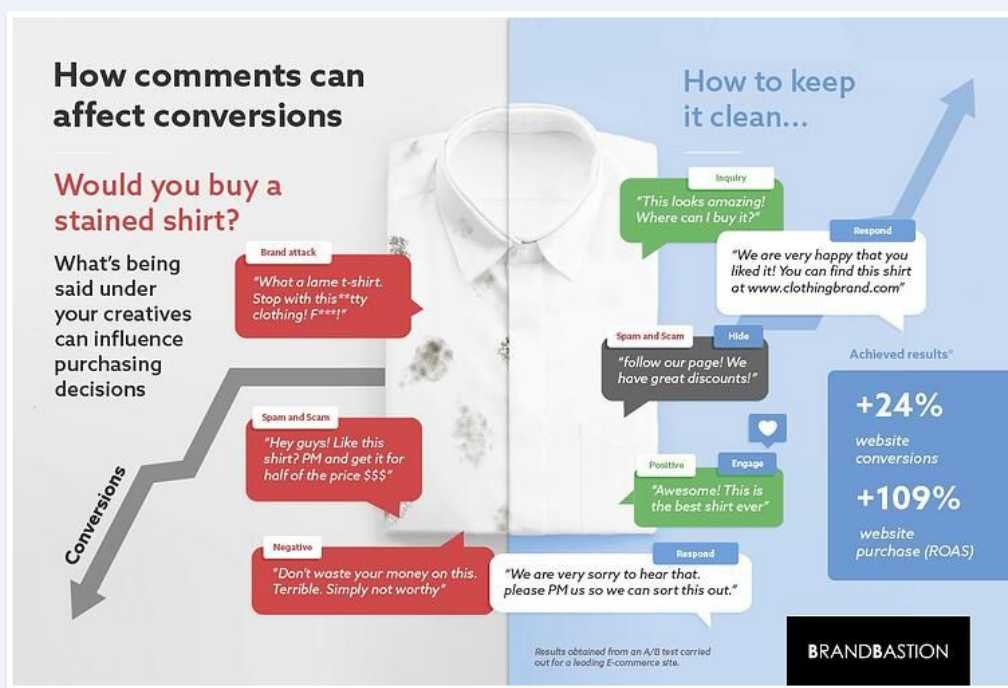
As these numbers show, customers are becoming more vocal about engaging with brands on social media. The sheer volume of comments that a brand can expect to generate suggests that consumer reaction will vary along a spectrum from disgust to delight. Not only is it challenging to deal with high volumes of engagement - it's also challenging to discern meaning from social media language which is typically littered with emojis, acronyms, and slang.

2. Spam and trolling can hurt reputation and ad performance

In 2019, [social media overtook print media](#) to become the third largest advertising channel with social media ad spending growing 20% to \$84 billion while ad spend on print media declined by 6% to \$69 billion. With the increase in the prominence of social media ads, brands and advertisers have become proficient in developing excellent ad creatives and copy layered on the targeting and optimization tools of the adtech industry.

However, when you've optimized all the variables within your control to get the maximum possible ROAS, there's still the risk that user-generated comments under the ad will have an impact on how the ad ultimately performs. 47% out of over 33,000 respondents to [Edelman's Trust Barometer 2018 report](#) believe that points of view that appear near a brand's advertising and marketing (such as comments) are an indication of that brand's values. Unmanaged comments can lead to lower conversion rates and in the long run, erosion of brand equity.

Social media comments feed can be found directly beneath or adjacent to both organic and paid content. They are sometimes the first thing users see just before they engage or immediately after they engage with your content. In the same way that graffiti left on traditional billboards can influence how the copy on the billboard is perceived, social media comments are gradually becoming the digital equivalent of graffiti. However, unlike traditional graffiti that can only be removed or covered, the digital nature of social media comments provide brands with opportunities to respond more effectively.



Another way comments can impact your ROAS is competitor mentions in the comments under your content. Comments such as **"Brand X is much better than this"** or **"Why would anyone buy this when there's brand Y?"** or **"I think I prefer brand Z"** are the kind of comments that sow seeds of doubt that hurt performance.

When you run ads, promoted or sponsored posts, you are paying money to have your content shown to people across the network. However, people drop competitor mentions into your comment feed, the competitor mentions accompany your ad everywhere it is shown and you are unwittingly helping the competition to ride on your ad spend to get more visibility.

3. The comment feed is a goldmine of information - Tapping into this information can drive customers further along the buying path

Customer experience has become one of the key differentiating factors for brands in today's highly competitive business world. And social media comment feeds are one channel in which brands are competing to stand out. Comments left by users can provide subtle hints about where they are on their customer journey with your business. Comments can indicate whether followers are in the awareness, consideration, or decision stage of their relationship with your brand.

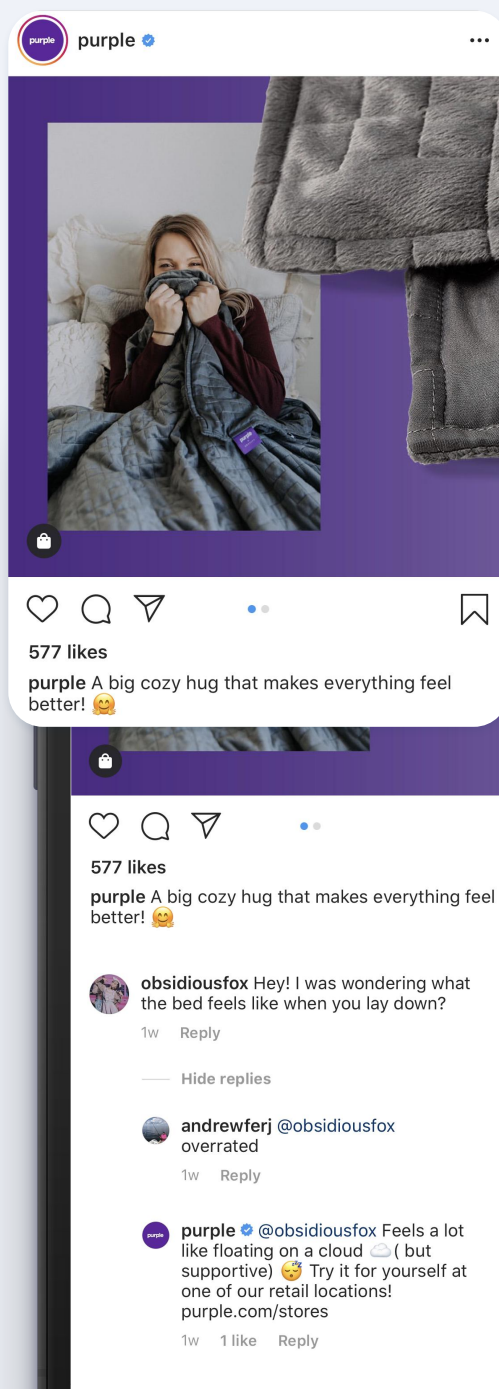
When brands make posts – organic and paid – showcasing their products and services, it is not uncommon to see comments indicating interest and consideration.

Comments such as **"This looks good "** typically indicate an awareness of your brand, its products or services. Instead of replying to such messages with a simple **"Thank You"** or liking the post, you can reply with a request to send them more information or a special offer via DM or you can send them a link to a landing page right away.

Comments such as **"I wish this was X% cheaper"** or questions such as **"What does this feel like after 3 months"** suggest that the user is in the consideration stage of the buyer's journey. In the [screenshot below](#), a user was in the consideration stage for Purple's mattress with a question asking what the bed feels like. The brand was quick to respond with information about how the product feels and the user was encouraged to go try it out in a physical store.

Declarative comments such as **"I want one of this"** or **"@janesmith should buy me this"** suggest that the user is at the decision point of their customer journey. Responding to such comments with more information, testimonials, stats, or guarantees in a conversational style can gently push the user forward to the point of making a decision.

Comments such as **"@johndoe see this"** suggest that the user is in the advocacy stage where they are recommending your products or services to other people that may be interested. Brands that deliver appropriate responses and CTAs to comments based on the user journey end up recording more conversions from their social media ads than brands who expect the users to go it alone from awareness, through consideration, and finally making a decision.



4. Comments hold valuable insights into brand perception and product feedback

The interest of social media users in the activities of brands, the two-way communication that social media facilitate, and the willingness of users to be vocal about their thoughts can provide brands with opportunity to get valuable feedback. You can mine valuable customer feedback on the product, and understand brand perception from the comments on your ads.

Last year, [90%](#) of Instagram users say they follow at least one brand, 66% of Facebook users follow or like a brand page, and an average Twitter user follows five brands. Similarly, The Manifest's 2019 Consumer Social Media Survey shows that the numbers are [much higher in the U.S.](#) with 74% of consumers following brands on social media and 96% of them taking time to interact with the brands they follow.


“ 74% of consumers follow brands on social media and 96% of them take time to interact with the brands they follow.


- The Manifest

Your social media comments can hold valuable feedback relating to design or user experience that your team may have missed during product development or in the operational flow of your service. The fact that social media is home to millions of people with different backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives can provide more compounded insights than you can get from focus groups or random customer population samples.

Unfortunately, it may be hard to spot these kinds of comments that provide valuable feedback out of hundreds or thousands (see Point 1 - page 3) of comments unless you are leveraging a solution that helps you to find, classify, and manage comments at scale.

Nonetheless, not all feedback can be managed individually, some feedback may be reactionary and it may be better to address them with a public statement. For instance, customers are sometimes averse to change - their feedback to changes that your brand wants to implement can be distracting. It may be wise to release an official statement further explaining the rationale behind the proposed changes, as responding to all feedback individually may not be efficient. It may also be worthwhile to note that reactionary feedback tends to fizzle out once people have had a chance to adjust to the changes.

74% 
of people follow
brands on social media

96% 
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N= 537 U.S social media users
Source: The Manifest's 2019 Consumer
Social Media Survey

How challenger brands are doing a killer job at engaging on social media

Now that we have explored why brands need to pay attention to social media comments, let's dive into practical tips to help you manage comments on your social media posts and ads.

The comments that users leave on your social media posts and ads can be broadly grouped into feedback and complaints, positive comments, negative comments, neutral comments, and universally harmful comments. In this segment we will also highlight examples from challenger brands that are managing social media comments effectively.

1. Managing feedback and complaints
2. Getting maximum value of out positive comments
3. Taking the fire out of negative comments
4. How to manage universally harmful comments

1. Managing feedback and complaints

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It's a dialogue, not a monologue, and some people don't understand that. Social media is more like a telephone than a television.

-Amy Jo Martin, author of *Renegades Write The Rules*



57% of users prefer reaching out to a brand's digital service channel to reaching out via dedicated customer service phone lines or emails. In essence, more than half of your customers are likely to reach out with feedback or customer complaints via social media and they are likely to do it in the public news feed, where it's fast and convenient, rather than in private messages.

The key to managing complaints and feedback effectively is to have a standard process for differentiating between customer complaints that need the attention of your customer service team and feedback about your brand and its products or services.



For managing feedback on social media, the best practice is to;

- I Proactively create pre-approved response sets to avoid sounding robotic
- I Acknowledge the feedback in a timely manner



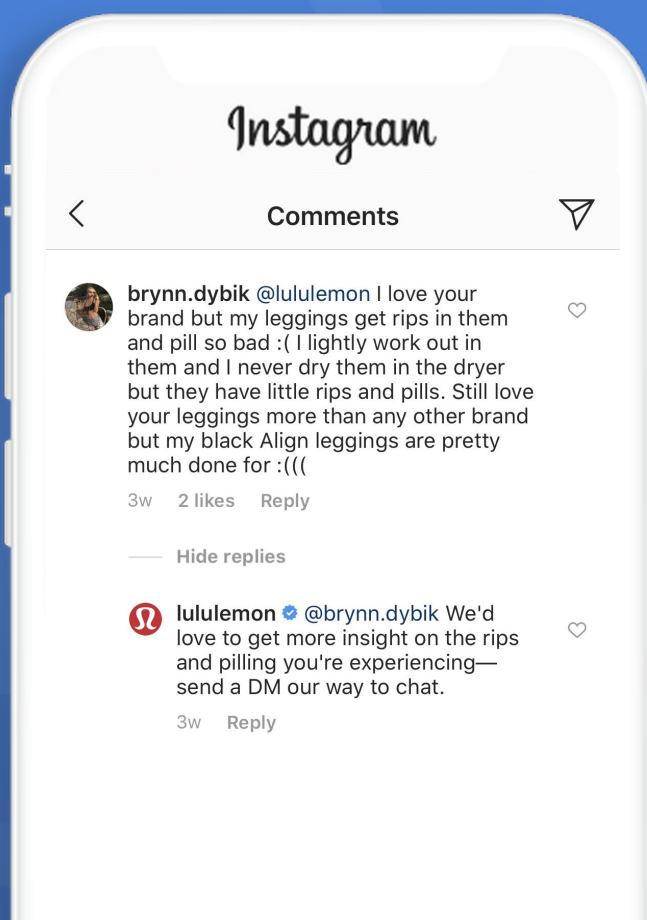
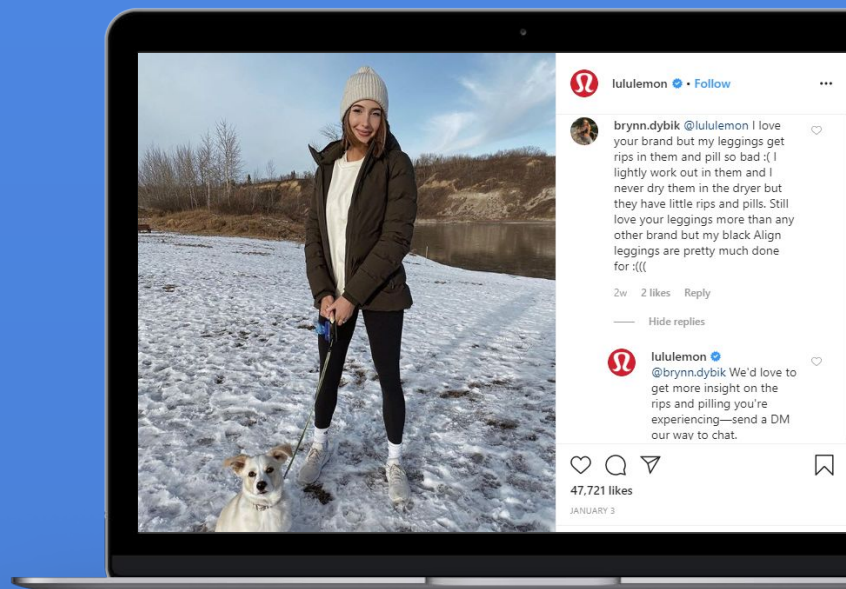
To manage customer complaints on social media, the best practice is to;

- I Proactively develop response sets to acknowledge the complaint
- I Respond timely within a one-hour window
- I Escalate the issue to the right teams as required
- I Follow up publicly to confirm that the issue has been resolved

Brand Spotlight

How Lululemon varies its responses to feedback versus customer complaints

Lululemon is a good example of a challenger brand that has to manage a significant mix of feedback and complaint across its social media content. The screenshot on the right highlights feedback from a user who loves the product, but thinks that something may be questionable about the quality. In this case, the Lululemon team acknowledged the feedback and expressed interest in getting more information from the customer.



In the second instance below, there's a customer complaint about how the quality of an item purchased has led to a disappointing experience. In this case, Lululemon responded with a sense of urgency to address the complaint while deftly moving the conversation away from the public feed into private channels.

Brands should resist the temptation to delete customer complaints. The presence of complaints suggests that the customer is unhappy with your brand and deleting the complaint will only aggravate them and cause them to vent their anger louder.

2. Getting maximum value of out positive comments

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People influence people. Nothing influences people more than a recommendation from a trusted friend... A trusted referral is the holy grail of advertising.

– Mark Zuckerberg



Positive comments are great; brands, advertisers, and marketers love them. Positive comments show that the brand is doing something right and it helps you to intensify efforts on actions that drive positivity for your brand. Unfortunately, [only one third of brands](#) have strategies in place to actively encourage users to share success stories. Positive comments are easily ignored even though responding to them acknowledges the experience of the user, rewards/reinforce their decision to comment, and helps to deepen brand loyalty.

To manage positive comments, start by developing a strategy that lets you respond to fan comments, but do it in a scalable way designed to meet user expectations. The key idea is to identify the user expectation relative to the comment and to be able to deliver a brand response that matches the enthusiasm and effort of the user. For instance, short and sweet comments (“**Gorgeous** 🍷”) should be replied with a variation of short and sweet comments (“**Thanks!** 😊 Or “**That’s Right!** 🍷”). This makes the user feel valued and leads to great word-of-mouth marketing.

Additionally, longer glowing reviews on the other hand can become testimonials and great user-generated marketing content. It’s not enough to reply with a simple “**Thank you**” to a long comment such as “**You guys do an excellent job of not only teaching students about the subject, but how to network and prepare to work in the industry. Proud to have you on my resume!**” or comments praising your product/service (“**I’m obsessed with the meal planner on your app! Not only does it help me lose weight, but it makes shopping so much easier!**”).

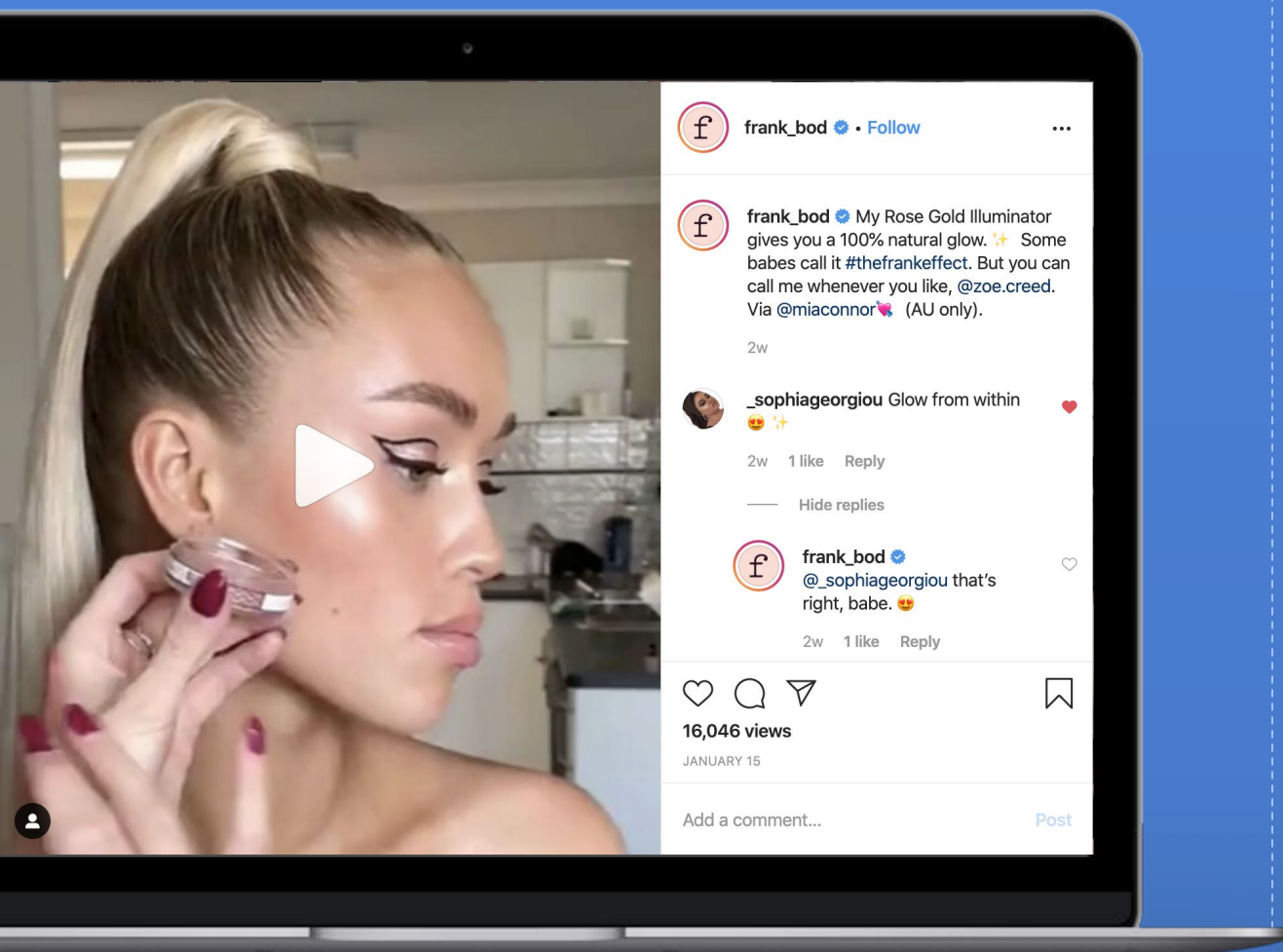
Ideally, you should make the effort to reply to longer thoughtful comments with an equally thoughtful response (“**Thanks for sharing how much you love our service, comments like yours drive us to do more.**”). You can also leverage the opportunity to get permission to highlight and share such comments to your larger community.

Brand Spotlight

Frank Body never misses a chance to appreciate a customer on social

Frank Body, for instance, NEVER misses a chance to appreciate a fan on Instagram. The brand managed to generate \$20 million in revenue, while taking less than \$10,000 in initial investments in just four years. They did this by positioning themselves as a highly-engaged brand.

And their powerful fan community response strategy isn't complicated. Frank Body's social team regularly responds to fan comments using only an emoji that's in-line with their brand voice, like 🥰 and 💖. The team's strategy is backed up by research showing Facebook posts with emojis see 33% more comments and 57% more likes. Ultimately, this leads to sales won through community engagement.



3. Taking the fire out of negative comments

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If you make customers unhappy in the physical world, they may each tell 6 friends. If you make customers unhappy on the Internet, they can each tell 6,000 friends.

—Jeff Bezos, CEO at Amazon.com



Negative comments are disheartening. No social media manager likes to receive negative comments on their organic posts or ads. And such comments also impact brand perception and sales. [PwC research shows](#) that reviews, comments, and feedback are 50% more effective than the ad itself in influencing online shopping. [Curalate's Consumer Survey reporting](#) echoes this, finding that 50% of shoppers say user-generated content such as accompanying comments makes them more likely to purchase a product through a brand's social media ad.

However, negative comments should not always be dreaded. In some instances, they can serve as a good indicator that the brand needs to fix something about its products, service, or messaging, as highlighted in the section above about customer feedback.

To manage negative posts effectively; start by understanding the difference between comments that are negative in sentiment (“**I hate broccoli.**”) and comments that are truly damaging to your brand (“**I hate your broccoli, it's always stale, and would never buy from you guys again!**”)

Thoughtful comments such as the examples below are great ways to douse the negativity and to work towards resolving the issue:

“This isn't the experience we want you to have! We'd love to chat more about how we can turn things around for you!”

“We appreciate you sharing your experience with us. This is definitely not how we want you to feel and we'd love to take a closer look at your account to see how we can help.”

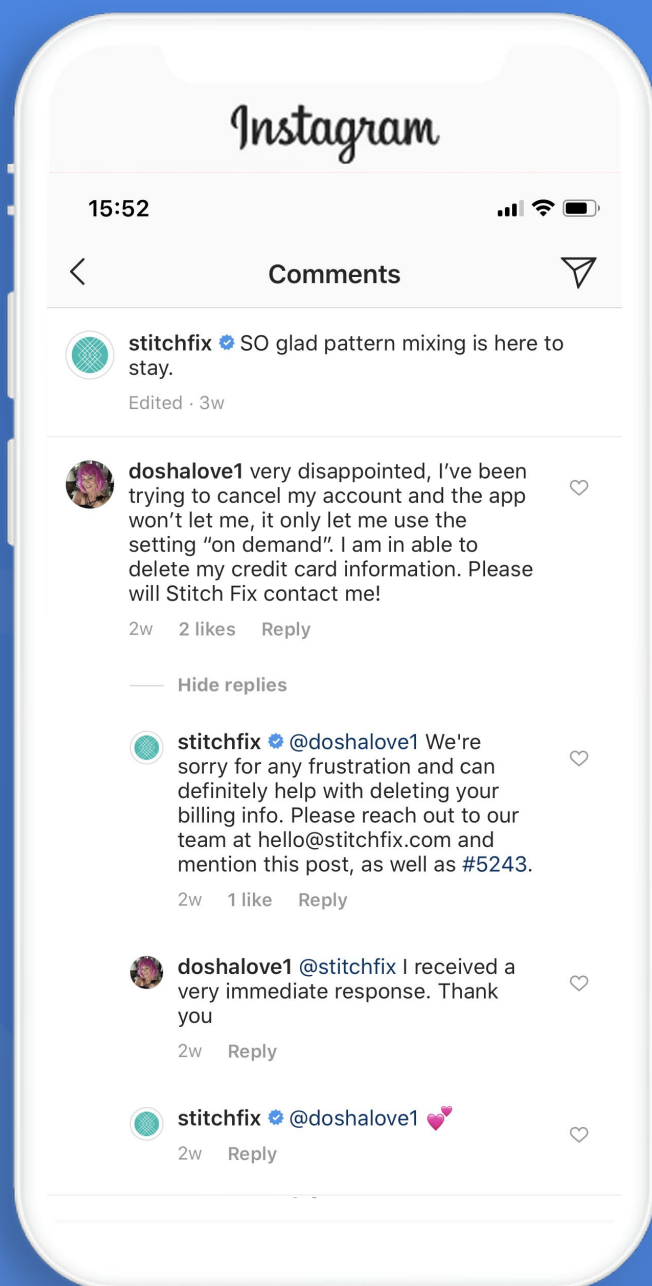
Negative comments should not be ignored because it impacts not only the commenter, but thousands of other users that are following the interaction. Some key tips to keep in mind:

- | Respond to the negative comment to acknowledge that the user has had a less than perfect experience.
- | You can then steer the conversation into private channels where the issue can be resolved.
- | Follow up publicly to confirm that the issue has been resolved.

Negativity should be used as a thermometer to quickly test the health of your brand and as an early-warning system to indicate that something isn't resonating with your customers.

Brand Spotlight

Stitchfix turns negative customer experiences into a win for everybody



Stitchfix, a disruptor brand that offers personal styling for everyone, exemplifies how brands can take key learnings from negative comments and ultimately turn such negative experiences into a win. In the [screenshot on the left](#), the user was clearly frustrated with a billing situation. Stitchfix responded with a comment acknowledging the frustration and provided a channel for resolution. The user came back to comment about the quick resolution afterwards. With this, the brand effectively kept the customer while also showing other people watching from the sidelines that they are quick to resolve issues.

4. How to manage universally harmful comments

“ Conversations among the members of your marketplace happen whether you like it or not. Good marketing encourages the right sort of conversations.

–Seth Godin



Some comments are considered universally harmful - comments that are racist, sexist, discriminatory, terrorizing, profane, inciteful or hateful are not the type of comments you want around your posts or ads. The management strategy for universally harmful comments is simple: these should always be hidden. Irregardless of your brand, your industry, or your target audience, these comments will always harm your brand, your community, and / or your sales.

You should note that nearly 70% of customers refuse to purchase from companies they see as [having poor ethics](#). Also, 71% of customers expect brands to manage communication (and this includes social media comments) in real time. Another [report from Morning Consult](#) shows that an overwhelming 80% of users believe hate speech in all its forms (sexism, racism, and the other ugly forms of discrimination) should be removed from social media. A nearly equal 79% of users think content that inspires violence and discrimination should be removed, and 66% feel the same about content that is offensively sexual in nature.

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70% of customers refuse to purchase from companies they see as having poor ethics.

Lastly, there's a chance that plug and play or rule-based moderation tools won't detect many types of damaging comments such as sarcasm, competitor promotions, spam links, and unauthorized product sales that haven't crossed the linguistic thresholds that the algorithms are trained to flag. However, next-gen moderation solutions that complement digital tools with human agents can offer a more comprehensive approach to managing harmful comments to ensure that your social media feed is a safe space.

“ I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.

– Maya Angelou, Civil Rights Activist & Poet



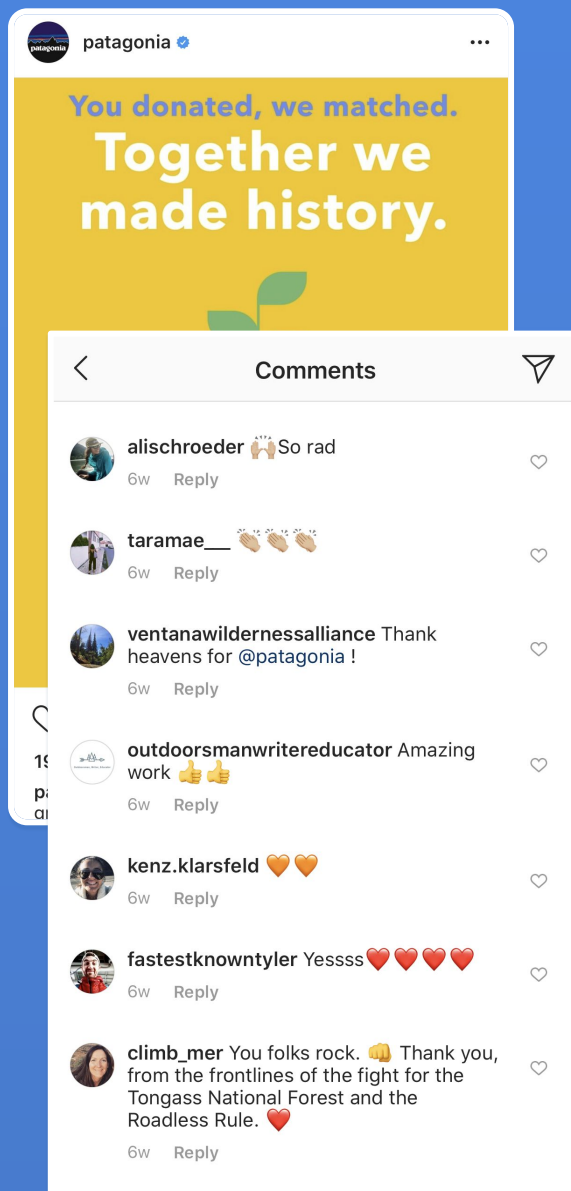
Brand Spotlight

Patagonia manages to keep its comments feed free of spam

Patagonia is one of the bold retail brands taking a public political stance over the last several years. In 2017, the company ran a “the president stole your land” campaign after President Trump said he would reduce the size of two national monuments. In 2018, the company publicly endorsed 2 democratic senate candidates - it promoted the endorsement on its website, emails to customers, and social media channels.

While brands typically choose to err on the side of caution on political issues, Patagonia is unapologetic about its corporate activism. The brand's CEO Rose Marcario in a conversation with Quartz revealed that while some people may not always agree with its political stance, “the response from our community has been overwhelmingly positive”.

However, the more interesting point to note is that the brand has managed to keep its social media accounts free of universally harmful comments that typically accompany polarizing topics such as politics and climate change.



Conclusion

The interdisciplinary nature of social media

The brands that have demonstrated an exemplary effectiveness in managing social media comments tend to take an interdisciplinary approach. For instance, comments indicating customer complaints may be managed by the customer service team, while the branding team may be in a better position to transform fan comments into user-generated marketing content. Meanwhile, the marketing team works hand-in-hand with the above two teams to ensure ads are kept free from harm, understanding that the comments affect ad performance.

Comments containing feedback will also be more useful when routed to product development teams even after the initial response from the customer service team. And of course, leadership teams and top management will benefit from the insights gained by distilling the comments to get actionable data on sentiments, customer engagement, and user expectations.

Ultimately, the central theme behind managing social media comments is that it helps brands to connect with different users at different points on the customer journey. Also managing social media comments will improve your odds of converting prospects and leads into customers and keeping current customers loyal.

It's often too easy for brands to lose sight of the fact that they are selling to people driven by needs and emotions rather than what your product or service does. Users are always expressing their feelings about brands through social media comments and brands must be proactive about responding to such comments to stay competitive in the digital economy.

In the words of Seth Godin: "you can use social media to turn strangers into friends, friends into customers, and customers into salespeople".

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We started BrandBastion to help brands have 1 on 1 conversations across social media at scale, without having to employ a big group of people, whilst protecting their brand. We help our clients set up their social media engagement strategies and help them learn what type of engagement they're receiving, as well as how to use the power of AI to automate.

-Jenny Wolfram, CEO at BrandBastion



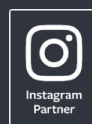
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