

Pinterest: Pinning for Inspiration and Aspiration

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Keywords: Pinterest, inspiration, aspiration

Back when we were young we cut out pictures that related to celebrities, cars, tourist attractions from magazines to create collages then stick them on the walls of our bedroom and feel very cool, because these collages were just like a mirror that can reflect a little something about ourselves. Now we have Pinterest, which is the second generation of the collage.

-Om Malik, 2012

Pinterest is a social network community where users can share, curate, and discover pictures that represent their personal interests such as food, travel and DIY. Founded in 2008, Pinterest is one of the fastest growing online social networks, which currently represents the third-largest entity of its kind with 10 million total users only behind Facebook and Twitter (CC-BY). This network provides a visual emphasis community that allows people with similar interests to post and share pictures. Pinterest focuses on the concept of personal lifestyle (Vaughan, 2012). Photographers and designers are able to get inspiration from pictures on Pinterest, which is reflected in the site's motto "no matter what you're interested in, there's a place for it here (Pinterest)." Girls plan for their future weddings on Pinterest, while wives plan their nightly dinners using recipes from Pinterest.

With hundreds of millions pictures and videos pinned or repined by consumers, companies are currently trying to seize the opportunity to develop their brand's potential on Pinterest (Glenn, 2013). However, as a new player in the social media, little research has been conducted on Pinterest in terms of its nature, its target users, and the potential implication that the network brings to companies that cater to consumer markets. This study explores the nature of Pinterest through investigating users' perceptions of and motivations toward using the network. Seven college students, including six females and one male, were recruited to participate in a focus group study on Pinterest. The focus group was guided by a list of predetermined questions to probe the participants' basic knowledge and usage of Pinterest. The discussion specifically focused upon the participants' Pinterest behaviors and their interests in brands and boards. The duration of the discussion was approximately one hour.

The participants reported that they spend varying amounts of time each day on Pinterest and unlike other social media, there is little or no written communication involved in their interaction. In contrast, the interaction among users of Pinterest is mainly expressed with visuals (i.e., through pinning or repining of pictures of interest). Participants reported that the most common boards they create include food, travel, DIY and crafts, design, and weddings. They tend to collect (through Pinning) ideas for activities they could carry out right away, such as cooking, traveling, DIY and crafts, or they are look for inspiration for important events that will take place later in their life, such as weddings. Female respondents also mentioned that they

maintained a board for men's fashion with a goal to collect ideas and inspiration on how to dress their (future) boyfriends and husbands.

In addition to inspiration, aspiration is another major motivation that appears to stimulate the users' participation. All female participants report having a wedding board, where they make future plans even if the event is 5-10 years in the future. They admit that their actual wedding will not likely be as glamorous or extravagant as their planned Pinterest version. Rather, their board reflects the ideal for their perfect wedding. Participants also mentioned that they have several dream destinations on their travel board with a hope that some day in the future they will be able to vacation in these places. Similarly, participants mentioned that items on their fashion board are often just for aspiration, instead of actually owning them. In that sense, Pinterest really serves as a great collection of possibilities, which ideally they would like to achieve.

Interestingly, this same fantasy of aspiration that keeps many users on Pinterest also sends some participants away from Pinterest. One of the participants mentioned that she discontinued using Pinterest because the feeling of envy and failure due to not being able to own those items that she saw on Pinterest and loved bothered her.

Another reason that participants become interested in Pinterest is due to the fact that it is not perceived as commercial. None of the participants pinned a picture promoted by a certain brand likely due to the fact that their main motivation for using Pinterest is not for immediate purchase, but rather for inspiration and/or aspiration. Therefore, it is a wise choice for businesses to use Pinterest to showcase the lifestyle of their brand(s), instead of promoting particular products. For example, for a shoe vendor, a pin board of a few of shoes interspersed with images of places where those shoes could take them is the direction the vendor should take, rather than focusing upon the shoes themselves with a promotional pricing tactic (Vaughan, 2012).

In summary, this focus group study indicates that Pinterest offers a collection of possibilities to its users. According to our findings, people use Pinterest for both inspiration and aspiration. Although the focus group participants are generally positive about Pinterest's business potential, they responded very negatively to the promotional advertisements on Pinterest. Therefore, companies should focus on pinning their beautiful and inspirational pictures to build their long-term brand image rather than promoting short-term sales.

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