A STUDY OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING AND ITS IMPACT ON BUYING BEHAVIOR

Mrs. Swati Sharma,

Research Scholar,
Assistant Professor, IBS,
CCS University, Meerut, UP, India

ABSTRACT

In recent past the entire world has witnessed a rapid shift in use and adoption of Social media platforms. Presence of millions of social media users have attracted marketers to communicate their customers and perspectives online. However, whether this social media marketing expenditure is useful and these are helpful in influencing customer buying behavior. Primary data has been collected and the analysis suggests that more than fifty percent of the social media users are influenced by these marketing practices. Educational level is a hinderance in promoting social media marketing and age a negatively related to the influencing ability of SMM.

INTRODUCTION

Marketing refers to the many distinct set of practices to communicate with existing customers or prospective buyers which involves market research for understanding the need and demand and completes with necessary supply. It also helps in stronger association with the existing customers through appropriate customer relationship management. During the past, marketing practices were performed through mass media like television, radio and newspapers as well as public displays. It was not possible to monitor the performance of our marketing activities and measure the returns on our marketing investments. Whether, customers were influenced by these marketing messages or arrived through any different channel, it was a difficult question to answer. The performance was gauged only through a combined performance through all channels. Communication was one way, where only marketers used to speak and there were limited ways to listen the customers. Also, any personalized and customized messaging was difficult and recording their feedback or response was even more challenging.

Later, internet came into existence and people started communicated through e-mails and hence there were ways to record responses, feedbacks and opinions through mails and telephones, though still it was challenging to monitor at individual level. Internet and communication technology (ICT) advanced over the time and eventually due to development of Web 2.0 this became easier and relatively more efficient. Due to inception of Web 2.0 and achievements in data warehousing and data manipulation capabilities, we were ready to record consumer voices apart form more involved communication with them. Further, the technologies led to the interactive communications by allowing the users and third parties to respond and record their comments. These interactive ways of communications and rapid

advancements in internet technologies, social media (SM) platforms evolved which allowed the users to communicate and respond immediately and promptly. Within a short span of time, social media platforms become very popular and millions of users registered over these platforms within few years of their emergence. Social media platforms allow users to record and relay their responses, feedbacks, voices, mood and grievances with the entire world or a closed network group within no time. Popular social media platforms include Facebook, You Tube, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter and many more. The popularity of these platforms can be assumed by the strength of user community which comprises many millions in India only.

Perceiving and noticing the presence of large number of audiences over the social media platforms marketers have been intuited to communicate with their customers through these platforms. Marketers created their social media pages and product pages and started targeting the audiences. Customers realized the prompt nature of communication with their sellers and source of supplies, started following the social media pages and thus a better method of communication which is two way in nature and customer voices are being heard and reacted. Commination over social media pages has many advantages apart from large number oof audiences. Their voices and feedbacks are immediately recorded sellers are supposed to react over them immediately. Also, any negative comments over the social media platforms is diffused instantly which negatively affects and hampers brand image and thus sellers are forced to react immediately and redress the grievances.

The marketers and promoters have well realized the possible benefits and business opportunities of promoting their products over the social media platforms and thus, there has been noticed a pattern shift in their marketing behavior. Now, they are spending a lot on social media marketing (SMM) and only a substantial portion of their marketing budget is allotted on traditional marketing means. It allows the marketers to monitor the purchase behavior of their customers and

proliferate their marketing practices through improved customer relationship management (CRM). Further, customized marketing and promotion is possible apart from problem redressal at the individual level. However, there is a fundamental question which needs to be addressed. A significant proportion of Indian population is illiterate earning below par and thus unable to access internet and social media platforms. Further, being traditional in nature, whether the social media marketing has been able to transform the buying behavior and induce purchasing.

REVIEW OF LITERATURES

Social media usage and its adoption in marketing practices has grown rapidly and within a short span, social media has created a considerable importance in our life. Social media has become very popular among youths who have shifted their entire attention from visible to invisible world and from real to virtual (Khurana, 2015). Due to wireless internet and social media people now a days keep their cellphones at an arm distance (Dey, et al., 2011). Social media applications due its network structure and capacity to proliferate user generated contents (UGC), social networking sites are high is demand.

There are number of social media platforms operational within the country and making a comprehensive list is nearly impossible. However, few most popular among them includes Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, WhatsApp, Tinder, LinkedIn etc. Estimates suggest that currently 376.1 million social media users are active in India (Statista, 2020). Currently, 1151.44 million wireless phones are registered within the country (TRAI, 2020) among which 72 percent are smartphone user having capacity to access and use digital platforms and social media.

Consumers are the individuals who finally consume or utilize the products or services as it is intended. End users or consumers are different from buyer who actually purchase the product but might not use it and thus a distinction is necessary to be

made in between (Sternthal & Craig, 1982). To influence the consumer's buying decision, marketing message must reach to the prospects in its original form through appropriate medium. Before making a final purchase decision, problem recognition (need identification) is necessary which is translated into search of information, its evaluation, purchase decision and post purchase decisions (Silverman, Bachann, & Al-Akharas, 2001). Consumer decision making process and individual consumption behavior needs to understand in a comprehensive manner and an attempt by Engel, Kollat and Blackwell popularly known as (EKB) (Sternthal & Craig, 1982) which starts with recognition and passes through information search, evaluation of alternatives, making a judgment and post purchase choices.

Social media is an interactive web-based environment where people can contact, communicate, interact and share information which includes ideas, emotions, interests, happenings and mood. Here, creation of contents and its communication needs to understand. Social media basically facilitates a dynamic virtual environment which allows its users to generate some content popularly known as User Generated Contents (UGC) unlike static environment which allows only viewing of the contents. The has been continuous arguments and discussions about the precise definition of Social Media and its function as this particular platform is continuously evolving (Solis, 2010) however, irrespective of any generally accepted definition, the generic definition remains same, a platform which allows users to generate contents and communicate them to the entire world. Social media platforms often allow to form a distinct group of users who share and distribute specialized and personalized contents within themselves. Group forming in an important functional building block of social media platforms (Dawot & Ibrahim, 2014). When people are able to form a group, it becomes specialized for communication within the people of similar cognition (Dunbar, 1992). Facebook permits forming group as well as page and so does WhatsApp. Other social media platforms also allow forming specialized group to share and receive intended messages.

(Thoumrungroje, 2014) proposed a model that links the intensity with which consumers use social media and their reliance on electronic word of mouth (EWOM) and consumption of conspicuous products. (Germán Aníbal Narváez Vásquez, 2014) intended to discuss best practices in the social networks usage as an effective strategic marketing communication tool in SMEs. (Dilhan Öztamura, 2014) analysed the role of social media for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs); as a new marketing strategy tool for the firm performance perspective.

(Hajli, 2014) accessed the usefulness of social media in marketing and using structured equation modeling (SEM) the author has demonstrated that social media marketing has led the development and proliferation of social commerce or e-commerce. Due to increased use of social media research over consumer behavior is increasing as a result of increased computing technology (Stephen A. T., 2016). The author emphasized that consumer decision making process is largely influenced due to social media and hence the social media platforms must be scrutinized more closely. Vinerean, Cetina, Dumitrescu, & Tichindelean, (2013) investigated the social media marketing and its effects on online consumers. They investigated 263 social media users and formulated a linear mode to study their behavior in order to ascertain who are using the social media and how they are interacting with their acquaintances with the various available platforms. Applying factor analysis and principal component analysis (PCA), the authors have reported four major components or types of social media users viz. expressers & Informers, engagers, networkers and watchers & Listeners. Ioanăs & Stoica (2014) stated that technology has extended power to the consumers to investigate a product, rate it, label it and give their feedback, comments and criticize them. Godey, Manthiou, Pederzoli, Rokka, Aiello, Donvito & Singh (2016) argued that the amount of evidence to prove the influence of brand equity and consumer

behavior towards brand loyalty is scant. They surveyed 845 consumers from China, France, Italy and India using luxury brands and applied structural equation modelling the fill the gaps in literature pertaining to social media brandings. The study demonstrates the impact of social media marketing on brand equity which is actually an extension of Kim & Ko (2012).

Through the extensive review of literature, it was concluded that, social media marketing is extensive being adopted and practice across the industries be it product or service marketing. Also, its proliferated use in gathering consumer feedback and its analysis for improved engagement and thus better CRM is being practiced. But, instead of rapid incubation, its effect in inducing buying behavior is questioned and the study intends to find, if the social media marketing practices are actually helpful in influencing consumer buying behavior.

METHODOLOGY

In this descriptive study intended to explore the degree with which social media marketing messages are able to influence buying behavior of online consumers, primary data has been used. Using standard questionnaire printed in Hindi and English to cater linguistic biasness, respondents were interviewed in the city of Lucknow. The respondents were chosen on random basis from across the city in order to make a sample which is true representative

of the entire population. In this sample, respondents with internet connection and having at least one social media account were included. Altogether, a sample of 273 was collected and the data was analyzed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics was calculated and their graphical representation has been shown. Also, appropriate statistical test like t-test and chi-square test has been performed to check the proportion and their statistical significance accordingly. The data has been subjected to reliability testing and the reported Cronbach alpha was 0.79 which is well enough to analyze and report the findings.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Once data quality and its reliability were established, the demographic information within the data was deciphered which actually represents the profile of social media users. In our sampled data (273), 189 were male comprising 69% of the sampled population (Figure 1). This slightly inclined figure towards male was due to the fact that female's usage of internet and social media is less popular and also, they were found a bit reluctant to respond the survey question threatened to reveal their identity and personal information. Further, the analysis revealed that the respondents were aged between 19 years to 67 years with a mean of 39.46 years which indicated that on an average the respondents belonged to young category.
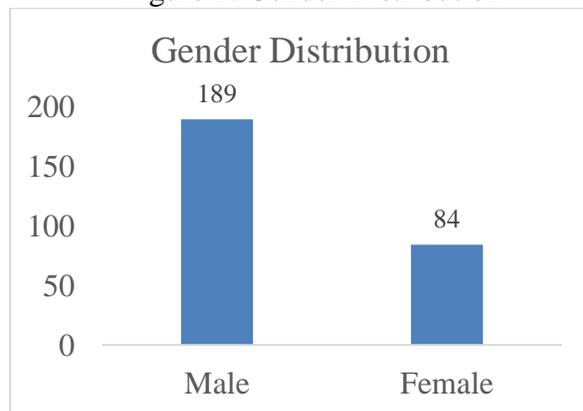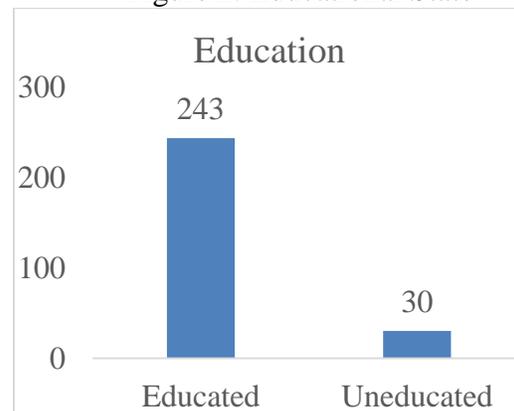
Figure 1: Gender Distribution

Figure 2: Educational State

It was found that 30 respondents were illiterate which comprised 11% of our entire sample (Figure 2). These uneducated respondents, though using social media platforms, in most of the cases are unable to go through the marketing messages and respond over them.

The respondents were asked to report the propensity to buy a product when a marketing message is displayed over the social media pages. The responses were recorded over a five-point scale ranging from definitely no to definitely yes passing through the neutral group. Table 1 shows the frequency distribution and associated percentage of responses.

Table 1: Frequency Distribution of buying behavior

	No	Rarely	May be	Sometimes	Often
Count	39	12	45	127	50
Percentage (%)	14.3	4.4	16.5	46.5	18.3

The Table 1 indicates that altogether, 177 respondents are inclined to buy and believe that social media messaging indeed affects their buying intention. This group together comprises 64.8% of entire sample. This high level of inducing suggests that social media is a powerful platform for the marketing practices. One sample Chi-Square proportion test to check whether the finding is statistically significant and actual proportion is 64.8% or greater. The findings suggest that the true population proportion is indeed greater than 50% with a 95% confidence interval of 59.77% to 100%. Clearly in almost all cases the population proportion of people being influenced by social media marketing messages is 59.77% or more.

The propensity to buy score was subjected to correlation test with the age of the respondents and it was found that the coefficient of correlation was -0.43. Though, the coefficient of correlation is not much stronger but statistically significant and thus it could be inferred that as age increases, buying over social media and being influenced by social media marketing messages decreases.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

During the study and analysis of data, it was found that majority of the respondents using social media platforms are educated enough to understand the functioning and process of handling social media accounts with a small proportion of 11% being uneducated. These uneducated people are not influenced by social media marketing messages and never influenced to make a buying decision. It was also reported that 64.8% respondents are induced to buy after watching a promotional content on social media platform and a 95% CI indicates that in all cases the proportion goes to 59.77% or even higher. This indicates a high level of influential ability with reference to social media messages. The degree of being influenced is negatively related with age, indicating that younger people are more inclined and influenced to buy after watching social media marketing messages. The findings could be summarized as: social media is highly influential in making a user to buy the products or services and hence, these practices should be more emphasized. Uneducated people do not receive the message as intended and hence other methods should be employed using artificial intelligence. In addition, younger people are more prone to buy and hence the practices of social media marketing should be more focused towards young users.

LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Due to time and economic constraints, the study was limited to the city of Lucknow only and hence the

generalization of the findings is not possible beyond the city. Further, the study could not cater the responses from the rural parts and hence, nothing could be said about its popularity, acceptability and influencing capability in the rural part of the country. In future course of studies, a wider population will be covered comprising respondents from rural areas as well in order to ensure more precise results and its generalizing ability.

REFERENCES

1. Dawot, N. M., & Ibrahim, R. (2014). A Review of Features and Functional Building Blocks of Social Media. 8th Malaysian Software Engineering Conference (MySEC) (pp. 177-182). Malysia: IEEE.

2. Dey, A. K., Wac, K., Ferreira, D., Tassini, K., Hong, J.-H., & Ramos, J. (2011). Getting Closer: An Empirical Investigation of the Proximity of User to Their Smart Phones. 13th International Conference on Ubiquitous Computing-UbiComp' 11 (pp. 163-172). Beijing, China: ACM.

3. Dunbar, R. I. (1992). Neocortex size as a constraint on group size in primates. Journal of human evolution, 22(6), 469-493.

4. Geho, P. R., & Dangelo, J. (2012). THE EVOLUTION OF SOCIAL MEDIA AS A MARKETING TOOL FOR ENTREPRENEURS. Entrepreneurial Executive, 17, 61-68.

5. Khurana, N. (2015). The impact of social networking sites on the youth. J Mass Communicat Journalism, 5(12), 1-4.

6. Kim, A. J., & Ko, E. (2012). Do social media marketing activities enhance customer equity? An empirical study of luxury fashion brand. Journal of Business Research, 1480-1486.

7. Silverman, B. G., Bachann, M., & Al-Akharas, K. (2001). Implications of Buyer Decision Theory for Design of eCommerce Websites. International Journal of Human-Computer Studies, 55(5), 815-844.

8. Statista. (2020, March 12). Social Media & User-Generated Content. Retrieved March 27, 2020, from Leading countries based on number of Twitter users as of January 2020: https://www.statista.com/statistics/242606/number-of-active-twitter-users-in-selected-countries/

9. Sternthal, B., & Craig, C. S. (1982). Consumer behavior: An information processing perspective. Viginia: Prentice Hall PTR.

10. Sternthal, B., & Craig, C. S. (1982). Consumer behavior: An information processing perspective.

11. Thoumrungroje, A. (2014). The Infuence of Social Media Intensity and EWOM on Conspicuous Consumption. Procedia- Social and Behavioural sciences, 7-15.

12. TRAI. (2020). Highlights of Telecom Subscription Data as on 31st December, 2019. GoI, TELECOM REGULATORY AUTHORITY OF INDIA. New Delhi: TRAI. Retrieved March 11, 2020

13. Zhang, P., & Benjamin, R. I. (2007). Understanding information related fields: A conceptual framework. Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology, 58(13), 1934-1947.