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Fostering Creativity & Innovation In Marketing Communication through Social Media

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Abstract:

In today's digitalised world, marketing has undergone dramatic change from what it used to be to what it has now become. That era has passed when corporations only had a few traditional vehicles for marketing their products and services. "Above the Line marketing is history, Below the Line marketing is here to stay" has become the mantra for being successful today. The boom in digital world has thrown up many opportunities for innovative techniques to be utilized in marketing and advertising like interactive marketing, social media, blogging, mobile marketing and many others. The creative spirit is so strong that even the traditional media like newspaper, television, radio are also adopting innovative ways to deliver the same message. Organizations today are using both traditional and contemporary media vehicles to communicate to their audience in a very unique way. The paper would try to analyse all the innovations that are being used today in the market, their creativity quotient, their effectiveness, their reach, their compatibility with the target audience and their feasibility keeping in mind the current circumstances of the market. The paper would also undertake an empirical research to understand the psyche of the youth towards social media as a platform for marketing. The paper would try to develop an integrated and comprehensive model for the Social Media marketing plan which can be readily followed by the organizations.

Key words: Innovation, Creativity, Social Media, Marketing, Digitalization

1. Introduction

The world is a changed place to live today. Technology revolution has brought together the entire world to a common platform. Everything from the way we communicate, talk, share, discuss, work and market have turned around. What we have today is the digital economy, which is boundaryless. Technology has transcended the barriers of countries and continents. Today one may not have a home address, but would definitely have an internet address like an email account, a Facebook or a twitter account. The internet has also spawned an economy of its own: a digital economy, in which anyone can be a content producer, where the lines between using and producing are blurred, and where the product being traded may be as ethereal as an ability to express an authenticated identity (Facebook), to connect people with information (Google), to capture the attention of anonymous masses (Flickr, YouTube, Twitter), to chat with near ones (Whatsapp, We Chat). This digital economy is expanding and changing rapidly, and has spawned some of the fastest growing and most innovative companies of the past decade.

The most visible change that is being seen today is the way how marketers are approaching their target segment. Marketing communication has evolved to reach a new paradigm. Marketing communications (or marcom or integrated marketing communications) are messages and related media used to communicate with a market. Marketing communications is the "promotion" part of the "marketing mix" or the "four Ps": price, place, promotion, and product. Those who practice advertising, branding, brand language, direct marketing, graphic design, marketing, packaging, promotion, publicity, sponsorship, public relations, sales promotion and online marketing are termed marketing communicators, marketing communication managers, or more briefly, marcom managers. Marketing and corporate communications are the main persuasive element the organization can use to connect with its markets by communicating ideas and seeking to impart particular perceptions of brands, products and services to customers, consumers and stakeholders. Nevertheless, the increasingly wider variety of communication and promotional tools together with the modern-day array of on- and off-line channels and media forms can widely disseminate messages. In this complex and dynamic context, the concept of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) has emerged and since the mid-1990's it has come to the fore and attracted considerable attention in the literature. The methods deployed under the IMC are advertising, public relations, direct marketing, sales promotion, personal selling and interactive or digital marketing. Companies seek to develop the right promotion mix of these elements to market themselves to the target segment.

Traditionally more emphasis was laid on advertising, sales promotion, PR, but the growing importance of internet which is called as a network of networks have significantly increased the contribution of the digital or interactive marketing. The new media has

thrown up massive opportunities for the marketers to reach the audience differently and more efficiently. Traditionally printed marketing was the whole sole method of conveying the messages to the consumers. However, in recent times, emails, sms, blogs, television and company websites have become the trendy way of conveying the organization's message to the consumers.

2. Literature Review

Over the last couple of years there has been a fundamental shift in the way that people learn, compare and ultimately buy. Connectivity speeds over the Internet have increased, the access to information has been made easier, and device performance has improved; your audience is now more connected and it is possible for them to, for instance, go through a presentation webinar on their phone while sitting in traffic.

People also now have incredible ways to select what they want to hear and what they don't want to hear, and this is also changing the mindset as it comes to researching and gathering not only information but also gaining confidence before making important business decisions. With the increased flexibility and connectivity your customers can now use interactive media to research, learn, compare and evaluate alternatives on their own time, leaving interruption-based traditional marketing behind. And also being able to gather important information that was traditionally only delivered by experienced sales persons and consultants. They do this all on their own.

The impetus on creativity and innovation in marketing communication is there to be seen by everyone. The entire way of handling marketing has completely changed. The creative quotient of companies have increased to a level where they are continuously raising the bars for the consumer and his expectations. The fundamentals of marketing communication have undergone a complete overhaul with the influence of information technology. Neither the content nor the media vehicles have remained the same over time. There are traces of innovative techniques found all around us in the marketing communication arena. Be it Facebook, Twitter, Google, YouTube, Smartphones, iPads, iPhones, Tablets, mobile marketing, interactive channels, technology has changed the face of modern day communication. Companies these days have a plethora of digitally enabled communication vehicles available to them, which they are and can utilize to connect directly with the target audience. Research also suggests that the drastically growing relevance of technology led communication has taken a major share of the vehicles to which consumer exposes himself. The amount of time, effort, money that the consumer today is spending on new media vehicles and new types of marketing communication is very promising and yet exciting.

Social media marketing is the buzz word today for marketers across industries from FMCG to durables, to electronics to automobiles. Research shows that there is a manifold rise in the expenditure being made on digital platform to promote the offering. The Major proportion of the marketing & advertising budget is being spent on technology driven marketing communication.

Social media marketing refers to the process of gaining traffic or attention through social media sites. Social media itself is a catchall term for sites that may provide radically different social actions. For instance, Twitter is a social site designed to let people share short messages or "updates" with others. Facebook, in contrast, is a full-blown social networking site that allows for sharing updates, photos, joining events and a variety of other activities. The various platforms used by social media marketers are:

- **Twitter-** Twitter allows companies to promote their products on an individual level. The use of a product can be explained in short messages that followers are more likely to read. These messages appear on followers' home pages. Messages can link to the product's website, Facebook profile, photos, videos, etc. This link provides followers the opportunity to spend more time interacting with the product online. This interaction can create a loyal connection between product and individual and can also lead to larger advertising opportunities. Twitter promotes a product in real-time and brings customers in.
- **Facebook-** Facebook profiles are far more detailed than Twitter accounts. They allow a product to provide videos, photos, and longer descriptions. Videos can show when a product can be used as well as how to use it. These also can include testimonials as other followers can comment on the product pages for others to see. Facebook can link back to the product's Twitter page as well as send out event reminders. Facebook promotes a product in real-time and brings customers in.
- As marketers see more value in social media marketing, advertisers continue to increase sequential ad spend in social by 25%. Strategies to extend the reach with Sponsored Stories and acquire new fans with Facebook ads contribute to an uptick in spending across the site. The study attributes 84% of "engagement" or clicks to Likes that link back to Facebook advertising. Today, brands increase fan counts on average of 9% monthly, increasing their fan base by two-times the amount annually.
- **Google+-** Google+, in addition to providing the profiles and features of Facebook, is also able to integrate with the Google search engine. Other Google products are also integrated, such as Google Adwords and Google Maps. With the development of Google Personalized Search and other location-based search services, Google+ allows for targeted advertising methods, navigation services, and other forms of location-based marketing and promotion.
- **LinkedIn-**LinkedIn, a professional business-related networking site, allows companies to create professional profiles for themselves as well as their business to network and meet others. Through the use of widgets, members can promote their various social networking activities, such as Twitter stream or blog entries of their product pages, onto their LinkedIn profile page. LinkedIn provides its members the opportunity to generate sales leads and business partners. Members can use "Company Pages" similar to Facebook pages to create an area that will allow business owners to promote their products or services and be able to interact with their customers.

- **Blogs-** Everyday there are more reasons for companies to use blogging platforms for their social media repertoire. Platforms like LinkedIn creates an environment for companies and clients to connect online. Companies that recognize the need for information, originality, and accessibility employ blogs to make their products popular and unique, and ultimately reach out to consumers who are privy to social media
- Blogs allow a product or company to provide longer descriptions of products or services. The longer description can include reasoning and uses. It can also include testimonials and can link to and from Facebook, Twitter and many social network and blog pages. Blogs can be updated frequently and are promotional techniques for sustaining customers. Other promotional uses are acquiring followers and subscribers and direct them to your social network pages.
- **YouTube-**YouTube is another popular avenue; advertisements are done in a way to suit the target audience. The type of language used in the commercials and the ideas used to promote the product reflect the audience's style and taste.
- There is a need for marketers to channel their efforts for tapping this innovative and immensely useful and cost effective communication platform. However, marketers need to understand that there are some fundamental differences between the traditional media and social media. Social media is a paradigm shift from mass media like television, radio and, print to an extreme niche i.e. one individual. The messages on social media thus need to be customized to individuals and this calls for a creative and innovative communication strategy. Also, customer engagement becomes an important tool that if used effectively could result in successful social media campaigns.

3. Objectives of the Study

- To analyze what are the various new media available to the marketers.
- To understand the psyche of the youth towards social media as a platform for marketing.
- To evaluate how the marketers can utilize the potential of the social media.

4. Research Methodology

Secondary literature review has been undertaken to understand the concept of social media, its components, digital marketing, uses, benefits and how it is the preferred media for the marketers today.

Primary research has been conducted on youth to understand the psychology of the consumers towards social media as a platform for marketing. Online questionnaire was administered to youngsters between the age group of 15 to 35 to understand their consumer buying behavior towards how they use these sites for decision making.

5. Research Design

The design being used is descriptive in nature to understand the 5W's and 1H of the study, which are who, when, where, what, why and how of using the social media as platform to be used by marketers today.

6. Sampling Design

- The sampling area is NCR as the social media is usually used by people living in urban areas because of the high penetration of computers and internet here.
- The sampling technique used is stratified random sampling based on the age stratum.
- The sample size chosen is 122 as the research is only indicative in nature and further research needs to be conducted to understand the social media deeply.

7. Data Analysis & Interpretations

Based on the responses received from the respondents the data was analyzed and following interpretations were drawn:

7.1. Sources of Social Media

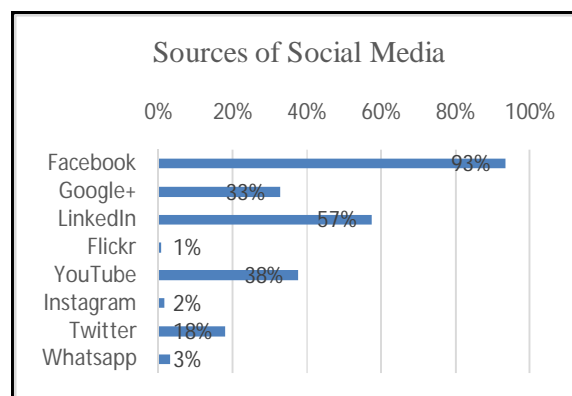


Figure 1

Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube and Twitter are the most preferred sources of Social Media among the youth. Among them, majority like to interact and be updated through Facebook.

7.2. Usage of Social Media

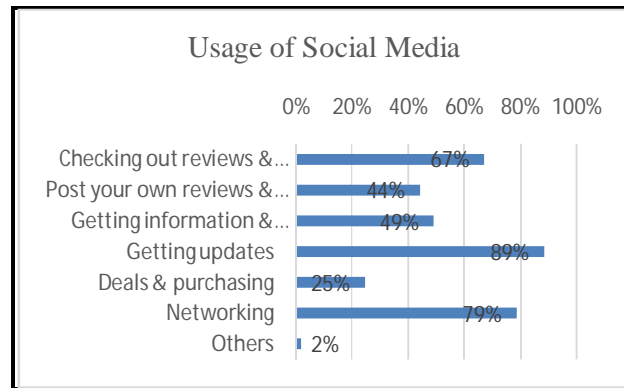


Figure 2

Majority of the people prefer to use social media for getting updates, networking, checking out reviews and posts. 25% of the respondents have also started using for Deals and Purchasing. This implies, social media has been able to penetrate into the market and convince people for undertaking purchasing apart from just acting as a communication tool. So the move of the social media will be to become a convincing tool rather than just being a communication tool.

7.3. Product Comparisons and Feedback

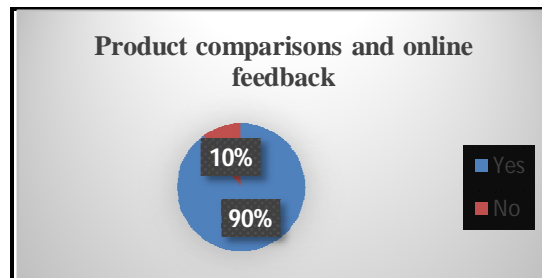


Figure 3

Further, close to 90% of the respondents go through product comparisons and online feedback through the social media before purchasing goods & services online.

7.4. Online Reviews Impacting Purchase Decisions



Figure 4

Social media also impacts the purchase decisions for 95% of the respondents through its online reviews, blogs, posts and feedback. Thus, people are socially aware and conscious of getting sufficient information about the product, its features and

performance before undertaking any purchase decisions. Social media has been able to create that influence and impact on the “socially conscious consumer”.

7.5. Types Of Products and Services Bought Online

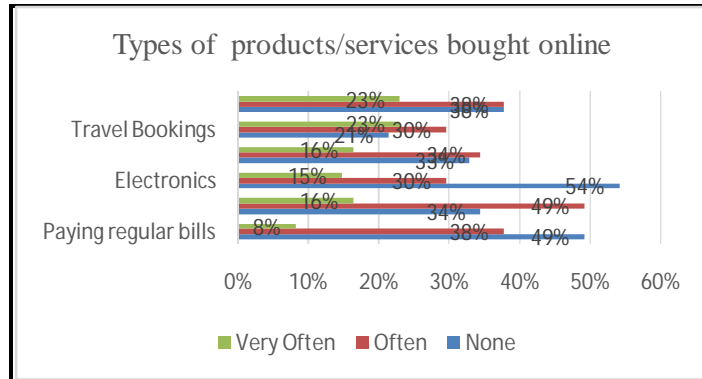


Figure 5

Understanding the needs of the consumer in today’s time is not an easy task. As per the survey, types of products/services bought online are mostly books, music, videos. Some have some inclination towards clothing, accessories, home items and paying regular bills. Still the Indian consumer does not feel confident for going for Online shopping as the “touch and feel” factor is missing, which is very well provided by the traditional brick and mortar model.

7.6. Primary Use of Facebook/Twitter

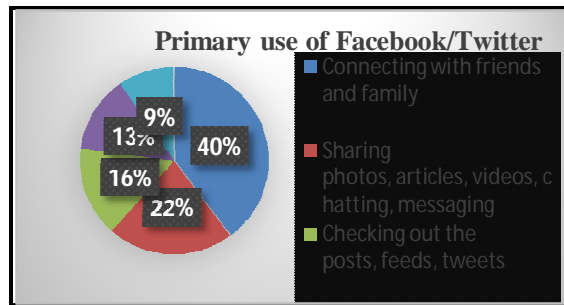


Figure 6

The primary use of Facebook or Twitter is still to connect with friends & family, and also to share photos, articles, videos, etc. Using them to read reviews and blogs about brands is still the last priority for the respondents. Marketers still have a long way to go to create a lasting impression on the most preferred social networking websites.

7.7. Channels of Marketing Preferred

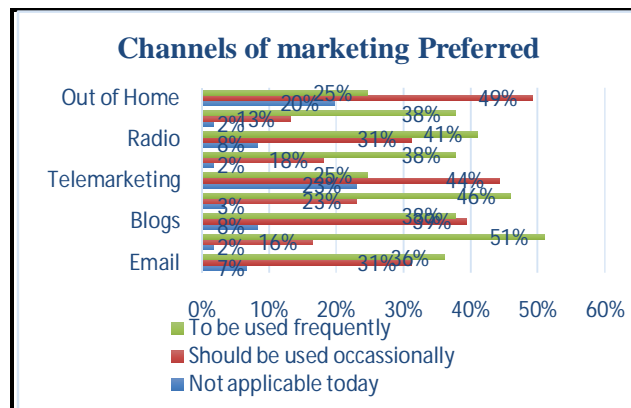


Figure 7

The young urban consumer can connect with the Social Networking sites much more easily as compared to other channels. Even Interactive media is getting sufficient acceptance. Both above the line and below the line channels of marketing have received a mixed response. Thus, it clearly indicates, the consumer of today is accepting both above and below the line channels of marketing.

8. Findings & Suggestion

Our empirical study also highlighted the following:

- Majority of the urban educated youth is online almost throughout the day, checking mails, interacting with peers, reading blogs, reviews, feedback, getting updates.
- They are frequently visiting the social media websites to get information, do brand comparisons, find out deals which can favor them and make the maximum out of the social networks.
- Purchasing brands through social media provides them convenience, saves their time and effort, give them ready-to-made useful information which helps them take the final decision to convert their awareness into action.
- Social media is the most effective way of word-of-mouth marketing. People prefer to rely on the recommendations given by their known ones and post updates which again creates a ripple effect, making or breaking the brand.

9. Conclusion

Thus, the youth of today prefers to be social, informative and responsive to all things which are affecting them. Marketers can make the most of it and supplement with their traditional model, till the time the Indian consumer makes purchasing through digitized media a habit. The marketers need to penetrate into the digital world further and capitalize on this opportunity to change the mindset of the consumer from using it as a mere communication tool to making it as a shopping tool.

10. Scope for Further Research

In this paper we have mainly focused on the demand side (consumers) of the social media marketing. Getting inputs from the supply side (marketers) is of equal relevance. The marketers can provide actual insights as to how creatively are they using this opportunity to promote their brands. Further, the sample can be extended to rural areas to understand the status and acceptance of social media marketing in that segment.

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