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## **Social Media Is Nothing But a Public Relation Tool**

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### ***Abstract:***

*Is social media a new element in the marketing communication process or it's nothing but an innovative media for communication? Does social media only plays a role of enhancing the marketing communication mix? Can social media be used in the same way as traditional communication tools? Or Is social media is taking over the traditional marketing communication mix. In order to find answers to these questions, we will revisit the marketing communication mix and will try to find our answers through the content analysis of the definitions of each element of the communication mix. We will find out if Social media fits in any of the five elements of the marketing communication mix. Based on our analysis we will formulate a theory at the end of our research paper.*

### **1. Introduction**

Social media refers to the means of interactions among people in which they create, share, and exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks. Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein (2010) define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that built on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Social media are interacting platforms that users use to create, share, and exchange content information via communities and Web 2.0 technologies (Ahlqvist, et al., 2008). As a functional definition, social media refers to the interaction of people and also to creating, sharing, exchanging and commenting contents in virtual communities and networks (see Toivonen 2007). Most commonly known social networking sites are facebook, twitter, youtube and orkut.

Social media marketing is a phenomenon that has drawn a lot of attention to both companies and individuals interacting with the networking landscape. However, when it comes to giving a clear definition of what social media marketing really is, the understanding of the term is minimal. Managers and academic researchers seem to differ on how social media differ from interchangeable related concept web 2.0 and User Generated Content (Kaplan, & Haenlein, 2010). Social Media marketing provides us with many opportunities to achieve our objectives. The top-tier Social Media and Social Networking sites provide staggering numbers—hundreds of millions of active users, hundreds of millions of conversations going on at these sites on every topic imaginable, seventy-two hours of video being uploaded every minute, a million blog posts every day, millions of Tweets daily, the opportunities are endless (Sweeney, & Craig, 2012). This is attributed to the fact that: (i) customers are now resistant to marketing messages in traditional media, (ii) customers have traits of marketing avoidance tendencies on Social Media, in favor of engagement with peers and brand (Mangold & Faulds, 2009, Parent et al., 2011; Kietzmann et al., 2011). In an effort to regain customers' attention and to take advantage of the new media, some companies are using traditional marketing strategies on Social Media. Some companies experiment with each of the Social Media applications to gain attention. Some on the other hand, observe and learn how best to use Social Media. To address the skepticism, experimentation and possible misuse of Social Media and traditional marketing communication, this study seeks to identify the role of Social Media in the Marketing Communication Mix (Advertising Sales Promotion, Public Relations, Direct Marketing and Personal Selling) and whether it can be regarded as the sixth element of the Marketing Communication Mix or it belongs to public relation element of the Communication mix.

#### ***1.1. Problem Statement***

In this study we will try to identify the position of the social media marketing in the marketing communication mix and will do a thorough analysis of the various theories which have been put forward to explain the role of social media marketing in the communication mix.

#### ***1.2. Research Objectives***

- To understand the position of Social Media in the Marketing Communication Mix.

### 1.3. Research Questions

1. What position is Social Media perceived to take in the Marketing Communication Mix?
2. Does social media marketing qualifies for the sixth position in the marketing communication mix?

### 1.4. Research Methodology

We revisited the traditional marketing communication mix and did a content analysis of the definitions of the five element of the marketing communication mix. This way we figured out the position of the social media in the marketing communication mix.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Social Media

Social media platforms provide unlimited ways for consumers to interact, express, share and create content about brands and products (Camarero & San José 2011). Social media is also accepted as the new sources of online information where the information itself is —created, initiated, circulated and used by consumers for the purposes of educating each other about products, brands, services, personalities, and issues“(Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2004).According to research, Internet users hold a more positive view about companies who engage in social media (Universal McCann, 2008). Social media are the highway to the future and organizations need to devise appropriate strategies to successfully navigate it (Patnaik Sandeep, 2011).This is only possible because of the feature and function available in the social media websites like facebook and twitter. According to —Honeycomb Modell of Smith (2007) (cf.1) social media sites are built upon seven functional blocks: identity, conversation, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups. So as per the honey comb model an organization in social media is a social entity who behave like any individual on the virtual networks. So these seven functional block of honey comb model turns an organization into an individual who is present in the virtual networks to socialize with its patrons, fans and loyal customers. Being on social media is more about relationship than about sales and revenue. An organization in the social media is governed by the rules and protocols of the social media operator.

### 2.2. Position of Social Media

Despite the acceptance that Social Media plays a role in the Marketing Communication Mix, there are different opinions on the position that Social Media should have in the marketing communication. These differences are centered on the way it can be used.

#### 2.2.1 Hybrid of Promotional Mix

The Hybrid of promotional mix school of thought argues that Social Media is a new element in the Marketing Communication Mix because it plays a different role from traditional Marketing Communication Mix. Mangold & Faulds', (2009) stance is that Social Media plays two roles; the first enables companies to talk to their customers, as they do with traditional marketing, and the second enables customers to converse with each other. Arguments are that because of the nature of Social Media and the fact that customers do not want to be marketed at, Social Media has replaced marketing communication and that Social Media is a passing fad.

#### 2.2.2 Social Media as a Media

This opinion put forward that Social Media is not a new element of the Marketing Communication Mix, but rather an innovation which builds upon already existing technology thus supporting the HCMC Model (Hoffman & Novak, 1996; Lagrosen, 2005). This is in line with Mangold & Faulds, (2009), and Hoffman & Novak, (1996) who proposed that Social Media “springs out from mixed technology and media origins that enable instantaneous, real time communication and uses multi-media formats (proposed by the CMC Model) and numerous platforms (Facebook, YouTube and blogs) with global capabilities”. Other scholars who share the same view posit that Social Media is just a new channel like TV and Radio. The only advantage with it is that it reaches a large audience at a lower cost (Singh et al., 2008). Further to this, Zolkepli & Kamarulzaman, (2011) added that Social Media has become a mass media vehicle for consumer sponsored communication and according to them this is attributed to a lack of understanding of how to use Social Media and the benefits it brings to them. Stephen & Galak, (2009) agree with this notion and propose that it also be used to measure marketing performance. This performance can be measured on the basis of social currency (defined as 30 engagement with consumers and consumer evangelism) as Stephen & Galak, (2009) and Weinberg & Pehlivan, (2011) put it. Thus what can be drawn from this school of thought is that Social Media is a new media, which comes with both traditional and new marketing benefits. However, there is a challenge is viewing it as an extension of mass communication because this may result in companies pushing adverts to customers, resulting in resistance from customers. Social Media should be used as a new channel for listening to customers, and engaging in important conversations (Constantinides & Fountain, 2008; DiStaso, McCorkindale & Wright, 2011). Social Media is a not a replacement for traditional media like TV but a new marketing tool targeting a specific type of customer who prefers online communication, thus it should be integrated into the traditional marketing channels, (Bolotaeva & Cata, 2010). However, Bolotaeva & Cata, (2010) seem to argue that Social Media is a new form of the marketing mix, possibly suggesting that it is at the same level as the promotional mix.

#### 2.2.3 Social Media as Enhancer

Another school of thought put forward that Social Media plays a role of enhancing the Marketing Communication Mix and therefore should be incorporated in the mix (Lagrosen, 2005). It is essential because according to Parent, Plangger & Bal, (2011), consumers are resistant to faceless and impersonal organizations in favor of more personal conversation and engagement with the

brand, and involvement with or without the company's approval in creating brand personalities. Adding to that, since customers are no longer passive consumers of marketing messages, they want to co-create products and promotional services and integrate Social Media as the mix allows companies to gain trust from them. However, according to DiStaso, et al., (2011), marketers are uncertain how to strategically incorporate Social Media.

#### 2.2.4 Social Media as a Traditional Tool

Social Media can be used in the same way as traditional tools. It can be used as an advertising agent. Constantinides & Fountain, (2008) argued that it should be part of the public relations and Marketing Communication Mix and as a means of direct one-to-one marketing. It is the word of mouth delivered and enhanced by online communities to a larger audience and at great speed (Preibusch, Hoser, Gürses, & Berendt, 2007; Mangold & Faulds, 2010). Scholars like Bolotaeva & Cata, (2010) state that social networks in particular have their different 4 Ps of marketing mix which are Personal, Participatory, Physical, and Plausible. Blogs can be integrated with Customer Relationship Management, public relations and can be used for press releases.

#### 2.2.5 Social Media as a Passing Fad

Constantinides & Fountain, (2008:243) contend that Social Media is not a passing fad; instead "...marketers should learn to co-exist and communicate with a powerful customer very sensitive to old-fashioned push marketing and by-and-large determined to participate as an equal in the marketing process." Fischer & Reuber, (2011) propose that Web 2.0 marketing will take over from traditional advertising 32 and marketing techniques. Preibusch, et al., (2007) equate Social Media with traditional ecommerce, but its difference is that user profile information is public and this helps in market intelligence.

### *2.3. Elements of the Marketing Communication Mix*

The marketing mix which is commonly known as 4p's of marketing is the traditional approach to market products goods and services for decades. The promotional mix is the third element of the marketing mix and is concerned with the communication process a firm or an individual applies to promote an idea, product or service. This is known as the marketing communication mix. The Marketing Communication Mix, also known as the promotional mix, is composed of 5 traditional elements which are advertising, personal selling, public relations, publicity, direct marketing and sales promotion. Of these five, advertising has often been regarded as the only marketing communication tool thus leading to the belief that marketing communication is only about sending information to the customer through electronic and print media (television, radio, newspapers and magazines) and not face to face. Below is a brief discussion on the elements of the Marketing Communication Mix.

#### 2.3.1. Advertising

Advertising is a one way, non personal and planned paid promotion or message aimed at influencing the attitude and behavior of a broad audience about a product or a service (Frey & Rudloff, 2010). The main aim of advertising is to create awareness, hence the term 'awareness builder', which will eventually lead to the purchasing of a product or service. Advertising originated in the Babylon age and has been widely used by marketers. Its attributes of being cost effective, giving complete control of message to the marketers and its ability to create brand value, have built its popularity. Some consumers and companies treat it as a form of mass communication which uses the push and pull marketing strategies. However, since it is a one-to-many type of communication, biased and low in credibility, consumers have lost trust in it. According to Mangold & Faulds, (2009), consumers have become more educated and want to control messages they receive. This has led to the current shaking up of the advertising industry.

#### 2.3.2. Direct Marketing

Direct marketing is a management concept, a multi-level communication and distribution tool (Hesse, Kraft & Peters, 2007:5-6). It is accountable, interactive and used to ensure direct response from customers (Percy, 2008:153-155). A Direct Marketing campaign accesses huge recorded databases to build profiles of potential customers and provide valuable marketing information for effective direct targeting. It involves activities like direct mail, telemarketing, database management, direct response ads through the direct mail, the internet and various broadcast and print media (Belch & Belch, 2003:18-20; Hesse et al., 2007:6). Direct Marketing is divided into two elements, namely building a quality database over a long period and cost monitoring and controlling. The controlling elements indicate that there is much control given to the marketer as opposed to Social Media which puts control in the hands of the consumers. Scholars suggest that the main aim of direct marketing is to stimulate the targeted audience to take a now action, and create an individualized customer relationship (Holland (cited in Hesse, et al., 2007; Percy, 2008:153-155).

#### 2.3.3. Personal Selling

According to Frey & Rudloff, (2010), personal selling is a flexible, accountable and measurable one-to-one marketing communication tool centered on building trust and a relationship between the seller and the buyer. The main focus of personal selling besides selling is to solve customer problems, add value and assist in purchasing decision making and building trust and relationships with customers, which may result in brand loyalty. Personal selling is more common in business-to-business markets and in situations where there is much competition and specialized products. There are great chances of customer-seller relationships being sacrificed at the expense of attaining a quick sale. The fact that personal selling is relationship based, gives a basis for Social Media which is based on relationship building.

#### 2.3.4. Sales Promotion

Sales promotion refers to "...marketing and communication activities that change the price/value relationship of a product or service perceived by the target, thereby generating immediate sales and alter long term value." (Schultz, Robinson & Petrison, 1998:7). To initiate instant sales or specific purchase, sales force and consumers are given incentives that result in tangible and non tangible benefits (Belch & Belch, 2003; Percy, 2008; Mullin & Cummins, 2008). However, Schultz et al., (1998) posit that one disadvantage of sales promotion is that it does not change the opinion of the buyer about the product but rather initiates immediate or short term results. Marketers however misuse sales promotion in Social Media through posting promotions and not engaging with customers.

#### 2.3.5. Public Relations

Public Relations is a proactive and reactive management function used to evaluate public attitudes, identify the policies and procedures of an individual or organization with the intention of executing a programme of action to earn public understanding and acceptance (Johnston & Zawawi, 2009). Although it is credible, 18 Public Relations does not allow organizations to control messages and responses of customers on Social Media. Many debates have been going on as to how companies and marketers can best take advantage of these elements to achieve their organizational goals effectively and efficiently. Integration of the all the elements seems to be the best way organizations can effectively use all the elements discussed above.

### **3. Findings and Analysis: (Marketing Communication Mix and Social Media)**

On the basis of the literature review our attempt in the paper is to find out the perfect position for the social media in the marketing communication process. So before we could make any comment on the five schools of thoughts we need to revisit the traditional marketing communication mix to understand the role of social media in the communication process. Below are our findings

#### *3.1. Advertising and Social Media*

As per the definition of advertising by Frey & Rudloff (2010) advertising is a one way communication where as social media is not because the consumers can revert back to the message and can generate their own content on the virtual networks. There is no that doubt Social media helps us to Advertise our products and events to a large number of customers but the nature of the message is not to make the consumers buy but to inform them as a good friend about the new products coming and sharing the stories of the organization or the brand. The purpose is to relate to the audience who are already in a social relationship with the Brand or Organization. So to consider it as a part of advertising is not acceptable. We can clearly say that social media marketing is not advertising.

#### *3.2. Direct Marketing and Social Media*

A Direct Marketing campaign accesses huge recorded databases to build profiles of potential customers and provide valuable marketing information for effective direct targeting. It involves activities like direct mail, telemarketing, database management, direct response ads through the direct mail, the internet and various broadcast and print media (Belch & Belch, 2003:18-20; Hesse et al., 2007:6). As per the above definition of the direct marketing we can easily deny that social media is not direct marketing because social media function does not allow you to create a data base unless the members of the social network are in a relationship with you by their own will. And second thing is that the database which organizations create on social media is not necessary of potential buyers. In direct marketing we can communicate to the customers through mail and telephone calls but here on social media we cannot send any information without their consent. So this makes it clear that social media marketing is not direct marketing, because here an organization needs to be in a social relationship with the customers before any information is exchanged.

#### *3.3. Personal Selling and Social Media*

The major focus of using a personal selling strategy is to make sales and is particularly used in business to business communication. But when we see an organization in a social media, we can clearly say that their purpose is not to make sales but to inform customers and indulge into a health discussion. Social media can definitely help in building traffic to the organization's official website but it does no personal selling. Whereas personal selling is most frequently used in business to business sales but social media is used for every type of product, service or organization.

#### *3.4. Sales Promotion and Social Media*

Sales promotion is all about building rush at the store by bringing down the prices. Social Media Marketing works as a medium for communication which can reach to the large base of potential consumers. But this does make Social Media marketing as an element of sale promotion but as a medium for communication. Marketers use social media to post sale promotion offers, so it acts as an medium of communication rather than an element of sales promotion.

#### *3.5. Public Relations and Social Media*

As per the definition of the public relation, it is used to earn public understanding and acceptance. Social media involve with the community and group of customers who have common needs and desires and figure out their attitudes, so that they can finally come up with something which can help them to relate to the customers and earn their acceptance in the virtual social networks. Social media helps an organization to evaluate public attitudes by indulging in the open discussions and listening to the customers.

So, social Media is a tool which has been used by the organizations to maintain relationship with the loyal or potential customers, so that they can earn their acceptance in the market. This is done by posting information about the organization's on the social media and initiating discussion.

#### 4. Conclusion

On the basis of above content analysis of the definitions of the five elements of the marketing communication mix we can easily figure out the only element which has a major relationship with the social media, that is Public Relation. This is because of the fact that the social media definition and functions don't relate to the other elements of the promotional mix to the extent they are related to the Public relation. In public relation we focus on the relationship between the organization and the customers and same happens in the social media where an organization in an individual entity on the social network who keeps sharing the events and happenings with the other members of the society. Here it is less about Selling and more about relationships with the people. As far as the analysis done in this research paper we don't agree with the other school of thought who give different approaches to perceive social media marketing in the communication mix. But we consider it as a tool for public relation's which an element of the traditional marketing communication mix is. So Social Media is an innovative tool that organizations use for creating a very strong public relation with the customers on the virtual networks.

#### 5. Limitation

The major limitation of this study is that no quantitative approach is used to defend our research finding. Only a few most appropriate definitions are taken into consideration and rest of the definitions and thoughts are neglected.

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