

A LITERATURE REVIEW ON AFFECT OF SOCIAL MEDIA AS A MARKETING TOOL

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ABSTRACT

These days, the retailers have extended their marketing by using social networking sites as a platform to reach wider range of consumers. The use of social media as an extension marketing strategy for retailers has phenomenally developed in the last decade. Most of the researches on social media explore the concepts that makeup its foundations, and the changes/ effects on consumer behaviour due to company's integration with social media. Review of the abundant available multi-disciplinary data revealed that most studies on social media are focused on examining the factors which affect consumer behaviour relative to social networking. It is necessary to expand the research to analyze and understand the long-term promotional gains which the retailers get from marketing on social media. In this paper, we are presenting a literature review on social media marketing and will discuss Virtual Brand Communities, Consumers Attitudes and Motives, User Generated Content, and Viral Advertising. This paper also reviews the gaps within social media marketing research and points out the need for future studies to investigate the benefits gained by social media marketing, especially for small retail business.

KEYWORDS: *Virtual Brand Community, Social Media, Viral Advertising, Personal Channel & Currency.*

Introduction

The connection between consumers and brands, which offers a personal channel and currency for social interaction and user centered networking, is called as social media marketing.¹ In order to understand social media completely and use it as a tool for marketing, one must understand what Web 2.0 is. Kaplan and Haenlein said that Web 2.0 is a place where the end users use the World Wide Web in a new way where the content can be altered continuously by all operators in a sharing and collaborative way.² Now the applied aspect of the technology has become more important than the technology itself because now a days, rather than simply obtaining information from the Web, the users are now creating information and also using it, thereby adding value to the websites which allow them to do so.³ Thus, from a simple information retrieval system, Web 2.0 has evolved to a platform for interoperability, collaboration and interactivity.³

Social media has been created on philosophy and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and is defined as an Internet based group of applications that allows the creation, alteration and exchange of user generated content.² The basic features which are necessary for a website to be treated as a social networking site are that site must contain user profiles and contents. This allows users to connect with each other, create and join user groups based on common interests eg. Sports, school, politics etc. and post comments on each other's pages.⁴

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It is important to understand the difference between social media and social networking sites. Although the two terms are used interchangeably, they are different. The social media permits the users to come together by creating personal information profiles and inviting colleagues, family members and friends to have access to those profiles. The social media thus provides the environment in which social networking takes place.² The social media has completely altered the way in which the consumers gain information and make buying decisions. In order to measure how well the consumers will perceive marketing on social media, the marketing researchers consider the factor- "*Consumers' Sentiment toward Marketing*" (CSM). It is defined as a concept which refers to general feelings that the consumers have for marketing and marketplace.⁵

If a retailer wants to create a successful social media based marketing campaign, his target consumer must be open to the use of technology. If the intended target market, is not familiar with social media and does not use it, or perceives it negatively, then the retailer's social media marketing campaign will be unrewarding. The inclination of people/ consumers to accept and use new technologies for accomplishing goals at work and in home is called as "*Consumer technology readiness*".⁵ Analysis of Consumer technology readiness of target market can determine if marketing via social media would be beneficial for a retailer or not. The "*Innovation Adoption Process*" (IAP) is another instrument which provides the information about consumer's acceptance of new technology.

Evolution of Social media simply from providing a platform for its users for staying in touch with their family and friends to a place where consumers can explore and learn more about their favourite products and the companies selling them has led to the utilization of these sites by marketers and retailers as a way to approach consumers and provide a new way to shop. Thus, the development in technology such as advanced mobile devices, powerful search engines etc have extended the retailer's ability to reach consumers through new touch points.⁶

Due to the large diversity of consumers who use social media, the social networking sites can provide a big growth in business for retailers if they make shopping services available on net. This social networking sites act as an effective platform for retailers to advertise their products and brand to potential consumers. The wide range of consumers using social media means that most target markets can be easily reached.⁷ The technological and applied progress of social media sites have led to formation of consumer communities which have created new ways by which the consumers and the companies can interact with each other to share information on brand products, e.g. Virtual brand communities are connecting the retailers and consumers with one another by creating a computer-generated space for marketing.

Virtual Brand Community

Virtual Brand Communities (VBC) is the main topic for study for understanding the use of social media as a marketing tool. The aggregation of consumers on internet related to their interest in a particular product or brand is called as VBC.⁸ In other words, a group of people who share common interest in a particular brand or its product are defined as a "brand community".⁹

The main aspect that guarantees the survival of a member in a VBC is Trust. The trust of members in their VBC, increases their participation in the community, and the consumers having a positive participation experience are more brand loyal.⁹ the trust in turn, is impacted by security, which is a major factor affecting a consumer's opinions toward social networking sites.

The VBCs depend on individual user's participation and so, both awareness and the unity of group can strengthen the satisfaction of user with a VBC. The study done by Casaló, Favián and Guinalú (2008) demonstrated the powerful sway that an online interaction between consumers on a VBC can have on their buying behaviour.⁹ The study by Georgi and Mink 2012 showed that within these VBCs many new forms of social interactions are taking place such as interactions between consumers of e-services. This is called as Electronic Consumer to Consumer Interaction.⁸ Because of eCCI, consumers are playing a more dominant role in influencing each other with their consumption decisions.

Georgi and Mink (2012) proposed a new concept of electronic consumer to consumer interaction quality (eCCIq). They said that seven factors contribute to the quality of eCCI. These include quality, content, security, convenience, social, atmosphere and hedonic (meaning the emotional aspects of consumers' interactions with products). An example of eCCI is when a consumer posts a question about the quality or a feature of a product being marketed online and another consumer replies to the question. This eCCI event would be made an eCCIq event if the question is answered by another consumer correctly, quickly and in a friendly approach. This example involves some of the factors associated with

eCCLq such as social and convenience. Thus it can be understood that when the consumers have the option to submit a feedback, they feel more engaged with products and companies.¹⁰ Therefore, it is of great importance for retailers to monitor the quality of their social media presence because it increasingly influences how consumers shop, even when consumers themselves are the creators of their marketing.

The groups on the social networking sites have group norms and social identity. Group norms represent the set of shared goals that group members believe in, whereas Social identity refers to the beliefs and values which influence the group behaviour.¹¹ Some VBC researches were done with focus on the concept that social identity and group norms influence the online buying behaviour of groups very strongly. For e.g., if a Face book group is focused on luxury brands, then advertisements related to high-end products are more relevant to members of that VBC.

VBC members give importance to the advertisements which are relevant to the theme of their community. Many times a VBC can manipulate or change the entire meaning of an ad by the way it is presented on the community forum and by the way it displays or uses an ad for branding. In order to conform to the theme of its community, a VBC can alter an ad and therefore the ads true meaning gets lost. The identity of an individual within social media and the customs of his social community affect the way in which the individual will perceive the ads presented on social media.

Technology Acceptance Model³ (TAM3) was used to assess the impact of culture on social media by Pookulangara and Koesler (2011). TAM3 draws attention to the role and procedures related to perceived usefulness and perceived ease of technology. TAM3 suggests that the factors which establish perceived usefulness will not influence perceived ease of use and the factors that influence perceived ease of use will not control perceived usefulness.¹² TAM3 has been used by various researchers to determine the effect of an individual's cultural background on perceived ease and perceived usefulness of technology and more specifically, to discern, if the cultural background of an individual will influence how a message, event, or idea presented to them through a social networking site is interpreted.

The studies done by research model using TAM3 led to the conclusion that cultural background actually influences how individuals act and perceive an event on technology based application, such as social media.¹² In addition, the traditions of individuals or group and cultural backgrounds and may account for and effect the formulation of opinion and attitude of consumers towards a brand or product. Thus, the retailers when utilizing social media as a marketing tool, should be conscious of the importance of culture of the target market.¹²

Consumer Attitudes/Motives

Being aware of the factors that affect attitudes and motives of consumer is of utmost importance for retailers and marketers because now days, consumers are increasingly making the report and content about brands and there by controlling its image, something which was solely controlled by companies previously.¹³

A study was done by Chu (2011) to find the association between Face book brands related group participation, advertising responses, and the psychological factors of self-disclosure and attitudes among members and non members of Face book groups. Face book groups provide a pathway which the consumers believe to be valuable for sharing viral content about brands to their social contacts and also while seeking self-status in a product category.¹⁴ The study revealed that users of a brand who are members of groups on Face book are more expected to reveal their personal data than non members of group.

Chu (2011) also found that users of a brand, who are members of related Face book group, maintain a more positive attitude toward social media and advertising. The users who have a more favorable attitude towards advertising are more likely to join a Face book group of a brand or a retailer to receive promotional messages. Chu (2011) stated that the users with the most favorable attitudes toward social media advertising are the Face book's college-aged users. This suggests that social media sites are a potentially rich platform for online advertising campaigns, especially for companies with a younger target market.

The correlation between consumer's age and his attitude toward online advertising formats (i.e. blogs, video, and brand channel or page) was investigated by Cox (2010) and she found that users in the age group of 18-28 years had strong positive attitude towards videos, blogs and brand channel ad formats because these ad formats seemed to be more amusing, informative and eye catching by them. On other hand users in age groups of 35-54 preferred ad formats on video and brand channels only as they perceived them to be better placed within the online page layout, other than being eye catching and

informative. However most network users disliked the ads such as pop up, expandable, or floating formatted ads as they interfere with online social networking activities.⁴

Harris and Dennis (2011) used the technology acceptance model (TAM) to analyze the user's combined trust and factors associated with TAM (i.e. perceived enjoyment, ease of use, and usefulness). The study determined that consumers, specially the students, hold a hierarchy of trust when using social media such as Face book. Student's trust 'real' friends, then Face book friends, followed by expert blogs and independent review sites and lastly celebrities and e-retailer sites.¹⁵

Further research using the TAM showed that the major factor which influences consumers to use social networks for assisting them in their buying decisions is enjoyment.¹⁶ The fun achieved by using Face book, as well as the easy and entertaining way of asking users for suggestions motivates individuals to pay more attention to the products promoted on Face book. Thus, by adding contests, games and interactive applications, the Retailers can improve their Face book page appeal, thereby attracting more users.¹⁶

A deeper understanding of how consumers perceive social marketing will help ensure marketing strategies which are successful. When it comes to social media marketing, awareness of consumer's motives is very important as it gives a deeper understanding of factors influencing the users to create content about a brand or store. Thus, the classic notion of individuals as mere consumers is outdated; consumers can now be seen as active producers of business value because user generated content is reducing the influence of traditional marketing tactics.¹³

User Generated Content

User generated content describes the sum of all ways in which people/ end users make use of social media, to describe and create various forms of media content which is available publicly.² Therefore, "While social media provides never ending avenues for communicating, it is the individuals who serve as the influencers not the technology".¹⁷ The user generated content helps to define a brand and thus it produces a social currency for marketers. When individuals share a brand or information about a brand, it is defined as social currency.¹⁸ It affects performance of a brand greatly and it is a concept which can be linked to the idea of social capital given by Bourdieu's (1977) and Coleman's (1988).

Social capital is shaped on a personal level and occurs in the relationships among individuals.¹⁸ Furthermore, the amount of an individual's social capital depends on the size of the network of connections that the user can successfully mobilize.¹⁸ An individual's connections can potentially aid in developing brands into an essential part of customers' social interactions via social networking.

Social currency can also be understood as the sum of actual and potential resources available to a brand due to its presence in social networks and communities".¹⁸ Social currency is generated by interactions between consumers and it is usually beyond the direct control of a company or a brand.

Zinnbauer and Honer 2011, through their empirical study, established that although social currency consists of six different components (affiliation, conversation, utility, advocacy, information, and indemnity), brands do not depend on all of them to create brand loyalty among users. In fact, a brand can become successful only by being an essential part of people's daily lives and by becoming integrated into a consumer's daily life. This enables consumers to connect, interact, and benefit from likeminded brand users, and this creates the possibility for increasing the consumer generated advertising of a brand.¹⁸

Consumer Generated Advertising (CGA) is described by Campbell et al. in 2011 a type of user-generated content referring to instances where brand focused messages are created by the consumers with the specific purpose of informing, persuading, or reminding others about a product or a brand.³

Researchers like Muñiz and Jensen Schau (2007) and Pehlivan, Sarican, and Berthon (2011) had discussed CGA under the term "vigilante marketing", which is an unpaid advertising and marketing efforts undertaken by brand loyalists on behalf of the brand, and it involves one to one, one to many, and many to many commercially oriented communications. Retailers need to be conscious and they should study UGC to completely understand its influence. They should be aware that, because CGA coexists with traditional marketing now days, it can positively support traditional marketing or it can negatively impact and undermine it.

Several studies have been done to compare the CGA with Firm Generated Advertising (FGA) [by Pehlivan, Sarican, and Berthon (2011) and by Taylor, Strutton, and Thompson (2012)] or producer generated content (PGC) [by Cheong and Morrison's 2008]. It was concluded from these studies that the consumers express appreciation for FGA, but they find CGA to be more entertaining making them talk

more about these ad.¹⁹ Also that, in comparison to the product information generated by manufactures, the consumers has more trust in the product information created by other consumers. The consumers read opinions of other consumers to obtain pre-purchase information and decrease their risks. Thus UGC appears to be more important than advertising for making buying decisions.²⁰ Finally, these studies indicated that consumers trust CGA over ads produced by companies and the more entertaining the ad the more it will be passed on.²¹ The consumers are more likely to share an ad with others if it is representative of who they are and what they like. Thus, "advertisers should consider the symbolic and self-expression properties of their online ads and match them to targeted consumers' self-concepts".²¹ The findings from all these studies show the impact and significance of CGA on online marketing.

CGA is relevant to companies because it reveals consumer's feelings and perceptions towards the brand.²² Therefore, now the brand managers have to think how to react when their brand is talked about by consumers.³

Zhang, Jansen, and Chowdhury (2011) specified that businesses should have a brand presence on many different social media sites to increase their consumer audience. This is called as electronic word of mouth (eWOM) and it generates more interest in a product than exposure to product information produced by marketers".²³ Consumers are now considered as co-producers of value because of internet and social media and they can provide companies with large returns on investment because they are increasing brand awareness, which signifies the importance of eWOM in today's marketing world.

Thus, companies are realizing the need to create their own brand presence on social media in order to stay informed and keep track of the consumer-generated content surrounding their brand and also to control some of its brand marketing. As companies cannot directly control consumer to consumer messages, the amount of control companies have over the content and distribution of data around brand is limited but they do have the ability to influence the conversations consumers partake in surrounding their brand.¹⁰ Social currency gained through UGC can and should be managed by companies.

"Social media such as Face book allow target consumers to become message senders by passing on ads to friends, connecting them to the advertisers explicitly, or commenting on the ad and having those comments passed along viral channels".¹⁴ Brands are becoming a vital part of social media by means of Viral advertising. New opportunities to build consumer-brand relationships and viral advertising platforms have arisen on social media as more and more consumers look at Face book groups as trusted sources of information and opinions.¹⁴

Viral Advertising

Viral advertising has become a way in which retailers are marketing and providing more information on their brands or products. A viral approach to online advertising has a major advantage because communication is more targeted to a brand's intended consumer through a message delivery medium that is more intimate and personalized, thereby increasing the likelihood of reaching hard to get audience members".²⁴

It is an unpaid peer to peer communication of provocative content which originates from an identified sponsor using the Internet to influence or persuade an audience to pass along the content to others".¹⁴ The difference between UGC and Viral advertising is that an identified sponsor is associated with the ad. Thus the origin of the ad and who created it is known.

Studies on viral advertising have found that humour, stealth, sexuality and positive experiences are relevant factors which account for the success of viral advertising. Golan and Zaidner (2008) analysed 360 viral ads using Taylor's six-segmented strategy wheel. They found that humour and sexuality are the main factors used to attract consumers to viral ads and the consumers are more likely to share or pass on the ads to their friends and family if they are entertained by the ads. The ads placed in the right location could produce word of mouth that can sometimes last for years.²⁵

However, Ferguson (2008) and Chu (2011) measured the amount of consumer response to return on investment and found that viral marketing campaigns may not be effective or desirable always because many users simply ignore online viral ads while many group members may be hesitant to pass on viral ads to their Face book friends.^{26 14}

Studies show that the trustworthiness of the medium controls how the consumer assesses the credibility of the information offered.²⁷ Kelly et al. (2010) claimed that negative past experiences with internet advertising, interruption of task and perceived clutter on the Internet sites are the three main factors

influencing ad avoidance online. They also concluded that majority of ads featured on social networking sites are not relevant to consumers and the users notice ads only when it annoys or entertains them.

Several studies have confirmed that advertisements that provide entertainment are usually liked and accepted. As social media has provided a new platform for brand marketing where consumers are actively contributing to the marketing of brands by communication, the brands/ businesses have become more creative when trying to influence and gain control of their marketing.¹

“Viral stealth” is the term given to the strategy where a retailer/brand tries to fly below consumer radar by hiring brand pushers who pose as consumers and try to influence buying by users. This has become a new practice by which marketers are trying to gain and control their social currency.²⁵ Viral stealth marketing strategies are planned to encourage consumer-to-consumer communication about a product or a brand or product because consumer to consumer communication is the principal force utilized for distributing messages created by advertisers. Thus retailers are now looking at marketing in a whole new way and they must include social media marketing in their business plan.²⁵

Pavlou and Stewart (2000) developed a new approach to assess the effectiveness of a company's participation in interactive advertising. The retailers can keep track of the type of information that a consumer or users of interactive media seeks. This can help the retailer know which information would be most useful for that consumer while assessing a product. This is a key concept for the retailers to consider while analyzing how responsive will the consumers be to their promotional and marketing strategies placed on social media.²⁸

Ultimately, the role of the consumer has changed and it is important to understand how consumers interact with online ads in order to create successful social media marketing campaigns.

Conclusion

To conclude, extensive research work has established that, as more and more shoppers are use and rely on social media (e.g., Twitter, Face book, MySpace, and LinkedIn) for marketing and making shopping decisions, advertising through these media has become very important and while engaging customers on social media sites, the retailers can increase awareness of their brand by being creative and entertaining.⁶

Social media is an effective platform for retailers to create and to improve users experience with their brand by using information stored on social networking sites. In this regard it seems that social media sites such as Face book are better than other advertising avenues because it stores information on all its users, thus ensuring that marketing reaches a retailer's specific target market.²⁹

Furthermore, research has proven that a firm can benefit from social networks to predict the likelihood of purchase intention. By assessing data on a social network, a company's marketing efforts can be substantially improved because it gives the company vital information on users of the network. This helps to determine the best social media tactics that can be applied for that particular site.³⁰

Sinclair and Vogus (2011) stated that “Consumers are no longer passive receivers of marketing messages; instead, they are using Face book, MySpace, YouTube, and Twitter to voice their opinions- both positive and negative” , Because of this, large number of companies are regard social media sites as strategic tools and some companies are even hiring employees to oversee their social media pages.³¹ In fact, it is very important that a retailer goes beyond the advertising aspect of social networking sites and comes up with ground breaking ways to use these sites to conduct conversations with consumers, instead of a one-way communication network.³²

It has been estimated that 1 in every 13 person in the world is an active Face book user. This points to the potential of finding a ready market on Face book for any product or service.²⁹ Hence, social media must be considered as an essential part of an organization's integrated marketing strategy and should not be taken lightly.¹⁰ As the social media sites can also be exploited for obtaining information about consumer behaviour in respect to their purchasing intentions, retailers must incorporate social networking sites into their business model. Furthermore, the consumer's participation with a brand on social media reinforces the need for retailers to be active participants in social networking sites and the virtual brand communities they create.

Feedback from consumers has always been important when it comes to product, brand, and business model development. Retailers are now paying attention to social media because it provides feedback- a key component which companies have struggled hard to collect for years.¹⁷ A new concept

that incorporates all forms of social media as potential tool for designing and implementing integrated marketing communication strategies must be created to replace the traditional integrated marketing communications.¹⁰ The business and retailers are using social networking sites to boost their brand appeal and to increase their target market because “new technologies allow for more personal, targeted communications, as well as increased consumer participation in the creation of marketing and brand related information”.²²

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