

STRATEGIZING SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING IN INDIA: A REVIEW

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Abstract

Social Media in recent times is gaining grounds to be among the 'best opportunities available' to a firm for connecting with its prospective customers. The number of internet users is increasing with a faster rate especially in India. Most people spend more time with their computers, personal gadgets and mobiles than their family or friends. Social media is the channel to socialize. These new media win the trust of customers by connecting with them at a deeper level. Social media marketing is the new mantra for numerous companies especially since three to four years. Marketers are taking note of several different social media opportunities and are gearing up to implement new social initiatives at a higher rate than ever before. Social media marketing and the businesses that employ it have become more refined. Companies prefer to have presence on the social channels as their competitors are generating effect with its products and services. The explosion of social media is growing at a phenomenal rate. However companies need to strategize their social media marketing efforts before implementing it else lack of clear objectives would result in wastage of efforts. This paper is an attempt to summarize the different forms of social media and the factors to be considered in planning and carving out a social media marketing strategy.

Key Words: Social media forms, social media India, social media marketing, social media strategy.

I. INTRODUCTION

Technological development has been seen as one of the main factors effecting company's processes and profitability in the last century. The birth of the Internet and its success in changing our society has been largely researched in various subjects and defined in various terms. But as year's passes by the Internet evolves and creates new rules for companies interacting and doing business with their customers and partners. The new applications and services are being developed and offered in order to catch up with changing information society define new concepts of doing business. In the last few years the terms of Web 2.0 and Social Media has emerged as the definitions for second generation of web based services and communities that emphasize online collaboration, networking and user created content. (Eikelman, S., Hajj, J., Peterson, M., (2008)). Social Media has changed the way we do business online. In this highly competitive marketplace, businesses are doing everything they can to get in front of their target customer, differentiate themselves from the competition, connect and engage customers and potential customers, get their brand recognized, and sell their products and services. Ostensibly, the entire goal of any marketing program is to move the relationship through awareness to a sale. Social Media, given its conversational nature, lends itself very well to each part of this cycle. It provides some things that traditional Web sites do not: third-party endorsement from existing customers, interaction with internal company representatives, product support post-purchase, and much more. The more the engagement, the stronger the relationship will become—even when the engagement is with other users on your Social Media platform and not your organization directly.

Furthermore, prospects (and customers) who interact within the Social Media presence will broadcast their participation to their circle of friends, spreading your message to an even wider audience. Therefore companies are targeting Social media platforms as a new marketing communication channel to create brand building and awareness, engage customers and improve sales.

II. CHANGING MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS LANDSCAPE

Online Social media has evolved in India at a rapid pace from the starting point of 2005 till date. According to EY report 2014 social media usage in India increased in leaps and bounds, as number of internet users in India reached 302 million users by December 2014. India is a key market for social media giants active social media users in India grew to around 106 million and India is among the top three countries in terms of number of people using Facebook (100m+ users), whereas Twitter is seeing an increased user base of over 33 million. The increased mobile web penetration is also seen as a key contributor to increased growth in active social media usage — 84% Facebook's 100 million users in India access it from their mobile devices.

According to Hermeking (2006) The global spread of modern technology, including information and communication technology (ICT), is commonly regarded both as an indicator of the postmodern era of globalization and as the very precondition for that era of intensive worldwide interactions of people and exchanges of goods, services, information, and capital. Hoffman (Hoffman *et al.*, 1995) argues that the

popularity of the WWW as a commercial medium (in contrast to other networks on the Internet) is due to its ability to facilitate global sharing of information and resources, and its potential to provide an efficient channel for advertising, marketing, and even direct distribution of certain goods and information services.

A. SOCIAL MEDIA AND WEB 2.0

The real power of people can be noticed in the new revolutionized media channel – *social media*. According to Mayfield (2008) social media is best understood as a *group of new kinds of online media*, which share most or all of the following characteristics:

Participation & Engagement: *social media encourages contributions and feedback from everyone who is interested. It blurs the line between media and audience.*

Openness: *most social media services are open to feedback and participation. They encourage voting, comments and the sharing of information. There are rarely any barriers to accessing and making use of content – password-protected content is frowned on.*

Conversation: *whereas traditional media is about „broadcast“ (content transmitted or distributed to an audience) social media is better seen as a two-way conversation.*

Community: *social media allows communities to form quickly and communicate effectively. Communities share common interests, such as a love of photography, a political issue or a favorite TV show.*

Connectedness: *Most kinds of social media thrive on their connectedness, making use of links to other sites, resources and people.*

B. FORMS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media can take many different forms, including Internet forums, weblogs, social blogs, micro blogging, wikis, podcasts, pictures, video, rating and social bookmarking. Technologies include: blogs, picture-sharing, vlogs, wall-postings, email, instant messaging, music-sharing, crowd sourcing, and voice over IP, to name a few. Many of these social media services can be integrated via social network aggregation platforms like Plugged.it, Mybloglog and Plaxo.

Examples of social media software applications include:

Communication

- **Blogs:** Blogger, LiveJournal, Open Diary, TypePad, WordPress, Vox, ExpressionEngine, Xanga

- **Micro-blogging / Presence applications:** FMyLife, Jaiku, Plurk, Twitter, Tumblr, Posterous, Yammer, Qaiku
- **Social networking:** Facebook, Geni.com, Hi5, LinkedIn, MySpace, Ning, Orkut, Skyrock, Ozone, Vkontakte, RenRen, Kaixin, ASmallWorld, studivz, Xing, RunAlong.se, Bebo, BigTent, Elgg, Hyves, Flirtomatic
- **Social network aggregation:** NutshellMail, FriendFeed, dillidost.com
- **Events:** Upcoming, Eventful, Meetup.com

Collaboration

- **Wikis:** Wikimedia, PBworks, Wetpaint
- **Social bookmarking** (or social tagging):^[7] Delicious, StumbleUpon, Google Reader, CiteULike
- **Social news:** Digg, Mixx, Reddit, NowPublic

Multimedia

- **Photography and art sharing:** deviantArt, Flickr, Photobucket, Picasa, SmugMug, Zoomr
- **Video sharing:** YouTube, Viddler, Vimeo, sevenload, Zideo
- **Livecasting:** Ustream.tv, Justin.tv, Stickam, Skype, OpenCU
- **Music and audio sharing:** MySpace Music, The Hype Machine, Last.fm, ccMixter, ShareTheMusic
- **Presentation sharing:** slideshare, scribd

Reviews and opinions

- **Product reviews:** epinions.com, MouthShut.com
- **Business reviews:** Customer Lobby, yelp.com
- **Community Q&A:** Yahoo! Answers, WikiAnswers, Askville, Google Answers

Entertainment

- **Media and entertainment platforms:** Cisco Eos
- **Virtual worlds:** Second Life, The Sims Online, Forterra
- **Game sharing:** Miniclip, Kongregate

Brand monitoring

- **Social media monitoring:** Attensity Voice of the Customer, Attensity360, Sysomos Heartbeat
- **Social media analytics:** Sysomos MAP

(Godes, David, and Dina Mayzlin, 2004) describe Social media, or consumer-generated media or consumer-generated content as a term that's used to describe any kind of text,

image, audio, or video clip that is uploaded to the Internet by ordinary people, and can be easily shared and located by other people. Social media is different from the articles, programs and broadcasts created by professional journalists, photographers, broadcasting networks, or by authority figures and experts that have a special privilege or position that makes it more likely that they will have an automatic audience. Social media is realized on the Internet in a wide range of formats. Written or textual forms of social media are typically found on blogs, web forums, email discussion lists, message boards, and consumer reviews and complaint sites; photographs are displayed as images on Flickr or other image sharing sites; audio broadcasts are created as podcasts; and consumers who create video clips can upload them on YouTube, or other video sharing sites. Social media have been modernized to reach consumers through the internet. Social media have become appealing to big and small businesses. Credible brands are utilizing social media to reach customers and to build or maintain reputation. As social media continue to grow, the ability to reach more consumers globally has also increased

Larry Weber (2011) believes that the social web is a new world of unpaid media created by individuals or enterprises on the Web. It has started playing a major role in brand promotion and influencing customer's thinking about making purchase decision. These new strategies, which have the capacity to change public opinion every hour—if not every minute—include:

- **Reputation aggregators** are search engines such as Google, Yahoo, Ask, and Microsoft's new Live. They aggregate sites with the best product or service to offer and usually put things in order of reputation.
- **Blogs** (a contraction of *web logs*) are online journals where people can post ideas, images, and links to other web pages or sites.
- **E-communities** are generally advertising supported although some are free; they focus on professional media such as trade magazines. Examples include BusinessWeek.com, SmartMoney.com, and FastCompany.com.
- **Social networks** are places where people with a common interest or concern come together to meet people with similar interests, express themselves, and vent.

Drury (2008) suggests that when analyzing social media marketers too often concentrate on the "media" factor, when "social" element is the key, because marketing within social media is about building a relationship and conversation with the audience, where the simple message delivery is changed by ongoing exchange of perceptions and ideas between company and the consumer. ***The interactivity gains a new meaning when it is applied through Web 2.0 platforms and Social media channels*** as dialogue between consumer and company becomes much more active and interactive. As summarized in the media landscape analysis the past decade

was all about two-way communications and interaction's models. Most of the marketing academics (Kotler, 2009) recognized the importance of creating two-way marketing channels between consumer and company for brand building, CRM, sales (and etc). Social media, itself, does not change this idea, but redefines interactivity and takes it to another level. Armano (2008a) argues that social media goes beyond the interactive marketing which is facilitated by computer-human interaction, and introduces human-to-human interaction enabled by technology. The main difference is that the companies instead of pushing the content (i.e. automated e-mail's) through online channels empower people to engage and interact with other people and produce new content about the company (blogging, commenting, social networking and etc.). ***Free production of content and voluntary distribution is the key elements of the social media.*** Social media marketing engagement replaces interruption; diversity and self-expression replace conformism and unity; the media of the masses replace mass media; granular insights and rich data replaces generalization and conversations in marketing replace control. Another major change from the marketing perspective is the ***shift from persuasion to influence.*** Past decades marketing practitioners were using the communication mix in order to "attack" consumers with pervasive messages to make them buy goods and services offered, but in the age where 25 percent of search results on Google for the world's 20 largest brands links to consumer-generated content (Nielsen Social, 2019), to do this is too late, not practical or impossible, as the messages are already floating out there. This process is facilitated by the change of information flows from "top down" (B2C) to "bottom up" (C2B) what redefines marketing environment as ***marketers do not own the message anymore.***

C.SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

Bough, B. Bonin, and Stephanie Agresta.(2011) describe Social media marketing (SMM) as a term that use Blogs, social networks, online communities, wikis, Rss, or any other online collaborative media for marketing, brand awareness & promotion, sales, public relations and customer service. It is a form of online marketing which seeks to achieve marketing communication goals, branding awareness and value through the participation in various social media networks (MySpace, Face book, LinkedIn), social bookmarking (Digg, Stumbleupon), social media sharing (Flickr, YouTube), blogs, forums, news aggregators. Each social media site can be optimized to generate awareness or traffic. SMM is the way of generating and building interest and excitement in a product or service through various online social media tools such as Social Networks, Wikis, Micro blogging, Blogs, RSS feeds The user-generated content of SMM can be an effective channel for creating brand awareness, building product, reputation management of organizations.

1.THE SOCIAL MEDIA AS MARKETING PARAMETER

Some marketers feel that Social Media also known as Web 2.0 is a controversial issue. Keegan (2007)question the ethical foundations of the Social Media stating that the fundamental element of it namely the User Generated Content (UGC), poses a serious threat to well established business. According to critics the social media movement endorses and promotes low quality amateur content, threatens intellectual property rights and confuses people by blurring the boundaries between original content and advertising. Objections about the Social Media movement have also to do with issues of privacy and the lack of editing responsibility for what is published on line.

On the other hand Gillin (2011)and others argue that in fact Social Media is a healthy phenomenon, promoting the ideas of free expression becoming an emerging source of consumer influence and empowerment. The influence of the Web 2.0/ social media phenomenon is affecting the way people communicate, make purchase decisions, socialize, learn, entertain themselves, interact with each other or even do their shopping. Social media has redefined the marketplace dynamics by causing a substantial migration of market power from producers or vendors towards web users / online customers. The customer empowerment is visible in different ways: people have more access to information, unbiased criticism, product reviews and peer recommendations and almost unlimited alternative choices.

D.SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY

Literature on social media advices companies to engage in the social media space as this trend cannot be ignored, and the examples of successful social media campaigns are many and increasing (Li and Bernoff,2008, p. 75)

A lot of companies are entering the social media space in order to utilize the opportunities, albeit there is an issue of how and where to start. Too often companies engage in social media without a plan. The initial costs to take part in social media are practically zero, but establishing and maintaining the presence does require resources.

In the same way the branding strategy needs to be aligned to support the business strategy, the social media strategy needs to be closely aligned to business objectives by focusing on strengthening and reinforcing each other which ultimately increases the competitiveness of the company.

The author Li and Bernoff (2008) in the book “Groundswell” presents a four step planning labeled “The POST method”. This process they consider to be best practice for how companies should build their social media strategy.

1.THE POSTMETHOD: A FOUR STEP PLANNING PROCESS FOR SOCIAL MEDIA.

POST is an acronym for **people, objectives, strategy and technology**, which is the four steps the company have to visit in order to build a viable strategy; there is no correct way of doing it because all companies are unique (Li and Bernoff, 2008, pp. 67- 71).

“Each company must adopt the tactics that are rights for its customers and its way of doing business and adapt as the technologies change. Copying others doesn’t work because your company, your customers, and your goals are not the same as anybody else’s.”

Source: Li and Bernoff (2009, p. 75)

The first step- **people**, is to assess how the companies want to reach the audience who currently are engaging online. If the audience the company is targeting are more likely to comment on blogs than joining social networks, the strategy need to be build on that basis. Companies then need to be clear on their objective to their social media engagement; seeking customer insights, extend marketing initiatives to a more interactive channel, motivate brand ambassadors, decreasing support costs or integrating the customers into the business by e.g. helping them design products. A company should have one primary objective even though they may accomplish more than they sat out to; it is the progress towards this primary objective companies should measure their success (Li and Bernoff, 2008, p. 67).

The people and objectives are the basis for the strategy; how could their relationship with their customers be different and better in three years? The company should also think through the consequences of the strategy and address key issues that may follow from social media engagements and how it will change the company. Only when people, objectives, and strategy are thought through the company should decide on which technologies and platforms to choose, viable to reach the desired objective. Based upon how their target audience uses social media, what the objective of the company’s engagement is and how they would like the relationship to change (Li and Bernoff, 2008, pp. 68, 71-3).

IIICONCLUSION

Firms may risk being left behind its competitors in the coming times if they do not change according to the changes in the environment. Social media is growing world over and India is feeling the heat, therefore there is no doubt about the growth of social media in the area of marketing. However social media does not change the way organizations conduct business but it offers a new important channel and numerous opportunities for the firms to connect and engage with their customers. It is important to employ appropriate social media strategy as not every company is fit to do everything and it does not fit with any business strategy , so rather focus on either of the factors like people, objectives, strategy and

technology, which is the four steps the company have to visit in order to build a viable strategy. Therefore using this model social media provides another layer with new opportunities for the marketer to build the brand.

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