



The Use of Social Media and its impact on shopping Behaviour on Indian Customer during Covid 19 Pandemic.

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of undertaking this study is to assess the degree of influence of social media on buying habits of residents of Mumbai pre and post pandemic and to discover the origination of numerous marketing methods consequently. "We get to live in a time where we get to use social media as a tool." Today, it is safe to say that the former statement is now an evident fact and no longer hearsay. Social Media is changing the way people view each other, connect and communicate. A drastic change in buying practises of Indian consumers has been recognized. Statistics speak as, a significant rise in the number of online user subscriptions and profiles over the years has been observed. The user graph was expected to peak in future years but broke records instantly ever since the onset of the ill-fated covid-19. This research paper also speaks about various online marketing techniques such as affiliate marketing, influencer marketing, content marketing, SEO, Viral Marketing. We have carried out our research with optimism and prior knowledge accumulation and readings on social psychology and internet technology. For this research the researchers have also made use of various research tools like SEM Rush, survey, interview & observation. In this paper there are examples of references & data collected from teachers, industry professionals, peers, colleagues. Microsoft Excel has been used for data segregation & analysis. From digital to phygital, social media has come a long way over a span of just two decades. Initially, from giving users the only so-called dopamine rush and an excuse to kill time to transforming into an everyday must-have and know-how buddy for almost everything is what intrigues us and further gives us a reason to carry out a thorough research on this evermore engrossing topic. Our findings indicate that month long lockdowns, wider audiences and FOMO (FEAR OF MISSING OUT) the gen-Z slang however applicable to all generations, affordable data pack rates and much more were some of the integral key factors at play. Virtual is the new norm and widely accepted among the majority of the consumer base. This is why it is vital for almost every small or big-time business out in the market to take to VR. To conclude we would like to state that many of these factors have played a massive role and resulted in social media growing leaps and bounds.

Keywords: Social media, social media advertising, social media marketing, social media research, affiliate marketing, content marketing, social media in branding, content makers, influence marketing.

1. Title

Introduction

This research paper talks about how buying behaviour of customers via social media has changed pre and post pandemic. Social Media consists of 7 major platforms viz. Facebook, Whatsapp, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, Linked In, YouTube as most visited social media where brands indulge in direct connect with customers. Some main aspects that are common in most platforms are like, share and comment. To understand how well your social media connection is there is an Insights column. Where you can see how many people visit your page/account, the amount of viewers on a story, shares on a particular post, etc. Keywords that are used on social media are in the form of hashtags. Below is the list of most used/trending hashtags in India for 2021. Social Media is a part of Digital Marketing along with Search Engine Optimization also known as SEO. SEO is used to promote your service or product via Search Engines such as Google. To have google show your website on top when you search a particular keyword the need of understanding what kind of keywords or variations of keyword your target customer will use. For Eg: For Apple's Smartphone website to be displayed on top Apple might use the keyword variations of Apple Mobiles, Apple 13 Pro, Apple Smartphones, etc. or they might also use paid search which results in use of Google Ads. Although Apple's website is not the first website to be shown when searching for apple mobiles since amazon and Flipkart have better website traffic and varied keywords such as mobiles, Apple mobiles, Smartphones, etc. From this we can also understand that having the best keywords is not the only way to be on top search you need to have the most website traffic too. There are tools along with whose help we can succeed in doing so. SEM Rush, small seo tools, Moz, Ahrefs, Google Search Console ,etc are some tools used for Search Engine Optimization.

2.Review of Literature

The making of social networking sites like MySpace in 2003 and Facebook in 2004 prompted the popularity of the term 'social media'. The term 'Web 2.0' was likewise first utilised around this time to portray the new utilisation of the internet as a stage where content was not made any more and published by people, yet is consistently changed by numerous users in a participatory and community-oriented way (Kaplan &Haenlein, 2010). Web 2.0 led to the presentation of community-oriented activities, Wikis and intuitive websites; thus, encouraging the formation of client systems, and the progression of thoughts, information and knowledge among users (Constantinides, 2014). User Generated Content (UGC) refers to media content that is freely accessible and made by end-users (Kaplan &Haenlein, 2010) and, as per OECD (2007), it ought to have been created outside expert schedules, without a commercial market context.

1. Brendan James Keegan and Jennifer Rowley (2017) contribute to knowledge regarding social media marketing strategy by developing a stage model of SMM evaluation and uncovering the challenges in this process. The research paper has developed a Social Media Marketing Evaluation framework. This framework has the following six stages: setting evaluation objectives, identifying key performance indicators (KPIs), identifying metrics, data collection and analysis, report generation and management decision making. Moreover, the paper also identifies and discusses challenges associated with each stage of the framework with a view to better understanding decision making associated with social media strategies. Two key challenges depicted by the study are the agency-client relationship and the available social analytics tools.

3.Rationale & GAP Analysis

What is different?

Social media marketing prevailed even before the pandemic and was popular and appreciated even back then but what the pandemic has done is it has not left an option with any brand as each and every brand had to focus on their social media marketing and invest in it heavily hence from an option it suddenly became their

only way to market their product due to the restrictions. Although it has also increased coverage of brands and small businesses.

Where will it be different?

It will be different in areas where the company relied on the offline methods before but now they had to switch on social media marketing. For eg. Before the pandemic we normally went to offline stores to try our glasses or spectacles but during the pandemic lenskart came up with the AR method of trying on glasses right from the comfort of your home on your mobile screens. Hence it has opened more ways of including technology in social media marketing.

When are the differences needed?

The difference in social media marketing is needed in pandemic times or any other time when access to the offline marketing modes isn't available or possible. It is very essential to have a strong social media marketing set up as a brand. When your product can have a universal consumer base and target audience is Millennials or Gen Z social media and Search Engines can prove to be of great use. Search Engine usage and Ecommerce platform usage is growing for FMCG due to less time delivery options.

Who will identify the gap?

The gap in these two methods of marketing (social media marketing and the traditional method of marketing) will be identified by both the customers as well as the companies themselves. The Gap can also be observed by content makers, influencers and affiliate marketers.

How will the gap be improved?

Since modern age marketing has shifted its focus from just providing the consumers with remarkable products to providing them remarkable experience along with products, Social Media can help in elevating customer experience. There is always scope for improvement no matter how much you improve and that's never going to stop the industry.

3. Objectives

- To understand the behaviour of customers pre & post pandemic and learn how E-Commerce platforms have grown during Covid & after Covid.
- To understand how brands/companies perceive social media & types of social media marketing and investigate how social media has tried to reshape the concept of traditional retail.
- To investigate how Search Engines play with keywords & paid advertisements when promoting & how SEO achieves higher rankings on search engines which in turn creates a larger target audience.
- To understand what affiliate marketing is and how it works & the growing nature & importance of influencer marketing.
- To understand the changes brought into content marketing pre & post pandemic how influencers are turning their followers into potential customers.
- To understand how companies convert social media followers into qualified leads and new business development ideas.

4. Hypothesis

1. Does social media help companies and do customers believe in social media?

During the pandemic times when everything was locked down and outdoor media advertising was not possible indoor advertising and social media advertising helped companies gain better customer base and loyalty. Customers tend to believe in products that are advertised based on the comments, shares and real customer testimonials on the page. Some also might believe in recommended posts.

2. Is Influencer & content marketing helpful?

If the influencer is someone who is confident and has a good reputation then the customers might believe in the influencer. How famous the influencer is, what kinds of products the influencer used to promote before, and the loyalty of the followers are also some aspects.

The researchers feel that customers won't find content marketing that useful. It can be used as an engagement strategy but as marketing techniques it won't work unless done by a content creator.

3. Is Affiliate Marketing and Moment marketing the next hit marketing techniques?

Moment marketing is a similar concept to viral marketing and since it generally takes place on social media it might be able to get attention of potential customers. Affiliate Marketing is a trend a lot of young budding marketers are following. Hence it might be a good marketing technique is what the researchers feel.

4. The Pandemic is the sole factor behind the social media boom.

The first social media site was created in the year 1997.

The site was named Six Degrees and provided users with basic features of creating their profile pages and providing a platform for users to interact and make new friends. This medium had been predicted and expected to continually evolve at a steady pace, but after the infamous pandemic hit the world back in 2019, the medium had proved its worth by breaking records instantaneously and has grown by leaps and bounds ever since then. According to a pre pandemic study, the global total number of social media users is estimated to grow to 3.29 billion users in 2022 which will be 42.3% of the world's population (eMarketer 2018). Hence it can be safely assumed that roughly half of the entire world is visibly online. Imposition of intermittent lockdowns and social distancing proved to constitute the perfect environment for social media to thrive. The covid-19 outbreak made the online business deals spike up to 45% in July 2020 alone (C Jamunadevi et al 2020). Therefore the above statistics speak for themselves and further fuel our view that the pandemic has only played the role of a catalyst by taking social media years ahead in a short span of time & this is only the beginning. From starting out as a bare choice for buyers and sellers alike, this medium seems to have transformed into the only feasible option left for conduction of businesses today. Therefore the question arising here is that, can the pandemic be termed as the only reason behind the exclusive development and popularity of social media or is it otherwise.

5. Diverse social media marketing techniques have evolved as a consequence of heavy consumer involvement and dependency on multiple social media platforms

Access to a variety of products and services at a single tap of the customer is what emphasizes the need for awareness about diverse marketing techniques.

From a marketing perspective the Omni-social nature of the present environment suggests that virtually every part of a consumer decision making process is prone to social media influence (Appel et al 2019). Therefore we presume that social media plays an integral role in moulding and setting a specific mentality towards a certain brand/product/service which is a notable point. Increased screen time and interaction among users on social platforms provide e-retailers with a massive opportunity to scrutinize and verify consumer sweet spots by looking at factors like time spent, reviews generated (either positive or negative), etc of preferred target audience of a specific social media website or application. Doing so might help businesses execute the most beneficial marketing techniques under certain circumstances and hence generate qualified leads followed by conversions. According to a study, people would prefer buying online in coming years rather than from shops/offline medium (Aggarwal and Kapoor 2020), thus reinforcing our inference. Identification and creation of echo chambers on social platforms has further helped simplify the process of displaying tailored results to individual users hence indicating an exciting need and future of several social media marketing techniques. The concept of echo chambers will be explained in the sixth hypothesis.

Email marketing, influencer marketing, affiliate marketing are but some examples of marketing techniques we will be exploring about in this research paper.

The question raised here is , do certain marketing methods have a higher lead generation capacity and which age group stands to be most affected by them.

6. Connect to Conversion is the 21st Century Norm

The logic of connect to conversion is observed in the digital world.

This is how it works; in connect to conversion logic the brands make the first move. Through various social platforms, brands try and reach out to a particular subset of a population with a similar set of characteristics, interests or mindset and try to initially form a strong emotional and mental connect with them. The second step is to get them to trust the brand which is followed by a possible conversion. Even though the risk of losing customers to switch is ever-present, ensuring a strong connection and excellent services increases the return rate and generates positive reviews and repurchases from the existing customer base.

Every customer in themselves is unique and so is their persona , likes and dislikes respectively. Customization is a game changer in such scenarios, as it helps brands stay a step ahead in the race. The idea of being provided with a service which is premium or extra tends to entice the customer. Therefore it is not surprising to find that customisation within social media exacerbates this problem by generating news coverage that is unique to specific users, locking them in their purported echo chambers. Echo chambers are nothing but an environment where users only encounter beliefs that coincide with their own opinions and alternate views aren't entertained. An excellent example of an echo chamber is Facebook's own newsfeed wherein users are only displayed advertisements or news specific to their areas of interest. Therefore we would like to probe whether or not the aforementioned logic is followed and if otherwise , which logic is followed and why.

5. Research Design / Methodology

The purpose of our research is to assess the degree of influence of social media on buying habits of residents of Mumbai pre and post pandemic and to discover the origination of numerous marketing methods consequently. Well structured and formatted questionnaire was designed to collect data. The questionnaires were distributed online. Suggestions and opinions given by the respondents were incorporated in the analysis performed. The method used to collect primary data for our research was the survey method. The data was extracted from experienced professors, industry experts in the field of digital marketing, working professionals and certain colleagues. The reliability and the validity of our research will be mentioned at the end of this chapter.

6. Primary Work / Survey

The Primary Survey consisted of 2 Google forms. From which one was circulated among close friends, college peers. While the other circulated among industry specials. For Google Form 1 that was circulated among students & close friends whereas the survey Google form 2 circulated among industry specialists.

7. Expected Outcomes

The research can be applied by companies whose target audience uses social media a lot like Millennials & Gen Z. Even while researching a major stand out point was low attention while interaction. Moment marketing and Content marketing will rule social media for 2022 according to the researchers. small retailers may see up to 30% higher mobile conversion rates compared to larger retailers. In 2023, E-Commerce retail

purchases are expected to rise from 14.1% to 22%. Although the oldest members of Generation Z are just now coming of age, their spending power is nothing to scoff at. Marketers need to understand this generation's unique needs and spending habits to stay relevant. It's predicted that this generation, born after 1998, will have \$44 billion in buying power. As of now, 93% of parents say their Gen Z child influences household spending. And in just a couple of years, this generation will dominate 40% of all consumer shopping. 95% of this generation have their own smartphone, in which they spend nearly 10 hours or more per day on. Because of this, they are 2X more likely to shop on mobile devices than millennials. They spend their most time scrolling through Instagram and watching YouTube videos. Surprisingly, Facebook among teens has taken a plunge, and usage has fallen from 71% in 2014 to 51% in 2018. For following brands, Instagram is the preferred platform. However, using either of these social platforms, 85% of Gen Z go on social media to learn about new products. Keep these online shopping statistics in mind and you'll understand your market. Then, you can start optimising your online store to get maximum sales. Indian millennials might have taken to e-commerce in a big way, with around 35 per cent of all online transactions being driven by this one age group, but it's still their older siblings or parents that are making the large purchases online. According to the latest report from WATConsult, the ride-hailing sector sees the highest number of transactions per month compared to any other e-commerce category, but travel and electronics were by far the two biggest categories with respect to money being spent. The gender gap in online average ticket size between men (Rs 1,865) and women (Rs 1,818) is very similar, but what is striking is that men outnumber women online shoppers by over three to one. Interestingly, while every other category has a smaller share of female spenders, in the range of 20 per cent, the home decor category witnesses over 40 per cent female shoppers. The generation gap of shopping behaviour is decreasing as more and more millennials are hopping on to online shopping. Although Millennials are indulged in Facebook shopping more than Gen Z. Affiliate marketing is a growing method to acquire a living, young generation is going in for affiliate marketing. Affiliate marketing has gotten progressively increasingly significant in the course of recent years. Starting in 2019, over 63.4% of individuals utilise their telephone to get to the web. Right now, 81% of brands take an interest in member promotion somewhat. A Google Analytics report shows that 40% of online exchanges are done on cell phones. Likewise, 70% of affiliate hunts lead to an activity or buy inside 60 minutes. Podcasts are growing with increase in content & influencer marketing. Content marketers have grown more empathy during the pandemic. Due to the pandemic the attention span has dropped as people have more and more options and variety to spend their time on, hence content creators might shorten the lengths of their videos. The research also shows that people are attracted towards confident & honest content creators and might purchase products that they promote. There are 4 billion daily email users. With more than 40% of marketers observing budget cuts due to high use of Email Marketing. 64% of small businesses use Email Marketing.

9. Application of outcomes / Future Scope

The research combines opinions of industry specialists as well as the younger generation (Gen Z). As input of Gen Z is likely to make up to approx 40% of online buyers it is important to understand the media vehicle that is being used to promote your products to them. They have a quality of being influenced and hence influencer and content marketing is in bloom. With pandemic affecting and a lot of things going online it truly is the new norm as website traffic for brands saw a hike. Analysing and selling products via online mode and promoting them on social media with help of moment, affiliate, content and influencer marketing is going on a hike. Email Marketing along with social media marketing is a preferred choice among small business owners. Overall it is safe to assume that increase in social media usage and ways / tools of social media marketing with Search Engines is going to be a boom.

10. Limitations

Time Constraint was one of the biggest limitations for this research. The Sample size was relatively small and tightly constrained to close friends, office colleagues and college peers.

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