A STUDY OF CHALLENGES FACING MARKETERS USING SOCIAL NETWORKING WEBSITES AS AN ADDITIONAL PROMOTIONAL TOOL

Dr. Charu Wadhwa

Associate Professor,
School of Commerce and Management,
ARKA JAIN University,
Jharkhand.

Ms. Sweta Kumari

Research Scholar,
ARKA JAIN University,
Jharkhand.

Abstract:

Every second person using internet is a member of social media these days. The time that people use to spend on TV, newspapers, Cinema halls etc. is gradually shifting to social media channels like YouTube; OTT platforms; Facebook, etc.

The role of marketing has changed and the social media is assisting that change. The traditional tools are getting outdated and have also reached the saturation point. (Daniasa et al., 2010). The new era customers are the same persons whom the firms used to target using traditional media like newspapers, television and billboards (Dan, 2006).

The only difference is that their behaviour as 'individuals' and as 'customers' have changed because of their increasing presence on the new 'virtual market spaces' like social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.

These are the new 'places' where they are present for the purpose of their entertainment and for social connect that drives them to be actively present on these platforms. And therefore, the social media has emerged as a channel for promotion and is offering various opportunities to the marketers. But along with opportunities, there are many challenges also facing the marketers.

This Paper aims at study of challenges facing the marketers while using social networking websites for the purpose of promotion. The study is based upon sample unit of people who are members of one or more social networking websites.

Keywords:

Social media marketing; Online marketing; Social networking websites marketing; Online marketing challenges.

Introduction:

It is no exaggeration to say that that businesses are undergoing a paradigm shift, in large part, to the Internet and social media and social networks. The evidence is everywhere, for example, many consumers no longer look up items in the yellow pages; they search for them on the Internet. We are still in early stages of the transformation social media and social networking is having on marketing.

Traditional marketing is undergoing a transformation due, in large part, to the Internet and social networks and social media. But along with the opportunities, there are certain challenges facing marketers using social media as marketing communication tools. This study is based upon the study of such challenges.

Objective of the Study:

The objective of the study was to analyse the challenges facing marketers using Social media as marketing communication tools.

Analysis and Interpretations:

Table 1: Gadget/machine used for accessing internet

Response	Frequency	Percent
Mobile Phones	244	59.5
Personal computer	64	15.6
Laptop	321	78.2
Tablet	40	9.7
Others	21	5.1

Gadget/Machine Used for Accessing Internet:

The Table 1 depicts various gadgets that the respondents use for accessing the internet. It is clear that the respondents use variety of gadgets for having an access to the internet. 244 respondents (about 60 percent) access the internet with the help of mobile phones, 64 respondents (about 16 percent) use personal computer for internet access. Majority of respondents i.e., 321 (about 78 percent) use laptop for the internet access while 40 respondents (about 10 percent) use tablets for internet usage and 21 respondents (about 5 percent) used other gadgets for accessing internet. This can be interpreted from the table that the respondents prefer those gadgets which are mobile in nature so that they can access internet wherever they are. This can be inferred that customers like to have access to internet and thereby to the social networking sites anywhere, without any limitation of place and time.

Table 2: Ownership of smart-phones with internet accessibility

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	137	33.4
No	273	66.6
Total	410	100.0

Ownership of Smart-Phones with Internet Accessibility:

A smart-phone is a mobile phone with more advanced computing capability and connectivity than the basic feature phones. It typically has the feature of Wi-Fi, web-browsing and third-party applications, etc. (Wikipedia 2014). The table 2 indicates that a sizeable number of respondents (about 33 percent) own smart-phones with internet accessibility and as indicated by the literature, this number is going to be bigger in future. This can be interpreted that with the increased availability of smart-phones, the access to the internet is increasing and thereby enhancing the access to the social networking sites.

Table 3: Reasons for joining social networking sites

Response	Frequency	Percent
Networking	221	53.9
Socializing	330	80.5
Entertainment	278	67.8
Keeping oneself up-to-date	133	32.4
Exchange of Information	190	46.3
Others	183	44.6

Source: Primary data

Reasons for Joining Social Networking Sites:

The table 3 presents the reasons that the respondents have for joining one or more social networking sites. 54 percent of the respondents communicated that networking is one of the significant reasons for joining a social networking site, 80 percent reported that socializing is the most important reason for the same, 46 percent reported that exchange of information with the counter members is their motivation behind joining one or more social networking sites, 68 percent responded that entertainment is the reason behind joining social networking sites. Therefore, it can be interpreted that respondents are joining new media i.e. various social networking sites for variety of reasons like entertainment, socializing.

It is a challenge for the marketers that people look for entertainment, networking etc. and therefore, the content of the marketer has to be interesting and entertaining enough so as to grab the attention of the target customers present on social networking sites.

Table 4: Ban on access to social networking sites in offices

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	46	11.2
No	174	42.4
Not a professional	190	46.3
Total	410	100.0

Source: Primary data

Ban on Access to Social Networking Sites in Offices:

The Table 4 depicts that out of about 54 percent respondents who are professionals, about 43 percent responded that there is no ban on access of social networking sites in their offices. Therefore, it can be safely concluded that it is heartening for the marketers to note that the people can access the social networking sites during their work-hours too.

Table 5: Notice of offers/advertisements/community/pages on social networking sites

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	131	32.0
No	279	68.0
Total	410	100.0

Source: Primary data

Notice of Offers / Advertisements / Community / Pages on Social Networking Sites:

A perusal of the Table 5 shows whether respondents notice any kind of advertisements/brand pages on their respective account on social networking site(s). About 32 percent reported that they notice one or the other kind of advertisements/brand pages/community pages etc on the social networking sites. Therefore, it is an opportunity for the marketers that social networking sites can also serve as a medium to promote the respective brands. However, it is also a challenge for the marketers as to how to make people notice their promotional content.

Table 6: Information received on new product/offers via social networking sites

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	101	24.6
No	309	75.4
Total	410	100.0

Source: Primary data

Information received on new product/offers via social networking sites:

The table 6 makes it obvious that about 25 percent of the respondents like to receive some kind of information on new product or offers etc through advertisements/community pages on social networking sites.

It can be deduced that social networking sites can be used as an additional medium for communicating information about the product-features, sales promotion offers, etc. In days to come, the number of people receiving information on social networking sites is going to be bigger as indicated by the previous studies.

Table 7: Shopping via links on social networking sites

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	13	3.2
No	397	96.8
Total	410	100.0

Source: Primary data

Shopping via links on social networking sites:

The table 7 depicts that about 3 percent of the respondents have purchased a product based on the link provided on social networking sites. It seems that people are either apprehensive or unaware or unwilling to purchase via links provided on social networking sites.

Therefore, the marketers need to address these issues so as to increase their business through social networking sites. It is noteworthy that India has close to 10 million online shoppers and is growing at an estimated rate of 40-45 percent CAGR (The IMAI 2014).

Table 8: Uploading of photographs of products recently purchased

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	61	14.9
No	349	85.1
Total	410	100.0

Source: Primary data

Uploading of photographs of products recently purchased

The table 8 presents that about 15 percent of the respondents have uploaded the photographs of the product(s) of their recent purchase(s). The literature available signifies the fact that what was private earlier is not so private now, which means that people have started talking about their purchases and sharing the same with others. It seems that such conversations and flaunting recent purchases is a new trend, which is likely to gain momentum in the times to come. This uploading straightaway means that the customers have started generating contents related to brands. It can also be interpreted that the customers are able to generate the electronic word of mouth on social networking sites.

Information sought on social networking sites

The table 9 depicts that about 38 percent of the respondents have reported that they sought different types of information on social networking sites before taking a purchase-decision. It may be interpreted that social networking sites can also serve as a platform/source for searching information regarding a product. Therefore, the marketers need to have a strong presence on social networking sites, with the availability of the adequate requisite information.

Table 9: Kind of information-sought on social networking sites

Response	Frequency	Percent*
Price	36	23.0
Reviews	77	49.3
Features	108	69.2
Performance	23	14.7
Competing Brands' information	61	39.1
Others	35	22.4
* N=156		

Source: Primary data

Kind of information-sought on social networking sites

The table 10 depicts the kind of information sought by the respondents on social networking sites related to a product. It is indicated by the table 5.09 that only 156 out of 410 respondents seek one or the other kind of information about a product on social networking sites. This question has been asked to only those respondents who have indicated that they seek information on social networking sites regarding a product.

The respondents have given multiple answers in response to this question. It is evident from this table that as high as about 69 percent look for features of the product, 49 percent look for reviews about the specific products and about 39 percent seek information about the competitive brands information.

It is surprising to see that only 23 percent respondents look for the price of the product. It seems that the Indian respondents who seek information on products on social networking sites are far more quality conscious and quite less price conscious.

Table 10: Customers' engagement through contests/quiz/games/activities/puzzles

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	135	32.9
No	275	67.1
Total	410	100

Source: Primary data

Customers' engagement through contests/quiz/games/activities/puzzles

In order to start the process of customer-engagement, marketers have to take some initiatives which catch the people off-the-cuff. The table 11 informs about customers' engagement through different tools like contests, quizzes, games, activities, puzzles, general knowledge tests, etc. About 33 percent of the respondents communicated that they have participated in such contests/quizzes etc that were promoted by some brand/organization on any social networking sites. It can be interpreted that the customers can be engaged indirectly through the use of elements like contests, games, puzzles, etc.

Table 11: Information-sharing about new product offerings on social networking sites

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	77	18.8
No	333	81.2
Total	410	100.0

Source: Primary data

Information-sharing about new product offerings on social networking sites

The table 12 depicts that 19 percent of the respondents share information about new products offerings with their respective counter-members on the social networking sites. However, a pertinent point here is the 'motive to do so' to which the researcher would like to attribute it to one-up-man-ship i.e. the urge on the part of individuals to show-off their superior knowledge. When this trend picks up momentum, it may be seen that most of the people will start sharing information on new product offerings. It is a significant opportunity for the marketer that the people create the electronic word of mouth on social networking sites. It is the customers who support the promotion of certain information about the product and create viral impact.

Table 13: Liking a page for lucky draw/procurement of free samples

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	54	13.2
No	356	86.8
Total	410	100.0

Source: Primary data

Liking a page for lucky draw/procurement of free samples

The table 13 suggests that 13 percent of the respondents have liked/joined brand pages on one or the other social networking site for the reason of procuring free samples. Free samples always have been many takers and as such it is a surprise that such a small percentage of respondents have liked a page for free samples. It can be explained that either the respondents do not have the information on this aspect or they suspect it as some kind of joke or trap. Considering these possibilities, marketers would have to think outside the box solutions to tempt people towards lucky draws and free samples.

Table 14: Watching videos on YouTube

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	338	82.4
No	72	17.6
Total	410	100.0

Source: Primary data

Watching videos on YouTube

The table 14 indicates the popularity of YouTube as 82 percent respondents have watched one or the other videos on 'YouTube'. This implies that 'YouTube' can be a significant site for the marketers for posting their promotional videos and advertisements on this site.

The researcher would like to underscore the point that the people are watching videos of their own choice, and if marketers want them to watch promotional videos also, some kind of alignment of these two has to be established.

Table 15: Skipping of advertisements on YouTube

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	102	30.2
No	150	44.4
Don't know how to skip	86	25.4
Total	338	100.0

Source: Primary data

Skipping of advertisements on YouTube

This question has been asked from those 338 respondents who watch videos on YouTube. The table 15 informs that about 30 percent respondents skip the advertisements that appear before the primary video on the site 'YouTube'. About 44 percent reported that they do not skip the advertisement and watch the advertisement video. Out of these, 21 percent watch the advertisements because they do not know how to skip the same.

Findings & Conclusion:

The study undertaken broadly revolves around the prime objective, which is also indicated by the title of the study i.e. to find out the opportunities as well as challenges faced by the marketer while using social networking sites.

Social networking sites are not an unmixed blessing for the marketers. On one side, where such sites offer huge opportunities for the marketers, on the other side they also create certain challenges for the marketers. The following points broadly indicate the major challenges facing the marketers in marketing through social networking sites:-

A major challenge for the marketers is the shortage of power supply and low internet accessibility in India, due to which there is relatively low accessibility to the social networking sites. About 74 percent respondents agree that shortage of power supply is a major hurdle to the smooth access to the internet and thereby access to the social networking sites. According to FICCI's report on Lack of affordable and quality power:

Shackling India's growth story (2012), one-third of Indian citizens, especially in the rural parts of the country remains without power, and 6 percent of the urban population feels short of power supply. Also, out of the total population of about 128 billion, only 125 million are the internet-users (Business Today October 2013). About 61 percent respondents disagree that internet connectivity is not a problem to them.

One of the biggest challenges for the marketers is that like any other media, the target customers are present on these sites also for the prime reasons like entertainment and other factors like networking, socializing, etc. (table 5.03). This is a big challenge for the marketers. They have to find innovative, interesting and entertaining ways for customers' engagement through such sites. Rather majority of respondents (about 67 percent) also feel that it is unethical to advertise on social networking sites, as most of them are of the opinion that the objectives of the people behind joining a social networking site are entertainment, social connectivity and not the procurement of any product information and shopping.

As discussed in the previous point and as indicated by table 5.03, table 5.05, the people are present on social networking sites, for the sake of entertainment, socializing, therefore they may tend to ignore certain information posted by the marketers. People may not notice all the information/advertisements about some brands/organizations. Therefore, the marketers have to inculcate innovative ways of customers' engagement like lucky draws/free samples/contests/games/ general knowledge tests, etc, to enhance the customers' engagement.

People are present on social networking sites for networking, socializing, as indicated by table 5.05 and not to discuss about brands. There are many customers who may not like to discuss about any product/brand on social networking sites and would ignore any such communication. This is another challenge for the marketers. (Table 5.09)

One of the most significant opportunities available before the marketers is the electronic word of mouth. But this electronic word of mouth is also the biggest and uncontrollable challenge for the marketers. The customers may not always talk positive about a product/brand/organization. They may not be ready to share true experience about a brand on social networking sites or they may be ready to share the respective experiences only at the time of dissatisfaction from some brand(s). It has been rightly said that 'a dissatisfied customer share about his experience to 7-9 prospective customers'. Social networking sites provide such forum and platform to the customers, where they can share their respective experience, specifically if they are dissatisfied from some brands. People may interact and spread negative word of mouth which is available and visible to a large number of individuals who are not only the known peer members but may also be strangers, which may harm the image of the brand. And the big part is that it is uncontrollable from the part of the marketers. They have no control over such interactions if they take place over such sites. For instance, in case of product/service failure, the customers are readily available with the platform where they can share the dissatisfaction with a large number of known as well as unknown customers. This is one of the biggest challenges for the marketers due to the existence of interaction on social networking sites.

One other implication is that when people interact about a brand, they may tend to believe on others' opinions and recommendations (table 5.09). One big challenge for the marketers is that the purchase decision of the customers may also be affected by number of likes or recommendations of others; or interactions with others. Such interactions or negative word of mouth are beyond the control of the marketers which pose a great challenge for them. Even if a marketer may not be actively present on social networking sites but the brand may be an active part of interaction among the customers, which cannot be stopped or controlled by the marketer.

In social networking sites like YouTube, people may skip the commercial videos that may appear before the beginning of the primary video, which one intends to watch. People are becoming smart enough to skip those advertisements that may appear before the target customers. The customers are available with the option of skipping such advertisements and customers are becoming smart enough to skip those (table 5.15).

Another challenge for the marketer is the expectation of people regarding the availability of facility of placing orders and making payment. About 70 percent of the respondents agree that the facility of placing the orders and making payment should be there on the brand page on the social networking sites also.

A simultaneous challenge is that despite the availability of links to the main website, many respondents (about 60 percent) may not like to buy anything from the social networking sites because they are of the opinion that the online payments are not safe and secure. Therefore, despite the availability of the adequate information and shopping links, people may not be willing to buy the products from social networking sites.

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