Social Media Marketing: Cutting Through The Clutter Through Innovation And Creativity

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Abstract: In this era of Digital Marketing, Social Media has caught the fancy of marketers in a big way, to promote the products, brands, services or even the organisation itself. Also, compared to the other channels available, social media has emerged as a highly cost-effective option. It has also led to a lot of clutter, making it challenging for the marketers to catch the attention of the right customer. The social media space is constantly changing along with the changes in the habits, likes and preferences of the consumers. This requires constant innovation and creativity to stand out of clutter and impact the consumers in a positive way. This paper through secondary research tries to find and list some of the important innovative strategies used by organisations to gain competitive advantage.

Index Terms: Social Media, social media networks, social media marketing, innovative strategies, creative strategies, buzz marketing, electronic word of mouth

1 INTRODUCTION

Social Media
Marketing is a well-defined and developed science, as well as an art, which has been used by marketers to reach their objectives. In the last two decades, Internet has been constantly changing the way marketing is being done. Initially the internet was just a one-way communication tool. Now in the present state known as web 2.0, the communication is taking place in all directions. The devices on which internet was accessed have also undergone a change. Previously only personal computers or laptops were being used to access internet. Now we have many more devices like Tablets and Mobile Phones, making it much easier to access the same. With the technological advances like high speed broad band services and 4G / LTE networks, the internet speed which used to be just 20 to 30 kbps in year 2000, has climbed to 1 Gbps, and even more. The most important phenomenon has been the decrease in the prices of mobile phones with internet access, and the drastic fall in the prices of mobile internet connections. In India particularly, the internet access charges have fallen by more than 90 %, compared to five years back. This has led to a very fast democratisation of internet. Internet, which used to be available to a privileged few, is now available even to a person who is at the bottom of the economic pyramid. The present version of internet Web 2.0 is an interactive system, where information flows not only from the organisation to people, but also from in the reverse direction.

At the same time, a lot of information exchange takes place amongst the people themselves, may or may not be involving the organisation. This phenomenon, referred to as a horizontal revolution, has created the phenomenon of ‘Electronic word of Mouth’ or E-WoM. (Tuten, 2017) Social Media can also be defined as “A group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content”. (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) The phenomenon of social media started initially as weblogs or blogs, and then MySpace and Facebook came into existence in 2003 and 2004 respectively. This was the first time people started referring to it as a social media. Soon, these platforms became quite popular, and people started using them to connect with their friends and relatives, to socialize, communicate, share thoughts, pictures, etc. Soon, advertisers started flocking to this new medium for advertising their products and communicating with the large number of potential buyers. Social media has become an important medium used by marketers to influence the perception held by the people about the organisations (Lipsman, Mudd, Rich, & Bruich, 2012) Prior to the advent of social media, the traditional media like newspaper, radio, television, used to rule. They were generally expensive and offered a limited interactivity. Now with the new technology, it has become quite easy for anyone to create and distribute the content. It could be a blog post, a tweet, or a video, which can be seen by millions, almost free of cost (Zarella, 2009). Social media has been classified in various manners by different authors. Zarella, 2009, classifies in eight popular kinds : blogs, microblogs ( like Twitter), social networks ( like LinkedIn, Facebook), media sharing sites ( like YouTube, Flickr), social bookmarking sites ( like Reddit, Digg), review sites ( like Yelp), forums and virtual worlds ( like Second Life). There are large number of diverse platforms and applications in the field of social media. We can also divide them in four zones: (a) Social Community, (b) Social Publishing, (c) Social Entertainment, (d) Social Commerce.

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Another interesting classification has been done, on the basis of social presence / media richness and self-presentation / self-disclosure. (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010)

The statistic provided by Statista, regarding the most popular social media networks (October 2019), ranked by number of active user accounts, indicates Facebook, is the market leader as well as, it’s the first social network to exceed 1 billion registered accounts. It is currently having about 2.41 billion monthly active users. Instagram had 1 billion monthly active accounts, and is ranked sixth. Apps like Whatsapp, Wechat, etc. are listed over here, but many experts classify them as messaging apps only, rather than a social media platform.

Social Media Marketing
Use of social media by the people for communicating and sharing has been happening for a long time now, but using it for marketing is relatively a newer phenomenon. Social media provides the marketers an opportunity to reach the prospective customers in their day to day lives. As the consumers are increasingly adopting an active role in the use of social media, it provides the opportunity to the marketers to access the customers in their daily lives and make the participate. “Participation” is the key word, along with the 4 Ps (Product, Place, Price and Promotion). Social media is being used by engaging consumers by helping them participate in the marketing communication by the organisations. (Hanna et al, 2011). The social media marketing can be defined as the use of social media technologies, platforms, software or applications to create, communicate, deliver and exchange offerings (goods or services) which are valued by the stakeholders. The consumer decision making passes through the different stages, and social media can be used in each of these stages. It is being use to create awareness, influence desire, encourage trials and facilitate purchase. It is also being used for the post purchase activities, for customer relationship management, which helps in a big way in cementing the brand loyalty. Social media marketing is a term used to describe the use of social networks, blogs, and other online collaborative media for marketing, sales, publicity, PR and customer relations / service. Organisations are using many different social media platforms, but Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and blogs are the most popular. Other platforms like Instagram, Snapchat and LinkedIn have also gained popularity in the last few years. There is a need to understand the role of social media in the marketing context. Social media is one of the most important sources of spreading e-Wom. The marketers need to not only keep a track of the discussions going on about their products, but also initiate and contribute in a positive way towards them (Fong and Burton, 2008). Social media marketing is also an enabler for getting the feedback from the customers. Organisations should have a service recovery system in place, to address the grievances and win back the dissatisfied customer. It has been described as LARA framework : Listening (to customer conversations), Analysing (those conversations), Relating (this information to the existing one) and Acting (on the customer conversations) (Ogneva, 2010).

3 INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES IN SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING
To understand the use of creative and innovative strategies being used in social media marketing, we have to refer to not only the scholarly articles, but also the various articles and blogs written by the practitioners of the trade. Any organisation doing social media marketing must have the following aspects in its strategy:
1. **Building the Fan Page**: Fan pages can be a profile page on Facebook, a handle on Twitter, which has been created by the company on a social media platform. This is the place used for interacting with your customers – present and potential. It should also be used for sending the information, as well as getting the feedback. The content on the web page should be interesting and engaging for the audience (Frasco, 2016).

2. **Customer Engagement**: In a society which has become increasingly networked, the customers can easily interact with the firm and the other customers through the social media. Customer engagement is defined as a Behavioural manifestation of the customer towards the brand or the company (Verhoef, 2010). The objective is to maximise the word of mouth potential of a product, by creating and expanding the conversations among consumer’s friends and family. Marketers want to get the customers talking about the products, leading to greater awareness, more online traffic and higher sales (Rouse, 2016).

3. **Buzz Creation**: The role of word-of-mouth communication is already well known to the marketers for the last many decades. In the last few years buzz marketing has caught the attention of a lot of marketers, where deliberate organisational efforts are made to stimulate buzz. The buzz may be defined as a contagious talk about a brand, product, service or an idea. For buzz marketing, organisations require either volunteers or paid persons, to try their products and then talk about them on their social networks (Carl, 2006).

4. **SEO and Social Media Integration**: The social media marketing starts with search engine optimisation. Until and unless the consumers are able to search and find the page / profile of the firm on the social media platform, its of no use. The content on the social media page such as stories, news, product, service-related information also improves the searchability of the page (Christian, 2012). A lot of people search for information on social media platforms directly, while many use the traditional search engines. Social connections are likely to have a good impact on the relevancy of the search results (Odden, 2012).

Apart from the above mentioned basic strategies, some other innovative strategies are suggested below:

1. **Content Localisation**: Having a global template for the social media page may be good, but adding a local flavour may be advisable. The blogs or microsite may be used for a more focussed approach, and address the local audience. The contact details of the area specific sales / service centres, should be preferred. Using some local words, tags, maps, etc may help in optimisation and improve social media rankings of the page.

2. **Determine Preferred Post Timings**: All the posts on social media do not get the same attention. A good post may remain un noticed if posted at a wrong time, thus wasting all the effort. There is a need to find that time window, which offers the maximum audience exposure. This may vary across the social media platforms. Eg. Facebook may be used during the day time, by its middle age to older subscribers, while Instagram (more popular with the youngsters), may be used more during the late night hours. The frequency of posting may also depend upon the kind of product and the audience. Too frequent postings may irritate the audience, while long gaps between the posts may lead to the audience losing interest.

3. **Interesting Content**: People visit the social media page of an organisation, only if it offers them something of value. It may be information or entertainment, which they may choose to like, comment and share with their friends, relatives and acquaintances. Good content not only improves the brand image of the company, but also keeps the audience interested and engaged. Analytics should be used to understand the psychographic profile of the audience, which helps in understanding about what kind of content appeals to the audience.

4. **Use of Photos and Videos**: Use of photos are a preferred, as it adds the visual appeal to the content. If the colour, image, design, shapes, etc are similar to company’s logo, it is likely to improve the brand recall. Use of videos on the page further improves the visual appeal and adds to the pulling power. They can be easily used to show the use and demo of the product. Live streaming is the newest technique being used by the firms, which makes the audience feel that they are part of the action, not just a watcher. A lot of product launches are being live streamed. Real time commenting makes them more interesting. Research suggests that such streaming, not only engages and motivates the viewer, but also increases the possibility of converting the viewers into actual customers.

5. **Mobile Friendly Content**: a lot of people nowadays use social media apps on their mobile phones, where the screen size is much smaller in comparison to a laptop or a PC. Mobile gives a tremendous advantage in terms of instant connectivity; ad messages can be pushed very easily through it. Mobile users are found to be more receptive to the social media content. The content should be mobile friendly, ie. It should be suitable to be viewed on a smaller mobile screen conveniently.

6. **Promote Flash Sale**: Flash sale are quite common tool used by the e-commerce websites. Firms can launch a flash sale on a e-commerce website, and use the social media page to promote the sale. A reverse counter depicting the time remaining for the sale to start, adds awareness as well as excitement among the audience, and that adds to the buzz.

7. **Use old Content as well**: If the page of the firm is existing for a long time, there is a possibility of digging up the older interesting content and reuse it. It is likely to be like new for the newer audience,
while the older audience may like it for its nostalgic value. There is a concept of evergreen content as well. This is the kind of content, that doesn’t get outdated easily.

8. **Choose the Right Channel:** An social media should not be chosen just on the basis of its popularity. There is a need to evaluate, whether they are the right choice for the product / brand under consideration. We need to find, on which platform, we are most likely to find our target customers. It may not be easy, but checking out the competitors may help.

9. **Provide downloadable content:** Any content available free of cost attracts the customer. A social media page can offer some freely downloadable eBooks, videos, PDFs, etc. This may add value and increase the audience appreciation.

10. **Find the exact Target customer group:** The posts need to be customised, based on the target market. To improve the social media strategies, one needs to be specific in terms of the audience’s gender, age, location, language, etc. Most of the social media platforms allow settings to target a specific audience. The number of audiences may be trimmed down to reach those, who are more likely to benefit from the posted information.

4 CONCLUSION & SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH
Once, only a few organisations used social media, and not every customer had a social media account. Things have changed fast, almost every business has a social media presence. No firm can escape from using social media these days, its no longer a fad. Social media marketing, started almost two decades back, has now started maturing. The strategies used by the organisations, in the beginning, are now losing the sheen. Companies need to commit resources and rethink about their conventional methods to attract and engage customer online and social media. The social media marketing is a very dynamic field and its environment keeps changing at a very fast pace. The organisations need to keep track of all such changes and adopt the strategies to keep pace with the change. They need to develop the human resources, who understand the intricacies of social media. Only those organisations, which are able to innovate and use creative strategies, are likely to outsmart their competitors, and grow at a faster pace. This paper has tried to understand and list some of the innovative and creative strategies in the field of social media marketing, on the basis of prior studies and industry trends. There is a lot of scope for further research on this topic. One aspect could be to find the impact of such strategies on the consumer behaviour, through the use of a structured questionnaire. Also, case studies of individual firms may be studied, to understand the organisational perspective as well.

5 REFERENCES