

Full Length Research Paper

Analysis of social networking sites: A study on effective communication strategy in developing brand communication

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Internet is the emerging information technology with the credibility of immediacy and fastness, thus, it brings globalization in every aspects of communication. Communication through internet is more specified, with effective interactive strategy among its users. In recent days, internet advertising has taken new forms which have more advantages over the traditional mediums like print media, television and radio. Marketing communication is becoming precise, personal, interesting, interactive and social. Different strategies of communication are followed in various social networking sites like Face book, Twitter and Orkut. They not only create impact over the audience but also make them interact with the marketing statistics created. People get attached to brand communication in social networking sites than usual banner and pop up ads. These networking sites bring more interactive communication with advertising. Social networking sites will become the primary arena for highly targeted marketing and advertising. Therefore, it is necessary to study the effectiveness of brand communication strategy followed in social networking sites which are mainly accessed by Indian users. This research attempts to find the effectiveness of brand communication strategy in promoting and advertising their brand in social networking sites. The effectiveness is determined with the help of survey from people who use these sites, and the content of three social networking sites is analyzed.

Key words: Social networking sites, brand, communication, strategy, social media.

INTRODUCTION

In its current form, internet is primarily a source of communication, information and entertainment, but increasingly, it also acts as a vehicle for commercial transactions. Since the explosion of the web as a business medium, one of its primary uses has been for marketing. Soon, the web could become a critical distribution channel for the majority of successful enterprises. One among them is marketing and spreading brand communication through Social networking sites (Thompson, 2002).

Social networking websites are online communities of people who share interests and activities or who are interested in exploring the interests and activities of others. They typically provide a variety of ways for users to interact, through chat, messaging, email, video, voice chat, file-sharing, blogging and discussion groups. As World Wide Web grew in popularity, social networking moved to web-based applications. In 2002, social networking era really started. In 2006, anyone with an email address could sign up in social networking sites (Zarella, 2010).

Now advertisers target more over to these media due to high rush in varsity of audiences. So they hire this as the ideal platform to communicate their brand and create an effective brand identity through highly effective and interactive communication strategy. Most of the

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advertisers present their ads in interactive form so that people tend more to check them and gain a little knowledge about the product. There are various forms of brand communication available in social networking sites. The effective way of brand communication present in these networking sites would be the main aim of the study.

Social media

Social media advertising is a paid form of brand, service or business promotion and requires a proper and planned communicative message and budget. Advertising is customer centric in nature. Customers play an important role in any major or minor communication because they are the one who are going to decide the fate of the advertising communication. Some benefits of social network advertising include:

1. Popularizing your brand, idea or service to the target group.
2. Informing target audience about your brand or service's presence in the market.
3. Encouraging healthy competition in the market.
4. Providing social benefits for the brand.
5. Making the audience to interact and keep them intact with the brand.

Advertising in internet provides a major contribution to brand competition in the market. Advertising here not only provides information about a product or service but also promotes innovation. Besides it also facilitates consumer satisfaction. Big and small companies, individuals of all walks of life, major and minor events, concepts, etc., nowadays lay their base on social network advertising to get recognized in the market (Zarella, 2010).

With over 200 million active users, Face book, Twitter and Orkut have become a personal, product and corporate branding hub in India. Every brand that exists on social networking sites has the same core features and benefits, such as the ability to create a page, share resources, add multimedia and much more (Eric, 2008). The effective brand communication strategies are analyzed to find the impact among the users.

Social networking sites

A social networking site creates network communication among the user community. Though social networking site serves for communication purposes among special interest groups, the marketing strategy has also entered this medium for its reach. People get exposed to various kinds of brand communication through this media. They

tend to interact with the brand and also get awareness about the brand and its service in an interesting way (Nicole, 2007). Hence, there is a need to study the effective way of communication in branding the product in social networking sites and analyze its reach among the people and their perceptions in this research.

In recent trend of marketing in social networking sites, various brand communications are widely used to attract targeted leads. So, this study would help to know the effectiveness of communication and strategy done through social networking sites which make the target audience to participate in this kind of advertising. This is mainly studied on networking sites which are popular among Indian users were Face book, Twitter and Orkut. This study would help the advertisers to understand the effective communication strategy to communicate their brand among the users.

Objectives of the study

1. To analyze the effective communication strategy through social networking sites.
2. To study the effectiveness of brand communication through social networking sites from its users and communicators.
3. To find the impact of interaction through these communication among Indian users (with reference to Face book, Twitter and Orkut).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scott (2009) states the reasons for brand promoters preferring online web for marketing is that the tools, techniques and content are constantly evolving. The buyers reward creativity by responding to the online efforts like:

"If you are open to trying out new things, you can be first in your industry to use something new to communicate to your buyers".

Marketing in some social networking websites are still the most popular in their niche. Shih (2009) says that there are hundreds of millions of active users across sites like Face book, Hi5, Orkut and MySpace. 2.6 billion min are spent on Face book each day. These websites are enabling brands to engage the right people in the right conversation at right time. Marketing the brands through social media is becoming precise, personal, interesting, interactive and social.

Weber (2009) says promoting a community is just like as promoting a new brand product or service to the consumers. Social media is used to communicate people in the promotional aspect and inclined to involve the

people. Traditional advertising and direct marketing in social media is to send people to the digital community to be informed, entertained and heard. Users find appealing, a value high enough to encourage them to participate.

Borges (2009) finds that today's buyers want to be engaged differently than in years past and many traditional marketing tactics simply do not work anymore. Social media marketing is a revolutionary way to build solid relationships with buyers. Low cost, brand building, staffing advantages, loyalty and level playing field are key benefits of social networking sites as a successful marketing media.

Zarella (2010) says the roots of online social networking can be traced to the 1980s bulletin board systems (BBS). These systems allowed the users to create personal profiles, helps to share information by sending private messages, public messages and post events at low speed connectivity. After emanation of social networking technology in the internet world, it grew higher and popular among the internet user.

Lacy and Hernandez (2009) says Twitter gives the ability to share nearly 140- characters thoughts in a split second, where user can easily share links to press releases and stories about their business, service or product. Making tweets interesting and diverse, there is a more possibility of increasing the followers, by consider with news sharing and stories about the industry that they serve.

The rules of marketing had to change and the web has proved a catalyst in bringing the changes forward and amplifying their scale. The sudden emergence of the Web 2.0 marketing techniques demand additional approaches, while most marketers are still wrestling with the first generation, savvy brands are exploring the landscape that social media and social networks create for marketers. These techniques are allowing much deeper drivers in social change to be unleashed, with a profound impact on planning customer connections. The new generation of relationship marketing responds to the additional challenges of digital media literacy and in the right hands can trigger a rebuild of the entire marketing mix through different strategies. Relationship marketing for the Face book generation demands both thinking and acting differently (Chaffey 2003).

Stroud (2007) says that the ability of social networking sites to generate these huge volumes of web traffic is proof of their huge popularity. Google, Yahoo and News International have bought themselves a presence in the social networking arena. The detailed rationale for these acquisitions differs but all have a common theme of wanting access to the enormous audiences.

Ricadela (2007) says, Coca-Cola has been running promotions on MySpace for the past two years for brands including Cherry Coke and Fanta and has promoted Diet Coke and other drinks on Google's YouTube.

Smith (2010) says that Face book is becoming one of the great internet communications of people time now days. Whereas many companies have tried to emulate Face book's success or challenge it in one geography or another, Face book has proven that the core asset on which all of its services are built - the social graph - is much more defensible and powerful than many others once anticipated.

Visitors to social networking sites are significantly more likely than average to visit leisure-oriented retail site categories, such as music, jewelry/luxury goods/accessories, consumer electronics and apparel. Heavy social networking visitors are defined as the top 20% of visitors based on time spent on social networking sites. People typically enjoy sharing their experiences with these products, whether it is to talk about their new iPhone or the pair of designer jeans they just bought. Social networking sites offer the venue for those conversations to occur. Social media advertising is ideal for promoting brand recognition, although click-through rates are not so strong. Still, there is no doubt that advertising via social media sites is an effective way to increase your overall revenue stream (Brinlee, 2007).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To analyze and find the effectiveness of communication strategy in developing brand, communication through social networking sites was done with the survey method and content analysis in the research.

Methods of data collection

The survey method helped to identify the reach of the brand among its target audience, ways of impact, usage of these social networking sites and access to these form of communication. And the content analysis is another method used to analyze the communication strategy of different social networking sites with certain parameters among top three Indian social networking sites which are tabulated with results.

Research design

This research study adopted survey and content analysis in order to find the effectiveness and the impact of communication in branding any product or the service among the target market through social networking sites like Face book, Twitter and Orkut.

Survey

Survey was conducted randomly among Face book, Twitter and Orkut user community, by sending questionnaire through online to collect the individual opinion from the respondents.

Sampling

Non probability sampling technique is used to collect the opinion

Table 1. Usage of internet.

S/N	Once a week(%)	2 to 3 days a week (%)	1 or 2 hours a day (%)	More than 3 hours a day(%)
1	12	19	30	39

Table 2. Awareness of social networking sites.

S/N	Yes (%)	No (%)
1	98	2

from the online respondents. The total population is social networking user community, but to collect the effective data the sampling is constrained to the target population like young adults, graduates within the age of 16 years to 30 years. The sampling size is hundred.

Content analysis

In content analysis, the following three popular social networking sites were selected to find the effective brand communication among its users (Face book, Twitter and Orkut).

Parameters and units of analysis

1. Target group: category of audience visiting these sites.
2. Types of advertisements: what are the types of brand communication followed by them?
3. Ads placement: how do these sites place their ad in their pages?
4. Communication strategy: kinds of brand promotion used by them.
5. Visual appealing factors: regarding the appearance of these sites.
6. User Interaction: kinds of participation with the brand.
7. Accessibility: how legibly they present themselves.
8. User interest: the forms of expectations from users in these sites.
9. Customization: the factors that the users could create by themselves.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Usage of internet by the user

It has been found that 12% of audience use internet once a week, 19% of the respondents use 2 to 3 days a week. 30% of the respondents use 1 or 2 h a day and the remaining 39% of users are accessing internet more than 3 h a day. It is understood that the new media and its technology is an emerging trend in communication which attracts almost all the people, if they have knowledge of computers. So this digital media has more snatchers towards its communication and internet is becoming part of necessary communication among the students and professionals, etc (Table 1).

Awareness of social networking sites

From this result, it is observed that nearly 98% of the internet users are aware of social networking sites and only 2% of them are clueless. Although the concept of computer-based communities dates back to the early days of computer networks, only some years after the advent of the internet online social networks have met public and commercial in a successive manner. At the most basic level, an online social network is an internet community where individuals interact, often through profiles that represent their selves to others (Donath and Boyd, 2004). Social networks have grown rapidly, and some like face book, orkut, have achieved the mass market and penetrated in a few months since their inception, such applications have infringed their users in different strategy to interact with more people (Table 2).

Number of profiles in social networking sites

The study found that all the respondents that is, 100% of respondents have profiles on Face book. And also, 88% respondents of the same group have profiles on Orkut, 62% respondents have connected to twitter and 37% of users have account on other social networking sites. The users can create many accounts in different social networking site. Face book is useful for communication, self-promotion, to know about friends' community and to find the missed out school and college mates. The peers use the Face book, Orkut and Twitter for the same reasons to share the information and communication. Due to this reasons, Face book, Orkut and Twitter were more popular among the internet users of youth population comparatively with other social networking sites (Table 3).

Ads in different social networking sites

From the earlier mentioned, it is found that 45% of the users find Face book as a well communicated social networking sites, which promotes more brands and

Table 3. Number of profiles in social networking sites.

S/N	Facebook	Orkut(%)	Twitter (%)	Others(%)
1	100	88	62	37

Table 4. Ads communicated in these social networking sites.

S/N	Facebook (%)	Orkut (%)	Twitter (%)	Others (%)
1	45	28	12	15

Table 5. Exposure of different kinds of ads.

S/N	Web banners (%)	Pop ups(%)	Flash ads(%)	Video ads(%)	Others(%)
1	32	8	31	22	7

Table 6. Communication creates trust on ads.

S/N	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
1	38	51	11

advertisements, gives information about product and service which is useful for the young user community in an interactive way to learn more about the particular brands, 12% user suggests Twitter, please follow one pattern all here small words has effective communication of advertisements. 28% of users find Orkut as the second option in communicating brand advertisements (Table 4).

Exposure of different kinds of ads

From the data, it is found that 32% of respondents have come across web banner ads in these social networking sites like Face book, Twitter and Orkut; whereas 8% cut across pop up ads and flash ads in various websites and 31% of users found video ads in YouTube and in other sites. Google, Yahoo and News International have bought themselves a presence in the social networking arena with different communication strategy to have innovative appearance in content and display (Stroud, 2007). The detailed rationale for these acquisitions differs, but all have a common theme of essential access to the enormous audiences of these sites (Table 5).

Communication creates trust on ads

From the survey data, it is understood that 38% of user agreed and satisfied with ads appearing in social

networking sites, whereas 11% of the user disagreed and unsatisfied with certain communication of information. Only 51% of the respondents found it neutral. The web has proved a catalyst in bringing the changes forward and amplifying their scale in creating trustworthiness (Table 6).

Accessibility of ads

Only 8% of the total samples say that they have never accessed or shown interest to the ads displayed in social networking sites, while browsing internet for other communication purposes. And 36% of the respondents use to access often and were interested to listen to the advertisements of various brands, 35% user says they listen to the brand communication and also link to the brand sites to gather more information and 21% of the user access according to the way of communication it appears, because sometimes the brand promotion could be in the form of display ads, interactive feedback forms or as interactive games, accessing of advertisements information differs sometimes according to the format of brand communication . Today's customers want to be engaged differently than in years past and many traditional marketing tactics simply do not work anymore. Social media marketing is a revolutionary way to build solid relationships with customers long before first contact with fun, attractive messages and interactions

Table 7. Access of these ads.

S/N	Often (%)	Sometimes (%)	Never (%)	Depends (%)
1	36	35	8	21

Table 8. Brand Communication that attracts the users.

S/N	Interactive fan pages (%)	Flash ads (%)	Banner ads (%)	Games, quiz or updates (%)	Video ads (%)
1	26	20	12	28	14

Table 9. Impact of communication.

S/N	Agree(%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree(%)
1	67	24	9

(Borges, 2009) (Table 7).

Brand communication that attracts the users

Games, quiz and updates of latest information are the kind of interactive communication messages that attracts 28% of users. 26% of users are attracted to fan pages and posts. 20% of users are pulled their interests towards flash ads, 14% of users listened to video ads and remaining 12% of users are interested to traditional banner ads. Most of the social networking websites are enabling brands to engage the right people in the right conversation at right time (Shih, 2009). Nowadays communication on branding in social networking sites is more personal, contentious, fascinating and influencing among the user community (Table 8).

Impact of communication

According to the respondents, 67% of user agreed that the communication strategy used in brand communication creates impact on certain brands effectively and also which could helps them to recall the same often and interactively. 24% of users said that it partially creates impact and traffic of communication, which result to confusion in users mind. The remaining respondents almost 9%, says that it does not create much impact on ads but still effective for other communication purpose like sharing and chatting information (Table 9).

Content analysis

The three social networking sites Face book, Twitter and

Orkut were chosen to analyze the units of parameters and the presentations of data are shown in Table 10.

Results of the analysis

As seen earlier, the various brand communication factors involve in these kinds of social media advertising and day by day competition among the brands increase. So, to survive brands, the communicators come up with more and more innovative, interactive and interesting kinds of brand communication messages which make the users to access them and develop closeness with the different brand communication strategy with attractive name and its service.

1. The finding of the study states that the audiences respond more to interactive marketing than the traditional ads followed in internet advertising.
2. Almost everyone is communicated through social networking sites.
3. Nearly 70% of the audience has impact through ads in social networking sites and half of them access these ads e.g. games, quiz, events, etc.
4. Users remember the brand by the way they advertise. They respond to any new form of advertising which interest them.
5. Social networking sites will become the primary arena for highly targeted marketing and advertising. Social networking sites present an unmatched opportunity to build brand.
6. Users of Face book and Orkut are of same age group and category. In twitter, people do not show much interest because it's just like a micro-blogging site.
7. Interaction is more in the display banners advertisements in Face book and Orkut. All the networking

Table 10. Layout of content analysis with parameters.

S/N	Parameters for content analysis	Facebook	Twitter	Orkut
1.	Target Group	Nearly 54% lie in the age group 16 – 30. Graduates and students of all age	16% stay updated with news, 22% for stay in touch with friends and to update status. Graduates > 16 yrs	53% < 25 years, 32% between 25 - 34 years. Graduates, students of all ages
2.	Types of Advertisements comm.	Poll engagement ads, Video engagement ads, Banded gift engagement ads, Event and hybrid engagement ads, Fan pages	No advertisements but regular brand follow ups and updates.	Banner ads, Ad optimization using ad trackers
3.	Ad placements	Generally placed right hand side corner and in wall posts	NA (Not applicable)	Right hand side top , above the profile page e.g.: Docomo
4.	Communication strategy	Brand promotion, To sell, users to interact, brand identity, sharing, fan and follow ups. Managing online reputation.	Regular feeds from brands and retain the brand identity with users	Using ad tracker, particular groups are selected and ads are hosted, themes and fan pages are one among the form.
5.	User interaction	Through fan pages, posts, events and games	To retweet and reply. Share messages among brand followers	Through fan pages and click ads
6.	Visual appealing factors	No themes, but visually appealing with cool colors like blue and white	Can customize the page and can ad own contents. Usually the designs are standard	Themes available. Usually colorful
7.	Accessibility	Clean and clear. Ads and content gets loaded fast. Friendly user interface	Easy loading and no time out	Same as facebook, but contents get loaded slower than other two.
8.	User interest	Expect brand to be communicated thro games, fan pages and events	Regular updates from following brands	Usually banner ads and optimization ads. So no expectations
9.	Customization	People can create their own ad and upload, sell products thro market place option	NA (Not applicable)	Can create own fan pages and send posts to users and can also create their own ads.

sites have their own space in their web pages for promoting ads.

8. Communication strategy and user interaction are unique among each site. Face book promote and allows user interaction, Twitter regularly feed posts regarding the brand and Orkut promote through click ads and promotional brand pages.

9. Face book follows a default backdrop and text whereas twitter and Orkut can be customized.

10. Accessibility is more in Face book than others. Twitter show importance only for text.

11. Users expect brand communication than brand marketing in these sites.

12. People can create their own ads in Orkut and Face book.

Conclusion

Communication about the product or service provides a major contribution to brand competition in the market. It not only provides information about a product or service but also promotes creative innovation. Besides advertising, it also facilitates consumer satisfaction. The hidden fact is that no brand can progress without effective communication strategy to attract their customers or users. Big and small variety of brands nowadays laid their base on social network communication to get recognized in the target market.

Social networking sites users of Face book, Twitter and Orkut have become a personal, product and corporate branding hub in India nowadays in digital era. Every brand

that exists on social networking sites has the same core features and benefits, such as the ability to create a page, share resources, add multimedia and much more. Social networking sites are filled with potential users who are mainly young adults. They spend more time in these networking sites due to heavy commercial contents, entertainment and social gathering. So, product or service communicators through their ads in these areas with more and more interactive and with fascinating factors so that their brand identity is developed among the right choice of focused audience. Advertisers and brands use social networking sites as the major resource for their promotion and developing brand identity among the focused market.

SUGGESTIONS

Communication should be more preferred than advertising: people do not prefer buying products through social networking sites. So, if the brand is communicated well and remembered by the audience, then it is a greatest success to the company for their promotion through social media.

Promotional way of advertising is best: the usual banner ads and pop-up ads make the users to ignore them. So advertising must be interactive, promotional and in innovative form to hold the audience. It should target the individuals than the mass. If an ad is hosted for a group then that would be no advantage in delivering specified information. Adding more multimedia elements

to have more interactive factors in fan pages and group would benefit the brand user.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1. Survey questionnaire.

A Questionnaire regarding the effectiveness of brand communication through Social Networking Sites

1. Age: _____
2. Educational Qualification: _____
3. How often do you use internet?
--- Once a week --- 2 to 3 days a week --- 1 or 2 hrs a day ---- more than 3 hrs
4. Are you aware of social networking sites?
---Yes --- No
5. How often do you log in those networking site?
--- Daily --- 2 to 3 times a day --- once a week --- more than 3 times a day
6. How many SNS profile do you have?
--- Orkut --- Face book --- Twitter --- Others _____
7. In which SNS do you find ads communicated well?
--- Face book ---Orkut ---Twitter ---Others
8. What kinds of ads have you come across in these sites?
--- Web banner ---Pop up ---Flash ads ---Video ads others _____
9. Do you agree ads appearing in SNS?
--- Agree --- Neutral --- Disagree
10. Have you ever accessed these ads coming on your way?
--- Often --- sometimes --- never --- depending on ads
11. What kinds of brand communication attract you in SNS?
--- Interactive --- Flash ads --- Banner ads --- Games, quiz, updates --- video ads
12. Did these kinds of ads made an impact over you?
--- Agree --- Neutral --- Disagree.