Social Media – the Lifeline of 21st Century!

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Abstract: Various inventions and discoveries since ages have been adding new dimension to the existing human knowledge. Historians believe, invention of wheel revolutionized the human kind, but the last decade bears testimony to the fact that nothing transformed the growth of human development the way internet did. A click and the world is at your service! Apart from official communication internet today is facilitating socialization through social networking sites like Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. Tapping the nerve of population the marketers too have started promoting their products through these sites. Now the question arises why are these sites gaining popularity so fast? Why are the marketers too getting attracted by these? Through this research paper an attempt has been made to answer all these questions. The research is based on primary as well as secondary information. The Primary data was collected from Pune city, Maharashtra (India) through a questionnaire survey conducted over a sample of 150 students belonging to the age group of 16 to 26 years. At the end of the research, the author identified various reasons making social networking a successful platform for sharing of ideas.

Key words: Social networking, Facebook, advertisement, communication, Internet.

I. Introduction

Going to fairs, attending marriages, visiting near and dears including family & friends, spending hours and days together with them are all outdated trends today. With the so called modernization of society & ever advancing technology, the eating, drinking, thinking, walking, talking habits have all undergone a cataclysmic change, revolutionizing the world in a manner never even thought of before. The family bonds are changing; the role of women is changing. Man is no more the only decision maker. The youngest member in the house, a toddler, also understands his tastes & preferences. He knows what does he need and where will he get it? Buyer behavior today is more affected by the convenience than anything else. A very obvious question that arises at this juncture is to know as to why is this happening? What is it that has changed the attitude of people? There could be any number of factors leading to this change but through this paper we would like to see if social networking sites have a role to play in this? If yes, then we would further like to find out the reasons for its increasing popularity. Why do people prefer these? Why are the marketers too getting attracted by these? Now let’s try to find out answers to all these questions.

A. Social Network Sites - Definition

According to Danah M. Boyd, Nicole B. Ellison [2], “Social Network Sites are the Web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.”

Abbreviated as SNS, a Social Networking Site is the phrase used to describe any Web site that enables users to create public profiles within that Web site and form relationships with other users of the same Web site who access their profile. Social networking sites can be used to describe community-based Web sites, online discussion forums, chat rooms and other social spaces online.[8]

II. Review of Literature

Community Web sites are fast replacing the social life. People are spending hours together in this virtual world, chatting, sharing opinions and photographs, making announcements and exploring the whole new world of friends. These online interactions and their impact over the global demography have been observed and reported by many researchers. [1]

Social networking sites today are serving more as the platforms for showcasing ones talent then exploring new friends. Though not the main objective, but it is definitely expanding the social circle of its users. [3]

A point worth mentioning here is the fact that these social networking sites, such as Face Book, MySpace and Yahoo! 360, are all free to use, though registration may be a mandatory requirement in few of them to check malpractices & authenticity of the user. This registration not only creates our own profile or online webpage, but also allows us to reach other members.
Certain social networking sites such as Classmates are not free, but they allow a free trial period or a free membership so as to allow the user to understand the value for money by investing in such sites.

A. Significance of SNS
According to a Survey [7], the internet has converted this world truly to a global village in letter and spirit. A single click takes us to any part of the world. These portals are widely being used as the media for sharing news and opinions. Sharing things on Facebook or to receive breaking news via Twitter on phones are quite common. It offers fabulous opportunity to create new online friendships with people sharing similar mindset and business interests. The survey rated Facebook, Twitter and Google as the best SNS for rendering unique and efficient services in comparison to their competitors.

Irrespective of the age, gender and background, these sites are serving the interest of all, right from sharing of any music playlists, videos to search for other members in a safe, secure and convenient way on the basis of their name, city, school and email address.

Another Survey [8] has ranked Facebook, Twitter & LinkedIn as the top 3 among other 15 social networking sites.

Alessandro Cecconi [6] in his paper stated that these social networking sites are not new to the Web users who had been actively surfing the Web during early 2000s. Classmates.com, primarily a move introduced to stay in touch with the old school friends way back in 1995, probably laid the foundation stone for the present day hot favorites such as Facebook and MySpace, by approximately 2003. He observed that the social networking is no more just a chatting site it’s more a platform for distance education. It gives a clear introduction of the web user through his displayed profile.

The SNS is more than just an informal chatting; the sites such as LinkedIn are mostly oriented towards establishing professional ties between their users and many a time culminates into the business collaborations. Users grow in a symbiotic manner by communicating, creating and sharing the relevant contents. They also give and receive recommendations to the deserving candidates making the job of recruiters simple. [4]

III. Research Methodology

A. Research Objectives
The basic objective of this research paper is:-
- To understand the reasons for the increasing popularity of social networking sites.
- To find out reasons for switching over of marketers towards this arena.

B. Research Methods
The research is based on primary as well as secondary information. The primary data is drawn from Pune city Maharashtra (India) through a questionnaire survey conducted over a sample of 150 students belonging to the age group of 16 to 26 years. The responses of the sample were recorded in a five point scale ranging from 1 to 5 with “5 representing excellent and 1 as very bad”. The pilot survey revealed that people directly associate Social networking sites (SNSs) with Facebook, despite their awareness of other sites such as Twitter, Tumbler, LinkedIn etc., therefore Facebook has been used to represent Social Networking Sites in the study. 

The secondary information was drawn from books, journals, newspapers and different articles published in the different websites.

### IV. Data Analysis & Interpretation

Figure 2 represents different attributes and their impact over the choice of user towards different Print and Electronic Media.

#### A. Reasons behind Face book’s popularity

According to the review of literature, this virtual world is being widely used for reaching out to family and friends through chatting, sharing opinions, photographs, making announcements and exploring the whole new world of friends. It is being used as a free of cost platform for showcasing ones talent, creating new online friendships with people sharing similar mindset and business interests, sharing of any music & video playlists. It is a tool to search friends in a safe, secure and convenient manner on the basis of their name, city, school and email address. It is a unique instrument to stay in touch with the old school friends. Apart from informal usage it is also finding use in establishing professional ties. The crux of secondary observation is that it is primarily being used for exchange of information, knowledge and showcase of talents at a free cost.

#### B. Primary Research Findings

Through primary research now let’s compare Facebook vis-à-vis other print and electronic sources of information including Magazines, Newspapers, Journals & Mobiles that too are serving the same purpose i.e., exchange of information, knowledge and showcase of talents. The study will help us understand the edge that one source has over the other along with the reasons for the same. The sample was asked to give their preferences towards Face Book, Newspaper, Magazine, Journal and Mobile with respect to different attributes of these sources as suggested by the review of literature.

#### B.1 Free of Cost

Of the five options given, 100% population responded by saying that in addition to other features they preferred SNSs for the Free of Cost services rendered by Face Book & Mobile (Whatsapp). The cost of different SNSs
varies from some abysmally low cost to no cost. Newspapers, Journals and Magazines were rated as 3, 2 and 1 in the five point scale. So the results proved beyond doubt that cost is one of the important attributes in the buyer decision making process and is true for user behavior towards Social Networking sites too.

B.2 Convenience & Instant Connectivity

Convenience in use & instant connectivity were voted as the other important factors in support of SNSs. Face Book & Mobile were again the most preferred ones with 100% sample giving it 5 on 5 marks. Others were rated as being comparatively less convenient. For instant connectivity Magazines and Journals were rated the worst with Newspaper finishing 2nd last.

B.3 Advertisement: Positive as well as Negative Publicity

The survey revealed that they do notice the advertisements flashing on the SNSs. The Generation Next, that spends almost 24 hours online and at the same time is low with the reading habit, advertisements on SNSs should come as first preference. The sample rated Facebook as being the best platform for advertisement. Here mobile (Whatsapp) was rated the worst with other sources little better than it. The study of networking sites revealed that looking at the growing membership of these sites; business houses have started promoting their products through them. In fact advertisements on these sites have a major role in making these sites free of cost. So much so the sudden spurt in the online business transaction is also one of the consequences of promotional drives on Facebook.

User groups of different products are another upcoming phenomenon. The product reviews posted in these groups by the users are being looked at as more reliable than the paid endorsements by the celebrities for the product by the manufacturer.

Grievance redressal platform: Gradually people have started using Facebook as the platform for expressing their dissatisfaction with respect to poor product quality and services. Despite series of request when the consumers are not getting relief, they are posting their bitter experiences on the Facebook and thus making people aware and marketer alert. It is the best weapon of democracy through which the common man can ensure that justice is done to him.

B.4 Visibility or display of personal talent

Here again Facebook won all applauds with not even Whatsapp sharing the dais with it. The sample rated Whatsapp number two with others nowhere in the scene at all. Author’s observation & responses of sample proved beyond doubt that Facebook and likes are being frequently used as the medium for display of personal talents and that too without paying a penny. The growing membership & popularity of these sites has rendered it possible. People, upload their videos and share it in the Facebook. This is now coming as an easiest and cheapest mode of reaching the masses. Number of likes received not only gives recognition to the individual but also serves as morale booster. In this process at times they may even get the best break of their life. Overnight turning of Dhanush, a super star due to his song, ”Why this Kolaberry di………” and reaching out of, “PSY’s Watch its Ganganam Style…………..to every household over the globe was made possible through U-tube & Facebook.

B.5 Spread of awareness of issues

Face book again won the votes for this objective too. But in this category Newspaper & Mobile appeared as the close competitors scoring 4 on 5 marks, signifying that these modes are also important but are suffering from certain deficiencies like slow pace & less cover space respectively. Magazine & Journal were rated worst again. In India, Facebook is rightly being used as the tool to spread awareness of social issues such as, ”Swachh Bharat Abhiyan” (Clean India drive), “Shikshit Bharat, Saksham Bharat” (Quality Education for All), Justice to Nirbhaya Delhi gang rape case, Anna Hazare’s demand for Lokpal Bill (ombudsman bill) , Anti-Corruption drive and promotion of ones achievements. The present Indian government is using it an instrument to reach out to the public and share with them the daily diary of the progress in a more transparent manner. Facebook is serving as the best instrument for making people aware of their rights and duties towards self, society, nation & the globe.

In addition to spreading awareness it is also offering as an excellent platform for the people of India and the world across to communicate with the key persons and celebrities of their country. [5]

B.6 Survey tool

When asked about the public perception of Facebook with respect to its use as a Survey tool, except for journals all others went neck to neck, with Facebook again winning the show with whatsapp coming 2nd. Facebook is a more authentic platform to conduct a survey poll regarding any local, national or global issue. Some of the important issues surveyed in the last one year were, “Is the criminal amendment bill 2013 strong enough to deal with criminals today?” Who should be the next Prime Minister of India? What kind of punishment should be given to the hard core criminals like Delhi gang rapist? How has corruption today become the root cause of every rot in the society?

B.7 Faster dissemination of news

Sample ranked Facebook, Whatsapp and newspaper as first, second and third respectively with Magazine & Journal struggling for last position again.
The way people used Facebook for disseminating the news on Himalayan tsunami proved beyond doubts that as of now, there cannot be any other instrument offering such a picturesque coverage with unbeatable pace, authenticity and clarity. Other sources too did the job well but not at the pace with Facebook. TV news channels are too doing a great job, but they generally cover the major national and international events. As far as Facebook is concerned it covers even the smallest & the slightest of the events.

V. the upcoming threat for Facebook

The responses of survey clearly reveal that where on one side it appears that there is no one to match Facebook’s pace, quality, cost convenience and clarity but the day is not far when it’s another close associate “Whatsapp” might pose it a tough competition. Like Facebook, as of now whatsapp is also rendering free of cost service with the great speed, quality and convenience. The survey revealed that Facebook has some unique features giving it an edge over other like platforms.

VI. Conclusion

After having a detailed analysis and discussion over the topic we conclude that the features like free of Cost service, Convenience in use, role in offering Visibility or display of personal talent, Spreading of awareness of issues, conducting Survey and potential for faster dissemination of news, are some of the unique features of Facebook behind its taking faster leap towards success and gaining wider membership.

This popularity of SNSs is being gradually used by the business houses to introduce their products, specifically catering to the user age group so as to reach out to the customers in the way, mode and manner as warranted by them.

VII. Recommendations

a) An Analysis of the strength & weakness and the proportionate threats and opportunities, reveal that Social Network Sites have a long way to go as they are fully fitting in the cost, convenience & quality criteria of buyer behavior.

b) The threat from “Whatsapp” should be taken seriously as even “Whatsapp” is getting wider attention from the population belonging to the same age group of people i.e., 16 to 26 years who are greatly enamored by the services of Facebook today. Like Facebook, as of now Whatsapp is also rendering free of cost service with the great speed, quality and convenience.

c) The social media because of its reach and efficiency will soon make the ethical marketing a possibility, provided the consumers play an active role in highlighting the unethical practices of corrupt marketers through posting, sharing, liking and permanently sealing the fate of such practitioners.

VIII. Research Limitations & Future Scope

Major bottleneck in writing this paper came from the fact that nothing much and concrete has been done with respect to Indian market in this area. The research in hand was conducted in the city of Pune, Maharashtra (India) amidst the population belonging to the age of 16 years to 26 years. The results of the research may further be verified in the other age groups and other parts of country specially the rural India.

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