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# Handbook of Research on Integrating Social Media into Strategic Marketing

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# Chapter 21

## Social Media Marketing

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter provides an insight of contemporary developments in social media marketing with special reference to the emergence of online technology and its influence upon various marketing operations. The information flow through the introduction of the concept of social Media involving the synthesis of sociology and technology and creating an environment on the internet where people share experiences with each other and develop networks followed by analysis of its three main components (Publishing Technology for Everyone, Information Diffusion, and Relationship Building) highlighting its various dimensions. Further, it leads to discussion about Social Media Marketing becoming a latest and popular trend as a digital platform for social interaction between virtual communities. Next section details main social media platforms, their rankings, features, corresponding strategic actions followed by advantages and challenges for organisations using Social Media for Marketing.*

### INTRODUCTION

The technological developments are having considerable impact upon any organisation in variety of ways. The emergence of online technology has revolutionised the marketing operations all over the world (Baird & Parasnis, 2011).

Now-a-days there is a high competition in the market and the customers have opportunities to take better decision for the available range of

goods and services. In this competitive situation, the organizations need to be vigilant to retain customer's loyalty. Reducing the communication gap between the company and the consumer could be a good way to create a better relationship which can further be helpful to develop a better understanding of consumer's needs and wants. Social media is playing crucial role in this regard and the enterprises are taking the benefit from social media's friendly approach to build brand relation-

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ship (Hachinski et al., 2010). Social media sites are the communication ties being used to bind people together. Research have proven that the people are moving towards utilizing the social media for getting access to information, ideas and opportunities (Donath, 2004).

Social media technology has modified the ways for managing the relationship between the brands and the customers. Success of the social media lies in a fact that it has provided the medium through which people interact with each other. They have been able to maintain connections with one another (Pauwels, 2004). The marketers are using the social media sites for fostering the brands. They employ social media to understand customer expectations and then develop appropriate strategies to promote their offerings for achieving the marketing goal (Donath, 2004).

Communication is very crucial and valuable for commencing the dialogues. Additionally, communication is the only tool that is used to initiate, develop and maintain the relationship between two persons. Communication opens doors for understanding and eradicating confusion (McEwen, 2005). Social media serves as a podium for communication and engagement of the large variety of customers. Through this medium, companies can raise awareness about their brands. They can also promote their brands by disseminating their specialty and point of parity (Breivik & Thorbjørnsen, 2008).

Social media sites made interaction and communication so much easy those different companies can interact with their customers and know about their preferences which is then used offline for developing appropriate strategy for promoting brands.

Social media provide flexibility to approach huge traffic of target audience due to variety of features (Brakus et al., 2009). Though face to face interaction and communication is much powerful, yet social media tends to provide an efficient alternative for communication. It helps to manage the instant message communication and dialogues

between the brands and customers. The conversation between the brands and the customers can be stored over these sites and can be used for further improvement.

Brands can also flash their advertisements on the social networking sites. Flashing the ads on the pages of the target audience is like winning a tender. Brands have to understand that they have to win the bid in displaying their ads. They have to clearly mention their target audience and place the highest bids. This ends in generating the exposure amongst many customers which may indirectly results in significant amount of sales and huge fan following for a brand.

Social media platforms are not just a trend that has to be followed. Rather they have proofed their importance in building relationship of a brand with the customer, grabbing potential customers, customer retention, high end promoting system, and brand's potential growth. Companies cannot afford to tend to ignore such a vital platform for the development of their brand.

Conrad et al., (2010) said that the social media and social networking websites are most modern basis of marketing communication. The platform is providing the marketers more open and free way of communication. The new generation of websites provide the customers more integrative facilities and marketers are using these facilities. The security of modern websites is increasing and this is also enhancing the trust of customers on online buying the product from the organisation. The social networking website likes Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn and similar others are attracting million of users. The marketers are looking for their customers on these social networking platforms and using these as sources of marketing and communication with the customers. Here customers are getting information from social networking websites at the same time they are testing and exchanging the information with each other. The reliability and validity of such information is more as customers trust each other more than the traditional ways of marketing.

## WHAT IS SOCIAL MEDIA?

Social media is basically the online content developed by a variety of people who are open for access over the internet. In other words, social media is the shift of people's attention on the online platforms where people share, discover and read information and gain knowledge (Borgan, 2010).

Conrad et al., (2010) believes that social media is a sort of synthesis of sociology and technology and creating an environment or platform on the internet where people share experiences with each other and develop networks for a variety of different official and unofficial reasons.

Social media has become an important platform and has gone so important that nearly every business uses social media for the marketing and promotion of their business, products and services. Social media is also used for sharing information and getting in touch with their customers and society at large.

Ahmad (2011) suggests that social media can be divided into 3 main components:

- **Publishing Technology for everyone:** Social media is free and open for publishing for everyone and the technological advancement has made it even more convenient. Social media is online therefore they are not restricted to any physical set up. Previously social places used to be like pubs, clubs, gardens where people used to interact with one another and share information. Advancement in the technology and the development of virtual social platforms enable people to interact and develop network with one another, online social media has become the new talk of the town. On online social media everyone can be the publishers and generator of the content for which the information is shared (Ahmad, 2011);

- **Information Diffusion:** The rate at which social media diffuses information, no other medium is capable of doing so because other media like TV, newspapers and magazines are not that faster in filtering and spreading information. Online social media like Facebook, Twitter are faster in the transmission of information and relatively far less expensive than the rest. Barefoot and Szabo (2010) suggest that previously companies used to market their products or services through advertising on TV and newspapers; making it a one way communication. Through the development of online social media, companies interact with their customers and take feedback and suggestions from them for further developments. Social media has made the information open and equally accessible for all. Online social media has brought democracy in the sharing of information (Ahmad, 2011);
- **Relationship Building:** Social media has become a powerful medium for the development of relationships through sharing valuable information and creating wonderful ideas. Social media helps people in connecting with one another. A person is connected and shares information from UK with a man in New Zealand; all because of online social media.

Gunelius (2011) states that social media has gone so powerful that it is now used for not only business and personal relationships but also for political developments.

All this clearly highlights the various dimensions and importance of social media. The rise and advancement of technology and the shift from traditional media to online social media has made it more significant. There are many other reasons due to which people, businesses and even the political parties are shifting and using social

media for the development of the achievement of their objectives.

## **Social Media Marketing**

Marketing through social media is the latest and popular trend in the market. Traditional marketing tools such as TV, newspapers, magazines have been very expensive and cover a limited targeted market. The traditional marketing strategies were based on focusing on specific markets individually. Even now it is difficult for businesses to target and market their products and services to the big geographical position through one single campaign such as covering the entire Asia through one newspaper advertisement; because not every country in Asia watches the same TV channels (Evans, 2012).

The social media has entirely changed that approach towards marketing. When we see the basic definition of marketing it says to maximize the usage of resources of the business and develop products and services to satisfy customer needs. (Hajir, 2012) The social media marketing has in reality enabled the businesses to take the feedback, comments, and suggestions from their customers through blogs, pictures and ratings and improve their products and services so that customer needs could be addressed in a more proactive manner. So the advertising and marketing has entirely changed due to social media.

Jaoker, Jacobs and Moore (2009) state that through social media, customers are building information about everything from insurance to career; from pet food to electronic appliances and through this customers are beating out marketers in their game. They are sharing their experiences with one another which now a days is directly making an impact on the business. This is the era of information; therefore it has become necessary that there is a spread of positive information about the company offerings out in the social platforms.

This positive word of mouth at the social platforms will help them to retain customers and generate more sales.

Kabani and Brogan (2010) say that the biggest comfort with the social media is that it helps the businesses in marketing their brand to the wider 'global' community. The social media platforms are open and accessible for everyone from every country and therefore they provide companies with tremendous opportunities to communicate with communities and build relationships with their target audience. The social media marketing is different all together than the traditional marketing.

Social media in marketing is all about using the natural conversational platforms of people for building relationships with them in order to satisfy their needs. Social media platform are helping businesses to spread a positive word of mouth for themselves and their goods so that customers' needs could be addressed effectively. Social media involves a number of different social channels as traditional media has offline channels. Social media keeps changing over time and therefore it gets better and better. Social media is highly participative and the participants of the conversation are the key people that generate the content. In traditional marketing on TV and newspapers the marketing and communication is one sided whereas social media is a collective approach that enables the collection and sharing of information. This information becomes very essential for businesses to actually revise their business and marketing plans in order to maximize customer attraction and retention (Evans and McKee, 2010).

## **Social Media Platforms**

A social media operate as a digital platform upon which social interaction occurs. Social networking platforms help in building virtual communities, or social networks, for individuals with similar attitude, interests, education, opinion and lifestyles.

Burke (2006 in Bolotaeva, 2011) defines social networking platform as: "... a loose affiliation of people who interact, communicate and share contents through platforms building relationships among communities of practices. A social platform management is a social and technological process that enables the development, deployment, use and management of social media solutions and services. In social aspects a 'social platform' enables communities of users in, posting, editing, and sorting, co-creating and sharing a variety of contents. Thus it enables to communicate implicitly or explicitly with specific person or broadcast to all. Its other features aid in adding friends into the network, setting privacy controls and other native social media network features (Leonardi, 2013). In its technological aspects, a social platform consists of dimensions of social mark-up language for creating native applications, an application programming interface (API) for third party application integration and a back-end admin console for managing the entire user base and preferences, etc. It provides continuous visibility and persistence to people and content.

### **SOCIAL PLATFORMS AND USER BEHAVIOURS**

Thus a social platform enables creating social media websites and services with complete social media network technical, user specific and social functionality. These are second generation (Web 2.) websites / platforms that provide users the ability and tools to create and publish their own mini web sites or web pages using the "bottom up approach" — using a many-to-many model. Such platforms provide features such as; user created contents, high degree of user participation in communities of practice and ability to integrate with multiple sites or networks (Campbell, 2010). Thus a social platform include things like social networking (Facebook, Google+ MySpace, twitter, LinkedIn); photo and video sharing sites (Flickr,

Vimeo and YouTube); blogs (such as Blogger, WordPress, Typepad), social bookmarking (Delicious, Stumble Upon) news sharing (Digg, Yahoo! Buzz) (Campbell, 2010). The social networked platforms can attract traffic by managing touches of 4Ps; Personal, Participatory, Physical, Plausible (Clemons, 2009. cited in Bolotaeva, 2011).

The companies have used social platforms for internal and external communication and branding. Its use can be attributed to demand side factors (the fact that social media give us that we can't get offline and let us meet our social needs) and supply side factors (websites such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn have more than 1.2 billion users and account for almost 25 per cent of Internet use). To get full advantaged of social media, companies need to develop and harness their social strategy (Piskorski, 2014).

Over 1.7 billion people use social platforms on the Internet. Some social platforms, such as Twitter, MeetUp and eHarmony, enable strangers to connect. eHarmony alone is estimated to account for one in six new marriages in the U.S. LinkedIn helps one expand business relationships. Other social platforms, like Facebook or Renren in China, creates more relationships with other known peoples. In fact, Facebook boasts staggering 750 million users, and valuation in excess of \$100 billion (Piskorski, 2014). Different platforms have different levels of restrictions to users' choices. This is puzzling that, some platforms like e-Harmony(dating site), WhatsApp (social one to one texting on phone), headhunting (recruitment) etc., are successful even with restrictive access and a user fee. On the other hand platforms like Facebook (social networking), Monster (job hunting), Lastminute.com (travel and tourism), YouTube etc. that offers unlimited free access are also successful. The understanding becomes more complex when even platforms with middle grounds on access like twitter (limited in words with unlimited in access to network) and LinkedIn etc. are also growing. Thus, It can be argued that the value of participation in a social platform



often depends on the number of choices offered, and a platform offering unrestricted access (yet in user's control) could quickly displace a platform that restricts choice or provides restricted access.

## **SOCIAL PLATFORMS AND KIND OF USERS**

In June 2014, Ebiz/MBA has ranked top 15 platforms by comprehensive average of integrating rankings from others ranking evaluators (Alexa Global Traffic, compete and Quantcast) (EbizMBA, 2014). In 2013, a study by Pew Research found that in the US around 73% of online adults use a social networking site of some kind, 42% of 2% of online adults now use multiple social networking sites but Facebook at 71% remains as top platform of the choice. The study by Pew research also found that users segments of different platforms are not same. Facebook is preferred by diverse mix of demographic segments and who also visit site daily many times. Pinterest has four times high appeal to female users, LinkedIn has more college graduates with higher income households. On the other hands the segments of Twitter and Instagram are overlapping with younger adults, urban dwellers, and non-whites (Duggan, 2013). Further 90% of Twitter users, 93% of Instagram and 83% of LinkedIn users also use Facebook. A small number of users use only one type of platform; 8% LinkedIn, 4% Pinterest, and 2% Instagram or Twitter only (Duggan, 2013). This pattern shows high level of similarities between user needs to visit social platforms on one hand and also put forward a question that why people visit many platform if one platform can meet their social needs! Do people have different motives at each platform or do they have different network of connections at each of the platform or they want to exhibit different personalities and roles at different platforms? The features of different

platforms are used to segment platforms. There are a variety of Social Media platforms that are in use with their corresponding features (Table 1).

Nearly one in four people worldwide (1.7 billion people) use social network sites (SEOPressor, 2012). There can be seven kinds of social media users. The Deal Seeker follow a company for bargain or value deals, so companies should always offer them deals along with a request to refer more friends to the brand; the Unhappy Customer has potential to do harm to a company by creating stream of negative words of mouths, so company should solve their problems immediately; The Loyal Fans spreads positive word of mouth and recommend the brand to their network and even defends their brand, so the company should reward their behaviour; a Quiet Follower neutral and is just there because his friends are there, so the company should call them to engage in actions; The Cheerleader is top fan of the brand and likes everything a company does, hence the company should keep him fresh and inspiring with updated information; and lastly the Ranter goes for virtual fights with strong opinions about everything, so the company should react cautiously and very selectively (SEOPressor, 2012). Hence in overall the company should have a customised social platform strategy and the contents of the messages should be engaging with a sense of community, inclusive in action, newsworthy, and contents from all followers be allowed and recognised.

## **DETAILED SOCIAL STRATEGIES FOR SOCIAL NETWORK PLATFORMS**

In his study of 60 companies, Piskorski, (2012) found that companies that simply posted their digital strategies onto the social environments, failed to succeed on social platforms. These companies were merely trying to broadcast their

## Social Media Marketing

Table 1. Variety of social media platforms

Social Media Platforms	Main Features
Social networking sites- Facebook, Google Plus, CafeMom, Gather, Fitsugar	Allows users to connect and share with people who have similar interests and backgrounds
Micro-blogging sites- Twitter, Tumblr, Posterous	Allow the users to submit short written entries, which can include links to product and service sites, as well as links to other social media sites
Publishing tools- WordPress, Blogger, Squarespace	Allows users engage in conversations by posting and responding to community message
Collaboration tools- Wikipedia, WikiTravel, WikiBooks	Apps or software based social platforms where users can work together (synchronously or asynchronously) to create, modify and manage content.
Rating/Review sites- Amazon ratings, Angie's List	Using web2. The platforms allow reviews to be posted about people, businesses, products, or services. It is a social strategy tool professionally designed and written to maximize conversions sales.
Photo sharing sites- Flickr, Instagram, Pinterest	Enable users to upload, transform edit, publish and share pictures and videos etc.
Video sharing sites- YouTube, Vimeo, Viddler	allow users to share different types of media, such as pictures and video
Personal broadcasting tools- Blog Talk radio, Ustream, Livestream, tumbler	Is a way of participatory journalism and synonyms to personal publishing?
Virtual worlds- Second Life, World of Warcraft, Farmville	Is a 3D computer based online community environment in which users are represented on screen as themselves or as made-up characters and interact in real time with other users using texts, or 2D or 3D models, knows as Avatars.
Location based services- Check-ins, Facebook Places, Foursquare, Yelp	Apps on gadgets and mobiles that uses geographical position (GPS) and link it with information, entertainment, or social media service that is available nearby location. E.g. gas prices and services or restaurants near your location.
Widgets- Profile badges, Like buttons	A small helpful software program or Apps, which gives extra power and control to the user when embedded directly into a web page. These can be used to add features like, weather, clock, local news, Twitter widget, Mailing list, gossips and joke of the day etc.
Social bookmarking and news aggregation- Digg, Delicious, StumbleUpon	Allow users to save and organize links to any number of online resources and websites
Group buying- Groupon, Living Social, Wowcer, Crowdsavings	Latest trend in money saving, with the power to pull in big discounts.

Source: Decidedlysocial, (2012); SEOPressor, (2012); About.com, (2014)

commercial information to customers, intruding with unwanted advances and yet expecting customers to give feedback. In contrast, successful companies were able to go beyond the trap of 'maximising number of followers' and implement their social strategies. Social strategies at stage one, advises business to build better relationships between people and provide incentives if people undertake corporate tasks for free. Only at second stage, consistent with user behaviour, the company should make non-intrusive attempt to build relationship between companies and consumers. A social strategist will call this social

network of 'many to many interaction' as social platforms (all equal to co-create and share freely) and should never limit ones thought by calling this social network as social media (medium to broadcast or dump contents with commercial messages). For instant, it has been found that the cardholders who used open Forum functionalities are more likely to recommend Amex credit card to others. The Nike Plus platform, that allows its 5 million customers of Nike's digital products to interact with their friends; has contributed up to 30% increase in sales. Cisco's social platform is not only protecting the company from aggressive

moves of Chinese giant Huawei but also it has enabled engineers to interact with each other, achieve a number of certifications and become more effective on their jobs (Olensky, 2014).

The effective companies needs to ask themselves, what is their core capability and how they can use customer profiles and social platforms to let the customers chat about their brands. It is about helping people connect with other people (and not company to consumers at first stage). To understand online user behaviour on social networks it is important to know, what they do when they are on social platforms. Piskorski, (2012) found that there are three-folds schemes of actions: Class, Action and Object. There are seven classes of on line actions namely: Ego, actions that the user can do to change the content of his or her profile; Alter, actions to change the content of others' profiles; Graph, actions of changing users' on-line networks; Info, is related to viewing information on others' profiles; Group, group related activities; Interact, all communications and; Miscellaneous actions, e.g. to add someone as a friend. Each of these 7 classes can have further actions, such as Add, Approve, Delete, Edit, Reject and 'Objects' such as Photo, Comment. Piskorski, (2014) found that 79% of all users activity is related to Info i.e. viewing other's profiles, 7% of activities related to Ego i.e. adding content to one's own profile. Only 1% of all actions are in the Alter i.e. to change the content of other's profiles and 8% of action related to Graph, actions of changing user's on-line networks i.e. adding and deleting. Interact category, of communication is just 5% and group related activities are miniscule 0.1%. Further exploration of info class found that 44% viewed profile and picture of known friends and equal percentage that of strangers. Remaining 12% of all Info activities was about people viewing their own profile analogous to behaviour of looking at daily looking at mirror before going it. The study also found that Men 67% off all additions or deletions to profiles (class Ego) as compared to 33% in case of women. This may be

due to fact that men usually get less viewing so in order to boost their profile views they put more information, other reason may be social roles of men vs. women in a society. Men who are older, have public (not private only) profile, not disclose their correct age, have more online friends and who are for longtime on network are more likely to look at women they did not know. (Piskorski, 2014) in his research at Harvard Business School, cites literature that supports three kinds of paradigms in which social platforms impact markets. The first paradigm is, 'the pipes view', it considers social networks are conduits which transfer trustworthy information about exchange opportunities between interested parties. The second paradigm is 'prisms view' and posits that a platform offers a network tie between two parties, it has implications not only for the parties but also for third-parties not involved in the exchange. A third paradigm is 'networks as cover', that posits that interactions with friends and acquaintances give actors an excuse to engage in other kind of prying activities, while still maintaining plausible deniability that they are not engaging in such behaviors. A 'cover' is any social action that allows 'Ego' to signal to 'Alter' that he is of type A personality, when in reality they are of type B. Such covers allow actors of type A to mix with actors of type B, by being virtually indistinguishable from actors of type B. For instance, LinkedIn allows users who are currently employed to go on the job market without appearing that they are on the job hunt, and Facebook networks can allow people to look for new partners without others realising this explicitly. Similarly on social networking sites people can peek into other users' privacy that social norms may not allow in physical world. The study found that, only 50 per cent of profile and picture views are of friends, the remaining 50 per cent is of strangers (Piskorski, 2012).

In another research Deighton (2007) found five emerging paradigms governing marketing using digital interactivity and five ways that firms interpose themselves into these lives. These five

paradigms are responses to the diminution of marketing's power relative to the consumer. The five paradigms are Thought tracing, Ubiquitous connectivity, Property exchanges, Social exchanges, and Cultural exchanges.

The above findings clearly have implications in social strategy in general and in tourism sector in particular. Hotel or tourism products should try to become part of 'pictures' – ego of the users and this information will stretch amongst networks.

The next section details main platforms, their rankings, features and corresponding social strategic actions.

### **Facebook**

Facebook is the biggest social network of the current era with 1.1 billion registered users and estimated 750 million unique monthly visitors (SEOPressor, 2012). Facebook can be utilised by the companies to build strong base for getting in touch with the potential customers. The business needs to develop their brand profile through creating a stellar Facebook page which is worth the attention on the platform and then share information with the people that are interesting, and newsworthy to the consumers. Then the content can be enriched with information related to the products and services, new launches, or company happenings etc. make sure that Facebook is not a broadcasting media rather it is a social platform for consumers and you can be guest there with invitations only. The company needs to help consumer meet their social needs and let them fulfil their other needs. Do not intrude or be pushy like salesman, be societal oriented marketers and act as facilitator for community of practitioner-prosumer. Those with account on Facebook can conveniently join the company profile and exchange information and updates provided but it is important that you first invite your close friends or missionary customers, they can create budget. Do offer incentives or recognitions for new needs. Do act according to kind of Internet users as mentioned in preceding

sections. It gives a great opportunity to enhance a company's visibility and image in the virtual world. Do respond to comments and weave into your comments and posts to continually extend this. Individuals interested in the company can easily share ideas with the actual or potential customers. They can also create discussion forums to have feedback about their products and services (Treadway and Smith, 2010).

### **Twitter**

Twitter is very popular micro blogging site amongst the celebrities and Politicians, due to which it attracts a wide variety of fans of such personalities from around the globe. It has 500 million registered users and 400 million tweets are sent each day (SEOPressor, 2012). It allows each user to post messages of 140 characters or less at one time. A business should create its unique profile. People at twitter share their ideas and link with one another. So it provides an excellent opportunity to businesses to market their brand. Companies have also created their profiles on Twitter in order to get in touch with the audience Thomases, (2010). The message or tweet can be personal thoughts, quotes, news and picture links, brand, and product and service links. The users start a Twitter account in order to follow, and feel connected to, their favourite celebrities, media personalities, opinion leaders, role models, sports figure, politicians etc. business can sign up for a Twitter account to keep up-to-date about industry leaders, stakeholders and keeping customers updated with newsworthy tweets. Invite friends or brand cheer leaders and follow opinion leaders or media channels that are of interest to your customers & followers. Each registered user has an average of 208 followers that can retweet if your content is relevant to them and touches their life or something they care about. The chain can grow exponentially provided tweet is worth tweeting repeatedly. Everything that can be applied to Facebook can also be applied here with

some alteration. Your followers are following you as role models or reference groups or your power authority due to rank, expertise; referrals, coercive etc. ensure that you continuously perform your role. Tweet yourself and retweet from higher ups in industry, media, consumer groups, government reports and news channels etc. sensible uses of hash tags (# brandname) are very important to create brand budge. It is about what is happening right now in the world? So keep up to date but avoid controversial contents.

## **LinkedIn**

LinkedIn is social networking platform mainly focused on the professional and business networking segments. It has 225 million registered users and on the average 110 million unique monthly visitors. This platform strategy also starts with creating a LinkedIn company page. The accounts on LinkedIn can help in expanding business or professional or employment related connections thus ultimately a platform to gain access to customers and professionals (Hendricks, 2010). Remember to follow principles of AIDA – attention-interest-desire and action. Request cheerleaders and opinion leaders for testimonials. Promote company through ‘follow’ button and remember to link your other social media accounts to your LinkedIn Company Page. Make the information engaging and varied but also remember pictures speak more than words.

The basic functionality of LinkedIn allows users (workers and employers) to create profiles and “connections” to each other in an online social network, which may represent real-world professional relationships. Users can invite anyone (whether a site user or not) to become a connection. However, if the invitee selects “I don’t know” or “Spam”, this counts against the inviter. If the inviter gets too many of such responses, the account may be restricted or closed.

This list of connections can then be used in a number of ways:

- Obtaining introductions to the connections of connections (termed *second-degree connections*) and connections of second-degree connections (termed *third-degree connections*);
- Users can find jobs, people and business opportunities recommended by someone in one’s contact network;
- Employers can list jobs and search for potential candidates;
- Job seekers can review the profile of hiring managers and discover which of their existing contacts can introduce them;
- Users can post their own photos and view photos of others to aid in identification;
- Users can follow different companies and can receive notifications about the new joining and offers available;
- Users can save (i.e. bookmark) jobs that they would like to apply for;
- Users can “like” and “congratulate” each other’s updates and new employments;
- Users can see who has visited their profile page.

## **YouTube**

YouTube with 1 billion registered users at which videos are viewed 4 billion times per day is largest media sharing site in the world. With inception in 2005 this platform has been used to entertain, educate, share thoughts, provoke, and inspire people. It is accessible to everyone, with or without registering an account. A business can register as a corporate account using Google mail only. Once registered a business can upgrade with a fee to get YouTube’s ‘branded channel’ option. It is important to bring in traffic use SEO keys and tags that are consumer segment and your brand related. A business can add as many relevant key words using the auto body example from the Pinterest. If one cannot create video to start with, the business can upload loyal / missionary customer videos or can search YouTube for your brand

relevant videos from other channels or industry or education etc. and link them to your site or social platform pages. Business should stay current and follow the rules of movie making and education. People like seeing more than reading but it must be something for them (SEOPressor, 2012).

### **Google+**

Google+ has 343 million registered users, who visit 65 million times per month. This social platform includes number of features that are very relevant for social platform marketing. For instance share button can be used to share links, videos, and photos with segmented and filtered Google circles. One more feature is option for bigger and clear cover picture. Business should use key words strategically. Business can link this with other websites and social platform and invite contacts. Other features like story, events, hangouts, Google+ community are really worth utility for a business but it is responsibility of the business to be responsive, empathetic and trustworthy to your community (SEOPressor, 2012).

Starting in November 2011, Google+ profiles are used as the background account for many Google services including YouTube, Gmail, Google Maps, Android, Google Play, Google Music, Google Voice, Google Wallet, Google Local and more. As of January 2012, Google Search is customized with a feature called Search Plus Your World, which inserts content shared on Google+ profiles and brand pages under Web Search results, if one is logged into their Google+ account while using it. The feature, which is opt-in, was received with controversy over the emphasis of Google+ profiles over other social networking services. The feature builds upon the earlier “Social Search” feature which indexes content shared or published by authors; “Social Search”.

A Google+ User profile is a public visible account of a user that is attached to many Google

properties. It includes basic social networking elements like a profile photo, about section, background photo, previous work and school history, interests, places lived and an area to post status updates. It also includes several identity service sections, such as a contributor and other profiles area that let one link their “properties across the web”. These section optionally link to other social media accounts one has, any blogs one owns or have written or sites one is a contributor to. This area is used for Google Authorship. Customized or Vanity URLs were made available to the public starting on October 29, 2013 to any account that was 30+ days old, has a profile photo and at least 10 followers. Google removed author photo from search results in June 2014 and in August 2014 Google will stop showing authorship in search results both photo and author name.

### **Circles**

Circles is a core feature of the Google+ Social Platform. It enable users to organize people into groups or lists for sharing across various Google products and services. Organization of circles is done through a drag-and-drop interface. Once a circle is created, a Google+ user can share specific private content to only that circle. For example, work themed content can be shared with only work colleagues, and one’s friends and family could see more personal content and photos. The option to share Public or with Everyone is always available Since September 26, 2011 users can share Circles; it’s a one-time share, so if the creator of the Circle updates the members, people’s shared copies won’t be updated.

Another function of Circles is to control the content of one’s Stream. A user may click on a Circle on the left side of the page and the Stream portion of the page (the center) will contain only posts shared by users in that Circle. For the unsegmented Stream (includes content from all

of a user's Circles), each Circle has a "slider" configuration item with four positions: nothing, some things, most things, and everything. The nothing position requires the user to select (click on) the Circle name explicitly to see content from users in that Circle. The everything setting as its name implies filters nothing out from people in that Circle. The remaining two positions control the quantity of posts which appear in one's main Stream, but the algorithm controlling what shows has not been disclosed.

## **Stream**

In the "*Stream*", which occupies the middle of three columns on the page, users see updates from those in their Circles. There is an input box which allows users to enter a post. Along with the text entry field there are icons to upload and share photos and videos. The Stream can be filtered to show only posts from specific Circles.

## **Instagram**

Instagram is very popular photos and videos sharing platform and recently purchased by Facebook. It has 130 million active monthly users. The business can upload photos or videos and can link with other social platforms and invite people to click for favourite ones. To keep always in the trend continuously upload new actions photos about your actions that would be of interest to users. That addresses their social, rational, emotional and epistemic needs. Promote photo-sharing contests of different themes, offer discount codes, invite testimonial and use hashtags (SEOPressor, 2012).

## **Blogs**

Blogs can be updated on a frequent basis. Blogs can also be regularly developed for a variety of different purposes. They are an active source of promoting products and services and spreading information (Khare, 2012). There are many dif-

ferent blogs that cover and attract people from specific industry. Marketers generally develop their profile and carry on updating them so that the fans and connected users are kept well informed.

## **Tumblr**

Tumblr is one of the blogging platforms that also allows sharing photos, videos, quotes almost everything. It is more images driven, interest focused rather than personnel oriented and offers much choice to the users. Tumblr has 300 million registered users and 216.3 million monthly visitors (SEOPressor, 2012). There are many options of formatting and layouts etc. that can be customised and focused as per your customers' need. The Admin option allows adding users, opinion leaders, experts and so on that can add blogs to your pages. Try a variety of photos and videos with themes, and things like bloomers, how to, behind scenes etc. try to make it as close to personal site as possible but make sure that company's social media strategy should lead to more contents from others as compared to from the company. Just like other traditional marketing platforms, these mediums also require consistent time and effort. Marketers generally develop their profile and carry on updating them so that the fans and connected users are kept well informed.

Development of Tumblr began in 2006 during a two-week gap between contracts at David Karp's software consulting company, Davidville (housed at Karp's former internship with producer/incubator Fred Seibert's Frederator Studios which was located a block from Tumblr's current headquarters). Karp had been interested in tumblelogs (short-form blogs) for some time and was waiting for one of the established blogging platforms to introduce their own tumblelogging platform. As no one had done so after a year of waiting, Karp and developer Marco Arment began working on their own tumblelogging platform. Tumblr was launched in February 2007 and within two weeks, the service had gained 75,000 users.

## BLOG MANAGEMENT

- **Dashboard:** The dashboard is the primary tool for the typical Tumblr user. It is a live feed of recent posts from blogs that they follow. Through the dashboard, users are able to comment, reblog, and like posts from other blogs that appear on their dashboard. The dashboard allows the user to upload text posts, images, video, quotes, or links to their blog with a click of a button displayed at the top of the dashboard. Users are also able to connect their blogs to their Twitter and Facebook accounts, so whenever they make a post, it will also be sent as a tweet and a status update;
- **Queue:** Users are able to set up a schedule to delay posts that they make. They can spread their posts over several hours or even days;
- **Tags:** For each post a user creates, they are able to help their audience find posts about certain topics by adding tags. If someone were to upload a picture to their blog and wanted their viewers to find pictures, they would add the tag #picture, and their viewers could use that word to search up posts with the tag #picture;
- **HTML editing:** Tumblr allows users to edit their blog's theme HTML coding to control the appearance of their blog. Users are also able to use a custom domain name for their blog.

## MySpace

*MySpace* (stylized as *MySpace*, previously stylized as *MySpace*) is a social networking service with a strong music emphasis owned by Specific Media LLC and pop music singer and actor Justin Timberlake. Myspace was launched in August 2003

and is headquartered in Beverly Hills, California. In April 2014, Myspace had 1 million unique U.S. visitors.

Founded in 2003 by Chris DeWolfe and Tom Anderson, Myspace was later acquired by News Corporation in July 2005 for \$580 million. From 2005 until early 2008, Myspace was the most visited social networking site in the world, and in June 2006 surpassed Google as the most visited website in the United States. In April 2008, Myspace was overtaken by Facebook in the number of unique worldwide visitors, and was surpassed in the number of unique U.S. visitors in May 2009, though Myspace generated \$800 million in revenue during the 2008 fiscal year. Since then, the number of Myspace users has declined steadily in spite of several redesigns. As of May 2014, Myspace was ranked 982 by total web traffic, and 392 in the United States.

Myspace had a significant influence on pop culture and music and created a gaming platform that launched the successes of Zynga and Rock You, among others. The site also started the trend of creating unique URLs for companies and artists.

MySpace is a wide majority of businesses market and promote their products and services on MySpace and target its users. The network also provides a variety of other options like gaming, music, videos etc. (Singh et al, 2008).

## Social Bookmarking

There are many such platforms of social bookmarking such as Stumble Upon. StumbleUpon discovery engine has 25 million registered users. It searches and recommends web pages to its users and can also be shared by others to 'like it'. This also recommends users other related sites or sites that your network has liked or submit industry related sites and blogs or create a stumble upon channel (SEOPressor, 2012).



## ADVANTAGES OF SOCIAL PLATFORM MARKETING

Many organizations including those in tourism now routinely use publicly available social networking and micro blogging sites for innovation, marketing and after sales service purposes. This is due to the fact that social networking offers many opportunities to address challenges and improve affordances to its users. The challenges of locating opinion leaders or experts, find users motivations to share knowledge and capitalise on social network connections and can address with help from transactive memory, public goods, and social capital theories (Leonardi, 2013). The social media enables different ways to engage in the publicly visible knowledge and conversations through different kinds of affordance. The affordance offered are; visibility, persistence, editability, and association, metavoicing, triggered attending, network-informed associating, and generative role taking (Leonardi, 2013). However there are still some challenges; like governance, abundance of information, interpreting quality, tensions of accessibility, contextual cues, leaky pipe, echo chambers, and intrinsic interest inherent in the information that needed to be addressed.

The online social media platforms have become so powerful and popular that they have proved to be very excellent for marketing activities too. Social network marketing can be very advantageous for businesses. As it can help find talent and customers, build brand awareness and intelligence, create word of mouth or viral marketing, create community of customers, and market research (Bolotaeva, 2011). It also helps customers communicate effectively and allow review or see reviews during decision making process, protect speaking to outside strategies for information, and thus decreases cognitive load on the shoppers. Business can create users relevant contents which can increase brand visibility. Social strategy can become core capability if properly managed. It is trendy much low cost supplement to other contents.

It is multiple to multiple connections that create opportunities for customers to know, demand, share, and participate and complaint about experiences of products, services, brands and other interests. The customers can get better products and services as they can participate in design, development and consumptions of products and services. It provides opportunity of publicity in contest to paid advertisement.

However there are certain challenges that the business needs to address it demands commitment of resources, continuous visibility, difficult to measure ROI and if it goes out of control than can cause huge damage in the least time. It can make use of faster diffusion of innovation by using the pressure of opinion leaders, early adopters and social pressures. The company in a tourism sector can use say 'Trip Advisor'. The company can understand target consumers' behaviour and profile, interact with potential, current or exiting customers, identify brand advocates and WOM leaders, improve customer experiences through all phases of consumer decisions making process, participate in trade competition, and scan moves of the competition (Bolotaeva, 2011).

Social network platforms works in various different ways such as:

- **Innovation:** Social media provides insight into customer experiences and ideas, which helps businesses to generate ideas for further development and innovation. The use of social media is also becoming very popular, especially in the context of marketing that it provides the opportunity to fetch some excellent ideas from the market without paying even a single penny (Zarella, 2009);
- **Purchasing Decisions:** The consumer decision-making models guides that, buying behaviour results from consumer involvement and engagement in multistage problem solving tasks. The stages are: need recognition, information search, evalua-

tion of alternatives (evoked set), evaluation result, and when buying, post-purchase evaluation (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2009). Marketing communication using social platforms provides consumers information, so they become able to support the learning process by which they acquire the purchase and consumption knowledge. Consumers' learning, attitude and motivation can change due to any newly acquired knowledge gained from reading, observation, discussions and virtual or actual experience. Social platform can effect consumer perception about evaluating the desired and actual state, and can drive active or latent 'problem recognition' and also offer solution to the problem. During second stage of 'the information search', social platform can aid in learning process by helping to search either internal or external memory sources. The evaluation of alternative stage is conditioned by the type of consumer's choice and discussion on social platform which can aid by influencing consumers' learning, motivation and attitudes with help of augmented reality experiences. In last stage of consumer decision-making process-post-purchase evaluation, the consumer compares the product real performance with his/her expectations, and right discussions and word of mouth on platforms is useful in setting right levels expectations at well above consumers' minimum noticeable threshold levels and by reducing any uncertainty in offerings or services. Right evaluation not only sets evokes set and helps in making choice of brand offerings or destination but also, can create positive word of mouth, customer loyalty, feedback and cross product buying.

The social platforms can provide conditions for high level of customer involvement and engagements with the product or the services. Level of

customer involvement in buying process means amount of psychophysical energy spent by consumer in the buying process. Higher levels of involvements are associated with greater use of affective and cognitive decision making strategies across different cultures (Edgett & Cullen, 1993). During buying or consuming highly involved individuals compared to lower involved individuals will use more criteria search for more information, accept fewer alternative, process relevant information in detail, and will form attitudes that are more resistant to change. Involvement levels, therefore, can have an impact on the information processing decision-making and responses to advertising. Lack of proper management of touch points / customer encounters can cause a churn among the firm's existing customers. Social platform not only increases customer relations but also enhances loyalty, satisfactions through customer's involvement and encounter management, socially, emotionally, visually, auditory and kinaesthetically. The social media marketing platforms are useful for businesses to spread a positive word of mouth through which they could influence them and exchange information. These platforms also provide an opportunity to clear any misunderstanding that could have become the hindrance in the purchasing decisions of customers. Singh et al (2008) states that because of the sharing of instant information the developed societies have got in the habit of creating awareness, sharing it on the Internet on social platforms and then making purchasing decisions:

- **Monitoring:** The social media also helps marketers to monitor what is going on about them amongst the people. It also gives them the chance of developing the strong basis for the business through which they could inspire individuals. The social platforms also help in interacting in real time. A business could clearly watch out of any incorrect information and take appropriate actions accordingly (Khare, 2012);

- **New Customers:** Social media marketing provides you the opportunity to reach new customers efficiently. Through social media you can also study and research people who could be your potential customers in the future. This also helps businesses to devise strategies that could target people in a more effective manner (Safko, 2010);
  - **Referral:** The social media also helps businesses to promote themselves through clearly targeting people who prefer to be with your company and like your offerings. This easily helps in increasing the referral for the business (Sterne, 2010);
  - **Fan Clubs:** The rise of social media has actually helped businesses to create fan clubs for their businesses. People who are crazy for your businesses can easily get closer to the company. The fan clubs work tremendously for the creation and spread of positive word of mouth (Kimbarovsky, 2009);
  - **Feedback:** Marketing through social media actually helps businesses to get in one to one contact with the target audience and let them share their experiences with you so that you could work on them to improve your offerings. Companies by getting involved in such platforms can actually gain information about their products and services and take corrective measures in order to address the issues (Turner and Shah, 2011).
- When people use a product, they then share their experiences of the internet with others on the conversation on social media platforms and this makes others to revise their purchasing decisions. A business can effectively take the advantage of such a platform and interact with its customers in order to help them satisfy their needs through addressing their issues promptly (Turner & Shah, 2011);
- **Connections and Access:** For marketers, social media provides an excellent opportunity to gain access to individuals in an informal manner without even making them feel different. Databases of customers from platforms give businesses opportunities to mine social network information and contacts. Furthermore, social platforms help in finding suppliers or employees too (Bolotaeva, 2011). It has been observed that social people are more comfortable and open in sharing information and experiences on social platforms and over the Internet than in face to face;
  - **Brand Awareness and Image:** Business have been actively involved in sharing information for the enhancement of their brand name and to improve the overall position of their brand in the market (Taylor & Riklan, 2009). Marketing on social media has also revised the concept of brand. A company can carry out brand Intelligence, thus collect consumer feedback, establish a brand presence, get insights about the way its brands are perceived and discussed. Through continuous interaction with customers business can address their needs and thus build long-term brand relationships (Bolotaeva, 2011);
  - **Product Launching:** It has also been noticed that social media also plays a pivotal role in the launching of the product. A wealth of word of mouth information regarding the brands and products, on social platforms leads to its use as a new channel that has features of search engines, review sites, and price comparison. It directly acts at least two marketing mix elements place and promotion which aids in other 2 Ps Price and product strategies (Bolotaeva, 2011);
  - **Sites:** Online social media platform give the opportunity to market products and ser-

vice and make people aware of the upcoming products and services. Social media is a great way of giving details about your company, its offerings and operations. It also helps businesses to create hype in the market for their products (Zimmerman and Sahlin, 2010);

- **Coverage:** The social media platform provides an excellent platform to cover a wide range of individuals from various segments of the society. As described earlier that these platforms are open for all and does not restrict any one from anywhere. This makes it convenient for companies to target wider global market;
- **Cost:** Marketing through social media is very cost effective as compared to traditional offline marketing media. This is inexpensive way to promote a business more efficiently. Previously Costs on MySpace (\$25 in 2009), Facebook (\$5 daily + \$0.01 in 2009) and LinkedIn (a \$25/1000 clicks in 2009) was very competitive and enticing in the US. In 2013 in UK costs per click on Facebook (£0.25-0.57), Google Ad (£1.50), LinkedIn (£1.50), Twitter (£0.75) was still attractive and lower than traditional media channels (Bryan, 2013).

## WORKING WITH SOCIAL MEDIA

Companies initially identify their goals and plans for the future, especially in relation to marketing and promotion and then develop pages or make accounts on the social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter etc. they keep on updating them with the latest information, pictures, company news, latest developments, product and service information, achievements, profits, operations and so on. The profile is tagged along with the search engines such as Yahoo, Google, Bing and so on so that when people are looking for company the link and profile should come up at the top. The

company also advertises on the general areas of the social media from where people come also come to know about the happenings of the business.

Companies further create fun ideas, advertisements, contests, promotions and a variety of other events through which they get people involved with them. These activities also inspire more people to join the company and get linked with the business.

Businesses further monitor and evaluate the suggestions, comments and user happenings. Through social media companies also create different blog in discussion forums, where people share their ideas and this makes the businesses to gain healthy ideas and creative recommendations which mainly turn out to be very beneficial for them (Hajir, 2012).

Businesses also link these social pages and platform with their key websites and portals through which they also get people in to the habit of visiting their websites and gaining information about the various products, features and happenings.

Zarrella (2009) suggests that online communities have become so powerful that they could make or break a business, individual or society. As established earlier, social media marketing is all about making relationships and these relationships can be taken in favour, or potential competitors can also develop their own network in order to break specific business (Tuten, 2008).

## CHALLENGES FOR ORGANISATIONS IN USING SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

Like any other media, social platform also offers challenges to the business. Challenges such as invasion of user privacy, aggressive advertising, lack of e-commerce abilities, lack of brand controls, and certain legal pitfalls can be major disruptions to social platforms. The consumers do not like intrusive advertisements and communications and they are not ready to share their privacy that can be pervaded in an online platform. Aggressive

advertisements are definitely no-no in an online platform. The consumers are there on the platforms to talk to their friends and do not like strangers being intrusive, aggressive communications and overselling.

The businesses needs to be careful against legal frameworks related to data mining, research and selling online. As social platforms are user created contents and users are free to take actions and comments so with a single mistake from business may lead to brand campaign going out of control. The biggest challenges are treating the social network as a broadcasting media instead of a social platform for communities of practice (Bolotaeva, 2011).

Halligan and Shah (2010) identified that there are a variety of things that businesses believe to be unimportant because of which they fail to take the benefit form social media marketing effectively:

- **Not Developing a Marketing Strategy:** Some businesses do not take social media seriously and believe that just creating a page would be enough. Just like other mediums, social media platforms also require a workable marketing strategy;
- **Gathering Followers not Networks:** some companies are only busy in generating users and people who could join their company page. They fail to focus on developing networks of people who could benefit them; customers who could strategically benefit them etc.;
- **Focus Only on Social Media:** Social media can be of great help and support if it is aligned with other offline marketing tools. Some companies only focus on social media for marketing and do not invest at all in other marketing mediums (Evans, 2012);
- **Abusing:** Some social media blogs do not give proper attention to their blogs due to which sometimes people even start using negative or abusive language for one an-

other. This does not only distracts people from coming to your blog but will also create a negative impression about your business (Evans, 2012).

## CONCLUSION

These are some of the notable mistakes done by companies due to which they lose out on the benefits of social media, especially in the context of marketing. The researcher personally believes that in order to take the maximum benefit out from social media for marketing and promotion, it is necessary for businesses to first develop an effective marketing strategy. That strategy should be in alignment with the organisational goals and objectives. The researcher further analyses that it is also important that the business should be actively handling and managing all of its social media profiles, blogs and accounts and promptly respond to peoples` queries and comments.

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## KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

### Advantages of Social Platform Marketing:

Share knowledge and capitalise on social network connections; Enables different ways to engage in the publicly visible knowledge and conversations through different kinds of affordance; Visibility, persistence, editability, and association, meta-voicing, triggered attending, network-informed associating and generative role taking.

**Challenges for Organisations in Using Social Media Marketing:** Invasion of user privacy, aggressive advertising, lack of e-commerce abilities, lack of brand controls, and certain legal pitfalls can be major disruptions to social platforms. Governance, abundance of information, interpreting quality, tensions of accessibility, contextual cues, leaky pipe, echo chambers and intrinsic interest.

**Components of Social media:** Three main components: Publishing Technology for everyone, Information Diffusion, and Relationship Building.

**Five Emerging Paradigms Governing Marketing Using Digital Intercativity:** Thought tracing, Ubiquitous connectivity, Property exchanges, Social exchanges and Cultural exchanges.

**Social Media Marketing:** It is an approach of marketing which enables businesses to take the feedback, comments, and suggestions from their customers through blogs, pictures and ratings and improve their products and services so that customer's needs could be addressed in a more proactive manner.

**Social Media:** Social media is a sort of synthesis of sociology and technology and creating an environment or platform on the internet where people share experiences with each other and develop networks for a variety of different official and unofficial reasons.

**Social Network Platforms Works in Various Different Ways:** Such as Innovation, Purchasing decisions, Monitoring, New Customers, Referral, Fan Clubs, Feedback, Connections and Access, Brand awareness and Image, Product Launching Sites, Coverage Cost etc.

**Social Platforms:** These are second generation (Web 2) websites/ platforms which provide users the ability and tools to create and publish their own mini web sites or web pages using the

“bottom up approach” — using a many-to-many model along with features such as; user created contents, high degree of user participation in communities of practice and ability to integrate with multiple sites or networks.

**Variety of Social Media Platforms:** Social networking sites- Facebook, Google Plus, CafeMom, Gather, Fitsugar, Micro-blogging sites- Twitter, Tumblr, Posterous, Publishing tools- WordPress, Blogger, Squarespace, Collaboration tools- Wikipedia, WikiTravel, WikiBooks, Rating/ Review sites- Amazon ratings, Angie's List Photo sharing sites- Flickr, Instagram, Pinterest, Video sharing sites- YouTube, Vimeo, Viddler, Personal broadcasting tools- Blog Talk radio, Ustream, Livestream, tumbler, Virtual worlds- Second Life, World of Warcraft, Farmville, Location based services- Check-ins, Facebook Places, Foursquare, Yelp, Widgets- Profile badges, Like buttons, Social bookmarking and news aggregation- Digg, Delicious, StumbleUpon, Group buying- Groupon, Living Social, Crowdsavings.