**E-Marketing and Its Impact on THE SOCIETY**

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**Abstract**

*The seminar explores the role of Electronic marketing and its potential impact on online community groups especially on women and children. Internet as independent variable affects online users in different ways that are dependent variables. However, recent academic investigations have highlighted various negative impacts of internet on children and women. The research helps to understand the concept of online marketing and how it has transformed social life structure. Secondary research sources have been used to support analysis concerning with online marketing and its potential negative or positive impact on online community groups. However, internet as independent variable leaves negative impact on online communities especially children and women.*

**Introduction**

New trends of doing business online to attract customers to surf online to evaluate the services or products of an organisation has lead organisations to use online marketing tools to deliver their messages to customers. The trend to market products online with a blend of online and off-line strategies has produced success to companies that are using online marketing strategies to execute their business in virtual business environment that has no boundaries. However, the concept of internet marketing merely does not full of advantages but some negatives appear alongside the advantages of internet marketing. A careful debate on the topic of internet marketing indicates as defined by Burrett (2008) that virtual marketing is a strategic process that enable organisations to *“carefully targeting users and getting them to interact with you while they are engaged with the most personal, intimate medium ever invented.”* Internet has given more power to control and decide on the basis of information available online (Belch, 2009).

The concept of ease and convenience as highlighted by Haver (2008) *“today’s younger, more ‘green’ shoppers aren’t going to waste precious money and gas going from store to store looking for just the right item. They shop online whenever they can, narrowing their choices to one or two items then go to the store to touch, feel, bounce and check out the actual product to see if it looks the way it was represented online.”* These concepts of ease in shopping have lead organisations to launch their own websites to attract customers to explore their products in details and to evaluate the reliability and quality of their products.

Burnett (2008) argues that the purpose behind launching a website does not merely to provide information about organisational products to customers but to attract and convince customers to buy products by knowing product specification, characteristics and benefits. It is a paramount aspect of internet marketing to increase customers’ strength. Internet marketing enables organisations to do business in a market that has no geographical boundaries.

## Internet marketing and its impact on users

The detailed study of literature concerning with internet marketing reveals strong relationship between online communities and an organisation. Internet marketing strategies have strong influence and impact on online communities who can be divided into different groups such as men, women and children. Internet marketing, no doubt is a sheer source of connection between individuals and the organisation providing consumers convenience of accessibility and ease to explore products using online forums. A rapid growth has been experienced in different types of online communities such as business-to-business (B-to-B), business-to-customer (B-to-C) and consumer to consumer (C-to-C) (Pitta & Fowler, 2005).

Internet being a useful and popular source of information provides opportunities to online communities to share their knowledge and access information on the product of their choice. Knowledge sharing influences marketers as well because of the availability of online information as it helps marketers to know customers’ choice and market trends (Wind, 1976).

## ADVANTAGES OF E-MARKETING

The availability of internet at schools, homes and in offices has increased the ratio of its users. The internet usage by girls and boys is relatively equal at middle school level. However, the case with men and women usage varies because of the nature of users’ interests (Bessiere, 2008). A detailed research conducted by Bessiere (2008) highlights the impact of internet use by different communities as change in social behaviour and depression. Results of this study highlights that entertainment and information are primary reasons behind internet use. However, 20% respondents of this research see internet a source to build new contacts based on mutual interests. This use of online forums helps to reduce users’ depression and change their overall behaviour. A similar study carried by Rajani and Chandio (2004) shows differences & effects of information technology use on different types of online communities. It appears that internet has

taken the place of other technologies as it is a faster medium of communication and source of accessing information.

Kraut (1998) argues that various empirical studies conducted on the issues of effects of internet use indicate that most of the use of internet is associated with isolation as a user intends to establish new contacts using internet. However, internet does not isolate people from other community members but it leads people to form new contacts and friends who have online presence. Internet marketing has significantly positive effects on online users; providing online users ease of access of information, opportunities to compare the price of products and convenience of searching from home. The growth in internet marketing reveals that it is the result of users’ trust as they largely depend on internet marketing in present times. Internet has produced more freedom to explore different aspects of products and opportunities to compare and to contrast the attributes of a product. The concept of price is not similar to olden times as internet facilitates customers to check price of the product using online facility.

## Online advertising

Online marketing is also known as online advertising & internet advertising. Organisations contact customers to deliver promotional messages by using internet marketing. The use of various online forms such as advertising banners, pop-ups, online newspapers, magazines and social networks enable organisations to introduce their products to online users across the globe. Atkins (2003) believes that online surfers require more satisfaction before they decide to make purchase. It is because they have more opportunities to evaluate online business performance. The use of e-commerce technology tools enable organisations to satisfy their customers by knowing their liking and disliking and if they are convinced with online marketing initiatives?

Many organisations as highlighted by Voight (2007) try to launch certain interactive platforms that can not only serve customers’ needs, introduce them with company initiatives but also facilitate customers to stay in contact with organisation by communicating online. One of the primary aspects of using interactive online marketing techniques is to create loyalty among customers towards certain brands of the company and such interaction “can lead to new products and inspire new positioning and inform marketing programs (Voight, 2007).” However, marketers can better exploit market opportunities by innovating online marketing initiatives and by making interactive social forums more feasible and reliable for customers to trust on company initiatives.

## Impact on purchasing decisions

The impact of online marketing is two ways process that not only affects customers but customers’ response affects the organisation as well. This process is known as pre-purchase and post-purchase response of customers. Riegner (2007) notes that the online marketing of products has received back strong impact in the form of customers’ response. There is good deal of change in social behaviour because of internet marketing and because of the availability of social networks. Heinrichs (2011) writes that internet marketing plays a role of communication platform between customers and business organisation and effective online marketing changes customer behaviour. According to Kempe, Kleinberg and Tardos (2003), the key role of internet marketing is to convey a meaningful message to customers that effectively attracts customers to buy company products.

## Online marketing and customer behaviour change

Understanding consumer's intentions and choice is vital to be successful in business filed. Customer behaviour as defined by Solomon (2010) is “the study of processes involved when individuals or groups select, purchase, use or dispose of products, services, ideas or experiences to satisfy needs and desires.” Market segmentation appears as one of the primary characteristics of customer behaviour (Lantos, 2011), as this involves, age, gender and various community groups (Solomon, 2010). The successful online marketing helps customers to decide and to change their behaviour towards company products (Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2010). The decision process involves different critical steps as a consumer evaluates the information and advertising content if it convinces him/her. Kardes, Cronley and Cline (2011) highlight five preliminary steps that help a consumer to make purchasing decision.

### Online marketing and problem recognition

The first element behind successful online marketing is problem recognition. The desire to buy a unique product with maximum characteristics is sought by a customer and this sense of a customer needs to be satisfied by strong and powerful marketing initiatives. However, sometimes certain problems such as poor marketing initiatives and paying less consideration to cultural, environmental and social factors become the reason of not attracting a customer (Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2010).

### Online marketing and consumer purchasing decision

Customer judgement is based on four evaluation processes that lead him/her to purchase a product. This includes problem solving Information, evaluation of information & product and availability of alternative. By all means internet marketing is an effective medium to attract customers (Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2010).

### Privacy issue and online financial transaction threats

Privacy of information is a major concern for online users. Individuals as well as groups show concerns about their personal information if it shared with third parties. Several surveys indicate that a good number of internet users are concerned about the sharing and displaying of their personal information to other people.

## Types of online marketing strategy

The presence of online users on online forums indicate two types active communities namely communities of interest and communities of practice. Communities of interest include all online groups who have similar interests to each other and share common values. This type of communities share their knowledge, information and interests to other online participants. These interests also include political, specific cultural, religious or geographical interests. These communities keep their presence on social network forums, internet blogs and hence are a good target for business organisations to introduce them with products or business services. Communities of interest, by internet marketing view point are useful to get views on products, brands and to know the perception of potential future customers. The collected information using communities of interest forums supports strategic decisions of the organisation and assists to improve online marketing strategies (Pitta & Fowler, 2005).

Online communities of practice work in groups; the community members share their ideas and take collective decision related to certain topic or issue. This approach of practice communities is different from communities of interest. Online blogs, social networks are popular place for communities of practice to exchange their ideas and information (Wenger, 1998).

Joy (2006) notes that organisations focus on three diverse aspects of marketing that include, visual, verbal and touch. However, visual aspect of online marketing is one of the dominant aspects as customers are attracted by video messages. Verbal marketing takes place in response to online queries or by engaging with customers using particular online forum. Radio and telephone calls are useful medium of verbal marketing. In contrast to visual and verbal marketing ‘touch and feel’ type of marketing is another aspect of traditional marketing that requires the physical presence of customers.

## Online marketing impact on children community

Children as large consumer community promises good revenue for business organisations and recent trends of using online social networks to communicate with friends appear to be a major element of change in social behaviours. Online marketers see social networks as opportunity to attract youth customers and market their products using banner add. Teenagers are greatly attracted to use Facebook, my space, twitter and the availability of internet on phones has made it convenient for teenagers to stay connected with friends at all times. Recent study indicates that race and class have no significant impact among children and they share their liking and disliking to other fellows equally and influence others opinion as well (Buckingham, 2008).

Online fashion blogs, according to Stokberger-Sauer and Hoyer (2009) generate strong impact on teenage boys and girls. Marketing through online blogs appears as influential and trend setter that also helps to change purchasing decisions. Buckingham (2008) notes that marketing on cartoons or animated films’ websites bring countless number of youth customers for costume industry. Dunlop (2010) believes that fashion blogs attracts not only children but female gender at a larger scale and for online marketers this is useful platform to influence customers and to create interest about particular brand. The power of blogs as medium of online marketing is not possible to ignore especially when organisations earn good revenue. This situation according to Buckingham (2008) appears as trend setter for new business entrants who are not familiar with the power of online marketing and potential men, women and children markets.

## DISADVANTAGES OF E-MARKETING

Certain types of negative impacts of independent (internet marketing) variables appear along with positive impacts on dependent (online communities) variables. Internet is blamed to isolate from one another. However, there is mixed opinion on this issue. Chandio (2004) denote that internet generates few negative impacts on online communities but cannot be blamed for user isolation. According to Kraut (1998), the notion of trend setting among online bloggers and online service providers especially concerning with fashion industry creates craze among children and female buyers to shop massively. This generates negative impact on family life especially on children as they cannot understand weakening financial condition of the family.

Sullivan (2008) note that despite the immense scale of positivity, internet has its negative consequences that appear as unethical use of internet by some users. The negative impact is always great on users who use internet in isolation and prefer to be isolated from other community members. Such users ignore online safety rules and sometimes become victim of online criminals who introduce them with sexual industry and latter attracts users to join this industry. This situation is extremely harmful for children who cannot distinguish between the positive or negative use of internet.

Sexually explicit advertisement on website distracts children attention that disturbs them mentally. According to Joy (2006), internet shares a significant role in sexual exploitation of children and women and plays a significant role to introduce children to sexually explicit material. Organized crime on internet relating to sex industry has created vast amount of concerns related to internet marketing. However, the negative impact of internet does not merely associated with sex industry or using internet in isolation but e-risks of e-payments emerge as significant threat as well. Sullivan (2008) note that online fraud in online transactions, fake telemarketing and security issues concerning with personal information are certain threats that internet marketing brings with it and these needs to be focused on to eliminate.

# Conclusion

The rapid change in business environment has led marketers to adopt certain online marketing strategies that help them to attract good number of customers. However, the use of internet has generated different positive and negative impacts side by side. Marketers market their products relying on visual and verbal marketing initiatives to attract and to engage online surfers.

This has brought convenience to customers to surf online to evaluate the services or products of their choice. Shopping from home and evaluation of prices and quality of products with other online marketers though appear as advantages of online marketing but at the same time using internet in isolation has highlighted various negative impacts of internet. Children’s’ acquaintance with explicit sexual material that appear on commercial websites has flamed the insecurity among parents. Lack of regulations has led criminals to use internet as platform to earn money from pornography. Privacy breach is one of the predominant aspects of internet marketing that people are concerned about. However, it is evident that internet marketing as independent variable has strong positive as well negative impacts on dependant variables that are online community groups and it has reshaped the social life structure and modernised social life style.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

The importance of online channels increase, the structure of the marketing organization and responsibilities may need to change to maximize the opportunities available through new media. For this whether to change the structure of the marketing organization or not, should be decided first.

After it the new responsibilities for e-marketing should be identified. How to develop e-marketing specific skills within the marketing team.

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