Social Media- Challenges of the Socially Connected Consumer

Prabha Kiran,
Research Scholar, School of Management Studies, Vels University, Pallavaram, Chennai

&

Dr S Vasantha,
Professor, School of Management Studies, Vels University, Pallavaram, Chennai

Abstract:
Social media has been described by many researchers in various ways which has generally been associated with common characteristics of living being of being able to interact and communicate for living and co-existing. The interaction as such may be intentional or unintentional. The very nature of social media has posed various challenges for the users. Social media is going to be next big challenge for the different aspects of our social and personal lives. Social media is creating a new kind of social order, which is strengthening social network but weakening inter-personal relations. The challenges discussed in this paper are- communication, privacy and security challenges. Loyalty of a consumer also poses a big challenge as the consumer has wide variety of products and services to choose from these social media. The paper examines these challenges in detail and highlights the way in which consumers should be alert while using social media for any kind of interactions and communications. The researcher has also studied the future aspects of social media and tried to bring about the lessons that need to be learnt from previous experiences.

Key Words: Social Media, Challenges, Connected Consumer

Introduction
Social media is described as the media that allows users to publish, create and share contents on internet. The content can be in the form of images, videos, reviews etc. (Strokes, 2009). Social media comprises of tools and platforms that permit the users to collaborate the content, share their experiences and insights on a particular topic, product and services and develop connections for business and (Strauss & Frost, 2009). Social media usage has been on an exponential rise in last few years and has penetrated in almost all the aspects of our lives. Social media is driven solely by communities and relationships. The use of social media has exploded in the last several years, so much so that it now touches almost every facet of our lives. Social media is about community and relationships. You probably already realize how important it is to increase your businesses exposure in your local community. There is a shift in the power from creative team of the company to the consumer who is more tech savvy and a proactive internet user. Various studies have disclosed the fact that consumers are willing to trust the views of other consumers in social media more easily as compared to the historical promotional and advertising methods. Social media now plays the role of a giant recommender machine that catalyses and accelerates the dynamic circulation and distribution of information (Dellarocas, 2003). It is therefore understood that the reputation of an organization no longer is solely in the hands of the marketing and communication department but has been shifted to all the users of internet.

Consumers can post any type of opinion or comments through various social media platforms. The kind of comments and opinion can have a very strong and long lasting impact on consumer purchasing intention. The image of the organization also is at stake due to these negative comments. The most prevalent challenge for any organization which has product and services line related to consumers must keep an eye on these sentiments of the consumers, their feedbacks and their ideas related to products and services. The changes in perception are motivated by advancements in technology and are related to social change that has propelled the media channels which was generally more fragmented to unite. Social media Consumer has become empowered and at times behaves as a media himself through blogging and social media advocacy.
Social Media Platforms: Challenge of the Changing Communication Patterns

Social media has emerged as an important tool for conducting various kinds of communication and has the capability where the user can share information, voice out his opinion, connect with other likeminded people and communities. Social media is defined as a mode of communication that allows people to create, share, and interchange information and thoughts in digital world (Ahlqvist, & Halonen, 2008). Further it is also defined as an internet based application that allows the user to generate content (Kaplan, & Haenlein, 2010). Social media introduces considerable and invasive changes among the user and the organization, various communities and consumers (Kietzmann, & Hermkens, 2011).

Impact of social media on communication:

Intrapersonal communication

Social media has emerged as a very important medium of one’s expression and the way user can present him. Consumers are able to communicate any information related to their personal or professional life on these websites. Users are trying to build a pseudo image in front of others that has lead to narcissism. In the virtual world they project unreal life and try to hide the reality by posting pictures that are created or edited. Due this nature of self satisfaction there is an unprecedented rise in the peer pressure. People have the habit of constantly checking for any comments and likes every now and then that has made youth addicted to social media.

Nicholas Carr’s *The Shallows: What the Internet is doing to Our Brains* has quoted “While internet improves our cognitive ability to skim and scan, it diminishes our intellectual capacity to concentrate and contemplate. Internet gradually makes us incapable of long form reading and long hours of intellectual focus.”

Interpersonal communication

Social media came into existence for having a social interaction among people and it has definitely lived upto its expectations. No doubt the communication has become very fast and cheap, and can be done anytime anywhere but this useful feature of this media is fast becoming a very serious problem for an individual’s interpersonal communication Consumers are connected to the social media 24/7 and constantly updating their status from time to time. This over obsession with the digital world has resulted in zero communication in the real world. People are so involved in their virtual world that they find no time to interact and communicate with their family members and friends in their physical world.

In this digital world of communication people have slowly started to drift away from the real world and have started living a virtual life where only fake rules with zero identities and no place for intimacies. Even people who are not able to access these social media sites find that they have done some crime by not being a part of this bandwagon. This over consumption and over usage of social media has affected the quality and quantity of our communication and also impacting our language. Our writing skills have been severely affected as the innovative ways of texting and using special characters and acronym has changed the way we write and speak. Even in exams students have started using such words which have no meaning in English language and many simple words are forgotten.

Group communication

There was a time when people usually have 15-20 good friends and there was a constant interaction with all of them. With the advent of social media people have more than hundred people in their friends list and all the updates are shared with all of them instantly. Relationships and break ups were a personal affair but it has all changed and they announced on facebook with a big fanfare. Many groups and communities get created on the facebook and anything and everything is shared in the group among all the members of the group.
Customer Loyalty and Social Media

Customer loyalty is another growing concern. Studies have pointed out that customer loyalty is fast depreciating as customers are putting less trust in brands and the phenomena of brand switch has become very common. The golden rule of 80/20 where it was understood that 20% of the consumers are responsible for generating 80% of the turnover has been converted to 60/40 and is moving ahead towards 50/50. Social media has turned out to be a competitive edge and requires people to advocate in order fast-forwarding the marketing strategy. Analyzing and maintaining customers is hence very important if the brand wants to continue its existence. Social media functions in a very similar way that humans interact with each other daily. Just as people constantly update their status and their activity, the organization should constantly update to their clients and consumers. Information regarding discounts, offers and other marketing advertisements should be constantly undated.

Power of Social media

Social networking sites are the websites that permit users can become members by creating a profile of themselves. These sites also promote them to form communities, group and develop relationships. The members of the social networking sites can post any content of their choice which is available for the member’s friends and also the general users of the site for further discussions, comments and likes (Knoke & Yang, 2007). These sites are used as community based sites for creating groups and communities of likeminded people, having discussions forums where users can have discussions regarding a specific topic (Ghannam, 2011). There are various other popular social networking sites which are more popular like You Tube, Twitter, linkedin and so on. While You Tube allows its users to share, post and view videos, twitter is more like micro blogging and linkedin for creating a professional network. It has been stated that You Tube gets almost 3 billion hits in a day and nearly 50 hours of videos gets uploaded every single minute (Henry, 2011). Twitter was started in U.S in the year 2006 and has more than 300 million active users. Twitter allows its user to send short messages and is very popular specially in case of spreading any information at lightening fast pace specially during disasters when phone lines are devastated (Sakaki, Okazaki, & Matsuo, 2010).

Challenges Posed by Social Media

Social networks are defined as the internet based services that facilitate the users to create profile within a network, bring together a list of other friends and users to develop connections and share the information with them (Boyd and Ellison 2008). Profiles created can be public, semi public or private. The features of social media has provided users the power to communicate, collaborate and share information and also brought along many risks and challenges. The paper discusses some them in brief.

Privacy:
The most important and prime challenge posed by social media is of the privacy. This also restricts many users to opt for social media as a medium of communication as they fear that their privacy may be compromised. Privacy as discussed by many researchers is the sense of freedom and autonomy that helps the society in freely pursuing its tasks. The sensitive information available on social media which is collected by these social networking sites without the knowledge of the user can be misused which can lead to breach of one’s personal privacy and freedom to accomplish their tasks. Companies also deploy personalized and customized marketing strategies to specific consumer and target marketing can be annoying at times. The cleverly designed ads drive the consumer more towards consumerism and buy things that are not necessary. Privacy is an integral and important situation that combined the well being of human beings freedom and right to security. Privacy grants the consumers their moral righ and allows them to exercise and develop their distinctive human powers (Hart 1983).

Commercial advertising on social media:
Advertisements on social media must be brought under the scrutiny of censor and the explicit content must be banned on these social websites as social media is for social connect just as we have in our routine daily lives. These restrictions are very important as they have the ability to spoil the young
users and increase the crime rates. Large numbers of facebook applications is posing potential danger to the users as they intend to steal our sensitive private information and we are unwillingly opening our secured information to be viewed by these app providers and third party vendors.

Terms of agreements:
The social media sites permit the users to create account and they are forced to accept the terms and conditions which are often very vague. These terms and conditions are necessary to be accepted in case the user wants to proceed to use the services of the social network. These terms and conditions have multiple interpretations and are also posing a huge threat as in the name of agreement accepted the users’ information can be used by the owners of service providers for their own use. These terms and conditions often contain hidden clauses which allow the owners to even share the user data with any third parties. The threat is indirectly for the users and results in privacy invasion. This too is one of the major challenges posed by these social media sites (Bangeman, 2010).

Security Concerns:
Another prominent threat is threat of security of personal information and other user data. Hacking is a very common form of security breach and leads the users to a very serious threat. Another common feature of social media sites is that of “Like” a particular content most prominently used by the facebook users. This feature is very tricky as it provides the complete history of the user and also highlights the browsing habits of the consumer that can be linked to the consumers personal information. This inbuilt architecture is a very powerful mechanism to understand behavior of the consumer and the companies can build around it for targeted marketing. Even facebook claims to track its user for at least a minimum of 90 days (Efrati 2011).

Deception:
The individuals who crate their profiles on social networking site cannot be adjudged based on the information they provide. In fact the information may be totally incorrect or fake. The sanctity of the information cannot be cross checked too. There have been instances of deception in social media in last few occasions and it is very easy to deceive other people for selfish motives.

Future of Social media
In spite of being used by billions of users the concept of social media still in a nascent stage. There have many other websites which boasted of strong users but lost their identity. There is a major threat to these social media web sites. Most of people consider facebook to be a societal burden than a website that is loved by young users. In a recent study conducted by Pew Research center has stated that facebook has been on a downfall and many users are abandoning the site due to its unfair practices and is losing its crucial foothold in demographics aspects that has helped the site becoming so popular. In another post in Hindustan times (2015) Huffington post has stated that teens are rapidly forgoing the facebook and turning towards other social networking sites like Instagram, Twitter, Myspace which projects themselves as being more secure and provide better privacy. Further the post states that teens consider that once these are overrun by parents it creates unwanted issues in the family (Hindustan Times, 2013). Since social media is fast becoming the new media where users can seek information related to any topic from being not so important to serious issues and posts coming in from various sources it becomes very difficult for information seekers to completely rely on the information. Most of the students are completely dependent on the internet and have stopped referring books to understand the theoretical concepts. British-American entrepreneur and author Andrew Keen has criticized social media in his book The Cult of the Amateur, writing, "Out of this anarchy, it suddenly became clear that what was governing the infinite monkeys is now putting away on the Internet was the law of digital Darwinism, the survival of the loudest and most opinionated. Under these rules, the only way to intellectually prevail is by infinite filibustering" (Keen, 2007).
Conclusions

Social media is a big source of information, education, and communication and of course leisure and entertainment. Along with all these usefulness it has brought along new set of challenges too in terms of personal and social lives of the users. Social media has created a different and novel category of social responsibility and has driven the users towards diminishing interpersonal relations and heavily dependent on pseudo focus. These media have made the younger generation more addicted towards technology and the disorder related to it. This has made them less adaptive and they find it difficult in rehabilitation and adjusting to difficult situations in life. Another major concern identified is being over connected and constant communication using their mobiles for texting and checking updates. This has lead to many psychological disorders and has degraded their ethical values.

Over dependency on social media has made unwarranted attention, providing additional unrelated information, misrepresentation and enhanced involvement of users in virtual social world. The obvious shift from conventional media to this new media has resulted in many discussions and raised a number of concerns regarding the advantages and disadvantages of this new media. On one side the opinion of consumers in the virtual world matters but at the same time the challenges posed by this new mode of communication cannot be ignored. The only possible solution to this situation is that it is the responsibility of the service provider as well as the users and the concerned authorities to keenly look into this matter and create a conducive environment to all of the parties involved.

References

- http://www.webstrategiesinc.com/blog/five-biggest-challenges-facing-online-marketing
- https://www.google.co.in/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CCQFfjABahUKWwj1enj0lHAbvVCg0KHaY7DB0&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.webstrategiesinc.com%2Fblog%2Ffive-biggest-challenges-facingonlinemarketing&ei=hNK5VeqDD8K0uASm97DoAQ&usg=AFQjCNCFSrOWKnj788S3QRTgEg8s4_lq4v&bvm=bv.99028883.d.c2E


• Teen Rage on facebook is ebbing, says new study. (2013, May 13). *Hindustan Times*, pp.25