BRAND ENGAGEMENT: CREATING RELATIONSHIP THROUGH SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

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Brand engagement is a new strategy adopted by the companies that aims at building strong and lasting relationship with the customer. Through this the companies can ensure profitable existence in the competitive marketplace. Brand engagement through social networking sites (SNS) is creating waves the marketing environment. SNS's are extensively being used in western countries and had recently placed its foot in India. The study reveals the social media consumption pattern of consumers of small cities of Madhya Pradesh. Further, the brand engagement factors are bifurcated at two levels; reflecting consumer perception towards advertisements on SNS and engagement behavior through consumer loyalty, trust, connection, brand followership, word of mouth, communication of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with product, brand or service through social media. The research also tries to states that difference of perception of the consumers belonging to different age groups. The paper concludes with a discussion of findings and implications.

Key Words: *Brand Engagement, Social networking Sites, consumer loyalty, Social Media Consumption Pattern, Brand Followership*

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INTRODUCTION

The world economy has now entered in the era of inextricable linkages. The new economic systems in which resources, markets, companies and the customers are closely associated with the help of information technology have submerged the national boundaries. Companies are crossing the physical boundaries and are reaching the probable customers with the help of internet. The reason for increasing nearness of company and the customer, the Internet, is also creating challenges. With every new advertisement shown or communication link created, the probable customer is eventually changing his preference to another brand. This is posing a great threat in front of the marketer and thus the marketer and the brand planner are shifting to virtual marketing for creating and retaining loyal customers. One of the most important goals of marketers and brand planners is to increase customer's engagement with the brand. In many companies customer retention and engagement is considered as an ultimate goal. Companies aim at building strong and lasting relationship with the customer and thus adopt the new strategy of brand engagement.

Brand engagement is a very broad term. It is a strategy of cultivating and maintaining a sense of attachment between the consumer and the specific brand. This attachment appeals to the intellects and the emotions of the customer. The ultimate result of brand engagement is to influence customer attitudes and feelings, in hopes of "winning" customer minds and generating brand "loyalty." The goal of brand engagement is to create the customers who will drive the business forward. Brand engagements are platform engagements, which mean advancing customers into new creative environment where the customers can add value back to the brand, where competitors can't compete. Most brand-engagement activities today revolve around enhancing experience. Apple and Sony make experiences, not products, the centerpiece of their stores. Lexus doesn't merely sell cars; it sells the experience of being a Lexus customer. Maggi is not just noodles its "My Maggi". Companies understand the importance of brand engagement, they know now that a really engaged customer in return gives you brand loyalty and word-of-mouth.

Brand engagement strategy lays the base on the view that human being are social animals and thus have an innate need to be with other people and communicate with them. Thus the brand engagement strategy let brands communicate and inform the customer and in turn customer can respond and communicate back. Engagement strategy is a need of today where potential customers in the connected environment search for products/services, look at websites, read reviews, email questions, and get an idea of the company's concept or brand through social media.

Social media as defined by Kaplan and Haenlein (2009) is "Internet-based applications that help consumers share opinions, insights, experiences and perspectives". These applications include virtual social spaces, social networking sites, content communities, virtual games etc. some of the renowned examples are Wikipedia, blogs, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. Though the use of social media for the purpose of promotion is an aged concept in the western countries, Social Media is the latest buzz word in the Indian market. Until recently company's marketing tasks follow a unidirectional channel that is from the marketer to the customer. Advertisements, direct marketing, web marketing or any other promotion strategy company talked and the customers listened and, occasionally respond. Now everything has changed, Internet and the Web provide the occasion in which the customer talk back to the company and talk among its peer at just a click of button. At the time of decision making the customers are likely to trust and act on peer endorsements and word of mouth.

Social media is becoming a new way of sharing brand experience. The social media do not only have an impact on the brand image but it even affects the financial performance of the brands. The companies with higher engagements through social media on average grew 18 percentage in revenues over the last 12 months, compared to the least engaged companies who on average saw a decline of 6% in revenue during the same period. Year 2010 was marked as the transition period from traditional mass media to social media. Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and other social media are the artillery to the people to keep their views infront of thousands of others at the

same time and get reaction from them. The customers get the opportunity to talk to the companies and other customers then just to listen.

McDonald's has long understood the importance of engagement. Unsurprisingly, it has had some competitive advantage for the brand. To energize consumer ties to its brand, the fast-food company kicked off its first-ever global online casting call, offering customers a chance to find a starring role on its packaging. As part of the engagement strategy and to extend the "i'm lovin' it" campaign, it was an attempt to highlight and further engage everyday consumers. Honda's hybrid car represents another example of engaging customer for getting promotion ideas for the product, the company started *'Live Every Litre'* campaign by crowd-sourcing the entire advertisement from its customers. This paper is an attempt to enhance the literature for Brand Engagement through Social Networking Sites. This research aims to identify the perception and behviour of people towards the social media from selected cities of Madhya Pradesh.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Social media has gained wide spread popularity in the current times, business houses are talking about it but very limited academic research is available in the area specially in India. Brief reviews of the studies conducted on social media are presented here. Variety of topics are discussed under research done on Social media such as characteristics of online brand communities (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001, de Chernatony and Christodoulides, 2004; de Valck, Van Bruggen and Wierenga, 2009), User Segmentation and Participation of the Users of Social Media (Berthon, et. al., 2008; Forrester Research, 2010), Gender Differences and Interactivity of Social Media (McMahan, et.al., 2009) and Electronic Word of Mouth through Social Media and its Impact (Okazaki, 2009; Riegner, 2007).

The studies which posses immediate reference for the current research on how big firms and companies use social networking sites to influence and create relationship with the customers are stated. Ko, et.al., (2005) studied and found that the people are motivated to use social media not only for information seeking, convenience, entertainment and social interaction but also for brand engagement purposes. Zeng, et.at., (2009) studied perceived interactivity and

advertising outcomes through social media they found that any responses to advertising on social networking sites (SNS) depended on perceptions of advertising relevance and value, as well as being influenced by social identity and group norms.

ACNielsen and Facebook (2010) studied the effectiveness of advertising media on Facebook. With the help of regularly collected data on social media consumption the research identified factors such as the fastest growing social media activities, most popular social media websites and uptake of mobile social networking: this helped in building a consumption behavior profile.

Calder et.at. (2009), researched on the relationship between online engagement and advertising effectiveness and found in the study that both personal and social-interactive experiences were positively correlated with advertising effectiveness and the fundamentals of their study could be applied to the context of social media. Kaplan and Haenlein, (2009) and: Mangold and Faulds, (2009) clearly stated that social media have been revolutionizing life for the consumer by influencing every stage of the consumer decision-making process including information acquisition, brand awareness, purchase behaviour, and post-purchase communication and evaluation, as well as influencing general opinions and attitude formation.

OBJECTIVES

The Objective of the study includes the following:

- To find out the social media consumption, that is most popular social networking website and the time people spend on these websites and the reason why people use these websites.

- To find out the effectiveness of SNS advertisements on consumer behavior.

- To find out effect of social media on the brand engagement.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study involves studying consumer behavior regarding the social networking site and to find out whether these websites help in creating relationship with customer and ultimately

creating brand engagement. The study aims at understanding the impact of social media on brand engagement among people from selected cities of Madhya Pradesh.

Universe of the study

The universe of the study consists of regular internet users belonging to different age groups from cities of M.P. i.e. Ujjain, Indore, Jabalpur and Bhopal.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample of the study was 156 respondents from different cities. Random sampling technique has been used to select the sample.

Tools for Data Collection: For the purpose of collection of data self designed questionnaire was sent to 250 respondents through mail. It was also uploaded on facebook. Out of which, 180 responses were received and only 156 responses were considered as relevant as per the area of research.

Tools for Data Analysis: For the purpose of data analysis SPSS software is used and along with the percentage method, One Way Anova Post-Hoc and Tukey test are also used.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

With the objective to understand the impact of social media on brand engagement the study is framed with the help of questionnaire which covers the questions about social media consumption, incidents of social media and ultimately effects of the social media on the engagement. The brand engagement results are measured through brand identification, brand awareness, word of mouth and satisfaction with social media.

Demographic Details

The demographic details of the research population, collected from selected cities of Madhya Pradesh i.e. Ujjain, Indore, Jabalpur and Bhopal are stated in the table 1

Social Media Consumption Pattern

The first part of the research aims at understanding the social media consumption habits of people of 4 cities of Madhya Pradesh. Social media consumption habits are judged through the

tools used by the people, the membership pattern of people and the reasons for which they use the social networking sites.

Tools used to access SNS: The details of tools usually used by people to access the social networking websites are; 52.86 percent people use personal computers, 68.78 percent people use laptops and 62.42 percent people use smart phones to access these social networking websites. There are people who use multiple tools to stay connected with the SNS. With the advent of all time connectivity through smart phones people are on regular basis connected with SNS.

Membership Pattern: The membership pattern that became visible through research is that facebook is the most popular website, 98.7 percent people are the member of facebook. People are member of multiple SNS. 28.85 percent people are the member of Orkut, 58 percent people are member of Youtube, Likedin membership is 40.38 percent, BigAdda an Indian website has membership of 3.21 percent, Ibibo membership pattern is 6.41 percent and 8.97 percent people are the member of Google+. The membership pattern makes it clear that the SNSs are becoming popular among people and they are regular visitors to these sites.

People Contacted through SNS: The research data portray that through SNS people contact with various people. 66.87 percent people become the member to be in touch with close friends, 28.66 percent people to be in association with co-workers, 30.57 percent people become members of SNS to be in touch with the family members, 61.14 percent people become the member of SNS to get associated with friends, 19.10 percent people join SNS to be touch with the people who live far away. 18.47 percent people use SNS to meet strangers and people whom they don't know earlier.

Reason to use SNS: The reasons for which SNS are used by people were asked, in the research, as the response it was identified that maximum number of people that is 88.46 percent people become member to be in touch with their friends, 19.87 percent people use SNS for finding new friends and similar interest group people. 2.56 percent people use SNS as a status symbol, 36.53 percent use SNS to share their views with known and unknown people, 3.20 percent people become members to get attractive offers from companies. Through this

result it is clear that the people do not become member of any SNS in order to know about the company's product or brand but the marketer can make use of fact that these websites are becoming popular among people and they regularly visit these sites.

Effectiveness of Advertisements on SNS

Social networking sites are nowadays extensively used by companies to float advertisements due to the growing number of membership of these websites. The increasing number of members of these sites provides companies the opportunity to get noticed directly and to measure the rate of response simultaneously. Companies are widely using SNS to communicate and generate interest among people towards their products, brands and companies. Impact of advertisements on SNS could be easily measured in terms of interest shown by the viewers.

The study tries to measure the effectiveness of advertisements on SNS on the basis of the response obtained. The table 2 states the response received from 156 respondents belonging to different cities.

Initially the respondents were asked about their interest towards advertisements shown on SNS. 57.69 percent people stated that they are interested in the advertisements. 70.51 percent respondents stated that the advertisements on the SNS are well communicative i.e they communicate about the product, offer and the company well. 64 percent of the respondents consider that the advertisements on SNS provide correct information and could be relied while taking decisions. Similarly, respondents from different cities of Madhya Pradesh considers that using SNS for the purpose of marketing is a good strategy as it is leading to awareness among the people regarding companies different products. 67 percent of people consider SNS as an effective marketing tool used by the company.

In order to find out that whether Social Networking Sites' advertisement is considered as a good marketing strategy across different age groups one way ANOVA (Table 3) is applied.

The table states that there exists significant difference between responses collected from different age groups. People of different age groups perceive differently about SNS

advertisements as good marketing strategy. Further, in order to identify that the perception of which age group significantly differs from the other a Post hoc. Tukey test (Table 4) is used.

The table 4 shows that there exists significant difference between perceptions of people belonging to age group of 35-44 against the people of other age groups. The particular group under which significant difference is shown, states that 65.79 percent people consider that the SNS advertisements are not a good marketing strategy where as the respondents belonging to other age groups consider it as a good marketing strategy. 77. 96 percent people from the other remaining group agrees SNS advertisement being a good marketing strategy.

Brand Engagement and Association through SNS

The research was conducted with the basic objective to know whether the social networking sites lead to brand engagement, i.e., whether these web sites creating loyal and engaged customers or not. These websites are considered as the strong medium for brand engagement The reason being they allow the customers to directly talk to the company. Through any other communication medium it is not possible for the customer to directly talk to the company and instantly get the response. The table 5 shows the result of brand engagement of people in selected cities of Madhya Pradesh.

The table 5 states that 55.13 percent of SNS members view the page and the blogs of brand. Despite they visit the page and the blog of the brands, the brand followership through SNS is done only by 41.03 percent respondents. More than half of the respondents do not follow brands. Only 37.82 percent people have added themselves as a fan to the brand. 66.03 percent people visit brand page or blog for getting product related, or brand related information. 57.69 percent people trust the information they receive through SNS. 57.96 percent people communicate the same to their friends and relatives that is they spread positive word of mouth or they communicate the information to the public. 60.26 percent respondents learn about new products of the company with the help of SNS. 62.25 percent people communicate their satisfaction or dissatisfaction about the brands, products and services of the company on the social networking websites.

Brand followership throughout different Age groups

In order to find that whether the people of different age groups have different perception towards brand followership one way ANOVA test is used. Different age groups that form the part of the study are 15 to 25, 25 to 35, 35 to 45 and 45 and above. The table 6 shows the result of ANOVA.

The table 6 shows that the brand followership does not differ significantly among different age groups. Very few people from all the age groups follow the brands regularly among the respondents belonging to selected cities of Madhya Pradesh.

Behavior of visiting brand page or blog for getting information among different age groups

For understanding that whether the people behavior of visiting band page or blog for getting information is also affected by the age factor one way Anova is used. The result is shown in the table 7.

The 7 table makes it clear that the people of all the age groups visit the brand pages and blogs in order to get the information regarding the products and brands. The table below states that all the people despite of their age groups consider SNS as a good medium to collect the information about the companies, products and brands.

The 8 table shows that the 73.68 percent people belonging to the age group of 35-45 and 75 percent people belonging to the age group 45 and above visit brand pages and blogs through SNS to collect information about brands and product.

FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

The research was conducted with the objective to understand the impact of social media on brand engagement. Following are the findings achieved through the research:

- For accessing social networking websites 52.86 percent people use personal computers, 68.78 percent people use laptops and 62.42 percent people use smart phones. Multiple tools

are used by people to stay connected. With the advent of all time connectivity through smart phones people are continuously connected with social networking sites. Marketer with his products services could be infront of the customer despite of the distance.

- Facebook is the most popular website, 98.7 percent, followed by Youtube 58 percent, and Linkedin 40.38 percent. The popularity of Orkut, once a famous website is reduced to 28.85 percent and Other SNSs hold a very small proportion BigAdda 3.21 percent, Ibibo 6.41 percent and Google+ 8.97 percent. Companies interested in doing SNS marketing should find out the popular sites to communicate and provide offers to the customers.

- Maximum people i.e. 66.87 percent use SNS to be in touch with close friends. Other reasons being 28.66 percent to communicate with Co-workers, 30.57 percent to be in touch with the family members, 61.14 percent to get associated with friends, 19.10 percent to be in touch with the people who live far away. 18.47 percent people use SNS to meet strangers and people whom they don't know earlier.

- Reasons for which SNSs are used by people are 88.46 percent to be in touch with friends, 19.87 percent for finding new friends and similar interest group people. 2.56 percent as a status symbol, 36.53 percent to share your views with known and unknown people, 3.20 percent people become members to get attractive offers from companies. Through the number of people who exclusively visit SNSs for getting offers are very less but attention and interest among customers could be developed through these sites.

- Social networking sites are nowadays extensively used by companies to float advertisements due to the growing number of membership of these websites. The research shows that 57.69 percent respondents are interested in the advertisements on SNS.

- 70.51 percent respondents find advertisements on SNSs are well communicated, they communicate about the product, offer and the company well. Companies should utilize this attitude for the purpose of creating brand positioning and for aiding in brand recall.

- 64 percent of the respondents consider that the advertisements on SNS provide correct information and could be relied while taking decisions. As a big proportion of people rely

on the information available on SNSs for taking the buying decision thus the companies should not ignore this strong medium.

- 67 percent of people consider SNSs as an effective marketing tool but a significant difference exists in the perception of people belonging to age group of 35-44. In this age group 65.79 percent people consider SNS advertisements as not a good strategy. The possible reason may be that they are not very much interested in the product/service and may not give attention to these advertisements.

- Only 37.82 percent people have added themselves as a fan to the brand and 41.03 percent respondents follow the brand but 55.13 percent people regularly visit the page and the blogs of brand. Nearly half of consumers engage with brands silently and regularly. Whereas, a survey done in US states that 52 percent of social network users become a fan or follower of a brand. It states that in India, despite of low fan following and followership, companies should continuously keep updating their pages and blogs, as various people silently visit their pages and blogs and ultimately at the time of taking buying decisions they compare and find out information from these pages and blogs.

- 66.03 percent people visit brand page or blog for getting product related, or brand related information. The trend of increasing interest of higher age group people is visible through the result showing that 73.68 percent respondents belonging to the age group of 35-45 and 75 percent belonging to 45 and above age group visit brand pages and blogs through SNSs to collect information about brands and products.

- 57.69 percent people trust the information they receive through SNSs and 57.96 percent people communicate the same to their friends and relatives i.e. they spread positive word of mouth or they communicate the information to the public.

- 60.26 percent respondents learn about new products of the company with the help of SNSs. The updates on these sites done by the marketer could create a desire in the minds of people to buy of to know about the product.

- 62.25 percent people communicate their satisfaction or dissatisfaction about the brands, products and services of the company on the social networking websites.

CONCLUSION

The research was carried out with the objective to understand the impact of social media on brand engagement. The research suggests the marketer about the social media consumption pattern of people of cities Madhya Pradesh. Through this study, it is clearly visible that more and more people even in small cities are nowadays using social networking sites. The increasing use of Smart phones provides people all time connectivity and thus reach to the social networking websites is increasing day-by-day. Though people generally use these websites to communicate with other people may be friends, family, colleague or people of similar interest groups, but these websites provide opportunity to the companies to reach to people. The small town people could also easily be catched by the marketer with the help of these websites. People refer these websites to get information, they get know about new products/ services though SNSs. People even communicate their satisfaction or dissatisfaction towards products and brands to other known and unknown people through these websites. Regardless, the companies are yet unable to create strong brand engagement; the task could be achieved through SNSs. The marketer could earn the trust and association of customers if they effectively use this two way channel of communication.

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ANNEXURES

Table 1: Demographic Details

City	Ujjain	Indore	Bhopal	Jabalpur
No. of Respondents	46	52	32	26
Sex	**Male**	**Female**		
No. of Respondents	88	68		

Age	15-24	25-34	35-44	45 & above
No. of Respondents	25	77	38	16
Occupation	**Students**	**Salaried**		
No. of Respondents	80	76		
Education	**Graduate**	**Postgraduate**	**Professionals**	
No. of Respondents	65	36	55	

Source: From the data collected

Table 2: Factors for Measuring Advertisement Effectiveness on Social Networking Sites

Factors to Measure Advertisement Effectiveness on Social networking sites	Yes	No
Interest of Social Networking Sites members towards Advertisements	57.69	42.31
Advertisement on Social Networking Sites are well communicated	70.51	29.49
Social Networking Sites advertisements provide correct Information	64.10	35.90
Social Networking Sites advertisements are a good marketing strategy	67.31	32.69

Source: From the data collected

Table 3: One Way ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	5.699	3	1.900	10.086	.000
Within Groups	28.628	152	.188		
Total	34.327	155			

Source: As obtained through SPSS

Table 4: Post-Hoc Tukey Test

(I) Age	(J) Age	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
15-24	25-34	0.045	0.1	0.969	-0.21	0.3
	35-44	-0.418(*)	0.112	0.001	-0.71	-0.13
	45 & above	-0.073	0.139	0.954	-0.43	0.29
25-34	15-24	-0.045	0.1	0.969	-0.3	0.21
	35-44	-.463(*)	0.086	0	-0.69	-0.24
	45 & above	-0.118	0.119	0.757	-0.43	0.19
35-44	15-24	.418(*)	0.112	0.001	0.13	0.71
	25-34	.463(*)	0.086	0	0.24	0.69
	45 & above	.345(*)	0.129	0.041	0.01	0.68
45 & above	15-24	0.073	0.139	0.954	-0.29	0.43
	25-34	0.118	0.119	0.757	-0.19	0.43
	35-44	-.345(*)	0.129	0.041	-0.68	0

(*) The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Source: As obtained through SPSS

Table 5: Factors to Measure Brand Engagement and Association

	Yes	No
Viewership of brands page and blog	55.13%	44.87%
Brand followership through Social Networking Sites	41.03%	58.97%
Added as fan of brand page	37.82%	62.18%
Visiting brand page or blog for getting information	66.03%	33.97%
Trustworthiness of information on SNS	57.69%	42.31%
Communicating the information received through SNS to	57.96%	42.04%

others.		
Learning about new product through SNS	60.26%	39.74%
Communication of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of product/services through SNS	62.25%	37.75%

Source: As obtained through SPSS

Table 6: Brand followership through SNS among different age groups

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.071	3	.024	.096	.962
Within Groups	37.672	152	.248		
Total	37.744	155			

Source: As obtained through SPSS

Table 7: Visiting brand page or blog for getting information among different age groups

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.647	3	.216	.954	.416
Within Groups	34.347	152	.226		
Total	34.994	155			

Source: As obtained through SPSS

Table 8: SNS as a Good Medium to Collect Information

Age	Yes	No	Total	% of Yes	% of No
15-25	14	11	25	56.00	44.00
25-35	49	28	77	63.64	36.36
35-45	28	10	38	73.68	26.32
45 & above	12	4	16	75.00	25.00
Total	103	53	156	66.03	33.97

Source: As obtained through SPSS