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Impact of Social Media Marketing on the Consumer Behavior

Introduction

The advancement of science and technology has created new dimensions for businesses houses and is often regarded as one of the greatest revolutions. Along with the progression of science and technology, innovation grew with it and resulted in the emergence of new equipments and gadgets. Irrespective of the type, size and nature of the business, technology has a profound impact on the tangible and intangible benefits of the company (Silverman 14). Moreover, several studies have shown that technology plays a vital role in making a company cost effective as well as meeting the growing demand of consumers. Nowadays, technology is vastly used in marketing campaigns of companies and deeply impacts the consumers as well. With the emergence and development of internet, marketers started to use it as a platform of promoting their products and services. Regarding, this context social media has been a key tool for the business houses. In the last few decades, there has been a surge in the implementation of e-commerce applications and few researchers deem that the cause of increased usage of e-commerce is the ongoing trends. This study aims to analyze the impact of social media marketing on the purchase behavior of the consumers. The study will mainly rely on the secondary sources of information and will also consider the previous research papers about the subject of concern. Lastly, on the basis of the findings from the analysis, the study will recommend few techniques to the companies regarding how they can improve their social media marketing campaign.

Discussion and Analysis

Consumer Buying Process

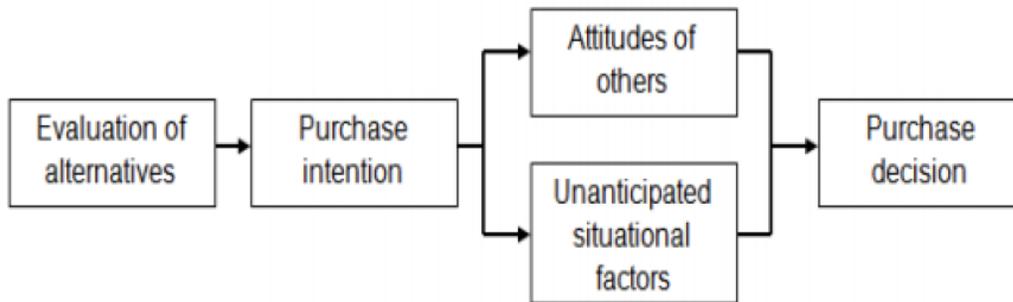
The consumer buying process is described through 5 different stages namely problem recognition, information search, evaluation, purchase decision and lastly post purchase behavior.



(Source: Kotler and Keller 15-25)

Among the aforementioned stages, the role of marketers is crucial during the information search and evaluation phase. In these two stages, consumers generally go through a series of assessments so as to ultimately reach a decision. Kotler and Keller (15-25) in this regards have accentuated that during the evaluation phase, a consumer forms preferences among the brands. The preference of a brand is as a result of the evaluation of the information. A consumer generally starts with exploration of different products and therefore a product with high visibility gets more inclination. According to Kotler and Keller (17-26) a consumer is undoubtedly influenced by the “infomediaries” often regarded as the intermediaries, who publishes the evaluation of products through tabular comparison. For example, studies have shown that reviews on the websites such as blogs, tweets, bulletin boards etc., highly influence the consumer purchase decision. Once the assessments of the alternative choices are made, consumers try to

formulate a belief about the alternatives that guides their intention, attitude and finally their selection among the alternatives.

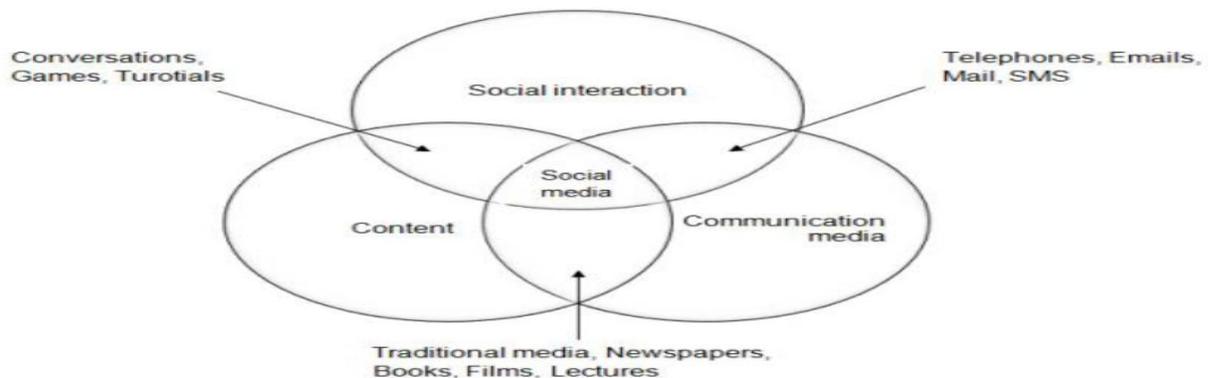


(Source: Weber 2- 18)

There are certain other factors as well affecting the consumer buying decision, yet attitude about the products and services are dubbed as the powerful predictors of the patterns and processes of the exposure to information. In addition, attitude which is learned through trails and past experience comprises of three elements namely conative, cognitive and affective. Therefore, from an overall point of view it can be sated that consumer buying process consists of several steps and a number of factors affects their decision making process. The next section of the study will try to analyze the extent to which social media, a recent buzz for the marketers influences the decision making process of consumers.

Social Media Marketing

The usage of social media has been increasing at a robust rate. For the marketing professionals, social media generally acts as a tool that is potentially used to create and increase awareness of the products and services of a firm. One of the major advantages of social media marketing is the ability to directly communicate with the end consumers. Industry experts and scholars have emphasized on the fact that emergence of internet and especially social media has changed the communication pattern between marketers and consumers.



(Source: Weber 2- 18)

Social media has been instrumental in expediting the flow of communication as it fosters feedback procedure. As a result of that, social media is often regarded a two way communication medium. Social media also describes the powerful new ways where individuals are engaging with internet contents and vice versa. It is often regarded as an umbrella term used to describe the employment of social media platforms as a tool of marketing.

Mass advertisements have no longer remained a striking fact as the efficiency has reduced when compared to the past. This can be attributed to the fact that mass media advertisements usually reach greater number of people than the intended customers, but is failing to identify the needs of consumers. As a result of that it is more of a one way communication. On the other hand, social media marketing provide companies with the opportunity to underpin the exact requirement of the consumers (Weber 2). Social media is the place where people with common interest gather for the purpose of sharing their thoughts, ideas and comments. Hence, in place of continuing as a broadcaster of mass message, marketers, through social media platforms can act as an aggregator to the customer community (Weinberg 20).

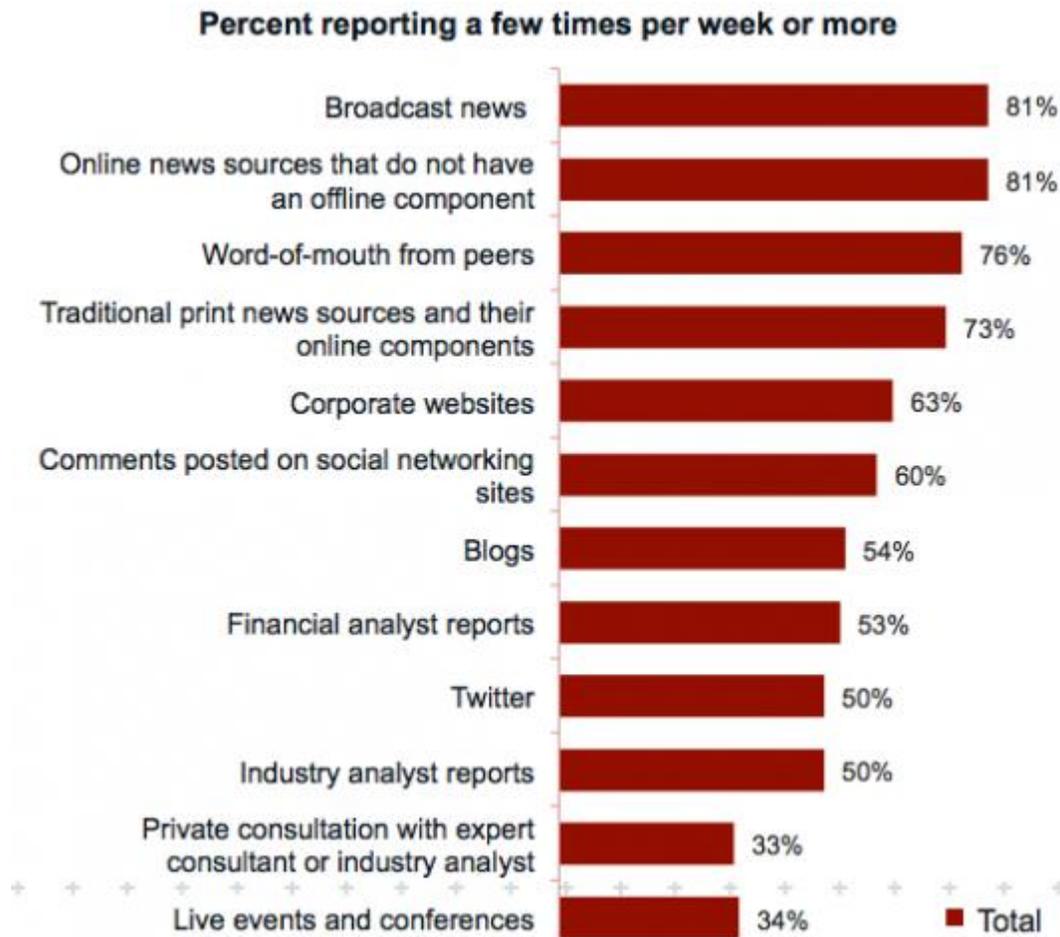
Influence of Social Media on Purchase Decision of Consumers

In today's market, social media is deemed as an essential touch point in the decision making process of the consumers. The association of social media with the consumers can be found from information search phase to the post purchase decision stage (Zarella 3-18) The social media platforms have been instrumental in exchanging information with the consumers without any limitation of geographical boundaries. A number of reports have suggested that nowadays, people use internet as one of the prime sources from where they can retrieve information about a product or a service (Smith and Zook 11). In the online world, social media is however considered more useful and pertinent than other sources such as reviewing sites and official websites. One possible reason can be the availability of common platform where every user can portray their own thought or feedback about a specific product or a service. Hence, it is obvious that the decision making process of the consumers will be highly influenced by the information they retrieve from social media platforms.

It is evident that social media somehow associates itself with the decision making process of consumers. The purchasing behavior of the consumers is influenced by a number of factors. For example, the perceived quality of the product, the ability of the product to satisfy the need of the customer as well as the feedback of others about the product acts as the influencing factors. One of the major sources is the online advertisement techniques and strategies adopted by the companies and large online population acts as an advantageous factor for them.

According to a survey, the impact of social network on the US consumers is growing at a vigorous rate. Among 80% respondents of the study highlighted that they are active members of facebook and among them 67% of them said that they look after the information on such platforms before making a purchase decision. Interestingly, 32% of the overall candidates mentioned that they get highly influenced by activities of friends on the social platforms ("Social Sites Impact on U.S. Consumers Purchasing Decision Growing Steadily"). Another study showed that around 91% of the chosen sample has gone to buy a product or visited a store just because of their online experience. In addition, it has been also observed that 72% of consumers trust the online reviews in the same manner as they trust personal recommendations. The study

has also shown that 78% of the total consumers stated that the posts made by marketers in the social media platform greatly influence their purchase decision (“Unignorable Stats about How Social Media Influences Purchase Behavior”). Hence, from the above facts and figure it is evident that social media marketing has a strong impact on the purchase decision of consumers.



(Source: Meyer-Gossner, “B2B Study: Impact of Social Media and Industry Analysts on B2B Technology Sales”)

Conclusion

The study was meant for analyzing the impact of social media on the consumer purchase behavior. The study found that nowadays consumers use internet as a major source of information thereby exhibiting strong faith on the electronic sources of information. Social media in this subject is one of the biggest influential factors. The study also found that the purchase decision of a consumer is highly influenced by the social media marketing. This is because it not only increases the visibility of the products but also creates a sense of trust in the mind of consumers. The consumers also find it easy to relate with the products that are promoted through social media platforms. One of the key findings of the study is that people nowadays make use of social media as a platform to share their reviews, experience, writings, advice, experience and any issues that may interest their friends and relatives. This information is

considered as a helpful source and influences the decision making process of the consumers. Furthermore, studies have also shown that people make use of information retrieved from the social media platforms as a guideline for their future purchase. As a result of that, marketers take this advantage and accordingly develop the marketing strategies. In general, social media advertisement is used by the marketers to influence the purchase decision of consumers. Furthermore, the study also found that consumers have the tendency to believe in what their relatives and friends have suggested. Hence, considering the reach, two way communications and convenience it can be concluded that social media marketing has a strong impact on the purchase decision of consumers.

Recommendations

The following are the techniques that marketers can use for the purpose of making the social media marketing strong and appealing to the customers: -

- **Redirecting Links:** - Companies are strongly recommended to make use of redirecting links in the social media banners. For example, if the user clicks on a link it will redirect them to the official website or any other website where in-depth information about the subject is present. This will allow them to drive more traffic.
- **Fan Page:** - The companies are also recommended to develop fan pages of the products or services in popular social media platforms such as facebook, twitter and orkut among others. This will allow users to post their comment about the products and can directly influence the purchase decision of other who is yet to explore the product.

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