Original Research Paper

Psychology

THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL NETWORKING ON CONSUMER'S BEHAVIOUR

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ABSTRACT An attempt has been made to understand the effect of Social networking on Consumer behaviour with the help of a Self-Formulated Questionnaire. The Study attempts to understand the pros and cons of the presence of consumer's opinions on social networking and the mitigating effects that the companies can employ to deal with those opinions which are not in their favour and to find out those aspects of social networking which are less reliable than the others through the lens of the target group i.e. "the consumers.

INTRODUCTION

Social networking:

Social- networking refers to a process through which a group of individuals become inter- connected through the use of dedicated websites, normally in an informal manner.

As per Oxford Dictionary, Social Network "is a network of social interactions and personal relationships through a dedicated website or other application which enables users to communicate with each other by posting information, comments, messages, images, etc." It is a grouping of people in accordance with their social environment, for instance rural people vs. urban people.

Social networks are sites where you connect with other people and expand your business values. MySpace, Face-book, Google+, LinkedIn and Twitter are the leading social networking sites.

Six Degrees.com was the first social site from 1997 to 2001. It was followed in 2002 by Friendster and MySpace a year later. Started by two friends, MySpace became extremely popular, and its parent company, Intermix, was acquired by News Corporation for $580 million two years after MySpace was launched.

Face-book came out in 2004 targeting college students, but when it opened to everyone, it grew exponentially to become the top social site. Two years later, Twitter was launched with a different approach but created its own revolution within a short time. Members create an online profile with biographical data, photos and any other information they choose to post. They communicate with each other by making their latest thoughts public in a blog-like format or via e-mail, instant messaging, voice or video-conferencing to selected members. Began for personal use it migrated to business purposes where companies went to use social sites to advertise products, gain brand recognition, as well as expand traffic to their main web-sites.

Consumer Behaviour.

During the 1950s, concept of marketing was flourished and the need to study of consumer behaviour became inevitable for all companies. Companies were going to think that everything is centered around the consumer, therefore, the first step of marketing is assessing the needs of the consumer and the last step in the wheel is satisfying the consumer.

Consumer behaviour is the study of individuals, groups, or organizations and all the activities associated with the purchase, use and disposal of goods and services, including the consumer's emotional, mental and behavioural responses that precede or follow these activities (Wikipedia.org)

Consumer Behaviour refers to "the mental and emotional processes and the observable behavior of consumers during searching for, purchasing and post consumption of a product or service"(Kazmi & Akhtar, 2013).

Understanding Consumer Behaviour and "knowing about the customers" are not very simple. It is almost impossible to predict with a hundred percent accuracy, how a consumer will behave in a given situation. The consumers are moved by a complex set of subtle behaviours, hence almost impossible to comprehend. Despite this fact, marketers are interested in watching people shopping flirting parading playing interacting as they are keenly interested in the wide variety of behaviours they display. The purpose of every marketer is to influence the behavior of consumers.

Linkage between Social Networking and Consumer Behaviour

Today, Social media has enabled millions of internet users to have access to numerous opinions on any product at the mere click of a mouse. The first aspect of Social media is that it is viral, which means that it allows information to travel faster than light.

The second aspect of social media is that it has given a big boost to transparency and made answerability of the companies to their consumers an inevitable outcome of the use of social media. Lee (2010) contends that social media has become vastly popular for "normal people" because it allows anyone to interact with content or deliver it. In recent years, social media have become a new hybrid component of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) that allow organizations to establish strong relationships with their consumers (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).With high levels of self-disclosure and social presence (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), Social Networking Sights (SNSs) have recently outpaced email as the most popular online activity (Nielsen Online 2009), and have enabled consumers to connect with others by exchanging information, opinions and thoughts about products and brands.

Studies indicated that social media is important for marketers because it allows them to dialogue directly with consumers, which in turn engages consumers directly with company brands(Hanlon & Hawkins, 2008). Many companies, such as Audi and Dunkin' Donuts have used social media very effectively to reach consumers. According to Wasserman (2011), out of all other brands on Face-book, Audi's fans are the most engaged of all major corporate brands on Face-book. The findings obtained by Altaf (2014) indicated that individuals pursue an active role in information search on social media comparing to mass media.

Electronic Word Of Mouth (eWOM)

The role of eWOM in consumer's decision making has been well recognized in marketing. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) defined eWOM as 'any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet' (p. 39). eWOM occurs on a wide range of online channels, such as blogs, emails, consumer review websites and forums, virtual consumer communities, and Social net-working sights. Impact of eWOM on consumers' decision-making processes (De Bruyn & Lilien 2008) and attitude towards the brand and the website (Lee et al. 2009)have been examined in earlier investigations. The results obtained by Chu and Kim (2011) confirm that tie strength, trust, normative and informational influence are positively associated with users' overall eWOM behaviour, whereas a negative relationship was found with regard to homophile. Luo et al. (2013) have suggested that the anonymity of online messages could have a negative effect on their

credibility. In contrast Hussain et al. (2017) have pointed that consumers use eWOM to reduce risks during decision-making. E-WOM would be more credible when it is used by experienced consumer (Sotiriadis and Van Zyl, 2013).

Conceptually, eWOM in SNSs can be examined through three aspects: opinion seeking, opinion giving and opinion passing. Past research has frequently viewed opinion seeking and opinion giving as two important dimensions of offline WOM. Another important yet overlooked dimension of Internet-based eWOM is opinion-passing behaviour (Norman & Russell 2006; Sun et al. 2006). Sun et al. (2006) suggested that eWOM facilitates the flow of information. Opinion-passing behaviour is more likely to occur in an online social context, as the unique characteristics of the Internet can facilitate multidirectional communication, and with a few clicks of the mouse, consumers can 'spread the word' on a global scale (Dellarocas, 2003; Norman & Russell, 2006).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:
The objective of this study is to provide empirical support for the effect of Social networking on Consumers behavior with the help of a Self-Formulated Questionnaire. With this view that social networking clearly ruling the consumer behaviour landscape, this study aims to understand what works and what doesn't in the world of consumer behavior. This study will be helpful to understand the pros and cons of the presence of consumer's opinions on social networking and the mitigating effects that the companies can employ to deal with those opinions which are not in their favour alongwith those aspects of social networking that consumers find less reliable than the others. This study aspires to understand the effect of social networking on consumer's behaviour through the lens of the target group i.e. "the consumers.

METHODOLOGY:
Sample:
In order to meet the requirement of the study, the questionnaire was mailed to 100 consumers / respondents. Out of them a total number of 61 responses were received from consumers / respondents. Information of social networking users regarding to their gender are 39 male and 22 female respondents.

Tools:
An online questionnaire made with the help of google forms application was sent across to the consumers. The self -formulated questionnaire consisted of 15 closed- ended questions is used for the study.

Procedure:
The respondents were asked to answer on the self-formulated questionnaire consisted of 15 closed- ended questions to examine the effect of social networking on consumer's behavior. The focus was on "Consumer's Perspective". A survey method was used by administering the questionnaire on the subjects. Primary data was collected through the questionnaires filled by consumers The answers received from the consumers were the first-hand information. The secondary data was collected through journals, encyclopedia, books etc. The survey was administered on the consumers spread across different geographical regions of India.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION:
Results and their interpretations have been given in following manner:
Consumer prefer to buy online products mostly in following manner.

Cloths	Books	Laptops and Accessories	Mobiles and Tablets	Cameras	Watches	Bags, Wallets and Belts	Beauty and personal care	Home and kitchen	Other
14	7	18	10	01	02	01	06	01	01
23%	11%	30%	16%	02%	03%	02%	10%	02%	02%

The top three categories that the consumers prefer to buy online are laptops and accessories (30%), Clothing (23%) and Mobiles and Tablets (16%). It needs to be noted that the percentage of online buyers(10%) is double the percentage of online browsers(5) for beauty and personal care products due to the reason that the consumption of beauty and personal care products is mostly driven by advertisements featured in television and women's magazines, hence females can get these products by ordering online.

Mean scores of Male and Female respondents

Gender	Print media	Social Media	TV	Colleague	Shop-keeper
Male	3.10	3.55	3.28	3.50	2.55
Female	3.27	4.36	4.00	3.81	3.00

Result table shows that males prefer TV and social media to the same degree and rank shopkeeper as the least preferred source whereas females prefer social media the most and also rank shopkeeper as the least preferred source. Thus, Social media is the most preferred option for both males and females. Contrary to popular beliefs females are not influenced by the shop-keepers opinions about products. Social media is ranked highest and shopkeeper is ranked lowest.

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