

Understanding Framework for Social Media Marketing Research

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SOCIAL MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

We are living in an ever-growing era of new technologies and media surrounded by various social applications, tools, profiles along with enormous social connectivity. People's lives have become highly social and active; impact of which is global online connectivity. Today everyone is spending a massive amount of their time on social media; people are networking, creating acquaintances, discussing, exploring and sharing a far-reaching content over the various social channel. There is a mini virtual world existing on contemporary media that runs upon the content of varied types like images, tweets, text, blogs, videos and so on.



Fig. 1:

Social media has fostered a sense of community among the people, and they feel intrinsically connected, which was not possible a decade ago. **Griffith & Tengahan, in 2009** stated that various Social networks such as Twitter and Facebook have always encouraged their subscribers to come up with an online persona. They provide them with a platform wherein they can build a personal network of friends and can easily connect to the open worldwide community.

Today, in the current marketing scenario, a consumer is exposed to many communications, literally bombarded by the information. It has become almost impossible to seek consumers' attention. The competition and increased level of awareness have made the consumers skeptical towards the brands. Before buying any product or services, consumers now want to know more about their choices and seek the opinion of friends as well as colleagues. Conventional methods of advertising are falling short of fulfilling ever-growing expectations of consumers. This situation has forced companies to look for new innovative and unconventional means of communication.

Social media not only enables companies to communicate their brand directly but also allows them to engage their end users on one to one basis at meager cost with maximum reach. **Social media has emerged as low cost, specific, direct and focused way of marketing communication tool.** In, a short period it has become most relevant communication media, not only to the large multinational but also to the medium and small businesses.

Social media has an advantage for the companies, i.e., to reach millions of customers with just one push of the button. At the same time, now consumer also has the opportunity to, connect with millions of satisfied and unsatisfied users of one brand before making a buying decision. Companies, on the one side, have the potential to reach and engage the consumers. On the other hand, their brands are directly under the scrutiny of consumers. Now the big challenge is "how to tap the power of social media as an advantage for the brand in an effective and balanced way."

RESEARCH CHALLENGE

The Marketing communication is a complicated process. It is a process by which, companies offer their services or products or project organizational values to their target audience. This communication effort can be planned based on the various models and theories. Communication is an effort by which companies share their information and expect the audience to interpret their meaning embedded in the message and respond accordingly.

Social media strategy should empower brands to cut across all the barriers of language and culture, cults and ethnic groups, social and economic, segmenting markets appropriately to reach and influence their target audience. Social media strategy should be customized in tandem with their established brand identity and vision of the companies.

Social media is a virtual marketing warfare domain for the companies, which is very fast moving and ever-changing. Companies should be willing to innovate, take calculated risks to create and expand consumer mind space. One wrong move can tarnish the brand image and adversely affect the growth of the companies.

As a researcher, you have to deal with the following critical focus areas.

1. Why do companies use social media?
2. How do companies use social media in their marketing communication?
3. How social media play a role in Brand Strategy?
4. What are the tools available for the Social Media Marketing?
5. How does social media, impact the Brand Equity?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The strategy for answering these questions is to engage in a study of the literature concerned with similar studies and then to proceed with theoretical and empirical analysis. In drawing a conceptual framework for social media marketing study, an appropriate theoretical framework is required to understand the empirical research.

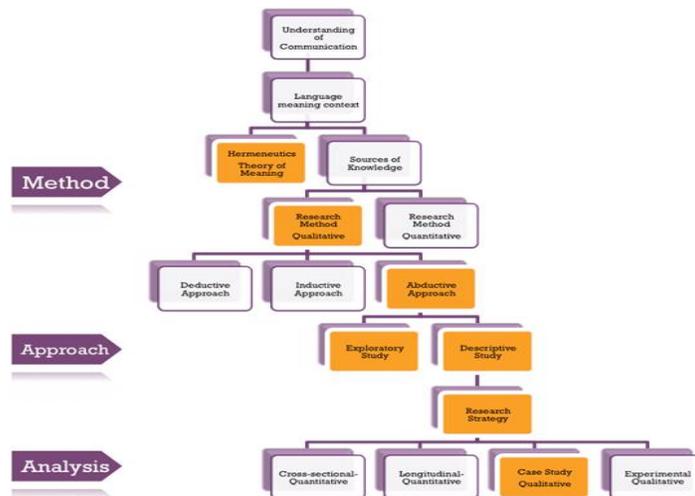


Figure 2: Methodology- Flow Chart of Conceptual Framework

Fig. 2 explains the overview of the entire research methodology.

A researcher can use Interpretive Technique based on the Hermeneutics. This Interpretive Technique is the theory to interpret text with a broader aspect which includes verbal, written, and non-verbal communication. Hermeneutics interpret the meaning of experiences, acts, symbols, and texts.

Modern hermeneutics comprises of both nonverbal and verbal communication as well as presuppositions, semiotics, and pre-understanding. To draw any conclusive result from a text, firstly we have to understand its meaning. The central theme in hermeneutics has been that the definition of a part can only be realized if it is related to the whole. This is shown in the so-called hermeneutic circle. The part can only be understood from the whole and the whole only from the part.

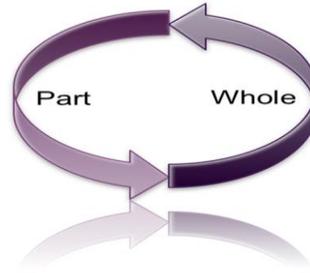


Figure 3: Hermeneutic circle Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000, s.53)

Sometimes text does not give us any specific information until we look at the entire context as a whole. Social media communication is largely, based on text and visual components. One has to decipher the meaning of it with different perspectives. We have to experience communication using our senses and logic to understand how and why companies are using social media in their marketing.

RESEARCH METHOD

The quantitative approach is largely based on statistical data collected from the large sample size and works best when you have a predefined problem area. On the other hand, qualitative approach focuses on the in-depth understanding of human behavior and understands the reasons behind such behavior.

The qualitative method outlines the decision-making process rather than what, where and when. Hence, data sample size may be smaller, but it is focused samples. For social media since consumer horizon is so vast, one can easily miss the focus. Depending on the objective a researcher on do audience segmentation and adopt a qualitative approach.

There are various options available for the qualitative researchers to choose from the data collection methods, still the widely used method is qualitative research review. To collect data one can even use observations and field notes, group discussions, pictures, various texts and other material.

RESEARCH APPROACH

While working on a research project, it is imperative to decide which research approach would be the best according to your area of research. There are primarily two kinds of research approaches deductive and inductive.

Deductive research approach allows the research to establish a hypothesis by using theory. To confirm or reject any hypothesis and to solve the issue, providing the outcome, the researcher have to collect a variety of information and data.

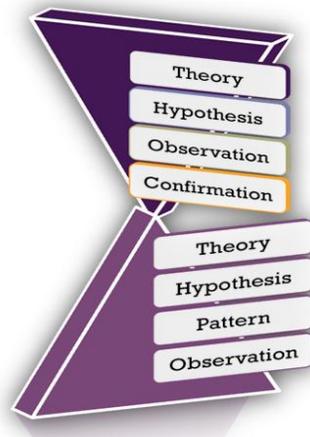


Figure 4: Deductive Vs. Inductive Approach (Trochim 2011)

Unlike deductive research, Inductive research is way more flexible. It is because it doesn't need or have a pre-determined theory to collect information or data. The researcher uses the facts along with the observed data to reach a tentative hypothesis and then define a theory as per the research problem. It helps in obtaining inductive arguments from the research.

Another way to understand both the researches are, the first one, i.e., the deductive research approach is based on general idea wherein it is used to reach a specific situation. It is even related to the positivism paradigm. On the other hand, the second research, i.e., the inductive approach mainly works for a specific idea in which it generalizes the situation as per the research topic. It is related to the interpretivism paradigm. The Inductive approach with the help of various real-life examples, try to provide subjective reasoning to the researchers.

These two methods are usually taken up by the researcher as the only options, but it would be difficult to fit all the research into only two approaches. By using both methods, it is effortless to estimate a logical and correct result, but it is necessary for the analysis to combine right pieces of these approaches.

Probably the Abduction reasoning which shall be used in this case. Abductive approach inferences to the best explanation and selects a logical set of preconditions. After which it gives a valid conclusion along with a rule. It tries to choose a few of the possible aspects which in case turn out to be true can be used to support the outcome. For Example: "When it rains, the grass gets wet. The grass is outside, and nothing outside is dry, therefore: maybe it rained."

Abductive approach is a wise choice for a researcher. It interprets the problem from a hypothetical point of view, taking some valid preconditions as if it were correct. Then that interpretation is validated by newer observations. This method has some features of both induction and deduction method. Abduction is based on empirical facts as well as induction, but at the same time, it considers all theoretical conceptions. Though it does not argue that it is the absolute truth, still, it tries to explain the phenomenon.

A researcher can also choose the Descriptive and Explanatory methods. Through exploratory mode, one can gain familiarity with a phenomenon or acquire new insight into it to formulate a more precise problem or develop a hypothesis. This will generally answer the "what" component of a question. Whereas the "how" component of the question is answered by the descriptive method. Descriptive research mainly deals in describing things, like the potential of a product or the demographics as well as attitudes of consumers who are interested in buying the product. These methods will enable us to know the efficacy and purpose of social media and will also aid us in finding the cause of why and how companies use social media.

ANALYSIS: CASE STUDY STRATEGY

A case study can be defined as the analysis of events, periods, persons, policies, projects, decisions, institutions as well as other systems which are studied with the help of one or more methods. The case remains the subject for which whole analysis is being done, it will be a class of phenomena which will provide the analyzer with an analytical frame, or you can say an object. In that frame only, the study will be conducted.

It is an empirical inquiry which elaborates the process within its real-life context. Case study research might consist of either one or more case studies. It relies on multiple sources of evidence, which can include data from quantitative or qualitative evidence or both, and at the same time take advantage of the prior development of theoretical propositions.

Case Study Strategy goes into deeper layers of understanding and underlying phenomenon to obtain the results. This strategy is required to investigate the social media marketing efforts of chosen brands with deeper understanding questions.

CONCLUSION

The structure of Communication has undergone complex and substantial developments and alterations. How we used to communicate a decade ago, is no more like, how we communicate now. Change is inevitable but what advantages it is bringing for the people -- is essential to see. Technological advancement has brought enormous changes in our communication infrastructure making it reachable and easily accessible in the form of mass communication.

It will be erratic even to assume that social media has a shallow future instead it has a tremendous scope of becoming even more prominent than its present resume. Not only, it has enhanced the social connectivity but assured great sustenance to the business world too. There are already numerous brands which are doing immensely well with the exposure of social

media networks such as Nike, Flipkart, Amazon, Airbnb, Bajaj Auto, Coca-Cola, and many more. Companies like IBM, Google, and Microsoft are reinforcing their social networks through Facebook and Twitter. Not only the distinct brands but small business and developing brands also trying to make their niche through social media marketing.

Some of the most prevalent social media channels are Facebook, Google+, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, Hi5, Flickr, Tumblr, etc. The rising time of social media is bringing forth enthralling possibilities of reaching and serving a vast number of internet users.

One more, underlying reason to assure the longevity of social media is, to have convenient access to technology. Smartphones, tablets, computers, mobile devices have made the access to social media so much easier and instantaneous, it's like, the people are just a click or touch away, and this is not a casual circumstance instead it has given a big boost to interpersonal communication on an all-inclusive level. Geographic boundaries are no more a hurdle because of social media virtually everyone is connected in real time. As per Omrcen in 2009, The technology had a significant impact on the world as well as have changed the way people use to communicate, it can be a topic for debate.

Specifically, in the Indian context, social media has a vast scope of survival and growth. Here social has already become extremely popular and familiar; people are making its use in the field of marketing, branding, social interactions, research, campaigning, awareness, and even for political purposes too. In precise, we can liberally assert that social media has come to stay for a long time because it is reaching to the people on a remarkable pace. It has enabled the commercial world to reach across the globe, and no business can afford to ignore it. At the social level too, people are reaching out and apparently; they would not want to go back to the world of hindered connections. What is required is to utilize the credibility of social media wisely.

Social media too has undergone many changes its reach and relevance all have changed now it is not just limited to the social aspect but, also impacting the economic, political and psychological aspects of our lives. Earlier communication shaped social media—now social media is shaping our communications.

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