



SOCIAL MEDIA AS AN EFFECTIVE TOOL OF COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

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ABSTRACT

Indian market environment has become highly competitive and dynamic. In order to achieve sustainable growth the Indian companies have to evolve innovative marketing strategies to become highly competitive and customer friendly. This poses major challenges to the companies and there is a need for periodic assessment of ever changing consumer needs and preferences and connect with them so as to create friendly associations and affinity. It is imperative that companies should come out with effective Social Media marketing strategies for achieving competitive advantage. The successful Indian companies were able to come out with the right Social Media marketing strategies to understand and meet ever changing customer needs and preferences. This paper analyses the Social Media strategy adopted by the Indian companies

Keywords: *Social Media, Live the Moment, Brand loyalty, Brand Equity, Customer Relationship, Competitive Advantage*

INTRODUCTION

Hagel and Armstrong (1997) indicate that on-line communities meet four types of consumer needs: (1) interest, (2) relationship building, (3) transaction, and (4) fantasy. *Communities of interest* are formed by individuals with a shared interest, expertise, and passion in a wide range of areas such as interior design, sports cars, or bird watching. Social media marketing is an engagement with various social media tools or any other online collaborative media to generate exposure, opportunity and sales. Social media marketing refers to the process of gaining traffic or attention through social media sites. Social networking sites allow individuals to interact with one another and build relationships. When products or companies join those sites, people can interact with the

product or company. That interaction seems personal to users because of their previous experiences with social networking site interactions. Social networking sites such as Twitter Facebook, YouTube, and blogs allow individual followers to “retweet” or “repost” comments made by the product being promoted. Social media itself is a catch-all term for sites that may provide radically different social actions. For instance, Twitter is a social site designed to let people share short messages or “updates” with others. Facebook, in contrast is a full-blown social networking site that allows for sharing updates, photos, joining events and a variety of other activities.

Virtual Internet communities can tap primarily into five potential sources for revenues (Hagel & Armstrong, 1997): (1) subscription fees, for example, a fixed monthly charge for participation in the community; (2) usage fees, for example, a charge based on the number of hours of usage or the number of web sites accessed or a combination of the two; (3) member fees, for example, a charge for downloading specific information; (4) advertising commission; and (5) transaction commission. We argue that advertising and transaction commissions represent the most sustaining business model for virtual Internet communities because the first three business models impede positive network effects (Arthur, 1996) as they slow down and limit growth and usage of the community.

By repeating the message, all the users who are connected are able to see the message, thereby reaching more number of people. Social networking sites act as word of mouth. Because of the dissemination of information about the product through social networking sites, products/companies can have conversations and interactions with individual followers. This personal interaction can instill a feeling of loyalty into followers and potential customers. Also, by choosing whom to follow on these sites, products can reach a very narrow target audience. Social networking is a wonderful tool for establishing a brand. A reputed brand always commands highest recall value among the consumers. And in today’s context, nothing can help in building a brand better than social networking. Websites like Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Friend Feed etc. have proved so crucial for building a strong brand name. These social networking sites are extremely useful in promoting company’s products/services. People having a website, blog, or online business can do much better for themselves using above mentioned networking sites.

LinkedIn has membership of over 14,000,000 professionals. Out of this 500,000 are senior executives from 498 Fortune 500 companies. There will be addition of 65,000 new professionals every week. Average household income of these members is US \$130,000 having an average work experience of 15 years. More than a third of American adult internet users (36%) consult the citizen-generated online encyclopedia Wikipedia. Credibility of Wikipedia has been called into question. Regardless of this, Wikipedia receives top placement on Google and almost 10% of daily Internet users visit the site. Stumble Upon has more than 3.5 million users. Twitter provides plenty of marketing opportunities to build a company profile, network with users and post links to articles. Stumble Upon user can Submit articles, photos and videos, force friends to stumble user’s articles, join groups, add friends, review friends, grab successful stories and add to Digg, Reddit and other social networks. With “Digg” Marketing Opportunities available are to write “linkbait”, have a popular or top user submit company’s story (or become one!), network with other Digg users by soliciting diggs from IM, StumbleUpon, Facebook, etc. As subscriptions and traffic increase, track blog posts that mention company’s article and link to the company. Marketers can also use Google alerts and trackbacks if the companies are on a blog system like Wordpress. Social networking is particularly useful for start-ups and individuals willing to offer quality services. Joining a popular social networking site is an essential part of brand building strategy. The networking factor helps in building relationships which in turn results into promotion of business. Online success cannot be achieved without building a strong brand name. Social networking helps the companies in socialising and providing quality content.

In today's competitive market environment companies need to use Social Media to build long term relationship and affinity with the prospects and customers.

Strong digital trust is a cornerstone of brands being able to move buyers from inspiration to confidence. Certainly this requires designing and building all products and services with a security element in mind.

It also involves privacy and data control—offering value in exchange for information, and taking accountability for the data in the company's possession.

It is on to engage the consumer, and the stakes are high. The industry is showing consumers the relevance of smart devices and inspiring purchases among early adopters.

To achieve widespread appeal and mainstream adoption, consumers need confidence in the:

- Service or device
- Experience
- Brand

For any brand in the digital world today, the need of the hour is **Digital Consumer Engagement** – the ability to engage with their consumers using digital and social media. The three fundamental business needs for Social Media Marketing are: Engaging with consumers in a structured and sustained manner, Deriving deep consumer insights, and Influencing brand advocacy

Through widespread access to and use of electronic devices, consumers today are more connected to one another, and to the world around them, than ever before. Questions that once required a trip to the library, a visit to an expert, or waiting on hold on the phone can now be answered within seconds just by clicking a few buttons. Far away relatives can now not only speak long-distance but enjoy a full meal together over video chat. Product pricing and information that was once shared by in-store salespeople can now be found on countless retail websites and consumer review platforms. For consumers with smartphones, these connections are even closer and available at any time of day in any place.

THE FIVE PILLARS OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

Any and all forms of Social Media Marketing tactics fall under at least one of these five forms of action. Often the same channel will incorporate two or more of these:

1. Declaration of Identity
2. Identity through Association
3. User-initiated Conversation
4. Provider-initiated Conversation
5. In-Person Interaction

SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN

The Objective is to build brand loyalty and relationships. Components of Social Network Campaign being part of the conversation fostering dialogue on social networks, shift in power from brand to consumer, building relationships with users on social networks, E-commerce functionality on social networks, such as Facebook., Viral marketing and word-of-mouth marketing .Social Network Campaign Management is done

through Profile monitoring, Fans turning on/against brands, Empowered fans. Research Findings indicate that Brand must use transparent communication. Here users do not want to purchase products and services via their profile page. Brands and marketers must listen to their friends/fans and any brand can benefit from social networks. Engage users far beyond the first transaction. User comments and suggestions offer real value. Great creative is the key to effective engagement. Social ads help build relationship between brand and the user. Loyalty and trust is the key metric not the number of friends or fans.

MARUTI SUZUKI'S SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN

Maruti Suzuki is India and Nepal's number one leading automobile manufacturer and the market leader in the car segment, both in terms of volume of vehicles sold and revenue earned. Until recently, 18.28% of the company was owned by the Indian Government and 54.2% by Suzuki of Japan.

Maruti Udyog Limited (MUL) was established in February 1981, though the actual production commenced in 1983 with the Maruti 800, which was at that time was the only modern car available in India, its only competitors- the Hindustan Ambassador and Premier Padmini were both around 25 years out of date at that point. Through 2004, Maruti Suzuki has produced over 5 Million vehicles. Maruti Suzuki cars are sold in India and various several other countries, depending upon export orders. The company exports more than 50,000 cars annually and has an extremely large domestic market in India selling over 730,000 cars annually. Maruti 800, till 2004, was the India's largest selling compact car ever since it was launched in 1983. More than a million units of this car have been sold worldwide so far. Currently, Maruti Suzuki Alto tops the sales charts. Its manufacturing facilities are located at two facilities Gurgaon and Manesar south of Delhi. Maruti Suzuki's Gurgaon facility has an installed capacity of 350,000 units per annum. The Manesar facilities, launched in February 2007 comprise a vehicle assembly plant with a capacity of 100,000 units per year and a Diesel Engine plant with an annual capacity of 100,000 engines and transmissions. Manesar and Gurgaon facilities have a combined capability to produce over 10,00,000 units annually. More than half the cars sold in India are Maruti Suzuki cars. Maruti Suzuki Ritz which was launched in the year 2009 is one of the most popular hatchback cars in India. It is targeted to young audiences who prefer a stylish car with excellent performance and sporty design. In the Indian auto market Suzuki Splash is known as Maruti Suzuki Ritz. Maruti Suzuki has changed its name because the name "Splash" was already registered by Ford.

In India Maruti Ritz is available with nine variants, five with petrol and rest four with diesel engine options. The petrol variants of Maruti Ritz are powered by the company's popular 1.2L, 1197 cc, K12M KB series petrol engine. This engine is getting much popularity in the Indian market because of its excellent performance and fuel efficiency. The light weight all aluminum K12M engine delivers 85 PS (63 kW; 84 hp) of maximum power at 6000 rpm with 113 N·m (83 lb·ft) of maximum torque 4000 rpm. The mileage it delivers in city is around 14.5kmpl in city and 18kmpl on highway.

The diesel variants of Maruti Ritz are powered by the Fiat's 1.3L Multijet diesel engine. The 1.3L, 1248 cc, DDiS diesel engine which is well known for its excellent fuel efficiency. The power it delivers is lower than the petrol version but is sufficient for any hatchback car. This engine delivers 75 PS (55 kW; 74 hp) of maximum power at 4000 rpm with 190 Nm (140 lb·ft) of maximum torque at 2000 rpm. The mileage it delivers is 17.7 kmpl in city while on highway it gives 21kmpl.

Immediately after its launch Maruti Suzuki Ritz received overwhelming response and support from the customers and dealers

There were around 100,000 cars sold in the segment in October 2010. Maruti Suzuki Ritz sold over 100,000 cars in just over a year. To celebrate the achievement Maruti Suzuki Ritz wanted to create excitement and pride amongst Ritz owners as well as reach out to potential customers.

There was considerable increase in the Maruti Suzuki Ritz's online community. While answering fans' queries and concerns, Maruti wanted to reinforce the message of the smart car by creating excitement and fun there by increasing the participation.

MARUTI SUZUKI'S MARKETING OBJECTIVES

The objective of the social media campaign was to facilitate people to share the moments of their lives. With the Ritz as the focus point, company intended to get Ritz owners together on a social platform and build pride and excitement among the Ritz owners and their friends and family. The target was to collect 25,000 moments in 2 months.

Maruti Suzuki launched social media program to help Ritz owners to connect with each other along with their friends, and family. This was to complement the mass media campaign around 'Live the moment' and build further buzz around the brand.

The initiative was led by the marketing team at Maruti Suzuki and sought to engage the existing Ritz owners to play up the feeling of pride in owning the car as well as their friends and family who could potentially be future customers.

IMPLEMENTATION:

The strategy was implemented across all social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, auto blogs and forums and resulted in a microsite which helped to collate all the moments from participants and share it among their friends and family.

The 'Live the moment' microsite allowed users to login to the site using their Facebook or Twitter account or by registering on the site. They could then submit any moment in their lives that was memorable to them. The best moments had a chance to win attractive prizes including a Maruti Suzuki Ritz car. To win this prize a person had to collect a minimum number of votes before the jury would look at his entry.

The website allowed the user to invite his friends on Facebook and Twitter to vote for him as well as a feature by which he could invite all his email contacts as well. Using APIs, a contact importer was built through which the user could fetch all the contacts from email.

All moments were shown as pixels on the moment's wall, to view any moment one had to simply click at the pixel. The site featured a search by which one could locate moments using their moment number or the name of the participant. There was even a live stream built-in where the moments were displayed as soon as they were entered.

To create a full 360 degree impact, on ground promotion as also undertaken at Café coffee Days and PVR Cinemas across the country. Promoters collected moments from users offline and the website provided them an import facility to add these moments to the Moments Wall.

IMPACT AND OUTCOME OF “LIVE THE MOMENT” CAMPAIGN:

During the campaign close to 50,000 unique entries were submitted by users. More than 2.2 million users visited the microsite. Around 2 lakhs votes were received by entrants. More than 1 lakh fans added to the Maruti Suzuki Ritz Facebook page.

The overwhelming response was mainly due to the fact that people wanted to share their experiences with regard to the car they loved most. While the program allowed people to enter any moment, most of the entries were revolving around their experiences with Ritz.

By connecting through social media network the company was able to reach large number of participants covering large section of society with very small media budget.

The “Live the Moment” became a most successful social media campaign of Maruti Suzuki for its Ritz car. Not only creating excitement and interest among its online fans community it also propelled the interest of other stakeholders such as customers, dealers, employees, and media.

Maruti Suzuki has been ranked the top most Indian brand in the social media space, according to NM Incite—a joint venture between Nielsen and Mckinsey & Company. The auto brand has taken the lead because of its strong performance across social media platforms replacing Samsung Mobile at the top spot, said the Nielsen-McKinsey report.

Maruti Suzuki enjoys strong sentiments and high volumes of conversations on auto forums that include blogs, boards and social media sites Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, the report said.

SOCIAL MEDIA FUTURE CHALLENGES

Social media, once the domain of younger, techsavvy consumers, has gradually entered the mainstream and covers the broad demographic spectrum. Although the intensity of usage is very high in metros and urban areas the social media is becoming increasingly popular among the younger generation in semi-urban areas. With the increase in popularity of E-Chaupal initiatives of ITC and E-Governance initiatives of state governments there is a considerable increase in the usage of social media in the rural areas. Social media is no longer a platform for friends to stay connected in real time social media is gaining its popularity among the organisations as an effective communication tool. Less than 10% of Fortune 500 companies know, understand the value, and correctly use social media. Almost all social media campaigns are too generic and unfocused. Most social media campaigns don't last long enough to be valuable and expect too much in too little time.

CONCLUSION

The Social Media campaign helped Maruti Suzuki in boosting the sales of Maruti Suzuki Ritz. This also resulted in connecting with the existing Ritz customers, fans and the dealers. This campaign was very useful for the company in creating the awareness and the brand preference for Maruti Ritz cars. As Social networking is particularly useful for start-ups and individuals willing to offer quality services, joining a popular social networking site is an essential part of brand building strategy. The networking factor helps in building relationships which in turn results into promotion of business. Online success cannot be achieved without building a strong brand name. Social networking helps in socialising and providing quality content. According to Chairman R.C.Bhargava; the Maruti Ritz “Live the moment” social media campaign was a great success. Using an integrated marketing approach involving digital, marketing and wide dealer network, Maruti was able

to take the Maruti Ritz to consumers' doorstep. This also resulted in multiple positive conversations on new mediums. The overwhelming response Maruti received from this campaign has boosted the Ritz's popularity to a higher level. The success of "Live the Moment" social media campaign of Maruti Ritz is mainly attributed to their multi-pronged strategy of using Social Media campaign along with the Print, TV and Outdoor advertisements. This campaign built high brand preference for Ritz cars, which in turn became most preferred car in its category. Maruti Suzuki has used Social Media as an effective tool of competitive advantage and reaped the benefits as a category leader.

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