ABSTRACT

Technology and the boom of the internet have encouraged people to connect with each other, allocate information and build relationships and the social web has presented a new appearance of communication through social media which allow people to interact and converse with each other. This presents marketers with the opportunity to affect consumers purchase decisions through online marketing and social media. This social engagement by customers has major impact on marketing activities as marketers need to be aware of the factors affecting consumer’s purchase decision. The paper is related to the impact of social media on consumer behavior, therefore it has been made a descriptive research. The sample counted 100 respondents and from the statistical viewpoint, the conclusions were established in terms of the percentage analysis. Following the analysis of the research variables we can make a consumer profile that uses social media. Likewise, after doing the complex statistical analysis, it can be seen how much it is influenced and the real impact of social media reflected in the behavior changes.

Keywords: Social media, Online buying, Consumer behavior

INTRODUCTION

Globalisation as described by Hill is the shift towards a new integrated and interdependent world economy thereby merging historically diverse and separate national markets into one huge global marketplace. The Economic Intelligence Unit reported that during the recession, the global market place was affected by changes in exchange rates, inflation and consumer purchasing behaviour. These changes in the economy forced organisations to remodel business strategies in order communicate their brands more effectively. One of an organisation’s most valuable assets is its brand and the modern organisation needs to realise that capitalising on its brand is important as it can help achieve growth, profitability objectives and sustainability. Brands can be built by means of advertising, meeting customer specific needs, associating a specific type of image to a product, identifying and closing a gap that competitors have not identified, aggressive communication and pricing strategies. As recessions are times of high anxiety, it was important for organisations to keep honest, open channels of communication and maintain a good reputation in the most cost effective way. One of the most popular means of communicating brands during the recession was through social media marketing; online or electronic media which facilitates participation, openness, conversation, community and connectivity amongst online users.

Social media such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are active tools that facilitate online relationships. It is a relatively low cost form of marketing and allows organisations to engage in direct and end-user contact. Given the choices made available to consumers and the dominant role of social media marketing, the brands and consumers have a changing role to play in the organisation’s strategy in that they now have an economic impact. Brands influence customer choice. Customers influence
other customers. These chains of actions affect repurchases, which further affect potential earnings and long term organisational sustainability.

DEFINITIONS

Social Media
It includes natural and general conversation among people about a topic of mutual interest (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Linkedin and Blogs). Social media facilitates the exchange of information via email, chat rooms, blogs, discussion forums, digital audio, images and movies.

Consumer Buying Behaviour
Consumer buying behavior is how persons, groups and organizations to choose, purchase, use and disposal of products, services, ideas or experience to meet the consumers' expectations.

Online Shopping
“Online shopping is a form of electronic commerce which allows consumers to directly purchase goods or services from sellers over the internet using a web browser.”

CHARACTERISTICS OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

1. **Tone**: Social media is about honesty and being authentic. Marketers need to ensure that the message to the audience is credible and reliable;
2. **Conversation**: Social media marketing generates two ways conversation where the customer is an integral part of the marketing department. Customer opinions matter and impact on marketing strategy;
3. **Validation**: Buyer and consumer reviews are as influential as the marketer’s claims of the brands features and benefits. This sets the stage for the brand to meet consumers expectations;
4. **Reach**: Social media marketing allows marketers to reach a wider audience with more dramatic results in far less time and at lower costs; and
5. **Control**: Control is the single biggest challenge in social media marketing.

These social media platforms are defined by Mayfield (2008) as follows:

1. **Facebook**: This is a social network site which allows people to build personal web pages and connect to and communicate with friends;
2. **Linkedin**: Linkedin in most popularly known as the “grown up” social network. This social media platform allows users to build professional relationships in online environments;
3. **Blogs**: These are online journals which allow participants to share their thoughts via journal entries. Blogs often allow other users to comment on journal entries;
4. **Twitter**: This is a form of micro blogging where small amounts of content or updates are uploaded online through mobile media; and
5. **YouTube**: This is a site that allows users to upload and share videos with fellow community members.

LITARATURE REVIEW

1. Social media as explained by Evans (2010) is changing the way information is communicated to and from people around the world. The rapid use of social media such as blogs and other social networking sites and media-sharing technology is changing the way firms respond to consumer’s needs and wants and changing the way they respond to their competitors. Marketers now have the opportunity to engage in broader and new innovative forms of online mass media communications by using the social media marketing tools.
2. Stelzner (2011) writes that social media represents marketing opportunities which can connect firms directly with their customers. In the Social Media Marketing Report found that 90% of marketers indicated that social media was important to their business, 33% of marketers are forming metrics to measure social media as part of their return on investment (ROI), 58% use social media for up to six hours per week, 34% use social media for up to eleven hours per week, 70% of marketers want to learn more about Facebook.

3. Kotler et al., (2010) The popularity of social media marketing is due to the fact that social media is low cost and bias free and allows marketers to gain insight into markets. The vast amount of available information allows marketers to mine social networking data and engage in consumer profiling which ultimately results in better and more effective market communication strategies. Consumers have become more aware of the power of social media and are therefore capable to positively or negatively reinforce a brand. Loyal customers will act as a sales force, spreading a positive message about the brand through viral marketing and in particular online marketing such as social networking sites and blogs. Social media thus presents marketers with the opportunity to execute more emotional touch points in areas where consumers are able to connect with each other and share their experiences. These touch points are hugely emotional and offer marketers the opportunity to connect and engage with consumers correctly and generate exposure for the organisation’s brands.

RESEARCH PROBLEM
The social phenomena investigated in the research study that follows are the elements of consumer’s purchasing behaviour in online environments and the influence of social media marketing in the consumer’s purchase decision. The main problem which this study aims to address is how social media affected to behaviour of consumers.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY
The present research objectives:
1. Measuring the degree of consumer confidence in purchasing products online
2. Identifying the consumer profile that purchase products from online
3. Determining the reasons for which consumers purchase products online

SAMPLE OF THE STUDY
Here in this research the researcher has selected 100 users of the Rajkot city who are connected with social media for the study. Keep in view the problem, scope of the study and convenience. Sampling methods of choosing social media users were adopted to select the responding in the Rajkot city to represent an overall picture of the Rajkot city.

SOURCE OF DATA
Data collection is very important task for the research. This study is totally based on the primary data collected through the predesigned well structured questionnaires. The questionnaire mainly includes close ended questions. The major reason for choosing Rajkot city was its demographic nature and the Rajkot city being considered as one of the important city in Gujarat state.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY
This study gives a clear picture about the social media users. This study covers various important aspects like preference of consumer behaviour towards various social media sites. It also helpful in enhance the knowledge of the researcher. This study provides great contribution to the social media users, marketing field, and at last to society as a whole.
FINDINGS

1. From the received 100 questionnaires, 62 (%) of the respondents were female, and 38 (%) were male. Four different age groups are covered by collected data, they are 18 – 21 years old (7%), 22 – 25 years old (65%), 26 – 30 years old (25%), and 30 years old or more (3%).

2. It was identified that, among 4 age groups, social networking sites are being used most (98%), and micro blogging is being used least (11%); the rest were: blogs/ forums with 22 (%), social news with 18 (%), and photos and videos sharing with 63 (%).

3. Only 16 (%) of respondents tend to spend 10 hours or more per week on mass media whereas 27(%) of respondents spend on social media platforms. As it is seen, there is a sudden drop in between 4-6 hours (15%) and 7-9 hours (30%) usage in mass media channels per week. Despite the age groups, in combination of the answers, an individual spends an average of 6.2 hours on social media sites per week.

4. Among the list of factors, 79 (%) of respondents expressed that information from peers, friends, and family members are the cause of their prejudgment, in which the credibility of source of information is high. In contrary to the source of information from mass media, 70 (%) of the respondents claimed that information from the internet (such as user reviews, blog posts, forums, and so on) are one of the factors that influenced their attitudes towards a product or service.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

1. This study is limited to the Rajkot city only, so the generalization of the conclusion of the study may therefore not have universal applicability.

2. The time constraint has been a major limitation of the study,

3. The present study is limited to only 100 consumers of Rajkot city. Although care has been taken in sample selection the consumer in the present study may not be representative of the actual population.

4. Primary data was collected through questionnaire as such suffers from the subjectivity biases of the consumers.

5. Some of consumers may not respond honestly to some questions.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, we can say that social media have a major role in influencing the behavior of consumers in the virtual environment, particularly when the degree of exposure of messages and the relation created between the variety of information given and the consumer who is about to make a purchase. If we look from a company’s perspective, it should successfully back track mixed marketing policies in order to increase sales and, thus, the net turnover and market share. Based on the company’s size and on the products and services which they promote, they may use niche marketing for unique products or to respond to the demand of an increasingly large consumer pool. By improving the details of the product or by developing the concept of a total product, the company strengthens the relationship between potential buyers who constantly follow social media. Price strategies are in close relationship with strategies regarding the product and directly influence the behavior purchases to the buyer, and as Kotler said, at this given time, in the situation of the online boom, the price is the most significant part of the mix of online marketing.

REFERENCES
