

## Social Media Marketing for Successful Communication and Attraction of Consumers



Dr. Sweta Singh<sup>1</sup>



Mr. Yogesh Singh<sup>2</sup>

*Social media has to a great extent revolutionized the way Internet users communicate and interact with each other. Its use has also exploded in the last several years, so much that it now touches each and every facet of our lives. Therefore, it can be very well said that it has now become a major factor in influencing different aspects of consumer behaviour including awareness, information acquisition, opinions, attitudes, purchase behaviour, post-purchase communication and evaluation which are very important for increasing your business exposure. This has encouraged a large number of firms to capitalize on different approaches for promoting their products and services to consumers. However, there is much debate about the potential of social media as a platform for marketing, and the viable strategies that could constitute them as a possible solution for future ventures. Several researches have been conducted, however, only a limited number of studies have managed to explore the business potential of social media. Social media has become one of the primary tools for higher levels of fan engagement through proper content sharing. This paper aims to focus on how specific aspects of social media websites motivate the users to browse/search for products, and the effect it has on their purchase and information sharing intentions. It also focuses on how the customer base is engaged through social media. The data for the study has been obtained from 300 social media users across India. After extensive study the outcomes indicate that specific aspects such as convenience, adventure, idea and word of mouth, trigger the social media users. These impacts the users' intention to browse/search for products on social media platforms. Finally, it can be seen that browsing intention is linked significantly in a positive manner with the purchase intentions of consumers.*

**Keywords :** Social media, Online shopping, Purchase, Consumer, Communication.

### 1. Introduction

In a very short span of time, social media has managed to become one of the most loved mediums for each and every one. It has appropriately engaged and responded to the needs of the customers. Social media marketing has emerged as the hottest new marketing concept and every business owner wants to know how social media can be useful and supporting for their business. People are mostly social by nature and they collect and share information that is important to them. Social Media Marketing is about understanding how technology is making it easier for people to connect on these social networks and how this business-to-customer communication channel can be profitable for the marketers. It is a social instrument of two way communication that facilitates the sharing of information between users (O'Reilly, 2005). Anyone such as teenagers, youths, adults, women, men, affluent consumers, and older individuals can join a social network site. They can easily stay connected with their

friends, meet new acquaintances, share user-generated content such as photos, videos and text, and get informed about news and trends [1].

Various latest studies show that US users spend more than 22% of their online time on social networking websites and other social sites [2]; while according to a survey done by Nielsen [3] users in India spend more time on social media sites than on any other activity on the Internet. In addition to the increasing time that is spent on social media, user adoption has multiplied, with some prominent examples being Facebook (900 million users), Twitter (500 million users) and QZone (480 million users) [4]. The spectrum of social media however does not consist solely of social networking sites (SNS), but also encompasses a broad range of applications, such as media sharing (YouTube, Flickr, Jamendo), business and academia networking (LinkedIn, Academia), virtual worlds (Second Life), blogs (Blogspot), and many other platforms.

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor, ICAI University Jharkhand, sweta.fmsbhu@gmail.com

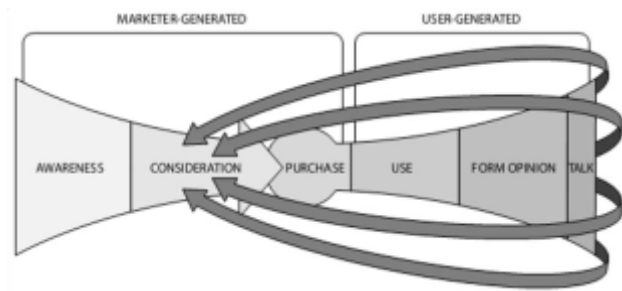
<sup>2</sup> Senior Research Scholar, Institute of Management Studies, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, yogeshfmsbhu1@gmail.com

Social networks have proved to be highly capable of informing and influencing the purchase decisions of consumers, as many users trust the opinion of their peer groups more than the marketing strategists. Customers also have the power to give their opinion about the brand and also broadcast their comments and opinions. Thus, marketers have no choice. They will have to respect their opinion, treat them differently and value their ideas. The different ways by which these social media platforms have managed to attract and retain users on their websites for longer periods of time has allured researchers in demarcating the facilitating factors of their success [5] and thus attracted a wide array of studies in this area.

The attention received by social media is however not just limited to research purposes only. There has been a great emphasis on the value that they may offer to the business organizations [6]. And it cannot be denied that over the past years business executives and marketers have also realized the business potential that these platforms may have for gaining a competitive edge [7], [8]. The richness of media supported by social media, in combination with the vast user base, enables them to be used as a unique tool for attracting new customers and gaining direct customer feedback. These aspects of social media combined with promising reports from early business adopters which state that 61% of companies are somewhat to very satisfied with the returns of their investment [9], have put pressure on companies to formulate strategies with the aim of harvesting this potential.

The Social Web acts as a stimulus to expose the good, the bad and the ugly experiences of the huge customer base. It rises up what works and puts down what doesn't without regard for the interests of any specific party or group.

Figure 1 shows the classic purchase funnel, connected to the Social Web through "digital word-of-mouth" (social media). It is popularly called as the "Social Feedback Cycle". This loop shows the expectation, the trial, the rating, and finally sharing the actual experience of every purchase or conversion process. Whether consumer-facing, B2B, for-profit or nonprofit, people are turning to people like themselves for seeking the information they need to make smart choices. Alongside the traditional media the consumers look for these new sources of information and guidance. Advertising and traditional communications are still very much a part of the overall marketing mix. The result is a new vetting that is impacting-sometimes positively, sometimes negatively-the efforts of businesses and organizations to grow their markets.



**Figure 1: "The Social Feedback Cycle".**

**Source :** Adapted from *Social Media Marketing, The Next Generation of Business Engagement* by Dave Evans and Jake Mckee; Wiley Publishing Inc., 2010; page 5.

Despite the rosy prospects of social media as a strategic tool for gaining a competitive advantage, a number of studies have revealed that in many occasions companies that have rushed into such websites without formulating a clear plan have not only failed to realize any gains, but have in some cases even had a damaging effect on their image [10]. Their low cost compared to conventional methods of marketing are the prime facilitating factors that have led to the wide engagement and involvement of companies in social media websites [11]. The users are the central theme of any social media platform and they are involved in media generation, circulation, and commenting on any content that is entered into the web, even that which is consumer-oriented or not related to them. It can be very well contended that the failure to see any return on the investments of marketing/business organizations is due to the lack of a well-defined social media strategy, which places emphasis on the particular aspects that users perceive as important. This friction between deployed approaches by firms and actual customer needs is apparent in many recent cases, where applications launched on social media by companies were either not used at all, or were for other purposes that suited consumer needs [11].

Thus it is apparent that there is a gap that exists between social media users and unsuccessful company strategies for product promotion. This can be attributed mainly because of the lack of solid empirical findings from the research areas to help and guide managers in increasing their decision making capability [12]. The small number of quantitative studies undermines promotional efforts undertaken by small and medium enterprises and their respective strategies, since in most cases they do not have the know-how compared to larger firms.

## 2. Theoretical Background

Various researches have been done till date however research on the business potential of social media is still relatively scarce. The effectiveness of social media as a tool for marketing and commerce in particular has remained at an abstract and theoretical level. In order to tackle and meet the research objective posed in this research we draw on literature regarding shopping motivations, social media, and browsing and purchase intentions from various previous studies and researches.

### 2.1. Research on Shopping Motivations

The shopping process is conceptualized as a sequential series of behaviour, along with the underlying motivations which lead to the purchase of an item [13]. It can be recognized that potential shoppers could be motivated to search and buy products and services by the use that they would probably make of a purchased product or a service. However, additional factors, such as socializing, satisfaction of the new purchase or simply wasting time have a profound impact on evoking people to purchase [13]. From Tauber's research it was found that people not only shop for the usability obtained from the purchased item, but also for the satisfaction perceived in the process of searching and purchasing. This practice has been seen largely in a large number of social media users.

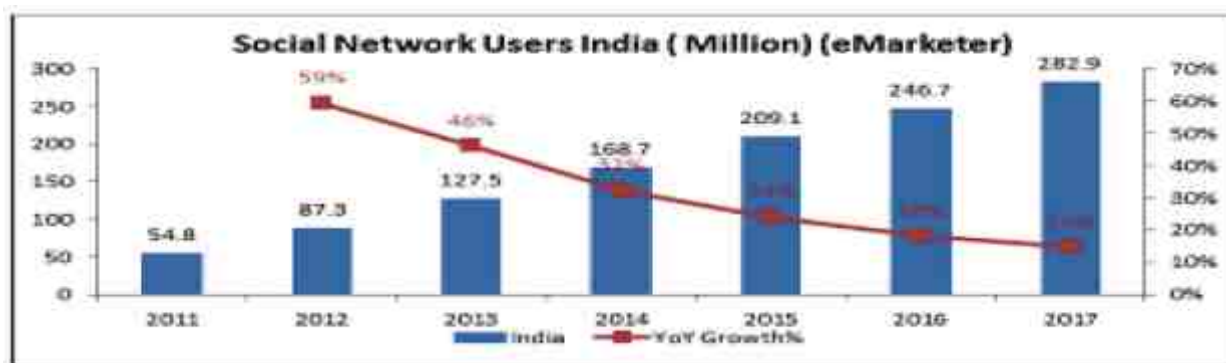


Figure 2 : Social Network Users in India  
(Year 2011-2017)

Source: eMarketer, 2017 (www.eMarketer.com)

### 2.2. Product Browsing and Purchase Intention

Product browsing on various social websites is considered as being a result of either a goal-oriented or an exploration-oriented behaviour [14]. Exploring or searching is considered to be the primary cause for consumers that want to gather information before purchase of a specific product which they have in mind, while there are also consumers that have no specific task to complete with regard to purchasing an item [15]. These general categories of consumer attitudes can be found on both conventional stores as well as electronic platforms. Extending on the theory of planned behavior, which postulates that users' intentions are a very powerful predictor to actual behavior [16], a number of articles have investigated consumers' intentions in order to predict actual purchases [17], [18]. The intention through which a person searches for a particular product or service shapes the final buying decision process.

### 2.3. Convenience

In a number of studies it has been found that shopping over the internet is more convenient since shoppers can access a vast array of products at their own time thus avoiding worrying about various means of transportation needed to reach the various retail stores in traditional means of shopping [19]. What's so appealing about social media is its power to reach not just one consumer at a time, but a huge network of friends providing a wide range of connectivity. Wolfinbarger & Gilly [20] support this thought, stating that social media is the space in which the browsing and purchasing of products, contributes to the convenience of shoppers. A study by Chiang and Dholakia [21] puts to test this proposition and finds that the convenience of online shops is one of the core aspects in driving consumers to engage in the process.

### 2.4. Information Availability

The Internet is undoubtedly the largest and most efficient source of information acquisition. This also applies to the case of shopping by which consumers can gather information about the product that they are interested in. The availability of product information is

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important for consumers, from the selection of the resource that provides it, to the impact it has on influencing purchase intentions [22], [23]. Social media integrates information from different sources and thus provides the user with the latest and most necessary information.

### **2.5. Product Selection**

In comparison with traditional stores, online consumers can find a greater range of products fitting their needs since more retailers exist and there is no need for large inventories [24]. The plethora of products present on one location increases the probability that a compatible match will be found according to consumers needs, thus constituting online mediums as an attractive alternative for product searching. Companies engaging in product promotion through social media websites can present the full range of products without having to stock them in their inventory [20] unlike with conventional stores.

### **2.6. Adventure**

Adventure associated with doing new things is always a priority for many of us. The main proposition lying behind the concept of adventure is that consumers will experience a novel and enjoying process when shopping. When considering this aspect with regard to human-computer interaction, Webster et al. [25] argue that people should experience this sense during their time on a computer. The novelty of performing a task, i.e. product browsing, on new medium could influence the sense of adventure experienced by users.

### **2.7. Purchase Intention**

From the theory of planned behavior it is debated that intentions are equally as important as actual actions, since in most cases they are a strong predictor of future outcomes. The intention to purchase has been found to be influenced by numerous factors and contingencies, such as product price, information availability and quality, product type, discount level and others [26].

### **2.8. Word of Mouth Intention**

An equally important aspect of the shopping experience is the sharing of information that a consumer will proceed to after he has engaged in the shopping process. Referral marketing as it is also termed is an aspect that is cited by practitioners and scholars at an increasing rate [27]. Additionally, users tend to share information on a product that they have seen and would be of interest to friends and peers, a typical action of post-browsing. Being familiar with a product and aware of recent product trends also leads to relatively high levels of word-of-mouth activity. The ease of

sharing information is greatly increased through internet technologies and especially by use of social media.

### **3. Aim/Objective of the Study**

The aim of this study is twofold. First we seek to define what aspects of social media websites impact user intention to browse products or services on them. Second, we examine if user intention to browse products over social media websites influences the intention of future purchase and if it leads to sharing product or brand information (word-of-mouth) with friends and acquaintances. Therefore, the aim of the study is :

- **To examine the extent, social media facilitate product browsing by users and how does this affect the consumers' intention to purchase.**

### **4. Hypotheses formulation**

In the light of the available literature and depending upon the main aim/objective of the study, following null hypotheses have been formulated -

- H0<sub>1</sub>:** Social media users don't find it convenient to browse websites for purchasing.
- H0<sub>2</sub>:** Social media users don't find it adventurous to browse websites for purchasing.
- H0<sub>3</sub>:** Social media users don't discuss with family, friends and peers.
- H0<sub>4</sub>:** Social media doesn't affect the consumer's intention to purchase.

### **5. Research Method**

Descriptive research design has been used for the study. Data has been collected by means of a well designed and tested questionnaire. The first part of the questionnaire contains information regarding demographics and usage pattern of social media of the respondent. The second part has a series of close-ended indirect questions which are based on impact of social media in making consumer buy a product and expectation from such media. The data was collected through a survey which was conducted online by means of various social networking sites and responses of 300 social networkers across India were collected. The instrument (questionnaire) was put over Google docs and the link was sent to users to fill the instrument through various social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Hi5, Bebo etc. Non-probability convenience sampling technique was used for conducting the whole study.



## 6. Data Collection and Measurements

The validity and reliability of the items were tested first, checking for item reliability measures to be at acceptable levels and standardized items loadings (above 0.5). Consequently, since loadings were well above 0.7, we can be sure that validity was attained. Composite reliability values [28], measuring the internal consistency of each construct, were all above 0.70, and are therefore considered reliable [29].

**Table 1 : Reliability Statistics for Questionnaire**

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.752	.728	100

### 6.1. Sample profile of the respondents

**Table 2: Gender-wise distribution of the sample**

Gender	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Male	175	59.4
Female	125	40.6
Total	300	100

**Table 3: Age-wise distribution of the sample**

Age (years)	No. of Social media users	Percentage (%)
Less than 30	162	54.0
30-45	62	20.7
Above 45	76	25.3
Total	300	100

## 7. Data Analysis

The data collected from various social media users clearly indicated that Facebook is the most popular and widely used social networking site for the respondents.

**Table 4 : Motivation behind following a brand or joining a brand page**

Variable	No. of Social media users
Through brand invitation/ advertising	118
By friend's invitation	82
By personal research	52
Loyalty towards the brand	48

The motivation or the urge to join/follow a particular brand page/ brand on various social networking platforms varies from person to person. The main reason why friends or fans come to join a brand page or follow a brand is through brand invitation/ advertising followed by a friend invitation. The search on social media websites through personal research also plays an important role, thus it is crucial for brands to find if consumers search for them. Loyalty by consumers towards a particular brand also plays a major role in motivation towards brand following on the social networking platforms. Brand loyalists are consumers who will market a certain brand and talk positively about it among their friends/ peers. This is also called as free word-of-mouth publicity/marketing for the brands and is often very effective. Social networking sites are a new customer relationship marketing tool where the consumer wants to feel exclusive. The attachment to brand is a key motivator to advocate the brands. Demonstrating appreciation for the brand, showing what you like, and supporting the brand's values play an active role in generating advocacy. The desire to engage with the brand either through dialogue with the brand's representatives or with other consumers reaches an interesting level.

**Table 5 : Time spent on Social networking sites per day**

Time Spent	Number of responses (%)
More than 3 hours	46
2 to 3 hours	38
1 to 2 hours	10
Less than 1 hour	6

Spending time by people on the social networking sites or various other online platforms is now an important aspect of the day. It is easily visible that most people spend more than three hours online. The above table depicts very clearly that how much it is important for the marketers to exploit the situation by making workable marketing strategies. Therefore more companies should join the social media sites in order to be able to create stronger relationships with their customers. This will also help them to improve their customer service by utilizing social media to address customer service issues.

**Table 6: Purpose for using social media platform**

Purpose	Number of responses (%)
Connecting with friends	58
Exchanging views about product and service	24
Playing contests/game	16
Other activities	2

Social media helped people connect with long lost friends. This is evident with 58% respondent in the survey using such platform to connect with friends. While 24% respondents believe in exchanging their views and experiences on various products/Services, the other (16%) use it for just playing games and participating in contests. So, here marketers have plenty of opportunity to communicate with their targets and offer them their products/services to persuade them to transact and become loyal customer for them. It is a fast growing platform for brands in all the sectors. It acts as an effective tool as it is the best way to reach out market segment without incurring huge cost. Also, using of social media platforms as a sales and marketing tool is a very economical mode of marketing and advertising because it reaches a vast audience for a marginal investment. Instead of spending large amounts of money on marketing and advertising campaigns, companies should let their happy customers advertise and publicize for them.

**Table 7: Considering Social media in buying decision**

Consideration of Social networks in buying decisions	Number of responses (%)
Always	42
Most often	36
Rarely	22
Never	0

**Table 9: One-Sample Test for Social media users**

Variables	Test Value = 3					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Convenience	17.977	299	.000	1.019	.98	1.06
Adventure	15.010	299	.000	.889	.85	.93
Discussion/Word of mouth	9.588	299	.000	.536	.49	.58
Purchase intention	17.575	299	.000	.940	.90	.98

It is evident from the above table that most of the respondents using social media networks are considering social media before starting of buying decision making process. More than two third of users are always considering social media networks at the time of getting into purchase decision. So, it is of enormous importance for the marketers to put information on the social sites where there is huge probability to come into the eyes of consumers.

Social media sites also provide an excellent medium for companies to share positive information about them. Conversations about various products/services and the experiences associated with them is always trending on the social sites. By actively taking part in the conversations happening on the web, you are able to manage these conversations in a positive manner.

Hence it indicates the more the companies should instigate individuals to talk about their brands/products the more the chances that consumer will get persuaded towards the products/brands and will make purchase decision accordingly.

#### 7.1. Hypothesis testing

**Table 8 : Displaying One-Sample Statistics for Social media users**

#### One-Sample Statistics

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Convenience	300	4.02	.601	.021
Adventure	300	3.89	.628	.022
Discussion/Word of mouth	300	3.54	.595	.021
Purchase intention	300	3.94	.567	.020

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**Result :** The table above shows that the calculated t-values of corresponding variables (Convenience, Adventure, Discussion/Word of mouth and Purchase intention) exceed the tabled t- values at 5% level of significance. The researcher assumed 5 % risk in this study to reject null hypothesis which came out to be true. At 5% level of significance, calculated t- values of all variables will be definitely significant as it is supported by the tabled t-value 1.6449 at 799 degrees of freedom. It implies that the sample results have failed to provide any evidence to accept the four null hypotheses at 5% level of significance. On this basis all the four null hypotheses are rejected. Therefore, it can be inferred that “Social media platforms fulfill user intention to browse products over social media websites and influences their intention of future purchase and it also leads to sharing product or brand information (word-of-mouth) with friends and acquaintances.”

## 8. Discussion and Conclusion

Social media presents unique characteristics since they allow for user generated content, facilitate synchronous and asynchronous communication between users, and enable immediate content sharing with peers. Building on the potential that such websites have in providing a new medium for doing business, we tried to determine what factors of such platforms encourage users to browse for products on them. In sequence, we examine if the browsing of products promotes the intention of purchasing them and sharing information with fellow peers.

In order to actualize the objectives of this research, a quantitative analysis was performed on data gathered from 300 active social media users. Outcomes from the analysis indicate that convenience, adventure, word of mouth and purchase intention have a significant positive impact on influencing user intention to browse products over such websites. The convenience of using social media and the selection of products available on such websites are found to be the most important contributors in explaining why consumers browse products. This finding is in accordance to what has been found to date for online shops where users engage in the browsing process much more effortlessly that in conventional stores.

The significantly positive association of trend discovery with product browsing can be justified by the continuous update of products on social media which can renewed with little effort, especially compared to conventional shopping, therefore providing users with the latest trends and fashions regarding products.

Also comments by other users and online discussions can influence the discovery of trends by users on such websites. Consequently, it is logical that this aspect of social media will facilitate as an attraction to users who are keen in finding out latest trends. The sense of adventure is also found to be a contributing factor in explaining why users use social media to browse for products.

The most important findings however, is the highly significant link between browsing and purchase intention since it validates the claim that social media can be used for marketing reasons, resulting in increased sales. This outcome is one of the first to be empirically proven through quantitative research methods, therefore reflecting a tendency of the majority. A large number of initiatives over social media were done in order to promote brand recognition, with few company-hosted sites on such mediums presenting a product range with related information.

This finding could propel firms that have been hesitant, in investing in a structured adoption plan with the aim of increasing commerce transactions. Additionally, users that engage in the browsing of product are prone to share the information that they have found with friends, attracting in that way more potential customers. Word of mouth as it has been coined is gaining increasing attention amongst marketers, since positive feedback from a peer about a product is a strong motivator for future purchasing. This finding stresses the importance which firms must place on customer feedback, since negative comments may result in negative word of mouth. Therefore, since the product browsing and word of mouth intention are inextricably linked, firms must be very careful on all the customer responses they can collect and act accordingly and in a timely fashion since dissatisfied consumers could potentially backfire on these investments.

## 9. Research Implications

The results of this study add to our knowledge and open up new avenues of thinking about the impact of social media on B2C e-commerce. For merchants, the need for integrating their online shops on attractive social media emerges, due to the phenomenal growth of such websites and the strong connection of product browsing and purchase intention. Additionally, by identifying what antecedents affect the browsing of products on such sites, business executives can focus on them without placing unnecessary emphasis on aspects which are proven to be less important.

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## 10. Limitations of the Study

One of the main limitations of the current study is that it examines social media as a whole. It may be beneficial to examine how the different types of social media can be leveraged for marketing purposes. It is our firm belief that this aspect of social media is revolutionary in comparison with traditional means of shopping and even electronic shopping.

## 11. Scope for future research

Research of conducting business over social media websites is still in its infancy. We encourage future researchers to investigate more detailed aspects of social media commerce, especially means by which firms can engage users to promote their products and services to fellow peers.

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