

Social Media and the Word of Mouth Publicity

Dr. K. R. Subramanian

Professor of Management & Senior, Consultant – Operations, Credait.com

Email address: krsbramania64@gmail.com

Abstract— *Publicity has been an important component of marketing efforts for a long time. Traditionally many companies relied on word of mouth publicity. With the arrival and proliferation of digital media and the new generation of millennial, the equation is changing. The speed of doing business has increased and customer is impatient to wait. Advertisement and Sales promotion are still relevant but the media has changed. A satisfied customer is the best ambassador for a company or Product even in the digital era and will perhaps be the same in the days to come. Traditionally, that even a few years ago, a satisfied customer was your best bet for further promotion by word of mouth and is still happening. But the word of mouth has changed to messages and images through the mobiles and the digital media. The point to be noticed is that the word of mouth is still the best, but in the present era of instant gratification, the word of mouth is accelerated through the mobile and other digital media devices. The social media is the new generation 'word of mouth'.*

Keywords— *Impact of social media in the digital world, word of mouth is accelerated in an age of instant gratification the relative roles are complimentary.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Social media is influencing every aspect of our daily lives. Advertisement and Sales Promotion have a great role to play in Product and Company acceptance. The advent of technology and the rise of social media have changed the way that consumers receive marketing messages and perceive advertisements. The entire process involved in buying a product has been transformed, and traditional advertising is beginning to lose its effect and importance. Paid media - television and radio commercials, print advertisements, hoardings - still influence the consumer to some extent, but not as much as they used to. Word-of-mouth marketing is the oldest form of advertising, the most simple and often the most effective. Earlier there were billboards, radio commercials or newspaper ads, people shared their opinions of products and services through conversation. Today, with the online communities that form on social networking sites, word-of-mouth marketing has become word of the messages and more important.

No longer does consumer promotion of a product have to be limited to one-on-one conversation. Social media sites, blogs, and online testimonials are platforms in which people can speak their mind and reach thousands of people at once. Digital word-of-mouth is social media marketing. Companies have to understand the power that consumers possess on social media networks and the influence they can have over each other concerning the purchases and opinions of goods and services. Consumers are much more likely to trust the advice and opinions of their peers over advertisements coming directly from the company through various media. People talk about products they like because

they believe they are of good quality, and they feel a compelling need to share their opinion with others. Before making a purchase, especially if it is a new product or something expensive, consumers like to do a certain amount of research beforehand. This generally consists of seeking the opinions of others and checking out what people have to say online. Both of these forms of product research are examples of word-of-mouth marketing; people talking to other people about a business and the goods or services that they sell.



Word of Mouth

For word of mouth to happen, people must talk and people must listen.

REASONS PEOPLE TALK

- They fully understand something.
- It enhances something about themselves.
- They are compelled to talk about something.

REASONS PEOPLE LISTEN

- They trust the person talking.
- They understand the backstory.
- It's interesting which gets them interested.

Word of Mouth...
Natural conversation between real people!

* Inspired by John Moore from BrandAutopsy.com • Prepared by IDEA SANDBOX • idea-sandbox.com •

Fig. 1. Word of mouth publicity.

Companies spend millions of dollars each year on traditional advertisements, which still serve a purpose and influence consumers. But digital word-of-mouth marketing is becoming increasingly more relevant for the businesses and their advertising teams. It is very effective, it's authentic, and it can help bring customers to your doors in numbers. In the information and digital age the word of mouth has become the click of the mouse.

II. OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

Although concepts like 'brand' and 'marketing' have only recently been introduced into our way of thinking and

language, people have been discussing products and brands with others for many centuries and they still do. Word-of-mouth occurs everywhere people get together: at the local pub, at home, in the sports club and increasingly online and on social media. And there are many reasons why people like to talk about their experiences with products and brands. These experiences, brand experiences and individual customer experiences, as well as overall opinions regarding perceived levels of overall customer experience, customer service, satisfaction, etc. are shared and often have a very personal and subjective nature. But they increasingly happen in a very public space: the social Web. In the social media age word-of-mouth can travel fast, very fast. The scale, speed and real-time nature of the social Web and the increased possibilities for people to share and express themselves play a crucial role in this. With this in view the following specific Objectives have been identified for this research paper:

1. A review of marketing environment and role of social media.
2. Word of mouth and the social web connection.
3. How marketers make use of this connection
4. How the digital media has accelerated this process.
5. Suggestions and recommendations for future marketers.

The nature of the topic will suggest a suitable methodology i.e. published literature in the print and web media. The author on making a detailed search was able to find a good number of papers ad publications and an increasing interest in the area. So, a detailed literature survey was made. The required data was analyzed to arrive at the conclusions

Various suggestions have been made along with the Conclusion for further detailed analysis and study by researchers who may find interest in this exciting area which holds a lot of promise for future.

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

With so many ads crowding social media, word of mouth is a prime factor in 20-50% of purchasing decisions. Social media influencers are major players in the marketing world as they have a long list of loyal followers who trust their judgments about products and companies. There is a social media influencer for everything; from beauty, to health & fitness, even technology. The users subscribing to the content in social media are actively investing their time and interest to follow these influencers and their opinions. It's almost like receiving advice from a trusted friend: you would rather listen to them than a one off advertisement. Social media influencers become a face to your brand or product, a recognizable person with lots of influence. That face is friendly and offers his or her followers advice when purchasing products, and this is more real time than ordinary product advertisements. While influencers in social media campaigns are growing in number and cost, social media influencers are sought after more and more by companies. With a target audience only a tweet away, social media influencers are the new, creative way to spread the word.

Word-of-mouth marketing is a connected effort that also includes offline marketing. This is natural, given the fact that people increasingly use various channels as well and they

share, information and even influence buying behavior. Marketers find out every day that combining word-of-mouth publicity and peer-to-peer programs and activities such as customer reviews, social media related WOM activities, referral marketing etc. leverage the global impact of their marketing campaigns. The same goes for having an integrated and holistic view on the customer centricity in corporate marketing and interactions with customers and prospects.

People are definitely influenced by family members, friends and other members that they know and trust. In this social media age they even rely upon the advice of complete strangers through their tweets in the media. This also applies to any pre-purchase advice and brand information which is obtained through such interactions. WOM is an offline matter; though it is clear from the rising success and the increasing attention from marketers has a lot to do with the emergence of the digital media, and in particular social media. They are the carriers of people's voices, brand and product messages and opinions through viral marketing efforts. To get "carried", all you need are the right stories to be planted in the messages of social media. Word-of-mouth marketing does not only involve products, brands and companies, it involves experiences and interactions, including with companies: experiences with businesses and products which are talked about in chats. Whether they are 'justified' or not: there is very little you can do to stop or get around this. Every individual contact with a company, and therefore with every employee of that company, influences brand perception and customer experience and thus plays an important role in WOM marketing.

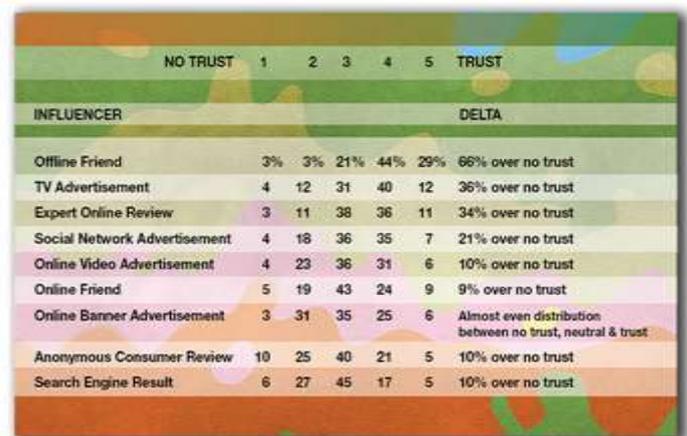


Fig. 2. Trust and influence – [Ref: Razor fish platforms].

Word-of-mouth leads to new customers, shorter sales cycles, improved branding and much more customer information on marketing of products and services. Implanting a client-oriented business story across all messages and tweets is the key to such marketing efforts. With the emergence of social media, which gives the stories and opinions of people a faster and larger reach, WOM has become a more complex and involved medium for marketers. Communication appears to be much more personalized and more uncontrollable than ever before because of the unpredictable nature of customer reactions. But at the same time the dynamic changes in

communication between people to people (businesses are composed of people) have opened many avenues for marketers who tactically exploit new media to efficiently use WOM with never before seen and exponentially effective results. One of the components of a word-of-mouth marketing plan is often identifying people with an influential voice and opinion on a specific topic, including for example web users. It is also important to know who is positive about your brand and could be a potential brand advocate. Through analysis of what happens on social media you can also see which users your target marketing aim to capture through your campaign and also who has the most influential voice. Through ‘Social Media Listening’ you can identify existing supporters of your brand whose opinion people seem to trust. You can reach these people as a brand promotion activity via social media. In other words, although WOM happens everywhere, there is a clear link between social media and word-of-mouth publicity.

People discuss products, brands and services with one another through social media. A more fundamental question will be why people do this. As an answer to this question will quickly indicate that there are people who ‘participate in WOM’ far more than others and that you can even categorize them as active for promotional messages. There are many reasons but the main ones are certainly psychological. *Social acceptance and recognition - People like to feel like they ‘belong’ to a particular group and accepted for their voice.* They like to contribute in a media tweet and another step further they crave for recognition and appreciation. One of the most important psychological motivations why people share their product and brand experiences with one another involves making a positive contribution to the social circle(s) to which they belong. This is an important reason for marketers who want to make maximum use of WOM. People are not only anxious of social acceptance, often they also want to differentiate themselves within the “groups” they belong to for their opinions. They do this by discussing their unique experiences about the products that they have purchased and the performance there of.

IV. SOME BENEFITS OF WORD-OF-MOUTH MARKETING

How word-of-mouth and social media are connected and how the attention WOM has received from marketers, has now been realized even more by the success of social network platforms as explained in the earlier paragraphs. With the emergence of the digital network economy, the focus on the client and the explosion of the ways in which we can satisfy our psychological WOM motivations (recognition, social acceptance, sharing, distinguishing oneself, radiating authority, doing something good for someone else, etc.) also play a role and has been exploited more.

1. WOM is customized to the digital network society.

Word-of-mouth marketing is an extremely powerful marketing instrument. It has an exponential effect that is strengthened by the online communication channels which can be customized and the consequences of the network economy. WOM leads to possibilities that are linked to the scale of the networks. The rise of online media and communication means

has markedly increased the speed in which messages are shared in social networks. At the same time the cost is often found to be much lower than that of other forms of marketing and the ROI better.



Fig. 3. Social influence and word of mouth publicity.

2. WOM presents a powerful answer to modern marketing challenges.

The explosion of media and the changing pattern of consumption thereof have made the marketing-communication reality a lot more challenging. Consumers are exposed daily, to an abundance of advertising messages while the impact of conventional communication is simultaneously reducing. The fragmentation of the communication is also one of the most important feeling grounds for WOM and therefore generates a significant response from real customers.

3. WOM is an answer in the customer centric marketing.

Word-of-mouth occurs between people who personally decide what they want to share in the media, important to viral marketing, and who believe in acquiring information, opinions etc. in their buying process. The impact of a recommendation from a reliable and reputed person, like a friend, is much

stronger than advertising message of a biased promotional campaign from a company. The message in WOM is well defined and customized for the particular consumer and his interest. After all, we talk to others about the product that we are interested in at the moment, otherwise we would be asking for advice. People generally talk about things that interest them, that they are passionate about etc. So, to generate a WOM-campaign, you will have to ensure that the message is interesting and relevant to the audience.

4. *WOM appears more reliable.*

The advice from friends is much more reliable in the consumers' perception than that of a seller or marketer who may be making a hard pitch for his product. Since people participate and personally create the media, amongst others via blogs, you get a fresh group of opinion leaders. It is important that identifying these opinion leaders is a challenging task for the marketer. Working with opinion leaders is for that matter not only a prerogative of online WOM, it is an imperative. It has been implemented successfully in many sectors in the last few years.

5. *WOM can be managed.*

Word-of-mouth marketing is not easy to control as it is not an exact science. Most of it escapes your control possibilities because of its interpersonal and limited controllable nature, in contrast to communication that can still be implanted in conventional advertisement and mass media. The fact that WOM is difficult to control does not mean that you cannot manage.

6. *WOM speeds the purchase process.*

In his book '*The secrets of word of mouth marketing*', George Silverman gave a new light on marketing. His statement is that all forms of marketing, advertising and communication should actually be considered possibilities for generating WOM. Silverman doesn't imply that other, classic ways to see marketing are senseless. He simply suggests looking at everything from the WOM-point of view, which provides some interesting insights if you do this exercise. One of them is that WOM considerably accelerates the decision process in the area of purchases, amongst others through the trust that consumers have in the person that they are talking to. Silverman states that the acceleration in the purchase process is a direct route to more sales and that this is exactly where WOM gets its strength.

7. *Word-of-mouth shortens the buying process (speeds up the decision process)*

People like to tell stories and that has its anthropological, cultural, sociological and historical reasons. As you know, the spoken language was in use earlier in history than the 'writing'. Ancient cultures were obliged to pass on their religious practices, their history and so on to their offspring by telling stories. In some cultures that tradition of passing on stories orally is still present, although they are now more often written down too. That is the reason for WOM to be effective.

We are storytellers by tradition because only a good story is worth telling and passing on. The conclusion for marketers who want to use the power of word of mouth marketing is simple: they should be good storytellers too. WOM is definitely not just a matter of communication, networking and so on, it is still primarily a question of a good and, in the case of marketing authentic, relevant and honest story that the 'audience' really wants to pass on. Regardless of the medium and the format, what once used to be oral and written storytelling is now multimedia and digital.

The Word-of-Mouth Marketing Association (WOMMA) released the "State of Word-of-Mouth Marketing" survey in January 2014, and it gives insight into what marketers think of word-of-mouth marketing is. 64% of their survey respondents mostly or completely agree that word-of-mouth marketing is more effective than traditional marketing. Half indicated that they've incorporated word-of-mouth marketing into their traditional marketing campaigns. 70% of respondents are planning to increase their online WOMM spend, and 29% will increase their offline word-of-mouth marketing spend. 82% use word-of-mouth marketing to increase their brand awareness and 43% expect word-of-mouth marketing to improve their direct sales.

It is easy to appreciate the buzz around word-of-mouth marketing, but the most challenging aspect is creating a word-of-mouth marketing strategy that works for your business and your customers. Keep the statistics handy as you identify, inspire, and incentivize key customers and influencers who can unlock important listeners and prospects through word-of-mouth.

V. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

Demand for word-of-mouth marketing is on the increase. With the emergence of new digital and computer savvy consumer, traditional marketing can no longer influence the consumer purchase decisions. This creates a gap between the new role of the consumer and the existing marketing strategies. In an increasingly competitive marketplace and abundance of choice, customers no longer trust the messages they are sent by traditional marketing channels. As a result, word-of-mouth marketing gained importance. Based on recommendations between two or more consumers related to a product or service, word-of-mouth is regarded as the most credible source of information and the most powerful tool to influence consumer purchase decision. Today, more and more companies have begun to include word-of-mouth in their marketing mix. For the majority, word-of-mouth is known but not yet fully understood

Social media is full of buzz and is influencing consumer behavior in many ways. Every marketing company is making full efforts to contact prospective customers and influence them through advertisements and word of mouth campaigns. However, with the advent of social media, customer contact has become a different cup of tea. The customers are always connected and not only have they expressed their choice, but they also influence the choice of their friends and family members. Social marketing efforts have paved the way for net working and mobile marketing and communication. Mobile

phones and other appliances influence the social media and the connected societal members.

Web has paved way for more and more social contact and the ‘always connected’ young members of the society through their digital messages are influencing public opinion and product reviews on the internet and social networks. It is rightly said that ‘word of mouth has been replaced by typed word messages flashing at great speeds to friends and family circles. These messages have the potential to form opinions and this network of social friends and contacts are exploited by marketers.

Marketing Communications used to rely on Advertisement and print media. As the speed of communication has accelerated new media plans are in place for marketing products and services through faster modes. That is how digital media has accelerated communication between consumers, opinion makers and new potential buyers. Advertisement through conventional media is also costly and many times ineffective in the ‘always on’ society. In fact conventional advertisements in the TV or news paper channels have reduced and have limited use in Product promotion and publicity. The digital media on the other hand offers the benefit of reach to large customer segments and opinion leaders.

With the advent and proliferation of digital media, conventional media has gone out of business. Word of mouth publicity is always true and that is how publicity takes place through opinion leaders. The way of finding and making use of this opinion leaders have changed. Social media is impacting all facets of society and Product promotion and publicity is no exception.

VI. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

Marketers have to fully realize the emerging trends and modify their campaigns to suit the new ways of doing business. Conventional methods of publicity and promotion through TV and the print media will have to be reviewed in the light of digital progress in the markets and consumer segments. Successful companies are aware of this new reality and they are already responding to consumer behavior. No company can ignore the reality of changes in the marketing environment.

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