

Engagement Pattern of Customers in Digital & Social Media Marketing: A Study on Effect of Age group

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ABSTRACT

Convenience, novelty and simplicity are the prominent characteristics of Digital & Social Media Marketing. At the same time, intensity and extensity of marketing activities on social media is a big challenge for any business to plan and handle. This very challenge provokes management studies researchers to explore as much as possible in terms of gathering deeper knowledge and to attempt to make it useful for all stake holders.

This paper covers the aspects of 'Age Group' related 'Engagement pattern' within the framework of DSMM. The aim is to create engagement opportunity and build up the relationship value and maintain it with long term objective. It tries to capture as to, how users look at online reviews and online purchases. Finally, their behaviour in terms of sharing the online experiences within friends, family and social group is examined. It is found that DSMM users of all age groups demonstrate quite positive indulgence in checking for online reviews and seeking information in social media. But the inclination to, share online experiences and influence buying decisions of others, actually declines with advancing age groups.

Key Words: DSMM, Engagement, Social Media, Online Reviews, Online Buying

Introduction:

Digital & Social Media Marketing in Service Industry Perspective:

How effective and how popular today is Digital & Social Media Marketing (DSMM)?

To have an elaborate discussion on such a burning topic, better way to start is to cite some current examples of relevance.

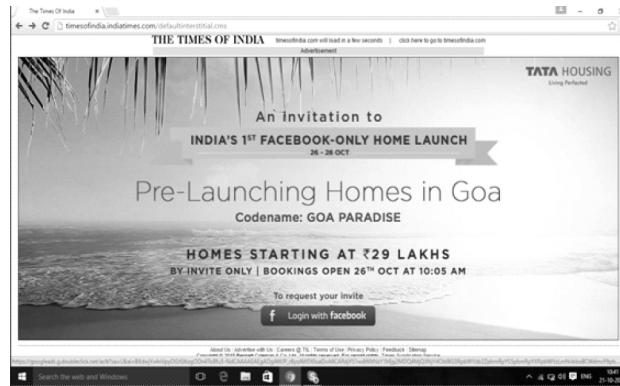


Fig. 1 Screen Shot of Times of India's Website (21/10/2015, 10:41 hrs.)

Through the above cited example (Fig.-1), Tata Housing was launching a new housing project in Goa, inviting prospective customers only if they are Facebook users. If the caption in this advertisement (Fig. 1.1) is carefully noticed - "India's 1st Facebook-only Home Launch", it appears interesting, mysterious and thought provoking. As the Times of India's normal website (not e-Paper) was being accessed, even before getting into homepage, this advertisement flashed for a few seconds.

The blending of a convenient platform like digital medium on the internet and the participation of a fairly active and reasonably well-informed consumer-group, laid the foundation of a new phenomenon called **Digital & Social Media Marketing (DSMM)**. The abbreviation DSMM, though often hyped as a revolutionarily new concept, is actually as simple as it appears in its full form. It does not make any change or difference in the overall broader marketing objectives, purpose or goals. The newness

is in the approach, channel used and the additional dimensions of inter-activeness, collaborative style and participatory modus operandi of the target audience. The new approach was possible due to the advantage of the digital network connectivity and internet.

In DSMM, the same basic frameworks and guiding principles are important and useful while designing the DSMM communication for promotion. Nevertheless, DSMM has certain uniqueness that makes it more visible, trendy and a convenient cost effective platform.

Virtual Community; the unique aspect of DSMM

After having said that the overall broad marketing objectives, purpose and goals do not change because of DSMM, the enormously large virtual community that builds up within seconds by a click on the net, is the new and unique aspect of this form of market management. It connects people based on their like-mindedness or

some commonality of thinking or characteristics, with respect to a subject of discussion. The impact becomes hugely visible by sheer intensity and extensity of the “collective voice on the net”. In a way, the DSMM supports and enables a convenient form of marketing, where interactive participation and collaboration of consumers help in co-creation of value offering.

Social Media, a boon for Consumers as well as Marketers

Social media websites like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp etc. were not created keeping marketing objectives in mind. But due to the fact that people are able to instantly share plethora of information in a free, open and transparent manner, both marketers and consumers started seeing huge opportunities in these mediums to very convenient mould or generate activities to support consumerism on one hand and marketers interests on the other hand.

The Challenges involved

Convenience, novelty and simplicity are the prominent characteristics of Social Media Marketing. At the same time, intensity and extensity of marketing activities on social media is a big challenge for any business to plan and handle. This very challenge provokes management studies researchers to explore as much as possible in terms of gathering deeper knowledge and to attempt to make it useful for all stake holders.

This paper covers the aspects of **Engagement pattern** within the framework of DSMM. We discuss the engagement pattern of customers or the prospects. The aim is to create engagement opportunity and build up the relationship value and maintain it with long term objective.

Review of Literature:

Plangger (2012) used a regression model to show that social media investment has a positive relationship with firm value. It creates popular online brand communities (reflected through size of virtual community), that tend to positively amplify the engagement benefits leading to enhance the firm value. Highly differentiated industry e.g., entertainment industry, tend to engage more in social network development than other industry groups in both Facebook and Twitter. B2C companies obviously tend to favour Facebook and Twitter. Interestingly, Twitter appeared to be less negative. We notice quite many researchers viz., **Liang et al.** (2008), **M. Bulearca & S. Bulearca** (2010), **Agnihotri et al.** (2012), and **Clark & Melancon** (2013), generally endorsing that social media investment positively impacts customer relationship value. This finding could be termed as next logical convergence of customer value creation into firm value (may be on a cumulative basis).

Hosamani and Vadiraj (2013) did an empirical study to know the customer engagement practices in tourism industry

(in the perspective of Indian online travel industry). The research objectives were, to find out the critical parameters considered by travel enthusiasts. It's rather increasingly becoming a peer-to-peer model of sharing and evaluating information, shifting away from traditional B2C marketing. This empirical study throws light on customer practices at micro level of demonstrated activities. The findings without any exceptions point to the fact that User Generated Contents (UGC) and Online Travel Reviews (OTR) carry the highest credibility in consumers' mind, be it information gathering or evaluation for decision. This matches well with findings of other study of **Chi** (2011), where we saw that users' seek gratification of information, interaction and entertainment from virtual community, rather than from interactive digital advertisement of organisations.

Lee et al. (2013) carried out this exploratory research based on blogs data over two and half years, to contribute to the debate on role of social media in responsible food business, in the background of health and obesity issue controversy. Findings showed that organisations issued more product-related information than promotion-related ones. New product introductions led to positive buzz, but modifications of current products resulted in more negative responses, even if there was high fit with core business. It was also found that promotion-related press-releases were received negatively in general. The findings partially support

those of other studies showing that social media tools are effective platform for relationship marketing, as referred to in the studies of **Agnihotri et al.** 2012, and **Clark and Melancon** (2013). At the same time, a part of it contradicts the finding in **Agnihotri et al** (2012), where we saw that a fit between social media use and sales people's service behaviour has a pull effect on customers. But here in this study of **Lee et al.** (2013), it shows that information about modifications of current products, results in negative response.

Meaningful insight into various aspects of DSMM was obtained, in terms of factors, variables, and the constructs that influence the user behavior and engagement pattern. Both customers and the service provider stand to gain out of DSMM usage as a facilitating platform and strategic marketing tool.

Objective and Scope of research:

It is also seen that the research scenario pertaining to service industry shows less coverage relatively, and especially for India centric organisations. We all know and appreciate the fact that India is now termed as "The Service-Hub of the World". It is only natural and challenging that new research is taken up on India focused on service industries. To cite from **Subudhi and Das** (2015), "The big talk of demographic advantage of India (largest educated youth manpower that will emerge around 2030s or so) and the service industry superpower (that India is termed as), is not properly backed up with

futuristic pragmatic policies by regulatory bodies at one hand and the blame game between Industry and Academia on the other.” Therefore, aiming at a new research in DSMM with service industries perspective will be more contextual.

Research Methodology and Design

After the usual stages of Issues / Problems Identification, and the review of the existing literature, the research objectives were framed up. Research Issues were transformed to research questions, which formed the basis of the survey instrument later on.

Survey Instrument, the Questionnaire

The main research was conducted through a structured questionnaire with close ended questions covering the aspects like, basic demographic information and some key engagement activities. It tries to capture as to, how they look at online reviews and online purchases. Finally, their behaviour in terms of sharing the online experiences within friends, family and social group is examined.

Survey Method (on Consumers Engagement Perspective)

Uni-Variate Analysis of demographic data

Description of Frequency and Percentage of the following prominent variables were taken up.

1. Age Group of Respondents

Code	Category	Frequency	Percent
1	18–25 Yrs	188	40.3
2	26–35 Yrs	154	33.0
3	36–45 Yrs	80	17.1
4	Above 45 Yrs	45	9.6
Total		467	100.0

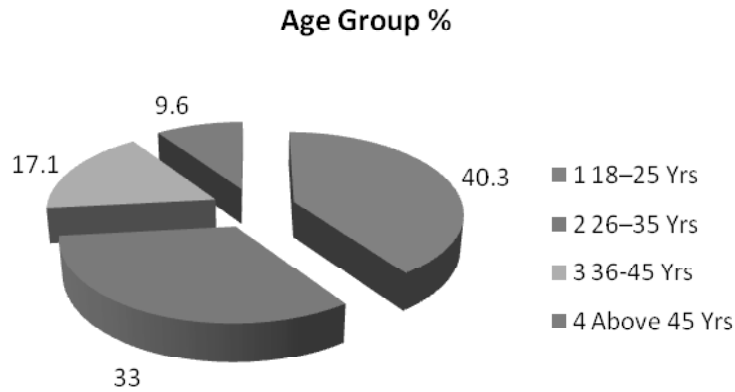
Google Form survey was done during 26th September 2015 to 30th October 2015 and resulted into 164 completed forms. Simultaneously physical forms survey was conducted in Bhubaneswar and Mumbai which continued till 15th November 2015. There were 303 completed forms from physical survey, 183 forms coming from Mumbai and 120 forms from Bhubaneswar.

Data from Google forms were converted to numeric code and data from physical forms were punched in excel sheet in numeric codes. Both these data were aligned and put in a single sheet in excel, resulting into a matrix of 467 rows and 77 columns. This sheet was put up for computations in SPSS and Advanced Excel.

Data Analysis

This paper deals with those aspects of the main research, wherein an attempt has been made to analyse the engagement pattern on broad dimensions like, how much of involvement is being carried out from consumer perspectives. Some basic demography and engagement related variables were analysed as under.

Fig.2 Age Group



As seen in the frequency percentage table, around 40% belong to first bracket of 18-25 years, 33% belong to 26 – 35

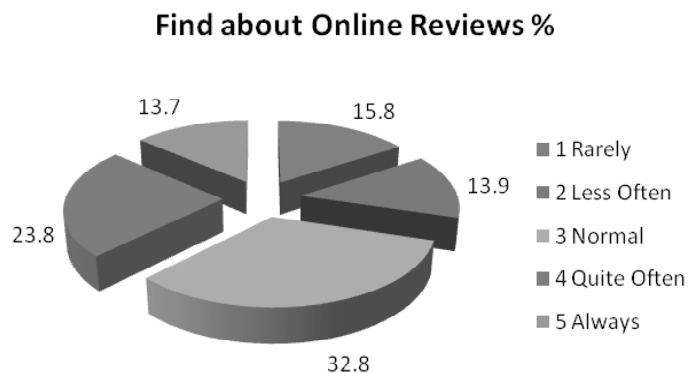
years, and about 27% are 36 years and above. This age group distribution appears to be quite normal and representative.

2. Checking about Online Reviews

Table 2 Checking about Online Reviews

Code	Category	Frequency	Percent
1	Rarely	74	15.8
2	Less Often	65	13.9
3	Normal	153	32.8
4	Quite Often	111	23.8
5	Always	64	13.7
Total		467	100.0

Fig. 3 Checking about Online Reviews



Around 37% of respondents engage in social media to check online reviews of specific things, in 'Quite Often' and 'Always' category put together. If

'Normal' use type is added to the above, it is over 70% of respondents who check online reviews on social network sites.

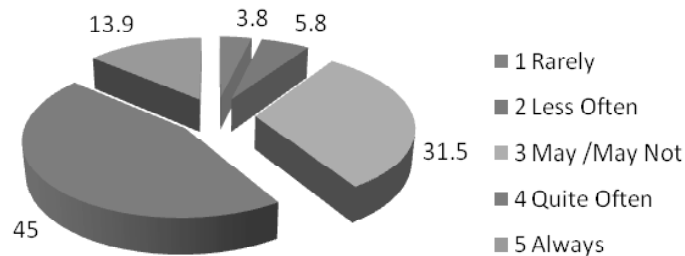
3. Willingness to Purchase Online

Table 3 : Will Purchase Online

Code	Category	Frequency	Percent
1	Rarely	18	3.8
2	Less Often	27	5.8
3	May /May Not	147	31.5
4	Quite Often	210	45.0
5	Always	65	13.9
Total		467	100.0

Fig. 4 : Will Purchase Online

Will Purchase Online %



Around 59% of respondents are quite inclined to purchase online. Added with another 31.5% in the 'May /May Not'

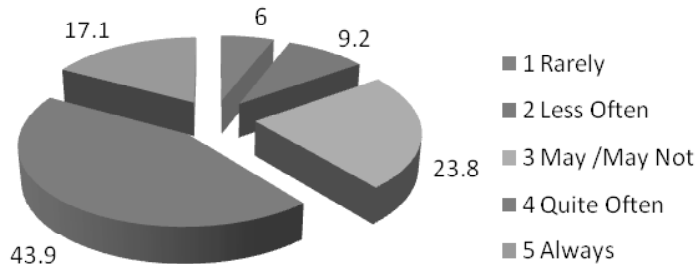
category gives an indication that over 90% are not averse to online buying.

4. Inclination for Sharing Experience and to Influence Buying Decisions of others

Table 4 Like to Share Experiences & Influence Others

Code	Category	Frequency	Percent
1	Rarely	28	6.0
2	Less Often	43	9.2
3	May /May Not	111	23.8
4	Quite Often	205	43.9
5	Always	80	17.1
Total		467	100.0

Fig. 5 Like to Share Experiences & Influence Others

Share Experience & Influence Others %

Clearly 61% of respondents would like to share the information and influence buying decisions of their family, friends and social group. Added with 'May /May Not' category, it shows that about 85% are not averse to sharing information and influencing buying decisions of others.

Bi-Variate Analysis (Cross-Tabulations)**1. 'Age Group' Vs. 'Checking Online Reviews' on Social Media**

Table 5 'Age Group' Vs. 'Online Reviews' Cross-tabulation

			Review					Total
			1	2	3	4	5	
Age Group	1	Count	36	33	60	35	24	188
		% within Review	48.6%	50.8%	39.2%	31.5%	37.5%	40.3%
	2	Count	22	13	52	41	26	154
		% within Review	29.7%	20.0%	34.0%	36.9%	40.6%	33.0%
	3	Count	7	9	24	29	11	80
		% within Review	9.5%	13.8%	15.7%	26.1%	17.2%	17.1%
	4	Count	9	10	17	6	3	45
		% within Review	12.2%	15.4%	11.1%	5.4%	4.7%	9.6%
Total	Count	74	65	153	111	64	467	
	% within Review	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Pearson Chi-Square: 0.012

Coeff: Eta (0.072, 0.186), Phi (0.235), and Cramer's V (0.136)

To get to know, whether there exist any association or dependence between the two factors, namely 'Age Group' and

'Checking Online Reviews', Chi-Square test was applied. As found from the above table (Significant), we accept the hypothesis and conclude that 'Checking Online Reviews' does have a relationship of association with age group.

2. 'Age Group' Vs. 'Like to Share Information & Influence Buying Decisions'

Table 6 'Age Group' Vs. 'Share Experience & Influence' Cross-tabulation

			Share-Exp-Inf					Total
			1	2	3	4	5	
Age Grp	1	Count	7	19	34	89	39	188
		% within ShareExpInf	25.0%	44.2%	30.6%	43.4%	48.8%	40.3%
	2	Count	5	14	37	74	24	154
		% within ShareExpInf	17.9%	32.6%	33.3%	36.1%	30.0%	33.0%
	3	Count	11	7	23	25	14	80
		% within ShareExpInf	39.3%	16.3%	20.7%	12.2%	17.5%	17.1%
	4	Count	5	3	17	17	3	45
		% within ShareExpInf	17.9%	7.0%	15.3%	8.3%	3.8%	9.6%
	Total	Count	28	43	111	205	80	467
		% within ShareExpInf	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Pearson Chi-Square: 0.003

Coeff: Eta (0.216, 0.173), Phi (0.254), and Cramer's V (0.147)

To probe whether there exist any association or dependence between the two factors, namely 'Age Group' and 'Like to Share Information & Influence Decisions', Chi-Square test was applied. As found from the above table (Significant), we accept the hypothesis and conclude that 'Like to Share Information & Influence Decisions' does have a relationship of association with age group.

Findings and Conclusion

As observed, the largest pie of the age group is the 18-25 years bracket (mostly the Millennials and Gen Z), i.e. over 40% of the DSMM users population. Within this age group, over 63% show positive behaviour for checking online

reviews in social media (with normal, quite often, and always category of frequency).

This age group is also found to be very active when it comes to sharing experiences and influencing buying decisions of others in family, friends and social group. This is evident from the fact that over 68% are more positively inclined to share experiences and influence buying decisions of others (in quite often and always category).

It may be inferred here that the age group 18-25 years, is quite positively active in social media and very much commits and contributes to sharing of their online experiences and influencing the buying decisions of their peers, family and social groups.

The next large pie is the age group of 26-35 years bracket and it constitutes 33% of the DSMM users. In this group, over

77% show positive behaviour for checking online reviews in social media (normal, quite often, and always category).

This age group is also seen to be quite active when it comes to sharing online experiences and influencing buying decisions of friends, family and social circle. About 64% of this age group bracket show positive inclination to share online experiences and influence others (in quite often and always category).

We may thus infer that the age group 26-35 years, is very positively active in in terms checking online reviews and is also active in sharing experiences and influencing buying decisions of their peers, family and social groups.

The third pie in age group dimension is the 36 years and above category, that constitutes about 27% of the DSMM users. A good 72% of this group show positive behaviour checking for online reviews in social media (normal, quite often, and always category).

However, this age group is also seen to be less active when it comes to sharing online experiences and influencing buying decisions of friends, family and social circle. Just over 47% of this group show positive inclination to share online experiences and influence others (in quite often and always category). This higher age group bracket, though constitutes a smaller pie in DSMM users, is pretty active in checking for online reviews information, yet is not so enthusiastic and forth coming about sharing experiences and influencing others.

Thus, we see an interesting phenomena that DSMM users of all age groups, demonstrate quite positive indulgence in checking for online reviews and seeking information in social media. But the inclination to share online experiences and influence buying decisions of others, actually declines with advancing age (68% drops to 64%, and then to 47%).

Implications of the research for business

Summary of the above findings gives ideas to business organizations and marketers so as to strategize their marketing and promotion campaigns on social media in such a manner that,

1. Social media engagement activities should also attract and encourage consumers of higher age groups to be more interactively engaged in terms of sharing experiences and influencing their peers and social groups.
2. Some more efforts should be done by organizations and marketers to increase the percentage of users in young age bracket, specially focussed at engaging in the dimension of online reviews / information. This percentage should match up to the figures seen in higher age brackets (63% vs. 77 & 72%). This will give double benefit in the sense that it will enlarge the base audience and also will lead to enhanced sharing with and influencing others.

[Note: *This paper is a part of the doctoral research work being done by*

first author, under the supervision of second author, in the area of DSMM engagement pattern. Authors acknowledge academic and administrative support of KSoM, KIIT University authority, for this research project.]

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Web Resource (Online Database, Websites and URLs)

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