

Use of Social Networking Websites as an Emerging Marcom Tool

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Abstract

It is no embellishment to say that that promoting is experiencing a standard transformation, in extensive part, to the internet and online networking and informal organizations. The proof is all around, for instance, numerous customers no more gaze upward things in the Yellow pages; they hunt down them on the Internet.

Utilizing Social Networking Websites, as showcasing instrument, is more than simply advertising in light of the fact that it incorporates requires the improvement of connections in view of shared hobbies.

We are still in ahead of schedule phases of the change online networking and long range interpersonal communication is having on advertising. Customary advertising is experiencing a change due, in substantial part, to the Internet and informal organizations and online networking.

While interpersonal interaction has gone on the length of social orders themselves have existed, the unparalleled capability of the Internet to advance such associations is just now being completely perceived and abused, through Web-based gatherings built up for that reason. With two thirds of the world's internet population visiting a social network or blogging website, and the sector now accounting for over 10% of all internet time, websites such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter are channels that marketers can really tap into.

Social networking can be an excellent way to acquire new customers and retain existing ones. The real value is the way marketers can engage with their audience on a personal level. Instead of simply 'sell sell sell', social networking is about the kind of two-way communication which helps to build a long term relationship. Of course, this form of interaction may not be suitable for all brands, but many organizations are benefiting from making their brand more personable.

This Paper analyses the opinion of potential consumer that is the internet users, on their attitude towards Social Networking Websites (SNWs) to be used as a Marcom tool (Marketing Communication tool). As the SNWs are the upcoming platforms that people have started using, to build networks. How can the marketers take the use of these Internet based platforms, as the tool for 'Customer engagement, viral marketing, Word of the mouth promotion, etc'.

The study is based on survey conducted where the opinions of the "Internet users" have been collected, with a sample size of approx 300, using 'Questionnaire' as a research tool. The findings are expected to give the conclusion for the marketers, to look the SNWs as an emerging marcom platform. The recommendations have been given on the basis of Findings.

Keywords: Communication; Marketing; Advertisements; Social networking

Introduction

A study appointed by the American Marketing Association uncovers an uplifting view point for probability of e-trade on person to person communication locales, in that 47% of purchasers said they would visit long range interpersonal communication destinations to hunt down and examine occasion blessing thoughts and 29% said they would purchase items there [1].

Informal organizations have outfitted to give shopping administrations. Facebook included a shopping application that empowers clients to look for items they need to purchase, and after that impart their insights of those items with other Facebook individuals [2].

It is no embellishment to say that that advertising is experiencing an ideal model transformation, in vast part, to the Internet and online networking and informal communities. The proof is all over the place, for instance, numerous buyers no more gaze upward things in the Yellow pages; they look for them on the Internet. "Social Network Marketing is the use of social media software to create or maintain connections".

It is more than just marketing because it includes requires the development of relationships based on shared interests.

"Social network marketing is the practice of expanding the number

of one's business and/or social contacts by making connections through individuals."

It can be undoubtedly said that the Social Media are the emerging tool for an effective marketing. It has been rightly said by Matt Dickman, that "Social media is not an island. It's a high-power engine on the larger marketing ship."

According to the recent research by www.internetworldstats.com, the total numbers of users on Facebook, as on June 30, 2011, worldwide are 6,930,055,154, with a penetration of 10.3%. That is a huge figure. Ready-to-consume free information in the form of age, likes, email, is available before the marketer. However, thinking out-of-the box requires, for leaving a trail of the so-called Word-of-mouth promotion i.e. the viral part of the marketing. For instance the song "Why this

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Kolaveri Di..”, is the recent example of effective social media marketing. The Kolaveri number has taken in people, especially youngsters and though they do not know the exact meaning and whether they follow the lyrics (which the promoters of the Video have done in scrolls in English) the number is on the lips of all these youngsters and that speaks volume of its acceptance amongst youngsters converging from different states. Yes, it is the viral part that helps spread the leaked video like anything, with the help of social media like YouTube and facebook.

Social networking sites are emerging as a boom for the marketers. It is being used as an innovative marketing strategy. Social media has become a platform that is easily accessible to anyone with internet access, opening doors for organizations to increase their brand awareness and facilitate conversations with the customer. Therefore, the Social networking sites, not initially formed with these objectives, would help marketers to achieve objectives like better customer understanding, knowledge sharing, informing about and promoting products. Social networks and social media are part of a phenomenon that is changing the way we communicate with our members and potential members. Consumers are using online tools to take charge of their own experience and connect with others. They are using blogs, wikis, pod casts and YouTube, to name only a few. The real value is the way marketers can engage with their audience on a personal level. Instead of simply ‘sell sell sell’, social networking is about the kind of two-way communication which helps to build a long term relationship. Of course, this form of interaction may not be suitable for all brands, but many organizations are benefiting from making their brand more personable. Social networking is opening up exciting new ways of communicating with audiences; like some marketers like Make my Trip, Yatra etc., have recently used Twitter in conjunction with their website to document their clients’ travels to many domestic and foreign locations, and gained many new fans/followers along the way. There is no doubt that the further development could be seen in this arena in the near future, and it would be surprising to see just how much of a benefit social networking can be to so many organizations.

Objectives of the Study

“A study without objectives is like a tree without roots”. In any area of study, the first and the foremost task is to define the objectives of the research i.e. the reason why the research study need to be conducted.

A research study may have many objectives but all these objectives revolve around one major objective which is the focus of the study. In this study, the focus is the use of the Social Networking Websites (SNWs) as a marketing tool.

The Social networking is an innovative marketing tool which is being adopted by so many marketers now-a-days. And so this study will be based on studying the emergence of Social Networking Sites as an efficient marketing tool.

The following are the objectives of this research study:

1. To study the use of the Social Networking Sites as an innovative marketing strategy.
2. To study the reactions of potential customers about marketing through SNWs.

Review of Literature

Research suggests that consumers rely on two different sets of values in making their shopping decisions: Hedonic and utilitarian define these values as follows:

- (1) Consummatory affective (hedonic) gratification from sensory attributes.
- (2) Instrumental, utilitarian reasons” [3-5].

Online shopping services lack multisensory attributes. The primary utilitarian values that online shoppers seek include the convenience of locating and comparing merchants, evaluating price/quality ratios, and conserving temporal and psychological resources [6].

Godes and Mayzlin [7] suggest that online conversations (e.g. Use net posts) can offer an easy and cost-effective way to measure ‘Word of Mouth’. Online conversations offer the firm an attractive opportunity to learn about its environment by directly observing the flow of interpersonal communication. By looking at activity across different online communities, firms are able to infer measures of social structure.

Online social networks are platforms, which allow individuals to connect and communicate with others with common interests termed as friends [5]. According to Urstad [8], social networking is the fastest growing activities on the new user centered Internet, Web2.0, which has spread to sites of all sizes, and are increasingly intertwined as platforms open.

A recent US study categorized five key objectives of social networking strategies, namely (i) improve customer understanding, (ii) promote issues of social concern, (iii) promote products and services, (iv) facilitate internal knowledge sharing, and (v) increase brand awareness. Leading companies such as Unilever, Xerox, P and G, Virgin, Toyota, JP Morgan, CISCO, IBM, Burger King and Honda had successfully utilized social networking websites [9].

Michael Trusov, et al. [10] explained that- Because social network sites record the electronic invitations from existing members, outbound Word of Mouth can be precisely tracked. Along with traditional marketing, Word of Mouth can then be linked to the number of new members subsequently joining the site (sign-ups) [11].

Research Methodology

Research design of the study

Data sources:

1. **Primary data sources:** The primary data i.e. the first hand data was collected from the people who are the member of one or more Social Networking Website (SNW).
2. **Secondary data sources:** The second hand data was collected from the sources like Books, Journal, Newspapers, Internet, discussions, etc.

Research approach: The research study was ‘Exploratory’ in nature. The study was based on taking out insights and ideas into the problem i.e. analyzing the marketing opportunities on the social networking sites.

Data collection tools: The tool that was used for the data collection was structured questionnaire.

Sample design of the study

The Sample design include the decision of the sample i.e. the respondents who represent the whole population. The sample design included:

Sample unit: The sample units were the people who are the members of one or more Social Networking Websites like Facebook,

Tweeter, LinkedIn, etc.

Sample size: The Sample Size for this research study comprised of 300 respondents.

Sample area: The data was collected from the Delhi and NCR regions, in India.

Sample technique: The respondents were selected on the basis of probability sampling technique i.e. Random sampling.

Analysis

The following is the analysis of the data collected from 300 respondents

Are you aware of any websites where you can make friends and socialize (social network websites)? (Table 1 and Figure 1).

Do you have a profile on any social networking website (SNW)? (Table 2 and Figure 2).

How long have you been using the SNW? (Table 3 and Figure 3).

Have you ever used SNWs for searching an Internship or Job? (Table 4 and Figure 4).

How many hours do you spend weekly on the SNW? (Table 5 and Figure 5).

Which SNW(s) are you a member of? (Table 6 and Figure 6).

Kindly indicate what information have you included on your social network websites? (Table 7 and Figure 7).

Do you believe companies save money by using SNWs to market their products? (Table 8 and Figure 8).

Do you notice any offers/advertisement for the product/services on a SNW? (Table 9 and Figure 9).

Do you think that in this busy lifestyle, the information received via advertisements on SNWs regarding the new offers help you keep up-to-date? (Table 10 and Figure 10).

Have you ever purchased any product after collecting the information from any SNWs? (Table 11 and Figure 11).

If Yes, What category of product have you purchased? (Table 12 and Figure 12).

Have you ever switch off from one brand to another after being influenced by the number of “Likes” on a brand? (Table 13 and Figure 13).

Do you think SNWs are a good way of providing feedback to the company regarding its product/service? (Table 14 and Figure 14).

Have you ever felt like your privacy was violated through sharing information with marketers on SNWs? (Table 15 and Figure 15).

Have you ever recommended any specific brand to any of your friends etc on SNWs? (Table 16 and Figure 16).

Findings

After analyzing the collected data, the followings interpretations can be made in the form of findings:

1. With advent in the internet revolution, more and more number of people are coming into the access of the same.

	No of Respondents	% of Total
Yes	300	100
No	0	0
	300	100

Table 1: Survey of analysis of the data collected from 300 respondents.

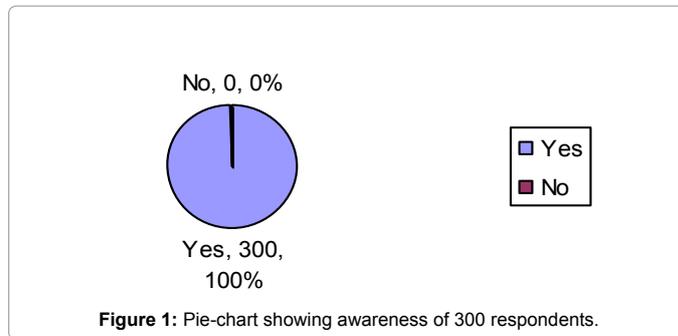


Figure 1: Pie-chart showing awareness of 300 respondents.

	No of Respondents	% of Total
Yes	300	100
No	0	0
	300	100

Table 2: Survey of analysis of the respondents having profile on SNWs.

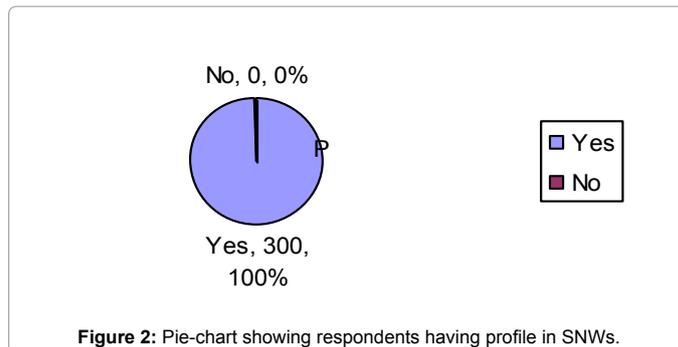


Figure 2: Pie-chart showing respondents having profile in SNWs.

	No of Respondents	% of Total
Less than 1 month	5	1.666667
6-12 months	63	21
12-24 months	111	37
More than 24 Months	121	40.33333
	300	100

Table 3: Time frame of using SNWs.

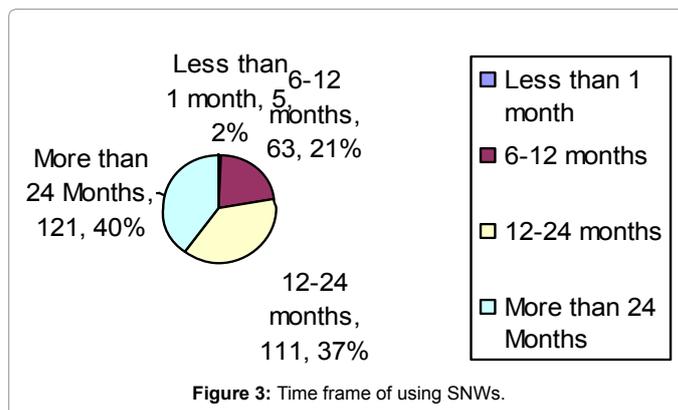


Figure 3: Time frame of using SNWs.

	No of Respondents	% of Total
Yes	73	24.33333
No	227	75.66667
	300	100

Table 4: Use of SNWs for job search etc.

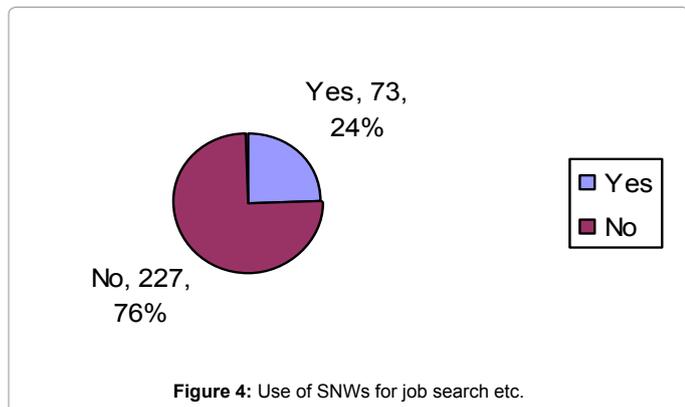


Figure 4: Use of SNWs for job search etc.

	No of Respondents	% of Total
0-5 hours	21	7
6-10 hours	35	11.6666667
10-20 Hours	170	56.6666667
20-30 Hours	16	5.33333333
More than 30 Hours	58	19.3333333
	300	100

Table 5: Table showing time spent per week on SNWs.

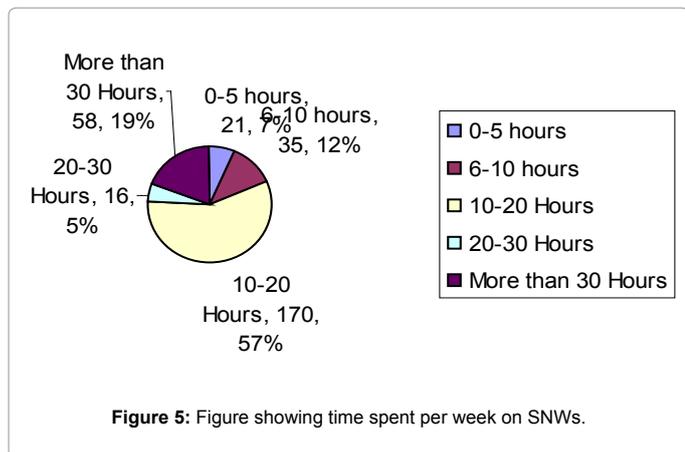


Figure 5: Figure showing time spent per week on SNWs.

	No. of Respondents	% of Total
Facebook	270	90
Linkedin	200	66.66667
My Space	30	10
Orkut	65	21.66667
Youtube	99	33
Twitter	230	76.66667
others	56	18.66667

(Note: Some Respondents had account on more than 1 SNW)

Table 6: Table showing membership of SNW.

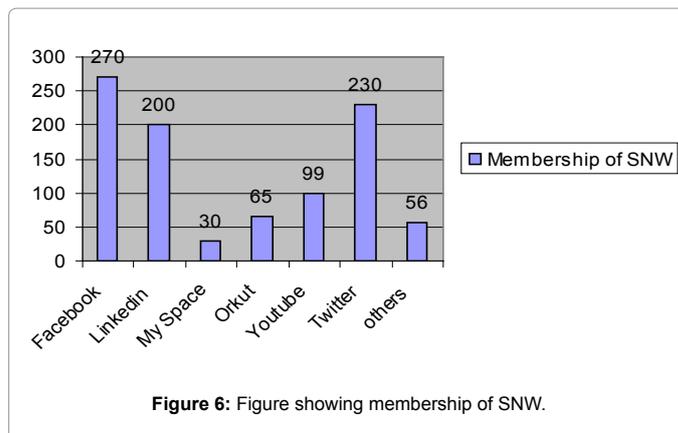


Figure 6: Figure showing membership of SNW.

	No. of Respondents	% of Total
Email	200	66.6666667
Phone No	78	26
Hometown/City	250	83.3333333
Music	113	37.6666667
Movies	65	21.6666667
Books	99	33
Passion	230	76.6666667
Sports	61	20.3333333
Activities	87	29
TV Shows	119	39.6666667
Relationship Status	229	76.3333333
Others	150	50

(Note: few respondents answered more than 1 option)

Table 7: Table showing information disclosed on any SNW.

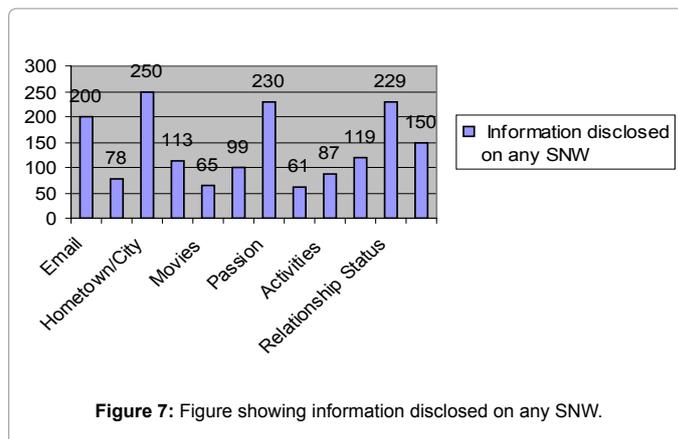
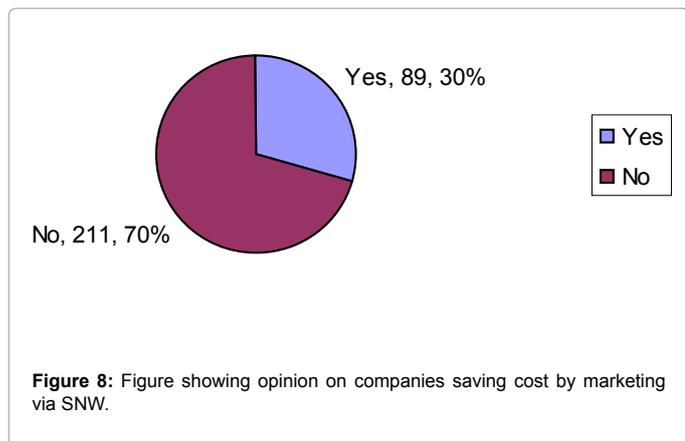


Figure 7: Figure showing information disclosed on any SNW.

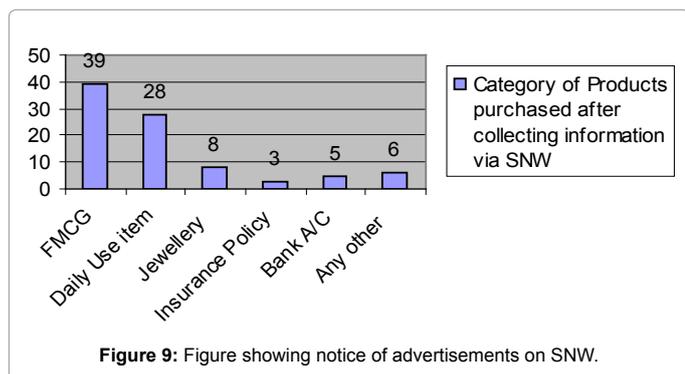
	No. of Respondents	% of Total
Yes	189	63
No	111	37
	300	100

Table 8: Table showing opinion on companies saving cost by marketing via SNW.



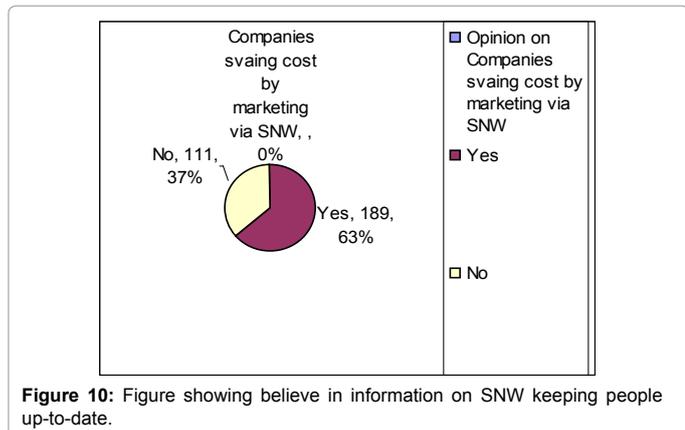
	No. of Respondents	% of Total
Yes	166	55.3333333
No	134	44.6666667
	300	100

Table 9: Table showing notice of advertisements on SNW.



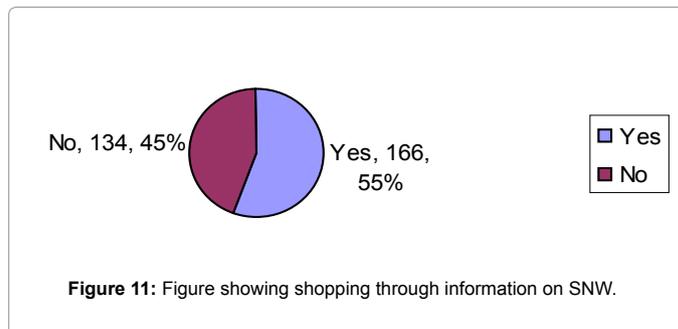
	No. of Respondents	% of Total
Strongly Agree	118	39.3333333
Agree	75	25
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	50	16.6666667
Disagree	42	14
Strongly Disagree	15	5
	300	100

Table 10: Table showing believe in information on SNW keeping people up-to-date.



	No. of Respondents	% of Total
Yes	89	29.6666667
No	211	70.3333333
	300	100

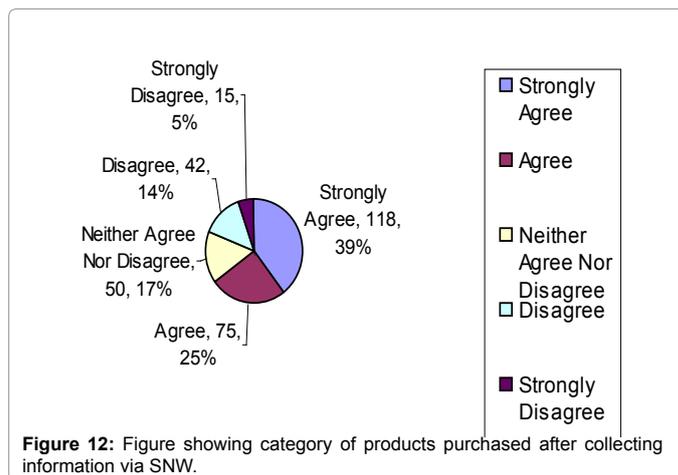
Table 11: Table showing shopping through information on SNW.



	No. of Respondents	% of Total
FMCG	39	13
Daily Use item	28	9.33333333
Jewellery	8	2.66666667
Insurance Policy	3	1
Bank A/C	5	1.66666667
Any other	6	2
	89	100

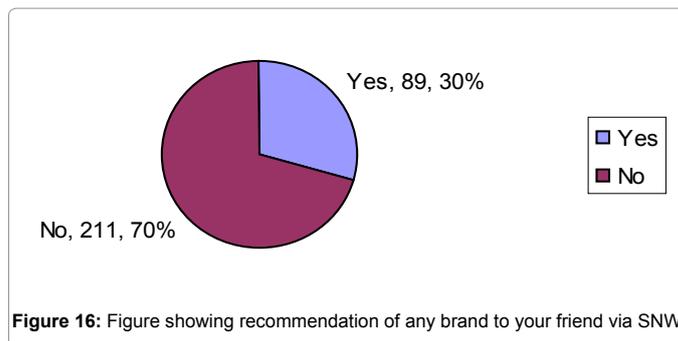
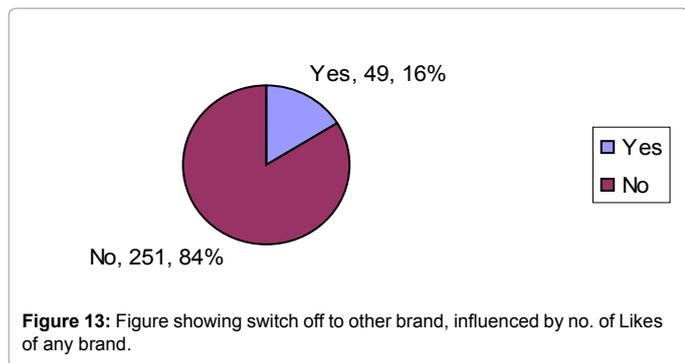
(Since 89 respondents purchased goods, refer to above ques, so total respondents=89, but % is calculated out of 300 total)

Table 12: Table showing category of products purchased after collecting information via SNW.



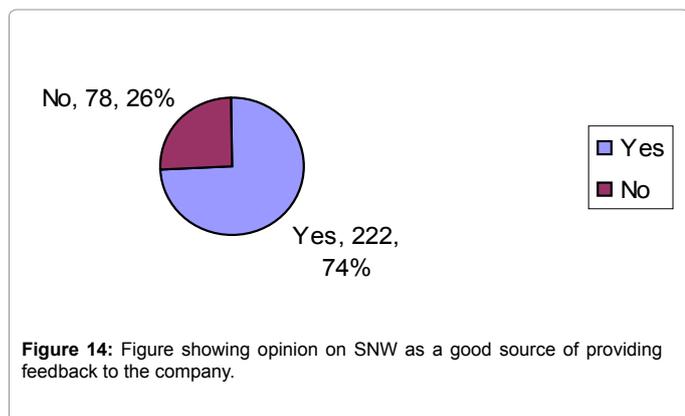
	No. of Respondents	% of Total
Yes	49	16.3333333
No	251	83.6666667
	300	100

Table 13: Table showing switch off to other brand, influenced by no. of Likes of any brand.



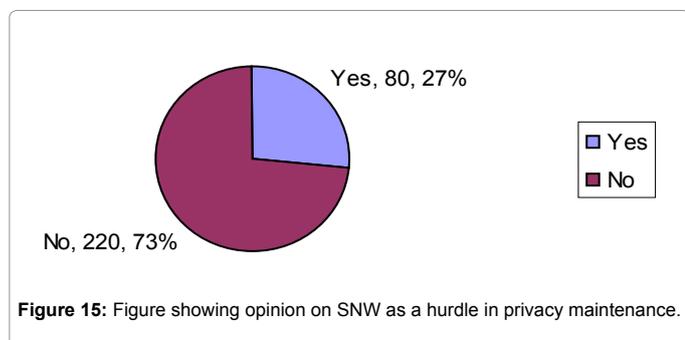
	No. of Respondents	% of Total
Yes	222	74
No	78	26
Total	300	100

Table 14: Table showing opinion on SNW as a good source of providing feedback to the company.



	No. of Respondents	% of Total
Yes	80	26.6666667
No	220	73.3333333
Total	300	100

Table 15: Table showing opinion on SNW as a hurdle in privacy maintenance.



	No. of Respondents	% of Total
Yes	89	29.6666667
No	211	70.3333333
Total	300	100

Table 16: Table showing recommendation of any brand to your friend via SNW.

- The number of members on various social networking sites is increasing at a very high pace, day by day.
- 2% of the respondents have been accessing the social networking sites from 1-6 months, 37% of the respondents have been accessing the social networking sites from 12-24 months, showing that this is a latest trend amongst the people.
- 57% of the respondents access the social networking sites 10-20 hours every week, showing that there is a lot of time for the marketers to act.
- 90% of the respondents are the members of Facebook, 33% of them are the members on the YouTube, 67% of them are the members on the LinkedIn and 77% of them are the members on the Twitter, making them most popular Social Networking Websites.
- 24% of the respondents have searched for a job/internship through any SNW, explaining the scope of SNW for HR oriented companies like Recruitment Firms, Consultancies, etc.
- 67% of the respondents have mentioned their Email ID, 26% have mentioned their Phone Numbers, 83% have mentioned their Home Town/City, 38% have mentioned their Music Interests, 22% have mentioned their Favorite Movies, 33% have mentioned their interests in Books, 77% have mentioned about their Passion areas, 20% have mentioned their favorite sport, 29% have mentioned their Interest Activities, 40% have mentioned their favorite T.V. Shows, 76% have mentioned their relationship status and 50% of them have mentioned any other information, on their respective Social Networking Sites.
- 63% of the respondents believe that the companies can save money by using SNWs as a marketing tool.
- 55% of the respondents notice any offer/advertisement for any Product/Service that highlights on their Social Network Website.
- 30% of the respondents took purchase decision on the basis of the information that they received on their Social Network Website.
- Out of 89 respondents (30%) who purchased any product after getting information from SNW, 13% (% of total i.e. 300) purchased FMCG, 9% purchased daily use item, 3% purchased jewellery, 1% purchased insurance policy, 2% purchased bank a/c, 2% purchased any other product category item.
- 16% of the respondents agree that they have switch off from one brand to another after being influenced by the number of "Likes" on a brand. Therefore, information search on SNW plays an important role in consumer decision-making process.

13. 74% of the respondents think that SNWs are a good way of providing feedback to the company regarding product/service, stating it clear that SNW are a good source for the marketers to get involved in to "Interactive Marketing".
14. 27% of the respondents agree that the advertisements are an intrusion on their privacy.
15. 61% of the respondents agree that due to their busy lifestyle, advertising on Social Networking Sites can be useful to them in gaining knowledge about interesting offerings, stating it clear that SNW can be a good source specially in Urban areas, where both husband-wife are working.
16. 30% of the respondents told that they had recommended a brand to another person, for use, via SNW. Therefore, SNWs are a good source of viral marketing and publicity. The 'word-of-mouth' promotion, which is considered as the best source of promotion, can be held via SNWs.
12. Social networking sites cost no or very less to the marketers, but the marketers have to take proper utilization of the huge opportunity available before them. So they have to plan strategically and then act.
13. Social media strategies must target certain groups in order for your plan to be successful. The question for your business is how you manage all of your social media accounts. You want to streamline, consolidate, and analyze your social media marketing plan in the most efficient way possible. Online businesses have originated over the past five years to do just that.
14. With the rapid burgeoning of social media websites, your business needs to find a way to consolidate social media marketing efforts to save money and time. Engage sciences has developed a platform that allows your business to view messages, comments, and post replies across all of your Facebook and Twitter channels.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following are my recommendations to the marketers, who use or would like to use the social networking websites as a part of their marketing strategy:

1. The marketers should use social networking sites as the part of their marketing strategies, as using SNWs is a recent trend amongst the people and more and more number of people are coming into the access of the same.
2. There should be strategic planning that should be made before advertising on the social networking sites.
3. The users/members mention a large set of their personal information and interests like Music, Passion, Relationship Status, etc. So the marketer should use one-to-one marketing in case of using Social Networking Sites as per the interest areas of the member of the Site.
4. The marketer should create their own communities in the name of their brand or business and attract the members to join the same.
5. A huge quantum of time is being spent by the people on the social networking sites and so marketers should take the advantage of the same.
6. Marketers' information or offerings etc. should not prove to be an intrusion to the privacy of the people and so they should be able to provide compact and relevant information.
7. Marketers also need to beware of cheating the customers, as the communication via SNWs spreads very fast.
8. The Marketer should try to increase their online presence on different SNWs, as the customers prefer it as a good source of information, while taking a purchase decision.
9. The access to the information available on the social networking sites regarding the marketers' offerings should be convenient and short on details.
10. The marketers can also create their own Blogs, Write-ups, and communities etc. to communicate regarding their offerings and also receive feedback.
11. The marketers should try to maintain healthy customer relationship with the help of social networking sites.

Conclusion

Taking everything into account, it can be said that the today in the period of globalization and web upset, the advertising is experiencing an ideal model transformation from the traditional promoting practices to the internet showcasing practices.

Long range interpersonal communication Sites are a blast for the advertisers. It could be utilized as an inventive advertising technique. SNWs have turn into the stages that are effortlessly available to anybody with web access, opening entryways for associations to build their image mindfulness and encourage discussions with the client. Furthermore, SNWs serves as a moderately cheap stage for associations to execute promoting crusades. With 66% of the world's web populace going to an informal organization or blogging site, the Word-of-mouth, which is viewed as the most grounded promoter, is available if there should arise an occurrence of advertising imaginatively through social networking sites. The viral piece of the SNWs makes it additionally intriguing for the advertisers to utilize it as a showcasing device.

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