

## DIGITAL CONSUMER COMMUNICATIONS

VINEET KAUL\*

### ABSTRACT

Since the beginning of the new technologically vibrant millennium, the new digital communication technologies have been constantly transforming marketing dynamics and consumer behavior. This paper illustrates the impact of intersection between digital media and consumer behavior and, specific to consumer empowerment and sovereignty-how they use devices and platforms effectively using different socio-economic variables, and how they make decisions about which to use when and customers interact with each other through new media, and how these interactions affect what customers think and how they behave in a relationship with a brand. This paper contributes to existing marketing literature by offering a framework that integrates various expressions of consumer behavior in digital media and links them to forms of consumer power.

With regard to brand attitudes, which include the thoughts and feelings that a consumer has about the focal brand, as well as new media attitudes, as consumers' thoughts and beliefs about the roles of media vehicles in their lives. In the modern era, digital literacy has become a "survival skill"-a key that helps users to work intuitively in executing complex digital tasks. Consumers that score high on both kinds of attitudes will exhibit high new media brand engagement-non-purchase customer behaviors that involve new media, such as creating and watching YouTube videos about the brand, blogs, web sites, reviews, etc. Relationship outcomes considered in this paper include short-term and long-term measures.

**KEYWORDS:** Digital Communication, Consumer, Consumer Empowerment, Brand Attitude, Digital Media.

### INTRODUCTION

The world today is becoming increasingly digital and its connectivity raises new opportunities and challenges to create an outstanding brand value. Most companies understand the need to respond and adapt to the evolving use of technology by their customers and other key stakeholders.

What they do not realise is how little time they have to address these changes. There is a new consumer power shift and they have access to information about a company and its products from a multitude of sources. Consumers can buy from anywhere, regardless of physical location.

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\*Scholar, DA-ICT (Dhirubhai Ambani Institute of Information, Communication & Technology) University, Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India. **Correspondence E-mail Id:** editor@eurekajournals.com

The Internet simplifies transactions for both consumers and industrial customers. Customers can connect directly with providers to buy goods and services. Increasing communication between customers amplifies and accelerates word-of-mouth marketing. However, modern-day consumers are wiser and more elusive than their more gullible predecessors. Even as consumers have embraced a greater influx of information, the media channels by which a company might push information to consumers have become less effective. Media fragmentation, consumer skepticism, and the time pressures of a modern lifestyle mean that pushing information and products on unsuspecting customers is an uphill battle.

Communication changed overnight, resulting in instant and ubiquitous information, shared globally through diverse channels. This heralded the reaching of a new era of consumption for new generation- well connected; constantly updated and widely networked. Since 1980s digital was a utopian dream for enthusiastic and digital technologies and it has arrived as revolutionary if not redemptive development. Today there is more information available than in any encapsulated system-no matter whether you are at home or taking a stroll in woods. Now digital media is a part of the minutiae of everyday life and we are living post-digital age. It is said that the traditional marketing still has a wider reach across the population, but typically does not carry the same explosive potential for change that characterises the most extreme examples in the digital space. As the trajectory of the 21st Century begins to take shape, no other single issue has higher potential, greater challenges, or wider implications for consumer justice and protection than digitization. Thanks to the proliferation of digital devices and platforms which help to ensure that we build sustainable socio-economic relationships both with advanced knowledge and technology. This plethora of new media is migrating customers from paper-based

to digital communication on a strategic management level. To start digital transformation successfully one needs to understand digital consumer, choices and preferences which lead to macro-level consumer-centric changes within the organizations that focus these needs. Customer is gradually changing into 'e-customers' with the use of internet, mobile devices, social media and raising the bar of digital expectations. By 2020 there will be 50bn internet enabled devices (Tele fonaktie bolaget LM Ericsson, 2011). Because these ubiquitous devices are all connected with each other they will make the internet of things become meaningful reality.

Traditional communication has become obsolete and marketers today care more and more about new media rather than mass media. Digital is not only a key channel of communication but also a choice to conduct volume of business. Consumers are enjoying freedom and have become hyper active partners so as to remain constantly connected with network of other hyper-connected consumers. The rise of new media channels such as Face book, YouTube, My Space, Google, and Twitter, no longer require computers too has become an integral element of consumer behavior which enable customers to take a more active role as market players navigating their way around the modern shopping labyrinth and reach almost anywhere and anytime. The use of search engines/ bolts has transformed the way passive consumers get information about products, services, firms and people. These new media threaten long established business models and corporate strategies, but also provide ample opportunities for growth through new adaptive strategies. The evolution of digital capability is a fluid and on-going process. Connectedness is pervading consumers' daily lives, and they continue to crave even more. People check their phones continuously, virtually anywhere they find themselves. Maintaining their digital connections is more important than ever before. Consumer businesses need to accelerate digital

thinking across the enterprise to drive digital evolution.

The digitization of everything is a step change even greater than the invention and adoption of internet primarily because of its scale and pace of change (Ingelton et al, (2011)). Exponential technology advances, greater consumer power and increased competition mean all industries face the threat of commoditisation. The winners will act now, and build a strategic advantage that leaves their counterparts wondering what happened. To start digital transformation successfully one needs to understand digital consumer, choices and preferences which lead to macro-level consumer-centric changes within the organizations that focus these needs. In order to stay ahead in the race, the modern-day business has to willy-nilly use digital technology not only to stay connected to customers, but to capitalize on the stupendous amounts of data available to stay ahead of the competition.

In 2005 consumer products giant Proctor & Gamble had coined the term FMOT (first moment of truth) when buyer uses the product and it either lives up or fail. Today the way people shop has changed and web browsing has become excessive pervasive. This has made shoppers to read reviews, compare prices, evaluate options. Then what happens to “first moment of truth?”

Now Google’s chief ZMOT evangelist has introduced ZMOT (Zero Moment of Truth) wherein shoppers are “pre-shopping” on line researching products and brands and also what to buy or how much they should pay. As Google’s ZMOT handbook for marketers explains, “the sales funnel isn’t really a funnel anymore.” Today there is a new, empowered consumer generation that does its homework ahead of time at this new and critically important Zero Moment of Truth. It is a sensitive behavioral change and marketers need to take into account when planning their marketing blueprint.

The myriad developments of digital technology have brought tsunami storm surge in the shopping paradigm and adapting to this ongoing digitization is arguably the most challenging transformation every business is encountering. Today, more and more brands are waking up to the transition and are preparing for service oriented shift from product design to R&D, communication, sales, customer service, and finally returning again to design. If marketers have to survive these digital divas, they have to learn to navigate the turbulent and challenging realities of a business. In the era of social networks, brand loyalty keeps plummeting, and the increased competition is continuing to transfer power from institutions to individuals. We have already entered the era of Digital Darwinism and the mantra is “*adapt or die*”. “Customer is king” and the new media offers multifarious ways to reach consumers, communicate with them, and measure their communication prowess, browsing or purchase-related attitudes. The companies investing more in learning about behaviors, expectations and preferences will have a significant competitive edge over those that figure out later.

It’s not just the small, agile startups like Instagram, Twitter, and zipcar who will profit from innovation through digitalization and revolutionize old business models. Digitalization is not a destination point for companies or brands, but rather a profound transformation process that requires focus and strategy in order not to lose sight of the business goals. Digitalization is gaining momentum and becoming a priority and hence to avail the opportunities offered require a spacious understanding as to why consumers are largely attracted to potential social impacts of these new media frameworks and how they influence consumers’ consumption affect and behavior and which are in line with the perceived impact of their new media and their effects on customers. Digital transformation also represents maturity of

companies to outperform peers and introduce new models for business and, equally, create a way of staying in business as customers become increasingly digitalized. Achieving and retaining leadership will require consistent renewal and presentation of product with improved consumer-oriented and technology based fascinations.

The customer relationship management literature recognizes the long-run value of potential and current customers. Companies are now increasingly focused on managing the major challenges of customer relationships. Today's brands are concerned with how consumers feel about their products and introduce inputs to drive innovations. Moreover, according to past research (Ha, 2005), brands evoke emotions (Bowlby, 1979), memories, and fantasies. In the context of brand strategies, this tendency can be translated into the Consumer-Brand (from now on C-B) relationship (Chang and Chieng, 2006). This relationship has been demonstrated to enhance several outcomes, such as brand loyalty (Park, MacInnis and Priester, 2006), brand durability (Ahluwalia, Burnkrant and Unnava, 2000), and consumers' willingness to pay a premium price (Thomson, MacInnis and Park, 2005). Therefore, in the recent years, brands find it imperative to maintain strong relationship amid competition. An evidence of these changes can be found into the growing marketing literature focused on the emotional aspects of brand relationship (Thompson, Rindfleisch and Arsel, 2006). In the past decades, scholars identified emotional and symbolic aspects in consumption experiences (e.g., Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982), and more recently researchers have paid greater attention to these emotional aspects, such as emotional attachment (perception of closeness of the self to a brand) (Fournier, 1998), emotions as reflection of personal and group identification or as a signal of social status associated with other brand users (Strizhakova, Coulter and Price, 2008). Scholars have found not only that emotional aspects of C-B relationships

are crucial in enhancing relationship quality in those individuals who are emotionally attached to a brand, but also that these individuals exhibit greater loyalty to it (Thomson, MacInnis and Park, 2005). In fact, as Belk (1988) showed in his research, consumer's purchases are partly driven by a desire to communicate their personality through wearing or using branded products. Although a growing body of literature has focused on the role that emotional factors play in the C-B relationship (Fournier, 1998), this role overtime is complex, dynamic and multi-determined. Particularly, it is interesting to note that, as Hwang and Kandampully (2012) stated in their recent work, the purchasing power of young consumers, including teenagers and generation Y individuals (people born between 1977 and 1994) has increased, and these younger consumers groups have become relevant consumer segment in various brand categories. Therefore, the analysis of the emotional elements related to the relationship between younger consumers and brands is of great interest'

Barely half-a-decade back-and it seems like eons ago -the rules of marketing were simple. If you had a product, you'd develop a slick marketing plan, set up shop to sell it, draw customers to your shop through ads and promos, get smart sales people to wheedle them into buying and once the buyer reached out for his wallet the job was done. You're happy, the customer is happy. Professionals argue that traditional marketing resembles pinball game/ metaphor (Hennig-Thurau et al.2010) where 'ball' is marketing instruments, 'pins' are to reach and influence customers and 'bowling alley' is mass media. The art of "pinball playing" illustrate this in a conceptual framework and each phenomenon affects (a) consumer behavior, (b) the successful management of customer interactions, and (c) measuring customers' activities and relationship outcomes, highlighting areas for future research. Two main differences reflect alterations in consumer behavior connected with the rise of

social media. Resultantly, consumers gain more power in the new pinball environment than they had in old pinball game (Labrecque et al, 2013). The unpredictability of game is increased by mass media in the form of slingshot and bumper thus multiplying social media episode. Playing pinball ourselves is an appropriate place to start provided we have substantial budgets for learning how to play. Academic research has not yet shed much light on the organizational adaptations required for success in the new pinball world. To keep in touch with the marketplace, scholars in every area of the marketing discipline need to understand the implications and consequences of the new paradigm.

With an unprecedented proliferation of devices and the explosion of the learning algorithms to sense, predict, infer and, in some ways, even think- digital channels are reshaping consumer decision-making process. They take more time, complete more research and travel through more points of influence than ever before. This is not always the case that marketers deliberately push consumers through the Consumer Decision Journey in a linear fashion. Many a time consumers have varied experiences or are influenced by sundry other factors and use different tools to decide on a purchase. It is online or offline, a successful marketing starts with a proper understanding of consumer decision journey en route to a purchase. This journey nevertheless has become much more arduous since digital technology touch points are seeping into decision journey. For decades, marketing visualized these touch points through the metaphor of a funnel but now consumer savviness has grown exponentially with the rise of digital. If we retrospect the consumer had started with total product ignorance, gradually progressed to increased product awareness, and now has ideally arrived at the decision to purchase. Potential customers are more well-informed than ever before and are increasingly

comfortable seeking out that information on their own instead of waiting for a marketer to deliver it to them. He follows consumer decision journey while selecting brands, products and services. Savvy decision-makers know that a traditional, wide-net, one-size-fits-all campaign is often no longer sufficient-the times call for a more holistic approach. Marketers need to stay cognizant of multiple choices of influential factor and use a mix of marketing tactics. The key to success lies in testing, iterations and guiding future strategy with appropriate metrics.

Omnichannel marketing offers marketers and retailers a holistic approach to reaching consumers with a more integrated message, through any channel and at any point in their path to purchase. Now, omnichannel marketing is making the path to purchase so complicated the linear funnel model has become obsolete and replaced by the “measurable Consumer Narrative “Today’s consumer journey is more like an infinite loop, where shoppers are always discovering, considering and buying via multiple channels. So keeping them engaged is an ongoing process. Customers are swamped with online and offline choices for buying new products/ services not requiring to remember and explicitly formulate an opinions on considerations and preference for brands. Once digital media was considered to be as a mere information gathering venue but now digital media and brands are weaving an important role in facilitating conversation about their products .Most companies know how to think through customers needs and engineer advocacy creating automatic way for consumers and engage customers in these digital channels. Now “shopping” behavior can be seen outside of consumer consciousness exploring validated brands, consumer emotion, albeit in quite different ways. According to researchers, new consumer engagement metrics should be clubbed with evolving purchase decision model. Every day, advertisements, conversations with family and friends, news

reports and product experiences make us form impressions of brands. It will be a waste exposure unless consumers are actively shopping. But if something triggers the impulse to buy, what happens? Then the accumulated impressions become crucial because they shape the initial-consideration set: the small number of brands consumers regard at the outset as potential purchasing options.

The ubiquity of process models of decision-making looks to be a circuitous journey supposedly having four primary phases reflecting potential battlegrounds where marketers can lose or win: active evaluation, initial consideration, or the process of researching potential purchases; closure, when consumers buy brands; and post-purchase, when consumers experience them. If we compare the funnel metaphor, that does not assist much-like, by assisting to understand the plus-points of a brand vis-a-vis its competitors at different stages, underlining the bottlenecks that stall adoption, and paving way to focus on various aspects of the marketing challenges.

Alignment cannot be achieved by simply integrating your marketing automation system with Salesforce.com. It's not about defining a new lead management approach. And simply creating more content and tools won't align anything. True marketing and sales alignment requires a fundamental shift. Consumers now-a-days connect with brands often through media channels beyond manufacturer's tether. Funnel metaphor is outdated and consumers use a variety of publicly available sources to better understand search activity and traffic patterns. Other marketers may need to retool their loyalty programs by focusing on active rather than passive loyalists or to spend money on in-store activities or word-of-mouth programs. The increasing complexity of the consumer decision journey will force virtually all companies to adopt new ways of measuring consumer attitudes, brand performance, and the effectiveness of

marketing expenditures across the whole process.

Without such a realignment of spending, marketers face two risks. First, they could waste money: at a time when revenue growth is critical and funding tight, advertising and other investments will be less effective because consumers aren't getting the right information at the right time. Second, marketers could seem out of touch-for instance, by trying to push products on customers rather than providing them with the information, support, and experience they want to reach decisions themselves.

Marketers have long been aware of profound changes in the way consumers research and buy products. Yet a failure to change the focus of marketing to match that evolution has undermined the core goal of reaching customers at the moments that most influence their purchases. The shift in consumer decision making means that marketers need to adjust their spending and to view the change not as a loss of power over consumers but as an opportunity to be in the right place at the right time, giving them the information and support they need to make the right decisions. Not all organisations can win the battle to retain the customer relationship-the digital world has thrown organisations into a strictly competitive game.

The study of this paper draws on survey data to study general patterns of influence across brands and categories. Analysis focused on people who had used each type of category in the past three months, and were familiar with each brand. All our measurements and conclusions are therefore derived from a relevant target audience .In addition I also run a great many custom studies for individual clients. These provide extra material and the opportunity to go into specific cases in greater depth. Findings from a couple of these are mentioned in this paper, with some details have been disguised for reasons of confidentiality.

## **LIMITATIONS IN DIGITAL MARKETING**

While Digital Marketing is certainly better than traditional media, there are still some limitations. These are typically related to the fact that the marketing approach, even with digital marketing, still remains predominantly Business to Consumer or B2C. In the digital era, what's really needed, and missing, is a Consumer to Business or C2B approach which results in a two ways, interactive dialogue or engagement between the brand and consumer. It is such engagement that can result in deep business insights related to how consumers perceive the brand and its products.

What are the limitations which arise in digital marketing from the lack of a C2B or engagement oriented approach?

## **EMAIL MARKETING**

Brand Promotions over email are fairly well known and all of us are the recipients for these. However there are three limitations in email marketing today. One is the lack of personalization or 'Blind Emails'-involving the same message going to all recipients regardless of their background and preferences. Second is that results regarding the campaign reach are at most based on 'Read Receipts' and not really on reactions to and impact of the message. Third is that it is extremely difficult to get meaningful business insights since there is typically no 'backward channel' from the consumer to brand. Even if consumers respond to emails, you need to have separate software to receive responses, parse them, and analyze them using text analytics engines-an expensive and time consuming approach.

## **SOCIAL MEDIA**

Brand and product related (sponsored) posts on social media channels such facebook and twitter are increasingly common these days. However

even with a channel such as facebook, 'Engagement' today typically means Likes, Shares and Comments. Let's say you have 5 million likes for your brand page. So what? Where do you go from there? The situation is similar with twitter too. You can find who is marking a tweet as a favorite, or who is retweeting, but not much beyond.

## **WEB**

For more than fifteen years now, brands have had a de facto web presence. However, again the messaging approach has been primarily B2C-the web is mainly a channel to 'push' information at the consumer. Some web sites have a 'feedback' feature where they try to collect some consumer data-however this is typically related to the site itself and rarely to the brand or the products from the brand. The result Generating meaningful consumer insights that can help the brand in their marketing strategy, is extremely difficult.

What then is the way forward? My recommendation would be to disrupt 'traditional' digital marketing by focusing, at the very outset, on consumer engagement rather than consumer communication. The need of the hour is for innovative approaches and software platforms that provide a way for brands to collect consumer insights, with the consent of the consumer of course. If this can be done in a transparent manner while at the same time making it fun for the consumer to participate in such 'engagements', the limitations of today's digital marketing techniques can be overcome. Brands need to plan their marketing strategy keeping the C2B channel in mind. Campaign plans, execution and measurement of effectiveness should also be based on business insights generated from direct consumer interactions.

In my opinion, the future of marketing is digital and the future of digital marketing is consumer engagement.

## **EMOTIONS AND DIGITAL CONSUMER**

Emotions are the source of inspiration, creativity and innovation, and central to understanding brands, the consumer-brand relationship and how to use emotion to benefit brand communication. 'Emotion', however, is a complex and slippery term which we tend to take for granted. Marketing, social, psychological, and philosophical literature abounds with argument about what exactly 'emotions' are and their links with terms like 'feelings', 'moods', 'affect', 'arousal'; let alone their relationships with 'motives', 'needs' and 'wants', and the part they play in forming 'attitudes', 'values', or 'goals'. Emotions represent key components of consumer judgments, decision and evaluation and like cognitions, have an impact on consumption, to more nuanced understandings of what drives the experience of discrete emotional states, how those discrete emotions uniquely affect decision making and the motivations that consumers might have to regulate their emotional states over time. One has to also understand how perception of quality of global brands, in relation with brand identification and emotional attachments are interrelated in contributing to brand loyalty (King 1773). Neuro-marketing/scientists are elaborating the "somatic-marker" hypothesis (Antonio Damasio, 1994) and shifting away from marketing those appeals to people's rational sides towards appealing more to their emotions. Emotion is based on perception and perception is based on exteroceptive stimuli -- what is seen, touched, tasted, heard and smelled, basically the holistic consumer experience. The last 100 years, psychologists have offered psycho-evolutionary variety of definitions, each focusing on different manifestations or components of the emotion. Emotions are understood as a very complex term playing an important role in our lives providing meaning to everyday existence (Cacioppo et al). As there seems to be no empirical solution to the debate on which component is sufficient or necessary to define

emotions, at present the most favoured solution is to say that emotions are best treated as a multifaceted phenomenon. Emotions are the primary reason why consumers prefer brand name products.

Brand emotions can be essentially personal, private and difficult to articulate, and are therefore communicated through labelling conventions of words, behaviour, body language, and metaphors for the emotional experience, which can also help articulation of emotions. There are two pathways in response to the emotional stimuli of brand communication: one cognitive and the other emotional. These are integrated via an 'ego executive function' which seeks to optimize consumer satisfaction in the context of personal, social and cultural values. A brand is nothing more than a mental representation of a product in the consumer's mind. Brands comprise both physical and socio-psychological attributes and it is marketing that builds your ego. Brands can imbue unique meaning to consumers and such meaning and personal experience with a brand can create a connection, or relationship, between the consumer and the brand. Because it makes you feel better about yourself, the brand transcends mere product status and is magically transformed into a friend. This gives the brand a heart and soul that builds life-long attachment. These are brands that share your values and priorities. Fournier [1994; 1998] was one of the first to conceptualize consumer brand relationships. In the past decades, scholars identified emotional and symbolic aspects in consumption experiences (e.g., Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982), and more recent researchers have paid greater attention to these emotional aspects, such as emotional attachment (Fournier, 1998), emotions as reflection of personal and group identification or as a signal of social status associated with other brand users (Strizhakova, Coulter and Price, 2008). Consumers are motivated to regulate not only the valence of their emotions but also the



arousal associated with their emotional states. Scholars have found not only that emotional aspects of C-B relationships are crucial in enhancing relationship quality in those individuals who are emotionally attached to a brand, but also that these individuals exhibit greater loyalty to it (Thomson, MacInnis and Park, 2005). In this metaphor, a consumer and a brand are theorized as being in a dyadic relationship similar to a relationship between two people. Subsequently, brand relationships can help consumers develop and communicate something about who they are, who they were, or who they aspire to be. The study also reminds us that arousal, not just valence, can play an important role in the desirability of emotions, as calm happiness in the moment is associated with lower arousal, while future-oriented excited happiness is much more energetic. consumers are motivated seekers of emotional states and that feeling good is not just a function of valence but is also driven by the energy that our emotions might require to sustain and perhaps provide to help us engage in future behavior.

Though the new digital world is complex and confusing but rich, intimate, alive, connected, networked, and hyper-aware. The inexorable rise of digital consumers is radically shifting the dynamics of the marketplace and communications, all of which is largely due to the acceleration of mobile infrastructure and digital technology revolution. In today's digital advertising world, the ubiquity of technology has quickly hidden the most important response rate of all time; the true human response-the emotional response. Digital is an optimal mechanism for developing consumer-brand relationship due to its interactivity. Digital provides a viable platform for the formation of such relationship and has become so central to people's behaviours that brands now should be thinking about "post-digital marketing. Digital can no longer be treated as a separate discipline or corporate function. Campaigns must now be

Omni-channel running seamlessly across online and offline media. Emotional branding" is by no means a recent innovation; it's been around since the dawn of advertising and it's here to stay, making appearances in every memorable ad campaign. It's a concept designed to instill powerful sentimental feelings towards the company in the client, the consumer's attachment of a strong, specific, usage-relevant emotion-such as Bonding, Companionship, or Love-to the brand. Psycho-evolutionary theory of emotion explains that emotions are not only adaptive but also play an important role both in cognition and behavior. Major advertisers have coined the phrase "high-definition media and marketing ecosystem" to describe the new media landscape, where consumers are continuously targeted and wooed both online and in the "real" world. Emotional marketing, however, is the ying to data-driven marketing's yang". What if a technology could quantify emotions into actionable data? What if we could turn the historically creative practice of storytelling and writing into a scientific practice rooted in data?! Emotional marketing and data don't necessarily need to be complimentary; they can be one in the same. We can quantify emotions to programmatically generate language that inspires action... actions that in turn fuel insight. This technology and practice is applicable for all brands who elicit/ engagement/ response/ revenue from marketing campaigns.

A totally emotional decision is typically very fast. This is because it takes time for the rational cortex to get going. This is the reactive decision-making that you encounter which either overrides logic or uses a pseudo-logic to support emotional choices. Values that drive the brand decision process to have become more emotionally-driven. In most categories the rational aspects are price-of-entry. Successful brands will identify what emotional values exist in their category, and utilize them as a foundation for meaningful differentiation. The consequence

of this new digital era is the proliferation of consumers' behavioural data. Back in the day when the points of contact with brands concentrated on very few channels, intuition-based decisions drove most of companies' marketing strategies. Consumers connect with brands through an ocean of new channels that generate daily an amount of data that leaves marketers struggling to understand what works or doesn't work.' While we are committed to a data-driven approach, at the same time we are sensitive to the emotional connection we need to make with our audience to truly tell our story. While very much data-driven in terms of metrics and optimizations, it's the creative nature of our campaigns that tap into the emotions of the fitness enthusiast and motivate them to be more active.'

In this new world of marketing, where everything can be measured, monitored and analyzed, it's about grabbing the right slice of an audience's attentions. And so, it becomes increasingly critical to incorporate the right kind of metrics and the right analyses. 'Marketing strategies without data analytics is like trying to make fire without oxygen. It is impossible.' Marketing must go through a dramatic change. This is not a superlative statement to garner interest or generate hype. It is the truth and still so many brands refuse to admit how weak and complacent they have been with their marketing efforts. Are brands really keeping up with their customers and their target audience behaviors? We actually want to create an emotional bond between the brand and the consumer/ client. If we continually feed our customer with meaningful content/ communication/ engagement, and then we might actually create an emotional bond rather than just stirring a few one-time hits of emotion.

"With regards to emotion-do not mix this up with emotional bond. A brand should aim for getting their target audience emotionally connected to them. This has to happen over a course of time

by continually playing to the audiences' emotions. A good brand appeals to its users by tapping into their emotions ... This is a one-time event. But a great brand does this continually to not just drive an emotion, but to obtain strong loyalty and an emotional bond."Our digital world has made our audience skeptical of advertisement. People can get real information across the Internet. And at the same time, the Internet/ digital/ mobile/ social world presents an opportunity to continually disseminate valuable information and interact with the target audience. So in essence what the new digital world has really created is a detriment for marketers that look for quick hits just to stir emotions. But at the same time the digital revolution creates an opportunity of great success for those that are committed to longer-term communication and engagement to build an emotional bond with a potential audience.

## **BRANDING IN THE DIGITAL AGE**

The days of pumping out marketing messages and waiting for buyers to place their orders are well behind us. The dictates of digital marketing today limit the expression and visualisation of the brand. Content is seen above creativity yet when all content is optimised and every meta tag in place we must ensure it is the brand that will reign supreme. Every interaction that B2B buyers have with brands today is influenced by shifting digital touch points that can enhance or destroy the sale. When buyers turn to digital channels to investigate their options brands must be ready with suitable content and signposts to efficiently guide them towards purchase. Branding has changed because consumers have changed because of vast impact of Internet, social media and mobile. Today, the successful branding involves a myriad of strategies, concepts and channels-a mixing of tried and true principles and an ever-evolving, agile adaptation to the digital age we live in. Consumers are promiscuous in their brand relationships. After a purchase these

consumers may remain aggressively engaged, publicly promoting or assailing the products they've bought, collaborating in the brands' development, and challenging and shaping their meaning. Smartphone's, portable entertainment products, digital displays, tactile, motion driven displays. and even new material and methods of branding, displaying and putting a brand within the senses of a consumer is now possible.

It sounds bizarre if it said that "Brands have magical power to change the world" but it is quite true. Brands are everywhere influencing consumers' daily life, behavior, attitude, and even their values. Thanks to digital media that consumers can now demand a seamless experience facilitated by explosion of digital media and interaction. Digital is significantly affecting the roles brands play in driving choice, commanding a premium and building loyalty. Let us assume that a customer has decided to buy a motorcycle. There is a plethora of choices but he does not think much and names XYZ brand. This is because the fragmenting of media and the proliferation of products that have made him decide a brand beforehand. Brand awareness plays a pivotal role during the active -evaluation phase. It is fair to say that the balance of power between consumer and business is undergoing a sea change. The individual consumer is going stronger and companies are getting weaker. We have entered the world of conversation.

In 2009, McKinsey & Company reworked on the funnel metaphor and proposed a new model called the Consumer Decision Journey. Digital has facilitated never-ending snowstorm of information and companies have no way of stopping it. Contrary to the funnel metaphor, the number of brands under consideration during the active-evaluation phase may now actually expand rather than narrow as consumers seek information and shop a category. To generate brand value, think of Disney's commitment to magic, Apple's to humanizing technology, BMW's to driving experience, Coca-Cola's to putting

desire within arm's reach. The potentials are endless, but the common theme is the digitally-enabled opportunities to turn every business into an 'always on, always relevant' business. In this age of dynamic dialogue, it is imperative to hear and understand what consumer wants and P&G, Idea and AT&T, IBM and Linex; they harness the power of interest like an active brand loop.

Now let us consider what brands mean to digital. The Dot.com boom had sounded the death-knell for brands but it fizzed. This is because brands are about people and human behavior from expectation and interpretation, to evaluation and ultimately satisfaction. A sterling brand can provide a collective sense of leadership, identity, involvement and values to people and become a living business asset.

## **SOCIAL MEDIA AND DIGITAL CONSUMER**

Email and telephonic voice have fallen from over 80% to about 60% of our "communications portfolio", while time spent on social networks has doubled to take over a quarter of all our communications time. Social media is increasingly becoming vastly popular and a constant in our lives. It is said that next to China and India, it is social media that constitute world's third largest country but still quite a large number of executives particularly no marketers have no idea how to harness the power of social media. They think this to be an enigma wrapped in a riddle seemingly because of nebulous nature. To discuss products, brands, guidance, consumers increasingly go on line and still it is difficult to influence these conversations because of ever-growing varieties occurring either with jet speed or over the months. Secondly, social media do not have any financial impact and companies find it difficult to justify resources. In this given situation, we need to demystify social media and observe how to monitor, amplify, respond and lead consumer behavior and connect with the journey consumer undertake when decisions of purchasing are made. Once we are able to

identify when, how and where social media influence consumers can help companies to marshal marketing strategies and take benefit of social media's salient feature to engage with consumers. Social media provides a new channel to acquire product information through peer communication, (Kozinets, 1999). Moreover, by using social media, consumers have the power to influence other buyers through reviews of products or services used. This can also be advantageous to leaders for launching, developing, and demonstrating the financial benefits of social media campaigns. Brand can also be repositioned as employees interact with consumers.

The consumer practices of finding, researching, and vetting brands are accelerating within social media platforms-not to mention the consumer practices which these platforms made popular: expressing brand loyalty or dissatisfaction. These findings provide key insights into social media's growing command on brand visibility, but also its equity in brand ambassadors-the types of customers who tend to provide the most value to companies. In 2014 this is clear that digital consumers increasingly navigate both their online and offline shopping activities through social media. The unique aspects of social media and its immense popularity have revolutionized marketing practices such as advertising and promotion (Hanna, Rohn and Crittenden, 2011) Social media has also influenced consumer behavior from information acquisition to post-purchase behavior such as dissatisfaction statements or behaviors about a product or a company. (Mangold and Faulds, 2009)

## **CONCLUSION**

Digital consumers are redefining consumer mindsets, patterns of purchase and decision making and organizations that wish to succeed in the future will have to adapt to this new wave of consumers. It's vital and very imperative to leverage the social channels for a superior

customer experience. Digital technology is now pervasive in people's lives. The range of products and services online is expanding. Opportunities to interact in different ways with companies, service providers, communities are growing online.

In developing the 21st Century workforce, it is important to understand that your clients are already using more avenues than ever to reach out to you through the Internet and social media. Companies must re-examine their businesses and place the digital consumer at the core of their existence. With the emergence of digital consumers, companies have the unique opportunity to capture the imagination of customers and ensure their loyalty by enabling meaningful self-service, providing personalized products, services and experiences and engaging them in their innovation process through co-creation. Organizations must broaden their outlook and institute the necessary cultural and organizational changes that will make them truly digital consumer-centric. The conclusion is to acquire the right customer service skills to master these new channels.

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