

AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON SOCIAL MEDIA CONVERSATION TO INCREASE BRAND AWARENESS: STARTUP ORGANIZATION CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter and other tools to reach consumers and facilitate conversation is known as social media marketing. The increasing popularity of social media marketing among companies helps out to new customers and strengthen relationships with existing ones. It is a risky proposition for start-ups to invest huge funds into advertisement and marketing. Social media marketing could be the solution in these situations to reach more customers with an optimized budget. It is easier for start-ups to build trust and brand awareness for new customers through social media. The correlation between social media marketing and brand awareness was investigated whether the added value by social media platforms for startup companies and their target clients supported to increase brand awareness. This research looks into the relationship between the use of social media marketing and brand recognition in the context of startups, with the aim of further understanding of the role of social media marketing in raising awareness of startups' goods and services. The significant advantage of web-based marketing is to use the colossal network on the web to build brand awareness. Online media promotion makes the spreading of news and information fast. This straightforwardly increases traffic by connecting to the social media group, social media accounts, or any item. The essential goal of any marketing channel is to publicize the services and product with minimal expense.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing, Brand Awareness, Start-Up Organizations, Social Media Strategy.

INTRODUCTION

Start-up companies have never been more famous or popular than it is right now. India has seen substantial growth in the amount of new businesses founded in recent years. For these start-ups, brand building is one of the tedious tasks to reach the break-even point. The quicker the product is famous and established in the market the sooner the sales number will up. The main issue is that small businesses face many obstacles to succeed. The most pressing issue is raising funds for the company and establishing brand awareness in the marketplace. The reduction of new startup organisation is projected to increase as a result of external constraints to sell products to end customers. Despite the fact that businesses have a difficult time attracting new consumers, particularly in a competitive market. Small start-ups reduce their marketing budgets and optimize their efforts to reach customers with the fewest resources.

The internet is started as a medium to share information and exchange communication. Gradually companies started using the internet as a promotional channel to advertise product information. Then it becomes two-way communication where users can comment and post as feedback for any information. Now it's one of the effective mediums to share information and to collect feedback. Startup companies can leverage social media marketing to advertise their product and services. The low-cost medium is more helpful for budget constraint advertisements.

Problem Background

The advertisement and promotion are the backbones of a brand awareness process. However, a start-up company can not spend a huge budget on marketing and promotion. The start-up organizations are more focused on products and solutions rather than image-building activities. In numerous new startups, brand management gets practically no consideration in daily business. Although the owners or founders should think in the direction of brand building, they either have very small knowledge about brand management or fully occupied in product building. Furthermore, on the grounds the employees are not sensitized with the idea of the brand, there is less contribution as a team for startups (Krake 2005).

In a summary of the literature, this article addresses the Brand Equity Model (Aaker, 1991) and the Honeycomb of social media structure (Kietzmann et al. 2011). This paper addresses the signifoance of brand and brand recognition of start-ups, as well as attempting to determine the connection between social media marketing and brand equity. In a nutshell, the gap in the literature which motivated this study includes the limited amount of research on the usage of social media marketing for start-ups as a branding strategy. As per Aaker, it often takes a long time for companies to create brand equity (Aaker 1991) while, at the same time, it is inevitable for the start-ups to establish their brand at the earliest to survive the initial start-up budget.

Startup Definition

There is no generally known definition of a startup on a global scale. A start-up is a new venture or enterprise that seeks to innovate or develop technologies with the assistance of partners or self-financing. In India, an individual is called a Startup whether it is formed as a joint corporation, a private limited company, or a limited liability partnership. The government of India declares every company to be a startup for the first ten years after its registration. The essence of the market may be linked to technical innovation or solutions, or a flexible business model that can generate a large number of jobs (Anon n.d.).

Social Media Marketing

Social Media has been defined as websites that allow profile creation and visibility of relationships between users. (Boyd & Ellison 2007) It is an online-based application that provides functionality for sharing updates about social life and relations building with any online social entity. The social entity could be a person or could be an organization. Users link themselves with online entities as an individual or professional. This reduces the distance between the users and one can influence the other. Activity on the social timeline may be visible to everyone within the closed or open network. It allows users to discuss and participate in any topic in a closed or open group. It is clear that users live a virtual life on social media and they update status based on their interest to show to the outer world. A user consumes information from social media platforms and also provides information to the platform. Social media platform helps the user to chat, interact, share information, share an update on events, communicate with the user across the globe, and create content to share the experience.

Social media is on the platform where the user feels free to express their experience. Any kind of experience that deals with products and services can be viral if the customer has a good experience. It could be a positive review and could be a negative review. The user always tries to post their usage and experience on social media timelines which can be seen by the users in the network. Users view the post and also share the content if they feel relevant. The post travels from one network to another network of users within a short timeframe and becomes viral if the post is meaningful. This transmission is similar to word of mouth and is often considered electronic word-of-mouth. These viral reviews travel a lot faster and farther on social media networks. Users are encouraged to follow their interests and form a group to share the most common interesting topic.

The posts are exponentially shared by the network to make them viral. Social media platforms are the best option for mass communication and do not require effort to propel throughout the post-life cycle.

Brand Awareness

A potential buyer's ability to identify or remember that a brand belongs to a specific product group is known as brand awareness. There is a correlation between a specific product and a brand. Brand recognition is a scale that ranges from a vague belief that the brand may be useful to the belief that it is the only one in the product category (Aaker 1991). Keller defines awareness as “the customers’ ability to recall and recognize the brand as reflected by their ability to identify the brand under different conditions and to link the brand name, logo, symbol, and so forth to certain associations in memory”. (Keller 2008)

According to Aaker, visibility is essential for new or niche brands. Recall and top-of-mind are more sensitive and meaningful for well-known brands. Brand recall can be improved in part by incorporating brand awareness and brand perceptions (Joanna Carter 2019). There are two steps of brand awareness: brand identification and brand recall. However, to achieve high brand recognition, a brand must increase its visibility. If consumers see, read, hear, or think about a brand, it is likely to be added to their list of considerations. Brand-building practices, such as advertisement, sponsorship, festivals, public relations, and online marketing, can be used to accomplish this. When these practices succeed in establishing a positive relationship with the brand, the brand reputation improves (Keller, 2008). Brand awareness is the extent to which a product or organization is known in public. Consumer buys a product because it is easily identifiable in the market and the brand can be identified easily by the people surrounded.

Advantages of Social Media Marketing

Winning brand recognition is one of the company's most important marketing goals. This is because consumers want to buy a product or service that relates to an identity recognized by everyone. Social media allows the fastest way to gain recognition and effective branding. Social media has an advantage over any traditional media because it can make a brand by reaching consumers faster.

A start-up is an institution formed to provide a new product or service. As a result, the environment of start-ups is a one-of-a-kind location where the future is unpredictable. Start-ups are intended for circumstances that cannot be predicted, are unclear, and where the risk is not inherently high – it is simply unknown. Start-ups are technology-based, new companies that are beyond the phase of idea or concept and have already established their legal infrastructure (Autio 1997).

According to research, it is typically difficult for start-up owners to collect funds (Davila et al. 2003). Since their companies have a short operating history, the majority of them are ineligible for bank loans or repayment. Some entrepreneurs may obtain capital from families and friends, but this is always insufficient. According to a study by handmadeology, Social Media Marketing is the low-cost channel where an organization can leverage its marketing strategy.

Social media can help to create relationships with individuals who never heard about the company, its products or services, and what the company represents. Social media can provide an identity about the firm and the services or products it offers (Roche 2019). The main reason why start-up organizations started using social media is to mark their presence in the social network world and to provide their identity. When organizations have more brand awareness on most of the social media platforms then it provides more exposure to the consumer.

Brand awareness is vital for start-ups to focus on self-promotion (e.g., Facebook) or self-branding (e.g., LinkedIn). For any start-up, a clear message about its purpose and who you are creates attention and helps the target audience to differentiate from other brands. This helps customers to follow or start the brand. A clear social media presence about the product offerings helps start-up to spread awareness about the company and its products or services. To verify the relationship between SMM and Brand Awareness, the

following hypothesis is constructed in Figure 1.

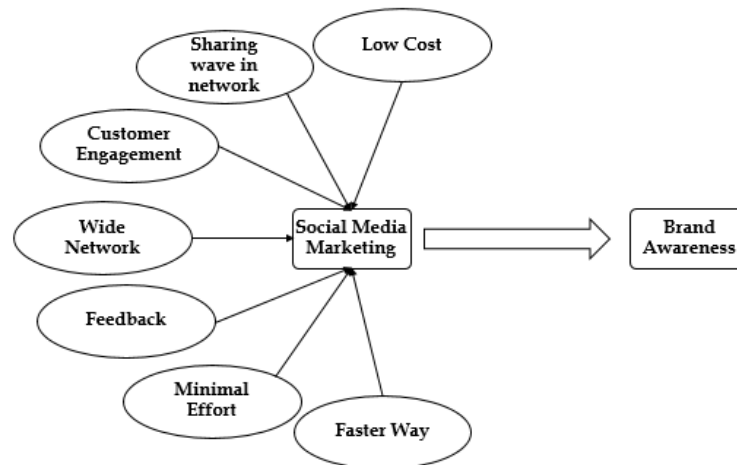


FIGURE 1
INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING FACTORS ON BRAND AWARENESS

Construct Measurement

The questionnaire elements were adapted from a variety of sources, including literature reviews and journal analysis. The questions were graded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree in the Table 1 below.

Table 1 CONSTRUCT MEASUREMENT		
	Classification	Questions
BA1	Brand Awareness	Is a social media strategy beneficial in allowing customers to learn more about the company?
BA2		Can you believe that using social media to promote your product makes customers recognize it?
BA3		Is social media assisting the company in educating consumers with its products or services?
CV1	Conversation	Social Media provides a platform to have a conversation regarding products or services.
CV2		Could social media spread a conversation to a wide number of people in a brief period?
CV3		Social Media channel is the easiest way to facilitate conversation for promotion.
CV4		Conversation creates more impact on consumers' minds when it's on social media.

Theoretical Framework

The conversation block depicts the extent to which a social media user engages in two-way dialogue with other social media users on social media platform (WEBB n.d.). Word-of-mouth (WOM) via social media has become a key driver of brand recommendation among consumers, prompting an increasing number of companies to promote their products and services through social media to stimulate consumer conversations, increase consumer loyalty, and acquire new customers (Hoffman & Fodor 2010; Financial Times Special 2012); (Donna L. Hoffman & Marek Fodor 2010). Social networking includes social networks

(for example, Facebook), video-sharing platforms (for example, YouTube), microblogging (for example, Twitter), and so on. Of course, this is a simplification of the social media world, which provides several ways for people to develop, post, and/or exchange knowledge and ideas in interactive communities and networks, such as consumer product reviews on Google, Amazon, and a variety of other pages.

Conversations about certain start-up goods or services boost customer awareness, resulting in a good value in the customer's perception. A discussion about the feature or idea may raise awareness of the start-up and its marketing strategy. Even though organizations can't control the conversation but they can create an impact by participating in the discussion. An honest and quick reply may stop the negative conversation and can create a positive impact on the consumer's mind. If the discussion is positive then the organization's reply may help to create brand advocates. These brand advocates can create a ripple effect on social media networks and may increase Brand Awareness. In a perfect world, Rowles (2014) says, people would hear about your great values first – and only thereafter hear about the products for sale. Practically this type of brand awareness comes down to initiating dialogue and the actual content of some form or another, driving and instigating the conversation(Daniel Rowles 2014).

H1: *Social Media Conversation Helps To Create Brand Awareness.*

METHODOLOGY

This investigation is based mainly on the study of start-up companies to understand and analyze their current social media activities. This study will aid in determining the relationship between the company's social media activity and brand recognition for their products and services, which will eventually aid in addressing the issue of managing marketing channels at a cheap cost. In this analysis, two different testing techniques were applied. First, conduct a literature analysis of publications and books on the topics of social media platforms, startup organization, and branding to include insights on current issues. The second method will be the involvement of start-up companies to understand and analyze their current social media activities.

This research will aid in determining the relationship between a company's social media practices and brand equity elements, which will eventually aid in addressing the problem of handling marketing platforms at a low cost. The Google Forms online platform is used to develop and design the standardized questionnaire (Google, n.d.). Google Forms are web-based questionnaires that can be accessed via the internet on a variety of devices, including computers, tablets, and smartphones. The questionnaire was shared with 1290 startup companies in India and 594 responses were received.

Findings

The relationship between observed or measured variables (measurement items) and a latent variable (construct) in a definite study is detected by the analysis of the measurement model (Hair et al. 2019). Several measurement items with numerical value were gathered from the research's respondents to measure the latent variables. Therefore, the validity and reliability of the measurement items should be determined.

A partial least square structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) technique was used to test the proposed model with SmartPLS version 3.0 (Ringle, Wende, and Becker 2015). The suggested hypothesis managed to fit into a statistical model to use PLS-PM in Table 2.

Table 2
MEASUREMENT MODEL ANALYSIS RESULT

Variables(Latent)	List of Items	Factor Loading	CA	CR	AVE
Brand Awareness	BA1	0.761	0.645	0.805	0.578
	BA2	0.748			
	BA3	0.773			

Conversation	CV1	0.738	0.623	0.779	0.469
	CV2	0.674			
	CV3	0.644			
	CV4	0.682			

CR: Composite Reliability, CA: Cronbach's Alpha and AVE: Average Variance Extracted

Cronbach's alpha > 0.60, and composite reliability (CR) > 0.70, indicating construct reliability (Hair et al. 2010). The construct reliability was identified because all of the latent variables' Cronbach's alpha values > 0.60 and all of the CR values > 0.70. After that, factor loading and AVE > 0.50 are used to assess convergent validity (Hair et al. 2010). The majority of the factor loading values exceed 0.70, which is considered sufficient.

Structural Model Analysis

After the validity of the entire measurement, the model has been verified, the structural model is checked. The structural model analysis is used to test the predictions of the theory. The mentioned hypotheses that demonstrate the meaning of the relationship are accepted or rejected by structural model analysis (Schumacker and Lomax 2004). The measurement model's validity and reliability were verified.

The results of the internal structural model are evaluated at this point. This included looking at the model's predictive value as well as the relationships between the constructs. The key norms are the determination coefficient (R²), path coefficient (-value), and T-statistic value, effect size (f²), model predictive significance (Q²), and goodness-of-fit (GOF) index. These are the main norms for the internal structural model evaluation in Figure 2 (Ango, 2020).

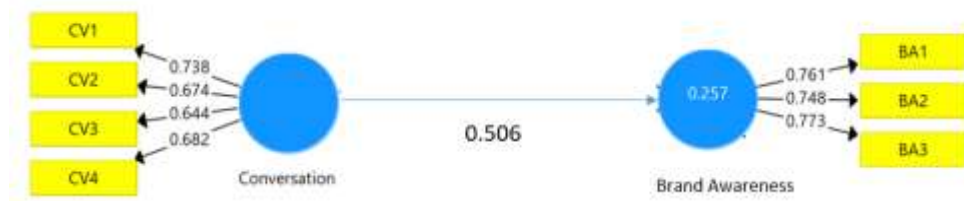


Figure 2
STRUCTURAL MODEL ANALYSIS

Direct Paths	Path coefficients (β)	T Statistics	P Values	Results
H1: Conversation -> Brand Awareness	0.506	3.448	0.001*	Significant

The standardized coefficient in the regression analysis and the path coefficients in the PLS were identical. The hypothesis's significance was checked using the β value. For a unit variation in the independent construct, the β denoted the expected variation in the dependent construct (s). The values of each path in the hypothesized model were calculated, with the higher the values, the more significant the impact on the endogenous latent build. The significance level of the value had to be checked using the T-statistics test. The relevance of the hypothesis was assessed using the bootstrapping technique. This analysis used a bootstrapping protocol of 1000 subsamples with no major adjustments to evaluate the importance of the path coefficient and T-statistics values in Table 3.

If the t value is beyond the range of -1.96 and +1.96 and the p-value is less than 0.05, the two-tailed test is statistically important (26). As a result, hypotheses were important and well-supported (Byrne 2013). The path coefficients ($\beta=0.506$) for the variable 'Conversation' suggested that when the Conversation was increased by 1 standard deviation unit, brand awareness increased by 0.506 standard deviation unit.

Note: * $p < 0.01$, based on two-tailed test; $t=1.96$.

DISCUSSION

Though there has been much study and debate in the field of social media conversation and its effects, the majority of the research found focused on the adoption of social media marketing tools in particular, with little research done in the context of start-ups. Furthermore, several research looked at the effect of social media on an organization's marketing. The study's limitations may pave the way for future research on social media components. The possible future research subject may be derived based on the focus of the social media conversation for a particular channel. Each start-up will have a strategy based on product and services. Individual social media components can be analyzed based on the suitability of business nature and objective.

CONCLUSION

Starting a business Organizations may stay competitive by increasing knowledge of their goods and services through social media conversation. Via conversation, Social Media Marketing helps companies to reach out to consumers with a personalized and individual post. It can also help to improve consumer contacts and the use of a company's worthiness. The use of social media has no limits, and the ability to expand the network is limitless. With the aid of conversation, social media can be useful for selling products and services. For start-up businesses, there is a paradigm change toward using the internet as one of the main marketing platforms. This allows for quicker access to the target consumer and has proven to be the most effective medium. As a result, a holistic approach is proposed to increase brand awareness by combining the positive aspects of social media marketing. The proposed model, however, must still be introduced and evaluated. To determine the most important drivers of social media marketing in future research, we will need to use a quantitative approach, such as a survey of start-ups and specific social media platforms. A specific social media platform can affect the brand awareness of a particular product due to its characteristics and consumer demographic segment.

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