Social Media: Constructive Role of the Disruptive Medium

Dr. Devinder Pal Singh, Assistant Professor, Punjabi University Regional Centre for IT & Management, Mohali, Punjab, India

Abstract

Social media, a disruptive form of communication is the most significant socio cultural phenomenon of the contemporary period. Internet popularity has led to the increasing consumption of electronic social media and emergence of online communities of consumption. The online communities snow ball into large member base providing a ready audience to any issue. The free flow interaction and exchange of views in these communities lends credence to the policies, initiatives and views by the various entities. Electronic social media could be employed by political players, policy makers, corporate, public authorities and individuals to put forth their views and initiatives. This article employs extant literature for highlighting the phenomenal rise of this media. Further it elucidates how the various agencies can constructively incorporate this neo media for better citizen engagement and furtherance of their objectives.

Keywords: Social media marketing

Introduction

Social media is the use of Internet and mobile technologies that turns into an interactive dialogue among the users. It includes a range of tools and services that all enable direct user interaction on computer-mediated environments (Lampe et al., 2011). The percolation of Internet across the globe has led to the emergence of new sub-cultures of consumption or online communities. Consumers in these communities coalesce around some shared emotion, interest, consumption pattern, or brand (Schouten, McAlexander and Koeing 2002). This new social landscape is a disruptive form of communication platform in which consumers freely exchange information on emerging and existing issues. Internet is a new medium where people access not only information but also other people in order to chat, discuss, argue and confide (Lin, 2007). The neo electronic media is more credible source of information and is trusted more as compared to the traditional media. Customers across the globe are increasingly becoming skeptical about the credibility of traditional media like advertising (Leonidou et al. 2011). Social media could be an ideal instrument to engage public as it provides a platform for exchanging opinions and comments on both emerging and existing issues (Fieseler et al., 2010). This new interactive landscape changes perception, alters attitudes, influences behavior and leads to opinion formation. Government, policy makers, public authorities, corporate and individuals, can leverage social media to augment citizen engagement and addressing priorities.

Rising Influence of Social Media

Social Media is the rapid rise of adoption (Holmes, 2011). It is one of the most significant socio cultural phenomena of the decade (Shih, 2009). It is something that is pervasive both at work and at home (Talwar, 2010). Social media is the now the turning to be the mainstream media as newsbreaks are routine on twitter or Facebook as companies, individuals and even political parties share information on the net (Madhavan, 2010). Celebrities, political spokespersons, industrialists, companies – they all have Twitter accounts or blogs that enable them to publish directly. The intrinsically shared nature of online information, news, audio or video files dramatically alters social behaviour (ibid.).

Social media will transform the way the society individuals behave and integrate. The genesis of the Egypt uprising also known as ‘Arab Revolution’ took place on the social media landscape. In India, the current Anna Hazare’s crusade against corruption, social media is acting as a vital anchor around which the people are coalescing. Social media is playing the role of watchdog and it has rendered reputation fickle as it has played an important role in amplifying important issues (Lalvani, 2010). ‘Damini revolution’ the social media uproar after the infamous Delhi gang rape victim that shook the world, made the authorities have a relook at the archaic laws and speedy trial of such crimes.

Constructive Use of Disruptive Media

Social media can be proactively employed as constructive interventions in majority of the sections of society. From an emerging tool, social media has gone on to become a mainstream phenomenon, deeply impacting reputation management, marketing, communication and enterprise collaboration (Nagarajan, 2010). It has also created opportunities for electronic word-of-mouth communication through on line discussion forums, electronic bulletin boards, newsgroups, blogs, review sites and social networking sites (Cheung et al., 2008).
Role of Social Media in Government

Social media enhances the government-citizen relationship. It has become a primary tool to disseminate government information, connect with members of the public, and provide access to services (Jaeger, 2012). The use of social media tools in government around the world, has been steadily gaining acceptance at all levels of government and the government agencies are turning to social media tools to improve the quality of services and enable greater citizen engagement (Hrdinová and Helbig, 2011). It fosters societal participation in public policy development and implementation thus making governments and public co-producers by jointly developing, designing and delivering government services (Jaeger, 2012). Solutions can be innovated through public knowledge and participation to societal issues (ibid.) Opportunities to receive feedback from residents, inform them of government-provided opportunities, and increase engagement with the governance process could serve as ways social media can play a role in Governance (Lampe et al., 2011). Government-public harmonization can be achieved by reconciliation of laws regulations and practices related to government with the access to information, communication, and services through social media (Jaeger, 2012).

Role of Social Media in Business

Social Media has huge implications for the business, as it tends to change business models (Madhavan, 2010). Virtual community is a new business communication channel, which allows businesses to interact with Internet users (Lin, 2007). These new channels help in opening up communication channels with customers (Mirza, 2010). New ideas and opinions about products or services may be articulated (Cheung et al., 2010). Many businesses have begun using blogs to stimulate discussions, garner ideas, and provide further visibility (Lu and Hsiao, 2007). This helps to build stronger relationships, to attract new customers and to retain existing ones too (Mirza, 2010).

Sinclaire and Vogus (2011) explore the strategic adoption of social media by large global organizations. In their study they have analyzed social networking sites used by 72 large global companies, and conducted a survey and follow-up interviews with high-level managers from these companies. The analysis of social networking sites identifies and characterizes the types of social media used, as well as the various organizational purposes for the use of social media. The exploratory survey and interviews indicate that there is an increased use of social media and social networking sites by organizations that results in the form of passive or active, proactive or reactive, and tactical or strategic uses.

Companies gain competitive advantage by linking Corporate Social Activities with customer value (Peloza and Shang, 2011). It could be an ideal instrument to engage stakeholders as it provides a platform for exchanging opinions and comments on both emerging and existing issues (Fieseler et al., 2010). Timberland’s Earthkeeper is an interactive Web 2.0 platform created to help individuals become catalysts of environmental movements around the world. Timberland created the site in 2008 with Changents.com with the goal of engaging one million consumers across the globe to support environmental stewardship. It features “Earthkeeper Heroes” and strives to provoke dialogue with its “Voices of Challenge” guest commentary. With blogs, photo galleries, Tweets, videos, podcasts and other social media tools, EarthKeepers can share their environmental stories in real time. Many corporations such as IBM and Microsoft have accepted the value of social media and have encouraged their employees to actively embrace this medium (Lu and Hsiao, 2007). Intel has their social media guidelines published online. The guidelines clearly outline what an employee should keep in mind while engaging on social forums and social networking sites and how to handle content moderation (Talwar, 2010). Many Indian companies have taken the route by banning social media sites on their network (Talwar, 2010). It is becoming critical for organisations to set the foundation for social media interaction and engagement for employees by training them how to start conversations and empowering them how to tweet, update and blog. India social media report (2010) shows that 90 percent of brands are using social media to engage customers.

Role of Social Media in Public Services

Social media can be used effectively for dissemination of public information and compliance of public behavior. Magro (2012) observes that the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention in the U.S. used Twitter to disseminate information about the spread of disease, and found that people passing along the message through the Twitter network amplified the spread of the information. The Queensland Police Service in Australia employed social media during a disaster, when Queensland was hit by a series of tropical cyclones resulting in mass flooding and a disaster-declaration over 90 percent of the state. Since then the Police Service began actively using Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube and it has garnered praise from government, citizens, and media for their service.

Public health practitioners mostly used social networking sites, followed by new media broadcasts, then blogs and discussion boards, podcasts, and Twitter to distribute health information (Avery et al. 2010). Ralph et al. (2009) explored the potential for using social networking sites specifically MySpace, to connect youth to sexual health services. Surveys and focus groups with youth aged 14–19 living in low-income communities in California revealed high levels of overall Internet access, frequent use of social networking sites, and experience...
Role of Social Media in Public relations

Social Media is has been impressively used by NGOs, celebrities, political parties, organizations, individuals for public relations management. Utz (2009) has examined the usage of social networking sites worked in the 2006 Dutch elections and how interaction with potential voters can influence the evaluation of the candidates. The study showed that social networking sites provide an opportunity to reach individuals less interested in politics. Viewing a candidate’s profile further strengthened existing attitudes. The web experiment showed that politicians who react on the comments of users were perceived more favorable.

Role of Social media in Politics

Contemporary political life seems to be deeply embedded in social media. It has transformed the political behavior as it has become an important platform for political activities for the general public. It has emerged to be the fundamental tool for social media political information. Its salience was witnessed in the recently concluded 2014 Indian general elections. Social media platforms Facebook and Twitter emerged to be the main players and by end of polling there were 49 million election related Twitter discussions - that were more than double the election related discussions on Twitter for whole 2013 (PTI, 2014). Citizens can employ social media to create and dispense political information. The content generated could be employed as feedback by political stakeholders. For example, India’s ministry of external affairs obtained a trend report on social media’s reaction to the newly formed BJP government’s invitation to foreign leaders for swearing in ceremony of the government and it was informed that 55% of the views tracked were neutral, 25-30% of the conversations were positive while only 15% were negative (Times of India, 2014).

Conclusions

Social Media is a useful communication tool of the future as it can reach critical and engaged stakeholders. It can help in building collaborative and communicative relationships across all stakeholders. The interest groups can effectively use social media for communication and performance, and to elicit adoption and feedback from the target audience.

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