Trends of Social Media Use by Organizations in India

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Abstract: **With growing popularity of social media with their target customers, marketers are increasingly focusing on this medium and adopting it for branding, communicating, customer engagement and even product innovation. There are many options of social media platforms available and users are present on multiple platforms to gratify their specific needs. As organizations adopt social media into their marketing function, it will be of importance to know the trends of social media usage by the organizations in India. A research was conducted where senior and middle managers of organizations in India were surveyed to study the social media usage trends in their organization. This paper presents the results of the research conducted to capture these social media trends. Trends validate the adoption of multiple social media platforms by organizations to be present where their target customers are present.**

Keywords: **Social Media, Social Media Platforms, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Social Media Trends.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Social media has given customers a voice and a platform to be heard. With rising popularity of social media, organizations are losing control over their online narrative which is increasingly being driven by their target customers. In a bid to regain this control and to be in sync with the needs and expectations of their customers, many organizations have started incorporating multiple social media platforms in their marketing plans. Empowered customer's involvement with the organization on social media is forcing organizations to rethink their marketing strategies not only to integrate the use of social media to create better marketing communication but also for opportunities of product co-creation (Piller et al., 2006).This paper will analyze the trends of social media adoption by organizations in India.

II. WHAT IS SOCIAL MEDIA?

Social media is an interactive platform that allows users to share media rich content with friends, family and like minded strangers. Kaplan and Haenlein, (2010) defined social media as "a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundation of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content". Looking at social media as a platform that allows organizations to connect with their target customers, Nair(2011) described social media as a set of "online tools where content, opinions, perspectives, insights, and media can be shared … (and) at its core social media is about relationships and connections between people and organizations". Social media platforms include blogs (Blogger.com)/micro-blogs (Twitter), media sharing sites (YouTube, Flickr), Bookmarking sites (Pinterest), social networking sites (Facebook) and virtual worlds (Second Life).

Constantinides and Fountain (2008) referred to Web 2.0 as "a collection of open-source, interactive and user controlled online applications expanding the experiences, knowledge and market power of the users and participants in business and social processes". The underlying technologies of Web 2.0 include basic internet technologies for publishing static web pages (e.g. HTML and server side programming languages) and additional tools and technologies for creating dynamic web environment to facilitate user interaction and collaboration (e.g. Adobe Flash, RSS, and AJAX) (Ngai et al., 2015). Web 2.0 technologies have caused three effects: i) a shift in locus of activity from the desktop to the Web, ii) a shift in

locus of value production from the firm to the consumer, and iii) a shift in the locus of power away from the firm to the consumer" (Berthon et al., 2012).

User Generated Content (UGC) can be described as the sum of all ways in which people can make use of Social Media. According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2007), any content to be identified as UGC:

i) Must be published either on a publicly accessible website or on a social networking site accessible to a selected group of people. This condition excludes content exchanged in e-mails or instant messages

ii) Needs to show a certain amount of creative effort - mere replications of already existing content (e.g. posting a copy of an existing newspaper article on a personal blog without any modifications or commenting) will not be considered as UGC

iii) Must have been created outside of professional routines and practices. This condition excludes all content that has been created with a commercial market context in mind.

Purchase decisions made by customers on social media are increasingly being influenced by user generated content. Hence marketers have started leveraging the same as a regular practice to market their brand (Lu et al., 2014; Rossmann et al., 2016).

III. SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

With the increasing popularity of social media, there are many social media platforms available today to a user to choose from. While researchers have categorized social media on different dimensions, most popular is the categorization proposed by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) proposed two dimensions, including the social presence/media richness and self-presentation/self-disclosure. Social Networking Sites (specifically Facebook and Twitter) and Content communities (specifically YouTube), known for its media rich content, allow users to upload content in media rich format and give ample opportunities to users to express themselves. Blogs and Collaborative projects score low on social presence and media richness but score high on self-presentation. They are commonly used to express opinions and knowledge and are more often exploited in B2B scenarios.

The different social media sites are explained in Table 1.

TABLE 1 : Popular Types of Social Media Sites		
S. No.	**Social Media Sites**	**Description**
1	Media Sharing Sites	Media sharing sites allow users to upload, organize, and share multi-media materials, including videos, audio, and photos, with people and/or selected communities (Ngai et al., 2015). YouTube, Instagram, and Flickr are popular examples of media sharing sites.
2	Social Networking Sites	Focus of social networking sites (SNSs) is to build social networks of people with common interests, build relationships and sharing of information among friends and acquaintances. Facebook and LinkedIn are two examples of social networking sites.
3	Blogs / Microblogs	Blogs and microblogs are used by authors to post their writings that are read by people having an interest in the topics and information on which the author has written. Blogger.com is an example of a blog site. Twitter is the most popular microblog. Though text-based blogs are most common and popular, many bloggers have begun to use different media formats (Kaplan et al, 2010).
4	Social Bookmarking Sites	Social bookmarking sites provide services and facilities for individuals to store and share bookmarks of web contents. Examples of book marking sites are Delicious, Pinterest, and Digg.
5	Virtual Worlds	With the growing power of computing and web technologies, people build computer-simulated environments in web sites that lead to virtual world environments, such as Second Life and Active World (Nagai et al., 2015). These computer simulated virtual worlds allow people to live a second life (virtually) with a family, job and social activities.

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Each social platform may have a different benefit and it is important for marketers to recognize these differences while designing campaigns for these platforms. There are some social platforms that are well designed to create longer-term engagement opportunities (example Facebook) with customers, while other platforms may be better suited for quick bursts of information (e.g. Twitter) or for providing entertainment (e.g. YouTube) to the user (Killian et al., 2015). Social networking sites are often used for relationship management with current and prospective customers.

Organizations can improve customer satisfaction and strengthen relationships through dynamic interactions with their customers on Facebook (Gamboa et al., 2014). Blogs facilitate building and maintaining of customer relationships through its information sharing format. Microblogging sites like Twitter offer the users a condensed way of staying in touch with news and events (Killian, 2015). Organizations often use Twitter to encourage immediate action from targeted customers especially in case of a newsworthy event or occurrence.

For the managers to effectively manage social media interactions with their consumers, it is important for them to understand that each social media site might provide various tools and applications, diverse and rich media exchanges, enabling varying levels of interactivity to their users to make their experience of using the site easy, efficient and convenient. Organizations can adopt a social media site for its media richness (YouTube, Instagram etc) or collaboration and self-presentation (Wikipedia and Blogs) or building relationships and communities (Twitter and Facebook). It is for the marketers to decide which social media sites to adopt that will make maximum positive impact on their business strategies.

According to Kaplan et al. (2010), for firms, using different social media channels to connect with their customers is a worthwhile and profitable strategy. However, they recommended, that it is important to ensure that the Social Media activities are all aligned with each other (Kaplan et al., 2010).

IV. SOCIAL MEDIA TRENDS

Study of social media marketing in India by Ernst & Young (2016) reveals that the organizations in India, in the past few years, "have been embracing social media to attract, engage and transact with its customers. Their report suggested that brands understand the importance of digital and social media presence in order to engage with customers. Social media is largely customer facing and the first function that interacts with the customer is marketing.

A research was conducted to study the social media usage patterns for marketing by organizations in India. Through a questionnaire survey, 342 responses were collected from senior and middle managers who used social media for their work. Responses captured the duration and types of social media used by organizations in India. The analysis of data showed the following results:

Duration of Social Media Adoption: Figure 1 shows the duration of social media by the companies studied in this research. Analysis of data reveals that 43% of the organizations have been using social media platform for 5 years or more, and around 21% of the organizations have been using social media platforms for 4 years, around 14% for 3 years, around 22 % for 2 years or less. This means that 64% of companies had been using social media for 4 or more years, indicating that use of social media by companies in India was fairly common.
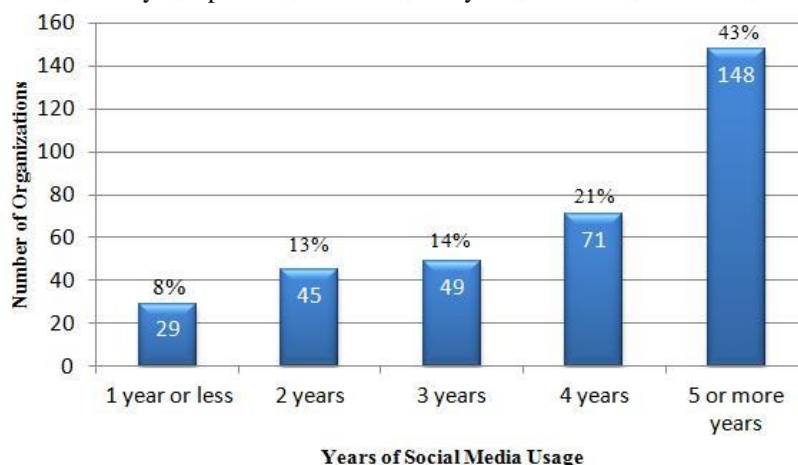

FIGURE 1: Duration of Social Media Adoption by Organizations

Number of social media in use: number of social media sites in use revealed (Figure 2) that as the years of social media use increases, there is a slight increase in the number of platforms used by the organization.

As is evident from the analysis, organizations are using multiple types of social media to address different needs and expectations of their customers. This matches with the results of the extant research which recommended that to ensure the customers remained engaged and to maximize gratification for these customers, it was important for the organization to be present on multiple social media, with each gratifying a certain need (Quan-Haase et al., 2010, Ku et al., 2013).
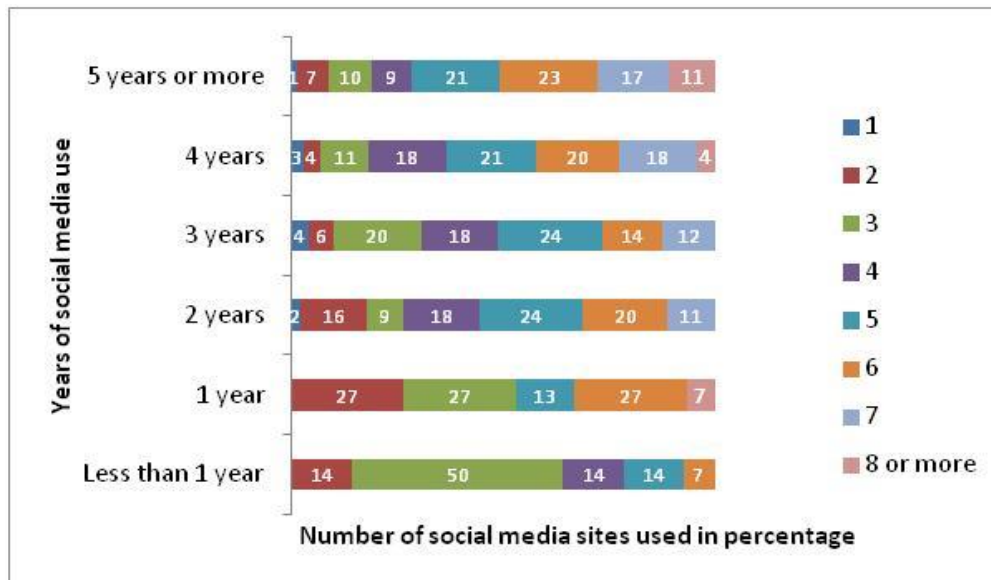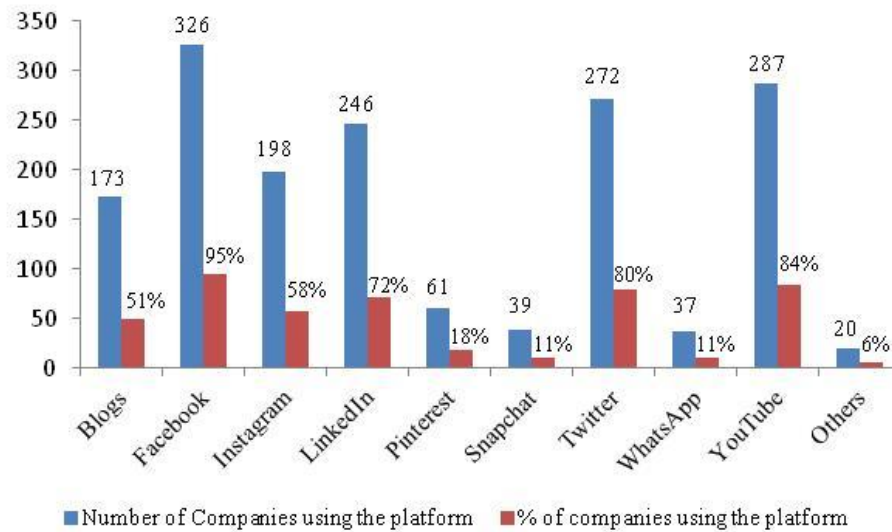

FIGURE 2: Break-up of Number of Platforms and Years of Adoption

Number of social media platforms used varied across the organizations, irrespective of the number of years for which the company was using social media or the size of the organization. So it can be said that no correlation was found between duration of social media usage, size of the organizations and number of social media platforms used.

Depth of Social Media Adoption: Another dimension of company's age i.e. period of establishment was added to the social media usage analysis. Companies were categorized as 'Old' if they were set up in the year 2004 or before. All companies established in the year 2005 or later were categorized as 'New'. New organizations were further split into two groups – first sub-group had all the companies established between 2005 and 2010. And the second sub-group had all the companies established after 2010.

On analyzing the data for companies set up on or before 2004, it was found that concentration of companies was in 4 or more years of social media adoption. To study the newer companies (set up 2005 or later), it was important to further break-up the data to find why very few companies across the sectors had reached the maturity of adoption (5 years or more) of social media. Study of data shows that a large concentration of companies surveyed were established in 2010 or later and might be in different stages of maturity; hence the social media adoption for these organization were also scattered across the years. For the companies that were established between 2005 and 2010, the concentration of companies in terms of social media adoption was between 4 to 5 years.

Popularity of Platforms: Figure 3 gives the popularity of social media platforms in terms of the number of companies present on a given social media platform. Facebook, with 95% companies surveyed using this platform, was by far the most popular social media platform for the organizations in India. With the advantage of visual communication, YouTube was the second most popular social media platform with 84% companies having a presence on it. YouTube was followed by Twitter and LinkedIn, with 80% and 72% of the surveyed companies using these medium.

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FIGURE 3: Popularity of Social Media Platforms

Popularity of these channels with organizations in India confirms that factors of media richness and relationship / community building play an important role in social media platform selection by the organizations. Media rich social media allows the marketers to post high definition videos and pictures. And community building features of the social media platforms like Facebook allow the organizations to build customer engagements and product communities.

Industry wise analysis of social media platform popularity did not reflect anything different from the results shown above. It meant the popularity of Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and LinkedIn was consistent across the industries.

V. CONCLUSION

The study has taken a broad level view of the use of social media platforms by the companies in India. The results show that majority organizations in India are using social media for their marketing activities and customer interaction. Also, the trend is for the companies to use multiple social media platforms to connect with their customers. Facebook, YouTube and Twitter were the most popular social media platforms across industries.

Though a wide use of social media platforms by organizations in India was evident from the data, specific trends of social media usage based on size, age or industry of the organization were not visible.

Further research is required to study in-depth, 'how' the popular social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube and Twitter are used by organizations in India. Also, the future research can further break down the study of these platforms based on size, age and industry to identify similarities and dissimilarities in *how* the social media platforms are being used by organizations in India.

Another area for future research could be to study the *effectiveness* of using these social media platforms based on size, age and industry of the organizations.

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