

Development of Quantitative Based Framework for Measurement of Online Brand Community and Encouraging Its Growth

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ABSTRACT

The extensive growth of Internet and with people spending more and more time on it, marketers had to shift their focus from traditional media to digital media. It became necessary for most of the companies to shift to digital marketing in order to reach more number of targeted audiences. Out of all the advantages that it offers, the most important one is development of brand loyal customers. The most effective way to achieve this is creation and development of online brand communities. These communities are a group of people who have a strong sense of belongingness towards the brand. Development of these communities will help the brand in increasing their publicity and also will act as a great source for new ideas. This paper presents a quantitative based theoretical framework for measuring the real size of online brand community. Also, this paper provides certain online execution strategies that will definitely help in building up an online brand community

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Brand Community, Online Brand Community, Social Media, Instagram.

INTRODUCTION

The birth of Internet has brought tremendous revolution in this world. Because of its many advantages, people easily started adopting it and gradually became glued to it. People started spending more and more time on Internet looking for information about various things. Realizing this shift of people from traditional media to digital media, marketing discipline also had to adapt to this new technology. This led to the birth of new dimension in marketing known as digital marketing. According to Philip Kotler,

“Digital marketing is a form of direct marketing which links consumers with sellers electronically using interactive technologies like emails, websites, online forums and newsgroups, interactive television, mobile communications etc.” [1]

Digital marketing is better than traditional marketing because of the following advantages that it offers [2]:

- It requires less cost for advertisements.
- It provides real time results.

- It provides greater geographical and targeted reach.
- It allows easy engagement with target audience.
- It provides easy quick analysis of the campaigns.
- It also allows making customized marketing campaigns.

Digital Marketing can be done under 7 major categories as follows [3]:

A] Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

Search Engine Optimization is the process of increasing the online visibility of website in organic search engine results. The higher the website will rank on Search Engine Results Page (SERP), the more traffic will be directed towards it. This may ultimately lead to increase in sales and customer base.

B] Search Engine Marketing (SEM)

Search Engine Marketing is the process of getting paid traffic from the search engines to the website. In this process, the marketer has to purchase an advertisement space on SERP. The search engine charges certain amount to display advertisements on SERP generated through some keywords.

C] Content Marketing

Content Marketing refers to providing a good quality content to target audience so as to generate sales and leads. By posting some

good quality blogs, images and videos, the company may attract its target audience towards their website. Also, if the content is worth enough, people may share it thus driving more traffic to website.

D] Social Media Marketing (SMM)

With the growth of platforms like Instagram, Facebook, Twitter etc. businesses have started marketing through the use of social media also. According to the type of business, some platforms work well. For example, for B2B type of business LinkedIn works best whereas for B2C platforms like Facebook and Instagram work best.

E] Pay-per-click Advertising (PPC)

PPC advertising is a process in which advertisers have to pay for some amount only when their ad is clicked. It is the process of getting paid visitors rather than acquiring them organically. The best example of PPC is - Display Ads. These are a kind of ads that appear on different websites in different sizes and are targeted to particular audience. These ads are linked to website and hence drives traffic to website.

F] Affiliate Marketing

Affiliate Marketing is the process of getting a commission for promoting and selling products or services for other companies. There are two main parties in this: The Merchant- who is the brand or the seller or the

retailer whose marketing is to be done and The Affiliate- who is the publisher of the advertisements. The affiliate gets paid every time a product is sold through its advertisement.

G] E-mail Marketing

Email marketing is a direct marketing technique that sends information to target audience directly to mailing list inboxes. Sending personalized email messages helps to create direct contact with the prospective customers and helps drive them directly to the website. This may further lead to increase in the sales.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Brand Community, in simple terms, can be seen as a group of people who extremely like the brand. It is a group of like-minded consumers who identify themselves with a particular brand. Some of the best examples of brand communities are Harley Owners Group (HOG) [4], Tata Safari Owners United League (SOUL) [5] etc. Establishment of these communities provides great benefits for the company. People in the community provide recommendations of the brand to others thereby helping in publicity and also these communities remain a great source of new ideas for the company.

The concept of brand community was introduced by Muniz and O'Guinn [6]. According to authors, brand community is defined as "a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand". The community under discussion is not delimited geographically which means that its members are not compelled to be located in the same physical area and is composed of consumers who have developed an attachment towards a brand.

They have identified three core components or markers of brand community as follows:

1. Consciousness of a kind,

which is the intrinsic connection that members feel toward each other, and the collective sense of difference from people outside a certain community. Members share "we-ness", i.e. members feel an important connection to the brand, and what is more essential they feel a stronger connection toward one another.

2. Shared rituals and traditions

represent vital social processes by which the meaning of the community is reproduced and transmitted within and beyond the community. Therefore, sharing brand stories and building upon the history of the brand are decisive for brand communities. These conventions enable the continued existence of the community's culture and history.

3. A sense of moral responsibility

is a sense of duty or obligation to the community as a whole, and to its individual members. It produces collective actions in times of threat to the community and contributes to group cohesion.

Online Brand Communities

Online brand communities can be seen as an extension of brand communities. These are the communities that are located on the Internet. In comparison to offline communities, these communities are generally larger because it is not geographically restricted.

There are two kinds of online brand community:

- Consumer initiated brand communities
- Company initiated brand communities

Consumer initiated brand community is built on voluntary basis by consumers themselves and company initiated brand community is built by the owner of the brand to establish relationship with the consumers[7].

Participants in Online Brand Community

Online Brand Community has three main types of people as follows: [8]

Visitors:

These are the people that are not registered and don't participate. They simply visit the community to satisfy their information needs.

Lurkers:

These are the people that have registered to the community but don't participate. They might have lost the interest to participate after they registered.

Members:

These are the people that have registered and they participate frequently in the community. They find something interesting on the platform and hence wish to participate.

Thus, the size of community should not be considered equal to the number of people who have registered because many of them (Lurkers) might have even forgotten about the community. Hence, the real size of the community should be taken equal to the number of people who participate i.e. Members.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research work was carried out on the Instagram profile of a personal brand who wanted to build an online brand community. The process began by first understanding the likes, dislikes and nature of the personal brand and also the purpose for which the brand was to be promoted. Frequent discussions and questionnaire helped in gathering the required data.

Objectives

- To build a brand community for personal brand
- To increase the engagement on Instagram posts

The first objective was the ultimate goal to be achieved. But, to achieve that, second objective had to be fulfilled first because that is an indicator that brand community is getting developed. As mentioned, the size of community is equated to only the number of people who participate (members) and participation on Instagram is considered in terms of 'likes' and 'comments' for a post which is known as engagement. Thus, a person who engages frequently will be considered as a part of the online brand community.

Scope

The scope of the research is restricted to business account of Instagram. Also, it takes into account only the 'comments' part of engagement and not 'likes' as 'comments' represent a stronger sense of belongingness towards the brand as compared to 'likes'.

Framework

This framework developed as a part of this research doesn't consider size of community directly equal to the number of followers. It provides a detailed procedure of finding the size of online brand community on Instagram. For the purpose of this research it is considered that if a person comments

minimum two times in a given interval, then that person is considered as a part of online brand community.

1. Select the posts to be analyzed.

Selection Criteria: Consider all the posts in a period of 15

days or select top 20 posts, whichever number is higher.

2. Analyzing the individual posts.

For every post calculate the following:

- Total number of comments from unique accounts.

[In case if the same account has commented twice, that

will be considered as only one.]

- Note down the usernames of all those unique accounts who commented.
- Followers reached for that particular post.

[This data will be directly available from Instagram Analytics' 'View Insights' tab.]

3. Calculating Members Count

Once the analysis of all the selected posts is done, find those accounts that have commented more than once.

Maintain a list of all such accounts. For every account in the above obtained list, check if it is a follower or not. If yes, that account is an online brand community member. If no, that account is not an online brand community

member. The output of this step will give the count of Online Brand Community Members and their usernames.

4. Calculating Followers Count

For every post, the metrics 'Followers reached' is calculated in step 2. Now, take the average of this metrics.

Average Followers Reached = Addition of 'Followers Reached' from all selected posts / Total number of posts selected for analysis in step 1.

[Here, followers count cannot be directly taken from the home page of profile because not everyone amongst them gets to see the post because of Instagram algorithm.]

5. Calculating Lurkers Count

Lurkers count will be obtained by deducting the count of online brand community members from obtained in step 3 from the count of average followers reached in step 4.

Lurkers = Average Followers reached - Brand Community Members.

6. Measurement Metrics

i) [**Members Count** (from step 3) / **Average Followers Reached** (from step 4)] * 100

This metrics will give you the current size of your online brand community in percentage. It is important to keep a track of this because an increase in this percentage will show that your online brand community is getting developed.

ii) [**Members Count** (from step 3) / **Lurkers Count** (from step 5)] * 100

This metrics will help to keep the track of conversions from Lurkers to Members. An increase in this percentage will indicate that lurkers like your posts and are getting converted to members of community.

iii) Comments Rate = [**Addition of Unique Comments** on selected posts (from step 2) / **Total number of posts** selected for analysis in step 1]

This metrics will help to track the average number of comments received in that particular period.

EXECUTION PLAN

The above developed framework was first applied to existing top 20 posts available on the profile. The results obtained were not at all satisfactory and hence a proper execution plan and strategy was formulated. Out of all the available Instagram execution strategies, four of them were selected that could fulfill the above mentioned objectives. Following major strategies were adopted:

1. Online Contest

An exciting online contest of 'treasure hunt' was conducted on the profile. The objective of this was to give something exciting to the audience and increase their engagement. A question was asked in the contest and the

answer to which was somewhere hidden in the text of one of the post. The audience were guided by a set of clues and had to go through five different posts to reach the winning clue. This resulted in the overall increase in engagement of 31 (29 video views increase and 2 new comments on the posts). Also, this obtained 62 profile visits which were highest amongst all other previous posts.

2. Ask the Audience Posts

Ask the Audience posts are a kind of posts that specifically ask for engagement from the audience. The objective of this was to simply increase the engagement on posts by stimulating the audiences to comment especially the lurkers. Two types of posts were included in this strategy that suited the profile: Complete the Sentence and Drafting a Quote.



Figure 1 Figure 2

A total of 7 posts were posted: 4 'Complete the sentence' and 3 'Drafting a Quote'. An average of 11 comments was received per post that was higher than other previous posts.

3. Influencer Marketing

Influencers are those accounts on Instagram that have established credibility with their audiences and can persuade them. These influencers take certain amount of money from the brand who wishes to market itself. The objective of this was to increase the brand awareness and hence ultimately the engagement. For the profile under consideration, a total of 15 influencer stories were done for the cost of 1400 INR. That resulted in increase of total 91 followers for the brand.

4. Sponsored Story

Instagram allows businesses to target audiences through their stories also. They appear above users' Instagram feeds and are available for viewing for 24 hours only. A 3-days campaign of Instagram sponsored story was executed for a budget of 200 INR with a view to increase the brand awareness and also increase the profile visits. A 14 second video was made that explained the profile. This story got a great reach of 18,377 people and there were total 85 profile visits.

RESULTS

These results show the comparison between two sets of 20 Instagram posts each. The first set (Pre Analysis) consists of all the posts that were posted earlier to the execution plan and second set (Post Analysis) consist of all the posts that are according to the execution plan.

After analyzing the number of comments on both the sets of post it was found that there is a significant increase in the overall comments in the second set of posts. This implies that some of the lurkers in the community started liking the brand and are converting into members. Figure 3 and 4 shows the results of comments analysis of individual posts. Figure shows that there is also an increase in average number of comments per post.

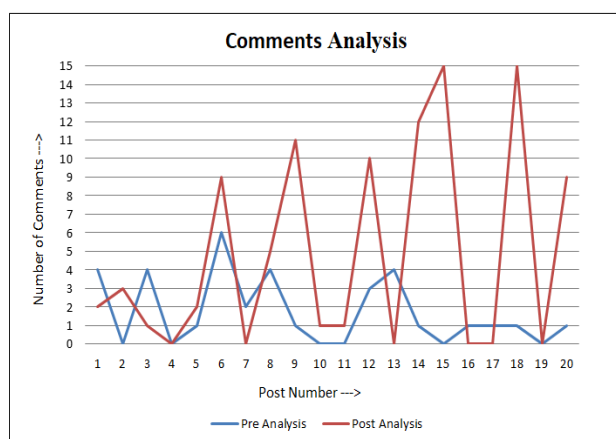


Figure 3

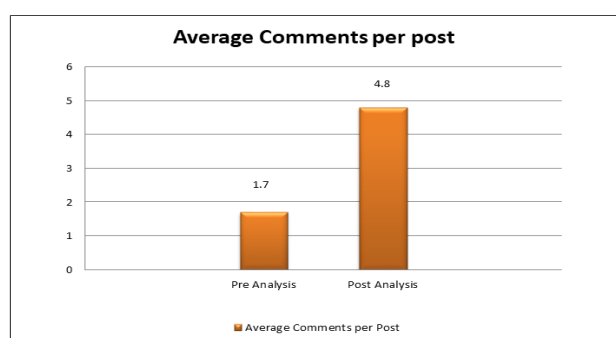


Figure 4

The ultimate objective of building up a brand community is fulfilled to some extent as seen in the figure 5. The execution plan assisted in increasing the size of community from 0.376% to 1.044%

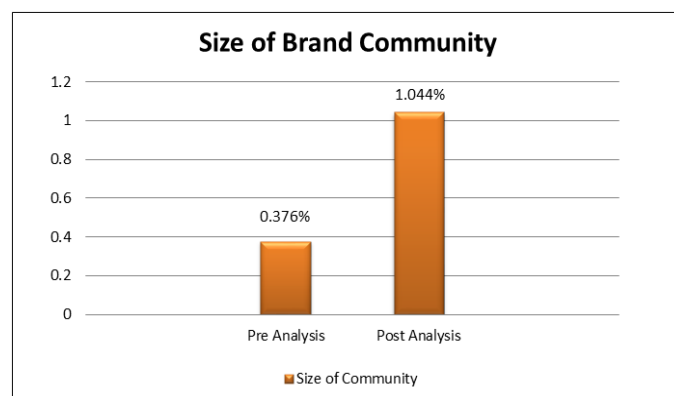


Figure 5

CONCLUSION

Developing a brand community requires providing an exciting and relevant content every time to retain the existing members and get the new ones. To achieve this, having an appropriate content strategy is a must. That includes deciding type of posts, content in those posts, frequency and time of posting. The content strategy should be decided keeping in mind the objectives of the brand and the target audience. The size of the community was increased from 0.376% to 1.044% for the personal brand under consideration by applying the same strategy.

FUTURE SCOPE

Currently, the framework has taken into consideration only the 'Comments' part of engagement on Instagram. But, as both 'likes' and 'comments' are important the existing framework can be extended for both. Also, this framework can be extended for all other social media platforms.

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