Understanding Motivations Underlying Consumers' Social Media Usage: Implications for Digital Marketing Executives

Idris Bhuiya Akil & Nguyen Thi Hong

Abstract:

The aim of this conceptual paper is to analyze and evaluate the important impetuses for consumers to use social media platforms. The study has made use of a conceptual model for elucidating the motivations for social media usage and what implications they have for contemporary businesses as they plan for the social media marketing strategies. An attempt has been made to come up with an effective platform where contemporary businesses would be able to design digital marketing strategies for taking advantage of social media as well as the unique ability offered by social media of generating one on one consumer relationship, targeting and engagement. For this purpose, 4C's model (Connecting, Creating, Consuming, and Controlling) has been employed in order to put forward six major propositions pertaining to the different aspects in which motivations of consumers are driving them towards accomplishing their social media goals. Moreover, contemporary business scenarios have been utilized for validating all propositions. Further, these precise propositions intend to provide tools and insights for social media marketing managers of contemporary businesses as they evolve in and figure out the specific strategies to connect with their potential as well as existing consumers.

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Introduction

In contemporary businesses, digital marketers are quite often exposed to a serious concern of figuring out the most appropriate way to connect with their potential as well as the existing consumers. With the rapid growth of several social media platforms, such as, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter and many more, there are some top concerns raising in the minds of these digital marketing strategists which include: "What is the best social media tactic which is actually going to work?", "What is the best way to engage with clients online for creating unique customer advantage?" and "Which digital marketing tool is going to give back best return over investment?" (Iankova et al., 2019). Although, more than 92% contemporary business strategists are of the opinion that social media marketing is indeed of significant importance, still effective and elaborative answers to these questions are very much imprecise (Büyüközkan & Göçer, 2018). It is vital to investigate this phenomenon as some recent reports have indicated that more than 36% of the digital marketers who are managing contemporary business across the globe are having less than 2 years of experience in this field (Key et al., 2020).

Increase in traffic and exposure have been categorized as two most important benefits obtained from social media (Singh et al., 2018), however, there are still some further questions that might be raised here including: "Can investment in social media yield more benefits?" and "If there are more benefits, what possibly can these benefits be and which theoretical models or conceptual underpinnings will explain about these extra benefits?" Even though many digital marketing executives are aware of the basic concepts of social media and its importance in terms of generating word of mouth, the majority is still pretty much clueless about harnessing the actual social media power (Lund, Cohen, & Scarles, 2018). This inability of these executive to make most out of social media might be attributed to two essential reasons. Firstly, social media consumers float across diversified platforms for seeking and offering discussions about different brands and products. Nevertheless, at this point it is literally impossible to make predictions about or gauging the products which are going to get adhesion or might face criticism by the social media consumers and when can brand or product conversations go viral which can be either positive or negative. Some of these conversations might spread fast within moments while some may slow cook for months. Secondly, the ever-increasing number of social media services has made it very challenging for these executives to precisely gauge the success and effectiveness of any one platform. A large number of contemporary businesses are reluctant to spend their resources on social media because a single measure is yet to be reached which can assess financial benefits of engaging with social media (Sivarajah et al., 2020).

As the broad field of social media is evolving and the questions mentioned above are surfacing and as the contemporary businesses are attempting to find answers, where questions themselves might be evolving every single year, the present research has attempted to explore the insights regarding: Why consumers use social media? When do consumers use social media? How consumers use social media? How can digital executives effectively target customers by using analytical insights based on behavior of consumers? What stimulates consumers to explore social media and what are the functions performed by social media for the consumers? Lastly, the influence of social media usage by consumers over explicating marketing implications by contemporary businesses has also been identified. The present research has explored the above mentioned perplexing questions with an aim of bringing closure to this area which is under-researched considering academic standpoint. It is also expected to assist the contemporary businesses to understand how does the social media influence consumers? Finding answers to the questions raised above might possibly result in

emergence of an effective platform where contemporary businesses would be able to design digital marketing strategies for taking advantage of social media as well as the unique ability offered by social media of generating one on one consumer relationship, targeting and engagement. It is evident that any discussion regarding data driven strategies while formulating effective digital marketing strategies is essentially not complete until a conceptual understanding has been incorporated into it for elaborating the motives behind social media usage by consumers. This conceptual paper has adopted demand side approach in order to arrive at the precise propositions which aim to enhance understanding pertaining to consumer's motivations for social media usage.

Conceptual Foundation and Empirical Overview
Motivations behind Consumers' Usage of Social Media Platforms

In contemporary business world, both academicians as well as managers have acknowledged the need for an elaborative understanding of social media usage by consumers for arriving at theoretically conclusive and conceivable models. Even more precisely, the questions that have been raised to enhance understanding about inspirations for consumers to engage and hook up with social media and consistently use the social media need to be answered more comprehensively. In this regard, the notion put forwarded by Hoffman and Novak (1996) becomes more significant that there is a strong bond between social media interactivity and higher order goals of consumers. These higher order goals are inclusive of collaboration, creation, collection, connection and consumption. Social media engagement and online consumer activities are primarily dependent upon diversified consumer engagement levels (Hollebeek, 2019). For proposition of why, when and how the engagement with social media takes place from consumers' perspective, the present research has incorporated the 4Cs model of social media, proposed by Hoffman and Novak (1996). The efforts have been directed to investigate why so much time is being spent by consumers over social media as the popularity of social media is increasing on daily basis. Next, the paper has discussed about 4Cs model briefly before making use of these motivations for arriving at the precise propositions. The 4Cs "connecting, creating, consuming and controlling" were proposed by Hoffman and Novak (1996) in order to evaluate what sort of role is played by consumer motivations for driving them towards accomplishment of their social media goals. The first social goal is of connecting and it is associated with the related needs of establishing connections with others. This social goal is linked to positive evaluation of the particular social media group and it eventually leads towards a self-esteem goal which is private as well as collective. The second social goal is of creating and it has significant contribution towards determination of self-concept. Creating has external locus of control which results in more social media involvement and it is associated with competence and autonomy. Next, consuming is not a social goal as it refers to an intrinsic motivation and has negative association with both competence and autonomy. Controlling, again is a social goal which is associated with social media knowledge and has positive relationship with competence and autonomy. By incorporating these 4Cs, the present research has explained and proposed why consumers use social media, when do they do it and how do they do it.

Why Consumers Utilize Social Media

There are plenty of motivations that can be focused on to understand the rationale behind "Why" do the consumers utilize social media. Firstly, the consumers quite often like to "connect" with real world. This can be for the purpose of getting information about launching of new brands and products, problems and issues with existing brands and products or it can be about general information of brands and products. For instance, a technology enthusiastic consumer might be utilizing social media to get most recent updates on latest launches of

Apple or Android applications. The evidence in support of this proposition can be found within social capital theory which advocates that consumers engage online in social listening as they read interactions taking place among other consumers and the brands that have invested in online customer service (Stewart Loane & Webster, 2017). Therefore, the first proposition, P1, is:

P1: Consumers are encouraged to utilize social media platforms as means of staying informed about online news and connecting with people, products and brands.

Second, consumers are also encouraged by goals of controlling and consumption as they tend to engage in social listening. This notion of social listening is linked with learning about specific brands as well as complimenting these brands. For instance, consumers frequently use Facebook for posting about what products or brands they like or dislike and compliments about their favorite products and brands. Similarly, some recent studies have confirmed that Facebook consumers are normally not confined towards depicting reactions only to posts of Volvo or Audi latest launches, instead they initiate or become part of enthusiastic discussion on these posts. These examples are in accordance with theory proposed by Clark et al. (2009) about online consumer reviews and their persuasive effects. Therefore, the second proposition, P2, is:

P2: Consumers are encouraged to utilize social listening for learning about the quality of brands and products, which make social listening an important consumer motivation for social media usage.

When and How Do Consumers Utilize Social Media
A latest phenomenon in social media marketing that has been discussed by numerous studies in this domain is the active engagement of social media consumers with "Social TV". It is considered as an essential motivation which explains when and how do the consumers utilize social media (Habes, 2019). Some of the most prominent contributors to the latest Social TV component are Snapchat, Facebook and Twitter. It has been revealed that Social TV has entirely titivated the perception about how does the interaction of consumers with social media take place, and how do consumers share their experiences and opinions about brands and products (Fossen & Schweidel, 2017). Furthermore, it has been argued that Social TV is an adaptive mechanism for recapturing social aspects of TV which have been lost after the multiple-screen households have come up (Fossen & Schweidel, 2017; Habes, 2019).

Typically, consumers tend to spend approximately 43 minutes watching TV every day and afterwards these consumers are encouraged by "create goal" to participate and get involved with social media as they share opinions and experiences about brands and other issues (from TV advertisements) online. The conversations prolonged by Social TV about brands over and over again result in augmented word of mouth (Fossen & Schweidel, 2017). For instance, the frequency of brand mentions for O2, a telecommunications service provider in United Kingdom, managed to exceed 120,000 on a single day of O2's biggest network disruption with bundles of negative tweets reaching more than 1.7 million people. This was turning into a tragic example for negative word of mouth for a top brand, however, O2 executives were able to turn it into a success story as they provided extensive updates and reached out for each consumer through social media. Hence, the company was able to alter the perceptions and behaviors of social media consumers within few days (Lorenzon, 2013). Furthermore, social media can be considered as very significant driver of acculturation strategies, instrument of culture change and predictor of consumption choices. It has also

been suggested that contemporary businesses can make use of product endorsers which fit in well with consumer cultures of immigrants (Ringrose, & Keller, 2018). Therefore, contemporary businesses can get advantage from endorsing mainstream opinion leaders within social media marketing strategies when their aim is to assimilate the immigrants to a different culture. Nevertheless, it is recommended to endorse opinion leaders and experts from their own cultures as the element of immigrants' separation tendencies is taken into consideration. The researches mentioned in support of this argument are of significant importance since social media usage is turning into more main stream and it is also influencing cultures and societies (Carter Olson, 2016; Mendes, Ringrose, & Keller, 2018; Entman & Usher, 2018). One novel contribution of the present research is that it has significantly contributed towards consumer acculturation research as it has revealed that social media is a strong driver of consumption choices and acculturation strategies as well as an important mean for cultural change. Therefore, the third proposition, P3, is:

P3: While watching TV, consumers tend to share their experiences and information with others by utilizing social media and result in creation of cyber living space for consumers where they can interact.

Subsequently, the evidence in support "Social Ads" is the fact that consumption goal is what drives consumers towards social media usage and they are more inclined towards paying closer attention to the ads posted by friends (Missaglia et al., 2017). For instance, consumers' attentions towards an ad will be more if anyone from their social network has posted ad to encourage people to donate for assisting natural disaster victims in any part of the world. The reason being that such ads seem to be less annoying and more relevant as they fit into personal interests and tastes of an individual. In the same line, when social ads are customized to the personal needs and interests of social media consumers, they are less likely to mind those ads either. This indeed is an approach which may not be probable to align with traditional media and can be regarded as a novel platform to create brand visibility as well as one on one connection with the brand consumers. The lack of customization in traditional marketing ads is something the consumers hate and may develop negative perception about the business as a result of it. As the old advertising mantra used to be that it is the entertainment value which drives positive perception of the ad (Kilbourne, 2012), the new social media advertising mantra is that it is the interactivity value which drives success and popularity of a brand over social networking platforms (Kujur & Singh, 2017). A prominent manner in which this interaction occurs is when consumers engage with ads posted by friends, comment on ads posted by businesses and share the ads they see with their friends. Therefore, the fourth proposition, P4, is:

P4: Consumers engage with and pay closer attention to the ads which are either posted or shared by their friends over social media platforms or they are customized as per their likings and interests. The engagement of consumers with social ads is consequently evident.

By the same token, the "consumption goal" of social media consumers is satisfied by checking out for most recent buzz on brands and products in order to follow up with physical brands and products (Fulgoni, 2015). Considering inside-out approach for supporting fifth proposition of the present study, the case of Chobani becomes more ideal to be discussed in accordance with social media strategies adopted by contemporary businesses in recent times. Chobani is an American leading yogurt brand which decided to tap into lifestyles of its existing consumers through actively engaging in the conversations that were on-going among the consumers and were resulting in social media buzz about the brand. The digital

executives of Chobani enhanced the engagement and excitement of consumers as they incorporated their own knowledge about social media habits of their consumers within their conversations. The results were amazing as the brand was able to provide precise content to the customers and this precise content included fitness tips, ideas for snacks and novel recipes (Fulgoni, 2015).

The response of social media consumers was in line with their "connection goals" of relatedness needs as well as the intrinsic motivation for connecting with brand and other consumers. Brands are often perceived as means of self-expression by consumers as they rely heavily upon brands portraying desirable brand identity for expressing their own identity. To pursue with this quest, consumers are inclined towards brands which seem to be convergent with identity and self- expression of these consumers in order to present unique image of their personal style of living (Harrigan et al., 2018). In accordance with the present investigation about relationships of consumers with brands over social networking services, some recent studies have identified that CBE (consumer brand engagement) is stimulated by CBI (consumer brand involvement) over social networking platforms, while brand usage intent and self-brand connection are important consequences of consumer brand engagement (Harrigan et al., 2018). Therefore, the fifth proposition, P5, is:

P5: Consumers are motivated to engage with social networking platforms for checking out the brand and product buzz in order to follow up with brands and products within stores.

For the last proposition of this conceptual paper, emotional contagion has been considered as a significant motivation. Pugh (2001) explained emotional contagion as exposure with a person who expresses positive or negative emotions due to any internal or external reason which might yield a corresponding change in observer's emotional state as well. In other words, this change can be regarded as bi-directional transfer of emotions among the initiator and the recipient (Thota, 2018). From the perspective of present research, it is critical to analyze the reaction of consumers towards brands and products as they are charged up emotionally, since emotional contagion has the power to either buzz, build and hype a brand or product or literally kill it. This emotional reaction, either positive or negative, is explained by "controlling goal" of social media consumers. For instance, the real beauty sketches campaign by Dove became viral over social media as more than 30 million online consumers turned into sketches as an emotional string was matched with the brand. Further, this campaign led to addition of more than 15,000 subscribers on the brand's YouTube channel in less than two months. On the contrary, when the emotional charge is in the negative direction, brands might be in deeper troubles due to social media engagement (Thota, 2018). The #PlusIsEqual campaign, which resulted in considerable negativity for Lane Bryant, can be a superlative example to corroborate the negative outcomes.

In anticipation to cover up the negativity, Lane Bryant made an announcement for its customers through #AskLaneBryant campaign that they are being given a chance to make their point and communicate whatever was their opinion. The social media consumers accused Lane Bryant for using inappropriate models in ads and hiring thin women for their stores. The restrictions put up for consumers who were beyond certain weight category to order online only were also brought into the discussion. These instances make it evident that controlling goal of consumers is pursued as they engage with brands online in order to voice their opinions. It can be in form of following the trend simply, as was the case with Dove Sketches, and it can be in form of active responses, as was the case with Lane Bryant. Emotionally charged consumers possess the potential of shaping up brands and products in

many ways that were not known before emergence of social media platforms (Etter, et al, 2019). Therefore, the sixth proposition, P6, is:

P6: The involvement and usage of consumers over social media is motivated by emotional contagion. Consumers' actions within social networking platforms, either simply following a trending brand or raising strong opinion against inappropriate campaign, are explained by the notion of emotional contagion.

Figure 1: Conceptual model for motivations underlying social media usage and implications of social media marketing for contemporary businesses

| Consumer Motivations for Social Media Usage | Outcomes and Potential Strategies for Contemporary Businesses |

The Why's
1. Means of staying informed about online news and connecting with products and brands (P1) (**Create** & **Connect**)
2. Learning about the quality of brands and products, which make social listening an important consumer motivation for social media usage (P2) (**Control**)

Engagement Level of Consumers is
Create
Control
Connect
Consume

High

Low

The When's and How's

1. Social TV: Sharing information and creating cyber living space (P3) (**Consume**)
2. Social Ads: Engaging with and paying closer attention to the ads which are either posted or shared by their friends over social media platforms or they are customized as per their likings and interests (P4) (**Connect**)
3. Checking out the brand and product buzz in order to follow up with brands and products within stores (P5) (**Connect**)
4. Emotional contagion: Consumers' actions within social networking platforms, either simply following a trending brand or raising strong opinion against inappropriate campaign, are explained by the notion of emotional contagion (P6) (**Control**)

Outcomes
- Awareness and exposure to business
- More website leads
- Loyal followers and fans development
- Brand engagement and brand familiarity
- Brand word of mouth which can be positive or negative
- Brand discussion
- Brand's fan club increase

Potential Strategies
- Social media influence: Engage with brand conversions on different social media platforms
- Utilize cross-channel efficiencies with social media integration
- Identify the channel that influences target customer for better integration
- Critically integrate the social media channel that leads to purchase decisions
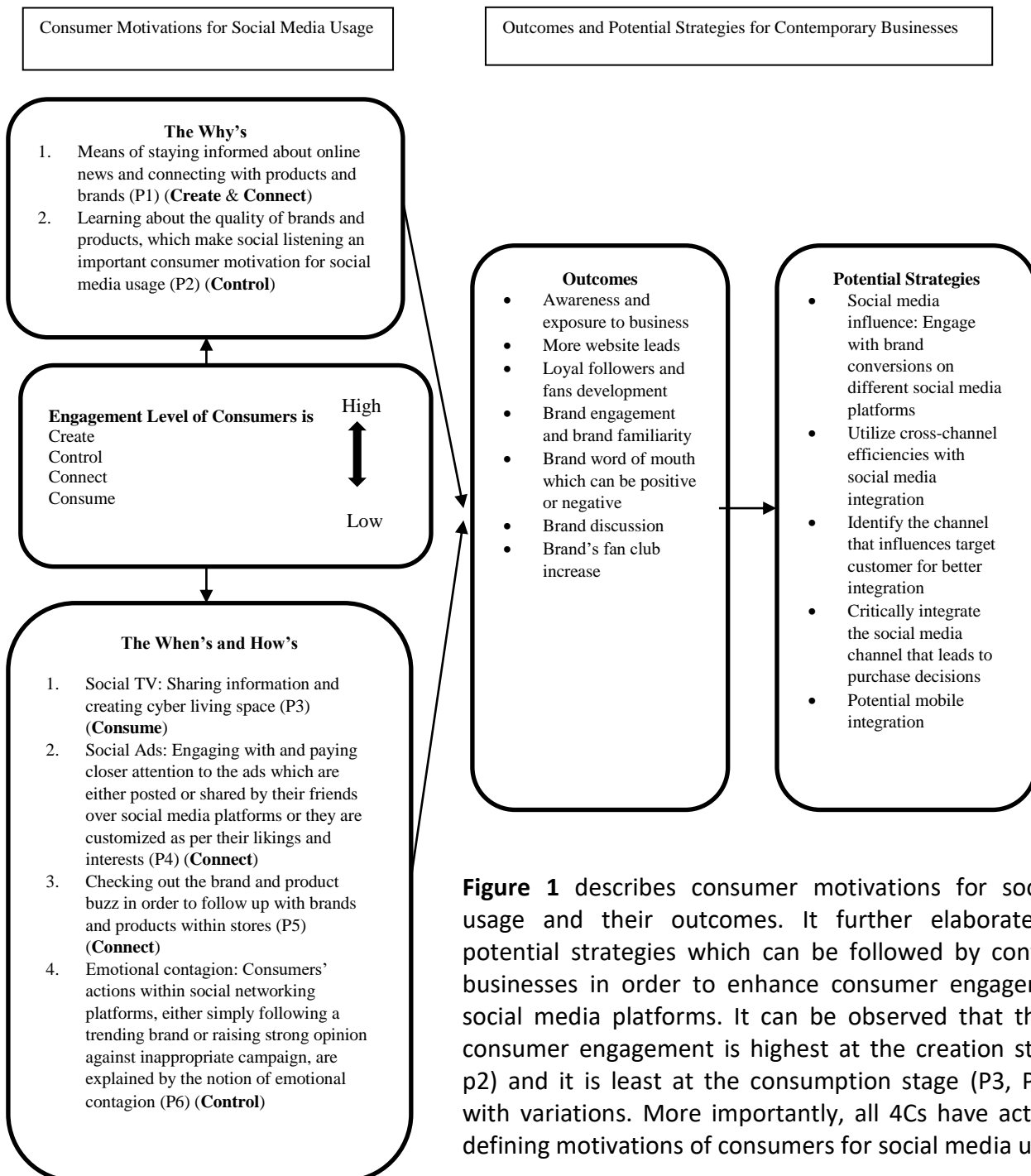- Potential mobile integration

Figure 1 describes consumer motivations for social media usage and their outcomes. It further elaborates on the potential strategies which can be followed by contemporary businesses in order to enhance consumer engagement over social media platforms. It can be observed that the level of consumer engagement is highest at the creation stage (P1 & p2) and it is least at the consumption stage (P3, P4, P5, P6) with variations. More importantly, all 4Cs have active role in defining motivations of consumers for social media usage.

Conclusion and Implications for Digital Media Executives
The present research has focused on the specific goals for proposing the why, the when and the how aspects of social media usage by consumers. Therefore, this study has primarily concentrated on motivations behind consumers' inclination to use social networking services. It is evident that these specific motivations have significant impact on contemporary businesses strategies and outcomes. Arriving at this conceptual framework is of utmost importance as it aids in explaining the driving forces behind social media consumption and how to extend this knowledge for betterment of performance of contemporary businesses as well as related metrics. It is anticipated that with the acknowledgment of theoretical rationales which play key role in stimulating social media usage by consumers, digital media executives of contemporary businesses can formulate cost effective and time saving marketing tools to incorporate them into their social media marketing strategies and campaigns.

This conceptual paper has highlighted the rapid advancement of social media platforms which has resulted in extraordinary consumer empowerment and the fact that contemporary businesses don't have the same dominance over consumers as the businesses used to have through traditional marketing practices. Contemporary businesses are merely able to mediate or simply facilitate an online conversation or even a negative buzz, however, they are no longer having a dominant control over these significant social aspects which have been linked with social image of a brand indistinguishably. There are several recent examples to prove the significance of consumer empowerment through social media and probably one of the most noticeable instances in this regard is the case of Gap Inc. announcing change of Gap logo. The new logo was presented a week before the planned date and this led to an immediate customer backlash as the millions of angry online consumers recorded protest against the new logo through a newly created Twitter account which was set up for this particular purpose. This particular example and the other examples discussed in support of different propositions in the present research elaborate on the need to find right opportunity for crowd sourcing by means of social media, to engage with social media consumers in an appropriate and strategic manner and making use of these opportunities for advantage of contemporary businesses. The digital media executives of contemporary businesses have to consider the fact that advertising is less important now to create desirable brand image over social media, rather interaction with online consumers is now a key determinant for the creation of loyal customers and long-term success of the products and brands.

Contemporary businesses can use social media platforms not only for the purpose of connecting with their consumers for triggering their opinions and brand conversations, but also for assessing what are the consumers saying about the brand, what do they think about the products and services, and what are their feelings towards ideas put forwarded by the brands. An in-depth analysis of which businesses are incorporating most of these strategies in recent times undoubtedly points out towards Starbucks which indeed has been one of the most engaged social media brands for past several years. The brand has realized that mere retail presence is not sufficient, despite the fact that Starbucks holds dominant physical existence in almost all parts of the world. By analyzing the digital marketing strategy adopted by Starbucks, it become clear that the company has taken into consideration most of the elements as discussed in the propositions of the present research and this is the main reason why Starbucks has managed to keep its online consumers engaged over different platforms such as Facebook, Foursquare, YouTube, Twitter, mobile applications and its own network by the name of My Starbucks Ideas.

It is expected that digital marketing executives of contemporary businesses would be considering, borrowing and adopting useful element, from the propositions offered and justified in the present study, in order to successfully and effectively manage their online consumers over different social media platforms. However, there are still prominent avenues for future research in this domain as future studies can consider empirical validation of the presented conceptual model and the propositions discussed in the present study to add to the generalizability and validity of the present study's research framework. Future researchers can also incorporate mixed method approach to identify the motivations which have more influence in a particular region, culture or industry. Furthermore, future studies can focus on the factors influencing negative emotional reactions of consumers against brands over social media platforms and propose effective strategies to counter these negative emotional reactions.

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