Chapter 22
Social Networking:
An Effective Tool of Virtual Marketing?

Shivani Arora
Delhi University, India

ABSTRACT
This chapter aims to explain the impact of social networking websites on the youth of India. Their usage pattern being the focus which would go on to establish the efficacy of usage of social networking websites to expand the business. The build-up of the chapter is not only theoretical but also provides an analytical opinion derived from the results of a study. For the purpose of the study, questions were administered to around 500 avid users of social networking websites from Delhi University (150 completed questionnaires were received). The representative sample would go a long way in forming an opinion on whether it is worthwhile to use social networking to promote brands to the segment studied or not.

INTRODUCTION
Every generation has its own tales to share; about how a particular invention changed the way they lived. Our great grandfathers and grandfathers probably would have talked of how the modes of transport evolved and the advent of electricity. Our fathers, about the television, cable, telephone; our generation had mobiles and internet to boast of and today’s generation has Social Networking websites, they are living by, through and with. If analyzed deeply, all inventions are somehow related to the inherent need of human-beings to stay connected.

Social Networking websites are relatively new phenomena which started with the simple idea of sharing a thought or a picture with friends and family, or being connected with the peer group. It has now emerged into a big movement, with millions of people active on Social Networking websites. It’s the platform where friends, peers, friends of friends stay connected 24*7 and share everything, right from what they are doing, what they plan to do to even what they would’ve done i.e. practically share their life.

With a huge population, making it their way of life, there is a huge potential. This chapter will study the usage pattern of social networking websites. With such huge base of users, it is advisable to ponder whether SNS can be used as an aid to marketing the products/persons (peculiar case of Indian Lok sabha polls). The Social networking
Social Networking is experiencing unprecedented growth, with new innovations and added features. Facebook and Twitter have added the buy option, which would further lead to impulse buying by the users. The user base would enjoy buying on the spot, without going to the company or brand’s website.

The facts and opinions being shared in this chapter are of respondents aged 17-22 years from Delhi University. The pertinent questions were administered to around 500 avid users of Social Networking websites from Delhi University (150 completed questionnaires were received). It is firmly believed that the representative sample would help business feel the pulse as to whether social networking is instrumental in promoting brands.

BACKGROUND

Social Networking sites are being extensively used. The Facebook id, LinkedIn id, twitter handle, all have become a part of the identity of a person. As SNS are increasingly popular with millions of users connecting within and beyond the platform, it is important to understand the effects of SNS use to identify the potential benefits and costs to personal relationships. The extensive use of Facebook by its users makes it an interesting to study it further, according to the study conducted by Vancouver based social media and promotion agency, Popcorn, half a million comments are posted every minute, around 3,00,000 updates posted and 1,40,000 photos are uploaded every minute. Twitter has around 1,20,000 tweets rolling out per minute (Laura, 2012).

A detailed note of the earlier studies in the field of Social Networking has been done to observe which areas have been explored and which need further investigation, in order to formulate the objectives and undertake productive research. The review has also been undertaken to earmark the problem areas related to social networking. Besides, these studies would provide an insight into the various efforts directed towards better understanding of the competencies and complexities of the social networking.

The study “Social Media Update 2013” by Pew Research Internet Project studied 5,112 users revealed that 74% of women were users of social networking sites as compared to 62% of men. The use of social networking sites among young adults (18-29 years) jumped from 9% in 2005 to 90% in 2013.

Marianne Stenger, in her article, Social Media Usage provides Educational Benefits Research Shows, shares the studies by researchers from the University of Science & Technology of China and the City University of Hong Kong. They found that social networking sites can help students to become academically and socially integrated, and may even improve learning outcomes rather than otherwise believed to be causing problems in studies of the youth.

The study, which collected data from students aged between 16 and 18 over a period of six months, found that social networking sites helped students to practice their technology skills, develop creativity and communication skills, and be more open to diverse views (Stenger, 2013).

In the report, How Marketers Are Using Social Media to Grow Their Businesses, a survey of over 3000 marketers with the goal of understanding how they are using social media to grow and promote their businesses, 97% of respondents are participants in the social media marketing. 86% of respondents considered it an important part of their business. Out of the surveyed people 47% had been using social media marketing for more than two years. 74% of the respondents were either uncertain or disagreed that they were able to measure return on their investment in social media activities. 41% of the respondents were uncertain about the effectiveness of their Facebook efforts.

The study “Facebook Addiction: Factors Influencing an Individuals Addiction”, by (Erica 2011) suggests that though internet addiction has been studied but social networking addiction has