


Chapter 32

Active Social Listening and Its Impact on Firm Strategies: Study of Indian Context

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ABSTRACT

Due to the present customer voice in a digital world, keeping a watchful eye on what customers were expressing on social media became a necessary firm imperative. For this study, the authors found that rather than using FGDs and survey research, digital tools like the applications of social media listening could serve as a valuable platform for gathering insights about a firm's latest strategy. This could be complemented by the existing channels of feedback. This research study focused on customer perspective. Data was collected from Indian consumers and social media handling experts regarding social listening based upon a semi structured open-ended questionnaire. The data collected was content analyzed based upon thematic content analysis. Customer voices were reading majorly complaints and compliments followed by advocacy. This helped to comprehend how well firm managers aligned and helped in getting insights regarding marketplace reflections for assessing a firm, its products, and its brands.

INTRODUCTION

Social listening has been defined as the monitoring of digital conversations in determining what consumers voiced online about a brand, product or a company (Steimer, 2017). Social listening as a novel concept was derived from social monitoring (Meg, 2015). Social monitoring provided a reactive approach, whereas social listening could be used as a platform for proactive business decision making and crisis management (Lee, 2018; O'Leary, 2011; Singh, Shukla, & Mishra, 2017). Social monitoring was also

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used to analyze the strategy of a firm (Booth & Matic, 2011). However, when firm managers failed to fully engage with its customers, firm managers also failed to fully exploit the capabilities of social media platforms, which gave rise to the importance of social listening (Bhimani et al., 2019). Social listening, thus, provided an alternative to the conventional way of data gathering. Data gathered via social listening enabled firm managers to tap into the right consumer insights which were being generated in real-time (Booth & Matic, 2011). In India, with a billion plus population and hundreds of millions of young internet users social media has become very important. Social media in India has been very popular and thus social listening could be very pertinent. One should note that a significant number of Indian FMCGs, had started unlocking the potential of customer perspectives via social media listening (Sangani, 2019). India had about 241 million Facebook users, 7.75 million Twitter users and 69 million Instagram users (Pragati, 2019). India had one of the highest numbers of internet and mobile device users in the world by the close of the second decade of the millennium (Fuscaldo, 2019). However, most social media and internet-based engagements were still at the nascent stage, using share-of-voice, delivering sentiment, and influencer analysis. Additionally, in India some brands were leveraging social data to understand the purchase journey, customers' views, perception or expectations from the products and service offering (Shaikh, 2018). In the present-day context in India, social media was used to such an extent that 93% of users believed that a good company should have a good social media presence (Cone, 2008). One DEI worldwide report indicated that 49% of users undertook purchase decisions based on the information they found on social media (DEI,2008). Another report by Hootsuite noted that 42% of users were likely to use social media websites to exchange information via mobile devices (Hootsuite, 2019). Statista predicted that Ad spending in the Social Media Advertising segment would amount to US\$3,770m by the year 2020 and grow at a CAGR of 7.4% (Statista, 2019). This would result in a market volume of US\$4,677m by the year 2023. This substantive size would make social media even more crucial for firms' success and branding (statista,2019).

It would be important to note that COVID-19 and the physical social distancing changed the lives of people around the world and it also had a massive impact on their social media habits (Banerjee, 2020). Social media like Facebook reported an increase in messaging of around 50% in March (Schultz & Parikh, 2020). Similarly, COVID-19 Tweets were being shared every 50 milliseconds on twitter (Josephson & Lambe, 2020). Further, according to Sprinklr, a platform which highlighted where and in which context a brand was being mentioned on social media, the presence of a global pandemic has made it even more important to listen to what customers had to say. Most importantly, getting alerts of a potential crisis, which varied on the basis geographical location made it furthermore important to make strategies which worked best for a particular geography (Conn, 2020). Given this one could argue that social media had become the new word of mouth for companies and every single day, millions of customers, brand enthusiasts, investors, business students, budding entrepreneurs, customers and others have started to voice their thoughts on social media platforms (Cui, *et al.*, 2018). It would be important to note that such discussions were majorly about what they had bought, where their purchases were done, what did they think about the latest marketing campaign of a brand, and their good and bad experiences related to services or goods offered by firms (Cui, Gallino, Moreno, & Zhang, 2018; Paniagua & Sapena, 2014). The presence of such substantial information was nothing less than a gold mine for several consumer-facing industries, such as retail, insurance, consumer goods, retail banking, and healthcare (Reiter et al., 2017). Nevertheless, so far, most Indian companies were not actively turning this information into valuable insights. In this article, the authors focused on how customers who voiced their opinion for

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