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Title

**IMPACT OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES ON E-
COMMERCE BUSINESS**

Author(s)

Preeti Dhankar

Ph.D (Scholar)

Abstract:

A Purchasing decisions are often strongly influenced by people who the consumer knows and trusts. Moreover, many online shoppers tend to wait for the opinions of early adopters before making a purchase decision to reduce the risk of buying a new product. Web-based social communities, actively fostered by E-commerce companies, allow consumers to share their personal experiences by writing reviews, rating reviews, and chatting among trusting members. E-commerce companies have recently started to capture data on the social interaction between consumers in their websites, with the potential objective of understanding and leveraging social influence in customers' purchase decision making to improve customer relationship management and increase sales. In this paper, we present an overview of the impact of social sites influence in E-commerce decision making to provide guidance to researchers and companies who have an interest in related issues. We provide a summary for social sites impact on E-commerce decision making.

Keywords – E-commerce, Social Networking, online business, consumer interaction, social sites.

I. INTRODUCTION:

Social media websites are becoming increasingly popular. These networking sites bring together like-minded people from across societies, even geographies, to share views, interact and exchange information. E-commerce website marketing executives recognize the potential of marketing on these portals to increase brand awareness. Currently, over 25% of display advertisements are posted on social media websites.

❖ **E-commerce developers use the following strategies on social media websites to develop and promote their internet business:**

- Display advertising
- Display ads can be developed for a target audience, include information on offers, discounts, coupons and deadlines to make the customer act urgently. Display ads can

clutter up a website's landscape, so make sure they are targeted to make them relevant to the website's context.

- Increasing brand awareness. Since these sites are interactive, e-commerce developers can engage users in discussions of the brand. They can demonstrate quality and expertise to the potential customers and build the brand's image.
- Spread the word

A lot of customers post their opinion of brands on social networking sites. E-commerce websites should encourage their satisfied customers to spread the word by sharing their feedback on these sites.

- Building a user community through the e-commerce site

The e-commerce business can begin building a user community on its own website. The web site should be designed to link their user community to various social media sites. User forums are an excellent source of feedback on the e-commerce business' products and services.

- Monitoring discussions of brands

Just as positive feedback of an e-commerce business' products and services can enhance the brand image, negative feedback can damage it. E-commerce developers should closely follow any mention of their products on social networking sites and address misconceptions and complaints. This builds a customer friendly image of the brand.

❖ **Advantages of using social media websites to promote e-commerce business.** There are many potential benefits of using social media websites for e-commerce development:

- Widened customer scope

Social networking websites are popular and their membership is rapidly growing. By placing ads on such sites, e-commerce businesses expand their customer outreach. Display ads should attract the attention of interested members. A click on the display ad should immediately take the customer to the page on the e-commerce website where they can finalize the sale.

- Increasing brand awareness

Social media websites allow e-commerce display ads to be viewed by a large section of people who share some common interests. Display ads that target this customer segment will have better chances of getting through to this community, increasing awareness of the brand.

- Influencing brand reputation

Social media website members will share their opinion of brands. This influences the brand's reputation, and improves sales if the customers have something good to say. Even bad opinions can be altered or at least improved by following up with the dis-satisfied customers.

Social media websites are opportunities for e-commerce businesses to expand their clientele and improve their brand image. By their very nature, social networking sites have a strong impact on the reputation of a brand. E-commerce developers should understand the merits and demerits of marketing through social networking websites and make the most of this advertising opportunity.

Figure 1: Usages of Social Applications

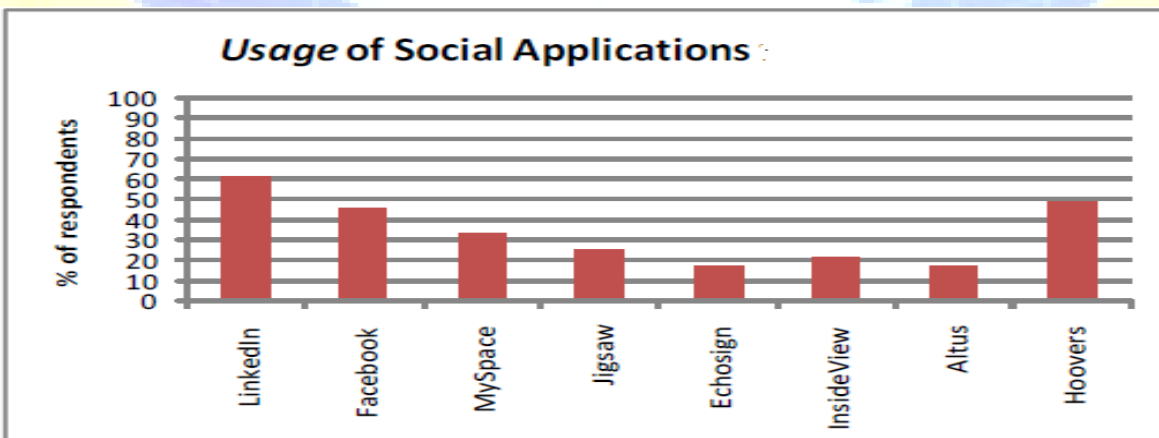
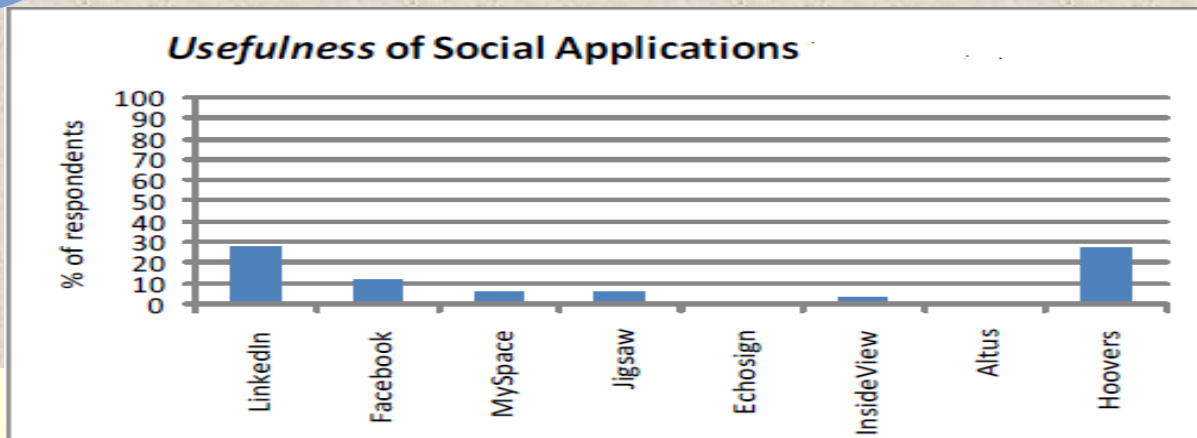


Figure 2: Usefulness of Social Applications



II. Ways to handle the Social Networking

Forrester research firm a leading research firm on online trends, conducted a survey on online trends and found that companies that are growing faster than expected are more likely to embrace social media. The study also showed that even companies planning to make a cut on their online business will be less likely to cut their spending on social media usage. More and more companies are embracing social media networking as their marketing strategy to boost their e-Commerce sales.

What is it that is making companies focus from their traditional online approach and embrace the social media networking? The answer is simple. Be it Christmas sales or Thanks giving sales, bargain hunters are always on the lookout for good deals on the internet. Social networking sites provide a one stop reference guide to these people with similar interests. Consumers are also using the social media to express their product or online opinion/experience positive as well as negative on this platform. And all this happens at a much higher rate than that would have been achieved using the conventional word of mouth publicity.

Effective Social media networking usage allows your company to get in touch with your customers, share their ideas and be in tune with their latest needs to achieve a superior competitive advantage. This tool can be effectively used to increase Ecommerce store traffic as well as to create awareness about your products/company ultimately leading to a boost in your Ecommerce sales. Good ecommerce deals can rapidly reach target customers frequenting these

sites. Also with budget cuts on marketing expenses in these tough economic times, this is a perfect medium for Ecommerce stores with to publicize their offerings at a very low cost.

❖ **Simple Steps to Leverage Social Media.**

1. Objective Definition:

Objectives will always differ from company to company. However a general guideline can be achieved by brainstorming the following questions within your team.

What communication do you want to propagate to your customers?

Do you want to announce a new sale coming up on your Ecommerce website?

Do you want to emphasize on your customer service?

Do you want to publicize a new promotion scheme on the web?

Do you want to emphasize on your corporate/environmental/social responsibility?

While outlining your goals, take care that the intended audience also benefits from the communication message.

2. Picking the right mix:

The right assortment of these sites is the key. Although social networking sites usage by customers will differ for every ecommerce business model, it is always recommended that your top Social Media set should comprise of at least one of these popular social networking sites www.youtube.com, www.flickr.com, www.twitter.com.

The right mix needs to be decided depending on the customer set you are targeting and your business objective.

❖ **Feature explanation of these sites given below.**

- www.youtube.com

You can upload your product information or demonstration videos on “YouTube” and embed the video on Ecommerce website. This feature helps your potential customers on

Ecommerce as well as networking sites access your well compiled images/videos on YouTube and get benefitted. Some simple steps given below:

- i. Post your videos on YouTube.
- ii. Add a YouTube building block to the website. Point that building block at the client YouTube account.
- iii. Add new videos to YouTube and simply change the setting in your YouTube building block to see that video on you site.

Check out this page of a client example using Ignify Ecommerce to show how easily you can embed YouTube videos on your e-Store and increase stickiness.
http://www.umarexusa.com/pages/100_shot_maintenanceMov.aspx

- www.flickr.com

Flickr is an online photo management and sharing application. You can upload your product photos to Flickr. Add this website block on your website and provide existing Ecommerce users with a unique visual appeal. And you get all this without worrying about your Ecommerce web server space. The steps are really simple to implement:

- i. Post your images and videos on Flickr and YouTube.
- ii. Add Flickr building block to the website. Point that building block at the client Flickr account.
- iii. Add new images to Flickr and see them appear instantly on the website.

- www.twitter.com

Twitter allows you to micro-blog and list all the activities in short texts. This tool can be effectively used to announce the commencement of a new product or company news. Providing a link to the product details page helps in increasing site traffic and boosting sale for that product.

3. Content Management:

We recommend using new products or products with promotions applied to generate maximum customer interest. You can also include discount codes on Twitter and link them to your website. Last but not the least; link your existing Ecommerce users to your social media by providing a link on the home page of your site itself.

4. Message Delivery and Follow up:

Although above benefits look simple, social networking usage requires a lot of personal attention from the management of Ecommerce stores. Take for example your customer shows interest in your promotional campaign on a networking site and there is nobody to respond to it or the page link does not open on the Ecommerce website. Incidents like these can create negative impact on your potential clients and customers can quickly lose interest. To avoid this pitfall, you may have to organize a resource who can dedicate some time to answer and guide your customer. You can make customers delighted by showing your genuine concern towards their tweets. This can require a dedicated knowledgeable person who can reply to tweets as well as ensure that customer responses are taken up internally within the team.

III. Effect on Business Growth:

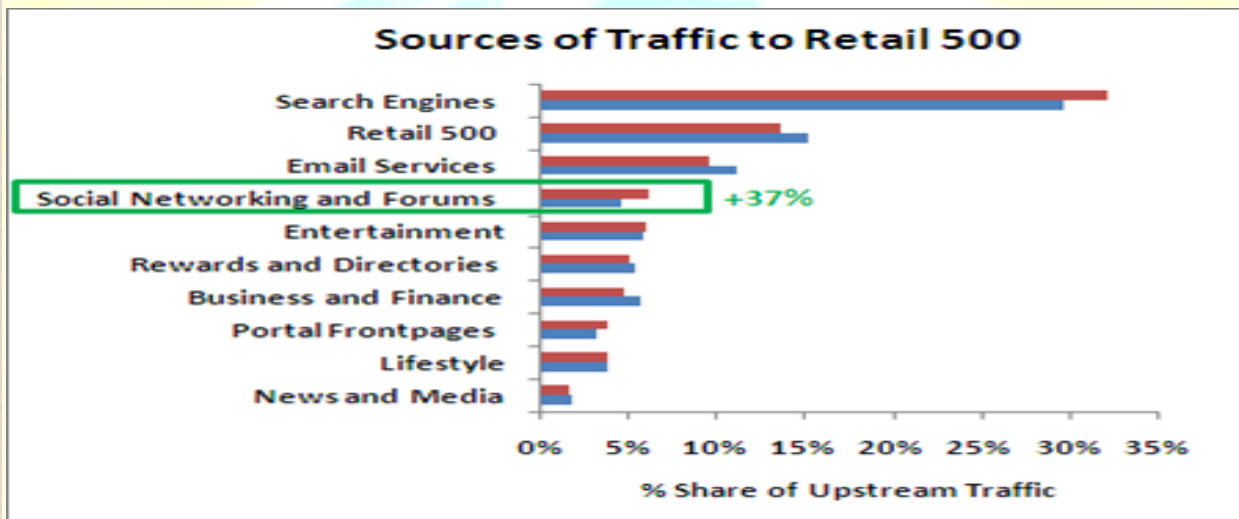
Social networking sites including MySpace, orkut and Facebook are driving a bigger portion of traffic to retail sites than a year ago, according to new research by Hitwise. Social sites are driving more than 6% of retail traffic, up from 2.9% in 2005. MySpace alone accounted for about one-third of that traffic.

The increase in retail traffic reflects social sites increasingly becoming a starting point for Web users. "What we're seeing is a trend among social networking sites, particularly MySpace, becoming a home base for Internet users," said Bill Tancer, general manager of global research at Hitwise. That trend in turn generates more traffic from social sites to online retailers.

It is observed that heavy users of social-networking sites visit leisure-oriented retail site for categories, such as apparel, music, jewelry/luxury goods/accessories and consumer electronics.

People generally enjoy sharing their experiences with respect to these products. They love to discuss their new iPhone or flaunt the pair of designer jeans they just bought. Social-networking sites offer a good platform to consumers for such kind of conversations. Capitalising on this fact, retailers use this ideal platform to build their web traffic at a relatively cost effective and easy way.

The best part of social networking media is that consumers too get to know about a brand/product/service through someone, who's one of them. When word is out from a friend than from a firm, it drives the credibility and identity of the brand to a completely different level.



Users are able to directly interact with the brands, the issue of non-trust that most print advertising is facing is eliminated. The marketing message is more positively accepted by the users and also the retailer gets instant feedback. Creating a trustworthy social persona also allows the retailers to tap a wider audience.

Without much pain and effort, social networking sites enable a retailer to reach out to people in every nook and cranny of the world. If a retailer based in metro launches in tier II and III cities he/she can leverage the benefits of social networking sites not just to promote but also gauge response to the product launched, to some extent.

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