Brands riding on Influencers Marketing Brandwagon

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ABSTRACT

Social media has connected us all across globe and changed the way companies communicate with their customers. It is easy to reach out to the customers but at the same time there is intense competition online. Customers at the other end can conveniently share their opinions and feedback about their experience with the products and services and chances are people might be listening, as the adoption of social media channels is high. Falling back on just traditional marketing channels is not sufficient for the companies. Need is to connect with large number of customers across various stratas. Influencer marketing is an extension of companies marketing and has an edge over word-of-mouth marketing as the influencers engage their fan-base with the content they share. These influencers have ardent audiences and they can get their attention for your product and aid them in their decision making process. They act as companies brand ambassador but at the same time be customers advocate. This paper explains the concept of influencer marketing and their types. The paper explains how companies can market to the influencers and how influencers can further target customers.

1. INTRODUCTION

With the growth of the ICT and developments in the social media, marketing has taken a new form. There is a rise in influencers, who reach out to the customers through their social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube. There are varieties of influencers targeting customers with some specific interest areas. Eg, food bloggers post pictures and reviews about food joints. Similarly, there can be travel influencers, beauty influencers, fitness influencers or lifestyle influencers. Usually, for a company it is difficult to make a connect with the masses both through traditional channels and online. This is were influencers help. These influencers have a leverage of connecting with the masses, as they are one of them.

The number of social media users has surged to 149 million and in rural India to 25 million in April 2015 and is expected to grow further. (PTI, 2015).There is a need to supplement the traditional form of marketing with new, innovative techniques. While customer may not always be hooked onto the television set and company’s heavily budgeted advertising campaigns may fall flat. As per Internet and Mobile Association of India Report, 61 percent of Indians access social media sites on their cellphones. This makes it easy to get customers attention across varied media.Companies primarily into beauty products, automobiles, wellness products, food have started relying on Influencer marketing.

2. INFLUENCER MARKETING:

The process by which you identify individuals who have influence over the potential customers and make your marketing strategies around them is called influencer marketing. A relationship is set up with an influential person who has large fan base. (Ranga & Sharma, 2014).Influencer marketing is largely dependent on social influence of the influencer. The ability to reach out to social media users who can share your message to large audience base is Social influence. (Hebert, 2013).

An influencer is just a consumers advocate. (Brown & Fiorella, 2013) Caro (2013) suggests that to qualify as influencer, one must have 2500 or more followers on his social media account. Besides this, he must have a desire to be compensated from the company and have influence on audience. They influence their audiences’ thoughts with their comments and content and the products they draw attention to. (Torres, 2015). However, Wong (2014) opines that influencer is not the one who has a lot of followers. Rather, it is characterized by the relationship between the follower and the influencer and his expert knowledge on the subject. Most popular channels for Influencer marketing so far have been YouTube and Instagram, Snapchat and Pinterest. Influencer marketing clicks with the customers as it comes as a good break from all the clutter of push marketing campaigns. Having an influencer who is already using the product makes it authentic and genuine campaign for the customer. (Brown & Fiorella, 2013). Influencer marketing is taking the‘people’ factor advantage. As more and more companies are putting out content to the customer, it is imperative to break the monotony by adopting a different route.
3. TYPES OF INFLUENCERS:

They can be either individuals or third party. Third party influencers are further of two types. The first type is a part of companies supply change. For example, when you walk into a store and the retailer recommends you a specific model of the Television. The second types of third party influencers are value-added influencers. Industry experts, journalists, professional advisors are included in these. (Ranga& Sharma, 2014). These are outsiders who share their views about your brand with the audiences.

Traditionally, influencers like celebrities mostly did the marketing. But now, there can also be ‘everyday’ influencers (Wong K., 2014). 27 per cent of Indian college-going youth access social media. (PTI, 2015). Since the users of social media sites are mostly youth, the new trend is to post or share information about companies product on their accounts. This has led to an increase in vlogging, which is video blogging as well.. Vlogs became popular after Google acquired Youtube. (Gao et al., 2010). This comes as good way of promoting your product and offers to be an alternative to television advertisements.

Companies keep a check on who is talking about them using social influence identification tools. The influencers are decided based on the kind and the frequency of content that they share and they number of audience they are able to engage with.

Influencers can also be put into three types based on the roles that they play. These could be Counselors, who based on their experience and knowledge about the product can be a resource for the peer group. The counselor just needs to post the blogs or articles and the audience contact the counselor themselves. In contrast, the communicators are actively trying to share their expertise with their target customers. They usually comment about company’s products, blog or rate them. They can easily be found on the search tools. When influencers create a space for a particular cause or topic and the target market joins in then they are called community builders.Eg. Reddit. (Stein, 2013).

4. MARKETING TO INFLUENCERS

The biggest challenge for companies is to finding the right influencers for your products. Nearly two third of the marketers face this challenge. (Nanji, 2014). To make this easy, companies must first define it’s objectives. It usually chooses between lead generation, r&d or sticks with the basic brand awareness. It takes a minimum of 50 to 60 hours commitment to find the right influencer. (Zinck, 2013). Only after this the influencer should be selected.

Companies can market their product to potential buyers through influencers built-in market. Usually the influencers are rewarded with free goodies or samples and the influencer in return talks about the product to its large potential audience. It’s only when you have established yourself as customer engaging influencer that companies pay you on commission basis. Those new to it are paid nothing but they are may be compensated with photoshoots or styled for the shoots and the influencers agree to do it because it gives them exposure. Most of the local Boutiques adopt this format.

Only 20 per cent influencers expect free goodies and 53 per cent expect to be paid. (Caro, 2013). A lot of hardwork goes into designing a campaign for the product that is not just novel but also interesting in terms of its content. Therefore, influencers must first do a cost-benefit analysis before taking up campaigns requiring them to work for free. (Tran, 2015).

Companies decide these influencers on the basis of their perceived social influence. This is done with the help of social influence scoring platforms. Sites like Alexa and Cision help companies find influencers with web traffic. The relationship of company and influencer must run on authenticity. Since they become face of the company, this helps in establishing trust. To assess the impact of the influencer, a company may consider the visitors rate to their website driven from the influencer. Conversion of prospects to leads and leads to sales. (Torres, 2015).

Companies must also make an attempt to rope in not just celebrity influencers but few everyday influencers as well to have a connect with all the stratas of the market. Since it’s a two way street, companies must also ‘mention’ influencers in posts and introduce them to industry experts in return for promoting their product. (Olenski, 2015).

5. MARKETING FROM INFLUENCERS

Influencers give direction to the thoughts of its audiences and aids in shaping their decision making process subconsciously. It helps customer feel confident about his purchase as it has been backed up with knowledge and experience. (Newman, 2015). However, influencers have to be smart to choose the right brands to partner with. There are risks of losing out lot of followers if the blog or account becomes more of information commercials. (Tran, 2015).

Giveaways help fetching high social engagement rate from the audiences. The right audiences are the ones who are likely to share the content and are already active on the social media. Influencers should use relevant keywords to engage with the audiences.

6. CONCLUSION

The paper highlights the concept of Influencer marketing and the types of influencers. Paper also puts forward how companies can reach out to the influencers and influencers to the customers. Literature available was reviewed from books and research papers. Traditional Word-of-mouth has taken a new shape in the current yet growing social media era with brands targeting their customers. Since, influencers have the flexibility to come up with creative ideas of their own to promote the product, it gives it an edge over traditional ad campaigns. It helps companies create awareness about their products, align perception of the customers favorably and
ultimately helps in sales. For an influencer, it helps him with increased fan base and customer engagement. His credibility also increases by engaging with prestigious brands.

References


[5]. Internet and Mobile Association of India Report, “Social media in India 2014”


