SOCIAL MEDIA MONITORING: A STUDY OF MARUTI SUZUKI INDIA LTD.

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ABSTRACT
Social media has shown exponential growth in the past few years. While organizations use it for customer support, customers use it to give their opinion. Since social media distributes information much faster than traditional word-of-mouth, an organization’s reputation is no longer in the hands of corporate communication department but in the hands of everyone with access to the internet. A single negative opinion/comment from the consumer can damage organizational reputation. The biggest challenge for any organization with a consumer-facing product should be monitoring the social media for feedback, ideas and sentiments of people/customers. This study focuses on social media monitoring done at Maruti Suzuki India Ltd.

KEY WORDS: Social Media, monitoring, responding, amplifying, leading, Maruti Suzuki India Ltd.

INTRODUCTION
Tim Berners-Lee created the World Wide Web at CERN laboratory in Switzerland in the year 1990 with a belief that internet would not only be abode of data but would also connect people the world over. The advent of Web 2.0 helped in the actualization of Lee’s vision of the web as a social and collaborative medium. In simple terms, social media is an open media for interactive communication led by common people. Unlike the one-way production and transfer of news, information, and entertainment from main media outlets via the mass media, social media allows anybody to become a producer of such content, and deliver it through interactive communication. Social media is the media that is published, created and shared by individuals on the internet, such as blogs, images, video and more (Strokes, 2009), as well as online tools and platforms that allow internet users to collaborate on content, share insights and experiences, and connect for business or pleasure (Strauss & Frost, 2009). SHOWING EXPLOSIVE GROWTH IN JUST FEW
years since its birth, social media is establishing itself as the media of choice all across the world. Social media can be called a strategy and an outlet for broadcasting, while social networking is a tool and a utility for connecting with others (Cohen, 2010). Organisations have come to realize that social media is an essential marketing tool, though not to be used as the only marketing tool. Social media is no longer a trend for marketers: It is a reality (Williamson, 2010). If marketers hop the social media bandwagon just because everybody else is a part of it then they are mistaken. Social media is an inevitable channel for customer support (Jacobs, 2009). Customers get a forum wherein they can freely express their views and opinion about a product/service. Social network is a type of web site model where individual members become part of a broader virtual community (Strokes, 2009) and/or the practice of expanding the number of one’s business and social connects by making connections through individuals online (Strauss & Frost, 2009). Thus one may say that the persuasion power has shifted from an agency creative genius to an internet savvy customer. Studies reveal that customers trust the opinion of someone on social media more than the traditional promotional messages. Social media operates like a giant word-of-mouth machine, catalyzing and accelerating the so-called viral distribution of information (Dellarocas, 2003). Therefore, an organization’s reputation is no longer in the hands of corporate communication department but in the hands of everyone with access to the internet. A single negative opinion/comment from the consumer can damage an organizational reputation. The biggest challenge for any organization with a consumer-facing product should be monitoring the social media for feedback, ideas and sentiments of people/customers. This study would focus on social media monitoring done at Maruti Suzuki India Ltd.(MSIL)

Objective of the Study:
The present study seeks to achieve the following objectives:
1. To study the functions of social media i.e. monitor, respond, amplify and lead at Maruti Suzuki India Ltd.
2. To study how social media monitoring can aid during consumer decision journey.

Literature Review
Social media offers faster distribution than the mass media like advertisement, promotional activities etc. because it is done through the users to people they are close to. According to a study conducted by Kwak, H. et al. (2010), most social media users retransmit content they have received within the hour. In Twitter, 35 percent of users redistribute content within 10 minutes and 55 percent of them within an hour.

Social media is considered as a good medium to transfer content to a more diverse range of people as compared to the conventional mass media. It creates a “small-world” network (Newman, 2003) where content is easily distributed to a large number of people; the network, formed through voluntary connection, is quick and requires very less steps for sharing information. As for Twitter, content tweeted to an average of four people can end up reaching any user in the world (Kwak, 2010). In other words, the content is transmitted to a broader public by linking it to another form of media. For example, a blog’s content can be linked onto Twitter, which can be then reported through mass media.

Organisations the world over have started using social media as a supplement to mass media. Social media can be used for marketing as direct sales channel, as a tool for customer contact and
services, to replace call center, third as an amplifier of word-of-mouth and lastly as a space for social commerce (Hun Dong, 2010)

A framework titled the ‘Consumer Decision Journey’ was suggested by David Court et al. in 2009 for understanding how consumers interact with companies during purchase decision. It’s important to understand that for any information/query that a customer seeks during purchase decision, there are many sources available on social media to provide information and opinion.

A study by Forrester Research in 2010 found that social network users tend to ask others opinions more than ordinary internet users. Among them, 30 percent said they follow others recommendations when buying a product while 50 percent shared their opinion on products or services that caught their interest to their friends. A similar study done in April 2010 by ROI Research, commissioned by Performics, revealed that at least once a week, 33% of active Twitter users share opinions about companies or products while 32% make recommendations and 30% ask for them. Thus, it’s important for an organization to assess how to participate in social media and also how to encourage consumers to get involved. Since social media allows consumers to have a voice in the form of a valuable feedback, such interaction should be encouraged. Interactivity would also help in attracting and retaining loyal consumers.

The reputation of a brand or organisation affects the consumers’ willingness to post feedback on their sites. By listening and responding promptly, companies can make a virtual community among loyal consumers. All this requires meticulous social media monitoring. In a study conducted by researchers Christina Chung and Kristine Austria (2011), it was found that there is a significant, positive relationship between attitude toward social media marketing messages and hedonic shopping values.

Monitoring the social media tools is thus an important function. Social media monitoring is also referred to as buzz monitoring, blog mining or simply social media research. It is a research based on listening to the discourse of the Web, especially social media, and usually refers to the use of automated tools to process that discourse, looking at thousands or millions of naturally occurring conversations (Ray Poynter, 2011).

**Rationale of the Study:**
After extensive literature review it was found that social media research has revolved around social media monitoring, proposed communities such as Marketing Research Online Communities (MROCs), community panels; and other forms of social media research. The importance of social media monitoring to gain sustainable competitive advantage is the need of the hour thus the study was conducted to study how social media monitoring is done by Maruti Suzuki India Ltd. particularly during the consumer decision journey.

**Research Methodology:**
Research is all about finding something, the absence of which may distort our ability to take informed decisions (Nwokah et al., 2009). The ability to take informed decision is facilitated through a systematic study that is conducted through various interrelated stages.
All the steps in a research are interrelated and no decision can be taken independently or in isolation of the previous step. The title of this study is ‘Social Media Monitoring: A Study on Maruti Suzuki India Ltd.’. The title of the research itself introduces the dimensions of the interrelated steps. Keeping in mind the title of the project, as researchers, it becomes important to understand the theoretical framework of social media. All other steps such as stating the objective, choosing the orientation to qualitative research and research tool, sample collection technique are all related to the title and are also interrelated and not independent.

**Research Approach:**

The next step was to develop approaches to the research problem. The type of research adopted in this study is exploratory research. While conducting a research, the researchers generally face the problem of not knowing anything about the problem. In this situation, the exploratory research is used to explore the different dimensions of the problem so that a better understanding of the research framework can be developed. The research procedure is unstructured and flexible and thus it gives the researchers all the freedom to understand the problem. Since social media has recently emerged as a powerful tool for communicating idea, product/service, feedback, and view-point etc. thus the research approach adopted was exploratory research which often involves qualitative methods. When the research objective is to develop an understanding of some phenomena in great detail and in much depth, qualitative research can be applied. It helps to learn how a phenomenon occurs in its natural settings.

Qualitative research can be performed in different ways using different techniques. Orientations to qualitative research are very much influenced by the different field of study involved in research and therefore phenomenological approach to research was adopted for the study. Phenomenology represents a philosophical approach to studying human experiences based on the idea that human experience itself is inherently subjective and determined by the context in which people live. This approach is highly unstructured and provides every opportunity for gaining new insights.

As researchers with a phenomenological orientation, conversational interview tools were used. No direct questions were asked during interview. The respondents were asked to share their experiences about social media tools used in the organization i.e. MSIL. The researchers also referred to the official social media sites to assess the content and understand the application of social media core functions.

**Data Collection tools:** The data was collected using conversation tool. The researchers had a series of discussion with the social media team which comprised a Deputy General Manager, and 2 Media Managers The approach was completely unstructured. The goal was to have the respondents produce a dialogue about his/her experience of social media tools being used in MSIL. Data was also collected from the official social media sites of MSIL.

**Sampling:** Sampling is the most widely used tool for gathering important and useful information from the population. The small portion of the population, referred to as sample, is on what the research tools are applied. Purposive sampling, one of the most common sampling strategies, groups participants according to preselected criteria relevant to a particular research question. Since the research problem was identifying how social media monitoring is done in Maruti
Suzuki India Ltd., purposive sampling technique was used to collect data from the social media team based at head office of MSIL in VasantKunj, New Delhi. The respondents were Media Manager and his team. The Media team manages social media, traditional, digital media of Maruti Suzuki India Ltd.

**Data Analysis Tools:** For the purpose of qualitative data analysis, a framework on how social media enables targeted marketing responses at individual touch points along the consumer decision journey (Divolet.al. Source: Expert Interview; McKinsey analysis) was considered since it suggested important touch points in the consumer decision journey to gain competitive advantage and better brand reputation. The model has been validated and is an extension of Consumer Decision Journey model, suggested by Court *et.al.* in 2009. The framework ‘Consumer Decision Journey Model’ was proposed to understand how consumers interact with companies during purchase decisions. It is important to mention here that the basis for considering this framework was the Consumer Decision Process (CDP) model which captures the activities that occur when decisions are made in a schematic format and shows how different internal and external forces interact to affect how consumers think, evaluate and act.

**Data Analysis and Discussion:**
Maruti Suzuki India Ltd. has a very efficient social media team that works round the clock to understand their customer’s needs. The team handling media includes one Deputy General Manager and two Media Managers. Social media is collectively handled by media team and 12 Brand Managers. The team takes care of traditional, digital and social media. The team utilises traditional medium like magazines, television, movies, webcasting for product promotion. Social media tools like facebook, twitter, orkut, LinkedIn, Google Circle are extensively used by MSIL now. The company has clearly understood the role of social media in influencing customer’s purchasing decision and fostering brand loyalty. The data was analysed for social media’s core functions viz. to monitor, respond, amplify and lead consumer behaviour. The framework given by Divolet.al was used for analysis. It could be understood from the framework that social media is a unique component of the consumer decision journey. Social media can be used as a quintessential and the only form of marketing that can touch consumers at each and every stage, right from when they’re considering products purchase to experience sharing post purchase and advocating the product to others. (See Exhibit 1).
The framework (see Exhibit 2) developed by Divol et al. strongly suggests that the most powerful social-media strategies focus on a limited number of marketing responses closely related to individual touch points along the consumer decision journey. This framework depicts the ten most important responses relevant across the entire consumer decision journey. It can be seen that one of those ten responses—monitoring what people say about any product/organisation—is so important that it has been depicted in the framework as a core function of social media, relevant across the entire consumer decision journey. The remaining nine responses have been organised in three clusters in the framework and underpin efforts to use social media to respond to consumer comments, to amplify positive sentiment and to lead changes in the behaviour and mind-sets of consumers.
Exhibit 2: Source: Expert Interviews; McKinsey analysis

1. Monitor
Brand monitoring, i.e. knowledge about what is being said online about an organisation’s product or service should be a default social media function, taking place continuously. Even though consumers may not be engaged directly, organisations can gain insights from an effective monitoring program while communicating about product design, pre-launching and launching activities. Monitoring is also a critical tool for handling negative comments/publicity; organisations can ensure that relevant information reaches the target customer/consumer timely.
MSIL has outsourced the brand monitoring task to an external agency named ‘Ignitee Digital Services’. Automated software, ‘Thoughtbuzz’ is used for monitoring what is being said about MSIL’s product/services/dealers/company as a whole. The frequency of monitoring social media is multiple times a day. Social media monitoring is a continuous process in MSIL. The company uses social media continuously for monitoring, responding, amplifying and leading. The automated software helps in identifying customer’s perspective which helps the Brand Managers in assessing which stage the customer is in the Consumer Decision Journey.

MSIL also does customer sentiment analysis to understand what goes in the mind of its customer. The inputs given by automated software ‘Thoughtbuzz’ are segregated on the basis of service related issues, sales related issues, complements/appreciation & negative comments. The media team including the Brand Managers is then required to take suitable measures.
2. Respond

Although it is important to know how an organization is doing and what are the areas of improvement, monitoring is just a beginning of greater customer engagement. Identifying and pinpointing customer conversations for responding at crucial stage of consumer’s decision journey increases organisation’s reputation. However, responding only at the time of crisis or negative comments cannot help in customer retention and improving organisation’s reputation.

At MSIL, every customer is valued and thus the media team does not try to identify the customers in terms of how many retweets they get or how many comments their Blog posts/Facebook posts attract. The Media Manager said that MSIL can consider monitoring the influence of customer in future keeping in mind the large customer base so as to harness a large communication footprint available. The social media team is quick to respond to incase of any query/comment/grievance posted on any of the social media tool. The information generated by ‘Thoughtbuzz’ is immediately analysed by the Brand Managers and post-analysis, information is sent to the Social Media team. The team addresses the issues/grievance immediately and does not wait for the number of similar comments/complaints to increase in the form of posts on any of the social media tool. The response, which is always vetted by the Brand Managers, is sent through the company’s official email id. Once a lady customer posted about how she was facing inconvenience as her MSIL car was under service repair for more than 4 days. The media team communicated this issue to the service team, who then immediately contacted her and through their intervention, a similar model was given to her by the company. Till such time her own car was repaired, she used the car provided by MSIL.

MSIL has 2000 dealers all across India and more than 1million cars are sold in a year. Handling such a large customer base becomes difficult therefore; the company also has a separate division for handling grievances. The company recruits dealers which in turn hire Dealer Sales Executives. The role of Dealer Sales Executives is to interact day-in day-out with the prospective & existing customers. They also get a feedback form and on a daily basis, the feedback is given to the Customer Relations Department (CRD) of MSIL. The company has delegated one Territory Sales Manager (TSM) to one dealer. Each TSM monitors the functioning of the dealer and gives input to the CRD. The CRD then processes information and provides inputs to the Media team &Brand team which then take appropriate action of responding/clarifying on its social media tools.

MSIL faced organizational crisis twice when its workers went on strike. During that period negative comments were posted which were again addressed through social media, apart from mass media. Since the information was confidential the respondents chose not to divulge details about crisis management through social media.

Responding as a function in social media is very important. Responsibility for taking action on a customer’s comments, appreciation or grievance may fall on functions outside marketing, and the message will differ depending on the situation. The ability to respond and act rapidly requires the constant, proactive monitoring of social media on an ongoing basis. By responding rapidly, transparently, and honestly, companies can positively influence consumer sentiment and behavior and ultimately improve the brand reputation.
3. Amplify
The sole purpose of amplification is to invite customers to share their experience and keeping them involved in ongoing activities organized by the organization. Amplification involves designing the marketing activities in such a way that it spurs broader engagement and sharing. If organisations only think of planning a marketing campaign and then upload a commercial to social medium like YouTube, the objective won’t be solved. Amplifying means that the core concepts for campaigns must invite customers into an experience that they can choose to extend by joining a conversation with the brand, product, fellow users, and other enthusiasts. It also means having ongoing programs that share new content with customers and provide opportunities for sharing back.

If we refer the initial phases of the consumer decision journey, consumers scrutinize through brands/products/services to determine their preferred options. At this juncture, referrals and recommendations become powerful social-media tools. MSIL allows and encourages customers to become its Brand Advocate. Through this medium, customers (who may not necessarily be MSIL car owners) are encouraged to post comments/share experience or even vouch for MSIL cars.

As per the media team, such direct recommendations from friends/relatives/peers generate engagement rates some 30 times higher than traditional online advertising does. The media team at MSIL uses its social media official sites to amplify the customer’s engagement and brand loyalty.

4. Lead
If social media is used proactively, it can lead consumers toward long-term purchasing behavioral changes. In the early stages of the consumer decision journey, this may involve boosting brand awareness by driving Web traffic to content about existing products and services. Even before launching its new Swift and Swift Dzire model, MSIL started flashing the car’s interiors at its YouTube and facebook pages to give a peek-a-boo about the new model to create excitement & curiosity. The company’s ambition was to increase its brand reach to everyone. This flash became a phenomenon and got more than 1 million hits across all social media tools. Finally, when these models were launched, the demand for MSIL’s products had jumped by 25 percent. MSIL uses social media to generate buzz around its existing products as well. It organizes frequent contests and online events. One such example is the 2nd Anniversary celebration for Ritz car. The buzz around it was ‘Fastest One Lac1 Sold’. MSIL also created buzz through its ‘KitnaDetiHai’ campaign which was aired on television and social media platforms as well.

Social media can solicit consumer input after the purchase. This ability to gain product-development insights from customers in a relatively inexpensive way is emerging as one of social media’s most significant advantages. MSIL has its community forums. The company, through its digital agency collects its customers’ views about improving the company’s products and services. The media team then aggregates submitted ideas and forwards them to the Product Development team which in turn tries to implement them on the basis of feasibility factor.
Conclusion: This study attempts to examine the functions of social media i.e to monitor, respond, amplify and lead consumer behaviour in Maruti Suzuki India Ltd. Just as the world witnessed the emergence of the Internet, now it is experiencing a growth in ‘socialnomics’. For ever organisation, harnessing social media has become a must. With the explosion of social networks, any organisation with a consumer-facing product should be thinking about managing the social media functions effectively. There is a tremendous amount of content and conversation out there in social media platforms about the brand and organisation wants to be able to see and hear all of it. Thus, organisations look for technology-based solutions for help. However, the conversations on the social media ecosystem have subtleties and layers that can be very difficult to interpret using automated solutions. In the absence of human context, one may receive a much skewed view of the conversation therefore; people can help to identify the issues and trends and help to build lasting relationships with customers.

1 One Lac = 0.1 million
Maruti Suzuki India Ltd. has very effectively managed the four functions of social media i. monitoring, responding, amplifying and leading the consumer behaviour. MSIL has not simply relied on its automated software ‘thoughtbuzz” to help interpret the data; its dedicated social media team is on its toes to constantly monitor, respond, amplify and lead the consumer behaviour. MSIL is spending relatively lesser money on conventional advertising and has concluded that social media activity not only boosted sales but also had higher ROIs than traditional marketing did. MSIL has been ranked No.1 in JD Power Customer Service Index (CSI) Study 2010 for the 11th time in a row. It has also received Significant Achievement in Sustainability award in CII-ITC Sustainability Awards 2010 for showing a significant drop in negative comments of customers/customer complaints.

If companies invest loads of money in social media with little understanding of how it influences consumers to buy their product/ do brand advocacy, it would fail miserably to harness social media’s true potential. This study would help organisations to understand the importance of monitoring its social media; responding in timely manner to give customer support/Manage crisis; amplify current positive activity/tone by giving recommendations, advocating about the brand and encouraging on-line communities; and leading to bring about changes in customer sentiment or behaviour by organising brand contests, product launches/deals and offers. This would help further in implementing innovative strategies, adjust campaigns at the right time and improve organisational reputation leveraging the power of social media.

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