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**ABSTRACT**

'While in earlier days major marketing tools were confined to the mail and the telephone, today direct marketing uses new age tools viz., computers, mobile phones, the Internet, and the social media. The social media is the best communication channel for creating buzz and referrals. However social media acts as a supportive role for direct marketing arena. Dell is one such company making the most of social media for a supportive role. However, the obvious question is: who are the people interacting online and how engaged are they in online activities? An experimental study was conducted to test the influence of social presence and need to belong on product choice and product rating. This paper aims to answer this question based on a study regarding the online activities of 281 social media users, out of which 169 respondents has revealed their experiences. by identifying different types of users, a segmentation of these users and a linear model to examine how different predictors related to social networking sites have a positive impact on the respondents' perception of online advertisements. The answer can help discover how to engage with different types of audiences in order to maximize the effect of the online marketing strategy.' This research focuses on how social presence and need to belong influence product ratings and product choice in an online context. Thereby identifying different types of users, a segmentation of these users and a linear model to examine how different predictors related to social networking sites have a positive impact on the respondents' perception of online advertisements. The answer can help discover how to engage with different types of audiences in order to maximize the effect of the online marketing strategy. Further implications of this finding are discussed.

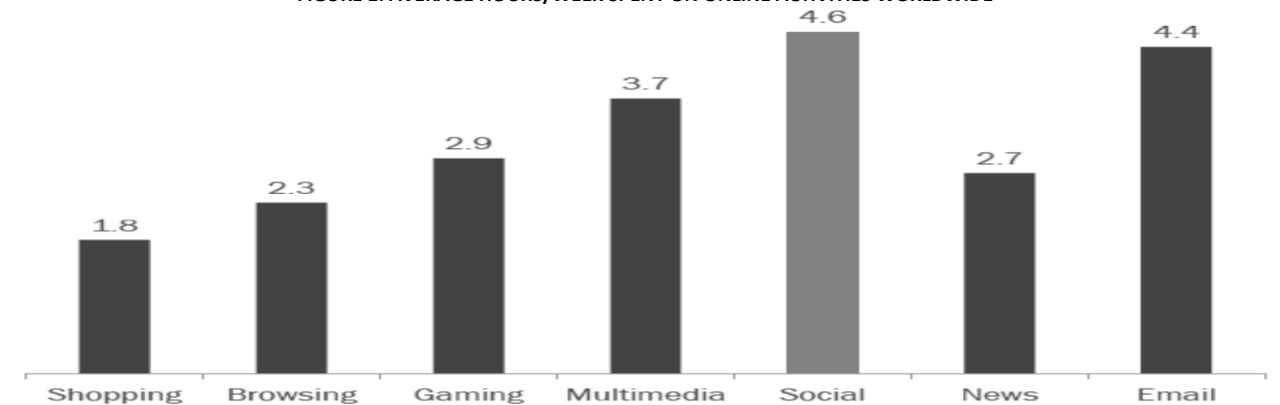
**KEYWORDS**

social media marketing, online consumer behavior, need to belong, referent groups and product rating.

**INTRODUCTION**

 Social Media Marketing is about understanding how technology is making it easier for people to connect socially with their social networks and how your business can profit from that understanding. There is a common misconception that social media and social networking sites (SNS) are two synonymous terms. Social media are tools for sharing and discussing information. It can be described as a kind of online media which encourages every member for feedback and contribution. It is a social instrument of two-way communication facilitating the sharing of information between users within a defined network via web 2.0 (O'Reilly, 2005). It involves online activities in which the user contributes to content creation.

Social Media is growing every day. Even if 90% of the 18-24 age group internet users use social network via any device at least once per month, social media affects every age group with much higher increase rates for the age groups over 35 (Hubspot, 2012). Also, when looking at the average hours per week spent on online activities, we can definitely see that the world is becoming more social, with an average of 4.6 hours per week spend on Social Media Sites worldwide (Figure 1).

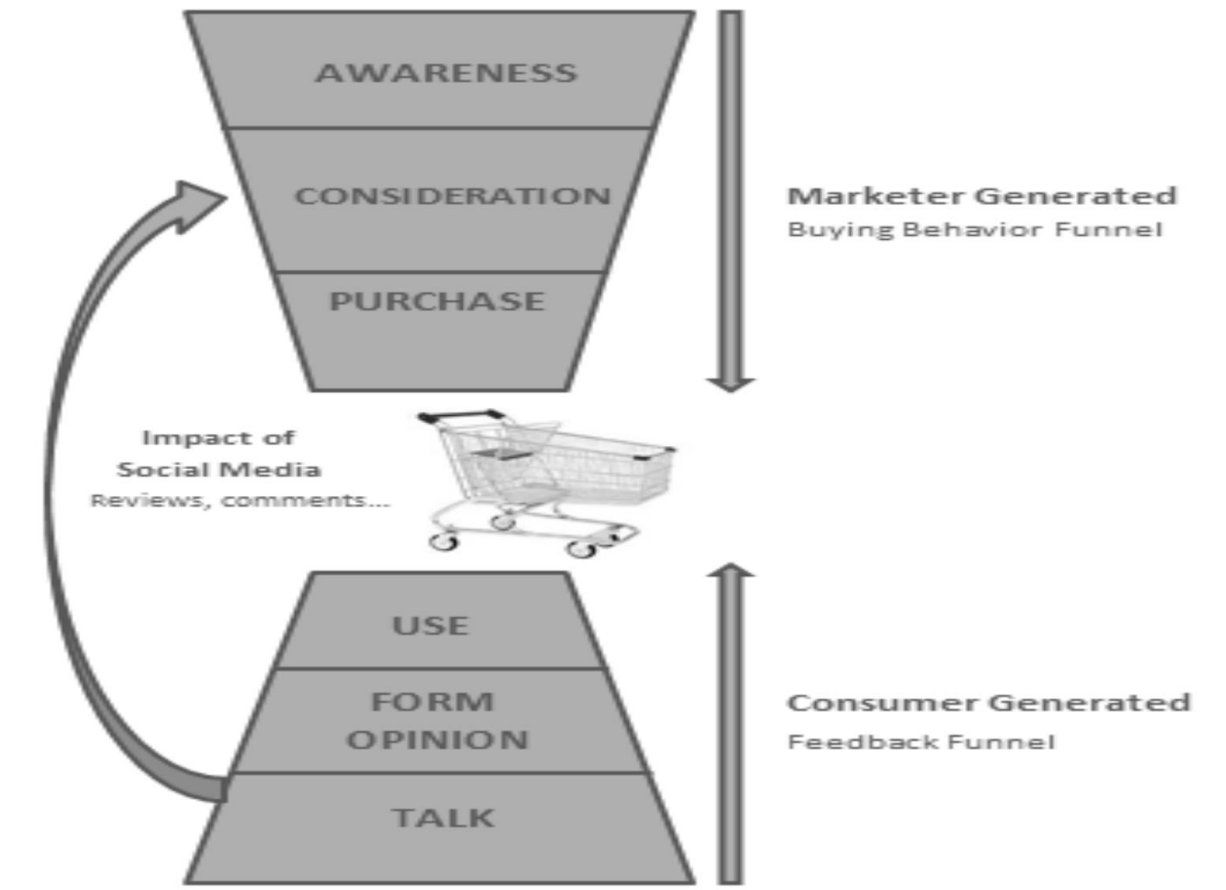
**FIGURE 1: AVERAGE HOURS/WEEK SPENT ON ONLINE ACTIVITIES WORLDWIDE**

(Source: Hubspot, 2012.)

On the other hand, the contemporary version of the purchase funnel (Figure 2) incorporates the Social Media by showing how the user-generated media in the post-purchase experiences can have impacts on the basic stage of consideration which is usually only part of the marketer-generated content



FIGURE 2: THE SOCIAL FEEDBACK CYCLE

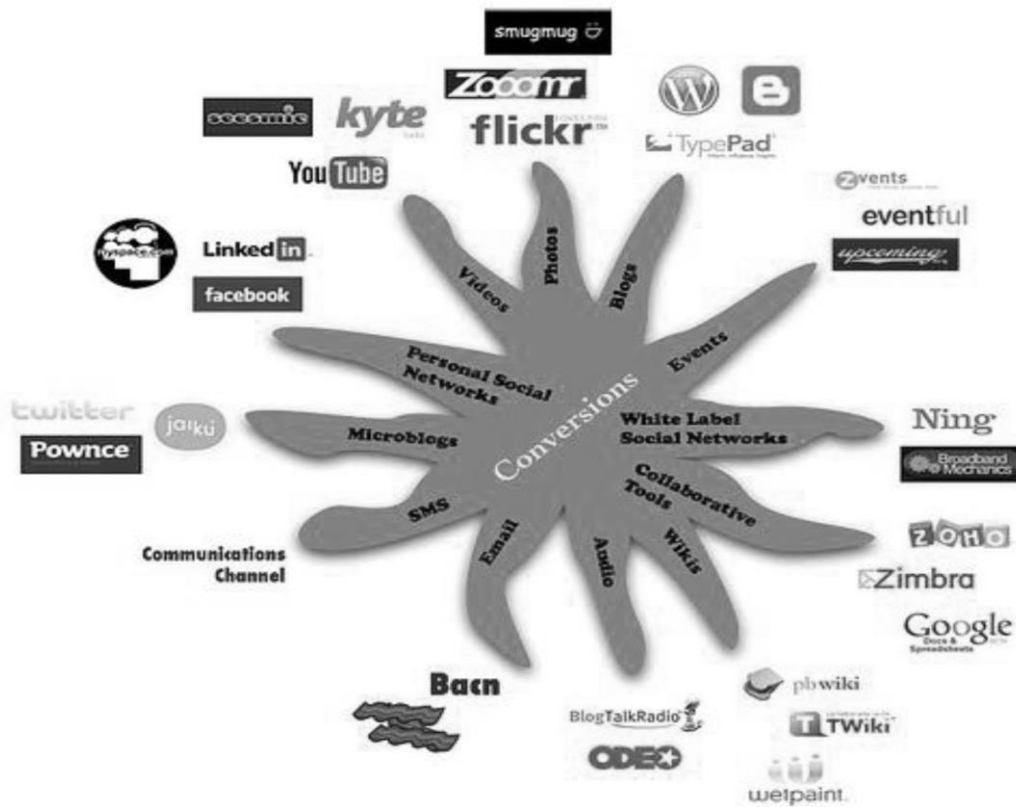


(Source: Own Creation, 2012.)

**THE TYPES OF SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS**

According to Robert Scoble, the Social Media Starfish (Figure 3) illustrates the different Social Media channels that people are using to interact on the Internet. It shows the evolving Social Media landscape.

FIGURE 3: THE SOCIAL MEDIA STARFISH, BY ROBERT SCOBLE



(Source: Scobleizer, 2007.)

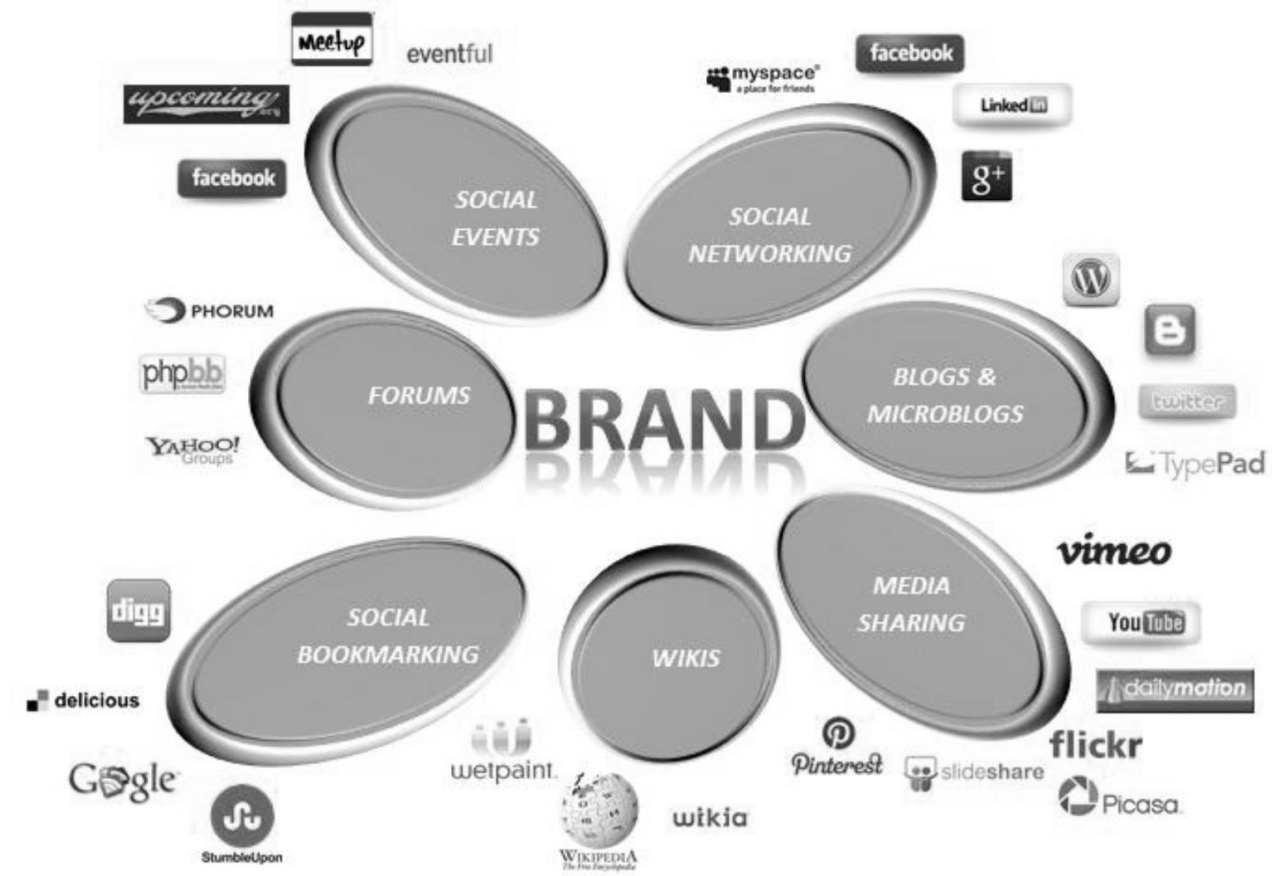
This graph illustrates greatly the very dense ecosystem which symbolizes Social Media, spreading the various services over families:

- **Publishing:** blog engines (WordPress, Blogger...), wiki platforms (Wikipedia, Wikia...), lifeblog services (Tumblr, Posterous...) and social Q&A (Quora) Celine ARCA Master of International Marketing

- **Sharing:** dedicated online services for videos (YouTube, Dailymotion, Vimeo...), pictures (Flickr, Instagram...), links (Delicious, Digg...), products (Pinterest), music (Spotify...) and documents (Slideshare, Scribd...)
- **Playing:** major editors (Zynga, Playdompcap...), dedicated platforms (Hi5...) and smaller but innovative editors (Digital Chocolate, Kobojo...)
- **Networking:** professional (LinkedIn, Viadeo...), personal (MySpace, Badoo...) or for former acquaintances (MyYearBook, Classmates...)
- **Buying:** customer intelligence platforms (Bazaarvoice, PowerReviews...), purchase sharing (Polyvore), recommendation (Hunch) or social commerce offerings (Boosket)
- **Localization:** mobile applications (Foursquare, Path...), socialized city guides (Yelp, DisMoisOu...) or upcoming events or venues (Plancast).

For every business using Social Media Marketing, the challenge is to find on which Social Media channels its audience and customers spend their time and hold conversations (Evans, 2010). Also, people usually visit several Social Media Sites instead of sticking to only one; this is called cross-pollinating. By reading, listening and analyzing their target audience's activities, marketers will be able to determine where, when, who and how the consumers are interacting in the Social Media Universe. It will also help marketers to define who the influencers are and which role they play in the online community: whether they are networkers, everyday users, trendsetters, reporters or opinion leaders.

FIGURE 4: SOCIAL MEDIA UNIVERSE FOR BUSINESSES



(Source: Own Creation, 2012.)

Seven types of Social Media channels affecting businesses will be the following:

- **Social Networks:** e.g. Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, Google+...
- **Blogs and Microblogs:** e.g. WordPress Blogger, Twitter...
- **Content Communities or Media Sharing Sites** (Video/Audio/Photo/Presentations): e.g. Flickr, YouTube, Dailymotion, Vimeo, Picasa, Pinterest, Slideshare...
- **Wikis or User Generated Content** (UGC): e.g. Wikipedia, WikiTravel, World66...
- **Social Bookmarking & News Sites:** e.g. Digg, Reddit, Diigo, Delicious, Google Reader...
- **Discussion Forums and Message Boards:** e.g. Phorum, Yahoo Groups, PHPbb...
- **Social Events:** e.g. Eventful, Meetup...

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Following Angella and Eunju (2012), do social media marketing activities enhance customer equity? An empirical study of luxury fashion brand, the results of the study showed that five constructs of perceived SMM activities as entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, and word of mouth had significantly positive impact on value equity, relationship equity, and brand equity. For the relationship between customer equity drivers and customer equity, brand equity had a significant negative effect on customer equity [1].

Vries et al., (2012) in a study Popularity of Brand Posts on Brand Fan Pages: "An Investigation of the Effects of Social Media Marketing", showed that positioning the brand post on top of the brand fan page enhances brand post popularity. But the findings also indicate that different drivers influence the number of likes and the number of comments. Namely, vivid and interactive brand post characteristics enhance the number of likes [2].

Michaelidou et al., (2011) "Usage, barriers and measurement of social media marketing: an exploratory investigation of small and medium B2B brands" showed that over 1/4 of B2B SMEs in the UK are currently using SNS to achieve brand objectives, the most popular of which is to attract new customers. On the other hand, the most significant barrier is the lack of perceived relevance for particular sectors [3].

Shih (2004) based on technology acceptance model considered the effect of variables of easy use, customers' satisfaction, usefulness of use and security of web on tendency to e-shopping. He showed that by increasing customers' perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness and customers' satisfaction web security, individual attitudes toward e-shopping is increased [4].

Chung G. J., Lee S. H. (2008) investigated the effect of effective variables on online shopping. Their findings showed that perception of website security, protecting private aspects of people and production innovation can have positive influence on online purchase [5].

Ha & Stoel (2009) in a study investigated the effective factors on accepting e-shopping. Their results showed that e-shopping quality affects trust, easy use and customers' satisfaction of e-shopping. In addition, usefulness of use and positive attitude of customers, affects their decision to e-shopping positively [6].

Akbari and Hassangholipour (2002) in a study investigated the effective factors on acceptance of Tehrani customers of e-shopping system of Shahrvand store. Their results showed that accepting to purchase from electronic stores of Shahrvand is dependent upon some factors as access of customers to internet, their awareness of electronic store, its free delivery, the attractions and capabilities of Shahrvand internet basis to respond the customers' demands and strong delivery system of this store are the important factors [7].

Olfat et al., (2011) in a study investigated the effective factors on e-shopping and their prioritization. The results of the study showed that purchase risk index is the most important factor in e-shopping and consumers consider e-shopping useful and they trust it [8].

Sanayei et al., (2010) in a study evaluated the effective factors on online buyers trust and its effect on e shopping intention. This study was done by an attitude evaluation by web-based questionnaire of the customers of internet book stores of Isfahan province. The results of the study showed that trust had a direct effect on customer purchase intention of internet stores and security, internet offenses, web-space control, graphic appearance and website structure were effective on trust [9].

Sanayei et al., (2010) evaluated the effective factors on e-shopping. The results of their study showed that the most important factors on e-shopping are attitude to e-shopping, perception of usefulness of shopping at home, interaction speed and response time, privacy and two variables of social benefits and website design had no significant effect on trust in e-shopping [9].

**PURPOSE/NEED OF THE STUDY**

The following information sought & to find out:

1. What is the influence of social presence on product rating and product choice in an online context?
2. What is the consumer's attitude towards online shopping?
3. What are the key concern areas for consumer's while shopping?
4. How has been recent shift taking place in online shopping?

**SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

The scope of the study has been limited to social media marketing only. The study has been confined to AMU Centre Murshidabad region as this area is growing & greater internet penetration and plenty of social Network Sites users has been observed

**RESEARCH DESIGN & ADOPTED METHODOLOGY**

A systematic literature search of multiple databases has been conducted, chosen for their coverage of a range of relevant disciplines, including psychology, sociology, business / marketing, and related social sciences using the keywords "social media" (social sciences/business/periodical databases).

- Exploratory & descriptive study
- Cross sectional study
- Experimental research, survey research & ethnographic studies has been carried out
- Data collection: questionnaire method
- Data Analysis: descriptive statistical techniques viz., frequency, percentage etc

**Data Collection**

The study is based on descriptive research design. A questionnaire has been designed, to know the point of view of respondent regarding the extent of social media that helps consumers in buying decision making. First part of the questionnaire contains information regarding demographics and usage pattern of social media of the respondent. Second part has series of close-ended indirect questions which are based on impact of social media in making consumer buy a product and expectation from such media. The author collected the data by their selves at AMU Center Murshidabad with the help of some students. A total of 281 students contacted out of which 161 responded.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

**1. PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENT**

TABLE 1

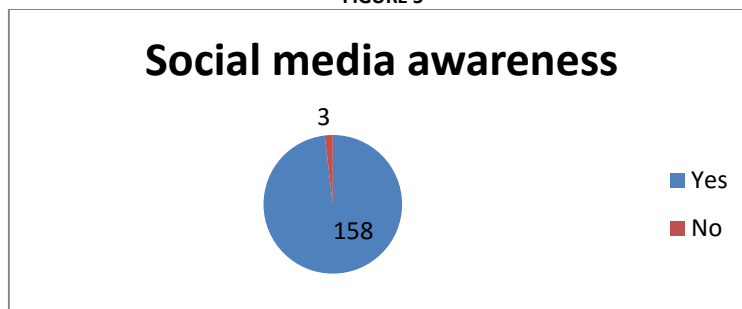
Variable*	Classification	Total N (%)
<b>Gender</b>	Male	123
	Female	38
<b>Age</b>	16-20	58
	21-24	94
	25-30	9
<b>Department</b>	Management	30
	Law	91
	Education	40

- \*at 95% the two variables are significantly different

**Analysis-** Since this is a institution based study majority are male respondents and are in the age of 21-24. Major responses are from the law department students followed by Education & MBA department respectively.

**2. AWARENESS REGARDING USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA**

FIGURE 5



Yes -158 respondents, No-3 respondents

**Analysis-** As all are students, almost everyone is aware about social media and online purchasing while studying except 3 respondents who are from the rural areas & are not pretty tech savvy.

3. TIME PERIOD OF USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

FIGURE 6

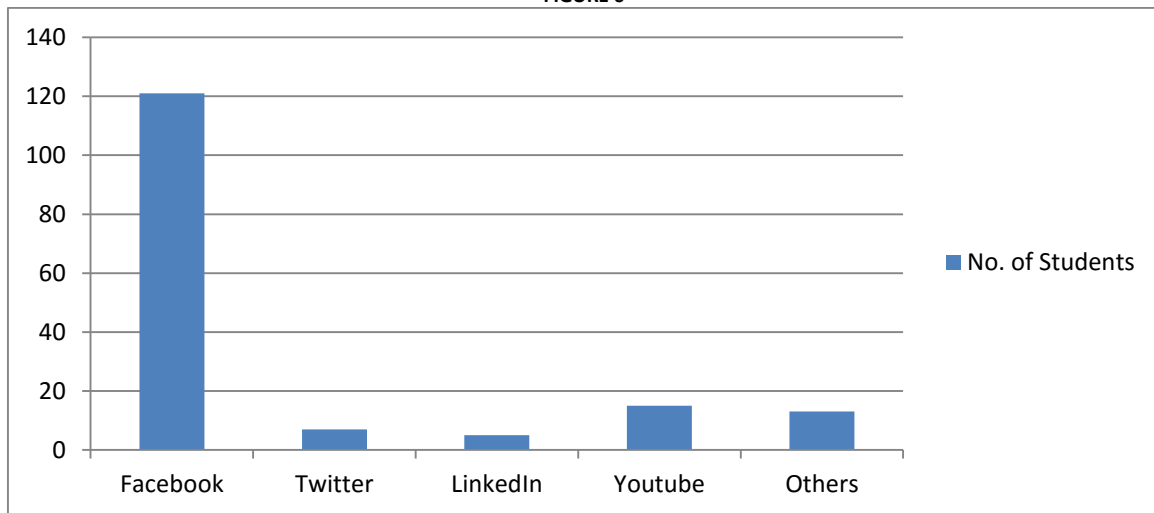


TABLE 2

0-6 months	9
>6 months-1 year	46
>1-2 years	88
>2-4 years	15
above 4 years	3

Analysis- 88 students are using social media for various purposes from more than 1 year to 2 years, it means they are quite novice in this field.

4. FREQUENCY OF VISITING SOCIAL MEDIA WEBSITES BY RESPONDENTS

FIGURE 7

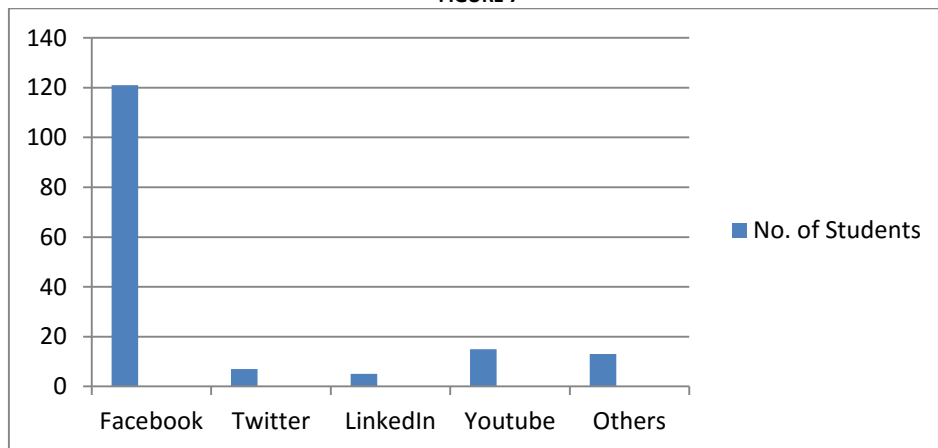


TABLE 3

Facebook	121
Twitter	7
LinkedIn	5
Youtube	15
Others	13

Analysis- Most of the respondents visit Facebook & Youtube as social media.

5. PURPOSE OF SOCIAL MEDIA VISIT

FIGURE 8

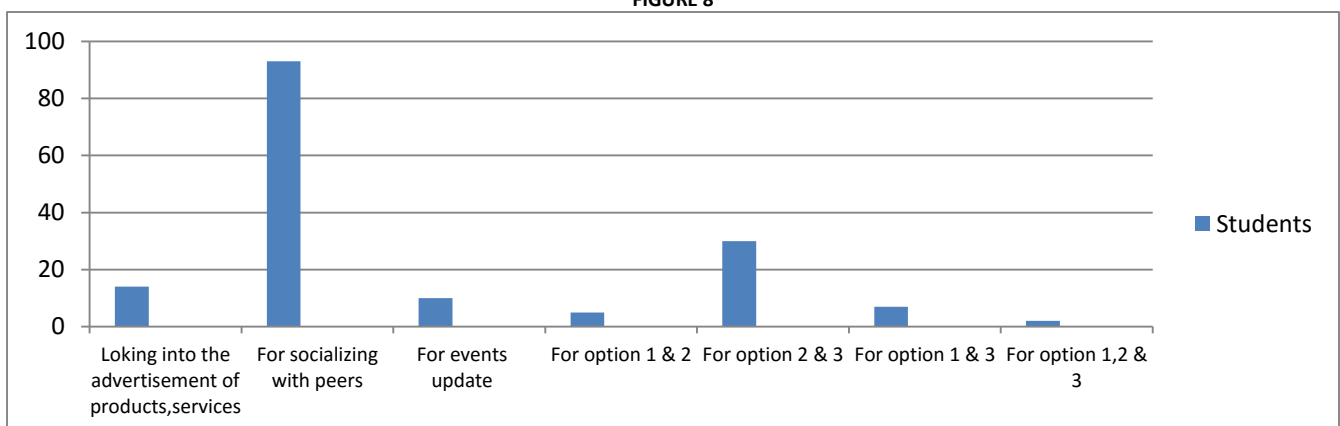


TABLE 4

For looking into the advertisement of products/services	14
For socializing with peers	93
For events update	10
For option 1 & 2	5
For option 2 & 3	30
For option 1 & 3	7
For option 1,2 & 3	2

**Analysis-** The purpose of social media visit has mixed responses based on their personal preferences & need. Nevertheless, most one are utilizing as medium for socialization, products/ services/events update.

**6. SOCIAL MEDIA CONTRIBUTION:**

- a) Effective for Brand awareness
- b) Revolutionized marketing of products/services
- c) Effectiveness for buying
- d) Effective ads
- e) Consumer engagement
- f) Increased online shopping

FIGURE 9

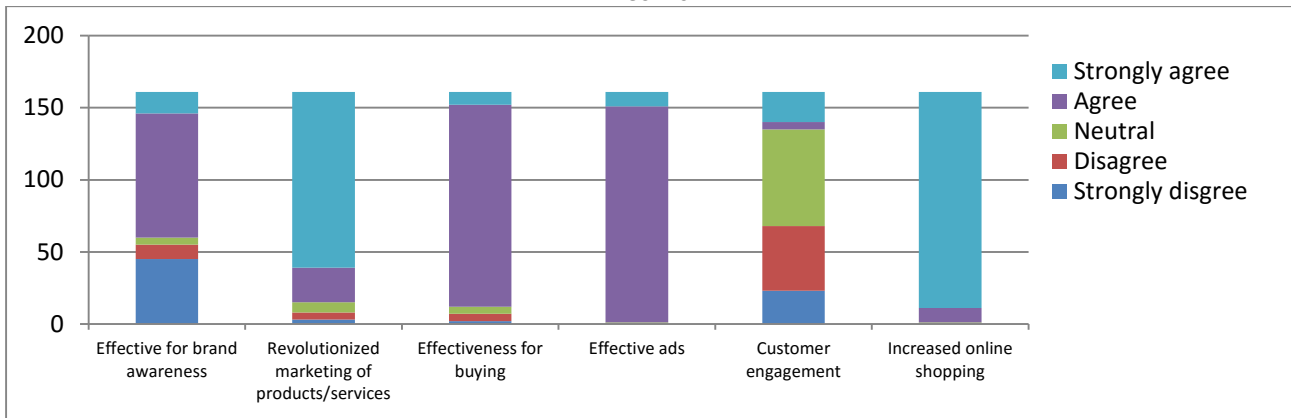


TABLE 5

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Effective for brand awareness	45	10	5	86	15
Revolutionized marketing of products/services	3	5	7	24	122
Effectiveness for buying	2	5	5	140	9
Effective ads	0	0	1	150	10
Customer engagement	23	45	67	5	21
Increased online shopping	0	0	1	10	150

**Analysis-** Most of them have positive perception regarding online shopping which affects their total purchasing behavior, attitude, learning, experience, motivation etc.

**7. ONLINE SHOPPING TRANSACTION FREQUENCY**

FIGURE 10

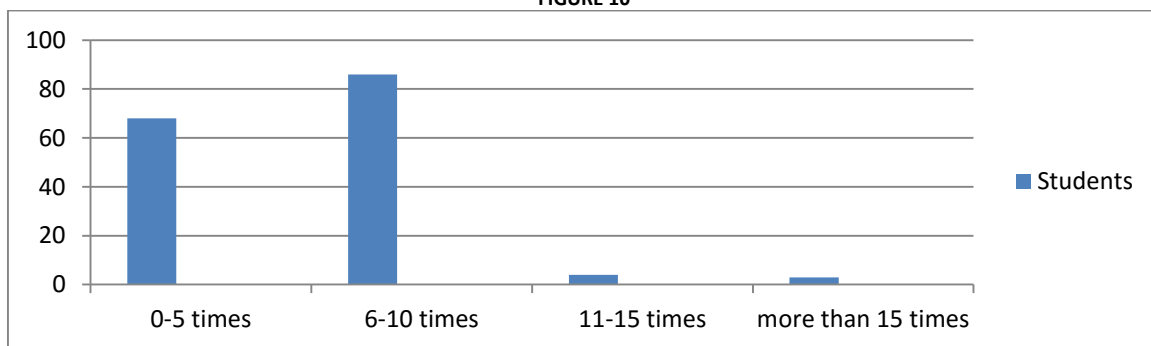


TABLE 6

	Students
0-5 times	68
6-10 times	86
11-15 times	4
>15 times	3

**Analysis-** This feature is directly proportional to the usage & frequency of respondents to visit social media. Moreover, more the visit more the prospects: sales conversion ratio.

8. USEFULNESS OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN DAY TO DAY OPERATION & RECOMMENDATION TO OTHERS

FIGURE 11

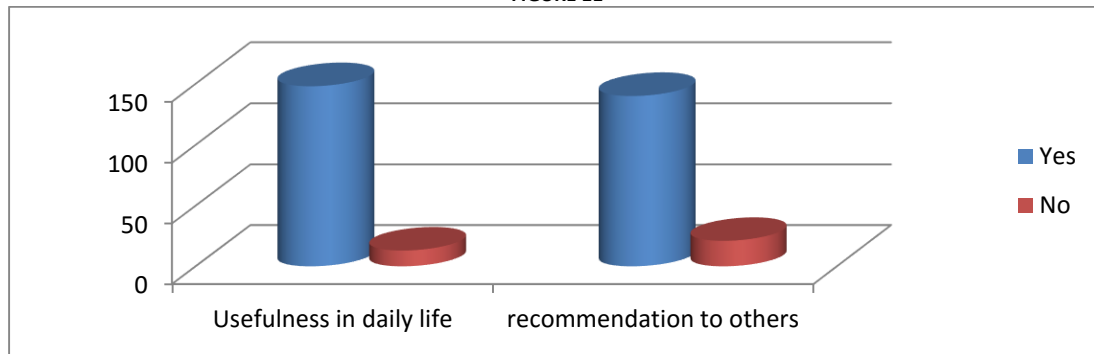


TABLE 7

	Yes	No
Usefulness in daily life	148	13
recommendation to others	140	21

Analysis- Well it is quite evident that social media do play an important role in our daily life. However, it is becoming inevitable and occupied a major position in our purchase attitude & orientation. So we do spread positive word-of-mouth (WOM) regarding online service providers.

**FINDINGS**

It has been found that younger people are adopting social media like anything and with a pace that was never before in the past. It has also been found that almost every social media user who were respondent in this case use to go to brand pages to learn more about the product/services, to learn about the exclusive offers, to find the reaction of their friends and peer on the selected brands. The affectivity of social media as a marketing tool will only be possible when organization having their presence on social media provide the concrete and timely information needed by the consumers. The desire to engage with the brand either through dialog with the brand’s representatives or with other consumers (business to consumer + consumer to consumer communication) leads to advocacy and loyalty towards the brand and such consumer starts working as a brand ambassador of the product/service.

There is a gap between consumer expectations and actual delivery at social networking websites; Consumers do not get the information timely and adequately.

**LIMITATIONS & SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

Limitations of this study include those commonly associated with questionnaires, including unsystematic sampling procedures and low response rates. While representativeness can always be improved, for the present research great efforts have been made in order to have a higher response rate for the sample. This study presented responses gathered from students of Aligarh Muslim University, Center Murshidabad. The respondents do not, therefore, reflect customer attitudes and behaviors related to social media users in other countries. Moreover, given the sample, the research did not include in its analysis demographic variables, such as sex, age, social class, and ethnicity.

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

In conclusion, business today is being transformed from a transactional relationship to a social relationship. With the present growth and scale of social networking, we would even be able to buy products and services through the social medium. The medium is growing very fast and holds huge potential but is still in its nascent stage in India. Thereby time for the companies to make effective strategies and execute them to win larger share of business through this revolutionary medium and become the innovative firm of coming future.

Social media leads to friendly relations among people via the relations between the customers of a company. Indeed, via the interactions in social media among people, many values are exchanged among people and this leads to much information exchange among people, groups and companies.

This result showed that awareness of services and products of company increases brand capital of travel agency companies via social media, interesting items of social media in relation to brand for customers, providing information sharing, and transferring beliefs, updating information regarding the company services and searching the customized information regarding company services. It can be said that brand capital is closely associated with brand selection and it can facilitate decision-making process of consumer and activate brand purchase.

Based on this finding, when the company provides suitable services via social media for customers, it leads to easy access of customers to services and goods of company and there is a consistency between price and quality of services and it also increases the value of this company for customers and the customer’s intention to shopping is increased based on the value of this company to them.

Time is bringing new opportunities every day in the Social Media universe. Each channel is evolving regularly, offering more and more valuable marketing features for businesses. Also, new Social Media channels are being launched every month, offering new business possibilities and new areas of marketing research. The question is: how will businesses combine Social Media Marketing, Mobile Marketing and Email Marketing together?

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**ANNEXURE**

**QUESTIONNAIRE**

Hello Dear Students, We are conducting a survey at our Institute premise regarding “SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING AND ITS IMPACT ON CONSUMER BUYING DECISION” for which I need your unbiased & genuine responses. The information being collected is purely for academic research purpose and will be kept confidential.

Please spare some time to make it viable and oblige. Please tick the suitable & appropriate option.

PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENT: (qualifying questions)

- a) GENDER       MALE       FEMALE
- b) AGE             16-20       21-25       26-30
- c) FACULTY/DEPARTMENT       MANAGEMENT       LAW       EDUCATION

**QUESTIONS**

1. Do you use social media? (verifying question)  
Yes  No
2. How long you have been using social media?  
a) 6 months  b) 1 year  c) 2-3 years  d) 4-5 years  e) above 5 years
3. Which social media websites do you use more often?  
a) Facebook  b) Twitter  c) LinkedIn  d) YouTube  e) Any other
4. For what purpose/s do you use social media? (Select as many choices as you like)  
a) For looking into the advertisement of products/services   
b) For socializing with peers   
c) For events update
5. How useful do you think that social media has been for you?  
a) Very useful   
b) Don't know   
c) Not very useful   
d) Useless
6. On the scales of 1-5 below, please state how much you agree with each statement, 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree  
1      2      3      4      5  
a) Social media is effective for brand awareness      ○○○○○  
b) Social media has revolutionized the marketing of a product/service      ○○○○○  
c) Social media is effective for buying a product/service ○○○○○  
d) Social media uses effective advertising for product/service      ○○○○○  
e) Social media is great for engaging with consumers      ○○○○○  
f) Social Media is better than any other type of media for the purposes of product purchase.
7. How many times has social media helped you to purchase/buy a specific product/service?  
a) 0-5   
b) 6-10   
c) 11-15   
d) More than 15 times
8. Would you recommend using social media to others, for buying a product/service?  
a) Yes  b) No
- 9) Do you feel that you should use social media more in its day to day operations?  
a) Yes  b) No
- 10) Would you like to share any experience of your shopping through social media?  
.....  
.....

Thanks for your assistance and generosity



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Thanking you profoundly

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