YOUTUBE VIDEOS AS AN EFFECTIVE MEDIUM IN BRANDING - A STUDY AMONG URBAN WOMEN IN MYSURU CITY

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ABSTRACT

Social media is an emerging field and with its range of tools for communication hence businesses are highly interested in tapping this medium for marketing. Social media Influencers especially YouTube content creators are used to communicate with the public using videos and podcasts. “As social media platforms expand and evolve, the advertising industry has had to change and adapt to continue to reach consumers. With social media growing in influence and advertising agencies allocating more of their media budgets to social, the advertising industry is in search of effective strategies to get the most return on investment when it comes to social. One of these strategies in recent years has been influencer marketing, which is a form of marketing where the focus is placed on specific individuals rather than a target market as a whole. It identifies the individuals that have influence over potential buyers, and orients marketing activities around these influencers.” The paper aims to study the role of YouTube as a social media platform and its impact on creating visibility for brands and to determine the effect of the views/opinions of You-Tubers on its viewers. It also explains the various promotional tools used by the content creators to effectively reach their viewers. A survey among 300 urban women you-tube viewers in Mysuru between the age 20-35 was proposed for this paper. The objectives of this paper would be to analyze the authenticity of the content generated by bloggers; to analyze the PR strategies used different brands, to understand the consumer behavior when it comes to buy a product marketed through blogs and to examine the role of bloggers in fashion industry. The study is based on Social Media Impact theory that states that “professionals must position themselves to benefit from fundamental changes that are occurring in the ways people decide on which products and services to consume, and how they actually consume them” (Mir & Zaheer, 2012). This paper would help to understand the rise in the use of social media fashion bloggers and as the storytellers of a brand and it’s products. “Fashion bloggers are fast becoming an influential force within the fashion industry, which has been facilitated by the growth of new media.” However the study is limited to a few respondents from Mysuru and is subjective to researcher’s and respondents understanding.
Key words: YouTube influencers for branding, social media fashion bloggers, Social Media Marketing.

Cite this Article: Ramya K.Prasad, YouTube Videos as an Effective Medium in Branding - A Study among Urban Women in Mysuru City, International Journal of Mechanical Engineering and Technology 9(7), 2018, pp. 397–408.
http://www.iaeme.com/IJMET/issues.asp?JType=IJMET&VType=9&IType=7

1. INTRODUCTION
Marketing and branding is about researching the Perceptions, identifying Perspectives, Planning, Partnering the tasks, Perfecting the executions, reviewing Post Performance and Pre-serving the necessary documents. It is about networking with and between the different public, both for individuals and for organisations / institutions. The major purpose is to weave the objectives, policies, products or services of their client/ organisation through integrated communications. A PRO must be able to listen to the clients / stakeholders, understand the pulse of the people, transform situations into opportunities and talk the language of the industry to the target specific audience.

“Today, social media branding is a cross-platform communications action reliant upon traditional and digital PR strategies, as well as social engagement, content marketing, brand publishing, media relations, inbound content, SEO strategies and limitless creativity.

In today’s scenario, marketing includes social media, blogging, online reputation management, brand journalism, content strategies, thought leadership and more. Even PR is now an extremely broad and diversified field – it is no longer anchored to crisis communications, press releases and media alerts.”

“Content is now more powerful than ever, as it carries awareness and supports brand identity, plus the opportunity to strategically generate leads, links and conversions. Corporates plans today to include content audits and content assessments, enabling marketing professionals to determine areas of weakness and winning measures, occurring in active campaigns and audience engagement. There was a time when branding was the strategy, incorporating the creation of content. Now, it seems as though the roles have reversed, with content strategies incorporating the marketing tasks and tools.

Perhaps the most significant changes have occurred most recently, as the Internet and social media like blogs, Facebook and Twitter have transformed the relationship between the members of the public and those communicating with them. Before the rise of social media, traditional branding was about trying to manage the message an entity was sharing with its different audiences, Now, it has to be more about facilitating the ongoing conversation in an always-on world. In a world where the ordinary consumer is walking around with global publishing power in his or her pocket, the role of corporates has shifted from creating content to attempting to influence the content that’s created by others.”

“Audiences want and value informative content from knowledgeable parties – that includes journalists, topic-specific experts and marketers. By clearly identifying the source one enables the reader to understand the filter through which the content was created, recalling communication theorists it’s about setting agenda through gate keeping.”

Guess branding in the new age is all about C-C-C-C-C: Contents with clarity to the content of the customer/ consumer by the client!!!
The connect and interaction with consumers via the Internet has gone up many folds with the rise of digital technologies. Because of the heightened presence of social media as a marketing communication platform, phenomena like e-word of mouth (eWOM) and viral advertising have emerged. Social media, whether in the form of a personal profile, photo or blog roll or video, is consistently turned to, by most audiences for updates in any market. The Social Media Impact theory states that professionals must “position themselves to benefit from fundamental changes that are occurring in the ways people decide on which products and services to consume, and how they actually consume them” (Mir & Zaheer, 2012). With the rise in the use of social media YouTubers are considered to be the storytellers of a brand and its products. Fashion, Technology gadgets, automobiles and even movies are fast becoming an influential force within the global-society, which has been facilitated by the growth of new media.

“As social media platforms expand and evolve, the advertising industry has had to change and adapt to continue to reach consumers. The number of social media users is steadily increasing over the years with more two billion Internet users currently using social networks. These figures are expected to increase as mobile device usage and mobile social networks increasingly gain traction. The time spent on social media by the users has also increased many folds. According to the Global Web Index, users are spending 1.72 hours per day on social platforms, which makes up 28% of all online activity (Bennett 2015). While the audience is certainly there, the power of influence is too, with 74% of consumers relying on social media to influence their purchasing decisions (Bennett 2015). With social media continuing to grow and having a great impact on consumers’ purchasing decisions, advertisers have been forced to find new and unique ways of reaching consumers on these platforms. Nowadays people are exposed to a large number of advertising messages every day. Consumers have become increasingly resistant to traditional forms of advertisement.”

“The returns on investment is the fact that advertisers are spending more and more on paid social media every year. In 2017, it is projected that digital advertising spending, which includes social, will surpass that of television for the first time. With social media advertising, ad agencies are allocating more of their media budgets to social and they are in search of effective strategies to get the most return on investment. The influencer marketing is one of the marketing strategies in recent years which focus on specific individuals rather than a target market as a whole. It helps to identify the content producers that have influence over potential buyers, and target marketing activities around these influencers.

As of 2016, Facebook has reached 1.39 billion active users, Twitter 302 million active users and 300 million on Instagram. The video-sharing websites such as YouTube and Vimeo have gained immense popularity. YouTube seem to capture a billion users. People have been playing an increasingly active role in creating content over the Internet especially on Social Media where the users themselves create all the content. Recently companies started taking advantage of this by allowing users to co-create marketing content for their brands. An important benefit that social media provides, is measurability. All major social media platforms provide comprehensive analytical reports that show very important measures such as Reach, engaged users and other types of insights, which allows for real-time monitoring of the marketing campaign. The analytical insights facilitate better understanding of the user engagement and feedback, which allows for better planning and adaptation of the campaign.”

It is believed that the customers have, always regarded word of mouth, as the most trusted form of advertisement. With the presence of social media, its frequency and impact has been magnified significantly because customer-customer communication has never been higher.
Social influencers have always had a great impact on mass-mindset and trends in general. In this age, the new social influencers are Social Media celebrities. They can have great effect to the point of triggering a revolution.

“There has been blurring of the lines between a genuine endorsement and a paid one through content-rich platforms and hence influencer marketing so powerful. Influencer marketing is essentially virtual word of mouth, and consumers are much more likely to positively perceive and react to a message that comes from a trusted friend or persona over a sponsored post that comes from a company.”

Nielsen’s report indicates 92% of consumers believe in all forms of advertising recommendations from friends and family over (Whitler 2014). Advertisers are trying to capitalize on this by communicating their messaging through social media influencers, who are trusted, nearly as much as a friend. It is no wonder advertisers are paying these influencers to post favorably about their brand or product, on one or more social networks. This marketing technique has taken off and become very popular in the advertising community.

“Advertisers are using these social media influencers in a variety of ways. Two-thirds (67%) marketers reported using influencers for content promotion and more than half (59%) reported using influencer-marketing tactics for product launches and content creation, says an eMarketer research.” “On social media, advertisers communicate this paid endorsement by including the words or hashtags: #ad or #sponsored in the post. There are many creative ways to disclose the paid relationship, however, these two are the most common. With the increasing use of influencer marketing, more research needs to be done to investigate beyond the quantitative benefits and examine the application of the same into a campaign strategy.”

Since 2005, YouTube has become extremely popular, streaming more than 100 million videos per day, with videos of few seconds to 10 minutes or more. The potential media producers, directors, or journalists, share their videos on YouTube and gauge responses from the community. YouTube offers opportunities for expression through video, on the notion self-publishing, making content available for anyone interested in consuming it. The social networking tools further engage users, encourages them to meet new people, read and share opinions, and be part of a community. The interactive features allow members of communities to earn the respect of their peers and increase their followers in the group.

2. YOUTUBERS AS OPINION LEADERS

“An opinion leader is a person of influence with greater access to information. They would be seen as an authority able to filter, interpret and explain media messages. They are a powerful group in the marketplace because they are able to influence consumers. When such leaders operate in social networks, the product is diffused through the marketplace much faster because the spread of information is quick.

YouTubers in today’s market place play a predominant role of acting as a powerful opinion leader. As opinion leaders they can be very influential during the product diffusion process. They have a high and enduring level of involvement and interest with the product category. Creating an inter-relationship between ‘trend setting’ and directly ‘persuading’ consumers to buy their clothes the influence of YouTube on consumers is increasingly prevalent in modern culture. Videos, hold the power to shape public perception of everything, including your brand image. Since YouTubers are becoming increasingly influential in the fashion industry, it is necessary to understand how they influence their followers.
Thus Social media Influencers especially YouTube content creators are used to communicate with the publics using videos and podcasts. This is a highly interactive medium, which allows free and creative expression of views and opinions.”

Hence the paper aims to study the role of YouTube as a social media platform and its impact on creating visibility for brands and to determine the effect of the views/opinions of You-Tubers on its viewers. It also explains the various promotional tools used by the content creators to effectively reach their viewers. A survey among 300 urban women you-tube viewers in Mysuru between the age 20-35 is proposed for this paper. The study is based on Social Media Impact theory that states that “professionals must position themselves to benefit from fundamental changes that are occurring in the ways people decide on which products and services to consume, and how they actually consume them” (Mir & Zaheer, 2012). However theories of Limited media effects such as Two Step Flow theory by Eliu Kartz and Paul Laserfield and the Users and Gratification theory and concepts of Early and Late Majority of theory of Technological Determinism could strongly be applied to the findings.

The objective of the study is to determine the effect of the views/opinions of YouTubers on its viewers and to study how influencer marketing is used on audience. Further the study aims to measure the role of YouTube as a social media platform and its impact on creating visibility for brands and analyze the ways in which the audiences are influenced.

This paper would help to understand the rise in the use of social media influencers and as the storytellers of a brand and it’s products. It also explains the various promotional tools used by the content creators to effectively reach their viewers.

However the time frame provided for the study could not possibly cover all the facets of social media marketing. Further there are over a million influencers across various social media platforms hence it is not plausible to include all of them in this study. The study is limited to a few respondents from Mysuru - Infosys Training Centre – Hebbal Electronic City, Hootagalli, and Hebbal Industrial Estate, Anagahalli, Mysuru and The Brain-tree, one of the Corporate Training Academy Group, Mysuru. The study is also subjective to researcher’s and respondents understanding.

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Social media networking gathered momentum after businesses began creating online web pages as a “double page advertising spread”, and since then, it has considerably gained importance as it is bringing many benefits to businesses. It is a shift in the way of marketing as the consumers changed the way they engage with brands, driving some of traditional marketing strategies and structures obsolete.

When firms engage with consumers timely, it can lead to improvement of the attributes of the brand and it can attract more customers believing in a given brand. Furthermore, since consumer engagement was evaluated as able to influence consumer decision to buy or not to buy, it shifted even more in the centre of attention of all marketers (Zailskaitė-Jakste and Kuvykaite, 2012). Major aim of being in social media is to attain more attention from audiences.

Social Media has been defined as the new type of online media that share various web 2.0 characteristics (Mayfield, 2008), such as:

- Participation: Social Media strengthens the relation between media and audience by encouraging users to make contributions and to give feedback to whoever is interested.
• Openness: There are hardly any barriers to accessing content nowadays. Most of the Social Media sites are interactive in the form of votes, comments and information sharing.

• Conversation: Social Media can be defined as a two-way conversation.

• Community: Social Media allows different types of communities to communicate in an effective manner.

• Connectedness: Most sites are connected and linked to other sites and online communities.

Not only have the companies influence consumers on Social Media platforms, but consumers also actively influence branded messages (Hanna et al., 2011)

Social Media plays a vital role in marketing and creating relationships with the customers. With increase in the competition between brands in the market, most of the brands are engaging themselves in social media in one way or the other.

Jeffries (2011) in her article explains in detail the purpose of hauls/shopping videos done by various female YouTubers across the United States of America and how it affects teenage girls and young women. Her study shows how the viewers sometimes perceive haul videos negatively as bragging and display of wealth. The vlogger protects her image of transparency and maintains positive social environment by giving out a disclaimer before starting the haul. It is also found that such videos have comments not related to productive questioning or broaching of important issue instead, there are pages and pages of compliments, thanks giving and genuinely empty catch-all positives and intensifiers.

This shows how content creators on YouTube use both paid and unpaid form of videos to showcase their purchases from famous retailers and brands in a bid to influence its viewers. They focus more on the positive aspects of the product, shopping experience and their view about it. Thus YouTuber’s use it as a PR tool to influence the audience.

The authors Robert V. Kozinets, Kristine de Valck, Andrea C. Wojnicki and Sarah J. S.Wilner (March, 2010) in an article explores the lived phenomenon of WOMM in a naturalistic context. The qualitative research approach is used.

“The article shows how marketers employing social media marketing methods face a situation of networked coproduction of narratives. There are lot of studies on mobile phones marketing campaigns which were seeded with prominent bloggers. Eighty-three blogs were followed for six months. The findings indicate that the network of communications offer four social media communication strategies evaluation, embracing, endorsement, and explanation. The character narrative, communications forum, communal norms, and the nature of the marketing promotion also seem to have a positive influence. The marketing messages and meanings are systematically altered in the process of increasing or amplifying marketing messages. The pragmatic implications for how marketers should plan, target, and leverage WOM and how scholars should understand WOM in a networked world is also proposed in this theory.

This shows how mere word of mouth marketing isn’t helpful which most marketers rely upon but instead a lot of other factors that are often looked down upon. It helps us understand how an influencer can effectively convince its viewer/follower into consuming that particular product.”

“Wachowich, Nancy and Scobie, Willow (2010), in an article has explored for 12 months of cyber-fieldwork on YouTube and it specifically explores how Inuit young people across the Canadian Arctic are using online spaces short excerpts from their lives and connect with
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others. This article explores the contemporary use of open-access video-sharing sites by and young adults. The paper situates these autobiographies in the recent trajectory of Inuit storytelling, showing that Internet allows individual narrators the freedom to bypass established rules and institutions representation. Self-produced videos posted online are more multivalent, dialogical, provocative expressions of Inuit selfhood than those texts that may have circulated While the Internet has been celebrated for its global reach, many of the social relationships dialogues seemingly fostered by this technology are intimate and localised. Inuit young adults use video-sharing technology to creatively mediate pasts, presents, and the creation of new social worlds. This study shows how YouTube is used as a tool for personal/individual PR. It also shows how common and young teenagers are influencing each other using their daily experiences and stories in the Canadian Arctic Region.”

Mayes, Laura (2011) in her study focuses on secondary research developed from scholarly articles on social networking sites and the uses and gratifications theory. Using social media analytics tools such as TweetReach and Quantcast, the progress of the two campaigns before, during and after was tracked. The research conducted is primarily secondary research. That secondary research is used to analyze the effectiveness of Coca-Cola’s social media presence and overall campaign success.

In both social media marketing campaigns, Coca-Cola followed all the best practices. In each campaign they listened to fans and followers and responded to many and paced their content so they were not overwhelming them. They injected themselves into the conversation, got feedback in real time, knew the audience and the platforms and created a user-centric experience. This study shows how by creating the buzz Coca-Cola gave fans, friends and followers a reason to visit their sites. In essence, the company created a “need” for users to search the sites for information regarding campaign status and progress. Users benefitted from visiting the sites and communicating with Coca-Cola and Maroon 5 by feeling as if they had formed a relationship and were part of something unique. Coca-Cola was successful in attracting and subtly influencing its fans and followers using social media campaigns.

“In a study titled ‘Social Networks and the Diffusion of User-Generated Content: Evidence from YouTube’ authored by Anjana Susarla, Jeong-Ha Oh and Yong Tan (March 2012), employed a panel of data consisting of information and user information collected from YouTube.com over a period of two months. The sample focuses on the videos uploaded within the group of interest, and the members of that specific group for a total of 4,106 videos posted by 913 users. The data was collected for 11 observation points in time, each 5 days apart. At each observation point, the information on each video and each user within the group was collected by taking screenshots. The qualitative evidence from YouTube on the networked structure of interactions have found that social interactions are influential not only in determining which videos become successful but also on the magnitude of that impact. Hence individuals watching such videos get highly influenced by the content presented to them. This study shows how YouTuber’s with close proximity and higher number of subscribers are more influential than others. It also shows how in an increasingly hyper networked age; individuals have access to informational content from a wide variety of online sources such as blogs, consumer forums, podcasts, and social media that influence their tastes and preferences. Individuals whose networks bridge a variety of sources have access to a diversity of information and can translate information across groups.”

“A case study on a content analysis of ‘DOVE : “Real Beauty” campaign on YouTube’, authored by M. A. Malathi Sriram, Shri Dharmasthala Manjunatheshwara Research Centre for Management Studies (SDM RCMS), SDMIMD, Mysore shows that it was one of the
most original and emotive experiments to come from the Campaign for Real Beauty in many years, because it hits the audience realistically rather than making graphically morphing the women to look good. The use of graphic designers with filters and airbrushes is not done at all. Since the YouTube video release April 14, 2013, it rapidly went viral on the social media platform. Many millions of people downloaded the video within a week. On YouTube, the shorter 3-minute version was viewed 30.6 million times. It garnered 660,000 shares on Facebook during its first ten days. This means that Social media is an excellent form of public relations because it reaches a large amount of people in a short period of time and is highly influential in creating a positive impact and building good brand image.”

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
The researcher in this research paper has employed an exploratory and explanatory research design using quantitative approach of research. A survey among 300 urban women you-tube viewers in Mysuru between the age 20-35 was conducted for this paper. The respondents were from Infosys Training Centre – Hebbal Electronic City, Hootagalli, and Hebbal Industrial Estate, Anagahalli, Mysuru and The Brain-tree, one of the Corporate Training Academy Group, Mysuru.

The survey conducted amongst 300 subjects when asked about their most frequently used social networking sites (SNS) yielded the following result: Facebook was ranked as the most used SNS followed by YouTube and Instagram. Twitter and LinkedIn were the least popular SNS. Facebook is the most popular used social media site because of its immense popularity amongst people across the globe. The exclusive ability to share photos, videos, status updates and message others is another reason why Facebook is more popular amongst other SNS. It can be assumed that YouTube was ranked 2nd because of exclusive launch of movie trailers, songs, stand-up comedy clips, product reviews, vlogs, tutorials and also due to the relatively new introduction of web-series.

Ascertaining the frequency of watching YouTube videos, 64% of the respondents admitted to watching YouTube videos often. 24% of the respondents occasionally watch YouTube videos followed by 12% of respondents who watch it rarely. There’s nobody who has never watched a video on YouTube. To stream YouTube videos seamlessly a minimum speed of 2 mbps is required and the average speed of Internet connectivity in India is 3.5 mbps (Huffington Post, 2016). The generation of new and entertaining content on YouTube has made people watch the videos often. With 60 hours of video being uploaded every minute the viewers are able to fresh new content every day.

4.1. Frequency of Watching Youtube Videos

![Frequency of Watching Youtube Videos](chart.png)
4.2. Type of Content Watched on Youtube

![Pie Chart]

When asked about the type of content they watch on YouTube, about 52% of the respondents chose the product reviews as the most watched genre followed by 24% of them who chose entertainment and (18%) movie trailers/reviews/songs as the next sought after genre. Vlogs were the least watched genre as only 6% of the respondents chose that particular category. With the trend of word of mouth (WOM) marketing catching up again, product reviews by YouTubers who are normal consumers just like the normal population is believed to be more authentic and real.

4.3. Subscription to Youtube Videos

![Pie Chart]

Researcher aimed at knowing if the respondents ever purchased a product just by watching a YouTuber endorse it. 72% of the respondents admitted to buying products after seeing a YouTuber endorse and like it. It is alarming to note that a majority of the respondents are easily influenced making them gullible and target of various marketers. This can be related to the Two Step Flow Theory, Users and Gratification theory and Selective Influence theory. Hence with the prevalence of videos such as product reviews/ first impressions etc. almost every product on YouTube has become an apparently reliable source for information. However, 28% of the respondents did not ever buy products based on a YouTubers recommendation. This particular set of respondents seem to be the least influenced by others and would buy products only based on their needs and requirements.

4.4. Trustworthiness of Youtube Videos

Survey further revealed that 57% of the respondents believed that the videos they watch are genuine and truthful whereas 43% of them didn’t believe that the videos are truthful and genuine. The explanation given by most people on why they believed that the videos are truthful and genuine was that the video creators were like people-next-door and have actually used the products before giving them a review/demo. And the explanation given by people
who didn’t believe in those videos was that these YouTubers are paid to create the video hence they aren’t reliable.

4.5. Usage of Links

Amongst the 100 respondents 54% of them responded stating that they didn’t use the links provided to purchase the products whereas 46% of them said that they used the links to buy the products. This non-compliance in using the links provided to buy the products may be due to the fact that these links are most times affiliate links which when used helps the video creator generate revenue by giving them commission on each purchase. And most times the YouTubers do not disclose that these links are affiliate thereby losing faith amongst its viewers.

4.6. Following of YouTubers on other Social Media

About 77% of them agreed on following their favorite YouTubers on other social media channels such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter whereas the 23% of the respondents didn’t follow. The following of these content creators on different social media channels help the viewers connect with them on a wider level and help them stay connected.
with their daily life happenings. This in turn increases the chance for YouTubers to influence its audience on other platforms as well.

5. INFERENCES OF THE STUDY

Thus YouTube is a very popular and effective medium amongst both the content creators as well as the viewers. It allows individuals across the globe to upload and share any video they have created provided all the copyright laws are adhered to. It has now become an effective tool amongst the marketers to launch and publicize their products/services.

Influencer marketing has now become an exclusive and happening field of its own with real-time tractions happening through the influencers. The kind of influencer chosen by the brand determines and talks a lot about the credibility of the brand. Hence careful selection of the right influencer/creator is necessary. Many brands have come up with their own YouTube channels to promote themselves and give tutorials thereby increasing brand likeability. A lot of successful brands have been created and launched on YouTube hence showcasing the powerful nature of the medium. The popular content creators due to the credibility that they have sustained influence the audience. The interaction between the brand via the influencer and the viewers is easy, instant and effortless on the medium. YouTube integrates other social media networks on its platform thereby increasing the visibility of the creator as well as the brand involved.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Social media especially YouTube has grown by multiple-folds in the past decade. With more than 15% of our total population using India, the use of social media for publicity, advertisement and PR is very high. It is also one of the most cost effective mediums and many businesses thrive solely on these mediums for their brand image building and sustenance. Apart from businesses celebrities as well as commoners are using social networking sites to do personal branding. They constantly update their social media accounts to keep their followers and well-wishers informed about their next projects or to give them a sneak peek into their daily life. With social media integrating itself so effortlessly with the real world the scope of research in this arena is high and is also the need of the hour now since trends on such platforms are constantly shifting.

REFERENCES


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