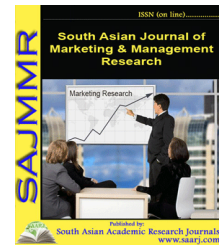




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WHATSAPP MARKETING BY WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Social Media or Social Commerce has become one of the most popular, economical and effective mode of business across the world. All types of social media tools are widely used by all types and levels of businesses. WhatsApp, as a marketing tool for business, owing to its amazing free of charge features and ease of use, has been adopted by companies and entrepreneurs, operating at all the scales. Women entrepreneurs in India, known for their creativity, hard work and sustained efforts, in both urban as well as rural areas, are making effective use of WhatsApp for marketing of their products and services. In order to improve upon the effectiveness of their marketing efforts, the present study proposes a nine step Strategic Framework for WhatsApp marketing by women entrepreneurs. Adoption and systematic application of the proposed strategic framework is expected to enhance WhatsApp marketing effectiveness.

KEYWORDS: *Social Media; Social Commerce; Whatsapp Marketing; Women Entrepreneurs, Marketing Effectiveness*

INTRODUCTION

Social Media or Web 2.0 has emerged as one of the most effective marketing tool in the recent past. Primarily created for personal or social interactions, social media tools found their applications in a variety of business activities and are being used widely by most of the companies as well as by women entrepreneurs (Melissa et al., 2013; Upkere et al., 2016). Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, WhatsApp and other tools are increasingly used for interaction with customers, promotion and selling of products and services, customer service and other marketing activities. Growing population of smart phone users has given a boost to social media applications on the phone. In line with E-Commerce, social media has taken shape of Social Commerce in the present times. WhatsApp, a commonly used social media application, owing to its ease of use and effectiveness, is found to be very popularly used by business organizations and entrepreneurs of all types and sizes, for a wide range of marketing activities.

Women entrepreneurs, both in urban and rural India, operating at micro levels, find WhatsApp as an effective business tool for performing most of their marketing activities. The present paper aims at explaining the role and applications of WhatsApp as marketing tool and suggests a strategic framework for WhatsApp marketing effectiveness, particularly for the women entrepreneurs.

Women Entrepreneurship

Women play a key role in family and social life, and also an important part of the workforce in all types of industries and jobs. Many women have ventured in business, particularly in micro, small and medium size industry. With the growing emphasis and support for women empowerment, India has seen a steady growth of women entrepreneurs in both rural as well as urban India. Women entrepreneurs may be described as women who have dominant financial control over their enterprise and embark towards starting, organizing and managing resources at their disposal in expectation of earning profits (Sharma, 2013; Tiwari, 2017). According to a study carried out by Bain and Google (Rajan et al., 2019), entrepreneurship among women has the power to create positive outcomes for individuals, societies and economies. India has 13.5–15.7 million women-owned enterprises, representing 20% of all enterprises. The report further mentions that majority of such enterprises comprised of single person enterprises, which provide direct employment for an estimated 22 to 27 million people. Although a majority of the women entrepreneurs work in the traditional and informal sectors such as food products, apparels, crafts, retailing, etc. but with the growing support, they are now entering into other emerging and contemporary areas such as IT, education, training, designing, healthcare, and others. In spite of having numerous challenges, women entrepreneurs are fast emerging as a major force in society. Government schemes, education, training, skill development, financial support and internet based business and banking applications, will further give a boost to women entrepreneurship.

WhatsApp as a Marketing Tool

It is one of the most popular mobile social media application in the world with over 2 billion users. Launched as an instant, free of charge messaging mobile application, WhatsApp was created in 2009 by Brian Acton and Jan Koum, two former Yahoo employees. It was later acquired by Facebook in 2014. According to India Today (2021), WhatsApp had about 459 million active users in December 2020, which are likely to reach to 500 million mark very soon in India. More than 95 per cent of WhatsApp's monthly active users in India use the app every day. The popularity of WhatsApp is attributed to its amazing free of charge features and ease of use. Its features include text message, voice message, voice and video calls, sharing of documents, pictures, videos, gif etc., instant notification and many more. Apart from being a personal communication tools, it has assumed a much bigger role as a marketing tool among all types of professions and businesses (Kumar and Sharma, 2016). Whether government or non-government, small or large, rural or urban, manufacturing or service, organizations of all types and sizes are using WhatsApp for a wide range of business activities. It is used for internal as well as external communications. Companies or professionals communicate with their clients using WhatsApp applications. Understanding the potential of business applications, WhatsApp has launched WhatsApp Business, an application aimed at small businesses.

WhatsApp Marketing by Women Entrepreneurs

Social media tools such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and others are commonly used by women entrepreneurs owing to their capability of low-cost information disclosure, instant

messaging, and wide networking (Gençaand Öksüzb, 2015). But for majority of the women entrepreneurs, WhatsApp is the most popular social media tool to facilitate their business activities. As most of them operate at micro or small scale, and many women work operate from home, with limitations of capital, space and infrastructure, WhatsApp provides many features at no cost with the benefits of mobility in a smartphone. There are numerous examples of how women use WhatsApp for reaching out to customers, making announcements, promoting products/services, handling customer queries, taking orders, selling, facilitating payments, confirming deliveries, customer service and many more functions. Many of them deal in home-made food and snacks, food and farm products, bakery products, beauty products, handicrafts, handcrafted jewellery, apparel and dress material, tutorials and training sessions, and other similar products and services. Citing many examples, Naruka (2019) explained that women entrepreneurs are using WhatsApp for receiving queries, promotion, order taking, selling, payments, and delivery related marketing activities for products ranging from handcraft jewellery, salads, whole range of kids' products, kitchen, products, household use items, personal use items, stationery products, eco-friendly bags and more. She further added that women entrepreneurs find many benefits in this mode of doing business with very few risks. WhatsApp is perceived as a very safe and secure mode of communication and customer engagement for both marketer as well as customers. The communication may be done at a personal level or women entrepreneurs use group communication to reach out to their customers. Zarouali et al. (2021) found that consumers' perceptions of socialness, security and privacy in WhatsApp create trust in brands communicated through its applications.

Strategic Framework for WhatsApp Marketing

Effective WhatsApp marketing requires developing a clear plan, smooth implementation and careful monitoring of well-defined activities. Women entrepreneurs, to be effective and successful, should adopt the proposed strategic framework:

1. Create Profile Page with Brand Name and Logo
2. Prepare Customer Database
3. Develop Product Catalogue
4. Design Integrated Communication Strategy
5. Define Pricing Policy
6. Devise Order Taking and Payment Mechanism
7. Schedule Supplies and Deliveries
8. Define Exchange/Return/Refund Policy
9. Customer Relationship Management

Create Profile Page with Brand Name and Logo: The first and foremost requirement is to create an identity and image about the entrepreneur and her business. A brand is to be build. This can be achieved by deciding about a brand name for the business, designing a logo by selecting appropriate symbol/character and writing style, colour scheme, graphics or any text or visual with contact details. All these details should be intelligently placed to create a profile page, which should be aesthetically appealing, conveys the essence of business and establish a connect

with the target audience. The logo or profile page can be used a picture and can also be sent to the customers.

Prepare Customer Database: It is important to define the customer segment and prepare a customer database with contact details. It may begin with friends, relatives, colleagues, neighbourhood, community, formal or informal clubs, associations etc. The database can be further strengthened using referrals from existing contacts. After preparing the master database of customers, different small groups in terms of locality or cities.

Develop Product Catalogue: Creating a visual appeal is important to attract customers. A product catalogue with the details about features/attributes, prices and some photographs or videos of the product can be developed. Efforts should be made to create an aesthetically attractive product catalogue. It not only serves as a means for information, but also create interest about the products among the customers.

Design Integrated Communication Strategy: In order to reach out to the target customers, it is essential to design an effective communication strategy. A low cost promotion is possible by integrating and using various social media such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter etc. to communicate the brand and product catalogue. Using customer database, different WhatsApp groups can be created and messages be posted. Existing WhatsApp groups may also be joined. WhatsApp may be integrated with social media, to supplement its features. A Facebook page, web page or website may also be created providing all the important details about product, pricing, delivery, exchange/return etc. The link of this Facebook page, web page or website may be shared using other social media or emails.

Define Pricing Policy: Price of the products should be appropriately calculated after incorporating all types of costs and expected profit margins. Customers' purchasing ability and competitive offers of similar products may also be considered while deciding about the price. Fixed price policy may be considered by the women entrepreneurs as it would avoid any kind of price negotiations or bargaining. Discounts, if any, offered on specific items or promotional offer or festival season or old stock etc. should also be clearly mentioned. It is important to clarify all the pricing related aspects so as to avoid any kind conflict at a later stage.

Devise Order Taking and Payment Mechanism: The customers are to be advised for placing the orders and making the payments in an organized manner. In certain cases, minimum quantity or order size may be required. Details are to be provided about how to place order on WhatsApp for specific products in specified quantities with complete delivery address and location. Minimum and maximum delivery time for the order should also be clearly specified. Payment mechanism may involve advance payments or cash on delivery. In most of the cases advance payment at the time of placing the order is widely adopted. Payment modes could be Digital Wallets such as Paytm, PhonePe, Google Pay etc or electronic bank transfers.

Schedule Supplies and Deliveries: Supplies for the orders are to arranged in a defined time limit. In certain cases, there may be ready availability of products, whereas, in some cases products are to be custom made or procured from different sources. In such cases the time of production and procurement of products needs to be taken into account while specifying delivery schedule. It is also possible to make direct deliveries to the customers from the suppliers or other sources of procurement. Reliable and reputed courier services, with proven track record, needs to be selected for product deliveries. A contract or agreement may be made with the courier company for regular delivery of products. Most of the courier companies provide for tracking

mechanism for the packages. Preparing a schedule for supplies and deliveries help in ensuring delivery of the products to the customers at right time at the right place.

Define Exchange/Return/Refund Policy: In certain situations, products may get damaged during transit or may not as per the order placed by the customer or the order may be cancelled by the customer. There should be clear policy as to under what conditions products will be accepted for exchange/return/refund. Policy for cancellation of order should also be clearly defined. In case of any dispute, the problem should be resolved as per the defined and communicated policy in amicable manner.

Customer Relationship Management: After the sale is over, the customer may be contacted on WhatsApp to provide the feedback about satisfaction and suggestions if any. The customers may also be requested to share their experience with other customers or recommend to others. Special offers may be given to regular customers for future purchases. Customers may be regularly updated about any new arrivals or new collections.

The above activities, when undertaken in a well-planned manner, are likely make WhatsApp marketing more effective and productive. Women entrepreneurs can achieve better results and build long term relations with customers.

CONCLUSION

Women entrepreneurs are making their sustained efforts with limited resources to market their products. They may not be able to use sophisticated professional marketing toolkit due to lack of formal training, low capital, poor infrastructure, limited manpower and other constraints, but they make their best efforts to reach out to their customers using digital marketing tools. Social media in general, and WhatsApp in particular, have emerged as economical yet powerful tools for marketing of all types of products. WhatsApp provides ease of use with free of charge features including text message, voice message, voice and video calls, sharing of documents, pictures, videos, gif etc., instant notification and many more. Women entrepreneurs are making effective use of WhatsApp for making announcements, promoting products/services, handling customer queries, taking orders, selling, facilitating payments, confirming deliveries, customer service and many more functions. The proposed strategic framework of WhatsApp Marketing is a systematic approach for increasing the effectiveness of marketing efforts made by women entrepreneurs. It suggests nine steps for effective WhatsApp marketing, including Create Profile Page with Brand Name and Logo; Prepare Customer Database; Develop Product Catalogue; Design Communication Strategy; Define Pricing Policy; Devise Order Taking and Payment Mechanism; Schedule Supplies and Deliveries; Define Exchange/Return/Refund Policy; and Customer Relationship Management. The present study makes a significant contribution by way of the proposed strategic framework for WhatsApp marketing by women entrepreneurs of India. Women entrepreneurs are likely to be greatly benefitted by systematic use of WhatsApp for marketing of their products, adopting the proposed strategic framework.

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