

RELEVANCE AND ADOPTION OF NETNOGRAPHY IN DETERMINING CONSUMER BEHAVIOR PATTERNS ON THE WEB

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ABSTRACT

Social Media is a form of media which encourages interaction. With the growth in technology, Social Media has gained a lot of importance. The interactive platforms through smart phones and internet have a major role to play in the success of Social Media. With the increase in such interactive platforms, there is abundant data available on the web. This attracts researchers to access the data thus available for research purpose. This also proves to be cost effective for the researchers. The study of data and its related aspects on the web is termed as Netnography. Netnography is a term advocated by Dr Robert V Kozinets. It is proven to be a very quick, simple, not so expensive technique. Modern marketers call it as the Secret Weapon to marketing. It concentrates on the cultural insights. It aims to provide information about online communities and their interaction.

KEYWORDS : Social Media, Communicating tool, Netnography, Lifestyle.

OBJECTIVES:

- To explore the online Lifestyle Segment Netnography
- To understand consumer buying behaviour with respect to online Lifestyle Segment.

METHODOLOGY :

Netnography is the main technique that is concentrated on in this paper. The author indulges in immersion and interaction in online communities related to lifestyle segment.

LIMITATIONS :

- Around 2-3 online communities is considered for this study.
- The study concentrates only on Lifestyle Segment.
- Information collected in the interactions is treated as authentic.

INTRODUCTION

Social media refers to the interaction among people which is social in nature. Here people tend to create, share and also exchange their



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thoughts and ideas. This happens on virtual communities with the help of networks.

The basic requirement for these virtual communities is that there should be strong communication channels that are interactive in nature. Communications here can happen among individuals, business organizations and communities as well. Social media differs from the traditional media in many ways. Social media is easy to reach, user friendly and there is possibility of immediate reaction and response to everything. Study also shows that humans spend a lot of time on these social media sites when they sit in front of the internet. It is these interactions that have made the Social media so special. These platforms not only share information and knowledge but also bring in a lot of career opportunities along with handsome monetary benefits. Way back in 1994 itself, there were geocities which formed the first social media site.

Social Media is responsible for changing the public relations professionals performing their jobs. There is an open arena for free exchange of ideas relating to products, brands and companies. As stated by Doc Searls and David Wagner (2011) two authorities on the effects of Internet on marketing, advertising, and PR, "The best of the people in PR are not PR types at all. They understand that there aren't censors, they're the company's best conversationalists."

NETNOGRAPHY

Netnography is very closely associated to Ethnography. Ethnography refers to the study of culture. It relates to that phenomenon where the society is observed by the researcher to explore the cultural related aspects.

Netnography = Inter(net) + Ethon(graphy) .

In other words it's a stream of ethnography that allows to study the behavior of individuals on the internet. It makes use of the online marketing research techniques. The concept has been put forth by Dr. Robert V. Kozinets. . As a method, "netnography" can be faster, simpler,

and less expensive than ethnography, and more naturalistic and unobtrusive than focus groups or interviews (Kozinets, 2009, del Fresno, 2011, del Fresno 2014).

Netnography is similar to ethnography in the following sense :

1. It is naturalistic
2. It is immersive
3. It is descriptive
4. It is multi-method
5. It is adaptable

It provides information on the symbolism, meaning, and consumption patterns of online consumer groups (Kozinets, 2010) or online communities consumption unrelated but online sociability based on the exchange of information (del Fresno, 2011). Netnography is focused on cultural, symbolic information insights.

Computers have become one of the important medium of communication. Lifestyle, brand choice are based on this. Consumers also engage in the use of virtual communities and other online social sharing formats to share ideas and build contacts. The opinions that are freely expressed by the individuals on this social space provides researchers with data flowing in from umpteen number of individuals without any hassles. Also, the researcher can keep a track of the interactions and perform meaningful analysis using a variety of tools and methods. The study of communication patterns and content between/within these social groups on the Internet is one method of netnographic analysis. These social groups are popularly referred to as "Virtual Communities" (Rheingold 1993).

LIFESTYLE

It is generally referred to the way in which people lead their lives. It's a combination of a person's opinions, attitudes, mindset, hobbies, area of interest and also the distribution of income. With the increase in the sophistication of life due to the disposable income available to individuals, people look forward for a better and



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elite lifestyle. Lifestyle can be influenced by family, friends, culture and also the social class one belongs to. The products that fall under the category of Lifestyle is Jewellery, Watches, Automobiles, Apparel, Real estate, Fitness, Kitchen appliances, Home décor, hobbies, work.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

From a theoretical point of view, Netnography is regarded as one of the most important research tools (Bartl & Stockinger, 2014).” It enables researchers to access the community members’ knowledge online which in turn helps to provide in-depth insights about the consumers.

Robert V Kozinets,(2002) the man behind Netnography has coined this term to provide a rich insight into consumers interaction online. The author highlights online environment that provides rigor and ethics in the field of Market Research. This is done through the discussion of an online coffee newsgroup where its implications also are discussed.

Lisa Marie Mewcer (2014) in her research has come out with some major trends for Social Media. They are trends like Trend Jacking, My Space Comeback, Google plus gains momentum, Predictive marketing tools and the like. Most of these trends have shown an upward growth in the market. This shows that there is a lot of scope for social networking.

Jayson Demers (2014) in another research work has come out with 5 Social Media trends for every entrepreneur. It includes trends like Diversification, Visual Content and its important, Integration of social media and content creation and also the use of Social Media to build a brand. Its only through a building of brand that even Lifestyle segment can get a leap forward.

S.Sathish and Dr A. Rajamohan (2012) opine that the consumer durables are becoming very competitive. Young crowd is getting attracted to have a better lifestyle which seeks for more

opportunities. The growing westernization is also responsible for the creation of awareness on lifestyle among Indian youth.

Linda Daurizand and Thomas Tochtermann (2013) indicate various points about the luxury segment goods in the Lifestyle segment. They are of the opinion that the brands should take all necessary steps not to dilute the offerings. Also, they express that it is very necessary to strengthen brand’s core potentiality for increased Lifestyle experience.

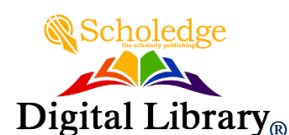
The biggest challenge in Lifestyle is to reach the specific group of audience with the right content to match their interest, Mossart Farhana (2014) . The article also shows that lifestyle and its related aspects are at a growing stage because of digital media. It also depends on the availability of correct website and a proper electronic gadget.

A report by A&A Associates (2015) shows that there is a sea change in the lifestyle of India’s youth of present generation when compared to that of the previous generation. Value orientation also plays an important role to Indian youth. This is due to major change in income and new technology.

KEY FACTORS OF ONLINE CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

There are three important factors to bind an online community. Firstly, the connection among the members of the online communities play a vital role. This is also known as the sense of belongingness. Secondly, it’s a combination of ethics and values what the members possess and thirdly it’s the duty seen as more of moral responsibility towards one another members of the community. (Muniz and O’Guinn 2001).

In this study, the technique of Netnography has been used to explore and analyze some of the meanings and symbols. In reality, Knowing and keeping a track of the meaning and symbol



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system has its own practical importance. It is also known that there has been tectonic shifts in the online lifestyle markets. (Bagozzi and Dholakia 2006).

For the research purpose, three lifestyle communities were narrowed upon. They were : gaiaonline.com community.com, sukhduhk.com and asmallworld.com. Out of them, gaiaonline.com was selected as it had the highest amount of online traffic. Approximately about 40 new threads that are being discussed everyday. This community has more than 350 members and more than 295 out of them are active. It also shows that most of the community members are decent and very creative. Keeping a track of the number of new threads being discussed on these online communities, gaiaonline.com tops the list.

It employs a very informal method of network analysis. The fact is that the insiders in the online communities are generally the opinion leaders. “Minglers” and “Tourists” are also present here. The data reveals that the posters in this community includes males, females and transgender also. People in the age group between 22-25 years are more.

As a part of the research, researcher immersed in the online community for more than 12 weeks (between October and December 2014) and read hundreds of messages. Along with this, several blogs, books, write-ups, mails related to lifestyle were looked into. To narrow down the study, as many as 102 threads were downloaded and printed. Before the downloading procedure, the threads were classified as “Relevant” or “Not so Relevant”. So, for example, threads like “Lifestyle for a better Life” or “Increase quality of life with enhanced lifestyle” were considered. Threads like “exhibition on lifestyle” were not considered. Content with richness and descriptive nature were given utmost importance.

For data analysis and interpretation of findings, manual analytical coding and hermeneutic

interpretation (Bernard, 2004; Kozinets, 2006; Moisander and Voltonen, 2006) was used. The biggest challenge for the researcher was the subjective interpretation of data as its mostly verbose. For proper interpretation of data, it was necessary for the researcher to possess knowledge of a particular online culture. (Kozinets, 2006).

Sampling plays a very vital role for any research. Utilizing carefully chosen message threads in “netnography” is akin to “purposive sampling” in market-oriented ethnography. (Wallendorf and Belk 1989, Lincoln and Guba 1985).

Among the community members, there were member check informants who felt the approach of netnography as “Wow”, “Interesting”, “fun to be researched”.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

A BETTER UNDERSTANDING

The first thing that is being understood is that the importance of lifestyle segment in one’s life. It includes various aspects like motivation, coming out of depression, connecting with nature and the like. It was also found out that there are 100+ websites online that assist people to come over depression in life. The newer dimension to this states that the quality of life can surely go up with better lifestyle. The discussions here merely do not include the problems. It aims at a workable solutions.

It also threw light on threads like “food for morning sickness during pregnancy”, “soaking fruits in alcohol”, “leftover food”. “Healthy eating” to “Awesome biking experience” and “Investments”. To sum up, the set of united products can be clubbed together as “Product Constellation” (Solomon and Assael 1987). The social class is something which is highlighted here in this aspect.



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CULTURE AND COMMUNITY

It was found out through the culture and community can be linked to social class and passion. Raji posts on gaiaonline.com, (12.07.14) “So, how does one makes friends?” and Rosy posted on 02.06.14 “ Suggestions for best way to travel in crowded cities”. It was also observed that there were many threads related to healthy eating habits among children. Many posters even felt that they got the best of the inputs on gaiaonline.com. Kin on (23.10.14) says “Gaia...my best pal...”, Lara on (15.11.14) says “ on and only place for all solutions is Gaia”.

Certain discussions related to Brands also happen online. The favorites among online shops are ASOS, Nastygal, Mango, Saboskirt. It also helps people to choose the best from available he course of study that the most iimportant aspect in relation to culture .

ANOTHERNESS

There is a lot of scope for lifestyle segment’s growth online. Lifestyle players on gaiaonline.com provide a broad spectrum of experiences. There have been discussions on the forum in relation to brands and its loyalty. It shows that lifestyle varies across society as culture has a major role to play to influence people in their purchasing behaviour.

VALUE CREATION

Online communities help to share the ideas with like minde people. There have been many conversations relating to feedback, suggestions and opinions about variuos brands relating to Lifestyle. Belongingness of members enhances comitment to the online communities. Community members act as ambassadors of goodwill. (Schau etal., 2009).

CONCLUSION

With the increasing acceptance of online communities in the Indian context, we can certainly expect a lot of research to happen in the area of studying consumer behavior pertaining to lifestyle segment using Netnography. Netnography helps to unleash many dimensions which are naturally occurring online. These kinds of information cannot be got through focus interviews or personal discussion. It’s a blend of factors like Happiness, joy, expectations, disappointments, awareness online.

The research shows that the members on gaiaonline.com are very active. The community members show a lot of mutual support and are enthusiastic for every aspect of discussion. This aspect helps and encourages the members to spread their skills and ideas actively.

The ideas being generated within the gaiaonline.com can be nurtured for further applications. Being an online community, there are everyday conversations which are happening among the members as a result, strong sense of belongingness is exhibited by the this community members.

Lifestyle emphasizes on a central life interest. Also it is influenced by a group in certain caeses. Predictions of a persons’ behaviour can be done through lifestyle.

The most important fact of Netnography is that it provides information to the researcher in an uninterrupted and accessible form. Members of these online communities tend to spend a lot of time and money online. By carefully evaluating their innovative ideas their knowledgebase and their customer insights, marketing researchers can obtain useful information similar to that obtained from “lead users” (Von Hippel 1986, 1988).

Careful validation of online data is very essential to understand the relationship between various online communities. Online groups may be



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considered as individual market segments that are of interest in their own right and size. (Koozinets, 2002).

The purpose of online communities is to allow mutual interaction. This strengthens the community member's relationship by creating new opportunities. Thus, online communities provide realistic and significant opportunities for marketing.

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