An Overview of the Role of Digital Marketing in Airline Industry

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ABSTRACT

Aviation Industry is one of the world's most essential and fastest-growing industries. The digital era has forced the world to become progressively influenced by prompt and instantaneous worldwide communications. Digital marketing tools and techniques are now being adopted by companies to spread their business digitally across the world. There is an extensive use of contemporary ways of communication between the company and its customers across the world. There has been a change to the way organisations and consumers interact with each other in social media. Social media has become a battlefield where people can receive information and share their own feelings and experience.This study reviews the overall role of digitization marketing programs in airline industry taking into consideration the three aspects of digital marketing techniques, which are 'e-mail marketing, social media marketing and web page marketing.' The increasing use of internet among airline customers have popularised the concept of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) which is discussed in this study. Word of mouth happened to be a popular factor in traditional marketing, but eWOM resulted as a consequence of digital marketing which is managed by every business, including airline industry. The paper depicts various opportunities and challenges faced by airline companies in applying digital marketing techniques across different areas and also views suggestions for its betterment.

Keywords: Airlines, digital marketing, e-mail marketing, social media marketing, web page marketing, word of mouth.

I. INTRODUCTION

The blooming internet usage among the consumers have forced companies to target the market digitally. Social media marketing is a form of digital marketing that influences the power of widespread social media networks to reach the marketing and branding goals of the company [1]. The digital marketing tools and techniques have gained such importance that it has become extremely important for companies to provide a positive and long-lasting impression on the minds of the customers thereby, building the brand image of the company. Organizations of all sizes started to immensely trust on social media and accomplish activities to carry conversations and involve with their customers in order to develop brand consciousness, develop a robust and healthy brand individuality, and, lastly, grow sales [2]. In recent years the online marketing concept has evolved which have been found to be more effective than conventional marketing techniques for developing a sense of belief for the brand and the buying intent among the consumers [3].

Digital marketing has a significant role in communicating the brand name of the company to the consumers. For promoting the brand name of the company, digital marketing carries out different activities by using 'mobile applications, web and other new media platforms.' 'Interactive marketing, online marketing, e-marketing and web marketing are the other alternative terms used for digital marketing [4].'

Digitization and new technologies have enabled marketers to formulate various campaigning programs to be closer to the consumers. The campaigning programs may be like advertising from the database to a specific segment, advertisement using digital tapes, advertisement containing quality messages, popular advertisements, interactive and gaming advertisements and many more[5]. Airline industries are rigorously applying digital marketing tools and techniques to gain the ground among the competitors.

There are four stages which are involved in bringing a brand closer to the customers: The initial phase is to have conversation with the customer, the second stage is to create a discussion; the next phase is to take part in the conversations

and to be a dynamic consumer; and the final phase is to enable the consumer to behave in a double way of both a consumer as well as an advocator. There is also a need to focus on the fact that digital marketing provides limitless interaction and freedom to the customers regardless of any limit on time or space, so, proper attention is required to avoid any kind of risk which may come up in such situation [6].

II. BACKGROUND

Aviation industry has become more competitive than before and the airlines are working on a competitive ground with diverse audience. As operating costs are going higher due to various reasons like fuel price, cost of aircraft maintenance and renewal, landing or parking fees, employees expenditure, so, in order to keep costs down, airlines have been relying on automation of processes. This resulted in the application of various digital marketing tools and techniques rather than appointing marketing professionals [7]. Moreover, the growing competition in the airline industry has propelled the marketers to spend more on marketing and advertising expenses in order to gain the ground among competitors. New methods of communications and dealings have been originated between customers and companies in the form of 'interactive media' which is combined with the other essentials of 'marketing mix' to produce better results. Marketing with the help of interactive media and unique features have opened the opportunity to play in an attractive market space without any technological barriers. This has enabled the digital marketing programs to apply its five different elements of attracting the users, making them engaged with interesting contents, retaining the customers, learn about the customers and relate them by creating value added offerings [8].

III. DIGITAL MARKETING AND AIRLINE INDUSTRY

Digital marketing has been a crucial aspect for meetingconsumer requirements and reinforcethe relation among consumers in the airline industry. Consumers avail digital techniques of services during the process of 'booking with the help of phones, through mobile devices,various processes of check and check out at the airport and even during the time of accessing to hotels[9]'.

The choices of travel, travel frequencies and many such data of the airline organizations are secured in their management databases.This storage of information helps in providing customized offerings to the consumers through personalized campaigns. Airline companies gather the data of consumers' calling, transactions, check-in, sales during flight, choices of refreshments of customers and many more activities. They then, examine this data and deliver customized offerings to targeted consumers [8].

Apart from providing customized products, it is known, that, latest technologies have a positive effect on refining marketing lessons. Customers' likings for travel can be analyzed, and depending on the requirement of the customer, various offerings can be provided related to the flights and expected type of travel. Among the various categories of digital marketing, this paper focuses on some of the following digital marketing applications:

- 'E-mail Marketing'

- 'Social Media Marketing'

- 'Web Page Marketing'

E-mail Marketing

E-mail marketing is the digital marketing tool that is a most commonly used. Airline businesses can differentiate target audience lists using different modern technologies and target to those customers interested in providing responses. In e-mail consignments, customized advertisements can be forwarded based on the consumer's profile and buying frequency. There are many parameters in e-mail marketing in airlines. For example, e-mail campaigns at the time of cold seasons, will focus on customers who are interested devote the vacations in warmer stations [10].

E-mail marketing is an activemethod of generating consumers, increasing the consistency of the present consumer, growing brand responsiveness,finding clues about the consumers through questionnaires which are answered by them. The frequency of e-mail applied in marketing in 2010 was more than 92%, with increase in the popularity of social media, the use of sending direct messages to customers also rose up. 'E-mail marketing' gained the ground when interactions and promotions were found from hand held mobile devices. Conveying e-newsletters, ad related operations and e-mail promotions to consumers enhances the number of clicks on the web page of the company. Thus, appropriate

communication is provided to the target audience at minimum expenditure and the reviews can be gauged easily as consumer data is documented [11].

E-mails by airlines are functional in creating commitment towards the company, compared to other emails which do not turn out to be that effective and functional [12].

Social Media Marketing

Social media helps to generate and exchange information which has earned huge acceptance among web users [13]. Social media marketing uses online communication technologies to enhance in building network and provide value added services to customers [6]. Organization uses social media to generate more conversations with consumers. The findings of the research conducted by Thao V. et. al, depicted that customer engage in Facebook communities for social gratitude and incorporation [14]. It is also found that the airline companies publish posts which are entertainment oriented and contain relevant information related to interesting facts for brand awareness. The study also indicated that a 'good mix of marketing contents with relevant brand-focus information, entertainment, awards, and tips make brand pages more vibrant to customers.' Regular communication should be done with the customers once in a day. Posts with entertainment factors brings more engagement and communication with the help of graphics help to bring more responses.

With the help of social media, organizations may know about the brand perceptions of the consumers. Companies can indorse the offerings to a wider base of prospective consumers thereby increasing brand consciousness. However, sharing views or opinions and feedback in social media may be jeopardizing on behalf of the consumers. Since this platform needs more consideration on the basis of regulation and control than any primitive methods of campaigning, therefore it is crucial for the companies to handle on the basis of monitoring and control, maintaining perfect content, tackling the services and addressing each feedback [5].

Nowadays, the existence of a brand in social media is required for the awareness of brand name among consumers, information propagation and conversation among customers. In the airline sector, an innovative idea known as "Social Seating" came up. Airline businesses let their consumers feel free to choose their friends possessing social media account [15].

Research study on Turkish airline market was conducted to gauge the brand trust and purchase intentions. Online advertising campaigns have been more effective than traditional marketing for augmenting brand trust and purchase intention of passengers [16].

In another study it is found that social media marketing has provided German airlines with a powerful set of tools and multiple platforms to digitally accumulate, interact, cooperate and share content with its consumers [17]. Hana et.al said in of their research that social media marketing is distinct from social media advertising. The former is the result of earned media and the latter is paid media [18]. Qualified leads are generated, and the reduction of overall marketing expenses occur, which have been identified as equally important for SMM [19].

In a study conducted by Punel A. and Ermagun A., it is found that Twitter network is used to detect market segment in the airline industry. A clustering method is used to detect the communities of customers. The 'community detection method' formulated in the research is helpful for advertising and consumer planning purposes as it allows airlines to distinguish the types of customers who are attracted to the brand. It also makes them find out the probable sources for advertising by looking for exceptionally associated customers who have high degrees of centrality [20].

One of the studies on consumer service involvement of airline industry used 'Twitter' to recognize the serious essentials of customer service. Diverse observations on Twitter were studied to find those factors which deliver good experience to consumers. It was found on one hand that positive feelings were associated mostly to 'online and mobile check-in services, favourable prices and price experience.' On the other hand, negative feelings revealed 'problems with usability of companies' websites, flight delays and lost luggage.' Indication of charming experiences was logged in among 'services in airport lounge.' Thus, all these can be easily identified with the help of social media network on Twitter [21].

A social network analysis on Twitter was done to detect the effect of social media influencers of airline services. It was found that influencer marketing contributes positively to purchase intentions. In particular, up to 80% of consumers are likely to consider purchasing a new brand based on what was recommended by a SMI [22]. In addition, SMIs play a key role in the introduction of a brand into foreign or previously unexplored markets [23]. These factors make influencer

marketing a notable choice for firms seeking to gain greater exposure and sales.

With the help of advertisement on 'Facebook's Ad Manager' for Indian airline, Jet Airways, one of the studies conducted by Murphy D. applies the 'Third-Party Seal Model' to optimize advertisement viewers to aim the appropriate prospects with the most effective communication. The use of innovative targeting applications offered by 'Facebook's ad manager platform', a single imaginative and attractive message displayed to five distinct viewers presenting the three stages of the 'Third-Party Seal Model.' The findings of the study provided prompt and implicative understandings for advertisers and brand managers within the airline and tourism industries including innovative and progressive targeting and messaging procedures which can be directly applied within digital advertising programs [24].

In another study it is revealed that the effects of social media marketing activities on brand equity and customer response in the airline industry. It is observed that the most important social media marketing component is 'Trendiness' which has a significant positive effect on brand awareness and brand image. This brand image significantly affects online word of mouth and commitment [3].

Word of Mouth (WOM) through Social Media Interaction.

Samotolkova O. in his research study depicted that social networking has set a new digital form of communication called digital word of mouth (WOM) which has enabled to propagate various contents and articles across the globe in real time. Customer engagement resulted in sharing contents, communicating views or feelings regarding a brand through WOM. Electronic WOM happened to be measured as a significant marketing technique because customers began to seek evidence on market offerings, which was posted online by past consumers before buying a goods or service, in order to review information and, in some way, get rid of the concern for a product or service. In his study, Samotolkova O. suggested that airline industries should understand and predict the behavior of eWOM of passengers. It also revealed that airline companies should try to provide a good customer experience thereby making the consumers become the brand representative who will be willing to spread a good WOM. WOM used by companies takes the shape of 'word of mouth marketing (WOMM).' Marketers are integrating WOMM into their day-to-day customer interactions. Brand awareness and brand engagement are the two ways of measuring WOM [8].

On one hand, social media is serving to bring tourism through the influence of prominent images of tourist explorable destinations using social media platforms like 'Instagram (that counts more than 500 million active users) popularizing sites and destinations.' On the other hand, despite the fact that social media has popularised and helped to develop tourism, it has also turned out to be a kind of a battlefield where tourists can obtain various information and provide both good and bad tour reviews [8].

Some practices in airlines' organizational operations are observed on the market. The practices comprise 'development of a market share and reduction of expenses for customers: setting up loyalty programs for frequent flyers, development of airline alliances and strategic partnerships, development of new technologies, such as new aircraft, reservation and ticketing systems, departure control systems, e-commerce tools, etc.' 'Among other new practices, the ones which are success-oriented are: focus on strategically important regional routes, innovative management and marketing, increased attention to customers' needs, customer-centric strategies and service, building positive company image and reputation and application of yield management.' The latter includes price determining policy, which is mostly used by airline business in order to produce major earnings from a perishable inventory.

Airlines proved that both good and bad WOM have almost the same level of influence: bad word of mouth flow along the public almost as fast as positive word of mouth. Hence, good WOM acts in favor of buying choice, which means that WOM marketing and handling interactions are much important today.

Web page marketing

E-commerce is an important way to transform the way of conducting business. Websites are the most predominant platforms to conduct business digitally across the world. Website emerged to the most essential and inevitable component in tourism and airline sector to maintain and develop a long-term relationship with the customers. It is important to maintain the quality of website and evaluate its performance regularly [25].

Many airline companies announced 'online reservation systems' which enabled customers to directly purchase online tickets. Well-framed online booking features with valuable content are presented to the consumers before the purchase, and there are some added advantages offered to the consumers when using the online methods to do bookings, which may help

in generating more sales volume, and help in making the goodwill of an airline. If the customers availing digital services do not feel that the airline website is useful, the money which is exhausted as an expenditure for the website development turns to be a waste. Most importantly, a bad reputation is developed if consumers are not happy and contented with the airline's online services [26].

Ideally every website may not be able to convert customers whoever lands on its page. Therefore, proper and efficient assessment of websites is a case of concern for the experts and the researchers [27]. Organizations are interested to develop ways to gauge and analyze customer feedback in various forms of website designs. It is the cause of concern for the businesses that a customer's feedback or reviews or experience makes him or her revisit a particular web page [28]. Efficient digital services may bring in desirable behaviors such as word-of-mouth promotion, willingness to pay a higher value, and repurchase [27]. Thus, for the airlines aiming to sustain and thrive on the internet, and eager to invest on online services, it is critical to evaluate their websites aspects and assess them.

The study conducted by Abbasi et.al found that the quality of an airline's website depends website design, content, transactional content, contact, remembrance and other services. It is also suggested to all the users and tourism industry management to design and expand their websites according to the five mentioned criteria. The websites are the window of the businesses. If the prospective consumers are contented with it, the buying and faithfulness towards the brand increases. Subsequently, airlines as one of the crucial aspects of tourism sector are required to work on their website quality. At first, they need to improve their website design through featuring on its appeal by adding pictures or videos such that the browsing speed could not hamper its accessibility. It should also be user-friendly so that the consumer or whoever visits the website should feel easy and comfortable in using it [25].

The perception of website is like a dynamic business device which performs effectively and efficiently at every point of time. It is a platform which is structured to provide marketing and advertising services for companies in the form of digital campaigns. 'Possessing a user-friendly website, clear menus, attractive and operational design' are necessary to increase customer interaction and engagement. This enhances the airline businesses in providing an improved marketing programthereby attracting more customers and gaining the ground among the competitors [11].

CONCLUSION

It is observed from the review of various research papers and articles on digital marketing in airlines, that, emerging technologies and consumers' propensity to use internet and online services have compelled the marketers to adopt digital marketing tools and technologies. Moreover, the growing competition have made each and every marketer to become alert on how to gain the ground among the competitors. The efficientutilization of digital programs in the airline businesses has offeredhuge advantageson branding, thereby providing a significant effect in providing enriched consumer involvements.

It is very crucial to frame a properpolicy to generate benefits among the changing consumer characteristic and potentials and to make sure that a good'customer relationship management' predominates in the present scenario of emerging innovative technologies. It is a crucial aspect for the airline business to spend in digitization, to gear up in fast digital conversionand look into providing better values and services to the customers in the best possible ways.

Required steps should be undertaken by viewing the probability of risks that may arise from digital platform by propagating viewsorfeelingsopenly. Since television advertisements or some different primitive promotional programs were tougher than modern techniques to manage, hence, they should effectively and efficiently manage the modern programs by providing useful services and collecting reviews.

In terms of the airline sector, it is observed that the consumers are very efficient in responding to digital activities of communications as they use updated gadgets and technologies. Customer information is processed to provide personalized offerings.

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