

Prospects and Challenges of WhatsApp as a Sales Promotion Tool with special reference to Women Entrepreneurs in Thane District

Dr. Savita Punjabi

Head, Department of Commerce, Bharat College, Badlapur (W)

CMA Neetu Kapoor

Head, Department of Accountancy, Bharat College of Arts & Commerce, Badlapur

ABSTRACT

Thane District is witnessing growth of women entrepreneurs on regular basis. Among the varied reasons for such change, the digitalization is one of the major highlight. As compared to the traditional times, where mobility was a major impediment for the marketing of goods, the modern times has provided a digital solution in the form of Whatsapp and other social media platforms to help women entrepreneurs. The current study focuses on the prospects and challenges of digital media in general and Whatsapp in particular used as a sales promotion tool by these women entrepreneurs. The survey included the women entrepreneurs handling different types of business and using these digital platforms for enhancing their turnover with minimum movements physically. It helps them to perform their dual role of a house maker and a business owner. The paper ends with certain suggestions to improve the profits and sales of the business.

Keywords: Women entrepreneurship, Digital Media, WhatsApp

INTRODUCTION

With the changing times, a great change is witnessed in the form of increase in the number of women leaving their home and playing an important role of an entrepreneur. As a significant source of economic progress, a need is felt to provide the women entrepreneurs with a new opportunity and the new media through which they can perform the hassle-free marketing and can mark an extensive boost in the business. Their abilities to successfully handle their dual role as a home manager and as a business owner, makes it imperative to provide them with matching opportunities. Though the society is not yet perfectly free from gender differences, still the level of acceptability and the exposure, these women entrepreneurs are trying for is sufficient to prove their abilities. Along with the marketing facilities, the another issue that is highlighted the most is the lack of finance that questions the survival and growth of the business. Here comes the role of modern gadgets including the smart phones that can increase the sales at very low cost thereby reducing the financial issues. Thus the social and digital media has proved to be a boon for the women entrepreneurs to solve the business problems.

The availability of tools for communication and networking has made human life comfortable. All the business activities irrespective of gender of the owner have been smoothened by the way digitalization has evolved. In present times, reaching the customer is not at all an issue as it was in the traditional times making it a brick wall to the growth of women entrepreneurs. In fact the outdated beliefs of the society and the cultural norms also restricted her movements and eventually the profits made from the business. So there was a dire need of some channel that can sort out all the problems i.e. reaching customer without actually moving out. Thanks to the smart phones and the softwares like WhatsApp. that helps to show the product to the masses at a time without physical movement ensuring the safety and stress-free progressive journey of such women entrepreneurs.

WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

Women Entrepreneurs may be defined as the woman or group of women who initiate, organize and co-operate a business enterprise. Government of India has defined women entrepreneurs as an enterprise owned and controlled by a woman having a minimum financial interest of 51% of the capital and giving at least 51% of employment generated in the enterprise to women. This is a common phenomena

witnessed all over leading to change in the status of women due to growing industrialization, globalization and social legislation. Due to the education and awareness, she is now ready to accept the challenges of higher level of professional activities along with the regular kitchen chores. In almost all the developed and developing countries, the number of women entrepreneurs is on the rise notifying the overall developing world. To be successful, they must be well equipped with entrepreneurial traits and skills for meeting the fast changes in the global market.

PROBLEMS OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

Though the number of women entrepreneur show a fast rise in case of various nations, still certain problems withhold the picture forming a huge gap between the expectation and the reality. These limitations include the following:

- Dual responsibility
- Lack of mobility
- Problem of raw material procurement
- Problem of male members working as juniors
- Issues of finance and loans
- Lack of social and family support

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Social media as a marketing tool was studied by O. Reilly in his article, (2005). The paper defined social media as “a broad term which describes software tools to create user-generated content that can be shared.” It also talked about a new feature known as Customer’s Sentiment towards Marketing (CSM). This was a mechanism to measure the effectiveness of a social media. It is a concept that measures the general feelings of the customers towards marketing and market place. Again, Kalpana and Haenlein, (2010), defined social media, as a group of internet based applications that build on ideological and technological foundation of web 2.0 and allow the creation and exchange of user-generation content.

Mady (2011) propounded the idea that the customer’s perception about the overall activities of marketing are important and it is immaterial if the consumer is actually consuming the product or purchasing it for someone else. Also the paper talked about the innovation as the tool that enhances the chances of consumer preference towards the product. They consider the product as fit for shopping. Nowadays social media not only provides a platform for networking with various groups but also helps the marketers to promote the products. The technology related developments including the introduction of powerful search engine, smartphone, various user friendly apps has further made the marketing process easy and smooth. (Shankar et al. 2011).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Therefore, the current study is undertaken to see if the smart phone softwares specifically WhatsApp are useful or not for the progress of such women entrepreneurship. The study focuses on the following objectives:

- 1) To study the reasons for using WhatsApp as a marketing and sales promotion tool by the women entrepreneurs.
- 2) To study the challenges of using WhatsApp as a marketing tool by the women entrepreneurs.
- 3) To suggest the strategies for making this marketing tool more effective.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

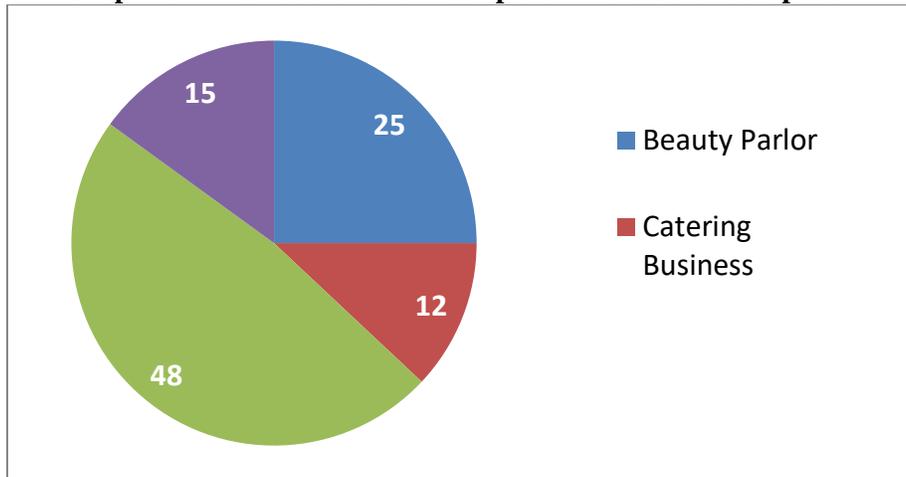
Primary data is collected through a structured questionnaire that was circulated among the women entrepreneurs across suburban areas of Thane District. The total sample of 100 women belonging to various businesses was randomly selected on the basis of convenience of the researcher. The secondary

data was collected from the various journals, books and websites. The limitations of the study included the area and the type of business due to the time and budget constraints.

PROFILE OF THE SAMPLE SELECTED FOR THE STUDY

Out of 100 women entrepreneurs, there were 25 beauty parlor owners, 12 women doing catering business, 48 women dealing in cloth material and 15 women dealing in bakery items as shown in the following graph:

Graph 1.1: Distribution of the sample on the basis of occupation



WHATSAPP AS A MARKETING TOOL

WhatsApp for Businesses has become an efficient marketing tool in order to provide a personalized experience for customers. WhatsApp is one of the most used platforms for communication. With an average daily user base of 1.5 billion active users, WhatsApp is used as an alternative to text message in more than 109 countries of the world. More than 50 billion messages are sent everyday which is a proof that it can open up a channel of the vast unexplored market for the organizations due to the following reasons:

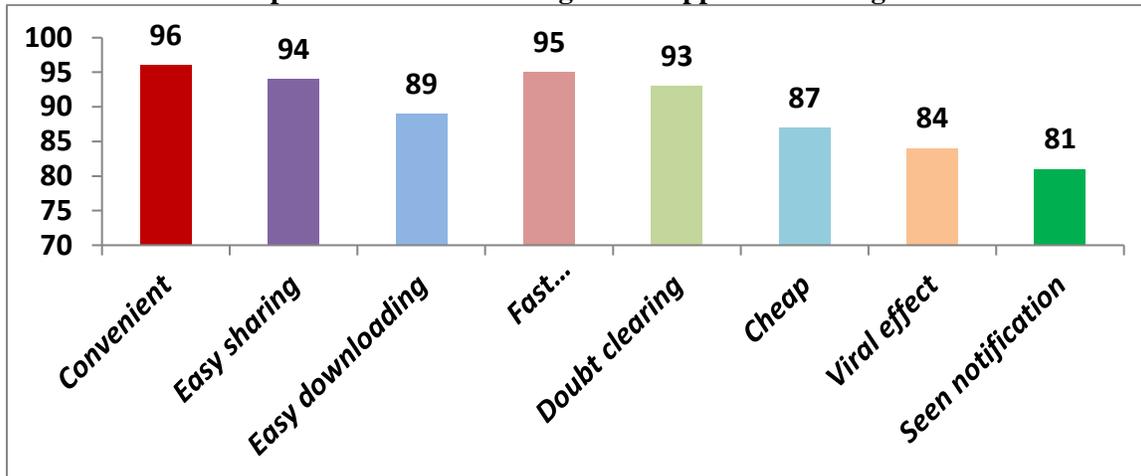
- 67 % out of all mobile users would rather communicate with businesses via chat and 53% say that they are much more likely to buy from a business which they can chat directly with.
- 42% Smartphone users belonging to the age groups 18-29 prefer WhatsApp Messenger
- Messaging marketing Campaigns are bound to have high engagement rates as compared to other campaigns as 95% of all mobile messages are opened and read
- In addition to this, 90% of WhatsApp messages are either “Seen from notifications” or read within 3 seconds of being delivered
- WhatsApp is highly efficient for dark social engagement meaning sharing content via private communication channels

Table 1.1: Reason for using WhatsApp as marketing tool

Sr. No	Reason	No. of responses
1.	Convenient to send the details and photos	96
2.	Easy to share the details to masses in groups	94
3.	Easy to download	89
4.	Fast Communication	95
5.	Easy to clear doubts	93
6.	Cheap and widely used	87

7.	Viral effect	84
8.	Seen the message notification through blue tick	81

Graph 1.2: Reason for using WhatsApp as marketing tool



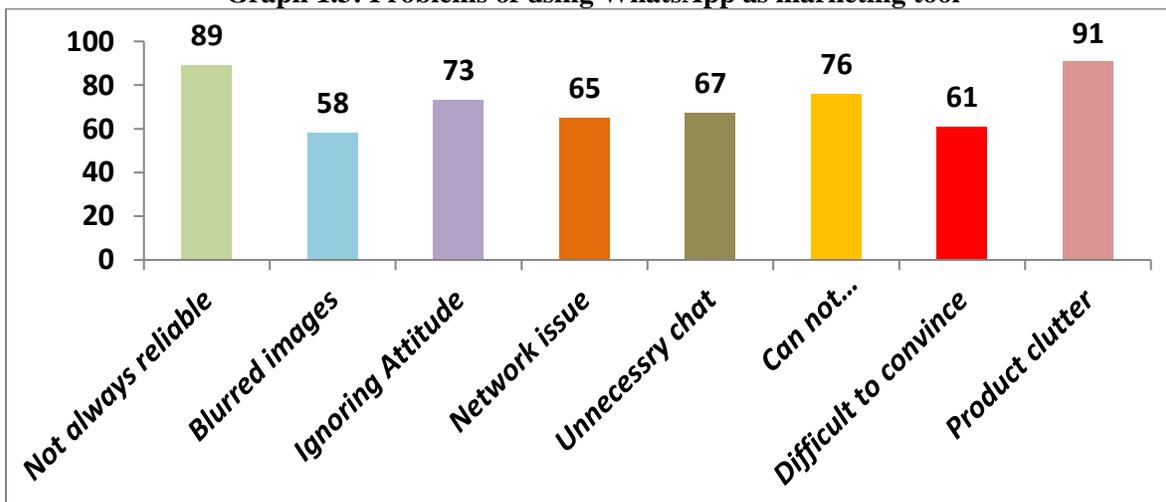
Problems of using WhatsApp as the marketing tool

However, the sample responded about the problems of using the WhatsApp as under:

Table 12: Problem of using WhatsApp as marketing tool

Sr. No	Problem	Number
1.	Not always reliable	89
2.	Blurred Images	58
3.	Ignoring attitude of the consumers	73
4.	Network issue	65
5.	Sometimes leads to unnecessary chat	67
6.	Difficult to demonstrate details of the product	76
7.	Difficult to convince the customer	61
8.	Product clutter leading to confusion	91

Graph 1.3: Problems of using WhatsApp as marketing tool



FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS

The findings of the study can be summarized as follows:

- 1) Maximum 96% women entrepreneurs find WhatsApp as a convenient tool for marketing and promotion of their product. 95% found it as a fast communication mode, followed by 94% feeling it easy to share the details to masses at a time by forming the groups. 93 women found it easy to clear the doubts and queries of the customers relating to the product. 89 women asserted for easy downloading, 87 called it cheap and widely used, 84 opined that it has viral effect as the product gets shared from one group to another and 81 showed their satisfaction that the product seen notification in the form of blue tick gives them a hope that the customer will now consider its purchase. This shows that all the women are in favour of using WhatsApp as a strong tool for marketing and promotion of the business due to several reasons.
- 2) As far as the problems of using WhatsApp are concerned, maximum respondents were concerned about the product clutter, i.e. images coming one after another leads to dilution of the previous image of the product. At the end the customer is confused and postpones or cancels the decision to purchase. 89 women entrepreneurs called it unreliable as they are not able to judge the response of the customers as it was possible in face to face communication. 76 women found it difficult for the products requiring demonstration, 73 showed their concern about the ignoring attitude, 67 talked about unnecessary chat, 65 respondents were concerned about network issues, 61 found it difficult for convincing the customer and 58 are concerned about blurred images. Thus the various problems according to the respondents are responsible that they cannot rely on WhatsApp to the great extent.

Therefore, the following strategies can be followed to create a win-win situation by using this powerful tool of social media:

- 1) Show one product at a time to avoid product clutter
- 2) Use high resolution camera mobile for perfect images
- 3) Request the customers to call rather than chat for the further details
- 4) e link to the videos uploaded demonstrating the use of the product.
- 5) Quote fixed prices so that the bargaining habit is diluted
- 6) Provide quick services so that the customers are fully satisfied
- 7) Frequently post the feedback and review of satisfied customers
- 8) Offer discounts and points for purchase to be redeemed on the next purchase
- 9) Advertise the awards and rewards again and again in the group
- 10) Repetitive marketing as the reminders should be given
- 11) Loyalty offers and rewards can be given to the regular customers
- 12) Participation in exhibitions and fairs, throwing tea party every fortnight, providing quality products at reasonable price, making them permanent members by issuing cards, referral bonus, customized or tailor-made products, quick delivery and home delivery sometimes can be other ways to promote the business using WhatsApp.

CONCLUSION

Thus the study shows that social media tool especially WhatsApp is a boon for the women entrepreneurs in the selected suburbs of Thane District. It saves time and money required for showing the product from one customer to another. Reaching the customer has become very easy and convenient. Also the impact in the form of increased sales and safe profits has increased the number of women entrepreneurs in the city. Their standard of living is raised and the stress free life due to busy schedule has converted them into happy and independent souls. The perfect work-life balance with dual responsibility of home and

business due to saving of time, money and energy by using WhatsApp as a marketing tool has really been a blessing to the women entrepreneurs.

REFERENCES

- 1) Bowan, donald d. And robert d. Hisrich (1986). "the female entrepreneur: a career development perspective", academy of management review. 11 (2), 393-407.
- 2) Gupta, C.B. and N.P. Srinivasan, "Entrepreneurial Development", Sultan Chand and Sons.
- 3) Mady, Tarek T., (2011). Sentiment toward marketing: Should we care about consumer alienation and readiness to use technology?, *Journal of Consumer Behavior* 10(1), 192-204.
- 4) Kaplan, A. M., &Haenlein, M., (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media. *Business Horizons*. 53(1), 59-68.
- 5) O'Reilly. T., (2005). What is web 2.0? Retrieved June 12, 2019, from [www.oreilly.com:http://oreilly.com/lpt/a/6228](http://oreilly.com/lpt/a/6228).
- 6) Shankar, Venkatesh, Jeffery Inman, MuraliMantrala, Eileen Kelley, and Ross Rizley, (2011). Innovations in Shopper Marketing: Current Insights and Future Research Issues. *Journal of Retailing* 56(3), pp. 129-142.