Social Customer Behaviour: Strategies to Manage Them

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ABSTRACT - Nowadays with the help of internet companies are selling their products and services to customers worldwide. The breed of this kind of new customers gives opportunity as well as threats also. They are Social Customers who either buy products/ service online or offline and discuss their experiences with other customers (prospect customers) on social networking platforms such as Facebook, youtube, instagram, blogs, twitter etc. This paper explores the concept of Social Customer and suggests some strategies to harness social customers so their communication on web will be converted in favor of company which will ultimately create positive perception in the mind of prospecting customers.

Key Words- Social Customer, recommender system, perception gap, social prospecting.

I.   INTRODUCTION

A company produces goods/ services to sell those to customers so it can generate revenue and profit. If a customer satisfied then he do repurchase becomes loyal and advocates the brand consumed. **Seiders and collegeagues (2005)** opined that marketing literature consistently identifies customer satisfaction as a key antecedent to loyalty and repurchase.[1] Customer satisfaction manifolds the business of the company. **Keiningham, Munn and Evans (2003)** opined that customer satisfaction results in customer behavior patterns that positively affect business results. The scenario at the time of birth of CRM in 1990 to now , Social Media (like facebook, youtube , twitter, various communities etc.) has a leading role in consumer behavior and expectations. Whether big or small company everyone need to go ahead in this curve by making strategies. **Mittal and Kamkura (2001)** also opined that customer satisfaction management has emerged as a strategic imperative for most firms. Due to millions users of social media now it is become a game changer in market place. **Social Customers** are those webinars who frequently use social media to share their experience related to consumed brands, it can be positive or negative way. In India many companies like Tata Steel , Dell India , TCS and Home shop 18 doing excel in harnessing their social customers (SEI 2013)

II.   THE SOCIAL CUSTOMER- CONCEPT

The social customer is a customer who is not only engaged with the companies he is doing business with but also willing to engage his peers. These Social Customers highly influence the buying behavior of company's prospect customers by playing role as influencer in buying decision process; apart from this they can create a great impact on company's reputation. That's the power of Social Customer. **Paul Greenberg (2011)** defines Social Customers by some characteristics –

1. Feels comfortable in communicating on social media
2. Conversant with the tools and never afraid to use them to communicate for positive, neutral, or negative reasons.
3. Focused on communicating with peers as a most trusted source, defined as "someone like them," not necessarily "someone they know"
4. Knows that he can influence a company's brand by these conversations
5. Demands a deeper engagement with the companies he cares enough to engage with
6. Demands a personalized experience with the company, based on individual, not demographic, preferences.
7. Knows he has a willing audience to hear about his experiences with a company   Communicates through multiple channels.

MAKING SOCIAL CUSTOMER IN FAVOR OF COMPANY

The use of social media is growing rapidly. For marketing professionals, social media is a new outlet that can be used to increase the interest in product or service. Social customers create a great impact on current and prospect customer's buying behavior due to their reference group. Now companies have to provide them personalized web experience that allows them to strengthen their social relationship and a fast responsive contact service so they

feel themselves valuable and satisfied. To get favorable attention companies should do following things -

1. SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY

Customers primarily want to connect with people, not companies. Mikotaj Jan Piskorski (HBR 2011) opined that to connect customers unmet social needs with business goals, businesses should adopt a social strategy that **(1)** reduces costs or increases customers willingness to pay **(2)** by helping people establish or strengthen relationships **(3)** if they do free work on the company's behalf. Successful social strategies have all three components. They're built, bit by digital bit, through helping people with the social challenges of connecting and interacting with friends and strangers.

2. RECOMMENDER SYSTEM

Recommender systems contribute to better customer experience and enhance success in meeting customer needs. These systems reduce search effort exertion by customers and increase cross-selling by providing relevant product recommendations. And they also affect the decision-making process of online users. Personalized recommendations are positively related to the satisfaction of users via the perceived social presence in Web sites that is, the social presence elicited by interacting with other people and feeling their presence affects satisfaction with e-commerce. When recommender systems present their suggestions to a target user, they can provide links to similar user lists**.**

3. CREATION OF CUSTOMER COMMUNITIES

There is a distinction between managing customers and managing the customers who are using social media. Managing customers falls in CRM but for manage social customers the term CoRM (Community Relationship Management) should be used. Because social customers share their experience by making communities, blogs and pages where they connect, communicate, create and collaborate with each other. If its talking place outside company's control it will be very dangerous. So it is suggested that to create communities, blogs or pages officially. Provide corporate knowledge base, talk about company's best practices, and allow them to communicate with other customers and some executive's too.

4. REMOVAL OF PERCEPTION GAP

There is a huge gap exist between what businesses thinks that consumers care about and what consumers really want from social media interactions with the companies. In exchange for their time, endorsement and personal data they expect something tangible like discounts but businesses think this reason is least important.

5. SOCIAL PROSPECTING

Social prospecting quite simply is the use of social media to identify, meet and grow relationships with qualified prospects. This is an effective marketing strategy with lots of fun elements. This is the best way to grow customer base.

Examples of social prospecting
• Client or customer appreciation events.
• Referral events (event marketing).
• Community service activities.
• Charity events (philanthropic endeavors).
• Club memberships.
• Hobby or special interest groups.

III.   CONCLUSION

The social customer is actually impacting your business in ways that could be beyond your control and is likely doing that in channels that you don't own. So make the decision that this is an opportunity to improve the relationship between you and your customer. If you play your cards right, you could create customer evangelists who would become passionate supporters out in those channels you don't control. If you spend time to find out what he wants, map his desires against your business requirements (and budget), develop a program, and then provide your customer with what he needs to control his experience and interactions with you, you'll be on the road to producing these customer advocates.

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