

## FROM CHOUPALS TO ONLINE CHOUPALS

<sup>1</sup>Prof Anju Chawla, <sup>2</sup>Prof Pushp Lamba

<sup>1</sup>Adjunct faculty, Symbiosis Centre for Management Studies, Noida, <sup>2</sup>SLS Noida  
[anju.chawla@scmsnoida.ac.in](mailto:anju.chawla@scmsnoida.ac.in), [pushp.lamba@hotmail.com](mailto:pushp.lamba@hotmail.com)

On May 18, 2012, Facebook, Inc. Launched its IPO. The frenzy of pre-launch had peaked and it met with an astounding investor's response. Marketers coined it as 'Cultural Touchdown' implicating that a company of this nature was being received like emperors by the investors. Indeed, there was a paradigm shift witnessed on this launch. But then the stock lost over a quarter of its value in less than a month and went on to less than half its IPO value in three months. What had gone wrong?!!

In India, the majority of population lives in rural areas (we have an astounding 6,28,000 villages in our country). Their cultural '*adda*' where the society meets and interacts are the village *choupals*. The social networking sites are also doing the same purpose – just online. We could very well refer to them as online-*choupals* where the youth meet, interact, put forward their opinions and discuss issues relevant to them in particular or the country in general.

But who decides what is the right way in which we can and should interact, what platforms should be on offer, which ones we should pick and which ones should be rejected? It's actually a herculean task! One school of thought that emerges here is that the marketer is taking all the decisions for us. He takes a call which social platform should be offered, which features should be offered (remember, there's still no 'Dislike' button on your Facebook page!), and which features should be taken down. The second school of thought talks about the consumer being the king and s/he deciding the flow of offerings.

The market, traditionally, has been reactive to anything new and not pro-active. We can understand the finer nuances of consumer behavior by realizing that if in 1980's someone would have suggested that instead of the giant black goliaths of the landline phones we had back then, we would have these sleek 100gm weighing phones which would have absolutely no constraint of being attached to a wire and the device could be taken across the globe and we could still be in touch with each other – would have been out rightly preposterous and laughed upon. But then mobile phones came, saw and conquered the markets.

So who is deciding and taking these product development decisions – the marketer or the consumer. Well, we need to understand that the marketer, by the very nature of his understanding of the market, takes these calls; but he takes it after understanding the market – i.e. the consumer – you and me. All he does is understand the gaps between what is and what should be and fill up the gap with the right offering.

Going by this logic, the social media or the online *choupal* is something that we implicitly always wanted – a medium through which we could stay connected to friends and family, who in the era of globalisation were no longer rooted to their places of origin and traveled far and wide to earn their livelihood, settle their families and generally to live. Globalisation has been the catalyst in the prodigal war between culture and liberalisation. We now understand that in this era, we need to slightly modify the cultures that we have been living with, to suit the requirements of this day and age. After all, culture is nothing but a mirror image of our collective thoughts and behaviors. And if these thoughts and behaviors are undergoing a shift, well, the culture *gully* moves with it.

Having said that, the marketer cannot pile up anything on us in the name of ‘shifting’ cultures and get away with it. It has to be in sync with our requirements, our aspirations – else the consumer will be quick to snub it out. A classical case would be that of Orkut – instead of being a billion dollar giant it has been reduced to the status of a case study.

The scene holds value in same spirit and sense even in India, the retail landscape is characterized by a scenario like David and Goliath:: referring to the Kirana and organized outlets, well – equipped with social digital marketing. One chunk of people who have the purchasing power, lovingly called ‘Generation X’, prefers calling up their very own Bansal/ Aggarwal/Jain or any other nearby departmental store and get their stuff. No, they do not have much of options but these traditional departmental stores are the one which will deliver even Rs 50/- thing to you only to maintain their relationships. But the Echo-boomers (hailing from Generation Y) prefer to take a round of a huge Organized retail store so that a wide variety can be perused through (they don’t mind taking pain of reading the matter associated with any product- one digestive is how digestive from the other brand?). Not just this, if they find something which is not up to their satisfaction, they will log onto mouthshut.com, facebook page of the product/ store et al and bad mouth with no hesitation as their intention is to spread awareness so that others don’t get cheated.

Adding to this, people can go for rating and the statement “one unhappy customer can cost the company dear” proves its weight. Be purposeful in what you do. Think about the why of every action you take, every piece of communication you share and every interaction or new relationship you forge.” — Toby Daniels, Founder, Social Media Week.

Even if you never knew about brands like “Blue Stone- the jewelry brand from US, in all these years chances are you will get to know it. Or at least have the itch to know about it because the moment, you logged off from your Facebook account an advertisement popped up displaying beautiful pieces and Bingo if you were aspiring for the same.

Sun Tzu, a Chinese military strategist and general wrote that war is about planning and positioning. He emphasized the importance of knowledge: “If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need

not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle". But he laid supreme importance to winning without fighting: "The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting." Stretching the idea forward in today's technological era- we visit face book, like few, not like few. Do all of us really mean our likes and not likes (since there is no dislike) or is it because of its abundance and convenience that we just do it without thinking much? Here on the question begins- are we using the convenience or are we misusing it? Any action of ours on Google is recorded as a statistics- is it a meaningful one or just one?

Hey hey, when did you last send a greeting card to your best friend?? Think! Think! You are taking so much time, not your fault, but technology has given us options like birthday reminder, auto SMS service, event reminder service et al. So the warmth has reduced. Till few years back we had handful of friends but we meant the word 'friendship', today we have 561 odd friends but besides their name, maximum their ethnicity and organization, we don't remember much for most of them. Not that I am a pro social networking, but just opening up the discussion to both the sides of the coin- Bright and the not so bright.

*When Facebook gets involved, relationships can quickly fall apart – as Hosni Mubarak and Muammar Gaddafi have discovered. But dictatorships are not the only ties being dissolved by social networking sites: now Facebook is increasingly being blamed for undermining American marriages.*

*Even though the rate of divorce in the US has remained largely stable in recent years, American divorce lawyers and academics have joined Middle East analysts in picking out Facebook as a leading cause of relationship trouble, with American lawyers now demanding to see their clients' Facebook pages as a matter of course before the start of proceedings.*

*"We're coming across it more and more. One spouse connects online with someone they knew from school. The person is emotionally available and they start communicating through Facebook," said Dr. Steven Kimmons, a clinical psychologist and marriage counselor at Loyola University Medical Centre near Chicago.*

You are feeling low, update it , feeling high , update your status, feeling nothing...still update it! And how much private time you have? Practically none!! With your smart phones buzzing every time you receive a message on What's app, status update on Facebook, update on your software and the list is endless.. You'll have a lot of noise to filter out if you want to find something specific.

10 years ago, probably half of the population wouldn't even know the meaning of the word 'viral'. In 2012, thanks to YouTube, this word has become common, and describes news, videos, photos, content or people that experience overnight fame and become instant celebrities, mostly through

social media exposure. This proves to be fantastic for people who got this overnight fame but what about those who have put in the long and serious efforts in getting across people in a traditional way (which till date happens to be better in long term).

“Are you an online network socialite? Do you Twitter about your Facebook status while listening to music on fm? Have your friends noticed that you'll only talk to them 140 characters at a time? Then you've got your finger on the pulse of online social networking -- a big part of Web 2.0. Infact if you are not bitten by this bug chances are you are not a cool dude, especially if you line in metro and belong to Gen Y. How one sided is the thought no? But you either have to take it or leave it.

Without a doubt, the best reason to join any social networking site is that it lets you make connections with other people. You can use social networking sites to stay up to speed with what your friends are doing. If the social network is popular, you may be able to track down old friends and acquaintances and renew long-forgotten friendships.

You can also use these sites to network professionally. Even if you're happy where you are in your career, you might be able to help someone else out. For instance, one friend might mention on his profile that he needs a carpenter to come to his house. You might know someone who's perfect for the job. All you have to do is send a couple of messages and you've helped two friends out at the same time!

Many social networking sites like MySpace and Facebook make it easy to organize an event and invite your friends. Some sites allow you to group friends using different criteria, including geographic location. So the next time you plan a group trip to the movies, you can send out a notice to your local friends using a social networking service.”

Source:: <http://computer.howstuffworks.com/internet/social-networking/information/pros-cons-social-networking1.htm>

Your ward goes to learn dance, trainer had picked up the latest song and has advised your ward to practice back home!! In your 9 to 9 job, you hardly got a chance to even hear this song forget alone to have the song

But is it always sun shines and roses? Give it a serious thought still because as the symposium's basic idea was to see how good is the light when there is complete darkness in you, hence we tried to give you a good food for thought.

**REFERENCES:**

- 1) Waldow,DJ (2012) : “The Rebel’s guide to Email Marketing”, Que Publishing.
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