

HOW DO DIGITAL CONTENTS AND MARKETING INFLUENCERS HACKS & PERILS THE CUSTOMERS' ATTENTION?

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ABSTRACT

Recent times have witnessed a surge in global connectivity and many new modus operandi for communicating, expressing, and information exchange is built on the practicalities of the Web 2.0. This has been offering new opportunities to consumers and the firms to engage with each other. It is all data-driven and digital. This makes marketers put in more effort than ever to attract our attention when we are neither looking nor listening. Thus, the brands have entered a zone where human interaction is made virtually and digitally through social media. It is a field where the consumers are, in real terms, the kings, queens and them being the controller of interactivity. Hence, came the latest tools of digital marketing are content marketing and influencer marketing. However, how much information is too much and too personal. Whether a customer wants it or not is not an issue. The content is made in such a way to make him/her realize that they lack it and thus to attach themselves to the product emotionally. They make decisions emotionally rather than rationally, even if it costs them or their money or mental peace. The influencers inspire, or may push to despair, may hurt to our lives. These words can appear in solution of problems, instead may influence plummeting self-esteem; may influence by increasing the fear of missing out and, unfortunately, create an anxiety, and sometimes may make viewers self-doubt themselves.

This paper aims to articulate how the content marketing and the influencers are coming together to attract the customer, keep them loyal to the company, and spread word of mouth about their experience regarding the product and interaction. This paper also attempts to discover the underlying downsides of this lucrative and alluring marketing strategy.

Keywords: Digital Content Marketing; Online Marketing; Attention Hacking; Customer Engagement; Influencer Marketing (I.M.); Digital Emotions; Content Fatigue

1. INTRODUCTION

Siddoo. V. & Sawattawee. J. (2020) in their seminal work stated “Digital Content Marketing (i.e. DCM)” is emerging out to be a vital and potent force for developing consumer awareness, Customer engagement, and sales lead conversion, trust, and loyalty. Rowley (2008, p. 522) defined DCM as “the management process responsible for identifying, anticipating, and satisfying customer requirements profitably” through relevant digital content. Carmody, (2017) & Hollebeek. & Brodie, (2016) in their work stated “70 per cent of consumers want to learn about products through content [e.g. blog-based], as opposed to traditional advertising” (MGDA 2014), The growing importance of DCM is evident that it focuses not only on selling brands but also on increasing the customer base by understanding the value added to their lives by showing gratefulness for a brand or to a firm. This is done by educating them about the brand. It aims to communicate about the product to the potential customers out there and build their confidence to buy them and be loyal to them. The exciting part of DCM's is that the customers can themselves offer content by their electronic brand(s) related word of mouth (WOM), and thereby, being either proactive or empowered consumers. Influencer marketing is a customary form of marketing tactics where people are ready to buy a product or services due to an influence or by a commendation, or by a reference of an influence or influencers. In engaging influence marketing, firm concentrates on recognizing individual(s) with a capacity to influence over the potential buyers and the positions in marketing activities around the influencers. This influencer in an individual, who can be a friend or a family member, or a person with a capability to value-add through influencing process. This person

may be a celebrity, journalist, or an industry expert. A survey conducted on 2017 among brand strategists and marketers regarding the role of influencer marketing in an organization revealed 58 per cent of respondents believed that influencer marketing would be integrated with all marketing activities within the subsequent three years (*Source, Financialnewsmedia.com News Commentary*).

The underpinning buzzwords are the diversity, variety, individuality, and engagement. Influencers and content marketing attracts customers with their created contents through video posts, texts, etc and keeping customer's captive through their contents. In the episode of content marketing loyalty need to be redefined. So, loyalty means “trusts in all forms on institution” where a brand also included. Brand loyalty as the phenomenon gets impacted due to the crisis and consumer expectations which are always exponentially increasing, where the brands has to plays as the satisfier. In the process, marketers take time to innovate and invest in a product to satisfy the customer's needs. In case of brand loyalty, the real expectation gap from perspective of customer is not functional but emotional. Now, we are in a world of a new emotion, i.e. ‘digital emotion’ caused by digital technology. Today, emotions are expressed through digital technology. The astonishing point is that the digital emotions are more contagious than the physical or explicit emotions (Hancock et al., 2008; Kramer et al., 2014). The main reason behind is the speed of dialogue and virility of digital communication. Just, like tweet, what we like we share too many at a time may create impact and repercussion.

Consumers make purchase decisions based on an emotion, which can manifest through peer pressure, personal relationships, advertising, location, and based on economic conditions

etc. It is known fact that human heart drives any people fast. The people who have the power of credit and debit cards, cashless payment methods in their hands, and buy anything that they want, just to be in the trend or may be, they do not want to miss the sensation of being Instagram or face book famous.

Some sections of people in the society have surplus money while others have just enough to survive. They save for their dreams through need postponement. Among them, some are working, and some are not; some are of different age groups. Digital marketing is not leaving any one on earth through its power of influence. The financially not-so-strong section allows them to fall on the loans or debt traps to satisfy their craze because their influencer is wearing that or advertised by the select influencers. They are ready to buy cosmetics that are way over their monthly rent,

to please their co-workers and friends, and to create a self-image that they are now fashionable. Some even buy tickets to the concerts when they do not have money to pay for their tuitions. Whatever is the emotion, which leads to the desire to purchase a product or in selection of one product over another, creates an empty space in the post purchase mind. We start questioning ourselves; cognitive dissonance takes our peace away, and consumers remain in stress. Emotions can always surpass rational decision-making processes. *M.F. Luce* in his research, published in the Journal of Consumer Research on consumers' decision-making processes and emotion, explained the emotional surpass phenomenon in case of consumer. *Luce* highlighted, 70% of consumers check reviews and peer comments before taking any purchase decision. Consumer considers these reviews are 12 times more trusted than the company's brand promises or in direct product marketing.

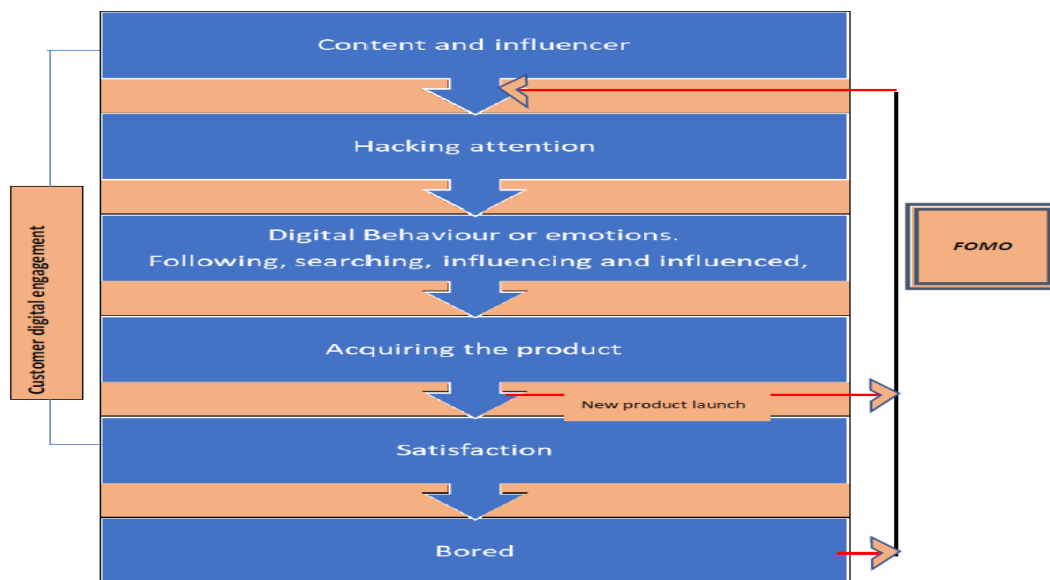


Figure 1: Vicious cycle of digital/influencer marketing and buying process by consumers

Figure 1 explains that both, digital and non-digital marketing strategies aim anyway at the “customer engagement. Highly engaged customers are loyal to the organizations. Such engaged customers buy more products as they

are loyal to it. Online customer engagement transpires when internet users connect with the brands or with the companies. The influencers keep their fans captivate and engaged by their contents in the online posts. They also get these

fans access to social media to re-tweet it and share it with their followers. It is like a snowball effects, where social media is plays like lever in ball rolling. An influencer can get the ball rolling and reach a large, engaged audience, whom they share their post with and through their followers, then followers to their followers and on and on is the process. Thus, a content posting for a brand or advertisement becomes viral; obviously, an ultimate aim of any advertisement in social media is “making viral”.

2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This paper aims to articulate how the content marketing and the influencers are coming together to attract the customer, keep them loyal to the company, and spread the word about their experience regarding the product and interaction. An attempt is being given to discover the underlying downsides of this lucrative and alluring marketing strategy. The aims would be achieved through an attempt to accomplishment following objectives-

1. To create a conceptual framework of customer engagement with content marketing and influencer markets.
2. To articulate emotional connections and consequences of content marketing and influencer markets.
3. To understand and review on subsequent customer’s behavior due to digital sinking.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Pulizzi. & Barrett’s (2008, p.8) offered a distinctive definition of digital content marketing. According to them, digital marketing contents are, “the creation and distribution of educational and/or compelling contents in multiple formats to attract and/or retain customers”. Opreana. & Vinerean (2015) indentified content marketing as a part of digital inbound marketing. Content

marketing was created in the quest of, either “to attract potential customers or to retain existing one. With an effort to transform the aspiring consumers who advocate the products by developing various forms of contents having a prospect of creating an impression, that product(s) is valuable one; or would use as an appeal to customers through their created contents to access to the website(s); or to learn more ways in order to come into a contact with declared marketing offers”. Content Marketing Institute redefined content marketing “is a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent contents to attract and to retain clearly defined audiences; eventually, to drive profitable customer action”. To be more precise, content marketing is the process of creating personalized, valuable contents for an interactive, engaged, and targeted audience (Content Marketing Institute, 2017). Online engagement by customers happens when internet users connect or collaborate with the brands, companies, or even to each other. Judy Strauss (2014) mentioned that engagement involves connecting with a user emotionally and intellectually. Online engagement involves creating an impression in the mind of the customer regarding the product or the brand. Its purpose is to gain the customer's trust to get involved with the brand by purchasing this one time and in the future and to communicate about the brand via electronic WOM. Online marketers engage their users by enticing them to partake or to participate in their contents or in their deployed media. Patterson. & et.al. (2006) indicated that the elements of customer engagement included Idea (vigor and absorption), Emotions (dedication), and Behavior (interaction). In the Web-2.0 environment, majority of the companies try to engage customers through content marketing through internet. The most important strategy to spawn the attention of

consumers toward the product is to provide good contents to build consumer brand engagement that leads to garner the purchase intention in the future (Vivek. & et al., 2012). Creating quality content may influence the consumer to engage with the brand. Therefore, companies need to create contents for keep customers visiting the website and stimulating the purchase intention (Puro, 2013).

Engaging consumers through digital media is more than the simply “pushing” marketing content or services at the digital display. Consumers by time become perceptive at ignoring ubiquitous display of advertisements by using more and more ad-blocking software. Instead, engagement requires providing valuable contents in meeting the user needs for information, convenience and entertainment so that all these can stimulates the content sharing and consumer pulling. For any brand or service, critical elements of this engagement strategy includes, entering into a conversation with consumers through social media, next engaging employees to advocate the company through their social media activities; finally, exhibiting socially responsible behavior, particularly regarding the use and control of users' data.

4. DCM AND INFLUENCERS MARKETING AS BETTER ROI STRATEGY

Study recaps that over 90 per cent of organizations used content marketing as a part of their marketing jingoes till 2019. The study revealed, almost 50 per cent of responding industry professionals estimated their companies' spending below 10,000 U.S. dollars, consider in making the content marketing as a comparatively inexpensive form of advertising. In America itself, between 30 and 40 per cent of B2B and B2C marketers

planned to increase their content marketing budgets for 2020. The use of visuals content was ubiquitous as they draw attention and engages audiences. In 2019, marketing professionals listed photos and video advertisements as the most effective advertising formats on the pitches of social media, like- Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook. (Statista, 2020).

Influencer marketing has indeed proved as the valuable tool for the marketers. In 2017, the average cost for influencer hiring for all industries stood at 12.21 U.S. dollars for every dollar spent. In 2018, the estimated value of global influencers marketing platform was 137 million US dollars. Projected the growth up to the mark of 162 million in 2020; predicting of surpassing 370 million dollars in 2027. The influencer marketing platforms are used for searching and discovery of clients, methods for campaign management, state of influencer relationship management, for customer analytics, and for reporting (*Statista, January 14, 2021*). Some of the leading influencer marketing fixes their goals- to improve brand awareness, reaching new target audiences, and increasing sales conversion. Thus, about 30 per cent of marketing professionals stated that they had worked with one to five influencers on their campaigns. Influencer marketing is still rising, proved by recently released figures in a specific market's value more than doubled between 2019 and 2021, growing from 6.5 billion to 13.8 billion U.S. dollars within three years alone (Statista, Feb 12, 2021)¹.

Influencer marketing also adds to the process of content marketing by increased exposure, increased traffic, developing a base of loyal admirer, generating leads, and the provision of marketplace insights. In the Nielsen report, 92 percent of consumers believe recommendations from friends and family

over all advertising (Whitler. 2014). Their joint research confirmed that the influencer marketing triggers 11 times more on investment return than other forms of traditional advertising annually (Kirkpatrick 2016). Research reported that the return on investment is measured in terms of reach, engagement, and ultimately sales, where a positive association exists among this diagnosed variable. Also found that 40% of respondents bought an item after seeing the influencer use it on Instagram, Twitter, Vine, or YouTube, and 20% said that they shared something they saw from an influences site. We can understand from the study, why marketers are investing in influencers (Statista, Instagram marketing - Statistics & facts, 2020). Influencers are the users who instill the brands trust, and so do the followers. Influencers and followers can recommend the products and services for their promoted brands to their followers and, in turn the influencer gets paid for it. Companies promoted their products and services via the sponsored stories created by influencer rather than the sponsored posts on the Instagram in 2019 regarding the budget spent. Influencers as an integral part in digital marketing on

Instagram through which projected brands directly communicate with their audience and potential customers. Brands with a following of 10 to 50,000 followers, for example, had a reach rate of 5.4 per cent in 2019 and posted approximately seven stories per month. Despite this overall significant impacts of Instagram marketing, a survey from 2019 found that a clear majority of 92 per cent of respondents had never purchased an item directly through Instagram. This does not necessarily indicate that social media marketing are inefficient but might show only a trend through Instagram. As the social media network is a valuable marketing and influencers' tool but may not be as popular among the users as it functions of an actual online shop, due to the pretext we cannot conclude as an inefficient.

4.1 Depicting Customers' Attention Hacking Flow

After analyzing the literature and from this theoretical observation, we can found that customer engagement leads to the development of their digital behavior, which in turn triggers their emotional behavior. They have access to all the information, even the one that they did not consider or had an idea about.

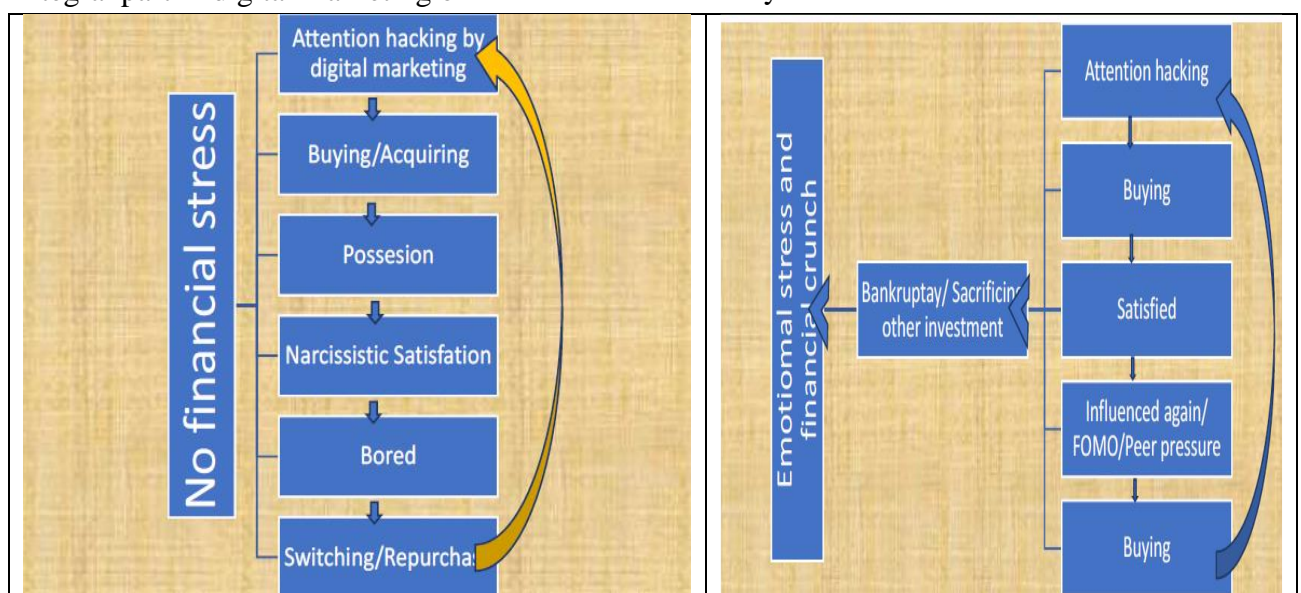


Figure 2. (a) *Financially sound with lots of disposable income in hand*
 2.b) *Middle class, lower-middle-class income group*

The influencers widen the need to use a particular product, making them more or less of what they (customer) want or dislike. Sometimes digital content marketing or influencers make customers feel that they are missing something or are not enough and should add something that they promote (influencer). Digital customers are never satisfied in totality as new and new products for the exact requirement are kept on being produced by so many brands, each promising something better than the other does. They constantly live under the fear of missing out and getting behind the fad. Sometimes customers are pushed into buying something that they do not need, but, because their influencers told them, so they are doing it. Thus, we see behavioral and emotional changes.

Not all people in the society belong to the same strata of income or of age. Some have money as disposable income, others have access, some are teens and some are old. Media has reached to all. Some may buy stuffs to fulfill the requirements, some others may buy only for the reason they can, and some more may buy stuffs, as because all around are buying. There is another category of customers, who are willing to buy but they cannot, due to lack of support monetary power. This group of customers has to cut on something else for fulfilling a need of theirs. Hence, there is a societal impact too.

4.2 Identified Pitfalls

A significant portion of literature has only dealt with constructive and more vibrant digital content marketing and influencer marketing. However, there are ambiguities too. No, wonder that both of these help generate more revenue than the other strategy, and the

investment is comparatively significantly less. The potential ethical, behavioral, and legal implications associated with the influencer and content marketing on the society and individuals cannot be overlooked.

1. The ethical allusion could be due to engagement of influencers, because influencer can be misleading and lying to the consumers. For example, they may not be using or believe in the particular product, but they create a positive review as they are getting money out of the deal. Moreover, an influencer should disclose his partnership with the brand or advertiser. By not doing so, both the influencer and the advertiser can land in trouble. An advertiser has every possibility to get into legal trouble, thus, the influencers may lose their credibility among their followers.
2. Another aspect, may be building upon trust with the followers regarding a particular product while the influencer is not using it but only posting it, because of the compensation influencer received. The trust of audiences on the influencers is a matter of concern. Since influencers are being paid for their contents for what they upload, doubt is of how much unbiased in their opinions, are also a matter of concern. Advertising regulatory bodies in many countries have made mandatory to disclose sponsorships to influencer in ensuring transparency. In India, too, there have been moves to bring influencer marketing under the purview of advertising standards.
3. Mentionable challenging task for brand promoter is- distinguishing genuine influencers with organic followers. Many influencers inflate their followers' numbers by using bots. Ingenuity crops up due to the

practice of “buying of short-term followers and the networks of influencers to usually promote each other’s posts may commonly used to inflate statistics”.

4. Influencers’ may deceive customers with fake follow up or even through fraudsters. Brand reputation is at significant risk if the influencers are fraudulent. Customers become an elusive reach by many fake followers. Therefore, brands end up paying to reach people who do not even exist. Therefore, companies need to do research and choose wisely.
5. The brand gives away its credibility in the hands of influencers. Marketing communicators and influencers can make or break a brand through the given the power of social media. They can do best with their content authentically. They improve brands visibility by increasing credibility, loyalty, and sales. In contrast, at their worst, they can make the brand look phoney or irresponsible (like the issue of credit cards of some banks).
6. Behavior Distress as an issue may take away the “time of each” – the precious resource; as the people spend their valuable time on social media today. It has increased further in 2020, albeit insignificantly. As per the Global Web Index report, the average user (in the world-2020) spends 2 hours and 16 minutes every day on social platforms, which was 2 hours and 15 minutes during 2018. This is about a third of the total time on the Internet and a seventh of the total time of waking up. In different cultures, the time spent on social networks is significantly different is a worth noting phenomenon. In some cases, productivity, might have taken a back seat. People now look up and check social media

before sleep and after waking up and waste many more hours in a day just of checking what is new and how and what their peers are doing online, what is the latest fashion which seldom they can afford and which social influencer is doing what.

7. Another trend is dropping down of customer tolerance. Customers today want an immediate response. If they are not happy with something, only with a single tweet or a viral post can destroy a company's rapport. In tune of common human psychology, consumers are more attracted to negative news/reviews. In exception, there are a very few consumers who share positive reviews or posts. The negative feedback on the connected issues is misused by the competitors many a times.
8. Consumers have started to experiment and switch. Brand loyalty is not what it used to be in the past customers depending on experienced consumers' feedback. However, now they know a product even before it has launched in the market from the content and the influencer. Nevertheless, is a making them easily bored of what they have and look for the recent launches. They are always looking for what is happening, what is a fad, and have this FOMO (fear of missing out). They quickly change from one brand to another because of their knowledge of the content and the influencers they follow.
9. Digital media can be a time drainer for a business. In social media engagement reports demonstrates that more than 60 per cent of marketers spend at least six hours a day on digital marketing. Businesses and customers may not be able to allocate hidden time utilized by forcing some tough

choices. Many a time, one has to forego the paid digital ads. Thus, the sweat equity investment can be unrelenting and considerable.

10. Digital media need to devolve into a damage-control operation. It is the most virulent complaint of small-business owners. The customers and the are perplexed by the scammers, spammers, trolls, and “reviewers” whose sole purpose seems to be stirring up trouble. But the trend is “going viral” considered as a good thing for businesses. But, it has latent possibility to strike multiple fears in the hearts of small-business owners today.
11. Another, controversial aspect is that the digital media has capacity to expose a business to copycats. Since, digital marketing campaigns are so “out there,” it also makes them easy to replicate or even copy. Influencers may right down the same content with the offers by similar wording against a familiar background or the shot. Another snag is that marketing contents are now easily be plagiarized.
12. People only make us see what they want us to see ‘as everything good and beautiful’. They want us to see how beautiful their vacation was in the middle of the sea or nowhere, how good they look after just waking up all because of the skincare products they have been using, or the clothes they are wearing by the trendsetter. However, ordinary people can barely afford all of those; even then, we believe that they give us an accurate picture and that it is not any fantasy of customers.
13. The principal risks of high level consumption of digital media are as follows:

- It may infuse harmful intentions to spread propaganda to mobilize followers.
- As it influences on decision-making of customer who are human being. There may be contagion of content filtering mechanisms, which may target specific information to certain group of people may potentially create the discriminatory effects. This can happen through information sharing or manipulation of information, for example, during an electoral process (“digital gerrymandering”).
- Influencer marketing bears possible of restoring an inequality through the disruptions in labor markets because of demand of different skill requirement forced by the digital technology.
- Consequent impacts on the changes in social skills among the users, impact on insensible empathy among children, and adults due to engagement of more time in online may develop behavioral malaise and catastrophes. Online bullying, harassment, and social defamation may inter alia will shape offline social chaos in the world.
- Finally, digital marketing may effect on the mental and physical health of users due to engagement on excessive screen time. It can pose health and developmental risks for young children if the usage is not monitored (World Economic Forum; 2016). The obvious harms include- stress, greater vulnerability to addictive behavior, and less time spent in physical activity will become serious health hazards.

5. CONCLUSION

We understand that the digital contents are more diverse. As the capacity of content display spaces are limited, all consumers are to be potentially focused more on breadth than depth, due to loopholes, gradually the importance of content filtering, curation, and recommendation have also been growing. The possibility to connect, share, recommend, and communicate creates a collective experience that shapes behaviors, preferences, and the collective consciousness of shared beliefs, ideas, and moral attitudes.

A colossal number of channels and the content creators are making the contents more fragmented. Users access to these contents through the multiple platforms and from multiple devices. Adapting contents to these multiple platforms becomes imperative. The higher the usage of digital media, higher will be the willingness to pay; increased connections and digital media use may sharpen the revenue scale in the industry's favour. No doubt, new consumption patterns along with the presence of more players and creators in the market fetch up more challenges too.

Digital marketing through the influencers jeopardize the consumer trust. Fundamental concern will be – the truthfulness of content, content volume, type of creators and credibility of sources. There will be the need for more clarity operation of filtering mechanisms. To serve consumer so, integrity of company will become indispensable action. Companies need to concentrate on value exchange, ensuring the security of personal data, and finally the protecting the digital identities from potential cybercrimes is a must. Content marketers need to prioritize customer data management from the point of professional, financial and social well-being (WEF, 2016).

We are presenting along with the positive and negative aspects of digital content marketing and influencer marketing along with customer engagement as they are sinking in the garbage of Marketing Ocean through digital revolution. Only the biased aspect of positivity is no way adequate and cannot create welfare for the consumer class and society. The digital marketing strategies have their benefits at the same time they have their lopsidedness too. The impact of digital marketing and engagement of influencers on customers and society still an interesting issue to explore. Further, research needs to understand the antecedents of digital media as cause and to explore the overbearing effects on the customers, brands, and the society as a whole.

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