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DEFINING AND RECOGNIZING AN EMERGING DIMENSION OF SOCIAL LISTENING IN SOCIAL MEDIA

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Abstract:

Now a days being a consumer, for purchasing any product or services we try to gather as much information as possible so that we can make best decision. There are lots of sources available in the market to get such kind of information but most of them are controlled and driven by brands itself. So to get trustworthy and true insights regarding brand and products many consumers prefers reviews and experience shared by other consumers. Social Media is acting as a mediator in the above activity. Both, brands and consumers are available on social media which make things easy for consumer to get information regarding brands and service. On the other hand brands are also tracking the content generated by users so that they can know about their loop holes, level of satisfaction and their brand's perceived image in the minds of their consumers and can solve the quarry or can make necessary changes in their products, services, promotional campaigns etc. This activity of monitoring and tracking user's content regarding brand is known as Social Listening.

This Social Listening trend on social media is becoming popular now a days. Consumers are getting awareness that brands are listening and their self-generated content is valuable and its worth sharing. This paper defines the Social Listening concepts from the scratch its need and roles, its association in various activities like consumer engagement, relationship management, word of mouth publicity and complaining behavior, its future perspective and limitations with an objective to recognize Social Listening as an Emerging Dimension of social media.

Key Words: Social Listening, Social Media, customer relationship, engagement, word of mouth

Introduction:

Currently Social Media emerged as one of the best tools for performing all the marketing activities. Market coverage, low cost, content presentation and many other features made social media platforms

very useful for business and for consumers as well. Social Media is the way for digital marketers to grab the attention of prospects or to answer queries of their customers. Social Media, unlike any other mediums used for marketing, is a real time platform where things can take place live. Which means now companies don't need to wait for days to respond back to consumers and vice versa. According to data retrieved from **Datareportal (2021)**, in India currently there are 624 million active internet users among which 448 million are active social media users which is 32.3% of total population. The growth rate of social media users in India is 21.2%. Total 96.3% of people owns a smartphone with an active Internet. On an average they spend 6.36 hours behind the Internet and 2.25 hours behind social media. Majority of the social media users in India belong to the 18 – 34 years of age group. Youtube, Facebook, Whatsapp, Instagram, Facebook Messenger, Twitter etc. are the most popular platforms of social media.

In recent times companies are tracking what their consumers and other people are talking about them and how satisfied or dissatisfied they are with the company's product and services, their promotional campaign, their activities and related things. Monitoring of such consumer's inputs is known as Social Listening or Social Monitoring. In other words, social listening enables a user to find out what is being said on social media and other online platforms.

Social Media Listening can be beneficial to companies and consumers in many ways and it will help companies to maintain their social media image on various platforms. For Executing Social Listening companies can use various tools like Hubspot Social Media Management Software, Sprout Social, Falcon.in, Hootsuite, Buffer, Keyhole, Mention, Awario etc. User generated content can't be controlled, it can be positive or negative. Other consumers and users use this kind of information for judging a brand and its product and this will affect company's image and consumer's purchase decision and that's how electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) will take place. Because of this reason companies will monitor what consumers are saying about a brand or product. Companies will praise the user who shares positive information and will try to solve the problem or query of users who share complaints or negative information. Companies will stay in touch with their consumers and this approach will help them to maintain good relations with their customers. By monitoring the views of the consumers, companies can measure their promotional content's effectiveness. Sometimes companies might find that users are trolling their promotional ads or any other shared content. This shows that the promotional campaign of the company is unable to create the desired image in the mind of consumers and it gives a wakeup call to the company to make necessary changes as soon as possible.

Defining Social Listening:

Many of the authors have defined Social Listening from different perspectives. According to **Skyword staff (2014)** Social Listening is the process which includes monitoring of digital conversations to understand what customers are saying about a brand and industry online. Companies can use social listening for community management, such as identifying customer pain points and providing direct consumer response to questions, complaints, and comments. It is also used to surface

feedback that could help to differentiate their brand, product, or service. **Heather Malec (2019)** defined Social Listening as a tool of analyzing the conversations of users and trends happening around a company's brand and company's industry as a whole and using that information to make better marketing decisions. According to **Stewart and Arnold (2016)** Social Listening as an active process of attending, observing, interpreting and responding to a different of stimuli through electronic and social channels. It is regarding how we communicate and listen to other people using the domain of social media and communication technologies which has influence on our interpersonal engagement. Social Listening provides marketers with the ability to track what consumers are saying about their brand within one or across multiple social media platforms. **Meltwater, (2015)** describes their Social Listening service by stating it enables brands to “find, analyze, and engage with conversations or trends across any geography, language, and social network”. The brief description of Microsoft states that their SL service analyzes “what people are saying on Social Media” (Microsoft, 2015) whereas Meltwater equates Social Listening with Social Media Monitoring and further says that at a technical level, Social Listening would be another way of saying “search”. These definitions of social listening mainly focus on certain things, which are common in the majority of definitions given by different authors. These are monitoring customer communication; sharing, observing, tracking content and responding to content shared, to know consumer's perception towards brands and overall brand image and performing all the above activity through social channel so that companies can take better marketing decisions.

Need and Emergence of Social Listening:

Social Listening has created a whole new and different world of possibility for companies and has both challenges and opportunities. Majority of the people associated with brands are available on social media as well. So it becomes necessary for marketers to keep tracking what they are saying on social media and like that they can get the information informed of reviews related to their product, services, and promotional campaign. Some of the supported stats of this argument is given below.

Fig 1 shows the data of various sources from where marketing leaders get rapid information about consumers during the coronavirus pandemic. Third party sources of consumer research give the highest information while at the second rank various Social Listening Platforms provide information to companies. This shows how Social Listening has emerged as a tool of getting information in recent era and it is the new need of companies to execute the business on social media. **Goto, Hisaki & Goto, Yukiko (2019)** executed the study on Social listening's effectiveness in predicting Japan's National election winners. They have found that it is possible in a more frequent manner at lower cost with higher accuracy compared to the conventional research through RDD. Although it is difficult to make predictions on parties or candidates in small-constituency districts or who rely on organized votes, election results predictions using social listening in the proportional representation system are effective. Especially the predictions for the proportional representation system in Upper House elections, which are voted nation-wide, were more precise than those in Lower House elections in which the nation is divided into 11 districts. This shows the effectiveness of Social Listening tools.

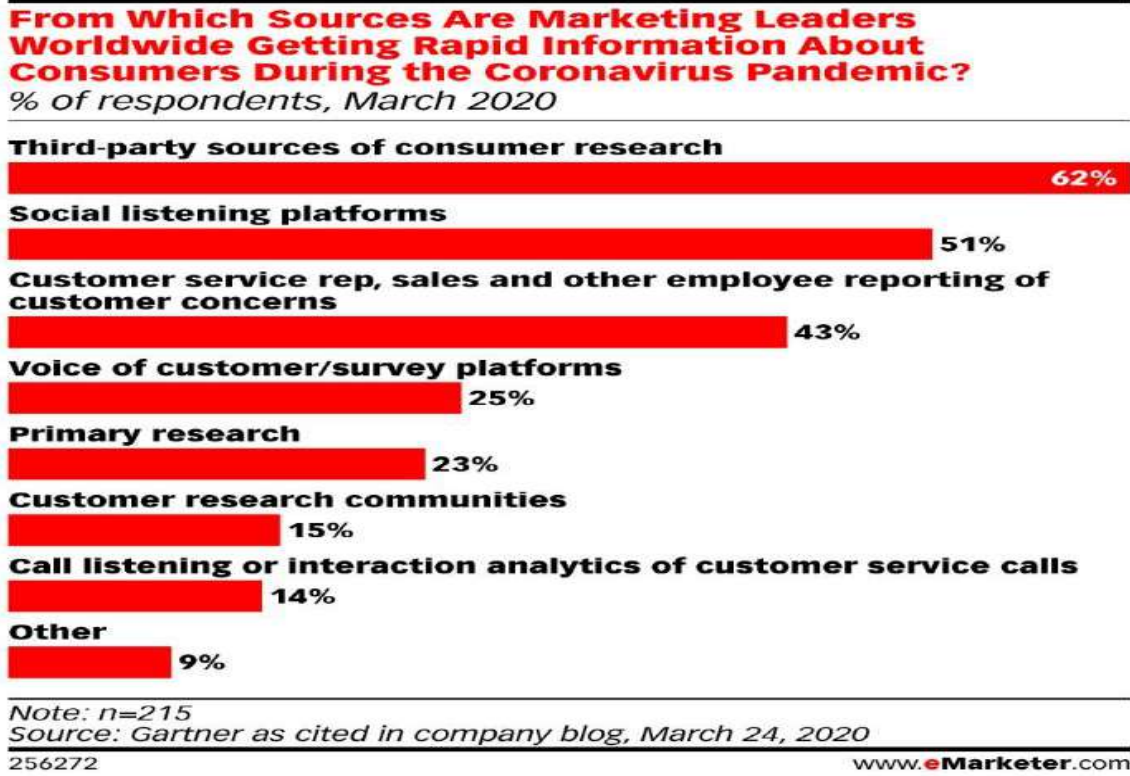


Fig. 1.

Sources of Information during COVID-19 pandemic

Following chart showcase growth in social media users. Companies are spending a lot of money behind analytical tools like Social Listening. The reason is it will give a good return on Investment at longer run.

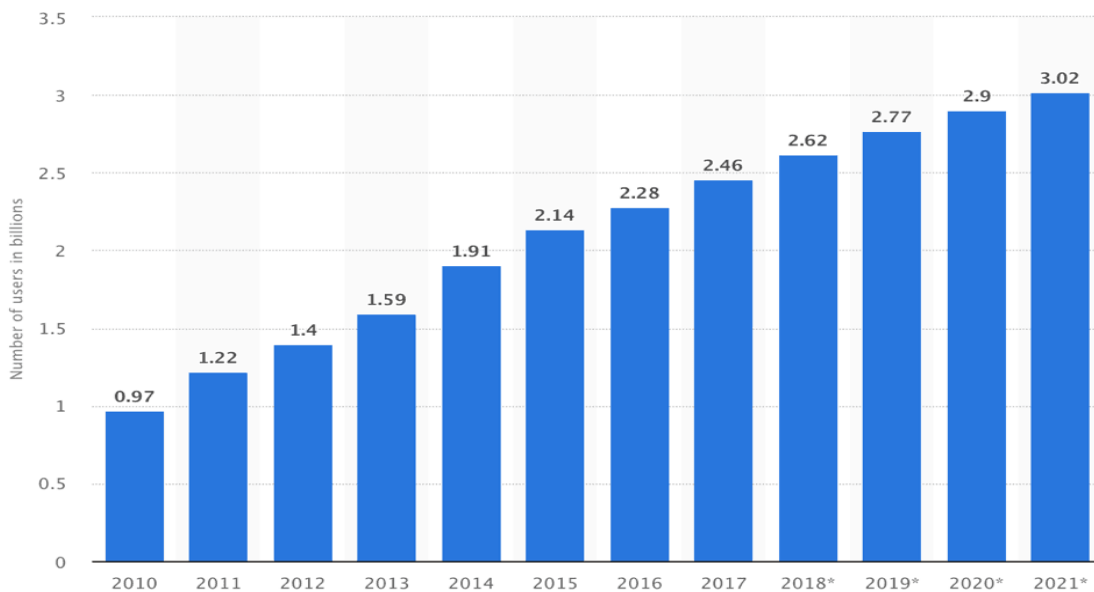


Fig. 2. Social

Media users around the world

As it is showcased in the Figure 2 that there are nearly 3 billion users of Social Media worldwide and these users are spending many hours on social networks in various activities. Users expect immediate response from your customer care representatives when there's an issue. So not being there isn't an option.

Courtney Morrison (2021) has explored many Social Listening facts found by different entities which shows the need for Social Listening in recent times. According to her, half of worldwide marketers have turned to social listening to understand consumers' changing preferences during the pandemic. More than 60% of social media marketers believe listening will become more important over the upcoming year. More than 50% of social browsers use social media to research products. Over 1 million people view tweets about customer service, and 80% of those tweets are negative. Answering a complaint on social media can increase customer advocacy by 25%. Almost 80% of consumers expect brands to respond within a day of reaching out over social media, but average brand response rates across all industries are lower than 25%.

Social Listening and Related Phenomena:

With Social Listening activity, other marketing activities are attached and it is necessary for companies to focus on these activities to execute their business effectively on social media. This includes Customer Engagement activity, Complaint Handling and Relationship management, electronic word-of-mouth Publicity. All of these factors require the attention of companies and continuous involvement and monitoring. Companies can engage their consumers through using various tools and executing various activities like using messaging platforms, Customer Surveys, Live Chat, Chat bots, Video Call etc. by engaging them, companies can stay in touch with their consumers and will get continuous flow of input from them. Consumers who are dissatisfied with a particular brand's product or dislike the promotional efforts made by the brands will share negative posts or might complain regarding the same on social media and satisfied consumers will share positives of brands and products. Like this there will be negative and positive word of mouth publicity. Other users and brand community members will use this information to judge the brand and to make purchase decisions. Companies should track such inputs by the users and try to solve the queries and matters of dissatisfaction. And should praise the users who are appreciating bands and products. By maintaining touch with consumers, responding to them and solving their queries companies can maintain their relationship with consumers.

Engagement and Social Listening:

Customer engagement is the ongoing cultivation of a relationship between the company and consumer that goes far beyond the transaction **Cari Murray (2019)**. In Social Media Customer Engagement depends on Individual's interest which is primarily emerged by his psychological attitude. Customers will be engaged with brands when they are motivated either by a brand or encouraged by other customers to get involved **Kim, E., & Drumwright, M. (2016)**. **Sawhney, M., Verona, G., & Prandelli, E. (2005)** outlined the distinctive capabilities of the Internet as a platform

for customer engagement, including interactivity, enhanced reach, persistence, speed, and flexibility, and suggest that firms can use these capabilities to engage customers in collaborative product innovation through a variety of Internet-based mechanisms. **Higgins and Scholer, (2009)** opined that Social media marketers act as a motivational force to achieve customer engagement. Engagement as a state of sustained attention, which can be characterized by full absorption and involvement as well as being fully occupied or engrossed in something. By getting consumers engaged with brands, companies can make consumers aware about their offering and other activities, can boost loyalty, can increase sales and can keep customers away from your competitors. Here in an example of Heinz Ketchup engaging their consumers.



Fig. 3.

Consumer Engagement efforts of Heinz Ketchup

Here Heinz offers a new product which is the combination of mayonnaise and tomato ketchup it's called Heinz Mayochup. Here the company is trying to know the preference of their consumers by engaging them with a poll vote post. In this among 930,691 votes 54.8% people say that they would like to have a product. So the company will think about launching its new product.

Word of Mouth and Social Listening:

Word-of-mouth is defined as any positive or negative statement made by customer's experiences about a product or company, which is made available to a mass of people and institutions using the Internet **Hennig-, T., Gwinner, K. P., Walsh, G., & Gremler, D. D. (2004)**. Electronic WOM marketing falls under the category of viral marketing, which broadly describes 'any strategy that encourages individuals to propagate a message, thus, creating the potential for exponential growth in the message's exposure and influence Bampo, **Ewing, Mather, Stewart, & Wallace (2008)**. Word

of Mouth (WOM) can also be clear as the method of communication between two noncommercial people and without benefit in the business they are talking about **Taylor, D. G., Strutton, D., & Thompson, K. (2012)**. In marketing context, word of mouth (WOM) means the act of consumers providing goods, services, brands, or companies information to other consumers and when such information is communicated with the help of the Internet (e.g., through tweets, reviews, blog posts, pins, likes, video testimonials, images), it is termed ‘electronic word of mouth’ **Rosario, Sotgiu, Valck, & Bijmolt (2016)**. **Riegner (2007)** studied the growth of User Generated Content’s influence on purchase decisions of consumers. The study revealed that at least one online source influenced nearly 50 percent of the young population’s recent purchases and half of the top 10 sources were online. E Word of Mouth was in an “early adopter” phase and influenced certain purchase channels and particular types of products more than others.

Users will be sharing content (User Generated Content) about a brand or product on various platforms and through various modes. This content will be used by companies to check the response of the consumers towards company’s offerings so that company can perform social listening activity. Not only that but other social media users will also receive this kind of information and like this through electronic word-of-mouth users will make their perception towards brands. Here in an example of electronic word-of-mouth.

Here a user is appreciating Tata Group’s Taj Hotel services for providing free accommodation services to doctors and nurses working in BMC hospitals during Coronavirus crises. This will enhance the company’s image in the market.

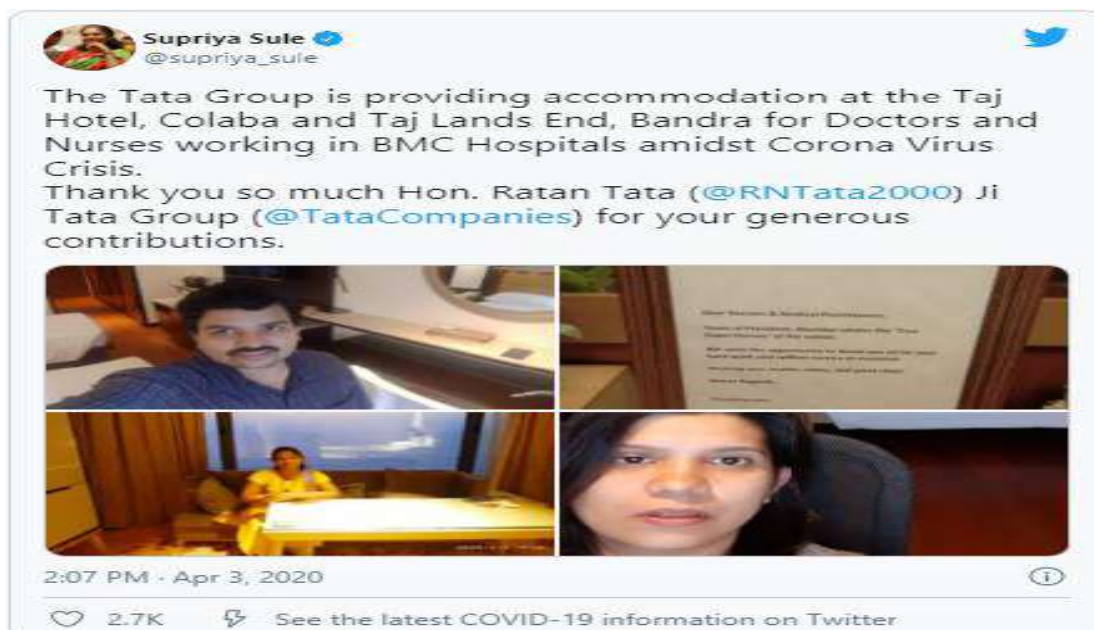


Fig. 4.
Post

related to positive Word of Mouth by a user

Customer Relation and Social Listening

Customer relationship management is referred to as an approach for managing interaction of a company with present and potential customers. Data of customers and their history is being used by companies to improve business relations with stakeholders, majorly relations with customers while focusing on their retention and acquiring new customers for sales growth. Association of customers with any organization or firm defined as behavior towards any brand as result of motivation also termed as customer engagement (**Van Doorn et al., 2010**). Social care is booming in a climate in the contemporary online social sphere where users value instant communication. Customers have come to expect this as the new norm in a culture where one in four social media users think that organizations should reply to messages online within the hour.

Customers also expect quality content, seeking a balance between marketing strategies and value added content. Above all, organizations need to present a genuine and authentic voice and persona and remain engaging. These techniques help to assure customers that they are interacting with real people of the organization and not faceless companies (**Coen, 2016**). Customer relationships are built more on trust than distribution of information, and relationships are reciprocal. By listening and responding rather than broadcasting and pitching, organizations have a new opportunity to identify with their consumers and meet them where they are. These are among the reasons that social media is of keen interest to CRM. With 2/3 of American consumers using social media, the power is increasingly in the customers' hands. This change in landscape represents a 180-degree conversion in CRM practices, emphasizing relationship management, promoting a balance of trust among an organization and its customers, and sponsoring relationship equilibrium (**McKee, 2012**). Effective communication is needed at every level of organization to make decisions and communication effectiveness is required with customers to keep them in touch and create loyalty. Social media plays a vital role for organizations to spread information and communicate with customers such as usage of Face-book, Twitter and YouTube has increased by various business owners. Various businesses such as interior designers named Louis Vuitton provide services including live streaming for fashion shows.

Chanel, Gucci, Ralph Lauren and Donna Karan worked and engaged with Apple for creation of applications for their business to be helping with customer relationships (**Kim & Ko, 2012**). Social media are transforming the ways in which customers communicate with firms for making complaints regarding product or service failure. Companies accept their failure and try to satisfy consumers so that their relation with them lasts long. While there is a positive side to this phenomenon, there is also a negative side, which can lead to serious social media crises from the side of the company. **Doga Istanbuluoglu (2017)** found that users expected companies to reply to their complaints within 1-3 hours on Twitter and within 3-6 hours on Facebook. His analysis reveals that both a quicker first response and a quicker conclusive response lead to higher satisfaction with complaint handling. **Peter McGraw, Caleb Warren, and Christina Kan (2015)** found that humorous complaints on social media benefit people who want to warn, entertain, and make a favorable impression on others.

By listening to consumers' views, queries and complaints and responding to them on time companies will be able to maintain good relations with their consumers and that's how it will win their loyalty. Solving the queries and problems will make consumers satisfied and companies will win their trust and of others as well. Showcasing such behavior will create a positive image of the firm. Consumers will feel that companies do care about them. Here are some of the examples of complaining and response of the company to maintain relations.



Fig. 5.

Complain handling efforts by Sainsbury over dissatisfied consumer

Here in Fig. 5 the consumer is complaining about the chicken's taste in the sandwich of Sainsbury in a funny way. Company is handling the complaint by apologizing first and responding in a humorous way.

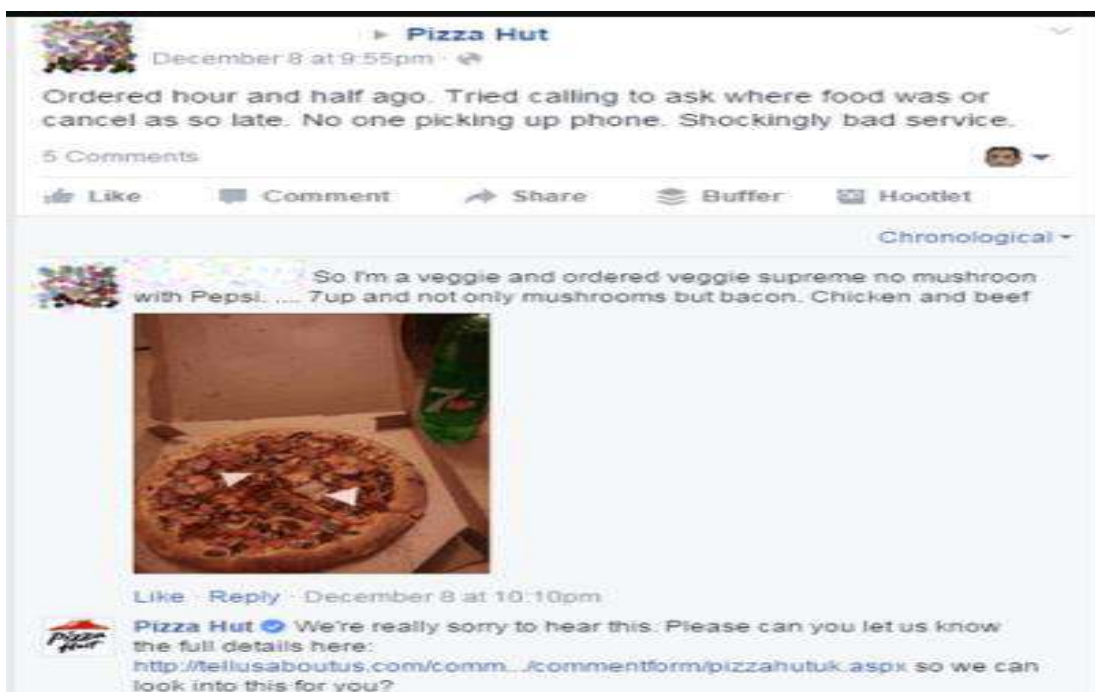


Fig. 6. Complain handling efforts by Pizza Hut over dissatisfied consumer

In Fig. 6 a dissatisfied consumer sharing the image of pizza he received is not the one he ordered. So Pizza Hut responded to the complaint and requested to share the same to the official portal of the company.

Future Perspective and Implication:

The modern network, Internet connectivity and growing importance of social networking will change the way in which consumers attend to stimuli, affecting how individuals listen and respond to messages. According to Statista Research Department (2021) in 2025 nearly there will be 4.41 billion active social media users worldwide. Such a huge social media presence and technologies contribute to the construction of social listening. Social listening appears to have clear implications among interpersonal relationships, organizations, and the relationships between businesses and their consumers; therefore, it is critical at this time that the dimension of social listening should be taken into consideration and explored to attain various marketing goals. For future studies some of the areas for investigation could be in testing if communication and receiver apprehension are reduced or increased in online engagements, can companies bring complain handling activity on social media and eliminating other modes? How companies can direct electronic word of mouth activities so that it falls in to favor of company. Also, further investigation into the effectiveness of mediated supportive responses, levels of self-disclosure, and detection of deceptive cues by interactions, study of consumer's emotions attached with brands, validity of user generated content and can faulty practices be stopped? These all are potential research areas to explore in the context of social listening.

Limitations:

Although there are lots of benefits companies can get by performing social listening effectively, there are certain limitations as well. Ruby Arenson (2021) defined some of the limitations of social listening activity in which she mentioned that social listening generates big amounts of data and analysis of which can be time consuming. Data doesn't always represent the views of true users that what they think and believe. This is because they might not want to appear on social media sharing something about brand and products. Social media platforms are noisy places which makes the task of finding the right data you are looking for difficult. Machines and software cannot understand the sentiment i.e. whether a particular information is positive or negative. It cannot differentiate sarcastic, humorous, irony and related inputs. Conversation nowadays is also changing, now people prefer to talk about something in a chat box rather than sharing through posts and the access of personal chat is not available in social listening.

Conclusion:

Apart from certain limitations, there is no doubt that Social Listening can be proven as one of the best modern tools which companies can use to serve their various purposes. Online presence of such a huge number of audience and their repeated inputs regarding their experience and views towards brands makes company's task easy for companies to get feedback on their offerings so that they can

make necessary changes accordingly and decrease dissatisfaction as much as possible. It is easier to engage an audience on social media platforms compared to any other tool and that's how companies can stay in touch with their consumers regularly and can make and maintain good relations with them. If we talk about the role of social listening activity from a consumer's perspective consumers can make the judgment about a brand's image from the views and experience shared by other users and can make purchase decisions as well. Because of awareness of social listening companies are active on social media so users can share complaints directly by mentioning a brand and can have a solution quickly compared to other modes of complaining. Like this social listening activity is beneficial for both sides if used correctly.

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