Social Listening as a Marketing Strategy to Analyze Beyond Consumer Buyology in the OTT Industry : A Research Note

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Abstract

The burgeoning vogue of over the top (OTT) media in India has amplified the competition in the Indian entertainment industry, trying its best to win over the viewers by understanding their buyology. However, capturing the sentiments and expectations attached with rapidly changing entertainment choices and preferences of the OTT viewers is beyond understanding consumer buyology. Literary sources highlighted that there are various studies on social media catering to distinct perspectives. However, studies focusing on social listening in the OTT industry's context are limited. Hence, there is a void in the ideologies and theoretical contribution on social listening concerning the OTT industry. This research note, perhaps formulated for massive research on social media in OTT, attempted to introduce the 4Rs of social listening such as, reach & enquire; relate & evolve; respond & engage; and relationship building & emotional connect.

Keywords : social listening, consumer buyology, over the top (OTT), online entertainment, social media, marketing strategy

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With USD 101.42 billion value, the worldwide OTT industry is expected to grow at 13.8% (CAGR) with USD 223.07 billion value by 2026 (Mordor Intelligence, 2020). Being a fast-growing industry in the Asia Pacific Region, OTT in India has huge growth potential as 45% of the total Indian population (624 million) are internet users and among which 448 million spend 2.25 hours on social media daily (The Global Statistics, 2021). Therefore, OTT players are busy decoding the consumer buyolgy (understanding the factors influencing purchase decisions of the audience) using social media platforms. The research work subjected to social media concerning the OTT industry is mostly limited to social media promotions (Arora et al., 2018; Kwon et al., 2021; Menon, 2021), social media strategies (Martínez-Sánchez et al.,2021; Sarkar & Sarkar, 2020), and social media networks & policies (Hanlon, 2016; Kim et al., 2021). However, the approaches towards social media as a listening platform for the OTT industry are yet to be explored. Hence, this research note focuses on one of such important approaches and intends to introduce 4Rs of social listening that are left unresearched and benefit the OTT industry in the lenses of social media through exploratory academic research.

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Social Listening Beyond Consumer Buyology

The literature validates the growing significance of social media amongst the OTT players as marketing communication platforms, enabling the promotions as well as monitoring the response towards the same (Zhang et al., 2020). However, one of the most important aspects of marketing communication, that is, 'listening,' is completely ignored in some of the celebrated definitions as well. For instance, according to Philip Kotler, marketing communications are means by which firms attempt to inform, persuade, and remind consumers – directly or indirectly – about the products and brands they sell. But the question here is: Is marketing communication all about talking to influence the purchase decisions? The answer is 'No.' Listening is more important than talking (Nichols & Stevens, 1957) as it helps the marketers to understand the deep-rooted sentiments of the audience and establish consumer relationships beyond understanding buyology.

There are many ways, including syndicated research, social media monitoring, interviews, forum discussions, and focus groups, etc., to captivate the knowledge about consumer behavior towards a brand. However, all of these have some or other limitations such as controlled monitoring, unwillingness to participate, data integrity, lack of free-flow conversation, etc. The results captured from the above methods may be systematic and easy to analyze, but they do not capture the real sentiments or emotions of the consumers (Li & Bernoff, 2011).

On the other hand, social listening enables proactive brand management, which revolves around the fact that the real identity of your brand is given by the customers' words about it. It is referred to as a systematic and scientific process to capture and analyze the relevant social media conversations (reviews, references, comments, complaints, concerns, etc.) with an intent to understand and explore the deep-rooted sentiments of the audience, which in turn leads to long term customer relationships (Li & Bernoff, 2011; Urban & Hauser, 2004). It not only focuses on purchase behavior but also majorly revolves around creating customer delight and brand loyalty based on relationship building.

Key Aspects (4 Rs) of Social Listening as a Marketing Strategy

The 4Rs of social listening suggest a well-defined pathway to use social media platforms proactively to establish an effective marketing communication strategy built around customer relationship management concerning the OTT industry. It elaborates the steps involved in the social listening process to get the insights of the related social media conversations besides response towards the social media promotions. It all begins with 'reaching out to conversations with proactive listening,' followed by 'relating to the conversations with dedicated listening,' 'responsive listening,' and 'relationship building with integrated listening.'

The key aspects (4Rs) of social listening from the strategic marketing perspective derived by us post an extensive literature review are listed below.

Reach & Enquire : Non-Participative Listening

The credibility and response rate towards the reference groups' communications, such as community groups, etc., is significantly higher than the response rate to paid promotions (Mu et al., 2018). However, having understood the importance of communications in the social community, researchers and marketers focus on the objective elements of such communication through social monitoring (participative listening), and that is too limited to paid promotions; whereas, research focusing on the subjective elements is unresearched. For example, when consumers communicate about a product or service on social media, there are research tools that marketers and researchers use to quantitatively measure the responses towards their paid promotions. Social monitoring is one of such strategies and is often confused with social listening. However, research on the qualitative and emotional

perspective has always been unexplored. Hence, the first note (first R) indicates that reach and enquire through targeted social media communications can be enhanced with non- participative listening. Unlike social monitoring, social listening follows a proactive approach (Keyhole, 2021), intending to understand the responses to the content related to the brand or product posted by someone else.

Moreover, social listening enhances the reach and ability to capture responses from a population that truly represents the viewers. For example, some of the viewers (especially the unhappy ones) may not be willing to pay attention to communication by the OTT service providers. Social listening can help the OTT service providers expand their reach to non-filtered responses of their viewers and create an insight about brand perception amongst them. Developing insights into the audience's sentiments requires active listening without getting in a rush to respond. Hence, this research note (R1) recommends research about this perspective.

Relate & Evolve : Dedicated Listening

Capturing the volume of unfiltered social media conversations on trending OTT communications is one of the major challenges attached to social listening. However, effective data mining helps identify the relevant data to capture the insights using the methods such as keyword search (Sarkar & Sarkar, 2020). The existing set of studies is limited to data mining techniques, which can surely help to narrow down the focus area by removing the unwanted conversations for better analysis. However, developing insights for better interpretation with related responses, which evolve along with the dedicated conversations, is yet to be explored. Research on filtering the responses based on relatability and evolution through dedicated listening is unexplored. Hence, the second note (second R) indicates that the effectiveness of the interpretation and receptivity of social media communications can be enhanced through relate & evolve with dedicated listening. Therefore, dedicated listening with an intent to relate to the ongoing conversation should be another key aspect of social listening. At this point also, the listening must be proactive and dedicated to related and relevant conversations about the OTT platforms and their services. It can help the OTT service providers dig deeper into the consumer's needs and highlight the point of concern, if any. The dedicated listening approaches to relate with the audience with social media listening for OTT platforms can be explored further. The impact of dedicated listening through social media platforms on relationship building concerning the OTT industry can also be studied further. Hence, this research note (R2) recommends research on this perspective.

Respond & Engage : Responsive Listening

Anger is one of the most contagious and thriving emotions on social media, leading to social media crises (Berger & Milkman, 2012). Social media monitoring can help in crisis management by sensing and acting in advance (Ott & Theunissen, 2014). However, it functions as a mere warning mechanism that helps the marketers to handle the negative conversations carefully before it gets out of control and damages the brand reputation. Modern marketing uses some of the advanced tools such as natural language processing to decode the nature (negative or positive) of the comments. The limitation with this approach is that it cannot sense the feelings such as sarcasm or humor of the comments but only can classify them as negative or positive comments (Kwon et al., 2021). A shift from monologue to dialogue in marketing perhaps becomes significantly important in social listening at this stage. The first two stages of non-participative and dedicated listening help to strategize the dialogue delivery plan of action. Hence, the third note (third R) indicates that response & engagement towards negative conversations can be improved well in advance of responsive social listening.

Moreover, it can also help establish a dialogue with the audience based on previous listening factors such as situational and emotional insights. It will help the marketers sort the point of concern well before any crisis. Thus, this research note (R3) recommends further research on developing effective responsive listening approaches in

proactive crisis management in the OTT industry. Further studies can also describe the impact of non-participative and dedicated listening on developing a responsive listening approach.

Relationship Building & Emotional Connect : Integrated Listening

The core existence of the OTT industry is to provide a seamless streaming experience to its viewers, although the delivery of the same is not possible without considering the contribution of the other stakeholders such as employees, channel partners, shareholders, promoters, social communities, etc. (Martínez-Sánchez et al., 2021; Ott & Theunissen, 2015). It can also include paying attention to the talk about the competitions on social media platforms. However, studies on paying attention to the social media conversations amongst stakeholders other than customers are unexplored. Hence, the fourth note (fourth R) indicates relationship building & development of emotional connect through an integrated listening approach focusing on all the stakeholders. It suggests utilizing social media platforms to not only listen to the customers but also to listen to all the stakeholders' concerns, including the conversations related to competition. Thus, this research note (R4) recommends that studies on the development of approaches related to integrated listening on social media can be captured in upcoming studies. The impact of integrated listening in developing relationships beyond consumer buyology can also be described in further research studies.

Implications

This research note highlights the role and significance of social listening as a proactive strategic marketing approach towards relationship building with consumers and stakeholders. The highlighted key aspects of social listening such as reach & enquire with non-participative listening; relate & evolve with dedicated listening; respond & engage with responsive listening; and relationship building & emotional connect with integrated listening not only offer a new research perspective for both academia as well as industry but also indicate to the marketing professionals to explore the social listening approaches to develop marketing communication strategies beyond consumer buyology for long term sustainability and growth.

Conclusion

There is too much talking on social media and too little listening and learning (Soils, 2021). This research note highlights the true significance of social media listening beyond consumer buyology. It attempts to introduce the 4Rs of social media listening such as reach & enquire; relate & evolve; respond & engage; and relationship building & emotional connect. It also indicates various approaches linked with the 4Rs of social listening, such as non-participative listening, dedicated listening, responsive listening, and integrated listening concerning the OTT platforms. We provide a fresh perspective and scope for further studies connecting social listening in the OTT industry for the industry and academia.

Authors' Contribution

The creation of the research ideology and conceptualization of the research note was done by Sonal Khatri based on the Literature Review. The outline of the note was designed by Dr. Shailendrakumar Kale.

Conflict of Interest

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