

Going Social With Emotional Data

Social proof is a data driven trend that helps the connected consumer to make informed decisions based on the buying behaviour of other customers who have already bought the product. Brand and retailers are using emotional data, an algorithmic mix of rational data and emotional choices, to assist in making a satisfactory choice in purchases.

The connected customer of today makes most of her decisions literally from the palm of her hands. Interestingly, 'brand loyalty' features lower in the priority of the new-age shopper who depends more on 'social proof' that she seeks and obtains at her will.

In psychology terms, Social proof is a phenomenon where people (read as 'worried customers') conform to the actions of others under the assumption that those actions are reflective of the correct behavior. It's a proven fact that a close to 70 percent of shoppers take the help of product reviews to make informed decisions. Also, product reviews are perceived as more trust worthy 12 times over that of product information from the brand.

Guess that implies, with due respect to brand marketers, that folks believe what other folks think and not brands pushing products.

Fundamentally, there are 5 types of social proofs that customers are know to be influenced by from the advent of advertising- Celebrities, Experts, Customers, Friends, Certification. Thanks to tech driven social media lifeline of the new-age shoppers, customers have constant access to social proofing from other Customers and Friends on their social pages.

"We don't 'go' shopping anymore. We are always shopping. You can't win from being well known" says leading digital agency Razorfish's Jason Goldberg. Mere investments in marketing and celebrity endorsements cannot make a product succeed in the hands of the connected consumer. Consumers have easy access



to facts and opinions about products through simple Google searches on their smart phones when browsing in retail environments.

This has been popular with online stores, now brick-and-mortar stores are also smartly adopting this trend to increase conversions on their products. Let's get some proofing from some initiatives taken by some global brands that have integrated their offline with their online presence in Social Media.

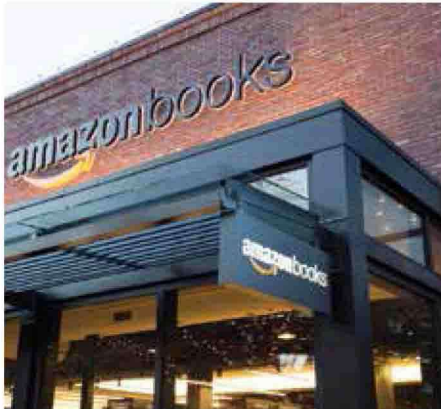
Nordstrom Rack, the off-price retail division of Nordstrom Inc., uses tags and digital screens in-stores to live stream Instagram photo updates of products recently purchased by customers.

Technology plays a very critical role in the enabling of live analytics in Facebook and Instagram feeds. This enables customers to get real time social proof data to understand social trends and preferences for products that they are considering to buy.

Dutch Fashion retailer, C&A, took this to the next level by integrating live digital streaming data from their social media into their garment hangers in-store. This enabled customer to browse through social proofs to make informed decisions to buy what is in vogue among their peers by looking at the Facebook likes that it displayed.

Target positioned as an upscale discount retailer that provides high-quality, on-trend merchandise at attractive prices, has also started using social proofing to promote the popularity of its products and influence an increase in its conversions in-store. The store encourages customers to tweet their rating for some of their key collections which is then consolidated and communicated at the point of sale of the product

Amazon.com, in its physical bookstore concept that it unveiled in the US, has a collection of about 5,000 titles stocked on its bookshelves. Interestingly the books are displayed in a cover-out format instead



of spine-out with the idea of showcasing the authors and their work and their social rating upfront. The shelves display positive reviews and star-ratings from the Amazon.com website which help book lovers access the collection and make informed decisions.

With technology enabled social proofing getting more popular this will soon become the new normal for converting a large majority of browsers to shoppers at the last mile in the store for all products irrespective of the brand. A day will come, sooner than we think, when Shoppers will need social proof for every product they buy. No wonder marketing spends and efforts are rapidly tilting towards social media engagement which will significantly impact brand preference and revenues on both online and physical retail.

Store designers and visual merchandising professionals of today have embraced the use of the concept of emotional data in retail design to endeavour to contribute in the delivery of customer acquisition and conversion with much more precision than ever before. ●

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