1.1 Introduction

Ever since its evolution as a separate discipline, one of the most significant development in marketing is the use of social media in marketing. Commencing as a tool for connecting the people, social media has emerged as a most potent input for the marketers, helping them in every aspect of marketing. Social media has surpassed all models of growth and with over 1.5 billion subscribers of various social media platforms, presently it has engaged over a sixth of the entire humanity. The magnanimity of numbers makes it a very potent database, which can be used for a multitude of meaningful applications, including marketing. Social media is being used for identifying customer needs, communicating and engagement with customers and helping them in recognizing and recalling the brands, influencing their purchase decision making process and post-purchase satisfaction. Recognizing the potential of this most potent tool for augmenting the effectiveness of their marketing strategies, all types of firms including the small businesses, non-profit organizations and even political parties are using this for reaching out to their target audience.

With the developments in technology, social media is no longer a medium for communication, rather it is a tool for generating large volumes of data, which is being used by the marketers to understand their markets and conduct various types of studies using big data. In India, the growth of social media has been phenomenal and within a few years of its launch, it has brought almost all the sections of the society, which hold a potent marketing potential under its ambit. It is making inroads even into the sections of subsistence level (BoP population) consumers. Social media has been seen to have potential in influencing even the rural consumers. It is even being used by the political parties to reach out to their potential voters and the recent elections have seen increasing use of social media by the political parties. Marketers of all types, big and small businesses, multinational or local firms, service industry, etc. are using it for brand building and increasing the effectiveness of their marketing efforts in persuading and influencing the consumers in their purchase decisions.

The use of social media has caught the attention of the researchers as well and its impact and use is being studied from various perspectives. There are a large number of studies conducted
abroad and now studies are being made on the Indian consumers as well. Research on social media in marketing has been done from the perspective of its impact on consumer decision making, effectiveness studies, ROI studies, data mining studies, sentiment analysis, etc. In the domain of consumer decision making, branding plays a major role in consumer purchase decision as it helps the consumer in search for alternatives. Social media has emerged as an extended medium for assisting the consumers in brand identification and recall. Further, social media also helps a consumer in getting testimony from their references, increasing the effectiveness of brands. In view of the huge usage and potential of social media in brand building and its impact on consumers’ choice of a brand, this study analyses the influence of social media on brand choice of the consumers. This chapter discusses some of the theoretical constructs, background, evolution and usage of social media and its usage in marketing.

1.2 Background – Brands and Social Media Marketing Landscapes

Brands are everywhere and influence our daily lives. Everyone aspires to certain brands. There are certain brands which people buy and obtain comfort and reassurance from the brands they associate themselves with. Infact, the brands influence the behaviors, attitudes and even the values of the people on a daily basis. With the evolution of digital media (from social networks and smartphone apps to online forums and blogs) has fundamentally changed brands and branding. The individual customer is getting stronger. Now, every small, medium and large company has their own websites, blogs, official pages on Facebook, Twitter, Youtube channels etc. They advertise their brands on it; even they display most of activities on social media platform.

Consumers want to buy products and services of popular brands. Gale (1994) defined a powerful brand as a “name that mean quality, satisfaction and value to customers”. He recommended some of the factors that helped to build a brand powerful which included knowledge of customer’s needs, providing best quality on different product’s features, overall leadership, very low cost of quality and effective positioning.

However, Aaker (1996) constructed brand identity framework which proposed four elements. These were the brand as product, brand as an organization, brand as person, and brand as a symbol. Brand as product was about the various features of product. It dealt with physical and intangible aspects of the products and how the customers felt relatedness with brands. Brand as organization dealt with innovations conducted by organization and concern for
consumers, which were the significant aspects for building a strong brand. Brand as person described as personality aspects of the brand. How a brand defines an individual’s personality, psychographic and social value. Brand as symbol dealt with symbolic aspects of the brand like logos, images, brand heritage etc. Similarly, Keller (2003) defined brand as a “name, term, symbol or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competition”.

The emergence of social media has given new perspectives to the consumers, which turned their way of communication into commercial purposes. The online users are now converted into marketers and consumers. Social media also changed the way of communication between them (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Now, consumer influence buyers through their reviews related to products or services used on social network platforms. The companies have transformed the marketing activities and approaches towards the social media. Now, every business large, medium and small is focusing on it and trying to divert attention of users to their pages existed on the various social networking sites. The consumers are also getting awareness about new brands. They recognize their favorite brands and like to discuss with the other users and brand managers about their expectations from the brand. Social media has put the consumers at the centre of business world, which needs marketers to use new set of marketing tools to integrate the consumers to their brands in very innovative manners.

Social media, today, is among the ‘best opportunities available’ to a brand for connecting with prospective consumers. Social media is the medium to socialize with consumers. It has a strong impact on the purchasing process of a consumer. The traditional buying process of a consumer includes search detail information of a brand/ product, after getting detailed information, they consider many brands and then from those brands they evaluate a few brands and in the end, the final decisions are taken according to his/her needs.

The consumers are going far from the traditional sources of advertising, such as radio and television, and they are consistently demanding more control over their media consumption (Vollmer and Precourt, 2008). Consumers require immediate and on demand access to information at their own convenience, and that’s the reason consumer are turning their ways to various types of social media to find their desired information and to make their purchasing decisions easily (Vollmer and Precourt 2008). Mangold and Faulds (2009) elucidated that people are exchanging their messages online at explosive rate. Enormous amount of online information is available on internet. That is why, social media has become a
major factor in influencing different aspects of consumer behaviour including awareness, information acquisition, purchase behaviour, opinions and post-purchase communication (Mangold and Faulds, 2009).

That’s why social media has been considered as the right medium to get right information at the right time by the consumer. Social media gives consumers high control as it facilitates the buyers to gather much more information, watch reviews, and make comparison of different products, while sitting at home. Interesting fact is that consumers perceive social media as a more trustworthy source of information regarding products and services than corporate-sponsored communications transmitted via the traditional elements of the promotion mix (Foux, 2006).

Social media is playing an important role in our daily life, as it has provided a convenient platform to connect and express with each other. According to Li et al. (2007), young generation inclined to use social networking sites. They used it several times a day. They joined social networking sites to keep in touch with their friends and family members. The young generation used social networking sites to communicate, to look for marketers’ profiles, and to show their activities to other through blogs and posts. Occasional users did not trust these websites. Evan (2008) and Weber (2009) also described various forms of social media such as forums, blogs, micro blogging, social networks, media sharing sites, virtual worlds, social bookmarking, voting sites, message boards, wikis, and podcasts. Social media played significant role in daily life of the people and their business. The social media would be employed as one of the important tool for marketing and customer support by more and more companies in the coming years because of its vast penetration and enormous growth of active users.

Similarly, Weber (2009) used the term “social web” instead of social media, and defined the social web as “the online place where people with a common interest could gather to share thoughts, comments and opinions”. It included social networks such as Gather, MySpace, Facebook, BlackPlanet, Eons, LinkedIn, and hundreds more. It involved branded web destinations like Amazon, Netflix and eBay. Enterprise websites such as Best, Cisco, Buy, IBM and Oracle are also engulfed by it. The social web is a spanking new world of free media created by individuals or enterprises on the web.
Weber (2009) also believed that social networks are places where people with a common interest or concern come together to meet people and share their interests to express themselves. Some sites are devoted specifically to image-sharing, such as Flickr, and some to video-sharing, YouTube serves 10 billion videos a month to U.S. viewers alone.

Likewise, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) describe that social media is “a group of internet based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content”. Social media can take different forms, such as social networks, Internet forums, weblogs, social blogs, micro blogging, wikis, podcasts, pictures, video, rating and social bookmarking. Again, Johansson (2010) observed the distinctiveness of social media from the traditional media, such as newspapers, TV, and films. It was found that the social media was less expansive and easy accessible to enable anyone access or publish information, as compared to traditional media, which generally required significant resources to publish and disseminate the information.

It is important to notice that social media is growing day by day. Richter et al. (2011) asserted that social networking sites attracted millions of users, becoming an integral part of their daily routines. As per, Stenovec (2015), Facebook is the largest SN with more than 1.44 billion active users in 2015, Twitter is placed second with 307 million users. In this ways, social media is growing and contributing in various ways exceptionally.

These techniques have proved to be quite cost-effective and have attracted many customers. In today’s world internet is considered as the best way to spread messages. Therefore, many companies have gained a lot from digital marketing and fans through social networking. Social Networking Websites including Facebook and Twitter which are now being used by various multinational companies in order to convey their message to the customers.

Social Media has become a major factor in influencing various aspects of consumer behavior which leads to brand commitment.

1.3 Social Networks

"People who need people" is not just a phrase, it has more relevance in our life. To live longer and healthier lives one should have friends and outside interests, this makes a difference. Everyone needs to feel supported and loved, especially as we grow older. So, people like to make good social networks. This is the emergence of social networks.
Although, social networking sites and Facebook have been studied from different perspectives such as the network structure, characteristics of the users (Bhattacharyya et al., 2011; Karl et al., 2010), usage patterns (Lampe et al., 2006), usage motivations (Joinson 2008; Raacke and Bonds-Raacke, 2008), identity management and self-presentation (Zhao et al., 2008), social interactions (Kostakos and Venkatanathan, 2010).

Social networking is the grouping of individuals into specific groups, like small rural communities or a neighborhood subdivision. Social networking is possible in person especially in the workplace, universities and high schools. The term is used to describe a social structure determined by such interactions. The ties through which any given social unit connects represent the meeting of the various social contacts of that unit. Websites are commonly used, when we talk about online social networking. These websites are known as social sites. Social networking sites work like online communities of internet users. It depends on nature or purpose of the website. Most of these online community members share common interests in religion, hobbies or politics. When you are approved to use a social networking website you can initiate to socialize. This socialisation may include reading the profile pages of other members and possibly even contacting them. Internet enables people access to interact people from all around the world. You not only make online friends from different countries, but you learn about their diverse culture.

Lea et al. (2006) described social network as a set of people, organizations or other social entities, connected by a set of socially meaningful relationship such as friendship, co-working or information exchange, and interaction to better achieve desired outcomes by sharing expertise, resource and information”.

Exhibit 1.1 : Types of Social Networks
Traditionally, when people were in offline mode, they connected with each other locally and often in small groups. With advancements in information technology in the 21st century, the traditional social networks transformed from personal and physical interactions into virtual interactions in the form of online social networks. The revolution in technology made a great impact in changing traditional social networks into online social networks. Presently, people are interacting online through web conferencing, social networking web sites, blogs, and instant messaging instead of meeting physically.

In the virtual space, there is no physical boundary associated, therefore they have the potential to become global in nature. On the online space, people can exchange any kind of knowledge from any geographical area anywhere in the world and at any time and people with common interests are creating a variety of online communities.

Social networks play an important role in exchanging social capital including financial resources, goods and service (Lea et al., 2006) and they are playing a significant role in developing social as well as business contacts. In the present times, in order to make a successful business, there is a need to establish more contacts and online social networking, which helps immensely in the growth of business. People can exchange their ideas very freely through social media. From the context of sociology, such a big social network of individual is connoted as a social capital, which defines the worth of social relations and the role of cooperation and confidence to achieve the positive outcomes. The social gaps are eased out and there can be more harmony between the social groups. Even the barriers in society by virtue of social demographics, semantics, etc. tend to be eased out because of social media. Social media can use multiple languages and people can understand what is being said on social-media.

1.4 Brief History of the Internet

The internet has transformed the computers as well as ways of communication tremendously. Internet is indeed at once a world-wide broadcasting capability. It’s a mechanism for distribution of information, as well as a means interaction and cooperation between individuals and their computers irrespective of their geographic boundaries (Leiner et al., 1997).

According to Leiner et al. (1997) and Internet Society.org, internet was started in the 1960s as a technique for US government researchers to share information. In 1960’s, computers were
large and they could not be moved from one place to another easily. If any person needed to use information stored in computer, then he had to either travel to the place of the computer or use magnetic computer tapes which were sent through the conventional postal system.

Internet has revolutionised the world of computers and made communication throughout the world very easy and cost effective. The earlier forms of computers, relying on magnetic storage devices have undergone almost complete extinction as we live in the world of cloud.

As per InternetSociety.org, during Cold War, the Soviet Union's launch of the Sputnik satellite stimulated the U.S. Defense department to consider ways information could still be disseminated even after a nuclear blast. Hence this led to the invention of ARPANET (Advanced Research Projects Agency Network), the network that finally developed into today’s internet. ARPANET was a great success but membership was limited to a few recognized research and academic organizations having sound deals with the Defense Department. In response to this, other networks were introduced to enable sharing of information.

The official birthday of the Internet is considered on January 1, 1983. Before this, many computer networks lacked a standard way to communicate with each other. A new communications protocol was invented known as Transfer Control Protocol/Internetwork Protocol (TCP/IP). This allowed different kinds of computers with different networks to “communicate” with one another.

The National Research and Education Network (NREN) was founded and the World Wide Web came into existence in 1991. Though Internet is still influenced by scientists and other academics, but begins to attract public interest. Due to the introduction of the Mosaic Web browser in 1993 and Netscape in 1994, interest in and use of the World Wide Web exploded. A large number of communities became connected leading to direct connections to the Internet. In 1995, the U.S. federal government renounced its management role in the Internet.

As soon as an individual person connects to the internet, there are a wide variety of different methods of communication and exchange of information through the network. These endless methods of communication and information retrieval are constantly changing thus making it difficult to categorize briefly. Most of these methods of communication can be used to transmit text, data, computer programs, audios, or visuals.
The most common methods of communications on the internet (along with the main online services) can be roughly grouped into six categories (Exhibit 1.2):

Exhibit 1.2: Methods of communication on internet
(source: https://www.ciec.org/trial/complaint/facts3.html)

Computer networks help in communication of information across the computers. All varieties of information, including audio, video, etc. can be communicated easily. This exhibit 1.2 shows various ways to communicate through internet. The user can interact with other with the use of any method as per requirement and convenience. In this way, internet changed the methods of communication. Anyone can choose any mode to communicate as per their conditions. We cannot think to live easily without internet. It has become integral part of our daily life.

1.5 Concept of Social Networking Sites

The concept of social networking sites is not new as many people would think. People used to create personal web pages, communicate through online chat rooms, blogs and web communities in the 1990’s. However, actual significant change came with the launch of the web site ‘frienster.com’ in 2002. After that a number of social networking sites have been established. Increase in internet access at homes, increased connectivity speed with the advent of broadband, and the ability to create personal profiles with audio and video contents are the major factors for the emergence of social networking sites.
Social networking sites allow their members to make profiles and develop a social circle online. Profiles reflect the information about the user’s date of birth, interests and hobbies, gender, hometown, marital status, profession, and what they like most to do in their free time etc (Ellison & Boyd, 2013). User can upload pictures, video and his/her favourite music to give a better appearance to his profile page. Some of the best examples of social networking sites are Myspace.com, orkut.com, facebook.com, linkedin.com, youtube.com, and bebo.com.

According to Boyd & Ellison (2007), “A social networking site is a web based service allowing people to make profiles and also express and share their views with other members on the same connection, and allow them ensure visibility of their connection to other users.”

Social networking sites have developed rapidly in the last six or seven years. People use these sites as a communication tools over the internet. It is easily accessed through PCs and smart phones. People use this medium to make contacts not just with their friends but with others as well. They write comments which are visible to their friends and to everyone. Because of the ample use of social networking sites, companies also get very interested in these sites. The companies, marketers and researchers understand that social networking sites are significant source of information about the users. These sites provide platform for different information like what they like, what they eat, where they like to eat/drink, where and with whom they are going, how they are feeling about anything etc. The companies can attract customers through advertising on these sites. However not all the companies are using social networking sites for advertising (Sawyer, 2008). “Social networking has evolved as a novel and relevant concept for business use as it enables employee communication and encourages information sharing.” It is not only helpful to get in contact with employees but also facilitates companies to reach the clients and customers effectively (Sawyer, 2008). Therefore, social networking sites can be considered a very favourable tool to remain in contact with the customers and the employees.

Today everyone can easily login to his/her social networking site from desktop, tablet, smartphones to check messages, share videos/photos, create their own blogs and comment on other’s blogs. In the late 1990’s many sites had the functions of today’s social networking sites. Friendster.com was the first social networking site which was launched in 2002, which made a big impact on people. After that emerged a wave of social networking sites. However, according to Boyd and Ellison (2007), the first social networking site was evolved in 1997. The ‘sixdegrees.com’ allowed its user to create profiles and their friends list. After Friendster.com many sites with different focus e.g. Linkedin.com (2003) for business,

### 1.6 Timeline of the launch dates of many major SNSs and dates when community sites re-launched with SNS features.

Social networking sites are online websites where people communicate easily and freely, share and discuss information about each other and their lives, by using mix of personal words, pictures, audio visuals. Individuals and groups, at these websites create and exchange content and engage in person-to-person conversations. These websites appear in various forms such as forums, message boards, wikis, microblogs, blogs, social bookmarking, writing communities, tagging and news, scrapbook and content, data, pictures and video sharing, portals, and podcast. There are plenty of popular websites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest, Google Plus, MySpace, Flickr, Blogger, WordPress, Wikipedia, LiveJournal, Wikidot, Second Life, Digg, Reddit, and many others. Boyd and Ellison (2007) presented the timeline of launch of various social networking sites also described the history of social networking sites. They highlighted the history and progress of these sites.

**Launch dates of Major Social Network Sites**

![Timeline of SNSs](image)

Exhibit 1.3: Timeline of SNSs (Source: Boyd And Ellison (2007), ‘Social network sites: definition, history, and scholarship’)
Boyd and Ellison (2007) observed that in 1997, the web had one million websites. People had started using Blog. The users had created profiles and list friends on SixDegrees.com. Instant Messenger users chat AOL had also been established.

Google opened its major Internet search engine and index in 1998. The year 2000 proved a very significant year for business and commerce, as the dot.com bubble burst and the future online seemed bleak as the business opportunities created because of Y2K had finished and the industry was struggling to develop newer products. By the year 2000, seventy million computers were connected to the Internet. Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia and world's largest wiki, was started in 2001 and Apple started selling iPods. In 2002, Friendster, a social networking website, was opened to the public access in the U.S. grabbing 3 million users in three months. The year 2003 was proved very significant year, as another social networking website MySpace and Hi5, were launched as a clone of Friendster and it was a very popular social networking site. LinkedIn was started as a business-oriented social networking site for professionals and executives. More than 3 billion Web pages were there. Apple introduced the online music service iTunes. In 2004, another social networking website, Facebook was embarked upon for students at Harvard College. It was referred to at the time as a college version of Friendster. Podcasting began on the Internet. Flickr image hosting website opened. Digg was founded as a social news website where people shared stories found across the Internet. In 2005, Facebook launched a version for high school students. YouTube also began storing and retrieving videos. Bebo, an acronym for Blog Early, Blog Often, was started as another social networking website. MySpace was the most popular social networking site in the U.S. However, based on monthly unique visitors, Facebook would take away that lead later, in 2008.

In 2006, Twitter as a social networking and microblogging site was launched, enabling members to send and receive 140-character messages popularly known as tweets. Membership of Facebook was expanded and opened to anyone over age 13. Google had indexed more than 25 billion web pages, 400 million queries per day, 1.3 billion images, and more than a billion Usenet messages. In 2007, a stake in Facebook was bought by microsoft. Facebook also initiated Facebook Platform which let third-party developers create applications (apps) for the site. Beacon advertising system was launched by Facebook, which exposed user purchasing activity. Data was sent by Beacon from external websites to Facebook so targeted advertisements could be presented. The civic action group MoveOn.org
and many others protested as it invaded privacy. Thus, Beacon was shut down in 2009. Apple released the iPhone multimedia and Internet smartphone. Facebook surpassed MySpace in the total number of monthly unique visitors in 2008. Meanwhile, Facebook tried unsuccessfully to buy Twitter. Facebook ranked as the most-used social network worldwide with more than 200 million in 2009. The site's traffic was twice that of MySpace.

There is tough competition between the Myspace and Facebook. Myspace had 57 million and Facebook increased it growth 400 million 2010. To compete with the site like Facebook or other social networking site, Google launched its own site known as Buzz with the help of other company Gmail. In the very first week, Millions of Gmail user created 9 million accounts. The population of internet user is approximately was 1.97 billion and this was accounted the thirty percentage of the total population. In 2011, with more than 550 million people on Facebook and social media was accessible from virtually anywhere and had become an integral part of our daily lives, such that 65 million tweets sent through Twitter each day and YouTube experienced 2 billion video views every day. 90 million professional users are supported by LinkedIn. Mobile social media via smartphones and tablet computers flourished along with the rise of social media commerce. Facebook reached a billion users in 2012. YouTube supports more than 800 million users each month with more than 1 trillion views per year or around 140 views for every person on Earth.

1.7 Social Media Platforms

If we think of social platforms, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn are the most common names. But there are thousands of other sites are existed. There are 5 types of social media which includes Collaborative projects (Wikipedia, Delicious, etc), Blogs, Content Communities (BookCrossing, Flickr, Youtube, Slideshare, etc.), Social networking sites, Virtual games, Virtual social worlds (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Virtual world allows people to choose their behavior in a free and essential manner thereby living a virtual life similar to their real life (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2009).

There are various categories of social media platforms. Social media includes web as well as mobile based technology that enable and encourage people to interact with anyone they want by creating profile and exchanging contents with each other. According Boyd & Ellison (2007) and Haenlein & Kaplan (2009), here are various categories of social media platforms which are shown in exhibit 1.4:
Exhibit 1.4: Various Social Media Platforms

a) **Social Networks**

Social networking websites provide online services to users to create their own profile, personal portfolios and interests. These profiles and pages are used to connect with friends, colleagues and other users in order to share media, content and combination of these. They make interactions with other users by posting status, commenting on other’s status, sharing photos and links or by other multimedia. Examples of social networks include Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+, MySpace and Bebo.

b) **Web blogs:**

Blog is the oldest and most popular forms of social media. Blogs are generally considered as online journals that arrange content chronologically, or by date, month, year and category. A Blog is a website, where blog owner write articles and posted/publish for the people to read. We can also create “vlogs,” or video blogs, which feature shared or homemade videos. Blogging websites include WordPress, Blogger and Tumblr.

c) **Microblogs:**

Microblog features short posts with few words; it is opposite to journal-style posts. Usually, users are restricted while posting a few lines of text, or uploading images and videos.
Microblogs now become very effective and influential tool among the millions of users to get information easily. Microblogging is very popular for posting quick updates and to distribute content via mobile devices. The famous microblogging sites include Twitter, Pinterest and Tumblr.

d) **Content Communities:**

Images and videos are organized, shared and commented upon by the content communities’ users. Examples of such content communities are YouTube, Flickr and scribd.

e) **Collaboration:**

Wikipedia and Wiki is the best example of collaboration or social knowledge. These websites allow a community of people to add and edit content in a community-based database. It creates a hub of knowledge to use as reference by others. For example: Wikipedia, Wikis, Quora and Answers.com.

f) **Geo-location:**

This types of social media is associated with mobile device and it establishes a user’s location. Such as people go somewhere and they want their friends to know about their location, therefore, they make check-in. A popular example of geo-location sharing is Four square. Facebook also provides this check-in facility to their users.

g) **Forums/ Message boards/apps:**

It is one of the oldest types of social media. Forums and message boards enable users to have a detailed discussion and interaction about a specific topic. Though these sites are not usually the most advanced in functionality and design, people who want to ask a question or get involved with a specific conversation online still prefer them at the first instance. Generally the forums and message boards centre around a common topic, question or industry.

h) **Live Sharing:**

A type of audio or visual sharing that is consumed by the audience at the same time as production becomes a part of Live sharing.
i) **Written/Visual Publishing:**

White papers, Blogs, presentations and eBooks are all common forms on written publishing. Publishing content that is relevant to your audience is key to building awareness, developing engagement and establishing yourself as knowledgeable in your industry.

j) **Podcasts:**

Podcasts are audio and video files available through subscription services such as Apple iTunes. Derived from "broadcast" and "pod", the term "podcast" is a neologism since Podcasts are often listened using portable media players.

People use different kinds of platforms to meet their specific needs. Whether you are exploring new potential markets for your business or looking for new ways to contact the customers, there are various types of social media one can use. Some have now become mandatory for any business.

**1.8 Internet and social media Usage**

Various statistics are available regarding the growth of internet and social media, which prove that internet and especially social media users are growing exponentially. This growth attracts various researchers, marketers and brand professionals to dig more about consumer choices and factors related decision making. Some important and wonderful statistics related to India and various major regions are given below:

**1.8.1 Internet Usage in Asia**

From the exhibit 1.5, it is clear that in 2017, there were 1938 millions users belong to Asia regions which is almost half (46.7%) of the total world’s Internet users. It shows tremendous internet usage growth in Asia.
Exhibit 1.5: Internet users in Asia – June, 2017

Exhibit 1.6: Internet Penetration in Asia – June 2017
The trend has continued and even recently, almost half of the Internet users live in Asia. However, when it comes to Internet penetration, Asia still lags from rest of the world. As per exhibit 1.6, on 30\textsuperscript{th} June, 2017, 57.8\% of the world's population had access to Internet while in Asia 46.7\% of the population had access to Internet. In India, after the launch of Jio, the access to Internet has increased tremendously.

1.8.2 Internet Users and 2017 population statistics for India

Table 1.1 shows that the number of internet users and Facebook subscribers are increasing day by day in India. But still only 36.5\% of total population of India has the facility of internet. The lack of infrastructure, education and poor financial condition may be the reasons behind it. But now government is trying to improve these problems by launching various programmes like Digital India, Skill India etc. Because of huge number of users, no one can ignore the power of internet and social media.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>Users</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>% Penetration</th>
<th>Usage Source</th>
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<td>2003</td>
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<td>2.1 %</td>
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<td>39,200,000</td>
<td>1,065,071,000</td>
<td>3.6 %</td>
<td>C.I. Almanac</td>
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<td>4.5 %</td>
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<td>3.7 %</td>
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<td>7.0 %</td>
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<tr>
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<td>8.5 %</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012</td>
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<tr>
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<td>IAMAI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>462,124,989</td>
<td>1,324,171,354</td>
<td>36.5 %</td>
<td>IAMAI</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: https://www.internetworldstats.com/top20.htm and)
The above table 1.1 shows the trends in the internet usage in India. It is growing at a very fast rate and as per reports of IAMAI, The number of internet users is expected to reach 500 million by June 2018, according to a report ‘Internet in India 2017’, published jointly by the Internet and Mobile Association of India & Kantar IMRB. According to the report, as on December 2017, the overall internet penetration is 35% of total population.

1.8.3 Top 20 Internet Countries

According a research and survey website ‘internet world stats’, exhibit 1.8 is highlighting the number of internet users (in millions) in the top 20 internet users countries. As of January, 2018, there are 772 million internet users in China. Whereas, India ranks second accounted for 462 million internet users. Thus, India has enormous scope for online businesses.

Exhibit 1.7: Top Internet user country in Asia 2018
(Source : Internet World Stats www.internetworldstats.com/top20.htm)
1.8.4 Mobile Internet users in India

This statistic shows the total number of mobile Internet users in India for the period 2015 to 2022. In January 2018, there are 358 million mobile Internet users are in India. This exhibit 1.8 is projected to increase to 493 million in June 2022. Now, it is vital for every business to develop their own mobile apps to reach to the customers and for the ease of customers. That’s why, lots of mobile app based online retail businesses are growing at a very fast pace. People are using mobile apps more than accessing websites on laptops/desktops to search, find information, compare, make choice, buy products and give reviews about the products.

![Number of Mobile Phone Internet users in India (in Millions) From 2015 to 2022](http://www.statista.com/graphic/1/558610/number-mobile-internet-user-in-india)

Exhibit 1.8 : Internet users on mobile in India (2015-2022)


These statistics has proved the broad scope of Internet and social media for brand professionals and consumer research. It has great power to influence people while making their choices about products or brands.

1.8.5 Growth of Social Media in India

The exhibit 1.10 is showing number of social network users in India from 2015 to 2022.
According a research and survey website ‘statista.com’, the growth in the usage of social networking sites in India is almost commensurate with the growth of Internet usage. As per exhibit 1.9, there will be 226 million projected social media users in 2018 and by 2022 there will be about 370 million users of social-media in India. This shows that there is huge scope of the outreach through social media and the marketers must make use of this to reach out to their prospective customers. It is a potent source of advertisements and other forms of marketing communication. Another added advantage is that through social-media, the campaign can be targeted campaign, which can be more efficient.

1.9 Advertising on Social Networking Sites

The emergence of social networking media, such as Facebook and Twitter, has propounded and offered a million possibilities for marketers. One reason why they are so effective is the ability for these social media to segment the market automatically. Consumers can customize their Facebook and social networking pages so that the information they receive is relevant to them. Marketers find it easy to reach connectors through social media networks for spreading the word of mouth and salespeople to convince others to jump on the social networking bandwagon. The 2008 presidential election was one very clear and successful example of the use of social media for marketing. The presidential election in 2008 was the first election in history where social media played a major role. A very aggressive and successful social
A networking campaign was launched by President Barack Obama. Clearly, the rise of social media forums deeply impacted the presidential election for 2008, and that trend will likely continue. Keller & Kotler (2009) observed that the rise in social media advertising also embarks upon a continued trend by marketers to establish more intimate customer-relationships. As per the digital age, more and more people in western cultures are finding new ways to connect with compatible individuals. The citizens of the developed countries are more interested in satisfying their greater esteem and self-actualization needs.

The technology is advancing at skyrocketing rate. Therefore, it has become more difficult for the marketers to predict future. The consumers are now using social media to put information about them and they also post their feedback about products or brands on it. These feedbacks and reviews on various social networking sites have become key for marketers to understand the new trends about products/services and also about new customer trends (Wright et al., 2010). However, an important question for the marketers is how can online business attract customers. Online business is simple and cost-effective and it also takes less time to setup an online store as compared to a Mall or Retail store. Still, it is very hard to attract traffic of potential customers for a website. Firms are rapidly adopting social networking advertising as their internet marketing strategy. Also ‘the users of social networking sites buy or visit the web sites recommended by other users’. Social networking tools such as wikis, blogs and virtual worlds (e.g. Second life) are used by people. However, the most effective and widely used tools are blogs and applications such as Facebook and LinkedIn (Sawyer, 2008).

1.10 Brand building through Social Media Marketing

This is the age of Social Influence. Now consumers are media-empowered which in turn help to drive sales. Now, marketers are trying to use social media to integrate online and offline media in order to create a multiplier/viral effect that would provide greater reach and strength to brand messaging. Social media is a new synergy apart from TV, and mobile also enabled the consumers to considerably influence ‘brand choice’ than to have a significant impact on traditional brand communication. Companies have databases of millions of people arranged through social media networks who have accounts on these websites across worldwide. There are sales people, marketers as well as consumers on these social networking sites. The brand consumer engagement and electric word of mouth on social media is the significant focus point for the companies.
Word-of-mouth has proved the most effective marketing tool which results in increase in both sales and brand awareness by motivating users to talk about brands/products and company. Apparently, it may have a negative impact on the brand equity, because sometimes the messages focus on the weakness of a brand/product (Sernovitz, 2009). On the other hand, word-of-mouth is a voluntary form of promotion where satisfied or disappointed consumers share with other people about their good or bad experience which is far beyond what was expected. In fact, the positive outcome or side effect of customer satisfaction is word-of-mouth, achieved by ensuring outstanding product quality and service quality like after sales service or customer care (Silverman, 2001). Whereas, the attention or time that a customer gives to a brand on the web across multiple online channels is called as ‘customer engagement’. It assumes repeated and frequent interactions between a brand and customer that strengthen the emotional, physical and psychological investment on a brand by the customers. Those repeated interactions happen through the purchase of specific product/brand. Online customer engagement involves improvement of single visit into multiple visits conversion rates on a website. It also has a long-term perspective of increasing visits or purchases (Chaffey and Smith, 2013). At last, it is obvious from the facts that the relationship of customer with a brand is determined by customer engagement, on the other hand, electronic word-of-mouth relies on the experience acquired through the online customer engagement. In other words, both concepts are complementary for successful marketing activities.

As per socialbakers.com, which deals with marketing research and digital marketing area provides statistics regarding ‘Top 10 Brands’ having millions of fans on Facebook. The data is upto January 2017. One can see how much users like these brands online.
## Table 1.2

**Top 10 Brands on Facebook, Twitter and Youtube (January, 2017)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranks</th>
<th>Brands on Facebook</th>
<th>Fans</th>
<th>Brands on Twitter</th>
<th>Followers</th>
<th>Popular Brand Channels on Youtube</th>
<th>Followers/Subscriber (in billions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Coca-Cola</td>
<td>97 245 951</td>
<td>PlayStation</td>
<td>14 929 737</td>
<td>LEGO</td>
<td>5.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>McDonald's</td>
<td>63 687 590</td>
<td>CHANEL</td>
<td>13 365 442</td>
<td>Vat19</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Red Bull</td>
<td>45 222 594</td>
<td>Xbox</td>
<td>12 366 071</td>
<td>Angry Birds</td>
<td>3.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Oreo</td>
<td>42 110 168</td>
<td>Android</td>
<td>9 989 070</td>
<td>PlayStation</td>
<td>1.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>KFC</td>
<td>40 810 329</td>
<td>Apple Music</td>
<td>9 359 000</td>
<td>GoPro</td>
<td>1.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Yo Amo los Zapatos</td>
<td>37 864 441</td>
<td>Marc Jacobs</td>
<td>9 138 038</td>
<td>Tobotyoungtous</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>PlayStation</td>
<td>37 806 586</td>
<td>Rockstar Games</td>
<td>8 934 121</td>
<td>Ninetendo</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: https://www.socialbakers.com/statistics/twitter/profiles/brands/)

The above table 1.2 shows millions and billions of users follow the various brands on Facebook, Twitter and Youtube. There are many other social networking sites which are also rising rapidly. Still, Facebook really is the game changer. It is the major player in social media marketing. Facebook actually appeals to its users to experience real-time information. It provides customers and brands greater detail as well as a platform for discussion. Facebook takes customer brand engagement at a deeper level, since user is not limited to specific character’s count, or images. One can say what he/she really wants to express. Whether it is Coca-Cola, Mc Donald or Nike, all big brands have strong presence on Facebook. These big brands have established and maintained a strong brand image among their customers, which resonates throughout their Facebook page. They try to create the most famous slogans, campaigns or advertisements on social sites, so they grab the popularity and transform it in their account cover photo, share pictures and through a popular branded hashtag. Another
effective strategy for these brands is that they have created separate pages for each of their product lines to better target their different markets.

Twitter is one of the most popular and active social sites i.e. second ranks to Facebook. It enables users a real-time conversations and fast-paced feed, which make it one of the world’s popular social networking sites for both businesses as well as individuals. As per Statita.com, there are 250 millions social media users in India out of 230 millions are active users. Facebook has over 1 billion registered users out of those 320 million approximately are active users. About 100 million users like to tweet daily. In order to achieve popularity on Twitter, brands will need to create valuable, attractive and new content. Brands post consistently, interact with their followers and good build relationships. It's no wonder social media marketers are trying to leverage Twitter for their business. They are also striving to create large and engaged followers, sometimes overwhelming at times. Customer engagement is traced by Twitter whenever a tweet is clicked. Engagement can be replies, follows, favorites, links, hashtags, username or profile clicks. Engagement helps brands to determine how interested people are in what they are posting. It shows people need or like the information brands are providing. In this way, brands are successful to engage their customers on Twitter by providing them information, replies to their queries and promote their products.

Similarly, according to Edwards (2015) from inc.com, a famous American weekly magazine about businesses and startups highlighted that YouTube ranked 2nd largest search engine as well as the 3rd most visited website worldwide, behind only Google and Facebook respectively. Approximately 33 percent of all online activities were spent to watch video content and out of that 75 percent of users visit a marketer's site after viewing a video. This trend is increasing with increased sharing of video content on the social media. About 80 percent of the internet users recall and recognise the video ads which they watch online and it is surprising that 64 percent of users are more likely to purchase a product from an ecommerce site after watching a related video. Youtube provides a great opportunity for brands to increase exposure, attention and acquire traffic. Because with the help of the videos on Youtube, brands can create a personal touch which increases the conversions. People buy from those they trust, and that trust is built by brands relating to them on an emotional level. Hence, firms find it is easy to connect with customers on Youtube as a video of explaining a product or a service will have a greater effect on a customer than just an image.
It is quite clear that brands are using various social media platforms increasingly day by day and engaging customers by their advertising, implementing content marketing strategies, organizing events & campaigns online and facilitating attractive offers on social media platforms. Customers also like to interact with the brands on social media platforms and they get immediate response to their complaints or queries. This encourages good customer relationship. Consumer’s reviews also play important role in purchase process. In a 2011 survey conducted by Lightspeed Research company in US, the reviews of other consumers on the internet were trusted by 56 percent of US consumers, whereas only 28 percent who believed the reviews on company websites trustworthy. The majority of consumers get discouraged between one and three bad reviews (62 percent) from purchasing a specific product or service (Leggatt, 2011).

The major point is that social media has provided a never-ending snowstorm of information, opinions, reviews, feedback, gossip, stories and (above all) experience and no doubts, brands/businesses have no control over it. At every stage of process of customer decision making, the other customers and users can influence brand choice, perceptions, either as passionate supporters of the brand or powerful critics.

1.11 Use of social media to influence online consumers

Now, all companies have recognised the power of digitalization, this is the reason they are creating websites, mobile apps and other e-commerce infrastructure. They have better understanding of significance of digital marketing as well as social media. Companies are investing big in maintaining IT infrastructure. India has vast digital potential. They are attracting consumers on online platforms in unique ways. Digital’s impact is becoming pervasive across all consumer segments and consumer decision-making process.

According to market research conducted by Nielsen (2010), while making a purchase decision, more than two-thirds of global internet users seek online product reviews, recommendations from discussion forums or feedback from social media sites.
Brand managers examine the interactions between consumers and brands through the lens of different online activities of the consumers. They try to engage consumers with innovative and attractive content marketing which in turn influence consumer’s decisions and actions.

Heinonen (2011) described that social media environment is comparatively easy to adopt to reach to the target audience which helps marketers to gain more customer. Customers also use social media to find whatever they look for. Social media communication has an impact on consumer’s buying decision. Also the advertising on social media page has built new consumer’s behavior. Consumers tend to make purchases or conduct business on social media. Consumers have three main gratifications or motives for using the Internet as a medium, namely, information, entertainment, and social aspects. So, consumers find everything on social media.

Recommendations by friends or connections on social media also could help consumers on decision-making. Those recommendations could help purchasing attitudes, advertising attitudes and brand attitudes. The more good responses on the products or services, the more
attractive for consumer purchasing. Most of top brands and services noticed it and started to focus on social media marketing.

According to Forbes & Vespoli (2013), consumers made recommendations on purchases, 59% of all respondents were using Facebook as their social media tool when they received a product recommendation. 37% percent of total users were using Twitter. From these results, social media has influenced their buying behavior. Consumers are purchasing either expensive or inexpensive products on recommendations from social media by their contacts or friends on social media.

The relationship between consumer decision-making and social media depict that social media affects brand attitudes, advertising attitudes and purchasing intentions of consumers. It will not necessarily affect consumer’s decision-making, but might possess a mediating effect (Yang 2012). The good image of product or brand can persuade the consumer to make decision about purchases. When friend of a consumer on social media recommends or shares products or brands on their social media, it affects consumer’s brand attitude and influences their decision-making. Yet, advertising on social media, which is provided by commercial sources affect both consumer brand attitudes and purchasing intention (Yang, 2012). From that information, it helps marketers plan their marketing strategies.

1.12 Discussion

With the developments in information technology, social media has grown by leaps and bounds. As per IAMAI (2018) India, it is expected that internet user are going be about half a billion by the year 2020 and this means they have access to digital platforms. Social media is also increasing very fast and almost three fourth of the Internet users are active on social media as well. Social media is influencing the people in many ways and they are using it as a source of information. In addition to the availability of information about the brands, the opinion and behaviour of the peers is also conveyed through the social media, which can be a very strong influencer of the consumer purchase decisions. Social media has very strong recall value and helps in brand recall and recognition and significantly contributes to brand building. Many small brands have become big through social media. Consumers are being influenced and their brand choice has an input from the social media as well. Social media is a very rich source of data for the firms and they are able to target the customers directly, as per their choices. This increases the probability of purchase of products by the customers and
hence any campaign through social media can be more efficient in terms of the achievement of the objectives. Marketers need to appreciate the scope of social media and study the degree to which it influences the brand choice of the customers. The present study aims at studying the impact of social media on brand choice.