

# How start-ups can leverage social media platforms

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Today it appears the whole world is connected. Everybody is online, posting on Facebook, tweeting, snap-chatting, updating their LinkedIn profile, posting photographs on Instagram ... and it is happening all over the world, a million times a second. Today, there are an estimated 145 million (*Statistica* journal) social network users in India, and the numbers are steadily rising. These users include high-profile public figures connecting with their fans, private individuals connecting with friends, family and colleagues, and start-ups and entrepreneurs seeking to build communities, attract potential customers and build demi-celebrity like profiles, broadcasting their progress to the world.

However, despite frequently sharing news, events and information via social media networks, many entrepreneurs fail to convert their interactions into meaningful outcomes for their business. In fact, it is a phenomenon that is observed worldwide.

Users of social media platforms need two ingredients to fuel their existence in the virtual world: the 'right mindset' and the 'right connection'. The right connection refers to Wi-Fi and bandwidth, which many take for granted, particularly in the western world. But before tackling the issue of high-quality internet connection, the mindset of users must be addressed. One big mistake social media users make is placing social media into the marketing arena. Although social media is very much part of a business marketing plan, it does not serve the same function. Marketing is about broadcasting, a one-way street of communication, promoting a business to generate sales or downloads; social media is designed for engagement. Social media

get to tell them about my great product or service?' This mindset is all about 'you', i.e. what you want to sell, what you want from the customer and what you say about yourself. Social media, however, is about the other person. Hence these thoughts ought to be: 'How can I help them? How can I engage with them? How can I offer them value? How can I become a friend?'

Social networks are an opportunity to engage with people and businesses who may not be easily accessible in the physical world. However, most users fail to see this. And larger corporations struggle to see the interactive power of social media, and continue to use it as an advertising platform alone.

Now to the issue of slow internet connectivity. Kshitij Salgunan, a tech-enthusiast and an activist, highlighted four key reasons why many users experience slow internet speed, including the low density of users who want high-speed internet at a specific location, and that most users who have slow internet are unwilling to pay more due to infrequent use. So, internet service providers are reluctant to invest in laying fibre optic cables to homes unwilling to upgrade their service plans, as the investment-to-profit ratio is too low. Finally, many of those who want high-speed internet are students or the young who have less disposable money. This emphasises the cyclical nature of the problem: a lack of demand due to the potential of the internet not being fully realised, and the potential not being realised until and unless users are able to experience all its possibilities.

The Digital India initiative seeks to improve infrastructure and provide an ecosystem where start-ups and entrepreneurs can thrive. In the social media realm, the world is increasingly small, so not being connected or experiencing a slow, intermittent connection cannot remain an option for long. Mindsets and connectivity need to be invested so

design and engagement. Social media platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter are crucial tools to help grow a business, but only when the target audience's attention has been captured and a dialogue has begun.

The opportunistic mindset of most social media users echoes marketing type thoughts, such as 'Buy my stuff because it's really good?' or 'Who can I tar-

get and connect with?'. It needs to be realised that the Indian start-up community can become world leader in entrepreneurship, innovation and technology.

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