CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction to Online Social Media

Online Social Media (OSM), popularly called Social Media, has created a complimentary universe for people around the globe, satisfying their need to connect and communicate with others in real time through a virtual world. Over the past decade, OSM has emerged as a strong tool of communication all over the world by shifting ways in which consumers select, share and appraise information (Duffett, 2015). Fast penetration of internet, decreased cost of browsing, more educated and tech-savvy people as well as sophisticated mobile technology have transformed this medium as one of the most popular and effective ways of communication not only in the developed world, but also in developing countries like India. It has given people the freedom to communicate with the outside world while sitting in the comfort of their home. The common person has been empowered with the advent of this latest form of communication and organizations cannot afford to ignore the voice of its customers when they become active in the online world of social media.

Once thought to be meant for teenagers and people in their early youth, the social media landscape has changed dramatically now, and people in the age group of 35-45 rank among the most prolific users of social media. A good number of people of age 65 and above are on various online social media sites to share information with their family and friends, and gather news. Globally people spend approximately one-third of their online time in Online Social Network (OSN) sites- one of the different types of OSM- alone (McGrath, 2016). Although with 28% internet penetration and 10% OSM penetration, India stands much below the global average of 46% and 31% respectively, Indians comprise 136 million active social media users of the global total of 2.31 billion (Kemp & We Are Social, 2016). Facebook, Google Plus, Twitter and LinkedIn have emerged as the four major OSN sites in India (Figure 1.1).

OSM sites have gained popularity not only in urban India, but in rural India as well. Usage of OSM in rural India grew by 100 per cent during 2014-15 with 25 million users in rural India. Urban India registered a relatively lower growth of 35 per cent with the total number of users at 118 million as on April 2015. The largest Indian segment accessing OSM consists of the college going students with 34% followed by young men at 27%. School going children

constitute 12% of the OSM users. College going students and young men together form the 60% of the OSM users in Urban India (IAMAI & IMRB International, 2015).
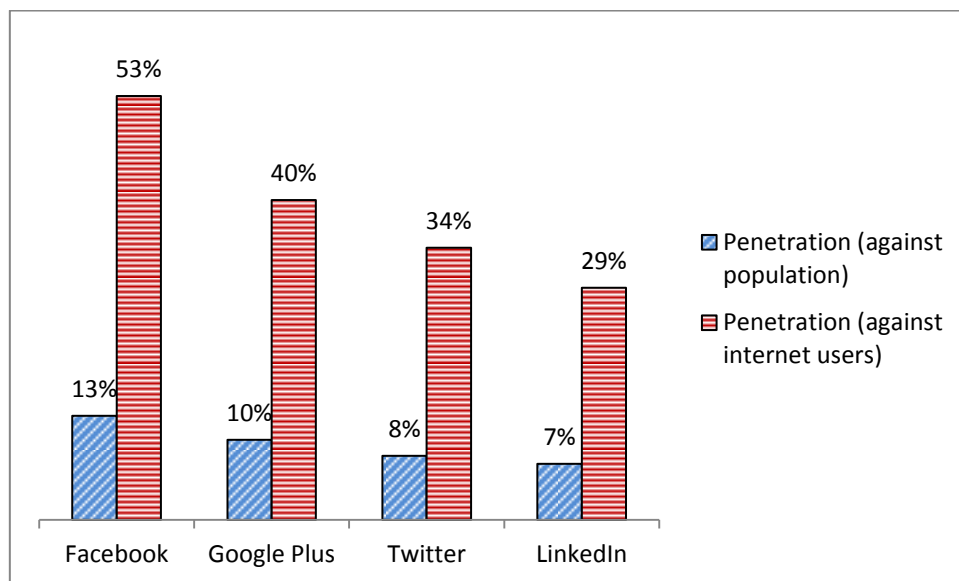

Figure 1.1: Penetration of major social media sites in India
(Naidu, 2015; Statista, 2016)

1.1.1 Online Social Media

Web 2.0 technology and User Generated Content (UGC) are two important pillars of OSM. Web 2.0 is an advanced technology which utilizes RSS Feed, Adobe Flash and AJAX to facilitate software developers and end-users in their attempt to utilize World Wide Web (WWW) for creating, publishing and modifying contents in a participative and collaborative fashion (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Creative contents of individuals, working outside their professional routines and practices, published on a publicly accessible website or on a social networking site which makes it available to a selected group of people qualify as UGC (OECD, 2007). Thus, a website of a company cannot be termed as a product of UGC, although it is available to general public, because it is created by professionals working as per their routines of work.

OSM has given common people the freedom to create their online presence and has opened the door of the virtual world to people from all spheres of life. It is characterized by the democratization of information, transforming people from passive readers to content creators and empowering them to disseminate knowledge in a many to many communication platform. Internet based applications, platforms and media which employ Web 2.0

technology to facilitate interaction, collaboration and content sharing constitute OSM. Blogs, Social Network Sites (SNS) or OSNs, video sharing sites, photo sharing sites, bookmarking tools are other examples of OSM.

History of Online Social Media

Although OSM is not a very old concept, still there have been hundreds of OSM sites around the world. Usenet created in 1979 by Tom Truscott and Jim Ellis from Duke University allowed individuals to post public messages online. This can be considered as the earliest form of OSM. Six Degrees, launched in 1997, is widely considered as the first OSN site. It allowed its users to create a profile and become friends with other users. The era of the modern age OSM started with the foundation of Open Diary by Bruce Ableson and Susan Ableson in 1998. It brought online diary writers together into a community through its website and permitted readers to add comments to another person's post.

LiveJournal became another popular OSN during the end of the twentieth century. It was built around constantly updated blogs. It encouraged its users to follow one another and interact among themselves. Blogger, developed by Pyra Labs and later bought by Google in 2003, allows private or multi-user blogs with time-stamped entries.

The launch of Wikipedia in 2001 is an important event in the history of OSM. It is considered as the largest and most popular general reference work in the internet. This collaboratively edited multilingual free online encyclopedia hosts more than 30 million articles in 287 languages.

Founded in 2002, Friendster is recognized as the first modern general OSN. However, OSM started to get more attention with the arrival of MySpace in 2003. Within the next three years, it became the most popular OSN in the world. It allowed users to completely customize the look of their profiles, post music from various artists and embed videos. LinkedIn launched in the same year is the first mainstream social network devoted to business and career. With the introduction of Photobucket and Delicious, people around the world got the taste of first major photo sharing and book marking sites respectively.

Launched in 2004, the Google owned OSN site Orkut enjoyed huge popularity for some time, while YouTube emerged as the first major video sharing site soon. Nevertheless, the world of OSM was revolutionized with the advent of Facebook and Twitter. Founded by Mark

Zuckerberg in 2004 with membership limited to Harvard students only, Facebook gradually opened to everyone above 13 years by 2006. With more than 1590 million registered users, Facebook has more people in it than any nation on earth. The most popular micro-blogging site, Twitter has over 330 million active users. Google+ is the latest OSN and is rapidly gaining popularity among businesses and common people alike.

Types of Social Media

OSM includes different forms of communication tools like internet forums, blogs, micro-blogs, wiki, photo / video / link sharing, bookmarking and rating, to name a few. Evans has identified nine different OSM based on their prominent characteristics (Evans, 2011). These are (i) Social News Sites (e.g. Digg, Reddit, NewsVine, Kirtsy etc.), (ii) Social Networking (e.g. MySpace, Facebook, Orkut etc.), (iii) Social Bookmarking (e.g. Delicious, Magnolia etc.), (iv) Social Sharing (e.g. YouTube, Flickr etc.), (v) Social Events (e.g. Eventful, Meetup etc.), (vi) Blogs (e.g. Blogger etc), (vii) Micro-blogging (e.g. Twitter, Plurk etc), (viii) Wikis (e.g., Wikipedia etc.) and (ix) Forums and Message Boards. However, with rapid change in the technology prevailing in the world of social media, the basis of this classification loses significance. For example, with more than 250 billion photos uploaded and an average of 350 million photos being uploaded daily, Facebook has emerged as the largest photo sharing site in the world (Smith, 2013).

		Social presence / media richness		
		Low	Medium	High
Self-presentation / Self-disclosure	**High**	Blogs	Social Networking Sites (eg. Facebook)	Virtual Social World (e.g., Second Life)
	Low	Collaborative Projects (e.g. Wikipedia)	Content Communities (e.g. YouTube)	Virtual Game Worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft)

Table 1.1: Classification of social media
(Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010)

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) classified OSM based on two key elements that signify it: Media Characteristics (social presence and media richness) and Social Processes (self-presentation and self-disclosure) (Table 1.1). Intimacy (closeness of relationship, signifying relationship strength) and immediacy of the medium (synchronous vs. asynchronous) are two factors that influence social presence. Varying degree of media richness leads to different amount of information being transmitted in a given time period, leading to different levels of disambiguation, which is one of the main purpose of any type of media. There are certain variations in the way self-presentation is handled by different social media. Self-presentation

allows one to project oneself consistently to others in a desired manner. In the absence of a verification process, it may give a different impression of one than his/ her real self. On the other hand, self-disclosure through conscious or unconscious revelation of oneself is required to develop a close relationship. Because of this theoretical foundation, the classification recommended by Kaplan and Haenlein gains importance.

1.1.2 Online Social Network Sites

Among the various forms of OSM, the most popular one is undoubtedly Online Social Network (OSN) Sites, also called as "Online Social Networking Sites", "Social Networking Sites" or "Social Network Sites" (SNS) etc. The term OSN broadly is used to refer to web sites that enable users to articulate a network of connections of people with whom they wish to share access to profile information, news, status updates, comments, photos, or other forms of content (Steinfield, Ellison, Lampe, & Vitak, 2012). It can be defined as a "networked communication platform in which participants have uniquely identifiable profiles that consist of user-supplied content, content provided by other users, and system-level data; can publicly articulate connections that can be viewed and traversed by others; and can consume, produce, and interact with streams of user-generated content" (Ellison & Boyd, 2013: 158). Thus an OSN site is characterised by three essential features: 1) a user-constructed public or semi-public profile, 2) a set of connections to other users within the system, and 3) the ability to view one's own list of connections, as well as the connections made by others in the system (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

OSNs are new applications and services that facilitate collective action and social interaction online with rich exchange of multimedia information and evolution of aggregate knowledge (Parameswaran, 2007). They focus on nurturing interpersonal relationships on a digital platform by adopting multiple content distribution methods (eg. XML enabled data push and streaming videos). Rapid growth of OSN sites is unparalleled among the many new forms of interaction made possible by internet.

Globally Facebook is the leader among OSNs, with more than 1590 million active users (Statistia, 2016). Facebook has been the focus of much of the research examining the impacts of OSN use (Steinfield et al., 2012). Twitter (330 million monthly active users), LinkedIn (100 million monthly active users) and Google Plus (540 million monthly active users) are other major OSN sites (Statistia, 2016).

1.1.3 Online Social Media Marketing

Although OSM has been recognized as a powerful tool in the modern management world, still there exist a lot of people who are skeptical about the efficiency of its use for productive purposes. Many people would simply ignore OSM as a passing fad for youth and teenagers. Others are apprehensive about finding their target audience through OSM. Then, there exist people who worry about using OSM properly for their businesses and fear divulging too much of personal information and losing privacy in the process. The severest challenge is posed by people who would simply stick to their proven old strategy of using conventional media for business purposes and complain that OSM destroy the beauty of communication. Some others do not see the need for having OSM because they have websites for their businesses.

All these apprehensions seem quite natural, although may lack logic. When telephone was first time used for business purposes and some companies kept on using letters to communicate with their clients, they were simply perceived as slow. OSM gives its users the power to connect with many people in less time and increases efficiency. The world of management, especially marketing, has transformed from selling to relationship building. OSM aids in this transformation process. More business can be generated through proper relationship building, which helps one to be at the top of mind of customers.

OSM cannot be ruled out as a passing fad, as its foundation lies in the basic instinct of people to communicate with others and share information with their near and dear ones. It is true that OSM started as a personal communication medium, but it is up to the businesses to efficiently use it for their own benefit.

"Digital in 2016" reports that nearly 1 in 3 of the entire world's population are using OSM, a rise of 10% from this time last year (Kemp & We Are Social, 2016). 40% of users in the age group of 16-24 use OSM sites to research on products or brands (Global Web Index, 2016). These figures put paid to talk of the 'social media bubble bursting' and bear testimony to the fact that OSM cannot be ruled out from business strategy any more.

Since people are swarming to OSM sites in droves, it is highly unlikely not to find one's prospective customer in a rightly targeted OSM. For example, Facebook users outnumber population of any country in the world. In the USA, YouTube is now more popular than traditional television (Elliott, 2014). As technology divide is waning rapidly, this trend would

not take long to catch up in other countries. Twitter has established itself as a great marketing tool with 34% of marketers claiming to have generated leads using Twitter (Pick, 2013). 52% of consumers revealed that blogs had impacted their purchasing decisions, while 57% of marketers acquired customers via their blogs (Team Visual Contenting, 2013).

As OSMs continue to gain in popularity, marketers are searching for a firm foundation to base their strategic decisions to engage and influence their customers on OSMs. With increase in importance of online social networking and social sharing behaviour among consumers, such a foundation is becoming increasingly important (Hoffman & Novak, 2012). Because of decline in usage of traditional consumer communication forms, such as print and broadcast, and decreasing share being generated by their brick-and-mortar operations, companies are seeking best practices in, what is to date, an untested consumer interaction paradigm called OSM (Naylor, Lamberton, & West, 2012).
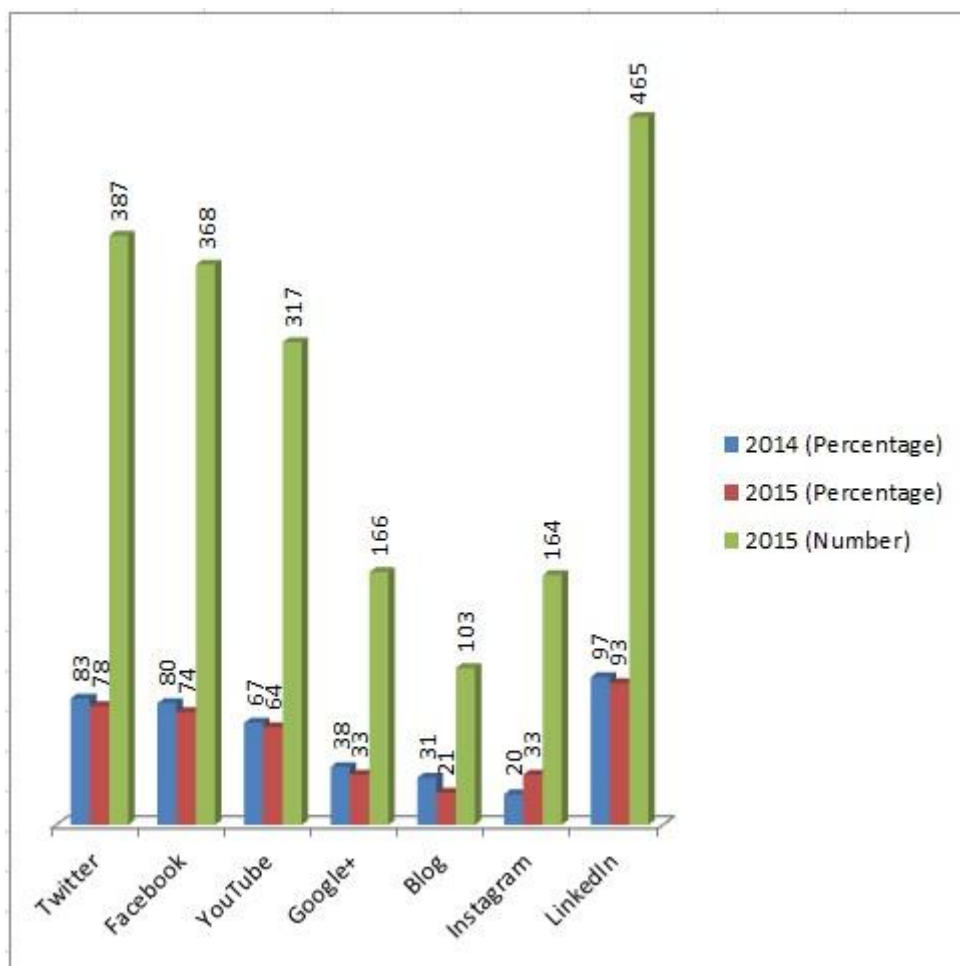

Figure 1.2: Use of social media by Fortune 500 companies
[Adapted from (Barnes, Lescault, & Holmes, 2015)]

Powered by science and technology, OSMs have come to exert great impact of commercial value (Thackeray, Neiger, Hanson, & McKenzie, 2008; Zhang & Vos, 2014), as their emergence has changed the consumers' role in storytelling from that of a passive listener to a more active participant (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). Increase in number and enhancement in popularity of OSN platforms imply that the customer is no longer limited to a passive role in his or her relationship with a company. Besides having more information about competitive products available anywhere, customers can easily express and disseminate their opinions to large audiences through personal reviews, shared recommendations and conversations with others before, during or after purchase (Court, Gordon, & Perrey, 2012), and companies may find it increasingly difficult to manage the messages about their products/services received by customers (Schultz, Malthouse, & Pick, 2012). Thus organizations are shifting their focus from traditional customer relationship management to community relationship management (CoRM) in these days ruled by Online Social Media Marketing (OSMM) for placing and creating advertisements, nurturing opinion leaders and brand advocates, developing new products, lowering cost, building brand loyalty and improving sales, as well as amplifying visibility (Ang, 2011).

By offering almost free or low-budget marketing options, OSM has emerged as the great leveller for the David and the Goliath in modern marketing space, fast replacing the earlier era of print or electronic marketing media. While Fortune 500 companies are using OSMM to a great extent (Figure 1.2), the smaller rivals are not lagging far behind. The sheer volume of consumer base actively crowding OSM daily makes this new form of marketing a coveted one, which no marketer can afford to ignore, for reaching out to new customers, communicating with the existing ones or even pleasing the disgruntled consumers by providing delightful service. In short, OSM provides different values to firms, such as enhanced brand popularity (de Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang, 2012), facilitating word-of-mouth communication (Chen, Fay, & Wang, 2011), increasing sales (Agnihotri, Kothandaraman, Kashyap, & Singh, 2012), sharing information in the context of business (Lu & Hsiao, 2010) and generating social support for the consumers (Ali, 2011; Ballantine & Stephenson, 2011).

1.2 Introduction to Online Trust

1.2.1   Conceptualization of Trust

In spite of trust being the foundation of nearly all major theories of interpersonal relationships and its great importance, a limited amount of research has examined how and why trust develops, is maintained and occasionally unravels when betrayed in relationships (Simpson, 2007). Although customer trust has gained a great deal of attention in the field of marketing during the last decade of the twentieth century and there exists a general agreement about its fundamental role in the management of market relationships, there is as yet neither complete agreement about its definition nor about its measurement (Raimondo, 2000). As a result the construct still remains somewhat "fuzzy" because of differences in the conceptualization and measurement of trust, as well as differences in the reference object of trust in the literature (Kantsperger & Kunz, 2010).

Trust may be considered as a belief in the behaviour of the counterpart to be predictable in terms of its direction and intensity, implying that future actions of the counterpart will explicitly or implicitly conform to obligations assumed. Thus, trust entails the willingness of one party to be vulnerable to the actions of the other party, on the basis of the expectation that the other one will carry out a particular action for the trustor, irrespective of the ability to control that party (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). Generally this perception of reliability emanates from experience, and more particularly from a sequence of satisfactory interactions, through evaluative processes.

Although "Trust" has been studied by different researchers from various perspectives [e.g. Behavioural/ Psychological (Colquitt, Scott, & LePine, 2007), Social / Institutional (Bachmann, 2001; Grimen, 2001), Economic: (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), Managerial / Organizational (Balasubramanian, Konana, & Menon, 2003; Jeffries & Reed, 2000; Mishra, 1996; Olson & Olson, 2000; Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998; Urban, Sultan, & Qualls, 2000), Technological (Corritore, Kracher, & Wiedenbeck, 2003; Shneiderman, 2000), Information Systems (Benbasat, Gefen, & Pavlou, 2010; Gefen, Benbasat, & Pavlou, 2008)], it was originally prevalent in the study of social psychology and sociology (Gerth & Wolff, 1950; Mollering, 2001; Rotter, 1967; Sztompka, 1999). Two prominent perspectives of study of trust emerge from these disciplines. The first one revolves around predictability of the behaviour of the subject (individual or organization) in whom trust is placed, which results

from experience-based learning process. The second one concerns the certainty as the trustee could not behave opportunistically and that his actions would be aimed to achieve joint benefits.

Interest in trust related studies arose in marketing literature in the late eighties, leading to generation of multiple research papers in the nineties (Anderson & Narus, 1990; Doney & Cannon, 1997; Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Schurr & Ozanne, 1985; Swan, Trawick, & Silva, 1985). Most of these studies view trust as a reciprocal dyadic phenomenon between organizations, or between organizations and individuals, or between individuals (Ganesan, 1994).

Some of the prominent research works on trust have been carried out by Deutsch (1960), Kee & Knox (1970), Cook & Wall (1980), Good (1988), Butler (1991), Ring & Van de Ven (1992), and Doney & Cannon (1997), which discuss few main attributes that lead to trust in general. On the other hand, Fehr & Wagner (2002), Barr (2003), Camerer (2003), Schechter (2007), Bellemare and Kroger (2007) and Ermisch et al (2009) have endeavoured to measure trust.

1.2.2   Online Trust

Apparent blessings of computer-mediated transactions may be countered by fear and anxiety brought forth by their intangible and faceless characteristics. Besides these, spatial and temporal separation between exchange partners makes online transactions more complex. Wider acceptance and usage of online transactions depend on their benefits as well as perceived risk. Trust in online transactions, the technology and the entities using the technology to offer this benefit may help in alleviating this perception of fear and anxiety to a great extent.

Online trust is defined as an attitude of confident expectation in an online situation of risk that one's vulnerabilities will not be exploited (Corritore et al., 2003). In the context of online economic exchanges, researchers have conceptualized trust as a reliance on a firm by its stakeholders with regard to the firm's business activities in the electronic medium, particularly its website (Shankar, Sultan, & Urban, 2002). Numerous research works on trust in offline settings are valuable for understanding online trust also, since both of these trust situations are rooted on exchange, hampered by fear, risk, complexity and cost. Moreover, in

both the scenario, the trustee has to prove its trustworthiness through improved reputation, performance, appearance, among others.

However, offline and online trust differ in terms of their objects of trust (Shankar et al., 2002). While the object of trust in the offline context is generally a person or an organization, in the online context technology and the organization deploying the technology are also to be considered. Considered from a marketing perspective, in contrast to traditional commerce, where the objects of customers' trust are only the sellers or the companies they represent (Doney & Cannon, 1997), customers in electronic commerce are required to trust the website, the company behind the site, and even an explanation of why the site is trustworthy (Boyd, 2003). Hence, in the context of online trust, interaction with the website replaces interaction with the salesperson in offline context. Often the unpredictable nature of internet gives rise to perception of financial and privacy related risks. To add to this, people with different levels of online experience may perceive risk and trust in the online context quite differently.

Research on Information Systems (IS) has highlighted the importance of online trust in various socially or technically complex situations, characterised by loss of control, in the context of e-Commerce (Gefen, Karahanna, & Straub, 2003), adoption of new technologies (Wang & Benbasat, 2005) and virtual communities (Leimeister, Ebner, & Krcmar, 2005). Trust in the e-vendor is important in assessing risk involved in a transaction in a business-to-consumer relationship facilitated by electronic medium (McCole, Ramsey, & Williams, 2010). Trust of consumers has a great impact on their intention to purchase online as well as actual purchase (Li et al., 2014; Ou, Sia, & Banerjee, 2007). Sondhi (2014) found that trust is one of the important considerations for different segments of online consumers.

1.2.3   Antecedents of Trust in Online Social Media Marketing

Based on studies done by various authors (Barney & Hansen, 1994; Doney & Cannon, 1997; McKnight, Choudhury, & Kacmar, 2002a; Walczuch & Lundgren, 2004), antecedents of trust can be categorized into four classes (Dutta & Bhat, 2016a): (a) cognition-based (e.g. privacy, security, system reliability, information quality etc.), (b) affect-based (e.g. reputation, third party seals, referral, recommendation, buyers' feedback, word-of-mouth etc.), (c) experience-based (e.g. familiarity, internet experience, e-commerce experience etc.) and (d) personality-oriented (e.g. disposition to trust, shopping style etc.).

It can be studied from four different levels (Kelton, Fleischmann, & Wallace, 2008): (i) individual (personality trait), (ii) interpersonal (trust placed on one entity by another), (iii) relational (mutual trust between two entities) and (iv) societal / system (trust in a community). This is quite similar to the framework put forward by McKnight & Chervany (2002), who suggested three high levels of trust, namely (i) dispositional trust, (ii) institutional trust and (iii) interpersonal trust. These different levels of trust can be treated as high level constructs, with lower order constructs having different effects on the outcomes of trust. E.g. Interpersonal trust is characterised by integrity, ability and benevolence (Gefen & Straub, 2004; McKnight, Cummings, & Chervany, 1998). Gefen and Heart (2006) showed that integrity primarily affects intentions to engage in a purchase, while ability basically affects intentions to inquire about the product without actually purchasing it. Pavlou and Dimoka (2006) showed that benevolence has a stronger effect on price premiums than ability and integrity (credibility).

Trust in multiple comparable sources may generalize to trust in the medium (Dutton & Shepherd, 2006). Thus people often refer to information obtained from Facebook, rather than from a specific user or a particular group or community in Facebook. Therefore, institutional trust refers to the mechanism in which the technology provider is trusted (e.g. Facebook or Twitter) for providing proper structural assurance to facilitate trust in the trustee which is utilizing it as the online platform (Dutta & Bhat, 2016b).

Similarly, propensity to trust or dispositional trust acts as the foundation which affects more case-specific trust situations (Merritt & Ilgen, 2008), influencing consumers' trust in internet shopping (Cheung & Lee, 2001; Lee & Turban, 2001). Although most research into trust in online environments has combined trust and trustworthiness because of difficulty in statistically separating them, not all trustworthiness dimensions are equal, and they influence behavioural outcomes in different ways.

Deriving from these earlier models, antecedents of trust in OSMM can be studied based on their sources too. This seems more logical, easier to comprehend, analyze and implement from a practitioner's point of view. It is to be borne in mind that OSMM, also called Social Commerce or s-Commerce by different authors (Zhang & Benyoucef, 2016), refers to the "exchange-related activities that occur in, or are influenced by, an individual's social network in computer-mediated social environments, where the activities correspond to the need recognition, pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase stages of a focal exchange" (Yadav et

al., 2013: 312). This definition clearly points to four vital sources or attributes of OSMM to be considered: (a) seller or online store, (b) individual's social network, (c) computer mediated social environment and (d) individual personality traits. These four sources can be referred to as perceived store characteristics, perceived structural characteristics of social media, perceived design characteristics of social media and individual characteristics. Antecedents of trust arising from these different sources may affect both interpersonal trust and institutional trust, whereas propensity to trust is one of the important components of individual characteristics.

1.2.4   Outcomes of Trust in Online Social Media Marketing

Every marketer aims for engaged customers in believing their brands, purchasing from them and supporting the marketer's brand both individually and among or with other consumers (Schultz & Peltier, 2013). High e-Trust is more likely to germinate into positive word-of-mouth in online retailing (Cater & Zabkar, 2009; Mukherjee & Nath, 2007). Marketers have unique opportunities to enhance engagement and word of mouth through their social media marketing campaigns (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010b).

Although many marketers believe that OSMM should be primarily used for increasing popularity of their brands through enhanced engagement (Divol, Edelman, & Sarrazin, 2012), researchers and practitioners alike have termed this as short-sighted, if not downright detrimental, to the brand owners (Nelson-Field & Klose, 2010). A 2014 report by Ernst & Young found that success of OSMM strategy is largely measured by engagement and social reach (Ernst & Young, 2014). On the other hand, another report claimed that 29% social media marketers insist on driving conversion by attempting to reach more consumers and increasing sales volume with the help of their marketing efforts (Shively, 2015). Thus, outcomes of trust in social media marketing may be majorly studied from the point of view of intention to purchase and intention to spread word of mouth, mostly of electronic nature.

1.3 Research Problem

Researchers and marketing executives have claimed that internet commerce has reduced the advantage of large and reputed online stores, compared to the new ones (Watson, Akselsen, & Pitt, 1998) and has created a level playing field. By providing free or low cost accounts, option for efficient marketing at reduced expenditure compared to click-based traditional paid internet marketing and avenue for fast communication with target consumers through virtual

communities, OSMM or s-Commerce has empowered even small online stores to compete strongly against their bigger rivals (Gramigna, 2015). Thus, stimulating the target segment with right message in the appropriate OSM becomes critical in order to achieve business goals of these organizations. Undoubtedly, achieving trust of the consumers can act as a vital factor in realization of these goals.

Until now, most of the organizations have been using OSMM as an extension of their conventional marketing activities to derive certain benefits (Figure 1.3). Thus, their brand pages would primarily redirect consumers to the company websites, offer sneak peek of the latest inventory, distribute discount coupons, or at best facilitate customers to know the work environment of their preferred brands. But the major OSM sites, like Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram etc. have already started rolling out direct sales options from within their social networks (Lorenze, 2014; Sorokina, 2015). In these circumstances, companies need to look back to the basics of OSMM to reap full benefit of this powerful media. The rise of OSMM was predominantly aided by availability of trustworthy recommendations from general consumers. Hence, in the next few years, the battle in the social media space will be won by those organizations which earn consumers' trust and turn them into loyal evangelists.
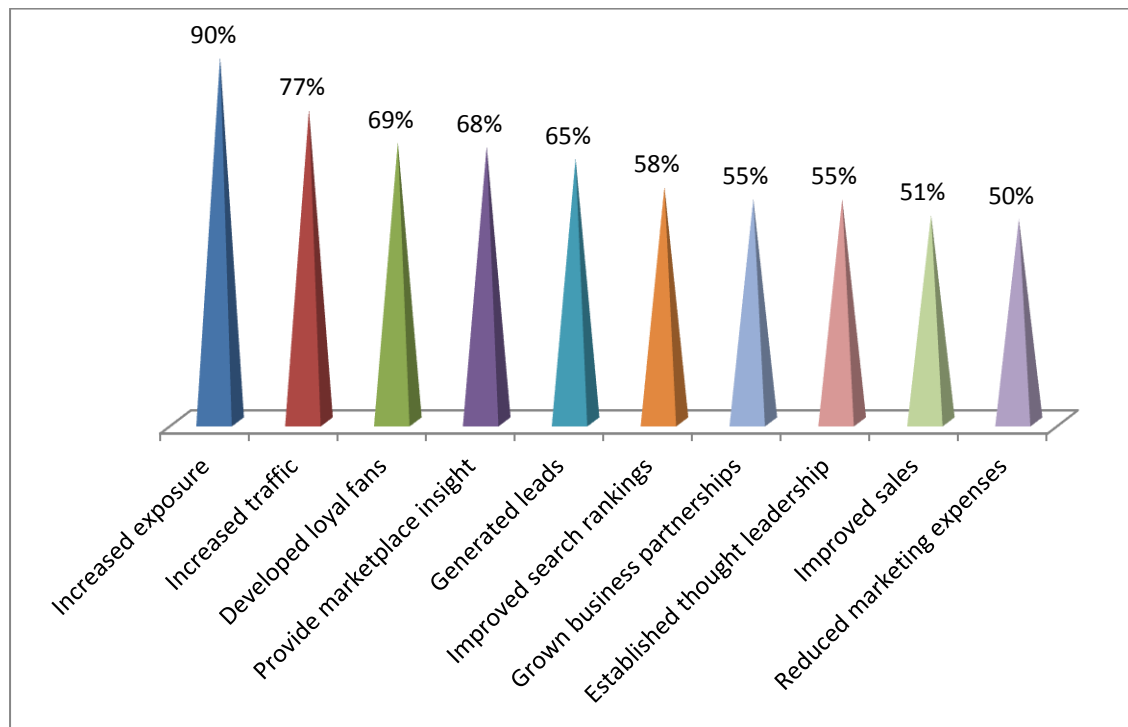

Figure 1.3: Perceived benefit of OSMM: Organizational perspective
(Stelzner, 2015)

Therefore, marketers need to understand which factors motivate consumers to trust their online social media marketing efforts and how trust in their social media marketing efforts impact expected organizational outcomes, especially with reference to intention to spread electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) and intention to purchase.

1.4 Objectives of Research

Based on the research problem identified and the definition of OSMM provided by Yadav et al. (2013), which focuses on three pertinent attributes of OSM related to individual, social network and computer mediated social environment, the objective of the research is outlined in three different steps:

- To determine the relationship between Online Social Media (OSM) attributes with trust of OSM participants
- To determine the relationship between trust of OSM participants with marketing outcomes
- To develop and validate a conceptual model depicting the role of trust in Online Social Media Marketing (OSMM).

A crude conceptual model to depict the objectives of research undertaken is illustrated in Figure 1.4.

Figure 1.4: Primitive model depicting objective of research

1.5 Outline of Thesis

Chapter 1: Introduction

The first chapter provides a brief overview of OSM, its history and growth. This chapter also introduces the concept of online trust, various antecedents and outcomes of online trust. It identifies the research problems and outlines the research objectives of the thesis. Thus this chapter provides the basic foundation for further studies in a lucid language.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The second chapter provides a succinct literature review on trust, especially in the online context. Some of the models put forward by earlier researchers are also described in this chapter. Importance of trust in the context of OSMM is elaborated and research gaps are identified.

Chapter 3: Proposed Conceptual Model and Hypothesis Development

The third chapter introduces antecedents and outcomes of trust in OSMM, which follow from a brief qualitative study and are backed by existing literature. Thus, the related literature on the antecedents and outcomes of trust in the context of OSMM considered in the thesis are described and hypotheses are formed. A corollary study is also mentioned in this chapter, which complements the primary focus of the thesis. Conceptual models for both the primary and corollary studies are provided in this chapter.

Chapter 4: Research Design and Methodology

This chapter elaborates on the rationale behind choosing the statistical technique for evaluation of the proposed conceptual models. Data analysis procedure is described in brief. Data collection process and analytical strategy adopted for the measurement are also elaborated in this chapter.

Chapter 5: Data Analysis and Discussion

The fifth chapter illustrates the data analysis in detail for each set of investigation. Three sets of investigations are performed for three identified sets of antecedents of trust. The chapter also illustrates the result of a comprehensive analysis which combine all the antecedents and outcomes of trust in a single model. Besides these, the corollary study is also reported in this chapter. Each analysis ends with a brief discussion to describe which hypotheses were accepted and which could not be accepted.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Future Scope of Research

The last chapter provides a brief overview of the research and its design. It reviews the research questions and briefly describes the findings. The academic and managerial implications of the findings are discussed in detail in this chapter. It ends with description of limitations of the present research and scope for further studies.

Because of its high popularity and characteristics related to self-presentation as well as media richness, four major OSN sites (Facebook, Google Plus, LinkedIn and Twitter) have been considered as representative of OSM in the thesis. This has been done with the objective to achieve a more parsimonious view and better understanding of OSMM. Thus, OSM and OSN are used interchangeably in many places in the thesis, although the studies were specifically conducted in the context of OSN. These OSN sites provide the channels and format for marketing through them. OSN sites may vary in their characteristics to provide options for customization. However, the four OSN sites considered in this thesis are very similar in their structure and format.

Various studies pertaining to this thesis work were carried out in the context of online retail stores. Thus, online retail stores have been taken as the representative of various "organizations" which use OSMM. This has been done basically for two reasons. Online retail sales are increasing rapidly in India (Lee, Paswan, Ganesh, & Xavier, 2009). It is fast becoming main-stream with increasing number of retailers offering their merchandize through online channel along with traditional brick and mortar stores (Thakur & Srivastava, 2015). Moreover, approximately 75% of internet users in India are school-aged or college students or youth (Khare, 2016). Therefore, surveys done for various studies were conducted on students. Again, e-Commerce is increasingly becoming the chosen retail format with young consumers regardless of geographic constraints (Sondhi, 2015). Hence, online retail stores emerge as very important business format for consideration, which match perfectly with the target market of OSMM as well as the respondents of various surveys for studies in this thesis. Therefore, online stores and organizations are many a time used interchangeably in this thesis.