CHAPTER – VI

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the qualitative and quantitative analysis and interpretation of data, the following inferences which may be generalized to the population may be drawn:

1. Indian Internet users greatly value the medium for its unique and unparalleled Medium Salience (defined as unique, salient characteristics, benefits and advantages of the medium, i.e. the Web), get frustrated by slow speeds and aspire for Broadband Navigation (as everybody values their time and want better service), positively influenced by its superior Advertising Salience (defined as unique, salient advertising characteristics of the Web), fascinated with its Magnetic Charm (defined as exciting, interesting and appealing nature), leading to Reduced Traditional Media Usage, challenged by Safety Concerns (unique to the medium), emancipated with the benefit of Unshackled Wings (i.e. with the loss of identity), concerned about Domain Name Issues, impressed by its Level-Playing Field and being a Better Promotion tool than Traditional Media and highly appreciative of its benefit of Consumer Empowerment.

2. Media Professionals awe its invaluable Marketing Power (defined as better brand management and marketing communication/promotion), value its utility of Brand Attachment (defined as reinforcing brand loyalty/commitment/values and better diffusion of information between company and consumers and vice-versa and among consumers) with
consumers, advocate **Indispensable Online Presence** of all businesses, admire its **harnessing power** of **Word-of-Mouth Communication**, caution against consumers' **Privacy Concerns** and stress about the **Domain Name Importance** (as the website's name/address is the brand here!) from the point of view of consumers.

3. A co. that has developed a great online consumer experience is only part-way to achieving successful Web marketing outcomes. Just like a trade fair, where many co.'s at different stands promote their products and services; effective promotion and achieving **visibility** of the stand is necessary to attract some of the many show visitors to the stand. Similarly, if a marketer wants to maximize quality visitors within a target audience to a web site to acquire new customers online, Web marketers have to select the **appropriate online and offline marketing communications techniques**. This is a major challenge since there are tens of millions of web sites with many pages, each vying to attract an audience (e.g. Google indexes over 20 billion pages).

4. The main objectives and tactics of developing an interactive marketing communications programme for Web marketing should be to:

   (i) Use **online and offline promotion** to drive quality visitors or traffic to a web site

   (ii) Use on-site communications to deliver an effective, relevant message to the visitor which helps shape customer perceptions or achieve a required marketing outcome through **conversion marketing** (using marketing communications to maximize conversion of potential customers to actual customers).

   (iii) **Integrate all communication channels** to help achieve marketing objectives by supporting **mixed-mode buying** (where the
customer's purchase decision is influenced by a range of media such as print, TV and Internet).

5. Only through understanding the key interactive communications characteristics enabled through digital media, marketers can exploit these media while guarding against their weaknesses. Traditional media such as print, TV and radio are push media, one-way streets where info. is mainly unidirectional, from co. to customer unless direct response elements are built in. In contrast, the web is an example of pull media. It is a strength and its biggest weakness. It is a strength since pull means that prospects and customers only visit a web site when it enters their head to do so, when they have a defined need – they are proactive and self-selecting. But this is a weakness since online pull means marketers have less control than in traditional communications where the message is pushed out to a defined audience. What are the e-marketing implications of the pull medium? First, marketers need to provide the physical stimuli to encourage visits to web sites. This may mean traditional ads, direct mail or physical reminders. Second, marketers need to ensure their website is optimized for search engines – it is registered and is ranked highly on relevant keyword searches. Third, e-mail is important – this is an online push medium and it should be a priority objective of web site design to capture customers' e-mail addresses in order that opt-in e-mail can be used to push relevant and timely messages to customers.

6. Creating a dialogue through interactivity is the next feature of the web site and digital media such as mobile and interactive TV which provide the opportunity for two-way interaction with the consumer. This is a key distinguishing feature of the medium and the interactive benefits of the Web should be used as a means of developing long-term relationships with customers. E.g., if a registered customer requests info. or orders a particular product, it will be possible for the supplier to contact them in
future using e-mail or personalized web messages with details of new offers related to their specific interest. But digital dialogues have a less obvious benefit also – intelligence. Interactive tools for customer self-help can collect intelligence – clickstream analysis recorded in web analytics can help marketers build up valuable pictures of customer preferences.

7. Traditional push communications are one-to-many, from one co. to many customers, often the same message to different segments and often poorly targeted. With digital media 'one-to-some' – reaching a niche or micro-segment becomes more practical – e-marketers can afford to tailor and target their message to different segments through providing different site content or e-mail for different audiences through mass-customization and personalization. It should be noted that many brochureware sites (in which a co. simply transfers or 'migrates' its existing paper-based promotional literature on to the Web without recognizing the differences required by this medium) do not take a full advantage and merely use the web to replicate other media channels by delivering a uniform message.

8. Potentially digital media provide a one-to-one communication (from co. to customer) rather than the one-to-many communication (from co. to customers) that is traditional in marketing using the mass media such as newspapers or TV. This change is significant enough to represent a new model for marketing or a new 'marketing paradigm'. The Web represent a computer-mediated environment in which the interactions are not between the sender and receiver of info., but with the medium itself. In the words of Hoffman and Novak, "the consumers can interact with the medium, firms can provide content to the medium and in the most radical departure from traditional marketing environments; consumers can provide commercially-oriented content to the media". This potential has not yet been fully developed since many co.'s are still using the Web to provide
standardized info. to a general audience. Despite reference to the new paradigm, it is still important to apply tried and tested marketing communications process to the Web environment. However, some opportunities will be missed if the Web is merely treated as another medium similar to existing media.

9. New media also enable many-to-many communications. Here customers can interact with other customers via a web site, in independent communities or on their personal web sites and blogs. The implications of many-to-many communications are a loss of control of communications requiring monitoring of info. sources. Digital media are also intense media – they are lean-forward media in which the web site usually has the visitor's undivided attention. This intensity means that the customer wants to be in control and wants to experience flow and responsiveness to their needs. First impressions are important. If the visitor to a site does not find what (s)he is looking for immediately, whether through poor design or slow speed, visitor(s) will move on, probably never to return.

10. In addition to offering the opportunity for one-to-one marketing, the Web can be and still is widely used for one-to-many advertising. On the Web, the brand essence and key concepts from the advertiser arguably becomes less important and typically it is detailed info. and independent opinions the user is seeking. The web site itself can be considered as similar in function to an advertisement (since it can inform, persuade and remind customers about the offering, although it is not paid for in the same way as a traditional advertisement). The web is essentially a mix between advertising and direct selling since it can be used to engage the visitor in a dialogue. Constraints on advertising in traditional mass media such as paying for time or space become less important. Consumers are looking for info. online all the time, so advertising in search engines in short
campaign-based bursts is appropriate for most co.'s – continuous representation is needed.

11. Web communication is differentiated from communication using traditional media in four different ways. First, communication style is changed, with immediate or synchronous transfer of info. through online customer service being possible. Asynchronous communication, where there is a time delay between sending and receiving info. as through e-mail, also occurs. Second, social presence or the feeling that a communications exchange is sociable, warm, personal and active may be lower if a standard web page is delivered, but can be enhanced, perhaps by personalization. Third, the consumer has more control of contact and finally the user has control of content, e.g. through personalization facilities.

12. As Hoffman and Novak (1996) point out that with the Web the main relationships are not directly between sender and receiver of info. but with the web-based environment, the classic communications model of Wilbur Schramm (1955) can still be used to help understand the effectiveness of marketing communication using the Web. Four of the elements of the model that can constrain the effectiveness of Web marketing are:

(i) encoding – this is the design and development of the site content or e-mail that aims to convey the message of the co. and is dependent on understanding of the target audience;

(ii) noise – this is the external influence that affects the quality of the message; in Web context this can be slow download times, the use of plug-ins that the user cannot use or confusion caused by too much info. on-screen;
(iii) *decoding* – this is the process of interpreting the message and is dependent on the cognitive ability of the receiver, which is partly influenced by the length of time they have used the Web;

(iv) *feedback* – this occurs through online forms and through monitoring of on-site behaviour through log files.

13. If we consider advertising and PR, with traditional media, increase in communications intermediaries occurs through a potentially large no. of media owners such as owners of TV, radio channels and newspaper and print publications such as magazines. In the Web era, there is a vast increased range of media owners or publishers through which marketers can promote their services and specifically gain links to their web site. Traditional radio channels, newspapers and print titles have migrated online, but in addition there are a vast no. of *online-only* publishers, including horizontal portals such as search engines and vertical portals such as industry-specific sites. The concept of the *long tail* (i.e. a frequency distribution suggesting the relative variation in popularity of items selected by consumers) also applies to web sites in any sector. There are a *handful of key sites*, but many others can also be used to reach customers. Online marketer needs to select the *most appropriate* of this *plethora* of sites which customers visit to *drive traffic to their web site*.

14. Although new media have distinct characteristics compared to traditional media, it does not follow that marketers should concentrate their communications solely on digital media. Rather marketers should *combine* and *integrate* traditional and digital media according to their strengths, to achieve *synergy*. Most of the people still spend most of their time in the *real* world rather than the *virtual* world and *multi-channel* customers' *journeys* involve both media, so *offline promotion of the proposition of a web site is important*. It is also important to support *mixed-mode* buying. E.g., a customer wanting to buy a computer may see a TV ad for a certain
brand which raises awareness of the brand and then see a print advert that directs them across to the web site for further info. However, the customer does not want to buy online, preferring the phone (e.g. toll-free numbers), but the site allows for this by prompting with a phone no. at the right time. Here all the different communications channels are mutually supporting each other. Similarly inbound communications to a company need to be managed and are crucial to the health of a brand. E.g. if the customer needs support for an error with their system, they may start by using the on-site diagnostics, which may not solve the problem. They then ring customer support. This process will be much more effective if support staff can access the details of the problem as previously typed in by the customer to the diagnostics package.

15. Evaluation of the differences between traditional and new media for advertising is necessary in order to select the best media for promoting the online presence. A few observations can be made regarding effectiveness:

(i) **Reach of media**: Access to the Internet in many developed countries has exceeded 50% indicating that the Web is now a mass medium, but there are a significant "digital have-nots" that don't have access and cannot be reached via this medium. The reach also varies markedly by age and social group, so the Web is inappropriate for reaching some groups.

(ii) **Media consumption**: Most consumers spend more of their time in the real world than the virtual world so it follows that digital media may not be the best method to reach them. However, a counter-argument to this is that they often involve specific customer journeys related to product research or purchase.

(iii) **Involvement**: Use of the Web has been described as a 'lean-forward' experience, suggesting high involvement based on the interactivity and control exerted by web users. This means that the user is receptive to content on a site. However, there is evidence
that certain forms of graphic advertising such as banner adverts are filtered out when info. content is sought. A study of online newspaper readers (www.poynter.org/eyetrack2000) found that text and captions were read first, with readers then later returning to graphics.

(iv) **Building awareness**: It can be argued that because of the form of their creative, some forms of offline advertising such as TV are more effective at explaining concepts and creating retention.

16. In common with other communications media, the Web will be most effective when it is deployed as part of integrated marketing communications (i.e. the concept under which a co. integrates and coordinates its many communications channels to deliver a clear, consistent message about the organization and its products) approach. The characteristics of IMC may be summarized as the 4 Cs of:

(i) **Coherence** – different communications are logically connected.

(ii) **Consistency** – multiple messages support and reinforce and are not contradictory.

(iii) **Continuity** – communications are connected and consistent through time.

(iv) **Complimentary** – synergistic or the sum of the parts is greater than the whole!

17. The 4 Cs also act as guidelines for how communications should be integrated and can be usefully applied to Internet marketing, which are:

(i) Communications planning is based on clearly identified marketing communications objectives.

(ii) Web marketing involves the full range of target audiences (i.e. customer segments plus employees, shareholders and suppliers).

(iii) Web marketing should involve management of all forms of contact, which includes management of both outbound
communications such as banner advertising or direct e-mail and inbound communications such as e-mail enquiries.

(iv) Web marketing should utilize a *range* of promotional tools.

(v) *A range of media* should be used to deliver the message about the web site. Marketers need to consider the most effective mix of media to drive traffic to their web site. The different techniques can be characterized as traditional offline marketing communications or new online communications. The objective of employing these techniques is to acquire new traffic on an e-commerce site and can also be used to drive customers to a site for retention.

(vi) The communications plan should involve careful selection of *most effective promotional and media mix*.

18. On the Web, *usability* is a necessary condition for survival. The audience shall *leave* the website if the website is difficult to use, if the *homepage* fails to clearly state what a company offers and what users can do on the site or if users get lost on a website or if a website’s information is hard to read or doesn’t answer users’ key questions.

19. Web marketers must ensure that the *user interface* of the site is *learnable, memorable, error free, efficient* and gives *user satisfaction*. Usability in website design incorporates testing and evaluation to ensure the best use of navigation and links to access information in the shortest possible time.

20. Lastly, unless a website meets the needs of the *intended* users it will not meet the needs of the organization providing the website. Website development should be *user-centred*, evaluating the *evolving* design against user requirements.