
THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING ON CONSUMER BRAND PREFERENCE IN TIRUCHIRAPALLI DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

Traditional business methods do not appear to suit in today's Internet and Smartphone-driven environment. As a result, it is critical to create a marketing strategy that incorporates social media and networking. Social media is now an important element in the marketing and promotion mix of enterprises. Online marketing through social networking sites has been adopted and welcomed by all businesses. This marketing strategy has proven to be more effective in industries where regular trend shifts have been noticed. Brands not only utilise social networking platforms to market themselves, but they also allow people to engage with them. Consumers also support brand evaluation and selection. Users prefer the brand pages because they can get notifications and exchange information about new things, deals, and freebies, as well as participate in brand discussions. They are also searching for product/brand reviews that other customers have purchased. Social media is a revolutionary new disruptive movement that should pique the interest of internet businesses. According to the survey, there are several reasons for using social media, and social media is becoming increasingly involved today. The growing relevance of social media marketing cannot be overstated, since it contributes significantly to customer brand preference. As a result, the suggested research activity sought to examine the impact of social media marketing on brand awareness and purchasing decisions.

Keywords: Social Media, Brand Preference, Consumer Support, Online Business, Sales Promotion Etc.

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INTRODUCTION

High-competition businesses must stay current in the new technological landscape to manage the challenges given by consumer demand trends and prevent obsolescence risks. Traditional business methods don't appear to work in the Internet and smartphone-driven world of today. Therefore, it's crucial to create a marketing strategy that incorporates networking and social media. Social media is becoming a crucial component of a company's marketing and promotion strategy (Usharani & Gopinath, 2020a). Social networking site-based online marketing has been adopted and welcomed by all businesses. This marketing strategy has proven to be more effective in sectors of the economy where regular trend shifts have been noted.

A growing and inevitable market is social networking. Social media is seen by businesses as a marketing opportunity to cut out the conventional middlemen (traders, dealers, wholesalers, and retailers) and create direct relationships between brands and customers (Gopinath, 2019a). Because of this, almost every company in the world, from large corporations like Reliance Trends & Genpact to independent coffee shops, is looking for social media marketing strategies to use in their advertising campaigns. Regarding a year ago, the organisation had a lot of questions about social media. But things have significantly changed now, and businesses quickly adopt SMM. The expansion of internet access for the nation's inhabitants is anticipated to increase at the same rate as the internet SMM revolution, which began in the early 1980s (Karthick et al., 2020a). With the advent of 4G, it is now more convenient for people to participate in social networking on their smart phones, and businesses are exploiting this to market their products on social media.

With the emergence of smart phones and affordable data plans, social media, which was first introduced through blogs, has increasingly impacted the company's mobile app market and has become the "greatest opportunity" for a firm to engage with its potential clients. Social media increase client engagement by interacting with them directly and providing tailored solutions to their requirements (Gopinath, 2019b) according to the phrase "the medium to socialise." SMM has made consumers' and marketers' life easier and more efficient. Social media puts what you desire at the tips of your fingertips. This is what a marketers seeks, and they may use social media to advertise their items to a wide range of potential customers, including those who are already interested in similar goods and services (Usharani & Gopinath, 2020b). Companies and their marketing departments are observing trends and are thus starting to take advantage of new chances in the social media industry much more quickly (Gopinath, 2019c). "The latest motto for most brands since the beginning of 2011 has been social media marketing." If their competitors dominate social media with their products and services, brands who do not place themselves in these channels cannot succeed. This SMM is developing quite quickly. The MNC referred to social media promotion as a potent marketing niche and exploited this SMM channel to strengthen its SMM marketing activities (Karthick et al., 2020b).

The use of social media in commercialization is one of the most significant developments in marketing since it emerged as a distinct science. Social media, which began as a tool to connect people, has evolved into the most effective form of feedback for marketers, assisting them in all facets of marketing (Kavitha & Gopinath, 2020). The volumes have a great deal of power and can be applied to many worthwhile tasks, including marketing. Social media is used to understand customer demands, engage with customers, help them remember things, and affect both their purchasing decisions and post-purchase satisfaction.

All types of businesses, including small businesses, non-profit organisations, and even political parties, use this most potent instrument to boost the effectiveness of their marketing strategies in order to reach their target audiences (Gopinath, 2011).

Because it helps people look for alternatives, branding is important in the area of consumer decision-making. Social media is a potent knowledge source that involves users and influences both their cognitive and behavioural characteristics as an expanded channel to assist buyers recognise brands and brand recall. According to opinions on social media's impact on brand preference, it impacts consumers' brand preferences and, as a result, their purchasing behaviour. Extended and simple channels give marketers a platform for brand interaction while also successfully reminding and acknowledging users. Social media facilitates word-of-mouth marketing and is a quick and effective tool for building brands through the unrestricted exchange of information, opinions, and other brand-building materials (Gopinath & Kalpana, 2019) FF. Due to the convergence of cognitive elements across all demographic groups as a result of this independence, marketing interaction strategies on social media are supported. It is also a goldmine of information for consumers, available to gather data on consumer behaviours, demographics, and other data that may include data on the targeting, segmentation, and placement of products. Due to their significance, an increasing number of businesses rely on social media to build their brands and have quantifiable success.

According to the report, there are many diverse motivations for utilising social media, and its use is growing. Another indication of its use is the younger generation in particular. Social media can significantly affect how people think and behave depending on the amount of time spent, the purpose for using it, and its wider use. Many social media platforms exist, including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, YouTube, Pinterest, and more. They individually attract users' attention and have unique USPs. Facebook is the platform that the vast majority of responders use the most frequently. Today, there is a growing tendency in social media for business connections. For example, LinkedIn is a platform for business networking, and professionals are more likely to use it from a professional standpoint.

A more intriguing development in social networking is the use of platforms to create content, and YouTube is a well-known example of this. It is widespread because it enables the uploading and sharing of videos that may be utilised for advertising and publicity. Even if a platform has been created for sending brief messages, Twitter frequently grabs users' attention. Although celebrities and politicians have utilised it more than the regular person, everyone now has the same account. It offers a respectable platform for forming opinions, rising to fame, and laconically expressing opinions. It might serve as an alternative forum for expression.

Since people enjoy taking and clicking on images, Instagram is also becoming more popular. They now regularly post pictures of their daily activities. Instagram allows you to upload high-quality photographs after editing. It is also used to build business websites, and a lot of famous people have profiles there. Technologically savvy people express their ideas on blogs, and the study found that roughly 1/6 of respondents have blogs or are active blog readers. Users share blogs via other social media platforms after they are published.

Digital marketing has altered as a result of how businesses and organisations now carry out their marketing campaigns. Digital marketing is now dominated by social media marketing, which has become the most effective and influential method of marketing and communication. An increasing number of clients use the internet and social media in their online buying operations. Consumer brand selection and brand-related behaviours are becoming more prevalent today. Customers' brand preferences are mostly impacted by the variety of marketing and communication strategies used by a given company. The brand's social media marketing initiatives aid in attracting new clients and converting them into actual customers.

These customers are then motivated to spread the word about the brand and tell their friends about their positive or negative brand experiences. Marketing brands can be challenging because loyal consumers come from the culture.

To the degree that the target market has chosen the brand and purchases have been made. Because social media marketing significantly influences customers' brand preferences, its growing significance cannot be understated. The planned study project thus aimed to evaluate the impact of social media marketing on brand perceptions and purchasing decisions.

Social media is a constant part of life and a means of disseminating thoughts, feelings, and ideas to a wider audience, which is implied. It promises to be an effective instrument for attracting potential clients and has great potential and speed in reaching others. Social media has ingrained itself into daily life, and many people visit these sites every day or every week. User involvement is growing as social media usage increases. According to the report, the majority of consumers utilise various social media platforms several times every day. Users frequent social networking sites frequently because they provide seamless connection, and this increased dedication influences their behaviour and thought. The amount of time individuals spend on social media demonstrates how committed they are to the same activity.

This study focused on social media users in the Thiruchirapalli district with the intention of examining and examining the impact of social media marketing on customer brand preference. Examining which social media platform and brand-related activities have the most impact on customer preferences and purchasing behaviour is another goal. This study focuses on the factors that influence purchasing decisions and how social networking sites can be extremely helpful in promoting a business.

STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The researcher reviewed several studies in the literature on "The Effect of Social Media Marketing on Customer Brand Preference" that were carried out by numerous researchers from different locations. The effect of social media marketing on consumer brand preference, particularly among social media users in the Thiruchirapalli district, has not, however, been the subject of any study. Because of this, the researcher decided to do study in Thiruchirapalli district, and the result is a report titled "Exploring the Impact of Social Media Marketing on Customer Purchase Decision: A Study on Social Media Users in Thiruchirapalli district."

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Customers and users from the Thiruchirapalli district who are signed up on at least one social networking site are the focus of this study. In this study, the customer behaviour perspective is used to examine subjects like the extent of their social media engagement, their attitudes toward and interpretations of social media networks, the relative importance they place on various forms of social media, brand contact behaviours, traits, and attitudes. According to this study, a business's integrated marketing messaging plan should include social media marketing tactics and characteristics because they might affect consumer behaviour, brand preference, and brand awareness.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

1. To ascertain the impact of social media marketing strategy towards brand promotion.
2. To identify the products that influences most through social networking sites
3. To study the purchase intention towards brands marketed on social media.

METHODOLOGY

"Investigating the entire cosmos for the research analysis is almost impossible. It is crucial to switch to sampling as a substitute as a result. The same type of research is being done here. A sample is a portion of the population that is examined to draw conclusions about the entire population." For the study, a sample size of 700 respondents was taken into consideration.

445 of the 700 replies that were gathered for the study's analysis were practical responses. Data gathering is required to lay the groundwork for analysis. Data is the presumption used to do the testing and deliver the information. Data will be gathered from primary and secondary sources, respectively.

A standardised questionnaire created by the researcher and personally distributed to respondents for valid responses will be used as the study's primary data collection tool. Respondents receive linked to Google forms via their email addresses, WhatsApp, etc. The questionnaire will be used to elucidate the questions and compile more data. A questionnaire is used to collect primary data in order to test ideas and provide research questions since it is structured and useful. It will be presented in a condensed rating scale format. In this, all of the research questions will be constructed in a way that will investigate the impact of social media on consumer brand habits, purchasing decisions, and the vital function that social networking sites may play in favourably promoting a brand.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Table: 1 Descriptive Statistics table of Follow of brands' pages

Descriptive Statistics			
Dependent Variable: Following of brands' pages			
1. Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Male	2.06	.788	193
Female	2.16	1.090	252
Total	2.12	.971	445

The Descriptive Statistics table of Brand Pages Followed is shown in the above table. The data displays the survey's mean, standard deviation, and sample size. Male and female respondents both had greater mean values, according to the data.

Table:2 Products influence most through social networking sites

	Products	Frequency	Rank
1.	Clothes	231	4
2.	Electronic	198	6
3.	Mobiles and Mobile Accessories	246	3
4.	Cosmetics/Personal Care	138	7
5.	Household Products	128	8
6.	Books	214	5
7.	Fashion Accessories	341	1
8.	Footwear	249	2
9.	None of the above	27	9

The respondents were also questioned about the products that most affect their use of social networking sites. Results of the replies gathered show that the majority of respondents are affected by social networking sites while choosing fashion accessories. Additionally, there are a few other areas that they are influenced by, such as apparel, footwear, and mobile devices and accessories.

Additionally, it should be emphasised that respondents vote on practically all product type categories. This suggests that social media and networking sites are influencing consumers' purchasing decisions for a wide range of goods.

Table: 3 One-Sample Statistics of brand's social media marketing strategy

One-Sample Statistics				
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Having Brand Accounts / Pages / Handles	445	1.60	.853	.040
Using only text posts	445	2.27	1.081	.051
Posting GIFs (Graphic Interfaces)	445	2.30	1.167	.055
Posting Videos	445	2.00	.976	.046
Endorsements by Celebrities	445	2.14	1.122	.053
Telling Stories through posts	445	2.06	.939	.045
Responding to Comments	445	1.84	.814	.039
Joining Conversations	445	1.96	.967	.046
Posting about latest products and services	445	1.64	.889	.042
Communicating events / contests	445	1.80	.955	.045
Sales promotions	445	1.74	.949	.045
Providing Tips and Advice	445	1.87	.908	.043
After seeing brand feeds on social media, I tested out new brands.	445	1.74	.924	.044

The aforementioned table displays the statistics from one sample of the brand's social media marketing programme. The mean, standard deviation, and standard error of the brand's social media marketing plan are shown in the table. The table also indicates that there were 445 participants. Table records the highest mean for the marketing tactic of posting GIFs (Graphic Interfaces).

Table: 4 Purchase intentions / behavior towards brands marketed on social media

Purchase intentions / behavior towards brands marketed on social media. * Occupation Cross tabulation							
Count		Occupation					Total
		Student	Private Sector Employee	Government Employee	Business / Self-Employed	Others (Please Mention)	
Purchase intentions / behavior towards brands marketed on social media	Strongly Agree	44	39	24	19	16	142
	Agree	50	83	39	28	11	211
	Neutral	12	24	12	0	32	80
	Disagree	4	0	0	0	0	4
	Strongly Agree	8	0	0	0	0	8
Total		118	146	75	47	59	445

According to different occupation groups of respondents, the majority of respondents in the table above agree or strongly agree with the association between brand choice and purchasing intentions of social media users in the Thiruchirapalli area.

Students are the only occupational category that has been found as substantially disagreeing with the relationship under discussion.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Marketers can use the following suggestions to develop more effective marketing programmes using their marketing strategy when social media becomes a significant source of brand recognition, brand recalls, and ultimately influences brand choices.

Big data in the context of social media provides a wealth of insight. Businesses must make advantage of this knowledge resource to comprehend their customers better. You ought to be aware of your viewpoints, interests, and influencing sources. This aids in improved product and service development as well as more effective feedback delivery.

Companies that better understand their customers can develop more precise categories, target them in more detail, and have individualised brand positioning. Big data analysis is extremely helpful.

The contestants' acts can be remembered via social media. To maintain their position as market leaders, campaigns should be conducted to spread the brand's favourable message to competitors.

Social media is an effective tool for resolving grievances. Companies are using it more frequently to interact with customers and address their issues. Customer switching is less likely, and brand loyalty is improved.

CONCLUSION

Social media has rapidly gained popularity among the general public in recent years, and in the near future, it is expected to surpass all other marketing tools in importance. Social media aims to close the gap between consumers and advertisers by building connections based on trust, maintaining a dialogue, and quickly engaging the appropriate audience. Although social media marketing is expanding quickly and has a huge potential, it is still developing in India. It is now time for businesses to create and put into practise efficient strategies that will enable social media marketing to work for them in a number of ways, including increasing their market share through this cutting-edge channel and taking the lead in innovation by safeguarding their competitive advantage going forward.

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