

The Impact of Social Media Marketing on Customer Decisions: A View from a New Era

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INTRODUCTION

Social media marketing plays a crucial role in shaping what customers decide to buy. This is especially true in today's changing world, where social platforms greatly influence people's choices. Understanding how these marketing activities affect customer intentions can help businesses connect better with their audience and boost their success.

Over the past decade, there has been a tremendous growth in the use of social media platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook (Chen & Qasim, 2021). People now use these platforms to communicate with one another, and companies leverage them for marketing their products. Social activities that were once confined to the physical world have now shifted to the virtual realm of social networking sites. The real-time exchange of messages has enabled people to interact and share information more seamlessly. As a result, companies view social media as vital tools for succeeding in the online marketplace (Ebrahim, 2020). This practice of using social media to commercially promote products, services, or events to attract potential consumers online is known as social media marketing (SMM).

The rise of community websites has led many organizations to find effective ways to utilize these platforms in building strong relationships and communication with users. This has enabled the creation of online brand communities (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2018). SMM efficiently fosters communication between customers and marketers, and it also facilitates activities that enhance brand awareness (Hafez, 2021). However, the impact of SMM on consumer intentions remains limited. Existing research on SMM has primarily focused on consumer behavior, creative strategies, content analysis, and the benefits of user-generated content in the context of virtual brand communities (Ibrahim, 2021).

The internet's development over time has led to the creation of new communication channels and significant changes in how people interact (Tarsakoo & Charoensukmongkol, 2020). Companies now recognize that sharing brand information and consumer experiences is a new avenue for brand marketing, driven by the widespread use of smartphones and social media. As a result, developing online communities has become a highly efficient strategy. These social groups create a sense of continuity for their members without the need for physical meetings (Yadav & Rahman, 2017). A community that acquires products from a specific brand is referred to as a virtual brand community. Customers are now interested not only in buying goods and services but also in creating meaningful experiences and building strong relationships with other customers and professionals. When customers are part of online communities, the cohesion that grows among them impacts the market. Therefore, companies need to identify methods or factors that will encourage customers to participate in these communities (Ismail et al., 2018).

The nature of online communities is similar to that of physical communities in terms of creating shared experiences, enabling social support, and catering to the members' need for self-identification, despite the differences between real-world and virtual communities (Seo & Park, 2018). However, online communities are distinct from real-life communities in terms of manifestations and technology, as the former primarily rely on computers to facilitate their operations. A specific brand product or service is used to establish a brand community, which refers to communities formed based on interactions that are not limited by geographical restrictions among brand consumers (Chen & Lin, 2019). Since consumers' social relationships create brand communities, these communities have their own customs, traditions, rituals, and community awareness. The group members learn from each other and share knowledge about a product, thereby appreciating each other's actions and ideas. When a consumer joins a particular brand community, the brand becomes a conduit and

common language linking the community members together due to their shared brand experiences (Arora & Sanni, 2019).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media marketing emerged as businesses started to leverage social media platforms to promote their goods and services. Social media enables the digital transmission of information about products from one person to another through the internet, relying primarily on word-of-mouth (WOM) as a marketing strategy. WOM is a powerful force that significantly impacts customer purchasing behavior (Richins & Shaffer, 1998).

According to Porter and Galon (2006), social media marketing is a non-paid, peer-to-peer connection that utilizes helpful content from trusted sources to reach target audiences. This organic, word-of-mouth approach can be both deliberate and non-deliberate. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are dynamic tools that simplify online connections and interactions (Golden, 2011).

Social media marketing offers benefits for businesses, as it allows for direct consumer communication and is a relatively inexpensive marketing method (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Given the abundance of consumer choices and the influence of brands and online advertising, social media has become an essential component of an organization's marketing strategy. Factors like brand influence on consumer choices and peer influence drive repeat purchases (Oliveira & Sullivan, 2003).

Businesses often use online marketing strategies such as blogger endorsements, social media advertising, and user-generated content management to build brand awareness among consumers (Wang & Kim, 2017). Social media comprises internet-based applications that are rooted in the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, enabling the production and sharing of user-generated content. Due to its interactive characteristics that facilitate knowledge sharing, collaborative, and participatory activities on a larger scale than traditional media formats like radio, TV, and print, social media is considered the most crucial communication channel for spreading brand information. Social media includes blogs, online forums, consumer review sites, social networking websites (e.g., Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook), and wikis (Arrigo, 2018).

Social media facilitates content sharing, collaborations, and interactions. These social media platforms and applications exist in various forms, such as social bookmarking, rating, video, pictures, podcasts, wikis, microblogging, social blogs, and weblogs. Social media is used extensively by social networkers, governmental organizations, and business firms for communication purposes (Cheung et al., 2021). Governmental organizations and businesses utilize social media for marketing and advertising purposes. Integrated marketing activities can be performed more cost-effectively and efficiently due to the seamless interactions and communication among consumer partners, events, media, digital services, and retailers via social media (Tafesse & Wien, 2018). According to Liu et al. (2021), luxury brand marketing campaigns consist of key factors like customization, reputation, trendiness, interaction, and entertainment, which significantly impact customers' purchase intentions and brand equity. Community marketing activities stem from the interactions between events and individuals' mental states, while products are external factors for users (Parsons & Lepkowska-White, 2018). However, even when people experience similar service activities, they may have different ideas and feelings about an event, leading to distinct outcomes for users and consumers. In future marketing, the focus will shift more towards brand marketing activities, and these activities should provide sensory stimulation and themes that offer customers a great experience. Brands must not only provide quality features but also focus on enabling an impressive customer experience (Beig & Khan, 2018).

Many studies on brand communities involve social identification, recognizing that a member's sense of belonging to a community is a crucial factor. Social identity theory explains how individuals enhance their self-affirmation and self-esteem through comparison, identity, and categorization processes (Chen & Lin, 2019). There is no clear definition of the brand community or the brand owner, but strengthening interactions between the community and its members or creating a rapport between the brand and community members is essential. As a result, members of a community are often categorized into groups based on their educational attainment, occupation, and living environment. Members of social networks tend to categorize each other into various groups or similar groups according to their classification in social networks (Salem & Salem, 2021).

Brand identification and brand community identification emerge from a similar process. Users can interact freely, creating similar ideologies about the community and strengthening bonds among members, enabling them to identify with that community. The brand community identity can also be considered a convergence of values between the principles of the social community and the values of the users (Wibowo et al., 2021).

According to Lee et al. (2021), members of a brand social community share their ideas by participating in community activities to help create solutions. When customers join a brand community, they actively engage in activities or discussions and are willing to help each other. This suggests that social community participation positively impacts community identity. Community involvement entails a person sharing their professional understanding or knowledge with other members to enhance personal growth and create a sense of belonging (Gupta & Syed, 2021). Haobin Ye et al. (2021) suggest that it is crucial to incorporate community identity in virtual communities, as it is a crucial factor affecting the operations of virtual communities. Community identity

also facilitates positive interactions among community members, encouraging them to actively participate in community activities (Assimakopoulos et al., 2017). This literature review indicates that social communities require members to work together, and individuals who can identify with the organization's visions and goals become dedicated to the virtual company.

Customer satisfaction involves comparing expected and post-service satisfaction with the standards set by accumulated previous experiences. According to the confirmation-disconfirmation paradigm, satisfaction is a consumer's judgment of how well the service has met their expectations (Pang, 2021).

Recent studies suggest that community satisfaction impacts consumer loyalty and community participation. The level of satisfaction in a community is determined by how its members rate it (Jarman et al., 2021). The community may be evaluated based on previous interactions. When members are satisfied with their communities, it is manifested through positive emotions, which affect their behavior. In short, satisfaction creates active participation and community loyalty (Shujaat et al., 2021).

Therefore, social media marketing reflects new opportunities and demands novel, unconventional approaches to shape consumer perceptions of brands and products (Rockendorf, 2011). Studies have shown that the growth of social media has increased situational awareness and can impact the consumer decision-making process at various stages (Mayfield, 2011; Fauser et al., 2011). As customer behavior continues to evolve, social media marketing has become a crucial tool for promoting brands and products, facilitating ongoing dialogue, knowledge sharing, and collaboration (Fauser, 2011).

RESEARCH GAP

Many studies on information and marketing systems have used continuance intention to measure whether a customer continues to use a particular product or service. The willingness of customers to continue using a product or service determines the success of service providers. An effective information marketing system should persuade users to use it and retain previous users to ensure continued use (Zollo et al., 2020).

Social network operators must identify the reasons behind the continued use of social network sites and attract more users. However, previous studies on information systems have mainly focused on behavior-cognition approaches, such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), and Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and their variants (Tarsakoo & Charoensukmongkol, 2020; Jamil et al., 2021b). According to Ismail et al. (2018), perceived usefulness and satisfaction positively impact a user's continuance intention. The continued participation of community members has two intentions: continuance intention, which defines the community member's intent to keep using the community (Beig & Khan, 2018; Dunnan et al., 2020), and recommendation intention (also known as word-of-mouth marketing), which describes the informal communication among community members about the virtual brand community. Previous studies on virtual community members have primarily focused on the continuous utilization of information systems (Seo & Park, 2018; Sarfraz et al., 2021). This study, however, focuses on the factors that support the continued participation of community members, investigating how usage purpose affects continuance intention and the factors influencing users' willingness to participate in community activities (Gul et al., 2021).

It is challenging to determine and monitor whether specific actions (recommendation or purchase) occurred during empirical investigations. Consumers will seek relevant information from their external environment and experiences when making purchasing decisions (Shareef et al., 2019). After collecting significant information, they will evaluate it and make comparisons to determine customer behavior. Purchase intention refers to a customer's affinity towards a particular product, and it is a metric of a customer's behavioral intention. According to Liu et al. (2021), purchase intention represents the probability of a customer buying a particular product. Past studies consider purchase intention as a factor that can predict consumer behavior and the subjective possibility of consumer purchases.

From a marketing perspective, if a company wants to retain its community and achieve community targets while establishing successful marketing through the community, at least three objectives are needed (Chen & Qasim, 2021): membership continuance intention (members' commitment to the community and willingness to belong), community recommendation intention (members' willingness to recommend or refer the community to others), and community participation intention (members' willingness to participate in brand community activities). Unlike previous literature on information system usage, this study aims to elucidate how social media marketing activities influence purchase intention and participation intention (Alalwan et al., 2017).

CONCLUSION

Despite the efforts to enable in-depth data collection, robust research methodology, and a well-structured research design, there are still various limitations that should be addressed in future studies. Another limitation is that different countries or regions have varying preferences for social media platforms. Future studies should explore the reasons behind individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds or countries using different social media platforms and the underlying demands and motivations behind their preferences. Furthermore, new social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter have distinct characteristics compared to traditional platforms, and future studies should focus on these shifts. This study primarily emphasized the influence of social media marketing activities on user behavior and usage demands. Effective management of a brand's online presence

and community can enhance its competitiveness. By cultivating a strong community identity, companies can inspire loyalty and discourage customers from using competitors' products or services.

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