A STUDY ON CUSTOMER PERCEPTION ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING WITH REFERENCE TO ONLINE RETAIL INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

Technology advancements in the twenty-first century have resulted in widespread use of social media platforms by both businesses and consumers around the world. As a result, there are now more windows for marketing on social media, raising the trend and possibility of interaction among the people and thus resolving the trust issues. These aspects are essential for businesses to understand regional and cultural variations in order to succeed globally. One important factor that affects the success of social media marketing is how consumers perceive it. According to the data gathered from the 177 respondents, consumers' interests are piqued when they are exposed to a variety of stimuli, in this case, trust, trend and interaction. When faced with several adverts, consumers decide which ones are most pertinent to their interests and requirements, leding to purchase intent and loyal intent. Nowadays, retail marketers tempt their customers in a variety of methods. Utilizing social media marketing is one method by which marketers may not only influence their customers but also determine their demographics and attract their attention by displaying advertisements based on those criteria. This study's goal is to establish how consumers feel about the promotions and marketing that businesses utilise on various social media platforms. This paper's main objective is to pinpoint the numerous elements that affect how consumers view social media advertising. 177 respondents took part in the study, and survey questionnaires with closed-ended questions were employed to gather the data. The study's findings indicate that users pay attention to advertisements the majority of the time, and they frequently buy things they need as well as those they do not.

Keywords: Social media marketing, advertisements, online customers, online business, customer perception.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the twenty-first century, people no longer have the free time to socialise and congregate. Social media fills the gap and assists users in connecting to social networking sites, allowing users to distance themselves while maintaining connections. Social media is used to not only connect people but also to largely advertise, which is where social media marketing comes into play. The online retail sector is a sector that is always changing, and social media is the most practical and economical option for reaching the target audience. With all transactions being transparent thanks to social media marketing, trust and brand recognition have been increased. Major platforms like Instagram, Face book, Pinterest and YouTube, among others, urge their devoted audience to engage in social media advertising and market their products and services. The online retail business is heavily skewed towards social media marketing or the digital platform due to the dynamic environment. People first used using social media as a communication tool, social interaction, and entertainment. Although the younger age group was first the focus of the social media fervour, other age groups have since joined in. Social media's influence over the last two to three years has spawned the phenomena of social commerce. It has frequently been linked to electronic marketing (e-marketing). Additionally, it is thought to be a strong technique for boosting brand recognition.

2. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The word "internet" has been the biggest addition in the history of the world because it has a lot of meaning in the twenty-first century. In addition, we can say that nothing that needs to be done, from invention to destruction, can be done without the aid of the internet because virtualization is a continuous process. The word "social media marketing" refers to the practise of increasing website attention or traffic via social media platforms.

Social media marketing is centred on producing attention-grabbing content that grabs readers' attention and entices them to share it with their social media networks. As contrast to purchased media, this sort of marketing creates earned media because it is ultimately driven by word-of-mouth. This research study demonstrates how social media marketing develops various channels and chances for connecting with consumers' perceptions of social media marketing in regard to the online retail industry as well as customers them selves.

3. MEANING OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media are computer-mediated communication technologies that enable individuals or organisations to create, exchange, and share data, concepts, thoughts, images/videos, and other items in online communities and networks. Social media 2.0 applications are web-based programmes with service-specific user profiles and user-generated content. Social media connects people or groups via user profiles, which aids in the growth of online social networks. The era of social media began about a decade ago. 2003 saw the debut of LinkedIn, Face book and following in 2004 and 2005 was Myspace, and in 2006 it was Twitter. 64% of marketers spend more than five hours a week on social media, and 39% spend more than 10, according to the Social Media Marketing Industry Report.

3.1 Simple Social Media Platforms

- **Social Networks:** These enable users to create individual web sites, connect with friends individually or collectively, and exchange material and communicate.
- **Blogs:** The best types of social media are online journals, or blogs.
- **Wikis:** These are online encyclopaedias that let users add content or change the data in their databases.
- **Podcasts:** It offers subscribers access to audio and video materials.
- **Forums:** A platform that enables online conversation on certain interests or subjects that is accessible to all users.
- **Microblogging:** This form of social networking allows for the quick distribution of content across the internet and mobile phone networks.

3.2 Social Media Marketing

Social media is a common way for people to communicate with one another. The e-marketers' utilisation of social media's marketing strategy reflects its expanding significance. It is now a well-liked marketing tool that promotes two-way connection between companies and customers. The word "social media" refers to the tools and methods individuals use to communicate ideas, knowledge, opinions, and perspectives online. It comes in a variety of shapes and sizes and can contain text, audio, video, graphics, and other types of material.

The business community should prioritise online buying since customers spend a lot of time today producing user produced content and sharing it online increasing interest in social media marketing among businesses, particularly those that offer online purchasing. Social media's development has made it easier for everyone to develop relationships with customers. Social media marketing has become a popular new channel for businesses to connect with their customers.

3.3 Factors affecting Social Media Marketing

Social media has given e-marketers new marketing opportunities. The conventional "word-of-mouth" method of advertising has been supplanted by "word-of-web" owing to the growing trend of consumers reading product reviews on social networking sites before making an online purchase, which is currently having a significant impact on consumer purchasing behaviour. Even though a lot of e-commerce businesses now have official websites with detailed descriptions of their items, prices, and other information, shoppers still prefer to read reviews and comments from previous clients. Prior to making a purchase, people desire to be certain that the item is of the highest calibre and provides excellent value. Social media is crucial in defining consumer behaviour at this point. Customers who have used the product before can assist spread knowledge by sharing their experiences, ideas, thoughts on the product and services, strengths, and weaknesses, among other things.

3.4 Social Media's Importance in Online Retailing

In today's cutthroat marketplace, firms are vying for consumers' attention. Platforms for social media help to raise brand recognition and consumer faith in the company. This makes a big difference in the brand-building process. Social media platforms like blogs and networking sites are becoming more important for product promotion. With the advent of the internet, which transformed how people use technology, the number of social networking sites that give businesses a platform to promote their brands in the online market and grow their businesses while satisfying customers has expanded.

Online businesses can also avoid clutter and achieve the right target audience. They may better understand their clients' tastes and update their products and services as a result, and it also helps them develop marketing plans for their items. They have ample room to respond to them right away. As a result, it promotes personal engagement and consumer pleasure. In social media, the emphasis is on material that sparks genuine dialogues and inspires users to get connected and involved in their procedure for determining decisions for purchasing things. The lives of customers are now operated by social networks. Customers look for endorsements to support their choices. Through social media, online shops are coming up with inventive ways to offer prompt, high-quality service for a range of client issues.

3.5 E-Commerce

E-commerce is essentially the creation, management, and expansion of business-related relationships between firms that take place online and involve the buying, producing, and designing of items as well as the management of production, marketing, sales, and services. By lowering sales calls, which saves money, it improves the effectiveness of selling to existing customers. It offers a special chance to stay in touch with clients and helps to concentrate on customer care, concerns, and inquiries. The interaction between the firm and the customer, the selling/purchasing transaction, and the money transfer are all included in the e-commerce business process. These transactions involved spontaneous purchases.

3.6 Online Marketing

It, also known as internet marketing has introduced numerous special advantages to marketing. Internet marketing is distinct and different from traditional marketing because of its interactive aspect, which offers immediate reaction and directs response in both terms. Its scope is wider. It relates to digital media such as the Internet and email, which include electronic customer relationship management (E-CRM) and digital customer data management. Effective online marketing calls for a well-thought-out plan that focuses on target market groups, the right advertising and promotional methods, and integrates a company's business model with the functionality and aesthetics of its website. The internet and new connected technologies have a significant impact on customers and marketers, particularly strategy. There were plenty of common marketing techniques used, including product standardisation, store merchandising, and advertising. Additionally, marketers create fresh tactics and methods that are better adapted to the contemporary digital world. E-marketing is a method of online client attraction, motivation, communication, and retailing.

3.7 Overview of Online Shopping

Shopping online is the practise of looking up and buying goods/services online. Online shopping is interactive and quick. Customers can engage with the seller's website to create the precise informational shopping-related structure, goods, or services they want, and then immediately order/download them based on their needs. Online shopping has become increasingly popular over the years, largely because people find it to be incredibly handy and simple to comfortably from their businesses and residences. The number of online retailers is growing every day, which can be attributed to people accepting this as a new way of life. This most recent change in the way of life of today's customer is necessary given the passing of time. Today, people may shop whenever they want; everywhere they are, for any product that is offered online, from banking services to purchasing travel tickets.

Today, a retail centre is only one click away. People purchase apparel, cosmetics, furniture, groceries, mobile and computer accessories, and other items online. The development of the e-commerce industry has made this possible.

3.7 Customers' Perceptions and Purchasing Patterns:

Thanks to e-commerce, the demands and expectations of both online customers and end-users are continuously evolving and expanding. Marketing managers are finding it difficult to select the best marketing mix while ignoring the market due to the online customer's behaviour. Although humans are similar, new technology has changed many of the ways that consumers shop and make purchases. To attract and keep online customers, marketers must have a thorough understanding of consumers' expectations for and reactions to e-commerce activities. In an online buying system, consumer satisfaction is the primary driver of both customer retention and acquisition. Satisfaction of customer with regard to online buying is in line with what the customer expects and confirms their opinion of the online experience. For online shops to survive in a cutthroat marketplace, after-sale services in particular are crucial. Various firms have increased their attempts to market and sell their goods and services online in the age of globalisation and the marvellous spread of the Internet. They have been offering their clients a variety of product categories, including clothing, books, furniture, computer equipment, toys, and electrical goods, through the internet with superior marketing results.

4. REVIEW OF LITERATURE Vasanth G (2021)

Claimed that technology is what drives today's world. Personal communication has given way to technology-based communication. The dynamism that occurs every hour motivates us to work more and harder to raise our standard of living and broaden our worldviews. Social media is playing an incredible part in our lives as digital technology becomes more and more prevalent. With regard to social media posts on sites like Face book, Instagram, Whats app, and others, the dependability quotient can be applied to any element. The value of promoting a good or service on social media has taken off like wildfire. The conventional approach of selling products by going door to door has given way to a digital marketing trend that brings the consumer closer to the brand. Increased consumerism has made the market more responsive and able to serve the various target demographics.

Shreya Pattnaik & Prachi Trivedi (2020)

Examined the respondents' knowledge of social media marketing and how fashion labels and online retailers use sites like Facebook and Instagram to advertise their goods and how these social media marketing campaigns affect individuals' buying intentions. Second, the study examined secondary data to determine how social media affects the advertising of the online fashion sector, as well as the drivers of that sector's growth and the reasons why more individuals are now interested in shopping online.

Mizanur Rahman et al. (2019)

looked into how social media marketing influences how customers form opinions. A systematic, closed-ended questionnaire with a Likert scale with five points was used to gather information from customers in Khulna City about their perspectives on using social media and the formation of their customer perception. The study's research questions were answered using a causal research design. Regression analysis was used to look into the relationships between social media marketing elements and consumer perceptions. The study's findings supported the notion that factors such as entertainment, informational value, annoyance, brand loyalty, customer engagement, electronic word-of-mouth, and purchasing opportunity influence how consumers perceive brands.

Karan Joshi's (2015) focused on the potential rise of online shopping with variables influencing customer attitudes about online purchasing. A study found that a number of macroeconomic elements, including advantages and disadvantages like convenience, homepage, privacy, fun, source, larger selection, pricing, and customer service, had a substantial impact on online buying in Himachal Pradesh. Online retailers can prioritise the implicit and explicit needs of the customer in the online purchasing environment by using the pertinent variables and elements to create their strategy.

4.1 Research Gap

The assessment of the literature indicates few significant shortcomings. Firstly, the majority of the investigations are neither based on rigid methodology or effective theory. The studies seem to be carried out on an ad hoc basis. Secondly, there are not many marketing studies using social media. Despite the dominance of online consumers in India, there is a significant research gap in the field of marketing. Perception of online consumers and the effectiveness of social media marketing research among the population of Chennai are both relatively low, which logically necessitates the current study to fills the gaps.

5. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Businesses nowadays are applying numerous social media marketing applications by using various social media platforms, an essential social network that is especially preferred by young customers, in their digital marketing strategies. Hence, currently, social media marketing is becoming more popular. Businesses and brands devote a lot of time, money, and resources to developing a variety of marketing tools that will allow them to engage with consumers on social media in an attempt to foster loyalty and purchase intent. On how these applications effect customer loyalty and purchasing intention, there is, however, little data. In this context, the current study aimed to provide light on the relationship between loyalty intention and purchase intention among customers and their perceptions of the marketing strategies used by businesses on their social media platforms.

6. RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The growing adoption of social media is altering how businesses respond to consumer demands and desires as well as how they address rivals. Although researchers disagreed on a number of social media marketing-related topics, there are many researches that have been done on the subject. Additionally, there are now just a few studies who have learned the long-term consequences of social media marketing. Additionally, some empirical study has identified the importance of a comparison of social media marketing techniques, purchase intention and loyalty intention. The primary goal of this project is to demonstrate a connection between consumer loyalty intentions and social media marketing methods. The results and findings would be "added value" for the online retail sector to understand the effectiveness of social media from the standpoint of the customer.

7. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES
- To examine social media marketing techniques used in Chennai.
- To examine how customer perception is formed with the ardent use of social media platforms.
- To comprehend the influence social media marketing has on consumer perception
- To provide the most effective methods to raise loyalty and purchase intention among customers.

8. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The process of identifying, selecting, and analysing information pertaining to a research study is referred to as the research technique. Key qualities are problem statement, research designing, instrument or questionnaire designing, data collection plan and data analysis strategy.

8.1 Research Design: This study utilised descriptive research as its design. It included carrying out surveys and providing supporting literature. It encompassed things like trends, interactions, trust, purchase intent, and loyalty intent, among other things.

8.2 Instrument: The structural questionnaire is prepared in order to get the data from online consumers in accordance with the objectives of the study for the purpose of seeking relevant information directly from online respondents about demographic characteristics, consumer opinions, and other topics pertaining to online purchases. For questions with answers ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," a Likert scale with five points is used. A questionnaire has both open-ended questions and closed-ended questions, and its purpose is to elicit responses from respondents in the form of opinions or suggestions.

8.3 Target population: The Research accompanied online consumers who shop from online retailers such as Amazon, Flipkart, and Myntra among others and who have access to social networking sites.

The research was conducted in Chennai, which is located in the state of Tamil Nadu. The reason why we are considering conducting study in Chennai is because our preliminary findings showed that online marketing is highly developed in this location.

8.4 Size of the Sample: We have determined that the sample size is 177.

8.5 Sampling Method: In order to choose samples of customers that shop from online retailers such as Amazon, Flipkart, and Myntra amongst others in the city of Chennai, non-probability sampling is the method that is employed. The convenience sampling method is used to select members of the population to serve as the sample.

8.6 Data Collection: During the course of this research, both primary and secondary methods of data collection were utilised. *Primary Data:* The current study depends significantly on primary data, which was acquired by personally canvassing online consumers for completed schedules and surveys. This was done in order to ensure the highest level of accuracy. The information was collected in a direct manner from the respondents of the survey, who came from a variety of categories. A questionnaire was distributed and then collected with appropriate responses; it related to the area of investigation and provided space for respondents to fill in their answers. There were about 177 individuals that participated, and the data collected from them was deemed adequate for the study. For the purpose of analysing customers' perspectives regarding social media marketing on online retails, the questionnaire comprises both independent and dependent factors. These variables include trends, interactions, trust, purchase intent, and loyal intent. *Secondary Data:* Books, magazines, newspapers, trade journals, and other publications, as well as other published and unpublished data, are examples of secondary data sources. Websites, online journals and research papers, blogs, and other sources are also used to collect secondary data.

9. DATA ANALYSIS

The primary data were analysed with the assistance of suitable statistical methods such as the Structural Equation Model (SEM) using SPSS AMOS, the correlation analysis, the Reliability test, and so on using SPSS version 20.

Correlation between Trust and Loyalty Intent

H_{01}: Trust has no significant relationship with loyalty intent

Table – 1: Trust and Loyalty Intent

		Trust	**Loyalty Intent**
Trust	**Correlation**	1	0.386**
	Sig.		.000
	N	177	177
Loyalty Intent	**Correlation**	0.386**	1
	Sig.	.000	
	N	177	177

**Correlation @ 0.01 level

Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1 indicates that the correlation coefficient between trust and intent to remain loyal is 0.386. The attained correlation coefficient is significant at the 1% (level of significance). Therefore, the null hypothesis is disproved. It appears reasonable to conclude that the trust and loyalty intentions are connected. It suggests that there is a substantial link between these two groups of data.

Correlation between Interaction and Purchase Intent

H_{02}: Interaction has no significant relationship with purchase intent

Table – 2: Interaction and Purchase Intent

		Interaction	Purchase Intent
Interaction	**Correlation**	1	0.986**
	Sig.		.000
	N	177	177
Purchase Intent	**Correlation**	0.986**	1
	Sig.	.000	
	N	177	177

****Correlation @ 0.01 level**

Analysis and Interpretation

Table 2 indicates that the correlation coefficient between interaction and purchase intent is 0.986. It suggests that two variables have a link with one another. The computed correlation coefficient has a 1% level of significance, which is significant. The null hypothesis is thus rejected. It appears reasonable to conclude that the interaction and purchase intent are connected. It suggests that there is a substantial link between these two groups of data.

SEM (Structural Equation Modelling)

Assessment of Customer perception about social media marketing in online retail industry

Fig – 1: Path Analysis
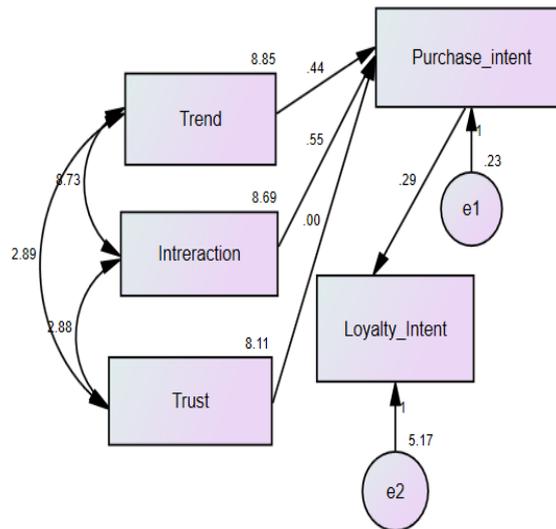
Source – Primary Data

Table 3: Hypothesis Result

Variables Relation	Estimation	SE	C.R	Value
Purchase Intent <--- Trend	0.437	0.129	3.403	0.000
Purchase Intent <--- Interaction	0.545	0.130	4.201	0.000
Purchase Intent <--- Trust	0.000	0.013	0.036	0.971
Loyalty Intent <--- Purchase Intent	0.289	0.058	4.963	0.000

*Significant at 1% level

Discussion

H₀₃ – Trend has no significant influence on purchase intent of online products

The null hypothesis is disproved since the p-value is less than the significance threshold. (0.01). As a result, trends greatly influence our purchasing intentions.

H₀₄ – Interaction has no significant impact on purchase intent of online products

The null hypothesis is disproved since the p-value is below the threshold of significance (0.01). As a result, interaction has a major influence on purchasing intent.

H₀₅ – Trust has no significant impact on purchase intent of online products

The null hypothesis is accepted since the p-value is greater than the threshold for significance (0.01). So, trust doesn't have a big effect on the purchase intent.

H₀₆ – Purchase Intent of online products has no significant impact on loyalty intent.

Table 4 demonstrates that the null hypothesis is rejected since the lower p-value than a significant value (0.01). Therefore, loyalty intent is significantly influenced by purchase intent.

Result:

In order to determine the adequacy of the model, the study looked at its overall fit (CMIN/df=2.33), absolute goodness of fit (GFI = 0.961), incremental fit indices (CFI=0.990), Tuker Lewis index (TLI=0.966), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA=0.051). The research suggests that RMSEA should be between 0.06 and 0.08, CMIN/df should be below 3.0, CFI, GFI and TLI measures should be above 0.90, and RMSEA should be below 0.08. The model thus works nicely.

9. FINDINGS

The correlation coefficients for interaction with purchase intent and trust with loyalty intent are respectively 0.386 and 0.98+. At a 1% level of significance, the obtained correlation coefficient is significant. Thus, the null hypothesis is disproved. It implies that these two sets of data have a strong connection.

RMSEA should be between 0.06 and 0.08, CMIN/df should be below 3.0, GFI, CFI, and TLI values should be more than 0.90, according to SEM analysis. Thus, the model is accurate.

10. SUGGESTIONS

A quick response to any question or concern raised by a customer on one of a company's social media pages will provide online retailers with an additional benefit toward the goal of developing a positive consumer perception. Updated news and details on the goods itself must be posted in order for the customers to be informed of the promotions and things. The content of any social media marketing endeavour should be the primary focus of attention. The number of companies using social media marketing to promote their products or services is in the millions. The online retail business should prioritise the delivery of engaging and captivating material on their social media pages in order to stay ahead of their rivals in the field of social media marketing. This will allow the content to immediately resonate with consumers.

Content that is interesting and captivating to the consumer will stay in their mind for a longer period of time. After that, it has an impact on the way customers perceive the company.

11. LIMITATIONS

The study was restricted to internet shoppers, thus any conclusions obtained from this sample could not be considered to be representative of the entire population. Furthermore, because they were simple to reach through social networking sites, the majority of survey participants throughout the field study were customers from Chennai's online retail industry. Future research can be done by obtaining various consumer perceptions of social media marketing applications, measuring the consequences of these perceptions on brand loyalty and purchase intent, or looking into the perceptions of online retailers as they relate to various variables.

12. CONCLUSION

Consumer perceptions of items have a significant influence on how they behave while making purchases. Consumer perception is thus very important to enterprises. The possible impacts of social media marketing on customer perception are the main topic of this research. Positive research results suggested that social media marketing significantly affects customer impression. Social media marketing affects the development of client relationships. According to a study, social media is useful for individuals, particularly for ongoing monitoring and providing real-time feedback about products from other customers who have used them online. This encourages brand engagements, which is a good first step in developing relationships. Social media gives users clear information regarding warranties and guarantees for goods and services, as well as real consumer reviews, ratings, and feedback on websites that encourage repeat purchases. Positive and substantial findings suggested that social media marketing will rank highly among firms', marketers', and customers' priorities in the next years. It will be the main tool used by marketers to promote a business or item and increase consumer awareness of the brand.

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