

Social Media Insights: A Study on Exploring the Dimensions of Consumer Behaviour

Madhurima Basu

Research Scholar, Ph.D. Indian Institute of Social Welfare & Business Management
(IISWBM), Kolkata

Abstract

Social media networking sites have witnessed exponential growth since the time of their inception in the new millennium. People use such virtual platforms to interact with their fellow counterparts beyond the geographical territories. A significant section of the global population is presently part of the social media sphere. Some of the most popular social media networks are Facebook, Youtube, Twitter, Whatsapp, Telegram, Pinterest, and so on. Business firms around the globe are also making every effort to mark their presence felt in the new age of social media platforms. Industrial houses are constantly investing their efforts to connect with consumers in online social communities. Unlike the traditional mode of communication, social media has paved the way to empower consumers to create content and connect with the brands like never before. This in a way has reshaped the age-old consumer-brand relationship. The current study attempts to evaluate the role of social media as an effective moderator in consumers' purchase intention. The present paper is based on a systematic review of academic articles on social media and consumer behavior. It is observed in the aforementioned study that consumers' engagement with the brand on the social media network appears to influence consumers' buying decision/s in the long run. Thus, it may be said, social media epitomizes the future of marketing, and thereby business firms in every corner of the world may consider taking up necessary measures to become an indispensable part of concurrent management practices.

Key Words: Social Media, Social Media Marketing, Organizations, Consumer Behaviour, Purchase Decisions

This paper was presented at the Two-Day International E-conference on 'Changing Landscapes in Business, Finance and Economy: A Global Perspective' organised by Department of Commerce, Sidho Kanho Birsha University, Purulia, West Bengal in collaboration with IQAC of the University during November 28-29, 2020.

Introduction

The beginning of the new millennium has set forth a new dawn in civil society. The world as commonly described has become a 'global village'. Rapid globalization and technological advancements have made life easier. It may not be wrong to say, technology in a way has become an intrinsic part of our daily lives. One such significant strand of technological development is the emergence of the Internet. More precisely, the internet made significant progress ever since the time of its entry into the human community. According to Stafford, Stafford, and Schkade (2004), people use the internet mainly for the fulfilment of three motives namely information, entertainment, and, social aspects. Social media is a part of the global communication channel. Some of the most notable social media networks are Facebook, Youtube, Twitter, Whatsapp, Telegram, Pinterest, and so on. Remarkably, social media networks have become a prominent media platform that connects a large section of the global population (Nelson-Field& Taylor, 2012). People across global boundaries usually make their presence felt on social media channels through endorsement activities for example: 'likes', 'shares', 'comments' or through individual activities such as posting photos, videos, or their thoughts on a wide range of emerging issues generally linked with the society at large. In the present-day context, researchers are attempting to understand the nitty-gritty of social media networking sites. Business organizations are too trying to make the most out of the leading edge media through their virtual presence on different social media networks. Emarketer (2017) found U.S based medium to large-sized industrial houses are incorporating social media into their system for the sole purpose of marketing. It has further led to the way of intermingling with consumers on social media platforms. As pointed out by Dolan, Conduit, Fahy, and Goodman (2016), the interactive characteristics of social media have empowered consumers to become functional participants from being mere observers, social media sites serve as an ideal framework to advocate brands and products consumers' content and consumer-generated product innovations. Such networking sites also enable individuals to generate services like virtual review/ rating websites, blogs, social networking platforms, and virtual communities (Heinonen, 2011). One of the most striking characteristics of the social media networking platform is they empower consumers to acknowledge endorsements from their peer community through recommendation features- such as using 'likes', 'follows', 'pins', and so forth in place of the respective posts (Barnes, 2018). Simultaneously, Haslehurst, Randall, Weber, and Sullivan (2016), observed consumers are using social media

to make online purchases and also as a landscape to communicate with the respective business house/s. Thus, it may be said, social media has opened an unexplored avenue for organizations to delve deeper into the world of new-era consumer behaviour for devising long-term strategies to retain and expand their respective market share.

Review of Literature

Social Media

Social media as an effective means of communication channel has witnessed remarkable growth in the last decade. The basic objective of social media was to offer an interactive virtual platform where users will get the opportunity to communicate, share, modify and co-create content. Online platforms have become content-rich with each passing day, as a large number of photos and videos are being shared on social networking sites regularly.

Some previous conceptual studies categorized social media networks along with different dimensions (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre 2011; Zhu and Chen, 2015). Social media may be further divided into collaborative projects, blogs, content forms, social networks, online games platforms, and virtual social communities (Heinonen, 2011). The emergence of Web 2.0 transformed consumers' powerbase from latent observers to enthusiastic participants on social media platforms. These social networking forums serve as an ideal ground for business brands to cultivate and thrive in word-of-mouth marketing (Daugherty and Hoffman, 2014) marketing strategies. Additionally, such sites offer consumers collaborative channel/s to inculcate value-added services and interact with the brand (Brodie, Ilic, Juric, & Hollebeek, 2013; Dolan, Conduit, Fahy, & Goodman, 2016) for their specific requirements. Bianchi, Andrews, Wiese & Fazal-E-Hasan (2017) mentioned of late netizens are highly reliant on social networking platforms such as Facebook for both active and passive activities (Campbell, Ferraro, & Sands, 2014; Tsai & Men, 2013), along with engaging into social interactions (Hajli, Shanmugam, Powell, & Love, 2015). They further emphasized social commerce is the latest outcome and sub-part of e-commerce that is making the most out of social technologies to enhance e-commerce transactions and activities. Thus, the need of the hour is to delve deeper into the various facades of social commerce like products and services offered, consumer behaviour, and branding measures at

the social media networks to devise effective plans and policies to expand the market segmentation of the organizations.

Social Media & Organizations

Social media which is aimed at offering an interactive platform for the users is presently serving wider aspects of societal needs. The presence of business firms on different social media channels is one such characteristic feature of the new age media. Studies show more than 15 million brands at a global scale are found to have their presence on the social networking site, Facebook (Koetsier, 2013; Dolan, Conduit, Fahy and Goodman, 2016). As per the Mckinsey report, business organizations are using social networking sites to engage with the consumer base and at the same time attempt to make the digital engagement a matter of high strategic priority (Brown, Sikes, & Willmott, 2013) for the sake of organizational growth. Social commerce in a way is an amalgamation of commercial activities and social interactions that simultaneously transpires at social networking platforms (Liang, Ho, Li, & Turban, 2011; Zhou, Zhang, & Zimmermann, 2013; Bianchi, Andrews, Wiese & Fazal-E-Hasan, 2017). It was noted by Mwaba, Saini, and Abratt (2017) that business firms are now aiming to share content at social media sites that are more visually aligned and contain lesser text to grab the attention of the ideal consumer base and interact with them through intriguing visual storytelling treat. At the same time, Schembri and Latimer (2016) detected consumers of late are acting as active participants and thereby they are sharing their stories regarding brand consumption experiences on social media platforms and accordingly are engaging with others, encouraging social cohesion and culturally creating brand community. Furthermore, the sheer preference to seek information directly from the business brands acts as a motivating factor for consumers to navigate through the different social media networking platforms. Thereby, the large-scale expansion of consumer behaviour in virtual media is paving the way to reshape traditional marketing practices.

Objective

The current study attempts to examine the role of social media networks as an effective moderator in consumers' purchase intention.

Methodology

The current paper follows a systematic review (Pettricrew & Roberts, 2006) of academic articles on social media and consumer behaviour.

Findings & Discussion

Social Media Networks and their Repercussions at the Community Level

In recent times it has become a common phenomenon to share content like posts, photos, and videos among friends on social networking sites. This in a way as pointed out by Errmann, Seo, Choi, & Yoon (2019) has become the central component for consumers to put across their views and opinions related to brands and services on social media platforms. Precisely, consumers' activities on social media platforms project a clear picture of their perception of esteemed business brands. Taking an engrossing stand Errmann, Seo, Choi, & Yoon (2019) has put forward a cardinal characteristic of friend recommendations on social network is that they are usually perceived to be more reliable as and when compared to the information derived directly from business firms. In another instance, Voorveld, Van Noort, Mutinga, and Bronner (2017) explored consumers' engagement with social media networks and their role in influencing the embedded advertisement in the respective post/s. The findings of their study suggested engagement are to a certain extent deeply related to the context, it consists of the different kinds of encounters on each social media networking platform such that each of them is perceived distinctively. Additionally, it was found in their study that at every site a varied set of online encounters is linked with the evaluation of advertisement. The findings of Voorveld, Van Noort, Mutinga, and Bronner's (2017) research further highlighted the notion that engaging in social media advertisement itself is the pivotal factor in examining how social media engagement is linked with advertisement evaluation. Last but not least they observed social media applications are volatile and selecting the ideal platform for advertisement is very crucial. Nevertheless, it may be said in the present-day context social media is acting as an active device in shaping the virtual community's outlook towards brand markers across territorial boundaries.

Social Media & Consumer Behaviour

Information technology in many possible ways has redefined the definition of consumer behaviour. Of late, consumers have become active information generators from being passive recipients of information as and when compared with the trend of the bygone millennium.

Studies exploring the motivating forces in consumer behaviour are presently considered to be an emerging area of research (Heinonen, 2011). With each passing day, the layers of the new age marketing are getting unveiled. One such aspect as elaborated by Nielsen (2018) indicates consumers across the globe spend around five to ten hours per day at social media sites. It denotes the immense potential hidden in the field of social media networks that may be further utilized by marketing professionals to expand their consumer base without any sort of geographical hurdles. At the same time, Schembri and Latimer (2016) precisely noted, at the online community of social media consumers is rapidly acting out the producers' role or intangible organizational valuables via online concerted efforts with their fellow virtual counterparts. Thus, it seems to emerge social media provides a platform for virtual interaction alongside offers an ideal gateway for organizations to expand their market share irrespective of their fields.

Role of Social Media in Shaping Purchase Decisions

Much has been said and examined as to how social media contributes to reshaping the recent shift in consumer behaviour. It is a well-accepted fact that consumers play a crucial role in deciding the long-term viability of business firms. Consumer behaviour as a field of study encompasses a wide variety of sub-areas. One such indispensable aspect of consumer behaviour is the decision-making process concerning purchasing products or services. More specially, decisions taken on the consumers' end have a reasonable impact on the firm's fortunes. Researchers have accordingly examined how social media networks contribute to designing consumers' purchase decision/s. Some of the selected research studies exploring the aforementioned objective of the study are observed for the current study to probe deeper into that area. Marketing professionals hold the belief customer engagement with their respective products and services on social media sites will reward them with soaring revenues and retention of consumers (Grewal, Stephen & Coleman, 2019). It is often observed brands irrespective of their size or global presence are encouraging their esteemed consumers to interact with the brands on various social media platforms. Some of the most common modes of engagement by consumers are through 'likes', 're-shares', 'reviews', 'comments', and so on social media (for example Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and so on).

A research study conducted by Bianchi, Andrews, Wiese, &Fazal-E-Hasan (2017), examined the factors contributing to consumers' intention to engage with social commerce in four

nations: Chile, Spain, South Africa, and Australia. The aforesaid study found that findings the main driving factor of social commerce engagement are the credibility of the message, consumers' trust in the brands' Facebook page, engagement, communication with peers, the propensity of virtual social interaction acting as the bench markers for consumers' satisfaction in lieu with the presence of such brands at the Facebook and dependency on social media platforms. All these factors according to Bianchi, Andrews, Wiese, &Fazal-E-Hasan (2017) contribute to shaping consumer engagement behaviour on social media networks. Malthouse, Calder, Kim &Vandenbosch (2016) suggested by organizing contests on social media networks brands in a way are encouraging active participation by individuals thereby generating user-created content. This in a way is influencing consumer purchase intention. They further highlighted such behaviours uplift the consumers' mood to engage in active thinking or illustrate a personally-set goal that is significant to the featured brand and ultimately influences her/his purchase decision/s in the real-world scenario.

Goh, Heng& Lin (2013) formulated an integrated study applying qualitative user-marketer interaction on a brand page on Facebook and thereby navigating through the customer transaction data to construct a distinctive data set at the level of consumers. The findings of their study show engaging with brand communities on social media ultimately contribute to positive growth in terms of expenditures linked with purchase decisions. It was further found by Goh, Heng& Lin (2013) that user-generated content has suggestive repercussions on individual consumer purchase behaviour mediated through encapsulated information and suggestive persuasion. Lastly, it was further highlighted by Goh, Heng& Lin (2013) that user-generated content has a higher potential impact as and when compared with marketer-generated content on consumer purchase behaviour at large. In another research study, it was assessed by Grewal, Stephen & Coleman (2019) that sharing pictures of products owned by individuals on a social media network acts as identity relevant factor. This can further result in the reduced intention of consumers for successive purchase decisions for products of similar nature; as such initiatives enable consumers in the virtual world to accomplish their self-identity signal needs.

A large number of previous literature emphasized that social media sites have distinctive features and components that should be taken into consideration while designing a constructive advertising campaign, mainly because social media reasonably influences

consumers' perception towards the featured advertisement/s of the respective business firm/s. The new era marketing channels must make the most out of the virtual networks because social media platforms appear to have immense potential to enhance market expansion drive for any said business firm/s. Thus, social media networks may be considered to be the ideal alternative for organizations to generate revenues and ensure sustainable growth in the long run.

Conclusion

The concurrent research studies have examined both the precursors and resultant of consumer engaging behaviour (Van Doorn, Lemon, Mittal, Nass, Pick, Pirner, & Verhoef, 2010) which explores engagement with social media as an emerging area (Dolan, Conduit, Fahy & Goodman, 2016) for management research. The field of management studies is always in constant flux it evolves with the passage of technological advancements, economic reforms, and market conditions. Social media of late has become a significant part of our daily lives which has bound together civil societies across the globe. Henceforth, it may be concluded, social media exemplifies forthcoming days of marketing research as a consequence of such a scenario business organizations across geographical territories may consider undertaking the much-needed measures to become an intrinsic part of the emerging contemporary management practices.

References

- (1) Barnes, R. (2018). *Uncovering Online Commenting Culture: Trolls, Fanboys, and Lurkers*, New York: Springer.
- (2) Bianchi, C., Andrews, L., Wiese, M., & Fazal-E-Hasan, S. (2017). Consumer intentions to engage in S-commerce: A cross-national study. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 33(5-6), 464-494.
- (3) Brodie, R. J., Hollenbeek, L. D., Juric, B., & Illic, A. (2011). Customer engagement: Conceptual domain, fundamental propositions, and implications for research. *Journal of Service Research*, 34(10), 251-271.
- (4) Brown, B., Sikes, J., & Willmott, P. (2013, August). Bullish on digital: McKinsey global survey results. McKinsey (Online). Retrieved from <http://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/digital-mckinsey/our-insights/bullish-on-digital-mckinsey-global-survey-results>.

- (5) Campbell, C., Ferraro, C., & Sands, S. (2014). Segmenting consumer reactions to social network marketing. *European Journal of Marketing*, 48(3/4), 432–452.
- (6) Daugherty, T., & Hoffman, E. (2014). EWOM and the importance of capturing consumer attention within social media. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 20(1-2), 82-102.
- (7) Dolan, R., Conduit, J., Fahy, J., & Goodman, S. (2016). Social media engagement behaviour: A uses and gratifications perspective. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 24(3-4), 261-277.
- (8) eMarketer .(2017). “US Companies Using Social Media for Marketing Purposes, 2015-2019 (%of Total),” (October 26), <https://www.emarketer.com/Chart/US-Companies-Using-Social-Media-Marketing-Purposes-2015-2019-of-total/212968>.
- (9) Errmann, A., Seo, Y., Choi, Y. K., & Yoon, S. (2019). Divergent effects of friend recommendations on disclosed social media advertising in the United States and Korea. *Journal of Advertising*, 48(5), 495-511.
- (10) Goh, K., Heng, C., & Lin, Z. (2013). Social media brand community and consumer behavior: Quantifying the relative impact of user- and marketer-generated content. *Information Systems Research*, 24(1), 88-107.
- (11) Grewal, L., Stephen, A. T., & Coleman, N. V. (2019). When posting about products on social media backfires: The negative effects of consumer identity signalling on product interest. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 56(2), 197-210.
- (12) Hajli, N., Shanmugam, M., Powell, P., & Love, P. E. D. (2015). A study on the continuance participation in on-line communities with social commerce perspective. *Technological Forecasting & Social Change*, 96, 232–241.
- (13) Haslehurst, R., Randall, C., Weber, J., & Sullivan, C. (2016). How to know which digital trends are worth chasing. *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved July 19, 2016, from <https://hbr.org/2016/07/how-to-know-which-digital-trends-are-worth-chasing>
- (14) Heinonen, K. (2011). Consumer activity in social media: Managerial approaches to consumers' social media behavior. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 10(6), 356-364.
- (15) Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media. *Business Horizons*, 53(1), 59–68.

- (16) Kietzmann, J. H., Hermkens, K., McCarthy, I. P., & Silvestre, B. S. (2011). Social media? Get serious! Understanding the functional building blocks of social media. *Business Horizons*, 54(3), 241-251.
- (17) Koetsier, J. (2013). Facebook: 15 million businesses, companies, and organizations now have a Facebook page. San Francisco, CA: Venture Beat.
- (18) Liang, T.-P., Ho, Y.-T., Li, Y.-W., & Turban, E. (2011). What drives social commerce: The role of social support and relationship quality. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, 16(2), 69–90.
- (19) Malthouse, E. C., Calder, B. J., Kim, S. J., & Vandebosch, M. (2016). Evidence that user-generated content that produces engagement increases purchase behaviours. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 32(5-6), 427-444.
- (20) Mwaba, K., Saini, Y., & Abratt, R. (2017) Personality and content preferences on social networking sites in South Africa. *South African Journal of Business Management*, 48(4), 13-20.
- (21) Nelson-Field, K., & Taylor, J. (2012, May) Facebook fans: A fan for life? *Admap*, pp. 25–27. Retrieved from http://www.warc.com/Content/LinkResolver.aspx?AID=96814&M=admap_may12.
- (22) Nielsen (2018), “Adults Now Spend Nearly Half a Day Interacting with Social Media,” Nielsen, October 28, <https://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/news/2018/time-flies-us-adults-now-spend-nearly-half-a-dayinteracting-with-media.print.html>.
- (23) Petticrew, M. & Roberts, H. (2006). How to appraise the studies: An introduction to assessing study quality. In *Systematic reviews in the social sciences: A practical guide*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- (24) Schembri, S., & Latimer, L. (2016). Online brand communities: Constructing and Co-Constructing brand culture. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 32(7-8), 628-651.
- (25) Stafford, T. F., Stafford, M. R., & Schkade, L. L. (2004). Determining uses and gratifications for the internet. *Decision Sciences*, 35(2), 259-288.
- (26) Tsai, W.-H.S., & Men, L. R. (2013). Motivations and antecedents of consumer engagement with brand pages on social networking sites. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 13(2), 76–87.

- (27) Van Doorn, J., Lemon, K. N., Mittal, V., Nass, S., Pick, D., Pirner, P., & Verhoef, P. C. (2010). Customer engagement behavior: Theoretical foundations and research directions. *Journal of Service Research*, 13(3), 253–266.
- (28) Voorveld, H. A., Van Noort, G., Muntinga, D. G., & Bronner, F. (2018). Engagement with social media and social media advertising: The differentiating role of platform type. *Journal of Advertising*, 47(1), 38-54.
- (29) Zhou, L., Zhang, P., & Zimmermann, H.-D. (2013). Social commerce research: An integrated view. *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*, 12(2), 61–68.
- (30) Zhu, Y., & Chen, H. (2015). Social media and human need satisfaction: Implications for social media marketing. *Business Horizons*, 58(3), 335-345.
