



Social Media Marketing and Consumer Adoption- A comparative assessment of the effect of select Social Media Platforms among youth in Kerala

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Abstract

The study examines how Social Media Marketing influences the various stages of Consumer Adoption. The study also attempts to compare the effectiveness of select social media platforms in guiding the consumer through the decision-making journey. The study provides new insights into the social media habits of youth in Kerala.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing, Consumer Adoption, Purchase Decision Making

1. Introduction

Social Media (SM) has played a big role in turning the world into a compact entity. They connect people who are far apart at a finger stroke and enable them to share their feelings, thoughts and emotions. Social media is defined as “a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and it allows the creation and exchange of user-generated contents” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). SM is now a force to reckon with in all fields involving human connectedness. The commercial potential of social media is well recognized and is widely accepted by the developed world. Today, the potential of social media platforms are being explored by nearly every business (Neti, 2011). SM is advancing at a rapid rate to developing countries as well. Social Media Marketing (SMM) involves using the potential of social media for selling goods and services. India, one of the fastest growing economies in the world, is a major market for most multinational companies. Spread of internet and communication technology, high penetration rate for mobile and internet, affordability, targetability, preference for the media particularly among the youth etc. have made SM a preferred tool to reach out to and engage with customers. However, Social Media Marketing is in an introductory phase in India and hence calls for empirical research covering its various dimensions.

The communication environment has drastically changed with the introduction of SM. Consumers have now become content creators, contrary to the conventional practice of communication being designed and executed by the marketers. These communications are known as User Generated Contents (UGC's) and come in various forms such as recommendations by the peer group, reviews and ratings about the products/services, discussions in forums and communities etc. Such communications are considered as highly credible and are preferred over the Marketer Generated Contents such as advertisements especially in the context of online buying. Thus, it is significant to study how SMM influences CA. Consumer adoption refers to the sequential stages through which a consumer passes from initial gaining of knowledge, to framing an attitude towards it, to reaching an adoption decision (Rogers, 2003). These stages can be further grouped into three phases-- Cognitive, Affective and Conative. In the classical theory of adoption called 'Diffusion of Innovation Theory', Rogers proposed that the mass media are more effective in the cognitive

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phases and personal media are more effective at the later phases. Hierarchy of effects models have successfully established this in the context of advertisements and personal selling. However, the effect can be different in the new context of SM as it possesses both the characteristics of personal as well as mass media. In this study, we propose that various SMM communication influences CA and the effect is different at various phases. The study makes an attempt to compare the effectiveness of select social media platforms in guiding the consumer through the decision-making journey. The study provides insight into the social media habits of youth in Kerala. Thus, the study contributes significantly to the theory building on SMM and CA and provides marketers with actionable insights to better strategize in the context of SM.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Social Media Marketing and Consumer Adoption

A thorough review of the existing literature is done to understand how SMM influences CA. SM strongly influences purchase decision-making especially in creating awareness; SM can induce or dissuade purchases (Yogesh & Yesha, 2014). The study indicates a positive relationship between SMM and purchases. Both user-generated and organizational social media brand communications positively affect awareness (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2015). This study establishes a clear relationship between Social Media communications and the initial phase of adoption; i.e, awareness. Social media influences all the stages in the decision-making process; however, it is predominantly used by consumers at the awareness and information search stages (Osei & Abenyin, 2016). The study goes a step further by pointing that SMM can influence the information search phase and other phases as well. Social media marketing communications has a positive influence on cognitive, affective and behavioral components among adolescents, but at a declining scale, which correlates to the purchase funnel (Duffett, 2017). This study systematically evaluates the influence of SMM on various phases of CA and also draws a connection with the well-established hierarchy of effects model. Social media usage influences consumer satisfaction in the stages of information search and alternative evaluation (Voramontri & Klieb, 2018). The study indicates that SM enhances the satisfaction level of consumers during the different phases of consumer decision making. SM platform's impact on consumer decision-making is on the rise, especially in gaining inspiration and information; however, the final intention to purchase is not as highly influenced by the content produced as previously expected (Nash, 2019). The study showcases the growing need for marketers to use SM as a strategy to influence the consumer decision making. Social media positively influences consumer luxury purchase intention and social media word of mouth is strongly influenced by personal and functional value (Park et al., 2020). This study draws attention to the additional variables that are likely to influence consumer decision making in the newly emerging environment of social media.

All the studies cited above suggest that SM strongly influences purchase decisions. However, there is a need to clearly establish the effect of SMM on various stages of CA and to study if social media platforms differ on its effectiveness in guiding one through the adoption process. An understanding on these aspects will help marketers to better target marketing using SM. In the light of a thorough review of the literature and discussions with the experts, following hypotheses are framed.

H1: Social media marketing has significant influence on the stages of consumer adoption

H2: Influence of Social Media Marketing is different at various stages of consumer adoption

H3: There is a significant difference between social media platforms when it comes to influencing the stages of adoption.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Method

The study is done in the State of Kerala, India among the youth. Social Media platforms- Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and WordPress- representing different categories of social media are selected. An online survey using a structured questionnaire was used for the survey and data were collected using google forms. The study used a multi-stage sampling approach. In the first stage a purposive sampling was used to collect the data owing to lack of authoritative data on the social media usership in the State. Initially, the researcher selected 20 respondents from his Facebook account and collected their responses. In the second stage, the respondents were asked to further circulate the questionnaire among their connections. Thus, in the second stage, a snowball sampling approach was used. Participants were asked to answer the

questions using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). A total of 110 samples were collected and were evaluated using SPSS.

3.4 Independent Variables

The Independent variable selected for the study is Social Media Marketing. The constructs used for measuring Social Media Marketing are Peer Recommendations, Ratings and Reviews and Forums and Communities. Standardised scale of Hajli (2013) is adapted for the study.

3.4 Dependent Variables

Consumer Adoption is the dependent variable used for the study. It was measured by the constructs Awareness, Knowledge, Liking, Preference, Intention to buy and Purchase following the model proposed by Lavidge & Steiner (1961). These stages are further grouped into Cognitive, Affective and Conative phases. Standardised scales were used to measure the constructs.

4. Conclusion

The communication environment related to marketing is rapidly changing due to the growing popularity of SM. It is important for marketers to understand how SM influences the CA stages. The study reveals that SM is very effective in the cognitive and affective phases; i.e, in informing about a product, learning about the functioning of a product or service, framing opinions and preferences about a product. However, its influence is lesser on the conative phase i.e., in prompting consumers to try the product and to finally purchase it. In guiding consumers through the adoption stages the effectiveness of social media platforms are not alike. YouTube is found more effective in building awareness and interest. However, Facebook is rated as a more effective platform in facilitating evaluation of the products. The findings of the study will help the marketers to strategize better as a new era of ‘influencer marketing’ through Social Media Platforms is unfolding.

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