

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING: CUSTOMER AWARENESS AND ATTITUDES IN DIR (UPPER), KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA

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Abstract

Background: The usage of social media is increasing exponentially to satisfy the social needs of internet users; at the same time, it has also increased the opportunities for corporations to market their products & services in a personalized way. The record shows that social media has contributed significantly to changing the perception of customers in the buying process. Organizations can't ignore the growing importance of social networking sites on the buying behavior of customers.

Aims and Methodology: This study is an attempt to examine the extent of social media in making /influencing the buying decisions of customers and to explore the antecedents of social media marketing in the faraway district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Dir Upper. The study was aimed at three points (i) to study the influence of social media on consumer buying behavior, (ii) to investigate the awareness of the customers about social media marketing and, (iii) to study the perception of customers towards social media marketing practices used by marketers. To achieve the study objective, a descriptive research design was used & a close-ended questionnaire was used based on prior literature and to collect the primary data from social media users.

Results: A total of 100 participants take part in this online survey out of which 91% were male and 9% were female. Further, the participant was classified into age, education, and monthly income as shown in the table. The majority of respondents were graduate 36% and 34% of the respondents belong to the age group of 30-35 years old. The monthly income for the respondents was found <15000 in 22 % while 15000-30000 in the respondents were 32%. Out of the total respondents, 76% respondents were aware of social media so further study was conducted with this group of people only.

Conclusion: The conclusions of the paper reveal the attitude of customers toward social media marketing. The majority of the internet users of Dir Upper were aware of social media & they are using it also, so it can be the best tool for brand promotion if used efficiently. Social media not only make customers aware of brands, but customers also prefer the brands advertised through social media while making their final purchase. Customers have a positive perception of social media marketing practices; they consider social media advertising more interesting, innovative, informative, and interactive as compared to traditional advertising.

Keywords: social media, Perception, Social Networking Sites, Dir Upper

Introduction

Over the last two decades, the extraordinary rise of interactive digital technology has influenced practically every element of young consumers' everyday lives. This new interactive revolution is the outcome of notable breakthroughs on the internet, the world's largest information superhighway [1]. With the emergence of the Internet and the globalization that preceded it, social networking became more faster, resulting in creative information communication technology (ICT) channels labeled social media and/or Web 2.0. However, social networking is not a new phenomenon; it has always been like humans to interact and socialize with one another, as well as to suggest, comment on, and alert one another to commercial material [2]. Hence, the majority of people who use the Internet also use one or more forms of online social media [3]. The way information is communicated to and from individuals all over the world is changing, ease by the social media. The increased adoption of social media, such as blogs and other social networking sites, as well as media-sharing technology, is altering how businesses respond to customers' demands and desires, as well as how they respond to competitors. By utilizing social media marketing technologies, marketers may now engage in larger and more inventive types of online mass media communications. Individuals are grouped by interests, hometowns, employers, schools, and other characteristics in social networking services. Marketers looking to engage users are increasingly turning to social networking.

Social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, WeChat, and Google allow people to create personalized online pages, communicate and interact with friends, and share user-generated content (UGC) and/or information from other brand-related sources [4, 5]. It is a low-cost technique of marketing that allows businesses to interact directly with their customers. Given the variety of options accessible to customers and the growing influence of social media marketing, brands and consumers play a different role in the organization's strategy now that they have a financial impact. Customers are influenced by brands. Customers have an impact on other customers. These occurrences have an impact on repurchases, which in turn has an impact on future earnings and the long-term viability of the company.

Overall, it aids a firm in raising brand awareness, generating leads, expanding its client base, and increasing sales and market share. Social media may be a very cost-effective means of online promotion if properly planned and handled.

Customers' perceptions of social media and its marketing methods are the focus of this cross-sectional study. It will also aid in determining the circumstances under which businesses should prefer social media marketing over traditional marketing.

Literature review

Sliva, Bhuptani, Menon & D'Sliva (2011) [6] attempted to understand the pattern of social media usage among Mumbai's youth. It also attempted to determine the impact of social media on consumer purchasing habits. According to the findings of the study, social media is an important tool for young people to network.

Bashar, A. Ahmad, Irshad and Wasiq (2012) [7] conducted an empirical study to determine the usefulness of social media as a marketing tool and to determine the extent to which social media aids customers in making purchasing decisions. According to the findings of the study, the medium is rapidly growing and has enormous potential, but it is still in its infancy in India. As a result, now is the moment for businesses to develop and implement successful strategies in order to gain a larger proportion of commerce through this new medium and become the innovative firm of the future.

Vij, S. and J. Sharma (2013) [8] conducted research on consumers' and marketers' social media experiences in Punjab. The report proposed metrics for effective Social Media Marketing (SMM) strategies based on the study's findings and literature review. Above all, material for social media marketing should be 'interesting,' 'educational,' 'interactive,' and 'trustworthy.' Marketers should adjust their social media marketing efforts to reflect evolving client tastes and preferences.

Yadav N.J (2012) [9] attempted to establish the importance of social networks as an advertising medium by evaluating the existing advertising methods that are currently in use through case studies, and came to the conclusion that social websites are not only a tool for interacting with different people, but also a medium for reaching out to potential customers.

Dash, Ajit Kumar (2011) [10] looked into the relevant factors for online marketing awareness, the purpose of use, and the use of social networking sites, and came to the conclusion that college students are well aware of different social networking sites, and their use and popularity is growing, so it is serving as a very good medium for connecting students. As a result, marketing with the help of these sites can play an important part in online marketing, but product quality must be ensured because user groups are knowledgeable.

P. Bhakuni and P. Aronkar (2012) [11] attempted to comprehend the social media usage patterns of Gwalior students, as well as the impact of social media advertising on the students' purchasing intentions. The study found that social media has a positive impact on people's lives.

Objective

This cross-sectional study aimed to

- a. To study the influence of social media on consumer buying behavior.
- b. To investigate the awareness of the customers about social media marketing and
- c. To study the perception of customers towards social media marketing practices used by the marketers.

Hypothesis

We hypothesized that there is no discernible link between brand awareness and desire for brands promoted on social media sites.

Research Methodology 1) Research design

A descriptive cross-sectional research design was utilized to examine customer behavior toward Social Media Marketing. Close ended questionnaires of google form were used to acquire primary data. The primary data were collected through social media form WhatsApp, Facebook and emails etc.

2) Research setting

This research study aimed the population involve the users of social media of Upper Dir irrespective of their socioeconomic status, gender and age. 100 internet users were selected through convenient sampling with a duration of one week.

3) Analysis:

The data collected was analyzed with the help of various SPSS statistical software.

Results 1) Demographic characteristics

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented in table 1. A total of 100 participant take part in this online survey out of which 91% were male and 9% were female. Further the participant was classified into age, education and monthly income as shown in the table. Majority of respondents were graduate 36% and 34% of the respondents belong to the age group of 30-35 years old. The monthly income for the respondents were found <15000 in 22 % while 15000-30000 the respondents were 32%.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Classification		Frequency	Percent
Age	<25 Years	25	25.0
	25-30	27	27.0
	30-35	34	34.0
	>35	14	14.0
Sex	Male Female	91	91.0
		9	9.0
Education	Intermediate	8	8.0
	Graduate	36	36.0
	Post-graduate Other	29	29.0
		27	27.0
Income	<15000 PKR	22	22.0
	15000-30000 PKR	32	32.0
	30000-450000	18	18.0
	>450000	28	28.0

2) Awareness of social media websites

Out of the total respondents 76% respondents were aware about the social media so further study was conducted with these group of people only.

Table 2: Awareness of social media websites

S NO	Response	Frequency	Percent
1	Yes	76	76.0
2	No	24	24.0
	Total	100	100.0

3) Perception of customers towards social media marketing practices

Respondents were requested to share their level of agreement on 7 statements about their perception towards social media marketing. The degree of agreement towards statements was set from 1 to 5 (5 denotes the strongly agree, whereas, 1 is the strongly disagree). In addition, following criteria is used for analysis part.

- a. The score among 1.00-1.80 means Strongly Disagree.
- b. The score among 1.81-2.60 means Disagree
- c. The score among 2.61-3.40 means Neutral
- d. The score among 3.41-4.20 means Agree
- e. The score among 4.21-5.00 means Strongly Agree

Table 3: Perception of customers towards social media marketing practices

S No	Statement	Mean	Level of agreement
1	Advertisements through social media are more interesting than traditional advertising.	3.53	Agree
2	Social media advertisements are more interactive than traditional advertising	4.07	Strongly Agree
3	Social media advertising is more informative than traditional advertising.	2.45	Disagree
4	I refer to the opinion of experts on social media sites while considering any product or service.	2.53	Disagree
5	I am subscribed to updates and alerts regarding a brand or product through social media networking sites.	2.42	Disagree
6	Organizations that use social media for marketing purpose are more innovative than others who are not using it.	4.26	Strongly agree
7	I feel comfortable in sharing my information on social media sites.	2.02	Disagree

Statement1:

Customers are agreeing with the statement that Advertisements through social media are more interesting than traditional advertising, which shows that marketers should move their promotional efforts from traditional tools to social media tools.

Statement 2:

The more interaction with customers can motivate them more to purchase the advertised brand. Here it is clear from the mean score of second statement that customers strongly believe that social media advertisements are more interactive than traditional advertising.

Statement 3:

Customers were asked to compare the social media advertising & traditional advertising on informative ground, & result revealed that customer disagree with social media advertising more informative than traditional

advertising. It shows that in social media advertising information cannot be revealed more effectively in comparison to traditional advertising.

Statement 4:

There are so many experts available on social media websites who provide opinion to customers before purchasing any product any service, respondents were asked to share their view that whether they consider these opinions or not. No customer's agreement was found that whether customers refer to the opinion of experts on social media sites while considering any product or service or not.

Statement 5:

Anybody can subscribe to updates and alerts regarding a brand or product through social media networking but the respondents taken under study don't subscribe to these updates.

Statement 6:

Innovation is highly needed to increase the market share and respondents are agreeing on the point that Organizations that use social media for marketing purpose are more innovative than others who are not using it. It means to be more innovative organizations must advertise through social media websites.

Statement 7:

The respondents taken under study feel not comfortable in sharing their information on social media websites so it can be said that while advertising on social media websites, marketers cannot get additional information about prospects which can help them to target customers in better way.

4) Conclusion

1. Majority of Internet users of Dir Upper are aware about social media & they are using it also, so it can be a best tool for brand promotion, if used efficiently.
2. Social media not only make customers' aware about brands, but customers also prefer the brands advertised through social media while making their final purchase.
3. Customers have positive perception towards social media marketing practices; they consider social media advertising more interesting, innovative, informative and interactive as compare to traditional advertising.

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