

A Comprehensive Study on The Influence of Social Media on The Consumption of High Involvement Products in The Context of Kolkata

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Abstract

In terms of usage and acceptability, social media is a roaring success. Social media platforms affect individual's communication and interaction with each other, how they voice and exchange thoughts, and how they connect with products, and corporations. Moreover, social media platforms have advanced to important knowledge-sharing platforms for consumers

A sufficient number of research have attempted to uncover the function and impact of social media on aspects of customer behavior pre, during, and post the purchase process. Most research take a micro approach, stressing on a specific type of social medium (e.g., consumer review websites), a particular application (e.g., Facebook), a specific stage of the decision-making process (e.g., information search), or a specific phase of the buying process (e.g., information search) (e.g., after purchase). In spite of the benefits of such micro perspectives, the entire scenario of how consumers utilize social media and their influence at all phases of the purchase process and decision making is still imprecise.

This research attempts to add to our understanding in a number of ways. Initially, to consumer behavior theory, by suggesting exchange of information as a consumer behavior construct. Secondly, study on social media in the context of high-involvement products. Thirdly, by providing the social media enabled buying process prototype as a framework for analyzing the function and influence of social media on a high-involvement products buying process.

Keywords: *Consumer Behaviour Theory, AIDA Model, High Involvement Products, Online Shopping.*

Introduction

The influence of social media on high involvement products has already been described as tremendous as purchases are seen as risky, and hence decision-making processes is data-heavy. The concept of consumer engagement in an online setting has also begun to gain prominence in marketing literature. Customers participate in several behaviours on social networks like browsing, and interacting but when making a major buying decision, customers believe social networks to be a critical source of information.

Growth of social media:

Social media is an admired digital activity, and the penetration of social networking is increasing across the globe. The usage of social media across the world was 49 percent in early 2020 and is forecasted to increase as other digital markets match up to other regions in terms of development of infrastructure and the availability of cheaper mobile devices. Thus, the rise in the use of mobile devices is a dominant force in the growth of social media's growth globally. In 2020, more than 3.6 billion people utilize social media at the global level and is projected to rise to approximately 4.41 billion by 2025. As an essential component of daily use of the internet, importance of social media cannot be ignored. Cyber citizens spend about 144 minutes every day on messaging apps and social media, approximately thirty minutes increase from 2015. Facebook was the first social media platform to cross the mark of one billion registered accounts. Facebook has about 2.93 billion active subscribers per month as of the first three months of 2022, making Facebook the most popular social network globally. As of January 2022, India had nearly 330 million Facebook subscribers, while the United States ranked second with approximately 179 million subscribers. On account of COVID-19 crisis, social media platforms witnessed an increase in daily usage, which then plateaued in 2021. In mid-2018, Instagram surpassed one billion monthly active users. In 2020, Instagram had 114 million users in the United States, and experts predicted by 2023 it would rise to 127 million. (Statista, 2022) Instagram has become the most popular social media among the Indian youth. YouTube has garnered maximum recognition during the pandemic. Youth Online Learning Organization report believes that 80 % of the respondents were engaged in social networks when they were online and over 49% users spend 5 hours a day and about 30 % for 6 hours a day. (Business Standard, 2020)

Shift of mode of purchase to Online:

The COVID-19 outbreak has hastened the shift to a more online realm and provoked improvements in online shopping habits that will have long-drawn consequences. According to a survey, internet shopping has risen across almost all product divisions. The most widely used platforms of communication, according to the survey, are Instagram, WhatsApp, and Facebook Messenger, which are all owned by Facebook. According to the survey results, transitions to online activities will transcend the COVID-19 outbreak. Electronics, household goods, gardening, education, pharmaceuticals, and personal care are the highest gainers. The global surge of online shopping showcases the relevance of certifying that the world can capitalize on the opportunity afforded by digitization as the world shifts from response of the pandemic to restoration. (UNCTAD, 2020)

Online purchase of high involvement products:

Involvement is a factor that might explain how advertising information is processed by consumers and how that information may impact the recipients of the communication. One of the issues that has hampered the research of involvement is determining how to describe and assess it. (Zabanga Marketing, 2020). High engagement products are mostly purchased through a sagacious procedure that is time-consuming and requires effort of the purchaser. Customers are expected to pay detailed attention to all stages of the process of buying. Consumers

undergo a rigorous and time-taking consumer decision process to spot all the data needed to take an informed decision regarding purchase. This includes information generated by the marketer through advertising, promotional activities and also information given by family members, friends, and reliable experts like opinion leaders and influencers. Communications technology advancements have changed and, in a lot of cases, replaced traditional methods of gathering relevant information during the assessment of alternatives phase of the process of decision-making. The latest generation of shoppers has accessibility to more advanced technology, and they can often make decisions in real time when purchasing high-engagement products over social media like cars and computers. It would be fascinating to discover what variables are important to consider when a new generation of purchasers buys high-involvement products. (Santandreu & Shurden, 2017)

Materials and Methodology

Models:

AIDA, Hierarchy of Effects Model, Innovation Adoption Model, Information Processing Model, and Operational model are traditional Response Hierarchy models that explains the behavior and response of consumers to marketing communication but such models are not free from criticism. The models' usefulness has been disputed by cognitive psychology, which analyses the brain's information processing. It has been chastised since the persuasive power of advertising on consumer purchasing decisions has been questioned. The impact of marketing communication on customer purchasing behavior is divided into a succession of stages by the hierarchy of effects. Consumers are exposed to a wide range of information in the real world, according to cognitive psychology academics, which influences their ultimate purchasing choice. Due to the large amount of background noise, gaining an understanding of how the marketing communication message is processed at each level in the consumer's thinking becomes nearly difficult. Another critique levelled against this theory is that all types of marketing communication is supposed to have the same number of stages. The distinction between marketing tactics and product kinds is completely ignored in this manner. Thus, the shift to non-hierarchical models was the best fit in a competitive world where transactional communication on social media is the key to sustainability. Understanding the shift of communication from a linear (only getting information through reading a newspaper or watching tv) to an interactive (creating value through feedback but creates interference due to noise in the communication channel like radio) to a transactional model (social media- where the people create shared meaning which entails response) is important. The linear/hierarchical models are not relevant to social media as it not only discourages effective real-time feedback but also dissuades open dialogue which is an engaging factor on which social media is built. The transition to a conversational media has commenced where the response of the consumer has an influence on the future communication with them. Hence, a positive transactional and meaningful communication is ideal to win a lifetime consumer. Thus, it is imperative for marketers to create a community of reference groups in the form of opinion leaders and influencers as engagement on social media can act as a real impetus which is more effective than other strategies of marketing in earning the trust of consumers. On the part of the consumer engaging in social media allows collaboration and content customization, also offers them more freedom of options with instant speed.

Cognitive Response Approach is used as a method to assess consumer's cognitive processing of communication messages from the marketer which influences the final affirmation or dismissal of the communication. There are three classifications of cognitive responses namely product thoughts, source-oriented thoughts, and ad execution-related thoughts. The success of this approach largely depends on the brand engagement of the customer and their possibility of processing the message communication. (Belch, Belch, & Purani, 2021)

Consumers process and respond to communication messages differently which is explained by the Elaboration Likelihood Model of Persuasion. This model was propounded by Richard Petty and John Cacioppo. This model believes the nature and extent of elaboration along with the information processing that transpires as a response to the persuasive communication impacts attitude formation. High elaboration implies that the recipient is carefully thinking, and assessing the information contained in the communication whereas low elaboration arises due to less consideration, thinking and evaluation of the information. The inference about the brand or source is made on a simple positive or negative hint. This model depicts that elaboration likelihood comprises of two components- motivation and the ability to process the persuasion message. Variables like involvement, personal relevance, needs of consumers and their levels of arousal influence the motivation to process the message. Ability on the other hand is dependent on recipient's knowledge, intellect and the opportunity to process the communication. According to this model, there are two ways to persuasion- central and peripheral. The implication of the ELM is vital for marketing communications especially regarding involvement. If the level of engagement is high amongst the recipients, the communication message should contain arguments which is challenging to counterargue. But if the level of involvement is low, cognitive shortcuts may be more vital than message arguments. The ELM is considered an influential contribution to literature on forms of persuasion but a recent study (UK, USA and Australia) noted that the paradigm shift from traditional to social media, challenges the relevance of such advertising theories propounded during the time when traditional media was ruling. The study also did not find any support to the idea that consumer attitudes created through the

central route to persuasion predicts behavior better than the peripheral route to persuasion. (Belch, Belch, & Purani, 2021)

The Theory of Reasoned Action and its offshoot, the Theory of Planned Behavior, are cognitive theories which provide a conceptual framework for examining human behavior in various situations. The theory of planned behavior has been widely employed to aid in the forecasting of a variety of buying behaviours. In the classic Theory of Reasoned Action, a person's intention to be involved in a particular behavior is the primary determinant of whether they will be engaged or not. Attitudes and subjective norms forecast intentions. If a person views a certain behavior or action favourably, and consider the conduct is essential to their peers, family, or community, the more probable they are to engage in it. Intentions can be forecasted through perceived behavioral control, subjective norms, and attitude towards behavior to perform a variety of high accuracy behaviour. (LaCaille, 2013)

Role of Opinion Leaders and Influencers:

Opinion leaders have a tremendous impact on consumer decision-making and information dissemination, particularly in high-involvement purchases. Opinion leaders in high-participation products have much higher levels of endurance of media-exposure, social engagement, product knowledge, uniqueness, and usage of computers than non-leaders, according to the findings of an empirical study. A theoretical model was created based on the findings, and conclusions, major implications, and future research avenues were identified. Marketers will benefit from the findings to promote high-involvement items. They're also important to real estate firms, banks, and the fast-moving consumer goods industry, which want to learn more about opinion leaders. This study represents a beginning step toward understanding opinion leadership and its impact on high-involvement products; nevertheless, additional research is needed in this area. (Sarathy & Patro, 2013)

Opinion leaders have a significant impact in shaping the passive viewer's decision, according to the data. Several research have been conducted to establish how market mavens get product details from the media and pass it on to other unassertive customers based on how they interpret it. In this context, insufficient meta-analyses have been conducted to compare, contrast, and combine the findings of various investigations. (Kwon & Song, 2014)

With the rise of social media activity involving peer and friend recommendations, user-generated content, product evaluations, and feedback, the concept of consumer engagement in an online setting has begun to gain prominence in marketing literature. (Dessart, Veloutsou & Morgan-Thomas, 2015).

The Indian consumer market is very competitive due to the constant flow of product and service information via social media. Using this information to affect purchase intent is a problem for social media marketing stakeholders. The impact of social networking applications on buying decisions thus warrants further investigation. As a result, there is a need to understand the research nuances of the decision-making process, as well as the consumer's engagement and psychological resources that enable purchase decisions. Developments in social media have had a significant impact on the influence of customer electronic communication on buying decision. Customers now perceive electronic communication as more trustworthy and reliable than traditional media communication because of social media advancement. Consumer reviews related to consumption in social media have a significantly larger impact on purchase decisions, acting as a marketing force. The most common social media applications on the internet are social networking sites (SNS). (D, 2018)

Social media networks have altered the way consumers express themselves. Identifying opinion leaders has a wide range of applications. Companies, for example, can manipulate popular sentiment by detecting opinion leaders. However, due to the complexity and constant change of the online communities' structure, this task is difficult. However, existing methods for detecting opinion leaders have primarily focused only on static social graphs, disregarding temporal characteristics. As a result, identifying opinion leaders appears to be more critical. In this context, one can present a novel method for identifying opinion leaders that is based on reviewing online community interactions and dealing with the evolving nature of social networks. (Oueslati, Arrami, Dhouioui, & Massaabi, 2020)

Opinion leaders are gaining more importance on social media platforms as their exposure can influence the attitudes of their followers on a range of issues. While previous research using agent-based modelling provided preliminary evidence on the effect of opinion leaders, it is still indistinct how opinion leaders influence their environment of network and also the opinion climate when they publicly have ambivalent attitudes, and when they not only express their own stance but also discredit the opposing perspective. (Rochert, Cargnino, & Neubaum, 2022)

Previous studies have been undertaken based on the expansion of influencer marketing, and the topic is well-represented in the literature. However, the phenomena have mostly been studied in a broad sense or in relation to low-involvement products. There is a paucity of literature addressing empirical proof of how efficient influencer marketing is in other product categories, such as high-involvement products. Previous findings may not be applicable in different circumstances because there is a variation in consumer behavior between low- and high-involvement items. (Halin, 2020)

This study looked at how a personality feature called public individuation can help us better comprehend opinion leadership. The importance of this new psychological component is examined, as well as previous results on the qualities of opinion leaders. Apart from personal participation and product acquaintance, discriminant analysis found that public individuation was the only other characteristic that distinguished opinion leaders from non-leaders. Though risk inclination, open-mindedness, and media exposure were found to be associated with opinion leadership, they were not found to be significant predictors. (Chan & Misra, 2013)

The research looks at how opinion leadership manifests itself in today's media contexts, as communication networks have expanded and begun to pervade relational interactions. Some researchers believe that under these conditions, opinion leadership becomes more crucial and thus greater orientation is required. Others think that opinion leadership is becoming less important as online media directly targets consumers without the involvement of opinion leaders. This research shows that in today's media landscapes, opinion leadership still exists. Three clusters were identified through cluster analysis in Germany: Opinion Leaders, Followers, and In actives. Another group, Mediatized Opinion Leaders, was identified as well. Individuals belonging to this group have powerful and distinctive personalities. (Schafer & Taddicken, 2015)

In spite of the hike of and enthusiasm for social-media marketing, there is a paucity of theoretical and empirical understanding about social media advertising's cross-border efficiency and influence on customer behavior in the social-media landscape. (Johnston, Khalil, Le, & Cheng, 2018)

Consumer reviews on the internet, which serve as recommenders and notifiers, are critical in purchase judgements and sales. Their convincing power is determined by both their quantity and quality. The Elaboration Likelihood Model is used in this research to explain how product engagement moderates these correlations. The study concludes that the calibre of online reviews has a positive consequence on consumers' purchasing aims, that purchasing intention is positively correlated to the number of reviews, and that low-engagement consumers are more affected by quantity of review than by review quality and high-engagement consumers are primarily impacted by review quantity when quality of review is high. These findings have ramifications for how online businesses manage online customer reviews. (Park, Lee, & Han, 2007)

Result and Discussions

Impact of social media on behavioral decision-making:

The impact of the extensive use of social media can have a massive influence on managerial and personal decision-making. In addition, social media leads to new forms of peer pressure that are more instant and broader in scope than anything encountered in person. Since the decision maker seeks trust-worthy information from members of his or her social network, informational conformance has an impact on decision making. Since the decision maker complies to be accepted by members of his or her social networks, normative conformity may result in biased conclusions.

Crowd behavior, which may be harmful, is also encouraged by social media. People in a crowd respond in various ways and are not too aware of the real nature of their behaviours, according to Sigmund Freud's hypothesis. Convergence theory, on the other extreme, maintains that mob behavior is not a result of the mob itself, but rather is brought into the crowd by certain individuals; hence, crowds reflect a gathering of similar and like-minded people. People use social media to generate mobs and impact behaviour.

Another drawback of social media is the saturation effect, which may shape decision-making. "In communications networks, saturation refers to the communication overflow experienced by group members in centralized positions." The higher the group is saturated; the efficiency is lesser and the satisfaction of its members is also less.

Conclusions

Broad Gaps:

- 1) There is a need to understand the research nuances of the decision-making process (pre, during and post purchase) and the customer's involvement and psychological factors that enable online purchase decisions for high involvement products by integrating a few social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.
- 2) The key question remains unanswered which has hampered the research on involvement is determining how to define and assess involvement.
- 3) It is important to address the situational factors (e.g., time of purchase) impacting offline purchase and whether they are relevant for online purchase of high involvement products or not.
- 4) It is indistinct how opinion leaders influence their network environment and opinion climate when they have ambivalent attitudes publicly.
- 5) There is insufficiency of study on the self-presentational motives (impression motivation) and involvement of opinion leaders to influence consumer behavior in the context of high involvement products.
- 6) There is paucity of literature on addressing empirical proof of how efficient social media influencers are with regard to high involvement products.

- 7) Prior studies of the online word of mouth effects, consumer reviews, product assessments and their experiences have largely focused on low involvement products thus neglecting the high involvement products which needs to be examined thoroughly.
- 8) There is a dearth of theoretical and empirical understanding about social media's cross-border efficiency and influence on consumer behavior in the context of high engagement products.
- 9) Studies on involvement with the product has found significant importance but involvement with the buying process, and communication is not defined elaborately.
- 10) Significant marketing variables impacting the purchase of high involvement products through social media pertinent to the latest generation of buyers should be investigated.

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