

Footprints of Digital Marketing on Customers' Purchase Decisions

by

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Abstract

The review article is specifically targeted towards the footprints of digital marketing on the customers' purchase decision. Though customers' purchase decision process is not single-handedly handled, it is a consolidated process that involves societal influence, word-of-mouth, cultural values, income level & other psychological aspects. However, the current era of the 2.0 web is not less than anything and contributes majorly towards constructing a customer's purchase decision. Thereby, the following article's objectivity is filled by reviewing 16 research articles from around the world from 2010. Nonetheless, specific recommendations have also been summarized at the end of this review article to help marketers digitalize their businesses & increase their customers' loyalty.

Keywords: Digital marketing, purchase decision, social influence, word-of-mouth, customers' loyalty, etc.

Introduction:

It roamed back to the cavemen ancient time, then forwarding it to the randomly modified era, formerly to the newly launched tech-savvy era and, lastly, to this present date. Selling of goods or services has been bartered in exchange for something; be it another materialistic object in exchange then or even currency. Businesses have run like this and will continue till the existence of this world. A very vital aspect of these selling activities are provoked / influences, and even too much extent is shaped by the extensive efforts of marketing for the offered good or service.

In accordance with the need of every specific era, marketing has revolutionized relatively as well. Initially, introducing from many fundamental activities of traditional ways of marketing which are exclusively performed through several means of TV advertisements, billboards, pamphlets, banners, point of purchase (POP) means and the essential method of Word-of-Mouth (WOM) marketing (Maisam et al., 2016). Though WOM has been roamed around since communication & language understandings have been established.

Speaking of which, marketing means of the present decade's need to be discussed along with proper dissection of it as well for the better way of opportunities for marketers and eventually for businesses. Varshney et al. (2018) dictated the underrated prominence of marketing with

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respect to changing times and needs. Appropriate marketing strategies, tactical & influential creation can majorly aid in making businesses' overall strategy a success or vice versa, which is why adequate study and R&D in the better interests of every entity is involved.

Discussions, studies, and rich research regarding traditional marketing approaches have been conducted vastly before, which have exclusively served as a guidance tool for many businesses. Thus, the current paper aims to analyze the enormous implications, benefits, persuasions & guidance through digital marketing to analyze customers' purchase decisions.

To prove the understandings & implications of the current discussion topic in correspondence. It is suitable mostly to have a brief view of the elements as individual entities.

Definition of Digital Marketing:

Kliejjan et al. (2020) indicate digital marketing to be a dual player doing nothing but advancing both of its stakeholders, be it consumer marketing or industrial marketing. Evolving customers' needs, amplifying competitors' pressures & rapid technological advancements have proved to be decisive for the marketers to perform well with sustainability. However, as a result, digital marketing has come into actuality, and since then, promoting offered products and services has transformed into more compacted yet operative mediums.

Unlike traditional marketing, digital marketing is updating and upgrading with every counting second. As the present era is full of uncertainty, digital marketing can be counted as one of them. It is full of enormous capabilities that can provoke a business's sales graph boom within weeks, and for which all it takes is continual & righteous engagement procedures for its target audience. All & all, these efforts will be offered to the target audience; therefore, digital marketing aims to give what exactly it takes (Madhu & Verma, 2018).

Chaffey and Smith (2017) described digital marketing as a consolidated amalgamation of data sciences, technological bits & continual target audience's requirements means package. Businesses, economics, and even individuals can learn a lot from the impeccable servings of modern world marketing, and they are doing so as well.

Typically, digital marketing involves social media appearance, SEO & content marketing, augmented reality & virtual reality activities. However, these modes of marketing are not finalized yet, as technology runs this marketing method.

Gawas et al. (2018) realized the underrated binding of digital marketing and customers' purchase decision. As mentioned before, customers are the direct stakeholders to all the resultant outcomes obtained from digital marketing. Hence, customers' liking, preference, and opinions matter a lot in shaping digital marketing efforts for a business. This mechanism works the other way around as well; likewise, digital marketing plays a technical yet prominent role in shaping customers' purchase decisions.

As discussed earlier, the realization serves primarily the worth to design the objective of this very research. The exclusive combination (effects, impacts, influences, and driving force) of digital marketing will be confirmed concerning the customers' purchase decision behavior.

Before accumulation to which, a quick review of the whereabouts of the customers' purchase decision pattern is needed to address.

Customers' Purchase Decision Model:

Wharton (2011) describes a customer's purchase decision about businesses' outcome to process and process it into a clean & clear form for further operational activities. The customer is

an individual who is made up of emotions, feelings, the ability to think & perceive messages & decode accordingly. However, these perceiving activities comprise a being’s self but are made in the contribution of societal, cultural & surrounding’s massive influence. Mentioning “word-of-mouth” influence is fully justified because whatever the customer hears, sees, or observes is a mixture of many variables available in his or her environment. The intensity of the purchased material plays a significant role in shaping every customer’s basic purchase decision pattern. The instance is; customer “A” who wants to buy a car will put more effort and time into deciding about his / her purchase and hence follow an extensive purchase decision pattern in comparison to customer “B” who wants to buy a pen.

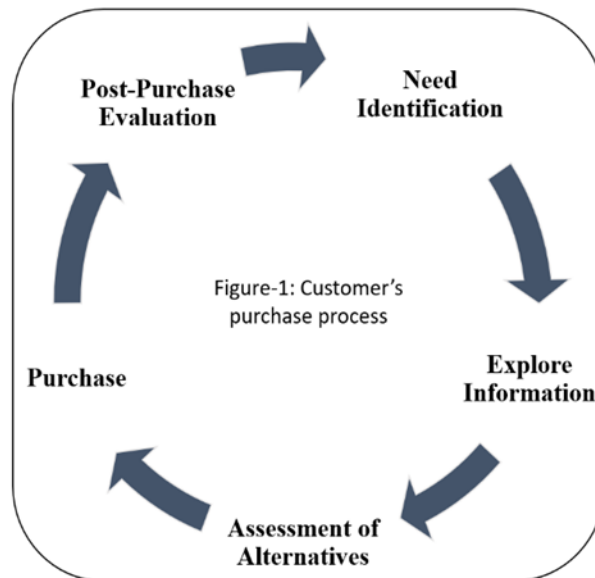


Figure 1: Customer’s purchase process (Wharton, 2011)

Thereby, the exact pattern of a customer’s purchase decision is indecisive and can be affected by cultural, social, and psychological factors. However, a general customer goes by the phases to make a purchase decision as shown in figure-1.

This process will immediately serve as the operative means for marketers striving for their businesses to grow virtually and enhance customer loyalty on the first basis.

Research Objective:

The paper will be dissecting the intended objective to prove the understanding & importance of the mentioned concepts upon one another, “Analyze the footprints of digital marketing on customers’ purchase decisions.”

Research Methodology:

To fulfill the designated objective, peer-reviewed articles and extensive research of the respective domains will be re-reviewed. Online versions of these research sources will be taken into considerations from the tenure of 2010. The sources which will be encountered in the

succeeding content will be vast as they will focus on the global perspective of digital marketing impact on customers' purchase decision.

Literature review:

The successive portion of literature will be divided into the different aspects which contribute to and influence customer's perception (psychological factors, demographic factors, income factors, societal & surrounding factors) that exclusively shape the customer's purchase decision pattern for him/her.

However, proceeding to which a comprehensive view of the peer-reviewed articles will be entitled in partial fulfillment of the objective as the above-given content's context will fill the other half.

Relationship of Digital Marketing & Customers' Purchase Decision:

To deeply understand the footprints of the former concept upon the latter, it is convenient to initially review one another's relationship, which is why the upcoming literature will be focused on the confirmations of the entitled umbrella.

Sashi (2012) investigated the customer engagement, social media & buyer-to-seller relationships of the present decade. The researchers made it clear that marketing 2.0, aka digital marketing, has opened new ways for businesses to connect with their target audience only if connected righteously. The author even focused on understanding the customer's easiness for decoding a message by the marketers, facilitating the business to grab its target audience's attention and convey the message. Thereby, to achieve the paper's aim, Sashi (2012) examined practitioner variant views about customer engagement, social media connectivity & buyer-to-seller to build a customer engagement model eventually.

As a result of which, connection, advocacy, loyalty, retention & engagement by the businesses through their social media appearance ruled the potential engagement of buyer-to-seller in the modern era.

The research by Sashi (2012) provided the dual nature of customer re-engagement results being ruled by businesses' social media performance. This eventually confirms the imperative impact of the relationship of digital marketing & customer's purchase decision as buyer-to-seller engagement will be rolled out to the amplified chances of purchase from the customer's side.

Though the upcoming literature is a bit diverged from the on-going context, but it eventually connects with the intended context at last if analyzed as a whole.

Krajnović et al. (2018) dissected the relationship of digital marketing & behavioral economics by means of relating the former with the customer's purchase decision process; as behavior plays a significant protagonist in shaping a customer's attitude towards his/her intended purchase.

With the help of peer-reviewed articles, the researchers developed a much multidisciplinary view about the cognitive process of a customer's purchase decision. They linked it with digital marketing miracles as the input of one content became the output for the other one ultimately.

Risk assessment, product familiarity, and emotions were found out to be the sole contestants that shape a customer's purchase decision, and digital marketing efforts handle the rest.

The researchers summarized digital marketing to be a two-way communicative method. Thus, marketers who use such means are directly listening and analyzing customer's viewpoints

regarding their products. Thereby, it becomes convenient in the way that marketers can examine the customer's psychic as well and market their product/service accordingly.

While they purchase or even start to think about making a purchase, customers' learning behaviors strategize the business's digital marketing efforts, which can be again affirmed by the next literature.

Prasad & Garg (2019) explained the purchase decision of generation Y in an online setting. The paper is an excellent example of digital marketing & customer's purchase decision's relevancy. As in an online setting, every little effort by the business will be following digital marketing efforts & those efforts are directly in the meantime will make or break the target audience's purchase decision towards the brand.

However, Prasad & Gard (2019) studied their intended objective with regards to Electronic Word-of-Mouth (EWOM) and generation Y (which are assumed to be university students). Literature reviews were utilized to affirm the objectives & six constructs of customer loyalty. EWOM, purchase decision, social media usage, conviction & brand reputation were the obtained variables that run in a circular motion & shape each other's adherence.

Hence, it was confirmed that the EWOM majorly contributes to generation Y's purchase decision; and EWOM is an exclusive marketed activity by businesses who live their brands digitally.

The above-entitled reviewed articles are a disseminated image of the relationship between digital marketing & customer purchase decisions. However, with the conformity of their relationship existence, the upcoming literature will now be directed towards the actual impact of digital marketing upon the customers' purchase decision.

Importance of Digital Marketing on Customers' Purchase Decision:

Mahalaxmi & Ranjith (2016) studied the impact of digital marketing on customer's purchase decision in the geographical territory of India. The study was initialized with the motive of the already established, well-reputable digital marketing existence from the customers' viewpoint. Thereby, the researchers used a qualitative research approach to gather digital marketing data on the customer purchase decision. Chi-square test was applied to clear the data obtained from surveying 50 respondents, and hence results were dictated.

Respondents were very open & imperative about digital marketing. They find it more convenient and easier to use with less hustle and accessible than traditional marketing means (selling & purchasing).

Hence, the research was locked up with the decisive outcome of digital marketing being the customer's priority, like the ease of such purchasing means benefiting the customer in terms of comfort of purchasing in just a click.

Likewise, a study was conducted in Saudi Arabia, which confirmed the other side of the matter; but eventually satisfies the on-going matter, of course. Khatib (2016) conducted quantitative research in the tenure to study the influence of social media (which was exhibited as an effort of digital marketing) on the customer's purchase decision. Furthermore, the study aimed to examine if social media's impact differs while a customer is experiencing his/her purchase decision duration. With convenient sampling, questionnaires were sent out to 360 respondents to engage them in the study and have a realistic assessment of the review.

The research results were partial as they laid to be social media influence was found out to be different for Saudi customers as they pass through different phases of a customer's decision-

making process. However, the impact of digital marketing efforts rose in the information phase of the decision-making process, which indicates that social media postings do majorly contribute to the customer's purchase intention decision.

Similarly, Meslat (2018) researched in France to propose social media's influence on consumer purchase decisions. The author conducted a case study researched in the sector of chocolate manufacturing, and the chosen company was "Chocolaterie Thibaut." The study was wholly devoted to why the customers of Chocolaterie Thibaut are not very well aware of their Facebook page, which comes under the array of social media & links back to digital marketing by Chocolaterie Thibaut.

Before contemplating the aspects of the very research, Meslat (2018) assured the importance of 2.0 marketing in France. French consumers were found out to be much skeptical about their purchases; hence there is much to handle for the marketers. The following study was conducted using mixed research methods & both interviews & questionnaires for data collection.

Later, to the data analysis procedure, outcomes were sealed as the case study company majorly had 51% female customers and was par the age of 60, indicating why customers are not very well aware of the firm's digital marketing efforts.

The generation gap & unfamiliarity of the customers for social media were blamed for being creating loopholes for the company's decreased social media appearance.

Hence, through the medium of this research, it was advised that the firm should become more open, transparent & easy with their social media appearance. Furthermore, create an awareness program about their digital marketing efforts for their customers; to influence the customer's purchase decision.

Conversely, a study in Dhaka, Bangladesh, was proposed, which discussed the binding effect of digital marketing on the amplified customer loyalty, which was proved by the exclusive help of different phases of a customer's purchase decision process.

Khan & Islam (2017) presented research to study the impact of social media's influence on increased customers' loyalty in Bangladeshi customers. The researchers considered a mix and match method to review & collect data for the intended objective, and hence questionnaires & literature available on the context was used. Exploratory factor analysis was applied to clear out the obtained data, and the impact of digital marketing was studied in regard to the customer's loyalty. The findings were exclusively indicating that additional value attributes were ranked as the priority by customers in online shopping or browsing. The content attribute was found out to be the second most influential aspect of it.

Similar research was conducted by Dahiya & Gayatri (2017), which was focused on analyzing the impact of digital marketing communication on the customer's purchase decision while purchasing a passenger car in India. A mixed research methodology was adopted for data collection, while 784 respondents were chosen from proportionate sampling to conduct interviews. After the data collection phase, data analysis was performed with three statistical tests of the binomial test, the Wilcoxon signed-rank & the chi-square test. The results were narrating the excellence of digital marketing communications and hypothetically proved that 75% of respondents chose 'Websites' to be the most influential medium of digital marketing communication while purchasing a car. Hence, the researchers summarized that from 'need recognition' to 'post-purchase,' customers find websites a trustworthy digital marketing medium.

Reddy (2017) realized the need for retail operations digital appearance thus proposed research on the impact of digital marketing on the customer's decision-making process of Nike's retail operation in South Africa. Reddy's (2017) research opens-up the impact of digital marketing

on customers' purchase decisions and signifies how vital it is for retail operating businesses to manage their digital appearance. A hybrid research methodology was utilized, and explanatory & exploratory research designs were used in collaboration with primary research methods.

Findings of the research supported the fact that Nike's Customers have accepted the idea of digital marketing & find it much appreciable rather than traditional marketing. Further, the results explained how much need recognition, the purchase & post-purchase decision are influentially affected by digital marketing other than other phases in a customers' purchase decision process.

Nizam et al. (2018) conducted a study in Malacca, Malaysia, to study online adverts' impact on the customers' purchase decision. The researchers showed a mediating role of marketing strategy towards affecting the customers' purchase decision and proposed study accordingly. Two hundred respondents were chosen to survey to gather their views & preferences on the ability to recall online ads and their likeliness to click that broadcasted ad.

Through quantitative means of data analysis, it was found that the ability to recall ads & likeliness to click that ad has the most influence over a customer's psychic to purchase or be influenced by that advertisement.

Chen et al. (2017) presented a paper on customers' purchase decision-making process as a social learning process. However, by the results of their intended study, the researchers found some other variables to be participative in making a customer's purchase decision.

A survey of 243 respondents has been conducted that were savvy users of web sites for shopping to fulfill the very research's objectivity concern. Apart from the social learning paradigm, affective & cognitive perspectives were found out to be the triggering parameters which switch the customer's purchase intentions.

Learning from forums and communities did not significantly impact customers' purchase decision process as much as learning from ratings & reviews. Thereby, the researchers summarized affective perspectives (ratings & reviews) as a persuasive variable that firmly shapes a customer's purchase decision process.

Nonetheless, the study by Chen et al. (2017) concluded in the agreement of digital marketing being a sole moderator of making a customer's purchase decision in accordance to how they are built/projected/broadcasted.

Aswari et al. (2019) investigated the impact of digital technology-driven generation Y & millennial customer behavior in Indonesia. The researchers aimed to collect information about whether generation Y and millennials even get influenced by digital media efforts & purchase in influence on that. Thereby, to fulfill this, the researchers constructed a quantitative research design and collected from 300 respondents who were millennials and Y generation respondents between 25-30 years of age. Online surveys were done to collect the data & with the help of statistical analysis, tests were used to clear out the impurities in the obtained data.

Through the medium of this research by Aswari et al. (2019) concluded that digital marketing does drive millennial & Y generation customers' purchase decisions in an imperative way around. However, the researchers also concluded that a little hint of partiality might occur where the income level is a potential variable to shift the customer's purchase paradigm in the long run.

Husnain et al. (2017) conducted a study to examine the influence of social media marketing upon the customer's purchase intention in Pakistan. The researchers conducted their study with a mediating role of customer engagement in it as well. Three hundred respondents who were online shoppers were asked to fill a questionnaire & Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to analyze the

obtained data. Results fully support the objectivity of the following research & social media influence was directly about the customer's purchase intention and customer's engagement on the company (who is marketing digitally) as a bonus.

Alrwashdeh et al. (2019) proposed a study in North Cyprus that aimed to examine the effect of Electronic Word-of-Mouth marketing on customer purchase intention & possible brand image of the brand as well. However, the study comprised only the smartphone users of North Cyprus because of the user-experience issue in online shopping; and 402 smartphone users were selected to participate in the study through online questionnaires. Findings indicated that EWOM affects customer's purchase decisions & the moderation impact of customer loyalty was shaped out by brand recognition (brand image).

Tiruwa et al. (2016) examined the impact of online brand communities, which are an exclusive activity of digital marketing, upon customers' purchase intention (PI). Literature studies' findings on the respective domain were systematically reviewed in correspondence to many brands' existing Facebook pages. Results were drawn upon the basis of the customers' engagement under the brand's Facebook posts. Along with this, 206 respondents were also made a part of the study as in adhering with the validation of a statistical model & structural equation model was, at last, applied to clean out the ultimate findings. The review research by Tiruwa et al. (2016) proved that online communities directly impact customers' purchase intention in terms of increased customer engagement under brands' posts.

Lim et al. (2017) inspected an element of digital marketing, which is the influence of "Influencers" to affect the target audience. However, the researchers do contrast their study with the mediating correspondence from the variable of customer attitude. Nonetheless, with the help of the sampling method, 200 respondents were questioned to gather data. Findings were exclusively directing towards product matchup, source credibility & source attractiveness to be the sole parameters that influence "Influencers" marketing in shaping the target audience's purchase decision; along with that, the customer attitude was also found to be worked in correspondence with those as mentioned above.

Conclusion:

Through the extensive review of the peer-reviewed articles in the field of digital marketing and customer's purchase decision, it is utterly cleared that digital marketing does serve primarily in shaping a customer's purchase decision. However, the purchase's nature might still be a mystery, and past literature lacks in justifying the former. Nonetheless, these 16 reviewed articles worldwide are solid proof of digital marketing's credibility & effectiveness in shaping the customers' purchase decision process. From the findings of reviewed articles, "the information search & post-purchase behavior" are found out to be most influenced by the activities of digital marketing. Hence, marketers must look out for the specific construction of such activities to provoke those mentioned above.

Recommendations:

Although the rich & extensive literature entitled in the following reviewed article's content is enough to justify the objectivity of the article, however, the literature is lacking a bit in roughly the following areas where marketers must grasp control & work on before their competitors do:

- i. Create awareness about digital media handling before offering the respective promotion in front of the target audience.
- ii. Engage in developing a sense of trust for customers who are relatively skeptical about shopping online rather than the others.
- iii. Satisfying the concerns of customers is a part of selling a product to them.
- iv. Lastly, as much as customers are readily comfortable buying online products of fewer amounts, the contrast exists while purchasing massive amounts. That is why grow the environment that influences customers to buy online heavy investment products.

Summary:

This review article's findings serve as an effective means of increasing knowledge regarding digital marketing's massive role in constructing a customer's purchase decision. Subsequently, the reviewed articles in this paper's context are very much vast in knowledge and provide marketers with several ways to work in and for researchers to compete.

Thus, through this paper's medium, recommendations have been reasonably mentioned to fill the currently underrated gaps, but their realization in a righteous digital marketing plan is needed.

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