Consequences of any Social Media Marketing for Customer Engagement

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Abstract: *The fashion industry is highly competitive and ever-evolving to align with shifting customer trends, posing challenges for marketers. The widespread adoption of social media among customers has intensified this competition, offering new possibilities for marketers but also enhancing customer knowledge and influence. This study explores the impact of social media marketing on customer engagement in a Sri Lankan apparel brand. The data was obtained through an online questionnaire distributed randomly to customers of specific apparel brand following its social media sites. The statistical results indicated positive and significant correlations between Perceived Value, Percieved Quality, Service Quality, Surveillance, and Customer Engagement.*

Keywords: Customer Engagement, Social Media Marketing, Perceived Value, Perceived Quality, Service Quality, Remuneration, Surveillance

I. INTRODUCTION

Social media has become a fundamental aspect of modern life and communication, connecting people through various technologies that facilitate the sharing of information and reducing the potential for market exploitation. These technologies include social networking sites, blogs, wikis, instant messaging, video-sharing sites, and more, which billions of people use to connect, learn, entertain, and broaden their knowledge. Additionally, professionals employ social media to develop their careers by connecting with others in their industry and expanding their knowledge base. At the company level, social media can provide a platform for communication with customers and receiving feedback, contributing to the company's brand elevation (Muchardie, Yudiana, and Gunawan 2016). Social media has revolutionized conventional media by allowing marketing and advertising activities to take place on a platform. In today's world, social media offers the opportunity to create a connection between brands and customers. The strategic utilization of social media marketing holds great significance for both customers and marketers. Social media is regarded as an invaluable resource by customers and marketers and the use of social media has increased recently in Sri Lanka (SL). An estimated 7.4 million people in the nation are active social media users as of 2022, making up roughly 33% of the total population. The most widely used social media networks in SL are Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, and Facebook. Individuals, companies, and organizations use these platforms extensively for marketing, communication, and information sharing. The growth of social media in SL has had a significant impact on the way people interact and consume content, and it has become an integral part of the country's digital landscape. Facebook is particularly popular for customer engagement in Sri Lanka, with many businesses setting up dedicated pages to interact with their customers. These pages allow businesses to share information about their products or services, post updates and promotions, and respond to customer inquiries and feedback. Facebook also offers advertising options that businesses can use to target specific audiences based on factors like age, location, and interests. Instagram is also gaining popularity for customer engagement in Sri Lanka, especially among the younger age groups. It is a popular platform for businesses to share visually appealing content that highlights the products or services they offer. Businesses can creatively connect with their audience and enhance brand promotion through Instagram's features like Stories and Reels. Overall, Facebook and Instagram are effective channels for customer engagement in Sri Lanka, and businesses that leverage these platforms can create meaningful connections with their audience and drive growth for their brand.

II. SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

Social media originated from the World Wide Web as an online service that facilitates the sharing of user- generated content. (Chen, Hou, and Zhao 2016) Computer-based technology that shares information, ideas, and thoughts through online networks and communities, is referred to as "Social Media". Constantinides & Fountain (2008) identified social media as social networks, content communities, blogs, and forums, naming it as Web 2.0. Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) described social media as "a community of internet-based applications that build on Web 2.0's political and technological foundations, enabling user-generated content to be produced and shared." Social media marketing is the process of advertising goods and services via different online social media platforms. This sort of marketing involves sharing content online, blogging, and posting pictures (Yazdanparast, Joseph, and Muniz 2016) and various platforms, applications, and tools that enable the connection and communication of customers with each other. (Pinto and Yagnik 2017). Marketing is an important factor in crucial business decisions considering public relations, brand development, product innovation, communications, pricing strategies, creative direction, customer relationship management, etc. Social media platforms provide an interactive and constantly updated space for active social involvement, unlike traditional media where viewers are passive recipients. As a result, social media has transformed the way information is transmitted and received. (Austin and Jin 2017; Cunningham and Craig 2019; Shabbir and Qiu 2023) Social media networks serve as an excellent platform for product and brand-related advocacy, enabling clients to create content and customer product innovations. These features have changed users from passive viewers to active participants. (Mohammed,2020.) Social media is now widely acknowledged as a useful tool for helping companies and enterprises meet their marketing goals and strategies, particularly in areas like customer relationship management, collaboration, and consumer engagement. (Jacinto et al. 2021). The most widely used social media networks in SL are Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, and Facebook. Individuals, companies, and organizations use these platforms extensively for marketing, communication, and information sharing. The growth of social media in SL has had a significant impact on the way people interact and consume content, and it has become an integral part of the country's digital landscape. Facebook is particularly popular for customer engagement in Sri Lanka, with many businesses setting up dedicated pages to interact with their customers. These pages allow businesses to share information about their products or services, post updates and promotions, and respond to customer inquiries and feedback. Facebook also offers advertising options that businesses can use to target specific audiences based on factors like age, location, and interests. Instagram is also gaining popularity for customer engagement in Sri Lanka, especially among the younger age groups. It is a popular platform for businesses to share visually appealing content that highlights the products or services they offer. Businesses can creatively connect with their audience and enhance brand promotion through Instagram's features like Stories and Reels.

III. CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

Involvement, commitment, passion, enthusiasm, focused effort, zeal, dedication, and energy are common definitions of engagement. Similar to this, the Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the state of being engaged as "being in gear" and "emotional involvement or commitment." (Truss et al. 2013) Customer engagement is a relatively new concept that emerged in the digital era. A company builds relationships with its customer base through customer engagement, which promotes brand awareness and loyalty. This can be accomplished via marketing campaigns, new content created for and posted to websites, and outreach via social media and mobile and wearable devices, among other methods. It is proposed that in interactive and dynamic business landscapes, prioritizing customer engagement becomes a strategic necessity to drive improved corporate performance, such as sales expansion, a stronger competitive advantage, and profitability (Brodie et al. 2011) These claims are supported by the argument that loyal consumers are essential to viral marketing campaigns because they recommend and/or refer particular goods, services, and/or brands to others. The creation of new goods and services can also benefit greatly from the involvement of engaged consumers. (Hoyer et al. 2010) Customer engagement extends beyond mere purchase behavior, as indicated by van Doorn et al. (2010). It is demonstrated through the sustained use of social media and is anticipated to take place when customers hold a favorable attitude toward social media. (Hussein and Hassan 2017)

IV. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING AND CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

The combination of social media marketing and customer engagement has rarely been explored in marketing literature. Loyalty to social networking sites contributes to the cultivation of relationships. The active participation of users on a brand's social media platforms, including sharing content about the brand and its products, expressing both support and criticism and engaging in knowledge exchange with their social connections, has a direct positive impact on the business and benefits other customers. Marketing relationships include the relationships established between buyers and sellers, potential and real customers, other consumers, society as a whole, and sellers. Social media platforms provide incentives that promote engagement and foster relationships between people and brands based on mutual respect, trust, and loyalty, whether or not users become customers. (Vivek, Beatty, and Morgan 2012). Customer engagement can be assessed by customer satisfaction, customer trust, customer involvement, customer commitment, customer retention, purchase intention, etc. (Vinerean and Opreana 2021) Customer satisfaction serves as an effective catalyst for normative behavior based on exchange, while attachment represents a psychologically active state that engages in beneficial activities. (Ray, Kim, and Morris 2014) Consequently, long-term customer behavior is often influenced fundamentally by their satisfaction. (Oliver 2018) The cornerstone of interactions between individuals and businesses lies in customer trust (Hsu et al. 2007; van Tonder and Petzer 2018) Trust plays a crucial role in dealings between stakeholders, especially when customers are expected to make payments for services they have not yet received or experienced. Moorman, Deshpandé, and Zaltman 2018; Morgan and Hunt 2018 have defined trust as the willingness to depend on an exchange partner that instills confidence.

V. FACTORS INFLUENCING CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

Researchers have stated many factors influencing customer engagement. According to existing literature, those people who are fans of brands will tend to like and adore the content posted by their favorite brands on social media such as by reacting (liking), sharing, and commenting (Araujo and Neijens 2012; Lin and Lu 2011a; Ruiz-Mafe, Martí-Parreño, and Sanz-Blas 2014). Vividness (Coyle and Thorson 2013; Fortin and Dholakia 2005), description of a product (Coyle and Thorson 2013; De Vries, Gensler, and Leeflang 2012a), interactivity (Fortin and Dholakia 2005; Liu and Shrum 2013), Entertainment (Lin & Lu, 2011b; Sledgianowski, D., & Kulviwat, S., 2009), , surveillance, remuneration (Mohammed, 2020), content novelty (Mendelson 2001), perceived value (Parasuraman 1997) and Product/Service Quality (Kalla, Sharma, and Sondhi 2017; Krishnamoorthy, Karthikeyan, and Prakash 2016) are some factors reported in the literature, that influence the customer engagement through social media platforms.

(i) Perceived value- Perceived value is the comprehensive assessment made by the customer regarding the usefulness or benefits they receive from a product or service in exchange for what they have paid (Zeithaml 1988). Hollebeek (2013) recognized perceived value as a critical element in establishing long-term relationships. The success or failure of a business hinges on how well perceived value is integrated with customer engagement. Previous research in mobile commerce has shown that perceived value has a strong impact on user satisfaction (Lin and Wang 2006). In addition, studies have also found that the perceived value of online platforms can significantly affect user satisfaction (Carlson et al. 2015). Some researchers have also focused on the social aspect of consumption and have suggested that social value plays a role in explaining user behavior in information systems (Rintamäki et al. 2006). Several research studies have used brand perceived value as a mediator to indirectly influence customer satisfaction or purchase intention on social media platforms (S. C. Chen & Lin, 2019; Gan & Wang, 2017; Prebensen & Xie, 2017).

(ii) Perceived quality - Perceived quality is the way customers assess the quality of a product or service, shaped by their expectations, perceptions, and actual experiences. It is an important factor in customer engagement as it can influence their level of satisfaction, loyalty, and willingness to engage with the brand. Customers are more likely to engage with brands that offer high-quality products or services that meet or exceed their expectations. Therefore, perceived quality can be seen as a key driver of customer engagement in marketing relationships. According to Ahire et al. (1996) product quality is determined by customers' evaluations of the actual quality in comparison to their expectations, particularly concerning performance, reliability, durability, and suitability. Yang et al. (2015) suggest that while positive perceptions of product quality may initiate brand engagement, long-term engagement is important for overall customer engagement. Quality generally is a factor contributing to the establishment of competitive advantage through enhancements in quality performance and customer satisfaction. (Benson, Saraph, and Schroeder 1991). van

Tonder and Petzer (2018) show a direct relationship between perceived product quality and customer engagement, indicating that higher perceived product quality leads to greater customer engagement.

(iii) Service quality - For businesses, offering qualified service, accurate information, and customer satisfaction are all parts of providing high-quality customer service. From the customer's perspective, service quality is measured by their level of satisfaction during the consumption of products or services offered by businesses. Customers experience the benefits and value provided by the supplier, leading to contentment with their expected needs being met in proportion to the costs incurred in the consumption of the product or service. In service marketing, the connection between customer engagement and service quality has been investigated. Numerous research studies have indicated that customer engagement is significantly impacted by service quality, with different levels. (Kalla, Sharma, and Sondhi 2017; Krishnamoorthy, Karthikeyan, and Prakash 2016). According to Pathak et al. (2018) behavioral intention, overall satisfaction, and overall service quality are primarily determined by service quality.

VI. CONCLUSION

The present study aimed to investigate the influence of social media on customer engagement in an apparel brand IN. The study examined various factors affecting social media marketing strategies that can enhance customer engagement, such as perceived value, perceived quality, service quality, remuneration, and surveillance. The study found that social media marketing activities have a significant positive impact on customer engagement in the respective brand, with all independent variables showing a positive correlation. at a significant level of 0.01. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a positive relationship between social media marketing activities and customer engagement. The testing of hypotheses showed that all of the variables including perceived value, perceived quality, service quality, surveillance, and social media marketing as a whole, except remuneration, significantly increase customer engagement. The speed of interaction with the brand, as well as the user-friendly interface and flexibility of its social network sites, determine the perceived value through social media and significantly affect customer engagement. Providing quality and up-to-date information, promptly attending to customer inquiries and feedback through social media sites, and offering prize drawings, discounts, giveaways, and customized items also increase customer engagement. These social media activities play a crucial role in influencing customer engagement and can impact their attitudes and decisions toward certain products, brands, or companies. Thus, they can provide valuable insights on strategies for enhancing customer engagement through social media. This study provides evidence-based findings that demonstrate the role of social media in customer engagement.

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