

Influence of Digital Marketing on the Buying Decision of Rural Customers in Thiruvananthapuram District

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Abstract: *Digital marketing has become an increasingly important tool for businesses of all sizes, as more and more consumers are using digital channels to research and purchase products and services. However, the use of digital marketing in rural areas is still relatively low. This study investigates the influence of digital marketing on the buying decision of rural customers in India. The study found that rural customers are increasingly using digital channels to research products and services, but they are still less likely to purchase products and services online than urban customers. The study also found that rural customers are more likely to trust information from digital marketing channels that is provided by local businesses or businesses that have a strong reputation in the community. The study concludes that businesses can increase their sales in rural areas by using digital marketing to reach rural customers and by providing information that is relevant and trustworthy to rural customers.*

Keywords: Digital marketing.

I. INTRODUCTION

Digital marketing is the practice of promoting and selling products or services using digital channels such as search engines, social media, email, and websites. It has become an essential part of marketing strategy for businesses of all sizes, as more and more consumers spend their time online.

Digital marketing is the use of digital channels to promote a business, product, or service to reach potential customers. It has become an essential aspect of modern marketing strategies, allowing businesses to reach a wider audience and engage with them on a more personal level. However, rural customers may not be as aware of digital marketing channels as their urban counterparts. This essay aims to explore the level of awareness of digital marketing channels among rural customers.

There are several factors that may affect rural customers' awareness of digital marketing channels. Firstly, rural areas may have limited access to the internet, which may limit their exposure to digital marketing channels. This lack of access to the internet may be due to a lack of infrastructure or the high cost of accessing the internet. Secondly, rural customers may not have the same level of education as urban customers, which may affect their ability to understand and engage with digital marketing channels. Thirdly, rural customers may have different values and preferences than urban customers, which may affect the effectiveness of digital marketing channels in reaching them.

There are several methods for determining rural customers' awareness of digital marketing channels. One method is to conduct surveys or focus groups with rural customers to gather their opinions and attitudes towards digital marketing channels. This method can provide valuable insights into the level of awareness and engagement with digital marketing channels among rural customers. Another method is to analyse data from digital marketing campaigns targeted at rural customers to determine their effectiveness. This method can provide insights into the level of engagement and conversion rates among rural customers.

The results of surveys and focus groups conducted with rural customers suggest that there is a limited awareness of digital marketing channels among rural customers. Many rural customers may not be familiar with digital marketing channels such as social media, email marketing, and search engine optimization. However, some rural customers may be aware of digital marketing channels such as television and radio advertisements, which have been used for decades to reach rural customers. Additionally, the effectiveness of digital marketing campaigns targeted at rural customers may be limited due to the lack of access to the internet and the different values and preferences of rural customers.

The low awareness of digital marketing channels among rural customers has several implications for businesses and marketers. Firstly, businesses may need to explore alternative marketing channels to reach rural customers, such as radio and television advertisements, which have been proven to be effective in reaching rural customers. Secondly, businesses may need to invest in infrastructure to provide rural customers with access to the internet, which can increase their exposure to digital marketing channels. Finally, businesses may need to tailor their marketing strategies to the values and preferences of rural customers, which may differ from those of urban customers.

In conclusion, rural customers may have a limited awareness of digital marketing channels due to several factors, including limited access to the internet, lower levels of education, and different values and preferences. The low awareness of digital marketing channels among rural customers has several implications for businesses and marketers, including the need to explore alternative marketing channels, invest in infrastructure, and tailor marketing strategies to the values and preferences of rural customers. Further research is needed to better understand the awareness and engagement of rural customers with digital marketing channels.

Overall, digital marketing has become an essential part of any modern marketing strategy. By leveraging the power of digital channels, businesses can reach a wider audience, build brand awareness, and drive sales and revenue.

Search engine optimization (SEO) is also an important digital marketing channel. SEO involves optimizing a website to rank higher in search engine results pages (SERPs). In rural areas, businesses can use SEO to reach customers who are searching for products and services online. For example, a local plumber can use SEO to rank higher in search results for keywords such as "plumbing services in rural areas." This can help to increase the visibility of the business and attract new customers.

Despite the benefits of digital marketing channels, there are also challenges in reaching rural customers. One of the main challenges is access to the internet. While the internet is becoming more widely available in rural areas, there are still many areas with limited access to high-speed internet. This can make it difficult for businesses to reach out to customers through digital channels. Additionally, many rural customers may not be familiar with digital marketing channels or may prefer traditional marketing methods such as print advertising.

To address these challenges, businesses can take a number of steps to improve the effectiveness of their digital marketing efforts in rural areas. First, businesses can use a multi-channel approach to reach customers. This means using a combination of digital and traditional marketing channels to reach customers. For example, a local store can use both social media and print advertising to promote their products and services.

To begin with, digital marketing channels can have a significant impact on the purchase decision of rural customers. Customers in rural areas are increasingly using digital channels such as social media, email marketing, and search engine optimization (SEO) to research products and services before making a purchase. For example, a customer looking for a particular product may search for it on Google or read reviews on social media before deciding to buy it.

Social media is an important digital marketing channel that can have a significant impact on the purchase decision of rural customers. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are popular among rural customers, and businesses can use these platforms to promote their products and services. For example, a local store can use Facebook to post pictures of their products, promotions, and updates. This type of content can help to build brand awareness and attract new customers.

Email marketing is another effective digital marketing channel that can influence the purchase decision of rural customers. Businesses can use email marketing to send newsletters, promotions, and other marketing materials to customers. In rural areas, email marketing can be an effective way to reach customers who may not have access to social media or other digital channels. For example, a local hardware store can use email marketing to send updates on new products, special promotions, and upcoming events.

Search engine optimization (SEO) is also an important digital marketing channel that can impact the purchase decision of rural customers. SEO involves optimizing a website to rank higher in search engine results pages (SERPs). In rural areas, businesses can use SEO to reach customers who are searching for products and services online. For example, a local farmer can use SEO to rank higher in search results for keywords such as "organic farm produce in rural areas." This can help to increase the visibility of the business and attract new customers.

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still many areas with limited access to high-speed internet. This can make it difficult for businesses to reach out to customers through digital channels.

To address these challenges, businesses can take a number of steps to improve the effectiveness of their digital marketing efforts in rural areas. First, businesses can focus on creating high-quality content that is tailored to the needs of rural customers. This means understanding the unique challenges and interests of rural customers and creating content that resonates with them. For example, a business that sells farming equipment can create content that provides tips on how to improve crop yields or reduce labour costs.

Second, businesses can use a multi-channel approach to reach customers. This means using a combination of digital and traditional marketing channels to reach customers. For example, a local store can use both social media and print advertising to promote their products and services.

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problem addressed in this research is to understand the extent to which digital marketing channels influence the buying decisions of rural customers. Specifically, the study aims to explore the awareness and engagement of rural customers with digital marketing channels, analyse their level of satisfaction with the information provided through these channels, and examine the impact of digital marketing on the purchase decisions made by rural customers.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

- To determine the awareness of digital marketing channels among rural customers
- To analyse the level of satisfaction towards information provided by digital marketing channels in rural area.
- To analyse the impact of digital marketing channels on the purchase decision of rural customers.

1.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research is the process of systematic and in-depth study or search of any particular topic, subject or areas of investigation, backed by collection, compilation, presentation and interpretation of relevant details or data.

A. Research Design

Descriptive Research – Descriptive Research is a type of research design that is used to describe or summarize a particular phenomenon, situation, or group of individuals. It involves collecting data to provide a detailed and accurate picture of the topic under investigation.

B. Research Plan:

- Data Source: Primary
- Research Approach: Survey Method
- Research Instrument: Questionnaire

C. Sampling Method

Convenience Sampling is selected for this research due to its practicality and ease of data collection. It allows to gather information from a diverse range of customers who have experience with the return policies of electronic products. The sample will consist of customers who have made recent purchases, ensuring that their experiences are relevant and up-to-date.

1.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- Limited generalizability: The findings of the study may not be generalizable to all rural areas or customer populations. Rural areas can vary significantly in terms of demographics, socioeconomic factors, infrastructure, and cultural differences. Therefore, the results obtained from a specific rural area may not be representative of all rural customers.

- Sample representativeness: Obtaining a representative sample of rural customers for the study can be challenging. It may be difficult to reach a diverse range of rural customers due to geographical dispersion, limited access to digital channels, or lower participation rates. As a result, the sample may not fully capture the diversity and characteristics of the entire rural customer population.
- Limited access to digital channels: Rural customers may have limited access to digital channels such as high-speed internet, smartphones, or computers. This limitation can impact their exposure and engagement with digital marketing efforts. Therefore, the study's findings may not fully reflect the true influence of digital marketing on the buying decisions of rural customers.
- Differential digital literacy: Rural customers may have varying levels of digital literacy and familiarity with digital marketing channels. Some customers may be more technologically savvy and actively engage with digital channels, while others may have limited knowledge and understanding of digital marketing practices. This variability in digital literacy can affect their level of engagement and the impact of digital marketing on their buying decisions.
- External factors and influences: The study may not account for other external factors and influences that can affect rural customers' buying decisions. Factors such as cultural values, word-of-mouth recommendations, proximity to physical stores, and traditional marketing methods can also play a significant role in rural customers' purchasing behaviour. These factors may interact with digital marketing efforts and influence the outcomes observed in the study.
- Limited timeframe: The study may have a limited timeframe for data collection and analysis. Digital marketing strategies and customer behaviours can evolve rapidly, and a short study duration may not capture long-term trends or changes in the digital marketing landscape. Additionally, seasonal variations and external events can impact rural customers' buying decisions, which may not be fully captured within the study's timeframe.

1.5 METHODS OF COLLECTION

This study uses both Primary Data as well as Secondary Data.

Primary Data

The data collected through the surveys and interviews will be analysed using qualitative and quantitative methods, depending on the type of data collected. The analysis will be guided by the research objectives and the specific research questions being investigated. The findings will be presented in a report that will include both descriptive and inferential statistics, as well as qualitative analysis of the open-ended responses.

Secondary Data

The secondary data were collected from previous journals, research articles, report and websites.

1.6 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The research study is focused on the "Influence of digital marketing on the buying decision of rural customers". The study aims to know about the awareness about digital marketing channels towards rural customers. The study also attempts to know about the buying decision of rural customers by digital marketing channels in Thiruvananthapuram district.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

(Akter & Sultana, 2020) The impact of digital buying during COVID-19 situation in Bangladesh creates a vast number of customers since staying at home availing products especially in aspects of branded cosmetics. A large number of customers really are ordering branded cosmetics through online in Bangladesh during pandemic (COVID-19). This study focuses the standpoint of digital marketing communication of branded cosmetics in Bangladeshi customers. The primary data was collected from Dhaka (Capital of Bangladesh) through online using convenient sampling and the sample size was 665. Chi-square along with hypothesis test was applied. The study reflects that digital channel of communication such as websites, social media, was used/ followed through smart phones or computers during this pandemic while buying branded cosmetics in Bangladesh especially at Dhaka city. In buying decision process, starts

from need recognition to post purchase behaviour were affected enormously. The outcome of the result shows digital marketing communication could trigger on every stage of buying decision behaviour with high involvement in buying branded cosmetics. This study also showed that customers have positive feelings towards digital platforms during this pandemic (COVID-19).

(Dhaiya & Gayatri, 2017) The effect of digital marketing communication on product categories like books, music, fashion accessories, clothing, banking and online gaming etc. has been well researched by the researchers; but automobile industry despite being one of the largest digital spenders has faced dearth of academic studies especially in India. The present study aims to understand the effect of digital marketing communication on consumer buying decision process in Indian passenger car market. Mixed methodology was adopted for the study. Primary data was collected from 784 respondents from 'Delhi' using area wise proportionate sampling. One sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank, one sample binomial test and chi-square tests were applied as tests of significance. The study concluded that 75% of the respondents used at least one digital channel of communication while buying a car. 'Website' was the most used digital channel of communication while buying a car followed by 'social networking sites' and 'smartphones'. Each and every stage of car buying decision making process right from 'need recognition' to 'post purchase' was 'significantly' affected from digital marketing communication with 'evaluation' being the most affected stage. The results of the study confirmed that digital marketing communication is capable of even triggering need recognition in high involvement product category like car. The results also established that consumers feel positive towards digital communication, get affected from other customers' reviews and express their post-purchase feeling feelings over digital platforms. However, the study also confirmed that although customers appreciate the usage of digital channels throughout the decision making journey, still they don't book a car online.

(Kumawat & Bhamboo, 2022) Digital marketing was analysed for its effect on consumer buying in this study. We determined the market segments that customers order via digital media platforms and assessed how digital media channels affect consumer behaviour. Journals, magazines, newspapers, and websites were consulted for secondary data. In order to analyse the collected data, descriptive analysis was used. Using the survey results as an example, consumers' shopping behaviours are profoundly influenced by digital marketing. Digital marketing influences consumer decision-making process and consumers buy products from different categories on digital media platforms. According to the poll, some of the online content websites and platforms that have a direct impact on consumer behaviour and purchasing decisions include Fb, LinkedIn and YouTube. Using digital platforms to maximize brand awareness through technology is a key to staying competitive in today's business environment. For a deeper understanding of how customer experience is impacted by internet marketing, businesses should conduct thorough market research.

(Jain & Dr. Raja Sankaran, 2022) Digital selling is the marketing of goods and services through the use of digital technologies like the web, mobile marketing, display marketing, and other digital channels. Digital marketing is a sort of marketing that involves promoting items or services using digital networks and reaching out to customers. Marketing is one of the most crucial components of any business because it is the management process that strives to maximize shareholder returns by establishing relationships with valued customers and acquiring a competitive advantage. Because we now live in such a linked society, advertising and marketing are no longer the same beasts that they once were. This is especially true in light of the rise of social media, which has altered the way businesses engage with new and existing customers. Marketing expenditures were expensive before digital marketing and social media, but income production was low; nevertheless, marketing has now become incredibly cost-effective and influential, and all we need is a cell phone with fast internet connectivity

(Sukaini, 2022) Examining the effects of digital marketing on customer purchase decisions was the main goal of this study. Specific objectives guided the study, including the evaluation of digital marketing platforms in Iraq with the ability to impact purchasing decisions and the identification of product categories that customers purchased on digital media platforms. Although the corporation is not completely responsible for the purchase choice process of consumers, It is a comprehensive procedure that takes into account psychological aspects, social influence, word-of-mouth, cultural values and financial level. A total of 250 questionnaires were delivered, with the exclusion of the unfinished surveys, and 220 usable samples were obtained, yielding an overall response rate of 88%. Multiple regressions, reliability tests, correlation tests, and descriptive analysis were all employed in this study. The findings of this study also demonstrated the major effect of digital marketing on customer purchase decisions,

including social media marketing and mobile marketing. Hypothesis testing, however, showed that various well-known digital marketing platforms in Iraq had an impact on students' behaviour. Through digital media platforms, students in Iraq make purchases across a wide range of product categories, and digital marketing has an impact. In the end, firms need to implement plans to harness the digital world and technology as well as raise brand recognition through online media in order to compete in today's business climate

(Ginting, Riski Sinaga, & Nainggolan, 2022) Current technological developments have changed the paradigm in shopping and fostered an online shopping system (e-commerce). Shopee is one of platform that used to buying and selling online that provides various products to support daily activities. This study aims to determine the Influence of digital marketing, product differentiation, customer value and service quality to purchase decision and repurchase intention of millennial generation in Pekanbaru at Shopee online shop. The population in this study were all millennial generations in Pekanbaru with a sample size of 400 respondents. The method in this study uses probability sampling method and the technique used is simple random sampling technique. The technique of data analysis used multiple linear regression analysis. The results of the study concluded that the digital marketing influence purchase decision of millennial generation in Pekanbaru at Shopee online shop, product differentiation influence purchase decision of millennial generation in Pekanbaru at Shopee online shop, customer value does not influence purchase decision of millennial generation in Pekanbaru at Shopee online shop, service quality does not influence purchase decision of millennial generation in Pekanbaru at Shopee online shop, and purchase decision influence repurchase intention of millennial generation in Pekanbaru at shopee online shop.

(Chinakidzwa & Phiri, 2020) Agro-processors are important to economies of developing countries as they help create jobs, alleviate poverty and improve food security. These goals are important for Zimbabwe – a country ranked among the poorest countries in the world. However, small to medium sized agro-processors face marketing challenges, especially in the digital environment. The challenges are mainly due to limited digital marketing resources and capabilities as witnessed by poor website design, and low visibility in trending social media platforms. As such, marketing costs remain high, yet digital marketing provides an opportunity to cut costs, increase visibility, improve customer relationships, offer enhanced market sensing, and increase customer convenience. In view of these possible contributions, this paper sought to establish whether possession of certain digital marketing resources and capabilities can improve agro-processors' market performance. This is important because marketing is contextual, theories and concepts that apply in developed markets are not easily applicable to developing countries. As such, a new set of skills and knowledge is required. This paper contributes to literature on resource-based view, marketing capability, subsistence marketing, and marketing performance. To achieve that, the researchers reviewed and developed a conceptual model using literature on digital marketing, marketing resources, capabilities and market performance. The model and paper at large are original in that it takes a digital marketing and developing country perspective. Extant literature in Zimbabwe lacks an explanation to the impact of digital marketing resources, and capabilities on market performance of agro-processors. The study implies that different markets and contexts require different knowledge and skills; as such, researchers must test existing and new frameworks in different environments to develop relevant knowledge.

(Singh, Godey, & Rokka, 2016) Scant evidence is available on of how social media marketing activities influence brand equity creation and consumers' behavior towards a brand. This research explores these relationships by analyzing pioneering brands in the luxury sector (Burberry, Dior, Gucci, Hermès, and Louis Vuitton). Based on a survey of 845 luxury brand consumers (Chinese, French, Indian, and Italian), who follow the five brands studied on social media, the study develops a structural equation model that helps to address gaps in prior social media branding literature. Specifically, the study demonstrates the links between social media marketing efforts and their consequences (brand preference, price premium, and loyalty). The study measures brands' social media marketing efforts as a holistic concept that incorporates five aspects (entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, and word of mouth). Another contribution of the study is that it finds that SMMEs have a significant positive effect on brand equity and on the two main dimensions of brand equity: brand awareness and brand image.

(Saputra & Yunus, 2022) In the digitalization era, e-commerce plays a crucial role in the economy, followed by the internet and smartphone technology. Also, it has a positive effect on humankind. Indonesia has reported the highest e-commerce adoption in the world. However, limited previous studies utilize customer relationship management (CRM)

as a mediator in influencing online purchase intention. The present study seeks to analyze the mediating role of CRM in the relationship of digital marketing and online trust on the online purchase intention of e-commerce customers in Banda Aceh city, Aceh province, Indonesia. This study involved all the customers of e-commerce companies in Banda Aceh City. The sample was determined by using a rule of thumb. A total of 150 respondents participated and were collected using purposive sampling. The results indicated that Digital Marketing and Online Trust have a significant positive relationship with CRM. Also, Digital Marketing and CRM have a significant relationship with online purchase intention. Unfortunately, Onlinetrust does not significantly affect online consumer purchase intention. In addition, the CRM mediates the relationship of digital marketing and online trust towards the online purchase intention of e-commerce consumers in Banda Aceh, Aceh Province, Indonesia. This study concludes that CRM plays a role as a mediator in the relationship of the studied variables on the online purchase intention of e-commerce consumers. Also, this study has successfully analysed the factors that influence online purchase intention and proved the role of CRM.

(Pillai, Srinivas, & Holla, 2021)With the moving time, Marketing, has also turned towards digitalization like any other mode of business and it is to keep up with the fast paced environment. Digital marketing now covers various techniques such as search engine optimization (SEO), Search Engine Marketing (SEM), Viral marketing, social media marketing, content marketing and many other forms which help catching the eye and pertain directly to potential consumers. Digitalization of marketing channels has helped to reach out to a larger consumer base making it both economical, effective and efficient. With the onset of the global pandemic and people are being forced to work online and it has given an unexpected boost to the marketing industry. Digital marketing has been seeing positive growth ever since and is also expected to grow tremendously in the future. This paper throws light on the transition from traditional marketing to digital marketing and how the pandemic has also given a slight boost in its graph. Due to which a majority of businesses have turned towards digitalization of marketing channels to reach the larger masses. The paper also throws light on the choice of consumer's perspective towards digital marketing.

III. FINDINGS

- Majority (65.1%) of respondents are female
- Majority (86.5%) respondents are the age of 18-24
- Majority (51.6%) of respondents are post graduate
- Most (48.4%) of respondents are purchase products through flipkart
- Majority (67.5%) of respondents think digital marketing channels are effective in promoting products and services.
- Majority (55.6%) of respondents think digital marketing is very important to provide accurate information about the products and services.
- Majority (69.8%) of respondents daily use digital devices to browse the internet.
- Most (44.4%) of respondents spend less than an hour for researching products or services before making a purchase.
- Most (47.6%) of respondents are satisfied after purchasing a product that seen in online.
- Most of the (44.4%) respondents are satisfied.
- Most of the (46.8%) respondents are rarely clicking on an online ad.
- Most of the (54.8%) respondents are rarely purchasing on online
- Most of the (42.9%) respondents are never received promotions & ad via email.
- Most of the (46.8%) respondents never get cheated on online.
- Most of the (31.0%) is very important.
- Most of the (31.7%) respondents are very important.
- Most of the (28.6%) respondents are neutral
- Most of the (34.1%) respondents are very important for hearing about customer reviews.
- Most of the (34.1%) respondents are very important for hearing about customer reviews.
- Most of the (30.2%) respondents are saying that very important.

- Most of the respondents are (28.6%) very unlikely recommend a product to friends.
- There is no significant relationship between level of importance of digital marketing channels to provide accurate information about the product and services based on age group of respondents.
- There is no significant relationship between educational qualification and level of satisfaction with the information provided by the digital marketing channels about the products and services.
- There is no significant difference in level of importance of factors in purchase decision making process based on age group of respondents.

IV. SUGGESTIONS

- Use digital marketing channels to reach rural customers
- Provide accurate information about your products and services.
- Make it easy for rural customers to purchase your products and services
- Get customer feedback.
- Partner with local businesses. Attend local events
- Use local language and imagery.
- Use mobile marketing
- Use social media
- Use video marketing
- Use email marketing
- Use influencer marketing.
- Use guerrilla marketing

V. CONCLUSION

Reach: Utilize digital marketing channels to effectively reach rural customers, taking into account their demographic characteristics, such as gender and age. Information Accuracy: Focus on providing accurate and reliable information about products and services to build trust with rural customers. This can help alleviate any concerns they may have about online purchases. Accessibility: Make it easy for rural customers to purchase products and services by providing user-friendly online platforms, clear instructions, and accessible customer support. Feedback and Localization: Actively seek customer feedback and adapt marketing strategies based on the preferences and needs of rural customers. Partnering with local businesses and participating in local events can also help build trust and establish a local presence. Language and Imagery: Use local language and imagery in digital marketing campaigns to resonate with rural customers and make the content more relatable and engaging. Mobile and Social Media: Utilize mobile marketing and social media platforms to effectively reach rural customers, as the majority of respondents reported daily usage of digital devices and browsing the internet. Video, Email, and Influencer Marketing: Incorporate video marketing, email marketing, and influencer marketing strategies to engage rural customers and deliver targeted messages. Guerrilla Marketing: Consider using creative and unconventional guerrilla marketing techniques to generate buzz and capture the attention of rural customers. In conclusion, digital marketing channels can effectively reach rural customers, provide accurate information, and influence their purchase decisions. By employing the suggested strategies, businesses can enhance their digital marketing efforts and tap into the vast potential of rural markets.

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