

Business Learning: How Digital Marketing Contributes to Customer's Purchase Decisions During the Covid-19

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Abstract: The coronavirus has dramatically changed the trend of global consumer behavior, further highlighting the function of digital marketing strategies. This article adopts a literature study that refers to research focused on the use of digital marketing in business. This research would be useful for future academic research to focus more on the relationship between digital marketing and customers' purchase decisions. It first mainly illustrates that digital marketing communication plays a valuable role in promoting the purchase decision of consumers during a pandemic by providing a case study of cosmetic consumption behavior in Bangladesh. It then demonstrates the dilemma faced by small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and how to use digital marketing to enhance the brand image for better business performance. To a considerable extent, digital marketing was regarded more as a boon for those who influenced SMEs by improving their brand awareness in a particular period, and they can use digital marketing to improve their popularity.

Keywords: digital marketing, consumer behavior, purchase decisions, Covid-19, SMEs

1. Introduction

COVID-19, initiated in 2019, drastically changed the global trend in various aspects, from the behavior of humans to business trading and even the way of life. Besides spreading fears, avoiding interacting with others would be one of the most complex parts to get used to, especially for socially gregarious living humans. Over the past few years, digital innovations have transformed consumer interactions and revolutionized businesses. Online shopping creates a more convenient way to make it easier for consumers to choose the products that best meet their needs, especially for young consumers. The pandemic has led to a surge in Internet businesses as more consumers and businesses adapt to buying and selling through online channels. According to the report, 52% of consumers steer clear of physical stores and busy areas, while the global e-commerce sector grew by 27.6% to more than \$4.28 trillion in 2020 [1]. Online shopping creates a more convenient way to make it easier for consumers to choose the products that best meet their needs. Especially for young consumers, being influenced by digital marketing to participate in purchasing actions or shopping through social media is becoming a big trend, and this digital image trend has become more evident during the pandemic.

The use of digital marketing has altered how marketers communicate with their customers. Most consumers now own and use various digital media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, which contributes to the phenomenal growth of digital ad spending [2]. 81% percent of the respondents' customers admitted to searching and researching online before buying any product,

influencing their purchasing decisions [2]. Digital marketing is crucial at every point of a consumer's decision-making process about a purchase, including brand recognition, information search, purchasing behavior, and user experience [2]. Perceived quality is the primary element influencing instant online purchasing decisions [3]. E-commerce, digital marketing, and brand prestige indirectly affect instant online buying because they have to transfer for perceived quality [3]. As digital platforms have become a user-based gathering place to gather consumers, advertising information, and share opinions, sometimes the explicit selling business online was not regarded as welcoming. Therefore, one of the main focuses is how businesses create more effective and positive brand marketing in such a highly competitive and rapidly transformed online market during the pandemic.

Measuring the effectiveness of each strategy has broad implications for digital marketing for current and future companies. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the critical question is how digital marketing methods influence customer purchase intentions. Firstly, this paper discusses the importance of digital marketing on consumers' purchase intention by providing a case study of cosmetic consumption behavior in Bangladesh. Next, the study discussed how consumer behavior theory is applied to explain the relationship between digital marketing, customer attitude towards marketing, and purchase intention. Lastly, the study examines the plight of small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) during the pandemic and how they can use digital marketing to improve business performance.

2. Digital Marketing

Digitalization, brands, and businesses have all evolved over the last two decades. Digital marketing strategies are gaining popularity, particularly as a global trend [4]. Digital marketing, as defined by Nguyen Ngoc Hien and Tran Nguyen Huynh Nhu, is a branch of traditional marketing that uses modern channels to place products and primarily communicate with stakeholders [5]. The web, email, wireless media, and other media combined with digital data are tools for managing all digital marketing activities. Digital marketing encompasses not only online advertising channels such as Facebook ads, Google ads, email marketing, and affiliate marketing, but also all marketing on digital platforms. Content marketing, social media marketing, search engine optimization (SEO), pay-per-click (PPC), affiliate marketing, and local advertising are all examples of marketing strategies. Content marketing, social media marketing, search engine optimization (SEO), pay-per-click (PPC), affiliate marketing, local advertising, marketing automation, and email marketing are some of the most common types of digital marketing [2]. Marketing practices are defined as digital when they are carried out via digital media.

2.1. The Importance of Digital Marketing Communication to Consumer Purchasing Decision

Throughout the pandemic, digital has played a critical role in all aspects of the business. Digital technologies are widely used and have significantly impacted all business areas, from product development, and brand selling, to customer relationship management (CRM) and communication building [2]. Customer attitudes toward digital marketing can be gleaned from their evaluations, feelings of emotional attachment, and proclivity to act toward some object or idea; these attitudes will shift over time as individuals encounter new concepts about those ideas [2]. Furthermore, consumers' attitudes toward advertising are another indicator that influences advertising effectiveness if purchase intention rises when attitudes toward advertising improve [2]. The influence of digital marketing on consumer decision-making can be seen in two ways: first, during the pandemic, consumers paid more attention to digital marketing channels than traditional channels, and second, digital marketing communication serves to stimulate people's buying cognition and also improves transforming purchase transactions.

Younger generations are now more logical, socially connected, nimble, skillful, and multitasking in the virtual world, according to Akter Mamtaj and Nigar Sultana [5]. To make selections about purchases, they are now prepared to use several gadgets at once, thanks to the development of cutting-edge technology. Smartphones and websites, particularly social networking sites, are to blame for all of these trends because they enable consumers to learn in an entertaining and instructive way, which encourages engagement and addiction regardless of the product category. Consumers will be able to produce material, share it, start dialogues, and give comments online thanks to digital distribution. Because they have the option to ignore marketing communications altogether or to pick and choose which ones to receive, consumers are given more power.

Although 46% of respondents reported spending less on discretionary or luxury items during the pandemic, most consumers communicate digitally at every step of their purchasing decision-making [5]. Purchasing goods or commodities face to face or through traditional channels remains problematic as health risks remain. In short, consumers' preference for digital communication channels will be a long-term trend until the pandemic is over. The cost of marketers' efforts to engage with clients has decreased thanks to the interactive communication capabilities made possible by digital platforms, often known as inbound marketing [5]. In the same way that it demonstrates the inefficiency of conventional marketing communication media, it also makes communication generation easier than traditional marketing approaches [5]. According to the yearly inbound marketing study, 45 percent of respondents don't open marketing-related direct mail, 85 percent swiftly bypass TV advertising, 84 percent avoid ad-heavy websites, and 91 percent discontinue email subscriptions [5]. Internal marketing was 54% more efficient and 61% more affordable in generating leads than traditional external marketing [5]. Digital marketing has a favorable and large impact on purchase intention, which supports the idea that content strategy is a crucial aspect in determining marketing efficacy. Therefore, when consumers view digital methods more favorably, they are more likely to purchase.

Digital marketing impacts every economy sector, regardless of its size, nature, or affiliation with any particular genre or category. The cosmetics sector in Bangladesh is no different. The Bangladesh market has become more appealing and has gained stronger momentum as a result of favorable variables such a sizable population, improved purchasing power, and export potential [5]. The study by Akter Mamtaj and Nigar Sultana on the Bangladeshi cosmetics industry demonstrates that consumers constantly look for both internal and external sources of information while making purchases, particularly for products that solve problems. Interestingly, respondents said they tend to focus on digital channels rather than traditional ones when buying branded cosmetics during this pandemic (COVID-19). The study also found reasons for using digital communications, such as informativeness, interactivity, and flexibility. While these reasons explain the increased focus on digital channels, another reason is that respondents believe consumers are most likely to avoid traditional channels to save time and effort when purchasing branded cosmetics.

According to Mamtaj Akter, Nigar Sultana's research, Table 1. displays samples broken down by geography and the main digital and traditional channels for purchasing branded cosmetics during the COVID-19 epidemic.

The results clearly demonstrate that 75% of customers use digital channels of contact, while only 25% continue to use traditional channels [5]. Because digital media is more engaging, quicker, and simpler to access, especially during the pandemic, consumers prefer them over traditional ones. A great alternative to traditional communication platforms, the digital channel is a key preferred means of communication [5]. Customers feel more at ease using digital channels for hunting for cosmetic information in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Table 1: Significant source of questionnaire [2].

Area in between Dhaka City	Determined Sample	Preferred medium (Digital channel during Covid-19 Pandemic)	Preferred medium (Traditional channel during Covid-19 Pandemic)
Mirpur	168	118	50
Dhanmondi	117	87	30
Uttara	114	86	28
Old Dhaka	101	91	10
Shantinagar/Malibagh	100	74	35
Banasree/Rampura	56	43	13
Total Samples	665(100%)	499(75%)	166(25%)

On the other hand, through the network, the customer's evaluation influences the consumer's purchase decision. Digital advertising's effectiveness is not limited to product purchases; it also extends to various psychological and cognitive aspects of awareness and intention that play a significant role in purchasing decisions. Since brand attitude and attachment have environmental repercussions, which show how consumer purchase intention is influenced, the positioning of effective advertising depends not only on the consumer's choice to buy the advertised product but also on the long-term relationship between consumer demand and the advertised product. Respondents (80%) are happy to join digital channel forums, blogs, and social media where they can find analysis and discussion about branded cosmetics, especially in the current pandemic (COVID-19) situation [5]. Digital channels concentrate on various effects at each stage of the decision-making process for purchases, with some parts being more important than others. In this pandemic (COVID-19) condition, consumers will investigate optimizing the usage of digital channels at each evaluation stage when buying branded cosmetics [5]. Following the purchase of branded cosmetics, people were quite active in leaving feedback [5]. However, in a nutshell, it will state that respondents believe it is sensible to do consumer research and make purchasing decisions using digital platforms.

2.2. Digital Marketing Stimulated Customer Purchases During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Digital sales are more active than before the pandemic. According to Khalid Mohammed Alomari, first-quarter digital revenue in 2020 was 18% higher than first-quarter revenue in 2019, and first-quarter traffic production in 2020 was 13% higher than first-quarter traffic production in 2019 [6]. In the first quarter of 2019, mobile traffic decreased by 9%, while it increased by 9% in 2020 [6]. The quick increase in traffic on social media is another trend. The share of social network shipping in the first quarter of 2019 was 6% [6]. By the first quarter of 2020, that share had risen to 8% [6]. Based on the survey taken by Khalid Mohammed Alomari in Amman, Jordan, People tend to be affected by Personalized Digital communication during purchase approaches. The results show that empathy displayed by digital marketing is significantly different from the gender and age of the consumer. The average indicates that women tend to be attracted to empathic information. Consumers aged 30 to 40 are more likely to be drawn to empathic messages [6]. When customers can't get to the stores that usually have sales and items offered, they are more likely to be attracted by offers from digital marketing platforms. And at a time when customers are experiencing such pandemic stress, they will be drawn and buy them if they see any anti-crisis deals. Furthermore, consumers tend to be loyal to the company if they get personalized communication and empathy from digital marketing to satisfy their needs [6]. In the digital age, product advertising is increasingly intense and creative, affecting consumer behavior regarding perceived quality levels [3]. Consumer decision-making is further aided by electronic digital marketing, which helps consumers perceive quality.

From the point of view of consumers' purchasing decision path relationship, digital media has also produced a positive effect. Companies can stimulate demand from consumers for their goods by starting brand discussions that advance favorable opinions about a given good, service, or concept. Digital media therefore gives businesses a way to raise brand awareness for their goods or services. For instance, businesses that manage their social media channels can broadcast branded material about their goods and services. Brand awareness can also be generated through paid media such as promoted Facebook posts to activate understanding of needs and problems the brand can solve. In addition, posts from fellow consumers and opinion leaders can stimulate brand influence. When a consumer looks up product information, the second stage of the decision-making process begins [7]. To put it another way, once a perceived need is stimulated, customers are motivated to learn how to supply the demand. Consumers look for comprehensive information from a variety of sources and learn about products through product trials. Exchanges between buyers and sellers on various social media platforms that are of a high caliber, unexpected, or entertaining nature might boost customer involvement [7]. Consumers analyze product and brand selections at the third stage of the decision-making process from a list of options that have been taken into consideration, also known as the evocation set [7]. Consumers build a conceptual map of substitute products in their minds after completing their information search that may minimize or remove their identified demands. Before Covid19, users traditionally sought product validation from professionals, opinion leaders, and family and friends to address their perceived hazards [7]. The COVID-19 pandemic, however, has restricted consumers' access to their social influencers [8]. Thankfully, social media platforms let users communicate virtually with a larger number of users. Social media will therefore probably become more important in consumer contacts with influencers during the COVID-19 epidemic as consumers try to reduce their perceived risk. In other words, social media will probably play a bigger part in how people make decisions about what to buy. Consumers perform the post-purchase behavior process, such as forming the buy happiness or dissatisfaction emotion, in the final stage of the consumer decision model [7]. A key element in creating and maintaining customer relationships is the degree of customer pleasure.

3. Digital Marketing on Business Performance During the Covid-19

Instead of developing digitalization as a linear value chain, businesses should do so as an ecosystem. For instance, Amazon is both a supplier and a distributor inside an ecosystem that is interdependent and dependent. This is not a simple task for small and medium-sized businesses, though. The government took severe actions, including lockdown and restrictions that caused significant negative impacts on SEMs management from two aspects. First, the production of SMEs enterprises has been destroyed. According to Jahid Syaifullahsy, the International Labour Organization (ILO) undertook a survey to determine how the COVID-19 epidemic affected 571 MSEs [8]. In fact, manufacturing has stopped in 70% of MSMEs [8]. Employees of MSMEs are also impacted by the termination of employment. The COVID-19 pandemic was then blamed by up to 90% of businesses for their cash flow issues.

Comparatively, 64 percent of interviewees reported a lack of raw materials due to disruptions in operations and restrictions on mobility [8]. At the same time, nearly two-thirds faced problems with the delivery of finished products [8]. COVID-19 has undoubtedly caused profound disruption to the marketing environment. How businesses operate has been transformed by social alienation and forced closure, requiring considerable changes in processes and structures. Due to the blocking and distribution of local supply chains throughout the majority of industries and marketplaces, global supply chains have become extremely fragmented, leading many businesses to cut production [6]. On the other hand, besides the falling consumer demand for all types of businesses, a quarter of companies say they don't have enough employees to run their interactions [6].

Based on the above problems, many micro, small and medium-sized enterprises are using digital marketing to diversify their sales or marketing channels. Only a fifth of businesses, according to an ILO poll, have successfully diversified their product lines, indicating that MSMEs still have limited ability to do so, especially when it comes to marketing on social media [9]. The practice of social or physical distance during COVID-19 has effects on the transition of traditional corporate activities to online ones. Jahid Syaifullah made reference to MSMEs in India using social media for marketing. The results showed that social media significantly impacts the perception of use, perceived convenience, and compatibility [9]. Indonesian consumers are similarly characterized by high perceived quality.

Mohammad Mehdi Mehralian's study of data marketing for Customer Relationship Management during the pandemic illustrates that in typical times, marketing capability is often a key driver of business performance [9]. Similarly, digital marketing capabilities positively impact business success in markets where the pandemic crisis and its resulting limited distortions have completely disrupted many non-digital business operations. With digital marketing, some businesses can even use such a crisis as an opportunity to promote their products and services. The findings of this study also demonstrate that CRM during the COVID-19 epidemic has benefited significantly from digital marketing. Customers' thoughts and behaviors in the marketplace have changed slightly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic's numerous negative effects during the previous few years [9]. Businesses should be aware of these difficulties and concentrate more on building relationships with customers via digital marketing platforms like internet, affiliate, email, and social media [9]. According to the findings, CRM significantly improved business performance during the COVID-19 pandemic, which is in line with findings from earlier studies [9]. The study also discovered that customer relationship management (CRM) can buffer the connection between digital marketing and company performance during the COVID-19 pandemic [9]. Digital marketing is an inbound marketing cycle that studies customer needs and behaviors through personalized feedback and opinions, reinforcing customer relationship management's (CRM) emphasis on consumer awareness, learning, and transformation [9]. In addition, digital marketing enables companies to acquire or track customer feedback and comments and develop personalized marketing strategies accordingly, promoting customer relationships and improving brand image, perception, and, ultimately, business sales.

4. Conclusion

The importance of digital media marketing during the epidemic is reflected in two aspects. First, due to geographical restrictions and policy isolation, consumers pay more attention to digital media channels than traditional channels, which leads to digital media can play a very positive role in consumer decision-making behavior. Second, digital media marketing promotes brand awareness by offering more sympathetic marketing to consumers to improve the quality of brand perception and increase positive interaction with consumers in decision-making and purchasing behavior. During this period, SMEs are facing great difficulties. Digital media can enhance the marketing capabilities of enterprises, such as online advertising, e-mail marketing, social media marketing, etc., to maintain positive customer relationships, thus improving the brand image.

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