

## IMPACT OF DIGITAL MARKETING ON CUSTOMER PERCEPTION DURING COVID - 19 PANDEMIC

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Dr. Ajay Kumar Singh\*

### ABSTRACT

*Digital marketing promotes products and brands where it reaches and interacts with customers using various digital channels. Digital connect has many ranges such as search engine marketing, affiliate marketing, content marketing, social media marketing, and e-mail marketing etc. Digital revolution is shifting the customer behavior towards customary buying networks. Henceforth the review paper aids in discussing the significant role played by digital marketing in easing marketing and operational process for the company. The way digital market helps a company in customer retention along with the diverse benefits that digital marketing plays from the customer perception with being firmly discussed in this paper. The purpose of this paper was to take into account the effects of digital marketing on business and how important it was for both customers and advertisers. To depict a comprehensive flow of information and maintain the format of a review paper, a secondary method of collecting data was incorporated. Information and accurate data were represented from the already existing scholarly articles, journals. The findings emphasized how web customers are evolving rapidly in this COVID 19pandemic and digital marketing has taken advantage of it most because it is based on the Internet. Customer buying behavior has been changing, and they were more likely to use a cutting-edge presentation instead of regular and advertising. Consumer design and consumer needs changed and their desires grow as the world was changing.*

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**Keywords:** *Digital Marketing, Customer Perception, Consumerism, Digital Channels, COVID-19 Impact.*

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### Introduction

The world is moving from simple to the complex operations and the need for digital marketing is increasing day by day. The development of the innovation is occurring, the use of innovative technology, online advertising, media promotion and search engine tools come in contact. Digital marketing links the marketers and customers on cybernetic platforms through internet connected devices which provides marketers many opportunities to market their products and services in different formats and ways. Most of the companies now ingest presence online which indicates that digital technology is increasingly influencing auto markets throughout the world. As per India Brand Equity report, Indians are the youngest customers in the world. India is expected to displace Japan as the third largest auto market by 2021 due to the rise of middle class income and the youngest population in the world (India Brand Equity Foundation 2021).The globalization of digital tools has enabled marketers to reach consumers anytime and anywhere (Al Kurdi and Al-Emran et al., 2019). These days, customers utilize advanced digital platforms to look for product information and services regarding the value, quality, and examinations of different products. (Alghizzawi, Salloum, and Habes, Al-Emran, Shaalan, and Tarhini et al., 2019). The number of online consumers worldwide has crossed more than 4.1 billion, where 93%-95% of them access the internet from their cell phones (Chaffey, 2021). Digital marketing channels aid consumers in investigating their preferred products (Salloum, 2018). It also helps marketers to trace the behavior pattern of consumers for their product. By 2022, it is predicted that 2/3 of worldwide spending on promotions by organizations will be through digital marketing (Lee and Park, 2008).

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\* Dean, Faculty of Mass Communication, Haridev Joshi University of Journalism and Mass Communication, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India.

In contemporary timing, it is evaluated that focusing on developing effective customer perception or customer-oriented approach ensures organization in redefining their brand image and awareness in their operating market. Digital marketing and the growth of the Internet has made it possible to increase the communication and relationship with the customer, ensuring direct impact on customer decision-making process (Confos & Davis, 2016). This approach therefore determines customer perception, which is defined as customer knowledge, awareness, opinion and impression on digital marketing practices. As a result, customer behavior has changed, and that the firm would be expected to understand the impact of more advanced marketing on a dynamic and buyer interaction. Henceforth the paper aims in proposing significance role of digital marketing which highly influences customer preferences while building positive attitude during their decision-making process. Despite, multiple variables that impacts customer's perceptions, followed by digital marketing are firmly discussed.

### **Statement of the Problem**

For this research, the statement of the problem was to understand the buying journey in an online entity with daily-use stuffs and establishing a relationship between company. Present proposal explored the correlation between digital marketing avenues and customer's buying behavior. Apart from that it also evaluated the extent of digital media marketing engagements across different socio-demographic profiles of customers.

### **Justification of Study**

FMCG industry has progressed swiftly in past few years and especially during Covid-19. Because of major development and progress in dynamics like technological evolution and media revolution, the industry has practiced changes to a customer's buying drive online to an extent. Digital Marketing has done astonishing changes in the way in which the retail outlets as well as marketers endorse their goods and services and the way the customers are ordering the same. Consumer buying behavior of the individual is influenced by many factors, and these factors invariably affects the marketer to match the needs of the customers in general. The purpose of conducting this study is to define the significance of various avenues of digital marketing and brand perception while a customer desires and priorities to buy online.

### **Research Objective**

Digital platforms do not directly sell the product but they engage the customer into useful solutions and then lead to make action. Significance of brand appearance and image has been an extensive argument aimed at the manufacturing industry. The current study purposes to discover the impact of digital marketing on customer buying behavior. The emphasis will be on exploring the impact of various elements of the digital marketing on consumer buying behavior.

### **Research Objectives**

- To investigate the impact of digital marketing strategies on the customer purchasing decision process.
- To assess the stages of potential customers' decision making process that drive customer buying behavior.

### **Review of Literature**

New digital marketing tools like social media platforms, mobile phones, and analytics update rapidly on the economic landscape (Lee et al., 2013). Ancillai (2019) found that the use of social media platforms improves the sales level and affects the relationship and customer performance and organizational and brand performance. With the changing scenario and fast-moving trends like Interactive chatbots, Influencer, and micro Influencer marketing, voice search helps understand the consumer decision-making process, which is challenging for companies (Shaw, 2018). Digital marketing is not just for understanding the new technology, but knowing the consumers' behavior, needs, purchase intentions, access to the technology, and how digital channels engage consumers more effectively in buying decisions (Kumar et al., 2016). Digital marketing channels generate value for customers and intensify interaction between companies and individuals. The organizations inform, converse, promote and sell products and services over digital platforms. (Lee et al., 2013). Enormous and stupendous expansion of online shopping globally, followed by digital marketing tool, has resulting in huge range of customers engagement, as customers are now able to do shopping while ideally sitting at suitable space (Confos & Davis, 2016). Henceforth, digital marketing, due to online shopping has become center of attraction for 90% of customers worldwide. Nizar & Janathanan, (2018) mentioned that digital advertisements were playing a vital role in customer day-to-day life. According to Dwivedi et al., (2020),

widespread adoption and rapid emerging of digital media, followed by information and communication technologies (ICTs) have a significant impact on the method organization and its customers communicate for fulfilling their emotional, social, material and economic needs.

Amounts which social media is playing most active role in developing and changing customer's perception which impacts their buying decision. In current business era, customers are expecting easy availability of knowledge that ensures them potential solutions to their products related issues. Hereby, a stable visibility of company's brand via digital marketing channels has enabled customers to gain accurate knowledge on the products (Phalle, 2020). As opined by Fierro, Cardona Arbelaez, & Gavilanez, (2017), despite digital marketing positive results, companies encounter diverse challenges while developing or designing attractive posts and slogans for their customers, which can ensure motivating customers by creating brand awareness. Digital marketing has drastically changed marketing method and approaches, resulting in various challenges along with benefits to companies (Arora & Sanni, 2019; Wang & Herrando, 2019). Henceforth, the company must align its digital marketing strategy with its core business objectives. As opined by Brindle, (2017), in terms of customers perception, digital marketing helps in changing customers perceived value, co-creation, satisfaction, attitudes and brand loyalty (Laroche et al., 2013; Chen et al. 2019; Kamboj et al., 2018). In this contemporary era, more and more customers are gaining information as per their requirements through online, via digital marketing channels, and thereby begun to realize the significance of online marketing as a fastest and easiest mode of shopping, which also leads in changing their perception (Vaghela, 2014). Phalle, (2020), stated that customers directly explore products via internet, while visiting company's websites and communicating directly with the vendors. Customers are having tendency to encompass rational behavior that influences accomplishment of efficiency within their decision-making in process, for achieving cognitive consistency through their decision while eliminating perceived risk associated with future choices. In a study, through qualitative analysis, it was proven that reason behind positive customer perception over digital marketing (Confos & Davis, 2016). Customers also think that digital marketing's helps them gain giant offer on products and services they desire for, as per which they freely make choices. Even at the time of COVID-19 crisis, digital marketing has made shopping easy for customers, with no contact facilities and easy modes of payment availability. As opined by Sathya, (2017), customers consider digital marketing and online shopping user friendly comparative to that of visiting physical stores. The increasing positive customers' perception to digital marketing can be viewed from its increasing growth.

Opposing the facts discussed above, Buchanan et al., (2018), as a process of digital marketing gets viral only by a single click, and marketing of any unhealthy services or commodities can pessimistically impact customers' attitude and behavior. Digital marketing activities that are encompassed by any channels (social networking sites, online games, applications, websites, emails or mobile phone text), are firmly popular due to their 24/7 availability, high interactive feature and ubiquity (Nunan & Di Domenico, 2019). As suggested by De Pelsmacker, Van Tilburg, & Holthof, (2018), digital marketing is more influencing and active compared to the traditional marketing approach, as it helps companies in connecting directly with its customers without any delay. Kannan, (2017), mentioned that while incorporating digital marketing process it is mandatory to maintain proper quality and pace. This would help the company ensure accurate customers attraction, eventually developing optimistic customer's perception toward its goods and services. Lamberton & Stephen, (2016), in his study, mentioned social media marketing as the most influencing tool of digital marketing as it accelerates customers engagement more easily, ensuring stable customer engagement leading to developing customers perception. Customers has become more experimental and are not resisting advance changes. Vast information and digital marketing are extended to the masses, which revolutionaries changing customer's perception, while welcoming new approaches (ATSHAYA, 2016). It is thereby evaluated that one of the biggest challenges that bring changes to customer's perception is customer's expectation through digital marketing for more personalized and consistent experience.

Dash & Chakraborty, (2021), discussed that COVID leads in prevailing pandemic along with rendering transformational impact on the digital marketing strategies. In this study, a firm interrelationship between customer's perception, their purchase intention and digital marketing tools like SEM and SEO were discussed. Digital marketing has firmly revolutionaries business management along with its engagement with its customers and society at an international scale (Khwaja, Mahmood & Zaman, (2020). Digital marketing has become a required and critical tool for addressing all sort of marketing obstacles encountered by the companies by the time of spreading awareness about its brand and products. Simultaneously, after the establishment of the 21st century, sustainability has become a significant concern for companies, specifically for marketers. Many research has proven that the

relationship between sustainability and marketing culminates the concept of smooth functioning of business and developing customer's engagement or perception towards that company. Combination of both results followed benefits: marketing (especially digital market), ensures a better understanding of customer's behaviors and act as a tool to alter society's values and attitudes (Shriyan, 2021). Besides, sustainability ensures improves overall operational and management system of the company, including marketing activities that help in accelerating optimistic customers perception towards the company brand awareness. Finally, it is proven that digital marketing activities help in improving customer's perception as a result company obtain their desired corporate objective like a competitive edge in their operating market. Customer's dissatisfaction and satisfaction, in terms of products and services information is significant by the time of their purchasing (Nizar & Janathanan, 2018). Digital marketing focusing on providing product and services information can satisfy customer's needs, in terms of pre-purchase while influencing their perception towards company, its brand and its products (Bala, & Verma, (2018). ATSHAYA, (2016), stated that customers show different buying behaviors while comparing products they are acknowledge through digital marketing approach. Besides, after the establishment of digital marketing, customer's perception, in terms of buying decision making became fragile as comparison became easy due to vast range of substitute available in the online markets.

#### **Gaps known in Available Research Work**

Evaluating the selected published papers, it is observed that a lack of consistency and standardization for measuring digital marketing exposure was noted from scholarly published articles and journals selected. Some of the papers examined at an engagement level whereas some examined mere exposure. The scope of customers perception, followed by digital marketing is vast, as discussed approximately 90% of world's population are engaged into online shopping. For this topic, this number is really not sufficient for portraying exact data and informative facts on customer's perception and digital marketing approach.

#### **Conclusion**

The relationship between customer behavior and digital marketing is a dialogical one. It brings out the practical and social meaning of customer behavior meaning in action. From the above discussion, it is proven that before purchasing any products or services and experiencing their quality, customers develop a perception. This perception is developed majorly by the marketing approaches implemented by the companies, in current times through digital marketing practices. Henceforth, it is thereby concluded that companies are required to record such perception of their customer's interest before designing any marketing strategies. Digital marketing in every paper is defined as a platform that helps companies to accelerate their marketing activities while creating ample opportunities for growth and development. Besides all above during the COVID-19, digital marketing has enhanced the communication process which influences customer's perception of the company's brand value, product and services. Finally, it is concluded that digital marketing helps companies in creating concrete impact for developing customer's perception, in terms of the company's brands, products and services.

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