

Personal Selling and Online Media: Correlation to Consumer Buying Intention

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Abstract

In today's competitive global market, online media and personal selling have become crucial tools for companies to influence consumer buying intention. Personal selling and online media advertising has opened up huge opportunities for businesses to flourish. Companies with good marketing activities supported by online media and personal selling have been successful in influencing consumer buying intention. The study aims to determine the correlation of personal selling or online media and degree of impact on consumer buying intention, as well as finding how those factors lead to purchase of a product by a consumer.

The result of this study from 250 respondents reveal that online media has been highly effective in developing consumer buying intention compared to personal selling. Moreover, the results show that quality orientation has been the most prominent determinant of online media in influencing consumer buying intention. Thus, it suggests that organisations must allocate higher funds to online media activities because of high customer shopping enjoyment experiences. However on the other hand the quality perception of personal selling contributes also to consumer buying intention

Keywords: Online media, Personal Selling, Consumer buying intention, Social structure Analysis, Online target groups.

1. Introduction

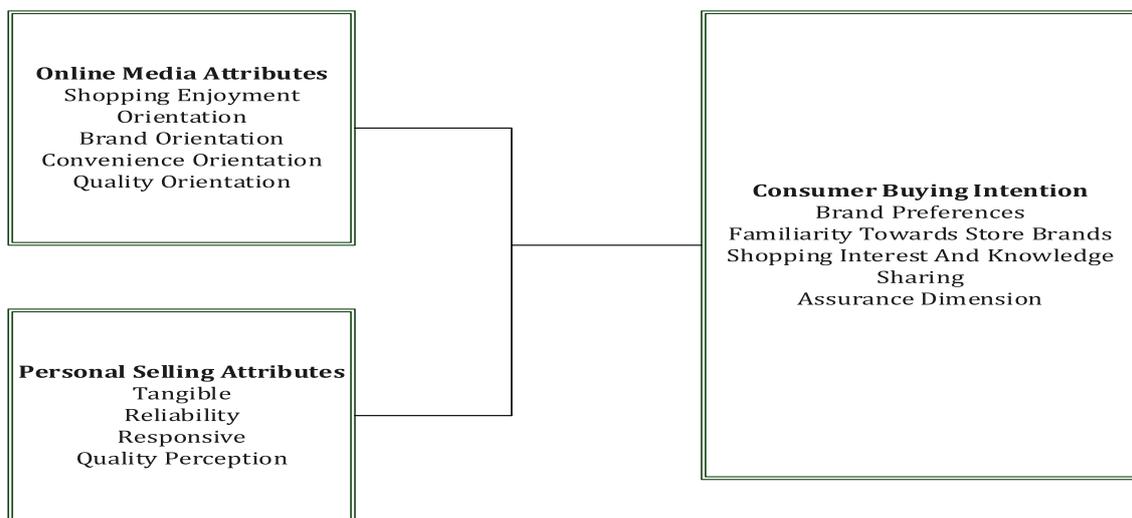
In modern economy, the use of Online Media and Personal selling to the organisations and different businesses are playing an important role in increasing their sales and performance. Literature review in between 2006 and 2009 has revealed that there has been a huge surge in online networking marketing expenditure- 165.8% from \$884 million to \$2.34 billion, indicating the level companies rely on online media marketing. The importance of online media as platform of communication digital interaction, and marketing is growing. Online media has been democratizing the content and has shifted the way of disseminating information and creating new ways of sharing content. Online media has been very useful for consumers instant and insightful content without time and space barriers in the virtual world. Because of its ease of use, speed and reach, Online media is fast changing the public discourse in society and setting trends and agendas in topics that range from the environment and politics to technology and different business industry. Online networking websites have still been one of the inventions of the today's era because they bridge lot of people together, these online networking sites are being used by companies to connect with huge number of people through social networks and effectively have their offerings communicated to potential employees, new product market launches and help in capturing feedback on their present lot of products as well as creating a base for future products with effective ideas. Many organisations reach easily to their customers and create a sense of great relationship with effective utilization of online Media marketing. Online media has certainly helped the companies for having an efficient way of advertising their product and creation of fast and convenient transaction with their customers leading to change the consumer buying intention positively.

Looking on other side, Consumer buying intention is also impacted by the role being played by Personal Selling with an oral presentation or conversation with one or more

buyers for the purpose of enhancing the sales. Personal selling has been distinctive element of marketing communication. Personal selling is an individualistic approach that is designed to meet specific need of prospects unlike advertising and sales promotion which mainly focuses to create awareness about the existence of a product or service and provide information as to the features of the products, its availability and price on a mass basis. A shared flow of communication between a potential buyer and a salesperson that is designed to identify consumer needs and wants is known as Personal selling. Personal selling matches those requirements to the firm's offered products and persuades the consumer to purchase the product. In today's world purchasing has become complex and risky. Therefore, personal selling acts as a personal communication between a firm's sales force and customers for making sales and also for the purpose of building customer relationship. The key role in decision making is played by 'Point-of-purchase' and becomes instrumental in influencing customer towards the final stages of decision making. This is when then customers make final decisions or change brands. The general rule applied here is that the goods that are new in the market and stand apart from the rest of the brands or expensive require more efforts in personal selling. The salesperson needs to step up and actively present products to customers, explaining its positive attributes and how the product can influence their attitudinal and subjective norms which would eventually lead to 'consumer buying intention'. Hence it can be asserted that personal selling is a contributing factor that affects consumer buying intention. Thus, this paper has been proposed with the conjecture that online media characteristics play a greater role in consumer buying intention than personal selling.

2. RESEARCH MODEL

Figure 1 illustrates the research model based on the concept of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) but modified.



3. METHODOLOGY

In a random field survey that was conducted to test the hypotheses, the respondents in this study were the general public who were exposed to personal selling and social media activities.

The questionnaire was divided into three parts:

Personal Selling, Online Media and Consumer Buying Intention.

Part 1 gives an account of respondents' understanding about personal selling, comprised of 16 components along the four specific proportions – tangible, reliability, responsive and quality.

Part 2 concentrates on the attributes of social media as a tool that is instrumental in influencing consumer purchasing intention which comprises of 10 questions on the lines of shopping enjoyment orientation, brand orientation, convenience orientation and quality orientation.

Part 3 outlines the respondents' buying decisions with 11 tools that are in relation with consumer brand preference, familiarity towards store brands, shopping interest and knowledge sharing. These indicators were all measured using 5-point Likert's scale on the basis of – strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1) responses.

Around 250 questionnaires were used for data analysis and understanding in the study. The study showed a valid response rate of 100%. Among the 250 participants, 86 (34.4%) were male and 164 (65.6%) were female. The respondents from age 18 years old and below were 123(49.2%) and respondents from age 19 years old and above were 127(50.8%).

4. RESULTS

The researchers on the basis of the evaluation came to a conclusion that 'Empathy Dimension' had the highest mean recorded ($\mu = 4.0775$). The result of respondents evaluation gave us a clear picture of the fact that the subjective norms of the consumer is predominantly influence by empathy towards the product which snowballs into creating a positive buying intention as compared to other factors that affect consumer behavior;

Tangible Dimension ($\mu = 3.9176$),

Reliability Dimension ($\mu = 3.7400$),

Responsive Dimension ($\mu = 3.7130$),

Quality perception ($\mu = 3.6180$),

Shopping Enjoyment Orientation ($\mu = 3.1598$),

Brand Orientation ($\mu = 3.3359$),

Convenience Orientation ($\mu = 3.1500$),

Shopping Interest And Knowledge Sharing ($\mu = 3.2143$),

Brand Preferences ($\mu = 3.9067$),

Familiarity Towards Store Brands ($\mu = 3.6840$) and

Quality Orientation ($\mu = 3.0680$) who got the lowest mean.

Tools used to test the proposed research model in order to confirm content validity were adapted predominantly from some previous researches and altered to conform to the study. The steps taken for personal selling attributes were based on existing research, while the steps for social media attributes were based on existing research.

According to the reference suggested, free samples or free subscription can be provided by the service providers for the probable web shoppers to test the products or services and also create the condition for earlier online purchasing experience. The service providers can also provide e-mail updates on product development or come up with special offers to increase the customer impulse purchase and quality orientation. The measures for consumer buying intention facets were based on existing research. Thus it can be concluded that there are gaps between the service providers and the customers which results in constraints that produce both bigger expectations and failure in service quality.

The conceptualized model by testing was examined by the researchers and they observed that the hypothesized relationships among variables in the research. The results show that the four variables of personal selling connect with the consumer's buying intention ($\beta = .419$, $p < .01$). It has been broken down to show highest correlation of personal selling variables to consumer purchasing decision variables, correlations of tangible dimension to empathy dimension ($\beta = .317$, $p < .01$), reliability dimension to

familiarity towards store brands ($\beta = .353, p < .01$), responsive dimension to empathy dimension ($\beta = .306, p < .01$) and quality perception to shopping interest and knowledge sharing ($\beta = .444, p < .01$), which compose personal selling and consumer purchasing decision, were found to be slightly significant.

The results on the other hand reveal that a significant correlation has been found between social media and consumer buying intention ($\beta = .441, p < .01$) that supports hypotheses 1. Breaking it down to show highest correlation between social media variables and consumer buying intention variables, shopping enjoyment orientation to shopping interest and knowledge sharing ($\beta = .375, p < .01$), brand orientation to brand preference ($\beta = .391, p < .01$), convenience orientation to shopping interest and knowledge sharing ($\beta = .366, p < .01$), quality orientation to shopping interest and knowledge sharing ($\beta = .444, p < .01$). Moreover, the outcome show that social media highly influences consumer decision and is recognized as an efficient tool to communicate effectively to their customers.

Researchers found a more effective way to examine the conceptualized model and that was by testing independently the effects of personal selling and social media to consumer buying intention. The confirmed results stated that in general view social media has a greater effect to consumer buying intention ($r^2=0.191, p=0.01$) as compared to personal selling ($r^2=0.172, p=0.01$). The social media delivers quality orientation to the consumers that catches their pulse highly and the way they perceive such product ($r=0.197, p=0.01$). Therefore, it becomes inevitable that the quality of the product should be properly delivered by social media because it highly affects consumer buying intention. Personal Selling on the other hand partially affects consumer buying behaviour ($r^2=0.172, p=0.01$). The results revealed that in Personal Selling the quality of the product is also important and positively affect consumer buying intention ($r^2=0.197, p=0.01$).

GENERAL OVERVIEW. PERSONAL SELLING, ONLINE MEDIA AND CONSUMER BUYING INTENTION

Independent	Dependent	β	R ²	Si g
Online Media	Consumer Buying Intention	0.441	0.191	.000
Personal Selling		0.375	0.172	.000

We can conclude that, online media variables such as Shopping enjoyment orientation, Brand orientation, Convenience orientation and Quality orientation have a reasonable impact on consumer buying decision, than the personal selling variables – tangible, reliability, responsive and quality perception which partly influence the behavioural motive of the consumers. The theoretical and scientific outcomes of the study are discussed in further detail below.

5. DISCUSSION

In order to test the conceptualize model ‘Statistical Regression’ was used. This study was conducted after interacting with different consumers. The goal is to draw out vital aspects of social media and personal selling that have been instrumental in influencing consumer buying intention. This study was based on the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) as its basic theory to explore an individual’s behaviour that supported the idea that the intention buying by a person is predicted by his behaviour. These intentions have a mutual connection determined by the person’s attitude and subjective norm about his or her behaviour. TRA has become a widely accepted model for exploring an individual’s behaviour over the past decade. Both attitude and subjective norms are explained by ‘The

Theory of Reasoned Action' (TRA) and it also explains that this model independently affects the consumers purchasing decision.

One of the two key constructs of the TRA is the Subjective norms. The researchers defined subjective norms to be the degree to which an individual acknowledges whether or not those people who are important to him/her think he/she should purchase a product. The study defines attitude norms as the degree to which the consumer has a favorable/unfavourable evaluation of purchasing the product. Attitude becomes a contributing factor in consumer personal belief that such factor will contribute to the intention to purchase the product. References also suggest that a customer's attitude towards knowledge sharing in the organization comes from his beliefs regarding expected rewards, association and contribution. Whereas, the subjective norms and the attitudinal norms act as influencers in the behavioural intention aspect of individual resulting which could either be positive or negative behaviour. Consumers derive positive attitude through social media because it shows much empathy to its viewer that results in positive response.

The results of this study gave us the confirmation that the influence of online media has been a major factor in consumer buying intention while purchasing products. Since consumers enjoy different online media advertisement and it affects their cognitive and affective behavior, it leads to positive attitude that tend them to purchase products. Advertisements like commercials on T.V, newspaper, magazine, social networking sites (Facebook, twitter, blog) and tangible ads like poster, tarpaulin and billboard are some of the social media tools that the companies use to enhance quality orientation of the product that acts as a positive influence on consumer buying intention.

The paper also presents how the different tools of online media and personal selling affect the decision making of the consumer towards the particular products. The results show that the brand and quality orientation of social media has positively influence the shopping interest and knowledge sharing of the consumers. Moreover, some variables of personal selling like reliability and quality perception also were partially affecting consumer purchasing decision.

It was also found that consumer purchase most of their products because of the influence of social media that motivates consumer subjective and attitudinal behavior. The service providers can give away free samples or free subscription for the probable online shoppers to test the products or services to arouse the attraction for prior online purchasing experience. Also, e-mail updates on product development or special offer can be provided to increase the customer impulse purchase and quality orientation. The customer gets familiar with a certain product and procures knowledge about the vital information of the product like features, specifications, attributes, and benefits through advertisements and this information becomes a motivating factor for purchase. Brand preference emphasizes the deployment of the marketing mix and human resources to deliver a distinctive brand in the customer's minds. Social media is a platform where consumers can easily find the product that they require through empathy that the advertisement portrayed to its viewer.

The research identified to be reliable for businesses that are using online media and personal selling in promoting their products. Businesses can use online media as an efficient and effective way to influence their consumer decision making. The impact of online media to the minds of consumer is more effective than personal selling, it saves much of business money and time in promoting products simply by use of online advertisements. The findings of this study provide useful insights for educators, businessman and students on how online media and personal selling build positive decision to the minds of the consumers so that learners" will have a greater perspective on how they can or will influence consumer buying intention.

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