

Customer Trust and Other Factors Associated with Digital Platforms & Marketing during a Pandemic

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EDITORIAL

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about a shift in consumer behaviour; the effect of lock-down and the fact that consumers stayed home resulted in the surge and significant growth of online channel utilisation. Companies and industries responded to meeting consumer demand by investing more in these channels [1-4]. The pandemic certainly affected budget trends in marketing activities, and the crisis showed consumer behaviour changes and marketing spending changes by companies during economic downturns caused by lock-down [5,6]. The adoption of digital platforms increased consumer interaction in digital channels and crisis management [7]. The use of digital platforms during the pandemic also changed the perception, attitude and acceptance and realising the benefits even for those who were sceptical as it was dominant as far as immediate access to information is concerned.

Digital Marketing Growth Trends: Studies also forecast continued growth in digital marketing investment both in the short and long term [8-10]. Marketing across digital channels will exceed 60% of global advertisement spending [11]. It is estimated to grow to 61.5% of total expenditure by 2024. The proliferation of websites, and mobile applications have also seen a massive rise in entities investing in mobile applications to offer services to clients and reach customers quicker [9]. It is debatable whether digital marketing outperforms traditional marketing, even though low-cost marketing is one of the benefits of digital marketing [10].

Cost reductions factor: Cost reduction associated with digital marketing instead of traditional marketing is the significant reduction of expenditure on paper and ink and the production of newsletters, advertisements, and banners yearly [12]. Furthermore, traditional marketing limits how small companies compete with big companies for advertisement space, requiring huge budgets [13]. Digital marketing levels the playing field on the size effect of

companies in that even smaller companies can reach a larger target audience with a broader reach.

Trust factor: Faster execution of purchase decisions due to digital marketing contributes to the purchasing decision of health insurance [14]. However, studies depict some limitations of digital marketing, including a lack of trust and human touch perspective coupled with the high probability of fraud [14,15]. Studies depict some shortcomings of digital marketing, including a lack of trust, privacy concerns, fear of being tracked online, misuse of personal data, fraud and lack of human touch [16,17]. Online customer interactions have been studied extensively in the online review (e.g., user-generated content and electronic word-of-mouth, or eWOM) [18-22]. eWOM encompasses customers' knowledge about the products, usage, experience, recommendations, and complaints and is generally perceived as trustworthy and reliable [23-25].

Misinformation factor: In the digital environment, customers can share word-of-mouth information with a few close friends and with strangers on an extended social network [9]. The relationship between elements of digital marketing mainly content marketing, storytelling and eWOM and service quality has been studied extensively in literature. The A study by Brzakovic et al. found that content marketing, storytelling and eWOM, observed individually, have a relatively weak influence on service quality dimensions such as reliability [27]. The study, however, focused on the Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises Sector and did not consider all the dimensions of digital marketing [23]. Customer trust factor on digital platforms, whether the direct purchase of the product or service delivered, has also been demonstrated in various industries, including banking, retail, fast food, and the health sector.

Health systems globally adopted digital platforms to reach their constituents during the COVID-19 era. One of the main

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interventions was also to build trust in the content and information about the pandemic. One of the main threats of digital space is that it is less regulated, which creates a risk of misinformation.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO)

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated how the spread of misinformation, amplified on social media and other digital platforms, is proving to be as much a threat to global public health as the virus itself.

Misinformation about the pandemic works against prevention strategies. Studies have also illustrated the effect of influential and public figures contributing to this phenomenon. COVID-19 health crisis misinformation is most prevalent in social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook in the main, and misinformation is mainly obtained from the internet [26]. Governments should develop strategies to regulate health information on the internet.

COVID-19 certainly accelerated the use of digital channels such as websites, and medial social platforms, which provide immediate access to information at any given point in time. The pandemic has also allowed companies to invest and reallocate more budgets toward these platforms. However, these opportunities are not without risks, such as lack of consistency, uniformity and accurate data reporting, and misinformation. Although the perception and attitudes have somewhat changed, there are many risks and threats that still remain. This review recommends an urgent need to regulate social media platforms to reduce the risk of misinformation and build trust in government prevention strategies during a pandemic.

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