"THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING ACTIVITIES IN INFLUENCING CUSTOMER INTENTIONS: PERSPECTIVES ON THE EMERGING DIGITAL ERA AND EVOLVING SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGIES"

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Abstract:

Social media marketing strategies play a crucial role in enhancing brand awareness for businesses. However, many organizations fail to fully leverage the creativity and innovative potential of these strategies due to a lack of awareness about the best tools available in modern technology. Additionally, some businesses do not recognize the full benefits of social networks in marketing.

The internet has unlocked numerous opportunities for online marketing, utilizing mechanisms such as podcasts, blogs, and social media platforms to reach target audiences. Beyond advertising, social media fosters interaction and community-building, facilitating knowledge exchange and discussions. Popular platforms include YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, while emerging networks like TikTok continue to reshape the digital landscape. Analysts measure platform popularity based on user engagement and activity levels. Modern social networks have proven to be more effective than traditional ones, as they facilitate global interactions and overcome geographical barriers.

Despite these advantages, only a limited number of organizations fully integrate social networking into their marketing strategies. This study aims to explore the best social media marketing strategies, their benefits, challenges, and the latest trends in modern technology, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and chatbots. The first section introduces the topic, followed by discussions on key marketing strategies such as image appeal and content creation. The challenges section addresses obstacles associated with these strategies. The emerging technology and trends section examines innovations like AI, chatbots, and short-form videos that are shaping the future of online marketing. The discussion is based on a review of relevant literature exploring these social media marketing issues.

The study specifically investigates social media marketing activities (SMMAs) and their impact on consumer intentions, including continued usage, participation, and purchase decisions. Additionally, it

analyzes the mediating roles of social identification and satisfaction. The research focuses on experienced users of Facebook and Instagram in Pakistan. Data were collected through a self-administered online questionnaire, with 353 respondents participating via an online community. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to analyze the data. The findings reveal that SMMAs significantly influence user intentions. Furthermore, social identification mediates the relationship between social media activities and satisfaction, while satisfaction mediates the link between social media activities and user intentions.

This study offers valuable insights for marketers on how to attract customers and shape their engagement intentions. Notably, it is the first novel research to utilize SMMAs to examine user intentions while incorporating the roles of social identification and satisfaction in the Pakistani context.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, chatbots, strategies, social media

1. Introduction

In today's competitive business environment, companies have implemented various strategies to remain relevant. One of the most effective strategies is social media marketing (SMM), which leverages the power of popular social media platforms to achieve business marketing goals. Given the vast number of social media users, nearly every business integrates some form of SMM. Advertisements frequently appear as users scroll through social media platforms, demonstrating just one of the many ways businesses use these platforms for marketing. The rise of digital marketing has prompted businesses to shift from traditional methods to innovative online strategies, which enhance consumer engagement and provide new business opportunities. As a result, companies have embraced digital marketing campaigns to maintain their competitive edge. This growing importance of online marketing raises the need to examine various social media marketing strategies, their benefits and challenges, the role of technology in marketing, and emerging trends in the field.

Over the past decade, the use of social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook has grown significantly (Chen & Qasim, 2021). These platforms facilitate communication while also serving as vital marketing tools for brands. Social networking sites have transformed real-world social interactions into digital experiences, allowing people to connect and share information in real time. Consequently, businesses recognize social media as an essential tool for achieving success in the online marketplace (Ebrahim, 2020).

Social media marketing (SMM) refers to the use of social media platforms to commercially promote products, services, or events, attracting potential consumers online. With the rise of community-driven

websites, many organizations are exploring the best ways to leverage these platforms to build strong relationships with users and create online brand communities (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2018). SMM facilitates direct communication between marketers and customers while enhancing brand awareness (Hafez, 2021). However, while SMM is recognized as an effective marketing strategy, research on its impact on consumer intentions remains limited. Current studies focus on consumer behavior, creative marketing strategies, content analysis, and user-generated content's role in virtual brand communities (Ibrahim, 2021).

Advancements in internet technology have introduced new communication channels, reshaping social interactions (Tarsakoo & Charoensukmongkol, 2020). Businesses now recognize the importance of sharing brand information and customer experiences as a marketing strategy, particularly with the widespread use of smartphones and the internet. The ability to build online communities has significantly improved, with social groups fostering a sense of continuity for members without physical meetings (Yadav & Rahman, 2017). A virtual brand community refers to a group of consumers united by their shared experience with a particular brand. Consumers today seek more than just products and services; they value meaningful experiences and connections with other customers and industry professionals. As a result, businesses must identify strategies to encourage customer participation in these communities (Ismail et al., 2018).

Although online communities differ from real-world communities in terms of technology and mode of interaction, they serve similar purposes, such as fostering shared experiences, social support, and a sense of identity (Seo & Park, 2018). Brand communities are built around specific products or services, enabling interactions between consumers beyond geographical limitations (Chen & Lin, 2019). These communities develop unique customs, traditions, and rituals, strengthening consumer relationships. Members exchange knowledge about products, learn from one another, and appreciate shared experiences. Once a consumer becomes part of a brand community, the brand itself acts as a unifying factor, fostering a sense of connection among members (Arora & Sanni, 2019).

While much research focuses on how businesses benefit from brand communities, studies also highlight the advantages for community members. Understanding how brand communities impact consumers provides insights into consumer behavior and loyalty (Shareef et al., 2019). Consumers value brands that consistently provide meaningful experiences and reliable information, which fosters long-term brand loyalty. According to Alalwan et al. (2017), brands that deliver value cultivate consumer trust and enhance brand awareness.

Social networking sites play a crucial role in evaluating consumer perceptions and behaviors. With user-friendly website development tools, businesses can attract consumers to social communities where they can learn more about a company and its products. Additionally, social media interactions provide businesses with valuable insights into consumer preferences. However, for a brand's online community to be successful, it must offer value to its members. It should provide relevant brand information and facilitate interactions among consumers, fostering a sense of belonging. Ultimately, consumer satisfaction within a brand community directly influences community retention and selection, reinforcing the importance of social media marketing in modern business strategies.

1.1. Social Media Marketing Strategies

Businesses have developed various strategies to enhance the effectiveness of their social media marketing efforts. One of the most widely used strategies is celebrity endorsements, where well-known personalities promote products on platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok [4]. These celebrities are perceived to have high social value, making them effective in attracting a larger customer base to the products they endorse [5].

Celebrity influencers are powerful advertising tools because they can easily capture consumers' attention and reach a broader audience compared to traditional advertising methods. This significantly boosts brand awareness and enhances brand credibility [6]. Today, it is common for businesses to approach social media influencers with large followings to advertise their products. In many cases, these endorsements involve celebrities going live on their social media platforms to engage with audiences directly [4]. Research indicates that approximately 25% of all television commercials and 10% of advertising budgets are allocated to celebrity endorsements [7]. Additionally, there is a strong correlation between the use of celebrities in advertisements and an increase in company profits, as celebrity endorsements help businesses establish a unique market position and a positive brand image [8,9].

Another effective strategy in social media marketing is corporate advertising, which focuses on enhancing a company's image rather than solely promoting its products and services [1]. Many businesses now invest in advertisements that aim to inform the public about their existence, sparking curiosity and encouraging potential customers to learn more about their offerings. These strategies have contributed to the high effectiveness of social media marketing.

Among the most impactful marketing approaches is image appeal, which has proven to be a powerful tool in engaging consumers. Johansson and Hiltula define image appeal as a combination of cognitive and emotional responses to consumers' perceptions [3]. Cognitive engagement involves problem-solving

situations, while emotional appeal influences consumer sentiment and attachment to a brand. Utilizing image appeal enhances consumer awareness and strengthens emotional connections, making it particularly effective for promoting valuable and expressive products. Many businesses incorporate visually compelling images into their social media marketing strategies to enhance brand promotion.

For example, First Media's "Blossom" campaign set a record for the highest number of views in social media history after posting an advertisement featuring a woman in undergarments. The post amassed over 280 million views on Facebook and 12 million shares [10]. The campaign's success was largely attributed to the strong visual appeal, which resonated with consumers on an emotional level.

Content marketing is another highly effective social media marketing strategy. Weerasinghe defines content marketing as the process of creating and distributing relevant, consistent, and valuable brand content to attract target audiences and drive business growth through well-defined objectives [11]. This content can take various forms, including infographics, eBooks, videos, and blogs. A random sample survey found that 61.4% of consumers engage with brand content on social media, compared to 38.6% on other online platforms [11]. This statistic underscores the importance of content marketing in capturing consumer interest and driving engagement on social media.

For brands to maximize their reach, they must maintain high-quality content, post frequently, and adhere to a well-planned posting schedule. Effective social media strategies also incorporate the use of hashtags to enhance visibility and engagement. For instance, GoPro consistently uses the hashtag #GoPro across its highly engaging content, which has contributed to its position as the most influential camera brand in the market [10]. By leveraging innovative content marketing strategies, brands can strengthen their presence and build a loyal customer base.

1.2. Benefits of Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing provides numerous benefits to both businesses and consumers. One of its primary advantages is that it enables businesses to promote their brands, products, and services effectively [12]. Si supports this assertion, emphasizing that social media marketing eliminates middlemen, allowing companies to connect directly with their consumers [13]. According to Arca (2012), social media marketing helps businesses reach their target audience, generate leads, gain insights into the market and competitors, enhance public relations and human resources, reduce costs, obtain customer feedback, and increase brand exposure and awareness [14].

Additionally, social media marketing allows businesses to target audiences based on users' personal interests and online interactions. This targeted approach enables companies to reach consumers who are most likely to be interested in their products or services, thereby enhancing word-of-mouth marketing and increasing customer engagement [15]. Another advantage is its ability to offer personalized experiences, leading to greater customer satisfaction and brand loyalty [16].

Furthermore, social media platforms provide businesses with analytical tools that help monitor the performance of advertising campaigns. Ibrahim and Ganeshbabu highlight the importance of these tools in tracking key performance indicators (KPIs) and refining marketing strategies to improve engagement and conversion rates [2]. Beyond business applications, social media marketing also benefits industries such as healthcare, education, and small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Dwivedi et al. note that social media facilitates direct communication between healthcare providers and patients, improving patient outcomes. Similarly, the education sector has leveraged social media to enhance learning experiences, while SMEs have experienced rapid growth due to increased digital exposure [17].

The growing adoption of social media marketing reflects its effectiveness in brand intelligence and audience engagement. Behera and Balaji emphasize that social media platforms provide marketing managers with valuable insights into customer behavior, including feedback, loyalty trends, segmentation, and product preferences [18]. Contrary to earlier assumptions that social media primarily appealed to younger audiences, recent trends indicate that other demographic groups, including employees, actively engage with online advertisements. Weerasinghe's research shows that employees (28.6%) contribute more to content engagement than students (15.7%), highlighting the diverse reach of social media marketing [11].

Moreover, social media marketing significantly enhances brand awareness. Behera and Balaji assert that it is one of the most effective content distribution strategies for expanding business reach. By leveraging high consumer engagement, businesses can enhance their visibility through campaigns that encourage employees, sponsors, and business partners to participate in "like" and "share" initiatives. The viral nature of social media sharing creates a chain reaction, increasing consumer reach and fostering a reputable brand image. For instance, continuous content sharing attracts both potential and existing customers, amplifying brand exposure. Research indicates that 91% of marketers believe social media marketing plays a crucial role in product visibility and brand recognition [18].

These insights confirm the effectiveness of social media marketing as a powerful tool for businesses seeking to expand their market presence, engage with consumers, and drive brand loyalty.

1.3. Challenges

Despite its numerous benefits, social media marketing also presents several challenges. One major drawback is the reduction of interpersonal communication, as digital interactions replace face-to-face engagement. This shift limits businesses' ability to receive direct feedback from customers, making it difficult to fully understand their specific needs. As a result, companies may struggle with an influx of products that do not align with market demand [19].

Another significant challenge is the spread of misinformation. According to Di Domenico et al., social media provides an avenue for the rapid dissemination of false information, which can severely damage a company's reputation [20]. Malicious actors may exploit these platforms to spread misleading claims about a brand's products, leading to customer distrust. Additionally, while celebrity endorsements are a powerful marketing tool, they may sometimes lead to over-promotion. This can create unrealistic consumer expectations, potentially misleading customers about product quality and features [4]. To mitigate these risks, businesses must carefully manage their social media marketing strategies, ensuring transparency and authenticity in their campaigns.

Social media marketing also exposes businesses to data privacy concerns. Behera and Balaji highlight that data mining—a practice used to collect and analyze consumer information—poses a significant challenge. Many consumers are unwilling to share their personal data, making it difficult for businesses to access key insights about their target audiences. Some data mining companies extract information from social media applications and posts without explicit user consent. For example, Colligent, a data analytics company, collects consumer data and sells it to record label companies. Disney Records leveraged Colligent's data to target Latin American audiences for the Jonas Brothers' album promotion. While data mining can enhance marketing efforts, it also raises ethical and legal concerns regarding consumer privacy [18].

Furthermore, businesses must navigate various social media regulations that govern content and posting frequency. Violating platform guidelines—such as those restricting explicit content or excessive promotional posts—can lead to account suspension or termination. To overcome these challenges, marketing managers should adopt responsible strategies. They should avoid content that explicitly requests users' private information and ensure that all marketing materials comply with platform policies. By maintaining ethical practices and respecting user privacy, businesses can effectively leverage social media marketing while minimizing potential risks.

2. Emerging Technologies

Business brands have increasingly incorporated chatbots and artificial intelligence (AI) into their marketing strategies. Sadiku et al. explain that AI-powered chatbots enable businesses to provide instant responses to customer inquiries, enhancing customer engagement and satisfaction. These tools also facilitate automated, interactive communication, offering personalized support that improves the overall consumer experience. Additionally, AI-driven marketing strategies, such as AI-powered advertisements, allow businesses to curate targeted content, identify potential customers, and optimize their advertising efforts [21]. These advancements suggest a promising future for AI and chatbots in social media marketing.

However, the integration of AI in marketing also presents several challenges. Sadiku et al. highlight privacy concerns associated with AI-powered applications, as they may expose sensitive information—such as financial, tax, and health records—to cyber threats. This raises critical concerns about consumer data protection. Businesses must strike a balance between personalization and privacy, ensuring that AI-driven promotions remain ethical and non-intrusive. Another challenge is the shortage of skilled AI professionals capable of effectively integrating AI into social media marketing. To address this, businesses should invest in training programs to equip their technology teams with modern AI expertise [21].

Social media marketing has evolved significantly in the 21st century. Husain et al. describe the exponential growth of social media platforms, a trend that aligns with Leeflang et al.'s observations on the increased internet penetration, which has fueled the rise of digital marketing [22][23]. Widespread smartphone and computer usage has enabled a significant portion of the global population to access business products online [12]. Consequently, companies are investing more in social media advertisements as digital engagement continues to grow. According to Nyagadza, over 77% of the population in North America and Europe frequently accesses the internet, with Oceania and Australasia following at 61% [24]. Even in Africa—home to many of the world's least developed countries—social media adoption is rapidly increasing, providing businesses with new market opportunities [23].

The rising prominence of social media marketing has also drawn the attention of scholars, leading to an increasing number of academic journals exploring its impact. These studies offer valuable insights into effective marketing strategies, helping businesses refine their approaches [25]. As digital marketing continues to evolve, social media trends are expected to expand even further.

Among the latest trends in social media marketing, short-form videos and social commerce are particularly influential. A study indicates that TikTok dominates the short-video strategy, with 67.6% of a surveyed sample engaging with the platform daily [26]. This suggests that consumers prefer TikTok for its concise, entertaining, and engaging content. Businesses are leveraging this trend by creating short, compelling videos that align with their marketing objectives.

Another major trend is social commerce—the practice of buying and selling directly through social media platforms. The post-COVID-19 era has significantly boosted social commerce, as consumers increasingly prefer to order products online. A study projects that mobile commerce will generate approximately $620.97 billion by 2024, underscoring the growing importance of online shopping [27]. These trends highlight the need for businesses to stay ahead of emerging digital marketing strategies to maximize their market reach and competitiveness.

2.1 Limitations and Recommendations

Despite efforts to ensure comprehensive data collection, well-structured research methodologies, and a robust research framework, certain limitations remain and should be addressed in future studies. One notable limitation is the potential for self-selection bias when using online questionnaires for data collection. Participants who strongly identify with a particular community may be more inclined to complete the survey, potentially affecting the validity and authenticity of the results.

Additionally, this study employed a cross-sectional sample, which limits the ability to analyze long-term user behavior across different social media platforms. Since various platforms offer distinct services, a more conclusive understanding of long-term usage patterns would require longitudinal studies. Future research should incorporate growth model analysis and track users' browsing experiences at different stages to establish causal relationships between variables more effectively.

Another limitation stems from the varying social media preferences across different regions and cultures. Future studies should explore the factors influencing individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds or geographical locations to choose specific platforms, as well as the motivations and demands driving these preferences.

Moreover, modern social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter possess unique characteristics that distinguish them from traditional platforms. Future research should investigate these evolving features and their impact on user behavior. While this study focused on the influence of Social Media

Marketing Activities (SMMAs) on user behavior and usage patterns, further research is needed to examine how emerging trends in social media shape user engagement and marketing effectiveness.

3. Conclusion

Social media marketing has become an integral part of modern business strategies and is expected to continue evolving. To remain competitive and achieve their objectives, businesses must adapt to this trend effectively. Key strategies in social media marketing include celebrity endorsements and corporate advertisements, both of which have contributed to significant benefits. These advantages include enhanced brand promotion, increased visibility of goods and services, personalized customer experiences, higher customer satisfaction, and positive impacts on various economic sectors.

However, despite these benefits, social media marketing also presents challenges such as the spread of misinformation and the reduction of direct interpersonal communication between businesses and consumers. These issues can impact brand reputation and customer trust if not properly managed.

Emerging trends indicate that social media marketing will continue to grow at a rapid pace in the near future. Therefore, businesses must stay ahead by equipping themselves with the necessary tools, strategies, and expertise to leverage this ever-evolving marketing landscape effectively.

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