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**Customer Reliance on Social Media Information for Buying Decisions:
A study about the reliability on SMI with reference to Vijayawada**

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ABSTRACT

Social Media Marketing with its throttled up application in most of the sophisticated metropolitan urban geo-locations is the transformational green initiative as the resultant of ICT. This mode of persuasive communication to deploy the information of the products and services has been very effective and convenient tool in reaching the targets since the early 2000s.

This research study analyses the impact of the information disseminated via the social media platforms to reach the customers at Vijayawada and around. It aims to find the customers reliance on the social media as source of information to take the buying decisions for both online/offline approaches. Results after the analysis of the data show that the customers truthfully depend, rely, trust and consider the Social Media Information for making purchase decisions at the location considered for the research.

This research study also analyses the significant relationship between the customer buying decision process and their reliability on social media information as an input in that very process. So, the findings sought in this study with the help of data analysis and interpretation help the study to accept the hypothesis considered in the research process to imply that Vijayawada has a huge potential of Digital marketing via Social Media to cater the needs of the prospective and existing customers through splendid value delivery system.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing, Social Media, Information, Customer Buying Decision Process, Digital marketing, Source of Information, Customer's Reliance.

INTRODUCTION

According to the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI), the number of Social Media users in Urban India reached 66 Million by June 2014 and by 2016, is expected to cross 105 million users. This clearly demonstrates that India is growing fast and people are becoming habitual of using the Internet as the evolution of human society, the improvement in Communication processes and Digital Convergence has open up innovative opportunities and challenges for Marketing. Subsequently, the Internet has moved ahead to play a significant role in the Consumer Decision Making Process. It is important for organizations to recognize the value of the relevance of website attributes in the context of their ability to cater to appropriate Consumer Intent for venturing online. Also, an analysis of Consumer Characteristics and Specific Traits can enable organizations to segment Consumers and design Targeting Strategies appropriately. Classifying consumers into well-defined segments on the basis of their Pre-Purchase & Post-Purchase Behavior can aid marketing teams in developing more streamlined and focused Consumer Targeting Process. (Neha Jain, 2014)

Social Media Websites (SMWs) such as Facebook, Orkut, Youtube, Flickr, Twitter, etc. have gained wide acceptance amongst internet users (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Millions of people across the world have become members of these SMWs to connect and build relationships with other like-minded people. SMWs are used for varied purposes like exchanging information, expressing opinions, sharing photos, and videos, showcasing one's interests and passions to others, engaging in discussions, and connecting to people, etc.

IMPORTANCE AND NEED FOR THE STUDY

This study is scoped with reference to consumer behavior and marketing management in regards with Social Media Marketing (SMM) which can be boosted further through customized and interactive communication. The days for broadcasting are archaic since today is the age of narrowcasting. Hence, this study finds its need as the results are going to be optimistic and worth for everyone seeking the eminence of Social media as information source aiding in buying decisions for the customers. The population of Vijayawada gave the sample for this study.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

The Statement Of Problem is that '**Do people of Vijayawada really believe and rely on the information displayed on the Social media websites**' when buying the products and services made available by any business unit in such a chaotic scenario where lots of incidents of fraudulent mishaps has already been experienced by the user segment.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To study the significance of Social Media as a source of information for the consumers while making purchase decisions
- To explore the factors those are making Social Media more appealing and persuasive
- To analyse and understand which popular Social Media are being considered by the consumers as good source of information
- To analyse the attributes of Social Media, that are influencing the consumers to rely upon Social Media as a source of information while making buying decisions

HYPOTHESIS

Hypotheses have been constructed taking age, educational qualification and income as independent variables and willingness to participate in Social Media as dependent variable to test the association.

- H0: There is no significant association between age of respondents and willingness to participate in Social Media
- H1: There is significant association between age of respondents and willingness to participate in Social Media
- H0: There is no significant association between educational qualifications of respondents and willingness to participate in Social Media

- H1: There is significant association between educational qualifications of respondents and willingness to participate in Social Media
- H0: There is no significant association between income of respondents and willingness to participate in Social Media
- H1: There is significant association between income of respondents and willingness to participate in Social Media

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Neha Jain (2014) found India as one of the fastest growing internet based economy where people are becoming habitual of using the Internet as the evolution of human society. The improvement in Communication processes and Digital Convergence opens up innovative opportunities and challenges for Marketing. Subsequently, the Internet has moved ahead to play a significant role in the Consumer Decision Making Process. This research study explored the dimensions of E-Marketing, Consumer Behavior, The Internet, and Website Contribution to Brand enhancement and Traditional Consumer Decision Making Process. The research thesis aimed to address noteworthy aspects with respect to the role of the internet in decision making, impact of the internet on Consumer Behavior, Post Purchase Behavior and the Consumer Decision Making Process and formulated Research Instruments to address the proposed issues.

Ayda Darban & Wei Li (2012) comprehended that the growth of online social networks around the world has created a new place of interaction and communication among people. Individuals can share their knowledge, opinions, and experiences with one other due to the features of online social networks and may have an impact on people's behavior in terms of communication and purchasing. The study aimed at examining the impact of online social networks on consumer's purchasing behavior; more precisely, it tried to discover how online social networks have impact on consumers' purchasing decision, and also the reasons behind it.

Elisabeta Ioană & Ivona Stoica (2014) recommended that by using social media, consumers can have the power to influence other buyers through reviews of products or services used. Consumers are also influenced by other psychosocial characteristics like: income, purchase motivation, company presentation, brand's presence on social networks, demographic variables (age, gender, disposable income etc.), workplace method of payment, type of stores (online or physical), etc.

Mrs Smita Dayal (2016) evaluated that Social Media Websites (SMWs) such as Facebook, Orkut, Youtube, Flickr, Twitter, etc. have gained wide acceptance amongst internet users in the Indian subcontinent. Millions of people across the world have become members of these SMWs to connect and build relationships with other like-minded people. SMWs are used for varied purposes like exchanging information, expressing opinions, sharing photos, and videos, showcasing one's interests and passions to others, engaging in discussions, and connecting to people, etc. (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Social media websites have contributed to increasing numbers of contacts between users sharing common interests and to the creation of online communities and digital social networks. Having one or multiple accounts in SMWs has become one of the most popular and faster growing Internet activities; SMWs applications attract already hundreds of millions of users and these numbers are growing fast.

RESEARCH DESIGN

1. For the collection of data in this study, both the primary as well as secondary data sources are used. The methodology of the study is an extensive **convenience sampling** technique based on structured **questionnaire method** of surveying where a sample of **200** people from **Vijayawada**. It used Email, Whatsapp, Google Forms, Facebook, LinkedIn and Direct Interaction (Face to Face Conversation) as the modes to get the data sheet filled. The data are further coded & classified into tables for analysis and presentation considers the graphs and figures followed by the interpretation. This involves **Close-ended & Open-ended** questions with the **Likert Scale** (5 point basis) as the measuring tool for the collected data which will be analysed to generate the conclusion.

Data Collection Methods

The data can be collected from Primary as well as Secondary sources.

A) Primary Data Sources:

- Questionnaire Survey.
- Face to Face Interception.

B) Secondary Data Sources:

- Published Research.
- Internet & Text Books.

Statistical Methods: The data as collected from the respondents are coded, tabulated, analysed and interpreted into logical statements using SPSS and MS Office

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study is a concurrent and cognizant pathway undertaken to meet the objectives of developing a wide horizon of exploratory and descriptive bases for the optimization of apt information need for judicious decisions. The scope of the study involves:

- The Geographical arena in Indian Consumer Market where the consumer base is diversified and large. Vijayawada is the new growing and potent capital of AP.
- The external factor of the business environment in the current economy is dynamic, versatile and full of nascent patterns.

CONCEPTUAL FRAME WORK

Social media are defined as –forms of electronic communication (as Web sites for social networking and microblogging) through which users creates online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (as videos). While there are different ways to categorize social media, its typology is often based on the main function and purpose of use, such as for blogging, microblogging (such as Twitter), social networking (for instance, Facebook), collaborative knowledge production and sharing (like Wikipedia), multimedia sharing (example: YouTube), and sharing reviews and opinions (such as social Q&A, user reviews). One of the challenges brought about by the advances in information and communication technologies is the detonation of information sources and channels leading to customers' conflict in selecting the reliable one. Some studies have investigated students' source selection across a host of information channels in both academic and everyday-life information-seeking contexts. More research also needs to be done to find out what **social media** platforms are being used for meeting various kinds of information needs. Among different social media platforms, the use of Wikipedia has received a lot of attention. Research shows that Wikipedia is often consulted for academic tasks, usually in the early stages of the research process. There is some evidence that customers are consulting Wikipedia for everyday-life information tasks as well. For example, in a survey of undergraduate students, Head and Eisenberg found that over 80 percent of respondents used **Wikipedia** for everyday-life information seeking. However, data about students' usage of other social media platforms is still vague. There has been notable interest in the potential for social question and answer sites (social Q&A), such as **Yahoo! Answers** or **Quora**, to assist in collaborative information seeking. Nevertheless, it is still unknown how many college students are actually using social Q&A for academic or everyday-life information seeking or commercial information seeking.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Q. Do you rely on Social media Information for Buying Decisions (Offline/Online)?

Table-1 Reliance on Social Media Information for Buying Decisions

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative
Agree Disagree Neutral	80	40.0	40.0	40.0
Valid Strongly Agree	14	7.0	7.0	47.0
Strongly Disagree	73	36.5	36.5	83.5
Total	26	13.0	13.0	96.5

	7	3.5	3.5	100.0
	200	100.0	100.0	

Interpretation:

The E-commerce business is also reliant on the medium of information disposition where social media is taken as one. The graph shows that 13% strongly agree to rely on the social media information for purchase decisions while 40% agree the same. 36.5% are neutral to the proposition while 7% disagree and 3.5% strongly disagree to rely and believe/trust on the social media information for buying (Offline/Online).

Q.N.8 What Social Media do you prefer to seek information for Buying?**Table-2 Social media preferred to seek information for Buying**

Social media	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
E-commerce websites	18	9.0	9.0	9.0
Facebook Instagram LinkedIn	83	41.5	41.5	50.5
Valid Others	16	8.0	8.0	58.5
Twitter Youtube Total	14	7.0	7.0	65.5
	16	8.0	8.0	73.5
	8	4.0	4.0	77.5
	45	22.5	22.5	100.0
	200	100.0	100.0	

Interpretation:

Facebook has been selected as the most sought social media information source for buying by 41.5% of the respondents followed by 22.5% voting for Youtube. 9.0% of respondents chose E-commerce sites for the information while LinkedIn and Instagram stood with 7% & 8% of support respectively. Twitter grabs only

4% of the votes as source of information in buying decisions for Vijayawada. Only 8% of the respondents have other sources as choice for the information.

Q. Which of these attributes of Social Media has an impact you're Buying Decisions?**Table-3 Social Medias attributes impacting buying decisions**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Accessibility	33	16.5	16.5	16.5
Interface	11	5.5	5.5	22.0
Popularity	68	34.0	34.0	56.0
Valid Reviews	56	28.0	28.0	84.0
Security	32	16.0	16.0	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

Interpretation: The attributes of social media that controls the buying behaviour has been very crucial for the study where popularity of the information source accounts for 34% of respondents choice while the reviews about the products or services accounts for 28% of vote.16.5 % of the respondents take accessibility of the social media source as the attribute for having a significant impact/influence on their buying decisions which is followed by 16% votes for security of the source and information. Interface of the source has been least considered by 5.5% respondents as a feature of the social media having an impact on the buying behaviour or decisions.

Q. What types of reviews do you see about the Products/Services on the Social media to finalize the deal?

Table-4 Reviews about the Products/Services on the social media to finalise the deal

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Both	70	35.0	35.0	35.0
Negative	30	15.0	15.0	50.0
Valid Never consider	33	16.5	16.5	66.5
Positive	67	33.5	33.5	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

Interpretation:

Here 35% of the respondents see both negative and positive reviews about the products and services on the social media while 16.5% never consider reviews in information processing stage for buying decisions.

33.5% of them prefer the positive reviews and 15% consider negative reviews into the buying as information from social media.

Q. In your experience, is it judicious decision to buy/sell using the Social media information?

Table-5 Judiciousness of decision to buy/sell using Social media Information

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Agree	93	46.5	46.5	46.5
Disagree	10	5.0	5.0	51.5
Neutral	58	29.0	29.0	80.5
Valid Strongly Agree	37	18.5	18.5	99.0
Strongly Disagree	2	1.0	1.0	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

Interpretation:

The judiciousness of the decisions of buying by the use of social media information was strongly disagreed by 1% of the respondents while strongly agreed by 18.5%. Also 29% were neutral about this query while 5% disagreed and 46.5% agreed on these decisions for buying using the social media information.

Q. What makes the social media information more appealing and persuasive for buying?

Table-6 Aspects that make Social Media Information more Appealing and Persuasive

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Infographics	1	.5	.5	.5
Webpage Design	24	12.0	12.0	12.5
Ad Videos	55	27.5	27.5	40.0
Valid Flash sale	35	17.5	17.5	57.5
Infographics	55	27.5	27.5	85.0
Textual Posts	30	15.0	15.0	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

Interpretation:

The social media are the fascinating tools that are used to generate leads for business. They use the aspects like Infographics, Webpage design, FlashSale, Textual posts & Ad Videos to reach the target. Here, 28% of the respondents prefer Infographics as the first attribute while 27.5% chose Ad videos for persuading them to buy. Webpage design has 12% weightage in the attracting process while Flash Sale bags 17.5% weightage. The textual posts were the preference of 15% respondents in the sample.

Q. Would you recommend others to believe in Social Media Information for Purchase Decisions?**Table-7 Recommendation on Reliance to Social media information**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Neutral	74	37.0	37.0	37.0
No	15	7.5	7.5	44.5
Valid Yes	111	55.5	55.5	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

Interpretation:

The social media information has been recommended for purchase by 55.5% of the respondents quoting YES while 37% respondents are on the Neutral edge of the recommendation. Also, only 7.5% of the respondents of the sample have an antagonistic view about recommending the social media as a reliable source of information for buying decision making.

Association between Variables: Respondents Age & Willingness to participate in Social Media catches an effect on Reliance to Social Media Information for buying decisions.

	Willingness to participate in Social Media Platform for purchase					
	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree	Total
16-25 years	65	4	48	24	1	142
26-35 years	20	1	12	9	0	42
Age 36-45 years	4	1	1	6	0	12
46-55 years	1	1	0	0	0	2
56 and above	1	0	0	1	0	2
Total	91	7	61	40	1	200
Pearson Chi-Square			25.961a	16	0.055	
Likelihood Ratio			17.772	16	0.337	

a. 18 cells (72.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .01

Syntax: Here the asymptotic significance is 0.055 which is greater than 0.05, so we accept the null hypothesis which implies that there is no significant association between age and the intention/willingness of participating in Social Media platform.

Association between Variables: Qualification & Willingness to participate in Social Media for purchases has influence on the Reliability of Social Media Information

Willing preference to Social Media Platforms							
		Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Qualification	Doctorate	3	1	1	2	0	7
	Intermediate	10	1	1	2	0	14
	Others	2	1	1	2	0	6
	PG	41	4	43	15	1	104
	SSC	0	0	0	1	0	1
	UG	36	0	15	17	0	68
	Total	92	7	61	39	1	200

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	31.387a	20	0.050
Likelihood Ratio	30.968	20	0.056
N of Valid Cases	200		

a. 23 cells (76.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .01.

Interpretation:

Here, the level of significance is 0.050 which is equal to 0.05; hence, we reject the null hypothesis which signifies that the variables: Qualification and Willingness to participation in Social Media has significant association among them. Thus, definite positive conclusion about Social media information and its reliability for purchases decisions on basis of qualification can be drawn.

Association between Variables: Income & Willful participation in Social Media has got an influence on the Reliance of Customer's on SMI

Willing preference to social media							
		Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Income	20k-40k	18	1	15	10	0	44
	40k-60k	7	2	3	5	0	17
	70K and above	7	3	4	9	0	23
	less than 10K	19	0	12	5	0	36
	None	41	1	27	10	1	80
	Total	92	7	61	39	1	200

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	26.961a	16	0.042
Likelihood Ratio	25.028	16	0.069
N of Valid Cases	200		

a. 12 cells (48.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .09.

Interpretation:

Here the asymptotic significance is 0.042 which is less than 0.05; hence the null hypothesis is accepted which entails that there is no significant association between income and willingness of participation in Social Media.

FINDINGS

- The study finds that 13% strongly agree to rely on the Social media information for purchase decisions while 40% agree. 36.5% are neutral to the proposition while 7% disagree and 3.5% strongly disagree to rely on the social media information for buying decisions (Offline/Online).

- **Facebook** has been selected as the most sought **Social media information source** for buying by **41.5%** of the respondents followed by **22.5%** choosing for **Youtube**. **9.0%** of respondents chose **E-commerce sites** for the information while **Linkedin** and **Instagram** stood nearly equal with **7%** & **8%** of support respectively. **Twitter** grabs only **4%** of the votes as source of information in buying decisions for **Vijayawada**. Only **8%** of the respondents have other sources for the information.
- **35%** of the respondents see **both negative and positive** reviews about the products and services on the **social media** while **16.5%** **never consider** the social media reviews in information processing stage for buying decisions. Also, **33.5%** of them prefer the **positive reviews** and **15%** consider **negative reviews** as information from social media to make buying decisions.
- In another exploratory quest regarding the customer shopping behaviour if the E-tail giants like- Amazon, Flipkart, Snapdeal, Paytm, Freecharge, etc. come with **physical stores** shows that **40.5%** are neutral to buying from their stores while **11.5%** think about not going to buy. But, **47.5%** of respondents are **willing to visit and buy** at the outlets of the E-commerce Giants.
- The **Social media information** has been recommended for purchase by **55.5%** of the respondents quoting **Yes** while **37%** respondents are on the **Neutral** edge of the recommendation. Also, only **7.5%** of the respondents of the sample have an **opposed** view about **recommending the social media as a reliable source** of information for buying decision making.
- The social media are the fascinating tools that are used to **generate leads** for business. They use the creative aspects like Infographics, Webpage Design, FlashSale, Textual Posts and Ad Videos to reach the target. Here, **28%** of the respondents prefer **Infographics** as the first attribute while **27.5%** pick **Ad videos** for persuading them to buy. Webpage design has **12%** weightage in the attracting process while FlashSale bags **17.5%** weightage. The **textual posts** were the preference of **15%** respondents in the sample.
- From the study it is found that age and income are having no association with the willingness to participate in Social Media whereas, educational Qualification is having significant association.

SUGGESTIONS

- The sample of 200 respondents may be a small and minute consideration but the precision and the accuracy of the results shows and strongly implies that we can plan focused budgeting strategies of communicating to the customers by using the Social Media platform.
- The demographic aspects are to be greatly considered while making the market entry/growth policies where the people of Vijayawada are very optimistic with good purchasing power and spending psychology since more than 90% of majors use electronic gadget and are connected with internet via social media.
- This study would like to recommend that the location for study is a virgin avenue for new business ventures, integration and development since it is the new capital of AP.
- The marketers can come up to narrow-cast the clientele with the customisation of communication process. Broadcasting is less preferable.
- The Social media as the study finds is a reliable and trustworthy source for information to finalise the purchase decisions hence, the marketers can use the customisation and narrowcasting approach to cater the individual needs & wants via interactive and relational channels of social media by deploying persuasive and authentic information.
- The study from the test finds that the gender, age, income and occupation are closely associated with each other for influencing the buying behaviour and decisions of the customers as the respondents have presented their view.

- The customer's reliance on the SMI for buying decisions is having a significant impact on the Frequency of purchase, Source of information search, Expenses on purchases and Gender purchase habits. It shows that mainly the working class employed and active age group of male prefers online commerce while students are the dominant in this online purchase war.

CONCLUSION

In the synopsis of this study after critically gauging and interpretation in purview of the data, charts, figures, hypothesis tests, findings and recommendations, this study would like to confirm that the alternate hypothesis (H1): The Customer Purchasing Decision in Vijayawada is reliant on the Social media information, which has been accepted in many grounds-since among 11 different parametric Chi-Square tests, 7 tests positively verifies it for ACCEPTANCE. Also more than 53% of the heterogeneous sample from Vijayawada as considered, rely/trust/use/believe on the social media information to take buying decisions. They also justify and recommend about taking the decisions based on Social media information because the experience of more than 55% respondents has shown the prudence of their cost-benefit value expectation was encountered by the Online/Offline purchase/sell decisions made. Also they are persuaded, motivated, attracted and influenced by the communications done on the basis of reliability, segmentation, targeting, customisation & accessibility of the modes/mediums chosen to digitally reach them.

Thus, this study can be a breakthrough and confirmatory resultant conquest for the used efforts, resources, objectives and motives considered to come out with the trueness and validity testing of the idea, concept and belief instilled in the researchers' mind at the inception phase of this feat. This can gratify the human society and world with an earnest plead for better future and green sustainable world through **digital marketing** concise that is in primitiveness at present time.

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