



The impact of social media marketing on consumer purchase decisions towards Fast-moving consumer goods with special reference to consumers of Unilever Sri Lanka in Colombo district, Sri Lanka

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Abstract

The study aims to investigate the impact of social media marketing on consumer purchase decisions towards fast-moving consumer goods with special reference to Unilever FMCG consumers in Colombo district, Sri Lanka. How social media marketing related dimensions; customer engagement, electronic word of mouth and brand loyalty are influencing the purchasing decision of consumers is investigated in this study. Two hundred customers from Colombo district are selected using convenient sampling method and a structured questionnaire is used to collect primary data. Data analysis is done using SPSS. The findings of the study revealed that customer engagement, electronic word of mouth and brand loyalty have positive impact on consumer purchase decisions. Further, brand loyalty attached to the social media marketing has the greatest impact on consumer purchase decisions towards fast moving consumer goods of Unilever Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Social media marketing, FMCG consumers, Colombo district

Introduction

Social media marketing (SMM) is increasingly essential in the modern marketing environment. In terms of sales and cost advantages, as well as communication and sharing advantages, social media (SM) present significant prospects for any business. This is in response to the positive adoption of SM as a crucial channel between businesses. The Datareportal web portal, which frequently assesses the data related to people's technological involvement, reveals that out of the 21.54Mn population, 11.34Mn used the internet in Sri Lanka (SL) in January 2022. It found that 8.2Mn out of those are SM users; 7.15Mn uses Facebook while 6.68Mn users use YouTube, 1.55Mn users use Instagram, and other SM platforms are also attracted by Sri Lankan users at different levels (Kemp, S. 2022)^[27].

Recognizing the value of SM, SL's FMCG business has been implementing SMM strategies more frequently lately. SM and business strategy are becoming interwoven (Qualman, 2010). Through their SMM initiatives, brands in the sector work to increase consumer interaction and, eventually, encourage them to make a purchase (Bulearca and Bulearca, 2010).

The period of virtual word-of-mouth recommendations is in full effect, with 80% of consumers basing their purchasing decisions on a friend's SM post. When considering the influence of recommendations, it's equally critical to consider how SM affects consumer purchase decisions (CPD). Most contemporary consumers carry their purchasing power in their pockets, and when they're not making purchases, they use SM to read reviews of products and decide where to purchase (or not) (Kowalewicz, 2022)^[29].

Despite the advantages of SMM, marketers find it challenging to assess its effectiveness (Godey *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, consumer interaction with the business through SMM is established as a crucial factor in evaluating the efficacy of SMM strategies. SMM's ability to engage customers with the business deepens their loyalty to the

brand, ultimately encouraging offline or online purchases (Mishra, 2019).

As per Datareportal SM statics, in SL, 8.2Mn people actively use SM, equivalent to 38.1% of the total population of 21Mn. These results demonstrate that SM can be a medium for successfully marketing products to consumers (Subasinghe and Weerasiri, 2020)^[44]. However, whether such messages or information disseminated through SM genuinely affects consumer purchase decisions and contributes to building trust in such material is a matter of debate. Thus, the study discusses the impacts of SMM on consumer purchase decisions towards FMCG among the consumers in the Colombo district of Sri Lanka by drawing special reference to one of the prominent FMCG businesses in the country, Unilever Sri Lanka, supported by theoretical and practical contributions.

It can be seen that Sri Lankan FMCG marketers spend a large portion of their marketing budget on SMM to increase brand engagement. For instance, among rival brands like Unilever and Kotmale, Nestle's MILO is thought to have the largest social media expenditure. According to Neo@Ogilvy, a digital media solutions provider, Milo spends approximately LKR 4Mn each quarter on working expenses related to digital media. To further increase consumer interaction in 2019, it has undertaken measures like producing AR games. Other firms, including Kotmale, have also invested in video posts to increase interaction. While FMCG marketers spend more money on SMM, there has never been any verified validation that it influences consumer purchase decisions.

Research Questions

- How does Social Media Marketing impact consumer purchase decisions towards FMCG among consumers in the Colombo district of Sri Lanka, with special reference to FMCGs of Unilever Sri Lanka?
- How does customer engagement impact consumer purchase decisions in FMCGs of Unilever Sri Lanka?

- How does e-WOM impact the consumer purchase decisions in FMCGs of Unilever Sri Lanka?
- What is the degree of the effects of brand loyalty on consumer purchase decisions in FMCGs of Unilever Sri Lanka?
- Which recommendations can be made to use SMM more effectively to drive consumer purchase decisions concerning the FMCGs of Unilever Sri Lanka?

Objectives of the Study

- To study the impact of SMM on CPD among consumers in the Colombo district towards FMCGs of USL.
- To analyze the impact of customer engagement on CPD in FMCGs of USL.
- To study the impact of e-WOM on the CPD in FMCGs of USL.
- To examine the degree of the effects of brand loyalty on CPD in FMCGs of USL.
- To recommend effective SMM strategies to drive CPD concerning FMCGs of USL.

Literature review

Alkharabsheh and Zhen (2021) ^[3], in their paper, identified how people are moving away from conventional marketing and adopting digital marketing strategies such as content marketing and SMM. Also, it is recommended that marketers should use SM to identify the needs of the people to maintain a positive relationship with consumers. SM is used by consumers in several ways, including buying products, complaining about brands, or sharing their shopping experiences (Dennis, 2019). Similarly, in particular, research done by Paquette (2013) ^[33] identified that marketers could use SMM to increase the awareness of the consumers of brands. He also recognizes that marketing and promoting production have become crucial since this media store information on user experience with brands. Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) and Lim and Ting (2012) emphasize the significance of using the Uses and Gratifications theory to comprehend how audiences use social media and brand content when making online purchases.

According to Alatawy (2021) ^[2], SMM has been used by firms in various industries to increase customer interactions, brand value and recognition, WOM, and sales. However, various social and cultural factors within a particular society also impact the use of SMM. Further, it was provided in the research that SMM will have a major role in the marketing sphere with the increasing SM usage. Recently another study was conducted by Laksamana (2018) ^[31] to identify the link between brand loyalty, purchase intent, and social media integration. The research revealed that there is a strong relationship between SMM and buying intention. Presath and Yognathan (2018) ^[35] also identified that SMM impact on the advertising attitude, brand attitude and purchase intention of the consumer. However, it cannot be precisely determined that SMM compulsorily impacts consumer behaviour, including CPD. However, it has a considerable impact. The research concluded that SMM has a positive relationship with the CPD and suggested that social media marketers improve SMM.

Consumers now communicate with brands on social media (Tsai and Men, 2013), and this interaction significantly impacts what consumers decide to purchase (Elwalda and

Lu, 2016) ^[10]. The use of social media will aid in increasing purchase decisions since it will boost user engagement and have an impact on how consumers behave by altering their purchasing decision-making processes (Seo and Park, 2018; Goodrich and de Mooij, 2014; Hudson and Thal, 2013) ^[16, 22, 43]. Communicating on social media will boost purchase intention (Jalilvand and Samiei, 2012) ^[25], which results in purchase decisions (Prasad *et al.*, 2017) ^[24].

A recent quantitative research paper concluded to identify the relationship between Brand awareness and SM content marketing on the CPD has found that Brand awareness has a weak statistically significant correlation with CPD; however, social media content marketing has a moderate positive relationship with CPD (Ansari *et al.*, 2019). Similarly, research by Ardiansyah and Sarwoko (2020) highlights that SM is a critical factor in creating brand awareness and providing a high level of awareness impact on the CPD. Research on "Social Media Marketing Towards Consumer Buying Behavior: A Case in Panabo City" (Jacinto *et al.*, 2021) ^[24] reveals that SMM is an effective strategy for developing consumer trust, loyalty, and discovery. This study too reveals a positive co-relationship between SMM and purchase decisions. Accordingly, consumers are impacted by process factors and external stimuli. Doh and Hwang (2009) contend that because customers trust e-WOM before making any purchases of products, e-WOM has a significant influence on consumer purchasing decisions.

A study on the "Impact of Social Media on consumer behaviour" identifies that social media gives a voice to consumers. Unlike other communication strategies, social media facilitates the transition of information from both parties to opposite parties simultaneously. Also, these social media platforms provide facilities to distribute, receive and share information with consumers. However, there can be negative consequences of these kinds of communication as this not only focuses on reaching the target audience but also on how people interpret messages, look for alternatives and after-purchase actions (Guptha and Chopra, 2020)

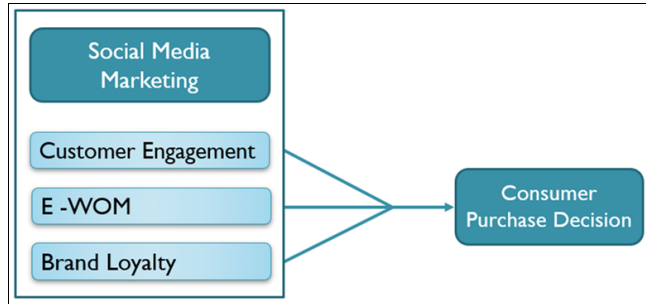
A study conducted to identify the "Relationship between Social Media Marketing and Consumer Buying Behavior" and revealed that several previous researchers have found that social media plays a significant role in customer decision-making. It was identified that SMM and social media preference significantly impact predicting the CPD (Arther *et al.*, 2018). Further, recent research identified how the informativeness, interactivity, and perceived relevance of SMM impact the CPD. (Hanaysha, 2022) ^[20]. Hanaysha (2022) revealed that the above three attributes positively impact CPD. Communication through social media is regarded as being closer to the heart and authentic since it strives to represent what the brand is without seeking to manage its image like most other marketing communication platforms. This leads to more favourable brand perceptions, which in turn strengthens commitment and purchase decision-making processes (Hutter *et al.*, 2013). Moreover, Kim and Ko's (2010) research supports the impact of social media marketing on consumers' decisions to purchase.

However, Presath and Yognathan (2018) ^[35] identify a deficit in literature focusing on SMM and Consuming Decision making relating to FMCG, which creates an empirical gap in their research. They highlight the necessity of conducting further research to identify the relationship between SMM and CPD. Also, Abhdul (2016) ^[1] identified

that social media had been researched in relation to many other fields, and there is not adequate research addressing social media as a marketing tool. However, as identified, SMM is a trending marketing mode that benefits both the marketer and the consumer.

Material and Methods

Conceptual Model



Development of Hypotheses

- H₀:** Social media marketing does not impact the Consumer's purchase decision towards FMCG of Unilever Sri Lanka.
- H₁:** Social media marketing impacts the Consumer's purchase decision towards FMCG of Unilever Sri Lanka.
- H_{0a}:** Customer engagement does not impact the Consumer's purchase decision towards FMCG of Unilever Sri Lanka.
- H_{1a}:** Customer engagement impacts the Consumer's purchase decision towards FMCG of Unilever Sri Lanka.
- H_{0b}:** e-Word of Mouth does not impact the Consumer's purchase decision towards FMCG of Unilever Sri Lanka.
- H_{1b}:** e-Word of Mouth impacts the Consumer's purchase decision towards FMCG of Unilever Sri Lanka.
- H_{0c}:** Brand loyalty does not impact the Consumer's purchase decision towards FMCG of Unilever Sri Lanka.
- H_{1c}:** Brand loyalty impacts the Consumer's purchase decision towards FMCG of Unilever Sri Lanka.

Research Design

The quantitative method relies on numeric values. In this study, the researcher focused on the existing theories and attempted to test those theories using the hypothesis testing methodology, so the researcher collected quantitative data for the convenience of analysis. The population of this study consists of people in the Colombo district of Sri Lanka who purchase Unilever FMCG products and are present on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube etc. According to the Datareportal website, there are 8.2Mn SM users in Sri Lanka as of January 2022. However, statistics are not available district-wise. Hence actual population size of the study is unknown. The researcher chose the non-probability convenience sampling method among the sampling techniques. Due to the extremely huge population and the lack of available information regarding the actual population size, this method is considered more fitting. Elements of the population do not have the same chance to be chosen as respondents in non-probability sampling. In convenience sampling, the sampling process is continued until a sufficient sample is selected (Saunders *et al.*, 2007) [42]. Since the population size is unknown due to the lack of available data, the author uses a sample of 200 for this study. Previous researchers, such as Balakrishnan *et al.* (2014) [5], Mishra (2019), and Barhemmati and Ahmad

(2015) [6], studying similar theories, have utilized a sample of 200. The researcher used a structured questionnaire as the technique in primary data collection.

Findings of the study

Cronbach's alpha coefficient values obtained for customer engagement, e-WOM, brand loyalty and consumer purchase decision are 0.925, 0.833, 0.782, and 0.794, respectively. Given that the research variables obtained a CAC greater than 0.7, these results indicate they are reliable for subsequent statistical analysis.

Variable	Dimension	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Reliability
Independent Variables	Customer Engagement	9	.925	Reliable
	e-WOM	6	.833	Reliable
	Brand Loyalty	7	.782	Reliable
Dependent Variable	Consumer Purchase Decision	5	.794	Reliable

The KMO measure of sampling adequacy is a test to determine whether factor analysis is appropriate to use on the given data set. Bartlett's test of sphericity is used to test the null hypothesis that the variables in the population correlation matrix are uncorrelated (Mikkelsen, 2019). Table 3 shows the test results obtained through SPSS.

Table 3: KMO and Bartlett's Test, Researcher's Original Work, 2023

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.940
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	3472.330
	df	351
	Sig.	<.001

The KMO value, which ranges from 0 to 1, indicates whether or not the data is eligible for further analysis. The data already qualify for further factor analysis if the value of KMO is equal to or more than 0.5 and has significant values (sig) or probability (p) less than 0.05 (Napitupulu *et al.*, 2017) [32]. As per Table 3, The KMO value was 0.940, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant with a p-value of <0.001. The results show that a factor analysis of the data is appropriate and that the data set is sufficiently sampled. There is a positive correlation between customer engagement and CPD. The Pearson Coefficient (r) for these two variables is 0.732 at 1% significance level, indicating a moderately positive correlation. The Sig. (2-Tailed) value is <.001, which is less than .05 and demonstrates a statistically significant correlation between customer engagement and CPD concerning Unilever FMCG.

Correlations			
		CustomerEngagement	PurchaseDecision
CustomerEngagement	Pearson Correlation	1	.732**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
	N	200	200
PurchaseDecision	Pearson Correlation	.732**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	200	200

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Correlation value for e-Word of mouth and CPD is 0.676 at 1% significance level. Therefore, these two variables have a moderately positive correlation. Since the Sig. (2-Tailed) value of <.001 is less than .05; it can be concluded that there is a statistically significant correlation between eWord of Mouth and CPD concerning Unilever FMCG. Further, H_{0b} can be rejected, and H_{1b} can be accepted, given that the significance value is less than 0.01.

Correlations			
		eWOM	PurchaseDecision
eWOM	Pearson Correlation	1	.676**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
	N	200	200
PurchaseDecision	Pearson Correlation	.676**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	200	200

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation between brand loyalty and CPD is moderately positive, provided that r value is 0.739 and significant at the 1% level. Similar to the above scenarios the Sig. (2-Tailed) value is <.001, which is less than .05 and demonstrates a statistically significant correlation between brand loyalty and CPD concerning Unilever FMCG.

Correlations			
		PurchaseDecision	BrandLoyalty
PurchaseDecision	Pearson Correlation	1	.739**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
	N	200	200
BrandLoyalty	Pearson Correlation	.739**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	200	200

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

when using all three independent variables of SMM to predict the value of the CPD, the adjusted R^2 was 0.612. This explains that 61.2% of sub-variables of SMM contributed to the CPD, and the other 38.8% was caused by indirect factors not considered in this study. This suggests that composite of all three SMM variables significantly influence CPD concerning Unilever FMCG in the Colombo district.

Table 24: Model Summary of Social Media Marketing and Consumer Purchase Decision, Survey Data (SPSS), 2023

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.786 ^a	.618	.612	.45223

a. Predictors: (Constant), BrandLoyalty, CustomerEngagement, eWOM

Table 25 illustrates the value of F as 105.608, which is significant since $p < \alpha = .05$. This proves that all three variables of SMM are substantial indicators of CPD concerning Unilever FMCG. This also gives a clear conclusion that all three predicted variables of SMM and CPD have a good correlation and linear relationship.

Table 25: ANOVA of Social Media Marketing and Consumer Purchase Decision, Survey Data (SPSS), 2023

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	64.795	3	21.598	105.608	<.001 ^b
	Residual	40.085	196	.205		
	Total	104.880	199			

a. Dependent Variable: PurchaseDecision
b. Predictors: (Constant), BrandLoyalty, CustomerEngagement, eWOM

In Table 26, the β column includes the slope of each independent variable, which implies the value of CPD when the effect of independent variables (SMM) is zero. Since each β is significantly far from +1, this does not indicate a strong relationship between SMM and CPD. The t and p values for customer engagement and brand loyalty meet the standard criteria of $t \geq 2$ and $p < 0.05$ to say that the variables are statistically significant. However, the t value of e-WOM is 1.466, which is below $t \geq 2$, and the standard significant value is above 0.05. Hence this creates a suppression effect. In other words, due to the suspense effect, the contribution of the e-WOM with the other attributes (i.e. customer engagement and brand loyalty) creates a relatively low impact on CPD. Nevertheless, as illustrated in the simple linear regression above, the facts under the individual independent variable are highly significant and impact consumer purchase decisions regarding Unilever FMCG.

Conclusions

According to the analysis, customer engagement was the second most influencing factor of CPD. The study concluded that customer engagement had a major influence on CPD concerning Unilever FMCG among the consumers in the Colombo district. Consequently, the study's second objective was achieved. E-WOM substantially impacted CPD concerning Unilever FMCG among the consumers in the Colombo district. Brand loyalty was the most significant factor influencing CPD compared to customer engagement and eWOM. Based on the findings, the study concluded that brand loyalty had the strongest influence on CPD concerning Unilever FMCG among the consumers in the Colombo district. Consequently, the study's last objective was achieved. Based on the key findings, it is evident that SMM impacts CPD related to the FMCG of USL. However, SMM accounts only for 61.2% of the variance in CPD. Therefore, to drive more sales and stimulate CPD, marketers must carefully consider the possible advantages of investing in all SM platforms, particularly when investing in digital tools like blogs. It is clear from observing engagement behavior that blog following is low. By concentrating on product marketing through SM, the business can raise consumer awareness of its brands and develop brand equity. As per the survey, Unilever has a small online community. Therefore, the company's marketing strategy should be supplemented by specific SM platform tactics to grow brand networks, foster community growth, and improve communication between brands and consumers. It is advised to educate consumers about the products and services supplied by SM and to forge lasting relationships with clients through online communities to boost earnings over the long term and strengthen brand loyalty. The study highlights that price is the key driver to purchasing USL's FMCG, while the fact that products are locally

manufactured has less impact on purchases; therefore, marketers can consider this a guideline in developing marketing communications for their FMCG brands.

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