

Consumer Perception and Purchase Behavior in the Digital Age: The Role of WOM, Online Chat, and Email Marketing

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Abstract:

In the evolving landscape of digital marketing, understanding how online tools influence consumer behavior is critical for brands striving to stay competitive. This research explores the impact of three key online marketing tools—Word of Mouth (WOM), online chat assistance, and email advertising on consumer brand perception and purchase behavior. The study examines how these tools shape consumer decisions across various industries, with a specific focus on internet-active residents of Lucknow. Findings indicate that WOM emerges as the most influential factor among the three, significantly affecting how consumers perceive brands and make purchasing decisions. Despite the presence of multiple variables that influence consumer behavior, WOM—due to its peer-driven nature and cost-effectiveness—holds a dominant role. While companies employ all three strategies as part of their digital marketing mix, WOM proves to be particularly effective in building trust and driving conversions. Interestingly, consumer decision-making patterns vary regionally, as observed in Lucknow, where no single generalized factor was found to impact purchasing behavior or brand perception consistently.

The study underscores the strategic importance of leveraging consumer-generated content and interactions in digital marketing and highlights WOM as a powerful, low-cost tool for enhancing brand influence in the digital age.

Keyword:

Digital marketing, Consumer behavior, Online chat assistance, Email advertising, Brand perception, Purchase decisions

1. Introduction

In the contemporary digital era, traditional marketing methods are gradually giving way to the dynamic and expansive realm of online marketing. With the rapid growth of internet usage and

digital platforms, online marketing has evolved into a multi-faceted approach encompassing social media, blogs, chat forums, and online communities. The unprecedented speed at which information is now shared has transformed the marketing landscape, positioning online channels as critical mediums for consumer engagement and brand communication. Online marketing has empowered consumers not only to receive information but also to actively participate in the marketing process. Consumers today play a pivotal role in shaping brand narratives by sharing their experiences, reviewing products, and engaging in detailed discussions about product features, quality, durability, and design. This shift has redefined the relationship between businesses and consumers, placing greater emphasis on consumer-generated content and peer influence.

Marketing professionals are increasingly leveraging online platforms due to several strategic advantages: elimination of geographical boundaries, enhanced accessibility, consolidation of information, customization capabilities, and broad reach to both potential and existing customers globally. These benefits allow marketers to connect with audiences more effectively, influence purchasing behavior, and build stronger brand perceptions.

This research aims to explore how online marketing tools and techniques—specifically Word of Mouth (WOM), online chat assistance, and email advertising—can be utilized by marketing managers to influence consumer purchasing decisions and shape brand perception. By analyzing consumer engagement with these tools, the study seeks to understand the extent to which consumers act as marketing assets in the digital age.

2. Problem Statement

With the rapid advancement of digital technologies, online marketing has emerged as a powerful tool for businesses to engage with consumers and shape their perceptions and purchasing decisions. Unlike traditional marketing, online marketing allows for active consumer participation, where individuals not only consume content but also contribute to marketing efforts through reviews, discussions, and sharing experiences.

Despite the widespread adoption of various online marketing tools, such as Word of Mouth (WOM), email advertising, and online chat support, there remains a gap in understanding how these tools influence consumer behavior across different industries. This study seeks to bridge this gap by analyzing the effectiveness of consumer-driven online marketing tools on brand perception and purchase decisions, thereby offering insights into how businesses can better utilize consumers as strategic marketing assets.

Hypotheses

- **H1:** *There is a significant effect of online Word of Mouth (WOM) marketing through consumers on consumer purchasing decisions and brand perception.*
- **H2:** *Consumer-driven email advertising significantly influences purchasing decisions and brand perception.*
- **H3:** *Online chat assistance has a significant effect on consumer purchasing decisions and brand perception.*

3. Literature Review

The swift advancement of digital platforms has transformed how brands engage with consumers and promote their products. In the modern marketplace, consumers do not merely act as end-users of products; they have become active participants in marketing processes by sharing their experiences, opinions, and evaluations through online forums, review sites, blogs, and social communities. As noted by Chaffee (1986), increased interaction among individuals via mass media heightens the likelihood of opinion change and broader social influence. This aligns with the contemporary shift toward consumer-driven marketing, where direct involvement of consumers in brand discourse enhances the credibility and persuasiveness of marketing messages. The role of word-of-mouth (WOM), especially in online contexts, has gained substantial attention in recent studies. WOM is now recognized not just as a communication method but as a strategic marketing asset (Godes & Mayzlin, 2004), capable of triggering offline decisions from online interactions. This shift is particularly significant given the proliferation of online review platforms such as Amazon, where consumer-generated content affects both sales outcomes and customer loyalty (Kozinets et al., 2010).

Furthermore, online chat platforms have emerged as powerful tools for real-time consumer engagement. Studies by Brown (1999) and Porterfield (1999) highlighted that a significant majority of youth engage in chatting as a primary internet activity. This presents opportunities for companies to leverage chat-based communication to disseminate product information and receive direct consumer feedback, contributing to marketing efficacy.

The evolution of viral marketing, sometimes described using terms like "vigilante marketing," "homebrew advertising," or "customer evangelism" (Kahney, 2004; O'Guinn, 2003; Ives, 2004), demonstrates how consumers are not just influenced by marketing but are also redefining brand identity themselves. This consumer-led phenomenon indicates a growing openness to collaborative branding efforts and "open-source" branding models.

However, media integrity and ethical concerns are crucial in consumer-involved marketing, especially in sensitive sectors such as pharmaceuticals. As observed in the case of Merck's Vioxx, unethical practices in consumer-involved promotion can have damaging consequences (Mercola, 2005). Researchers like Huh, Delorme, and Reid (2004) emphasize that consumer attitudes toward direct-to-consumer marketing are heavily influenced by the perceived trustworthiness of the medium and message.

In terms of information quality, Dellarocas (2003) argues that objective, non-subjective information shared online can overcome the barrier of unfamiliarity between content creators and content consumers. While online identities are often anonymous, objective product evaluations reduce variability and enhance reliability, thereby making consumer-generated content a more trustworthy source.

Technological advancements continue to shape the tools available for online marketing. For example, Montgomery (2001) and Chavez & Maes (1996) highlight the use of AI-driven tools such as recommendation engines and virtual marketplaces, while Pazgal (1999) explores the impact of software agents on the effectiveness of e-marketing. Similarly, collective filtering

methods used by companies like CD Now are reshaping personalized marketing strategies (Ungar & Foster, 1998).

From a market dynamics perspective, scholars have also noted the strategic implications of growth rates, market structure, and product standardization. While high market growth may suggest opportunities for profitability, Aaker and Day (1985) caution that growth alone does not guarantee high margins due to strategic pricing and penetration tactics. Scherer and Ross (1990) argue that increased competition typically erodes profit margins, while concentrated markets may erect high barriers to entry to protect profitability. Moreover, Kotler (1991) points out that in standardized markets, differentiation must rely on effective marketing strategies, as the products themselves offer little distinction.

In summary, the literature suggests that online consumer behavior, particularly through WOM, chat platforms, and user-generated content, significantly influences brand perception and purchase decisions. The role of consumers has shifted from passive receivers to active co-creators of marketing value, offering a rich avenue for research on the effectiveness and ethics of online marketing strategies.

4. Research Methodology and Results

This study is based entirely on primary data, collected directly from respondents through structured surveys. A self-administered questionnaire was designed to explore the impact of various online marketing tools—specifically Word of Mouth (WOM), online chat assistance, and email advertising—on consumer purchasing decisions and brand perception. The sampling technique adopted was unrestricted, non-probability sampling, allowing for convenient and flexible respondent selection. A total of 75 individuals from different areas of Lucknow, including office spaces and shopping malls, participated in the study. The questionnaire consisted of close-ended questions, including multiple-choice items and Likert-scale responses, to capture a broad range of consumer opinions and behaviors.

To analyze the data and test the proposed hypotheses, a One-Sample T-Test was applied. This statistical method was used to determine whether the mean response from the sample significantly differed from a set benchmark, thereby indicating the effectiveness of each marketing tool under study. The results revealed that among the three tools examined, Word of Mouth (WOM) had the most significant influence on consumer behavior. Respondents showed a higher level of trust in peer recommendations and shared experiences compared to interactions through online chat or promotional emails. These findings suggest that consumer-generated content and conversations play a vital role in shaping brand perception and influencing purchase decisions, emphasizing the strategic value of WOM as a marketing tool in the digital age.

Table 4.1: Do you think a brand’s existence in social media is essential for its growth? (One-Sample Statistics)

Response Level	Tool	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean

Strongly Agree	Chat Section	30	2.2667	0.69149	0.12625
	Word of Mouth	30	4.4	0.81368	0.14856
	Email Advertising	30	2.1	0.75886	0.13855
Agree	Chat Section	32	2.3438	0.82733	0.14625
	Word of Mouth	32	4.2813	0.81258	0.14364
	Email Advertising	32	1.9063	0.64053	0.11323
Neutral	Chat Section	13	2.3846	0.86972	0.24122
	Word of Mouth	13	4.1538	0.89872	0.24926
	Email Advertising	13	1.9231	0.75955	0.21066

Table 4.1.1
One-Sample Test (Test Value = 4)

In this contemporary era ,do you think a brand's existence on social media is essential for its growth	Tool	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference (Lower)	(Upper)
Strongly Agree	Chat Section	-13.73	29	0	-1.7333	-1.9915	-1.4751
	Word of Mouth	2.693	29	0.012	0.4	0.0962	0.7038
	Email Advertising	-13.714	29	0	-1.9	-2.1834	-1.6166
Agree	Chat Section	-11.325	31	0	-1.6563	-1.9545	-1.358
	Word of Mouth	-1.958	31	0.059	-0.2813	-0.5742	0.0117

	Email Advertising	-18.491	31	0	-2.0938	-2.3247	-1.8628
Neutral	Chat Section	-6.697	12	0	-1.6154	-2.141	-1.0898
	Word of Mouth	0.617	12	0.549	0.15385	-0.3892	0.6969
	Email Advertising	-9.859	12	0	-2.0769	-2.5359	-1.6179

The data analysis was conducted using a One-Sample T-Test with a test value of 4, where the response scale ranged from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Agree). The study focused on three prominent tools used in online marketing: Chat Section, Email Advertising, and Word-of-Mouth. The findings were consistent across all categories—Strongly Agree, Agree, and Neutral. Among these tools, Word-of-Mouth emerged as the most effective method of online marketing, as indicated by its mean values across all response categories being equal to or greater than the test value of 4. This reflects a clear agreement among respondents regarding its effectiveness.

In contrast, the mean values for both Chat Section and Email Advertising were consistently below 3 in all response categories, suggesting a general disagreement regarding their effectiveness as online marketing tools. Furthermore, the statistical significance of the One-Sample T-Test supports these observations. For Word-of-Mouth, the two-tailed significance (p-value) may vary; however, when significant, the positive mean difference validates the effectiveness of this tool. On the other hand, the two-tailed significance values for Chat Section and Email Advertising were consistently significant with negative mean differences, reinforcing the conclusion that these tools are perceived as less effective by the respondents.

Table 4.2: Hypothesis Assessment Summary

Hypothesis	Representation	Result
The effect of online word of mouth marketing through consumers on consumer purchasing decision and brand perception.	H1	Accepted
The effect of email advertising through consumers on consumer purchasing decision and brand perception.	H2	Rejected
The effect of chat section on consumer purchasing decision and brand perception.	H3	Rejected

5. Conclusion

Based on the analysis of data collected from a sample of 75 respondents, the study reveals that while there is no direct correlation between consumer purchasing decisions, brand perception, and online marketing tools such as email advertising or chat sections, consumers overwhelmingly

agree that a brand's presence on social media is essential for its growth. Among the various tools evaluated, word-of-mouth (WOM) marketing emerged as the most influential in shaping consumer behavior and brand perception. Respondents consistently favored WOM over email and chat-based marketing strategies. These findings align with previous research, notably Sheth (1971), who emphasized the pivotal role of WOM in creating awareness and driving product trial. Similarly, Murray (1991) highlighted that personal sources, such as peer recommendations, are considered more trustworthy than traditional advertisements, reinforcing the credibility and effectiveness of WOM.

6. Discussion

Word-of-mouth marketing serves as a powerful channel that captures real-time consumer feedback and offers valuable insights into customer needs, preferences, and concerns. It plays a crucial role in identifying market opportunities and threats from the consumer's perspective. Unlike traditional forms of advertising, WOM provides an authentic and persuasive influence on consumer purchase behavior. Customers tend to trust peer reviews and expert opinions, which significantly impact their buying decisions. Furthermore, WOM proves to be a cost-effective and time-efficient alternative to conventional advertising techniques. Once a perception is formed through WOM, it tends to remain stable over time, making it challenging for other methods like email marketing or chat-based promotions to alter consumer viewpoints. Therefore, building and maintaining a positive WOM from the early stages of a product's life cycle is vital for long-term brand success.

7. Implications & Future Research

This study implies that among the various consumer-driven online marketing strategies, word-of-mouth marketing stands out as the most impactful tool across industries. It significantly influences both consumer purchasing decisions and brand perception, making it a critical focus area for marketing professionals aiming to strengthen brand engagement and drive sales.

Future studies can further explore the role of social media platforms—especially Facebook, which has the largest user base—in enhancing the effectiveness of online marketing. In addition, researchers may examine the influence of internet accessibility and digital infrastructure in both urban and rural settings to understand how connectivity impacts the reach and effectiveness of online word-of-mouth strategies.

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