



THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON BRAND PERCEPTION AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

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Abstract

Owing to the quick advancement in internet technology, particularly the emergence of the Web 2.0 era, social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WeChat and TikTok have risen rapidly and become an indispensable part of people's daily life. These platforms, with their characteristics of immediacy, interaction and personalization, have changed the traditional mode of information transmission and reception, providing a new channel for communication between brands and consumers. Therefore, this paper explores the relationship between brand perception and consumer behavior under social media through literature analysis. The study found that social media provides brands with more direct, flexible and diversified communication channels, enabling brands to rapidly improve their visibility and consumer recognition in the fierce market competition. Highly interactive social media advertising and consumer platform users' evaluation significantly affect consumers' purchasing decisions. Finally, brands should enhance direct interaction with consumers, leverage the power of social media marketing, create personalized content to increase consumer engagement, and build online brand communities to enhance consumer loyalty. Meanwhile, brands must also pay attention to consumer privacy protection and ensure the transparency and security of data processing to maintain consumer trust.

Keywords: social media; brand marketing; brand perception; consumer behavior.

Introduction

Social media is growing as a crucial channel for brands to communicate with customers in modern times. With the rapid development of Internet technology, the communication mode between brands and consumers has changed from one-way communication to two-way interaction. Social media platforms like Facebook, WeChat and TikTok have also become an important way to connect brands and consumers. Changes in information dissemination, brand marketing, and consumer purchasing behavior are all inseparable from the influence of social media. China's 52nd Statistical Report on the Development of the Internet in China states that as of June 2023, 845 million Chinese people were shopping online, and that online retail sales of goods totaled 12 trillion yuan, a 13.1% rise . By analyzing the different platforms of social media and their development history, people can better understand the role of social media in modern



marketing and how social media change consumer purchasing motivations and decision-making processes. The discussion of these issues is of great significance for brand competitiveness and consumer demand.

This study is based on exploring how social media shapes brand perception and influences consumer purchasing behavior, as well as the mechanism behind such influence, and evaluating how different functions of social media affect consumers' information search, brand selection and purchase decision through literature review and how these factors work together on consumers' final behavior.

The Concept of Social Media

2.1. Definition and Characteristics of social media

Social media on the Online is defined as a platform for content creation and exchange based on user relationships, which serves as a vehicle and platform for individuals to share thoughts, perspectives, experiences, and perspectives with one another. Bolin Cao concluded that social media is an interactive community built on the foundation of Internet technology, especially web2.0. The basic characteristics of social media are proposed in the e-book What is social media, which includes six features: Participation, openness, communication, dialogue, community, connectivity. It also reflects other multiple dimensions such as real-time, interactive, personalized, and rich content.

2.2. The Differences of Different Social Media Platforms and Development History of social media

Among social networking platforms, Facebook, as one of the largest in the world, has a large number of monthly active users. The most popular platform in China, WeChat, is a multifunctional platform that integrates chat, payment, social networking, and information sharing. Their core function is to help users establish personal profiles and connect with others. Video platforms such as TikTok and YouTube allow users to create and share rich video content. Social media platforms such as Instagram, Pinterest, and Snapchat mainly focus on users sharing visual content, such as photos and short videos, to help users showcase their creations, lives, or hobbies. At the beginning of the development of social media, traditional media such as television and newspapers dominated information dissemination, with the audience being passive recipients. People usually only get information through these media channels, and the interaction is low.

The communication mode of traditional media emphasizes one-way information transmission, advertising and news content are mainly dominated by a few media organizations, and the audience can only accept and digest these edited and filtered information. Subsequently, then came the rise of social platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, which quickly attracted a large number of users with their efficient visual communication and instant interaction, and users began to transform into creators and participants. Then short videos and real-time interaction became mainstream, and social media gradually diversified by combining e-commerce, live streaming, and AI technology, becoming an indispensable tool for information dissemination and social networking in modern times.

2.3. Social Media's Significance in Contemporary Marketing



Social media provides brands with a platform for direct interaction with consumers, where brands interact directly with users and use data for precise advertising and personalized recommendations. Enables brands to respond to consumer feedback, promote products, and start conversations around the brand's values and products. Through these interactions, brands can build relationships with their customers, transforming passive viewers into active participants and creating a personal connection to the brand.

Social media also profoundly influences users' consumption behavior and brand identity. Users' purchasing decisions are influenced by those around them through advertising and marketing, and brand interaction also stimulates users' sense of brand identity. This marketing function also brings troubles to some users. Too much marketing information can interfere with the user browsing experience, and even collecting user data to achieve marketing goals has raised privacy and security issues. Therefore, brands must find a balance between using consumer data for marketing and maintaining transparency and respecting user privacy.

Impact of Social Media on People's Perception of a Brand

3.1. Basic Concepts of Brand Perception and Formation Process of Brand Perception

Brand perception refers to consumers' perception and impression of the brand, and reflects whether consumers can recognize the logo or name of the brand, Brand trust is defined as "the willingness of the average consumer to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function". It also refers to the implicit trust customers have in online service providers to follow their expectations of service quality in exchange for their payment. Brand trust pays more attention to consumers' trust and expectations of the brand, while brand loyalty is the long-term behavior of consumers to choose a brand, and more is emotional dependence and preference. Only on the basis of trust in the brand, consumers are likely to develop brand loyalty, so the two are closely related. In the Chaudhuri and Holbrook study, it was found that a high degree of brand loyalty was highly associated with clients who exhibited positive and confident emotions. This way, consumers may feel comfortable committing to and identifying with a brand.

Consumers' brand perception is gradually built through diversified information channels, mainly including brand identity (such as name, logo, and packaging design), advertising, word-of-mouth, product experience, brand story and culture, public relations activities, and media reports. This information influences consumers perceptions through direct contact (such as using the product or service) and also shapes consumers' emotional connection and cognitive framework toward the brand through indirect channels (such as advertising and social media recommendations). Brand identity is the consumer's initial cognition of the brand, and advertising helps to establish the brand image through creativity and emotional appeal. Word of mouth in particular plays an important role in social media and online reviews, where customers have a greater inclined to believe what other people have experienced. Brand stories and culture add an emotional dimension to the brand and help consumers build a deep emotional identity. Product experience generates lasting brand feelings through direct use and enhances consumer loyalty to the brand. In addition, public relations activities and media coverage further affect brand perception by shaping brand image, dealing with crises, etc. Social media gives businesses an opportunity for communicating to customers, enhancing brand transparency and affinity.



3.2. The Mechanism of Social Media's Influence on Consumer Brand Perception

The improvement of brand perception through social media, in terms of brand exposure, allows brands to reach a large user base through platform exposure and establish close connections with consumers through real-time interaction. The viral spread of social media content can generate broader discussions and attention, and brands can quickly expand their exposure range. At the same time, the precise advertising targeting function of the platform is essential for brands to accurately deliver information to potential consumers.

According to the characteristics of different audiences, enterprises can divide the market into different segmented markets and develop targeted marketing strategies for each segmented market [6]. For example, Nike launches different products and strategies according to different consumer segments. For professional athletes, Nike launched high-performance sports shoes, such as Nike Air Zoom series; For fitness enthusiasts, the launch of comfortable and fashionable sportswear; For casual fashion consumers, the launch of design-focused shoes such as Nike Court Vision series. Through this differentiated strategy, Nike accurately meets the needs of different markets.

From the standpoint of brand-building, companies and customers that are able to communicate better or interact more in turn with regard to goods and services have a strong connection. Compared with traditional advertising forms, social media provides a more direct and instant communication channel between brands and consumers. Consumers can participate in the dissemination of brand content through comments, likes, shares, and offline participation in brand publishing activities, competitions, and other means. This two-way interaction and sense of participation make users perceive the brand as a more interactive and credible presence. In addition, brands can create dedicated brand communities or fan groups through social media to gather loyal fans. These community members can get additional experiences, such as getting the latest information from the brand and interacting with the brand at a deeper level. These experiences enhance users' sense of engagement and belonging. This community effect strengthens brand loyalty and promotes long-term brand recognition. In general, social media provides brands with a more direct, flexible and diversified communication channel, enabling brands to quickly improve their visibility and consumer perception in the fierce market competition.

4. Social Media's Impact on Consumer Behavior

4.1. Basic Concepts of Consumer Behavior

The psychological, emotional, and behavioral reactions that customers display when they purchase, utilization, assess, and discard items and offerings are together referred to as consumer behavior. It covers every step of the process by which clients determine what they need, get data, weigh their options, decide what to buy, then use the goods or services. Consumer behavior is influenced by three aspects, such as personal factors (such as age, income, and psychological state), social factors (such as culture, family, and social class), and external environmental factors (such as market trends, advertising, and technological innovation). Understanding the mechanisms of consumer behavior helps brands optimize product design, pricing strategies, marketing communication, and customer relationship management, thereby enhancing market



competitiveness and consumer satisfaction. Consumer purchasing motivation is a psychological factor that drives consumers to choose specific products or services, typically stemming from individual needs, desires, and goals.

Customers' purchase motivation can progressively go from fundamental physical requirements, safety requirements, and social desires to additional requirements for personal development, in accordance with Maslow's structure of need theory [7]. Specifically, consumer purchasing motivation may include the satisfaction of basic survival needs (such as food and clothing), the pursuit of safety and security (such as insurance and home security), and the need for social identity and self-expression (such as brand image and personalized products). In addition, factors such as emotional drive, psychological satisfaction, and social identity also play important roles in shaping consumer purchasing motivation. By understanding and satisfying these motivations, brands can effectively stimulate consumers' purchasing desires and occupy a favorable position in market competition.

4.2. The Influence of social media on Consumer Behavior

Due to its extensive reach, immediacy, and interactivity, social media has significantly altered the way consumers get information, which will further alter consumer behavior. Through brand advertisements and content marketing, consumers can learn about products and services, and through interactions with the brand and other consumers, they can get real-time feedback on the quality of the product, the user experience, while the reputation of the brand. The sharing mechanism and social network effect of social media enable consumers to quickly spread information, expand the coverage of information, and verify the authenticity and credibility of information through comments and recommendations from others. In addition, the algorithms and targeted advertising functions of social media platforms push personalized information based on consumers' interests and behaviors, enabling consumers to more efficiently obtain brand and product information that meets their needs.

4.3. The Role of social media in Different Consumption Stages

Social media is mainly reflected in three stages of modern consumer decision-making: brand perception, information search and brand selection, and purchasing decision. In the brand perception stage, social media widely disseminates brand information through advertising, brand content marketing, and user generated content (UGC), helping consumers form a preliminary understanding and attention to the brand. In the process of information search and brand selection, the professional degree of KOL (Key Opinion Leader) is an important factor affecting consumers' shopping intention. Most investigators indicate that they choose to search for relevant product reviews and introductions when purchasing a product, and tend to prefer introductions from professional bloggers. King and Summers' research suggests that due to the long-term attention of opinion leaders to a certain type of product, a higher level of involvement will enable them to have more professional knowledge and the ability to provide high-value information for others' decision-making, thereby affecting consumers' purchasing decisions. Ultimately, in the purchasing decision stage, the influence of social media is further strengthened,



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5. Discussion and Suggestion

5.1. Overall Conclusion of the Current Study

This study shows how brands interact with clients throughout today's digital world by examining the substantial influence of social media on consumer behavior and brand perception. Social media platforms have profoundly changed the relationship between brands and consumers through their interactivity and real-time nature, enabling brands to engage in direct communication, personalized marketing and real-time feedback. Through the dynamic nature of content creation and consumption, social media promotes brand perception, brand loyalty, and trust building. When consumers interact with brands through social platforms, it shapes consumers' perception of the brand and affects consumers' purchase decisions. The rapid spread of user-generated content (UGC), influencer endorsements, and targeted advertising is a major driver of changing consumer behavior, making social media one of the indispensable tools in modern marketing strategies. In addition, social media is essential to the selection process of consumers, through all stages of brand perception, information search, brand selection and purchase decision making. With its ability to personalize content and interact with real-time communication, social media continues to shape consumer purchasing behavior, leading to increased impulse buying and reliance on social identification.

5.2. Revelations and Suggestions Based on This Study

Considering the results about this investigation, there are several key areas that brands should focus on when leveraging social media. First, enhancing direct interaction with consumers is critical, and brands should use two-way communication to build stronger emotional connections

and trust, and build stronger relationships with consumers through reviews, real-time feedback, and personalized responses. Second, brands should take full advantage of the power of influencer marketing, choosing influencers who align with brand values to ensure they have high credibility with the target audience, thereby effectively boosting brand perception and consumer purchase intentions.

In addition, content personalization is another effective way to increase consumer engagement, and brands should use data analysis to accurately deliver ads that match consumer interests and behaviors, and increase AD relevance and conversion rates. Brands can also increase consumer loyalty and engagement by building and nurturing online brand communities, which can provide consumers with a platform for interaction and also provide brands with valuable market insights. Finally, brands must pay attention to consumer privacy protection, especially in the context of the increasing popularity of data use and personalized marketing, ensuring transparent data processing processes and effective security measures to maintain consumer trust. Overall, brands should leverage the advantages of social media in modern marketing through genuine engagement, precise content strategies and respect for privacy to drive closer connections and long-term brand loyalty between brands and consumers.

Conclusion

This study reveals the crucial role that social media plays for modern advertising by thoroughly analyzing its effects on customer behavior and brand perception. The study found that social media platforms had profoundly changed the interaction mode between brands and consumers through their interactivity and real-time, providing brands with new ways of direct communication, precision marketing and real-time feedback. Through the above research analysis, this study believes that the brand should also pay attention to the following aspects. First, the brand enhances direct interaction with consumers to build a stronger emotional connection and trust through two-way communication. Secondly, make full use of the power of influencer marketing to select influencers that are consistent with brand values to improve brand perception and purchase intention. Finally, brand should pay more attention to consumer privacy protection and ensure the transparency and security of data processing to maintain consumer trust.

In conclusion, brands should take advantage of the benefits of social media to promote stronger connections between brands and consumers and long-term brand loyalty through genuine engagement with consumers, lively content strategies and respect for consumer privacy. Social media has become an indispensable tool in modern marketing strategies, having a profound impact on brand perception and consumer behavior.

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