

The Study of Marketing through Social Media Platforms: Analysis of Users in Aizawl

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Abstract: Social media has now become one of the largest means of communication and its increasing popularity has attracted many companies to employ social media platforms for online marketing. It also definitely has an impact on many areas in our lives, including our behaviour as consumers. In this study we will try to analyse the impact that social media has on consumer behaviour, identifying the consumers' motivation and also try study its influence in their decision making. This is done with the help of questionnaire, with a sample consisting of 121 participants, who are mostly users of social media in Aizawl. This study also has limitations being such a small sample and confined to only residents of Aizawl. Hence, we will also discuss the future possibilities of research.

Keywords: Social media, Consumer behaviour, Marketing, Research, Survey

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I. INTRODUCTION

Social media is all about enabling people to express and share thoughts, opinions and ideas with other individuals. At the same time, it enables people to connect with each other. There are many studies which show that the usage of internet and social media is changing the trend in consumers all over the world, as is also witnessed in a small city like Aizawl. The use of Internet among Mizos in Mizoram, like in the rest of the world, has increased dramatically over the last years which are further driven by the increase in the use of smart phones. Through the social media, viral marketing is developed, which denotes the strategy of urging the visitors of web page to share information published on Internet, to their friends, so that, they can inform more people for a product or event, through photos, videos, etc (Jashari & Rrustemi, 2017). However, it was only during the second half of the '90s that scholars started discussing the influence of the Internet on consumer power suggesting that such developments will make traditional marketing practices obsolete (Raaij, 1998).

Number of internet users in India is second in the world at 560 million in 2019, next to China with 802 million users. The number of social media users in India has also increased over the years from 142.23 million in 2015 to 351.4 million in 2019. (Source: <https://www.statista.com/>). Mizoram is not far behind in digital development. . As we can see from Table 1, the number of mobile users is quite large now in Mizoram and undoubtedly, the use of internet and social media, along with it. We must also be aware of the many shopping groups that are formed within Whatsapp application and pages made on Facebook and Instagram, which altogether try to get customers using social media as a platform.

Table 1: Number of mobile phones and landline connections in Mizoram (2016-17)

Network	pre paid	post paid	landline
Aircel	228562	648	
Airtel	390205	8890	
Jio	87710		
Vodafone	230000	2860	
Idea	160000	380	
Bsnl	167655	19174	17237

Source: Mizoram Economic Survey 2017-18

What this study aims to do is to analyse the impact that social media has on consumer behaviour, identifying the consumers' motivation and their engagement to follow or like products of their choice. We also aim to study which social media is most influential in their decision making. Keeping this in mind, the research questions raised in this paper is:

1. Does the use of social media have an impact on consumer behaviour?
2. To what extent are the users influenced by it?
3. How do they respond to the information that is provided by social media on the various products and services?

There are also limitations in this research. It is a small sample size of 121 respondents and also it has a small representation in which all the respondents are only residents of Aizawl. Hence, we will also discuss the future possibilities of various research studies.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, we have collected two types of data: the primary and the secondary ones. The paper is however mainly based on primary data, collected through a survey questionnaire conducted directly with consumers. A random sampling method was used and each member of the population had same chances to be part of the sample. The sample consisted of 121 participants, who are mostly users of social media. All of the respondents are residents of Aizawl, the capital city of Mizoram. The respondents were mainly new aged, with 37.5% being below 25 years, 54.2 % of them being between the age group 25-40 and 8.3% above 40 years. The sample consists of two gender respondents (40% male and 60% female). The respondents comprises of students (36.1%), employed persons (51.26%) and unemployed persons (12.61%).

The questionnaire consisted of 19 questions, including Yes/No questions, filter questions, closed questions with alternatives, closed questions with possibilities of adding more responses through the box "Others:", and six-point Likert scale, asking respondents to evaluate their responses by rating from 0 to 5. The questionnaire was designed in a Web page that provides those kinds of services (www.esurveycreator.com), and the questions were sent out randomly via email and Whatsapp.

The secondary data consists of data collected from online statistics website as well as literatures comprising of books, journals and online articles. These are presented as a literature review and studied in order to get a better understanding on the consumer decision making process and social media. However, primary data is mostly used in this study. The data obtained are statistically analysed using the arithmetic average, percentage, standard deviation, etc.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Consumer Behaviour

Kotler (1994) defines consumer behaviour as the study of how people buy, what they buy, when they buy and why they buy. According to Solomon et al. (1995), it is the study "of the processes involved when individuals or groups select, purchase, use, or dispose of products, services, ideas, or experiences to satisfy needs and desires". Kotler and Keller (2011) that consumer buying behaviour is the study of the ways of buying and disposing of goods, services, ideas or experiences by the individuals, groups and organizations in order to satisfy their needs and wants.

Jashari et al (2017) studied how the consumers use social media in the various stages of decision making as well as the psychographic variables that influence their behaviour in the city of Pristina. The study reveal that social media does have an impact on the consumer behaviour, and that this also comes to the benefit of businesses through communication channels by offering better products and services, and make them easily available to the consumers. Cívico, (2014) gave a report on the study of consumer behavior towards fashion brand on social media. However the study revealed that social media users are rather passive even more when it is related with fashion brands. Individuals are seen to be lowly engaged with fashion brands in social media.

Even from the point of view of companies and business organisations, it is important to recognize that social media is a game changer and the customer is in control. According to a study conducted by Baird & Parasnis (2011), business companies need to blend social media programs with customer relationship management (CRM) in which instead of just managing customers, the role of the business is to facilitate collaborative social experiences and dialogue that customers value.

Some of the reasons for individuals to join social networks are to self-express and to feel connected with the members of the community (Heinonen, 2011). George Herbert Mead's theory of symbolic interactionism can rightly be applied in our interactions with individuals and communities which shape our identities and influence our actions. Individuals use language and significant symbols in their communication with others. Symbolic Interactionists shift their attention to the interpretation of subjective viewpoints and how

individuals make sense of their world from their unique perspective. It tells us how individual acts according to the meaning objects have for them.

A version of symbolic interactionism was developed by Herbert Blumer (1969) at the University of Chicago in the 1950s (Carter & Fulle, 2015). Blumer’s theoretical orientation towards symbolic interactionism can be summarized through three premises (Blumer, 1969): (1) human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them; (2) the meaning of things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with others; (3) meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by a person in dealing with the things they encounter. Hence, there is definitely a psychological variable that can be used to interpret individual’s behavior in explaining their actions when exposed to social media.

Relevance of Social Media

The Internet has become a powerful knowledge machine which joins part of the scientific infrastructure across the social sciences, sciences and humanities and not just across technology fields (Meyer et al., 2016). It is among the most commonly used sources of information search, causing revolution in this stage of consumer decision making process. "Googlization of search", as Meyer puts it, is called the phenomenon of searching information in the search engine Google, which is the first and most used source of information. Along with the increase use of internet is the growth of social media. According to Merriam-Webster dictionary, social media is defined as forms of electronic communication through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages and other content. Social media can be divided into number of categories. Some of the commonly used tools are blogging (like blogger, wordpress), microblogging (twitter, googlebuzz), social networking (facebook, myspace, Instagram), multimedia (youtube, scribd, flickretc) and many other. The social tools mentioned above provide channels through which information is given out daily. People use social media in a certain way which uses their social or professional networks to filter the vast array of information down to something manageable (Cann, 2011).

Analysis and Result Assessment

Assessment of Time Spent on Social Media and the Types of Social Media Used

Respondents were asked if they have access of internet on their personal phones or any wireless device, 99.17% answered with a yes. 98.33% said they are active social media users. Most of the respondents spend significant amount of time on social media, with 47.9% saying they spend more than 3 hours a day. 19.8% say they use it for 2-3 hours, 22.3% say 1-2 hours and 9.1% use it for less than 1 hour.

We had used Likert scale to find out the degree of preferences of the different social media by users. The findings proposes that the social media most used in Aizawl are the social network sites or apps like Facebook and Instagram with close to 52.21% of respondents claiming to use it at the scale of 4 out of 0 to 5. 49.56% claims to use YouTube(Table 2). The least used media are Blogs in which 78.21% of respondents claim that they never use it and Microblog with 55.70%. We can see from the last column of the table that the value of standard deviation for Blog is low (± 1.18), and also for the use of youtube (1.16) meaning that the responses are quite aggregated around the average.

Table 2: Types of Social Media used in Aizawl

	0		1		2		3		4		5		Arithmetic average (\bar{Q})	Standard deviation (\pm)
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)				
Blog	61x	78.21	9x	11.54	2x	2.56	2x	2.56	1x	1.28	3x	3.85	1.49	1.18
micro-blog(twitter)	44x	55.70	19x	24.05	7x	8.86	4x	5.06	2x	2.53	3x	3.80	1.86	1.30
Social Networks (facebook...)	1x	0.88	5x	4.42	16x	14.16	12x	10.62	20x	17.70	59x	52.21	4.96	1.32
Pinterest	35x	43.75	8x	10.00	13x	16.25	12x	15.00	2x	2.50	10x	12.50	2.60	1.76
Youtube	1x	0.88	2x	1.77	10x	8.85	22x	19.47	22x	19.47	56x	49.56	5.04	1.16

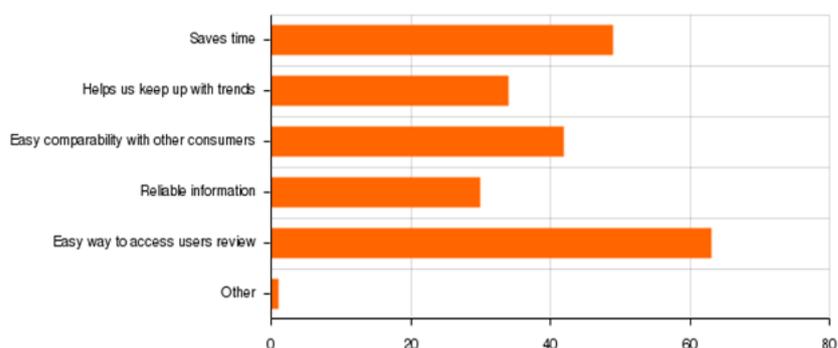
Impact of Social Media in Decision Making Process While Making a Purchase

When asked if the use of social media has ever caused them to buy anything unplanned, 60.33% answered with a yes. 69.1% say they either ‘like’ or ‘follow’ the brand of their choice on social media to keep track. When asked if social media gives an insight and if it has increased their awareness regarding various products, 63.64% say they agree and 20.66% say they strongly agree. Regarding how influential social media is in their decision to make a purchase, 17.4% claims very influential and 47.1% says quite influential. Respondents were also asked

if they follow a brand or buy the product after seeing how popular it is on social media. The average on a Likert scale of 1-6 was 3.34 which implies a great number of respondents agree that they do.

When it comes to seeking information, the source that is mostly used for search are search engines like Google with 60.75% saying they mostly use this site. On a Likert scale of 1-6, search engines scores an average of 5.31 which means users give it a high opinion on it when it comes to searching for information. YouTube has an average of 4.18, Instagram has 3.16 and Facebook has 3.08. We can see from the graph below what respondents think of social media and the advantage it has before making a purchase. 52.5% agree that it is useful because of the easy access to users review. Hence, this shows how much importance is given to access reviews for consumers.40.8% agree that it saves time.35.0% agree that it enables easy comparability with others.

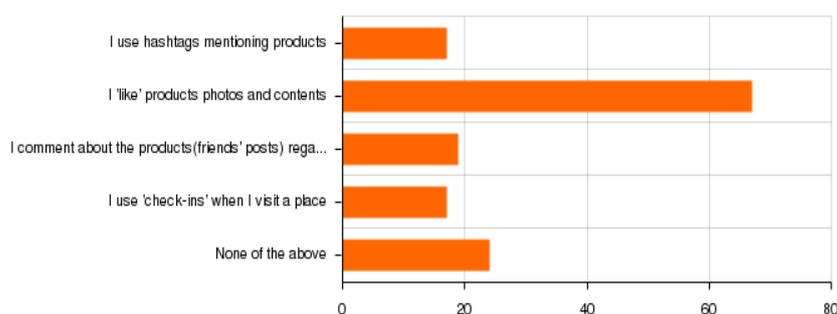
Graph 1: Advantages of using Social Media before making a purchase



Giving Recommendations And Seeking Reviews

Respondents were asked if they check reviews on social media. On a Likert Scale of 1-6, the Arithmetic Average was 4.25 which implies that a larger section of the respondents do check reviews. 20.66% answered with the highest scale of 6, which is they always check reviews. They were asked the level of importance given to reviews, with 4 options to choose from. 40.3% claimed 'Most important as they influence my action', 47.1% claimed 'They sometimes influence my action', 11.8% replied with 'I buy a product no matter the review' and lastly, only 0.8% replied 'I don't read reviews as it has no impact on my action'. When it comes to giving recommendations, however, respondents are not very active in social media participation, although 56.8% say they like photos of the products and contents (Graph 2).

Graph 2: Activities one is most likely to do on social media regarding a product



IV. DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

We can say from the study that consumers who participated in the sample survey use a lot Internet and social media. We can see that spend considerable time is also spent in social media. The vast majority of respondents have Internet access via mobile phones or any other wireless. The most used social media are social networks (Facebook, Instagram), while the least are the Blogs and the Microblogs like twitter. Search engines like Google and Youtube and social networks are the respondents' main source of searching for information. We also saw that a huge chunk of the respondents admit to unplanned buying when exposed to social media.

Therefore, based on the findings, we can positively say that the social media does have an impact the consumer behaviour. This also benefits the businesses through communication channels to offer better products and services, and make them easier available to the consumers.

The study definitely has some implications for companies, brands or local entrepreneurs as well as potential buyers. Apart from big popular brands and huge companies, there are many small local entrepreneurs and producers who sell their goods through social media. For instance in Aizawl, many young self-employed entrepreneurs have come up in different fields like handloom, food and beverages, apparel designers, soap making and many other products involving creativity. Social Media is definitely a good way to reach out to potential customers, who are active social media users, and are informed of the benefits of their products through their posts and stories on their pages. To achieve a good degree of connectedness, sellers may evaluate the sociability of different social media for the purpose of marketing. The social media enables the functional space of Inspiration prior to 'need' recognition. During Inspiration consumers receive stimuli through passive attention and/or ongoing search before need recognition, thus outside of a specific decision making process (Fotis, 2015). Hence, it has a significant impact on users to be potential buyers.

Emerging Areas for Future Research and Recommendations

This study identifies the different responses due to exposure of social media. This exposure develops a feeling of want and desire for something that is seen on social media and eventually leads to action. Hence, in this area, for future research, one can study the impact and incidences of these responses using more literatures and theories of social media impact, which is quite lacking in this present study.

From this research, we can see that the respondents are vastly of the age group 25-40 consisting of 54.17% and this is the age group which is usually most influential and are easily influenced by the digital environment. Future study may explore the differences between samples from the population. Examples could be the age difference or gender difference of social media influence.

Additionally, other variables such as product related factors can also be studied. A survey comparing the rural consumer behaviour with that of urban may also be an interesting study as rural area may comparatively be less informed than the urban. We could even look at the difference in consumer behaviour between users of various social media platforms. Much is still to be studied and understood in this area of research. Hence, several directions for future research can definitely be worked out to consider a broader range of phenomena.

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