Examining Consumer Information Search Trends in Digitalized India: An Empirical Study

Ahmed Al-Farsi

Department of Electrical Engineering, Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat, Oman

ABSTRACT

Understanding the consumer information search process plays a pivotal role in marketing decision making such as product planning, product development, and on its entire promotional strategies. As internet is concerned, this interactive medium opens up possibilities of consumer's on-line in-formation search to a new experience. The Web represents an extremely efficient medium for ac-cessing, organizing, and communicating information. As such, the Internet covers various facets of communication technologies ranging from the written and spoken word to visual images. More and more businesses today are discovering the Internet as a fundamental communication tool for conducting daily business. Large and small companies are embracing the Web in order to com-municate with current and potential customers abroad with the same cost and ease as in their home countries. The buying and selling over this digital media is called electronic commerce, or e-commerce. E-commerce is not just a single technology but also a combination of technologies, applications, processes, business strategies, and practices, necessary to do business electronically. A challenge faced by all marketers in this modern digitalized era is how to influence the purchase behavior of consumers in favor of the product or service they offer. Before making a decision to make a purchase, consumers are involved in making information searches about the product. These searches include analyzing the official web sites of companies, getting involved in the dis-cussion groups on the internet, following the discussions or communication with the others via e-mails. For influencing consumers for product purchase there is a great need to give correct infor-mation to consumers on time. This paper is a significant step forward to understand recent trends in Consumer information search in the modern digitalized India.

INTRODUCTION

Digitalization have greatly increased the capabilities of consumers and marketing organizations. Consumers demand for a sort of commodity or service is the prerequisite of consumer information search. Marketing is fundamentally about facilitating exchanges, and much of the exchange process involves the search for information. Consumers must determine what is available, where it may be found, and how much it will cost. Firms can help their cause by providing consumers with information about availability and prices in the form of information. Firms must also determine what consumers want and what they are willing to pay. These requirements make information search on the part of both consumers and to firms it as a fundamental part of marketing. With the rapid development of the Internet, new consumption mode arouses and received wide attention from every work of life in the society. In the meantime the digitalization of India is continually expanding and growing as the development of worldwide main force. In the accustomed model, for getting the information about product or service the customers mainly depend on multimedia advertising or convey from relatives and friends by mouth, therefore, plenty of time and money were wasted on information research. Compared with traditional consumer information search process, modern consumer information search mainly depends on internet medium. Internet saves time for searching information, costs less and also compares the prices and products from any part of the world. So buyers are being more attracted towards this medium. As Internet is a vast media in the digitalized era, which helps for storing the information, sharing the ideas and placing the strategies, these factors can be used by the Internet sellers in understanding the buyer decision making methods which helps them gaining business advantage and build consumer relationship. It provides wide range of information, evaluation, and also to purchase effectively than any other media. Internet helps the consumers to save time, effort and at a very less cost comparatively. The mix of sound, virtual and messages to suit the needs of the customers has increased the effectiveness. As a result Internet is replacing the traditional methods of consumer information search, evaluation and purchase. Moreover, by using digitalized media, consumers 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, company or brand's presence on social networks, demographic variable (age, sex, disposable income etc.), workplace method of payment, type of stores (online or physical), etc. Consumers information search through digitalized media are becoming a substantial phenomenon; they have insofar not been well explored. In effect, despite there is some empirical research about consumer information search in general, but there is no research which focuses on modern trends in consumer information search in the digitalized Indian economy context. The primary purpose of this paper is therefore to fill this gap by

assessing why consumers are leaving the traditional channels of information search and are being more influenced towards the modern technology for information search.

OBJECTIVES
a) To study about recent trends in consumer information search.
b) To identify major difference between Traditional and Modern information search of consumers.

METHODOLOGY
This study is based on the analysis of the secondary data published in the magazines and websites.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Bei, L. T., Chen, E. Y., & Widdows, R. (2004) The intrinsic attributes of productssearch are easy to access, concrete, and more objective for comparing the quality of the product. In contrast, consumers rely on more extrinsic cues to judge the quality of experience products or services. Internet is concerned as an interactive medium that opens up possibilities of on-line information search as an alternative to experience. Consumers now can easily obtain information from others' experiences of these products.

Grant, R., Clarke, R. J., &Kyriazis, E. (2007). Identify consumer frustrations from information that is inaccurate, poorly presented, insufficient or of dubious credibility and acts as an information roadblock. Marketing professionals should design their marketing strategies by catering consumer demand based on the categorization of need. Rose, S., Samouel, P. (2009). This study extends the existing understanding of information search into the online environment and focuses upon the factors that drive the amount of Online Consumer Information Search. Cheema, A., Papatla, P. (2010). Reveals that the relative importance of online information is higher for utilitarian products (computer hardware and software) than for hedonic products (books, music, and movies). The study also identify that in online purchases, the relative importance of online information decreases with increasing consumer Internet experience.Kumar, D.P&Raju, K.V. (2013). Consumer is more likely to associate with advertisements of those brands, which have emotional values and messages. Positive emotional appeals also provide a strong brand cue and stimulate category-based processing.Maity, M&Dass, M (2014). The effect of salespeople in consumer behavior indicates that 'consumers' purchase intention is influenced by their cognitive and emotional trust. Higher cognitive or emotional trust will result in higher purchase intention. The trust in salespersons is expected to enhance customer loyalty and shows the significant influence it has on the decision making process. Utkarsh; Medhavi, Sanjay(2015).The study classify variables affecting information search into four categories, namely, behavioral factors, personal factors, product/service factors and situational factors.Zhang, J., Shabbir, R., Abro, M, R (2015). The availability of information about a product/service on internet guides the users to collect more specific and accurate information and its related opinions. Consumer receives large quantities of information on social media but feel free to accept those aspects which provide him/her satisfactory information. Meera .V. & Gayatri.P (2015). Customer expectations on interactive and immersive visual experiences have increased. Moving images and interactive clickable videos allow customers to learn more about products.Utkarsh (2017). The study offers insights into the role of consumers' individual differences in information search. Consumers engaged in variety-seeking behavior are more confident in their decision making and search for abundant information before buying a service.Akalamkam, K., Mitra. J.K. (2017).infer that consumers tend to use both traditional offline information sources as well as online information sources when they shop online. However, the preference for different online and offline information sources is likely to be different for hedonic and utilitarian products.

INFORMATION SEARCH AND DECISION MAKING
Consumers engage in both internal and external information search. Internal search involves the consumer identifying alternatives from his or her memory. For certain low involvement products, it is very important that marketing programs achieve top of mind awareness. For high involvement products, consumers are more likely to use an external search. The consumer may ask friends' opinions, read reviews in Consumer Reports, consult several web sites, and visit several dealerships. Thus, firms that make products that are selected predominantly through external search must invest in having information available to the consumer in need through brochures, web sites, or news coverage.

CONSUMER BUYING DECISION PROCESS
Consumer buying decision process is the steps followed by consumers during their purchasing. This process varies due to the influence of various factors, classified based on internal and external. Internal factors include motivation, perception, personality, attitude and learning of a consumer. External factors include social settings, culture, media and economic variable. Influence of these factors depends on the demographic profile of the

consumer like gender, age, education, occupation and income. In this head various stages generally followed by consumers in buying process is explained.

Problem Recognition-Put simply, before a purchase can ever take place, the customer must have a reason to believe that what they want, where they want to be or how they perceive themselves or a situation is different from where they actually are. The desire is different from the reality – this presents a problem for the customer.

Information Search-Once a problem is recognized, the customer search process begins. They know there is an issue and they're looking for a solution. As a marketer, the best way to market to this need is to establish the brand as an industry leader or expert in a specific field. The company should also increase its credibility in market.

Evaluation of Alternatives- Customer starts to compare different options to ensure their decision is the right one. Marketing to this couldn't be easier, company should try to keep customer on your site for the evaluation of alternatives stage.

Purchase Decision- The purchase decision falls near the middle of the six stages of the consumer buying process. At this point, the customer has explored multiple options, they understand pricing and payment options and they are deciding whether to move forward with the purchase or not.

Purchase-A need has been created, research has been completed and the customer has decided to make a purchase. All the stages that lead to a conversion have been finished.

Post-Purchase Evaluation- Just because a purchase has been made, the process has not ended. After a purchase is made, it's inevitable that the customer must decide whether they are satisfied with the decision that was made or not.
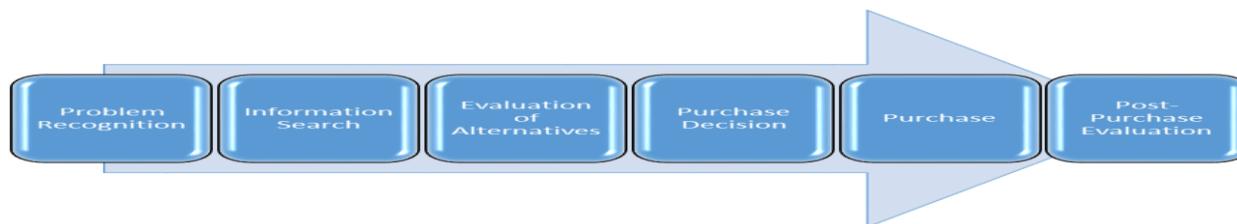
METHODS CONSIDERED AS TRADITIONAL FOR CONSUMER INFORMATION SEARCH

Traditional methods of consumer information search include mostly non-digital advertising and other marketing methods. It mainly includes Television, print, direct mail advertisements, Billboards and off-site signs, Cold calling, and banner advertising.

METHODS CONSIDERED AS MODERN INFORMATION SEARCH IN THE DIGITALIZED ERA

Product Videos- Video can be a great way to communicate how products work and how they help potential customers, particularly for products that lend themselves to a more visual explanation.

Product Pages-One asset that product marketers typically manage is a website's product pages. These pages should highlight various product and service offerings and provide the information that prospects are looking for.

Product Blog Content-All leading marketers use blogs to attract visitors through educational, industry content and product updates. Use of this blog helps to communicate significant product, service, feature updates and company news.

Group Product Demos- product demos are another great type of webinar used to give product information. Company's doing software business, technology based business are mainly using this form.

Product Digest Emails- Product marketers also have the unique challenge of doing internal marketing. One particularly great way for them to share news and information about new product features and sales enablement

content and resources is to send regular product digest emails. These emails should provide important new information about products and services.

Product Apps-An app is a piece of software that you can download onto a device like a smartphone or tablet computer and that fulfils a particular purpose. Leading marketers also provide free of cost apps for their products and for online support.

Social Media- Social media is all about building relationships and who's better to build and cultivate relationships. Customers can hear more about new products and promotions so it's important to use these channels regularly for a company.

Community Groups and Discussion Boards- Online community groups and discussion boards provide a great platform to get more information about products.

Live Chat- Mainly online consumer's want help from a live person while there are shopping online. Live Chat into company's offering is a way to stay in touch with customers and shorten response times.

POINTS THAT ARE IMPORTANT TO COMPANIES FOR CONSUMER ONLINE INFORMATION SEARCH

Change Social Conversations: Businesses think they can use social media to influence consumers and their buying decisions but research has shown that consumers use social media primarily to connect with family and friends, follow trends and find product reviews or information. Marketers should Use social media channels the way consumers want to use them, not the way the business wants to use them.

Pass required information: Give to customer's friendly content information that fits their needs and preferences. If marketer is not sure what customer is looking for, ask them clearly about their requirement.

Engage Customers Offline and Online: If marketer wants to influence consumers, you must engage with them both online and offline. The key is to understand the brand's emotional connection with consumers and act upon it.

Give authentic Facebook Conversations: Social media is highly personal for consumers they want to interact with other people, not with brands. Consumers are more likely to respond to companies that are personable and genuine.
Be Available at All Times: Because social media is 24/7, consumers have come to expect immediate responses from brands—even nights and weekends.

MAJOR DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TRADITIONAL AND MODERN CONSUMER INFORMATION SEARCH

Traditional information search	Modern information search
One-way conversation	Two-way conversation
Closed system	Open system
Brand and User-generated Content	Professional content
Economic decision-making	Community decision-making
Controlled communication	Unstructured communication
Pre-produced/ scheduled information	Real time creation
Top-down strategy	Bottom-up strategy
Passive involvement	Active involvement

CONCLUSION
Most leading research firms and pundits agree that digitalization will first impact businesses in the places they interact with customers – across sales, service, and marketing, whether online or in the store. A digitally enabled enterprise engages with both current and prospective customers by giving information online. This study aims to conduct a literature review on online consumer information search. For this study, the observations have confirmed that online information search based on modern technology and concepts are more used in modern digitalized economy. For this study many journals and websites has been reviewed. Furthermore, as this study was conducted for a limited period, it could be possible that there is a chance of missing some previous findings regarding this topic as well.

REFERENCES

1. Lien-Ti Bei, Etta Y. I. Chen, & Richard Widdows (2004). Consumers' online information search behavior and the phenomenon of search vs. experience products. Journal of Family and Economic Issues, 25(4), 449–467.
2. Robert Grant, Rodney J. Clarke & Elias Kyriazis (2007). A review of factors affecting online consumer search behavior from an information value perspective. Journal of Marketing Management, 23(5–6), 519–533.
3. Susan Rose & Phillip Samouel. (2009). Internal psychological versus external market-driven determinants of the amount of consumer information search amongst online shoppers. Journal of Marketing Management, 25(1–2), 171–190.
4. Cheema, Amar & Papatla, Purushottam. (2010). Relative importance of online versus offline information for Internet purchases: Product category and Internet experience effects. Journal of Business Research, 63(9), 979–985.
5. Dr. D.Prasanna Kumar & K. Venkateswara Raju (2013). The Role of Advertising in Consumer Decision Making. IOSR Journal of Business and Management, 14(4), 37-45.
6. Moutusy Maity, Mayukh Dass (2014). Consumer decision-making across modern and traditional channels: E-commerce, m-commerce, in-store Decision Support Systems, 61, 34-46
7. Utkarsh; Medhavi, Sanjay (2015). Information search behavior of service consumers: Review and future directions. The Marketing Review, 15(2), 201-219.
8. Jing Zhang, Rizwan Shabbir, Mujeeb-ur-Rehman Abro (2015). Role of Social Media in Pre-purchase Consumer Information Search:A Uses and Gratifications Perspective. Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences, 6(1),11-22.
9. Meera .V. & Gayatri.P (2015) Digital marketing and enhancing consumer experience in online shopping. The international journal of business and management, 3(6), 186-189.
10. Utkarsh (2017). Individual differences in consumer information search for services: A multiple mediation study. Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 37, 33-42.
11. Krishna Akalamkam, Joy Kumar Mitra (2017). Consumer Pre-purchase Search in Online Shopping: Role of Offline and Online Information Sources. Business Perspective and Research, 6 (1), 2018.
12. Kotler, P. and Armstrong, G. (2015), Principles of Marketing, Pearson India.

WEBSITES

1. http://www.ebscosearch.com.
2. http://www.answers.com/Q/How_consumer_get_product_information.
3. https://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Marketing/Consumer_Behavior#Search_for_information.