

The impact of SMM on Students' purchase decision-making process

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1. Abstract

This study explores the main impacts of SMM on students' purchase decision. Purchase decision making is made up by 5 stages mentioned by Kotler and Keller (2016). For primary research method, the survey is going to be used to provide quantitative data for this study. Secondary research is also used to get broader knowledge in this field as we are going to look through several studies conducted in Malaysia, Indonesia and India. The findings underline the importance of the objectives such as targeted ads, customer engagement used in SMM to impact on students' purchase decision. It contributes for marketing field to understand the effectiveness of SMM for targeting students.

Key words: targeted ads, target audience, customer engagement, customer decision making process.

2. Background

As more people are using social media platforms, the role of social media marketing is increasing day by day in the field of marketing as it promises many advantages for companies.

As the popularity of social media platforms is increasing day by day, the use of social media among people is also rising significantly. According to the statistics provided by DataReportal (2024), as for October, 2024, the number of social media users around the world reached 5.22 billion, equals to 63.8% of the global population [1]. In terms of adults using social media, 86.3% of all adults use social media actively. The average time spent on social media platforms is about 2 hours and 19 minutes. These changes in the way people spend their majority time on social media, it creates advantages for marketers to highly interact with their target audience effectively. As mentioned by Ardiansyah and Sarwoko (2020), the effectiveness of social media has already proven in terms of raising brand awareness and having highly interactive platforms [2].

There are many studies conducted in this field but due to gaps, we can not generalize their results. The gaps might be geographic, the size and group of people studied.

This study aims to explore the main impacts of social media marketing by examining objectives of SMM and customer decision making process in depth. It focuses on deeply each stage of customer decision making process of students. The group surveyed for this study is Business management faculty students at Millat Umidi University in Tashkent.

3. Literature review

As many people use social media platforms these days, marketers now realized that companies should be present in where their target audience are. By interacting with target customers effectively, companies can build high brand awareness, that in turn help them to communicate their services and good effectively. This is the main goal of social media marketing. As Alagar R, (2024) mentioned that there are 6 main objectives (activities) of social media marketing (SMM):

- Brand awareness

By executing this activity, SMM managers make sure that targeted audience is aware of the brand, services and products their company provides. To do this effectively, they usually inform their target audience about company and its products and services by storytelling, visual contents like informative videos, posts and collaboration with influencers.

- Driving traffic in website

Another important task is working on website where targeted customers take basic and main information about the products and services. To make customers visit the website, SMM managers execute several tasks such as putting links on bios on social media platforms, using search engine optimization, targeted and paid ads.

- Customer engagement

This is the way SMM managers interact with customers through social media platforms. They do not just release the content or posts, they also work with followers' comments, questions. They can interact with them and show respect towards them as they take their comments and questions into account. They also motivate them to share and generate user-generated contents as word of mouth.

- Conversion and leads

Another crucial objective of SMM is generating leads and conversion. This is where sales are made. They usually use special offers, discounts and retargeting ads so as to reach more targeted audience. Special offers and discounts make customers purchase. By calculating conversion rate, they can measure the effectiveness of the actions they are carrying out.

- Customer support

To support customer well, SMM managers always try to answer customers' questions quickly so as to prevent their dissatisfaction. They might sometimes respond publicly so that other customers might be informed. These quick and quality interactions help them, to resolve the issues occurred. This is one that prevents customers' dissatisfaction and serves to satisfy them.

- Gathering customer reviews, insights and feedbacks

The last activity taken by SMM managers is to work on gathering customers' reviews, insights and feedback given through social media platforms, website and channels. By gathering those insights, they have enough data to analyze whether their customers are satisfied with the products or services of the company or not. They work on shortcomings and aspects that make customers dissatisfied [3].

Customer decision making process

In terms of customer purchase decision, at first, we should talk about 5 main stages of customer decision making process identified by Kotler and Keller (2016) because social media marketing is without a doubt interconnected with customer decision making process [4]. Social media

marketing has its impacts on each stage of this decision-making process. If social media marketing managers miss one of those stages, their whole effort might go waste.

Impacts of SMM on each stage of students' purchase decision:

1. Problem recognition

In this stage, customers recognize their needs and problems. These occurred needs and problems might be triggered by internal and external stimuli. External stimuli works when customers see any ads and promotions online (Kotler and Keller, 2016) [5]. Here SMM managers use targeted ads to increase brand awareness as target audience, in our case, students start seeing ads online. As a result of it, they will be informed about the brand, products and services this brand is offering. This serves as external stimuli.

According to the research conducted by Ostojic et al., (2024) among 230 students in the faculty of Economics in Belgrade University, they provided descriptive statistics about the findings [6]. As they provided, one of the best rated variables among students is sponsored ads, with mean 5,29 out of max 6. It means that majority of students out of 230 rated that targeted ads play a big role to make them informed about the products and services and highly impact on their purchase decisions.

Another research conducted by Al-Azzam and Al-Mizeed (2021) also mentioned that targeted ads have a huge impact of students' purchase decision as the effectiveness of targeted ads are so high [7].

2. Search of information

In this stage of decision making, targeted audience, students try to find out information about products or services once they are informed in the stage of problem recognition. Marketers should identify where their target customers usually look for the information about products and services. SMM managers use information source called commercial, including web sites, ads, displays (Kotler and Keller, 2016) [8].

In the research conducted by Ostojic et al., (2024) among 230 students at Belgrade University, as they provided in their descriptive statistics, it shows that another highest rated variable is availability of the information about company and products, in mean, 4.57 out of 6 in maximum [9]. It means that students are highly impacted by information provided on social media platforms and websites.

3. Consideration of alternatives

In this decision-making stage, customers try to satisfy their needs by looking for more benefits that they can gain from their choices. They tend to compare other alternatives so that they can get more benefits out of it. To win this competition, marketing managers offer discounts, lower prices or as a bundle of attributes as mentioned by Kotler and Keller (2016) [10]. It means additional benefits added to the product or service. SMM managers promote these offers on social media platforms, websites, through targeted ads for their target audience.

According to the research conducted by Sulaeman and Mujriah (2024) in Mandalika University of Education in Indonesia, they proved that the discounts have highly impact on students' purchase decision making [11].

4. Purchase decision and Post purchase evaluation

In this stage, once customers go through evaluation of alternatives stage, they now take others' opinion, reviews about a certain product or service into account. As Kotler and Keller (2016) called it, "attitudes of others". SMM managers always try to post customers reviews and their positive comments on social media platforms so that potential customers can trust them [12]. According to another research conducted by Yang, Sarathy and Walsh (2016), positive reviews from credible sources about a certain product or service has a positive impact on customers' purchase decision as it serves to raise persuasiveness in students and increase trustworthiness [13].

In this last stage, customers evaluate what they purchased from a certain brand once they used. Customer take post purchase actions whether they are satisfied or dissatisfied. SMM managers take also certain actions to work with their post purchase actions such as negative and positive reviews, quick responses to questions, comments and feedbacks on social media platforms. They also provide personalized messages for customers to keep the close relationship. As Aggarwal and Mittal (2022) researched the impact of relationship and high interaction with customer on their purchase decision by taking 343 respondents in India, they concluded that having close relationship and interaction with customers have a highly positive impact on their purchase intentions [14].

As I mentioned those research studies above conducted by several researchers in different geographic regions, we cannot apply them universally due to the limitations and gaps in those researches. Those studies are conducted in Pakistan, India, Malasia and Indonesia but we cannot apply those results to other universities in other countries. The aim of this study is to explore the impact of SMM on students' purchase decisions.

5. Hypothesis

H1: Social media marketing has a highly impact on each stage of students' purchase decision.

6. Methodology

For this research paper, both primary and secondary methods were used to gather reliable and enough information and data. Quantitative method was employed for primary research while existing studies and article was reviewed as secondary research to thoroughly explore this field. Primary research is made up by survey including 15 questions that are going to be delivered for students to identify the impact of SMM on their purchase decision. The reason why

7. Data collection

The data was gathered through an online survey with the help of Google form. The survey includes 15 questions distributed among 53 students in business management faculty at Millat Umidi University. The questions were allocated into two parts in terms of the data type, background

information about students and questions directed to identify the factors in SMM affecting their purchase decision.

8. Results

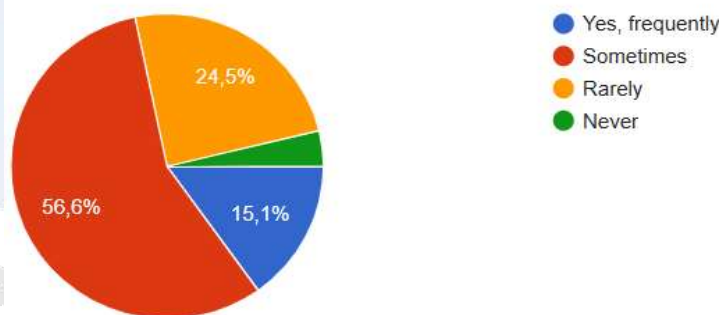
In the survey conducted among 53 students in Business Management faculty at Millat Umidi University, 88.7% respondents are between the age of 17 to 22 while other 2 group ages 22-25 and older than 25 got 5.7% respectively. 66% of all respondents are male whereas 34% are female.

Among those respondents, the most used social media platform is Instagram with 88.7%, you tube with 69,8%, and Facebook and Tik Tok, 13,2% and 7.5%, respectively, respondents use those social media platforms actively.

In terms of the amount of time they spend on those social media platforms, 41,5% of all respondents spend about 2 hours daily, 26.4% of students spend about 2-3 hours while 22.6% students use social media platforms for 3-4 hours. Only 9.4% of all students spend more than 4 hours on social media platforms.

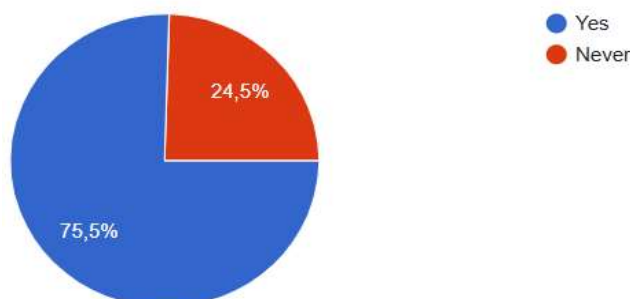
Another result is about how often they receive ads on their social media pages via google and email. The statistics indicates that 35.8% of all respondents often receive ads online while the same percent respondents inform that they sometimes receive those kinds of ads online. 15.1% of students said that they always encounter that type of ads via platforms, google, email.

Fig.1. How often do you feel that those ads match your needs and problems?



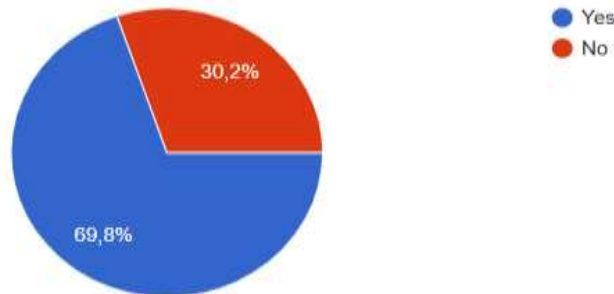
In this chart, we can see that 56.6% students notice that targeted ads match their needs and preferences when they receive via social media platforms, google and email.

Fig.2. Have you ever purchased products or services after receiving ads online on social media platforms?



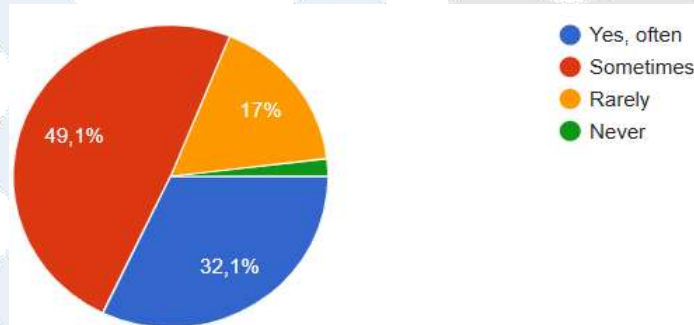
75.5% students purchased products and services after seeing those online targeted ads.

Fig.3. Do you usually visit websites to get more information about the product or service?



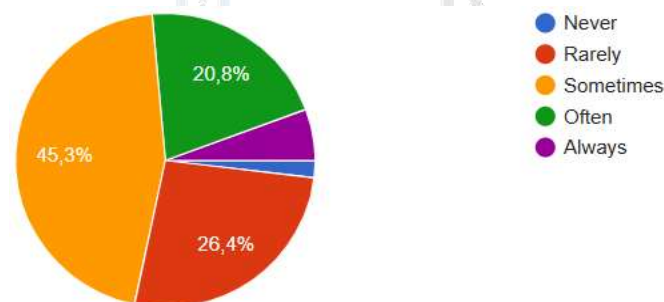
As the chart indicates that 69.8%, almost 70% students usually use links to visit websites to get more information about products and services they are going to purchase.

Fig.4. How often is the information provided on websites, social media platforms helpful for you to make your purchase?



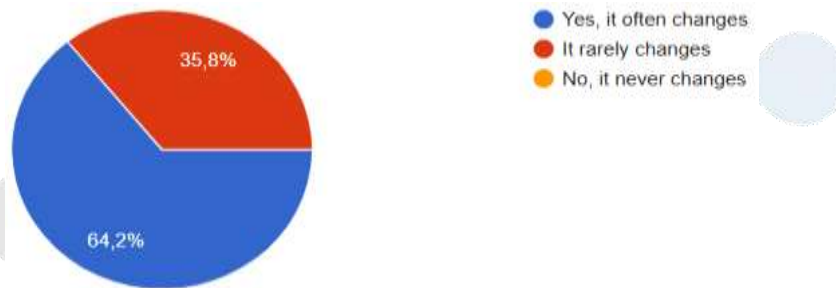
As we see the chart that the information provided on websites, social media platforms is helpful for 49.1%, almost 50% of all students.

Fig.5. How often do you consider discounts, additional benefits before making a purchase online?



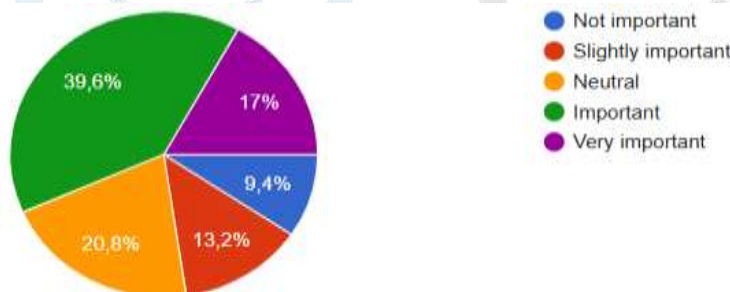
As Figure 5 shows that discounts, additional benefits offered on social media platforms are sometimes important for 45.3% students, while discounts often play an important role in 20.8% students' purchase decision.

Fig.6. Have reviews, comments on social media platforms ever changed your purchase decision positively



It means that 64.2% students also consider reviews and comments made by other customers to make their purchase decision while 35.8% students rarely consider reviews before making their purchase.

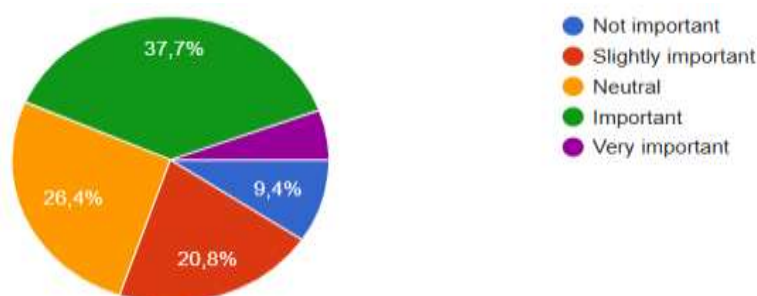
Fig.7. How important are quick responses, interactions to questions you asked on social media platforms to make your purchase decision?



For 39.6% students, the importance of quick responses, interactions provided by SMM managers are so high while for 9.4% of respondents, quick responses are not important.

In terms of other statistics, 52.8% of all students made purchases again once they received personalized messages.

Fig.8. The importance of feedback requesting after the purchase



The importance of feedback requesting for 37.7% students are important after the purchase whereas 26.4% students are neutral about it.

9. Analysis

The impact of SMM on each stage of customer decision making process:

In this part, article going to analyze the impacts of SMM objectives on each stage of students' purchase decision. As mentioned above, there are 5 stages of customer decision making process mentioned by Kotler and Keller (2016) [\[15\]](#).

- **Problem recognition**

Our respondents are mainly students and 88.9% of those students use Instagram actively and 70.4% of them use You tube as well. This percentages indicates how our respondents are actively engaged with the contents on those social media platforms. In this stage of decision-making process, students are primarily informed about the brands, in other words, SMM managers try to increase the brand awareness of the company. In terms of the results, 88.9% of all respondents are well-informed about the brands and their product, services even if they have not purchased the products and services yet offered by those brands. It means how effective the promotions and informative contents on social media are to raise brand awareness. When it comes to target ads used by SMM managers on social media platforms, google and email, 57.4% of all students informed that most of the time, ads on social media pages match their needs and problems while 14,8% students said that those ads always match their needs as if their smartphones are listening to them. These results show how targeted and sponsored ads are effective in raising brand awareness.

- **Search information**

In this stage of customer decision making process, students usually try to find out appropriate information about the products or services they are considering to purchase. Companies usually use 2 types of SMM objectives to impact on students' purchase decision: Driving traffic in website and customer engagement (Alagar R, 2024) [\[16\]](#). In these two objectives, SMM managers use their websites, informative contents like posts, videos so that students can get enough information about what they are looking for on social media. As my results in the survey indicated that 37% of all students often receive ads via social media platforms, email and google. This is what SMM managers implement in driving traffic in websites because, as another result shows that 68.5% students said that they use websites to get more information about products and services they are interested in. It means that the appropriate enough information provided on websites is must-have for growing business. Once students are considering any products or services to purchase, having enough information about what they are considering in the websites and informative contents like posts, videos can trigger them to purchase.

Another result proving the effectiveness of providing information and informative contents on social media platforms and websites is that 49.1% students said that information provided on websites, social media pages as informative contents are most of the time helpful for them to make their purchase decision while it is always helpful for 32.1% students.

- **Consideration of alternatives**

As Kotler and Keller (2016) mentioned in their book called Marketing management, third stage of customer decision making process is consideration of alternatives [17]. In these stages, students compare what they are offered with other alternatives in the market. What SMM managers do on social media platforms, via google and email, is that they usually promote discounts and additional benefits so that students choose their brand over others. According to our survey, 45.3% students sometimes take discounts and additional benefits into account before purchasing whereas those additional benefits play a crucial role 20.8% of all students' purchase decision.

In terms of the impact of customer reviews, comments posted and displayed on social media platforms, reviews and comments can positively change customers' purchase decision. As my survey results show that 64.2% students said that comments and reviews on social media platforms often change their purchase decision while 35.8% students might sometimes change their purchase decision based on reviews and comments posted on social media platforms. Interesting result is that no one has chosen "never" option. Those results indicate that those customers' positive comments and reviews about products and services have enough power to influence students' purchase decision.

- **Purchase decision**

As I have mentioned above the fourth stage of customer decision making process, purchase decision, identified by Kotler and Keller (2016), this is the stage where the main goal of SMM, sales are made [18]. The objectives, taken in SMM are customer engagement and customer support, so that customers make their final decision, whether they buy or not (Alagar R, 2024) [19]. As my survey results indicates that 39.6% of all students consider quick response to their questions important for them to make their purchase decision and they think that quick responses provided on social media reflect how much they value their time. For 17% students, quick responses and close interactions are so important while 20.4% students are neutral about quick responses. It means that providing good customer engagement for students is highly effective to impact their purchase decision.

- **Post-purchase decision**

In this last stage of customer decision making process, students start evaluating what they purchased once they tried. To positively impact on this stage, SMM managers implement some objectives such as feedback requesting and personalized messages, offers. According to the survey results, even though 25.9% students are a little bit neutral, 37% students said that asking feedbacks from them once they purchased products and services are important for them while it is slightly important for 20.4%. These results are the indicators of how feedback requesting is highly important for students to make their purchase from the same brand and staying loyal for that brand because asking feedback from students makes them feel valued and important for brands.

Another main action implemented in SMM is sending personalized messages to those who already bought products and services from companies. It helps brands make their customers return to their companies. As the results shows that 53.7% of all students used the same brand once they received personalized messages and offers on social media. This is what triggers them to be loyal to those

brands as they feel appreciated and return to the same companies to use their products and services. It also helps companies to keep in touch with those customers for a long time so that those students use more from their products and services.

10. Discussion

As the research conducted by Ostojic et al., (2024) among 230 students in the faculty of Economics in Belgrade University, based on their descriptive statistics with 5.29 variables out of 6, it shows that how highly important target ads are in terms of affecting students purchase decision [20]. As for the survey results conducted in Millat Umid University among 53 students in Business management faculty, 56.6% of students said that most of the time, targeted ads match their needs and problems and 75.5% of all students purchased a product or service once they received targeted ads on their social media pages, google and email.

According to the research conducted by Ostojic et al., (2024) among 230 students at Belgrade University, another highest rated point, 4.57 out of 6, among other factors is the importance of appropriate and enough information provided in the websites and social media platforms [21]. The result clearly indicates how highly impactful the information providing is in students' purchase decision. In terms of the results of the survey conducted in Millat Umid University among 53 students in Business management faculty, 69.8% of the students informed that they visit websites to get more information about what they are going to buy while 49.1% of the students said that the information provided in websites and social media platforms is most of the time helpful for them to make their purchase decisions.

In the research conducted by Sulaeman and Mujriah (2024) in Mandalika University of Education in Indonesia, they proved that for students, the discounts play a crucial role in their purchase decision as it triggers them to purchase if there is the certain number of discounts they want [22]. In our research, 45.3% of the students take discounts into account before purchasing via social media. It means that discounts and additional benefits promoted on social media can highly impact on most of the students' purchase decision.

Another finding in the research conducted by Yang, Sarathy and Walsh (2016) proving that positive reviews have high impact on students purchase decision because it persuade students to purchase by raising trustworthiness of the brand [23]. As the results of our survey, 64.7% of the students said that positive reviews and comments about the products and services on social media can change their purchase decision. It means that providing customers' reviews and positive comments about the brand serve to raise the trustworthiness for brands as students judge by seeing them.

As Aggarwal and Mittal (2022) researched the impact of relationship and high interaction with customer on their purchase decision by taking 343 respondents in India, they concluded that having close relationship and interaction with customers have a highly positive impact on their purchase intentions whereas our research results indicate that 39.6% of the students approved that, quick responses and interactions are so important for them to make their final purchase decision [24].

11. Conclusion

This study explored the impact of SMM on students' purchase decision by focusing on the specific impacts of each objective in SMM on each stage of customer decision making process. The targeted group was 53 students in Business management faculty at Millat Umidi university in Tashkent. The objectives of SMM explored in this study are the impacts of discounts, additional benefits, reviews and positive comments, targeted ads and feedback requesting. The hypothesis provided in the beginning was that social media marketing has a highly impact on each stage of students' purchase decision.

The hypothesis provided was highly supported as the findings in this research indicated that SMM have high impact on each stage of students' decision-making process.

12. Limitation

This study mainly surveyed the limited number of students from only one university, which might not be representative of all age groups and all students from other universities in Tashkent. As this survey was conducted in one region, Tashkent, it may not be generalized and reflect all regions in Uzbekistan.

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