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Role of Persuasion in Online Purchases: A Conceptual Framework

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Abstract: ***The trend towards online purchases continues to grow globally with significant increases in both the number of consumers and the volume of transactions. Indian e-commerce market is likely to show positive growth trend in the coming years. The study focuses on the role of persuasion and the factors related to attitude formation that leads to purchase intention among the population. The literature study covers online purchases, factors, time period from 1967 to present year. The identified variables for the study are marketer generated content, user generated content, social influence, trust, persuasion, attitude and purchase intention. The conceptual framework is proposed and is designed from the above select variables to understand the role of persuasion and its influence on attitude and purchase intention.***

Keywords: ***Persuasion, Attitude Formation, Purchase Intention, Online Purchase Trend, Conceptual Framework.***

1. INTRODUCTION

Online purchases display a positive growing trend globally. Global e-commerce sales are expected to surpass $6.767 trillion in 2024, with projections reaching $7.391 trillion by 2025 (Tidio, Yaguara). Mobile commerce (m-commerce) continues to rise, with an estimated $558 billion in sales for 2024. By the year 2025, it's projected that mobile commerce will constitute 40% of total e-commerce sales in the United States (The Future of Commerce). Furthermore, Shopify reports that in 2023, the global mobile commerce market reached a value of $2.2 trillion, representing 60% of all e-commerce sales worldwide.

The anticipation is that by 2024, the Indian e-commerce market is poised to achieve a value of $111 billion, reflecting an 84% increase since the pandemic accelerated digital commerce adoption (mint). As of 2023, with more than 821 million internet users, India holds the position as the world's second-largest internet market. This number is expected to rise to 900

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million by 2025 (India Brand Equity Foundation). Bharathi et.al (2022) states the online shopping trends in retail industry in Bangalore city.

The trend towards online purchases continues to grow globally, with significant increases in both the number of consumers and the volume of transactions. Consumer behaviour has shifted significantly towards online shopping owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. The convenience, variety, and often better pricing available online have made it a preferred shopping method for many (India Brand Equity Foundation).

Persuasion plays a critical role in online purchases. Effective persuasive strategies can significantly influence consumer behaviour and decision-making processes. Persuasion is the act of changing the mindset of an individual. It is proven that verbal and nonverbal cues play an important role in persuading someone. Persuasion brings changes in attitudes which in marketing parlance can lead to positive online buying behaviour.

Marketers have used various means to persuade prospective customers to buy their products. To clearly understand the pattern of persuasion marketers have undertaken voluminous research ranging from understanding the pattern of thoughts of the audience to a wide spectrum of topics like, the usage of the correct language, tone and emotions; the right media; and the right sources. Persuasion is often a planned and controlled process that engages the audience to respond to cues of the marketer. The immediate expected result is trust on the marketer by the audience.

Various techniques are used by marketers to build persuasion. Some of these are (1) the principle of social proof where in an online environment, the proof of a good product or service is obtained through the endorsements in social media by way of reviews, shares, comments and testimonials (2) the principle of consistency where the marketer positions the product or service with the prospect's values or former commitments and the prospect perceives that the offering is consistent with his or her need (3) the principle of scarcity where the marketer builds a notion of scarcity and prompts prospects to act immediately. The prospects are made to feel guilty for losing the opportunity to act (4) the principle of authority where the marketer effectively uses endorsements by experts, testimonials of past users in order to establish credibility. The objective is to build trust and credibility of a company and its offerings.

Purpose of the Study

The study focuses on the role of persuasion and the factors related to attitude formation that leads to purchase intention among the population. It aims to frame the concepts related to persuasion, attitude and purchase intention. It analyses the relationship between attitudes and purchase intention, the study seeks to understand how strong attitudes translate into actual buying behaviour. Through this exploration, the study aims to provide valuable insights to develop effective marketing strategies that lead to positive consumer attitudes and enhance purchase intentions.

Research Objectives

1. To identify the role of persuasion on attitude and purchase intention.
2. To explore the factors that influence persuasion, attitude and purchase intention.

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2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The motive of the literature reviews is to provide insight into the numerous facets of research and to determine the variables of the study. The study focuses on variables like Expectations of Experience, Social Influence, Trust, Marketer Generated Content, User Generated Content and its effect on Attitude towards online purchase intention. Attitude is suggested as a mediating factor between these key factors and online purchase intention. The variables mentioned above, namely, Expectations of Experience, Social Influence, Trust, Marketer Generated Content, User Generated Content have intrinsic persuasive characteristics.

Goh, K. Y., Heng, C. S., & Lin, Z. (2013) defines marketer-generated content (MGC) as promotional materials, advertisements, and other content created by companies or brands with the intent to inform, persuade, or remind consumers about their products, services, or brand image. This content is strategically crafted to influence consumer behaviour and decision-making.

Tan, S., & Chen, W. (2022) explores the influence of marketer-generated content for food products over WeChat, a social media platform popular in China. MGC dimensions like valence, content types, vividness and interactivity were tested for its influence on consumer engagement.

Yang, Q., et al., (2022) studied on various devices that are used for generating content, like the mobile phone and personal computers. It was found that MGC over the mobile phones attracted more customer engagement particularly those with more social features.

Abdelkader, A. A., & Ebrahim, R. S. (2021) studied on the interaction of content generators on repurchase intention in the context of online airline services. It was found that UGC had stronger influence than MGC on customer engagement.

Daugherty, T., Eastin, M. S., & Bright, L. (2008) states that User-generated content (UGC) encompasses various types of content, including text, videos, images, reviews, and blogs, generated and disseminated by users across online platforms. UGC is typically produced by non-professionals and can reflect personal opinions, experiences, and creativity. The public perception and consumer behaviour are influenced by the content.

Research by Mayrhofer et.al (2020) examined whether user generated content influence purchase intention of youngsters who use the social media. The study was conducted among facebook users and the researchers proposed that if covert advertisements were disclosed it can lead to negative affective reactions and low purchase intention.

Zhao, Y et al. (2020) studied on the impact of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) on user buying decisions. They opined that the quality of information in electronic platforms are uneven and it will affect user trust in in eWOM.

Davari et al. (2022) studied on the customers hotel experiences during the period of covid-19 pandemic. The research was grounded on the customers' online reviews. The authors concluded that even in hotels that had a brand reputation of being high-tech or having updated technology facilities, the customers expected human touch and interactions.

McClure & Seock (2020) examined how brands' social media pages effected consumer purchase intention. It was opined that brand familiarity and the quality of information provided on the social network pages compelled customers to engage with those pages.

Cialdini, R. B., & Goldstein, N. J. (2004) refers to social influence as the ways in which individuals change their behaviour due to external and internal influences. It encompasses a

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variety of phenomena, including conformity, compliance, and obedience, where people's attitudes, beliefs, or behaviours are affected by others.

Hassanein et.al (2007) in the study used perceived social presence as an antecedent to attitude towards online shopping. The impact of perceived social presence on attitude is moderated through perceived usefulness, trust, and enjoyment.

A. Giovanis et al. (2020) in their study on customer intention to adopt proximity m-payment services adopts the decomposed TPB model and test results confirm the beneficial influence of attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control on the intention to use.

Abed S (2018) researched on Instagram as a social commerce channel. The study identified that social influence and trust are the main components to impact behavioural intention to use of social commerce.

Li et al (2019) examined the influence of different variables on social shopping intention. The study opined that presence in social platforms and information support influenced intention to trust in product recommendations, which result in influencing social shopping intention.

Mayer, R. C., Davis, J. H., & Schoorman, F. D. (1995) states that Trust involves a strong conviction in the dependability, truthfulness, capability, or resilience of an individual or something and it involves a willingness to be vulnerable of another person's intentions or conduct based on optimistic anticipations.

Trust is considered as the extent to which consumers believe on the acts and responsibility of others for the common good (Fukuyama, 1995).

In the recent past there are many cases of breach of this trust as customers find that their personal information and financial data are being compromised at. This has affected the business and general perception of the security people have on such websites. One notable example is the case of facebook in 2019 with the Cambridge Analytica scandal.

Study by Riley et.al points out that trust along with other factors directly influence online purchase attitude. The study pointed out that the reputation of the logistic carrier moderated the importance of trust in shaping attitudes towards online purchases (Riley, J. M., & Klein, R. 2019).

While studying on the implementation of facial recognition check on the hotel guest in Singapore, a relatively new technology, the researchers reveal that the strength of the brand trust is desirable and though it may not reduce the risk perception, trust can induce guest to accept and benefit from the use of the new technology (Boo, H. C., & Chua, B. L., 2022).

Mammen, V. A, et.al (2021) talks about the trust, social influence, perceived ease of use, privacy and memberships as key players for online purchases.

Trust, as articulated by various scholars, encompasses the fundamental belief in the reliability of promises exchanged between individuals. It's characterized by mutual confidence, where each party respects the vulnerabilities of the other without exploitation. Additionally, it leads to an inclination to be vulnerable based on the anticipation that the other party will fulfil important actions, regardless of direct oversight or control (Rotter, 1967; Sabel, C. F., 1993, Mayer et al. 1995)

Schwarz, N. (2012) defines expectations of experience as preconceived notions or anticipations individuals hold regarding their upcoming experiences, often based on past experiences, cultural norms, social influences, and personal aspirations. These expectations can significantly impact an individual's behaviour, decision-making process, emotional responses, and overall satisfaction with the experience.

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In an online environment, these expectations expand to include digital aspects such as the online presence of the product or brand, access to reliable product information, online purchasing facilities, ease of transactions, a wide product assortment, and the ability to share opinions with the company and the public. Therefore, expectations are related to the product's features and functionality, the content and usability of online platforms, and the ability to communicate with others online.

Expectations of experience can be linked to the quality of information available on the online platforms. Kotler & Armstrong (2018) stated that quality is a condition wherein the customers get back to us, not the products.' In the words of Batini & Scannapieco (2016) information quality constitute of objectivity, utility and integrity. According to Khairani (2015) information is any kind of message that communicates benefits that are relevant and believable. O'Brien & Marakas (2013) states that worth of information is associated to the extent of content, form, and time characteristics as determined by the users. The dimensions of time are: Timeliness, Currency, Frequency, Period, and the dimensions of Content are: Relevance, Accuracy, Completeness, Performance, Conciseness, and Scope; and the dimensions of Form are: Order, Media, Clarity, Detail, Presentation.

Attitude refers to an individual's predisposition or orientation towards a particular object, idea, person, or situation. It encompasses a blend of emotions, beliefs, and behavioural tendencies that influence how one perceives and responds to stimuli in their environment. Attitudes can be favourable, unfavourable or neutral and are often developed through interactions, experiences, and the reasoning processes (Taylor and Todd,1995, p.149). They play a significant role in shaping behaviour, decision-making, and overall psychological well-being. The attitude towards undertaking an action is based on the belief that it will produce a certain outcome. If this outcome is not deemed valuable, the individual is less likely to develop a positive attitude towards the action. Consequently, attitude influences purchase intention, which in turn strongly motivates the actual behaviour.

Attitude is proved to be a key predictor of intention to use in many studies. Different theories like the 'theory of reasoned action', 'theory of planned behaviour' (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Ajzen, 1985, 1991) use the attitudinal component in their models. Attitude denotes a person's general appraisal of a concept (Peter and Olson, 2010). One may evaluate the object based on his or her own experience or the experience of those whom they trust. Individual beliefs differ based on one's earlier experiences, character traits, and their individual mind-sets (Al-Lozi, 2011).

Eagly, A. H., & Chaiken, S. (1993) explains psychological concept that reflects an individual's level of favourability or unfavourability towards an object, idea, person, or event. It encompasses affective (emotional), cognitive (belief-based), and behavioural components that together influence how a person responds to the attitude object.

Dodds, W. B., Monroe, K. B., & Grewal, D. (1991) defines Purchase intention as consumer's idea or readiness to buy a specific product or service at a later time. It is a key predictor of actual purchasing behaviour and is influenced by various factors such as attitudes, perceived value, and external influences like marketing and social norms.

Major Finding from Review of Literature

The literatures from researches helps to understand the extensive study conducted on online purchases discussed below,

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1. The factors related to online purchases (globally) has been identified.
2. The researchers have identified various factors related to online purchases, attitude, purchase intention and persuasion. The notable factors can be perceived usefulness, enjoyment, perceived risk, marketer/firm generated content, user generated content, social influence, trust and the like.
3. Models like TPB, TRA and TAM are studied to understand their role on online purchases.

Rationale of the Study

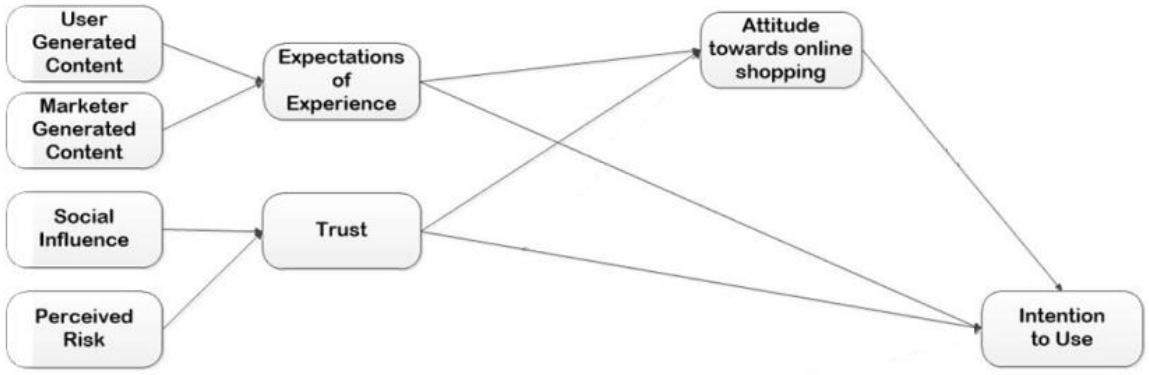
Persuasion is required in attitude formation leading to online purchases to help consumers process information, change attitudes, build trust and credibility, evoke emotions, and shape behavioural intentions, ultimately influencing their decision to make a purchase in the online environment.

1. There is a lack in holistic framework on persuasion and its bearing on attitude and purchase intention.
2. Studies on the set of variables selected for the development of framework are fewer.
3. Studies on the major factors influencing purchase intention has to take place due to change in technology and change in business scenarios.
4. Consumer behaviour towards purchase changes over a period of time and hence the factors identified over a period of time cannot be generalized for all studies related to online purchases.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is conducted to identify the role of persuasion on attitude and purchase intention. Several literatures are reviewed to understand the concept and role of persuasion, attitude and purchase intention of consumers. The literature review helps to identify the rationale of the study with the existing gap to study further. An extensive variable for the study is identified through reviewing literature and some variables are selected to have developed framework for the study. Theoretical models and frameworks, are also considered while developing the framework.

Figure 1: Proposed model



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Variables of the study

Marketer-Generated Content (MGC) encompasses all sponsored promotional materials crafted by the company to engage with its audience.

User-Generated Content (UGC) refers to any type of content shared by customers on the online platforms.

Social Influence is categorized as Interpersonal influence and External influence. Interpersonal influence refers to the influence exerted by an individual's personal relationships, such as family members, friends, or colleagues. External influence refers to the influence exerted by external sources, such as media, technology, or societal norms.

Trust is considered as the extent to which consumers believe on the acts and responsibility of others for the common good and the confidence that the company will not exploit the trust bestowed on it.

Expectations of Experience represent a customer's anticipations for their forthcoming interactions, shaped by previous encounters, cultural context, social factors, and individual aspirations.

Attitude refers Attitude refers to an individual's predisposition or orientation towards a particular object, idea, person, or situation. It encompasses a blend of emotions, beliefs, and behavioural tendencies that influence how one perceives and responds to stimuli in their environment.

Purchase Intention refers to the consumers inkling or readiness to purchase a specific product or service within a specific time frame.

Theoretical Framework

Persuasion helps in shaping, changing, and reinforcing attitudes. An attitude is a psychological concept that reflects an individual's level of favourability or unfavourability towards an object, idea, person, or event. Attitudes influence thoughts, behaviours, and decision-making processes. Persuasion is the process by which a person's attitudes or behaviours are influenced by communications from others. The key theories that explain the concept are Elaboration Likelihood Model, Social Judgment Theory, Cognitive Dissonance Theory and Heuristic-Systematic Model.

Attitudes formed through persuasive communication influence purchase intentions, which is the likelihood that a consumer is likely to buy a product or service. The association between attitudes and purchase intentions can be understood through several psychological mechanisms like Attitude-Behaviour Consistency, Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and Attitude Strength and Accessibility.

Persuasion plays a pivotal role in forming attitudes, which are crucial determinants of purchase intentions. By understanding and leveraging the principles of persuasion, marketers can effectively influence consumer attitudes, leading to increased purchase intentions and ultimately driving sales. Integrating persuasive communication strategies with an understanding of audience characteristics and message framing can significantly enhance the effectiveness of marketing efforts.

The TPB was proposed by Ajzen (1991) as an expansion of the TRA model. Apart from the attitudinal component and the social norm component proposed in the TRA model a third component, ‘perceived behavioural control’ that expresses an individuals’ perceptions about the ease of performing the behaviour which depend on external and internal constraints

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to the behaviour. This behavioural control varies across situations. The three components together are said to influence potential customers' intention to use an online product or service. The 'technology acceptance model' (TAM) utilises the theory of reasoned action (TRA). The extended theory of planned behaviour also considers attitude as a determinant of behavioural intention. All the four models mentioned above use attitude and behavioural intention as the determinants of actual use.

The above theories help us to identify the factors related to persuasion, attitude and purchase intention. The few factors considered for proposing the framework is based of the gaps identified from previous literatures.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Theoretical Contribution:
The listed variables are found to exercise persuasive features and can be used by marketers to promote their products or brand in an effective manner. Examining each variable can bring clarity the concept. It can be said that a customer's higher level of expectation based on his or her past positive experiences can persuade the person to make a purchase. Social influences by way of opinions, reviews, ratings, testimonials, and endorsements by friends, family, or influencers can positively persuade a consumer to buy. The trust in a brand, product, or online platform is the result of delivering consistent quality, transparent business practices, secure payment methods, and responsive customer service, all of which can persuade consumers to make purchases. The content created by brands or marketers, such as advertisements, promotional videos, blog posts, and product descriptions have persuasive powers that can convince consumers to buy. Similarly, the reviews, and testimonials from actual users of the product or service can build credibility and trust, making potential buyers more likely to make a purchase.

Practical Implication:
The marketer can consider each of these as a persuasive tactics that leverages different psychological and social factors to the extent of influencing consumer behaviour. By carefully deploying these tactics the marketer can reap high dividends in an online shopping environment. Further, the different frameworks like TPB, TAM, TRA, UTAUT can enrich the marketers understanding of online purchase behaviour.
Future research: The study can be taken further with new variables that are not considered in the present study. The role of persuasion using emerging technologies can be done to understand the influence on consumer trust. Longitudinal studies can be examined on attitude and purchase intention over time to understand the persuasion influence.

5. CONCLUSION

The present study is undertaken to identify the factors related to persuasion on attitude and purchase intention. The variables from various existing literature are user generated content, marketer generated content, trust, social influence, expectations of experience, quality of information, e-wom, perceived usefulness, enjoyment and so on. The researcher has selected few variables among the mentioned above based on the studies conducted and the outcome

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related to previous studies. Studies on role of persuasion on attitude that leads to purchase intention are not found in the existing literatures, either persuasion on attitude, persuasion on purchase intention or persuasion on online shopping is found in general. Hence research framework model is proposed to take this study further. The model proposed will help the marketers to strategize their marketing plan that leads to higher sales volume for online purchases.

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