

The Influence of Social Media on Young Consumers' Purchase Intention During Global Pandemic

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Abstract

The year 2020 was undoubtedly going down in history as one of the worst years ever due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Many countries around the world were forced to impose a total lockdown, and this situation occurred again in early June 2021 in Malaysia. Many countries were in their 2nd wave or 3rd wave of lockdown, which caused several restrictions such as movement control, the limit of travel or inter-states. Many businesses were affected. Some big corporations were forced to shut down their productions, lay off, and causing huge numbers of unemployment in the country. There were several news reported that Malaysia's retails faced bad financial losses and even wave a 'white flag' campaign to strike for help from the public. However, instead of begging for help, retailers or businesses should adapt to a new channel and accepting to a more sophisticated computerized operation and diversify into electronic (e-retails) or mobile retails (m-retails) via social media. This study aims to study the causes of young consumer purchase intention using social media during the global pandemic. There are five main variables being studied. The five factors, such as perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, performance expectancy, interactivity, and intention to express empathy, were selected and analyzed using SPSS Software. This study concluded that perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, and interactivity have a significant relationship with young consumer purchase intention using social media, while performance expectancy and intention to express empathy have not significant relationship with young consumer purchase intention. This study benefits newly operate SMEs or existing SMEs as they can provide better marketing through social media in order to sustain their businesses.

Keywords: *social media; young consumer; purchase intention; global pandemic*



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INTRODUCTION

With borders remaining closed, travelling and shopping are totally disallowed. Many companies and retailers were facing serious financial losses. To address this issue, retailers or SMEs must implement change. Along with the change of era, we can see that social media had been increasingly used as a platform for advertising and marketing activities. Averagely, the young millennials spent more than 3.7 hours daily on their phone and during the lockdown and restriction of movement control moment, these young consumers spend more than 6 hours per day on screen. These young consumers are known as the digital natives and adopt quickly on any digital gadget or device (Lad et al., 2020). Due to this, most well-known brands or companies started to use social media platforms for advertising. These companies actively use social media advertising to increase the consumption of the brands (Lee & Hong, 2016). According to Alalwan (2018), customers are more likely to interact with social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Google+ and Snapchat than physical stores. These platforms become a new place where organizations, people and even governments can commercially interact with each other. To consider if a

social network site (SNS) advertisement is effective or not, especially during the global pandemic season, a study on identifying the causes of young consumer intention to purchase is important.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The trend of purchasing online has becoming a norm, especially during the Global pandemic. According to Barreto (2013), there will be rapid growth in online advertising spending compare to traditional media. Many retailers or SMEs were forced to go online or shut down during the global pandemic. To sustain, the retailers or the SMEs have to consider several new ways of marketing to attach the consumer, especially the millennials or the young consumers. Social media also provide opportunities for companies to interact, participate with potential consumers, build relationships with potential consumers and encourage intimacy with consumers (Mersey, Malthouse & Calder, 2010). Among all of the U.S internet users, the use of Facebook is about 70%, while Twitter and Instagram were 35% and 24%, respectively (Smith & Anderson, 2018). Lately, the growth of TikTok is also accumulated more than 1 billion users in the year 2020. The revenue that Facebook earn from advertising is high. According to Statista (2019), Facebook had 4 million active advertisers, and it earns about \$17.4 billion from advertising in July, August and September of 2019. For Instagram and Twitter, it predicts to generate \$6.8 billion and \$1.62 billion respectively by the end of 2020 through advertising revenue (Statista, 2019). These statistics prove that social media advertising is beneficial for those retails and SMEs.

Perceive ease of use is the basic theory of technology acceptance often regards it as an important predictor of an individual's attitude and willingness to continue using technology (Assemi et al., 2018). Perceived ease of use imitates the degree to which an individual feels easy and uncomplicated while using a particular technology (Davis, 1989). The technology acceptance model theoretically illustrates the impact of ease of use on personal intentions to continue using the technology over its influence on personal attitudes or satisfaction with the technology (Davis, 1989; Hsieh & Wang, 2007). Perceive ease of use is conducted as an independent variable in this research because it can provide an accurate outcome in this research.

Perceive usefulness is also a factor that impacts young consumer purchase intention towards social media advertising. Perceived usefulness is an additional key indicator of a person's attitude and willingness to continue using social software technology (Venkatesh et al., 2003; Wolf & Seebauer, 2014). Davis (1989) stated that perceived usefulness indicates the degree of the individual believes that using a specific technology can improve his/her expected routine or output. According to Davis (1989) and Hsieh & Wang (2007), the technology acceptance model (TAM) thinks that perceive the usefulness of a technology touches an individual's intention to continue using it, and it will impact on person's attitude or level of satisfaction towards the technology. Therefore, perceive usefulness should include in this research because it is suitable to investigate in this research.

For performance expectancy, Chang et al. (2015) support the role of usefulness as a factor similar to performance expectancy on customer favourites such as intention and shared intention. According to Alalwan et al. (2017), in the online area, it is generally believed that if individuals think that the new system is more productive, beneficial and can save their time and energy, they will be more involved and adopt the new system. Chang et al. (2015) stated that if people think targeted advertisement is more useful and valuable, they are more likely to be attracted. Hence, this research will investigate the relationship between performance expectancy and young consumer purchase intention towards social media advertising.

Moreover, interactivity will also affect consumer purchase intention. Interactivity is one of the most serious and vital features related to online areas and social media platforms (Alalwan, 2018). Interactivity

has greatly changed the nature of the communication route and the exchange of information among parties in the online area (Sundar et al., 2014). Some of the researchers discussed interactivity as a communication process between people, and some defined it as interaction with technical devices (Alalwan, 2018). According to Wang et al. (2013), interactivity similarly plays a vital part in modelling customers' online buying behavior. According to Chen, Hsu & Lin (2010), customers are unlikely to trust the safety of the particular online shopping website if the target website is less interaction. It can be considered that the degree of interaction in social media advertising may affect customers' willingness to obtain products displayed in social media advertising. So, this research will examine whether there is a relationship between interactivity and young consumer purchase intention towards social media advertisement.

The last one is the intention to express empathy. According to (Escalas & Stern, 2003), when the user involuntarily merges with the emotions of others, empathy is generated from the user's perspective. Empathy is well-defined as the user's ability to perceive and cognize the feelings and personality of others who have been advertised on social networks and the ability to visualize others' thoughts or feelings about the advertisement (Lee & Hong, 2016). Hence, the relationship between intention to express empathy and young consumer purchase intention towards social media advertising will be investigated in this research.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used quantitative data analysis. By using purposive sampling, a total of 150 participants have participated in this research. Since Malaysia is under Movement Control Order (MCO), the questionnaire had been distributed using Google Form. Data collected has been analyzed by using SPSS software. Five hypotheses were developed and discussed. The data analysis methods are descriptive analysis, reliability analysis and multiple linear regression.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the multiple linear regression analysis, the R Square value is 0.637, which means 63.7% of the dependent variable has been explained by the independent variables. Among these five variables, perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness and interactivity are strongly supported with a p-value less than 0.05. Performance expectancy and empathy have not significant relationship with young consumer purchase intention. Performance expectancy has no significant relationship with young consumer purchase intention. For empathy, social media are the channel of communication and platform for posting and comments, which involve very low physical interactions. With that, it cant show much empathy compare with the physical; interaction or emotional marketing technique. This result is inconsistent with the past research conducted by Alalwan (2018). There is a possibility that young consumer makes impulse purchase more frequently. Impulsive purchase is an extraordinarily special mode of human consumption (Zhang et al., 2014), and it happens very common among young millennials. Therefore, performance expectation and empathy might not be the key variables for young consumers in making a decision to purchase.

CONCLUSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH

As in a nutshell, this study focused on young consumer purchase intention. This is because young consumers love to have interaction using social media, and they are the digital native's generation. This research can be the references for retailers or SMEs to consider more perceived usefulness information such as knowledge sharing through social media, perceived ease of use such as convenience, live stream

and delivery on time, as well as more interactivities such as questions and answers session, addressing the customers' name and being more friendly and approachable. Instead of spending more money on traditional marketing, businesses can consider using social media platforms for advertisement. In addition, network users can also gain benefits by referring to this research. They can understand more about the use of social media advertising, and this can increase their trust toward social media advertisement and gain confidence to purchase from the online platform.

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