

Transformation of Consumer Attitude through Social Media towards Purchase Intention of Cars

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Abstract

Background/Objectives: Transformation is an ever changing phenomenon which can impact various spheres of consumer decision making. Attitudes can shape consumer's minds, make them prefer or ignore objects and products. Hence, the consumer behaviors are impacted by attitudes and force them to behave in a quite consistent way toward comparable objects. The unprecedented rise in social media usage and its impact on consumer's attitude is also very evident. The study attempts to specify the factors affecting consumer's attitude towards purchase intention of automobile giving special reference to cars. **Methods/Statistical Analysis:** In this context consumer based attitude scale was developed and a questionnaire was completed by respondents who either have purchased a car in last one year or are willing to purchase one in next one year. Frequency, t-test, One way Anova and factor analysis were used for data analysis using SPSS 20.0. **Findings:** In the end five factors were found to have strong impact on consumer's attitude towards development of purchase intension of cars. It was also found that Attitude of males and females towards car related information search on social media are different from each other. The study also found that there is significant difference in social media information search related to car factors (Economical, Functional and Psychological) considered for purchasing a car between male and female. **Applications/Improvements:** There is a meaningful relationship between the car related factors (economical, functional and psychological) with respect to their incomes and family types. There was a significant relationship between income and economical car factors. Income was found to have a significant relationship with psychological factors as well. In terms of family types it was found that car factors had a significant relationship. Hence marketers can focus on that aspects too while advertising via social media.

Keywords: Attitude, Purchase Intention, Social Media, Transformation

1. Introduction

Digital media landscape has seen a drastic change with infusion of wide spectrum of platforms, channels and user data. Social media has turned out to be one of the very important pillars and is definitely more than a passing trend. The rules of communication have seen a complete makeover in terms of consumer behavior in B2B and B2C market places. The new social transformation model has come into place that has described the importance of social media and the need for the marketers to use this for generating more profits for the business. The new ways of communication is the major transformation seen as a result of emergence of social media. The participa-

tive communication that happens in real time is the key catch that can have a strong impact on the consumer's attitude leading to purchase intention. These phenomena of democratized communication are the core strength of social media. The brand and its reputation are no longer in the hands business as consumers and followers manifest the brand image by sharing their experiences online. Social media has become the way of life as people now don't wait for a call or message for demonstrating their feelings. A simple "like", re-tweet, comment or "share" is enough to provide that instant connection. Consumers are always on the go, constantly exchanging multiple dialogues with multiple people, are connected to multiple devices, sharing events and activities from our everyday

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lives and so on. It is not surprising that social media has completely transformed our interaction with business too especially after the purchase of the service or product.

2. Social Transformation

Social transformation is a phenomenon where the consumer behavior is drastically altered at an exponential rate and introduction of any new technology and the advancements in existing technology pave way for such transformation on a massive scale. This has also led to efficient and broader interaction and is changing the thinking behavior of consumers impacting cultures, countries and societies. The weakening of economy worldwide has prompted consumers to rethink their spending habits with time and money being so scarce. They hence have now started weighing the perceived value related to consumer experience and cost. The outcome has led to massive consumer revolution in terms of their expectations, information and engagement with the product and services. Consumers no longer are the mute spectators accepting information provided by brands but they verify the same with their network and seek guidance related to perceived value of all their purchases. Consumers are able to share their experiences instantly while interacting with other likeminded consumers. Business must adapt to this paradigm shift in consumers behavior and high expectations else be prepared to face loss.

Companies must facilitate social interaction among the consumers and the contact centers of their business for a systematic, proactive and intelligent approach that connects, engages and listen to the consumers. These functions can be classified into five key processes, (refer Figure 1) (Oracle White paper - Is social transforming your business March 2012):

- Listen. Get access to conversations across social media channels - preferably in a way that enables you to search and aggregate across social media channels.
- Funnel. Find the conversations that matter to your brand and implement a straightforward process for turning relevant conversations into incidents or cases.
- Route. Direct important conversations to qualified company representatives - ideally filtered by the intent of the conversation.
- Engage. Provide representatives with a simple means of engaging, with relevant knowledge and

guidance at their fingertips - plus the ability to seamlessly “change the channel.”

- Record. Monitor and measure social Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to improve quality and performance.

3. Objectives of the Study

- To specify the transformation in consumer attitude and purchase intention which is primarily driven by social media.
- To identify the factors that form the attitude of the consumer towards social media information search.

4. Literature Review

Attitude can be a very strong force in shaping consumers mind and influence them to like or unlike a product. Study has shown that attitudes drive consumers to associate themselves positively towards comparable objects¹.

Studies have highlighted the importance of communication channels for consumers purchasing process and have concluded that these channels have changed the way consumers use internet. With constant development of web 2.0 consumers are introduced to many new technologies³. Online social networks are one such application on internet that has seen an unprecedented growth among users. It can be seen as an extension of web applications that can be helpful in developing relationships among its users^{4,5}.

This newfound communication setup has dynamically transformed the way consumers interact with one another and have become more active creators and influencers than being mere passive participants in marketing scenarios^{6,7}. It has been observed that the power over brands has been shifted marketer’s control directly to consumers.

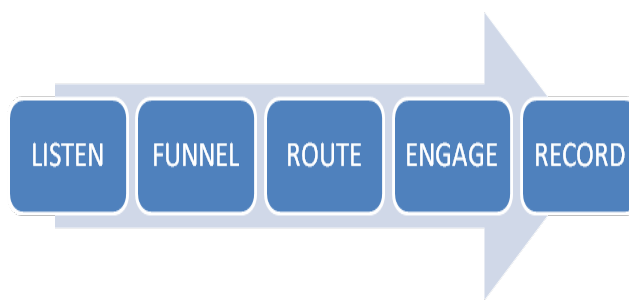


Figure 1. Key functional process for business transformation.

As highlighted by “the growing grounds well of customer power”⁸ and “cultural shift in a customer-centric direction”⁹. Traditional mode of one way communication with the marketing brand (product and services) has been transformed into a multi-dimensional, multi-way, peer to peer interaction reality¹⁰. Reliance on social networks has increased among consumers for making purchase decisions¹¹. Internet is being used by the consumers for actual purchase and gathering pre purchase information regarding the product or services. Consumers are also benefited by using internet for obtaining information about the product by reading ratings, reviews, blogs and reports¹². People are quite often looking for information about the product on social media website before making any purchases. Marketing on social media utilizes pull strategy which has propelled consumers to reach their desired products, services and brands. Social media has allowed consumers to communicate, socialize and influence each other.

4.1 Social Media and its Impact on Attitude of Consumers

A major part of social networking websites is located within the social media environment and hence consumer communicating is maximum in this space^{13,14}. Authors have studied and concluded that social media platforms are an important medium for impacting consumer decision making. They has stated that brands are viewed as an continuous social process that helps in imbibing values to the brand while the interplay and negotiations are underway by the stakeholders¹⁵. According to studies conducted brand value is co-created by the consumer’s social network relationships and interactions within their communities.

Literature related to brand has seen a transformation too from the old logic that stated that brands identification is not determined only on the basis of its exchange value but by its complicated social exchanges between the users and non-users on social media^{16,17} and that the value of brand as a combination of expected value in use by social media users^{18,19}.

The relevant relationships that consumers are building for co-creating a brand value for a product or services along with the social nature of brands leads to enhancement of the importance of social media marketing channel²⁰. The consumers are directly involved in social media that favors relationships and community based

platforms for creating brand value²¹. Consumers tend to provide more information when they are excessively satisfied or dissatisfied as compared to those who have moderate experiences²². Prior knowledge about the brand, comparisons, brand evaluation and consumer purchasing behavior too impacts the type of information consumers provide. According to authors²³ the information received from prior know-how has a very robust and straight impression on attitudes of the consumers and their purchasing activities. Consumers generally depend on their personal experiences too. In their study Cho and Cheon have identified that “learning from experience” theory is aptly used in the context of internet advertising and “past negative experience” portrays the general discontent and expected dearth of usage. Hence people wish to stay away from such sources that provide negative experience.

4.2 Attitude Drives Purchase Intention

According to Well²⁴ and Dodds²⁵ purchase intention is mental stage in the process of decision making where in the consumers decides there an inclination towards a product or services. The primary goal of marketing communications is to develop an intention among consumers to purchase the product. Social media hence should play a major role in doing so^{26,27}. Other factors driving purchase intension and attitude are trust and loyalty in the website. The social media can affect the repurchase intention in positive way^{28,29}.

4.3 Purchase Intention depends on Social Media Information Search

According³⁰ attitude towards product and services that consumer has read about in social media sites or blogs has been found to have a strong positive effect on his purchase intention. Interactivity was another factor highlighted²⁸ that’s affects purchase intention. Lee and colleagues have further found that consumers drawing higher salaries are falling in the category of frequent online buyers. In a survey conducted by iCrossing³¹ has revealed that high income is a major factor driving consumers to spend

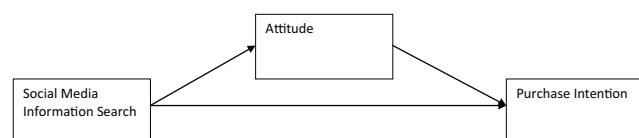


Figure 2. Authors model.

online. In another study by Pew Internet and American life project³² have reported that teens having parents whose have high incomes too tend to shop more online. A research conducted by Australian Communication and Media Authority report that was published in 2009³³ it has been found that young people having higher annual income use internet more significantly than their equal parts earning less. A model has been developed after studying the available literature. (Refer Figure 2).

5. Research Design

5.1 Research Objective

The main objective of this study is to specify the transformation in consumer attitude and purchase intention which is primarily driven by social media. The paper also presents the factors that are affective and that are not regarding the attitude of the consumer towards social media information search. There is a lack of academic studies about the social media and its impact on consumer's attitude transformation leading to purchase intention but news related to this change is in abundance in the online, print and mass media. In this context it is important to meet the academic need in the field. This is also one of the limitations of the study.

5.2 Research Methodology

The scope of the research is comprised of adults who have purchased a car in last one year or are willing to purchase the same in next one year. The questionnaire prepared for gathering data was distributed from June 2015-Aug 2015 to the respondents. Respondents belonged to Chennai city and were chosen randomly satisfying the above stated condition.

5.3 Research Sample

Total number of respondents fulfilling the condition was chosen and questionnaire was administered to 202 respondents.

5.4 Data collection

The first part of questionnaire consist the questions related to demographic information, social media usage pattern, preferred mode searching the information and multiple choice questions about use of internet and social media

and choice of platform for searching car related information. In the second part, Likert Scale containing five items is used (1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree).

5.5 Hypothesis, Findings and Result

For the analysis of the data congregated from questionnaire, SPSS version 20.0 statistical software for Windows was used. Cronbach's alpha test was implemented for the reliability test of the scale, and it was calculated that Cronbach's alpha = 0.843. The calculated value shows that scale is highly reliable.

In order to assist understanding and clarification of the association between a wide variety of factors stated in the questionnaire that are believed to have associations and in order to decrease the amount to a more basic dimensional aspect a factor analysis has been used.

For factor analysis feasibility test of data Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test and Bartlet test have been applied. In factor analysis, the Varimax method has been applied and five factors were found to be influencing the consumer attitude. Of the total 15 variables considered for factor analysis the researchers were able to extract five factors and all the variables were included.

These five factors explain 74.713 percent of the total variance. The factors regarding social media transforming the attitude of consumers for car purchase intention can be seen in Table 1.

The first of the factors can be called "Brand Awareness" and it consists of four parameters. It explains 17.936 percentage of total variance. The second factor is "Social media for Communication" and it includes three parameters and it explains 17.363 percent of total variance. The third factor is "Information through Social media" and it explains 15.751 percent of the total variance. It has five variables. Factor four is "Auto websites" having two parameters and it explains 15.519 percent of total variance. Fifth and final factor is labeled as "Social media Effectiveness" and includes one variable explaining about 8.144 percent of total variance.

Gender is most commonly studied demographic factor. Most of the earlier studies have focused on gender differences and their use of social media for information search. Since this paper highlights the use of social media information search with regard to a product of high involvement the study focuses on other demographic variables too. Income and family type have found to have

Table 1. Factors regarding attitude of consumers for car related information search through social media

	Value of Factors				
	1	2	3	4	5
Factor1: Brand Awareness					
KNOWLEDGE ABOUT BRANDS	.879				
PAST EXPERIENCE	.813				
BRAND REPUTATION	.772				
PREJUDGE PRODUCT BEFORE PURCHASE	.575				
Factor:2 Social Media For Communication					
FEEDBACKS ON SOCIAL MEDIA AFFECT MY PURCHASE		.863			
SOCIAL MEDIA PROVIDES PLATFORM FOR COMMUNICATION		.819			
SHARE COMMENTS ON SOCIAL MEDIA AFTER PURCHASE		.669			
Factor: 3 Information through Social Media					
INFORMATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA			.796		
SEEK INFORMATION CONSISTENT WITH INITIAL OPINION			.668		
INFORMATION ON INTERNET			.640		
BLOGS MORE CREDITABLE THAN MASS MEDIA			.619		
RELY ON INFORMATION AVAILABLE ON SOCIAL MEDIA			.571		
Factor: 4 Autowebsites					
AWARENESS OF AUTOWEBSITES				.920	
VISIT AUTO WEBSITE				.920	
Factor: 5 Social media Effectiveness					
SOCIAL MEDIA EFFECTIVE THAN MASS MEDIA					.727

strong link in the way car related information search is carried out.

Previous studies have shown that male respondents have been using internet for longer time as compared to females and have more purchasing power while females prefer to shop via direct marketing channels³⁴⁻³⁶. In a more current study piloted by MasterCard worldwide showed that “women shoppers have increased and they are actively taking part in online mode of purchases over internet³⁷”.

Studies have shown that social media environments provide more favorable platforms for females to search for information and shop³⁵ as males and females have dissimilar drives for purchasing. Women give emphasis to psychological and emotional involvement in buying process³⁸ and are driven by non-economic ends³⁹, whereas men give more emphasis to efficiency and convenience while making purchases⁴⁰ and are reasonably more motivated by functional factors. In a study conducted on students of Islamic Azad University of Ahvaz, various factors has been highlighted which influence the student's attitude for using social media websites⁴¹. These factors include usefulness of website and intention of using the social network site.

E-commerce sites limit opportunities for social interaction during shopping and social networks enable users to interact with their friends and other likeminded people. They can rate and discuss the products they want to purchase with their friends. Social media empowers the users to get the opinion of their online friends about the products they want to buy³⁵.

Hypothesis 1: Attitude of males and females towards car related information search on social media are different from each other

There is no difference between the Attitude of males and females towards car related information search on social media are different from each other.

This is shown in Table 2. H1 is accepted and hence it can be concluded that there is a difference in the attitude of males and females towards car related information search on social media. There is positive attitude among the consumers towards car related information search on social media.

Hypothesis 2: There is significant difference in social media information search related to car factors (Economical, Functional and Psychological) considered for purchasing a car between male and female.

There is no significant difference in social media information search related to car factors (Economical,

Table 2. T test statistics about attitude of consumers towards car related information search on social media

	GENDER	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	p
ATTITUDE towards information search with Social Media	FEMALE	94	57.06	8.562	.000
	MALE	108	61.22	8.074	

Table 1

Functional and Psychological) considered for purchasing a car between male and female.

There is significant difference between the social media information search of car factor under Functional factors only but there is no significant difference among male and female with respect to economical and psychological factors. Hence H2 is rejected. Results are depicted in Table 3.

Table 3. One way variance analysis about car factors considered for development of attitude and purchase intention through social media information search in terms of gender

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	P
CAR FACTORS ECO	FEMALE	94	36.04	8.388	.340
	MALE	108	36.94	4.734	
	Total	202	36.52	6.685	
CAR FACTORS FUN	FEMALE	94	35.70	8.462	.036
	MALE	108	37.76	5.152	
	Total	202	36.80	6.951	
CAR FACTORS PSY	FEMALE	94	17.55	2.939	.125
	MALE	108	16.93	2.841	
	Total	202	17.22	2.897	

Table 2.

Hypothesis 3: There is a difference in social media search related to car factors (Economical, Functional and Psychological) considered for purchasing a car in terms of their family income.

There is no difference in social media search related to car factors (Economical, Functional and Psychological) considered for purchasing a car in terms of their family income.

Table 4. One way variance analysis about car factors considered for development of attitude and purchase intention through social media information search in terms of Income

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	p
CAR FACTORS ECO	BELOW 40000	56	38.1429	5.99827	.021
	40000-60000	66	34.5758	7.52444	
	60001-80000	36	36.5000	6.70394	
	ABOVE 80000	44	37.4091	5.53769	
	Total	202	36.5248	6.68494	
CAR FACTORS FUN	BELOW 40000	56	36.8214	7.40051	.255
	40000-60000	66	35.7273	8.06234	
	60001-80000	36	36.7222	6.82688	
	ABOVE 80000	44	38.4545	3.87871	
	Total	202	36.8020	6.95117	
CAR FACTORS PSY	BELOW 40000	56	18.3571	1.38076	.000
	40000-60000	66	16.2121	3.71075	
	60001-80000	36	16.4444	3.12085	
	ABOVE 80000	44	17.9091	1.95077	
	Total	202	17.2178	2.89657	

Table 3.

The result shows significant difference in social media search related to car factors (Economical and Psychological) considered for purchasing a car in terms of their family income but not significant for functional factors. Hence H3 accepted. Results are depicted in Table 4.

Hypothesis 4: There is a difference in social media information search related to car factors (Economical, Functional and Psychological) considered for purchasing a car in terms of their family type.

There is no difference in social media information search related to car factors (Economical, Functional and

Table 5. One way variance analysis about car factors considered for development of attitude and purchase intention through social media information search in terms of family type

	FAMILY TYPE	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	P
CAR FACTORS ECO	NUCLEAR	130	34.94	6.950	.000
	JOINT	72	39.39	5.081	
CAR FACTORS FUN	NUCLEAR	130	35.74	6.800	.003
	JOINT	72	38.72	6.853	
CAR FACTORS PSY	NUCLEAR	130	16.60	3.183	.000
	JOINT	72	18.33	1.839	

Psychological) considered for purchasing a car in terms of their family type.

There is a difference in social media search related to car factors (Economical, Functional and Psychological) considered for purchasing a car in terms of their family type (Joint and Nuclear) proven by Table 5. Family size and type hence impact the factors considered.

6. Conclusions and Discussions

Constant developments in technology have revolutionized social media usage among consumers. Social media can be easily adopted and has a huge mass base. It is there for very important for that marketers, content creators and advertisers consider it as an integral part of communication as it has impacted and transformed role of internet in lives of people. Consumers have become content creators and hence are functional consumers than just being consumer.

The study attempted to specify the factors transforming attitude of consumers towards car related information search for development of purchase intention. A consumer based scale has been developed for this purpose. This study has contributed to the field with this component because in the literature review performed no scale was found towards information search on social media related to cars. The research sample included respondents aged above 18 who were willing to purchase a car in next one year or have purchased one in last one year.

The research has found that gender is significant in determining attitude for the car related information search through social media ($p = .000$) and support the

existing literature that states that women are bridging the gap fast in their attitude for searching car related information on social media as compared to men.

There is also a meaningful relationship between the car related factors (economical, functional and psychological) with respect to their incomes and family types. There was a significant relationship between income and economical car factors. Income was found to have a significant relationship with psychological factors as well. In terms of family types it was found that car factors had a significant relationship. Hence marketers can focus on that aspects too while advertising via social media.

Business transformation has led to transformation in consumer's attitude and social media has impacted their purchase decision process. Attitude transformation through social media and in turn the driving force for developing a purchase intention is the focus of this study.

It has been hence proven that changes in the technology has changed the way people form an attitude and purchase intention and social media has only been a rising trend by attracting wide range of users. Hence it is an area which needs to be researched intensively by the marketers. Marketers must understand that social media platform is not a place to be used only for one way communication. Consumers are constantly interacting, searching, sharing and they need to be involved in the process too. Companies must be very careful in sending, receiving and engaging the customers with the kind of information provided so that consumers are well informed about the product under their purchase intention consideration.

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