International Journal of Management, Finance and Accounting

Ranking Up the Social Media Factors on Purchasing Decision of Malaysian Generation Y Consumers

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Abstract

Social media platforms offer marketing, information dissemination, direct customer contact and optimised availability of product and service information, which influences consumer behaviour, especially among Generation Y. Therefore, this study ranking up the social media factors such as electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), customer engagement, trust, brand image and advertising on the purchasing decisions of Generation Y consumers in Malaysia. 193 data were collected using Google Forms and face-to-face questionnaires. The data was then analysed using the Best-Worst method, which ranks the most important factors according to respondents' gender, income, and education level. One response was rejected because the value of consistency ratio (CR) was above the associated threshold value of 0.3062. Across all demographics, trust was found to be the most important factor in the purchase decision. Brand image and advertisement, on the other hand, are the least important, indicating a departure from traditional marketing strategies. A detailed explanation of these findings is presented in the paper. This study provides further insight and deepens knowledge for businesses by enabling them to adapt their marketing approaches and gain an understanding of the changing buying patterns and behaviours of Malaysian Generation Y consumers.

1.0   Introduction

Social media has quickly evolved from a simple tool for exchanging information to a crucial commerce location, marketing platform, and online social network for the twenty-first century that affects customer behaviour and purchase choices. This research uses the Best-Worst Method (BWM) for data analysis to examine the complex relationship between social media and Generation Y customers' purchasing choices in Johor, Malaysia. The rise of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and YouTube has changed how people communicate, receive information, and campaign for change (Lua, 2023). In January 2023, 78.5% of Malaysians were using social media, indicating how widely used these platforms had grown in the country (Kemp, 2023).

In contemporary Malaysia, internet shopping has become commonplace, reflecting patterns seen during the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to social media's ability to expedite purchasing and delivery procedures, online shopping is increasingly seen as a need rather than a convenience (John & Wichayachakorn, 2019). A key aspect of online shopping is convenience, which includes a variety of features including the capacity to buy whenever you want, a large selection of products, easy search functionality, safe payment methods, and prompt delivery services (Djan & Adawiyyah, 2020). The combination of social media with online shopping presents many potential for a wide range of enterprises (Chua, 2022). Therefore, social media is a crucial component of digital transformation for companies looking to gain a competitive advantage (Kunsman, 2018).

Despite the advantages for both customers and companies, the dynamics of online purchases are impacted by characteristics such as gender, income level, and education. The demographics of Gen Y and Gen Z, who account for 99.8% of Malaysians aged 18 and older who use social media, spend a lot of time on the platform, which shapes their opinions and influences their buying behaviour (Howe, 2023). According to the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (2020), 53% of online sales are ascribed to Gen Y in particular, who has unique shopping habits. Nonetheless, differences in Gen Y's gender, income, and level of education all play a role in their

diverse purchasing behaviours.

Given that Johor is a key financial centre in Malaysia and that this demographic makes up a sizable section of the population, attention must be placed on this group and their unique consumer behaviours in contrast to those found in rural regions. The analysis also accounts for the greater income dynamic caused by the fact that many Johor residents are Malaysians who work in Singapore (Jamal, 2022). Businesses looking to customise their marketing strategy might get significant insights by knowing the social media elements impacting Generation Y's purchase choices in this urban context. Prioritising social media factors among Generation Y consumers in Johor according to educational attainment, income, and gender are the three primary objectives of this study. By completing these objectives, the research aims to provide an extensive understanding of how various social media components influence judgements about what to purchase within this particular group, enabling companies to create focused and efficient marketing campaigns.

2.0   Literature Review

2.1   Social Media

According to the Cambridge Dictionary (2019), social media includes websites and programmes that facilitate online connections and the exchange of information between users. They serve as a platform that fosters the growth of online communities by enabling users to build networks, maintain connections and share user-generated content. Social media platforms allow users from different backgrounds to communicate with each other, creating a large amount of information and increasing the overall value of the service (Kapoor et al., 2018).

Aichner et al. (2021) emphasise the multiple uses of social media, which include networking, conducting business, communicating with friends and family and research. It is critical to comprehend how social media platforms affect customer behaviour when examining the relationship between these platforms and purchase choices. Social media platforms are important channels for discovering goods, assessment, and interaction, and

they have a significant influence on customers' purchase choices (Varkaris & Neuhofer, 2017). Before making a purchase, consumers are increasingly using social media sites to look for advice, reviews, and insights (Hall et al, 2017). The implications of purchasing choices made on social media transcend simple transactions and incorporate the complete range of consumer engagements, starting from the initial recognition of a product to the experiences that follow its purchase. In addition, Marchand et al. (2021) examine the strategic components of social media, such as the selection of applications, hashtags, SEO activities, content marketing and dealing with bad online elements. These aspects illustrate the complexity of social media, where many platforms have different functions for people and organisations.

2.2   Social Media Factors

Customers are increasingly using social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, YouTube, and Twitter (Kim & Kim, 2018). These platforms are important in providing insightful information about consumers' experiences with goods and services, satisfaction levels and likelihood to purchase. By analysing previous studies, researchers discover key factors that influence consumers' purchase intentions (Cui et al., 2019). Key factors found in social media include advertising, brand image, trust, customer interaction and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM). Figure 1 shows the social media factors for this study.

2.2.1   Electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM)

According to Chu & Kim (2018), electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) refers to consumers disseminating information about a brand or company or sharing their experiences via mobile devices, social media platforms and the internet. On the other hand, Tajuddin (2020) emphasises that e-WOM is valued by consumers as it contains the views and experiences of like-minded people, as opposed to material produced by companies. This type of online exchange is seen as one of the best ways for customers to get informed. Social media offers marketers many opportunities to utilise e-WOM to

shape brand perceptions and influence consumer decisions (Poturak & Softic, 2019). Through e-WOM, customers not only receive product information, but can also categorise it into good and bad experiences, allowing them to advise or warn others based on first-hand experience (Rahman et al., 2020). Effective e-WOM has more influence on customers because it creates a pleasant impression of the brand, evokes feelings of excitement, provides insightful information and promotes virality, all of which increase its impact. A study from Kelantan shows that e-WOM is more successful in persuading consumers to make online purchases than other marketing tactics because it has a greater influence on purchasing decisions (Francis et al., 2023). Consequently, e-WOM underlines its place in modern consumer decision-making by proving to be a powerful tool for influencing customer attitudes and changing purchasing behaviour.

2.2.2   Customer Engagement

Customer engagement is the attitude that customers have towards a particular company or brand, with a focus on interactions that go beyond simple purchases (Sheng, 2019). This idea emphasises how important it is for a company to have genuine connections with its customers. According to de Oliveira Santini et al (2020), customer engagement on social media refers to users' involvement in sharing brand-related material, which functions similarly to advertising in that it influences users' purchasing decisions. Four different types of engagement can develop over time: Influence, Proximity, Participation and Interaction (Al Mamun, 2020). Followers on social media instantly analyse and discuss companies' posts that contain images, videos or status updates related to their brand. This enables quick and easy communication between the company and its customers, which increases brand awareness, boosts customer engagement and ultimately leads to more sales (Sheriff et al., 2019). Those prospective buyers who want to know more about a brand or product before deciding to buy would benefit most from robust consumer interaction. According to studies, customer engagement on social media significantly increases purchase intentions in the Malaysian hotel industry (Yoong & Lian, 2019) also there is a significant and positive relationship between purchase intention and customer involvement (Corkum et al., 2021).

2.2.3   Trust

Al-Gasawneh et al. (2020) define trust as the level of certainty that consumers place in both other users and the e-commerce platform. Trust is an essential component of many economic transactions as it arises from people's inherent need to understand their social environment and the behaviour of others (Sembada & Koay, 2021). Due to the inherent ambiguity of information and social interactions in online networks, the presence of social networks has made consumers wary of online purchases (Makmor et al., 2018). The idea of trust has been crucial in the history of business, including branding, organisational frameworks, business strategies and operational procedures that ensure continuous business operations (Usman & Kumar, 2021). Since social media platforms rely on human connections, users' ability to sustain their usage depends on their trust, which has a great influence on their interactions and purchasing decisions (Zafar et al., 2021). Social media has the power to increase public awareness and build trust when used correctly. Trust is a crucial factor that influences consumer behaviour in online purchasing among urban Malaysian consumers (Lim & Goh, 2019). When consumers rely sufficiently on online platforms to make decisions, the trust built through online surveys allows them to access a wealth of information and a well-defined plan (Varma et al., 2020).

2.2.4   Brand Image

Chatterjee and Basu (2023) state that brand image is one of the most important business ideas of the last decade, used as a term, phrase, logo, symbol or combination to identify a company or a group of providers of products or services. A strong brand image is important for consumers to understand a company's identity and differentiate it from the competition (Dam & Dam, 2021). A positive brand impression which reduces perceived risk or increases perceived value is an incentive for consumers to buy (Yeo et al., 2020). Studies conducted in the brand agglomeration region of Shanghai show the significant positive influence of the brand image of clothing on customers' purchasing preferences (Chen et al., 2021). Self-perceived quality is one of two additional indirect methods through which this influence becomes clear alongside the direct option. Brand image is

the most important factor influencing the interest and purchase intentions of Malaysian Gen Y consumers who are interested in clothing (Cham et al., 2018). The associated brand image has a significant impact on consumers' views about a product and gives them a general idea about it. Understanding the impact of brand image on customers' purchasing decisions is critical as organisations have the opportunity to leverage their reputation to build more positive and lasting relationships with consumers.

2.2.5   Advertisement

Advertising is a targeted activity that attempts to generate sales or increase brand awareness by promoting a product or service to the public (Mahaputra and Saputra, 2021). It is also an important tool which allows marketers to connect with a large audience and persuade them to purchase their products or services (Mohd Johan et al., 2022). Since internet advertising has become widespread on social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, companies may share extensive information about their products and services to attract new customers by tailoring adverts to users' stated preferences (Islamb, 2020). Constant exposure to these adverts may influence customers' opinions about products or services. Depending on the marketing strategy used, the effect can be positive or negative (Hee & Yen, 2018). Consumers' attitudes and perceptions may be inferred from evaluating their reactions to the advertising materials, which in turn affects how they respond to the adverts.
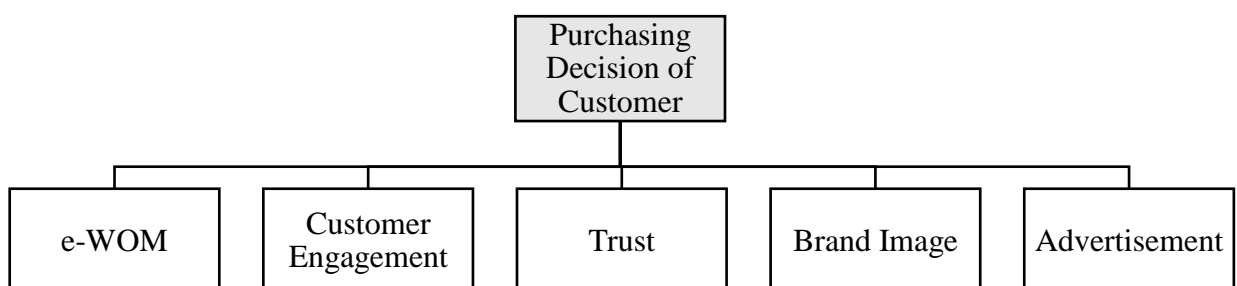

Figure 1: Key factors in social media purchasing decision

3.0   Research Methodology

This study applies the Best-Worst Method (BWM), which belongs to the category of Multi-Criteria Decision-Making (MCDM). Its objective is to rank social media factors on the purchasing decisions of Generation Y in Johor, Malaysia. Ranking aspects of social media in relation to demographic characteristics such as income level, gender and education level can be investigated using quantitative techniques that focus on accurate measurements and statistical analyses. The BWM allows for a methodical ranking of alternatives by relevance which, unlike the widely used Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), is consistent with the study's goal of evaluating elements of social media. The physical surveys are distributed in person in Johor and respondents fill out Google Forms as part of the data collection process. The questionnaire is divided into two parts that contain information about the respondents and the elements of social media that influence their purchasing decisions. The responses are scored using a nine-point rating scale.

The target respondents are Generation Y in Johor, Malaysia, aged between 27 and 42 years old. Roscoe's criterion and Krejcie & Morgan's table are used to calculate the sample size; the result is 384 within Roscoe's acceptable range. The data was collected using a purposive sample, and the BWM approach was applied in Microsoft Excel to analyse the results. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method in which investigators specifically choose participants according to predetermined standards that are related to the study's objectives (Mweshi & Sakyi, 2020). Purposive sampling enables a targeted selection of individuals who satisfy the requirements thought necessary for the study's purpose.

The BWM is a decision-making technique that is becoming increasingly popular due to its transparency, simplicity and consistent results across different areas (Hasan et al., 2022). Within a collection of evaluation criteria, the best and worst criteria are identified and prioritised by pairwise comparisons (Rezaei, 2015). Compared to other weighing algorithms, the BWM is characterised by fewer pairwise comparisons and a higher consistency rate. The BWM has been proven over the past five years to solve real-world problems in a variety of industries (Ecer & Pamucar, 2020), including online food

delivery (Zolkiffli et al., 2021; Ramlan & Mamat, 2021; Ramlan & Zakaria, 2021), tourism (Abu Bakar et al., 2023), healthcare (Ramlan & Tajuddin, 2022), and education (Hisham & Ramlan, 2020; Azmi et al., 2021). This due to BWM's ability to provide clear insights into the relative weights of multiple criteria or characteristics makes it a flexible and trustworthy tool for research and decision-making.

4.0   Results and Discussion

A response rate of 50 % was achieved in the cross-sectional survey conducted in Johor. Of 384 possible respondents, 193 answers were received by face-to-face data collection. Data integrity was ensured by excluding one respondent due to an insufficient CR value. The quality and reliability of the 192 validated surveys for further analysis were then ensured through data screening. Studying the demographics of Generation Y in Johor is important to understand their preferences on social media that influence their purchasing decisions.

Table 1 shows the overall results of favoured social media factors of Generation Y customers in Johor. A weighted ranking of these features emphasises their relative importance using the best-worst method. With a weighting of 0.279, trust is the most important component, while brand image has the least influence (0.136). The average weights of E-WOM, customer loyalty and advertising remain at 0.199, 0.198 and 0.186 respectively. These results provide insight into the complex interactions that influence purchasing decisions within the social media ecosystem. A consistency ratio of 0.211, which is well below the required correlation level of 0.3062, emphasises the reliability of these results.

Table 1: Average weight of the preferred social media factors on purchase decision

Average Weight	e-WOM	Customer Engagement	Trust	Brand Image	Advertisement
	0.199	0.198	0.279	0.136	0.186
Ranking	3	2	1	5	4
Input Based CR	0.211				
Associate Threshold	0.3062				

Table 2: The summary of the preferred social media factors based on demographic

No	Items	Most Influence Social Media Factors	Least Influence Social Media Factors
Gender			
1	Female	Trust	Brand Image
2	Male		
Level of Education			
1	SPM	Trust	Brand Image
2	STPM		
3	Bachelor Diploma		
4	Bachelor Degree		
5	Bachelor Master		
6	PhD		Advertisement
Income Level			
1	No Income	Trust	Brand Image
2	Below RM4850		
3	RM5250		
4	Above RM11820		Advertisement

Table 2 shows the social media factors ranked by demographic criteria, including gender, income and education. The comprehensive study provides insightful information on the complex preferences that influence the shopping habits of Generation Y in Johor. It provides a comprehensive overview of the social media factors that influence purchasing decisions by demographics. Regardless of age, education level or income level, trust is always identified as the most important factor, while brand image is the least important.

Trust proves to be the most important influencing factor in the use of social media, regardless of gender, which emphasises Generation Y's concern about the reliability and credibility of the information disseminated via these platforms. This aligns with the findings of previous studies that have identified the influence of trust on the purchase intentions of consumers using social media platforms (Kian et al., 2017), the critical role of trust in social commerce (Hajli et al., 2017) and the importance of trust for consumers' purchase intentions, especially in situations where physical interaction with the product is not possible (Kristina and Sugiarto, 2020). This is due to the fact that trust develops confidence, which empowers people to make adequately informed choices, particularly when it comes to the purchase of goods or services. However, authenticity is likely to be preferred above aesthetically pleasing brand representations by both male and female respondents, making the brand image the least important criterion for both genders (Pelet et al, 2020). Brand image may be seen as more superficial, and may have less influence as credibility and substance in information may be more highly appreciated.

In contrast, brand image has been shown to have the least influence, with the exception of PhD education level and T20 income, which select advertising as least favoured. This suggests that the preferred selection of social media factors may vary slightly depending on the user's education level and income level. As noted, Vongurai et al. (2018) suggest that individuals in these income categories place more importance on trust than on well-designed brand representation. This is supported by Nurhandayani et al. (2019) who reported that influencer-driven advertising may not have a significant impact on the purchase intentions of higher-income customers. A study by Mustapha & Ramlan (2020) also revealed brand image is only the third most important factor for

Generation Y when purchasing products on social media. However, this study contradicts Valaei and Nikhashemi (2017), who reported that brands have a significant impact on Generation Y because this group is obsessed with maintaining a sense of identity and achievement. Those with greater levels of education could be more information literate, which would enable them to distinguish between advertising strategies and real content (Jones-Jang et al, 2021). A stronger tolerance for conventional advertising is not always correlated with higher income. Additionally, people of all financial levels could look for real, educational information that speaks to their interests.

5.0   Conclusion

To summarise, the aim of this study is to rank up social media factors of Generation Y living in Johor based on their demographic characteristics (gender, education level and income) using the BWM method. The results provide valuable insights into the complexities of consumer behaviour in the e-commerce industry. The most favoured factor is trust, which scores the highest percentage and is significantly selected by all demographic variables. Meanwhile, brand image and advertising were selected as the least preferred social media factors influencing Gen Y purchase decisions. By comprehensively analysing various elements, including advertising, customer loyalty, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), trust and brand image, the study provides a nuanced understanding of the relative importance of these factors, recognising the critical role of trust and understanding the complex preferences of Generation Y. This allows stakeholders to adapt their approaches to successfully engage with the insights that will enable them to increase the success of their marketing activities and build substantive connections with consumers in the age of digitalisation.

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