

Social Network Marketing and its Influence on Online Purchase of Grocery Products during Covid-19 Pandemic: Mediating Role of Brand Awareness

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ABSTRACT

Digital technologies in the present day have witnessed phenomenal growth in the field of marketing and advertising of products. The online shopping is a relatively growing phenomenon, which is attracting a lot of attention in the present Covid-19 pandemic period. The influence of social networking sites (SNS) is being so widely discussed around the world and a number of studies have been on the use of SNS among consumers in India. Many grocery shoppers are concerned about exposing themselves to Covid-19 by going to stores and have chosen to buy groceries online by either stepping up the online delivery service or pickup services, or by trying for the first time. Several studies have primarily discussed how businesses communicate with consumers, but the gap in the study is whether social media can actually change consumers' knowledge of brands. The aim of this study is to analyze factors that influence the customer in adapting to social networks in order to increase brand awareness and intention to purchase food products online. The paper also examines the mediating role of brand awareness to the relationship of SNS and intention to purchase.

Keywords: Social media, Social network sites, Brand awareness, Digital technologies, Digital marketing

1. INTRODUCTION

Digital technologies in the present day have witnessed phenomenal growth in the field of marketing and advertising of products. Online shopping is a relatively new phenomenon that is attracting a lot of attention in research areas. Over the past decade there have been intense studies into the areas of online shopping, and most of them have tried to clarify, identify and understand factors that contribute to online shopping adaption. Indeed, much has been learned about online shopping and its dynamics by conducting these studies, although most of these studies have approached online shopping from different perspectives and avenues. The world today is surrounded by technology in particular, high technology; therefore, it is appropriate to understand how social network marketing can affect consumer purchase intention.

The influence of Social Networking Sites (SNS) is so widely discussed around the world and a number of studies have been carried out on the use of SNS among consumers in India. The internet impacts business innovation by expanding reach and minimizing the time-lag to market. Ever since declared by World Health Organisation a global pandemic of coronavirus (Covid-19) on 11th March, 2020, it has posed several problems before customers [1]. Worried about exposing themselves to Covid-19 by going into stores, many grocery shoppers have opted to make food purchases online, either by increasing their use of online grocery delivery or pickup service or trying it for the first time. Some of the companies are now quite established in using the collaboration and advocacy associated with social networks to promote and grow their business. The studies so far have mainly discussed how businesses communicate with consumers, but the gap in the study is whether social media can actually transform consumers' knowledge of brands. This study examines the role of the social media from the context of disseminating information and further influencing customers to purchase grocery products online. The use of social media during Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown of all economic activity has increased significantly. People began to use social media for different purposes, and so the research question arises as to whether or not consumers really attach importance to social media advertising when exploring food products. The study attempts to examine whether or not social media marketing actually influences consumer awareness and helps build online purchase intentions, and whether brand awareness mediates the relationship between social network marketing and online grocery purchase intent.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Social Network Sites and Consumer online Purchase Intention

Social networks have become an important digital marketing and advertising tool to motivate customers to buy online. Social network users in India have grown exponentially. Social media marketing has become an important topic for researchers. Many researchers have analyzed how it influences consumers' purchase intentions and suggested positive relationship between social media marketing and consumer buying intention and found that a large number of customers is using social media and suggested that business should invest more on social media marketing to ensure success through long term strategy rather than focusing on known application of social media [2-4]. The use of collaborative technologies such as blogs and Social Networking Sites (SNS) leads to instant online community in which people communicate rapidly and conveniently with each other. In addition, there is growing interest and concern about the topological structure of this new online social network. Nowadays Social Networking is growing rapidly all over the world India is one of the fastest growing markets for community networks. The basic aim of the research is to find out the growth of community networks or social networking websites in India. Social networks are achieved through the use of social media platforms that allow users to create accounts, share content, connect and interact with other users through the same websites [5]. The utility of the social network is somewhat determined by advertisers, who have the option of fully using and optimizing the advertising space and defining the advertising to meet the preferences of the customers.

Investigation on the role and effect of social media platforms on consumers' buying intentions and on user confidence in a global trade climate [6] finds that before making a purchase, people are constantly looking for feedback from their social media communities [7]. Consumers use social media to join community groups to consider perspectives of their peers and gain a better understanding of a good or service [8]. Social networking is becoming increasingly important in messaging, advertising, and collaboration, with the number of users growing rapidly year after year [9]. Customers who have a personal friendship with a brand share their experiences on social media with others and recommend the company's products or services to their colleagues through supportive word of mouth. Investigations on how social media posts influenced South African consumers' purchasing intentions to purchase automotive products finds that there is a clearly positive correlation between

brand attitudes and brand value that influences millennial's purchasing intention [10].

H₁: Social network marketing has significant impact on online purchase intention of grocery products.

2.2 Social Media and Brand Awareness

The social media is used as a reference for a wide range of internet and mobile based services that allows users to participate in online exchanges, contribute to user-created content or join online communities including blogs, wikis, social bookmarking, social networking sites and media-sharing sites [11]. Social media has flourished due to technological revolution and has become an innovative way of communicating between people. Most of the companies are using social media to promote their products and to establish communication with customers as they allows users to create their profiles, share information, interact and communicate with other users on the same websites [5, 12]. Many researchers believe that internet users uses social media and social network marketing has played an important role in creating brand awareness by improving customer interaction and promoting two-way communication [13-14]. Several studies also examined the influence of social media on the decision making process and found that majority of the respondents are familiar with social media technologies and Facebook was used the most [15-16]. The present study thus aims to close this literature gap.

H₂: Social Network marketing has positive influence on social media.

2.3 Brand Awareness and Buying Intention

The increasing use of social media sites has resulted in a significant change in the way consumers approach product awareness and intention to purchase grocery products online. Many researchers are of the opinion that brands are no longer just abstract descriptors, but rather exist as part of a social process [14-17]. Brand awareness and brand value are therefore linked to social interactions and reactions within social networks in which value as a part of social mechanisms becomes an element of exchange. Studies found that brand awareness is the basic and most important constraint in any brand related search [18]. It is the ability of a consumer to recognize and recall a brand in different situations. Brand awareness affects the decision-making of a consumer about a product. When a consumer is going to buy something, he considers a brand so. Despite the prevalence of constantly advancing social media mechanisms and the increasing use of technology, consumers still follow a consistent sequence of purchase decisions [14]. In deciding which product to purchase, "the buyer first gains insight and information about a product, then creates positive or negative feelings about the product, and then

behaves by purchasing and then using the product or refusing and ignoring the product”.

In a survey of 595 respondents, analysis on whether perceived innovation and brand awareness have a significant influence on the intention to buy innovative products, the results confirm that the innovation perceived by the consumer has a greater impact on purchase intent than just brand awareness [19]. Other studies examine the influence of brand awareness on consumer decision-making, suggesting that high brand awareness has several advantages in customer intent and the online purchase decision process [20-22]. On the other hand, several researchers are of negative opinion, suggesting that electronic advertising in the clothing industry has been ineffective and would not go beyond the step of awareness [23], these arguments lead to the following hypothesis.

H₃: Brand Awareness has positive influence on consumer online purchase intention toward grocery products

2.4 Mediation

Social network marketing is expected to have a positive direct impact on consumer purchase intention of grocery products. The spread of covid-19 pandemic has forced Companies and service providers have begun to research and investigate the usage and efficiency of digital communications (SNS) in order to improve their brand awareness and build consumer intention in their favour [24]. In order to survive in today’s intensely competitive market, firms need to be informed of the brand awareness of their consumers and devise up-to-date marketing and advertising strategies accordingly [25]. In this study, we expect that there is a positive indirect relationship between SNS advertisements and consumer purchase decisions through brand awareness towards grocery products on social media platforms.

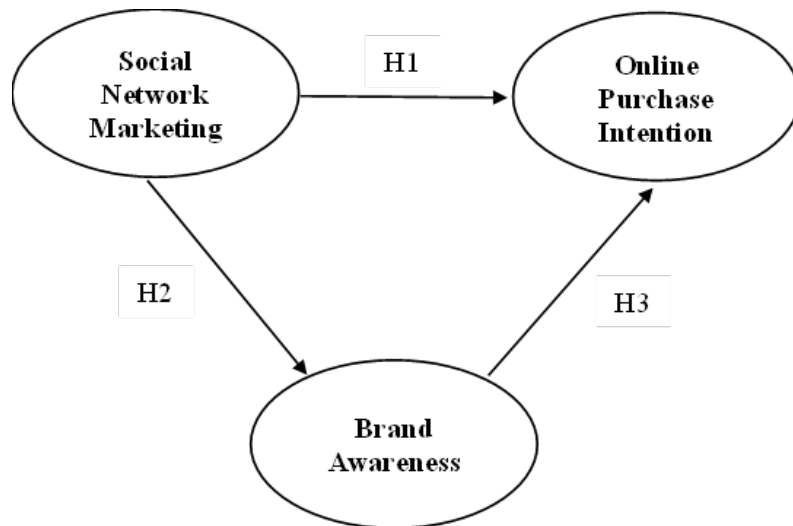


Figure 1. Conceptual model

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Present study is taken up with the following objectives:

- a. To analyze the factors influencing customers in adapting to social network sites for enhancing brand awareness and making intention to purchase online grocery products
- b. To assess the social network sites and its impact on brand awareness and consumer online purchase intention of grocery products
- c. To assess the mediating role of brand awareness in the relationship between social network sites adaption and online purchase intention of grocery products

4. METHODOLOGY

The current study employs a descriptive research design and the data is based on both primary and secondary data. The Covid-19 pandemic crisis has forced consumers to opt for online transactions in most of product categories that fall under everyday needs. Data for the current study were gathered from Indian consumers via an online survey created on Google forms and administered over a period of three month from Nov., 2020 to Jan., 2021. Likert scale was used, which is a well-known approach for measuring attitudes [26]. The primary goal of this study is to determine whether consumer positively adapt social network sites for gaining product information and building purchase intention online. The construct for the study were identified based on previous research works [27-30]. Brand awareness scale [31] and purchase intention

scale [32] was developed on the basis of previous works. Respondents were instructed to indicate their opinion on a five-point Likert scale based on their level of agreement with specific attributes (where 5 designated strongly agree and 1 designated strongly disagree). A panel of marketing and faculty members scrutinized the initial questionnaire by judging the content's validity, the clarity of its item meaning, and the linkages of identified variables with the research objectives. The questionnaire was pilot tested for reliability with 50 respondents, representing almost 10% of the total sample size, who were considered representative of the study population. Cronbach's alpha was found to be 0.963, indicating that the questionnaire had an acceptable level of reliability. Researchers received 493 responses, and after screening, 469 were found to be suitable for use in this study, excluding 24 responses that were incomplete or insincerely answered. The collected data was systematically organized, tabulated, and analyzed using SPSS 22.

5. RESULTS

The demographic characteristic of employees plays an important factor in affecting employee motivation to work from home during the Covid-19 pandemic. The demographic information as presented in Table 1 reveals that the sample is dominated by the respondents in the age group of 21-30 years by 167 (35.6%) respondents fall in this age group. Looking at the gender category of respondents, sample is the combination of males (56.7%) and females (43.3%). It is observed that 284 (60.6%) respondents are married while 173 (36.9%) are unmarried and remaining 2.6% respondents are from the divorced/separated category. Looking at the educational qualification of respondents, it is observed that sample is the combination of educated respondents as 71 (15.1%) respondents are having technical (diploma/degree etc.) or professional qualifications to their credit. 114 (24.3%) respondents are post graduates, 133 (28.4%) possess graduate degrees to their credit. Remaining 113 (24.1%) respondents are high school graduates. Looking at the profession of respondents, it is observed that 102 (21.7%) respondents are from students' class, 74 (15.8%) respondents are from business class respondents, 105 (22.4%) respondents are from service class, 123 (26.2%) respondents are from professional categories respondents and remaining 65 (13.9%) respondents are from homemaker categories respondents. This indicates that sample is the combination of diverse class of respondents representing all demographic segments.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N=469)

Demographic Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
Age	Less Than 20 Years	74	15.8
	21-30 Years	167	35.6
	31-40 Years	115	24.5
	41 to 50 Years	44	9.4
	50+60 Years	41	8.7
	More Than 60 Years	28	6.0
Gender	Male	266	56.7
	Female	203	43.3
Marital Status	Married	284	60.6
	Unmarried	173	36.9
	Divorce/ Separated	12	2.6
Educational Level	No formal education	38	8.1
	Up to High School level	113	24.1
	Up to Graduation	133	28.4
	Up to Post Graduation	114	24.3
	Technical degree / Diploma certificate	71	15.1
Profession	Student	102	21.7
	Business	74	15.8
	Service	105	22.4
	Professionals	123	26.2
	Homemaker	65	13.9

The information presented in table 2 indicates the customer preference of purchasing different categories of grocery item online in the Covid-19 pandemic period. The descriptive statistics presented in the table 2 indicates that prepared meals has scored highest mean of 4.28 followed by beverages products with mean 4.1791, processed foods ($m=4.0981$), medicines ($m=4.0704$), baked goods ($m=3.9424$), fresh frozen foods, and dry foods ($m=3.8635$), cleaning products ($m=3.7932$), consumable product under office supplies ($m=3.7271$) and cosmetics and toiletries ($m=3.3689$). High standard deviation of product like cosmetics and toiletries ($SD=1.19220$), consumable product under office supplies $SD=1.09687$ indicates that customer view of ordering such product online is heterogeneous.

Table 2. Consumer preference of purchasing grocery product online

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Processed foods	469	4.0981	0.77002
Prepared meals	469	4.2878	0.73980
Beverage products	469	4.1791	0.65201
Baked goods	469	3.9424	0.75028
Fresh, frozen foods, and dry foods	469	3.8635	0.84639
Medicines	469	4.0704	0.97476
Cleaning products	469	3.7932	0.77479
Cosmetics and toiletries	469	3.3689	1.19220
Consumable product under office supplies:	469	3.7271	1.09687
Valid N (listwise)	469		

Data summarized in table 3 indicates the descriptive statistics of factor of customer adaption of social network sites influencing customer to purchase grocery product online. The outcome of descriptive statistics indicates that customer has given highest rating to facilitating condition that has scored mean =4.1164 and standard Deviation d=0.63111. Reliability(α) of this factor was found to be 0.714, which is more than 0.600 and suitable for further statistical test. This is followed by social influence (α =0.736, m=4.0112 and SD=0.74626), effort expectancy (α =0.745, m=3.8918, SD+0.70665), performance expectancy (α =0.765, m=3.7326, SD=0.64429), hedonic motivation (α =0.679, m=3.7244, SD=0.99095). Looking at the measurement variable, it is observed that variable like “I find it easy to get necessary knowledge needed for online” has scored highest mean of 4.2516 with SD=0.80106. it is followed by variable like “People around me make me comfortable in using digital technologies needed for online shopping of grocery” with mean=4.2495 and SD=0.80039. Reliability (α) of all the factors was more than 0.600, which is considered to be sufficient for further statistical analysis.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of factors influencing customer adaption of online shopping of grocery products

	Mean	Std.
Performance Expectancy ($\alpha=0.765$)	3.7326	0.64429
I find social network sites very useful for transaction of	3.7846	0.64591
Using social network sites for ordering grocery products	3.8038	0.79790
Social network sites offer many benefits in online grocery	3.9531	0.87824
Contents shown on social networking sites of brands are	3.4499	1.31402
I can save time by using social network sites in process of	3.6716	1.00579
Effort Expectancy($\alpha=0.745$)	3.8918	0.70665
My interaction with social network sites is very clear and	3.6716	0.96679
It is easy for me to become skillful at using social	3.8380	0.87179
I often visit pages of brands I follow on social networking sites.	4.1258	0.85682
I believe that social network sites are very helpful in exploring	3.9318	0.89134
Social Influence($\alpha=0.736$)	4.0112	0.74626
Social networking sites of brands enable information sharing	4.2431	0.79567
People who influence my behavior think that I should use	4.1194	0.87133
People around me motivate me towards online shopping of	3.9019	0.93540
Grocery Brand social networking sites allow for conversation	3.7804	0.95226
Facilitating Condition($\alpha=0.714$)	4.1164	0.63111
I have the resources necessary to use the social network sites	3.8699	0.90708
I get required assistance from other in facilitating online	4.2644	0.79154
I find it easy to get necessary knowledge needed for online	4.2516	0.80106
People around me make me comfortable in using digital	4.2495	0.80039
It is easy to give my opinion and feedback on brands in social	3.9467	1.08571
Hedonic Motivation ($\alpha=0.679$)	3.7244	0.99095
Using social network sites for grocery products is fun.	3.7079	1.16482
I enjoy using social network sites for online shopping of	3.8955	1.01892
I feel very happy while online shopping of grocery items	3.5821	1.03784
I am satisfied with the social network regarding marketing	3.7122	1.12484
Valid N (listwise)		

Table 4 indicates the descriptive statistics related to brand awareness as rated by customers. It is observed that brand awareness attributes “I seek lot of information on social media sites to develop my intent in favor of online purchase of grocery product” has scored highest mean of 4.0810 with SD=0.90218. It is followed by attribute like “My product awareness become high if it is recommended in SNSs” with mean =4.0661 and SD =0.83070. Combined mean and standard deviation of brand awareness was found to be 3.7670 with SD=0.6673. Reliability (α) value of brand awareness was found to be 0.838, which is sufficient for further statistical analysis.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of Brand Awareness

	Mean	SD
Brand Awareness ($\alpha=0.683$)	3.7670	0.66730
The social media platforms are very interesting and informative for grocery product advertising. and brand awareness	3.9296	0.89237
I seek lot of information on social media sites to develop my intent in favour of online purchase of grocery product	4.0810	0.90218
I see the product review before online purchase of grocery product	3.4819	1.04503
I intend to purchase online those product that I recognize and seen on SNSs	3.9744	0.88638
I am able to recall grocery product that I have seen in SNS	3.7889	1.08220
I remember the brand often once I see it in SNS.	3.1130	1.32772
I feel familiar with grocery brand on social network sites	3.9979	0.84858
I easily describe the brand to a friend on SNSs which I intend to purchase online	3.7207	1.18250
My product awareness become high if it is recommended in SNSs	4.0661	0.83070

The information presented in Table 5 provides descriptive statistical values (mean and standard deviation) for various measures of measurement of consumer purchase intention. It is observed that attributes like “I intend to use digital technology in my daily routine order of grocery items” has scored highest mean of 4.0128 with SD=0.72194. it is followed by “Purchasing online grocery product has become a compulsion” with mean =4.1002 and SD=0.72544. Combined mean of all measurement item of consumers purchase intention was found to be 3.8414 and SD of 0.60672. Reliability (α) of this factor was found to be 0.683.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics of Online Purchase Intention

	Mean	SD
Online Purchase Intention ($\alpha=0.790$)	3.8414	0.60672
I am confident that the government can manage the overcrowding of religious places in the city.	3.5160	1.20640
I intend to purchase grocery products online in the coming years	3.6823	0.69440
Purchasing online grocery product has become a compulsion	4.1002	0.72544
I intend to use digital technology in my daily routine order of grocery items	4.0128	0.72194
I plan to continue to use social network sites of grocery products frequently in all types of transaction.	3.6823	0.71561
I intend to continue using social network sites in online shopping of grocery products in the future.	3.7292	0.85311

6. Testing of model

Regression analysis was carried out to measure the coefficients of the linear equation between factors and social network adaption on brand awareness of grocery products and online purchase intention. For calculating the Regression Coefficient, Combined Factor Mean (Performance Expectancy, Effort Expectancy, Social Influence, Facilitating Condition and Hedonic Motivation) were used in analyzing the construct 'Factors of consumer adaption of social network sites. Similar, combined mean of all measurement variable of Brand Awareness were calculated for assessing "Consumer Brand awareness" and combined d mean of five measurement variables of online purchase intention were calculated using SPSS software and then further regression analysis was carried out. Before carrying out regression, correlation analysis of all the factors and fear of stress was carried out. Table 6 indicates that there is a significant correlation between the variable.

Table 6. Correlations^b

			Adaption of Social Network Sites	Brand Awareness	Online Purchase Intention
Spearman's rho	Adaption of Social Network Sites	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	0.769**	0.869**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	0.000	0.000
	Brand Awareness	Correlation Coefficient	0.769**	1.000	.837**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	.	0.000
	Online Purchase Intention	Correlation Coefficient	0.869**	0.837**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	.

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

b. Listwise N = 469

Table 7 shows the results of the regression analysis. Analysis indicates that direct impact of Factors of Consumer Adaption of Social Media Sites on consumers' online purchase intention of grocery products were found significant ($F = 2216.88$, $P = 0.000$; $t=46.010$, $p=0.000$) and contributed 81.9% ($R^2 = 0.819$) to consumer online purchase intention of grocery products. The results showed that the beta values for factors of social network sites is 0.905 and it has significant effect on online purchase intention. Hence, the research hypothesis is accepted indicating the factors of adaption of social network sites have significant effect on consumers online purchase intention. Further regression analyses were carried out to measure the indirect impact of Factors of Consumer Adaption of Social Media Sites on consumers' online purchase intention via brand awareness. The regression outcome as presented in table 7 indicates that impact of Factors of Consumer Adaption of Social Media Sites on brand awareness of consumer was found significant ($F = 1063.19$, $P = 0.000$; $t=32.607$, $p=0.000$) and contributed 69.59% ($R^2 = 0.695$) to brand awareness. The results showed that the beta values for factors of adaption of social network site is 0.834 and it has significant effect on brand awareness. This shows the acceptance of second research hypothesis indicating that impact consumers' adaption of social network sites has significant influence on consumer brand awareness of grocery products. Further impact of consumer brand awareness on online purchase intention of grocery product was calculated and found significant ($F = 1478.19$, $P = 0.000$; $t= 38.453$, $p=.000$) and contributed 76% ($R^2 = 0.760$) to consumer online purchase of grocery products. The results showed that the beta value for brand awareness is 0.872 and it has significant effect on consumer online purchase intention and thus support the third hypothesis.

Table 7. Maximum Likelihood Estimates for Model (N = 469)

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Standardized Estimate(β)	Standard Error	t-statistic	R	R ²	F-value	p-value
FCASNS	COPI	0.905	0.020	46.010	0.909	0.819	2216.88	0.000
FCASNS	BA	0.834	0.028	32.607	0.834	0.695	1063.19	0.000
BA	COPI	0.872	0.021	38.453	0.834	0.760	1478.651	0.000

FCASNS = Factors of Consumer Adaption of Social Media Sites, COPI = Consumers Online Purchase Intention, BA = Brand Awareness.

6.1 Mediation Effect of Brand Awareness between the factors of consumer adaption of social network sites and online purchase intention

Table 8(A) and 8(B) revealed the results of Sobel test, Aroian test, and Goodman test that were conducted to evaluate the effect of mediating variable (brand awareness) of a given independent variable (factors for consumer adaption of social network sites) on a given dependent variable (online purchase intention of grocery products). In general, mediation may occur if: (1) the independent variable significantly affects the mediator; (2) the independent variable significantly affects the dependent variable in the absence of the mediator; (3) the mediator has a major unique effect on the dependent variable; and (4) the influence of the independent variable on the dependent variable shrinks when the mediator is applied to the model. Such principles can be used to informally determine whether mediation is taking place or not. Sobel test indicated that p-values is less than 0.05 assuming a two-tailed z-test is greater than 1.96 and hence research hypothesis is accepted and concluded that consumer brand awareness mediates the relationship between social network marketing and consumer purchase intention of grocery products.

Table 8(A). Influence of Mediating Variable using Sobel Test (A)

	Input		Test Statistics	Standard Error	P-Value
a	0.915	Sobel test	24.79005518	0.02949106	0.000
b	0.799	Aroian test	24.7851292	0.02949692	0.000
S _a	0.028	Goodman test	24.79498409	0.0294852	0.000
S _b	0.021				

Table 8(B). Influence of Mediating Variable using Sobel Test (B)

Input				
t_a	32.607	Sobel test	24.89875092	0.000
t_b	38.453	Aroian test	24.89386361	0.000
		Goodman test	24.90364111	0.000

7. DISCUSSION

This research examines the relationship between factors for adapting social network sites, brand awareness and online purchase intention of grocery product in the times of Covid-19 pandemic. The research outcome derived from this study explains that brand awareness plays an important role in enhancing consumer intention towards online purchase of grocery products. The role of brand awareness as mediator in this study also facilitates in explaining how marketers engage social network sites as a tool to increase consumer purchase intention of grocery item in the Covid-19 period when tradition market is forced to close and online markets are only made accessible to the consumers. In this study, social networking sites and their adaption were found to have a major impact on the brand recognition and online purchasing intention of grocery items in the Indian sense. The study found that Prepared meals, Beverage products, Processed foods and Medicines are some of the grocery products are most preferred online by customers in this age of pandemic. The results suggest that social networking sites can inspire and influence specific customers to create brand awareness and move them from traditional buying patterns to online buying patterns. In contrast to traditional marketing approaches, social network marketing as an ecosystem offers users an immersive forum that is used not only with people they meet, but also with complete strangers. Consumers discuss and share their information about their preferences in relation to certain goods and services offered by the respective companies through these interactions. It is expected that these experiences would have an effect on customers' purchasing intentions. The results of this study are supported by previous empirical work in Western countries [33-36], as well as in India [37], [38] and in Pakistan [39] and in Indonesia [40]. Unique platforms offered by social websites such as Facebook, WhatsApp, etc., tends to be able to create viral

effects and this can help to expose Indian consumers to certain products or services, thus, generating their positive attitudes towards purchase intentions. Following that, our second major contribution is how the relationship between SNS advertisements and consumer purchase decision occurred through the role of brand awareness. We found that brand awareness mediates the positive relationship between SNS and the food product purchase decision, suggesting that brand awareness plays a critical role in building and enhancing brands in SNS. This finding is in line with previous research by the researcher who found that brand awareness is an important element in creating and developing a brand on the SNS platform [41]. We also contributed to the literature on social media marketing by examining the level of awareness among consumers of grocery branded products through SNS platforms. We found that brand awareness mediates the relationship between advertising on social networking sites and consumers' purchase decisions, as brand awareness may be the primary relationship.

8. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND FUTURE SCOPE OF RESEARCH

The current study, like any other research, is not without limitations that must be considered in future studies. First, the main aim of this study was to examine the relationship between SNS advertisements and consumer purchase decision. Therefore, the main goal of any advertisement is the actual behavior of the consumer after seeing the advertisements on the social media platform. Future researchers are highly recommended in investigating the effect of SNS advertisings on actual buying behavior [36]. Second, our research model focused in the brand awareness as the main factor which could influence the relationship between SNS advertisement and consumer purchase decision. Therefore, future research could combine affective and cognitive factors such as online trust and emotional responses, which may mediate the relationship among the study constructs which can provide a more comprehensive picture of consumer behavior in responding to the brand advertisements in social media platform. In addition, we measured consumer purchase decision using the three short measures validated by [36] over the full measures of 36 developed by [42]. These three items may be not be reflective to the five stages of consumer purchase decision making processes (need recognition; searching for information; the evaluation of alternatives; purchasing; and post-purchasing) conceptualized [43]. Future research may supplement our measure of consumer purchase decision with the full measures of the five stages of consumer decision making processes. Further

studies, therefore, must build upon these limitations in order to attempt to provide further insights into the nature of the relationships between social networking sites advertisements, brand awareness, and consumer purchase decision. Finally, the main focus of this study was on high-involvement products only (i.e., apparel brands), more investigation is needed on other product categories such as high touch involvement products e.g., smart phone. Future research may provide a holistic picture of the nature of the relationship between SNS advertisements and consumer purchase decision by extending our research model.

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