

Digital Marketing Communication and Consumer Buying Decision Process in Pandemic Standpoint (COVID-19): An Empirical Study of Bangladeshi Customers' in Branded Cosmetics Perspective

Mamtaj Akter*, Nigar Sultana*#

Department of Marketing, Jahangirnagar University, Savar, Bangladesh
Email: #nigarsultana26@yahoo.com

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Abstract

The impact of digital buying during COVID-19 situation in Bangladesh creates a vast number of customers since staying at home availing products specially in aspects of branded cosmetics. A large number of customers really are ordering branded cosmetics through online in Bangladesh during pandemic (COVID-19). This study focuses the standpoint of digital marketing communication of branded cosmetics in Bangladeshi customers. The primary data was collected from Dhaka (Capital of Bangladesh) through online using convenient sampling and the sample size was 665. Chi-square along with hypothesis test was applied. The study reflects that digital channel of communication such as websites, social media, was used/ followed through smart phones or computers during this pandemic while buying branded cosmetics in Bangladesh specially at Dhaka city. In buying decision process, starts from need recognition to post purchase behaviour were affected enormously. The outcome of the result shows digital marketing communication could trigger on every stage of buying decision behaviour with high involvement in buying branded cosmetics. This study also showed that customers have positive feelings towards digital platforms during this pandemic (COVID-19).

Keywords

Digital Communication Channel, Customer Buying Stage, High Involvement Products, Pandemic (COVID-19)

*Mamtaj Akter: Assistant Professor, Nigar Sultana: Associate Professor.

1. Introduction

Digital marketing is described as the practice of promoting products and services using digital distribution channels through mobile computing, smartphones, or other digital devices (Taken Smith, 2012). It is defined by (Chen & Lin, 2019) as marketing activity, including branding, that uses various media like blogs, websites, e-mails, Ad words, and various social media networks. The use of digital marketing has brought about changes the way marketers communicate with consumers. Most consumers currently possess and use a variety of digital media such as computers, mobile devices, and social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp, YouTube, that contribute to the extraordinary progression of digital advertising expenditure (Yasmin, Tasneem, & Fatima, 2015). Owing to affordable smartphones, easy access to cheap data, the number of people across Bangladesh who have access to the internet has increased exponentially. This scenario has invoked companies to connect with their target customers, create brand awareness and sell their products or services; they can easily do it through online channels. Thus, cyberspace of the brand is indispensable, because people will do an online search before buying product. Digital tools empower consumers to compare prices and find the best value. According to Dahiya (2013), 81% respondents of customers admit before buying any product they do search & research online and it influences their buying decisions. Digital marketing is significantly involved in each stage of consumer buying decision making process including information search, brand awareness, buying behaviour and post-purchase communication and evaluation. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, people are inside their houses and spending more time online than ever before. Potential Market has been moved towards digital. The COVID-19 pandemic has deeply changed all aspects of life the way we used to know, think and live. Marketers, consumers are trying to cope up with this unthinkable new normal situation. Companies already have suffered massive loss and demanding to survive. The controlled lockdown and widespread fear of infection has shifted consumer consumers' attitudes, behaviours and spending habits as the pandemic progresses. Consumers now want on-demand products and services, whether it's food delivery, groceries, beauty and care products, fitness courses, telemedicine, conferencing, learning or entertainment. The closure of physical stores has enforced consumers to question their inherent shopping habits. People who had previously been hesitant to shop online are setting up online accounts and going through utterly a new customer ride. They are now appreciating such services and stating their satisfaction in the convenience of the platform. Brands are increasingly turning to a direct-to-consumer (D2C) business model through mobile and digital channels. Buying local trend is going faster as a factor that influences brand decisions is also affecting. Such shifting of consumer behaviour and business model will help the industry grow rapidly in the long run.

2. Literature Review

Online purchase played a significant role in each and every part of business in this pandemic situation. Digital technologies have been hugely used and created noteworthy impact in all the areas of business including product development, purchase and sales, branding, customer relationship management (CRM), and establishment of communication (Hudson, Roth, & Madden, 2012). Digital technologies have made the utmost impact on communication process in the business world; development of electronic devices and equipment, and flourishing of marketing practices have facilitated this impact (Chen & Lin, 2019). Marketing practices have stepped into their digital format. As it is defined, a marketing practice is known to be digital when digital medium is used to execute it (Yasmin, Tasneem, & Fatima, 2015). Similarly, a marketing communication turns digital when digital transmission technology is used to establish relationship between marketer and customers. Marketers use digital communication to set up a direct communication through digital transmission technologies with their customers (Bird, 2007). Internet, through its channels like websites, social media, e-mail, smartphones, online groups and communities etc., is overwhelmingly used in digital communication in the field of marketing; however, it does not necessarily mean that digital marketing communication is limited to this particular technology. Channels free of internet connection also greatly avail marketers an avenue to communicate with their customers (Chen & Lin, 2019). Offline digital platforms like TV, mobile phone is quite often used for the promotion of products and services along with the internet sites (Scharl, Dickinger, & Murphy, 2005; Pandey & Shukla, 2010).

Style of communication in different capabilities such as interaction, accessibility, customer engagement, customization, measurability, and dealing with large information sources, have been reshaped by digital technologies (Deighton, 1996; Merisavo et al., 2007; Salehi, Mirzaei, Aghaei, & Abyari, 2012; Edelman & Heller, 2015). Digital communication technology enables delivery of real-time and personalized offerings and contents to an individual service user. This has made marketers massively use digital marketing communication to communicate with their clients (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). Establishing interactive and targeted communication are the primary motives of marketers to use digital marketing communication (Merisavo et al., 2007). Gay, Charlesworth, & Esen (2007) have pointed out that digital marketing communication enables delivery of marketing messages with allure yet subtlety, and at the same time, makes sure customer satisfaction is not compromised. Because it enables enhanced customer experience with customization and personalization, digital medium of marketing communication has undoubtedly become more popular than the traditional format (Adam, Ibrahim, & Syahputra, 2020).

Business organizations around the world are now increasing their investment in digital marketing (Classen & Friedli, 2019). Winterberry Group confirmed the noticeable upsurge in digital spending and evidenced it with the findings from

an investigation they conducted in 2016 that there had been 6.4% increase in digital marketing compared to 3.3% increase in TV marketing and 2.6% increase in marketing via outdoor media. Investigation about expenditure in magazine and newspaper advertising revealed negative growth of almost 2% and 6% respectively. The interactive communicative capability created by digital channels, known as inbound marketing, has helped in the reduction of cost for the marketers in their effort to establish connection with customers and generate leads to a greater extent than traditional ways of marketing communication (Angelides, 1997) and at the same way evidenced the ineffectiveness of traditional marketing communication media by their annual research on inbound marketing which revealed that 45% of respondents do not open the direct mail from marketers, 85% swiftly skip TV adverts, 84% move away from a website saturated with adverts, and 91% cancel subscription from e-mails. It is also stated in the research that inbound marketing is 54% more effective in generating leads and 61% more cost effective than conventional outbound marketing.

As digital marketing has become a global practice, Bangladesh as a significantly growing economy in the world is not remaining behindhand in adopting this practice. The country now brims with spontaneous digital activities of both marketers and consumers and this phenomenon has been being noticed for the last decade. A significant portion of marketing investment by marketers is going on digital marketing at an increasing rate for various product categories among which cars, financial services like banking services and insurances, and fast-moving consumers good (FMCG) are at the top of the list (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). Likewise, consumers are showing their frequent involvement with the digital marketing activities by purchasing through digital channels, providing their likes and dislikes, ratings, feedbacks, opinions and recommendations, sharing information, revealing their favour for or affiliation with a particular brand, and directly engaging with marketers (Classen & Friedli, 2019). This revolutionary trend seems to flourish in the upcoming days as smartphone users and internet subscribers are increasing in number, expenditure on internet service is going up, digital barrier between rural and urban areas is being broken down, and government is providing their sufficient support towards digital economy (Jayaram, Manrai, & Manrai, 2015).

Each and every industry, whatever size or nature it is, or whatever type and category it belongs to, is affected by digital marketing (Kothari & Saxena, 2004; Ricciuti, 1995). Bangladeshi cosmetics industry is no exception to it. Favourable factors like large population, increasing purchase capability of people, and exporting opportunities have made Bangladeshi market more alluring and given stronger motivation to penetrate it. The country's cosmetics industry seems to be a rewarding segment and thus it is quite normal that it intrigues marketers and researchers. In fact, it is unconscionable to exclude Bangladeshi cosmetics industry from research and investigation as it holds a significant position in the list of biggest industries. People are frequently searching branded cosmetics online and buying branded cosmetics online predominantly, and their demand

for uninterrupted online buying process is increasing. In response to these, top branded cosmetics market players are investing their money at an increasing rate in digital platforms specially in this COVID 19 pandemic situation. All of these factors indicate the future immense potential of branded cosmetics market in Bangladesh and unsurprisingly encourage investigation into consumer dynamics in the country.

The predominance of digital media in influencing consumers' decision regarding various product categories is widely recognized across the world. There is evidence suggesting that participation from both sides in digital marketing communication is equally frequent. From one side, digital channel are making their efforts in influencing consumer buying decision. From the other side, consumers are exerting their influence through digital media by searching products and making their evaluation, choices, preference, reference, opinion, suggestion, rating, feedback, and recommendation in product categories like clothing and fashion products, books, accessories etc. (Kink & Hess, 2008). However, this evidence, especially, the real impact of digital marketing on total process of consumers' decision making, is yet to be proved by Bangladeshi researches. Researches taking Bangladeshi cosmetics industry as a case of study have focused on offline factors that influence buying decision in the branded cosmetics market. If put together findings from those studies, branded cosmetics price, recommendations and suggestions from family and friends, affordable financing abilities are the factors that influence consumers' purchase decision (Sudhahar & Venkatapathy, 2005). Overall, none of these studies have explored the impact of digital communication on customer buying decision in the Bangladeshi branded cosmetics market.

However, the research of Hutter, Hautz, Dennhardt and Füller (2013) is a particular study which asserted the fact of modern technologies imposing new challenges and at the same time creating opportunities for the marketers working in branded cosmetics market as digital communication is affecting customers' buying decision. Being said that, what outcome the use of digital technologies brings is still unverified, and this keeps marketers in the need of understanding exactly how technological usage in marketing communication can influence buying decision. Although research bodies including KPMG, GE, Accenture and others publish reports regarding digital media's effect on branded cosmetics buyers' purchase decision, these cannot satisfy a marketer who wants to know exactly how digital marketing communication its influence throughout the whole process has of buying decision of Bangladeshi customer. Hence, the influence of digital marketing of branded cosmetics on Bangladeshi buyers' purchase decision still remains in the list of further research.

Researches have presented the term "digital media" as a collective one, which is why a very few studies are found to investigate about which digital media channels consumers put in their preference while making their information search on cosmetics products. Although studies have been able to show the evidence of consumers finding product and service information mostly through

digital channels, how much these channels are able to induce a purchase action is still undetected. Hence, there remains a scope of researching on key parameters of branded cosmetics buyers consider throughout the whole process of their purchasing branded cosmetics. This study is aimed at working on these study gaps by conducting an empirical study.

Digital Marketing and Customer Behaviour:

There have been huge and significant changes in consumer behaviour in the world at present. Consumers are now more empowered and demanding in the digital environment with higher satisfaction (Racolta-Paina & Luca, 2010). Consumers who belong to “Generation X”, are now more rational minds, socially connected, and dynamic with agility, skills, and multi-tasking abilities in the virtual world (Schiffman, Kanuk, & Hansen, 2008). They are now flatter to use multiple devices at a time while making their purchase decision; this trend is attributed to advent of advanced technologies (Petit, Velasco, & Spence, 2019) and now it is obvious. Consumers are now during this pandemic doing their individual research and evaluation as well as purchase of products and services ranging from basic-need items like groceries, clothes, home appliances to luxury and big budget items like gadgets, insurance, automobiles and homes through online channels (Clemens, Matkovic, Faasse, & Geers, 2020). All these trends are attributed to smartphones and internet sites, especially social media sites, getting consumers involved with learning in an informative and intriguing way that motivates participation and indulgence regardless of product category (Alexa, Shayne, Robert, & Michael, 1996; Wertime & Fenwick, 2011).

Digital communication is creating an outlet for consumers to create content, share content, initiate a dialogue, and provide feedback online. Consumers are empowered by this unleashed opportunity to exert their power over marketing communications as they can avoid or choose and raise their demand for the contents (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004a). According to Labrecque, Esche, Mathwick, Novak and Hofacker (2013), there are four sources of power that make up consumer empowerment in digital world—demand, information, network building, and crowd-based influence. Marketers now obtain permission first before sending a digital marketing message to consumers which is designed with relevance to establish a meaningful engagement (Corniani, 2006). Consumers now have a great control over their own decision-making process. This has caused re-creation of value for them in the forms of enlightenment, entertainment, and utility (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004b). One study found that customer value rises from online searches when there is present a list of factors which includes better matching, increased awareness, time efficiency, transparency in pricing, people’s matches, problem solving, and entertainment (Bughin et al., 2011). The modern media is by nature social, as asserted by Pearson (2013), and it sufficiently meets the need for communication by affording cheap or no cost online exchange and conversation. Another significant and interesting issue, as added by the author, is that establishing an identity and connectivity in

digital media has become in some ways a basic need of people around the world.

In most of their purchase decisions, consumers recourse to the use of digital channels more than traditional channels (Kink & Hess, 2008). It is mainly because digital channels are cheap, easy to use and access, and quick in response (Bakos, 1997; Shapiro & Varian, 1999). More than three quartiles of the whole market population make an online search before buying a product (Srivastava, Srivastava, & Pai, 2014). Items which are mostly searched include electronic products while clothing products are the second most. Apart from these, books, personal care items, beauty products, home and furnishing items, healthcare products and services, and baby products have also their places among the product categories which are mostly found to be searched online.

Consumers' buying process usually starts from need recognition. Digital media's capability in stimulating this preliminary stage of buying process has been expressed in various opinions. For example, while studies of Jayawardhena, Wright, and Masterson (2003) disagreed to the effectiveness of digital media in stimulating the need recognition stage, researches of Hausman (2014), and Gross (2014) opined that the case is exactly opposite in the case of low-involvement product categories. And the study of Maklan, Knox, and Watson (2001) remained confused about the fact. However, digital channels, especially social media sites, affect the way consumers make information search. In line with this researcher, Hausman (2014) stated that customers information searching in various internet sites such as search engines, YouTube, websites, discussion forums, comparison websites and suchlike is more frequent than ever, which has caused a massive change in the digital arena. In addition to that, mobile phones are swiftly supplanting traditional channels of communication, and consumers are using mobile phones at an increasing rate to conduct their individual research before making a purchase.

In the world of internet, consumers' reviews are becoming an increasingly influential factor as 70% of consumers see the online reviews and count those reviews before making a purchase (Ludwig et al., 2013). Consumers have their reliance on online reviews mainly because the reviews are deemed to be neutral and unbiased (Mir & Rehman, 2013). In fact, reviews of other people online are so influential that they sometimes make consumers change their purchase decision (Giamanco & Gregoire, 2012; Funde & Mehta, 2014), and as found by one study, both positive and negative reviews can have this influence; positive reviews cause decisional change in 96% of the consumers and negative reviews cause change in 86% of consumers. As the study stated, positive reviews motivate to buy while negative reviews demotivate.

3. Access and Availabilities of Cheap/Affordable Electronic Devices and Internet Connection

The mobile industry in Bangladesh has climbed speedily over the last decade to become the fifth largest mobile market in Asia Pacific, with 85 million sole sub-

scribers in 2017 almost half the population. The number of mobile subscribers in Bangladesh reached 162.920 million at the end of April, according to data provided by the country's regulator, the Bangladesh Telecommunication and Regulatory Commission (Btrc.gov.bd. 2020). Subscriber means the biometric verified subscriptions who have any activity at least once in the preceding 90 days, assumed a press release of BTRC. The number of internet subscribers in the country raised at 103.476 million as of June 2020, the statistics of the telecom regulator showed. Internet subscriber means who have accessed the internet at least once in the preceding 90 days. Bangladesh with 161.4 million people, the growth has been sensibly sharp. According to (Btrc.gov.bd. 2020) data of the total subscribers, there were 94.905 million mobile internet users and 8.571 million broadband internet users in the country (Btrc.gov.bd. 2020). Earlier total internet subscribers in the country were 99.428 million until December 2019, the BTRC data further revealed. Bangladesh has observed an explosion in internet usage riding on the back of fast-growing mobile internet and the government's thrust for digitalization. The growing demand for smartphones has created prospects for local manufacturers to establish gainful businesses. Consumers who hunted affordability and effective value delivery started buying locally made handsets. Smartphone market in Bangladesh grew 45% year-on-year (YoY) during the first quarter of 2019 due to the advent of locally manufactured devices. Locally assembled devices are priced lower than that of the imported ones. The government has been making efforts to endorse local manufacturing. The local manufacturers can now take advantage of less cumulative tax rates than the imported handsets.

4. Impact of COVID-19 on Consumers

Any kind of pandemic was considered as unlikely event (Chiplunkar, Gowda, & Shivakumar, 2020) and it was already being come out from the research. Virtual meetings had been conducted even before this COVID 19 pandemic and digital communication channel was hassle-free and degree of freedom was also high. The usage pattern of consumers on their buying decisions had been changed and these changes might last even after the pandemic overs. Recent study reveals that respondents (46%) planned to reduce their spending during this pandemic (Coibion, Gorodnichenko, & Weber, 2020) and Spending pattern on emergency products such as groceries, household supplies had been increased (Coibion, Gorodnichenko, & Weber, 2020) and consumers tried to decrease the costs for luxury products but most of the shopping consumers are doing through digital channel communication in each and every step of buying decision behaviour. It is still in doubt buying goods or commodity via face to face or traditional channels since it is still health risking situations are around and consumers would prefer digital channel of communication till this Pandemic would over. Though this is a shock and alarming situation, consumers might prefer digital channel of communication till the end if they can afford.

5. Hypothesis of the Study

Most of the literatures provide that the online or digital channels only show digital communication channels (Kink & Hess, 2008), but did not show a particular digital channel. Also a few literatures denote that websites, smartphones and social media are significant used communication channel by customers, but ultimately still marketers are facing challenges to decide particular channel what has influence on consumer behaviour, that is why the first hypothesis for this research is:

H1: There is an exact digital channel preferred by customers while buying branded cosmetics.

Consumer buying decision process has a large effect on buying decision process by the consumers, but researchers ignored this specially while buying branded cosmetics. A customer does not follow or notice this process or sequence of consumer buying-decision process, but marketers should have to understand specially to understand buying intentions, actual purchase behaviour and loyalty of the customers. A few studies (Naik & Peters, 2009) showed that effect of digital marketing on consumer buying process while buying branded cosmetics only in Western context. So, it is necessary to understand it precisely and that is why, some additional hypotheses need to be discussed.

Digital channels cannot make any trigger in need recognition stage while buying low-involvement products though (Maklan, Knox, & Watson, 2001), so need stimulation for “branded cosmetics” which is still high involvement product should be a huge intrinsic in nature in Pandemic (COVID-19) situation and in relation to that the following hypothesis can be formulated:

H2: Digital platform of marketing communication for customers does not create any need to buy branded cosmetic in Pandemic (COVID-19) situation.

Customers always search internal and external sources of information while buying products specially in problem-solving category (Schiffman, Kanuk, & Kumar, 2010). Consumers look digital channels rather than traditional channels since digital channels are more interactive, quick and easily accessible (Kink & Hess, 2008) and this is also an obvious demand in this pandemic situation. This is how the following hypotheses might be formulated:

H3: Customers feel comfort digital channels rather than traditional channels looking for information on cosmetics products in Pandemic (COVID-19) situation.

Another hypothesis can be made as follows:

H4: Customers are very much positive on the characteristics of digital marketing communication while looking for information about products in Pandemic (COVID-19) situation.

Customers reviews through online affect in buying decision of consumers. Digital channels focus different types of effect on each stage of buying decision process and also some steps more than others (Maklan, Knox, & Watson, 2001). And for buying branded cosmetics in this Pandemic (COVID-19) situation,

consumers would explore maximum utilisation of digital channels in each and every evaluation stage. Thus, this led following hypothesis:

H5: Customers are influenced by online reviews by other customers while evaluating every dimensions of branded cosmetics in this Pandemic (COVID-19) situation.

H6: Evaluation might be a step of the consumer buying-decision process affected by digital marketing communication at the time of purchasing branded cosmetics Pandemic (COVID-19) situation.

It is revealed that searching from digital marketing might provide good information of branded cosmetics in Pandemic (COVID-19) situation and easy to find out as well. So, it can be hypothesized:

H7: Digital marketing communication helps to select branded cosmetics easily in Pandemic (COVID-19) situation.

It would be also hypothesized:

H8: Consumers does not book branded cosmetics from online Pandemic (COVID-19) situation.

A few literatures showed that customers used to provide post-purchase feedback and recommendations to disapproving brands in aspect of negative post-purchase experiences (Hausman, 2014). Branded cosmetics are mostly self-expressive products, so these require social approval basically boost up the confidence of the customers and reducing the post-purchase dissonance (Aaker, & McLoughlin, 2009). And branded customers would like to share after sales experiences digitally and at the same time researchers find a hypothesis:

H9: Consumers like to focus their post-purchase experience digitally.

6. Methodology

There is a huge research gap for the current study and that is why mixed research methodology was taken here. Mixed research methodology is better than pure qualitative and pure quantitative research especially while researcher wants to develop the theory. Usually mixed research methodology provides a balanced and informative research outcome (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007).

Literature provides that important features of digital marketing communication are the most preferred channel of communication both for customers and marketers. Five (5) points Likert scale were referred. When a researcher is interested to know the proportion instead of mean value of the population, in that situation population proportion approach is appropriate to find out the sample size (Malhotra & Dash, 2012). Use of population proportion approach is appropriate while objectives of the research are clearly defined and since this study shows impact of digital marketing communication across urban and semi-urban locations across different types of populations such as different income groups, different educational groups, different occupations above all it is a composition of different respondents groups who use digital channel of communication.

This approach identifies the confidence level (z), error margin (d) and pro-

portions (p and q), and the equation is:

$$n = p \times q \times \frac{z^2}{D^2} = 0.5 \times 0.5 \times \frac{1.96^2}{0.038^2} = 0.25 \times \frac{3.8416}{0.001444} = 0.25 \times 2660.38781 = 665$$

In this study, z value is 95% and its table value is ± 1.96 , this is most commonly used alpha level. Margin of error (d) is 3.8% or it can state as 0.038, normal range of margin of error taken for educational research study is between 3% to 5%. P value referred as 0.5. After that calculation, the sample size would be 665.

The target population is segmented mutually exclusive such as sub-groups called clusters. The capital of Bangladesh; Dhaka was taken as sample area and this might be the limitations of this research.

The location of data collection has been chosen conveniently here. The sample was conveniently picked up here as well through online platform. Data were gathered from 665 respondents; actual and potential buyers from Dhaka City (**Table 1**).

This research is empirical in nature what derives on the basis of actual experience rather than theoretical beliefs. Empirical study basically finds the observed result and then drives a conclusion based on primary data. The theory was brought from secondary sources of data such as books, journals. Primary data were collected from actual and potential buyers of branded cosmetics products through survey (structured questionnaire). Online modes were used to collect the primary data (**Table 2**).

Preferable Digital Channel:

Digital channel is a significant preferred communication and it is a very good communication platform as an alternative of traditional communication platform.

Table 3 is showing area (Dhaka city) wise samples and respective preferred medium of digital channel and traditional channel of buying branded cosmetics during COVID-19 pandemic situation. The outcome clearly shows that 75% of the customers follow digital channel of communication whereas 25% customers still rely on traditional channel of communication (**Table 4**).

Table 1. Location (Dhaka City) based sample.

| SL No | Locations | Population approximately | % Total population (Approximately) | Determination of Sample |
|-------|----------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 | Mirpur | 4,676,549 | 23.00 | 168 |
| 2 | Dhanmondi | 3,731,929 | 18.06 | 117 |
| 3 | Uttara | 3,553,243 | 17.01 | 114 |
| 4 | Old Dhaka | 3,341,624 | 16.88 | 101 |
| 5 | Shantinagar/Malibagh | 1,809,346 | 15.00 | 109 |
| 6 | Banasree/Rampura | 1,009,978 | 10.05 | 56 |
| Total | | | 100 | 665 |

Source: Authors' analysis.

Table 2. Significant sources of questionnaire.

| <u>Different stages of consumer buying decision</u> | <u>Content of the Questions</u> | <u>References of the content</u> |
|---|---|----------------------------------|
| Consumer need identification or need recognition | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Introduction of digital marketing buying branded cosmetics | Hausman (2014); Gross (2014) |
| Collecting information regarding object | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fundamental searching activities on digital channel ▪ Digital marketing helps to reduce time of visiting stores of buying objects and significant information is available ▪ Availing the access of digital marketing is much easier | Nguyen, H. T. (2014) |
| Comparing the object with other alternative objects | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Digital channel provides expert advices ▪ Digital marketing helps giving experts' opinion ▪ Digital channel focuses more consensus outcome ▪ Comparing tools or dimensions are available in online | (Xhema, 2019) |
| Purchase decision | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Availability and easy choose ▪ Easy selection ▪ Easy to read the reviews of the existing or new customers ▪ Easy payment system & feedback ▪ Brand decision might change & return policies are strong and proactive | (Sharma and Klein, 2020) |
| Post-purchase behaviour | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Complain & suggestions are in proactive manner ▪ Feedback on satisfaction and dissatisfaction might play a great role in future or current decision making ▪ Suggesting to other friends would be easy and good platforms as well | Nguyen, H. T. (2014) |

Source: Authors' analysis.

Table 3. Respondents' preferred outcome on digital channel & traditional channel.

| Area in between Dhaka City | Determined Sample | Preferred medium (Digital channel during Covit-19 Pandemic) | Preferred medium (Traditional channel during Covit-19 Pandemic) |
|----------------------------|-------------------|---|---|
| Mirpur | 168 | 118 | 50 |
| Dhanmondi | 117 | 87 | 30 |
| Uttara | 114 | 86 | 28 |
| Old Dhaka | 101 | 91 | 10 |
| Shantinagar/Malibagh | 109 | 74 | 35 |
| Banasree/Rampura | 56 | 43 | 13 |
| Total Samples | 665 (100%) | 499 (75%) | 166 (25%) |

Source: Authors' analysis.

Table 4. Statistics for sources of information on Digital channel.

| Channel | Test | Significance | Decision |
|------------|-----------------|--------------|------------------------|
| You Tube | | 0.000 | Reject Null Hypothesis |
| Phone | | 0.000 | Reject Null Hypothesis |
| Online | | 0.000 | Reject Null Hypothesis |
| Television | One-Sample Test | 0.000 | Reject Null Hypothesis |
| E-mails | | 0.000 | Reject Null Hypothesis |
| Websites | | 0.000 | Reject Null Hypothesis |
| SNS | | 0.022 | Reject Null Hypothesis |

Source: Authors' analysis.

This research hypothesized and showed that there is a significant preference of particular digital channels of communication for branded cosmetics products and significant value of 0.000 for digital channels reflected that customers or respondents used to use all the digital channels indifferently, so, thus the hypothesis H1 would be accepted.

Influence on Consumer Buying Decision Process:

Digital marketing communication influenced strongly on consumer buying decision process (Gay, Charlesworth, & Esen, 2007). This research hypothesized that digital marketing communication influence the entire buying-decision process. If statistics shows the significant positive effects, it will reflect the significant association with every stage of buying decision process. Statistical result shows the association higher than average since the descriptive results focus the average value more than (3) in each stage of buying decision process (Table 5).

Digital marketing communication influence the respondents at the initial stage of consumer buying decision process as per the statistics outcome for branded cosmetics product in Pandemic (COVID-19) situation. Interestingly, respondents stated that they use to focus on digital channels rather than traditional channels while they think of purchasing branded cosmetics in this Pandemic (COVID-19) situation.

The Chi-Square test value of 203.776 with 0.000 sig that leads the acceptance of hypothesis H3 where saying customers focus digital channels more than traditional channels at searching for information of branded cosmetics. The study also finds the reasons such as informative, interactive and flexibility of using digital communication. These reasons accounted for the increase of focusing digital channels and another believe came from respondents that customers most likely avoid traditional channel due to save time and energy while buying branded cosmetics products.

Respondents (75%) uttered that evaluation of branded cosmetics is much easier through digital channel since they might gain feedback easily from existing customers. This sort of information is available. Respondents also believe their positive vibes of branded cosmetics usually come from positive reviews mostly. The respondents underline consensus of customers' recommendations rather

than manufacturer of branded cosmetics usually. Respondents accepted that digital marketing helps them to select the convenient dealers for branded cosmetics. Respondents (80%) happy to join digital channel forums, blogs and social media where they find analysis and discussions on branded cosmetics specially in this Pandemic (COVID-19) situation. Special offers, instruction for usage and so on are easily accessible at digital media according to respondents. Changing pattern of buying branded cosmetics might come while searching for information through digital channel given by the respondents. A few respondents also showed their distrustfulness while they searched information such as misinformation, buying conditions etc. Another interesting thing is that respondents are very much positive to provide feedback after purchasing branded cosmetics. But in a nutshell, it would say that respondents consider searching and going through consumer buying decision by digital channels are wise.

This research study conducted inferential analysis and normality tests as well. But the data were not found in normal distribution level and that is why One Sample rank test at 5% level of significance used.

Table 5. Statistics for consumer buying decision process.

| Buying decision stage | Mean | Standard Deviation | Test | Significant | Accepted or rejected of Null Hypothesis |
|--|------|--------------------|---------------------------|-------------|---|
| Stage ONE: Need evaluation & recognition | 3.17 | 1.112 | One sample rank test | 0.00 | Null Hypothesis rejection |
| | 3.16 | 0.950 | | | |
| | 3.68 | 0.971 | | | |
| | 3.89 | 0.990 | | | |
| Stage TWO: Search information | 3.94 | 1.017 | | | Null Hypothesis rejection |
| | 3.90 | 0.918 | | | |
| | 3.89 | 0.929 | | | |
| | 3.79 | 0.939 | | | |
| | 3.73 | 1.101 | | | |
| Stage THREE: Alternative search option | 3.63 | 0.945 | | | Null Hypothesis rejection |
| | 3.82 | .924 | | | |
| | 3.81 | 0.955 | | | |
| | 3.67 | 1.006 | | | |
| | 4.00 | 0.924 | | | |
| | 3.44 | 1.154 | | | |
| Stage FOUR: Purchase | 3.56 | 1.007 | | | Null Hypothesis rejection |
| | 4.12 | 0.858 | | | |
| | 4.07 | 0.872 | | | |
| | 4.06 | 0.901 | | | |
| | 3.70 | 0.878 | | | |
| | 3.06 | 1.114 | | | |
| Stage FIVE: post-purchase | 3.48 | 0.955 | Null Hypothesis rejection | | |
| | 3.22 | 1.142 | | | |
| | 3.67 | 0.956 | | | |
| | 3.85 | 0.934 | | | |
| | 3.29 | 1.109 | | | Null Hypothesis rejection |
| | 3.97 | 0.862 | | | |

Source: Authors' analysis.

The significant p value of 0.000 indicated that digital marketing communication reflected a good amount of effect on entire consumer buying-decision process. The findings of this study agreed with outcomes of the studies such as Hausman (2014) who provided that digital channels such as cell phones, social media and websites have abilities to arouse need understanding step of the consumer buying-decision process specially for high-involvement products. Branded cosmetics could consider as high involvement products. The results of this study clearly shows that digital marketing communication has the abilities of stimulating or making recognition and awareness for buying branded cosmetics and at the same time the outcomes of the study led to the acceptances of different hypotheses such as H3, H4, H5, H6, H7, and H9. But H8 did not accept, it was rejected since respondents found that customers use to order, or book branded cosmetics from digital channels.

7. Application of Theories along with the Research Findings

This study has the contribution on relatively digital economy gaining global context in this Pandemic (COVID-19) situation. South Asian culture is high context and collectivist culture where in customers use to rely on non-verbal communication. Though digital marketing channel still captures only approximately 10% budget of any fiscal year in these types of countries. Though Bangladesh has fairly indigenous characteristics (diversified cultures and segmented demographics, lack of literacy, bottleneck infrastructure facilities, lack of privacy), the usage of digital channel communication is developing in its way gradually specially in this pandemic (COVID-19) situation. Now customers are mostly going through digital channel activities while buying any high involvement products such as branded cosmetics.

This research extends the degree of global theory focusing its application in high context collectivism Bangladeshi culture. The result of this research might provide the demographic aspects of the country where young people included with internet enabled mobile devices and it also upraises the country. Bangladeshi customers feel more attractive while they can access information on branded cosmetics with reviews of previous customers without spending time and traffic hassle as well as the scaring situation of this pandemic (COVID-19) at Dhaka city instead of traditional face to face communication channels. This research develops the existing global digital theory in the contexts of proliferation of low-cost digital devices, individual skills what reflect successful application of different digital marketing communication. This research can motivate future researchers as in finding out the factors of successful digital communication in same cultural context. Thus, it may contribute to global theories in buying decision making subject to convenient technology usage based.

The outcome of this research infers that customers in Bangladesh understood the benefits of digital communication very much specially on this kind of high involvement products such as branded cosmetics and they almost flexible of us-

ing technological aspects of digital channel of communication. So, this outcome may contribute to the theory of global digital theory as in high-involvement products, customer buying decision process subject to technology-based purchase stage.

8. Research Outcomes for Marketing Managers of Branded Cosmetics Specially in Pandemic (COVID-19) Situation

According to the outcome of the study, the marketing managers of branded products can boost up the confidence of strategies in digital communication channel. And marketers also would know the synergistic influence of traditional and digital channels of communication for selling branded cosmetics products. Marketers may focus their branded cosmetics products appropriately through traditional and digital channels in integrated way. Thus, customers would get the benefits of consistent experiences in both ways. Earlier research could not provide most preferred channel used for buying branded cosmetics product (high-involvement products) while the result of this research provides a coherent way of digital channel communication. The result provides that it could be the most-used channel of communication while buying branded cosmetics. And managers might receive adequate return on investment since advertising costs are accounted while considering profit and ROI as well. But managers need to consider effectively the SEO (Search engine optimization) what would help customers finding out the websites in a deliberate way. Branded cosmetics marketers should keep their websites in sophisticated ways as if customers would use their convenient devices such as TV, laptops, desktops, mobile phones and so on easily.

The content of the websites should be informative, appealing, flexible, relevant and interesting. These facilities would help customers to make their wise decisions in aspect of choosing digital channel of buying decision. Digital channel preferred customers prefer dialogue rather than monologue, so marketers may apply this strategy. Now-a-days customers want to be loved and excited with promotional efforts from marketers or sellers. In this aspect, marketers may create social networking quizzes, games or contests what would resemble the customers a new dimension of thought.

There is no adequate way of describing digital communication channel strategy and it varies industry to industry and also customers to customers in this COVID-19 situation. If anyone starts a business but ignoring the digital marketing communication channel reflects opening business in a disguised way (Vadhwani, 2020). According Vadhwani (2020), the marketers need to invest on advertisements choosing the right platforms, need to build brand psychology on different social media. And due to lockdown & pandemic situation, customers' behaviour drastically changes, and marketers need to find out right match through digital marketing communication channel. This research already shows that customers are already adopted with digital marketing communication

channel and that indicates the sustainability of digital marketing channel communication in aspects of branded cosmetics consumption.

9. Limitation of the Study

Potential limitation of this study is the representativeness of the data. Bangladeshi consumer market is demographically large. The study is focused only particular areas of the capital of Bangladesh; hence the result may differ with the demographic characteristics of the sample.

10. Conclusion Laterally Future Research Opportunities

Digital marketing channel performs an attractive role selling and buying products in each and every stage of buying decision behaviour of the consumers of Bangladesh. Since only Dhaka city was explored and researched, near future rest of the geographic areas or locations of Bangladesh would do explore or would consider as sample collection area and at the same way other commodities might consider as research objects. Thus, future research would focus on different locations and different products phenomenon of Bangladesh and would show a sophisticated milestone of digital channel communication and marketing specially during any kind of pandemic situation similar to COVID-19 issue/situation.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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