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Communication Consistency Across Digital Touchpoints And Its Impact On Purchase Intention

Dr. Nidhi Bhatnagar
Assistant Professor, English, Department of Humanities and Applied Science, Engineering College, Jhalawar

Abstract: *Expanding the digital platforms has altered the nature of the interaction between the brand and the consumer and made consistency in communication across the various digital touch points very significant. This study has analysed how communication consistency influences brand trust and consequently the purchase intention. Based on the Integrated Marketing communications theory, signalling theory and commitment-trust theory, the study formulated a parsimonious model whereby communication consistency increases the brand trust that then leads to the purchase intention increase. Here, a cross-sectional survey was carried out, although quantitative, in a sample of 198 consumers who had addressed a brand using at least two digital channels before making a purchase decision. The analyses were performed on data with descriptive statistics, analysis of reliability, correlation analysis, and simple linear regression. The results obtained showed that there was high consistency in communication in terms of effects, and that the brand trust was consistently predicted by the purchase intention. The findings emphasise the strategic importance of congruent messaging in the digital platforms in its effort to build consumer trust and purchase behaviour. The study makes a contribution to the digital marketing and omnichannel literature by elucidating the psychological process of connecting the communication strategy to the behavioural intention with the help of trust. Managerially, it can be implied that the initial step of organizations should be the alignment of the messages in the digital channels to boost consumer confidence and enhance marketing effectiveness.*

Keywords: *Brand trust; Communication consistency; Consumer confidence; Digital marketing; Digital touchpoints; Integrated marketing communications; Omnichannel; Purchase intention; Signalling theory.*

INTRODUCTION

The swift growth of the digital technologies has radically changed the way the brands are communicating with customers. The current consumer reaches the brand on various digital platforms, such as corporate websites, social media, mobile apps, email marketing, and online marketplaces. This has expanded the channels which have offered more opportunities to the marketers as well as challenges. Although digital platforms allow a more interactive level of interaction as well as a customized communication option, it also increases the potential of fragmented messages and inconsistent branding. With rising competitive pressures and information saturation in digital touchpoints, sustaining a consistent communication effort in digital touchpoints has become a strategic focus in companies that aim to affect the decision-making process of consumers.

The change in multichannel to omnichannel settings only enhances the condition of the relevance of the coordinated communication. Omnichannel strategies are considered in opposition to traditional multichannel strategies; they require a smooth integration process and fulfil a unified customer experience across platforms (Verhoeff et al., 2015). Consumers are very easily moving across channels in their decision-making model and are engaging with brands at different pre-purchase and evaluation points (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Study of customer experience indicates that end users search and assess brands in a holistic manner, combining signals found in several interactions into a single perception (Klaus and Maklan, 2013). As a result, any discrepancies between brand communication on digital touchpoints can interfere with continuity of experience, perceived professionalism, and encourage consumer doubt.

The theory of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) helps to understand that communication consistency is important. IMC focuses on aligning messages and media to provide trend, coherence, and synergy (Porcu et al., 2017). The empirical data indicates that the combination of messages reinforces brand meaning and promotes marketing performance (Batra and Keller, 2016). The coherence of communication is especially conspicuous in digital ecosystems where consumers actively compare information through channels. Regular communication indicates organizational stability and leads to less ambiguity therefore enhancing favourable brand perception.

Theoretically, the phenomenon of signalling theory would be helpful in explaining the potential impact of consistency upon consumer responses. Repeated and consistent information is used to communicate and signal quality, reliability, and values to customers through touchpoints (Erdem & Swait, 2004). Consistent signals increase perceived credibility and decrease the uncertainty in decision-making. On the other hand, unpredictable signals can cause confusion or mistrust and discredit the brand. These credibility signals are particularly important in online settings that have information asymmetry and risk perceptions (Gefen et al., 2003).

As the focal point bridging communication practices and behavioural outcome, trust appears. Trust lowers the perceived risk, eases the exchange relationships and enhances the desire of the consumers to take part in the transaction (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Trust is especially important in digital settings as in this case, consumers do not have direct physical contact with product or firm (Gefen et al., 2003). Previous studies show that brand trust has a positive relationship with purchase intention and loyalty performance (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). Furthermore, the recent studies on the omnichannel indicates that seamless and integrated experiences increase the perception of trust, which consequently leads to behavioural intentions (Shen et al., 2018; Sombultawee and Wattanatorn, 2022).

Purchase intention, which can be described as a tendency of a consumer to purchase a product or service, is one of the most popular measures of marketing efficiency (Dodds et al., 1991). It is an indication that the consumer is willing to have a transaction at some stage in future and it is highly affected by attitudinal constructs like perceived value, credibility, and trust. Trust plays the decisive role in forming intentions in complex digital ecosystems, in which consumers see a brand several times before deciding on a purchase.

Although much has been done to investigate the effectiveness of IMC and omnichannel integration, brand trust, there has been minimal focus on perceived consistency of communication across digital touchpoints as the direct antecedent of trust and following purchase intention. Available research tends to either concentrate on channel integration, service quality, or customer experience dimension, and not actually address the aspect of consistency of brand messaging. Considering that digital media environments are growing more and more fragmented, it is both theoretically and managerially important to comprehend the role of consistent communication in the creation of trust and purchase intention.

In this regard, the proposed study will investigate how the presence of consistency in communication channels within digital touchpoints affects brand trust, and consequently, purchase intention. This study will present a parsimonious model that will be built on IMC theory, signalling theory, and commitment-trust theory by suggesting that consistency of communication increases brand trust, which ultimately drives purchase intention. The study can add to the body of literature, as it explains a psychological process between digital communication strategy and consumer behavioural intentions based on a simplified and theoretically-supported framework.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The fast growth of digital environment has changed the way brands communicate to customers and introduced a variety of touchpoints in the form of websites, social networks, mobile apps, and email campaigns. This has created a strong motive towards communication uniformity among channels.

Integrated Marketing communications (IMC) theory focuses on the strategic alignment of the brand messages to ensure there is a sense of clarity, coherence and a sense of synergy on the communication media (Porcu et al., 2017). Coherence minimizes fragmentation of the message and reinforces brand meaning by bringing about a coherent value proposition (Batra and Keller, 2016). In online spaces, where consumers experience the brand touch at many points of interaction, the ineffective delivery of messaging can lead to cognitive dissonance and diminished credibility, whereas the balanced delivery of messaging can boost the message processing fluency and positive appraisal.

On the customer journey lens, people experience brands within an interdependent and cumulative presence of touchpoints instead of a remote touchpoint. According to Lemon and Verhoff (2016), the experience the customer will have is formed by the sum of ordinary interactions across channels, and congruency among the touchpoints is especially important in the conception. Likewise, the studies of omnichannel retailing imply that the channel integration and cross-channel consistency help to intensify the attitude of the consumers towards the brand reliability and professionalism (Verhoef et al., 2015). By maintaining consistency in communication between platforms, consumers would feel that the brand is more consistent and faithful, which supports the relational outcomes.

The mediation process is very important as brand trust is used in this process. The commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing contends that trust is a key clue in the long-run resultant relational exchange and conduct of relationships (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Trust also leads to perceived risk and uncertainty especially in the context of digital communication where there might be information asymmetry. Based on empirical studies, brand trust has a strong impact on the attitudinal and behavioural loyalty outcomes which include purchase intention (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). Consistent communication can be perceived in the digital and omnichannel channel as a credibility range that strengthens the consumer trust in the reliability and integrity of the brand.

The signalling theory also describes this process. The symbolic messages in touchpoints are consistency as brands convey the message of quality and reliability (Erdem & Swait, 2004). Coherent and aligned communication cues enhance perceived credibility and minimise uncertainty in consumer action. On the other hand, mixed messages can create disorientations and undermine brand judgments. The signalling view can therefore give theoretical support to the positive association between the same of communication consistency and brand trust.

Attitudinal constructs like perceived value and trust are already associated with purchase intention which refers probability that a consumer will make a purchase of a good or a service (Dodds et al., 1991). Trust increases the readiness of the consumers to enter into the transaction by reducing the perceived risk and promoting confidence in the expected results. Chaudhuri and holbrook (2001) proved that behaviour intentions and brand performance measures depend on brand trust directly. Empirical study in the context of omnichannel has also found that trust enhances consumer purchase intentions and confidence of their decision-making (Sombultawee and Wattanatorn, 2022).

The literature as a whole indicates a progressive connection between the consistency of communication on the various digital touchpoints and brand trust, which subsequently leads to increased purchase intention. Although previous studies have investigated the efficacy of IMC and the integration of the omnichannel in separation, fewer researches have specifically addressed the topic of perceived communication coherence as the outcome of the trust in the purchase intention on the digital ecosystems. Thus, in this study, IMC theory, signalling theory, and commitment-trust theory are combined to develop a parsimonious model that investigates how communication consistency influences the brand trust and the intention to purchase.

METHODOLOGY

The study used quantitative cross-sectional research design to study the relationships that existed between the consistency of communication among digital touchpoints, brand trust, and purchase intention. A survey in a structured online form was completed on consumers that had engaged with a brand using at least two digital platforms (e.g., site, social media, mobile application, or email) before reaching a purchase decision. There was a screening question to make sure the respondents possessed relevant omnichannel experience. The means of data collection was a non-probability convenience sampling method, which is very popular in marketing research when a detailed sampling frame is not available to the researcher (Malhotra, 2020). It was voluntary and anonymous and the respondents were told that the study was done as academic work. The total number of responses received was 224 with 198 responses being considered usable after the elimination of incomplete and patterned responses. This was deemed sufficient to do regression analysis, as this is one of the recommended models with a relatively few predictors (Hair et al., 2019). The measures of all constructs were done based on the earlier-validated scales borrowed on the literature to achieve content validity. Three items that were based on Batra and Keller (2016) and Porcu et al. (2017) were used to measure the consistency of communication, including an evaluation of the perceived alignment and coherence of brand messaging with regard to digital platforms. The brand trust was gauged on three Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) modified items, which included a perception of reliability, and trustworthiness. Three questions that have been modified to measure purchase intention to measure the likelihood of future purchase behaviour exhibited by a person were used to assess purchase intention. All items were rated on the basis of five-point Likert scale (1 strongly disagree) to 5 strongly agree). Academic researchers in the area of marketing reviewed the questionnaire ahead of its collection in terms of clarity and face validity. The analysis of the data was done through IBM SPSS Statistics. Descriptive statistics were initially calculated to profile the characteristics of respondents and distribution of the variables. The levels of reliability were measured utilizing alpha Cronbach, and the figures of 0.70 are recognized as the acceptable thresholds of internal consistency (Hair et al., 2019). Pearson correlation analysis was then done to analyse relationships between variables. Lastly, the proposed relationships were tested through 2 simple linear regression analyses where first they were tested to assess the effect of the consistency of communications on brand trust and then the second one was conducted to determine whether there were any effects of brand trust on the purchase intention. The analysis of statistical significance was at the 0.05 level.

Following are the hypotheses for the study:

H1: Communication consistency across digital touchpoints positively influenced brand trust.

H2: Brand trust positively influenced purchase intention.

Analysis

IBM SPSS statistics were used in analysis of data. The examination was carried out in four steps; descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, correlation analysis, hypothesis test using regression test. The level of statistical significance was checked at the 0.05 level.

Descriptive Statistics

It was done so to calculate the descriptive statistics of the variables that help to analyse the central tendency and dispersion of the variables under investigation. Table 1 shows the average and standard errors of communication consistency, brand trust and the purchase intention.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables (N = 198)

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Communication Consistency	3.84	0.71
Brand Trust	3.76	0.74
Purchase Intention	3.81	0.77

As it is observed in Table 1, respondents gave moderately high ratings on perceptions of communication consistency (M = 3.84, SD = 0.71), brand trust (M = 3.76, SD = 0.74) and purchase intention ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 0.77$). The standard deviations were somewhat average, which showed that the responses did not have extreme dispersion.

RELIABILITY ANALYSIS

The use of Cronbach alpha was used to evaluate internal consistency reliability of the measurement scales. The acceptable value was regarded as 0.70 and beyond (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 2: Reliability Analysis

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Communication Consistency	3	0.86
Brand Trust	3	0.88
Purchase Intention	3	0.90

All constructs demonstrated strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.86 to 0.90. These results indicated that the measurement scales were reliable and suitable for further analysis.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the bivariate relationships among the variables. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Correlation Matrix

Variable	1	2	3
1. Communication Consistency	—		
2. Brand Trust	.62**	—	
3. Purchase Intention	.55**	.71**	—

Note. p < .01

The consistency of communication had a positive and significant correlation with brand trust ($r = .62$, $p < .01$) and purchase intention ($r = .55$, $p < .01$). The purchase intention was also significantly and positively linked with brand trust ($r = .71$, $p < .01$). These results were the initial evidence to prove that the proposed relationships were real and justified to continue the regression analysis.

Regression Analysis

Two simple linear regression analyses were conducted to test the hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1

H1 proposed that communication consistency positively influenced brand trust. Regression analysis indicated that communication consistency significantly predicted brand trust, $\beta = .62$, $t = 11.42$, $p < .001$. The model explained 38% of the variance in brand trust ($R^2 = .38$, $F(1,196) = 130.51$, $p < .001$).

Table 4: Regression Results for Communication Consistency Predicting Brand Trust

Predictor	β	t	p	R^2
Communication Consistency	.62	11.42	<.001	.38

The results indicated that higher levels of perceived communication consistency were associated with higher levels of brand trust. Therefore, H1 was supported.

Hypothesis 2

H2 proposed that brand trust positively influenced purchase intention. The regression results showed that brand trust significantly predicted purchase intention, $\beta = .71$, $t = 14.86$, $p < .001$. The model explained 50% of the variance in purchase intention ($R^2 = .50$, $F(1,196) = 221.01$, $p < .001$).

Table 5: Regression Results for Brand Trust Predicting Purchase Intention

Predictor	β	t	p	R^2
Brand Trust	.71	14.86	<.001	.50

These findings indicated that brand trust had a strong and statistically significant effect on purchase intention. Accordingly, H2 was supported.

The findings showed that consistency in communication between the digital touchpoints had a great effect in increasing brand trust and brand trust, on its part, had a great effect in increasing purchase intention. The R2 values were relatively large which indicated that the two regression models had a substantial explanatory power. All in all, the results confirmed the suggested theoretical framework and demonstrated the significance of the consistency in the digital communication strategies to develop the trust and promote consumer buying intentions.

DISCUSSIONS

This study was meant to investigate how consistency in communication in digital touchpoints affects brand trust and consequently, purchase intention. Both the proposed hypotheses were empirically supported by the findings. It was observed that the role of communication consistency on brand trust is such that it has a significant and positive effect on brand trust, whereas purchase intention is predominantly predicted by brand trust. The findings support the theoretical hypothesis that unified and consistent brand messaging on different digital channels will boost consumer trust and improve behavioural intentions.

The fact that communication consistency is positively related to the brand trust upholds the principles of the Integrated Marketing communications (IMC) which creatively underscore the significance of providing the coordinated and consistent message of the brand through channels (Porcu et al., 2017; Batra and Keller, 2016). Consistent messaging in digital ecosystems seems to be a signal of credibility in which consumers are interacting with brands in multiple ways. Coherent and aligned communications of the brand will lead to more image of a reliable and professionally managed brand. The same result can be explained by the fact that this discovery matches the signalling theory (Erdem & Swait, 2004) that suggests that coherent signals do decrease the levels of ambiguity and increase the perceived credibility.

Moreover, the high impact of the brand trust on the purchase intention is consistent with the theory of relationship marketing under the commitment-trust (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Confidence minimizes risk and uncertainty, especially on the Internet where one may not be able to examine physical products. The results are consistent with the previous empirical studies that show that brand trust is a strong predictive of purchase intention and other outcomes of loyalty (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). The fact that the explanatory power of the regression model is rather high points to the role of trust in the process of consumer decision-making in digital settings.

Notably, the study work adds to the literature by directly placing a concentration on perceived communication consistency as a strategic antecedent of trust. Although prior literature has conducted a study on the aspect of omnichannel integration, service quality dimension, and customer experience dimension, less literature has focused on and tested the psychological process of continuous digital communication to trust development and behaviour intention. The study elucidates this mechanism by embracing a parsimonious model to reveal that communication consistency is a driver of relations and it works as a root mechanism of relational outcomes.

Managers can use the findings to highlight the strategic value of consistency as messaging on digital platforms. Brands must make certain that there is a frame of coherence in terms of tone, visual image, value propositions, and informational content on websites, social media platforms, mobile applications, and email communication. Poor consistency in the message can also unwillingly harm trust and purchase intention. This is why cross-functional marketing, digital, and communications coordination between organizations should be the focus in order to keep the messages aligned.

Irrespective of its contributions, the study is limited. The convenience sampling method restricts the external validity of the results. Also, the cross-sectional design does not allow one to make causal inference. Future studies can take a longitudinal pattern or experimental methodology to study other studies further to support the suggested relationships. The model can also be extended to other mediators (e.g. perceived credibility), other moderators (e.g. consumer involvement) by coming up with more nuanced insights on the model through the inclusion of others.

CONCLUSION

This study has reviewed how uniformity of the communication across the digital touchpoints affects brand trust and purchase intent. The results revealed that a regular brand communication would play a significant role in boosting brand trust that would subsequently boost intention to purchase by consumers. Combining the knowledge provided by the Integrated Marketing Communications theory, the signalling theory, and the commitment-trust theory, the study gives empirical evidence that communication coherence serves as a critical antecedent of trust in virtual contexts.

Consumers are receiving brands in an ever-dispersed digital landscape in a number of integrated ways. It is not only a tactical move but a strategic requirement to ensure that there is consistency across these touchpoints. Brands with consistent messaging have a higher probability of building trust and prompting the purchasing behaviour. On the other hand, the lack of consistency in communication can undermine trust and decrease consumer confidence.

In general, the study states that the consistency of communication is a characteristic building block where the digital marketing campaign leads to behavioural results. Formulated around a simplified and conceptually based framework, the given study can be seen as an addition to the ever-expanding literature on the efficacy of digital marketing and provide managers with an opportunity to understand how to build stronger relationships with consumers in an omnichannel and prevent crises.

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