A study on impact of IMC trends on customer loyalty of Zara fashion in Uttar Pradesh

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Abstract: *For making its presence in the market, the company needs to communicate with its customers effectively. All the sources of communication should be channelized so that the customer gets the same message through different mediums. With the emergence of IMC, the company can adopt an integrated approach to marketing communication. This not only helps in increasing the sales of the company but also brings customer loyalty. The present study aims to understand the impact of IMC trends on customer loyalty of Zara fashion in Uttar Pradesh.*

The sample of 250 loyal customers of Zara fashion was randomly chosen from Uttar Pradesh. The data was collected through a structured questionnaire and was analyzed using a t-test. The variables taken into consideration were Mobile marketing, Social media marketing, and Viral marketing.

The study found that IMC trends had a significant and positive impact on customer loyalty towards Zara fashion. Also, it was found that the perception of genders towards IMC trends differs.

Various studies have been conducted to study the impact of IMC trends on the fashion industry. But there's a scarcity of studies in context to Uttar Pradesh in India. Thus, the present study aims to bridge the gap by studying the impact of IMC trends on customer loyalty of the fashion industry in Uttar Pradesh.

Key Words: *IMC, Customer loyalty, Mobile Marketing, Social Media Marketing, Viral Marketing.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Integrated marketing communication (IMC) is an effective marketing approach that enhances the communication between the company and the customers. IMC helps the company to channelize the message in less time and cost. There are many IMC tools such as advertising, public relations, personal selling, sales promotion, mobile marketing, social media marketing, and viral marketing, to name a few. The company can personify these tools as per its needs. The company usually tests the effectiveness of marketing campaigns by integrating different IMC tools.

IMC is gaining popularity in the fashion industry as well. The preferences and choices of the customers change rapidly by "what's trending." The companies dealing in fashion needs to understand and bridge the gap between "trending" fashion and "customer" fashion to gain customer loyalty.

Today, customers switch from one brand to another if they don't get what they are looking for. In this certainty, it is difficult to gain customer loyalty and maintain it for the long-run, especially in the fashion industry. The brands need to send out the message sound and clearly, at the right place and at the right time. At the same time, one-way communication is outdated. Today, listening to customers is also essential, thereby encouraging two-way communication. Thus, IMC tools should be chosen so that the company and customers are both in a win-win situation. Zara fashion is an apparel retailer specializing in clothing, accessories, shoes, beauty, and perfumes. It has become a renowned apparel dealer, setting a fashion statement in India. Lately, customer loyalty towards Zara has been increasing rapidly. But with different brands coming up, it may become difficult for Zara fashion to hold on to this customer loyalty in the long-term. Thus, it is important to understand the impact that IMC trends have on customer loyalty towards Zara fashion.

1.1 Mobile Marketing

Mobile marketing is an advertising activity that uses mobile devices, such as text promos and apps, via push notifications. It aims to provide customers to access personalized, time- and location-sensitive information using their smartphones, irrespective of time or place. Different definitions of Mobile marketing include:

i.) Mobile marketing is "the set of practices that enables organizations to communicate and engage with their audience in an interactive and relevant manner through any network or mobile device." (Mobile Marketing Association, 2008 cited in Oscar et al., 2017)

ii.) Mobile marketing is "communication and promotion of double or multiple pathways between a company and its customers using a medium, device, or mobile technology." (Shankar & Balasubramanian, 2009)

1.2 Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing refers to marketing products or services with the help of social media websites. Being one of the most cost-effective promotional methods, it aims to attract a wide range of target customers and engage with them to promote the desired culture and vision of the organization. Different definitions of Social media marketing are as below:

i.) Social media marketing is "an interdisciplinary and cross-functional concept that uses social media (often in combination with other communications channels) to achieve organizational goals by creating value for stakeholders. On a strategic level, social media marketing covers an organization's decisions about social media marketing scope (ranging from defenders to explorers), culture (ranging from conservatism to modernism), structure (ranging from hierarchies to networks), and governance (ranging from autocracy to anarchy)".(Felix et al., 2017)

ii.) Social media marketing is "an organization's integrated pattern of activities that, based on a careful assessment of customers' motivations for brand-related social media use and the undertaking of deliberate engagement initiatives, transform social media connectedness (networks) and interactions (influences) into valuable strategic means to achieve desirable marketing outcomes." (Li et al., 2020)

1.3 Viral Marketing

Viral marketing is a promotional tool in which organizations rely on consumers to generate and circulate information about the product or service. It can either be in the form of word-of-mouth or improvised by using Internet tools. Different definitions of Viral marketing are as below:

i.) Viral marketing can be defined as "… efforts that allow satisfied customers to spread the word about products to other customers". (Boone & Kurtz, 2009)

ii.) Viral marketing is "the Internet version of word-of-mouth marketing – websites, videos, email messages, or other marketing events that are so infectious that customers will want to pass them along to friends." (Kotler & Keller, 2016)

1.4 Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty refers to the positive relationship between the customer and the company. With customer loyalty, the company can estimate the re-purchasing intentions of the customers. Different definitions of Customer loyalty are as follows:

i.) "In the business context, loyalty is the customer's commitment to do business with a particular organization which effects in repeat purchases of goods and services of that organization" (Bose and Rao, 2011)

ii.) "Customer loyalty has been perceived to be a behavioural concept entailing repeat buying of product or service measured as the series or share of purchases, referrals, magnitude of relationship or all of the above mingled together." (Rai and Medha, 2013)

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:
Integrated Marketing Communication

Oluwafemi and Adebiyi (2018) studied the impact of integrated marketing communication on customer loyalty in the telecommunication sector in Lagos Metropolis, Nigeria. With the help of a cross-sectional survey research design and mixed sampling technique, a sample of 150 respondents was chosen. The data received through questionnaires was of 134 respondents. The IMC tools taken into consideration were advertising, direct marketing, publicity, and sales promotion. Using descriptive statistics and regression analysis, it was found that IMC had a significant impact on customer loyalty.

Khizar et al. (2016) studied the impact of integrated marketing communication on customer loyalty and brand awareness with respect to the beverage sector in Lahore. The selected four beverage companies listed at LSE were Murree Brewery, Nestle, Shezan, and Unilever. The data of 105 respondents were collected through a questionnaire. Using regression analysis, it was found that IMC components had a significant impact on customer loyalty towards beverage companies.

Mobile Marketing

Singh (2019) studied the factors influencing customer satisfaction towards mobile marketing in India. The data of 200 consumers were obtained through questionnaires. With the help of factor analysis and logistic regression, it was found that there are primarily four factors that influence customer satisfaction. These factors included "accuracy and social influence," effective form of service," "reliability," and "value for money."

Saeed and Bekhet (2018) examined the factors of mobile marketing influencing customer attitudes in Malaysia. The data of 602 respondents was collected through a questionnaire. The parameters considered were attitude, entertainment and personal attachment, perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, permission and personalization, and privacy and trust. With the help of PLS-SEM, it was found that mobile marketing had a positive and significant impact on customer attitudes.

Social Media Marketing

Ebrahim (2019) explored the impact of social media marketing activities on brand loyalty towards telecommunication companies in Egypt. The variables of social media marketing involved customization, trendiness, and word-of-mouth. The moderator variables considered for the study were brand trust and brand equity. The data was collected from 287 social media users through online surveys. With the help of Structured Equation Modeling (SEM), it was found that social media marketing had a direct and significant impact on brand loyalty. Further, it was found that social media marketing had a significant yet indirect influence on brand equity, with the moderator variable being brand trust.

Yadav and Rahman (2018) examined the influence of social media marketing activities on customer loyalty in an e-commerce context. The data was collected from 371 students from a university in India. The collected data was analyzed through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using Structured Equation Modeling (SEM). The findings stated that customer loyalty was positively and significantly impacted by social media marketing activities towards e-commerce.

Viral Marketing

Sawaftah et al. (2020) examined the influence of viral marketing on the purchase intention of the customers. The two dimensions of viral marketing considered were viral advertising and E-word-of-mouth. The moderator variables were brand image and age. The data was collected from 177 graduate students in a private Cypriot university. Using ANOVA and multiple linear regression analysis, it was found that viral marketing had a significant impact on the purchase intention of customers with moderator variable of brand image. In contrast, viral marketing was not affected by purchase intentions when the moderator variable was the age of the customers. Further, it was also stated that viral advertising had more significance than E-word-of-mouth.

Al Muala (2018) studied the impact of viral marketing on customer satisfaction in fast-food restaurants in Zarqa city, Jordan. The data was obtained from 159 respondents through questionnaire surveys. With the help of descriptive statistics and regression analysis, it was found that three dimensions of viral marketing, namely, brand association, brand awareness, and trust, had a positive and significant impact on customer satisfaction. In contrast, promotion as a dimension of viral marketing did not affect customer satisfaction.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The objectives of the study are:

- To study the impact of IMC trends on customer loyalty towards Zara fashion.
- To study the relationship between IMC trends and gender of the customers.

3.1 RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS:

H1: The IMC trends have no impact on customer loyalty towards Zara fashion.
H1a: Mobile Marketing has no impact on customer loyalty towards Zara fashion.
H1b: Social Media Marketing has no impact on customer loyalty towards Zara fashion.
H1c: Viral Marketing has no impact on customer loyalty towards Zara fashion.
H2: There is no relationship between IMC trends and the gender of the customers.

3.2 RESEARCH FRAMEWORK:
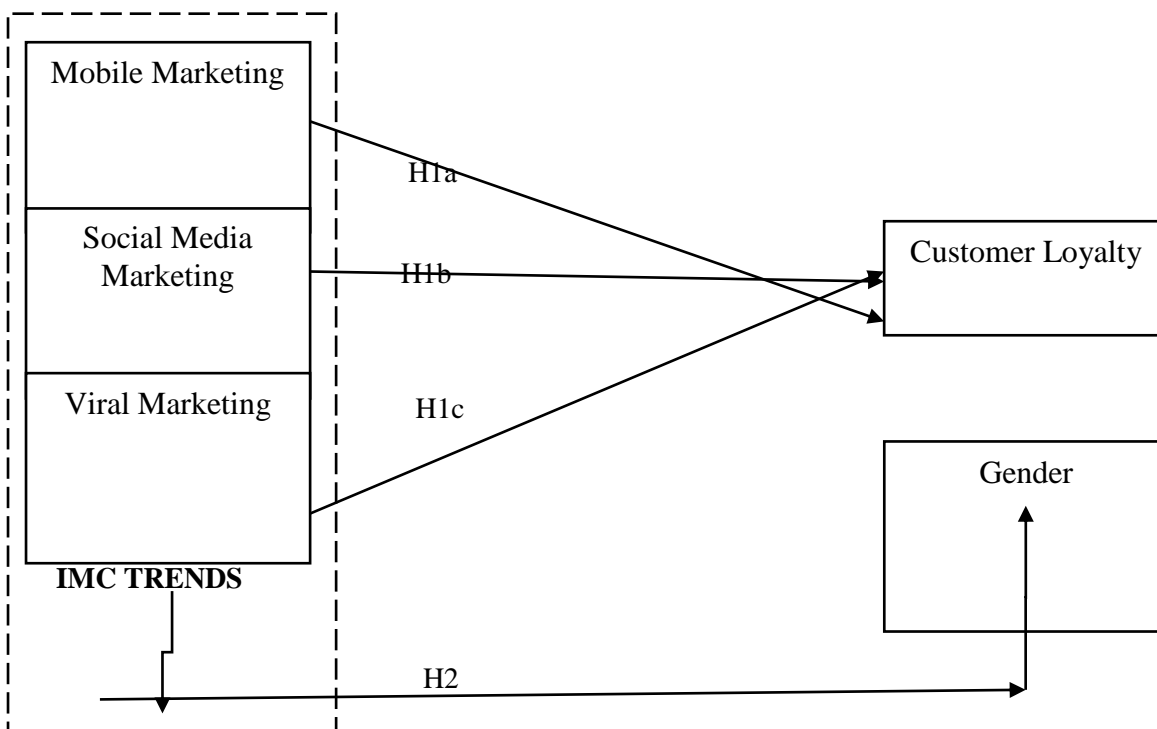
4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The present study has adopted a descriptive research design. With the help of random sampling, a sample of 250 respondents, who were also loyal customers of Zara fashion, was chosen. The data was collected through structured questionnaires using Google forms. The secondary data was collected from journal articles, websites, and magazines. The variables considered for the study included Mobile Marketing, Social Media Marketing, Viral Marketing, and Customer Loyalty. The collected data was analyzed using one-sample t-test and paired samples t-test.

5. ANALYSIS & FINDINGS:

One-Sample Test

	Test Value = 0					
	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
MOBILE MARKETING	32.027	250	.000	2.789	2.62	2.96
SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING	31.384	250	.000	2.761	2.59	2.93
VIRAL MARKETING	32.377	250	.000	2.873	2.70	3.05

Table 1: One-sample t-test

According to Table 1, it can be seen that viral marketing (t-value = 32.377) is the most important IMC tool when it comes to bringing in customer loyalty, followed by mobile marketing (t-value = 32.027) and social media marketing (t-value = 31.384).

Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences					T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	MOBILE MARKETING – MALE	2.231	1.497	.095	2.045	2.417	23.605	250	.000

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Pair 2	MOBILE MARKETING – FEMALE	2.347	1.435	.091	2.168	2.525	25.907	250	.000
Pair 3	SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING – MALE	2.203	1.484	.094	2.019	2.388	23.519	250	.000
Pair 4	SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING – FEMALE	2.319	1.476	.093	2.135	2.502	24.892	250	.000
Pair 5	VIRAL MARKETING – MALE	2.315	1.515	.096	2.126	2.503	24.199	250	.000
Pair 6	VIRAL MARKETING – FEMALE	2.430	1.466	.093	2.248	2.613	26.258	250	.000

Table 2: Paired sample t-test

According to Table 2, it can be seen that mobile marketing has more impact on females (t-value = 25.907) than males (t-value = 23.605). Similarly, social media marketing has more impact on females (t-value = 24.892) than males (t-value = 23.519). Further, viral marketing has more impact on females (t-value = 26.258) than males (t-value = 24.199).

Based on data analysis, it has been found that:
- Mobile marketing has a positive and significant impact on customer loyalty with respect to Zara fashion.
- Social media marketing has a positive and significant impact on customer loyalty with respect to Zara fashion.
- Viral marketing has a positive and significant impact on customer loyalty with respect to Zara fashion.
- Viral marketing is the most effective tool to bring in customer loyalty, followed by mobile marketing and social media marketing.
- IMC trends have more impact on females than on males with respect to Zara fashion.

On the basis of the findings, the acceptance/rejection of hypotheses can be summarized as follows:

Hypothesis No.	Hypothesis	Accept/Reject
H1a	Mobile marketing has no impact on customer loyalty towards Zara fashion.	Rejected
H1b	Social Media Marketing has no impact on customer loyalty towards Zara fashion.	Rejected
H1c	Viral Marketing has no impact on customer loyalty towards Zara fashion.	Rejected
H2	There is no relationship between IMC trends and the gender of the customers	Rejected

Table 3: Hypothesis testing

6. CONCLUSION:

Integrated marketing communication (IMC) has gained popularity in a short span of time because of the emerging need to retain customer loyalty, specifically in the fashion industry. The ever-changing preferences of customers lead to switching from one brand to another, thereby giving a setback to customer loyalty. The companies and customers need to interact to bridge the gap between needs and products/services offered. IMC, with its integrated approach, can help the company to reach its target customers, communicate effectively, and gain and retain customer loyalty in the long-run.

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