ONLINE MARKETING STRATEGIES & OLDER POPULATION

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ABSTRACT

This thematic aims to explore the effects of different marketing strategies on online purchasing behavior of older adults. A qualitative method in the form of indepth interviews was utilized to gather insights on how content, influencers, and brand image impact tendency to buy and consumer's decision making. The result implied that these elements were connected but in different altitudes among each individual, but all directed to quality information of the product, credibility of influencers, and brand image congruence. A marketing plan to target older adults should be formulated to fit the target segment's preferences and lifestyle, which requires further research to be identifiable.

KEYWORDS: Digital Marketing/ Aging Population/ Content Marketing/ Influencer Marketing/ Branding

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CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

Perhaps it can be assumed that the world has completely entered a digital era during the past few years, where more and more transactions happened online. The trends in Marketing have also shifted to the digital world. We have witnessed the rise of many huge conglomerates whose main markets were completely online, and, unfortunately, the fallen of many who refused to adapt.

A report of the Global eCommerce in 2019 done by eMarketer.com shows that despite a slight decline in total global retail sales since 2017, the percentage of retail eCommerce sales is expected to increase by approximately 10%, making about 22% of the total retail sales in 2023. It is also reported that most of the growth took place in Asia-Pacific, followed by Latin America. China also hosts the largest eCommerce market with a total value of 1,900 billion USD, three times larger than the USA's (Lipsman, 2019).

Nonetheless, it is very important to state that these reports were made before the COVID-19 outbreak, which had significant effects on retail markets all over the world. Many retailers have faced difficulties continuing business as usual due to new regulations to control the spread of the pandemic. However, there are many reports which showed that the growth in eCommerce sales has spiked in many countries. A report from Forbes (Columbus, 2020) revealed that the growth in online retail orders of the USA and Canada was surprisingly high at a value of 146% as of 21st April 2020. A similar pattern was observed by Bangkok Post, who published a report stating that the sales value of Lazada, a top online marketplace in Thailand, has grown for 130% from February to April 2020 (Leessa-Ngunsuk, 2020). The massive expansion of the eCommerce transactions was expected to be the result of behavioral change as most consumers no longer feel safe to go shop in malls, and also have learned to shop online during the lockdown. Another global phenomenon that has been taking place during the past few years is the escalation of world population aging, or more commonly known as aging societies. According to the World Health Organization, population aging refers to "the aging of the world's population as a result of the continued decline in fertility rates and increased life expectancy". The measurement showed a significant increase in population over 60 (WHO, 2010). It is predicted by the United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2017) that in the year 2050, the world's population will consist of more elderly people than those who are younger than 24. The occurrence will impose substantial changes to the world's economy and social structure.

As a result of the current situation which is changing the world's population, retail businesses need to adapt their marketing strategy to fit with the growing market for elderly people, and as the case may be, change their perception and mindset regarding such market segments. As it would become an inevitable phenomenon (Orešković, 2020), businesses must acclimate to this new essence of the market to survive and continue to make a profit.

This thematic paper aims to study the application of marketing theories on the assumption that, shortly, a swift change in consumer behavior will occur due to both undergoing circumstances. The study is expected to reveal what adaptations and how they should be constructed by retailers to meet the preferences of the aging population. The results would provide a more detailed explanation of how the elderly in Thailand have adjusted to the new digital era, particularly on how their retail shopping behaviors have changed. Ultimately, it is the uttermost hope that this paper would help businesses to accommodate themselves with the best of both worlds.

1.1 Research Objectives

The purpose of this study is to explore purchasing behaviors and attitudes toward online marketing of older adults (age 60+). In-depth qualitative interviews will be used to understand the reasons behind these behaviors and how or why different marketing strategies can positively or negatively promote online shopping or create purchasing motivations among older populations. The aspects of marketing included in the interviews are content marketing, influencers, and brand image. Interview participants are chosen by the criteria of age (over 60 years old). 10 participants included 5 users (older adults who have and will use online shopping), and 5 non-users (those who have not and are not considering online shopping). The expected outcome of this study is to understand the relationships between different online marketing tools and purchasing behavior of the participants to fabricate better marketing strategies for future online campaigns targeting older adults.



CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Aging Population

It has been predicted by numerous researches, the increase in the global population median age is expected to be an inevitable phenomenon. Apart from the possibilities of a reduced workforce and slow production rate, businesses should be aware of the possible change in consumer behavior. As in the first decade of the 21st century, it could be assumed the generation who initiated innovations and technological advances as those who are younger than baby-boomers. Thus, most retailers that wished to expand usually focused on the younger market as their target group. Perhaps it was the reason why marketing strategies from the early years of the century were shaped to promote certain features of the product which were more appealing to younger people. This kind of stereotyping also played an important role in the marketing of products that target older people. For example, portraying the elderly as 'medically dependent' in the medical industry, or even assuming the ceiling age for consumers who would buy particular pieces of clothing. These stereotypes had a negative impact on how society viewed aging people and how the elderly viewed themselves as well (Kotter-Grühn, 2015).

2.2 Segmentation, Targeting & Positioning

In traditional market segmentation, the market is commonly divided by demographics including age, gender, location, or income. However, using demographics alone may not reflect true consumer behavior. Other factors such as lifestyle or psychographics, consumers' likes and dislikes, are often more useful dividers of the market as they can more effectively categorize consumer behavior. This is true for all population groups, however, for the older population, each individual becomes more distinctive from one another due to different courses of life, life events, and personal experiences. Using psychographics alone may result in many small impractical and illogical segments which have no useful applications. Other methods such as using 'gerontographics', grouping by similar life events, and circumstances are proposed to segment the older adult market) to get a better prediction of the segment behavior (Thanasrivanitchai et al., 2016).

As for targeting and positioning, although segments may vary by cultural differences, marketers should be reminded that older adults' shopping preferences are not the same as those younger. Older adults generally look for products with functional benefits that are convenient to use, and usually from brands that they have positive experiences with.

2.3 Content

Content is one of the most important tools in online marketing. A good content that would increase the advertising value provides either useful information and/or entertainment that is connected to the brand (Lou et al., 2019). Content is not only useful as an advertisement but also an important tool to establish customer relationships and retention. If the brand constantly provides attractive content, with the right amount and frequency, it is more likely to turn potential customers into actual customers, and also to build trust among existing customers (Lou et al., 2019).

To create successful content for older adults, marketers should understand the difference in the definition of good content for the elderly. A qualitative study done in 2013 among 10 Swedish seniors, aged 62-88, found that even though 8 out of 10 already had experience using computers from their previous career, only 4 were active users of internet-based activities. The detailed interview revealed that those who were established performers appeared to find internet-based activities had brought them personal meanings. This referred to either a means to connect with their family and loved ones or provide them easier access to participate in their interests (Larsson et al., 2013). Another interview done in the USA during the same year with 48 seniors, aged from 57-89 years old, found a similar pattern. While 71% reported that they had been using the internet for more than 5 years, 85% of those used the internet to connect with family and friends. This study revealed more details as they found that over 70% of senior users used the internet to stay informed with current news, knowledge, and even leisure contents such as music, movies, and photography (Chattaraman et al., 2013). Noted that both studies were conducted in developed countries, with well-educated participants, considerations may be needed to apply with the local communities.

2.4 Influencers

Using influencers has also been a marketing technique in which usage has increased over the years. Influencers or opinion leaders are usually key persons whose social status or expertise is perceived higher than the general population. Their ability to inform and manipulate their interconnected network has been proven effective for firms to use as a marketing tool (Geng et al., 2020).

Influencer marketing for targeting senior citizens might be tricky. Even though many pieces of research in the past found that most older adults valued family and friends as their most significant influencers, 2 studies have found that among the older adults who had more potential to use online shopping, the perceived age (how old they felt) was approximately 10 years younger than their chronological age.

A study done in Spain during 2015 had found that seniors who felt younger were more likely to become an online shopper because they were more confident, innovative, and more adventurous when it came to trying new technology (Peral-Peral et al., 2015). A characteristic that is in line with the traditional innovators and early adopters in the technology s-curve. Another recent study in 2019 done in Germany, with over 1200 samples have revealed one factor that influences online behavior, perceived behavior control (PBC), which refers to abilities the person believes he/she can perform. The findings showed that high PBC had a positive correlation with being an active online shopper, with no impact from neither age nor gender (Schehl et al., 2019). It can be assumed that finding the right influencers for older adults is not as simple as for other segments. Generally, they put more trust in people they know such as family and friends, or other influencers who have a positive impact on their morality, trust, and self-belief, a factor which can greatly differ from one person to another.

2.5 Brand Image

Brand image has been defined as a series of brand associated memory perceived by the consumer (Aaker & Keller, 1990), and a total sum of brand memory which leads to the whole perception of the brand in the consumer's mind (Keller, 1993). The brand image also creates brand personality, a concept in which consumers can find a relationship with the brand through lifestyle image, or the way they can identify themselves with the identity of the brand. A study has revealed the relationship between brand experience, brand trust, brand image-congruence, and brand re-purchasing intention. While positive brand experiences generally build trust, brand congruence, or the degree which the consumer can identify themselves with the brand has a positive impact on both building trust and increasing re-purchasing intention (Aslam et al., 2018).

A study from Taiwan in 2014 on online shopping drivers among senior citizens has discovered the barriers to entry for older adults as value, risk, and tradition (Lian & Yen, 2014). A report made for an APEC International Workshop in 2017 provided an insight into how brand marketing impacted older adults' shopping behavior. The conclusion was that although seniors did not want to be looked at as old, dependant, and weak, they still preferred brands to design marketing tools to accommodate the physiological challenges resulting from aging (Arensberg, 2018). These two studies provided an aspect that is more relatable to the Asian context, however, further investigation should be made to grasp the current situations where marketing has become more globalized especially among the middle-upper class population.

Despite the evidence that shows how each online marketing technique works, it is also important for brands to understand that there is no one-for-all strategy. Since delivery channels, format, and reach differ among each technique, combining all techniques using as many channels to deliver has been proven more effective than using solely one type of marketing with all contents over time (Geng et al., 2020). Particularly, for the older adults, where each technique must be tailored to match with their beliefs, purchasing routine, values, and lifestyle, marketers must develop distinguished approaches to target the right consumers. Success will not only lead to an increase in sales but also build strong brand effects and customer loyalty.

CHAPTER III METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

In-depth interviews will be used in this study to extract the past experiences and behaviors of participants. The qualitative interview was chosen not only because of the need to understand why some older adults shop online and why some do not, but to understand how certain marketing techniques affect their motivation to buy, brand credibility, and most important if they could create a change in purchasing behavior. The interviews are designed to be 60 minutes long one-on-one interviews and will be semi-structured with the same set of open-ended questions for every participant.

3.2 Data Collection

As for the expected data, the interview is designed to be used as a tool to gain insights and understandings of the perception of older adults towards online shopping. Also, the interviewer aims to understand their lifestyle, behavior, preferences, and attitude, in general, to fully evaluate what would be the best way to target this group of population.

The interviews were intentionally designated to be done in person, but due to the current outbreak situation, most interviews are done online. The interviewer will use voice and screen recording for further analysis. All interviewees are informed and aware of the recordings.

3.3 Sample Selection

User participants will be chosen with the criteria of;

• Age 60 or older, working or retired.

- Accessibility to smartphones, tablets, computers, or other devices connected to the internet.
- Active use of those devices regularly (for work or for socializing are both acceptable).
- Awareness of online shopping existence, but never used online shopping.

Non-user participants will be chosen with the criteria of;

- Age 60 or older, working or retired.
- Accessibility to smartphones, tablets, computers, or other devices connected to the internet.
- Active use of those devices regularly (for work or for socializing are both acceptable).
- Experiences in using online shopping for more than one time.

3.4 Interview Structure & Questions/Exercises

3.4.1 Introduction/General Questions

- Name/age/location/status to get to know the participant's living conditions (whether they live alone or with family) and whether they are still working or retired.
- How often are you online? Which devices?
- Have you ever purchased anything online?
- If yes, how often, which products, and from which devices?
- Which platform/channel do you like/use the most? Why?
- If no, what is the reason you never shop online? (can be anything as this question was designed for the interviewer to gather some background information)
- Has your shopping routine changed after the COVID-19 outbreak and how?

3.4.2 Specific Questions

Participants will be shown 3 Facebook ads targeting older adults (Appendix 1), and asked the following questions;

- Do you think the celebrities in the ads use the product? Why?
- Would you buy any of these products, in the hypothetical circumstance that they are necessary for you? Why?
- Instead, if someone you know well (family, friends, even doctors) recommend these products, would you buy them? Why?
- What do you think could be added to the ads to increase the tendency to buy? Why?
- Do you think the brand image fits your personality? If it does, does that increase your interest in the product?
- If instead these ads are posted offline, would you consider buying any of these products?



CHAPTER IV RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 General Information & Online Purchasing Experiences

After conducting interviews, participants were divided into 2 groups; users and non-users. The criteria for users is to have current and continuous online purchase and intention to purchase. Non-users may have had experiences of online shopping, but are no longer interested or have no intention to purchase more merchandise online. Participants were aware of many online sales channels, including official brand websites, online marketplaces, and social media such as Facebook & Line. The channels they chose varied but all put more significance on trustworthiness and credibility of the sale channels. None of the participants had negative experiences with online shopping that include fraudulence or scams.

It should be taken into consideration that all of the participants have had experiences with online shopping. They are also active users of the internet, all reported they are online every day for almost throughout the day. The purpose of using the internet varies from work-related activities, social media/connecting with friends and family, to finding resources of their interests. The devices used were mostly mobile phones. Lastly, their shopping behavior also has not changed since the COVID-19 outbreak, because either they had someone else to shop for them, or they had alternative stores as choices. The detailed data collected for the general information part of the interview is presented in table 4.1 and 4.2 below.

Table 4.1 General Information of Users

Participant	Age/Gender/Status	Reason For Repurchasing	Platform Used
User 1	64/Male/Retired, research consultant at a private company	He found the internet and social network an updated resource and easy to use buying channel as he likes to study and compare the products' prices and features before deciding to buy.	Line, Official websites, e- Marketplace
User 2	63/Female/ Independent academic counselor	She considers online as the most convenient and practical way to get the best price with less traveling expenses. Also, she thinks because online marketing can reduce costs, so products sold online should have lower prices.	Official websites
User 3	64/Female/Private sector employee	She prefers online shopping because the price is usually lower and it is more convenient for her due to less traveling and easier accessibility to selections of products to compare before purchasing.	e-Marketplace
User 4	65/Male/Business owner	He thinks online shopping can save time, more convenient, and most importantly, allows easier product comparisons. Even though the price can be higher, the traveling cost is less.	e-Marketplace
User 5	63/Male/Engineer	3 points he considers as benefits from online shopping are lower prices, ease of product browsing, and less traveling time.	e-Marketplace

Table 4.2 General Information of Non-users

Participant	Age/Gender/Status	Reason For Not Repurchasing	Platform Used
Non-user 1	63/Female/CEO of a private company	She doesn't like to shop for leisure. She did not find online shopping an enjoyable activity. Also, she likes to find as much information about the product as she could before making a purchase, and traditional advertising does not work on her.	Official websites
Non-user 2	62/Female/General manager at a private company	She doesn't like to wait for the item to be shipped so she prefers offline shopping as she can actually select and receive the product instantly.	e- Marketplace
Non-user 3	63/Male/Architect	Although he thinks online shopping is more convenient, he enjoys the experience of browsing and selecting the products in real life, often with other people as he thinks of it as a bonding activity.	Social Media
Non-user 4	64/Female/ Housewife	She still prefers offline shopping because it has become her habit and she also enjoys going out to do the shopping and other activities with her family, which she cannot do with online shopping.	Social Media
Non-user 5	66/Female/Retired	She thinks buying online is complicated and worries about the quality of the products. Also, she feels that providing private information online is an invasion of her privacy.	Official Websites

4.2 Participants' Response to Online Advertising

All participants were shown 3 images of advertisement and were informed to answer the questions in the context that these are posted online. The interviews were semi-structured and covered the topics of content marketing, using influencers, and brand image effects. The results will be presented by these three categories rather than in chronological order due to the nature of the interview in which the interviewer did not follow a rigid pattern.

4.2.1 The Importance of Content Marketing

For both users and nonusers, a similar pattern showed when questioned about what would be the most effective content to add to the ads to promote intention to buy. As reported in previous studies, older adults pay more attention to the features and functions of the product. All participants stated that informational content, preferably provided by experts or academics, would significantly result in a higher chance for them to consider buying the product. Furthermore, scientific or numerical data is highly recommended to increase credibility, which is corresponding to previous researches that older adults focus more on the features and usability of the product, and are less impulsive and emotional when it comes to shopping (Thanasrivanitchai et al., 2016).

For non-users, details on the ads themselves provide some impact on the likelihood of purchase consideration. Two non-users reported that the ad with more information about the product was more attractive in terms that when they could see in detail what they could get, it was easier for them to make a purchase.

For the user group, the responses were more concrete on what kind of information they are looking for when deciding to make a purchase, as they are already using the internet as a resource for making buying decisions. User 1 reported he usually compares specs, prices, promotions, and reviews online before making a purchase. The users also mentioned that even the ads claimed to have certain benefits and were posted by official accounts, details such as ingredients and technical details are needed before they can make a decision. Thus, it is not efficient just to say a product works with older adults, they are far more experienced and wise in choosing what is best and brands should be able to build credibility through informational contents to successfully sell to this market.

4.2.2 Roles of Influencers

When asked about the presenters of the products, responses varied. Most participants mentioned that their initial thoughts would be that the celebrities were hired for the advertisement and had no effects on the product's credibility. However, there was a deviation in each response due to the degree of how much the participant identified the product with the presenter. For example, User 2 stated that when the product did not match the presenter, it had a negative impact on the product itself. Choosing the right presenter might be more complex when targeting older adults as they do not consider only popularity as a factor of credibility.

Exploring deeper into the relationship between product-presenter compatibility and the credibility of the ads. Participants described that when they assumed the presenter used the product, they found the ads to be more 'real'. Differences between users and non-users are that, among those influencers whom they considered credibile (each respondent had different opinions), the user group reported that the credibility has a positive effect on their buying decision. While it has no significance on non-users. Even with different product categories, when the users mentioned they believed the influencers used the product, their tendency to buy increased. While for non-users, the influencers alone did not encourage their buying. They required more details about the product. Non-user 2 even mentioned that it would be more likely for her to buy the product if she had heard about it offline than to see the celebrity promoting it online. It could mean that the level of perceived behavioral control (PBC) can be boosted when the participant can align their self-image with the influencers, in higher PBC positively affects higher tendency to perform actions (Schehl et al., 2019), which in this place is to purchase the product.

Even though the majority of older adults use the internet to stay connected with their loved ones (Chattaraman et al., 2013), other influencers such as friends and family, there were no significant findings as to the level of impact mostly depends on the degree of trust or how each participant valued the extremely diverse relationship.

4.2.3 Brand Image and Individual Identity

Initially, all participants responded that well-known brands were more credible than others (it should be noted that there was a significant impact on brand recognition from frequent exposure, for example, repeated TV commercials). When questioned more deeply, participants started to relate themselves to the brand, and most of them have reported that they would not consider buying the product because they did not feel 'matched' with the brand (or the product image). The emphasis of the brand-building should be constructing brand congruence as it has been shown to improve customer retention and re-purchase (Aslam et al., 2018).

Self-identification is not always easily expressed by words. For most of the interviews, when questioned why they would not buy the product, many responses were 'I just don't feel like it' or 'it does not fit me'. This is consistent among users and nonusers. In the interview with User 2 about the insurance for an elderly ad, she answered 'I think I am too young to use this product', which could mean that the image of the product that the brand wants to portray may not fit with its target customers at all. Also, brand image plays an important role in their social status. Non-user 1 mentioned that 'even a brand of cosmetics is really good, I cannot use it in front of other people if I bought it from 7-11'. This could imply that more sociocultural factors should be considered when trying to target older adults.

4.2.4 Offline vs. Online

Another point worth mentioning is the differences between online and offline sales channels. The variation did not depend on whether the respondent was an active online shopper or not, but rather on their personality and preferences. User 1 and Non-User 2 reported that they would not be as easily convinced offline as online, and other factors such as provided information and personal interest would always have more influence on their buying intention. However, User-2 and Non-User 2 correspondingly cited that interacting with real-life sellers would increase the possibility to buy the product. This contrast somehow portrays the consumer's preferences by their personality. Whether it is more beneficial for brands to target those who are easily influenced by personal interactions is still up for question. For a detailed explanation, half of the respondents who accepted that interaction with real-life salespeople would increase the chance to purchase, being able to ask questions about the product and observe professionalism from the personnel were the two main reasons accountable.



CHAPTER V DISCUSSION & IMPLEMENTATION

5.1 Discussion

There have been many studies on how influencers can affect consumer purchasing behavior. Most online influencer/celebrity marketing campaigns are paid for (or 'sponsored' by the brand). However, the true relationship between paid celebrities and the effectiveness of the ads has been questionable. Firstly, including well-known celebrities or influencers increases ad-recognition, and ad-recognition can induce an intention to buy (Dhanesh & Duthler, 2019). This study showed that there is a correlation between celebrities and ad-recognition among older adults, but it does not always convert to purchase, especially when the person is already a non-user. Moreover, there has been a report on the correlation between the disclosure of sponsorship and the reliability of the ad. For campaigns with impartial disclosure, or when the influencers only provide their genuine opinions about the products while accepting that they were provided by the brand, the credibility increases. While when there is full disclosure or no information about sponsorship, the credibility falls lower (Stubb & Colliander, 2019). Perhaps this could be accounted for as the reason why celebrity marketing is not always effective, especially with older adults who tend to believe in the stereotype that all celebrities are paid-for advertisements. However, if the image of the brand is fitting with the image of the influencer, it could have a more positive impact on credibility.

From various researches, brand image can have a strong impression on purchase intention. The relationship between brand image and brand credibility is not always correlated, but a stronger brand image usually results in higher effects of advertisements on clients. Brand credibility, however, may or may not increase the tendency to purchase, but the brand image is believed to play an important role in linking both, thus can increase purchase intention (Wang & Yang, 2010). Although this study may not be capable of investigating the core of brand perception, some evidence strongly supports the impact of brand credibility and awareness on initial trust from the participants. Nevertheless, the results have revealed an important relationship between brand image and purchase intention. A strong purchase intention comes from a compelling brand image that matches the consumer's self-concept (Yu, et al., 2013). The emphasis on how the brand personality matches with the consumer is even heightened with older adults as they have a very strong sense of self. This evidence supports how demographics alone cannot adequately be used to segment the aging population market.

5.2 Managerial Implications

The information gathered from this study can be used to plan marketing tools for businesses that aim to target the older population market. The insights found in the effects brand image can be applied to designing marketing campaigns that would be more appealing to older adults online or offline.

By far the most significant finding from this study is that all components are correlated. Brand image will have a significant impact on choosing influencers to promote the brand and products. It is shown in this study that congruence between brand and consumers can be made through having the appropriate influencers for the target group. Choosing the right messages or content depends on the understanding of customer journeys of older adults. For each product or product category, further market research might be needed to capture the real consumer preferences as the general image for older adult products can not be used in all campaigns. Marketers who only rely on traditional demographics would face ghastly challenges to be successful in the aging market.

Even though it is nowhere nearly as straight forward to target older adults as for younger markets, a pattern could be recognized and appreciated. While mass marketing would be successful by using popular influencers and persuasive content, senior citizens are far wittier than that. Population aging is the force pushing advertising and marketing to be more honest and to provide real scientific proofs. Taking into consideration that older adults possess larger buying power, it would be beneficial for all consumers if cooperates adapt to the change in demographics as older adults usually provide such insight about the worthiness and usefulness of the product rather than only advertising nuance.

5.3 Limitations

This study had the limitations of time and a narrow sample group. The participants were mostly well-educated, upper-medium class, and their opinions could differ from the mass population. However, their insights were very well-thought and stimulating, and certainly could be used in further research.



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Appendix 1: Photos Used for Interviews





