

Research Proposal

*Digital Revolution and the Impact of Social Media and Influencers on
Consumer Buying Behaviour: A Case Study on Apple Inc.*

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Introduction

Background of the research

The Digital revolution is fundamentally changing the ways of working together of businesses and people as digital transformation across the globe is also accelerating. Business organisations are investing in disruptive technologies in order to stay ahead of the competitors and maintain a strong position in the market. Therefore, new models of businesses are being adapted by organisation for meeting the expectations of consumers (Ertemel and Ammoura, 2020). Social media can be defined as an internet-based application community through which the ideological and technological foundation of Web 2.0 is built - is a part of the digital revolution in the 21st century and this social media community is having impacts on consumer buying behaviour to great extent. For the younger generations, social media is no longer just a medium of entertainment; it impacts everyone, both customers and organizations. Business executives, analysts and decision-makers all struggle to grasp and decrypt how the different social media applications available on the market can be best utilised for increasing customers' responsiveness (Langner and Wiedmann, 2013). Influencers in recent years have been a part of today's marketing by business organisations where they are using their face value and fan base for attracting potential consumers toward purchasing a product. The researcher has, therefore, focusing on the rising issue in today's business scenario; the impact of social media and influencers on the purchase behaviour of consumers in this digital revolution age where a company has been selected to best demonstrate the impacts. Apple Inc, the largest technology company that has maintained its growth and success over the years also uses social media and influencers for attracting customers, and the extent of impacts has been discussed by this researcher.

Research question/title

- ❖ How the digital revolution is changing the buying behaviour of consumers?
- ❖ What is the impact of social media on consumers' buying behaviour of Apple Inc.?
- ❖ What is the impact of influencers on consumers' buying decisions of Apple Inc.?

Aims and Objectives of the research

Research Aim

The aim of this research is to assess how the digital revolution is happening and social media and influencers are having impacts on Apple's customer buying behaviour.

Research Objectives

- ❖ To determine the ways the digital revolution is impacting the buying behaviour of Apple's consumers.
- ❖ To analyse the impact that social media and influencers are having on Apple's consumer buying behaviour.
- ❖ To assess the existing social media performance of Apple Inc.

Literature Review

The digital revolution has not only changed the understanding of companies, but also the output of companies that means a change from the traditional means of action to the technology-aided one (Quester and Hawkins, 2017). In today's business era, digital tools are used to operate every part of an organisation, from logistics to management also it has changed every sector and revolutionised the way consumers are handled, increased the company's productivity and moved forward its reach into the global market. According to Berman (2018), the digital revolution can be considered as the Third Industrial Revolution that is the transition from mechanical and analog electronic technology to digital electronics that started with the introduction and proliferation of digital computers and digital record keeping in the latter half of the 20th century and continues to the present day.

According to Ioana and Stoica (2014), the digital revolution is called both a manifestation and a consequence of the advent of technology for information exchange, thereby inaugurating the Information Age (Ozer, 2012), and this revolution includes the mass development of digital logic circuits and their derived technologies (Peter and Grunert, 2019), i.e. computers, digital mobile phones and fax machines, and widespread use of them. The digital revolution can be regarded as a technological revolution as people all over the world along with businesses have been reliant on technology use and it has been an integral part of daily activities, and one of the most valuable and trending gifts of the revolution is social media that is bringing new phenomenon in business, business model, everyday life, and above all the buying behaviour of consumers (Kaplan, 2015).

According to Bronner and de Hoog (2014), social media are computer-mediated communicating technologies that help in encouraging and boosting the creation or sharing through virtual communities and networks of knowledge, ideas, career interests, and other forms of speech. One of the most common practices online is the use of social media, and in 2020, an estimated 3.6 billion people worldwide using social media that is expected to grow to almost 4.41 billion by 2025 according to Ertemel and Ammoura, 2020). The worldwide penetration of social networks is gradually growing and stood at 49 percent as of January 2020, and this vast platform is only indicating paying opportunities in the social media platform for businesses where actual buyers and potential buyers are waiting to grab a product or service from the business organisation (Putter, 2017).

Globally, people have begun to express their experiences using social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn, and as a consumer, people exchange product reviews, service details, food or health recommendations, product alerts, tips on using those items, and much more using the digital platform (Langner and Wiedmann, 2013). The emergence of social data as a stronger force for purchasing decisions has resulted from social media. Owing to the propensity of individuals to mimic the actions of individuals around them or those who have control over them, social evidence has emerged. According to Foxall (2019), sharing satisfied customers' testimonials, case studies, photos, comments and videos creates greater trust and also works well on a business' landing, page, page consulting and sign-up page. In addition to this, Berman (2018) has mentioned social media as the best inexpensive platforms from where businesses can get more insights about their consumers as satisfied consumers often form social media groups for reviewing and taking decisions regarding the next purchase of a brand.

With the emergence of social media in the business world, an influencer is also impacting decisions of consumers regarding the purchase of a product or service that is also another part of the digital revolution in today's scenario (Ozer, 2012). In the contemporary globalised market where businesses are maximising profits by utilising social media, opinion leaders who are best known as influencers are also playing a vital role in the process of consumers' decision making of buying (Ioană and Stoica, 2014). This position is taken over by influencers in contemporary globalised marketing using social media, who impact consumers with their thoughts, perceptions and opinions and thus have a major influence on trends in demand for specific goods. Conducting marketing activities through influencers has become increasingly common over recent years, reflecting a particular kind of social media marketing. Quester and Hawkins, (2017) has opined that influencers raise conversations in the social media platform, drive interactions, and set cultural trends on the mind of consumers who are following them, and consumers are more interested than celebrities in social media influencers. Early adopters of new goods and services are influencers, generating demand among their audiences. Consumers in recent years prefer to take reviews, user feedback and ensure quality from the favourite influencer rather than purchase and use it (Dosi and Galambos, 2013), whereas some get influenced to purchase a new product after watching videos, reviews, feedback on social media by influencers.

Methodology

Research method (quantitative and qualitative data)

While conducting business research, whether for academic purposes or other purposes; the research usually adopts two types of data for competing for the process and makes it either qualitative or quantitative (Lazaraton, 2005). Using qualitative data allows the researcher to apply phenomena and fulfil the research objectives with descriptive analysis, but quantitative data does not allow this as it discovers social phenomena and its facts that can be measured also.

This research aims to assess the impacts of social media and influencers that have resulted from the digital revolution on consumers' buying behaviour of Apple Inc's products, therefore, the researcher needs to identify facts and figures in order to demonstrate the impacts. The best research method for covering this topic is to select quantitative data, therefore, this research has been prepared using *quantitative data*.

Sample size, type and sampling method is chosen

Sample size

For conducting this quantitative research, the researcher has selected a sample size of 50. This researcher has chosen to take a questionnaire survey with 50 participants and these participants will be random customers using gadgets of Apple Inc.

Sampling type

The researcher has selected the *probability sampling* type where each member of the population has a non-zero probability of being picked. The researcher tries to choose in a randomized and non-biased manner as selecting specific customers of the company is quite difficult. *Random sampling* will allow the researcher to perform bias-less research that will also provide fresh data regarding consumers' buying behaviour of Apple's gadgets after getting influenced by social media or influencers. In addition to this, selecting based on customers' attributes is also impossible because Apple has a large customer base and the individual customer has different attributes.

Demographic and geographic characteristics of respondents

In order to conduct the questionnaire survey, the respondents will be selected based on the following characteristics:

- Aged between 20-55 will be selected.
- Population staying within the area of Vassal, London will be focused on sample selection.
- United Kingdom citizens within the selected area will get preferences.
- People earning an amount of a minimum of £30000 per month.

Selected data collection method

For selecting appropriate data collection method according to the research topic, researchers require to analyse two options: data collection using primary sources that provide raw and unpolished data or data collection from secondary sources that provide published, polished, used data (Cooper and Schindler, 2014). The researcher has chosen **primary sources** as a data collection method where the **questionnaire survey** method has been used. The researcher needs to identify numeric data about how many people are using Apple's product, how many have purchased after getting reviewed through social media, how many are buying after influencers' reviews or suggestions; and all that requirements can be accomplished through numeric or quantitative analysis. The process becomes easier with the questionnaire survey as it is the best method of quantitative data collection from research participants.

Selected research approach

Research is conducted based on an inductive or deductive approach and these approaches are selected by analysing the selected research method. This researcher has chosen a quantitative method of data for which **the deductive approach** will be used as it is the process of reasoning from hypotheses and reach a logical conclusion after completing the research.

Method of analysing quantitative data

Quantitative data analysis requires the researcher to select any preferable method that allows the researcher to analyse and interpret statically. This research has been conducted by demonstrating charts, graphs, diagrams, and the researcher has chosen to use MS excel through which collected data will be analysed and interpreted.

Research ethics

The research ethics give guidance for the responsible conduct of research so that the norms, values, and beliefs of participants are not hurt, and the society does not get harmed by it. Moreover, to maintain a high ethical level, it educates and tracks researchers conducting research. The researcher has considered some ethical issues that should be maintained throughout the process of accomplishing the aim of this research.

- ❖ This research outcome of collected data will cause no harm to the participants or society and misinterpret of data will not be happened by any means.
- ❖ Prior to this research, consent from selected participants will be taken, and they will be given full autonomy to respond to the questions they prefer.
- ❖ Anonymity regarding the research will be maintained.
- ❖ No confidential data will be asked or questioned in the questionnaire survey and collected data will be encrypted if requires.

Resource and Planning

Timeline

This research will be conducted within the time frame of 6 weeks, and in the meanwhile, the researcher will select the sample and then collect primary data through a questionnaire survey. The activities by the researcher have been distributed in the 6-week timeframe in a Gantt Chart below:

Activities	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
Identifying the area of this research						
Articulating the research questions regarding the selected topic						
Writing the literature review						
Formulating research methods, sampling size, research design, and overall methodology						
Negotiating access						
Formulating research proposal						

Collecting primary data through questionnaire						
Analysing the research data						
Preparing the draft of the conducted research paper						
Preparing the final draft						
Submitting the research paper						

Estimated Budget

Particulars	Amount
Questionnaire survey	£15
Statistical data analysis	£10
Transportation cost of visiting respondents	£250
Purchasing subscription of MS 365 Office	£100
Miscellaneous	£20
Subtotal =	£395

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