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An Empirical Study on the Effectiveness of Digital Marketing Channels on B2b Purchase Intentions in HR Consulting.

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Abstract

This research paper investigates the effect of digital marketing strategies on customer purchase intention within the context of HR consultancy, a leading B2B service provider. Through descriptive and statistical analysis, the study examines various channels influencing purchase intention, including email marketing, social media marketing, and Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM). Descriptive findings reveal insights into respondent demographics, educational qualifications, association tenure, sector affiliation, company size, and services availed. Statistical analysis elucidates significant relationships between digital marketing channels and purchase intention, highlighting the importance of tailored strategies for different industry sectors. Suggestions derived from the findings include refining email marketing strategies, enhancing social media engagement, leveraging positive EWOM, and implementing sector-specific marketing approaches. The study concludes by emphasizing the importance of dynamic and adaptive marketing strategies to influence customer purchase intentions effectively.

Keywords: Customer purchase intention, social media marketing, electronic word of mouth, Email marketing.

Introduction

In the rapidly evolving business landscape, digital marketing has become an indispensable tool for organizations, including HR consultancy firms, to influence customer purchase intentions. Digital marketing encompasses a wide range of strategies and techniques that leverage online platforms to engage and communicate with potential customers. With the rise of the internet and social media, traditional marketing methods are no longer sufficient to meet the needs of businesses, making it essential for HR consultancy firms to explore and utilize effective digital marketing strategies (Chaffey, 2019). This study aims to explore the role of digital marketing in shaping customer purchase intention, particularly within the context of HR consultancy services.

In today's competitive market, customer purchase intention plays a critical role in driving sales and business growth (Kotler et al., 2017). Understanding what influences these intentions is crucial for HR consultancy firms looking to attract and retain clients. Digital marketing techniques, such as social media marketing, email marketing, and electronic word of mouth (eWOM), have shown to be effective tools in impacting customer decision-making (Solomon, 2020). Social media platforms provide opportunities for real-time engagement, brand awareness, and trust-building with potential clients, while email marketing offers personalized communication, fostering stronger relationships (Baker et al., 2020). Furthermore, eWOM, through online reviews and customer testimonials, serves as a powerful influence on purchase decisions, as potential clients often trust peer recommendations over traditional advertising (Cheung et al., 2008).

The primary objective of this study is to understand the effect of digital marketing on customer purchase intention with reference to HR consultancy. This research seeks to determine which digital marketing strategies most effectively influence clients' decisions to purchase HR consultancy services. By focusing on social media marketing, email marketing, and eWOM, the study will identify the most impactful digital marketing methods and their specific role in shaping customer behavior (Kotler et al., 2017).

The secondary objectives of the study are as follows: first, to analyze the current email marketing techniques employed by HR consultancy firms and assess their impact on customer purchase intention. Email marketing remains one of the most direct and personalized forms of digital communication, and understanding its effectiveness in influencing purchase decisions is a key area of interest (Baker et al., 2020). Second, the study will examine the role of social media marketing efforts and eWOM in influencing customer purchase intentions. Social media marketing has grown significantly, providing HR consultancy firms with a platform to directly engage with potential clients, while eWOM builds credibility and trust, further influencing consumer decisions (Cheung et al., 2008). Lastly, the study aims to provide recommendations on the most effective digital marketing strategies that HR consultancy firms can implement to enhance customer purchase intention.

The scope of this study is to focus on the most impactful digital marketing techniques—social media marketing, email marketing, and eWOM—that influence customer purchase intentions. It will provide HR consultancy firms with insights into selecting the most effective strategies to improve customer acquisition and retention (Chaffey, 2019). The research will also examine the digital marketing processes employed by HR consultancies, offering

an overview of how these organizations utilize various platforms to promote their services and engage with clients. This will allow the study to provide practical, evidence-based recommendations on how to improve digital marketing efforts within the HR consultancy industry.

By delving into these areas, this research will contribute to the understanding of how digital marketing strategies influence customer behavior and help HR consultancy firms improve their marketing strategies. The study aims to offer actionable insights that HR consultancy firms can use to refine their digital marketing techniques and, ultimately, increase their customer purchase intention and business success (Solomon, 2020).

Conceptual Framework

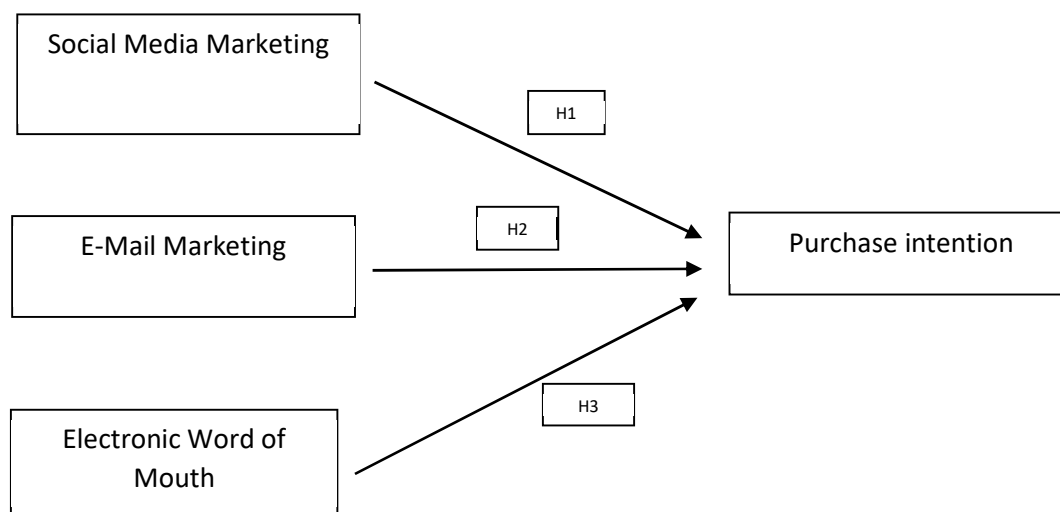


Figure 1.1 - Conceptual Framework

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Social Media Marketing and Purchase Intention

The pivotal role of social media marketing (SMM) in shaping consumer purchase intentions through various interconnected factors. Social media, defined as electronic communication platforms enabling online communities for sharing content and ideas (Merriam-Webster, 2012), serves as a dynamic tool for brands to engage consumers and influence their buying behavior. Research highlights that antecedents of social media marketing, such as consumer engagement, interactivity, and informativeness, significantly impact brand loyalty and, in turn, purchase intention (Almohaimmeed, 2019; Balakrishnan, 2014). Platform-specific studies, such as Aji et al. (2020) on Instagram in Indonesia's ready-to-drink tea market, illustrate the importance of visual content in driving purchase decisions. Similarly, Erlangga (2021) emphasized the ability of SMEs to leverage SMM for enhancing brand visibility and engagement, while Husnain et al. (2017) identified consumer engagement as a mediator linking SMM activities to purchase intention. Emotional and psychological connections fostered through luxury brand strategies (Kim & Ko, 2012) and performance-focused factors like hedonic provocation and customization (Alalwan, 2018; Godey et al., 2016) further enhance the effectiveness of SMM. Studies by Hutter and Hautz (2013) demonstrated the interactive impact of Facebook engagement on brand awareness, word-of-mouth, and purchase intention, reinforcing the value of tailored SMM strategies. Collectively, these findings suggest that successful social media marketing requires a strategic focus on consumer engagement, content quality, and platform-specific dynamics to drive purchase intentions and foster brand loyalty across diverse markets.

H1: Social media marketing has a significant positive effect on purchase intention.

Electronic- Word Of Mouth and Purchase Intention

The critical influence of Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) on purchase intention, highlighting its role as a powerful marketing tool in the digital age. Thureau et al. (2004) defined eWOM as online consumer statements—positive or negative—accessible to a broad audience. eWOM disseminates opinions, recommendations, and experiences through social media and online platforms, significantly impacting purchase decisions (Choi Meng Leong, 2022). Positive eWOM fosters trust, credibility, and social proof, encouraging favorable consumer responses, while its effectiveness depends on factors like source credibility, content relevance, user engagement,

and message virality (Choi Meng Leong, 2022). Online reviews and ratings, pivotal components of eWOM, have been found to directly influence purchase intention, with higher ratings and positive reviews boosting consumer trust (Sulthana & Vasantha, 2019).

Meta-analytic research by Ismagilova et al. (2020) identified key predictors of purchase intention, such as argument quality, valence, and eWOM usefulness, while highlighting less influential factors like message volume. This analysis offered both academic insights for future research and practical guidance for marketers. Verma and Yadav (2021) provided a comprehensive historical and forward-looking perspective on eWOM, examining its evolution and projecting its trajectory in marketing strategies. Studies like those by Erkan (2016) and Kala (2018) further explored eWOM's growing importance in reducing perceived risk, enhancing brand credibility, and influencing purchase decisions. Erkan emphasized the role of social ties and product involvement, while Kala demonstrated eWOM's impact on brand image in the lifestyle products sector, showcasing its dual potential to enhance or harm brand perceptions.

Jalilvand and Samiei (2012) corroborated these findings in the Iranian automobile industry, identifying a positive correlation between eWOM, brand image, and purchase intention, underlining the strategic importance of fostering positive eWOM interactions. Tariq et al. (2017) and Sa'ait et al. (2016) highlighted the mediating role of brand image in the eWOM-purchase intention relationship and the significance of eWOM attributes such as relevance, accuracy, timeliness, and comprehensiveness. Collectively, these studies underscore the necessity for businesses to actively manage and leverage eWOM to build trust, enhance brand image, and drive consumer purchase intentions, particularly in the context of growing e-commerce and social media integration.

H3: Electronic Word of mouth has a significant positive effect on purchase intention.

E-Mail Marketing and Purchase Intention

The literature highlights the critical role of email marketing in influencing customer purchase intentions, emphasizing its value as a direct and personalized communication tool. E-mail marketing as a direct marketing strategy aimed at fostering customer engagement, enhancing brand awareness, and promoting products or services. Nawas and Kaldeen (2020) demonstrated that the "offer" component in email marketing, such as clear product value explanations and attractive promotions, significantly enhances customer engagement, which in turn drives purchase intentions. Similarly, Bismo et al. (2019) confirmed that effective email campaigns, along with social media efforts, positively correlate with customer engagement, leading to increased conversion rates and business success. The personalization and relevance of email content were identified as key factors in fostering deeper customer connections (Bismo et al., 2019; Ali et al., 2015). Reimers et al. (2016) highlighted the impact of permission-based email marketing (PEM) in reducing perceived risks associated with online shopping while increasing perceived usefulness and enjoyment, aligning with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). Chittenden and Rettie (2003) further emphasized the importance of content relevance, timing, personalization, and strong calls-to-action in enhancing email campaign response rates. Ali et al. (2015) reinforced these findings by demonstrating how well-crafted email marketing campaigns improve brand perceptions, trust, and loyalty when they are consistent, visually appealing, and ethically executed.

While the benefits of email marketing are substantial, challenges such as information overload and privacy concerns remain. Ali et al. (2015) stressed the importance of balancing email frequency with content relevance to avoid overwhelming recipients and ensuring compliance with data protection laws to build trust. Collectively, these studies suggest that businesses leveraging tailored, engaging, and ethically executed email marketing strategies can enhance customer engagement, strengthen brand loyalty, and drive purchase intentions effectively.

H2: E-mail marketing has a significant positive effect on purchase intention.

Research Methodology

The research methodology used in this study is descriptive research, which aims to describe the current state of affairs without manipulating any variables. This approach focuses on depicting the characteristics of the individuals or groups being studied. Data was collected through a well-structured questionnaire, which was administered to customers, allowing for an accurate portrayal of their profiles and characteristics. Descriptive research serves to provide a clear understanding of the phenomenon under investigation and is useful in generating an overview of the subject matter based on the collected data. SPSS software was used in analysing the collected data.

Sampling

The sampling method used in this study is **convenience sampling**, a non-probability sampling technique where participants are selected based on their availability and accessibility to the researcher. This method involves selecting individuals who are conveniently located and willing to participate, rather than choosing a random sample from the population. In this study, the sample consists of **107 B2B customers** from an HR consultancy firm, who were surveyed due to their proximity and availability during the data collection process. This approach allows for quick and practical data collection but may limit the generalizability of the findings.

Data Collection

Primary data in this study was collected through a survey method using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to capture specific information relevant to the research objectives. To ensure the accuracy and reliability of the responses, a Likert scale was used to measure the attitudes, opinions, and perceptions of the respondents. The Likert scale provided a range of responses (such as strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree), allowing for a detailed analysis of the data collected from the participants. This approach enabled the researcher to gather quantitative data that could be analyzed systematically.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire for this research begins with a section on demographic information, followed by items addressing the key variables. The email marketing variable items were adopted from Bismo et al. (2019), while the social media marketing variable items were adapted from Husnain et al. (2017). Additionally, the electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) variable items were sourced from Choi Meng Leong (2022). These sources provided validated scales to ensure the reliability and relevance of the questionnaire items in capturing the essence of the research problem.

Data Analysis

Reliability Analysis

The reliability analysis for the constructs indicates strong internal consistency, as evidenced by Cronbach's Alpha coefficients exceeding the threshold of 0.7 for all variables. Specifically, the Social Media Marketing construct, comprising 5 items, achieved a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.897, while the Email Marketing construct, also with 5 items, recorded a value of 0.779. Similarly, the eWOM construct with 5 items showed a coefficient of 0.837, and the Purchase Intention construct, containing 5 items, yielded a value of 0.752. These results confirm that the questionnaire items reliably measure their respective constructs.

Table -1 Reliability Test

Construct	No. Of. Items	Cronbach Alpha
Social Media Marketing	5	0.897
Email Marketing	5	0.779
EWOM	5	0.837
Purchase Intention	5	0.752

DESCRIPTIVE FINDING

The demographic analysis of the respondents revealed several key insights. Regarding age distribution, 43% of the respondents fall between the ages of 18–30 years, 23.4% are aged 31–40 years, 19.6% are aged 41–50 years, and 14% are above 50 years. In terms of gender, 61.1% of the respondents are male, while 38.9% are female. The educational qualifications of respondents indicate that 9.3% hold a diploma or equivalent degree, 31.5% possess a bachelor's degree, 25.9% have a master's degree, and 33.3% hold a professional degree. Regarding the years of association with HR consultancy, 29.6% of the respondents have been associated for one year, 9.3% for two years, 20.4% for three years, and 39.8% for four or more years.

The sector analysis shows that 60.2% of respondents are from the IT sector, while 39.8% are from the non-IT sector. Regarding employee size, 30.6% of the respondent companies have 1–10 employees, 50.9% have 1–30 employees, 13% have 1–50 employees, and 5.4% have more than 50 employees. Lastly, the services availed by respondents include payroll management (28.7%), contract staffing (20.4%), recruitment (20.3%), and permanent staffing (30.6%).

Table 1.2 – descriptive findings

Demographic Aspect	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age Group	18–30 years	46	43
	31–40 years	25	23.4
	41–50 years	21	19.6
	51 years and above	15	14
Gender	Male	66	61.1
	Female	41	38.9
Qualification	Diploma or equivalent degree	10	9.3
	Bachelor's degree	34	31.5
	Master's degree	28	25.9
	Professional degree	35	33.3
Years of Association	1 year	32	29.6
	2 years	10	9.3
	3 years	22	20.4
	4 and above years	43	39.8
Sector	IT sector	65	60.2
	Non-IT sector	42	39.8
Employee Size	1–10 employees	33	30.6
	1–30 employees	55	50.9
	1–50 employees	14	13
	More than 50 employees	5	5.4
Services Availed	Payroll management	31	28.7
	Contract staffing	22	20.4
	Recruitment	21	20.3
	Permanent staffing	33	30.6

Satistical Analysis and Discussions

Chi Square Test

Chi-Square Test: Sector and Service Availed

A chi-square test of independence was conducted to examine the relationship between the sector of the customer company and the service availed by the customers. The test revealed a statistically significant association between these variables, $\chi^2 (3, N = 107) = 83.934, p = .000$. This indicates that the type of service availed is influenced by the sector of the customer company. The results suggest that IT sector companies predominantly avail themselves of permanent staffing services, whereas non-IT sector companies are more likely to opt for payroll management and contract staffing.

Table 1.3 - Chi Square Test

Sector you belong to * Service availed Crosstabulation
Count

		service availed				Total
		Payroll management	Contract staffing	Recruitment	Permanent staffing	
Sector you belong to	IT sector	0	11	21	33	65
	non-IT sector	31	11	0	0	42
Total		31	22	21	33	107

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	83.934 ^a	3	.000
Likelihood Ratio	112.852	3	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	75.389	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	107		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 8.24.

Correlation Analysis

A Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to assess the linear relationship between the variables: social media marketing, email marketing, eWOM, and purchase intention. The results indicated significant positive correlations between all the variables. Social media marketing showed a strong positive correlation with email marketing ($r = .698$, $p < .01$), eWOM ($r = .770$, $p < .01$), and purchase intention ($r = .655$, $p < .01$). Similarly, email marketing exhibited positive correlations with social media marketing ($r = .698$, $p < .01$), eWOM ($r = .523$, $p < .01$), and purchase intention ($r = .670$, $p < .01$). eWOM demonstrated a strong positive correlation with social media marketing ($r = .770$, $p < .01$), email marketing ($r = .523$, $p < .01$), and purchase intention ($r = .901$, $p < .01$). Finally, purchase intention showed significant positive correlations with social media marketing ($r = .655$, $p < .01$), email marketing ($r = .670$, $p < .01$), and eWOM ($r = .901$, $p < .01$). These results suggest a significant association between all the variables, supporting the alternative hypothesis that a strong linear relationship exists among social media marketing, email marketing, eWOM, and purchase intention.

Table 1.4 Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
social media marketing	17.50	5.41	107.00
Email marketing	18.23	4.03	107.00
ewom	18.65	3.99	107.00
pi	16.92	3.02	107.00

Correlations

		Social media marketing	Email marketing	ewom	pi
Social media marketing	Pearson Correlation	1	.698**	.770**	.655**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0	0	0
	N	107	107	107	107
Email marketing	Pearson Correlation	.698**	1	.523**	.670**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0	0	0
	N	107	107	107	107
E-WOM	Pearson Correlation	.770**	.523**	1	.901**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0	0	0
	N	107	107	107	107
pi	Pearson Correlation	.655**	.670**	.901**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0	0	0
	N	107	107	107	107

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Regression Analysis

Table 1.5

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
1	0.96	0.5		1.9	0.1					
	-0.2	0	-0.4	-7.9	0	0.7	-1	-0.2	0.3	3.5
	0.33	0	0.4	11.2	0	0.7	0.7	0.3	0.5	2
	0.75	0	1	22.3	0	0.9	0.9	0.6	0.4	2.5

ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	885.913	3	295.304	378.644	.000 ^b
Residual	80.33	103	0.78		
Total	966.243	106			

a. Dependent Variable: purchase intention

b. Predictors: (Constant), ewom, emailmarketing, socialmediamarketing

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
1	0.96	0.5		1.9	0.1					
	-0.2	0	-0.4	-7.9	0	0.7	-1	-0.2	0.3	3.5
	0.33	0	0.4	11.2	0	0.7	0.7	0.3	0.5	2
	0.75	0	1	22.3	0	0.9	0.9	0.6	0.4	2.5

The multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the impact of social media marketing, email marketing, and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) on purchase intention. The null hypothesis (H0) posited that there is no significant relationship between these variables, while the alternative hypothesis (H1) suggested a significant relationship. The model summary revealed an R value of 0.850, an R-squared value of 0.723, and an adjusted R-squared value of 0.712, indicating that the independent variables collectively explain 72.3% of the variance in purchase intention. The ANOVA results confirmed the overall model's significance ($F(3, 103) = 378.6$, $p < .001$). Upon examining the coefficients, social media marketing was found to have a significant negative relationship with purchase intention ($\beta = -0.417$, $t = -7.871$, $p < .001$). This suggests that an increase in social media marketing is associated with a decrease in purchase intention. In contrast, email marketing exhibited a significant positive relationship with purchase intention ($\beta = 0.443$, $t = 11.17$, $p < .001$), indicating that higher email marketing efforts result in a higher purchase intention. Similarly, eWOM showed a significant positive relationship with purchase intention ($\beta = 0.991$, $t = 22.252$, $p < .001$), implying that increased eWOM enhances purchase intention.

The final regression equation derived from the model is as follows:

Purchase Intention = 0.958 + (-0.417 * Social Media Marketing) + (0.443 * Email Marketing) + (0.991 * eWOM)

These findings underscore the significant influence of email marketing and eWOM in predicting purchase intention, while social media marketing shows a negative association. The adjusted R-squared value of 0.712 suggests a strong explanatory power of the model. Assumptions of linearity, independence of errors, constant variance, and normality of residuals were met, and no significant multicollinearity was detected among the independent variables.

Implication / Suggestions

The findings of this study present valuable insights for marketing managers and businesses aiming to enhance their digital marketing efforts. By understanding the influence of social media marketing, email marketing, and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) on consumer purchase intentions, managers can develop more effective strategies, strengthen customer engagement, and improve campaign outcomes. The study emphasizes the significant role of eWOM, which was found to have the strongest positive impact on purchase intention. To leverage this, businesses should focus on fostering trust and encouraging online reviews, testimonials, and social proof. Establishing platforms where customers can share their experiences and opinions can amplify the impact of eWOM. Proactively addressing negative feedback and showcasing excellent customer service can turn challenges into opportunities. Engaging influencers and brand advocates can further enhance the reach and authenticity of eWOM campaigns. Email marketing also emerged as a key driver of purchase intention, highlighting the importance of personalized communication. Managers should use data analytics and segmentation tools to design targeted campaigns that align with customer preferences. Dynamic content tailored to individual behaviors and purchase histories can strengthen connections and build loyalty. Employing automation tools ensures timely and relevant communication while maintaining a human touch.

Interestingly, the study revealed a negative relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention, signaling the need to reassess strategies within this channel. Managers should conduct audits to address potential issues like oversaturation, irrelevant content, or intrusive ads. To improve social media effectiveness, businesses should prioritize delivering valuable content that engages, informs, and entertains their target audiences. Strategies such as user-generated content, interactive features, and precise ad targeting can help enhance the impact of social media marketing. An integrated marketing approach is critical, given the interconnected nature of these channels. Consistent messaging across platforms and a seamless customer experience can amplify the strengths of each channel while mitigating their weaknesses. For instance, social media can drive traffic to email sign-ups, while email campaigns can amplify eWOM through user testimonials. The study's findings underscore the importance of data-driven decision-making, with the model explaining 72.3% of the variance in purchase intention. Businesses should invest in analytics and optimization tools to monitor key performance indicators like click-through rates, conversion rates, and engagement metrics, enabling continuous improvement of marketing campaigns.

Finally, fostering consumer trust remains a cornerstone of effective marketing. Transparent communication, ethical practices, and delivering on brand promises contribute to a positive brand image, ultimately strengthening purchase intention. Businesses should explore innovative strategies, such as integrating AI-driven personalization in email marketing or using social media for real-time interactions. Experimenting with emerging platforms, incorporating technologies like augmented reality in campaigns, and staying attuned to consumer trends will help businesses remain competitive and relevant in the dynamic digital landscape.

Conclusion

The study conducted at HR consultancy, exploring the effect of digital marketing on customer purchase intention among B2B clients of consultancy, provided valuable insights into the dynamics of contemporary marketing strategies. The findings underscored the significance of specific digital marketing elements and shed light on key areas for strategic enhancement. The analysis revealed that email marketing emerged as a substantial predictor of purchase intention, highlighting the importance of personalized and targeted email campaigns. Additionally, the study identified a positive correlation between social media marketing and purchase intention, emphasizing the need for HR consultancy to refine and intensify its social media engagement strategies. Furthermore, the influential role of Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM) in shaping purchase intentions was evident. The company is encouraged to actively encourage and manage positive customer reviews, leveraging them as powerful tools for building brand credibility and trust. The sector-wise variations in purchase intention, particularly between IT and non-IT sectors, suggest the importance of tailoring marketing approaches to specific industry characteristics. HR consultancy can capitalize on these insights to design sector-specific strategies, ensuring a more nuanced and targeted approach. The multiple linear regression model, encompassing social media marketing, email marketing, and EWOM, provided a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing purchase intention. The adjusted R-squared value of 0.914 signifies the model's robustness in explaining the variability in customer purchase intentions. As HR consultancy moves forward, it is recommended to implement the suggested strategies derived from the study. Strengthening email marketing, enhancing social media engagement, optimizing EWOM impact, diversifying marketing approaches across sectors, and maintaining a dynamic and adaptive marketing strategy are vital considerations for sustained success in influencing customer purchase intentions. This study not only contributes to the academic discourse on digital marketing but also equips HR consultancy with actionable insights to refine its marketing strategies, foster customer loyalty, and thrive in the competitive B2B landscape. The findings pave the way for continued exploration and refinement of marketing approaches, ensuring HR consultancy remains at the forefront of digital marketing effectiveness.

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