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Leveraging social media marketing: To shape brand perception and increase brand awareness in the online retail industry

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Abstract

The ascent of social media has significantly altered customer behaviour, mainly in the online retail business where it has shaped brand recognition and perceptions. In this regard, social media, as studied with the help of the Elaboration Likelihood Model, helps in clarifying how social media platforms affect brand awareness among consumers in the retail sector. An online questionnaire through Google Forms was used in the present study to gather data related to demographic data, brand perception, and trends of social media usage. The findings suggest that social media usage indeed has a high influence on brand awareness as well as perception. More aware of brands and giving more positive brand evaluations were heavy social media users compared with less frequent users. These results show that social media is a potential powerful tool for consumer interaction and brand perception reinforcement in the online retail industry. The findings add to literature in that actual data of consumer behavior and involvement with social media can be brought forward to substantiate the applicability of the ELM framework. All this knowledge obtained enables marketers and brand managers to obtain advice on how to assess the success of their social media while catching chances to build nearer relations with the target market. The end Conclusion the use of social media impacts perceptual consumer attitudes and brand awareness within the online retail industry, with this study confirming the conclusion and providing practical advice for companies looking to improve their reputation and visibility through social media strategy.

Keywords: Elaboration likelihood model, social media, consumer behavior, brand perception, brand awareness

Introduction

Social media, today, has become the most significant channel for most brands and individuals. There are 4.7 billion users of social media globally. However, it was no longer just another platform people went to kill time in but has now become a multi-purpose platform that, when used rightly, may take one closer to one's target audience. The following research will determine how social media affects consumer behavior. It pertains to how consumers perceive and how much respect they give to the companies. The aim of the research is to guide brand managers and marketers in perfecting their marketing campaigns to better create ties between brands and the consumers as it seeks to examine the nature of such a relationship.

Social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn have completely changed the relation of business with the market. Since millions of people use these social networking sites, they allow businesses to connect with their customers, communicate, and then develop relationships that could not have been built in the first place. Websites like any other social media are not limited to one-way marketing. Instead, they incite the conversation-the foundation on which a firm connects with a target market. Therefore, that allows the passing of information and simultaneously take shape of a particular brand form and brand awareness.

The importance of this study lies in the fact that it addresses a growing direction in consumer-brand interaction in the digital age. Brand perception is an important aspect of consumer behavior which is seen as perceptions, feelings, or beliefs that consumers have regarding a brand. Now, as more consumers rely on social media for information and recommendations, there is a great need to understand how social media influences brand perception and awareness to help brands stay competitive.

Brand perception refers to how consumers perceive and understand a brand through their experience, belief, and connection that they develop about the brand. It constitutes thought processes, emotions, and attitudes formed with regard to the brand through marketing, service from the company, and the quality of products. Brand perception leading to consumers' trust and loyalty positively encourages them to choose and prefer that brand over the rest.

Brand awareness, on the other hand, refers to consumers' knowledge and memory of a brand. It is a measure of the degree to which a brand has visibility in the consumer's mind. The consumer is able to identify the brand name, logo, or goods. High brand awareness allows familiarity, so the brand is always top-of-mind during purchasing decisions. Social media can now make both perception and awareness drivers as brands are able to engage constantly with audiences and reinforce the image.

Influencer marketing has also been an effective tool to manage brand image. These social media influencers have a large number of followers and can influence the audience to develop a positive attitude toward certain brands with their endorsements and collaborations. Influencer endorsements are more believable to their audiences than commercials because people believe them due to their relatability.

Third, social media has enabled brands to position themselves through stories which explain their purpose, values, and what makes them outstanding. Brands can get closer to their audience at deeper personal levels hence winning their loyalty and compassion by using several types of content.

Elaboration likelihood model (ELM)

The elaboration likelihood model (ELM) is a dual-process theory that elucidates how attitudes are altered. Developed by Richard E. Petty and John Cacioppo in 1980, this model outlines different methods of processing stimuli, identifying which methods are employed and their resulting effects on attitudes. ELM introduces two primary pathways of persuasion: the central route and the peripheral route.

Central Route Processing

These include situations in which the central route is activated, and elaboration is extremely high: careful consideration of a persuasive message by an individual. High relevance of the message to the individual and cognitive resources capable of processing the information are facilitators for the activation of this particular route. In the social context of media, central route processing occurs because it deals with customers that are exposed to highly detailed and informative communications such as product specifications, in-depth reviews, and comprehensive comparisons. Such consumers tend to be more critical of information quality and credibility, hence attitudes that would endure longer and be more stable. For example, the technology-oriented consumer may follow the in-depth comments of a tech brand on social media and view the brand even stronger and more positive.

Peripheral Route Processing: The peripheral route, in contrast, is characterized by minimal elaboration. In this approach, consumers depend on superficial signals instead of the actual content of the message. This route is generally

engaged when the message holds little personal significance or when the individual does not possess the capacity or motivation for thorough processing. Peripheral route processing can occur in social media when an individual is influenced through peripheral cues such as the attractiveness of a particular influencer promoting a specific product or many likes and shares received on a specific post or if an ad is perceived to be beautiful. Such peripheral cues may make attitude changes fast and unstable. For example, a mindless scrolling through Instagram may end up promoting the idea of a brand in the consumer's attitude when one of the popular influencers endorses that brand incidentally without investigating the product thoroughly.

Review of literature

- Mathur, M. (2018) ^[27]. "Utilizing social media factors to enhance customer-based brand equity for retailers." Retailers can enhance their customer-based brand equity by effectively utilizing consumer traits on social media, thereby successfully integrating and maximizing their social media marketing efforts
- Khajuria, I., & R. (2019) ^[28]. "The Role of Social Media Marketing in Building Brand Awareness and Trust". Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter play a crucial role in enabling brands to connect directly with their consumers, facilitating significant interactions. The research indicates that maintaining consistent, transparent, and engaging social media campaigns is vital for establishing brand credibility and fostering emotional ties with audiences.
- Mathur, M. (2020) ^[29]. "Enhancing Retail Brand Value Through Social Media Equity." The overall value of a brand is influenced by customers' subjective assessments, which extend beyond objective brand valuation. Social media has become an essential element in these subjective evaluations, prompting a shift in brand advertising strategies
- Faisal, A., & Ekawanto, I. (2022) ^[30]. "The impact of Social Media Marketing on Brand Awareness, Brand Image, and Purchase Intent." Social media marketing initiatives that focus on entertainment, engagement, trendiness, personalization, and word-of-mouth significantly boost brand awareness, brand image, and purchase intentions. Khajuria, I., & R. (2019) ^[28]. "Social Media Marketing in Creating Brand Awareness and Brand Trust". Social media platforms significantly contribute to brand awareness and trust building, but alone cannot develop and grow a business.
- Wilis, R. (2023) ^[31]. "Social Media Marketing Strategy for Enhancing Brand Awareness." This research focuses on examining the engagement levels of an Instagram store account and their impact on brand awareness. It evaluates three key elements of social media interaction: creator-related features, contextual features, and content features.
- Oleárová, M., & Bačík, R. "The Connection Between Social Media Marketing and Enhanced Brand Awareness." This study highlights how social media marketing plays a crucial role in boosting brand awareness through various factors, including perceived personalization, content usefulness, entertaining content, and customer engagement.

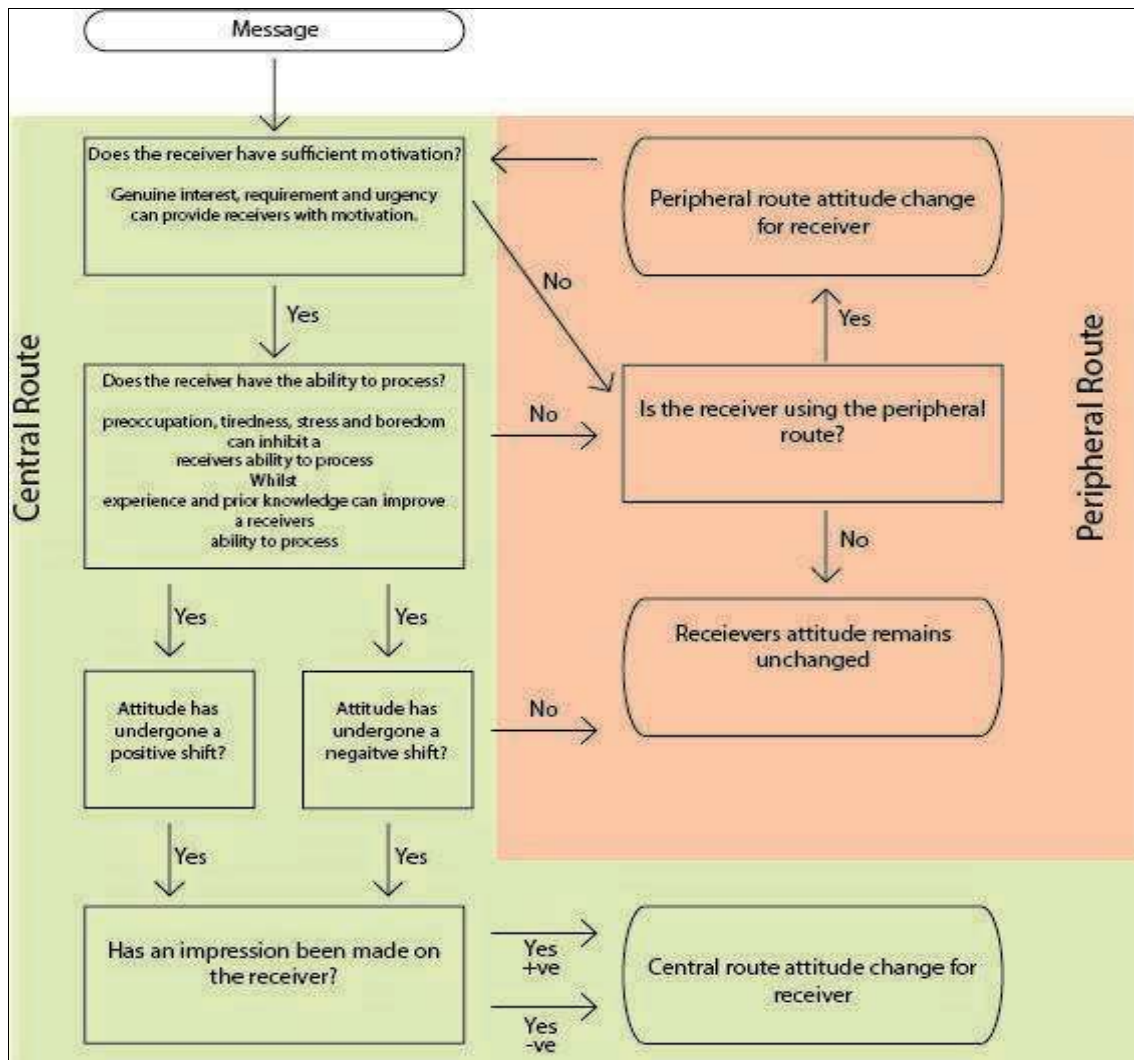


Fig 1: Elaboration Likelihood Model diagram

Problem Statement

- **The Impact of Social Media on Consumer Perception:** Examining how consumers perceive brand names in the online retail industry through their engagement with social media platforms.
- **Effects on Brand Awareness:** Analyzing the potential effects of social media activities on consumer awareness of brands within the online retail landscape.
- **The Significance of Social Media Engagement:** Investigating whether different intensities of social media usage-heavy, moderate, or light-impact consumer attitudes and brand recognition.

Research Objective

- Analyze the online retail sector to assess how the use of social media influences the perceptions of consumers about brands.
- Assess how social media engagement relates to the generation of brand awareness among online retail customers.
- Analyze how publicity via social media affects the spread of awareness and perception of a brand using the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM).

Research Methodology

The research will utilize a quantitative methodology to examine the impact of social media usage on brand

perception and brand awareness within the online retail industry. This approach is chosen to enable the quantification of relationships between variables and to facilitate the generalization of results from a sample to a broader population. The study will be grounded in the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), which posits that the degree of consumer engagement with social media influences their behavior and perceptions regarding the brand. This study uses convenience sampling, which falls under the category of non-probability sampling. 120 Subjects were solicited online, mainly via social media, to participate in the online survey conducted using Google Forms. Convenience sampling was selected because it allows for the greatest number of participants to be reached in a short amount of time and at little cost. Although this method does contain some sampling bias, it is suitable for exploratory studies where the main aim is to provide some insight into any possible relationships and not statistical representation. The data were collected using an online questionnaire that was structured to capture information on social media usage, metrics of brand perception, and demographic variables. The questionnaire included the following sections:

- **Demographics:** Questions about age, gender, education level, and income to understand the profile of the respondents.
- **Social Media Usage:** Questions measuring the frequency and intensity of social media use, including

platforms used, time spent, and engagement activities such as liking, sharing, and commenting.

- **Brand Perception Metrics:** Questions designed to assess participants' perceptions of brands encountered on social media, including brand trust, brand loyalty, and brand association.
- **Brand Awareness Metrics:** Questions measuring the recognition and recall of brands seen on social media platforms.

This study has been conducted to analyze the data using SPSS Statistics. For this purpose, descriptive statistics were used first in order to present the demographic profile of the respondents and their social media usage patterns. Later, ANOVA has been applied for testing hypotheses and calculating the significance of the effect of social media usage on brand perception as well as brand awareness. The ANOVA test was selected for comparison of means across multiple groups, namely, heavy, moderate, and light social media users who could highlight if there is a significant difference in the levels of brand perception and awareness.

Hypotheses

- **H0 (Null Hypothesis):** Social media use has no impact on perception and brand awareness for online retail.
- **H1 (Alternative Hypothesis):** Social media usage affects brand perception and brand awareness for online retail positively.

Data analysis and interpretation

The structured online survey was the major tool for primary data collection, with 14 questions prepared to capture respondents' demographic details, social media usage, brand perception, and brand awareness. The survey was created using validated scales found within existing literature and was dispatched to 120 participants through a series of shared links on various social media as well as by email invitations. The widespread reach and convenience of the online format ensured a high response rate. Data was improved in terms of

accuracy and reliability through several measures: a pilot test identified and corrected errors in the questionnaire; anonymity and confidentiality guaranteed honest answers from the respondents; validation checks ensured that all questions in the questionnaire were answered by validating responses; and post-collection, the dataset was cleaned of incomplete or inconsistent responses. The survey was left open for a number of days long enough to collect the responses.

Table 1: Demographic Information

Age group	Gender	Count
U 18	Female	4
U 18	Male	5
18-24	Female	33
18-24	Male	21
25-34	Female	10
25-34	Male	9
35-44	Female	11
35-44	Male	8
Abv 44	Female	12
Abv 44	Male	7

Demographic Information of Participants

The demographic data of 120 participants depict a diverse age and gender distribution. From this, the majority, that is 54 participants, fall within the age bracket of 18-24 years as well as 33 females and 21 males. There are 10 females and 9 males from the 25-34 age bracket as well as 11 females and 8 males within the 35-44 age bracket. Participants aged 45 and above are female 12 and male 7, while the under-18 category is composed of female 4 and male 5. With this breakdown of demographics, it's possible to analyze each age group and gender when it comes to social media engagement, with an emphasis on young adults highly influencing the perception and awareness of a brand.

Analysis of Social Media Usage Frequency Across Demographic Groups

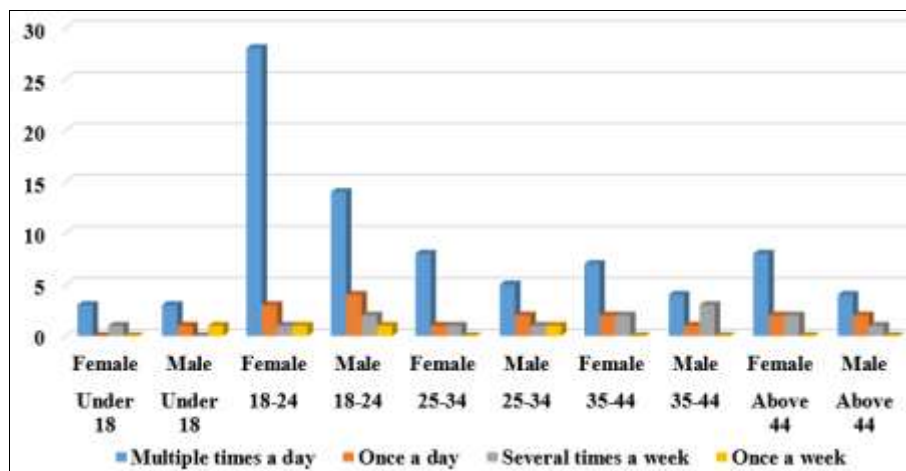


Fig 2: Social Media Usage Frequency by Demographics

Age Groups

Blue: This is the most frequent category, indicating how many times a day people use social media. The highest usage is found among the 18-24-year-olds, especially females, at around 30 females to 15 males reporting usage of social media several times a day. Other age groups have lower, yet still significant, usage several times a day, and

females appear to use social media more often than males.

Once a day: In this category usage is relatively more uniform across different age groups but remains low compared to multiple times a day. The 25-34 age group has the most once-a-day users of both sexes.

Sometimes a week to several times a week (Gray): Here, the usage is less pronounced, spread more sparsely across all age groups. Usage is slightly higher for older age groups: 35-44 and above 44.

Every week (Yellow): This is the least frequent across all

ages and both sexes. There is a slight rise in the advanced age, especially above 44, with both males and females having similarly lower frequencies of weekly use.

The social media platforms commonly utilized by participants are as follows

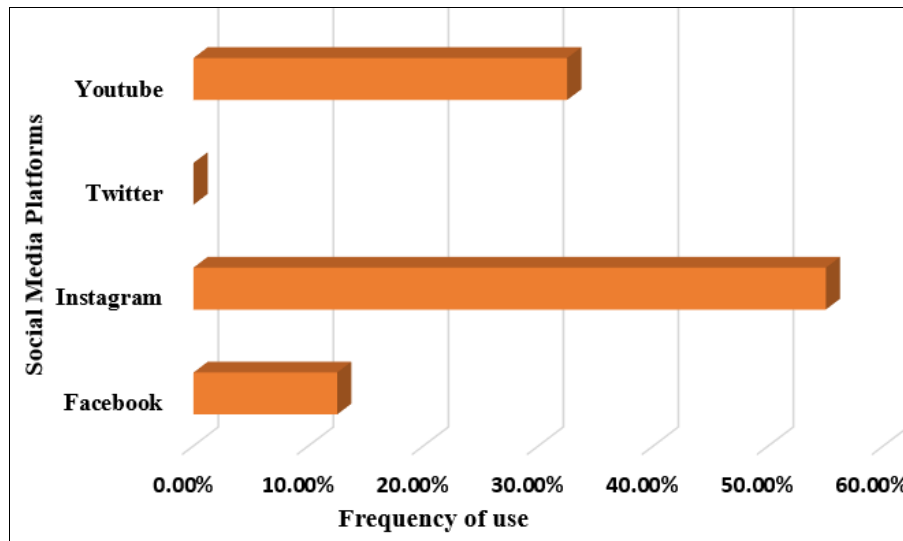


Fig 3: Most frequently used social media platforms by participants

Instagram is the most dominant application, showing that 55% of respondents use it the most. The high usage rate reflects the effectiveness of Instagram for connecting oneself with one's brand, especially visual and interactive content relating to improving perception and awareness. YouTube is the second most active service a participant uses, which amounts to 32.5%. Since this platform focuses more on videos, brands are able to communicate richer, more compelling stories that might pay off through positive brand perceptions. The Facebook accounts for 12.5% of participant usage. Though it is not so popular, still as a platform brands can reach certain demographics or even

work on community-based awareness. No user has claimed to have used Twitter, so therefore, it might not be a preferred platform by the population group on their engagement with the brands.

This distribution of platform preferences would suggest that brands targeting similar demographics need to focus on Instagram and YouTube for its marketing efforts to effectively build brand perception and awareness. The use of Facebook can be more as supplementary and Twitter could be deprioritized according to this survey.

Social media usage frequency

Table 2: ANOVA Analysis of Social Media Usage Frequency

Dependent Variable	Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
OI Perception	Between Groups	6.524	3	2.175	4.589	.005
	Within Groups	55.901	116	.396		
	Total	62.425	119			
OI Awareness	Between Groups	3.120	3	1.040	.694	.410
	Within Groups	124.380	116	1.072		
	Total	127.500	119			

Analysis

Q4_Perception: The Sum of Squares for 'Between Groups' amounts to 5.424, leading to a Mean Square of 1.808 and an F-value of 4.569. The significance (Sig.) value is recorded at 0.005. For 'Within Groups', the Sum of Squares totals 45.901, resulting in a Mean Square of 0.396. Q8_Awareness: The Sum of Squares for 'Between Groups' is 3.120, which produces a Mean Square of 1.040 and an F-value of 0.969. The significance (Sig.) value stands at 0.410. The Sum of Squares for 'Within Groups' is 124.580, with a Mean Square of 1.074.

Q4_Perception, the significance value of 0.005 is lower than the 0.05 threshold, indicating a statistically significant difference in brand perceptions across different usage frequencies. This implies that the frequency with which individuals use social media can significantly shape their perceptions of brands. In contrast, the significance value for Q8_Awareness is 0.410, which is above 0.05, suggesting that there is no statistically significant difference in brand awareness among the various usage frequency groups. Thus, while the frequency of social media usage seems to influence brand perception, it does not have a significant effect on brand awareness.

Interpretation

This ANOVA analysis examines how the frequency of social media usage affects brand perception (Q4_Perception) and brand awareness (Q8_Awareness). For

**Social media usage frequency with age and gender
Social Media usage frequency with age**

Table 3: ANOVA Analysis of Social Media Usage Frequency with Age

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	10.212	4	2.553	3.875	.005
Within Groups	75.755	115	.659		
Total	85.967	119			

The ANOVA analysis of the age factor on how often people use social media postulates that the difference in how often people use social media is significantly affected by their age. The F-value is 3.875, and the p-value or Sig. is 0.005. Since it is less than 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis whereby no age group has a difference in using social media. We, therefore conclude that there is a statistically significant difference in the frequency of social media usage across different age groups. Hence, this evidence supports the alternative hypothesis that perception and awareness of brands through online retailing is affected by social media usage.

Social Media Usage Frequency with Gender

Table 4: ANOVA Analysis of Social Media Usage Frequency with Gender

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2.107	1	2.107	2.965	.088
Within Groups	83.859	118	.711		
Total	85.967	119			

The ANOVA analysis regarding the frequency of social media usage in relation to gender interaction reveals an F-value of 2.965 and a p-value of 0.088. Given that the p-value exceeds the threshold of 0.05, we cannot reject the null hypothesis, indicating no significant differences in social media usage frequency across genders. Consequently, it can be concluded that there is no notable difference in social media engagement between males and females. This implies that gender does not play a significant role in influencing how frequently individuals participate on social media, particularly concerning brand perception and awareness within the online retail sector. The mixed findings from the ANOVA suggest that social media does impact brand perception and awareness. While the hypotheses propose that social media usage has a significant effect on brand perception, it appears to have a negligible effect on brand awareness. Gender does not significantly affect either brand perception or awareness. In contrast, age demonstrates a significant influence on brand awareness, though it does not similarly affect perception. These findings indicate that while age and usage levels are critical factors in shaping brand awareness, their impact on perception is more variable, highlighting the complexity of social media's influence on consumer behavior.

Findings

Social Media Engagement Frequency

The difference is not statistically significant at 0.410 ($p > 0.05$) (Table 3). That is, brand awareness is not significantly different between the various groups of social media usage frequency. Accordingly, H_0 holds, meaning that the social media usage frequency does not change brand awareness. Brand Perception with Social Media Usage Frequency: The ANOVA results show a significance value of 0.005 ($p <$

0.05) (Table 3). This implies that there is a significant difference in brand perception among various groups that differ in their social media usage frequency. In other words, the more one uses social media, the greater its impact will be on perceiving brands.

Analysis of Social Media Usage Patterns by Age and Gender

Social Media Usage Frequency with Age: The ANOVA results in Table 8 reveal a very significant age effect on the frequency of social media usage, with a p-value of 0.005, that is, $p < .05$. Thus, age groups significantly differ from each other in the frequency of social media usage.

Social Media Usage Frequency with Gender: A p-value of 0.088 ($p > 0.05$) in Table 9 implies that there is no significant difference in the frequency of social media usage in any gender group, and subsequently, it suggests that gender has no influence on the social media usage frequency.

Brand Awareness: Significance value is more than 0.05 ($p = 0.410$) Hence, we are unable to reject the null hypothesis (H_0). Social media usage frequency is not a significant contributor to brand awareness.

Brand Perception: With a significance value less than 0.05, $p = 0.005$, we fail to accept the null hypothesis, H_0 and accept the alternative hypothesis, H_1 . The frequency of social media usage significantly influences brand perception.

Conclusion

In summary, the analytical results reveal that age is a significant influencer of brand awareness and social media usage frequency, while the latter is also a significant influencer of brand perception. In turn, gender does not have any significant influence on brand perception or brand awareness. Findings correlate with the alternative hypothesis (H_1) to some extent in the form of brands' perception and social media usage frequency. These findings suggest that online retailing brands should develop social media marketing strategies to various ages in order to build brand awareness and perception even more effectively. This study underscores a huge role of social media in shaping perception and awareness about a brand online. Such brands that want to create a long-lasting digital presence should, therefore, consider them as core engagement channels by using visuals and video content to allure their target demographics. Online retailing businesses must, therefore, remain agile by tracking platform trends as it keeps changing to ensure alignments in focus with the preferences of consumers.

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