Study on the Effectiveness of Digital Marketing on Purchase Intent with the Moderating Role of Brand Special Value

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to analyze the influence of digital marketing on purchase intention and to investigate the moderating effect of brand equity in this setting. A quantitative research method was utilized in this study to meet the research goals. This study is applied in terms of its purpose and employs a descriptive survey design by nature. Data were gathered from a sample of 170 online shoppers of the Ofoq Kourosh chain store in District 22, Tehran Province, through convenient sampling and electronic questionnaire distribution. Statistical tests, including data normality and scale reliability, were conducted using SPSS 24 software. Subsequently, the measurement model and hypothesis testing were carried out with Smart PLS 3 software. The findings, based on the validity of the measurement and structural models and analyses aligned with the research objectives, demonstrated that digital marketing and brand equity as moderating factors positively and significantly affect purchase intention. This research offers practical recommendations and strategies to enhance marketing efforts and improve their impact on purchase intention in chain stores.

Key words: Digital marketing, Brand equity, Purchase intention.

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

The rapid changes in today's world have introduced numerous challenges for organizations. Yet, successful organizations are those that leverage management tools and modern technologies to transform these challenges into opportunities. One such tool is the e-commerce environment, which, through the Internet, enables customers to search for information and purchase goods and services via direct interaction with online stores (Feiznia, 2017). Global research indicates that customers spend millions of dollars on online shopping, facilitated by smartphones and innovative apps that make the process simpler, more accessible, and cost-effective. Many individuals dedicate several hours daily to browsing the web for various services (Statista, 2019; Suez, 2021). With the increasing prevalence of virtual spaces, companies in digital marketing must understand the extent and manner of their usage. Moreover, as social networks expand and market competition intensifies, creating search

engine-optimized marketing content has become crucial in online marketing. It can be argued that marketing is fundamental to achieving business success in today's competitive landscape. Consequently, digital marketing has emerged as an indispensable cornerstone for all major industries and businesses (Zarei & Bagheri Qarah-Bagh, 2021). Digital marketing has surpassed geographical limitations, enabling quick and cost-effective access to target markets worldwide (Lynch, 2018). The Central Marketing Organization of the United States defines digital marketing as the activities and processes of organizations that facilitate the creation, communication, and

delivery of value to customers and stakeholders through digital technologies. These activities encompass marketing, organizations, processes, and customers, with touchpoints growing by over 30% annually due to the increasing consumer inclination toward digital technologies (Bogin, 2015). With the advancement of integrated marketing methods, digital marketing has emerged as a transformative concept, bringing substantial changes to the marketing landscape and often replacing traditional approaches. Many companies now rely on digital marketing to establish effective customer communication, especially through online sales (Atapato & Koaltanga, 2014; Edemoor, 2021; Leo, 2021). This growing interest in digital marketing has intensified competition in e-commerce markets, prompting major players to explore innovative strategies for attracting new online customers while retaining their existing base (Obidat & Sefi, 2019). Customers often harbor doubts about the reliability of digital marketing tools. Consequently, they advise companies to build awareness and trust around their brand through robust branding strategies. As a result, many businesses allocate significant investments to digital marketing to secure their sustainability and growth. Failure in digital marketing campaigns leads to substantial costs and time-consuming efforts, often leaving companies less competitive in the market (Al-Azam & Al-Mazid, 2021; Al-Baya, 2022). The current business environment is highly competitive, characterized by the entry of strong international brands into various production sectors, threatening the survival of even large companies. To counter these challenges, reputable global firms must assess their brand's current standing and how consumers perceive it. This evaluation is essential for maintaining and enhancing their position while increasing consumer awareness of their brand (Mohammadian et al., 2010). Brand awareness is a key element and an effective factor in customer decision-making. Customers tend to buy a product that has a good reputation, offers various benefits, and meets their expectations (Swandy, 2015). Brand equity has become a

priority for many organizations due to the outstanding benefits it creates, playing a role in customer retention and gaining a competitive advantage (Brekzendorf & Keller, 2019). Customers prefer one brand over another based on factors that matter to them (Ebrahimi, 2020). Therefore, to make marketing costs more effective, it is necessary to better understand consumer behavior and know what the customer thinks about the brand. Having a unique image in the minds of customers regarding services/products helps them understand their brand value, increases brand loyalty, and encourages sponsors to collaborate with a specific brand (Ali Rezaei, 2017). Brand equity is one of the assets that maintain the value of the company, attracting customer attention and loyalty by creating a competitive advantage over competitors (Altzolo, 2020). The personality of a product plays an important role in shaping the brand, and the increasing competition among diverse markets and efforts to differentiate organizations have made brand personality a focal point. Thus, organizations may use digital marketing strategies to attract customers in the process of building brand personality. In this process, creating a strong brand means creating a meaningful and valuable personality, which can play a key role in the success of the organization (Morgan & Richard, 2010).

Importance and Necessity of the Research

With the advancement of science and technology, the proliferation of digital tools, shifts in lifestyles from traditional to modern, and the growing preference for accessing services and purchasing products online through smart devices like computers and mobile phones, traditional marketing has been inevitably replaced by digital marketing. This transition is driven by the cost-effectiveness, time efficiency, and faster results associated with digital marketing. Consequently, most organizations have been compelled to shift their business activities from traditional to digital methods. This transformation necessitates establishing IT infrastructure, employing information systems, and leveraging skilled

professionals and digital tools. Organizations must adopt digital marketing to remain competitive, yet this shift comes with challenges such as financial limitations, a shortage of skilled personnel, employee resistance, and inadequate knowledge sharing within organizations. A successful digital marketing strategy relies heavily on key factors, including branding, which is the central focus of this research. It investigates how branding and its influencing factors contribute to increased purchase intention and customer loyalty to a specific brand. In the face of intense competition in digital marketing at both domestic and international levels, organizations strive to differentiate their products to gain a competitive edge. This challenge revolves around identifying factors that help establish product or service differentiation in customers' minds and encourage repeat purchases. Moreover, determining the necessary infrastructure to achieve these goals is critical. Given the dynamic global environment—shaped by economic, political, cultural, and other factors—alongside customers' ever-evolving needs and expectations, understanding the drivers of organizational success is crucial. Achieving profitability while maintaining customer-centricity and adhering to professional ethics is paramount. Mistakes in this journey could lead to resource wastage, irreparable losses, and potentially the organization's exit from the competitive market.

Literature Review

Digital marketing is defined as the integration of modern digital technologies with traditional marketing strategies to achieve key marketing objectives. Companies leverage this approach to capitalize on opportunities like easy commerce via smartphone applications, which promote business activities and have evolved into trading platforms (Li Faling, 2014; Almazmi, 2021; Tarek, 2022). Digital marketing has reshaped global markets, enhancing customers' purchase intent and driving the development of advanced business technologies in response to these changes (Puyarak & Saptik, 2019; Kasana, 2021). Digital marketing encompasses elements like laptops, smartphones, e-commerce platforms, and artificial intelligence, all of which influence customer attitudes and shape future marketing strategies (Al-Hashemi, 2021; Al-Shamsi, 2021; Nasir, 2021; Yusuf, 2021). Research highlights the role of conceptual models and moderating factors, such as brand awareness, in linking digital marketing to purchase intent (Patri, 2021). Although digital marketing significantly impacts purchase intent, existing research has yet to fully explore this relationship, especially in regions like Jordan, where it is a growing focus (Dustin, 2020). Digital marketing enables organizations to engage customers and promote products without limitations of location, time, or cost (Manfred, 2021; Webisoria, 2018). Research confirms its positive impact on purchase intent, with attractive, customized content playing a critical role (Puyarak & Saptik, 2019). Customers' online searches and time spent on e-commerce websites further influence purchase intent, prompting businesses to develop innovative communication strategies to compete effectively (Wang et al., 2019). Brand equity, an essential organizational asset, supports customer loyalty and competitive differentiation (Zolo, 2020). Customers' brand preferences are influenced by factors significant to them (Ibrahim, 2020). In e-commerce, brand personality encompasses five core factors: benevolence, knowledge and wisdom, courage, enjoyment, and beauty (Zhu et al., 2019). Benevolence reflects traits like economic viability and practicality, while knowledge and wisdom—key components—are measured by trustworthiness, expertise, and security. Courage embodies power and prominence, enjoyment focuses on customer pleasure, and beauty evokes emotional connection and likability. Brand identity represents the brand's promise to the market, while brand associations reflect the elements tied to a brand in consumers' minds, such as product features, lifestyle, and organizational values (Asmeri, 2019; Eglesias, 2019). Brand equity fosters customer retention and competitive advantage, enabling organizations to maintain market share and justify premium pricing (Keller &

Brexendorff, 2019; Aqa'i, 2018). Additionally, trademarks—forms of intellectual property like colors, images, or symbols—offer legal protection and distinguish brands in the marketplace (Aqa'i, 2018).

Foreign Research Background

Planko (2020), in his article *Using Digital Marketing Strategies in the Sharing Economy*, identified key digital marketing strategies for sharing economy businesses, including user experience-based approaches, search engine marketing and optimization, and social media marketing. These strategies were found to be crucial for achieving profitable business outcomes. Birch et al. (2018) examined the mental processes and attitudes of Australian customers toward online shopping. Their study considered factors such as ethical identity and environmental awareness, revealing that selfish attitudes and motivations influenced online purchase decisions more significantly than altruistic ones. They suggested that targeted marketing strategies, familiar branding, and clear product labeling could better meet customers' psychological needs. Hakki Chai et al. (2018) explored the impact of product features on perceived value, brand trust, and repurchase intent, finding that product features positively influenced all three factors. Similarly, Demirgons (2018), in *Ethical Seller Behavior: The Impact of Consumer Perception on Trust, Satisfaction, and Repeat Buying Behavior*, demonstrated that consumer perception significantly impacted trust, satisfaction, and repeat purchase behavior. Chawli et al. (2016) studied the relationship between motivation, social influence, and customer trust in online banking services. Their findings highlighted that motivation, social influence, and trust in the security of banking services played a significant role in customers' intent to purchase these services. Ross et al. (2016) outlined two types of digital strategies: the customer interaction strategy and the digital solutions strategy. While these approaches overlap, the customer interaction strategy focuses on transforming organizational engagement with customers and stakeholders, leveraging transformative technologies to enhance communication. Bavarzad et al. (2015) examined factors driving repurchase intent and concluded that brand satisfaction, brand trust, and brand commitment significantly influenced brand loyalty and repurchase intent. Overall, these studies underscore the importance of trust, satisfaction, motivation, branding, and digital strategies in shaping purchase behaviors and fostering customer loyalty.

Background of domestic research

In 2021, Zarari and Baghery Gharablag concluded in their research titled "Investigating the Antecedents of Resilience Against Negative Information Among Digital Product Consumers" that, based on social identity theory, the relationship between brand value and the consumer, as well as the similarity between customers, determine the consumer's identity with the brand. They found that brand appeal is a solution for establishing deep relationships with the brand, which in turn makes these relationships resilient against negative information. In 2020, Safavi, in his study titled "Investigating Digital Marketing and Digital Marketing Strategies in Iran," concluded that: 1) The majority strongly agree that digital marketing positively impacts B2B companies' success, 2) Referral and content marketing positively affects the revenue of these companies, 3) Customer value and production revenue are the most important company goals, 4) A good company website, social media, and SEO are crucial, 5) The largest portion of the budget is allocated to digital advertising, 6) Websites are the most important sales factor, 7) Content marketing is one of the main priorities. Ansari, Arbatani, Nasihi Far, and Pourhosseini, in 2020, conducted a study titled "The commercialization model of electronic sales ideas using grounded theory," in which they identified causal categories (knowledge and understanding of market needs, intellectual property protection, and adopting marketing perspectives), central categories (creativity and ideation, applicability of ideas, support for ideation, and risk-taking), strategic categories (education, research and development,

management mechanisms, and identifying customer needs), background categories (environmental surveys, financial and human resources, and organizational infrastructure), intervening categories (legal infrastructure, social, economic, and cultural factors, and technology development), and as a result, concluded that these categories (increased sales and profit, customer satisfaction, innovation, and service development) affect the commercialization of electronic sales ideas. Izadian, in his research in 2019, titled "Exploring the relationship between brand personality, brand trust, and brand loyalty," concluded that there is a positive and significant relationship between brand personality and brand trust, as well as brand loyalty. Shah Tahmasbi and Bagheri Rouch, in 2019, in their study titled "Investigating the impact of the planned behavior model dimensions on the intention to buy local food," found that the dimensions of the planned behavior model (attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control) have a positive impact on purchase intention. Also, price sensitivity plays a moderating role in the relationship between attitude and purchase intention. This means it increases the relationship between these two. Moreover, based on the ethnographic results regarding the relationship between subjective norm and purchase intention, self-interpretation was conducted for the relationship between perceived behavioral control and purchase intention and price sensitivity did not moderate the relationship between subjective norm and perceived behavioral control on purchase intention. Riyadars and Abbaspour Asfeden, in 2017, in their research titled "Investigating the impact of gender, consumer involvement, and source credibility fit on brand recall," concluded that the source credibility fit with the product affects brand recall, and the higher the fit, the more brand recall occurs. Gender did not have any impact on brand recall under conditions of high or low consumer involvement, or high or low fit with the product. Rezaei, in 2017, in a study titled "Investigating the impact of e-business ethics on repurchase intention," showed that e-business ethics significantly affects consumers' willingness to repurchase and customer loyalty. Khanifar and colleagues, in 2017, in a study titled "Exploring the Role of Brand Personality in Stimulating Mobile Phone Purchase Decisions Considering the Mediating Role of Brand Trust and Advertising Content," examined the impact of preferred brand personalities on mobile phone purchase decisions, considering two mediating variables: brand trust and brand content. The findings indicated that among the five dimensions of brand personality, three dimensions—responsibility, dynamism, and courage—significantly affect brand trust. Also, the three dimensions of responsibility, dynamism, and emotionality affect advertising content, one of the research variables, while the effects of courage and simplicity on advertising content were not confirmed. However, the effect of brand trust and advertising content on consumers' purchase decisions was confirmed. Ekhtiaryodin, in 2017, in a study titled "Ranking digital marketing strategies concerning their impact on the performance of the Royan Cord Blood Bank Organization," found that digital marketing strategies such as communicative, distributive, and interactive strategies using digital marketing tools increase the number of cord blood samples collected and the revenue generated from them. Based on this, agencies that have considered interactive, communicative, and distributive components in the use of digital marketing tools have been able to convert more potential customers into actual customers and improve their performance compared to agencies that used these components and tools less. Hadadian and colleagues, in 2014, also conducted a study on brand identity. They stated that customer brand identification significantly influences brand loyalty through service quality, trust, and perceived value.

Research Objectives

To examine the impact of digital marketing on purchase intention and to explore the effect of brand equity as a moderating variable in digital marketing on purchase intention in the chain stores of Ofogh Kourosh in District 22 of Tehran

Province.

Research Hypotheses

Digital marketing has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention. Brand equity, as a moderating variable, has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is applied in terms of its goal and is descriptive-survey in nature. The research uses a convenience (accidental) sampling method, with the sample population consisting of customers from Ofogh Kourosh chain stores in Tehran Province. The sample size was determined based on Cochran's formula for populations with unknown variance, with a total of 170 individuals. Data collection was done using an electronic two-part questionnaire. The first part contains demographic information about the respondents (personal and demographic characteristics), while the second part uses a five-point Likert scale (ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree). Statistical methods were employed to analyze the variables in the population, with digital marketing as the independent variable, purchase intention as the dependent variable, and brand equity as the moderating variable. The relationships between these variables and the proposed hypotheses were tested. This study used a quantitative scientific method with a positivist model to test the research hypotheses. The questionnaire was distributed via a link through social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Telegram, etc., in local and regional virtual networks accessible to respondents. The hypotheses were tested using Smart PLS software, and the data were analyzed using statistical modeling. Various statistical analyses, such as demographic analysis, normality testing, and reliability of the scale using IBM SPSS 24, were conducted. The data were evaluated through factor analysis and structural equation modeling using Smart PLS. Validity and reliability of the measurement model were also assessed using Smart PLS. Finally, the hypotheses were tested, and the results were analyzed.
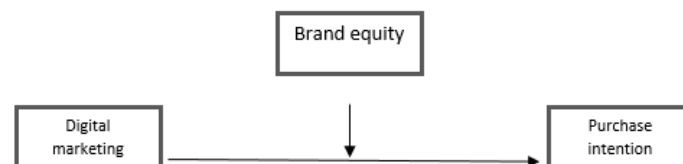

Figure 1 - Conceptual Model of the Research

FINDINGS
Descriptive statistics

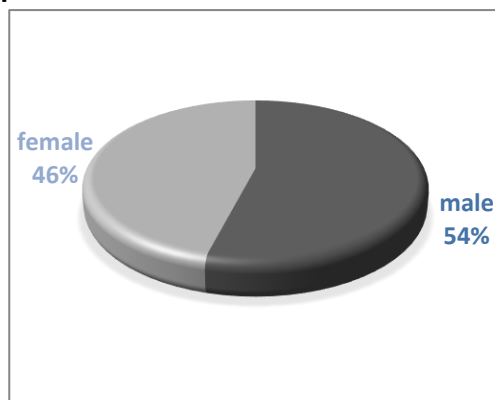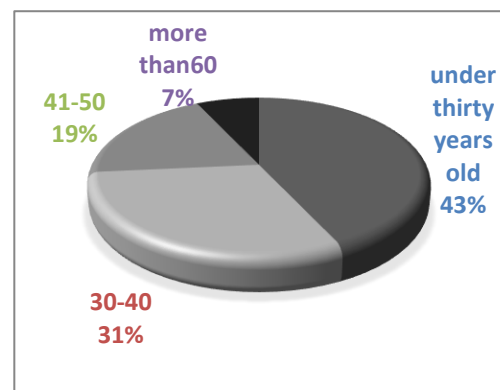Figure 1 - Age of the respondents

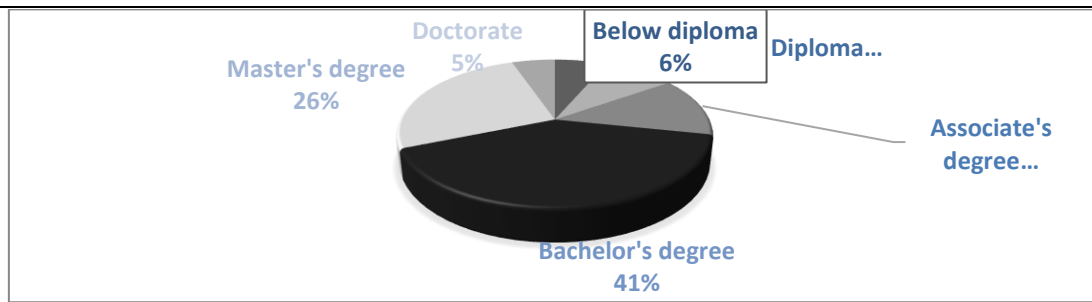
Figure 2 - Gender of the respondents
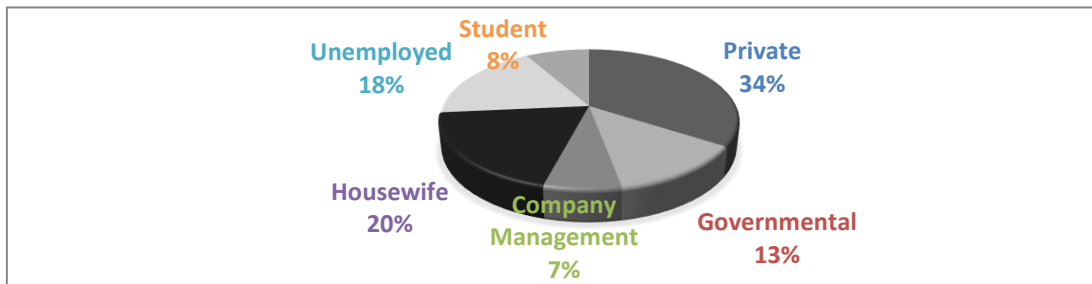
Figure 3 - Level of education

Figure 4 - Type of employment

The findings in the descriptive statistics section showed that the sample population, based on Figure 1, has the highest frequency distribution in the age group under 30, with 73 individuals and a frequency percentage of 42.94%. The lowest frequency distribution is in the age group over 50, with 12 individuals and a frequency percentage of 7.06%. Based on Figure 2, in terms of gender, the number of men is higher than women, with 92 men and a frequency percentage of 54.12%. According to Figure 3, in terms of educational qualification, the respondents with a bachelor's degree make up the highest frequency distribution, with 69 individuals and a frequency percentage of 40.59%. Those with a doctorate degree, with 9 individuals and a frequency percentage of 5.29%, have the lowest frequency distribution. According to Figure 4, in terms of employment, individuals working in private companies are the majority, with 58 individuals and a frequency percentage of 34.12%. Company managers, with a frequency percentage of 7.94%, and 12 individuals, have the lowest frequency distribution.

Description of the research indicators

Table 1 - Mean and standard deviation of the model variables

	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance
Brand Equity	170	3.184	0.748	0.560
Digital Marketing	170	3.086	0.735	0.541
Purchase Intention	170	3.337	0.727	0.528

According to the above table, it can be observed that the highest mean response from individuals is for purchase intention, with a mean of 3.33 and a standard deviation of 0.72

Inferential statistics

Table 2 - Normality test of the variables under study

	Number	Skewness	Kurtosis	Status
Brand Equity	170	-0.390	-0.801	It is normal
Digital Marketing	170	-0.112	-0.976	It is normal
Purchase Intention	170	-0.314	-0.522	It is normal

As can be seen in the above table, the skewness and kurtosis coefficients of all variables fall within the safe and acceptable range (between -3 and +3). Therefore, it can be inferred that the distribution of the variables' data follows a normal statistical distribution.

Table 3 - Cronbach's Alpha test

	Cronbach's Alpha
Brand Equity	0.836
Digital Marketing	0.862
Purchase Intention	0.856

If the obtained alpha coefficient is greater than 0.7, the questionnaire has a good and reliable scale, and increasing the alpha value improves the correlation of the variables. However, if the alpha coefficient is smaller than 0.7, it indicates that the questionnaire has a weak and unreliable scale. The output obtained in the table above shows the alpha coefficients in SPSS software, and as can be seen, all the coefficients are above 0.7, which proves the good, reliable, and consistent scale of the questionnaire.

In Table 4, it can be observed that the average variance extracted (AVE) is always greater than 0.5, and the composite reliability value is greater than 0.7 in all cases, which is also higher than the average variance extracted (AVE); therefore, convergent validity is confirmed.

Table 4 - Convergent validity of the research variables

	composite reliability	average variance extracted (AVE)
Brand Equity	0.891	0.671
Digital Marketing	0.897	0.591
Purchase Intention	0.897	0.635

R^2 is a criterion used to connect the measurement and structural parts of structural equation modeling and indicates the impact of an exogenous variable on an endogenous variable. This value is zero for exogenous variables and is only reported for endogenous variables in the model. The higher the R^2 value for the endogenous constructs of a model, the better the model fit. Davari and Reza Zadeh (2017) citing Chin (1998) introduced three values: 0.19, 0.33, and 0.67 as benchmarks for weak, moderate, and strong R^2 values, respectively. For the variable of purchase intention, the R^2 value is 0.779, which indicates a good fit at an appropriate level.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Finally, after the final analysis, the significance of the relationship in the first hypothesis was calculated to be 4.74, which is greater than 1.96, indicating that the relationship is significant and the hypothesis is confirmed. The obtained path coefficient is 0.46. In the second hypothesis, the significance of the relationship was 2.88, which is greater than 1.96, meaning the relationship is significant, and the second hypothesis is also confirmed. The obtained path coefficient is 0.78. The results of the present study showed that digital marketing positively and significantly affects purchase intention, with brand equity acting as a moderator. The findings of this research are consistent with the studies of Deliri

et al. (2020), Mahdavinajad et al. (2018), Tinomessi et al. (2019), Tarooq et al. (2020), La et al. (2019), Varooq et al. (2017), Rakiana et al. (2020), Anwar et al. (2017), Badisar et al. (2017), Tolmos et al. (2018), Hof et al. (2021), and Halbe et al. (2015).

Suggestions

Business managers and marketers should utilize beneficial marketing programs to achieve brand equity for profitable customer decision-making. To achieve this goal, the following recommendations are made: To positively influence purchase decisions under various conditions, we should always have the ability to offer suitable alternatives and provide a range of key elements aligned with the conditions. For example, after the outbreak of COVID-19, which greatly increased the tendency for online shopping, products and equipment related to crises and health had high demand. Many stores tried to add such products to their offerings. Similarly, it is recommended to always consider various social, health, economic, educational, political, and geographic conditions, as well as national, ancient, and religious occasions, and provide services and products accordingly. In simpler terms, customer needs should be considered, and marketing activities should be developed based on them. This will ultimately attract potential customers through new marketing strategies, improve the buying process, and increase purchase intention. To create an effective purchasing process, the following suggestions are made:

First, focus and invest more in current technological infrastructure to improve product and service quality, as well as to maintain product priority and differentiation. Second, address the growing and diverse needs and expectations of customers by considering variety in all aspects and catering to various tastes. Third, always consider that customers prefer easy and advanced marketing methods that are updated according to their needs, expectations, and current conditions. Fourth, digital marketing graphics should have visually appealing elements, as online retail websites are key tools for attracting customers and increasing purchase intention. It is recommended to pay more attention to strengthening website infrastructure, improving the quality of images and information, and updating products. For instance, using a light background color on websites and related apps is more impactful. Fifth, create appropriate informational content that can be found in search engines, develop SEO content, and create attractive posts while reducing content scattering, which will attract customers and lead to their purchase intention. This content should be simple and related to the brand. Sixth, build trust among customers, such as ensuring the security of online payment gateways and committing to maintaining the confidentiality of customers' personal and financial information. Future researchers are also encouraged to develop the conceptual model of this study, adding more digital marketing channels to expand the concepts of this marketing type and analyze its impact on consumer purchase behavior. It is recommended to use qualitative and exploratory methods to create a more comprehensive and reliable model. The study should also be conducted in other cities and provinces, as there are very few studies on this topic.

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