

CONSUMER EMPOWERMENT IN THE DIGITAL MEDIA MARKETING AGE: A COMPARATIVE LITERATURE REVIEW AND TRENDS ACROSS SELECTED COUNTRIES

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ABSTRACT

Globally, environment and consumer interactions are rapidly changing due to digital technologies and digital media marketing. The introduction of new digital technologies and the complexity it has brought about has led to a change in the old marketing paradigm. Traditional consumer dynamics have evolved drastically with innovative ways to interact, communicate and connect with consumers supported by digital technologies. With the progression of new age digital marketing mediums communication practices have transformed and consumers have become empowered, which has led to a shift in the balance of power towards consumers. Consumer empowerment is considered as an integrated factor which promotes adoption of digital media as it allows a consumer to communicate and share views with others. With the increased user-generated content available online, there has been a shift of power from practitioners to consumers and as such it is an important factor in the adoption of digital media. This paper applied a semi-systematic comparative literature review about the elements of digital media that lead to consumer empowerment in the context of Pakistan, and compared them with China, South Korea, and Mexico, which are the highest spending countries in digital advertising in 2021. It was found that in comparison with China and South Korea, Pakistani and Mexican brands and organizations were not well equipped to meet the multifaceted challenges of digital transformation.

KEYWORDS

Digital Media Marketing, Consumer Empowerment, Semi-systematic Literature Review.

1. INTRODUCTION

New age technologies have brought about a change in the way of thinking and doing things. The traditional paradigm of marketing has shifted to a new paradigm facilitated by digital technologies. Many countries have used this change to their advantage and have adopted new age technologies and digital media marketing channels to cater to the needs of the changing customers, while others have not been able to adopt to the digital revolution and use the various possibilities available to them in an effective manner (Goel, 2020). The digital advancements and technological developments have far reaching effects including but not limited to connectivity, speed, productivity and access. Various offerings and possibilities have been further intensified and customized using technology advancements.

After the advent of internet and the evolution in digital technologies, there has been a drastic change in consumers' wants and needs, and two-way communication mediums, especially social media has wrought changes in the traditional communication model. Consumers now prefer to directly interact with brands and share their opinions and preferences publicly. Customers expect brands to be more accessible and available on multiple touchpoints for ease of communication and interaction (Goel, 2020; Reynolds-Pearson & Hyman, 2020). Due to these changes in consumer preferences and behavior, the traditional marketing practices followed by practitioners are also evolving. Marketing practitioners have to pay attention on how consumers interact with brands, how they respond and engage in marketing promotions. User generated content and two-way communication are the most important factors of web 2.0 and these features introduce the element of empowerment for customers in social interactions. Through user generated content, companies have the opportunity to connect with companies and interact with them to give feedback on a daily basis. As these changes arise in consumers' behavior, the expectations they have with their brands also change. In order to cater to the evolving customer base, companies need to use a multi-channel approach with integrated communications across platforms. Customers prefer information they gain through testimonials, user comments and recommendations

instead of the communication companies throw out towards them. (Arora & Sanni, 2019; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2019; Kasemsap & Kijpokin, 2018; Lipsmeier *et al.*, 2020; Suominen & Jussila, 2018).

Most consumers prefer to be continuously engaged with their preferred brands and companies, which leads to a high engagement model that shifts power from companies to customers. A shift from a one-way to a two-way communication model has been observed and as such, there is a pressing need to see if digital media marketing advancements have empowered customers and brought about changes in how practitioners look at marketing activities. Customers are paying more attention to references and recommendations they receive from other customers instead of listening to a company's communication. This further points to vertical augmentation due to internet and social media. This has resulted in emergence of numerous comparison websites in which customers rate a company's services and products for the knowledge of other consumers and companies, e.g. TripAdvisor and Yelp (Kotler *et al.*, 2017; 2021).

Digital technologies have enabled people to move towards new possibilities with more portability and less place-based expectations. Static content has moved towards more interactive and video-oriented content, which has facilitated in building stronger and more collaborative relationships with customers. Digital media marketing offers the advantage of instantaneous response and the term 'real time' technology has become the norm. Digital media is empowering people to share their opinions and audiences are able to respond to brands, which has given rise to new set of expectations and has expanded the power people possess.

Countries like China, South Korea, and Mexico remain focused on technological innovation as a critical factor for future strategic planning. Pakistan can learn and take inspiration to create a conducive environment for future digital media marketing growth strategies. Digital media has been flourishing for the last few decades and it is important to look at leading digital media spenders and learn from their growth and learnings, which ultimately increases consumer empowerment and their brand engagement. This compels us to investigate the positioning of the market leaders in terms of digital spend and helps us

understand the steps taken by countries for successful technology spread and growth. Authors like Bovill and Livingstone (2013), Fletcher and Nielsen (2016), Prathapan *et al.* (2019), and Sebestyén *et al.* (2020) have used a comparative technique to analyze different countries for analyzing different state of affairs compared with other countries. Some pertinent comparative studies have been done in the context of Pakistan and have highlighted a need to study dual countries for diverse comparison, the digital spread, digital know-how factors, and a few also call specially for more comparative research within the Asia region (Ida *et al.*, 2020; Islm *et al.*, 2021; Khan *et al.*, 2021). So, to address this research gap, a purposeful sample of four (4) countries Pakistan, China, South Korea, Mexico has been taken (Bovill & Livingstone, 2013; Fletcher & Nielsen, 2016; Prathapan *et al.*, 2019; Sebestyén *et al.*, 2020).

While assessing digital media marketing and consumer empowerment, we have used five pertinent theories. They include uses and gratification theory (U&G) that assumes that there lies a purpose that motivates individuals to select a particular media channel among mass channels. (But our limitation is that we have taken digital media as one powerful channel against the traditional channels of marketing communication). Another is social influence theory (SIT) that assumes that individuals' values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors are influenced by people in their network. Liu, Min, & Han (2019) applied these both theories in the context of users' content contribution. The third is social exchange theory that assumes that interaction between two parties involves economic relations too, which is based on cost-benefit analysis or assessing the benefits and risks. The fourth theory is adoption theory that assumes that individuals adopt new ideas and technologies. Lupo (2018) applied these both theories in the context of social media marketing strategies. The fifth theory is empowerment theory that assumes that individuals' lives can be influenced or controlled (Zimmerman, 2000). In general, it is a process to give power to people to control their lives by making their own decisions and claim their rights, while our context is consumer empowerment. This paper ascertains the research question that how digital media marketing is reshaping marketing and affecting consumers' empowerment. This will be examined from the latest trends of digital media spending from selected global markets. Moreover, this study discovers consumer

empowerment-related attributes and benefits to consumers, marketers and organizations for mutual gains.

2. METHODOLOGY

For this research, a semi-systematic literature review methodology was employed. Conducting a literature review has gained immense popularity in the domain of business and management research due to the increasing complexity of data collection in this rapidly evolving environment (Snyder, 2019). In situations where the research problem and questions are broad and the possibility of reviewing all the literature systematically is less, a semi-systematic literature review provides a purposeful and flexible way for researchers to carry out the literature review and answer research problem and questions. Using semi-systematic literature review as a methodology in business research has been a robust practice (Hunziker & Blankenagel, 2021).

In academic research, similar methodologies are used under a lot of alternative terms like meta-analysis, meta-synthesis and meta-inquiry to construe in various qualitative studies and even when constructing theories. A comparative literature review method has also been used to identify themes and patterns during the literature review and data collection stages when doing a critical review of digital marketing in developing countries (Bala & Verma, 2018).

Considering the dynamism and innovative nature of the topic a significant number of literature sources have been used including academic and non-academic sources. In order to provide a level of recency, the source material has been kept recent, with majority of the sources spanning the last 5 years along with other older essential sources. The focus is to understand the role and growth of digital media marketing and the effect it is having on consumer empowerment in Pakistan, the impact, gaps and lesson learned through a comparative technique by comparing Pakistan with technologically advanced countries that are leading in digital media marketing.

Many scholars have used a comparative technique for analyzing state of affair of developing countries (Etse *et al.*, 2021; Sebestyén *et al.*, 2020; Shirmohammadi *et al.*, 2020). A purposive sample of four countries (with three having the highest spending countries in digital advertising in 2021 and Pakistan) has been used for thematic analysis for which sufficient data and literature were available for comparison with the data of Pakistan. The latest literature has been used and trustworthiness principles have been taken into account to identify gaps in the current adoption of digital media and consumer empowerment and as outcome areas have been highlighted where the government can take measures to improve the strategies recommended. There needs to be continuous, thorough and rigorous research both academic and applied in order to take appropriate action steps. The depth of this research may not be enough to lead to a direct conversion to government actions. However, it will be an extremely important first step in understanding Pakistan's position in the current digital marketing landscape as compared to the highest spenders in digital media marketing with comparison and proven models for Pakistan to move forward.

2.1. SEMI-SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1.1. CONSUMER EMPOWERMENT IN THE DIGITAL MEDIA MARKETING AGE

We can describe power as the influence used by one person on another who does not have it, “Consumer empowerment is a positive subjective state evoked by consumer perceptions of increasing control” (Wu & Chang, 2019). Consumer empowerment is an authority given to the consumers through which they experience any product or brand. This practice allows users to edit the usage as per their own ease. Today Digital Media has handed over power to the consumer and through it they are taking actions according to their own suitability. In the context of the digital marketing environment consumer empowerment points towards a state in which customers can take decisions about their own likes, dislikes and preferences for products and brands. Consumer empowerment is also considered as a positive context in essence as it provides customers with choices and solutions to their needs and problems (Dahl *et al.*, 2015; Gazzola *et al.*, 2017; Wright *et al.*, 2006; Zimmerman, 2000). The term Information and Communication Technology (ICT) points towards the power shift from companies and practitioners

to consumers (Shankar *et al.*, 2006). This concept instigated by the digital environmental changes leads us to the fact that consumers have become more involved in the communication and decision-making process and are now controlling what, when and how they consume. Few authors have discussed the connection between User Generated Content (UGC) and consumer empowerment (Constantinides *et al.*, 2009; Mayrhofer *et al.*, 2019; Mohammad *et al.*, 2020). The substantive literature also discusses the empowerment concept specially connected to information systems, where the findings point towards customized customer service providing empowerment to customers (Clement, 1996; Kim & Gupta, 2014; Torres & Augusto, 2019). Researches also indicate workplace management where empowering employees leads to increased ownership, satisfaction and motivation (Coleman, 1996; Gómez & Rosen, 2001; Olschewski *et al.*, 2018; Spreitzer, 1995). Today we see practitioners changing their strategies to incorporate the changes that have come about as a result of the introduction of digital media marketing.

There has been a radical change in the relationship between customers and marketing practitioners since the emergence of digital media and ICT, which has led to them being more demanding and empowered. Authors have discussed this shift in power and changing dynamics, which have led to customers demanding more from brands and companies (Labrecque *et al.*, 2013; Pires *et al.*, 2006; Shirmohammadi *et al.*, 2020). The two-way communication between the customers and organizations has become part of the modern culture (Amin, Qureshi, & Chandio, 2017). In the global economy, the market share of service-related sectors has been flourishing (Qureshi *et al.*, 2021). In this regard, electronic service quality plays a dominant role, for instance, the speed of the internet, ICT infrastructure, trust worthy services, and privacy of customers' data also matter (Baqai, Qureshi, & Morah, 2021). Organizations take advantage of customers' data and utilize it as a competitive weapon, since data assists them in making data-driven decisions (Baqai & Qureshi, 2020).

Technology has had the most impact on traditional communication strategy and has led to new ways of delivering products and services. Consumers are empowered and can access company information and choose how and when to interact with brands (Berthon *et al.*, 2000; Cataldo *et al.*, 2019; Sultan

et al., 2005). Digital technologies and ICT also facilitate customers by reducing geographic distances and enabling customers world-wide to interact with each other, which is another factor that increases consumer empowerment by allowing customers to share their views and feedback with a wider audience base (Constantinides *et al.*, 2008; Wu & Chang, 2019).

Another attribute of consumer empowerment is that the customers are free to choose between all alternatives available to them and they are free to choose what they deem good for themselves instead of the company designing something for them without any input and companies can facilitate customers by providing them the right tools (Geyer-Schulz & Meyer-Waarden, 2014; Koivisto & Mattila, 2018; Wu & Chang, 2019).

In the digital age, customers prefer the channels that provide the most interactivity. Practitioners are aware of the change in customer preference and are now developing customized communication plans in order to ensure a more personalized experience for customers. The communication model is moving to a two-way model in which there is response to communication by customers thus leading to more empowerment (Bacile *et al.*, 2014; Chen & Wang, 2019). The practitioners have been exploring the ever-changing reasons behind individual customers' needs for personalized services and customization (Shannon, 1949).

2.1.2. EMPOWERMENT AND VIRTUAL CO-CREATION THROUGH USER GENERATED CONTENT

Consumer empowerment rises from the knowledge the consumers gather from digital and online sources; how well are customers able to use the information for evaluating competing products and satisfy their needs depends on their ability to decipher the information and gain useful insights (Dey *et al.*, 2019; Zhang *et al.*, 2018). With the rise of online communities and digital communication mediums, the cost of information has decreased and due to that the traditional hierarchy of power is shifting to a decentralized model and internet is transforming “information scarcity” to “information democracy” (Dey *et al.*, 2019). Consumer empowerment is an authority given to the consumers through which they

experience any product or brand. This practice allows users to edit the usage as per their own ease and it has been observed that the advent of digital media and technologies encourage customers' participation, which shows that even nonparticipants feel more empowered when exposed to the participation of others (Cambier & Poncin, 2020). Another core element of Digital media that is encouraging consumer empowerment is co-creation, in which companies involve consumers with them to co-create content. It makes consumers interact with the product/ service and help with research and development and they create a product or service as a creator (Koivisto & Mattila, 2018; Wu & Chang, 2019).

User Generated Content (UGC) is called such because it is created by the customers. It is also called Customer Generated Content (CGC) and includes any comments, reviews, testimonials, videos, texts or animated contents that the customers produce, but not the practitioners on the internet (Mendes-Filho & Tan, 2009a; Mohammad *et al.*, 2020; Morra *et al.*, 2018). Mediums like blogs, videos, Graphics Interchange Formats (GIFs), social networks, mobile phones, user comments online and wikis are the best sources of UGC. In UGC, the main differentiating factor is that consumers act as both producers and consumers of the data (Arriaga & Levina, 2008; Daugherty *et al.*, 2008; Lorenzo *et al.*, 2007; Patel, 2020).

The motive for consumers to create content stems from the fact that they are connecting with friends, peers and family, trying to learn and gather information and review products or doing it for entertainment purposes (George & Skerri, 2007). Internet usage and penetration have changed customers' expectations and thus, also changed the strategies firms and practitioners employ. More and more organizations are adopting digital marketing in their plans and strategies, because they are aware of the consumers' interest and attention shifting to social media (Funk, 2014; Stroganova *et al.*, 2019). After the introduction of internet and evolution of digital technologies, Customer Generated Content (CGC) has increased long with how companies operate and interact with customers. The marketing environment has evolved drastically from the old age traditional marketing strategies to more technology led, interactive modes of communication. Some researchers also discussed the fundamental role of User Generated Content

(UGC) in the increase of consumer empowerment (Constantinides *et al.*, 2009; Mendes-Filho & Tan, 2009b).

Many companies and academic researchers have made efforts to understand the role of UGC and how it can be used by practitioners to meet customer preferences (Jamil, 2021; Moe & Schweidel, 2014), but most of the companies are unable to turn the research insights they receive into actionable items and there is no model that can be implemented by companies. The effect of Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) on sales is highly positive, yet it can vary widely by platform, product and metric (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2019; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008; Rosario *et al.*, 2016).

Companies need to have an integrated strategy in place to meet market trends and consumer expectations. Initially when internet was introduced, websites were not interactive and the content was fixed, but as technology evolved websites became interactive, which was called web 2.0 era. Now the websites have evolved to include UGC content generated by customers (Christensson, 2012; Southgate, 2017).

2.1.3. TECHNOLOGY DRIVEN MARKETING: PAKISTAN VERSUS THE HIGHEST SPENDING COUNTRIES IN DIGITAL ADVERTISING IN 2021 (CHINA, SOUTH KOREA, AND MEXICO)

As per the 2021 Digital overview report, today more than half of the population of the world has access to the internet (Kemp, 2021; The Nielsen Company, 2021).

If we look at the growth numbers following trends have been emerged:

- There is 59% penetration of internet which means 4.54 billion people globally have access to internet.
- There is 49% penetration of social media which means 3.80 billion people across the globe have access to social media.
- There are 67% unique mobile phone users which make up 5.19 billion people across the globe.

Apart from the growth of internet, there are many other milestones that have emerged such as cell phones' availability to two-third of the world's population. More than half of the population worldwide has a smartphone, more than half of the world accesses the web through their cell phones, and out of every five people at least one has shopped online in the last month. All these statistics point towards the enormous growth that has come about as a result of digital media technologies. These numbers tell us that the world has experienced immense growth on the digital front. The number of digital spend and investment clearly points towards digital mediums overtaking their traditional counterparts and it is forecasted that this trend will continue in the coming year (The Nielsen Company, 2021).

We review and discuss the elements of digital media growth and compare them with the data of China, South Korea, and Mexico, which are the highest spending countries in digital advertising in 2021 (Ceurevels, 2021). The below table summarizes the main statistics and essential insights into digital use for Pakistan, China, Mexico and South Korea.

Table 1. Digital Usage Factors.

S. No	Country	Population (Million)	Internet Users (Million)	Social Media Users (Million)	Mobile Connections (Million)
1	Pakistan	223.0	61.34	46.0	173.2
2	China	1440	939.8	930.8	1610
3	Mexico	129.6	92.01	100.0	115.4
4	South Korea	51.29	49.75	45.79	60.67

Source: (Kemp, 2021).

If we look at the population of all four (4) countries, China is the largest in terms of population followed by Pakistan, Mexico and then South Korea. 65.2% of China's population has access to the internet, compared to 27.5% of Pakistan's population, 71% of Mexico's and 97% of South Korea's. In China, 930.8 million users with access to social media have been reported, which is 64.6% penetration. In Pakistan, the reported number of social media users is 46 M that is 20.6% of the population; in Mexico, it is 100 M, which is 77.2% of population and in South Korea, it is 45.79 M that is 89.3% of population. In China, 1.61 billion users of mobile phones have been reported, which is 64.6% penetration. In

Pakistan, 173.2 M users have mobile phones, which is 77.7% penetration; in Mexico, it is 115.4 M that is 89.1% of population and in South Korea, it is 60.67 that is 118.3% of the population.

(Note: many people have more than one mobile connection, so figures for mobile connections may exceed 100% of the total population)..

Table 2. Digital Spending.

Countries	Total Digital Ad Spend (\$)	Spend on Digital Search Ads (\$)	Spend on Social Media Ads (\$)	Spend on Digital Banner Ads (\$)	Spend on Digital Video Ads (\$)	Spend on Digital Classified Ads (\$)
Pakistan	25.85 m	4.94 m	11.72 m	6.67 m	1.58 m	930 thousand
China	79.43 m	33.61 m	25.25 m	8.07 m	6.65 m	5.85 thousand
Mexico	2.42 b	684.6 m	762.3 m	491.4 m	374.2 m	106.9 m
South Korea	5.83 b	2.60 b	1.10 b	1.04 b	767.3 m	328.0 m

Source: (Kemp, 2021).

2.1.4. CHINA' S SPENDING ON DIGITAL ADVERTISING

Among the sampled countries, China ranks the highest in digital connectivity, with 65.2% of population having access to the internet. Chinese companies only face competition from local rivals as the global companies, particularly US and Japanese companies operating in internet search, news, social media and e-commerce including Facebook are banned under the internet censorship policy (Wang, 2015).

Looking at the population of China and its economic indicators the recorded population is 1.44 B, females make up 48.7 of the population compared to 51.3 males, the population growth rate is 0.4% and the median age is 38.6 years with a 96.8% rate of literacy. 80.2% of China's population has an account in any financial institution, 20.8 of the population has a credit card and 48.8% are paying their bills online or making purchases online. For mobile devices and internet usage 88.6% of the population has a mobile phone and 48.2% have a desktop or laptop computer. If we look at the value of the digital advertising market in 2020, the total digital ad spend was \$79.43 M, spend on digital search ads was \$33.61 M, spend on social media ads was \$25.25mn, spend on digital banner ads was \$8.07 M, spend on digital video ads was \$6.65 M and spend on digital classified ads was \$5.85 thousand.

Chinese internet companies face a lot of competition due to rapidly evolving innovation and technology growth from other local rivals. Platforms like Weibo and WeChat are developing at a much faster rate than their counterparts Twitter and WhatsApp in western countries (Arcesati *et al.*, 2020). China's rapid digital and technological growth is posing challenges for Europe. With China making swift progress in achieving leadership globally in disruptive digital technologies including 5G, quantum computing and artificial intelligence (AI). The Chinese government has been pursuing an aggressive digital growth strategy in partnership with select Chinese companies. The increasing growth and dependency on Chinese IT companies into the global environment are raising concerns for European companies (Shi-Kupfer & Ohlberg, 2019).

2.1.5. PAKISTAN' S SPENDING ON DIGITAL ADVERTISING

Pakistan has a rapidly growing mobile user base and its economy is powered by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The country is well on its way to growing to be one of the largest digital audiences in the world (Jamil, 2020). Digital inequalities are increasing in Pakistan in-terms of public access and usage of the internet. Considering the population of Pakistan and the economic indicators, the total population is recorded at 223.0 million, the female to male population split is 48.5 females to 51.5 males, the growth rate of the population is 2.0% and the median age is 22.9 years with a literacy rate of 59.1%. Out of the total population 21.3% have an account in any financial institution, credit card users are 0.1% and consumers who make online purchases or pay bills online make up 8.0% of the population.

Looking at the internet and device usage statistics, 78.3% have a mobile phone and 20.5% have a desktop or laptop computer. If we look at the value of the digital advertising market in 2020, the total digital ad spend was \$25.85 M, spend on digital search ads was \$4.94 M, spend on social media ads was \$11.72mn, spend on digital banner ads was \$6.67 M, spend on digital video ads was \$1.58 M and spend on digital classified ads was \$930 thousand. China has been investing heavily in the technology growth in Pakistan. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has the largest investment by

China in a foreign country with ongoing investments in the fourth and fifth generations (4G and 5G) developments and has plans to invest a lot more in the future. Keeping the growth trajectory of Pakistan in view, it is becoming crucial in the development of the region and future investments in technology and infrastructure will help in minimizing any barriers that are there in terms of internet access (Foreign Investment Statistics, 2021).

2.1.6. MEXICO'S SPENDING ON DIGITAL ADVERTISING

Mexico's technology and telecommunications sector has developed slowly and has lower penetration rates than regional averages. With slower internet speed and internet adoption and less internet access in rural areas, Mexico is less developed than other Latin American countries (Martínez-Domínguez & Mora-Rivera, 2020). Looking at Mexico's economic indicators and population, the recorded population is 129.6 million with a population split of 51.1% female's to 48.9% male's, the growth rate of the population is 1.0% and the median age is 29.3 years and the population has a 95.4% literacy rate.

36.9% people in the population have an account with any financial institution, 9.5 of the population has a credit card and people who make online purchases or pay their bills online make up 13.2% of the population. Looking at the usage of the internet and devices, 98.9% have a mobile phone and 74.2% have a desktop or laptop computer. If we look at the value of the digital advertising market in 2020, the total digital ad spend was \$2.42 B, spend on digital search ads was \$684.6 M, spend on social media ads was \$762.3 M, spend on digital banner ads was \$491.4 M, spend on digital video ads was \$374.2 M and spend on digital classified ads was \$106.9 M. Like other developing countries, Mexico's rural sector has also experienced a slow internet diffusion process. The rural population with a lower education level has slower internet adoption rates and there is a need to develop adequate infrastructure and provide high-speed internet by improving the existing conditions (Martínez-Domínguez & Mora-Rivera, 2020).

2.1.7. SOUTH KOREA' S SPENDING ON DIGITAL ADVERTISING

South Korea presents a success story with regards to information technology and communication development and it is frequently considered the most connected country in the world. Korea also boasts a steadfast commitment to its long-term plan of building an information and knowledge-based society to take the lead in internet and broadband connectivity and adoption (Curran, 2018).

Keeping in mind South Korea's population and its economic indicators, the total number of people in the population is 51.29 million, the female to male population split is 49.9% female to 50.1% males, with a 0.08% population growth rate and the median age is 44 years with a literacy rate of 98.0%. population with an account in any financial institution are 94.9%, credit card users make up 63.7 and 76.0% of the population makes online purchases or pays their bills online. Looking at the internet and device usage stats, 96.9% of the population has a mobile phone and 83.0% have a desktop or laptop computer.

If we look at the value of the digital advertising market in 2020, the total digital ad spend was \$5.83 B, spend on digital search ads was \$2.60 B, spend on social media ads was \$1.10 B, spend on digital banner ads was \$1.04 B, spend on digital video ads was \$767.3 M and spend on digital classified ads was \$328.0 M. A major reason for Korea's success is the successful deployment and adoption of broadband internet and with its objectives of connectivity, universal service and information-oriented economy, it is attributed to lead to its success. And Korea's long-term success is a result of a long series of historical technological investments (Curran, 2018; Jin, 2017)..

3. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

For strategic planning, technological innovation remains the main focal point for countries like China, Mexico and South Korea. A conducive environment can be created for progressive digital media growth strategies. With digital media marketing flourishing for the last decades, it is important to keep the highest spenders and their learnings as guidelines. This gave us a compelling reason to study the relative positioning of the highest spenders and compare them with Pakistan. Few comparative studies have

been done including in Pakistan, but many highlighted the need for a comparative study by keeping Pakistan in front of other countries, discussing the digital spread and the know-how factors (Ida *et al.*, 2020; Islm *et al.*, 2021; Khan *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, a purposeful sample of four (4) countries inclusive of Pakistan, China, Mexico and South Korea have been taken and a semi-systematic literature review is conducted in this study to analyze the emerging trends of digital media marketing in nexus with consumer empowerment and ascertain its attributes and advantages to consumers, marketers and companies.

There has been an amalgamation of marketing with technology that has helped brands to stand apart in front of customers. Technology is playing the most important role by facilitating marketers through digital media marketing in reaching their target markets. The new age of digital media marketing has become an age of opportunities and there is no doubt that its significance has grown exponentially. Countries are facing a paradigm shift and are becoming highly focused on harnessing the power of digital marketing in different fields of life. In today's age, the consumers make choices about brands and products themselves rather than listening to one-way communication given by companies. This means increased customer participation and engagement, which leads to increased consumer empowerment and an active role in the decision-making process (Arora & Sanni, 2019; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2019).

After the analysis of both academic and non-academic literature, the data highlights country-wise digital spending from all sectors of selected countries. It is clear that not all countries have the same playing field and the same level of success in expansion in digital marketing. Pakistan is in at an infancy stage compared to China. Developing Countries like Pakistan and Mexico can learn a lot from advanced countries like China and South Korea. Although, Pakistan has grown a great deal in the digital arena after the introduction of 4G and availability of affordable smartphones, amidst the radical developments and raising competition amongst countries, Pakistan needs to be proactive in approaches towards technological advancements and developments, so that the challenges ahead can be countered. Pakistan's media bodies and government need to devise short and long-term strategies to facilitate adoption of technologies, encourage launch of 4G and investment in research and development (R&D). This

transformation turns unexpected and the very fact is that brands and organizations need to embrace the evolving trends and cater to the changing customer needs and wants. In comparison with China and South Korea, Pakistani and Mexican brands and organizations were not that much adaptive to embrace the digital transformation.

From theoretical standpoint, we learned that how people prefer and select an individual media channel brand among mass media, but our limitation was that we only distinguished between traditional media and digital media. We observed that people's values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors are influenced by people in their network, because they share their views, comments, likes, dislikes, or write blogs on digital media. Brands and organizations also take advantage of such communication to promote their campaigns or objectives. Consumers get engaged with the brands and they develop a brand community.

These findings match with those of the research work of Liu, Min, & Han (2019) regarding uses and gratification theory and social influence theory. Moreover, when consumers make queries regarding buying some brands or services of individual organizations or order some products, this interaction between two parties involves economic relations too, which is based on cost-benefit analysis or assessing the associated benefits and risks. While engaging with the brands, individuals adopt new ideas and technologies, which they try for taking advantage of the new developments. These findings match with those of the research work of Lupo (2018) regarding social exchange theory and adoption theory. As a consequence of the modern trends towards digital media, consumers get empowered. These findings match with those of the research work of Zimmerman (2000) regarding empowerment theory in general.

4.1. CONTRIBUTIONS, CAVEATS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH

In Pakistan's context, this research is a unique analysis comparing Pakistan with China, South Korea, and Mexico as the highest digital media / mobile spenders in the world. It offers implications for five pertinent theories including uses and gratification theory, social influence theory, social exchange theory,

adoption theory, and empowerment theory. This research does not cover the role of individual digital media channels. Secondly, only China, South Korea, and Mexico have been discussed, because it is intended to learn from the market leaders in-terms of digital spend. For future researches, individual digital media channels can be considered, which will provide detailed channel analysis. A global-level inquiry can be undertaken to cover more countries where the advertising spend of main stream media can be compared to digital media. Moreover, consumers' digital-brand engagement, physical and mental or psychological stress due to information and communication overload, false reviews, deceptive digital advertising, and ethics and cyber laws can be studied in this context.

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