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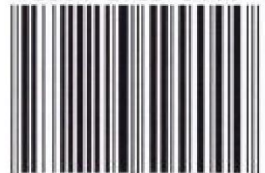
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THE DIGITAL ERA: WILL YOU TRUST ME?

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The trend of going online demonstrates a tremendous increase among companies. The increase is attributed to the change in consumer behavior and the pandemic. Companies that originally employ brick-and-mortar as their sole distribution channel are now venturing into the digital platform. Various companies are shutting down their brick-and-mortar outlets and are focusing on the online platform exclusively. This move highlights that companies who are still perform their business the traditional way might lose their business or sales decline.

In the digital era, trust is essential, especially in searching for information and transacting for any products and services. Trust helps minimize consumers' belief towards the company, especially when they are performing their online transaction with some level of risk. Companies can improve consumers' trust to ensure that customers do not doubt the company and that the platform aligns with the product they offer. Trust comprises several elements such as integrity, benevolence, and competence (Zhao, Koenig-Lewis, Hanmer-Lloyd, & Ward, 2010). Integrity is about keeping a promise made by the provider and being honest towards their customers. Benevolence prioritizes customer interest and right. Lastly, competence reflects the companies' proficiency in all processes, including assembling the resources needed to produce the end product or service.

Trust will become an issue not only on the platform being used but also on the producer because consumers are dealing with them online without any face-to-face interaction. Anything might go wrong starting from searching for information and lastly ending up with purchasing the product or service. Improper management of trust will cause customers to move from the current company to competitors. Customers are provided numerous options in purchasing similar products whether online or offline. Therefore, they can easily sway from one company to another with a click of the mouse.

Trust is also associated with customer loyalty when they are riding on Internet technology. Companies can easily obtain information about a particular company or product online. It has become a trend that consumers' trust could be based on other customers' reviews or word-of-mouth. Reviews become an important indicator for customers to make their final decision in their purchases and become loyal to that particular product or brand.

There are few ways to instill trust among customers, especially when they are going online. First, it is crucial to know who your customers are, their buying patterns, and preferences. Data mining can be useful to instill customers trust. Next, companies need to create a consistent touchpoint with customers that include information about the company and the product. In addition, companies must ensure that all information is transparent with no hidden messages or terms. Next, companies are highly encouraged to be responsive. Companies should create proper channels for customers to inquire and provide feedback regarding the

product or their orders. The channel must be created to make sure that all inquiries are entertained within a specified period of time.

Building trust is the main challenge. However, if managed properly, companies can easily gain consumers' trust towards the online platform and the product or service being offered. It has been argued that trust is an important element in an online transaction. Trust has become a major concern, especially among online users. Trust can either promote or demote customer in purchasing and repurchasing from a company. Instilling trust among customers can generate first purchase and the intention to repurchase and the act of purchase. It has been contended that trust is the ultimate way to retain customers and to build customer loyalty. Trust can act as the key to generate better customer relations and contribute to more sales.

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