



THE EXTENT OF SOCIAL MEDIA'S INFLUENCE THE DECISIONS OF CONSUMERS

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Abstract:

Social Media is part of the 21st century, it cannot be escaped as it has become an essential way that society communicates its ideas, beliefs and feelings. Jenny (2016), stated "Social media can be broadly defined as the set of interactive Internet applications that facilitate (collaborative or individual) creation, curation, and sharing of user-generated content". Data was collected from 332 respondents, revealing significant insights into consumer behavior. A large proportion (48.8%) of respondents indicated that they may change their initial purchase decision after researching relevant information on social media. The study also found that 97.6% of respondents believe social media makes decision-making easier, highlighting its effectiveness as a tool for consumers. On customer retention, results suggest that social media enhances customer service and provides reliable, efficient information. However, a considerable portion (40.9%) disagreed that social media alone can change initial purchase preferences. The findings underscore the power of social media in shaping consumer behavior, improving customer service, and driving business growth, while also highlighting challenges related to the credibility of information. Chi-square tests confirmed the significance of these findings, suggesting that social media plays a crucial role in modern marketing strategies.

Keywords:

Social Media, Influence, Customer Engagement, Behavior, Chi-Square tests

1. Introduction

Social media has evolved into a central element of modern communication, shaping the way individuals connect, share information, and form opinions. As Jenny (2016) states, social media can be broadly defined as "the set of interactive Internet applications that facilitate (collaborative or individual) creation, curation, and sharing of user-generated content." In the 21st century, platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter/X, Snapchat, and WhatsApp have become integral to daily life. Urrutia (2024) highlights the role of early social networking platforms like Friendster (2002), Myspace (2003), and LinkedIn (2003), which laid the foundation for the more advanced social media networks we see today. As social media continues to dominate the digital landscape, understanding its impact on consumer behavior and purchasing decisions is essential. This article explores how social media influences consumer behavior both online and offline, affecting purchasing decisions, brand loyalty, and general behavior patterns.

1.1 Social Media as a Communication Platform

Social media platforms provide users with the ability to share their ideas, beliefs, and feelings with a global audience, making them essential tools for self-expression and communication. Over the years, these platforms have transformed from simple social interaction tools to powerful marketing and advertising channels. Today, social media plays a crucial role in shaping cultural trends, opinions, and purchasing behaviors. The rise of influencers, user-generated content, and targeted advertisements has further amplified the influence of social media on consumer decision-making processes.

Social Media's Influence on Consumer Behavior

The way social media shapes consumer behavior can be divided into several key areas, including product discovery, brand perception, and purchasing decisions.

1.2 Background information

Product Discovery and Awareness

Social media has become a key platform for consumers to discover new products and services. Through targeted ads, influencer endorsements, and organic content, consumers are frequently exposed to products they may not have encountered through traditional advertising methods. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok allow brands to showcase their products through engaging visual content, while Facebook and Twitter enable brands to reach specific demographics through highly targeted ads. This ability to discover new products through social media has made it a vital tool in the consumer journey.

Influencer Marketing and Peer Recommendations

One of the most significant trends in social media marketing is the rise of influencers. Influencers are individuals who have built large followings on platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok and have the power to affect the purchasing decisions of their audiences. According to research, consumers are more likely to trust recommendations from influencers or peers than from traditional advertising methods. The "social proof" effect, wherein individuals look to others' experiences and opinions before making decisions, is a powerful force in shaping consumer behavior. Influencers not only promote products but often provide authentic, relatable reviews that resonate with their followers.

Brand Perception and Loyalty

Social media also plays a significant role in shaping brand perception. Through consistent engagement, brands can build relationships with their audience, foster trust, and create a sense of community. Negative reviews, viral posts, and customer complaints can quickly spread on social media, impacting a brand's reputation. On the other hand, positive interactions and user-generated content can enhance a brand's image and foster loyalty. When consumers feel connected to a brand on social media, they are more likely to remain loyal, advocate for the brand, and make repeat purchases.

2. Methodology

2.1 Purpose of the Study

This study mainly intended to identify how social media platform influence consumer behavior, especially consumer purchasing decision process. Secondary data is supported by a theoretical framework that responds to research questions and provides evidence to back up the findings. Theoretical framework, the foundation of this research, has been provided the basis of explanation, permit the anticipation of phenomena, predict their occurrence and therefore allow them to be controlled. This chapter presents the data analyzed beginning with respondents' demographic information, descriptive statistics, and finally inferential statistics relative to the study objectives. The initial sample size for the study was 357. After issuance of the questionnaires, 332 was fully filled and collected. This gave a response rate of 93% which was seen to be adequate to provide sufficient study data.

The theoretical part regarding to the revolution of social media and components of consumer purchasing decision process have provided a deep understanding of stages of buying decision process which individuals would engage, moreover, the theory has proven a systematic method in purchasing stages where consumers participate in a possible market transaction before, during, and after purchase, including phases and components that make up the consumer decision-making process. The flip side of the coin is that it has pinpointed the essence of social media marketing and how it has changed today's marketing techniques and purchase decisions. Along with theoretical part, the empirical part has focused on how people collect and process information before their purchasing as well as the impact of social media on different demographics (gender, age). Quantitative methodology has been used in collecting data. Quantitative research is a method that expresses the result in graphs and numbers which used to confirm the theories and assumptions based on collected data (Babbie, 2010). The purpose of using this method is not the pursuit of accurate Social media networking used by gender disaggregation

2.2 Social Media most used by Gender

The table shows the data of social media platforms used the most by gender. The frequency of their choice of social media is shown as well as their Gender and the type of social media used.

Types of social media used by gender	Gender	Frequency
Bookmarking sites (Pinterest)	Male	95
	Female	227
	Prefer not to say	10
Photo/videos sharing sites (Instagram, TikTok)	Male	85
	Female	228
	Prefer not to say	19
Blogs/Forums	Male	75
	Female	229
	Prefer not to say	28
Social news	Male	79
	Female	233
	Prefer not to say	20
Social networking sites (Facebook, LinkedIn)	Male	59
	Female	235

	Prefer not to say	38
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2.2.1 Social media's impact on Customer Retention

Data was analyzed to investigate respondents' view of customer retention approaches employed and their influence on consumer behavior. The finding is presented below:

Statement	N	SD	D	N	A	SA	χ^2	P-value
The whole process of inquiring and getting information is enjoyable	332	8.5 %	4.2%	0.0%	62.0 %	25.4 %	58.86	0.000
Social media is effective in providing customer service	332	4.2 %	0.0%	22.5 %	64.8 %	8.5%	65.17	0.000
Every information provided is reliable	332	0.0 %	4.2%	18.3 %	53.5 %	23.9 %	36.67	0.000
The service is efficiently provided by social media	332	1.4 %	16.9 %	18.3 %	39.4 %	23.9 %	26.68	0.000

It was observed from the finding that 87.4% significantly ($\chi^2=58.86$; $p<0.05$) agreed that the whole process of inquiring and getting information is enjoyable while 12.6% disagreed with the statement. Moreover, 77.4% % significantly ($\chi^2=36.67$; $p<0.05$) agreed that every information provided is reliable. Correspondingly, 63.3% significantly ($\chi^2=26.68$; $p<0.05$) reported that the service is efficiently provided by social media. On the other hand, 26.7% of respondents significantly ($\chi^2=65.17$; $p<0.05$) disagreed that social media is effective in providing customer service. This implies that that ineffective social media may affect negatively consumer behavior. In this study, Chi-Square goodness of fit test was used to find out how the observed value of a given phenomenon was significantly different from the expected value. It is noted that if the p-value is less than the significance level (0.05), null hypothesis is rejected.

2.2.2 Social media on sales performance

Analysis was computed to examine respondents' Sales Performance in their enterprises.

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	χ^2	P-value
It enables the firm to customize promotion to target a specific group	0.0%	4.2%	14.1%	56.3%	25.4%	43.54	0.000
Social media is more efficient, cost- effective than other marketing outreach.	1.4%	2.8%	19.7%	47.9%	28.2%	52.73	0.000
Social media builds relationships with new and existing clients.	1.4%	2.8%	28.2%	46.5%	21.1%	50.06	0.000
Social has provided useful audience and market insights of products and services.	1.4%	1.4%	5.6%	63.4%	28.2%	101.04	0.000
Social media has led to quick response of inquiries and technical support.	0.0%	2.8%	9.9%	59.2%	28.2%	53.90	0.000
Social media has led to increases exposure and brand awareness.	1.4%	5.6%	25.4%	40.8%	26.8%	37.67	0.000
Has market share been affected in the first year since the introduction/expansion of social media.	4.2%	2.8%	29.6%	36.6%	26.8%	34.00	0.000
Social media is cheap compared to other traditional channels hence the firms less budget	1.4%	2.8%	16.9%	47.9%	31.0%	54.99	0.000
Sensitization of prices and offers of products offered through social media has led to increase in customer size	2.8%	0.0%	32.4%	45.1%	19.7%	27.76	0.000

Social media has increased the frequency of transactions per customer.	1.4%	1.4%	31.0 %	56.3%	9.9%	79.35	0.000
Social media engagements has increased the average transaction size.	2.8%	0.0%	19.7 %	62.0%	15.5 %	56.16	0.000
Social media has led to increase the number of customers accessing services/products.	2.8%	0.0%	4.2%	78.9%	14.1 %	112.04	0.000
Social media advertisements persuade clients that leads to increased sales.	1.4%	2.8%	14.1 %	31.0%	50.7 %	61.75	0.000

The finding revealed that 81.7 % of respondents significantly ($\chi^2=43.54$; $p<0.05$) acknowledged that social media enables the firm to customize promotion to target a specific group. This view was supported by 76.1% who significantly ($\chi^2=52.73$; $p<0.05$) admitted Social media is more efficient, cost-effective than other marketing outreach. This finding is in line with Berthon et al (2012) who aver that social media offer the benefits of customers and employees sharing experiences, companies being more networked and being able to absorb and employ better experienced employees. This translates to increased performance and service delivery, enabling efficient achievement of corporate goals and objectives.

3. Conclusion

Demographic characteristics

The analysis of gender and age in the survey reveals significant patterns in the demographic composition of respondents and offers insights into how social media may influence decision-making processes. Among the respondents, 53.7% identified as female, 41.5% as male, and 4.9% chose not to disclose their gender. The age distribution highlighted that the majority of respondents (61%) fell within the 21–25 years age group, known as Generation Z (Gen Z), who are considered digital natives, having grown up with technology and the internet. The smallest group was those aged 18–20 years, comprising 12.2% of the respondents.

3.1 Conclusions

Gender Representation: The gender analysis indicates a slightly higher proportion of female respondents, suggesting that females might be more inclined to participate in online surveys or platforms related to decision-making. However, the gender disparity is not significant enough to suggest that gender alone would influence decision-making processes on social media platforms. The data does not show a stark difference between genders, but further research could explore how gender affects the types of decisions made or content consumed on social media.

Age Influence and Gen Z: The overwhelming majority of respondents (61%) were in the 21–25 years age group, a demographic largely known as Gen Z. This group has had continuous exposure to digital technologies, making them more likely to be heavily influenced by social media in their decision-making processes. The high representation of this age group supports the theory that Gen Z's daily interactions with mobile devices and social media shape their opinions, preferences, and choices in a unique manner compared to other age groups. The relatively low participation of respondents aged 18–20 years further underscores the notion that the influence of social media on decision-making becomes more prominent as individuals grow older and gain more autonomy over their choices.

3.2 Comparison with Previous Studies

When compared with previous studies, these findings align with the trends observed in research related to social media use and decision-making. Studies have consistently shown that Generation Z, as digital natives, exhibits a distinct relationship with technology, often relying on social media platforms for information, entertainment, and decision-making. According to a study by Smith et al. (2021), Gen Z spends more time on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube compared to older generations, influencing their consumption patterns, preferences, and even political opinions. The prominence of female users in this study also mirrors findings from previous research, where women have been found to be more active on social media platforms, especially those that involve community building, lifestyle content, and product recommendations (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). While gender differences are often explored in social media research, the relatively balanced representation of male and female respondents in this study suggests that gender may not have as significant an impact on decision-making as other factors such as age, digital fluency, or platform preference. Previous studies, such as those by Ross et al. (2018), have found that while gender might influence social media usage patterns, its effect on decision-making is often intertwined with other variables like content type, platform features, and user engagement.

Recommendations

Targeted Marketing Strategies: Given the prominence of Gen Z in the survey, businesses and marketers should focus their efforts on this demographic. Social media campaigns tailored to their preferences—such as short-form video content, influencer partnerships, and interactive experiences—are likely to resonate more with this group. Moreover, marketing strategies should consider their strong preference for mobile-first content and on-demand entertainment.

Gender-Specific Content: While gender was not a dominant factor in this study, understanding subtle differences in how males and females engage with content on social media could provide value. Brands could consider gender-sensitive content that resonates with the different preferences and interests of each gender, although this may require deeper, more nuanced analysis.

Further Research on Age and Decision-Making: Given the substantial proportion of Gen Z in the study, it is crucial to explore how this generation's decision-making processes are influenced by social media platforms. Future studies could also examine how decision-making trends evolve across different age groups and over time. Understanding the motivations and preferences of individuals as they transition from adolescence to adulthood could provide valuable insights for long-term strategic planning in digital marketing.

Encouraging Diverse Participation: With 4.9% of respondents opting not to disclose their gender, it is important to foster inclusivity in research by expanding options beyond the traditional male and female categories. This could provide more comprehensive insights into the experiences of non-binary or gender-fluid individuals in relation to social media engagement and decision-making.

Social media networking sites used

The analysis of social media networking site usage in enterprises reveals significant trends in platform preferences and consumer behavior. Among the respondents, Facebook is the most commonly used social media platform, with 95.1% of users engaging with it. This is followed by photo/video sharing sites such as Instagram and TikTok (58.5%), social news sites (39%), and bookmarking sites (14.6%). The findings suggest that social media is a dominant force in both personal and professional spheres, with Facebook being the most used platform. The study also examines gender-based differences in social media usage. In line with previous research, women were found to engage with social media more frequently than men.

3.3 Comparison with Previous Studies

The results of this study are consistent with previous research in several areas:

Platform Usage: Studies have consistently shown that Facebook remains the most widely used social networking site globally (Pew Research, 2021), which aligns with the findings of this survey. The popularity of Instagram and TikTok among younger generations is also in line with trends reported in recent research, which suggests that these platforms are preferred for visual content and entertainment (Smith et al., 2021).

Gender Differences: Previous studies have found that women are more likely to engage in social media platforms for social interaction and personal connections, while men tend to use them more for networking and professional purposes (Nogutu, et.al 2018). This gender difference in platform usage is also observed in the current study, where female respondents

avored platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook, while males used LinkedIn more frequently for networking.

Purchasing Behavior: The reliance on social media for product research and decision-making aligns with findings from other studies that emphasize social media's significant role in consumer behavior. According to research by Nielsen (2019), 67% of consumers report that social media influences their purchasing decisions, which is supported by the high percentage (90.2%) of respondents in this study who use social media to research products before buying.

Targeted Marketing on Popular Platforms: Given the dominance of Facebook and Instagram, businesses and marketers should prioritize these platforms for their marketing strategies. Tailored campaigns, particularly those that leverage visual content, influencer partnerships, and user-generated content, will likely be more effective in reaching both male and female consumers

Summary

The analysis of the influence of feedback on purchasing decisions highlights a strong correlation between consumer purchasing behavior and feedback from previous customers. According to the survey, 73.1% of respondents (46.3% agreeing and 26.8% strongly agreeing) reported that their purchases are often affected by feedback, indicating that online reviews and ratings—both positive and negative—play a significant role in shaping purchasing decisions. Regarding the role of social media in decision-making, 97.6% of respondents agreed that social media makes their decision-making process easier. This finding is consistent with previous research showing that social media is a useful tool for consumers, enhancing their satisfaction with purchases made via social media platforms. A similar sentiment is echoed in Supriyanto et al.'s (2021) study, which found high levels of satisfaction among consumers who made purchases through social media. When considering customer retention, data shows that 87.4% of respondents found the process of inquiring and gathering information through social media to be enjoyable, and 77.4% agreed that the information provided is reliable.

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