

The Impact of Social Media Characteristics on Purchase Decision Empirical Study of Saudi Customers in Aseer Region

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Abstract

The study aims to explain how the influence of Social Media is reflected on consumers' purchasing decision-making process and if this influence differs at the various stages of this process. Quantitative research method is adapted for the purpose of this research. The primary data was gathered by sending out questionnaire to a convenient sample of 310 individuals in Aseer Region in Saudi Arabia. The study finds that the influence of Social Media differs according to the various stages of the consumers' purchasing decision making-process. The influence was more on information post purchase stage, followed by purchase decision stage. The study also highlights implications for marketers that have the opportunities to seize the power of influence of Social Media.

Keywords: Social media, Consumer behavior, Marketing, Decision making process

Objectives of the Research

Social media marketing is no longer a new aspect, but it is still considered an evolving topic in the field. The internet and especially social media have changed how consumers and marketers communicate. Social media provide a virtual space for people to communicate through the internet, which also might be an important agent of consumer socialization. Social Media have greatly changed the relationships between consumers and companies by allowing a two-way communication (Hoyer, and MacInnis, 2010, p389), and a new marketing function called 'Social Media Marketing' has risen. The objectives of the research are to find out what is the exact role of influence played by Social Media at the various stages of consumers' purchasing decision-making process.

The literature review showed that Social Media seem to be influential at the different stages of the consumer's purchasing decision-making process. However, the exact role played by the influence of Social Media at the various stages of the process seems to be still unclear.

Research Problem and Questions

The development of the field of communication in today's world have reflected on the field of advertising, websites, including social networking sites that spread rapidly with amazing speed and began to clear affected society and behavior. It is found that there is an important lack of research explaining what the exact role is played by Social Media at the different stages of consumers' purchasing decision-making process. Therefore, the problem of the current study focused on a fact that many companies in Saudi Arabia are still not aware of the importance and the role of social networking sites on consumer decision making.

The research is thus guided by one central research question that is "How does the increasing influence of Social Media on consumers' purchasing decision-making process in kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Aseer region) differs according to the different stages?"

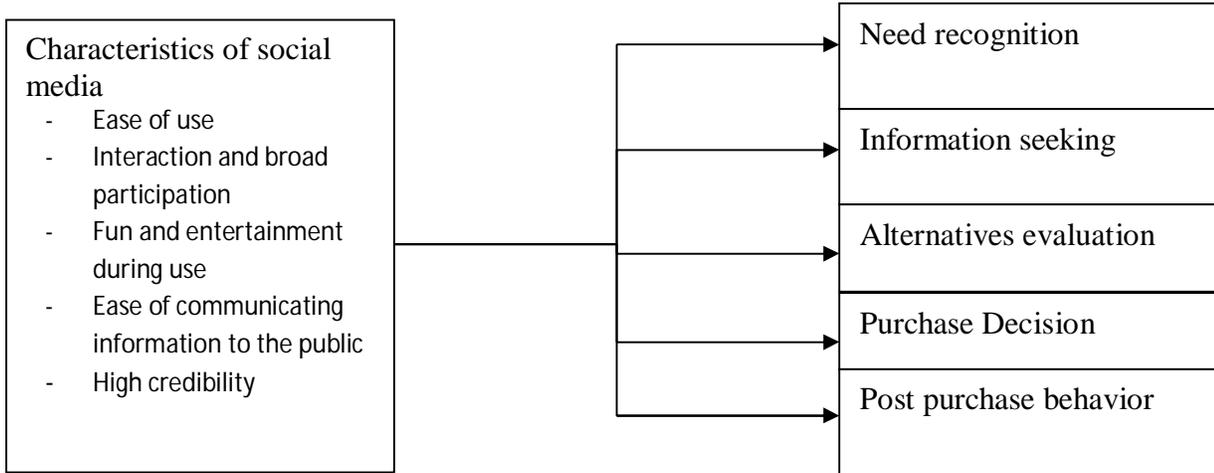
The following research questions directed the pursuit of the research objectives:

1. What is the impact of social media on need recognition?
2. What is the impact of social media on information seeking?
3. What is the impact of social media on alternative evaluation?
4. What is the impact of social media on buying decision making?
5. What is the impact of social media on post purchase stage?

Research model:

Independent variable

Dependent variables



Study hypotheses:

The main hypotheses of the study are stated in null format as follows:

- H1: Social media characteristics have no significant impact on need recognition.
- H2: Social media characteristics have no significant impact on search of information.
- H3: Social media characteristics have no significant impact on evaluation of alternatives.
- H4: Social media characteristics have no significant impact on buying decision.
- H5: Social media characteristics have no significant impact on post-purchase behavior.

Literature Review:

1) What is social media

There are still many ongoing debates and discussions regarding social media’s universal definition; as social media has been transforming and merging into the evolving development of New Media (Solis 2010). Social media as Kaplan and Haenlein (2009) stated, describes “Internet-based applications that help consumers share opinions, insights, experiences, and perspectives” (p.565). According to these authors, social media can include: collaborative projects (i.e. Wikipedia), blogs, content communities (i.e. YouTube), social networking sites (i.e. Facebook), virtual social worlds (i.e. Second Life) and virtual game worlds (i.e. World of Warcraft) (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Social media has created a new landscape in supporting the socialization of information (Solis 2007), as a result it has facilitated and enhanced communication flow by making it easier and to more people, and to spread useful information with potentially vast online audiences (Smith and Zook, 2011, 10), in which the conversation may be taken place on media locally but lead to a global impact. Cavazza (2010) argued that Social Media Marketing refers to the tools and practices used to identify and analyze conversations, to participate and initiate social interactions within communities and thus consumers. In contrast with traditional media, Social Media offers more possibilities to marketers to engage with customers and have real interactions with them.

The marketing area has thus evolved from a time where marketers had the power of influence to today where consumers have a greater power of influence on their peers (Jaffe, 2010). Weinberg (2009) has proposed few reasons to tap into a solid social media strategy in addition to (or instead of) the traditional ones, which are – *facilitation in natural discovery of new content, boost up in traffic numbers, strong relationship building*, as well as *a cheap alternative to traditional marketing*. Unlike the traditional advertising, individuals in the social media era have access to contents that are not necessarily associated with commercial intent (neutral); consequently, if a person like a content, he/she is likely to pass it on to their peers, families, and so on via social sites, then content will be spread out quickly without interfering with traditional marketing (Weinberg 2009). Social media offers opportunities to achieve communities, once company has established its presence as a community participant worth following, eventually others will be likely interested in what it shares and pass to the relevant ones (Weber 2009).

2) Consumer Decision Process

In consumption, consumers pass through different stages that put together form the consumer's purchasing decision-making process (Belch and Belch, 2003, p107-122). Specific stages are involved in this process. Hoyer and MacInnis (2010, p12) and Sternthal and Craig (1982) recognized five stages that are 'Need Recognition', 'Information Search', 'Evaluation of Alternatives', 'Decision Making' and 'Postpurchase Evaluation'. In their purchasing decision-making process, consumers are often influenced by both internal and external influences (Belch and Belch, 2003, p112-114).

Today the *accessibility and transparency* of information has profoundly influenced the decision making process; therefore, it is important to examine what are the hurdles and friction points that hold prospects becoming consumers, or keeps consumers hesitating from repurchasing. (Silverman, 2001.)

Problem recognition: This stage takes place whenever a consumer recognizes a significant difference between the desired and the actual state of affairs, which is insufficient magnitude to *arouse and activate* the decision process (Solomon, Bamossy and Askegaard, 2002), or need triggered by internal or external stimuli.

Need recognition occurs when consumers realize that they have an unfulfilled need (Hoyer, MacInnis, 2010, p12). Needs might be triggered by internal stimuli but also by external stimuli. What is of interest here is that Social Media might trigger needs through advertisements displayed on a Facebook page for example or through a discussion with a friend that could make consumers recognize that they have an unfulfilled need. Nowadays, the mass media is no longer the only source of information, which may serve as a trigger of a purchase to individuals. As a result, consumers are exposed to vast amount of information, in order to get through the consumer's filter, marketers have to identify a claim or promise about their services or products, which are strongly penetrative. Filter, in this case, is a fact of being overlooked because of too much information competing in the marketplace (Silverman 2001).

Search of Information: When prospects have a certain interest in a product or service, they tend to go through the following steps before carrying out any action – *identifying available options, studying information of selected options, and eventually judging* which of these options can most likely deliver the best outcome (Silverman 2001). The information sources can be divided into two types: *internal and external*. Internal search indicates former information and experience of an individual will result in future behavior that the consumers will be likely to take (Solomon, Bamossy and Askegaard, 2002). Even when a consumer is attentive towards a marketing offer, it does not imply that the offer will be comprehended as intended; therefore, aside from the accumulated information, any information or message that is generally analyzed and stored in the consumers' memory in forms of certain meaning will be used to evaluate alternatives.

Hoyer and MacInnis (2010, p13) said that once the need recognition stage passed, consumers want to be exposed to information. Social Media offers them this information exposition since consumers can get information from their 'friends' but also from brands about products and services through pages they can 'like' on Facebook and 'follow' on Twitter. Belch and Belch (2003, p112-114) stated that consumers in the information search stage undertake an internal and external search. In the external search, the authors said that consumers often consult personal sources when they seek information. This means that consumers that are seeking for information about products, services or brands can use Social Media platforms and tools to grasp or ask information to their 'friends'.

Alternatives evaluation: Once an option is identified as the *best/suitable solution* according to the individual's needs after accumulating sufficient information, they undertake alternative evaluation (Sternthal and Craig 1982, 46). Depending on their motives or goals, consumers establish a criteria for evaluating choice alternatives (Sternthal and Craig 1982, 46), for instance which alternative is the simplest to use or to arrange, or what are *other users' experiences*, because there is a need to confirm whether or not the information is reliable and to verify that the product will work out as anticipated (Silverman 2001.)

In order to ensure the outcome within the expectation, individuals require relevance of *experience*. *Direct and indirect experience*, which individuals, serve as indicators during the buying process. Direct experience is not always preferred since individuals are inexperienced towards specific products, which may result using it in an unskilled manner and have negative experience with it. Most often, if negative experiences take place, they are most likely to be costly (both financially and time), risky, or even damaging to reputation (Silverman 2001.)

After the assessment of the choice alternatives, consumers *formulate beliefs* regarding the alternatives, which guide their *attitudes, intentions, and ultimately their choice* among alternatives (Sternthal and Craig 1982, 46). Besides, several studies have provided evident findings that the decision maker will increasingly seek ways to simplify the evaluation process when a decision becomes more complex (Bruner, Good now and Austin 1956; Association for Psychological Science 2008).

Final Decision: Kotler and Keller (2009) have suggested that during the course of evaluation, consumer eventually forms preferences among the brands in the choice desk, however, there are two factors, which can interfere between the purchase intension and purchase decision – attitude of the others and unanticipated situational factors (172).

Attitudes of others is the extent to which *another person's negative attitude towards the preferred alternatives or reluctance to meet the terms of supporting the purchase intention*, this may result in a readjustment of the consumer's purchase intention (Kotler and Keller 2009, 172).

Likewise, Kotler (2009) has also stated that consumers are undoubtedly influenced by the informed diaries who publish their evaluations (e.g. customer reviews on Amazon.com, blogs, bulletin boards, and so on). Unanticipated situational factors refer to those may erupt to alter the purchase intention, for instance, there might come an unexpected purchase that is more urgent compared to the purchase the consumer was firstly stimulated to buy; in other words, preferences and purchase intentions cannot be served as completely reliable predictors of purchase behavior (Kotler and Keller 2009). At this stage, consumers will decide whether they will buy products/services or not.

Post Purchase Decision: After the consumption, the consumer then experiences certain levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, and evaluates the wisdom of the choice made in selecting the alternative. Two potential outcomes are derived from this phase – satisfaction or dissonance. When consumer experiences dissonance towards the purchase, the choice is 'devaluated' and the consumer begins the process of searching, obtaining information and evaluating other options for future buying decision, in which triggers new behavior (Sternthal and Craig 1982).

It is a phase when the consumer decides whether or not to move from merely implementing the product to a *full adaption*; that is, whether to use the product repeatedly or repurchase or not. Since consumer always has a choice regarding the products priority, frequency of usage, and new circumstances of new uses. When individuals are comfortable in using a specific product *regularly*, they will *recommend* it to others from using the product as well (Silverman 2001).

3) Social media and consumer decision making

Consumer motives for engaging in social media provide insights into consumers' activities. Consumers have three main gratifications or motives for using the Internet as a medium, namely, information, entertainment, and social aspects (Heinonen, 2011). The influence of social media on buying behavior can be in any services or products. The relationship between social media and consumer decision-making present that social media affects advertising attitudes, brand attitudes, and purchasing intentions of consumer. Social Media influence the way consumers behave during the different stages of their purchase decision-making processes. It has changed the way consumers behave in their consumption. Before consumers were waiting for companies to push messages toward them, they are now directly seeking for information on Social Media. Consumers can recognize new needs on Social Media when 'surfing' on some social networks such as Facebook where they can see friends displaying pictures of products they bought or using the 'like' button to mention brands that they like for example. Indeed, Social Media enable consumers to share contents and ideas together, write recommendations, reviews and opinions about companies' performance and to tell, to a wider audience than before, about their own good or bad experience with them (Brown, and Hayes, 2008, p179-180). According to Weinberg (2009), he refers *social media marketing* as *leveraging the 'social' through the 'media' to 'market' businesses' constituents*; in other words, it is a process in empowering individuals to promote their websites, products, and/or services through online social channels, to interact with and to tap into a much larger community that may not have been available via traditional advertising channels.

There are strong tendencies how the individual consumer's shopping behavior may be affected and changed by the emergence of social networks (Deutcher, 1955). This is backed by the observation that numerous web-based social communities have allowed consumers to share their personal experiences by writing reviews, commenting and rating others' reviews for many years now.

However, it became also clear that consumers are more likely to believe recommendations from people they know and trust, friends and family-members, rather than strangers or recommender systems (Sinha,2001). This may explain why according to the latest research (Kim, 2007), social networks are driving an increasing volume of traffic to retail sites and may become the entry hub for ecommerce.

Social media, as a new component, has further complicated the time-honored buying behavior process theory wherein the buying attitudes are not impacted merely by the traditional channels but *extend to the online platforms*. Preferences and decision making are prompted depend upon the inputs provided by parties beyond the control of online marketers, such as peer reviews, referrals, blogs, social networks, and other forms of user-generated content. Constantinides and Fountain (2008) have suggested an innovative Stimuli and Response model based on Kotler's (1994) framework, due to the increasing usage of social media. Within a traditional shopping environment, consumers are most likely to be affected by the traditional marketing mix (e.g. ads on radio, newspaper, television, and so on) and other uncontrollable stimuli (e.g. values, societies, demographics, perceptions, and so on); however, with social media and Web 2.0, it extends to online marketing mix (e.g. emails, banners, cooperate websites, and so on) and the social media experiences, which are far beyond the marketer's control (Constantinides and Fountain 2008).

When making a purchase decision, social influence plays an important role. Once a consumer has defined a list of required features, he can use those to start searching for the right product. But browsing, searching, and buying a product on E-commerce websites is often a time consuming and frustrating task for consumers. Over 80% of Web shoppers have at some point left E-commerce websites without finding what they want (Silverman et al., 2001). People tend to ask for advice of the people they trusts the most, i.e. friends and family members. But those acquaintances may be mostly unavailable or at least out of physical reach. Since Facebook provides ties to our closes friends and can even provide access to their statements and opinions in an asynchronous manner, this metaphor could be used to share product experience even if our friends are offline.

Google (2012) conducted a research in U.K, U.S, France, Germany, Japan, Canada, and Brazil associating with the customer journey to online purchase, the research has shown different marketing channels influence the customer at different points in the path to purchase. In all the targeted countries, social media serves as an assisting channel in which to *build awareness, consideration, and intent earlier in the purchase funnel*. Silverman (2009) has also stated that there are many brands competing for attention, therefore an interesting blog post or a compelling video on YouTube can be the stage quo in which a prospect pays attentions and gains awareness of a product or a service. During the stages of consumer decision process, social media is applicable as both a prompt (awareness) and as a validation (support the purchase decision takes place) (Evans, 2008.)

Therefore, we can say that, one of the most valuable aspects of social media is in building and maintaining a feedback loop, as the conversations are more dynamic and flow in two-way. The difference that social media has impacted on the purchase funnel is the *accessibility and transparency* of experiential data generated by current customers for the benefit of the next wave of shoppers and prospects.

The Social Web has had a pronounced impact on how people view *their ability to gather unbiased information, to seek, find, and obtain a wider range of products and services, and to talk with others about actual experiences both before and after purchase*. The main objective of marketers, particularly with social media, is to get people to talk about their positive experiences and to accelerate the spread of these contents around the communities.

Social media has also influenced consumer behavior from information acquisition to post-purchase behavior such as dissatisfaction statements or behaviors (Mangold & Faulds, 2009) and patterns of Internet usage (Ross et al., 2009; Laroche et al., 2012). Social media websites provide an opportunity for companies to engage and interact with potential and current consumers, to encourage an increased sense of intimacy of the customer relationship, and build all important meaningful relationships with consumers (Mersey, Malthouse, & Calder 2010) especially in today's business environment when consumer loyalty can vanish at the smallest mistake, which can additionally have online propagation of their unfortunate encounter with a particular product, service, brand or company.

The Research Design

The purpose of the current study is to explore the impact of social media on consumer purchasing decision making. A quantitative research fits to complete this study.

Population

The total population of this study comprised from all consumers buying shopping goods in Aseer region. The estimated number of the population of this region is about 1,913,392 persons.

Sample Selection and Data collection method

In order to answer the research, question a primary data collection was used. Using primary data collection allowed addressing specific issues to consumers about their use of Social Media and how these media specifically influence their purchase decision-making processes. A questionnaire, distributed to a "convenience sample" of customers who buy shopping goods. The researcher distributed 400 questionnaires, 340 ones were retained, and only 310 were chosen for analysis. Questionnaires were distributed taking into consideration having customers from different demographic characteristics in terms of education, age and income levels.

Questionnaire construction:

The researcher developed a questionnaire in accordance with the research model described previously as well as previous studies. The researcher judged the questionnaire by many colleagues in marketing and Business departments in Prince Sultan college/Abha and in King Khalid University. The questionnaire developed from three parts: the first one describes demographic characteristics, the second one related to social media dimensions, and the third one handles consumer purchasing decision making process. A five-point Likert scale (1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree) was used in the second and third sections of the questionnaire to obtain the information to test the impact of social media on consumer purchasing decision making.

Analysis and results

1) Sample profile

The sample used for my research is made up of 310 respondents. 53.2 % of respondents are male and 46.8 % are female (table). As seen in (table) below, 70 % of respondents are between 20 and 34 years old. 56% of the sample is bachelor holders, 82 % are married, and 59% their monthly income ranges between 5000-11000 Riyals.

Table 1: Sample characteristics

Variable		Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	165	53.2
	Female	145	46.8
Total		310	100%
Education	Higher School	61	19.7
	Diploma	61	19.7
	Bachelor	172	55.5
	Post Graduate	16	5.2
Total		310	100%
Age	Less than 20 years	3	1.0
	20-24	97	31.3
	25-29	36	11.6
	30-34	84	27.1
	35-39	42	13.5
	More than 40	48	15.5
Total	Total	310	100%
Marital Status	Married	255	82.3
	Single	55	17.7
Total		310	100%
Income	Less than 5000 SR	38	12.3
	5001-8000	92	29.7
	8001-11000	90	29.0
	11001-14000	53	17.1
	More than 14000	37	11.9
Total		310	100%

Validity and Reliability

Validity and Reliability checks were performed in a number of ways. The face validity was checked by some experts, and through a pilot study on (50) persons. The participants were asked to comment on the format and appropriateness of questions, and to suggest any items that they believe to be included in the questionnaire.

In view of their suggestions, several amendments were incorporated into some questions that improved the clarity. Reliability scores are expressed numerically as a coefficient. A coefficient score will be 1.00 if a test is perfectly reliable. Coefficient of at least .60 is required to indicate an acceptable degree of reliability (Sekaran, 2004). The following is the Cronbach’s alpha of all the factors.

Table 2: Reliability scores

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach’s Alpha
Need recognition	3	0.79
Information Seek	4	0.83
Evaluation	5	0.89
Decision	4	0.89
Post purchase	5	0.86
Ease of use	3	0.75
Interaction and broad participation	4	0.70
Fun and entertainment during use	5	0.78
Ease of communicating information to public	4	0.80
High Credibility	5	0.70
Facilitate the purchase process	3	0.86
Total		0.94

Hypotheses Testing:

In order to test study hypotheses, multiple regression analysis will be used. The investigation focused on six variables: ease of use, interaction, fun, information communication, credibility, and easy purchase. Whereas the variables tested for this study is to validate the influence of these six variables on each stage of purchase decision.

Table 3: Impact of social media dimensions on each purchase decision

Dependent	Independent	Beta	t	Sig.	R2	F	Sig.
Need	Ease of use	-.090-	-1.057-	.291	.344	25.58	.000 ^a
	Interaction and broad participation	.057	.549	.583			
	Fun and entertainment during use	.191	2.035	.043			
	Ease of communicating information to public	-.153-	-1.468-	.143			
	High Credibility	.287	3.006	.003			
	Facilitation of purchase	.396	7.468	.000			
Information seek	Ease of use	-.011-	-.154-	.878	0.57	64.28	.000 ^a
	Interaction and broad participation	.034	.402	.688			
	Fun and entertainment during use	-.016-	-.207-	.836			
	Ease of communicating information to public	.033	.388	.698			
	High Credibility	.582	7.523	.000			
	Facilitation of purchase	.253	5.889	.000			
Evaluation	Ease of use	-.036-	-.485-	.628	.51	51.12	.000 ^a
	Interaction and broad participation	.087	.973	.332			
	Fun and entertainment during use	.068	.846	.398			
	Ease of communicating information to public	.184	2.052	.041			
	High Credibility	.313	3.805	.000			
	Facilitation of purchase	.244	5.330	.000			
Decision	Ease of use	-.070-	-.986-	.325	0.55	59	.000 ^a
	Interaction and broad participation	.268	3.107	.002			
	Fun and entertainment during use	.013	.165	.869			
	Ease of communicating information to public	-.013-	-.151-	.880			
	High Credibility	.444	5.604	.000			
	Facilitation of purchase	.232	5.271	.000			
Post purchase	Ease of use	-.069-	-.859-	.391	0.41	34.15	.000 ^a
	Interaction and broad participation	.115	1.167	.244			
	Fun and entertainment during use	.070	.793	.428			
	Ease of communicating information to public	.130	1.323	.187			
	High Credibility	.323	3.574	.000			
	Facilitation of purchase	.189	3.759	.000			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Ease of use, Interaction and broad participation, Fun and entertainment during use, Ease of communicating information to public, High Credibility, Facilitation of purchase

As shown in the table (3) of multiple regression analysis, R-square is equal to (0.344, 0.57, 0.51, 0.55, 0.41 respectively), this signifies that 34.4% of the variance in dependent variable (need recognition) explained by independent variable (social media), 57% of the variance in (information seek) is explained by dependent variable; while 51% of the variance in evaluation, and 55% of variance purchase decision, and 41% of the variance of post purchase stage were explained by the dependent variable which is the social media . The P-value of all models is 0.000 and it is <0.05, the consequence is that model is statistically significant. Table 3 elaborates also that the dependent variable (social media) has significant relationship $F = (25.58, 64.28, 51.12, 59, 34.15)$ with $P < .05$ with independent variables need recognition, information seeks, evaluation, decision, and post purchase.

Results of the multiple regressions (table 3) show also the following:

- 1- Fun and entertainment during use, High Credibility, and Facilitation of the purchase process have significant impact on need recognition.
- 2- High Credibility and Facilitation of purchase have significant impacts on information search stage.
- 3- Ease of communicating information to public and Facilitation of purchase have significant impacts on evaluation stage.
- 4- Interaction and broad participation, high credibility and Facilitation of purchase have significant impacts on decision stage.
- 5- High Credibility and Facilitation of purchase have significant impacts on post purchase stage.

From the results, the dimensional factors of social media such as those factors of (High credibility and Facilitation of purchase) have significant impact on all purchase decision stages. This means that these factors seen by study sample as a crucial factors that influence purchase decision.

Table 4: Impact of social media on purchase decision

Dependent Variable	R2	F	Sig.	Order
Need	0.24	92.186	0.000	5
Information Seek	0.50	274.244	0.000	1
Evaluation	0.47	266.49	0.000	3
Purchase Decision	0.48	294.6	0.000	2
Post purchase	0.38	181.03	0.000	4

Independent variable: social media influence

From table (4), the results mean that all study hypotheses were rejected, and it is seen that social media as an independent variable has a significant impact on all purchase decision stages. Results showed also that this impact was more on the stage of (decision, followed by (information search stage), evaluation, post purchase and finally on need recognition stage.

Discussion Implications and Conclusion

The five-stage decision making model has provided a systematic approach in outlining the general stages that consumers engage in all purchase stages. Results showed that social media had direct influences on every stage of the consumer decision-making process including information acquisition, purchase behavior, and post-purchase communication and evaluation, as well as influencing general opinions and attitude formation. This is consistent with previous literature (e.g., Kaplan and Haenlein, 2009; Mangold and Faulds, 2009).

The study demonstrated thus that the influence of Social Media seemed to be very strong on the Information Search stage, and purchase decision stages. Consumers are highly selective in attending, process, and selecting the information before a purchase takes place. Information exposure is highly selective in the initial stage of information, because consumers have the selections of information source, in which determinates the type of information that consumer will be exposed to. To be noted, personal attitude is a crucial factor which underlines during the course of information acquisition and evaluation. As a result, not only judgments regarding products or services are presumably based, but also it is a vital determinant of the information consumers will seek out, in which it eventually affects the extent of the information reception. Concerning the Evaluation of Alternatives stage, unbiased advices and customer experiences may turn consumers' choice from a brand to another. The notion of trust seems really important since consumers tend to trust more peers than companies.

In the research findings, consumers play an active role in the course of information acquisition because of the accessibility and availability of information on social media platforms. The implication of this role of Social Media in the Purchase Decision stage means that consumers have been able to use a wide range of comparison tools, recommendation and reviews available on Social Media that help them to make their purchase decision.

The influence of Social Media seems to be lower and of a smaller importance at the need recognition and Post Purchase Behavior stages compared to the other stages of the consumer's purchasing decision-making process. The research finding has revealed the current situation concerning consumers' post purchase behavior in Saudi Arabia. Many individuals have noticed and agreed that with social media, they are able to voice out their opinions and to communicate with other consumers and with the company more effectively.

However, again, many of them have felt not encouraged to voice out their feedbacks and to pass along their comments to peers, friends, or family members via social media. In responding to the purchase validation tool (Evans 2008), the reason why social media has added value to today's marketing is by bridging up the post-purchase word of mouth with the consideration stage of the consumer decision process, which has extended purchase funnel. Specifically, due to the word of mouth and user-generated contents on social media, the "talks" are able to generate an experiential data for prospects; however, the findings have shown that the word of mouth would be insufficient for the influence because of unwillingness to share the information via social media. In the perspective of marketers, this pitfall may serve as a bottleneck in association with marketing via social media; thus, marketers should identify the reason of these particular negative feelings among consumers and initiate consumers to participate in the conversations.

To conclude, these findings indicate directions for futures researches to investigate the impact of characteristics, such as cultural background, demographics features and differences in usage, on the influence of Social Media that might affect consumers' purchasing decision making process. With the emergence of Social Media these last years, the traditional purchasing decision making process of consumers has been modified. Peers that have always been a source of influence on consumers are playing today an even greater role of influence through their recommendations on Social Media. The Need Recognition stage could be modified, as the influence from peers is now easier spread.

From the findings of this research, it can be observed that consumers in Saudi Arabia are actively utilizing social media platforms as a tool in validating of the purchase decisions; however, consumers are deemed to be inactive in sharing their word of mouth to others with the available social media platforms. The consistency in the gathered data and time-honored theories relating to consumer behavior and contemporary frameworks regarding social media marketing, it has suggested that the essence of consumer behavior still remains the same even after the advent of social media, in which individuals have to go through the all the stages before a purchase, instead of straight to the purchase decision once a thought of purchase being triggered.

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