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## **Impact of Social Media on Consumer Buying Behavior in Oman: An Exploratory Study**

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## **Abstract**

This paper aims to investigate and discuss the impact of social media on the online buying behavior of consumers in Oman. Social media marketing has become one of the most influential tools used by companies seeking to reach out to their forecasted customer base. Stores are gradually becoming more reliant on social media to achieve their promotion and branding objectives. Replacing more traditional marketing methods, social media provides new opportunities for global companies to engage with buyers through online social interactions. To investigate the impact of social media on consumer buying behavior in Oman, we collected data using a two-part questionnaire focusing on attributes of social media platforms which might influence purchasing decisions. The findings of the study suggested that social media use has a positive impact on consumer buying behavior in Oman. In addition, the outcomes suggested that celebrity endorsements and recommendations from friends also have a positive impact on consumer buying behavior.

**Keywords:** Social media marketing, consumer buying behavior, digital marketing, social media, electronic commerce.

## **1. Introduction**

According to the Global Digital Report 2019, the number of internet users worldwide is increasing dramatically, with an average of more than one million new users every day. The report counted 3.48 billion social media users in 2019, with the worldwide total growing by 288 million 9% increment more than the total number registered in 2018. The study was authored by Damian Radcliffe, Journalism Professor at the University of Oregon's School of Journalism and Communication, and PR expert Amanda Lam. The results demonstrate that in terms of social media growth in the region, Oman is far from alone, since Oman's total Snapchat user base was the third highest, ranking below Saudi Arabia (13,425,000 users) and the UAE (1,950,000 users). The usage figures for Instagram were equally impressive, with a total of 63 million people using the social network in the MENA region (AL Bawaba, 2017).

The digital age brought about by the increasing ubiquity of the internet has reformed and redefined social wellbeing. Some studies stated that social media provides new

ways of communicating and disseminating information using state-of-the-art interconnectivity Chukwuere & Onyebukwa, 2017). These platforms are considered valuable communication tools, which connect groups of people with shared values. Wamuyu (2018) highlighted the importance of Web 2.0 technologies in promoting knowledge sharing, as internet users can utilize digital media to generate ideas, collaborate and interact with individuals with similar interests, and disseminate information across online societies. This shift in consumerism in the digital age has forced markets to radically change how they conceptualize consumer needs.

Today, most companies use social media to encourage consumer feedback; this shift away from traditional marketing methods has meant that customers have started to shop online using applications such as Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, and Instagram. Many people have made significant lifestyle changes because of their increased engagement with technology, acquiring different attitudes, behaviors, needs, wants, and desires. As new digital customer behaviors have developed, new tools have emerged which enable consumers to make informed buying decisions from the range of choices available online (Marija Boban, 2017).

Over the past decade, many researchers have investigated the impacts of social media at an international level; our research intends to investigate at the local level.

## **1.1.Literature Review**

### **1.1.1. Social Media**

The concept of social media is a relatively new area of research. Social media has been defined by various scholars as a remote form of communication between individuals. In addition, it can be described as the blending of technology and social interaction for the cocreation of value (Bhanot, 2012). However, there is no evidence of a single, universal definition of the term since each discipline defines social media in the context of its own field.

The most profound and agreed-upon definition of social media was posited by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010): “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content.” Howard and Parks (2012) described social media in greater detail, dividing their definition into three sections:

(1) The information infrastructure and tools used to produce and distribute content; (2) the content that takes the digital form of personal messages, news, ideas, and cultural products; and (3) the people, organizations, and industries that produce and consume digital content. (Howard, Philip, & Parks, 2019, p. 359-362).

Social media has also been defined as “consumer-generated media that covers a wide variety of new sources of online information, created and used by consumers intent on sharing information with others regarding any topic of interest” (Kohli, Suri & Kapoor, 2014, p. 1).

The value of social platforms can be directly correlated with increasing internet usage and digitalization of social venues, with new generations being born into the world of social media (Putter, M, Akhunjonov, U., and Obrenovic, B. (2017).). Cibango argued that social media platforms have reformed every aspect of human behavior and societies worldwide, adjusting human needs in alignment with continuously evolving digital technologies (Cibango, 2013).

### **1.1.2. The Impact of Social Media on Buying Behavior**

Since social media is a growing phenomenon, researchers are eager to learn more about its impact within communities, and consumer behavior is a salient element of this research perspective. The appearance of social media networks has forced markets to focus more closely on providing greater consumer choice and acknowledging consumer influences. Through analyzing the shift in consumer attitudes, companies hope to optimize methods for attracting consumers to product choices.

Adaptation to different consumer segments and generations has resulted in significant lifestyle changes at a societal level. Studies have shown that one in four individuals globally use social networking sites; this translates to approximately 1.73 billion people. It has become obvious that social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat have successfully adapted traditional tactics previously used in offline settings to attract customers. Therefore, according to Ham, Lee, Hayes, and Bae, it's critical to understand these changes in consumer behavior and the motivations behind them (Ham, Lee, Hayes & Bae, 2019).

From a buyer's viewpoint, the internet provides a number of advantages, including increased efficiency and ease of use, more comprehensive product information, and a greater selection of products, prices, and product customization. The information revolution has meant that vast amounts of data have become available to consumers and can be accessed at any time. The accessibility of information has empowered consumers to directly influence the decision-making process in huge organizations (Oliveira, Gonçalves, Martins & Branco, 2018). Furthermore, customers' experiences of using social media platforms in turn might influence their buying behaviors (Chianga, Weib, Parker & Daveyd, 2017). Over time, social networks have become integrated into consumers' "day-to-day" lives; users engage in social activities, share their opinions of the products they use, and observe the products used by others. The facilities provided by social media platforms have posed dilemmas for consumers, forcing them to choose between their needs, desires, and temptations when shopping online. Researchers also argue that such platforms encourage consumers to buy impulsively at an unconscious level (Zafar, Qiu, Li, Wang & Shahzad, 2019). At the same time, social media is considered a transformational tool for consumers, removing their limitations, and allowing them to transform their lives (Nelson, 2017).

### **1.1.3. Celebrity Endorsement**

Using celebrities to market products is a longstanding and central strategy used by many global companies. In a marketplace where effective advertising campaigns play a vital role, companies have initiated all possible actions to influence and motivate customers to make a purchase. People view celebrities as representatives for the products and brands they advertise, enforcing a better image of the product in the consumer mindset (Katy 2007). Some companies have spent billions of dollars for superstar endorsement, and famous figures such as Liz Hurley, Britney Spears, and Tiger Woods, have played an important role in the advertising industry (Shvany & Schwer, 2000; Kambtsis et al., 2002). Celebrity endorsement has been employed across an increasing range of industries and product types, and with the emergence of online marketing, this strategy has been adapted to incorporate celebrity social media accounts.

### **1.1.4. Recommendations from Friends**

Recommendations are a major new trend in social media marketing whereby customers purchase a product and then recommend the product to their friends. Current purchases can be linked with past purchases through status updates and news feeds. In addition, the use of social media presents a valuable tool for firms, whereby the satisfied user of a product could recommend that product to other potential users by clicking a “like” button or mentioning the product to another customer. In this way, social media platforms are replacing traditional product reviews with a new, digital format. Today’s customers may often rely on the endorsement or opinion of a friend or colleague within their social media network when making purchasing decisions (Forbes, L. and Forbes, L, 2019).

### **1.2. Research Objectives**

Having examined the relevant literature in this area, we have identified three key research objectives:

- To investigate the impact of social media on the buying behavior of consumers in Oman
- To identify whether recommendations from friends have an impact on the buying behavior of consumers in Oman
- To explore whether celebrity endorsements have an impact on the buying behavior of consumers in Oman

### **1.3. Hypothesis**

The study concentrates on various attributes and behaviors that will be used to ascertain whether social media use has an impact on consumer buying behavior. Taking into consideration the study’s scope and depth and the evidence presented in the literature review, the following hypothesis statements were formulated:

**H1:** Social media marketing has an impact on consumer buying behavior.

**H2:** Recommendations from friends have an impact on consumer buying behavior.

**H3:** Celebrity endorsements have an impact on consumer buying behavior.

## 2. Methodology

To collect data, an initial baseline survey was conducted. Hard copies of the survey were distributed from the College of Banking and Financial Studies, located in Bawshar, Muscat, in the Sultanate of Oman, to a sample of 250 consumers from different regions in Oman. We received valid responses from 190 consumers.

The questionnaire was composed of 20 questions divided between two categories. The questionnaire was submitted to all participants and examined different aspects of social media use and its impact on consumers' daily lives. The first category included general information about the participant (gender, age, academic qualifications, income, and region); the second category included survey questions exploring whether customers used online and mobile shopping applications such as Amazon, eBay, etc., and if so, the frequency of their use. Participants were also asked:

- To identify the delivery services, they used
- To rate their satisfaction with the speed and efficiency of those delivery services
- To identify the social media platforms, they used regularly
- To give the frequency of their use of these social media platforms
- Whether they were affected by online social media influencers
- The likelihood that they would buy a product because of recommendations from friends
- How much they participated in cross-selling

The questionnaire also included more detailed questions regarding the categories outlined above.

## 3. Data Collection and Analysis

The study's primary data was collected using structured questionnaires which were distributed to individuals across the region. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with various statements regarding using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree 5 = strongly agree).

**Table 1. Participant Demographics**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Male	67	35.3
Female	123	64.7
Total	190	100.0

**Table 2. Participant Age**

<b>Age</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
20-29	158	83.2
30-40	31	16.3
41-49	1	0.5
Total	190	100.0

**Table 3. Participant Qualifications**

<b>Qualification Level</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
High School	57	30.0
Diploma	47	24.7
Bachelor's Degree	83	43.7
Master's Degree or Higher	3	1.6
Total	190	100.0

**Table 4. Participant Income**

<b>Income</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Less than 500 OMR	119	62.6
More than 500 OMR	71	37.4
Total	190	100.0



**Table4. Participant Region**

<b>Region</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Muscat	155	81.6
Dhofar	3	1.6
Al Batinah	22	11.6
Other	10	5.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>100.0</b>

We used Excel to compile descriptive statistics and develop a multivariate regression model from the study data. The questionnaire was designed and structured well and met all aspects of the purpose of the study. The consistency of the survey instrument was tested using Cronbach's alpha. The test checked whether respondents' scores for each attribute tended to be related to their scores for other attributes. An alpha coefficient equal to or greater than 0.75 is considered an acceptable indication of construct reliability. The Cronbach's alpha for the survey questions in this study was 0.83, indicating a good level of internal consistency.

#### **4. Demographic Profile of Sample Data**

Primary data: Structured questionnaire

Secondary data: Obtained from online journals and magazines.

Sampling method: Snowball.

#### **5. Data Collection Procedure**

We distributed by hand hard copies of the questionnaire to a sample of 250 consumers from different regions in Oman and received 190 responses back. The results were entered into SPP and an Excel spreadsheet.

### 3.3. Regression Analysis

**Table 5. Regression Analysis**

<i>Regression Statistics</i>					
Multiple R	0.32				
R <sup>2</sup>	0.10				
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.09				
Standard Error	0.84				
Observations	190				
<i>ANOVA</i>					
	<i>Df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Significance F</i>
Regression	3	15.87240483	5.290802	7.43942707	9.87601E-05
Residual	186	132.2802267	0.711184		
Total	189	148.1526316			

<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Lower 95%</i>	<i>Upper</i>	<i>Lower</i>	<i>Upper</i>
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	<i>Error</i>					<i>95%</i>	<i>95.0%</i>	<i>95.0%</i>
Intercept	1.301089626	0.253205903	5.138465	6.9658E-07	0.801564991	1.8006143	0.80156499	1.800614261
X Variable 1 (Social media marketing)	0.019026893	0.082393372	0.230927	0.81762496	-0.14351876	0.1815725	-0.1435188	0.181572547
X Variable 2 (Recommendation from a friend)	0.119684022	0.078161903	1.531232	0.12741103	-0.03451379	0.2738818	-0.0345138	0.273881834
X Variable 3 (Celebrity endorsement)	0.290849738	0.079734724	3.647717	0.00034346	0.133549066	0.4481504	0.13354907	0.44815041



### 3.4. Interpretation

Table 5 provides a summary of the regression model which indicates projected consumer buying behaviors based on various attributes of social media. The R value (0.32) presented in the model summary table indicates a positive correlation among all five attributes under study. The  $R^2$  (0.10) value indicates how much of the total variation in the dependent variable (consumer buying behavior) can be explained by the independent variables. In this study,  $R^2$  is 0.10, indicating that the model explained 10% of the variations in overall impact on customer buying behaviors. The results of the ANOVA also show that the regression model predicts the dependent variable significantly well. The F-statistics show that the overall model is highly significant and a good fit at the 5% level ( $0.00 \leq 0.05$ ) of significance, indicating that the model has a significant positive impact on customer buying behavior.

The multivariate regression model can be written as:

$$\text{Overall Impact on Buying Behavior} = 1.30 + (0.01)(X1) + (0.11)(X2) + 0.29(X3) + \text{Error}$$

As observed in the model outlined above, all attributes of social media were found to have a significant positive impact on consumer buying behavior.

## 4. Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper attempted to investigate the impact of social media on consumer buying behavior. The results of the regression analysis indicate that attributes of social media have a significant positive effect on overall consumer buying behavior. The results of the study have significant implications for understanding patterns of customer buying behavior pertaining to social media.

### 4.1. Study Limitations

The time frame were only 6 months and sample size of the study were limited to less than 250. Additionally, while the study considered three attributes of social media, observation of the collected data suggested that the inclusion of more attributes in the study may have improved the accuracy of the model. Out of 250 questionnaires, sent

through various modes, the turn-up rate was 76% as we have expected higher rate of participation.

#### **4.2. Statement of Disclosure**

No potential conflicts of interest were reported by the authors.

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