# Implications Of Social Media Use On Consumer Behavior & Habits

**أثر وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي على عادات العادات الشرائية المستهلك**

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## Abstract

The social networking sites have become websites of "commercial communication," where electronic commerce has taken over social media. And as web rowse these sites, we find that all companies, especially e-marketing companies, have effectively dominated a large area in the pages of the popular media. These sites, through which can harvest a lot of views and interactions that affect the movement of trade and sales in all areas. This paper examines the relation ship between the increasing use of social media, and the implication of this use on the online shopping activities and behaviors of it susers. The study included the Mass Communication first year students (Arabic track) in two sections (each with 25 students) for a preparatory course (Introduction to

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Communication) in the University of Sharjah. A structured web–based questionnaire was designed and distributed am on the students participating in this study. The result of this study showed As 86.8% of the respondents believe that social media platforms encourage them to do online shopping, and 68.4% of the respondents reported that their purchasing habits have changed and increased after the use of social media.

Keywords: Social media, Online shopping, Consumer behavior

**الملخص**

أصبحت مواقع الشبكات الاجتماعية مواقع "اتصالات تجارية" ، حيث سيطرت التجارة الإلكترونية على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي. وبينما نتصفح هذه المواقع ، نجد أن جميع الشركات ، وخاصة شركات التسويق الإلكتروني ، قد سيطرت بشكل فعال على مساحة كبيرة في صفحات الوسائط الشعبية. هذه المواقع ، والتي يمكن من خلالها حصاد الكثير من الآراء والتفاعلات التي تؤثر على حركة التجارة والمبيعات في جميع المجالات. تبحث هذه الورقة في العلاقة بين الاستخدام المتزايد للوسائط الاجتماعية، وتأثير هذا الاستخدام على أنشطة التسوق عبر الإنترنت وسلوكيات مستخدميها. شملت الدراسة طلاب السنة الأولى في كلية الاتصال الجماهيري (المسار العربي) في شعبتين (كل شعبة بها 25 من

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الطلبة) لإحدى المواد التحضيرية (مادة مدخل إلى علم الاتصال) جامعة الشارقة. تم تصميم استبيان إلكتروني وتوزيعه على الطلاب المشاركين في الدراسة. أظهرت نتائج هذه الدراسة أن 86.8٪ من المستطلعين يعتقدون أن منصات التواصل الاجتماعي تشجعهم على التسوق عبر الإنترنت ، وأفاد 68.4٪ من المشاركين بأن عاداتهم الشرائية قد تغيرت وزادت بعد استخدام وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي.

**الكلمات المفتاحية: شبكات التواصل الاجتماعي، التسوق الإلكتروني، العادات الشرائية، سلوك المستهلك**

## 1.    Introduction

The technical developments in the UAE have resulted in changing the habits of the country's population, including buying and shopping habits. Which are influenced by this change and the transition to rapid patterns. In the UAE, shoppers tend to use mobile devices connected to the Internet "smart phones, tablets and laptops" and use credit cards to buy through these devices from electronic stores within the UAE or abroad without the restriction of place or time.

New shoppers in the UAE are becoming more capable of completing their transactions, while not taking traditional shopping considerations such as choosing time, using cars or transportation, and keeping up with the times when malls open, which requires time and effort to shop. In conjunction with these changes, many shopping malls, traditional retailers and well-known brands have been developing electronic platforms

to keep abreast of the new trends of shoppers, meeting the requirements of new shoppers and maintaining their loyalty.

The readiness of the technical infrastructure supports the development of e-shopping in the UAE. Depending on the availability of high Internet speeds and the spread of networked devices, as the smart phone accounts for the lion's share in the use of these devices in online shopping.

The evolution of social media platforms worldwide has established a new environment where interaction and communication between people became limitless regardless of the place and time. People now are able to share their opinions, and experiences with one another thanks to the special features provided by these platforms, which may in turn, affect or have a certain impact on individual's habits and behavior concerning communication and purchasing. Therefore, this study aims to explore the social media's possible impact on purchasing behavior among the Mass Communication college students in the University of Sharjah.

## 2.   Literature review

### Definition of social media

Social media can be defined as Websites that provide platforms in order to share ideas, experiences and knowledge among Individuals and groups in which they interact positively. Another definition can be used by (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) :*" Social networking sites are applications that enable users to connect by creating personal information profiles, inviting friends and colleagues to have access to those profiles, and sending e-mails and instant messages between each other. These personal profiles can include any type of information,*

*including photos, video, audio files, and."*(Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 63)

**Social Media Usage in UAE**

According to (Blogger, 2018), UAE is among the highest countries with social media users worldwide. The number of active social media users in UAE is about 9.38 million users, which is 99% of UAE population. And the average daily time spent on social media among UAE citizens and residents is 2.56 hours per day. Moreover, the top active social network platforms are Facebook (82%), Youtube (79%), Instagram (53%), and Twitter (41%). Regarding the top active social chat apps and messengers, Whatsapp is the most used chat app with a percentage of 83%, then comes Facebook messenger with 5.58 million users and a percentage of 59%. (Blogger, 2018)

**Social networking platforms change marketing strategies**

Companies and institutions operating in the country have recently changed their business strategies to focus on their presence on social networking sites as a tool to attract more new customers and raise the level of loyalty of existing customers. (Abdulnaby, 2011)

According to estimates by heads of companies, 69% of companies in the Arabian Gulf believe that there is no hope of success without marketing strategies for social media activities, and 50% of companies in the Gulf region have been able to attract new traders through social networking activities. It is estimated that 62% of companies in the Gulf region use social networking sites to connect with current customers and keep them updated, compared to 52% of companies worldwide. (Abdulnaby, 2011)

**Social media use and online shopping**

Many e-marketing companies have used social networks to advertise and promote products and make purchasing decisions.

Companies are managing their advertising campaigns due to the diversity of the user segments in these advertising sites due to the diversity of the user segments of these platforms

Thus, reaching a specific segment of people and targeting them with an ad that matches their interests is easy and accurate. The real benefit of making a buying decision on these sites is the multiplicity of services that use these services in a large, continuous and intensive manner.

(PWC) or "*Price water house Cooeprs,*" polled around 22,618 online shoppers ranging from ages 18 and above. The poll results showed that the participants shopped at least once in the year 2015. And almost half of these consumers (45%) reported that their exposure to reviews, comments and different feedbacks on social media platforms influenced their online shopping behavior. While 44% of the participants reported that promotional emails they usually received had also affected their online shopping behavior. (eMarketer, 2016) Another study done by (Muralidharan & Men, 2016) in which they a cross-cultural online questionnaire was conducted of 304 Chinese and 328 American regular social users. The results from the survey showed that communicating using social media had impacted their shopping behavior. (Muralidharan & Men, 2016)

(Richard & Guppy, 2014) surveyed about 215 Facebook users. With the analysis of their responses, it was found that their purchasing intentions were affected by the share feature that in the app, as well as the liked posts that appear on the user's news feed, the liked pages suggested by other users, and the check-in feature that allows users to reveal their location. Yet this study showed that comments had no significant effect on their purchasing behavior.

(Hudson, Huang, Roth, & Madden, 2015) conducted three studies to examine the relationship between the use of social media among individuals and their interaction with their favorite brands that own official pages on different platforms. The studies revealed that the respondents' use of social media was positively associated with their shopping behavior as these brands are constantly active on social platforms providing their online customers with trends and keep them updated.

**Benefits of Online Shopping**

Several studies conducted by (Hoffman & Novak, 1996)(Ioanas & Stoica, 2014) addressed the impact of social media on consumer behavior as online consumers have more power and control  than consumers of physical stores because the Internet offers more interactivity between consumers, and the availability of information found online regarding the products was also a prominent benefit. It was also found that a number of benefits play a huge role on the consumers' re-purchasing from the online source. Quality of the products, the easiness of ordering products online, the security in case of buying from trusted websites,  diversity of products and services available online.

**Age and Gender correlation with online shopping**

According to (Gangai, Tamor, Dash, & Agrawal, 2018) online shoppers in the age groups of 21-30 and 30-40 were doing more online shopping than older age group.

Several study showed that females are more likely to do online shopping. A study by (Gangai, Tamor, Dash, & Agrawal, 2018) revealed that out of 200 respondents, females were the majority of the sample of 140 female that favored online shopping. While 60 males participated in the survey. (Dennis, Morgan, Wright, & Jayawardhena, 2010)Also conducted a study were they interviewed and surveyed regular online shoppers. The study's finding was that younger women preferred online shopping because they thought it was enjoyable and useful even though they faced some difficulties at first while learning how to shop online.

## 3.   Research Questions
❖   What is the link between social media and online purchasing activities?
❖   Does social media encourage its users to do more online shopping?

## 4.   Theoretical framework

The theory of "Uses and Gratifications" is suggested for this particular study. This theory presumes that the media audience aren't passive, instead, they are very active as they are able to satisfy their needs and fulfill their desires within media. They do not accept everything presented by the media, and their exposure to different media is related to specific purposes determined by their needs. The members of the public here are active researchers for the content that seems to be more satisfying to them. And the more the content is able to meet the needs of individuals, the greater their choice of this content

would be. Through the impact of needs and motives, the individual begins to evaluate the information he receives and even evaluate the sources of that specific information to assure his needs are met. A need is a person's lack of feeling or lack of something that makes his presence a state of satisfaction and saturation and need may be physiological or psychological. While motivation is a psychological condition that directs the individual to perform a particular behavior that strengthen his response to a stimulus. (Craig, 2003)

According to the presumptions of this theory, individuals are the ones who choose the media content that meets their needs, and the means of communication compete with other sources in meeting these needs. They also have the ability to determine the motives of their exposure, thus they choose the appropriate means to satisfy these specific needs.

The results of this study has shown that respondents choose different kinds of media depending on their need. For example, 34.9% of the respondents use SOUQ.com to do their online shopping. They use it to satisfy their needs that are related to shopping.

## 5.    Research Methodology

This study is based on a quantitative approach. A structured questionnaire is used as closed questions were critical in order to allow statistical conclusions to be made in a relatively objective manner; likewise, a few open-ended were used as they allow individuals to develop own responses. The hypothesis of this study is that social media does encourage people to do more online shopping. To test this hypothesis, a web-based survey was used and sent out to 50 undergraduate students majoring in Mass Communication (Arabic track) for a

preparatory course (Introduction to Communication) in the University of Sharjah.

Out of 50 respondents, only 43 respondents agreed to participate in the study. The majority of the respondents are female, who constitute 69.8% of the sample size. While males constitute 30.2%.

50% of the respondents are in the age group of 18-21, followed by 22-25 (26.2%), 26-30 (16.7%), Above 30 (7.1%)." The minimum age of the respondents begin with 18 years and the maximum was above 30 years.

In order to ensure the face validity of the research, the questionnaire was pilot tested, so that to refine the questionnaire and to assure respondents will not encounter problems in answering the questions. Before sending the questionnaire to the targeted respondents, the researcher had consulted with and approved by the professor of the course Professor Bouziane Zaid & Professor Fawziya Al-Ali.

Analyses and conclusions of the research are made upon actual numerical facts of the collected data, in order to obtain verified and applicable data.

## 6. Data collection

Primary data: The primary data collected for the purpose of this research is obtained from a quantitative approach using web-based survey sent out to 50 undergraduate students of Mass Communication studying in the Arabic track.

Secondary data: The sources of secondary data are published papers in academic journals, textbooks (electronic format).

Findings (Results from the survey)

*Table 1. Demographic information*

| Particulars | | No. of respondents | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| Age | 18-21 | 22 | 50 |
| | 22-25 | 11 | 26.2 |
| | 26-30 | 7 | 16.7 |
| | Above 30 | 3 | 7.1 |
| | Total | 43 | 100 |
| Gender | Female | 30 | 69.8 |
| | Male | 13 | 30.2 |
| | Total | 43 | 100 |

### *Demographic information*

- *Age*

Out of 43 respondents,50% of the respondents are in the age group of 18-21, followed by 22-25 (26.2%), 26-30 (16.7%), Above 30 (7.1%). The minimum age of the respondents begin with 18 years and the maximum was above 30 years.

- *Gender*

Out of 43 Respondents, 69.8% of the respondents are female and 30.2% are male who are all buying the products through online shopping.
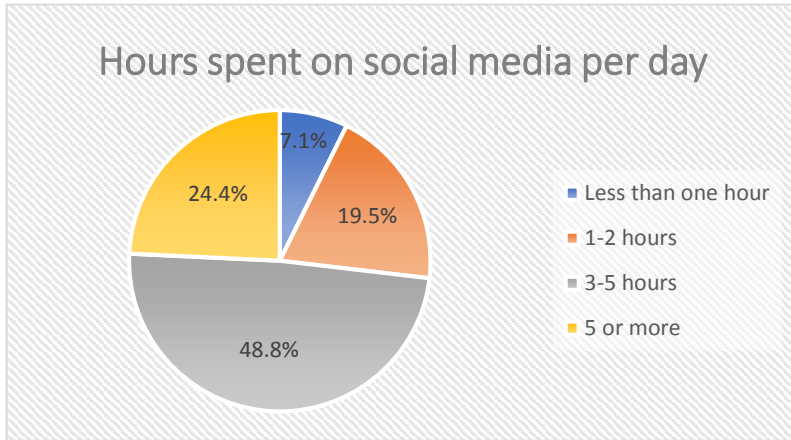


Figure 1. Hours spent on reading per day

*Figure 1. re*presents the time spent on social media per day. The time ranges from less than 1 hours to more than 5 hours. 48.8% of respondents spend from 3 to 5 hours a day on social

media. followed by 24.4% who spend more than 5 hours, and 19.5% spend from 1-2 hours while 7.1% spend less than one hour.

*Figure 2. Online shopping frequency*

*Figure 2.* shows that 46.34% of the respondents do online shopping monthly, followed by 31.71% who shop once or twice a year, and 17.07% for those who shop weekly, while 4.88% shop daily.

*Table 2. Most used social media while shopping*

| Social media platform | No. of respondents | Percentage(%) |
|---|---|---|
| Instagram | 20 | 46.2 |
| Facebook | 13 | 28.2 |
| Youtube | 4 | 10.3 |
| Twitter | 2 | 5 |
| Other (Whatsapp,Snapchat) | 4 | 10.3 |
| Total | 43 | 100 |

*Table 2.* shows that46.2% of the respondents use Instagram while shopping online, followed by 28.2% of those who use Facebook, 10.3% stands equally with those who use Youtube and those who use Other social media platforms (like Snapchat, Whatsapp, and Pinterest). While 5% use Twitter.

*Table 3. Most used App/Website for online shopping*

| Equipment | No. of respondents | Percentage(%) |
|---|---|---|
| SOUQ.com | 15 | 34.9 |
| Jollychic | 10 | 23.3 |
| Amazon | 10 | 23.3 |
| Dubbizle | 5 | 11.6 |
| Other (Noon, Namshi, iHerb, Homecentre, Sourcebmx) | 3 | 6.9 |
| Total | 43 | 100 |

*Table 3.* represents most used apps/websites by respondents. 34.9% of the respondents use Souq.com, followed by 23.3% of those who use Jolly chick and Amazon equally, then 11.6% of those who use Dubbizle, while 6.9% choose other options (Noon, Namshi, iHerb, Home centre, ourcebmx).

## Table 4. Purchasing preferences using online tools

| Purchasing preferences | No. of respondents | Percentage(%) |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Clothes | 14 | 32.6 |
| Makeup | 12 | 27.9 |
| Electronic devices & gadgets | 8 | 18.6 |
| Furniture | 4 | 9.3 |
| Books | 2 | 4.6 |
| Sports equipment | 2 | 4.6 |
| Other (Accessories, Skin care) | 1 | 2.1 |

*Table 4.*shows purchasing preferences using online tools. 32.6% of the respondents prefer purchasing clothes, followed by 27.9% who prefer buying makeup, 18.6% of those who buy electronic devices and gadgets, 9.3% who prefer purchasing furniture, 4.6% stands equally for those who purchase books and sports equipment. While 2.1% choose Other products (Accessories, skin care products).

*Table 5. Perception of preference*

| | Yes | Sometimes | No | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Presence of the brand page on social media is important | 31<br>73.68% | 7<br>15.79% | 5<br>10.53% | 43<br>100% |
| Presence of the brand page on social media affects my purchasing decisions | 30<br>71.05% | 8<br>18.42% | 5<br>10.53% | 43<br>100% |
| Contents, comments and shares related to brands affects my purchasing decisions | 37<br>86.8% | 2<br>5.3% | 4<br>7.9% | 43<br>100% |
| The brand's response/following up complaints, questions, comments affects the brand's image positively | 28<br>65.79% | 12<br>26.32% | 3<br>7.89% | 43<br>100% |
| I share my purchasing experience (reviews/satisfactions or dissatisfactions) with others | 28<br>65.79% | 9<br>21.05% | 6<br>13.16% | 45<br>100% |
| My purchasing habits changed after online shopping (Increased) | 29<br>68.42% | 8<br>18.42% | 6<br>13.16% | 43<br>100% |
| Social media platforms encourage me to do online shopping | 37<br>86.8% | 6<br>13.2% | 0 | 43<br>100% |

*Table 6.* shows perception of preferences among respondents. When respondents were asked whether the presence of a brand on social on social media is important to them, 73.68% answered yes, while 15.79% answered sometimes, and 10.53% answered no. When respondents were asked whether they think that the presence of a brand page on social media affects their purchasing habits, 71.05% answered yes (Increased), while 18.42% answered sometimes, and 10.53% answered no (remained the same). When the respondents were asked if the contents, comments or shares related to brands affect their purchasing decisions, 86.8% answered yes (Increased), while 7.9% answered no (remained the same), and 5.3% answered sometimes. When the respondents were asked if the brand follows up complaints, questions, and comments affects the brand's image positively, 65.79% answered yes, while 26.32% answered sometimes, and 7.89% answered no. When respondents were asked if they share their purchasing experiences with others, 65.79% answered yes, while 21.05% answered sometimes, and 13.16% answered no. When respondents were asked whether their purchasing habits changed after online shopping 68.42% answered yes (Increased), while 18.42% answered sometimes, and 13.16% answered no (remained the same). 86.8% of the respondents believe that social media platforms encourages them to do online shopping, while 13.2% answered sometimes, and zero respondents answered no.

## 7. Discussion/Analysis of the findings

According to the data that was obtained from the survey, it would help answer the main research question that this paper had addressed.

❖ Does social media encourage its users to do more online shopping?

The study's results and findings revealed that social media can have an impact on the consumers' purchasing behavior and habits. As 86.8% of the respondents believe that social media platforms encourage them to do online shopping, and 68.4% of the respondents reported that their purchasing habits have changed and increased after the use of social media. This correlates with a previous research study conducted by (Zhang, Trusov, T. Stephen, & Jamal, 2017) in which they found that the increasing use of social media is linked positively with shopping activities. Regarding the most used social media while online shopping, the study found that 46.2% of the respondents mostly use Instagram while shopping online. While SOUQ is found to be the most used website for online shopping with 34.9% of the respondents using it. Regarding shopping preferences, the results show that 32.6% of respondents prefer buying clothes.

❖ Are younger generations more engaged in online shopping?

According to the results of this study, 50% of the respondents are in the age group of 18-21, followed by 22-25 (26.2%), 26-30 (16.7%), Above 30 (7.1%). The minimum age of the respondents begin with 18 years and the maximum was above 30 years. It is quite evident that younger generations are more immersed in online shopping which correlates with a previous study done by (Gangai, Tamor, Dash, & Agrawal, 2018)  which indicates that online shoppers in the age groups of 21-30 and 30-40 were doing more online shopping than older age group.

## 8.  Research limitations

This study has faced a number of limitations that can be taken into consideration in the future for further research. The first limitation this study faced was the lack of male participants.

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This is due to the lack of male students in the College of Communication in the University of Sharjah where the majority of its students are females. The second limitation was the sample size. This study could have included a larger number of students from different majors which can be taken into consideration in the future for further research.

While the last limitation this study has faced was the language obstacle, as the targeted respondents were studying in the Arabic track, they couldn't understand the questions that were purposed in the survey. So, a translated web-based survey was designed in Arabic for this purpose.

## 9. Conclusion and recommendations

In conclusion, the findings from the survey support the hypothesis that was suggested, and it also correlates with previous literature review conducted by researches.

The students' of Mass Communication (Arabic track) at the Communication College in the University of Sharjah consuming and purchasing habits through online shopping is definitely affected by their use and exposure of social media.

The findings revealed that the participants use social media from 3-5 hours per day which indicates how social media can be addictive due to its various features such as the ease of use and simplicity. Also, they prefer using Instagram while shopping, which indicates that Instagram as a social media is a trendsetter. It shares preferences and experiences of its users over the platform. The respondents also expressed how the presence of a brand page that they usually follow on social media is important to them. They also reported that the brands' following up with their customers if they had any complaints or suggestions affects the

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brand's images which in turn impacts on their purchasing decision. this also indicates how brands can easily gain their customers' trust.

Hence, social media plays a significant role in the decision making process of its users as they're constantly exposed a huge amount of information that is shared through the virtual community. Furthermore, social media can be seen as an essential tool for different companies and brands to attract millions of social platforms members.

Perhaps the recommendations shall include further research on the reasons that are the basis of this influence.

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