

Influence of Social Media on Consumer Buying Behavior

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Abstract - With around 4 billion social media users and 5.19 billion mobile phone users today, the influence of social media on consumer behavior is a paramount research area. The study explores the nexus between social media and purchasing decisions, spotlighting how digital connectivity and mobility reshape brand marketing and impact consumer choices. Amidst this digital revolution, social media emerges as a goldmine for marketers, offering innovative strategies to engage consumers. The study, primarily quantitative, employs an online survey to unveil social media's pivotal role in shaping consumer purchasing behaviors, notably in information-seeking and decision-making processes. Consumers readily harness social media's swift access to vast information and exhibit receptivity to targeted ads, while social media influencers emerge as potent marketing allies, spanning generations. Active social media engagement, reliable customer service, and seamless information provision stand out as key tenets for building consumer trust. As technology advances, social media's sway on purchasing decisions is poised to intensify further, compelling businesses to adapt. The impetus for this research stemmed from the retail industry, driven by existing challenges in social media marketing strategy and customer engagement.

Key Words: leadership; attachment theory; security provider; organizational climate; organizational dehumanization, burnout.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the ever-evolving landscape of trends and dynamics, the influence of social media on users has reached unprecedented heights, coinciding with more discerning and need-conscious consumers. This study delves into the interplay between consumer behavior and social media, dissecting their mutual impact. The primary aim is to uncover the tangible effects of social media on consumer purchasing choices.

Consumer behavior is a well-explored domain, though much of the existing literature falls short in addressing current consumer needs and the transformative role of technology. This research addresses this gap, providing insights across industries like hospitality, food and beverage, and retail, elucidating how consumers respond to

social media marketing and pinpointing lucrative strategies that cater to consumer needs.

Comprehending consumer behavior on social media and their needs is indispensable for companies, furnishing vital insights into consumer expectations and the triggers that drive purchases. A grasp of distinct buying behaviors and pivotal factors influencing purchasing decisions is crucial groundwork, enabling a comprehensive exploration of social media's impact on consumer choices.

This thesis comprehensively outlines prominent social media platforms and recent marketing trends. As per Econsultancy's Future of Marketing report, a significant 64% of marketers anticipate heightened importance of social media in their marketing strategies in the upcoming two years. Adapting to the swift evolution of social networks is challenging, given frequent updates that necessitate fluid shifts in social media marketing strategies.

The research's theoretical framework encompasses literature and prior studies concerning consumer behavior, social media, and social media marketing. Employing a predominantly quantitative approach, the study employs an online survey to dissect the facets of social media influencing consumer decisions and purchases. Furthermore, the research seeks to unravel how individuals engage with, process, and attribute value to social media information both before and during the purchasing journey.

2. SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media refers to websites and applications enabling users to generate and exchange content while engaging with others (Hudson 2020). This platform enables swift, real-time content sharing through smartphones, tablets, and computers, playing an integral role in daily life as evidenced by its adoption by 3.5 billion global smartphone users (Statista 2020). Accessible to anyone with internet connectivity, social media permits individuals to create accounts and freely share content, reaching anyone who visits their page or profile (Hudson 2020). It has evolved into a hub where diverse individuals and entities interact, disseminating information to a broad audience simultaneously.



Figure 1. Global Utilization of Social Media (Hootsuite 2020)

The provided graphic depicts the cumulative count of actively engaged users of social media networks and messaging services. The study was executed in 2020, offering contemporary and up-to-date insights into global usage trends.

2.1 Social Media platforms

Social media existed prior to its integration into smartphones, with Facebook, YouTube, and Myspace being transformative forces that revolutionized communication and interaction. These pioneering platforms paved the way for a fresh mode of connectivity. Subsequently, a plethora of new social media outlets emerged, including Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, and TikTok. A social media platform refers to any service, application, or medium associated with social interaction.

Over the last decade, extensive research has been conducted to assess the prevalence of various social media platforms. As per Statista (2019), the leading five contenders comprise Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, and WeChat. Interestingly, a significant majority of these prominent platforms (three out of five) are messenger applications.

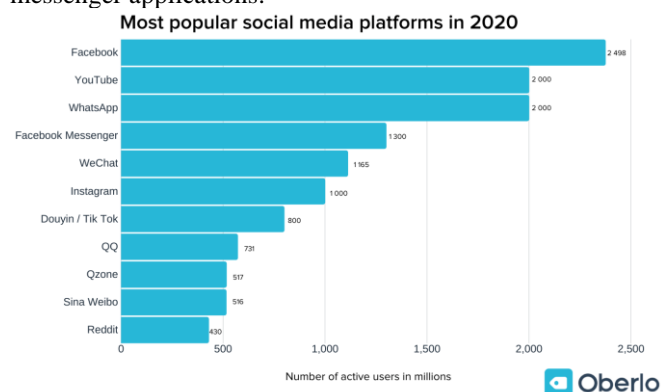


Figure 2. Predominant Global Social Media Platforms (Dataportal 2020)

Presently, Facebook stands as the foremost and largest social media platform, boasting a staggering 2.4 billion monthly active users. Notably, it captures the lion's share of users' time, with an average daily engagement of 58 minutes per user (Ortiz-Ospina 2019). Facilitating communication and content sharing, Facebook encompasses various forms of media, from images and videos to articles and information. Impressively, 92% of social marketers employ Facebook for advertising, with a notable 18.4% of global mobile digital advertising attributed to Facebook ads, as noted by CEO Khalid Saleh of Invesp (2015).

Facebook Messenger, an offshoot of Facebook, emerges as a widely embraced messenger application in 2020. Leveraging the popularity of its parent platform, Facebook Messenger fosters connectivity among users, enabling interactions with friends, family, and even businesses.

YouTube, a premier video-sharing platform, takes the lead with 2 billion active monthly users. Its staggering daily consumption of 1 billion hours of video content underscores its potential as a compelling marketing tool. Remarkably, 90% of consumers acknowledge discovering new brands and products through YouTube (Oberlo 2020), underscoring the potency of video content marketing.

WhatsApp and WeChat, both functioning as messenger applications, unite global users under the banner of instant communication. While WhatsApp boasts around 2 billion monthly users, WeChat predominantly caters to the Chinese audience.

Instagram, the second most downloaded free app in 2018, showcases the rapid ascent of its popularity. Its appeal is evident in the surge of daily active Instagram Stories users, soaring from 150 million in January 2017 to 500 million in January 2019 (Statista 2019). Notably, Instagram empowers businesses through advertising, augmented reality features like storefronts and shopping, and collaborations with influential social media figures.

TikTok, ranking seventh among the most utilized social media platforms, epitomizes a "niche social platform," rapidly skyrocketing in popularity since its September 2016 launch. By mid-2018, it boasted 500 million users, averaging a remarkable 20 million new users monthly (Ortiz-Ospina 2019). Renowned for viral trends, challenges, and dances, TikTok's global impact is reinforced by its widespread presence across other platforms, solidifying its appeal, particularly among the youth.

2.2. Social Media trends 2020

Over the past decade, the role of social media has expanded significantly, cementing its status as a pivotal component within the marketing strategies of businesses (Quadros 2020). Each year births new trends while consigning old ones to oblivion. As social media undergoes continuous transformation, the swift emergence of novel trends demands constant vigilance. Adapting and integrating the latest social media trends can empower brands and enterprises to elevate their marketing initiatives, differentiating them in a competitive landscape (Influencer Marketing Hub 2020). The dynamic nature of social media engenders varying trends contingent upon publication dates and information sources. To glean insights into the most current trends of 2020, this author has meticulously selected the most credible sources and recent studies.

2.2.1. Ephemeral content

Ephemeral content characterizes temporary social media content, available for a maximum of 24 hours or even briefer periods before vanishing. Platforms such as Snapchat, Instagram, and Facebook have embraced this trend. Evolving user content preferences have led to the rise of formats like Stories, catering to this shifting dynamic (Influencer Marketing Hub 2020). A recent Hootsuite report

underscores this phenomenon, revealing that 64% of marketers have either integrated Instagram Stories into their social media strategies or have imminent plans to do so (Hootsuite 2019 Social Trends Survey, 12).

2.2.2. Social commerce

For an extended period, brands have harnessed social media platforms such as Instagram, Pinterest, and Facebook to bolster their sales across diverse products and services (Sovann 2019). Integrating social commerce into marketing strategies has evolved into a customary practice, poised to amplify its impact over time (Influencer Marketing Hub 2020). Reinforcing this progression, social media platforms introduce novel features like shoppable posts and Instagram's Storefronts, effectively transforming social networks into contemporary retail hubs (Sovann 2019). Social commerce is rapidly maturing into a pivotal component of marketers' sales approaches.

2.2.3. Video content

In 2020, video content has surged as the most rapidly growing trend, having been adeptly leveraged by numerous brands with notably positive outcomes. Varied forms of video content, encompassing short-form videos like those on TikTok or Stories, and long-form videos as seen on YouTube, are poised to shape the future of social media content (Influencer Marketing, 2020). In a Cisco study (Cisco Annual Internet Report 2020), projections indicate that video content will encompass a significant 82% of all social media and advertising content by 2022. This comprehensive analysis underscores the imperative of integrating video content into brands' marketing strategies to remain competitive in the realm of social media marketing.

2.2.4. Influencer marketing

While not a nascent concept, influencer marketing has assumed heightened significance within brands' marketing blueprints, solidifying its enduring relevance. A notable evolution lies in the recent shift away from mega-influencers (>1 million followers), with brands gravitating towards macro influencers (40,000-1 million followers) due to their enhanced credibility and consumer trust (Digital Marketing Institute). Consequently, marketers now favor collaborations with smaller, niche-relevant influencers over relying solely on one or two mega-influencers (Influencer Marketing Hub 2020). Such influencers yield heightened engagement rates among their followers and entail lower costs. Significantly, 49% of consumers acknowledge their reliance on influencer recommendations on social media as a crucial factor guiding their purchasing decisions (Digital Marketing Institute).

2.2.5. Customer service interaction

Historically, social media served as a space for user interaction, communication, and the sharing of visual content. However, its contemporary role has expanded significantly, transforming into not only a retail platform but also a vehicle for product discovery and customer service (Influencer Marketing Hub 2020). Recognizing the need for

enhanced and expedited customer service, brands have transitioned to leveraging social media as a channel for prompt assistance, a far cry from its previous sluggishness. The current landscape enables brands to be available for customer support almost around the clock, taking full advantage of social media's heightened visibility. This heightened visibility underscores the imperative for brands to adeptly manage customer interactions, ensuring a positive reputation (Newberry, 2020).

2.2.6. Social listening

Social media offers an ideal platform for gathering valuable data and insights that businesses can harness to refine their social media marketing strategies (Influencer Marketing Hub 2020). Establishing a robust brand reputation is pivotal, and to achieve this, brands can glean abundant information through social listening. This practice involves vigilantly tracking a brand's social media channels to capture customer feedback, explicit brand mentions, or discussions revolving around designated keywords, subjects, or competitors. Subsequent analysis of this data yields valuable insights (Amaresan 2020).

2.3. Social media marketing

Real-time information sharing has revolutionized business dynamics, prompting companies to elevate their social media marketing within overarching marketing plans. Social media marketing is now an integral facet of contemporary digital marketing, as defined by Dave Chaffey, Smart Insight's content director, as the attainment of marketing objectives through digital technologies and media. This encompasses diverse online presences like websites, mobile apps, and social media pages (Chaffey 2020).

Tailored to distinct platforms, social media marketing aligns with companies' objectives, leveraging varied methods for promoting products and services. Recent research by Simon Kemp and Datareportal (2020) reveals rapid global growth, with over 3.96 billion users and a 10% increase in the past year, signifying more than half of the world's populace engaging with social media (Gilliand 2020). Evidently, this piques marketers' interest, as 31% of customers employ social media for pre-sale inquiries (Mangles 2017).

Yet, the surge in social media usage also unveils challenges. Intense content saturation and heightened competition for visibility render it arduous for companies to stand out (Mangles 2017).

3. CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Users log into their social media accounts primarily for enjoyment, relaxation, connection, information, and entertainment. With the emergence of social media as a retail platform, convenience has transformed consumer behavior. A Global Web Index study (2018) indicates that 54% of users now employ social media to research products before purchase, reflecting a shift from social interaction to product exploration.

3.1. What exactly has changed?

Modern consumers exhibit heightened awareness and curiosity, actively expressing their opinions through various mediums such as reviews, YouTube videos, and TikTok unboxing sessions. This paradigm shift empowers consumers, who now utilize diverse social networks to share perspectives on retailer offerings and experiences, compelling retailers to attentively engage and cater to their customers' needs (Brennan, Brenna, Schafer & Schafer 2012, 2.).

While social media use is prevalent among the younger generation, its adoption is swiftly expanding among older demographics. Pew Research (2019) reveals that 69% of adults aged 50-64 and 40% of those above 65 engage with social media. Everyday essentials, from bus tickets to banking services and loyalty programs, are transitioning to smartphone apps, a trend accelerated by the demand for mobile-enabled tools like Corona apps. As smartphone ownership becomes ubiquitous, people of all ages are integrating social media into their routines, enhancing their shopping experiences (Brennan & al. 2012, 48.).

3.2. Understanding consumer purchasing behaviour

To comprehend consumer purchasing behavior, an understanding of its influencing elements is imperative. As FitzGerald (2019) asserts, consumer buying behavior is shaped by three key factors: personal, psychological, and social. Additionally, renowned researcher Philip Kotler introduces a fourth dimension, emphasizing the cultural factor's weighty impact.

Cultural factors wield substantial sway over consumer choices, varying across countries due to distinct values, needs, behaviors, and learned preferences, rooted in familial and environmental influences (Kotler 2018, 159.). Human sociability naturally invites influence from close peers and a desire for societal acceptance (Cloodtrack 2020). Social elements encompass networks, groups, roles, and status, deeply shaping purchasing patterns (Kotler 2018, 162.).

Personal attributes, encompassing interests, opinions, and unique individuality, contribute to divergent perceptions and consumer behaviors (Cloodtrack 2020). Essential personal characteristics like age, income, occupation, personality, and lifestyle exert substantial influence (Kotler 2018, 167.).

Psychology is a commanding determinant of consumer behavior, with psychological factors remarkably potent yet challenging to measure (Cloodtrack 2020). These factors revolve around perceptions, beliefs, motivations, attitudes, comprehension abilities, and needs (Kotler 2018, 169.).

The synthesis of these factors intricately shapes the mosaic of consumer purchasing behavior, visually depicted in the accompanying figure.

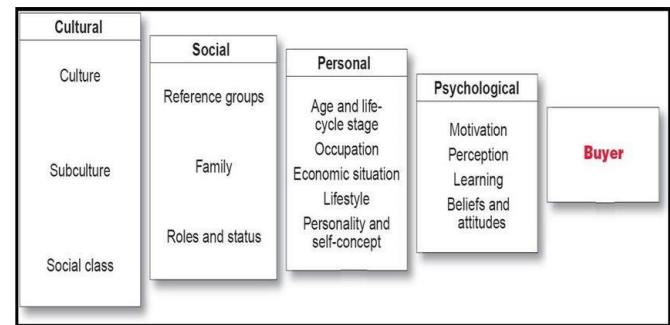


Figure 3. Factors Influencing Purchase Decisions (Kotler & Armstrong 2010)

Although each consumer possesses distinct deliberations when contemplating a purchase, a common buying process underpins their decision-making journey. While the specifics of this process can diverge among individuals, here are the typical stages traversed by consumers (FitzGerald 2019):

- Recognition of Need: Consumers become aware of a need and decide to make a purchase.
- Information Search: Consumers seek product/service information, often influenced by online reviews and blog posts, to assess their potential purchase.
- Product Assessment: Evaluating personal criteria and priorities, consumers determine which product/service aligns with their preferences.
- Purchase Decision: Upon identifying the suitable product/service, consumers contemplate whether to make the purchase immediately.
- Transaction Completion: The payment process and product receipt occur, emphasizing the need for a seamless payment experience.
- Post-Purchase Evaluation: Following product usage, consumers gauge their satisfaction level. This phase commonly involves post-purchase surveys or thank-you emails to gather feedback and ensure customer contentment.

3.3. Social media as influencer

Social media wields considerable influence over consumer decision-making, as it brims with opinions and reviews on diverse brands and products. Notable factors shaping consumer choices include influencer and social connections' reviews, brand presence, and social media advertising (FitzGerald 2019).

Prominent social influencers, possessing substantial followers, actively engage in influencer marketing, especially on platforms like Instagram and TikTok. These influencers endorse specific brands, sharing their viewpoints with their followers.

Initially designed for interconnection and information sharing, social media now enables users to extend their opinions about products, services, and brands to a broader audience across diverse platforms (FitzGerald 2019).

Merely offering products and services online falls short today. Brands must distinguish themselves, achieve visibility, and ensure information accessibility across social media. By fostering dynamic social media engagement and delivering valuable content, brands enhance their reputation, credibility, and follower count. As social media's reach

expands, precision targeting and retargeting options empower brands for strategic marketing maneuvers, optimizing resources (FitzGerald 2019).

3.4. Cross-Channel shopping

Cross-channel shopping is a burgeoning trend, where the majority of online consumers engage in online browsing but opt for offline purchases, often in physical brand stores (Brennan & al. 2012, 49.). This involves consumers gathering information, price comparisons, and even making purchase decisions online, subsequently choosing to buy in-store. The business advantages of cross-channel shopping encompass comprehensive information availability, fostering brand loyalty (Gilliland 2017).

Cross-channel shopping enhances customers' retail experiences, providing added value (Gilliland 2017). Prominent corporations have implemented innovative strategies, such as online orders with in-store pickup, same-day local delivery, and seamless online-to-store returns. These initiatives not only deepen customer engagement but also facilitate decision-making through diverse payment and return options. Remarkably, consumers who interact both online and in-store exhibit higher spending tendencies, sometimes 50% or more above average shoppers (Csek Creative).

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

When researchers systematically structure a study tailored to a specific research project in order to ensure reliable results that contribute to addressing research objectives, it is referred to as research methodology (Jansen & Warren 2020). This study primarily aims to explore the genuine impact of social media on consumers' purchasing decisions, seeking to ascertain whether such an impact exists. The intention is to enhance comprehension for both consumers and companies regarding the nature, timing, and extent of social media's influence on consumer decision-making processes. Additionally, the study strives to offer actionable insights to companies about how customers respond to diverse social media marketing strategies, pinpointing the most effective methods to align with consumer needs.

The research is underpinned by a theoretical framework, which serves as the groundwork and relies on secondary data. The gathering of primary data is geared towards addressing the research objectives and supplying substantiating evidence to support the secondary data. To obtain primary data, an online survey was employed as the data collection method.

4.1. Research design

The chosen research design for this study was quantitative, employing an electronic survey via the Webropol web tool. Quantitative research was deemed most suitable due to its capacity to efficiently gather data from a wide-ranging population. The survey, encompassing 12 questions and a two-minute completion estimate, was distributed across diverse social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and online chats. Anonymity ensured candid responses. The questionnaire

aligned closely with the theoretical framework, investigating the impact of social media on purchasing decisions concerning why, when, and how. Initial inquiries covered demographics, while subsequent sections delved into social media usage and its influence on purchasing choices. Conducted from September 24 to October 15, 2020, the survey yielded 139 responses.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND KEY RESULTS

The subsequent segment outlines the analysis conducted on the data extracted from the online survey. Initial inquiries encompassed demographic details, namely gender, age, and financial status. This approach aimed to discern potential divergences in the impact of social media on decision-making across these demographics. The data reveals a distribution of 37% male and 63% female respondents.

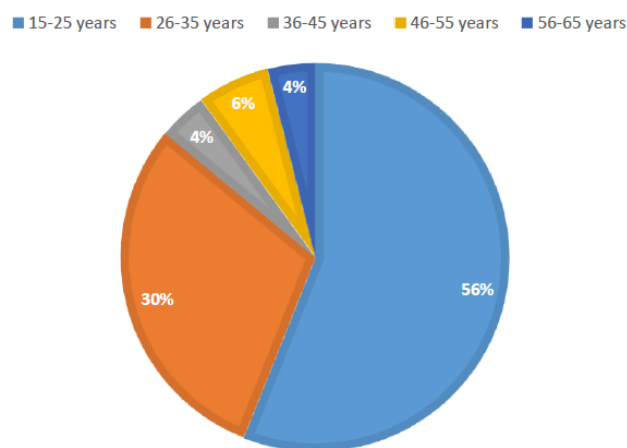
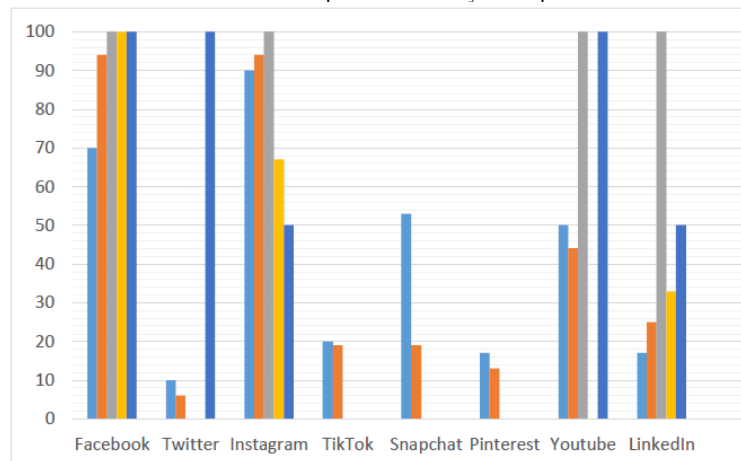


Figure 4. Age distribution of the respondents

The fourth survey question aimed to ascertain the predominant social media platforms utilized by participants. The available options were influenced by Dataportal's research (refer to figure 2). Notably, messenger applications were excluded from this inquiry, as their primary function is communication and they do not significantly impact social media-related purchasing behavior. The subsequent table presents respondents' data categorized by age groups, reflecting their primary social media platform preferences.

Table 1. Most used social media platforms used by the respondents



The data indicates a distinct trend: TikTok, Snapchat, and Pinterest are exclusively popular among respondents aged 15 to 35. Conversely, participants aged 46 to 55 display lesser engagement across various social media platforms. Echoing Dataportal's findings (refer to figure 2), Facebook emerges as the dominant choice across multiple age brackets. Notably, Instagram claims the highest usage among individuals aged 15 to 25.

5.1. Results analysis

The analyzed findings underscore the significant role of social media in shaping purchase behavior, particularly in information seeking. Consumers readily embrace social media as a rapid information source and exhibit receptiveness to targeted ads, leading to confident purchases. Remarkably, age and financial stability exhibit no substantial influence on social media engagement or purchase choices. Paradoxically, despite Generation Z's familiarity with social media, their opinions on its effects on purchasing behavior diverge considerably.

The study endorses the efficacy of employing social media influencers for marketing, given their broad intergenerational reach. Brands should prioritize active social media engagement to foster consumer trust, deliver swift customer service, and facilitate product information accessibility. Although consumers mainly rely on personal connections and knowledge for decisions, social media undeniably aids shopping, expediting informed choices. As social media's significance in purchasing decisions is already evident, its impact is poised to deepen with advancing technology.

6. CONCLUSION

The relentless surge of information has led to information overload, compelling us to adopt diverse perspectives on social media content. Sharing customer experiences and rapid word-of-mouth dissemination has necessitated brands to adopt a customer-centric approach, guarding against negative perceptions. In contemporary marketing, addressing consumer needs necessitates crafting pertinent, high-quality content on social media. The evolving digital landscape and shifting consumer behaviours demand a departure from conventional marketing strategies. Rooted in consumer buying models, this study aimed to probe the influence of social media on consumer purchasing. Findings suggest that varied social media marketing approaches can sway purchasing decisions and even generate fresh consumer needs through targeted ads and convenient solutions. Yet, consumers typically engage in extensive information seeking on social media before making purchase decisions.

The researcher's objective was to uncover the "why, when, and how" behind social media's impact on decision-making. Social media's integration into our lives and its accessibility to an array of information has woven it into the fabric of the buying process. The "why" is evident, as social media has bridged the gap between services and consumers, irrespective of geographical distances.

Typically, social media's greatest influence on consumer purchasing occurs prior to the actual transaction. It serves as an information hub, aiding in product research

and identification of alternatives. Additionally, it plays a role in instigating new needs by presenting enticing products and services. The "how" lies in its ability to deliver tailored content, which shapes consumer opinions and influences the trajectory of the buying process, contingent on individual attitudes and social media behaviors.

In conclusion, this study's findings affirm that consumers actively employ social media to validate purchase decisions and gather pertinent information. The research proceeded as planned, yielding insights into social media marketing, consumer purchasing behavior, and the reciprocal communication dynamic intrinsic to social media platforms. Overcoming challenges in garnering a diverse respondent pool from various platforms, the research remained within the envisioned timeline, culminating in current and valuable results.

6.1. Limitations

The findings and conclusions of this research hold validity exclusively within the chosen population, and cannot be universally applied due to divergent environmental influences and individual respondent viewpoints. To establish results reflective of broader consumer social media behavior and the extent of its impact on purchasing, a more expansive and quantitative geographical study is imperative.

Given the constrained timeframe and scope, numerous theories pertinent to social media and consumer purchasing behavior were explored, albeit in a generalized manner. This approach aimed to offer readers an overarching understanding of the subject matter.

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