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Impact of Social Media on Purchase Decision Making of Saudi Students in London.

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Abstract

The paper looks at how social media alters consumer decision making process of the Saudi students living in the UK (London). It focuses on five stages of decision making – need recognition, search of information, product evaluation, purchase and post purchase. The research aims to reveal, and study changes of social media impacting purchase decisions of the Saudi students in the London. In addition to that, to know which social media has the highest impact on the Saudi students. Moreover, the research aims to find which products are mainly purchased based on social media interaction or recommendation. The results and findings showed that the social media was used in all the stages of the purchase decision making process of the Saudi student in the London. Also, it showed that the clothes along with the holiday were the most purchased products by the Saudi students based on social media. The results revealed that social media does impact consumer decision making from different aspects with product evaluation stage being the most influenced. This work indicates the importance of social media for any business or company trying to target particular consumer group such as Saudi students in the London.

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Keyword: social media; consumer purchase decision making process; Saudi Students; London

1. Introduction

Social media been defined as a form of digital communication, which users create online to share information, ideas and other content (Merriam-Webster,2018). Social media has been the most used technology. Businesses now adays building their strategies to include social media due to its impact on business. The decision-making process model developed by Engel, Blackwell and Kollat in 1986. The model as explained by Engel et al. (1995) goes through different stages before making a decision. Once the users knew and understood the use of the internet, then they have more control on how to express, communicate and share their experience, relying on the internet has increased or took off (Evans,2010). This communication now is taking place through social media/networking, websites and forums. These platforms have provided the infrastructure to the customers to communicate and share conversations regarding a product or a brand. The information shared using the person's Facebook page resembles their likes, interest and their personality (Casteleyn et al,2009).

Regarding product information and purchase recommendation, the Saudi consumer relies on influencers through social media in addition to their friends and family members. Information in these tools or sites is termed as 'user-generated content' meaning that anyone can post with very minimal restrictions (Wilson,2010). With reference to Mersey et al. (2010), social media is used by businesses and companies to enhance their reach to more customers and make their brand more famous. Saudi Arabia in particular has seen its people change their way of life, majorly due to the improved use of technology and communication (Al-Jenaibi 2011). The research will study the impact of social media marketing (as a marketing tool) affecting the consumers purchase decisions

of the Saudi students in the UK. Understanding the impact of social media is vital for the people or business trying to engage with Saudi students in the UK.

2. Literature Review

Social media marketing can be defined as a form of marketing done over the internet and uses various social media networks with an intention to achieve goals of marketing as well as branding. It majorly covers activities that involve sharing of content, images and videos for the purposes of marketing as well as paid social media advertising. Considering the different social media context between KSA (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) and UK, the changes and the availability of various social media networks or platforms would influence the purchasing decision making compared to the traditional buying. This part will provide a review on the Saudi consumer of social media and the consumers decision making process which are the theoretical basis for this paper.

2.1 Saudi consumers of Social Media

Different types of social media are currently available with different business use has been recorded. For example, the use of Facebook for purposes of marketing, requires a business to create a Facebook Business Fan Page. According to Evans (2010), the layout and the visual component of the page are the most key aspects that should be considered when creating the page. More precisely as pointed out by Tuten and Solomon (2014), social media marketing on Facebook revolves around talking with audiences through posting relevant articles related to the business and the industry, images, videos and many others. These platforms have provided the infrastructure to the customers to communicate and share conversations regarding a product or a brand. Moreover, for social media to be used for marketing purposes, certain characteristics or features of

social media need to be reviewed. These characteristics may include participation, openness, build relationship and customer service. These characteristics deemed important for improving the marketing side of the social media.

(1) Participation: Social media for marketing purposes should allow the audience to contribute and give feedback on the content shared or uploaded in social media sites. The role played by social media is to ensure that the gap between the business and the audience is bridged (Damani, 2012).

(2) Openness: The use of social media requires integrity, transparency and authenticity. For instance, businesses should ensure that they create trustworthy relationships with clients. A single negative comment can destroy your reputation (Damani, 2012). Social media gave the users the platform to freely express their opinions and to share reviews that would affect a business reputation either positively or negatively.

(3) Build Relationship: Since communication in social media sites is a two-way traffic, a business should ensure that it creates long-term relationships with clients (Damani, 2012). That is why businesses nowadays rely on social media to improve the customer loyalty. Using social media, businesses are able to reach the customers in more efficient way by creating a dedicated pages or presence over the social media which is accessible by all customers. This approach has helped companies forming a good relationship with their customers.

(4) Customer Service: The use of social media is supposed to be user friendly and this means that a business should have customer service representatives who can answer any queries from clients (Evans, 2010). As stated above, forming the pages or groups over the social media is helping companies building relationship it also provides the customers with service required and with access of 24/7 for such pages or groups.

The rates of social media penetration in Saudi Arabia and the Middle East in general is scoring very high. Saudi Arabia in particular has seen its people change their way of life majorly due to improved use of technology and communication (Al-Jenaibi, 2011). In the 1960s, Saudi Arabia was predominantly involved in nomadism, but this has changed with an increased rate of urbanization leading to approximately 80 percent of the Saudis currently living within the urban setting. The use of social media among the Saudis has become a major force today. For instance, today, Saudi Arabia is among the first countries with has the highest number of people registered on Twitter. The major driving force for this trend among the Saudis has been an increasing population of youths who embrace technological advancements with a lot of enthusiasm. The country has witnessed a widespread recognition and approval of smartphones and other related technological advancements. Also, based on Global Media Insight (2018), the availability of affordable internet access has enable more Saudis to use social media. In the year 2016, for example, the number of Saudis who accessed the internet and the web through laptops and desktops decreased by 17 percent but the number of those who used smartphones increased by 19 percent. This indicates that social media is mostly accessed via hand-held gadgets in Saudi.

Social media marketing in Saudi Arabia can easily be a good strategy for businesses to promote their business and create strong brands among the Saudis (Dosari, 2016). Among the famous social media network, Facebook is the most active and maintains its top position among the Saudis as indicated in the figure. In the year 2015, Facebook saw an increase in terms of numbers and percentage of users. Currently, the number of Saudis using Facebook are 7.96 million. Twitter is the second commonly used social media tool in Saudi Arabia with a 20 percent share of the market. Google comes third with 15 percent share (Al-Jenaibi, 2011). However, statistics indicate that

Google usage has gone down, and this is basically due to the rise of Instagram, a popular social media site that one can use to share photos and videos. The rate at which social media platforms are used among the Saudis is very high to an extent that businesses are doing very well in terms of social media marketing as the number of audience is very high (Dosari,2016).

2.2 Consumer Decision Making Process

In the recent years, the use of social media and social networking sites has increased. For example, Facebook is said to have more than 2.2 billion users (Statistica, 2018), and this number continues to grow as time goes by. According to Hanna et al. (2011), social media has revolutionized marketing practices such as promotion, branding and advertising as well as consumer behaviors. It is very clear that the increased use of social media has changed consumer behaviors as many are not just using social networking sites for inspiration but also to buy products from. Decision making process models been developed long time to present the stages consumers go through before purchasing. Engel et al. (1968) proposed the EKB model which is regarded high in consumer decision-making and adopted by many authors like Solomon (2016) shows that decision process involves in five steps: (1) Problem recognition (2) Information search (3) Evaluation alternatives (4) Purchase decision (5) Post purchase behaviour.

- **Problem Recognition:** this is where the consumer needs to recognize what to have. If the consumer does not know what to have he/she will not be able to progress in the decision-making process.
- **Information search:** After identifying the need (recognising) at this stage is where the consumer starts searching for information. Consumers will tend to collect the information from their

preferred sources such as family, friends or organisations.

- Evaluation alternatives: Once enough information is collected the consumer will start to evaluate and look at alternatives through comparing the information collected in order to make the right decision.
- Purchase decision: This is considered as the most important stage of the process. As the consumer, has completed the information search, comparing and evaluating he/she needs to make the final purchase decision.
- Post purchase behaviour: After the purchase or the consumption of the product the consumer goes through the evaluation of the purchase. At this stage the consumer will reflect on his/her experience with the item purchased which will affect the future decision-making process.

Making a purchase via social media is easy, convenient, fast and less costly and this forms the basis as to why consumers have turned to social media for purposes of purchasing products (Akrimi & Khemakhem, 2012). Almost everyone with a smartphone or rather the youth generations have a Facebook account, and this forms the basis as to why Facebook has the higher chances of influencing purchase (Stadd, 2014).

3. Method

Research philosophy includes the approach a research is applying to generate a knowledge. As Orišek (2004) referred to research philosophy as the perception on the basis of which the research is conducted and relevant knowledge is generated. Saunders et al. (2011) defined the main research philosophies in business and management which are positivism, interpretivism, realism, and pragmatism. The positivism promises unambiguous and accurate knowledge (Saunders, 2016). With

positivism, a research is conducted based on a theory to formulate new understanding and knowledge. A scientific assumption is held when positivists are performing their research (Cohen et al., 2000). Moreover, the researchers believe that by using a generalised theory or existing one hypothesis can be developed (Saunders et al., 2009). The positivist paradigm usually referred to as a scientific approach for gathering data as it only focusses on reaching the truth. The researcher will adopt the positivism paradigms as researchers are going to use an existing theory (purchase decision making process) to reach a new knowledge. In addition to that, is that the positivism indicates that new knowledge is reached through measurements and observations.

According to Saunders et al., (2011) two research approaches exist inductive and deductive. The inductive which presents a theory that is developed from the observation of empirically reality (Collis and Hussey ,2009, p.335). It involves moving from observation to statement of general pattern. With the inductive approach the researcher is considered to be part of the his/her research process and mainly less apprehensive regarding a generalisation. As for the deductive it starts with general assumptions or theories and ends with the specific (Burney,2008). With deductive approach researchers will use a scientific theory and move from this theory to explaining the association between the variables using the data collected. Moreover, this approach involves collecting specific data of variables to draw the conclusion to find the relationship among the variables. Variety of data and information is collected by the researcher to confirm or reject the hypothesis to resolve issue (Gill and Johnson 2010). As the researcher will adopt a positivism paradigm the research approach will be deductive approach.

4. Results

The population of the researcher is the Saudi students in the UK. Considering the approaches and the limitations mentioned above the researcher will take a sample of 100 Saudi students who use or has a social network account. The questionnaires are distributed using online tools (SurveyMonkey). The questionnaire was emailed (link) to 100 Saudi students. The response rate was 88% and the collected data is then entered and analysed using SPSS. Out of the 88 responses there were 5 incomplete questionnaires and were disregarded; thus only 83 questionnaires were considered valid.

Table 1 shows the age of the respondents of considered questionnaires and considered valid to the research (83 in total). Table 2 shows the respondents gender with majority were male. Most of the respondents were undergraduate students with 60% while 36% were postgraduate. The last 4% were college and PhD respondents.

Table 1: Demographic details age of the respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18-22	10	12.0	12.0	12.0
	23-26	49	59.0	59.0	71.1
	27-30	21	25.3	25.3	96.4
	31-34	2	2.4	2.4	98.8
	35-40	1	1.2	1.2	100.0
	Total	83	100.0	100.0	

Table 2: Demographic details gender figures of respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	65	78.3	78.3	78.3
	Female	18	21.7	21.7	100.0
	Total	83	100.0	100.0	

The researcher considered knowing the use of the social media to be important as it will help to determine the impact on the purchase decisions. Also, to serve the aim of the research it was important to know the use of the social media among the respondents. The first aspect of the research is to find which social media or network the mostly used by the respondents. The findings showed that Facebook is a very popular among the respondents followed by Instagram. In addition to that, the data collected showed that users use the social media several times a day with 83% from the total respondents. While around 13% of the respondent indicated that they use social media once a day. The lowest response was for the several time a week and once a week with 1.4% and 1.2% respectively.

Table 3: Mostly used Social Media

		Percent	Valid Percent	Total
Valid	Facebook	100	100	100
	Instagram	67	67	67
	Twitter	56	56	56
	Google+	4	4	4
	LinkedIn	45	45	45

Table 4: Use of Social Media

Reasons Social Media Use

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
ReasonSocialMedia_Use ^a	Networking	69	14.7%	83.1%
	Keeping in touch	83	17.7%	100.0%
	Sharing	47	10.0%	56.6%
	Research for information	63	13.4%	75.9%
	Socialising	77	16.4%	92.8%
	Play Games	56	11.9%	67.5%

Get opinions reviews	74	15.8%	89.2%
Total	469	100.0%	565.1%

Table 4 shows the results demonstrating the reasons of the social media use. As it is clear, all the respondents use social media for keeping in touch with 100%. Also, up to 83% use social media for networking and expanding their circle of people. Moreover, around 92% of the Saudi students use the social media for socialising over the web. However, the most important aspect was that around 56% of the respondents use the social media for sharing, up to 76% use social media searching for information and 89% use social media looking for opinions.

To find out which information sources are used by the Saudi students to buy product, a set of multiple responses were created. The results presented in table 5 showed that that social media or social networks along with the word-of-mouth are the major sources among the Saudi students.

Table 5: Product Information Sources

	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Social media websites	80	32,3%	77,6%
Word-of-mouth	76	30,6%	72,7%
Official websites	38	15,3%	49,1%
Product Information Sources ^a newspaper or magazine articles	29	11,7%	43,6%
Advertisements	25	10,1%	26,3%
Total	248	100,0%	298,6%

In order to serve the aim of the research, the respondents were asked to select the products that they purchased based on social media. Multi response set was created to allow multi selection from the users. It was important for the research to gather the information in order to determine if certain products are purchased as a result of social media. The Saudi students were asked to select from clothes, jewellery, media (music, DVD), video games, mobile phones and holidays as products purchased based on social media. The results showed that the most purchased products were clothes and holidays with 72% and 71% respectively. While media products such as DVD and music were the lowest purchased products with only 24% of users purchasing multimedia based on information on social media. Moreover, it was imperative to know the impact of the social media in affecting the decisions of respondents by changing their initial purchase decision. Measuring the influence of social media, the researcher investigated if the respondents have made any changes to their purchasing based on reviews (positive or negative) and opinions found on social media. The results demonstrated that more than half of the Saudi students (55.4%) have made minor changes to their purchase of the product.

Table 6: Decision Change Based on Social Media

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	I have not made any changes to any purchase due to opinions on social media	20	22.1	22.1	22.1
	I have made minor changes to my purchase due to opinions on social media	46	55.4	55.4	77.5

I have totally changed decision to purchase a product due to opinions on social media	17	22.5	22.5	100.0
Total	83	100.0	100.0	

In addition to that, to find out what use of social media by the Saudi student during the purchase of the product; the researchers used a multiple response question. It was clear that posting a photo is the most used social media activity by the Saudi students, almost by 71% of the Saudi students. Also, up to 70% said they were involved with information searching for places to buy a product. Moreover, 40.3% follow the page of the product and only 23.4% of the respondents update their status or tweet. Furthermore, only 18.2% share a blog or post a review, while quarter (25%) of the Saudi students indicated that they do not use social media during purchase of the product. The researcher also studied the use of the social media after the product purchase. This step helps the researcher to determine if social media is used in the last stage of the purchase decision of the Saudi students. The results showed that more Saudi students share photos or video after the purchase of the product with 81% an increase of 10% compared with the number of users post photo or video during the purchase of the product. Moreover, there was an increase in number of users who follow the product page, tweet and share a blog or review with 54.7%, 44% and 30.7% respectively. There was a decrease of 11% by the number of respondents who do not use social media after the purchase with 13% only indicated they do not use social media after the purchase of the product. After completing the stages of the purchase decision making process and the use of the social media in that process, the researchers aimed to find if the respondents would recommend the use of social media for purchase advice. The results indicated that almost 80% (79.5%) of the respondents

indicated they would recommend social media to be used as an advice for product purchase that indicates social media to be considered a good source for information when it comes to purchase decision making.

Test of significance Chi-square was conducted between the use of the social media for information search and following page after purchase. The results showed that there is significant relationship among these two variables: $\chi^2 = 16,362$, $df = 1$, $p=0.000$.

Table 7: Chi-Square Test

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2- sided)	Exact Sig. (2- sided)	Exact Sig. (1- sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	16.362 ^a	1	.000		
Continuity Correction ^b	14.351	1	.000		
Likelihood Ratio	18.316	1	.000		
Fisher's Exact Test				.000	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	16.165	1	.000		
N of Valid Cases	83				

Further analysis using Cronbach test conducted to test the reliability the data especially the variables that are related to social media and purchase decision making process. The results showed that the data is reliable with $\alpha=0.80$.

4. Discussion

The results showed that the subjects do use the social media when it comes for the purchase decision making. The respondents were considered to be mature students with almost 84% of respondents are aged between 23 and 30; stating that the students have the knowledge in the

purchasing and using social media. These findings are aligned with the figures presented previously by Statistica (2018) indicating Facebook is still the most the used social network. Also, the figures presented, showed the that Saudi students are all using social media as highlighted by Al-Jenaibi (2011) indicating the Saudi people are changing their way of life due to the use of the new technology. The findings of the main use of the social media served as an objective to o find if social media plays a role in the purchase decision making process will identify which stages (problem recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, purchase decision, post purchase evaluation) of the process is social media used. This result showed that the social media is used in the purchase decision process in information search and alternative evaluation. Also, this result is in line with Ross et al. (2009) that there is a correlation between social media use and purchase in intention. Moreover, the study looked into the type of products purchased based on social media, the result indicated that the Saudi students used information from social media to purchase mobile phones and video games with 68% and 66% respectively. Jewellery as product did not indicate that the Saudi students rely on social media information to purchase jewellery products with only 48% of respondents buying it. These numbers and result indicated that mainly Saudi students buy clothes and holiday according to what they find over the social media.

Finding the impact of the social media on the purchase decision helped in reflecting how and if the respondents were influenced by the social media content. The findngs showed that the Saudi students have changed their decisions based on Social media with almost 55.4% made a minor change. This result considered important to the research as it showed that social media did influence the subjects in the purchase of product. This is an indication that Saudi students do change their purchased decisions based on what they perceive over the social media. Furthermore, the study

showed that the Saudi students are highly active over social media during product purchase. The options presented by the smartphones helped the users to use social media rapidly. This result is in line with Goodrich and de Mooij (2014) indicating increased number of people using social media while purchase or making a purchasing. The findings indicated that the social media is heavily used after the purchase of the product which can be related to the Post-evaluation in the purchase decision process. This result served the aim of the research to know which stage of the purchasing decision process social media is used and whether Saudi students would recommend the social media for product purchase advice. This result is in line with Goodrich and de Mooij (2014) indicating users spend more time on social network that influence their behaviour toward making purchase.

The results from the research indicating that more users are using the social media for product purchase is consistent with Akrimi and Khemakhem (2012). Social media and word of mouth are considered by the Saudi students the most used information sources regarding products. As indicated in the literature review social media is a tool that gives the people chance to share information (Wilson,2010). This tool has given the users to share different type of information opinions (reviews), photos, blogs and videos. The results also indicated that the least used information sources were advertisements. As Bolton et al (2013) concluded that the users are aware that they are being targeted by advertisement and that they do not trust this type of push marketing tool, hence users do not consider using advertisement as information source. In addition to that, the results obtained is consistent with Goodrich and de Mooij (2014) that more people own smart phones that gives them the possibility to stay connected on to their social networks and that is why the most used source of information was social media. Moreover, the results from the research

indicated that more than half of the Saudi students have made some changes to their purchases as result of reviews (negative or positive) viewed on the social media. The aim of the researcher was to find if social media was an influencing factor that make Saudi students change their initial purchase plans. This result is consistent with Mintel (2013) reporting on the high influence of social media saying that more than 85% of the travellers were influenced by user generated content when planning their holiday.

The research revealed that the Saudi students are eager to share photos or videos while purchasing a product. As Al-Jenaibi (2011) have noted that the Saudi people have improved on the use of the technology. This might be due to the availability of the smartphones and ease of accessibility to social media on the go. As Global Media Insight (2016) concluded that the availability of affordable internet access has enable more Saudis to use social media. In addition to that and considering a holiday as one of the products purchased based on social media with 71.1% respondents; Text100 (2012) found that the main reasons of using social media during holiday is sharing photos and videos. In addition to that, the result showed that around 40% of the Saudi student like or follow the page of the product while purchasing. The reason for this, can be that the respondents want to show that they are now a customer of the purchased product. As Mersey et al. (2010) highlighted that social media is used by businesses and companies to enhance their reach to more customers and make their brand more famous; which indicates the results presented is consistent with that statement. After the purchase of the product more Saudi students (81.3%) participate with posting photos and videos after the purchase. These posts can be reviews of the purchased product to share on the social network. The result is consistent with Text100 (2012) that highlighted photo and or video sharing as the most leading activity after the holiday.

The results of the study have shown that mainly the social media was used during the information search stage of the purchase decision making process. It showed that the respondents are mainly active during the purchase decision of product. Also, the analysis showed that social media is not just used for information search but also used for product post evaluation which is the last stage of the purchase decision process with high number of respondents posting videos or photos after the purchase. It is clear that the social media has effect on the Saudi students in London and plays an important role during purchase decisions, future recommendations for research could include the which social network is used the most for online purchases as currently some social networks launched their own selling point like Facebook. Moreover, it might include a study of the impact of luxury brands over social media, to determine if their online presence does impact the Saudi students to purchase. Another recommendation is the possibility of conducting a study on the social media apps to check if any of them is considered to be more influential than the other. To be successful, companies from the various industry especially retail and tourism need to transform their marketing strategies to comply with the excessive use of social media by these consumers.

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