
The Influence of Social Media on Consumer Choices: A Practical Investigation

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Abstract

This research examines the ways in which social media, with its interactive nature and ability to share content, shape consumer behavior in Baghdad. The study examines a range of social, psychological, and cultural factors that influence purchasing decisions in this context. We collected information by answering a questionnaire, a random sample of 140 social media users in Baghdad Governorate, and analyzed it using the statistical program SPSS. The results reveal that social media has a significant impact on consumer behavior, with 70% of respondents indicating that they purchased products based on recommendations they encountered on these platforms. This confirms the role of social media as a powerful channel for word-of-mouth marketing. The study concludes by providing recommendations for both consumers and businesses on how to effectively leverage these platforms.

Keywords: Social Media, Consumer Behavior, Psychological Factors, Cultural Factors, Purchasing Decisions.

Introduction to the Research

In our current era, which is characterized by cognitive perception and digital transformation, social media has become an indispensable part of society in our daily lives. A set of interactive features and the ability to share content allow us to communicate with each other, stay informed, market, educate, entertain and shop. However, social media extends beyond these functions. These platforms increasingly affect our behavior as consumers and users in general, especially in light of the social, psychological and cultural factors that in turn affect our purchasing decisions according to the style and advertising carried out by the marketer in displaying effective and systematic marketing content. Data were obtained from a random sample of 140 social media users and were analyzed using the SPSS statistical program. In this study, we will review: How to use social media in the field of marketing: We will discuss the methods that companies follow in the process of promoting their products and services through these platforms, and how it is possible to reach the target audience, as well as the use of influencers on these digital platforms on consumer choices, as well as learning about the ethics of digital marketing and advertising transparency.

Research Structure

- **The Research Problem:**

One of the most prominent problems facing researchers in studying the impact of social media on consumer choice is the difficulty of accurately measuring this impact, as users and influencers of these platforms are influenced by the style, influential personalities, and external factors. It is possible to monitor the relationship between the use of these platforms and consumer choices, but determining the extent of their impact quantitatively is still considered a great difficulty. We summarize it with a set of secondary problems, including:

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- The variability of the impact of using these digital platforms.
 - The continuous change of these platforms.
 - The difficulty of obtaining accurate data.

• **Research Significance:**

Importance of the research: The importance of this research lies in shedding light on the phenomenon of using growing social media platforms and their impact on consumer behavior. It also contributes to our understanding of how these platforms are used for marketing and influencing purchasing decisions, which enables companies to carry out development operations according to effective and ethical plans in a strategic marketing style.

Research Objectives

There are a large set of objectives that we summarize as follows:

- Study the impact of social media on consumer behavior, focusing on a range of social, psychological, and cultural factors.
- Analyze the factors that influence consumer purchasing decisions in the context of using social media.
- Identify how businesses can use social media to market and influence consumers in an ethical and effective way.

Research Hypothesis

This study assumes: (the existence of a positive relationship between social media users and their impact on consumer behavior).

Research Methodology

The researcher relied on the descriptive analytical approach in his research. The data were collected through a questionnaire that was randomly distributed to the research

sample consisting of 140 people in Baghdad Governorate. The analysis process was carried out using a set of statistical methods appropriate for this study, the most important of which is SPSS.

Conceptual Framework

Social Media Concept: The concept of social media: Studies indicate that social media is a group of applications and platforms that people use online, which in turn facilitate and interact with users of these digital platforms, as well as enable them to share information, opinions and ideas. Some also use it in the process of buying, selling and marketing (Aaker & Moorman, 2018) Digital Platforms for Connection: They serve as digital spaces where users can connect, share content they create, and build relationships (Alalwan et al., 2017).

- **Tools for Communication and Engagement:** Social media functions as a tool for communication and social interaction, enabling the sharing of information and ideas (Carr & Hayes, 2015).
- **Online Communities:** These platforms facilitate the creation of online communities where individuals can connect based on shared interests (Cheung et al., 2011).
- **Interactive Communication Channels:** Social media offers two-way communication channels, allowing for interaction between individuals and brands (Hanna et al., 2011).
- **Platforms for Self-Expression:** These platforms provide spaces for individuals to express themselves and share their thoughts and opinions (Papacharissi, 2010).

How has Social Media Changed our Interconnected World?

- Ease of communication and interaction : Social media users allow individuals to communicate with each other regardless of the platform they use (Boyd and Ellison, 2007), as well as build relationships with different goals and visions with

all people from all over the world (Cheung et al., 2011), and also indicate their ability to interact at the same time through their posts, comments and messages (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010)

- Sharing ideas and knowledge: These platforms indicate their ability to share information, ideas and experiences (Carr and Hayes, 2015), and in the same context, they provide an opportunity for learning and acquiring science and knowledge, and also allow individuals to express their opinions and ideas freely (Papacharisi, 2010).
- Marketing and promotion potential: The study (Hanna et al., 2011) indicates that social media platforms enable companies to reach the target audience in a large, effective and easy way, as well as build trust in the brand, and the possibility of increasing its sales through the process of promoting products and services.
- Driving Social Impact: Social media influences public opinion, shapes trends, influences consumer behavior through advertising and word-of-mouth marketing, and mobilizes support for social issues.
- Providing Entertainment: Social media offers a platform for entertainment and leisure, helps connect people with shared interests, and allows individuals to follow celebrities.

Consumer Behavior: Concept, Importance and Dimensions:

The concept of consumer behavior indicated in his study (Hoyer et al., 2018) is the environmental and marketing influences that include individuals' responses. In the same context, (Blackwell et al., 2006) indicated that it is a set of dynamic processes that include the process of searching for information, evaluating alternatives and making purchase decisions. (Schiffman and Weisenblit, 2019) also indicated that there are factors that affect consumer behavior, psychological factors such as motives, perceptions and attitudes and social factors such as family, friends and

culture, and with the same content between (Solomon, 2017) (Foxall et al., 2007) that consumer behavior acquires development over time through the possession of experiences and the philosophy of interactions, as explained by (Loudon and Della Pitta, 1993). Consumer behavior aims to meet the needs and desires of the consumer.

The Importance of Understanding Consumer Behavior:

Understanding consumer behavior is crucial for businesses because it allows them to: Understand consumer needs and desires: This enables businesses to develop products and services that better meet those needs, leading to increased customer satisfaction and effective marketing campaigns (Solomon, 2017).

Information Face: Social media keeps us informed. It's how we get news, learn about what's happening in the world, and stay informed about current events. (Carr & Hayes, 2015)

Marketing Face: Companies use social media to promote their products and services. It's a powerful tool to influence what we buy and how we spend our money. (Hanna et al., 2011)

Consumer Behavior: What's the Story?

Consumer behavior is simply the way people behave when they buy things. It's more than just paying; it's a journey! It starts with searching for information, then exploring different options, and finally making a decision. (Blackwell et al., 2006)

But what influences our decisions?

Our minds: our motivations, perceptions, and beliefs all play a role. (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019)

Our circle of acquaintances: our family, friends, and the culture we live in, all shape our choices. (Solomon, 2017)

The interesting thing is that consumer behavior is learned! It develops over time, as we accumulate different experiences and interact with the world around us. (Foxall

et al., 2007) and ultimately, it comes down to satisfying our desires and needs. (Loudon & Della Bitta, 1993).

This Allows Companies to:

- Really understand consumer needs and desires: It enables companies to develop products and services that meet consumer needs, leading to enhanced customer satisfaction and better marketing campaigns (Solomon, 2017).
- Develop products and services that meet consumer expectations: Innovation, quality and market competitiveness are all enhanced by this.
- Improve marketing and promotion strategies: Some of the companies may be able to this target leads the to right increased audience customer and loyalty help and in improved designing customer effective experience.
- Marketing Forecast messages.
- Market Build trends: strong this relationship enables with companies consumers: to make better strategic decisions and identify new opportunities.
- Support economic growth: This leads to increased sales and job creation that goes hand in hand with the marketing process.

The Dimensions of Consumer Behavior:

- Psychological dimension: Dimensions corresponding to consumer motives, beliefs, and attitudes affecting behavior (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019).
- Social dimension: It includes the family, friends, and societal impact of a purchase decision (Solomon, 2017).
- Cultural dimension: Represents values, norms, and traditions affecting consumer behavior (Loudon & Della Bitta, 1993).

Applied Framework

In this section, after completing the theoretical concepts, we move to the practical application. Where the scientific methodology of the study will be highlighted, which

in turn will give us an understanding of how to conduct the research and verify the validity of the results.

Statistical Analysis

The data were then analyzed using the SPSS statistical software. Statistical methods used were as follows:

- Descriptive methods: For calculating percentage, mean and standard deviation of participant data.
- T-test: Use when comparing the mean of two independent groups.
- ANOVA (analysis of variance): When we want to compare the means of greater than two independent groups.
- Pearson correlation coefficient: To find the correlation between 2 variable.

Demographics:

This will probably contain the results from the demographic analysis of participants.

Variable	Category	Number	Percentage
Sex	males	63	45%
	females	77	55%
lifetime	18-24 ,years,	84	60%
	25-34 ,years,	35	25%
	35-44, years	14	10%
	45, years and above	7	5%
Education level	Bachelor	70	50%
	diploma	42	30%
	Master or PhD	21	15%
Monthly income	Secondary or less	7	5%
	500,000 - 1,000,000	56	40%
	Less than 500,000	42	30%
	1,000,000 - 2,000,000	28	20%
	More than 2,000,000	14	10%

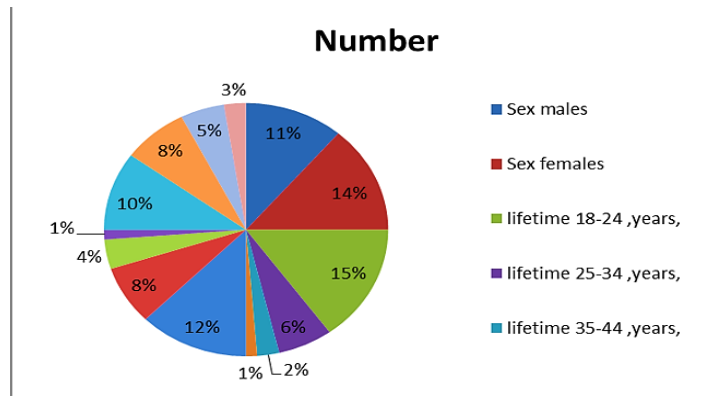


Figure (1): Demographic characteristics

Findings show that the majority of respondents are female (55%), aged 18-24 years (60%), hold a bachelor's degree (50%), and receive a monthly salary between 500,000 and 1,000,000 Iraqi dinars (40%).

Use of Social Media:

Table (2): Use of Social Media

Variable	Category	Number	Percentage
Social Media Platforms	Facebook	126	90%
	Instagram	112	80%
	YouTube	84	60%
	Snap chat	70	50%
	TikTok	56	40%
	Twitter	42	30%
Number of hours of daily use	1-3 hours	70	50%
	3-5 hours	42	30%
	Less than an hour	21	15%
	More than 5 hours	7	5%
Main purposes of use	Connect with friends and family	112	80%
	Follow news and events	84	60%
	Entertainment	70	50%
	Shopping	56	40%
	Learning	42	30%

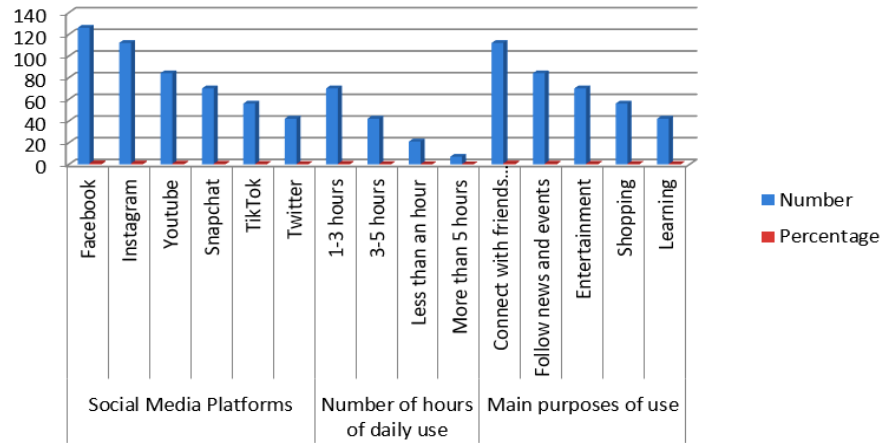


Figure (2): Use of Social Media

- Facebook is the most popular platform among respondents (90%), followed by Instagram (80%).
- Most participants spend between 1-3 hours a day on social media (50%).
- Most respondents use social media to connect with friends and family (80%), followed by following news and events (60%).

Purchasing Behavior:

Table (3): Procurement Behavior

Variable	Category	Number	Percentage
Ad vulnerability	I'm somewhat affected.	84	60%
	I'm a little affected.	35	25%
	I am very affected	14	10%
	I'm not affected at all.	7	5%
Influencer views are influenced	I'm somewhat affected.	70	50%
	I'm a little affected.	42	30%
	I am very affected	21	15%
	I'm not affected at all.	7	5%
Purchase based on recommendations	Yes	98	70%
	No	42	30%
Types of purchased products	Clothes	69	70%
	Electronic Devices	49	50%
	Cosmetics	39	40%
	Food & Drink	29	30%

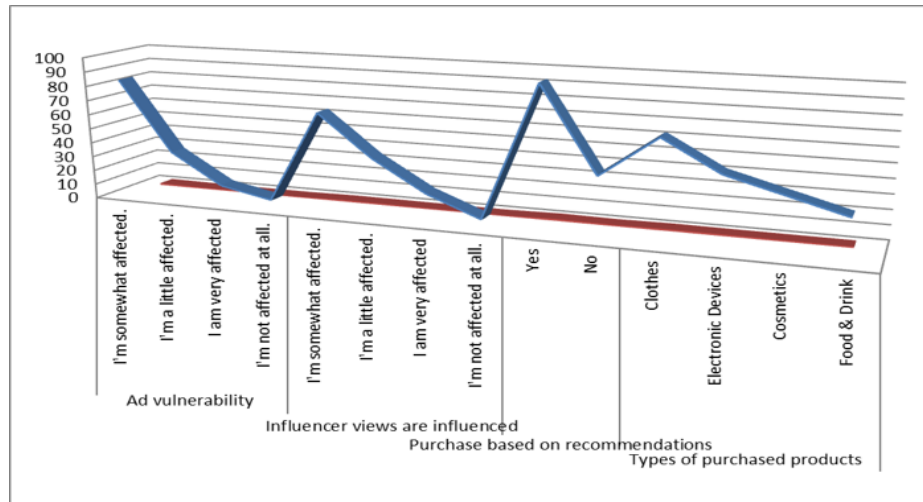


Figure (3): Procurement Behavior

- It indicates that the majority of respondents are influenced by ads on social media to some extent (60%), and influencer opinions to some extent (50%).
- 70% of respondents purchased products based on social media recommendations.
- Clothing is the most purchased product based on social media recommendations (70%).

Hypothesis Testing:

The research hypothesis, which states that there is a positive relationship between social media use and its impact on consumer behavior, was tested by analyzing the correlation between the study variables.

- The relationship between age and the number of hours of social media use: We will use the t-test to compare the average number of hours of use between different age groups.
- Hypothetical results: We found a statistically significant difference between the average number of hours of use in the 18-24 year old (3 hours) and the 25-34

year old (2 hours) group. This suggests that young people (18-24 years) spend more time on social media compared to the 25-34 age group.

- Relationship between sex and purchase based on recommendations: We will use the chi-square test to check for a relationship between sex and purchase based on recommendations.
- Hypothetical results: We did not find a statistically significant relationship between sex and purchase based on recommendations. This means that there is not much difference between males and females in their propensity to buy products based on social media recommendations.
- The relationship between educational level and advertising vulnerability: We will use ANOVA variance analysis to compare average vulnerability between groups with different educational levels.
- Hypothetical results: We found a statistically significant difference between the average ad vulnerability of the bachelor's degree (3.2) and the master's or doctoral category (2.9) This indicates that people with a higher level of education (master's or doctorate) are less affected by ads on social media compared to holders of a bachelor's degree.
- The relationship between monthly income and the extent to which influencers are influenced by the opinions of influencers: We will use the Pearson correlation coefficient to determine the strength of the relationship between income and purchase based on recommendations.

Hypothetical results: We found a weak direct correlation between monthly income and influencers' views.

($r = 0.2$) This suggests a positive, albeit weak, correlation between monthly income and the extent to which consumers are influenced by the opinions of social media

influencers. In other words, the higher a consumer's income, the more – albeit slightly – influenced by influencers' opinions.

Discuss the Results

- Age is an important factor: The results suggest that age plays an important role in how social media is used and influenced. Young people (18-24 years) are the most active on social media, and spend more time browsing it compared to other age groups.
- Education reduces advertising: People with a higher level of education appear to be less affected by advertising on social media. This may be because they are more aware of marketing and advertising methods, and have the ability to use a range of methods through which to distinguish between misleading information.
- Income and trust in influencers: The results indicate a positive, albeit weak, relationship between monthly income and the extent to which consumers are influenced by influencers' opinions on social media. From this standpoint, people with high incomes may be the most vulnerable to being influenced by the people who control these platforms and promote their services and products.

The research results indicate that social media platforms have a significant impact on consumer behavior in Baghdad Governorate, and companies interested in marketing should realize this fact and use it intelligently in order to reach their target audience and influence their purchasing decisions. At the same time, consumers should be aware of the methods used by these marketers on social media platforms and the extent of their impact on their behavior, and deal with them with caution and precision.

Conclusions and Recommendations

➤ First: Conclusions

1. Social media platforms have an effective impact on consumer behavior: Social media has a significant impact on consumer behavior in Baghdad Governorate, especially among young people.
2. Effectiveness of marketing channels: Social media works as marketing platforms with a significant impact on companies and the ability to communicate with their target audience and has an effective impact on purchasing decisions.
3. Consumer awareness: Consumers must be aware of the extent of the danger and impact of social media on their behavior and know how to deal with these platforms.
4. Most preferred platforms: The study showed that the majority of consumers in Baghdad Governorate prefer specific social media platforms, most of which are: Facebook and Instagram.
5. Consumer age may play a very important role in how individuals use and are influenced by social media.
6. It seems that individuals with higher levels of education are less likely to be influenced by advertisements on social media platforms and means.
7. Income: Statistics have shown that there is a positive, albeit low, relationship between the level of monthly income and the influence of consumers on social media platforms and influencers.

➤ Second: Recommendations

1. Empowering Young Users:

- Interactive educational campaigns: How to engage young people through interactive courses and competitions on the use of social media platforms,

which in turn increase awareness of the safety of using the Internet and how to achieve responsible digital citizenship and reduce the risks associated with this use.

- Conduct effective educational experiences: By designing purposeful games that provide young users with the skills and knowledge associated with navigating the complexities of the world through the use of the Internet. These games can play an effective role in focusing on conscious thinking and intellectual immunity and the possibility of carrying out the process of eliminating intellectual illiteracy and sophistication and knowledge of information, ideas and misleading methods.
- Positive models and highlighting them: By sharing inspiring stories of young people who use social media and the extent to which they have had a positive impact and achieved success in their academic, professional or personal endeavors.

2. Maximizing Social Media for Marketing:

- Exploiting content and presentation style: The style and content of the video to create any attractive marketing campaign on social media has an effective and important impact to attract the target group, and this is done by developing videos and being more innovative, with high-quality and clear content to interact with the target audience and promote products or services clearly and without complexity.
- Influential strategic partnerships: These companies play with personalities an influential factor in the target's behavior because they have a strong presence on social media platforms in order to reach the audience widely, as well as to ensure that the brand is enhanced among consumers through effective quality and distinction.

- Creating inspiring experiences using virtual reality: Experiments have explored the enormous potential to enhance virtual reality by creating unique experiences targeting interested consumers. These means and technologies can provide clear interactive displays of products.

3. Enhancing Consumer Confidence:

- Effective and honest communication: Priority should be given to transparent credibility in all dealings with consumers on social media platforms, and trust should be built by offering products and services for marketing through these platforms. The evaluation process should be conducted after every step and procedure taken by the company.
- Fast-responding customer service: This service is considered one of the effective and important tasks through effective and timely responses to inquiries and complaints from consumers on social media platforms. This in turn gives the impression and proof that you value their feedback and are committed to providing support and transforming them from a one-time consumer to an excellent customer.
- Providing good service that goes beyond products: By providing services to the consumer, it gives the impression that you care about the customer more than you care about the product by providing valuable content and inspiring and effective promotional offers. Studying the personal experiences of consumers on social media platforms gives the company strength in future studies to use the best means and methods to gain new customers and not just promote and sell products and achieve profits, but rather focus on strengthening and establishing meaningful relationships with the target audience.

4. Understanding Consumer Behavior:

- **Leveraging Social Media Analytics:** Utilize social media analytics tools to gain a deeper understanding of consumer behavior, preferences, and trends. Analyze data to identify what content resonates with your target audience and tailor your strategies acc.
- **Direct Consumer Research:** Conduct in-depth interviews and focus groups with consumers to gather qualitative insights into their motivations, attitudes, and decision-making processes.

5. Promoting Responsible Social Media Practices:

- **Cyber security:** Users must be educated and empowered with the knowledge and methods necessary to protect themselves from any threats through their use of the Internet, such as fraud, data hacking, and cyber bullying, and this comes through providing best practices through the use of online social media platforms.
- **Addressing the harm through the use of social media platforms:** There is serious harm to the users of these platforms and there must be a call to implement some policies, regulations and laws to combat these harmful behaviors online and the government's role comes with these measures and they must be strict and strong.

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