

The Influence of Social Media on Shopping Behavior among Youth in the United Arab Emirates.

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Abstract: The consumer decision making process is a constant subject of research, it aims to understand the factors that influence consumer choice, thought, and behavior. Today, it is no surprise that most local and international businesses are turning to social media to find their targeted consumers as social media is proven to have a huge influence on consumer shopping behavior. This study is a quantitative study that aims to explore the influence of social media on online shopping behavior of United Arab Emirates youth residences. It seeks to understand the change occurred on their shopping behavior preferences by using a survey questionnaire to find out data. The study has concluded that youth consumers are well literate about online shopping, and have shown tendency to shop online in high numbers and depend on social media influencers to know about the latest trends in market.

Keywords: Online Shopping Experience; Social Media Influencers impact; Youth Shopping Behavior.

1. Introduction

Consumer behavior is defined as how individual customers, groups, or organizations choose, buy, use, and dispose of ideas, goods, and services to meet their needs and desires. It refers to consumer market actions and the underlying motives for traders who hope that by understanding the reasons for consumers to purchase certain goods and services, they will be able to determine which products are in demand, which are out of date, and what are the best way to present them to consumers, in other words deciding the marketing strategies. (Fotis, 2015) Social media enables people to express their ideas, thoughts and opinions and share them with others. And to connect with others like they have been doing for thousands of years. However, social media: (1) removed the spatial and temporal constraints inherent in traditional methods of communication; (2) Provided online tools that enable multimedia content to be shared among several people. (3) use simple interfaces that allow even non-specialists to share content. (Fotis, 2015)

Undoubtedly, social media has become a convenient method of communication among all age groups. Also it has become a convenient method of shopping that has changed the means of communication for buyers and merchants. With the help of the network and the presence of various social networking sites, entrepreneurs can now meet customers from all over the

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world with just one click. The internet technology helps consumers to search the web for products, see reviews and ratings for products before buying. (Chopra, 2020)

The study will examine how social media platforms influence the shopping behavior of Emirates youth and what are the reasons behind their preference of online shopping. It will clarify the reasons of youth tendency to buy from social media platforms. And will explore the role of social media influencers in social media marketing.

2. Literature Review

There are many studies made to understand the social media influence on consumers buying behavior, one of them is Mukhaini (2014) study in Oman that seeks to understand the type of products and platforms preferred by Omani community. Mukhaini's study mere focus was on the type and platform preferred to indicate the Omani community online shopping preferences. The study showed that Instagram is the most preferred social media platform for the Omani community to purchase from. And the most preferred product to shop for online was fashion and clothes. (Mukhaini, Al Dhuhli, & Ismael, 2014)

In his study, Sema has wondered if social media affect consumer decision-making. And has defined social media as a very important communication tool people use to be in touch with other people and organization. Posting information could lead their friends to do the same thing or use their information to make decisions. (Sema, 2013)

Based on Ashman's study social media has fully changed the traditional shopping experience into a virtual experience that allows information sharing, product comparison of almost all types of products and services and being able to keep the product reviews for future customers. Such interaction between customers has been proved by that it has given a positive impact and influence on consumers purchase intentions and Social media is perceived as a more trustworthy source of information when compared to corporate communications and advertisements. (Ashman, 2015)

Some studies have argued that online consumers are more powerful than traditional consumer and that's due to the concept of Electronic word of mouth. In her study about online marketing Madalina has asserted that due to the internet and online shopping consumers started to feel more in charge of their shopping experience and have a variety of options, and are able to express and share their opinion any time and at any platform. What makes the Electronic word of mouth a strong player in electronic marketing is that comments make a big motivation to purchase certain products, on the other hand some comments do make you not purchase a certain good or gives a disappointing reputation about some brands. (Madalina, 2017)

On regard to the consumer buying behavior, which is one of the main concepts of this study actually there are many models in literature that describes the consumer behavior. Some literature has defined the consumer decision making process as the actions or patterns of consumers that precede, determines and follow on the decision process for the acquisition of need satisfying products, ideas or services. (Alet C Erasmus, 2001)

One of the simplest consumer behavior models is the economic model. This model claimed that consumers follow the principle of maximum utility and spend the least amount for maximum benefits. Adding to the economic model, there is the psychological model which is

based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs. This model asserts that consumers are motivated by their strongest needs. In addition to the sociological model where consumers are influenced by society and social norms to purchase certain products. (Alet C Erasmus, 2001)

The classis model that includes the Engel, Kollat and Blackwell model has described consumer decision process and how decisions are made to purchase products. This model consists of five stages. Based on Ashman's study of consumer behavior in 2015, he argued that the EKB mode is an old model for a new age, he added that the model has proved its validity in the digital culture of online shopping. (Ashman, 2015)

Some studies have examined the concept of privacy in online shopping and found that privacy in the online shopping means the willingness to share personal or financial information over the internet to complete the purchase from a certain website. Private information including address, mobile number, house number and even requesting copy of the customer ID number in some websites. Whereas financial information points out to the credit card details. (Raja & Gurung , 2015)

According to there are a list of four factors of online privacy, one is the unauthorized use of personal information by secondary party, improper access of any information that is digitally stored, collecting and saving the personal information of any individual, errors in personal information that's been collected (Raja & Gurung, 2015)

After going through the past literature about consumer shopping behavior and social media, there is no doubt that social media is a very important source of information for consumer pre-buying and therefore, it has a huge impact on their shopping decision. Sample in most studies has used social media as a guide for their shopping decisions and it has been proven that social media shopping has given a positive impact on overall shopping experience of consumers. There is a set of common factors that customers look for in their online shopping experience to be able to classify their shopping experience as a successful and pleasant one, including the quality of the product, the value of the product, the privacy policy of the platform shopped from and level of trust in certain website.

3. Theoretical Framework

Researchers used Engel, Kollat and Blackwell model as a theoretical framework due to its accuracy with the study.

3.1 Historical Background about EKB model

The Engel, Kollat and Blackwell model was created at the late 1970's to describe the consumer shopping behavior. It has divided the consumer behavior into stages and analyzed the variables that affects the shopping behaviors. EKB describes how shopping decisions are made when choosing from a set of alternatives. The five consequential stages start with the need recognition, where consumers recognize the need to get or have something for certain reason. The second stage following need recognition is a search for solution from external and internal environments such as past experiences and memories. Third step is to evaluate those solutions and alternatives that is closely related to the customer personal criterion in deciding their

preferences. The fourth step is the purchasing of selected alternatives. The final step is the post purchase evaluation. (Ashman, 2015)

3.2 Criticism of the EKB model

Over the years, the EKB model was criticized for being too restrictive to be applied for all consumer purchasing situations. as it is not necessary that for every consumer to go through all the five stages of the model. Some stages can be skipped; it depends on the situation the consumer is going through while thinking about purchasing some products. The most significant criticism of this theory is that it is too old to cope with the current trends of online shopping behavior. (Ashman, 2015)

3.3 Defend of EKB model

Such criticism led to the creation of studies that defended the model and has described it as an old model for new age. This model is one of the core theories of consumer behavior, its stages is proven to be applicable for both type of shopping (online and traditional ways). EKB model was first formulated almost 50 years ago, its authors have not imagined the digital world we have now and how shopping has transferred into digital platforms. While in many ways our needs as customers has not changed over the time, for example the need to stay healthy, buy a dress, or get a certain service while the mechanisms and tools used to fulfill them has certainly changed. In their conceptual research, Ashman-2015 has demonstrated how EKB model is a useful tool for studying the current shopping environment. And it remains a core theoretical framework of studies related to online shopping, and consumer behavior. (Ashman, 2015)

4. Methodology

Researchers depended on quantitative research method to through a survey to answer the study the questions. The survey questions were designed in a way to fully cover the needed study questions and come out with the logical findings and conclusions. The survey has four main parts as explained in details below.

The reason for choosing quantitative method is the nature of the study that require an examination of a large number of participants and the type of data which are collectable through a questionnaire.

4.1 Survey Sections

1. The first part has the biographical information of the sample such as gender, age, employment status, educational qualifications.
2. The second part of the survey has aimed to gain information about the sample opinion regarding many aspects of online shopping aspects.
3. The third part focus was on the sample experience of shopping through social media platform.
4. The last part of the survey was about the sample view on social media influencers as marketers.

5. Sample

Total of 253 respondents has completed the survey, 50 males and 203 females. The highest number of respondents are aging between 25-30 years. And 62% Percent of respondents are bachelor degree holders. The number of employed sample are more than the unemployed ones. As 57% are employed, whereas 43% are not Employed. But the difference is not very high. (See table1).

Table (1) sample illustration

Variables		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	50	19.8%
	Female	203	80.2%
Total	253		
Age	18 – 24	68	26.8%
	25 -30	137	54.2%
	31-35	48	19%
Total	253		
Education	Bachelors	50	19.7%
	Masters	157	62.1%
	PhD.	46	18.2%
Total	253		
Employment	Employed	145	57.3%
	Unemployed	108	42.7%
Total	253		100%

6. Results

Results are divided into two sections, the first include questions about the sample attitude on social media platforms, like the number of social media platforms they are on, and the time spent on those platforms. Whereas the second part is made of three tables each have ten statements that discusses in details the sample (opinion on online shopping, evaluation of online shopping, the role of social media influencers in the shopping experience). See the below tables and discussion.

6.1 Number of social Media platforms used, and the average of time surfing the web.

The study found that most respondents are active on 3-4 social media platforms. This indicate that most sample are actively engaged in social media platforms and participating in it. In contrast, only 6% of total sample have from 1-2 social media platforms which assures that the rest of categories have more than 3 platforms, which confirmed that most of respondents are active users on social media platforms.

6.2 Type of products and platforms mostly preferred among sample.

90.48% percent of respondents use Instagram to shop. This high number of users that prefers Instagram over any other platforms let us wonder about the specifications Instagram have over any other platforms. First, Instagram allows business owners to post their products in fascinating way that is very eye catching to customers. Secondly, it allows customers to see the price of the products immediately, and to compare between a wide range of products. Thirds, it enables users to share the

product with friends and colleagues for advice and recommendation very easily. Respondents had shown more tendency to purchase beauty products by a percentage of 44.66% percent.

6.3 Statements Evaluation about sample Opinions regarding online shopping

Table (2) Youth opinion about online shopping

Agreement Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		M.	St. d	Ratio
	F.	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%			
Online shopping is convenience it saves time and effort	106	41.9 %	108	42.7	35	13.8	3	1.2	1	0.4	4.25	0.763	84.9
online shopping has more discounts and better prices than in store shopping.	112	44.3 %	97	38.3	38	15.0	6	2.4	0	0.0	4.25	0.794	84.9
online shopping allows for price and product comparison before buying.	103	40.7 %	107	42.3	36	14.2	6	2.4	1	0.4	4.21	0.800	84.1
the choices of products online are wide and variant	88	34.7 %	110	43.5	48	19.0	7	2.8	0	0.0	4.10	0.800	82.1
It is hard to examine the quality of products bought online	3	1.3%	11	4.3	32	12.6	129	51.0	78	30.8	4.06	0.845	81.2

In table (2) researchers aimed to test respondent's opinion regarding some areas of shopping through social media platforms. The largest number of sample has shown a high tendency toward online shopping and agreed that shopping through social media platforms is:

- It is easy, convenient and save time and effort.
- It has more offers.
- It provides variety of products.
- It is not hard to examine the quality of products bought online.
- It provides more details about products.

Such results indicate that Emirates youth consumers are well-literate about online shopping through social media platforms, they are aware about its specifications, offers, advantages and disadvantages, and are able to evaluate their options and what they like and dislike on this regard.

6.4 Statements About Youth Evaluation of their Online Shopping Experience

Table (3) Youth Evaluation about online shopping

Agreement Statement	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		M. F	St. d %	Ratio F
	F.	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F.	%			
The shipment and package was delivered on time and without any damages	38	15	127	50.2	73	28.9	14	5.5	1	0.4	3.74	0.794	74.8
Your online shopping experience is describes as wonderful pleasant and satisfying	50	19.8	145	57.3	53	20.9	5	2	0	0	3.95	0.697	79.0
You suggested to your family and friends to shop from social media platforms	47	18.5	137	54.2	51	20.2	15	5.9	3	1.2	3.83	0.840	76.6
The website has a flexible return after sale policy	51	20.2	124	49	63	24.9	12	4.7	3	1.2	3.82	0.847	76.4
The product was similar to what you expected	33	13	127	50.2	76	30	14	5.5	3	1.3	3.68	0.813	73.7

Table (3) second statement shows that 195 respondents have confidently agreed that their shopping experience is wonderful, satisfying, and pleasant. which cause us to wonder about the reasons caused them to evaluate their shopping experience in a positive way. When analyzing the statements above, we see that respondents were asked about the package, delivery time, authenticity of the product if it was similar to what they ordered

Based on the above schedule, that has discussed and analyzed the respondents shopping experience evaluation based on their past and current view on shopping through social media websites. The most prefer factors evaluation were close to each other and are as following:

- Package, and delivery time.

Today's consumers that are very well aware of the package quality, and has looked at hundreds of packages samples are not going to accept a package delivered in a bad condition. In other words, currently customers are looking for a fancy and nicely finished package to meet up with their expectation of online shopping.

- Website flexibility.

Website flexibility means a good communication channel between merchant and consumers. Where feedbacks are well heard, and comments are taken into consideration. More than that, a flexible shopping window allows for product exchange, refund and more.

- The product quality and authenticity.

The study has approved that respondents are concerned about the product quality and authenticity. A number of 160 respondents has agreed that they received their products similar to what is presented in the websites.

6.5 Statements About Sample opinion on Social Media Influencers

Table (4) Youth's opinion about Social Media Influencers

Agreement Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Mean	St. deviation	Ratio
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage			
Social media influencers are very important factor in letting you to know about the latest trends in social media market.	52	20.6	125	49.4	56	22.1	11	4.3	9	3.6	3.79	0.938	75.8
Social media influencers are qualified for advertisement	29	11.4	92	36.4	86	34	31	12.3	15	5.9	3.35	1.031	67.0
You tend to buy the product that is promoted by a popular influencer	19	7.4	90	35.6	72	28.5	51	20.2	21	8.3	3.14	1.084	62.8
Social media influencers are trust worthy	16	6.3	63	24.9	104	41.1	45	17.8	25	9.9	3.00	1.039	60.0
What makes you trust a certain influencer is his high number of followers and the huge amount of advertisements assigned to him/her	22	8.7	68	26.9	76	30	51	20.2	36	14.2	2.96	1.179	59.1
Total	253												

Social media influencers are one of the most powerful marketing tools used by business owners to promote their products/services to a wide range of customers on their social media platforms. Due to their high influence and importance, this study has specified a part on its survey to examine sample opinion about social media influencers. 177 out of 253 respondents agreed that social media influencers are very important factor in letting them to know about the latest trends in social media market. And that's due the high dependency of business owners on social media influencers to promote their products. (See Table 4).

7. Discussion

The study has confirmed that most respondents are active on 3-4 social media platforms. This indicate that most sample are actively engaged in social media platforms and participating in it. 90.48% percent of respondents use Instagram to shop. This high number of users that prefers Instagram over any other platforms let us wonder about the specifications Instagram have over any other platforms. First, Instagram allows business owners to post their products in fascinating way that is very eye catching to customers. Secondly, it allows customers to see the price of the products immediately, and to compare between a wide range of products. Thirds, it enables users to share the product with friends and colleagues for advice and recommendation very easily.

The study has shown that the most looked for trait in online shopping is creditability and trustworthiness. 120 – 47% respondents have agreed that they are more likely to get convinced to purchase a certain product if the application advertising and selling the product is trust worthy. 157 respondents have agreed that sometimes they prefer to shop online more than in store. Whereas 32 persons has rarely preferred to shop in store more than online shopping. On the other hand, 64 respondents have confirmed that they always prefer to shop online than in store shopping. The study has tested respondents' preference of spending their time on social media platforms. To see if they are active users or no. result was that a total of 93 respondents spend from 1 to 3 hours daily. Whereas 160 respondents spend from 3-4 hours and more on social media platforms on daily basis.

The study has shown that people's tendency to shop online has increased due to some factors available in online shopping experience, such as It is easy, convenient and save time and effort, it has more offers, it provides variety of products, it is not hard to examine the quality of products bought online, it provides more details about products, Online shopping is a safe platform to shop from, Online shopping provides the feelings of a real shopping experience

The study confirmed that the tested sample have a high level of trust in online shopping from social media platforms and are well literate about its advantages. Moreover, they are active users that uses social media platforms for about 3-4 hours a day, and are active on more than 4 platforms. Finally, social media influencers have a huge role in influencing the shopping decision of youth, as Majority of respondents agreed that social media influencers are very important factor in letting them to know about the latest trends in social media market.

8. Conclusion

Understanding the digital and social media usage in purchase decision will continue to be a key issue for marketers and communication study field. Specially with the expanding number of stores transferring into virtual stores. The things which indicates that social media market is not going to decline, though the disappointing experiences some customer had, the social media market is still the favorite way of shopping for most people which was proven in study thesis and in previous studies reviewed in literature. Additionally, it is believed that more studies will examine the influence social media has on other fields as well and only on shopping behaviors, especially as social media has become one of the most important things in our daily lives. This study has confidently concluded that Emirates youth are well literate about online shopping specifications and have high tendency toward online shopping. Unsurprisingly, the phenomenon discussed in this study is expected to stay in our society as long as people are welcoming new technologies and creations of social media.

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