

The influence of social media on contemporary consumer behavior: Part II, Research Methodology

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Abstract

The significance of social media in today's world cannot be understated. It has significantly altered how we connect, communicate, and obtain information. Regardless of distance, online communication has made it simpler for people to stay in touch with friends and family. Today's society is heavily reliant on social media, with billions of users regularly using sites like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Customers are once again in the forefront in the business world thanks to the widespread usage of social media, which also provides marketers with a brand-new set of tools for connecting with customers and inventively integrating them into businesses. In essence, marketers need to be aware of the impact social media has had on customers' buying behavior. Understanding how social media affects consumer behavior can offer useful insights on consumer tastes, inclinations, and decision-making processes, which can guide marketing initiatives and promote company expansion. Businesses can more effectively communicate with customers, better focus their marketing campaigns, and keep on top of consumer trends by researching the effects of social media. Additionally, companies that comprehend how social media affects consumer behavior are at a competitive edge over rivals. Overall, social media has both positive and negative consequences on society, but it has unquestionably altered how we connect and communicate with one another, and it is sure to continue to develop and have potentially interesting implications on our daily lives. Recognizing that consumer behavior is a fairly comprehensive and broad topic, it would be difficult to gather, examine, and draw all relevant data and findings into single research; consequently, the research has concentrated on how decisions are made as it applies to social media marketing. The study's goal is to identify the causes, timing, and ways in which social media's influence on consumer decision-making. Additionally, possibly with this specific perspective, the research can help identify the chances and problems businesses are confronting with this impact on customers' decision-making in order to capture and embrace the opportunities in the new marketing era. Our study used two research questions within this context: 1. How do consumers receive, interpret, and choose the information before making a decision? 2. How social media today affects on consumer behavior? This paper is divided into four chapters, as follows. Part I contains Introduction and Chapter II, the relevant literature review with regard to the consumer decision making process, social media, social media and consumer behavior, and figures about social media. Part II presents the research methodology (qualitative research; research variables connected to the discussion topics). Part III contains research findings and discussion, and Part IV presents the research conclusions.

Keywords: Social media; Consumer behavior; New marketing era

JEL Classification: D10; D80; L81; L82; M31

Chapter III: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study's main objective is to ascertain whether social media influences consumers' purchasing decisions in any way. With the help of this study, businesses and consumers will be better able to comprehend the extent to which social media influences consumer choice. The theoretical framework serves as the basis for this study and is used as secondary data.

Primary source of data aims to fulfill the research objectives and provide evidence to support secondary data. The primary information used in this research was gathered through qualitative research by interviewing 20 respondents via an interview guide, answering ten open-ended questions. Open-ended questions enable the researcher gather insightful qualitative data and information for more in-depth analysis.

3.1 Qualitative research

Qualitative research is a type of research that explores and provides deeper insights into real-world problems (Moser A, Korstjens 2017). The qualitative method aids in the generation of hypotheses as well as the further investigation and understanding of quantitative data, as opposed to gathering numerical data points or intervening or introducing treatments as in quantitative research. In qualitative research, participants' experiences, viewpoints, and actions are gathered. Instead of addressing how many or how much, it addresses how's and why's.

One of the strengths of qualitative research is its ability to explain processes and patterns of human behavior that can be difficult to quantify (Foley G., Timonen V.). While it can be challenging to correctly quantify phenomena like sensations, attitudes, and actions, a qualitative method allows participants to describe how, why, or what they were feeling, thinking, and experiencing at a specific time or during an event of interest.

There is no doubt that qualitative data can be quantified, but at its core, qualitative data seeks themes and patterns that can be challenging to quantify. The sample size is adequate for qualitative research (Agaman, A.K., & Wutich, A. 2017), in qualitative research, sample sizes are typically smaller compared to quantitative studies. The focus is on obtaining in-depth, rich insights rather than achieving statistical representativeness. The appropriate sample size will vary depending on the objectives, questions being investigated, method of inquiry, data saturation, and desired level of analysis.

Although there is no predetermined formula for determining an appropriate sample dimension in qualitative study design, the seminal study by Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) shows that 16 or fewer interviews were sufficient to uncover common themes from locations with reasonably homogeneous populations, though, their research shows that in order to obtain data saturation for meta themes that span all sites, greater sample sizes — between 20 and 40 interviews — were required. However, the suitability of the sample size ultimately depends on the specific research context and objectives. Researchers should prioritize the depth and richness of data rather than focusing solely on the sample size.

3.2 Research variables connected to the discussion topics

An interview guide was used to collect data in the format of a google form. The table (see table 1) provides a conceptual and operational definition of the research variables. The collected data were analyzed by using content analysis. For operational purposes, Microsoft Excel spreadsheet program was used.

Variable	Conceptual Definition	Operational Definition
Social media usage	The extent and manner in which individuals engage with social media platforms.	Frequency of social media platform usage, types of activities performed (e.g., posting, commenting, sharing), time spent on social media.
Consumer behavior	The actions, attitudes, and decision-making processes of consumers influenced by social media.	Purchasing behavior, brand preferences, product research and information-seeking behavior on social media.
Psychological effects	The emotional, cognitive, and behavioral impacts of social media on consumers.	Emotional responses (e.g., joy, frustration), cognitive effects (e.g., perception of self, body image), behavioral changes (e.g., online shopping habits).
Influence of peers	The impact of social connections and peer interactions on consumer behavior.	Influence of friends, family, or online communities on purchase decisions, product recommendations, and brand perceptions.
Brand-consumer engagement	The interaction and relationship between consumers and brands on social media.	Participation in brand campaigns, communication with brand representatives, brand loyalty and advocacy on social media.

Table 1. Variables

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