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### EXAMINING SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE IN THE CONTEXT OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

UDC / UDK: 659.113.25:004.738.5

JEL classification / JEL klasifikacija: D12, L86, M31, M37

Preliminary communication / Prethodno priopćenje

Received / Primljeno: April 20, 2019 / 20. travnja 2019.

Accepted for publishing / Prihvaćeno za tisak: December 4, 2019 / 4. prosinca 2019.

#### *Abstract*

*In recent years, social media have become an important part of a consumer's life in terms of easier access to information. As opposed to that, for the companies social media represent a new challenge and an opportunity to achieve their strategic goals such as creating a positive image, enhanced brand awareness and to make quality interactions with their actual or potential consumers. The aim of this paper is to determine the behavioural patterns of social media users, especially in the decision making process when purchasing. In order to achieve the aim of this study, factor analysis and analysis of variance were used. The research sample consisted of 504 social media users. The findings reveal that there are significant differences between the extracted factors and the use of social media when purchasing. Findings also suggest that respondents tend to purchase via social media but they are insecure in providing the review and comments for the purchase made.*

**Keywords:** *social media, purchase behaviour, perceived risk, satisfaction, attitude*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Social media have become important channels for consumers in order to exchange information and have better communication. The presence of millions of users on social media opens a new communication channel for interacting with their previous or potential consumers. In this way, social media change traditional marketing communication and create a two-way communication system which

made it easier for consumers to connect, create, produce, and share media content (Daugherty & Hoffman, 2014).

Sake and Brake (2009, p. 6) define social media as "activities, practices, and behaviours, among communities of people who gather online to share information, knowledge, and opinions using conversational media". There are various definitions of social media. All the definitions are similar because they describe social media as media for the exchange of information, attitudes, opinions, and influence on buying decisions.

Social media, such as Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn, have been defined as a group of Internet-based applications that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). One of the main benefits of using social media is the interactions among the users (Rauniar, Rawski, Yang, & Johnson, 2014), especially when they exchange information or their experience about past purchases.

Today, social media allow consumers to share information, opinion or purchase experience about the brand products and services and they will trust more often information that has been published by previous consumers on social media. Many users who often leave various posts or comments on social media will be more inclined to share valuable shopping information with others users (Bai, Yao & Dou, 2015).

The impact of social media activities and interaction on the user's purchase behaviour has been poorly analyzed. Therefore, user's activities and posted reviews and comments for specific products, such as Facebook fan pages, can be a valuable source to gain a better understanding of the purchase decision-making processes in social media.

The aim of this paper is to determine the effects of a user's activities toward purchase behaviour in a social media environment. The purpose of this study is to investigate how user's activities can influence their purchase usage and attitude in buying decision process. Also, the purpose of this study is to examine social media user feelings while posting the review or comments in a social media environment.

This paper is structured as follows: In section 2, the literature of user's behaviour in social media is briefly reviewed. The methods applied in the study and sample characteristics are presented in section 3 and research findings are presented in section 4. Section 5 presents concluding comments, contribution, limitations and recommendations for future research.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The usage of social media increases interactions and conversations among their users and simplifies spreading information especially regarding

experience about previous purchases. Hence, to achieve successful online purchases, the potential consumers usually use social media for communication about brand characteristics or to search for reviews and comments from previous consumers (Haslehurst, Randall, Weber & Sullivan, 2016). Chung and Muk (2017) emphasized that many online users visit a social media site rather than the company's official site and that activity posted on that site could impact their purchase. In social media, interactivity is the main activity among users who intentionally post information about characteristics of brands and their products or services, unintentionally display their preferences or dissatisfaction about brand characteristics, interacting with brands through reviewing and commenting, or posting about their purchase experiences. These activities included content without any advertising purpose for social media users.

Zhu and Chen (2015) created a typology of social media and divided it into four types, profile-based and content-based depending on the nature of the connection and interaction. In profile-based social media, the information is related to the individual social media users while content-based social media focus on the contents, discussions, and comments on the posted content. On the other hand, there are customized and broadcast messages that differ by types of postings, customized type refers to post to a specific person or a small audience and the broadcast messages indicate for everyone. According to Muntinga, Moorman and Smit (2011), providing information in social media includes four sub-motivations: surveillance, knowledge, repurchase information, and inspiration. All these sub-motivations encourage users to be active on social media and the conversations in social media frequently refer to brands (Wolny & Mueller, 2013) that could have an impact on consumers purchase intentions (Wang, et.al 2012).

The positive or negative customer feedback plays an important and vital role in promoting companies and their products and services and in gaining the trust of the new consumers and it is called electronic Word-of-mouth (Munir Shafi, Khan & Ahmed, 2018). Liang and Turban, 2011 suggested that e-WOM have a key role in creating user's attitude and behaviour in a social media environment. Therefore, the effectiveness of e-WOM has a positive influence on purchasing decision (Boon-Long & Wongsurawat, 2015, Munir et.al., 2018, Florez 2018) and direct impact on users purchasing intentions (See-To & Ho, 2014; Mortazavi, Rahim Esfidani, & Shaemi Barzoki, 2014, Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017, Wang & Yu, 2017) in the context of social media.

Many social media users, before making any purchases, check other users reviews about purchase experience so as to have enough information for successful purchases. Many studies indicate that consumer activities could broadly classify as either contribution (posting) or consumption (lurking or observing) activities (Schlosser, 2005, Shao, 2009); which suggests that most users consume rather than contribute to social media (Jones, Ravid & Rafaeli, 2004). On the other hand, according to Chu and Kim (2011), e-WOM on social media is used from three perspectives: opinion seeking, opinion giving, and

opinion passing. The users with a high level of opinion seeking behavior tend to search for information and advice from previous consumers when making a purchase decision. Social media users with a high level of opinion-giving behaviour, also called opinion leaders, have a significant influence on purchase attitudes and behaviors of other users in social media. The main objective of e-WOM includes passing or forwarding information about the characteristics of a brand of social media users that are related to the opinion-passing behaviour. Therefore, e-WOM could have a crucial role in the user's purchase behaviour and could be an important factor in decision-making processes especially in a social media environment (Prasad, Gupta & Totala, 2017).

Credibility includes the integrity and ability of the platform in providing the expected outcomes, which increases intentions to buy on the platform (Kaiser & Müller Seitz, 2008). Credibility in social media allows users, before making any purchase, to find trustworthy reviews or comments about the desired product from users who have bought it. The final purchase decision of these users is based on user-generated product reviews especially when educated and well-informed users recommend the specific products (Büttner & Goritz, 2008, Erkan & Evans, 2018). Kim and Park (2013) indicated that users who trust social media sites are more likely to provide positive reviews or comments and make a purchase on these platforms. Posted reviews or comments help users overcome uncertainty and risk in online purchase, especially in a social media. Therefore, when a user is satisfied with the purchase they will have a positive attitude and provide a positive review in social media environment (Kim, 2012, Wang & Yu, 2017). On the other hand, Park and Lee (2009) stated that negative comments could have a stronger impact on consumer purchase behaviour than positive

It is important to emphasize the consumer's engagement on social media in the context of providing reviews and comments about past purchases (Leong, Jaafar & Ainin 2018). Sharing positive information or negative experiences about a past purchase, social media users can provide valuable information that could help other users in their future purchase decision-making process (Chu & Kim, 2011, Hajli, Sims, Zadeh & Richard, 2017). This indicates that social media allowed users to get more trustworthiness information for secure and satisfied purchase decision and consequently be an essential part of creating the content and brand image for companies.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DATA ANALYSIS**

In this paper, based on an online survey the author tries to analyze the activities of social media users that are related to their behaviour used in the context of the purchasing decision making. The data were collated with the online survey questionnaire in two weeks' period in June 2018. The sample of research was convenient and included 504 social media users i.e. Facebook users. Facebook users can provide a good foundation for marketers' activities in order to target social media users effectively. The online survey questionnaire consisted of

two sections. The first section of the questionnaire related to the demographic profile of respondents such as gender, age, education and monthly income of users. Also, this section included questions of what is the most frequently used social media and the usage frequency of social media. The second section included statements that determine purchase behavior via social media. Author used current internet marketing literature and developed modified measurement scale for the research purpose. The statements of the measurement scale were associated with the activities of users in a social media environment. This part of a questionnaire included variables created in relation to the users purchase behavior and attitudes in a social media environment. All variables were carried out by a five-point Likert-scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Items were based on previous literature and modified for this study. The basic demographic factors of respondents included their gender, age, education level, and monthly income level.

Among the sample of 504 social media users, most of the respondents were female (66,9%), 34,7% were between 26 to 35 years. With regard to education, most of the respondents (77,2%) have finished secondary school and only 9,1% had a college degree. Regarding personal monthly income, 31,9% of incomes were between 2000 and 3999 HRK, followed by those with the income between 4000 to 5999 HRK (23,4%), while 21,6% of respondents stated that they were unemployed or students. Most of the respondents (84,9%) used Facebook as the main social network and 44,4% used it every day. In order to achieve the purpose of this study, the SPSS 20.0 statistics package programs were used.

#### 4. RESEARCH RESULTS

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) on the measurement scale was conducted to test for convergent factor validity of the measurement scale used for this research. The Cronbach's was applied to test the reliability of the measurement scale. Table 1 shows the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the measurement scale of social media user's activities.

Table 1

Reliability of the measurement scale of social media user's activities

Number of variables	Cronbach's Alpha
12	,920

Source: *Research findings (N=504)*

The result shows a high value of the Cronbach's alpha coefficient (0.924) indicating high reliability of measurement scale. In order to validate the measurement scale of research, the Bartlett test of sphericity and Kaiser-Meyer-

Olkin (KMO) test were used. The results for the statistical tests KMO and Bartlett test of sphericity are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test and Bartlett's test of sphericity the measurement scale

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test		,871
Bartlett's test of sphericity $\chi^2$	Hi-square	4106,28
Degree of freedom df		66
Significance		,000

Source: *Research findings (N=504)*

The value of the KMO is 0.871, and Bartlett test of sphericity has shown as statistically significant ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ) indicating that factor analysis is suitable for performing. To further explore the grouped variable in the measurement scale, the discriminant validity of the measurement scale was assessed by principal component factor analysis with Varimax rotation.

Table 3

Total variance explained for the measurement scale of social media user's activities

Items	Initial eigenvalues			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	Variance %	Cumulative %	Total	Variance %	Cumulative %
1	6,39	53,28	53,28	6,39	53,28	53,28
2	1,25	10,45	63,74	1,25	10,46	63,74

Extraction Method: *Method Principal Component Analysis*

Source: *Research findings (N=504)*

Based on the results, two factors explain 63.74% of the total variance i.e. two factors have eigenvalues above 1. Factor 1 is explained 53.28% of the total variance, while 10.46% is explained by Factor 2. The factor loadings for all items were greater than 0.60 which indicate good convergent and discriminant validity of measurement scale. To name these factors that consist of grouped variables, it can be concluded that Factor 1 includes user's activities related to the trustworthiness of the reviews and comments and it is named the credibility factor, whilst Factor 2 was including statements related to user's activities in creating custom-made interactions and is named the personalization factor. The

factor analysis has reached its purpose and the interpretation of factors is satisfactory.

Followed by results of CFA analysis, analysis of variance (ANOVA) was examined to determine the significant differences between extracted factors and variables related to users purchase behaviour in a social media environment. Table 4 shows the analysis of variance between factors of credibility and personalization and social media purchase usage.

Table 4

Analysis of variance between credibility and personalization factors and social media purchase usage

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Credibility	37,215	4	9,304	9,967	,000
Personalization	84,356	4	21,089	25,137	,000

Source: *Research findings (N=504)*

From Table 4 it is evident that there are significant differences between the factor of credibility and social media purchase usage ( $p < 0.000$ ,  $F = 9,967$ ). According to the results, users who use social media mainly to explore review and comments of previous consumers will use social media for purchase. These users consider posting review and comment useful and trustworthy and therefore they will be more inclined to purchasing via social media. Furthermore, analysis shows that there is a significant relation between personalization factor and social media purchase usage ( $p < 0.000$ ,  $F = 25,137$ ). There are differences among users who are looking for individual approach and social media purchase usage. This explains that these users will be more inclined to buy in social media environment probably because they can achieve a stronger and unique relationship with the company and they can easily customize their requirements and desire in the process of making a purchase. The results of variance between credibility and personalization and the tendency toward purchasing via social media are provided in Table 5.

Table 5

Analysis of variance between credibility and personalization factors and the tendency toward purchasing via social media

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Credibility	79,184	4	19,796	23,308	,000
Personalization	98,243	4	24,561	30,280	,000

Source: *Research findings (N=504)*

As observed from Table 5, there are significant differences between the credibility and tendency toward purchasing via social media ( $p < 0.000$ ,  $F = 23,308$ ). The analysis revealed that users who use social networks for insight into reviews and comments of previous consumers, they do not perceive the differences between making a purchase within social networks or via the official website of a certain company. Possibly, they consider this purchase more meaningful and secure because it is based on the recommendations of previous consumers which are posted on social network sites. Further results in the table reveal significant differences between the personalization factor and tendency toward purchasing via social media ( $p < 0.000$ ,  $F = 30,280$ ). According to the results, it is evident that users who needed to enhance interactions via social media will be more inclined to make a purchase on social media instead via the official website of the same company. It is evident that these types of users in social media environment do not have a specific or main site for shopping, therefore they will purchase via social media regardless of the company's official website. The next table shows results of difference between variance analysis between credibility and personalization factor and unsecured in providing the comments and reviews.

Table 6

Analysis of variance between the factor of credibility and personalization factors and insecurity in providing the comments and reviews

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Credibility	25,800	4	6,450	6,745	,000
Personalization	81,905	4	20,476	24,265	,000

Source: *Research findings* ( $N = 504$ )

The results of Table 6 illustrated that significant differences are explained between extracted factors and consumer's feelings while writing reviews and comments on social networks. There is a significant difference between the factor of credibility and insecurity of the users in providing the comments and review ( $p < 0.000$ ,  $F = 6,745$ ), shown in table 6. Although, buying decision of these users are basically defined by the revised reviews of other users they will feel insecure when their experience with bought products needs to share with other users in a social media environment. Also, the results of the analysis reveal significant differences between the personalization factor and unsecured in providing comments and reviews ( $p < 0.000$ ,  $F = 24,265$ ). This significant relation suggested that consumers who have needs for the personal and individual approach of the company also feel insecure when the need to reveal their experience and knowledge via social media environment. The result obtained by analysis indicates that both types of users feel insecure when they need to provide their opinion via social media regardless of the fact that precisely these products assessments mostly modify their purchasing decision.



## 5. CONCLUSION

Today, social media interactions increasingly shape the new feature of marketing communication thus creating new challenges and opportunities for companies in developing their social media strategy. Also, marketing communication is motivated to capture the consumer's attention in order to influence their purchase intention and decision, especially in a social media environment. Social media provide better content, open communication with current and potential consumers. It is a place where the company gets quality information about their products or services, product definition, product development and where they can receive essential feedback, or any forms of consumer's service and support in order to gain competitive advantages.

The factor analysis suggested two factors, credibility and personalization factor. Credibility factor consists of the user's activities related to the mainly overviews the review and comments in order to make the right purchase decision. The other type of consumers pursues on personal and customized interactivity that would improve their relationship with the company in order to gain personal satisfaction and thus the pleasure of buying via social media. Using the analysis of variance, the results suggested that respondents who use social media to access reviews or looking for personal and custom relation with brand/companies use social networks as an additional sales channel.

Furthermore, the results indicate that social media as a sales channel is recommended and that it does not differ from the purchase that could be made through the company's official website. Hence, results are indicating the social media users are neutral where they do the shopping or through social networks or official web sites of companies. That shows that social networks can be an effective sales channel i.e. a place where companies will be able to create a positive image and achieve significant sales results. However, these consumers feel insecure when they expose their experience and judgment about the products bought via social media. This is probably associated with fear of disapproval from other users and the possibility of elimination from the brand community which they are part of or want to belong to soon. The result obtained by analysis indicates that both types of users have a positive attitude towards purchasing via social media but when they need to contribute with their opinion via social media about a bought product they feel insecure or exposed, regardless of the fact that precisely these products assessments mostly modify their purchasing decision.

When integrated through a social media platform, companies should influence the existing consumers to place a review or comments on their products and also to enhance their interactivity with them in order to gain their loyalty. Also, it would be necessary for companies to create some specific activities especially in the context of interactivity in order to gain their trust to give their positive experience and information about their products.

This paper evaluates and explains the usage of social media purchase behaviour in the process of purchasing decision, especially while using Facebook. The results of this research can provide validated information for managers and companies to understand the consumer purchase tendency in the context of social media. Therefore, opening official social media pages can help companies to improve engagement with their consumers through social media interactivity. The effective use of these activities is especially advantageous for smaller to medium-sized companies, which oftentimes lack the resources that are necessary for employing traditional forms of business. This research provides a guideline for companies who want to engage with their existing and potential consumers who are active and make purchasing in a social media environment.

The present study has a number of limitations that provide opportunities for future research. For future research it would be necessary to collect different type of sample in order to obtain more consistent data and have a better general overview of the findings. Also, there were only a limited number of variables included in the research questionnaire. Further contribution for future research could be viewed in expanding this research with additional variables in order to achieve a comprehensive insight of user's activities in a social media environment. The recommendation for future research would also be in expanding this research with new factors that could significantly underline specific forms of users purchase behaviour in the context of social media.

The research contributes to the existing literature by providing new insights into the user's activities and their specific purchase in a social media environment. The findings of this study will provide valuable guidance for the marketers and companies to create an effective social media strategy in order to achieve a positive image and respectable additional sales results.

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**ISPITIVANJE UPORABE DRUŠTVENIH MEDIJA U  
KONTEKSTU PONAŠANJA KUPACA*****Sažetak***

*U posljednjih nekoliko godina društveni mediji postali su važan dio života potrošača u kontekstu jednostavnijeg pristupa informacijama. Nasuprot tome, za poduzeća društveni mediji predstavljaju izazov u vidu ostvarivanja vlastitih strateških ciljeva, kao što je izgradnja pozitivnog imidža, podizanje svijesti o marki proizvoda te postizanje kvalitetnije interakcije s postojećim ili potencijalnim potrošačima. Cilj ovoga rada je odrediti obrasce ponašanja korisnika društvenih medija, posebice u procesu donošenja kupovnih odluka. U radu su korištene faktorska analiza i analiza varijance. Empirijsko istraživanje provedeno je na uzorku od 504 korisnika društvenih medija. Rezultati istraživanja pokazali su da postoje značajne razlike između izdvojenih faktora i korištenja društvenih medija u svrhu kupovine. Jednako tako, ispitanici su skloni kupnji putem društvenih medija, ali su nesigurni u pružanju recenzija i komentara za izvršenu kupnju.*

***Ključne riječi:*** društveni mediji, ponašanje kupaca, percipirani rizik, zadovoljstvo, stav.

***JEL klasifikacija:*** D12, L86, M31, M37.