

# The influence of using social media on preference for a particular product: a case study of smartphone

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## Keywords

Social media, Smartphone, Consumer Behaviour, Evaluation

## Abstract

*Social media is becoming an important means of daily communication for people in general and for customers in particular. There is a lack of studies that have examined, in any depth, how users of social media interact with others' content (e.g. feedback and comments), and how that affects their preference for a particular product. Thus, this paper will study customers' online engagement with a product during evaluating a product to prefer it and dislike it. The study was organised around one social engagement: users' comments/feedback about products. The study investigates how the use of social media might influence customers engagement with a particular product. A survey was conducted to investigate the prevalence of this new engagement among Saudis who are already involved with social media and have active social media accounts. The survey was conducted with 264 Saudi participants from 27 cities in Saudi Arabia. The sample consists of 132 males and 132 females. Most of the participants were highly educated: 43.6% held a bachelor's degree and were aged between 25 to 30 and 19 to 24 years old. The majority were from three cities: Riyadh, Jeddah and Mecca. In general, the findings demonstrate that evaluating the quality of a product highly depends on how others evaluate it. When customers engage with feedback and exchange information regarding a particular product on social media, it greatly facilitates their preference. Finally, smart phones (e.g. i-Phone), were the most bought products by Saudi customers as a result of evaluating items through social media.*

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## 1. Introduction

Being social is a desire of human nature. Recently, the growth of internet technologies and online activities has eliminated the barrier to being social. It is easy for everyone to have an online page, to blog, comment, tweet and review, as all he/she needs is internet access. This development of online communication resulted in a new platform of communication, which is known as social media, where users post comments, blogs, create their own videos, photos and post them on different social accounts (Pan and Crotts, 2012). Social media defined by Saffo and Brake (2009) as "activities, practices and behaviours among communities of people who gather online to share information, knowledge, and opinions using conversational media". This study is applied to Smartphone industry. The following sections provide a brief review of the Smartphone market as whole, and Apple, Inc. as the innovator of the Smartphone industry (iPhone).

### 1.2. Social Media on Mobile Applications

The quality of the recent mobile applications allows consumers to be in touch with other users, to expand their views and attitudes conveniently (Myers and Fellow, 2014). This is one of the main dimensions of social media, which makes it different from previous public Computer Mediate Communications (CMC) (Ellison et al., 2007). CMC means "any communication that occurs through the use of two or more electronic devices" (McQuail, 2005). This technological development laid the foundation for transferring social media from desktop PCs and Laptops to mobile devices. Thus, users would not wait until finishing work to return home to watch new videos posted on YouTube, as they can conveniently watch them on their own phones (Kapla and Haenlein, 2011).

As social media sites have become mobile applications, it is argued that, while the evaluation of social media facilitates the in-depth following of friends across the world, it can encourage a society where there is no communication with the next-door neighbours (Kapla and Haenlein, 2011). That is an unquestionable proof that mobile social media will be the 'locomotive', which develops the worldwide community.

### 1.3. The Smartphone industry

Currently, the worldwide Smartphone market is witnessing an unexpected expansion, with consignments increasing by 40% in 2013 to be over the \$1 billion threshold and worth \$266 billion. Moreover,

Smartphone consignments are estimated to reach 1.89 billion units by 2018 (CCS Insight Report, 2014). Smartphone consignments have been overtaking normal cell-phones in the earliest quarter of 2013. In addition, it is estimated that more than 722.5 million Smartphones were dispatched globally in 2012 (Myers and Fellow, 2014). Recently, 90% of the Smartphone market is dominated by the ten leading companies, with a major growth in revenues for Apple. In 2012, Apple took roughly 70% of Smartphone revenues, whereas Samsung took only 25% (Myers and Fellow, 2014). In addition, Apple and Google are considered as the leading companies that control the Smartphone market, taking 92% of the profit share for themselves (Fadaei, 2013). Therefore, it is concluded that the massive success of iPhones and other Smartphone proves the power of customers' demands for smart devices. Even if there is an issue within the industry, customers will continue purchasing Smartphones.

#### **1. 4. Apple's Background**

Apple, Inc. is an American company, founded in April 1976. Apple was founded by three people: Steve Jobs who is talented in conceptualising products, Steve Wozniak is expert in technology and was providing Jobs with technical support and co-founder Ronald Wayne, is electronics industry worker, was providing administrative supervision for the new enterprise (Fadaei, 2013). The company's head office is located in Cupertino, California (Aguilar, 2014). In 2015, Apple has 463 stores crossing 18 different nations (Aguilar, 2014). Apple invents and produces computers, hardware, software and electronic products (Dougherty, 2010). Currently, Apple maintains the lead in the electronic industry with their exceptional and award winning products and services. It is also qualified with leading the digital revolution by "their iPod transportable music, videos players, and iTunes online media store, creating the first sustainable music-downloading and business model" (Huang, 2010). In addition, Apple entered the mobile phone manufacturing industry with an overall different business strategy, recognised as 'value innovation' with the iPhone. According to Fadaei (2013), Apple launched its 'revolutionary' product, the iPhone. The iPhone combines three concepts popular with customers: a mobile phone, a widescreen iPod and an internet communication device. The iPhone displayed an entirely new user interface based on a large multi-touch display and pioneering software, which users can control with just their fingers.

#### **1.5. Why Saudi Arabia?**

Saudi consumers are the motivation of this research. The following sections justify why Saudi Arabia was chosen as a case study for this research.

##### **1.5.1. Attendance on social media**

According to the BBC News (2015), Saudi Arabia presents highest percentage of YouTube viewers/users and Twitter users the world. Additionally, it demonstrates 10% of all Facebook users and over 40% of all active Twitter users in Arab countries. Amongst the Twitter users are ministers, religious leaders and member of the Saudi royal family (BBC News, 2015). Saudis spend most of their time on social media and use Twitter more frequently than any Arab countries. Moreover, the Saudi population is ranked first amongst Arab nations for YouTube viewing (The Middle East, 2013).

##### **1.5.2. The Usage of Smartphone**

The demand for smartphones has been increasing rapidly in Saudi Arabia, rising from 17.0% in 2010 to 25.0% in 2011 and 72% in 2014 (Al-Jazera Capital, 2015). As identified by Radcliffe (2013), Saudis have two or more "active phones/live SIM cards". A survey conducted in 2011, by the Arab Advisors Group showed that 55% of Saudis own a Smartphone. 40% of Saudis had iPhones and 38% of them had a Blackberry. In 2013, a survey conducted by Axiom Telecom and YouGov showed that the iPhone (36%) was the most preferred Smartphone brand by Saudis, followed by 25% for Galaxy (TekCarta, 2013). Saudi Arabia has a substantial increase in the rate of Smartphone ownership, which contributes to the rapid popularity of social media (BBC News, 2015).

##### **1.5.3. Aim and Objective**

The aim of this paper is to investigate to what extent the use of social media influences customers' preference during the evaluation of a particular product. The objectives of this research are measured as follows: (1) To investigate to what extent social media change the way consumers evaluate the products. (2) To investigate to what extent the use of social media influences customers' preference for a particular product (e.g. Smartphone) during the evaluation stage.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Social Influences and Social Network Theory

Social influence is defined by Kate et al (2010), as "the perceived external pressure that individuals feel in the process of being informed about an innovation and decide to use it, and the degree in which an individual perceives that important others believe he or she should use the new system".

People are likely to change their beliefs to be consistent with the group of friends/colleagues they are in. For example, when the majority of the group's members hold a particular attitude, an individual tends to perform as them (Kate et al, 2010). Thus, to make a decision an individual is affected by their colleagues' opinions. An earlier research defined social influence as "the perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform the action" (Ajzen, 1991). It means the familiar attitudes of others, who are close or important to an individual and who sustain an effect over decision-making that affects someone's behaviour to adopt an action or not (Pelling, 2009). According to the theory of planned behaviour social influence relies on collective culture (Kate et al., 2010). Despite these studies, there is limited research on social influence in the context of social media. Moreover, social influence could be an effective aspect to justify consumers' attitudes and behaviour on social media, particularly consumers who are from a high context culture, such as Saudi consumers.

### 2.3. Evaluation

According to Browne (2012), evaluation on social media means: "when consumers weigh up whether the product meets their needs, after reading comments, reviews and watching videos posted by users on social media sites in relation to the product and its alternatives".

### 2.4. Social influence during the evaluation intention

A recent study by Chu and Kim (2011), shows that the power of influencing opinion guides behaviour. This means that the closer a person perceives himself/herself to be involved with others on social media sites, the more willing to search for their advice on items/services, and their advice influences him/her as a customer. The convenience of sharing information has been increasing considerably, particularly by the use of social media. Thus, individual advice could have a greater influence than any agency-based advertising (Thackeray et al., 2008). Therefore, negative/positive comments about a particular brand/product are posted either with or without the company's authorisation (Murchu, 2004). Stephen and Lehman (2009) emphasise that consumers are selective receivers of feedback in both real and online life (e.g. social media sites) such as Twitter and Facebook. When a consumer joins a community, the information about his or her membership is generally spread to all members' personal networks. Thus, consumers tend to socially exchange information, seek advice and follow recommendations (Darden and Reynolds, 1971; Shim et al., 2001). As they prefer a particular item when lots of users on social media post positive comments, videos, photos about it. On the other hand, customers do not prefer any item that many users on social media evaluate negatively. Hence, it is concluded that accessing comments and feedback about product on social media strongly influences customers' intention to evaluate the product, and strongly influences customers' preferences for a particulate product. The concept of the research and its framework is described in figure 1 below.



Figure1: Research framework, Designed by the Researcher

## 3. Methodology

A quantitative approach was chosen. Online-survey(264 self-completion questionnaires contains open-end questions) was designed by using Qualtrics software and conducted by Qualtrics's team online, among 264 Saudis equal number of both gender (132 males and 132 females). The collected data from 2 statements (containing 5 points scales ranging from from 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree as a selection of answers) will be analyzed by using the cross-tabulation statistical technique (using SPSS software) in order to meet the research's aim and objectives.

#### 4. Finding

##### 4.1. Gender and frequency of use of social media

As shown in the cross-tabulation table 1 below, 50% of the respondents were female (n=132) and 50% were male (n=132), with 264 respondents. The participation of both genders in this study is essential to examine their behaviour and attitudes while using social media. This helps to observe any differences in attitude or behaviour between males and females during their activities on social media. As shown in the below table, when participants were asked 'How often do you use social media sites?', 18.9% of males and 15.9% of females picked '10 hours and more'. Overall, the percentages are similar, which concludes that both Saudi males and females use social media frequently, more than 1 hour a week.

		Time spent on using social media sites					Total	
		Not more than 1 hour a week	More than 1 hour	1 hour up to 5 hours	More than 5 hours	10 hours and more		
Gender	Male	Count	9	33	40	25	25	132
		% within Gender	6.8%	25.0%	30.3%	18.9%	18.9%	100.0%
	Female	Count	11	39	31	30	21	132
		% within Gender	8.3%	29.5%	23.5%	22.7%	15.9%	100.0%
Total		Count	20	72	71	55	46	264
		% within Gender	7.6%	27.3%	26.9%	20.8%	17.4%	100.0%

Table 1 : Gender and Frequency use of social media Cross-tabulation

##### 4.2. Age and frequency of use of social media

For the research purpose, young populations were targeted, with the expectation of their experiences on social media sites, as they seem to be more active compared with older populations, who are not engaged in the world of social media or not interested in using them. As shown in table 2 below, the first age group (19-24) presents 67 respondents, where 35.8% use social media 'more than 10 hours per week'. This is followed by the second age group (25-30), which presents the highest number (92) of the participants, where 29.3% of them use social media up to five hours a week, and only 20.7% of them use social media more than 5 hours a week. The third age group (31-37), which is 72 respondents, shows similar percentages of frequency use of social media, while the last age group (45-50) shows the fewest number of 11 respondents who present a lesser use of social media. This is not a surprising result, as people in this age usually have more responsibilities and obligations than young people (e.g. social events, house, children, hard job, or do not have basic knowledge in using the internet or social media sites).

		Time spent on using social media sites					Total	
		Not more than 1 hour a week	More than 1 hour	1 hour up to 5 hours	More than 5 hours	10 hours and more		
Age	19 - 24	Count	5	14	14	10	24	67
		% within Age	7.5%	20.9%	20.9%	14.9%	35.8%	100.0%
	25 - 30	Count	10	27	27	19	9	92
		% within Age	10.9%	29.3%	29.3%	20.7%	9.8%	100.0%
	31 - 37	Count	3	20	20	20	9	72
		% within Age	4.2%	27.8%	27.8%	27.8%	12.5%	100.0%
	38 - 44	Count	0	8	6	5	3	22
		% within Age	0.0%	36.4%	27.3%	22.7%	13.6%	100.0%
	45 - 50	Count	2	3	4	1	1	11
		% within Age	18.2%	27.3%	36.4%	9.1%	9.1%	100.0%
Total		Count	20	72	71	55	46	264
		% within Age	7.6%	27.3%	26.9%	20.8%	17.4%	100.0%

Table 2: Age and Frequency of use of social media Cross-tabulation

##### 4.3. Occupation and frequency use of social media

The intention was to investigate participants with various occupations, which could help in collecting data from different environments. As shown in table 3, the sample includes seven categories of occupation. 125 respondents were employees with different careers. Thus, the majority of respondents (47%) are employees. This is followed by 18.2% of students, which is slightly similar to the percentage of 18.9% of respondents, who

have no job. This is an unexpected result; it reflects a real picture of the Saudi population. This might be because Saudi culture is high context (collectivism), fathers provide money for their sons, even if they are over 25, or until they get a job. A further fact is that 6 years ago the Saudi government adopted a program called ‘Hafez’, for people who have no job. They can apply for it online by uploading their qualifications and Saudi ID. Then they get allowance every month. The aim of this programme is to help unemployed Saudis until they get a job or the government find a job for them. The numbers of jobless are increasing. As appears in tables 3 below, social media is used frequently (10 hours and more) by employees and the jobless. This result could predict that employed respondents may use social media for business purposes (especially respondents, who are in the sales and management field), otherwise, this result concludes that social media is used frequently by Saudis from different environments.

		Time spent on using social media sites					Total	
		Not more than 1 hour a week	More than 1 hour	1 hour up to 5 hours	More than 5 hours	10 hours and more		
Occupation	Retired	Count	0	0	4	0	2	6
		% within Occupation	0.0%	0.0%	66.7%	0.0%	33.3%	100.0%
	Student	Count	2	17	15	10	7	51
		% within Occupation	3.9%	33.3%	29.4%	19.6%	13.7%	100.0%
	Employee	Count	4	18	25	14	13	74
		% within Occupation	5.4%	24.3%	33.8%	18.9%	17.6%	100.0%
	No job	Count	7	8	12	11	10	48
		% within Occupation	14.6%	16.7%	25.0%	22.9%	20.8%	100.0%
	Housewife	Count	5	10	8	8	3	34
		% within Occupation	14.7%	29.4%	23.5%	23.5%	8.8%	100.0%
	Professional job	Count	1	15	4	7	5	32
		% within Occupation	3.1%	46.9%	12.5%	21.9%	15.6%	100.0%
	Sales and management	Count	1	4	3	5	6	19
		% within Occupation	5.3%	21.1%	15.8%	26.3%	31.6%	100.0%
Total	Count	20	72	71	55	46	264	
	% within Occupation	7.6%	27.3%	26.9%	20.8%	17.4%	100.0%	

Table 3: Occupation and frequency of use of social media cross-tabulation

4.4. Access comments and feedback from other people:

Table 4 and 5 demonstrate that a considerable percentage (52.3%) of males, (47.0%) of females, (54.3%) of age group (25-30), followed by age group (31-37), which presents similar percentage (47.2%), and (52.2%) of age group (19-24), scored ‘Access comments and feedback from other people’, with 4. Thus, it could be predicted that Saudi respondents tend to access social media directly when they look for particular information to help them in making their decision, such as to purchase a particular item.

		Access comments and feedback from other people.					Total	
		Not at all	1	2	3	Very much		
Gender	Male	Count	12	7	20	24	69	132
		% within Gender	9.1%	5.3%	15.2%	18.2%	52.3%	100.0%
	Female	Count	16	11	17	26	62	132
		% within Gender	12.1%	8.3%	12.9%	19.7%	47.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	28	18	37	50	131	264	
	% within Gender	10.6%	6.8%	14.0%	18.9%	49.6%	100.0%	

Table 4: Gender and to Access comments and feedback from other people. Cross-tabulation

		Access comments and feedback from other people.					Total	
		Not at all	1	2	3	Very much		
Age	19 - 24	Count	11	4	7	10	35	67
		% within Age	16.4%	6.0%	10.4%	14.9%	52.2%	100.0%
	25 - 30	Count	7	1	13	21	50	92
		% within Age	7.6%	1.1%	14.1%	22.8%	54.3%	100.0%
	31 - 37	Count	6	10	10	12	34	72
		% within Age	8.3%	13.9%	13.9%	16.7%	47.2%	100.0%
	38 - 44	Count	1	2	4	5	10	22
		% within Age	4.5%	9.1%	18.2%	22.7%	45.5%	100.0%
	45 - 50	Count	3	1	3	2	2	11
		% within Age	27.3%	9.1%	27.3%	18.2%	18.2%	100.0%
Total	Count	28	18	37	50	131	264	
	% within Age	10.6%	6.8%	14.0%	18.9%	49.6%	100.0%	

Table 5: Age and to Access comments and feedback from other people. Cross-tabulation

**4.5. Evaluation of products:**

The participants were asked whether they agree with the following two statements:

‘When people I respect say a Smartphone is good or bad on social media I take a lot of notice of their opinion.

‘The more people on social media generally think a particular Smartphone is good or bad the more it influences my thinking’.

As is made clear in Table 6 (below), large percentages of both male (62.9%) and female (59.8%) participants agreed that they have been influenced by the opinions and feedback of others regarding a Smartphone, when accessing comments and feedback posted by product's users or influencers such as friends, celebrities, or expert users on social media. In the age table (see table 7 below) indicates that roughly over half (59.8%) of respondents from different age groups agreed with above statements. Young and old Saudi participants agreed that their evaluation of a Smartphone on social media is strongly influenced by others comments and feedback posted about different brand of a Smartphone. Additionally, table 8 (below) shows that more than half of the total number of respondents (59.8%) who uses social media ‘not more than an hour a week’ and those who use it ‘more than 10 hours’ agreed that others' evaluations and opinions have a strong social influence on their evaluation of the Smartphone.

			SN_Evaluation					Total
			Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	
Gender	Male	Count	0	4	3	83	42	132
		% within Gender	0.0%	3.0%	2.3%	62.9%	31.8%	100.0%
	Female	Count	1	9	13	75	34	132
		% within Gender	0.8%	6.8%	9.8%	56.8%	25.8%	100.0%
Total	Count	1	13	16	158	76	264	
	% within Gender	0.4%	4.9%	6.1%	59.8%	28.8%	100.0%	

Table 6: Gender and Social Norm Evaluation Cross-tabulation

			SN_Evaluation					Total
			Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	
Age	19 - 24	Count	0	6	6	36	19	67
		% within Age	0.0%	9.0%	9.0%	53.7%	28.4%	100.0%
	25 - 30	Count	1	4	3	59	25	92
		% within Age	1.1%	4.3%	3.3%	64.1%	27.2%	100.0%
	31-37	Count	0	1	6	43	22	72
		% within Age	0.0%	1.4%	8.3%	59.7%	30.6%	100.0%
	38 - 44	Count	0	0	0	14	8	22
		% within Age	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	63.6%	36.4%	100.0%
	45 - 50	Count	0	2	1	6	2	11
		% within Age	0.0%	18.2%	9.1%	54.5%	18.2%	100.0%
Total	Count	1	13	16	158	76	264	
	% within Age	0.4%	4.9%	6.1%	59.8%	28.8%	100.0%	

Table 7: Age and Social Norm Evaluation Cross-tabulation

			SN_Evaluation					Total
			Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	
UsingSMTIME	Not more than 1 hour a week	Count	0	2	2	12	4	20
		% within UsingSMTIME	0.0%	10.0%	10.0%	60.0%	20.0%	100.0%
	More than 1 hour	Count	1	1	4	44	22	72
		% within UsingSMTIME	1.4%	1.4%	5.6%	61.1%	30.6%	100.0%
	1 hour up to 5 hours	Count	0	3	7	42	19	71
		% within UsingSMTIME	0.0%	4.2%	9.9%	59.2%	26.8%	100.0%
	More than 5 hours	Count	0	3	1	35	16	55
		% within UsingSMTIME	0.0%	5.5%	1.8%	63.6%	29.1%	100.0%
	10 hours and more	Count	0	4	2	25	15	46
		% within UsingSMTIME	0.0%	8.7%	4.3%	54.3%	32.6%	100.0%
Total	Count	1	13	16	158	76	264	
	% within UsingSMTIME	0.4%	4.9%	6.1%	59.8%	28.8%	100.0%	

Table 8: Frequency use of social media and Social Norm Evaluation Cross-tabulation

Table 9 (below) indicates that users who have an account on Instagram (62.9%) present the largest percentage of those who agreed with the above two statements, with a small difference to those who have an account on YouTube (56.8%). This may be due to the fact that Instagram and YouTube both allow users to post contents with no character limit. As they can post a video with a very long description, article and story. Thus, their followers and viewers can obtain all the information they are looking for regarding the quality of the product by viewing one post on these applications. Table 10 (below) illustrates that respondents who use social media 'very much' to access comments and feedback from other people present the highest number 81 (out of 131) of those who agreed and 39 (out of 131) of them strongly agreed. An unexpected result is that respondents who do 'not at all' use social media to access comments and feedback from other people, 14 (out of 28) of them agreed and 11 (out of 28) of them strongly agreed with the above two statements. Overall, the results conclude that most participants (males, females, young and old participants) agreed that their evaluation of Smartphone industries is strongly influenced by others on social media. As they trust the opinions of others about any product or a Smartphone. Therefore, using social media influences Saudi customers' preference for a particular Smartphone.

			SN_Evaluation					Total
			Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	
Instagram	Count		1	5	8	42	28	84
	% within SM_Accounts		1.2%	6.0%	9.5%	50.0%	33.3%	100.0%
YouTube	Count		0	4	5	55	28	92
	% within SM_Accounts		0.0%	4.3%	5.4%	59.8%	30.4%	100.0%
SM_Accounts Twitter	Count		0	3	2	38	14	57
	% within SM_Accounts		0.0%	5.3%	3.5%	66.7%	24.6%	100.0%
Facebook	Count		0	1	1	20	5	27
	% within SM_Accounts		0.0%	3.7%	3.7%	74.1%	18.5%	100.0%
Other	Count		0	0	0	3	1	4
	% within SM_Accounts		0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	75.0%	25.0%	100.0%
Total	Count		1	13	16	158	76	264
	% within SM_Accounts		0.4%	4.9%	6.1%	59.8%	28.8%	100.0%

Table 9: Social media Accounts and Social Norm Evaluation Cross-tabulation

			SN_Evaluation					Total
			Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	
Not at all	Count		0	2	1	14	11	28
	% within Feedback		0.0%	7.1%	3.6%	50.0%	39.3%	100.0%
1	Count		0	1	3	9	5	18
	% within Feedback		0.0%	5.6%	16.7%	50.0%	27.8%	100.0%
Feedback 2	Count		1	2	2	18	14	37
	% within Feedback		2.7%	5.4%	5.4%	48.6%	37.8%	100.0%
3	Count		0	2	5	36	7	50
	% within Feedback		0.0%	4.0%	10.0%	72.0%	14.0%	100.0%
Very much	Count		0	6	5	81	39	131
	% within Feedback		0.0%	4.6%	3.8%	61.8%	29.8%	100.0%
Total	Count		1	13	16	158	76	264
	% within Feedback		0.4%	4.9%	6.1%	59.8%	28.8%	100.0%

Table 10: Feedback and Social Norm Evaluation Cross-tabulation

5. Discussion

The aim of this study was to identify the influence of using social media on preference for a particular product during evaluating it on social media. Based on 264 questionnaires (self-completion survey), with Saudi customers who have active social media accounts, this study provides a deep insight into customer behaviour during evaluating products on social media. The accessibility of social media has changed the way consumers gather information. It is easy for anyone is interested in a particular item to learn about and explore the item further by obtaining product information and feedback from a product's users. This content is posted on different social media sites as videos, photos and written content. As illustrated by the quantitative findings of this study, most of the participants (young participants) scored the purpose of accessing social media to "Access comments and feedback from other people" with 4, which means important very much. This is consistent with a recent study by Chu and Kim (2011), who pointed out that the power of influencing opinion guides behaviour. The closer a person perceives himself/herself to be involved with others on social media sites, the more willing to search for their advice on items/services. Then, their advice influences him/her as a customer.

Additionally, to estimate how good a particular product is, highly depends on how others evaluate it. Customers perceive an external social pressure, when accessing comments and feedback posted by a product's users or influencers such as friends and expert users on social media. This bases their evaluation of a particular product on others' evaluation. According to quantitative findings, all participants pointed out that evaluating how good a product is, highly depends on how other users evaluate it. Customers (who have never

bought the product) could estimate a specific product as a high-quality product, in terms of another user's experience and opinion (positive comments). On the other hand, they could estimate it as a low-quality product (even if they have never tried it) because of another user's bad experience and opinion (negative comments). Moreover, quantitative findings confirm that nearly all participants agreed that when numerous users on social media say a product is good or bad, a lot of notices are taken of this opinions and this in turn influences their own opinion. This is consistent with Chu and Kim (2011), who indicated that being influenced by others' opinions also guides behaviour; which means that an individual advice could have a greater influence on the customers' intention than advertising (Thackeray et al, 2008). Therefore, negative/positive comments about the brand have been posted either with or without a companies' authorisation (Murchu et al, 2004). Saudi culture (collectivism) could play a significant role in interpreting these findings. As Saudis tend to depend largely on others' advices and opinions.

Moreover, the findings showed that low touch products (as an outcome of activities on social media) are the most purchased products by Saudi customers. The rate of Saudi consumers purchasing a Smartphone has been increasing during the past six years due to the accessibility of feedback/comments and the mass improvement of interaction between Saudis and customers who are experts in Smartphone industries. This is similar to the BBC News, (2015), which pointed out that Saudi Arabia has a substantial increase in the rate of a Smartphone ownership. That contributes to the rapid popularity of social media. Furthermore, the results demonstrated that most of the participants (256 out of 264) use social media on their Smartphones as Smartphones motivate them to share their daily events, knowledge, opinions and discuss things immediately with their followers or online friends. Thus, the Smartphone makes the delivery of word much easier and faster. This is consistent with Antony (2008), who indicated that the quality of recent mobile applications allows consumers to be in touch with other users, to expand their views and attitudes conveniently. These findings could be owing to that fact that social media applications uploaded on iPhones once bought (such as Facebook and Twitter). Moreover, applications such as Instagram can be uploaded easily from the Apple store. While in Other Smartphones (such as Galaxy) these application must be uploaded from the Google play store and usually Galaxy owners cannot run applications on their phone due to many technical problems. Thus, the iPhone features have attracted a lot of Galaxy owners to substitute their Smartphones with an iPhone.

## **6. Implications**

### **6.1. For Academics**

This study built a theoretical and conceptual framework of purchase intention in relation to the use of social media. Opportunities exist for academic researchers to conduct empirical studies, to test the framework presented in this research within a developed country context. There may be differences in the findings of such research due to differences in cultures between countries.

### **6.2. For Companies that Produce Smartphones and the Electronics Industry**

These companies can make a contract with influencers who are expert in the field of smart devices and have enough knowledge to make them consultants for their followers; the followers believe them more and trust their recommendations. Thus, by posting a single post on their pages (video, picture, article or oral), it will be viewed and discovered by millions of customers, who may be motivated to buy the product after viewing the post directly. Thus, Marketers can make deals with the advisers in relation to electronic items such as smartphones, computers and camera.

## **7. Conclusion**

This research aimed to provide a simple explanation of customer engagement with social media. Thus, this research contributes to literature concerning online collective culture literature by collecting data within a developing country context on social media. The significant findings of this research could be summarized as follows. Customers evaluate how well or bad a product is dependant on how friends (and important people to them) evaluate a product through social media. Moreover, when customers engage with this feedback and exchange information regarding a particular product on social media, it greatly influences their preference.

## **8. Limitation and Direction for Future Research**

As any study, this research has a limitation. The majority of participants were employees with high salary jobs. Employees in these careers tend to have the buying power so their attitude toward luxury goods will be different from those who have no job or students. Employees in professional jobs or high salary careers always have different thinking, behavior, beliefs and living situations. This may lead to missing further potential issues that influence other Saudi (non-employees or employees with low salary jobs) consumers during their



interaction or activities on social media. Therefore, the findings of this study might not be generalised and applied to the Saudi population as a whole.

Future research could cover a comparative study on the effect of social media between customers from developed and developing countries. It is possible that new social media theories will be developed, in terms of the differences between collective and individual cultural background, differences in belief, attitude and behavioural intention.

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