Library Progress International
Vol.44 No. 3, Jul-Dec 2024: P.9707-9717

Print version ISSN 0970 1052
Online version ISSN 2320 317X

Original Article

Available online at www.bpasjournals.com

Effect Of Social Media Review On Libyan Students 'Digital Product Purchasing Behavior

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How to cite this article: Mahmoud Alferjani Omar Etshaisha, Arun Kumar Tarofder (2024) Effect Of Social Media Review On Libyan Students' Digital Product Purchasing Behavior. *Library Progress International,* 44(3), 9707-9717.

Abstract
Last few decades, social media has dramatically changed human communication and purchasing behaviour. The impact of social media reviews has tremendously captured scholars' attention. Despite the substantial amount of research on social media reviews, there is a significant gap in predicting the effect of social media reviews on students purchasing behaviour especially related digital products. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the effect of social media reviews on students' digital purchasing behaviour. A cross-sectional descriptive study was conducted to find out how social media review effects Libyan students' digital product purchasing behavior. This study developed a structured questionnaire by adapting items from several prior studies. This study targeted Libyan students as its respondents and distributed the questionnaire link through social media. Structural equation modelling (SEM) was applied to quantify the effect of all these variables. The results and findings of this research quantify the effect of social media reviews characteristics on purchasing decision, especially for digital products.

Keywords: Social Media, Digital Products, Purchasing Behavior, Students, Libya

Introduction

Digital products business is expanding faster than physical goods commerce. Soon, exponential technology and seismic consumer movements will push its dominance. It's a $950 billion market with much larger prospects (Balkan, 2021). Digital products are distinguished from physical products by a number of distinguishing features. It requires time and space to physically transfer physical products. Digital products do not need amount of space, and they can be delivered across networks like the Internet, which decreases the time required for delivery to almost nothing. There are more distinctions in the physical features of digital products (Attar et al., 2022; Tseng et al., 2022). These qualities include indestructibility, transmutability, and reproduction.

Digital goods are items and services that are offered entirely through the use of digital technology. In other words, there is no exchange of actual objects. As technology digitises the globe, the number of items on the list increases daily (Lovari & Materassi, 2021; Shaker et al., 2021). The purpose of this thesis is to examine the effects of this industry's rapid expansion, its potential effects on consumer behaviors and business, and the remarkable prospects that are emerging. Marketing professionals and policymakers have spent many years analysing and attempting to comprehend consumer behaviour and the elements that create and impact it in diverse situations. Knowing why and how customers buy and consume is essential for companies to produce products, sell them successfully, and engage with customers efficiently before, during, and after the sale (Marmat, 2022). Due to the rising availability and use of the internet, businesses have had to modify their sales methods and concentrate on meeting the new digital demand for their products and services. Social Media has been a developing trend for several years, and it has evolved into a great platform for companies to advertise their services and products. Online marketing

streamlines the process of targeting, and social media sites are the ideal area to collect clients and learn about their preferences (Hafez, 2021; Seyyedamiri & Tajrobehkar, 2021).

Online shoppers rarely contact or feel the goods, unlike offline shoppers, and instead rely on user evaluations. According to a Google research based on 57 million online customer evaluations, these reviews affect consumer purchasing decisions. A 'sales assistant' supports a consumer by looking for product details; similarly, online reviews assist customers in identifying product information that meets their requirements. Before concluding their purchasing selections, the majority of shoppers like to review the views of other consumers about a retailer's products or services. Because social media use is particularly prevalent among young people, businesses often utilise these platforms to attract their younger demographic. In order to examine the effect of social media on students' online consumption habits, and for the purposes of this research, university students served as the reference group (Y. Wu et al., 2022).

Online reviews are an integral aspect of e-commerce that have a substantial influence on customer purchasing choices and expenditures. Consumers seek an online review to identify the brand's usefulness, which inadvertently increases their buy intent. An online review is a consumer's post on a product or service on the company's website or other online platforms, based on their current or past experience (Baker & Kim, 2019; H. Li, Meng, Jeong, et al., 2020). However, no research has been undertaken in either developing or wealthy nations to examine the impact of review relevance and review accuracy. In light of this, the current research investigates the impact of review valence, review relevance, and review accuracy on online purchase intent (Lai et al., 2021; Liang et al., 2022; Mariani & Borghi, 2021).

With the advent of digital and social media, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has become a significant source of information that influences purchasing choices (Hsu, 2022). A new sort of eWOM, also known as online customer evaluations, has emerged as a result of the quick ascent and expansive expansion of virtual communities (OCR) (Huang et al., 2019; R. Wu et al., 2022). ORCs refer to the customer-generated evaluations that are placed on corporate or third-party websites. According to research, OCRs are among the most prevalent and significant types of eWOM. 61% of shoppers consult internet reviews, blogs, or other types of consumer feedback prior to making a purchase, according to a survey by eMarketer (2008). According to Sotiriadis (2017)'s research, customers who consult an internet recommendation are twice as likely to purchase a product as those who do not. Moreover, 69 percent of buyers reportedly trust OCRs as much as they do personal recommendations (Shen et al., 2020).

Traditional studies on negative emotion would predict that bad evaluations would beat good ones since negative information is more prominent and weighted more severely by individuals. That is, in the instance of online reviews, one will put more weight on unfavourable consumer evaluations, and conversely, one will place more weight on negative professional ratings. This study indicates that the solution is not that simple. As typical customers and professional critics are diverse information sources that represent different sorts of social groupings, consumers will weigh numerous features of the source type in addition to the reviews' value (Meijerink & Schoenmakers, 2020; S. Wang et al., 2022). In particular, the author suggests that personality or environmental variables may influence how buyers react to mixed ratings. According to research, the degree of social influence relies on what people believe to be similar to others and the quality of their connection (Luo et al., 2022; Mi et al., 2014; C. Zhao & Zhang, 2021). This study examines the effect of self-construal on decision-making, attitude change, and information processing using self-construal literature. Numerous studies have demonstrated that self-construal influences consumer decision-making, attitude change, and information processing. This study focuses on the same basic base of social influence and analyses how consuming environment might modify consumers' responses to mixed evaluations (Chakraborty & Bhat, 2018; Sebastianelli & Tamimi, 2018).

Given the significance of Social Media Reviews (SMR), this study examines the current state of research on the influence of SMRs on students' digital purchase choices. This study examines the research on mobile SMRs and their effects. In addition, ideas and methodologies created in SMR research are examined. In addition, this research adds to the current body of knowledge by explicating the process through which SMRs may influence students' purchase choices for digital products.

Overall, this study will try to answer the following question as shown in Figure 1.

- Is there any significant effect of review valence on students' digital purchasing decisions?
- Is there any significant effect of review relevance on students' digital purchasing decisions?
- Is there any significant effect of review content on students' digital purchasing decisions?
- Is there any significant effect of review creditability on students' digital purchasing decisions?
- Is there any significant effect of review volume on students' digital purchasing decisions?

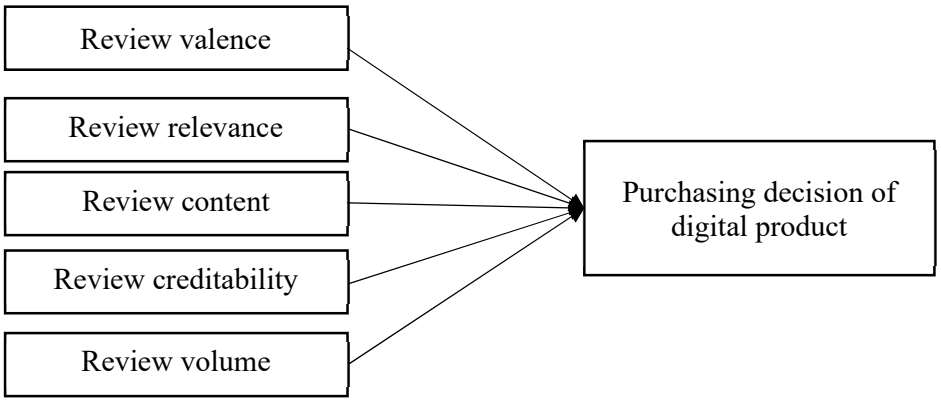

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

METHODS

For this research, a descriptive study method is employed in line with standard requirements. Sekaran et al. (2009) state that a descriptive study enables the researcher to delve deeper into relevant aspects or phenomena related to the company, industry, individual, or any other perspective of interest.

SAMPLING

Libyan university students were identified as the target population for this study. For this investigation, online questionnaires were sent via instant messenger to university students in Libya. Total university enrollment in Libya is approximately 127,207 (Libyan Monthly 2021). Researchers chose Libya because the majority of the generation that uses social media most frequently is of university age. A total of 500 questionnaires were distributed among universities students using social media. The research participants were recruited on a voluntary basis, and the queries were written in English. In order to collect the data, the method of convenience sampling was utilised. In addition, the participants were assured that their responses will remain confidential.

DATA COLLECTION

Sekaran and Bougie (2009) describe questionnaires as a set of pre-formulated questions designed for respondents to answer and provide input. These questionnaires are used as tools for data collection, allowing researchers to measure variables as needed. Each variable was represented by a set of five questions, and a five-point Likert scale was used for responses. The questionnaire was divided into two parts: Part A covered demographic information, and Part B focused on the study's key variables. To ensure clarity and simplicity, a pilot test was conducted with about 40 to 50 customers, which helped refine and improve the questions before the final distribution and data collection. Table 1 shows the development sources for questionnaire.

Table 1 Variable, Items, Scale and Source

Variables	Items	Source	Scale
Review valence	• The review was negative. • The review was positive. • The review received a negative rating. • The review received a positive rating.	(U. Mishra, 2021)	5 point Likert Scale
Review relevance	• The social media review on the digital product is relevant to me • The social media review is appropriate for my needs • The social media review is related to my digital product purchase decision • The social media review is related to my digital product search.	(Mumuni et al., 2020)	
Review content	• Social media reviews on digital product brand X are defined. • Social media reviews on digital product brand X are explained. • Social media reviews on digital product brand X are detailed.	(Chakraborty & Bhat, 2018)	5 point Likert Scale
Review creditability	• I will perceive Social media reviews as reliable • I will perceive the Social media reviews as trustworthy • I will perceive the Social media reviews as accurate • I will perceive the Social media reviews as not biased	(Izogo et al., 2022)	5 point Likert Scale

Review volume	• More reviews on digital products improve purchasing decision. • More rating on digital products improve purchasing decision. • More likes on digital products post improve purchasing decision. • More videos on digital products improve purchasing decision.	(Kordrostami et al., 2021)	5 point Likert Scale
Digital Product Purchase Intention	• Social media reviews help me decide which digital product I will likely buy. • Social media reviews facilitate me to decide which digital product I would consider procuring. • Social media reviews guide me to consider the digital product that I am likely to obtain.	(Chakraborty, 2019b)	5 point Likert Scale

RESULTS

Questionnaire links were sent to a total of 500 respondents from 5 prestigious colleges situated in the cities of Tripoli, Benghazi, and Bayda in Libya. Out of the 500 questionnaires that were handed out, only 321 were received back by the participants. This gives us an overall response rate of 64.2%. To maintain the quality of answers, it is recommended to arrange any missing data appropriately and reject up to 50 percent of the responses that are missing from the sample size. 298 out of 321 responses were selected for the final data analysis.

Based on the findings, there were 197 male students, accounting for 66.11% of the total, and 101 female students, accounting for 33.89%. The bulk of participants consist of students pursuing a Bachelor's degree (211 students, 70.81%), next to those pursuing a Master's degree (58 students, 19.46%), as well as those having a Diploma (26 students, 8.72%). Merely a minute proportion of the participants consists of Ph.D. students, specifically 3 individuals, accounting for 1.01%.

Findings indicated that Facebook emerges as the dominant platform, with 291 students (97.65%) utilizing it, maybe for assessing digital products. YouTube has a notable influence, with 113 pupils (37.92%) actively participating on the platform. Instagram and an undisclosed platform branded 'X' had a moderate level of utilization, with 37 (12.42%) and 43 (14.43%) pupils, respectively. LinkedIn and other sites exert the least impact on purchasing behavior, as indicated by the respective percentages of 23 (7.72%) and 15 (5.03%) student users. These numbers, which intriguingly surpass a total of 100%, indicate that students probably use many channels concurrently to gather information for their purchasing choices. According to the research, social media reviews have the greatest impact on the purchasing decisions of entertainment products, having 247 students (82.89%) being influenced. Apps come next, with 205 students (68.79%) being influenced. Software exerts a significant impact on 118 students, accounting for 39.60% of the total. E-books and papers have a significant influence on 68 (22.82%) and 47 (15.77%) students, respectively. The category marked 'Others' has a negligible impact, as it only consists of 6 pupils, which accounts for 2.01% of the total. The cumulative values exceeding 100% indicate that students may depend upon social media reviews across many product categories.

Discriminant validity asserts that measurement items within the same construct should have stronger correlations with each other compared to their correlations with measurement items from constructs which are assumed to have no correlation. In simple terms, discriminant validity refers to the extent to which a concept is distinct from other concepts based on empirical criteria. There are three distinct measures that can be implemented to establish discriminant validity. The initial method employed is cross-loadings, which assesses the discriminant validity of the indicators. The Fornell-Larcker criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981a) is a method used to verify discriminant validity. It involves comparing the inter-construct correlations with the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE). The third assessment method employed in this work is the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations, which was developed by (Henseler et al., 2015). The HTMT ratio provides an estimation of the actual correlation between two entities assuming perfect reliability. If there is no absence of discriminant validity, the value of the HTMT should be less than 0.90. Here, all the values of the HTMT are consistently below 0.90, suggesting that measures that are not anticipated to be correlated are truly uncorrelated.

Table 2 Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) - Matrix

	PD	REVC	REVCR	REVR	REVVA	REVV
DIGITAL PRODUCT PURCHAING DECISION (PD)						
REVIEW CONTENT (REVC)	0.424					
REVIEW CREDIBILITY (REVCR)	0.536	0.497				
REVIEW RELEVANCE (REVR)	0.649	0.577	0.638			
REVIEW VALANCE (REVVA)	0.592	0.673	0.637	0.785		
REVIEW VOLUME (REVV)	0.485	0.576	0.573	0.635	0.708	

The study reveals significant insights into the impact of various review-related factors on the digital product purchasing decisions (PD) of Libyan students. The findings indicate that 'Review Credibility' (REVCR) has a strong positive effect on PD, with a path coefficient of 0.202, and this relationship is statistically significant ($p = 0.002$). This shows the importance of perceived credibility in influencing purchase behavior, suggesting that students are more likely to make a purchase when they trust the authenticity of the reviews they encounter.

Similarly, 'Review Relevance' (REVR) also shows a substantial positive impact on PD, with a path coefficient of 0.254 and a p-value of 0.001. This finding highlights that reviews perceived as relevant to the students' needs and preferences play a crucial role in shaping their purchasing decisions. In contrast, the impact of 'Review Volume' (REVV) on PD is negligible, indicating that the sheer number of reviews does not significantly influence the likelihood of making a purchase.

Interestingly, the study also finds that 'Review Content' (REVC) and 'Review Valence' (RV) do not have a significant impact on PD. The lack of association between RV and purchasing decisions suggests that the overall sentiment of the reviews—whether positive or negative—does not directly affect students' buying choices. Likewise, the content of the reviews, while potentially informative, does not exert a substantial influence on their decision-making process.

These findings indicate the varying effects of different types of social media evaluations on purchasing behaviour. The analysis, supported by path coefficients, p-values, and confidence intervals, provides a nuanced understanding of the factors that most significantly drive the purchasing decisions of Libyan students, with credibility and relevance of reviews emerging as the key determinants.

Table 3 Analyzing Path Analysis

	Path Coefficient	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values	Results	2.5% CI	97.50% CI
REVC -> PD	0.011	0.054	0.195	0.845	Not Accepted	-0.097	0.117
REVCR -> PD	0.202	0.066	3.077	0.002	Accepted	0.073	0.326
REVR -> PD	0.254	0.076	3.358	0.001	Accepted	0.105	0.402
REVV -> PD	0.053	0.075	0.698	0.485	Not Accepted	-0.100	0.197
RV -> PD	0.016	0.063	0.255	0.799	Not Accepted	-0.103	0.144

DISCUSSION

The gender disparity is noteworthy within the research's framework, as it implies a possible divergence in the perception and response of male and female students towards social media reviews while engaging in digital product purchases. The larger percentage of male participants may suggest either a heightened involvement with social media or digital products amongst males, or could be indicative of wider societal patterns in Libya concerning gender and technology utilization. Gaining insight into these dynamics is essential, as it may uncover gender-specific trends in trust and making decisions that are influenced by social media. This, in turn, can provide a more profound understanding of the psychological components of digital shopping among Libyan students.

Cultural and societal elements may impact the interaction among Libyan students in this particular environment. Due to the community aspect of numerous Middle Eastern countries, where the importance of shared thoughts and experiences is highly regarded, favorable reviews have the potential to greatly increase trust in an item or service. This shared mentality could enhance individuals' openness to the favorable observations made by others, as indicated by the review's overall positivity. Curiously, the study reveals that there is no substantial direct correlation between RV and PD. This disconnection presents a challenge to the conventional marketing thinking that typically assumes a direct correlation between favorable ratings and a rise in sales (Pipitwanichakarn & Wongtada, 2020; Qin et al., 2021; R. Wu et al., 2022). The intricacy of decision-making in digital environments could be a potential explanation for this divergence. Modern consumers are inundated with an abundance of information, which has made them more astute and analytical when it comes to making purchasing choices. Although excellent evaluations can contribute to establishing confidence, the final purchasing decision is often influenced more significantly by factors like price, individual tastes, and specific product attributes.

In order to provide a background for these discoveries, it is crucial to explore the theory of information processing and relevance. According to Lai et al. (2021), the fundamental principle of this idea is that people are more prone to being persuaded by communications that they see as personally meaningful. Scholars like Zhu et al. (2022) have investigated deeper into this notion within the realm of online reviews. They assert that relevance plays a crucial role in determining the practicality and persuasion of online information. For Libyan students, the significance of reviews has a substantial impact on their purchasing choices, perhaps due to the fact that they perceive these reviews as more personal, tailored to their requirements, and therefore more reliable.

The findings of this study suggest that emphasizing the significance of reviews may have a greater impact on affecting purchasing decisions than to just increasing their quantity. Furthermore, the correlation between the relevance of reviews and purchasing decisions presents opportunities for future investigation. Future research could investigate the impact of various aspects of relevance, such as customization and precision, on consumer behavior. Furthermore, doing an analysis on how demographic factors such as age, gender, and education level influence the perception of relevance would yield a more intricate comprehension of consumer behavior in digital settings.

The content of a review is expected to have a direct influence on a consumer's perception and decision-making process (M. Lee et al., 2017; Ma & Lee, 2014; Mi et al., 2014). Nevertheless, the absence of a noteworthy influence in this particular situation can be ascribed to other variables. Initially, the vast amount of information accessible on the internet might result in information overload, causing the distinct substance of individual evaluations to become less distinguishable or influential. During such situations, buyers may place greater reliance on heuristic cues, such as the total star ratings or the quantity of reviews, rather than thoroughly examining the specific substance of each review. Furthermore, the lack of importance of REVC could be ascribed to the dynamic nature of consumer behavior in digital environments. According to Kim & Lee (2022), customers in online contexts frequently exhibit selective perception, which involves focusing on information that supports their existing views and attitudes while ignoring contradicting information. Hence, the substance of reviews may not significantly influence consumers that have already established their judgments regarding a product. Similarly, the study's results regarding RV - its minimal effect on PD - contradict the widely accepted belief that the attitude expressed in reviews (positive or negative) strongly influences purchase choices. This phenomenon can be understood by examining the characteristics of the online marketplace, where consumers are confronted with a diverse range of viewpoints and have developed the skill to navigate through both favorable and unfavorable attitudes. Consequently, the overall emotional tone of assessments may not be as crucial in the process of making decisions as it was previously believed (Fan et al., 2021; Shaheen et al., 2020; Xiao et al., 2022).

It is imperative to take into account the cultural background of Libyan students. Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory posits that cultural values have a substantial influence on consumer behavior (Petrescu, 2011). In countries characterized by strong uncertainty avoidance, such as many Middle Eastern cultures, customers may exhibit greater skepticism towards the content and sentiment expressed in internet evaluations. Instead, they tend to depend more heavily on personal experiences or recommendations from individuals they are acquainted with. Furthermore, the particular circumstances surrounding the acquisition of digital goods may also impact the perceived connections. Due to their intangible nature and reliance on personal desire, digital products may evoke distinct decision-making criteria in comparison to physical products. In this scenario, the importance and trustworthiness of reviews may be more significant than the actual content or feeling expressed in them (Hengyun Li et al., 2020).

The research conducted by previous researchers (Baltescu, 2020; Bhattacharjee et al., 2011; Ray et al., 2021) provides evidence that the perceived reliability of internet information has a substantial impact on customer purchase choices. The findings also prompt inquiries on the efficacy of conventional marketing methods in the digital era. According to Koohang et al. (2018), a comprehensive grasp of customer behavior in relation to online content is essential for effective digital marketing. The findings of this study suggest that only improving the credibility of reviews might not be enough; marketers must also take into account how these evaluations are seen in terms of their genuineness and reliability. Furthermore, the research emphasizes the necessity for a more profound comprehension of the mechanisms of trust in digital settings (Marmat, 2022; Shaker et al., 2021; Wallace et al., 2022; L. Zhao et al., 2022; Z. Zhu et al., 2023).

it is worth mentioning that the impact of REVV on PD is not substantial. A possible reason for this difference could be the trade-off between the quality and quantity in how consumers perceive things. According to (Z. Zhu et al., 2023), although a big number of reviews can create confidence by showing acceptance and engagement, it does not necessarily mean that the product is of high quality or relevance. These findings align with the research conducted by (Marmat, 2022), which suggests that consumers may regard a large number of evaluations as overwhelming or irrelevant. This perception can potentially result in choice paralysis instead of helping them make a decision to purchase.

Ultimately, the research's results provide a substantial contribution to the body of knowledge on digital marketing and customer behavior, specifically within the realm of social media evaluations. The study's results have significant relevance for both managers and legislators, and also provide a foundation for future research in the dynamic sector of digital commerce. The study provides significant insights for marketers and organizations seeking to utilize social media reviews to influence consumer behavior by emphasizing the significance of review in impacting purchasing decisions. Moreover, it establishes a basis for future investigations into the intricate interplay between trust, relevance, and customer behavior in the digital economy.

Conclusion

With a primary focus on digital products, this study emphasizes the significance of examining the impact of social media review characteristics on consumer purchasing choices. By conducting a thorough examination of existing literature, it has discovered five key characteristics of social media reviews that have the ability to influence customer behavior. The study developed a research model based on these characteristics and thoroughly examined it using structural equation modeling. These findings have significant implications, providing a deeper understanding of how social media influences consumer purchasing behavior. Furthermore, the study has established a basis for policymakers to create policies that promote transparency and genuineness in online reviews, ultimately improving consumer confidence and well-informed decision-making.

Limitation

This study employed a purely quantitative methodological approach, utilizing questionnaires to gather structured and statistical data. Although this strategy provides useful quantitative insights, it inevitably did not include the intricate qualitative variations that could be discovered by more exploratory methodologies. The absence of qualitative data in this analysis suggests a limited perspective on the intricate nature of students' purchasing patterns. We recommend doing cross-cultural comparisons to identify both the common and distinct elements of consumer behavior in other societies. Additionally, it is important to thoroughly analyze the diverse effects that various social media platforms might have on consumer decision-making. Finally, we support an investigation into the impact of individual variations, which could offer a more customized comprehension of the customer decision-making process.

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