

THE INFLUENCE OF CONSUMER BRAND ENGAGEMENT IN SOCIAL MEDIA AND INFORMATION SEARCH INTENTION ON BRAND USAGE INTENTION AND POSITIVE E-WOM: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON SAUDI CONTEXT.

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ABSTRACT: *This paper aims to study the influence of consumer brand engagement in Social media and information search intention on brand use intention and positive E-WOM. adopting an empirical approach that uses a quantitative method and probability sampling technique. Online Survey was conducted using Web-based questionnaire where 378 questionnaires were analyzed. The findings of this study reveal that both consumer brand engagement in Social media and information search intention have a significant statistical impact on brand use intention and positive e-wom.*

KEYWORDS: consumer brand engagement; e-wom; information search intention; brand use intention.

INTRODUCTION

Consumers behaviour have changed dramatically after internet and other technological advancements emerged. Social media use grown rapidly in both personal and businesses settings. Particularly, Saudi Arabia has posted high penetration rate of active social media users at 75% of the total population, with 2hours and 34 minutes average daily time spent. (Kemp, 2018). With lots of brands concerning to utilize their social media platforms, consumers became engaged with brands at a deeper and broader level than ever before. (Kotler & Keller, 2014). In view of this, it is critical for brands to understand and plan their brand engagement activities in social media, which will potentially increase consumers' usage intention and promote positive electronic word of mouth "e-wom" (Park et al., 2007; Kozinets et al., 2010; Osei-Frimpong & McLean, 2018). In addition, the effect of information search intention "IS" on usage intention and e-wom has received little attention from previous researches, hence this study attempts to examine this influence; because According to (Kaur et al., 2017) effective management of brands' social media platforms is achieved by providing relevant information regarding consumers' expectations.

Importance of the study:

The researchers will study the influence of consumer brand engagement in social media on both Brand Usage Intention and positive e-wom. Further, researchers proposed that consumers engaged with brands for different motives, one of them is searching for relevant and helpful information; because acquiring information will maintain their knowledge about brands and will

mostly facilitate their brand use intention and sharing this knowledge and disseminating positive word of mouth.

Finally, the study will be applied in Saudi context since the Saudi context has almost not been studied before. And the results will be generalized to analyze several contributions to the marketing implication since it aims to examine the consumer brand engagement in social media and its consequences, providing more insights to business and marketers to utilize their social media platform and optimize its significance.

Theoretical Framework:

Consumption value theory

consumers are participating in online social media brands' platforms for different motives, some of them are to seek information, express self and socialize with others or improve skills. (Zaglia, 2013; Jung et al., 2014; Wallace et al., 2014). In this regard, the researchers apply consumption value theory "CVT", which was proposed by Sheth et al. (1991) to shed the light of the different values concerning consumer choice behavior in the context of products, services or brands. CVT is comprised of: functional, emotional, social, epistemic, and conditional consumption values that describe consumer choice behavior. Functional value is defined as "the perceived utility acquired from an alternative's capacity for functional, utilitarian, or physical performance." whereas Emotional value is defined as "the perceived utility acquired from an alternative's capacity to arouse feelings or affective states" and Social value is defined as "the perceived utility acquired from an alternative's association with one or more specific social groups" And Epistemic value is defined as "the perceived utility acquired from an alternative's capacity to arouse curiosity, provide novelty, and/or satisfy a desire for knowledge" finally, conditional value is defined as "the perceived utility acquired by an alternative as the result of the specific situation or set of circumstances facing the choice maker" (Sheth et al., 1991). These values are derived from the consumers' experience with the brand and hence contribute differentially in different conditions. (Lee et al, 2015)

In this study, the theory of consumption values has been used to examine the consumption values and their effects on consumer brand engagement in social media, which is likely to result in brand-use intention and e-wom. For instance, Functional value includes the performance and attributes of brand social media platform. (Teng, 2018) Emotional value is derived by the arousal of feelings when using brand social media platform. Thus, positive emotional attachment with the brand will effectively strengthen the relationship between consumer and brand. (Karjaluo et al., 2016) Social value is derived from how consumers are using brand social media platform for enhancing one's image within the group.

Epistemic value is derived by the value generated by acquiring information from the brand social media platform. Many factors such as satisfaction of needed information (Jung et al., 2014) and usefulness of information (Ruiz-Mafe et al., 2014) contribute to consumers' perceived utility and hence increase Epistemic value. Consumption value theory administers a balanced view for understanding consumers' motives, it considers both intrinsic motives as well as extrinsic ones. (Aladwani, 2014), it also assigns the importance of each value to different groups in different contexts. (Pope, 2001) and has been used to study consumption choices in various context such as college courses (Stafford, 1994), mobile services (Deng et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2013; Yen, 2012), social networking communities (Kim et al., 2011),

digital items in online social media communities (Kim et al., 2011), online gamers (Teng, 2018).

It has been also used to provide a foundation for value constructs (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001) and validating a new Facebook use construct (Aladwani, 2014). Finally, the researchers propose that the higher the values consumers gain from engaging with brands in social media, the more likely that values increase their intention to use the brand and promote e-wom.

Consumer Brand Engagement in social media “CBE”:

Social media have been an effective technology tool that brands use and utilize to connect its consumers. They frequently interact with consumers in social media to engage them with the brand and provide them relevant information (Park et al., 2007). The researchers adopt (Hollebeek et al., 2014) definition of Consumer brand engagement “A consumer's positively valenced cognitive, emotional and behavioral brand-related activity during, or related to specific consumer/brand interactions”. This definition asserted other researcher who defined CBE as multidimensional construct comprising cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions (Brodie et al., 2013; Dessart et al., 2015; Dwivedi, 2015). And by examining Consumer brand engagement in social media context, the researchers conceptualize Social brand engagement as “meaningful connection, creation and communication between one consumer and one or more other consumers, using brand or brand-related language, images and meanings” (Kozinets, 2014). Another definition of Social brand engagement is the “intensity of an individual's participation in and connection with an organization's offerings and/or organizational activities, which either the customer or the organization initiate”. (Vivek et al., 2012).

Further, applying social presence theory in the context of social brand engagement, it is asserted that “the social presence of a medium influences the recipients’ understanding of messages sent from senders” (Miranda & Saunders, 2003). And since the communications in social media are mediated by information technologies, social presence plays a major role in determining the understanding and the effectiveness of the messages and interactions between users and brands (Chang and Hsu, 2016). Further, (Hajli, 2015) suggested that consumers who engaged in brand’s social media platforms are willing to expose to behavioral consequences like: purchase intention. (Wang et al., 2017). Evidently, the impact of consumers' brand engagement has been positively influencing organizational performance outcomes and consumer contributions to collaborative product development processes (Hollebeek et al., 2014).

Brand use intention

For the purpose of our study, the researchers adopted (Osei-Frimpong & McLean, 2018) brand usage intention definition “the consumer's intention to purchase and use a particular brand (compared to others with similar attributes) for her good self, with others or for others”. Applying Observational learning theory: “people learn through observing the behavior of other people, which could affect their behavior” (Bandura, 1977) on brand use intention, researchers have argued that consumers’ product-adopting decisions could be shaped by those of previous consumers (Bikhchandani et al., 1998; Park & Lessig, 1977).

Further, branded social media activities effectively increase brand awareness and stimulate brand use. (Ashley & Tuten, 2014). **Consumers** are observing other consumers’ purchases on social media, analyzing the interaction and purchases they made, and utilize the information they

gain on their buying decision (Wang & Yu, 2015). Therefore, highly engaged consumers are evidenced to contribute to social media connectedness and increase brand use intention. (Wan & Ren, 2017; Rahman et al, 2018). Finally, brand usage intention represents key consumer brand engagement consequence (Hollebeek et al., 2014).

Thereby the researchers hypothesize:

H1: consumer brand engagement in Social media has a significant statistical impact on brand use intention.

Electronic word of mouth “E-WOM”:

“WOM” defined as “any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual or former customers about a product or a company, which is made available through offline or online channels” (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).in the essence of social media, e-wom is more relevant. Electronic word of mouth is being driven by social media, brands find strategies to engage consumers to talk and interact with others about their products. (Kotler & Keller, 2014). according to (Kozinets et al.,2010), brands take “WOM” messages and meanings and then modify and use them to deliver more valued and relevant marketing message to the community. Brands are also benefiting from communities and social media networks to create a platform for consumers to exchange information about their experiences in an open and interactive way (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001).

Further, (Ang, 2011) argues that managing brand social media platforms effectively can stimulate positive electronic word of mouth.Align with this, brands are putting high efforts on engaging consumers on their social media platforms to encourage them to share positive e-wom (Gvili & Levy,2018).In addition, the more online product reviews and ratings are generated from brand engagement with consumers, the more likely e-wom developed (Wu et al.,2018) hence, researchers second hypothesis is:

H2: consumer brand engagement in social media has a significant statistical impact on positive e-wom.

Information search intention:

In the era of information expansion, it is critical to examine the effects of information. Specifically, the researchers will test the effect of Information search intention on both brand use intention and positive e-wom; because it is evidenced that consumers engage more with the brands that post more relevance information about their product (Schmitt, 2012).It is also evidenced that consumers with high “information acquisition confidence” who are aware of the different sources of information while they consider using product (Mourali et al.,2005) are more likely to search for more information.in addition, when consumers know that there is new information for a particular product exists, they will try to acquire that information. (Sangwan & Agarwal,2018)Further, the quality and quantity of that information provided by the brand or by other consumers such as “consumers reviews and comments” would influence social activities (Park et al.,2007). Furthermore, (Hajli,2014) argues that Being socially interacted with other members are human needs; these needs are now facilitated by social media platforms. Consumers like to share their shopping experiences with others, they also search for information and ask about others’ experiences with certain brands; as a result, e-wom will be accrued. In

connection with that, (Simpson et al., 2008) have also assessed that the opinions of others' purchases can be regarded as valuable information to take into account in the use intention. While (Habibi et al., 2014) suggested that higher engaged consumers would obtain more information about the brand and would be more likely exposed to brand elements, which could contribute to use intention. On the other hand, information search would stimulate e-wom and aims to help consumers fully understand a service or a product before they consume it. (Wang & Yu, 2017) To conclude, (Carlson et al., 2018) argue that consumers who search and acquire more relevant information are more likely to engage in the brand social media platform and more willing to collaborate with other consumers and help and support their brand experience and develop positive e-wom. Hence, the researchers hypothesize:

H3: Information search intention has a significant statistical impact on brand use intention.

H4: Information search intention has a significant statistical impact on positive e-wom.

Research Model:

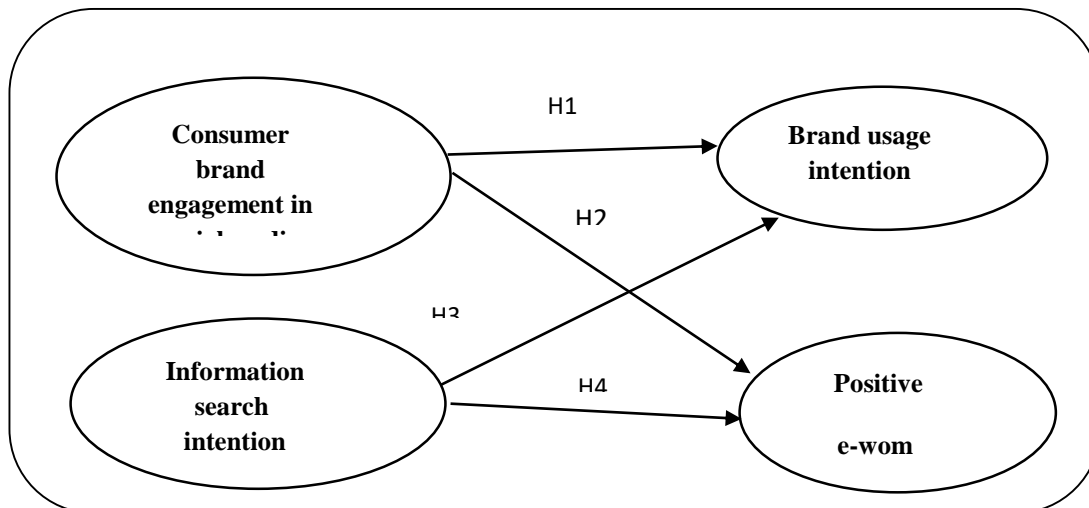


Figure (1): Research Model

Research Hypotheses

To test the study model, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H1: Consumer brand engagement in social media has a significant statistical impact on brand use intention.
- H2: Consumer brand engagement in social media has a significant statistical impact on positive e-wom.
- H3: Information search intention has a significant statistical impact on brand use intention.
- H4: Information search intention has a significant statistical impact on positive e-wom.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data Collection and Sampling Framework

This study aims to quantitatively examine the influence of consumer brand engagement in social media and Information search intention on brand use intention and positive e-wom. Since the

research subject revolve around social media, the hypotheses were tested with data collected from an online survey. With specific criteria, respondents were first asked a filtering question on whether they are above the age of 18 years old and engaging in brand's social media. Then, only respondents who met the study criteria were recruited.

The questioners neither imply to certain social networking site nor that focus on any brand. Thus, the population involved all Saudi consumers who are above the age of 18 years old and who are engaging with brands in social media. Then a random sample method was used to collect the required data. Online Survey was conducted using Web based questionnaire where 480 questionnaires were distributed and exactly 378 questionnaires were analyzed. Hence, the questionnaires got 79% response rate and 102 questionnaires were excluded due to incompatibility. The respondents were made up of 71.7% females and 28.3% males and the majority of them "75%" were between 18 and 30 years old, which is not surprisingly as younger consumers are using and engaging with brands more frequently than older consumers. In addition, nearly half of respondents visit social media brands' page multiple times or one time a week, where 15% of them are visiting social media brands' page daily. Out of this, the most social media platform that respondents used to engage with brand was Instagram "48.7%", followed by Twitter "33.3%", then Snapchat "15.9%" and lastly Facebook "2.2%". Table (1) below outlines more detailed respondents' characteristics.

Table (1): respondents' characteristics

Respondent characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	107	28.3
	Female	271	71.7
Age	18-30	283	74.9
	31-43	77	20.4
	44-56	15	4.0
	57-69	3	.8
Educational level	Diploma(college) or less	38	10.1
	Bachelor's degree	269	71.2
	Higher education	71	18.8
Frequency of visit to brands' social media page	Daily	57	15.1
	Multiple times weekly	100	26.5
	Once weekly	79	20.9
	At least once a month	142	37.6
Most used social media platform for brand engagement	Instagram	184	48.7
	Twitter	126	33.3
	Snapchat	60	15.9
	Facebook	8	2.2
Total		378	100%

Data Collection Instrument

All scales were measured on a five-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Consumer Brand Engagement scale was derived from Habibi et al. (2014) and Laroche et al. (2012). While the scale for e-wom was adapted from Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004). In addition, Brand Usage Intent scale from Hollebeek et al. (2014) was employed to Measure Brand Usage Intent. Lastly, information search intention scale was adapted from Richins et al. (1992), which was also used by Dholakia (2001). The survey was professionally translated from English to Arabic language by management professors, then it was administered in Arabic as it is the respondents' native language; to effectively target them. Furthermore, backward translation was developed to maintain the equivalence of the questionnaire in the Arabic language.

Statistical Analysis

Partial least squares (PLS) was conducted using (SmartPLS 3) software.

PLS is effective for the study as it can relate set of independent variables to multiple dependent variables (Garson, 2016). and it was used in a two-stages, namely: measurement and structural model testing; a two-stage approach allows for handling the technical limitation of the repeated indicator approach (Hair et al., 2013). The measurement model assessed and examined the reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity. Specifically, reliability shows the internal consistency of measurement, and it was assessed by checking if the values of "Cronbach's α " is greater than 0.6 (Hair et al., 2006), composite reliability "CR" is more than 0.7, the average variance extracted "AVE" is greater than 0.5. Table (2) below shows that Reliability Cronbach's alpha are $>.7$ for all scales and the CR values ranged from 0.80 to 0.91 and the AVE values ranged from 0.66 to 0.84. These values are above the acceptance values, which indicate a good construct reliability. In addition, in order to check the convergent validity, items loading was measured and showed values greater than 0.6 at the significant level of 0.05, which indicated that all Items are well loaded on constructs they were intended to measure. In addition, there was no evidence of cross loading. The items and their factor loadings are presented in Appendix. Furthermore, Bootstrapping method in SmartPLS software was used and the structural model was also developed. (Figure 2) below showed the P and R^2 values for all research variables.

Table (2): Validity and construct reliability.

construct	CR	Cronbach's α	AVE
Consumer brand engagement in social media	0.812	.714	.685
Brand Usage Intention	0.891	.838	.665
Electronic word-of-mouth (EWOM)	0.803	.772	.664
Information search Intention	0.918	.822	.848

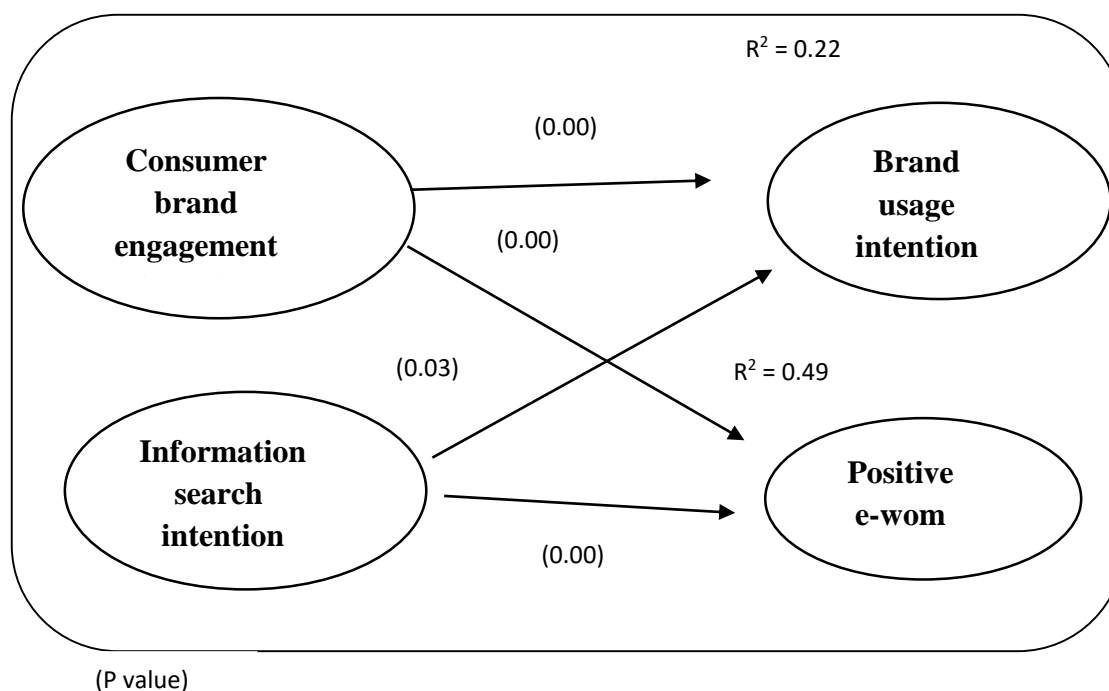


Figure (2): Model Result of PLS

RESULTS

The analysis results reveal that the variable “Consumer brand engagement in social media” has a significant impact on “Brand usage intention” at $t=9.740$, $p \leq 0.001$, which supported the first hypothesis:

H1: consumer brand engagement in Social media has a significant statistical impact on brand use intention.

In addition, "information search intention" has a significant impact on “Brand usage intention” at $t=3.555$, $p \leq 0.05$, which also supported the third hypothesis:

H3: Information search intention has a significant statistical impact on brand use intention.

Consequently, these two variables explained 22% of brand usage intention variance, which is reflected by its R^2 value of .22. On the other hand, “consumer brand engagement” has a significant impact on “e-wom” at $t=8.176$, $p \leq 0.001$ which supported the second hypothesis:

H2: consumer brand engagement in social media has a significant statistical impact on e-wom.

Furthermore, “information search intention” has a significant impact on “e-wom” at $t=9.134$, $p \leq 0.001$ which supported the fourth hypothesis:

H4: Information search intention has a significant statistical impact on e-wom.

To sum, these two variables explained 49% of e-wom variance, which is presented in R^2 value of .49 and indicated the model’s explanatory power was higher for e-wom.

Finally, Table (3) below summarized the hypothesized testing results.

Paths	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	P Values	Results
Consumer brand engagement in social media → Brand usage intention (H1)	0.043	9.740	0.000	Supported
Consumer brand engagement in social media→Positive E-WOM (H2)	0.050	8.176	0.000	Supported
Information search intention → Brand usage intention (H3)	0.048	3.555	0.030	Supported
Information search intention → Positive E-WOM (H4)	0.056	9.134	0.000	Supported

Table (3): Summary of hypothesis testing results

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study aimed to investigate the influence of consumer brand engagement in Social media and information search intention on brand use intention and positive e-wom. Researchers found that both consumer brand engagement in Social media and information search intention had a significant impact on brand use intention and positive e-wom. In line with previous studies who argued that engaging consumers lead to a valued brand performance (Bijmolt et al., 2010; Kumar et al., 2010; Bowden, 2009), the current study shed the light on the importance of engaging consumers with brands in social media. In addition, it supports that consumer brand engagement have an influence on brand usage intention and positive electronic word of mouth (Osei-Frimpong & McLean, 2018; Habibi et al., 2014).

Other studies have examined the influence of consumer brand engagement on purchase intention (Park et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2011), brand loyalty (Habibi et al., 2016; Hollebeek et al., 2014), brand trust (Habibi et al., 2014; Laroche et al., 2012) and brand equity (Zhang et al., 2015).

Further, the influence of information search intention has not been widely studied in the context of brand usage intention and positive e-wom. For instance, (Rahman & Mannan, 2018) have examined the influence of Information adoption on e-wom and purchase intention. and Parallel to researchers' findings, (Carlson et al., 2018; Sangwan & Agarwal, 2018; Wang & Yu, 2017; Simpson et al., 2008) have claimed that valuable information brands provide to its consumers will positively influence the relationship between brands and consumers; brands deliver valuable information that consumers search about it to reduce their information asymmetry and assist them to fully understand a service or a product before their consumption.

In addition, given that information search costs less in online than offline (Bakos, 1991); it is anticipated that consumers are more likely to search for information in brands' social media platforms and therefore exposed to both e-wom and brand usage more frequently. This implies that searching for relevant information in brands' social media platform influences consumers behavior, which support researchers' findings of significant effects of information search intention on both brand use intention and positive e-wom.

Implications

Theoretical Implications

This study provides important insights into the application of consumption value theory.

The theory proposed different values that consumers take in account when they confront with choice or use decision.

In addition, the results highlight the significance of consumer brand engagement in brands' social media platforms, which in return likely to increase brand usage intention and positive e-wom.

The other contribution of current study is that it examined the role of Information search intention on brand usage intention and positive e-wom.

Managerial Implications

The application of consumption value theory highlights why consumers engage in brands' social media platform, and why they use what they use. This contribute to different values and attitude consumer develop for the brand. And in this regard, brands should deal with various values and motivations of consumers accordingly. In addition, it is effective that Brands develop creative social media strategies to attract and engage target consumers to their platforms, also to build and strengthen brand relationships. Further, brands are suggested to share interesting information and be up-to-date and adapt to change. They also should utilize various tools and techniques available in social media marketing to effectively reach target audience, increase brand usage intent and stimulate e-wom. According to (Huang et al., 2011), online or e-wom is more controllable by brands than offline WOM; therefore, brands should monitor and manage its content to keep the right flow of interactions and gain a bigger reach efficiently.

They should also stimulate positive e-wom of consumers and encourage them to share their experiences as well as provide them a means to answer their queries and solve their problem.

In addition, the content posted on brands' social media platforms must be informative, relevant and attractive enough to keep consumers involved and engaged with the brand. In view of this, brands should establish information support and develop an informative content in their social media platforms as many consumers engage in brands' social media platform to get information; therefore, providing relevant information can build consumers trust and enhance their commitment, which in return would result in brand use intention and positive e-wom. To conclude, brands' social media platforms are effective tools for brands to engage their consumers and it is helpful source for consumers to seek out and search for relevant information about brands.

Limitations and Further research

The several contributions this study offers are not without some limitation. First, current study examined the influence of consumer brand engagement and information search intention without investigating their determinants, which could provide more insight into the study. Second, it applied on Saudi consumers and most of the respondents were female (71%); therefore, it is suggested to extend the scope to other geographical locations as well as balancing the percentage between males and females. Third, the study did not focus on any specific social media platform or specific brand; hence future studies could base their investigations on specific social media platform or specific brand as consumers' attitudes may vary in different aspects. Finally, future studies can examine The Influence of consumer brand engagement in social media and information search intention on other outcomes related to the consumer behavior such as trust, loyalty, and satisfaction or complaining.

They could also examine the potential advantages of creative strategies brands can use to engage its consumers.

Acknowledgment

The authors extend their appreciation to the Deanship of Scientific Research at King Saud University for financing the study

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Appendix 1: Scales items summary

Constructs	Items	Factor loading	Mean	SD
Consumer brand engagement in social media	I follow companies and their brands using social media	0.661	3.415	1.049
	I participate in the brand engagement activities on social media because I feel better afterwards	0.762	2.389	1.152
	I participate in the brand engagement activities on social media because I am able share my experiences with others	0.755	2.431	1.237
	I participate in the brand engagement activities to enable me reach personal goals	0.698	2.69	1.369
	I participate in the brand engagement activities on social media because of the emotional attachment I develop for the brand	0.706	2.796	1.376
Brand Usage Intention	It makes sense to use brand X following my engagement with the brand	0.714	2.897	1.383
	Even if another brand has the same features as brand X, I would prefer to use brand X.	0.902	3.108	1.386
	If there is another brand as good as brand X, I prefer to use brand X because of my experience with brand X.	0.792	3.476	1.281
	If another brand is not different from brand X in any way, it seems smarter to use brand X because of my knowledge on the brand	0.862	3.151	1.3
Electronic word-of-mouth	Through social media, I can express and share my joy about a brand with others.	0.750	3.611	1.186
	I feel good when I share with others on social media about brands I engage with.	0.749	3.037	1.295

	I tell others about a great experience with a brand I have engaged with on social media.	0.763	3.516	1.26
	My contributions with others on social media show my level of knowledge about the brand.	0.670	4.267	0.917
Information search Intention	Before buying the product, I would obtain substantial information about the different makes and models of products.	0.930	4.421	0.94
	I would acquire a great deal of information about the different makes and models before buying the product.	0.912	4.27	1.022