# INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA CHARACTERISTICS ON CONSUMERS' PRODUCT INFORMATION SEARCH

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**ABSTRACT:** *The study investigated the effect of social media characteristics on product information search. The study employed openness, interactivity, connectedness, conversation and communality as proxies for social media characteristics. The descriptive survey study employed a self-developed questionnaire distributed to 398 students in Federal Universities in South-East Nigeria. A regression model and results showed that social media characteristics (SMC) explained about 99% of product information search for students in federal universities in south-east Nigeria. The coefficient of regression revealed that openness (33%), Interactivity (4.7%), connectedness (4.1%) and Communality (2.1%) had a positive contribution to product information search of consumers.*

**KEYWORDS**: Consumer Behaviour, Social Media Characteristics, Product Information Search, Openness, Interactivity, Connectedness, Communality.

## INTRODUCTION

Consumer behaviour is the process which individuals, groups, or organizations employ "to select, secure, use, and dispose of products, services, experiences, or ideas to satisfy needs and the impacts that these processes have on the consumer and society" (Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2010). This process encompasses all the decisions which help consumers to acquire, consume, and dispose of goods, services, activities, experience, people and ideas by decision-making units (Hoyer, MacInnis, & Pieters, 2012). The crust of consumer behaviour is the explanation of the way the environment impacts consumer perception and behaviour. However, consumer decision-making is the behaviour patterns of consumers that precede, determine and follow on the decision process for the acquisition of need satisfying products, ideas or services (Du Plessis, Rousseau, & Blem, 1991). The consumer decision-making process comprises the various steps a consumer passes through when making a purchase decision (Olshavsky & Granbois, 1979). The conventional five stage processes of consumer buying behaviour are Problem recognition or need identification, search of information, evaluation of alternatives, actual purchase decisions, and post-purchase decision/evaluation.

Amongst these stages, information search provides the impetus for consumers to gather adequate information to enhance selection of the most satisfying product. A consumer undertakes a 'search' into memory to determine if enough is known about the available options to make a choice. If internal knowledge is not sufficient, an external search is required to supplement existing knowledge. Complex buying with its infrequency will involve a greater amount and intensity of search. External search is typically undertaken through personal sources (e.g., friends and family), commercial sources (e.g., advertisements and salespeople), and public media sources (e.g., newspapers, magazines, television, and internet). User reviews

on websites like Amazon.com or TripAdvisor are seen as providing a more complete and reliable product assessment (Kotler & Armstrong, 2014). Search continues until enough information of sufficient quality is gathered, but can be constrained by the availability and quantity of information. While low availability certainly limits decision-making, too much information also hinders good decisions due to limits on the consumers' information processing capabilities. Social media is part of the external source of information search. These information come from 'friends' (Kosavinta, Kosavinta, Krairit, Krairit, Khang & Khang, 2017).

The social media provides avenue for information sharing. It is a means of interaction by way of sharing and discussing information and experiences in an efficient manner, among persons using the electronic and Internet technologies (Parr, 2010). The contents shared on the social media are largely democratic and neutral, and as such consumers begins to accept the social media and makes more frequent visits to various types of social media in search of information for their purchasing decisions (Asma & Misbah, 2018). Consumers obtain vital product information for their purchase decisions through the external online sources like the social media (Wang & Chang, 2013). The more access to information about a product the better enhanced the purchasing decisions of the consumer (Wang, Yu & Wei, 2012). There is therefore a positive relationship between social media characteristics and information search of consumers on social media.

Amongst these characteristics are openness, Interactivity, connectedness, conversation and communality. Openness connotes the willingness of an individual to self-disclose: reveal information about himself or herself as appropriate, which includes the willingness to listen openly and to react honestly to the messages of others (The Communication Blog, 2011). Individual with high level of openness are generally imaginative, creative, open to new and different ideas, and in touch with their feelings (https://www.123test.com/personality-openness). Thus, there is no restriction to belonging to and sharing information on social media platforms. Mayfield (2008) noted that virtually every social media platforms gives free access to joining any use social media and in using such as medium to create, edit, communicate, consumer and comment contents. This characteristics of the social media creates an atmosphere that encourages participation/Interactivity and sharing information.

Interactivity is an important element of the communication process and serves as a relational maintenance strategy that contributes to relational outcomes (Ariel & Avidar, 2015). One main characteristics that engender the use of social media in information search is the user interactivity that is capable of influencing the decision-making process of consumers (Wang & Chang, 2013). The higher the level of interactivity of the social media, the tendency for use in information search. For instance, interactivity exposes consumers to others. As such, Wang and Lin (2011) posit that individuals tend to align the choices of others instead of making their own decisions to avert the cognitive effort needed the handle the too many online information they may be exposed to. Since consumers see product and company information on the social media as reliable, they tend to depend on them for buying decision (Sinclaire & Vogus, 2011).

Social connectedness is the interpersonal, community, and general social ties that exist among people (Teixeira, 1992, cited in Chen, 2014). It is a situation where every user or participant feels accepted, valued, and a sense of belonging (Patterson, 2018). Baumeister and Leary (1995) however, posit that the drive for belongingness encourages meaningful social interactions. Connectedness brings people closer and engages them in continual interaction.

The power of two-way communication inherent in social media enhances the level of conservation among participants. With the social media platforms, the free speech (free actions and activities) that essentially takes place only in a face to face platform can now be broadcast even from a sofa. The social media has become a powerful tool for compelling the world to engage in conservation (Bornfree, 2020).

Social media communities are the host of all the online properties that allows members to relate common experiences and interests (Douma, 2007). Even the word 'social' in 'social media' suggests that the platforms are designed to facilitate communal activities (Villi & Matikainen, 2016). Just like communities in other online and virtual platforms, social media community are formed for or joined by people who share similar interests or background. However, Klinkhoff (2017) noted that social media networks, despite being an extension of the network in the real world, people in the social media network shares more trust than other communities. Gotter (2018) have acknowledged that social media communality is essentially an engine for winning customers and brand loyalty in through the social media platform.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was anchored on the Social Influence Theory (SIT) popularized by Kelman (1958). The SIT posits that an individual's attitudes, beliefs, and subsequent actions or behaviours are influenced by referent others through three processes: compliance, identification, and internalization. Kelman (1958) observed that social influence brings about changes in attitude and actions, and that changes may occur at different "levels." This difference in the level of changes can be attributed by the differences in the processes through which individuals accept influence. Kelman (1958) delineated three primary processes of influence as described below:

- **Compliance** occurs when an individual perceives that a social actor wants him/her to perform a specific behavior, and the social actor has the ability to reward the behavior or to punish the non-behavior (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000)

- **Internalization** refers to the adoption of common self-guides for meeting idealized goals shared with others (Dholakia, Bagozzi, & Pearo, 2004).

- **Identification** occurs when an individual accepts influence because he wants to establish or maintain a satisfying self-defining relationship with another person or a group (Kelman, 1958).

Each of the three processes can be represented by a function of the following three determinants of influence: (a) the relative importance of the anticipated effect, (b) the relative power of the influencing agent, and (c) the prepotency of the induced response (Kelman, 1958). However, for each process, these determinants are qualitatively different. So each process has a distinctive set of antecedent conditions; similarly, each process leads to a distinctive set of consequent conditions.

In the context of this study, the "distinctive set of consequent conditions" can be likened to purchase decision process which can be determined by inherent social media characteristics (antecedent conditions). This supposes that the extent of exposure or involvement with social media characteristics such as openness, participation, conversation, connectedness and

communality, can influence consumer behaviour at all states of decision making. This follows that the degree to which the three primary processes of influence applies (Kelman, 1958).

**Empirical Studies**

Extant literature embracing relationships on social media issues and consumer behaviour were reviewed to appreciate the positions of previous empirical studies. This review cut across broad range of social media marketing concepts carried out across in Nigeria, in different sectors as well as ones done in other climes and economies abroad. Among these studies are equally ones that assessed the extent of and factors that influence social media usages.

Among these studies was the work of Asma and Misbah (2018) which examined the capacity of social media marketing on the perception and purchase decisions of customers in India. The study aimed to specifically itemise the advantages of the use of social media marketing to companies. The study adopted the qualitative deigns to analyse the variables employed. The results showed that social media marketing has a positive effect on consumers' brand awareness & purchase intentions; and negative influence on the overall commitment & involvement of the consumers.

In Nigeria, the work of Mathew, Ogedebe and Ogedebe (2013) examined the influence of web advertising on consumers using 150 respondents from in Maiduguri Metropolis. Data obtained from a structured randomly distributed questionnaires were analysed using percentage frequencies. The results showed positive consumer disposition towards web advertising, and informative attitude towards web advertising. Also, web advertising influences consumers' use of products and services and future purchase. However, the challenges of web advertising on purchasing are erratic electricity supply, lack of access to internet, services not provided as advertised, fraud and products were delivered in bad conditions. The study thus posited that web advertising would continue to influence consumers because of its interactive nature, the global nature, and the opportunities offered to consumers to purchase goods and services through online.

Onyedikachi (2013) investigated the effect of social media advertisements on university students buying decisions in the Eastern Mediterranean University, of the North Cyprus. Consumer (audience) responses to social media advertisements was captured on a questionnaire distributed to 300 students from Nigeria, TRNC, Turkey, Iran, and analysed based on descriptive percentage frequencies. The results showed that university students are involved in spreading information across the web and have redefined their relationships and friendship through the habitual use of Facebook. Further results revealed that gained influences from web usage can be informative or interactive, however, consistent visit to the newspapers and other informative sites increases the informative influences of users while using social channel like twitter, Facebook, and others increases the interactive influences of users more. Thus the study concluded that social media advertisements have a significant influence on university students.

Anh and Tuan (2016) examined the extent to which Facebook social media interactions influence product and advertisement characteristics on consumer buying intentions in Vietnam. In the model, product characteristics proxied by convenience goods and researched goods while advertisement characteristics were represented as design, content and size, as the impulse stimulus that Facebook can influence on buying intention. Questionnaire responses from 100 consumers were analysed using the correction techniques, t-test and KMO and Bartlett's Test.

The results showed that advertisement designs, contents, and sizes are determinants of consumer buying intension. Further results showed that the buying intention for convenience goods on Facebook is higher than researched good. The study also found that gender has not effect on the level of product and advisement characteristics influence on consumer buying intentions.

Smem (2012) aimed to find out how social media affect consumer buying decision process in Ireland. The study employed the use of semi-structured interviews and secondary data to obtained data on three technology products, social interactive tools, and source in the buying decision process. Qualitative narratives on the data showed that social interactive tools is an effective source to acquire information about the products at different prices and evaluate brand choices to make a purchase decision. The study posit that social interactive tools have a high influence on information search about the products at different prices.

Chaturvedi and Gupta (2014) did an exploratory study to understand the effect of social media on online shopping behaviour of apparels in Jaipur Cityan. The study employed the case study design to review the use of social media platforms such as Twitter, LinkedIn, blogs and Facebook affect the online shopping behaviour of apparels in Jaipur city. With the use of analytical charts and tables, the study critiqued extant studies and revealed that e-shopping is more convenient for Jaipurrites since it saves time, less expensive, offers more alternatives & products and services; more female online shoppers prefer than males do; most consumers now prefer to online shopping for Apparels and Accessories.

Ioanăs and Stoica (2014) examined the impact of social media on consumer behaviour. The study employed structured questionnaire to generated data from 116 respondents. The data were analysed using the univariate and bivariate analysis. The results showed that social media has effect on behaviour changes in consumers.

Jindoliya (2017) carried out a study to investigate the effect of social media marketing on the buying behaviour of consumers between the age bracket of 18 and 40years in Navi Mumbai who patronise e-retailing companies. The study employed a 31-item questionnaire distributed to 385 respondents. The results obtained from frequency distribution table and chi-square tests revealed that marketing through the social media has a significant effect the buying behaviour of consumers.

Goyal (2016) was a qualitative study that investigated the effect of social media platforms consumer selection of restaurants to patronage. The study sampled a cross-section of social media platforms including zomato, food panda, swiggyin Jaipur region of India. The content analysis technique of data review was used to examine the various platforms on restaurant patronage. The findings revealed that social media has become a positive channel for consumer buying decisions about restaurant patronage.

In a study carried out in Germany, Raithel (2018) examined "the relationship between consumers' actual behaviour on social media and their purchase behaviour". A sample of 104 respondents were administered with 23-item Likert-type questionnaire. TData collected were analysed using the frequency tables and Cross-tabulations techniques. The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between consumer's actual social media behaviour and purchase behaviour. Further findings showed that social media has higher influence on female than male consumers.

Bharucha (2018) observed continuous growth in the rate social media was becoming popular in India and carried out a study to understand the effect of the flow of social media marketing content on consumer decision-making. Among the specific objectives carried out were the importance of social media to the young users, most frequently used social media, frequency of online purchase, and influence of social media on advertising campaign and the attitude of consumers towards online advertisements. The exploratory research was employed to collect data from 145 young social media users within the ages of 16 to 30 years. The online survey involved a direct internet administration of questionnaire from March 5th to May 16th, in 2017. The data were analysed using frequency distribution and charts. The results showed that WhatsApp and Facebook were the most popular social media platforms, that most visited pages are news, fashion/lifestyle brands and social causes with most given reasons being to keep in touch with family and friends and to view celebrities. Further findings revealed that social media has influence on consumer purchase decisions.

Montague, Gazal and Wiedenbeck (2019) carried out an online survey study in 2017 to examine the impacts of social media marketing on decision-making process of wood products consumers in the USA. Data obtained through questionnaire distribution to 928 respondents was analysed using frequency distribution and charts. Findings showed that over 58% of consumers in the USA are using social media to gather information before purchasing wood products; and top among the social media platforms in use are Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. Further results indicated that social media usage influenced their decision to purchase a wood product.

Pradeep and Nair (2018) examined the influence of social media on buying behaviour in financial assets among IT professionals in Kerala. Data were collected using structured questionnaire administered on 403 professionals working in Information Technology Industry. The analyses from frequency distribution and t-statistics revealed that social media significant influence onall the purchase decision making processes of financial products. Further among the decision buying processes, the influence was ranked more in information search followed by post purchase review, alternative decisions, final purchase and then initiation stage.

Icoz, Kutuk and Icoz (2018) equally examined the influence of social media on decision-making process as well as online buying trends of tourism consumers. The study further employed the Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to regress potential relationships between participant demographics and information search, obtained from social media, use of social media for tourism services, the act of buying, influence and intention to share travel experiences. The analyses revealed that statistically significant relationships between the variables of knowledge about tourism services in the media and perceptions of use, influence on customers, intention to share experiences and the act of buying tourism and hospitality services.

Khatib (2016) investigated the influence of Social Media on consumers' purchasing decision making process, as well as the extent to which social media influence differs at the various stages of the purchase decision process. Social media characteristics (Ease of use, Interaction and broad participation, Fun and entertainment during use, Ease of communicating information to the public, High credibility) were used as independent variables while consumer buying process (Need recognition, Information seeking, Alternatives evaluation, Purchase Decision, Post purchase behaviour) served as the dependent variable. Data were obtained using the questionnaire from 310 individuals in Aseer Region in Saudi Arabia. A multiple regression

analyses were performed for all the five buying decision processes and found that ease of use had significant negative influence on all the process, while other have various directions of significant influences on all the process. Further results indicated that social media influence was more on information post purchase stage, followed by purchase decision stage.

Mainye (2017) investigated the impact of social media on decision making process among the youth in Nairobi, Kenya. The study disintegrated buying decision process into three (pre-purchase stage, purchase stage and post purchase stage) as the dependent variable. The pre-purchase stage had three process which are Problem Recognition, Information Search and Evaluation of Alternatives. The purchase stage also has three processes which are Consumer Attitude, Consumer Motivation and Consumer Perception; and the Post Purchase Stage Analysis fall into Feedback Loop, Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction, and Product Ownership. Sample of 389 were taken from population of 713,437 youths in Nairobi County aged 18-35 years. A descriptive analyses based on mean, standard deviation and charts answer the research questions while correlation analyses tested the hypotheses. The results revealed that social media has significant impact on consumer's pre-purchase, purchase stage, and post-purchase behaviour.

In Sri Lanka, Hewage and Madhuhansi (2019) investigated the influence of social media characteristics on each stage of the consumer buying decision process. Social media characteristics were disintegrated into Openness, Participation, Connectedness, Conversation, and Communality as the independent variable; and consumer buying decision process classified into problem identification, information search, evaluation of alternatives, final purchase and post-purchase stages. A structured Likert-type questionnaire for data collection was self-administered on 147 respondents obtained by snowball sampling method. The results obtained from regression analyses revealed that social media characteristics influence on all the stages of consumer buying decision process while the biggest impacts are on post-purchase stage, information stage and evaluation stage respectively.

Akar, Yüksel and Bulut (2015) examined the effect of social influence on the phases of decision-making process of sports consumers on Facebook in Turkey. A structural model was developed such that phases of the decision making process (need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, actual; purchase and post-purchase evaluation) are independent variables of social influence, which are further linked to social media source and social media activities. The study employed a sample of 392 football fans who followed their favorite football team on Facebook. The results of the structural equation model showed that social influence has the strongest effect on the evaluation of alternatives phase. Social influence source and social platform activities significantly affected social influence; social platform activities had a stronger effect. Additionally, the effect of social influence is differed for some team supporter groups.

In Nigeria, Chukwu and Uzoma (2014) carried out a study that investigated the impact of social media networks on consumers' patronage of products via online businesses of Jumia and Kongacompanies Enugu and Lagos states. The study specifically sought to determine the perception of the consumers toward online shopping and to determine the extent to which the consumers patronize the online retailers. Data gathered from a cross sectional survey of 396 sampled questionnaire analysed using ANOVA and Chi-square. The findings indicated that social media has influenced the rate at which Nigerians patronise online retailers.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the survey research design. The study used primary data obtained mainly through self-developed questionnaire. This source allows the researchers to distribute questionnaire items to respondents from which answers that address the research objectives can be obtained.

The study covered all the students in the Federal Universities in the South East region of Nigeria. Records from the various Registry Department of the universities revealed a total population of 68,392 students in Federal Universities in south-east of Nigeria. It is worthy of note that all the five states in the South East of Nigeria have one Federal University comprising Mikael Okpara Federal University of Agriculture, Umudike, Abia state, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra state, Alex Ekwueme University, Ndufu-Alike Ebonyi State, University of Nigeria (UNN), Nsukka, Enugu state, and Federal University of Technology Owerri, (FUTO), Imo State.

The sample size was 398 students in Federal Universities in South East Nigeria. The mathematical model developed by Yamane (1964) for individual sample sizes for each states of the South East using a sampling error of 5%. The formula is given as:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where
$n$ = Sample size (?)

$N$ = Population (68,392)

$e$ = Margin of Sampling Errors (0.05)

$$n = \frac{68,392}{1+68,392(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = 397.63 \approx 398.$$

The sample size is therefore, 398 undergraduate students of Federal Universities in the South-East Nigeria.

The proportional sampling technique was adopted to distribute the respondents across the five Federal Universities involved in the study. The number of students from each of the five universities are shown on Table 1.

**Table 1: Proportional distribution of sample for the study**

| SN | Name of School | Proportion of Population | Sample Size |
|----|----------------|--------------------------|-------------|
| 1 | Nnamdi Azikiwe University, NAU, Awka, Anambra State | 15,177/68,392 x 398 | 87 |
| 2 | Federal University of Technology Owerri (FUTO), Imo State | 13,927/68,392 x 398 | 85 |
| 3 | University of Nigeria Nsukka, (UNN), Enugu state | 18,267/68,392 x 398 | 105 |
| 4 | Mikael Okpara Federal University of Agriculture, Umudike, Abia state | 12,845/68,392 x 398 | 75 |
| 5 | Alex Ekwueme University, Ndufu-Alike Ebonyi State | 8,176/68,392 x 398 | 46 |
| | **Total** | 68,392 | 398 |

**Instrument for Data Collection**

The instrument is a self-administered and structured questionnaire. It has three sections. Section A is 8-item general information of the respondents which include the gender, age bracket, most popular social media, most visited social media pages, reasons for using social media, how often respondents are on social media, roles for which social media are used, and whiter social media triggers purchase decisions.

Section B comprises the question items that generate data on social media characteristics comprising accessibility, interactivity, connectedness, conversation, communality. Each of the five variables has three questionnaire items making up 15 items for the section B. This section is structured in a 5-point Likert type format of Very Low (VL), Low (L), Moderate (M), High (H) and Very High (VH).

Section C is the question items on consumer purchase. The question items are cue on a 5-point rating scale of Very Low (VL), Low (L), Moderate (M), High (H) and Very High (VH). It has 10 questionnaire items covering the purchase intentions of mobile phone users.

The reliability of the instrument was determined through a test of internal consistency of the questionnaire items in each of the constructs. The internal consistency is usually calculated using an alpha coefficient, which measures the interrelationship between items in the questionnaire (Cortina, 1993). Nunally (1978) argues that a reliability of 0.70 or higher is acceptable. The result of reliability test is shown on Table 2.

**Table 2. Reliability of Research Variables**

| Variables | Chronbach's Alpha | Decision |
|---|---|---|
| Social Media characteristics | 0.83 | Reliable |
| Product Information Search | 0.87 | Reliable |
| Grand overall | 0.85 | Reliable |

*Source: Extracts from SPSS result of Cronbach Alpha reliability test.*

Based on the results in Table 2, all indices are acceptable (>0.7) and this justifies the reliability of the questionnaire.

The multiple regression technique was used. The technique for analyses is the Ordinary Least Square technique. The analyses were processed with the help of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 for windows. The interpretation was based on coefficient of regression and the t-statistics.

The statistics for result interpretation included:

F-Statistics, gives the overall significance of the independent variables (social media characteristics) on the dependent variable (product information search).

Coefficient of Determination ($R^2$), explains the extent to which changes in social media characteristics influences product information search.

Coefficient of Regression, explains the individual contributions of the social media characteristics. Beta was used to rank the contribution of social media characteristics to product information search. The characteristics that has higher coefficient will be ranked first than ones with lower coefficient values.

**The Decision rule for test of hypothesis:** At 5% level of significance, reject null hypotheses for tests with probability estimates lower or equal t0 5% (0.05) and conclude that they are statistically significant. Otherwise, we accept the null hypothesis, when probability estimates are above 0.05, and conclude that there is no overall statistical significance.

**Model Specification**

The ideology on which the model was premised is obtained from the work of Hewage and Madhuhansi (2019) carried out in the western province of Sri Lanka. The previous work posits that the various stages of Consumer Buying Decision Process can be influenced by Social Media Characteristics. In the study, social media characteristics (Openness, Interactivity, Connectedness, Conversation, and Communality) is a function Information Search in Consumer Buying Decision Process. The functional relationship is thus:

$$PIS = f(OP, INTR, CONN, CONV, COMM) \qquad 1$$

This can be rewritten into equation thus:

$$PIS = \alpha_0 + \beta_1 OP + \beta_2 PAT + \beta_3 CONN + \beta_4 CONV + \beta_5 COMM + \varepsilon \qquad 2$$

Where:

OP = Openness

INTR = Interactivity

CONN = Connectedness

CONV = Conversation

COMM = Communality

PIS = Dependent variable as a proxy for product information search

$\alpha_0$ is a constant, $\varepsilon$ is the error term while $\beta_{1-5}$ are the coefficient of the independent variables.

## DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

**Table 3: OLS Regression of the Influence of social media characteristics on product information search**

| Model | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| (Constant) | 128 | .026 | | 4.889 | .000 |
| Openness (OP) | .350 | .010 | .330 | 103.946 | .000 |
| Interactivity (INTR) | .044 | .009 | .047 | 4.708 | .000 |
| Connectedness (CONN) | .015 | .002 | .041 | 7.377 | .000 |
| Conversation (CONV) | .014 | .008 | .014 | 1.728 | .085 |
| Communality (COMM) | .022 | .008 | .021 | 2.577 | .010 |
| Adjusted Coefficient of Determination (Adj R $^2$) = 0.988 F-statistics (P.Value)     = 6758.080 (0.000) Durbin Watson Statistics     = 2.376 | | | | | |

a. Dependent Variable: Product information search (PIS)

The coefficient of determination ($R^2$) showed the explanatory power of social media characteristics on information search behaviour of mobile phone consumers. The result is 0.988 which indicates that about 99% of variations in Social Media Characteristics can explain the product information search of mobile phone users in the universities in the south east Nigeria. This suggests that social media characteristics has large amount of influencing capacity on information search for mobile phones. The value of the Durbin Watson statistics is 2.376. Since the value is approximately 2, it indicates that there is no autocorrelation in the model. Therefore, the model has a good fit.

The result of the standardised coefficient of regression (Beta) was used to answer research question two of the study. The results of the coefficients for openness (OP), Interactivity (INTR), Connectedness (CONN), Conservation (CONV) and Communality (COMM) are 0.330, 0.047, 0.041, 0.014 and 0.021 respectively. The results show that all the social media characteristics have positive influence on information search behaviour of mobile phones. The extent of influences are 33% from OP, 4.7% from INTR, 4.1% from CONN, 1.4% from CONV and 2.1% from COMM.

The t-statistics determines the significance of the individual variables of the social media characteristics (OP, INTR, CONN, CONV, and COMM) while F-statistics tests the overall significance of the model involving all the variables of social media characteristics.

From the result of the t-statistics, the p-values for OP, INTR, CONN, CONV and COMM are 0.000, 0.000, 0.000, 0.085 and 0.010, respectively. The result indicated that p.values for OP, PAT, CONN and COMM are less than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$), while that of CONV is greater than 0.05 ($p > 0.05$). The study thus posits that openness, participation, connectedness and Communality have significant positive influence on information search of mobile phone products in south east Nigeria. However, conversation has positive but insignificant influence on information search of mobile phone products in south east Nigeria.

To test hypothesis two, the result from F-statistics (6758.080) with p.value of 0.000 is considered. Since the p-value is less than 0.05 (p. < 0.05), the study rejected the null hypothesis. It therefore concludes that social media characteristics have significant influence on consumers' product information search.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The result of the study showed that social media characteristics (SMC) explained about 99% of product information search of mobile phone users in the universities in the south east Nigeria. This means that SMC is a near-perfect determinant of information search behaviours of consumers in the mobile phone market in south east Nigeria. The extent of influence is supported by openness (33%), Interactivity (4.7%), connectedness (4.1%) and Communality (2.1%). The result is a congruence with the theories adopted in this study. The study agreed with Theory of Planned Action (TPA) wherein behavioural performance expressed as the five buying decision processes, are largely determined by behavioural control occasioned by the social media characteristics. Validating the Social Influence Theory (SIT) the present study posit that the extent of consumer exposure to social media characteristics has positive influence on product information search behaviour.

All the variables of social media characteristics including openness (0.330, p = 0.000), Participation (0.047, p = 0.000), Connectedness (0.041, p = 0.000), and Communality (0.021, p = 0.010) have significant and positive effects, except for Conservation (0.014, p = 0.085) with insignificant positive influence on information search of mobile phone products in south east Nigeria. This means that social media engagements that exposes users to openness, participation, connectedness and Communality, enhances consumers' information search on new products.

This finding supports the previous empirical literature that social media characteristics has positive influence on product information search behaviour. For instance, Khatib (2016) and Hewage and Madhuhansi (2019) posited that social media characteristics has positive influence on product information search behaviour. Other studies of similar opinion has general findings which posit that social media has positive effect on consumer behaviour (Ioanăs & Stoica, 2014; Mainye, 2017; Icoz, Kutuk & Icoz, 2018; Bharucha, 2018; Pradeep & Nair, 2018; Montague, Gazal & Wiedenbeck, 2019). These studies infer that social media determines consumer behaviour process. Thus, at information search stage, users of the social media could be influence in the product buying process, according to the amount of information available to him or her.

The study has shown that social media characteristics have huge influence on information search. It is therefore recommended that consumers should exploit their social media in enhancing their information search for products to satisfy identified human need.

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