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The influence of Snapchat ads on students buying behaviors in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract. This research is about the influence of Snapchat ads on the students' buying behavior in Saudi Arabia. With the rampant use of social media like Snapchat, there is need to explore how the social media platforms affect people's buying behavior. This study was conducted based on the Uses and Gratification theory (UGT). Ninety-three students from 3 different colleges in Saudi Arabia participated in the study, and answered questions related to their perception and attitude and as well as the impact of Snapchat ads on their buying decisions. The study found a strong link between Snapchat ads, attitudes and buying intentions. In addition, the students were found to be motivated by the presence of Snapchat ads in their buying decisions.

Keywords. Snapchat, buying behavior, students, attitude, Saudi Arabia

Introduction

Social media platforms play a critical role in shaping customer behaviors. The platforms, such as Snapchat, have created a new landscape that provides an opportunity for social connections between companies and social network users. Social network platforms are relevant in decision-making since customers tend to process and select information from the sites or apps before coming up with purchase decisions. In this regard, Snapchat features are relevant because they provide room for brands to influence customer behaviors.

Company advertisers in Saudi Arabia seek to persuade online users to make purchase decisions in favor of their brands. To achieve this aim, brands advertise online, giving consumers a room to choose from the variety products offered (Radcliff and Lam, 2018). According to Makki and Chang (2015), Snapchat is ideal because it provides users with an opportunity to view products and their description, allowing them to make purchasing decisions.

Since a huge amount of money is used in online advertisements, there is a need for researchers to ascertain if an advert's contents are getting the desired audience as well as impacting consumer behavior (Al Saud and Khan, 2013). Therefore, it becomes necessary to establish whether Snapchat has an impressive return on investment when it is used for ads. Khatib (2016) states that, since Snapchat enables users to send a picture within a short time

frame, the platform has become a huge asset for not only marketing but also personal and professional branding.

Although social media has greatly influenced consumer behavior, little is known about the role of Snapchat advertisements on purchasing decisions among young people in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, the study aims to explain why and how Snapchat has impacted the consumer decision-making process since understanding users' needs, behaviors, and types of engagement is critical for developers and marketers.

The study is significant since it will enable readers to appreciate the shopping trends in Saudi Arabia, hence developing a deeper appreciation of the platform as a formidable tool for shopping and promoting brands. Since most studies have concentrated on the role of Facebook and Instagram in influencing consumer behavior, little is known about the role of Snapchat on marketing and behavior change. Therefore, the study aims to determine the influence of Snapchat ads on student buying behaviors in Saudi Arabia. Through a descriptive survey, the research will analyze opinions of participants, an endeavor that would aid managers and policy makers to make necessary adjustments in order to improve market trends in Saudi Arabia.

Background Information

After studying the role of Snapchat on marketing among social groups, Alanzi et al., (2018) revealed that Snapchat has performed well in terms of youth engagement in Saudi Arabia, a country where more than 59% of the population is below the age of 34 years. The study also revealed that Snapchat is also appropriate because it appeals more to young people than other platforms. Alalwan et al., (2017) determined that almost 60% of the users are youths below 25 years. Users can share a Snap picture or video of 10 seconds or less, as well as take snaps to create a story. Moreover, it has little information in the user's profile as it relies more on private snaps and replies compared to other social sites, such as Facebook, where profiles can be accessed by anybody. Therefore, the launch of the social chat application appeared to be an opportunity for companies to reach the youthful audience. It is also relevant to note that cultural and religious factors can shape online social engagement. In this regard, gendered concerns and a strong influence of social collectivities can be used to manage information in a region.

The number of online users tends to vary in accordance with religion, age, and gender. While there have been reports suggesting cultural barriers may hinder Saudi women from accessing social media platforms, new studies reveal the trend has changed. For instance, in 2017, there were nine million daily active users and women who constituted 55% of the population (Arafat and Saba, 2016). Furthermore, the residents of Riyadh and Jeddah use the camera option on Snapchat about 40 times in a day while spending another 35 minutes viewing the posted snaps. In another survey conducted in the country, analysts discovered that more than one-third of the country's population use Snapchat video than any other platform. However, Alalwan et al. (2017) opine that major differences in culture and functionality in the Snapchat community have hindered the use of the platform in business.

Snapchat is a vital tool that uses the advertising feature to influence buying behaviors in Saudi Arabia. Particularly, YouCam, a virtual tool that uses filter technology, can allow people to try on makeup and thereby influence their purchasing behavior (Radcliffe and Lam, 2018). The beauty industry gained significantly from Snapchat ads. For instance, brands such as L'Oréal and Cover girl have invested in Snapchat ads allowing customers to virtually try-on their products, leading to purchases of the items that suit the customer's style (Akerman, 2018). Therefore, Snapchat ads influence the purchasing patterns of Saudis.

Literature Review

The Use Snapchat in Saudi Arabia among Youths

Makki and Chang (2015) note that the contemporary world has seen a shift from traditional methods of advertising, such as billboards, televisions, radios, magazines, and newspapers, to digital advertisements. The advent of internet advertisements has taken a more creative dimension, compelling organizations to use highly creative designs, such as Snapchat, to attract the taste of social media users. Social media marketing has increased in recent years, whereby most people spend more time on social sites like Snapchat compared to other platforms.

In Saudi Arabia, popular social networks include LinkedIn, Snapchat, WhatsApp, Facebook, and Skype. However, recent studies show that Snapchat has become increasingly widespread in the country, especially with regards to sharing statuses, videos, pictures, and text messages (Geronimo, 2018). According to Alanzi et al. (2018), Saudi Arabian youths are ranked eighth globally in terms of Snapchat usage. According to research conducted by Stanger, Alnaghaimshi, and Pearson (2017), social media networks and applications are popular in Saudi Arabia, especially among young people. According to Geronimo (2018), Saudi is the world's largest monthly subscriber of Snapchat, where more than 14 million people are using the platform. The popular platform Facebook has an estimated 15 million users, and there is likelihood that Snapchat may overtake it by the year 2020 (Abodhodair, 2015). Besides, Stanger et al., (2017) highlighted that by 2014, there were more than 35 million internet users in the Arab region, with two-thirds of them being social media users below the age of 25.

According to Khatib (2016), Snapchat is popular among young people because it provides a direct connection with the consumer by creating engaging stories to share with an audience, as well as being tailored to deliver a more casual message compared to other platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter. Snapchat generally integrates advertisement in its business model in a way that is better than other platforms (Abokhodair et al., 2017). According to Stanger, Alnaghaimshi, & Pearson (2017), Snapchat platform has 187 million daily active users worldwide, of which 12.97 million are from Saudi Arabia. Radcliffe and Lam (2018) found that most of Snapchat users utilize the platform to interact socially, while some use the app to discover popular trends in goods and services.

The impact of Snapchat on Buying Behaviors

Radcliff and Lam (2018) did a study to determine the role of social media in influencing the purchase behavior of students in Saudi Arabia. The findings confirmed that social media engagement can increase the likelihood of purchase of products or services. In Saudi Arabia, social sites decreased the importance of brands' physical presence, enabling consumers to turn to social media for information before buying products.

Furthermore, Stanger et al. (2017) found that customer satisfaction shared in the form of stories and comments is a key contributor to purchase based social media. Thus, brand reputation can grow rapidly or suffer tremendously depending on customer satisfaction and activeness on social sites (Alanzi et al., 2018). Since most students in Saudi Arabia are using Snapchat, most companies have turned to the platform as an advertisement base for their products (Stanger et al., 2017). The app can also help companies be aware of customer needs, thus aiding efforts aimed at meeting consumer needs.

Moreover, Snapchat presence eases the growth of brand loyalty as it makes brands visible and increases the consumer's ability to find information about a particular company. Visibility can translate to loyalty, especially if social media marketing is effective (Alanzi et

al., 2018). Customers who follow, share, and like posts on media are more likely to click on links, hence increasing web traffic of the business. Radcliff and Lam (2018) found out that most companies tend to reach consumers while they are online, thus helping build brand loyalty and influence the perceptions of the target populations.

Arafat and Saba (2016) carried out a study to determine the role of Snapchat in influencing consumers to buy products and services. The study used surveys and questionnaires that were administered to university students. The study concluded that introduction of digital platforms has revolutionized businesses in Saudi Arabia. Additionally, Andrews and Shimp (2017) determined that social media platforms in Saudi Arabia are changing rapidly due to technology development. Internet penetration in Saudi Arabia has increased rapidly in recent years, with 89.77% of homes having access to the internet in 2018 either through a Mobile Broadband Network or cell phone package (Stanger et al., 2017). Among Saudi Arabians, internet penetration is estimated at 93%. A survey conducted by Alalwan and others (2017) showed 99.16% of households had access to cell phones, and further revealed that approximately half, or 50.57%, of the households in Saudi Arabia had access to a computer. Furthermore, 92.66% of the population aged 12-65 years used a cell phone in 2018 in one way or another. According to Arafat and Saba (2016), most of the internet usage, 72.54%, in Saudi Arabia is premised on social media activity, which has become a cardinal means of communication and social interaction.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT). Being an audience based approach, the perspective aids in understanding why and how users actively seek out a particular medium to satisfy certain needs. Bulmer and Kartz' model begins from the fact that users tend to seek out media platforms that best fulfill their needs (Katz et al, 1973). The theory explores the effects of media on media, whereby it explains how people use media platforms for their own needs and the resulting gratifications when those needs are satisfied.

Since UGT is an audience-centered perspective in comprehending mass communication (Alqahtani, 2018), the theory can aid the researcher in demonstrating the effects of Snapchat on consumers and why people opt to use Snapchat. The viewpoint holds that media users play an active role in choosing and using media. Therefore, the theory is significant because it will show the effects of Snapchat on the audience in relation to getting information, achieving entertainment, expressing personal identity, enhancing social integration, and achieving escapism.

Historically, several studies have indicated UGT can aid in explaining how individuals use mass communication to satisfy their needs. For instance, West, Turner and Zhao (2010) conducted a study on the effectiveness of UGT on the audience. After interviewing various soap opera fans, the researchers were able to identify three types of gratification based on why people who listen to soap operas tend to be emotional and wishful thinkers. Similarly, Grellhesl and Punyanunt-Carter (2012) as well as Al-Jabri and Sohail and Ndubisi (2015) found that users choose social media on the basis of their moods, implying that their needs would be satisfied through the platform.

U&G and Snapchat

The conducted literature review indicates that the Saudi Arabian students use Snapchat for passing information that includes product buying. It is obvious from the studies that social media such Snapchat have influences on the consumer buying behaviors. The platform is not

only used as mere passing of social information but also to influence or manipulate the users in one way or another. The Uses and Gratification theory (UGT) being an approach used to explain why people prefer a certain social platform and how they use it to satisfy their needs, has it that people have control over their application of a particular platform thus are not passive consumers of the same. In general, UGT explains what these students do with Snapchat and not what Snapchat does to them as well as why they seek Snapchat to achieve some goals such as buying behaviors (Grellhesl and Punyanunt-Carter 2012). The Saudi Arabian students use Snapchat in line with the Uses-and Gratification Theory. They prefer Snapchat over other social media platforms due to the set gratifications that they opt to achieve-they want a platform that provide space for absolute reviews of the products among real consumers.

How U&G is used to study social media

The U&G is an important theory investigating how humans interact with social media. People turn to social media to meet needs that were met by just talking and interacting with people. Studies have identified a number of need categories addressed through social media. These include cognitive needs, where people use social media to remain up-to-date with current issues through news. In this category, people also watch digital media for educational purposes (Kane, 2015). Affective need is met when people turn to social media to form an emotional connection with the media or when they use the platform for entertainment. The personal integrative needs are met through social media when people develop connections with certain character that may even end up being role models (Kane, 2015). Therefore, researcher could use these underpinning to create studies that could help elucidate people's interaction with social media.

Research Questions

1. For what purpose and how frequent do these students use Snapchat?
2. What are the perception and attitude that are associated with Snapchat ads with regards to these students?
3. Are these students motivated by the presence of Snapchat ads in their buying decisions?

Research Method

Sample

The study focused on 93 Saudi students in 3 different colleges in Saudi Arabia and how Snapchat ads impact their buying behaviors. The participants had to be active Snapchat users. The researcher applied the snowballing technique to target the research population. Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling technique that creates objective questionnaire and excludes biases. Handcock and Gile (2011), in their analysis on snowball sampling, concluded that the sampling procedure is among the key elements of network sampling utilized unofficially in various forms of research. Per their suggestion, the snowball-sampling method helped the researcher to access populations that could otherwise be impossible using standard sampling processes. To gain as many participants as possible, the researcher sent the link for the questionnaire through social media to two students, who would then be asked to pass the questionnaire on to other students. Sampling was done through a questionnaire that will contain responses such as "Agree" or "Disagree."

The participants clicked on the link of this study's survey when they received the link through social media platforms asking them for participation. There were four requirements to

be participants at the beginning of the survey that asked the participant “Must be 18 years old or older” the second requirement was “Must be a citizen of Saudi Arabia” and the third requirement was “Must currently be a student attending a college or university” and the four “Must have a valid Snapchat account” If the participant clicked you do no to any of the requirements, the survey automatically ended.

Procedure

The study used an online survey to collect data from 93 Saudi students. Ideally, internet usage is growing in the region and thus, using an electronic survey would be appropriate for the topic. Similarly, online surveys can be distributed, accessed, completed, and returned within a short time. Although designing an online study can be time-consuming, it has advantages, among which is ease of data storage. The study took place between March 23, 2019, and April 9, 2019. Bryman (2017) states that this structure is the most convenient way to obtain data for a quantitative analysis as the research would only count the number and percentage of each answer and build the table for further investigation.

Measures

The scale items used in this study measured using a five-point Likert-type scale. To measure the purposes and how frequently the participants use Snapchat, four items; to view products, get up-to-date entertainment, learn about the current trends and to purchase products against five-point scale ranging from ‘Never’ use the Snapchat for that purpose to ‘Most frequently’. To measure perception and attitude, four items would be used in each case against five-point scale of ‘Strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’. To measure motivation, the students would be asked if the Snapchat ads influence their buying decisions against five-point scale that ranges from ‘extremely likely’ to ‘Not likely’. The measures revolve around various gratifications such as social, content, process and technology gratifications. More details of these measures are shown in the appendix below.

Results

The majority of the students, 85%, were undergraduate students. Only 10 participants were master’s students. All the participants were aged between 18 and 30 years. The majority of the respondents, 85%, were aged between 18 and 25 years. The rest 15% were aged between 26 and 30 years. All the respondents were users of Snapchat. The respondents were made aware of the study’s objectives and their roles in the study if they chose to participate. All respondents gave informed consent before being study participants.

The majority, forty-three respondents, 46%, indicated that they have between 100 and 250 friends on snapchat (*see fig 1 below*). Twenty respondents cited that they have between 250 and 350 friends on Snapchat. Twelve respondents stated that they have between 350 and 450 friends on Snapchat. Ten respondents stated that they have less than 100 friends on Snapchat. 8 students stated that they have a following of less than fifty people on Snapchat.

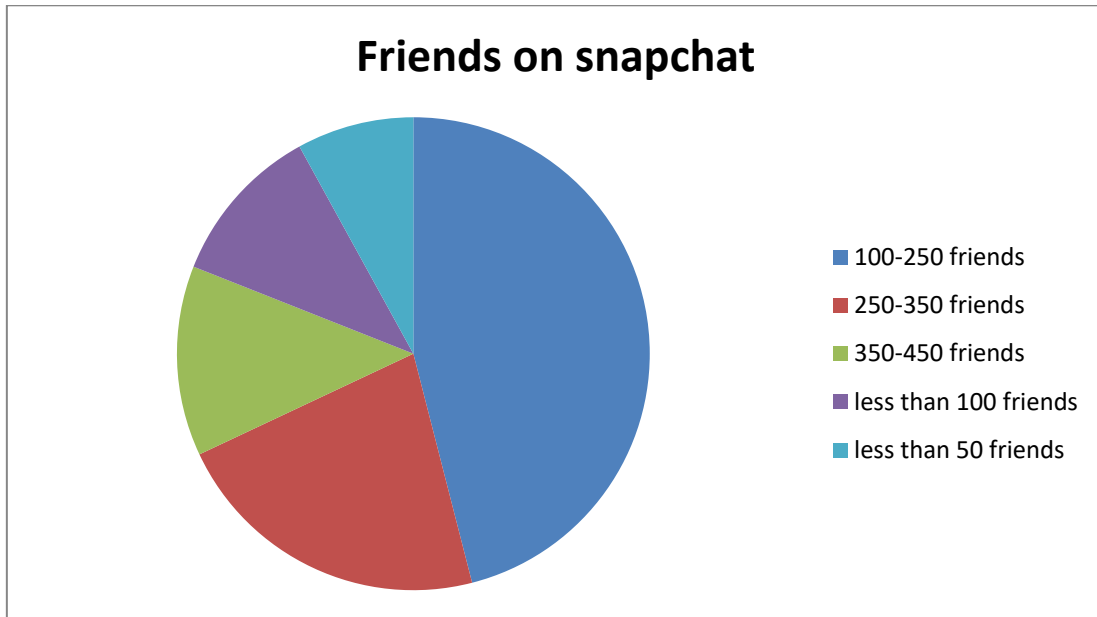


Fig 1; Students response on the number of friends they have on snapchat

The first research question dwells on frequency of Snapchat use as well as the reasons for use. Fifty-five respondents representing fifty nine percent of the respondents indicated that they use Snapchat an average of 30 minute to one hour per day (*see fig 2 below*). Extrapolating this data, it is apparent that the student use Snapchat for more than four hours per week. Twenty four respondents representing twenty six percent of the study participants stated that they use the platform for more than 15 minutes but less than thirty minutes a day. Thirteen respondents representing fourteen percent of the respondents stated that they use Snapchat for less than fifteen minutes daily. One respondent stated that they use the platform for more than one hour each day.

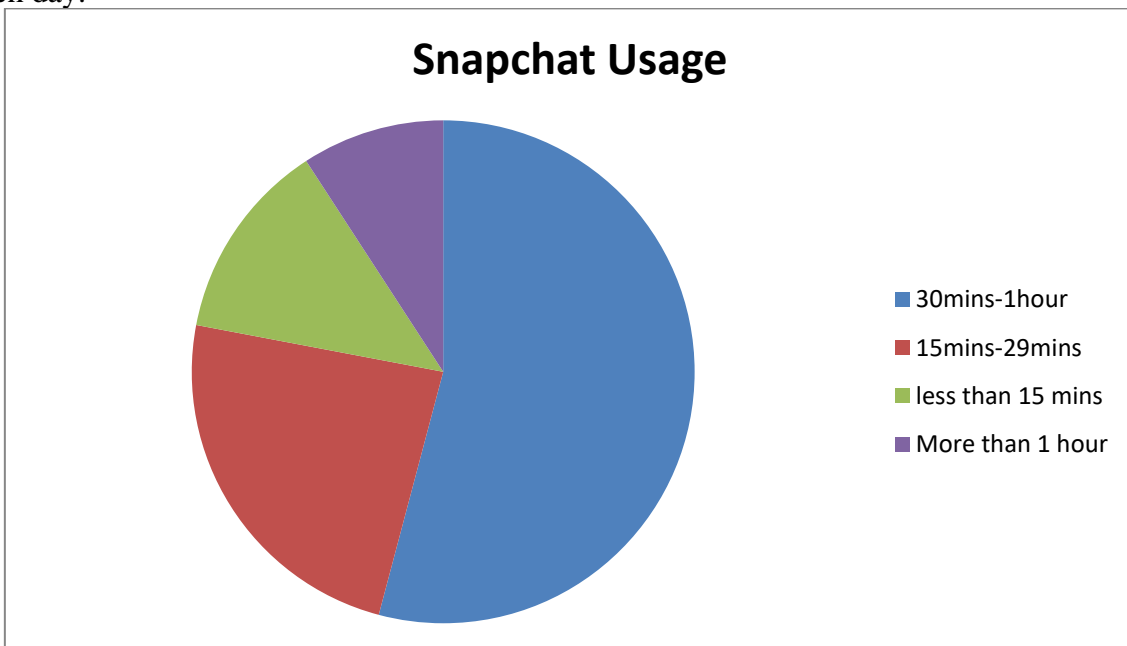


Fig 2: Students frequency of Snapchat use

All respondent stated that they use Snapchat to catch up on the lives of their friends and celebrities, though they cited that Snapchat is a great platform to learn more about new products and current trends in fashion and technology. All the participants stated that they use the platform to catch up on the social lives of their friends and celebrities (*see table 1 below*). All the participants also stated that they use the platform to view products that they are interested in purchasing. Seventy-five participants stated that they would use the platform to learn more about products they are interested in buying to make a decision to buy the product. All the participants stated that they use the platform to learn about the newest trends

	N
Use Snapchat to catch up on the lives of their friends and celebrities	93
To view products	93
Learn more about products they are interested in buying	75
To get up-to-date entertainment	93
To learn about the newest trends	93
To purchase products	93

Table 1: Reasons of using snapchat

The second research question of the research is about the perception and attitude that the students have regarding Snapchat. All of the respondents cited that they gain perceptions about products on Snapchat. They argued that the thoughts and feelings of their friends online as well as the general perception by peers helped influence their perception. Fifty four percent of respondents agreed that they felt as part of the Snapchat family. Twenty-seven percent strongly agreed that felt as part of the Snapchat family. Nineteen percent were neutral on the question. Eighty five percent of the respondents agreed that Snapchat was part of their everyday activity. Four percent agreed that Snapchat was part of their everyday life while 11% were neutral. All respondents stated that they did not want to see Snapchat ad when using Snapchat. All respondents stated that they disagreed with the statement that “I will not buy if Snapchat ads are missing from the Snapchat”

The third research question of the study is that are the students motivated by the presence of snapchat ads in their buying decisions. Seventy percent of the respondents stated that they were likely to purchase an item on Snapchat when there are ads. Twenty percent were neutral on whether they would purchase items because of ads on Snapchat. The rest were extremely likely to purchase an item on Snapchat when there are ads. Sixty-three percent stated that they would use Snapchat ads to purchase products rather than other platforms. Twenty percent stated that they were neutral on using Snapchat over other platforms while 7% stated they were less likely to use Snapchat over other platforms for purchases. As stated earlier, students find Snapchat to be important in making some of their purchasing decisions. These decisions are oriented to product details and specifications as well as current trends and emerging technologies in fashion and technology industry respectively.

Discussion

From the evidence presented above, it is apparent that social media plays a critical role in product promotion. The majority of people, and especially the younger generation uses social media often. Some of the common social media uses include maintaining a social life online, catching up with current trends and emerging technologies and most importantly finding out more about products to buy.

Organizations and business have identified this trend as an opportunity to market their products. They use social media platforms to market their products and services. Numerous studies have been conducted on various social media platforms and how they influence marketing decisions. Some of the social media platforms that have been investigated include Facebook and Instagram. However, very few studies have focused on the use of Snapchat as a marketing platform.

The study shows that nowadays people highly depend on Snapchat for buying purposes and also for entertainment. This research should be practically implemented on all students regarding their time wastage in terms of studies. The results obtained from the study will be properly analyzed and observed under the light of issues students due to excessive usage of Snapchat. After final research once it is accepted, it should be implemented on practical grounds to improve student's mental stability and knowledge level. Moreover, the outcomes appeared there are no static importance contrasts in the general level of the understudy's assessment of the Snapchat ads impact on the purchase aim perspectives because of utilization hours, age and staff, while the outcomes appeared there are static importance contrasts for the support of huge age respects the assessment of understudies with certain impacts of Snapchat promotions, and static hugeness contrasts because of kind of school.

As shown by the primary data collected student's account for some of the major users of social media. They use Snapchat for sufficient amounts of time to view adverts and catch up on latest trends. Some students reported that they use Snapchat to view products they would buy. The majority of respondents cited that Snapchat plays a critical role in the attitudes they develop towards products advertised through the platform. Therefore, organizations and businesses could utilize the platform to market their products and appeal to the customers.

Conclusion

Social media have been identified as very efficient marketing platform. However, it is not apparent the extent to which the various social media platforms contribute towards organization's marketing strategies. Snapchat is one of the least explored social media platforms. However, the evidence from this study shows that the platform is often used by students for social purposes as well as making important decisions on purchases. However, there is need for more research on the subject; particularly the extent to which various platforms contribute to organization's marketing strategies. This could be by way of assessing how well the users.

Future Research

Taking this research as reference, further research can be done on any other type of social application. Social applications like snap chat and Instagram plays a very pivotal role in bringing people together but at a same time it wastes people time. So, in addition a statistical analysis block should be added with the social app so that data can be fetched at run time easily.

Future research can also be done in terms of mobile robotic apps. Simply data and buying trends will be entered into the memory of the robot. The robot will then automatically

pick what is more desired by its owner or customer. The main limitation of using this type of research on practical basis is that it will require a large-scale verdict from the students that they will use the app in a calculated way. Obviously, this type of implementation will surely discourage the frequent use of app at the same time, which is again not good in terms of business for any software making organizations.

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