A study on the effects of social media on young consumers' buying behaviors

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Abstract

Consumers started to use Internet and web tools more today thanks to the rapid development of technology and communication channels. The most important one of these tools is social media. Consumers access to information that they need about goods and services to be purchased by means of social media to a great extent. It is clear that today especially the popular social networks of social media elements such as Facebook and Twitter have been great consumer markets. Therefore, this study aims to know about social media which affects our live in recent years and brings a new dimension to Internet and to determine the effects of social media networks on purchasing behaviors of consumers. The study group consisted of a total of 688 young consumers between the age group of 18-24 years who use social media platforms and have an account in any of the social networks. Random sampling method was used to determine the study group. Face-to-face interview technique was used to obtain the data of the study; the questionnaire form and the scale developed by the researcher were taken into account. The first chapter of the questionnaire form consists of questions to determine demographic information of young people and the second chapter consists of questions to determine the duration and aim of young people to use Internet and social media. In the last chapter of the form, 5-point Likert attitude scale was used to determine the relationship between purchasing behaviors of young people and social media. The reliability and validity studies of the scale were performed. The Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of the scale which was prepared to determine the relationship between purchasing behaviors of consumers and social media was .965. SPSS 16.0 package program and suitable statistical techniques were used to analyze the data obtained from the answers of social media users. The study results indicate that social media tools create a statistically significant difference on purchasing behaviors of consumers according to age groups and educational status of them (p<.01).

Keywords: Social media, social networks, social media and consumer behaviors;

1. Introduction

New communication technologies offer media based sharing and discussion, and create environments where people can share their ideas, products and services. Social media has become a preferred internet application and is the most important communication tool today. As the frequency of using the Internet increases, the rate of social media use has also increased (Dryer, 2010).

Social media grows rapidly and is an indispensable part of every organization. In the last two years, social media use has become one of the most rapidly growing activities worldwide since the invention of television. Within 30 years, radio reached 50 million listeners, while it took only 13 years for television to reach 50 million viewers. Strikingly, the internet reached 50 million users in only four years, indeed, Facebook reached that figure in one and half years. Designed for students at Harvard University in 2004, Facebook is a single phenomenon. In 2009,
Facebook had 100 million members, and by the end of 2010, that number increased to 500 million users worldwide. As social media grows at a faster rate than other communication programs, the importance of social media increases and following its development has become even more challenging (Civelek, 2009; Şener, 2012).

By the year 2013, more than half of 2.4 billion internet users have become members of and use the services offered by a social network. According to the "Global Social Network" survey conducted worldwide in 2012, the following statistics were found: in Europe there are 518,512,109 users, Asia has 1,076,681,059 users, Africa has 167,335,676 users, North America has 273,785,413 users, South America has 254,915,745 users and 24,287,919 users at sea. While 50% and 67.6% of internet users were members of a social network in 2012 and 2013 respectively; this rate is expected to rise to 70.7% in 2014. Even when excluding the population of China from this calculation, "Facebook", as a social network, has more than a billion members. The top five countries that have the most Facebook members in the world are: Bangkok-Thailand (12,797,500), Jakarta-Indonesia (11,658,760), Sao Paulo-Brazil (8,791,700), Istanbul-Turkey (8,325,860), and Mexico-Mexico City (7,743,220). The most prominent social networks worldwide are Badoo, Cyworld, Diaspora, Facebook, Friendfeed, Friendster, Google, Hi5, Hyves, Ibibo, Jaiku, Myspace, Netlog, Nextdoor, Orkut, StudiVZ, Tagged, Tribe.net, Tuenti, Tumblr, Twitter, Unthink, Vkontakte, You Tube, Hub Culture, Linkedin, NationalField, Plaxo, Viadeo, XING, and WiserEart. Globally, each month, approximately 800 million users visit "YouTube" and each minute, at least 7000 videos are shared via "Twitter." Twitter is used mostly in USA, Brazil and Japan. Considering all these figures, it is predicted that in the near future, an important part of internet use will be through social media (Global Social Network Statistics, 2012).

Unlike traditional media, social media impacts a wider audience at a greater pace. The term social media can be defined as social platforms that enable users to share information, ideas or interests, and interact, via the internet or mobile systems. These social platforms include some applications such as chat rooms, discussion forums, location services, social networking, social guides, social bookmarking, social status networks, weblogs, blogs, podcasts, video casts, wikis, Facebook and twitter.

In this new order created by new media and communication technologies, companies have started to integrate systems and adapt social media programs to meet the needs of their individual organization. The social media concept, which is the name of the whole social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Friendfeed, Flickr and blogs, has been one of the important fields for businesses. Companies have designed entire departments committed to the design and control of social media within their organizational structures (Miller, 2009; Kelsey, 2010).

As a result of global competition, businesses have gone beyond the traditional boundaries of purchasing, selling or other commercial transactions and consequently, the boundaries of national markets have disappeared and become indistinct. A new global vision requires businesses to carry on their commerce globally rather than in one country, and hence to use their core skills and information efficiently. Therefore, social media has become very important tool with regard to the effective dissemination of information.

Social media is a space in which almost everyone using the Internet participates. To take place in this area has been a necessity not only for individuals but also for corporations. This is because of the necessity to take place where the target mass takes place. To "be" in this space does not refer only to building a web site for a company, advertising on the Internet or to have a web site; rather it refers to conducting marketing activities on social media as a breathing brand. This is because, social media directly communicates with its target group. The most important benefit of this communication is the strengthening of brand perception and brand dependence. A company using social media effectively can easily know its current and potential consumers and determine their characteristics and preferences. As an area where people share their ideas and suggestions, social media subsequently gains more importance. Furthermore, user ideas, experiences and thoughts about companies are available for other users (Van, 2006; Sonia, 2007).

Today consumers exchange their ideas in discussion forums that are offered by social networks with the purpose of asking for help, information and suggestions before buying a product. According to research published by SMG Knowledge (2012) and conducted by the Global Web Index on Changes in Consumer Buying Behaviors Caused by Internet (in 2011, 89% of active users in Turkey research online before purchasing, 62% consider researching
products or brands as the most important reason to use the internet, 72% commented on products or brands in at least one online platform, and 52% stated that a suggestion made by a foreigner in an online platform created a positive impression about a brand (SMG Knowledge, 2012). In addition, a study titled, "Social Networking Sites as Advertisement Environment" conducted by Hacıefendioğlu (2011) revealed that consumers are affected by the views of their friends on social media while deciding to buy, and friends opinions guide consumers to choose a certain product or company (Hacıefendioğlu, 2011).

For this reason, it is beneficial to investigate how target consumers use social media and how they behave while purchasing a product. This study aims to introduce social media penetrating into our lives in recent years and bringing a new dimension to internet and to determine the effects of social media networks on buying behaviors of young consumers in different age groups and educational levels.

2. Social Media Concept

Previously, activities of users on the Internet were limited to reading and shopping; however, advanced Internet technologies have brought a new dimension to these activities. Now users can create content and share it without the need for technical expertise. This new internet concept that is based on interactivity and communication, and makes the rapid and free sharing of information possible, is called "Web 2.0".

The Web 2.0 concept refers to second generation internet based web services; namely, social networking environments, web based encyclopedias, forums, podcasts and other environments where online sharing is possible. For many people, Web 2.0 is a concept representing technologies that make our lives easier such as blogs, wikis, podcasts and RSS. These technologies socialize the internet (Hay, 2009).

Web 2.0 is a catalyst that reflects and accelerates changes in technology and society. By means of this innovation, consumers can give feedback and share their ideas with others. In today’s world, individuals are free to make their own choices and decisions based on the information presented to them. This situation changes the methods that businesses use to communicate with consumers. In the past, companies could decide the image presented to consumers. However, they have lost this control with the arrival of Web 2.0. Today, companies must be in constant contact with consumers in order to control their image. In this way, anyone using the internet is included in a bilateral communication process.

Pursuant to the Web 2.0 concept, the social media concept was created. The beginning of social media came in the form of offering Web 2.0 to the general public. Social media is a media system that turns unilateral information sharing into a bilateral and simultaneous one with the public offering of Web 2.0.

The term, social media, was used for the first time by Chris Shipley, the co-founder of San Francisco based Guidewire Group. This concept includes all tools enabling online communication and information and supporting participation and cooperation. Innovations such as corporate and personal blogs, professional and social networks, cyber worlds, and social bookmarking, can be counted within the social media category.

YouTube, Twitter, Linkedin and Facebook, known by almost everyone today, are the most important components of social media. Social networks create environments that can facilitate communication within the business world or can bring individuals with common interests together. In other words, social media is the common name of online tools through which people share their point of view. While some people create content, others search on, investigate and disseminate this content. Social media is (Akar, 2010) based on connections between relationships, people and organizations.

Social media is generally defined as, "Web 2.0 based sites which bring different people together in a virtual platform and ensure a deeper social interaction, stronger community and implementation of cooperation projects" (Brown, 2009). The most frequently used definition for social media is "online platforms that people use to share their ideas, experiences, perspectives and communicate with each other" (Kahraman, 2010).

According to Weber (2009), social media is "online environments where people with common interest share their ideas and comments. This is consistent with Goeldner and Ritchie (2009), who state that social media is "online content created by Internet users rather than professional writers and journalists and reached by other users via interactive technology. "Further, Hatipoğlu explains that social media creates, "internet platforms where people have
contact with each other by means of photographs, videos and audio files. "Finally, the social media concept is based on "communication" and "sharing" (Hatipoğlu, 2009).

To summarize, social media is an internet based service that enables people to communicate with each other about their mutual interests and activities. Web sites or applications that gain value through user interaction and participation can be defined as social media. In order to define a web site or application as social media, it should have independent users or members, should be free of time and place restriction, should allow user based content, and guarantee interaction between users (Zorlu, 2011).

2.1. Social Media and Consumer Behavior Relation

In our day, social sharing and personal relationships are of great importance as they can provide financial support for commercial activities. During the past five years, social networking sites have been the preferred communication method for many people. Especially since 2010, the popularity of social media tools has rapidly increased. Social networking sites such as Facebook, twitter, blogs and wikis, and multimedia sharing sites such as YouTube and Flickr, have instigated deep-rooted change in the communication process. While web sites can be used as important tools for marketing since they provide an opportunity to advertise and sell products, social networks are known as tools that empower social and economic networks. Such social networks are one of the most important marking methods in media.

Social network sites where millions of people meet virtually are great markets for communication and interaction. Social networks are perfect tools for the dissemination of marketing messages, creating a wider product representation and company administration (Dunne, Lawlor & Rowley, 2010).

The penetration of media into the entire society and the increase in time that consumers spend on the Internet and social media also has impact on commercial life. For this reason, consumption trends have changed. Consumers and sellers using magazines, interviews and catalogs and such traditional tools are replaced by those shopping on web sites through e-mails and sharing networks in social media without any need for a physical environment. The effective role that social media plays on the increased times spent on the Internet, and consumers’ departure from traditional shopping environments, cannot be ignored. Social media tools have turned into environments where products are offered, opportunities are discussed, and brands are praised and criticized (Gürsakal, 2009).

The information sources that today’s active consumer’s use for products or services they want to buy are constantly changing. Consumers use social media considerably to access the information that they need. Social networking sites greatly affect product and service purchasing decisions as they provide platform on which consumers share their experiences with each other.

Social media changes consumers ’decision-making process and their buying behavior and adds a new factor to this process that cannot be controlled by businesses. Social media affects the consumer and other users while it is also affected by other users. In this sense, we can divide the effects of social media on consumer behaviors into three groups:

- Behaviors affecting consumption (positive verbal communication, negative verbal communication, opinion leadership)
- Behaviors affected by others regarding consumption (searching for information on products, searching for others’ opinions)
- Consumer behaviors towards using social media as a communication tool to report satisfaction or dissatisfaction following product purchase (Odabaş & Odabaş, 2010).

Consumer behaviors are differentiated by social media. Demographic, psychological, socio-cultural and situational factors that affect consumer behavior within the general consumer behavior model are also valid for social media. Businesses can carry on more effective social media marketing activities by categorizing social media
users by demographic features such as age, gender, educational level, geographical location and occupation/income level. Similarly, psychological factors such as learning, motivation, perception and personality are remarkable features that businesses can use during the social media marketing process. Socio-cultural factors such as family, psychological counseling group, social class and cultural variables offer advantages for businesses to divide, locate and target social media marketing as these factors determine consumers’ use of social media (Constantinides & Stagno, 2011).

Consumers’ satisfaction or dissatisfaction reported on social networking sites offer important opportunities for businesses to predict the buying decisions of other consumers. Businesses should closely follow, understand and efficiently use social media in order to have a sustainable competition advantage. For this purpose, the development of strategies and policies specific to social media environments is crucial for the business world.

Due to the increasing use of the internet, consumers exchange their ideas within the context of discussion forums that are facilitated by social networks with the purpose of asking for help, information and suggestions before buying a product or service. Social networks have become platforms that businesses consider for their brands, images and sales revenue. Today, people spend so much time on these platforms that it is normal for businesses to consider these platforms as advertisement areas and social media users as potential consumers (Iyengar, Sangman & Gupta, 2009).

Marketers can follow consumers, determine the factors affecting their ideas and choices and steer their preferences via social media. It is observed that especially popular social networks provide large consumption markets and consumers are willing to share their ideas and demands with companies on these networks (Smith, 2009).

In the last ten years, changing consumer behaviors and technology have altered market dynamics. Internet and social media are in the lives of the consumer who, ten years ago, used to get their information from work or school, reading the newspaper or magazines, and from watch television. The importance of social networks to brand communication is appreciated by everyone and all brands from white goods to textiles attempt to raise their visibility by using different visual strategies. While the visitors to social network platforms surpass hundreds of millions, hundreds of new social networks increase their effect and importance in both the commercial and political arena. Social networks are regarded as the most common internet activity all around the globe. Furthermore, instant messaging, independent of time and place restriction, directly affects consumers’ instant shopping decisions.

Two-thirds of the world population visits a social network site and the time spent on social networks increases three times faster than the time spent on the Internet in general. Innovative and energetic corporations that want to access target masses more rapidly and easily use social media effectively (Zorlu, 2011). Facebook, twitter, Myspace, LinkedIn, g+, and blogger are the most commonly used social networks. Facebook, among them, is the most commonly used social network site in Turkey. According to Household Use of Information Technologies Research conducted by TÜİK (Turkish Statistics Institute) 2012, there are 1.9 billion internet users in the world. In Turkey, household access to the internet is 47.2%. According to the Socialbakers’ report on Facebook use (2012), there are 750 million Facebook users in the world and 31.2 million of them are in Turkey. Turkey ranks as sixth in the world and the first in Europe. According to reports of TÜİK 2012, one out of every three people using Internet shop online and nine out of every ten has a Facebook account (TÜİK, 2012).

As it can be seen, consumption that is moved to cyber environments and social networks creates significant tools for both consumers and sellers alike. The dissemination of social networks into people’s personal lives has affected manufacturers’ strategies. Manufacturers create accounts on social networks and arrange applications, designs and promotions through these accounts. These promotions and advertisements are posted on the Facebook wall directly and links related to the sale of products are also shared on Facebook. These links that are shared by the company itself are then shared between social media users, and the contents are explored and comments are added. This circle continues until it reaches millions of people. In this way, manufacturer’s market their products by means of these networks and have the opportunity to reach the target mass immediately (Boyd & Ellison, 2008).
3. Methodology

The study group used in this study is made up of young consumers in Turkey who have different demographic and socio-economic features and use social media tools. The study group is very large; the study sample consists of 688 students from different faculties (law, information, engineering, technology, health sciences and dentistry) at Gazi University. These students, who are within the age range of 19-24 years of age, and visit social media as members or users, were selected by a random sampling method. In order to determine the effect of social media on consumer buying behavior, questionnaires prepared by the researcher were conducted using a face-to-face interviewing technique. A 30-item scale was prepared by the researcher to determine the relationship between consumer buying behaviors and social media. Opinions of specialists studying consumer behaviors were asked for the scale’s content validity. Following this review of the scale’s content validity, 11 items were removed. In the scope of the pilot study, the scale was firstly conducted on 204 university students in the law, engineering, and dentistry faculties of Gazi University. The main study is conducted on 688 university students of which 231 are in social sciences (Law and Information Faculty); 228 are in physical sciences (Engineering and Technology Faculty) and 229 are in health sciences (Health Sciences and Dentistry Faculty) at Gazi University. The data obtained by the participants in line with the answers of social media users was assessed using the SPSS 16.0 package program. The scale was prepared with 19 items. Factor analysis was used to determine the structure validity of the scale. According to the results of the Principal Components Analysis, Kaiser-Meyer Olkin (KMO), the value is found to be .956. The value found using the Bartlett test (12702490, sd=171) is significant (p<.001). The KMO value over 0.60 and significant result of the Bartlett test show that factor analysis is appropriate to be done. (Büyüköztürk, 2007).

Factor loads obtained as a result of factor analysis conducted with the principal component analysis are presented in Table 1. There 40 factor loads on the usability of items in the scale and the difference between load values of each item is less than 10. Factor analysis is conducted with the Varimax Rotation Method and as a result it was determined that the scale developed to determine consumer buying behaviors and social media relation has a single factorial structure. This factor explains the 41.475% of total variance. The item factor loads differ between .624 and .823.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor Loads</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>16</th>
<th>17</th>
<th>18</th>
<th>19</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.763</td>
<td>.801</td>
<td>.646</td>
<td>.724</td>
<td>.779</td>
<td>.621</td>
<td>.693</td>
<td>.762</td>
<td>.774</td>
<td>.719</td>
<td>.754</td>
<td>.662</td>
<td>.696</td>
<td>.823</td>
<td>.803</td>
<td>.793</td>
<td>.805</td>
<td>.818</td>
<td>.776</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reliability of the scale is calculated with alpha coefficient developed by Cronbach. The reliability coefficient calculated for a psychological test to be .70 and over is regarded to be sufficient for the reliability of test scores (Büyüköztürk, 2007). The scale’s Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient, prepared to determine the relationship between consumer buying behaviors and social media, is .965.

4. Findings and Evaluation

4.1. Demographic Features of Participants

50.1% of 688 young people in the study are females and 49.9% are males. 34.5% of them are within the age range of 19-20, 34.1% are between 21-22, and 31.4% are between 23-24 years of age. More than half of the participants (78.5%) are undergraduates. The faculties from which the participants come are social sciences (33.6%),
physical sciences (33.1%) and health sciences (33.3%). Monthly income of participants are similar (less than 500 TL 31.4%; 501 TL-1000 TL 34.0%; 1001 TL-1500 TL 34.6%) (Table 2).

Table 2. Demographic Distribution of Participants (N=688)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>345</td>
<td>50.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>49.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-20</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>34.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-22</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>34.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23-24</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>31.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Degree Program</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>78.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Field</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Sciences</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>33.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Sciences</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>33.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Sciences</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Monthly Income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 500 TL</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>31.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>501 TL - 1000TL</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>34.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1001 TL – 1500TL</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>34.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2. Attitudes of Participants Towards Buying Behaviors on Social Media

In order to determine whether the attitudes of participants towards buying behaviors and social media relations differs by age groups or not, single factor variance analysis (Anova) was conducted (Table 3).

Table 3. Results of Single Factor Variance Analysis on the Differentiation of Participant Attitudes towards Buying Behaviors and Social Media Relations by Age Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Squares Mean</th>
<th>sd</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19-20</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>41.695</td>
<td>20.848</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>27.223</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>ages of 19-20 and 23-24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-22</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>524.587</td>
<td>.766</td>
<td>685</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
<td>ages of 21-22 and 23-24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23-24</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>566.282</td>
<td>687</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>688</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Table 3, it was found that participant attitudes towards buying behaviors and social media relations differs by age groups (F(2-685)=27.223, p<.01). In order to determine between which groups the difference occurs, the Schfee test was conducted. Accordingly, the difference occurs between those in the age groups of 19-20 and 23-24; and those in the age groups of 21-22 and 23-24.

In order to determine whether the attitudes of participants towards buying behaviors and social media relations
differs by educational level or not, t-test was conducted (Table 4).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Level</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Α</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>sd</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Associate Degree Program</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>686</td>
<td>6.666</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>688</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

According to Table 4, it was found that participant attitudes towards buying behaviors and social media relations causes a significant difference with regard to educational level (t(686)=6.666, p>.01). The average attitudes of participants in an associate degree program towards buying behaviors and social media relations is ( =4.29) and the average attitudes of those in an undergraduate programs ( =3.74). These values suggest that participants enrolled in an associate degree program are affected by social media in their buying behaviors more than those in an undergraduate program.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

In recent years, the internet has penetrated our lives and become an indispensable element with its advanced technology. Especially the opportunities offered by web 2.0 technology have increased the time people spend on the Internet. These kinds of technological developments have brought a different dimension to human life. Today, people can access the internet anywhere and share their ideas and feelings with their friends. Consumers can easily share shoes in a shop, a meal in a restaurant or a video with people in their profiles and can reach thousands of people in only a few seconds. It is possible to reach hundreds and even millions of people through means of social networking sites.

Social media minimizes and even removes time and place restrictions and thus minimize the economic restrictions for businesses. Today, while large-scale businesses use social media with the purposes of drawing attention, standing out amongst other competitors and creating brand commitment, small-scale businesses can target to use social media opportunities effectively in order to make their names and create brand awareness. This allows small-scale businesses to make their place within social media according to their own strategies. Businesses creating their own accounts can reach their consumers effectively using this method. Therefore, there are some points that businesses should take into account while using social media. These points are summarized as the following:

- Consumers prefer their own profiles to state their content in social media rather than company profiles. In parallel, enterprises should follow and analyze consumer profiles.
- The fact that consumers use social networks mostly amongst social media tools and that they are affected by sharing on social networks requires businesses to center social media campaigns on social networks.
- Considering that consumers research products/services on social media, businesses should share their introductory information related to their products/services, brands and companies on social media.
- It is evident that social media is the right place to communicate with consumers and so businesses should immediately use social media tools effectively for marketing communication.
- Current and potential customers should be followed carefully on web. Apart from Facebook, Twitter, and
Friendfeed, businesses should also follow social environments related to the business world such as LinkedIn, XING, Ecaddy, and by means of Google alert and such different applications, therefore comments on brands can be known immediately. The groups and sites used by people who make comments should be explored and other brands that these people are interested in should be analyzed.

- Contents that contribute to communities should be created and the needs of the communities should be met. For example, if consumers ask for product features, a twitter account can be created to give information. If they complain about a product or service, a social media channel can be created to hear these complaints and to respond them. Whether these complaints are really about a problem or they are made to tarnish the image of brand should also be determined.

- Businesses should develop a process to define how and when to respond to negative content and inaccurate information. Inaccurate information should also be corrected. This is because social media contents eternally available to Internet users. Most of the time, providing a response to criticism is the best method to respond to comments.

- Each minute that the consumer is not satisfied, s/he will write more and more negative comments. As negative brand comments are indexed by Google, it will be more difficult to save the image of the brand within an online environment. For this reason, an immediate response can prevent loss of reputation which otherwise, can take months to repair.

References