



# ASOS JOURNAL

The Journal of Academic Social Science

*Akademik Sosyal Arařtırmalar Dergisi, Yıl: 13, Sayı: 170, Kasım 2025, s. 380-395*

*ISSN: 2148-2489 Doi Number: <http://dx.doi.org/10.29228/ASOS.87183>*

*Yayın Geliř Tarihi / Article Arrival Date*

*7.09.2025*

*Yayımlanma Tarihi / The Publication Date*

*29.11.2025*

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## **FALSE NEEDS IN THE DIGITAL AGE: EXPLORING SOCIAL MEDIA'S ROLE IN DIGITAL CONSUMPTION BEHAVIOR**

### **Abstract**

The modern period we live in today is typified by technology, and this evermore entangled technology in all facets of our lives has also affected consumer behavior. This escalating influence has prompted crucial questions concerning the genuineness of individuals' needs. This paper uses the theory of false needs by philosopher Herbert Marcuse, and focuses on how the utilization of social media platforms impacts consumption by fabricating false needs that don't arise from authentic needs. To accomplish the goal of this study, a quantitative approach was applied, with data gathered from 395 Arab residents in Türkiye, from different income, education, and cultural backgrounds. The study results shows that online purchasing behavior is positively associated with augmented time spent on social media platforms. Purchase intentions—conceptualized as false needs—were also found to significantly mediate the relationship between social media use and consumer purchasing behavior. The research outcomes did not reveal any significant influence of income, age, or educational level on false needs or purchasing behavior. The current findings empirically validate Marcuse's

assumptions about the existence of false needs in modern society, which in turn suggests that social media influences consumption principally by creating false needs. The study contributes to the discourse surrounding digital consumption and consumer behavior in the digital age.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Consumer Behavior, False Needs, Consumption, Digital Age.

## **DİJİTAL ÇAĞDA SAHTE İHTİYAÇLAR: SOSYAL MEDYANIN DİJİTAL TÜKETİM DAVRANIŞINDAKİ ROLÜNÜ ARAŞTIRMAK**

### **Öz**

Yaşadığımız modern dönem, teknolojiyle özdeşleşmiştir ve hayatımızın her alanında giderek daha fazla iç içe geçen bu teknoloji, tüketici davranışlarını da etkilemiştir. Bu artan etki, bireylerin ihtiyaçlarının gerçekliğiyle ilgili önemli soruları gündeme getirmiştir. Bu makale, filozof Herbert Marcuse'un sahte ihtiyaçlar teorisini kullanmakta ve sosyal medya platformlarının kullanımının, gerçek ihtiyaçlardan kaynaklanmayan sahte ihtiyaçlar yaratarak tüketimi nasıl etkilediğine odaklanmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın amacına ulaşmak için, Türkiye'de yaşayan ve farklı gelir, eğitim ve kültürel geçmişlere sahip 395 Arap'tan toplanan verilerle nicel bir yaklaşım uygulanmıştır. Çalışma sonuçları, çevrimiçi satın alma davranışının sosyal medya platformlarında geçirilen zamanla pozitif ilişkili olduğunu göstermektedir. Sahte ihtiyaçlar olarak kavramsallaştırılan satın alma niyetlerinin de sosyal medya kullanımı ile tüketici satın alma davranışı arasındaki ilişkiye önemli ölçüde aracılık ettiği bulunmuştur. Araştırma sonuçları, gelir, yaş veya eğitim düzeyinin sahte ihtiyaçlar veya satın alma davranışı üzerinde anlamlı bir etkisi olmadığını ortaya koymuştur. Mevcut bulgular, Marcuse'un modern toplumda sahte ihtiyaçların varlığına ilişkin varsayımlarını deneysel olarak doğrulamaktadır; bu da sosyal medyanın tüketimi esas olarak sahte ihtiyaçlar yaratarak etkilediğini göstermektedir. Çalışma, dijital çağda dijital tüketim ve tüketici davranışı etrafındaki söyleme katkıda bulunmaktadır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Sosyal Medya, Tüketici Davranışı, Sahte İhtiyaçlar, Tüketim, Dijital Çağ.

### **1. Introduction**

The internet has revolutionized the way we consume and purchase goods. It has opened up the entire world to us, making it possible for us to access any product, no matter how distant. With the widespread use of the Internet worldwide, we can now purchase goods from anywhere, at any time.

Thanks to the internet, instead of going to the grocery store or any other store to buy what we need/want, we can now complete this process while in bed before going to sleep, or even while working, studying, or driving. Thus, consumption has shifted from an act performed in a specific place and time to one in which a person requires a mobile phone/computer, the internet, and money to purchase goods.

This shift in the form of consumption has led to an explosion in people's purchases and the goods they want/need in their daily lives. Social media has also played a role in encouraging consumption. With the ease of purchasing in the current internet age, modern humans are surrounded by a flood of goods and seemingly endless desires that they see everywhere. From street advertisements to television ads to online ads and social media.

This increase in consumption, as a result of technological development, raises the question of whether this desire stems from a real need or from false needs created by both the ease of consumption and the abundance of advertisements.

The issue of real needs versus false needs has been a topic of much debate. One of the most important philosophers to shed light on this topic is Herbert Marcuse and his famous book, "One-Dimensional Man." Marcuse attempts to differentiate between real human needs and false needs resulting from societal conditions or media pressures. This paper attempts to examine whether the decision to consume digitally stems from real or false needs.

## **2. Theoretical Background**

### **2.1 Digital Advertising**

Advertising in all its forms is the backbone of the entire business process, as is evident from the massive amounts of money spent on advertising campaigns. For example, in 2016, approximately \$524.58 billion was invested in this field (Wibowo et al. 2020). Studies by Ahn, Ryu, and Han (2005), and Yang (2017) found that a person's consumption decision is closely linked to the amount of interest they gain from an online advertisement.

Advertising can be defined as the paid promotion of products, services, or ideas across various media channels (Soti 2022). Online advertising can also be defined as a form of promotion that uses the Internet and the World Wide Web to deliver marketing messages to attract customers. Examples of online advertising include contextual ads on search engine result pages, banner ads, Rich Media Ads, social network advertising, interstitial ads, online classified advertising, advertising networks, and e-mail marketing, including e-mail spam, etc. (Deshwal 2016).

Advertising can be defined as the paid promotion of products, services, or ideas through various media (Soti 2022). Online advertising can also be defined as a form of promotion that uses the internet to deliver marketing messages to attract new customers. Examples of online advertising include contextual ads on search engine results pages, banner ads, rich media ads, social media ads, interstitial ads, online classifieds, advertising networks, email marketing, including spam, and others (Deshwal 2016). Also, the online advertising can be viewed in real time—24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

Additionally, an advertising campaign can be launched, updated, or canceled instantly. Furthermore, advertisers can track the campaign's progress daily, and when they realize that a campaign is generating little response in the first week, they can replace it with a new one by the second week. This is a much more advantageous situation than print media, where an ad cannot be changed until a new edition is published, or television, where the high costs of developing an ad often prevent changes (Talih Akkaya, Akyol, and Gölbaşı Şimşek 2017). This is what makes social media advertising superior to traditional media advertising.

Many studies have confirmed the importance of advertising in influencing individual purchasing behavior. For example, the studies by Gaurav and Suraj Ray (2020), Smith and Johnson (2018),

and Kotler and Keller (2022) demonstrated that advertising plays a crucial role in shaping consumer purchasing decisions.

But in the same time the digital world is characterized by its ability to monitor, record, and track our behavior (Kochoy et al., 2020). This has led to the problem of "surveillance privacy." Despite these privacy concerns, more than a quarter of consumers don't mind seeing ads on social media platforms tailored specifically to them based on their profile information (Lee, 2013). In other words, individuals tend to trust this content to filter and objectively evaluate this vast amount of information.

## **2.2 Social Media**

Social media has immensely helped transform the way content is created, both in terms of content and in terms of user interaction. Interactivity has been among the distinguishing features of social media, changing the nature of user communication and information exchange in the online space immensely (Arora, Kumar, & Agarwal, 2020).

User content, including movie, book, and product reviews and ratings, plays a central role as a driver of consumer behavior as fellow consumers are influenced by the experiences of past consumers. Although the contributions are subjective and personal, they form an essential part with a substantial influence on consumption decisions (Dehghani & Tomer, 2015; Weibo et al., 2020). Research indicates that approximately 83% of customers read reviews from other users before making a purchase (Chang & Li, 2025).

Social media interaction is a key driver of consumption, according to Jiang et al. (2023) and Arora, Kumar, & Agarwal (2020). According to Autio (2020), 69% of the population aged between 50–64 years, and 40% of individuals over 65 years, use social media. Such widespread usage makes social media sites a valuable basis for marketers required to connect with various categories of audiences. In addition, social media influencers have become more powerful in recent years. Social media influencers are important figures in marketing communications who have a sizable fan base. These influencers promote a range of brands, using their notoriety and sizable fan base to influence trends and consumer behavior. For instance, fashion bloggers and social media influencers have become powerful leaders in the industry, influencing and accelerating fashion trends with their posts and promotions (Emma, 2024).

## **2.3 Digital Consumption**

The most important feature of consumption over the Internet is that websites, online shops, and auction houses offer consumers more varied goods and services, and hopefully inspire their imagination with many products much superior to what they might have access to in their local region (Denegri-Knott and Molesworth 2010). With the advent of the Internet and especially the influence of social media, consumers today are more knowledgeable and curious than ever before. They comment on blogs, make videos of their shopping experiences on YouTube, unpack products on TikTok, and post their thoughts, cautions, and product suggestions on a variety of different networks. Consumers are empowered for the first time, using various social media networks to provide feedback on retailers' services, products, and quality continuously. Retailers that capitalize on this and listen to their consumers stand a good opportunity to engage with them and meet their demands (Autio 2020). Consumers are now in control for the first time, using various social media forums to continuously share their opinions about retailers' service, goods, and quality. These online reviews play an important role in one's purchasing

decision, as is evident from the research carried out by Maulid, Hurriyati, and Hendrayati (2022) and Stephen (2016).

#### **2.4 Social Media and Consumer Decision-Making**

The aim of online advertising is to bring about a buying decisions. Buying decisions are the processes by which consumers evaluate a variety of possibilities and choose one or more reasons. (Maulid, Hurriyati, and Hendrayati 2022). The probability of a customer to make a purchase is described by "purchase intention" (Giang et al. 2023). Buying intent defines how likely it is that a consumer would buy a specific product, and higher intent means the more likely a customer is to make a purchase (Wibowo et al. 2020).

Decision-making involves various cognitive and behavioral processes that consumers go through when they choose to purchase. Consumer choice is influenced by various factors, ranging from the inside factors like personal attitudes, personal tastes, impressions, and individual requirements. Outside factors like cultural values, social, and influences, and marketing variables—such as advert messages—are significant drivers of consumer choices (Soti 2022).

Al-Dhuhli and Mukhaini (2015) proved that Instagram significantly influences consumers' buying habits. Sharma (2020) and Vazquez et al. (2020) also proved that the consumption is encouraged by social media usage.

When the subject matter of purchasing and the role played by the internet, and indeed social media, is mentioned, impulse buying must be mentioned alongside. This thoughtless and nonsensical buying is a psychological state described as an overwhelming, irresistible urge to purchase a good or service without thinking. Researchers have found impulse buying represents nearly 50% of total supermarket sales, that 80% of consumers are impulse buyers at least occasionally (Yang et al. 2024). Studies by Singh et al.'s (2023), Yeoh and Naghavi's (2022) and Johan et al.'s (2020) validated that social media advertising influences impulse purchase intention and impulse buying significantly.

#### **2.5 False Needs**

Marcuse first proposed the concept of "false need" in his 1964 book, *One-Dimensional Man*. Marcuse argued that production creates false needs—in reality, the product of boredom—to fuel the wealth of the few. Through the mechanism of media and educational propaganda, production creates a culture of false needs (Ajvazi 2021). Thus, with the development of production, individual needs have transformed from primitive (real) needs into false needs that the individual never needed, but rather are socially forced to meet by the culture industry (Ago 2015).

It was believed that technological progress in capitalist society creates material wealth and satisfies people's material needs. When people's needs are satisfied and their lives are stable and prosperous, they are easily manipulated by the existing social system, blindly pursuing their material needs according to external propaganda. This material need is not the real need of the people, but rather a "false need" imposed from outside through the consumption pattern of the dominant ideology (Chang 2022). For example, the desire to own a car may stem from a genuine need for mobility, but it often turns into a superficial pursuit of social acceptance, reinforcing a cycle of consumerism driven by outdoor advertising (Ocay 2010; Cutts 2019)

In other words, the need for efficiency is replaced by the immediate need to "fit in" with the social order as a whole. Automatically reproducing these false needs makes individuals more voracious, thus requiring them to buy a new car every two or three years to keep up (Ocay 2010).

Marcuse views consumer behavior and purchasing as a drive to satisfy false needs. The increase in information and the abundance of goods such as clothing and food has led to the emergence of innovative lifestyles. In other words, the increased exposure of an individual to external advertisements on social media or in the real world leads to an increase in his false needs, which in turn leads to an increase in consumption and purchasing. This lifestyle constantly supports the needs generated by technological advances without considering whether these needs are truly necessary. This reflects a lifestyle driven by patterns of excessive consumption (Nurlala et al. 2023).

In the context of contemporary consumer culture, the more an individual consumes or satisfies these perceived needs (false needs), the more these needs appear to them as real needs, and the more their critical thoughts are repressed (Fourie 2016). Marcuse believed that residents of advanced industrial societies indulge in the pleasures of material desires, becoming obsessed with material success and addicted to consumption (Lee 2023).

In this study, we use Marcuse's notion of inauthentic needs to view consumer behavior as more than a simple economic act; it is also a social and psychological response to the influence and persuasion exerted by digital platforms. Marketing research often treats behavior as a product of attitudes and motivations, but Marcuse reminds us that many of these motivations are externally shaped by the media, technology, and culture they produce. From this perspective, familiar marketing concepts such as purchase intention and impulse buying are not merely procedural variables; they are indicators of a deeper process by which desires are produced and normalized. In practice, we treat purchase intention as a proxy for inauthentic needs, and purchase behavior as a subsequent consequence of exposure to social media. Combining Marcuse's critical ideas with models of consumer behavior allows us to read digital consumption not only as an individual choice but also as a form of identification with the desires shaped within the individual by media.

### **3. Current Study**

Online consumption has been increasing in recent years and is expanding over time due to rapid technological advancements. This study seeks to examine the role that social media plays in inducing false needs among consumers, leading to increased consumption and purchasing behavior. As social media continues to dominate daily life, it significantly influences how consumers think, like, and spend money. This research explores how exposure to social media triggers consumers' needs for a product or service they may not have previously considered needed prior to exposure to social media. This research was conducted using a quantitative approach to collecting data about consumer shopping attitudes and behavior via social media. By examining a heterogenous population sample (the Arab people in Türkiye), the research seeks to provide a descriptive account of how different age segments and socio-economic strata are affected by the stresses brought about by social media-induced false needs. The current study is also new in its field in empirically testing Marcuse's theory on the function of false needs.

Arabs residing in Turkey were chosen because they live at the intersection of two cultures: they carry their social and cultural values from their countries, yet interact daily with a fast-paced, digital Turkish market. This daily friction between two worlds makes them more susceptible to social media messages and persuasion tactics, thus creating needs that may not even be necessary—precisely what Marcuse's theory of false needs discusses. Furthermore, this group is diverse in education, income, and age, and many of them were educated in different countries, providing us with a broader picture of how social media is changing purchasing behavior across multiple social segments. Therefore, studying this group provides us with a realistic opportunity to test Marcuse's ideas in a multicultural, media-saturated environment, where the intersection of culture, identity, and digital consumption is clearly evident.

### **3.1 Importance of Current Study**

The significance of this study is that it has the potential to show the dynamics of consumer behavior during the age of digitalization. Understanding how social media creates and maintains false needs can assist in marketing strategy, public policy, and consumer education programs to ensure consumption is made accountable. This study also contributes to overall academic knowledge regarding consumer behavior, digital marketing, and consumer psychology. It highlights the significant intersection of technology and consumption, enriching the existing literature with empirical evidence of how social media platforms impact consumer awareness and choice.

### **3.2 Research Questions**

1. Do false needs (purchase intentions) mediate the relationship between social media use and impulse buying behavior?
2. Do false needs (purchase intentions) and impulsive buying behavior differ according to demographic factors—age, education level, and income—among social media users?

## **4. METHOD**

### **4.1 Participants**

The current study included a sample of 395 participants from various Arab countries residing in Türkiye and who had lived in Türkiye for at least one year. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 61 years ( $M = 30.56$ ,  $SD = 9.35$ ). The study participants had various educational levels (from primary school to PhD level). Moreover, the participants in the current study were users of social media applications to varying degrees.

### **4.2 Instruments**

The questionnaire was used as a tool for collecting data in the current study. The questionnaire included the following scales:

#### *Frequency of Social Media Use*

The item related to the frequency of social media use was adapted from Singh et al. (2023) and included five response options. Participants could select from the following categories: less than one hour, one to three hours, three to five hours, five to seven hours, and more than seven hours.

#### *Buying Intention (false needs)*

In this research, pseudo-needs are defined as consumer desires stimulated by social media, not real needs. Therefore, we measure pseudo-needs indirectly using purchase intention as a practical behavioral indicator of these false needs, which are specifically fueled by social media platforms.

The impulse buying intention scale was employed to assess the presence of false needs that are not real for the consumer to buy, but rather false needs generated as a result of the use of social media. This scale, which was developed by Singh et al. (2023), comprises three items that measure the participant's intention to buy when they use social media. For example, "I have a tendency to make purchases when exploring social networking websites that are unrelated to my intended shopping list". The reliability of the scale in the current study was measured using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which was 0.82. According to our theoretical framework, purchase intention is treated as a proxy for Marcue's false needs that are generated through social media exposure.

### ***Buying Behavior***

Buying behavior was measured using the four-item Trait Buying Impulsiveness Scale, adapted from Kacen and Lee (2002). The scale includes statements such as "I buy things that I had not intended to purchase". Respondents indicated their agreement through a Likert scale with four response options, ranging from "not applicable to me at all" to "extremely applicable to me." The reliability of the scale was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which was 0.76.

### ***Demographic Information Form***

Demographic data were gathered from participants, including variables such as age, educational level, duration of residence in Türkiye, income level, and proficiency in Turkish language.

### **4.3 Procedure**

Upon finalizing the study design, the researchers reached out to various Arab Associations in Türkiye to facilitate participant recruitment. Data collection was conducted using an e-questionnaire, which ensured accessibility and efficiency. In the introductory section of the survey, the objectives of the study were clearly articulated, along with comprehensive instructions to guide participants in completing the questionnaire accurately. This approach aimed to enhance understanding and ensure informed participation, ultimately contributing to the reliability and validity of the collected data.

The study was also conducted in accordance with ethical research standards. Participation was completely voluntary and confidential, and participants were informed of the purpose of the research before completing the questionnaire. Because the study involved minimal risk and did not collect any sensitive personal data, formal approval from an institutional ethics committee was not required. All measurement tools used in the study were adapted from previously published studies (Singh et al., 2023; Kassin and Lee, 2002) and were used exclusively for academic and non-commercial purposes with appropriate documentation.

### **4.4 Data Analysis**

The research data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 28 and Jamovi statistical software version 2.6.44. Descriptive statistics, including the mean, standard deviation, and frequency distributions, were employed. Furthermore, an analysis

of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to derive the research findings. A significance level of 0.05 was established as the statistical criterion for interpreting all results.

## 5. RESULTS

This section reviews the findings of the study, which are directly related to its research questions. In the context of this research, false needs were defined as purchase intentions triggered and measured by individuals' engagement with social media platforms. To define and quantify this phenomenon, we used the three-item Impulse Purchase Intention Scale (Singh et al., 2023). This scale demonstrated high reliability and strong internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.82). Higher scores on this scale indicate a greater degree of false needs among participants, attributed to the content they consume on social media. This finding is consistent with the theoretical framework and critique presented by Marcuse regarding socially constructed needs.

### 5.1 Mediation Estimates of Buying Intentions "False Needs"

This subsection addresses question 1 by testing whether false needs (purchase intentions) mediate the relationship between social media use and buying behavior. And to investigate the mediating role of buying intentions "false needs" in the relationship between social media usage and buying behavior, the mediation analyses were conducted by Jamovi statistical software. The results in Table 3 show that the total effect of social media use on buying behavior was found to be statistically significant ( $\beta = 0.1187, t = 3.48, p < .001$ ).

Upon incorporating the mediating variable of buying intentions (false needs), the direct effect of social media use on buying behavior was statistically significant ( $\beta = 0.0692, t = 2.24, p < .05$ ). Moreover, the analysis revealed a significant indirect effect of social media use on buying behavior via the buying intentions ( $\beta = 0.0495, t = 3.08, p < .01$ ).

**Table 1.**

*Mediation Estimates of buying intentions "false needs" between social media usage and buying behavior*

Effect	Label	Estimate	SE	95% Confidence Interval		Z	p	Percent Mediation
				Lower	Upper			
Indirect	a × b	0.0495	0.0160	0.01802	0.0809	3.08	<b>0.002</b>	58.3 %
Direct	C	0.0692	0.0309	0.00867	0.1298	2.24	<b>0.025</b>	41.7 %
Total	c + a × b	0.1187	0.0341	0.05187	0.1855	3.48	<b>&lt;.001</b>	100 %

The results underscore that the relationship between social media usage and buying behavior is partially mediated by the construction of buying intentions. Specifically, a higher mediation rate of 58.3% compared to the direct effect rate of 41.7% suggests that the influence of social media on purchasing decisions is significantly facilitated through the development of perceived false needs rather than through direct influence alone. This outcome directly addresses Research Question 1 of this study, confirming that false needs mediate the effect of social media use on buying behavior.

## 5.2 Differences in Buying Intentions (False Needs)

To address Research Question 2, this subsection utilizes one-way ANOVAs to test whether false needs (measured as purchase intentions) differ across the demographic variables of age, education level, and income (see Table 2).

To examine the differences in buying intentions (false needs), ANOVA was used. The results in Table 2 indicate that there are no statistically significant differences in buying intentions (False Needs) attributable to age ( $F(4, 378) = 1.665, p > 0.05, \eta^2 = 0.017$ ), educational level ( $F(4, 378) = 1.952, p > 0.05, \eta^2 = 0.020$ ), or income level ( $F(3, 378) = 1.536, p > 0.05, \eta^2 = 0.012$ ). That means that there are no significant differences in buying intentions classified as "false needs" across different demographic groups, specifically age, educational level, and income level. In statistical terms, the F-values and corresponding p-values show that the variations in buying intentions among these groups are not statistically significant—meaning that any observed differences could likely be due to chance rather than any real underlying differences in behavior. Consequently, it can be concluded that demographic factors such as age, education, and income do not have a meaningful impact on individuals' buying intentions.

**Table 2.**

*ANOVA Results for Differences in Buying Intentions (False Needs)*

Variables	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	p	$\eta^2$
Age	2.720	4	.680	1.665	.158	.017
Education level	3.190	4	.797	1.952	.101	.020
Income level	1.883	3	.628	1.536	.205	.012
Error	154.439	378	.409			
Total	2120.806	390				

The demographic profile of the respondents—specifically their age, educational attainment, and income level—was found to have no statistically significant bearing on their reported buying intentions (which reflect false needs). This outcome, which directly answers Question 2, suggests that the tendency to develop false needs fueled by social media is consistent across different socio-economic and age groups.

## 5.3 Differences in Buying Behavior

In an attempt to elaborate on answering the second research question, this subsection uses one-way ANOVA to determine whether differences in purchasing behavior are observable across different categories of demographic variables: age, education level, and income (see Table 3).

To test the differences in buying behavior by age, educational level and income level, ANOVA was used. The results in Table 3 show that there are no statistically significant differences in buying behavior by age ( $F(4, 378) = 1.529, p > 0.05, \eta^2 = 0.016$ ), educational level ( $F(4, 378) = 0.505, p > 0.05, \eta^2 = 0.005$ ), or income level ( $F(3, 378) = 1.717, p > 0.05, \eta^2 = 0.014$ ). These findings suggest that age, educational level, and income do not significantly influence purchasing behavior, as the p-values for all comparisons exceed the threshold of 0.05, indicating that any observed differences are not statistically meaningful.

**Table 3.**

*ANOVA Results for Differences in Buying Behavior*

Variables	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	P	$\eta^2$
Age	2.889	4	.722	1.529	.193	.016
Education level	.953	4	.238	.505	.732	.005
Income level	2.432	3	.811	1.717	.163	.013
Error	178.514	378	.472			
Total	1989.375	390				

There were no statistically significant differences found in buying behavior across age, education, or income (all  $p > 0.05$ ). This means that these demographic factors do not meaningfully influence impulsive purchasing patterns.

Considering the overall results, it is clear that the impact of social media on purchasing is primarily through the development of false needs (represented by the intention to purchase), while demographic factors do not play a significant role in modifying or determining the course of this impact.

## 6. DISCUSSION

Returning to the first research question, empirical tests show that false needs—activated as purchase intentions—significantly influence the effect of social media use on purchasing behavior, accounting for 58.3% of the total effect.

Regarding the second research question, neither false needs nor purchasing behavior showed statistically significant differences across age, education, and income, suggesting a broadly uniform pattern of social media-driven consumption in this sample.

Taken together, this evidence supports a mechanism by which social media shapes purchasing primarily through the formation of false needs, rather than through direct influence alone.

These findings are consistent with Marcus's description of socially produced desires: repeated digital exposure cultivates intentions that present themselves as needs and, in turn, guide the purchase. Rather than reflecting a purely independent choice, the observed pattern suggests a normalization of media-constructed desires—consistent with previous work on the role of social media in shaping purchase intentions (e.g., Dehghani & Tumer, 2015; Wibowo et al., 2020).

The finding is also in agreement with findings from earlier theoretical studies (Marcuse 1964; Fourie 2016; Cutts 2019).

The digital platform, social media in particular, has the ability to control what information reaches the masses, information that is centered mainly on consumption and a relentless pursuit of a consumerist and exploratory existence. The constant social media content that commodifies joy and puts it on terms of consumption erodes the boundary dividing the consumers' true needs and their acquired needs, and therefore compels the subject to consume numerous products he does not require.

Surprisingly, no statistically significant false needs or purchasing behavior differences were found among demographic variables such as age, education, or income. This finding is in contrast to some previous research that has established the moderating role of demographics on consumer behavior. For example, Kishari and Jain (2016) noted that age and gender can

influence receptiveness to advertising appeal. But the results here concur with more recent evidence by Maulid, Hurriyati, and Hendrayati (2022), who argued that consumer experiences are normalized on online platforms in a manner that reduces demographic heterogeneity. The observed homogeneity between demographic groups could also be due to universal design of social media platforms to target big groups with the same visual, emotional, and interactive strategies. Therefore, there is the creation of false needs by a wide section of users regardless of variations in individuals—a point that confirms the claims of Autio (2020) and Al-Dhuhli and Mukhaini (2015), who quoted that social media's impact on consumer behavior crosses over in demographically wide terms.

Apart from that, the findings confirm the study by Nurlela et al. (2023), who used Marcuse's theory to argue that social media fosters a culture of hyperconsumption by projecting fake needs. This empirical validation of Marcuse's theoretical position makes the current study original by providing quantifiable evidence for psychological internalization of false needs.

Together, these findings validate the relevance of Marcuse's theory in the contemporary digital environment. While his early analysis was of mid-twentieth-century industrial capitalism, this study offers empirical evidence that the same mechanisms are at work in today's digital economy, but more so and with greater psychological depth. The replacement of material goods with digital stimulation (e.g., social media ads and online influencers) indicates a shift in the way false needs are met, not the disappearance of false needs.

Finally, the current findings present a critical analysis of the intersection of consumer behavior, media influence. It also demands further research on the impact of social media and digital content on individual economic behavior, with the aim of promoting conscious consumption.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

The current study demonstrates the impact of social media on enhancing purchasing behavior, consistent with most studies in this field. It also confirms Marcuse's assumptions about false needs, that media generates false needs in individuals. The results show that although purchasing behavior is directly influenced by social media use, this effect is mediated by false needs. In other words, social media creates false needs in users, which in turn leads to purchasing behavior. The paper also shows the lack of any statistically significant differences in purchasing behavior attributable to age, income level, or educational level. The current findings draw the attention of policymakers to the need to pay attention to the psychological role social media plays in user behavior, which ultimately leads to increased purchasing behavior as a result of false needs.

### ***Limitations and Future Research***

Although the current study provides meaningful findings on the mediating role of false needs in social media use-consumer behavior relationship, there are several limitations that should be considered.

first, the sample in this study was limited to Arab who live in Turkiye, and that could affect the external validity of findings to other cultural or geographical contexts. Consumer behavior and needs are susceptible to cultural values and norms; therefore, future research must take cross-cultural comparative studies to determine whether the same trends happen among other regions or communities.

Second, the study employed self-report scales, which, by their nature, may be susceptible to social bias and personal interpretation. Respondents may not always be best placed to know what motivates them, or may underestimate irrationality or impulsiveness of action. Future studies could capitalize on employing mixed research methods, like qualitative interviews or behavioral tracking data, in an attempt to achieve a richer understanding of the mechanisms involved in false needs and consumption.

Third, while the current study successfully established the mediating role of false needs, it did not control for other psychological variables, such as self-esteem and social comparison, which may have some influence on both social media usage and consumption behavior.

Besides, this study focused on social media as one concept without distinguishing between platforms (e.g., Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook). As the type of content and user engagement differ between platforms, future studies might investigate whether there are some platforms that are better at generating false needs than others.

Finally, while the current research has leaned on Marcuse's conceptual construct, it remains possible to study intersections with other critical constructs—like theory of mimesis in Baudrillard or Bourdieu's construct of symbolic capital—to enrich sociological understanding of digital consumption.

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