

The Effect of Social Media (X) on Consumer Complaint Behaviour in the Retail Sector (Gas Station) in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract:

Saudi Arabia is a major crude oil producer and exporter, making its oil market vital to the global energy system. The Kingdom's large oil reserves, strategic location, and OPEC membership affect global oil prices and supply (OPEC). Social media has changed communication, marketing, and consumer behaviour in Saudi Arabia. Consumer Complaint Behaviour is how Saudis convey product or service displeasure. Cultural, economic, and technical variables affect Saudi CCB. While service deficiencies at petroleum retail facilities are widespread, CCB remains disproportionately infrequent. Social media is witnessing these complaints, prompting firms to monitor and address them (Stieglitz et al., 2018). This paper draws on six qualitative interviews to examine how platform X effect on CCB and proposes a Retail Consumer Engagement Model.

Background, Research Gap.

Service failures are prevalent globally, occurring when customer expectations are unmet (Santos et al., 2022). In Saudi Arabia, fuel station consumers rarely lodge complaints despite frequent dissatisfaction. While traditional channels like emails and feedback forms exist, social media, particularly X (formerly Twitter), has become a key outlet for CCB (Castillo et al., 2021). Consumer Complaint Behaviour (CCB) refers to the actions individuals use to express dissatisfaction and seek resolution (Wilson et al., 2021). Although some studies address online CCB in Saudi Arabia (Badghish et al., 2015) . (Alshurideh et al., 2021) , few examine how platform content and engagement influence complaint resolution (Alsahli et al., 2021). This study fills that gap and responds to fragmented theoretical and empirical insights by analyzing how X shapes CCB in the Saudi context.

Research Aims and Objectives:

This study investigates the effect of social media (X) on the consumer complaint behaviour of gas station users in SA.

R1: To explore the influence of X user interactions and communications on CCB within the context of SA gas stations.

R2: To critically examine the role of (X) on CCB from the gas users/retailers' perspective in the SA gas market.

R3: To critically examine the role of (X) on CCB from a Customer perspective in the SA gas market.

In this development paper R1 and R2 as addressed as prelamin analysis R3 will be concocted in future research.

Social Media & X Platform:

Social media platforms, particularly X, have transformed how consumers express dissatisfaction, offering an anonymous and less confrontational space for grievances (Escalante et al., 2021). These tools amplify consumer voices, enhance advocacy, and shift public perception, prompting businesses to adopt transparent service practices (Macarthy et al., 2021). As a result, many companies now engage directly with consumers online to manage reputational risk and foster accountability (Leonowicz-Bukała et al., 2021).

Social Media and the Oil Sector:

In industries such as fuel retail, a disconnect persists between consumer dissatisfaction and formal complaint submission (Widyastuti et al., 2025). Social media has surpassed traditional channels as the primary outlet for expressing service concerns (Laer et al., 2021), prompting firms to monitor digital sentiment and adopt proactive customer service strategies.

Social Media in the Oil Sector in SA Market in B2B and B2C:

In Saudi Arabia, this shift reflects broader socioeconomic trends. Consumer engagement is reshaping B2B and B2C dynamics in the oil sector (Hoq, 2020). (Kassim et al. 2020) underscore the role of feedback in service quality and brand equity, while (Martínek, 2021) calls for deeper analysis of mechanisms that enable such engagement. Integrated feedback systems foster operational responsiveness and competitive resilience (Shavitt et al., 2020; Mabkhot et al., 2022).

Performance Management of X Platform in the SA Oil Sector

In today's volatile business environment, performance-oriented frameworks are vital (Jengwa et al., 2022). Aligning complaint systems with organizational goals enhances capabilities and drives improvement (Liu et al., 2014; Mbambale et al., 2025; Denisi et al., 2006). Within the Saudi oil sector, structured complaint protocols on X enable rapid resolution, data-driven service refinement, and long-term institutional effectiveness (Khan et al., 2021).

Theoretical concepts - The Diffusion of Innovations Theory (DOI) and CCB:

The diffusion of innovations theory explains how new ideas, behaviours, or technologies spread within a population over time (Dwivedi et al., 2021). In B2B settings, innovation often depends on interdependent collaboration between partners (Chowdhury et al., 2023). The framework identifies categories of adopters, beginning with innovators who display higher risk tolerance and an openness to experimentation. In modern societies, innovation has become embedded in cultural dynamics, influencing how individuals and institutions engage with change. This paper applies diffusion theory to examine how digital platforms such as X (platform) function as innovations in consumer complaint behaviour (CCB) in Saudi Arabia. As these platforms gain traction, their adoption reflects an innovation diffusion process. CCB remains shaped by cultural, economic, and technological factors (Shavitt et al., 2020), within a social landscape marked by respect and cohesion (Crie, 2003). By using this framework, the study explores how social media-driven CCB spreads and what influences its adoption in the Saudi market.

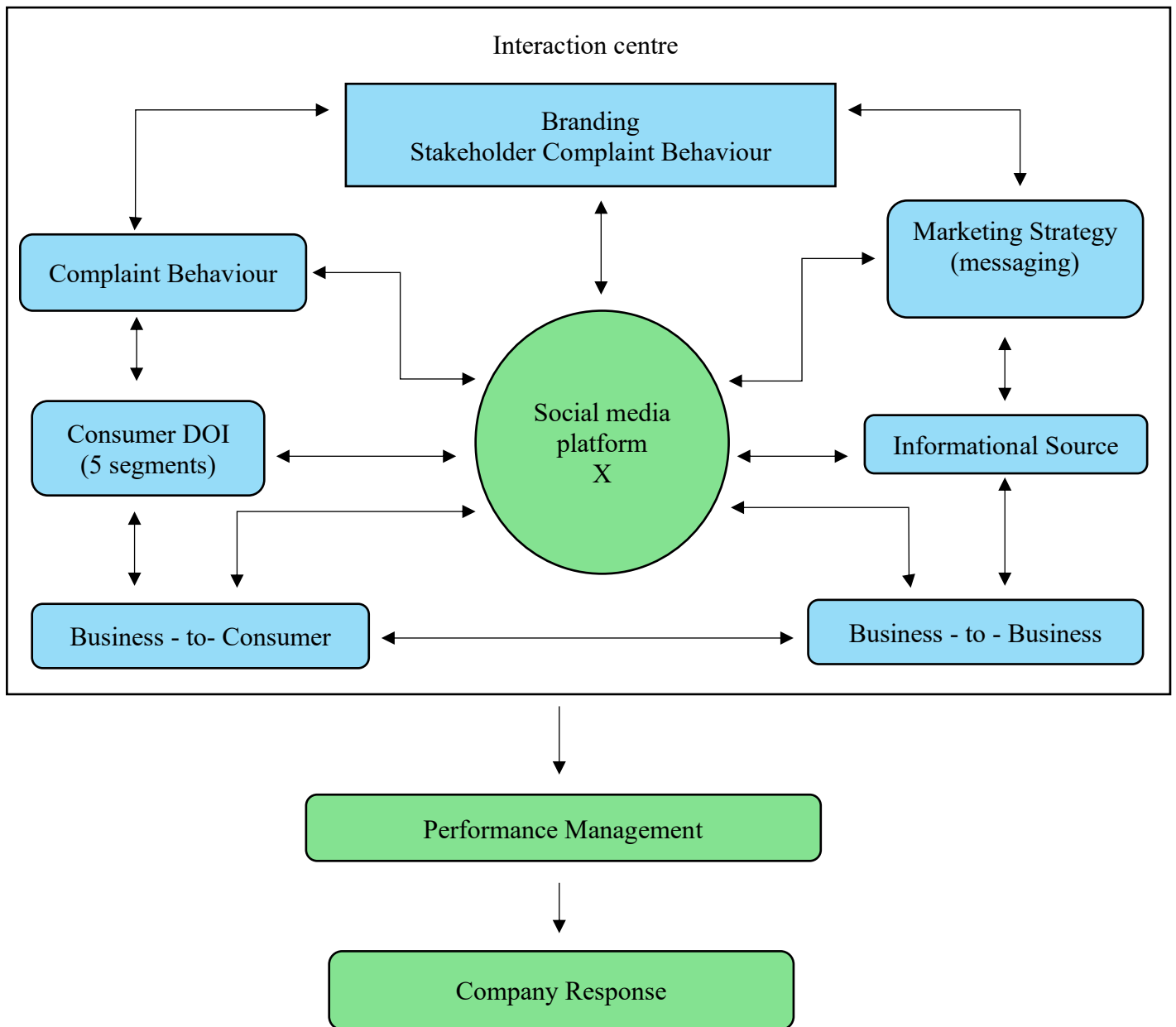


Figure 1: CCB framework. Source by (Allukhmy. A, et al., 2022).

Methodology.

The qualitative data for this study was derived from six in-depth interviews conducted with a diverse group of participants, including three males and three females, aged between 18 and 50. All participants were car drivers and active social media users, particularly on platform X providing valuable insights into consumer complaint behaviour. The analysis adopted a thematic approach, exploring recurring patterns and perspectives to understand how consumers in Saudi Arabia interact with retail businesses through social media.

Findings and Thematic Analysis (retail perspective).

RCEM (Figure 2) integrates five analytically derived themes into a strategic X-based retail complaint engagement framework.

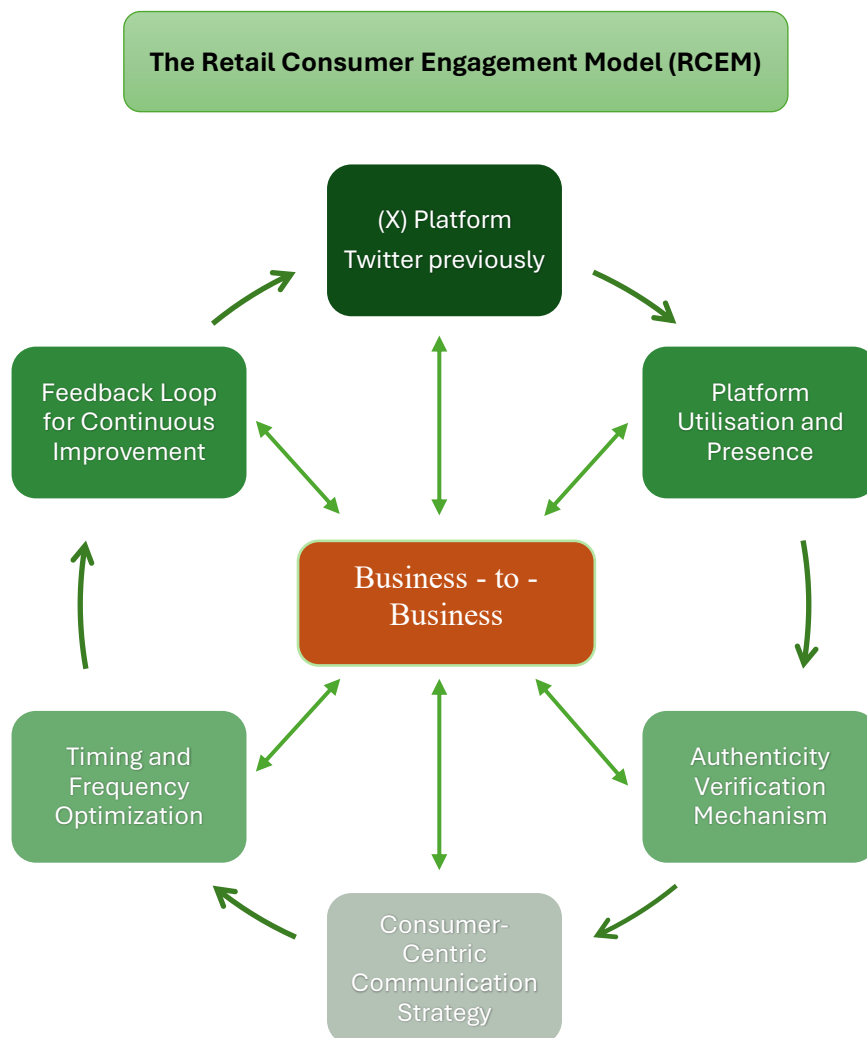


Figure 2: Retail Consumer Engagement Model (RCEM). Source by (Allukhmy., A, et al., 2025).

Theme 1: Platform Utilisation and Presence

Participants preferred X (formerly Twitter) for its openness and reach. E.A. explained, “I use Twitter because it has a lot of opinions... and I take them seriously.” H.B. noted, “If a brand isn’t on X or Instagram, I assume they’re not serious about customer engagement.” From the retailer side, N.S. stated, “It has the most official users, and it’s easier to manage customer complaints.” E.A. added, “I follow the latest news and trends about our business and competitors.” Within RCEM (Figure 2), platform utilisation serves as the gateway for visibility, trust, and digitally mediated complaint resolution.

Theme 2: Authenticity Verification Mechanism

Authenticity verification emerged as a central concern for both consumers and retailers. H.B. shared, “A blue checkmark instantly makes me feel I’m talking to the right people,” highlighting how visual trust markers guide user engagement. E.A. added, “I look for the company’s contact details in their bio to confirm it’s the real account.” On the retail side, N.S. stated, “We make sure our account is verified and that our contact information is clearly displayed to build trust.” S.A. emphasized, “We monitor unofficial accounts posing as our brand.” Within the RCEM model (Figure 2), authenticity ensures secure engagement, preventing reputational and operational risk on X.

Theme 3: Consumer-Centric Communication

Empathetic and personalized communication was consistently emphasized as essential to trust-building. H.B. stated, “If the response feels robotic, I lose interest,” illustrating the need for a humanized tone. E.A. added, “When companies address me by name and offer tailored solutions, it makes me feel valued.” Retailers echoed this sentiment. N.S. explained, “We ensure our responses are personalized to build a strong connection with our customers.” S.A. noted, “Empathy is crucial... we always acknowledge the customer’s frustration and offer a solution.” These findings suggest that tone and empathy, rather than automation, are key relational tools. Within RCEM (Figure 2), consumer-centric communication reinforces trust and emotional connection in complaint engagement.

Theme 4: Timing and Frequency Optimization

Timeliness and follow-up emerged as key expectations in complaint resolution. H.B. noted, “Even if they don't have a solution right away, a quick 'we're on it' matters.” E.A. expected a response within 24 hours, adding, “If it takes longer, I start to get frustrated.” N.S. emphasized, “Being available outside working hours is essential, especially on social media.” Consumers also valued ongoing communication. S.A. explained, “If it's a complex issue, hearing from them every day or two keeps me reassured.” Retailers echoed these expectations. E.A. stated, “We always check in after issues are resolved.” Within RCEM (Figure 2), timing and follow-up reinforce relational continuity and signal a brand's commitment to consumer care.

Theme 5: Feedback Loop for Continuous Improvement

Both consumers and retailers emphasized the role of feedback in improving service and maintaining trust. H.B. stated, “Asking for feedback after resolving a complaint shows they care,” while E.A. noted, “When I see that my feedback leads to real changes, it makes me feel like my opinion matters.” This connection between feedback and action was key to reinforcing consumer loyalty. From the retail side, N.S. shared, “We use customer feedback to identify recurring issues and make improvements,” and S.A. explained, “We follow up with customers to ensure concerns are addressed.” Within RCEM (Figure 2), the feedback loop functions as a closing and reopening mechanism, ensuring that complaint handling leads to measurable service enhancement and continued engagement. However, (table 1): illustrates that RCEM offers a structured, consumer-driven approach to complaint resolution and trust-building through Twitter (X).

RCEM Component	Theme Summary and Conclusion
1. Platform Utilisation and Presence	X is the primary platform for complaint expression due to its openness, visibility, and real-time engagement capabilities.
2. Authenticity Verification	Verified badges, clear contact information, and humanized responses help users confirm legitimacy and foster trust.
3. Consumer-Centric Communication	Empathy, personalization, and acknowledgment of consumer frustration are essential for building emotional connection and resolving complaints effectively.
4. Timing and Follow-Up	Prompt replies, updates within 24 hours, and off-hours availability meet consumer expectations and reduce dissatisfaction.
5. Feedback Loop for Continuous Improvement	Soliciting feedback and implementing visible changes signal responsiveness, drive service quality, and reinforce brand credibility.
Conclusion	Integrating these elements enables retailers to manage complaints more effectively and strengthen trust, loyalty, and long-term engagement on X.

Table 1: Summary of Themes in the Retail Consumer Engagement Model (RCEM)

Proposed Future Directions for the Research and Implementation.

Next steps include diverse sampling and mixed methods to enhance understanding of CCB across retail sectors and geographic contexts using social media. Future research may explore AI tools, sentiment analysis, and cross-industry comparisons using diverse samples and methods to strengthen complaint resolution strategies.

Conclusion.

This paper demonstrates X's role in transforming CCB in Saudi retail petroleum. The RCEM framework emphasizes authenticity, transparency, and content strategy. Findings highlight timely responses and feedback use. This addresses critical knowledge gaps and underscores social media's strategic value in gaining competitive retail advantage.

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