

# The Effect of Social Media Mix on Brand Switching Intention: The Mediating Role of Risk Perception

## Sosyal Medya Karmasının Marka Değişirme Eğilimi Üzerindeki Etkisi: Risk Algısının Aracılık Etkisi

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*Abstract: The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of social media mix combinations on the brand switching intentions of consumers by integrating signaling, social exchange and uncertainty reduction theories and existing literature. The study measures the effect of social media mix combinations on brand switching intentions through the mediating effect of perceived risk. This study implemented an experimental design and the manipulated experimental condition was social media mix with three intensity levels (Solo<sub>Mix</sub>, Combo<sub>Mix</sub> and Full<sub>Mix</sub>). The results indicate that higher levels of social media mix intensity leads to decreasing levels of perceived risk regarding the new brand purchase, which in return increases the brand switching intention of consumers. The study contributes to the existing literature by providing an understanding of the earned media's relative marginal contribution on triggering brand switching behavior in comparison with brand generated media and explores the role of perceived risk in this relationship.*

*Keywords: Social Media, Paid, Owned and Earned Media, Perceived Risk, Brand Switching.*

*Öz: Bu çalışmanın amacı, sinyal, sosyal değişim, belirsizlik azaltma kuramları ve mevcut literatürü entegre ederek çeşitli sosyal medya karması kombinasyonlarının tüketicilerin marka değiştirme eğilimleri üzerindeki etkilerini incelemektir. Çalışmada, sosyal medya karmasını kombinasyonlarının tüketicilerin marka değiştirme eğilimleri üzerindeki etkileri risk algısının aracılık etkisi kapsamında ölçülmüştür. Deneysel bir desen kapsamında yürütülen çalışmada manipüle edilen deneysel durum üç seviyede oluşturulan sosyal medya karmasıdır (Solo<sub>Mix</sub>, Combo<sub>Mix</sub> and Full<sub>Mix</sub>). Yapılan analizler sonucunda yüksek seviyede sosyal medya karması yoğunluğuna maruz kalan tüketicilerin, yeni marka satın almaya yönelik oluşan risk algısı seviyelerinde azalma oluşması suretiyle, marka değiştirme eğilimlerinde artış gerçekleştiği tespit edilmiştir. Bu çalışma, Edinilen Medya'nın, marka tarafından oluşturulan medyalara kıyasla, tüketici marka değiştirme eğilimlerini tetikleyen etki üzerindeki marjinal katkısının ölçülmesini ve bu ilişki içerisinde risk algısının rolünün anlaşılmasını sağlayarak, mevcut literatüre katkı sağlamaktadır.*

*Anahtar Sözcükler: Sosyal Medya, Edinilen, Üretilen ve Satın Alınan Medya, Risk Algısı, Marka Değişirme.*

## 1. Introduction

The transformation process of media from conventional to digital has been accelerated in recent years due to increasing penetration rate of internet and usage of social networking sites by consumers for sharing their opinions about almost everything. According to e-marketer (2017), the number of consumers using internet reached at 3.47 billion in 2017 and one in each three people have a social media account. Consequently, social media has been embraced by brands and became an important communication channel which is used for engaging with prospect and existing customers (Kumar et al. 2015).

The total marketing communication investment made through the digital media channel is estimated to reach at 39 % of total global ad spending in 2017 and is expected to level with traditional media ad spending in 2021 (eMarketer, 2017). Parallel to this growth performance, total spending for social media advertisement also reached at 48 billion \$ in 2017 and is expected to increase up to 152 billion \$ in 2021 (Statista, 2017).

Brands who wish to utilize social media channel for their communication purposes, may engage with their prospect customers using three types of social media messages: Paid Media, Owned Media and Earned Media. Paid media involves a message content created by the sender of the message and disseminated through a third party platform in exchange for a fee. The owner controls the content of the message and has some control on the platform also. Owned media involves the social media activities and messages developed and organized by the brand owner in the social networking platforms under the brand owner's control (Xee and Lee, 2015). On the other hand, earned media, refers to social media activity that is not directly generated by the brand owner (Stephen and Galak, 2012). The brand owner has no control at all in the earned social media content; users generate the content about the brand.

Whether it is paid, owned or earned, compared to traditional media, social media interactions between the brand and consumers may be regarded as being more effective in generating conative effects on consumer behavior (Olbrich and Holsing, 2011). Due to the highly competitive structure of consumer markets as well as the

communication clutter, brands need to increase the efficiency of each dollar spent in the marketing communications. Thus, it is imperative to understand the comparative performance of different social media message categories and find out the optimum social media mix in terms of paid, owned and earned media, in order to have the optimum conative effect on prospect consumer's behavior.

From consumer's perspective, when consumers are in the eve of making a new purchase decision, the process becomes more complex in cases where there is a perception of increasing risk about the consequences of this purchase decision (Siegrist et al. 2005). Risk is perceived high when consumers cannot make estimations about the possible outcomes of their behavior and there is a probability of a negative consequence of their shopping experience (Cox and Rich, 1964).

This study aims to examine the effect of three different social media mix combinations on consumers' brand switching behavior and to explore the mediating effect of risk perception on the relationship between social media mix and brand switching behavior. It is proposed that social media communication, whether it is paid, owned or earned, influences the brand switching behavior of customers in a positive way, and this relationship is mediated by the perceived risk level of consumers. Perceived risk level of consumers is expected to be set based on the social media mix exposed and this situation is expected to result in varying levels of social media communication effect on the brand switching behavior. Previous studies, mainly focusing on e-WoM, deal with the outcomes of social media communication including its effects on the adoption of innovations or new products / services (Arndt, 1967), on the formation of attitudes towards brands and products (Bone, 1995), purchasing decisions (Bansal & Voyer, 2000), risk perception (Settle, & Alreck, 1989) and cognitive dissonance (Buttle, 1998). However, there is lack of studies which investigate the comparative influence of different combinations of social media mix on the brand switching behavior through risk perceptions of consumers. Thus, this study targets to contribute to the existing literature by exploring this relationship and consequently filling a gap in the marketing literature.

## **2. Literature Review**

### ***2.1. Theoretical Background***

Three inter-related theories, namely Signaling, Social Exchange and Uncertainty Reduction Theory, help us to understand the dynamics of social media communication process, underlying motivations and its possible effects on perceived risk level of consumers and their switching intentions.

The first one, Signaling Theory, which was first introduced by the Michael Spence (1973), deals with the information acquisition process which helps to eliminate the information asymmetry between the two parties. Information asymmetries occur when there is a difference in terms of content and level of information between the two parties (Stiglitz, 2002). In order to eliminate these differences, the party with the higher information level sends a signal to the receiving party in order to balance the information level and eliminate the asymmetry. In return the receiving party uses the information and makes some inferences (Lee and Stoel, 2014). When we adapt this theory into the consumer behavior context, asymmetric information becomes more important when the buyer does not know the features of the seller's products or services. Thus, paid and owned social media communications are the seller's efforts to send effective signals to consumers for bridging the gap between the information levels, eliminating the asymmetries and consequently reducing the perceived risk level of consumers (Biswas and Biswas, 2004). Elimination of the information asymmetries increase the likelihood of consumers switching to another brand as the perceived risk level will be lowered. Thus, signaling theory provides us the theoretical background which connects social media communication process with the consumer behavior outcomes including perceived risk and brand switching.

The second theory which sheds light into the social media communication dynamics is the Social Exchange Theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). The theory suggests that interactions between the two parties lead to some outcome which can be classified as costs and rewards received from these relationships (Homans, 1958; Blau, 1964). Generally, rewards that are received as a result of these interactions are security, social approval and value (Lambe et al. 2008). Every social interaction bears also some costs in terms of effort, time and money (Dwyer et al. 1987). Thus, the ultimate goal of the parties engaging into these social exchanges is to maximize the rewards and minimize the costs. As long as the parties receive the positive value as a result of these social exchanges, they remain in the relationship (Blau, 1964). When we adapt the social exchange theory into the social media context, the motivations of buyers and sellers for engaging into the social media communication become apparent. Sellers are intended to engage into these interactions by sending signals to the buyers via paid and owned social media communication, with the motivation of establishing social exchanges which will lead to valuable economic outcomes. On the other hand, buyers engage into the interactions with both sellers and other consumers in the market with the motivation of

bridging the information gap, maximizing the rewards and minimizing the risks. Consequently, an effective interaction with positive feedbacks leads to the lowering levels of perceived risk and facilitates brand switching. The total outcome of these interactions forms the earned media performance of the sellers. In this perspective, Social Exchange Theory contributes to the understanding of effects of social media interactions on consumer behavior outcomes including risk perception and brand switching.

Finally, a third theory, Uncertainty Reduction Theory, helps us to understand the motivation of buyers into engaging into the social media communication. The theory, first introduced by Charles R. Berger and Richard J. Calabrese (1975), suggests that the main motivation of the parties engaging into a communication process is to reduce the uncertainties. The high level of uncertainty, leads to the unpredictable outcomes, which in turn increases the perceived risk levels. Thus, one party seeks to have enough information to eliminate the uncertainties and consequently reducing the risk (Kellerman and Reynolds, 1990). Adapting this theory into the social media context leads us to the conclusion that consumers' main motivation to engage into the social media communication with both sellers and other buyers in the market is to acquire information, eliminate the uncertainties and reduce the risk of negative outcomes. This in turn increase the likelihood of consumers to switch between brands as the perceived risk will be lowered. Similar to the conclusions made on Social Exchange Theory, the total outcome of these interactions forms the earned media performance of the sellers.

Signaling Theory, Social Exchange Theory and Uncertainty Reduction Theory are inter-related and interacting theories helping us to understand the underlying dynamics of communication process in the social media context and its possible consequences on the consumer behavior in terms of risk perception and brand switching. Specifically, adapting these three theories to social media context helps us to understand the relationship between the three types of social media messages and the buying behavior and risk perception of consumers.

## ***2.2. The Effect of Social Media Communication on Brand Switching Behavior***

As an important channel where consumer spend one third of their time (Lang, 2010), social media has become a preferred communication platform for both brands and consumers. Social media communications can be categorized as Brand Generated Content (BGC) and User Generated Content (UGC). Marketers use social media communication to engage with prospect customers and try to create cognitive, affective and conative effects in favor of their brands. On the other hand, consumers use social media to access the required information which will facilitate their decision-making (Li and Bernoff 2011). The intensity of communication between consumers has been accelerated with the support of social media (Duan et al. 2008).

As Signaling, Social Exchange and Uncertainty Reduction Theory predicts, the information flow in social media is directly affecting all stages of consumer decision-making process including pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase stages (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Social media interactions within the consumer community leads to the increasing effect on consumer behavior including the effects on brand awareness (Godes and Mayzlin 2009), brand attitude (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2016), and brand loyalty (Laroche et al. 2012). Two other important outcomes of these interactions are consumer's brand switching and purchase intentions. When consumers engage into relationships with brands, their main motivation is to receive the expected value from this relationship. The relationship between the consumer and brand proceeds to the dissolution stage when consumers do not get the expected value from the relationship (Michalski, 2004). At this stage, consumer's intention to switch the brand increases. Factors which contribute to the formation of brand switching intention include poor product or service performance (Keaveney, 1995; Kanwal and Lodhi, 2015), negative value for money evaluations (Bansal et al. 2005) or the availability of attractive alternatives (Zhang et al. 2009). As the consumers' readiness to switch the brand increases, social media becomes an effective source of information for finding and evaluating the alternatives. This claim is supported by the results of the previous research confirming the effect of social media messages on the purchase intention and switching behavior of consumers (Goh et al. 2013), whether these messages are brand generated or earned (Kumar et al. 2016, Xie and Lee, 2015).

Theoretical foundations as well as the findings in the literature show that whether BGC or UGC, social media messages support customers to fill the information gap, eliminate the uncertainties about the purchase situation, help them to find alternatives and consequently affect the consumer behavior. This leads us to propose the following hypotheses:

H<sub>1</sub>: Exposure to positive social media messages about an alternative brand will increase the likelihood of brand switching.

H<sub>1a</sub>: Exposure to brand generated social media messages (Paid Media) about an alternative brand will increase the likelihood of brand switching.

H<sub>1b</sub>: Exposure to positive consumer generated social media messages (Earned Media) about an alternative brand will increase the brand switching intentions of consumers.

### ***2.3. The Effect of Social Media Communication on Perceived Risk***

The core concept of marketing is determined as exchange and consumers involve into these exchange transactions with sellers in order to extract the maximum value possible (Kotler, 1972; Bagozzi, 1975). Similarly, consumers prefer a brand which is expected to generate the maximum value for them throughout their journey. A value for the customer is the total sum of benefits and costs that are generated as a result of interactions with a brand (Zeithaml, 1998).

Perceived risk is one of the critical components of customer value at the cost side of the equation and affects consumer decision process (Erdem, 1998). It is defined as the nature and amount of risk perceived in a purchase decision context (Cox and Rich, 1964). Marketing literature identifies six types of risks associated with a purchase situation including financial, performance, physical, social, psychological and time (Jacoby and Kaplan, 1972; Roselius, 1971). Financial risk represents monetary losses derived from choosing the wrong product and having some negative consequences such as paying for repair, replacement, and experiencing similar burdens (Kaplan et al. 1974). Performance risk is related with the functional problems that may be experienced due to the poor product quality (Horton, 1976). Physical risk represents the harm which may be experienced as a result of using the product. Social risk is related with the exposure to the negative opinions of other consumers in the community following the purchase decision (Jacoby and Kaplan, 1972). Psychological risk represents the unfavorable feelings and emotions of consumers regarding the effects of product usage outcome on their image and status (Cunningham, 1967). Finally time risk is the risk associated with spending of long time to find the product, order or receive it (Roselius, 1971). Perceived risk is a construct composed of two dimensions which are uncertainty experienced and the consequences of an action (Bettman, 1973; Schiffman, 1972). Its relationship with social media communication becomes apparent when we consider the uncertainty dimension of perceived risk. When consumers feel the uncertainty about the possible consequences of a purchase decision, increased perceived risk lead them to engage into risk-handling activities (Bettman 1973). Involving into the social media interactions is one of those risk-handling activities used to fill the information gap and eliminate the uncertainties about the situation. This is supported by the findings of the previous research on the effect of social media content on consumers' risk perceptions in different contexts such as health (Choi et al. 2017; Wu and Lee, 2016), security (Lu et al. 2015) and purchasing situations (Andrews and Boyle, 2008; Maoyan et al. 2014).

Referring to the signaling, social exchange and uncertainty reduction theories as well as findings in the current literature, social media communication is expected to fill the information gap, eliminate the uncertainties about the purchase situation and consequently reduce the perceived risk of consumers. This leads us to propose the following hypotheses:

H<sub>2</sub>: Exposure to positive social media content about an alternative brand will decrease consumers' perceived risk level towards that brand.

H<sub>2a</sub>: Exposure to brand generated social media messages (Paid Media) about an alternative brand will decrease consumers' perceived risk level towards that brand.

H<sub>2b</sub>: Exposure to positive consumer generated social media messages (Earned Media) about an alternative brand will decrease consumers' perceived risk level towards that brand.

### ***2.4. The Effect of Perceived Risk on Brand Switching Behavior***

When we consider the second dimension of perceived risk construct, consequences of action, its relationship with consumer behavior becomes also apparent. Previous studies in the marketing literature confirm the effect of perceived risk level on consumer evaluation and behavior in different context and buying situations including business to consumer context (Bauer, 1967); business to business context (Brown et al. 2011), services (Cunningham et al. 2005) and online shopping (Park and Jun, 2003). Increasing levels of perceived risk leads to negative evaluations of new purchases (Cox and Rich, 1964; Forsythe and Shi, 2003; Yeung and Morris, 2006). In the light of the existing findings we propose the following hypothesis:

H<sub>3</sub>: Higher perceived risk levels of consumers about purchasing an alternative brand will decrease the likelihood of switching to that alternative brand.

### 2.5. Mediating Effect of Perceived Risk

Based on the findings of previous studies, we expect social media communication to have a convincing effect on consumers' intention to try the new products and consequently influence their brand switching decisions positively. However, this relationship is expected to be mediated by the perceived risk level of consumer regarding the product planned to be purchased since the perception of risk about purchasing the alternative brand is also expected to affect negatively the brand switching intentions, as it is confirmed in the current marketing literature (Cox and Rich, 1964; Forsythe and Shi, 2003; Yeung and Morris, 2006). Thus, we expect that capability of social media communication regarding the activation of consumers for brand switching, may be varying based on the different intensity levels of social media exposure, especially taking into consideration the effect of perceived risk on consumer brand switching behavior.

In this perspective, we believe that different intensity levels of social media mix exposures, that is exposure to only owned media mix on the brands' social media page (SoloMix) or exposure in combination with paid media as ads in social media pages (ComboMix) or to be exposed also to earned media messages in consumer forums (FullMix), will have differing levels of effect on the brand switching intentions due to the mediation effect of perceived risk level of consumers. Thus, referring to the theoretical background as well as previous findings in the literature, we propose the following hypothesis:

H<sub>4</sub>: Social media mix messages and perceived risk will collectively influence brand switching intention of consumers.

H<sub>5</sub>: Perceived risk level of consumers will mediate the effect of social media mix messages on the brand switching intention of consumers.

## 3. Research Methodology

### 3.1. Conceptual Model

The conceptual model which is developed based on the hypothesis proposed is summarized in Figure 1.

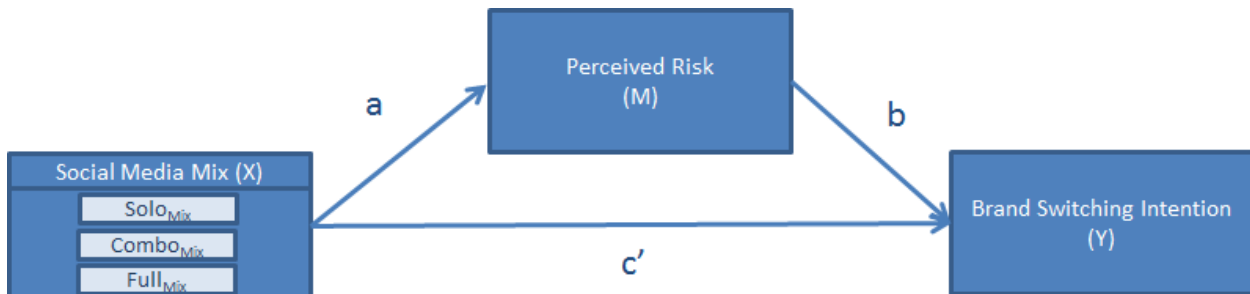


Figure 1. Conceptual Model

### 3.2. Experimental Design and Procedure

This study implemented an experimental design to explore the effects of different combinations of social media mix on the brand switching intention of consumers, on their perceived risk levels and the mediating effect of perceived risk between the different combinations of social media mix and brand switching intentions. The product category identified for the purpose of this study was consumer electronics and the product type was selected as a laptop.

Social media mix was determined as the manipulated factor in the experimental design. Three groups of social media messages were created for the purpose of this study. Table 1 summarizes the experimental design of three groups.

Table 1. Experimental Design Groups

Group	Media Mix Name	Media Type			Message Exposure Combination
		Owned	Paid	Earned	
0	Solo <sub>Mix</sub>	●	-	-	Brand's Social Media Page
1	Combo <sub>Mix</sub>	●	●	-	Brand's Social Media Page Advertisement in Social Media Platform
2	Full <sub>Mix</sub>	●	●	●	Brand's Social Media Page Advertisement in Social Media Platform Consumer Reviews in Forums

As we see in Table 1, subjects in each group were exposed to different combinations of Social Media Mix. Subjects in SoloMix group were exposed to a message generated by the brand and presented to the subjects via brand's social media page. This media mix represented the Owned Media in the experimental design. Subjects in ComboMix group were exposed to two messages generated by the brand, presented to the subjects via brand's social media page and an advertisement in social media platform. This media mix represented the combination of Owned Media and Paid Media in the experimental design. Finally, subjects in FullMix group were exposed to three sources of messages generated by the brand and customers, presented to the subjects via brand's social media page, advertisement in social media platform and consumer reviews about the brand and its products in consumer forums. This media mix represented the combination of Owned Media, Paid Media and Earned Media in the experimental design.

Messages in all media mix groups were identical and included price promotion information regarding a new a model of laptop offered by a hypothetical brand generated for the purpose of this study. The social media platforms and consumer review forums were replicas of well-known social media platforms and the messages presented to each group via respective web pages in a picture format.

Subjects involved in the study consisted of citizens living in the three large cities of Turkey. More than 170 online questionnaires were distributed, 150 complete questionnaires were collected. Subjects were randomly assigned to one of the three groups, each having 50 subjects and in total 150 respondents. They filled out the questionnaire in online environment and an introductory scenario was presented explaining that they need to buy a new laptop and they search for a brand and product which offers a good value. Following the introductory scenario, relevant messages were introduced to respondents depending on the experimental group they belong. Subjects first asked to fill out the items which measure the perceived risk level regarding the purchase of this product category. Following the measurement of perceived risk, brand switching intention of consumers was measured.

### 3.3. Measures

The scales used in this study were taken from the corresponding literature, each validated by the respective authors. Depending on the scales employed, the instrument was designed in combination of semantic and bipolar scales. Brand Switching Intention scale was adopted from the study of Bansal and Taylor (2002). The authors generated this bipolar scale with three items based on the studies of Oliver and Swan (1989) and Zeithaml et al. (1996). Perceived Risk scale was adopted from the study of Bearden and Shrimp (1982). The authors used a three-item, nine points, semantic scale.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and reliability analysis were simultaneously conducted in order to confirm the validity and the reliability of the scales employed.

Construct validity was checked by conducting the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) including 6 variable items. CFA produced adequate level of fit indices ( $\chi^2/DF = 1.047$ , CFI=0.999, IFI=0.999, RMSEA= 0.020). The CMIN/DF value reported including all other fit indices were at the acceptable levels (Bagozzi & Yi, 1990).

Standardized and unstandardized factor loadings which are shown in Table 2 are at satisfactory levels and all statistically significant.

Table 2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results

Variables	Items	Standardized Factor Loads	Unstandardized Factor Loads
Perceived Risk	RI1	0.895	0.914
	RI2	0.942	1.006
	RI3	0.944	1,000
Brand Switching Intention	SW1	0.853	0.952
	SW2	0.938	1.059
	SW3	0.917	1,000
p<0.01 for all items			

Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were calculated to check the convergent validity of the scales employed. All calculated values are above the minimum threshold of 0.5 and this confirms the convergent validity (Byrne, 2010). The discriminant validity of the scales was also confirmed by comparing the square roots of calculated AVE scores with the correlation components. Composite reliability and Cronbach  $\alpha$  scores were above the minimum acceptable levels, thus the reliabilities of the scales were also confirmed (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The results of convergent validity, discriminant validity and reliability checks are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Validity and Reliability Checks

Variables	1	2
Perceived Risk	(.927)	
Brand Switching Intention	-.148	(.903)
Composite Reliability	.948	.930
Average Variance Extracted	.860	.816
Cronbach $\alpha$	.948	.929
*No Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).		
Diagonals show the square root of AVEs		

### 3.4. Analysis

Testing of the hypothesis in this experimental design was done by employing PROCESS SPSS macro which provides the asymmetric bootstrap confidence interval (CI) estimates for the measurement of relative indirect relationships, the mediation effect (Hayes and Preacher, 2013). The macro is preferred based on the suitability reference in the literature due to two reasons: First, it is tested and approved in many studies in the literature (Biesanz, Falk, & Savalei, 2010) and secondly, does not make a normality assumption regarding the sample distribution of relative indirect effect (Hayes & Scharkow, 2013). Relative total and direct effects were also measured using the same macro which generates the required regression equations.

## 4. Results

Table 4 shows the results of the mediation effect analysis of perceived risk on the relationship between different levels of social media mix exposures and brand switching intention of consumers.

Table 4. Model Outputs

Antecedents	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3					
	Brand Switching Intention (Y)			Perceived Risk (M)			Brand Switching Intention (Y)					
	Coefficient	SE	p	Coefficient	SE	p	Coefficient	SE	p			
Combo <sub>Mix</sub> (X <sub>1</sub> )	c <sub>1</sub>	0,660	0,127	<.001	a <sub>1</sub>	-0,960	0,115	<.001	c <sub>1</sub> <sup>1</sup>	0,370	0,149	.014
Full <sub>Mix</sub> (X <sub>2</sub> )	c <sub>2</sub>	2,360	0,127	<.001	a <sub>2</sub>	-2,340	0,115	<.001	c <sub>2</sub> <sup>1</sup>	1,653	0,240	<.001
Perceived Risk (M)									b	-0,302	0,088	.008
Constant	l <sub>y</sub>	1,800	0,090	<.001	l <sub>m</sub>	3,780	0,081	<.001	l <sub>y</sub>	2,942	0,344	<.001
		R <sup>2</sup> = .7148				R <sup>2</sup> = .7413				R <sup>2</sup> = .7361		
		F(2,147) = 184, p<.001				F(2,147) = 210, p<.001				F(3,146) = 135, p<.001		

Model 1: c<sub>1</sub> and c<sub>2</sub> stand for relative total effects of X<sub>1</sub> and X<sub>2</sub> on Y. l<sub>y</sub> stands for the constant.

Model 2: a<sub>1</sub> and a<sub>2</sub> stand for relative total effects of X<sub>1</sub> and X<sub>2</sub> on M. l<sub>m</sub> stands for the constant.

Model 3: c<sub>1</sub><sup>1</sup> and c<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup> stand for relative direct effects of X<sub>1</sub> and X<sub>2</sub> on Y. b stands for the direct effect of M on Y and l<sub>y</sub> stands for the constant.

Model 1 estimates the relative total effects of social media mix experimental conditions on the brand switching intention of consumers. The results confirm that social media mix exposure influence the brand switching behavior of consumers (R<sup>2</sup> = .714, F(2,147) = 184, p<.001). This result leads us to support H1. Further analysis of Model 1 indicates that compared to be exposed to SoloMix, consumers have higher brand switching intention when they exposed to ComboMix (B= 0.660, p<.001) and similarly they have higher brand switching intention when they exposed to FullMix (B=2.360, p<.001). The coefficients of regression analysis indicate the mean differences between the ComboMix and SoloMix and between FullMix and SoloMix in terms of brand switching intention. Thus, H1a and H1b were also supported.

Model 2 estimates the relative total effects of social media mix experimental conditions on the perceived risk of consumers. The results confirm that social media mix exposure influence the perceived risk level of consumers (R<sup>2</sup> = .741, F(2,147) = 210, p<.001). Thus, H2 was supported. The results in Model 2 indicate that compared to be exposed to SoloMix, consumers have lower perceived risk when they exposed to ComboMix (B=-0.960, p<.001) and similarly they have lower perceived risk when they exposed to FullMix (B=-2.340, p<.001). The coefficients in Model 2 indicate the mean differences of perceived risk between the ComboMix and SoloMix and between FullMix and SoloMix. These results lead us to support H2a and H2b.

Finally, Model 3 estimates the relative direct effects of social media mix experimental conditions and perceived risk on brand switching intention. The results confirm that both social media mix exposure and perceived risk collectively influence the brand switching intention of consumers (R<sup>2</sup> = .736, F(3,146) = 135, p<.001). Relative direct effects of ComboMix (B=0.370, p=.014) and FullMix (B=1.653, p<.001) on brand switching intention are positive and statistically significant. Further analysis of Model 3 indicates that perceived risk has a negative and significant effect on brand switching intention of consumers (B= -0.302, p=.008). Based on these results, H3 and H4 were supported. The illustration of relative total and direct effects based on the findings are shown in the Figure 2.



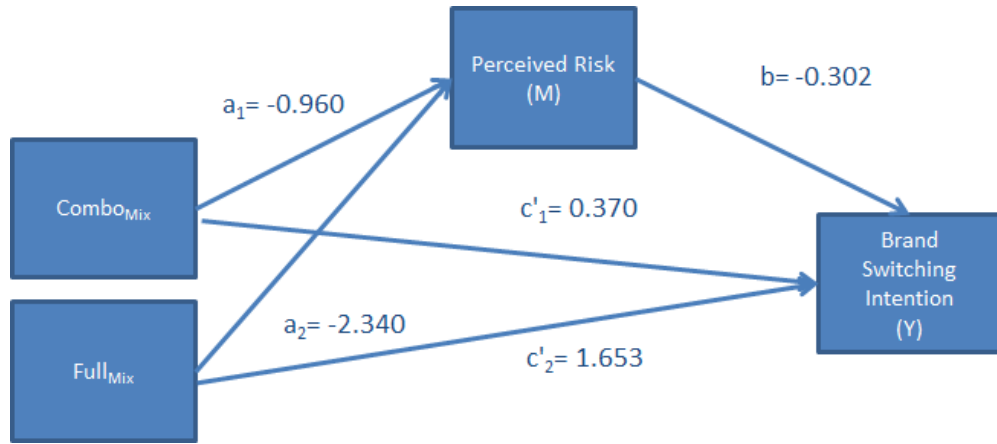


Figure 2. Relative Total and Relative Direct Effects

The testing of mediation effect is done by measuring the relative indirect effects of social media mix on brand switching behavior through perceived risk. The mediation effect is the product of regression equations of Model 1 and Model 2. Due to the non-normal sampling distribution of regression coefficients, a bootstrap confidence interval with 5,000 bootstrap samples has been employed. The following equations provide the relative indirect effect values for ComboMix and FullMix, respectively. The results of the analysis are summarized in Table 5.

$$RIE_{\text{Combo}} = a_1 b = -0.960(-0.302) = 0.2899$$

$$RIE_{\text{Full}} = a_2 b = -2.340(-0.302) = 0.7067$$

Table 5. Relative Indirect Effects of Social Media Mix on Brand Switching Intention

	Media Mix	→	Risk Perception	→	Brand Switching Intention	
	Effect		Boot SE		Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
Combo Mix ( $X_1$ )	0.2899		0.0915		0.1146	0.4731
Full Mix ( $X_2$ )	0.7067		0.2122		0.2834	1.1256

Table 5 provides 95% CI = 0.1146 to 0.4731 and 95% CI = 0.2834 to 1.1256 for ComboMix and FullMix, respectively. Since both CI values in each experimental condition are above zero, this indicates that the relative indirect effects are positive. Additionally, as at least one of the relative indirect effects are different from zero, this confirms us that the effect of social media mix exposed on the brand switching behavior is mediated by the perceived risk level of consumers (Hayes and Preacher, 2014). The level of mediation is partial since relative total and relative direct effects are different from zero and statistically significant. Based on this result, H5 was supported.

## 5. Discussion

The results of this study suggest that those consumers who are exposed to only brand generated messages placed in the social media page of the brand (Solo<sub>Mix</sub>), react less favorably towards a price promotion offer made by this brand and consequently have lower levels of intention to switch their brands. Referring to the Signaling, Social Exchange and Uncertainty Reduction theories, consumers hesitate to try the new brand due to the incomplete information, uncertainty about the consequences as well as perceived risks associated with wrong decisions. The intention level to switch the brand becomes higher when the social media exposure intensifies with the inclusion of exposures to paid media content (Combo<sub>Mix</sub>) as well as earned media content (Full<sub>Mix</sub>).

The level of perceived risk regarding switching to the new brand is higher when the customer is exposed only to only brand generated messages placed in the social media page of the brand (Solo<sub>Mix</sub>) and the level of perceived risk becomes lower when the social media exposure intensifies with the inclusion of exposures to paid media content (Combo<sub>Mix</sub>) as well as earned media content (Full<sub>Mix</sub>). Referring to the three theories mentioned above, as the information gap, uncertainty and risks associated with the situation decreases, consumer perceive the brand switching decision less risky.

In this perspective, the results of the study also confirm that the perceived risk level of consumers mediate the effectiveness of social media messages on brand switching intention of consumers. Compared to brand generated messages placed in the social media page of the brand (SoloMix), exposure also to paid media messages (ComboMix), increases the intention to switch the brand since exposure to ComboMix decreases the perceived risk level of consumers. Similarly and at the same time showing a higher effect, exposure to owned, paid and earned media messages at the same time (FullMix) increases the brand switching intention of consumers more than the exposure only to brand generated messages placed in the social media page of the brand (SoloMix). Thus, the impact on brand switching intention through perceived risk is relatively higher when the intensity of social media increases and exposure moves from SoloMix to ComboMix and finally to FullMix.

## **6. Managerial Implications, Limitation and Future Research**

### ***6.1 Managerial Implications***

As the conventional media transforms to digital, and digital media becomes the new mainstream media, marketers need to understand the dynamics of consumer behavior in the social media context. Collective behavior and synchronized reflexes underline the interactions between the brands and consumers. Thus, consumers do not represent only themselves and decisions made by these consumers affect the rest of the community in a much intense level than ever before. The results of the study clearly indicates that brand generated messages need to be supported by more credible message sources such as other consumers to have a higher impact on brand switching intentions by reducing the perceived risk level.

Marketers who target to acquire new customers should understand that whatever is the offer presented to the prospect consumers, the decision making process is an asymmetric one and changes of having a successful return to marketing messages increase with the inclusion of credible message sources into the communication process. In this perspective, the most credible source is existing consumers who have some experience with the brand. Thus, marketers should start to create a unique, superior customer experience in a continuous way in order to energize the customer base to spread the positive word about their experiences with the brand in the social media. This will lead to the creation of support base helping to increase the effectiveness of social media communication and consequently increase the efficiency of promotional campaigns.

### ***6.2 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research***

This study measures the effect of different media mix exposures on the brand switching intention of consumers through the perceived risk levels by considering a hypothetical brand name and only one product category, electronics. Thus, measurement was not made taking into consideration a real brand. In order to increase the generalizability of the current study, testing real brands in multiple categories would be appropriate.

Future researches should expand the scope of the current study by including other product categories, measuring cross country and generational differences. An additional expansion may be to conduct the study in the services context to understand the underlying relations which by nature is expected to be different from physical product context.

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