

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING ON CONSUMER BRAND SELECTION: A CASE OF DURBAN CUSTOMERS

O impacto do marketing de mídia social na seleção da marca do consumidor: um caso de clientes de Durban

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to assess the impact of social media marketing on South African consumers' brand selection in Durban, with the primary goal of determining the extent to which social media marketing influences consumers' decision-making when selecting a brand. This research used a

Resumo

O objetivo deste estudo foi avaliar o impacto do marketing de mídia social na seleção de marcas dos consumidores sul-africanos em Durban, com o objetivo principal de determinar até que ponto o marketing de mídia social influencia a tomada de decisão dos consumidores ao selecionar uma marca.

quantitative research method and non-probability sampling approaches. Only 400 questionnaires out of 450 were collected. In this study, descriptive, and inferential statistics were used. The results of this study suggest that social media is an extremely effective communication tool that might be used to sway consumers' judgments when selecting where to buy. All users claimed to utilize computer-generated platforms, with Facebook being the most widely used. Customers claimed that the more information they learnt about a business through social media, the more they desired to purchase it, and the opposite was also true. According to the report, businesses should publish promotional events, competitions, and giveaways on their social media brand pages to increase customer interest and traffic. Another recommendation was for marketers to establish a personality who can effectively represent a brand on social media and give it a lively mood that will attract customers.

Keywords: Brand Selection; Consumer Purchasing; Social Media; Social Media Marketing; South African Consumers.

Esta pesquisa utilizou um método de pesquisa quantitativo e abordagens de amostragem não probabilística. Apenas 400 questionários de 450 foram coletados. Neste estudo, foram utilizadas estatísticas descritivas e inferenciais. Os resultados deste estudo sugerem que a mídia social é uma ferramenta de comunicação extremamente eficaz que pode ser usada para influenciar os julgamentos dos consumidores ao selecionar onde comprar. Todos os usuários afirmaram utilizar plataformas geradas por computador, sendo o Facebook a mais utilizada. Os clientes alegaram que quanto mais informações eles aprenderam sobre um negócio por meio da mídia social, mais eles desejaram comprá-lo, e o oposto também era verdadeiro. De acordo com o relatório, as empresas devem publicar eventos promocionais, concursos e brindes em suas páginas de marca de mídia social para aumentar o interesse e o tráfego do cliente. Outra recomendação foi que os profissionais de marketing estabelecessem uma personalidade que pudesse representar uma marca de maneira eficaz nas mídias sociais e dar a ela um clima animado que atrairia clientes.

Palavras-chave: Seleção de Marca; Compras do Consumidor; Mídia social; Marketing de mídia social; Consumidores da África do Sul.

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INTRODUCTION

Social media has altered the way that companies and customers interact in the modern era. Technology improvements have made it necessary for modern consumers to demand quick, simple, and clear information about brands, and this is also true for customers in Durban, South Africa. Sites like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram are examples of social media platforms that provide open forums and simple access to information about businesses and brands that could influence consumers' purchasing decisions. Now, customers are more interested in and find more credibility through chasing and streamlining peer opinions instead of receiving traditional marketing messages, and this has radically shifted how consumers analyze products, evaluate them, and build their final attitudes (Shareef, et al., 2019).

Customers are now pickier and have higher expectations of brands because they are now part of the conversation, and they can now even influence it. One-way communication has become two-way thanks to social media. Given the potential to increase customer satisfaction, attract new customers, and strengthen ties with current customers, marketing communication tactics must alter to reflect this significant transformation (Cheung, Pires & Rosenberger III, 2019; Lin, et al., 2022).

It has also been observed that businesses typically struggle to leverage social media to advance strategic marketing strategies, and it is also acknowledged that they have difficulty calculating the return on investment (ROI) from social media marketing efforts because most of them concentrate only on specific observable results, such as the effect on sales and purchases (Lal, et al., 2020; Tafesse & Wien,

2018). It is also unknown whether Durban businesses use social media extensively as a component of their marketing plans. The attitudes of Durban consumers toward the use of social media marketing as a tool for making purchases are likewise unknown. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to ascertain how social media marketing affects Durban customers' brand selection. Four social media networking websites—Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram- are this study's focus.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing (SMM) is a multidisciplinary and cross-functional concept that uses social media to accomplish business goals by providing value to stakeholders (Hinson, Twum & Arhin, 2022). Additionally, it describes the concerted efforts a business makes to convert its social media participation, influence, and communication networks into useful, strategic means of accomplishing desired marketing goals (Wibowo, et al., 2020). The market and business dynamics have changed because of a shift in the competitive positions of enterprises and an increase in consumer power brought about by social media sites and all other digitals, social media, and mobile platforms. The game has changed for marketers who are attempting to figure out how to adapt their business strategy to survive in connected, computer-mediated social environments and comprehend how online consumers behave on social networks (Arora & Sanni, 2019).

Social media marketing has brought about many important developments in the market. Firstly, social media marketing enables connections between companies and customers that were previously inconceivable. This connectivity is made possible through a variety of platforms that allow social networks to develop from shared interests and ideas. Social media marketing has been found to lessen dissatisfaction by satisfying both the emotional and cognitive needs of customers. More specifically, it has been found that accessing social media as a source of information satisfies both the cognitive and emotional entertainment needs of consumers (such as joy, comedy, and excitement) (Athwal, et al., 2019; Li, Larimo & Leonidou, 2021).

SMM is a simple, affordable alternative for keeping up with sectorial transitions and gaining a competitive edge. Building strong brand equity requires engaging in social media marketing activities (Buratti, Parola & Satta, 2018; Zollo, et al., 2020). Businesses that employ successful SMM techniques may discover new ways to acquire a competitive edge. SMM offers the chance to develop, maintain, and enhance social and professional ties with friends, family, and even enterprises in addition to providing a new channel for communicating with one's audience. Businesses gain from SMM since it plays a key role in brand marketing, which is crucial for commercial investments. SMM helps companies improve their relationships with internal and external stakeholders, which is advantageous to their financial performance (Dlamini & Johnston, 2018; Jacobson, Gruzd & Hernández-García, 2020; Mason, Narcum & Mason, 2021).

Social Media and Buying Behaviour of South African consumers

Like many customers in the first world, South African customers are enthusiastic about advancements in smartphone technology. Over 90 million mobile connections exist in South Africa, and 20 to 22 million people are estimated to access social media websites via mobile devices. Of South African internet users, 22% have made online purchases, and 48% have this as a future intention (IT News Africa, 2016; Shava & Chinyamurindi, 2018; Thusi & Maduku, 2020). Contrary to their counterparts in industrialized nations, South African consumers and businesses have regrettably not fully utilized the potential of social media networks (Oji, Iwu & Haydam, 2017). Consumers in South Africa are mostly concerned with brand awareness and their views of brand purchase are impacted by two major variables functional value and uniqueness. The middle class, namely the new black middle class, spends very well. These buyers are looking for one-of-a-kind things and are less likely to spend money on necessities like food and housing. South African consumers are technologically savvy. South African consumers are always willing to try new brands and frequently switch between certain well-known names within a category, but they are quite selective about the brands they favour. They prefer to buy fashionable and high-quality brands. To capture the attention of South African consumers, brand

marketers must guarantee that their brands are distinct and distinguishable from other brands on the market (Makhitha, 2021; Mosupyoe, 2014).

Customers leverage social media as a platform to share their thoughts and experiences and search for information, suggestions, and any other issues that interest them. Social media has consequently altered the shopping behaviour of consumers. Social media has given users more power by adding a new element to information search and promoting a "participatory culture." Users can now connect with people who have similar interests to them and engage in an infinite circle of information exchange, updating their knowledge of new developments, and soliciting feedback and ratings on a variety of products, services, and activities. New strategies for locating and learning about the large range of products and services accessible have emerged as a result of the increasing dominance of consumer opinions on goods and services in digital forums by strangers. (Prasath & Yoganathen, 2018; Voramontri & Klieb, 2019).

As consumers respond favourably to social media, they frequently buy products promoted on it or search for information. At every stage of the purchasing decision-making process, social media can be used to influence consumers. After seeing products on social media, customers can search for them and purchase them online or in person. In addition to being a potent instrument that can trigger impulse buying, social media exerts more impact on customer trust in their purchase intentions through social networking sites (Manzoor, et al., 2020; Shah, Zahoor & Qureshi, 2019). Customers are more engaged in complex purchases, which is why they more frequently use social media and read customer evaluations before deciding (Aragoncillo & Orus, 2018; Xhema, 2019).

Social Media and Brand Selection

Social media influences consumer attitudes, behaviours, and purchasing intentions as well as cultivates opinion capital (Park, Hyun & Thavisay, 2021). Social media can influence how consumers feel about brands, as well as their views and purchasing decisions. Social media makes it easier for companies to communicate with their customers, which promotes positive brand perception (Ismail, 2017; Maresova, Hruska & Kuca, 2020). Therefore, promoting user engagement on brand social media pages boosts client loyalty and commitment, which in turn affects consumer behaviours such as enhanced favourable word-of-mouth, brand preference, and buy intentions (Qin, 2020).

In addition to brand marketing, social media may be used to establish an organization's brand selection and play a significant role in enhancing consumer education and customer service (Kohli, et al., 2018). The use of social media enhances customer brand preference, reputation, and image. Furthermore, it has a bigger role in influencing consumers' preference for positive brands and the growth of their long-lasting online reach since it helps change consumers' "neutral" perceptions of a company into "positive" perceptions (Shay & Van Der Horst, 2019; Yang, Basile & Letourneau, 2020).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was descriptive in design as it was intended to produce precise explanations of perceptions and experiences and further methodically explain the current events under the study phenomenon (Atmowardoyo, 2018; Doyle, 2020). A cross-sectional quantitative research design was used in this study to examine how social media marketing impacts Durban consumers' brand selection. Customers residing in Durban who were 18 years of age and older and active on social media platforms comprised the study's target group. The recruitment of respondents used non-probability sampling techniques such as convenience and purposive sampling. The response rate was 89% despite the fact that a sample size of 450 was anticipated. A survey with a standardized 45-question questionnaire was conducted amongst consumers to gather primary data; participation in the study was entirely voluntary. A pre-test was conducted using 10 questionnaires distributed to users to ascertain the measurement tool's validity. Social media networks and email were used to distribute the questionnaires. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 20) was used to analyze the data collected for this study, utilizing both descriptive and inferential statistics.

RESULTS

Table 1
Age-Related Gender Distribution

		Gender		Total	
		Male	Female		
Age group (years)	18 – 19	Count	38	39	77
		% within the Age group	49.4%	50.6%	100.0%
		% within Gender	17.5%	21.3%	19.3%
		% of Total	9.5%	9.8%	19.3%
	20 – 29	Count	150	111	261
		% within the Age group	57.5%	42.5%	100.0%
		% within Gender	69.1%	60.7%	65.3%
		% of Total	37.5%	27.8%	65.3%
	30 – 39	Count	22	22	44
		% within the Age group	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
		% within Gender	10.1%	12.0%	11.0%
		% of Total	5.5%	5.5%	11.0%
	40 – 49	Count	4	6	10
		% within the Age group	40.0%	60.0%	100.0%
		% within Gender	1.8%	3.3%	2.5%
		% of Total	1.0%	1.5%	2.5%
	50 – 59	Count	3	5	8
		% within the Age group	37.5%	62.5%	100.0%
		% within Gender	1.4%	2.7%	2.0%
		% of Total	0.8%	1.3%	2.0%
Total	Count	217	183	400	
	% within the Age group	54.3%	45.8%	100.0%	
	% within Gender	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
	% of Total	54.3%	45.8%	100.0%	

Source: Developed by the authors

The ratio of men to women is almost 1:1 overall. (54.3 %: 45.8 %). Males made up 69.1% of the population aged 20 to 29. Ages 20 to 29 made up 57.5% of the total population. 20 to 29 years old males made up 37.5% of the sample. Ages 20 to 29 made up 42.5% of the population. 27.8% of the sample were females between the ages of 20 and 29.

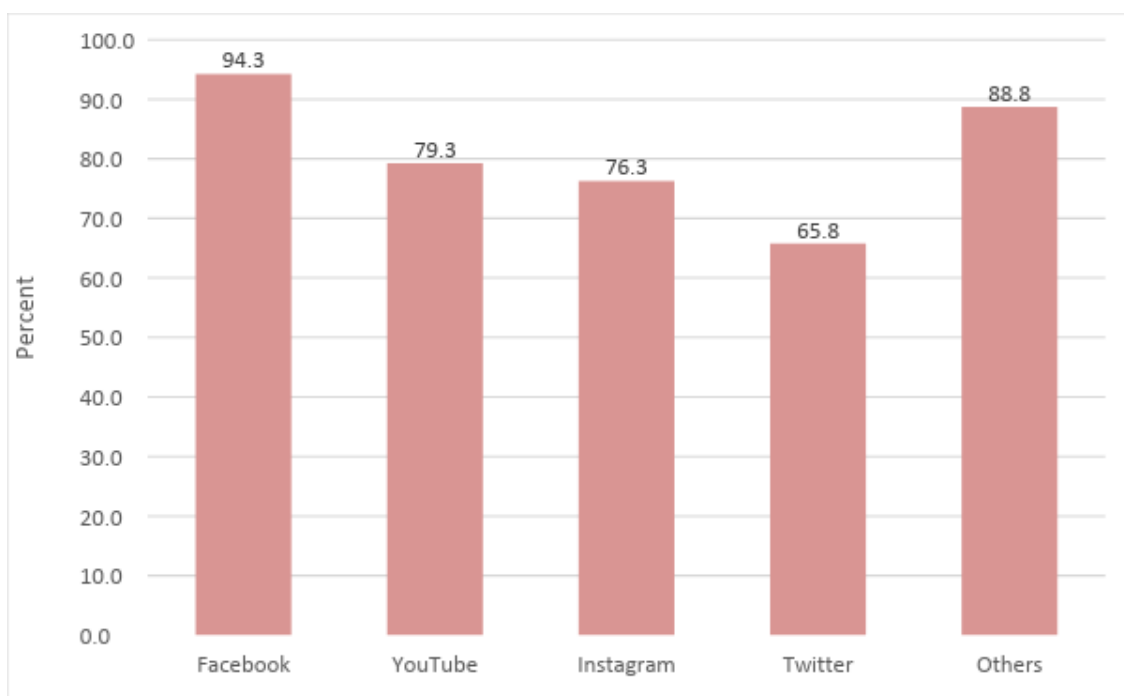
The smallest group of respondents, those between the ages of 50 and 59, constituted only 2.0% of the sample as a whole. In the whole sample, men made up 1.4% while women made up 2.7%. The age group of 40 to 49, which made up 2.5% of the entire sample, came next. In the overall sample, there were 1.8% males and 3.3% females.

Table 2
Consumers 'computer-generated communities' involvement

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	400	100,0	100,0	100,0

Source: Developed by the authors

The majority of respondents admitted to taking part in computer-generated communities. This illustrates how crucial social media is to marketing. This analysis corroborates the claims by Kim & Kim (2020) that social media has enhanced online social contact. Social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn made it possible for societies to communicate with one another in tremendously meaningful ways. Social media users can swiftly and easily exchange passive information while conversing actively with friends, co-workers, and other users.

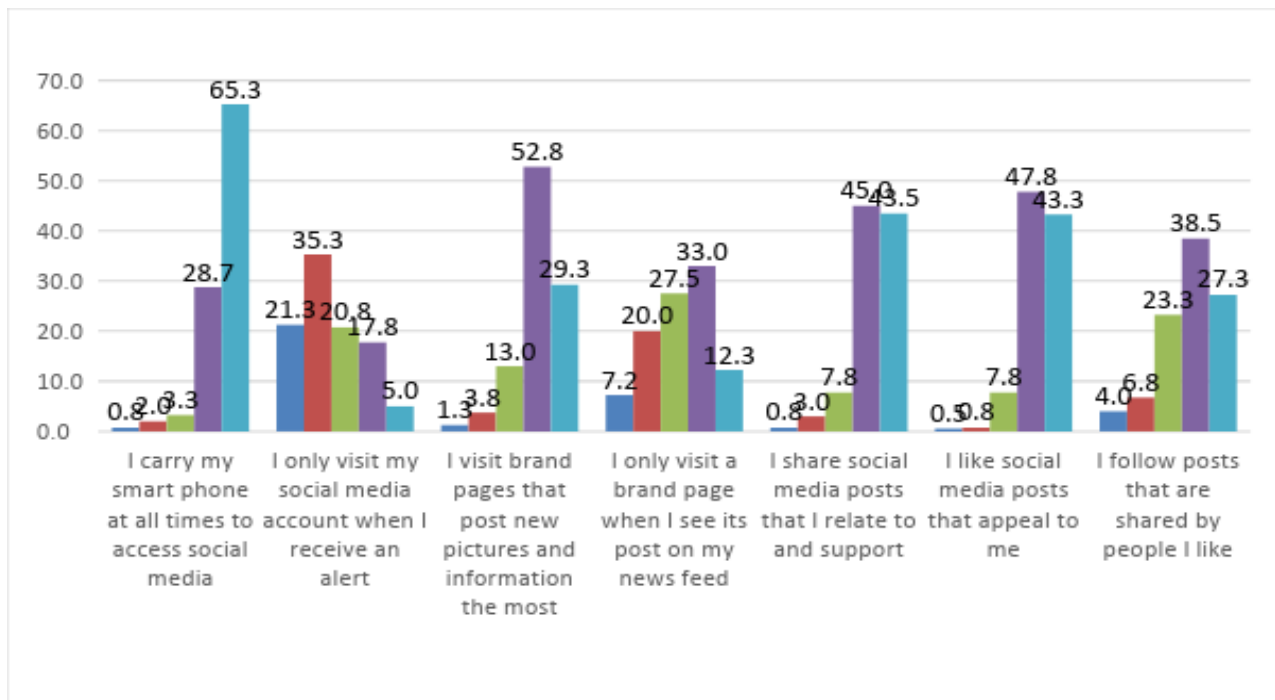


Source: Developed by the authors

Figure 1. The popularity of social media networks among users

Facebook is the most widely used platform (94.3%) and Twitter is the least popular (65.8%). This implies that amongst people living in Durban, Facebook is the most widely used social networking site. The results validate assertions made by Sanne and Wiese (2018) that the most popular social media channel for marketing is Facebook, particularly business-to-customer advertising. With 1.04 billion daily active users, Facebook offers two main ways for businesses to interact with their audience.

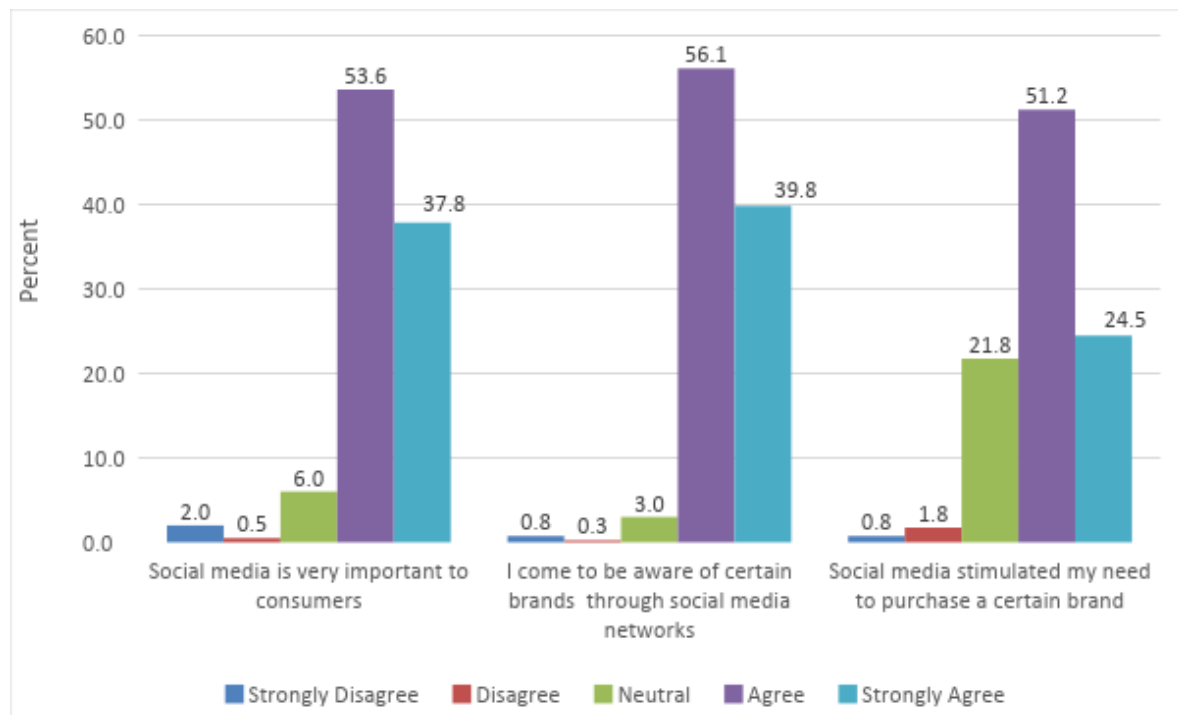
The statement with the highest percentage of disagrees (56.6%) was "Only when I get an alert do I access my social media accounts." However, more respondents claimed they kept using their social media accounts even when they weren't getting any notifications. The majority of people agreed with the statement, "I always have my phone with me so I can utilize social media." The brand pages with the most recent images and content are visited by 82.1% of respondents. Only 88.5% of the consumers surveyed for this study consented to share social media postings that they supported and identified with, and 65.8% followed posts from persons they liked on social media.



Source: Developed by the authors

Figure 2. Consumers' social media network usage

This suggests that compared to YouTube and Twitter, the majority of users are more engaged on Facebook and other social media platforms. Furthermore, this will imply that Facebook will offer more opportunities for marketers to interact with customers than other platforms.



Source: Developed by the authors

Figure 3. Social media importance

In every case, there is a high level of agreement (Agree + Strongly Agree). 53.6 % agreed and 37.8 % strongly agreed that social media is very important to them, respectively, while 56.9 % agreed and 39.8 % strongly agreed that they become aware of brands through social media networks. Finally, 51.3 % agreed and 24.5 % strongly agreed that social media increased their desire to purchase specific brands. The level of agreement is much higher than for the other alternatives ($p < 0.001$).

This exemplifies how crucial social media is for promoting brands. Establishing a company's brand is the main objective of social media marketing. Raising public awareness of a new service or product is frequently the top concern for big corporations, individuals, and small businesses. According to Hermanda, Sumarwan & Tinaprillian (2019), one of the best ways to gradually enhance sales is by enhancing a company's brand perception through social media (2019).

Table 3
Consumer's brand preference

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree		Chi-Square
	C o u n t	R o w N %	C o u n t	R o w N %	C o u n t	R o w N %	C o u n t	R o w N %	C o u n t	R o w N %	p- value
The brand's products are of good quality	2	0.5%	6	1.5%	66	16.5%	218	54.5%	108	27.0%	0.000
The brand provides the best customer service	4	1.0%	9	2.3%	75	18.8%	228	57.0%	84	21.0%	0.000
The Brand's online purchases are secure	8	2.0%	33	8.3%	127	31.8%	162	40.5%	70	17.5%	0.000
I like the cost-effectiveness of the brand	6	1.5%	16	4.0%	103	25.8%	215	53.8%	60	15.0%	0.000
The price of the brand is reasonable	4	1.0%	25	6.3%	91	22.8%	204	51.1%	75	18.8%	0.000
I like the quality and reliability of the information provided on the brand page	0	0.0%	5	1.3%	55	13.8%	241	60.3%	99	24.8%	0.000
The brand's social media page provides real-time customer feedback	2	0.5%	0	0.0%	36	9.0%	237	59.3%	125	31.3%	0.000
The brand's social media page content is exciting	3	0.8%	7	1.8%	69	17.3%	198	49.6%	122	30.6%	0.000
The brand is used by my favourite celebrity	19	4.8%	42	10.5%	103	25.8%	143	35.8%	93	23.3%	0.000
The brand has a lot of promotional activities	5	1.3%	19	4.8%	72	18.0%	236	59.0%	68	17.0%	0.000
Most of my online friends buy the same brand	11	2.8%	39	9.8%	116	29.0%	172	43.0%	62	15.5%	0.000
I am loyal to the brand	6	1.5%	13	3.3%	117	29.3%	184	46.0%	80	20.0%	0.000
The brand seems to be involved in corporate social responsibilities that I relate to	2	0.5%	21	5.3%	133	33.3%	180	45.0%	64	16.0%	0.000
Communication with the brand on this platform is less formal and I relate to it	0	0.0%	3	0.8%	24	6.0%	224	56.0%	149	37.3%	0.000
The brand satisfies all my needs	1	0.3%	12	3.0%	94	23.5%	195	48.8%	98	24.5%	0.000

Source: Developed by the authors

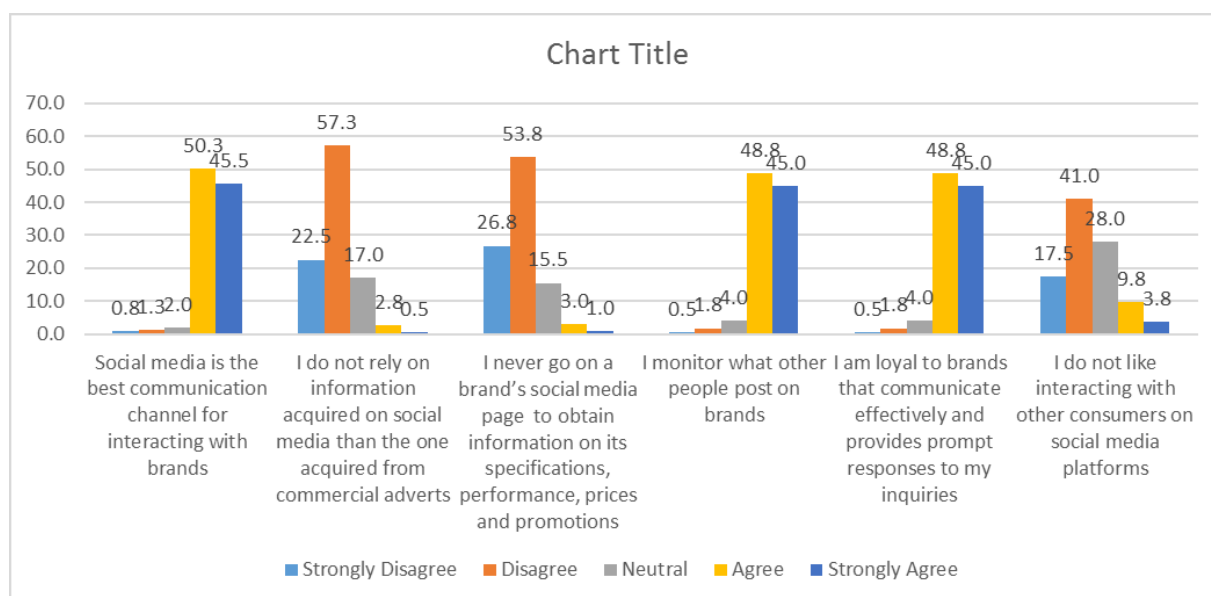
The three statements with the highest levels of agreement were "I like the quality and reliability of the information provided on the brand page," "I like the communication with the brand on this platform is less formal and I relate to it," and "the brand's social media page provides real-time feedback." People value a company that puts their needs and beliefs first, as evidenced by the level of pleasure they expressed across all three claims. The following highest levels of agreement were found for the statements "the brand's products are of good quality," "the company's social media page content is engaging," and "the brand gives the best customer service," respectively, at 81.5%, 80.2%, and 78.0%.

An important tactic for convincing customers that the brand is reliable is to produce and distribute pertinent information. In a similar vein, users are more likely to be drawn to a brand when it presents open, truthful information in a conversational tone. The resultant trust will therefore finally result in sales. Karim (2020) asserts that positive customer experiences brought forth by social media marketing assist businesses in a variety of ways to market to and draw in more potential customers. The provision of services or goods, encompasses all interactions and communications with the customer. The evidence shows that the statements "the brand is used by my favourite celebrity," "most of my online friends buy the same brand," and "the brand's online purchases are secure" have the highest levels of disagreement, respectively, 15.3%, 12.6%, and 10.3%. There are no statements with a high level of agreement.

None of the aforementioned statements met any threshold of agreement. All 15 statements had higher levels of uncertainty than disagreement, with the two highest levels of uncertainty slightly over 30%, but no uncertainty level was higher than any level of agreement.

Observed are the following trends:

- Every statement shows significantly more agreement than disagreement, with certain degrees of the agreement being smaller but still more than others;
- There are no claims that point to greater degrees of disagreement; and
- The table tests the importance of the differences and displays the results.



Source: Developed by the authors

Figure 4. Social media effectiveness

The results reveal a range of scoring patterns, with high scores for both agreement and disagreement with the statements about the effectiveness of social networking. The level of uncertainty is less than the other scores. Additionally, there is a significant gap between those who agree and disagree. With 95.8% of respondents agreeing, this claim is the most widely accepted: "For interacting with brands, social media is the best communication platform." The statements "I monitor what other people post about brands" and "I am loyal to brands that communicate well and provide quick responses to my issues" were the ones that received the highest levels of agreement (93.8% each), and they were placed next.

The results imply that customers want to engage with companies on social media platforms similarly to how they engage with their peers in the modern world. Social media has emerged as a crucial tool for connecting customers and brands, so businesses must comprehend how consumers offer value (Dootson, Beatson & Drenan, 2016).

Table 4

Social media and consumer decision making

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	p-value
My purchase decisions are influenced by other consumers' reviews	1,5	6,3	28,3	49,3	14,8	0,000
I don't think information found on social media is trustworthy.	27,5	59,3	9,3	3,3	0,8	0,000
I always depict alternative brands to purchase on social media networks	1,0	3,5	42,0	48,3	5,3	0,000
Interactions with online friends cannot sway my purchase behaviour	9,3	41,0	37,5	10,0	2,3	0,000
Before making a buying decision, I ask other customers for recommendations and opinions.	1,0	3,3	20,3	62,8	12,8	0,000
I always make better or different choices for myself after reading the social media information on a brand page.	0,5	0,5	6,0	60,3	32,8	0,000

Source: Developed by the authors

According to data in Table 4, 93.1% of consumers seek recommendations and guidance from other buyers before making a purchase. This implies that consumers turn to social media for brand information at various points during the purchasing process. Reviews left by other users and data from brand social media pages, as a result, have a significant influence on consumers' decisions over which brands to purchase.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Social media should be used along with other elements of the marketing mix for maximum effectiveness. Promotional events, competitions, and giveaways should be posted on a brand page on social media to increase traffic and consumer interest.

Positive interactions between customers and brands lead to increased brand preference, thus brands must expand their engagement with consumers on social media. Brands must also be sincere and truthful when conversing with consumers. It is crucial to position the brand correctly and take part in discussions on social media about issues of shared interest. Brands come across as sincere when their needs and those of the consumer are balanced (Shepherd, Chartrand & Fitzsimons, 2021). In conversations with customers, it has been observed that the less genuine a brand appears, the more dissatisfied customers become with the brand, and dissatisfaction may lead to behaviour that damages the brand. Nothing beats openness when it comes to closing a sale. When consumers are given all the information they require and know how to contact a brand in the event of a problem, they are more likely to choose to buy it (Bright & Logan, 2018; Peng, et al., 2022).

To further improve effectiveness and swiftly identify and correct any anomalies on social media platforms, brands should be examined to ascertain the effectiveness of applied marketing activities. Knowing how many visitors visit a website, how many pages are visited, and which pages perform best is essential. Social media analytics can be used as they help with decision-making (Grover, Kar & Janssen, 2019). With the use of solid analytics and trend analysis of how interactions grow, and sentiment shifts over time utilizing metrics, brands can manageably ration all the conversations, both positive and unfavourable. Overall, the effectiveness of a marketing activity depends on performance indicators.

DIRECTION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study offered several directions for further research, including the investigation and fusion of demographic profiles and sentiment as tools for development, particularly among clients in emerging nations. Instead of the study's major focus on the impact of social media marketing on consumers' brand selection, future research should assess the role of opinion leaders and other influencers on consumer brand preferences. Additionally, it is crucial to study the effects of certain social media platforms because doing so will enable marketers to better understand how those platforms function, who uses them, and how they draw users. This will be incredibly useful to marketers when they create their social media marketing strategies and modify them as needed to account for shifting consumer sentiments.

Research ethic statement

The authors declare that this article is original and has not been previously published elsewhere.

Author contribution statement

The authors oversaw the research's conception, design, implementation, and publication.

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