INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON CONSUMER PURCHASING DECISIONS IN DURBAN

Paballo Patience Ntobaki[1], ORCID: 0000-0001-5746-8972,
Tshepo Tlapana[2*], ORCID: 0000-0002-1777-6177,
Cleopatra Moipone Matli[1], ORCID: 0000-0001-6864-4222

[1]*Durban University of Technology, 41/43 M L Sultan Rd, Greyville, Durban, 4001 Durban, South Africa*
[2]*Walter Sisulu University, 1 Branksome Rd, Chiselhurst, East London, 5247, South Africa*
Corresponding author: Tshepo Tlapana, ttlapana@wsu.ac.za

Abstract. This study examined the influence of social media on Durban customers' purchasing decisions and the extent to which social media influences consumers' decision-making while buying products. The primary purpose of this study was to determine whether consumers are eager to interact with products on social media platforms to obtain more information about product features, benefits, performance, prices, promotions, and reputation. An exploratory study employing a quantitative research approach was carried out, with questionnaires distributed to 400 Durban consumers over the age of 18 who were regular social media users. Descriptive and inferential statistics were employed in this study. The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The study discovered that social media is a very powerful communication tool that can be used to influence consumers' purchasing decisions, and consumers stated that the more they knew about a product through social media, the more they desired to buy it, and vice versa. Businesses should incorporate promotional events, contests, and competitions on their social network product pages to enhance awareness, social media platform traffic, and customer engagement.

Rezumat. Acest studiu a examinat influenţa reţelelor sociale asupra deciziilor de cumpărare ale clienţilor din Durban şi măsura în care reţelele sociale influenţează luarea deciziilor consumatorilor în timp ce cumpără produse. Scopul principal al acestui studiu a fost de a determina dacă consumatorii sunt dornici să interacţioneze cu produsele pe platformele de social media pentru a obţine mai multe informaţii despre caracteristicile produsului, beneficii, performanţă, preţuri, promoţii şi reputaţie. A fost realizat un studiu exploratoriu care foloseşte o abordare de cercetare cantitativă, cu chestionare distribuite la 400 de consumatori Durban cu vârsta de peste 18 ani care erau utilizatori obişnuiţi ai reţelelor sociale. În acest studiu au fost folosite statistici descriptive şi inferenţiale. Datele au fost analizate folosind Pachetul Statistic pentru Ştiinţe Sociale (SPSS). Studiul a descoperit că social media este un instrument de comunicare foarte puternic care poate fi folosit pentru a influenţa deciziile de cumpărare ale consumatorilor, iar consumatorii au afirmat că, cu cât ştiu mai multe despre un produs prin intermediul reţelelor sociale, cu atât îşi doresc mai mult să-l cumpere şi invers. Companiile ar trebui să includă evenimente promoţionale, concursuri şi competiţii pe paginile

lor de produse din rețelele sociale pentru a spori gradul de conștientizare, traficul platformei de social media și implicarea clienților.

Cuvinte cheie: *Comportamentul consumatorului, Luarea deciziilor cumpărătorului, Teoria influenței sociale, Social Media.*

Introduction

Given the circumstances, it is unclear whether businesses in the Durban area are utilizing social media as a substantial component of their promotional campaigns. It is also unknown what Durban consumers' attitudes regarding online product research are during the consumer purchasing decision process; more specifically, the effect of social media marketing when utilized as a research tool. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of social media on Durban customers' purchasing decisions and the extent to which social media influences consumers' decision-making while purchasing goods. It should be underlined that social media has had an irreversible impact on the purchasing cycle of consumers. Rather than simply completing a purchase, today's buyers have added two critical vital skills to the purchasing process that occur before and after the transaction. Consumers now undertake internet research on the products they intend to purchase by reading blog posts, reviews, forums, tweets, and other consumers' opinions. These frames of view surely impact individual judgments. Observing what other consumers remark on social media and participating in their arguments is now part of the consumer decision-making process. Website ratings, comments, reviews, and other features are used by social media to disseminate consumer opinions about products to a large extent, if not totally [1, 2].

Social Media

Since the dawn of computer networking, the internet has served as a social gathering place, earning it the title "social media." Collaboration, sharing, and communications are facilitated through blogs, social networks such as Facebook, and microblogging systems such as Twitter. Web 2.0 broadcasting technologies that translate and transmit media monologues into social-media websites are used in social media. Though wired communication is not a new notion, it is a vastly networked technology that allows massive, online communication available to everyone with an internet connection anywhere in the world. Furthermore, it improves the interactive nature of online conversations [3, 4].

According to [5], social media is intended for advertising, but it may also be used to communicate with customers. Social media, on the other hand, allows consumers and potential customers to engage directly with product managers and marketers. Meanwhile, the worldwide internet consumer market is thriving; most consumers use social media as a tool to search for and purchase products, and product managers and marketers make use of this opportunity to sell their products. According to [6], social networking sites are unquestionably popular. Facebook and YouTube are two of the top three websites in the globe, with Twitter and LinkedIn ranking eighth and thirteenth, respectively. Furthermore, according to [7], Instagram and Facebook are thriving. A quarter of all South Africans now use Facebook, while Instagram had the biggest growth of all South African social networks in 2015, followed by Twitter, which boosted its user base marginally, and YouTube, a video-sharing network. Each year is expected to provide new highlights as the number of social media users continues to grow and existing users' usage escalates.

In light of this, [8] assert that social media allows organizations to communicate with hundreds or even thousands of customers all over the world and that firms are no longer the

sole source of product communication. Customers becoming devotees of products on social media networks and using social media as a growing source of product information leads to the belief that social media, in addition to traditional marketing communication channels, has a substantial impact on a product's success. [9], on the other hand, says that traditional marketing tactics have proven ineffective in an era disrupted by geopolitical, social, cultural, technological, and economic spheres. Consumer needs, attitudes, and demands have also changed dramatically, necessitating current promotional strategies. Thus, information gained from social media networks has a greater influence on encouraging consumer purchases than information obtained from conventional sources [10].

While the subject of social media has received a lot of attention, and businesses are beginning to incorporate it into their marketing strategies, academia has paid insufficient attention to the strategic and commercial aspects of this phenomenon, particularly its relevance and significance as a strategic marketing instrument. Social media is made up of several technologies, but they all share the same basic goal of increasing contact. Forums, blogs, microblogging, social bookmarking, podcasts, videos, image sharing sites, social networking sites, virtual communities such as online gaming, and community-moderated content such as wiki are examples of social media platforms [11, 12].

It makes sense to use social media in an internet marketing setup because it is another online medium by which consumer acquisition efforts may be carried out. Online marketers will be able to understand the behaviour of social media users as a result of this, and online metrics to assess social media activity must be developed [13]. Not just in our daily lives, but also in our societal relationships, has social media revolutionized. Social media use has steadily gained traction as a marketing tool for forming and managing consumer relationships, and it has also been found to influence consumer purchasing behaviour [14]. This means that marketing strategies must be carefully crafted and implemented to facilitate transactions under dynamic and changing environmental conditions to create customer connections and influence consumer behaviour [15, 16] conclude that the rapid shift and development of social media and its web makeover has and will continue to revolutionize marketing, shopping, socializing, publishing, gaming, and music.

Social Influence Theory

The term "social influence" refers to the process through which people's behavior changes as a result of the encouragement of others. The ability to exert social influence is dependent on the relationship between people, timing, network distances, network, individual features, and so on. Social networks play an active role in information dissemination and broad marketing, especially when combined with other methods such as endorsement systems and commerce. Impact intensification in social networks is defined as the search for a subset of nodules known as a seed set that can generate the greatest number of consumers sharing the offered information [17, 18].

According to [19], the efficiency of mass leaders can be attributed to the so-called 'liking' norm. The more people like someone, the more they will try to build meaningful relationships with them. As a result, a mass leader is effective because the use of prevalent social networks increases the likelihood of information reaching a specific crowd, as well as the increasing chances that individuals in the network react to information. After all, it comes from someone with whom they identify. Therefore, consumers can easily note and trigger each other's sentiments because of the popularity of social networks [20].

Consumer Behaviour and Buyer Decision-Making

Consumer behavior is defined by [21] as the actions that consumers take when searching for, purchasing, using, assessing, and disposing of things and services that they believe will meet their requirements. Consumer behaviour is concerned with how individuals, families, or households decide how to spend their available resources (time and money) on consumption-related things. This covers what they buy, why they buy it, when they buy it, where they buy it, how frequently they buy it, how frequently they use it, how they evaluate it after they acquire it, the impact of such evaluations on future purchases, and how they dispose of it. Consumer behavior is influenced by a variety of factors, including psychological and psychographic factors.

Nonetheless, it must be emphasized that buyer behaviour is closely related to their motivation to act [22]. Furthermore, purchasing behaviour does not always represent the acts of a single consumer but can involve a large number of individuals. Buyer behaviourists might take on more than one role. Others may play the position of influencer and have an impact on the outcome of a decision, and others, or all, may be users [23].

All products that people recognize are eventually influenced by the activities involved in perception. Perception begins to be active as soon as humans begin to search for features to focus on, whether it be a product or an environment in which they are constantly immersed. Consumers are guided by the perception to focus on information that has piqued their attention [24]. Consumer decisions, according to studies, are the product of a composite organization of mindful efforts [25], and they are also the result of consumers' unconscious psychological practices [26].

According to [27], the only way to define buyer decision-making is on a scale ranging from extremely low to very high. Repetitive selection is done on the spur of the moment, with only a minimal conscious effort. As a result, it includes neither planning for information search. Intermediary problem solving typically entails a partial search for information and planning. Shoppers are rarely motivated to thoroughly evaluate each alternative; as a result, they adopt mild decision guidelines or experiments to aid their decision-making. Most customers in this area do not have well-established methods for evaluating products and may be unfamiliar with the product's category. For uncommonly purchased, one-of-a-kind products or services, users typically engage in extensive problem-solving. Since each decision here is high-risk, customers frequently expend a lot of work and time gathering information and weighing options before making a purchase [28] recommends that they follow the instructions described below.

Figure 1. Consumer decision making process theory (model). Source: [28].

Research Methodology

The study was exploratory and descriptive since it did not attempt to give evidence that could be used to make a decision; nonetheless, it is a type of research that is undertaken with the intention that future research will be required to provide more conclusive evidence [29].
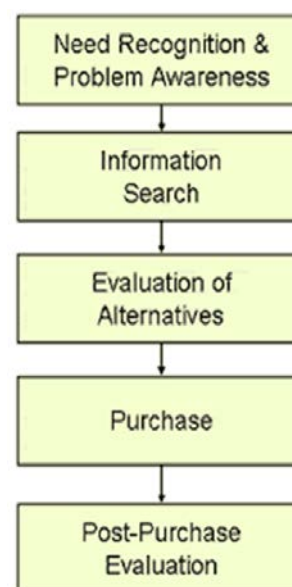
The study employed a cross-sectional quantitative research approach to investigate the influence of social media on the purchasing decisions of Durban consumers. Customers aged 18 and up who are active on social media sites and live in Durban were the study's target population. Respondents were recruited using non-probability sampling methods such as convenience and purposive sampling. Even though, the planned sample size was 450, the response rate was 400. A survey was done with a standardized questionnaire consisting of 45 questions to collect primary data from consumers, and participation in the study was entirely voluntary. A pre-test with 10 questionnaires given to users was conducted to verify the validity of the measurement instrument. The questionnaires were distributed via email and social media networks. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences was used to analyze the data collected for this study, which included both descriptive and inferential statistics (SPSS version 20).

Results

Table 1

Gender and Age Distribution of Respondents

			Gender		Total
			Male	**Female**	
Age group (years)	**18 – 19**	Count	38	39	77
		% within 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 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 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 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 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 Age group	**54.3%**	**45.8%**	**100.0%**
		% within Gender	**100.0%**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**
		% of Total	**54.3%**	**45.8%**	**100.0%**

The male-to-female ratio is nearly 1:1. (54.3 % and 45.8 % respectively). Respondents aged 50 to 59 made up the smallest category, accounting for 2.0 % of the entire sample. This was followed by the 40-49 age group, which accounted for 2.5 % of the total sample.
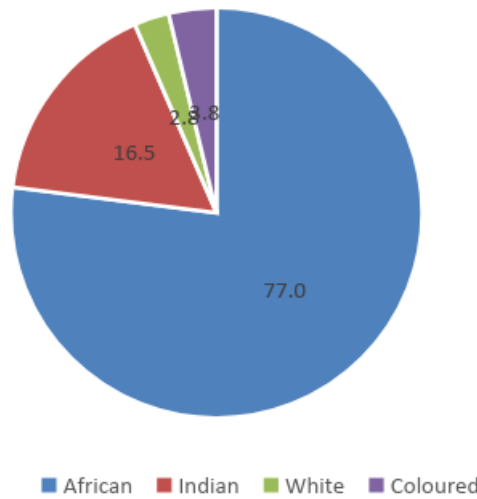

Figure 2. Race of respondents.

The great majority of respondents (77.0 %) were African, with White respondents constituting the smallest grouping (2.8 %). In that order, Indian and coloured respondents made up 16.5 % and 3.8 % of the total sample, respectively.
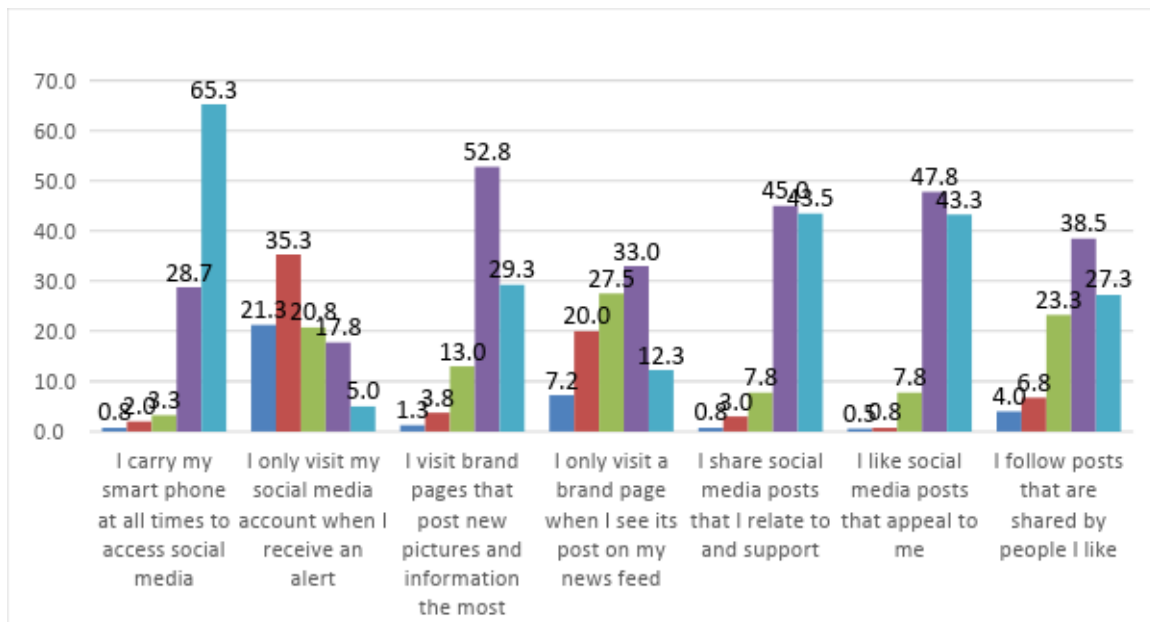

Figure 3. Consumers' social media network usage.

"I only access my social media account when I receive an alert," had the highest level of disagreement (56.6 %). However, more respondents stated that they continue to browse their social media platforms without receiving any notifications. The statement "I carry my phone with me at all times to use social media" received the greatest level of agreement. The product websites with the most recent pictures and information are visited by 82.1 % of respondents. Only 88.5 % of the consumers polled in this study agreed to share social media postings that they relate to and support, while 91.1 % liked social media posts that appealed to them and only 65.8 % agreed to follow social media posts made by people they like.

Effectiveness of social media

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	p-value
Social media is the best communication channel for interacting with products	0.8	1.3	2.0	50.3	45.5	0.00
I do not rely on information acquired on social media than the one acquired from commercial adverts	22.5	57.3	17.0	2.8	0.5	0.00
I never go on a product's social media page to obtain information on its specifications, performance, prices, and promotions	26.8	53.8	15.5	3.0	1.0	0.00
I monitor what other people post on products	0.5	1.8	4.0	48.8	45.0	0.00
I am loyal to products that communicate effectively and provide prompt responses to my inquiries	0.5	1.8	4.0	48.8	45.0	0.00
I do not like interacting with other consumers on social media platforms	17.5	41.0	28.0	9.8	3.8	0.00

The results demonstrate a variety of scoring patterns, with high scores for both agreement and disagreement with the statements about the usefulness of social media. All other scores are lower than the degree of indecision. There is also a large disparity in the level of agreement and disagreement. The statement "social media is the preferred

communication channel for interacting with products" has the highest level of agreement at 95.8 %. This was followed by "I check what other people post on products" and "I am loyal to products that communicate effectively and provide timely solutions to my concerns," with 93.8% agreement on both assertions.

In recent times, consumers want to interact with products on social media platforms in the same way that they interact with their peers. As a result, because social media has become an important communication medium between customers and companies, products must learn how consumers build value. The internet and social media have dramatically altered product-to-consumer relationships, which have become bidirectional, and in some cases, entirely consumer-to-consumer [30, 31].
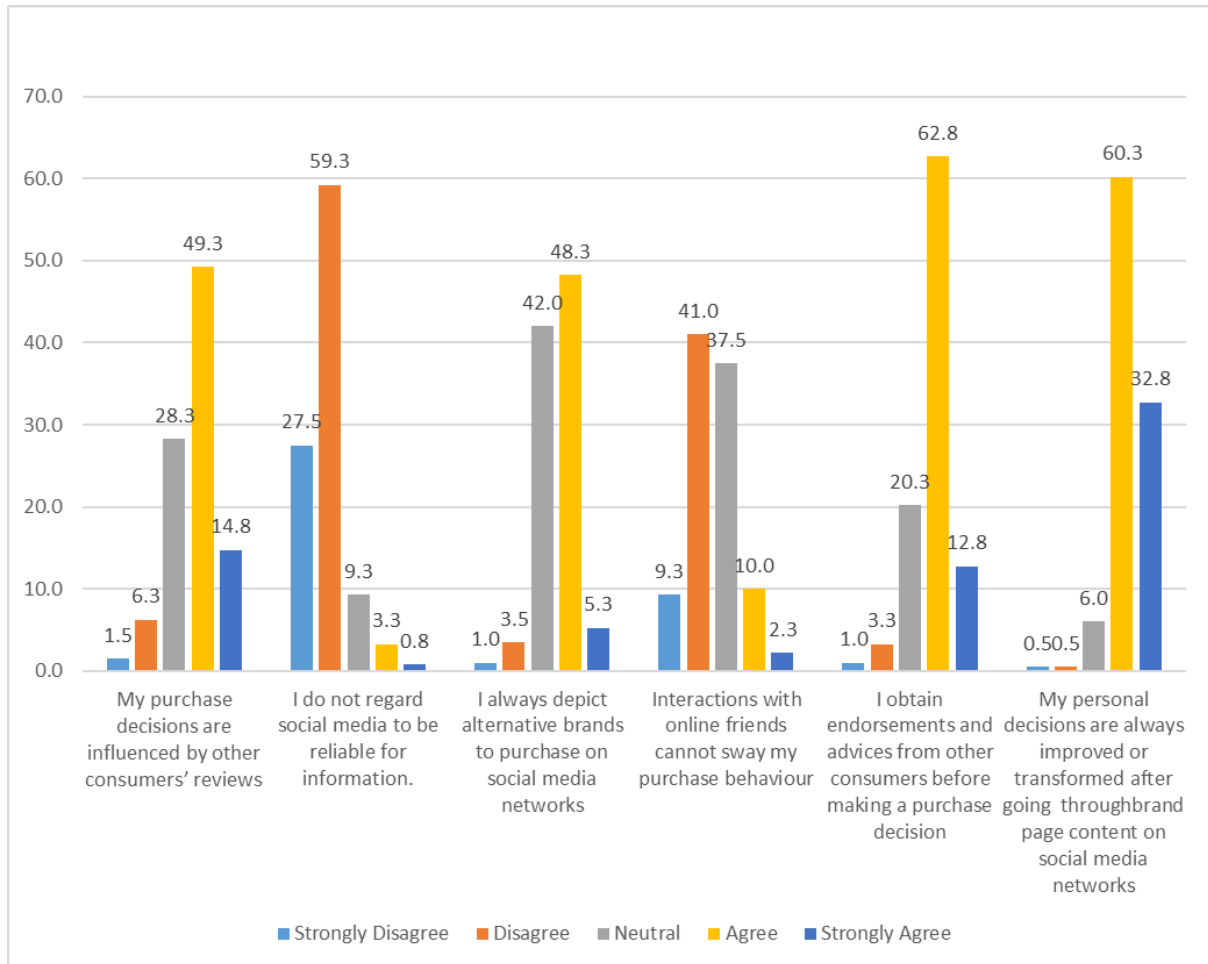

Figure 4. Social media and consumer decision making.

Figure 4 depicts several scores with differing degrees of indecision (neutral). Three of the variables had values of more than 25%. The statement "I do not believe social media to be reliable for information," which states that consumers trust information provided on social media to some extent, received the most criticism (86.5 %). "My personal decisions are always improved or transformed after going through a product content on social media networks," and "I obtain endorsements and advice from other consumers before making a purchase decision," received the highest agreement scores of 93.1 % and 75.6 %, respectively. This shows that social media has a substantial impact on the product selection decisions of customers.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The empirical findings of this study suggest that consumers currently live in social media environments, hence products should make social media networks their home. Social media is tremendously influential in consumer decision-making, and it may make or break a product. As a result, marketers and product managers should incorporate social media into their marketing, promotional, and advertising campaigns. Marketers should be strategic in their product offerings and make them active and consistent across all social media platforms, with a clear understanding of the target audience's specific product expectations and values, to gain a long-term relationship and to improve sustain their competitive advantage by ensuring that through these platforms they retain their market share.

It can also be concluded that consumers search for products on a product's social media platforms or through their websites. Customers who have used a product or service typically post their comments, reviews, and opinions on social media. As a result, social media is the most trustworthy source of information for both customers and products, as social media networks can be used not only to market products but also to learn about the product's target market. Furthermore, social media has a significant impact on consumer product selection being that it creates a certain perception and provides ways in which products can be utilized. The level of influence that social media has on consumers can either break or make a product in the marketplace because it has a significant impact on consumers' decision-making process.

References

1. Agresta S., Bough BB. *Perspectives on social media marketing.* Nelson Education, 2010.
2. Evans D. *Social media marketing: An hour a day.* John Wiley & Sons, 2010.
3. Barefoot D., Szabo J. *Friends with benefits: A social media marketing handbook.* No Starch Press, 2009.
4. Brennan B., Schafer L. *Branded!: How retailers engage consumers with social media and mobility.* John Wiley & Sons, 2010.
5. Sema P. *Does social media affect consumer decision-making.* Johnsons and Wales University, Feinstein Graduate school. 2013, 25, pp. 243-70.
6. Boulianne S. *Social media use and participation: A meta-analysis of current research.* Information, communication & society. 2015, 18 (5), pp. 524-38.
7. Worldwideworx and Fuseware. *South Africa Social media landscape* [online]. 2016. [17.07.2021]. Available at: www.worldwideworx.com
8. Bruhn M., Schoenmueller V., Schäfer DB. *Are social media replacing traditional media in terms of brand equity creation?.* Management research review. 2012, 35 (9), pp. 770-790.
9. Mukherjee K. *Social media marketing and customers' passion for brands.* Marketing intelligence & planning. 2019, 38 (4), pp. 509-522.
10. Okazaki S. *Social influence model and electronic word of mouth: PC versus mobile internet.* International Journal of Advertising. 2009, 28 (3), pp. 439-72.
11. Boswell W. *Social media: what is it? Available* [online]. 2016. [21.2.2021]. Available at: https://www.lifewire.com/social-media-what-is-it-3481713
12. Constantinides E, Romero CL, Boria MA. *Social media: a new frontier for retailers?* European retail research. 2008, 22, pp. 1-28.
13. Salt S. *Social location marketing: outshining your competitors on Foursquare, Gowalla, Yelp & other location sharing sites.* Pearson Education, 2011.
14. Ruane L., Wallace E. *Generation Y females online: insights from brand narratives.* Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal. 2013, 16 (3), pp. 315-335.
15. Hoffman KD. *Marketing principles and best practices.* Thomson South-Western, 2005.
16. Brennan B., Schafer L. *Branded!: How retailers engage consumers with social media and mobility.* John Wiley & Sons, 2010.

17. Lu WX., Zhou C., Wu J. *Big social network influence maximization via recursively estimating influence spread.* Knowledge-Based Systems. 2016, 113, pp. 143-54.
18. Peng L., Cui G., Zhuang M., Li C. *Consumer perceptions of online review deceptions: an empirical study in China.* Journal of Consumer Marketing. 2016, 33 (4), pp. 269-280.
19. Abrahamse W., Steg L. *Social influence approaches to encourage resource conservation: A meta-analysis*, Global environmental change, 2013, 23 (6), pp.1773-85.
20. Li X., Cheng X., Su S., Li S., Yang J. *A hybrid collaborative filtering model for social influence prediction in event-based social networks.* Neurocomputing. 2017, 230, pp. 197-209.
21. Schiffmen LG, Kanuk LK. *Consumer Behaviour.* Pearson Education Inc, 2009.
22. Andersone I, Gaile-Sarkane E. Consumer expectancy theory for business. *InThe 6th International Scientific Conference "Business and Management 2010*, Vilnius, 13–14 May 2010, pp. 321-327.
23. Hoyer WD., MacInnis DJ., Peters R. *Consumer Behaviour.* Andover: Cengage Learning, 2013.
24. Jansson-Boyd CV. *Quantitative research: Its place in consumer psychology. In Quantitative Research Methods in Consumer Psychology.* Routledge, 2018.
25. Foxall Gr., Oliveira-Castro Jm., James Vk., Schrezenmaier Tc. *Consumer behaviour analysis and the behavioural perspective model. Management Online Review (MORE)* [online]. 2011. [14.10.22]. Available at: http://dro.dur.ac.uk/7962/1/7962.pdf
26. Bargh JA. *Losing consciousness: Automatic influences on consumer judgment, behavior, and motivation.* Journal of consumer research, 2002, 29 (2), pp. 280-5.
27. Kardes FR, Cline TW, Cronley ML. *Consumer Behavior: Science and practice.* Cengage Learning, 2011.
28. Riley J. Buyer *behavior-The decision-making process* [online]. 2012. [22.03.2021]. Available at: https://www.tutor2u.net/business/reference/marketing-buyer-behaviour-the-decision-making-process
29. Babin Bj., Zikmund Wg. *Exploring marketing research.* Cengage Learning, 2015.
30. Campbell C., Ferraro C., Sands S. *Segmenting consumer reactions to social network marketing.* European Journal of Marketing. 2014, 48 (3/4), pp. 432-452.
31. Dootson P., Beatson A., Drennan J. *Financial institutions using social media–do consumers perceive value?.* International Journal of Bank Marketing. 2016, 34 (1), pp. 9-36.