

DOI: 10.55643/ser.3.57.2025.613

Steven Kayambazinthu Msosa

D.Sc. in Philosophy, Department of Marketing, Mangosuthu University of Technology, Durban, South Africa;
e-mail: kayambazinthu@outlook.com
ORCID: [0000-0001-9074-5644](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9074-5644)
(Corresponding author)

Gona Govender

PhD in Public Management and Administration, Academician of the Department of Marketing, Mangosuthu University of Technology, Durban, South Africa;
ORCID: [0009-0002-9130-7333](https://orcid.org/0009-0002-9130-7333)

Mathews Smangaliso Shange

PhD in Marketing, Academician of the Department of Marketing, Mangosuthu University of Technology, Durban, South Africa;
ORCID: [0000-0001-8994-4427](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8994-4427)

Thuthukani Mkhize

Candidate of Sciences in Public Administration, Academician of the Department of Marketing, Mangosuthu University of Technology, Durban, South Africa;
ORCID: [0000-0002-7881-1001](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7881-1001)

Lynelle Martin

D.Sc. in Public Administration, Academician of the Department of Marketing, Mangosuthu University of Technology, Durban, South Africa;
ORCID: [0009-0006-5856-6711](https://orcid.org/0009-0006-5856-6711)

Received: 18/07/2025

Accepted: 24/09/2025

Published: 30/09/2025

© Copyright
2025 by the author(s)



This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons CC-BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

CUSTOMER PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING AS A DRIVER OF BUYING BEHAVIOUR

ABSTRACT

Social media usage has increased tremendously in recent years, and the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated its uptake amongst customers. Furthermore, social media usage in advertising has not only transformed traditional advertising platforms but also assisted in the collection of information regarding consumer taste and consumer behaviour. This study analysed customer perceptions of social media marketing as a driver of buying behaviour.

A non-probability sampling technique known as purposive sampling was adopted to select 10 respondents. Data was analysed using thematic analysis. The findings of this study show that social media plays an important role in promoting businesses, as an effective source of information, as a source of advertisements and reviews, and as a tool for engaging with brands, ultimately influencing customer purchasing decisions.

Thus, managers should ensure consistency and quality in the content they put on social media platforms in order to remain relevant. In addition, social media content must not only be image-based and branded but value-generating, aimed at captivating the interest of current and prospective customers. The ethical usage of social media should be encouraged amongst employees because the modern customer is very wary about data misuse. In this regard, practising honesty and openness in the usage of social media can be a tool for managing sustainable consumer buying behaviour. This study has contributed to the literature on social media marketing in the developing world, where social media usage as a tool for marketing is still in the development phase as a result of infrastructural challenges and the high cost of data.

Keywords: social media, communication, brands, customer purchasing behaviour, data privacy, information

JEL Classification: D85, D83, D8, M31

INTRODUCTION

The use of social media has grown exponentially in the recent past, and the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated its usage amongst customers. In addition, the growth of social media sites has reshaped the dynamics of the online market through the establishment of social networks of buyers, opinion leaders and specialists. Social media marketing can be an effective tool for businesses as it makes a difference by shaping customers' product image perceptions and determines consumption habits. The integration of social media into advertising has not only transformed the conventional marketing platform but also helped to gain knowledge about consumers' behaviour and taste (Mason et al., 2021). Social media largely support networking, communication, collaboration and community amongst people or groups of common interest, be it friends, family members, co-workers or acquaintances (Figeac & Favre, 2023). Some of the popular social media platforms are Facebook, Twitter (X), Instagram, LinkedIn, TikTok and Snapchat, amongst numerous others (Szeto et al., 2021). Social media has also been integrated into modern communication in order to make it possible for individuals to communicate, interact and relate with one another in different ways, such as posting their status, sharing photos and videos, messaging, commenting, and discussing and engaging in communities (Temnikova & Vandsheva, 2022).

The introduction of social media websites changed the way people interact, communicate and consume content. The change is not only evident in the behaviour of consumers since social media has become part of consumer decision-making (Vidan & Das, 2021). The social media revolution has introduced new forms of searching and accessing information about the different products and services available in the market. It has equipped consumers with the ability to communicate and exchange ideas related to brands with one another at ease and speed (Voramontri & Klieb, 2019). Varghese and Agrawal (2021) reported that businesses can draw closer to customers via social media since the brands can interact with them every day and assist or advise them in making intelligent buying choices. Research by Varghese and Agrawal (2021) revealed that due to social media, consumers spend four times more than their daily purchases, and the interest in the products is such that they purchase them on the same day through social media. Without doubt, it is thus highly necessary for companies to place greater emphasis on social media marketing. Companies' social media presence can make them more visible and also enhance their brand value, which would translate into customer loyalty as well as customer lifetime value.

The ubiquity of social media's impact on consumer behaviour in the modern world has introduced serious questions and issues for marketers as well as businesses. As an increasing number of people become entrenched in the world of multiple social media sites, from Facebook and Instagram to Twitter (X) and TikTok, their brand attitudes, values and shopping habits are being influenced in novel and intricate patterns. Social media sites have redefined consumerism codes (Selezneva, 2024), with both danger and possibility for companies in every industry in South Africa. However, even as there has been increased acknowledgement of social media's impact, there remains a need for deep research that cuts through its complex impact on consumer sentiments. Therefore, this study analysed customer perceptions of social media marketing as a driver of buying behaviour.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Background of Social Media Marketing

The internet's technological advancement has, without doubt, offered consumers and businesses a platform for communication. The development of Web4.0, with now social media marketing platforms, allows businesses to interact and share information on products and services (Wibowo et al., 2021a). Recent studies defined social media marketing as internet-based communication channels that enable marketers to reach large communities who see value in the generated content (Lundmark et al., 2017). It is a quick way to reach large audiences with minimal costs being incurred. Kapoor et al. (2018) state that social media marketing has reached critical mass, with most populations around the globe using some form of social media platform. More information is discovered and accessed just by clicking the link or website that saw the era of the development of many retail business sites for social media marketing.

The rise of social media platforms, namely Facebook, Twitter(X) and Instagram, created new avenues for marketers to promote company branding and awareness (Manzoor et al., 2020). Zeqiri et al. (2024) claim that social media has the potential to facilitate word-of-mouth communication, which shares important company and product information needed to influence consumer behaviour. Thus, consumers have become agents who amplify marketers' information through word-of-mouth (Vrontis et al., 2021). However, users must be willing to create content, exchange information and knowledge that is valuable for purchasing decisions. Similar views were expressed by Kapoor et al. (2018), who stated that social media marketing encompasses co-creating content with consumers, building online communities, and sharing brand experiences and knowledge to achieve set marketing objectives.

Social media marketing has also been interpreted as a marketing tool that builds long-term relationships and inculcates brand loyalty amongst users (Manzoor et al., 2020). Consumers who form online communities use social media platforms to share information and brand experiences, which shape their perceptions of the brand or business. Marketers are using influencers to tap into their audiences to build brand communities and brand loyalists. However, this approach requires customised retail marketing strategies designed to constantly generate new content that keeps the audience engaged (Maitri et al., 2023). Social media platforms have given power to retail consumers who can now decide *what* information they need, *how* it must be communicated and *when* it must be communicated. Therefore, it has become key for marketers to upload innovative content that appeals to the audience to regularly improve sales performance (Zeqiri et al., 2024). A buying decision occurs when the consumer has collected all the information about the product or service they need and decides to purchase (Bashar et al., 2024). It is therefore vital for the business to understand the scope and impact of social media marketing campaigns in accelerating consumer buying decisions, according to Ibrahim and Ganeshbabu (2018). Such buying decisions cannot be reached by customers through simply being exposed to the retail business's social media marketing content. However, consumers can express their buying choice if the content speaks to their emotions

and lifestyle values; intends to build quality relationships; and offers the opportunity to be heard or provide feedback to the business (Urban & Maphathe, 2021). Hence, the secret of marketers' effective social media strategies lies in the repeat purchase decisions and brand preferences of consumers (Jannah et al., 2024).

Extant research suggests that marketers have not adequately estimated the effect of social media marketing on consumers' behaviour, or on the influence of social media marketing on consumer purchasing decisions (Heggde & Shainesh, 2018). Social media platforms such as Facebook, Snapchat, X, Instagram, WhatsApp and blogs have emerged as powerful online voices (Ibrahim & Ganeshbabu, 2018), with Digital and Viral Marketing being utilised by marketers as a tool of introducing, communicating or selling their goods and services on these sites (Bashar et al., 2024). The development of social media influencers has also transformed the way social media content is created on social media and live-streamed daily (Maitri et al., 2023). Social media influencers are compensated endorsers to aid in company branding on social media (Vrontis et al., 2021), and other studies have shown that these trends enabled sharing of podcasts and videos to widen reach and reach a wider audience through YouTube, TikTok, Google and other online platforms (Zeqiri et al., 2024). Kim et al. (2017) further suggest that all these trends have played a crucial role in shaping the beliefs and attitudes of consumers towards retail business products and services.

Consumer buying behaviour

Rathnayaka (2017) identifies consumer behaviour as the process that influences consumers' choices to fulfil their wants and needs. Conversely, the American Marketing Association (2020) agrees that consumer behaviour is the process by which consumers choose, buy and use product and service offerings to meet their wants and needs. Nonetheless, the consumer behaviour of young people in the 21st century is rather different while utilising social media and shopping through brick-and-mortar stores. The use of information technology is progressing at a very fast pace, and people now like online business because it simplifies life (Raghunath & Sahay, 2015). Kinker and Shukla (2016) argue that consumer behaviour varies from individual to individual according to his/her attitude towards business and/or brands, as conveyed, just like the decision process of buying varies from individual to individual, place to place, and consumer experience. Furthermore, the authors added that companies can anticipate future trends and introduce new and profitable products to their markets (Durmaz, 2014).

Social media platforms also enable companies to present their products during the time of decision-making by the consumer, which is not possible within a physical store (e.g., audio-visual product demonstrations). Social media also provides additional information on brands to youth and has opportunities for consumer comments and opinions (Gerritsen et al., 2014). Yap and Ismail (2022) narrate that leading brands have brand credibility on social media sites among young people since Generation Y believes in brands that are seen on social media sites because of brand integrity. Marketers, therefore, need to research the purchasing habits of consumers so that they are aware of how they purchase, where they purchase, the type of product they purchase regularly, and why they purchase a particular brand. In addition, why and how customers buy a certain brand is hard to determine because the answer lies deep within consumers' hearts (Chan, 2022). Herawati (2019) explained that different psycho-social traits compel these customers towards a buying decision. Interesting to marketers is the customer buying decision that precedes and follows eventual possession of the product (Akbar & James, 2014). Both shifting consumer behaviour and technology have played their part in bringing about this transformation, which calls for a closer examination of the social media implications (Kotler et al., 2021).

Today, there is an easier relationship between consumers and marketers, and the social media-consumer behaviour relationship has turned immersive and interactive as a consequence (Chowdhury et al., 2024). Social media has exposed consumers to more product information and consumer reviews, and consumers are now better informed and more assertive, as noted by Nyagadza et al. (2023). This shift has even more empowered the consumer to make a buying choice based on what they believe in, are interested in, and want. For instance, a company can utilise Instagram and plan a product launch; tag trending influencers who have a big following to market their products; and lastly persuade potential consumers to buy the product (Usta, 2023).

The Consumer decision-making process

The process of consumer buying decisions is usually the same whether consumers are online or offline. Nevertheless, significant differences occur when real buying occurs on the internet. For instance, youths' preferences are mostly instigated by social media advertisements (Nash, 2019). Cox et al. (1983) built the conventional consumer decision model theory that the purchase decision of a consumer generally begins with noticing a need. To gain further understanding regarding the history of the theory of satisfaction or cognitive dissonance, Tanner and Raymond (2012) suggested another step. Awareness is succeeded by information search, alternative evaluation, buying decision, and lastly, post-purchase

behaviour. Contrary to this, Katawetawaraks and Cheng (2013) offered further understanding regarding online communication. These authors clarified that when consumers pay attention to online brand messages, such promotional messages are those that evoke customers' interest towards a certain brand. However, before purchasing, it is advisable to provide customers with additional brand information to diminish the state of cognitive dissonance after purchase. As stated by Sethi and Chawla (2014), companies ought to evaluate the consumer buying behaviour and the reaction of buyers towards a firm's marketing strategy for determining the correct marketing mix, as well as the reaction of customers to the marketing strategies. Some marketing scholars like Furaiji et al. (2012), Kotler and Armstrong (2021), Tanner and Raymond (2012) and Sethi and Chawla (2014) agreed that young consumers, are bombarded with limitless choices that renders buying a complicated series of activities composed of five steps: problem recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, purchase decision, and post-purchase behaviour.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This study analysed customer perceptions of social media marketing as a driver of buying behaviour, with specific reference to the retail sector in South Africa. Specifically, the following objectives were derived from the aim of the study:

1. To examine customer perceptions of social media marketing when interacting with brands.
2. To assess perceptions of social media marketing as a driver of customer purchasing behaviour.

METHODS

This study is rooted in an interpretivist research paradigm. The interpretivist/constructivist paradigm is a worldview that emphasises interpretation in the construction of reality. The interpretivist paradigm believes that there is no one objective reality, but that one's conception of reality is constructed by one's own individual viewpoint. This implies that knowledge cannot be objectively measured or quantified but is constructed through conversations with others (Tanlaka & Aryal, 2025). Furthermore, a qualitative exploratory approach was adopted to collect and analyse data. According to Creswell et al. (2021), the qualitative research design dwells on an in-depth understanding of experience, attitude and behaviour, most often through non-numeric data such as observations or interviews. It examines the "how" and "why" of things and attempts to draw meaning and context.

A non-probability sampling method known as purposive or judgmental sampling was used to identify respondents in this study. Purposive sampling entails choosing respondents based on their knowledge and understanding of a particular subject. Thus, the researcher uses his or her discretion to identify such participants (Campbell et al., 2020). The sample size utilised in this study was 10 purposively selected respondents. Secondary and primary data collection methods were employed in this study. Secondary data was collected through journal articles, conference proceedings, books and internet sources, whereas primary data was collected through interviews. The data was recorded, transcribed and coded for final analysis. Thematic analysis was utilised to analyse data. Braun and Clarke (2019) define thematic analysis as the systematic classification and organisation of data to expose salient patterns, ideas and concepts. This process typically involves familiarisation with the data, initial coding, theme searching, the analysis and definition of themes, and finally presenting an integrated narrative or account of the data.

RESULTS

Figure 1 shows the characteristics of the sample that was used for this study. The results show that the majority of the participants were Black (100%) and South Africans by nationality (100%). In terms of gender, the findings show that most of the participants in this study were male (60%), whereas female participants contributed 40% of the sample. In terms of their age bracket, the majority of the participants were between the ages of 18 and 25 (50%), followed by participants between the ages of 26 and 34 (30%). Lastly, the participants who were 35 and above contributed 20% of the sample. This implies that the majority of the participants were largely young people.

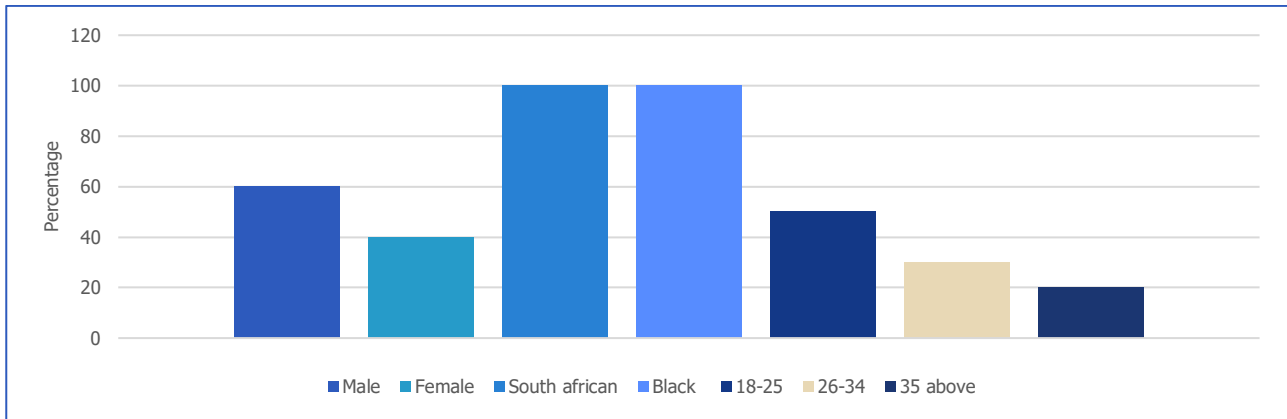


Figure 1. Sample characteristics.

For the purposes of data cleaning and preparation for the analysis of all data that guided this research, Nvivo was employed. Five broad themes were extracted, including the role of social media in promoting businesses; the use of social media as an effective source of information; the impact of social media ads and reviews; the process of engaging with brands on social media; and the experience of interacting with brands on social media and the influence thereof on purchasing decisions by the consumer. Table 1 below illustrates a correlation of the primary study theme with the emerging sub-themes.

Table 1. Emerging themes underpinning the study.	
Key theme	Sub Themes
Customer perceptions of Social Media Marketing	Role of Social Media in Promoting businesses
	Social media as a Source of Information
	Impact of Social Media Ads and Reviews
	Experience Interacting with Brands on social media
	Influence on Purchasing Decisions

The Role of Social Media in Promoting Businesses

All participants conceded that social media plays a central role in the marketing of businesses. Assuming that everything else remains constant, the respondents underscored the strength of social media as a tool for interaction and communication that the company may leverage to reach their potential customers. Participant 1 stated that *"Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube are now media through which businesses can communicate, share product information. These companies can understand their target market's choice better with a two-way communication process so they can adjust their marketing strategies"*. This emphasised that the two-way dialogue, which social media facilitates, assists companies in fine-tuning their advertising. Afren (2024) concurs with this observation by suggesting that social media is a powerful means of refining the advertisement strategy of businesses. Businesses that have a conversation with customers can actually get real-time comments, understand client preferences, and attempt to alter their advertising activities based on the same. This one-on-one interaction allows for a more personal and efficient method of advertising, thereby enhancing the performance and results of campaigns.

Social media assists with building and developing the business brand by promoting products, customer experiences, and conducting special events. Likewise, Participant 8 mentioned the way in which social media assists businesses in targeting future customers by providing a sample of their products' functionalities and informing them how they address their needs and meet their tastes. The participant indicated that *"Social media platforms assist in getting businesses to reach prospective customers. By using social media, they are able to show people how the business is, what environment they will be exposed to, and it's a good way to show customers if it's a business they feel they want to associate with"*. Social media branding plays a crucial role in digital marketing since it enables companies to communicate with their consumers and build well-established relationships. It does not utilise middlemen, hence leading to more precise and immediate contact. The second fundamental benefit of social media is being able to connect with clients, which is the immediate boost in incoming traffic (Hilong, 2023).

Social Media as a Source of Information

The majority of interview participants concurred that social media marketing was a credible source of information. Social media, in the opinion of Participant 2, is the most convenient means of accessing information. *"The world has evolved, and social media is one of the easiest ways of getting your reliable information"*. Personal persuasion starts with the credibility of information, which has been defined as a credible source. Information from highly credible sources is appreciated and encourages sharing knowledge, and is also the initial process in personal persuasion (Erkan and Evans, 2016). Past research has established a positive relationship between customer purchase intent and information credibility, especially when information is known to be valuable and versatile (Leong et al., 2021).

Participant 6 felt apprehensive that there was prejudice in the information, where social media sites sometimes push the narrative of selling specific agendas. Since it is easy to access and how much time it saves, social media is still widely accepted as a source of information. Thus, Participant 6 stated that *"Social media marketing can be a good source of information for up-to-date and engaging content, but nowadays it's often biased towards promoting specific agendas"*. Another school of thought reinforces that latter view by indicating that misinformation and disinformation are now disseminated more rapidly and extensively than ever due to social media. The ability of users to tailor their options in social media platforms to take into account information from only those sources they have selected creates concerns of "bubbles" or "echo chambers" that would reinforce existing beliefs (Chou et al., 2021).

Impact of Social Media Ads and Reviews

Participants' responses to advertisements and social media reviews were diverse. Their interest depended on the quality of the information, although a majority of respondents considered advertisements and reviews as determinants of their attitude towards a business. For instance, Participant 7 explained that *"Ads and reviews really have a good effect on my attention because when the reviews are good and the advertisement is good, that can make me want to experience the product that is being advertised"*. The willingness of consumers and their interest in buying goods can be greatly influenced by effective advertising and positive reviews. Arief et al. (2023) argue that positive reviews aid in establishing credibility and trust, hence making customers open to messages being communicated through advertisements. Successful commercials, on the other hand, can command customers' attention, educate them about various goods and services, and eventually trigger sales.

Participant 6 also discussed how commercial messages with eye-catching visuals and past customers' reviews that provided genuine customer opinions influenced their brand trust. The participant indicated that *"Social media advertisements grab my attention with attractive visuals and messages that are personally addressed to me, and reviews give me feedback about the actual experiences other people or clients have had collaborating with the company. What I mean is that both of these literally influence how I feel about the brand and how I connect with it on a personal level, such as feeling that brand"*. Sreejesh et al. (2020) believe that the key to digital marketing is to capture the attention of individuals by means of advertisements, communications and information that are relevant to the target audience. For generating interaction and, in turn, economic value, acquiring the attention of the target market is required as a preliminary step, followed by repetition of the same for a duration of time.

Experience Interacting with Brands on Social Media

Participants also had varied experiences whilst interacting with companies on social media. For instance, participant 10 was infuriated by brands that give more importance to influencers than they normally give to consumers. Participant 10 expressed, *"My experience was not too good because some brands only focus on influencers and not everyone"*. Thus, companies can avoid such consumer perceptions by engaging authentic influencers. Inauthenticity, then, is not the sole difficulty for brand marketers because they also have to identify unethical influencers who inflate followers or inflate engagement rates. These issues mean that companies must go through rigorous processes to identify and collaborate with the right influencers. Moreover, influencers need to create campaigns that are perceived as organic to the followers and not suspicious of being masked ads, such that the supporters receive the advertised message and react positively (e.g., buying or sharing the products). These requirements call for healthy relationships between companies and influencers (Belanche et al., 2021).

One of the interviewees, Participant 6, raised the issue of timely responses by companies enhancing their experience, but late responses cause frustration and confusion. The participant observed that *"Interacting with a brand on social media can be positive when responses are quick, but frustrating if they're slow, especially if maybe I am enquiring about a*

particular product". Hence, the significance of prompt and interactive engagement in building a positive consumer experience cannot be overemphasised. Customers can access information regarding a brand at their fingertips due to the prevalence of smart devices and high-speed Internet access (Papakonstantinidis, 2017; Lim et al., 2022).

Influence on Purchasing Decisions

Amongst the key considerations on the minds of participants whilst making decisions was how they interacted with firms on social media platforms. Hence, having an active presence on the social media of a company made it convenient to make informed decisions on purchasing. Furthermore, the discussions on social media sites provide important clues regarding the authenticity of a company, especially in today's age of cyber fraud. Participant 8 stressed that *"It helps to open your eyes to many things. It's a bit difficult to be trusting with the scams we have these days, so having to see a proper social media platform with a brand that seems to get a lot of people's attention makes you feel more at ease when purchasing. Interacting with a brand will let you know if people are really purchasing and whether or not they are receiving their product, and how the quality of it is"*. Social media has dominion in human life, that is, the accessibility of information. Social media has various uses, such as searching for information and sharing one's viewpoint. However, Nathanael et al. (2023) confirm that social media is flawed, especially in relation to security and access to a plethora of information. The internet provides excellent channels of information collection and expressing views, but excessive information can be dangerous, especially in terms of inaccurate information. Similarly, security is an issue, especially with companies emerging in the era of Big Data from social media. Social media can be misused by some individuals for the benefit of some groups. Information is made available on purpose to influence attitudes and create a specific mood based on the interests of specific parties. In addition to hoax-spreading ability, social media can also be exploited for the theft of data and the leverage of social media or Big Data in support of specific actors at the expense of others (Wijaya et al., 2025; Effendi, 2023).

Social media interactions provide helpful information regarding product information and reviews before purchase, thus enhancing customers' confidence. Participant 9 pointed out that *"You are more informed about the product before buying it to ensure you really like it"*. Satisfied customers of a product or service will most likely compliment the same on social media via shares, likes, reviews and comments. Marketers are trying to make the public space more comprehensible by wanting to place glad customers' feedback, "comments", likes, "tweets" and pins to create brand trust and conversion rates. Customer feedback, case studies, images, responses and customer testimonials of happy customers might likely build the trust of prospective customers (Vashishth et al., 2024; Nathanael et al., 2023).

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study yield an in-depth understanding of how customers view and interact with social media marketing as a driver of their consumption patterns. This study is unique because it offers customer experiences in the developing world, where social, economic and cultural factors are impacting the way businesses interact with customers. The study provides a contextual difference from previous studies and is based on a customer lens or experiences in a resource-constrained setting where the cost of data is very high. The emerging themes from the study, including the role of social media in promoting businesses, its function as a source of information, the impact of social media ads and reviews, experiences interacting with brands on social media, and their influence on purchasing decisions, underscore the growing role of social media in shaping consumer behaviour and decision-making. The findings of this study are in sync with Stephen (2016), who observed that the digital environment plays a crucial role in influencing customer purchasing behaviour. Thus, this study shows that social media has gone beyond the conventional status as a tool for communication and networking. The purpose of social media as a tool for corporate advertising and branding cannot be overemphasised. The respondents agreed that social media such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and Twitter (now known as X) have become crucial to businesses not only for promoting their goods and services but also for establishing a visual identity and personality for the brand. This change from passive advertisement to active business participation is a wholly essential change in the shape of modern marketing, with social media coming into prominence. Similarly, previous research indicates that the unique attributes of social media platforms such as TikTok, like influencer collaborations, viral challenges, and user-generated content (UGC), enable brands to co-create and interact with consumers, drive more loyalty towards the brand, and create more emotional bonds. This is of great value to brand planners and marketers who wish to utilise the active platform of TikTok to establish their brands and create long-term connections with customers (Sulonen, 2025).

Nowadays, customers are increasingly shifting away from traditional means of advertising as sources of information. Social media is becoming more of an interactive, real-time, peer-to-peer source of information. In this study, it was found that consumers are using social media for product reviews, comparisons, influencer opinions, and brand stories. Thus, the

findings are consistent with the observation by Stephen (2016), who averred that it is intriguing to watch how the different informational and social content of digital/social settings, e.g., being exposed to other consumers' opinions (e.g., opinions) or decisions (e.g., bids placed in online auctions), or even only friends' lives through social media networks, affect subsequent consumer actions. Conversely, other scholars suggest that although social media has positive aspects, it also has negative elements that may impact customer acquisition. For instance, bloggers may write negative reviews or comments about a product. Even customers may freely post negative comments about the company due to a lack of control, thereby leading to organisational failure (Siddiqui & Singh, 2016). The phenomenon has profound implications for the buying process: the research phase of the purchase cycle now happens mostly on social media. The casual, user-generated nature of the content makes it more credible and authentic for consumers. This is particularly the case in a nation like South Africa, where mobile-first internet penetration is the norm and where the digitally aware, younger consumer is increasingly the leading consumer segment. Social media interactions between customers and brands also impact brand loyalty and customer satisfaction. Prompt, respectful, and personalised interaction was found to be a critical issue that caused a consumer to develop a favourable view of a brand. Similarly, Buzeta et al. (2020) suggest that the ease with which social media can be created and utilised has accorded customers convenience in commenting openly and sharing their views and opinions regarding different businesses in the form of comments, shares or likes; thus, subsequently impacting customer perception of a brand. Most significantly, this study determined that social advertising actually influences buying behaviours directly. Thus, showing individuals strong content, influencer endorsement, engaging visual presentation, and time-based content can translate interest into actual buys.

CONCLUSIONS

This study analysed customers' perceptions of social media marketing as a driver of buying behaviour. Social media is not only a medium of communication but also a strategic driver of consumer purchasing behaviour. However, to be able to capitalise on this potential with full effect, managers need to pursue a proactive, fact-based customer-centric approach to social media. One of the most important functions of a manager in this position is to develop a social media strategy that aligns with the overall business and marketing objectives of the organisation. This is achieved by determining the most appropriate channels based on the target market's online behaviours and demographics. Managers must lead marketing teams in creating content that is appropriate to each platform's form and structure, and therefore engage and become relevant. To influence purchasing behaviour amongst consumers, managers must also ensure consistency and quality in content. Social media content must not only be image-based and branded but also value-generating—via entertainment, information, learning or inspiration. High-quality content also creates brand trust and credibility, two of the drivers of consumer buying behaviour.

User-generated content (UGC), reviews, testimonials and influencer collaborations, all of which have been proven to create consumer trust and feelings of authenticity, must be encouraged or triggered by managers. Social media offers strong capabilities to monitor engagement, reach, conversions and demographics. Managers would need to implement a data management culture in which marketing personnel are constantly looking at performance metrics, trying to analyse what kind of content is driving the consumer and what ads are converting into sales. Training and development are no less important to any company. Managers need to ensure that their employees are properly trained in social media marketing, consumer psychology and communication. This process encompasses ongoing learning programmes, workshops and embracing adjustments and digital trends. Finally, managers have to ensure honesty and ethical social media behaviour. The modern customer cares more about data privacy, genuineness and brand image. Therefore, managers have to implement policies against misleading advertisements, hiding sponsored posts and data misuse. Authenticity and transparency on social media can generate long-term trust, which is the basis for the sustainable management of consumers' buying behaviours.

This study focused on customer perception of social media marketing as a driver of consumer behaviour with specific reference to the retail sector. Therefore, the findings of this study may be limited in their applicability beyond the current scope. In addition, the sample size utilised in this study was small, thereby limiting the generalisability of the findings. However, the findings may be useful and can be used as a tool for benchmarking in organisations with similar management architectures. Future research should consider exploring customer perception of social media marketing in other sectors of the economy using a quantitative approach and a larger sample size to facilitate extrapolation of the findings to the target population. In addition, a comparative study should be undertaken to determine the efficacy and application of social media marketing across multiple sectors.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors have contributed equally.

FUNDING

The Authors received no funding for this research.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

REFERENCES

1. Afren, S. (2024). The role of digital marketing promoting tourism business. A study of the use of social media in prompting travel. *World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews*, 21(01), 272-287. <https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2024.21.1.2668>
2. Akbar, S., & James, P.T. (2014). Consumers' attitude towards online shopping: Factors influencing employees of crazy domains to shop online. *Journal of Management and Marketing Research*, 14, 1-11. <https://d1wqtxs1x2le7.cloudfront.net/47291135/131640-libre.pdf>
3. American Marketing Association. (2020). *Consumer behaviour*. <https://www.ama.org/topics/consumer-behaviour/>
4. Arief, M., Mustikowati, R. I., & Chrismardani, Y. (2023). Why customers buy an online product? The effects of advertising attractiveness, influencer marketing and online customer reviews. *LBS Journal of Management & Research*, 21(1), 81-99. <https://doi.org/10.1108/LBSJMR-09-2022-0052>
5. Bashar, A., Wasiq, M., Nyagadza, B., & Maziriri, E. T. (2024). Emerging trends in social media marketing: a retrospective review using data mining and bibliometric analysis. *Future Business Journal*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s43093-024-00308-6>
6. Belanche, D., Casaló, L. V., Flavián, M., & Ibáñez-Sánchez, S. (2021). Understanding influencer marketing: The role of congruence between influencers, products and consumers. *Journal of Business Research*, 132, 186-195. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.03.067>
7. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative research in sport, exercise and health*, 11(4), 589-597. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806>
8. Buzeta, C., De Pelsmacker, P., & Dens, N. (2020). Motivations to use different social media types and their impact on consumers' online brand-related activities (COBRAS). *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 52, 79-98. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2020.04.004>
9. Campbell, S., Greenwood, M., Prior, S., Shearer, T., Walkem, K., Young, S., ... & Walker, K. (2020). Purposive sampling: complex or simple? Research case examples. *Journal of research in Nursing*, 25(8), 652-661. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1744987120927206>
10. Chan, F. (2022). A study of social media influencers and impact on consumer buying behaviour in the United Kingdom. *International Journal of Business & Management Studies*, 3(07), 2694-1449. <https://www.ijbms.net/assets/files/1659111546.pdf>
11. Chou, W.Y.S., Gaysynsky, A., & Cappella, J.N. (2020). Where to Go from Here: Health Misinformation on Social Media. *American Journal of Public Health*, 110(10), 273-275. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2020.305905>
12. Chowdhury, S. N., Faruque, M. O., Sharmin, S., Talukder, T., Al Mahmud, M. A., Dastagir, G., & Akter, S. (2024). The impact of social media marketing on consumer behaviour: A study of the fashion retail industry. *Open Journal of Business and Management*, 12(3), 1666-1699. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojbm.2024.123090>
13. Cox, A., Granbois, D.H., & Summers, J. (1983). Planning, search, certainty and satisfaction among durables buyers: a longitudinal Study. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 10(1). <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Planning%2C-Search%2C-Certainty-and-Satisfaction-Among-Cox-Granbois/d92bf9657c803c2ba531106e30221c18c0647c9c>
14. Creswell, C., Leigh, E., Larkin, M., Stephens, G., Violato, M., Brooks, E., & Clark, D. M. (2021). Qualitative interviews: Approach, design, sample and analysis. In *Cognitive therapy compared with CBT for social anxiety disorder in adolescents: A feasibility study*. NIHR Journals Library. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK568929/>
15. Durmaz, Y. (2014). The impact of psychological factors on consumer buying behaviour and an empirical application in Turkey. *Asian Social Science*, 10(6), 194-204. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ass.v10n6p194>
16. Effendi, E. (2023). Turnitin User Behaviour And Hoax Information On Social Media Case Of Indonesia. *Jurnal Studi Komunikasi*, 7(3), 930-943. <http://repository.uinsu.ac.id/id/eprint/22712>

17. Erkan, I., & Evans, C. (2016). The influence of eWOM in social media on consumers' purchase intentions: An extended approach to information adoption. *Computers in human behaviour*, 61, 47-55. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.03.003>
18. Figeac, J., & Favre, G. (2023). How behavioural homophily on social media influences the perception of tie-strengthening within young adults' personal networks. *New Media & Society*, 25(8), 1971-1990. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448211020691>
19. Furajji, F., Łatuszyńska, M., & Wawrzyniak, A., (2012). An empirical study of the factors influencing consumer behaviour in the electric appliances market. *Contemporary Economics*, 6(3), 76-86. <https://doi.org/10.5709/ce.1897-9254.52>
20. Gerritsen, B. H., Soilen, K. S., de Visser, P. B., Hoogreef, P. J., Hulst, K., Janssen, M. L., & Consenheim, E. (2014). Social Media Coming to the Mall: A Cross-Channel Response. In: Schaefer, D. (eds) *Product Development in the Socio-sphere*. Springer, Cham. https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-07404-7_7
21. Heggde, G., & Shainesh, G. (2018). Social media marketing: Emerging concepts and applications. In *Social Media Marketing: Emerging Concepts and Applications*. Springer Singapore. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-5323-8>
22. Herawati, H., Prajanti, S. D. W., & Kardoyo, K. (2019). Predicted purchasing decisions from lifestyle, product quality and price through purchase motivation. *Journal of Economic Education*, 8(1), 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.15294/jeec.v8i1.29636>
23. Hilong, L. (2023). Effectiveness of social media to attract customers for start-up business. *International Journal of Management and Human Science (IJMHS)*, 7(1), 16-23. <https://doi.org/10.31674/ijmhs.2023.v07i01.003>
24. Ibrahim, S. S., & Ganeshbabu, P. (2018). A study on the impact of social media marketing trends on digital marketing. *Shanlax International Journal of Management*, 6(1), 120-125. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1461321>
25. Jannah, R., Wahyuningsih, O., & Azzahra, A. (2024). Implementation of Marketing Techniques on Social Media to Increase Sales Via Repeat Orders. *OPSearch: American Journal of Open Research*, 3(1), 877-882. <https://doi.org/10.58811/opsearch.v3i3.109>
26. Kapoor, K. K., Tamilmani, K., Rana, N. P., Patil, P., Dwivedi, Y. K., & Nerur, S. (2018). Advances in Social Media Research: Past, Present and Future. *Information Systems Frontiers*, 20(3), 531-558. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10796-017-9810-y>
27. Katawetawarakas, C., & Wang, C. (2011). Online shopper behaviour: influences of online shopping decision. *Asian Journal of Business Research*, 1(2), 66-74. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2345198>
28. Kim, Y., Park, Y., & Choi, J. (2017). A study on the adoption of IoT smart home service: using Value-based Adoption Model. *Total Quality Management and Business Excellence*, 28(9-10), 1149-1165. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14783363.2017.1310708>
29. Kinker, M., & Shukla, N. K. (2016). An analysis of consumer behaviours towards online shopping of electronic goods with special reference to Bhopal and Jabalpur city. *International journal of innovation and applied studies*, 14(1), 218. <https://ijias.issr-journals.org/abstract.php?article=IJIAS-15-209-05>
30. Kotler, P., Kartajaya, H., & Setiawan, I. (2021). *Marketing 5.0: Technology for Humanity*. John Wiley & Sons.
31. Kotler, P., & Armstrong, G. (2021). Fundamentos de Marketing. <https://doi.org/978-9702604006>
32. Leong, C. M., Loi, A. M. W., & Woon, S. (2021). The influence of social media eWOM information on purchase intention. *Journal of Marketing Analytics*, 10(2), 145. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41270-021-00132-9>
33. Lim, W. M., & Rasul, T. (2022). Customer engagement and social media: Revisiting the past to inform the future. *Journal of Business Research*, 148, 325-342. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.04.068>
34. Lundmark, L. W., Oh, C., & Verhaal, J. C. (2017). A little Birdie told me: Social media, organizational legitimacy, and underpricing in initial public offerings. *Information Systems Frontiers*, 19, 1407-1422. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10796-016-9654-x>
35. Maitri, W. S., Suherlan, S., Dwi, R., Prakosos, Y., Subagja, A. D., Muna, A., Ausat, A., Studi, P., & Bisnis, A. (2023). Recent Trends in Social Media Marketing Strategy. *Jurnal Minfo Polgan*, 12(2). <https://doi.org/10.33395/jmp.v12i2.12517>
36. Manzoor, U., Baig, S. A., Hashim, M., & Sami, A. (2020). Impact of social media marketing on consumer's purchase intentions: the mediating role of customer trust. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Research*, 3(2), 41-48. <https://doi.org/10.31580/ijer.v3i2.1386>
37. Mason, A. N., Narcum, J., & Mason, K. (2021). Social media marketing gains importance after Covid-19. *Cogent Business & Management*, 8(1), 1870797. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2020.1870797>
38. Nash, J. (2019). Exploring How Social Media Platforms Influence Fashion Consumer Decisions in the UK Retail Sector. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal*, 23, 82-103. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JFMM-01-2018-0012>
39. Nathanael, G. K., Angeliawati, D., & Muhadjir, M. (2023). The power of social media to influence people in Indonesia: case study of crazy rich scam and big data of election postponement. *JPPi (Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Indonesia)*, 9(1), 439-448. <http://dx.doi.org/10.29210/020221755>
40. Nyagadza, B., Mazuruse, G., Simango, K., Chikazhe, L., Tsokota, T., & Macheke, L. (2023). Examining the influence of social media eWOM on consumers' purchase intentions of commercialised indigenous fruits (IFs) products in FMCGs retailers. *Sustainable Technology and Entrepreneurship*, 2(3), 100040. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stae.2023.100040>

41. Papakonstantinidis, S. (2017). The SoLoMo customer journey: a review and research agenda. *Innovative Marketing*, 13(4), 47. [http://dx.doi.org/10.21511/im.13\(4\).2017.05](http://dx.doi.org/10.21511/im.13(4).2017.05)
42. Raghunath, C., & Sahay, M. (2015). Consumer behaviour in online retail in India. *IOSR Journal of Business and Management*, 16-19. https://www.iosrjournals.org/iosr-jbm/papers/AETM15_MBA/1/03-MBA-133.pdf
43. Rathnayaka, R.M.U.R.K. (2017). Factors affecting for consumer switching behaviour from toilet soap to face wash reference to female segment in Kandy District. *International Journal of Research*, 4(13), 736-742. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325987787>
44. Selezneva, A. (2024). Influence of social media content on TikTok on consumer purchasing intention of beauty and cosmetic products. <https://lutpub.lut.fi/handle/10024/167165>
45. Sethi, I., & Chawla, A.S. (2014). Influence of cultural, social and marketing factors on the buying behaviour of telecom users: a comparative study of rural, semi-urban and urban areas in and around Chandigarh. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 2(1), 97-110. https://jmm.thebrpi.org/journals/jmm/Vol_2_No_1_March_2014/7.pdf
46. Siddiqui, S., & Singh, T. (2016). Social media its impact with positive and negative aspects. *International journal of computer applications technology and research*, 5(2), 71-75. <https://jogamayadevicollege.ac.in/uploads/1586197536.pdf>
47. Sulonen, S. (2025). Brand building in the era of social media: the role of TikTok in shaping brand identity. <https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi-fe2025060257105>
48. Sreejesh, S., Paul, J., Strong, C., & Pius, J. (2020). Consumer response towards social media advertising: Effect of media interactivity, its conditions and the underlying mechanism. *International Journal of Information Management*, 54, 102155. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2020.102155>
49. Stephen, A. T. (2016). The role of digital and social media marketing in consumer behaviour. *Current opinion in Psychology*, 10, 17-21. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2015.10.016>
50. Szeto, M. D., Mamo, A., Afrin, A., Militello, M., & Barber, C. (2021). Social media in dermatology and an overview of popular social media platforms. *Current dermatology reports*, 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13671-021-00343-4>
51. Tanlaka, E. F., & Aryal, S. (2025). Interpretivist Constructivism: A Valuable Approach for Qualitative Nursing Research. *Open Journal of Therapy and Rehabilitation*, 13(1), 8-19. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojtr.2025.131002>
52. Tanner, J., & Raymond, M.A. (2012). Marketing Principles. V 2.0 creative commons. <https://2012books.lardbucket.org/pdfs/marketing-principles-v2.0.pdf>
53. Urban, B., & Maphathe, T. (2021). Social media marketing and customer engagement: a focus on small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in South Africa. *Journal of Contemporary Management*, 18(1), 48-69. <https://doi.org/10.35683/jcm20065.96>
54. Usta, M. (2023). *Influencer Marketing and Evolving Brand Image Strategies Impact on Startup and Digital Businesses' Growth* (Doctoral dissertation, Mykolo Romerio universitetas.). <https://gs.elaba.lt/object/elaba:152447014/>
55. Varghese, S., & Agrawal, M. (2021). Impact of social media on Consumer Buying Behaviour. *Saudi Journal of Business and Management Studies*, 6(3), 51-55. <https://doi.org/10.36348/sjbm.2021.v06i03.001>
56. Vashishth, T. K., Sharma, K. K., Kumar, B., Chaudhary, S., & Panwar, R. (2024). Enhancing customer experience through AI-enabled content personalization in e-commerce marketing. *Advances in digital marketing in the era of artificial intelligence*, 7-32. <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.1201/9781003450443-2/>
57. Vidani, J., & Das, S. G. (2021). A Review on Evolution of Social Media Influencer Marketing: Reflection on Consumer Behaviour and Consumer's Decision-Making Process. *Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(9). <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354388861>
58. Voramontri, D., & Klieb, L. (2019). Impact of Social Media on Consumer Behaviour. *International Journal of Information and Decision Sciences*, 11(3). <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJIDS.2019.101994>
59. Vrontis, D., Makrides, A., Christofi, M., & Thrassou, A. (2021). Social media influencer marketing: A systematic review, integrative framework and future research agenda. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 45(4), 617-644. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.12647>
60. Wibowo, A., Chen, S. C., Wiangin, U., Ma, Y., & Ruangkanjanases, A. (2021). Customer behaviour as an outcome of social media marketing: The role of social media marketing activity and customer experience. *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 13(1), 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13010189>
61. Wijaya, E., Wulan, D. P., & Nursanti, T. D. (2025, January). Exploring Millennial Security Awareness of Data Protection, Cybercrime, and Privacy Management in Indonesia. In *2025 International Conference on Computer Sciences, Engineering, and Technology Innovation (ICoCSETI)* (pp. 858-863). IEEE. <https://doi.org/10.1109/ICoCSETI63724.2025.11019204>
62. Yap, Y. R., & Ismail, N. (2022). Factors of virtual influencer marketing influencing Generation Y consumers' purchase intention in Malaysia. *International Journal of Internet Marketing and Advertising*, 17(3-4), 437-458. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJIMA.2022.126735>
63. Zeqiri, J., Koku, P. S., Dobre, C., Milovan, A. M., Hasani, V. V., & Paientko, T. (2024). The impact of social media marketing on brand awareness, brand engagement, and purchase intention in emerging economies. *Marketing Intelligence and Planning*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MIP-06-2023-0248>

Мсоса С. К., Говендер Г., Шанге М. С., Мхізе Т., Мартін Л.

СПРИЙНЯТТЯ КЛІЄНТАМИ МАРКЕТИНГУ В СОЦІАЛЬНИХ МЕРЕЖАХ ЯК РУШІЙНОЇ СИЛИ КУПІВЕЛЬНОЇ ПОВЕДІНКИ

Використання соціальних мереж надзвичайно зросло за останні роки, а пандемія COVID-19 прискорила його поширення серед клієнтів. Крім того, використання соціальних медіа в рекламі не тільки трансформувало традиційні рекламні платформи, а й допомогло збирати інформацію про смаки та поведінку споживачів. У цьому дослідженні було проаналізовано сприйняття клієнтами маркетингу в соціальних мережах як рушійної сили купівельної поведінки.

Техніка неймовірної вибірки, відома як цілеспрямована, була прийнята для відбору 10 респондентів. Дані були проаналізовані за допомогою тематичного аналізу. Результати цього дослідження показують, що соціальні мережі відіграють важливу роль у просуванні бізнесу, як ефективне джерело інформації, як джерело реклами та відгуків і як інструмент для взаємодії з брендами, що врешті-решт впливає на рішення клієнтів про покупку.

Отож, менеджери повинні забезпечувати послідовність і якість контенту, який вони розміщують на платформах соціальних мереж, щоб залишатися актуальними. Крім того, контент у соціальних мережах має бути не лише іміджевим і брендованим, а й ціннісним, спрямованим на привернення уваги поточних і потенційних клієнтів. Слід заохочувати співробітників до етичного використання соціальних мереж, оскільки сучасний клієнт дуже насторожено ставиться до неправильного використання даних. У зв'язку з цим, чесність і відкритість у використанні соціальних мереж може бути інструментом для управління стійкою купівельною поведінкою споживачів. Це дослідження робить свій вклад у літературу з маркетингу в соціальних медіа в країнах, що розвиваються, де використання соціальних медіа як інструмента для маркетингу досі перебуває на стадії розробки в результаті інфраструктурних проблем і високої вартості даних.

Ключові слова: соціальні медіа, комунікація, бренди, купівельна поведінка клієнтів, конфіденційність даних, інформація

JEL Класифікація: D85, D83, D8, M31