The Impact of Social Media Marketing on Students' Purchase Intention

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The Impact of Social Media Marketing on Students' Purchase Intention

by

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APPROVAL

Title: The Impact of Social Media Marketing on Students' Purchase Intention

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I dedicate this thesis to my dear parents, family and friends for all their sacrifices, love, tenderness, support and prayers throughout my studies…

ETHICAL DECLARATION

I, Salma Benelmostafa, hereby, declare that I am the sole author of this thesis and it is my original work. I declare that I have followed ethical standards in collecting and analyzing the data and accurately reported the findings in this thesis. I have also properly credited all the sources included in this work.

Salma Benelmostafa

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ABSTRACT

The lifestyle of people has been changed tremendously in the last few decades. Today, people's lives are intertwined with technology. As a result, people are rarely using traditional means of communication. Instead, they have started to use new technologies and modes of communication such as Social Media.

This paper examines the impact of Social Media Marketing on Consumer Purchase Intention and how it affected by the mediating role of Consumer Engagement and Consumer Attitude. We used the quantitative method to get results; 201 data were collected from students in Northern Cyprus through face-to-face and self-administrated surveys online.

The study finds that Social Media Marketing is significantly related to Consumer Purchase Intention. It is also demonstrated that Consumer Engagement and Consumer Attitude act as a mediator in how Social Media Marketing impact Consumer Purchase Intention.

To conclude, these findings indicate a direction for future studies to use a qualitative method by choosing a specific platform such as Instagram to compare others studies.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing, Consumer Engagement, Consumer Attitude, Consumer Purchase Intention.

ÖZ

İnsanların yaşam tarzı son birkaç on yılda büyük ölçüde değişti. Günümüzde insanların hayatı teknoloji ile iç içedir. Sonuç olarak, insanlar nadiren geleneksel iletişim araçlarını kullanırlar. Bunun yerine, Sosyal Medya gibi yeni teknolojileri ve iletişim biçimlerini kullanmaya başladılar.

Bu makale, Sosyal Medya Pazarlamasının Tüketici Satın Alma Niyeti üzerindeki etkisini ve Tüketici Bağlılığı ve Tüketici Tutumunun aracılık rolünden nasıl etkilendiğini incelemektedir. Sonuç almak için nicel yöntem kullanılmış, Kuzey Kıbrıs'taki öğrencilerden yüz yüze ve online anket yoluyla 201 veri toplanmıştır.

Çalışma, Sosyal Medya Pazarlamasının Tüketici Satın Alma Niyeti ile önemli ölçüde ilişkili olduğunu bulmuştur. Ayrıca, Tüketici Bağlılığı ve Tüketici Tutumunun, Sosyal Medya Pazarlamasının Tüketici Satın Alma Niyetini nasıl etkilediği konusunda bir aracı olarak hareket ettiğini göstermektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Sosyal Medya Pazarlaması, Tüketici Bağlılığı, Tüketici Tutumu, Tüketici Satın Alma Niyeti.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CA   Consumer Attitude

CE   Consumer Engagement

CPI   Consumer Purchase Intention

FIU   Final International University

SD   Standard Deviation

sig.   Significance Level

SMM   Social Media Marketing

SPSS   Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

TRNC   Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, technological development such as internet and cellphones have significantly impacted these social and societal trends. The changes also mark the preferences and behavior of consumers (Antoniqdes, 2016). Additionally, we are living in a period of change on several fronts. One of the most significant changes has been accessing real-time information.

The appearance of Web 2.0 has brought about a significant change in marketing concepts, in the way that all customers can connect to the Internet at any moment, by taking a part in online communities. Thus, customers become actors by reacting freely with their voices. In addition, constantly, it has develop into challenging to preserve customers and keep permanent contact with them due to the expanding demands of customers and the propagation of products and brands (Mayol et al., 2011).

Today, internet, computers, smartphones, social media makes our life easier. This ability to access the internet and technologies has facilitated the integration and impact of social networks on our lives. Internet and social media have become a way of life and an imperative for many. Today all companies rely on digital marketing, whether for the direct sale of their products, the promotion of their image, or corporate communication. Social media has redefined the way users interact with brands (Dimitriu et al., 2017). Multiple options are available on social media to promote brands, either during lifecycle phases (Roch et al., 2016) or according to different business strategies or types of products and services (Hoffman et al., 2010). Digital marketers and social media specialists are therefore highly sought after, whether by companies, institutions, or web agencies. Digital functions are becoming more precise and acquiring more responsibilities (Lamouret, 2019).

Therefore, it becomes inevitable to measure the effectiveness of investments to justify marketing initiatives on these platforms. The efficacy in this context would be to engage consumers on social media as a first step, aiming to lead them towards an ultimate conversion goal (sales) (Lamouret, 2019).

1.1 Problem Statement

As a new and popular marketing tool, social media marketing has changed consumers' roles from observers to participants who engage in this social media context. This unique two-way communication method connects businesses and consumers with no restriction in time and location (Kim et al., 2012). Due to its convenience and popularity, social media marketing has been employed as a marketing tool by various brands and became their primary mode of advertising (Toor, 2017). Thus, the increase in social media use has offered companies an opportunity to provide more marketing efforts and the best method to attain to customers. The issue with the rise of social media is that people who use this method of communication can define a business's reputation and branding Edosomwan (2011) and Taneja (2014) affirmed that companies that are involved in social media can retain customers and increased their profits. However, regardless of the increased practical importance of social media and social influencers and their impact on consumer purchasing intention, this aspect of social media influencers has been under-studied.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

Despite the growing of social media and its effect on consumer purchase intention, the impact of social media marketing on students as a new generation is neglected in the literature. Hence, due to the absence of research in this field, the purpose of this paper is to use a survey study to explore the impacts of social media marketing on students purchase intention. Moreover, this research also aims to examine the potential underlying mechanism in the relationship between social media marketing and student's purchase intention.

1.3 Significance of the Study

The lifestyle of people has been changed tremendously in the last few decades. Today, peoples' lives are intertwined with technology. As a result, people are rarely using traditional means of communication. Instead, they have started to use new technologies and modes of communication such as social networks and social media (Phillips & Noble, 2007).

However, we choose to focus on students in this study because they are the young generation who grow up with social media and use it frequently and on daily basis. Especially in Covid-19 when students are more active in terms of social media due to lockdowns.

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This research provides a clear presentation of this recent phenomenon and its impact on students. The findings of this study will directly benefit start-up companies to introduce social media in their marketing strategy. Furthermore, the analysis that is presented in this research will bring valuable information for upcoming studies.

1.4 Research Questions

To contribute the understanding of the impacts of social media marketing market on student's engagemnet, attitudes and purchase intention, the following research questions are established:

1. Can social media marketing affect students 'purchasing intention?

2. Is the relationship between social media marketing and students purchase intention mediated by any variables (e.g. consumer engagement, consumer attitude)?

1.5 Assumptions

The following assumptions are made regarding this study:

1. The questions fully understand by all respondents.

2. The respondents will provide honest expressions of their knowledge

3. All results provided are clear regarding the impact of social media marketing influencers on customer's responses and purchase intention.

1.6 Limitations

This study has potential limitations. The sample selected for this study was explicitly students in TRNC. This study aimed at least 300 respondents. Due to the health crisis (Covid-19), the number of students has decreased which prevented us from accessing a large population which conducts us to have a dropped data as well.

Another limitation is that some students do not speak English and could not participate in the survey.

1.7 Definition of Key Terminology

Social media marketing (SMM) refers to the use of social media and social networks to market a company's products and services (Adam, 2018).

Consumer engagemnet refers to emotional attachment that a customer experience during the repeated. and ongoing interactions (Rohit,2020).

Consumer attitude is a composite of a consumer's (1) beliefs about, (2) feelings about, (3) and behavioral intentions toward some object--within the context of marketing, usually a brand or retail store. These components are viewed together since they are highly interdependent and together represent forces that influence how the consumer will react to the object (Lars, 2018).

Purchase intention is a kind of decision-making that studies the reason to buy a particular brand by consumer (Shah et al., 2012; Morinez et al., 2007) define purchase intention as a situation where consumer tends to buy a certain product in certain condition.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Foundation

This study confers to the Uses and Gratification Theory "need seeking," refined by (Katz et al., 1974). UGT theory has mainly been employed to investigate the behaviors of consumers and its relationship to conventional media. Nonetheless, the emergence of new communication platforms (e.g., internet, email, blogging) social media caused various researchers to apply UGT in their social media research.

For instance, Wang, Yang, and Chen, (2016) employed UGT to identify the motives behind social network platform usage. Likewise, Oliveira, Huertas, and Lin (2016), used UGT to determine the factors that affect consumers' engagement in social media. Additionally, Vries and Carlson (2014) used UGT to investigate the relationship between social media content, positive engagement behavior, brand strength, and brand loyalty. Based on its vast and successful applications, it is thus argued that the UGT fits well with the current study, which investigates how social media influences consumers' intention to purchase.

Hence, the current study has applied UGT to assume that consumers, motivated by their personal goals, actively and self-consciously contribute to their in-media choices. UGT contends that thus assumes that consumers are seeking out the media platforms which satisfy their needs and gratification. Consequently, it is the consumer's gratification that would lead to recurring media use. Thus, the consumer's media choice is considered objective-oriented and value-focused (Dahl, 2014).

According to the literature, most former studies have used the UGT to elucidate why consumers use specific social media platforms (Wang et al., 2016), such as entertainment socializing, status-seeking, and information seeking. Furthermore, Smith (2011) stated that 88% of marketers use social media as a marketing tool; and companies spend approximately USD 60 billion on social media advertisements in the U.S. only. Besides, the relationship businesses are developing with their customers over their social media platforms generates greater returns (Okazaki & Mueller, 2007). Accordingly, due to the extensive usage of social media, researchers need to identify the influence of social media on consumer purchase intentions (Husnain, 2017).

Therefore, this study believes that students are active and self-aware of their social media choices. Accordingly, they choose social media platforms to gain

different gratification in social interaction, information seeking, information sharing, expression of opinion, entertainment, and communication. Hence, social media marketing positively affects student's engagement and attitude and eventually affects their purchase intention.

2.2 Social Media Marketing and Consumer Purchase Intention

Following the technological revolution that has taken place worldwide, social media has spread to all spheres of communication. As a result, there have been innovative ways to communicate between people. Suddenly, it has affected the approach companies have illustrated relationships with the clients, and the servicing provided through social media are fast, efficient, and agreeable (Kahle, Florence & Ebrary, 2012).

Nowadays, the development of social media has changed the mode of communication, and almost all companies are active on social media (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2004).

First and foremost, social media is described as a set of compositions created by word of mouth online and consists of blogs, forums, and social networks such as Facebook and Instagram. However, with technology, social media is causing very responsive platforms in bringing people together and building communities. Furthermore, social media have allowed companies to establish a direct relationship with consumers. On the one hand, consumers can freely post whatever content they want, whether favorable or unfavourable on their social media pages. Therefore, companies have the opportunity to share their information with a large customer base using social media as a market tool (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

Social media marketing is a marketing d that promotes high participation and attention of consumers through social media (Jara, 2014). Therefore, Social media marketing can be determined as an exchange initiated by individuals or a company/service or product that crosses in a circle amongst the announced parties to elicit divulging communications about certain promotional informations or acquire from each other's experiences (Kim & Ko, 2012; Richter & Schafermeyer, 2011).

According to Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), intention to purchase is defined as an eventuality that a consumer passes into the act of purchasing. Therefore, The intention to purchase shows that the individual will base their choices on their experiences, their tastes, and their external environment to gather information, examine the options, and

make a purchase decision (Yang, 2009). Additionally, purchase intention is considered a constituent of a customer's cognitive behavior showing how a person intends to purchase a specific brand. Purchase Intention can be used to guess which products or brands consumers will buy on their next shipment. Based on the lit, many things can influence purchase intent, such as price, quality, and perceived value (Boon, 2017).

Currently, companies have accomplished numerous development of interactions between their customers and themselves through the use of social media. First, companies are reaping all the profits generated by social media to forge closer ties with their customers (Rapp, 2013) and consolidate brand reviews (Naylor, 2012). Second, customers are dominating the marketing communication process due to due to their interactivity in social media (Hamilton, 2016). According to Lamberton and Stephen (2016), marketers must use and leverage social media to achieve desired performance and competitive advantage.

According to Schultz and Peltier (2013), to maintain the relationship with its customers, social media must put in place marketing strategies to disseminate information related to the brand. Hence, Social media channels are more and more used by consumers who are increasingly seeking information about products and brands (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

Furthermore, consumers use social media to debate and share their experiences. Social media, thus became a place where there is a circulation of information and credible sources of knowledge. For instance, Consumers' decisions can be influenced by the share of opinions of others, either negative or positive. The reason is that the dialogue between buyers and sellers has changed due to the massive use of social media. Thus, new opportunities faced and changed the way customers react to purchase (Shaw, 2012). The reason is that social media marketing, has been found to affect consumers purchase intention (Husnain, 2017).

Moreover, the Theory of Uses and Gratifications UGT is a communication research theory that marketing researchers use for social media communicational analysis (Katz, 1959). UGT theory seems to be applicable in clarifying the above-mentioned relationships. Therefore, this study believes that social media marketing will have an influence on students' purchase intention.

According to what has been discussed so far, we propose:

H1: There is a significant association between social media marketing and consumer purchase intention.

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2.3 Social Media Marketing and Consumer Engagement

According to Durkin (2013), since the 1990s, people began to think that the next thing in relationship marketing will be the Internet. Over the years, social media has grown and become a primary factor that drives the success of a business or product (Hawkins & Vel, 2013).

Safko and Bracke (2009) stated that social media is a trendy term in the era of the participatory web. It is used to qualify Internet users' practices and behaviors in online communities, disseminate, share, and exchange their opinions, experiences, and knowledge by borrowing conventional media.

According to Baker (2009), social media becomes more and more verbose. For this reason, consumers are more able to influence each other by sharing their opinions and experiences than to be subject to the influence of brands that borders on manipulation. Brands that have understood how everyday markets work see them as a gigantic human relations laboratory and use the data provided by big data to better profile consumers and design more effective communication campaigns.

Eagleman (2013) stated that social media is a part of people's daily life of the marketing and communication target. As a result, many brands have integrated social media into their web marketing systems to devote themselves to it to reap the benefits promised.

These new exchange platforms promote a more precise knowledge of consumer behavior (Kim et al., 2001) and make it possible to improve the effectiveness of their prospecting policies (Michael, 2014), conquest, conversion, customer loyalty (Jackson et al., Akhtar 2011) and better management of their online reputation (Uries, 2012).

Nowadays, communication began to change between consumers and businesses using social media and the Internet. Two-way communication is one of the essential features of social media that allows enterprises to interfere and receive customer reviews (Hootsuite, 2020). However, a deep understanding is inevitable when using this new medium.

Furthermore, perceived freedom of choice is rarely assessed. Freedom is indeed a condition for the functioning of the market, of the pleasure of consuming and shopping. However, this freedom is an illusion. Behavioral Decision Theory affirmed how the shaping of a message could alter the perception of a situation of choice. The

consumer remains free, but he is under the influence (Walton et al., 1985). Indeed, the consumer's ability to understand the marketing mechanisms to which he is subject makes him more alert and more resistant to commercial proposals. Thus, while always offering more to the customer, the marketing manager also asks more and more (Dussart, 2005).

With the explosion of this social media phenomenon, businesses are finding it increasingly difficult to manage the information and feedback received by customers. This relationship between the customer and the company is described as "Social CRM" (Malthouse, 2013). However, by providing practical marketing activities, information via social media, and relevant content, businesses will affect customer brand loyalty and positively influence consumer response and brand value (Godey, 2016).

As stated by Brodie (2014), engagement is a two-way relationship between three key players: the user, the community, and the brand. Each party has a relationship of commitment to the other and benefits from it. Consumer engagement can be defined as having a relationship with a brand that stands out from loyalty through interactions, visits to the page, purchases, or actions like sharing, commenting, or liking the content (Gummerus, 2012).

For the brand, the use of the engagement generated is a loyalty effect. Engagement is, therefore, an intermediate step in brands' strategies to retain their community. This loyalty offers the advantage of developing the relationship between the brand and its community and the development of its economic performance such as increased sales, reduced costs, and increased profits. In addition, the engagement would generate loyalty for the user / Consumer himself, but also around him as an influencer.

In service marketing, the psychological connection of a supplier of a brand or service with its customer is conceptualized based on consumer engagement (Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric, & Ilic, 2011; Hapsari, Clemes, & Dean, 2017).

According to researchers, engagement is one of the essential steps at the start of a sequential buying process, while for practitioners, it is more of a direct vehicle to sales. Thus, the consumer's engagement is explained by his behavioral reactions towards a company going beyond what is necessary for the primary economic transaction. That is to say, the search for alternatives and the taking of decision on brand choice (Doorn, 2010; Vivek; Morgan & Beatty, 2012).

However, the theory of uses and gratifications theory (UGT) was one of the first approaches that took into consideration the active role of the audience in media

choice, advising that individuals actively search for, identify and employ media to fulfill specific gratification needs (Ku et al., 2013). This approach affirms that consumers are active, rather than passive, recipients of media.

Hence, we believe that social media marketing can highlen student's engagement as customers. Therefore, this study believes that social media marketing will have an influence on consumer engagement.

According to what has been discussed so far, we propose:

H2a: There is a positive and significant relationship between social media marketing and consumer engagement.

2.4 Social Media Marketing and Consumer Attitude

Social media marketing has become a rapid development tool for companies that want to target customers efficiently. The expansion of social media has been strongly accompanied by instantaneous changes in consumer attitude (Lin & Lu, 2011).

Currently, there is a development in digital interactivity, particularly in terms of individuals' activity in social media. Because of information technology, consumers have become active generators of information (Stewart et al., 2002). Due to the changes generated by consumers, businesses must focus on understanding changing consumer behavior to use social media effectively. Therefore, consumers are starting to participate in activities ranging from consuming content, contributing to conversations, and sharing knowledge with other consumers (Berthon, 2008).

Nowadays, social media impacts the consumer's attitude (Rowley, 2017), these impacts can be due to the environment. Being exposed to other people's opinions or even people's thoughts on social media can influence consumer behavior. On the one hand, attitude can be acquired through paths, past experiences, and information processing. On the other hand, it can be learned from a successful or unsuccessful experience that the individual has lived with a brand or specific product. It may also depend on the credibility and consistency of the information source (Smith, 1993). Social media is extensively used to discover services and products (Karimi et al., 2015). As a result, when redeeming or deciding to buy customers, social media is considered the essential source of information (Erkan et al., 2016). Through social media, customers can explore all things related to products and companies and products they like

(Paquette, 2013). Furthermore, the information posted on social media platforms can anticipate shopper behavior and perceptions (Malthouse, 2013).

According to Fader (2011), social media, user-generated content, and other "Web 2.0" developments undoubtedly represent many opportunities for companies in all industries. They provide a valuable platform for creating new business models, changing the way companies interact with their customers, and offering an unprecedented amount of data on consumer behavior.

As to Shankar (2011) stated, the new social media technology enabled marketers to reach consumers through new touchpoints and allows retailers to engage with their customers at all times. As a result, social media marketing helps build intimacy and trust with customers and elicits customer emotions with the business concerned (Batra & Keller, 2016).

The current phenomenon is that consumer's use social media while purchasing, such as collecting data, evaluating choices, and choosing the excellent alternative to share individual experiences on social media as a post-purchase process (Drews & Schemer, 2010).

Moreover, the consumer study has become more difficult since the consumer is currently warned early, demanding, multi-loyal, evolving. Therefore, we can say that this behavior is sometimes difficult to predict.

Despite this, consumer attitude is an essential basis for evaluating and planning a marketing strategy. Attitude measures are used to assess news, advertisement effectiveness, consumer sentiment regarding specific products or societal issues, etc. An individual's attitude predicts his behavior, and that knowledge of the attitudinal dispositions of consumers is the basis of any marketing strategy (Bagozzi, et al., 1979; Chu & Kamal, 2008). For example, if an individual has a favorable attitude towards a brand, the use will increase. On the contrary, if the individual has an unfavorable attitude towards the brand, she will not use it (Lambin et al., 2008). If an individual has a favorable attitude towards a brand, the use of that brand will increase. Oppositel, if the individual has an unfavorable attitude towards the brand, he will not use it (Lambin & Moerloose, 2008).

The employment of the theory of uses and gratifications seems to be essential to understand the use of social media. This theory suggests that individuals use a specific platform to satisfy their needs and wants. However, UGT theory admits that the

individual has a significant influence on his decisions regarding social media over the impact that the media have on them (Katz, Gurevitch & Haas, 1973).

The current study focuses on studying consumer attitudes in the context of social media. As elaborated by the uses and gratification theory, individuals' gratifications have been considered to inspect the impact that motivates young consumers to keep using a particular social media.

According to what has been discussed so far, this study proposes:

H2b: Social media marketing is positively and significaly related to consumer attitude.

2.5 Consumer Engagement and Consumer Purchase Intention

Nowadays, companies are looking to develop and maintain a competitive advantage, performance, an increase in profitability, and an increase in sales (Brodie, 2011). Therefore, all companies develop their strategy in terms of consumer engagement because engaged customers can contribute to this process of innovation and value creation (Brodie & Hollebeek, 2013; Hoyer, Krafft & Singh, 2010).

According to Sedley and Perks (2008), for the establishment and maintenance of a competitive advantage over others, consideration of consumer engage ment must be a necessity for marketers. However, companies need to boost their efforts to the customer to be engaged. The reason is that engaged consumers have more loyalty and are more emotionally attached to the brand (Sorenson & Adkins, 2014).

Consumer engagement is at the heart of a business goal when it comes to social media. As a result, companies are setting up initiatives to communicate with consumers to obtain an action or interaction reflecting their short-term interest, intending to build a long-term relationship that will translate into consumer loyalty through repetitive purchases (Brodie 2011; Gummerus, 2012; Hollebeek, 2011).

Moreover, social media may serve as a channel for numerous marketing activities: customer service, customer relationship management, sales promotion, buyer research, and advertising. Brand information must be meaningful to the consumer, whether the goal is to engage with a brand in a self-relevant way (Schmitt, 2012).

According to eMarketer (2013), social media is classified as a brand channel by marketers. So, to increase awareness, promote engagement, and retain customers, use branded social media activities.

In the world of social media, engaged consumers are those who share and participate. It can just join in social content consumption, including such behaviors as sharing a story (Hutton & Fosdick, 2011).

Moreover, social media provides more and more new performances. However, consumers can share whatever content and opinions they want since brands are part of the performance (Merchant, 2006).

With the advent of the Internet, consumer behavior has undergone remarkable changes following changes like the information available. Among the main differences in consumer behavior that have emerged due to this new context is the shift from passive reaction to postmodern consumerism (Clark et al., 2005). Thus, the postmodern consumer is creative, innovative, interacts, and initiates and reshapes his purchasing experience (Szmigin, 2003). Therefore, consideration of the postmodern consumer is one of the tools that help understand consumer purchasing intent in online communities.

Nowadays, there are a lot of new perceptions in the market to captivate customers; suddenly, the international trade market becomes very competitive, which leaves a wide purchasing choice for the customers and affects the purchasing intention of the customer (Shabbir, Kirmani & Iqbal, 2009).

According to Spears and Singh (2004), purchase intention is "an individual's conscious plan to make an effort to purchase a brand." While, other researchers trust that purchase intention is "what we think we will buy" (Park, J. 2002). Conforming to Daneshvary and Schower (2000), demographic factors like gender, age, education, and profession correlate with purchase intention.

Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) identify intention as a conative component between attitude and behavior. It is stimulated by a need or desire or a need (Darpy, 1997). O'Shaughnessy (1992) stated that purchase intention is more than a desire and promise to purchase. Online, it has been associated, in the context of electronic commerce, to recommend, buy, or repurchase and revisiting the site (Garbarino et al., 1999; Chouk & 2004). In fulfillment of Ling (2010), it corresponds to the situation in which a customer is ready to engage in an online transaction

Buying intention occurs during the decision-making phase of the consumer towards a brand or brand. It is an essential indicator for assessing consumer behavior because it measures the probability that a consumer will buy a product (Dodds, 1991; Valacich & Hess, 2011)

In another study, Porter (1974) elaborates on customers' intention to purchase a focused brand by his same brand attitude and attitudes leading to other brands' choice of set.

In recent years the media has started to influence individuals within the society. Suddenly, researchers have further investigated how social media affect people.

According to UGT theory, engaged customers are active in assessing the media and will make operational choices that will best meet their needs, which will maximize their purchase intention (Luo & Remus, 2014).

Based on these arguments, the following is proposed as follows:

H3: There is a positive and significaly assosciation between consumer engagement consumer purchase intention.

2.6 Consumer Attitude and Consumer Purchase Intention

Attitude is an essential variable in research in psychology and consumer behavior. It is determined as a psychological habit communicated by measuring a particular entity with few degrees of disfavor or favor (Eagly et al., 1993). According to Fishbein and Azjen (1975), attitude is described as a "learned predisposition to answer a class or an object of things in a regularly unfavorable manner or favorable.

Indeed, marketing managers should understand how attitudes are formed among these consumers to make consumers prefer their brands to competitors (D'astous, 2006). Thus, the authors are persuaded of the vital role played by this variable in a consumer's decision-making process and its influence on the latter's behavior.

Therefore, the consumer's attitude is evoked by the act of buying a service or product. Before any purchase, consumers begin to do their research to collect information on the Web, interview those around them and discuss all the possible choices. The result obtained by this information helps the consumer choose a specific brand and proceed to the purchase act (D'astous, 2006).

According to Kim and Ko (2012), purchase intention is characterized as a set of consumer interests and the likelihood of making the purchase. In several studies, they have indicated that purchase intention is significantly associated with attitude and attraction towards a product or brand (Kim et al., 2012); therefore, measuring purchase intention presumes the future behavior of customers based on their attitude. Furthermore, buying a product requires comparing other products offered by competitors (Teng et al., 2007). But, this purchase intention will only happen when companies have

to provide their consumer's expectations that meet their needs. However, the greater the intention, the greater the desire to purchase (Luo & Chen, 2011).

With the continuous evolution of technology, businesses must survive in the global marketplace, so understanding consumers' buying intent is paramount. For marketers, consumer attitudes (Hidayat et al., 2013), perceived risk, usefulness, and ease of use. (Faqih, 2013) are considered variables related to the consumer's purchase intention. In addition, the consumer's intention is a key and essential element for the subsequent success of the business. Therefore, consumer attitude will be examined by purchase intention, and it is measured as a primary variable in assessing the potential to purchase an item by a consumer (Tahmasebifard, 2015).

With the advent of modern technology, marketers are starting to give more importance to consumer attitudes. Customer responsiveness allows marketers to study consumers' attitudes regarding their choices, thoughts, and feelings concerning other possibilities. However, the consumer buys a product based on cultural, social, and psychological factors (Solomon, 1983).

The customer is the center of interest of all companies. However, social media marketing gives businesses the chance to build a healthy relationship that will benefit both parties. Therefore, companies wishing to have existing business advantages should make all necessary social media marketing strategies (Ahmed & Zahid 2014).

Kim and Ko (2010) stated that social media marketing positively affects purchase intention and customer relationship management. Thus, each activity practiced by social media, whether content creation, customer management, or information collection, improves customer relationship management and purchase intention.

According to UGT theory, consumers are active in examining all media. Therefore, they will make operational decisions influenced by psychological factors to fulfill their needs and improve their gratification (Luo et al., 2014). Thus, the UGT theory assumes that consumers know their own needs. To conclude, every individual feels to be satisfied. As a reaction, the individual moves on to an act of purchase.

In line with what is discussed so far this study proposes that:

H4: There is a positive assosciation between consumer attitude and consumer purchase intention.

2.7 Consumer Engagement, Social Media Marketing and Consumer Purchase Intention

In recent years, consumers have experienced an upheaval in terms of decisions about current or future purchases, the way they perceive information about the services and products that captivate them, and the manner of their purchasing act (Simona, 2017).

It is for this reason that all businesses desire to establish mutually beneficial relationships with their internal and external customers, as well as with other stake-holders. However, social media is a medium that provides a competitive advantage for every type of relationship or target audience of an organization (Simona, 2017).

Due to the digitalization of consumption patterns, consumers are exposed to a more extensive offer. With increased competition, companies have a challenge which is to rethink their customer relationship. An engaged consumer is an individual who constantly consumes products of the same brand. He is also involved in the company's marketing strategy. Moreover, the customer becomes a brand ambassador via social networks by sharing their feedback. However, a person who recommends is morally committed. For this reason, people trust the recommendations (Boniface, 2020).

In social media marketing, consumer engagement is getting vast attention. However, the critical goal of marketers is customer engagement. To achieve marketing objectives, the relationship between customers and the company contributes to the development potential of this company. The chances of consumers' buying intention on products and services will be higher if their shopping experience is positive (Barhemmati & Ahmad, 2015).

Consumers expect brands to speak to them in a relevant and personalized way. Therefore, advertisers have every interest in contextualizing their message to win the attention battle and target only prospects who have a high probability of buying (Yoaan, 2020). However, buying intention is fostered by a set of elements such as brand loyalty and the trust they place in a specific brand. Businesses need to nurture a loyal customer base because it will help them reduce business expenses. After all, a loyal customer is more profitable than the effort of acquiring new customers. Buying

intention and brand loyalty are two elements that contribute to increased sales because a loyal consumer hardly ever changes their buying habits; because if the consumer is completely satisfied, it will be difficult to convince other competitors (Johanna, 2020).

These studies' findings confirm that firms should manage and develop their social media marketing strategy by formulating new marketing strategies with more coherent business objectives. However, consumer engagement serves as a determinant issue in stimulating consumer purchase intention. For this reason, a business can use its social media marketing to boost its customer purchase intention.

Based on the study results from Toor, Husnain, and Hussain (2017), consumer engagement acts as a mediator between social network marketing and consumer purchase intention because people spend more time on social media every day are created by sharing information with others. Therefore, a person who becomes emotionally engaged in social media may be more engaged in the future with companies (VanMeter & Grisaffe, 2013).

Hence, this study believes that social media marketing cause students to be more engaged as consumers. This boosted engagement will eventually affect their purchase intention.

In line with what is discussed so far this study proposes that:

H5a: The association among social media marketing and consumer purchase intention is mediated by consumer engagement.

2.8 Consumer Attitude, Social Media Marketing and Consumer Purchase Intention

Social media has completely changed the way consumers interact with brands, directly impacting their current decision-making process. For brands, social media has become a new method of reaching new consumers and discerning their needs (Carle, 2003).

Nowadays, it is essential to know the needs of individuals to determine an offer that meets their expectations. Beyond that, it is also necessary to understand the factors that will make your choices. Good knowledge of the consumer's personality and the evolving context makes it easier to influence their behavior and support them in their act of purchase. By analyzing the consumer's behavior, it is a question of trying to understand the reactions of a customer, facing a set of stimuli supporting the relation-

ship that we have with him. By understanding what activates online purchasing behavior by distinguishing between elements with which the customer is sensitive, by analyzing their reactions and attitudes, we can find levers for improving the experience offered to them, activating the sale, or further strengthen the relationship (Clara, 2020).

Customer attitude is an essential part of participation in terms of loyalty. For this, it is necessary to analyze the attitude of the consumer in the purchasing decision process. Therefore, the attitude of the consumer is a fundamental element in understanding the consumer's decision-making process (Matbios, 2009).

Nowadays, we exist in a world where consumers have attained power over brands, in particular, due to the arrival of absolute transparency in commerce e.g., social Media, customer reviews. Thus, the consumer has become the critical element. Its attitude is based on the satisfaction of individual needs. Indeed, the main objective of a consumer is to satisfy his needs as well as possible. He is subject to the influence of many multiple variables that determine his motivations and obstacles. Social Media is becoming a source of information for the consumer; these variables play an essential role in the final purchase decision (Madjene & Bennour, 2018).

In addition, social media have now become more and more critical in the communication strategy of companies. They are the ideal explnation to this consumer need for discussion. Brands can directly reach that consumer and create contact with him, send him a message and, in principle, answer his investigations. Therefore, Social has absolutely restored the nature of interactions between consumers and brands, thus directly impacting its current decision-making process (Carle, 2013).

Social media marketing can implement highly effective strategies in businesses through trust-building mechanisms, which will influence the purchasing intentions of consumers (Usman et al., 2019). In addition, social media provide companies with new ways to become universally engaging (Aksoy, 2013). Thus, it will significantly influence the purchase of consumers.

Therefore, this study believes that consumer attitude acts as a mediator since the consumer attitude plays a crucial role in social media marketing and purchase intention.

According to what has been discussed so far, we propose:

H5b: The association among social media marketing and consumer purchase intention is mediated by consumer attitude.

Figure 1 *(Proposed Conceptual Model)*
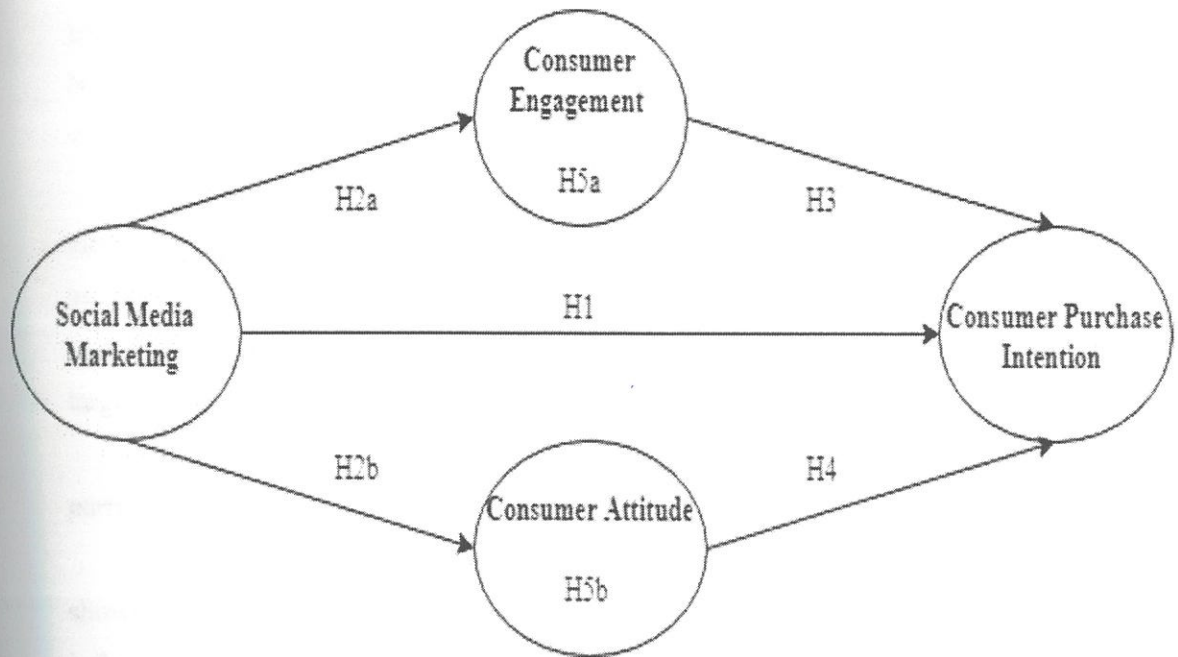
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

To collect and analyze data for this thesis, a quantitative research method was used. In the literature, quantitative methods are primarily preferred; they necessitate knowledge of a variety of very precise methods and procedures, all of which are associated with specific terminology and a variety of principles derived from probability theory. The research process is discussed in detail in the following sections.

3.1 Research Design and Proposed Model

The present study aims to examine the relationship between independent variables of Social Media Marketing on the dependent variable of Consumer Purchase Intention. A quantitative research approach was conducted among students in Northern Cyprus to test the proposed hypotheses. The data collected for this research was between February and May 2021.

A questionnaire is a research instrument consisting of a series of questions aiming to gather information from participants in a study. A questionnaire was chosen as the data collection tool for this study because of the size of the sample. Using a questionnaire made data collection, data entry, and analysis easy for such a relatively large sample.

Additionally, questionnaires are familiar to most people, which make participation in the study relatively easier.

According to the literature discussed 5 hypotheses were proposed. The model shown in Figure 1 was developed to test the impacts of social media marketing influencers on Consumer Engagement (CE), Consumer Attitude (CA), and Consumer Purchase Intention (CPI).

3.2 Population and Sampling

This quantitative study was conducted in universities in Northern Cyprus with the focus on international students. The study was conducted both online (Google Docs) and face to face. For the face to face data collection, the researchers used the convenience sampling technique. Survey questionnaires were distributed to students for data collection. Twenty students were selected for a pilot study to confirm the understandability the questionnaires and to minimize errors which can happen in the data collection process. Based on the feedback gathered, few items were fixed.

The researcher provided a cover letter at the beginning of the questionnaire. The cover page of each questionnaire included such information to reduce the risk of common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The cover letter was assuring the respondents about the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. More precisely, statements such as "There are no right or wrong answers in this questionnaire", "Any sort of information collected during our research will be kept confidential" and "Participation is voluntary" were included in the cover letter.

In this study, 300 students in Northern Cyprus were solicited to participate. Although, due to the restrictions regarding COVID-19, from the 300 administered questionnaires, 116 were removed as being incomplete, leaving 184 to be further analyzed and providing response rate of 61%. Table 1 provides information about the respondents.

Table 1 shows that 99 out of 184 survey participants are female, making up 53,8% of the study sample. The age of the participants is distributed as follows: 56,5% are from 21 to 25 years old, 34,2% are between 17 to 20 years old. The vast majority of respondents have bachelor's degree (87%).

As it indicated in Table 1, 90,2% of respondents follow social media influencers. The majority's frequency of purchased product based on those influencers was occasionally (45,1%) accordingly with young people being the main participants. The rest is divided between seldom (26,6%) and frequently (16,8%). However, there were others who never bought anything based on social media reviews (11,4%).

Table 1 show that people with an income of 3000 TL and more make up 26,1% of the sample and ranked to be the lowest income category. The other two categories of income, 1000-2000 TL, and 2000-3000 TL are almost equally divided and make up 37,5% and 36,4% of respondents, respectively.

Table 1

Sample demographics

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	85	46.2
Female	99	53.8

Age	Frequency	Percent
17-20 years	63	34.2
21-25 years	104	56.5
Above 25	17	9.2

Educational level	Frequency	Percent
Bachelor's degree	160	87
Master's degree	24	13

Income	Frequency	Percent
1000-2000 TL	69	37.5
2001-3000 TL	67	36.4
3001 TL or more	48	26.1

Table 1 *(continued)*

Sample demographics

Do you follow any social media influencers	Frequency	Percent
Yes	166	90.2
No	18	9.8

Frequency of buying a product based on social media reviews	Frequency	Percent
Frequently	31	16.8
Occasionally	83	45.1
Seldom	49	26.6
Never	21	11.4

3.3 Instruments and Procedures of Data Collection

This study is based on a quantitative survey using a self-administered questionnaire. All measurement items were adopted from existing literature and former empirical studies. Social media marketing was adapted from the study of (Kim & Ko, 2010). Consumer engagement scale was adapted from the study (Weman, 2011 ; Gummerus et al., 2012). Customer attitude scale was taken from the Lim,Radzol, Cheah, and Wong (2017). Consumer purchase intention scale was adapted from the (McKnight et al., 2002; Wang & Chang 2013; Yoo & Donthu, 2001). All measurement items have a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5) was used in the study. Table 2 shows the constructs and scale items.

Table 2

Constructs and scale items

Constructs	Item
Social Media Marketing (SMM)	The content found in social media seems interesting.
	It is exciting to use social media.
	It is fun to collect information on products through social media.
	It is easy to kill time using social media.
	It is possible to search for customized information on social media.
	Social media provide customized services.
	Social media provide lively feed information I am interested in.
	It is easy to use social media.
	Social media can be used anytime, anywhere.
	It is easy to convey my opinion through social media.
	It is possible to have two-way interaction through social media.
	It is possible to share information with other users through social media.

Table 2 (continued)

Constructs and scale items

Consumer Engagement (CE)	I often visit pages of brands I follow on social networking sites.
	I often read posts of brands I follow on social networking sites.
	I often use the "like" option on brands posts; I follow on social networking sites.
	I often comment on brands pages on social networking sites.
	I follow brands pages of my interest to get information (e.g., new products)
	Being part of brands I follow on social networking sites, increased my trust on that brands.
Consumer Attitude (CA)	I believe that using a social media influencer in an advertisement will be able to convince the customers to purchase the product.
	I believe that a social media influencer will be able to persuade me to try the product.
	There is a high probability I would purchase the product after watching the advertisement endorsed by a social media influencer.
	Using social networking sites of brands help me make decisions better before purchasing goods and services.
	Using social networking sites of brands increase my interest in buying products and services.
	I am very likely to buy products or services recommended by my friends on social networking sites.
Consumer Purchase Intention (CPI)	I will definitely buy products as marketed on brands' social networking sites, I follow.
	I intend to purchase products as marketed on brand's social networking sites, I follow.
	It is likely that I will purchase products as marketed on brand's social networking sites, I follow.
	I expect to purchase products as marketed on brands' social networking sites, I follow.

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CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS RESULTS

4.1 Preliminary Data Analysis

Statistical Package for Social Sciences software (SPSS) were used for data analysis. A preliminary data analysis was based to edit the data to prepare it for further analysis, describe the key features of the data, and summarize the results. Regression analysis was used to describe and analyze the impact of social media marketing on consumer purchase intention. Exploratory factor analysis was used to uncover the underlying structure (dimensions) for the set of variables for social media marketing, consumer engagement, consumer attitude, and consumer purchase intention. Reliability analysis was used to check whether the measurement scales are reliable. In other words, reliability checks whether the different questions of a construct are consistent, that they measure the same thing. Regression analysis was used to test the proposed hypotheses.

Preliminary data analysis is conveyed to designate number of respondents. Missing item were rejected according to the study's purpose, the number of respondents was dropped to 184.

According to Cook's Distance calculations (Cook, 1977), over 17 participants who were removed from the sample as outliers.

4.2 Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

The table 3 shows that the KMO value is 0.913, exceeding the recommended value of .60 (Kaiser 1970; 1974) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity 2634.268 (Bartlett, 1954) reached statistical significance ($p < alpha = 0.1$). Thus, the data is considered appropriate for factor analysis.

Table 3

KMO and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.913
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	2634.268
	df	300
	Sig.	.000

All measures were subjected to exploratory factor analysis. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted for establishing the relationship between measured variables in a data set and the latent factors that explain the covariation between these measured variables (Mike Allen, 2017).

The initial results demonstrated that two item from social media marketing measures produced a distinct dimension. Therefore, they were removed from the social media marketing measures. Addtionnaly 1 item from consumer purchase intetion produced a distinct dimension and thus removed from the consumer purchase intetion measures. The final results indicated that all items loaded on their underlying dimensions. None of the items showed cross loading (all were leass than <0.44). Table 4 shows the factor loading of each of the variables in this study. Table 4 also shows that all items were located beneth their underying variables with magnitudes of loadings ranged from 0.788 to 0.506. According to the data, 10 items loaded under social media marketing, 6 items loaded under consumer purchase intention, 6 items loaded under consumer engagement, and 3 items loaded under consumer attitude. All Eigenvalues were greater than 1.0. In short, there was evidence of convergent validity.

Table 4

Factor loadings

Items	Social Media Marketing	Consumer Purchase Intention	Consumer Engagement	Consumer Attitude
			Factor	
SMM12	,746			
SMM11	,740			
SMM5	,713			
SMM6	,711			
SMM10	,694			
SMM2	,689			
SMM7	,638			
SMM4	,636			
SMM3	,629			
SMM1	,506			
CPI4		,788		
CPI5		,763		
CPI3		,739		
CPI6		,733		
CPI7		,705		
CPI2		,673		
CE2			,772	
CE3			,745	
CE1			,718	
CE4			,633	
CE6			,576	
CE5			,529	
CA2				,782
CA1				,751
CA3				,559

Table 5

Exploratory Factor Analysis

Factors	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	10,175	40,701	40,701	10,175	40,701	40,701
2	2,508	10,032	50,734	2,508	10,032	50,734
3	1,506	6,025	56,759	1,506	6,025	56,759
4	1,190	4,760	61,519	1,190	4,760	61,519
5	,988	3,953	65,472			
6	,820	3,278	68,750			
7	,768	3,073	71,823			
8	,684	2,734	74,557			
9	,662	2,646	77,204			
10	,608	2,432	79,635			
11	,540	2,160	81,795			
12	,520	2,080	83,875			
13	,487	1,949	85,824			
14	,455	1,819	87,642			
15	,422	1,686	89,329			
16	,385	1,539	90,868			
17	,368	1,470	92,338			
18	,314	1,258	93,596			
19	,303	1,212	94,807			
20	,263	1,052	95,859			
21	,250	1,002	96,861			
22	,227	,906	97,767			
23	,209	,835	98,602			
24	,183	,732	99,334			
25	,167	,666	100,000			

According to the Table 5, four factors jointly elucidated for 61.519% of the variance.

4.3 Reliability

Reliability is used to evaluate the quality of research. It indicates how well a method, technique or test measures something. Reliability is about the consistency of a measure (Fiona Middleton, 2020). In an attempt to have internal consistency, the relative Chronbach's alpha level of measurement scales should be over .70 (Cronbach, 1951). Ranged from 0.763 to 0. 903 all measures proved to be reliable, since all coefficient alphas were above the commonly accepted cut-off values of 0.70 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988).

Table 6 shows that the scales used in the study have good internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values reported as follows: social media marketing (alpha: 0.903), consumer purchase intention (0.899), consumer engagement (0.857) and consumer attitude (0.763).

Table 6

Reliability

Dimensions	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Social Media Marketing	.903	10
Consumer Purchase Intention	.899	6
Consumer Engagement	.857	6
Consumer Attitude	.763	3

4.4 Correlation

The table 7 presents mean, standard deviation and correlation of study constructs. Since all correlations among study variables are significant the first three conditions for a mediation analysis as outlined by Baron and Kenny (1986) are met.

Social media marketing is positively related to consumer engagement ($r = 0.576^{**}$) and consumer attitude ($r = 0.490^{**}$). This shows that the first condition is met. The second condition is also met because consumer engagement positively related to consumer purchase intention ($r = 0.646^{**}$) and consumer attitude positively related to consumer purchase intention ($r = 0.589^{**}$).

Since social media marketing is positively related to consumer purchase intention (r = 0.509**), the third condition is likewise met.

Table 7

Correlation Matrix

Variables	1	2	3	4
1.Social Media Marketing	1			
2.Consumer Purchase Intention	,509**	1		
3.Consumer Attitude	,490**	,589**	1	
4.Consumer Engagement	,576**	,646**	,544**	1
Mean	4,0016	3,5335	3,5960	3,6957
Standard deviation	,67293	,81813	,83587	,82743

Note: All correlations were significant beyond 0.05 levels (two-tailed test)

4.5 Regression

Regression analysis allows researchers to analyze relationships between one independent and one dependent variable (Erik et al., 2014). Hierarchical regression analysis was executed to investigate the proposed model and to test the hypotheses for significant relationship between social media marketing and consumer engagement, and consumer attitude and consumer purchase intention. Regression analysis is also used to check the mediation effect of consumer engagement in the relationship between social media marketing and consumer purchase intention; and also mediation effect of consumer attitude in the relationship between social media marketing and consumer purchase intention.

Multicollinearity happens when independent variables in the regression model are highly correlated to each other (Songhao, 2020). Through linear regression, it can be recognized by checking the Tolerance values and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). All variables had a Tolerance value higher than .10 and VIF value below 10. The results did not reveal any issues with multicollinearity.

The results concerning direct and mediation effect are demonstrated in Table 8.

Social media marketing has a significant positive effect on purchase intention ($\beta=0.509$, $p< 0.000$, $t=7.976$). Therefore, hypothesis H1is supported. Social media marketing has a significant positive effect on consumer engagement ($\beta=0.576$, $p<$

0.000, $t=9.506$). Therefore, hypothesis H2a is supported. The results indicate that media marketing has a significant positive effect on consumer attitude ($\beta=0.490$, $p < 0.000$, $t=7.593$). Therefore, hypothesis H2b is supported. The results also indicate that consumer engagement has a significant positive effect on consumer purchase intention ($\beta= 0.528$, $p< 0.000$, $t=7.802$) and consumer attitude has a significant positive effect on consumer purchase intention ($\beta=0.447$, $p< 0.000$, $t=6.826$). Therefore, hypothesis 3 and 4 are supported.

As demonstrated in Table 8 the inclusion of consumer engagement in step 2, increases the explained variance by 21.4%. The positive effect of social media marketing on consumer purchase intention is still significant despite the inclusion of consumer engagement in the model. In this case, consumer engagement partially mediates the relationship between social media marketing and consumer purchase intention. This effect is significant based on Sobel test (*sobel test*= 6.008*, *std*= 0.061, $P< 0.01$). Also, inclusion of consumer attitude in step 2, increases the explained variance by 15.2%. The positive effect of social media marketing on consumer purchase intention is still significant despite the inclusion of consumer attitude in the model. In this case, consumer attitude partially mediates the relationship between social media marketing and consumer purchase intention. This effect is significant based on Sobel test (*sobel test = 5.0829*, std= 0.052, P< 0.01*). Therefore, hypothesis H5a and H5b are supported.

Table 8

Regression Analysis, direct and mediating effects

Independent Variables		Standardized Regression Weights (β)	
		Customer Purchase Intention	
		Step 1	step 2
I.	Social Media Marketing	0.509*	0.205*
	Consumer Engagement	–	0.528*
	F	63.613*	72.702*
	R^2 at each step	0.259	0.445
	ΔR^2	–	0.186
II.	Social Media Marketing	0.509*	0.290*
	Consumer Attitude	–	0.477*
	F	63.613*	63.069*
	R^2 at each step	0.259	0.411
	ΔR^2	–	0.152
	Sobel test		5.0829*

***Note: F statistcs Show the significance of our mediation model.*

Table 9 represents the accepted and rejected hypotheses.

Table 9

Results of the proposed hypotheses

Hypotheses	Results
H1: Social Media Marketing has a positive impact on Consumer Purchase Intentio	Accepted
H2a: Social Media Marketing has a positive impact on Consumer Engagement.	Accepted
H2b: Social Media Marketing has a positive impact on Consumer Attitude.	Accepted
H3: Consumer Engagement has a positive impact on Consumer Purchase Intention.	Accepted
H4: Consumer Attitude has a positive impact on Consumer Purchase Intention.	Accepted
H5a: Consumer Engagement mediate the relationship between Social Media Marketing and Consumer Purchase Intention.	Accepted
H5b: Consumer Attitude mediate the relationship between Social Media Marketing and Consumer Purchase Intention.	Accepted

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Discussion

Using data collected from international students in Northern Cyprus universities, this study examined the impact of SMM on student's purchase intention through mediating effect of consumer attitude and consumer engagement. The current study used the uses and gratification theory (UGT) and previous research findings to clarify the relationship between the variables mentioned above.

The results of this study reveal that social media marketing is significantly affects consumer purchase intention. Social media has developed and tends to be a primary factor that leads to a business or product/service (Hawkins & Vel, 2013). Social media is a platform that creates a link between the company and the consumers. All companies are starting to integrate social networks into their marketing strategy, especially during the pandemic where all companies have been affected by covid-19 (Freberg, 2019). The use of social media in a company's marketing strategy allows businesses to access potential customers who do not know them but might be interested in their products and services (Neti, 2011). The goal is to retain customers and encourage them to make repeat purchases. According to Amin (2020), it is beyond all to catch a larger audience if they are growing their offerings. Therefore, brands need to communicate the right products to consumers and facilitate the purchase.

Hence, social media marketing had a positive impact on student's purchase intention. It means that purchasing intentions of students following the company's social media pages are affected by social media marketing. Indeed, as Hubspot (2018), stated 71% of students are more likely to purchase online if others recommend the product or service. Therefore, social media and social media marketing influence students' purchase intention.

In line with Kim and Ko (2010), our results confirmed that social media marketing positively and significantly affects consumer engagement. Furthermore, Conferring to our results, students using social media were becoming more engaged as customers. In other words, social media marketing increase consumer engagement (e.g., students).

The results of this study reveal that social media marketing is significantly affects consumer attitudes. The expansion of social media has been strongly

accompanied by instantaneous changes in consumer attitude (Lin & Lu, 2011). Accordingly, consumer attitudes of students who are following company's social media pages are affected by social media marketing

The study results confirm formers the research results, such as Weman (2011), Gummerus (2012), and Lim et al. (2017). According to our findings, consumer engagement has a significant positive impact on consumer purchase intention. Consumer engagement is at the heart of a business goal regarding social media (Brodie, 2011). According to Ouahi (2020), engagement can be explained as maintaining a relationship with a brand characterized by loyalty through interactions through visits and by sharing brand content. However, engagement is considered the primary phase of a purchasing process (Ouahi, 2020). As a result, companies are setting up initiatives to communicate with consumers to obtain an action or interaction reflecting their short-term interest, intending to build a long-term relationship that will translate into consumer loyalty through repetitive purchases (Brodie, 2011; Gummerus, 2012; Hollebeek, 2011).

An engaged consumer to a brand will always seek to improve his positive thoughts connected with the brand. This link will bring favorable and advantageous actions to the brand. Therefore, he is inclined to maintain a relationship with the brand and repurchase it, which is the very definition of loyalty (attitudinal and behavioral).

Hence, according to our results, consumer engagement can affect students' purchase intention. In other words, engaged consumers (e.g., students) have a higher tendency and intention for purchasing.

The results of this study reveal that consumer attitude significantly affects consumer purchase intention. The consumer's attitude is stimulated by the act of buying a service or product. Before any purchase, consumers begin to do their research to collect information on the Web, interview those around them and discuss all the possible choices. The result obtained by this information helps the consumer choose a specific brand and proceed to the purchase act. Hence, according to our result, consumer attitude can positively influence students' purchase intention.

The study's results also revealed that consumer engagement act as a mediator between social media marketing and consumer purchase intention. It means that social media marketing affects students' engagement. Their engagement will eventually influence and increase their purchase intention. An engaged consumer to a brand develops and improves positive thoughts towards the brand and positively influences

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what will bring him to purchase (Barhemmati et al., 2015). Based on this process of increased consumer engagement, it is likely that sales will also increase, as engaged consumers are satisfied or dedicated and expressively connected to the company's brand (Sorenson, 2014).

The study also confirmed that consumer attitude mediates the relationship between social media marketing and consumer purchase intention. It means that social media marketing affects students' attitudes. Their engagement will eventually impact and boost their purchase intention. Social media has completely changed the way consumers interact with brands, directly impacting their current decision-making process. For brands, social media has become a new method of reaching new consumers and discerning their needs (Carle, 2003). Although, any business needs to know the needs of consumers to define an offer that meets their expectations and understand the factors that will determine their choices. Good knowledge of the personality of its customers makes it easier to influence their attitude and support them in their act of purchase. Furthermore, social media marketing can implement highly effective strategies in businesses through trust-building mechanisms, which will influence the purchasing intentions of consumers. (Usman & Okafor, 2019).

5.2 Limitations

Although this study provides useful findings for understanding students' perspectives toward social media marketing and the impact of social media marketing on their engagement, attitude, and purchase intention as consumers, there are limitations to the study. To begin with, our measures were self-reported, which can raise concerns regarding common method variance (Podsakoff, 2003). However, efforts were made to lessen the impact of this bias by ensuring the confidentiality of responses, which is expected to reduce social desirability biases.

Second, the absence of a cross-lagged study design confines the causal conclusions that can be drawn from the results. Third, the study findings' generalizability is constraint due to the use of data from students which 61 % were in the range of 17 and 25. This is an important factor constraining the generalizability of the findings taking a more realistic snapshot of the phenomenon in the study. Lastly, another limitation on the findings' generalizability is that the study was conducted at Final International University due to budgetary, time, pandemic, and lockdown

constraints. A study using a larger sample would present more generalizable findings regarding students' attitudes regarding social media marketing.

5.3 Future studies

Due to the limitation of our study, the present research urges scholars to conduct similar studies in other cultural settings and with a larger sample. A longitudinal research design can also provide confirmatory evidence for the current finding. Future research can also examine other variables as mediators in the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention, such as trust, perception toward the influencer, and social identity. Likewise, other potential outcomes of social media marketing can be investigated, such as WOM, attitudes toward the brand, and green behavior. Furthermore, future research can include the moderating effect of demographic variables, including gender, generational groups, and personality, in the relationship between social media marketing and consumers' attitude and engagement.

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APPENDIX: SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

You are invited to participate in a survey which is investigating the impacts of social media marketing influencers on customer's response and purchase intention.

This research composed by BENELMOSTAFA Salma MBA student of Final International University and supervised by Assist. Prof. Dr. Taraneh FOROUTAN.

Your survey responses will be strictly confidential and data from this research will be used only for academic purposes.

The survey's duration is approximately 7 minutes and participation is voluntary. By starting the survey, you are accepting to give consent for evaluation of your responses. If you feel any concern or discomfort, you are free to withdraw from the survey at any time. In such a case, the use of the information you provide will only be possible with your consent.

Your sincere, thoughtful answers are kindly requested.

Thank you in advance for your participation.

Salma BENELMOSTAFA

1. Do you accept to participate in the study?

Yes   No

2. Gender

Male   Female

3. Age

17-20years   21-25years   Above 25

4. Nationality

5. Education level

High School   Bachelor's degree   Master's Degree   Others

6. Income

1000-2000TL   2000-3000TL   3000TL

7. Do you follow any social media influencers?

Yes   No

8. Frequency of buying a product based on social media reviews

Never   Seldom   Occasionally   Frequently

9. To what degree do you agree with the following sentences regarding Social Network Marketing?

(Strongly disagree ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Strongly agree)

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I like to use social networking sites to increase my knowledge about the products, services and brands.

I am satisfied with the social network marketing of brands, I follow.

The social network marketing of brands is very attractive.

Using social network sites of brands is fun.

Contents shown on social networking sites of brands are interesting.

Social networking sites of brands enable information sharing with others.

Conversation or opinion exchange with others is possible through brands social networking sites.

It is easy to deliver my opinion on brands social networking sites.

10. To what degree do you agree with the following sentences regarding Consumer Purchase Intention

(Strongly disagree ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Strongly agree)

I will definitely buy products as marketed on brands' social networking sites, I follow.

I intend to purchase products as marketed on brand's social networking sites, I follow.

It is likely that I will purchase products as marketed on brand's social networking sites, I follow.

I expect to purchase products as marketed on brands' social networking sites, I follow.

11. To what degree do you agree with the following sentences regarding Consumer Engagement

(Strongly disagree ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Strongly agree)

I often visit pages of brands I follow on social networking sites.

I follow brands pages of my interest to get information (e.g., new products)

Being part of brands I follow on social networking sites, increased my trust on that brands.

12. To what degree do you agree with the following sentences regarding Consumer Attitude

(Strongly disagree ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Strongly agree)

I believe that using a social media influencer in an advertisement will be able to convince the customers to purchase the product.

I believe that a social media influencer will be able to persuade me to try the product.

There is a high probability I would purchase the product after watching the advertisement endorsed by a social media influencer.

13. To what degree do you agree with the following sentences regarding Credibility

(Strongly disagree ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Strongly agree)

I follow influencers on Instagram because they are attractive

I follow influencers on Instagram because they are classy

I follow influencers on Instagram because they are dependable

I follow influencers on Instagram because they are honest

I follow influencers on Instagram because they are reliable

I follow influencers on Instagram because they are sincere

I follow influencers on Instagram because they are trustworthy

I follow influencers on Instagram because they are expert

I follow influencers on Instagram because they are experienced

I follow influencers on Instagram because they are knowledgeable

I follow influencers on Instagram because they are qualified

I follow influencers on Instagram because they are skilled

14. To what degree do you agree with the following sentences regarding Social Media Marketing

(Strongly disagree ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Strongly agree)

The content found in social media seems interesting

It is exciting to use social media

It is fun to collect information on products through social media

It is easy to kill time using social media

It is possible to search for customized information on social media

Social media provide customized services

Social media provide lively feed information I am interested in

It is easy to use social media

Social media can be used anytime, anywhere

It is easy to convey my opinion through social media

It is possible to have two-way interaction through social media

It is possible to share information with other users through social media