RESEARCH ARTICLE:

The Effect of Social Media Brand Engagement on South African Consumers' Purchase Intentions

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Abstract

Social media has perennially transformed consumers' purchasing cycles. Today, consumers can effortlessly conduct online information searches about brands based on their interest in brands' social media pages or read brand reviews made by other consumers on social media networks. Social media is undisputedly characterised by ratings, comments, reviews, and other features found on websites that indicate what users think of the content being discussed. Taking note of what users say on social media and engaging in discussions is a great way for brands to influence these discussions and condition consumers' purchase decisions and intentions. To achieve the objectives of this research, this study adopts a quantitative research method in which convenience and purposive sampling were utilised to recruit research participants. Self-administered, structured questionnaires are used to collect primary data. Both descriptive and inferential statistics are utilised in this study. Data is analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24.0. The outcomes of this research advocate that social media is an immensely powerful communication tool that can be used to shape consumers' purchase intentions.

Keywords: social media; brand engagement; consumer behaviour; purchase intentions

Introduction

The internet has formed a remarkable existence as a platform of communication and business and as a social tool that is significantly restructuring and transforming marketing (Constantinides *et al*., 2010). The transparent nature of the internet has paved the way for reliable user-generated content in social media that consumers pay attention to (Jin, 2012: 687). Through the internet, emerging technologies, such as social media networks, collaborative social media sites, content community sites, virtual worlds, blogs, and microblogs as well as all other digital platforms, have transformed business and market dynamics by giving consumers more power and shifting brands' competitive positions (Arora *et al*., 2019: 87). These advancements in technology and consumer transformation alongside the digitalisation of marketing have changed the history of communication and become the key drivers of change in marketing strategies due to their speed and relevance (Junusi, 2020: 17). The internet has also opened new opportunities for brands to engage with their target audience in social interactions through social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp (Rameshkumar, 2022: 1601). The use of social media keeps rising rapidly as the number of users grow, and with the intensification of usage by existing users it is anticipated that each year it presents notable trends or milestones (World Wide Wax, 2016). Sema (2013: 45) stipulates that social media gives consumers an opportunity to communicate directly with brand managers and marketers. However, it has also created challenges for brands trying to connect with consumers to understand their online behaviour (Arora *et al.,* 2019: 87).

The emergence of the internet and mobile technologies has incited the utilisation of internet-based applications among consumers (Chen *et al*., 2020: 2). Due to these technological advancements in the 21st century, the roles of both

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consumers and brands has shifted by giving a voice in digital platforms. Marketers have been afforded an opportunity to analyse data and use it to improve their brands' performance. This opportunity comes as consumers view the internet as a credible source of information prior to purchasing products and services and as a platform for sharing their experiences of products and the services they have consumed (Junusi, 2020: 18). (Ferreira *et al*., 2016: 15) substantiate that the internet and social media have become common platforms that simplify information searches, decision making, and buying processes. Through the internet, consumers can look for goods and envisage how those goods will satisfy their needs, compare product prices, and join online discussions about those products with other consumers in online environments. Thus, the internet plays a substantial part in advancing the co-creation concept. The web creates an avenue of synchronisation and sharing that is accessible and extensively spread. Thus, it creates opportunities to engage customers in product development (Zwass, 2014). A report by (Galal, 2022: 01) reveals that there are 41.19 million active internet users in South Africa as of January 2022. Of these internet users, 28 million, which amounts to 46 percent of the total population, use social media.

Arora *et al.,* (2019: 89) and Ebrahim (2020: 289) define the term social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content." However, Safko, (2010: 4) describes the first part of the term, social, as the visceral desire of human beings to associate with others. The latter part of that terminology refers to the channels which humans utilise to form those associations with others; be it through written words, bells, drums, telegraphs, television, radio, the telephone, e-mail, photographs, websites, audio, mobile phones, text messaging, or video, media is any technology used to form a connection. On the other hand, Tuten and Solomon (2018: 18) define social media marketing as the use of social media networks or platforms to generate, communicate, or deliver information to consumers as well as exchange values with consumers. Social media interactions on platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and other online communities have created opportunities for brands to share information and create value for consumers (Li *et al*., 2021: 52).

 In general, South Africa had 38.2 million internet users, which is 64 percent of the total population, and this number grew by 1.7 million users (4.5%) yearly. Of the 38.2 million internet users, about 22 million active social media users in January 2020 grew to 25 million in January 2021. This report suggests that nearly 42 percent of all South Africans are using some form of social media. This growth of social media usage and its developments are primary enablers of consumer interactions, resulting in co-branding and co-creation. Consumers can share information, learn skills, create relationships, and form a culture through social media interactions, creating value for themselves, other consumers, and brands (Zadeh *et al*., 2019: 284). Even though the South African consumer market has differing characteristics due to its multicultural demographic that embraces diversity, its social media usage is different from that of other countries in the African continent (Duffett 2017: 21). Santander (2016) asserts that South African consumers with higher spending habits are more mindful of brands as they look for exclusive products and tend to not spend much on basic supplies or housing. South Africans are also up to date with trends in social media. However, the country's dynamic economy has given rise to high consumer buying power and economic growth in its previously marginalised consumer segment, which presently has greater disposable earnings. Makhitha and Ngobeni (2021: 2) add that South African purchasing behaviours are dynamic, with most consumers conducting information searches on digital platforms such as social media before making a purchase decision.

A majority of brands have collaborated with companies like Facebook to create a platform that allows consumers to share their opinions and experiences of brands with their families and friends. This is because reviews by acquaintances are more attractive and trustworthy in comparison to those made by brands themselves (Sun *et al*., 2017: 329). Furthermore, consumers can build their identities, socialise with other consumers, and express themselves creatively, enjoying a unique and memorable experience. Corcione (2017), on the other hand, adds that social media is an incredible opportunity for brand promotion as social media platforms, despite being free, have the option of paid advertising for brands to reach new and broader audiences. Brands, however, should be careful to select social media platforms that suit their market. The table below demonstrates the distinction between traditional and social media marketing strategies under different dimensions.

Table 1: The distinction between social media and traditional marketing strategy (Li *et al.* 2021: 53)

Dimension	Social Media	Marketing Strategy	Social Media Marketing Strategy
Core	Interaction and connectedness	Long-term customer relationship building	Customer engagement
Orientation	Passive actor versus active actor	Transactional-oriented versus relational-oriented	Transactional-oriented versus engagement-oriented
Resource	Resource integrator	Basic resources and high-order resources	In an exchange with customer-owned resources
Purpose	To interact and connect	To achieve a competitive advantage	To generate, integrate, and reconfigure social media resources to achieve specific marketing objectives.
Premise	To recognise different customer motivations for social media brand-related activities.	To enhance long-lasting customer relationships by delivering superior value.	To capitalise on social media interactions and customer engagement to generate marketing resources.

The table above depicts that social behaviour and consumers' thought processes were disseminated by traditional media, newspapers, magazines, radio, and television. It also demonstrates that, in contrast to traditional marketing channels, social media's enduring and influential role in consumers' behaviours represents both an opportunity and a challenge from a brand's viewpoint by allowing consumers to communicate, interact, and co-create brand-related information (Duffett, 2017: 20). With more consumers engaging in brand communication on social media platforms, brands are prone to providing more information to the consumer. Social media has a strong impact on how brands disseminate information and how they design their marketing approach (Putter, 2017: 8). Grubor and Jaksar (2018: 268) conclude that through social media brands carry authentic, relevant, and focused information aimed at retaining engagement through interaction and brand awareness.

Social Exchange Theory: The Nexus between Brand Engagement and Brand Loyalty

Harrigana *et al*. (2017: 389) state that the theory of social exchange upholds the idea that people make realistic decisions when engaging in a social exchange depending on how they view the economic, social, or socio-economic benefits, and costs of parties involved in an ongoing relationship. Potter (2017: 500) substantiates that economic or social exchange relationships are the proceeds of ongoing interactions. Consumer brand engagement entails exchanges where consumers prioritise information relevance, association, and social status more than outcomes and resources. Consumers are more likely to reciprocate positive thoughts, feelings, and behaviours with brands as they receive certain benefits from brands (Rather and Sharma, 2019: 256). These social relationships involve reciprocity and are of mutual obligation while economic relationships usually adopt negotiated rules (Potter, 2017: 500). In social exchange, consumers typically engage with brands upon receiving benefits from those brands. For such relationships' sustainability, there must be a balance between benefits and costs in the long run (Phan *et al*., 2020: 141). Potter (2017: 500) adds that social exchange relationships are stronger than economic exchange relationships as the involved parties trust one another and relate willingly. In contrast, economic exchange relationships are bound by obligations and parties involved are accountable to one another (Potter, 2017: 500). Social exchange theory posits that relationships between consumers and brands in brand engagement can vary from casual to committed (Verma, 2021: 104). The personalisation of these relationships makes consumers feel valued and important, and the extent to which consumers' individual needs are consistently satisfied invites consumers to participate positively in brand communities (Phan, 2020: 141).

The use of social media is not limited to content sharing and networking with friends and family, but social media can also be used as a platform in which consumers can interact with brands and share their experiences to strengthen consumer-brand relationships. This shows that communication in social media is interactive, collaborative, participatory, communal, and personal, allowing brands to build meaningful relationships with consumers (Osei-Frimpong and McLean, 2017: 11). Khan *et al.*, (2020: 164) define brand engagement as a psychological state that is co-creative and provides an interactive customer experience with a brand. Lal *et al.*, (2020: 6) add that consumer brand engagement is a recurring interaction that enhances consumers' emotional ties with a brand. These relations are motivationally driven by the volitional investment of instrumental resources, such as emotional, behavioural, cognitive,

and social skills, and often consumers intend to reach their hedonic, utilitarian, social products or brand-related goals which assist in building trust and reducing perceived risk (Khan *et al*., 2020: 164). Also, due to social media, conversations about brands, products, or services are now sped up among consumers as consumers frequently share experiences and information about brands and solve problems, eliminating the need for involvement from product marketing groups or customer care divisions. Forums have existed before, yet the actual time made up of new media inspires communication where queries are responded to (Macy and Thompson, 2011: 71). Baker *et al*., (2013: 32) allege that, unlike traditional branding, the most significant function of social media is to create a brand image and reputation through what consumers say about a brand that is more impactful than what the brand says of itself. The most significant task for a new service or product is to form broad consciousness among consumers that the service or product exists and the company provides it. This is certain for big brands and people. Using social media to develop a company's brand perception is one of the most operative methods to escalate sales over time. Brands that participate in social media discussions are most likely to get endorsements on social sites because they are at the front of people's minds. Social existence builds a brand's content and voice by merely repeating statements in the newsfeed and using hashtags throughout social networks (Chatterjee, 2016).
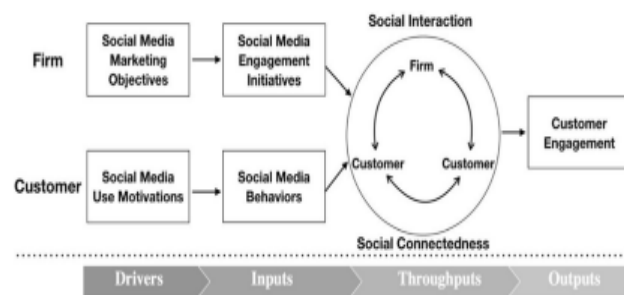

Figure 1: The process of consumer engagement in the social media environment (Li *et al*. 2021: 53).

The process of customer engagement does not follow a sequential order of phases but is an interaction of the subprocesses of consolidated engagement. On social media platforms, customer participation, customer involvement, and interactivity act as antecedents of consumer brand engagement. However, customer flow experiences, brand social communities, customer identification with social media communities, and customers' trust contribute to brand engagement on social media (Carvalho and Fernandes, 2018: 25). Social media platforms cater for various brand stimuli and direct engagement through numerous creative strategies. This may include interactive, informative, and trendy activities within social media platforms which translate to how consumers exchange information, consume, and share content about brands with other consumers (Hazzam, 2018: 200). The commitment and connection of engaged consumers is also expected to be influential in consumers' loyalty behaviour because of intense relational bonds built through the interactive and immersive nature of consumer brand engagement (Fernandes and Moreira, 2019: 276). These interactions between brands and consumers, in the form of two-way communication, indicate that brands are paying attention to consumers, contributing to the decision-making processes, and enhancing consumers' engagement for value creation (Cheung *et al.*, 2020: 671).

Brand loyalty has been described as a measure of the strength of the customer-brand relationship. Loyalty appears as a two-dimensional concept: attitudinal and behavioural. Attitudinal loyalty covers the customers' attachment to, commitment for, and intention to repurchase the brand. behavioural brand loyalty focuses on repeat brand purchases and recommendation behaviours. Loyal customers are essential for a brand's success in many ways, specifically repeat purchases, lower price sensitivity, and lower service costs. Engagement itself is a loyalty-building process (Kumar and Nayak, 2019: 170). Bilgin (2018: 131) points out that customer loyalty is created and recreated in every interaction between a brand and consumers. In contrast to traditional communication channels, social media promotes interaction and collaboration between brands and consumers through content sharing. The interactions are significant to constructing and upholding resilient relationships with customers. Choi *et al*. (2018: 56) sustain that psychologically and emotionally attached consumers tend to share brand information with other consumers and their social media actions intensify as their brand loyalty intensifies. As a result, social media offer brands numerous benefits by protecting

brand image, engaging users in the brand-building process, upturning sales, increasing brand awareness, and delivering additional positive brand associations (Zailskaite-Jakste and Kuvykaite, 2013: 143). Brand loyalty in the social media environment requires brands to consider numerous factors, such as interactivity, connectivity, convenience, customisation, relevance, ease of use of social media platforms, and the cultivation of information (Ebrahim, 2020:295).

Methodology

This study adopts a cross-sectional quantitative research method to investigate the influence of social media marketing on South African consumers' brand loyalty. The target population of this study was consumers aged 18 years and older who are active on social media platforms and reside in Durban. Convenience and purposive sampling techniques are two types of non-probability sampling techniques that will be employed in recruiting respondents. While the projected sample size will be 450, the response rate is envisaged to be around 80 percent. A survey was carried out with a structured questionnaire consisting of 45 questions to obtain primary data from consumers. Partaking in the study was completely voluntary. A pre-test was conducted with ten questionnaires, distributed to the consumers to ascertain the validity of the measuring instrument. The questionnaires were distributed to the researcher's online friends through e-mail and social media networks. The first 400 responses received were used in this study. This study employs descriptive and inferential statistics, and the collected data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 20).

Findings and Discussions

This section analyses the scoring patterns of the respondents per variable per section. The outcomes are first presented utilising summarised percentages for the variables that form each section. The results are then further analysed according to the significance of the statements. The table below describes the overall gender distribution by age:

Table 2: Gender distribution by age

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

Overall, the ratio of males to females is approximately 1:1 (54.3%: 45.8%). Of the males, 69.1 percent fell within the category of 20 to 29 years, while 42.5 percent of this age group were females. Within the category of males (only), 57.5 percent were between the ages of 20 to 29 years and the males in the 20-29 years age group formed 37.5 percent of the total sample. At the same time, the females in the same age group, formed 27.8 percent of the total sample. However, in the category of females, 42.5 percent were between the ages of 20 to 29 years. Whereas 50 percent of the category of 30- to 39-year-olds were male. This age group accounted for 10.1 percent of the male participants. This category of males between the ages of 30 to 39 years formed 5.5 percent of the total sample. Of the total number of female participants, 12 percent were between the ages of 30 to 39 years. This category of females between the aged 30 to 39 years formed 5.5 percent of the total sample. The category of males and females between the ages of 20 to 29 was the highest category; it formed 65.3 percent of the total sample. This category was followed by the age category of 18 to 19 years with 19.3 percent of the total sample, and the gender distribution was 49.4 percent males and 50.6 percent females. In comparison, the smallest category comprised of respondents between the ages of 50 to 59 with two percent of the total sample; males in this age group made up 1.4 percent while females made up 2.7 percent of the total sample. Followed by the 40-49 age group, which accounted 2.5 percent of the total sample.
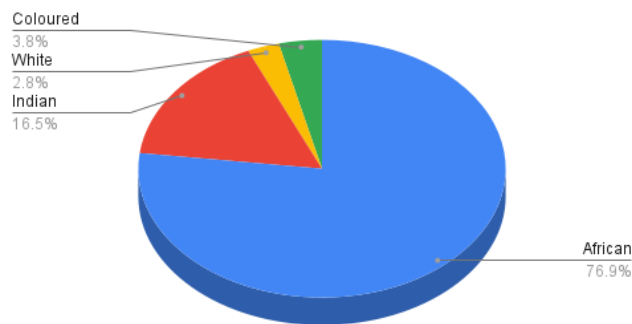

Figure 2: Racial composition of the respondents

Most respondents were African (76.9%), while white respondents that constituted the smallest group were white (2.8%). The Indian and Coloured respondents constituted 16.5 percent and 3.8 percent of the sample, respectively. This distribution reflects a significant majority of African respondents, with smaller but notable representations from the Indian and Coloured communities, while the white demographic was the least represented in the surveyed population.
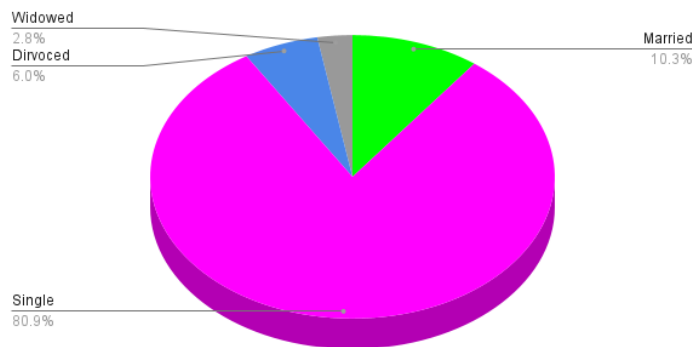

Figure 3: Marital status of respondents

The participants who were single were the largest group of respondents accounting for 80.9 percent of the total sample, followed by 10.3 percent which were the married respondents. In contrast, the number of divorced and widowed respondents was six percent and 2.8 percent of the sample, respectively. These findings indicate that the single

respondents utilise social media networks the most compared to the married, divorced, and widowed participants. This data highlights a potential correlation between marital status and social media usage.
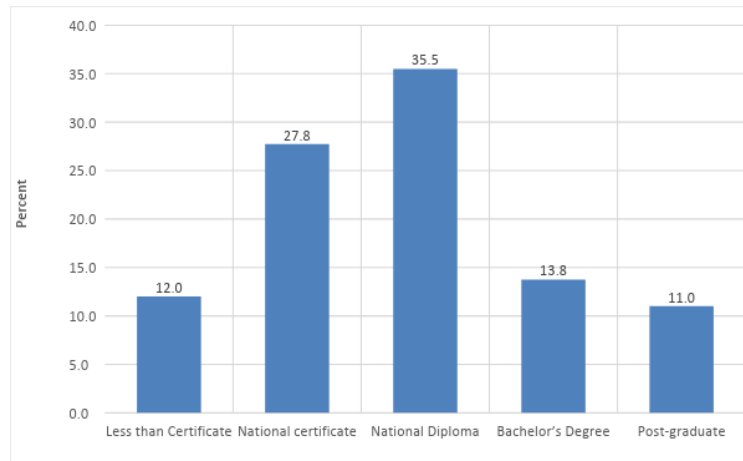

Figure 4: Educational levels of the respondents.

The largest group of respondents (35.5%) had a National Diploma, followed by those with a National Certificate level, who made up 27.8 percent of the sample, and those with a bachelor's degree at 13. Percent of the sample. On the other hand, 11 percent of the respondents had a post-graduate degree. Respondents with less than a Certificate were the smallest group, accounting for 12 percent of the sample. This points out that a fair fraction of the respondents have higher qualifications. Therefore, it designates that the responses collected would have been from informed sources.

Table 3: Consumers' social media engagement

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

All respondents pointed out that they were active on social media platforms. This indicates the relevance of brand engagement in this environment. This is consistent with Meyerson (2010: 98), who states that social media has made the internet more social than ever before. Systems like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram provide consumers with ways to connect and interact with one another. Social media allows users to vigorously interact with friends, colleagues, and other users while yielding quick and easy passive information sharing.
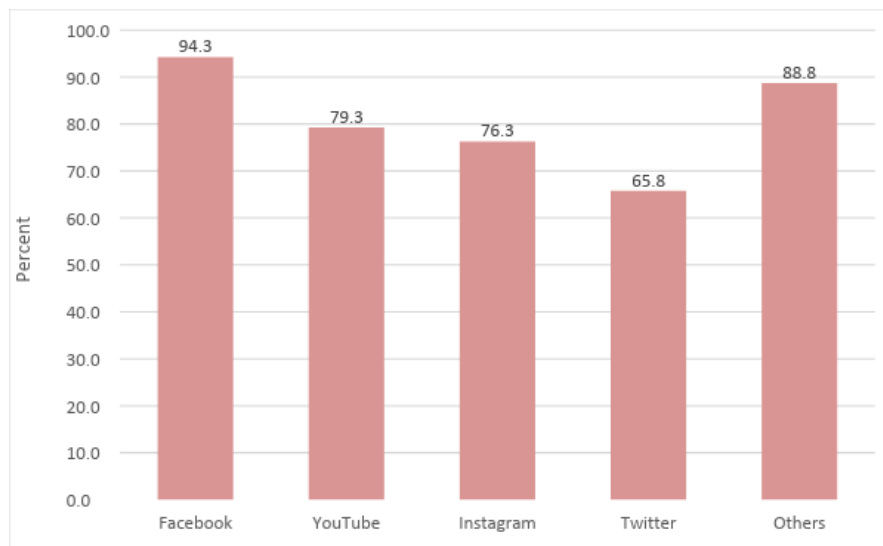

Figure 5: Social media networks popular with consumers

There was reasonably high usage of all platforms, with Facebook having the highest use of all the platforms, 94.3 percent of the sample using the platform, and Twitter being the least used at 65.8 percent of respondents using the platform. This indicates that Facebook is the most influential social media platform among South African consumers. This is consistent with Baker *et al*. (2013: 332) who make the statement that Facebook is the utmost widespread platform with over 750 million users, while Twitter is presently the fourth most widespread social media network with more than 200 million distinctive monthly users. According to Springleap (2015), South African consumers are not too different from those in first world countries regarding their passion for technological advancements. While there is an immense disproportion isolating the poor and rich markets, it appears that most South Africans have access to smartphones and social media channels, such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, which have turned into mobile apps that effortlessly make consumers seek to engage in social activity, stay up to date with the latest news updates, and to unite with friends and family.   Meyerson (2010: 104) agrees that the power of Facebook is in its popularity as many consumers participate in conversations on this platform.
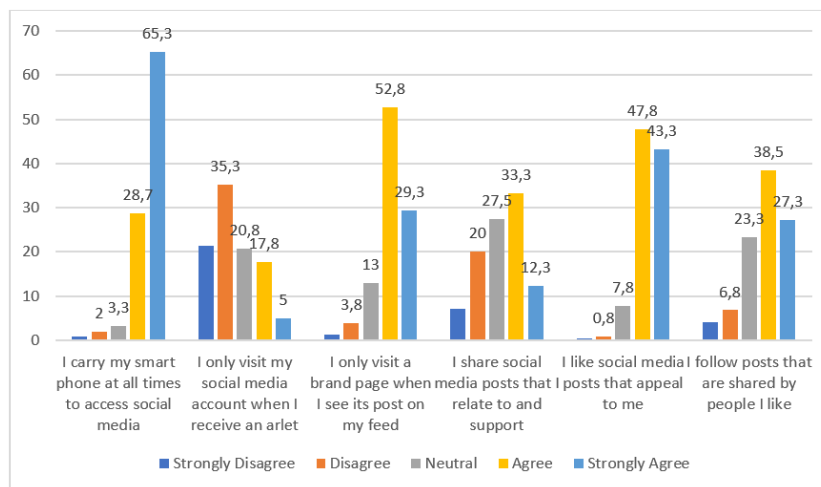

Figure 6: Consumers' social media network usage

One statement that had the highest level of disagreement, 56.6 percent disagreeing, was "I only visit my social media account when I receive an alert". More people indicated that they still visit their social media accounts without any alert notifications. The highest level of agreement came from the statement, "I carry my phone at all times to access social media". Of the respondents, 82.1 percent indicated that they mostly visit brand pages that post new pictures and information. Of all the consumers surveyed in this study, 88.5 percent of them share social media posts that they relate to and support, while 91.1 percent of them like social media posts that appeal to them, and only 65.8 percent of them agreed that they follow social media posts shared by people they like. This is in line with Dwivedi *et al.,* (2021: 2) assertion that billions of people have incorporated the use of mobile technologies, the internet, social media, and other virtual communication technologies into their daily lives. As a result, brands began to generate content for consumers. Consumers, in return, co-created their own content on different social media platforms with their friends, families, other consumers, and the world at large (Ceyhan, 2019: 88). Social media use in South Africa continues to grow, particularly regarding the intensity of use by existing social media consumers and the overall number of users. On the other hand, South Africa is considered to be leading in social media use on the African continent (Burdee *et al*., 2019: 318). According to a social media landscape report by (Ornico and Worldwide Worx, 2021: 4), South Africans, like many other people globally, needed to keep in contact with their loved ones while staying apart during COVID-19. This increased internet access and social media usageThis growing global use of technology has led to extensive shifts in how brands are advertised and promoted in the marketplace (Putter, 2017: 7).
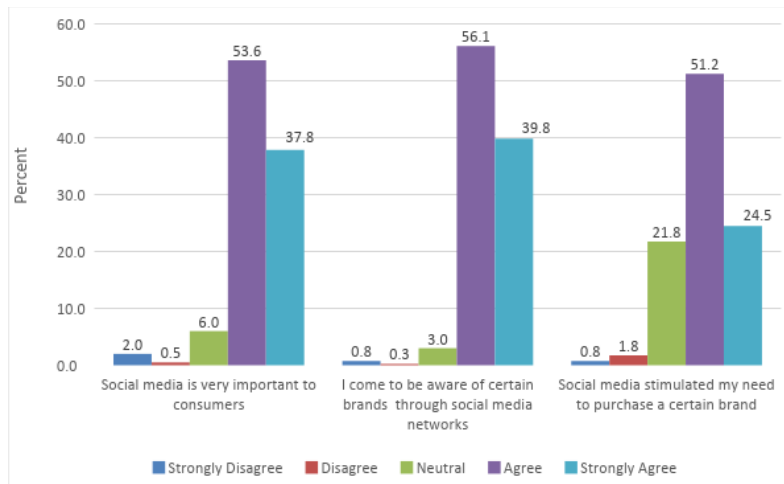
Figure 7: Social media importance

There is a strong level of agreement in all instances (Agree + Strongly Agree) that social media is important to consumers. Of the respondents, 53.6 percent and 37.8 percent of the total sample agreed and strongly agreed that social media is very important to them respectively. In addition, 56.9 percent agreed and 39.8 percent strongly agreed that they become aware of brands through social media networks. Moreover, 51.3 percent agreed and 24.5 percent of the total population strongly agreed that social media stimulated their need to purchase certain brands. The level of agreement is significantly higher than the other options (p < 0.001). Social media is used by billions of people across all sectors and has been the most widely used marketing tool all over the world. It is estimated that users will grow to 3.29 billion, globally, approximately 42.3 percent of the world's population. Grubor and Jaksa (2018: 268) highlight social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, Instagram and LinkedIn as consisting of large and various communities of customers that are not easily available and visible through traditional channels. These customers are believed to share information about company products, express opinions, and rate their experiences (both negative and positive). Hence, marketers have embraced social media as a marketing channel to target potential audiences across various platforms (Appel *et al.*, 2019: 79).
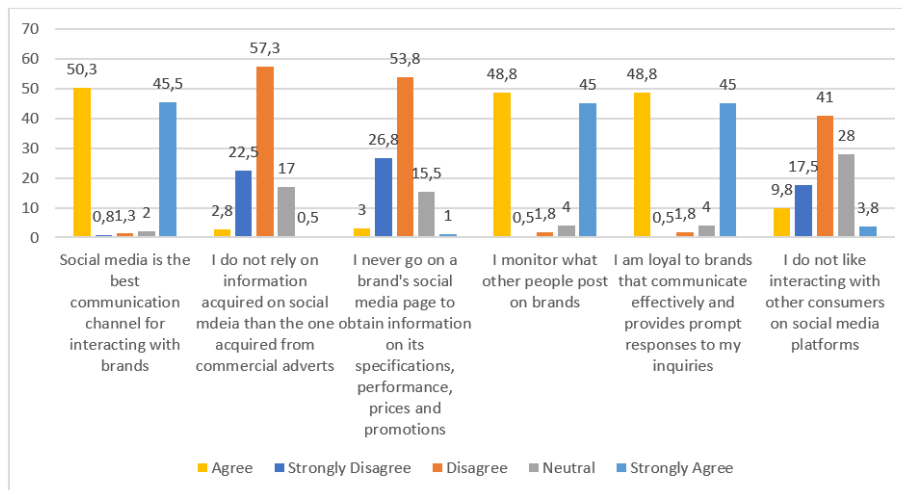

Figure 8: Consumer brand engagement

The results show different scoring patterns, with high scores for both agreement and disagreement with the statements concerning the effectiveness of brand engagement on social media. The level of indecisiveness is lower than all other scores. There is also a significant difference between the level of agreement and disagreement. The statement, "social media is the best communication channel for interacting with brands," had the highest agreement level 95.8 percent of participants selecting this response. This was followed by two statements with equal levels of agreement at 93.8

percent. With no order of importance, the statements are "I monitor what other people post on brands" and "I am loyal to brands that communicate effectively and provides prompt responses to my inquiries". Social media platforms can be leveraged to create personalised messages about their offerings to their target market and potentially acquire eight times return on investment on marketing expenditure as well as a resultant ten percent sales increase. Again, through the two-way communication platform, brands can build strong relationships with customers, which is the main aim of customer relations and marketing efforts (Jacobson *et al.,* 2020: 2). These strong relations ultimately build strong brand loyalty as the concept of marketing is embedded in the philosophy of marketing. Social media marketing works best when it is part of the marketing strategy that utilises various marketing tools (Martin, 2010: 126). Ebrahim (2020: 287) substantiates that it is wise to incorporate social media into brands' marketing strategies as a tool to engage potential and existing customers as many South African consumers are a young population of internet users who are active on one or more social media platforms incorporated in their everyday lives (Duffett, 2017: 20). Mickler (2011: 77) adds that consumers using social media appreciate opportunities to interact with brands by communicating directly with brands on these platforms. This is supported by Egan (2011: 51) who adds that social media affords brands and consumers abundant social exchange due to its subjective nature that instils brands with a human-like character, unlike traditional marketing methods.
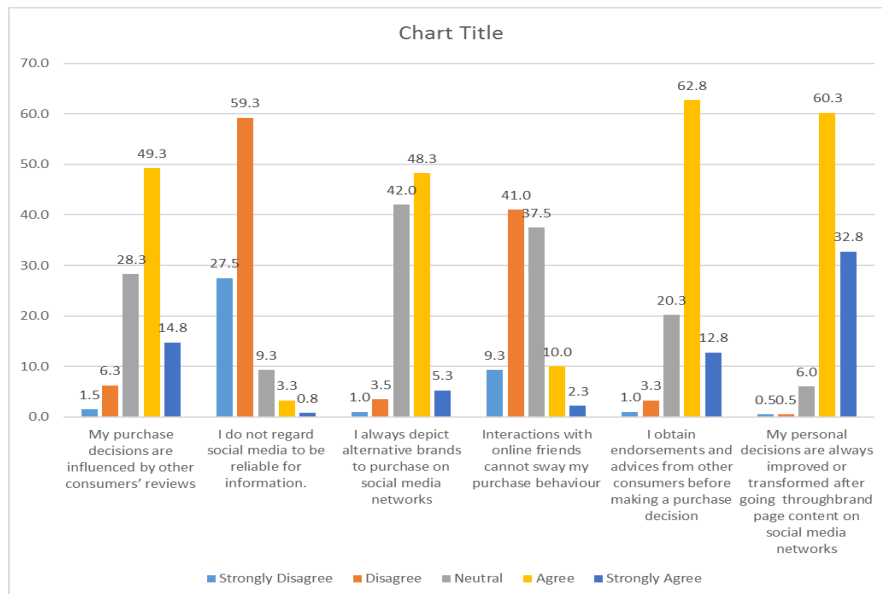

Figure 9: Social media and consumer decision-making

The data presented in figure 4.9 illustrates different scores with high levels of indecisiveness (neutral). Three of the variables had measures above 25 percent. The highest level of disagreement at 86.5 percent, which came from the statement "I do not regard social media to be reliable for information", which explains that consumers trust information provided on social media to a considerable extent. Two of the highest agreement scores were 93.1 percent and 75.6 percent, which were for the following statements, respectively: "my personal decisions are always improved or transformed after going through a brand content on social media networks", and "I obtain endorsements and advice from other consumers before making a purchase decision". This indicates that social media has a significant point of influence on consumers' decision-making when selecting a brand. Since social media is a direct communication channel between brands and their customers, brands can address customers' needs in real-time through social mdeia. This interactive engagement between brands and their customers enhances the emotional ties between customers and brands, displaying potential brand loyalty (Li *et al*., 2020:185). Loyal consumers purchase repeatedly or higher quantity. They do not consider other options or a brand's competition when purchasing. Thus, brand loyalty construes that clients like and constantly purchase a particular brand in a merchandise category and are unwilling to change to new brands when their preferred brand is out of stock (Levy and Weitz, 2009: 112). Li *et al.* (2020: 189) further assert that brand loyalty influences consumer buying behaviours. Thus, brands need to comprehend customer engagement better than their rivals. The ideal or valued client may not be a person who buys frequently or a lot, but it could simply

be an influencer who posts reviews and ratings. These customers who portray behavioural loyalty tend to be proficient in acquiring new customers for the brand through brand recommendations encouraging prospective customers to purchase. Ultimately, this becomes attitudinal and cognitive loyalty as consumers provide reliable brand recommendations to other consumers.

Conclusion

The empirical findings of this study suggest that consumers spend most of their time on social media platforms on which they get exposed to a great deal of information that has the power to influence their purchasing decisions. Furthermore, consumers also tend to share their experiences and opinions of brands through these platforms with their friends, families, and brand communities, influencing other consumers' decision-making. Hence, it is crucial for a brand to be present in this environment to steer the direction of these social media conversations in favour of the brand's success. The findings also revealed the value of social media to consumers and how much they value the presence of brands on social media. This study further noted that consumers care about what brands post, how they interact with them, and how fast they respond to their messages. Therefore, it is crucial that brands listen to consumers' conversations on social media to perfectly meet consumers' needs and wants in these interactions. The communication of brands in this environment must be strategic to stay exciting and relevant to dynamic consumer behaviour. It can also be concluded that when customers feel that brands value them, they develop brand attachments which strengthen their brand loyalty. For a successful brand engagement strategy, this research recommends that brands target and focus their efforts on specific target groups in social media. Brands should also share unique information that is valuable to their target audience through videos, pictures, texts, or engaging stories. Consumers should be able to relate with brands and brands must provide personalised and real-time feedback to customers.

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