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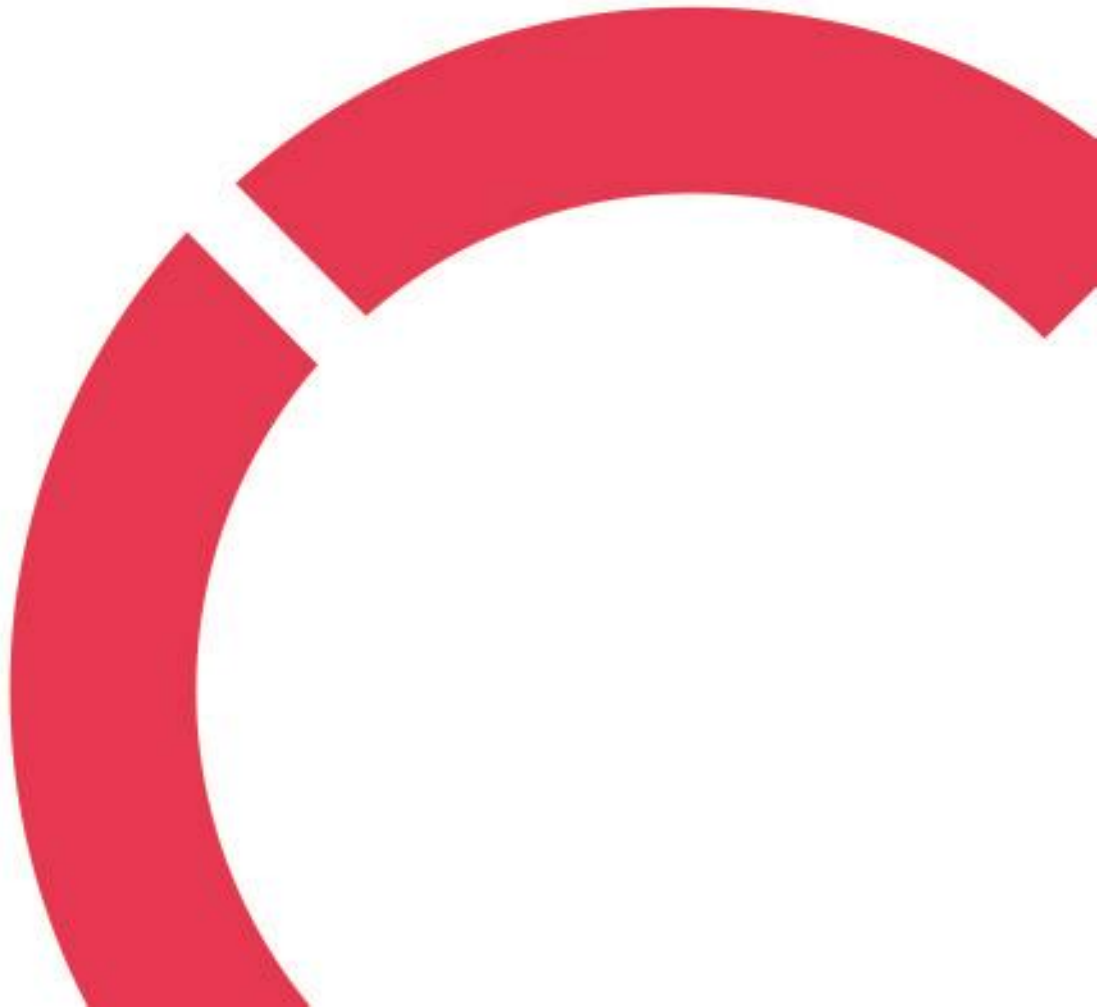
**EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING
AND ENGAGEMENT ON APPAREL PURCHASE DECISIONS
A Study on Pakistani Students in Finland**

Thesis

CENTRIA UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

Master of Business Administration, International Business Management

May 2024



ABSTRACT

Centria University of Applied Sciences	Date May 2024	Author Neelam Iqbal
Degree programme International Business Management		
Name of thesis EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING AND ENGAGEMENT ON APPAREL PURCHASE DECISIONS A Study on Pakistani Students in Finland.		
Centria supervisor Weimu You	Pages 43+1	
<p>The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of social media marketing and engagement on consumer purchase decisions. The focus was made on the apparel industry due to its growing potential and impact through social media. Considering the diversity within the ethnic group in Finland, the study was conducted by focusing on Pakistani students.</p> <p>This study provided valuable insights into the apparel brands targeting this niche group. The theoretical framework was developed based on the empirical literature related to the relationship of social media marketing and engagement with apparel-consuming behavior.</p> <p>The study was conducted by adopting quantitative methods. The reason for selecting this method was to gather a large amount of data by gathering opinions from an acceptable sample group. The data was collected through a structured questionnaire that was developed by adapting research variables' statements. The data was collected using the Webropol survey platform with a response rate of 87%. The findings of the study revealed that social media marketing and engagement significantly affect consumer perception. The respondents agreed with the availability of the information on the brand pages that are used by them for making purchase decisions. Consumer purchase decisions are also observed to be affected by the opinions of others while engaging with them on social media platforms. The research findings provided important evidence regarding the relationship between social media marketing and engagement with apparel purchase decisions. The study concluded with the identification of the research limitations and providing guidance regarding the potential future research areas.</p>		
Keywords Apparel industry, Consumer purchase decision, , Pakistani student, quantitative study, social media engagement, Social media marketing.		

ABSTRACT

CONCEPT DEFINITIONS

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	3
2.1 Social Media.....	4
2.1.1 Social Media Marketing	5
2.1.2 Social Media Engagement	7
2.2 Consumer Purchase Decision.....	9
2.3 Relationship Between Social Media Marketing and Engagement with Consumer Purchase Decision	11
2.4 Apparel Industry: Social Media and Consumer Buying Behavior Trends	12
2.5 Research Gap.....	13
2.6 Theoretical Framework.....	15
3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	16
3.1 Research Method.....	16
3.2 Justification of Chosen Methodology	17
3.3 Sampling Method	17
3.4 Data Collection Method.....	18
3.5 Data Analysis Method.....	18
4 RESULTS	20
4.1 Demographic Responses	20
4.2 Research Variables Results	22
4.2.1 Social Media Marketing	22
4.2.2 Social Media Engagement	26
4.2.3 Consumer Purchase Decision	30
5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	33
5.1 Summary of Findings.....	33
5.2 Interpretations.....	34
5.3 Implications of Findings	35
5.4 Research Limitations	35
5.5 Recommendations for Future Studies.....	36
REFERENCES.....	37
APPENDIX 1. QUESTIONNAIRE.....	42

FIGURES

FIGURE 1. Literature Map	3
FIGURE 2. Uses and Gratifications Theory Model (UGT) (Ringuette, 2021).....	8
FIGURE 3. Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991).....	10
FIGURE 4. Theoretical Framework of Study	15
FIGURE 5. Gender of the Respondents.....	20
FIGURE 6. of the Respondents.....	21
FIGURE 7. Marital Status of the Respondents	21
FIGURE 8. Education Level of the Respondents	22
FIGURE 9. Social Media Marketing (SMM1) Result	23
FIGURE 10. Social Media Marketing (SMM2) Result	23
FIGURE 11. Social Media Marketing (SMM3) Result	24
FIGURE 12. Social Media Marketing (SMM4) Result	24
FIGURE 13. Social Media Marketing (SMM5) Result	25
FIGURE 14. Social Media Marketing (SMM6) Result	25
FIGURE 15. Social Media Engagement (SME1) Result.....	26
FIGURE 16. Social Media Engagement (SME2) Result.....	27
FIGURE 17. Social Media Engagement (SME3) Result.....	27
FIGURE 18. Social Media Engagement (SME4) Result.....	28
FIGURE 19. Social Media Engagement (SME5) Result.....	28
FIGURE 20. Social Media Engagement (SME6) Result.....	29
FIGURE 21. Social Media Engagement (SME7) Result.....	29
FIGURE 22. Social Media Engagement (SME8) Result.....	30
FIGURE 23. Consumer Purchase Decision (CPD1) Result	30
FIGURE 24. Consumer Purchase Decision (CPD2) Result	31
FIGURE 25. Consumer Purchase Decision (CPD3) Result	31
FIGURE 26. Consumer Purchase Decision (CPD4) Result	32

1 INTRODUCTION

Finland's apparel industry is not internationally focused and is based on medium brands operating at the national level. The industry generated \$191 billion US dollars in 2022 with a market share of 5 percent. Finland's apparel industry is directed to compete with its local and international brands in the local market by using different marketing tactics. Similar to international brands, Finland is home to communities from diversified cultural backgrounds. People from different countries move to Finland as students and other professionals. One of the significant numbers of the international community consists of Pakistani students.

After social media gained popularity among individuals, a trend of promoting products has gained pace in the last couple of years. Beig and Khan (2018) stated that social media has transformed the marketing strategies of the apparel industry by providing diversified creative and innovative ways of promoting and selling goods. The increased adoption of social media has positively affected the consumer's knowledge and also helped them to become proactive and social by voicing their opinions (Pookulangara, & Koesler, 2011). Ngai et al. (2015) stated that social media has transformed the living style of individuals and also the ways of conducting business. This growing platform has gained the attention of academicians and studies have been conducted to understand its role in business sectors (Shahbaznezhad, et al., 2021). Brands are directed to use the platform to engage with their target customers and market their products and services. This study will explore the influence created through social media marketing and social media engagement.

Over the last couple of years, a significant rise has been witnessed in social media users across the world. According to an ITA (2023) report, 43.3% of people globally use Facebook, 83.3% use YouTube, and 41.5% use Instagram. This significant number is reported to grow with every passing year. The increase in the presence of a major part of the country's population has also directed the attention of the brands to focus on these platforms to reach out to their potential customers. Statista (2024) reported a significant rise in digital advertising with an expected volume of US\$ 998.1 million globally. The problem that will be addressed through this research is to understand how this growing dependence on social media in approaching customers impacts their purchase decisions. To carry out the research, apparel brands that are high in demand will be focused on.

The research aim is to understand the impact of social media marketing and social media engagement by apparel brands on consumer purchase decisions. Based on the identified problem and the aim of the research, the objectives are developed to be addressed by the research findings. 1) To understand the impact of social media marketing of apparel brands on consumer purchase decisions among Pakistani students in Finland. 2) To examine the impact of social media engagement of apparel brands on consumer purchase decisions among Pakistani students in Finland. 3) To provide recommendations to apparel brands based on the findings from the research.

Based on the aim and research objectives, the research questions of the study are: 1) What is the impact of social media marketing of apparel brands on consumer purchase decisions among Pakistani students in Finland? 2) What is the impact of social media engagement of apparel brands on consumer purchase decisions among Pakistani students in Finland? 3) What are recommendations to the apparel brands for positive impact the consumer purchase decisions?

This study is significant because social media is a largely developing platform among the corporate sectors for directly reaching out to their end-users. Social media has provided a great opportunity for engaging and interacting with consumers. Furthermore, the brands also have an opportunity to promote and sell their goods, where significant changes have been made in the marketing activities of the large corporate brands. This study helps in understanding the role of engaging and marketing the products through social media on the purchase decision of consumers. The ultimate aim of the millions of dollars spent on social media is to generate revenues, which is analyzed here by gathering first-hand information from the consumers who are targeted by the brands.

This thesis consists of five chapters. The first chapter is an introduction that provides an overall purpose and agenda for carrying out the research. The second chapter presents the theoretical framework, which highlights numerous past studies conducted in the domain of research problems. Based on the findings from the past study, an understanding is developed related to aspects that are already known and identified as the tools for gathering the data. The third chapter presents the methodology by discussing the type of research, sources for the data collection, and tools and methods used. The fourth chapter presents the research findings based on the empirical data collected from the customers. Lastly, the fifth chapter presents the discussion and conclusion of the research.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To address the research purpose, a critical analysis is conducted on previous studies to explore the link or relationship among the variables in those studies. It is important to understand that different studies are conducted in different contexts, limiting the research findings' applicability. This is the reason that despite numerous studies conducted in the context of social media marketing and engagement, some potential dimensions of the variables are yet to be explored. Therefore, to carry out the research, literature is analyzed to develop the theoretical framework of the study. Figure 1 below shows the literature map showing the structure of this chapter.

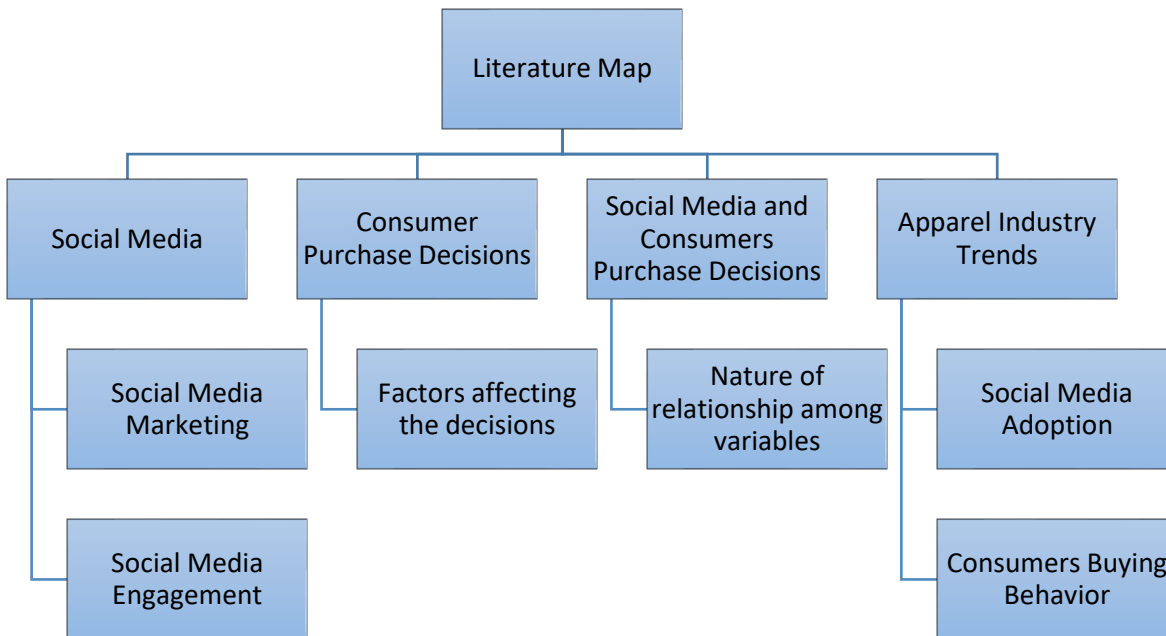


FIGURE 1. Literature Map

Figure 1 presents the structure of the theoretical framework. It shows the variables that are critically studied based on past studies along with relationships prevailing among them. It is linked to the research variable and context of the study.

2.1 Social Media

Social media gained an enormous popularity among consumers and businesses, which resulted in transforming the ways of conducting business in the corporate world (Turban et al., 2010). Social media includes platforms like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and others, where consumers are witnessed to spend an enormous amount of time resulting in increased communication among consumers and brands (Islam, et al., 2018). Shafi et al. (2020) argued that the adoption and usage of social media platforms have immensely increased among consumers as well as business organizations. Zhao and Zhou (2021) argued that the social media platform has provided an opportunity for businesses to promote and engage with their potential target markets. According to the analysis, it is evident that nowadays almost a hundred percent of larger companies either dealing with consumers or businesses as end-users are engaged in using social media platforms for different purposes (Zhao & Zhou, 2021). Earlier, Lyon and Montgomery (2013) revealed that social media platforms are used by companies to gather and share information through two-way communication between brands and consumers. This shows that social media is integral to a company's marketing strategies.

Baird and Parsnis (2011) stated that social media is a useful tool that could help companies get closer to their customers. However, the researchers observed that the purpose or agenda of customers to approach social media is different from the one perceived by the companies. They added that consumers are observed to use social media platforms to communicate and reach out to companies quickly while the company expects that the right information is being delivered to customers timely. Malthouse et al. (2013) stated that the growth of social media also diverted the attention of companies to understand the platform and carry out communication that is aligned with consumer behaviors. Also, the immense need for social media for business success has been referred to result in the need for customer relationship management to efficiently manage the customers through the platform (Hasan & Sohail, 2020).

Furthermore, there are numerous studies conducted to understand social media strategies. Golob et al. (2020) argued that social media strategies entail 25% of impersonal factors while the remaining 75% are personal factors. Moreover, the strategies and activities of social media are revealed to be influenced and dependent on human activities. Tsimonis and Dimitriadis (2014) argued that companies are using social media platforms to develop entry barriers for new entrants by creating an effective digital presence. Therefore, researchers argued that to compete in the market, it is important to have strategies that help to acquire a competitive advantage. Grönroos (2014) added that companies can't acquire a

competitive advantage without adopting tactical approaches. He added that three possible elements could be considered to develop an effective social media marketing activity: Develop direct contact with the groups of stakeholders, especially the customers; Develop a database of customers to have data for making well-informed decisions related to marketing activities; and Adopt a customer-oriented approach and develop the system accordingly (Cartwright et al., 2021).

This shows that a social media platform is not only a platform to communicate and interact with stakeholders, but it requires strategic planning and decision-making. Furthermore, Kwahk and Kim (2017) added that the outcomes of social media usage and adoption depend on the way the platform is used, which directs us to the two variables that are linked to social media and considered in this study: Social Media Marketing and Social Media Engagement. Each of them is discussed in the sub-sections.

2.1.1 Social Media Marketing

The term social media marketing has been defined as “the utilization of social media technologies, channels, and software to create, communicate, deliver, and exchange offerings that have value for an organization's stakeholders” (Vinerean, 2017, p. 21). Based on the purpose of adoption of the social media platform, the businesses also do social media marketing, which is known as corporate social media marketing. The businesses doing the social media marketing are considered as a web-based platform that is used by the representatives of the companies to carry out the tasks such as: To communicate the products and services to the right target market; Implicitly reveal or explicitly indicate the particular coworkers as the communication personnel; Post, edit, and sort texts and files for sharing with the customers and other coworkers; View the messages, respond to queries, and handle the orders if placed through social media (Leonardi et al., 2013).

Leek et al. (2016) revealed that corporate social media involves the usage of both internal and external platforms for the communication of business products through marketing in the most appropriate way. Pitt et al. (2019) added that all of the different types of social media platforms are used by businesses to promote and create awareness among customers regarding the brands' products and services. The functions of social media marketing depend on the marketing activities that could be carried out by the organizations. Different platforms allow users to carry out different activities and costs accordingly.

According to Pham and Gammoh (2015), Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube are the most extensively accepted social media platforms to design and share different content.

Stephenson (2009) revealed that different platforms have different human accents as Twitter is used for human accents for publicity and content creators use it to create the brand image or personality among the audience. Yadav and Rahman (2017) also added in the context that social media marketing helps create an opportunity to innovate new elements by marketing and displaying products, one can also generate sales and create new customers. Kim and Ko (2010) also observed that social media platforms provide the opportunity to distribute, collaborate, and communicate a company's content that helps to create impact on consumer's minds and imprints a vivid picture in the customers' minds. The relationship between social media, the company, and its audience is interlinked and interdependent.

Different authors in the past have discussed social media marketing from the benefits and outcomes acquired. Kim and Ko revealed that social media marketing helps in developing and enhancing customer equity among the brands. This is done based on five categories that are: "Trendiness", "Customization", "Interaction", "Entertainment", and "Word-of-Mouth (WOM)" to determine customer equity (Kim & Ko, 2012). This shows that the content developed by the companies creates the customers' equity. Yadav and Rahman (2017) validated these categories based on the perceptions of customers in the e-commerce industry's content. Further, they also supported the impact of the marketing activities on the purchase intention and brand equity.

Bilgin (2018) also contributed to the literature by adding that social media marketing helps create an impact on brand image, brand awareness, and brand loyalty in the social media environment. It also supports the findings from Yadav and Rahman (2017), who revealed that social media marketing components involve informativeness, trendiness, WOM communication, and personalization that are best fit for the ecommerce industry. However, Kamboj et al. (2018) argued that the definition and components of social media marketing are ever-changing due to the continuous evolution of digital technologies. However, despite the nature of changes, the purpose of carrying out social media marketing by the companies has remained to reach out to consumers and create awareness.

2.1.2 Social Media Engagement

Social media engagement has been defined as the engagement of the consumer with the content generated by the peer or the company on social media platforms (Popovic, 2016). Numerous studies have been conducted in the past to understand the engagement with the content generated and it is revealed that consumers do “Follow”, “Comment”, “Like”, and “Share” the content (Pentina et al., 2018). Habibi et al. (2016) stated that social media is observed to provide an opportunity for businesses as well as consumers to share and engage with the content. This results in creating an opportunity for peer-to-peer engagement that is crucial to the brand as it reflects the actual value and experience with each other. Khan (2017) added that social media engagement helps communities build up social networks that affect the perception and understanding of the brand differently.

Cao et al. (2021) conducted an in-depth study on the role of social media content on the engagement of consumers and observed that consumers are influenced and affected by the content being developed online. Muntinga et al. (2011) revealed that there are three types of social media usage from a brand perspective and these are consuming, creating, and contributing. Schivinski et al. (2016) developed the three-factor framework and determined the engagement of consumers with social media content. It was observed by the researchers that social media content is directed to create a significant impact on the nature of the engagement of consumers. Therefore, they added that the perception expected to be created by the brands on the consumers is greatly affected by the strategies and techniques adopted and used.

Dolan et al. (2019) conducted an empirical study on social media engagement by using the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) as shown in Figure 2. UGT is an approach to developing an understanding of why and how individuals are using the media or content to fulfill their needs (Katz & Foulkers, 1962). Ko et al. (2005) revealed that UGT applicability refers to gratification as a way of enhancing knowledge, entertainment, social interaction, and reward or benefits. Ku et al. (2013) also added that the UGT was among the first theories that helped in understanding the audience's role in choosing between the media and understanding how the same content is being used differently by a group of people. It was added that it is mainly related to the perception and interest of the audience who is interacting with the content.

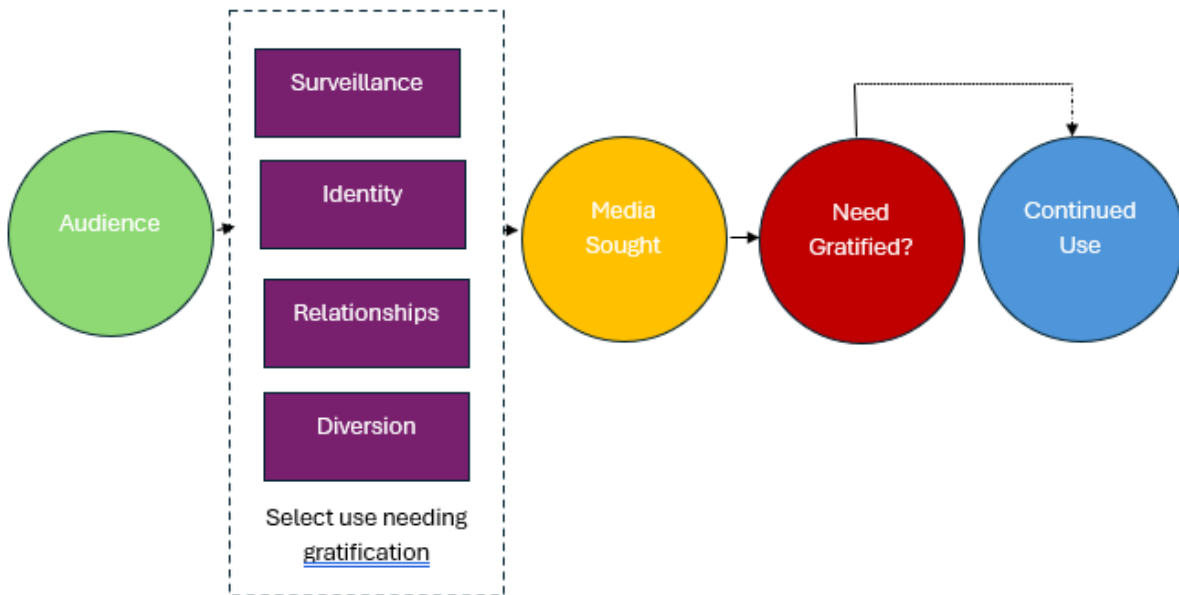


FIGURE 2. Uses and Gratifications Theory Model (UGT) (Ringuette, 2021)

Figure 2 shows that the audience has four reasons for selecting any specific platform. If one achieves successful outcomes, then one continues using it or quit it. Dolan et al. (2019) and Kahneman (2011) observed that the content used by the brands is directed to create different types of appeal from the audience such as rational and emotional appeals. The rational appeal is related to information and remuneration while the emotional appeal is relational and based on entertainment (Tafesse & Wien, 2017). Chandrasekaran et al. (2017) added that the message used for developing the content is linked to the reaction and response expected to be received from the audience. This is the reason why the brands are engaged in developing content that they believe can help to achieve their goals and targets in more effective and appropriate ways. In Pentina's et al. (2018) study findings, it is observed that consumers are directed to address different and diversified expectations and opinions of the audience. Social media content plays a crucial role in determining, but they added the purpose of developing, any kind of content is linked to the type of response or reaction expected from the audience.

Tafesse and Wien (2017) added that when the brands are engaged in developing the content, they are considering different factors. However, the most crucial is the target audience. This is the reason why social media content is witnessed to create a direct and quick impact on the perception of the consum-

ers. Cao et al. (2021) also supported these facts by adding that social media content determines consumer engagement with the brand. Therefore, the platform must be used to create a positive impact on the consumers' minds as it impacts their actions and decisions. This shows that there is a significant impact of social media engagement on the actions taken by consumers including their purchase decisions as well, which is discussed in detail in the next section.

2.2 Consumer Purchase Decision

Consumer purchase decision refers to the decisions by consumers to buy any specific product or service by ensuring that it satisfies their needs and wants (Palalic et al., 2021). Different studies have been conducted in the past to understand the relationship between different factors that influence and affect consumer purchase intention and revealed that the business's internal and external environment significantly affect the decisions (Al-Hafizi & Ali, 2021; Alavi et al., 2016). Al-Hafizi and Ali (2021) argued that businesses are engaged in developing their product image and services by using different marketing platforms so that they can create a positive impact on the consumers' perceptions and influence them to make a purchase decision. This is done by carrying out different marketing activities by focusing on the four Ps of the marketing mix. This reveals that the consumer purchase decision is being influenced by the marketing strategies and techniques, which shows that it will also be affected by the platform used for carrying out the communication.

The concept of the consumer purchase decision is not new to the literature and numerous studies have been conducted in the past to understand the relationship between various factors causing an impact on the consumer purchase decisions (Habibie, et al., 2021; Goswami, 2016). Habibie et al. (2021) stated that consumers are nowadays engaged in acquiring information and knowledge regarding products and services from different platforms. This is carried out by gaining information that creates an impact on the decisions. They referred to the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) as shown in Figure 3 (Ajzen, 1991), and stated that different factors contribute to the development of particular actions and social media content determines the nature of the interaction.

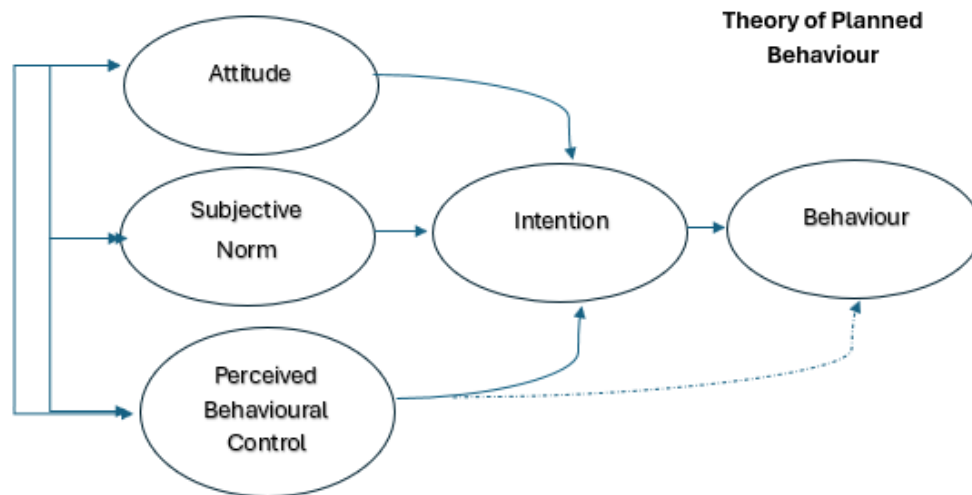


FIGURE 3. Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991)

From Figure 3 above, it is revealed that there are three factors within the consumer intention, and they are affected in various aspects as they are influenced and affected by the personal perceptions, opinions of peers, and the environment created by the brands. Goswami (2016) added in this context that the consumers of the organizations are greatly affected by peer-to-peer communication as they revealed that consumers seek information from their colleagues, friends, and family members regarding a particular product or service. This is discussed in the context of the WOM, and the brands make maximum efforts to ensure that they create a positive perception among the people regarding the brands' products or services.

Another study conducted by Oliveira et al. (2016) added that consumer purchase decisions are observed to be greatly affected by social media platforms these days. The reason is that people are found to be continuously communicating and interacting with each other on social media. They are sharing their opinions and perceptions that help others to make their decisions. Similarly, Muralidharan and Men (2015) added that social media has created opportunities for brands to share and interact with their audience but it has also created a lot of challenges for companies as they have provided an opportunity for customers to share their experience that creates a very long-lasting and drastic impact on the reputation of the business. This shows that social media is affecting the decisions taken by the companies. However, there is a need to understand how the effects being created could be transformed into favorable impacts for the businesses.

2.3 Relationship Between Social Media Marketing and Engagement with Consumer Purchase Decision

From the critical analysis of the previous studies, it is evident that social media is creating an impact on consumers. Alavi et al. (2016) thoroughly observed the role of the consumer decision-making style and revealed that social media has a crucial role to play in developing and determining the possible actions of consumers. The reason is based on Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), consumers look for and gather information from diversified sources. These sources affect the perception of the consumers. Oliveira et al. (2016) added that social media marketing is based on developing content and information that creates a positive and effective impact on the consumers' perception. They supported a direct and significant relationship between social media content with the decisions and actions taken by the consumers.

Moreover, Kim and Ko (2012) added that social media marketing creates an avenue to reduce miscommunication and misunderstanding among consumers regarding the company's offerings. It also helps to create and enhance the value of the product which positively impacts the purchase decisions of the consumers. However, Muralidharan and Men (2015) added that the consumer's purchase decision is affected by numerous other factors that are not limited to the company's content and information. They added that the consumers look for the information on their own, which affects the perceptions and decisions of the consumers. However, in alignment with Kim and Ko (2012), social media marketing is carried out by the companies to create awareness, but the way information is processed, and decisions depend on the consumers.

Alves et al. (2016) stated that the social media platform is used by companies for various activities including the development of brands, carrying out marketing, managing customer relations, provisions for services, and marketing the products and services. The reason is that social media provides an opportunity where brands can engage with the audience and help them understand the factors that are related to the brand and can create a significant impact on the perception and opinions of the consumers. Muralidharan and Men (2015) also added that social media can help brands understand the perception of consumers. This shows that social media can also be used for understanding and identifying the potential demands and needs so that a company can offer a product or service.

Cambria et al. (2012) stated that social media channels can be used by companies to help in conveying brand-related information to their existing as well as new customers. These platforms are useful as they are lower in cost and also affect the consumer purchase intention. They referred to diversified tools such as images, blogs, ratings, and podcasts that could be used by the brands to communicate with the customers about the brand offerings. However, the factor to ponder on is that these tools can provide the opportunity for the consumers to engage with. Ismail et al. (2018) added in this context as the consumers can engage and share information, it also affects their perception towards the brands and also of the other group of people who are just viewing the information. This shows that social media engagement is not only affecting the purchase decision of the consumers, but it is also causing significant impact on the decisions of the others who are not directly engaging with content. Leung et al. (2013) added that social media platforms are nowadays actually used by brands to do marketing and engage with audiences to create sales that show that it creates a positive impact on their purchase decisions. Yu et al. (2013) argued that the sales or revenues of the brands are affected by the WOM and communication carried out by the brands with their audience. The reason is that people are directed to share their opinions and with a positive value and experience of the consumers, others are also influenced through it.

It is evident from the literature that social media marketing and social media engagement are two different aspects of social media. They facilitate the brands differently while communicating and interacting with the customers. Based on, the nature of the impact created, it is observed that consumers are affected through it. Therefore, there is a potential relationship between social media marketing and social media engagement with consumer purchase decisions that differ in their effects.

2.4 Apparel Industry: Social Media and Consumer Buying Behavior Trends

The concept of social media applicability within different sectors has been discussed in different sectors as Yadav and Rahman (2017) conducted a study in the domain of the e-commerce industry but added that there is a potential for this research to be conducted in the domain of other industries espe-

cially the apparel industry as it creates an image or picture in the mind of the audience. The social media's advent created revolutionary changes within the apparel sector by facilitating information sharing and communication among companies and consumers. Researchers stated that from 2008 till 2011 it was observed that the adoption of social media by the apparel industry grew to 88% while currently it is reported as 100% because of its importance and impact being created.

Burmann (2010) added that social media platforms have been used by apparel companies to develop a strong and loyal customer base. This is because consumers are observed to share their opinions and perceptions through social media. Furthermore, Rialti et al (2017) argued that social media has helped the apparel industry in reaching out to potential customers across borders. This is because of the social media platforms as the brands can share their products with consumers from different countries and also understand their fashion demands. Ahmad et al. (2015) added that social media is used by different apparel companies such as giant corporations as well as small entrepreneurs because of the ease of usage and accessibility along with lower cost options. Sarkar et al. (2019) added that social media has helped brands to develop themselves to consumers' preferences by learning their behaviors and demands from the social media platforms.

2.5 Research Gap

From the literature, it is observed that social media platforms are extensively used among companies to interact and communicate with customers (Golob et al., 2020; Kwak & Kim, 2017). There are two different aspects of looking into social media usage from a corporate perspective that is by creating awareness, businesses do social media marketing while by responding and engaging with the audience, the businesses are indulged in doing the social media engagement (Pitt et al., 2019; Dolan et al., 2019). Furthermore, Yadav and Rahman (2017) stated that each industry is observed to have a different impact on the usage of social media as they conducted the study in the domain of the e-commerce industry while Rialti et al. (2017) argued that the geographical context also impacts on the social media adoption and usage among the people. This is the reason why numerous studies have been conducted to understand the usability of social media and its impact on people. From the observation of the apparel industry, the literature lacks an understanding of the segregated impact of social media marketing

and social media engagement. Moreover, the literature lacks a study that is conducted in the context of the Finnish apparel Industry in the context of Pakistani students in Finland. These potential research gaps will be filled by the researcher.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

From the critical analysis of the past studies, it is evident that there is a potential to carry out research in the domain of the apparel industry. Therefore, the theoretical framework is developed as shown in Figure 4.

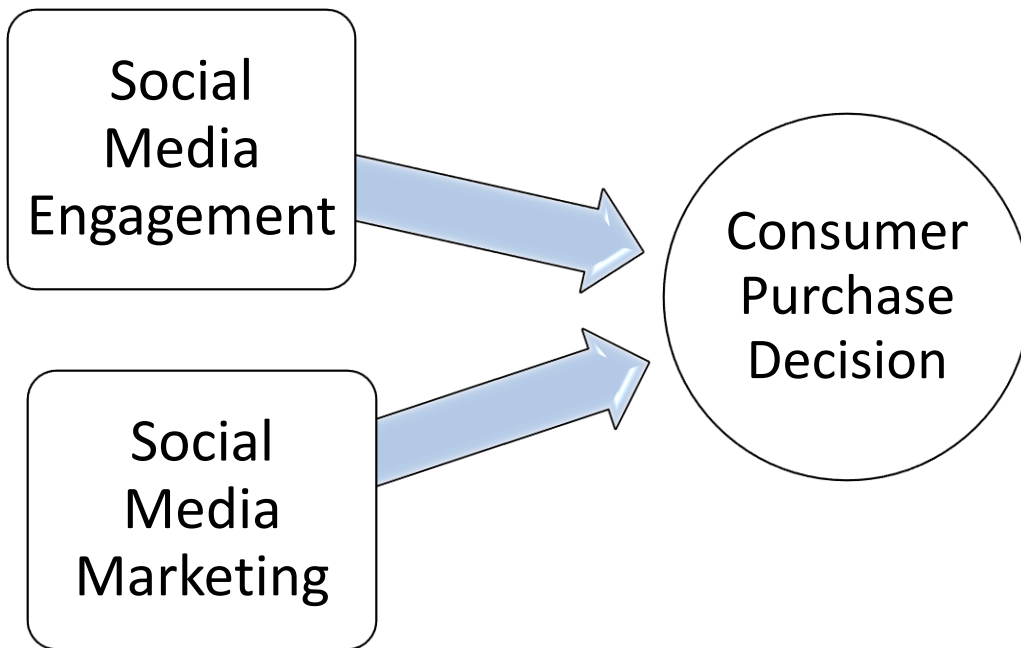


FIGURE 4. Theoretical Framework of Study

Figure 4 shows the independent variables of the study are social media engagement and social media marketing while the consumer purchase decision is a dependent variable. To explore the nature of the relationship among the variables, a research methodology is developed, which is developed in accordance with the methodology used in these past studies. The study aims to understand the influence of social media marketing and engagement on consumer purchase decisions. The methodology is explained in detail in the next chapter.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research methodology of the study. Kumar (2018) said that research methodology refers to the methods, tools, and techniques used for the collection of data to address research problems. This study aims to explore the relationship between social media marketing, social media engagement, and consumer purchase decisions. It aims to examine how the independent variables influence consumer purchase decisions. Hence, the nature of the study is exploratory and fundamental to the research. The methods and techniques are selected that align with the limitations of the research such as cost and time.

3.1 Research Method

There are two types of research, quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative type of research involves the number of data while the qualitative type of research involves words (Flick, 2015). Each of the research types has its advantages and disadvantages. The quantitative data is in numerical form that is easy to collect, analyze, and interpret. However, because the data is collected in the form of numbers, it restricts the opinions of the respondents within the numerical options available to choose from. On the other hand, qualitative research provides valuable information that depicts respondents' opinions, thoughts, and ideas. However, this type of research is difficult to conduct as a lot of variation is found within the data and it is also very time-consuming and complicated to interpret.

For this research, the quantitative method is selected. It means that data is collected in the form of numbers or figures. The operational definition of each research variable is defined here. Social Media Marketing: It refers to the information shared by the brands regarding their products on the social media pages of the company (Vinerean, 2017). Social Media Engagement: It refers to the ability of the users to interact with the brand's representatives and other customers to seek information and share their opinions (Popovic, 2016). Consumer Purchase Decision: It refers to the decision to purchase from the brand's marketing and engaging on social media sites (Palalic et al., 2021).

To measure these research variables, primary data is collected from the respondents. There are two types of data sources, primary and secondary data sources. The primary data source refers to the

firsthand data collection from the respondents. It provides the data by selecting a specific group of respondents and is also the latest and most reliable. The secondary data refers to the data that is already published and available for others such as research articles or online databases. This provides a large sum of data that may or may not represent the actual target respondent. Hence, to measure the research variables by exploring the relationship between them, primary data is collected by the research.

3.2 Justification of Chosen Methodology

The reason for selecting the quantitative research type is that to explore the relationship among the variables, there is a need to gather data from a large number of respondents. According to Kothari (2004), when the study is based on the opinions of the majority of the people and there are previously conducted studies in different contexts, then it is appropriate to research a large group of respondents. Hence, to explore the relationship between variables, data is collected from a sample group which is explained in the later section of this chapter. Moreover, this type of research helps in gathering large amounts of data with less effort. Also, numerical data, despite being produced in large amounts, has limited variation that is easier to analyze and interpret.

Furthermore, the reason for considering the primary data is that this study is conducted on a specific geographical region and a specific group of people. Therefore, to gather their opinions, it is important to gather data from them only, which is only possible by conducting primary research.

3.3 Sampling Method

There are two different types of sampling methods, probability, and non-probability. The probability sampling method states that there are certain criteria for selecting a respondent therefore there is a chance of a specific type of respondent to be selected for the study (Kothari, 2004). The non-probability sampling method states that there are no criteria for selecting the respondent, therefore, anyone can be selected as a respondent of the study (Kothari, 2004). Based on these methods, there are various techniques for selecting the sample group. For this research, a probability sampling method was selected. The reason is that the inclusion criteria of the population is that one must be a student within Finland and come from Pakistan. However, anyone who is not a student is excluded despite meeting the other criteria. To select the respondents, a random sampling technique is selected.

The sample size of the study is 100, which is selected by keeping the limitations of the research into consideration. Also, the entire population of the study is around 400-500 as per the information gathered from social media.

3.4 Data Collection Method

To collect the quantitative data from the primary source, a structured questionnaire is developed by using the 5-point Likert scale. The questionnaire is developed by adopting the research statements from previous studies (Bilgin, 2018; Seo & Park, 2018; Yadav & Rahman, 2017; Koivulehto, 2017) by amending it to align with the purpose of this study. The structured questionnaire is distributed into two main sections (See Appendix 1). The first section includes a question related to the demographic profile of the respondents. It includes general questions that ensure the anonymity of the respondents. The second section includes the statements related to the research variables. There are six statements that relate to social media marketing, eight to social media engagement, and four to consumer purchase decisions. Respondents are asked to rate these statements from 1 to 5 based on the degree of agreeableness with the statements.

The structured questionnaire is uploaded on the platform called Webropol Survey. It is a platform that is used for conducting surveys and reporting the findings. Data collection is made by using the online and offline platforms. The link to the questionnaire is distributed among the target population by using the Facebook page that is allocated to Pakistani students who are enrolled in the Finish Universities. Also, data is collected by physically visiting the universities of applied sciences: Centria UAS, Aalto, Turku, Lappeenranta, and Eastern Finland.

3.5 Data Analysis Method

Data collected, as discussed earlier, is in quantitative form. Therefore, to analyze the data and extract the meanings from the numerical data, a descriptive analysis is conducted. A descriptive analysis presents the summarized statistics that describe the features of the collected information (Flick, 2015). There is a different descriptive analysis test, but this thesis's findings are based on the frequency distribution. Frequency distribution is a graphical or tabular representation of the entire data set showing the

distribution of the data against certain class intervals (Flick, 2015). The frequency distribution is used for determining how each respondent has rated the statements by distributing data against the 5-point Likert scale. The results are generated by Webropol Survey; therefore, no additional software is used.

4 RESULTS

This chapter presents the results generated by processing the data collected from the respondents. Of the 101 questionnaires that were left out, 88 complete responses were gathered, while 13 were missing answers to some of the questions. Therefore, these 13 responses are deleted and provide 88 complete responses from the respondents. The survey's response rate is 87%, which is greater than 80%. Jarrett (2021) said that a survey, which produces a response rate greater than 80% has a good response rate and the findings are reliable. Therefore, the data collected from 88 respondents is used to address the research purpose.

4.1 Demographic Responses

Respondents were asked to provide some basic information related to themselves. The purpose of it is to understand who has been approached and what is the overall profile of the respondents. The question statements included gender, age, marital status, and education level.

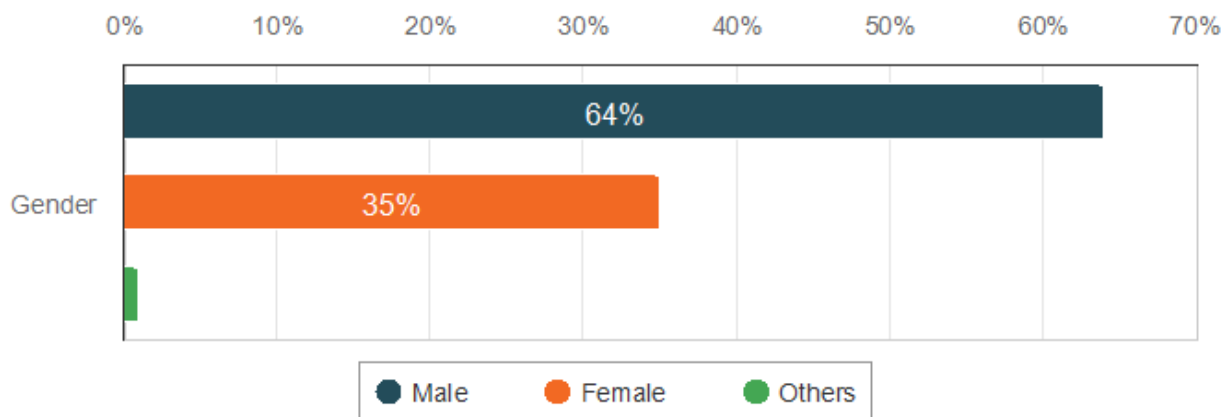


FIGURE 5. Gender of the Respondents

Figure 5 presents the gender division of the respondents. It shows that 64% of the respondents are male, 35% are female, and 1% are other. It shows that the majority of the respondents of the study are male, but there is also a representation of females and other genders within the study.

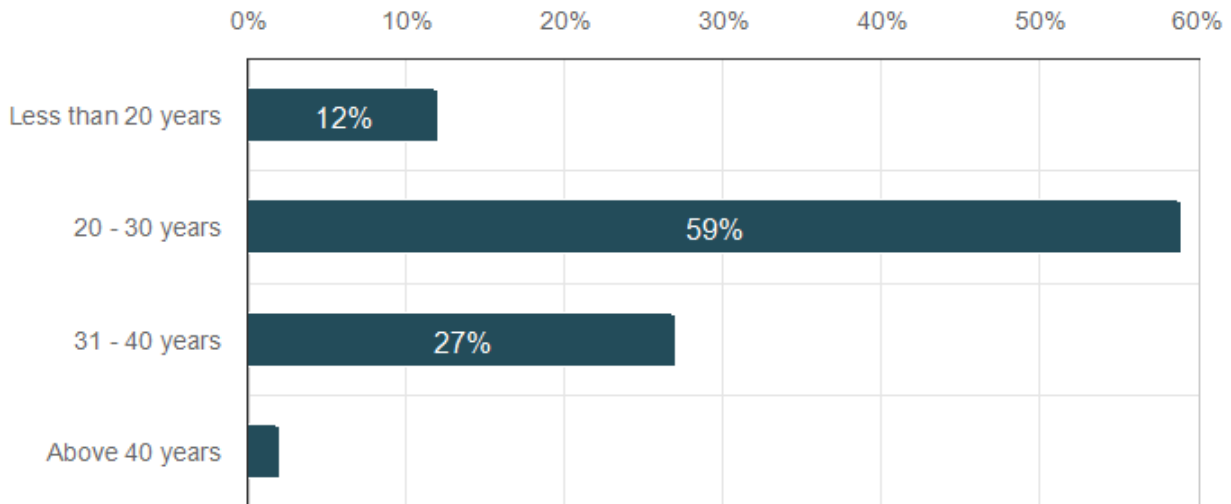


FIGURE 6. of the Respondents

Figure 6 presents the distribution of data against the different age groups. 12% of the respondents are less than 20 years. 50% of the respondents are aged between 20 to 30 years. 27% are aged between 31 to 40 years. Lastly, 2% are aged above 40 years. The data is collected from diversified age groups covering every target age group identified to approach. However, the majority of the respondents are between 20 to 30 years of age.

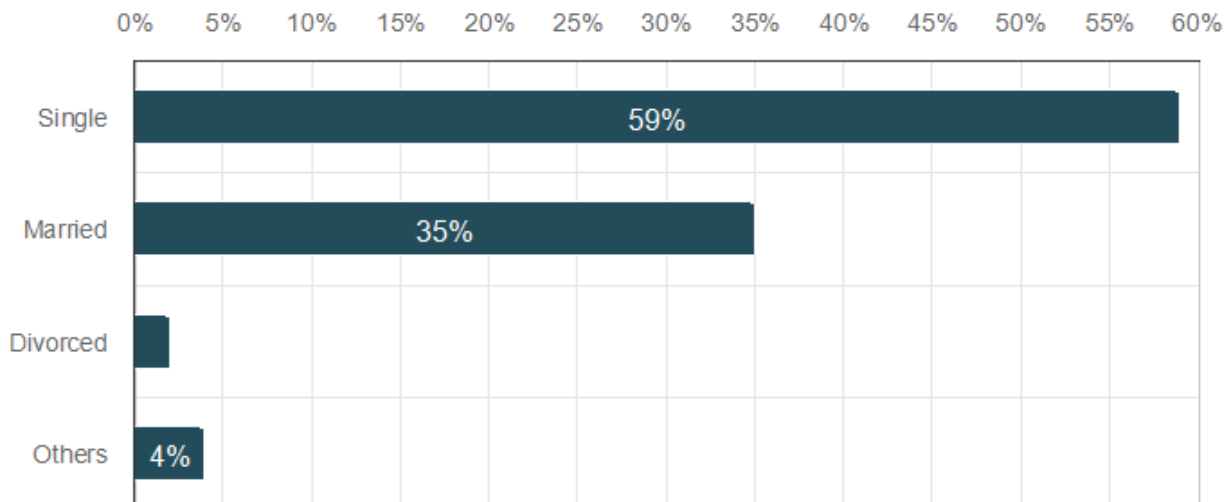


FIGURE 7. Marital Status of the Respondents

Figure 7 showcases the marital status of the respondents. 59% of the respondents are single. 35% are married and 2% are divorced. The remaining 4% selected others in marital status. Based on the results, the majority of the respondents are observed to be single.

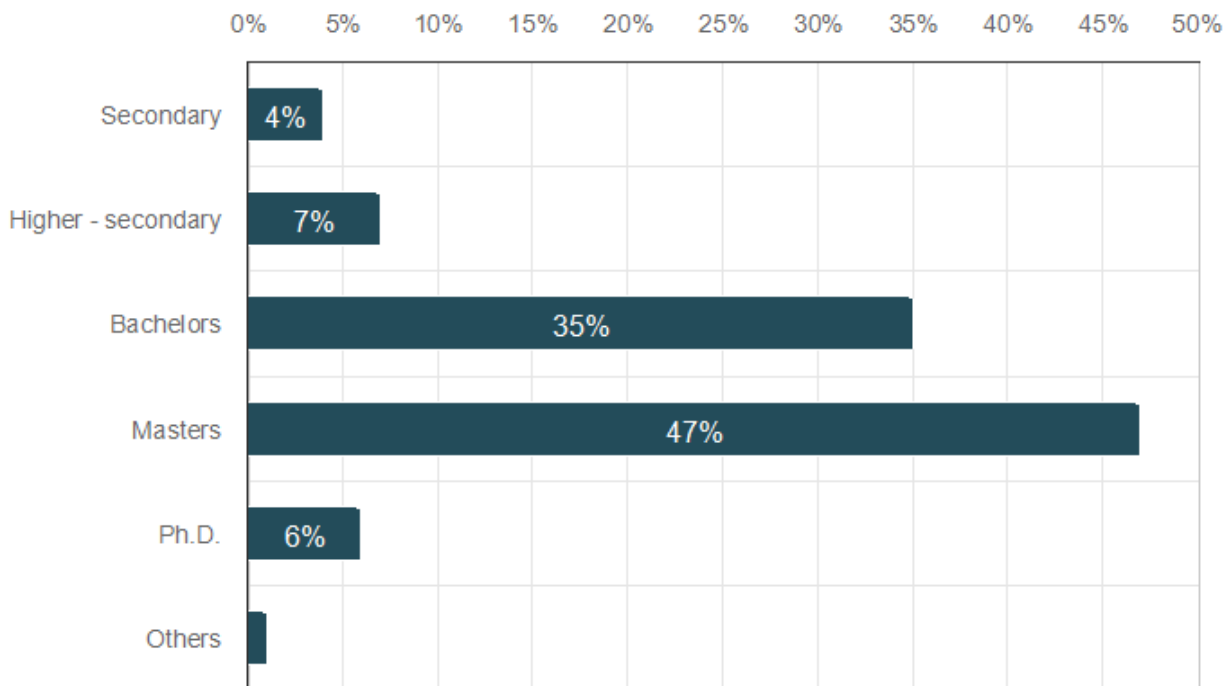


FIGURE 8. Education Level of the Respondents

Figure 8 presents the educational background of the respondents. 4% of the respondents have a secondary-level education. 7% have a higher secondary level of education. 35% have Bachelor's degrees. 47% have a Master's level of education. 6% have a Ph.D. education while 1% have another educational background. This also represents a high level of diversity within the educational background of the respondents with the majority of the respondents having a Master's level of education.

4.2 Research Variables Results

To understand the influence of social media marketing and social media engagement on the consumer purchase decision, different statements were used. Data is collected in the form of numbers by giving ratings such as strongly agree, agree, etc. In this section, each research variable's statements are presented.

4.2.1 Social Media Marketing

Six statements are used from the literature to determine this variable and the findings from the primary data collected are presented in the form of charts. The first statement is: “Facebook fashion brand pages offer accurate information on products”. Figure 9 presents the opinions of the respondents. According to the respondents’ opinions, 54% of the respondents agree with the statement that Facebook pages by the brands provide accurate information about the product. The remaining 9% strongly agree with the statement, 18% neither agree nor disagree, 18% disagree, and 1% strongly disagree with it. Hence with an average of 2.5, respondents have an opinion varying between agreeing or neither agreeing nor disagreeing with the statement.

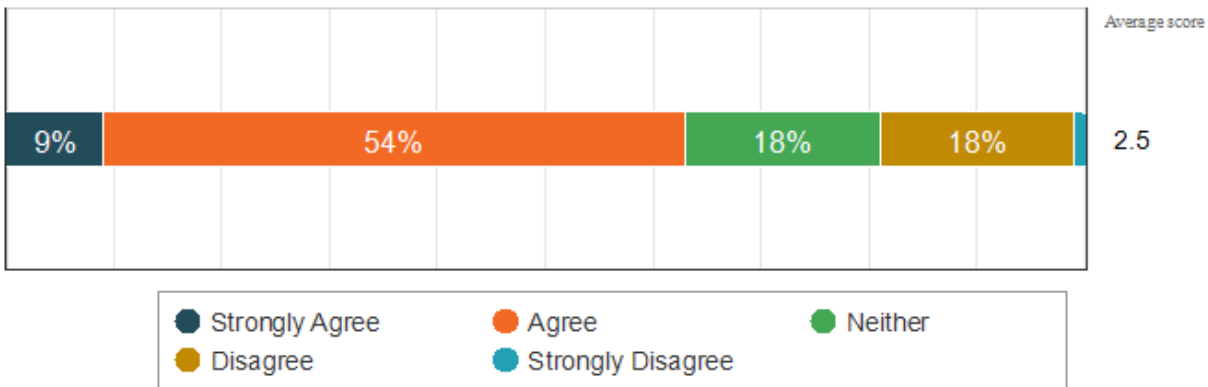


FIGURE 9. Social Media Marketing (SMM1) Result

Figure 10 presents the responses to the statement: “Facebook fashion brand pages offer useful information”. According to it, 10% strongly agree, 55% again agree with the statement, 26% remained neutral, 8% and 1% strongly disagree with it. Overall, an average of 2.4 is acquired which shows that respondents agree with it.

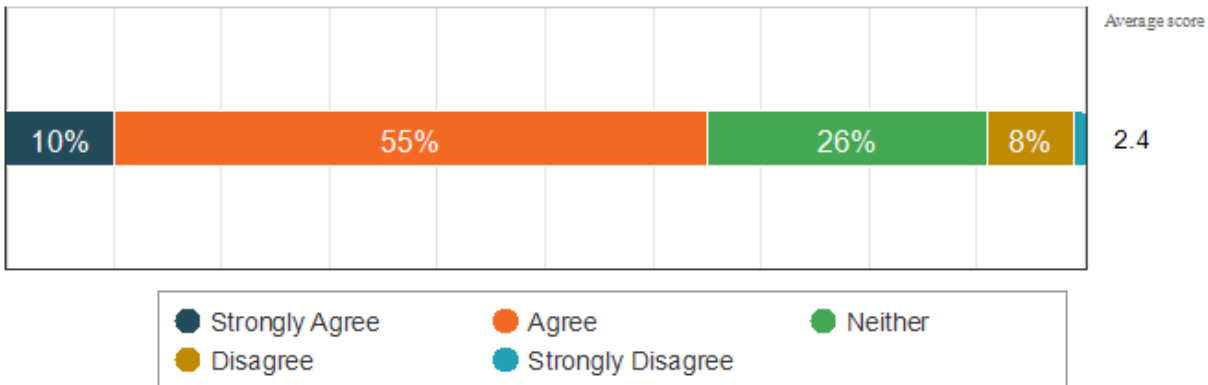


FIGURE 10. Social Media Marketing (SMM2) Result

Figure 11 presents the opinion of the respondents regarding the statement: “The information provided by Facebook fashion brand pages is comprehensive”. According to it, 10% of the respondents strongly agreed with the comprehensiveness of the brand page. Further, 41% agreed, 28% remained neutral, and 21% disagreed with it. With an average of 2.6, the respondents are found to neither agree nor disagree with it.

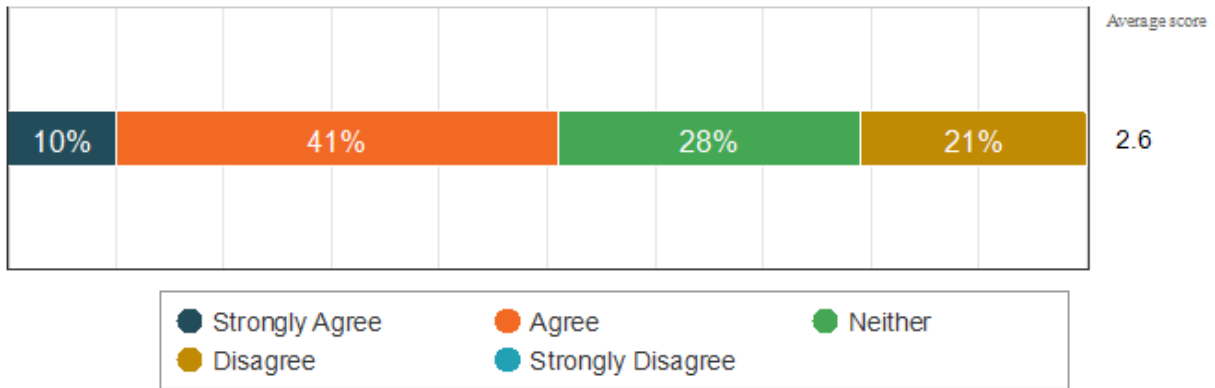


FIGURE 11. Social Media Marketing (SMM3) Result

Figure 12 presents the responses to the statement: “Facebook fashion brand pages offer customized information search”. According to the results, 11% strongly agree, 53% agree, 21% remain neutral, 11% disagree, and 4% strongly disagree with it. However, with an average of 2.4, it is observed that the majority of the respondents agree that brands are offering customized information searches through their pages.

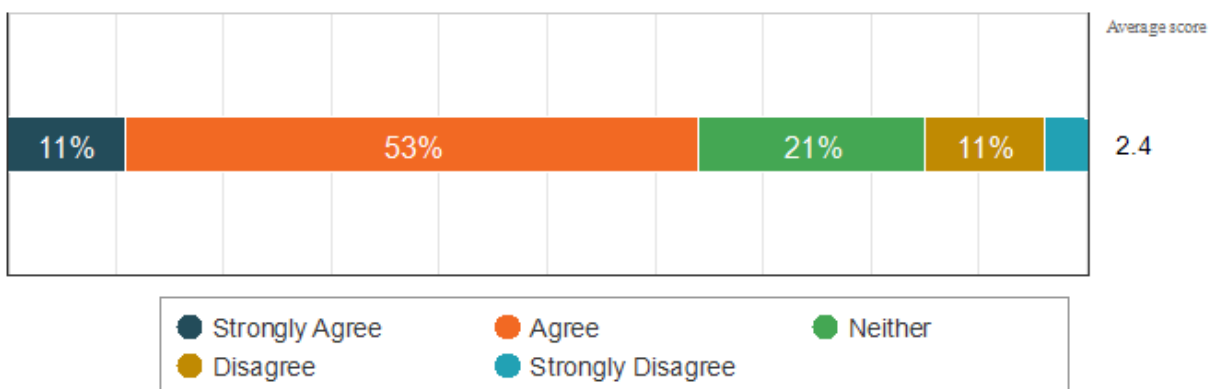


FIGURE 12. Social Media Marketing (SMM4) Result

Figure 13 provides the results on the respondents' opinions of the statement, "Contents shown on Facebook fashion brand pages are the newest information". It is observed that 15% of the respondents strongly agree with it while 53% agree with it. The remaining 21% remained neutral, while 1% disagreed with the statement. The average response result is 2.3 which shows that the majority of the respondents agree with the statement.

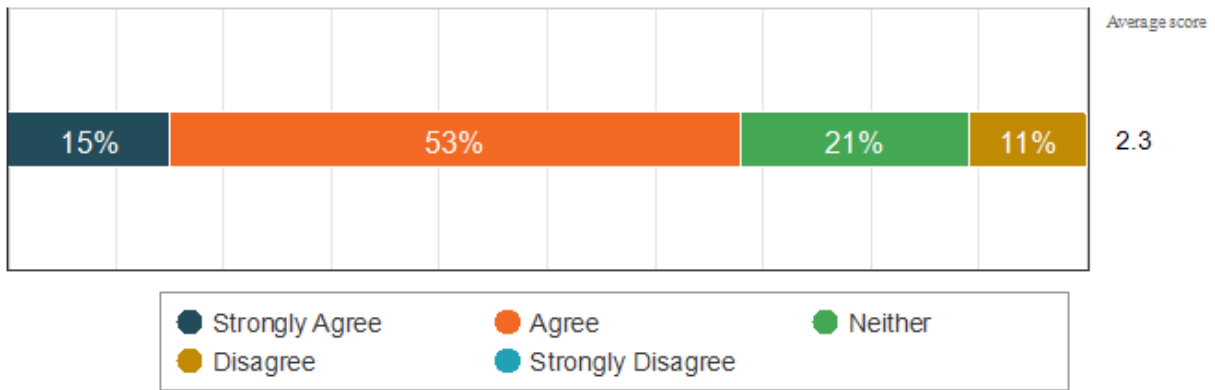


FIGURE 13. Social Media Marketing (SMM5) Result

Figure 14 shows the responses to the statement, "Anything trendy is available on Facebook fashion brand pages". It shows that 24% strongly agree with it while 50% agree with the statement. However, 14% remained neutral and 12% disagreed with it. With an average of 2.1, the majority of the respondents agree with it.

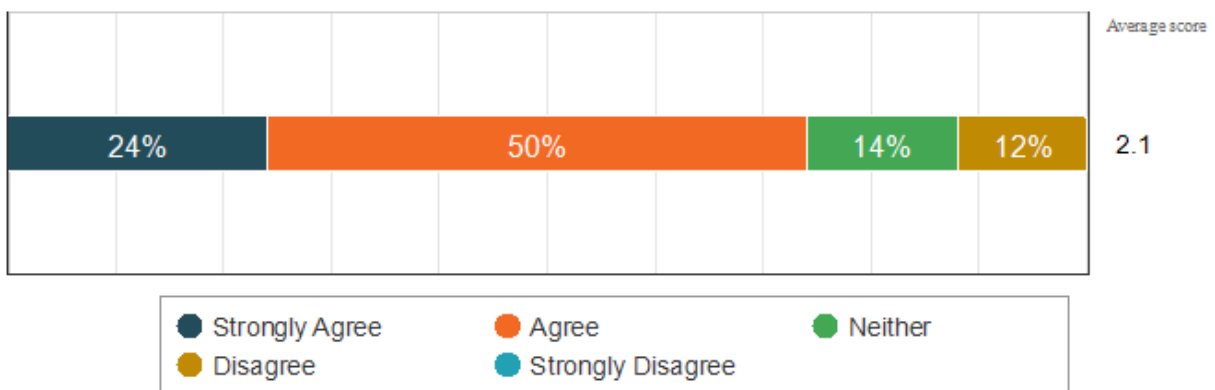


FIGURE 14. Social Media Marketing (SMM6) Result

Overall, an average of 2.4 is acquired for all six statements or statements used for exploring social media marketing. Based on the nature of the statements, it is found that social media marketing provides positive and valuable information to consumers.

4.2.2 Social Media Engagement

To explore social media engagement, eight statements were adopted. These statements are used to understand the consumer's engagement with the brand due to its social media activities. The first statement to explore the variable is: “Facebook apparel brand pages enable me to share information with others”. Figure 15 presents the result, where 19% strongly agree with their ability to share information with others through brands’ pages. The remaining 58% agree, 15% remain neutral, and 8% disagree with it. Overall, 2.1 average is acquired which shows the majority of the respondents agree to share the information on the brand pages.

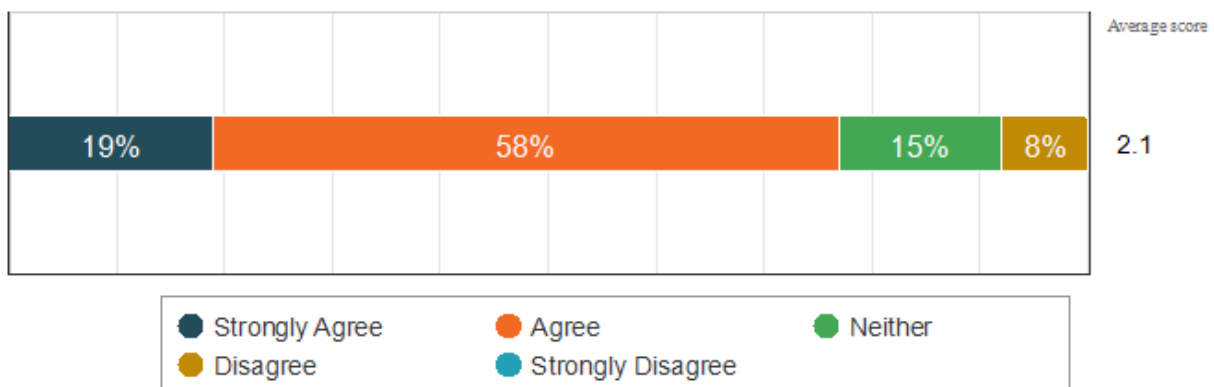


FIGURE 15. Social Media Engagement (SME1) Result

Figure 16 presents the results for the responses against, “Discussion or exchange of opinion with others is possible through Facebook fashion brand pages”. According to the results, 19% strongly agree with the statement, 41% agree with it, 23% neither agree nor disagree, 15% disagree with it, and 2% strongly disagree with it. With an average of 2.4 majority of the respondents agree with it.

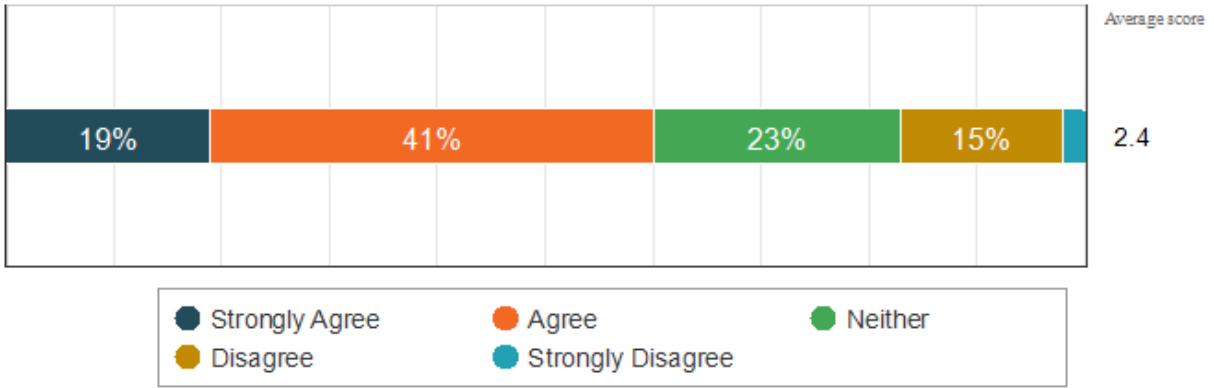


FIGURE 16. Social Media Engagement (SME2) Result

The next Figure 17 provides the results for the statement: “Easy delivery of my opinion through Facebook apparel brand pages”. According to the results, 10% strongly agree while 49% with the easy delivery of opinions on Facebook. The remaining 24% neither agree nor disagree, 15% disagree, and 2% strongly disagree with it. With an average of 2.5, it shows that the majority of the respondents agree or remain neutral to this statement.

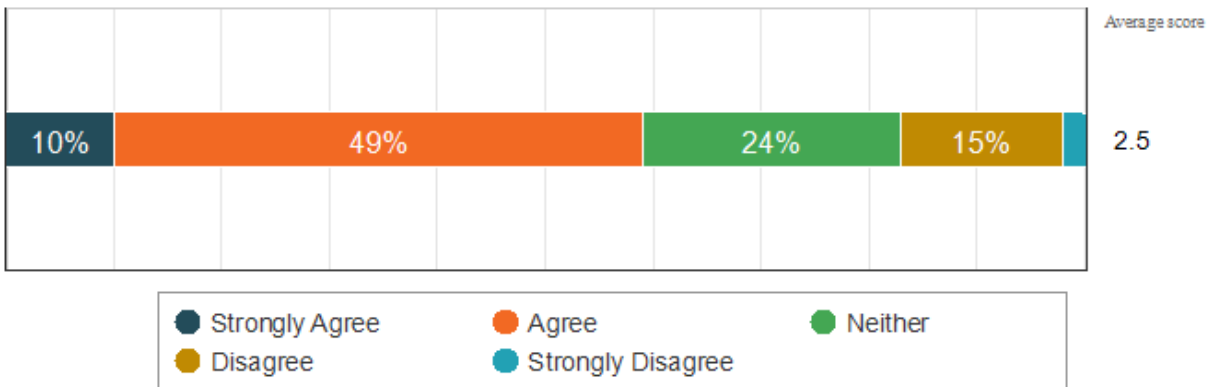


FIGURE 17. Social Media Engagement (SME3) Result

Figure 18 provides the results for the statement: “Facebook fashion brand pages provide customized service”. According to the results, 14% strongly agreed, 39% agreed, 27% remained neutral and 20% disagreed with it. With an average of 2.5, again the respondents are between agreeing or remaining neutral related to the customized services offered by the brands’ Facebook pages.

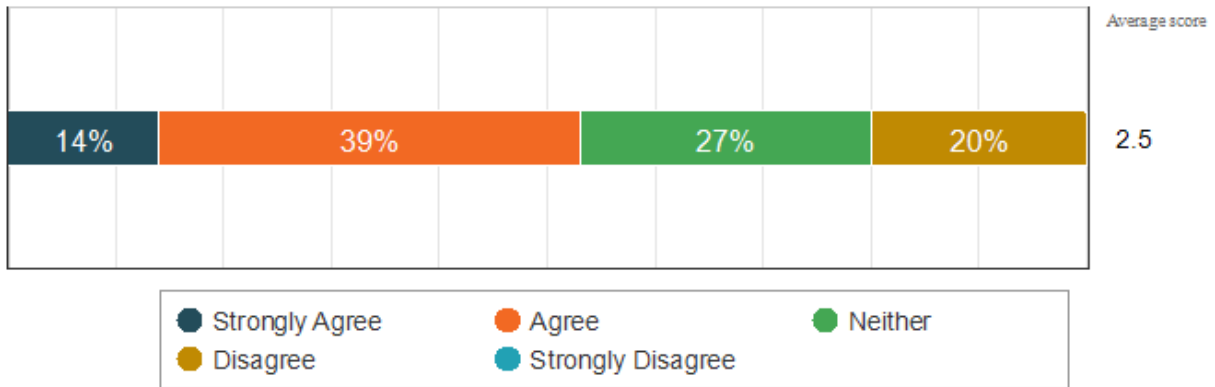


FIGURE 18. Social Media Engagement (SME4) Result

Figure 19 provides the opinions of respondents related to the statement: “Facebook fashion brand pages give me recommendations as per my requirements”. According to the results, 18% of the respondents strongly agreed with it, 49% agreed with it, 22% remained neutral, 9% disagreed with it, and 2% strongly disagreed with it. With an average of 2.3, the majority of the respondents agree that the Facebook page provides recommendations as per their requirements.

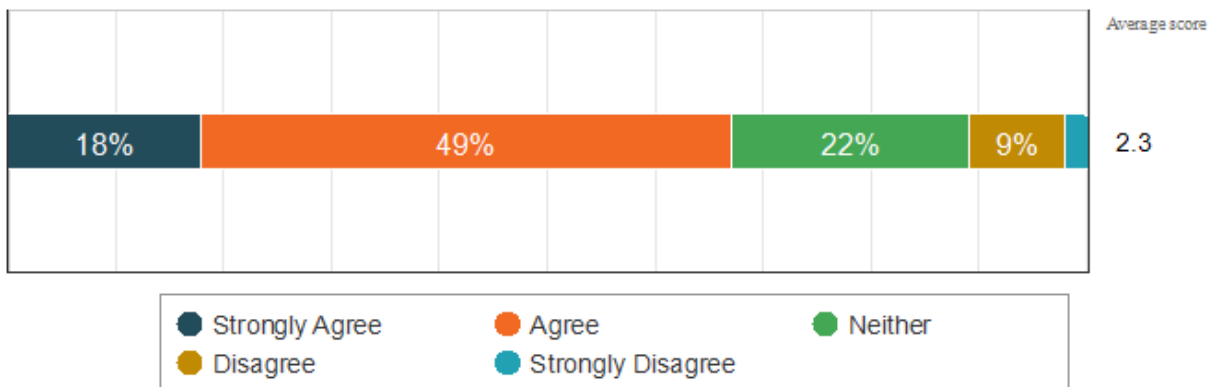


FIGURE 19. Social Media Engagement (SME5) Result

The next statement is, “Sharing by me for information on the brand, product, or services from Facebook fashion brands pages my friends”. The responses gathered are shown in Figure 20. It shows that 14% of the respondents strongly agreed with it, 48% agreed with it, 28% neither agreed nor disagreed, 8% disagreed with it, and the remaining strongly disagreed with it. With an average of 2.4, the majority of the respondents agree with it.

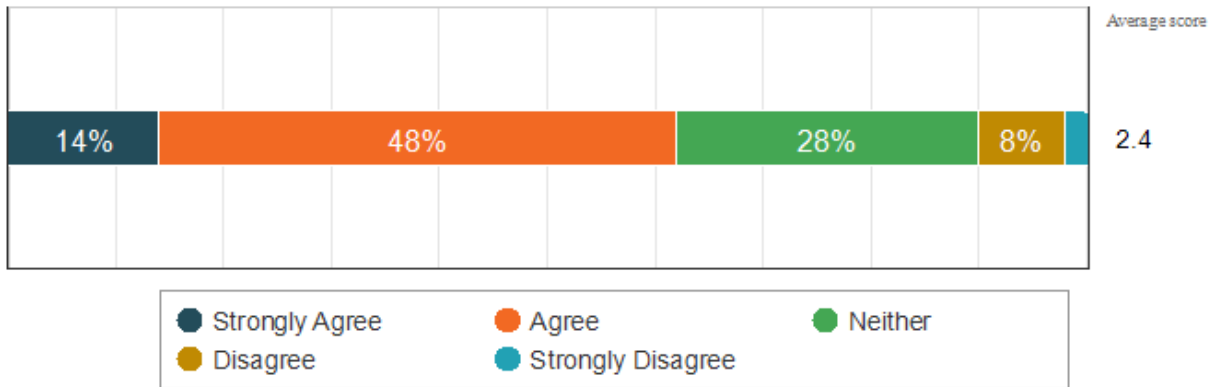


FIGURE 20. Social Media Engagement (SME6) Result

Figure 21 presents the responses to the statement: “Recommendations by me to my friends to visit Facebook fashion brand pages”. According to the results, 16% strongly agreed, 50% agreed, with 18% remained neutral, and 16% disagreed with it. An average of 2.3, shows that the majority of the respondents agreed with it.

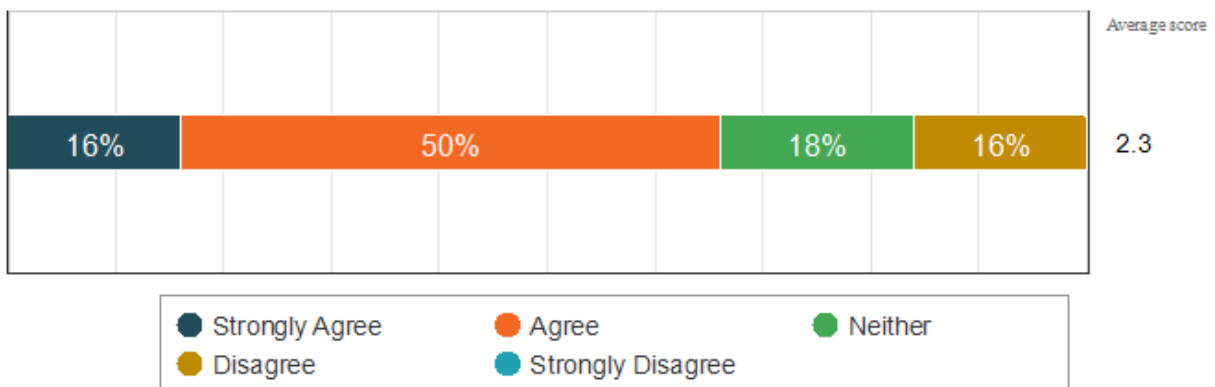


FIGURE 21. Social Media Engagement (SME7) Result

Figure 22 provides the results for the statement, “Encouragement by my friends and awareness to use Facebook fashion brand pages”. According to the results, 17% strongly agreed with the statement that They were encouraged by friends to use the Facebook brand pages for awareness. The remaining agreed with it, 27% remained neutral, 15% disagreed with it, and 3% strongly disagreed with it. With an average of 2.5, it shows that the majority of the respondents agree or neither agree nor disagree with it.

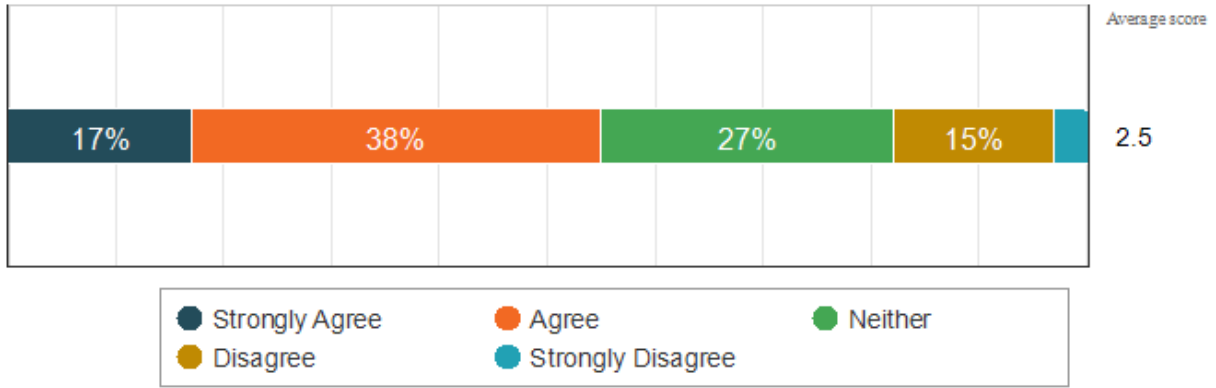


FIGURE 22. Social Media Engagement (SME8) Result

Overall, the eight statements of the variable provided an average response of 2.4. It shows that the majority of the respondents agree that Social Media Engagement has a positive influence on them.

4.2.3 Consumer Purchase Decision

To explore the Consume purchase decisions, four statements are used. These statements are rated by the respondents from 1 to 5 based on agreeing with the statement. The first statement is: “I will purchase the brands recommended by my friends on social media (SM) sites”. Figure 23 presents the result, which shows that 49% of respondents in the majority agreed with it. The remaining 28% strongly agreed with it, 15% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 7% disagreed with it. And 1% strongly disagreed with it. With an average of 2.0, it shows that the majority of the respondents agree to purchase the brands that are recommended on social media sites.

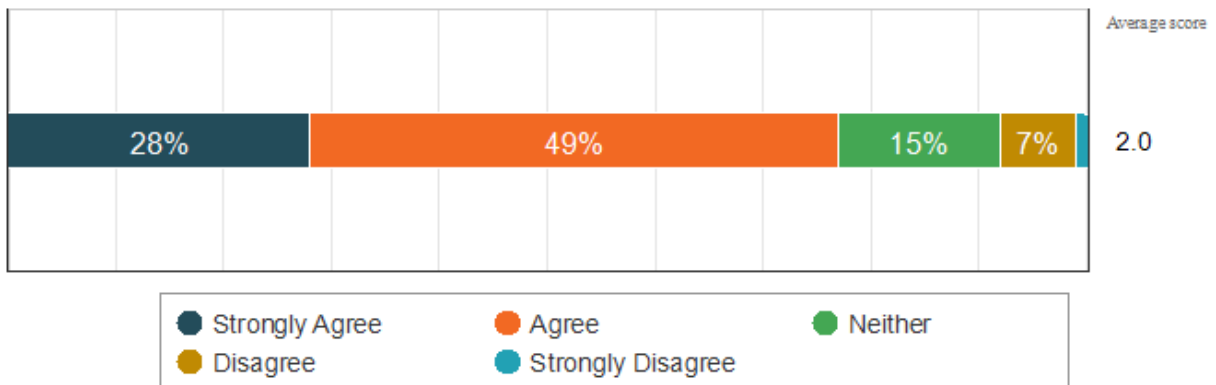


FIGURE 23. Consumer Purchase Decision (CPD1) Result

The next statement to explore consumer purchase decision is, “I will purchase the brands as marketed on social media sites the next time I need a product”. Figure 24 shows that 8% strongly agreed with it, 58% agreed with it, 17% remained neutral, 16% disagreed with it, and 1% strongly disagreed with it. With an average of 2.4, it shows majority of the respondents agreed with it.

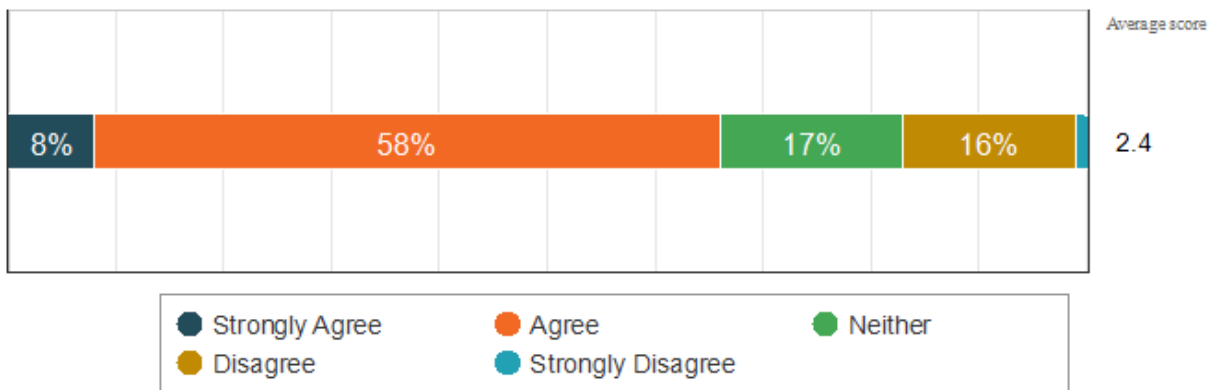


FIGURE 24. Consumer Purchase Decision (CPD2) Result

The next statement is, “I will try the brand as marketing on social media sites”. Figure 25 presents the responses to this statement, which shows that the majority of respondents, 53%, agreed with it. The remaining 18% strongly agreed, 13% remained neutral, and 16% disagreed with it. The average response rate is 2.3, which shows that the majority of the respondents have agreed with it.

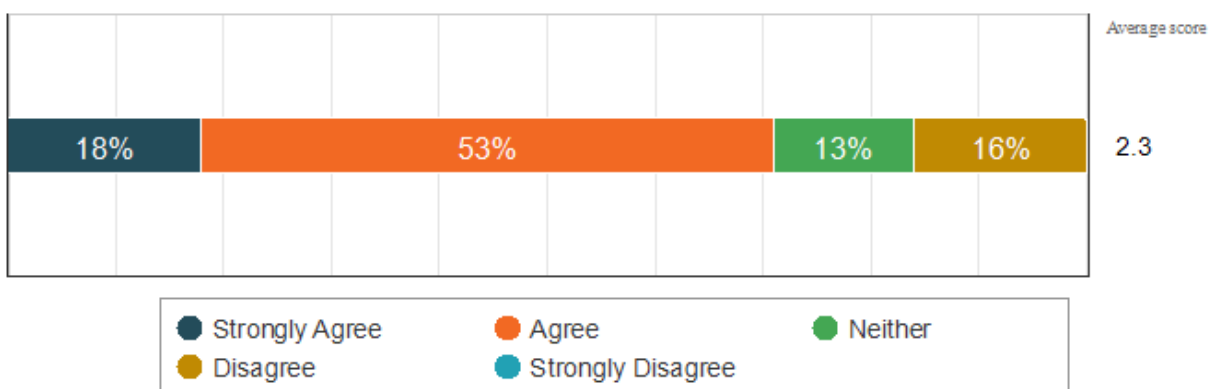


FIGURE 25. Consumer Purchase Decision (CPD3) Result

The last statement is, “I will recommend the brand on social media sites to my friends”. The result for this statement is shown in Figure 26. It shows that 24% strongly agreed to it, 46% agreed to it, 22%

remained neutral, and 8% disagreed to it. The average response rate was 2.1 which shows that the majority agreed with the statement of recommending brands on social media.

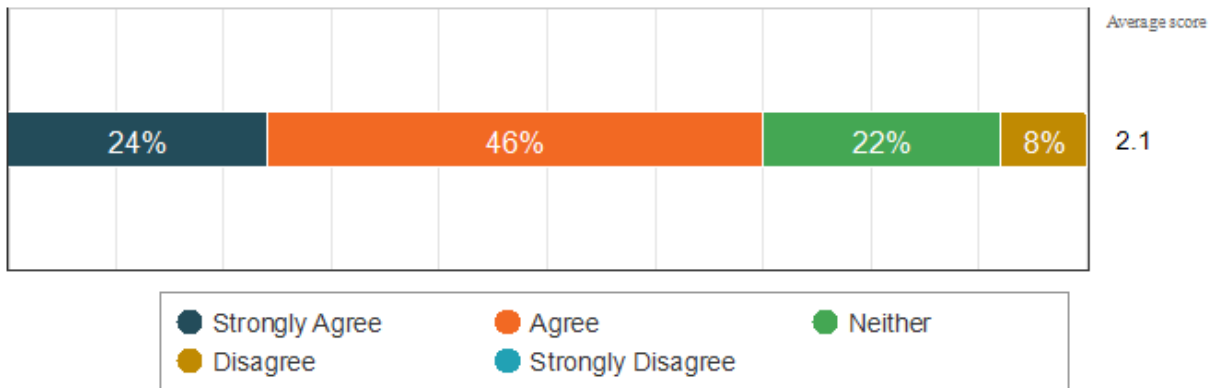


FIGURE 26. Consumer Purchase Decision (CPD4) Result

The Consumer Purchase Decisions provided an overall average response of 2.2. It shows the respondents have positive responses by agreeing with the statements. In the next chapter, these findings are discussed, and the link is created with the theoretical evidence. Based on these results and the discussion made, a conclusion is drawn to the research questions.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This final chapter presents the discussion and conclusion of the study. In the previous chapter, the findings were presented in detail based on the opinions of the respondents. The findings are summarized and aligned with the research problem. The interpretation of the findings is made to understand the research findings and discussion is made by linking to the previous literature. Based on it, implications are drawn that highlight the practical and theoretical contribution of the study. Limitations are discussed based on the context of the study. Lastly, recommendations are given for future studies based on the current study's limitations.

5.1 Summary of Findings

The research aimed to understand the impact of social media marketing and social media engagement by apparel brands on consumer purchase decisions. To achieve this aim, a quantitative study is conducted by selecting Pakistani students in Finland as target respondents. The past studies provided evidence regarding the influence or impact of social media marketing and engagement on consumer purchase decisions (Pitt et al., 2019; Dolan et al., 2019). However, the studies fail to explore niche seraphical segments that are potential target markets for brands offering their products.

The study is expected to address three research questions. The first question inquired about the impact of social media marketing on consumer purchase decisions. The research variables' statements reveals that the majority of the respondents observe a positive role of social media marketing. The study reveals social media marketing helps consumers to get updated information that further helps in understanding what the brand is offering to the consumers. Also, social media marketing provides the newest and latest trends to consumers, and it is revealed to be crucial for retaining customers in the retail industry (Burman, 2010).

The second question inquired about the impact of social media engagement on consumer purchase decisions. Based on the data collected from the respondents by using the structured questionnaire, it is found that consumers engage on social media to get information related to apparel brands. From the research conducted, it is evident that social media helps in sharing and engaging with consumers and

allows consumers to interact with each other. This shows that social media provides a platform for individuals to engage with brands and other consumers. It leads to creating an impact on their buying decisions.

The last question relates to the recommendations for positively affecting consumer purchase decisions. Based on the data collected, the majority of the respondents agreed that they consider an apparel brand that is recommended by their friends on social media sites. Furthermore, the majority of the respondents agreed that social media influences their decisions, and the consumers not only buy products from such brands but also recommend them to others. Therefore, to have a positive impact on consumer purchase decisions, it is recommended to improve social media marketing and engaging activities to create a positive impact on consumer purchase decisions.

5.2 Interpretations

The research findings helped in exploring the nature of the relationship prevailing between social media marketing and engagement with consumer purchase decisions. The findings align with the previous studies, where Yadav and Rahman (2017) stated that social media helps influence consumers' perceptions and opinions by carrying out different activities on digital media platforms. First social media marketing is explored, which is observed to have a significant impact on the perception of consumers regarding a particular brand. As concluded by Kim and Ko (2010), social media helps in creating an image of the brand within the consumer minds, this study also provided evidence regarding the impact of social media marketing on the consumers. The findings on social media marketing's relationship with consumer purchase decisions are according to the expectations. The reason is that Pham and Gammoh (2015) revealed that Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube are the most commonly adopted and preferred social media sites among brands for engaging with brands' content and products.

Furthermore, the relationship between social media engagement and consumer purchase decisions is also found to be similar to the pattern of relationship predicted in the literature. Habibi et al. (2016) supported that social media provides an opportunity for businesses and consumers to interact, similarly, this study also observed a similar kind of interaction on social media with consumers. Furthermore, as revealed by Dolan et al. (2019), the content shared for engaging is found to create a significant impact on the buying decisions of consumers. Based on the literature themes and pattern of relationship, this study also observed a similar pattern of the relationship. This was also expected because

of the increased usage of social media and the dependency of businesses on developing effective social media campaigns.

Lastly, based on the observations and findings acquired, social media is declared an effective and appropriate tool for creating brand awareness. Furthermore, it is found to create a positive and significant impact on the perceptions of consumers. Based on it, the study provides valuable implications that are discussed in the next few sub-chapters. In conclusion, social media marketing and engagement are important for positively affecting the consumer purchase decision.

5.3 Implications of Findings

This study has potential theoretical implications. This study is the first study conducted on Pakistani students located in Finland that helped in understanding the perception and opinions of the young generation related to the social media importance in their buying behavior. Furthermore, the study also provided valuable insights regarding the apparel brands and their dependency on the social media. Lastly, the findings of the study helped in understanding the relationship between the perception of this study's population with the population selected in the previous studies.

From the practical implications, this study provides important evidence for apparel brands to develop their social media campaigns according to the perception of the target audience. This study is of crucial importance to the apparel brands that are interested in targeting Pakistani students in Finland. Moreover, the opinions gathered for exploring the relationship reflect that social media is required by the consumers to gather information and share it. Therefore, apparel brands must have a social media presence and remain connected to it.

5.4 Research Limitations

Based on the nature and context of the study, certain limitations can impact the applicability of the research findings. The limitations of the study are discussed here. First, due to the limited time and resources available, this study is conducted on a population of Pakistani students located in Finland. This limited target population provides the opinions of the niche targeted population based on nationality and locality.

Furthermore, the study is conducted on a sample size of 100 respondents. This is also limited in terms of number of respondents that may or may not present the opinion of the entire population. The study has been conducted to explore the relationship of the study within social media marketing and engagement with consumer purchase decisions by using descriptive analysis that cannot help in determining the magnitude of impact created on the variables.

5.5 Recommendations for Future Studies

This research provided valuable insights regarding the social media marketing and engagement impact on consumer purchase decisions. The study contributed to the prevailing literature gap. However, the limitations identified limit the generalization of the research findings. Based on this, some recommendations are made for conducting any future study. First, the apparel industry targets a wide range of customers belonging to diversified geographical locations. It is recommended that future studies be conducted by increasing the scope of the study by collecting data from different geographical locations. It will help in understanding the social media impact on the purchase decisions of the diversified target group. Second, a future study can be conducted by carrying out inferential statistical testing to determine the magnitude of change created by social media marketing and engagement of consumer purchase decisions. This study will provide strong practical implications because of the important input provided to the apparel brands for developing their social media campaigns accordingly.

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APPENDIX 1. QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is developed for conducting research as a part of an academic degree. The purpose of this study is to understand how social media marketing and social media engagement have affected consumer purchase decisions for Pakistani students in Finland. Participation in this survey is voluntary and one has the right to withdraw from the survey if one doesn't want to continue further. Further, the data acquired will be kept confidential and participant information will be kept anonymous.

Thank you!

SECTIONS

Demographic profile

Gender	Male Female Other
Age	Less than 20 years 20-30 years 31-40 years Above 40 Years
Marital Status	Single Married Divorced Other
Education	Secondary Higher-secondary Bachelors Masters Ph.D. Others

Rate the below statements from 1 to 5 where 1 stands for strongly agree while 5 stands for strongly disagree.

Statements	1	2	3	4	5
Social Media Marketing					

Facebook fashion brand pages offer accurate information on products					
Facebook fashion brand pages offer useful information					
The information provided by Facebook fashion brand pages is comprehensive					
Facebook fashion brand pages offer customized information search					
Contents shown on Facebook fashion brand pages are the newest information					
Anything trendy is available on Facebook fashion brand pages					
Social Media Engagement					
Facebook apparel brand pages enable me to share information with others					
Discussion or exchange of opinion with others is possible through Facebook fashion brand pages					
Easy delivery of my opinion through Facebook apparel brand pages					
Facebook fashion brand pages provide customized service					
Facebook fashion brand pages give me recommendations as per my requirements					
Sharing by me for information on the brand, product, or services from Facebook fashion brands pages my friends					
Recommendations by me to my friends to visit Facebook fashion brand pages					
Encouragement by my friends and awareness to use Facebook fashion brand pages					
Consumer Purchase Decision					
I will purchase the brands recommended by my friends on social media (SM) sites.					
I will purchase the brands as marketed on social media sites the next time I need a product					
I will try the brand as marketing on social media sites					
I will recommend the brand on social media sites to my friends					