Factors Influencing Consumer Purchase Intention in Social Media

Yusufu Chima Jibrin

Submitted to the
Institute of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
Marketing Management

Eastern Mediterranean University
February, 2021
Gazimağusa, North Cyprus

Approval of the Institute of Graduate Studies and Research

_____
Prof. Dr. Ali Hakan Ulusoy
Director

I certify that this thesis satisfies the requirements as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Marketing Management.

_____
Prof. Dr. Şule Aker
Chair, Department of Business Administration

We certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate in scope and quality as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Marketing Management.

_____
Prof. Dr. Mehmet Haluk Köksal
Supervisor

Examining Committee
_____

1. Prof. Dr. Şule Aker   _____

2. Prof. Dr. Mehmet Haluk Köksal   _____

3. Asst. Prof. Dr. Mehmet İslamoğlu   _____

ABSTRACT

A number of factors influence consumer purchase intention especially in the digital environment. With the advent of social media marketing, brands make effort to attract attention of consumers. The primary goal of this research is to explore the factors that influence brand purchase intention (BPI) of consumers in the context of social media environment. The factors examined included social media communication i.e. user-generated (UGSMC) and firm-created communication (FCSMC), brand image (BI) and electronic word of mouth (eWOM). Their respective influence on brand purchase intention was analyzed.

Necessary data was gathered via a random sampling technique where surveys were distributed at populated areas like restaurants and malls within Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. The data collected were analyzed using the SPSS statistical software to evaluate the relationship between the observed variables.

Findings in this study demonstrated that UGSMC and BI have a positive effect on BPI. However, FCSMC and eWOM exhibited a negative association with BPI.

This research contributes to existing literature by further affirming the importance of social media communication and building positive brand image in stimulating favorable purchase intention from customers. It also demonstrates how factors like trust and information overload could hinder the positive influence of firm-created communication and electronic word of mouth on consumer purchase intention.

ÖZ

Dijital ortamda birçok faktör tüketicinin satın alma niyeti üzerinde etkili olmaktadır. Sosyal medya pazarlamasının gelişimi ile markalar tüketicilerin ilgisini çekmek için çaba harcamaktadır. Bu çalışma sosyal medya ortamı bağlamında tüketicilerin marka satın alma niyetini etkileyen faktörleri incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. İncelemeye konu olan faktörler sosyal medya iletişimi (kullanıcı ve firmalar tarafından yaratılan), marka imajı ve elektronik ağızdan ağıza iletişimi içermektedir.

Araştırma için gerekli olan veriler anket yöntemiyle Kuzey Kıbrıs Cumhuriyetinde restoran ve alışveriş merkezleri gibi kalabalık yerlerde rastlantısal örnekleme tekniği ile elde edildi. Söz konusu veriler gözlemlenen değişkenleri değerlendirmek üzere SPSS istatistik yazılımı ile analiz edildi.

Çalışmanın bulguları kullanıcı tarafından yapılan sosyal medya iletişimi ve marka imajının tüketicilerin satın alma niyeti üzerinde olumlu bir etkisi olduğunu göstermiştir. Bununla beraber, firma tarafından yapılan sosyal medya iletişiminin tüketicilerin satın alma niyeti üzerinde olumsuz bir etkiye sahip olduğunu ortaya koymuştur.

Bu araştırma sosyal medya iletişiminin ve tüketicilerin olumlu satın alma niyetlerini teşvik etmede pozitif marka imajı geliştirmenin önemini daha iyi ortaya koymuştur. Ayrıca, tüketici güveni ve aşırı bilgi gibi faktörlerin firma tarafında yapılan sosyal medya iletişimi ve elektronik ağızdan ağıza iletişimin tüketicilerin satın alma niyetleri üzerindeki olumlu etkisini azalttığını göstermiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Firma-tarafından yaratılan sosyal medya iletişimi, kullanıcı-tarafından yapılan sosyal medya iletişimi, Marka imajı, Satın alma niyeti

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to show my utmost gratitude and appreciation to my loving family, who provided me with all the love and support during my research, and kept me focused with their prayers and words of encouragement.

I would also love to express my sincere gratitude to my Advisor Prof. Dr. Mehmet Haluk Köksal for his consistent and continuous guidance over the course of this work.

I am able to complete this work today due to the support and love I got from them.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BPI   Brand Purchase Intention

EMU   Eastern Mediterranean University

eWOM   Electronic Word Of Mouth

FCSMC   Firm-Created Social Media Communication

PI   Purchase Intention

SMC   Social Media Communication

UGC   User-Generated Communication

WOM   Word Of Mouth

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

Today, it is no doubt that technology plays a vital role in business innovation. More importantly, since the advent of the web 2.0 technology, businesses have continued to find ways to interact with target customers using the various platforms that are available on social media. It may affect an organization negatively if it chooses not to interact with its customers via the various social media platforms available. These platforms have undoubtedly grown to be relevant marketing tools of interaction for businesses with their target audience. They have provided a platform for global and local brands to reach more customers than they could have traditionally.

On the other hand, today, a substantial portion of customers' time is spent on social media. This gives various brands an opportunity to reach their target customers directly compared to the known traditional means like TVs, radios and newspapers that were available. This is why social media marketing has become a major buzzword today.

Communication today, is taking advantage of various social media platforms and the level of interaction they create between firms and their target customers (Ogunmokun, 2017; Kumar & Singh, 2020). Consequently, a good number of companies have begun building communities primarily online by taking advantage of social media as a means to promote their offerings (Chou, 2019).

Furthermore, Bernoff and Li (2011) proposed earlier also that opportunities are provided by social media platforms for customers to develop interaction with other customers. This implies that, unlike prior traditional means, firms and their brands do not solely control the means of communication and message encoded, customers on the other hand can also generate communication about the brands in question hence, user-generated. Consumers generally, are increasingly shunning popular media channels like radio, magazines and TVs and are rather turning to social media sites to obtain information about brands (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). This certainly limits the control of firm over their brand perception and equity (Berthon et al., 2007). Information generated by other customers on social media platforms have proven trustworthy and reliable to other customers than the traditional media (Keller, 2009). Thus, understanding that customer perception of brands is not solely controlled by the brand owners themselves rather along with the information generated by other customers about the brand in focus.

Furthermore, the advent of platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn and several others have created a new dimension of word of mouth i.e. eWOM (electronic word of mouth) and created valuable opportunities for generating positive word of mouth for brands if properly managed (Erkan & Evans, 2016). This also makes it possible for customers to generate and share information about brands with other customers using the different social media platforms as the case may be (Nuseir, 2019). The concept of eWOM today is highly relevant especially when considering consumer empowerment. It is also considered an effective marketing tool for influencing consumer purchase behaviors and attitudes (Abubakar et al., 2017) e.g. purchase intention and actual purchase. This makes it possible for a free flow of information exchange about products among internet users (Belanche et al., 2020). Thus, a large

population of consumers trusting to get information about products from social media websites as opposed to other alternatives (Elci et al., 2017).

Everson (2014) posits that, for brands to position themselves in a desired place in the minds of consumers, they must take advantage of a social analytics team for the purpose of engaging and monitoring target markets on the various social media platforms. This will help brand managers stay abreast of facts and information spread about their brands and give them opportunities to provide strategic response promptly when necessary.

1.2 Research Gap

While a few number of research have made attempts to analyze the influence of social media communication (SMC) on eWOM and brand equity within North Cyprus (e.g. Sagynbekova et al. 2020; Alrwashdeh et al., 2019), few research has been conducted on how variables like eWOM, SMC and brand image (BI) stimulate brand purchase intention (BPI).

This will contribute to existing literature by showing further emphasizing the various factors that contribute to purchase intention (PI). This will also help brand managers understand better ways to use social media platforms to their advantage.

1.3 Research Questions

Few questions were raised in this research with the aim of providing answers to them. They include:

1. When considering positive effects on brand purchase intention, what is the role of social media communication?

2. Regarding the internet how does eWOM stimulate purchase intention?

3. Does brand image influence purchase intention?

1.4 Research Objectives

This research aims at examining the effects of SMC, eWOM, and BI on stimulating PI of customers within North Cyprus. In carrying out this examination, the research will distinguish between firm generated communication (FGSMC) and user generated communication (UGSMC). This is to ascertain the level of effect each has on the outcome variable.

Furthermore this research aims to identify the various factors that are associated with consumer purchase intention and how brand managers are to strategically use them to their advantage.

1.5 Scope of the Study

The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus was the primary location of conducting this research. Survey questionnaires will be distributed to residents in the country with focus on domestic brands that have social media presence within the country.

1.6 Limitations of the Study

Considering TRNC is a predominantly an island filled with students, much of the sample drawn are from students which may not be a proper representation of a larger population. In addition, data gathered was done over a short period of time considering it was done in partial fulfilment of the thesis requirement hence data collection was limited to only TRNC and domestic brands within the country.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

A combination of factors influence purchase intention in various ways. This research was geared towards examining some of these various factors especially in today's era. Recently, the rave surrounding online content creation has constantly been on the increase (Koiso-Kanttila, 2004). This is consequently because of the internet usage growth. One of the main benefits the internet has offered in recent years is the ease of access to information for consumers. Information concerning product price, features, experience and availability are now easily accessed by people thus reducing issues of information asymmetry (Brown, Pope & Voges, 2003). Due to this level information density, it is no wonder the generation of online word of mouth is being rapidly created by consumers. According to Anderson (1998), Word of Mouth (WOM) can be referred to as information provided by consumers, customers or people in general regarding brand offerings and services, which would in turn influence the purchasing, decision of consumers positively or negatively.

This constant growth in internet usage serves as motivation for brands and marketers to adopt online strategies for campaigns in order to generate more positive online WOM or in this case, eWOM. Thus, brands have adopted modern strategies of communicating their message through social media and other electronic platforms to enhance a positive outlook for the brand (Tariq et al., 2017). In addition, consumers

are also being facilitated in their purchasing decisions as they now have access to information generated by other customers online regarding their experiences with brands and their offerings i.e. eWOM (Zhang, Law & Li, 2010).

As of recently, according to Hootsuite (2017), social media make up over seventy percent of the total online population. Hence, marketers employing social media especially if they intend to reach a larger audience with their brands (Schivinski et al., 2019). As of 2017, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter are among the largest social media platforms with over 2 billion users globally, Facebook being the most prominent (socialbakers, 2017; Hootsuite, 2017). According to statistics from Hootsuite (2017), users are active on the Facebook platform at least 8 times a day and for twenty minutes on the average. Thus, it is only of high priority that brands and marketers take advantage of such statistics by creating avenues for communication on these platforms. Consequently, brands have rightfully responded to this. There are currently over seventy million pages on social media created by brands (Tariq et al., 2017).

As more brand pages are created on these social media platforms, more opportunities are created for them to engage and interact with their consumers online (Berthon, Pitt, Plangger, & Shapiro, 2012). The essence of firms using the various social media platforms as means of communication is to positively influence the perception of consumers about their various product offerings and brands whilst maintaining and expanding their customer base (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). Furthermore, consumers are able to interact with brand related content online thus contributing to and creating similar content (Schivinski, Christodoulides, & Dabrowski, 2016; Muntinga, Smit, & Moorman, 2012).

Few works of research have successfully made evident that the participation in social media communication by brands produces advantageous effects on emotional and cognitive dimensions of brands such as brand trust, awareness, attitude and commitment (Langaro et al., 2015; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2015). In addition, further research have shown that it does positively influence consumer behavioral factors like WOM (Wallace et al., 2014; Hutter et al., 2013) and consumer purchase intention (Kim & Kim, 2004; Hutter et al., 2013).

2.2 Social Media Communication

Social media is categorized as online platforms and apps that facilitate online interactions, content sharing and collaborations (Richter & Koch 2007). According to Safko and Brake (2009) social media may also be described as behaviors, activities and practices among various groups of people who share knowledge, information and opinions online via interactive media. These platforms also referred to as Web 2.0 platforms, possess features that allow online communication, interaction, instant feedback and knowledge sharing (Robinson, 2007). They create opportunities for users to access information, engage and share this information with other online users. Firms, on the other hand via online means of communication are able to create avenues to interact with their target audience and facilitate value co-creation (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2010; Kietzmann et al., 2011;). Social media platforms give room for spontaneous interactions among users and also between the receiver and the communicator in case of firms. What this implies is that messages encoded by firms on the platforms appear less formal or commercial rather, organic. This makes receivers consider such messages more reliable and authentic (Wood & Burkhalter, 2014).

Consequently, social media has emerged as the new strategic platform for brands to establish communication with their target audience. It provides several unique features and benefits for both users and firms alike, some of which have now been employed to influence consumers positively (Jansen et al., 2009). Prior to the advent of social media platforms, previous means of communication gave very limited opportunity for feedbacks and consumer interaction. Consumers mostly relied on the trust that firm generated messages were true and authentic whilst also having limited access to word of mouth endorsements from other consumers. However, today social networking platforms have become major source of information and consumer socialization, providing an avenue for information sharing over the internet (Vinerean et al., 2013). Instagram, Facebook, Twitter among many others have become the predominant platforms for communication and instigating brand-related interactions (Reynolds-McIlnay & Taran, 2010). Consumers on another hand have taken keen interest in social media platforms generating user content thus also facilitating value co-creation (Heinonen, 2011). According to Smith and Zook (2011), for brands to maintain competitive advantage and gain loyal customers, they must be able to initiate customer interactions effectively on social media. Whilst personal interaction is the primary focus of platforms on social media, they also have potentials to provide social capital to brands and firms (Gillin & Schwartzman, 2011). This consequently facilitates the gathering of marketing intelligence and avenue for identifying opportunities via the observation of online behaviors of the target market on social media sites.

It is noteworthy that both users and firms actively take part in creating, generating and circulate information about brands (Bambauer-Sachse & Mangold, 2011). However, there are differences in the sources of content (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2015, 2016; Bruhn et al., 2013) hence the necessity to clearly differentiate them and examine their

level of influence on other users. On one hand, online content created and generated by firms is often referred to as firm-created content by a number of authors as it is viewed as a promotion tool (Bruhn et al., 2012). This is largely because such content is initiated by the brand with the aim of communicating to a target audience and consequently trigger interaction. Consumers begin to receive brand-related social media content as soon as they start following these brands on the social media platforms or have any form of online interaction with the brands or their products. These consumers are further exposed to content created by firms targeted at promoting followers' social interactions, information sharing and entertainment (de Vries et al., 2017; Shao, 2009). In other words, firm-created social media communication is targeted at attracting and ensuring customer's participation via consuming shared contents, interacting with content shared (like commenting with opinions, liking or disliking posts etc.) and sharing brand-related content with their friendship network (Schivinski et al., 2016; Langaro et al., 2015; Muntinga et al., 2012).

On the other hand, user-generated content are those originated by users outside formal settings, independent of firms' control and are available to the public over the internet (OECD, 2007). Consumers when including brands in their online content often either share information about brands that are congruent with their self-representation (brand-centered) or create stories that are centered on themselves (user-centered) (Smith, Fischer, & Yongjian, 2012). Consumers who share brand-centered content usually do this to air their views and perspective with respect to the products. These opinions may be negative (i.e. user complaints about the brand/product), or positive (user recommending the brand/product). According to previous studies, such content shared relating to the brands predominantly has a significant influence on behavioral responses of other users (Smith et al., 2012; Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Chan, & Joy,

2012; Cui, Lui). Online users tend to perceive user-generated content as more reliable and trustworthy considering they are independent of the firm and are not viewed as traditional advertisements (Christodoulides, Jevons, & Bonhomme, 2012). Furthermore, users who generate content often stand as positive advocates for brands via sharing their views concerning the brands to other users (Bright et al., 2008).

2.3 Electronic Word of Mouth

Several research have demonstrated that consumers' word of mouth exerts an enormous level of influence on consumer behavior and attitudes towards brands and their product than other alternative sources of information available (Smith et al., 2005; Schindler & Bickart, 2001; Bambauer-Sachse & Mangold, 2011; Trusov et al., 2009). Word of Mouth (or WOM), as commonly referred to, is a communication means that is fully controlled by the consumers or customers and absent of the firm's interference or the market (Brown, Broderick, & Lee, 2007). In order to facilitate their purchase decisions, consumers generally would seek for information about products from various sources available (Kuo & Nakhata, 2019).

However, consumers are more trusting of information gotten from other consumers and friends than information provided by the marketers and retailers via advertisements and promotions (Dellarocas et al., 2007; Liu, 2006). Today, since the advent of the internet and the unprecedented growth in the popularity of social media, eWOM has become one of the most trusted information sources by consumers to aid in their buying decisions (Zhu & Zhang, 2010).

Rosario et al. (2020), in their work, opined that eWOM should be approached in the light of any form information about products generated online by consumers. As

aforementioned, this source of information appears to be more trusted by consumers and is considered reliable than information originating from the firms (Arndt, 1967; Kanuk & Schiffman, 1995). According to some statistics released in recent years, over 90% of consumers seek eWOM as their primary source of information and a major percentage of them (40%) after reading a number of reviews online develop an opinion about a brand or product before patronizing or purchasing (Shrestha, 2016).

eWOM has made information available on platforms where consumers can express their views and opinions about a product offering, brand or service. Due to its ubiquitous nature, level of reach and ease of access, eWOM is considered more effective when compared with the traditional WOM communication (e.g. Schindler & Bickart, 2001; Chatterjee, 2001; Mayzlin, 2006; Mayzlin & Godes, 2004; Walsh et al., 2004).

2.4 Brand Image

Brand image has since the 50s been established as relevant concept in research focusing on customer behavior (Riaz, 2015). In broad terms, it is seen as a brand's perception by a consumer in terms of the various brand associations and communication and what is retained in the consumer's memory (Herzog, 1963; Newman, 1957). In other words, it is seen as the combination of impressions influenced by various consumer interactions with a brand i.e. consumption and observation (Dichter, 1985; Newman, 1957).

Brand image forms the fundamental aspect of a brand (De Chenatony & Riley, 1998). Brand image influences the consumer in a favorable way by causing them to act positive towards the brand's offerings (Keller, 1993). Thus, sustaining brand image is

among the several relevant tools of marketing strategy for organizations and brands (Roth, 1995; Keller, 1993; Aaker, 1991). This is why brand image serves as one of the most vital assets for any organization. It facilitates the establishment of a stronger competitive advantage for the organization whilst also effectively positioning the company in the minds of the customers favorably. This consequently stimulates loyalty from customers towards the company and the brand (Deheshti et al., 2016). Brands that succeeds in building well-known and positive image provide themselves a favorable marketing strategy as the created image exerts a powerful influence on consumer purchases and positive effects on how consumers perceive the brand (Groonroos, 2002).

2.5 Purchase Intention

According to Schiffman and Kanuk (2010), purchase intention can be described as a behavior shown by customers in terms of transactions after properly evaluating the product in focus. It is the likelihood behavior of a customer purchasing a product (Alford & Biswas, 2000). The higher the purchase intention of the customer, the more likely they are to make the purchase. Consumers in general, prior to product purchase, conduct relevant research about the product and gather necessary information based on a number of factors like previous experiences, user reviews and the environment. Usually, opinions and judgements about these products are formed by the consumer after collecting adequate information and product evaluation and comparisons are done (Wang, Cheng & Chu, 2012).

2.6 Hypotheses Development

2.6.1 Social Media Communication and Purchase Intention

Today, the possibility of firms and users to interact more effectively has certainly become a reality as a result of social media platforms. Information about brands are

easily shared on these platforms and firms are able to effectively communicate about their offerings and brand with a window for generating feedback. The implication of this is that, information provided on social media platforms about brands (by consumers or firms) would largely influence the consumers' intention to purchase (Nunes et al., 2018). Considering social media have demonstrated being an effective tool for improving interaction of users and customers, and sharing product information, the significance of social media in the online business world cannot be overemphasized (Kwahk & Kim, 2017).

On one hand, in order to interact effectively with customers and positively influence their decisions, brands can take advantage of social media as a strategic tool (McClure & Seock, 2020). It provides many opportunities for brands to increase customers' intimacy with the brand, attract potential customers and interact with them (Mersey et al., 2010). According to Wang et al. (2012), the attitudes of customers towards a product can be positively related to consumption-related communication about the product on social media. Thus, influencing the consumer's intention to purchase or engage with the product. In their analysis on how social media communication initiated by brands affect consumer purchase decision process, Hutter et al. (2013) discovered that consumers' interaction with the social media activities influenced all the decision-making stages including purchase.

On the other hand, these platforms are seen by consumers as more reliable and trustworthy in terms of information about brands as they give very little control to the brands. Hence, increasing the possibility of consumer positive attitudes towards the brands and subsequently influencing their purchase decisions (Hutter et al., 2013). Social media also have demonstrated the strong tendency of increasing sales

performance for brands and purchase intention of customers (Zhu & Zhang, 2010; Ko & Kim, 2010). Therefore this research hypothesizes that:

H1a: Firm created communication influences brand purchase intention positively

H1b: User-generated communication influences brand purchase intention positively

2.6.2 eWOM and Purchase Intention

When making purchase decisions, information generated by eWOM tend to reduce the level of ambiguity involved and risk hence increasing the chances of consumer purchase intention (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis, 2014; Wang et al., 2012; Chatterjee, 2001). Research conducted by Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006) also affirmed that information shared online about brands influence the intention of customers to make purchase. In an also similar research, Berger et al. (2010) discovered that the number of online comments by users and the intention to purchase the specified brand had a significant relationship. Ideally, products with positive comments and reviews record higher sales (Lee et al., 2011). However, the intention to purchase reduces as well if the product generates more negative comments and reviews as the exposes the weaknesses of the specified product (Park & Lee, 2008). Interestingly, research show that negative reviews and comments have a stronger influence on purchase decision hence firms must ensure to guard against such negative reviews (Lee et al., 2011). In addition, Alharbi et al. (2020) also found a positive correlation between eWOM communication and purchase intention among online users in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, seeing the importance of eWOM communication and its relevance in influencing purchase decision, this study also proposes thus:

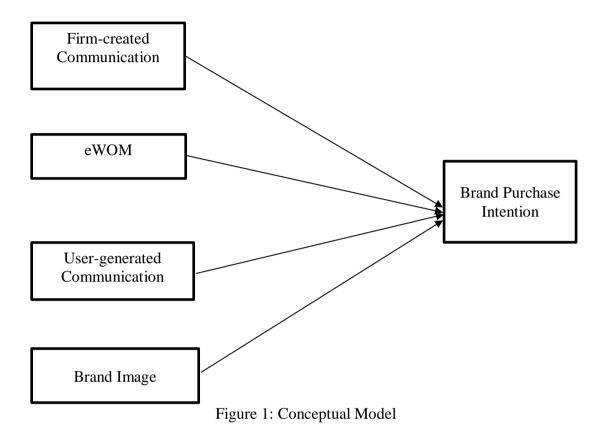**H2**: eWOM positively influences purchase intention

2.6.3 Brand Image and Purchase Intention

As consumers learn of specific brands and gather information about them, they generate perceptions, emotions and ideas about the brand (Keller, 1993) which could be either favorable or unfavorable for the brands. Considering feelings of trust, confidence, uniqueness and security can be instigated by brands, building brand image can be seen as a fundamental means for reducing or eliminating levels of uncertainty and facilitating the consumer decision-making process by providing relevant information about the brand via communication (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 1993; Erdem et al., 2002). Factors like organizations expected income or revenue, competitive advantage, consumers' willingness to pay premium prices, market strategy can be heavily influenced by brand image (Brakus et al., 2009; Chen, 2010) thus paying attention to this concept is vital for corporate survival. According to Keller (2003), by effectively linking consumers' memories of the brand and the various unique brand associations along with efficient marketing communication, an organization can successfully develop a positive brand image.

Furthermore, brand image could serve as a significant predictor of purchase decision (Okonkwo, 2007; Lee et al., 2008) considering it adds a significant amount of value to the organizations (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2012). Research has shown that organizations with relatively strong brand image generate higher purchase intention thus the more positive the image, the higher the likelihood of purchase (Khanna et al., 2007; Cronin & Taylor, 1992). In addition, organizations that succeed in creating a superior image in the minds of consumers increase their chances of being patronized by consumers (Pitta & Katsanis, 1995). Invariably, consumers would exhibit more positive disposition towards a brand if the brand possesses a favorable brand image (Aghekyan-Simonian et al., 2012). Consumers also, are more likely to purchase

products with positive and well-known image online (Lee & Tan, 2003). Thus this research proposes that:

H3: Brand image positively influences brand purchase intention

Figure 1: Conceptual Model

Chapter 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Overview

This research examines the factors that influence brand purchase intention within the social media context. A number of factors were considered i.e. FGSMC, UGSMC, BI and eWOM. Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus was the location of the conducted research. The rest of this chapter explains the details in methodology of this research.

3.2 Research Design

A quantitative approach was employed for this research by following a random sampling technique, which involved distributing survey questions for data collection. Voluntary participants living in TRNC, majorly students were given the surveys. Giving the large numbers of students on the island from various nationalities, this helped in gathering rich data from the various nationalities available. Furthermore, appropriate statistical software was used analyze the responses gathered.

3.3 Data Collection

Necessary permission within the boundaries of ethical practices for conduction of research was obtained from the Eastern Mediterranean University research ethics board. The survey questionnaires were then distributed to respondents willing to participate in the study with their consent fully obtained and voluntary participation and confidentiality guaranteed. They were distributed randomly to willing respondents at restaurants, dormitories, and shopping malls.

The questionnaire was prepared in English language and separated into different sections. Items measuring the social media behavior of respondents were included in the first section.

The second section consisted of items measuring the variables in the conceptual model. Firm created social media communication was measured using four items. User-generated communication was also measured by four items. Five items were used to measure electronic word-of-mouth. Five items including were used to measure perceived brand image. Finally, brand purchase intention was measured by four items, which included "I am willing to recommend that others buy this product/brand" among many others. All items in this section were measured on a Likert scale ranging from "Strongly disagree" (1) to "Strongly agree" (5). The table below depicts the items and their sources:

Table 1: Items and their sources

VARIABLE	NO. OF ITEMS	SOURCE
Firm-generated Communication	4	Schivinski and Dabrowski, (2014)
User-generated Communication	4	Schivinski and Dabrowski, (2014)
Brand Purchase Intention	4	Yoo, Donthu, and Lee (2000)
E-Word of Mouth	5	(Mirza & Almana, 2013)
Brand Image	5	Lien et al. (2015)

Finally, the socio-demographic section focused on items like gender, nationality, income level and other relevant demographic items.

3.4 Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used to further analyze the data collected. Each component underwent a confirmatory factor analysis to measure the reliability and consistency of the scale of measurement considering the factors are an already established scale. Furthermore, correlation, ANOVA and multiple-regression analyses were also conducted accordingly.

Chapter 4

FINDINGS

4.1 Demographic Profile of the Participants

The results of the frequency analysis are presented in Table 1, which shows the distribution of the demographic of participants. The males accounted for 57.6 percent (n = 144) while 42.4 percent were female (n = 106). In terms of age, the majority of the respondents were in the range 18 to 27 years old which was 72.4 percent of the total sample (n = 181). The second most represented age group was 28 to 37 years old, by 25.6 percent (n = 64).

There were only two categories of education level represented in the sample: the university level constituting of any year of undergraduate level, and post-graduate level consisting of Master and PhD level. The majority of the respondents (69.6 percent, n = 174) fell within the first category while the remaining 30.4 percent (n = 76) had a post-graduate level of education. In terms of marital status, 97 percent of the participants were single (n = 235) while the remaining 6 percent (n = 15) were married. There were in total 30 nationalities represented in the sample, although some were more represented than others. For instance, the four most represented countries in the order of occurrence were respectively Nigeria with 25.2 percent (n = 63), Turkey with 10.8 percent (n = 27), Iran and Morocco with 8.4 percent (n = 21) each.

Table 2: Sample profile (n = 250)

Demographic variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	144	57.6
Female	106	42.4
Total	250	100
Age		
18-27	181	72.4
28-37	64	25.6
38-47	3	1.2
48-57	2	0.8
Total	250	100
Education		
University	174	69.6
Master and PHD	76	30.4
Marital Status		
Single	235	94.0
Married	15	6.0
Employment status		
Public and Private Sector Employee	7	2.8
Unemployed	243	97.2
Monthly income		
$0 to $500	221	88.4
$501 to $1,500	16	6.4
$1,501 to $2,500	11	4.4
$2,501 to $3,500	2	0.8
Nationality		
Nigeria	63	25.2
Turkey	27	10.8
Iran	21	8.4
Morrocco	21	8.4
Others	118	46.9

Nearly all the participants reported to be unemployed (97.2 percent, n = 243) and only a residual 2.8 percent of participants (n = 7) reported to be employed in a public or private organization. In the same vein, the overwhelming majority (88.4 percent, n = 221) had a monthly income reaching up to $500; the second most represented group

(6.4 percent, n = 16) had a monthly income ranging from \$501 to \$1,500; the third

most represented group (4.4 percent, n = 11) earned between \$1,501 and \$2,500

monthly.

Table 3: Social media behavior

	Frequency	Percentage
Time do you spend on Social Media		
More than two hours a day	220	88.0
One to two hours a day	21	8.4
Less than one hour a day	9	3.6
Which of the following do you utilize the most often?		
Websites	52	20.8
Facebook	9	3.6
Blogs	2	0.8
Instagram	187	74.8
Brand in TRNC you follow on Social Media		
ADIDAS	14	5.6
APPLE	6	2.4
CAFÉ HAN	1	0.4
COFFEMANIA	5	2.0
CONVERSE	8	3.2
D AND P PERFUME	2	0.8
DE FACTO	17	6.8
DYNASTY	1	0.4
GLORIA JEANS	11	4.4
JAMIES CAFÉ	4	1.6
LC WAIKIKI	39	15.6
MACKBEAR	8	3.2
MADAME COCO	1	0.4
MAVI	6	2.4
MOUSTACHE	10	4.0
NEW BALANCE	7	2.8
NIKE	36	14.4
OOPS	1	0.4
SAMSUNG	3	1.2
SHOE FOR ME	30	12.0
TEETA	5	2.0
TERRANOVA	20	8.0
VANS	15	6.0
With regards to social media advertisements		
I frequently pay attention to social media ads	98	39.2
I carefully read the social media ads	69	27.6
I frequently visit social media ads websites	67	26.8
I wish I had a way to block social media ads	13	5.2
I have never noticed social media ads	3	1.2
Have you ever clicked on a Social media ad?		
Yes many times	115	46.0
Yes but only a few times	117	46.8
Yes but only by accident	9	3.6
Never will do that	9	3.6

If you have clicked on an advertisement on social media, which one of the following is the main reason that explains your action		
I want to make a purchase	94	37.6
I want to search for a particular product	67	26.8
I am curious to see what the company has to offer	79	31.6
I click by accident	1	0.4
I never click on ads	9	3.6

The participants were also asked about the time they spend on average in social media. 88 percent (n = 220) spent more than two hours daily, followed by 8.4 percent who spent one to two hours daily, and only 3.6 percent (n = 9) spent less than an hour per day on social media. Further regarding the platform they use most often, 74.8 percent of the participants (n = 187) reportedly used Instagram, followed by the 20.8 percent (n = 52) who used website.

With respect to the stance on social media advertisements, 39.2 percent (n = 98) reported that they frequently pay attention to social media advertisements, 27.6 percent (n = 69) reported that they carefully read the advertisements on social media, and 26.8 percent (n = 67) frequently visit social media ads website. There respondents who instead wished they could block social media ads (5.2 percent, n = 13) and only 1.2 percent (n = 3) never noticed social media ads.

The majority of respondents had volitionally clicked on a social media ad. Specifically, 46 percent (n = 115) revealed to have clicked several times and 46.8 percent (n = 117) indicated to have done it only few times. The remaining participants indicated to have either done it accidentally or vowed never to do that. Further there were some reasons behind clicking on social media ads. For example, 37.6 percent (n = 94) who clicked wanted to make a purchase, 26.8 percent (n = 67) looked out for a particular product,

and 31.6 percent (n = 79) clicked on ads by pure curiosity about the offerings of the focal company.

Lastly, the bands that were followed by the participants in the TRNC were surveyed and there were in total 23 brands. The most followed brands however were from the apparel industry and represented by LC WAIKIKI with 15.6 percent (n = 39), followed by NIKE with 14.4 percent (n = 36), SHOE FOR ME with 12 percent (n = 36), and TERRANOVA with 8 percent (n = 20), DE FACTO with 6.8 percent (n = 17), of participants, respectively.

4.2 Psychometric Properties of the Instruments

The scales' items were subjected to a confirmatory factor analysis to assess the dimensionality, validity and reliability. To assess the internal consistency and reliability of the measures, the Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability coefficients were employed. As presented in Table 4, they respectively exceeded the 0.70 cut-off (Hair et al., 2006; Bernstein & Nunnally, 1994). This suggested that the five scales were reliable.

To assess the convergent validity, the standardized factor loadings of the items and average variance extracted were scrutinized. The results also in Table 4 indicated that the standardized factor loadings ranged from 0.701 to 0.949 and thus exceeded the threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2006). Moreover, the average variance extracted of all the constructs also met the satisfactory criterion (> 0.50) following standards set in prior research (Hair et al., 2006). Overall, these provided adequate support for convergent validity.

Table 4: Confirmatory factor analysis results

Variables and items	SFL	CA	CR	AVE
FCSMC		0.82	0.881	0.65
FCSMC 1	0.792			
FCSMC 2	0.760			
FCSMC 3	0.823			
FCSMC 4	0.847			
User-generated social media communication		0.857	0.903	0.702
UGSMC 1	0.701			
UGSMC 2	0.895			
UGSMC 3	0.895			
UGSMC 4	0.844			
eWOM		0.84	0.883	0.602
eWOM 1	0.776			
eWOM 2	0.792			
eWOM 3	0.777			
eWOM 4	0.778			
eWOM 5	0.754			
Brand Purchase Intention		0.86	0.888	0.667
BPI 1	0.785			
BPI 2	0.726			
BPI 3	0.789			
BPI 4	0.949			
Brand Image		0.876	0.908	0.664
BI 1	0.820			
BI 2	0.828			
BI 3	0.806			
BI 4	0.817			
BI 5	0.803			

Note: SFL = standardized factor loading, CA = Cronbach's alpha, CR = composite reliability, AVE = average variance extracted. All SFL are significant at $p < 0.001$

The construct discriminant validity was assessed using relevant criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The results indicated that the square root of each construct's average variance extracted was greater than the each pair of bivariate correlations. Moreover

the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) method was used to complement the Fornell & Larcker criterion. HTMT values not exceeding 0.90 are considered to be satisfactory (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015). The highest HTMT value was 0.847. In all, these findings presented in Table 5 lent support for discriminant validity.

Table 5: Discriminant validity results

Criterion	1	2	3	4	5
1. BPI	*0.817*				
2. FCSMC	0.478	*0.806*			
3. BI	0.742	0.533	*0.815*		
4. UGSMC	0.600	0.700	0.637	*0.838*	
5. eWOM	0.205	0.358	0.289	0.278	*0.776*
Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)	1	2	3	4	5
1. BPI	-				
2. FCSMC	0.546	-			
3. BI	0.816	0.632	-		
4. UGSMC	0.648	0.847	0.735	-	
5. eWOM	0.157	0.393	0.303	0.289	-

Note:The square root values of AVE are presented on the top panel diagonal.

4.3 Assessment of Common Method Variance

Common method variance may arise when data is collected from a single source, within at one point in time (MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2012) as it was the case in the present research. Thus, the Harman's test was conducted through an exploratory factor analysis and the results indicated that the four factors emerged explaining 64.07 percent of total variance. The first factor explained 41.43 percent of the variance in the data, below the recommended 50% (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). Second, previous research (e.g. Koch, 2015; Anasori, Bayighomog, & Tanova, 2020) recommended the use of a full collinearity test to control for the threat of common method variance in PLS-SEM, by generating the variance inflator factors (VIF) of the latent variables. A

VIF greater than 3.3 would suggest a likelihood of common method variance (Koch, 2015). In this research, the maximum VIF value was 1.96. Overall, the results indicated that common method variance did not pose a threat to this study.

4.4 Correlation Analysis

The descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations are presented in Table 4. All the correlations were positive and significant at $p < 0.05$. The highest correlation ($r = 0.742$) was between BI and BPI. The second highest correlation ($r = 0.70$) was between FCSMC and UGSMC. There was also a strong correlation between UGSMC and BI ($r = 0.637$). The weakest correlation was between eWOM and BPI ($r = 0.205$).

Table 6: Descriptive statistics and correlations

	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD
1. BPI	-					3.55	0.63
2. FCSMC	0.478	-				2.71	0.51
3. BI	0.742	0.533	-			2.91	0.50
4. UGSMC	0.600	0.700	0.637	-		3.19	0.62
5. eWOM	0.205	0.358	0.289	0.278	-	2.55	0.39

Note: n = 250. Correlations are significant at $p < 0.05$.

The descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations are presented in Table 4. All the correlations were positive and significant at $p < 0.05$. The highest correlation ($r = 0.742$) was between BI and BPI. The second highest correlation ($r = 0.70$) was between FCSMC and UGSMC. There was also a strong correlation between UGSMC and BI ($r = 0.637$). The weakest correlation was between eWOM and BPI ($r = 0.205$).

4.5 Hypotheses Testing

To test the research hypotheses, a multiple linear regression was estimated and the results are presented in Table 7. FCSMC was negatively associated with BPI (β = -

0.171, t = -2.549, p < 0.05). UGSMC was positively associated to BPI (β = 0.356, t = 4.898, p < 0.001). eWOM was negatively associated with brand purchase intention (β = -0.044, t = -1.98, p < 0.05). Finally, BI was positively associated to BPI (β = 0.774, t = 16.971, p < 0.001). Moreover, the regression model significantly explained 88.4% of the variances in BPI: F(4, 245) = 464.982, p < 0.001. Consequently, H1b and H3 were supported, while H1a and H2 were not supported.

Table 7: Multiple regression results

Dependent variable	Independent variables	β coefficient	t-value	R-squared
BPI	FGSMC	-0.171	-2.549*	0.884
	UGSMC	0.356	4.898***	
	eWOM	-0.044	-1.98*	
	BI	0.774	16.971***	

Note: $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

4.6 Post-hoc Analyses

Further analyses related to mean comparison tests were carried out to determine the mean differences involving the demographic variables and the key research variables. Specifically, independent sample t-tests were carried out for demographic variables that had two distinct and valid groups, while a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed for demographic variables with three or more valid groups. The assumption of homogeneity of variance was examined for each individual test and wherever it was violated, the robust test for inequality of variance was instead reported.

4.6.1 Independent Sample T-tests

First, the t-test was performed to measure the mean difference of key study variables for gender. As presented in Table 8, there were no statistically significant mean differences between male and female participants in all the five research variables.

Table 8: Independent sample t-test for gender

Variable	Group	Mean	*t*-statistic	*p*-value
FGSMC	Male	2.706	0.03	0.976
	Female	2.711		
UGSMC	Male	3.195	-0.081	0.935
	Female	3.193		
eWOM	Male	2.543	-0.365	0.715
	Female	2.561		
BI	Male	2.907	-0.256	0.799
	Female	2.923		
BPI	Male	3.553	-0.075	0.940
	Female	3.559		

Further, the t-tests were also carried out for education level, marital status, and employment status. Although these demographic variables initially comprised at least three different categories, respectively, a scrutiny of the frequencies in each variable (see Table 1) indicated that there were only two valid groups. Thus, this provided the support to perform an independent sample t-test for each demographic variable.

With respect to education level, the results in Table 9 indicated that there were significant differences in UGSMC, BI, and BPI. Specifically, university level participants had a greater perceived UGSMC, a more favorable brand image and a stronger BPI than post-graduate participants. However, the perceived FGSMC and eWOM intensity did not significantly differ across the two groups.

Table 9: Independent sample t-test for education level

Variable	Group	Mean	*t*-statistic	*p*-value
Firm-generated social media communication	University	2.732	1.185	0.237
	Master and PhD	2.648		
User-generated social media communication	University	3.245	**2.021**	**0.044**
	Master and PhD	3.075		
Electronic word-of-mouth	University	2.563	0.915	0.361
	Master and PhD	2.514		
Brand image	University	2.951	**2.026**	**0.044**

	Master and PhD	2.821		
Brand purchase intention	University	3.629	**3.164**	**0.002**
	Master and PhD	3.377		

However, as presented in Table 10, the two marital status groups (single and married) did have any significant differences in any of the five study variables. Likewise, Table 11 also indicates that in terms of employment status, participants who were unemployed and those with a job did not have any significant difference with respect to the five study variables.

Table 10: Independent sample t-test for marital status

Variable	Group	Mean	t-statistic	p-value
FCSMC	Single	2.705	-0.13	0.897
	Married	2.723		
UGSMC	Single	3.202	0.847	0.398
	Married	3.063		
eWOM	Single	2.552	0.625	0.533
	Married	2.487		
BI	Single	2.909	-0.318	0.750
	Married	2.951		
BPI	Single	3.547	-0.566	0.572
	Married	3.642		

Table 11: Independent sample t-test for employment status

Variable	Group	Mean	t-statistic	p-value
FCSMC	Employed	2.629	-0.404	0.686
	Unemployed	2.709		
UGSMC	Employed	2.957	-1.022	0.308
	Unemployed	3.199		
eWOM	Employed	2.379	-1.172	0.249
	Unemployed	2.553		
BI	Employed	2.949	0.202	0.84
	Unemployed	2.911		
BPI	Employed	3.682	0.55	0.583
	Unemployed	3.549		

4.6.2 One-way ANOVA

The one-way ANOVA was performed for age and monthly income because they had four valid groups respectively and the results are presented in Table 12. Regarding age, the test did not reveal any significant group differences in all the five study variables. Likewise, the test did not also reveal significant difference in FCSMC and UGSMC, BI and BPI across the monthly income groups. However, there was a statistically significant difference in eWOM. The post hoc test indicated that the \$1,501-\$2,500 group's eWOM ($M = 2.248$) was significantly lower than the \$0 - \$500 ($M = 2.554$) and the \$501 - \$1,000 ($M = 2.64$) groups.

Table 12: One-way analysis of variance

Variable	Factors	F-statistic	p-value
FCSMC	Age	0.385	0.764
	Monthly income	0.925	0.429
UGSMC	Age	1.145	0.331
	Monthly income	0.859	0.453
eWOM	Age	0.861	0.462
	Monthly income	**2.859**	**0.038**
BI	Age	0.716	0.543
	Monthly income	1.075	0.36
BPI	Age	0.553	0.647
	Monthly income	1.214	0.305

In addition, ANOVA test was conducted based on some of the items measuring the social media behavior of respondents. This was done to examine significant differences between the variables with BPI remaining as the dependent variable. The analysis demonstrated that all the social media behavior variables tested were not statically significant. The tables below show the results obtained.

Table 13: One-way analysis of variance

Factors	Variable	F-statistic	p-value
Time Spent On Social Media. More than two hours a day One to two hours a day Less than one hour a day	BPI	.523	.534

Note: SM = Social Media, Ads = Advertisements

Table 14: One-way analysis of variance

FACTORS	Variables	F-statistic	p-value
With Regards to Social media Advertisements I frequently pay attention to social media ads. I carefully read the social media ads. I frequently visit social media ads websites. I wish I had a way to block social media ads. I have never noticed social media ads.	BPI	.259	.904

Note: SM = Social Media, Ads = Advertisements

Table 15: One-way analysis of variance

FACTORS	Variable	F-statistic	p-value
Have you ever clicked on socialmedia advertisements			
Yes many times Yes but only a few times Yes but only by accident Never will do that	BPI	.259	.847

Table 16: One-way analysis of variance

FACTORS	Variable	F-statistic	p-value
Main reason for clicking on an Advertisement			
I want to make a purchase I want to search for a particular product I am curious to see what the company has to offer I click by accident I never click on ads	BPI	2.205	.069

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

The main findings discovered in this study and their implications are summarized in this chapter along with future research recommendations and the study limitations.

5.1 Summary of Findings

This study aimed at examining the various factors influencing consumer purchase intention within the context of social media. A number of factors were considered which included SMC (i.e. FGSMC and UGSMC), BI and (eWOM). The goal was to examine how much of positive influence these factors have on consumer purchase intention. Considering the intention to purchase a product or patronize a brand is a result of various factors or a combination of them. This study focused on the aforementioned factors amongst many others.

The model of the study was developed based on relevant existing literature and appropriate survey items were adopted for this purpose. Furthermore, data obtained were analyzed using relevant statistical procedures and several findings were made as regards the relationship between the variables.

The study proposed to examine how brand purchase intention of consumers is positively influenced by the social media communication activities carried out by the firms or brands directly. Previous research showed that when firms provide information about their brands on social media platforms, there is a higher tendency

of increasing consumer purchase intention (Nunes et al., 2018). According to Schivinski (2011), the importance of firm created social media communication cannot be overstated; brands must leverage social media platforms strategically if they intend to increase the likelihood of purchase for consumers.

However, results exhibited otherwise in this research. A negative association between FCSMC and BPI was discovered. This implies that social media activities carried out by the firm do not exert any form of influence on customer's intention to purchase positvely. While this may not be in line with findings from previous study (Nunes et al., 2018; Schivinski, 2011), this may be as a result of the issue of trust on the part of consumers. Generally, consumers tend to view FCSMC as a form of advertisement targeted at them. Hence, such promotion may not be as reliable and trustworthy considering the firms will ensure to communicate only the positive sides of their brand (Christodoulides et al., 2012). If consumers perceive this form of communication by firms as not entirely reliable, such communication may not produce the desired positive effect on the consumers. Thus, as brand managers seek to communicate with target consumers on various social media platforms they should also seek to leverage other means of increasing consumer trust in their brand.

A primary goal of this research was to examine the positive influence of the second form of social media communication i.e. UGSMC on consumer's intention to purchase. Previous research have also shown that the attitudinal and behavioral response of consumers towards a brand can be significantly influenced by the various content shared by other users on social media platforms concerning the brand (Smith et al., 2012; Cui et al., 2012; Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). As stated earlier in the research, consumers tend to perceive content shared by other consumers on social

media platforms as more reliable and trustworthy considering they are independent of the firm and are not viewed as traditional advertisements (Christodoulides et al., 2012).

Findings in this study support previous research findings (Smith et al., 2012; Cui et al., 2012; Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Christodoulides et al., 2012). UGSMC positively influenced brand purchase intention. This further adds to existing literature by demonstrating the importance of content generated by other consumers on social media platforms. Consumers trust information provided by other consumers about a brand than they would content provided by the brands themselves. Brand managers must also understand the implication of this and ensure services or products offered by their brands must deliver satisfaction to customers in order to influence positive content shared by these consumers on social media platforms.

According to previous research conducted on this relationship, eWOM generated by the users about a brand exerts a positive influence on consumers' PI (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). There is a strong significant relationship between online comments and reviews by users which connotes eWOM and intention of other customers to purchase a specified brand (Berger et al., 2010). Hence, this study proposed a positive influence of eWOM on brand purchase intention.

However, results in this study proved otherwise. This study found a negative relationship between eWOM and brand purchase intention. While there may be several reasons for this outcome, one major reason could be the issue of information overload. A research specified that consumers are often faced with too much information which invariably leads to information overload (Park & Lee, 2008). Considering a great number of users can generate online comments and reviews for brands, there becomes

too much information to process by potential consumers. Also, some of these information could be generated by spambots or online users paid by the brands to give positive reviews giving rise to the problem of trust in this context.

Finally, this study examined the positive influence of BI on BPI. The hypothesis was developed based on previous literature that have demonstrated the positive relationship between both variables. Brands with more favorable image have a higher chance of stimulating positive disposition from consumers towards their brand which includes purchase intention (Aghekyan-Simonian et al., 2012). As mentioned earlier in the research, consumers have a higher tendency of purchasing products or brand with popular and positive image than those without (Lee & Tan, 2003). The findings in this research support these assertions and contributes to existing literature by demonstrating a positive influence of brand image on brand purchase intention. Thus, the hypothesis h3 was accepted. What this implies for brand managers is that, they must work to ensure that the image of their respective brands is portrayed positively in the minds of consumers to increase the likelihood of patronage from prospective customers.

5.2 Limitations and Recommendation for Further Studies

This research had its number of limitations. Firstly, research was conducted within a short period of time, which may not accurately demonstrate the effect of the various factors. Further research should be conducted using a longitudinal research design.

Secondly, the research was conducted during the COVID 19 pandemic period thus, the number of participants accessible were limited. Although the responses gathered were sufficient for the study, the availability of more respondents could have strengthened

the outcome of the study. This study recommends that in future, a larger number of respondents can examined to confirm or dispute results in this research.

Thirdly, the research was conducted within TRNC alone and thus findings in this study cannot be generalized. Future research should be done in other countries for more results.

REFERENCES

Aaker, D. A. (1996). *Building strong brands*. New York: The Free Press.

Aaker, D., (1991). *Managing Brand Equity*. The Green Press, New York, NY.

Abubakar, A. M., Ilkan, M., Al-Tal, R. M., & Eluwole, K. K. (2017). eWOM, revisit intention, destination trust and gender. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 31, 220-227.

Aghekyan-Simonian, M., Forsythe, S., Kwon, W. S., & Chattaraman, V. (2012). The role of product brand image and online store image on perceived risks and online purchase intentions for apparel. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *19*(3), 325-331.

Alford, B. L., & Biswas, A. (2002). The effects of discount level, price consciousness and sale proneness on consumers' price perception and behavioral intention. *Journal of Business research*, *55*(9), 775-783.

Alharbi, M. K., Aziz, Y. A., Yusof, R. N. R., & Hamid, A. B. A. (2020). Moderating role of trust between eWOM communication and purchase intention. *Journal of Chemical Information and Modeling*, *1*(1), 44-53.

Alrwashdeh, M., Emeagwali, O., & Aljuhmani, H. (2019). The effect of electronic word of mouthcommunication on purchase intention and brand image: An

applicant smartphone brands in North Cyprus. *Management Science Letters*, *9*(4), 505-518.

Anasori, E., Bayighomog, S. W., & Tanova, C. (2020). Workplace bullying, psychological distress, resilience, mindfulness, and emotional exhaustion. *The Service Industries Journal*, *40*(1-2), 65-89.

Anderson, E. W. (1998). Customer satisfaction and word of mouth. *Journal of service research*, *1*(1), 5-17.

Arndt, J. (1967). Role of product-related conversations in the diffusion of a new product. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 4(3), 291–295.

Bambauer-Sachse, S., & Mangold, S. (2011). Brand equity dilution through negative online word of-mouth communication. *Journal of retailing and consumer services*, *18*(1), 38-45.

Belanche, D., Flavián, C., & Pérez-Rueda, A. (2020). Consumer empower- ment in interactive advertising and eWOM consequences: The PITRE model. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 26(1), 1–20

Berger, J., Sorensen, A. T., & Rasmussen, S. J. (2010). Positive effects of negative publicity: When negative reviews increase sales. *Marketing science*, *29*(5), 815-827.

Bernoff, J., & Li, C. (2011). *Groundswell: Winning in a world transformed by social technologies*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press.

Berthon, P. R., Pitt, L. F., Plangger, K., & Shapiro, D. (2012). Marketing meets Web 2.0, social media, and creative consumers: Implications for international marketing strategy. *Business horizons*, *55*(3), 261-271.

Bickart, B., Schindler, R.M., 2001. Internet forums as influential sources of consumer information. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 15(3), 31–40.

Brakus, J.J., Schmitt, B.H., & Zarantonello, L., 2009. Brand experience: what is it? How is it measured? Does it affect loyalty? *Journal of Marketing*, 73(3), 52-68.

Brown, J., Broderick, A.J., Lee, N., 2007. Word of mouth communication within online communities: conceptualizing the online social network. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*. 21(3), 2–20.

Brown, M., Pope, N., & Voges, K. (2003).Buying or browsing? *European Journal of Marketing*, 37(11/12), 1666 – 1684.

Bruhn, M., Schnebelen, S., & Schäfer, D. (2014). Antecedents and consequences of the quality of e-customer-to-customer interactions in B2B brand communities. *Industrial Marketing Management*, *43*(1), 164-176.

Chatterjee, P. (2001). Online reviews: Do consumers use them? *Advances in Consumer Research*, 28, 129–133.

Chevalier M & Mazzalovo G. (2008). *Luxury Brand Management: A World of Privilege*. John Wiley & Sons.

Chevalier, J. A., & Mayzlin, D. (2006). The effect of word of mouth on sales: Online book reviews. *Journal of marketing research*, *43*(3), 345-354.

Chin, W. W. (2010). How to write up and report PLS analyses. In V. Esposito Vinzi, W. W. Chin, & J. Henseler (Eds.), *Handbook of partial least squares: Concepts, methods and applications* (pp. 655–690). Berlin: Springer-Verlag.

Chou, C. M. (2014). Social media characteristics, customer relationship and brand equity. *Journal of Applied Business and Economics*, *16*(1), 128-139.

Christodoulides, G., Jevons, C., & Bonhomme, J. (2012). Memo to marketers: Quantitative evidence for change. How user-generated content really affects brands. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 52(1), 53–64.

Coulter, K. S., Bruhn, M., Schoenmueller, V., & Schäfer, D. B. (2012). Are social media replacing traditional media in terms of brand equity creation? *Management research review*.

Cronin Jr, J. J., & Taylor, S. A. (1992). Measuring service quality: a reexamination and extension. *Journal of marketing*, *56*(3), 55-68.

Cui, G., Lui, H.-K., Chan, T.-S., & Joy, A. (2012). Decom position of cross-country differences in consumer attitudes toward marketing. Journal of Consumer Marketing, 29(3), 214–224.

Daugherty, T., M. Eastin, and L. Bright. 2008. "Exploring Consumer Motivations for Creating User- Generated Content." *Journal of Interactive Advertising,* 8 (2): 16–25.

De Chernatony, L., & Dall'Olmo Riley, F. (1998). Defining a" brand": Beyond the literature with experts' interpretations. *Journal of Marketing Management*, *14*(5), 417-443.

de Vries, L., Peluso, A. M., Romani, S., Leeflang, P. S., & Marcati, A. (2017). Explaining consumer brand-related activities on social media: An investigation of the different roles of self-expression and socializing motivations. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *75*, 272-282.

Deheshti, M., Adabi Firouzjah, J., & Alimohammadi, H. (2016). The relationship between brand image and brand trust in sporting goods Consumers. *Annals of Applied Sport Science*, *4*(3), 27-34.

Dellarocas, C., X. Zhang, and N. F. Awad. 2007. "Exploring the Value of Online Product Reviews in Forecasting Sales: The Case of Motion Pictures." *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 21 (4), 3–45.

Dichter, E. (1985), "What is in an image". *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 2(1), 75 81.

Elci, A., Abubakar, A. M., Ilkan, M., Kolawole, E. K., & Lasisi, T. T. (2017). The impact of travel 2.0 on travellers booking and reservation behaviors. *Business Perspectives and Research*, 5(2), 124–136.

Erdem, T., J. Swait, & J. Louviere. 2002. "The Impact of Brand Credibility on Consumer Price Sensitivity." *International Journal of Research in Marketing,* 19(2002), 1–19.

Erkan, I., & Evans, C. (2016). The influence of eWOM in social media on consumers' purchase intentions: An extended approach to information adoption. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 61, 47–55.

Everson, A. (2014, January 8). Five Big Social Media Trends for 2014. Retrieved February 10, 2016, from http://www.marketingprofs.com/articles/print/2014/24085/five big - social media - trends - for – 2014

Fornell, C., & Larcker, D. (1981). Evaluating structural equation models with unobservable variables and measurement error. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *18*(1), 39–50.

Gillin, P., & Schwartzman, E. (2010). *Social marketing to the business customer: Listen to your B2B market, generate major account leads, and build client relationships*. John Wiley & Sons.

Godes, D., & Mayzlin, D. (2004). Using online conversations to study word-of-mouth communication. *Marketing science*, *23*(4), 545-560.

Grönroos, C. (2002). *Service management och marknadsföring: en CRM ansats*. Liber ekonomi.

Hair, J. F., Black, W. C., Babin, B. J., Anderson, R. E., & Tatham, R. L. (2006). *Multivariate Data Analysis* (6th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.

Heinonen, K. (2011). Consumer activity in social media: Managerial approaches to consumers' social media behavior. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, *10*(6), 356-364.

Hennig-Thurau, T., Gwinner, K., Walsh, G., & Gremler, D. (2004). Electronic word of-mouth via consumer-opinion platforms: What motivates consumers to articulate themselves on the Internet? *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 18(1), 38–52

Henseler, J., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2015). A new criterion for assessing discriminant validity in variance-based structural equation modeling. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *43*(1), 115–135.

Herzog, H. (1963). Behavioral science concepts for analyzing the consumer. *Marketing and the behavioral sciences*, *3*(1), 76-86.

Hootsuite. (2017). Digital in 2017: Global overview. Retrieved from https://wearesocial.com/special-reports/ digital-in-2017-global-overview

Hutter, K., Hautz, J., Dennhardt, S., & Füller, J. (2013). The impact of user interactions in social media on brand awareness and purchase intention: The case of MINI on Facebook. *Journal of Product & Brand Management,* 22(5), 342–351.

Jansen, B. J., Zhang, M., Sobel, K., & Chowdury, A. (2009). Twitter power: Tweets as electronic word of mouth. *Journal of the American society for information science and technology*, *60*(11), 2169-2188.

Johnson, E. J., & Russo, J. E. (1984). Product familiarity and learning new information. *Journal   of consumer research*, *11*(1), 542-550.

Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business horizons*, *53*(1), 59-68.

Keller, K. L. (1993). Conceptualizing, measuring, and managing customer-based brand equity. *Journal of marketing*, *57*(1), 1-22.

Keller, K. L. 2009. "Building Strong Brands in a Modern Marketing Communications Environment." *Journal of Marketing Communications,* 15 (2–3), 139–155.

Kietzmann, J. H., Hermkens, K., McCarthy, I. P., & Silvestre, B. S. (2011). Social media? Get serious! Understanding the functional building blocks of social media. *Business horizons*, *54*(3), 241-251.

Kim, W. G., & Kim, H.-B. (2004). Measuring customer-based restaurant brand equity: Investigating the relationship between brand equity and firm's performance. *The Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, 45(2), 115–131.

Ko, Y. J., & Kim, Y. K. (2010). Martial arts participation: Consumer motivation. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*.

Kock, N. (2015). Common method bias in PLS-SEM: A full collinearity assessment approach. *International Journal of e-Collaboration*, *11*(4), 1–10.

Koiso-Kantilla, K. (2004). Digital content marketing; a literature synthesis. *Journal of marketing management*, 20, 45-65.

Kumar, P., & Singh, G. (2020). Using social media and digital marketing tools and techniques for developing brand equity with connected consumers. In *Handbook of research on innovations in technology and marketing for the connected consumer* (pp. 336-355). IGI Global.

Kuo, H. C., & Nakhata, C. (2019). The impact of electronic word-of-mouth on customer satisfaction. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, *27*(3), 331-348.

Kwahk, K. Y., & Kim, B. (2017). Effects of social media on consumers' purchase decisions: evidence from Taobao. *Service Business*, *11*(4), 803-829.

Langaro, D., Rita, P., & de Fátima Salgueiro, M. (2015). Do social networking sites contribute for building brands? Evaluating the impact of users' participation on brand awareness and brand attitude. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 7266, 1–23.

Lee, J., Lee, J. N., & Shin, H. (2011). The long tail or the short tail: The category specific impact of eWOM on sales distribution. *Decision Support Systems*, *51*(3), 466-479.

Lee, K. S., & Tan, S. J. (2003). E-retailing versus physical retailing: A theoretical model and empirical test of consumer choice. *Journal of Business Research*, *56*(11), 877-885.

Liu, Y. (2006). Word of mouth for movies: Its dynamics and impact on box office revenue. *Journal of Marketing*, 70(3), 74–89.

MacKenzie, S. B., & Podsakoff, P. M. (2012). Common method bias in marketing: Causes, mechanisms, and procedural remedies. *Journal of Retailing*, *88*(4), 542–555.

Mangold, W. G., and D. J. Faulds. 2009. "Social Media: The New Hybrid Element of the Promotion Mix." *Business Horizons*, 52 (4), 357–365.

McClure, C., & Seock, Y. K. (2020). The role of involvement: Investigating the effect of brand's social media pages on consumer purchase intention. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *53*, 101975.

Muntinga, D. G., Smit, E., & Moorman, M. (2012). *Social media DNA: How brand characteristics shape COBRAs*. In Advances in Advertising Research (Vol. III) (pp. 121-135). Gabler Verlag, Wiesbaden.

Newman, J. W. (1957). New insight, new progress, for marketing. *Harvard business review*, *35*(6), 95-102.

Nunes, R. H., Ferreira, J. B., Freitas, A. S. D., & Ramos, F. L. (2018). Efeitos das recomendações de líderes de opinião em mídias sociais sobre a intenção de compra de seus seguidores. *Revista Brasileira de Gestão de Negócios*, *20*(1), 57-73.

Nunnally, J.C., & Bernstein, I.H. (1994). *Psychological Theory.* New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Nuseir, M. T. (2019). The impact of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) on the online purchase intention of consumers in the Islamic countries–a case of (UAE). *Journal of Islamic Marketing*, 10, 759–767.

Ogunmokun, O. A. (2017). *Interactions between Social Media and E-service Quality of Online Travel Agencies in Nigeria* (Master's thesis, Eastern Mediterranean University EMU).

Okonkwo, U. (2007). *Luxury fashion branding trends, tactics, techniques*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2007). *Participative web and user created con- tent: Web 2.0 wikis and social networking*. Paris, France: Author.

Park, D. H., & Lee, J. (2008). eWOM overload and its effect on consumer behavioral intention depending on consumer involvement. *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*, *7*(4), 386-398.

Pitta, D. A., & Katsanis, L. P. (1995). Understanding brand equity for successful brand extension. *Journal of consumer marketing*.

Podsakoff, P. M., & Organ, D. W. (1986). Self-reports in organizational research: Problems and prospects. *Journal of Management*, *12*(4), 531-544.

Reynolds-McIlnay, R., & Taran, Z. (2010). Ten of your friends like this: Brand related word-of mouth on Facebook. *Marketing Management Association*, 37-42.

Riaz, H. A. (2015). Impact of brand image on consumer buying behavior in clothing sector: A Comparative Study between Males and Females of Central Punjab (Lahore) and Southern Punjab (Multan). *Kuwait Chapter of the Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review*, *4*(9), 24.

Richter, A., & Koch, M. (2007). *Social software-status quo und Zukunft* (pp. 1-49). Fak. Für Informatik, Univ. der Bundeswehr München.

Robinson J E (2007), "*A Study of Social Media Marketing in North Carolina Special Libraries*". Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, USA.

Rosario, A. B., de Valck, K., & Sotgiu, F. (2020). Conceptualizing the electronic word of-mouth process: What we know and need to know about eWOM creation, exposure, and evaluation. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *48*(3), 422-448.

Roth, M. S. (1995). Effects of global market conditions on brand image customization and brand performance. *Journal of Advertising*, *24*(4), 55-75.

Safko L and Brake D K (2009). *The Social Media Bible*. John Wiley & Sons Inc., New Jersey.

Sagynbekova, S., Ince, E., Ogunmokun, O. A., Olaoke, R. O., & Ukeje, U. E. Social media communication and higher education brand equity: The mediating role of eWOM. *Journal of Public Affairs*, e2112.

Schiffman, L. G., & Kanuk, L. L. (1995). *Consumer Behavior, 9th Ed*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Schivinski, B., & Dabrowski, D. (2015). The impact of brand communication on brand equity through Facebook. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*.

Schivinski, B., & Dabrowski, D. (2016). The effect of social media communication on consumer perceptions of brands. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, *22*(2), 189-214.

Schivinski, B., Christodoulides, G., & Dabrowski, D. (2016). Measuring consumers' engagement with brand-related social-media content: Development and validation of a scale that identifies levels of social-media engagement with brands. *Journal of Advertising Research*, *56*(1), 64-80.

Schivinski, B., Langaro, D., & Shaw, C. (2019). The influence of social media communication on consumer's attitudes and behavioral intentions concerning brand-sponsored events. *Event Management*, *23*(6), 835-853.

Shao, G. (2009). Understanding the appeal of user- generated media: A uses and gratification perspective. *Internet Research*, 19(1), 7–25.

Shrestha, K. (2016). *[Infographic] 50 stats you need to know about online reviews*. Retrieved from https://www.vendasta.com/ blog/50-stats-you-need-to-know about-online-reviews

Smith, A. N., Fischer, E., & Yongjian, C. (2012). How does brand-related user generated content differ across YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter? *Journal of interactive marketing*, *26*(2), 102-113.

Smith, D., Menon, S., Sivakumar, K., 2005. Online peer and editorial recommendations, trust, and choice in virtual markets. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 19 (3), 15–37.

Smith, P. R., & Zook, Z. (2019). *Marketing Communications: Integrating Online and Offline, Customer Engagement and Digital Technologies*. Kogan Page Publishers.

Socialbakers (2017). Facebook statistics directory. Retrieved from https://www.socialbakers.com/statistics/ facebook/

Tariq, M., Abbas, T., Abrar, M., & Iqbal, A. (2017). eWom and brand awareness impact on consumer purchase intention: mediating role of brand image. *Pakistan Administrative Review*, *1*(1), 84-102.

Trusov, M., Bucklin, R.E., Pauwels, K., 2009. Effects of word-of-mouth versus traditional marketing: findings from an Internet social networking site. *Journal of Marketing*, 73(5), 90–102.

Tsimonis, G., & Dimitriadis, S. (2014). Brand strategies in social media. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*.

Vinerean, S., Cetina, I., Dumitrescu, L., & Tichindelean, M. (2013). The effects of social media marketing on online consumer behavior. *International Journal of Business and Management*, *8*(14), 66.

Wallace, E., Buil, I., & Chernatony, L. De. (2014). Con- sumer engagement with self expressive brands: brand love and WOM outcomes. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 23(1),   33–42.

Wang, X., Yu, C., & Wei, Y. (2012). Social media peer communication and impacts on purchase intentions: A consumer socialization framework. *Journal of interactive marketing*, *26*(4), 198-208.

Wood, N. T., & Burkhalter, J. N. (2014). Tweet this, not that: A comparison between brand promotions in microblogging environments using celebrity and company-generated tweets. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, *20*(1-2), 129-146.

Xiang, Z., & Gretzel, U. (2010). Role of social media in online travel information search. *Tourism management*, *31*(2), 179-188.

Zhang, Z., Ye, Q., Law, R. & Li, Y. (2010). The impact of e-word-of-mouth on the online popularity of restaurants: a comparison of consumer reviews and editor reviews. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 29 (4), 694-700.

Zhu, F., & Zhang, X. (2010). Impact of online consumer reviews on sales: The moderating role of product and consumer characteristics. *Journal of Marketing*, 74(2), 133–148.

APPENDIX

Survey Questionnaire

Effects of Social Media Communication on Brand Image and Purchase Intention: The Mediating Role of Electronic Word of Mouth

Thank you for making out time to take this survey. The survey is carried out as part of a thesis research for the department of marketing in Eastern Mediterranean University. This survey is for academic research purpose only. The purpose of this study is to analyze the relationship between social media communication, electronic word of mouth, brand image and purchase intention. I fully assure you that all of the answers you provide in this survey will be kept confidential. The survey data will be reported in a summary fashion only and will not identify any individual person.

I. Please underline below, which is applicable to you
1. How much time do you spend on Social Media (i.e. Facebook or Instagram)?

1	More than two hours a day	2	One to two hours a day
3	Less than one hour a day	4	One to two hours a week
5	Other		

2. Social media is an interactive communication among individuals on the internet. Which of the following do you utilize the most often? (you can select more than one).

1	Twitter	2	YouTube
3	Websites	4	Facebook
5	Blogs		
6	Online forums		
7	Podcasts		

3. What is one brand in TRNC you follow on Social Media?
   ………………………………………………………………..

4. With regards to social media advertisements

1	I frequently pay attention to social media ads	5	I always ignore social media ads
2	I carefully read the social media ads	6	I wish I had a way to block social media ads
3	I frequently visit social media ads websites	7	I have never noticed social media ads

5. Have you ever clicked on a Social media ad?

1	Yes, many times	5	No
2	Yes, but only a few times	6	Never will do that
3	Yes, but only by accident		

6. If you have clicked on an advertisement on social media, which one of the following is the main reason that explains your action?

1	I want to make a purchase	5	I click by accident
2	I want to search for a particular product	6	I never click on ads
3	I am curious to see what the company has to offer		

II. In the following statements, your responses are needed based on the brand you mentioned above in order to measure to some extent the effects of social media communication on electronic word of mouth and brand purchase intention. For each statement, please use the scale:

1) Strongly Disagree 2) Disagree   3) Neutral   4) Agree   5) Strongly Agree

FCSMC					
I am satisfied with the company's social media communications for [brand]	1	2	3	4	5
The level of the company's social media communications for [brand] meets my expectations	1	2	3	4	5
The company's social media communications for [brand] are very attractive	1	2	3	4	5
This company's social media communications for [brand] perform well, when compared with the social media communications of other companies	1	2	3	4	5
UGSMC					
I am satisfied with the content generated on social media sites by other users about [brand]	1	2	3	4	5
The level of the content generated on social media sites by other users about [brand] meets my expectations	1	2	3	4	5
The content generated by other users about [brand] is very attractive	1	2	3	4	5
The content generated on social media sites by other users about [brand] performs well, when compared with other brands	1	2	3	4	5
Brand Purchase Intention					
I would buy this product/brand rather than any other brands available	1	2	3	4	5
I am willing to recommend that others buy this product/brand	1	2	3	4	5
I intend to purchase this product/brand in the Future	1	2	3	4	5
The possibility of purchasing this product/brand in the near future is high	1	2	3	4	5
Electronic Word of Mouth					
When I buy a product, the online reviews on the product are helpful in my decision making	1	2	3	4	5
The number of positive product reviews online affects my purchase decision	1	2	3	4	5
The number of negative product reviews online affect my purchase decision	1	2	3	4	5
The number of product reviews online affect my purchase decision	1	2	3	4	5
Received high ratings for products affect my purchase decision	1	2	3	4	5
Perceived Brand Image					
This brand is reliable	1	2	3	4	5

This brand is attractive	1	2	3	4	5
This brand is pleasing	1	2	3	4	5
This brand is a social status symbol	1	2	3	4	5
This hotel has a good reputation	1	2	3	4	5

7. Gender:

1	Male	2	Female
3	Other		

8. Age:

1	18-27	2	28-37
3	38-47	4	48-57
5	58-67	6	68+

9. What is Nationality:_____

10. What is your level of education?

1	Elementary or less	2	Intermediate	3	Secondary/ Diploma	4	University	5	Master and PHD

11. Marital Status:

1	Single	2	Married	3	Divorced	4	Separated

12. Employment Status:

1	Company Owner	5	Student
2	Self-Employed	6	Unemployed
3	Public and Private Sector Employee	7	Retired

13. What is your monthly income?

1	$0 to $500	3	$1,501 to $2,500	5	$3,501 to $5,000	7	Above $10,000
2	$501 to $1,500	4	$2,501 to $3,500	6	$5,001 to $10,000		

Thank you for your time in answering this survey