

**UNIVERSITY
OF
LUSAKA**

SCHOOL OF POSTGRADUATE STUDIES

**THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING ON CONSUMER
PURCHASE INTENTIONS AND ITS BENEFITS FOR BUSINESSES**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF POSTGRADUATE
STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF LUSAKA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
AWARD OF MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION IN FINANCE**

BY

MUSADABWE MBEWE

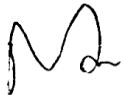
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DECLARATION

I, **MUSADABWE MBEWE**, hereby declare that this dissertation submitted is in partial fulfilment for the award of Master's Degree of Business Administration in Finance and that the work contained herein is my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text.

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DEDICATION

This research is dedicated with love and gratitude to my beloved parents, Mr. and Mrs. Mbewe. Their unwavering support and encouragement have been the foundation of my journey. From the start, they have been my strongest pillars, constantly inspiring me to strive for excellence and persevere through challenges. Their steadfast belief in my potential has been a driving force behind my achievements, and I owe so much to their sacrifices and endless care. Their constant encouragement has instilled in me the values of hard work, resilience, and determination. For their unconditional love and guidance, I am deeply thankful.

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The bond we share as a family is priceless and has been my greatest source of comfort and strength. Each of you has contributed to my success in ways that words cannot fully convey. Your collective encouragement has driven me forward, helping me stay focused on my aspirations.

This dedication is a heartfelt tribute to the incredible support system I have been blessed with. It symbolizes the love, sacrifices, and unwavering belief my family has shown me throughout this journey. I am profoundly grateful for each one of you and pray that God continues to bless and guide you always.

In conclusion, this research represents not just a personal accomplishment but a collective triumph. It stands as proof of the power of faith, family, and steadfast support. With sincere gratitude, I dedicate this work to God Almighty, my parents, and my siblings.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

GDPR – General Data Protection Regulation

GSMA – Global System for Mobile Communications Association

TPB – Theory of Planned Behaviour

ELM – Elaboration Likelihood Model

SPSS – Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

ZICTA – Zambia Information and Communication Technology Authority

SME – Small and Medium Enterprises

eWOM – Electronic Word-of-Mouth

AI – Artificial Intelligence

UGT – Uses and Gratifications Theory

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the influence of social media marketing on consumer purchase intentions, with a specific focus on the Zambian market. Social media platforms have become indispensable tools for businesses to connect with consumers, shaping their perceptions, trust levels, and purchasing behaviors. The study aimed to identify key factors driving consumer engagement on social media, evaluate the effectiveness of different marketing strategies, and provide actionable insights for businesses to optimize their online presence.

A mixed-methods approach was employed to collect data from 405 respondents through a structured questionnaire. Quantitative data analysis using SPSS revealed significant trends in consumer behavior, while qualitative thematic analysis provided deeper insights into the role of social media in shaping brand perception. The findings indicate that platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook dominate consumer engagement, offering businesses cost effective and interactive channels to reach their target audiences. Key drivers of purchase intentions identified include positive user-generated content, influencer endorsements, targeted advertisements, and trust building through direct brand interaction.

The study highlights the transition from traditional marketing to digital platforms, emphasizing the advantages of social media in fostering two-way communication and enhancing customer loyalty. It also underscores the challenges businesses face, such as the need for consistent content creation, managing customer feedback, and addressing issues of digital literacy among consumers. Practical recommendations include leveraging analytics for targeted marketing, collaborating with local influencers, and developing culturally relevant campaigns to resonate with diverse demographic groups.

While the research provides a robust understanding of social media's impact on consumer behavior, it also acknowledges its limitations. The study's focus on a single geographical area and reliance on self-reported data may limit its generalizability. Future research is recommended to expand the scope by exploring the influence of emerging platforms like

TikTok and Instagram, as well as examining how socioeconomic factors shape consumer responses to social media marketing.

By integrating theoretical frameworks such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), this dissertation offers a comprehensive analysis of how social media marketing influences consumer purchase intentions. The study contributes to the growing body of digital marketing literature and provides businesses with practical strategies to navigate the rapidly evolving landscape of online consumer engagement.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

Understanding consumer attitudes towards products and services is crucial for businesses, as customers are fundamental to their success. Studies indicate that companies that actively engage with their customers through social media gain a significant competitive advantage. This engagement enables businesses to understand customer needs and preferences while gaining insights into consumer behaviour before, during, and after a purchase. Social media platforms provide an effective means to achieve this, offering businesses direct communication channels to influence consumer purchase intentions. In today's business landscape, including the Zambian market, social media has become indispensable. Businesses seeking to understand their customers must engage with them through platforms that foster mutual interaction and benefit. By leveraging social media marketing, companies can enhance brand awareness, build trust, and ultimately drive sales.

The first chapter introduces social media marketing, providing background information on its origins and the various types of social media platforms. It also outlines the study's objectives, research questions, and key focus areas. This structured approach aims to highlight the significance of investigating how social media marketing influences consumer purchase intentions and the advantages this impact offers to businesses.

1.1 Background to the Study

Social media is described as "an interactive computer-mediated technology that facilitates the creation and sharing of knowledge, ideas, and other forms of expression through internet sites, virtual communities, and virtual worlds" (Bhandari, 2021). These technologies provide users with dynamic platforms to exchange, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content or prepackaged information available online. In today's business landscape, social media has become an essential tool, enabling companies worldwide to explore innovative methods to engage with their target audiences (Alalwan et al., 2017). While traditional marketing once dominated the field and still plays a minor role in some industries, the rise of digital platforms has compelled businesses to adopt

more sophisticated strategies to attract and retain customers. Social media marketing offers businesses a powerful, interactive tool to build brand awareness, influence consumer purchase intentions, and establish a competitive advantage in the marketplace. The ability to enhance brand perception and foster direct engagement with potential customers underscores the growing importance of social media marketing in modern business strategies (Putter, 2017).

The evolution of marketing has allowed businesses to reach their target audiences on an unprecedented scale, transforming marketing into a two-way communication channel. Matin et al. (2020) highlight that the interactive nature of social media facilitates real-time customer feedback, enabling businesses to make informed decisions, refine marketing strategies, and boost overall productivity. This engagement fosters a deeper connection between brands and consumers, allowing companies to better understand customer preferences and tailor their offerings accordingly. Unlike traditional marketing methods, which often have limited reach, social media marketing enables businesses to target a diverse range of customers with tailored content, ultimately increasing market share and customer loyalty (Assaad & Gomez, 2011).

Social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter play a critical role in connecting businesses with consumers. Companies leverage these platforms for various marketing activities, including advertising, branding, customer relationship management, and e-commerce. Social media advertisements, which serve as a direct channel for business-to-customer communication, benefit from continuous technological advancements. Marketers must constantly innovate and enhance these advertisements to ensure they remain engaging and effective in influencing consumer behavior. Consequently, social media ads play a vital role in shaping consumer purchase intentions by building product awareness, motivating customer engagement, and strengthening brand positioning (Alalwan et al., 2017).

1.2 Research Problem

Rosario & Darius (2023) state that the rapid expansion of social media platforms has revolutionised marketing strategies, enabling businesses to engage directly with consumers in real time. Social media marketing has emerged as a key driver of consumer engagement, brand awareness, and purchase intentions, particularly in developing economies like Zambia (Shona & Chuubi; 2024). However, despite its growing adoption, Sohail & Hasan (2021) highlight that the extent to which social media marketing influences consumer purchase intentions remains an area of limited empirical exploration. Lim & Rasul (2022) state that as consumers increasingly rely on online platforms for product research, reviews, and recommendations, businesses must understand how social media engagement shapes purchasing decisions.

This study seeks to examine the mechanisms through which social media marketing affects consumer purchase intentions, investigating the factors that mediate this relationship. Key questions include: How does exposure to social media marketing influence consumer perceptions of a product? What role does online brand engagement play in shaping purchase decisions? While global studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies such as influencer promotions, targeted advertising, and user-generated content, there is a need for context-specific research in Zambia to determine the applicability of these strategies in a market characterised by varying levels of digital literacy, internet accessibility, and consumer trust in online transactions.

Kobets et.al (2024) mentions that the effectiveness of social media marketing is further challenged by issues such as misinformation, data privacy concerns, and consumer scepticism, particularly in markets where digital transformation is still evolving. Additionally, while platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp dominate digital communication in Zambia, their specific impact on consumer decision-making remains underexplored. This study aims to bridge these gaps by providing empirical evidence on the influence of social media marketing on consumer purchase intentions, offering valuable insights for marketers and policymakers.

Despite the increasing integration of social media marketing into business strategies, limited research has been conducted on its effectiveness in influencing consumer behaviour in Zambia. Existing studies primarily focus on digital marketing in developed economies, where internet penetration and digital literacy are significantly higher (Bruce et.al; 2023). This has resulted in a knowledge gap regarding how social media marketing strategies can be optimised in markets where barriers such as high internet costs, low trust in online transactions, and digital illiteracy persist (Woldu & Quazi; 2023). Furthermore, while global research highlights the impact of influencer marketing, targeted advertisements, and interactive content on consumer engagement, there is insufficient data on how these strategies translate into actual purchase behaviour in Zambia. The role of consumer trust, engagement, and cultural factors in shaping social media-driven purchase decisions remains underexplored. This study addresses this gap by providing empirical insights into the effectiveness of social media marketing in influencing purchase intentions, helping businesses tailor their digital strategies to the unique characteristics of the Zambian market.

1.3 Justifications for the Research

There are several key reasons why this study is essential. Social media marketing significantly influences consumer buying intentions, given the broad audience that social media platforms can reach, businesses can enhance user awareness of their brands. By consistently engaging with consumers through appealing content, businesses can build their brand identity and increase potential customer familiarity with their products or services. This increased brand awareness makes the brand more recognizable and trustworthy, positively affecting consumer purchase intentions (Assaad & Gomez, 2011). Social media also facilitates direct interaction and two-way communication between brands and customers, helping to build relationships, address customer issues, and provide immediate support. By actively engaging with consumers, businesses can build trust, improve their brand reputation, and influence purchasing decisions.

Consumers can feel more confident in their purchase decisions when they directly engage with brands through social media (Heinonen, 2011). Social media also allows for targeted advertising with sophisticated targeting capabilities, enabling businesses to reach niche

markets based on demographics, interests, behaviors, and other factors. By providing customized and relevant content to potential customers, businesses can increase the likelihood of attracting attention and encouraging purchase intentions. Targeted social media advertising helps companies reach more potential customers and improve conversion rates (Anon., 2023). Additionally, social media platforms facilitate the sharing of user-generated content, such as reviews, testimonials, and product demonstrations. Consumers often rely on social proof, such as recommendations from friends or influencers, when making purchase decisions. Positive user-generated content on social media can significantly influence customer purchase intentions because people tend to trust their peers opinions (Stacey McLachlan, 2021).

1.4 Research Aim

The aim of this study is to explore how social media influences consumer purchase intentions and to comprehend the advantages this impact offers to businesses.

1.5 Research Objectives

This study will pursue various objectives, including:

1. To assess the impact of social media marketing strategies on consumer purchase intentions.
2. To analyse the relationship between social media engagement and brand trust in influencing consumer purchasing decisions.
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of different social media marketing techniques in driving customer acquisition and retention.
4. To identify challenges businesses, face in leveraging social media marketing and recommend strategies for optimising its effectiveness.

1.6 Research Questions

1. How do social media marketing strategies influence consumer purchase intentions?
2. What challenges do businesses face in leveraging social media marketing, and what strategies can optimise its effectiveness?

3. What is the relationship between social media engagement and brand trust in shaping consumer purchasing decisions?
4. How effective are different social media marketing techniques in driving customer acquisition and retention?

1.7 Research Hypothesis

The hypotheses developed from this study are;

H1: Social media marketing positively influences consumer purchase intention.

H2: Social media marketing does not positively influence consumer purchase intention.

1.8 Significance of the study

This research will be highly valuable to three main stakeholders: marketers, academicians, and customers (social media users). Marketers, or companies looking to boost profits through social media sales opportunities, will gain insights into the online market and learn how to leverage social media to access market niches. Academicians will benefit from the research as it expands the knowledge base, aiding further studies on social media and online marketing. Lastly, customers will find the research informative, as it explains how their social media usage affects their decision-making processes.

1.9 Scope of Research

This study also supports the notion that consumers purchase intentions on social media platforms are influenced by their level of trust. Additionally, it indicates that for businesses to succeed internationally, they must build a strong reputation and offer detailed information about their operations. The demographic variables that affect customer purchase intent on social media sites identify the primary target audiences for social commerce. In other words, it provides businesses with guidance on whom to target with their strategies and operations. According to numerous respondents, social media has provided users with a more effective platform for engagement between themselves and the firm (Lee, 2017), this paper focused on Zambia.

1.10 Limitations of the Study

Differences in innovation, infrastructure, social norms, and other factors across continents contribute to variations in the findings of this dissertation by country. The dissertation includes an analysis of the research, providing readers with insights into the implications of the study. A future extension of this study should incorporate a more comprehensive survey to deepen the understanding of the research (Lee, 2017). It is essential to consider that any future research should involve a thorough analysis of social media platforms to explore how these platforms can enhance business operations while fostering stronger customer relationships, given that customers are pivotal to every business.

1.11 Definition of key terms and concepts

Social Media Marketing, Customer Engagement, Customer Purchasing Intention.

Social media marketing involves companies using social media platforms to develop, convey, and provide online marketing content. This process aims to build and sustain relationships with stakeholders, enhancing their value by promoting interaction, sharing information, providing personalized purchase recommendations, and generating word of mouth about current and popular products and services (Yandav & Rahman 2018).

Customer engagement involves providing continuous, connected experiences rather than isolated, one time transactions. It requires optimizing team structure, operations, and technology to establish an ongoing feedback loop with customers. Businesses must stay attuned to customers changing needs, uphold and enhance brand integrity, and use customer data ethically to ensure the best possible experience for customers (Afshar, 2024).

Researchers have long utilized repurchase intentions to predict future purchasing behavior. In the context of recommendations, a user's willingness to buy a product suggested by a recommender system is referred to as purchase intention. Studies have demonstrated that consumers are more likely to buy from an online store they trust (Gefen et al., 2003). Additionally, Nilashi et al. (2016) found a correlation between customers' trust and their purchase intentions in e-commerce recommendation systems.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

The second chapter reviews global, regional and local studies from various journals and reports. It includes an empirical examination of the subject, providing context and rationale for the research. This chapter aims to offer a comprehensive overview of the study and its conclusion, present both the conceptual and theoretical frameworks of the topic.

2.1 Empirical Literature

Researchers worldwide have investigated various studies to illustrate the potential influence of social media on customer purchasing decisions. The empirical segment of this study examines how individuals in Zambia perceive and utilize social media information prior to making purchases, their post consumption behavior, and their overall perspective on the contemporary marketing landscape, with a specific focus on social media. Additionally, this research aims to offer fresh insights into the effects of social media on diverse demographic groups (such as age and gender) in the decision making process by obtaining a comprehensive understanding of current purchasing behavior in Zambia (Anon., 2023).

Businesses often encounter obstacles when information fails to reach their clients and potential clients, as consumers and prospects may encounter significant barriers during their decision making process. If this were not the case, every individual would be devoted, enthusiastic, committed, and loyal clients, yet this is not the reality. The accessibility and accuracy of information significantly influence decision making today, underscoring the importance of examining the obstacles and misconceptions that hinder potential customers from becoming clients or prevent existing clients from making further purchases (Putter, 2017).

The stages of the consumer decision process are depicted in Figure 1 as follows: need (problem) recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, purchase decision, and post-purchase decision (Sternthal & Craig, 2012).

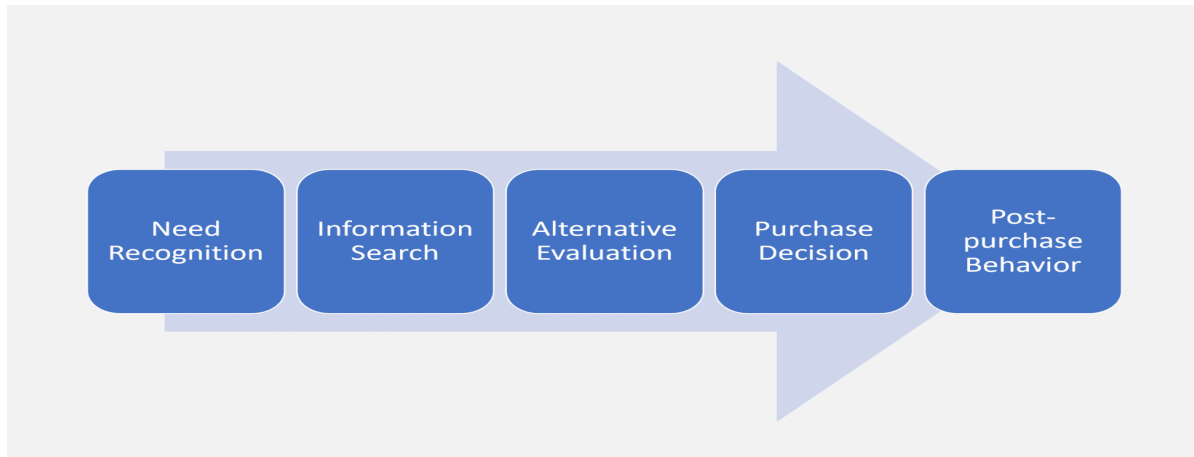


Figure 1 Five-Stage Decision Making

This section is further divided into three parts: global studies, regional studies, and local studies. Global studies encompass research conducted outside Africa, regional studies focus on research carried out within Africa, and local studies pertain to research conducted specifically in Zambia.

2.1.1 Global Review

Social media marketing has become a cornerstone of digital marketing strategies worldwide, driven by the widespread adoption of platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, and TikTok. According to Statista (2023), over 4.9 billion people globally are active on social media, making it a critical space for businesses to interact with their audiences.

Key studies have shown that consumer engagement with brands through social media influences purchasing decisions. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) highlighted the dual role of social media as both a communication tool and a sales platform. Personalized advertisements, interactive content, and influencer marketing have proven effective in enhancing consumer trust and increasing conversion rates (Dwivedi et al., 2021).

For instance, brands like Coca Cola and Nike have successfully utilized storytelling and influencer partnerships to build strong emotional connections with consumers, resulting in increased brand loyalty and purchase intent. Moreover, e-commerce platforms such as

Amazon and Alibaba integrate social media marketing into their strategies to enhance customer experiences, using personalized recommendations and direct social media advertising.

However, challenges persist. Data privacy concerns, misinformation, and algorithm biases have raised questions about the ethical use of social media marketing. Regulatory changes like GDPR in Europe have forced companies to rethink their strategies, emphasizing transparency and consumer consent (Hudson & Thal, 2013). Despite these challenges, advancements in AI driven marketing, virtual reality (VR) advertising, and interactive shopping experiences on platforms like Instagram and TikTok continue to shape global trends. Empirical studies on digital marketing and consumer behaviour highlight the increasing reliance on online platforms for brand engagement and purchase decisions. The Adoption and Diffusion Theory explains how individuals and societies integrate digital marketing into their purchasing behaviour, demonstrating that technological advancements and convenience influence adoption rates (Straub, 2017). The Covid-19 pandemic accelerated digital marketing trends, with businesses rapidly shifting their strategies to engage consumers online, reinforcing the digital transformation already underway (Baig et al., 2020). Empirical research further suggests that social media marketing significantly influences consumer perceptions. Studies indicate that platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp have become primary channels for businesses to interact with customers, increasing brand trust and loyalty (Dash & Chakraborty, 2021). The effectiveness of digital marketing is further enhanced by targeted advertising, influencer marketing, and user-generated content, which have proven instrumental in building consumer confidence and influencing purchase intentions (Emmons, 2020).

The shift from traditional marketing to digital strategies has also been widely documented. Studies show that consumer preferences have moved away from mass media advertisements toward interactive and personalised content (Gustafsson, 2020). Research by Uvarova (2019) highlights how businesses have leveraged digitalisation to improve customer experiences, with many firms integrating AI-driven customer service, data analytics, and e-commerce solutions to enhance digital engagement.

Despite the positive impact, challenges remain in digital marketing adoption. Studies have identified issues such as consumer scepticism, data privacy concerns, and internet accessibility, particularly in developing economies (Akroush & Al-Debei, 2020). In Zambia, digital literacy and high internet costs have been significant barriers to wider adoption (Katongo & Musawa, 2022). However, government initiatives to enhance internet infrastructure and promote e-commerce have facilitated a gradual shift towards online marketing and transactions (ZICTA, 2021).

2.1.2 Regional Review (Africa)

The African continent has witnessed a surge in social media adoption, driven by rapid technological advancements, increased internet penetration, and the proliferation of affordable smartphones. According to the GSMA Mobile Economy Report (2023), sub-Saharan Africa's internet penetration stood at 35%, with significant growth projected over the next decade. This growth has enabled businesses to tap into social media marketing to reach a digitally connected and youthful audience.

A study by Mahlatji and Makgato (2020) revealed that in countries like South Africa, Nigeria, and Kenya, social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube dominate the digital landscape. Social media campaigns tailored to the region's diverse cultures and languages have been particularly successful in influencing consumer behavior. For instance, MTN's #WeGotU campaign and Coca-Cola's #TasteTheFeeling have effectively engaged African audiences by leveraging local influencers and culturally relevant content.

Influencer marketing is another critical trend in Africa. A survey by Okeke et al. (2022) indicated that African consumers are highly influenced by local celebrities and social media influencers who promote products. For example, Nigerian influencers like Tacha Akide and South Africa's Bonang Matheba have collaborated with major brands to boost their online presence and sales.

Nevertheless, barriers such as digital illiteracy, inconsistent internet access, and high data costs limit the full potential of social media marketing in some areas. However,

governments and organizations are actively working to improve digital infrastructure and literacy. Initiatives like Kenya's Digital Economy Blueprint and South Africa's Fourth Industrial Revolution Policy aim to enhance the regions digital economy, fostering growth in social media marketing. Empirical studies in Southern and East Africa reveal the increasing adoption of digital marketing strategies and their significant influence on consumer purchase behaviour. In Tanzania, Thomas (2024) found that trust, personalisation, and user satisfaction are key determinants of purchase intention in social media marketing. The study emphasised that user trust plays a crucial role in shaping consumer decision-making, with personalisation enhancing engagement and satisfaction. These findings align with the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), which suggests that consumers actively engage with social media platforms to fulfil specific needs, including product information and brand interaction (Katz et al., 1973).

Similarly, research conducted in South Africa has demonstrated that social media engagement significantly influences brand perception and consumer loyalty. Dlodlo (2014) highlighted that companies leveraging targeted advertising, influencer marketing, and interactive content experience higher levels of customer engagement and purchase conversions. The shift towards digitalisation has been particularly evident in urban markets, where mobile internet penetration has fuelled the adoption of e-commerce and social media-based transactions (Hinson et al., 2019).

In Kenya, studies indicate that electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and peer recommendations strongly impact consumer purchase decisions (Gikonyo & Muthoki, 2022). The role of digital trust remains a critical factor, with businesses that prioritise transparent communication and customer reviews gaining a competitive advantage. The growing preference for mobile payment solutions such as M-Pesa has further strengthened digital consumerism, allowing seamless integration between social media marketing and e-commerce platforms (Wambugu et al., 2020).

2.1.3 Local Review (Zambia)

In Zambia, social media marketing is still an emerging field, but it is growing rapidly due to increasing internet access and mobile phone penetration. Data from the Zambia Information and Communication Technology Authority (ZICTA, 2023) shows that 19.6% of Zambians actively use social media platforms, with Facebook and WhatsApp being the most popular. Businesses, particularly small and medium enterprises (SMEs), are leveraging these platforms to reach a broader audience cost effectively.

In Zambia, digital marketing adoption has been gradually increasing, particularly among SMEs and large retail businesses. Jere and Mukupa (2018) found that customer satisfaction and personalisation are major drivers of purchase intention, reinforcing the importance of tailored marketing strategies. However, internet accessibility and digital literacy remain significant challenges in fully realising the potential of digital marketing. The Zambia Information and Communication Technology Authority (ZICTA, 2021) has reported an increase in mobile internet usage, which has facilitated greater consumer engagement with brands online. Local studies (Mumba et al., 2021) suggest that Zambian consumers are highly receptive to promotional content, especially when it includes value driven offers, testimonials, and relatable imagery. For instance, Zambeef has successfully used Facebook to promote its products through targeted ads and customer engagement campaigns. Similarly, telecommunications companies like Airtel and MTN Zambia frequently use social media to launch campaigns and offer real time customer support.

Despite these successes, challenges such as inadequate digital skills among marketers and consumers, inconsistent internet access in rural areas, and limited trust in online transactions hinder the growth of social media marketing in Zambia. Moreover, many businesses lack the expertise to analyze data and optimize campaigns effectively.

To address these challenges, the Zambian government and private organizations are promoting digital literacy and e-commerce adoption (Smart Zambia Institute; 2024). Initiatives such as the establishment of digital hubs and partnerships with international

organizations like Facebook's Boost Your Business Program are helping SMEs and individuals develop the skills needed to thrive in the digital economy.

2.1.4 Discussion of literature

Social media marketing has undoubtedly transformed digital marketing strategies worldwide, with Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) asserting that it serves both as a communication tool and a sales platform. Dwivedi et al. (2021) extend this argument, emphasising that personalised advertisements and influencer marketing have been instrumental in fostering consumer trust and driving conversions. However, Hudson and Thal (2013) caution that the widespread adoption of social media marketing is not without challenges, particularly concerning data privacy, misinformation, and algorithm biases, all of which necessitate regulatory intervention, as seen with GDPR in Europe. While Straub (2017) supports the view that technological advancements facilitate consumer adoption of digital marketing, Baig et al. (2020) argue that the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this shift, making digital engagement a necessity rather than an option.

Despite the optimistic outlook, some scholars remain sceptical. Akroush and Al-Debei (2020) contend that while digital marketing enhances brand engagement, issues such as consumer scepticism and limited internet accessibility hinder its effectiveness, particularly in developing economies. Katongo and Musawa (2022) further illustrate these limitations in Zambia, citing high internet costs and digital literacy gaps as major barriers. However, ZICTA (2021) presents a counterpoint, highlighting governmental efforts to improve internet infrastructure and facilitate e-commerce growth, thus creating an enabling environment for digital marketing expansion.

In Africa, Mahlatji and Makgato (2020) acknowledge the growing prominence of social media marketing, particularly in South Africa, Nigeria, and Kenya, where platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram dominate consumer engagement. Okeke et al. (2022) add that influencer marketing is a critical driver of consumer behaviour in these markets, a view that aligns with the Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1973), which underscores consumer-driven media consumption. However, Wambugu et al.

(2020) argue that while mobile payment solutions such as M-Pesa have strengthened digital consumerism, barriers such as digital illiteracy and unreliable internet access continue to impede social media marketing's full potential in Africa.

Zambia's digital marketing landscape reflects both the opportunities and challenges identified in broader African contexts. While Jere and Mukupa (2018) find that personalisation and customer satisfaction drive consumer purchase intentions, Mumba et al. (2021) highlight that Zambian consumers are particularly responsive to promotional content that offers tangible value, such as discounts and testimonials. Yet, concerns persist. The Smart Zambia Institute (2024) acknowledges that inadequate digital skills, especially among marketers and rural consumers, remain a significant obstacle. Nonetheless, partnerships with global organisations, such as Facebook's Boost Your Business Program, offer hope for bridging these gaps and equipping SMEs with the necessary tools to thrive in the digital economy. Thus, while scholars largely agree on the transformative role of social media marketing, critical debates persist regarding its accessibility, ethical concerns, and effectiveness across different economic contexts. Moving forward, a balance must be struck between leveraging digital advancements and addressing the structural barriers that hinder its full potential.

Although social media marketing has been widely studied in global and regional contexts, there remains a significant research gap in its impact on consumer purchase intentions in Zambia. While existing research in developed economies highlights the effectiveness of influencer marketing, targeted advertisements, and interactive content in driving consumer engagement, there is a lack of empirical data on how these strategies influence actual purchase behavior in Zambia. Additionally, factors such as consumer trust, engagement levels, and cultural perceptions of online transactions remain underexplored in the Zambian context. Furthermore, previous studies have predominantly focused on broader digital marketing adoption rather than the specific role of social media platforms in shaping consumer purchasing decisions.

This study seeks to address these gaps by providing empirical evidence on the influence of social media marketing on consumer purchase intentions in Zambia. It aims to determine the key drivers of consumer engagement on social media, evaluate the effectiveness of different marketing techniques, and offer insights into the challenges businesses face in leveraging digital platforms. While integrating both quantitative and qualitative analyses, this research will contribute to the growing body of knowledge on digital marketing in emerging economies and provide actionable recommendations for businesses seeking to optimize their online strategies (Bakri, 2023).

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The aim of this theoretical framework is to thoroughly understand the impact of social media on customers purchasing intentions. Given the widespread use of social media platforms, online content, and interactions significantly influence customers buying decisions. This study proposes a theoretical framework to explore the effects of social media on purchase intentions, integrating concepts from social influence, information processing, and consumer behavior. By examining the factors that drive social media influence and the psychological processes underlying consumer decision making, this framework aims to enhance our comprehension of how social media shapes consumer behavior (Sternthal & Craig, 2012).

In essence, social media marketing focuses less on obvious product placement and more on creating high quality content that resonates with consumers. It also prioritizes building relationships between customers and businesses. With customers being more empowered, research indicates that their role in the new marketing strategy is central (Emini & Zeqiri, 2021).

The theoretical framework for this study integrates two influential theories, The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), to explore how social media marketing influences consumer purchase intentions. These theories provide complementary perspectives, addressing the psychological, social, and cognitive factors that underpin consumer decision making in the digital age. Together, they form a robust

foundation for understanding the mechanisms through which social media marketing strategies affects a consumers behavior.

2.2.1 Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), developed by Ajzen (1991), is a well-established model that has been widely applied to understand and predict human behavior across various contexts, including consumer behavior. According to TPB, an individual's intention to perform a behavior is the most immediate determinant of that behavior (Ajzen; 2020). This intention, in turn, is influenced by three primary constructs:

1. **Attitude toward the behavior:** This refers to an individual's evaluation of the behavior as favorable or unfavorable. In the context of social media marketing, consumers attitudes toward advertisements significantly influence their purchase intentions (Chu & Chen; 2019). For example, a consumer who perceives an advertisement as engaging, creative, and informative is more likely to develop a positive attitude, which translates into a stronger intention to purchase the advertised product or service. Riedel (2024) states that ads perceived as intrusive, irrelevant, or overly repetitive can lead to negative attitudes and reduced purchase intentions.

Social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok enable marketers to create visually appealing and interactive content that shapes consumers attitudes positively (Nguyen; 2024). Features such as short videos, polls, and augmented reality (AR) filters allow brands to create dynamic advertisements that resonate with target audiences, fostering positive attitudes toward their products or services.

Subjective norms: According to La Barbera (2020) states that these refer to the perceived social pressures to engage in or avoid a particular behavior. Adewale (2024) states that social media amplifies the role of subjective norms through peer influence, influencer endorsements, and user-generated content. For instance, when consumers see their friends or favorite influencers recommending a product,

they may feel a stronger inclination to conform to these social pressures by purchasing the product (Ki, Park,& Kim; 2022). Lee & Hong highlights that the power of subjective norms on social media is evident in viral marketing campaigns, where the actions of a few influential users can quickly spread to a wider audience. Hashtags, challenges, and collaborations with influencers are common strategies used by brands to capitalize on social norms and encourage consumer participation.

2. **Perceived behavioral control:** Hagger (2022) states that this factor reflects an individual's belief in their ability to perform the behavior. In the context of social media marketing, perceived behavioral control is shaped by factors such as the ease of accessing information about a product, the simplicity of the purchasing process, and the availability of resources (e.g., time, money, and internet access). Lopes (2024) mentions that platforms that offer seamless shopping experiences, such as integrated e-commerce features, enhance perceived behavioral control and make it more likely for consumers to follow through with their purchase intentions.

For example, social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook now feature "Shop Now" buttons and direct links to product pages, allowing consumers to transition smoothly from browsing to purchasing (Martínez-López; 2020). These features reduce friction in the buying process and enhance consumers' confidence in their ability to complete the transaction.

2.2.2 Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), developed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986), is a dual process theory of persuasion that explains how individuals process information and form attitudes. ELM proposes two distinct routes to persuasion:

1. **The central route:** Kitchen et.al (2014) states that this route involves thoughtful and deliberate processing of message content. Consumers using the central route carefully evaluate the arguments and evidence presented in a message before

forming an attitude. For example, a consumer researching a product may analyze detailed specifications, customer reviews, and comparisons with competing products to make an informed decision.

In the context of social media marketing, central route processing is often triggered by content that provides substantive information, such as blog posts, instructional videos, or detailed product descriptions (Chung, Han, & Koo; 2015). For instance, a brand promoting a new smartphone might create a video explaining its unique features, durability tests, and user benefits. Consumers who are highly involved in the purchase decision and motivated to learn about the product are likely to process such content through the central route.

2. **The peripheral route:** This route relies on superficial cues that do not require extensive cognitive effort (Chaiken; 2014). Instead of focusing on the message content, consumers process information based on external factors such as the attractiveness of visuals, the credibility of the spokesperson, or the emotional appeal of the advertisement.

Zhou (2012) states that social media platforms are particularly effective in leveraging peripheral cues to influence consumer attitudes. Ahmadi & leamsom (2022) state that an Instagram post featuring a popular influencer using a skincare product may attract consumers attention due to the influencer's credibility and popularity, even if the post provides minimal information about the product itself. Similarly, visually appealing content, catchy slogans, and emotionally engaging campaigns are common strategies used to activate peripheral route processing (Sattorov; 2024).

ELM highlights the importance of tailoring marketing messages to different consumer preferences. Cheng, Yang, & Wang (2024) states that while some consumers prefer detailed, logical arguments (central route), others respond more effectively to emotional and aesthetic elements (peripheral route). Effective social media marketing campaigns often combine both routes to appeal to a broader audience. For example, a campaign for

a fitness app might include testimonials from satisfied users (central route) alongside motivational videos and endorsements from fitness influencers (peripheral route).

2.2.3 Psychoanalytic Theory

Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory suggests that human behaviour is influenced by unconscious desires and motivations. In the context of social media marketing, businesses leverage emotional triggers and subconscious associations to influence consumer purchase intentions (Varalakshimi; 2024). Social media advertisements often appeal to deep-seated desires such as status, self-esteem, and belongingness by using aspirational imagery, persuasive storytelling, and targeted messaging (Hu; 2024). For instance, luxury brands often use social media to evoke a sense of exclusivity and prestige, tapping into consumers' unconscious motivations to achieve higher social status (Barbarisque; 2024). Similarly, advertisements that highlight comfort, security, or nostalgia resonate with consumers on a subconscious level, influencing their purchasing decisions without their explicit awareness.

2.2.4 Behaviourism Theory

Behaviourism, as proposed by B.F. Skinner and John Watson, focuses on observable behaviours and the effects of reinforcement and conditioning on learning. This theory is relevant to social media marketing because digital platforms use reinforcement mechanisms such as likes, shares, comments, and rewards to influence consumer behaviour (Walinga; 2019). For example, when users see a high number of positive reviews, influencer endorsements, or social validation in the form of likes and shares, they are more likely to perceive a product as desirable and make a purchase (Vontris et.al; 2021). Razak (2024) states that businesses also use gamification techniques, such as loyalty programs and interactive social media campaigns, to condition consumer responses and increase brand engagement. The more positive reinforcement consumers receive from interacting with a brand online, the higher their likelihood of purchasing.

2.2.5 Cognitive Theory

Cognitive Theory, which focuses on internal thought processes and problem-solving, plays a critical role in understanding how consumers make purchase decisions through social media (Nooteboom; 2009). Consumers engage in cognitive processing when evaluating social media content, comparing products, reading reviews, and seeking validation from online communities (Dessart; 2015). Chari et.al (2016) mentions that social media marketing provides an abundance of information that enables consumers to make informed decisions, reducing uncertainty and increasing trust in brands. Poleac & Ghergut-Babii (2024) explains that platforms such as Facebook and Instagram use algorithms to personalise content, showing consumers products based on their previous interactions, which reinforces their cognitive engagement and decision-making process. The cognitive approach also explains the role of perceived value, where consumers weigh the benefits of a product against the costs before committing to a purchase.

2.2.6 Social Learning Theory

Social Learning Theory, developed by Albert Bandura, suggests that people learn behaviours through observation and imitation. Dudda (2024) states this is particularly relevant in the age of influencer marketing, where consumers are influenced by the actions, recommendations, and endorsements of social media personalities. Seeing others use and approve of a product increases the likelihood of purchase, as consumers trust peer opinions more than traditional advertising. The rise of influencer collaborations and user-generated content in social media marketing aligns with this theory, as consumers are more likely to purchase products that are endorsed by individuals they admire or relate to (Naeem; 2020).

The justification for the use of the selected theoretical frameworks in this study is grounded in their ability to comprehensively explain the mechanisms through which social media marketing influences consumer purchase intentions. The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) is particularly relevant as it highlights how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control influence consumers' intentions to purchase products

or services. Since social media marketing plays a crucial role in shaping consumer attitudes and perceptions through digital interactions, TPB provides a strong foundation for understanding how these factors translate into purchase intentions. Similarly, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) is instrumental in explaining the different ways consumers process information presented through social media marketing. This theory differentiates between central and peripheral routes of persuasion, which is essential in understanding how consumers engage with promotional content. While some individuals critically evaluate advertisements based on detailed information (central route), others are influenced by visual appeal, influencer endorsements, or emotional triggers (peripheral route). Given that social media marketing heavily relies on both rational arguments and aesthetic appeal, ELM effectively captures the dual nature of persuasion in digital consumer behaviour.

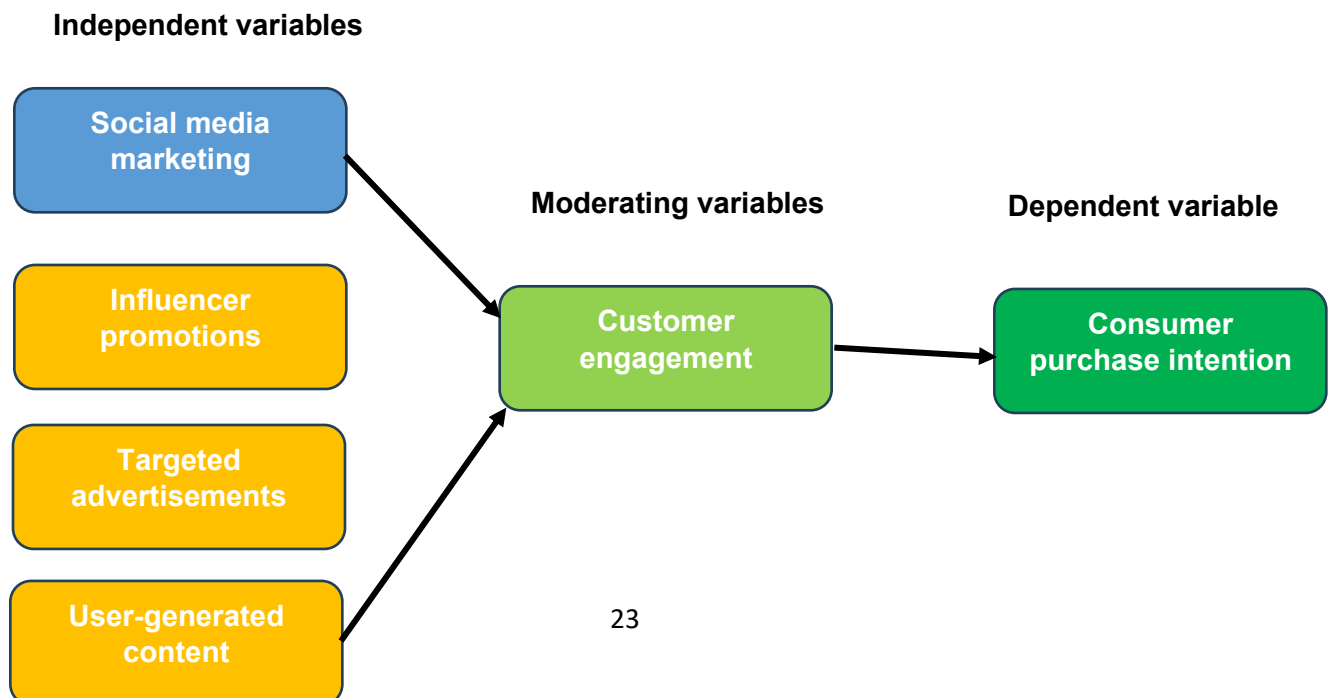
Beyond these, additional psychological and behavioural theories further enhance the study's theoretical foundation. Social Learning Theory (SLT) is highly relevant as it explains how consumers adopt purchasing behaviours by observing and imitating influencers, peers, and brand ambassadors on social media. The increasing use of influencer marketing aligns with SLT, as consumers tend to trust and emulate individuals they perceive as credible or aspirational figures. Cognitive Theory also plays a crucial role, as social media marketing provides consumers with vast amounts of information that influence their decision-making processes. Features such as product reviews, testimonials, and comparisons enable consumers to cognitively assess alternatives before making purchase decisions.

Behaviourism, particularly the concepts introduced by B.F. Skinner and John Watson, is useful in explaining how reinforcement mechanisms such as likes, shares, and promotional rewards condition consumer responses to social media marketing efforts. The continuous exposure to brand messages, coupled with positive reinforcement through incentives and social validation, influences consumers to develop favourable perceptions of brands and, consequently, purchase intentions. Finally, Psychoanalytic Theory, rooted in Freud's perspectives, offers insights into the subconscious drivers of consumer behaviour. Social media marketing often appeals to emotions, desires, and

psychological needs, such as status, self-image, and belonging, all of which play a crucial role in purchase decisions.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study focuses on the influence of social media marketing on consumer purchase intentions. The independent variable is social media marketing, which encompasses various digital marketing strategies, including influencer promotions, targeted advertisements, user-generated content and direct brand interactions. These factors shape consumer perceptions and engagement with brands online. The dependent variable is consumer purchase intention, which reflects the likelihood of a consumer making a purchase based on their exposure to social media marketing efforts. Customer engagement acts as a mediating variable, illustrating how interactive and participatory elements of social media influence consumers' decision-making processes. This framework is justified as it provides a structured way to examine how digital marketing strategies translate into consumer behaviour, helping businesses optimise their online marketing efforts for maximum impact. While integrating elements from the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), the framework effectively captures both rational and emotional factors influencing consumer purchasing decisions.



CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter of the research will provide an overview of the approach, strategy, and data collection method that was employed in the study. The goal is to explain and understand the differences between social media marketing and traditional media, highlighting the impact of social media on the decision-making process. Additionally, it will offer valuable insights for businesses on identifying opportunities and threats in the contemporary marketing landscape.

3.1 Research Approach

The study employs a mixed-method approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative research methods to comprehensively examine the influence of social media marketing on consumer purchase intentions. The quantitative aspect provides numerical data that can be statistically analysed to identify patterns and trends in consumer behaviour, while the qualitative component offers deeper insights into consumer perceptions, attitudes, and motivations (Ghauri & Gronghaug, 2009). This approach is justified as it allows for a more holistic understanding of the research problem by combining numerical data with contextual interpretations. Moreover, mixed-method research enhances the validity and reliability of findings by corroborating quantitative results with qualitative insights (Donthu et al., 2016). Given the study's focus on social media marketing, which involves subjective consumer experiences and measurable behavioural patterns, a mixed-method approach is the most appropriate to capture both aspects effectively.

3.2 Research Design

A case study design is adopted to conduct an in-depth analysis of the relationship between social media marketing and consumer purchase intentions, with a specific focus on Lusaka, Zambia. The case study approach allows for a detailed examination of the subject within its real-world context, making it ideal for understanding complex social interactions, such as consumer engagement with digital marketing (Saunders et al., 2007). This design is justified as it provides a rich, contextual analysis of how consumers

interact with brands online, incorporating both empirical data and real-world scenarios (Yin, 2018). Furthermore, a case study approach enables the collection of diverse data sources, including surveys and thematic analysis, which strengthens the credibility and applicability of the findings.

3.3 Study Population

According to the state of Digital Report (2024), Zambia was home to 3.55 million social media users in January 2024. This formed our study population. As per Saunders (2007), the population denotes the entire collection of groups from which a sample is drawn. The target respondents for this study comprised of social media users in Zambia as the study was shared online and boosted to reach all the 10 provinces in the country. The actual sample size of the population was tabled in the following sub-chapter and the study targeted individuals who are aged 18 years and above and utilize social media to influence their decision-making process when intending to purchase a product or service.

3.4 Sample Size

Cooper and Schindler (2014) define a sample size as a subset of respondents selected from the target population, chosen with care to represent the entire population. Ombath (2009) emphasizes that to draw conclusions applicable to the entire study population; researchers should ensure that the sample is representative of that population. Therefore, for this study, a sample size of respondents was selected from the target population.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$

n = sample size

N = population size

e = margin of error (expressed as a decimal, e.g., 0.05 for 5%)

$$n = 3,550,120/1+3,550,120(0.05)^2$$

$$n = 3550120/8876.3$$

n = **400 respondents**

The study will have 400 respondents.

3.5 Sampling Technique

Sampling is an essential aspect of research as it is often impractical to survey the entire targeted population due to limitations in budget and time (Saunders, 2007). In this study, a convenience sampling technique was employed to select Zambian consumers, who constitute the target population, a questionnaire was sent out to people online via social media, and email.

3.6 Data Collection/Instruments

The study utilises a combination of data collection instruments to ensure a comprehensive analysis of the influence of social media marketing on consumer purchase intentions. Structured questionnaires were distributed to respondents in Lusaka via social media and email, serving as the primary data collection tool. This method was chosen due to its efficiency and cost-effectiveness in gathering a large volume of data (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). The questionnaires primarily comprised closed-ended questions to ensure standardised, measurable, and statistically significant responses.

In addition to questionnaires, online surveys were conducted to collect quantitative data from a diverse group of respondents. Surveys provide a reliable means of facilitating statistical analysis, enabling the study to establish correlations between social media marketing strategies and consumer purchase behaviour (Emini & Zeqiri, 2021). Furthermore, the widespread use of online surveys ensures accessibility across different demographics, thereby enhancing the generalisability of the findings. To complement the quantitative data, thematic analysis was employed to examine open-ended responses, allowing the study to explore key themes related to consumer behaviour, brand perception, and engagement on social media. This approach enables the extraction of meaningful patterns and insights from qualitative data, providing a deeper contextual

understanding of consumer attitudes and motivations (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The inclusion of qualitative analysis enhances the study by capturing the psychological impact of social media marketing, offering a more nuanced perspective that numerical data alone may not fully reveal. By integrating these data collection methods, the study ensures a robust and well-rounded examination of the research problem.

3.7 Data Analysis

To effectively analyze the collected data and address the research objectives, this study employs both quantitative and qualitative analysis techniques (Ghauri & Gronghaug, 2009). The quantitative data analysis is conducted using descriptive and inferential statistical methods, with the aid of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Descriptive statistics, such as means, frequencies, and percentages, are used to summarize and present key trends in consumer behavior. Additionally, regression analysis and Pearson correlation analysis, are applied to examine relationships between social media marketing and consumer purchase intentions (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). These methods facilitate hypothesis testing and enable the study to determine the strength and significance of associations between variables (Mugenda et al., 2012). For the qualitative data analysis, a thematic analysis approach is employed to examine open-ended responses. Thematic analysis involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting recurring themes within the qualitative dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method helps uncover deeper insights into consumer perceptions, attitudes, and motivations regarding social media marketing. By categorizing qualitative responses into key themes, the study enhances its contextual understanding of how digital marketing influences purchasing decisions (Donthu et al., 2016).

Given the study's mixed-methods approach, integrating both statistical and thematic analyses provides a comprehensive and well-rounded interpretation of findings. This methodological combination allows for the validation of numerical results through qualitative insights, ensuring a richer and more holistic understanding of the influence of social media marketing on consumer decision-making. Tables and figures are utilized to present findings clearly and enhance interpretation (Cooper & Schindler, 2014).

3.8 Ethical Considerations

3.8.1 Accessibility

The research will maintain an appropriate length for the questionnaire, so certain theories discussed in earlier chapters will be omitted. The questions will be logically organized to follow the main steps of the decision-making process: problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post purchase decision (Lee, 2017).

3.8.2 Research Ethics

The literature has largely overlooked the influence of social media on consumer purchasing intentions. Examining issues such as privacy, information security, online manipulation, and disclosure policies can shed light on the ethical challenges of social media marketing and its impact on consumer behavior (Bhandari, 2021).

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

Chapter Four presents the findings derived from the analysis of data collected during this research on the impact of social media marketing on consumer purchase intentions. The results are organised thematically, reflecting the research objectives and questions. The chapter focuses on interpreting the responses obtained from participants, highlighting key patterns, correlations, and variations. This section also delves into the implications of the findings, providing a foundation for discussions in subsequent chapters.

4.2 Response rate

The study had a response rate for the study out of the 400 anticipated respondents was only 392 respondents indicating a response rate of 98% for the study. One of the main reasons why the study did not achieve a 100% response rate was due to time constraints and that participants have sceptical observations about surveys due to the ongoing online scams.

4.3 Demographic data of respondents

4.3.1 Age of the respondents

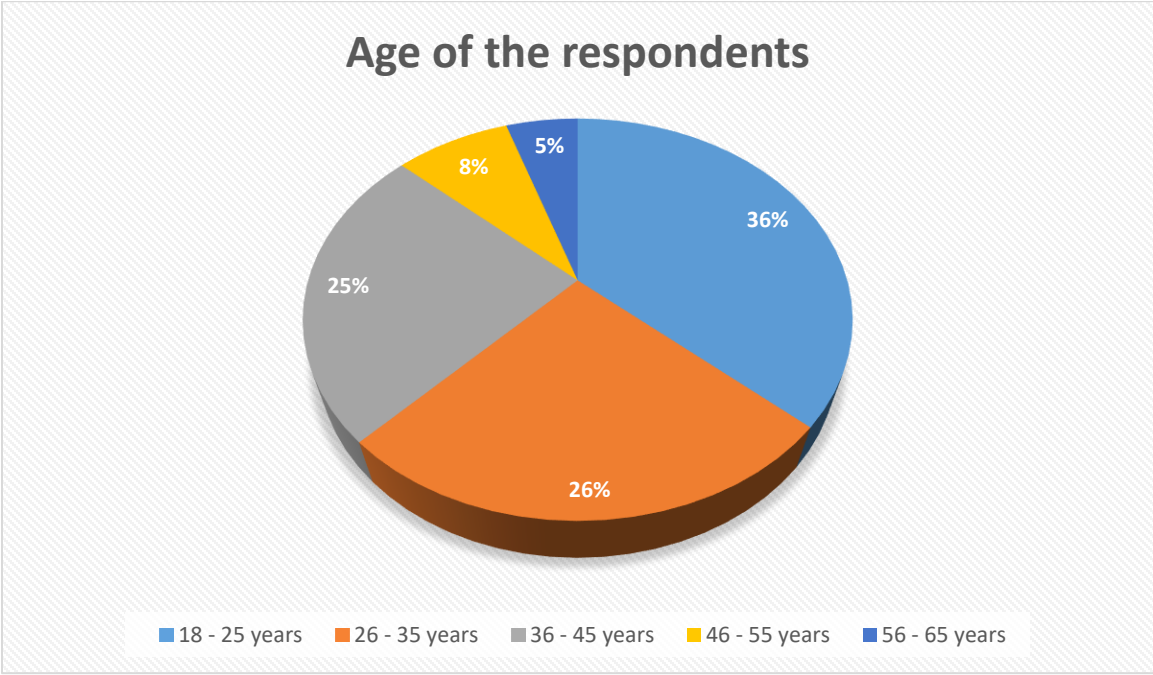


Figure 2: Age of the respondents

143 respondents were between the age of 18 to 25 years, 101 respondents were between the age of 26 to 35 years of age, 96 respondents were between the age of 36 years to 45 years, 32 respondents were between the age of 46 to 55 years of age, 20 respondents were between the age of 56 to 65 years of age.

4.3.2 Gender of the Respondents

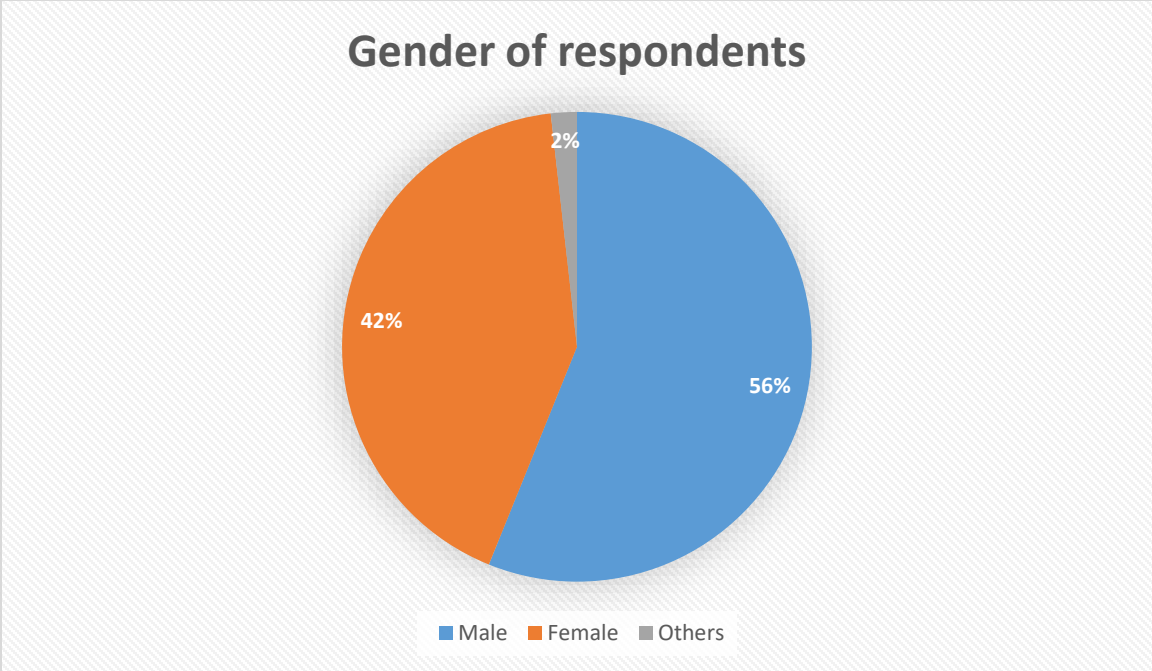


Figure 3: Gender of the Respondents

Out of the 392 respondents, 220 were male respondents, 165 were female respondents, and 7 stated another gender which was falling under others.

4.4 Presentation of findings

4.4.1 Frequency Table

Which of the social media sites do you use on a daily basis?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Facebook	94	24.0	24.0	24.0
Twitter	12	3.1	3.1	27.0
Instagram	8	2.0	2.0	29.1
TikTok	22	5.6	5.6	34.7
LinkedIn	6	1.5	1.5	36.2
WhatsApp	243	62.0	62.0	98.2
YouTube	7	1.8	1.8	100.0
Total	392	100.0	100.0	

Table 1: Data on which social media sites respondents use on a daily basis

The data reveals that WhatsApp is the most frequently used social media platform daily, with 62.0% of respondents indicating regular usage. This is significantly higher than any other platform, highlighting its dominance in daily social media engagement. Facebook follows as the second most used platform, with 24.0% of users reporting daily activity. TikTok is the third most popular, albeit at a much lower rate, with 5.6% of respondents using it daily. Twitter (3.1%), Instagram (2.0%), YouTube (1.8%), and LinkedIn (1.5%) have the lowest daily engagement rates among the surveyed platforms. The cumulative percentages indicate that by the time WhatsApp is accounted for, 98.2% of respondents have been represented, with YouTube bringing the total to 100.0%. These findings suggest that messaging and social networking platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook remain dominant, whereas professional networking (LinkedIn) and video-based platforms (YouTube) are less frequently accessed daily.

How much time do you spend on social media sites per day?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Less than an hour	33	8.4	8.4	8.4
1-3 hours	149	38.0	38.0	46.4
4-6 hours	142	36.2	36.2	82.7
7-9 hours	54	13.8	13.8	96.4
Over 10 hours	14	3.6	3.6	100.0
Total	392	100.0	100.0	

Table 2: Time spent on social media

The data indicates that most respondents spend a considerable amount of time on social media daily. The most common duration is 1-3 hours per day, reported by 38.0% of participants, followed closely by 4-6 hours, which accounts for 36.2%. This suggests that nearly three-quarters (74.2%) of respondents spend between 1 and 6 hours on social media daily. A smaller yet notable proportion (13.8%) engage for 7-9 hours, while 3.6% report usage exceeding 10 hours per day, highlighting a group with particularly high engagement. Meanwhile, only 8.4% of respondents spend less than an hour on social media daily, indicating that minimal use is relatively uncommon. The cumulative percentages show that by the time the 4–6-hour category is accounted for, 82.7% of respondents have been included, with nearly all users falling within the 7–9-hour range before reaching full representation at 100.0%.

Can social media provide information about products and services

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly disagree	2	.5	.5	.5
Neutral	15	3.8	3.8	4.3
Agree	134	34.2	34.2	38.5
Strongly agree	241	61.5	61.5	100.0
Total	392	100.0	100.0	

Table 3: Data on whether social media can provide information about a product or service

The data clearly indicates that social media is widely recognised as an effective source of information about products and services. A significant 61.5% of respondents strongly agree that social media provides such information, while an additional 34.2% agree, bringing the total positive response to 95.7%. This overwhelming majority suggests that social media plays a crucial role in informing consumers about products and services. Conversely, only 3.8% of respondents remain neutral, indicating uncertainty or indifference, while a mere 0.5% strongly disagree, reflecting minimal opposition to this notion. The cumulative percentages show that by the time agreement is accounted for, nearly 99.5% of respondents acknowledge at least some level of recognition of social media as an information source.

Do you have positive or negative prejudgment towards a product before you use it?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Always	55	14.0	14.0	14.0
Never	3	.8	.8	14.8
Rarely	23	5.9	5.9	20.7
Sometimes	311	79.3	79.3	100.0
Total	392	100.0	100.0	

Table 4: Prejudgment towards a product before you use it

The data suggests that most respondents form some level of prejudgment about a product before using it. A significant 79.3% of respondents stated that they sometimes have either positive or negative preconceived opinions, indicating that external influences such as reviews, advertisements, or word-of-mouth often shape their expectations. Additionally, 14.0% of respondents always have a prejudgment, reinforcing the idea that initial perceptions are a key factor in consumer behaviour. In contrast, only 5.9% rarely form such opinions, and an even smaller 0.8% claim they never prejudge a product before trying it. The cumulative percentages highlight that by the time the rarely category is included, 20.7% of respondents have already been accounted for, with the remaining 79.3% falling into the sometimes category before reaching full representation at 100.0%.

Which of the following led you to prejudge the product or service?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Past experience	137	34.9	34.9	34.9
Reputation of the brand	46	11.7	11.7	46.7
Internet information	92	23.5	23.5	70.2
Information from friends, family, and peers	97	24.7	24.7	94.9
Knowledge about the brand	20	5.1	5.1	100.0
Total	392	100.0	100.0	

Table 5: Prejudge the product or service

The data reveals that past experience plays the most significant role in shaping consumer prejudgment about a product or service, with 34.9% of respondents citing it as their primary influence. This suggests that previous interactions with a brand heavily impact future perceptions. Information from friends, family, and peers is the second most influential factor, accounting for 24.7%, highlighting the importance of word-of-mouth recommendations in shaping consumer expectations.

Additionally, internet information is a key driver of prejudgment for 23.5% of respondents, reflecting the growing reliance on online reviews, advertisements, and digital content in decision-making. Brand reputation influences 11.7% of respondents, showing that a company’s overall image plays a role but is not as dominant as direct experience or personal recommendations. Finally, knowledge about the brand accounts for 5.1%, indicating that while some consumers form opinions based on prior awareness of the brand, this factor is the least influential overall. The cumulative percentages show that by

the time internet information is included, 70.2% of respondents have already been accounted for, with the remaining factors contributing to the final 100%.

Do you search for information about a product or service before you purchase?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Always	268	68.4	68.4	68.4
Maybe	103	26.3	26.3	94.6
Rarely	14	3.6	3.6	98.2
Never	7	1.8	1.8	100.0
Total	392	100.0	100.0	

Table 6: Do people search for information about a product or service before purchase

The data indicates that the majority of respondents actively seek information about a product or service before making a purchase. A significant 68.4% of respondents always research before buying, highlighting the importance of informed decision-making in consumer behaviour. Additionally, 26.3% responded with maybe, suggesting that while they do not always conduct research, they still consider it an important step in some cases. Only 3.6% of respondents rarely look for product or service information before purchasing, and an even smaller 1.8% never conduct any prior research. The cumulative percentages show that by the time the maybe category is accounted for, 94.6% of respondents have already been included, with only a minimal portion making impulse purchases without prior research.

Does social media influence you to buy products/services?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Yes	275	70.2	70.2	70.2
No	32	8.2	8.2	78.3
Maybe	85	21.7	21.7	100.0
Total	392	100.0	100.0	

Table 7: Social media influence on buying products/services

The data suggests that social media plays a significant role in influencing purchasing decisions. A majority of 70.2% of respondents confirmed that social media does influence them to buy products or services, highlighting the power of digital marketing, advertisements, and influencer recommendations. Additionally, 21.7% of respondents selected maybe, indicating that while they are not always influenced, social media still plays a role in shaping their purchasing choices. On the other hand, only 8.2% of respondents stated that social media does not influence their buying decisions, suggesting that a very small portion of consumers remain unaffected by online promotions and recommendations. The cumulative percentages show that by the time the maybe category is accounted for, 100% of respondents have been included.

Do you find mass media advertisements helpful?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Yes	361	92.1	92.1	92.1
No	31	7.9	7.9	100.0
Total	392	100.0	100.0	

Table 8: Do respondents find mass media advertisements helpful

The data shows that a significant majority of respondents, 92.1%, find mass media advertisements helpful, indicating that traditional advertising channels, such as TV, radio, and print, still play a vital role in informing consumers. In contrast, only 7.9% of respondents do not find these advertisements helpful. The cumulative percentages confirm that almost all respondents, with the exception of a small minority, consider mass media advertisements to be a valuable source of information.

Which mass media channels do you find helpful?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid TV	311	79.3	79.3	79.3
Radio	74	18.9	18.9	98.2
Newspaper	7	1.8	1.8	100.0
Total	392	100.0	100.0	

Table 9: Which mass media channels are helpful

The data reveals that TV is by far the most helpful mass media channel for respondents, with 79.3% of participants indicating its effectiveness. This highlights TV's continued dominance as a preferred medium for mass media advertising. Radio follows as the second most helpful channel, with 18.9% of respondents finding it useful. In contrast, newspapers are the least helpful, with only 1.8% of respondents considering them valuable for mass media advertisements. The cumulative percentages show that by the time radio is included, 98.2% of respondents have been accounted for, with the remaining 1.8% noting newspapers as the source of helpful mass media advertisements.

Do you believe that looking for information about a product/service is easier on social media as compared to mass media?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strong agree	213	54.3	54.3	54.3
Agree	147	37.5	37.5	91.8
Neutral	29	7.4	7.4	99.2
Disagree	3	.8	.8	100.0
Total	392	100.0	100.0	

Table 10: Looking for information about a product/service on social media

The data shows a clear preference for social media as a more accessible source for information about products and services compared to mass media. A majority of 54.3% of respondents strongly agree that it is easier to search for information on social media, while 37.5% agree, bringing the total positive response to 91.8%. Only 7.4% of respondents remain neutral, and a very small 0.8% disagree, indicating that very few people find mass media more accessible for product research.

Do you rely on information that is on social media when you have questions about a purchase?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Always	77	19.6	19.6	19.6
	Sometimes	244	62.2	62.2	81.9
	Rarely	62	15.8	15.8	97.7
	Never	9	2.3	2.3	100.0
	Total	392	100.0	100.0	

Table 11: Rely on information on social media when questions about a product or service

The data reveals that a large proportion of respondents rely on social media for information when they have questions about a purchase. 62.2% of respondents sometimes turn to social media, suggesting it is an occasional but significant resource for product-related queries. Additionally, 19.6% always rely on social media for purchase-related information, indicating a strong dependence on these platforms. A smaller group, 15.8%, rarely use social media for such inquiries, while only 2.3% never seek information on social media when considering a purchase. The cumulative percentages show that by the time the sometimes category is included, 81.9% of respondents rely on social media in some capacity, making it a crucial channel for consumer decision-making.

Change mind about a purchase after new information on social media sites

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Always	44	11.2	11.2	11.2
Sometimes	294	75.0	75.0	86.2
Rarely	50	12.8	12.8	99.0
Never	4	1.0	1.0	100.0
Total	392	100.0	100.0	

Table 12: Change mind about a purchase after new information

The data shows that a substantial number of respondents change their mind about a purchase after receiving new information on social media sites. 75% of respondents sometimes alter their decision based on social media content, indicating that social media plays a significant role in influencing purchasing behaviour. Additionally, 11.2% always change their mind, showing a strong reliance on social media updates. A smaller portion, 12.8%, rarely change their mind after encountering new information, and only 1% never change their purchase decision based on social media. The cumulative percentages demonstrate that 86.2% of respondents are influenced in some way by new information on social media, highlighting its power in shaping consumer choices.

Are you likely to share information/reviews/blogs etc. with friends, family, or peers via social media about a purchase you made?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Always	99	25.3	25.3	25.3
	Sometimes	226	57.7	57.7	82.9
	Rarely	67	17.1	17.1	100.0
	Total	392	100.0	100.0	

Table 13: Likely to share information

The data shows that a majority of respondents are likely to share information, reviews, or blogs about a purchase they made via social media. 57.7% of respondents sometimes share such content, indicating that sharing is a common practice but not always consistent. Additionally, 25.3% always share information or reviews, demonstrating a strong willingness to engage with their networks about their purchases. A smaller portion, 17.1%, rarely share their experiences, while no respondents were found to completely refrain from sharing such content.

Do you change your attitude towards certain brands after you come across positive information about them?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	318	81.1	81.1	81.1
	No	9	2.3	2.3	83.4
	Maybe	65	16.6	16.6	100.0
	Total	392	100.0	100.0	

Table 14: Change attitude towards certain brands after positive information

The data reveals that a significant majority of respondents, 81.1%, change their attitude towards certain brands after coming across positive information about them. This highlights the strong influence of favourable brand perceptions on consumer behaviour. Additionally, 16.6% of respondents are unsure, indicating that positive information may have some impact, but it is not always definitive. Only a small minority, 2.3%, do not change their attitude towards brands after encountering positive information. The cumulative percentages show that a vast majority, 97.7%, are influenced by positive brand information, suggesting that businesses can significantly improve their image and consumer loyalty through effective communication and positive online presence.

Do you agree that social media gives customers and companies an effective platform to communicate with each other?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly agree	210	53.6	53.6	53.6
Agree	166	42.3	42.3	95.9
Neutral	16	4.1	4.1	100.0
Total	392	100.0	100.0	

Table 15: social media gives customers and companies an effective platform

The data indicates that a strong majority of respondents believe social media provides an effective platform for communication between customers and companies. 53.6% strongly agree with this statement, while 42.3% agree, making up a combined 95.9% who see social media as an effective communication tool. Only a small proportion, 4.1%, remain neutral, suggesting that almost all respondents recognise the value of social media in facilitating customer-company interactions.

Do you feel encouraged to share your opinion on social media platforms after a purchase?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Yes	220	56.1	56.1	56.1
No	81	20.7	20.7	76.8
Maybe	91	23.2	23.2	100.0
Total	392	100.0	100.0	

Table 16: Feel encouraged to share your opinion on social media platforms

The data shows that over half of the respondents, 56.1%, feel encouraged to share their opinion on social media platforms after making a purchase. This indicates that a significant number of consumers are motivated to engage online about their buying experiences. Additionally, 23.2% of respondents are unsure, reflecting some uncertainty about sharing opinions.

On the other hand, 20.7% do not feel encouraged to share their opinions on social media after a purchase.

4.4.2 Descriptive statistics

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Which of the social media sites do you use on a daily basis?	392	1	7	4.51	2.170
How much time do you spend on social media sites per day?	392	1	5	2.66	.941
Can social media provide information about products and services	392	1	4	3.57	.595
Do you have positive or negative prejudgment towards a product before you use it?	392	1	4	3.51	1.054
Which of the following led you to prejudge the product or service?	392	1	5	2.53	1.324
Do you search for information about a product or service before you purchase?	392	1	4	1.39	.646
Does social media influence you to buy products/services?	392	1	3	1.52	.828

Do you find mass media advertisements helpful?	392	1	2	1.08	.270
Which mass media channels do you find helpful?	392	1	3	1.22	.459
Do you believe that looking for information about a product/service is easier on social media as compared to mass media?	392	1	4	1.55	.666
Do you rely on information that is on social media when you have questions about a purchase?	392	1	4	2.01	.669
Change mind about a purchase after new information on social media sites	392	1	4	2.04	.529
Are you likely to share information/reviews/blogs etc. with friends, family, or peers via social media about a purchase you made?	392	1	3	1.92	.646

Do you change your attitude towards certain brands after you come across positive information about them?	392	1	3	1.35	.750
Do you agree that social media gives customers and companies an effective platform to communicate with each other?	392	1	3	1.51	.577
Do you feel encouraged to share your opinion on social media platforms after a purchase?	392	1	3	1.67	.829
Valid N (listwise)	392				

Table 17: Descriptive statistics

The descriptive statistics provide valuable insights into the patterns of social media usage and its influence on consumer behaviour. The mean value of 4.51 (SD = 2.170) for the variable measuring daily social media usage indicates that respondents frequently engage with various platforms. On average, individuals spend between 2-3 hours per day on social media (M = 2.66, SD = 0.941), highlighting the significant role these platforms play in daily routines. Regarding the effectiveness of social media as an information source, respondents overwhelmingly agreed that social media provides information about products and services (M = 3.57, SD = 0.595). This is further supported by the tendency of consumers to prejudge products before use (M = 3.51, SD = 1.054), with factors such as past experiences, brand reputation, and online reviews contributing to their perceptions (M = 2.53, SD = 1.324).

Consumer decision-making behaviour is also shaped by social media, with a mean score of 1.39 (SD = 0.646) indicating that most respondents actively search for product information before making a purchase. Furthermore, social media exerts a strong influence on purchasing decisions (M = 1.52, SD = 0.828), reinforcing its growing role in shaping consumer intent. In contrast, mass media advertisements were not perceived as particularly influential (M = 1.08, SD = 0.270), suggesting a shift away from traditional marketing channels. Additionally, the data reveals that consumers find it easier to access product information via social media compared to mass media (M = 1.55, SD = 0.666). They also exhibit a tendency to change their purchase decisions after encountering new information on social media (M = 2.04, SD = 0.529).

Social interactions further play a role, with a mean score of 1.92 (SD = 0.646) indicating that many respondents share product information with friends and family, reinforcing the role of peer influence in consumer decisions. The findings also show that social media enhances brand perception, as evidenced by the mean score of 1.35 (SD = 0.750) for attitude changes towards brands based on positive information. Respondents further recognised social media's effectiveness in facilitating communication between businesses and consumers (M = 1.51, SD = 0.577), reinforcing its role as a customer engagement tool. Lastly, there is a moderate tendency for individuals to share their opinions online after making a purchase (M = 1.67, SD = 0.829), indicating the growing impact of user-generated content on brand reputation.

4.4.3 Regression analysis

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.624 ^a	.389	.388	.648

a. Predictors: (Constant), Do you change your attitude towards certain brands after you come across positive information about them?

Table 18: Model summary

ANOVA^b

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	104.289	1	104.289	248.583	.000 ^a
	Residual	163.619	390	.420		
	Total	267.908	391			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Do you change your attitude towards certain brands after you come across positive information about them?

b. Dependent Variable: Does social media influence you to buy products/services?

Table 19: Anova

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.582	.068		8.606	.000
	Do you change your attitude towards certain brands after you come across positive information about them?	.689	.044	.624	15.767	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Does social media influence you to buy products/services?

Table 20: Coefficients

The regression analysis examined the relationship between social media influence on purchasing decisions and changes in consumer attitudes towards brands after encountering positive information online. The results indicate a statistically significant relationship between these variables ($p < 0.001$), suggesting that a positive shift in brand perception is strongly associated with an increased likelihood of purchasing products or services due to social media influence. The R-squared value ($R^2 = 0.389$) demonstrates that 38.9% of the variation in purchase decisions can be explained by changes in consumer attitudes towards brands. This implies that while brand perception plays a crucial role in influencing purchasing behaviour, other factors not included in this model also contribute to consumer decisions. The coefficient analysis reveals that for every unit increase in positive attitude change towards a brand, the likelihood of being influenced to purchase on social media increases by 0.689 units. Additionally, the F-statistic (248.583, $p < 0.001$) confirms that the regression model is highly significant, reinforcing the robustness of the relationship between the variables.

4.4.4 Pearson Correlation analysis

Correlations

	Does social media influence you to buy products/services?	Do you change your attitude towards certain brands after you come across positive information about them?
Does social media influence you to buy products/services? Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	1 392	.624** .000 392
Do you change your attitude towards certain brands after you come across positive information about them? Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.624** .000 392	1 392

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 21: Pearson Correlation analysis

The Pearson correlation analysis demonstrates a strong positive relationship ($r = 0.624$, $p < 0.001$) between social media influence on purchasing decisions and changes in consumer attitudes towards brands after encountering positive information online. This indicates that individuals who experience a favourable shift in brand perception due to social media are significantly more likely to be influenced to purchase products or services

through these platforms. The statistical significance ($p < 0.01$) suggests that this relationship is unlikely to have occurred by chance, reinforcing the reliability of the findings.

4.4.5 Thematic analysis

4.4.5.1 Social Media as a Persuasive Tool for Purchase Intentions

Participants expressed that social media marketing significantly influences their purchase decisions by offering personalised content, product recommendations, and a sense of community around brands. One participant mentioned, “I often purchase products after seeing influencer reviews on Instagram, as they feel more genuine than traditional ads,” highlighting the persuasive power of peer influence. Another participant added, “When a brand consistently shares engaging content and offers discounts through social media, I’m more likely to make a purchase because it feels like a good deal,” demonstrating the impact of targeted offers and engagement.

4.4.5.2 Challenges and Optimisation Strategies in Social Media Marketing

Many participants noted that businesses struggle with staying relevant and maintaining engagement amidst a crowded digital space. A participant shared, “It’s hard for brands to stand out, especially when there are so many similar products being advertised all the time,” illustrating the challenge of differentiation. Others pointed to the need for targeted content creation, with one remarking, “Businesses should focus on creating content that speaks directly to their audience’s needs, rather than trying to appeal to everyone. This has worked better for brands I follow.” Effective strategies that were suggested included investing in data analytics to understand customer behaviour and creating interactive content that fosters engagement.

4.4.5.3 Building Trust Through Social Media Engagement

Participants highlighted the importance of consistent and transparent engagement in fostering trust, which directly influences purchasing decisions. One respondent said, “I trust brands more when they interact with me directly on social media and respond to my queries quickly. It shows they care about their customers.” Another participant expressed, “When I see a brand actively engaging with customers and being transparent about their

products, it makes me feel more confident in buying from them,” reinforcing the idea that trust is a crucial factor in the decision-making process.

4.4.5.4 Effectiveness of Social Media Marketing Techniques in Customer Acquisition and Retention

Participants felt that a variety of techniques, including targeted ads, influencer partnerships, and content marketing, played pivotal roles in attracting new customers and retaining existing ones. One participant remarked, “I’m drawn to a brand when I see them working with influencers that I trust. It makes me more likely to buy, and I keep coming back because I feel connected to the brand.” Another commented, “Brands that offer exclusive deals to followers on social media make me feel valued, which encourages me to stay loyal to them.” These insights highlight the multifaceted approach businesses can adopt to achieve both acquisition and retention through social media marketing.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter offers a comprehensive analysis and interpretation of the research findings. It achieves this by outlining each research objective and presenting the results obtained through the data analysis process. The findings are then compared with those of previous studies.

5.2 Discussion of findings

The study revealed that WhatsApp and Facebook are the most frequently used social media platforms among respondents, suggesting that businesses targeting consumers in Zambia should prioritise these platforms for marketing campaigns. This finding aligns with previous studies that have identified WhatsApp as a dominant tool for instant communication and brand interaction (Alalwan et al., 2017). Yang et.al (2016) states that the high engagement on these platforms supports the notion that businesses can maximise their reach and brand awareness by leveraging targeted content on these networks. Additionally, the study found that the majority of respondents spend between one and six hours on social media daily, which indicates a significant opportunity for businesses to capture consumer attention. Dolan (2016) states that the high level of engagement reflects the increasing reliance on social media for entertainment, communication, and information-seeking purposes. This finding aligns with research suggesting that businesses must create engaging and interactive content to maintain consumer interest (Pütter, 2017). A key finding of the study is that social media is widely recognised as an effective source of product and service information.

Nearly all respondents agreed that they rely on social media to learn about brands, which underscores the growing preference for digital platforms over traditional marketing channels (Donthu et al., 2021). This finding supports previous research indicating that consumers actively seek product information, reviews, and recommendations on social media before making purchasing decisions (Hudson & Thal, 2013).

Furthermore, the study highlighted that consumers are influenced by factors such as past experiences, brand reputation, online reviews, and peer recommendations when forming perceptions of products. These findings are consistent with the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), which suggests that consumers process marketing messages through both rational (central) and emotional (peripheral) routes (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Ashley & Tuten (2015) confirms that businesses should therefore focus on providing both detailed product information and engaging visual content to appeal to different consumer segments. The study found that a significant number of respondents actively search for product information before making a purchase, indicating a high level of consumer involvement in decision-making. Additionally, most respondents confirmed that social media influences their purchasing decisions, reinforcing the power of digital marketing in shaping consumer behaviour. This finding aligns with research by Gass & Seiter (2022), which emphasises the persuasive impact of social media marketing in influencing consumer choices.

Notably, the study also revealed that consumers frequently change their purchase decisions after encountering new information on social media. This finding supports the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), which posits that attitudes and external influences, such as peer recommendations and brand messaging, can significantly alter consumer intentions (Teng & Kong; 2015). Onesi-Ozigagun et.al (2024) states that businesses should therefore prioritise real-time engagement and customer feedback management to positively influence consumer decision-making. The findings indicate that social media plays a pivotal role in shaping brand perception. Most respondents reported changing their attitude towards brands after encountering positive information about them online. This aligns with research suggesting that user-generated content, influencer endorsements, and social proof significantly impact consumer trust and brand loyalty (Dwivedi et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the study confirmed that social media provides a highly effective platform for communication between businesses and consumers. Most respondents agreed that social media enables direct interaction with companies, reinforcing the importance of two-way communication in modern marketing strategies. This finding is supported by studies

that highlight the benefits of digital engagement in fostering brand loyalty and customer satisfaction (Assaad & Gomez, 2011). Chahal (2017) states that businesses should, therefore, actively manage their social media presence, engage with consumers, and respond to queries to enhance brand trust and credibility. Another critical finding of the study is the declining influence of traditional mass media in consumer decision-making. Although many respondents still find television and radio advertisements helpful, a significant proportion believe that social media is a more effective tool for obtaining product information. This finding supports the shift from traditional to digital marketing, which has been widely documented in literature (Alalwan et al., 2017).

Additionally, the study found that social media marketing offers greater accessibility and engagement compared to mass media. This confirms that digital platforms provide consumers with more control over the information they consume, allowing them to interact with brands in real time (Blasco-Arcas; 2016). Celestin et.al (2024) highlights that businesses should leverage this trend by investing in social media advertising, influencer partnerships, and targeted digital campaigns to enhance customer engagement and drive conversions. The regression analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between social media marketing and consumer purchase intentions. The model demonstrated that changes in brand perception significantly influence purchasing decisions, confirming that positive brand messaging and consumer engagement directly contribute to increased sales (Cheung & Pires; 2024). This finding aligns with previous studies highlighting the role of social media in shaping consumer trust and brand loyalty (Matin et al., 2020). Similarly, the Pearson correlation analysis confirmed a strong correlation ($r = 0.624$, $p < 0.001$) between social media influence and consumer attitudes toward brands. This statistical relationship suggests that businesses can strategically enhance their brand image through effective digital marketing campaigns. Companies should therefore focus on building trust, authenticity, and consumer engagement to maximise the impact of their online marketing efforts.

5.3 Conclusion: Addressing the Research Objectives

The findings of this study successfully address the research objectives outlined at the beginning of the research.

1. Assessing the impact of social media marketing on consumer purchase intentions

The study confirms that social media marketing significantly influences consumer purchasing behaviour, as evidenced by the strong correlation between social media engagement and brand perception.

2. Analysing the relationship between social media engagement and brand trust

The findings reveal that consumers trust brands more when they engage positively on social media, supporting the idea that digital interactions enhance brand credibility.

3. Evaluating the effectiveness of social media marketing strategies

The study highlights that WhatsApp and Facebook are the most effective platforms for consumer engagement, and that influencer marketing, online reviews, and targeted ads are highly persuasive strategies.

4. Identifying challenges and recommending solutions

Challenges such as digital illiteracy, misinformation, and consumer scepticism were noted.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter brings together the research findings and presents conclusions about the impact of social media marketing on consumer purchase intentions. It assesses how well the study's objectives were achieved, situates the results within the context of current literature, and offers practical suggestions for businesses, marketers, and upcoming

6.2 Conclusion

This study set out to examine the influence of social media marketing on consumer purchase intentions and the benefits for businesses, with a particular focus on the Zambian market. The research explored key factors driving consumer engagement, assessed the effectiveness of social media marketing strategies, and analysed the challenges businesses face in leveraging digital platforms. The findings confirmed that social media is a dominant force in shaping consumer perceptions, purchase intentions, and brand loyalty.

The study was structured into five chapters, each playing a crucial role in addressing the research objectives. Chapter One provided an introduction to the research, highlighting the background, problem statement, objectives, and research questions. This chapter justified the need to explore the impact of social media marketing in a digitalised business environment. Chapter Two reviewed empirical literature and theoretical frameworks, drawing insights from global, regional, and local studies. The review established that consumer trust, engagement, and digital marketing strategies are critical determinants of purchasing behaviour. Chapter Three outlined the methodology, detailing the research design, sample size, data collection techniques, and analysis methods. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, using both quantitative (survey) and qualitative (thematic) analysis, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. Chapter Four presented the findings, revealing that WhatsApp and Facebook are the most used platforms, with many consumers actively seeking product information before making a purchase. Social media was found to be more influential than traditional media in shaping consumer choices, with businesses leveraging digital marketing strategies

such as influencer collaborations, targeted ads, and online engagement to build brand trust. Chapter Five discussed these findings, relating them to the research objectives and existing literature. The results supported the hypothesis that social media marketing significantly influences consumer purchase intentions, reinforcing the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM).

The study successfully answered its research objectives:

To assess the impact of social media marketing on consumer purchase intentions – Findings confirmed that digital marketing significantly influences purchasing behaviour, with positive brand messaging and user engagement increasing purchase likelihood. To analyse the relationship between social media engagement and brand trust – The study found a strong correlation between social media interactions and consumer trust, highlighting the importance of authenticity and responsiveness in digital marketing.

To evaluate the effectiveness of different social media marketing strategies – Strategies such as user-generated content, targeted advertising, and influencer partnerships were identified as key drivers of customer acquisition and retention. To identify challenges businesses face in leveraging social media marketing – The research revealed barriers such as digital illiteracy, misinformation, and trust issues, suggesting the need for education, transparency, and brand consistency in digital campaigns.

In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into the evolving landscape of digital marketing and underscores the importance of social media as a tool for business growth. Companies must continuously adapt to emerging trends, leveraging data analytics and consumer insights to refine their strategies. The findings confirm that social media marketing is a powerful driver of consumer engagement and brand success, making it an indispensable component of modern business practices.

6.3 Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed for businesses, policymakers, and future researchers.

6.3.1 Recommendations for Businesses

To maximise the effectiveness of digital marketing, businesses should adopt innovative strategies that enhance consumer engagement and drive sales. Firstly, investing in data-driven marketing strategies is crucial. Businesses should leverage data analytics and artificial intelligence (AI) to track consumer preferences and tailor marketing efforts accordingly. Predictive analytics can help companies understand buying patterns, optimise ad targeting, and improve overall marketing efficiency.

Enhancing consumer trust and transparency is also essential. Trust plays a significant role in influencing purchase decisions, and businesses should ensure transparency in product information, promptly address customer concerns, and collaborate with credible influencers and brand advocates to build consumer confidence. Additionally, optimising content for engagement can significantly boost digital marketing success. Social media users prefer interactive and visually appealing content, making video marketing, live interactions, and engaging storytelling techniques valuable tools for capturing consumer interest and fostering brand loyalty.

Leveraging influencer and peer marketing can further enhance brand credibility and increase conversion rates. Partnering with local influencers and encouraging customers to share their experiences through reviews and testimonials can create a sense of authenticity and trust in a brand's offerings. Strengthening social media customer support is another critical aspect of digital marketing. Consumers expect real-time engagement, and businesses should establish dedicated social media support teams to handle inquiries efficiently, ensuring improved customer satisfaction and long-term brand loyalty.

Moreover, adapting to emerging platforms is vital for reaching new audiences. While Facebook and WhatsApp currently dominate the Zambian market, businesses should explore platforms like TikTok and Instagram Reels to connect with younger demographics and expand their reach.

Finally, integrating social commerce features can enhance the shopping experience and drive direct sales. Businesses should enable seamless purchases through platforms like Instagram Shopping, Facebook Marketplace, and WhatsApp Business Payments,

making it easier for consumers to buy products without leaving their preferred social media apps.

6.3.2 Recommendations for Policymakers

To enhance the effectiveness of digital marketing and foster a more inclusive digital economy, several key measures should be implemented.

Firstly, promoting digital literacy is essential. Both the government and the private sector should invest in digital literacy programmes to educate businesses and consumers on safe and effective online marketing practices. Increased awareness and knowledge will empower individuals to navigate the digital landscape responsibly and maximise its potential. Additionally, strengthening consumer protection policies is crucial. Regulatory bodies should enforce strict guidelines on misleading advertisements to ensure businesses operate ethically in the digital space. Transparent marketing practices will enhance consumer trust and contribute to a fairer digital marketplace.

Improving internet accessibility and affordability is another critical step. Limited internet access remains a significant barrier to digital transformation, particularly in underserved areas. Policies should focus on expanding broadband infrastructure and reducing data costs to facilitate greater online engagement and economic participation.

Furthermore, encouraging the participation of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in digital marketing can drive economic growth. SMEs should receive financial incentives, training, and mentorship programmes to help them leverage digital platforms effectively. Equipping smaller businesses with the necessary skills and resources will enable them to compete more effectively in the digital economy.

6.3.3 Recommendations for Future Research

While this study provides substantial insights, it also identifies several gaps that future research can address. One key area for further exploration is the role of emerging platforms. Future studies should examine the impact of newer social media platforms, such as TikTok and Instagram Reels, on consumer purchase intentions, as these channels continue to gain popularity and reshape digital marketing strategies.

Another crucial aspect is the long-term impact of social media marketing. While this study offers a snapshot of current trends, longitudinal research is necessary to assess how digital marketing efforts contribute to sustained consumer loyalty over time. Understanding these long-term effects can help businesses refine their strategies for improved customer retention.

Additionally, further research should analyse how social media marketing influences different demographics. Factors such as age, gender, income levels, and cultural differences may shape consumer engagement with digital marketing in distinct ways. A deeper understanding of these variations can help businesses tailor their marketing efforts to different target audiences more effectively.

The ethical implications of digital advertising also warrant further investigation. With increasing concerns over data privacy, targeted advertisements, and misinformation, future studies should evaluate the ethical considerations surrounding social media marketing. This research can help develop more responsible advertising practices that align with consumer expectations and regulatory standards. Finally, a comparative analysis of social media marketing in different African markets could offer valuable insights. Examining the differences between Zambia and other African countries would provide a better understanding of regional variations and best practices for businesses operating across multiple markets. Such research can enhance strategic decision-making and foster more effective marketing approaches tailored to diverse consumer landscapes.

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APPENDIX

1. Questionnaire



Dear respondent,

You are invited to participate in a survey as part of my research study titled "The Impact of Social Media Marketing on Consumer Purchase Intentions." This study is being conducted as part of the requirements for my Master of Business Administration in Finance (MBA FIN) at the University of Lusaka.

The primary objective of this study is to explore how social media marketing influences consumer behavior and purchase decisions. Your input will provide valuable insights into understanding the role of social media in shaping consumer perceptions and preferences.

Your responses will be kept confidential and used solely for academic purposes. Participation is entirely voluntary, and you may choose to exit the survey at any time. It will only take approximately 5–10 minutes to complete this questionnaire. Your honest feedback is greatly appreciated, if you have any questions or concerns about this survey, please feel free to contact me at Mbewemu@gmail.com.

Thank you for your time and valuable contributions.

Sincerely,

Musadabwe Mbewe

MBA Finance Candidate

University of Lusaka

Age

- 18-21
- 22-25
- 26-30
- 30+

Gender

- Female
- Male

Which of the social media sites do you use on a daily basis?

- Facebook
- WhatsApp
- Instagram
- Twitter (now X)
- LinkedIn
- TikTok
- YouTube
- Snapchat
- Pinterest
- Blogs

How much time do you spend on social media sites per day?

- Less than an hour
- 1-3 hours
- 4-6 hours
- 7-9 hours
- Over 10 hours

Do you think social media sites can provide you with information about products/services?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Do you have positive or negative prejudgment towards a product before you use it?

- Always
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

Which of the following led you to prejudge the product or service? (You can select more than one)

- Past experience
- Reputation of the brand
- Internet information
- Information from friends, family, and peers
- Knowledge about the brand

Do you search for information about a product or service before you purchase?

- Always
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

Does social media influence you to buy products/services?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

Do you find mass media advertisements helpful?

- Yes
- No

Which mass media channels do you find helpful?

- TV
- Radio
- Newspaper

Do you believe that looking for information about a product/service is easier on social media as compared to mass media?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Do you rely on information that is on social media when you have questions about a purchase?

- Always
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

Do you change your mind about a purchase after new information from social media sites?

- Always
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

Are you likely to share information/reviews/blogs etc. with friends, family, or peers via social media about a purchase you made?

- Always
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

Do you change your attitude towards certain brands after you come across positive information about them?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

Do you agree that social media gives customers and companies an effective platform to communicate with each other?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Do you feel encouraged to share your opinion on social media platforms after a purchase?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

2. Regression Analysis

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.624 ^a	.389	.388	.648


a. Predictors: (Constant), Do you change your attitude towards certain brands after you come across positive information about them?

3. Pearson correlation analysis

Correlation

	Does social media influence you to buy products/services?	Do you change your attitude towards certain brands after you come across positive information about them?
Does social media influence you to buy products/services? Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	1 392	.624** .000 392
Do you change your attitude towards certain brands after you come across positive information about them? Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.624** .000 392	1 392

4. Similarity Report



13.02%

SIMILARITY OVERALL

84.70%

POTENTIALLY AI

SCANNED ON: 15 JAN 2025, 10:55 PM

Similarity report

Your text is highlighted according to the matched content in the results above.

● IDENTICAL 0.29%	● CHANGED TEXT 12.73%	● QUOTES 0.35%	● REFERENCES 2.41%
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AI Detector Results

Highlighted sentences with the lowest perplexity, most likely generated by AI.

● LIKELY AI 51.01%	● HIGHLY LIKELY AI 33.69%
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Report #24435339

SCHOOL OF POSTGRADUATE STUDIES THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA
MARKETING ON CONSUMER PURCHASE INTENTIONS. 1 2 5 9 10 11 12 14 17 26 28 53 57 59

64 76 85 100 A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF
POSTGRADUATE STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF LUSAKA IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF THE AWARD OF MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION
IN FINANCE BY MUSADABWE MBEWE MBAFIN23118851 @ 2025 DECLARATIO
N I, MUSADABWE MBEWE, hereby declare that this dissertation
submitted is in partial fulfilment for the award of Master'
s Degree of Business Administration in Finance and that the
work contained herein is my own except where explicitly
stated otherwise in the text. 1 AU 1 THOR: MUSADABWE MB
EWE Signature: Date: /2025
SUPERVISOR: Mr LACKSON ZULU Signature:
Date: /2025 1 DEDICATION This research is de
dicated with love and gratitude to my beloved parents, Mr.
and Mrs. Mbeve. 1 Their unwavering support and encouragement
have been the foundation of my journey.
1 From 1 the start, they have been my strongest pillars,
constantly inspiring me to strive for ex
cellence and persevere through challe
nges. 1 146 Their steadfast belief in my potential has been

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a driving force behind my achievements, and I owe so much to their sacrifices and endless care.

146 Their constant encouragement has instilled in me the values of hard work, resilience, and determination.

For their unconditional love and guidance, I am deeply thankful. To my siblings Floridah, Grace, Wilson, Elijah, and Emmanuel, your love and support have been invaluable throughout this journey. Each of you has played a special role in shaping my growth, offering motivation, reassurance, and unwavering confidence in my abilities. Grace, your wise counsel and guidance have kept me grounded and focused. Elijah, your belief in me has given me the courage to overcome any obstacle. Floridah, your optimism and positivity have been a source of light during tough times. Wilson, your consistent support and understanding have provided strength during challenging moments.

Emmanuel, thank you for being the kind and supportive younger brother I can always rely on.

1 The bond we share as a family is priceless and has been my greatest source of comfort and strength.

1 Each of you has contributed to my success in ways that words cannot fully convey.

1 Your collective encouragement has driven me forward, helping me stay focused on my aspirations. This dedication is a heartfelt tribute to the incredible support system I have been blessed with. It symbolizes the love, sacrifices, and unwavering belief my family has shown me throughout this journey.

1 I am profoundly grateful for each one of you and pray that God continues to bless and guide you always. 2 In conclusion, this research represents not just a personal accomplishment but a collective triumph.

AUTHOR: NUSADABWE MBEWE

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