

WAGENINGEN UNIVERSITY AND RESEARCH

BACHELOR THESIS

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**Factors influencing the purchase intention  
on Facebook**

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# Table of Contents

- I. Introduction ..... 2**
- II. Theoretical framework..... 6**
  - Theory of Planned Behaviour ..... 6*
  - Social Media Marketing ..... 7*
  - Social Media and Facebook ..... 7*
  - Social Media Engagement..... 8*
  - Impression Management ..... 9*
  - Consumer Attitudes towards Social Media Marketing ..... 9*
  - Purchase Intention of the Consumer ..... 10*
- III. Method..... 11**
  - Development of a Query ..... 11*
  - Screening of Papers ..... 13*
- IV. Results and Analysis ..... 15**
  - Bibliometric Data ..... 15*
  - Results Sub-question 1 ..... 16*
  - Results Sub-question 2 ..... 18*
  - Results Sub-question 3 ..... 20*
  - Results ..... 22*
  - Summary of Articles ..... 24*
- V. Discussion and Conclusion ..... 26**
  - Theoretical Implications..... 27*
  - Practical Implications..... 27*
  - Limitations ..... 28*
  - Future scope of research ..... 29*
  - Conclusion ..... 30*
- Reference list ..... 31**

# I. Introduction

Social media is a phenomenon that has completely changed the traditional business environment, by playing a vital role in marketing and customer relationship building. Nowadays, traditional marketing methods struggle to sustain a business, therefore, businesses must adjust to the rapidly changing environment (Kennerly & Neely, 2003). Many businesses are already implementing new marketing strategies, such as using social media marketing (SMM), within a platform such as Facebook. But how does this affect the consumer's purchase intention? Specifically, does the consumer's attitude towards SMM affect purchase intention? This research, therefore, aims to acquire an initial understanding of consumer attitudes towards SMM and its relationship with purchase intention within the Facebook platform.

Social media refers to “online tools where content, opinions, perspectives, insights, and media can be shared” (Nair, 2011, p. 45). With the approach of the Internet and emerging global organizational trends, social media has become a prominent topic. In almost every part of the world there is an increasing rate of social media usage and many people spend part of their daily routine on social media. Statistics show that half of the global population is currently active on the internet (Galov, 2019). Galov (2019) suggests that from approximately today's 3.5 billion internet users, 72% are frequently active on social media platforms. In addition, Clement (2020) shows that Facebook has more than 2.6 billion monthly users, and therefore is the most widely used social media platform worldwide.

Currently we are experiencing a pandemic which has changed the lives of people around the globe. As physical contact becomes minimized, online contact became even more important and social media usage increased. Online purchases also experienced a record-breaking rise. In some countries, shops are closed, or people do not want to visit physical stores to avoid the risk of getting COVID-19. This topic has become more important lately due to the increased opportunities to sell online.

Social media is a phenomenon that is very useful for marketers and those working in advertising agencies. Moreover, social media encourages people to self-select into lifestyle groups that facilitate target marketing (Kahle & Valette-Florence, 2012). Furthermore, social media has many advantages by helping connect businesses to consumers, develop relationships, and foster those relationships in a timely and low-cost manner. (Andreas and Haenlein, 2010).

Social media provides an opportunity for companies to engage with potential and current consumers and to increase a sense of intimacy for the company (Mersey, Malthouse, & Calder, 2010). Online advertisement works very quickly given the fact that once an advertising campaign is published, the same day results manifest. There is basically neither a waiting period nor a long start-up process. Once an entrepreneur is ready to get started, he/she can very easily launch an advertisement promotion through a number of channels (Balakrishnan et al., 2014).

Due to the widespread usage and the variety of platforms available online, social media has become part of the consumer's everyday life (Arli, 2017). On average, individuals tend to spend 2.8 hours a day on social media platforms (Galov, 2019). As a result, marketers are continuously formulating innovative marketing strategies which influence customers towards purchasing their brand. These marketing strategies have innovated in such a way, that today it is not only about engaging the customer with the brand, but also about triggering customers to spread their advertisements, a process known as sharing (Arli & Dietrich, 2017).

Consumers tend to shift attitude stages before a purchase is possibly made: brand awareness, brand knowledge, affective response to the brand, a behavioural intention, and an ultimate behavioural response to the brand, in which the purchase of the brand's product(s) or service(s) is potentially made (Duffett, 2017). If the consumer has a positive attitude towards a brand, he or she is more likely to purchase its' product or service. Following the research of Iranmanesh & Najafabadi (2013) the opposite is also true. When a consumer has a negative attitude towards the brand, he or she is less likely to purchase its' product or service. The research conducted by Iranmanesh & Najafabadi (2013), however, is limited to mentioning attitudes towards brands, it does not mention how attitudes towards social media influence the purchase intention. Subsequently, it would be interesting to investigate the specific attitude a person can have towards social media marketing, and moreover, how this specifically influences the purchase intention.

To sum up, the rapid technological developments have given rise to significant changes in today's society. With the number of internet users increasing daily SMM has become a growing phenomenon across the globe. This enables marketers to target their customers on a variety of SMM platforms. In turn, consumers are not only engaged with the brand and becoming influenced to make a purchase, but they are also triggered to share online SMM content. Interestingly, this sharing enables the spread of peer opinions on social media advertisements, which consumers tend to find extremely valuable, as it provides a sense of reliability of the information that the marketers provide. This all occurs through online communities and networks that are outside of a marketer's control. However, due to consumer attitudes towards online marketing, marketers utilize social media platforms to trigger purchase intentions (Arli, 2017). This study from Arli (2017), however, did not examine whether the consumer attitudes towards online marketing activities influence purchase intentions.

Considering this, the following research question is formulated: "*What are the factors influencing the purchase intention on Facebook?*". As Facebook is the most widely adopted SMM platform worldwide, and the focus of the existing literature is on Facebook, this is the platform that will be most useful for this research. Consumer attitudes will be the determinant and main focus of this review. This research will strive to illustrate a clear overview on the relationship of social media engagement with consumer attitude and purchase intention within the Facebook platform.

In order to answer this research question correctly, sub-research questions will be implemented. To formulate these research questions, a closer look at the study of Hutter, Katja, et al. (2013) can be of interest. This study investigates how social media activities affect the perception of brands, and, moreover, how social media engagement influences the purchase decision of consumers. It would be interesting to explore the importance of consumer attitude towards SMM, to see what the relationship with social media engagement and the purchase intention is. Therefore, the following sub-questions will be considered:

- *Sub-question 1:* What is the relationship of consumer attitude towards social media marketing and social media engagement?
- *Sub-question 2:* What is the relationship of purchase intention and social media engagement?

Benthaus, et al. (2016) conducted research regarding social media management strategies for organizational impression management and their effect on public perception. Results of the research show that within the first five months a more active SMM strategy leads to an increase in relationship strength with the social media users who tend to speak more critically about a company. The study also found that active impression management in form of a SMM strategy leads to an improvement in the average user word-of-mouth as people communicate more positively about a company. The study concluded that disregarding social media engagement can negatively impact a companies' perception. For this reason, this study is limited to companies' perception, and does not consider the relationship between impression management and consumer attitude. For the third and last sub-research question, it could be relevant to build on this research and extend the findings regarding consumer attitude. If the findings of this sub-question 1 are combined with the findings of sub-question 2 it is possible to discover the relationship that impression management ultimately has with purchase intention.

Therefore, the following sub-question will be considered:

- *Sub-question 3:* What is the relationship between consumer attitude and impression management?

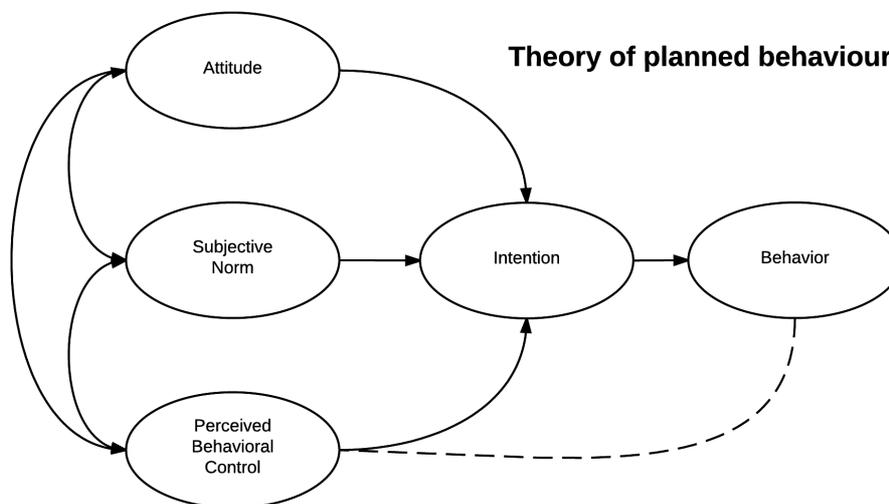
## II. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework chapter explains each topic of this study. The introduction of this chapter will elaborate upon social media in general and Facebook. The next section covers the consumer attitudes towards SMM. Subsequently, social media engagement and SMM will be elaborated extensively. The last section covers the definition of purchase intention and impression management. The theoretical framework will be presented to provide a better understanding of the relation between the discussed variables.

### Theory of Planned Behaviour

The theory of planned behaviour is a theory used to understand and predict behaviours, which posits that behaviours are immediately determined by behavioural intentions and under certain circumstances, perceived behavioural control (Kan & Fabrigar, 2017). Behavioural intentions are determined by a combination of three factors: attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control.

The Theory of Planned Behaviour model (TPB model) helps in explaining this research as the variables of the model correspond to the variables that are used within this research. The TPB model suggests that intention is the most important factor for planned behaviour and that this intention is derived from the three factors stated above. This research, therefore, is based on this model, as the first step (from attitude towards intention) is going to be explored, but in more detail. Specifically, the relationship between consumer attitudes towards SMM and purchase intention.



## **Social Media Marketing**

Social media marketing, a form of word-of-mouth (WOM) marketing, is described as the intentional influencing of consumer-to-consumer communication through professional marketing techniques (Kozinets et al., 2010). Social media empowers firms to communicate with their customers and furthermore enables customers to communicate with each other. Henceforth, SMM assists building brand loyalty beyond conventional strategies (Jackson, 2011; Kaplein & Haenlein, 2010), which leads to the promotion of products and services as well as the setting up of online communities (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Besides, conversations between customers provide firms with new methods for expanding brand awareness, brand acknowledgment, and brand recall (Gunelius, 2011).

## **Social Media and Facebook**

There seems to a discrepancy between academic researchers to what exactly should be included under the “umbrella” term ‘social media’ (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Their definition of social media is ‘a group of internet-based applications that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content’. The term social media can also be described as ‘content that has been created by its audience’ (Comm, 2009). Social media can also be referred to as online tools and platforms which allow internet users to collaborate on content, share insights, and experiences, and connect for business or pleasure (Strauss and Frost, 2009).

Facebook is a social media platform that was launched in 2004. The platform has 2.6 billion monthly Facebook users worldwide, generating the largest social network in the world (Clement, 2020). Facebook is a platform where users can maintain contact with friends, family, or make new friends through shared communities. A study of Brankaute (2010) shows that the average Facebook user spends 700 minutes per month online with an average of 130 friends. The platform provides a lot of advantages to consumer and businesses, as the website is online 24/7 and is considered by many businesses as a cost-effective strategy to employ when communicating with consumers (Nelson-Field et al., 2012).

## **Social Media Engagement**

Engagement in the broadest sense of the word is a topic that researchers provide various definitions for depending on the subject that is being studied. Gambetti et al. (2012) defines engagement as ‘a strong and enduring bond between brand and consumer based on an ongoing effort from the brand to activate consumers through interaction, shared values, experiential contents and rewards’. If this is linked to social media, a user is engaged when they view the social media platform as an integral part of their daily life which ensures that their needs are satisfied by the social media platform. Subsequently, social media engagement is a collection of experiences towards the platform. Experience is defined as a consumer’s belief about how a site fits into his or her life (Calder et al., 2009). Mishra (2019) made a distinction between three levels of engagement: consumption, contribution, and creation. Consumption is the lowest level of engagement; user only passively consume content of a firm or brand by for example watching their ads or videos. Contribution consist of activities as liking or sharing, users interact with brand- or firm-related content. The highest level of engagement is creation, users create brand or firm-related content by themselves by for example uploading pictures of their favourite brand or with worth-of-mouth. The study of Calder et al. (2009) found that consumers that are more frequently engaged with social media platforms, tend to be more responsive to advertisements on a social media platform. The findings of Voorveld et al. (2018) show that the greater the experience of a particular social media platform is, the greater a consumer’s attitude is towards a social media advertisement, making them more prone to intend to purchase a product or service of the brand. Here, as mentioned earlier, if the SMM efforts are perceived to be more reliable and secure, engagement on the online platform will increase (Farook & Abeysekara, 2016). The higher the engagement, the more responsive a consumer is towards an advertisement, which in turn, increases the likelihood a purchase intention triggers social media content (Voorveld et al., 2018; Farook & Abeysekara, 2016). With that in mind, this thesis aims to contribute to existing research by conducting literature research which exams the relationship of social media engagement towards consumer attitude and purchase intention.

## **Impression Management**

Impression management describes how individuals engage in activities which control or influence how the public perceives, other individuals, groups, or organizations (Schlenker, 1980). The goal of impression management is to steer others' opinions or impressions by controlling information within a personal or social situation (Drory & Zaidman, 2007).

Impression management organizations use tactics which enhance, sustain, and defend a positive image incorporating a variety of stakeholders outside and inside the organization (Bolino et al., 2008). Companies may be able to effectively manage consumers' impression towards the organization through their interactions with consumers on Facebook.

Several studies concluded that undermining social media engagement can cause a negative impact on companies' perception but disregard the effect of impression management on consumer attitude. To illustrate how impression management affects purchase intention, it is interesting to extend consumer attitude findings.

## **Consumer Attitudes towards Social Media Marketing**

Previous adequate research regarding consumers' attitude has been conducted in the last decade. Namely since, consumers' attitude is an important predictor for successful marketing operations (Solomon et al., 2010). Consumer attitudes refer to evaluative individual judgments as a result of their beliefs (i.e. conative), feelings (i.e. affective), and behavioural intentions (i.e. cognitive) (Duffett, 2017).

In consumer studies, attitude and purchase intention exhibit a parallel relationship (Ting & de Run, 2015). Substantially, a favourable attitude towards a specific product is a dominant predictor that can lead to consumers' purchase intention. Linked to this research, a favourable attitude towards social media (marketing) can lead to a higher chance of purchase intention. Marketers employ SMM strategies to influence consumers' attitudes to, in turn, trigger a purchase intention for the brands' products or services (Duffett, 2017). Noticeably, marketers aim to influence consumers' attitudes and behaviours through social media, because the social context makes social media advertising more reliable and credible than traditional marketing efforts, such as TV, radio, flyers, brochures, and billboards (Hayes & Carr, 2015).

Moreover, attitudes are the best way of predicting behaviour to measure an individual's purchase intention because attitude impacts consumer decision-making (Fill, 2009).

## **Purchase Intention of the Consumer**

Grewal, Monroe, and Krishnan (1998) defined purchasing intention as ‘a probability that lies in the hands of the customers who intend to purchase a particular product’. A study of Schiffman and Kanuk (2009) found that customers’ decisions to buy a product (purchasing intention) depended on the product’s value and suggestions that past consumers have shared on social media. The application of firm-created advertising (viral marketing) merged with user-generated word-of-mouth (WOM) leads to spontaneous forwarding and recommendations by users who find the brands worthy of consideration (Hoy & Milne, 2010). Hayes & Carr (2015) argue that consumer reliability and credibility associated with SMM positively influence their purchase intentions. Moreover, research proposes that from a consumer perspective, the greater the experience on a particular social media platform, the more positive their attitude is towards a social media advertisement, making them more prone to intend to purchase a product or service of the brand (Voorveld et al., 2018). Evidently, existing literature suggests that purchase intentions are driven by consumer attitudes (Arlı, 2017; Arlı & Dietrich, 2017; Hayes & Carr, 2015; Voorveld et al., 2018). This thesis aims to replicate these findings, but from a SMM perspective, by conducting a literature research examining as to what extent purchase intentions are affected by consumer attitudes towards SMM, in particular.

### III. Method

#### **Development of a Query**

For this thesis the database Scopus was used and access to the database was provided by the Wageningen University and Research centre. The chosen database is motivated by university researchers with similar access to this database. This allows others to replicate the research, therefore adding credibility to the thesis.

Firstly, it is important to limit the literature search to reliable and useful results. Therefore, the first query-block contains general requirements, the other blocks contain search criteria relevant for the different term of the sub-questions. Results are limited to only the English language so we can understand the papers. The results only include recent articles because the social media environment has rapidly changed over the past years and it might be incorrect to apply older findings to today's online world. The last criteria states that only reviews and articles from journals are included. This ensures that all results are peer reviewed and reliable. For every sub-question a separate query was created as all sub-questions require different combinations of terms.

A remarkable finding is that in the second block of the first query lack word(combinations), including terms referencing to social media. However, this is not an issue as the third block makes sure that the results are all linked to social media. For the first query, papers derived from 2014 were included instead of papers from 2017 for the other two queries; therefore, extremely limiting the results. For the second query, the search terms were more limited in the social media engagement block. This occurs as 'purchase intention' is a frequently used term which allows for a more specified query. The opposite is true for the third block of the third query which includes search terms for customer attitude towards social media (marketing). Research on impression management is more limited and thus it is necessary to broaden the search terms.

The first query results in 63 documents, the second query provides us with 38 documents and the last query increases the results with 66 to a total of 167 documents. This lies within the required range of 100 up to 300 documents.

Block 1 *general requirements*

LANGUAGE(ENGLISH) AND PUBYEAR > 2014 AND SRCTYPE(J) AND DOCTYPE(ar) OR DOCTYPE(re)

**AND**

Block 2 *social media engagement*

"social media engagement" OR "social media involvement" OR "user engagement" OR "user involvement" OR "consumer involvement" OR "consumer engagement" OR "customer involvement" OR "customer engagement"

**AND**

Block 3 *customer attitude towards social media*

"attitude towards social media"

Figure 1: Search query for sub-question 1

Block 1 *general requirements*

LANGUAGE(ENGLISH) AND PUBYEAR > 2014 AND SRCTYPE(J) AND DOCTYPE(ar) OR DOCTYPE(re)

**AND**

Block 2 *social media engagement*

"social media engagement" OR "social media involvement" OR "user engagement" OR "user involvement" OR "consumer involvement" OR "consumer engagement" OR "customer involvement" OR "customer engagement" OR interaction

**AND**

Block 3 *customer attitude towards social media marketing*

TITLE-ABS-KEY ("attitude toward\* social media" ) AND marketing

Figure 2: Search query for sub-question 1

Block 1 *general requirements*

LANGUAGE(ENGLISH) AND PUBYEAR > 2017 AND SRCTYPE(J) AND DOCTYPE(ar) OR DOCTYPE(re)

**AND**

Block 2 *social media (marketing) engagement*

"social media engagement" OR "social media involvement" OR "user involvement" OR "social network engagement" AND "social media" OR "social network"

**AND**

Block 3 *purchase intention*

ABS ("purchase\* intention")

Figure 3: Search query for sub-question 2

Block 1 *general requirements*

LANGUAGE(ENGLISH) AND PUBYEAR > 2017 AND SRCTYPE(J) AND DOCTYPE(ar) OR DOCTYPE(re)

AND

Block 2 *impression management*

"impression management" AND (company OR business OR firm)

AND

Block 3 *customer attitude towards social media (marketing)*

"consumer attitude" AND "social media" OR "social network" AND marketing

Figure 4: Search query for sub-question 3

Block 1 *general requirements*

LANGUAGE(ENGLISH) AND PUBYEAR > 2017 AND SRCTYPE(J) AND DOCTYPE(ar) OR DOCTYPE(re)

AND

Block 2 *impression management*

TITLE-ABS-KEY ( "impression management" ) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ( "public opinion" ) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ( "public perception" ) AND company OR business OR firm

AND

Block 3 *customer attitude towards social media (marketing)*

"online marketing" OR "viral marketing" OR "social media marketing" AND "social media" OR "social network" AND attitude

Figure 5: Search query for sub-question 3

## Screening of Papers

Among the 167 papers as much as 7 duplicates were found, and consequently were excluded from the results. After reading the abstracts of the remaining 160 papers, another 127 papers were excluded from the results based on their abstract. To research the relevance of the remaining papers, they are systematically reviewed. Figure 6 includes a PRISMA diagram which displays the systematic screening of the papers, the diagram can be find at the end of this section. The following steps are taken to analyse and evaluate the relevance of the full papers:

1. Identification (Title, authors, year of publishing)
2. What are the measured variables of the research? (IV, mediator, moderator, DV)
3. What is the relationship found in the research?
4. What is the type of research?
5. What is the context of the research? (Social media in general, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter)

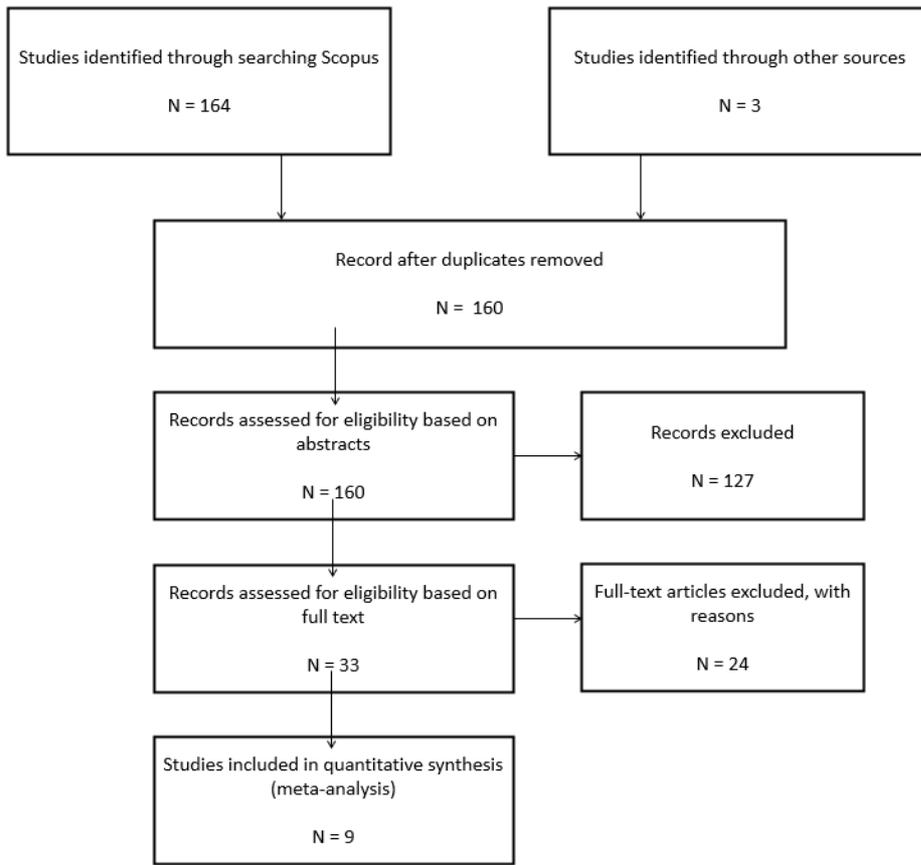


Figure 6: Prisma Flow Diagram

## IV. Results and Analysis

### **Bibliometric Data**

Results of the sub-question were found by conducting five different search queries based on different keywords. The literature database of Scopus was used, so other researchers from other universities can access this database as well. The found papers were analysed to find relevant results by reading the abstracts. Systematic screening was used in order to research the relevance of these remaining papers. Several steps were taken to analyse and evaluate the relevance of the full papers.

All the papers that were used to determine results for the second and third sub-question were not older than 2017. For the first sub-question, the papers were not older than 2014. The reason being that the results for the corresponding search query were extremely limited. The oldest paper mentioned is from the year 2009, as this article was referenced in a paper that resulted from the search query. The newest papers are from Wiese, M., Martínez-Climent, C., & Botella-Carrubi, D. and Yang, R., & Che, T. Both these papers are published in 2020. Most of the papers are published in the last three years, so results of the literature research are relatively recent, and therefore composed of high value.

## Results Sub-question 1

All the papers included in the research provide evidence for a positive relationship between attitude towards SMM and social media engagement. The context of the research varies, but all of the selected research is focussed on some form of social media or online behaviour. Facebook is the medium which is used for most of the research found, which perfectly matches with the aim of the research to apply the results to Facebook.

A study among Facebook users provided evidence for a strong relationship between attitude towards SMM and the time spent on social media (Hussein & Hassan, 2017). In addition to that, the variable “time spent on social media” predicts continuation intention. Continuation intention is important for a durable relationship with customers, and engagement with customers is required in the future as well. The paper mentions that the identified relationship is useful for managers as they think managers are valid for brand social networks as well. An important incentive for users to spend their time on social media is the enjoyment factor, companies should keep this in mind when interacting with social media users. Their content should be relevant and compelling in order to increase enjoyment and audience engagement according to the research. However, Bianchi & Andrews (2018) investigated the link between enjoyment and attitude towards social media engagement and did not find a significant relationship between the two variables. Previous research has presented evidence that enjoyment positively influences attitude towards SMM (Kang and Lee, 2010; Lin and Lu, 2011; Sledgianowski and Kulviwat, 2009). Thus, enjoyment is most likely only a sufficient condition for a positive attitude towards SMM in general and not for a positive attitude towards social media engagement. What makes the results of the study of Hussein & Hassan (2017) valuable is that the demographics in the sample are similar to the demographics of the US population where the samples of most studies are dominated by students.

A relationship between online brand attitude and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is found in three distinct studies within the research of VanMeter et al. (2018). Attitude towards SMM is not being investigated in this paper, however, relationship findings between attitude towards brands / social media and social media engagement are investigated. The main type of social media engagement researched within the paper of VanMeter et al. (2018) is eWOM. The research findings indicate that attitude towards social media does not significantly influence social media engagement. However, a positive attitude towards a brand significantly predicts

social media engagement, and more specifically it predicts positive eWOM. An important difference with traditional offline WOM is that eWOM is much more visible, this means that people are less eager to recommend online brands than they would recommend offline. The user's incentive to conduct in positive eWOM depends on the medium and visibility differs among the different media. Therefore, it is important for marketers to consider the visibility when they want to increase engagement of a single user. Users are more eager to conduct in eWOM on social media with lower visibility, however for a marketer this is less valuable as less people see the positive recommendation. A limitation of the paper is that the research does not mention which media users are more likely to engage.

An important aspect of SMM is the global reach of its message. A company may simultaneously interact with customers from all over the world. Wiese et al. (2020) showed that attitude towards Facebook advertising significantly affects behaviour towards a brand, where behaviour towards a brand can be considered as low-level social media engagement such as liking and navigating a company or brand's Facebook page. The research differentiates itself from the previously discussed literature by having an international sample. Their sample consists of two groups, the first consists solely of users from South Africa and the second group only includes users from Australia. Evidence is presented for a positive relationship between attitude towards SMM and the engagement level of contribution. The research states that customers from different cultures display similar attitudes and behaviours towards SMM and social media engagement. This is useful for marketing managers from multinationals as they can use a standardized global marketing strategy, it makes marketing much more efficiently for them as they can adopt the same strategy in multiple countries. However, the sample only includes two countries, so generalizing the results globally is therefore considered questionable.

## Results Sub-question 2

Marketing could be a way of increasing sales of the company, and so is SMM. Purchase intention is widely used to predict sales, and thus an increase in purchase intention most likely indicate an increase in sales. The relationship between social media engagement and purchase intention is the most highly researched of all relationships in this thesis.

Rahman et al. (2018) investigated the direct link between social media engagement and purchase intention. The research measured medium-level engagement, whom which are engaged users liking a fan-page and who were an active member of the fan-page community. The engaged users were asked whether they had intentions to purchase any products of the brand, these findings were compared to the users which were not engaged. The researchers found a strong relationship between this type of engagement and purchase intention. Also, Bianchi & Andrews (2018) presented evidence for a relationship between engagement with retail brands through social media and purchase intention through social media. Interestingly they researched the purchase intention in the context of social media as most of the remaining research did not acknowledge purchase intention specifically on social media.

Yang & Che (2020) conducted an analysis of Chinese users and their messaging behaviour regarding the application WeChat. They found that customers who have stronger social ties have a higher purchasing frequency. Social ties are measured by the frequency of contact between a customer and a seller, and the frequency of liking a seller's content by a customer. Hence, social ties can certainly be considered as social media engagement. This study aims to investigate purchase intention and not necessarily purchasing frequency. However, purchase intention obviously tries to predict purchase frequency, therefore the findings from this study are worthwhile for this thesis.

Mishra (2019) researched various levels of engagement and its effect on purchase intention. Only the highest level, creation, has a weak relationship with purchase intention in her research. For the other two levels, consumption and contribution, no significant relationship has been found. However, all levels of engagement have a strong relationship with overall brand equity. Overall brand equity can be defined as the commercial value that derives from consumer perception of the brand name of a particular product or service, rather than from the product or service itself. which does have a strong relationship with purchase intention. Therefore, one

could argue that engagement does have a strong relationship with purchase intention through overall brand equity.

Jain et al. (2019) also investigated the relationship between social media engagement and purchase intention. In contrary to the other studies, they utilized secondary data from alternative studies rather than primary data. Another aspect which differentiates this study is their conceptual framework where they adopted trust as a mediator in this relationship. They argued that through engagement, customers trust the brand more, they start to feel part of the brand themselves, and therefore trust it more. Then trust is seen a critical condition for purchase intention. Customers prefer to purchase products from brands they trust due to credibility and benevolence, this is especially true for online retail. In addition to that, trust in a brand on social media moderates the performance expectancy of a brand on social media. Obviously, customers prefer higher performance and therefore it has a positive effect on purchase intention.

The outbreak of COVID-19 highlighted trust and more importantly, customers are anxious and uncertain about the future. Several sources as Braaksma, J., & van der Velden, L. (2020) and Neurensics (2020) reported items which stated that consumers tend to buy products from brands they know and experiment less with new products. Unilever and Nestlé found that their old-fashioned products as soup out of a can or bouillon cubes perform much better than the new products, such as poke bowls. This is a reoccurring phenomenon which the companies see during every crisis and mostly lasts for years. Trusted brands benefit from the pandemic as consumers make more conservative choices where they buy old traditional and trusted brands. Therefore, trust is even more important than ever, companies should gain trust to increase the purchase intention.

### **Results Sub-question 3**

The link between the attitude towards SMM and impression management has not been subject to intensive research. The queries were broader formulated than for the other two sub-questions, but the high number of studies did not result in useful studies. Only one study from the query provided slightly useful insights in the relationship, this is too little to state something about it. However, the results do indicate such a positive link as evidence of a positive relationship and no opposing evidence has been found. Not much can be said due to the lack of useful results. The only result which will be discussed in this section provides extra information about impression management.

Li et al. (2019) researched how a company's after-crisis apology changes users' attitude towards the company. People tend to forgive someone easier after an apology; therefore, this also holds for an online apology by a company to their customers, which could be seen as a form of impression management. The study is interesting in the first place to determine whether this is indeed the case for companies on social media, but more appealing were the findings which suggest the moderating role interactivity plays in the relationship. Companies which interact more intensively with their users can positively influence the user's attitude towards the company with an apology. However, if these interactive companies do not apologize, the attitude towards the company among users is more negative than for less interactive companies. Also, for firms with a poor reputation, the interactivity results in a much more favourable attitude after an apology. Firms known for a bad reputation and low interactivity benefit less from an apology. For firms with a good reputation interactivity matters less; attitude towards this type of firms benefits all levels of interactivity.

Impression management can be very useful in the current marketing environment. The public opinion about a company can change rapidly when people view their behaviour as wrong or immoral. Someone could tweet or post their opinions, and companies can find themselves on the wrong end of public perception within a few hours, which can cause huge damage to their reputation. There are some famous cases, as for example with H&M and their "coolest monkey in the jungle" shirt. As a company you want to respond to such issues. Leary and Kowalski (1990) stated that impression management can be used to correct differences of what is perceived by the public with what is desired to be perceived, this is exactly what a company

wants to do during such a scandal. Social media is the ideal platform for this communication as people react quickly, it is low cost, and has a large audience.

Also, sometimes brands prefer to maintain or establish a certain image: climate-friendly, good for local communities, or selling high quality products for example. Carter (2006) stated that a company can use impression management to present themselves, or their brands, in a positive manner. Ultimately this is achieved by establishing a positive customer attitude towards the brand. From here it is obviously recognizable why there would be a positive customer attitude towards SMM as well due to impression management. The queries did not result in any relevant studies, this might be due to the lack of current studies focused on the subject. Maybe a future study on this subject would find relevant studies. Also, it might be the case that no studies have been conducted with these particular variables but other similar variables. Therefore, another study could try to find a link between impression management and purchase intention through other variables. Ultimately, impression management is conducted to increase purchase intention, it would be remarkable if in the near future there is no research on this subject.

## Results

The most intensive researched relationship in this thesis is the relationship between social media engagement and purchase intention. All the papers included in the research provide evidence for a positive relationship between attitude towards social media and social media engagement.

Results of the first sub-question show that Facebook users have a strong relationship between attitude towards SMM and the time spent on social media (Hussein & Hassan, 2017). The variable “time spent on social media” predicts continuation intention.

There are mixed results for the relationship between enjoyment and attitude towards SMM and social media engagement. A study conducted by Bianchi & Andrews (2018) regarding the link between enjoyment and attitude towards social media engagement did not find a significant relationship between these two variables. On the contrary, several other studies presented evidence where enjoyment positively influences attitude towards SMM. Therefore, enjoyment is most likely only a sufficient condition for a positive attitude towards social media in general and not for a positive attitude towards social media engagement.

Findings of another research indicate that attitude towards SMM does not significantly influence social media engagement (VanMeter et al., 2018). However, a positive attitude towards a brand does predict social media engagement, and more specifically, it predicts positive eWOM.

A previous study uses an international sample that consists of two groups, namely users from South Africa and users from Australia. This study presents how attitude towards Facebook advertisement significantly affects behaviour towards a brand. The behaviour towards a brand can be considered as low-level social media engagement such as liking and visiting a company, or brand page (Wiese et al. 2020). It also states that customers from diverse backgrounds and cultures display similar attitudes and behaviours towards SMM and social media engagement.

Results regarding the second sub-question present that there is a direct link between social media engagement and purchase intention (Rahman et al., 2018). Other researchers that conducted an analysis on the Chinese messaging application WeChat found that customers who have stronger social ties have a higher purchasing frequency (Yang & Che, 2020).

Another study found that all levels of engagement have a strong relationship with overall brand equity, which does have a strong relationship with purchase intention (Mishra, 2019). All levels of engagement have a strong relationship with overall brand equity, which does have a strong

relationship with purchase intention. Therefore, one could argue that engagement does have a strong relationship with purchase intention through overall brand equity.

The last sub-question tries to indicate the impact of impression management on social media, focusing on consumer attitude towards SMM. The relationship between these variables have not been researched intensively yet, therefore, the search query for this sub-question was broader formulated than for the other two sub-questions. Due to the lack of useful results, not much can be said about the link between attitude towards SMM and impression management.

One article found that people tend to forgive someone easier after an apology (Li et al, 2019). Therefore, this also holds for an online apology by a company to their customers, which could be seen as a form of impression management. The study is interesting in the first place to see whether this is indeed the case for companies on social media, but more interesting were the findings which suggest the moderating role interactivity plays in the relationship.

Impression management can be very useful in the current marketing environment. The public opinion about a company can change rapidly when people view their behaviour as wrong or immoral. Leary and Kowalski (1990) stated that impression management can be used to correct differences of what is perceived by the public with what is desired to be perceived, this is exactly what a company wants to do during such a scandal. Social media is the ideal platform for this communication as people react quickly, it is low cost, and has a large audience.

The queries did not result in any relevant studies, this might be due to the lack of current studies focused on the subject. Also, it might be the case that no studies have been conducted with these particular variables but with other similar variables. Therefore, another study could try to find a link between impression management and purchase intention through other variables.

## Summary of Articles

Article	Conclusion
<i>Bianchi, C., &amp; Andrews, L. (2018)</i>	Consumers' attitudes toward engaging with retail brands through Facebook are influenced by peer communication, compatibility and credibility, and that attitude has a strong influence on intentions toward this behaviour.
<i>Braaksma, J., &amp; van der Velden, L. (2020) and Neurensics (2020)</i>	Consumers tend to buy products from brands they know and experiment less with new products.
<i>Hussein, R., &amp; Hassan, S. (2017)</i>	Attitude toward social media use was found to have a significant effect on level of use and level of use was found to have a significant effect on continuation intention.
<i>Jain, V., Goyal, M., &amp; Pahwa, M. S. (2019)</i>	Brand trust has a direct relation with purchase intention and more trust increases performance expectancy of Facebook brand pages, which directly effects again purchase intention.
<i>Kang, Y. S., &amp; Lee, H. (2010)</i>	Website information satisfaction and system satisfaction play key roles in forming continuance intention through perceived usefulness and perceived enjoyment.
<i>Li, Y., Yang, K., Chen, J., Gupta, S., &amp; Ning, F. (2019)</i>	An after-crisis apology and firm reputation both have a positive effect on after-crisis user attitude toward the firm.
<i>Lin, K. Y., &amp; Lu, H. P. (2011)</i>	Enjoyment is the most influential factor in people's continued use of SNS, followed by number of peers, and usefulness.
<i>Mishra, A. S. (2019)</i>	Creation has a weak relationship with purchase intention. Contribution and consumption do not have a relationship with purchase intention.
<i>Rahman, Z., Moghavvemi, S., Suberamanaian, K., Zanuuddin, H., &amp; Nasir, H. N. B. M. (2018)</i>	Following fan pages will influence fan page engagement, which in turn affects purchase intention and social media connectedness.
<i>Sledgianowski, D., &amp; Kulviwat, S. (2009)</i>	Enjoyment positively influences attitude towards social media marketing.
<i>VanMeter, R., Syrdal, H. A., Powell-Mantel, S., Grisaffe, D. B., &amp; Nesson, E. T. (2018)</i>	Individuals who are attached to or have a positive attitude toward the brand are more likely to engage in offline advocacy.
<i>Vo, T. T., Xiao, X., &amp; Ho, S. Y. (2019)</i>	A company's CSR engagement enhances its corporate image, which in turn, influences WOM about the company on Twitter.

<i>Wiese, M., Martínez-Climent, C., &amp; Botella-Carrubi, D. (2020)</i>	Attitude towards Facebook advertisement significantly affects behaviour towards a brand.
<i>Yang, R., &amp; Che, T. (2020)</i>	Buyers with strong social ties with sellers reveal higher purchase frequencies than those with weak social ties.

## V. Discussion and Conclusion

This study intended to acquire an initial understanding of the effect of the consumer attitude towards SMM on purchase intention within the Facebook platform. In more detail, the study explores the importance of consumer attitude towards SMM, and how this attitude influences the social media engagement and the purchase intention. This chapter discusses theoretical and practical implications of the findings. Furthermore, limitations and future research suggestions based on the approach and outcome of this study are provided. Finally, a detailed conclusion will communicate an answer to the main research question.

The aim of this paper was to answer the main research question by conducting a review of already existing literature. *“What are the factors influencing the purchase intention on Facebook?”*. To help finding the answer on this question, three sub-questions were formulated and answered.

The results of the literature research show that time spent on social media of Facebook users has a positive effect on consumer attitudes towards SMM (Hussein & Hassan, 2017). “Time spent on social media” is the variable that predicts continuation intention. Several studies presented a positive relationship between enjoyment and attitude towards social media marketing. Another study concluded that a positive attitude towards a brand does predict social media engagement, and more specifically, it predicts positive eWOM.

Furthermore, Rahman et al., 2018 concluded that there is a direct link between social media engagement and purchase intention. Another study found that all levels of engagement have a strong relationship with overall brand equity, which does have a strong relationship with purchase intention (Mishra, 2019). All levels of engagement have a strong relationship with overall brand equity, which does have a strong relationship with purchase intention. Therefore, one could argue that engagement does have a strong relationship with purchase intention through overall brand equity.

Due to the lack of useful results of the literature study, unfortunately not much can be said about the link between attitude towards SMM and impression management.

If we put these findings in perspective we get the following results in turn: time spent on social media of Facebook users has a positive effect on consumer attitudes towards SMM → positive

consumer attitudes towards SMM have a positive effect on social media engagement → social media engagement has a strong relationship with overall brand equity, which does have a strong relationship with purchase intention. We can conclude that consumer attitude towards SMM has an indirect positive effect on purchase intention. Moreover, social media engagement has a direct positive effect on purchase intention. Joy and trust are important as they are sufficient conditions in the relationship between attitude towards SMM and between social media engagement and purchase intention.

### **Theoretical Implications**

This research contributes to existing research on consumer attitudes towards social media marketing, social media engagement, purchase intention and impression management. Despite of the already abundant written studies on consumer attitudes towards social media marketing and the relationship between attitude and purchase intention, existing literature has remained scarce on the relationship of these variables with social media engagement, especially on Facebook. In conclusion, this thesis adds value to existing literature by providing an increased understanding of the relationship of social media engagement with the factors influencing the purchase intention on Facebook.

### **Practical Implications**

The findings of this paper emphasize the importance of a positive attitude towards SMM in order for a consumer to make a purchase intention. Before a purchase intention is made, several intermediate steps have been explored. The results indicate that the more positive the consumer attitudes towards SMM are, the higher the social media engagement of this same consumer is. More social media engagement brings a positive effect on brand equity, which leads to a positive effect on purchase intention. If we put these findings in perspective, a practical implication could be to advice businesses to put online content that causes a positive consumer attitude towards the SMM of these businesses. An example of this type of online content is making consumers aware of the fact that their company is implementing CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) (Johnson et al., 2019). Putting online content that causes a positive consumer attitude in turn will lead to more social media engagement, which ultimately leads to a positive effect on purchase intentions, based on the findings of the literature. Though, it is better to limit

the amount of content that is put online, as a study of Han (2018) indicates that consumers overwhelmed by SMM efforts potentially give rise to negative consumer attitudes towards SMM. This is contradictory to the goal to reach a positive effect on purchase intentions.

## **Limitations**

This thesis was written during the COVID-19 pandemic. No physical contact was possible, so every meeting with the supervisor had to be done through mobile communication.

A linear relationship has been observed in this study (Figure 7). However, in practicality, there may be other intervening variables that can be taken into account from the further review of literature in this domain.

Moreover, all the results relevant for the first sub-question provide evidence which points towards a positive relationship between attitude towards SMM and engagement. This is a clear indication that there is indeed a relationship between the two variables, however not all studies use exactly these two variables. VanMeter et al. (2018) used the attitude towards brands / social media and Bianchi & Andrews (2018) used attitude towards engagement, instead of social media engagement. However, these variables can be seen as a proxy for our variables as they are really similar, the results of the two studies provide supporting evidence for the relationship.

As previously mentioned, the evidence in favour of a relationship between attitude towards SMM and social media engagement is convincing, however it is still hard to draw a conclusion due to small number of studies about the subject. In total, only three studies that use exactly these variables are presented, however all these studies provide evidence in favour of a relationship between the two variables. Therefore, it is most likely that attitude towards SMM positively influences social media engagement, but more research on the subject is needed.

## **Future scope of research**

More research has been conducted in the area of sub-question 2 that looked into the relationship of purchase intention and social media engagement as compared to sub-question 1 regarding the link between consumer attitude towards social media marketing and social media engagement and sub-question 3 that investigated the relationship of consumer attitudes and impression management. The link between engagement on social media engagement has been investigated most intensive, therefore the search criteria could be more specific. The query resulted in five studies which most often presented evidence for a positive link between engagement on social media and purchase intention, only the results of Mishra (2019) are contradictory. Mishra (2019) only found a weak link between purchase intention and the highest level of engagement: creation. Future research could ask why Mishra did not find such convincing evidence for a relationship as other studies. However, Mishra found evidence for a positive relationship between all levels of engagement and brand equity, which in turn has a positive influence on purchase intention. Future research could focus on different engagement levels and their different influences on purchase intention so managers can stimulate the most effective type of engagement. Yang & Che (2020) found the most substantial evidence, they researched a direct link between social media engagement and purchase frequency. Also, Jain et al. (2019) discovered support for the fact that trust is a sufficient condition in the relationship between social media engagement and purchase intention. At this moment, it may be lucrative to further explore this field of research due to the current pandemic situation. Consumers tend to buy more trusted brands in crisis which could be seen an indication for lower levels of trust. Recent studies have found evidence in favour of a relationship and have no irregularities.

Not much research has been conducted on the relationship between impression management in social media and the consumer attitude towards SMM. In an attempt to obtain a sufficient number of relevant articles the search criteria have been broadened. However, this did not result in enough relevant articles, only one relevant article has been found. This article researched how interactivity and firm reputation moderate the relationship between an apology on social media and users' attitude towards the company. Firms with a good reputation and high interactivity benefited most of an apology while firms with a bad reputation and low interactivity benefited less. These results are interesting as they provide an answer to the research question but only one study is not sufficient. Hence, not much can be said about the link between impression management and attitude towards SMM. So, another scope for further

researchers could be to focus on further exploration on the relationship between impression management and attitude towards SMM.

### Conclusion

The aim of this paper is to answer the main research question by conducting a review of already existing literature. “*What are the factors influencing the purchase intention on Facebook?*”. To help finding the answer on this question, three sub-questions were formulated and answered.

The results of the literature research show that time spent on social media of Facebook users has a positive effect on consumer attitudes towards SMM. In turn, positive consumer attitudes towards SMM have a positive effect on social media engagement; social media engagement has a strong relationship with overall brand equity, which does have a strong relationship with purchase intention. Accordingly, a positive consumer attitude towards SMM has an indirect positive effect on purchase intention. But also, social media engagement has a direct positive effect on purchase intention. Joy and trust are important as they are sufficient conditions in the relationship between attitude towards SMM and between social media engagement and purchase intention.



Figure 7: Conclusion Flow Chart

Consumer attitudes and social media engagement can be seen as mediating variables, as time spent on social media lead to positive consumer attitudes towards SMM and positive consumer attitudes towards SMM have a positive effect on social media engagement, which leads to purchase intentions. The literature research did not imply that impression management has a significant influence on consumer attitude towards SMM. For the other relationships there is enough convincing evidence that they do have a significant relationship which makes that consumers attitude towards SMM has an indirect relationship with purchase intention as long as trust and enjoyment are present.

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