

INTEGRATING SOCIAL MEDIA IN SALES: A YOUTH PERSPECTIVE

Răzvan-Andrei CORBOȘ^a, Ovidiu-Iulian BUNEA^{b}, Ruxandra-Irina POPESCU^c*

^{a, b, c} Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania

ABSTRACT

Social media has been present in our lives for the past decades, creating several business opportunities. Sales management, sales agents, and the sales force in general today use social media as part of the sales process, leading to important transformations in the sales activity. The objective of our study is to identify the main behaviors of young people with respect to their interaction with companies on social media. To achieve this objective, we applied a questionnaire to young consumers in Romania. In this way, we managed to collect 359 valid responses, which constitute the data for this research. The results highlighted that Instagram, Facebook, Tik-Tok, and YouTube are the most popular among young people, who prefer to communicate with companies through them, being familiar with the tools available. Furthermore, the results show a very high potential for social media to influence the purchase decision of young consumers.

KEYWORDS: *marketing, sales, social media, young consumers.*

DOI: 10.24818/IMC/2022/04.17

1. INTRODUCTION

Today, social media provides tools that enable growth in both business-to-business and business-to-consumer approaches. Both marketing and sales are concerned about how to best use these tools to achieve their objectives. A lot of recent research supports this point, with 83% of marketers using social media. Furthermore, the new normal brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic, which meant fewer and fewer physical sales visits, tends to tip the scales even more in favor of social media. As academics pay increasing attention to the phenomenon of using social media in sales, we might conclude that selling on social media actually involves the use of some technologies. As a result, salespeople use social media to become content creators to build and expand their customer base. On the business-to-business sales side, Kumar and Sharma (2022) suggested that a better understanding of the interactions that occur on sales and social media is required.

Given that the phrase "social media and sales" appears in an increasing number of contexts, and that research indicates that young people use social media more frequently in this context (Marshall et al., 2012; Keinänen & Kuivalainen, 2015), the goal of our work is to approach social media in sales from the perspective of young people.

Thus, the purpose of this paper is to determine the main behaviors of young people in their interactions with companies through social media. Despite the fact that there is a large body of literature, we believe that our approach is necessary and fills a knowledge gap because such studies in Romania are scarce.

* Corresponding author. E-mail address: ovidiu.bunea@man.ase.ro

2. LITERATURE REVIEW: CLARIFYING THE IDEA OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN SALES

As we can see in most of our daily actions, social media have become a variable in each of our lives. Social networks like Instagram, Facebook, Tik-Tok, especially are used by consumers worldwide as they are using a lot of time to spend on social media compared with any other type of web activity. Academics and businesses alike have been drawn to understand the resorts of social media that can drive a certain amount of influence on consumer behaviors.

2.1 Social media and its forms of manifestation

There are various definitions of social media. According to Andzulis et al. (2012), social media is the "creation, consumption, and exchange of various information through on-line social interactions and platforms." Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) mention social media as being "a category of applications which are based on the Internet and that are founded on Web 2.0 while enabling the manufacturing and exchange of content generated by their users." Andzulis et al. (2012) also describe social media in a sales environment as "the technical component of a company's communication, transaction, and relationship-building capabilities that utilizes the network of existing and future consumers to encourage value co-creation."

The phrase "social media" refers to a broad range of Internet-based services that enable users to generate online content, participate in information exchanges, and join online communities (Dewing, 2012). Such services related with the phrase "social media" (also known as "Web 2.0") can be found in the following forms:

Blogs: are a type of online journal given in reverse chronological order (from current to past) (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development - OECD), (2007), which are most often offered for free on platforms such as WordPress, Tumblr, and Blogger.

Wiki: a communal site where any user can add new material or edit old information in any way (Paquet & Désilets, 2005). The website "Wikipedia," a free online encyclopedia that uses Wiki technology, is a well-known example of such a platform.

Sites that allow users to exchange links to other websites are known as sites for social bookmarking. Social bookmarking sites include Reddit, Digg, and StumbleUpon.

Social network: web services that enable individuals to build a public or semi-public profile inside a platform, which may then be used to make linkages with the profiles of other users, as well as to monitor and investigate the array of links established by other members of the network (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Facebook and LinkedIn are two of the most popular such sites.

Status-update services, sometimes known as microblogging, such as Twitter, allow users to publish updates about individuals and/or events and follow the updates of other users (Fox et al., 2009).

Virtual word content: These websites mimic a virtual world in the form of a game in which users engage. The SecondLife platform, for example, replicates the real world through a game in which users construct avatars (virtual representations of themselves) that converse (OECD, 2007).

Media sharing: Users can publish material in the form of photographs and videos on such networks. YouTube, Pinterest, and Instagram are the most well-known platforms of this sort.

The above-mentioned categories do not have well-defined borders, and distinct platforms may fall under two or more of them. Twitter, for example, is both a social network and a status update service. Facebook users can submit photos and videos to the same registry, and Pinterest users can follow other individuals.

2.2 Integrating social media as a sales instrument

The growing role of social media in commerce has prompted academics to explore the various social media platforms for selling, their primary benefits and drawbacks, and the role sellers perform in implementing social media tactics to increase performance and develop customer connections. This new body of research combines conceptual and empirical studies.

Andzulis et al. (2012) discuss the significance of social media for selling activities, particularly from the standpoint of the sales process. They say that the usage of social media must be founded on a thorough understanding of consumers, and that the field of social media should thus be managed by sales and marketing departments because they are the most familiar with the customers. The authors also advocate for the development of performance measures that quantify the success of social media and are suited to consumers and the value propositions they face. Furthermore, the authors recommend that social media strategies address connection, product/service, client, and price, and that they be linked to promote consumer involvement. Finally, the study investigated how social media can influence the entire sales cycle, including comprehending the client (e.g., by getting involved in particular LinkedIn groups), trying to approach the buyer (e.g., by making posts on Instagram or Twitter), uncovering necessities (e.g., by creating blogs to inspire discussion), promoting value (e.g., through a Youtube clip), completing a transaction (e.g., by driving people from Facebook to a distribution service), and providing after-sales customer care (e.g. following clients on Twitter).

Salespeople are increasingly embracing social media to demonstrate connectedness to clients and their business, while the authors note that salespeople's adoption and usage of the technology varies greatly. Social media also improves the efficiency of buyer-seller relationships, although this can be damaging to the strength of the connection by diminishing direct engagement. Using social media has clearly decreased information asymmetries between customers and sellers, making the sales process more efficient and customized. Furthermore, research uncovers some resistance to technology adoption among senior salespeople, as well as a proclivity to utilize social media to hunt for opportunities in a worldwide market (Guesalaga, 2016).

Various quantitative studies were conducted to better understand the causes and repercussions of salespeople, suppliers, and customers using social media. Levin et al. (2012), for example, investigated the motivators for using social media. The study compared extrinsic, intrinsic and apathetic motivation as being antecedents of behavioral intention to participate in blogging, finding that all three are significantly predictive, with extrinsic motivation being the most important, followed by apathy and then intrinsic. Furthermore, the authors demonstrate that behavioral purpose leads to behavioral usage of social media, which affects both objective and subjective results. They argue that these findings may be generalized to real-world salespeople and that supply businesses interested in having salespeople who utilize social media should create strategies to motivate them.

Furthermore, using the seller as the unit of analysis, Schultz et al. (2012) discovered that the age of the seller had a negative effect on the use of social networks. They also discovered evidence of a link between social media use and improved performance results. Contrary to their assumptions, they discover that customer-oriented marketing has little to do with the usage of social media.

Rodriguez et al. (2012), on the other hand, performed a study of business-to-business salespeople from several sectors to uncover some important effects of social media use at the supplier company level. They discover that social media use is favorably associated to the company's capacity to develop opportunities through prospecting and maintain commercial connections; however, they fail to establish how using social media aids in consumer knowledge. Finally, the authors discover that, contrary to their assumptions, social media use is positively connected to relationship sales performance, but not related to outcome-based performance.

Finally, Keinänen and Kuivalainen (2015) investigated the usage of social media by B2B clients and found that executives who use social media for personal reasons tend to use them more for business purposes. Furthermore, the authors discover that younger executives use social media more for commercial purposes than older executives.

3. DATA AND VARIABLES

Starting from the objective of this study, namely to identify the main behaviors of young people with respect to their interaction with companies through social media, our study approached a quantitative analysis as a research methodology. To carry out this analysis, the data were collected through a survey built with the help of Google Forms and applied on the Romanian market.

The respondents were contacted through email addresses and in this way, we managed to collect 359 valid responses through their voluntary participation. From the point of view of the structure of the respondents, it is important to mention that 250 declared themselves to be of the female gender and 109 of the male gender, and most of them have university degrees and come from the urban environment with a weight of 70%. The study was carried out between August and September 2022. The age of the respondents was between 18-30 years, the average age being 21 years old.

Regarding data analysis, they were downloaded from the platform used, and later processed using Microsoft Excel. We have chosen to present the results obtained through the figures and graphs that we will present in the Results section of this paper.

The research variables we used referred to (1) the way in which respondents prefer to buy products/services (Baruach, 2012), (2) the type of products/services that consumers prefer to buy through social media (Ertemel & Ammoura, 2016), (3) the social media where consumers created their account (Ioanas, 2020), (4) the average time spent daily on social media (Thoumrungroje, 2014), (5) how often consumers used social media to find/buy the desired product or service (Gogulamudi & Prabhu, 2022), (6) how familiar consumers are with the tools offered by social media (Hajli, 2014), (7) the general level of use of social media (Buzeta et al., 2020), (8) the level of knowledge about social media (Liu, 2010), (9) the level at which consumers prefer to communicate with companies through social media to the detriment of traditional ways (Fraccastoro et al., 2021), (10) the level of interaction with companies present on social media (Heller Baird & Parasnis, 2011), (11) perception of the influence of social media on the purchase decision (Yogesh & Yesha, 2014; Erlangga, 2021). The research variables were measured using a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 meant do not prefer, and 10 meant totally prefer, respectively, total disagreement, total agreement depending on the studied phenomenon.

4. RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

The results we obtained as a result of the data analysis are presented in the form of graphs and figures. Figure 1 shows the preferred way of purchasing goods or services of respondents. We observe that there is a balance between the preference for traditional and online shopping. These results indicate that there is potential for development in terms of both physical and online sales, with respondents citing both options as roughly equally used.

Moving on, Figure 2 illustrates the type of products or services that young consumers prefer to purchase with or through social media. We can thus note that tourist services, electronic equipment, and construction services are among the most preferred products and services that young consumers prefer to purchase with the help of social media. At the opposite pole, we find food products. Within this research item, we also have the other answer option, which revealed other types of products for which young consumers consider social media useful. Thus, they also use social media for cosmetics and personal care products, products used in various hobbies, and even car parts. These results contribute to a better understanding of the types of products and services that are best suited to be marketed through social media when we talk about young consumers in Romania.

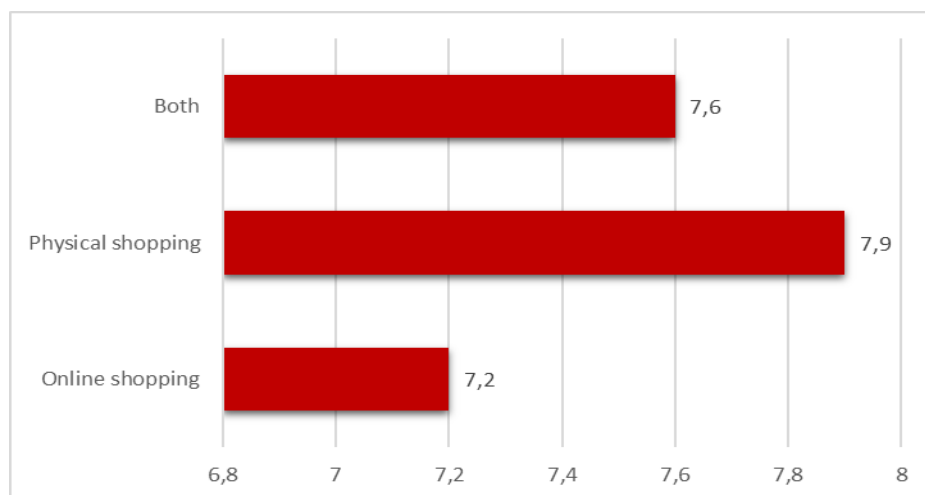


Figure 1. Preferred way to buy products or services

Source: author's contribution

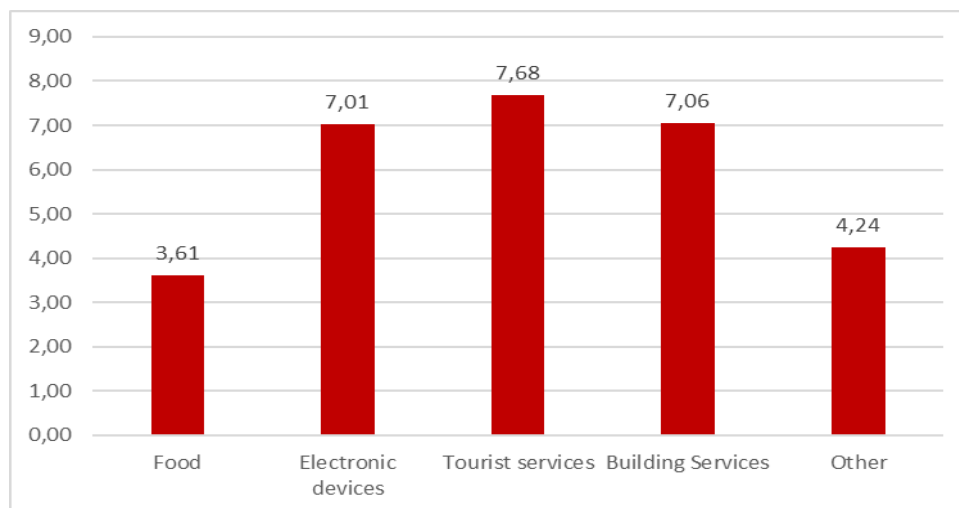


Figure 2. Types of products and services preferred on social media

Source: author's contribution

Once the preferred ways of purchasing products and services were established, as well as the types of products that would be preferred to be purchased through social media, the research continued by identifying the most popular social networks among young consumers in Romania in the sense that they have an account created for them. Therefore, Figure 3 shows six of the most popular social networks. We notice that the first places are occupied by Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. In contrast, we can see networks such as LinkedIn and Twitter, which are not considered to be preferred mediums from the point of view of the existence of an account created by users.

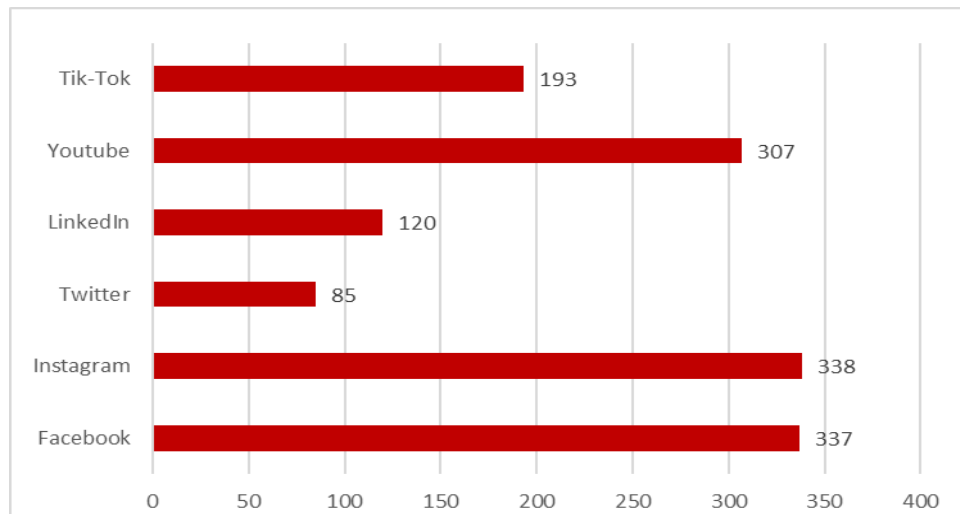


Figure 3. Social media networks where young consumers have an account created

Source: author's contribution

In addition to the existence of a simple account created on a social network, our objective was also to study the average time spent daily on certain social media. So, Figure 4 based on the results obtained shows us that Instagram keeps the first position, with the most time spent using the network by young users, followed by YouTube, Tik-Tok, and Facebook. At the opposite pole we again find LinkedIn and Twitter. These results are significant from the point of view of managerial implications, because the mere existence of an account created does not equate to the importance given by young consumers to a certain social media network and are useful in choosing the most suitable networks to market products or services.

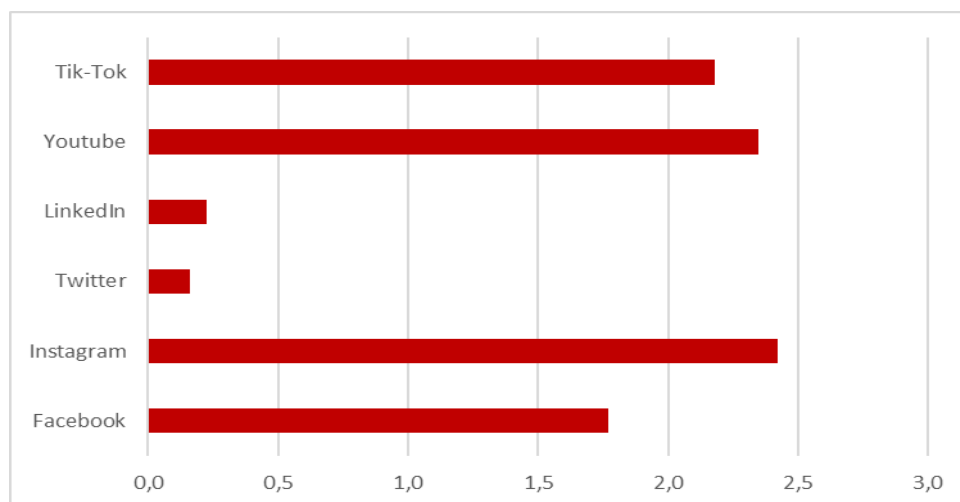


Figure 4. Average time spent daily on social media networks

Source: author's contribution

Furthermore, Figure 5 illustrates four of the questions asked to young consumers regarding how often they use social media to find and buy the desired product or service, how familiar they are with social media tools, how much they use social media and how they perceive their own knowledge of social media. The results indicate that young consumers use social media to identify and, respectively, buy products or services at an average level. This result was expected because we previously saw that young consumers prefer to buy traditionally and online at approximately the same level. At the same time, high values were recorded for the other items, which suggests that

young consumers are familiar with specific social media tools, use it often, and possess high knowledge about it.

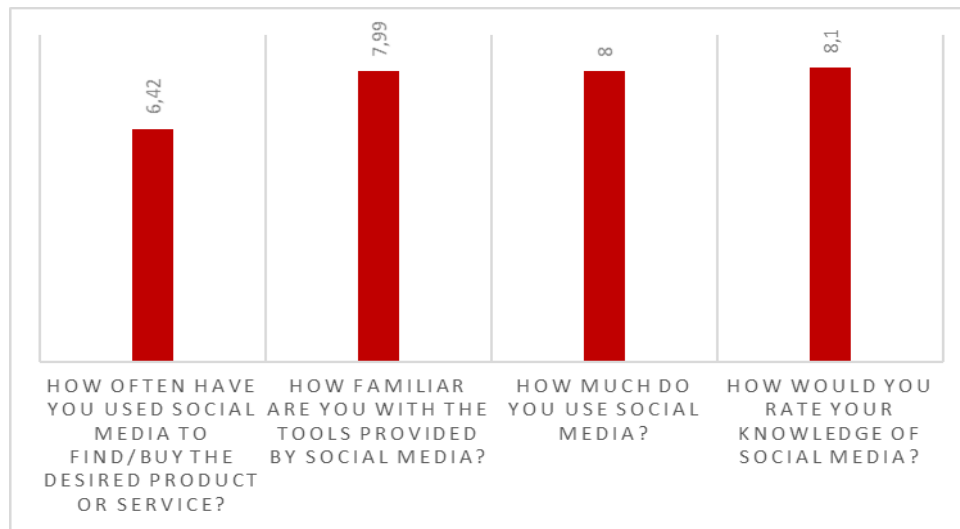


Figure 5. Young people's interaction with social media

Source: author's contribution

The study then focused on the interaction of young consumers with companies present on social media. In this sense, the results presented in Figure 6 indicate that respondents prefer to communicate with the companies they are interested in through social media to the detriment of traditional methods (by phone, e-mail, face to face), but there is a medium level of actual interaction in the sense that they actually interact with those companies from time to time. At the same time, young consumers believe that social networks are an effective tool because they perceive that they can influence their intention to buy and their decision.

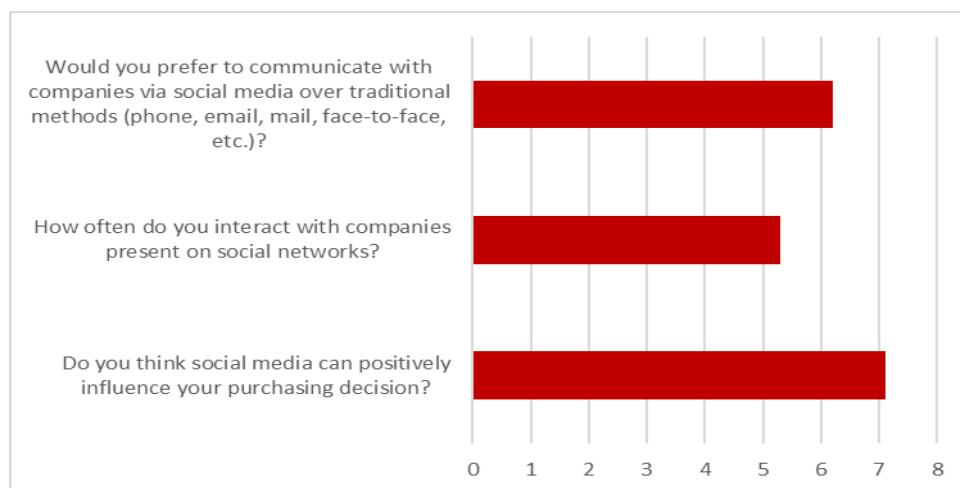


Figure 6. The level of interaction of young consumers with companies present on social media.

Source: author's contribution

In conclusion, the objective of the article is to identify the main behaviors of young people about their interaction with companies through social media. Therefore, from the point of view of preference on the purchase method, the behavior of young consumers in Romania reflects the fact that both traditional methods involving physical interaction and online methods are equally preferred. The most frequently purchased services and products through social media are tourism

services, electronic equipment, and construction services. Furthermore, young Romanian consumers have accounts created especially on Instagram, Facebook and YouTube, but from the point of view of the average daily time spent on social media networks, which actually reflects the intensity of their use, the results showed us that social media networks rank as follows: Instagram, followed by YouTube, Tik-Tok, and Facebook. Finally, young consumers in Romania know the specific tools of social networks, use them often, and have high specific knowledge about them. Social media is a good means of communication with young consumers because this way of communication is preferred compared to traditional methods.

Our results come with a number of managerial implications in that they revealed the most important and frequently used social media networks by young consumers, so that marketing and sales decision-makers targeting these market segments can use the information to strengthen the presence on those media. Also, the results are useful for managers to strengthen their strategic position on social media, knowing the main types of services and products sought by young consumers on social media and their preferences regarding the network and its specific communication modality. Last but not least, the research reiterates the importance of social media by showing the high interest of young consumers in the products and services offered in this way, which represents an additional argument for management to integrate social media in sales processes.

Our research has several limitations caused by the focus on a specific age group and a specific country, which weakens the generalizability of the results. We consider these limitations as opportunities for future research, which could consider more complex contexts, diverse age groups, and diverse geographic areas.

REFERENCES

- Andzulis, J., Rapp, A., & Panagopoulos, N. (2012). A review of social media and implications for the sales process. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 32. doi:<https://doi.org/10.2753/PSS0885-3134320302>
- Baruah, T. D. (2012). Effectiveness of Social Media as a tool of communication and its potential for technology enabled connections: A micro-level study. *International journal of scientific and research publications*, 2(5), 1-10.
- Boyd, D., & Ellison, N. (2007). Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 210-230. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00393.x>
- Buzeta, C., De Pelsmacker, P., & Dens, N. (2020). Motivations to use different social media types and their impact on consumers' online brand-related activities (COBRAs). *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 52, 79-98.
- Dewing, M. (2012). *Social Media: An Introduction*. Ottawa: Library of Parliament. Retrieved from https://bdp.parl.ca/staticfiles/PublicWebsite/Home/ResearchPublications/InBriefs/PDF/20_10-03-e.pdf
- Erlangga, H. (2021). Effect of digital marketing and social media on purchase intention of Smes food products. *Turkish Journal of Computer and Mathematics Education (TURCOMAT)*, 12(3), 3672-3678.
- Ertemel, A. V., & Ammoura, A. (2016). The role of social media advertising in consumer buying behavior. *International Journal of Commerce and Finance*, 2(1), 81-89.
- Fox, S., Zickuhr, K., & Smith, A. (2009). Twitter and Status Updating, Fall 2009. *Pew Internet and American Life Project*. Retrieved from https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/media/Files/Reports/2009/PIP_Twitter_Fall_2009web.pdf
- Fraccastoro, S., Gabrielsson, M., & Pullins, E. B. (2021). The integrated use of social media, digital, and traditional communication tools in the B2B sales process of international SMEs. *International Business Review*, 30(4), 101776.

- Gogulamudi, A., & Prabhu, S. (2022, March). Consumer Decisions Under the Influence of social media & Behavioral Targeting. In *2022 International Conference on Decision Aid Sciences and Applications (DASA)* (pp. 357-361). IEEE.
- Guesalaga, R. (2016). The use of social media in sales: Individual and organizational antecedents, and the role of customer engagement in social media. *Industrial Marketing Management*, *54*, 71-79.
- Hajli, M. N. (2014). A study of the impact of social media on consumers. *International journal of market research*, *56*(3), 387-404.
- Heller Baird, C. and Parasnis, G. (2011). From social media to social customer relationship management., *Strategy & Leadership*, *39*(5), 30-37. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1108/10878571111161507>
- Ioanas, E. (2020). Social media and its impact on consumers behavior. *Jurnal Analisa Kesehatan*, *1*(1), 1-1.
- Kaplan , A., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business Horizons*, 59-68. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2009.09.003>
- Keinänen, H., & Kuivalainen, O. (2015). Antecedents of social media B2B use in industrial marketing context: Customers' view. *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing*, *30*(6), 711-722.
- Kumar, B., & Sharma, A. (2022). Examining the research on social media in business-to-business marketing with a focus on sales and the selling process. *Industrial Marketing Management*, *102*, 122-140.
- Levin, M., Hansen, J., & Laverie, D. (2012). Toward Understanding New Sales Employees' Participation in Marketing-Related Technology: Motivation, Voluntariness, and Past Performance. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 379-393. doi: <https://doi.org/10.2753/PSS0885-3134320307>
- Liu, Y. (2010). Social media tools as a learning resource. *Journal of Educational Technology Development and Exchange (JETDE)*, *3*(1), 8.
- Marshall, G., Moncrief, W., Rudd, J., & Lee, N. (2012). Revolution in Sales: The Impact of Social Media and Related Technology on the Selling Environment. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, *32*(3), 349-363. doi: <https://doi.org/10.2753/PSS0885-3134320305>
- Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2007). *Participative Web and User-Created Content: Web 2.0, Wikis and Social Networking*. Paris: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). doi:10.1787/9789264037472-en
- Paquet, S., & Désilets, A. (2005). *Wiki as a Tool for Web-based Collaborative Story Telling in Primary School: a Case Study*. Montreal: Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education (AACE).
- Rodriguez, M., Peterson, R., & Krishnan, V. (2012). Social Media's Influence on Business-to-Business Sales Performance. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 365-378.
- Schultz, R., Schwepker, C., & Good, D. (2012). Social media usage: an investigation of B2B salespeople. *American Journal of Business*, *27*(2), 174-194.
- Thoumrungroje, A. (2014). The influence of social media intensity and EWOM on conspicuous consumption. *Procedia-Social and behavioral sciences*, *148*, 7-15.
- Yogesh, F., & Yesha, M. (2014). Effect of social media on purchase decision. *Pacific Business Review International*, *6*(11), 45-51.