

**ΣΧΟΛΗ ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΚΩΝ, ΔΙΟΙΚΗΣΗΣ ΚΑΙ  
ΠΛΗΡΟΦΟΡΙΚΗΣ**

**FACTORS INFLUENCING CONSUMER  
ENGAGEMENT IN SOCIAL MEDIA FOR  
SUSTAINABLE FASHION FIRMS: A  
QUANTITATIVE STUDY**

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**05/2022**

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**Διατριβή η οποία υποβλήθηκε προς απόκτηση εξ αποστάσεως  
μεταπτυχιακού τίτλου σπουδών στο Ψηφιακό Μάρκετινγκ  
στο Πανεπιστήμιο Νεάπολις**

**NATASA KORFIOTOU**

**05/2022**

## **Πνευματικά δικαιώματα**

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Η έγκριση της διατριβής από το Πανεπιστημίου Νεάπολις δεν υποδηλώνει απαραίτητως και αποδοχή των απόψεων του συγγραφέα εκ μέρους του Πανεπιστημίου.

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## ΣΕΛΙΔΑ ΕΓΚΥΡΟΤΗΤΑΣ

**Ονοματεπώνυμο Φοιτήτριας:** Natasa Korfiotou

**Τίτλος Μεταπτυχιακής Διατριβής:** FACTORS INFLUENCING CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT IN SOCIAL MEDIA FOR SUSTAINABLE FASHION FIRMS: A QUANTITATIVE STUDY

Η παρούσα Μεταπτυχιακή Διατριβή εκπονήθηκε στο πλαίσιο των σπουδών για την απόκτηση εξ αποστάσεως μεταπτυχιακού τίτλου στο Πανεπιστήμιο Νεάπολις και εγκρίθηκε στις ..... [ημερομηνία έγκρισης] από τα μέλη της Εξεταστικής Επιτροπής.

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## ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Η τάση των καταναλωτών να χρησιμοποιούν συστηματικά τα μέσα κοινωνικής δικτύωσης και να αγοράζουν προϊόντα διαδικτυακά, καταδεικνύει την ανάγκη για μελέτη των παραγόντων που αυξάνουν τη δέσμευση των καταναλωτών με τις βιώσιμες φίρμες μόδα στα μέσα κοινωνικής δικτύωσης. Στα πλαίσια αυτά, στόχος της παρούσας μελέτης ήταν η διερεύνηση των παραγόντων που μπορούν να επηρεάσουν τη δέσμευση των καταναλωτών με τα μέσα κοινωνικής δικτύωσης για τις βιώσιμες φίρμες μόδας. Έτσι, διεξήχθη ποσοτική μελέτη με 112 χρήστες μέσων κοινωνικής δικτύωσης, ηλικίας 18-40 ετών. Τα δεδομένα συλλέχθηκαν με δομημένο ερωτηματολόγιο. Τα κύρια ευρήματα ήταν ότι η εξωστρέφεια και η επιθυμία για γνώση δεν σχετίζονταν με τη δέσμευση των καταναλωτών. Από την άλλη, βρέθηκε ότι κάποια χαρακτηριστικά των μέσων κοινωνικής δικτύωσης και των προϊόντων μπορούσαν να επηρεάσουν τη δέσμευση. Επομένως οι στρατηγικές μάρκετινγκ πρέπει να επικεντρωθούν στα χαρακτηριστικά αυτά, τα οποία περιλαμβάνουν δημιουργία γραμμής βοήθειας, διαμόρφωση πολιτικής επιστροφών, δημιουργία μιας θετικής εμπειρίας του καταναλωτή, διευκόλυνση της πρόσβασης, των διαντιδράσεων και της επικοινωνίας με τους πελάτες, εισαγωγή οπτικοακουστικού υλικού, συχνές αναρτήσεις με πληροφορίες και σχόλια, αναλυτική περιγραφή της φίρμας και των προϊόντων της και υποστήριξη των πελατών. Επιπρόσθετα, τα προϊόντα πρέπει να προωθούνται αποτελεσματικά με έμφαση στην ποιότητα, να γίνονται εκπτώσεις, η παρουσίασή τους να είναι προσεγμένη, να ανταποκρίνονται στις προσδοκίες και στις ανάγκες των καταναλωτών, ενώ παράλληλα να υπογραμμίζονται τα θετικά σχόλια και οι εμπειρίες των άλλων χρηστών. Με αυτό τον τρόπο αυξάνονται οι πιθανότητες να αυξηθεί η δέσμευση των πελατών με τη φίρμα στα μέσα κοινωνικής δικτύωσης και να προωθηθεί η βιώσιμη βιομηχανία μόδας.

**Λέξεις κλειδιά:** μέσα κοινωνικής δικτύωσης, δέσμευση καταναλωτών, επιχειρήσεις μόδας, βιώσιμες επιχειρήσεις μόδας

## **ABSTRACT**

Because of the increased tendency of consumers to engage with social media and purchase products online, studying the factors that may influence younger consumers' engagement with social media for sustainable fashion forms seems important. Hence, the aim of this study was to explore the factors that may influence consumer engagement in social media for sustainable fashion firms. Quantitative research was conducted with 112 social media users, aged 18-40 years old. Data were gathered with a structured questionnaire. The main findings were that extraversion and desire for knowledge are not related with customers engagement with a sustainable fashion firm on social media. On the other hand, the organization and function of the firm's platform as well as the presentation of the product may encourage consumers' engagement. Hence, marketing strategies should focus on the creation of helpline, return and refund policy, creation of positive experiences for customers, easy, access, interactions and communication with the customers, inclusion of audio-visual material, frequent posts with information and comments, detailed description of the firm and its products and support for customers. Moreover, the products should be efficiently promoted, with emphasis on quality, discounts, nice presentation, and correspondence with consumers' expectations and needs, while positive comments and experiences by other users should be highlighted. In this way, it would be more likely to encourage customers' engagement with the firm on social media.

**Keywords:** social media, consumer engagement, fashion industries, sustainable business

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I would like to thank my supervisor for all the help and support I had during this research project.

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. Background and Research Rationale

Fashion is one of the largest industries worldwide. The global textile consumption is estimated at 62 million tons of apparel per year and it is expected to reach 102 million tons by 2030 (Niinimäki et al., 2020). Regardless its growth, the fashion industry has been criticized for being one of the most harmful sectors of the market in terms of sustainability, since the production of fashionable items involve the release of large amounts of chemicals and the overuse of raw materials and water (Bagheri et al., 2021). According to European Commission (2009), there are certain principles for the sustainable design of commodities. Firstly, impact materials should be limited, non-toxic, produced or recycled. Secondly, they should be created from manufacturing products that consume the fewer possible natural resources (Dietrich et al., 2017). Thirdly, long-lasting and aesthetically classic clothes should be created to reduce the need for short-term replacement, while the idea of reuse should be promoted (Turker & Altuntas, 2014).

According to Cataldi et al. (2017), slow fashion movement has been identified as a step towards the achievement of a more sustainable fashion industry; it also aims to convene eco, ethical and sustainable fashion into a single movement with the purpose of simultaneously meeting primary human needs and allowing natural resources to regenerate. The significant increase in clothing consumption and, thus, textile manufacturing, can be ascribed to the increased environmental effect (and awareness of it). For example, between 1975 and 2018, global per-capita textile production climbed from 5.9 kilogram to 13 kg per year. Similarly, global textile consumption has increased to an estimated 62 million tons per year, with an estimated increase of 102 million tons by 2030. As a consequence, fashion industry is currently generating nearly twice as much apparel compared to 20 years before (Niinimäki et al., 2020).

Sustainable fashion, as a concept, is associated mainly with the use of organic and eco-friendly materials and fair working conditions. Moreover, sustainable fashion has emerged as a response to the growth of fashion waste and the increased concerns regarding the potential harmful impact of global fashion industry on the natural environment (Henninger et al., 2016). Thus, sustainable fashion has developed over the past two decades as the outcome of the slow fashion movement, and is related with ethical fashion. The latter may be viewed as the endorsement of fair-trade principles and minimizing potential hazards and health risks for workers through the use of biodegradable and organic cotton (Liu et al., 2020). Ethical

consumption then is based on the harmonic co-existence of humans and the natural environment. As a result, consumers demand products of higher quality and are more concerned regarding the corporate social responsibility of firms and sustainability (Lundblad & Davies, 2016).

Sustainability is a term with many interpretations, including concepts such as "maintain", "support", "last". Sustainability is generally seen as a desirable goal of systemic development. Sustainability is clearly linked to survival, and survival anywhere in the world has the same value (Brown, Hanson, Liverman, & Merideth, 1987). A general principle is that growth and evolution must meet the needs of living organisms on Earth in such a way as to ensure that the needs of future generations are met (Binet et al., 2019). Sustainable fashion then has become a philosophy and a way of life. The main purpose of those involved is to improve conditions at the social, economic and environmental level. Often, instead of the term "sustainable", fashion is characterized as "organic", "green", "slow", "ecological" and "ethical" (Lundblad & Davies, 2016). According to research conducted by KPMG (2019) in major capitals of the world, consumers acknowledge as key features of sustainable fashion the high quality, the long service life, the ecological production and ethical/fair work.

Moreover, the fact that consumers seem to prefer products that are compatible with ethical and sustainable consumption, has motivated firms to learn, create and adapt promotion strategies in the marketplace (Kumar, 2017; Mo et al., 2018). Since then, sustainable fashion is still a niche market, it seems essential to find ways to further promote its products and reach more potential customers, who may be attracted by using effective marketing techniques (Shen et al., 2014). As the internet and social media continue to gain popularity, marketers have eventually turned their attention on using social media to promote a firm's product, including sustainable fashion (Cervellon & Wernerfelt, 2012). However, more research is essential in order to better understand the factors that may prompt consumers to be engaged with sustainable fashion products in social media, which is the purpose of this study.

## **1.2. Research Aim and Objectives**

The aim of this study was to explore the factors that may influence consumer engagement in social media for sustainable fashion firms. The current study focuses on views and attitudes of consumers aged from 18 to 40 years old, i.e. adults of Generation Z and millennials. Generation Z, also known as "Children of Internet", "Digital Generation", "Media Generation" or "Instant Online" (Levickaite, 2010), is the first generation to be directly and extensively exposed to digital technologies such as social networks and internet hyper-information

(Turner, 2015). According to Oblinger and Oblinger (2005), the Internet is for Generation Z like oxygen, without which it is assumed that they cannot even imagine their lives. The previous generation is referred to as the millennials of generation Y, who are considered as the first global generation that grew up in the Internet age. Hence, they are considered as digital natives and are also familiar with the use of technology and social media (Creighton, 2018), which is the focus of this research.

Based on the above, the objectives of this study were the following:

- To identify the most important factors that may influence consumer engagement in social media for sustainable fashion firms.
- To determine the extent to which consumers' personality may impact their engagement with social media.

### **1.3. Importance for Policy and Practice**

Studies on the factors influencing online consumer engagement through social media for sustainable firms seem to be scarce. However, recent studies (e.g. Evans and Peirson-Smith, 2018; Hatley, 2021; La Rosa & Jorgensen, 2021) provide some evidence about consumers eagerness to buy more sustainable fashion items, particularly younger ones. On the other hand, some conflicting findings regarding the preferences of generations Z and Y for sustainable fashion have been reported. Thus, Cheung (2017) concluded that sustainable fashion is not a priority for generation Z that emphasizes other product characteristics, such as price and quality. On the other hand, Gazzola et al (2020) argued that sustainability in the fashion industry is an important priority for younger generations. In contrast, Ly and Vigren, (2020) postulated that even though younger generations are aware of the importance of sustainability in fashion, likely change in their attitudes is not always accompanied by changing their behavior, too.

Thus, studying younger consumers' preferences, attitudes, perceptions, and opinions may improve our understanding about the factors that may influence their online behavior regarding sustainable fashion firms. Because of the increased tendency of consumers to engage with social media and purchase products online, studying the factors that may influence younger consumers' engagement with social media for sustainable fashion forms seems important. Thus, crucial information for marketers may be reveal, which may enable them to design effective online campaigns that may attract specific target groups. Furthermore, it may help policymakers to dealing more effectively with sustainability-related issues in the

fashion industry and take informed decisions regarding policies. Thus, the focus of attention may be transferred on how to increase the demand of sustainable fashion items using digital tools, such as social media, and, hopefully, slow down the degradation of the natural environment. Thus, by improving understanding about consumers' engagement with social media of sustainable firms may enrich current knowledge and facilitate social media marketing in sustainable firms.

#### **1.4. Structure of the Study**

After the introductory chapter, Chapter 2 presents the relevant literature on sustainable fashion, consumer behavior and the factors that may influence consumer engagement in social media for sustainable fashion firms. In the same chapter a conceptual model is also proposed. Chapter 3 provides a detailed description of the research methodology, with reference on the research design, the methods, and the research process. In Chapter 4 the findings are presented, which are further discussed in Chapter 5, which includes the theoretical and managerial implications of this study. Chapter 6 includes the conclusion, the challenges of this study and suggestions for future research.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Introduction**

The aim of this chapter is to define and analyze how marketing may be integrated with sustainability and fast fashion to promote products online, and which factors are related to consumer engagement with social media.

### **2.2. Marketing Mix**

The marketing mix is a tool that is used by firms to implement their marketing strategy. It consists of four parts, which are product, price, promotion, and place. These four elements constitute the "marketing mix" and are known as 4Ps. No product or service can be effectively marketed if one of these elements is missing, because there is a strong interaction between these four elements. The term "mix" indicates the importance of combining all parts in a harmonious way that may lead to a successful result. These different parts must not collide with each other, otherwise the promoted product most probably will fail to become competitive in the contemporary increasingly demanding market (Chernev, 2018). Achieving the above goal is not an easy process, since the demographic collapse, the environmental degradation in industrialized countries and the increasing socioeconomic problems, due to the excessive consumption and the fierce competition between similar firms, have resulted to increased concerns regarding the feasibility of sustainable growth of firms (Khan, 2017).

Within this framework, knowing consumer characteristics and preferences, as well as market conditions is essential for the design of effective marketing strategies that may reach easily and influence the "target market". This means that there is a clear understanding of a) the characteristics of individuals or companies that might become customers; b) the nature of their needs that should be met with the products or services offered by the company, and c) the characteristics of the products or services desired by prospective customers. Consequently, decisions should be taken about the products or services to be offered to the target market, the pricing policy to be followed, the method of distribution and points of sale and the methods of promoting sales of products or services (Chernev, 2018). Even though for a long time, the above activity was viewed solely as a means of increasing sales and profits (Belz & Peattie, 2009), modern marketing faces new challenges in terms of developing marketing strategies that may not only attract customers but also keep them engaged with the firm (Kumar, Rahman & Kazmi, 2013).

The significance and extent of various marketing techniques may differ among firms, because it is based on the company's industry, size and organizational culture. In some cases, marketing is primarily focused on developing promotional activities associated with participating in community-wide social events or on a more "sustainable" product. In some other cases, marketers may implement a sustainable marketing concept through a complete correction and re-development of individual marketing tools. In each of these instances, understanding of the importance of conducting effective marketing efforts as well as eco-friendly and pro-social attitudes across all value chain actors is critical (Kemper & Ballantine, 2019). Within the frames of sustainable fashion, reaching potential customers and promoting products in an eco-friendly way may be facilitated with the use of social media. To this end, it is essential to understand which factors may prompt customers to engage with social media and thereby receive the messages sent by sustainable fashion firms.

## **2.3. Sustainable Fashion**

### **2.3.1. *Slow Fashion vs. Fast Fashion***

Fast fashion refers to low-cost clothing that tries to imitate luxury trends. It is usually popular among younger consumers desiring to taste luxury fashion, regardless of being sustainable or not. Thus, fast fashion has raised concerns regarding potential negative impact on the environment. Fast fashion aims to design and create fashion that is cheaper and faster regarding its availability. On the one hand, from the consumers' perspective, this extremely fast fashion encourages buyers to proceed to unnecessary purchases that have a short-term life and limited use, resulting in continuously buying new outfits. Fast fashion then consists of three important components for the consumer: it is cheap, trendy and disposable, which render impulse shopping easier and cost-effective. On the other hand, from a business perspective, more production means lower costs; as a result, some fashion brands surpass seasonality and introduce new trends every few weeks (Bick, Halsey, & Ekenga, 2018).

Slow fashion made its appearance as a response to the current growth of fashion cycles of unsustainable existing business. Its main purpose was to promote the ethical aspect of sustainable fashion production and the value of quality over quantity. For several years, the practices of the fashion industry appalled with a fast-paced production that was mainly based on low-cost materials and seasonality (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). Low-cost materials and consequently low prices may stimulate consumer behavior towards overconsumption. In addition, the absence of durability and style prompts consumers to buy several clothes. In contrast, Cataldi et al. (2010) suggested that slower production may enable people to have a

healthier coexistence with the environment. Thus, slow fashion aimed to stop the waste of natural resources, such as water, since clothes were made in smaller batches (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010).

However, contemporary fashion industry is characterized by high competitiveness and cost pressure. On the other hand, its inevitable environmental impact indicates that the entire fashion industry, from fiber manufacturing to retail, should take responsibility for the damage caused to the environment, including energy, water, chemicals, waste, and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Mitigating and eliminating though the above consequences implies need for change, which firms, particularly fast-fashion ones, frequently do not want to implement for a variety of reasons, primarily economic. Investing in cutting-edge pollution control technology, for example, is critical for the future, since it may remove harmful substances, heavy metals, and chemicals from waste streams. On the other side, using “cleaner” procedures would raise production costs, which would ultimately be passed on to consumers, potentially putting an end to cheap and fast fashion and causing the fashion industry to enter an economic slump (Bick, Halsey, & Ekenga, 2018).

According to Niinimäki et al. (2020), the fashion industry's long-term stability is predicated on the complete abandonment of the "quick fashion" model, which is associated with lower overproduction and overconsumption, as well as worse material efficiency. Such changes indicate the necessity of international cooperation and the adoption of new philosophy at both the corporate and consumer level. As the above authors suggest, one possible approach could be shifting the system from linear (receiving, constructing, disposing) to circular by “narrowing (efficiency), closing (recycling), and slowing down (reusing)”, which are three techniques to improve the environmental impact of fashion. Another approach is to investigate new business models like updating, leasing, renting, repair, and resale, which enable things to survive longer while also offering consumers a new, slower lifestyle (Niinimäki et al., 2020).

Successful improvements in consumer behavior, on the other hand, must be followed and supported by policies on the social, cultural, economic, and material organization of consuming. To this end, it is essential to understand what makes consumers be engaged with sustainable firms and how marketers may prompt them to buy products from such firms. Since slow fashion then may be the way things are going to be in the future, a new knowledge of the entire system is required to progress toward such a model. In fact, changing consumer behavior and the concept of fashion may be one of the most difficult tasks. However, the above

goal may be facilitated through the use of social media as a means to engage consumers with sustainable fashion industries.

## **2.4. Consumer Engagement in Social Media**

Although the appropriate definition of commitment is debatable (Schultz et al., 2013), in the field of social media commitment is often referred as a consumer doing “something beyond viewing or reading” (Paine, 2011, p. 60). This could include “liking” a post, commenting or replying to a post, or sharing a post with others. As each platform uses its own terminology, potential behaviors are classified as “expressing agreement”, “rating”, “expressing opinion” and “sharing”. Tracking loyalty per post allows the marketer to assess the level of public interest in the content of each post, thus informing the creation of future posts. As an overall measure, engagement can also indicate the overall level of consumer interest in a brand message. To adjust the differences in the views of each post, Lovett and Owyang (2010) suggest tracking overall loyalty based on total views, while others have argued that tracking loyalty depends on the number of followers at the time of posting (Sterne, 2010).

According to Barger and Labrecque (2013), indicators for consumer commitment to social media include the following:

- **Viewer:** Attendees may see brand references on social media, but they are not actively looking for posts by name or interacting with the brand.
- **Follower:** The follower seeks the message of a brand by choosing to receive brand communications (e.g. following, befriending or subscribing), but do not interact with the brand name or message.
- **Participant:** Participants interact with a brand on social media. Participation ranges from “passive” (e.g., I like it) to “active” (e.g. commenting), depending on the type and purpose of the action.
- **Influencer:** Influential people not only interact with the brand on social media, but also they actively promote the brand by creating and uploading content that is favorable to the brand (e.g. post, review).

### **2.4.1. Factors Affecting Consumer Engagement in Social Media**

A number of reasons have been proposed in the relevant literature, explaining why consumers engage with social media. These include information retrieval, entertainment, social influences and links, incentives and promotions, and impression management (VanMeter, Grisaffe & Chonko, 2015). Shao and Ross (2015) examined the way in which motivation for

commitment can change over time in the context of the life cycle of customer loyalty. According to the above authors, consumers initially participate in branded communities on social media mainly to obtain information and socialize. As consumers become more familiar with the community, the main reason for their engagement becomes entertainment, which later is replaced by the consumer's need for information about the brand and its products.

Personality traits as well as individual differences are predictors of consumer engagement with a brand on social media (Goldsmith, Pagani & Lu, 2013). Blazevic et al. (2014) confirmed the results of Goldsmith Pagani and Lu's (2013) study, going one step further, in identifying the specific individual differences related to commitment with the internet and social networks. Individual differences as well as personality traits as predictors of consumer engagement were also confirmed by VanMeter, Grisaffe and Chonko (2015), as well as by Pagani, Goldsmith and Hofacker (2013). The latter pointed out the importance of extroversion as an element of personality that influences consumer engagement, something that was also confirmed by Kabadayi and Price (2014).

As Packard and Wooten (2013) pointed out, another factor related to consumer engagement is consumer knowledge. Thus, the above authors have found that consumers who find gaps in their level of knowledge are more motivated to share their existing knowledge with other consumers in order to reach a higher level of knowledge. This willingness, according to Barasch and Berger (2014), is related to the number of followers or friends that each consumer has on social media. Moreover, consumers' trend to engage with branded content is influenced by the type of content they are exposed to. Huang et al. (2013), in a study about viral video advertising, found that attitude toward the content is the key factor that influences sharing behavior in social media. According to Swani, Milne and Brown (2013), consumers were more inclined to engage with posts that were not overtly commercial and incorporated emotional sentiments.

Consumer engagement is also influenced by the format and purpose of the content, according to De Vries, Gensler and Leeftang (2012), who found that posts with interactive and multisensory features were more likely to create engagement than ones without these characteristics. Kim, Spiller and Hettche (2015) found that posts with photographs received the most shares, comments and likes. They discovered that consumers were more likely to engage with task-oriented content than self-oriented content when they categorized the posts by marketing objective, that is, self-oriented (e.g., posting information about the company), interaction-oriented (e.g., posting content not directly related to the brand) and task-oriented

(e.g., communicating a sales promotion. There was no statistically significant difference between content that was interaction-oriented and content that was self-oriented.

Furthermore, the extent to which information is entertaining, instructive, and fascinating may impact on consumers engagement with social media. Liu-Thompkins and Rogerson (2012) looked at the distribution of YouTube videos to discover that instructional and amusing user-generated content was more likely to be shared, while production quality had no bearing. Moreover, according to Berger and Iyengar (2013), consumers are more inclined to upload posts about fascinating items and brands. This behavior may be explained by self-improvement as a major motivator when commenting about items and companies; on the other hand, customers have more time to compose written messages compared to oral comments. Chen and Berger (2016), in a follow-up study, found that the importance of interest depends on how the information is accessed. Consumers are more likely to share fascinating content they acquire from others, but they are less selective when sharing content that they found on their own.

Barger, Peltier and Schultz (2016) in a literature review identified five categories of factors that affect consumer engagement, which are:

- Branding factors: Branding factors are relevant to brands and include brand warmth, brand attitude, word of mouth for relevant brands, for-profit versus non-profit status, a commitment to innovative communication technologies and traditional advertising spending.
- Product factors: Product factors related to consumer engagement are new versus updated products, hedonic versus utility products, product quality, existing product reviews and product experience.
- Consumer-related factors: They include factors such as motivation and promotion, information acquisition, entertainment, social influence and bonding, socialization and impression management.
- Content factors: Content is a prominent factor for consumer engagement as it may determine the degree to which consumers will eventually be engaged. According to Swani, Milne and Brown, (2013), consumers are more likely to engage with posts that are not overly commercial and that contain emotional messages. In addition, the purpose and form of the content influences consumer engagement, with interactive and multi-sensory posts encouraging greater commitment.

- Social media factors: The characteristics of social networks that may promote engagement are entertainment, social relationships, ease of use and access to information (Mortazavi, Esfidani & Barzok, 2014).

## **2.5. Online Consumer Engagement with Fashion Firms**

The fashion industry is deeply connected to traditional business practices. It consists mainly of people throughout the sales process, from production to marketing. With the proliferating use of social media, brands started to rely more on digital technologies than traditional means to create readability and predict fashion behavior (Ahmad, Salman & Ashiq, 2015). Social media is a useful tool to get customers closer to the brand. Sharma, Alavi and Ahuja (2017) argue that social media may help a brand to build its name and reach more customers. The two-way communication between business and customers was also emphasized by Kontu and Vecchi (2013), who pointed out that companies use marketing practices in social networks to prompt users become co-producers and contribute with their creativity to the business advertising effort, as Burberry did by prompting users to post photos of its products on social media.

Firms may choose among different social networking platforms, depending on the type of brand and the audience that they want to approach. Manikonda et al. (2016) concluded that even topics with the same text that are differently presented in platforms, using different styles. Social networks may empower businesses in the fashion industry, regardless their size. In particular, Instagram, which seems to gain ground lately compared to Facebook, can increase the power of the brand and act as a reliable marketing tool, as long as the sellers are active in building the brand and each step is carefully and properly planned (Latiff & Safiee, 2015). The almost zero cost of social media is a big advantage, especially for small businesses with low financial transparency. Participants in the survey conducted by Genc and Oksuz (2015) stressed that they prefer to use Instagram than other social media, because it has a more appropriate structure and is more convenient for businesses; thus, they believe that it enabled them to follow global trends and present photos of their products in public portfolios, something that is not provided by Facebook.

## **2.6. Conceptual Model and Research Questions**

Based on the above, it seems that personality traits as well as individual differences are predictors of consumer engagement with a brand on social media, with extraversion being a key personality factor in this case (Blazevic et al., 2014; Goldsmith, Pagani & Lu, 2013;

Pagani, Goldsmith & Hofacker 2013; VanMeter, Grisaffe & Chonko, 2015). In addition, socialization and information are key goals of consumer engagement in the first stage, followed by entertainment (Shao & Ross , 2015). Consumer knowledge is an additional factor that influences consumer engagement, since consumers who find gaps in their knowledge of a product, they are more willing to engage with social media in order to enrich their existing knowledge (Packard & Wooten, 2013). Moreover, it seems that consumer engagement is not a simple process, since branding factors, product factors, consumer factors, content factors and social media factors may affect consumer engagement on social media (Barger, Peltier & Schultz, 2016). Based on the above, the conceptual model of the present research focuses on consumer engagement as the outcome of personality traits, product factors, desire for knowledge and social media factors (Figure 1).

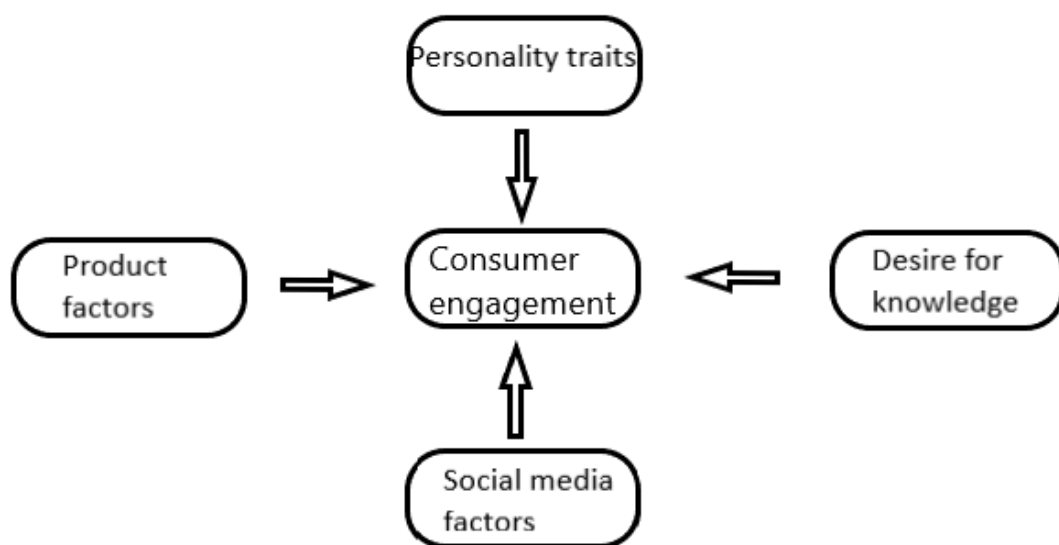


Figure 1. Conceptual model

Hence, the following research questions occurred:

- To what extent extraversion as a personality trait is related to consumer engagement with social media?
- To what extent the desire for knowledge is related to consumers' commitment to social media?
- Which social media factors may affect consumer engagement with a sustainable fashion firm on social media?
- Which product characteristics may affect consumer engagement with a sustainable fashion firm on social media?

Based on the above questions, the following research hypotheses were investigated:

- H1: Extroversion as a personality trait is positively related to consumer engagement on social media.
- H2: The desire for knowledge is positively related to the consumer's commitment to social media.
- H3: Accessibility of social media may affect consumer engagement with a sustainable fashion firm on social media.
- H4: Products of good quality may affect consumer engagement with a sustainable fashion firm on social media.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1. Introduction**

The purpose of Chapter 3 is to present the research methodology, focusing on the design of the research, the research tool, the sample and the sampling method, the research process and the ethical considerations.

### **3.2. Research Design**

The usual research designs include qualitative and quantitative approaches. Qualitative approaches are based on interpretivism, according to which reality is subjective and understood through the personal experience and the interpretations that individuals attribute to social phenomena. To this end, researchers should listen to the participants voice and encourage them to share their experiences, while researchers are the medium between the participants and the dissemination of their experiences (Patten & Newhart, 2018). In contrast, quantitative approaches are based on positivism, according to which reality is objective and therefore knowledge may occur through the collective experience of a sample that is drawn from a population. To facilitate this process, researchers are expected to keep distance from the participants and avoid interactions with them, so as to avoid influencing their answers (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

Thus, qualitative research methods help the researchers to convey the participants' experiences and dig deeper into what the participants say and reveal by attributing unique meaning to social phenomena. Hence, a qualitative researcher observes, seeks for and describes as much information as possible from the participants and their context and tries to interpret the phenomena as they evolve and gain meaning through the participants' narratives. Moreover, researchers not only record the events as they are explained by the participants, but also at the same time they discuss with themselves and use self-reflection to understand their interpretations and involvement in the research process. In addition, qualitative researchers try to combine in a logical way data, facts and situations that occurred during the discussions with the participants, in order to draw conclusions from what they had observed and how they perceived events and their importance. So, what is important in qualitative methods is the interpretations and the cultural capital of the researcher and those who will read the researcher's report (Eisner, 2017).

In contrast, quantitative research methods aim to gather general information about the participants' views and attitudes and reach a broad understanding of reality and social phenomena, which are considered to exist independently of the context and the researchers' background and personal stories. Hence, quantitative research does not aim to uncover deep insights but to draw conclusions about general trends, causal relations and differences among variables. To this end, researchers aim to select large samples that may enable them to gather adequate data to proceed to statistical analyses and generalize their findings to the population (Panke, 2018). Thus, this research was in line with the positivist approach and therefore a quantitative research method was employed.

### **3.3. Research Tool**

The most usual research tools include interviews and questionnaires. Interviews are used to explore in depth views, experiences, feelings, perceptions, beliefs and motivations of individuals regarding specific issues. Personal interviews are usually conducted individually. For this reason, they are suitable for sensitive and personal issues, for which the participants may be reluctant to express views in front of other people. In addition, interviews are suitable for research questions, about which little is known, as well as in cases where individuals look for further details. Within this framework, the interview questions aim at extracting information and answering the research question with detailed information. Thus, the interview questions are usually open-ended, neutral and comprehensible (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2020).

In contrast, questionnaires have a more impersonal character, since they are usually addressed to large samples of people. They consist of a series of questions, which aim to collect information from participants that have the knowledge and the experience to opine about the phenomenon under study. In addition, questionnaires have the advantage that they may measure behavior, attitudes, intentions and views in a cheap and quick way, compared to interviews. Moreover, questionnaires are in line with positivism, which was the foundation of this study (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Hence, it was decided to use the questionnaire as the research tool of this study. The researcher also decided to include only close-ended questions, which are easy to answer and elicit a higher response rate. In addition, too sensitive, indiscrete, rude or irrelevant questions were avoided. In order to be sure about the appropriateness of the questionnaire, the researcher piloted the questionnaire (Patten & Newhart, 2018).

The final questionnaire included three parts. The first part asked participants to complete their demographic characteristics, without providing any hint about their identity. Thus, in this part

the researcher asked for participants' gender, age, marital status, education, work status, economic status, knowledge of information technology, hours spent on social media and favorite social media. The second part included questions from the Extrovert and Introvert Personality Inventory, which was developed by Arip et al. (2017). It contained five statements that indicated extroversion and five more statements that indicated introversion traits. The third part included factors related to consumer engagement with a sustainable fashion firm on social media.

### **3.4. Sample and Sampling**

Sampling involves selecting a sample of participants from the study population that includes all potential participants (Taherdoost, 2016). Sampling methods include probability sampling, in which every member of the population has equal probability to be selected to participate in the research, and non-probability sampling, where the probability of selecting individuals from the study population is unknown. Probability sampling has the advantage that is related to random selection of a sample; as a result, generalization of the findings to the source population is allowed. It is clear, however, that probability sampling is a much more difficult, time-consuming and costly process. Hence, even though it allows researchers to select a random and representative sample that will permit generalization, it is not always feasible, while the population is often unknown; hence, it is not possible to draw a random sample from a population that is not known (Gill, 2020).

The most common non-probability sampling methods include convenience sampling, purposive sampling, quota sampling, and snowball sampling (Taherdoost, 2016). In convenience sampling, researchers collect data from individuals who can be approached with the greatest possible ease and who have the greatest possible availability and willingness to participate in the study. Convenience sampling is an extremely simple, fast, easy and low-cost sampling method. In purposive sampling, the researchers first focus on their research hypotheses and then define certain characteristics that the prospective participants must have in order to be able to provide the researcher with the essential information to answer the research questions. In addition, purposive sampling is used when researchers aim to use extremely specific and strict criteria to include participants in the study.

On the other hand, sampling with predetermined percentages (quota sampling) is essentially an extension of purposive sampling which, on the one hand, defines certain characteristics that participants must have and, on the other, determines the percentages of the participants with those characteristics. In this way, the researchers aim to include in the study adequate

percentages of individuals with different characteristics, so as to draw safer conclusions. In snowball sampling, participants in the study indicate other prospective participants, based on their social contacts and connections. In this way, the researchers have the opportunity to reach other potential participants who may be eligible to participate in the study. Snowball sampling is especially useful in studies that explore sensitive and personal issues, which individuals may try to “hide” from strangers (Gill, 2020).

For the purposes of this research, it was decided to use the convenience sampling method, which is in line with quantitative research methods. The population of the study included consumers who use social media.

### **3.5. Data Collection Process**

The researcher approached friends and relatives and their friends, asking them to participate in the research, after explaining them the purposes of the study. The participants who agreed to participate had to complete the questionnaire and then return it to the researcher, who had explained them that they had the right to deny participation or withdraw from the study. When the researcher had gathered all the questionnaires, she coded them and proceeded to data analysis.

### **3.6. Data Analysis**

Since data were quantitative, the researcher used the statistical package SPSS for data analysis. Firstly, variables were described with frequencies and means. Then correlations were explored with Pearson’s correlation and differences with independent samples t-test and ANOVA. Moreover, predictors were explored with multiple regression (Patten & Newhart, 2018).

### **3.7. Ethical Considerations**

Conducting ethical research is an essential prerequisite for a study. Hence, in this study, the code of conduct was the basis of the research, aiming to be compliant with ethics. To this end, firstly the researcher reassured that the participants’ anonymity was safeguarded by delivering an anonymous questionnaire and avoiding questions, which might have led to identification of the participants. In addition, the researcher retained data confidentiality by using a personal computer for the study, to which only the researcher had access. Moreover, the researcher is going to destroy the data after a reasonable amount of time. The researcher was also compliant with research ethics by informing the participants about the purposes of the study, and their right to deny participation or withdraw from the study before submitting their questionnaire. Finally, no harm occurred to any of the participants (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

## CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

### 4.1. Demographics

In total, 112 people participated in this research, 43 men (38.39%) and 69 women (61.61%) (Figure 2).

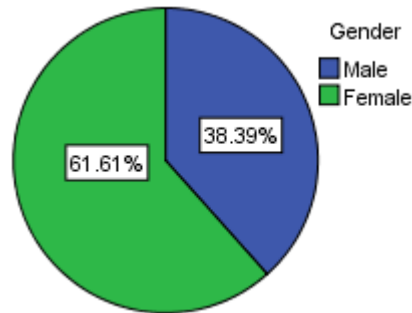


Figure 2. Participants' gender

Most of the participants were between 26-30 years old (60.71%). The rest were up to 25 (17.86%), 31-35 (14.29%) and 36-40 years old (7.14%) (Figure 3).

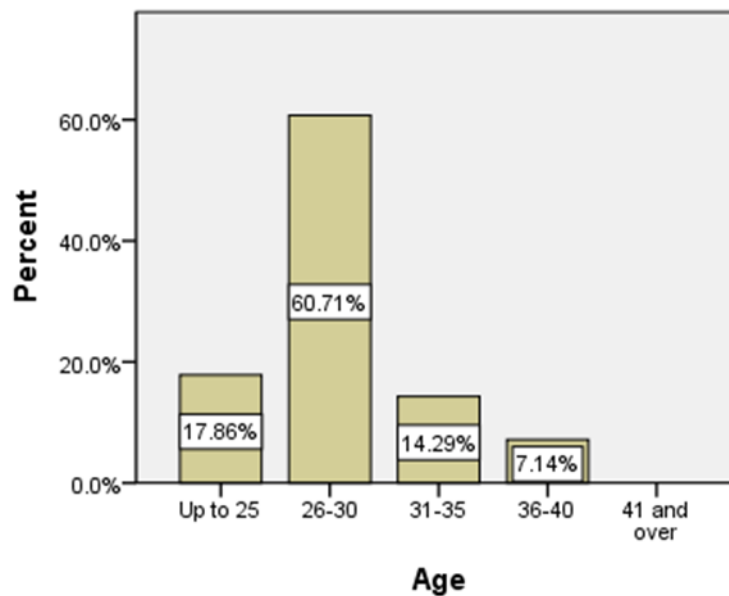


Figure 3. Participants' age

Most participants were married or living with a partner (58.04%). The rest were single (41.96%) (Figure 4).

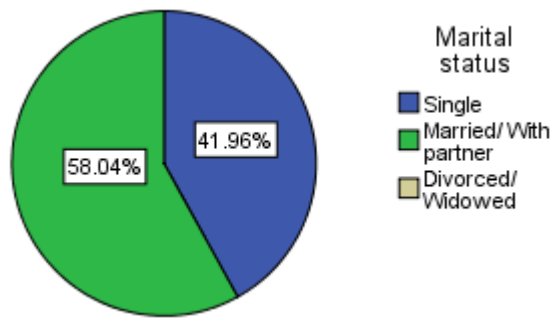


Figure 4. Participants' marital status

Most participants held a master's degree (59.82%). Almost one third held a Bachelor (30.36%). The rest held a PhD (6.25%) or were graduates from secondary education (3.57%) (Figure 5).

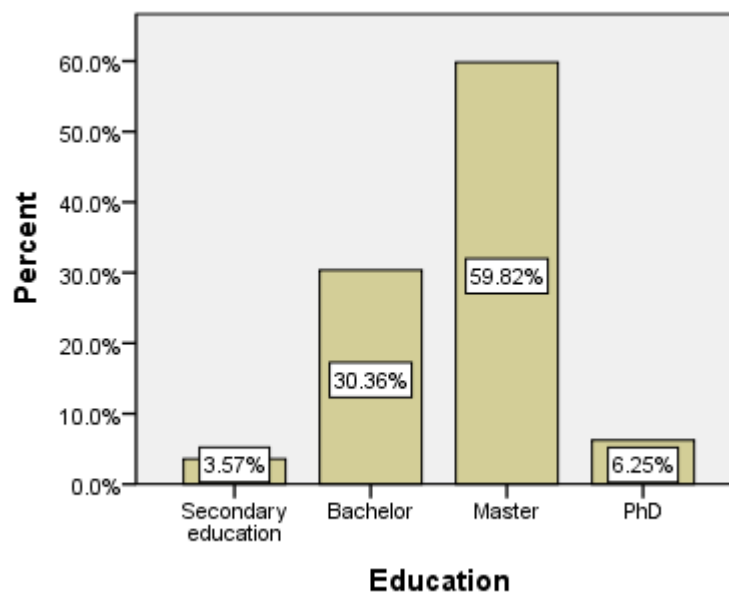


Figure 5. Participants' education

Most of the participants were employed (78.57%). The rest were unemployed (21.43%) (Figure 6).

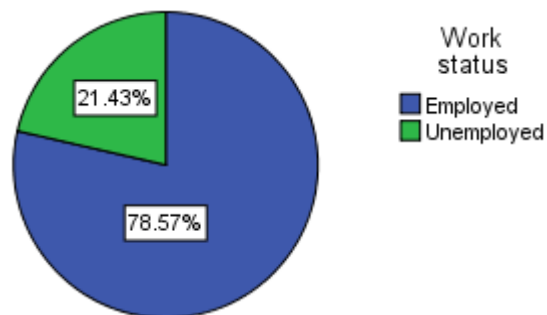


Figure 6. Participants' work status

Almost half of the participants had above average economic status (45.54%). Approximately one third had average economic status (31.25%). The rest had excellent (16.07%) or bad economic status (7.14%) (Figure 7).

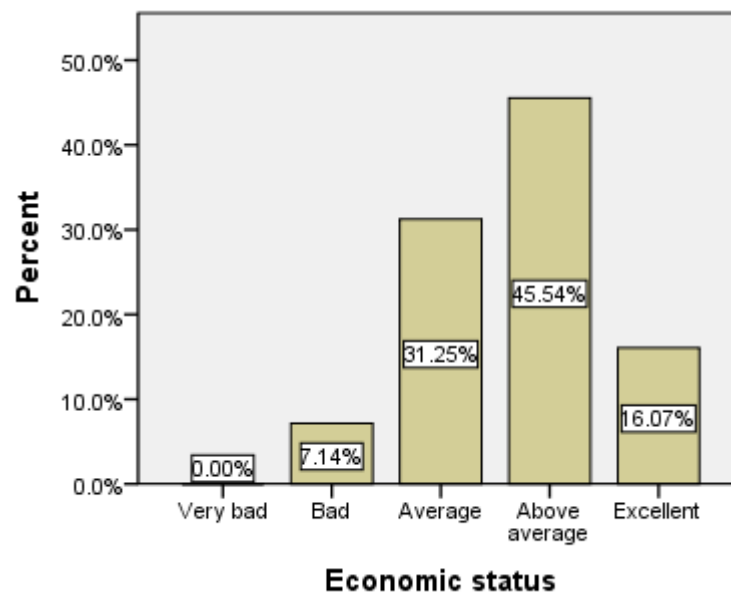


Figure 7. Participants' economic status

Most of the participants had good knowledge of information technology (71.43%). The rest had very good (17.86%) or average knowledge (10.71%) (Figure 8).

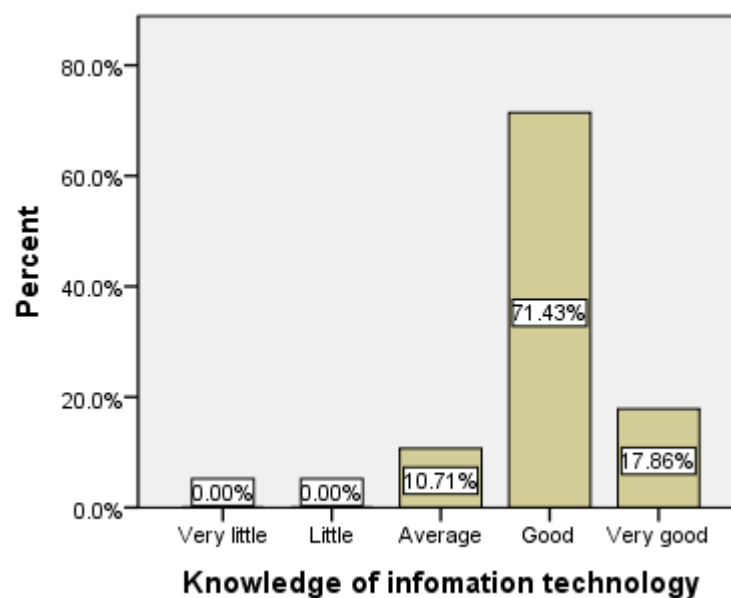


Figure 8. Participants' knowledge of information technology

Most of the participants spent 4-5 hours on social media per day (57.14%). One fifth of the participants spent 2-3 hours (21.43%). The rest spent 6 hours and more (14.29%) or up to 1 hour on social media (7.14%) (Figure 9). Based on independent samples t-test, it was found

that women, single and unemployed participants spent statistically significantly more time on social media compared to men, married or living with partner and employed participants, respectively ( $t=-3.322$ ,  $df=65.405$ ,  $p<0.01$  and  $t=3.956$ ,  $df=110$ ,  $p<0.01$  and  $t=-5.426$ ,  $df=59.241$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). In addition, Pearson's correlation indicated a negative correlation of time spent on social media with age and economic status ( $r=-0.321$ ,  $p<0.01$  and  $r=-0.198$ ,  $p<0.05$ , respectively) and a positive correlation with knowledge of information technology ( $r=0.299$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). This means that the younger the participants, the worse their economic status and the better their knowledge of information technology, the more time they spent on social media, and vice versa. Moreover, One-way ANOVA indicated that participants whose favorite social media was Tik Tok spent statistically significantly more time on social media compared to participants whose favorite social media were Facebook or Instagram ( $F(3,108)=17.667$ ,  $p<0.01$ ).

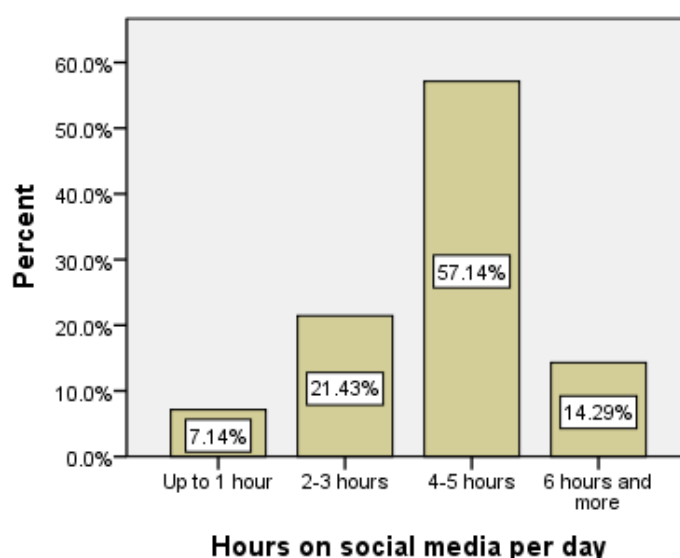


Figure 9. Spent hours on social media per day

The participants' favorite social media was Tik Tok for almost half of them (41.96%). For more than one third of the participants their favorite social media was Instagram (36.61%). For the rest, their favorite social media were Facebook (17.86%) or YouTube (3.57%) (Figure 10).

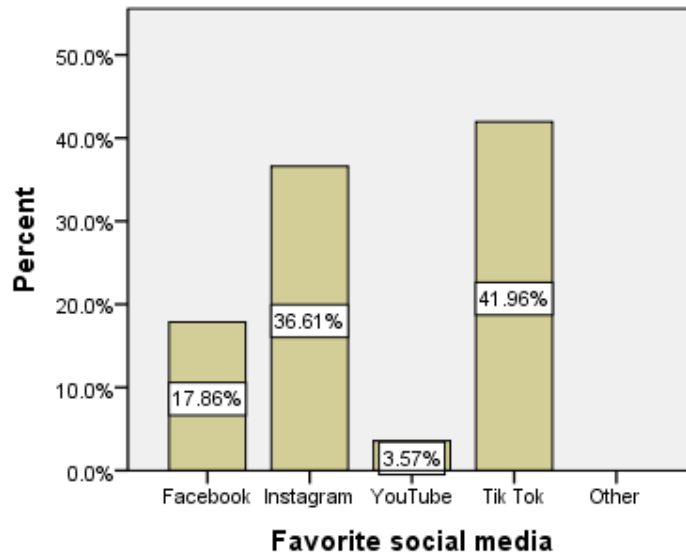


Figure 10. Participants' favorite social media

#### 4.2. Findings for Research Question 1

The first research question explored whether extroversion as a personality trait was related to consumer engagement with social media. Firstly, participants' self-evaluation was explored with frequencies. On average, participants agreed that they liked to joke with friends, were jolly persons, love outdoor activities, are comfortable when in a crowded place and love a festive atmosphere (Table 1). All the above are traits of extroversion personalities.

Table 1. Participants' self-evaluation

| STATEMENTS                                     | LEVEL OF AGREEMENT (%) |      |      |      |      | Mean |
|------------------------------------------------|------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
|                                                | SD                     | D    | N    | A    | SA   |      |
| I like to joke with friends.                   | 0.0                    | 3.6  | 14.3 | 42.0 | 40.2 | 4.19 |
| I am a jolly person.                           | 0.0                    | 0.0  | 27.7 | 50.9 | 21.4 | 3.94 |
| I love outdoor activities.                     | 0.0                    | 7.1  | 28.6 | 40.2 | 24.1 | 3.81 |
| I am comfortable when I am in a crowded place. | 0.0                    | 7.1  | 24.1 | 54.5 | 14.3 | 3.76 |
| I love a festive atmosphere.                   | 0.0                    | 3.6  | 42.9 | 46.4 | 7.1  | 3.57 |
| I feel stressed in a noisy environment.        | 2.7                    | 30.4 | 38.4 | 28.6 | 0.0  | 2.93 |
| I don't like to talk about myself.             | 0.0                    | 40.2 | 31.2 | 28.6 | 0.0  | 2.88 |
| I like to eat alone.                           | 3.6                    | 33.9 | 35.7 | 26.8 | 0.0  | 2.86 |
| I am a quiet person.                           | 0.0                    | 40.2 | 35.7 | 24.1 | 0.0  | 2.84 |
| I don't have many friends.                     | 6.2                    | 58.9 | 24.1 | 10.7 | 0.0  | 2.39 |

Note: SD =Strongly disagree, D =Disagree, N =Neutral, A =Agree, SA=Strongly agree

Then the statements that indicate either extroversion or introversion personality were added to assess the frequency of each personality type among participants. A score of 16 and over indicated the participant's match with the particular personality type. Almost all of the participants indicated that they had an extroverted personality (92.86%) (Figure 11).

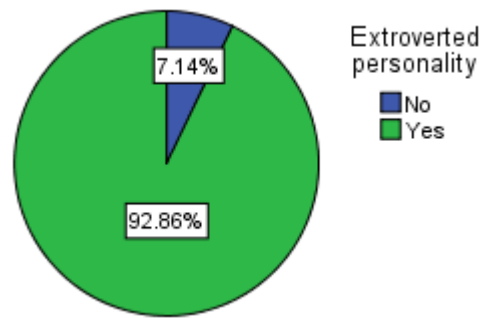


Figure 11. Extroverted personality

Based on independent samples t-test, it was found that men were more extroverted than women ( $t= 2.903$ ,  $df=110$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). In addition, single participants were more extroverted than married/living with partner ( $t= 4.760$ ,  $df=77.191$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Moreover, Pearson correlation indicated statistically significant positive and negative correlations of extroversion with age and knowledge of information technology, respectively ( $r=0.315$ ,  $p<0.01$  for age and  $r=-0.366$ ,  $p<0.01$  for information technology knowledge). This means that the older the participants and the less knowledge of information technology they have, the more extroverted they are. In addition, based on One-way ANOVA and Scheffe post-hoc tests, statistically significant differences were found between categories of favorite social media, with people having Tik Tok as their favorite social media being more extroverted than participants, who liked YouTube more ( $F(3,108)=5.976$ ,  $p<0.01$ ).

On the other hand, it was also found that more than one third of the participants had traits that corresponded with the introverted personality (Figure 12). Based on independent samples t-test, it was found that employed participants were more introverted than unemployed ones ( $t= 2.359$ ,  $df=110$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). based on Pearson correlation, statistically significant negative correlations of introversion with age and education were found ( $r=-0.356$ ,  $p<0.01$  and  $r=-0.272$ ,  $p<0.01$ , respectively). This means that the younger the participants and the less educated, the more introverted they were. On the other hand, statistically significant positive correlations were found of introversion with economic status and knowledge of information technology ( $r=0.383$ ,  $p<0.01$  and  $r=0.482$ ,  $p<0.01$ , respectively). This means that the better the economic status and the more knowledgeable about information technology, the more the participants are introverted.

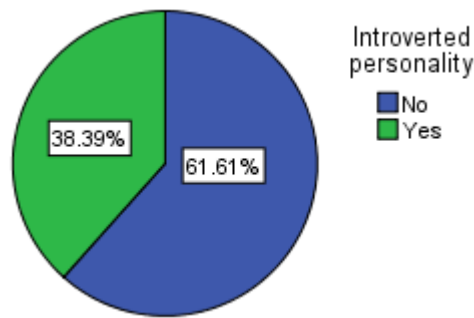


Figure 12. Introverted personality

Then the relationship between extroversion and time spent on social media was explored with Pearson's correlation. No statistically significant correlation was found between the two variables. Then likely correlations with dimensions of introversion and extroversion were explored with the same test. A positive correlation was found between time spent on social media and loving a festive atmosphere ( $r=0.234$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Moreover, statistically significant negative correlations were found between time spent on social media and loving outdoor activities and eating alone ( $r=-0.256$ ,  $p<0.01$  and  $r=-0.317$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). This means that the more the participants loved a festive atmosphere and the less they loved outdoor activities and eating alone, the more they were engaged with social media and vice-versa.

After that, multiple regression with the stepwise method was conducted to explore likely predictor variables among participants' demographics and personality traits. One model occurred, which could explain 72.2% of the variance (Table 2).

Table 2. Model Summary<sup>a</sup>

| Model | R     | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | Change Statistics |          |     |     |               | Durbin-Watson |
|-------|-------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|----------|-----|-----|---------------|---------------|
|       |       |          |                   |                            | R Square Change   | F Change | df1 | df2 | Sig. F Change |               |
| 1     | .850b | .722     | .672              | .445                       | .722              | 14.372   | 17  | 94  | .000          | 1.828         |

a. Dependent Variable: Hours on social media per day

b. Predictors: (Constant), I feel stressed in a noisy environment, Education, Marital status, Economic status, I don't have many friends, Knowledge of information technology, I don't like to talk about myself, Work status, I like to eat alone, I love outdoor activities, I love a festive atmosphere, I am comfortable when I am in a crowded place, Gender, I am a jolly person, I am a quiet person, I like to joke with friends, Age.

Based on the values of the statistically significant coefficients (Table 3), the following equation occurred:

$$\text{Hours spent on social media} = 4.488 + (0.456\text{gender}) + (-1.032\text{age}) + (-0.468\text{marital status}) + (0.271\text{education}) + (-0.605\text{work status}) + (-0.452\text{knowledge of information technology}) + (-0.329\text{loving outdoor activities}) + (0.888\text{comfortable when in a crowded})$$

place) + (-0.444liking jokes with friends) + (-0.597liking eating alone) + (0.354not having many friends) + (0.604being a quiet person)

The above equation means that participants engagement with social media may be predicted by being a woman, younger, single and employed, having a higher level of education and lower knowledge of information technology, not loving outdoor activities, feeling comfortable in a crowded place, not liking jokes with friends or eating alone, not having many friends and being a quiet person.

Table 3. Coefficients for time spent on social media

| Model                                         | Unstandardized Coefficients |            | Standardized Coefficients | t      | Sig. | 95.0% Confidence Interval for B |             | Collinearity Statistics |        |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|------|---------------------------------|-------------|-------------------------|--------|
|                                               | B                           | Std. Error | Beta                      |        |      | Lower Bound                     | Upper Bound | Tolerance               | VIF    |
| (Constant)                                    | 4.488                       | 1.352      |                           | 3.320  | .001 | 1.804                           | 7.172       |                         |        |
| Gender                                        | .456                        | .160       | .287                      | 2.854  | .005 | .139                            | .773        | .292                    | 3.422  |
| Age                                           | -1.032                      | .167       | -1.030                    | -6.164 | .000 | -1.364                          | -.699       | .106                    | 9.455  |
| Marital status                                | -.468                       | .187       | -.299                     | -2.505 | .014 | -.840                           | -.097       | .207                    | 4.827  |
| Education                                     | .271                        | .076       | .225                      | 3.573  | .001 | .121                            | .422        | .744                    | 1.345  |
| Work status                                   | -.605                       | .200       | -.321                     | -3.025 | .003 | -1.002                          | -.208       | .262                    | 3.813  |
| Economic status                               | .135                        | .084       | .143                      | 1.604  | .112 | -.032                           | .302        | .372                    | 2.689  |
| Knowledge of infomation technology            | .165                        | .127       | .113                      | 1.292  | .199 | -.088                           | .417        | .388                    | 2.578  |
| I am a jolly person                           | -.452                       | .137       | -.408                     | -3.293 | .001 | -.724                           | -.179       | .192                    | 5.197  |
| I love outdoor activities                     | -.329                       | .068       | -.376                     | -4.849 | .000 | -.464                           | -.194       | .493                    | 2.030  |
| I am comfortable when I am in a crowded place | .888                        | .185       | .899                      | 4.795  | .000 | .520                            | 1.256       | .084                    | 11.892 |
| I love a festive atmosphere                   | .009                        | .091       | .008                      | .100   | .921 | -.172                           | .190        | .464                    | 2.154  |
| I like to joke with friends                   | -.444                       | .121       | -.465                     | -3.675 | .000 | -.685                           | -.204       | .185                    | 5.410  |
| I like to eat alone                           | -.597                       | .081       | -.660                     | -7.360 | .000 | -.758                           | -.436       | .367                    | 2.723  |

|                                        |       |      |       |       |      |       |      |      |       |
|----------------------------------------|-------|------|-------|-------|------|-------|------|------|-------|
| I don't like to talk about myself      | -.032 | .081 | -.034 | -.401 | .689 | -.192 | .128 | .403 | 2.478 |
| I don't have many friends              | .354  | .102 | .348  | 3.477 | .001 | .152  | .555 | .295 | 3.386 |
| I am a quiet person                    | .604  | .166 | .614  | 3.641 | .000 | .275  | .933 | .104 | 9.622 |
| I feel stressed in a noisy environment | .025  | .067 | .027  | .372  | .710 | -.109 | .159 | .563 | 1.777 |

a. Dependent Variable: Hours on social media per day

### 4.3. Findings for Research Question 2

The second research question explored whether desire for knowledge was related to consumers' commitment to social media. To this end, Pearson's correlation was employed. It was found that the correlation of time spent on social media with informativeness of the social media platform and a firm that helps the participants increase their knowledge about products was not statistically significant ( $p > 0.05$ ). Hence, the above assumption was rejected. However, when the same test was performed separately for men and women, a statistically significant positive correlation was found for men between time spent on social media and the firm helping men increasing their knowledge about the product ( $r = 0.525$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). In addition, for women a statistically significant negative correlation was found between time spent on social media and the firm helping women increasing their knowledge about the product ( $r = -0.454$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This means that men's desire for knowledge is related to increased commitment with social media, while women's increased commitment with social media is related to less desire for knowledge.

### 4.4. Findings for Research Question 3

The third research question explored which social media factors may affect consumer engagement with a sustainable fashion firm on social media. Based on frequencies and means, it was found that on average, participants agreed that they felt more engaged with a firm on social media when there was a helpline for questions, the product was of good quality, the participants had previous positive experiences with the firm, which was trustful, the participants had a choice among similar items, the product was exactly what they were looking for, the firm appeared knowledgeable about sustainability, interaction with the firm was easy, the previous participants' experience with similar products was positive, interaction with other social media users was easy, the platform included audio-visual material, was accessible and described the firm in detail, there were positive comments for the product, there was an option

to return the product and get a refund, the participants felt that they needed the product, there were frequent posts in the platform about products, the firm helped the participants' increase their knowledge about the product, the product had been used by other social media users, the participants' family had recommended the firm or the product, the firm had many followers and the product was nicely presented. The least important factor was a product that was recommended by celebrities (Table 4).

Table 4. Factors affecting social media users' engagement

| FACTORS FOR FEELING MORE ENGAGED WITH A SUSTAINABLE FASHION FIRM ON SOCIAL MEDIA | LEVEL OF AGREEMENT (%) |      |      |      |      | Mean |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
|                                                                                  | SD                     | D    | N    | A    | SA   |      |
| There is a helpline, where I can ask questions.                                  | 0.0                    | 3.6  | 14.3 | 44.6 | 37.5 | 4.16 |
| The quality of the product is good.                                              | 0.0                    | 0.0  | 21.4 | 50.0 | 28.6 | 4.07 |
| My previous experiences with the firm were positive.                             | 0.0                    | 0.0  | 29.5 | 46.4 | 24.1 | 3.95 |
| The firm is trustful.                                                            | 0.0                    | 3.6  | 17.9 | 59.8 | 18.8 | 3.94 |
| There are similar items from which I can choose.                                 | 0.0                    | 6.2  | 24.1 | 51.8 | 17.9 | 3.81 |
| The product is exactly what I was looking for.                                   | 0.0                    | 0.0  | 36.6 | 46.4 | 17.0 | 3.80 |
| The firm appears knowledgeable about sustainability.                             | 0.0                    | 0.0  | 31.2 | 58.9 | 9.8  | 3.79 |
| Interaction with the firm is easy.                                               | 0.0                    | 3.6  | 27.7 | 58.0 | 10.7 | 3.76 |
| My previous experience with similar products were positive.                      | 0.0                    | 0.0  | 48.2 | 31.2 | 20.5 | 3.72 |
| Interaction with other social media users is easy.                               | 0.0                    | 3.6  | 30.4 | 58.9 | 7.1  | 3.70 |
| The platform includes audio-visual material.                                     | 0.0                    | 3.6  | 34.8 | 50.9 | 10.7 | 3.69 |
| The platform is accessible.                                                      | 0.0                    | 7.1  | 31.2 | 47.3 | 14.3 | 3.69 |
| The platform describes the firm in detail.                                       | 0.0                    | 3.6  | 40.2 | 42.0 | 14.3 | 3.67 |
| There are positive comments for the product.                                     | 0.0                    | 6.2  | 33.9 | 46.4 | 13.4 | 3.67 |
| I have the option to return the product and get a refund.                        | 0.0                    | 3.6  | 37.5 | 48.2 | 10.7 | 3.66 |
| I feel that I need the product.                                                  | 0.0                    | 0.0  | 45.5 | 43.8 | 10.7 | 3.65 |
| There are frequent posts in the platform about products.                         | 0.0                    | 3.6  | 39.3 | 48.2 | 8.9  | 3.63 |
| The firm helps me increase my knowledge about the product.                       | 0.0                    | 7.1  | 32.1 | 51.8 | 8.9  | 3.63 |
| The product has been used by other social media users.                           | 3.6                    | 0.0  | 38.4 | 48.2 | 9.8  | 3.61 |
| My family has recommended the firm or the product.                               | 0.0                    | 3.6  | 42.0 | 47.3 | 7.1  | 3.58 |
| The firm has many followers.                                                     | 0.0                    | 10.7 | 31.2 | 51.8 | 6.2  | 3.54 |
| The product is nicely presented.                                                 | 0.0                    | 6.2  | 42.0 | 44.6 | 7.1  | 3.53 |
| The product has many likes.                                                      | 0.0                    | 13.4 | 31.2 | 48.2 | 7.1  | 3.49 |
| The advertisement is persuasive.                                                 | 0.0                    | 7.1  | 38.4 | 54.5 | 0.0  | 3.47 |
| My friends have recommended the firm or the product.                             | 0.0                    | 3.6  | 49.1 | 43.8 | 3.6  | 3.47 |
| There is adequate information about the product.                                 | 0.0                    | 3.6  | 53.6 | 35.7 | 7.1  | 3.46 |

|                                                      |      |      |      |      |     |      |
|------------------------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|-----|------|
| The product has a good discount.                     | 2.7  | 17.0 | 20.5 | 59.8 | 0.0 | 3.38 |
| The firm is well-known.                              | 0.0  | 14.3 | 45.5 | 33.0 | 7.1 | 3.33 |
| The firm's webpage looks nice.                       | 0.0  | 13.4 | 44.6 | 38.4 | 3.6 | 3.32 |
| There are special offers for purchasing the product. | 0.0  | 10.7 | 50.0 | 35.7 | 3.6 | 3.32 |
| The product makes me feel more important.            | 3.6  | 17.0 | 34.8 | 44.6 | 0.0 | 3.21 |
| The product is available in many colors.             | 2.7  | 20.5 | 41.1 | 32.1 | 3.6 | 3.13 |
| The product makes me feel better about myself.       | 0.0  | 24.1 | 40.2 | 35.7 | 0.0 | 3.12 |
| I am in a good mood on that day.                     | 7.1  | 31.2 | 26.8 | 31.2 | 3.6 | 2.93 |
| The product is cheap.                                | 2.7  | 51.8 | 24.1 | 17.9 | 3.6 | 2.68 |
| The product is recommended by celebrities.           | 14.3 | 34.8 | 26.8 | 20.5 | 3.6 | 2.64 |

Note: SD =Strongly disagree, D =Disagree, N =Neutral, A =Agree, SA=Strongly agree

Based on independent samples t-test, some statistically significant differences between men and women were found. Thus, men were more engaged with a firm on social media when the firm appeared knowledgeable about sustainability, and the product was exactly what they were looking for. In contrast, women were more engaged with a firm on social media when the firm helped them to increase their knowledge about the product, the product was nicely presented, cheap, of good quality and made them feel better about themselves, the firms page looked nice, the product was recommended by celebrities or their friends, and their previous experiences with similar products were positive (Table 5).

Table 5. Men and women's differences for engagement with firms on social media

|                                                            |                             | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances |      | t-test for Equality of Means |        |                 |
|------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------------|------|------------------------------|--------|-----------------|
|                                                            |                             | F                                       | Sig. | t                            | df     | Sig. (2-tailed) |
| The firm helps me increase my knowledge about the product. | Equal variances assumed     | .001                                    | .975 | -3.207                       | 110    | .002            |
|                                                            | Equal variances not assumed |                                         |      | -3.324                       | 99.333 | .001            |
| The product is nicely presented.                           | Equal variances assumed     | .971                                    | .327 | -2.089                       | 110    | .039            |
|                                                            | Equal variances not assumed |                                         |      | -2.157                       | 98.371 | .033            |
| The firm appears knowledgeable about sustainability.       | Equal variances assumed     | 4.061                                   | .046 | 3.060                        | 110    | .003            |
|                                                            | Equal variances not assumed |                                         |      | 2.996                        | 83.206 | .004            |
| The product makes me feel better about myself.             | Equal variances assumed     | .311                                    | .578 | -3.443                       | 110    | .001            |
|                                                            | Equal variances not assumed |                                         |      | -3.445                       | 89.401 | .001            |

|                                                             |                             |        |      |        |         |      |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------|------|--------|---------|------|
| The firm's webpage looks nice.                              | Equal variances assumed     | 12.084 | .001 | -3.790 | 110     | .000 |
|                                                             | Equal variances not assumed |        |      | -3.976 | 102.360 | .000 |
| The product is recommended by celebrities.                  | Equal variances assumed     | .971   | .327 | -4.905 | 110     | .000 |
|                                                             | Equal variances not assumed |        |      | -5.031 | 96.497  | .000 |
| My friends have recommended the firm or the product.        | Equal variances assumed     | 2.416  | .123 | -4.460 | 110     | .000 |
|                                                             | Equal variances not assumed |        |      | -4.480 | 90.575  | .000 |
| The product is cheap.                                       | Equal variances assumed     | 10.084 | .002 | -3.836 | 110     | .000 |
|                                                             | Equal variances not assumed |        |      | -4.237 | 109.935 | .000 |
| My previous experience with similar products were positive. | Equal variances assumed     | .940   | .334 | -2.832 | 110     | .006 |
|                                                             | Equal variances not assumed |        |      | -2.782 | 84.063  | .007 |
| The product is exactly what I was looking for.              | Equal variances assumed     | 29.142 | .000 | 3.275  | 110     | .001 |
|                                                             | Equal variances not assumed |        |      | 3.590  | 109.566 | .000 |
| The quality of the product is good.                         | Equal variances assumed     | .400   | .528 | -4.487 | 110     | .000 |
|                                                             | Equal variances not assumed |        |      | -4.547 | 93.092  | .000 |

Moreover, Pearson's correlation indicated some statistically significant positive and negative correlations of factors affecting engagement with a firm on social media with age, education level, economic status and knowledge of information technology. Thus, older participants are more affected to be engaged with a firm on social media when the firm helps them increase their knowledge about the product, the platform includes audio-visual material and is accessible, they feel that they need the product, the advertisement is persuasive, there are positive comments for the product, their friends or family have recommended the firm or the product, there are special offers for purchasing the product, they have the option to return the product and get a refund and there is a helpline, where they can ask questions. In contrast, younger participants are more affected when interaction with other social media users is easy, the product makes them feel better about themselves, they are in a good mood on that day, their previous experiences with similar products were positive, there are similar items from which they can choose, and the product is available in many colors (Table 6).

It was also found that participants with higher education level are more affected when the platform describes the firm in detail, there are frequent posts in the platform about products, the platform includes audio-visual material, interaction with the firm is easy, the product has been used by other social media users, they feel that they need the product, the advertisement is persuasive, and there is a helpline, where they can ask questions. In contrast, participants with lower education level are more affected when the firm has many followers, there is adequate information about the product, the product makes them feel better about themselves, the firm's webpage looks nice, the product is cheap and available in many colors (Table 6).

Furthermore, it was found that participants with better economic status are more affected when the platform describes the firm in detail, interaction with the firm is easy, the product is nicely presented, the firm appears knowledgeable about sustainability and there are special offers for purchasing the product. In contrast, participants with worse economic status are more affected when the firm has many followers, the platform includes audio-visual material, interaction with other social media users is easy, there is adequate information about the product, the product makes them feel better about themselves, there are positive comments for the product, the product has a good discount and is cheap, and there are similar items from which they can choose (Table 6).

Finally, it was found that participants with better knowledge of information technology are more affected when the platform describes the firm in detail, interaction with other social media users is easy and the product makes them feel better about themselves. In contrast, participants with lower knowledge of information technology are more affected when the product is nicely presented, the advertisement is persuasive, the firm's webpage looks nice, there are positive comments for the product, the product has many likes, their friends or family have recommended the firm, or the product and the product is exactly what they were looking for and of good quality (Table 6).

Table 6. Correlations for factors affecting engagement with a firm

| FACTORS AFFECTING<br>ENGAGEMENT WITH A<br>SUSTAINABLE FASHION FIRM<br>ON SOCIAL MEDIA | AGE | EDUCATION | ECONOMIC<br>STATUS | KNOWLEDGE<br>OF<br>INFOMATION<br>TECHNOLOGY |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-----------|--------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| The firm has many followers.                                                          |     | -.186*    | -.246**            |                                             |
| The platform describes the firm in detail.                                            |     | .154      | .302**             | .236*                                       |
| There are frequent posts in the platform about products.                              |     | .218*     |                    |                                             |

|                                                             |         |         |         |         |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| The firm helps me increase my knowledge about the product.  | .194*   |         |         |         |
| The platform includes audio-visual material.                | .323**  | .316**  | -.205*  |         |
| The platform is accessible.                                 | .227*   |         |         |         |
| Interaction with the firm is easy.                          |         | .255**  | .335**  |         |
| Interaction with other social media users is easy.          | -.290** |         | -.234*  | .476**  |
| The product is nicely presented.                            |         |         | .294**  | -.193*  |
| The product has been used by other social media users.      |         | .281**  |         |         |
| I feel that I need the product.                             | .212*   | .415**  |         |         |
| There is adequate information about the product.            |         | -.240*  | -.267** |         |
| The firm appears knowledgeable about sustainability.        |         |         | .269**  |         |
| The product makes me feel better about myself.              | -.263** | -.308** | -.330** | .244**  |
| The advertisement is persuasive.                            | .191*   | .190*   |         | -.210*  |
| The firm's webpage looks nice.                              |         | -.200*  |         | -.239*  |
| There are positive comments for the product.                | .295**  |         | -.221*  | -.029   |
| The product has many likes.                                 |         |         |         | -.247** |
| My friends have recommended the firm or the product.        | .191*   |         |         | -.210*  |
| My family has recommended the firm or the product.          | .223*   |         |         | -.215*  |
| The product has a good discount.                            |         |         | -.453** |         |
| The product is cheap.                                       |         | -.337** | -.375** |         |
| I am in a good mood on that day.                            | -.216*  |         |         |         |
| There are special offers for purchasing the product.        | .393**  |         | .285**  |         |
| I have the option to return the product and get a refund.   | .260**  |         |         |         |
| My previous experience with similar products were positive. | -.365** |         |         |         |
| The product is exactly what I was looking for.              |         |         |         | -.249** |
| The quality of the product is good.                         |         |         |         | -.301** |
| There are similar items from which I can choose.            | -.258** |         | -.208*  |         |
| The product is available in many colors.                    | -.340** | -.293** |         |         |
| There is a helpline, where I can ask questions.             | .262**  | .290**  |         |         |

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

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

#### **4.5. Findings for Research Question 4**

The fourth research question explored which product characteristics may affect consumer engagement on social media. Based on Pearson's correlation, statistically significant positive correlations were found of time spent on social media with products that make participants feel better about themselves, are recommended by celebrities and have a good discount, while there is an option to return the product and get a refund ( $r=0.269$ ,  $p<0.01$ ,  $r=0.297$ ,  $p<0.01$ ,  $r=0.202$ ,  $p<0.05$ ,  $r=0.418$ ,  $p<0.01$ , respectively). This means that participants are more engaged with social media when the firm's products make them feel better, have more discounts and are highly recommended by celebrities, while they have more options to return the product and be refunded. In contrast, a statistically significant negative correlation was also found between engagement with social media and a product that was exactly what the participants were looking for ( $r=-0.372$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). This means that the more the product is exactly what the participants were looking for, the less engaged with social media the participants are.

Moreover, as indicated in Table 2 above, participants are more likely to be engaged with the firm when the quality of the product is good, and it is exactly what they were looking for, there are positive comments for the product and the option to return it and get a refund, the product has been used by other social media users and it is nicely presented (Table 2).

#### **4.6. Answers to Research Questions**

The first research question explored whether extroversion as a personality trait was related to consumer engagement with social media. Participants attributed to themselves extroversion traits, which included joking with friends, being jolly persons, loving outdoor activities and a festive atmosphere, and being comfortable in a crowded place. In addition, it was found that almost all of the participants seemed to have an extroverted personality. Women, single, older participants, less knowledgeable of information technology and having Tik Tok as their favorite social media were the most extroverted. On the other hand, it was also found that more than one third of the participants had traits that corresponded with the introverted personality. More introverted were the younger, more knowledgeable of information technology and less educated participants, with better economic status. No statistically significant correlation was found between extroversion and participant engagement with social media. However, participants engagement with social media may be predicted by being a woman, younger, single and employed, having a higher level of education and lower knowledge of information

technology, not loving outdoor activities, feeling comfortable in a crowded place, not liking jokes with friends or eating alone, not having many friends and being a quiet person.

The second research question explored whether desire for knowledge was related to consumers' commitment to social media. Even though no statistically significant correlation was found for the participants as a whole, it was found that men's desire for knowledge was related to increased commitment with social media, while women's increased commitment with social media was related to less desire for knowledge.

The third research question explored which social media factors may affect consumer engagement with a sustainable fashion firm on social media. Participants agreed that they felt more engaged with a firm on social media when there was a helpline for questions and return policy, the product was of good quality, exactly what they were looking for, nicely presented and with positive comments; the participants had previous positive experiences with the firm and similar products, could easily interact with the firm and other users, and had a choice among similar items; the firm was trustful and knowledgeable about sustainability and had many followers; the platform included audio-visual material and frequent posts, was accessible, informative and described the firm in detail; and the participants' family had recommended the firm or the product,. The least important factor was recommendations by celebrities. The above findings differed according to the participants' demographics.

The fourth research question explored which product characteristics may affect consumer engagement on social media. It was found that participants were more engaged with social media when the firm's products make them feel better, have more discounts and are highly recommended by celebrities, while they have more options to return the product and be refunded. Moreover, participants were more likely to be engaged with the firm when the product was of good quality, nicely presented, exactly what they were looking for, with positive comments and used by other social media users, and the participants had the option to return it.

#### **4.7. Answers to Research Hypotheses**

H1 assumed that extroversion as a personality trait would be positively related to consumer engagement on social media. The first hypothesis was rejected, since only some personality traits were related to consumer engagement, which included both extroversion and introversion traits.

H2 assumed that the desire for knowledge would be positively related to the consumer's commitment to social media. The second hypothesis was partially rejected since the above relationship was valid only for men.

H3: Accessibility of social media may affect consumer engagement with a sustainable fashion firm on social media. The third hypothesis was retained because the relationship between accessibility and consumer engagement was statistically significant.

H4: Products of good quality may affect consumer engagement with a sustainable fashion firm on social media. The fourth hypothesis was retained because the above relationship was statistically significant.

## **5. DISCUSSION**

### **5.1. Introduction**

This study aimed to explore the factors that may influence consumer engagement in social media for sustainable fashion firms. To this end, quantitative research was conducted, with 112 social media users aged 18-40 years old. Questionnaire data were analyzed statistically. The discussion of the findings is presented in the next section.

### **5.2. Discussion for Research Question 1**

In this research, it was found that almost all of the participants seemed to have an extroverted personality, while more than one third of the participants had traits that corresponded with the introverted personality. According to the Big Five personality theory, personality has five dimensions which include openness to experience, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. These traits are assumed to influence people's behaviors, since each personality type is related to particular inclinations. Thus, extroverted individuals are active and energetic, enjoy interactions with others, are more enthusiastic and action oriented. Moreover, they like to talk with others and affirm themselves. In contrast, introverted people are less loud, low-profile, less involved with people, and less social, while they seem to be shy, lonely and quiet (Friedman & Schustack, 2016).

What is surprising in this research though is the finding that some participants are both extraverted and introverted, which seems to need further exploration, since this finding may be related to sampling bias. On the other hand, it may be related to the Cypriot culture, which usually matches the extraverted type or to social desirability bias. However, it has to be noted that in this research it was found that women, single, older participants, less knowledgeable of information technology and having Tik Tok as their favorite social media were found to be the most extraverted. Most introverted were found to be the younger, more knowledgeable of information technology and less educated participants, with better economic status. Since no other research was found that could explain the above findings, the relationship of the above characteristics with extraversion and introversion needs to be better explored.

In this research, no statistically significant correlation was found between extraversion and participant engagement with social media. In contrast, Pagani, Goldsmith and Hofacker (2013) and Kabadayi and Price (2014) indicated the importance of extraversion as an element of personality that may influence consumer engagement with social media. On the other hand,

Miao et al. (2019) found that neither extraversion nor introversion were related to consumer engagement with social media. In contrast, the above authors found that what could actually influence users' engagement were cultural factors and the consequent appropriate marketing strategies. Hence the role of culture needs to be better explored.

In this research it was found that participants engagement with social media may be predicted by being a woman, younger, single, and employed, having a higher level of education and lower knowledge of information technology, not loving outdoor activities, feeling comfortable in a crowded place, not liking jokes with friends or eating alone, not having many friends and being a quiet person. Hence, it seems that both extraverted traits such as feeling comfortable in a crowded place and introverted characteristics like being a quiet person may predict engagement with social media. Since other research findings though indicate that not both types are related to engagement with social media, the impact of likely mediator and moderator variables should be considered in future research studies.

### **5.3. Discussion for Research Question 2**

In this research it was found that desire for knowledge had no statistically significant correlation with consumers' commitment to social media. In contrast, according to research findings by Packard and Wooten (2013), consumer knowledge is related to consumer engagement. Thus, the above authors found that consumers who perceive their knowledge as less adequate, they are more motivated to interact with other consumers in order to achieve a higher level of knowledge. On the other hand, in this research, a statistically significant correlation was found for men, whose desire for knowledge was related to increased commitment with social media. In contrast, women's increased commitment with social media was related to less desire for knowledge. Hence, the above contradiction needs to be better explored with further research.

### **5.4. Discussion for Research Question 3**

Participants in this research agreed that they felt more engaged with a sustainable fashion firm on social media when there was a helpline for questions and return policy. This finding is in line with other research findings (e.g. Hinson et al., 2019), which underline the importance of customer service and customer relationship management for customer engagement with the firm. According to Santos (2019), positive relationships with customers is of great importance in the digital era, where communication with customers may be impersonal and behind a screen. Hence, it is important to have policies and processes that may encourage customers to

express their concerns and be assisted to solve potential problems with products or the purchase process. To improve then relationships with customers, Santos (2019) suggests knowing them and understanding their needs. To this end, firms may implement customer service processes, reward customer loyalty, capture and analyze customer feedback so as to identify likely shortcomings, raise quality standards and the efficiency of operations and encourage innovations (Woodside, 2017).

Moreover, in this research it was found that participants felt more engaged when the product was of good quality, exactly what they were looking for, nicely presented and with positive comments. According to marketing theories, the presentation of products is important for attracting customers, who are more positive against products that are nicely presented (Hinson et al., 2019), as the participants in this study indicated. On the other hand, according to Bae (2021), the increased concerns regarding the negative impact of manufacturing on the environment have prompted firms to prefer recycled materials for their products, in an effort to both protect the environment and satisfy potential customers, who are advocates of eco-friendly products. However, not all customers have positive reactions to the efforts to replace traditional materials with recycled products (Meng & Leary, 2021). As Bae (2021) explains, some consumers believe that recycled materials are not of the same quality as non-recycled materials. Since then, quality is an important factor for employee engagement with the firm, it seems essential to inform the customers about the product's quality.

In addition, participants in this research felt more engaged if they had previous positive experiences with the firm and similar products, could easily interact with the firm and other users, and had a choice among similar items. Abdul-Ghani et al. (2011) agree with the above findings and highlight the close relationship of customer engagement with involvement and interactivity, which seem to reflect consumers' interest in the product, and therefore their purchase intentions. Likewise, Dessart et al. (2016) and Harrigan et al. (2017) highlight the importance of the cognitive aspect for customer engagement with a firm in social media. In addition, according to Boujena et al. (2021), the cognitive engagement may be enhanced by positive experiences, which may increase customers' attention and absorption with the firm and thereby their commitment to the firm's products.

Another important factor that was related with the participants engagement with social media was a trustful and knowledgeable about sustainability firm, with many followers and an accessible, informative platform with audio-visual material and frequent posts, which described the firm in detail. The above findings are in line with other research findings (e.g.

Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Gummerus et al., 2017), which indicate that trust is a prerequisite for engagement with a brand, while trust towards a firm may increase when the firm seems to have adequate knowledge about the promoted products and their specifications, has many followers and likes, provides adequate information in the firm's platform and has a detailed description of the firm and the products in the firm's online platform. In this way, customers have the option to search for more information and ask questions about the firm and product, which, in turn may result to being more easily convinced about the appropriateness of the product and the trustworthiness of the firm. On the other hand, a poor platform and negative comments about the firm and the products may have the opposite impact and decrease consumers' trust, resulting to their disengagement with the firm (Arli, 2017).

Furthermore, in this research it was found that participants were more engaged with a sustainable fashion firm on social media, when their family had recommended the firm or the product. In contrast, recommendations by celebrities were not important for the participants in this research. The significant influence of comments from family members was also found by other researchers (e.g. Joshi & Suman, 2017), who explain that consumers seem to trust their family and friends and therefore follow their advice. On the other hand, other researchers (e.g. Phua & Ahn, 2016) found that what matters are the 'likes' that a product have, regardless the source of the positive comment and the relationship of the source with the social media user. Conflicting results were also reported about the impact of celebrities, since some researchers found that celebrities may influence their followers to purchase products (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017), while others found that celebrities' comments may be indifferent for consumers (Phua & Ahn, 2016), like the participants in this research.

The influence of others' comments on customer engagement may be explained by Merwe and Heerden's (2009) theory of limited rationality, which indicates that consumers' objective and concrete knowledge about products is not possible, because they can never access the range of existing information because of their limited time on the one hand and on the other, the continuous updates regarding what is known. Hence, consumers tend to look for sources of expertise, which are considered more knowledgeable and valid. Thus, they turn their attention on opinion leaders, who may influence others' behaviours and thoughts through their perceived as knowledgeable and trustful comments, because they are considered as specialists and connoisseurs regarding their suggestions to others (Shi & Wojnicki, 2014).

## **5.5. Discussion for Research Question 4**

In this research it was found that important product characteristics that could influence participants' engagement with social media included promotion of positive feelings, discounts, nice presentation, matching participants' expectations, good quality, positive comments by other users, returnability and recommendations by celebrities. As explained by the theory of reasoned action (TRA), consumers' behaviour is guided by the outcomes they expect to occur (Ajzen, Albarracín & Hornik, 2007); hence, when their expectations are met, consumers are more likely to engage with the firm (Boujena et al., 2021). It seems then that the marketing department should ask for and take into consideration the customers' expectations, aiming to meet their needs and keep them satisfied. In this way, customers' trust towards the firm may increase and thereby their engagement with the firm (Santos, 2019)

The impact of other comments on customers engagement with social media may be explained by the theory about word-of-mouth (WOM), which postulates that simply talking persistently about something has the potential to raise the listeners' interest and may pass information that the listeners consciously or unconsciously retain. As a result, oral communication may be used as an advertising tool, when the talk is about products, or a means to guide behaviour, such as engagement with a firm on social media. For this reason, some firms may intentionally include WOM in their marketing strategy, with the purpose to spread positive information about their products and influence consumers' behaviour (Chen et al., 2014). To this end, firms may encourage customers to share positive experiences with the firm in social media networks, which are spread to other consumers through WOM. The characteristics of influencing WOM include making people look and feel better, referring to accessible products, being easily detected, practical and relate to a story. As a result of efficient WOM, consumer engagement and sales may increase (Woodside, 2017).

## **5.6. Implications for Policy and Practice**

This research has important implications for policy and practice, since it was found that consumer engagement with sustainable fashion firms on social media may be increased by taking into consideration some social media and product factors. Moreover, it was found that personality traits and desire for knowledge did not have an important role, as it was initially assumed, which leaves room for customer management and marketing to focus on how social media may be best used to increase consumers' engagement with the firm on social media. According to the findings of this research, such strategies should include building customers' trust and positive relationships with the firm, having accessible and informative platforms,

encouraging users' feedback and positive comments, and promoting the quality of the product, which should be nicely presented and match the customers' expectations.

## **6. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

### **6.1. Conclusion**

In conclusion, in this study the importance of social media and product factors was highlighted, contrary to the less significant role of personality traits and participants' desire for knowledge. Thus, while extraversion and desire for knowledge are not related with customers engagement with a sustainable fashion firm on social media, on the other hand the organization and function of the firm's platform as well as the presentation of the product may encourage consumers' engagement. Hence, marketing strategies should focus on the creation of helpline, return and refund policy, creation of positive experiences for customers, easy, access, interactions and communication with the customers, inclusion of audio-visual material, frequent posts with information and comments, detailed description of the firm and its products and support for customers. Moreover, the products should be efficiently promoted, with emphasis on quality, discounts, nice presentation, and correspondence with consumers' expectations and needs, while positive comments and experiences by other users should be highlighted. In this way, it would be more likely to encourage customers' engagement with the firm on social media and to promote sustainability in the fashion industry.

### **6.2. Challenges**

The main challenges of this research include the sample size and the sampling method, which might have led to sampling bias, since a non-probability sampling method was used. In addition, likely social desirability bias may have influenced some conflicting findings. Hence, the results of this study should be interpreted with caution.

### **6.3. Suggestions for Further Research**

In order to enrich and further clarify the findings of this study, it is essential to conduct further research. Thus, qualitative research with interviews may enable the researcher to understand and explain likely conflicting findings such as participants' personality traits. In addition, research with larger and representative samples may allow safer conclusions and generalizability of the findings. Finally, using different research tools, such as observation and texts from firms' platforms may enable a better understanding of the process of consumers' engagement with firms on social media.

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# **APPENDIX A: THE QUESTIONNAIRE**

## **PARTICIPANT AGREEMENT FORM**

### **Title and brief description of the research project:**

This research is entitled ‘FACTORS INFLUENCING CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT IN SOCIAL MEDIA FOR SUSTAINABLE FASHION FIRMS’. The aim of the study is to identify and explore the factors that influence consumer engagement in social media of fashion firms. If you would like to participate in this research, please complete the following questionnaire.

### **Name and contact details of researcher:**

Name: Natasa Korfiotou

Email: XXXX

### **Statement of agreement:**

I know that my participation in this research is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any point, before submitting my questionnaire. I understand that the information I will provide will be confidential and anonymous. I understand that data will be destroyed after the examination process is over. By continuing to the questionnaire, I agree to participate in this research with the above terms.

## QUESTIONNAIRE

### PART I: DEMOGRAPHIC

Please TICK the box that best represents you.

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Gender:</b> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/>                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Age:</b> up to 25 <input type="checkbox"/> 26-30 <input type="checkbox"/> 31-35 <input type="checkbox"/> 36-40 <input type="checkbox"/> 41 and over <input type="checkbox"/>                                       |
| <b>Marital status:</b> Single <input type="checkbox"/> Married/With partner <input type="checkbox"/> Divorced/Widowed <input type="checkbox"/>                                                                        |
| <b>Education:</b> Secondary education <input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor <input type="checkbox"/> Master <input type="checkbox"/> PhD <input type="checkbox"/>                                                         |
| <b>Work status:</b> Employed <input type="checkbox"/> Unemployed <input type="checkbox"/>                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Economic status:</b><br>Very bad <input type="checkbox"/> Bad <input type="checkbox"/> Average <input type="checkbox"/> Above average <input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/>                  |
| <b>Knowledge of information technology:</b><br>Very little <input type="checkbox"/> Little <input type="checkbox"/> Average <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Very good <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>How many hours do you spend on social media per day?</b><br>Up to 1 hour <input type="checkbox"/> 2-3 hours <input type="checkbox"/> 4-5 hours <input type="checkbox"/> 6 hours and more <input type="checkbox"/>  |
| <b>Which is your favorite social media?</b><br>Facebook <input type="checkbox"/> Instagram <input type="checkbox"/> YouTube <input type="checkbox"/> Tik Tok <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/>  |

### PART II: PERSONALITY TRAITS

Please declare the extent to which you agree with the following statements, choosing 1-5, where 1=Strongly disagree (SD), 2=Disagree (D), 3=Neutral (N), 4=Agree (A), 5=Strongly agree (SA).

| STATEMENTS                                        | SD | D | N | A | SA |
|---------------------------------------------------|----|---|---|---|----|
| 1. I am a jolly person.                           | 1  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  |
| 2. I love outdoor activities.                     | 1  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  |
| 3. I am comfortable when I am in a crowded place. | 1  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  |
| 4. I love a festive atmosphere.                   | 1  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  |
| 5. I like to joke with friends.                   | 1  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  |
| 6. I like to eat alone.                           | 1  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  |
| 7. I don't like to talk about myself.             | 1  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  |
| 8. I don't have many friends.                     | 1  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  |
| 9. I am a quiet person.                           | 1  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  |
| 10. I feel stressed in a noisy environment.       | 1  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  |

### PART III: FACTORS RELATED TO CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT

Please declare the extent to which you agree with the following statements, choosing 1-5, where 1=Strongly disagree (SD), 2=Disagree (D), 3=Neutral (N), 4=Agree (A), 5=Strongly agree (SA).

| I FEEL MORE ENGAGED WITH A SUSTAINABLE FASHION FIRM ON SOCIAL MEDIA WHEN... | SD | D | N | A | SA |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|---|---|---|----|
| 11. The firm is trustful.                                                   | 1  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  |

|                                                                 |   |   |   |   |   |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| 12. The firm has many followers.                                | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. The platform describes the firm in detail.                  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. There are frequent posts in the platform about products.    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. The firm helps me increase my knowledge about the product.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. The platform includes audio-visual material.                | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. The platform is accessible.                                 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. Interaction with the firm is easy.                          | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. Interaction with other social media users is easy.          | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. The product is nicely presented.                            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 21. The product has been used by other social media users.      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 22. I feel that I need the product.                             | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 23. There is adequate information about the product.            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 24. The firm appears knowledgeable about sustainability.        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 25. The product makes me feel better about myself.              | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 26. The product makes me feel more important.                   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 27. The advertisement is persuasive.                            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 28. The firm is well-known.                                     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 29. The firm's webpage looks nice.                              | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 30. There are positive comments for of the product.             | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 31. The product has many likes.                                 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 32. The product is recommended by celebrities.                  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 33. My friends have recommended the firm or the product.        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 34. My family has recommended the firm or the product.          | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 35. The product has a good discount.                            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 36. The product is cheap.                                       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 37. I am in a good mood on that day.                            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 38. There are special offers for purchasing the product.        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 39. I have the option to return the product and get a refund.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 40. My previous experiences with the firm were positive.        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 41. My previous experience with similar products were positive. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 42. The product is exactly what I was looking for.              | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 43. The quality of the product is good.                         | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 44. There are similar items from which I can choose.            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 45. The product is available in many colors.                    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 46. There is a helpline, where I can ask questions.             | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

**THANK YOU!**