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**THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING ACTIVITIES
ON CONSUMERS BRAND PREFERENCE. A COMPARATIVE
STUDY OF CAMEROON AND FINLAND. CASE OF SMALL AND
MEDIUM SIZE ENTERPRISES.**

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ABSTRACT

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<p>The cost of marketing products nowadays keeps going up especially when it comes to small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). These increases in cost comes from the classical communication systems such as radios, televisions and newspapers which unfortunately hardly meets the target customers or yield expected results. The main objective of this study was to proof that social media marketing activities has an effect on consumers brand preference. Several theories where used in the process of this work such as the unified theory of acceptance of use of technology, the theory of reasoned action etc. A questionnaire was formulated and distributed via a link to individuals from both countries and a comparative study was done. The objective was to get 60 respondents from Cameroon and Finland and the objective was attained giving a response rate of 100%.</p> <p>The data collected was analysed using webpropol and presented by using descriptive statistics such as bar charts. The results of the data reveals that digital marketing systems such as social media greatly influences the growth of small and medium sized enterprises. So it was concluded that social media is a convenient source of product information and it should be used to promote small and medium size enterprises.</p>		
Key words Social media, Enterprise, User generated content, Brand preference, Advertisement, Marketing.		

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INTRODUCTION

The competitive nature of the environment is proof that marketing in general plays a vital role in aiding the rationing of goods from the production stage, till when it reaches the hands of the final consumers. Marketing is done by different means, including various aspects such as network, geo-marketing, tribal, viral, e-marketing and so much more. Nowadays, the most popularly used is the social media marketing. Social media space has experienced an exponential growth due to an increasing number of internet users. This has led business operations being driven by technology and online shopping portals that facilitated the creation of the digital culture. This marketing whatever its type, is capable of influencing consumer's preference, creating awareness and making the customers loyal or indifferent to a particular brand in question. So, businesses carry out studies to gain consumers' attention and to create a positive and permanent brand image in their minds, which will go a long way to ensure brand loyalty. This is usually done by utilizing all the communication channels they have at their disposal to create a brand value to the customers.

To begin with, Social media is an online environment where people with common interests come together to share their thoughts, comments and ideas about a particular item or brand of good Weber (2009). Based on this statement, businesses take advantage of the interactions of social media users by coercing (positive coercion) their customers to share their purchase experience with other users using social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, You Tube, WhatsApp etc. Social media marketing can be viewed as using any social network with the aim of marketing a particular good or service. This social media marketing provides a company with the means to engage with existing customers and reach-out to new ones while allowing them to promote their desired culture and mission.

The definition of social media can be viewed from four perspectives. Firstly, the technological perspective which is of the opinion that the social media constitutes a combination of mobile and web-based technologies. Otherwise said, internet based applications that are generated by Web 2.0 technologies represents social media functions. This approach defines the general functions of social media. Secondly, the General User Perspective rather points out the differences that exist between social media and the traditional media. The second approach explains how the content creation and development is made possible by the users of social media, contrary to the traditional media which made its users only consumers of content. Therefore, Social media facilitates communication, networking, the sharing and interaction with each other's perception and experiences. Approach number three deals with how information and communication is related to the Business perspective which is kind of simi-

lar with the perspective of the general user. The main point here is how social media is being used by organizations to gather and communicate information with customers.

Another perspective is the Marketing Perspective which views social media as a new marketing tool that is both cost and time effective. It is of the opinion that social media acts as an important factor that facilitates the growth of revenue and the promotion of brand. Considering the marketing point of view, Social media has proven to be an effective means to communicate with customers and that makes it indispensable in formulating the business strategy of any organization.

At this juncture, it is fair to pose the question, what is the content of social media and what functions does it make available for the user? This question is answered by the statement of Anthony Mayfield (2008) who viewed social media as a form of media with five applications namely: Participation, Openness, Conversation, Community and Connectedness. Participation simply means that the content of social media can be accessed by everyone who intends to make use of it. Conversation on the other hand is all about the ability of social media to provide a two-way communication between the provider of the content and the user. Communities are created by social media as a result interactions on various social media platforms. This brings together users of same background, school of thought etc. Also, Connectedness is what social media thrives on and what Web 2.0, the foundation of early social media, has enabled with social networking (Mayfield, 2008). Social media connects not only websites and resources, but also people.

A British programmer named Jonathan Abrams created the first social media named Friendster in the year 2002 but this platform did not last long and before long was the creation of Facebook by Mark Zuckerberg in the year 2004. This platform gradually gained lots of grounds and became a huge influence to the world. This huge influence was later referred to as the “Facebook Effect”. A couple of years later, Jack Dorsey a U.S. national created the Twitter and later on, Instagram was created by Kevin Systrom which became popular around 2013. These Social Medias are being used today by business owners and marketers as a strong marketing strategy to retain customers, for research, for branding etc. The reason the social media gained so much grounds in marketing can be traced to the fact that it is very cost efficient and as today stands as the fastest and easiest means to access the customers since the dominance of the social media in the 21st Century can be likened to some sort of addiction. Most social media users are often glued to their social media devices to the point where some barely notice changes to their surroundings.

Social media activities content helps in shaping the preferences of consumers since consumer preferences for brands grow with respect to their increased exposure to vast amounts of web based or social medial information (Schultz and Block, 2011). A brand preference can simply be described as a consumers desire to make use of a particular product despite the availability of alternatives. It is worth noting that the Social media marketing activities goes as far as influencing the choices of consumers, which in turn influences the purchasing degree, their trust and enables the sharing of experiences and knowledge amongst consumers.

Although this literature is still growing and seems unanimous on the elements of social media marketing activities, what remains speculative is the influence of these activities on consumers' preferences in the small and medium size enterprises. Several academic literatures, blogs articles attempted to define the complex notion of social media derived from the characteristics of Web 2.0. Web 2.0 is a concept originally coined during a conference brainstorming session between O'Reilly and Media Live International in 2004 who described it to be an attitude instead of a technology (O'Reilly 2005).

The case of Cameroon when it comes to small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) is not so different from those of other developing countries. They lag behind because issues such as corruption, unfavourable business climates, low and stagnant per capital income.

Social media usage in Cameroon stood at 85.04% of the total population with Instagram at 0.19%, Facebook at 7.44%, and twitter at 4.37%. You Tube at 2.08% and Print users at 7.44% (Global stats produced by counter: June 2021). By January 2021, Cameroon had about 9.15 million internet users. She recorded an increase in internet users between 2020 and 2021 by 1.3 million users. She had an internet penetration rate of 34.0% by January 2021. Mobile connections stood at 26.60 million by January 2021. (Digital reports¹ produced by Hootsuits²; February 2021).

On the other hand, the case of Finland when it comes to small and medium sized enterprises looks really interesting and optimistic. The small and medium sized enterprises in Finland employ about 65.2% of workers and accounts for about 59.6% of value added growth. There has been a significant

¹ Digital report : this is the set of digital, social media, mobile and e-commerce trends around the world, produced by the international web agency are social and the Hootsuite platform

² Hootsuite is a social media management tool created by Ryan Holmes in 2008.

increase in value added growth generated by SMEs. Between 2014-2018, SME recorded a 22.1% increase in value added growth. (2019 SBA fact sheet Finland).

Social media usage in Finland has also experienced an exponential growth, 70% of the Finish population between the ages of 18 and 64 has access or actually participated in one social network or the other. Finland is estimated to reach about 3.7 million social network users before the end of 2021, with a penetration rate of 60%. This is according the Statista's Digital Market Outlook forecast.

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The 21st Century can be said to be the digital era where marketing has gradually moved from the traditional marketing method to a new means which adopts strategy and technology. As a result of this shift in marketing, enterprises have now adopted modern strategies that enable them to accommodate the changes brought into the world market. The Social media is one of the modern strategies being adopted by companies in the global market. This has prompted most enterprises and especially Small and Medium Sized enterprises to operate online thereby giving access to the goods and services to a larger number of customers since these customers can now access the services of these companies online while using their phones.

From a typical Cameroonian perspective, we realize that even though the social media is mostly dominated by the youths, they connect online mostly for entertainment purposes. Thus, there is serious need for these SMEs to generate good and entertaining adverts which goal is geared towards the increase in the number of social media followers which of course increases the customer base.

From debates of past works, in the Cameroonian context, research on the subject seems to be underdeveloped (unlike in the Finnish context where research on this topic seems to be at its optimum). So in order to improve on the exploitation and services of this sector I propose the use of social media marketing activities with the aid of user generated content and social media advertisement. As such there is still a rather limited understanding of social media-driven brand preference in the Cameroonian SMEs. This may seem to be paradoxical especially if one considers the growing number of internet users (6.10 million Cameroonian internet users in 2018 and 7.87 million in 2020, according to the digital report produced by Hootsuits) and therefore the importance of this new marketing strategy. We want to participate in the debate on the influence of social media marketing activities on consumers brand preference by opting for understanding and not only explaining the consumer's online brand preferences by exploring the role of social media marketing activities through user generated content and social media advertisement. So, the problem statement specifically developed for this study states: What is the influence of social media marketing activities on consumers brand preference?

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.2.1. Main research question

What influence does social media marketing activity have on consumers brand preference?

1.2.2. Specific research questions

For a better understanding of this research topic, the following questions are being asked;

- What is the impact of social media user generated content (UGC) on consumers brand preference in the SMEs?
- What is the effect of Social Media advertisement (SMA) on consumers brand preference in the SMEs?

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

Below are the objectives of this study:

Main objective

The main objective of this study is to prove that; social media marketing activities has an effect on consumer brand preferences.

Specific objectives

- To examine and compare the effect of social media user generated content on brand preference in Cameroon and Finland.
- To examine and compare the effect of social media advertisement on brand preference in Cameroon and Finland.

1.4 HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

For the purpose of this research, we are going to have two hypotheses. These will help unveil the relationship between brand preferences in the SMEs and social media marketing activities.

H1. Social Media User Generated Content (UGC) significantly affects brand preference in the SMEs sector in Cameroon and Finland.

H2. Social Media Advertisement significantly affects brand preference in the SMEs sector.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The outcome of this research will go a long way to produce a cost efficient method to access consumer's preferences and changes in the wants and needs of consumers. This will enable SMEs to improve on the quality of their products so as to be more competitive in the market while meeting customer needs.

This research will also enable the management of SMEs to improve their brands and also create awareness on new trends in order stimulate the preferences of consumers. By so doing, the SMEs will eventually gain a greater market share.

Considering the fact that the social media platform is a rapidly changing platform, this study will go a long way to contribute to the body of research by helping future researchers understand the concept of social media marketing.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The activities of social media are so many but we are going to be more interested in the User Generated Content and Advertisement. These concepts are being explained below.

2.1. The Concept of Social media and user generated content.

We will be defining the following concepts; social media and user generated content.

Social media

It is described as a group of Internet based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, allowing the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

User generated content

A User Generated Content can be viewed as a brand specific content created and published on a website by an individual.

2.2. SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISEMENT

Social media advertising can be defined as a process by which companies create, communicate, and deliver online advertising offerings via social media platforms to build and maintain stakeholder relationships which enhances stakeholders' value by facilitating interaction and information sharing, offering personalized purchase recommendations, and creating word-of-mouth advertising among stakeholders about existing and trending products and services (Yadav & Rahman, 2017).

2.3. Features of online advertising

It is of essence to understand what social media advertisement is composed of; the different features are outlined as follows.

Multimedia

Multimedia can be viewed in simple terms as the combination of sound, video and text with the aim of expressing an idea. Examples of multimedia may include video podcast and animated slide shows.

Pictures

Pictures are more like a vivid description of a mental image. Pictures usually give an accurate idea of something. Examples could include paintings, photographs and drawings.

Content

It provides consumers with written information about products and services. Content as far as social media is concerned is either a text, audio or video shared on social media.

2.4. Consumers Brand Preference Evaluation

Brand preference will be looked upon through brand loyalty, brand trust and brand awareness.

Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty is a situation when a consumer makes repeated purchase on a particular brand especially when he or she perceives a higher quality of the brand.

Traditional Dimensions of Brand Loyalty

Traditional marketing literature generally emphasizes two different dimensions of the concept of brand loyalty behavioural and attitudinal.

Attitudinal brand loyalty

Attitudinal brand loyalty is repeat purchase that takes place because the consumer loves a particular brand in question. The decision to purchase is usually not spontaneous because the consumer recognises the brand and usually has many other options but chooses that particular brand.

Behavioural loyalty

Behavioural loyalty is a scenario where consumers constantly make repeat purchases to a particular product. This usually happens when these customers are kind of trapped. A good example is when you have just one shopping mall in your town. You shop there because you have no other choice.

The spurious brand loyalty

The spurious brand loyalty consumers may make repeated purchases only because the brand they purchase is the only one choice in the stores.

True brand loyalty

True brand loyalty consumers should show both psychological and affective commitments in addition to repurchase consistency.

2.5. Brand Trust

Brand trust is the degree of confidence consumers have on a particular brand. This usually depends on the ability of the producer of that brand to keep to its promises and standards.

Brand credibility

Brand credibility refers to the brand's ability to meet the terms of exchange relative to expected performance. This dimension is grounded on the consumer's attribution to the brand of a certain degree of expertise resulting from the consumer's functional expectations for the satisfaction of his/her needs.

Brand integrity

Brands integrity is how consumers perceive a product in question. This perception can be based on the quality of the product, its image or its values.

Brand benevolence

Brand benevolence is a situation in which brand leaders make decision while taking into consideration the interest of the consumers.

2.6. Brand Awareness

Brand awareness can be indicated to as the level of consumers' familiarity with a brand. Brand awareness is a key component of brand value (Aaker, 1991). There are different variables which affect the consumer's awareness about a brand which are;

Name: The name of a brand is the first thing which attracts a consumer towards a brand. If the company has an attractive brand name consumer will be encouraged to buy that product.

Advertising: An effective advertisement also helps the organization to increase the awareness about a brand. The influence of advertisement is always on a large scale. An attractive total variable cost will bring more customers and one happy customer will advertise the brand by WOM (Word of Mouth). The celebrity who is endorsing the brand is also a very important part of advertising the product. Companies hire famous faces as their brand ambassadors and people get attracted towards the brand.

Promotions and Sales: The sales and promotions also increase the awareness about the brand. Companies use different ways to promote their brand like a free gift, free sampling, giving their product as a gift with another well-known product of their own brand or in collaboration of any other company.

3. THEORETICAL LINK OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING ACTIVITIES AND CONSUMERS BRAND PREFERENCE OF SMES BRANDS

Social media like any other concept has theories that enable the understanding of the concept. Many studies have been carried to investigate the link between social media marketing activities and consumers brand preferences. The objective of this chapter is to bring out theories and to review the empirical link that exist between User Generated Content (UGC), advertisement and brand preference. To this effect, we are going to present the different theoretical contributions in sections. Section two will be made up of different literature reviews that has been carried by out by different authors on the link between UGC, Advertisement and Brand Preference.

3.1. GENERAL THEORIES ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND CONSUMERS BRAND PREFERENCE

I will examine the various theories surrounding our topic wherein I will explore theories, identify variables and establish the links amongst the variables. The theories are; the unified theory of acceptance of use of technology (UTAUT), the flow theory and experience, the information acceptance model and the advertising value model. These theories will form the foundation of the theoretical framework of this research and highlight variables used in the model.

3.1.1. The Unified Theory of Acceptance of Use of Technology (UTAUT)

The UTAUT model proposed by Venkatesh, Morris, Davis & Davis, (2003) consists of measuring how well the use of new technologies is accepted by consumers through the explanation of different variables including the attitude towards new technologies. The UTAUT gathers eight theories which are the theory of reasoned action (TRA), theory of planned behaviour (TPB), theory of acceptance model (TAM), extended theory of acceptance model (TAM2), motivational model (MM), innovation diffusion theory (IDT), model of PC utilization (MPCU) and Social cognitive theory (SCT) (Venkatesh, et al 2003). In consideration of this research, literature on TRA and TPB will be discussed as they will be used to develop the conceptual model for this research study.

3.1.2. The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)

This theory was developed by Ajzen & Fishbein in 1980 according to which an intention to engage in certain behaviour is considered the best predictor of whether or not a person actually engages in that behaviour. Intentions are in turn predicted by attitude and subjective norms. This means that there exist a relationship between the behaviour and attitude within the action of every individual. As a matter of fact, this theory can be used to make predictions on the behaviour of an individual, using their pre-existing attitude as a base. Thus, for an individual to make a particular decision to engage in a behaviour, this decision making process has to be based on the result this person desires or expects to come with making that decision.

The theory of reasoned action is geared towards understanding the relationship between the behaviour towards an object, the attitude of an individual and its intentions. At this juncture, it can be said that the main idea or the base of the theory of reasoned action is to understand the behaviour of an individual by making a close examination of the motivating factors that caused the individual to make or take that action. Teo & Van Schaik (2012) elaborated more on the TRA with their comparative study of TRA, TPB, TAM and integrated theory, in order to identify which model is the best suited for predicting consumers' intentions to use technology. Han, Hsu & Sheu (2010) also elaborated TRA by expanding it to investigate the attitude and subjective norms as factors influencing the intention to adopt Internet Banking. Moreover, Ramayah, Lee & Mohamad (2010) brought a new approach to TRA studying the motivational perspective of the TRA in relation to how values and attitudes can influence the purchase intention of a green product. Initially, TRA model comprises of four variables from which attitude towards behaviour and subjective norms are independent variables, whilst behaviour intention is the mediator variable and actual behaviour is the dependent variable.

The aim of the TRA is to investigate the relationship between attitude and behaviour based on two major concepts: "principles of compatibility" and "behavioural intention". As such, it is a predictive model and is being used in a variety of fields to predict individuals. Teo & Van Schaik (2012) describe attitude as the belief that behaviour leads to a desired outcome. Attitude also refers to positive or negative perceptions an individual holds toward behaviour and consists of beliefs, knowledge and values that shape their perception (Hackman & Knowlden, 2014).

The theory of reasoned action is built on the fact that the intention a person has to perform an action can be used as the main predictor to predict if or not that person engages in that action. Therefore, the

intention to do certain behaviour precedes the actual behaviour itself. The intentions to do a particular act are very important as far as this theory is concerned because these intentions are determined by the attitudes to behaviour and subjective norms (social norms surrounding the act). The theory concludes that a stronger intention would definitely lead to an increase in the effort to do an act which in turns increases the possibility for behaviour to be performed.

3.1.3. The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

The theory of planned behaviour is an extension of the theory of reasoned action. This is a psychological theory that links beliefs to behaviour. The ideology of Ajzen was aimed at to including perceived behavioural control in the theory of planned behaviour which was not a component in the theory of reasoned action. This theory states that behavioural achievement depends on both motivation (intention) and ability (behavioural control). It comprises of six constructs that collectively represents ones actual control over a behaviour (attitudes, behavioural intention, normative norms, social norms, perceived beliefs and perceived behavioural control). The theory of planned behaviour explains human behaviour by analysing their various underlying behavioural dispositions: their personal view on a concept (attitude), social attitude (subjective norms) and cognitive self-regulations (perceived behavioural control). This theory can be seen simply as a psychological theory that tries to link beliefs to behaviour. This theory comes out with three main aspects which are subjective norms, attitude and perceived behavioural control that work together to shape the intentions of an individual. The theory of planned behaviour however highlights the fact that the behavioural intentions of an individual are the main determinant of the social behaviour of that individual.

The theory of planned behaviour (TPB) is not only used to predict intention and behaviour it is also an extension of the TRA which highlights that behaviours in the model are under voluntary control (Hackman & Knowlden, 2014). Thus this theory was formulated with the aim of making improvements to the predictive power of the theory of reasoned action. The idea was to include an element of perceived behavioural control into the theory of reasoned action which originally was not part of the theory of reasoned action. The theory of planned behaviour has been made used in studies relating to attitudes, beliefs, behavioural intentions of various domains such as advertising campaigns, health care, sport management, public relations and sustainability.

3.1.4. The Information Acceptance Model (IAM) and Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

The Information Acceptance Model (IAM) and the Technology Acceptance model (TAM) are two models that have great effect on the adoption and use of User Generated Content. The main distinction between these two models is that whereas TAM places more importance on usefulness which is technologically related, IAM makes emphasis on information at the core of the User Generated Content. Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) illustrated by Davis (1986) is an extended model of TRA with additional factors, including perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use and external variables. Here, according to Davis (1986), perceived usefulness is defined as “the prospective user’s subjective probability that using a specific application system will increase their job performance within an organizational context”, while perceived ease of use refers to “degree to which the prospective user expects the target system to be free of effort.” The Technology Acceptance Model is mainly a model that illustrates how people accept and use technology. This model takes into consideration that behavioural intention is a huge factor that makes people accept and use technology.

According to this model, when users are presented with technology which happens to be new, their decision to use such technology is affected by two factors which are perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use.

Perceived usefulness can simply be defined as whether an individual views that technology in question to be useful to them especially when it concerns what they intend to use it for. A good example is if the technology in question is going to make their job easier.

On the other hand, perceived ease to use kind of measures or evaluates the degree to which making use of a particular technology would be effortless. This means that if the technology is easy to use, then there is little or no barrier to use that technology. Therefore, as far as the technology acceptance model is concerned, if the technology is perceived to be easy to use and useful, the barrier to usage is conquered and everyone kind of has a positive attitude towards its usage.

The Information Adoption Model (IAM) as pointed out by Sussman & Siegal. (2003) explains how individuals adopt information and change their intentions and behaviours within the computer-mediated communication platforms. IAM is based on both TAM and dual process model of informational influence (Elaboration Likelihood Model).

Looking at the Elaborated Likelihood Model, the influence of information can occur at any degree of receiver elaboration, and two different influence routes, including a central route and a peripheral route affect the results. If the individual has a deep and careful consideration on the information, a high level elaboration is obtained and the information influence occurs in the central route and vice versa. Hence, Sussman and Siegal, (2003) integrates TAM and ELM, and uses the argument quality as the central route, the source quality as the peripheral route, the perceived information usefulness as a mediator. IAM suggests that both argument quality (Information quality) and source credibility influence the perceived usefulness to the receiver which influences the adoption behaviour.

3.1.5. Flow theory and experience

Csikszentmihalyi (1975) developed the concept of flow experience and has been additionally contributing to the research over the past years. This theory is of the opinion that when an individual engages his or her self in an activity where there is balance between the skills possessed and the challenge of the activity, that individual can attain a state called flow. This means that the individuals are kind of lost in such an activity that nothing else actually matters. They continue to do the activity because it is enjoyable to the point where they get lost.

This flow theory is associated with experimental observations of some people who engaged in activities for pleasure. Those involved in the activities included writers, athletes, surgeons and chess masters. He came up with the conclusion that the enjoyment and rewards came directly from the engaging in their various activities and not from relaxation and living without stress but enjoyment rather came when these participants were engaged in these activities in which all their attention was focused and absorbed by these activities. He then named this state flow because during the course of the research, the participants express their experiences by making use of the metaphor being carried by the current like a river flows. The concept of flow later became a very important factor in the theory of optimal experience given the fact that it provided the best user experience.

Maslow, who has been involved in creating conceptual ground bases for future research regarding flow and experience, describe the intention of engaging in activity as a need for self-actualization, in order to explore one's potentials (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988). Csikszentmihalyi (1988) suggests in his further research that such an engagement is driven by the need of enjoyment, common for engagement in play and common to humans and to rats and monkeys as well. Such a hypothesis is based on arousal

concept, proving that even monkeys and rats engaged in activities driven by curiosity, novelty, and competent drivers.

Further, based on Csikszentmihalyi model, Hoffman & Novak (1996) defines flow as a “cognitive experience during online navigation that is determined by (1) high levels of skill and control; (2) high levels of challenge and arousal; (3) focused attention; and (4) is enhanced by interactivity and telepresence. Richard & Chandra (2005) mention additional inhibitors of flow, such as long downloading time, delays to download plug-ins, failure of navigation links, bring or not intuitive sites, slow responses, challenges greater than skills.

4. METHODOLOGY.

Both Finland and Cameroon has experienced an exponential growth in internet users and especially the aspect of technology driven business operations. As a matter of fact, because of how popular the social media has become, marketers are now obliged to promote their brand using the social media with the aim of wooing their targeted audience. This research is being carried out to show the effects of Social media marketing activities on consumer brand preference. It is going to be a comparative analysis between Finland and Cameroon. It is worth noting that these effects could either be positive or negative and will depend on the outcome of the data analysis.

4.1. Nature of the research

This research is going to be comparative and descriptive in nature. This research is going to accurately as possible portray events, the profile of respondents and the situations that surround them, then relate these information with the use of social media in Cameroon and Finland. A comparative descriptive research is ideal for this analysis because it will best show the correlation between the dependent and independent variables compare and contrast social media activities in both Cameroon and Finland and then cut down the data to a manageable size.

4.2. Population and sampling

Cameroon is a developing country located in the Gulf of Guinea who happens to be a member of the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC). She is also referred to as a sub-Saharan African country. This name is usually used for countries south of the Maghreb. This country has a population of about 27 Million people and a total surface area of 197,527 square miles. She boasts of about 250 ethnic groups with the northern part mostly dominated by Muslims and the south made of mostly Christians (Catholics, Protestants and pentacostants).

Cameroon has as its main export commodity petroleum products, crude oil and agricultural products which includes cocoa beans, coffee, cotton, banana etc. she trades internationally with countries such as France, Spain, Netherlands, USA, Nigeria etc.

Cameroon got its independence in 1960 and has since then be politically stabled except for some recent instabilities that plagued the North West and South West Regions around 2017. These regions

have been unstable from 2017 till date. Another unstable area is the Far North plagued by the Boko-Haram group which has made the North very unstable. The Cameroon senate was inaugurated in May 2013, with 180 members of parliament of which 56 are women.

Finland is a Scandinavian country located North of Europe. She got her independence 1917. She currently has a population of over 5.5 million people and a population density of about 17 inhabitants per square kilometres. The country is ethnically dominated by Finns but there are historic minorities like Finnish Swedes, the Sami and Roma people.

Finland's economy grew by 2.1 percent in the June quarter of 2021. That is 0.1 percent more than the expected growth rate of its gross domestic product (Finland Statistics). This country is stable politically and was ranked the happiest country in the world 2021. This was amongst many other reasons because of its excellent public school system, universal health care etc.

4.3 Data collection method

The data collected for this research are from two main sources which are Primary and Secondary data sources. The Primary data will be collected by issuing questionnaires to a total sample of 120 correspondents 60 from Cameroon and 60 from Finland. This method is called a survey by questionnaire. The validity of this method is more or less totally depends on the technic of sample selection. The reason these questionnaires will be issued will be to collect and simplify data which will permit for the analysis of the effects social media has on brand preference of consumers.

For the secondary method for this research has to do with lots of consultations of documents such as journals, published and unpublished materials, books and articles. All these sources were gotten from the internet and some from libraries. Information gotten from these sources includes information on research pedagogy, information on concepts such as the definition of key elements of the research. At the level of the theoretical frame work, information was gotten mostly from academic works such as dissertations, Journals and the works of other university students and lecturers.

4.4 Sampling technic and data processing

I used the non- probabilistic sampling technic method which can also be regarded as sampling by convenience. Cameroon and Finland were chosen because of my mastery of the terrain and amongst the 10 regions of Cameroon, I choose 2 regions Littoral and Centre. These regions were chosen simply because I could easily access these region and it was convenient for me to get random correspondents for the questionnaire. As for Finland, these questionnaires will be issued randomly. Anyone from any part of Finland could respond to these questionnaires. A total of 120 questionnaires will be issued (online). The targeted correspondents are business people, managers and workers of all sorts of life and those that have social media as a channel for marketing.

At the level of data processing, statistics gotten from the questionnaires will be analysed by webpool, represented on bar charts.

5. DATA ANALYSES AND PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

Chapter 4 laid out the process of this thesis methodology, the data sources and the method used in collecting the data. Chapter 5 has as its objective to empirically analyse the responds of the questionnaires and present the findings with analysis.

For the sake of simplicity, the results of these surveys will be analysed and a comparative analysis made on the results gotten from Cameroon and Finland. These charts can be seen at the level of the appendix.

5.1. Responds rate

This study had as its target population respondents from all works of life, ranging from managers and workers from divers SMEs, sales persons, customers to SMEs and students. We had a responds rate of 100%. Our target population was 60 respondents and we got responds from 60 respondents from Cameroon and 61 respondents from Finland.

5.2. Comparative analysis of results

The result of the study shows that more males use social media platforms than females in both countries. 57% responded as being males in Cameroon while 53% responded as males in Finland (see figure 1 appendix 1 and figure 1 appendix 2). Also worth noting is the fact that the bulk of the respondents in Cameroon (54%) were between the ages of 21-30 while in Finland the bulk of the respondents (34%) were between the ages of 31-40.(see figure 2 appendix 1 and figure 2 appendix 2).

More so, for both countries, we had more respondents whose level of education was first degree. We had 65% from Cameroon and 52% from Finland.

As far as their favourite social media brand is concerned, Facebook was top on the list of the respondents with 44% indicating Facebook as favourite brand from Cameroon and 31% from Finland.

In addition, respondents of both countries admit to use social media more than 15 hours a week. 44% of social media users admit to use social media more than 15 hours a week in Cameroon while 57% admit to you social media more than 15 hours a week in Finland. This means more people are glued to social media platforms in Finland than in Cameroon.

At the level of peer influence on using User Generated Content (UGC) to make a choice about a Small and Medium Sized enterprise, more respondents from Cameroon (50%) think they are influenced by their peer while in Finland, 30% strongly disagree they are not influenced by peer group while another 30% agrees to peer influence. Coupled with that, more respondents in Cameroon seem to agree that they communicate with more people who use UGC to make decisions (55%). In Finland on the other hand, most respondents disagree (44%) on the fact that they communicate with people who use UGC to make decisions. Thus, the decisions of Finnish respondents as far as this aspect is concerned, seems not to be influenced by others.

As far as the relevance of others comments on social media with respect to products and services are concerned, more respondents in Cameroon seem to agree (61%) to the fact that these comments are relevant while 42% of respondents from Finland agree it is relevant. Respondents from both countries seem to agree on this but a greater proportion from Cameroon seems to take the comments of others on a product or service seriously. Even though respondents from both countries think the comments of others are not trust worthy. 66% of respondents from Cameroon disagree the comments of others are trust worthy while for respondents from Finland, 36% strongly disagree and 37% disagrees.

Looking at social media advertising as a convenient source of product information, 52% of respondents from Cameroon seem to agree it is a convenient source of information while 37% of respondents from Finland agree and 35% strongly agrees social media is a convenient platform for product information. More so, 43% of respondents agree and 45% strongly agrees to the fact that social media platforms should be used to promote a business in Cameroon. Respondents in Finland also feel the same way with 28% of respondents agreeing to this statement and 60% strongly agreeing.

Analysing the result of the question if social media advertising of brands are more interesting than the content of other Medias, 43% of the responds from Cameroon agrees and 32% strongly agrees while 33% of respondents from Finland agree and 52% strongly agree to this statement. More so, 50% of respondents from Cameroon agree and 33 % strongly agrees to receive adverts on social media with rewards. 51% of Finnish respondents agree and 34% strongly agrees to receive advert with rewards.

Respondents from both countries seem to feel adverts from social media are not intrusive. 52% of respondents from Cameroon disagrees these adverts are intrusive and 40% of respondents in Finland disagree these adverts are not intrusive.

Responding to the question if the brands of SMEs are dependable and have a guarantee, 51% of respondents from Cameroon agree these brands are dependable and have a guarantee. Respondents from Finland also feel the same way with 41% of respondent agreeing these brands are dependable and have a guarantee. Respondents in Cameroon also agree (55%) that these brands of SMEs are famous and they have confidence in those brands. 60% of respondents from Finland also agree to have confidence in the brands of SMEs.

Analysing the stability and quality of products and services of SMEs, 46% of the responds from Cameroon agree these products are stable and meet the needs of the customer. The responds from Finland does not differ from that of Cameroon as 46% of the respondents agree these products are stable and these products meet their needs. More so, 59% of the responds from Cameroon agree to consider the brand of SMEs as their first choice and intend to buy it in the near future. 45% of respondents in Finland also agree the brand of SMEs is their first choice even though a good percentage (42%) disagrees to this statement.

Analysing brand loyalty, 66% of responds from Cameroon agree they will continue to be loyal to a particular brand and 59% of responds from Finland agree to be loyal to a particular brand. In addition, 44% of respondents from Cameroon agree and 42% strongly agrees to the statement that SMEs can attract more customers using social media platforms. At the level of the respondents from Finland, 28% of the respondents agree and 65% strongly agree social media is the place to get more customers.

Lastly, more respondents from Cameroon agree (49%) and even strongly agree (41%) that social media is the place for SMEs to create awareness of their products and services. The respondents from Finland don't differ a lot from those of Cameroon as 24% agrees and 69% strongly agrees social media is indeed the place to create brand awareness. More so. 46% of respondents from Cameroon agree and 44% strongly agree brands are quickly recognized when advertised on social media than other media. The respondents from Finland seem to feel the same way as 31% agrees and 61% strongly agrees brands are quickly recognized on social media than on other Medias.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 6 which happens to be the last chapter comes with the summary, conclusion and the recommendations of this work. Here, the researcher will give interpretations and conclusions from data collected during the survey, use the results of the survey to give answers to the research questions posed at the beginning of the research.

6.1. CONCLUSION

Social media marketing has proven to be a very important topic especially to researchers, managers and investors. This is because there are an increasing number of enterprises especially small and Medium Size enterprises that rely on social media marketing platforms to meet the needs of their customers. Thus, it is worth saying that social media proffers a prevailing opportunity to connect with those customers on a more personal level (Saleh 2014).

The objective of this study was to proof that social media marketing activities has an effect on brand preference. Different theories where however used to explain how social media marketing actually functions. The results after conducting the survey of randomly distributing questionnaires to 60 individuals in the economic capital of Cameroon (Douala) and 60 questionnaires to random individuals in kokkola Finland shows that there is a significant relationship between social media marketing activities and consumers brand preference. The data reveals that most of the respondents from both Finland and Cameroon admit to use social media more than 15 hours a week; they are loyal to a particular brand and more liable to make repeat purchases. These respondents from both countries also admit that social media is a convenient source of product information and it should be used to promote a business. Lastly these respondents where more than willing to receive adverts on social media especially when it comes with rewards. This goes a long way to answer the question if social media marketing activities has an effect on brand preference.

6.2. RECOMMENDATION

This survey of this study was carried out in Douala the economic capital of Cameroon and Kokkola in Finland. It is however recommended that for further studies in this area, more cities should be included in the study and the sample size be increased. This would provide results which are more useful and a perfect representation of the reality on ground.

This research was interested in the influence social media has on consumers brand preference. A good idea will be to also investigate what effect social media has on customer relationship management. This is important because according to Saleh 2014, the integration of social media and customer relationship management is imperative for organizations in conducting business.

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APENDIX ONE

Data response from Cameroon.

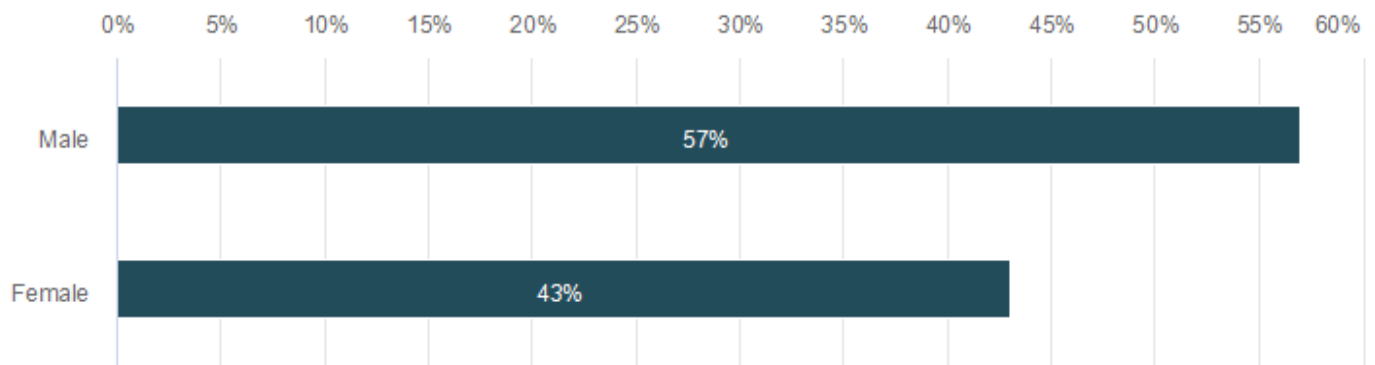
Basic report

THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING ACTIVITIES ON CONSUMERS BRAND PREFERENCE. A COMPERATIVE STUDY OF CAMEROON AND FINLAND. CASE OF SMALL AND MEDIUM SIZE ENTERPRISES. Cam

Total number of respondents: 60

1. Please indicate your gender:

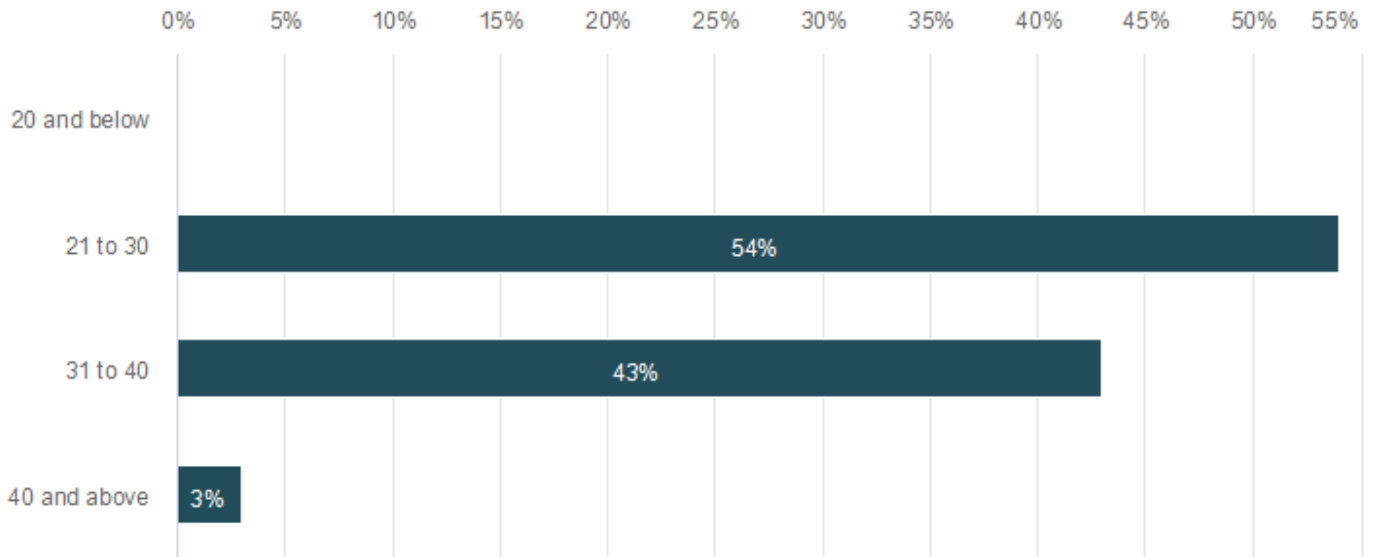
Number of respondents: 60



	n	Percent
Male	34	56.7%
Female	26	43.3%

2. Kindly indicate your age:

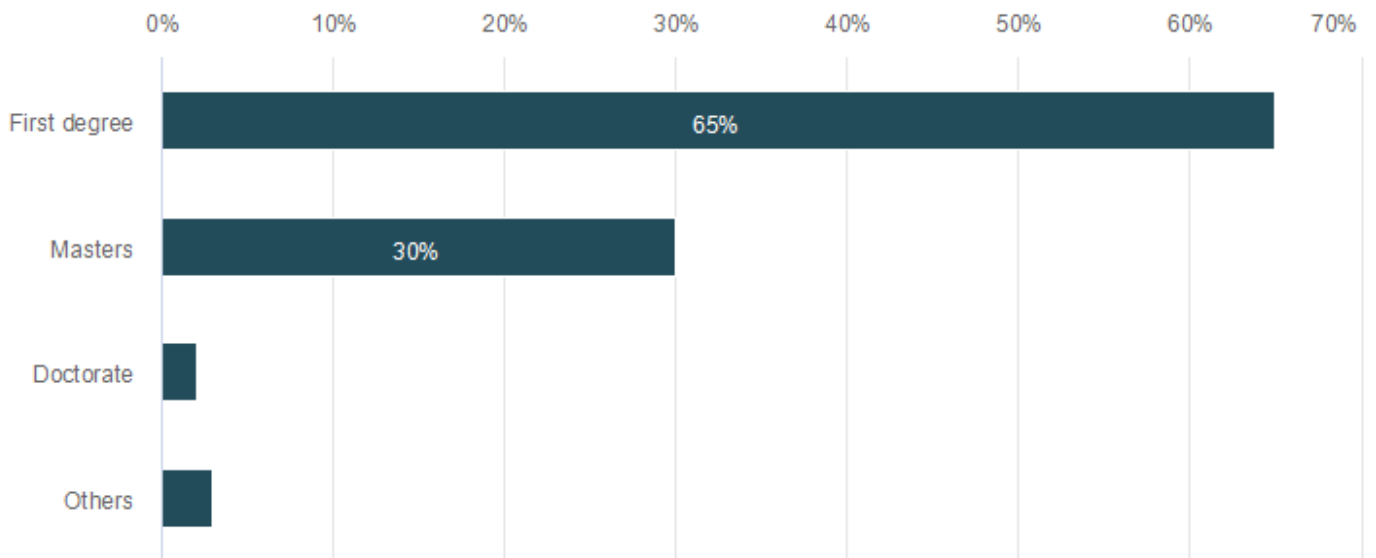
Number of respondents: 60



	n	Percent
20 and below	0	0.0%
21 to 30	32	53.4%
31 to 40	26	43.3%
40 and above	2	3.3%

3. Indicate your level of education:

Number of respondents: 60

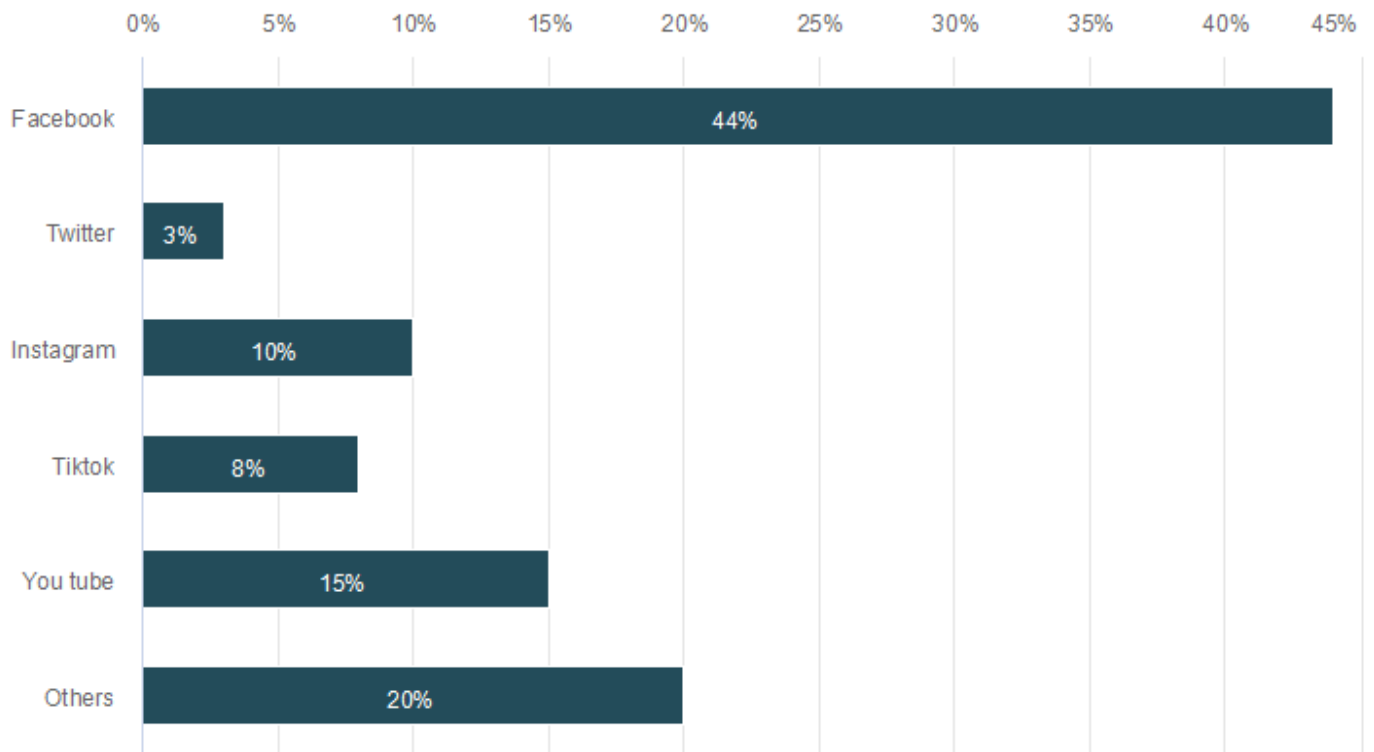


	n	Percent
First degree	39	65.0%

Masters	18	30.0%
Doctorate	1	1.7%
Others	2	3.3%

4. Favourite social media brand:

Number of respondents: 60

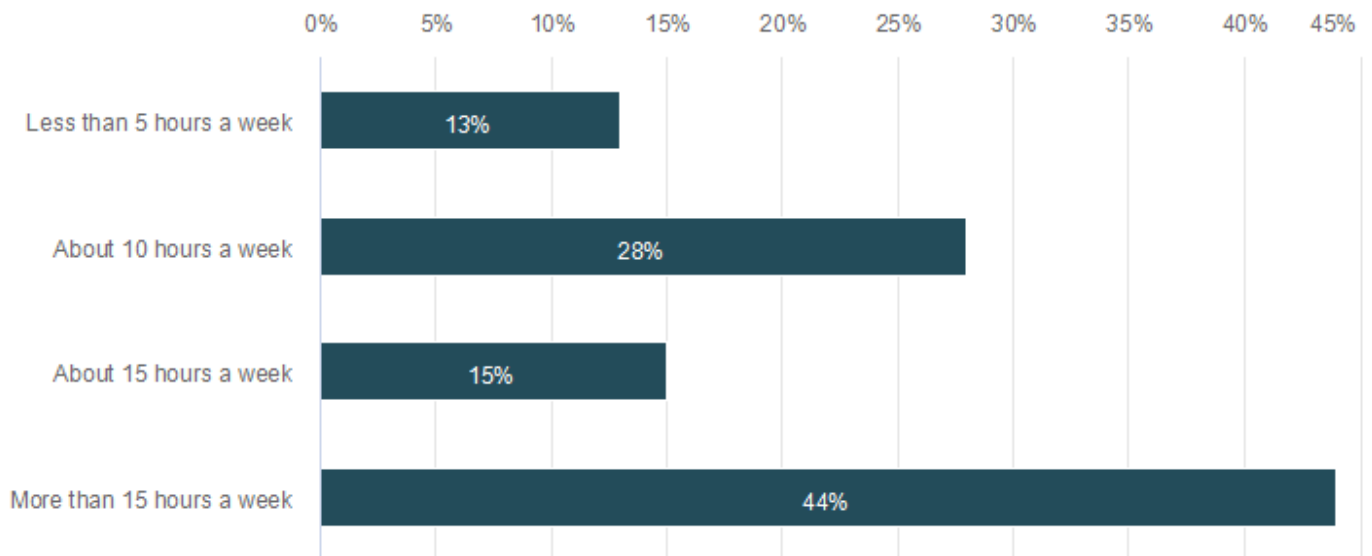


	n	Percent
Facebook	26	43.4%
Twitter	2	3.3%
Instagram	6	10.0%
Tiktok	5	8.3%

You tube	9	15.0%
Others	12	20.0%

5. Frequency of social media usage:

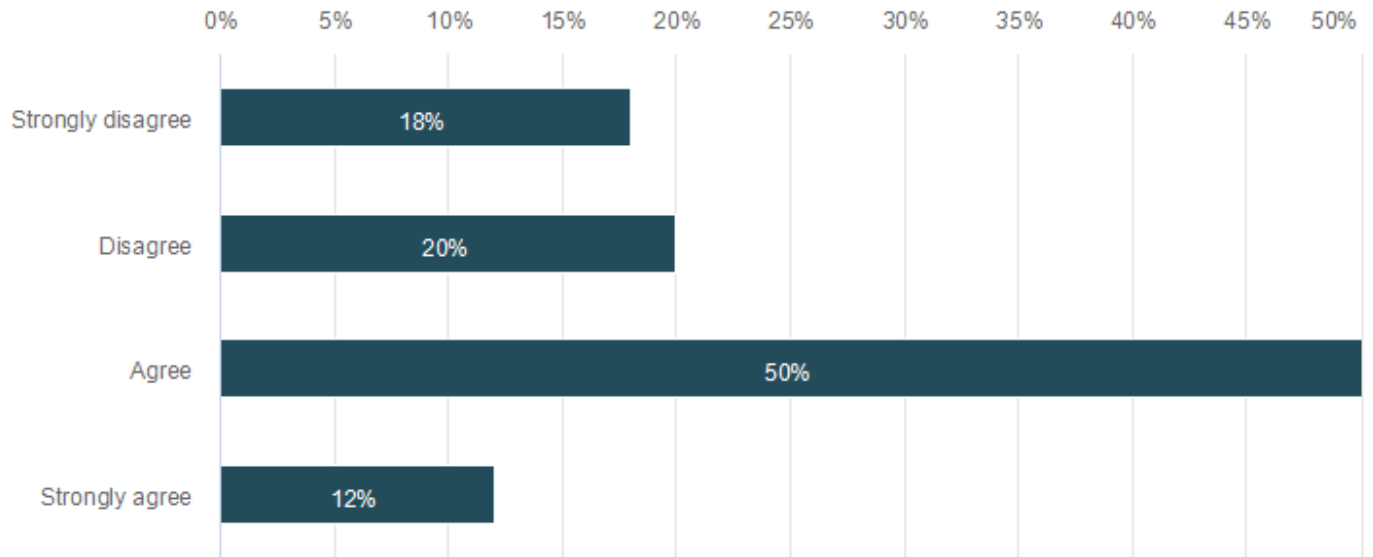
Number of respondents: 60



	n	Percent
Less than 5 hours a week	8	13.3%
About 10 hours a week	17	28.3%
About 15 hours a week	9	15.0%
More than 15 hours a week	26	43.4%

6. My peers and people who influence me think I should use UGC (social networks, online reviews, websites, blogs etc...) to decide whether or not to make a choice about an SMEs Brand

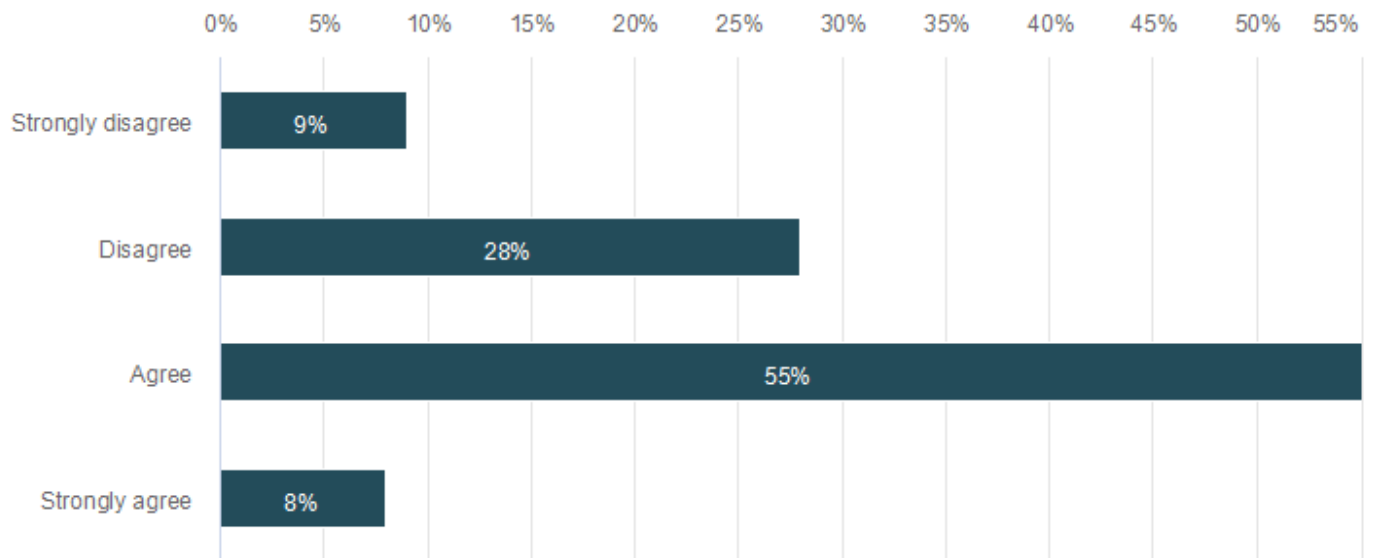
Number of respondents: 60



	n	Percent
Strongly disagree	11	18.3%
Disagree	12	20.0%
Agree	30	50.0%
Strongly agree	7	11.7%

7. Many people I regularly communicate with use UGC to make decisions:

Number of respondents: 60

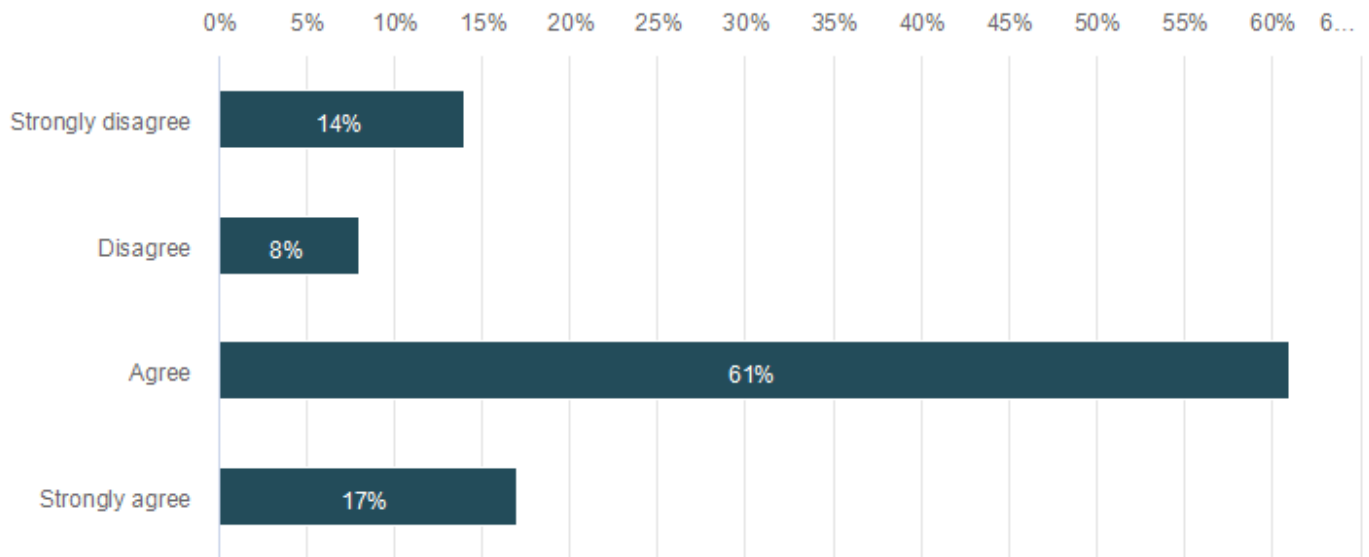


	n	Percent
Strongly disagree	5	8.4%

Disagree	17	28.3%
Agree	33	55.0%
Strongly agree	5	8.3%

8. The comments of others online about the SMEs (small and medium size enterprises) products and services of different brands are relevant and appropriate:

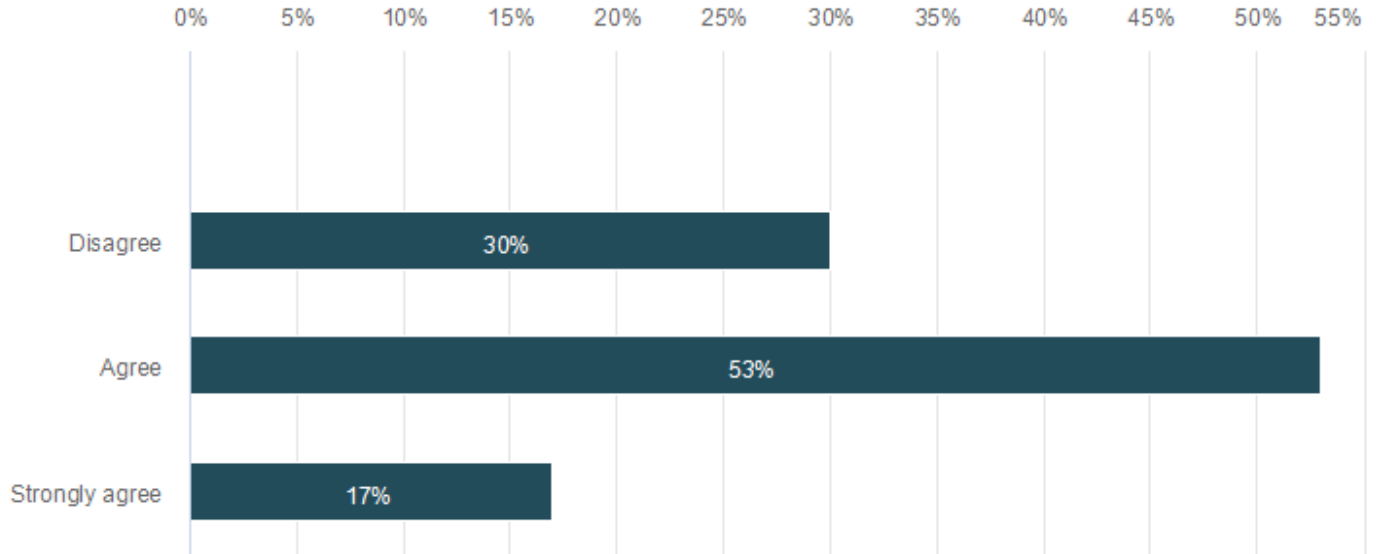
Number of respondents: 59



	n	Percent
Strongly disagree	8	13.6%
Disagree	5	8.5%
Agree	36	61.0%
Strongly agree	10	16.9%

9. The comments viewed online are timely, recent, current and up-to-date:

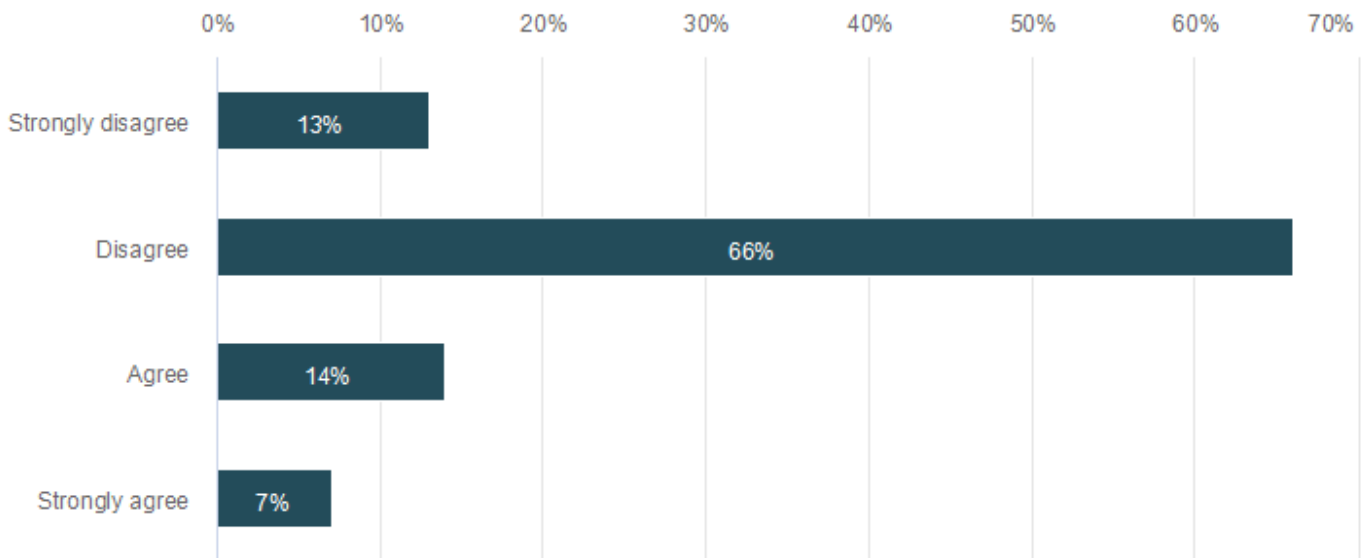
Number of respondents: 59



	n	Percent
	0	0.0%
Disagree	18	30.5%
Agree	31	52.5%
Strongly agree	10	17.0%

10. People who left comments online are trustworthy and reliable:

Number of respondents: 59

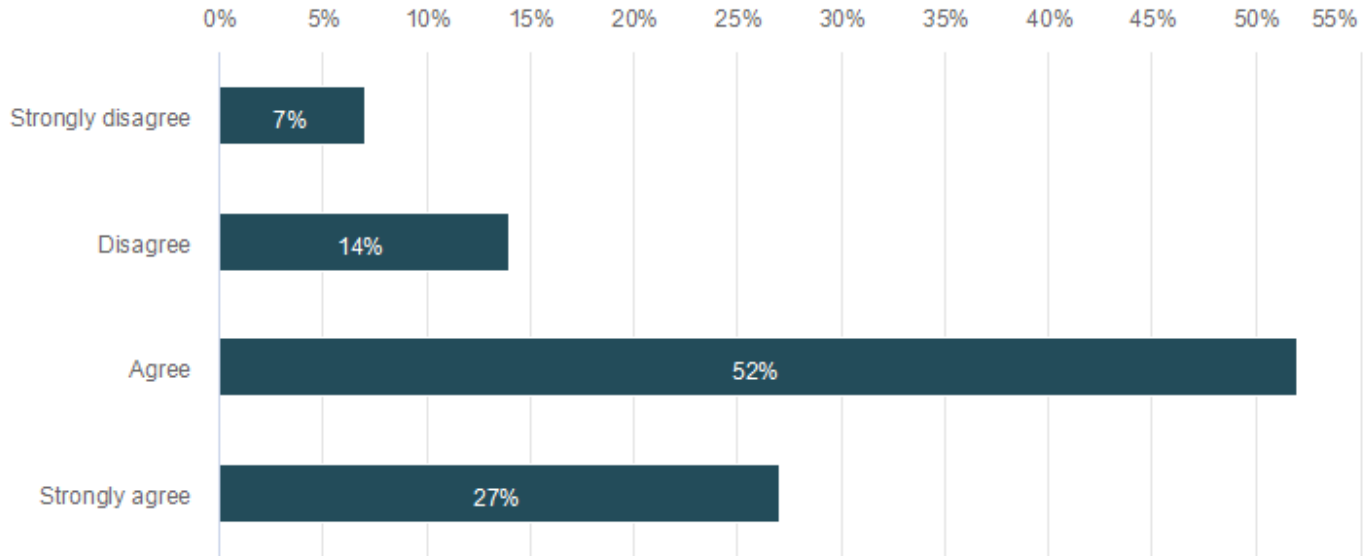


	n	Percent
Strongly disagree	8	13.5%

Disagree	39	66.1%
Agree	8	13.6%
Strongly agree	4	6.8%

11. Social media advertising are convenient source of product information:

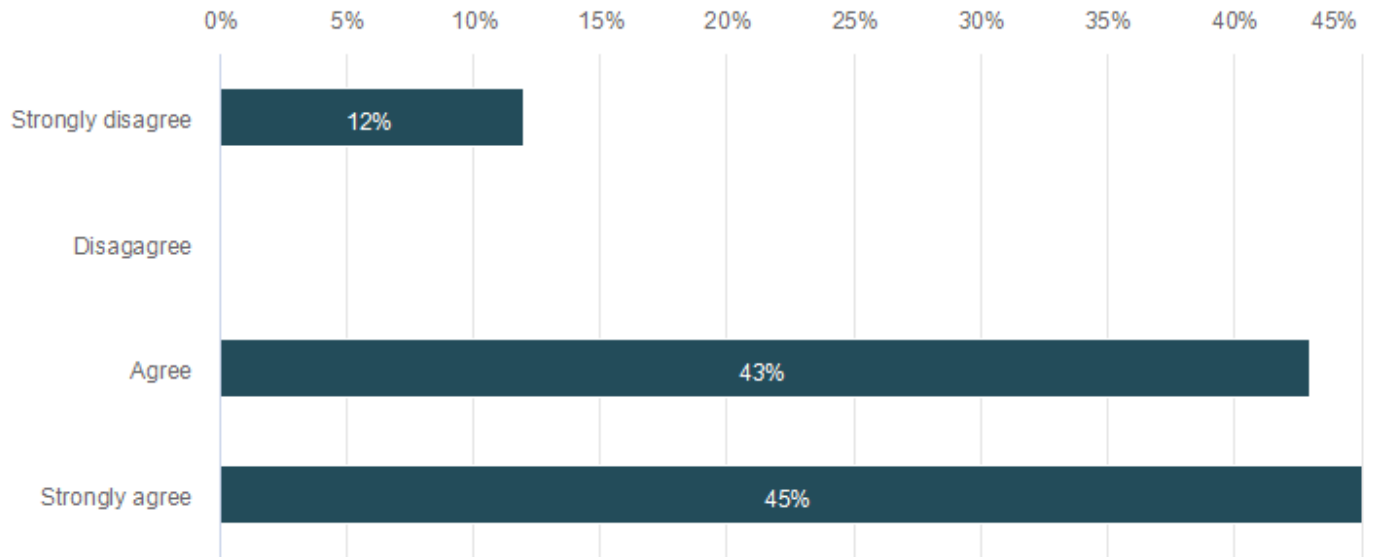
Number of respondents: 58



	n	Percent
Strongly disagree	4	6.9%
Disagree	8	13.8%
Agree	30	51.7%
Strongly agree	16	27.6%

12. Social media should be used for promoting my businesses in commercializing their products/ services:

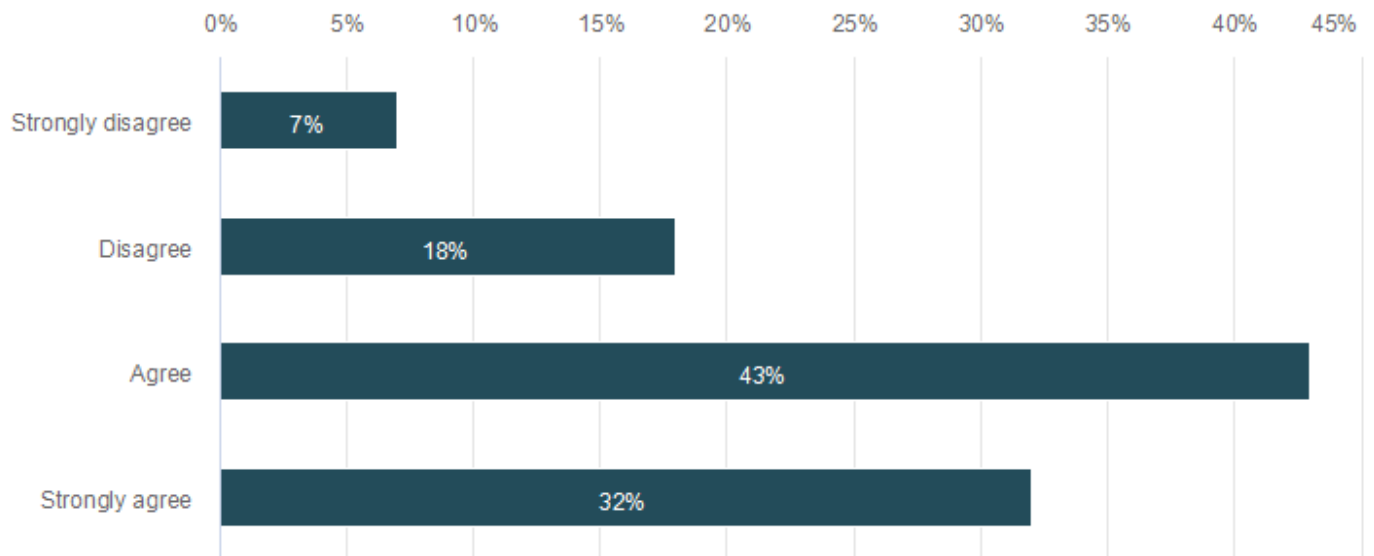
Number of respondents: 60



	n	Percent
Strongly disagree	7	11.7%
Disagree	0	0.0%
Agree	26	43.3%
Strongly agree	27	45.0%

13. Social media advertising of brands are more interesting than the content of other media:

Number of respondents: 60

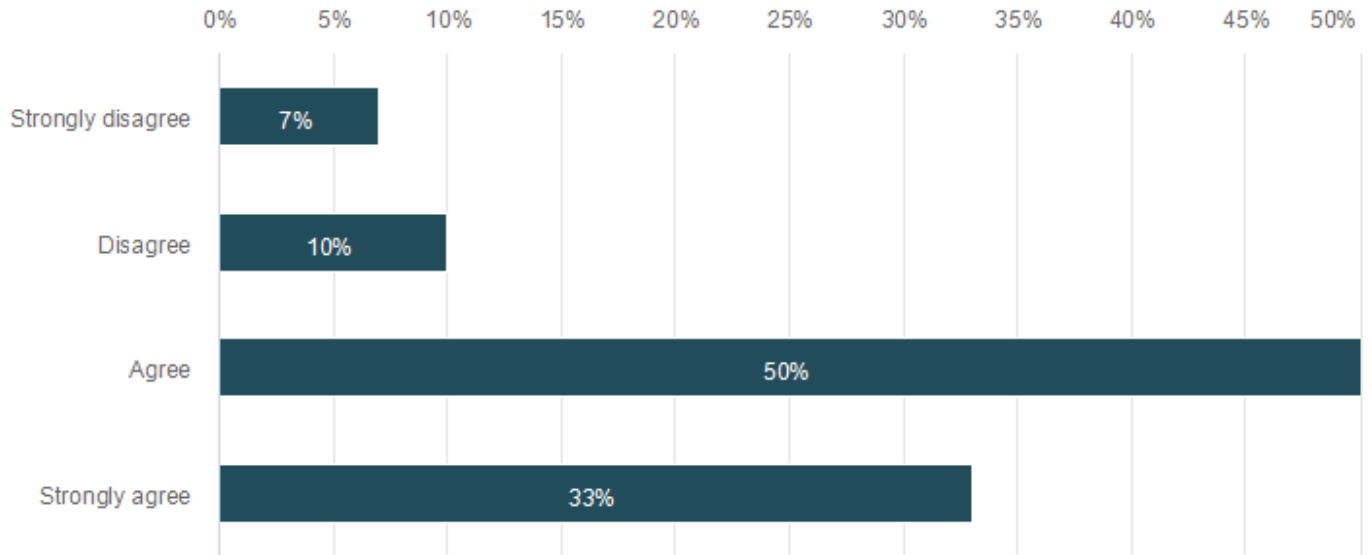


	n	Percent
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Strongly disagree	4	6.7%
Disagree	11	18.3%
Agree	26	43.3%
Strongly agree	19	31.7%

14. I am willing to receive social media advertisements when it offers rewards:

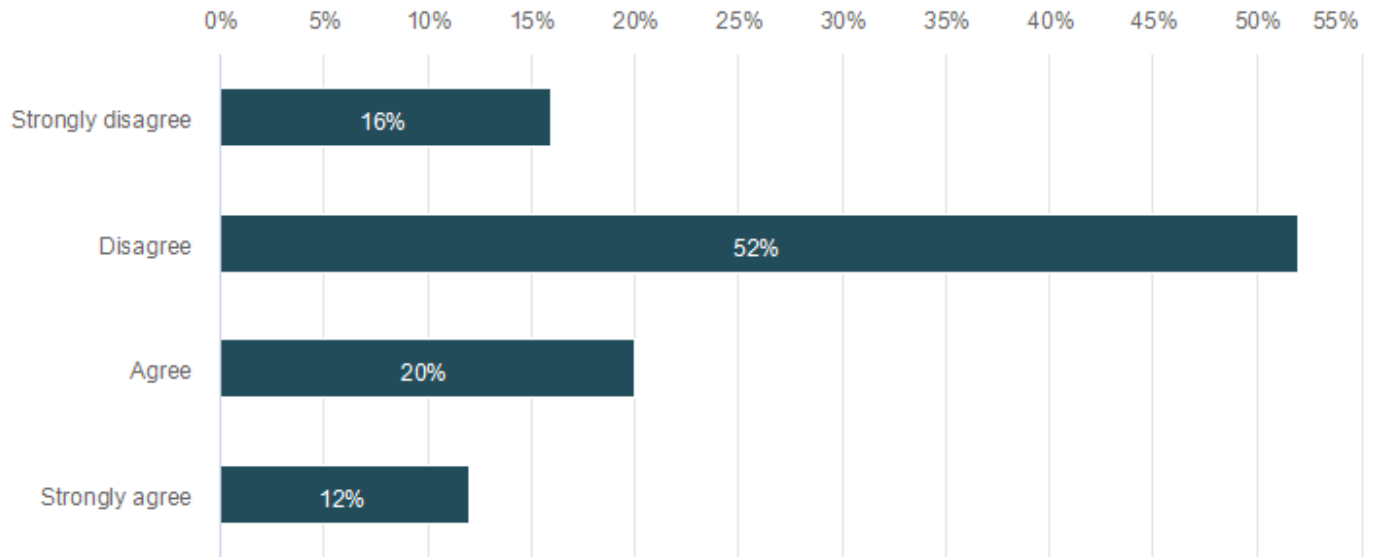
Number of respondents: 60



	n	Percent
Strongly disagree	4	6.7%
Disagree	6	10.0%
Agree	30	50.0%
Strongly agree	20	33.3%

15. I feel social media advertising is intrusive and I consider it as unwelcomed interruption:

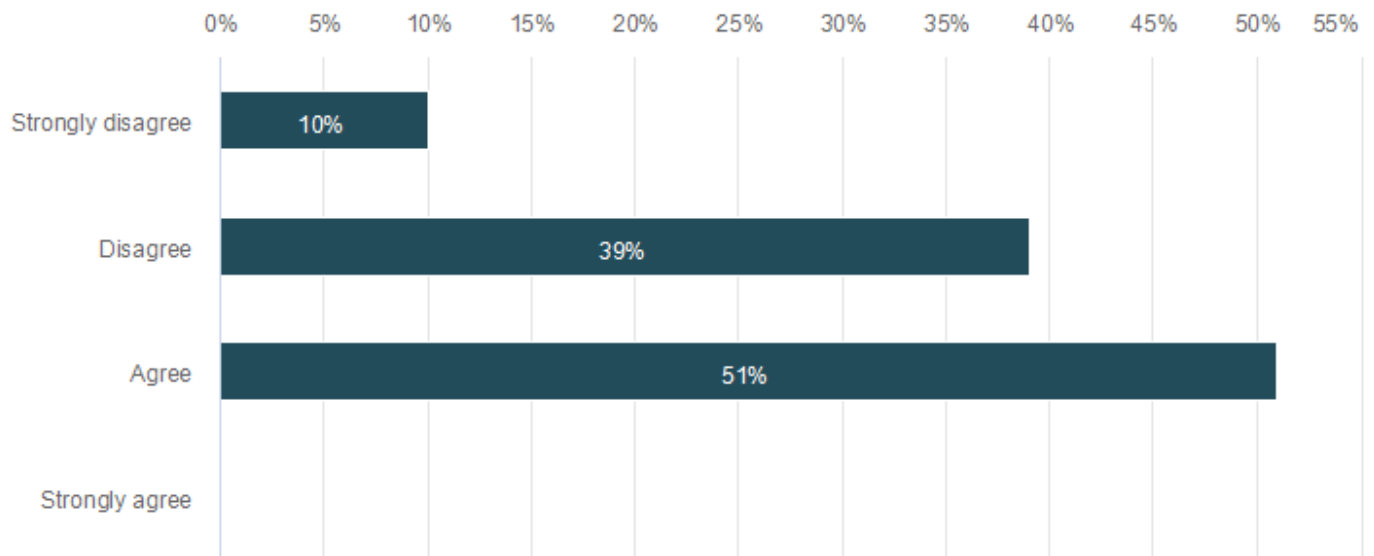
Number of respondents: 60



	n	Percent
Strongly disagree	10	16.6%
Disagree	31	51.7%
Agree	12	20.0%
Strongly agree	7	11.7%

16. Based on online content shared, that SMEs brand is dependable and have a guarantee:

Number of respondents: 59

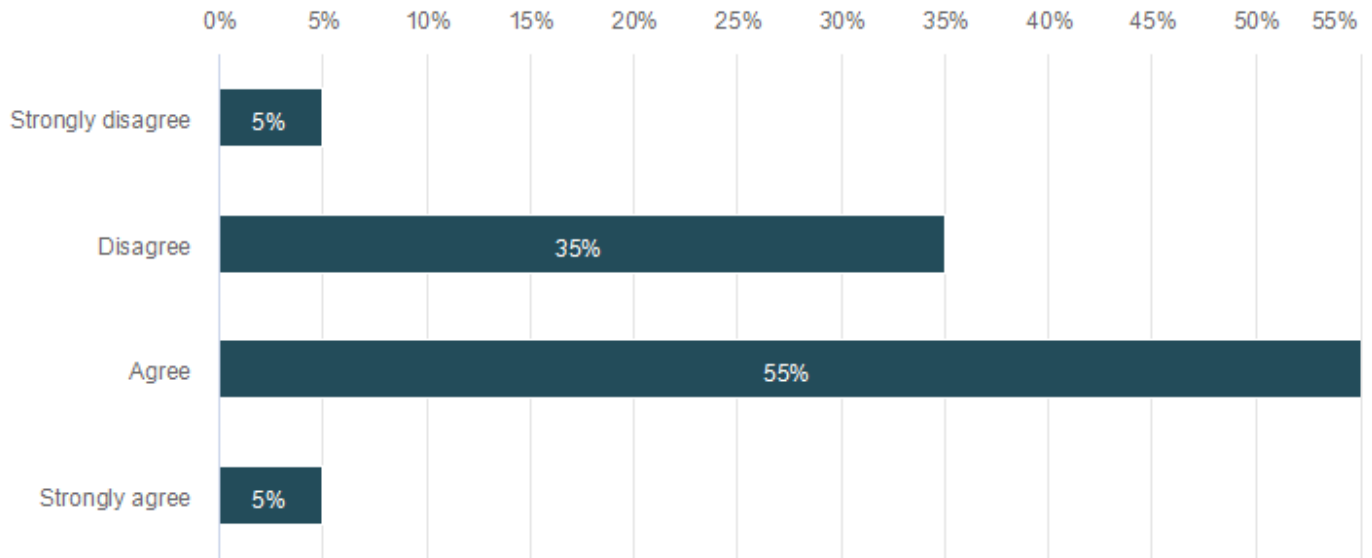


	n	Percent
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Strongly disagree	6	10.2%
Disagree	23	39.0%
Agree	30	50.8%
Strongly agree	0	0.0%

17. Based on online content shared, the brand of SMEs are very famous in the industry and I have confidence in the brand:

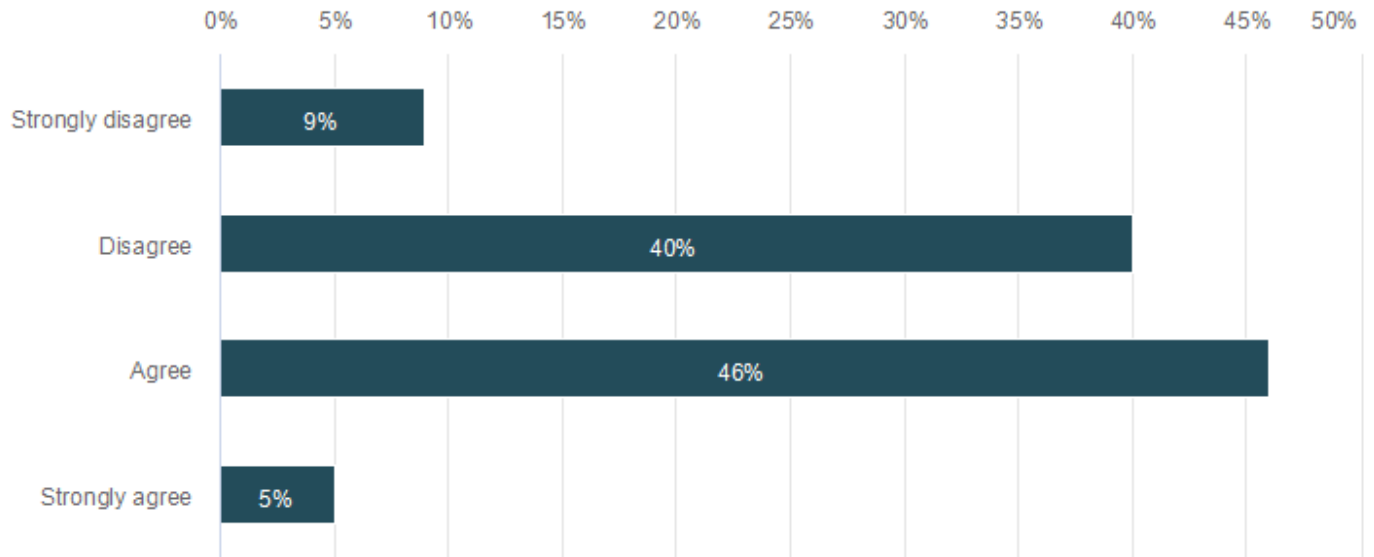
Number of respondents: 57



	n	Percent
Strongly disagree	3	5.2%
Disagree	20	35.1%
Agree	31	54.4%
Strongly agree	3	5.3%

18. Based on online content shared, the products and service qualities of the SMEs brand are stable and sincerely concern my needs and rights:

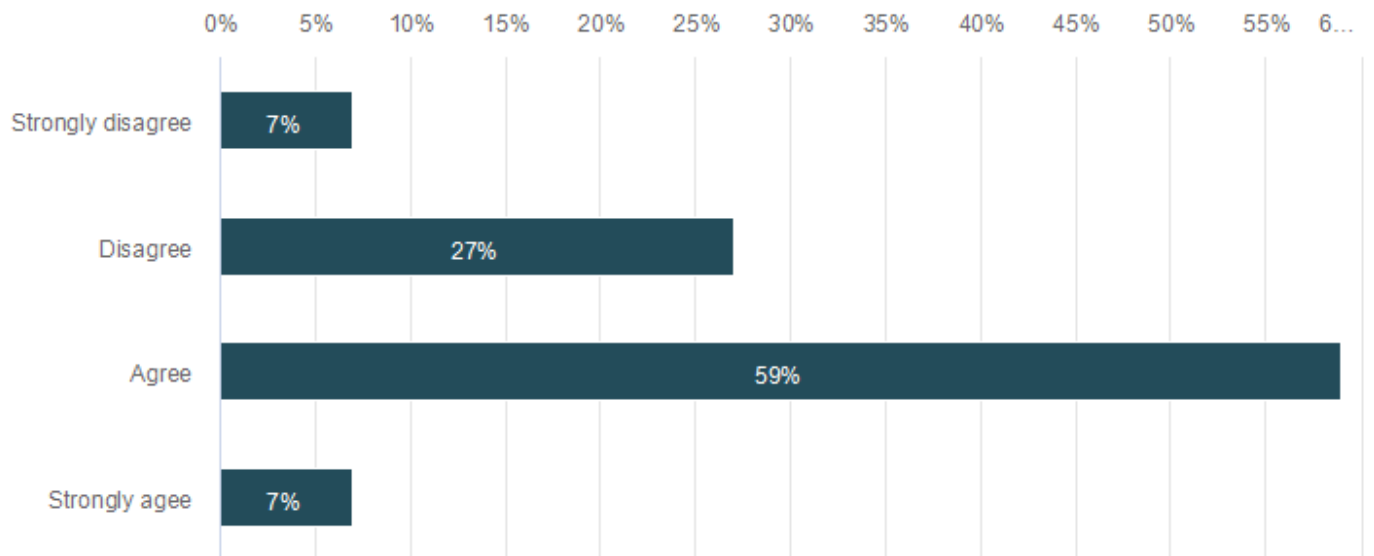
Number of respondents: 58



	n	Percent
Strongly disagree	5	8.6%
Disagree	23	39.7%
Agree	27	46.5%
Strongly agree	3	5.2%

19. I consider the SMEs brand as my first choice in the industry and intend to buy it in the near future:

Number of respondents: 59

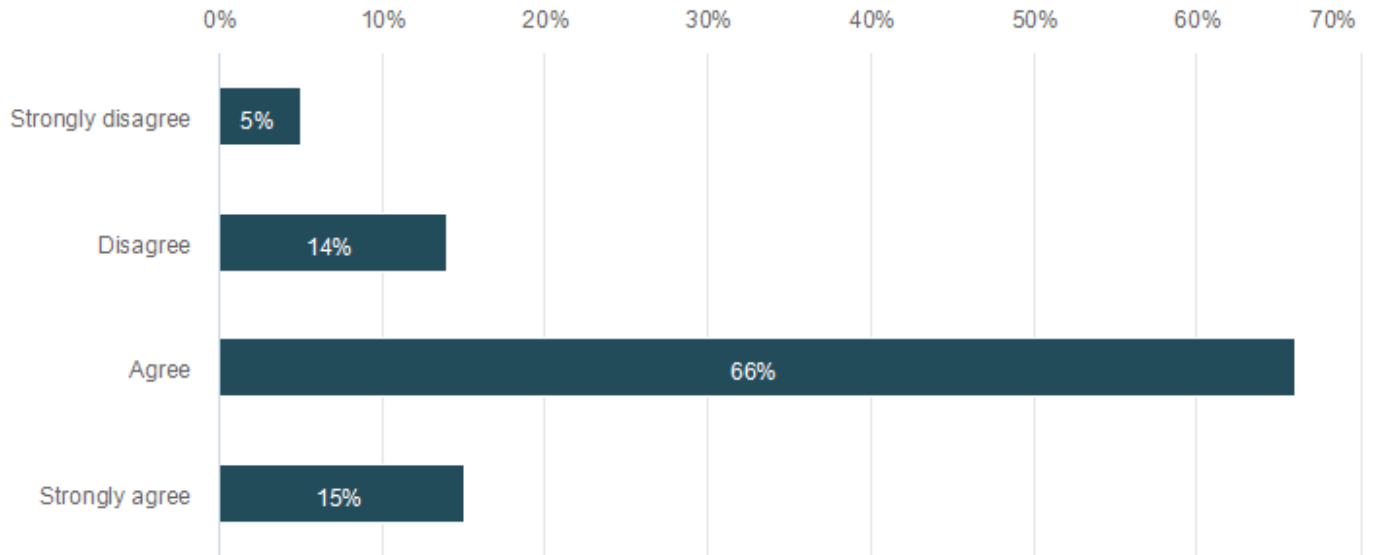


	n	Percent
--	---	---------

Strongly disagree	4	6.8%
Disagree	16	27.1%
Agree	35	59.3%
Strongly agree	4	6.8%

20. I will continue to be a loyal customer for a brand:

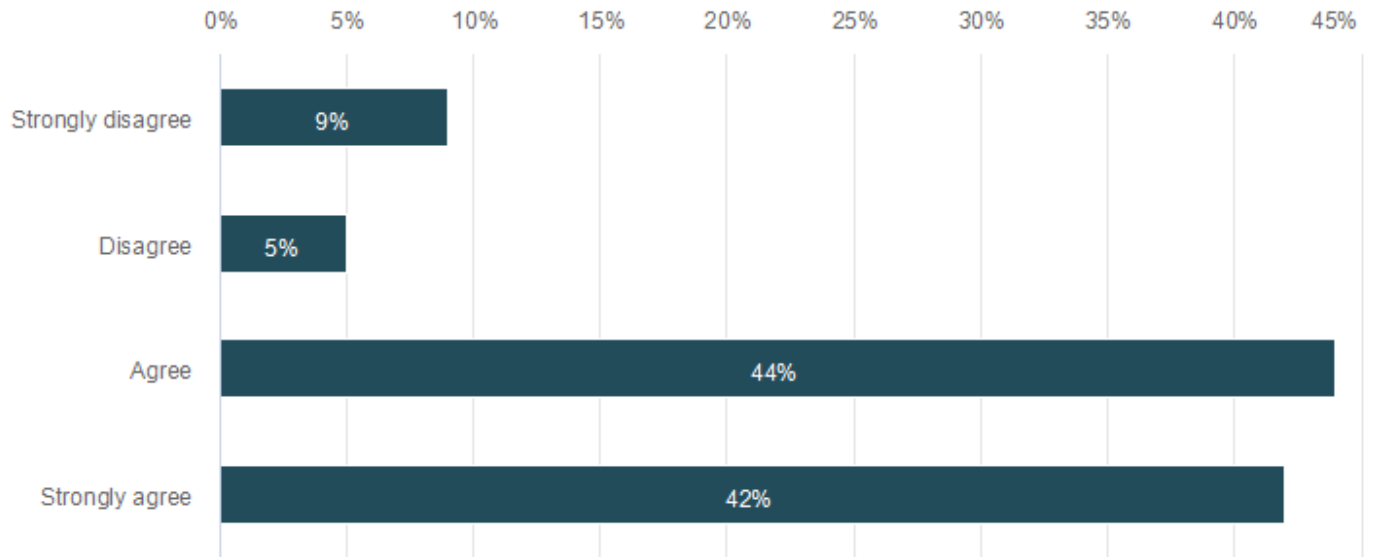
Number of respondents: 59



	n	Percent
Strongly disagree	3	5.1%
Disagree	8	13.6%
Agree	39	66.1%
Strongly agree	9	15.2%

21. Based on social media advertising I believe the SMEs brand can attract more customers:

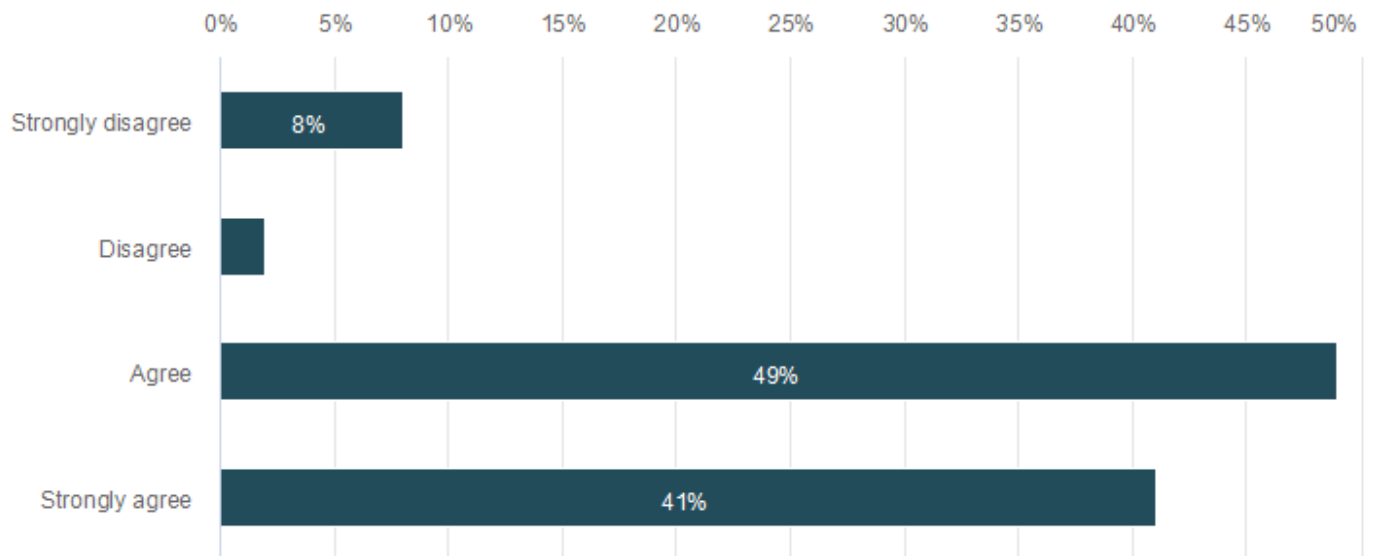
Number of respondents: 59



	n	Percent
Strongly disagree	5	8.5%
Disagree	3	5.1%
Agree	26	44.0%
Strongly agree	25	42.4%

22. Social media advertising helps me to be aware and remember new products and services offered by the SMEs brand:

Number of respondents: 59

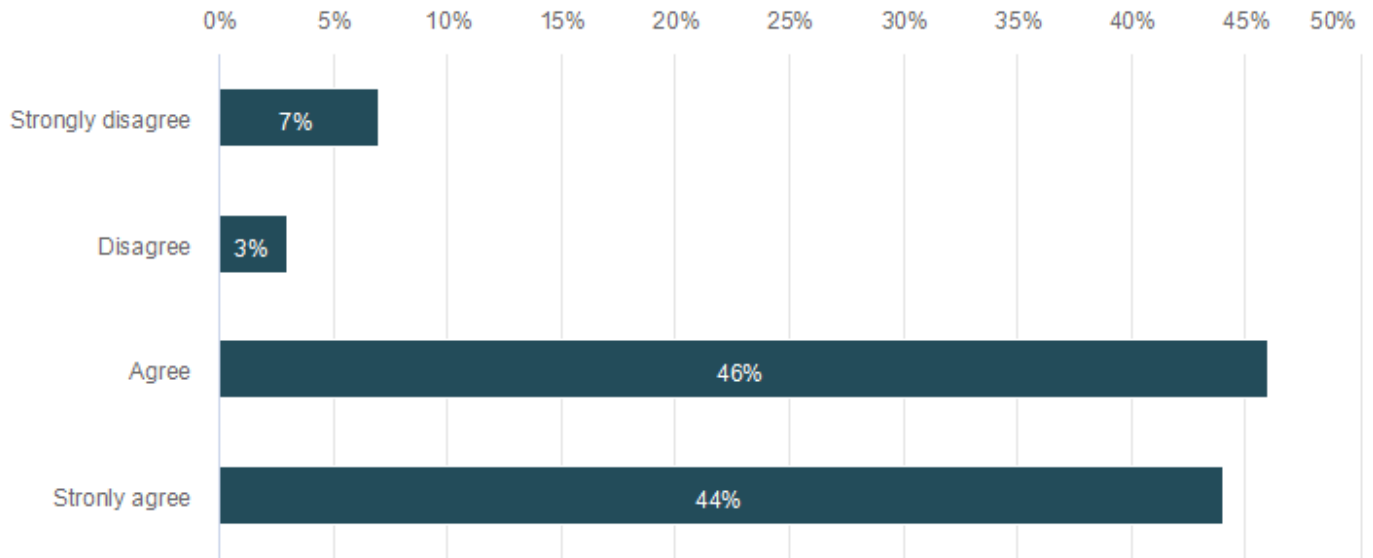


	n	Percent
--	---	---------

Strongly disagree	5	8.5%
Disagree	1	1.7%
Agree	29	49.1%
Strongly agree	24	40.7%

23. Social media advertising of brands is quickly recognised by people other than adverts through other media:

Number of respondents: 59



	n	Percent
Strongly disagree	4	6.8%
Disagree	2	3.4%
Agree	27	45.7%
Strongly agree	26	44.1%

APPENDIX TWO

Data response from Finland

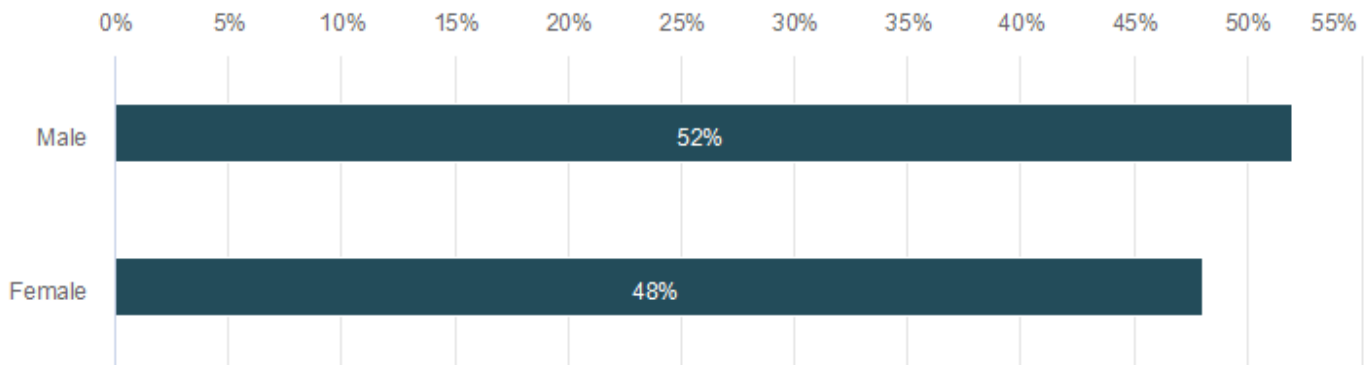
Basic report

THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING ACTIVITIES ON CONSUMERS BRAND PREFERENCE, A COMPERATIVE STUDY OF CAMEROON AND FINLAND. CASE OF SMALL AND MEDIUM SIZE ENTERPRISES. FIN

Total number of respondents: 62

1. Please indicate your gender:

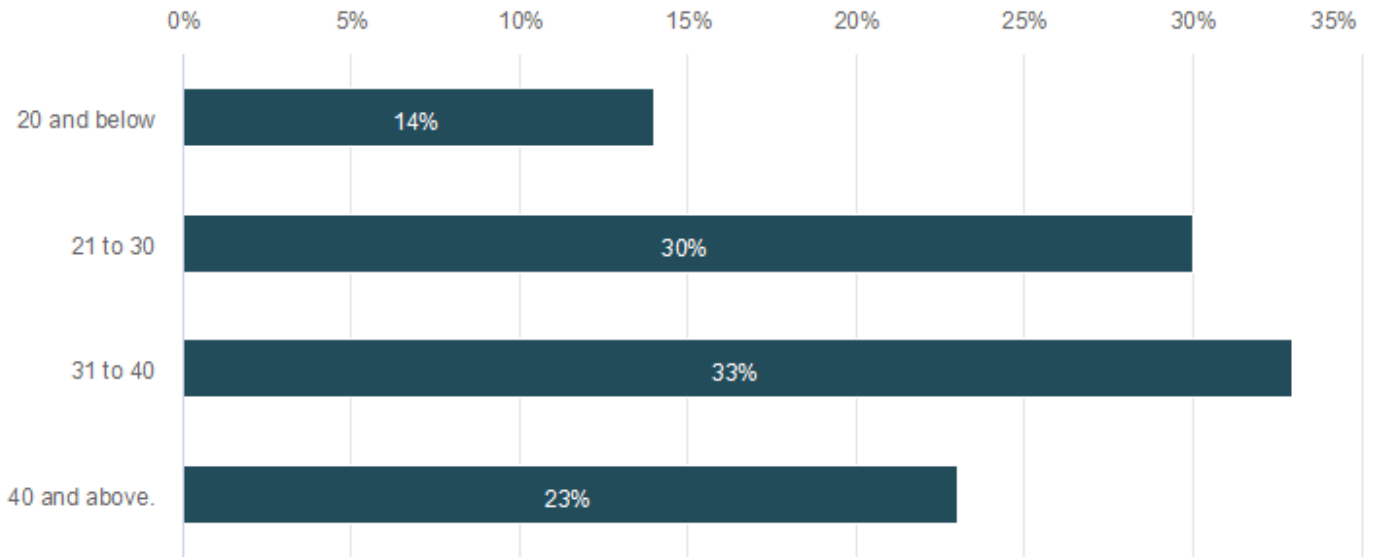
Number of respondents: 60



	n	Percent
Male	31	51.7%
Female	29	48.3%

2. Kindly indicate your age:

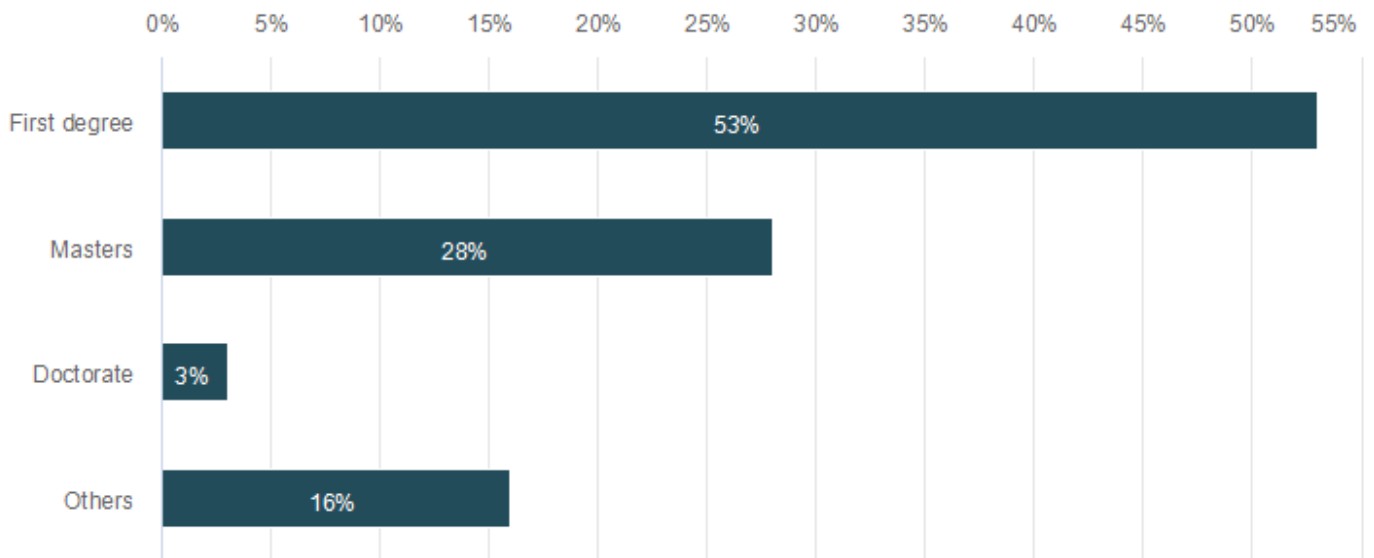
Number of respondents: 60



	n	Percent
20 and below	8	13.4%
21 to 30	18	30.0%
31 to 40	20	33.3%
40 and above.	14	23.3%

3. Indicate your level of education:

Number of respondents: 61

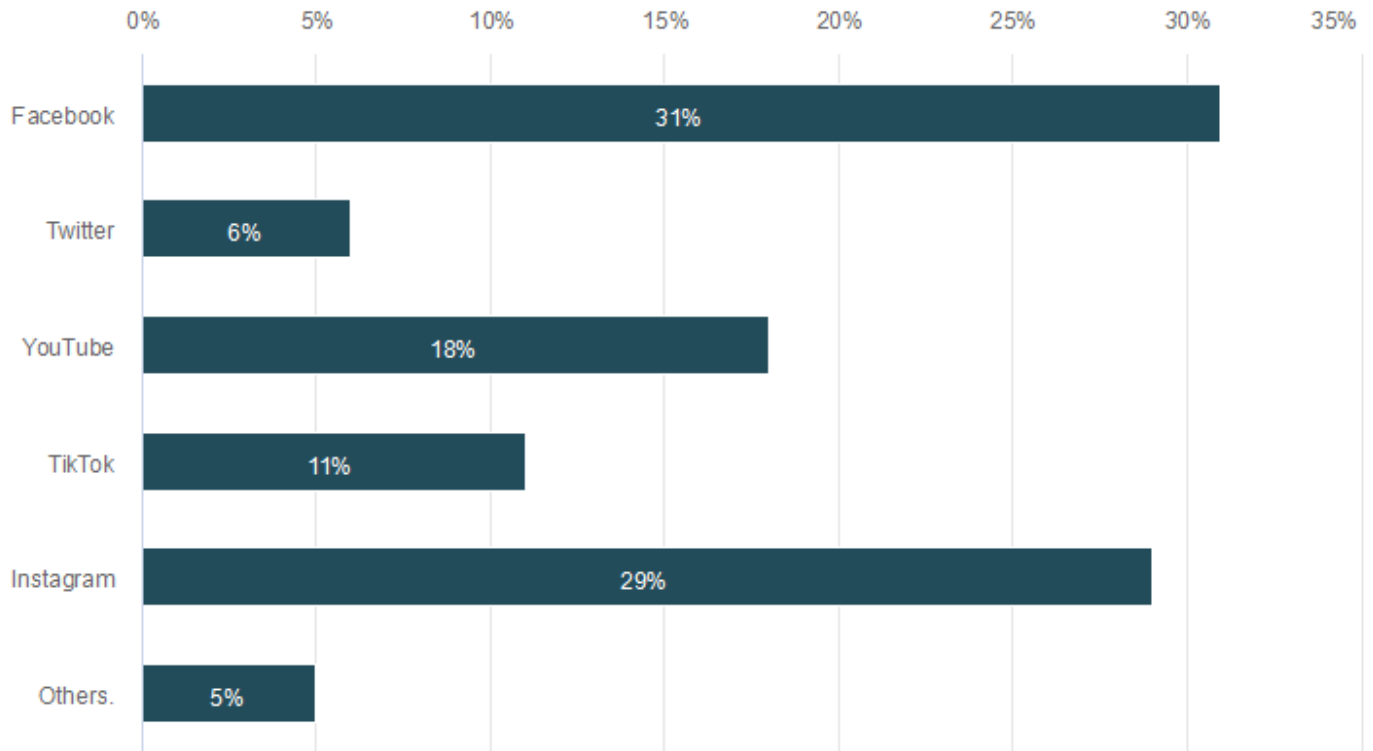


	n	Percent
First degree	32	52.4%

Masters	17	27.9%
Doctorate	2	3.3%
Others	10	16.4%

4. Favourite social media brand:

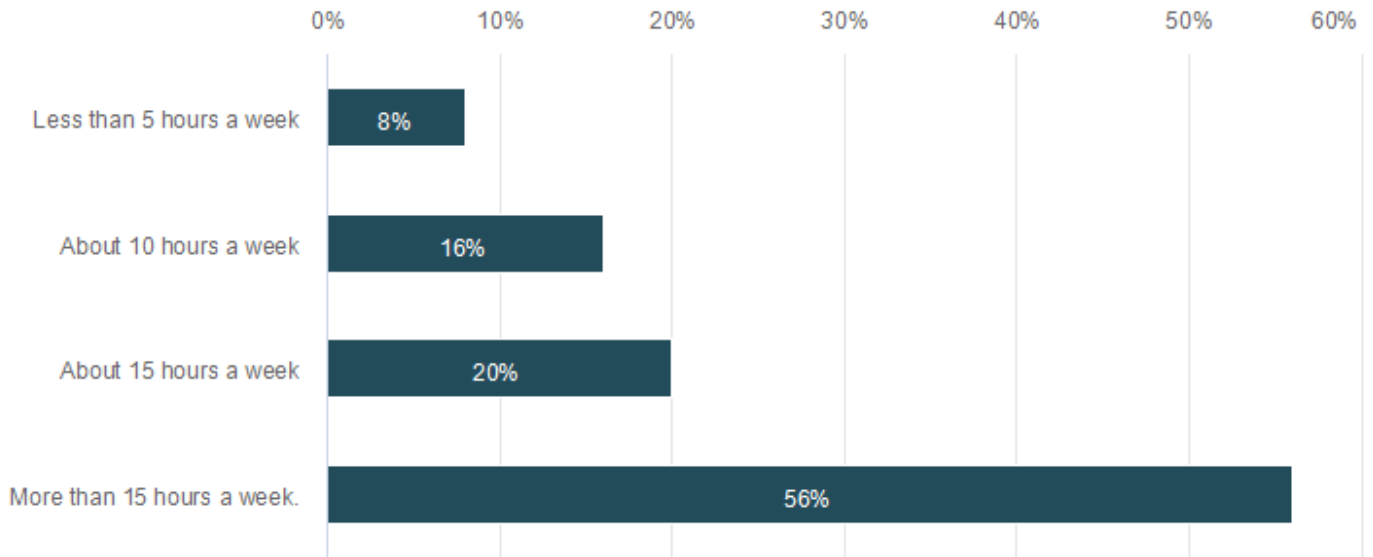
Number of respondents: 62



	n	Percent
Facebook	19	30.7%
Twitter	4	6.5%
YouTube	11	17.7%
TikTok	7	11.3%
Instagram	18	29.0%
Others.	3	4.8%

5. Frequency of social media usage:

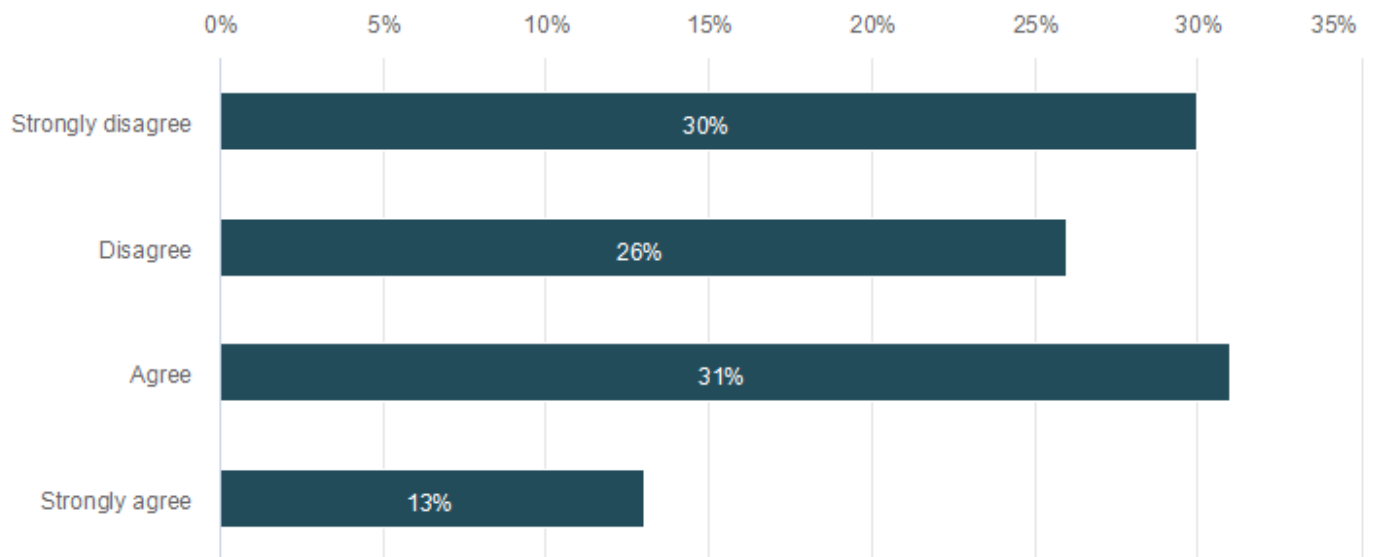
Number of respondents: 61



	n	Percent
Less than 5 hours a week	5	8.2%
About 10 hours a week	10	16.4%
About 15 hours a week	12	19.7%
More than 15 hours a week.	34	55.7%

6. My peers and people who are influence to me think I should use UGC (social networks, online reviews, websites, blogs etc...) to decide whether or not to make a choice about an SMEs Brand:

Number of respondents: 61

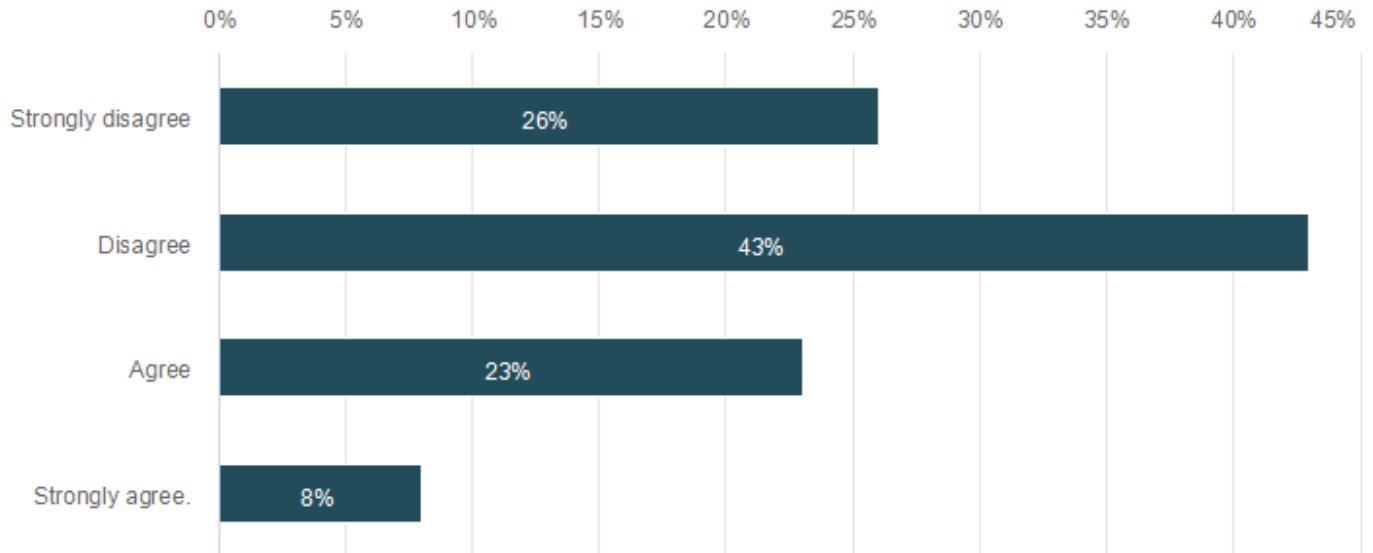


	n	Percent
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Strongly disagree	18	29.5%
Disagree	16	26.2%
Agree	19	31.2%
Strongly agree	8	13.1%

7. Many people I regularly communicate with use UGC to make decisions:

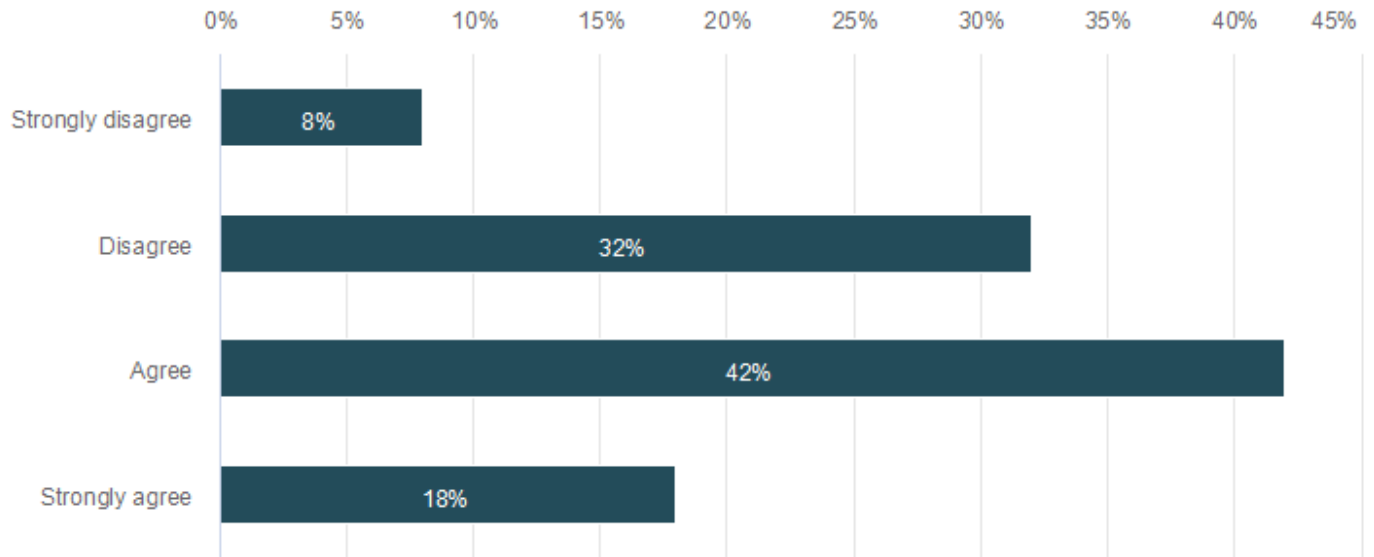
Number of respondents: 62



	n	Percent
Strongly disagree	16	25.8%
Disagree	27	43.5%
Agree	14	22.6%
Strongly agree.	5	8.1%

8. The comments of others online about the SMEs products and services of different brands are relevant and appropriate:

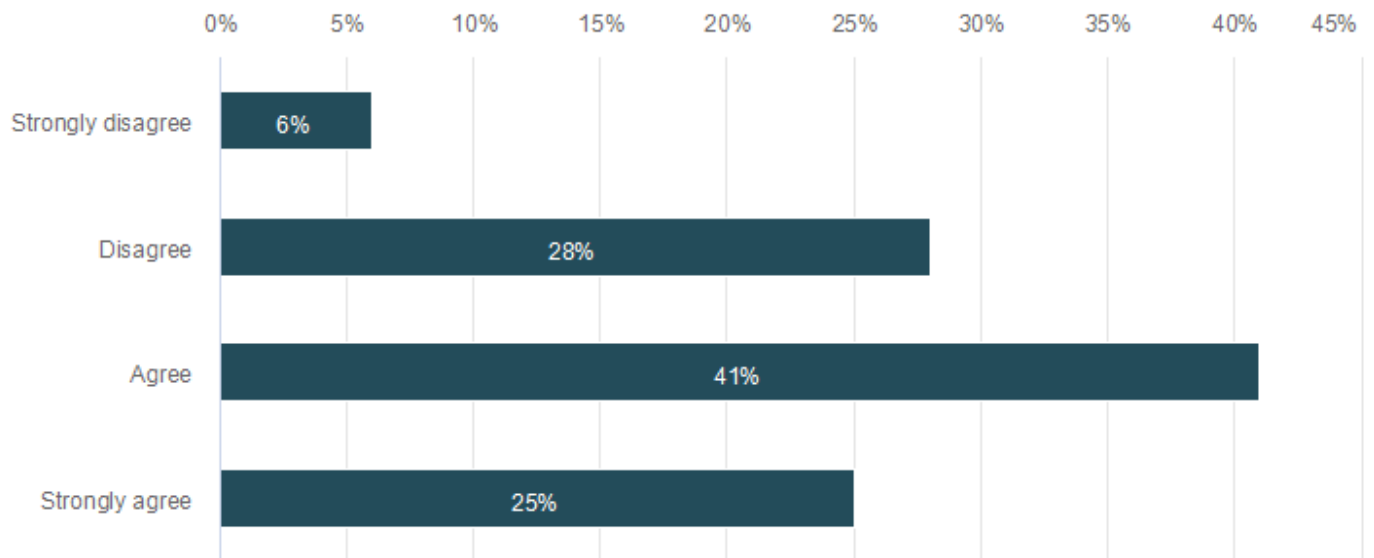
Number of respondents: 60



	n	Percent
Strongly disagree	5	8.3%
Disagree	19	31.7%
Agree	25	41.7%
Strongly agree	11	18.3%

9. The comments viewed online are timely, recent, current and up-to-date:

Number of respondents: 61

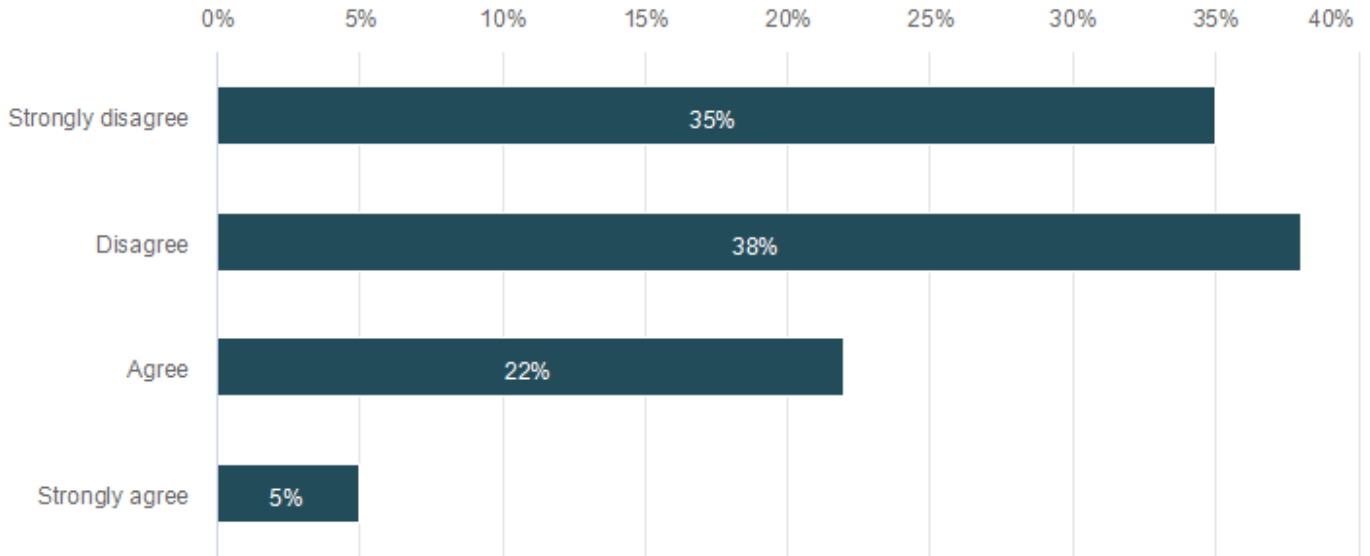


	n	Percent
Strongly disagree	4	6.5%

Disagree	17	27.9%
Agree	25	41.0%
Strongly agree	15	24.6%

10. People who left comments online are trustworthy and reliable:

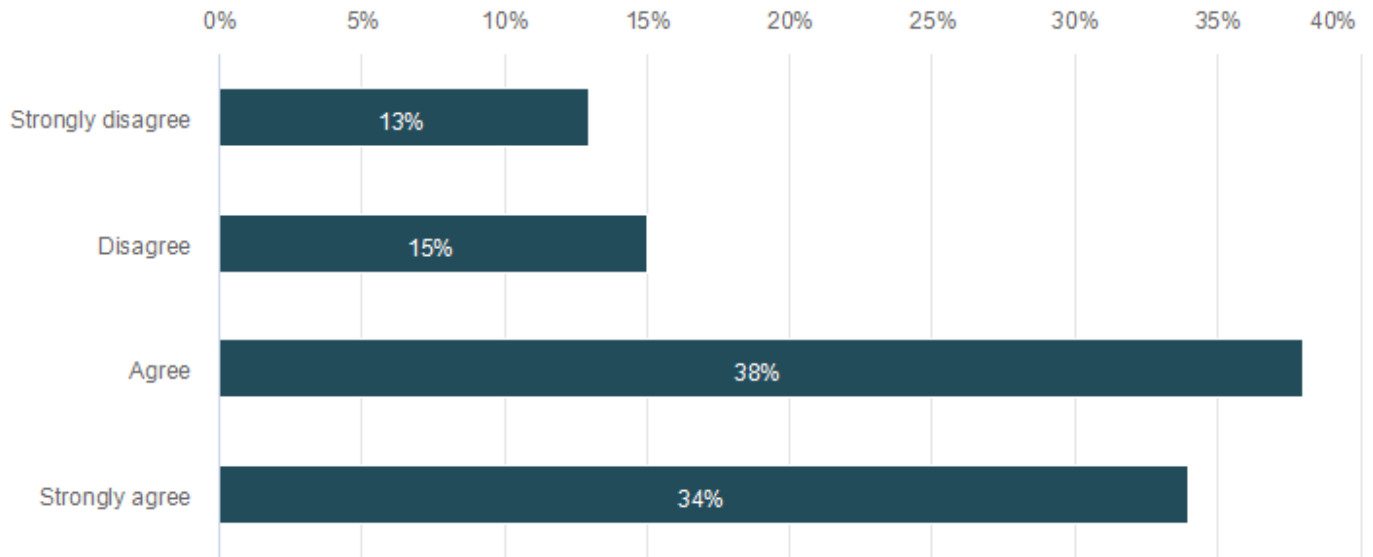
Number of respondents: 60



	n	Percent
Strongly disagree	21	35.0%
Disagree	23	38.3%
Agree	13	21.7%
Strongly agree	3	5.0%

11. Social media advertising are convenient source of product information:

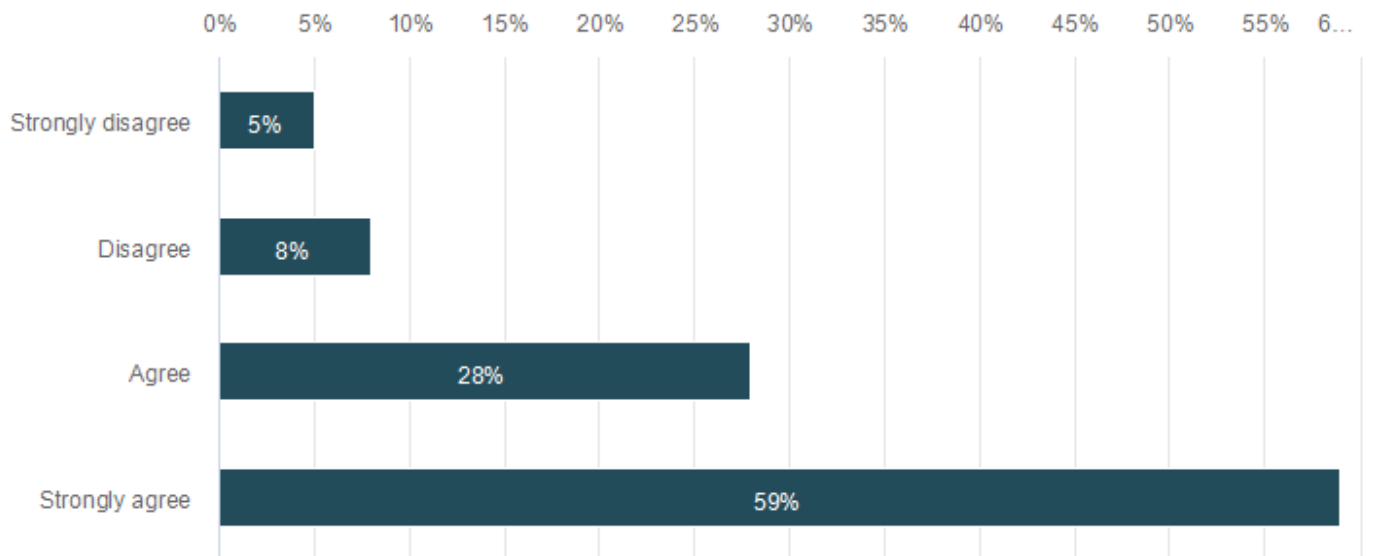
Number of respondents: 61



	n	Percent
Strongly disagree	8	13.1%
Disagree	9	14.8%
Agree	23	37.7%
Strongly agree	21	34.4%

12. Social media should be used for promoting my businesses in commercializing their products/ services:

Number of respondents: 61

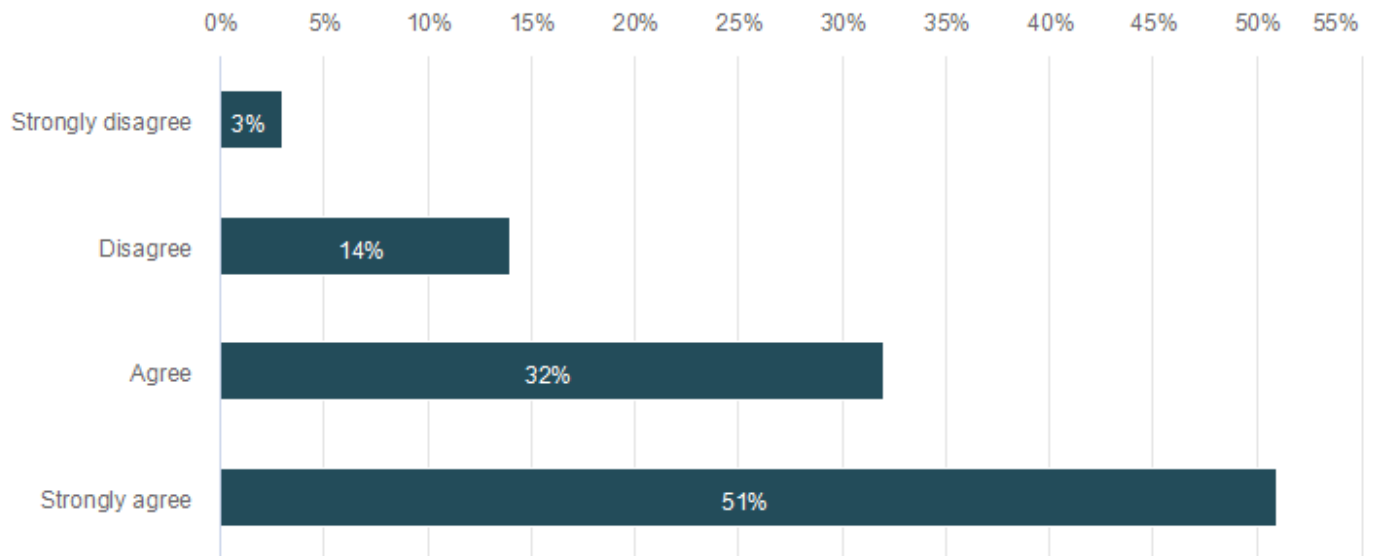


	n	Percent
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Strongly disagree	3	4.9%
Disagree	5	8.2%
Agree	17	27.9%
Strongly agree	36	59.0%

13. Social media advertising of my brands are more interesting than the content of other media:

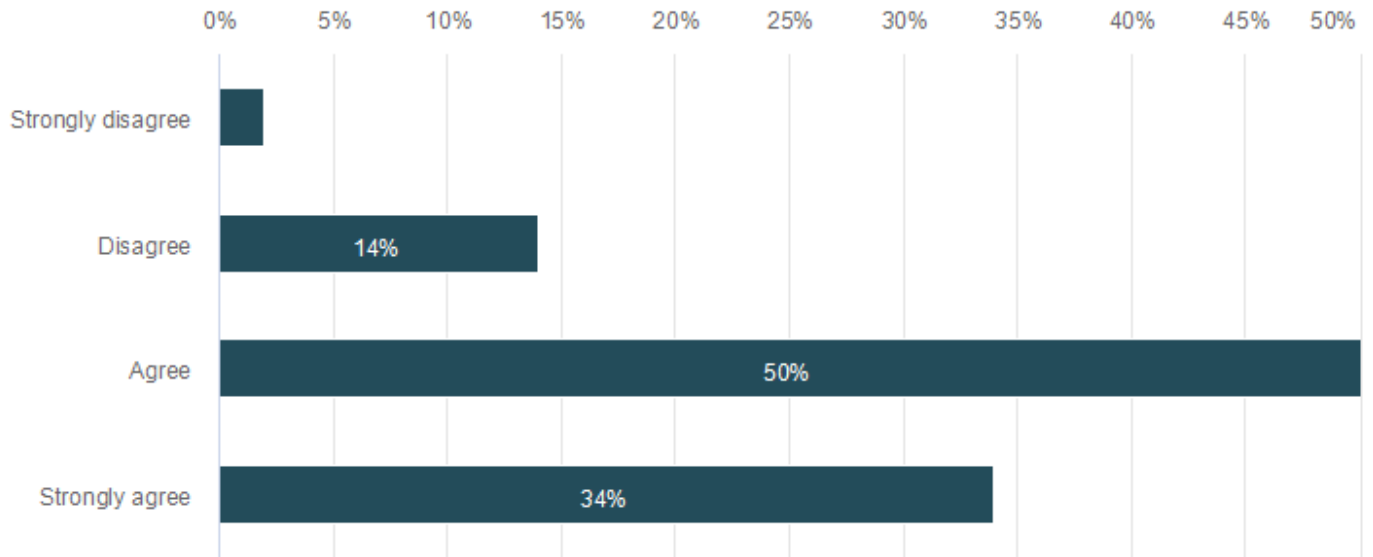
Number of respondents: 59



	n	Percent
Strongly disagree	2	3.4%
Disagree	8	13.6%
Agree	19	32.2%
Strongly agree	30	50.8%

14. I am willing to receive social media advertisements when it offers rewards;

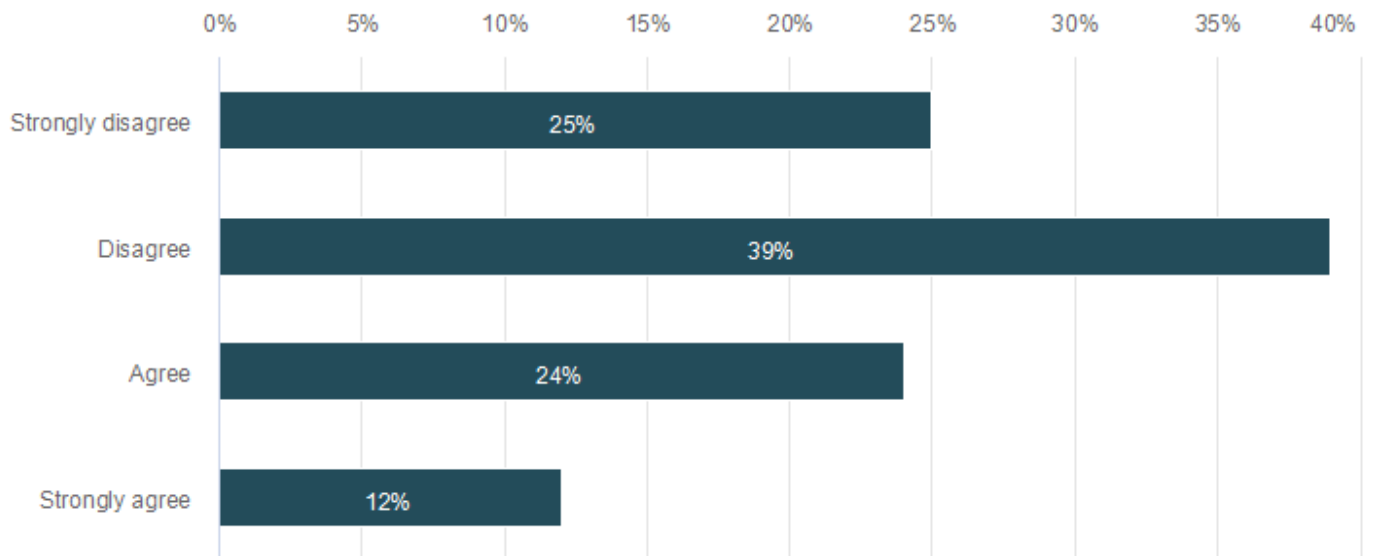
Number of respondents: 62



	n	Percent
Strongly disagree	1	1.6%
Disagree	9	14.5%
Agree	31	50.0%
Strongly agree	21	33.9%

15. I feel social media advertising is intrusive and I consider it as unwelcomed interruption:

Number of respondents: 59

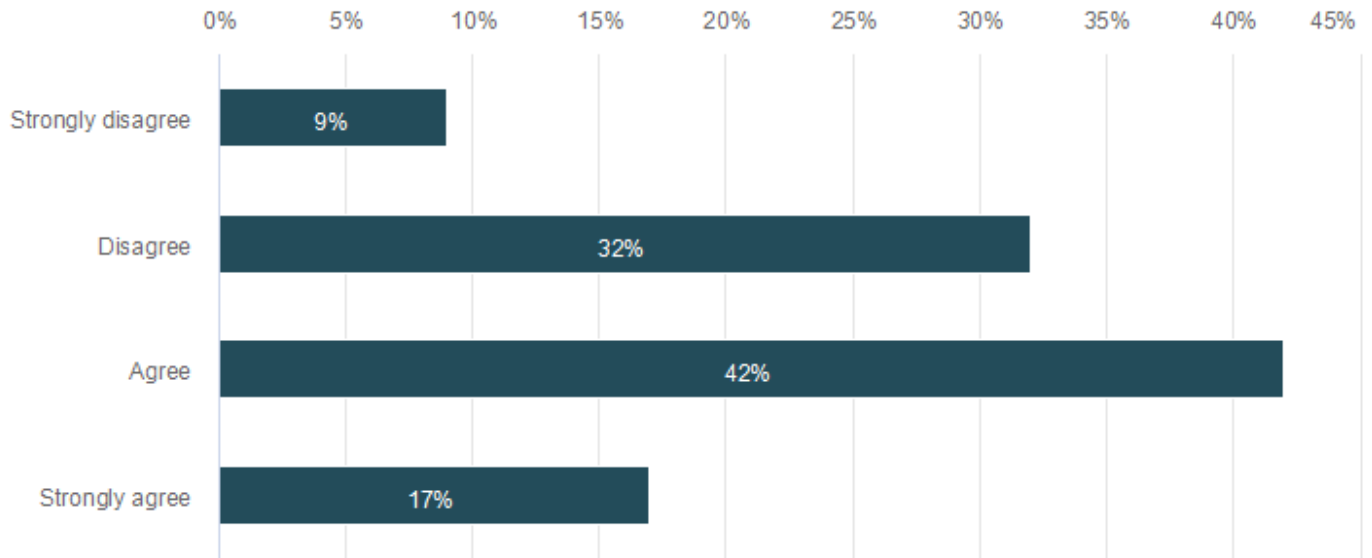


	n	Percent
--	---	---------

Strongly disagree	15	25.4%
Disagree	23	39.0%
Agree	14	23.7%
Strongly agree	7	11.9%

16. Based on online content shared, SMEs (Small and Medium Size Enterprises) brand is dependable and have a guarantee:

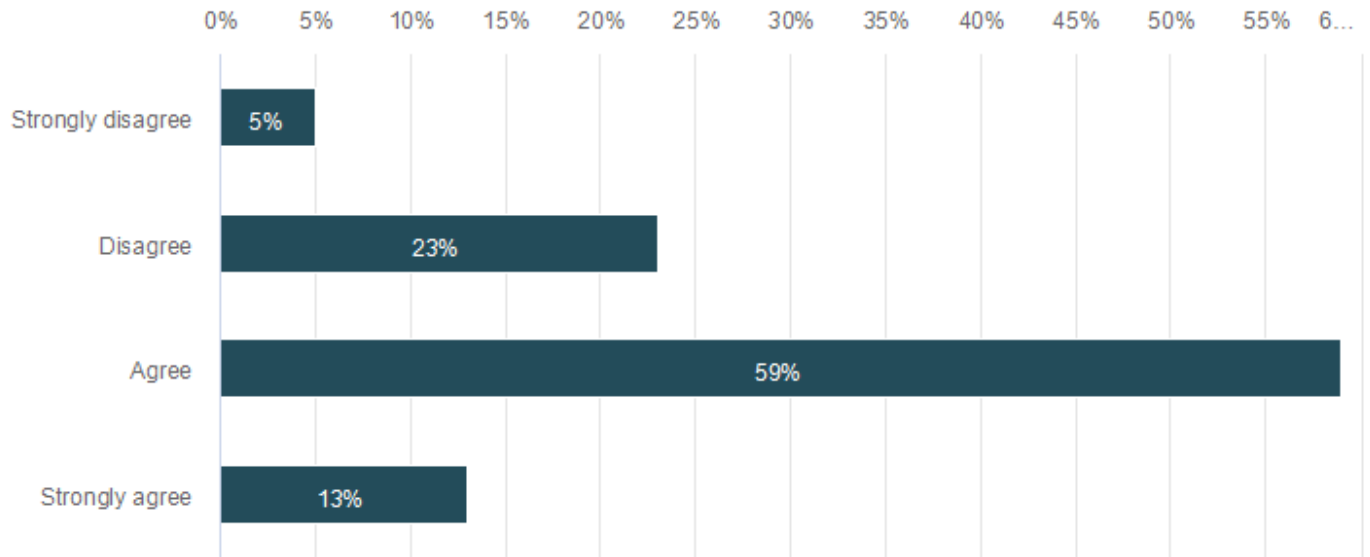
Number of respondents: 59



	n	Percent
Strongly disagree	5	8.5%
Disagree	19	32.2%
Agree	25	42.4%
Strongly agree	10	16.9%

17. Based on online content shared, that brand is very famous in the industry and I have confidence in the brand:

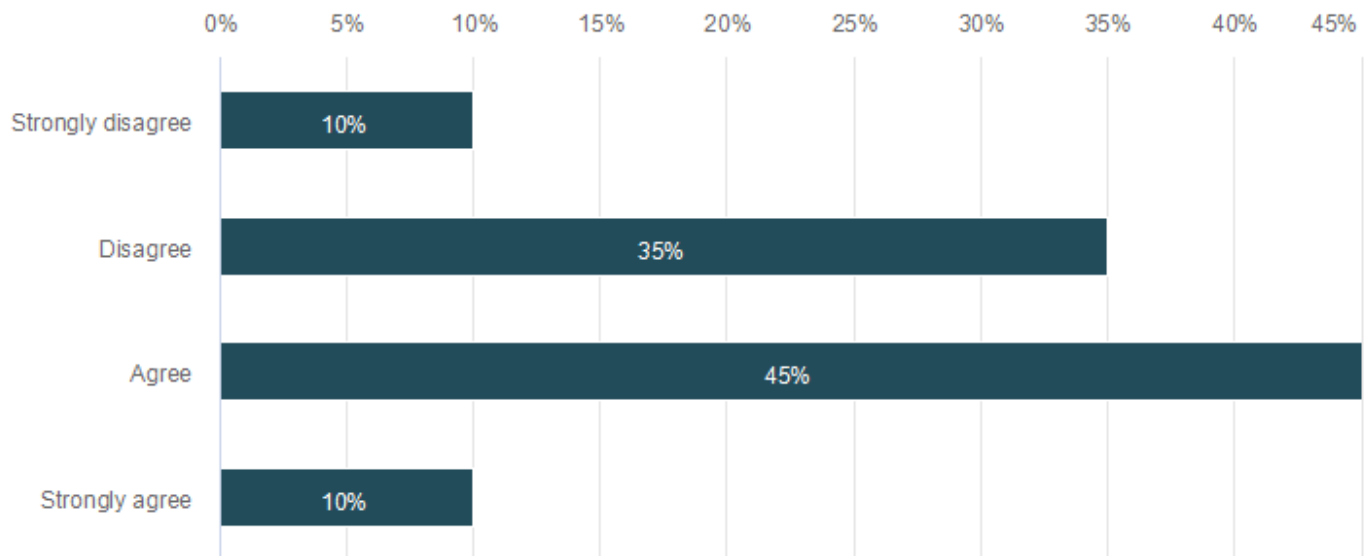
Number of respondents: 61



	n	Percent
Strongly disagree	3	4.9%
Disagree	14	23.0%
Agree	36	59.0%
Strongly agree	8	13.1%

18. Based on online content shared, products and service qualities of the SMEs brand are stable and sincerely concern my needs and rights:

Number of respondents: 60

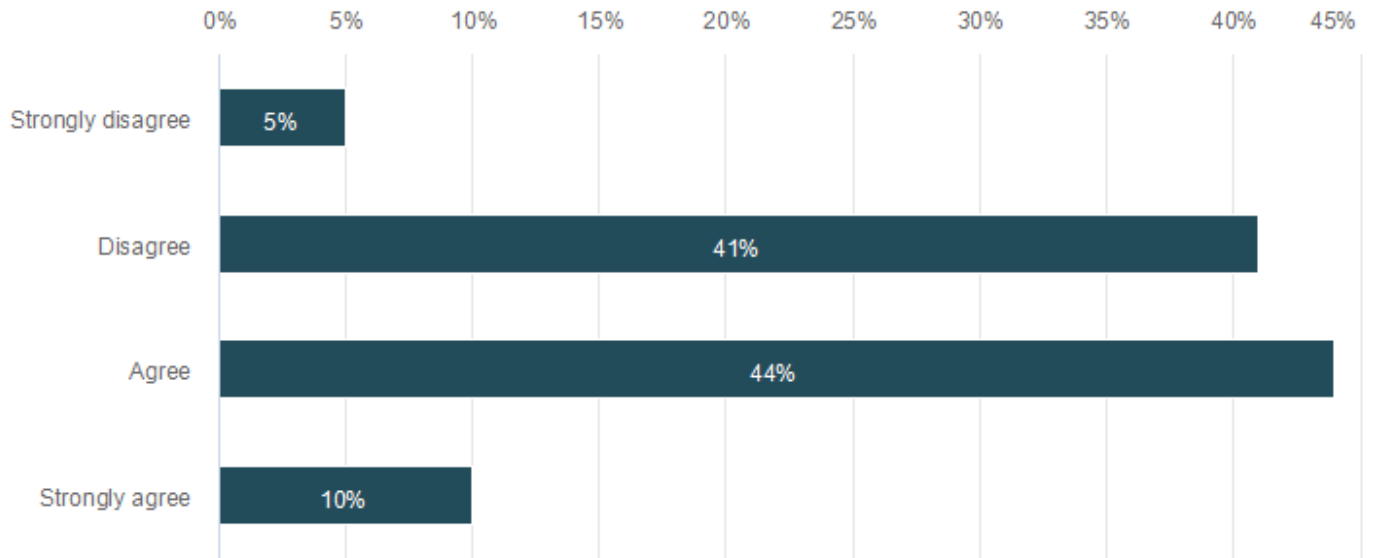


	n	Percent
--	---	---------

Strongly disagree	6	10.0%
Disagree	21	35.0%
Agree	27	45.0%
Strongly agree	6	10.0%

19. I consider the SMEs brand as my first choice in the industry and intend to buy it in the near future:

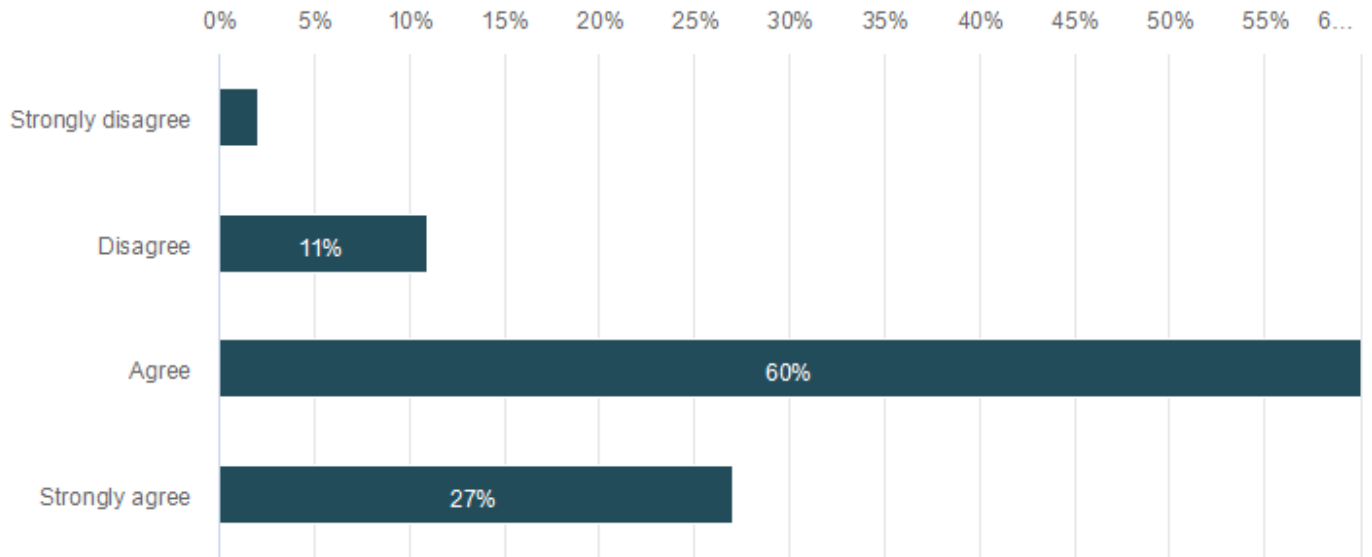
Number of respondents: 61



	n	Percent
Strongly disagree	3	4.9%
Disagree	25	41.0%
Agree	27	44.3%
Strongly agree	6	9.8%

20. I will continue to be a loyal customer for a brand:

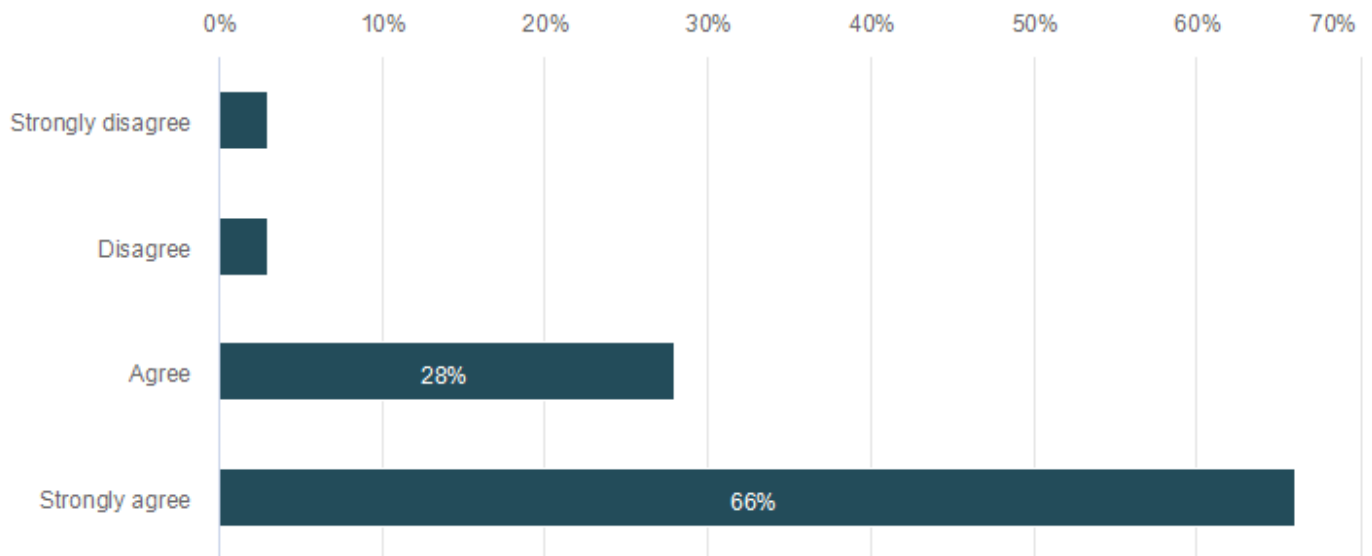
Number of respondents: 60



	n	Percent
Strongly disagree	1	1.6%
Disagree	7	11.7%
Agree	36	60.0%
Strongly agree	16	26.7%

21. Based on social media advertising I believe the SMEs brand can attract more customers:

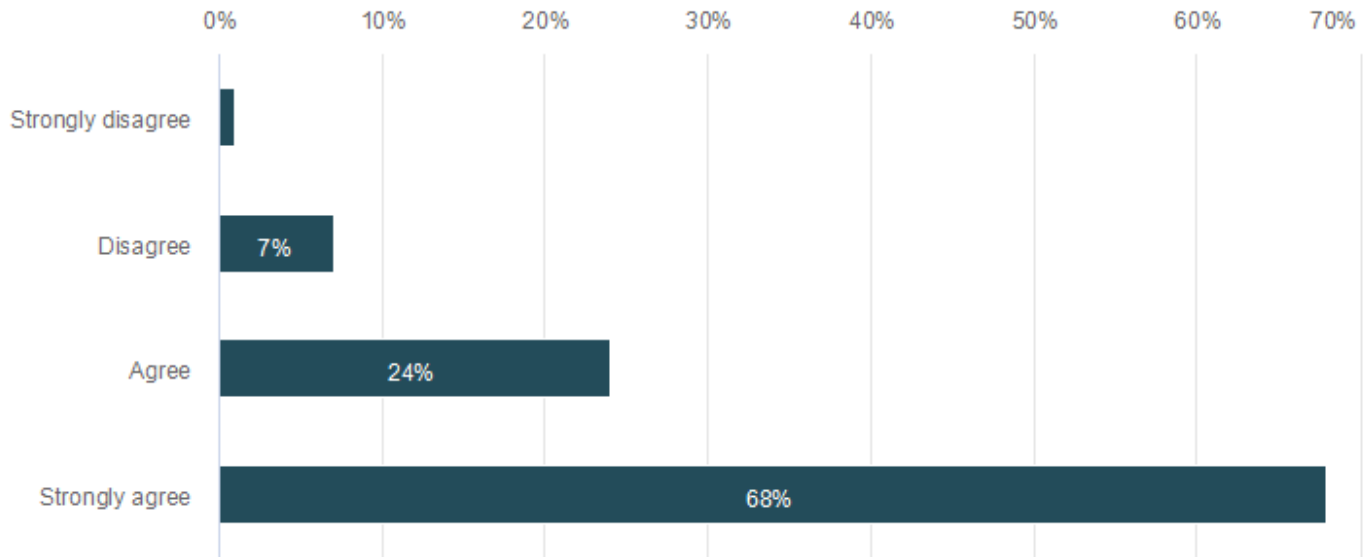
Number of respondents: 61



	n	Percent
Strongly disagree	2	3.3%
Disagree	2	3.3%
Agree	17	27.8%
Strongly agree	40	65.6%

22. Social media advertising helps me to be aware and remember new products and services offered by the SMEs brand:

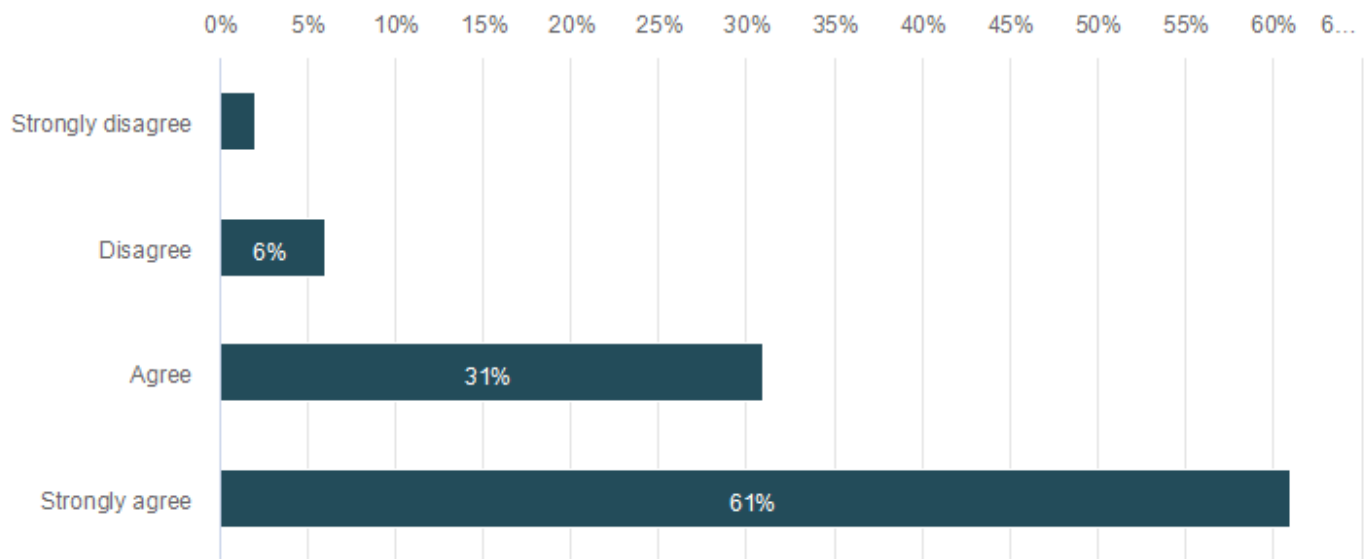
Number of respondents: 59



	n	Percent
Strongly disagree	1	1.7%
Disagree	4	6.8%
Agree	14	23.7%
Strongly agree	40	67.8%

23. Social media advertising of brands is quickly recognised by people other than adverts through other Medias:

Number of respondents: 62



	n	Percent
Strongly disagree	1	1.6%
Disagree	4	6.5%
Agree	19	30.6%
Strongly agree	38	61.3%

APPENDIX THREE**LINK TO QUESTIONNAIRE**

[HTTPS://LINK.WEBPOLSURVEYS.COM/S/2226AB7B9EAFD7C3](https://link.webpolsurveys.com/S/2226AB7B9EAFD7C3)