



SEINÄJOEN AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU
SEINÄJOKI UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

Katelyne Aluoch

Social Media as a Promotional Tool for Products and Services

A Case of Small Businesses in Kenya and Finland

Thesis

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Thesis Abstract

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Author: Katelyne Aluoch

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This thesis focuses on the topic of social media marketing. The general objective was to compare Finland and Kenya in terms of how small businesses in the two countries use social media as a promotional tool for their products and services.

The research methods employed to achieve the objective were comparative research methodology and qualitative content analysis. The research was conducted to answer three research questions: what are the similarities in the usage of social media as a promotional tool for products and services among small businesses in Kenya and Finland? What are the differences in the usage of social media as a promotional tool for products and services among small businesses in Kenya and Finland? To what extent does social media marketing campaigns influence the purchase decisions of customers of small businesses in Kenya and Finland?

The findings of this study were presented in three subsections as per the research objectives. The findings of the first objective were presented using three themes: social media promotes e-commerce, social media promotes influencer marketing, and social media promotes educational content. The findings of the second objective were presented using two themes: different social media platforms, and different SMM strategies. The findings of the third objective were presented according to the extent to which SMM campaigns influence purchase decisions of customers of small businesses in Kenya and Finland.

¹ Keywords: social media marketing, small business, consumer purchase decision

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Terms and Abbreviations

SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
SMM	Social Media Marketing
TAM	Technology Acceptance Model
DOI	Diffusion of Innovation
PU	Perceived Usefulness
PEU	Perceived Ease of Use

1 INTRODUCTION

Social media marketing (SMM), which is synonymous to e-marketing and digital marketing) refers to the use of various online-based social networks with the aim of sharing information with users so that a company can build awareness about its brand, boost sales, and drive website traffic (Evans, Bratton & McKee, 2021). SMM is an emerging and rapidly growing discipline within marketing and brand awareness. Among existing social media networks, LinkedIn is the pioneer since it was founded in 2002; followed by Facebook (2004), YouTube (2005), Twitter (2006), Tumblr (2007), Instagram (2010), Pinterest (2010), TikTok (2017), Clubhouse (2020) (see Figure 1). As at 2022, there were 4.7 billion active social media users. Companies make use of social media platforms to offer their customers a personalized online experience. This ensures companies make adequate measurements regarding effectiveness: from consumer behaviours to taking the ideal actions and adequate outcome paths, to recording desired results (Dwivedi et al., 2015).

According to a study carried out by Díaz and Koutra (2013), social media networks continue to dominate companies' communication channel. The authors state that corporate websites constitute about 90% of communications followed by Facebook (73%), LinkedIn (46%), and Twitter (42%). The larger percentage of people aged 22-50 years old own at least one social media account, which makes them viable targets to digital ads from companies that advertise through the platforms. With more people signing up on social media, companies are leveraging on this growth to increase brand awareness and reach.

Today, many consumers make use of reviews on social media platforms when making purchase decisions, which represents the overall equity of the brand (Simmons, 2007). Social media advertising offers companies and businesses affordable, unlimited brand awareness with international customer engagement. Compared to traditional advertising methods like mass media, social media remains significantly cost-effective, offers quality content and unmatched, timely customer engagement. Although it offers numerous benefits, social media is also capable of destroying a brand easily.

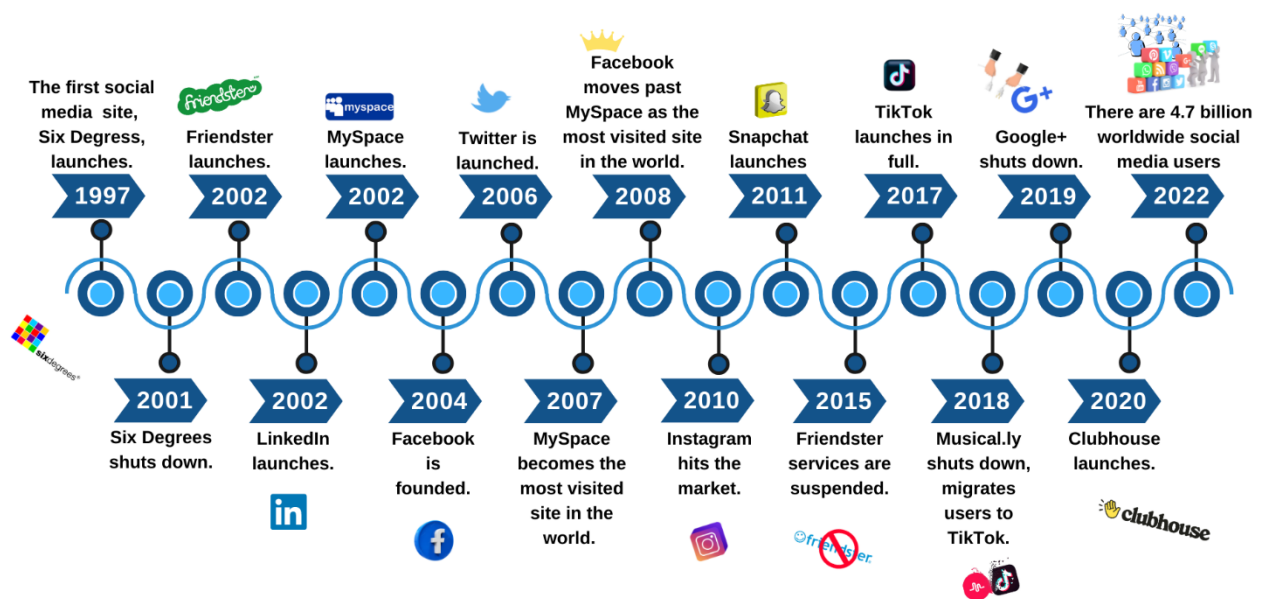


Figure 1: Timeline Launch of Popular Social Media Platforms

According to Constantinides (2014), the popularity of social media has catapulted due to its fast-moving nature, which is one of the unique characteristic that draws many people into using it constantly. With the majority of social media users craving news and latest information about products and services, a number of companies in the modern-day business world today have resorted to creating content and publishing them to various social media platforms. As argued by Bala & Verma (2018), companies that have prioritised the need to use SMM understand are in constant pursuit to enjoy a competitive advantage over their rivals in their respective markets. As such, the companies are maximising the use of social media to listen to both potential and existing customers, and at the same time to learn from them as they map their findings against competitors in the social media universe. With social media playing a key role in raising awareness among users in various target markets, companies continue to devise unique ways of not only differentiating themselves from competitors, but also impressing and attracting customers for long-term profitability.

1.1 Background of the Study

Social media marketing is virtually free (Díaz & Koutra, 2013). This fact alone has enticed many small businesses to adapt it as part of their marketing efforts. As small businesses naturally have lower budget for their marketing activities, social media can help a small business to reach potential customers without investing a lot of money in their marketing efforts. As stated by Jones, Borgman & Ulusoy (2015), the effectiveness of SMM can be monitored and measured. Free social media monitoring applications deliver accurate data in a form that is easy to interpret without being a SMM specialist.

Bigger companies can create social media campaigns that are directed generally to every present and potential customer (Bala & Verma, 2018). They don't need specific information from all of their different target groups to make be successful. Strong brands and well-known products of big multi-cultural companies makes it possible to use same marketing approach among a very diverse group of targets (Cox, 2012). Unlike big companies, smaller businesses need to know their target group. Many small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are operating in their local area. And even if they are planning to expand their business to international markets, it is not going to happen overnight. SMEs don't have big brand awareness among people to help them with their sales. Smaller companies really need to know their target audience, their demographics, psychographics and behavioural aspects. SME companies need to plan and allocate their SMM actions taking these things into consideration (Bala & Verma, 2018).

Cox (2012) argues that over the years, SMEs have been struggling to compete with large companies in terms of invests in research and development, economics of scale or large promotional expenditures. However, since small companies are more flexible within a strategic point of view, they can be more adaptable towards new marketing solutions, especially with regard to SMM (Torzhevskaja 2017). The dynamicity of a small company can be made use of in small company's SMM. When a new marketing trend or a platform in SMM world comes up, the small companies can be first ones to exploit it in their activities as the information flows faster through a small organization and decisions making process is shorter.

While small companies conform and react to changes in their environment faster. They also need to be more open for new opportunities. As stated by Cox (2012), on the contrary to big companies who can lose millions of customers and lots of revenue by taking the wrong step in social media, small companies take a risk of losing their whole business by not trying new things in marketing. Small companies can try out new things and see if they work, and if they don't work they can nimbly move on to something else (Karimi & Naghibi, 2015).

1.2 Research Problem and Research Questions

Today, many companies in different parts of the world have either completely abandoned traditional marketing strategies or complemented them with ads in social networks to promote their products and services. In Finland, this has been fuelled by the rise of many SMM companies such as Volume Nine, Disruptive Advertising, NCrypted Technologies, etc. Leading SMM agencies in Kenya include Growthpad Digital Consulting, Bean Interactive, Squad Digital, Dottsavy Africa, Agency Africa, etc. According to a 2020 report, active social media penetration in Finland was estimated at 60%, meaning, 60% of Finns actively accessed social media (Oksa et al., 2021). In Kenya, the number of social media users increased by 25% between 2020 and 2021 (Kipkoech, 2022). This study will compare Finland and Kenya in terms of how small businesses use social media as a promotional tool for their products and services.

Since SMM is growing in popularity, this thesis aims to help small businesses and start-ups to understand key social media activities that Finns and Kenyans prefer to engage in. This will play a key role in determining the most effective strategy for implementing SMM for promoting various products and services.

The thesis was guided by three research questions:

1. What are the similarities in the usage of social media as a promotional tool for products and services among small businesses in Kenya and Finland?
2. What are the differences in the usage of social media as a promotional tool for products and services among small businesses in Kenya and Finland?
3. To what extent does social media marketing campaigns influence the purchase decisions of customers of small businesses in Kenya and Finland?

1.3 Outline of the Thesis

The thesis is composed of five chapters. Chapter one delves into the background of the study, research problem, and research questions. Chapter two looks into the theoretical framework and literature review. Chapter three discusses the research methodology. Chapter four discusses the findings, and finally, chapter five provides the conclusion and recommendations.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Theoretical Framework

To examine the determinants of SMM adoption by small businesses in Kenya and Finland, this study considers two theories: Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) theory.

2.1.1 Technology Acceptance Model

This research adopts the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to predict and demonstrate the way people and businesses accept and incorporate SMM. TAM was developed by Davis (1989) and states that perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEU) are vital technology adoption predictors. The perceived usefulness (PU) refers to “a person’s degree of belief that the use of a particular system enhances performance. On the other hand, the perceived ease of use (PEU) is “a person’s degree of belief that the use of a particular system is free from effort”. By applying the Technology Acceptance Model the user’s intentions are vital for predicting his/her actual behaviour (Silva, 2015)” Figure 2 shows the TAM model developed by Davis (1989).

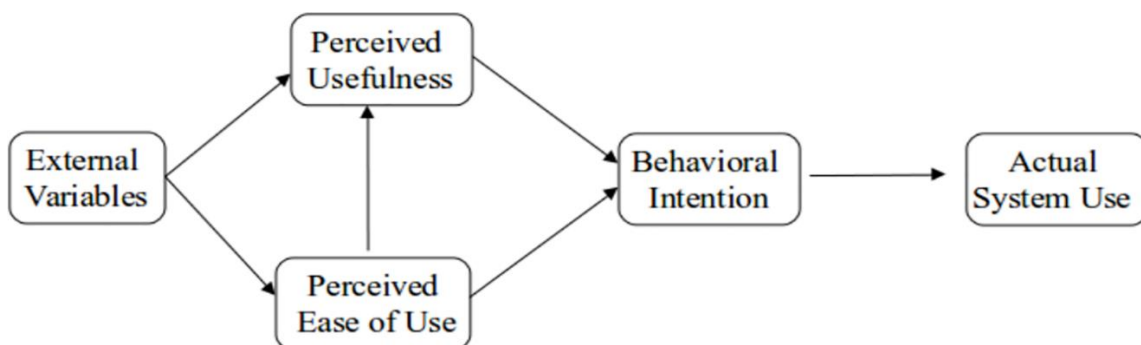


Figure 2: Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989)

In relation to SMM, it is important to examine the impact of indicators such as attitudes, perceived behavioural control, PEU, subjective norms and PU. The scholars discovered that the above mentioned predictors have a positive influence on e-banking. According to Saloum et al (2019), PEU was the primary determinant of the intention to use web banking compared to user's trust and self-efficacy. The scholars also discovered that there exist a relationship between the intention and PEU. If the user perceive the technology useful his/her intention to embrace the innovation increases.

In the context of this study, perceived usefulness describes the perception of small businesses that social media has the potential to promote their products and services to potential and existing customers. Some key features of social media are considered to bring about crucial 'utilitarian value' to various customers. These include the offerings that come with using social media apps as well as the various types of marketing tools that can be used through social media. Generally, when social media users perceive that certain social media platforms have higher 'utilitarian value,' they will also positively perceive its usefulness.

In relation to SMM, perceived usefulness plays a key role in defining the attitudes of small businesses toward deciding to adopt certain social media platforms with the intention of providing valuable information to customers and streamlining their tasks (Austermann and Mertins, 2014). Therefore, it can be concluded that perceived benefits of using SMM pay a regular contribution to the overall perceived usefulness of a product or service. This goes a long way in influencing the attitudes of businesses and the purchase decisions of customers toward adopting specific technologies (Matikiti, 2018).

It is also important to note that one of TAM's perceived advantages is its ability to acquire knowledge of the market with regard to the needs and wants of customers. With reference to the sustainability of small businesses, PEU creates a purposive way of obtaining important information from key stakeholders. Once the information can be accessed, small businesses can manage it efficiently to gain competitive advantage in their respective markets. Social media data can be used to gain customer insight (Alford and Page, 2015).

Austermann and Mertins (2014) state that visual attractiveness and quality is another development that characterise how much an individual perceives and accepts that a social media platform is attractive to the eye. The visual appeal of the platforms relates to how they can influence business decisions. The visual components of the platforms also include the hues utilized and how they spread out on the site. Colours and layouts are immediate framework highlights and system features, which as per TAM can influence purchase decisions use through convenience, pleasure, and usability. Therefore, perceived visual attractiveness positively influences perceived ease of use.

In relation to the promotion of products and services, Matikiti (2013) examines the impact of indicators such as attitudes, perceived behavioural control, PEU, subjective norms and PU on online banking. The scholar discovered that the above mentioned predictors have a positive influence on the promotion of products and services. PEU is the primary determinant of the intention to use social media compared to user's trust and self-efficacy. The scholar also discovered that there exist a relationship between the intention and PEU. If the user perceive the technology useful his/her intention to embrace the innovation increases.

More specifically, customer insights collected through social media can go a long way in helping small business to beef up their product and process innovation. They can use insights such as demographic information of their target customers to come up with a robust SMM strategy. With the ability to access customer insights through social media, small businesses can use this collective intelligence to inform their business decisions in the long term. Through social media marketing, it can be easier to predict and demonstrate why and how people accept and incorporate technological advancements in their daily lives. SMEs can do this by gathering feedback from customers about their products or services. Such insights can help them fine-tune their existing offerings by incorporating innovative ways of making their business more successful.

2.1.2 Diffusion of Innovation Theory

Originally invented in 1962 by E.M. Rogers, the DOI theory explains the speed at which new concepts about a product, process or practices are communicated to a population or spread through a social system (Dearing & Cox, 2018). Diffusion can also be referred to as the process by which community members accepts and adopts an innovation. As explained by Rogers, the diffusion process is influenced by a number of key factors that must be put into consideration when assessing technologies, in this case, social media. These factors include the innovation itself, the medium used to communicate the information, time takes for the technology to diffuse, and the intrinsic nature of the social system.

In relation to DOI theory, it can be argued that the prevalent use of social media has resulted from many instances of decision-making processes, which can be associated with the diffusion of innovation approach. The following five stages of decision-making processes of innovation were described by Rogers (1995).

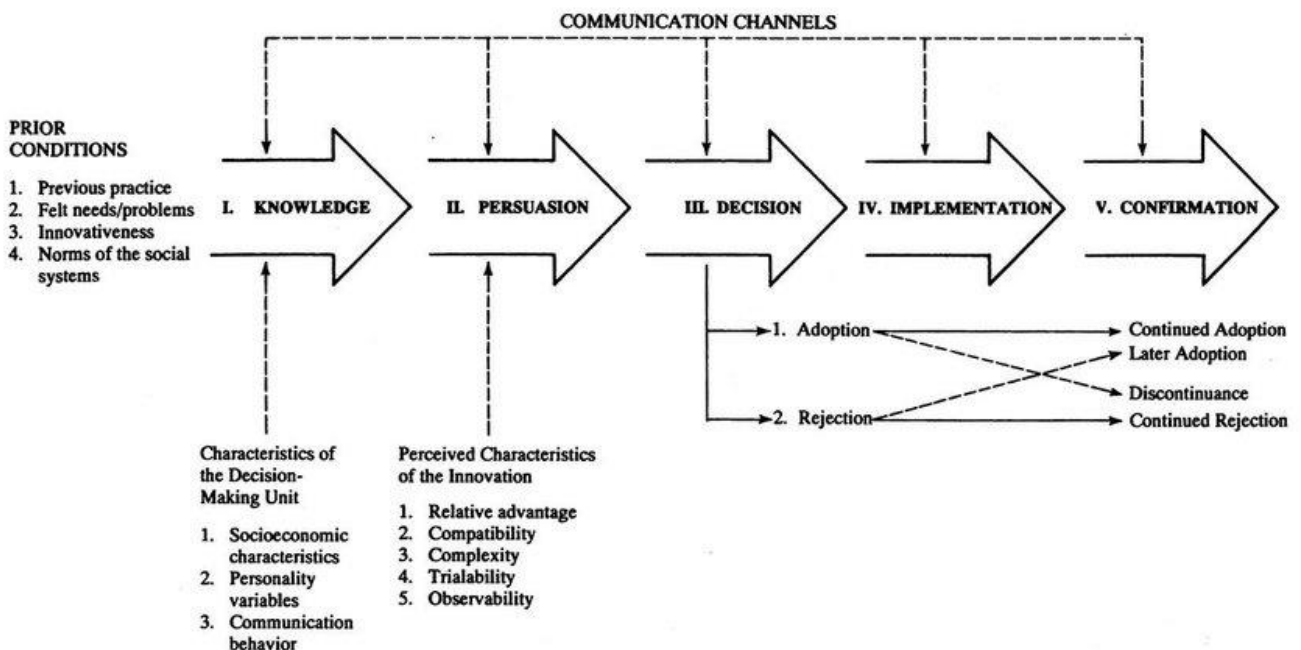


Figure 3: Decision-making process of innovation (Rogers, 1995)

Stage 1: Knowledge

This stage analyses and describes how people familiarise with various social media platforms and their respective technologies, but the information is still fragmented and incomplete.

Stage 2: Persuasion

In this stage, people show that they are interested in a particular social media platforms and their respective technologies because of their familiarity with the innovation.

Stage 3: Decision

This stage is crucial for the continuance use of social media platforms and their respective technologies because people will decide whether to accept or reject it based on their pros and cons.

Stage 4: Implementation

Here, people adopt the social media platforms and their respective technologies and actively seek ways of making it more useful in their daily activities.

Stage 5: Confirmation

This stage is crucial in the context of the continuance use of social media platforms and their respective SMM campaigns. Here, people make the final decision whether to continue or stop using the technology.

It is important to note that every stage is a prerequisite for the next stage. To put this into perspective, the “persuasion” stage comes after the “knowledge” stage because the attitudes of social media users (in this case small businesses and their customers) toward various platforms are shaped after becoming aware of the innovation. The “decision stage”

allows social media users to make an informed choice of either accepting or rejecting various products or services as advertised on social media platforms. The implementation stage enables social media users to put innovation into practical use, while the confirmation stage allows them to reinforce their decision to adopt or reject the innovation (Kaminski, 2011).

As explained by Dearing & Cox (2018), DOI theory describes the extent to which users of a particular technology responds to and accepts a new idea with the intention of exploring its adoption rate. As such, a number of perceived characteristics of an innovation in the DOI theory can be used to identify and explain why small businesses in Finland and Kenya make the decision to continue using (adopt or reject) SMM to promote their products and services. They include relative advantage, technology compatibility, the complexity of technology, observability of innovation, and trialability of technology as explained below:

1. Relative Advantage

Relative advantage refers to the extent to which users of certain technologies perceive that the innovation is better in improving performance than its predecessors. Relative advantage is crucial in showing the extent to which the SMM has improved over the years using key innovations. This is important in analysing the advantages that the current version has over an older versions. The benefits that come with relative advantage can be assessed in terms of social prestige, economic profitability, and the levels of adoption.

2. Technology Compatibility

Compatibility is defined as the extent to which users of certain technologies perceive that the innovation keeps up with their past experiences, existing value, and desires of would-be adopters. In the context of SMM, small businesses that adopt certain platforms because they are more compatible with their situation usually become potential adopters. Compatibility will indicate how the SMM innovations are compatible with the day-to-day lives of users because it is considered familiar.

3. Complexity

Complexity is defined as the extent to which users find certain technologies easy or difficult to understand and use. To put this into perspective, it is important to note that an innovation's complexity is negatively related to its adoption rate. Precisely, this indicates the extent to which SMM innovations in Finland and Kenya are simple or complex to use. Simplicity and complexity seek order through subtraction and addition respectively. For instance, if a social media platform demands a lot of effort for continuance use, people are more likely to reject it.

4. Trialability

Trialability refers to the extent to which an innovation can be experimented with as soon as it is available so that users can make informed decisions before adopting it. In other words, trialability means that social media users can try out different platforms in order to realize how it works under specific circumstances. This perceived characteristic is used to show the extent to which small businesses are able to try or experiment with the various social media platforms using the least effort.

5. Observability

Observability refers to the extent to which an innovation is visible to a number of potential users. This perceived characteristic goes a long way in assessing the degree to which various ideas can be observed and transferred to others. In the context of SMM, small businesses can use observability to evaluate the rate of adoption of various social media platforms as perceived by members of a social system.

2.2 Literature Review

2.2.1 Social Media Marketing

Social media refers to the online means of communication among various people, communities and organizations from all walks of life interacting over the internet through technological tools and applications (Broekemier, Chau & Seshadri, 2015). In the modern-day business world, social media remains as one of the most prominent communication and advertising platforms for both small-scale and large-scale businesses. SMM is the practice of expanding online marketing activities to interact with audiences in different target markets on a personal level. SMM is an emerging and rapidly growing discipline within marketing and brand awareness. Companies make use of social media platforms to offer their customers a personalized online experience. This ensures that companies make adequate measurements regarding effectiveness from consumer behaviours, to taking the ideal actions and adequate outcome paths, to recording desired results (Roberts & Zahay 2013). Social media has become more prominent and widely used than traditional media because it provides a myriad of effective ways for influencing consumer behaviour.

According to Roberts & Zahay (2013), SMM has been instrumental in helping small businesses connect with their consumers effortlessly and cost-effectively thus making them make more informed decisions with instantaneous information and constant feedback. The increasing acceptance of social media in the modern-day business world has driven small business into integrate social media tools including blogs, forums, instant messaging, location based services, podcasts, tags, RSS, Web chats, and widgets in their business model. According to a study carried out by Karimi & Naghibi (2015), social media networks continue to dominate companies' communication channel. The authors state that corporate websites constitute about 90% of communications followed by Facebook (73%), LinkedIn (46%), and Twitter (42%). The larger percentage of people aged 22-50 years old own at least one social media account, which makes them viable targets for ads from companies that advertise through social media. With more people signing up on social media, companies are leveraging on this growth to increase brand awareness and reach.

SMM is considered to play a key role in integrated marketing communication not only because it has the potential to reach millions of customers, but also because it is a rich source of valuable marketing insights. While mass media is predominantly a one-way communication channel, social media constantly provides a two-way communication process between brands and their customers (Karimi & Naghibi, 2015). As explained by Cox (2012), social media is the digital form of word-of-mouth, and it plays a key role in revitalizing traditional forms of marketing. Unlike mass media, SMM goes the extra mile in the materializing, storing and retrieving opinions of various customers irrespective of their target markets. However, it is important to note that one of the major drawback of social media is catalysed by the anonymous and short-lived nature of Internet, which usually makes it challenging to interpret and manage its content (Cox, 2012).

Over the past two decades, the increased usage of social media has been catapulted by the fact that it effortlessly enables individuals to socialise and share opinions in an entertaining and cost-efficient manner (Alford & Page, 2015). Such ground-breaking characteristics of social media created a solid foundation for a number of modern-day businesses to build a massive network of communities over a very short period. Evans, Bratton & McKee (2021) argues that many businesses readily adopt social media because they have realised that it has the potential to build brand awareness. A number of SMM tools are currently being used by businesses to conduct in-depth research, solicit for customer opinions, drive website traffic, increase customer base, enhance brand credibility, and spread key messages virally, among others.

To ensure that social media brings about desired results, businesses must be willing to constantly engage with their target customers even if it may take a couple of years. Gretzel & Yoo (2014) contends that compared to traditional forms of marketing campaigns, SMM is more cost-effective from the start. Since the social media universe is constantly changing especially with algorithms and audiences, every business owner must be willing to implement a wide range of experimental approaches until they achieve their desired goals. The marketing campaigns must have clear objectives with clear strategic goals.

2.2.2 Marketing in Small Businesses

Generally, the term 'small business' or 'small-scale enterprises' does not have a universally accepted definition. While many scholars have attempted to describe the term using benchmarks including number of employees, value of assets, and sales volume, mainstream scholarly literature has adopted the definition provided by the European Commission. According to their definition, SMEs are small businesses that employ less than 250 people and have a yearly turnover of up to EUR 50 million (Cox, 2012). All over the world, small businesses play a key role in the economic prosperity of various countries. Not only are they important in creating employment opportunities, but they also contribute to a large proportion of gross domestic products (GDP) of many countries and regions.

From a perspective of small businesses, marketing takes account of finding effective ways to inform both potential and existing customers about the brand, products and services and at the same time to build and retain long term customer relationships (Nakara, Benmoussa & Jaouen, 2012). With the advent of social media, small businesses have numerous marketing opportunities. In addition to their personal networks, small business owners and managers can make the most of networks of their suppliers, customers, and investors to promote their products and services. Word-of-mouth marketing is one of the ways that small businesses can use to solicit for recommendations for new customers. In the context of small businesses, networking is broadly mentioned as an important activity during their establishment, growth and development (Walsh & Lipinski (2009). Their small size gives them a competitive edge over large firms, which makes it effortless to create and maintain an interpersonal relationship with potential and existing customers. This enables small businesses to exploit a number of networking and marketing opportunities available (Rosokhata et al., 2021).

When promoting their brand, small businesses face a number of challenges. These include insufficient funds, lack of time, lack of online presence, inconsistent marketing campaigns, limited content, and poor digital strategy, among others. As argued by Upadana & Pramudana (2020), SMM is one of the leading solutions to the marketing challenges. This is because SMM allows small businesses to access niche markets and develop long-term

relationships with their customers. Small businesses that have already embraced SMM perform better than their counterparts as they are able to gather a larger customer base, enhance brand recognition, increased profits and sales, and enhance their brand image. As such, small businesses are rapidly embracing SMM because it is more affordable, interactive, and allows integrated marketing (Raki & Shakur, 2018).

Gretzel & Yoo (2014) state that the primary interest of small businesses is to understand how SMM works in such a way that they can use the tools to engage all relevant stakeholders including customers, employees, suppliers, investors, etc. Small businesses are also interested in finding out how social media can enhance their brand by connecting with consumers; setting themselves apart from competitors; reduce costs, boost innovation, and increase revenue. Some of the benefits small businesses have acquired from incorporating SMM include improved consumer satisfaction, ease of sharing information concerning the products and services offered by the institution; interact with clients through comments and provide financial advice and education.

2.2.3 Consumer Purchase Decisions

By definition, purchase decision refers to a process that consumers use with the intention of selecting the right product or services offered by different businesses in the market (Upadana & Pramudana, 2020). As explained by Ansari et al. (2019), the purchase decision journey of every customer begins with their awareness of a brand, a product or a service using information search. This is usually followed by a thorough assessment of the brand, product or service, which helps them consider whether they will make the purchase. When they finally make the purchase, the extent to which they will like it will dictate the level of their loyalty to the brand. Therefore, customer purchase decisions involve perceptive processes that consumers experience (Hanaysha, 2018).

According to Kurniasari & Budiarmo (2018), finding applicable information is significant, because once consumers discover their alternatives and assessed them, they are able to settle on their decision between these alternatives. Consumers pick a product based on the level of appeal it affords them. The decision can be affected by the information gathered from various sources, which makes social media a powerful tool. Rosokhata et al. (2021) viewed that the presentation of information is an essential determining factor in the decision-making process, since it affects the way information search takes place, and the manner in which it can be handled in later stages. By distinguishing the most popular platforms and channels, it helps to identify how consumer's exposure to information and the kind of source they are exposed to. Moreover, individuals attitude is a basic factor associated with the purchase choice. SMM offers companies and businesses affordable, unlimited brand awareness with international customer engagement.

Compared to traditional advertising methods like mass media, social media remains significantly cost-effective, offers quality content and unmatched, timely customer engagement. Although it offers numerous benefits when it comes to influencing customer purchase decisions, social media is also capable of destroying a brand easily. As argued by Court et al., (2010), numerous individuals and special interest groups use social media to start anti-brand campaigns and forge brand protests when concerns arise. Therefore, online brand reputation can be sustained through vigorous monitoring of its online health and status. However, several limitations exist regarding content creation, measurement and interpretation of social media insights as well as customer engagement. These factors limit social media's potential not only as a promotional tool for product and services, but also as an influence of consumer purchase decisions across all markets (Upadana & Pramudana, 2020).

A buyer's choice accomplishes a certain purpose or goals and is crucial in many consumer behaviour theories. Motivation influences one's behaviour because individuals make choices continually based on intensity and the capacity allocations on a certain activity (Baxendale, Macdonald & Wilson, 2015). Motivation can be defined in different stages of the purchase decision process and is directly related to the need. Therefore, brands have

to reinforce a need in the buyer to develop and sustain a purchase motivation and interest in the product in order to encourage consumers to buy their products and increase sales.

Since customers are currently bombarded with a lot of information, they focus on a number of factors including price, perceived risk, past experience with the product, and the information presented to them before making their decision (Peppard and Butler, 1998). Court et al. (2009) described the consumer's purchase decision journey as "The Purchasing Funnel", which consists of five stages as shown in figure 4.

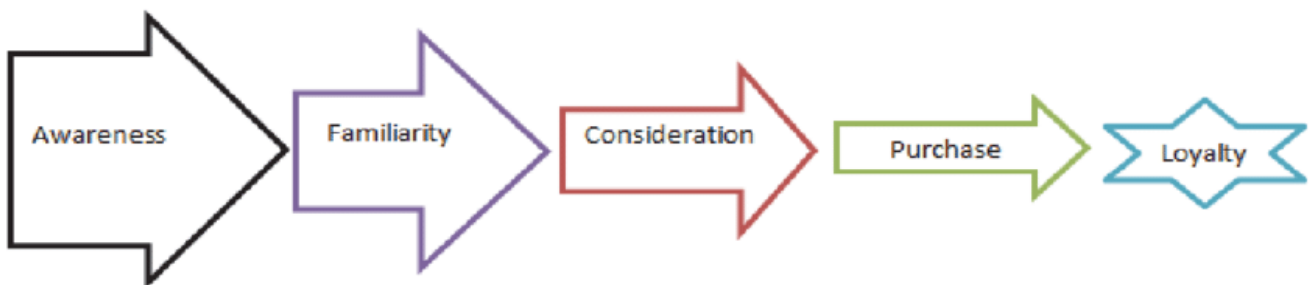


Figure 4: The Purchasing Funnel (Court et al., 2009)

Stage1 – Awareness

In this stage, consumers become aware of the problem or rather, they recognise that they have a problem that require immediate solution "awareness" or problem recognition. According to Butler & Peppard (1998), this stage prompts the consumer to kick start his or her purchase journey because it initiates all activities in the next stages. The awareness stage helps consumers understand the gap between their present state and their preferred state.

In the context of SMM, small businesses can make the most of this stage by using social media to raise brand awareness among their target customers. In this way, they will be able to lure them into purchasing specific products and services from their brand in order to fulfil the customer's desires. To ensure they effectively accomplish this, small business can incorporate various elements of the marketing mix in their social media campaigns. This will not only build long lasting relationships, but also ensure long-term customer loyalty.

Stage 2 – Familiarity

As stated by Butler & Peppard (1998), the main activity in the familiarity stage is information search. This is when customers who are already aware of their problems make a decision to know more about various potential products and services that can provide the desired solution. Court et al. (2009) stated that customers can carry out information search either internally or externally. Customers who carry out an internal search usually rely on their past experience with the products or services of a particular brand. In contrast, customers who carry out an external search usually rely on information from a number of external sources, such as mass media before making a knowledgeable purchasing decision (Lamb, Hair & McDaniel, 2012).

In the context of small businesses, the role of SMM goes a long way in ensuring that potential customers build a positive relationship with the brand. This can be achieved by providing sufficient information in their social media campaigns using various elements of the marketing mix including product and price. Social media can be instrumental in providing relevant information that develop customer loyalty and trust in the brand.

Stage 3 – Consideration

Customers who successfully conduct information search and become familiar with a brand's products or services usually come up with a list of potential brands to purchase from. According to Lamb, Hair & McDaniel (2012) the short list is called the "consideration set". Consumers usually evaluate the relative importance of every brand's attributes by making trade-offs of each at various levels. Traditional sources of information that qualify for the evaluation take account of past experiences, word of mouth (WOM) and consumer groups (Butler & Peppard, 1998).

In the context of small businesses, SMM can provide positive WOM by seeking to develop positive references from other consumers online. Potential customers would consider these references and in turn create a positive influence on their purchase decisions. The role of SMM is to influence the emotions of a number of customers, which goes a long way in

persuading them to purchase the right products or services that will solve their problems. Therefore, social media marketers for small businesses need to understand the factors that persuade the minds, hearts, and pockets of all potential customers.

Stage 4 – Purchase

Once customers evaluate the list of potential brands that they consider purchasing from, this stage involves making the actual decision to purchase from their most preferred brand (Santos & Gonçalves, 2021). To come up with the best purchase decision, customers not only consider internal variables, but also external variables. According to Butler & Peppard, (1998), making the decision to buy from a brand over the internet requires tactical knowledge about the brand. In the context of small businesses, SMM can be used to ensure that the brand's products and services are not restricted to point of sale. They can use social media to reach out to potential customers and making them aware of a number of distribution channels where the brand offers its products and services.

Stage 5 – Loyalty and post-purchase behaviour

Once the customers have made their purchase, it is important for the brand to gather feedback. In this stage, the brand is mandated to respond to customer comments, queries and suggestions based on their various experiences after making the purchase (Butler & Peppard, 1998). The feedback usually touch on every stage of the purchasing funnel in order to determine the extent to which their expectations were met. In the context of small businesses, SMM campaigns can be developed to engage customers based on their experience on the whole purchasing experience. This stage can be considered an after sales service, as it plays a key role of supporting ongoing communications with the intention of building long-term relationship between customers and the brand (Enyinda et al., 2020).

3 METHODOLOGY

The research methodology focuses on comparing SMM among small businesses in Finland and Kenya. The study used both comparative research methodology and qualitative content analysis. The comparative method was used because it helped understand the extent to which businesses in both Kenya and Finland use social media as a promotional tool for products and services. The researcher then used quantitative content analysis to condense the collected data into themes with reference to opinions and interpretations of various researchers from past studies about SMM in both countries. As stated by Mayring (2004), content analysis validates the true nature of the collected data.

3.1 Comparative Research Methodology

This study used comparative research methodology to compare how small businesses use social media in Finland and Kenya. As explained by Esser & Vliegenthart (2017), this methodology helps researcher to identify patterns of similarities and differences in a phenomenon, which can be used to describe change and continuity. It is important to note that one of the biggest challenge encountered during comparative research is that countries define the characteristics of various elements differently. In this study, social media strategies used by small businesses in both Finland and Kenya were compared to deduce meaningful conclusions. The historical perspective of social media usage in both countries was also an essential component of the detailed description.

3.2 Qualitative Content Analysis

This researcher conducted a thorough qualitative analysis of secondary data from different sources. Qualitative content analysis condenses collected data with reference to opinions and interpretations of various researchers from past studies. The researcher used the process of inductive reasoning to come up with themes through a careful analysis and continuous assessment of secondary data. The qualitative content analysis of collected literature pertaining to SMM among small business in Kenya and Finland was conducted.

The researcher thoroughly analysed books, articles journals, and academic paper in order to find, describe and organise key ideas and themes and patterns. The process called for a systematic analysis approach that goes a long way in comprehensively examining data and rationally interpreting the findings. With reference to the research objectives in this study, data was collected by carefully selecting 'relevant' articles that were instrumental in thematic analysis of findings.

Six key steps were used to conduct the thematic analysis as outlined by Sodhi and Tang (2018). They include (1) familiarization with the corpus of 'data'; (2) coming up with preliminary data codes; (3) searching for key themes; (4) conducting a thorough review of the identified themes; (5) naming and describing the identified themes; and (6) generating the final report. The following five academic research websites were used to gather journals: EBSCO, Google Books, Google Scholar, JSTOR and ResearchGate. The researcher used the five academic websites not only because they contained journals with relevant data, but also because they have a filtering feature for classifying various publication as per their year.

The filtering feature was instrumental in helping the researcher to sift out various academic journals and publications relevant to the study. All the five academic research websites have a patented algorithm that ranks published articles as per the authors' names; they year of publication, and the frequency at which other scholars have cited them in various parts of the world.

The researcher conducted the search in each of the academic research sources by entering the keywords 'social media', 'social media marketing', 'small businesses', 'SMEs' or 'small and medium enterprises' as well as 'Finland', and 'Kenya' in the search box. Since the patented algorithm of each academic research website ranks articles in relation to their popularity and importance, the researcher selected those ranked higher.

The researcher systematically assessed the articles in accordance with their relevance. This was done by thoroughly skimming through each of the publication from the preliminary pages to the last page. During the process, the researcher discarded publications with content that were considered irrelevant to the study. In addition, articles the researcher also

disregarded publications that were ranked too low by the search engine, meaning they had not been cited by many researchers in various parts of the world.

For this systematic review, inclusion-exclusion criteria was that the publication was empirical; it focused on the social media and small businesses in Finland and/or Kenya, and it was published in the last 10 years. Using the selection criteria explained above, 27 sources were selected by the researcher for thematic analysis as shown in Appendix 1.

4 FINDINGS

4.1 Similarities in Social Media Usage among Small Businesses in Kenya and Finland

The following three themes were developed after exploring similarities in the usage of social media as a promotional tool for products and services among small businesses in Kenya and Finland.

4.1.1 Social Media Promotes E-Commerce

The study found that in both Kenya and Finland, a number of small businesses use social media for e-commerce purposes.

In Finland, e-commerce has developed quickly in the past decade thanks to increased internet access, which leads to increased social media usage. The extent of Internet access popularity in Finland provides a good foundation for small businesses to do e-commerce. A study by Abed, Dwivedi & Williams (2015) revealed that in Finland, the percentage of small businesses using social media for e-commerce purposes rose from 63 percent in 2010 to 72 percent in 2014. Recent statistics according to Peltola (2022) revealed that the recent Covid-19 pandemic accelerated e-commerce development in Finland, with many small businesses starting from scratch and doing it 100 percent in-house since 2020. The major e-commerce trends in Finland according to Saarijärvi et al. (2018) include the integration of social media with e-commerce, e-commerce businesses using cloud services, and the rapid use of e-commerce applications in mobile devices, such as smartphones and tablets.

In Kenya, the proportion of small businesses using social media for e-commerce now constitutes about 25-30 percent of total retail sales (Chebichiy & Odhiambo, 2020). While most of the SMEs have adopted to e-commerce, only a handful have fully implemented it in all their business models (Achiando, 2019). The largest e-commerce retailer, Jumia Kenya, uses social media to sell more than 30 percent of its specialty products, such as designer clothing, luxury watches, electronics, mobile phones, and exotic perfumes. Their products

can be accessed online on their social media accounts. The company also allows various kinds of payments through their websites that are integrated with their social media pages. The payment methods include Mpesa, Visa and/or MasterCard (Kimana, 2020). While other small businesses continue to use social media for e-commerce purposes, they experience direct and indirect costs, such as the cost of realigning external and internal business processes, training employees, and managing the global work force (Achiando, 2019).

4.1.2 Social Media Promotes Influencer Marketing

According to the findings, small businesses in both Finland and Kenya rely on social media influencers to market their products and services.

In Finland, a study by Biaudet (2017) revealed that many consumers spend time on social media not only because they find it easily accessible through social media influencers, but also because SMM is not as disbelieving as brand-generated advertising. More than 70% of small businesses surveyed said that they rely more on social media influencers to spread awareness about their brand as well as newly launched products and services. In another study conducted by Kanjo (2018), it was revealed that social media influencers are widely used by small business in Finland that are keen to achieve their internationalization goals. The small businesses have found it effective to work together with local influencers who have a huge social media following with the aim of capturing potential customers and expanding their customer base in foreign markets. In addition, the social media influencers play an instrumental role in establishing trust with other stakeholders, such as investors and suppliers in the overseas market. Similar findings were echoed by Vulkko (2021) who also revealed that SMEs in Finland mainly use Instagram and YouTube influencers in their SMM campaigns in order to boost the credibility of their brand.

In Kenya, many SMEs use influencers in the SMM campaigns in order to market their products and services. In a study conducted by Wafula (2022), it was found that SMEs prefer hiring social media influencers who predominantly share video content on leading platforms including Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok. Their preference for video content is

because they are more engaging and interactive compared to texts and photos. Video content is more interactive and engaging. Social media influencers also promote blog posts, podcasts, and even interviews about various products and services. With more emphasis on Instagram, Mwaisaka (2017) explains that Instagram influencers are more popular because of their capacity to popularise small businesses that are new in the market to their followers. With many social media followers eager to imitate celebrities, the influencers have an upper hand in luring them into purchasing from different brands. In a study by Jarrar, Awobamise & Aderibigbe (2020), influencers' main objectives was to provide engaging content to the intended audience; and have a huge social media following.

4.1.3 Social Media Promotes Educational Content

According to the findings, small businesses in Finland and Kenya used SMM strategies to incorporate educational content about their products and services to their followers.

In Finland, owners of small businesses use social media platforms to connect with and engage with potential and existing customers in order to increase their understanding of new products. In a study carried out by Nikula (2017), it was revealed that some small business owner come up with SMM campaigns aimed at educating their followers about their new products. This SMM strategy incorporates topics of interests that go a long way in attracting the right customers from various target markets. The small businesses use a wide range of content including photos, videos, and business news that increase the awareness of their brand as well as the benefits of their products.

In another study conducted by Koironen et al. (2020), it was found that SMM has transformed the way small businesses market their products and interact with their customers in Finland. By marketing to various customers on social media, they are able to retain them in the long term and spread positive messages about their brand to potential customers who are friend of friends to their existing customers. Furthermore, SMM campaigns have enabled small businesses in Finland to reach potential customers in the early stages of the purchasing process. By providing educational content through SMM, they have managed to attract

customers that would have been difficult to reach using traditional methods, such as television, radio and newspapers.

In Kenya, Josee et al. (2014) revealed that owners of small businesses mainly use photos and video content in their SMM campaigns to educate their followers about their products and services. This type of content in play an important role in increasing the interaction among followers as well as with the brand. The study also revealed small business owners and managers use SMM campaigns to educate and spread awareness in various target markets about new products. To put this into perspective, findings by Ndiege (2019) revealed that many small businesses use videos because it stands out as one of the most effective content in their SMM strategy.

4.2 Differences in Social Media Usage among Small Businesses in Kenya and Finland

The following three themes were developed after exploring the differences in the usage of social media as a promotional tool for products and services among small businesses in Kenya and Finland.

4.2.1 Different Social Media Platforms

According to the findings, small businesses in Finland and Kenya predominantly prefer using different social media platforms to market their products and services.

In Finland, many SMEs used Facebook and Instagram to evangelize, motivate, and entertain with stories. In a study conducted by Cartwright, Liu & Raddats (2021), it was revealed that business leaders predominantly used Facebook to engage and connect with their potential customers with the intention of marketing their new products. The findings also revealed that small businesses select specific social media platforms in relation to the demographics of their target audience. For Facebook, the majority of established small businesses use SMM campaigns geared towards a more seasoned population. In addition,

some small business owners cross post to Facebook through Instagram. The same video posts were also posted to YouTube.

In Kenya, a study conducted by Wanyoike & Kithae (2019) found that many SMEs preferred using Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube for their SMM campaigns because it helped them build communities interested in exploring their interests while understanding their competitors' tactics. Social media platforms enabled the SMEs to extend relationships between the brand and their communities by providing member-selected functionality and the ability to impact the consumer buying decision cycle at all points. These findings were echoed by Wilson & Makau (2018) who revealed that SMEs in Kenya use social media to source for high quality products from overseas. In particular, Facebook enabled SMES to better understand foreign products while relating them to existing customer needs, a strategy that helped them build customer loyalty in the long term.

4.2.2 Different Social Media Marketing Strategies

While small businesses in both Kenya and Finland used various social media platforms to connect and engage with followers who are considered potential customers for their various products and services, their marketing strategies were different. In Finland, as reported in a study conducted by Mäki & Toivola (2021), small business owners used social media for targeted marketing activities, capability building, and knowledge sharing. In particular, Facebook and Instagram pages of small businesses engaged in e-commerce reported to have more engagement on Instagram when posting content that focused on targeted marketing activities, capability building, and knowledge sharing. The study concluded that the SMEs preferred Instagram because it had a younger generation of followers.

In Kenya, Silvano & Mbogo (2022) reported that SMEs focused more on using Instagram for their branding campaign and Facebook as the primary selection for their marketing strategies. This finding was echoed by Chepkemoi, Zakayo & Koima (2018) who revealed that

in Kenya, small businesses prefer Facebook for posting photos and videos related to products and services. In addition, the study revealed that Facebook allows customers who follow various brands on social media to share their experiences effortlessly. This leads to improved service delivery and effective attainment of company objectives.

4.3 Influence of Social Media on Customer Purchase Decisions in Kenya and Finland

The findings regarding the extent to which SMM campaigns influence purchase decisions of customers of small businesses are presented in the following subsections. Each subsections presents findings from various researchers in Kenya and Finland.

4.3.1 Finland

In Finland, integrated communications to customers through social media influenced customer purchase decisions in Finland. In a study carried out by Ammirato et al. (2019), it was revealed that SMM campaigns in Finland create unified communications to customers, which influence their purchase decisions. With new communication channels brought about by the advent of and increased use of social media, many small businesses emphasise their marketing messages in SMM campaigns. The study revealed that small businesses in Finland recognize that originally designed SMM campaigns should reflect their physical stores. This is because any discrepancies in the availability of products advertised on social media with those in the physical stores can make customers not only switch to competitors' channels, but also change their buying decisions depending on their needs.

The study also revealed that with the increased use of mobile devices to access different social media platforms, many customers are prone to this opportunistic behaviour. Among the various elements of the marketing mix, price stands out as the key influence for customers to switch to competitors even after reaching their final buying decision. Furthermore,

other factors such as availability of products and service quality play a key role in their purchase decisions.

In Finland, customer purchase decisions through social media campaigns also depend on the age group, with increased social media use occurring among Generation Y or millennials. In a study conducted by Davidavičienė, Meidutė-Kavaliauskienė & Paliulis (2019), it was revealed that the process of creating SMM campaigns to influence customers purchase decisions depends on the factors that influence the decision to buy. Influencing the decisions of Generation Y customers usually required a more in-depth information research compared to other generations because in most cases, they make their own decisions while purchasing the product. Therefore, many small businesses focused on maintaining relations and creating a community that incorporates factors that influence the decision of Generation Y to buy certain products. These include characteristics of a brand, product features, customer features, environment features, etc. It was concluded that small businesses can solve the customer's problem only by properly leading them in the decision-making process to buy.

4.3.2 Kenya

In Kenya, the majority of SMEs heavily rely on SMM due to its potential to provide them with ready market for various products compared to other avenues. According to a study carried out by Wamuyu (2022), it was revealed that at least 87% of small businesses use social media. This study found that SMM provides a rich foundation for assessing customer purchase decisions online. In a similar study carried out by Kibandi & Reuben (2019), it was revealed that social media fulfills the bulk of information needs for the majority of customers in Kenya. This includes blog posts, discussion forums and content posts.

Galan, Lawley & Clements (2015) also contend that when it comes to postgraduate students' decision-making journey, information in social media is no longer asymmetrical since customers can effortlessly find the needed information about various products and services online. The study revealed the key role played by SMM as a unique information hub and

marketplace for brands and their respective customers. Kibandi & Reuben (2019) support this by crediting the importance of social media as a marketing channel that provides brands with an effective way of assessing customer purchase decisions.

In a study conducted by Mwaisaka, (2017), the researcher assess the extent to which social media influenced customer purchase decision in cosmetic industries in Nairobi, Kenya. It was revealed that SMM positively affected customer purchase decisions. This finding revealed that the way consumers make purchase decisions has significantly changed in such a way that users not only use the platforms to communicate with friends and family, but also as an e-commerce platform for making their purchase decisions. As explained by Galan, Lawley & Clements (2015), many customers of small e-commerce businesses consider shopping through social media as more reliable.

In Kenya, research has shown that there is a positive relationship between SMM and consumer buying behaviour in a number of fields. In study conducted by Maina and Afande (2015), it was established that banks that use social media to market their products experience an increase in sales volume. Similarly, Omondi (2017) found that players in the tourism experienced an increase in sales when using SMM campaigns for international advertising in the travel industry. These studies reveal that many potential customers make buying decisions based on social media posts shared by brands or friends. According to Omondi (2017), since profiles of social media users are a representation of themselves, buying decisions is deemed more effective. However, for social media platforms of small businesses that provide e-commerce reviews, profiles do not impact the effectiveness of buying decisions (Achiando, 2019).

4.4 Summary

The findings of this study were presented in three subsections as per the research objectives. The first objective was to explore similarities in the usage of social media as a promotional tool for products and services among small businesses in Kenya and Finland. The findings of were presented using three themes: social media promotes e-commerce, social

media promotes influencer marketing, and social media promotes educational content. The second objective was to explore differences in the usage of social media as a promotional tool for products and services among small businesses in Kenya and Finland. The findings of were presented using two themes: different social media platforms, and different social media marketing strategies. The third objective determined the extent to which social media marketing campaigns influence purchase decisions of customers of small businesses in Kenya and Finland. Each subsection presents findings from various researchers in Kenya and Finland.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The general objective of this thesis was to compare Finland and Kenya in terms of how small businesses in the two countries use social media as a promotional tool for their products and services. This chapter summarizes the findings of the research and states the answers to the research questions.

5.1 Answers to the Research Questions

5.1.1 Similarities in Social Media Usage in Kenya and Finland

The study found that in both Kenya and Finland, a number of small businesses use social media for e-commerce purposes. In Finland, e-commerce has developed quickly in the past decade thanks to increased internet usage and consequently social media usage. In Kenya, the proportion of small businesses using social media for e-commerce now constitutes about 25-30 percent of total retail sales.

Small businesses in both Finland and Kenya also rely on social media influencers to market their products and services. SMEs in Kenya collaborate with rely more on social media influencers to spread awareness about their brand as well as newly launched products and services. The small businesses mainly use Instagram to conduct influencer marketing and work with influencers who are authentically interested in their company. The small business prefer working with influencers who have a catchy social media profile with engaging content that generate leads for various brands.

In both countries, owners of small businesses also use social media influencers to engage with potential and existing customers in order to increase their understanding of new products. They educate their followers using a wide range of content including photos, videos, and business news that increase the awareness of their brand as well as the benefits of their products.

5.1.2 Differences in Social Media Usage in Kenya and Finland

The study found that small businesses in Kenya and Finland use different social media platforms and different social media marketing strategies. In Finland, many SMEs used Facebook and Instagram to evangelize, motivate, and entertain with stories. In Kenya, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube were the most used social networking sites by SMEs because they helped business owners build online communities.

When it comes to marketing strategies, small business owners in Finland used social media for targeted marketing activities, capability building, and knowledge sharing. In Kenya, small businesses prefer Facebook for posting photos and videos related to products and services, which leads to improved service delivery as well as effective attainment of company objectives.

5.1.3 Influence of Social Media on Customer Purchase Decisions in Kenya and Finland

In Finland, customer purchase decisions through social media campaigns depend on the age group, with increased social media use occurring among Generation Y or millennials. As such, SMM campaigns created unified communications to customers, which influenced their purchase decisions. It is also important to conclude that price stands out as the key influence for customers to switch to competitors even after reaching their final buying decision. Furthermore, other factors such as availability of products and service quality play a key role in their purchase decisions.

In Kenya, the way consumers make purchase decisions has drastically changed. Social media users have evolved from using them not only to communicate with friends and family, but also as an e-commerce platform for making their purchase decisions. The largest e-commerce retailer, Jumia Kenya, uses social media to sell more than 30 percent of its specialty products.

5.2 Proposals for Future Research

This thesis compared Finland and Kenya in terms of how small businesses in the two countries use social media as a promotional tool for their products and services. Therefore, there is a need to conduct further studies on various aspects and approaches employed by large corporations in both countries in terms of social media campaigns used. In addition, since the study used a qualitative approach, further studies should focus on quantitative approach because the data would be more straightforward and less prone to subjectivity.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Sources Selected for Thematic Analysis

#	Sources in Finland Context	#	Sources in Kenyan Context
1	Jussila, Kärkkäinen & Aramo-Immonen (2014)	1	Chebichiy & Odhiambo (2020)
2	Abed, Dwivedi & Williams (2015)	2	Wafula (2022)
3	Peltola (2022)	3	Mwaisaka (2017)
4	Saarijärvi et al. (2018)	4	Kimana (2020)
5	Vulkko (2021)	5	Ndiege (2019)
6	Kanjo (2018)	6	Josee et al. (2014)
7	Koiranen et al. (2020)	7	Wanyoike & Kithae (2019)
8	Nikula (2017)	8	Wilson & Makau (2018)
9	Mäki & Toivola (2021)	9	Silvano & Mbogo (2022)
10	Biaudet (2017)	10	Achiando (2019)
11	Ammirato et al. (2019)	11	Jarrar, Awobamise & Aderibigbe (2020)
12	Davidavičienė, Meidutė-Kavaliauskienė & Paliulis (2019),	12	Chepkemoi, Zakayo & Koima (2018)
		13	Kibandi & Reuben (2019)
		14	Galan, Lawley & Clements (2015)
		15	Simiyu, Bonuke & Komen (2020)