The role of Social Media Engagement in Shaping Consumer Buying Patterns: Insights from the Albanian Textile Sector

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Abstract

Given that the textile sector is a key driver of Albania's socio-economic well-being, examining the factors influencing customer decision-making within this sector is crucial. Based on this fact that this study focuses on social media marketing and advertising techniques used by marketers in the textile sector in Albania. The aim of this study is to investigate the impact of the main social media marketing and advertising strategies used in the Albanian textile sector on the purchasing decisions of potential customers.

In this study, a quantitative research design was adopted to systematically examine the research questions. In the data collection process, a structured survey instrument was developed focusing on key variables such as social media usage, marketing strategies and customer purchasing behavior. Data collected from 201 participants were analyzed using SPSS software.

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and correlation methods to investigate the relationships between social media marketing strategies and customer purchasing decisions. This methodological approach was preferred in order to obtain robust and statistically supported findings in line with the research objectives.

Keywords: Social media, marketing, advertising, customer purchasing behavior, textile sector, Albania.

JEL Classification Codes*: M30, M31, M37, M39.

1. Introduction

This article consists of several main sections to comprehensively address the research topic. This introduction section provides general information, main challenges and trends about the textile sector in Albania, social media and marketing-advertising, social media marketing and in textile sector, the research objectives of the study, the research questions and hypotheses of the study.

The second section is about literature review and the third section is about research methodology. The research design, data analysis methods and tools used to evaluate the survey questions are explained. The findings from the survey analysis are interpreted in section four. In the conclusion section, important conclusions and recommendations are shared both for future research and for market experts in the textile sector.

1.1. The textile sector in Albania

1.1.1. The history of the textile sector

The textile sector in Albania has a rich history starting from ancient times with the production of natural fibers such as goat wool, cotton and silk (Hylli et al., 2021).

The textile sector, which made considerable progress during the Ottoman period, played a significant role in the country's economy. During this period, the sector focused more on the production of handmade fabrics. Many Albanian cities were known for their high-quality textiles, and the city of Korçë was especially famous for its carpets and rugs (Gekas, 2007).

After gaining independence in 1912, the sector experienced many difficulties due to political and social changes (Gekas, 2007). The sector had a traditional and low-scale structure between 1912 and 1944, that is, during the pre-communist period. The main activities consisted of the production of basic fabrics for the local market.

During the communist period (1944-1990), the sector entered a period of expansion and modernization. The economy became centralized and state-controlled factories were established. During this period, the sector focused on the production of basic products and raw materials, generally characterized by simplicity, durability and functionality for the local market.

In the early 1990s, with the beginning of privatization and the transition to a market-oriented economy, economic difficulties and instability were experienced in terms of adapting to new conditions. In the post-communist transition period, the main activity was focused on the external transaction regime and exports.

1.1.2. Current conditions and trends of the textile sector

The 21st century has presented many challenges and growth opportunities for the textile sector. While the challenges include obsolete technology, intense competition, infrastructural deficiencies and logistics problems, many opportunities have also emerged for foreign investments and new private enterprises (Hylli et al., 2021).

It has been observed that the Albanian textile sector has made considerable progress in recent years. The findings show that ready-made clothing production is the main segment of the sector and has a successful history of outsourcing, especially since the 1990s (Anamali, Zizi and Shosha, 2015). The textile sector is an important source of employment in major Albanian cities such as Tirana, Durrës and Shkodër, with about 45,000 employees.

The apparel manufacturing, which is known as the "contract manufacturing" sector, has remained to be the most important sector of the textile sector. This sector, in addition to being the most important branch of the textile sector, has a significant impact on the country's economy due to the wide employment opportunities it offers. A large part of the exports is made to European countries thanks to the skilled and cheap labor, strategic geographical location, long-standing experience in the sector, short delivery times and low transportation costs (INSTAT, 2024). The "contract manufacturing" sector is moving towards the Full Production Package and, as a result, deepening the map of cooperating countries beyond Italy and Greece (Kazani, Tomovska, & Jordeva, 2021).

The strategic decisions of manufacturing companies to direct their operations to low-cost countries are mostly influenced by cost advantages, regulatory frameworks and environmental conditions, skilled labor, and emerging supply chain dynamics (Liça & Gashi, 2023).

Between 2020 and 2023, the textile sector in Albania continued to be primarily export oriented. During this period, the sector faced challenges such as the lack of a clear development strategy and the need for new products. However, the interest of foreign investors in the Albanian market

has also created growth opportunities, offering potential for the modernization and development of fabric production.

Currently, the textile sector is one of the main determinants of Albania's socio-economic well-being. This sector in Albania is mostly focused on the clothing manufacturing, which together with the footwear sector represents about 39.6% of the total exports and 40% of the workforce in the sector, thus being one of the main key players of the economic and social welfare of the country. The sector represents about 5.7% of GDP while accounting for about 10.9% of total employment (AIDA, 2024).

1.2. Social media and marketing-advertising

1.2.1. Social media

What is Social Media?

Social media is a variety of online platforms that allow people to connect and communicate, create, share, and interact with shared content (Aichner et al., 2021). Social media is a set of computerized communication channels that allow its users to engage in different social interactions in real time (Bayer, Triệu, & Ellison, 2020). When it comes to social media, the main platforms that come to mind are Facebook (social networking), Instagram (photo sharing), Twitter (microblogging), TikTok (video sharing), YouTube (video sharing).

Demographics of Social Media Usage

A study conducted among American users found that adults over the age of 30 prefer platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and Reddit, while those under the age of 30 use Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok more (Auxier & Anderson, 2021). Demographic factors such as income, education, and age play a vital role in social media usage. It has been observed that higher-income and educated individuals tend to use social media more, while social media usage decreases as age increases (Hruska & Maresova, 2020).

In Albania, it has been observed that individuals between the ages of 25-45 prefer Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube more, while individuals over the age of 45 predominantly use Facebook (Moreover et al., 2022). WhatsApp, which serves more as a communication tool, stands out as the most used application for both the younger generation and adult groups. Netflix and Snapchat were

determined to be the least used platforms in the country. Considering the results of the research on the subject, it was concluded that companies investing in online marketing should use Instagram and YouTube to reach younger generations and Facebook and LinkedIn to target older users.

Social Media and Business

These platforms mentioned in terms of business are the basic platforms that companies use to promote their brands and businesses, and to interact with their customers. Social media has made it possible for businesses and marketers to reach and interact with a wider demographic audience in general (Appel et al., 2020; Zollo et al., 2020). At the same time, it has helped them establish closer relationships with their target audiences by sharing daily on different platforms (Li, Larimo, & Leonidou, 2021). Therefore, understanding and defining the key platforms to create a strong social media presence is of great importance for companies.

Considering that social media has changed the way society connects and communicates on the one hand, and the way businesses conduct and promote their activities on the other, it has basic functions such as socializing and searching for a job for individuals, and interacting with brands and doing business for companies (Aichner et al., 2021).

1.2.2. Social media marketing

Considering the critical role that social media plays in today's way of doing business, how businesses affect customer purchasing decisions through social media marketing is considered a comprehensive area of research. On the one hand, the ever-changing nature of human nature, preferences and needs, and on the other hand, advances in technology make this area both necessary, challenging and attractive for marketers (Appel et al., 2020).

Social media marketing refers to the use of social media sites for the purpose of showcasing services and products. This includes different elements such as content creation, publishing, promotion, community interaction, and User Generated Content (UGC) (Moorthi, 2023). Social media marketing also helps in getting feedback on the implemented marketing strategies. Generally, social media marketing includes five dimensions: word-of-mouth, trend creation, interaction, customization, and entertainment. (Zollo et al., 2020). Social media marketing has

many advantages such as cost, effectiveness, easy adaptability, personalization, unlimited target audience access, and rich content creation (Rrustemi and Jusufi, 2021).

Social media strategy is a strategic plan that plans to use social media as the main marketing tool. It ensures that activities such as content creation, interaction, and advertising work in harmony with each other. This is achieved by analyzing customers' purchasing behavior, how they use social media, what influences their purchasing decisions, how they interact with the brand, and how they transform these interactions into customer loyalty and satisfaction. The biggest challenge for most companies is to combine social media with marketing strategies to communicate and interact with customers correctly and build brand loyalty. Therefore, the main goals of social media strategies include primarily increasing brand awareness and reputation, increasing sales and revenues, and creating a positive brand image. Marketing strategies can be divided into four main categories: social customer relationship management, monitoring strategy, content strategy, and social commerce strategy (Li et al., 2021).

1.2.3. Social media advertising

From a marketing perspective, social media is considered a digital marketing tool that marketers use to communicate with their target audience through advertising (Li et al., 2021). Social media advertising is one of the most important strategies of social media marketing, as a pay-per-click approach that aims to deliver paid advertising to potential customers. Therefore, social media marketing is an effective method for businesses to convey their messages, establish a market presence, increase brand reputation, and gain competitive advantage (Moorthi, 2023).

Advertising has many dimensions that can be used to gain an advantage in terms of marketing. The most important ones can be listed as follows:

- *Informativeness*: The ability to convey the necessary information to the target audience correctly),

- *Entertainment*: The ability to attract attention and increase the attention received),

- *Reliability*: The trust that customers create in the brand),

- *Ease of use*: The wide use and ease of use of social media platforms such as Facebook attract attention and this allows customers to prefer online shopping),

- *Privacy:* Keeping the personal information of people who participate in social media platforms confidential deepens their trust),

- *Content:* Content used by advertisers to attract the attention of potential customers, entertain them and influence their attitudes towards the advertisement.

These advantageous dimensions briefly stated above will contribute to brand success when used correctly, effectively and efficiently (Rehman & Al-Ghazali, 2022).

By using a business account on social media platforms, companies can use targeted marketing, track the effectiveness of their advertising content, and ensure that their messages are delivered to their target audience (Voorveld et al., 2018) using the metrics provided (e.g. tracking likes, shares, comments, followers, reach, etc.). The best social media platforms for advertising are Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and LinkedIn (Moorthi, 2023). However, some studies have also found that brand presence on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn is critical for a positive brand image (see Hashmi, Ahmad, & Ali, 2021). Of course, the most common social media platforms vary from country to country. For example, the primary social media platforms used by Italian SMEs were determined to be Instagram and Facebook (Matarazzo et al., 2021).

1.2.4. Social media marketing and advertising, and textile sector

Social media marketing and advertising are the key marketing tools for the success of businesses in today's digital world. These tools, which have great advantages over traditional marketing tools, offer significant opportunities in terms of reaching potential target audiences, displaying products, and creating a strong brand image, loyalty and presence (Dwivedi et al., 2015). This situation is also valid for the textile sector. Social media offers textile businesses the opportunity to introduce themselves and the products they sell to a wide audience from different demographic perspectives. It allows them to tell the story of their businesses through visuals, videos and explanations. At the same time, creative and effective advertising techniques provide textile businesses with a competitive advantage and help them remain competitive in the market.

1.3. Research objectives

In the dynamic structure of the textile sector, the constant change in customer preferences and choices creates a need to investigate how social media marketing strategies and advertising

techniques affect customer purchasing behavior. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between the strategic use of social media platforms in the textile sector and their impact on the purchasing preferences of Albanian customers. Thus, this study also aims to provide insights into the critical role of social media in the decision-making process.

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1) To investigate the relationship between social media marketing and customer purchasing behavior.

2) To investigate the relationship between social media advertising and customer purchasing behavior.

3) To examine the impact of personal factors (e.g., demographic characteristics, preferences) on customer purchasing behavior in the context of social media marketing.

4) To identify the social media channels, tools and platforms that have the greatest impact on customer purchasing decisions and to offer recommendations to businesses on how to prioritize their strategies.

Based on the main objectives of the study stated above, the topic was chosen for three main reasons: First, to contribute to the deep practical understanding of how social media managers, business owners and other professionals in this field can use social media more accurately, effectively and efficiently to align their businesses with their target audiences. Second, investigating the psychology of customers and providing insights into how social media affects their decisions will provide a terrific opportunity for businesses to adjust their marketing strategies and advertising techniques accordingly. Finally, businesses can use the findings of this study to make informed decisions.

1.4 Research questions

Considering that different people are affected by various aspects of social media, different advertising techniques, different marketing strategies and different tools and platforms, it was decided to answer the following questions in the study:

Research Questions:

1) What is the impact of personal factors on customer purchasing behavior?

2) What is the impact of social media marketing strategies on the customer purchasing behavior?

3) What is the impact of social media advertising on customer purchasing decisions?

4) Which channels, tools and platforms, including both online and offline, have the greatest impact on the customer purchasing behavior?

1.5. Hypothesis development

In this study, the relationship between social media marketing and advertising techniques and customer purchasing behavior in Albania's textile sector are analyzed. In the literature, there is a limited number of survey-based studies on this topic.

To assess the relationship between social media marketing, advertising techniques, and customer purchasing behavior in Albania's textile sector, the following hypotheses were developed:

Table 1 The Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Description
H1	Personal factors have a significant impact on customer purchasing behavior.
H2	Social media marketing has a significant impact on customer purchasing behavior.
H3	Social media advertising has a significant impact on customer purchasing behavior leading to greater sales and conversation rates.
H4	Online channels have greater impact on the customer purchasing decision than the offline tools.

1.6. Research gap and the contribution of the study

Although many studies have investigated the impact of social media on customer behavior in different countries, there is a significant literature gap for the Albanian textile sector. This study aims to fill this gap by comprehensively examining how social media marketing strategies interact with personal, economic, social and cultural elements in Albania.

The study not only fills the literature gap, but also provides practical insights for policy makers, social media managers and business owners. It provides guidance on how to use social media correctly and effectively to promote the activities of companies in the textile sector in Albania, how to develop marketing strategies, how to adapt to the constant change in customer preferences and purchase intentions, and which social media platforms and tools are most effective.

2. Literature Review

In this section, the literature on the subject will be reviewed under the subsections of factors influence on the purchasing behavior in the textile sector, social media marketing and customer purchasing behavior, and social media advertising and customer purchasing behavior.

2.1. Factors influence on the purchasing behavior in the textile sector

According to the studies there are several factors that influence the purchasing behavior within the textile sector:

Islam (2022) focuses on demographic structures, types and contents of digital marketing, the connection between fashion products and the way these products are presented on social media, and indicators of purchasing decisions. In this study, all these important variables are considered in order to see the relationship between social media marketing, advertising techniques and customer purchasing decisions. In the findings of some studies conducted like this study, it is seen that factors such as interaction, brand image and reputation, advertising techniques and electronic word of mouth marketing (EWOM) are also very important (Gibson, 2018; Rehman & Al-Ghazali, 2022; Sama, 2019; Paramasivan, 2021).

Nencková, Pecáková and Šauer (2020) claim that gender, age, education, income and the number of household members are statistically significant and positive factors affecting the decision to purchase textile products, but the number of children does not have a significant effect.

Marsasi and Yuanita (2023) argue that the most key factors shaping the purchase decision for luxury fashion products are demographic characteristics such as gender, age, and income. However, the study also stated that there is a gap in the model regarding the integration of variables.

Yeo, Tan, Kumar, Tan, and Wong (2022) show that perceived emotional value, EWOM, and quality have a statistically significant effect on the purchase decision, and the online environment has become a key factor in the success of a business.

Eger et al. (2021) state that purchasing decisions are largely dependent on fears and economic factors.

In addition, Çalışkan, Özkan Özen, and Öztürkoğlu (2021) claim that product, process, and physical evidence are the most important factors affecting consumers' purchase decision.

2.2. Social media marketing and customer purchasing behavior

Braholli, Qafa, Goga, and Bello (2023) analyze how Albanian companies use social media to reach their customers. According to the study findings, online sales, improved services, product or service quality, and word of mouth (WOM) are the main factors affecting purchasing behavior among different Albanian customers. Instagram is the most used platform by customers.

Bello, Muceku, and Ndoka (2021) reveal that one of the most effective marketing strategies implemented by Albanian companies is influencer collaborations. These collaborations positively affect customers' purchasing decisions, build trust in the brand, and increase sales. In addition, the study found that eye-catching, high-quality, and informative content stands out as an important strategy in attracting customers.

Braimllari and Nerjaku (2021) state that the factors that most influence the decision-making processes of Albanian customers when it comes to online shopping are time saving and cost saving. However, only about one third of the participants expressed satisfaction with the online shopping process. This rate shows that businesses need to address concerns and improve their online shopping experience.

Rrustemi and Jusufi (2021) examine social media marketing activities in the Western Balkans, especially in Kosovo. The findings show that Facebook is the most preferred platform by fashion

brands and that business policies are largely designed in line with online customer reviews. It was found that SME managers follow a strategy that attaches immense importance to customer reviews, analyzes these reviews in detail and is careful to provide fair information about their products. This strategy is not only a good marketing method, but also increases sales by establishing close relationships with customers. In addition, enriched content such as competitions and prizes were created to increase customer purchase intention.

Ananda, Hernández-García, and Lamberti (2017) study how Spanish and Italian fashion brands implement social media strategies. The study findings show that Spanish brands and some Italian brands follow a transactional marketing approach, while other Italian brands adopt a hybrid transactional and relationship marketing approach.

Zollo et al. (2020) state that social media marketing plays a critical role in building strong brand equity, which in turn leads to higher brand loyalty and purchase intentions among potential customers. The study findings suggest that luxury fashion brands should invest in content that entertains customers, is enriched with information, and encourages audience participation.

Civelek, Gajdka, Světlík, and Vavrečka (2020) examine the main differences between social media marketing and platforms of Czech, Slovak, and Hungarian SMEs. The findings show that Hungarian SMEs invest more in social media marketing and have a higher social media presence. This is associated with the higher level of education of Hungarian managers and owners. According to another finding of the study, Czech SMEs have the lowest social media presence.

Finally, Orzan, Burlacu, Florescu, Orzan, and Macovei (2020) analyze the effects of online marketing on financial performance in the Romanian textile sector. The findings showed that social media marketing positively affects purchasing behavior, strengthens sales and the financial position of brands. The study recommended that textile companies that do not use social media to promote their business gain a competitive advantage by using marketing tools.

2.3. Social media advertising and customer purchasing behavior

Adeola, Moradeyo, Muogboh, and Adisa (2021) categorize the key factors affecting online purchasing decisions in Albania as perceived satisfaction, price discounts, and product quality.

According to Sama (2019), many marketers and business owners invest in both online and offline media platforms to influence their customers' purchasing decisions. Therefore, the study focused on the impact of advertisements on television, magazines, and social media on purchasing behavior of customers. The results of the study showed that both online and offline platforms positively affect purchasing behavior.

Rehman and Al-Ghazali (2022) examine the impact of social advertising, personal factors, and brand image on customers' purchasing behavior toward fashion clothing brands in Malaysia. The study findings show that effective social media advertising, along with brand image and personal factors, plays a leading role in the purchasing decision. According to the study results, advertisers who use social advertising tactics such as informative, entertaining, trustworthy and attractive content are more likely to achieve their brand goals. Therefore, the study findings suggest that companies should put more effort into advertising to promote their businesses, analyze the factors affecting their customers' purchasing behavior and focus on their brand image.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

This study adopts a mixed method approach by combining quantitative and qualitative research methods. Qualitative data were interpreted through thematic analysis, while quantitative data were interpreted through descriptive statistics and correlation analysis using SPSS. The data obtained were collected from primary sources and simple random sampling method was used. The sample consisted of random social media users who use social media as a virtual shopping environment in the Albanian textile sector.

3.2. Survey methodology, sampling and data collection

A structured online survey was conducted using Google Forms in this study. The survey was shared through different social media platforms and email, and the responses were collected in Albania between April and May 2024.

The aim of the survey was to answer questions regarding the following topics related to Albanian customers in textile sector:

- Factors affecting customer behavior (through the analysis of demographic characteristics).

- The level of interaction of Albanian textile customers with social media platforms.

- The effectiveness of social media marketing from the customer perspective and online marketing strategies followed by brands.

- The impact of social media advertising on brand image and reputation, as well as repeat purchases.

- The role of user-generated content (UGC) in the decision-making process.

A total of 201 survey responses were collected, and the response rate was 22.3%. In fact, Edwards (2024) stated that this rate is a good response rate for online surveys. Participants were assured that the data they shared would be under full confidentiality, protection and anonymity, considering ethical sensitivities, and their e-mail addresses were not recorded after the form was submitted.

The survey was divided into four sections in accordance with the objectives of the study. The first section aimed to collect information on personal factors affecting purchase decisions through demographic characteristics. The second section attempted to monitor the social media usage and interaction level of customers in the textile sector. The third section measured the customer perspective on the effectiveness of online marketing strategies followed by Albanian brands. The fourth section aimed to examine the impact of advertising and UGC on brand reputation and the decision-making process of potential customers.

The first and second sections consisted of multiple-choice questions, checkboxes, and a few open-ended questions. The third and fourth sections were prepared with a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5; 1 indicates disagreement and 5 indicates complete agreement.

During the preparation phase of the survey, many studies on the subject were analyzed. Since there was no other study with exactly the same scope as this study, the questions were adapted, developed, and prepared to suit the objectives of this study. While studies such as Islam (2022), Gibson (2018), Rehman & Al-Ghazali (2022), Sama (2019), and Paramasivan (2021) were used in the preparation of the survey questions, some questions were created by the authors of this study.

3.3. Demographics and sample description

The first section of the survey consisted of demographic questions to gather information about personal factors that may affect the purchase decision, such as gender, age, education level, occupation and monthly income level.

The majority of the sample consisted of young (18-25 years old), well-educated (with a bachelor's and/or master's degree) and full-time employees. According to gender distribution, 64% of the participants were female. In addition, a sizable portion of the participants had a monthly income of more than 65,000 ALL.

Table 2 Summary of Sample Composition

Variables	Code	Features	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	**PF_1**	Male	72	36%
		Female	129	64%
		Other	0	0%
Age	**PF_2**	Under 18 years old	11	5%
		18 – 25 years old	121	60%
		26 – 33 years old	29	14%
		34 – 40 years old	18	9%
		Above 40 years old	22	11%
Education Level	**PF_3**	Elementary School	0	0%
		High School	50	25%
		Bachelor's Degree	72	36%

		Master's Degree	73	36%
		Ph.D.	6	3%
Occupation	**PF_4**	Full-time Employee	129	64%
		Part-time Employee	23	11%
		Freelance	16	8%
		Unemployed	6	3%
		Student	27	13%
		Retired	0	0%
Income Level	**PF_5**	No Income	26	13%
		Below 35.000 ALL	12	6%
		35.000 ALL – 50.000 ALL	30	15%
			35	17%
		50.000 ALL – 65.000 ALL	98	49%
		More than 65.000 ALL		

3.4. Descriptive statistics

3.4.1 Social media usage

The following information provided in Table 3 provides insights on the social media usage and the purchase behavior of Albanian textile shoppers.

Table 3 Summary of Social Media Usage Construct Measures

Variables	Code	Features	Frequency	Percentage
Do you follow any fashion brand or textile business on social media?	**SMU_1**	Yes	201	100%
		No	0	0%
How often do you engage (like a post, share or comment) with them in social media?	**SMU_3**	Daily	55	27%
		Weekly	82	41%
		Monthly	29	14%
		Rarely	35	17%
		Never	0	0%
Which social media platforms do you primarily use to engage with your favorite brands?	**SMU_4**	Facebook	53	26%
		Instagram	172	86%
		TikTok	91	45%
		YouTube	21	10%
		Twitter	2	1%
		Pinterest	8	4%
		LinkedIn	7	3%
		Other	1	0.3%

How often do you make online purchases?	SMU_5	Daily	0	0%
		Weekly	18	9%
		Monthly	131	65%
		Rarely	52	26%
		Never	0	0%
What factors influence your purchase decision most?	SMU_6	Price	40	20%
		Brand reputation	40	20%
		Product quality	57	28%
		Influencers/friends/family members	19	9%
		Social media presence	3	1%
		Past experiences with the brand	22	11%
		Positive reviews by other customers	20	10%
		Other	0	0%
Which marketing channels do you find more entertaining to discover and purchase new textile products	SMU_7	Online	191	95%
		Offline	10	5%

(online or offline ones)?

The results regarding social media usage show that it is critical for businesses to maintain an active and interactive presence on different social media platforms, especially Instagram, TikTok and Facebook, to engage with a wider audience. In order to maintain their loyalty, businesses need to regularly share content and engage with their potential customers. Considering that about 86% of the respondents extensively use Instagram, sharing high-quality visual content should be one of the key digital marketing strategies to follow for Albanian textile businesses.

Furthermore, providing a user-friendly and transparent online shopping experience is of utmost importance in order to maintain and further increase customer trust. The top factors that influence customers' purchasing decisions and encourage customer reviews are Transparency, quality and maintaining a strong brand reputation. These reviews, based on the results of social media usage, will serve as a crucial tool for businesses in the sector to expand their customer base.

Finally, another important conclusion is the fact that 95% of the respondents prefer online marketing channels over traditional channels. Targeted online advertising, influencer collaborations, and user-generated content (UGC) are attracting more customers and increasing their engagement. Only by taking these insights into account can textile businesses make informed, effective, and efficient decisions that will create strong marketing strategies that will enable them to succeed in the competitive textile sector conditions.

3.4.2 Likert scale questions

In order to provide a more detailed understanding of the responses, the range of 1-5 was distributed equally among the categories representing diverse levels of agreement/disagreement, in accordance with the Likert scale. The range width for each classification was calculated by dividing the total range (5-1) by 5 (total number of categories). The calculation steps are as follows:

Step 1: Width = (5-1)/5 = 0.8

Step 2: Starting from the minimum value of 1, the upper limit of each category was calculated by adding the range width to the upper limit of the previous category. This process is shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4 Range Classification

Likert-Scale	Range
Extremely	4.30 - 5.00
Very	3.50 - 4.20
Moderately	2.70 - 3.40
Slightly	1.90 - 2.60
Not at all	1.00 - 1.80
Strongly Agree	4.30 - 5.00
Agree	3.50 - 4.20
Neither	2.70 - 3.40
Disagree	1.90 - 2.60
Strongly Disagree	1.00 - 1.80

Table 5 Variable Construct Measure

Variable	Item	Code
Online Marketing Strategies	1. In your opinion, how effective are the online marketing strategies of Albanian textile businesses in reaching and engaging their potential customers?	**OMS_1**
	2. How influential do you find online marketing strategies (such as influencer collaborations,	**OMS_2**

promotions etc.) in your purchase decisions for textile and fashion items?

3. How effective is UCG (User-Generated Content) in your decision-making process?

OMS_3

Social Media Advertising	1. In my opinion social media campaigns of Albanian fashion and textile businesses are effective and fully represent their products and services.	**SMA_1**
	2. I often make online purchases after seeing advertisements on social media.	**SMA_2**
	3. In my opinion social media advertising positively impacts the brands' image and reputation.	**SMA_3**
	4. Advertisement and good brand reputation make me repeat purchases of the same brand.	**SMA_4**

3.5. Correlation analysis

Correlation analysis will be conducted in order to assess the relationship between the dependent variable (customer purchasing behavior) and the independent variables (personal factors, digital marketing strategies, social media advertising and marketing channels). The correlation coefficient ranges from (+1) to (-1), where (+1) indicates a perfect positive relationship, 0 indicates no relationship, and (-1) indicates a perfect negative relationship. Considering the ordinal nature of the data, Spearman Correlation (also known as p or rho) was chosen to measure the strength and direction of the relationship between two variables.

Table 7 Spearman Correlation

Hypothesis	Measure	Spearman	
		p (r_{ho})	p-value
H1: Personal factors have a significant impact on customer purchasing behavior.	PF_4 &SMU_5	0.13	0.03
H2: Social media marketing has a significant impact on customer purchasing behavior.	OMS_2 & SMU_5	0.14	0.02
H3: Social media advertising has a significant impact on customer purchasing behavior leading to greater sales and conversation rates.	SMA_2 & SMU_5	0.15	0.02
H4: Online channels have a greater impact on the customer purchasing decision than the offline tools.	SMU_7 & SMU_5	0.17	0.01

As shown in Table 7 above, at 95% confidence level, we can say that all hypotheses are confirmed and there is a statistically significant relationship between the independent variables and customer purchasing behavior. This is proven by the p-values of each measurement being less than 0.05, which indicates that the positive relationship is not random. In addition, the positive Spearman correlation coefficients (r_{ho} values) indicate that there is a positive correlation between the independent variables and customer purchasing behavior, and this relationship supports the hypotheses in the study.

3.6. Survey limitations

The survey had the following limitations, which can be addressed in future studies:

1) Considering some contradictory statements observed in the responses, it is possible that some of the participants may have answered some questions in a way they thought was expected or acceptable rather than their actual thoughts.

2) Considering the social conditions, it would have been better to share physical copies of the survey questions and conduct face-to-face interviews to provide more in-depth insights.

4. Results

4.1. Demographics

The following pie charts provide information about personal factors that affect the purchasing decision:
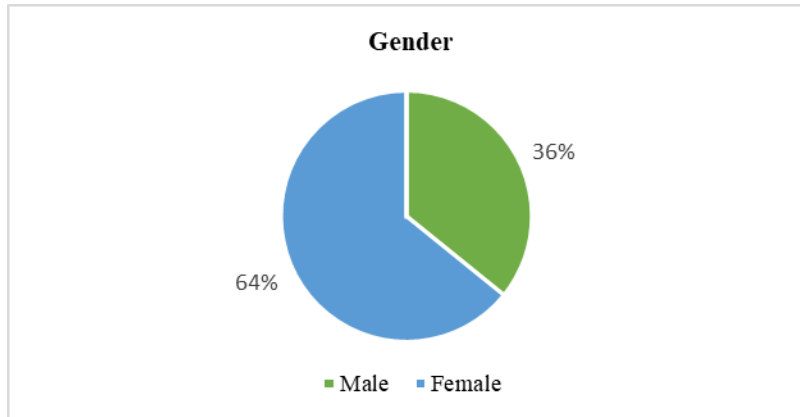
Figure 1 Gender

Figure 1 represents gender distribution. The majority of the participants were females, representing 64% of the sample, while males only constituted 36%.
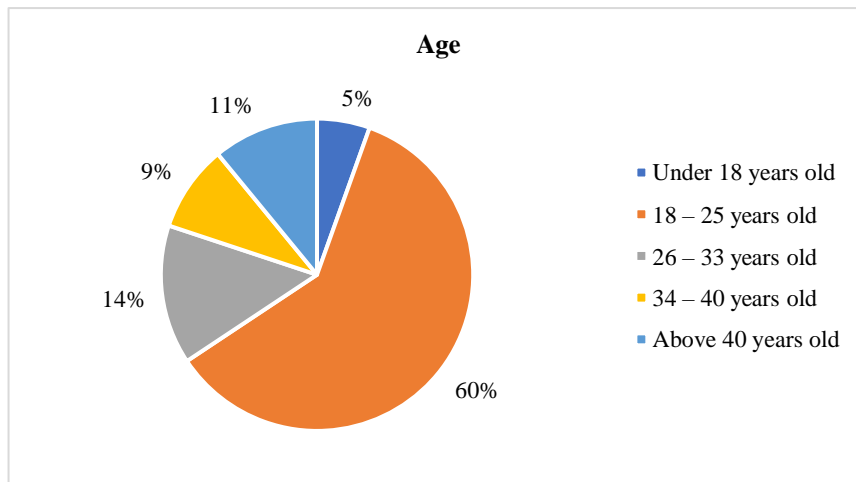
Figure 2 Age

According to Figure 2, the largest age group, making up 60% of the respondents, is made up of youngers ageing between 18-25 years old, followed by individuals aged 26-33 years old, making up 14% of the respondents, and respondents older than 40 years old (11%). The smallest fraction of the sample is made up of individuals aged between 34-40 years old (9%) and individuals under 18 years old (5%).
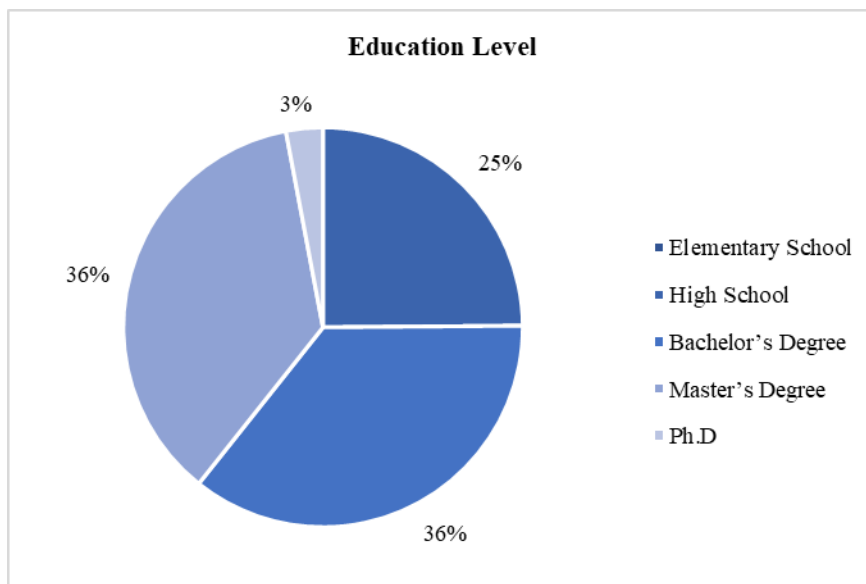
Figure 3 Education Level

Figure 3 provides information about the level of education of the participants. More than one-third of the participants had a bachelor's or master's degree. This indicates a highly educated participant population. This is followed by high school graduates who represented 25% of the sample. A small portion of the participants, 3%, had a doctorate (Ph.D.) degree.
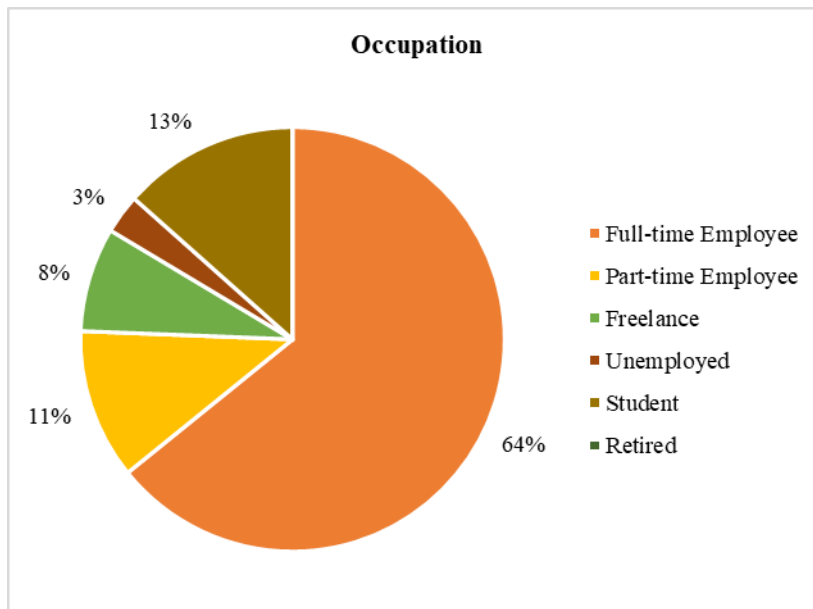
Figure 4 Occupation

According to Figure 4, the majority of the respondents are full-time employees, making up 64% of the sample size. Another 13% represents a portion that is still in education. Followed by part-time employees making up 11% of the respondents. 8% of the sample are freelancers, and lastly, a small number of 3% are made up of unemployed individuals.
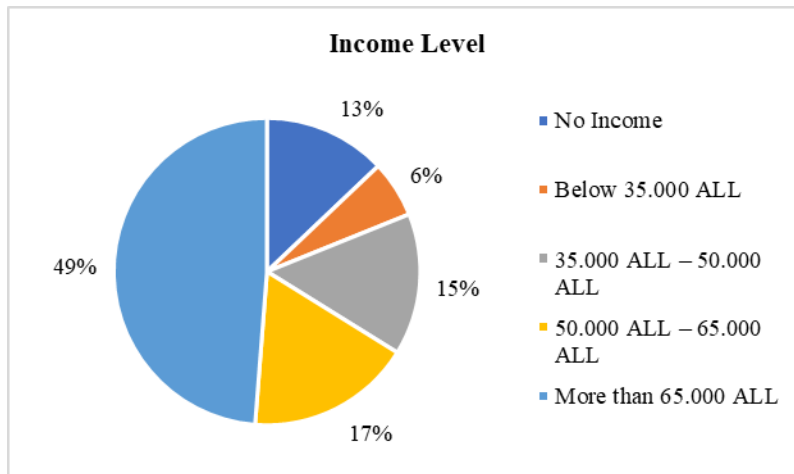
Figure 5 Income Level

Figure 5 shows the income level of the participants. Almost half of the participants earn more than 65,000 ALL. This is followed by 17% with income between 50,000 - 65,000 ALL and 15% with income between 35,000 - 50,000 ALL. About 13% of the participants reported that they did not have a monthly income; this group is thought to be most likely composed of students. Those who declared that they earned less than 35,000 ALL constitute 6% of the sample.

4.2. The textile sector and social media usage
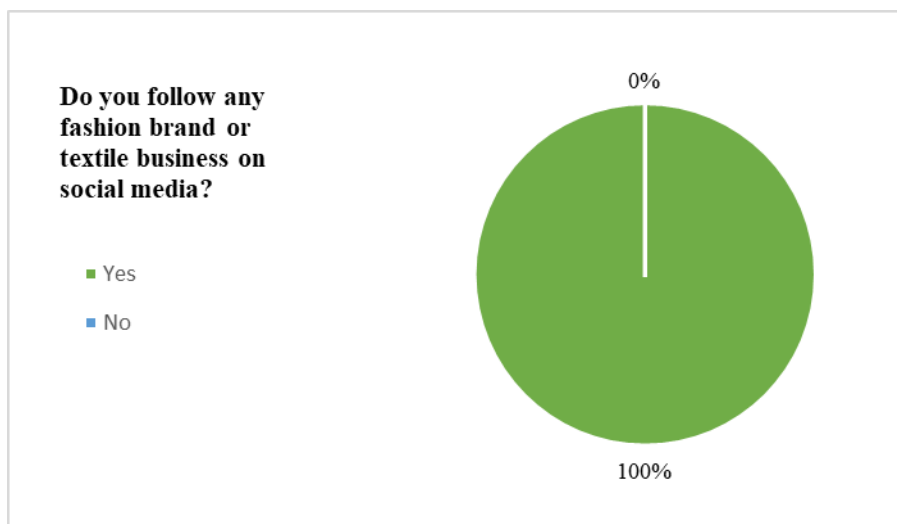
Figure 6 Fashion Brand Followers

According to Figure 6, all participants stated that they follow at least one fashion brand on social media. This shows that there is an important level of interaction with the sector among the samples that participated in the survey.
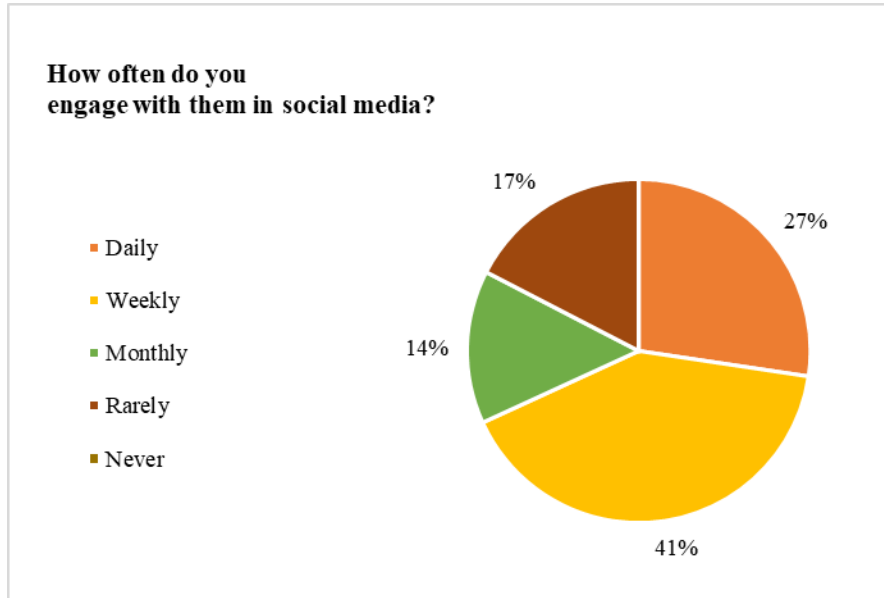

Figure 7 Social Media Engagement with Brands

Figure 7 shows social media engagement with brands of the participants. The majority of participants (41%) stated that they interact with the brands they follow on a weekly basis. This data shows that customers interact with brands' content regularly, even if they do not interact on a daily basis. Therefore, this result once again demonstrates the importance of high-quality content. These findings emphasize that information-rich, planned and carefully prepared content encourages potential customers to interact and creates long-term brand loyalty. It also confirms the result that brands should share daily on different platforms in order to establish closer relationships with their target audiences.

About 27% of the sample stated that they interact daily. This rate represents the group that is always interested in the latest updates, trends and promotions.

17% of the participants reported that they rarely interact with the brands they follow on social media. However, this does not mean that they do not access up-to-date information, it just shows that they do not interact consistently.

And lastly, 14% of the participants stated that they interact with brands on a monthly basis. This usually indicates a group interacting in search of new purchases or updates.
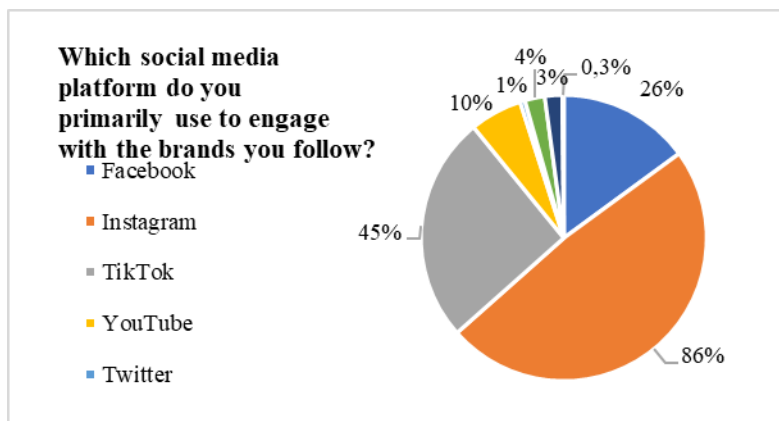

Figure 8 Social Media Platform Preference

As seen from Figure 8, the social media platforms most used by customers in the Albanian textile sector were identified as Instagram (86%), TikTok (45%) and Facebook (26%). These results are the same as the findings of another study conducted on Albania, Vukatana et al. (2022). In this study, it was found that people between the ages of 25-45 in Albania mostly preferred Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, while people over the age of 45 were more active on Facebook. From the perspective of brands, they need to take into account the insights in this study and similar studies in order to shape their content strategies correctly and increase interaction and expand their reach on each platform (see: Ali Taha et al., 2021; Matarazzo et al., 2021; Moorthi, 2023).
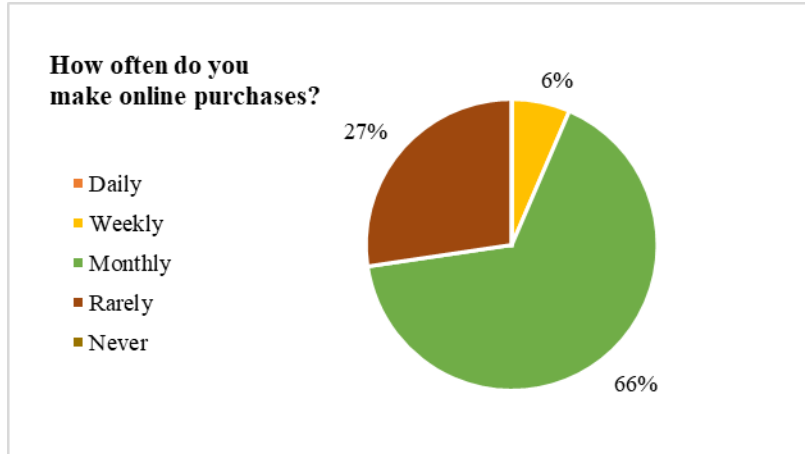
Figure 9 Online Shopping Frequency

Figure 9 shows the findings on online shopping frequency. About 66% of the survey participants indicated that they have regular shopping behavior by stating that they shop online monthly. Another 27% shared that they rarely shop online, meaning that they only buy certain products online, while for other products they may prefer to shop in-store. Finally, 6% of the participants stated that they shop weekly. It is thought that the participants in this group represent active shoppers who are more likely to benefit from new products, discounts and promotions offered by businesses on a weekly basis.
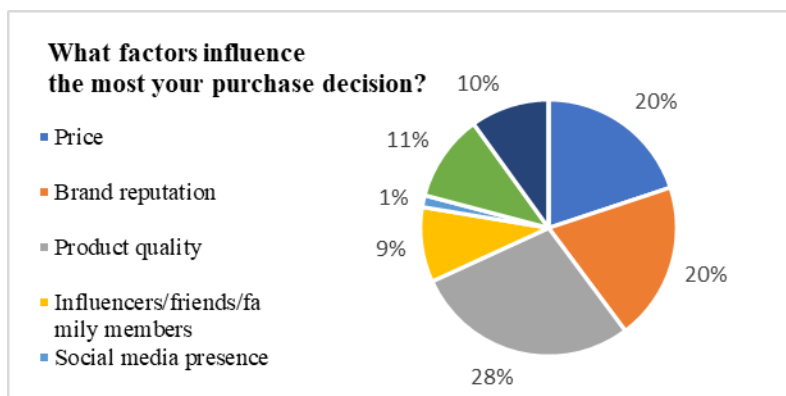

Figure 10 Purchase Decision Influencers

According to the data in Figure 10, about 28% of the participants indicated product quality as the most crucial factor affecting their purchasing decisions. This situation emphasizes that brands should focus on offering high-quality products to attract and retain customers. 20% of the participants evaluated price and brand reputation as the primary influencing factors. This situation shows that competitive pricing and maintaining positive brand loyalty are important strategies for fashion brands. About 11% indicated their past experience with the brand as the main factor. This shows that businesses should pay attention to every detail to keep their customers happy.

10% of the participants evaluated positive comments from other customers (UGC - User Generated Content) as the most crucial factor. Therefore, encouraging satisfied customers to leave positive comments would be a good marketing strategy to influence potential customers' purchasing decisions. 9% of the participants indicated social factors such as influencers, friends or family as critical factors affecting their decision-making processes. This shows that collaborating with influencers can be an effective strategy to attract such customers in the sector. And lastly, only 1% considered social media presence as a key factor.
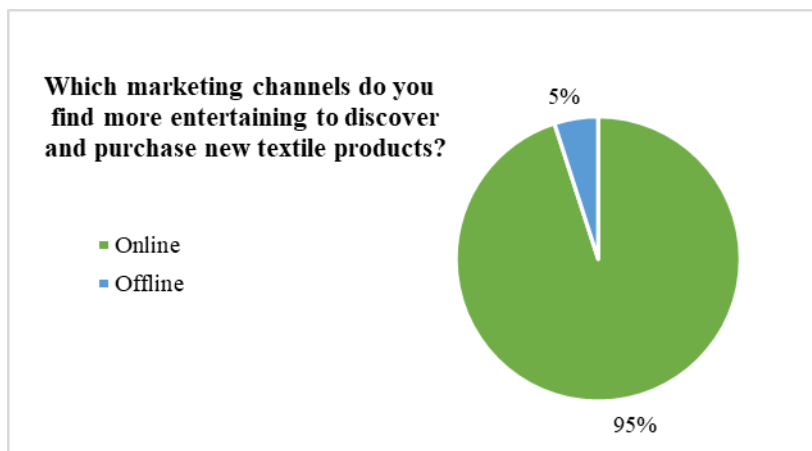

Figure 11 Preferred Marketing Channels

Figure 11 shows preferred marketing channels in the sector. The vast majority of participants (95%) stated that they find online channels much more enjoyable for discovering and purchasing textile products. This shows that digital marketing strategies are much more effective in interacting

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with potential customers and increasing sales. It should be noted that online channels are largely preferred by the younger generation (Generation Z). A small portion of participants (5%), mostly Generation Y and older, still prefer traditional marketing channels such as television commercials and billboards to discover and purchase new textile products.

4.3. Descriptive statistics

4.3.1 Social media marketing and customer purchasing behavior

Table 8 Awareness of Social Media Marketing and its Strategies

Question	Mean	Interpretation
In your opinion, how effective are the online marketing strategies of Albanian textile businesses in reaching and engaging their potential customers?	3.85	Very
How influential do you find online marketing strategies (such as influencer collaborations, promotions etc.) in your purchase decisions for textile and fashion items?	4.00	Very
How effective is UCG (user-generated content) in your decision-making process?	4.21	Very

As seen in Table 8, participants find current online marketing strategies quite effective in reaching potential customers and keeping them engaged. This shows that the efforts of marketers in the textile sector attract attention, provide interaction and are well-matched with the target audience. In addition, it was stated that online marketing strategies that include collaborations, campaigns and promotions with different influencers positively affect purchasing decisions for textile products. These results are similar to the findings of Arania et al. (2022), Braholli et al. (2023) and Bello, Muceku and Ndoka (2021). In these studies, factors such as influencer collaborations, online sales, improved services, quality of the product or service and word of mouth (WOM) communication were emphasized as key factors that help businesses overcome challenges and

increase their sales. Considering this situation, which coincides with the results of other studies (see: Arania et al., 2022; Braholli et al., 2023; Bello, Muceku, & Ndoka, 2021), brands need to collaborate with influencers and be innovative in their marketing strategies.

Another critical point in the data is that another key factor that is considered to be remarkably effective in increasing sales and significantly influencing customers' decision-making processes is user-generated content (UGC). This situation suggests that businesses should establish strong relationships with their customers and strive to collect as many reviews and customer references as possible in order to expand their customer base.

4.3.2 Social media advertising and customer purchasing behavior

Table 9 Awareness of Social Media Advertising

Question	Mean	Interpretation
In my opinion social media campaigns of Albanian fashion and textile businesses are effective and fully represent their products and services.	3.73	Agree
I often make online purchases after seeing advertisements on social media.	3.90	Agree
In my opinion social media advertising positively impacts the brands' image and reputation.	4.36	Strongly Agree
Advertisement and good brand reputation make me repeat purchases of the same brand.	4.29	Strongly Agree

Table 9 shows awareness level of social media advertising in the textile sector. In general, the participants agree that the social media campaigns of Albanian textile companies are effective and represent their products appropriately. Considering this situation, it can be said that Albanian brands are successful in promoting their business activities and conveying their messages to their target markets.

The fact that the participants admit that they make online purchases after seeing advertisements on social media platforms shows that there is a positive direct relationship between well-targeted, impressive advertising campaigns and customer purchasing behavior. In addition, the participants strongly agree that advertisements and a strong brand reputation encourage repeat purchases from the same brand. This suggests that transparent procedures, high-quality advertisements and a strong brand reputation are important for increasing customer loyalty.

Finally, there is a strong consensus that advertisements have a positive impact on the image and reputation of a brand. This shows that advertisements not only increase sales, but also improve the perception of the brand by others.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

This study, in addition to contributing to the literature, has results that can help Albanian textile companies make informed decisions while creating their marketing strategies by providing important and valuable insights and suggestions to marketing experts and advertisers. Some suggestions based on the results of the study can be listed as follows:

Social Media Activity: This study has shown that Instagram, TikTok and Facebook are widely used platforms in Albania. Being active on these platforms is also necessary for businesses in the textile sector. In addition, practices such as evaluating influencer collaborations and encouraging satisfied customers to share their opinions and comments can be considered as effective marketing strategies to reach a wider audience.

Transparency and Establishing Emotional Connection: In the context of customer-centric marketing strategies, providing transparent practices and sharing creative content that "sells emotions instead of products" can be strategic steps that support establishing close relationships with customers and building brand loyalty. Brands should listen to their customers, allow them to express their opinions fully, and improve their marketing strategies, especially by taking advantage of negative comments. In addition, following trends that attract attention and increase sales is also an important insight.

Building Trust in Online Shopping: It has been determined that some customers still show uncertainty and dissatisfaction with online shopping. This uncertainty and dissatisfaction can be

eliminated or reduced by providing an extraordinary e-commerce experience and creating trust in online transactions. This trust will strengthen the brand-customer relationship. As the online environment gains strength, businesses will be able to use this environment to deepen their in-store success. By adopting a multi-channel approach that includes online and traditional shopping experiences, promoting online products can reach a wider audience and increase store visits, improving sales and profitability.

Following Customer Trends: Businesses in the sector should pay attention to what customers perceive as useful content and the elements they interact with the most and align their promotional efforts with practices that will ensure success. By focusing on factors that increase sales, textile businesses can drive traffic to their online channels. Based on the results of this study, brands should primarily focus on providing high-quality products, being transparent to protect their reputation, offering competitive prices, offering weekly/monthly discounts, organizing occasional raffles, and offering promo codes and gift cards to their loyal customers.

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