



Social media presence:

The impact of a brand's social media presence on
consumers' purchase intentions

Inês Esteves

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Abstract

Title: Social media presence: The impact of a brand's social media presence on consumers' purchase intentions

Author: Inês Esteves

Transactions have gotten more competitive in recent years as a result of shifting marketplaces, globalization, and new technologies, all of which have accelerated the pace of change in the corporate sector. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are directing firms in a new direction via the use of social media. Customers and prospects may contact a brand representative directly or share information about a company with their friends via social media.

Social media has become firmly embedded in the lives of millions of people across the globe, capturing the attention of companies. Nevertheless, the inability to place confidence in online transactions has been mentioned as the primary cause of people's aversion to online shopping. According to the results of this study, trust's role as a mediator in online transactions may reduce the risks that come with digital environments and make people more likely to buy.

Academic research also suggests that the phenomenon of customer engagement influences consumer behavior. Engagement on social media, such as liking posts and commenting, is one of the most prevalent behaviors users conduct on a regular basis. They operate as "cues" in social media, facilitating communication and connection without requiring terminology to convey their messages, thus improving confidence in the seller and, as a result, purchasing behavior. These results show that differences in trust and in how engaged customers are seen to be can be important for businesses that want to use their social media image to their advantage.

Keywords: Social media presence; purchase intentions; trust; consumer engagement; web 2.0; User Generated Content

Sumário Executivo

Título: Presença em redes sociais: O impacto da presença nas redes sociais de uma marca na intenção de compra do consumidor

Autor: Inês Esteves

Os mercados, nestes últimos anos, têm ficado cada vez mais competitivos como resultado da recente evolução, globalização e de novas tecnologias, contribuindo para a aceleração da mudança no setor empresarial. Plataformas como o Instagram, o Facebook, o Twitter e o YouTube estão a levar as empresas a tomar novas direções quanto ao uso de redes sociais. Consumidores podem entrar em contato com um representante da marca ou partilhar informação acerca de uma empresa com os seus conhecidos através destas plataformas. As redes sociais entraram nas vidas de milhões de pessoas, capturando, por conseguinte, a atenção de empresas. Contudo, a falta de confiança relativamente a transações online tem sido mencionada como causa principal para a aversão das pessoas em relação a compras online. De acordo com este estudo, a confiança tem um papel mediador, já que pode reduzir o risco associado e, positivamente, influenciar a intenção de compra.

Estudos também sugerem que o fenómeno da interação do consumidor com conteúdo digital pode influenciar a intenção de compra de outros utilizadores. Estas interações, como “gostar” ou comentar posts são dois dos comportamentos mais observados nestas plataformas. Operam como “pistas”, facilitando a comunicação e conexão sem requerer outro tipo de terminologia para fazer passar uma mensagem, aumentando assim o nível de confiança, e consequentemente, impactando a intenção de compra. Estes resultados demonstram que diferenças no nível de confiança e nos níveis de interação dos consumidores podem ter implicações para as empresas que procuram usar em sua vantagem a presença nas redes sociais.

Palavras-chave: Presença em redes sociais; intenção de compra; confiança; interação do consumidor; web 2.0; Conteúdo Gerado pelo utilizador

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Abbreviations

SMP- Social media presence

WOM- Word-of-mouth

1. Introduction

1.1. Topic presentation and Problem Statement

Around four billion people worldwide are active social media users. On average, these internet users spend about 144 minutes per day on social media apps (Statistica, 2022). The most popular ones include names such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, or Tiktok, platforms which have a number of active users of one billion or more per month (Statistica, 2022).

As a result of this fact, brands have started to pay attention to their social media presence. Social media facilitates customer relationship management by allowing real-time interactions with a broader demography of consumers, which frequently leads to the propagation of good word of mouth (WOM) and user-generated brand material, boosting brand marketing prospects (Kim, 2020). Indeed, more than half of businesses that have been using social media marketing methods for two years have seen an increase in sales (Small Business Trends, 2016).

Because of these changes, people now have a postmodern consumer view in which they talk to each other, rate other things, review the ideas of others, join forums, talk about their own experiences, and suggest services and goods (Hajli, 2015).

These social platforms enable customers to help one another through the exchange of information and the conversations that take place on them. Nevertheless, there's a critical point in this online context: trust. Trust is a major problem in online buying settings (Ganguly et al., 2010), such as social commerce platforms, where uncertainty is increased owing to the lack of face-to-face conversations and the prevalence of user-generated material (Yahia et al., 2018).

Provisionally, because social network users are acquaintances or indirect contacts, this limitation of trust may be overcome by employing social linkage within these platforms. Bai et al. (2015) say that customers talk about and share their buying and using experiences to get product information that is mostly true and reliable.

So, this social commerce channeled through social media has impacted consumer decision-making (Bai et al., 2015; Vinerean et al., 2013). When a consumer's social media acquaintance shares or recommends services or goods on their social media, it influences brand attitude and decision-making (Sema, 2013).

Zhang et al. (2014) found that consumers' perceptions related to online content can be strengthened by their perceptions related to non-content cues (i.e., consumers' interactions with the online content). Undeniably, if consumers find that there is a large quantity of credible

interactions with the online content, then they will expect and recognize these online interactions to be more informative and persuasive.

Using this reasoning, consumers' engagement with online content is identified as an important piece in accessing online trustworthiness. Indeed, according to the Global Web Index (Global Web Index, 2018), 54% of people said they use social media to research products.

To summarize, the problem statement under consideration can be outlined as "How does a brand's social media presence (SMP) affect the purchase intentions of consumers?". In order to evaluate the problem mentioned above, the following research questions will be looked at:

RQ1: Can social media presence influence the purchase intentions of consumers?

RQ2: Can trust be a mediator of the relationship between social media presence and purchase intentions of consumers?

RQ3: Will consumer engagement have a positive impact on trust in a seller?

1.2. Research Methods

Primary data will be collected, rigorously monitored, and compared to the current literature to answer the issue statement. An online survey will be the major source of primary data for understanding the influence of a brand's social media presence on consumers' purchase intentions. In the end, the answers to the study questions will come from a statistical analysis of the data that was collected.

1.3. Dissertation Outline

This dissertation is divided into six chapters. Following this brief introduction, there will be a chapter with a literature analysis on social media, purchase intentions, trust, and consumer engagement, which will be essential for hypothesis development. After that, a chapter about the study's design and methods, the pilot, and the people who took part in the study is written.

The findings of the study will then be revealed. Finally, in light of the literature review, the findings will be extensively discussed and evaluated, and the key conclusions, as well as managerial implications, limits, and future study suggestions, will be displayed.

2. Literature Review

The purpose of the literature review is to offer empirical and academic background on the issues that are pertinent to answering the research questions. Starting with a full review of social media and purchase intent, the course goes on to talk about trust and customer engagement.

2.1. Social Media

Globally, social media has grown in popularity in recent years. Social media user counts increased by more than 13% in 2020, with over half a billion new users, bringing the worldwide total to nearly 4.2 billion by the start of 2021. Moreover, in 2020, more than 1.3 million new users joined social media on a daily basis, amounting to around 1512 new users every single second (We Are Social, 2021).

Social media is *"the term often used to refer to new forms of media that involve interactive participation"* (Manning, 2014). The evolution of media is frequently split into two periods: the broadcast period and the interactive period. During the broadcast period, the media was nearly entirely centralized, with one agency, such as a radio or television station, a newspaper corporation, or a film production studio, distributing messages to a large number of individuals. With the emergence of digital and mobile technologies, large-scale contact became simpler for users than before; as a result, a media technology period was formed, with interactivity at the core of new media functionalities – the interactive period. (Manning, 2014).

Within the interactive period that we are currently in, it is necessary to establish a boundary between two related ideas that are sometimes used interchangeably: Web 2.0 and User Generated Content.

Even though Web 2.0 doesn't refer to a specific version of the World Wide Web, Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) define it as a platform where information and applications are no longer made and published by people, but instead are constantly changed by all users in a collaborative way.

While Web 2.0 is the intellectual and technological foundation, User Generated Content (UGC) is the sum of all forms in which people use social media (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010). It can be used to describe the numerous types of media content that are freely available to the public and developed by end-users.

Clearly, social media has fundamentally altered knowledge transfer by making it exceedingly simple to exchange and consume information on the internet. One person can now talk to many people, and fast feedback is possible. Citizens and customers used to have restricted and rather muffled voices, but today they can communicate their thoughts with a large number of people. (Manning, 2014).

As discovered by Kaplan & Haenlein (2010), because of the low cost and ease of use of new technology, there are now more possibilities for media consumption than ever before. Individuals may now find input from a range of resources and dialogue with others on the

material presented in internet forums. In this way, the development of connections with people all over the world can be accelerated.

Additional uses of social media include influencing views, attitudes, and behavior, along with bringing together diverse groups of individuals who have similar interests. Indeed, people appreciate the concept of participating, forming, and joining communities to fulfill demands for belonging, being socially linked and acknowledged, or simply interacting with other members who share their interests (Vinerean et al., 2013).

Since social media has a significantly better degree of efficiency than other conventional media, industry executives have stated that organizations must participate in Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, and other social media platforms in order to flourish in online settings (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010).

Therefore, businesses may use social media to connect and communicate with future and present customers, strengthen the intimacy of the customer relationship, and develop all-important strong customer relationships (Vinerean et al., 2013).

2.2. Purchase intention

The increased variety and quantity of information online has improved customers' capacity to make better consumption decisions and has opened up new options for information search due to cheap search costs (Voramontri & Klieb, 2019). Originally, the internet only assisted the information search stage, but new developments in social media, online decision aids, and recommendation engines have expanded the internet's influence to all decision phases (Karimi et al., 2013).

According to Forbes (2013), customers buy affordable or costly things based on suggestions from social media by their connections or friends on social media. According to this report, 59% of Facebook users who answered utilized social media to obtain a product suggestion from a friend or contact. These results back up the idea that social media has an effect on how people buy things.

Aside from time costs and the cognitive costs of getting and processing information, additional contributing elements to online decision-making quality include perceived risk, product expertise, and trust. The Internet usage or online skills have also grown in importance; the more customers utilize the internet, the more likely they are to use it for decision-making (Voramontri & Klieb, 2019).

Social media has created a "participatory culture" in which users network with other people to engage in an endless cycle of exchanging information, monitoring developments, and soliciting comments and ratings on a wide range of products, services, and activities (Ashman et al., 2015). This type of culture, when compared to business communications and ads, is seen as a more trustworthy source of information (Voramontri & Klieb, 2019). When a user's social media acquaintance shares or recommends services or goods on their social media, it influences brand attitude and decision-making towards that good or service (Sema, 2013).

Supporting this view, Lehmann et al. (2013) studied the influence of social media on customer decision-making. During the months of February, March, and April of 2012, advertisements for the influenza vaccine were placed on social networking websites and Dutch news websites. According to the survey, people responded to the news on social media more than they did on traditional news media. Madni (2014) says that social media is a powerful and appealing way to change people's minds and give them information.

Without a doubt, social media platforms are increasingly crucial sources of information for consumers in their purchase decisions. When compared to commercials and other marketer-generated material, peer recommendations on social media are perceived as an eWOM and as more trustworthy sources of information (Voramontri & Klieb, 2019), which, consequently, affect people's purchase behavior.

Following this line of thought, I hypothesize that the social media presence of a brand will positively influence a consumer's purchase intention towards that same brand, as follows:

H1: Social media presence will positively influence consumers' purchase intentions.

2.3. Trust

As social technologies and people's connectedness on the Internet have grown in popularity, an issue has emerged as a byproduct of this phenomenon – trust. Trust can be defined as the “*firm belief in the reliability, truth, or ability of someone or something*” (Oxford Languages, 2022).

In a business-to-consumer relationship, trust in the e-vendor is critical in determining transaction risk (Hajli, 2013), particularly in an online situation where there may be a great deal of uncertainty since there is a lack of interpersonal contact.

Therefore, in settings with high ambiguity, there is a need for some form of trust in order to minimize the perceived risk regarding these online transactions (Hajli, 2015). When norms and traditional conventions are not present or are insufficient—as happens in online settings—trust serves as a substitute guarantor, replacing these applicable rules and customs as a guarantee that the intended results of the connection will be realized (Gefen & Straub, 2004).

This process may be supported by social technologies such as consumer feedback, information, and other people's experiences in forums and communities. For example, if a trusted member of an online forum or community recommends a vendor and says good things about them, the other members are likely to trust the process (Hajli, 2015).

Ba & Pavlou (2002) say that people trust each other on the Internet because they are kind and trustworthy. *Benevolence* is related to the notion that one party is truly concerned about the wellbeing of the other party and has objectives and motives that benefit the other party, even in difficult situations for which no commitment was made.

On the other hand, credibility is the belief in the other party's honesty, dependability, and competence (Ba & Pavlou, 2002). So, a user's trust in other people in the online community is based on how much he or she thinks the other person is trustworthy and good.

Customers' social interactions on social platforms appear to have an influence on users' behavior, as it provides motivation for vendors to be trustworthy. People's acquaintance with an e-vendor is likely to improve when they join forums and communities or read other people's evaluations and ratings of a product or service. This builds trust in the process (Hajli, 2015). Undeniably, researchers agree that social activities will improve purchase intent (Han & Windsor, 2011).

It has been shown that trust plays a mediating role in an electronic market (Ba & Pavlou, 2002), and likewise, this proposed model will also act as a mediator. Since trust plays the main role in e-commerce, it should also play the same important part in social commerce, as it operates under the same online setting (Gefen & Straub, 2004).

When looking for new things or services online, having confidence and a lower perceived risk are crucial variables (Hajli, 2015). As a result, it's critical to look into the impact of trust on social commerce adoption.

Thus, I think that trust can help explain the link between consumers' social media use and their plans to buy, as shown by the following hypothesis:

H2: Trust mediates the relationship between the social media presence of a seller and consumers' purchase intentions.

2.4. Consumer engagement

Customers nowadays engage in a wide range of behaviors that deepen their relationship with the company and go beyond traditional customer loyalty metrics such as frequency of visits, purchase behavior, and planned activities (Gummerus et al., 2012). One of the most popular ways for customers to interact with businesses right now is through social media (Eslami et al., 2021).

Consumer engagement can be defined as

“behaviors [that] go beyond transactions and may be specifically defined as a customer’s behavioral manifestations that have a brand or firm focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers” (van Doorn et al., 2010).

It includes the customer's interactions with the brand, changes depending on the situation, and makes customers think the brand is more valuable (Gummerus et al., 2012).

Considering the above definition, consumer engagement can be measured by how consumers react to a social media post (Eslami et al., 2021). This can include likes, comments, and/or shares on a post. In that way, this dissertation develops, conceptualizes, confirms, and assesses the idea of social media consumer interaction as a multidimensional formative construct to capture customer engagement’s full conceptual domain (Kam et al., 2020). Thus, the total number of likes and comments on a social media post is included in this study's proposed evaluation of consumer engagement.

Even though liking content on social media is less cognitively involved than commenting, the simple one-click act is a type of nonverbal communication that conveys a variety of meanings to both the sender and the recipient (Hayes et al., 2016). This type of action (i.e., liking content on social media, sharing or favoriting a post) has been conceptualized as a *paralinguistic digital affordance*, and it conveys cues which facilitate communication and engagement in the lack of direct terms connected with social media posts (Hayes et al., 2016).

Additionally, regarding commenting, Winter (2015) discovered that comments may strengthen a post's argument and make it more compelling. Commenting may be a very accessible way of talking and can take place amongst a huge group of strangers and may have an impact on the perception of social media news postings (Winter, 2015). Furthermore, other non-interactive behaviors such as reading others’ comments or lurking can have an impact on the perception of social media news postings (Gummerus et al., 2012).

The popularity of a user's post (i.e., the number of interactions, such as likes, comments, shares, or others) can offer a theoretical explanation of how a social media post is evaluated for its credibility (Alhayan et al., 2013). Also, research done so far (Almoqbel et al., 2019) shows that the number of views of a social media post is related to how social media users react to that post.

Therefore, a higher degree of a post's reach is thought to draw more likes, comments, and shares from other social media users. As a result, this study will compare consumer engagement to the number of followers, which can be used as a proxy to determine the reach of a post (Eslami et al., 2021).

Undeniably, social media is intrinsically driven by user-generated, mass personal content, with individuals adding to even organizationally created content through likes and comments (Almoqbel et al., 2019). Therefore, I formulate this:

***H3:** Consumer engagement will moderate the relationship between social media presence and trust.*

2.5. Conceptual Model

The following diagram, Figure 1, depicts the links between the hypotheses offered in this study and the variables:

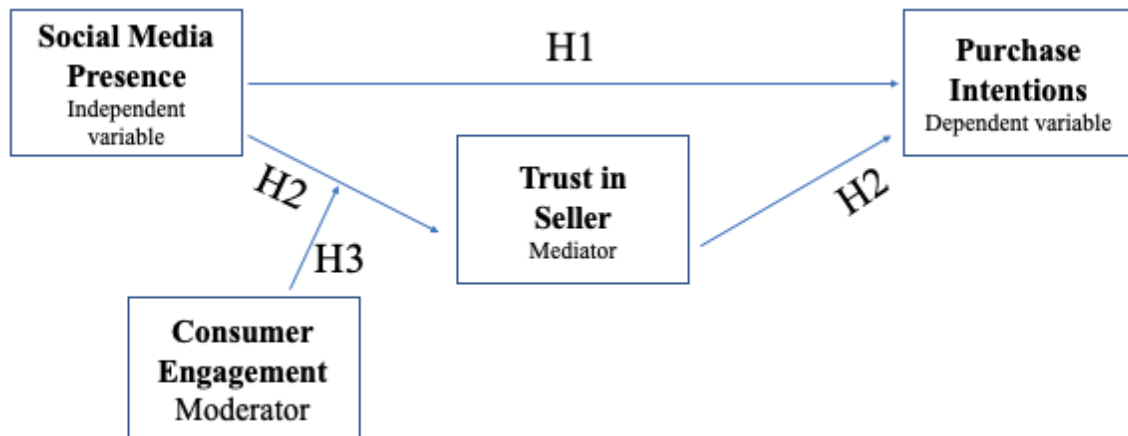


Figure - Conceptual Model

3. Methodology

This section discusses the research methods utilized to test the previously proposed research hypotheses. The study approach is presented first, followed by an explanation of the technique and a description of how each variable was examined to determine the link between them. Finally, a brief description of the analysis is provided.

3.1. Research approach

The purpose of this research is to determine the effect of a brand's social media presence on customer purchase intentions. Additionally, whether this hypothesized connection is modulated by customer participation and mediated by trust.

Secondary data was analyzed in order to explain the study issue and determine the linkages between the underlying components. As a consequence, the prior chapter's conceptual framework (figure 1) was constructed. Following that, a confirmatory research study using Qualtrics to gather primary data was conducted.

To do this, an experimental research design was used, which is the most often used method for examining cause-effect correlations (Saunders et al., 2008). Distinct individuals were randomly allocated to three different conditions using a block randomization method, which resulted in a between-subjects design. The conditions were as follows: high consumer engagement on social media; low consumer engagement on social media; no social media presence (see appendix 1 for the survey).

This methodology permitted the development of a shorter survey that was simpler for participants to fill out and complete, while limiting information exchange across conditions and ensuring the correctness of the data via randomization. In this investigation, the independent variable (SMP) will be utilized to determine whether or not it has an influence on the dependent variable, consumer purchase intentions, as well as on the mediator, trust. Additionally, consumer engagement will be considered since it will work as a moderator in this construct.

For more reliable results, the dependent variable, the mediator, and the moderator are going to be all evaluated with the help of previously published research projects, which will be discussed in more detail later.

As for the brand, a technological company was used in the survey, specifically a smartphone, which was the product chosen for the post. This is because, not only is it a gadget used by any gender, but ages 25-34 years old dominate the use of this device, with the highest smartphone penetration rate being among ages 18 to 24 years old (Deloitte, 2017).

Moreover, the two age groups who use Instagram the most are 25–34 years old and 18–24 years old, representing 31,5% and 30,1% of the worldwide usage of this platform (Statista, 2022). When this information was linked to the use of smartphones, it was thought that this product was a good fit for the study.

Seven sections were included in the survey: social media usage; frequency of online purchases; social media brand presence (one out of the three scenarios mentioned was displayed); purchase intention of brand; social media presence; trust in seller; demographics. In order to make sure that all of the questions and conditions were clear, eight people were asked to fill out the questionnaire as part of a pilot survey.

All components were assessed using Likert scales with five points. Indeed, it is simpler for participants to read the whole list of scale descriptors than it is for them to memorize them, and scaling is a core data collection approach in the natural sciences (Page-Bucci, 2003). This survey was only accessible in English.

3.2. Procedure

3.2.1. Social media usage

The main research study began with a question to determine whether or not respondents were social media users. This was the first critical criterion to examine since it establishes the framework for the research of consumer behavior on social media. Additionally, this portion analyzed each respondent's daily usage. Inspired by Gummerus et al. (2012), respondents also responded on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1-"strongly disagree" to 5-"strongly agree") on activities taken inside social media platforms in relation to brand content.

3.2.2. Online purchases

Since it was important to determine if social media postings may pique consumers' purchase intentions for the framework suggested by this research, it was asked whether they had bought an item online as a result of seeing it posted on a social media platform. If they said yes to the previous question, they were then asked to say what category the item they bought fit into.

3.2.3. Social media brand presence

In this block, participants were provided with a hypothetical situation that had been constructed in such a manner that it was as similar and comparable to the three distinct circumstances (high consumer's engagement on social media; low consumer's engagement on social media; and no social media presence), such that the only distinctions would be in terms

of customer engagement and social media presence (or in its absence, in the case of the control group).

The scenarios for manipulating consumer engagement were as follows: “A technologic brand, Brand, which is present on social media, specifically Instagram. Below you can see a post of one of their products, Smartphone X. Having in mind that this brand’s account has 170k followers (170000 followers), look at this post carefully”



Figure 2 - High engagement scenario



Figure 1 - Low engagement scenario

The number of followers was included in these situations since consumer engagement is typically measured in terms of the number of follows to evaluate reach (Statista, 2022).

Considering that the average engagement rate for brand posts on Instagram was 0.67 percent in 2021, the scenario with strong customer interaction included a 3,145 percent $((5303+44)/1700000=0,3145)$. This is because the greatest percentage of engagement validated across many sectors was 3%. The scenario of low engagement, at 0,148 percent $((251+1)/170000=0,00148)$, was chosen since the lowest engagement rates for industries were between 0.2-0.3 percent (Statista, 2022).

Concerning the situation involving the measurement of brand presence (or, in this instance, testing its absence), the following description was provided: “This is a technologic brand, Brand, which is currently present online through their website; however, does not have any presence in social media platforms. Below you can see a photo of one of their products, Smartphone X. Look at it carefully.”



Figure 3 - No social media presence scenario

Also investigated was how the interactivity and experience of the presence of brands on social media compared to other factors using the Likert scale approach, as influenced by Kim & Ko (2012) and Dabbous et al. (2020).

3.2.4. Purchase intention of brand

Following the presentation of one of three hypothetical situations, participants were asked to rate their own purchase intentions for the product in the scenario they had just seen using a 5-point Likert scale (1-"strongly disagree" to 5-"strongly agree").

Furthermore, it was said that the product observed, in terms of pricing, was priced pretty competitively when compared to the prices of other companies that were also present in this market. This was done in order to ensure that the price was not a factor in the model's depreciation, as previously stated. The purchasing intentions evaluation was inspired by Gefen & Straub (2004).

3.2.5. Trust

In order to analyze the function of trust as a mediator in the social media e-commerce done by companies, participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statements provided on a 5-point Likert scale. The studies conducted by Dabbous et al., (2020) and Yahia et al. (2018) served as an inspiration.

3.2.6. Demographics

Finally, the survey concluded with a demographics section, in which respondents were questioned about their gender, age, what their country of origin was, their educational level, their professional status, and their annual gross household income.

3.3. Operational Model

An overview of the constructs that were utilized to measure each variable is provided in the following table.

	Operational Model		
Construct	Scale	Items	Literature
Social media usage	5 point-Likert scale	3	(Gummerus et al., 2012)
Social media brand presence	5 point-Likert scale	3	(Kim & Ko, 2012) (Dabbous et al., 2020)
Purchase intentions	5 point-Likert scale	3	(Gefen & Straub, 2004)
Trust	5 point-Likert scale	4	(Dabbous et al., 2020) and (Yahia et al., 2018)

Table 1 - Operational Model

3.4. Pilot and data collection

Prior to publishing the final survey, I conducted a prototype survey with eight individuals to ascertain respondents' perceptions of the survey, as well as its organization and clarity, in order to enhance future components.

To maximize the number of valid responses, data was gathered using an online survey conducted by Qualtrics and disseminated anonymously via social media platforms and word of mouth. This last non-probabilistic snowball sampling technique was employed since it would be difficult to attract enough individuals otherwise. In this scenario, respondents were asked to circulate the survey to their contacts, who then solicited further replies from their networks. Participation was purely voluntary and there was no monetary remuneration associated with it. SPSS was used to do further analysis on the data.

4. Results

This chapter will define the main results from the research that was undertaken to answer the issue statement about the effect of a brand's social media presence on purchase intentions. It starts with cleaning up the data and getting to know the samples; moves on to preliminary verification, where normality and scale reliability are checked; and ends with testing the hypothesis.

4.1. Data cleaning

From a sample of 232 responses (note that an obligatory complete order was put on each question while conducting the survey, so that respondents had to answer each question before moving on to the next), only 188 were evaluated since the rest were incomplete. 18 respondents out of 188 said that they did not use social media; as a result, their questionnaire concluded at question 1, which was the screening question for social media use. Therefore, they were not presented with the hypothetical circumstance.

Their distribution across all three of the varied stimuli is shown in the following table. Despite the fact that the "Randomizer" tool from Qualtrics was used, the distribution is not as even as it should be due to the fact that some questionnaires were not completed.

1- High consumer engagement	2- Low consumer engagement	3- No Social Media presence	Total
55	62	53	170

Table 2- Scenario Stimuli distribution

This study's sample size was approximated using the number of experimental situations. On average, 30 individuals per cell are recommended (Wilson Vanvoorhis & Morgan, 2007). However, as seen in table 2, the number of participants in each cell exceeded 30.

4.2. Sample characterization

In terms of demographics (appendix 2 section 1 table 4), the sample was dominated by male respondents (55.3%), followed by female respondents (42.9%). In terms of the countries from which the participants originated, Portugal was the most common, accounting for 60.6% of the total. The remainder was contributed by 26 nations, with the United States and the United Kingdom coming in second and third place, respectively, after Portugal, with contributions of 3.7 % and 3.2 % of the total.

The vast majority of participants fall into one of the following age groups: 18–24 years old (37.6%), 25–34 years old (23.5%), and 35–44 years old (25.3%). In terms of the respondents' levels of education, the overwhelming majority of them had completed high school (31.2%), held a bachelor of science (22.8%), or earned a master's degree (16.5%). When asked about their occupation, a majority of respondents said they were working full time (51.1%). It was followed by student occupations with 22.3% and part-time employment with 14.4%. Moreover, based on their annual gross income, people fall into four categories: > €10,000 (32,9%); €10,000-€19,999 (30,6%); €20,000-€29,999 (14,1%); and, lastly, €30,000-€39,999 (7,1%).

4.3. Preliminary verification

Before continuing with additional investigation and selecting the appropriate tests, I will do a preliminary verification. When verifying for normalcy and in order to examine the Likert scale answers, it is necessary to calculate the mean for each variable.

After computing these mean variables, it will then be possible to determine whether or not they follow a normal distribution. After carrying out the normality tests (appendix 2 section 3), it was discovered that none of the variables were able to pass the normality test. This is because the results of the Shapiro-Wilk and Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests all indicated a p-value that was lower than 0.05 (it is important to keep in mind that due to the size of the sample, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test is the most appropriate one to look at; yet, none of them proved the normality of the variables in issue).

As a result, the null hypotheses about the normality of the data are rejected, and it is possible to say that the data obtained do not meet the criteria for being normally distributed. Because the data does not follow a normal distribution, non-parametric approaches will be used in the analysis of the findings.

In addition, the Cronbach's Alpha test was carried out in order to ascertain whether or not there was internal consistency or dependability. When looking at the output of the reliability statistics (table 3), the value of Cronbach's Alpha that was obtained for purchase intention was 0.90, which is excellent; the values that were reported for the other coefficients were all above 0.70, which is acceptable.

	N° of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Social Media Usage	3	0,752
Purchase Intention	3	0,9
Social Media Presence	3	0,836
Trust	4	0,764

Table 3- Cronbach's Alpha Results

This data passed the internal consistency test since values below 0.5 would be reason for worry (George & Mallery, 2003). Furthermore, while examining the item-total statistics table, particularly to Cronbach's Alpha if removed (appendix 2 section 2), an increase in the number compared to the original coefficients is not seen in any of the circumstances, indicating that no item needed to be deleted.

In addition, it is beneficial to examine the inter-item correlation matrix (appendix 2 section 2) to learn more about the link between each item on the scale and every other item. When looking at this data, it's clear that all of the values are positive because all of the questions were asked in the same way.

Also, it may be said that the association between the replies is stronger when the value is greater (or when it is closer to 1). The values for purchase intentions and social media presence range between 0.6 and 0.8, indicating a significant connection between answers; for social media usage and trust, the values range between 0.3 and 0.6, indicating a less significant connection between responses to these measures.

4.4. Hypothesis testing

H1: Social media presence will positively influence consumers' purchase intentions.

To validate the stated hypothesis, it is essential to choose the most suitable statistical test. Thus, it was necessary to classify the variables involved. Since the independent variable (social media presence-scenario stimuli) is categorical and the dependent variable (purchase intention) is quantitative, a comparison of means test will be used to compare two groups at the same time.

Consequently, an Independent Sample T-Test appeared to be the suitable statistical test to use, but the necessary assumptions needed to be verified first. The independence of findings was confirmed because each participant was exposed to a single stimulus. Nevertheless, as mentioned in the preliminary verification stage, it was discovered that the data acquired was not normally distributed after completing the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk Tests for normality at a significance level of 5%. (appendix 2 section 3).

The idea was to use the Mann-Whitney U Test, which is a nonparametric statistical test, instead of the Independent Sample T-Test so that comparisons could be made without making assumptions about how the data were distributed.

The Mann-Whitney U test was done twice to compare both of the scenarios with social media presence to the scenario without social media presence. The model created had three different scenarios: high consumer engagement on social media (S1), low consumer engagement on social media (S2), and no social media presence (S3).

Regarding the Mann-Whitney U Test for scenarios S1 and S3 (appendix 3 section 1), and looking at the mean rank (S1=49,98; S2=59,19), it can be observed that there is not much of a value difference between these two. Observation which is supported by the obtained p-value, since at a significance level of 5%, it is possible to conclude that there is no evidence to suggest a difference between the purchase intentions of customers in the two scenarios stated (U = 1209; N1 = 55; N3 = 53; p = 0,124, two-tailed).

In relation to the Mann-Whitney U test for the scenarios S2 and S3 (appendix 3 section 1), and reexamining the mean rank (S2=52,90; S3=63,97), it is clear that there isn't much of a value difference between these two. Observation backed by the acquired p-value (sig. level of 5%), it is feasible to infer that there is no evidence to imply a difference in consumer purchase intentions in the two scenarios presented (U = 1326,5; N1 = 62; N3 = 53; p = 0,073, two-tailed).

In other words, the hypothesis was not supported since the social media presence did not affect respondents' purchase intentions for the shown product.

In addition, the Kruskal-Wallis Test was conducted (appendix 3 section 2), which is analogous to the Mann-Whitney U Test yet allows for the simultaneous comparison of more than two groups. Again, the findings obtained with this test were identical to those obtained with the two preceding Mann-Whitney U tests ($K = 3,694$; $N_1 = 55$; $N_2 = 62$; $N_3 = 53$; $p = 0,158$, two-tailed). Since the p-value was higher than 0.05, we can't say that there is a statistically significant difference between the groups. This means that the hypothesis was not supported.

On a side note, although the tests conducted did not validate the impact of social media presence on purchase intention of consumers, the items from question 5 of the survey (see survey in appendix 1), which addressed brand-related matters in the context of social media, presented a positive connotation for social media marketing interactions and brand touch points. The aggregated mean for question 5's Likert phrases was 3.75, indicating that respondents "somewhat agree" that social media platforms provide easy interaction with brands and access to product evaluations and recommendations.

***H2:** Trust mediates the relationship between the social media presence of a seller and consumers' purchase intentions.*

The process macro model 4 for SPSS was used since the objective of this research was to examine the relationships between the independent variable (X) social media presence, the dependent variable (Y) consumers' purchase intention, and the postulated mediator (M) trust. As the process model conducts regressions, the regression assumptions must be met (assumption check displayed in appendix 4).

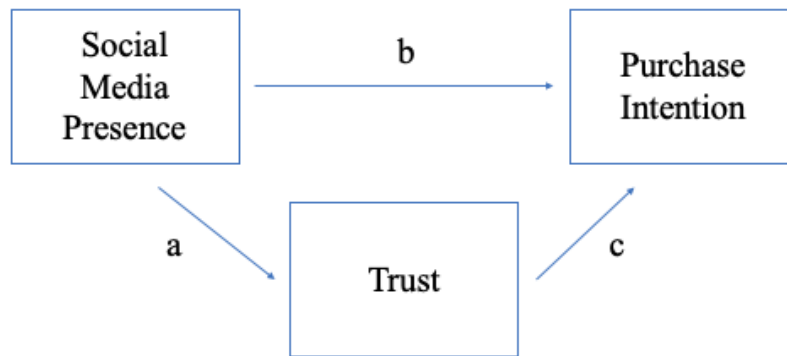


Figure 4- Framework for trust mediation.

Before looking at model 4, it's important to remember that the significance level was 5% and that 5,000 subsamples were looked at.

After examining the model's framework (see appendix 4 for the entire model report), the path of direct effect ($a = 0,4525$) from social media presence to trust was positive and statistically significant ($p\text{-value} < 0,05$). This shows that those who place a higher value on a company's social media presence display a higher level of brand trust.

The path from social media presence to purchase intentions ($b = -0,027$; $p\text{-value} = 0,79 > 0,05$) is not significant, therefore no inferences can be made regarding this path. However, the direct impact of trust on purchase intentions ($c = 0,472$; $p\text{-value} = 0,00$) is positive and statistically significant, showing that those with higher trust scores are more likely to indicate an intention to buy from the brand than those with lower trust scores.

Looking at the actual test of the indirect impact to determine whether there is mediation in the model, it can be seen that the null of 0 does not lie within the lower and upper bounds of the 95 % confidence interval ($95\%CI = 0,109; 0,267$), indicating that the indirect effect is non-zero. So, in this case, the indirect effect is significant and reports a value of 0.2103.

In light of the statistical significance of this mediation process, I may conclude that there is a mediation effect via customer trust that mediates the relationship between social media presence and consumer purchase intentions, thereby supporting hypothesis 2.

H3: *Consumer engagement will moderate the relationship between social media presence and trust.*

The purpose of this analysis was to examine the relationships between social media presence, trust, and the hypothesized moderator of consumer engagement. Hence, process macro model 1 for SPSS was used for this hypothesis. In addition, since moderation is based on the linear regression approach, the linear regression assumptions must be satisfied prior to continuing the study (see appendix 5 for the assumption check).

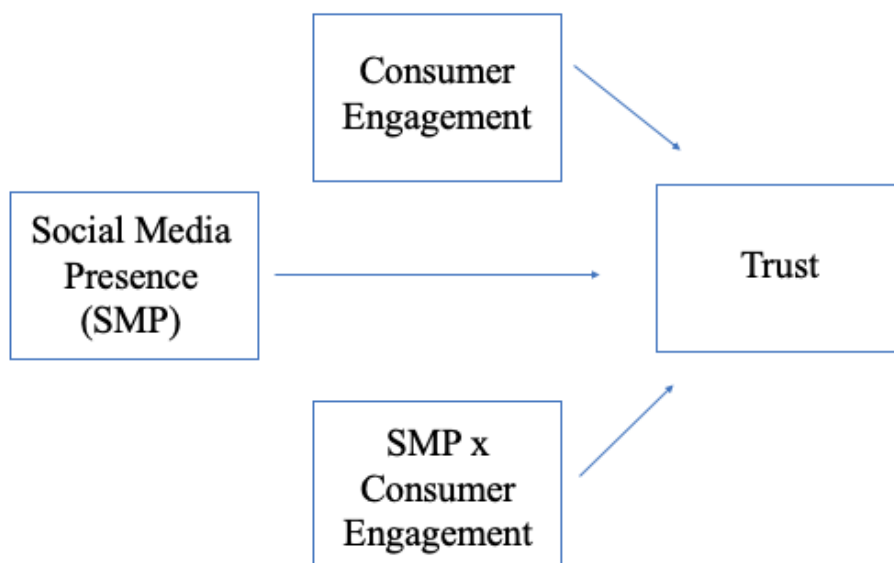


Figure 5- Statistical framework for moderation of Consumer Engagement.

Examining the derived moderation model (appendix 5) reveals that this model is statistically significant (p-value = 0,0001, which is less than 0,05). The R-square value was calculated to be 0.176, which means that our model explains 17.6% of what trust is in this data set.

However, upon examining the model output, social media presence was the only predictor with a p-value less than 0,05 and was thus statistically significant (appendix 5).

Consequently, the interaction term between consumer engagement and social media presence, a variable derived by this model and indicating the existence or absence of moderating, is not statistically significant. Hence, hypothesis 3 is not supported.

The graph below (figure 7) shows why a significant model was achieved even if the interaction term was not statistically significant.

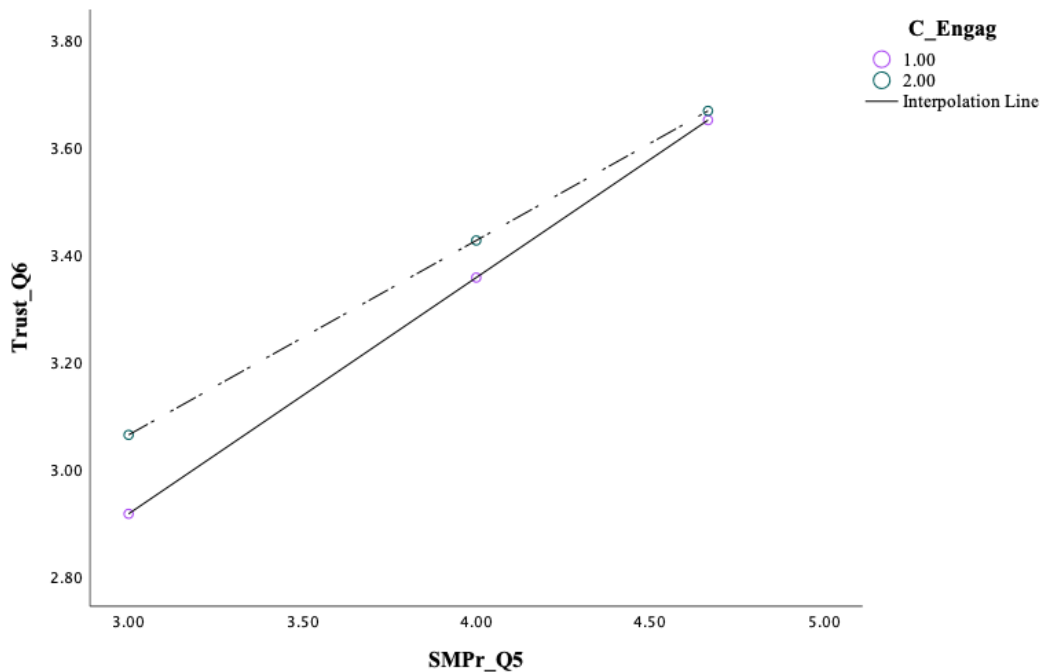


Figure 6- Graphic representation of the moderation effect of Consumer Engagement.

It is understood that the interpolation lines, which reveal how consumer engagement is reflected via the varied levels of the variables, provide a pattern that does not support a moderating effect.

The line representing scenario 2 (low consumer interaction) can be seen to be above the line representing scenario 1 (high consumer engagement). It can be seen that the more respondents valued the social media presence of brands, the less impact customer engagement had. For high x-axis values, we can see the convergence of the two lines (scenarios 1 and 2). That is, the more people cared about a brand's social media presence, the less they cared about customer engagement, and in the end, it didn't matter when they ran into each other. This demonstrates why this moderator was deemed unimportant based on the procedure outcome.

5. Discussion

This chapter will cover the findings and important conclusions of the dissertation. In addition, it will comment on the academic and managerial importance before ending with limitations and future study suggestions.

5.1. Findings and main conclusions

5.1.1. Social media presence and consumer's purchase intentions

The findings demonstrated that respondents' purchase intentions for the shown goods were unaffected by their social media presence. There was no statistically significant difference in how likely people were to buy the product based on whether or not they used social media.

Contrary to what was seen in the literature (Sema, 2013), the presence of social media did not affect how people felt about a brand or their decision to buy that product. Because it is a "participatory culture" in which users take part in a cycle of trade cues (Ashman et al., 2015) Voramontri & Klieb (2019) see it as a useful tool in the process of buying something.

However, the testing that was carried out as part of this study did not verify this to be the case. Possible causes for this discrepancy include a lack of interest in purchasing the product shown in the survey (i.e. a smartphone); the use of a generic brand could have caused mistrust, whereas a well-known brand would have led to preconceived notions that would have compromised the study; or possibly displaying not just the product's social media post, but also the brand's social media page, would provide more information that might influence the purchasing decision. This could have improved the likelihood to purchase the product when the social media scenario was presented.

These factors may provide an explanation for the observed outcome. However, the inability of social media presence to influence customers' purchasing intentions raises the following questions: What additional factors may explain the connection between these two things? What additional kinds of societal pressures and influences could be at play here? How

did respondents feel about themselves when they were answering the survey, and should this factor into the analysis at all?

5.1.2. Mediating role of trust

As confirmed by anticipations (Han & Windsor, 2011), consumers' purchase intentions were affected by trust, as this last variable was a statistically significant mediator of the relationship between social media presence and purchase intentions. Also, Ba & Pavlou (2002) research shows that trust is a mediator in the electronic market, which is the industry of the product shown in the survey scenarios.

Even while trust takes time to develop, consumers' social interactions on social platforms tend to affect user behavior by providing incentives for sellers to be trustworthy, hence fostering the development of trust (Hajli, 2015). Therefore, this decreased perceived risk resulting from more certainty in the process is a critical determinant affecting purchasers' purchase perspective. As shown by this research, the greater the respondents' online brand trust, the greater their social commerce buying intentions.

5.1.3. Moderating role of consumer engagement

This research demonstrated that consumer engagement does not moderate the association between social media presence and trust. Unlike what Alhayan et al. (2013) found, this dissertation showed that trust was not statistically important.

It was predicted that the popularity of a post (i.e., the number of interactions, such as likes, comments, shares, etc.) would influence the credibility rating of that same post (Gummerus et al., 2012; Alhayan et al., 2013). So, the more interactions people have with a post (also called consumer engagement, the more they trust that publication.

However, the findings that were acquired via the use of this study paradigm revealed that there was no moderation brought about by the interaction of consumers. When evaluating the several reasons why this phenomenon happens, it is possible to state that due to the high number of followers (170k) selected for the generic brand, the low engagement scenario with approximately 250 interactions (i.e., number of likes and comments), even if expressed in percentage (only 0,148%), displays a very low level of engagement in respect to the number of

followers of the brand in question, but is a significant value in absolute terms, which may have led to misunderstanding and a misleading impression of engagement among respondents.

As a result of the fact that the respondents were only given access to a single scenario, they were unable to know what the engagement metrics were on the high participation scenario (which featured approximately 5,350 interactions), which revealed a stark contrast between the two.

Another possible explanation lies in the fact that respondents were only provided with a limited amount of information on the brand. Since knowledge builds trust, the fact that the brand mentioned in the research was made up makes it more likely that it had an effect on how the respondents judged customer engagement.

5.2. Academic relevance

With the emergence of Web 2.0, various research has been conducted on social media, purchase intentions in social commerce settings, and its antecedents. Due to the fact that this study focuses on a specific social media platform, Instagram, it helps to the development of a new research approach that yields more targeted findings. Since the findings may be applied to real-world scenarios and because they can be extended to the context in which they are currently found, an approach of this sort can be highly useful when considering consumer behavior and marketing.

As a direct result of this, the door has been opened for other research to be conducted on other social media platforms and using alternative product categories. Indeed, there is still much to learn about how consumers perceive social commerce and how these triggers affect their behavior. This study also employs the number of followers as a metric of customer engagement, which may inspire new research avenues on this issue.

5.3. Managerial relevance

This study's findings indicate that trust can play an essential role as a mediator between social media presence and customer purchase intentions. Therefore, brands and managers will need to expand their understanding of the factors that promote social media users' trust in order

to present their social media marketing as a trustworthy enterprise, which ultimately results in increased buying rates (Dabbous et al., 2020).

Social commerce is focused on individuals, so customers choose items based on the opinions of their peers (Bai et al., 2015). So, through public reviews on Instagram supplied by social network users who have purchased the seller's items in the past, sellers may increase and disseminate consumer confidence in their goods, thereby attracting additional prospective buyers. Using this, businesses may foster an environment of dialogue among their consumers, which can facilitate the development of trust. So, instead of pushing information about products directly to users, businesses should focus on meeting customer needs. This will lead to the growth of online WOM, which can increase trust in the process and, in turn, make purchases more efficient.

Listening to and engaging in online discussions and seeing what people are talking about in blogs, forums, and online communities has made it possible for marketers to obtain and track customer views in real-time (Voramontri & Klieb, 2019). In this study, neither consumer participation nor social media presence were shown to have a statistically significant effect on trust or purchase intent. However, managers should not be deterred by this fact. Instead, it might be better to look for ways to get results in a way that makes it easier for customers to get involved.

Providing clients with additional assurance by eliciting hints from other customers through consumer participation in their social media post, or by just revealing more information about the brand and company/product directly on the social media account. This instills in them the confidence required to make purchase judgments (Hajli, 2015). Also, managers can find out in real time what is or isn't working based on how customers respond to this social platform ecosystem. This is because they can always access and watch what customers say.

6. Limitations and future research

There are certain limits, despite the fact that this dissertation offers insights into how customers see social media. To begin with, since this was a dissertation for a master's degree, there were significant time limits, which restricted the amount of work that could be done (e.g., the collection of data for a second study, collecting behavioral data).

In addition, the study technique, an online survey, has certain benefits, such as distribution efficacy, but it also has some problems. For instance, it is well known that

participants may respond based on their ideal purpose rather than their actual conduct (Acharya, Blackwell, & Sen, 2015). This might influence the results of an experiment. In addition, because of limitations in both resources and logistics, the questionnaire was answered by a sample that was not heterogeneous (appendix 2, table 4).

Likewise, additional types of social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) might be included in future research since this study focused only on Instagram and did not include other platforms. Also, the purchasing intention is employed as a surrogate for the real action; a forthcoming investigation may use real purchasing behavior to see whether there is a discrepancy between the two notions and may incorporate other factors to explain any apparent discrepancy between intentions and actions.

Looking at the variables used in this study to explain social commerce, it can be seen that they have been evaluated at a particular moment in time. However, further research may be undertaken by studying continuous behaviors and investigating whether or not these variables might change over time.

Besides, supplementary reasons for the possible impact of social media presence on consumer purchasing behavior may also be cause for concern. This study doesn't look into all of these possible trust-building factors, such as reputation, brand, and past buying experiences.

Regarding the evaluation of social media presence itself, there are some factors that may be regarded as limitations. What is this product's degree of attraction to the respondent based on the type of content presented in this study (i.e., the smartphone from a generic brand)? What is the product's degree of attraction and relevance to the respondent? In accordance with this line of thinking, other research with alternative products or services should be conducted.

According to Constantinides (2004), personal and environmental cues are also influential. The buyer's decision-making process is influenced by uncontrollable variables (e.g., personal, cultural, legal, and environmental variables) as well as trust-building phenomena. Consequently, future studies should place a greater emphasis on these variables since the influence of cultural diversity and buyer empowerment in the context of social commerce has received little or no attention.

This similar train of thought leads me to believe that enlightening participants, to a greater extent, about the background of the generic electrical brand presented would motivate them to contribute more actively to the product evaluation. Also, it would be helpful to show the brand's Instagram page with the number of followers. This would strengthen the link to the

number of followers and, as a result, change the way the displayed post is seen as being engaged with.

Finally, research in the future might emphasize demographic factors, such as gender or age, as potential moderators of the association between social media commerce and purchase intentions.

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8. Appendix

Appendix 1: Survey

Dear participant,

My name is Inês and the questionnaire you are about to answer is part of an ongoing quantitative research.

Practical information:

This questionnaire is expected to take about three minutes to complete.

The survey is meant to be made anonymously and all data gathered will be kept confidential.

Feel free to answer all these questions with honesty as there are no right or wrong answers.

Thank you so much for your participation.

Block 1: Social media usage

Q1. Are you a user of social media platforms (e.g. Instagram, Facebook, Tiktok, Twitter, ...)?

Yes No

(Note: If the answer is “No”, end of the survey)

Q1.1. What’s your average daily usage?

- Daily more than 3 hours
- Daily between 1 and 3 hours
- Less than 1 hour per day
- I don’t use it daily only occasionally during the week
- I don’t use it weekly only occasionally during the month

Q2 - How much do you agree with the following sentences? (1- strongly disagree; 5- strongly agree).

Q2. 1. I visit pages of brands on social media platforms (e.g. Instagram, Facebook, Tiktok, Twitter, ...)

Q2. 2. I read posts of brands on social media platforms

Q2. 3. I interact with posts of brands on social media, either using the “Like” option or leaving a comment

Block 2: Online purchase frequency

Q3. Have you ever purchased an item online, because you saw it displayed on a social media platform (e.g. Instagram, Facebook, Tiktok, ...)?

Yes No

(Note: End of block is “No” is selected)

Q3.1. Which type(s) of products? (you can select more than 1 option)

- Clothing and Footwear
- Technologic (e.g. computers, phones, accessories, ...)
- Food and health
- Books
- Skin care and cosmetics
- Sporting gear
- Online educational products (e.g. online courses, ...)
- Others

Block 3: Social media brand presence

(One of the three scenarios were presented based on the randomization feature)

Scenario 1: Social media presence with high engagement

Consider now the following scenario:

A technologic brand, Brand, is present on social media, specifically Instagram. Below you can see a post of one of their products, Smartphone X. Having in mind that this brand's account has 170k followers (170000 followers), look at this post carefully.



Scenario 2: Social media presence with low engagement

Consider now the following scenario:

A technologic brand, Brand, is present on social media, specifically Instagram. Below you can see a post of one of their products, Smartphone X. Having in mind that this brand's account has 170k followers (170000 followers), look at this post carefully.



Scenario 3: No social media presence

Consider now the following scenario:

Brand, a technological company, is exclusively available online via the brand's website; it does not have a presence on social media platforms. A photo of one of their products, Smartphone X, is seen below. Take a close look at it.



Block 4: Purchase intention of brand

Q4. After considering the scenario presented before, and knowing that in terms of price, it is priced fairly competitive relatively to other competitors present in this space, how much do you agree with the following sentences? (1- strongly disagree; 5- strongly agree)

Q4.1. I am very likely to buy this product

Q4.2. I would consider buying this product in the future

Q4.3. I intend to buy the product from this brand

Block 5: Social media presence

Q5. Considering your experience using social media platforms (e.g. Instagram, Facebook, Tiktok, ...), how much do you agree with the following sentences? (1- strongly disagree; 5- strongly agree)

Q5.1. Social media platforms permit me to interact easily with brands

Q5.2. Social media platforms allow me to access product recommendations and reviews

Q5.3. Social media platforms let me interact easily with other consumers regarding brand-related issues

Block 6: Trust in seller

Q6. Regarding now the social media e-commerce conducted by brands, how much do you agree with the following sentences? (1- strongly disagree; 5- strongly agree)

Q6.1. I feel secure if I want to buy products from brands present on social media

Q6.2. I trust the brands that I see on social media

Q6.3. I trust brands on social media more than brands that do not have this online presence

Q6.4. Social media keeps me up to date about new products and services

Block 7: Demographics

Q7: What's your gender?

Male

Female

Non-binary / third gender

Prefer not to say

Q8: What's your age?

- Under 18
- 18–24
- 25–34
- 35–44
- 45–54
- 55–64
- 65–74
- 75–84
- 85 or older

Q9: What's the highest degree or level of education you have completed?

- Less than high school
- High school graduate
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Associate degree
- Professional degree
- Doctorate

Q10: What's your current occupation?

- Employed full time
- Employed part time
- Unemployed looking for work
- Unemployed not looking for work
- Retired
- Student
- Disabled

Q11: What's your yearly gross income?

- Less than €10,000
- €10,000-€19,999
- €20,000 - €29,999
- €30,000 - €39,999
- €40,000 - €49,999
- €50,000 - €59,999
- €60,000 - €69,999
- €70,000 - €79,999
- €80,000 - €89,999
- €90,000 - €99,999
- €100,000 - €149,999
- More than €150,000

Q12: What's your country of origin?

(select within List of Countries)

End of Survey

Appendix 2: Sample demographics, Cronbach's Alpha & Normality test

Section 1: Sample Demographics - Table 4- Sample demographics characteristics

Variables		Frequency	Valid %	Cumulative %
Gender	Male	94	55.3	55.3
	Female	73	42.9	98.2
	Non-binary / third gender	1	0.6	98.8
	Prefer not to say	2	1.2	100.0
Age	Under 18	4	2.4	2.4
	18-24	64	37.6	40.0
	25-34	40	23.5	63.5
	35-44	43	25.3	88.8
	45-54	17	10.0	98.8
	55-64	1	0.6	99.4
	65-74	1	0.6	100.0
Country	Angola	1	0.6	0.6
	Australia	3	1.8	2.4
	Austria	1	0.6	2.9
	Belgium	1	0.6	3.5
	Bolivia	1	0.6	4.1
	Brazil	1	0.6	4.7
	Canada	1	0.6	5.3
	China	3	1.8	7.1
	Croatia	1	0.6	7.6
	Cyprus	2	1.2	8.8
	Denmark	1	0.6	9.4
	Estonia	1	0.6	10.0
	France	2	1.2	11.2
	Germany	5	2.9	14.1
	Hungary	1	0.6	14.7

	India	4	2.4	17.1
	Ireland	1	0.6	17.6
	Netherlands	7	4.1	21.8
	Norway	1	0.6	22.4
	Portugal	114	67.1	89.4
	Romania	1	0.6	90.0
	Russian Federation	1	0.6	90.6
	Syrian Arab Republic	1	0.6	91.2
	Turkey	1	0.6	91.8
	Ukraine	1	0.6	92.4
	United Kingdom	6	3.5	95.9
	United States of America	7	4.1	100.0
Current occupation	Employed full time	96	56.5	56.5
	Employed part time	27	15.9	72.4
	Unemployed looking for work	3	1.8	74.1
	Retired	1	0.6	74.7
	Student	42	24.7	99.4
	Disabled	1	0.6	100.0
Level of education	Less than high school	19	11.2	11.2
	High school graduate	53	31.2	42.4
	Bachelor's degree	49	28.8	71.2
	Master's degree	31	18.2	89.4
	Professional degree	15	8.8	98.2
	Doctorate	3	1.8	100.0
Gross Income	Less than €10.000	56	32.9	32.9
	€10.000-€19.999	52	30.6	63.5
	€20.000-€29.999	24	14.1	77.6
	€30.000-€39.999	12	7.1	84.7
	€40.000-€49.999	9	5.3	90.0

€50.000-€59.999	9	5.3	95.3
€60.000-€69.999	1	0.6	95.9
€90.000-€99.999	1	0.6	96.5
More than €150.000	6	3.5	100.0

Section 2: Cronbach's Alpha

- Cronbach's Alpha if item deleted (for all variables)

Social Media Usage	Cronbach's Alpha if item deleted
Item 1	0,601
Item 2	0,593
Item 3	0,806

Purchase Intention	Cronbach's Alpha if item deleted
Item 1	0,884
Item 2	0,857
Item 3	0,827

Social Media Presence	Cronbach's Alpha if item deleted
Item 1	0,810
Item 2	0,739
Item 3	0,768

Trust	Cronbach's Alpha if item deleted
Item 1	0,663
Item 2	0,645
Item 3	0,711
Item 4	0,791

- Correlation Matrix (for all variables)

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix			
	SMUsage_1	SMUsage_2	SMUsage_3
SMUsage_1	1.000	0.676	0.423
SMUsage_2	0.676	1.000	0.433
SMUsage_3	0.423	0.433	1.000

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix			
	PurchaseInt_1	PurchaseInt_2	PurchaseInt_3
PurchaseInt_1	1.000	0.707	0.750
PurchaseInt_2	0.707	1.000	0.794
PurchaseInt_3	0.750	0.794	1.000

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix			
	SMPresence_1	SMPresence_2	SMPresence_3
SMPresence_1	1.000	0.624	0.586
SMPresence_2	0.624	1.000	0.684
SMPresence_3	0.586	0.684	1.000

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix				
	Trust_1	Trust_2	Trust_3	Trust_4
Trust_1	1.000	0.618	0.504	0.362
Trust_2	0.618	1.000	0.571	0.357
Trust_3	0.504	0.571	1.000	0.256
Trust_4	0.362	0.357	0.256	1.000

Section 3: Normality test

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	<i>Statistic</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Statistic</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Donation Amount	0.146	170	<0.001	0.936	170	<0.001
PDB	0.094	170	<0.001	0.946	170	<0.001
Social Hierarchy	0.210	170	<0.001	0.916	170	<0.001
PR	0.100	170	<0.001	0.976	170	0.004

Appendix 1: Mann-Whitney U Test and Kruskal-Wallis Test (H1)

Section 1: Mann-Whitney U Test

Descriptive Statistics			
	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
Purchase Intention (PI)	170	2.52	1.08355
Scenarios	170	1.99	0.799

- Scenarios 1 and 3

Ranks				
	<i>Scenarios</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean Rank</i>	<i>Sum of Ranks</i>
<i>PI</i>	High engagement (S1)	55	49.98	2749.00
	No Social Media Presence (S3)	53	59.19	3137.00

Test Statistics	
	<i>Purchase Intention</i>
Mann-Whitney U	1209.000
Wilcoxon W	2749.000
Z	-1.539
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.124

- Scenarios 2 and 3

Ranks				
	<i>Scenarios</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean Rank</i>	<i>Sum of Ranks</i>
<i>PI</i>	Low engagement (S2)	62	52.90	3279.50
	No Social Media Presence (S3)	53	63.97	3390.50

Test Statistics	
	<i>Purchase Intention</i>
Mann-Whitney U	1326.500
Wilcoxon W	3279.500
Z	-1.791
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.073

Section 2: Kruskal-Wallis Test

Ranks			
	<i>Scenarios</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean Rank</i>
<i>PI</i>	High engagement (S1)	55	81.38
	Low engagement (S2)	62	80.04
	No Social Media Presence (S3)	53	96.16

Test Statistics	
	<i>Purchase Intention</i>
Kruskal-Wallis H	3.694
df	2
Asymp. Sig.	0.158

Appendix 4: Mediation PROCESS (H2)

The following assumptions must be satisfied about linear regression and, consequently, the mediation process:

- the dependent variable must be assessed on a continuous scale (purchase intentions is measured on a continuous scale in question 4);
- independence of observations must be satisfied (because all values of the result originate from separate individuals);
- Data must be roughly normal distributed (as previously stated, this requirement is not satisfied; nonetheless, according to the Central Limit Theory, data with a sufficient number of observations tends to be normally distributed, as is the case with the replies received);
- If you look at figure 8, you can see that the residual plot shows a random distribution of positive and negative values over the whole range of variables represented horizontally; this shows that the linearity requirement has been fulfilled.

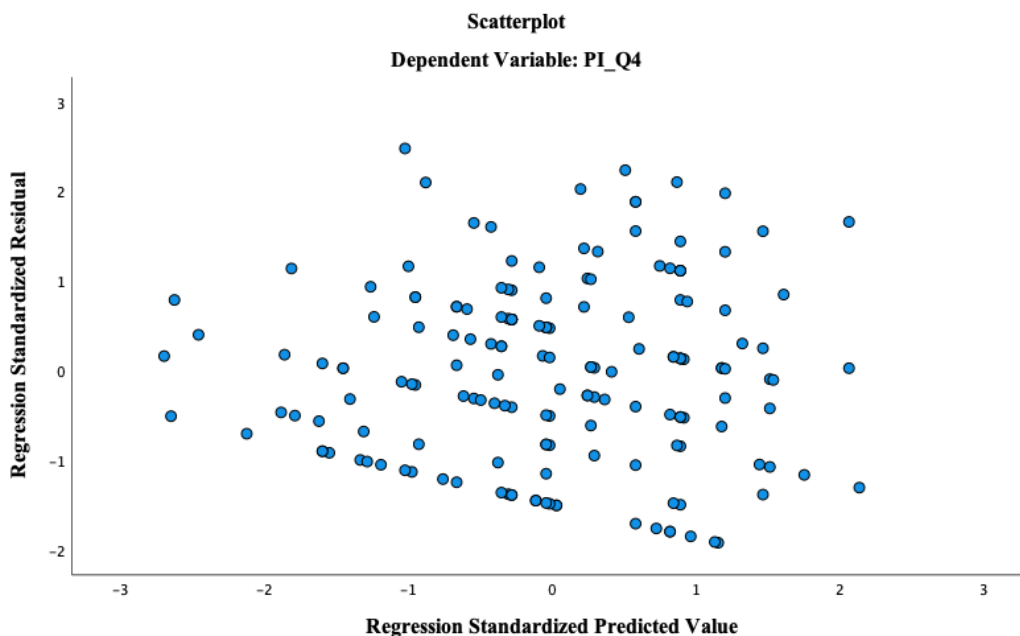


Figure 7- Plot of residuals against predictor value - mediation

- Data must demonstrate homoscedasticity (this requirement is not violated since figure 8 demonstrates that the plotted dots are dispersed, indicating that the residual variances are constant);
- must not exhibit multicollinearity (in table 5 below, the VIF is about 1 and the tolerance is more than 0.2, therefore this assumption is fulfilled);

Collinearity Statistics		
	Tolerance	VIF
Trust	0.776	1.288
SMPresence	0.776	1.288

Table 5- Coefficients of Collinearity - mediations

- no major outliers were present in the data (condition satisfied after data cleaning);
- independence of error, the error terms should be uncorrelated (figure 8 demonstrates that there is no pattern in the residuals, hence this condition is satisfied);
- residuals should be roughly normally distributed (as shown in the histogram and normal probability plot below, this requirement is also satisfied).

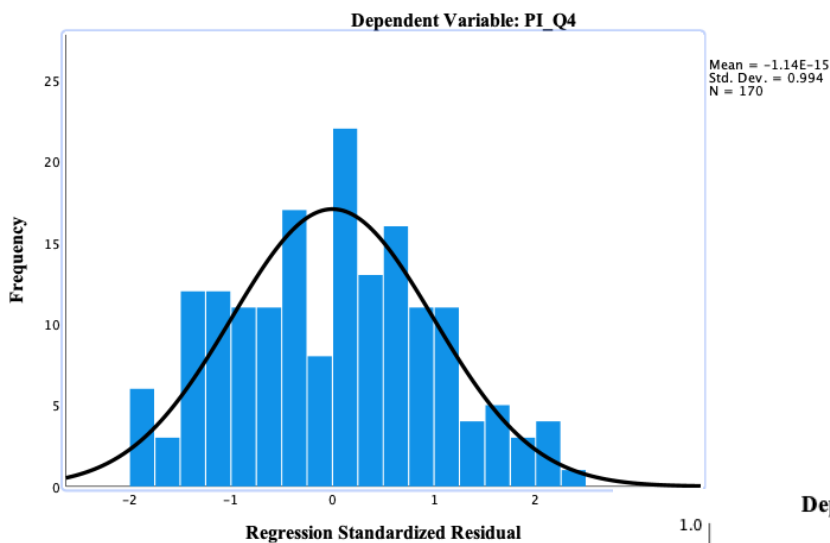


Figure 8- Histogram of regression standardized residual- mediation

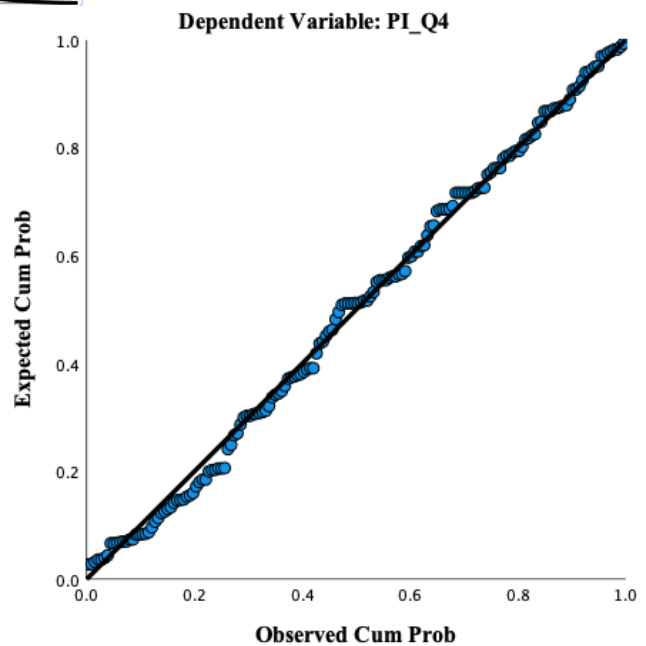


Figure 9- Normal probability standardized residual- mediation

Model Summary of Mediation PROCESS

Run MATRIX procedure:

***** PROCESS Procedure for SPSS Version 4.1 *****

Written by Andrew F. Hayes, Ph.D. www.afhayes.com
 Documentation available in Hayes (2022). www.guilford.com/p/hayes3

Model : 4
 Y : PI_Q4
 X : SMPr_Q5
 M : Trust_Q6

Sample
 Size: 170

OUTCOME VARIABLE:
 Trust_Q6

Model Summary

	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
	.4728	.2235	.5344	48.3647	1.0000	168.0000	.0000

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	1.5682	.2509	6.2498	.0000	1.0728	2.0636
SMPr_Q5	.4525	.0651	6.9545	.0000	.3241	.5810

Standardized coefficients

	coeff
SMPr_Q5	.4728

OUTCOME VARIABLE:
 PI_Q4

Model Summary

	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
	.3502	.1227	1.0424	11.6754	2.0000	167.0000	.0000

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	1.0823	.3891	2.7819	.0060	.3142	1.8504
SMPPr_Q5	-.0273	.1031	-.2643	.7919	-.2309	.1763
Trust_Q6	.4716	.1078	4.3767	.0000	.2589	.6843

Standardized coefficients

	coeff
SMPPr_Q5	-.0217
Trust_Q6	.3600

***** TOTAL EFFECT MODEL *****

OUTCOME VARIABLE:

PI_Q4

Model Summary

	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
	.1485	.0220	1.1550	3.7864	1.0000	168.0000	.0533

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	1.8219	.3689	4.9388	.0000	1.0936	2.5502
SMPPr_Q5	.1861	.0957	1.9459	.0533	-.0027	.3750

Standardized coefficients

	coeff
SMPPr_Q5	.1485

***** TOTAL, DIRECT, AND INDIRECT EFFECTS OF X ON Y *****

Total effect of X on Y

Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI	c_cs
.1861	.0957	1.9459	.0533	-.0027	.3750	.1485

Direct effect of X on Y

Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI	c'_cs
-.0273	.1031	-.2643	.7919	-.2309	.1763	-.0217

Indirect effect(s) of X on Y:

	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
Trust_Q6	.2134	.0582	.1087	.3358

Completely standardized indirect effect(s) of X on Y:

	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
Trust_Q6	.1702	.0464	.0864	.2671

***** ANALYSIS NOTES AND ERRORS *****

Level of confidence for all confidence intervals in output:
95.0000

Number of bootstrap samples for percentile bootstrap confidence intervals:
5000

----- END MATRIX -----

Appendix 5: Moderation PROCESS (H3)

The following assumptions must be satisfied about linear regression and, consequently, the mediation process:

- the dependent variable must be assessed on a continuous scale (trust is measured on a continuous scale in question 5);
- independence of observations must be satisfied (because all values of the result originate from separate individuals);
- Data must be roughly normal distributed (as previously stated, this requirement is not satisfied; nonetheless, according to the Central Limit Theory, data with a sufficient number of observations tends to be normally distributed, as is the case with the replies received);
- If you look at figure 11, you can see that the residual plot shows a random distribution of positive and negative values over the whole range of variables represented horizontally; this shows that the linearity requirement has been fulfilled.

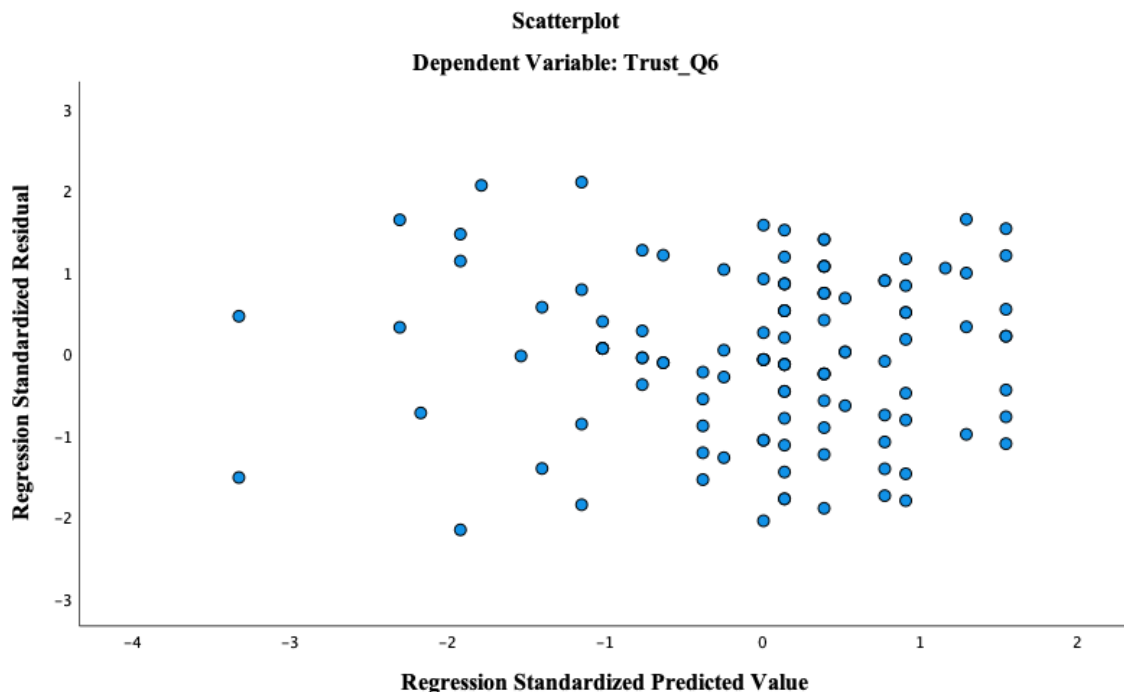


Figure 10- Plot of residuals against predictor value - moderation

- Data must demonstrate homoscedasticity (this requirement is not violated since figure 11 demonstrates that the plotted dots are dispersed, indicating that the residual variances are constant);
- must not exhibit multicollinearity (in table 6 below, the VIF is about 1 and the tolerance is more than 0.2, therefore this assumption is fulfilled);

Collinearity Statistics		
	Tolerance	VIF
SMPresence	0.995	1.005
C_Engagement	0.995	1.005

Table 6- Coefficients of Collinearity - moderation

- no major outliers were present in the data (condition satisfied after data cleaning);
- independence of error, the error terms should be uncorrelated (figure 11 demonstrates that there is no pattern in the residuals, hence this condition is satisfied);
- residuals should be roughly normally distributed (as shown in the histogram and normal probability plot below, this requirement is also satisfied).

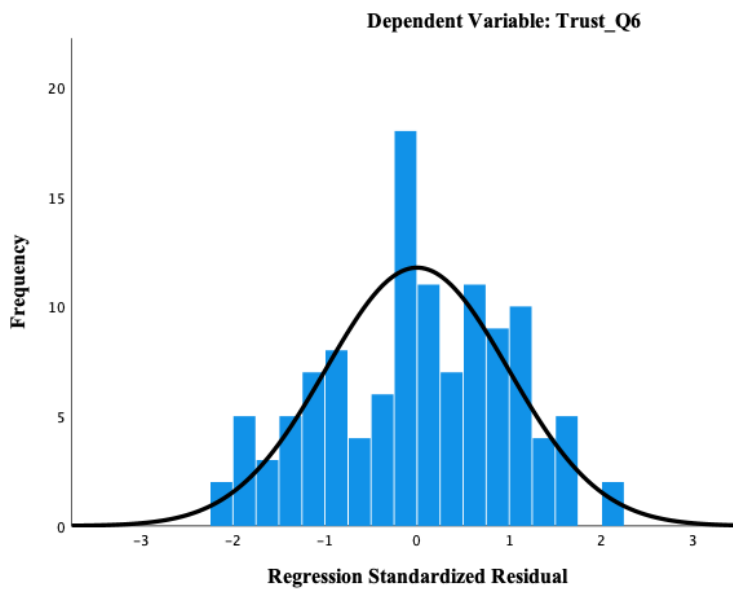


Figure 11- Histogram of regression standardized residual - moderation

Mean = 7.58E-16
Std. Dev. = 0.991
N = 117

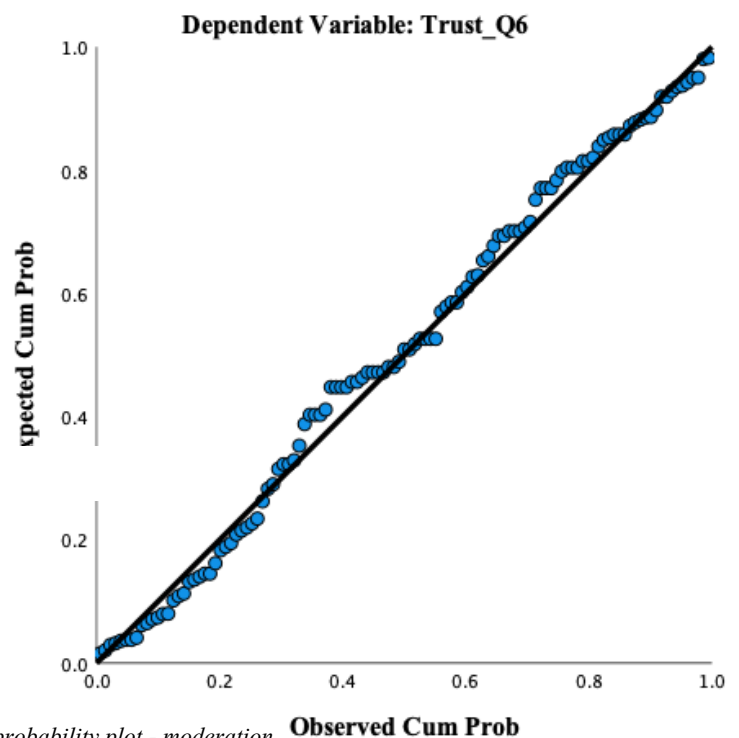


Figure 12- Normal probability plot - moderation

Model Summary of Moderation PROCESS

Run MATRIX procedure:

***** PROCESS Procedure for SPSS Version 4.1 *****

Written by Andrew F. Hayes, Ph.D. www.afhayes.com
 Documentation available in Hayes (2022). www.guilford.com/p/hayes3

Model : 1
 Y : Trust_Q6
 X : SMPr_Q5
 W : C_Engag

Sample
 Size: 117

OUTCOME VARIABLE:
 Trust_Q6

Model Summary							
	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
	.4198	.1763	.5809	8.0593	3.0000	113.0000	.0001

Model						
	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	1.2160	1.0205	1.1916	.2359	-.8058	3.2377
SMPr_Q5	.5178	.2613	1.9815	.0500	.0001	1.0356
C_Engag	.3809	.6328	.6018	.5485	-.8729	1.6347
Int_1	-.0779	.1636	-.4763	.6348	-.4021	.2463

Product terms key:
 Int_1 : SMPr_Q5 x C_Engag

Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s):					
	R2-chng	F	df1	df2	p
X*W	.0017	.2269	1.0000	113.0000	.6348

Focal predict: SMPr_Q5 (X)
Mod var: C_Engag (W)

Data for visualizing the conditional effect of the focal predictor:
Paste text below into a SPSS syntax window and execute to produce plot.

```
DATA LIST FREE/  
  SMPr_Q5    C_Engag    Trust_Q6    .  
BEGIN DATA.  
  3.0000    1.0000    2.9166  
  4.0000    1.0000    3.3565  
  4.6667    1.0000    3.6497  
  3.0000    2.0000    3.0636  
  4.0000    2.0000    3.4256  
  4.6667    2.0000    3.6669  
END DATA.  
GRAPH/SCATTERPLOT=  
  SMPr_Q5 WITH    Trust_Q6 BY    C_Engag    .
```

***** ANALYSIS NOTES AND ERRORS *****

Level of confidence for all confidence intervals in output:
95.0000

----- END MATRIX -----