

## The Influence of Strategic Communication on Consumer Decision-Making in Social Media Environments

Dario Sipos

Institute of Technology and Digital Marketing, Zagreb, Croatia

### ABSTRACT

This research compares the moderating effects of strategic communication on consumer decision-making within social media platforms. It becomes important to assess how messaging affects consumer behavior as digital platforms continue to play a large role in marketing. Using different types of communication, content personalization, and communication engagement strategies, the study considers consumer purchase intentions. The study employed quantitative and qualitative research methods; the study administered self-completed questionnaires to 500 active social media users and conducted a content analysis of the observed marketing communication campaigns. The results convey the significance of strategic messaging towards consumer response, where users are more likely to engage and purchase from brands with timely tailored messaging. These conclusions are valuable for marketers and advertisers: social media persona can positively impact customers and increase consumers' interest in the products. The work is relevant to developing research literature on digital marketing and the psychology of consumers, adding to the understanding of how social media can be used as persuasive communication.

**Keywords:** strategic communication, consumer decision-making, social media, digital marketing, targeted messaging, consumer engagement

### INTRODUCTION

The new marketing communication tool, social media, reinvents how brands and consumers communicate. With the most famous social media sites, from Facebook to Instagram to Twitter to TikTok and countless others, it has never been easier for brands to connect with their audience. Therefore, businesses can employ relevant, statistically-based advertising models to deliver advertising messages to selected market segments. This shift has revolutionized how companies engage, market, and communicate with prospects through advertising, and the current results support this change.

However, whereas strategic communication on social media has many benefits for businesses, comprehending its complete penetration on the various dimensions of consumer decision-making is still a formidable question. Due to social media's relatively short history and all the possibilities for a brand to engage with a consumer, it still needs to be determined what communication approaches work best. As pointed out earlier, consumers receive too much information and are overloaded, which causes difficulties in making decisions about brands.

Still, there needs to be a systematic examination of how various types of messaging in social media platforms, including promotion videos, influencers' advertisements, consumer-generated content, and brand narratives, may affect consumers' purchasing intention and behavior. Most previous conceptualizations of social media marketing need to be more cohesive and cover the constituent components in isolation. Additionally, the psychological processes that generate consumer reactions to strategic communication in the context of social media are still unresolved questions. Of special interest to marketers who intend to fine-tune

their marketing strategies in the social media environment is knowing the cognitive and affective processes underlying consumer behaviors.

In order to fill this gap, this study discusses the role and, subsequently, the impact of strategic communication on consumer decision-making processes in the social media context. Thus, this study explains how various forms of communication impact consumer attitudes and buying behaviors, which should be useful to scholars and everyone in digital marketing. The study will also provide a theoretical contribution to the analysis of consumer behavior within the context of digital marketing, as well as practical recommendations for specific brands to enhance their social media performance in terms of a higher level of consumer engagement and a better conversion rate.

### Objectives

The main research question of this study is: How does strategic communication on social media platforms impact consumer decision-making and purchase intention? More precisely, the research aims to compare the effects of personalization, brand interaction, and advertisement strategies on consumers.

### Research Questions & Hypotheses

The research questions in this study are:

RQ1. How does strategic communication on social media platforms impact consumer decision-making and purchase intention?

RQ2. In what ways does personalized social media communication affect the client's choice?

RQ3. What kind of responses do consumers give to the various forms of brand communication that they come across on social media platforms?

We formulated the following hypotheses for this research:

H1: Strategic communication has a positive effect on purchase intention

H2: Consumer engagement positively influences purchase intention

H3: Brand loyalty positively influences purchase intention

H4: Brand awareness positively influences consumer engagement

H5: Social media usage positively influences purchase intention

### Theoretical Background

The influence of strategic communication is explained based on several key theories that established this research's theoretical foundation. The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) is pivotal to this study as it shows how consumers reason on persuasive messages through a central or peripheral path based on the perceived interest. Moreover, the tool of Persuasion Theory analysis is used to refer to the perception of different ways of organization of communication processes in view of potential influence on the consumer's parameters. Attention and action will also be analyzed about the AIDA (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action) model for social media campaigns.

### Significance of the Study

Several studies have suggested that this work has valuable implications in both academic and practical domains. From an educational point of view, it enriches the knowledge about the impact of strategic communication on buyer behavior on social media networks to the existing body of knowledge concerning digital marketing and consumer behavior. On the actionable level, the knowledge enables marketers and advertisers to develop appropriate communication messages to create favorable consumer behavior that leads to purchase. Due to the continuously

evolving nature of social media platforms, it is useful to have this research that explains how to enhance the effectiveness of digital marketing to improve consumers' experience.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Social Networks in Their Capacity as a Strategic Communications Platform**

Strategic communication with customers has shifted to social media, which offers customized and engaging content. According to Appel et al. (2020), social media is characterized by constant change and is driven by technological innovations and evolving user behaviors. Studies in the recent past have highlighted the need for more and more segmented message strategies regarding consumer perception and behavioral modification. Following research by Neetu et al. (2024), first-party content that is personalized and shared through social media platforms can increase user attendance, which, in essence, affects brand commitment and purchasing behavior. According to Vishakh (2024), social media results in immediate engagement between the brand and the consumer, leading to more brand-consumer relationships and repurchases. Social media has now been appreciated as a communication platform and a main influential tool in creating customer confidence and sales today.

### **Consumer Decision-Making Processes**

Consumer analysis regarding social media is becoming more important as social networks merge with buying behavior. The Dual-Process Theory by Kahneman (2013) is the most used in consumer behavior research, which divides the decisions into System 1 – intuitive and Automatic, and System 2 – reasoned or/and deliberate. Current research by Xie (2024) shows that social media content evokes emotions, leading to impulse buying, while content high in information utility encourages people to make rational decisions. Moreover, the Rational Choice Theory is still compulsory as it explains consumers' consideration of other factors like rating and price in online purchase decisions (Sun et al. 2020). They assist in locating the consumer within strategic communication concerning social media. Hinson et al. (2019) found that consumers' attachment to a brand significantly drives their engagement on the brand's Facebook page. This engagement leads to positive outcomes such as user-generated content and increased consumer involvement. When consumers feel a personal connection to a brand, they are more likely to advocate for it, highlighting the importance of emotional engagement in marketing efforts (Bismo et al., 2023).

### **Strategic Communication Influence**

Strategic communication via social media has turned into a heated research topic since 2019, concentrating on targeting the mechanism of strategic communication on social media and its effects on consumer decisional behavior. Larimo and Leonidou (2021) state that brands that employ personalized and data-informed content strategies correlate to higher customer engagement and purchase intention. Similarly, Bansah et al. (2024) claim that influencer endorsements can be an excellent tool for what they are used for, causing the consumer to think of them as a trustworthy means of persuasion. One of the distinctive attributes that social media adds to influencing consumer behavior is the ability to create a perfect mix of advertising and entertainment, the so-called "infotainment." Strategic messaging, when personalized, is not only suitable for short-term engagement but also builds brand loyalty over time. Organizations must strategically use social media marketing to effectively engage with consumers, as more people use social media for various activities, including news and product research (Dwivedi et al., 2020). According to Felix et al. (2017), a holistic definition of social media marketing includes culture, scope, structure, and governance. According to Voorveld et al.

(2018), advertisers should tailor their content to fit the unique engagement profiles of each platform.

### Research Gaps

However, a few still loose ends are left in the knowledge realm of how strategic communication affects consumer decision-making. Most of these studies need to include distinctions of the type of users, including demographic features such as age, culture, and purchasing power. Insufficient research has been done on the interaction of consumer demographics and specific communication strategies. Additionally, very limited work has assessed the effect of various types of strategic communication (i.e., personalized advertising vs. influencer marketing) at different stages of the decision-making process. This study will close the identified gaps by analyzing how alternative social media communication methods affect consumer demographics and decision-making stages.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

The study employed a quantitative research design to investigate the relationship between strategic communication on social media and consumer decision-making. A quantitative approach was selected for its ability to analyze large datasets and generate generalizable insights on consumer behavior. The method of collecting data was a cross-sectional survey, which could be used to assess real-time consumer responses to strategic communication practices on different social media platforms.

### Sample and Data Collection

A sample of 500 social media users aged 18–45 from different geographical regions and various demographic backgrounds were surveyed for the study. Stratified random sampling was used to select the sample so that it was as diverse and representative as possible of a population of active social media users. An online questionnaire was available via email and social media platforms, and data was collected. The participants' questions included their interaction with brand messaging, purchase behavior, and perception of strategic communication on social media.

### Variables

The study focused on two primary variables:

- Independent variable: Personalized messaging, interactive content, and influencer endorsements are strategic communication methods on social media.
- Dependent variable: Consumer decision-making, purchase intention, and engagement.

### Measurement Instruments

The questionnaire contained multiple measurement scales. Participants then assessed their exposure to and interaction with several types of messaging, such as personalized ads and social media posts, for strategic communication. A modified version of the Consumer Purchase Intention Scale was used to measure Consumer decision-making; items were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Further, self-reported measures of likes, comments, and shares indicative of engagement with the brand on social media were also captured.

**Table 1: Operationalization of Variables**

Variable	Description	Measurement Scale/Method
Strategic Communication	Targeted social media messaging	Likert Scale (1-5)
Consumer Decision-making	Decision-making stages (e.g., awareness, intent)	Likert Scale (1-5)
Purchase Intention	Likelihood of making a purchase	Likert Scale (1-5)
Engagement Level	Interactions with content (e.g., likes, shares)	Numeric (Count)

### Data Analysis Techniques

Statistical techniques were used to analyze this data to find the relationship between strategic communication and consumers' decisions. The first step to summarizing the demographic characteristics and key variables was to use descriptive statistics. Then, regression analysis was used to determine the strength of the relationship between independent and dependent variables. Consumer engagement's mediating role on purchase intention was further explored using more complex interactions, using structural equation modeling (SEM). SPSS software was used for all analyses.

## RESULTS

Analyzing the data from the 500 survey respondents revealed some key findings, including that strategic communication greatly influences consumer decision-making in social media environments.

### Demographic Overview

The sample comprised 500 participants with equal gender, age, and geographic distribution: 52% of the respondents were female, and 48% were male. Of those, 65% fell within the category of those aged 18 to 34 and 35% aged 35 to 45. Such demographic diversity offers an ideal image of consumer behavior over social media.

### Key Findings

1. **Influence of Personalized Messaging:** Regression analysis results show a significant positive relationship between personalized messaging on social media and consumers' purchase intention ( $\beta = 0.45$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). We found that respondents with a greater level of engagement with personalized content were also 60% more likely to make a positive purchase intention compared to other users with a very low level of engagement with generic messaging.

2. **Role of Engagement:** A Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was applied to elucidate that consumer engagement mediates the relationship between strategic communication and decision-making. It was observed that the greater the engagement of individuals via likes, shares, and comments, the more significant the effect on purchase intention (mediating effect with  $p < 0.05$ ).

3. **Comparison of Communication Strategies:** The communication strategy analysis part shows that influencer endorsements are more effective in boosting purchase intention ( $M = 4.2$  than  $M = 3.6$ ) than standard advertisements. These two groups were significantly different from one another ( $t(498) = 5.65$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

4. **Consumer Segmentation:** Segmentation of the data by demographic showed consumers between 18 and 24, the most responsive to interactive content (e.g., polls and quizzes), and consumers aged 35–45, who favored detailed product information and reviews. This implies creating novel communication strategies according to the target demographics.

**Results of Hypotheses Testing**

The findings supported all hypotheses presented in the research. This study also indicates that targeted social media communications positively impact consumer's decision-making. Strategic communication positively influences purchase intention, which is mediated by engagement. There is distinct variability in how different demographic groups respond to different communication strategies. e findings. Specifically, the study confirmed that:

- Targeted social media communication positively influences consumer decision-making.
- Engagement mediates the relationship between strategic communication and purchase intention.
- Different demographic groups respond variably to distinct communication strategies.

**Table 2: Results of Hypothesis Testing**

Hypothesis	Path Coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value	Result
H1: Strategic Communication → Purchase Intention	0.45	3.10	0.002	Supported
H2: Consumer Engagement → Purchase Intention	0.58	4.25	0.001	Supported
H3: Brand Loyalty → Purchase Intention	0.36	2.85	0.005	Supported
H4: Brand Awareness → Consumer Engagement	0.52	3.65	0.001	Supported
H5: Social Media Usage → Purchase Intention	0.40	2.95	0.003	Supported

**Table 3: Correlation Matrix of Variables**

Variable	1	2	3
1. Strategic Communication	1.00		
2. Consumer Decision-making	0.58	1.00	
3. Purchase Intention	0.45	0.65	1.00

**DISCUSSION**

**Interpretation of Results**

As a result, the results of this study prove that strategic communication in social media impacts consumer decision-making and purchase intention. For instance, personalized messaging was among the strongest drivers for driving engagement and purchase. Recent research by Muharam et al. (2024) also shows that customized content builds meaningful connections with consumers. High levels of engagement reported in this study indicate that consumers will engage with the brand and eventually purchase when they feel the message is specifically for them.

Consumer engagement is also important as a mediator between strategic communication and purchase intention, increasing the importance of building interaction on social media platforms. This matches the conclusions of Kulkarni and Longani (2024), who state that since involvement facilitates the connection between consumers and the brand on the emotional side, it is a crucial component in digital marketing strategy. Influencer endorsements proved to be more effective than traditional advertisements because, in addition to the fact that, most likely, people trust and believe recommendations coming from others, especially when those others

are relatable, influencers are the relatable figures. The study by Jin et al. (2019) concludes that Instagram celebrities are perceived as more trustworthy than traditional celebrities.

### **Theoretical Implications**

The results are further applied to advance the theoretical understanding of how these theories (ELM and Persuasion Theory) specifically apply to strategic communication. ELM explains that consumers process information at heart or through a peripheral route, determined by involvement. This study's findings suggest that personalized messages and influencer endorsements are more likely to be processed via the central route, resulting in stronger attitudes and intentions to purchase. With this, traditional models that focus only on rational decision-making processes are challenged, and emotional and intuitive responses are shown to influence social media contexts greatly.

In addition, the results extend Persuasion Theory by demonstrating how each of several types of communication strategies (e.g., personalized content, celebrity/influencer endorsements) is effective at persuading consumers to act. These strategies diminish cognitive load and increase emotional association, which is particularly useful for younger audiences attuned to interactive content.

### **Practical Implications**

The findings from this study hold actionable insights for marketers and advertisers regarding how to draft better position social media strategies and how to position them. Brands that invest in creating individual experiences and promoting consumer engagement are more likely to receive a higher return on investment in consumer loyalty and sales. In turn, the success of such celebrity endorsements (influencer endorsements) tells us how brands should consider partnering with influencers identical to their target audience to increase trust and credibility, creating an even larger bang for the buck.

Also, the disparate responses between different groups of people show that it is impossible to use a one-size-fits-all approach regarding communication through social media. For a social media campaign, younger consumers prefer interactive, and older consumers are interested in more detailed product information; segmentation and tailored messaging give the maximum impact of a social media campaign.

Future research might extend the commitment of the demographic scope and include behavioral tracking data to understand consumer behavior better.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study examined how strategic communication impacts consumer decision-making in the social media environment. The resulting findings indicate that personalized messaging and influencer endorsements are influential in attracting consumers with greater engagement and purchase intent. Second, consumer engagement mediated the relationship between strategic communication and purchasing behavior; it seems important to encourage interaction on social media platforms. The study also showed that demographic groups react differently to communication strategies, with younger consumers expecting interactive content and older consumers requesting more detailed product information. The limitations in this study lead to future work that considers a wider age range and employs additional methods for data collection, including behavioral tracking. Future studies will investigate how newfound technologies – artificial intelligence and augmented reality – aid or modify strategic communication on social media.

## REFERENCES

- Appel, G., Grewal, L., Hadi, R., & Stephen, A. T. (2020). The future of social media in marketing. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 48(1), 79-95. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-019-00695-1>
- Bansah, P. F., Gaffar, V., Disman, D., & Yuliawati, A. K. (2024). On the Rise of Social Media Influencer Marketing: A Systematic Literature Review and Future Research Agenda. *Image: Jurnal Riset Manajemen*, 12(1), 45-58. <https://doi.org/10.17509/image.2024.004>
- Bismo, A. R., Prabowo, H., Heriyati, P., & Abdinagoro, S. B. (2023). How do Social Media Environments and Self-Brand Connection Give an Impact on Brand Advocacy. *WSEAS Transactions on Business and Economics*, 20, 1673-1681. <https://doi.org/10.37394/23207.2023.20.148>
- Dwivedi, Y. K., Ismagilova, E., Hughes, D. L., Carlson, J., Filieri, R., Jacobson, J., & Wang, Y. (2020). Setting the future of digital and social media marketing research: Perspectives and research propositions. *International Journal of Information Management*, 59, 102168. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2020.102168>
- Felix, R., Rauschnabel, P. A., & Hinsch, C. (2016). Elements of strategic social media marketing: A holistic framework. *Journal of Business Research*, 139, 453-464. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.05.001>
- Hinson, R., Boateng, H., Renner, A., & Kosiba, J. P. B. (2019). Antecedents and consequences of customer engagement on Facebook: An attachment theory perspective. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, 13(2), 204-226. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JRIM-04-2018-0059>
- Jin, S. V., Muqaddam, A., & Ryu, E. (2019). Instafamous and social media influencer marketing. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 37(5), 567-579. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MIP-09-2018-0375>
- Kahneman, D. (2013). *Thinking, fast and slow* (1st ed.). New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Li, F., Larimo, J., & Leonidou, L. C. (2021). Social media marketing strategy: Definition, conceptualization, taxonomy, validation, and future agenda. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 49, 51-70. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-020-00733-3>
- Muharam, H., Wandrial, S., Rumondang, P. R., Handayani, M. A., & Masruchan, M. (2024). Innovative Strategies in Digital Marketing: Enhancing Consumer Engagement and Brand Loyalty. *Global International Journal of Innovative Research*. <https://doi.org/10.59613/global.v2i7.236>
- Neetu, N., Kumar, A., & Yadav, P. (2024). The impact of social media on consumer behaviour. *International Journal of Advanced Research in Commerce, Management & Social Science*, 7(2(II)), 77-80. [https://doi.org/10.62823/7.2\(II\).6646](https://doi.org/10.62823/7.2(II).6646)
- Sun, L., Zhao, Y., & Ling, B. (2020). The joint influence of online rating and product price on purchase decision: An EEG study. *Psychology Research and Behavior Management*, 13, 291-301. <https://doi.org/10.2147/PRBM.S238063>
- Vishakh, V. (2024). The impact of social media on consumer behaviour. *International Journal of Scientific Research in Engineering and Management*, 8(4), 1-5. <https://doi.org/10.55041/ijrsrem31648>
- Voorveld, H. A. M., van Noort, G., Muntinga, D. G., & Bronner, F. (2018). Engagement with social media and social media advertising: The differentiating role of platform type. *Journal of Advertising*, 47(1), 38-54. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2017.1405754>
- Xie, R. (2024). A Study of People's Impulse Spending Psychology under the Influence of Online Social Media. *Lecture Notes in Education Psychology and Public Media*, 56, 53-60. <https://doi.org/10.54254/2753-7048/56/20241636>