The Impact of Consumers’ Actual Behaviour on Social Media on their Purchase Behaviour

Dissertation submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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at Dublin Business School

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Declaration: I, Paula Raithel, declare that this research is my original work and that it has never been presented to any institution or university for the award of Degree or Diploma. In addition, I have referenced correctly all literature and sources used in this work and this work is fully compliant with the Dublin Business School’s academic honesty policy.

Signed: Raithel, P. PR

Date: 24.08.2018
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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Further, I want to express my appreciation to the understanding of my current manager at LinkedIn who nicely gave me a day of at a very stressful moment during this period.

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Thank you very much!

Paula Raithel

Dublin, 24.08.2018
ABSTRACT

THE PROBLEM
The digital world and Social Media have changed the economic landscape. Marketers face challenges in succeeding in their marketing approaches. Real-time communication on a global level has not only made information transparent, but has also empowered consumers. This empowerment has changed the way consumers consume and engage with companies. Not only this, but also the fact that Social Media has become an almost necessary network for human beings, users experience challenges and opportunities when they participate.

The aim of this dissertation is to understand the relationship between consumers actual behaviour on social media and their purchase behaviour. Further, insights on consumers self-assessment and self-presentation on Social Media is investigated.

METHODOLOGY
The centre of the research was defined as German Millennials. As a result, only respondents in this group could participate. The research results are based on an online survey, which included 23 questions. The researcher used a quantitative mono-method. Further, a deductive research approach has been chosen, which implies the testing of pre-defined hypotheses. In total 104 respondents participated in this survey, with 4 respondents were excluded.
CONCLUSION RECOMMENDATION

The dissertation reveals a relation between consumers actual social media behaviour and their purchase behaviour. Further, a strong discrepancy between consumers’ self-assessment in respect with social was explored. In addition, female consumers were higher influenced by social media. Nevertheless, two out of three hypotheses were solely proven partially. As a result, further research is suggested in order to develop a deeper understanding.
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<td>SM</td>
<td>Social Media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMS</td>
<td>Social Media Sites</td>
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<td>ZMOT</td>
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1 INTRODUCTION

Social Media (SM) or Social Media Sites (SMS) are defined as: “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, which allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) Which has changed the social, behavioural and economic environment we live in (Qualmann, 2013). The digital age has shaped the way people all around the world receive information and the way that information is processed. Therefore, Internet and especially SMS have become the first and often most valued source of information and communication (Pownall, 2015).

Those new ways of communication, interaction and new research tools through SMS, instant messages or video chats have opened new perspectives of reaching people but also lead to massive challenges. Taking the immense user base of Internet users as a way to showcase the power of those changes: About 3.77 billion people worldwide have access and use the Internet on a daily basis. This reflects almost 50% of the world’s population. The fact that 37% of those users are so-called active SMS users shows the massive power of SM. An active SM user is defined as a person, which logs into the application at least one time a month (Facebook, 2018). Furthermore, this trend is even increasing in the following years as regions such as Africa or South Asia are getting access to the Internet and within this SMS (Tuten & Solomon, 2018).

Hence, the rise of SMS fosters mass but also personal communication worldwide (French & Bazarova, 2017). Therefore, the users are willing to share personal and professional information, ideas and interest on those virtual platforms in order to
socialize and be part of this digital world (Tuten & Solomon, 2018; Van Dijck, 2013). Moreover, people literally create a virtual identity by voluntarily publishing information on SMS. That information can be accurate but is also are shaped by the peoples’ desire for social rewarding or need for attention (Ellison et al., 2006). This need of attention fosters users to change their online appearance from their real-life appearance by publishing content with the aim of showing of a version of their desired self. Further, SM has an impact on the way users consume. This impact can be seen, for instance, especially within the so-called Millenials. In this regard, Millenials' are consumers born between 1980-2000 and are on the main focus of this dissertation. Therefore, research shows that among this target group SM influences the purchase of goods in order to define them in a certain status group (Van Dijck, 2013).

1.1 BACKGROUND AND CURRENCY OF TOPIC
As already stated, the development of the Internet and SMS has shaped the way people connect with each other. Social interactions have become more and more digitally through the use of online forums, SM communities or rating pages (Hajil, 2014). “User-Generated Content” is any created form of content, which is published by users on the internet. This unlimited information is accessible for all users and is seen as a valid source when consumers are actively searching for product or company information. Taking the shift to a company’s point of view, as the way of communication and reaching people has changed, companies have a need to be active on SMS in order to reach their audience group (Mangold & Fauls, 2009). Not only this, but also the fact that consumers’ perception regarding advertisement has widely changed, putting companies under pressure to change the way of
communicating with their customers. Consumers’ are not willing to accept passive marketing approaches anymore (Acer & Puntoni, 2016). Therefore, consumers want advertisement, which is (unlike traditional media) without any commercial messages (Büchenau & Fürtbauer, 2015). Further, as the Internet has facilitated ways of online purchasing, consumers are increasingly demanding online shops from companies. Those online shops give consumers various advantages and increase the likelihood of sales.

In addition, User-Generated content on SMS, for instance as product ratings and recommendations, have a major impact on a company’s brand image and the consumers’ willingness to buy goods (Rigik 2015). Positive online word of mouth can have a huge advantage for companies but needs to be managed closely as companies have almost no control of online content. Further, the Internet gives users the power to create content anonymous or offer them the use of pseudonyms (Palme & Berglund, 2002). Furthermore, research shows that the digital world and especially SMS should be considered as a domain where anybody can be anything. This means, users are able to try out different identities or play with and perform their actual identity in order to leave an impression online, which (in certain cases), cannot be reached in the real world (Buckingham & Willett, 2013; Mehdizadeh, 2010). Individuals strive a certain level of behaviour or activity that strengthen, supports and reinforces their own identity (Burke & Tully, 1997). This identity has an impact on the choice’s individuals make and is therefore linked with the level of performance. In this respect, the activity, which is the result from a taken decision, corresponds with the representation of one’s identity (Burke & Reitzes, 1981).
All in all, the online identity can vary from a real-life identity due to the desire of consumers’ desired online self-presentation. The fact that this online identity has an impact on ones’ decisions makes it relevant for marketers as for instance buying decisions are influenced. As a result, it is important to measure the degree of influence SM self-presentation, the actual activity, other users’ content and both behaviours have on consumers’ buying-decision process and which part companies can play in this construct.

1.2 RESEARCH PURPOSE

SMS have a major impact on today’s society regarding information and communication. Further, the trust in traditional media has declined which means that companies need to develop approaches to interact with their consumers as well as establish new understandings of what influences their targets. Taking the already stated facts that online opinions and ratings are a powerful and valid source of information research and the fact that consumers tend to re-shape, play with or change their own identities online, a research addressing the actual SM behaviour of users can give great insights for marketers. Therefore, the purpose of this dissertation seeks to address the gap in the literature. Hence, the aim is to understand the degree of influence SM behaviour has on purchase behaviour of consumers. The researcher’s goal is to answer the following main question:

What is the impact of consumers’ behaviour on social media channels on their purchase behaviour?

The author wants to stress that SM is not the centre of interest. More the actual behaviour of consumers on their personal SM channels is of interest. Therefore, the
The author wants to investigate if the actual behaviour (defined by: How many SM channels? How frequent is the consumer publishing content? How many followers? Online Self-presentation versus Real Self-Perception? Purchasing online or offline?) on SM gives insights in the purchase behaviour.

In order to further address this question, the following three sub-questions will be researched:

1. Are active SM users more likely to purchase online?
2. Does user’s actual SM behaviour foster status consumption?
3. Does the online self-presentation have influence on actual purchases?

The following objectives are sourced from the research question and sub-questions:

- to determine how SM behaviour influences purchase behaviour;
- to understand the relation between online self-presentation, status consumption and SM;
- to evaluate the degree of influence other users, have on consumers SM behaviour and their purchase behaviour;
- to define the impact of SM behaviour and purchase channel choice.

As a result of the stated research questions, the author has set four hypotheses:

As the use of SMS rise and influencer marketing has become a valid marketing approach, the first hypothesis is defined as:

**H1:** Consumers’ SM behaviour has a strong influence on purchase behaviour.

The way consumers purchase has changed. The online shop landscape has evolved, and more consumers tend to buy online.
As a result, the second hypothesis is defined as:

- **H2**: *Active consumers on SM tend to purchase online.*

The self-presentation on SM can vary from the offline real world from users. In order to stick with the online self-presentation of ones’ self, hypothesis three has been set as:

- **H3**: *Active consumers on SM with a varying online self-presentation (compared to the real-life version) tend to purchase goods to obtain a certain online status.*

### 1.3 SCOPES AND LIMITATIONS

The literature research started in June 2018 with the primary research being completed during a period of 14 days. This includes a questionnaire with 23 questions (including 3 critical questions in order to ensure that only the appropriate respondents are part of the questionnaire). The survey was published on Facebook and LinkedIn with the following respondents (so-called Millennials’):

- Living in Germany for at least 5 years
- Born between 1980-2000
- Using at least two different social media channels

In addition, the main limitations of this research arise are time and financial resources and a limited respondents’ group as the research is conducted via convenience sampling.

The research submission was originally the 20 of August 2018 and was extended to the 26 of August 2018 (due to sickness of the supervisor).

### 1.4 STRUCTURE OF CONTENT

In order to understand the correlation between individuals’ behaviour on SMS and their purchase behaviour, the research has been structured as follows. The first
chapter (Introduction) defines the background and the currency of this topic. Furthermore, the problem, meaning the gap in the literature and four hypothesises are defined. The following chapter (Literature Review) aims to give a detailed description and understanding of the existing literature regarding: Social Media Marketing, E-Commerce and Consumer Behaviour in the digital age. The third chapter (Methodology) gives insights of the chosen methodology including research design, research ethics, limitations and philosophy. Further, the chapter “Presentation of Findings” (Chapter 4), presents all relevant findings from the questionnaire. Taking those findings into chapter 5 (The Discussion of Findings) giving a deeper insight and statistical analysis of the findings. From this knowledge, chapter 6 (Conclusions and Recommendations) has been derived. “Learner Reflection” is also added to the appendices section, discusses the researchers’ individual attitudes towards learning, including learning styles, achievements and the experience during the development process of this dissertation.

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

In respect of the previous explained changes regarding the rise of SM and a power-shift from marketers to consumers, companies need a way to understand consumers’ behaviour better. As online self-presentation is likely to vary from ones’ real life, the influence on purchase behaviours needs to be investigated in order to give companies the chance to re-define their target groups. In addition, the result of this research can lead to significant changing approaches regarding companies understanding of their own customers.

Furthermore, the chosen target (Millennials in Germany) is a highly lucrative target group for marketers, which justifies the researcher’s choice of respondents.
2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Built upon existing research literature, the purpose of this chapter is to provide the readers a deep understanding of the SM landscape. In this respect, an overview of two different SM channels, SM marketing approaches, as well as users self-presentation on SM platforms will be discussed. All aspects are investigated with an awareness of digitally empowered consumers, with the impact of a power-shift from companies to consumers also explored. Further, the following aims to give a deeper insight into consumers’ behaviour in the digital age. The changed buying-decision process, due to almost transparent information and SM influence is discussed. This section also provides an overview of the theory of status consumption in order to obtain an understanding of the concept with regards to SM influence. In addition, e-commerce, with all its challenges and opportunities follows, and the literature review is concluded with a summary of the critical findings.

2.1 SOCIAL MEDIA ENVIRONMENT & CLASSIFICATION

The age of the internet has created new forms of communication. The possibility of digital shaped communication has changed the way society is interacting. Nowadays, consumers all over the world share, create, and define content together with other internet users. This information exchange is not aligned with any locally or timed framework. Communication has become borderless, and each user can be part of it at anytime, anywhere and in different ways (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). One method of this is SM, facilitating communication between users around the world. As a result, the globe is increasingly connected digitally, and online networks of people transform to digital communities (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). With regards to content, there are no rules or boundaries. Users share their opinions, experiences, and any
information they wish to discuss online (Weinberg et al., 2012). This many-to-many communication addresses a larger communication base due to the fact that it is not linked to any real-life social environment (Charlesworth, 2009).

In order to understand SM in all its various facets it is important to classify the different types of SM platforms. There are different approaches in order to classify SM portals. Regarding Zarella (2009) and Weinberg et al. (2012), micro-blogs, social networks, media sharing platforms, social bookmarking, voting sites, forums, virtual worlds, blogs and site-related portals are all defined as SM. In order to understand the classification of the mentioned platforms, the most practical is to cluster them with respect to their functionalities. First, platforms, which are focused on communication exchange amongst all users. This category includes micro-blogs, social networks or social bookmarking platforms (Kreutzer 2014; Weinberg et al. 2012).

Social networks are a crucial part of this category as it includes platforms such as Facebook, which is the largest social networking site worldwide with 2.13 billion users monthly. This network fosters communication through user interaction, content sharing (including music, videos, games, and images) and is combined with an instant messaging tool “Facebook Messenger” (Facebook, 2018). This category is focused on interpersonal contact, which can happen between individuals but also between groups of users. Further, these platforms can be on a private, professional or geographical level (Van Dijck, 2013). The second category is centred around cooperation among all users. This cooperative behaviour can be seen in varying iterations such as general rating pages (for instance for companies products or
services) but also includes forums detailing personal interests, challenges or experiences. The opinion of users on those sites can have a massive impact of individuals’ life, the way they gather information and can create attitudes towards certain topics. Finally, a significant category within SM are portals, which are focused on content exchange. This is shown in various forms such as videos, images or audio sharing sites (Kreutzer 2014; Weinberg et al. 2012). Popular channels are Instagram and YouTube. In brief, some SM platforms have a strong focus on exchanging information between users by pushing global interaction through sharing content (such as images, videos, and statuses). On the other hand, other networks have been created to facilitate the display of so-called user-generated-content (UGC). UGC is defined as content, which is published in a public and accessible manner and needs to be created by a user. Further, the UGC needs to show a certain degree of creativity and should not be aligned with any professional practices, implying it should be outside commercial context (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

All in all, the main objective of SM interaction is to enable all users to create social communication, facilitate information exchange, and foster a way to creatively showcase users’ personal opinions, interests, or experiences. (Ellison et al., 2007).

2.1.1 SOCIAL MEDIA | SELF-PRESENTATION & SELF-DISCLOSURE

As previously stated, the internet enables consumers to communicate globally, rapidly, and easily. Thus, users decide which parts of their identity are shown online. Consumers can surf anonymously or even create pseudonyms for their online footprint (Palme & Berglund, 2002). These identities are often shaped by internal
desires of a changed or advanced personality. Research shows that users tend to play, broadcast or perform with their identity in order to give a different online impression of themselves (Buckingham & Willet, 2013). Goffman’s (1959) Theory of Impression Management states that individuals have the desire to control the impression other people (in this case other users) have about them. Therefore, a change in behaviour or adapting different mannerisms form as a result of this desire. Real-life situations are generally not controllable, and individuals are unable to always embody only their positive characteristics or attributes. Hence, the online world gives users a chance to highlight the personal features of themselves they like and with this the chance to hide traits they do not want to show the world. This means, online self-presentation is easier to control as they are conscious and managed by the individuals themselves (Krämer & Winter, 2008). As a result, SM sites give users the possibility to create an ideal, impeccable and error-free version of their own selves (Mehdizadeh, 2010).

In order to get a deeper understanding of desired self-presentation and real self, a division into three different dimensions is necessary. The first dimension is the real self, defined through actual characteristics a person possesses. The second dimension reflects the ideal self and includes the characteristics an individual desire to possess, and is strongly influenced by people’s personal wishes and the environment they live in. The last dimension is the ought self and shows a version of oneself with the characteristics others wish to see in them (Higgins, 1987). As the digital perception of users is shaped by a desire for perfection, it is most likely that individuals choose their digital identity wisely and in a manner, which highlights all positive attributes of their personality or even exceeds and reforms their personal
traits to a certain level. Therefore, the selection of self-promoting pictures or the use of applications, which create error-free images and attractive versions of an individual (such as Photoshop) are widely used in SM in order to emphasise the ideal self, the ought self and alter the actual self (Ellison et al., 2006).

As a result, offline self-disclosure is likely to be different from online self-disclosure and is often created to gain social rewards or social connectedness (Tamir & Mitchell, 2012).

As previously stated, SM sites come in varying forms and have different features. Taking into consideration online self-disclosure theory, it is possible to divide SM platforms in two different categories. First, there is a media-related component (relying on the Theory of Media Research), which defines the degree of social presence as well as media richness. Then, there is the social dimension, describing self-presentation and self-disclosure, and is based on Theory of Social Processes. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) combine these dimensions and have created the following classification of SM (see Figure 1).

*Figure 1: Classification of Social Media by social presence/media richness and self-presentation/self-disclosure*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social presence/ Media richness</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-presentation/ Self-disclosure</strong></td>
<td>Blogs</td>
<td>Social networking sites (e.g., Facebook)</td>
<td>Virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia)</td>
<td>Content communities (e.g., YouTube)</td>
<td>Virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Adapted from Kaplan & Haenlein (2010).*
This classification categorises different SM portals and can be used to decide which platforms give the users the best tools and features to fulfil their needs, as each SM portal offers different services.

Taking Figure 1 and the example of Wikipedia, it is defined a collaborative project which has low self-presentation/self-disclosure and lower social presence/media richness than blogs, SM sites and virtual social worlds. Therefore, the focus of collaborative projects is solely informational in nature. On the contrary, blogs or SM networks have a very high self-presentation/self-disclosure as all users share their personal information, experiences, opinions or beliefs. Taking virtual social networks with the highest social presence/media richness it becomes clear that a whole different online society with rich media has been created while on the other hand, blogs with lower social presence/media richness focus more on the actual content than creating a different world.

To summarize, SM gives users the possibly to decide in which way they want to share their personal information, interact and disclose themselves. Trepte and Reinecke (2011), believe that people have the deep desire to self-disclose which implies to build relationships, social rewards and support, which means that SM builds the base to fulfil this need in the online world. Furthermore, it is important to also distinguish between different factions within a SM site. For instance, public status updates (such as on Facebook) are defined as an act of social validation and self-expression (Bazarova & Choi’s). In addition, status updates reflect a user’s internal self, which means it is an act of self-oriented content to express feelings, experiences or attitudes and is not published in order to connect with others (Toma & Hancock, 2013).
On the other hand, private messages (such as on Facebook messenger) or wall posts are likely to play part in a user’s desire for self-disclosure and relationship building (Bazarova & Choi’s). However, it is important to keep in mind that people do not want to lose control over others’ perception of them. As a result, users are most likely publishing content, which transmits an ideal-self persona, which is a modified version of their real offline self (Gibbs et al., 2006).

2.1.2 SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

SM has become a crucial communication channel for businesses worldwide. Social Media Marketing (SMM) is the action of companies actively participating on SM platforms, which means publishing content, interacting with users, and creating company owned profiles in order to achieve their business and marketing goals (Hettler, 2012). This participation is in the digital age no longer an additional channel used by companies, it is more seen as an essential way of communication in order to reach their targets (Kreutzer et. al, 2010). SM offers companies a significant number of potential targets. Taking figure 2, it becomes clear that this channel offers high potential for companies.
As already discussed, SM does not have any boundaries regarding location, therefore a global marketing approach is feasible as SM facilitates many-to-many communication (Charlesworth, 2009; Zarella, 2009). As a result of weakened trust in traditional advertisements, businesses use SM in order to gain back trust and build loyalty. In addition, consumers favour brands which interact with them instead of receiving passive marketing communication (Acer & Puntoni, 2016). This is aligned with the fact that users on SM often shape and co-create online communication as the users are not only consumers of the messages but also producers of the content.
in regarding comments, re-posts, share or social voting (such as likes) (Berthon et al., 2012). SMM can give companies great opportunities to build initial customer loyalty, brand awareness and increases sales. This is supported by the fact that SM communication fosters word-of-mouth effect as the online landscape offers real-time communication at any time.

The viral online word-of-mouth effect gives brands, if they are positive, a huge advantage over their competitors as the opinion from others regarding companies products or services are highly regarded in society (Kreutzer et al., 2010; Buchenau & Fürtbauer, 2015). This should be considered critical, as SM is known for facilitating backlash from users against companies, which may damage a brand’s perception, performance and overall business success immensely (Weinberg et al., 2012). Therefore, the opportunity given by consumers actively interacting with the companies online on SM is simultaneously a big challenge in SMM as this content from users shared online can be equally value-adding as value-destructive (Kreuter, 2014). This reveals the importance of constantly monitoring all SM channels in order to prevent negative comments, or comfort dissatisfied customers before any negative reaction or backlash occurs (Armelini & Villanueva, 2011).

Furthermore, companies have to show a certain amount of integrity on their SM channels. SM in general is known as an easy, authentic and informal way of communication. This means that companies should stick to those communication rules but never lose their core brand voice so as not to damage the company’s brand image. As a result, SM communication will be a credible way of pushing marketing messages online and can potentially lead to a stronger brand identity and advocacy
from consumers (Kreutzer, 2014; Buchenau & Fürtbauer, 2015). Furthermore, regarding SMM content, it is highly recommended to have a strong content marketing approach. Content marketing is defined as, “a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience — and, ultimately, to drive profitable customer action“ (Contentmarketing, n.d.). Therefore, the companies’ content needs to be relevant, interesting and useful for their target audience. High-quality content should be the main focus, rather than a greater quantity of low-quality content, which may damage the brands SM performance. As such, a wide spread of unique, quality content across multiple SM portals is recommended in order to reach the biggest possible target (Del Rowe, 2016; Baltes, 2015).

Another important component of SMM is the use of influencer’s on SM. Influencer Marketing is a communication approach on SM, which aims to achieve companies’ goals with the use of Influencers on SM, who are people such as celebrities, bloggers, or other users with a large following. Woods (2016), found that 92% of consumers tend to believe friends’ or families’ opinions regarding products or services more than any advertisement message. Research shows that 49% of questioned participants rely on opinions from SM influencers (Swant 2016). The paid relationships between companies and influencers are a powerful SM communication tool and should be considered in every SMM strategy. It is important to note that selecting the appropriate influencer as well as the paid-for content produced by the influencer are two critical parts of any Influencer Marketing Strategy, as the chosen influencer needs to reflect the brands identity. Moreover, the influencer initial brand
identity (which is the way the influencer brands them self) should be compatible with the brand in order to develop a credible campaign.

2.1.3 INSTAGRAM

Instagram is an application, developed in 2010, which aims to connect people and enables them to publish pictures and videos. Instagram fosters interaction between users via comments, likes or shares.

“Instagram is a fun and quirky way to share your life with friends through a series of pictures. Snap a photo with your mobile phone, and then choose a filter to transform the image into a memory to keep around forever. We're building Instagram to allow you to experience moments in your friends' lives through pictures as they happen. We imagine a world more connected through photos” (Instagram, 2016a)

Taking this quotation - published by Instagram, the application is a combination between a photo sharing platform and a SMS.

2.1.3.1 FUNCTIONALITY INSTAGRAM

Users of Instagram are able to open the application via a mobile device, such as a smartphone or tablet, but also via a web browser. Nevertheless, there are differences to consider when analysing the functionality of the social platform. In general, Instagram is mainly provided for the usage via the application, entered with a mobile device. The web browser version is restricted to the functionalities of the log in of the own account, watching the users' personalised newsfeed, and notifications, search, likes and commenting functionalities (Instagram, 2016b).
Comparing the application to these functions, the user can edit and publish content – pictures and videos – view the list of followers and follow people, and the usage of ‘Direct-Message’ or create stories. The latter (Stories), is a feature developed in August 2016. Instagram users can create daily stories on their account and watch stories from users they are following. All stories are deleted after 24 hours, which gives the platform a fast-moving identity and fosters user interaction (Welt, 2017).

The objective of Instagram is the commitment of users towards the mobile application. This characteristic differentiates Instagram from other SM platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest, which engages the user with all functionalities in the application itself and the web browser version.

To ease the registration process for the usage of the app, users can connect their Facebook profile with the Instagram account, which has the advantage of connecting with Facebook friends in Instagram. However, the user also has the opportunity to register with an existing e-mail address and synchronize existing contacts on the mobile device with his/her Instagram account. The download and usage of Instagram is free of charge, and available for Android, IOS, and Windows phone (Kobilke, 2016).

All in all, Instagram provides the following tools for its users:

- Publish pictures, Videos and Stories
- Direct Messages’
- Edit pictures, videos and stories
- User Interaction via likes, comments and shares
2.1.3.2 USER BASE INSTAGRAM

Instagram represents one of the strongest SM applications. In 2018, Instagram has over 1 billion active users worldwide. Germany has 15 million active users in 2018 (Firsching, 2018). The target audience of Instagram is described as “a young audience of people with an interest in style, fashion and technology.” (Walter & Gioglio (2014). Instagram is a SM platform dominated by women, and in 2016 53% of German users are female. Nevertheless, the male user base is steadily increasing (Statista, 2016).

Further, figure 3, shows that especially people under 18-34 are active on Instagram in Germany.

*Figure 3: Instagram: US American & German users divided into age groups 2015*

Source: Adapted from Statista (2018).
2.1.3.3 INSTAGRAM FOR COMPANIES

Instagram represents a strong and powerful tool for companies to interact with their customers. Over 25 Million businesses worldwide use Instagram in order to engage with their targets, to promote their products and to establish strong customer relationships. Further, the SM application is well suited for untraditional marketing approaches as the platform fosters Storytelling approaches (ZBW Mediatalk, 2015). Instagram is broadly used in order to give customer insights “behind the scene” with an informal word of tone. This fosters an authentic relationship between customers and companies (Walter & Gioglio, 2014).

In addition, the use of Hashtags from the company and users can enable organic digital word of mouth. Users tend to copy Hashtags given from companies when they speak or publish something relating to a brand (Firsching, 2018).

2.1.4 FACEBOOK

Facebook is a SMS established in 2004. It's original mission statement was: “Facebook's mission is to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected “. This statement was adjusted in 2017 to “to bring the world closer together” (Heath, 2017).

2.1.4.1 FUNCTIONALITY FACEBOOK

Facebook has enlarged its various functionalities over the last years. In order to set up an account for Facebook, users need to give their first and last name, gender, e-mail address and date of birth on the landing page of the website.
The registration process is possible via computer, tablet, as well as on smartphones. Facebook users are expected to reveal their true identity to provide a trusted user base on the platform. This is aligned to Facebook’s vision of distinguishing itself from Chatrooms, where everyone is anonymous (Spudich, 2016).

After registration, users are taken to their profile page where they can present themselves by, for example, disclosing personal information under the "Info" section. In addition to personal information such as hobbies, favourite books or music, personal address or phone number users can also upload a profile picture and other photos and videos. Users have the opportunity to connect with other users on Facebook. To do so, users have to send friend request to others or accept received requests.
On a user’s personal pin board (their own profile page), Facebook friends can leave public messages and users have the option to update their own status via the function "What are you doing?". In addition, users can send private messages to friends or chat with them (Moses, 2015). This direct messaging function was adjusted in 2011 when Facebook released a separated mobile application (Facebook Messenger) for its users. This direct messaging function includes now call and video call options for Facebook users (Facebook, 2018).

In addition, users can invite Facebook friends to events or groups and vice versa. The latest update of Facebook was in 2016 when Facebook launched a Story function for their users. This tool is similar to Instagram stories and gives users the chance to upload videos or pictures which last for only 24 hours within the platform (Raed, 2017).

All in all, Facebook offers the following tools for its users:

- Self-presentation with personal data on personal pin board
- Uploading pictures and videos
- Public communication on personal pin board
- Private communication via Facebook messenger
- Creation of events and groups
- Facebook Stories

2.1.4.2 USER BASE FACEBOOK

Facebook represents the largest SM platform and has 2,2 billion users worldwide in 2018. In Germany, over 30 million users are active on Facebook. Facebook defines
“an active user” as a user who is online at least once per month (Statista, 2018; Allfacebook, 2018). Facebook has an equal gender base in Germany (Keil, n.d.). Facebook’s user base regarding age has immensely changed. While Facebook was widely used by people between 14-19 in the past (89% in 2015), only 61% in this age group are still active on Facebook. Nevertheless, the user base between 20-40 year olds remains stable and are active on Facebook. This indicates a demographic aging of Facebook users (Meedia, 2018).

2.1.4.3 FACEBOOK FOR COMPANIES

Facebook gives companies a great chance to interact with their consumers. There are three different options for businesses to use Facebook. First of all, companies register a company page. This page is similar to users’ profile page and gives companies the chance to share information, marketing content and interactive elements with users. Second, Facebook Ads give companies the chance to reach out to their chosen target group directly on the platform. The Ads are usually shown on the right hand side of the application and are similar to Google Ads. The goal of the Ads are mainly traffic creation for the company’s website. Finally, Facebook messenger can be used to communicate with customers. This communication can either be on an automated basis with messenger bots but can also be done with individual messages (Facebook Business, n.d.).

2.2 CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR AND CONSUMPTION IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Consumer behaviour describes, “(…) the study of the processes involved when individuals or groups select, purchase, use or dispose of products, services, ideas or
experiences to satisfy needs and desires.” (Solomon et al., 2016; p.5). The digitalization and the already described changes in the online environment (such as development of SM platforms) influences these processes, which changes the overall consumer behaviour immensely. Therefore, consumers have developed a strong desire to be empowered by companies. This empowerment means that consumers want to interact with brands and expect an engaging and emotional communication in order to actually make the decision to buy from this company (Acer & Puntoni, 2016). Therefore, consumption and the processes involved have been changed over the years and will be discusses in detail in the following chapters.

2.2.1 CONSUMPTION TYPOLOGY

Consumption is defined as a social act in which people use consumption objects (such as products and services) in varying forms (Holt, 1995). These objectives satisfy consumers in different ways. Therefore, the satisfaction is either physically, psychologically, ideologically or socially (Molesworth & Knott, 2013). There are different approaches in order to classify consumption practice. Taking figure 5, Holt (1995) classifies consumption practice in four different patterns.

Based on this differentiation, consumption is defined through Structure of Action (either with a focus on the actual object of the action or with a focus on the interpersonal action) and Purpose of Action (meaning autolytic action or instrumental actions). As a result, the four patterns if consumption are:

- Consuming as Experience
- Consuming as Integration
• Consuming as Classification and
• Consuming as Play (Holt, 1995).

*Figure 5: Consumption practice model*

All areas are defined with different characteristics and the consumption action underlies varying objectives. Consuming as Experience refers to the way consumers experience the consumption of goods and services in relation to the social world they are living in. This social world is on an individual level and within an interpretive framework. On the other hand, Consuming as Integration is defined as the action of a consumer consuming in order to integrate this product or service to a personal concept of one's self. Therefore, the object of consumption becomes an element of a person's identity. Consuming as Classification refers to consumers, who consume a consumption object in order to classify or distinguish themselves from other
consumers. Finally, Consuming as Play reflects the consumption action of a valued object in order to use this object in a playful manner. This playful behaviour can either be on an individual and ulterior manner or can be seen as an opportunity to interact with other consumers (Andrews & Drennan, 2007).

In all, consumption is defined through the consumers' individual experience, emotions and feelings. Moreover, a relationship between consumption objects and consumers is developed in every consumption action. This relationship and the objective behind consumption actions is dependent on consumers' social worlds, the economic system they live in, as well as on socioeconomic factors (such as age, gender and culture) (Holt, 1995).

2.2.2 STATUS CONSUMPTION

As discussed in previous chapters, consumers on SMS tend to present themselves on a different (and mainly superior) manner on SM compared with reality. Therefore, another aspect of consumption (Status Consumption) is of interest in this thesis. Status is defined as “an expression of evaluative judgment that conveys high or low prestige, regard or esteem” (Donnenwerth & Foals, 1974:p.786), and can be divided into three different areas. First of all, status resulting within a social system (for instance royalty). Second, status defined through personal performance and resulting achievements, such as higher salary and/or influence within a company compared to others. Finally, the status consumer establishes through consumption objects. Therefore, this status reflects the possessions individual purchase (Hayakawa, 1963).
Goffmann (1959) states that there is a connection between consumption objects and the individuals desired sense of self. Thus, consumers purchase and display products in order to either enhance their self-perception or create an image of what they are or would like to be. In addition, certain goods may be owned in order to maintain or develop social relationships with other consumers (Goffmann, 1959). Moreover, products obtain a certain status value. This value is defined as the consumers’ personal estimation of the degree to which the product displays a desired status (Dawson & Cavalls, 1987). Veblen (1988) examines in his “Theory of Leisure Class” that especially upper-class consumers (regarding social status and monetary wealth) tend to purchase conspicuous products or services in order to showcase their wealth. Therefore, this theory explains the so-called Veblen effects, which explain the phenomena that consumers are willing to pay a higher price (even though a cheaper substitute good would be available) in order to establish or maintain a certain social status. Thus, Veblen effects are known to be more significant within luxury goods than to commodity goods (Bagwell & Bernheim, 1996).

Apart from luxury goods and wealthy consumers, research shows that Millennials (also known as called Generation Y) have a need to consume in a unique and conspicuous way. Research shows that Generation Y is strongly influenced by the status a product obtains. As a result, Status Consumption influences Millennials’ willingness to buy substantially (Buchter, Phau & Shimul, 2017). Therefore, Status Consumption needs to be considered within this dissertation since Generation Y (Millennials) in Germany are the consumers of interest.
Understanding different patterns of consumption and the reasons for purchase intention, it is important to gain deeper insights into the process of making a buying-decision and is hence discussed in the next section.
2.2.3 CONSUMERS’ BUYING-DECISION PROCESS

This section examines how consumers make buying decisions. Therefore, the traditional Consumer Decision Making Process as well as changes in this process due to the digitalization are explained.

A buying decision is the result of an internal process of each consumer choosing a certain good or service. “The most advanced form of choosing involves weighing information about currently available options so as to select the option that seems most promising.” (Vohes et al., 2008). Choosing the best option of a good or service is therefore a process. The traditional point of view defines five different stages of a buying decision. Kotler, Keller and Bliemel (2007) define these stages as the following:

- **Recognition of Problem/Need:**

“A need is understood as the feeling of a lack combined with the desire to satisfy this lack.” (Groissberger,n.d.). Therefore, the first stage is the moment when a consumer understands that he/she has a need for a certain good/service in order to satisfy the desire to solve a problem with this good/service. Both (internal stimuli and external stimuli) can be the reason for recognizing this need. The internal stimuli refer to all recognitions, which are sourced form, an individual internal (for instance the feeling of hunger or cold). The external stimuli reflect the recognition of a problem through external factors such as social environment, advertising or sociocultural factors (Groissberger, n.d.).
Furthermore, regarding external stimuli, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) developed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986) needs to be considered. The ELM explains in which way consumers perceive, process and in some cases convert the external stimuli into attitudes. Petty and Cacioppo (1986) distinguish between the two ways consumers process stimuli. A consumer can either process using the central or the peripheral route. This choice is mainly subconscious. A consumer uses the central route when he/she evaluates the provided information (or external stimuli) with the use of cognitive processes. Therefore, the outcome of the evaluation depends on the arguments within the provided information. The central route demands a high understanding of the message within the information as well as a high interest in the good or service. As a result, if a consumer develops positive attitudes throughout the process, a strong attitude towards this information is developed and the behaviour of the consumer is predictable. On the contrary, the peripheral route is characterised with a low interest in the information combined with a lower understanding of the message within the information. As a result, consumers tend to rely on their first impression, which makes the outcome of this route less predictable (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

- **Information Seeking:**

The second stage defines the moment in which the consumer is conscious about the need and refers to all actions undertaken in order to gather information about the relevant set of options (Kotler, Keller and Bliemel, 2007).
• Evaluation of Alternatives:
At this stage, the consumer has identified all relevant goods or services. Therefore, an initial evaluation of all options is processed in this stage. This stage is dependent on individuals’ attitudes and experience. Thus, consumers’ attitudes towards risk influence this stage highly (Kotler, Keller and Bliemel, 2007).

• Purchase Decision:
This stage is defined as the actual decision among all relevant alternatives. The consumers purchase intention, information seeking, and evaluation leads to the buying decision (Kotler, Keller and Bliemel, 2007).

• After Purchase Evaluation:
This post-purchase stage describes the evaluation of the purchase. The consumers evaluate to which degree the good or service has satisfied the need or solved the problem. Even though this stage is after the buying decision, it is highly important. The importance is given when it comes to commodity goods, which need to be purchased repeatedly (Kotler, Keller and Bliemel, 2007). Thus, a positive evaluation of a purchased good can lead to a positive online customer review. This review is a powerful source of information for other consumers and can have influence on stage one and two (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006).

Furthermore, the aforementioned online customer reviews are an important part of the changed decision-making process due to the digitalization. Nicholls in Prophet (2014) states that 90% of customers rely on online customer reviews. Therefore, the digitalization has enlarged the touch points consumers have and companies need to be aware of each one. Thus, not only customer online reviews but also blog content
are SM content regarding brands or products which influence the purchase decision immensely and establish a different customer journey (Prophet, 2014).

Customer journey is defined as “(...) the complete sum of experiences that customers go through when interacting with your company and brand. Instead of looking at just a part of a transaction or experience, the customer journey documents the full experience of being a customer.” (Sorman, n.d.). This Customer Journey has become more complex and less transparent. Therefore, companies have to be aware of its customers’ whole journey and the critical touch points need to be defined. As a result, Google (2011) has established the Zero Moment of Truth (ZMOT).

ZMOT is defined as the “moment where marketing happens, and where consumers make choices that affect the success and failure of nearly every brand in the world” (Lecinski, 2011). This moment should be seen as the most important moment when it comes to a purchase decision (Runge, n.d).

*Figure 6: The Zero Moment of Truth Study*
Taking figure 6, the most important moment of the purchase decision (ZMOT) is the information seeking process. The First Moment of Truth (which describes the moment right before the decision to purchase or not purchase) has become less important as it is strongly influenced by the ZMOT due to the fact that more information, especially online and from many sources have become available (Aichner, 2012).

2.3 E-COMMERCE AS ONLINE CONSUMPTION

The emergence of the World Wide Web in the 1990s as a mass platform and the associated rapid development of digital innovations not only changed the lives of consumers, but also made an essential mark on the way individuals purchase goods and services. Therefore, the following section is focused on E-Commerce as this reflects online consumption behaviour. E-Commerce enables companies to offer the products and services they offer in physical locations on online platforms (online shops), which are accessed by customers via the internet (Chaffey, 2012).
Generally, e-commerce - or electronic commerce - involves the purchase and sale of physical or non-physical goods and services on a virtual platform (Meier & Stormer, 2008). E-commerce has proven its value both for business-to-consumer retail (B2C) (a business operating an online for consumers) - and for business-to-business (B2B) for direct sales to other companies (Holtforth, 2017). As this thesis focuses on consumers and not companies, e-commerce is discussed with a B2C approach.

E-commerce offers the opportunity to purchase goods via computers, laptops, tablets and even smartphones (Veijalainen, 2009). Latest (purchase via smartphone), is also called M-Commerce and becomes increasingly important as the use of smartphones increases (Meier & Stromer, 2008). Further, another important dimension of E-Commerce is Conversational Commerce (C-Commerce), which refers to online purchases with the use of Chatbots (Messina, 2016). In summary, E-Commerce and its components (M-Commerce and C-Commerce) refer to all online transactions and purchases with an electronic nature. Therefore, there is no physical exchange or contact between customers and the company. As a result, E-Commerce offers different possibilities and challenges through the fact that no location, time or framework of the actual buying process is defined (Heinemann, 2017).

E-commerce as a combined communication, distribution and sales channel for the supply of consumers is becoming more and more important as part of the digital transformation. It offers the opportunity to increase, speed up and intensify sales with use of new digital technologies and a steady, ever-increasing exchange of information (Holtforth, 2017). As a result, businesses can solve customer problems
and meet consumer needs more efficiently and precisely. In addition, the satisfaction of customer needs can lead to new targets and may increase sales potential, which can overall increase the market value in the end (Heinemann, 2016). Figure 7 shows the prognostic sales via E-Commerce world-wide.

**Figure 7: Digital Market Outlook 2016**

The presented figure clearly shows the relevance of E-Commerce world-wide as in all industries above, a growth between 10% and 16% is expected until 2021 (Statista Digital Market Outlook, 2016). This potential growth is aligned with the various benefits E-Commerce offers for companies and consumers. From a consumer point of view, E-Commerce offers more flexibility regarding purchase times and location. In addition, purchases online are more likely to be better value for the money, as there are no added logistics or transport costs for reaching the physical stores. As a result, consumers add value to E-Commerce as the perception of the buying process appears more dynamic, innovative, and practical. Thus, the amount of subjective added value to an online purchase action depends on the individuals’ experience of the overall customer journey but is also linked to seven different success factors of E-Commerce.
IFH Köln (2015), defines the following success factors as the key elements to satisfy online shoppers and states, which are the requirements customers have.

I. Website Design: One of the most important aspects refers to the overall design of the website. It is important to notice that not only design decisions (regarding layout and styles) but also the informative part of a website are crucial elements to satisfy online shoppers. Therefore, the product description, payment methods and shipping methods have to be displayed and need to be easy to understand. Further, the website design has an influence on a customer's retention time. The longer a user is on the website the more likely an actual purchase will occur (IFH Köln, 2015; Liu & Arnett, 2000).

II. Usability: The usability of a website is always a main point when it comes to positive user experience. In respect with online shops, the usability needs to be as user friendly as possible in order to avoid bounce rates of users with willingness to buy (IHF Köln, 2015; Liu & Arnett, 2015).

III. Product Line: Another point to consider is the product line offered on an online shop. Consumers tend to favour online purchases on sites with a wide product range in order to have the feeling of variety (IHF Köln, 2015).

IV. Cost-Performance ratio: Online shops need to display their value for money. Therefore, free shipping offers for a certain number of products, promotions or special prices are key success factors of E-Commerce (Jiang & Rosenbloom, 2015).
V. Payment & Check-out: Consumers nowadays are aware of the high value customer data has for companies. Therefore, data security and security payment methods are highly important for online shops (IFH Köln, 2015).

VI. Shipping & Delivery: Customers expect punctual delivery, transparent information regarding delivery times and standards, and the possibility to return goods. Therefore, information about delivery date and time as well as a purchase confirmation via E-Mail is highly valued and can lead to satisfied online shoppers (IFH Köln, 2015).

VII. Service: Even though E-commerce is separated from any physical interaction between customer and company, consumers expect a certain amount of customer service in online shops. Therefore, companies have to give customers the feeling that they are easy to contact in case of difficulties. Technologies like chatbots or live chats with customer care employees are possibilities to satisfy online shoppers (IFH Köln, 2015; Langenberg, 2017).

The explained success factors are a key element of customer satisfaction when it comes to E-Commerce and should be considered in any E-Commerce strategy.

Furthermore, the previously discussed rapid development of the SM landscape has had an influence on E-Commerce and has established further possibilities within E-Commerce strategies. Social Commerce (SC) describes the action of companies using the content of SM platforms within their marketplace system or E-Commerce strategy. Therefore, UGC and social interactions are included within online shops or integrated in the website (Kim & Srivastva, 2007). This strategy aims to achieve a higher level of credibility and reliability as consumers’ content, opinions, and
experiences (through the use of customer reviews) are displayed. Thus, consumers’ perceptions and the decision-making process is no longer only dependent on the company’s product description rather than influenced by content generated by other customers on SM (Constantinides & Fountain, 2008).

As a result, companies can achieve stronger relationships with their customers, increase the traffic on the E-Commerce platform and website, and support product sales as well as define challenges and opportunities (Michaelidou et al., 2011).

2.4 LITERATURE CONCLUSION

The progression of the Internet and the subsequent development of a whole SM landscape has created a new ecosystem in the world. SM has empowered consumers as they can access almost-transparent information regarding brands and companies. As a result, companies have experienced a shift in the way consumers expect and accept marketing approaches. Interactive, creative digital content, which, unlike traditional media, is less commercial is expected by consumers nowadays. Therefore, the use of different SMS, such as Instagram or Facebook give companies the chance to communicate with their target market segment. Influencer marketing as well as content marketing with valuable, engaging interactive content is more important than ever.

In addition, SM has not only empowered consumers but also given them a chance to present themselves online. This representation is likely to be different from their real-life personality traits. As a result, users present themselves on SM as the person they would like to be, which has an impact on the way consumers and companies notice each other online. From a companies’ point of view, the variances in a target
segments’ self-presentation online may be challenging. Therefore, a deeper understanding of the buying-decision process was established and the ZMOT has been defined as the most important moment in a buying-decision. Considering these changes, it has always become increasingly important to give consumers the right information about the right products, which shows the need for a strong digital communication approach as well as the monitoring of SM behaviour of consumers.

Further, not only the buying-decision process has changed but also the reasons for consumption are experiencing changes. Millennials, as the chosen segment in this thesis, represent an interesting consumer group regarding their consumption behaviour. Status consumption fostered by SM is a common way of consuming within this group. Millennials aim to not only consume in order to showcase a certain type of personality, they also tend to purchase online, as there are several advantages from a consumers’ point of view are associated with E-Commerce.

Taking the viewpoint of existing literature, it becomes obvious that the actual behaviour of users on SM portals need to be given more attention. As such, the aim of the thesis if to fill this gap and is relevant as SM fosters beneficial self-presentation as well as status consumption. Companies may gain major advantages over competitors if they figure out ways to match actual user behaviour on SM with purchase patterns to maximize their return on investment with regards to marketing communication expenditure and business success.
3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Research is defined as “a search for knowledge” (Kothari, 2004). Therefore, methodology describes the process of how this knowledge is acquired (Saunders et al., 2009). It describes, an organized process of the search of certain information. This process can involve varying techniques and tools. Therefore, specific approaches towards the data generation need to be chosen. Surveys, interviews or observation are common techniques when it comes to research methods (Greener, 2008).

This chapter aims to clarify the chosen methodology of this thesis. In order to do so, this section explains the authors’ choice of the research design, research approach and methods and strategy. Further, the choice of data collection including sampling selection, the process of data analysis, research ethics and the limitations of the research are discussed.

3.2 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

The research philosophy shows the authors’ views, attitudes and understandings of the environment and kind of knowledge, which is required. Therefore, this philosophy creates the base for each level within the research process. Taking figure 8, Saunders et al. (2009) “research onion” delivers a framework of the present research. Hence, this “research onion” identifies the objectives of this study starting with the outer layer (Philosophies) and terminating with the inner one (Data collection and data analysis).
Saunders et al. (2009) separates the available research philosophies into four different areas. Those main research philosophies are named as: Positivism, realism, interpretivism and pragmatism. Further, these different approaches are varying on their level of ontology, epistemology and axiology, which are defined in figure 9.

**Figure 8: Research Onion**

![Research Onion Diagram](image)

**Source:** Adapted from Saunders et al. (2009), p.138.

**Figure 9: Comparison of Ontology, Epistemology & Axiology**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ontology</th>
<th>Epistemology</th>
<th>Axiology</th>
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The focus of the present research is to understand the impact of consumers’ actual social media behaviour on their purchase behaviour. Therefore, critical realism has been chosen as the research philosophy. This decision has been made as critical realism states that human beings do not perceive the real life and the world they are living in as it actually is. In fact, according to critical realism, humans tend to interpret the reality based on their individual senses. Hence, personality, emotions, experiences, culture, social conditions or attitudes are factors, which influence this interpreted form of reality. As a result, critical realism states that those factors cannot be controlled. Thus, they need to be accepted and observed during the research process as they influence the outcome. Therefore, critical realism was chosen as it describes social phenomena’s, which the actual social media behaviour of consumers is (Saunders et al., 2009).

Further, critical realism is aware of the ever-changing environment respondents live in. Moreover, different levels of the social world and the interaction among each level are considered. The following research intends to give insights on consumers purchase behaviour. This behaviour is influenced by independent factors such as their actual SM behaviour or their self-presentation on SM.

3.2.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design describes the plan followed during the research process. It explains the plan of the researcher how the questions are answered as well as states the importance of a clear structure in the research questions (Saunders et al., 2009).
Hence, the research design defines the framework for the whole research including data collection, the justification of the methods and analysis (Saunders et al., 2009). Therefore, the following sections give insights on the researchers’ decisions regarding how the research is conducted.

3.2.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

On the next level of Saunders et al. (2009) “research onion”, the research approach needs to be defined. This section covers how the theory is used. Therefore, the author has to choose between an inductive, deductive approach or combined approach. Deductive approaches aim to gather the results starting with a very general reasoning to a highly specific one (Trochim, 2006). Reasoning includes, among others, the process of using existing knowledge in order to draw conclusions from it, develop predictions or construct explanations (Babin & Zikmund, 2016). This is based on existing theories and research. That information designs a strategy through testing assumed hypothesizes. On the other hand, inductive approach aims to collect data and then establish a theory as well as generalizations from this data (Saunders et al., 2009).

The following study uses a deductive approach in order to understand the degree of influence the chosen factor (SM behaviour) has on customers’ purchase behaviour. As a starting point, the previous explained literature offers a framework, which has led to a research question. In order to answer the main research question and sub-research questions, the specific hypothesize are formed in order to find the degree of influence or correlation between the factors. Further, quantitative data from a survey
is used in this deductive approach. Quantitative data is one key element of deduction and will be collected, presented and analysed in order to confirm, test or decline hypotheses and theoretical framework. Hence, this approach has been chosen, as deduction is perceived a low-risk and quick strategy. This is regarding time limitations most appropriate (Saunders et al., 2009).

3.2.3 RESEARCH METHODS AND STRATEGY

According to Saunders et al. (2009), the next step within the “research onion” model is the research strategy. This strategy can be in different forms. Experiments, surveys, interviews or case studies are examples of the research form also called as tools. Therefore, the data can be collected in a quantitative or qualitative way. Quantitative data refers to numerical data while qualitative data use non-numerical data. Further, choosing either quantitative or qualitative data is also referred as mono methods. In addition, also a combination of quantitative and qualitative data can be chosen. This is also called multiple methods. This can then be divided into mixed and multiple method (Saunders et al., 2009).

*Figure 10: Mono Method vs. Multiple Methods*
Regarding the nature and the goal of this study, a survey with the use of an online questionnaire, a mono method with quantitative data has been chosen. This explanatory research (online questionnaire) has multiple advantages as data can be collected convenient, fast and with a large number of respondents (Saunders et al., 2009). Further, a large amount of data is necessary in order to test the pre-defined hypotheses statistically. Moreover, online questionnaires reduce researchers’ costs and the risk of input-errors (occurring when collected data is transcribed) (Saunders et al., 2009). Thus, Millenials’ are the target group of this study. This population is a highly tech-savvy generation, which increases the likelihood of participating in an online survey (Bolton et al., 2013). Further, the survey is based on the pre-defined hypotheses.

Therefore, the earlier mentioned independent and dependent variables develop a model and the variables have been set as the following:

**H1:** Consumers’ SM behaviour has a strong influence on purchase behaviour.
The independent variable in H1 is **Consumers' SM behaviour**. This behaviour is measured within the survey with questions regarding their activity on SM. Further, the dependent variable in H1 is **purchase behaviour**. Further, the degree of influence on the dependent factor (purchase behaviour) can be classified with the use of the collected data.

*Figure 11: Independence relation of H1*

![Image](image11.png)

*Source: Raithel (2018).*

**H2**: *Active consumers on SM tend to purchase online.*

H2 defines **active consumers** as the independent variable. Active consumers are measured through their degree of activity on SM. The survey is designed to classify consumers into different activity types depending on their activity level. Further, H2 uses **online purchases** as the dependent variable. Unlike in H1, the dependent variable will not be classified as the level of activity on SM (independent variable) but explains the degree of influence on the dependent variable (online purchases). As such, the independent variable is also linked to another variable (activity level), which makes it dependent on it.

*Figure 12: Independence relation H2*

![Image](image12.png)

*Source: Raithel (2018).*

**H3**: *Active consumers on SM with a varying online self-presentation (compared to the real-life version) tend to purchase goods to obtain a certain online status.*
**H3** combines two factors into one independent variable (V1). Therefore, V1 is defined as **active consumers** on SM with **varying online self-presentation**. This means the consumers need to be active and have to show patterns of a varying online self-presentation. The degree of activity is like in **H1** classified in different categories depending on the data. Further, the varying online self-presentation degree is an activity level measured through the questions within the survey. As an outcome, this hypothesis can categorise consumers into different classifications, based on the degree of influence. Hence, **H3** defines the **purchase of goods for (online) status** as the dependent variable.

**Figure 13: Independence relation H3**


Therefore, **H2** and **H3** are built upon **H1** and as a result of the study, the impact measured by the degree of influence on purchase behaviour can be defined.

### 3.2.4 SAMPLING-SELECTING RESPONDENTS

Most of researches are undertaken within a subgroup of a population. This is mainly due to the fact that the whole population is unknown, not possible to reach or not feasible regarding time and costs. “Sampling is the process of selecting a few (a
sample) from a bigger group to become the basis for estimating the prevalence of an unknown piece of information regarding the bigger group” (Kumar, 2011, p.193). Further, the use of a sampling has the advantage of making the results highly accurate (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). Thus, two main ways of sampling selection can be distinguished. First, probability sampling means that anyone interested can participate within the study (Saunders et al., 2009). This has the advantage to generalize the outcome and minimize bias (Uprichard, 2013). A non-probability sampling is described as a sample with specific characteristics and one’s own personal judgement (Saunders et al., 2009).

As already stated, this research will focus on so-called Millennials, which live in Germany. Therefore, a non-probability snowball sampling has been conducted, as the selected respondents need to have the following characteristics:

- Living in Germany for at least 5 years
- Born between 1980-2000
- Using at least two different social media channels daily

Further, the author self-selected the respondents as the survey was promoted on the authors’ personal Facebook and LinkedIn account. Further, researchers’ online network was used to encourage other online users to participate in the study and to share the study within their network. This strategy is also called snowball sampling (Saunders et al., 2009).

3.3 DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES
The research in this study is conducted with a survey. This survey is an explanatory study as the researcher uses a questionnaire. Further, quantitative data needs to be analysed in order to make the answers useful. The researcher uses graphical statistics such as diagrams, pie-charts or bar-chart (mostly from Excel). Hence, the data needs to be edited and further coded into a statistical format (Hair et al., 2007). The researcher has developed the questions based on the three hypothesizes in order to understand the degree of influences the pre-defined variables have in each other.

In this regard, **H1** will be tested with the use of the following questions: 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 18, 23, 24, 25. **H2** can be proven or declined with the use of questions 12, 13, 14, 15. Further, questions 16, 17, 19, 20, 21 and 22 focus on **H3**. Hence, the answers are the base for a categorization of the consumers regarding their SM behaviour as well as purchase behaviour. The answers were disaggregated labelled in order to understand the correlation between different factors.

### 3.3.1 TIME HORIZON

This research uses a cross-sectional design. A cross-sectional design is research, which is conducted for a specific subgroup or population at certain time. On the other hand, a longitudinal research approach focuses on data of the changes regarding the respondents’ answers over time (Saunders et al., 2009). As this research is conducted within an academic research, a longitudinal research was not possible. Further, the changes of the answers of the respondents would not help to answer the research questions and was therefore rejected. Figure 14 shows the time horizon of the current study.
Figure 14: Time horizon of study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Start</th>
<th>Final</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Development Questions</td>
<td>27. July</td>
<td>06. August</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>22. July</td>
<td>06. August</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection</td>
<td>07. August</td>
<td>14. August</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editing data for presenting data</td>
<td>14. August</td>
<td>17. August</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis for discussion of data</td>
<td>17. August</td>
<td>21 August</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions + Recommendation</td>
<td>21. August</td>
<td>23. August</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection + revision</td>
<td>23. August</td>
<td>25. August</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


This time horizon shows that the researcher worked simultaneously on different parts during the research process (for instance introduction and literature review).

3.3.2 RESEARCH ETHICS

Saunders et al. (2009), argues that ethical issues can arise in almost every stage of the “research onion”. Therefore, the data collection, storage and the transparency
Regarding respondents' data has to be ensured during the research process. Research ethics aims to define the appropriate behaviour of the researcher. Thus, confidentiality of the data and the privacy of all respondents can be points of concerns of the participants. Thus, another ethical issue within primary research arises from the probability of misinterpretation of data. In order to avoid ethical issues within this study, the researcher decided to inform all participants of the confidentiality of their answers and tried to provide transparency in giving the authors' email address for further questions. Further, no names, IP addresses or other personal data was collected.

### 3.3.3 LIMITATION OF RESEARCH

The study is limited due to certain facts, which are mainly linked to limited financial resources and the time horizon. First of all, the questionnaire was conducted online and promoted within the authors' Facebook and LinkedIn network. Therefore, this convenience sampling method leads to a highly limited subgroup of the population. Further, convenience sampling is argued to be less serious and fosters bias (Malhotra et al., 2012). Second, in-depth interviews of all respondents would have been a valuable source in order to increase the credibility of the answers. In-depth interviews have not been possible due to the time frame, costs and practicability (high number of respondents). Third, one of the main risks in online questionnaires is a low response rate and cannot be controlled by the researcher. Further, participants may stop the survey or answer questions they do not understand. Online self-administrated surveys are not observed. Hence, no occurring questions of respondents can be answered. Therefore, the outcome of the answers has to be seen limited regarding their credibility.
4 PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

This chapter provides all relevant findings of the quantitative online survey. Quantitative data needs to be processed in order to turn the data into useful information (Saunders et al., 2009). Therefore, the author uses descriptive statistics with graphs in order to turn the data into useful information. The findings present 104 responses. Further, 4 out of those had to be eliminated. This exclusion happened due to the fact that the respondents either have not been within the target audience or did not fill in the survey properly.

4.1 CRITICAL QUESTIONS & DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

The first three questions of the survey were the critical questions.

- Q1: Do you live in Germany for at least 5 years?
- Q2: Are you born between 1980-2000?
- Q3: Do you usually (at least 1 time a day) log into Facebook or Instagram?

Those 3 questions have been mandatory as the target of this survey was German Millennials. As a result, respondents without those characteristics were excluded from the research and could not continue the survey.

Further, the two demographic indicators follow the critical questions. In this research a demographic profile can give valuable insights of the differences in behaviour of gender and age groups. Therefore, question 4 & 5 define the age and gender of the respondents. In the following, figure 15 shows that most of the respondents were between 20-30.
Figure 15: Survey question: Age

What is your age?
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Further, as visible in figure 16, most of the respondents (61.8%) were female.

Figure 16: Survey question: Gender

What is your gender?
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Therefore, the demographic profile of this research is female between 20-30 years.
4.2 MAIN RESULTS OF SURVEY

In the following the main results of the survey will be displayed. In this regard, the questions Q6 until Q22 has been considered.

Q6: Which of the following features of Instagram are you using? Select all, which apply.

Figures 17 and 18 shows that, regardless of gender, the Instagram feature “Watching Instagram Stories” is the most used feature with 86.1%. This is followed by “Publishing Instagram Stories” (65.3%) and “Publishing Content” 60.4%.

Figure 17: Survey question: Instagram features usage

Which of the following features of Instagram are you using? Select all which apply.

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Figure 18: Survey question: Instagram features usage by gender

Q7: Which of the following features of Facebook are you using?

Taking figure 19 into consideration, the messaging feature is the most used feature of Facebook (80,4%). Further, this is followed by “Watching Facebook Stories” with 61,8%. It is important to notice, that “Publishing Facebook Stories” (40,2%) is compared to “Publishing Instagram Stories” (60,4%) a very low used feature even though that watching Instagram or Facebook stories is almost used on an even level.

*Figure 19: Survey question: Facebook features usage*

Which of the following features of Facebook are you using? Select all which apply

Q8: Have you published an Instagram Story in the last 7 days?

This question was designed in order to understand the respondent’s activity level on Instagram. 57.8% stated that they have published an Instagram story in the last 7 days. Further, female respondents show a higher activity level on Instagram as the majority (40 respondents) did publish a story. Male respondents have been almost even regarding their activity level. Therefore, 18 stated that they did not publish a story while just 16 said they did.

*Figure 20: Survey question: Facebook features usage by gender*

*Source: Raithel (2018).*
Figure 21: Survey question: Publishing Instagram story

Have you published an Instagram story in the last 7 days?

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- 42.2% Yes
- 57.8% No

Q9: Have you updated your Facebook profile in the last 30 days?

Q9 is as Q8 designed to understand the user’s activity level on SM. 53% of the respondents’ state that they have updated their profile picture in the last 30 days. Comparing female and male respondents, like in Q8 female show a higher level of activity. 42 female respondents answered this question with “yes”, while just 12 male respondents changed their profile picture.

Figure 22: Survey question: Facebook profile update

**Figure 23: Survey question: Facebook profile update by gender**

![Bar chart showing Facebook profile update by gender]

**Source:** Raithel (2018).
Q10: Rate yourself:

Q10 has two main objectives. First of all, it was designed like Q8 and Q9 to measure the respondents’ activity level. Second, Q10 should reveal the respondent’s self-assessment. Comparing the self-assessment with the real activity level (measured by the previous questions) can give insights of the consumers’ awareness regarding their own SM behaviour. Taking figure 24, 27% stated that they are heavy Instagram users and publish stories daily. 39% consider themselves as heavy passive users, which means they tend to consume the content without publishing it. 20% use Instagram occasionally and would rate themselves as no heavy users. Further, only 14% stated that they do not publish content or use the app as often.

Figure 24: Survey question: Self-assessment - Instagram usage

Furthermore, figure 25 shows the three main results from the respondents. The table reveals that female respondents assess themselves as active users as 45 respondents consider them as heavy users.

Figure 25: Survey question: Instagram usage by gender

Q11: Have you purchased online in the last 30 days?

Q11 was designed to understand the link between heavy SM use and e-commerce. 78.4% of all respondents did purchase online in the last 30 days.

*Figure 26: Survey question: Online purchase*

*Source: Raithel (2018).*
Figure 27 shows that female respondents are using online shops more often than male respondents. This can be an indicator that heavy SM use can lead to consumers, which favour online shopping.

Figure 27: Survey question: Online purchase by gender

Q12: Do you prefer to purchase online.

Q12 gives a deeper understanding of consumers’ attitudes towards e-commerce. Taking figure 28 into consideration, 66,3% state that they prefer to purchase goods online.

*Figure 28: Survey question: Preferability of online purchase*

Do you prefer to purchase online (compared with going to a physical store)?

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- Yes: 66,3%
- No: 33,7%

*Source: Raithel (2018).*
Further, figure 29 displays that female respondents have a strong preference for purchasing online (comparing 45 with a “YES” to 17 respondents with a “NO”). On the other hand, male respondents have been almost indifferent regarding their preference (comparing 20 respondents with a “YES” to 15 respondents with a “NO”).

*Figure 29: Survey question: Preferability of online purchase by gender*

*Source: Raithel (2018).*
Q13: Select all the advantages you think you obtain when purchasing online.

Q13 is as Q12 designed to understand the respondents’ attitude towards online shopping. Considering figure 30, 71.6% see online shopping as a more convenient way of purchasing. This is followed by 59.8%, which state that online purchases are less expensive compared to physical shops.

*Figure 30: Survey question: Advantages of online purchases*

Select all the advantages you think you obtain when purchasing online.

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- Latest fashion trends: 51 (50%)
- More convenient compared with going to …: 73 (71.6%)
- Less expensive: 61 (59.8%)
- Superior Product Portfolio: 34 (33.3%)
- Superior Quality: 11 (10.8%)

*Source: Raithel (2018).*
Q14: Do you have online shopping apps?

Q14 delivers insights in the consumers' behaviour regarding their online purchases. Taking figure 31, 77.5% do have online shopping apps. As a result, only 22.5% are not using apps when they go online shopping.

Figure 31: Survey question: Online shopping apps

Figure 32 shows that the majority female and male respondents have online shopping apps on their smartphone.

*Figure 32: Survey question: Online shopping apps used by gender*

*Source: Raithel (2018).*
Q15: Have you ever published purchases online?

Q15 delivers insights on the consumers' behaviour on SM regarding their published content. Figure 33 shows that 54.9% of all respondents have published new purchased goods online.

*Figure 33: Survey question: Publishing new purchases online*

Have you ever published new purchases online (for instance food, drinks, beauty products or clothes)?

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45.1% Yes

56 (54.9%) Yes

Figure 34 reveals that female respondents are more likely to publish new purchased goods on their SM profile.

**Figure 34: Survey question: Publishing new purchases online by gender**

Q16: Do you feel like your online presence conveys a true version of your lifestyle?

Q16 wants to understand consumers’ attitude about their Social Media footprint and their self-assessment on SM integrity. Taking figure 35, 62.7% state that their online presence conveys a true version of their lifestyle. This question was designed in order to give a deeper understanding of consumers’ self-assessment of their SM self-presentation and disclosure.

Figure 35: Survey question: Online presence represents the truth?

Do you feel like your online presence conveys a true version of your lifestyle?
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Figure 36 shows that female respondents have slightly stronger feeling that their SM presence is not a true version of their lifestyle (comparing 37 “YES” to 25 “NO”).

*Figure 36: Survey question: Online presence represents the truth?*

*Source: Raithel (2018).*
Q17: Have you ever purchased a good/service because you saw it on an Instagram story?

Q17 gives insights on the influence SM content has on the respondent’s desire to purchase a good. Figure 37 shows that 63,7% have been influenced by SM content and purchased the good/service as a result of seeing it online.

Figure 37: Survey question: Purchase influenced by social media?

Have you ever purchased a good/service because you saw it on an Instagram Story (from a blogger, influencer or friends/acquaintance)?

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![Pie chart showing 63.7% and 36.3%]

Figure 38 reveals again that female respondents are stronger influenced by SM. Therefore, 47 female respondents stated that they are influenced while only 17 male respondents have been influenced.

*Figure 38: Survey question: Purchase influenced by social media categorized by gender*

Q18: Do you use apps to improve the quality/aesthetic of the pictures you publish online?

Q18 is linked to Q17 and want to understand consumers SM self-presentation relatively to their real-life self. Using apps in order to improve content of them online, shows that they want to convey a superior version of themselves online. As a result Q16 was the self-assessment while Q18 shows the status quo regarding the respondents online presence. Taking figure 39, 77.2% of all respondents are using apps to improve pictures. As already stated in Q16, 62.7% feel like they convey their real lifestyle on SM. Comparing both findings, reveals a strong discrepancy in the consumers self-assessment and reality, which is discussed in the further process of the dissertation.

*Figure 39: Survey question: Photo editing apps*

Do you use apps to improve the quality/aesthetic of the pictures you publish online (such as Photo Lab or Instagram filters)?

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Further, figure 40 states that the majority of female respondents is using apps to improve the content they publish.

*Figure 40: Survey question: Photo editing apps used by gender*

*Source: Raithel (2018).*
Q19: Do you agree to the following statement: Instagram and Facebook influence the products I want to purchase.

Q19 assess the consumers’ opinion on the level of influence SM has on them. Taking figure 41, 60.8% either agree or strongly agree with the statement that Instagram or Facebook influences them in their buying-decision. 19.6% do not entirely agree, which means they are aware of a certain level of influence but cannot measure how strong the influence is. As a result, only 19.6% of all respondents do not feel influenced by SM when it comes to their buying-decisions or desires.

*Figure 41: Survey question: Instagram & Facebook influence consumers’ purchase*

*Source: Raithel (2018).*
Further, figure 42 strengthens the previous presented findings that female are stronger influenced by SM. Therefore, 53 female respondents feel influenced by SM when it comes to purchasing goods. Further, only 17 male respondents link SM content to their buying-decisions.

Figure 42: Survey question: Instagram & Facebook influence consumers’ purchase by gender

Q20: Do you agree to the following statement: Social Media platforms pressure consumers to buy new and the latest products/services.

Q20 was designed to self-assess the consumers opinion on SM and the influence SM has on them. 70,6% of all respondents feel pressured by SM to buy new products/services. 17,6% do not entirely agree, which means those respondents agree on a certain level but do not disagree or are neutral. Therefore, only 11,8% do not feel pressured by SM.

*Figure 43: Survey question: Consumers are pressured to purchase by social media platforms*

Do you agree to the following statement: Social Media platforms pressure consumers to buy new and the latest products/services.

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Figure 44 shows an almost even allocation between genders. Therefore, SM pressures the majority of female and male respondents.

Figure 44: Survey question: Consumers are pressured to purchase by social media platforms categorized by gender

Q21: Do you agree to the following statement: My Social Media presence reflects my personality.

Q21 is linked to Q18 and Q16. It was designed to let the consumers self-assess their SM self-presentation relatively to their real life. Taking figure 45, 47.5% of all respondents stated that they feel like their SM presence shows their personality (either strongly agree or agree). Therefore, 52.5% see a discrepancy between their self-presentation online and their personality.

Figure 45: Survey question: Social Media presence reflects consumers' personality?

Do you agree to the following statement: My Social Media presence reflects my personality.

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Further, figure 46 shows a relatively even allocation regarding the opinions of different gender. Therefore, no strong gender difference regarding Q21 can be stated.

Figure 46: Survey question: Social Media presence reflects consumers' personality? Opinion categorized by gender

5 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This part of the dissertation evaluates the outcomes of both, the primary and secondary data findings. Therefore, the research questions and the hypotheses are answered by use of the research results. This discussion is the base for the following recommendations and conclusions as it links the background research and the research findings of this dissertation.

The main research question was: “What is the impact of consumers’ behaviour on social media channels on their purchase behaviour?”. This question is sub-divided with the following sub-questions:

- Are active SM users more likely to purchase online?
- Does users’ actual SM behaviour foster status consumption?
- Does online self-presentation influence actual purchases?

Sub-questions 1, 2 and 3 are proven with the use of the primary and secondary research findings. Studies show that, especially within the target group (Millenials), SM fosters status consumption (Buchter, Phau & Shimul, 2017).

Further, Q20 reveals that 70,6% of consumers feel pressured by SM to buy new products. This question was designed to understand the impact of SM on status consumption. Above that, Q15 shows that 54,9% of all respondents published a new purchased good online. This means that the consumers show off their products in order to maintain or obtain a certain status. As a result, both primary and secondary research proves that SM fosters status consumption. Furthermore, secondary research gives insight on e-commerce and the buying-decision process. The ZMOT is defined as the most important component of a buying-decision (Aichner, 2012).
As active SM users are more likely to experience the ZMOT within a SM platform (for instance through influencer content), the literature verifies that SM does influence purchase behaviour. Q19 clearly states that 60.8% of those surveyed are influenced by SM content and purchases reflect viewed SM content. Furthermore, Q17 solidifies this idea as 63.7% of all respondents bought a good after seeing it on a SM profile. Thus, aside from the fact that SM influences consumers, it can also be concluded that these users also tend to purchase online. Q12 shows that 66.3% of those surveyed prefer to purchase online and Q11 supports this as 78.4% purchased online within the last 30 days. In addition, the secondary research states various advantages consumers experience when purchasing online, such as more convenience and higher value (IFH Köln, 2015). These advantages are proven by Q13 as 71.6% see online purchases as more convenient.

Sub-question 3 is proven, as the secondary research conducted states that consumers tend to present themselves in a superior way, as their online presence can be easily modified while their offline presence cannot (Palme & Berglund, 2002). Q18 clearly states that users, especially women, try to convey a superior version of themselves online. 77.2% of all respondents utilise apps to improve the content they publish online. In contrast, Q16 shows that consumers self-assess their online presence as a true version of their lifestyle, with 62.7% stating that they convey a true version of their lifestyle on their SM profiles. This reveals that consumers are either unaware of the fact that they wish to have a superior online presence, or they did not want to share the fact that they modify their online presence from their offline real-life. It should be stated that female respondents had a more active and more influenced position on SM. Responses to Q9-12 and Q14-19 show that the female
respondents are either more active, more influenced or have less integrity when it comes to their SM behaviour.

Three hypotheses have been identified in this dissertation, linked to the sub-questions and main research question. The primary and secondary research proves, partially proves or disproves them. Taking the already explained model of H1-H3, a deeper understanding on consumers actual SM behaviour and their purchase behaviour has been developed. Starting with H1:

**H1**: Consumers’ SM behaviour has a strong influence on purchase behaviour.

To test this hypothesis several questions in the survey were asked. Question 8, 9, 10 measures the activity level of the respondents. Therefore, three different types have been defined. Active type 1, active type 2 and Passive.

Active type 1 has been defined with different questions, for instance: Q10, which reflect 47% of all respondents considering themselves as heavy Instagram users. Further, type 2 are all respondents which have stated they are heavy users but tend to consume the content rather than publishing it (39%). Passive are 34% as they
only use Instagram occasionally or do not consume the content. Further, Q9 counts 53% into active type 1 or 2 as they updated their profile picture in the last 30 days. Q8 takes 57.8% into either active type 1 or active type 2 users as they published on Instagram in the last 7 days. As a result, all three questions define an even almost even division between active type 1,2 and passive.

Furthermore, questions 15 and 17 proves that there is a relationship between consumers’ behaviour on SM and their purchase behaviour. 54.9% of all respondents stated that they have published new purchases online. Therefore, they are within active type 1 or 2. Question 17 states that 63.7% of all respondents have purchased a good because they have seen it on an Instagram story. Therefore, those 63.7% are active type 1 or active type 2 consumers (defined through Q10, Q9, Q8) and are influenced by their SM behaviour.

It is important to state that the behaviour is also tested within questions 6 and 7. Within those questions the main finding to consider is that there is a major difference regarding the use of the Facebook stories and Instagram stories. Publishing stories on Instagram was, with 60.4% the most used feature while Facebook stories only obtain 40.2%. Facebook seems to be most used for messaging (80.2%). As a result, the differences between both SM sites have to be considered, and the question of whether Instagram influences consumers more than Facebook should be included in future research conducted.

Continuing with H2 the following results has been conducted.
**H2:** *Active consumers on SM tend to purchase online.*

Figure 12: Independence relation H2

H2, stating that active consumers on SM tend to purchase online, has been partially proven. First of all, Questions 6-9 were used to define the level of activity of respondents. Question 11 states that 78.4% of those surveyed have purchased online in the last 30 days, and Q 12 reveals that 66.3% of all respondents prefer to purchase online. As a result, the assumption that the Active Type 1 and 2 are within those 78.4% and 66.3% can be drawn, thus proving the hypothesis. Nevertheless, as stated above, approximately 50% of all respondents are Active Type 1 or 2. As 66.3% and 78.4% exceeds this figure significantly, the assumption that also passive SM users tend to purchase online has to be made. Therefore, hypothesis 2 is partially proven as active consumers (type 1 and 2) tend to purchase online but also passive consumers use e-commerce. As a result, other factors such as the development of e-commerce and digital empowered consumers foster online purchases in general and SM has not the only influence on it.

**H3:** *Active consumers on SM with a varying online self-presentation (compared to the real-life version) tend to purchase goods to obtain a certain online status.*
Figure 13: Independence relation H3


Hypothesis number 3 has partially proven but the research has to be continued in order to prove hypothesis number 3 completely. Furthermore, the survey reveals a discrepancy between consumers’ self-assessment of their self-presentation on SM. Question 16 states that 62.7% of all respondents feel as though their online presence conveys a true version of their lifestyle. This would imply that most of the respondents do not have varying self-presentation on SM.

Nevertheless, question 18 reveals that 77.2% use apps in order to modify and improve the content they publish online. This result implies that 77.2% display differing self-presentation on SM and contradicts the result of Q16. Question 21 finds that 47.5% of all respondents see their SM presence as a true version of their personality. Therefore, 52.7% acknowledge a discrepancy between their offline personality and their online personality, implying a varying online presence.

As the result of question 16 states the opposite, an overall conclusion cannot be drawn, and further research needs to be conducted. Nevertheless, it can be concluded that female respondents show a significantly higher tendency towards modifying their online presence. In addition, question 20 supports hypothesis 3 as 70.6% of all respondents’ report feeling pressured by SM to buy new products or
services. Purchasing new products and publishing them online (question 15 states that 54.9% ever published new purchased products online) indicates that active consumers tend to purchase for status, but this cannot be definitively proven by use of the data from the research conducted.

Overall, the primary research has given insights of the respondents’ SM behaviour and purchase behaviour. The main research question, asking for the impacts of both factors has been addressed. It can be concluded that from the research conducted, consumers’ SM behaviour has a strong impact on the way the respondents consume.

From the analysis above, active consumers, in particular the female survey participants, are influenced and pressured by SM in order to maintain a certain status. Nevertheless, two of the research questions have only been partially proven. Therefore, it is clear that more research must be conducted in order to develop more complete conclusions. Qualitative data with interviews would validate the tentative findings of this dissertation. Furthermore, the main limitation of the primary data was the sample size. 100 valid responses cannot be representative of or deliver accurate data of the target group. Thus, further research is required in order to understand and cluster active and passive SM users.
6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Consumers nowadays live in a digital world. SM as one of the most powerful tools of the Internet has changed and re-shaped the way consumers communicate, interact, consume and gather information. As a result, consumers obtain several advantages regarding information research or collaboration on a global level. Therefore, an empowerment and simultaneous a decrease of the success of traditional marketing approaches has happened. Apart from the advantages SM provides for consumers, companies although can make use of the real-time communication and can be a part of a global network though SM marketing. The recent study shows that SM does not only influence consumers’ in the way they purchase, but although reflects that SM has a major impact on the consumers themselves. In this regard, the primary research reveals that especially female consumers within the target audience have a strong attitude towards SM. Further, the research states that the respondents self-assessment of their own SM behaviour shows discrepancies from the real life situation. In addition, consumers have confirmed that SM puts them under pressure when it comes to buying new products. As a result, not only advantages but also a strong correlation between consumers actual SM behaviour, their self-assessment of SM activity, self-presentation assessment and their consumption behaviour has been proven or partially proven.

Furthermore, other factors such as the fact that the respondents have been digital natives, have shown that not only SM but although the whole internet landscape influences consumers’ consumption patterns. In addition, the research reveals that different SM sites have different objectives for consumers’.
In addition, this research has to be seen as a starting point. As several new questions have been arising during the evaluation of the research, another research with quantitative and qualitative data is suggested. Further, correlation between both factors (purchase behaviour) and (SM behaviour) should be clustered into different segments in further research.

6.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

The previous chapters, conclusions and discussions, prove that consumers’ are influenced by SM. The degree of influence is dependent on the level of activity of consumers as well as the objective of different SM channels. As a result, the relation between consumers actual SM behaviour and their purchase behaviour has been tested and proven to be right. As a result, several recommendations can be manifested as the result of this dissertation.

First of all, starting with a company’s point of view, the findings clearly state that consumers are influenced by SM. Further, it is important to clarify that this influence is not based on SM marketing but on the actual behaviour of themselves or their friends, acquaintances or followers. Especially, women tend to consume goods they have seen on Instagram before. As a result, companies have to understand two main things. They should be aware of the fact that SM channels have different objectives and should choose the right channels for their target. Thus, brands with a female target should evaluate the behaviour of their target group on those channels in order to understand the target. As a result, target specified content can foster business success and brand awareness.
Secondly, as the self-assessment of most of the respondents showed a discrepancy to their real-life persona, companies have to be aware of varying self-presentation on SM. Companies could benefit if they would understand the degrees of varying SM personas. As a result, marketing targeting can be done in more specified ways and the success of those approaches would increase.

Thirdly, as the secondary research reveals a strong discrepancy between self-assessment and real life, consumers should evaluate themselves and their SM behaviour as well. The fact that a majority of the respondents feel under pressure to consume is a highly concerning outcome of this research. SM should be a place of collaboration and should not pressure users to consume. Further, the fact that self-assessment and real-life assessment of the consumers behaviour show strong discrepancies, support the fact that users feel the pressured by SM. As a recommendation, I highly suggest people to maintain an authentic self in order to be a person with integrity which is not pressured by society or SM.
7 BIBLIOGRAPHY


8 APPENDICES

8.1 APPENDIX 1:

ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND

Before starting the Master of Science Degree in Marketing I have finished a Business Degree in Germany. In between both degrees I have done two internships at Nestlé within the Brand Management Department. Further, I decided for this master’s degree as I wanted to learn more about Marketing. This degree gave me valuable insights in a variety of marketing theories and approaches. Thus, especially the area of digital marketing was (as per choice) an area I wanted to gather more knowledge. Dublin Business School has a strong focus on group projects, which was very useful way of learning more in this area.

As a result, I got the opportunity to start as an online consultant at Google AdWords in January. I did this on a part-time basis as I was still studying. This was a hard time in order to fulfil both, learning at university and working. Nevertheless, my professors (and especially) my supervisor did always support me and kept me updated in case I have missed out on an important tasks or lecture. I have to say, that I was very grateful for this and that it is much appreciated.

Further, as already mentioned, I think the most learning outcomes are from gaining theoretical knowledge and then converting this knowledge into practical experience, I started to apply for jobs very early in this year. As a result, I had a lot of time consuming and exhausting interviews with companies in Dublin. In the end, I finally got into my preferred company (LinkedIn) and started working there mid-July. This role was my absolute dream job, which why I accepted it before finishing up my dissertation.
LEARNING STYLE

Learning is a process in which people try to develop skills or knowledge. In order to make this process as efficient as possible, it is important to understand one's own learning style. At the stage of understanding a person's own learning style, a learning process is maximized (Kolb et al., 1974).

Further, Kolb et al. (1984) explain learning as “Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb et al., 1974, p.38). Therefore, the process of learning is the adaptation of different theories or information which can be used in different situations of solving a problem. Further, Kolb et al. (1974) divided the process of learning into four different stages.

• Concrete experience
• Reflective Observation
• Abstract Conceptualization
• Active Experimentation

Thus, effective learning can solely be achieved by going through all four stages. Further, it is important to understand that every individual has his or her own style of learning. Kolb et al. (1974) used the four different stages of learning and has developed linked learning styles from each stage. Therefore, learning styles can be categorized in four different styles. Those styles are dependent on the person's personal characteristics.

Diverging (feel and watch) is the first of Kolb's defined learning styles. In this category, the person is able to understand situations from a variety of perspectives. Those people tend to watch the situation detailed before they make a decision.
Brainstorming or general ideas-generating approaches are an effective way to make the diverging learning style successful.

Further, the Assimilating learning style (watching and thinking) is an even more abstract approach of learning. Individuals, which tend to watch, and (over)-think situations are in this category. Nevertheless, the development of abstract theories is one of the benefits regarding this type of person. The Converging (doing and thinking) on the other hand are people with way more active in the way they process information. The individuals in this category are excellent problem solvers, which convert the learning instantly into action. As a result, people with this approach tend to favour technical tasks or experiments rather than the development of theories.

Last but not least, the Accommodating (doing and feeling) learning style. This category has the most active approach. Individuals in this category have a “hands-on” mentality. As a result, intuition rather than logic are used to convert the learning into action.

Furthermore, another way to categorize different learning styles has been established by Fleming & Baume (2006). In this categorization the main differences of learning are less linked to personal characteristics. Fleming & Baume (2006) has clustered them as,

Visual Type (this type has to visualize the information in order to understand and learn from it)

Auditory Type (this type has to listen to the information in order to understand and learn from it)
Reading Type (this type as to listen to the information in order to understand an learn from it)

Kinaesthetic (this type needs to practice and learn from mistakes during this hands-on approach in order to learn from it).

During the process of developing my dissertation, I tried to understand more about my preferred learning styles. The outcome of this reflection is, that I categorize myself in category accommodating typ as I process information quickly and convert them into action. I think I learn the most if I have the opportunity to convert my gained knowledge straight into action. Regarding my dissertation, this categorization has been proven to be right as I had the most difficulties with the literature review as it is a very theoretical part of the work. I way more enjoyed and had the feeling of developing a good work in more practical parts such as my development of the survey in alignment with hypothesises. Putting both things together and in a way developing a model was very interesting for me. Further, as a result of this reflection I have to remember the fact that not every task can contain a practical component and that I need to be less impatient and have to learn to focus for a longer amount of time. Nevertheless, when it comes to developing an academic understanding of a topic I would categorize myself as the Visual Type defined by Fleming & Baume (2006) as I always have to see presentations in order to gain the most knowledge from it.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

As already addressed, my main challenges in this dissertation were the limited time aligned with a poor time management. Further, I learned to give myself more time...
and have to avoid managing several tasks at once. Nevertheless, I think this dissertation thought me to stay focused and to avoid panicking when tasks are more time consuming than expected. Being a self-organized, hard working person will help me in my future career. Furthermore, regarding the whole master’s degree I have increased a lot of my personal skill due to a variety of group projects. I always have favoured diverse groups in order to become a person, which is aware of cultural differences and knows how to manage them. Apart from this, I have gained valuable insights from an academic point of view and have developed my first primary research paper. Thus, I have improved my English skills and managed to establish a valuable network with the other students. This network is a very important outcome of this degree as I am aware that those students will be/can be my professional network in the future.

ASSESSMENT OF RESEARCH PROCESS

Before this Degree I have never made primary research on my own. As my interest in social media and consumer behaviour has evolved during this degree I have chosen this area to make my first primary research on it. At the beginning my main challenge was to figure out which areas of literature are relevant for my topic as I did not want to make too much about social media marketing as this area is connected but not the major part of my research area. Further, as already stated I had a variety of different interviews for companies. As a result, my timeframe was limited, and I got aware of the fact that I have to work on my time management. This dissertation thought me that I tend to underestimate the amount of time I need when managing different tasks. Managing both, working and writing my dissertation has not always
been easy, as I had to work long hours to make the most of my product trainings. As a result, I had some difficulties regarding the timeframe of the dissertation.
LEARNING TAKEAWAYS FOR FUTURE
The overall degree in Marketing gave me not only insights in areas such as social media marketing, consumer behaviour, SEO & SEA but even thought me important lectures regarding researching topics. The outcome is that I feel on the one hand fully capable to research more and on the other hand the confidence that I am well-equipped to start and be successful in my professional life. Further, I discovered areas I have to improve such as time management and became aware of personal traits, which are very useful in-group projects such as taking ownership of tasks or being a leader of a group.

In the end I want to mention that I was although inspired by several lectures I got to know during this degree. As I was studying in Germany before, I did not have lectures, which were really interested in their students from a personal point of view. Having smaller sizes of courses and very open-mined lecturers gives you a deeper learning experience and fosters your desire to learn more about different subjects. As an outcome, I am aware of the facts that being an open-mined, down to earth manager/lecturer has an higher impact on employees/students. I want to take this awareness and knowledge into my professional life and become a well-respected, fair and interesting manager of people within LinkedIn in my future.
8.2 APPENDIX 2:

SURVEY

1. Do you accept?
   Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.
   ○ I accept.
   ○ I do not accept.

2. Do you live in Germany for at least 5 years? *
   Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.
   ○ Yes
   ○ No Beenden Sie nach der letzten Frage in diesem Abschnitt das Ausfüllen des Formulars.

   Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.
   ○ Yes
   ○ No Beenden Sie nach der letzten Frage in diesem Abschnitt das Ausfüllen des Formulars.

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1CuF8d48TPGrG1w8t0FJS70AcQWz2CPuR0dGqPabDyI/edit

3/24/2016

The impact of Consumers’ Actual Behaviour on Social Media on their Purchase Behaviour

4. Do you usually (at least 1 time a day) log into Facebook or Instagram? *
   Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.
   ○ Yes
   ○ No Ausfüllen dieses Formulars beenden

Unbenannter Abschnitt

5. What is your age?
   Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.
   ○ Between 10-20
   ○ 20-25
   ○ 25-30
   ○ 30-35
   ○ 35-40

6. What is your gender?
   Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.
   ○ Female
   ○ Male
   ○ Prefer not to say

7. Which of the following features of Instagram are you using? Select all which apply.
   Wählen Sie alle zutreffenden Antworten aus.
   ○ Publishing Instagram Stories
   ○ Watching Instagram Stories of other users
   ○ Messaging on Instagram
   ○ Publishing Content (Pictures/Videos) on Instagram

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8. Which of the following features of Facebook are you using? Select all which apply

- [ ] Publishing Content (Pictures/Photos) on Instagram
- [ ] None of the above
- [ ] Messenger
- [ ] Publishing Facebook Stories
- [ ] Watching Facebook Stories of other users
- [ ] Updating my profile (Pictures/Posts)
- [ ] None of the above

9. Have you published an Instagram story in the last 7 days?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

10. Have you updated your Facebook profile in the last 30 days? (Post pictures, update info.)

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

11. Rate yourself:

- [ ] I am a heavy user of Instagram, I tend to publish stories almost daily
- [ ] I am a heavy user of Instagram, but I tend to consume the content and do not publish as often
- [ ] I use Instagram occasionally, I publish and consume from time to time
- [ ] I have the Instagram app but I do not publish content

12. Have you purchased online in the last 30 days?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

13. Do you prefer to purchase online (compared with going to a physical store)?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

14. Select all the advantages you think you obtain when purchasing online.

- [ ] Latest fashion trends
- [ ] More convenient compared with going to a shop
- [ ] Less expensive
- [ ] Superior Product Portfolio
15. Do you have online shopping apps (such as Amazon, ASOS or H&M)?
Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.
- Yes
- No

16. Have you ever published new purchases online (for instance food, drinks, beauty products or clothes)?
Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.
- Yes
- No

17. Do you feel like your online presence is the same as you offline (real-life) presence?
Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.
- Yes
- No

18. Have you ever purchased a good/service because you saw it on an Instagram Story (from a blogger, influencer or friends/acquaintance)?
Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.
- Yes
- No

19. Do you use apps to improve the quality/aesthetic of the pictures you publish online (such as Photo Lab or Instagram filters)?
Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.
- Yes
- No

20. Do you agree to the following statement: Instagram and Facebook influence the products I want to purchase.
Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.
- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Not entirely agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

21. Do you agree to the following statement: Social Media platforms pressure consumers to buy new and the latest products/services.
Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.
- Strongly agree
- Agree
21. Do you agree to the following statement: Social Media platforms pressure consumers to buy new and the latest products/services.

*Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.*

- [ ] Strongly agree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Not entirely agree
- [ ] Neutral
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Strongly disagree

22. Do you agree to the following statement: My Social Media presence reflects my personality.

*Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.*

- [ ] Strongly agree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Not entirely agree
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Strongly Disagree
- [ ] Neutral
- [ ] Sonstiges: ______________________

23. Do you feel like your online presence conveys a true version of your lifestyle?

*Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.*

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

24. Do you agree to the following statement: Instagram and Facebook influence the products/services I want to purchase?

*Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.*

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No