

Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	5-6 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 1.000.001 - 2.000.000
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	<Rp. 1.000.000
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	> Rp. 5.000.001
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 1.000.001 - 2.000.000
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 1.000.001 - 2.000.000
Ya	Tidak					
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	31-40	>7 tahun	Ibu rumah tangga	<Rp. 1.000.000
Tidak						
Ya	Ya	Laki-laki	21-30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 2.000.001 - Rp. 3.000.000
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 2.000.001 - Rp. 3.000.000
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 1.000.001 - 2.000.000

Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	>7 tahun	Pegawai negeri sipil/swasta	> Rp. 5.000.001
Ya	Ya	Laki-laki	21-30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 3.000.001 - Rp. 4.000.000
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 1.000.001 - 2.000.000
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	31-40	>7 tahun	Pegawai negeri sipil/swasta	Rp. 3.000.001 - Rp. 4.000.000
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 3.000.001 - Rp. 4.000.000
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 2.000.001 - Rp. 3.000.000
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 1.000.001 - 2.000.000
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 2.000.001 - Rp. 3.000.000

Ya	Ya	Peremp uan	21- 30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/maha siswa	<Rp. 1.000.000
Ya	Ya	Peremp uan	21- 30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/maha siswa	Rp. 1.000.001 - 2.000.000
Ya	Ya	Peremp uan	21- 30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/maha siswa	Rp. 1.000.001 - 2.000.000
Ya	Ya	Peremp uan	21- 30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/maha siswa	Rp. 1.000.001 - 2.000.000
Ya	Ya	Peremp uan	21- 30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/maha siswa	Rp. 1.000.001 - 2.000.000
Ya	Ya	Laki- laki	21- 30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/maha siswa	Rp. 2.000.001 - Rp. 3.000.000
Ya	Ya	Laki- laki	21- 30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/maha siswa	Rp. 1.000.001 - 2.000.000
Ya	Ya	Laki- laki	21- 30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/maha siswa	<Rp. 1.000.000
Ya	Ya	Laki- laki	21- 30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/maha siswa	Rp. 1.000.001 - 2.000.000
Ya	Ya	Peremp uan	21- 30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/maha siswa	Rp. 1.000.001 - 2.000.000

Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 1.000.001 - 2.000.000
Ya	Ya	Laki-laki	21-30	5-6 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 3.000.001 - Rp. 4.000.000
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 1.000.001 - 2.000.000
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 4.000.001 - Rp. 5.000.000
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 2.000.001 - Rp. 3.000.000
Ya	Ya	Laki-laki	21-30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 2.000.001 - Rp. 3.000.000
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	1-2 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 3.000.001 - Rp. 4.000.000
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 1.000.001 - 2.000.000

Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	5-6 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 1.000.001 - 2.000.000
Ya	Ya	Laki-laki	21-30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	<Rp. 1.000.000
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 2.000.001 - Rp. 3.000.000
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 2.000.001 - Rp. 3.000.000
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	31-40	>7 tahun	Wirausaha	Rp. 3.000.001 - Rp. 4.000.000
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 3.000.001 - Rp. 4.000.000
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	41-50	>7 tahun	ibu rumah tangga	> Rp. 5.000.001
Ya	Ya	Laki-laki	21-30	>7 tahun	Pegawai negeri sipil/swasta	Rp. 4.000.001 - Rp. 5.000.000
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 2.000.001 -

						Rp. 3.000.000
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 4.000.001 - Rp. 5.000.000
Ya	Ya	Laki-laki	21-30	5-6 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 1.000.001 - 2.000.000
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	5-6 tahun	Freelance	Rp. 1.000.001 - 2.000.000
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 2.000.001 - Rp. 3.000.000
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	41-50	>7 tahun	Pegawai negeri sipil/swasta	> Rp. 5.000.001
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 1.000.001 - 2.000.000
Ya	Ya	Laki-laki	<20	>7 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 1.000.001 - 2.000.000
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 3.000.001 - Rp. 4.000.000

Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 2.000.001 - Rp. 3.000.000
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	41-50	>7 tahun	Wirausaha	> Rp. 5.000.001
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 1.000.001 - 2.000.000
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	>7 tahun	Wirausaha	Rp. 4.000.001 - Rp. 5.000.000
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	>7 tahun	Freelance	Rp. 2.000.001 - Rp. 3.000.000
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	31-40	3-4 tahun	Pegawai negeri sipil/swasta	Rp. 3.000.001 - Rp. 4.000.000
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 4.000.001 - Rp. 5.000.000
Ya	Ya	Laki-laki	21-30	1-2 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 1.000.001 - 2.000.000

Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	1-2 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 1.000.001 - 2.000.000
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	3-4 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 1.000.001 - 2.000.000
Ya	Ya	Laki-laki	21-30	5-6 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 1.000.001 - 2.000.000
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	1-2 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 1.000.001 - 2.000.000
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	5-6 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 1.000.001 - 2.000.000
Ya	Ya	Laki-laki	21-30	5-6 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	<Rp. 1.000.000
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 1.000.001 - 2.000.000
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	3-4 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 1.000.001 - 2.000.000
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	3-4 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 1.000.001 - 2.000.000
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 1.000.001 - 2.000.000

Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 1.000.001 - 2.000.000
Ya	Ya	Laki-laki	21-30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 2.000.001 - Rp. 3.000.000
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 4.000.001 - Rp. 5.000.000
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	> Rp. 5.000.001
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 2.000.001 - Rp. 3.000.000
Ya	Ya	Laki-laki	21-30	>7 tahun	Wirausaha	> Rp. 5.000.001
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	5-6 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 2.000.001 - Rp. 3.000.000
Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21-30	>7 tahun	Pelajar/mahasiswa	Rp. 1.000.001 - 2.000.000

P	P	P	P	P	P	P	K	K	K	K	K	N	N	N	N	K	K	K	K
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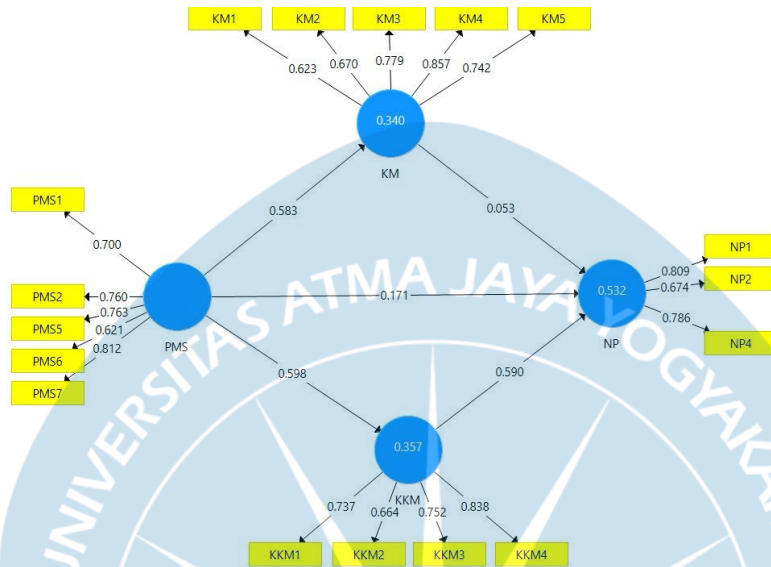
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4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
4	5	5	4	4	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	4	3	1	3	4	2

Lampiran 3 Olah Data

Model Struktural (SEM-PLS)



Outer loading

	KKM	KM	NP	PMS
KKM1	0.737			
KKM2	0.664			
KKM3	0.752			
KKM4	0.838			
KM1		0.623		
KM2		0.670		
KM3		0.779		
KM4		0.857		
KM5		0.742		
NP1			0.809	
NP2			0.674	
NP4			0.786	
PMS1				0.700
PMS2				0.760
PMS5				0.763

	KKM	KM	NP	PMS
KKM3	0.752			
KKM4	0.838			
KM1		0.623		
KM2		0.670		
KM3		0.779		
KM4		0.857		
KM5		0.742		
NP1			0.809	
NP2			0.674	
NP4			0.786	
PMS1				0.700
PMS2				0.760
PMS5				0.763
PMS6				0.621
PMS7				0.812

AVE

	Cronbach's ...	rho_A	Composite ...	Average Va...
KKM	0.741	0.760	0.837	0.563
KM	0.802	0.842	0.856	0.546
NP	0.633	0.646	0.802	0.576
PMS	0.784	0.797	0.853	0.539

Cross Loading

	KKM	KM	NP	PMS
KKM1	0.737	0.091	0.608	0.328
KKM2	0.664	0.226	0.395	0.352
KKM3	0.752	0.391	0.492	0.530
KKM4	0.838	0.313	0.612	0.552
KM1	0.067	0.623	0.082	0.239
KM2	0.177	0.670	0.233	0.239
KM3	0.347	0.779	0.296	0.565
KM4	0.340	0.857	0.317	0.547
KM5	0.212	0.742	0.300	0.393
NP1	0.523	0.242	0.809	0.318
NP2	0.457	0.303	0.674	0.344
NP4	0.614	0.271	0.786	0.561
PMS1	0.384	0.333	0.314	0.700
PMS2	0.432	0.463	0.382	0.760
PMS5	0.499	0.374	0.452	0.763

	KKM	KM	NP	PMS
KKM3	0.752	0.391	0.492	0.530
KKM4	0.838	0.313	0.612	0.552
KM1	0.067	0.623	0.082	0.239
KM2	0.177	0.670	0.233	0.239
KM3	0.347	0.779	0.296	0.565
KM4	0.340	0.857	0.317	0.547
KM5	0.212	0.742	0.300	0.393
NP1	0.523	0.242	0.809	0.318
NP2	0.457	0.303	0.674	0.344
NP4	0.614	0.271	0.786	0.561
PMS1	0.384	0.333	0.314	0.700
PMS2	0.432	0.463	0.382	0.760
PMS5	0.499	0.374	0.452	0.763
PMS6	0.258	0.566	0.325	0.621
PMS7	0.575	0.417	0.522	0.812

Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	KKM	KM	NP	PMS
KKM	0.750			
KM	0.346	0.739		
NP	0.710	0.356	0.759	
PMS	0.598	0.583	0.554	0.734

Reliabilitas (CA & CR)

	Cronbach's ...	rho_A	Composite ...	Average Va...
KKM	0.741	0.760	0.837	0.563
KM	0.802	0.842	0.856	0.546
NP	0.633	0.646	0.802	0.576
PMS	0.784	0.797	0.853	0.539

R-Square

	R Square	R Square A...
KKM	0.357	0.353
KM	0.340	0.336
NP	0.532	0.522

F-Square

	KKM	KM	NP	PMS
KKM			0.478	
KM			0.004	
NP				
PMS	0.556	0.516	0.030	

Path Coefficients

	Original Sa...	Sample Me...	Standard D...	T Statistics (...)	P Values
KKM -> NP	0.590	0.592	0.064	9.243	0.000
KM -> NP	0.053	0.055	0.078	0.676	0.499
PMS -> KKM	0.598	0.609	0.061	9.781	0.000
PMS -> KM	0.583	0.595	0.050	11.600	0.000
PMS -> NP	0.171	0.173	0.092	1.850	0.065

Specific Indirect Effects

	Original Sa...	Sample Me...	Standard D...	T Statistics (...)	P Values
PMS -> KK...	0.352	0.361	0.056	6.333	0.000
PMS -> KM ...	0.031	0.034	0.047	0.649	0.517

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The impact of social media marketing on brand awareness, brand engagement and purchase intention in emerging economies

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Abstract

Purpose – Purpose. Based on the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), theory of consumer brand engagement (CBE), and empirical findings, we examine the impact of social media marketing (SMM) on brand awareness (BA), consumer brand engagement (CBE), and purchase intention in emerging economies.

Design/methodology/approach – Data were collected in North Macedonia, Albania, Kosovo, Romania, and Ukraine from 1,808 social media users, through a self-administered online survey. Partial least square structural equation modeling was used to assess the theoretical model, and a multi-group analysis to explore the differences between countries.

Findings – Social media marketing has a positive impact on brand awareness, brand engagement, and purchase intention, while country moderates the relationship between brand engagement and purchase intention. We reveal differences among countries regarding SMM's impact on brand engagement and purchase intention.

Practical implications – The study promotes SM's impact on brand communications, providing consumer insights that help companies design effective SMM strategies, using similarities and differences in emerging economies. The different levels of CBE and their different influences on purchase intention require a focus on the motivations for brand engagement in social media and the type of content preferred by consumers in each country. The originality of our research lies in our examination of the impact of social media marketing on consumer behavior in five emerging countries. Additionally, we are investigating how the country of origin influences the relationship between social media marketing, brand awareness, consumer behavior, and purchase intention in different countries.

Originality/value – The originality of our research lies in our examination of the impact of social media marketing on consumer behavior in five emerging countries. Additionally, we are investigating how the country of origin influences the relationship between social media marketing, brand awareness, consumer behavior, and purchase intention in different countries.

Keywords Social media marketing, Consumer brand engagement, Brand awareness, Purchase intention, Emerging economies

Paper type Research paper



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1. Introduction

Social media has facilitated complex and intense interactions between brands and consumers for over a decade (Li *et al.*, 2021). As a participatory platform, it encourages consumers to engage, connect, and share ideas with other like-minded consumers, but also with brands on a wider scale. The widespread use of social media has enabled consumers to voice their opinions about companies' products and services (Cheung *et al.*, 2022b), transforming them from passive receivers of marketing communication into influencers and active creators (Bazi *et al.*, 2020). As a result of these growing trends, companies have invested considerable efforts and resources in marketing strategies that facilitate consumer participation on social media platforms (Dabbous and Barakat, 2020) – trends and strategic approaches that are also evident in the countries where the current research was conducted.

By using social media marketing (SMM) to encourage consumers to engage with a brand online through activities such as consuming, contributing, and creating content (Muntinga *et al.*, 2011), companies can increase consumer brand engagement and positive consumer behaviors (Cheung *et al.*, 2021c). From the many effects social media marketing campaigns have on consumer reactions, i.e., positive word-of-mouth, greater brand awareness, brand equity, purchase intent, value co-creation, brand engagement, emotions, and purchases (Kouy *et al.*, 2022; Cheung *et al.*, 2021a, b; Bazi *et al.*, 2020; Godey *et al.*, 2016), this study considered the direct effects on brand awareness, consumer brand engagement and purchase intention, but also the effects that brand awareness and consumer brand engagement have on the purchase intent.

Consumer brand engagement (CBE) reflects how consumers interact with engaging organizations (Beckers *et al.*, 2019). The evolution of technology and social media has added complexity to the consumer-firm relationship (Steinhilf *et al.*, 2019) and engagement models (Wirtz *et al.*, 2019), requiring cohesive alignment. Despite some promising conceptual developments regarding consumer brand engagement, the attention given by researchers to the importance of social media marketing activities on consumer brand engagement (CBE) is limited (Cheung *et al.*, 2020b).

Moreover, Hollebeek (2018) highlights the necessity of CBE research in various cultural contexts. While few notable studies are confirming SMM's significant positive effects on brand equity, including its components—brand awareness and brand image (Godey *et al.*, 2016; Seo and Park, 2018; Hafez, 2022)—there is a lack of cross-cultural studies that explore these relationships. Although Godey *et al.* (2016) collected data from four countries; they only evaluated a particular sector: luxury goods. Therefore, their findings should be compared to other contexts of research. Given the significant number of studies asserting the importance of cultural differences among countries in shaping consumers' behavior through SMM (Godey *et al.*, 2016; Cheung *et al.*, 2020a), we consider the country as a moderating factor. In our study, we collected data from social media users in North Macedonia, Albania, Kosovo, Romania, and Ukraine, countries that share similarities but also present cultural and behavioral differences.

Behavioral differences among the analyzed countries, especially regarding the use of social media and relationships with brands, are poorly addressed in the literature. The existing literature either refers to the degree of new technology adoption (Tsotsou, 2019) or provides various statistics on social media use in these countries. Tsotsou (2019) found that consumers from Eastern Europe leave more reviews than consumers from Southern Europe. This feature can be explained by the higher proportion of social media users in the post-strip stage in Romania and Ukraine, who demonstrate a higher level of engagement. According to datareportal.com, social media penetration reached 74% of the total population in Ukraine, 67.3% in Romania, 56.1% in Kosovo, 57.5% in North Macedonia, and 56.4% in Albania in 2023. Although Facebook has the highest market share in all countries, it accounts for 94.96% in Romania, 91.68% in Albania, and only 37.4% in Ukraine (statcounter.com).

The analyzed countries are also grouped into different clusters based on the speed of technology adoption and internet penetration rates. Jayaram *et al.* (2015) suggest including Romania in a cluster with medium adoption speed, while Albania is classified in a cluster with low adoption speed.

To the best of our knowledge, there is limited research on the effects of social media marketing campaigns on brand awareness or consumer brand engagement in countries from Eastern Europe/Balkan countries. Therefore, with this study, we aim to fill these research gaps.

2. Literature review and hypotheses development

2.1 Uses and gratifications and consumer brand engagement theories

For the theoretical foundations of this research, we considered the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) and the consumer brand engagement theory (CBE). Empirical findings from previous studies that use UGT and CBE allow us to examine how consumers engage with brands' social media content and how their engagement generates marketing outcomes, specifically purchase intent. UGT is one of the most popular theories used to explain consumer desires and the effects of various behavioral intentions. UGT allows an understanding of how individuals actively seek and use certain media channels to satisfy their specific needs (Dolan *et al.*, 2016), and postulates that individuals are active recipients of media channels, and their behavior of using various media channels is driven by specific goals (Cheung *et al.*, 2021b). Specific needs refer to obtaining rewards ("gratifications") such as knowledge enhancement, entertainment and relaxation, social interaction, and obtaining rewards or economic benefits (Ko *et al.*, 2005).

In the context of rapid social media platform development, characterized by high interactivity between companies and users, or users among themselves (Kujur and Singh, 2020), UGT becomes a valuable framework for marketing researchers. It helps to understand and explain reasons for social media platform use (Khan, 2017; Sheth and Kim, 2017; Bazi *et al.*, 2020), identify the factors that motivate consumer engagement with brand pages on social platforms (Oliveira *et al.*, 2016; Dolan *et al.*, 2016), and examine the influence of different types of social media content on online engagement (Cheung *et al.*, 2021a; Dolan *et al.*, 2016; Buzeta *et al.*, 2020).

In this study, we focus on the relationships between perceptions of SMM activities, which are closely related to the type of posted content, social media use, engagement motivations, consumer brand engagement, brand awareness, and purchase intention. The term perceived social media marketing is used in literature (Kim and Ko, 2012) and is associated with the benefits/motivations that determine consumers' use of social media platforms.

Following Buzeta *et al.* (2020), who classified motivation for social media use into categories such as entertainment, integration and social interaction, personal identity, information, remuneration, and empowerment, we investigate perceptions and motivations that relate to consumers' need for information, entertainment, and social interaction. Based on other empirical studies (Cheung *et al.*, 2020a, b; Kim and Ko, 2012), we considered perception dimensions linked to social interaction. In the survey, we included items that refer to information sharing and opinion exchange ("I prefer using social media to share information about brands with my friends"). We also took trendiness into account as a characteristic of social media. This is why we included questions about how trendy respondents perceive information sharing to be, as well as their interest in learning information or news about the brand on social media. To understand what motivates consumers to use and engage in social media, we also considered the entertainment dimension, "Advertisements through social media draw my attention to brands".

Regarding SMM communication strategy, companies display different content to gratify consumers' needs and deliver benefits, stimulating their engagement in social media (Khan, 2017). Kulikovskaja *et al.* (2023) identify three types of social media content: infotainment content - in other approaches treated as separate constructs; informational and entertainment content (Buzeta *et al.*, 2020; Meire *et al.*, 2019); remunerative content, and relational content. Each type is the counterpart of a motivation for using social media platforms and engaging with brands in social media, as found in UGT-based approaches. For example, infotainment content refers to content that delivers information and/or entertainment to users with new, factual, useful, educational, and/or interesting information (Gavilanes *et al.*, 2018). It can be associated with the motivation of entertainment (escape from routine, relaxation, having fun, playing, etc.), respectively the motivation for information (to be aware of news, news about brands) in the approach of Buzeta *et al.* (2020) based on UGT. On the other hand, social content refers to the degree to which social media content satisfies the need for social interaction and integration of consumers (Dolan *et al.*, 2016). It corresponds to integration and social interaction (creating communities, peer support, sense of belonging, etc) from the approaches based on UGT.

Theories regarding CBE originate in the relationship marketing literature (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014). Studies on the impact of social media on consumer engagement with brands have primarily focused on motivations or drivers of CBE in social media (Bani *et al.*, 2020; Buzeta *et al.*, 2020; Dolan *et al.*, 2016; Muntinga *et al.*, 2011; Cheung *et al.*, 2020a; Khan, 2017; Oliveira *et al.*, 2016) and on antecedents and outcomes of CBE together (Cheung *et al.*, 2019, 2020a; Kulikovskaja *et al.*, 2023). Other authors have focused on the topic of CBE dimensions/sub-dimensions (Cheung *et al.*, 2020a; Dessart *et al.*, 2015, 2016) or the topic of engagement intensity (Muntinga *et al.*, 2011). Dessart *et al.* (2016) break down CBE into cognitive (attention, absorption), affective (enthusiasm, joy), and behavioral (sharing, learning, and endorsing) dimensions, and Muntinga *et al.* (2011) identify three stages of engagement: social media content consumption, content sharing and content creation. For this study, similar to Dessart *et al.* (2016), we considered the following consumer brand engagement dimensions: the cognitive dimension ("I am very focused when I see brands on social media"), the affective dimension ("Brands seen on social media make me feel very positive") and the activation dimension (by including the items "Social media engages me during different brand activities" and "I am in close contact with others who use the same brands as me on social media" in the questionnaire). We posit that CBE antecedents, or the benefits of using social media correspond to certain CBE motivations, and CBE outcomes reflected in the purchase intention.

2.2 Hypotheses development

Buzeta *et al.* (2020), building upon the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), state that online brand-related consumption (e.g., viewing a brand-related video, reading product reviews) can benefit brand awareness. Key assumptions of UGT are that consumers are goal-directed in their media selection behavior and actively interpret and integrate media messages, including advertisements (Phua *et al.*, 2017). Brand awareness reflects the consumer's ability to recognize and recall a brand in different situations (Aaker, 1996). On social media platforms, brand awareness can be achieved through various means and activities that connect the consumer to the brand, such as advertising, sales promotion, public relations, etc. Regarding social media, Barreda *et al.* (2015) demonstrated that virtual interactivity, system quality, information content quality, and rewarding activities contribute to brand awareness. A study by Cheung *et al.* in 2021c, which observed the impact of social media marketing (SMM) activities on Chinese consumers' online brand-related activities on the WeChat platform, revealed that entertaining and interactive SMM

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efforts stimulate consumer awareness. Games, contests, two-way communication, and enjoyable consumer experiences are likely to prompt users to read about brand content and visit a brand page.

In today's landscape, consumers often discover brands through endorsement messages from social media influencers. These posts are highly valued as they provide detailed information, reasons for purchase, and information about trending products from brands (Cheung *et al.*, 2022a). According to Cheung *et al.* (2022b), reading information, watching videos or viewing pictures about brands from social media influencer posts is primarily a result of their entertaining and interactive value. Features like Q&As, hashtags, tags, votes, and fun content are expected to enhance consumer attention. The idea of encouraging brands to provide consumers with interesting and entertaining information, such as video content and photos, and sharing amusing stories on platforms like Facebook and Instagram to increase brand recall and recognition is also supported by Ismail (2017).

In a cross-country study on the influences of social media marketing campaigns on brand awareness and brand image, Godey *et al.* (2016) found significant relationships, but with varying intensity from one country to another. In France, social media marketing activities had a more pronounced influence on awareness than on image, in Italy, they obtained an equal score, while in China and India, the influence was higher on brand image than on brand awareness.

Social media marketing stimulates consumers to subscribe to brand pages (Cheung *et al.*, 2019), where they interact with the respective brands, and consequently, their ability to remember these brands is stronger. In other words, they develop brand awareness. Based on the above, we formulate the following hypothesis:

H1. Perceived social media marketing (social interaction, trendiness/informational, entertainment) positively influences brand awareness.

Consumer brand engagement (CBE) is defined as the "consumers' positively valenced brand-related cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity during or related to focal consumer/brand interactions" (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014, p. 154). CBE is linked to consumers' brand-related thought processing, effect, and consumers' energy, effort, and time spent on a brand (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014). In a quantitative research, Cheung *et al.* (2020a) concluded that effective social media marketing strategies lead to increased CBE. Trendy topics and updates on social media pages motivate consumers to spend more cognitive effort to understand the focal brand better. The authors suggest that interactive social media content such as live streaming, chat rooms, and rewards for active consumers that generate feedback also foster consumer engagement with the brand.

We find in the aforementioned the informational and remunerative content referred to by numerous authors who based their studies on CBE and UGT motivations (Buzeta *et al.*, 2020; Dolan *et al.*, 2016; Gavilanes *et al.*, 2018; Meire *et al.*, 2019) or to perceived social media marketing elements (Cheung *et al.*, 2020a). Osei-Frimpong and McLean (2018) validate a positive relationship between social presence and social brand engagement. Group membership, strong relationships, or the value of information are responsible for social brand engagement. As social media communication "is interactive, participatory, collaborative, personal and shared at the same time" (Ismail and Mer, 2017, p. 3), companies can obtain consumer engagement and build meaningful relationships (Osei-Frimpong and McLean, 2018), which again refers to recent research based on UGT (Buzeta *et al.*, 2020; Kulikovskaja *et al.*, 2023).

In a study regarding the relationship between social media influencers and consumer brand engagement, Cheung *et al.* (2022a, b) found that among social media consumers in Malaysia, social interaction, reward, and entertainment are key motivational factors that drive consumer-influencer engagement behaviors, which, in turn, foster consumer

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engagement with endorsed brands. Interactive posts that facilitate brand experience sharing and the inclusion of various social media technologies, like voting, question-answer posts, and challenges, facilitate consumer participation, thereby driving consumers' intention to engage (Wirtz *et al.*, 2019; Cheung *et al.*, 2022a, b). Based on the above, we formulated the following hypothesis:

H2 Perceived social media marketing (social interaction, trendiness/informational, entertainment) positively influences on social media brand engagement.

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Social media positively impacts at every stage of the decision-making process (Ranawi *et al.*, 2019): need recognition, information search, alternatives evaluation, purchase intention, purchase, and loyalty. From their cognitive need, consumers embark on information-seeking endeavors before crystallizing their purchase intentions, and the need leads, based on UGT (Ranawi *et al.*, 2019), to the motivation to acquire information about the product they want to buy. According to UGT, one of the main motivations for using social media platforms is information/information seeking, alongside various other motivations, including entertainment, social interaction, personal identity, remuneration, and empowerment (Manning *et al.*, 2011; Rozeta *et al.*, 2020). In our research, as we have pointed out, the SMM construct comprises items that refer to the motivations or perceived benefits of using social media platforms from the perspective of UGT.

Purchase intention refers to the probability that consumers will plan or be inclined to buy a product or service in the future (Wu *et al.*, 2011), and Choeon and Lee (2020) link it to the user's probability and willingness to buy a product that he was recommended while using social media platforms. Based on the literature review, Dabbous and Barakat (2020) show that in a social media context, consumers who are satisfied with positive brand interactions might want to purchase the brand.

Social media marketing activities facilitate the quick and viral delivery of offers that grab the attention of consumers, generating increased purchase intention (Baird and Parasnis, 2011). Piero and Kercini (2015), in their study regarding social media and its influence on consumer behavior, carried out in Albania, show that information about products and services offered in the virtual world can positively impact purchase intentions. Moreover, Bivavani and Ho (2019) suggest that purchase intention is driven by social media suggestions, a conclusion also validated in the study of Haji (2015), as social commerce constructs have a positive effect on the user's intention to buy. Given that social media facilitates the social interaction of consumers, it leads to increased trust and the intention to buy (Haji, 2014). The purchase intention is considered one of the outcomes of social media marketing activities (Vedav and Rahman, 2017; Kim, 2022), that takes into account the evaluation consumers make regarding products/brands. Moreover, the brand's participation in social media can lead to the development of relationships with consumers, which may positively impact on the purchase intention towards the brand (Daghani and Tumer, 2015). By joining a brand group on Facebook, consumers receive information from other users that could influence their brand perceptions and purchase intentions (Zhao *et al.*, 2008). Based on the above, we formulated the following hypothesis:

H3 Perceived social media marketing activities have a positive influence on purchase intention.

The relationship between consumer engagement and brand usage intent has been studied more than the relationship between other variables specific to brands (Vander Schee *et al.*, 2020). Hollebek *et al.* (2014) demonstrated that brand usage intent is an outcome of consumer-brand engagement in a LinkedIn user context. Fang (2017) found that consumer engagement is positively related to brand repurchase intention in the context of branded apps, while Harrigan *et al.* (2018) also showed a significant relationship between consumer-

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brand engagement and brand usage intent in the context of tourism brands on social media. Hissain and Toor (2017) found in their quantitative study, which was applied to a sample of 300 social media users in Pakistan that consumer engagement is a positive relationship with their purchase intention. Harasysha (2021) also confirmed that brand engagement has positively effects purchase intention, validating the relationship after questioning a sample of 238 fast-food restaurant consumers from the United Arab Emirates.

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Fish *et al.* (2013) suggest that a high number of online reviews can lead to online purchase intention, information backed by the research of Yagci and Sanchoy Das (2018), according to which the online reviews that offer a large quantity of information based on experiences with the products can influence their purchase decision. Tran (2020) argues, starting from the UGT theory, that online reviews, such as comments or pictures, have directly and positively influence consumer purchase intention.

H4 Consumer brand engagement has a positive influence on purchase intention.

The research carried out up to this point regarding the relationship between brand awareness and purchase intention is relatively vague, especially regarding the relationship between the two variables in the online environment. So far, Dabbous and Barakat (2020) have validated the positive influence of creating brand awareness in social networks on purchase intentions in offline stores. In their study, carried out on a sample of 302 Facebook Millennial users, the authors also found that brand awareness mediates the positive relationship between content quality, brand interactivity in the social network and offline purchase intention. In another study, Chen *et al.* (2021) used a sample of 2276 Chinese users to test the influence of WeChat platform usage on the purchase intentions regarding South Korean brands. Based on their empirical results, the authors confirm that social media content marketing activities promote brand recognition and enhance consumers' purchase intention. For Kapferer (2008), brand awareness is the most important condition and essential step in any search for a brand, directly affecting the purchase decision, and, according to Evans *et al.* (2021), companies using social media platforms can promote their brands and create awareness that leads to the buying behavior.

Starting from the theory that emphasises that a successful brand is a brand with a high score for awareness, the perceived awareness impacts the evaluation of the brand and leads to an increase in its purchase intention. Based on the above, we formulated the following hypothesis:

H5 Brand Awareness has a positive influence on purchase intention.

Therefore, based on the above, we conceptualize the following framework of the study in Figure 1.



Figure 1.
Research model

3. Methodology

3.1 Sample and data collection

The research utilized a structured questionnaire to investigate the effects of social media marketing (SMM) on brand awareness, brand engagement, and purchase intention. A total of 1808 social media users' responses were collected in North Macedonia, Albania, Kosovo, Romania, and Ukraine. The sample was selected using a mixed nonprobability method, convenience sampling, and snowballing method. The first respondents were randomly chosen, students, alumni, or marketing professionals, after which the selection of the sample was expanded by using snowballing method. 19.9% of the respondents were from North Macedonia, 18.9% from Kosovo, 17.4% from Albania, 25.3% from Romania, and 18.5% from Ukraine. The complete profiles of the respondents are detailed in Table 1. The questionnaire was translated from English into the mother tongue of each country included in the sample and was administered online via the Google Forms platform, from June to September 2020. North Macedonia, Albania, Kosovo, Romania, and Ukraine, located in Southeastern Europe, share geographical proximity, intertwined histories, and economies, which results in similarities in consumer behavior, cultural norms, and social media usage. These similarities improve data comparability and validate the findings. Cultural similarities arising from historical, linguistic, and geographical ties can lead to shared consumer preferences and

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		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	605	33.5
	Female	1203	66.5
	Total	1808	100.0
Age	Under 20	603	33.4
	21-30	619	34.2
	31-40	220	12.2
	41-50	131	7.2
	More than 51	41	2.4
	Total	1808	100.0
SOC_EXP	1-2 years	37	2.0
	3-4 years	137	7.6
	5-6 years	467	25.8
	More than 7 years	1107	61.2
	Total	1808	100.0
Country	North Macedonia	359	19.9
	Kosovo	341	18.9
	Albania	315	17.4
	Romania	458	25.3
	Ukraine	334	18.5
	Total	1808	100
Occupation	College student (part time)	861	47.6
	Working full-time	408	22.6
	Working part-time and going to college	236	13.1
	Working part-time only	130	7.2
	Total	1808	100.0
Income	Up to 250 EU	669	37.0
	251-400 EU	437	24.2
	401-600 EU	316	17.5
	More than 600 EU	386	21.3
	Total	1808	100.0

Source(s): Authors' illustration

Table 1.
Demographic profile of
respondents

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behaviors. Additionally, the role of social media in brand promotion and consumer engagement in these countries may differ from that in developed nations due to variations in technology penetration, consumer behavior, and economic conditions.

3.2 Measurement scale

This research utilized a structured questionnaire to investigate the impact of SMM on brand awareness, consumer brand engagement, and purchase intentions, with country added to the model as a moderating variable to test its effect on the relationships between independent and dependent variables. The measurement scales for SMM, brand awareness, and consumer brand engagement were adapted from [Emiri and Zeqiri \(2021\)](#) and for purchase intention from [Musa and Zeqiri \(2020\)](#) (Table 2). Respondents had to rate statements using 5 Likert-point scales.

4. Results

We employed IBM Amos 26 and SPSS 20 to analyze the proposed research model. Further, we used [structural equation modeling \(SEM\)](#) to test observant and latent variables. We used a

Items	Standardized loadings	Alpha	AVE
SMM7 - It is interesting to share information on social media about brands	0.731		
SMD6 - Social media provides me with the brand information I look for	0.682		
SMD5 - I prefer using social media to share information about brands with my friends	0.689		
SMD4 - Advertisements through social media draw my attention to brands	0.678		
SMD3 - Sharing information using social media is trendy	0.585		
SMD2 - Social media marketing provides opportunities for sharing information about brands	0.456		
SMM1 - I prefer sharing content about brands that I like using social media	0.602	0.825	0.474
BA1 - Social media increases my brand awareness and makes me aware of brands	0.671		
BA2 - Social media provides me with more information regarding the characteristics of brands	0.751		
BA3 - Through social media, I can easily remember brands	0.736		
BA4 - I can easily recognize brands through social media	0.773		
BA5 - I can easily distinguish different brands through social media	0.672	0.841	0.521
PI1 - My intention is to continue buying brands that I see on social media	0.746		
PI2 - I recommend brands that I prefer to others using social media	0.722		
PI3 - I intend to purchase brands that I prefer based on discussions on social media	0.713		
PI4 - My intention is to stay loyal to this brand in the future	0.344	0.721	0.573
BE4 - I am very focused when I see brands on social media	0.782		
BE3 - Brands seen on social media make me feel very positive	0.734		
BE2 - Social media engages me during different brand activities	0.735		
BE1 - I am in close contact with others who use the same brands as me on social media	0.689	0.825	0.541

Table 2.
Convergent validity

Source(s): Authors' calculations using IBM AMOS 26
Authors' illustration

two-step strategy for assessing the structural equation modeling. To analyze the appropriateness of the measurement model, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used and in the second step, **structural equation modeling (SEM)** was assessed. A bootstrapping method was used to test the significance of the path coefficients and the factor loadings (Hair *et al.*, 2016).

4.1 Measurement model, reliability, and validity

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was carried out to evaluate the goodness-of-fit indices and proceed with testing to check whether the following indices fall within threshold indices. Thus, for proceeding with another further test, the following: chi-square/df ratio, comparative fit index (CFI), goodness-of-fit index (GFI), adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI), normed fit index (NFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) were checked. Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability were used to calculate the scale reliability of the four constructs. The proposed threshold of 0.70 or greater reliability coefficient indicates good reliability (Hair *et al.*, 2016).

This study used SEM to analyze the proposed research model and the model fit. Further, SEM was used to test the hypothesis and validate the conceptual model. To assess the model fit, the SEM evaluates R², β , and t-values (Zeqiri *et al.*, 2020) were used. Therefore, the SEM technique is used to evaluate the measurement model and to estimate the structural model. The obtained results from CFA showed that chi-square/df was 8.423, indicating a satisfactory fit; a ratio of five or less is a good fit (Wheaton *et al.*, 1977). CFI (0.924), GFI (0.927), AGFI (0.907), NFI (0.914), TLI (0.912), and RMSEA (0.064) all denote an adequate fit of the model. To test the normality of the data, we performed the normality test using the skewness and kurtosis approach. The data are seen to be normal when skewness and kurtosis are aligned with the proposed normality thresholds. If the data range from -2 to +2 for skewness, and -7 to +7 for kurtosis, then the data are within the corresponding limits (Byrne, 2010). As Table 3 shows, all the data fall between the threshold, thus indicating a good normality fit.

		Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
SMM	SMD1	3.3008	1.11941	-0.318	-0.521
	SMD2	4.2500	0.81321	-1.284	2.357
	SMD3	4.0702	0.87645	-0.951	1.027
	SMD4	3.5496	0.99947	-0.957	0.604
	SMD5	3.4425	1.09686	-0.423	-0.462
	SMD6	3.7163	0.99791	-0.670	0.032
	SMD7	3.6543	0.98717	-0.692	0.235
BA	BA1	3.6761	0.92922	-0.854	0.688
	BA2	3.7671	0.99277	-0.741	0.173
	BA3	3.7369	0.96010	-0.710	0.155
	BA4	3.9842	0.84805	-0.839	0.975
	BA5	3.6676	0.95766	-0.612	0.084
CBE	BE1	2.8899	1.11266	0.085	-0.642
	BE2	2.9004	1.10642	-0.021	-0.737
	BE3	3.4463	0.95058	-0.418	0.143
PI	BE4	2.9773	1.09536	-0.084	-0.618
	PI1	3.1742	1.09183	-0.319	-0.528
	PI2	3.3822	1.07980	-0.447	-0.442
	PI3	3.2760	1.07682	-0.307	-0.576
Source(s):	PI4	3.3489	1.01294	-0.310	-0.280
	Authors' illustration				

Table 3.
Assessment of data
quality

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Validity tests were conducted in two stages to check if the items describe the context of the construct. Firstly, we carried convergent validity followed by a discriminant validity test (Hair *et al.*, 2016).

4.2 Convergent validity

Convergent validity examines whether an item of a construct is similar to another item in the construct compared to their correlation within the same construct (Becker *et al.*, 2013). Convergent validity is usually tested by assessing the loadings, average variance extracted (AVE), and composite reliability (Zeqiri *et al.*, 2020).

Cronbach's alphas are 0.825 for social media marketing, 0.841 for brand awareness, 0.825 for brand engagement, and 0.721 for purchase intention. The results show that all four constructs had reliability coefficients greater than the proposed threshold of 0.70. We can conclude that if the factor loading exceeds the 0.7 threshold and the average variance extracted (AVE) exceeds 0.5, convergent validity is reached (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

4.3 Discriminant validity

Discriminant validity examines how items differ statistically from other item constructs (Franke and Sarstedt, 2019). As can be seen in Table 4, the AVE is greater than 0.5 for all constructs except Social MM. Therefore, to achieve discriminant and convergent validity, the square root of the AVE should be greater than the correlations among the constructs (see Table 4).

4.4 Structural model estimation

As shown in Figure 2, for the proposed model, all paths were significant at 0.05 levels. It is estimated that the predictors of purchase intention explain 81.3% of its variance, consumer brand engagement is explained by 66.3% of its variance, and brand awareness is explained by 66.6% of its variance by the model.

Furthermore, the results of the model supported all the hypotheses, and the values of the path analysis are significant. For example, the path analysis of social media marketing shows 0.173, 0.468, and 0.508, brand awareness shows 0.128, and consumer brand engagement shows 0.385.

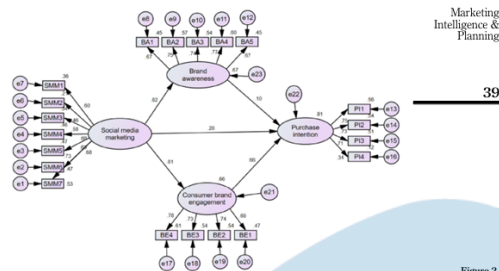
Table 5 displays the results of the path coefficients of the constructs. According to the table, the direct relationships of brand awareness, consumer brand engagement, and social media marketing are statistically significant. The findings indicate a significant ($p < 0.001$) and positive relationship between social media marketing and brand awareness, supporting H1. Specifically, when social media marketing increases by 1, brand awareness goes up by 0.508. Social media marketing also impacts consumer brand engagement; when social media marketing increases by 1, consumer brand engagement goes up by 0.468 units, supporting H2. The results also support H3, as social media marketing has an impact on purchase

Table 4.
Discriminant validity

Construct	SMM	BA	CBE	PI
Social media marketing (SMM)	0.689			
Brand awareness (BA)	0.400	0.722		
Consumer brand engagement (CBE)	0.398	0.328	0.757	
Purchase intention (PI)	0.411	0.276	0.447	0.736

Note(s): Squared correlations; AVE is the diagonal

Source(s): Authors' illustration



Source(s): Authors' illustration

Figure 2.
SEM model

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
H1	Brand awareness	←	SMM	0.508	0.013	38.345	*** Supported
H2	Brand engagement	←	SMM	0.468	0.013	36.312	*** Supported
H3	Purchase intention	←	SMM	0.173	0.016	10.532	*** Supported
H4	Purchase intention	←	CBE	0.385	0.019	20.287	*** Supported
H5	Purchase intention	←	BA	0.128	0.018	7.028	*** Supported

Source(s): Authors' calculations using IBM AMOS 20

Table 5.
Results of hypothesis testing

intention, with a path coefficient of 0.173 and $p < 0.001$. Specifically, when social media marketing increases by 1, purchase intention goes up by 0.326. Furthermore, brand engagement is also significant ($p < 0.001$); a one-unit increase in consumer brand engagement results in a 0.385 increase in purchase intention, supporting H4. Table 5 also indicates a significant ($p < 0.001$) relationship between brand awareness and purchase intention. When brand awareness increases by 1, purchase intention increases by 0.128, supporting H5.

4.5 Multi-group analysis (MGA) and moderating effect of country

A multi-group analysis (MGA) was used to explore the differences between countries in the study. The results were based on critical ratios that showed the t-values and p-values of groups concerning the dimensions used in the model.

To find out whether the country dimension moderates the relationship between exogenous and endogenous variables, we carried out an analysis for the second model

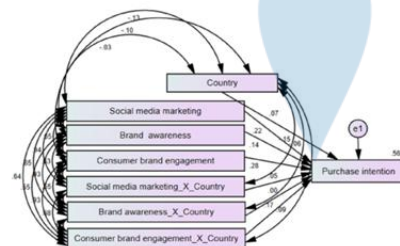
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(Figure 3). First, we had to check the significant relationship between country and purchase intention. Then we came up with a product variable by computing independent variables with country variables. Table 6 shows that the country only moderates the relationship between consumer brand engagement and purchase intention, with a critical ratio of 3.050 and p-value 0.002.

Table 6 also reveals that only CBE is moderated by the country on the relationship with purchase intention. Thus, the country moderates the relationship between CBE and purchase intention. The second step is to check critical ratios among groups. If critical ratios are above the recommended threshold of ± 1.96 , then we can assume that there are differences between country groups. Table 6 shows that consumer brand engagement critical ratios are higher than the recommended threshold, thus supporting the H8. Therefore, we can conclude that the country moderates the relationship between brand engagement and purchase intention.

Figure 4 shows the moderation effect of the country on the relationship between CBE and purchase intention. Country strengthens the positive relationship between CBE and purchase intention. The graph shows that the more participants from different countries in the study, the more differences are in their perceptions concerning consumer brand engagement with purchase intention. Therefore, we can assume that consumer brand engagement increases purchase intentions in some countries.

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Figure 3.
Moderating effect of country

Source(s): Authors' illustration

Table 6.
Indirect effects
(moderating effects)

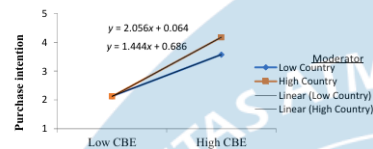
			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	p-value	Label
Purchase intention	←	Social media marketing_X_Country	0.015	0.018	0.832	0.405	Not moderating
Purchase intention	←	Brand awareness_X_Country	0.000	0.017	-0.012	0.990	Not moderating
Purchase intention	←	Consumer brand engagement_X_Country	0.049	0.016	3.050	0.002	Moderating
Purchase intention	←	Country	0.017	0.011	4.164	***	Moderating

Source(s): Authors' illustration

Table 7 shows the country path loading to check the differences in social media marketing, brand awareness, and consumer brand engagement between these five countries.

Henseler *et al.* (2015) recommend that differences occur between groups if the *t*-value is higher than 1.96 and the *p*-value is lower than 0.05. Results from Table 7 show that Social Media Marketing (SMM) has a significant (*p*-value <0.000) impact on purchase intention (PI) in North Macedonia, Kosovo, Albania, Romania, and Ukraine. Regarding consumers' perception in Albania, results revealed that brand awareness (BA) did not impact purchase intention. In contrast, the other two dimensions (SMM and CBE) impacted PI. To find out if there were significant differences between countries in their perceptions regarding the impact of SMM, CBE, and BA on PI, we used the country as a moderating factor to explore the significant differences between countries. Table 8 shows critical ratios between countries concerning SMM, CBE, and BA dimensions. Table 8 also showed differences and similarities concerning dimensions within countries in the study. Results revealed that Romanian consumers differ greatly in their perception concerning the impact of CBE on purchase intention compared to the three Balkan countries, with critical ratios of 2.095 (with Mac), 3.238 (with Kos), and 1.979 (with Alb). The results in Ukraine also revealed the differences in the impact of CBE on purchase intention compared to the three Balkan countries, with critical ratios of 1.968 (with Mac), 2.925 (with Kos), and 1.851 (with Alb).

Romania and Ukraine scored higher in their path coefficient loadings compared to three Balkan countries concerning the impact of consumer brand engagement on purchase



Source(s): Authors' illustration

Figure 4.
Country moderating
effect of consumer
brand engagement
(CBE) on purchase
intention

Country	Estimates and <i>p</i> -values	Purchase intention ← SMM	Purchase intention ← CBE	Purchase intention ← BA
N. Macedonia	Estimate <i>p</i> -value ***	0.272 ***	0.354 ***	0.104 0.025
Kosovo	Estimate <i>p</i> -value ***	0.131 ***	0.289 ***	0.146 ***
Albania	Estimate <i>p</i> -value ***	0.116 ***	0.367 ***	0.055 0.164
Romania	Estimate <i>p</i> -value ***	0.149 ***	0.474 ***	0.162 ***
Ukraine	Estimate <i>p</i> -value ***	0.110 ***	0.490 ***	0.027 0.602

Source(s): Authors' illustration

Table 7.
Comparison of the path
coefficients results
between countries

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Table 8.
Critical ratios for
differences between
country parameters

	Mac2	Mac3	Mac1	Kos2	Kos3	Kos1	Alb2	Alb3
Mac2	0							
Mac3	2.32	0						
Mac1	1.414	-3.39	0					
Kos2	1.387	3.918	0.463	0				
Kos3	1.537	-1.05	2.907	2.337	0			
Kos1	1.062	3.543	0.685	0.221	2.203	0		
Alb2	1.781	4.371	0.212	0.313	3.185	0.582	0	
Alb3	3.073	0.215	4.306	4.378	1.317	3.961	4.137	0
Alb1	2.769	5.089	0.812	1.431	3.992	1.638	1.026	4.859
Rom2	1.165	3.925	0.817	0.374	2.691	0.06	0.732	4.457
Rom3	5.289	2.225	6.256	6.688	3.238	6.109	7.318	-1.979
Rom1	0.791	3.408	1	0.613	2.258	0.315	0.966	-3.819
Ukr2	0.253	2.835	1.409	1.089	1.723	0.786	1.449	-3.22
Ukr3	4.511	1.968	5.502	5.612	2.925	5.244	6.059	1.851
Ukr1	0.818	4.878	1.125	1.674	3.916	1.853	1.483	5.272

Note(s): Values in italics denote significant differences between countries

Source(s): Authors' illustration

intention, with 0.474 and 0.490, respectively, whereas North Macedonia, Kosovo, and Albania scored lower, with 0.354, 0.289, and 0.367, respectively.

Table 8 also revealed that the three Balkan countries had no significant differences based on lower critical ratios, less than the recommended thresholds of -1.96/+1.96. Thus, the results confirmed that there were no significant differences between North Macedonia, Kosovo, and Albania concerning the impact of SMM, CBE, and BA on PI.

5. Discussion and conclusions

5.1 Discussion

This study aimed to examine the impact of social media marketing on brand awareness, brand engagement, and purchase intention in emerging economies, specifically in North Macedonia, Albania, Kosovo, Romania, and Ukraine. Perceived social media marketing was found to have a positive relationship with brand awareness. Our findings support previous studies (Alalwan *et al.*, 2017; Barreda *et al.*, 2015; Dabbous and Barakat, 2020; Godey *et al.*, 2016; Hutter *et al.*, 2013).

In addition, social media platforms enable companies to communicate with consumers to boost their level of consumer brand engagement (Tsai and Men, 2017), which in turn leads to increased satisfaction, loyalty, trust, and word of mouth (Brodie *et al.*, 2013). The results also supported the hypothesis that perceived social media marketing impacts consumer brand engagement (CBE). These findings are aligned with previous studies by Hollebeek (2011), Bazi *et al.* (2020), Godey *et al.* (2016), Rasool *et al.* (2020) and Lee and Hsieh (2022).

Our results are consistent with other studies based on UGT and CBE theories, emphasizing the influence of perceived social media benefits and social media platform use motivations on consumer brand engagement. They also highlight the impact of consumer brand engagement and perceived social media marketing on brand outcomes, such as brand awareness and purchase intention.

Following other studies (Dabbous and Barakat, 2020; Pjero and Kercini, 2015; Choedon and Lee, 2020; Yadav and Rahman, 2017; Khan, 2022), our results also support the hypothesis that social media marketing impacts purchase intention. Social media marketing activities facilitate the quick and viral delivery of offers that grab consumers' attention, generating increased purchase intention (Baird and Parasnis, 2011).

Our research findings uncovered some interesting facts about the multi-group analysis of different countries' perceptions of social media marketing, brand awareness, and consumer brand engagement on purchase intention. Our empirical results show that the country does not moderate the relationship between brand awareness and SMM on purchase intention, but it does moderate the relationship between consumer brand engagement and purchase intention. Furthermore, the results indicate that Romanian consumers have significantly different perceptions of the impact of CBE on purchase intention compared to consumers in three Balkan countries. The critical ratios are 2.095 (with Macedonia), 3.238 (with Kosovo), and 1.979 (with Albania). Similarly, the results from Ukraine also revealed the differences in the impact of consumer brand engagement (CBE) on purchase intention compared to the three Balkan countries, with critical ratios of 1.968 (with Mac), 2.925 (with Kos), and 1.851 (with Alb).

Romania and Ukraine scored higher in their path coefficient loadings compared to three Balkan countries concerning the impact of consumer brand engagement on purchase intention, with 0.474 and 0.490, respectively, whereas North Macedonia, Kosovo, and Albania scored lower, with 0.354, 0.289, and 0.367, respectively.

5.2 Theoretical implication

To the best of our knowledge, our research is the first study to use a multi-group analysis to explore the differences between some emerging countries regarding SMM, brand awareness, consumer brand engagement, and purchase intention. This uniqueness enriches the literature on SMM in emerging markets.

First, the study reveals that the use of social media platforms in emerging countries bears many resemblances to their usage in developed counterparts, resulting in comparable outcomes concerning the interaction between brands and consumers. The findings align closely with existing literature, suggesting minimal disparities between social media marketing strategies in emerging versus developed countries. We attribute this to economic globalization and the accelerated dissemination of digital technologies, which hasten communication between companies and between companies and consumers.

Second, this research extends the understanding that besides the many similarities these emerging countries embrace, there are also differences. Findings indicate that consumer brand engagement is more contextual, and there are differences in the adoption process of social media in these countries. In this line the findings provide evidence that the adoption process of social media marketing, and geodemographics' context play an impactful role in the consumer journey. Based on the results, emerging countries from the western Balkans (North Macedonia, Albania, and Kosovo) had lower engagement scores than the other clusters of emerging countries (Romania and Ukraine).

Notably, the empirical evidence reveals the importance of consumer brand engagement as a key driver for consumer purchase intention, followed by brand awareness. These results are consistent with the results of previous studies (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014).

5.3 Practical implications

This research provides several managerial implications that can be considered in online branding campaigns. Our study suggests that SMM campaigns generate and develop brand awareness, including brand recognition and recall. We show that SM campaigns can generate and develop user engagement with brands and that user engagement positively influences purchase intention. Our study also revealed differences in the moderating influence of the country on the relationship between social media consumer brand engagement and purchase intention.

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The differences highlighted by the averages obtained for each of the SMM dimensions (information, entertainment, social interaction, personal identity, etc.) for each country may have implications for the choice of content marketing as a marketing strategy used to attract, retain, and engage with the audiences through the creation and sharing of relevant articles, videos, podcasts, and specific content.

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Since Romanian consumers use SM to create their self-identity and display their tastes ($M = 3.63$; $SD = 1.31$) more than the average of consumers from the five countries ($M = 3.30$; $SD = 1.11$), they could feel attracted to personalized messages, collections, personal dialogue, and a customized interface more than consumers from the other analyzed countries. Albanian consumers could be attracted by games, branded videos, and contests, as they place more importance on entertainment-based content ($M = 3.96$; $SD = 0.71$) than the 5-country group average ($M_{group} = 3.65$; $SD = 0.98$). Consumers in Kosovo ($M = 3.59$; $SD = 0.94$) use SM for social interaction above the group average ($M = 3.44$; $SD = 1.09$), so they might be drawn to interactive content, social interaction opportunities, reviews, Website registration options, customer clubs integration, and participation in community forums. Kosovo and Romanian consumers can be attracted and retained on social media platforms by informational content (news, product/collection presentations, tutorials, webinars, press releases), as consumers from Kosovo ($M = 3.88$; $SD = 0.88$) and Romania ($M = 3.83$; $SD = 1.11$) perceive SM as information channels to a greater extent than consumers from the other three countries ($M_{group} = 3.71$; $SD = 0.99$).

Keeping up with trends is a more important benefit for consumers in Kosovo ($M = 4.38$; $SD = 0.63$) and Albania ($M = 4.28$; $SD = 0.74$), so these consumers could be enticed by campaigns that emphasize conforming to fashion trends and staying updated with the latest styles, which may include elements such as celebrity endorsements and trend reports.

5.4 Limitations and future research

This study used samples only from some emerging countries; hence, it cannot be generalized in all contexts. Future research can focus on carrying out a cross-national study using a multi-group analysis to explore and compare the role of social media marketing both in some emerging economies and in more developed economies. Performing this approach would provide firms with more insights into similarities and differences regarding the role of social media marketing on consumer engagement in different countries.

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