

## Consumer behavior in the digital world: Social media usage, brand attitude and consumer purchasing trends

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### Abstract

In the digital world, consumer behavior transforms social media usage and brand attitude. Social media is not only a communication tool but also a marketing tool that affects consumer behavior. In this context, the research was conducted to determine the relationship between social media usage, brand attitude and consumer purchasing tendencies of students studying in different departments of Istanbul University-Cerrahpaşa Faculty of Sports Sciences. The study is a descriptive and relational exploratory type research conducted in accordance with the screening model, one of the quantitative research methods. The study group consisted of 275 students of the faculty of sports sciences, 63.3% of whom were female and 36.7% male, selected with the purposeful sampling method. Personal information form, Social Media Usage Scale, Brand Attitude Scale and Pre-Purchase Consumer Behavior Scale on Social Media were used as data collection tools. In the analysis of the data, descriptive statistics were used as well as parametric tests for comparisons between groups. The reliability levels of the scales used in the study were evaluated. A significant difference was found between the pre-purchase consumer behavior of social media according to the gender, economic level and frequency of social media use of the participants. In the study, a significant difference was found between the pre-purchase social media consumer behavior according to the gender, economic level and social media usage frequency of the participants. While a significant difference was found between the brand attitude and social media usage level according to the socio-economic level and social media usage frequency, no significant difference was found between the level of social media usage and brand attitude according to gender. As a result, social media usage, brand attitude and pre-purchase consumer behavior on social media vary according to the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants.

**Keywords:** Consumer behavior, social media, brand attitude.

### *Dijital dünyada tüketici davranışı: Sosyal medya kullanımı, marka tutumu ve tüketici satın alma eğilimleri*

#### Öz

Dijital dünyada tüketici davranışları sosyal medyanın kullanımı ve marka tutumunu dönüştürmektedir. Sosyal medya sadece iletişim aracı değil tüketici davranışlarını etkileyen bir pazarlama aracıdır. Bu kapsamda araştırma İstanbul Üniversitesi-Cerrahpaşa Spor Bilimleri Fakültesi'nin farklı bölümlerinde öğrenim gören öğrencilerin sosyal medya kullanımı, marka tutumu ve tüketici satın alma eğilimlerine dair ilişkisinin tespit edilmesi amacıyla gerçekleştirilmiştir. Çalışma nicel araştırma yöntemlerinden tarama modeline uygun yürütülmüş, betimsel ve ilişkisel arayıcı türde bir araştırmadır. Araştırmanın çalışma grubunu amaçlı örnekleme yöntemi ile seçilen %63,3'ü kadın %36,7'si erkek toplam 275 spor bilimleri fakültesi öğrencileri oluşturmaktadır. Veri toplama aracı olarak kişisel bilgi formu, Sosyal Medya Kullanım Ölçeği, Marka Tutum Ölçeği ve Sosyal Medyada Satın Alma Öncesi Tüketici Davranışı Ölçeği kullanılmıştır. Verilerin analizinde betimleyici istatistik değerlerin yanı sıra gruplar arası karşılaştırmalar için parametrik testler kullanılmıştır. Çalışmada kullanılan ölçeklerin güvenirlik düzeyleri değerlendirilmiştir. Katılımcıların cinsiyet, ekonomik düzey ve sosyal medya kullanım sıklığına göre sosyal medya satın alma öncesi tüketici davranışı arasında anlamlı farklılık bulunmuştur. Sosyo ekonomik düzey ve sosyal medya kullanım sıklığına göre marka tutumu ve sosyal medya kullanım düzeyi arasında anlamlı farklılık tespit edilirken, cinsiyete göre sosyal medya kullanım düzeyi ve marka tutumu arasında anlamlı farklılık bulunmamıştır. Sonuç olarak katılımcıların sosyo demografik özelliklerine göre sosyal medya kullanımı, marka tutumu ve sosyal medyada satın alma öncesi tüketici davranışı değişiklik göstermektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Tüketici davranışı, sosyal medya, marka tutumu

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## INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of technology and the widespread use of the Internet significantly influence and transform human life in various aspects, as they do in many other domains. The internet and the opportunities it provides allow people to enter into a fast and effective communication process; to follow developments in their fields of work, their areas of interest, and to share their own experiences and opinions. In this context, social media is regarded as a pivotal component of the Internet, having profoundly transformed the ways in which individuals communicate and exchange information in contemporary societies (Sarsar et al., 2015). The concept of social media has many areas of use on the internet. From simple video sharing to more complex blogging, social media brings many advantages to its producers and users with a constantly growing communication network that is fed by users and its own public (Solmaz & Gökemli, 2012). In the research conducted by Hall (2018), it was determined that social media users spend most of the time they spend on social media consuming content, that is, reviewing their friends' posts and reading the news. Social media platforms have a wide range of influence, from how individuals access information to shaping their purchasing decisions. The influence of social media on individuals extends beyond mere social interaction, playing a critical role in shaping consumers' brand perceptions and attitudes. Consumers can now easily connect to the internet whenever and wherever they want with mobile devices such as smartphones, tablets, and computers, and thus share about many things. Consumers can perform many different actions regarding a product/service/brand using social media tools (Hacıfendioğlu & Fırat, 2014). Brands can direct consumers' perceptions and increase their loyalty by directly interacting with them. In this context, the relationship between consumers' social media use and brand attitudes plays a critical role in understanding purchasing tendencies. Brand attitude is the communication required for a brand's brand purchase to occur and the consumer's feelings and tendencies towards the brand (Yıldız & Avcı, 2019; Erdinç & Özkaya, 2023).

Consumer is the most important element in the marketing concept. Consumer can be defined as individuals or groups who are directly affected by the services offered or who buy and use the products. Sports consumer is defined as a person or group who buys and uses a sport or sports-related product or service in exchange for money (Yoka ve Polat, 2019). Sports consumers, unlike traditional sports viewers, have evolved into a multi-dimensional structure that now accesses sports content through digital platforms, interacts with them, and purchases sports products online. Today, the widespread use of social media has radically changed the

way consumers relate to sports clubs, brands, and athletes. Sports consumers are those who participate in amateur sports activities for the purpose of playing sports, professional athletes who accept sports as a profession, those who watch sports activities and purchase related products, those who work in the sports industry and those who do business with the sports industry (Akkaya, 2016). One of the most important tasks of sports marketers and managers today and in the future will be to maintain public interest in sports and sports events. The most basic way to maintain this interest is to meet the expectations and needs of the sports consumer (Katırcı ve Oyman, 2011). Consumer behaviors change in almost every sector, and can even be seen in the sports sector. As human needs change over time, demands also change as a result. Some products or services that are in demand at one time may not be in demand at another. In this respect, it is necessary to see and analyze the behaviors and tendencies of sports consumers well (Soygüden, 2020). One of the fundamental assumptions about consumer behavior is that individuals often purchase products not only for their basic functions but also for their subjectively perceived value (Tükenmez, 2024). It is important to analyze and interpret consumer behavior correctly in order to manage the market correctly and effectively and to ensure that the product offered is compatible with the consumer (Yurtsızoğlu & Fişne, 2020; Yurtsızoğlu & Gül, 2022). With the widespread use of the internet, social media has become an online environment where brands can increase their sales, brand loyalty, brand trust, awareness and other marketing activities (Can, 2017). It can be stated that consumers can meet their needs and solve their problems with the products they purchase, while at the same time, they can have the chance to satisfy their internal needs thanks to the additional benefits provided by the use of the product. In this regard, it can be argued that social media facilitates the development of consumer attitudes such as excitement, a sense of perfection, uniqueness, and attractiveness toward the brand (Yıldız, 2019). Attitude towards the brand is also a part of the brand image. Attitude has a decisive quality in provoking the consumer's intention to purchase the brand. For this reason, the formation and development of the consumer's positive attitude is at the center of brand communication studies (Kaptanoğlu et al., 2019). According to Batra and Ray (1983), attitude toward a brand comprises two main components: a cognitive component, shaped by consumers' beliefs about the brand, and an emotional component, encompassing affective responses such as liking, affection, and a sense of closeness to the brand. When consumers possess limited knowledge about brand attributes and the cognitive effort required to process brand-related information is minimal, the role of emotional responses—particularly liking—gains greater significance in the formation of brand attitudes (Çakır, 2006). Brands have the

potential to influence purchasing decisions by creating a certain perception and set of values in the consumer's mind. Consumers evaluate a brand not only on the basis of the product or service it offers, but also in terms of the cognitive and emotional meanings they attribute to it. Variables that we can express as brand attitude, brand image, brand value and brand trust are the determining factors in consumers' purchasing actions (Atıgan & Yükselen, 2018). In this respect, brand attitude stands out as a critical variable that determines consumers' purchasing tendencies. In particular, elements such as trust, quality perception and emotional commitment direct consumers' brand preferences and shape their purchasing behaviors. While the consumer directs his/her own life with the decisions he/she makes as an individual, it will also affect economic decisions such as which goods will be produced, how much and with which methods, how the distribution will be made between factors, how income will be used to meet needs, and how savings will be evaluated (Durmaz et al., 2011). Businesses' product or service offerings need to be shaped according to consumer purchasing behaviors. In this context, businesses must first understand the importance of digitalization and then develop new business methods (Çelikkol, 2022). The fact that consumers are looking for more alternatives and the increase in questions and answers about the product they want to buy has brought a new dimension to consumers. Moreover, consumers can use the internet at every stage of the purchasing process (Özcan, 2010).

Brands identify the preferences and tendencies of their target audiences in a wide range by using new generation communication technologies along with conventional communication tools. In line with this information they obtain, they have had to keep up with digitalization by carrying out functional and structural changes and transformations in all marketing processes (Şeker, 2021). Just as traditional media has evolved into digital media, digital media also tends to undergo rapid changes within itself (Acar & İkizler, 2023). In order for brands and businesses offering sports products to conduct customer-focused marketing activities more efficiently and expand their consumer base, they need to know the reasons for preference of the groups they will serve (Özer & Yurtsızoğlu, 2022). Sports consumers; sports organizations can create a sense of belonging by ensuring their own success, suitability to their culture, reputation, strong club history and socio-cultural values. At the same time, they state that understanding fans is very important as they are an important element in the branding process of clubs (Baran ve Taşkın, 2017).

This study aims to examine the impact of social media usage on consumers' brand attitudes and purchasing behaviors. Today, social media platforms have become an important

area where consumers interact with brands, learn about products and services, and shape their purchasing decisions. In this context, understanding the relationships between the level of social media usage and consumers' perceptions and purchasing tendencies towards brands is of critical importance in terms of marketing strategies. In the study, the dynamics between the relevant variables will be addressed and how social media platforms direct consumer behaviors will be discussed in light of empirical findings.

## **METHOD**

### **Research group (population-sample)**

It consists of students studying in different departments of Istanbul University-Cerrahpasa Faculty of Sports Sciences. Participants were informed about the research with an informed consent form before the data collection process. Data were collected from the participants who volunteered for the research using a face-to-face survey method. In this context, the study group of the research consists of a total of 275 sports sciences faculty students, 63.3% of whom are female and 36.7% are male, selected by the purposeful sampling method. Purposive sampling method, which allows for in-depth research by selecting information-rich situations depending on the purpose of the research, is preferred when it is desired to study one or more special situations that meet certain criteria or have certain characteristics (Başaran, 2024).

The criteria for inclusion in the research are; being a university student, studying at the faculty of sports sciences, being literate, using social media platforms, and individuals who shop online through social media.

### **Ethics of research**

Before entering the data collection process of this research, ethics committee permission was obtained from the Istanbul University-Cerrahpaşa Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee (numbered E-74555795-050.04-1150592 and numbered 2024/477).

### **Data collection tools**

In the study, in order to collect information about the personal characteristics of the students of the faculty of sports sciences, the Social Media Usage Scale, the Brand Attitude Scale and the Pre-Purchase Consumer Behavior Scale on Social Media were used together with a personal information form in line with the literature.

### ***Social media usage scale***

It was developed by Deniz and Tutgun-Ünal (2019) to determine the social media usage levels of the participants. The scale, consisting of 8 items, consists of a 5-point Likert scale and

2 sub-dimensions. The sub-dimensions are continuity and competence. There is no reverse item in the scale. In the Deniz and Tutgun-Ünal (2019) study, the alpha coefficient for the overall scale was calculated as 0.82, while the sub-dimensions were found to be 0.72 for continuity and 0.73 for competence.

#### ***Brand attitude scale***

It was developed by Akın and Özen (2018) to determine the brand attitude levels of the participants. The scale consists of 5-point Likert, 6 items and a single sub-dimension. The 4th item in the scale is reverse coded. Akın and Özen (2018) found the Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale to be 0.60.

#### ***Pre-purchase consumer behavior scale in social media***

It was developed by İşlek (2018) to determine the pre-purchase behavior levels of participants on social media. The scale consists of a 5-point Likert and 10 items. The Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale was found to be 0.92 by İşlek (2018).

#### **Data collection/processing method**

The current research was carried out to determine the relationship between the use of social media, brand attitude and consumer purchasing tendencies of university students of the faculty of sports sciences. The study was designed in a descriptive and relationship-seeking type, using the screening model, one of the quantitative research methods.

#### **Data analysis**

The research data were analyzed using the SPSS 29 statistical software package. Descriptive statistics, including percentages and frequencies, were employed to identify the demographic characteristics of the participants. To assess the normality of the data distribution, skewness and kurtosis values were examined. The values were considered acceptable within the  $\pm 1.5$  range, indicating that the data conformed to the normal distribution criteria (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Additionally, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test confirmed the assumption of normality, as p-values exceeded 0.05. Based on these findings, parametric tests such as the independent samples t-test and one-way ANOVA were conducted. Furthermore, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated to assess the internal consistency reliability of the scale's sub-dimensions.

## FINDINGS

**Table 1. Descriptive statistics regarding scale sub-dimensions**

Scales	Min.	Max.	$\bar{X}$	S.d.	Skewness	Kurtosis	$\alpha$
Social Media Usage Scale (SMUS)	8.00	40.00	24.08	7.63	-0.001	-0.453	0.88
Continuity	1.00	5.00	2.90	1.05	0.062	-0.818	0.83
Sufficiency	1.00	5.00	3.11	1.05	-0.045	-0.663	0.83
Brand Attitude Scale (BAS)	1.33	5.00	3.23	0.82	-0.132	-0.554	0.74
Pre-Purchase Consumer Behavior Scale on Social Media (PPCBSSM)	1.00	5.00	3.28	0.80	-0.538	0.524	0.86

\*= $p < 0.05$

Table 1 includes descriptive statistics for the sub-dimensions of the scale. According to the results in the table; the average score obtained from SMUS was 24.08 ( $\pm 7.63$ ), and the highest average was obtained in the “competence” sub-dimension ( $3.11 \pm 1.05$ ). The average score obtained from MBS was found to be 3.23 ( $\pm 0.82$ ). It was found that the skewness and kurtosis values of the variables were within the range of  $\pm 1.5$ . While the Cronbach alpha coefficient of SMUS was found to be 0.88, it was found to be 0.83 in the sub-dimensions. While the internal consistency coefficient of BAS was 0.74, the internal consistency coefficient obtained from PPCBSSM was found to be 0.86.

**Table 2. Percentage and frequency values of demographic characteristics of the participants**

Variable	Groups	n	%
Gender	Female	174	63.3
	Male	101	36.7
Socio-economic level	Low	14	5.1
	Medium	225	81.8
	High	36	13.1
Daily social media use	Less than 1 hour	25	9.1
	1-3 hours	40	50.9
	4-6 hours	90	32.7
	7 hours and above	20	7.3
Total		275	100.0

Table 2 shows the distribution of participants according to their demographic characteristics. According to the analysis results; 63.3% of the participants are “female” and 81.8% of them have a “medium” socio-economic level.

**Table 3. Distribution of participants between SMUS and BAS sub-dimensions according to gender**

Scale	Gender	n	Mean $\pm$ Sd	T	p
Continuity	Female	174	2.96 $\pm$ 1.04	1.353	0.888
	Male	101	2.78 $\pm$ 1.07		
Sufficiency	Female	174	3.10 $\pm$ 1.05	-0.204	0.273
	Male	101	3.13 $\pm$ 1.05		

Scale	Gender	n	Mean±Sd	T	p
Brand Attitude	Female	174	3.18±0.79	-1.345	0.578
	Male	101	3.32±0.86		

\*=p<0.05

As presented in Table 3, an independent samples t-test was conducted to examine whether there were statistically significant differences in the sub-dimensions of the scale based on the participants' gender. The analysis revealed no significant differences between gender and any of the scale's sub-dimensions.

**Table 4. Distribution of participants according to gender regarding pre-purchase consumer behavior scale on social media**

	Female (n=174)		Male (n=101)		t	p
	Mean	Sd	Mean	Sd		
<b>Matter 1</b>	4.00	1.07	3.68	1.34	2.189	<b>0.000*</b>
<b>Matter 2</b>	3.47	1.16	3.37	1.23	0.675	0.408
<b>Matter 3</b>	3.47	1.14	3.36	1.11	0.783	0.520
<b>Matter 4</b>	2.85	1.15	2.80	1.13	0.379	0.580
<b>Matter 5</b>	3.48	1.16	3.51	1.11	-0.183	0.417
<b>Matter 6</b>	3.02	1.25	2.78	1.23	1.543	0.879
<b>Matter 7</b>	3.52	1.18	3.29	1.17	1.565	0.987
<b>Matter 8</b>	3.37	1.29	3.26	1.27	0.661	0.792
<b>Matter 9</b>	3.56	1.15	3.40	1.13	1.133	0.626
<b>Matter 10</b>	2.44	1.22	2.81	1.38	-2.299	0.077

\*=p<0.05

In Table 4, an independent sample t-test was conducted to determine whether there was a significant difference between the pre-purchase consumer behavior scale on social media according to the gender of the participants. According to the analysis results, a significant difference was found between gender and "I do research on social media about a product/service before purchasing it."

**Table 5. Distribution between SMUS and BAS sub-dimensions according to the economic levels of the participants**

Scale	Socio-economic level	n	Mean±Sd	F	p
Continuity	Low	14	2.58±1.10	4.513	<b>0.012*</b>
	Medium	225	2.84±1.04		
	High	36	3.36±1.01		
Sufficiency	Low	14	2.58±1.08	4.697	<b>0.010*</b>
	Medium	225	3.08±1.03		
	High	36	3.52±1.05		
Brand Attitude	Low	14	2.80±0.78	13.773	<b>0.000*</b>
	Medium	225	3.16±0.74		
	High	36	3.84±0.82		

\*=p<0.05



In Table 5, a one-way Anova test was conducted to determine whether there is a significant difference between the sub-dimensions of the scale according to the economic levels of the participants. According to the analysis results, a significant difference was found between the economic level and the sub-dimensions of “continuity”, “sufficiency” and “brand attitude”.

**Table 6. Distribution of participants according to their economic levels on the social media pre-purchase consumer behavior scale**

	Low (n=14)		Medium (n=225)		High (n=36)		F	p
	Mean	Sd	Mean	Sd	Mean	Sd		
<b>Matter 1</b>	3.07	1.38	3.88	1.18	4.22	0.98	4.882	<b>0.008*</b>
<b>Matter 2</b>	2.64	1.15	3.39	1.17	4.02	1.08	8.049	<b>0.000*</b>
<b>Matter 3</b>	3.00	1.176	3.38	1.11	3.91	1.10	4.936	<b>0.010*</b>
<b>Matter 4</b>	2.35	0.74	2.80	1.15	3.19	1.11	3.094	<b>0.047*</b>
<b>Matter 5</b>	3.00	1.17	3.47	1.15	3.83	1.02	2.940	0.055
<b>Matter 6</b>	2.35	1.08	2.91	1.26	3.27	1.13	2.912	0.056
<b>Matter 7</b>	2.85	1.29	3.48	1.17	3.44	1.20	1.826	0.163
<b>Matter 8</b>	2.78	1.31	3.32	1.25	3.63	1.37	2.330	0.099
<b>Matter 9</b>	3.21	1.05	3.44	1.15	4.00	1.06	4.137	<b>0.017*</b>
<b>Matter 10</b>	1.85	0.86	2.61	1.27	2.63	1.49	2.317	0.101

\*=p<0.05

As shown in Table 6, a one-way ANOVA test was conducted to examine whether participants' economic status led to significant differences in responses related to the pre-purchase consumer behavior scale on social media. The analysis revealed statistically significant differences based on economic level for the following items: ‘Before purchasing a product, I conduct research on social media about that product/service,’ ‘I believe that I can obtain reliable information on social media regarding the product/service I intend to purchase,’ ‘I trust information shared by consumers on social media about the product/service I plan to buy,’ ‘I trust information shared by sellers on social media about the product/service I plan to buy,’ and ‘Social media platforms are appropriate channels for consumers to engage with companies/brands.’

**Table 7. Distribution between SMUS and BAS sub-dimensions according to the frequency of participants' social media use**

Scale	Daily social media use	n	Mean±Sd	F	p
Continuity	Less than 1 hour	25	2.08±0.97	25.675	<b>0.000*</b>
	1-3 hours	40	2.64±0.92		
	4-6 hours	90	3.26±0.96		
	7 hours and above	20	4.11±0.86		
Sufficiency	Less than 1 hour	25	2.42±0.97	17.265	<b>0.000*</b>
	1-3 hours	40	2.89±0.93		
	4-6 hours	90	3.44±1.03		

Scale	Daily social media use	n	Mean±Sd	F	p
Brand Attitude	7 hours and above	20	4.11±0.94	3.502	<b>0.016*</b>
	Less than 1 hour	25	3.10±1012		
	1-3 hours	40	3.13 ±0.76		
	4-6 hours	90	3.32±0.79		
	7 hours and above	20	3.70±0.71		

\*=p<0.05

In Table 7, a one-way Anova test was conducted to determine whether there was a significant difference between the sub-dimensions of the scale according to the frequency of participants' social media use. According to the analysis results, a significant difference was found between the frequency of social media use and the sub-dimensions of “continuity”, “sufficiency” and “brand attitude” (p<0.05).

**Table 8. Distribution of participants on the social media pre-purchase consumer behavior scale according to their social media usage frequency.**

	Less than 1 hour (n=25)		1-3 hours (n=40)		4-6 hours (n=90)		7 hours and above (n=20)		F	p
	Mean	Sd	Mean	Sd	Mean	Sd	Mean	Sd		
<b>Matter 1</b>	3.40	1.52	3.83	1.18	4.10	1.02	3.90	1.25	2.501	0.060
<b>Matter 2</b>	3.12	1.45	3.25	1.18	3.75	1.05	3.75	1.20	4.501	<b>0.004*</b>
<b>Matter 3</b>	3.08	1.32	3.35	1.08	3.61	1.11	3.70	1.12	2.212	0.087
<b>Matter 4</b>	2.48	1.08	2.67	1.07	3.08	1.16	3.25	1.33	4.157	<b>0.007*</b>
<b>Matter 5</b>	3.12	1.48	3.42	1.07	3.72	1.12	3.45	1.19	2.263	0.081
<b>Matter 6</b>	2.40	1.32	2.68	1.18	3.26	1.19	3.85	1.03	9.938	<b>0.000*</b>
<b>Matter 7</b>	2.84	1.37	3.34	1.18	3.70	1.09	3.75	1.01	4.503	<b>0.004*</b>
<b>Matter 8</b>	3.00	1.58	3.15	1.26	3.56	1.18	4.00	1.07	4.469	<b>0.004*</b>
<b>Matter 9</b>	3.12	1.45	3.37	1.16	3.77	1.02	3.75	0.91	3.652	<b>0.013*</b>
<b>Matter 10</b>	2.28	1.20	2.61	1.26	2.47	1.34	3.15	1.30	1.981	0.117

\*=p<0.05

In Table 8, a one-way Anova test was conducted to determine whether there is a significant difference between the pre-purchase consumer behavior scale on social media according to the frequency of participants' social media use. According to the analysis results; a significant difference was found between the frequency of social media use and the items, “I believe that I will reach reliable information on social media about the product/service I will purchase”, “If the information on social media about the product/service I will purchase is created by the seller, I trust that information”, “I value the recommendations of users who are popular on social media (have many followers and friends) about the product/service I will purchase”, “I prefer to buy products from companies/brands that I like and follow on social media tools”, “A company/brand contacting me on social media positively affects me towards purchasing”, “Social media sites are a suitable place for consumers to contact companies/brands”.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In today's world where digitalization is accelerating, consumer behavior is also undergoing a radical change. The widespread use of social media in particular directly affects purchasing decisions by increasing the interaction between brands and consumers. While consumers' reactions to content on social media platforms shape brand attitudes, these attitudes are reflected in their purchasing tendencies. This research aims to evaluate how brands can create a roadmap for shaping their marketing strategies by examining consumer behavior in the digital world in the context of social media use, brand perception and purchasing decisions.

In this context, a total of 275 students from the faculty of sports sciences, 63.3% of whom were female and 36.7% were male, participated in the study. According to the analysis results, no significant difference was found between the social media usage and brand attitude levels of the participants according to their gender. While brands traditionally used strategies that differentiated according to gender, they may now be running more inclusive and gender-neutral campaigns. This situation may have reduced the difference between the brand attitudes of female and male consumers. A significant difference was found between gender and pre-purchase consumer behavior on social media with the item "I do research on social media about a product/service before purchasing it". In the studies of İnce and Koçak (2017) and Olkun and Balcı (2004), a significant difference was found between gender and social media usage level. In the study of Aksoğan and Türel (2021), a significant difference was found between pre-purchase consumer behavior on social media according to gender. In addition, in the literature, the research conducted by Dönmez et al. (2020) found that the purchasing behavior of sports fans differs according to the gender variable. Based on this finding, it can be explained by the tendency of women to do more research, give importance to user comments and interact more with brands.

According to the analysis results between the participants' social media usage and brand attitude levels according to their economic levels in Table 5, a significant difference was found in the sub-dimensions. In the research conducted by Yalçın et al. (2009), Generation Y is a group that is impatient and in search of speed. Considering that the study context is Istanbul, one of the largest metropolitan cities in the world, Generation Y prefers comfort; they want stores and brands to be diverse wherever possible. When this result is examined, it can be thought that brand attitudes will differ according to generations. In Table 6, a significant difference was found between the participants' pre-purchase social media consumer behaviors according to their economic levels. When the results of Kaplan's (2019) research on the

purposes of university students' social media usage were examined, it was determined that the purposes of young people's social media usage did not show a significant difference according to the income status variable. In Obut's (2024) study, a statistically significant difference was found between the brand attitude scale brand identification and brand preference sub-dimensions score averages according to the income level variable. In the study conducted by Anbarlı (2022), a significant difference was found between the economic income level and consumer purchasing decisions. It can be thought that young people use social media for common purposes such as entertainment, socializing and obtaining information. On the other hand, it shows that the economic situation can shape individuals' brand perception and preference. In this context, it can be thought that consumers with higher income levels may tend to prefer more expensive or quality products, while consumers with lower income levels may make price-oriented choices. Chen et al. (2019) concluded in their study that the use of celebrities in the promotion of brands positively affects the consumer's purchase intention. Of course, people who sell through social media are not limited to sports organizations only, but can also apply different sales strategies (Akoğlu ve Doğaner, 2020).

Table 7 and Table 8 show that there is a significant difference between social media usage, brand attitude and pre-purchase consumer behavior scale on social media according to the frequency of participants' social media usage. In the study of Şişman Eren (2014), social media usage purposes differ according to the duration of internet usage. In the study of Sungur (2024), there is no significant difference in terms of brand attitude tendencies between income groups. In the study of İşler et al. (2014), there was no significant difference between the incomes of the participants in the average attitudes developed by the participants towards online shopping. In the research conducted by Magro (2012), although social media policies and strategies have evolved over time, the lack of a strategic approach for sustainable and holistic success is striking. In this context, the right management mechanisms need to be established to increase social media use.

The research findings show that there is no significant difference in general brand attitudes depending on the gender variable, but students tend to do more research on social media before purchasing. This can be explained by the fact that women attach more importance to user comments and product evaluations. In the analyses conducted according to the economic level variable, significant differences were found between social media usage and brand attitude in certain sub-dimensions. It was observed that as the income level increases, students tend to prefer more expensive and high-quality products, while low-income students make price-

focused choices. In addition, it was determined that there were changes in brand attitude and pre-purchase consumer behavior as the frequency of social media use increases. Although no significant difference was observed in general brand attitudes based on gender variable in the study, the tendency to conduct research on social media before purchase is more common, especially among female participants. This situation is also consistent with the sports consumerism literature. For example, Filo et al. (2015) emphasize that sports consumers are willing to gather information about clubs and brands, especially through digital media, and that this process directly affects their purchasing decisions. In addition, the finding that there are changes in brand attitudes and purchasing behaviors with the increase in the frequency of social media use has also been revealed in the studies conducted by Hambrick and Kang (2015). Sports consumers can develop stronger brand attitudes by establishing an emotional bond with club or athlete brands through social media. On the other hand, when the results of the study conducted by Bilge et al. (2020) are evaluated in terms of social media usage time, using it for more than three hours may be a possible risk factor. In line with these findings, it can be said that the brand perceptions of sports science faculty students are shaped through social media and that they make their purchasing decisions largely according to the information they obtain on social media. In the study conducted by Alkan and Doğan (2018), no significant relationship was found between the social media use of secondary school students and their well-being levels, and between social media use and well-being levels according to gender. It may be beneficial for brands to produce content aimed at increasing social media interactions and to highlight user comments and experience sharing while creating their marketing strategies for this audience. On the other hand, considering the effect of economic level on consumer preferences, it is recommended to develop flexible pricing and campaign strategies that appeal to different income groups.

### **Recommendations**

In order to expand the scope of the study and conduct more in-depth analyses, a similar study can be conducted on individuals from different faculties or professional groups other than students at the faculty of sports sciences in future studies, and the results can be compared with general consumer behavior. The effects of different social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube on consumer behavior can be evaluated separately. It can be determined which types of content consumers trust more and which factors guide their purchasing decisions. The psychological effects of content disclosed on social media on consumer trust, brand loyalty, and purchasing motivation can be investigated. The perception of products

offered by brands operating in the field of health and sports on social media can be analyzed. With the impact of digitalization in sports marketing, consumer behavior has become more measurable. More targeted communication and campaign planning should be done using social media analytics, follower profile analysis and purchase data. Sports brands can increase their brand value by transparently presenting environmentally friendly production, social responsibility projects and ethical manufacturing processes.

Future studies to be conducted in line with these suggestions can contribute to the development of brands' marketing strategies by revealing the dynamics between social media and consumer behavior in a more comprehensive way.

### **Limitations and strengths**

This study examines the relationships between social media usage, brand perception, and purchasing decisions of students at the faculty of sports sciences. The study is limited to students studying at the faculty of sports sciences. The study is limited to the participants' personal information form, social media usage scale, brand attitude scale and the response they gave to the consumer pre-purchase scale on social media.

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KATKI ORANI CONTRIBUTION RATE	AÇIKLAMA EXPLANATION	KATKIDA BULUNANLAR CONTRIBUTORS
Fikir ve Kavramsal Örgü Idea or Notion	Araştırma hipotezini veya fikrini oluşturmak Form the research hypothesis or idea	Cemal GÜLER
Tasarım Design	Yöntem ve araştırma desenini tasarlamak To design the method and research design.	Cemal GÜLER
Literatür Tarama Literature Review	Çalışma için gerekli literatürü taramak Review the literature required for the study	Cemal GÜLER
Veri Toplama ve İşleme Data Collecting and Processing	Verileri toplamak, düzenlemek ve raporlaştırmak Collecting, organizing and reporting data	Cemal GÜLER
Tartışma ve Yorum Discussion and Commentary	Elde edilen bulguların değerlendirilmesi Evaluation of the obtained finding	Cemal GÜLER
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