

## The influence of social media marketing on online buying behavior: Perception of experts in post-COVID-19 context in Morocco.

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## Abstract

This study aims to investigate the key factors influencing Moroccan consumers' online purchasing behavior through social media marketing, especially in a post-COVID context. The research focuses on understanding the roles of branding, emotional engagement, trust, and transparency in shaping consumer decisions. The study employs qualitative textometric analysis to identify the most frequently used terms and their relationships within the context of social media marketing and consumer behavior. Techniques such as hierarchical cluster analysis, factorial correspondence analysis (FCA), and network analysis of similarities were applied to reveal the connections between these factors and their impact on purchasing behavior.

The analysis highlights that emotional engagement, trust, and transparency are pivotal in influencing Moroccan consumers' purchase intentions. Emotional attachment, fostered through storytelling and transparent communication, enhances brand loyalty and trust. Moreover, word-of-mouth recommendations, supported by perceived product/service quality, play a crucial role in shaping purchase decisions. Social media serves as a key platform for brands to engage Moroccan consumers and build meaningful connections. Future research could extend these findings through a quantitative survey conducted directly with Moroccan online shoppers to validate the identified hypotheses and deepen the understanding of branding, emotional engagement, and trust on consumer behavior.

The study provides actionable insights for brands operating in Morocco, highlighting the need to prioritize emotional engagement, transparency, and personalized content in their social media strategies. By doing so, brands can strengthen consumer trust and foster loyalty, driving purchase intentions and enhancing their market influence. This study sheds light on how social media marketing influences Moroccan consumers' online purchasing behavior, offering a fresh perspective in the post-COVID era. It provides valuable insights into the essential role of emotional connection, trust, and transparent communication, laying the groundwork for future research and strategic applications in marketing.

**Keywords:** Social media marketing, Emotional engagement, Trust, Moroccan consumers, Online purchasing behavior.

## **1. Introduction**

The rapid development of the internet and digital technologies has significantly transformed consumer behavior worldwide, particularly in the realm of online shopping (Anand et al. 2023; Bourlakis, Papagiannidis, and Fox 2008). Over the past two decades, e-commerce has experienced exponential growth, driven by increased internet penetration, advancements in mobile technology, and the proliferation of social media platforms (Albertyn-Burton and Scheepers 2017; Jain, Malviya, and Arya 2021). This digital revolution has reshaped traditional retail models, providing consumers with unprecedented access to a global marketplace, offering convenience, variety, and personalized shopping experiences (Reinartz, Wiegand, and Imschloss 2019; Teufel and Zimmermann 2015).

In the context of Morocco, the COVID-19 pandemic has further accelerated the shift towards online purchasing, as restrictions on movement and physical distancing measures pushed both businesses and consumers to adopt digital solutions (Abdelkhalek et al. 2021; Othman, Driss, and Malika 2022). This evolution highlights the critical role of social media marketing in influencing consumer decisions, especially in a post-pandemic era where online interactions are increasingly shaping buying behavior (Chetioui, Lebdaoui, and Chetioui 2021).

Recent studies on Morocco confirmed the growing trend of internet and social media usage. With an internet penetration rate of 63% and 44% for social media, this rapid expansion highlights the increasing prominence of digital platforms in the country (Zaid 2016). Annual growth in these areas is marked by double-digit increases, positioning Morocco competitively on the global, Arab, and African stages. This democratization of internet access reaches both urban and rural populations, broadening access to new technologies (ANRT 2019).

Regarding social media, WhatsApp leads as the most used platform, with 58% of users, followed by Facebook (50%) and YouTube (41%). Other platforms, such as FB Messenger (28%), Instagram (24%), and Snapchat (18%), also hold significant shares (Medianet 2018). Platforms like Twitter (8%) and LinkedIn (3%) see more limited use, though they still have a presence. In terms of devices used to access these networks, smartphones are the dominant tool, with 57% of Moroccan internet users using them to browse, compared to only 25% using computers and 14% using tablets (Medianet 2018). This highlights the growing importance of mobile technology in digital consumption in Morocco. Gender distribution shows that social media usage is predominantly male, with 63% of users being men, compared to 37% women. This reflects, in part, the patriarchal nature of Moroccan society, where access to technology and social networks remains unequal between genders (Medianet 2018). Additionally, French

is the main language used by Moroccan Facebook users, with 75% opting for it, compared to 33% who use Arabic. This linguistic trend emphasizes the influence of foreign languages, especially in the digital sphere in Morocco. Finally, Moroccan interactions with professional pages on social media are primarily driven by the search for commercial discounts (29%), exclusive information (22%), and practical advice (16%). These motivations reveal the growing expectations of consumers towards brands and businesses on social platforms (ANRT 2019; Hootsuite 2021; Medianet 2018).

The objective of this study is to explore and analyze the influence of social media marketing practices on consumer buying behavior in Morocco, particularly from the perspective of experts in a post-COVID-19 context. By examining how businesses have adapted their digital marketing strategies during and after the pandemic, this research seeks to identify key factors driving consumer engagement and purchase decisions on social media platforms.

Furthermore, it aims to assess the extent to which these practices have shifted in response to changing consumer habits and digital consumption patterns in the wake of the global health crisis.

To address this objective, we adopted a qualitative approach using a semi-structured interview guide with experts and specialists in social media marketing practices and online purchasing within the Moroccan context. This method allows for in-depth exploration of their insights and experiences, providing a nuanced understanding of the evolving dynamics between social media marketing and consumer buying behavior in the post-COVID-19 era. The qualitative nature of the study enables us to capture detailed perspectives, shedding light on key trends and practices that are shaping the digital marketing landscape in Morocco.

This paper is structured as follows: Section 2 presents the Methodology, detailing the qualitative approach used, including the semi-structured interviews conducted with experts in social media marketing and online purchasing in Morocco. Section 3 outlines the Results, summarizing key findings from the interviews and highlighting emerging trends in consumer behavior and marketing practices. Section 4 provides a Discussion of the results, linking them to existing literature and analyzing their implications in the post-COVID-19 context. Finally, Section 5 offers the Conclusion, summarizing the main insights and suggesting future research directions.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1. Approach and method**

Our study adopts a qualitative approach to explore the influence of social media marketing practices on consumer buying behavior in Morocco, in line with established research criteria that prioritize understanding participants' perspectives within their specific social context (Belahouaoui and Attak 2023; Law et al. 1998). Given the unique digital and cultural landscape in Morocco (Belahouaoui and Attak 2024a), this approach is particularly effective for capturing the nuanced interactions between marketing strategies and consumer responses in the post-COVID-19 era. This method is further supported by recent discussions on improving the rigor and transparency of qualitative research. Haven & Van Grootel (2019) advocated for preregistration in qualitative studies to enhance credibility and ensure methodological clarity, a practice we considered in designing our study to strengthen the reliability of our findings.

Moreover, the success of recent qualitative studies in marketing, particularly in exploring consumer behavior in diverse cultural environments, underscores the relevance and effectiveness of this approach (Hwang and Seo 2016; Oberecker, Riefler, and Diamantopoulos 2008). The Moroccan context, with its dynamic social media usage and shifting consumer habits, provides a rich field for qualitative inquiry, allowing us to delve deeply into the perceptions of experts and specialists on how social media marketing impacts online purchasing behavior.

### **2.2. Data collection procedure**

The data for this study were collected through semi-structured interviews with 20 experts and specialists in social media marketing and online purchasing (see Table 1). The interviews were conducted in a hybrid manner, with some taking place in person and others online via platforms such as Google Meet and Zoom. This approach allowed for flexibility and accessibility, ensuring that all participants could contribute despite geographical or scheduling constraints.

**Table 1. Characteristics of interview participants**

Characteristics		Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>	Female	12	60%
	Male	8	40%
<b>Age</b>	25–35 yaers	12	60%
	36–45 years	6	30%
	46–55 years	2	10%
<b>Qualifications</b>	Bachelor's degree	8	40%
	Master's degree	10	50%
	PhD	2	10%
<b>Professional experience</b>	5 – 9 years	10	50%
	10 – 15 years	8	40%
	> 15 years	2	10%
<b>Position held</b>	Marketing director	2	10%
	Communication manager	8	40%
	Community Manager	10	50%

**Source: by authors**

This table summarizes the demographic and professional profiles of the participants, providing insight into the diversity and expertise of the sample used for the study.

### 2.3. Data analysis

The interview transcripts were anonymized and carefully reviewed for typographical errors, punctuation inconsistencies, and expanded abbreviations before beginning the analysis. To ensure the confidentiality and integrity of the data, all records were securely stored. These initial processing steps ensured that the dataset was clean and fully prepared for in-depth analysis.

For the analysis of the textual data, we used IRAMUTEQ software (Ratinaud 2009), which is well-suited for the statistical interpretation of complex qualitative datasets (Belahouaoui and Attak 2024b; Souza et al. 2018). This tool has proven effective in marketing research, particularly in analyzing social media marketing practices and consumer behavior. Our analytical approach included three key techniques to ensure a comprehensive exploration of the data: hierarchical top-down classification (Figure 1), which helped categorize responses; factorial correspondence analysis (Figure 2), which highlighted relationships between

variables; and similarity analysis (Figure 3), which illustrated connections between concepts emerging from the interviews.

### 3. Results and discussion

The analysis of the data reveals important insights into the key elements that shape Moroccan consumers' purchase intentions in the context of social media marketing. Through a detailed textometric analysis, we identified the most frequently used words across the collected data, shedding light on the dominant themes and factors influencing consumer behavior. This section presents the findings in Table 2, highlighting the 15 most frequently mentioned terms and their frequencies of occurrence. These results provide a clear indication of the significant role played by factors such as brand, trust, social media marketing, and emotional connection in shaping purchase intention.

**Table 2. The 15 most frequently used words**

Order	Words	Frequency
01	Brand	74
02	Trust	62
03	Social media marketing	59
04	Moroccan consumers	57
05	Purchase intention	54
06	Interaction	46
07	Emotional connection	46
08	Content	42
09	Attachment	42
10	Service	39
11	Quality	33
12	Loyalty	32
13	Comments	32
14	Audience	30
15	Stories	24
16	Perceived value	24
17	Transparency	23
18	Recommendations	20
19	Experiences	19
20	Engagement	19

Source: IRAMUTEQ Software

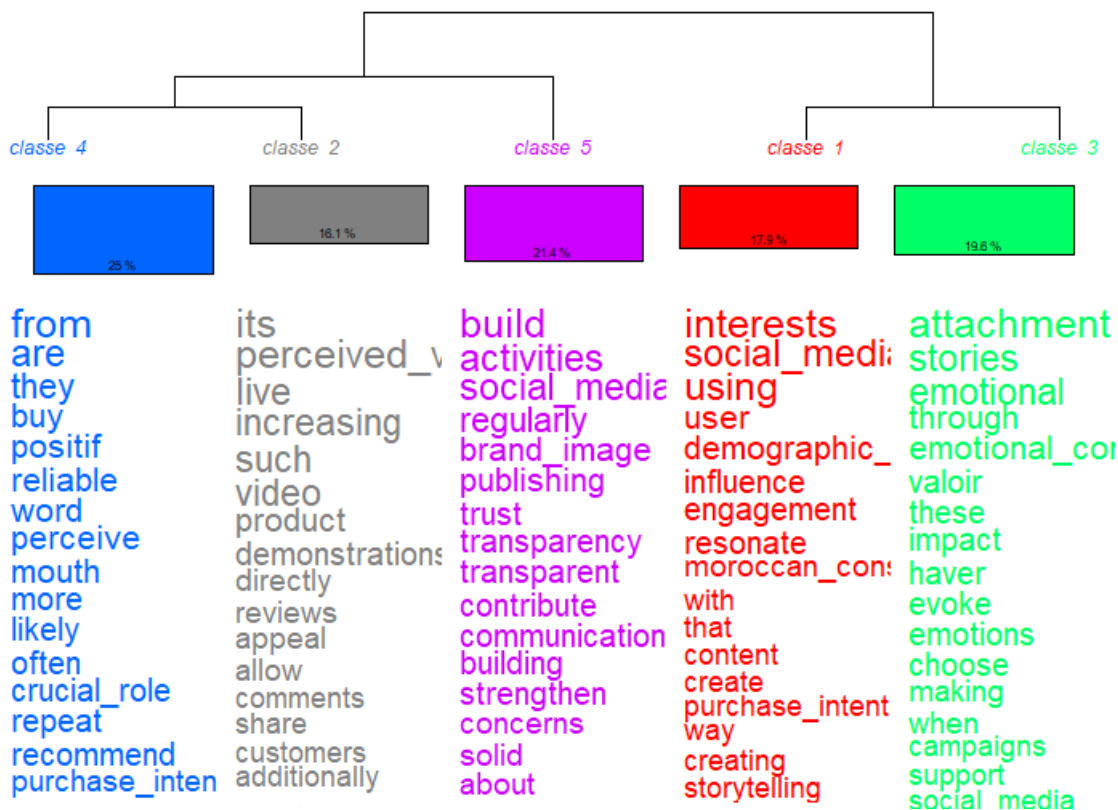
Table 2 below outlines the 15 most frequently used words in the analysis. The terms are ranked in order of their frequency, with 'Brand' being the most mentioned word, followed by 'Trust' and 'Social media marketing.' This frequency distribution offers valuable insights into

the most important aspects of consumer engagement and brand perception in the Moroccan market.

Table 2 demonstrates that 'Brand' (74 occurrences) is the most frequently mentioned word, underscoring the centrality of brand identity in driving consumer behavior. 'Trust' (62 occurrences) closely follows, indicating that building consumer trust is a critical factor in enhancing purchase intention. Other key terms, such as 'Social media marketing' (59 occurrences) and 'Moroccan consumers' (57 occurrences), highlight the role of targeted marketing efforts and the specific cultural context of Moroccan consumers. Emotional factors like 'Emotional connection' (46 occurrences) and 'Attachment' (42 occurrences) emphasize the importance of creating deep, personal bonds with consumers. Overall, the table reflects a multifaceted approach to understanding consumer behavior, with a strong focus on trust, brand identity, and emotional engagement.

Figure 1 presents a dendrogram resulting from a hierarchical cluster analysis, which groups key terms related to social media marketing and Moroccan consumers' purchase intentions. This visualization organizes the data into five distinct classes (or clusters), each representing a thematic area.

**Figure 1. Dendrogram of the hierarchical cluster analysis**



Source: IRAMUTEQ Software



This structure helps identify how different aspects of social media marketing, such as emotional attachment, trust, and brand transparency, shape Moroccan consumers' engagement and purchasing decisions.

- ***Cluster 1 (Red) - "Targeted Social Media Marketing" (17.9%)***

Cluster 1 centers around the idea of using demographic and behavioral data for precise targeting in social media marketing. Words such as "social media," "using," "influence," and "content" suggest that brands should create marketing campaigns that resonate with specific consumer groups. This cluster underscores the importance of targeted and relevant content in influencing Moroccan consumers' purchase intentions.

- ***Cluster 2 (Gray) - "Product Demonstration and Perceived Value" (16.1%)***

Cluster 2 focuses on the impact of live product demonstrations and reviews on increasing the perceived value of products. The terms "video," "product demonstrations," "reviews," and "customers" indicate that consumers find value in real-time product showcases and honest reviews. This transparency helps reduce uncertainty and enhances the product's appeal, influencing purchase decisions.

- ***Cluster 3 (Green) - "Emotional Attachment and Storytelling" (19.6%)***

This cluster focuses on the emotional connection consumers build with brands through storytelling. Terms like "attachment," "emotional connection," "stories," and "evoke" suggest that campaigns that appeal to consumers' emotions can foster strong loyalty and increase purchase intention. Emotional storytelling creates a deep sense of attachment, making consumers more inclined to support a brand through repeated purchases.

- ***Cluster 4 (Blue) - "Word-of-Mouth and Purchase Reliability" (25%)***

This cluster revolves around consumer perceptions of reliability and the role of positive word-of-mouth in shaping purchase intentions. Terms like "buy," "positif," "reliable," and "recommend" suggest that Moroccan consumers highly value peer recommendations and are more likely to purchase when products are perceived positively by others. This cluster emphasizes how repeat purchases and recommendations contribute to increasing trust and purchase intention.

- ***Cluster 5 (Purple) - "Building Brand Image through Transparency" (21.4%)***

This cluster highlights the role of brand transparency and consistent communication in building trust. Keywords like "build," "activities," "publishing," and "trust" suggest that regularly sharing information about a brand's values and maintaining transparency are key

strategies for strengthening brand image. The focus is on establishing a solid and trustworthy presence through open communication with consumers.

Each of these clusters represents a key factor in the social media marketing strategies that influence Moroccan consumers, from leveraging emotional appeal to ensuring product transparency and fostering trust through word-of-mouth.

Figure 2 presents a Factorial Correspondence Analysis (FCA), which visually displays the relationships between key terms from the dataset and their associations with different factors. The FCA technique reduces complex data into a two-dimensional space, revealing clusters of words and their proximities, indicating how closely they are related.

**Figure 2. Factorial correspondence analyses (FCA)**



Source: IRAMUTEQ Software

The FCA reveals four key dimensions of social media marketing influencing Moroccan consumers' purchase intentions. The top-left quadrant emphasizes targeted marketing strategies, where the use of demographic data, consumer interests, and storytelling techniques help brands create personalized content that resonates with specific audiences, influencing purchasing behavior. The bottom-left quadrant highlights the role of emotional engagement and attachment, showing that emotional connections, built through storytelling and meaningful interactions, are crucial for fostering brand loyalty and increasing purchase intention. The top-right quadrant focuses on building brand trust and transparency, where consistent social media activity and transparency strengthen brand credibility and encourage long-term loyalty through regular interaction and consumer feedback. Finally, the bottom-right quadrant underscores the importance of word-of-mouth and reliability, showing that positive consumer experiences and trust in product quality lead to peer recommendations, which strongly influence purchase decisions. Together, these dimensions offer a holistic view of how social media strategies drive consumer behavior in Morocco.

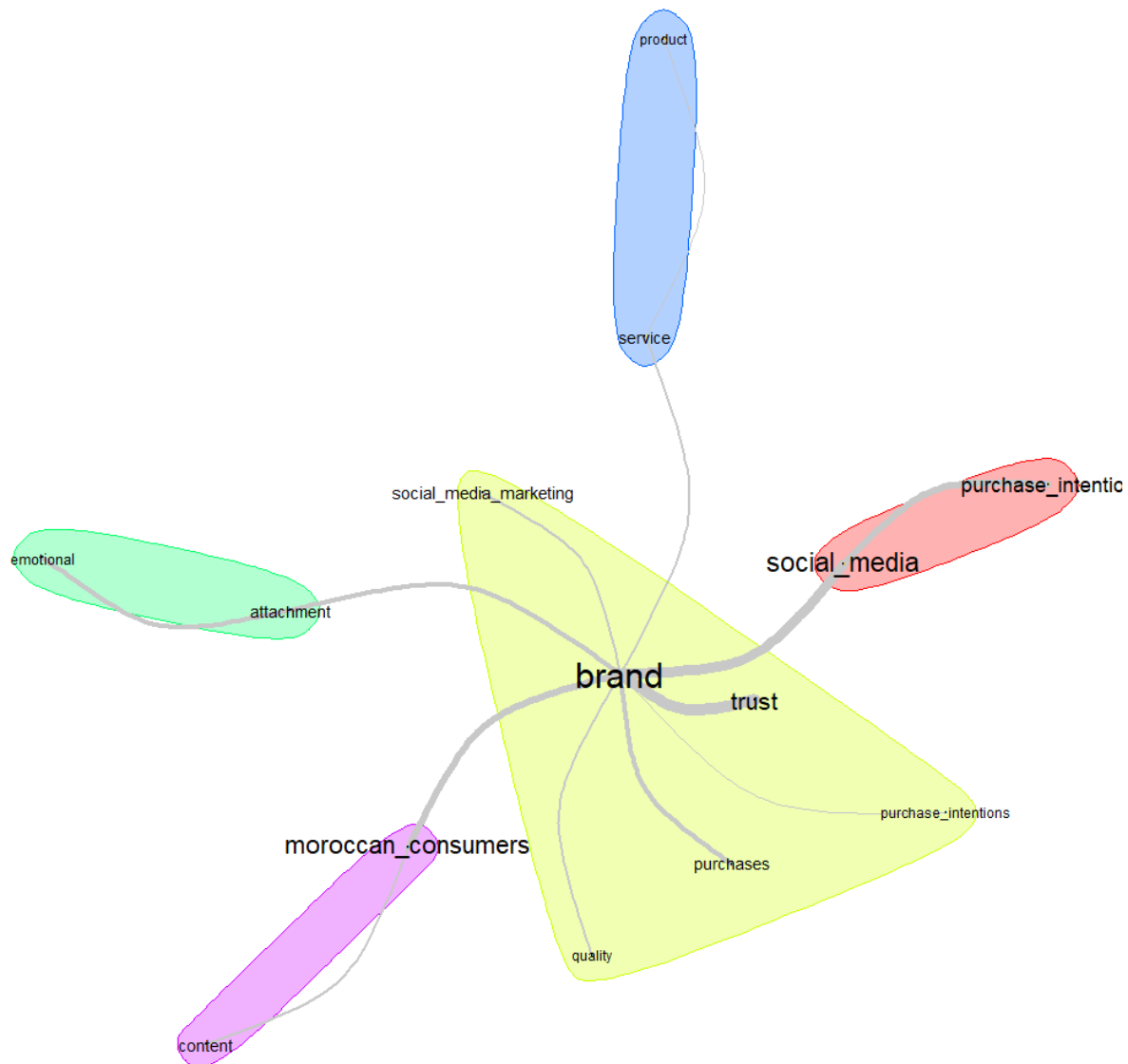
This FCA highlights the various dimensions of social media marketing and their impacts on Moroccan consumers' purchase intentions. Key insights from the analysis include:

- **Targeted marketing:** Personalized content that aligns with consumer interests is essential for influencing behavior.
- **Emotional connection:** Building deep, emotional connections through storytelling and personal engagement strengthens brand loyalty.
- **Trust and transparency:** Regular and transparent communication with consumers fosters trust and enhances brand image.
- **Word-of-mouth:** Positive experiences shared through word-of-mouth play a critical role in shaping consumer perceptions and driving purchase intention.

These dimensions reflect a comprehensive approach to understanding the factors that influence Moroccan consumers' engagement with brands on social media, offering actionable insights for effective marketing strategies.

Figure 3 presents a network visualization displaying the relationships between key terms related to social media marketing, Moroccan consumers, and brand perception. The analysis of similarities highlights how various elements interact around the central concept of "brand," showing the significant factors that influence consumers' perceptions and purchase intentions.

**Figure 3. Analysis of similarities**



**Source:** IRAMUTEQ Software

- **Brand as the central element:**

The term "brand" is central in the network, reflecting its fundamental role in the overall perception of consumers. This centrality highlights the critical importance of brand identity and its influence on all related factors, such as trust, social media, product/service quality, and emotional attachment.

- **Clusters of influence:**

**Social media and purchase intention (red cluster):** This cluster demonstrates the strong connection between social media activities and consumers' purchase intentions. Social media serves as a primary channel for brands to engage with Moroccan consumers, build trust, and drive purchase decisions.

**Product/service (blue cluster):** The quality and characteristics of the product and service are closely linked to the brand's reputation. Positive experiences with a brand's product or service contribute to trust and loyalty, essential for sustaining purchase intention.

**Emotional attachment (green cluster):** Emotional factors, including attachment and connection, are key to building long-term relationships with consumers. This cluster emphasizes the emotional bond that Moroccan consumers form with brands, particularly through engaging and meaningful social media interactions.

**Moroccan consumers and content (purple cluster):** This cluster reflects the role of content in resonating with Moroccan consumers. It suggests that the quality and relevance of the content shared by brands on social media are essential to engaging consumers and influencing their purchase behaviors.

- **Trust as a bridging factor:**

Trust plays a bridging role between social media, the brand, and consumer behavior. Building trust through transparency, consistent communication, and positive consumer experiences is essential for strengthening the brand's influence over consumers' purchase intentions.

This analysis highlights the complex, interconnected nature of how brands, social media, product/service quality, and emotional attachment influence Moroccan consumers. At the heart of this network is the "brand," which acts as the pivotal element around which trust, consumer engagement, and purchase intentions revolve. By effectively leveraging social media, creating meaningful content, and building emotional connections, brands can significantly enhance their influence and foster long-term loyalty among Moroccan consumers.

#### 4. Conclusion

The analyses conducted throughout this study provide a comprehensive view of the key factors influencing Moroccan consumers' purchase intentions in the context of social media marketing. Using various analytical techniques, including hierarchical cluster analysis, FCA and network analysis of similarities, several key insights have been revealed regarding consumer behavior and brand perception.

The hierarchical cluster analysis identified four primary themes that shape consumer engagement: targeted marketing strategies, emotional engagement and attachment, building brand trust through transparency, and the influence of word-of-mouth and reliability. These clusters show how personalized content, emotional connections, consistent communication, and positive consumer experiences directly affect consumers' trust in a brand and their likelihood to make a purchase.

The FCA further highlighted the relationships between these themes, with emotional attachment and targeted strategies playing a crucial role. It also demonstrated that trust, transparency, and consistent social media marketing efforts are central to building a credible brand image, influencing purchase intentions, and fostering long-term consumer loyalty. Lastly, the analysis of similarities placed the "brand" at the heart of consumer engagement, showing that trust, product and service quality, emotional attachment, and content relevance all revolve around the brand's identity. This analysis underscored that social media is a powerful tool for building emotional connections with Moroccan consumers, strengthening brand loyalty, and increasing purchase intention.

- **Key results:**

**Emotional engagement** and personalized content are essential in fostering brand loyalty and motivating consumers to make purchases.

**Trust and transparency** are critical factors that Moroccan consumers value, which significantly influence their purchasing decisions and long-term loyalty.

**Social media marketing** is a central strategy for reaching Moroccan consumers, providing opportunities for brands to engage, influence, and build emotional connections.

**Word-of-mouth** and peer recommendations have a strong impact on consumer trust and purchase intention, particularly when the brand demonstrates reliability and quality.

In conclusion, Moroccan consumers are heavily influenced by a combination of emotional connections, trust, and personalized engagement when interacting with brands on social

media. By strategically leveraging these factors, brands can effectively increase consumer trust, drive purchase intentions, and build lasting loyalty.

The practical implications of this study are significant for brands looking to engage with Moroccan consumers through social media marketing. The findings highlight the importance of building emotional connections, fostering trust, and delivering personalized content as key strategies to influence purchase intentions. Brands should focus on creating transparent and engaging interactions with their audience, leveraging storytelling, and emphasizing authenticity to build deeper emotional attachments. Moreover, ensuring product and service quality, as well as encouraging positive word-of-mouth through reliable consumer experiences, can significantly enhance brand loyalty. Companies operating in the Moroccan market can use these insights to refine their social media marketing strategies, align their content with consumers' values, and prioritize trust-building initiatives to maximize engagement and drive long-term customer loyalty.

A forthcoming quantitative empirical study will be conducted through a survey targeting online shoppers in Morocco. This next phase will aim to test the hypotheses derived from the current findings, focusing on the influence of social media marketing on online purchasing behavior in a post-COVID context. The survey will specifically explore key factors such as branding, emotional engagement, trust, and transparency to understand their direct impact on consumer decision-making. By collecting data from Moroccan online consumers, this study will provide a deeper understanding of how these elements shape purchasing patterns and consumer loyalty in the evolving digital landscape. This empirical approach will offer actionable insights for brands aiming to optimize their social media strategies and enhance consumer trust and engagement in the Moroccan market.

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