SOCIAL AND HUMANITIES SCIENCES

Theory, Current Researches and New Trends-5

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CHAPTER I

THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON CONSUMER DECISIONS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: THE CASE OF ÇANAKKALE ONSEKİZ MART UNIVERSITY

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1. Introduction

With the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, social media has become a rapidly developing communication tool that produces information and enables the dissemination of information. In recent years, social media has enabled the rapid dissemination of information about public health. (Kadam, Atre, 2020:1; Topçu, 2022 :344).

The pandemic has further increased the interest in online shopping. The contactless shopping process has been a unique opportunity for people in this period. With the increase in online shopping, many businesses have started to promote their goods and services via social media platforms.(Lv, et al. 2020: 5).

The pandemic has presented an unprecedented challenge for both public health, food systems, and business (Taha, 2021: 1). Uncertainty for future periods on consumers' decisions decreases their consumption behavior, while increasing their savings. Lyhagen (2001: 675) .

The pandemic is reversing the flow of work, education, health and purchasing and consumption. Thanks to more flexible time spent at home, consumers have tried recipes (playing a musical instrument, shopping online, etc.) and honed their skills. While some of them go viral, consumers become producers with commercial possibilities. Because of this situation, YouTube and the like are full of videos with the potential for innovation and commercial success. Consumption behaviors vary due to the contagion period, economic uncertainty and isolation during the pandemic process. This situation has led to the use of more online shopping and the purchase of non-perishable basic food and cleaning materials on rapidly reshaped consumer behavior. (Sheth, 2020: 281-282).

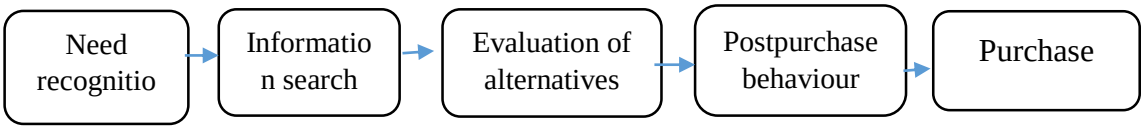


Figure 1: Five-stage model of the consumer buying proces

(Stankevich 2017: 10)

Figure 1 shows the traditional five-stage model of consumer decision making. Accordingly, the consumer decision-making process consists of the stages of recognizing needs, seeking information, evaluating alternatives, purchasing and post-sales behavior. An operator has to understand these steps well in order to mobilize the consumer, that is, to ensure that he buys goods and services appropriately.

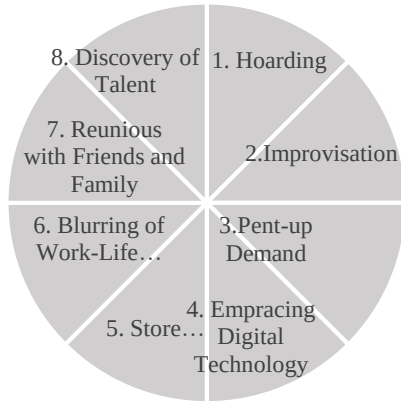


Figure 2: Immediate Impact of Covid-19 on Consumption Behavior

(Sheth, 2020: 281)

Figure 2 shows the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on consumption behaviors. Based on the graph, these effects are; stocking, temporary measures, pent-up demand, adopting digital technology and online merchandising, blurring of work/life boundaries, meetings with friends/family, and talent discovery. In this context, consumers stockpile

their basic consumption needs (toilet paper, bread, water, meat, disinfection, etc.) during the pandemic period. Consumers want to take temporary measures since there are restrictions during this period. Temporary measures also bring innovative practices.Such as funeral services on zoom instead of funerals that cannot be held due to restrictions. In times of crisis and uncertainty, the general trend is to delay the purchase and consumption of optional goods or services. This situation is generally associated with durable consumer goods (house, car, etc.). It also includes optional services such as concerts, sports, bars and restaurants. This causes demand to shift (postpone) from the present to the future. Consumers have adopted new technology and its applications out of necessity. Most consumers love social media, including Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, and more. In general, the impact of digital technology, and social media in particular, on consumer behavior is huge in scale and pervasive in the consumer's daily life.

Social media has had significant effects during the pandemic. This effect can be seen from entertainment to shopping. Social distancing and quarantine during the pandemic process have allowed people to connect with other people and increase their interest in social media (Nabity-Grover et al., 2020: 3). This research was conducted to examine the effect of social media on the changes in the consumption and saving habits of consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic.

2. Literature Review

During the Covid-19 pandemic, many studies have been conducted on the changes in the consumption and saving habits of consumers. Below are the domestic and foreign literature on the effect of social media on consumers' decisions.

Erden (2020), investigated the effect of social media use during the Covid-19 pandemic. In the research, an online questionnaire was applied to 100 people. The survey results were analyzed with the SPSS 23 statistical package program. The scope of the research was limited to Whatsapp, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. According to the results of the research, it was observed that the use of social media increased by 47% in this process.

Hasanat et. al.. (2020), investigated the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on online business in Malaysia. In the research, an online questionnaire was applied to 60 participants. The data were analyzed in the SPSS statistical package program. According to the results of the research, it has been reached that the maximum of the products came from China

and that many of the sectors were closed in this process, and there was no product import and export.

Belbağ (2021), investigated customer behavior in Turkey during the Covid-19 pandemic and how customers adapted to the new normal. For this purpose, online interviews were conducted with 78 Turkish consumers. According to the results of the research, economic recession, partial shutdown regulations, social media messages are shown as environmental stimuli that affect consumer behavior during the pandemic. Also, consumers' behavioral responses to the pandemic include changes in purchasing consumer goods, avoidance of physical stores, reductions in leisure activities and shopping frequency, stocking and consumption.

Kocabıyık (2021), conducted a research on the social media usage experiences and satisfaction of young users during the Covid-19 pandemic. In the research, an online questionnaire was applied to 52 students who received university education. The data were analyzed with the Maxqda 12 program. According to the results of the research, the participants stated that they use social media to get information, communicate, socialize and have fun.

Masonet. et. al.. (2021), investigated the effect of social media on consumers living in India during the Covid-19 pandemic. In the research, 313 Indian consumers were surveyed online to compare how social media has changed consumer behavior since the Covid-19 pandemic began. Multiple statistical methods were used to analyze the data. The findings reveal the increasing use of social media as a consumer decision-making tool. Also, the effects of the increasing importance of social media in consumer decision-making process with the global reach of Covid-19 apply to most countries.

Mason et. al. (2021), conducted a research to examine changes in social media marketing after the covid-19 pandemic in the USA. For this purpose, an online survey was applied to 327 consumers living in the USA. According to the results of the research, after the pandemic, social media has changed consumer decision-making processes. The research has shown that consumers use social media more to get to know products, gather information about products and evaluate them in this process.

Taha et. al. (2021) examined the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on consumers' social media use and shopping behavior. An online questionnaire was applied to 937 consumers living in Italy and Slovakia. According to the results of the research, a statistical difference was found in the use of social media by various demographic factors (such as age, gender) in the first wave of Covid-19. In addition, a weak relationship was

found between the use of social media and purchasing from e-shops advertising social media.

Alamaslı et. al. (2022), examined the effect of media on consumer decisions during the pandemic process. In the research, five e-commerce companies (Hepsiburada, Trendyol, N11, Gittigidiyor and Çiçek Sepeti) with the highest number of Instagram followers between March and December 2020 were selected. Analysis in Turkey was analyzed using IBM SPSS Software and NVivo programs. According to the results of the research, it was revealed that consumers' decisions changed during the pandemic period, they shopped more online, and the effect of social media on this decision was high. In addition, it is among the findings of the research that the number of followers of the five companies that are the subject of the research increased significantly during this period.

3. Research Method, Application and Sampling

The results of the research were reached by using the descriptive statistics technique, one of the quantitative data analysis methods. The research was conducted with 207 students aged 18-46 and over, continuing their education at Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, using the online questionnaire technique. Participants were randomly selected from Gökçeada Vocational School and Gökçeada School of Applied Sciences. In addition, the research is based on the general screening model. In this model, a specific group, sample is selected from the universe in order to reach general information about the universe (Karasar, 2005).

4. Measurement Tools and Tests Used

In this research, Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University students were asked questions to measure the effect of social media on consumer decisions during Covid-19. The first five questions of the research are aimed at measuring the socio-demographic characteristics of the students. The remaining questions are aimed at explaining the effects between the use of social media and consumer decisions during the Covid-19. The questions were formed as a result of the literature review. Multiple choice, 5-point likert (“Regular every day, 5-6 days a week, 3-4 days a week, 1-2 days a week, I do not use”) and 3-point Likert (“Yes”, “No”, “Undecided”)) scales, checkbox options and questions were created and presented to the students.

4.1. Research Questions

1- Which social media account did the students use the most during the Covid-19?
2- Why did the students use social media during the Covid-19 ?

3- What is the reason for the increase in the shopping made by students through social media during the Covid-19?
4- In which way did students do their shopping the most during the Covid-19?

5. Findings and Comment

Within the scope of the research, data were obtained on the socio-demographic characteristics of the students, which communication tools they used and how often during the Covid-19 pandemic, which social media accounts they used the most, the average daily time they spent on social media, why they used social media, and the effect of social media on consumer decisions. Frequency analysis and percentage values obtained from the data were used to reach the data results.

Table 1: Frequency and Percent Values of Gender of Participants

		N (Total Number)	**Percent (%)**
Gender	Female	126	60,9
	Male	81	39,1
	Total	*207*	*100,0*

60,9 % of the participants are females (N=126), 39,1 % of the participants are males (N=81).

Table 2: Frequency and Percent Values of Participants Age Range

		N (Total Number)	**Percent (%)**
Age Range	18-25	188	90,8
	26-35	10	4,8
	36-45	6	2,9
	Above 46	3	1,4
	Total	*207*	*100,0*

Age range of participants is 90,8 % (N=188) 18-25 age, 4,8 % (N=10) 26-35 age, 2,9% (N=6) 36-45 age and 1,4 % (N=3) 46 and over.

Table 3: Frequency and Percent Values of Participants' Income Status

		N	Percent (%)
Income Status	0 TL-1500 TL	86	41,5
	1501 TL- 3000 TL	81	39,1
	3001TL -4500 TL	30	14,5
	Above 4501 TL	10	4,8
	Total	*207*	*100,0*

Income status of students are; 41,5% (N=86) 0-1500 TL, 39,1% (N=81) 1501 TL-3000 TL, 14,5% (N=30) 3001 TL- 4500TL and 4,8 % (N=10) 45001 TL and over.

Table 4: Frequency and Percentage Values of the Researched Departments

		N (Total Number)	Percent (%)
Researched Departments	Gökçeada Vocational School	139	67,1
	Gökçeada School of Applied Sciences	68	32,9
	Total	*207*	*100,0*

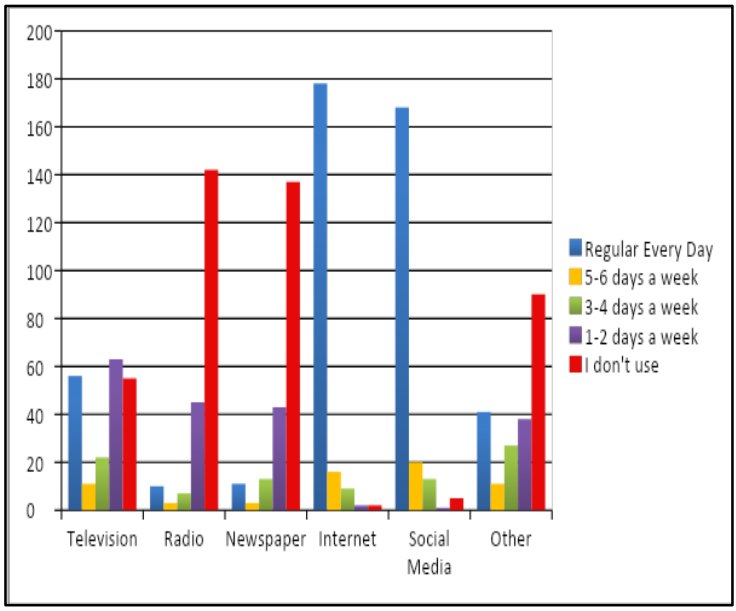
67.1% (N=139) of the students are studying at Gökçeada Vocational School, and 32.9% (N=68) of them are studying at Gökçeada School of Applied Sciences.

Table 5: Percentage and frequency values of the data of which grade the students are in

		N (Total Number)	Percent (%)
Data of which grade the students are in	1	70	33,8
	2	100	48,3
	3	20	9,7
	4	17	8,2
	Total	*207*	*100,0*

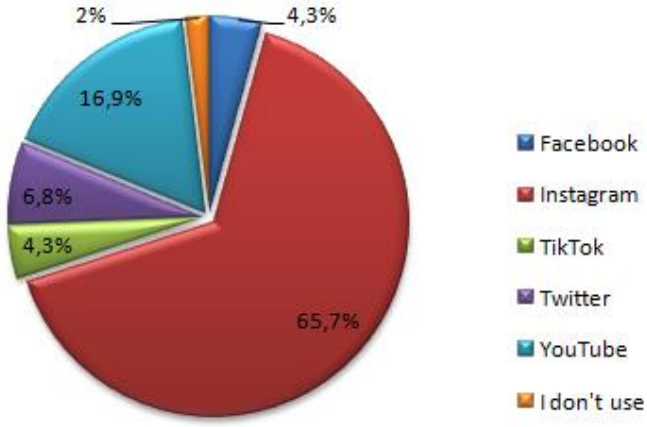
33.8 % (N=70) of the students were in the first year, 48.3 % (N=100) were in the second year, 9.7% (N=20) were in the third year, 8.2 % (N) =17) of them are in the fourth grade.

Graph 1: Frequency of students' use of communication tools during the Covid-19 pandemic period



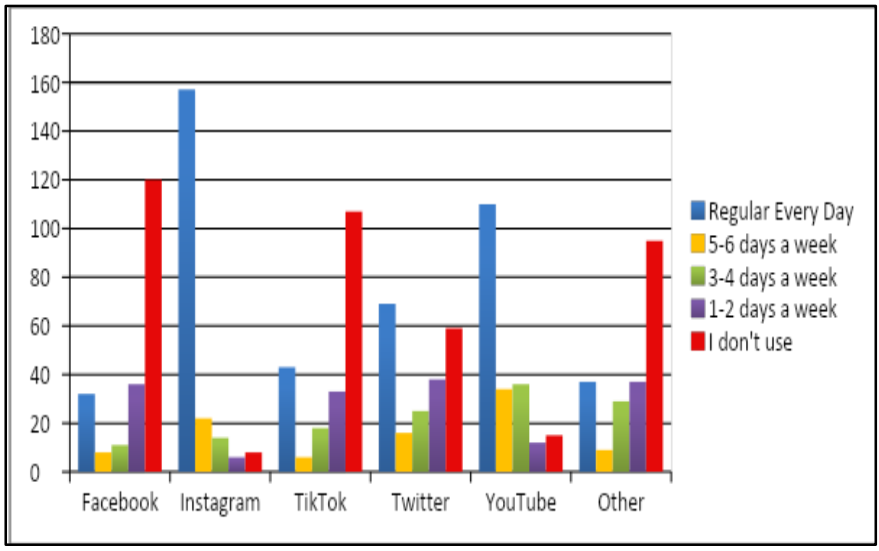
Looking at the frequency of television use by students in Table 6, it is seen that 63 people watch television 1-2 days a week, and 56 people watch television regularly every day. While 142 of the participants do not prefer to listen to the radio, 45 people listen to the radio 1-2 days a week. 137 of the participants do not read newspapers, 43 people read newspapers 1-2 days a week. While 178 use the internet regularly every day, 16 people use the internet 5-6 days a week. 168 of the participants use social media regularly every day, while 20 people use social media 5-6 days a week. 90 people do not use mass media, 41 people regularly use other mass media every day.

Graph 2: Students' use of social media accounts during the Covid-19 pandemic



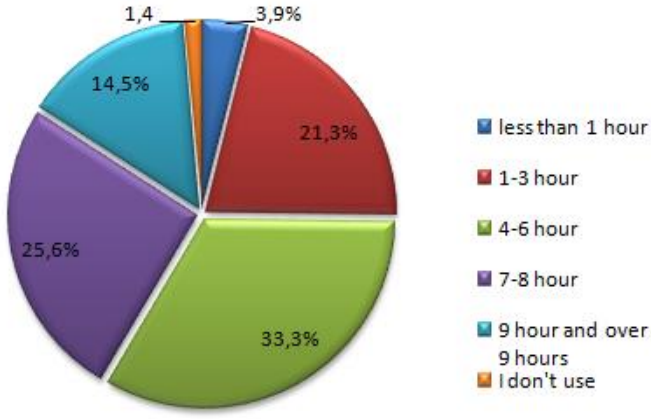
When the use of social media accounts by students during the Covid-19 pandemic is examined, it is seen that they use Instagram the most among their social media accounts. The least used social media tools by students are Facebook and TikTok applications. The emergence of Instagram as the most used social media channel also provides an answer to the first research question.

Graph 3: Frequency of students' use of social media accounts during the Covid-19 pandemic



When the frequency of use of students' social media accounts during the Covid-19 process is examined, it is revealed that 157 students use Instagram regularly every day. 34 people access the YouTube application 5-6 days a week, while 36 people use it 3-4 days a week. 38 students use the Twitter application 1-2 days a week. 120 students do not use the Facebook application at all.

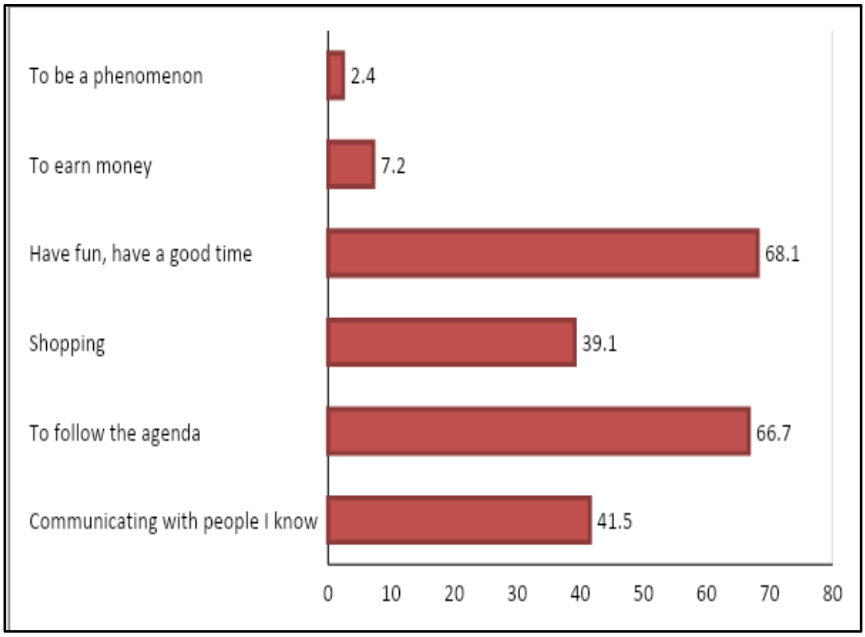
Graph 4: Average daily time spent by students on social media during the Covid-19 pandemic period



When the time spent by students on social media during the Covid-19 period is examined, respectively; 33.3% (N=69 people) 4-6 hours, 26.6%

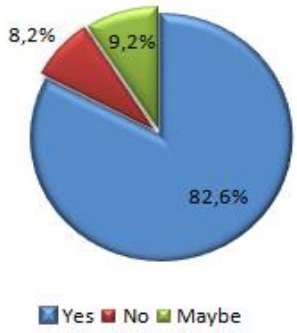
(N=53 people) 7-8 hours, 21.3% (N=44 people) 1-3 hours It was revealed that 14.5% (N=30 people) spent 9 hours or more on social media. The rate of using social media for less than 1 hour during the Covid-19 period is 8 people with a rate of 3.9%.

Graph 5: Reasons for students to use social media during the Covid-19 pandemic period



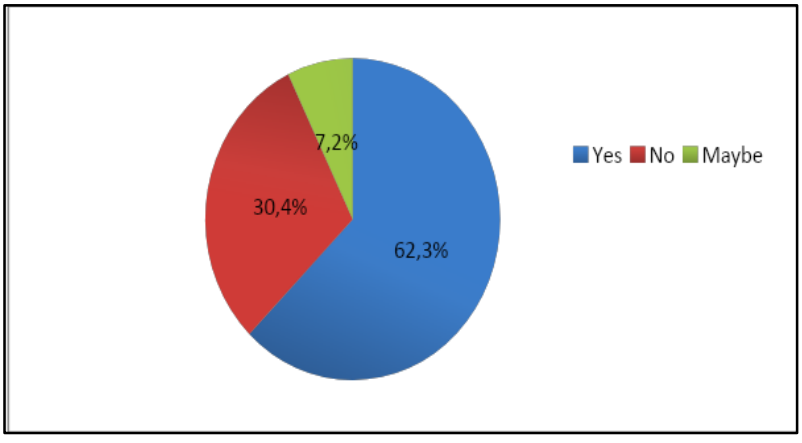
It is seen that students use social media mostly to have fun, have a good time and follow the agenda during the Covid-19 pandemic period. Therefore, it is seen that the second research question has an answer in line with these data. Students marked being a phenomenon the least among the options.

Graph 6: Students' "Do you think that social media affects consumer behavior? graph of their answers to the question



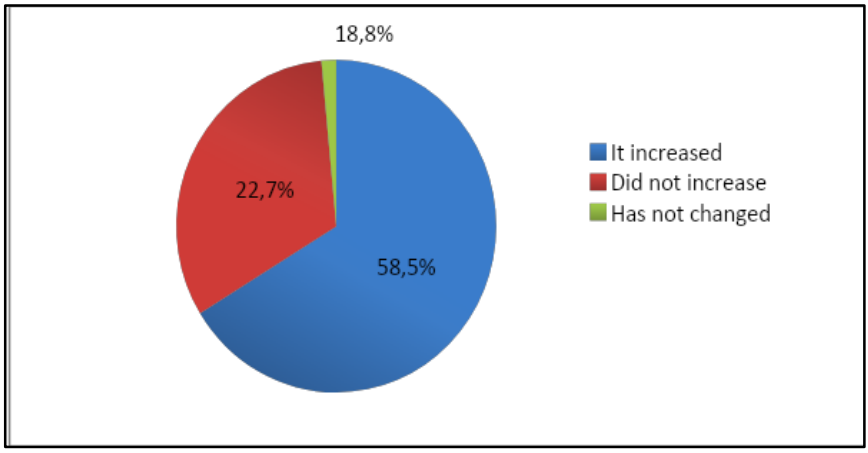
82.6% of the students (N=171) think that social media affects consumer behavior. 9.2% (N=19) were undecided on this question. 8.2% (N=17) do not think that social media affects consumer behavior.

Graph 7: "Did social media affect your consumption habits during the Covid-19 pandemic?" graph of their answers to the question



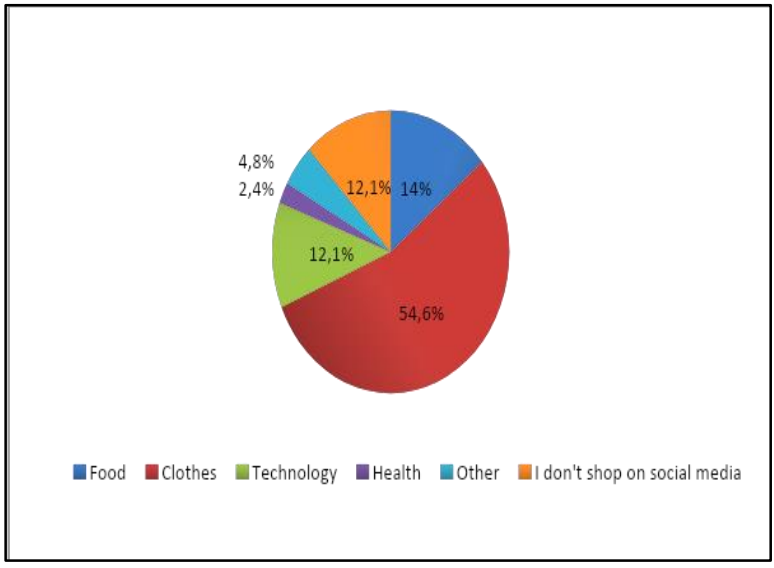
62.3% (N=129) of the students think that social media affects their consumption habits during the Covid-19 process, while 30.4% (N=63) think that it does not.

Graph 8: "Did your shopping on social media increase during the Covid-19 pandemic? graph of their answers to the question



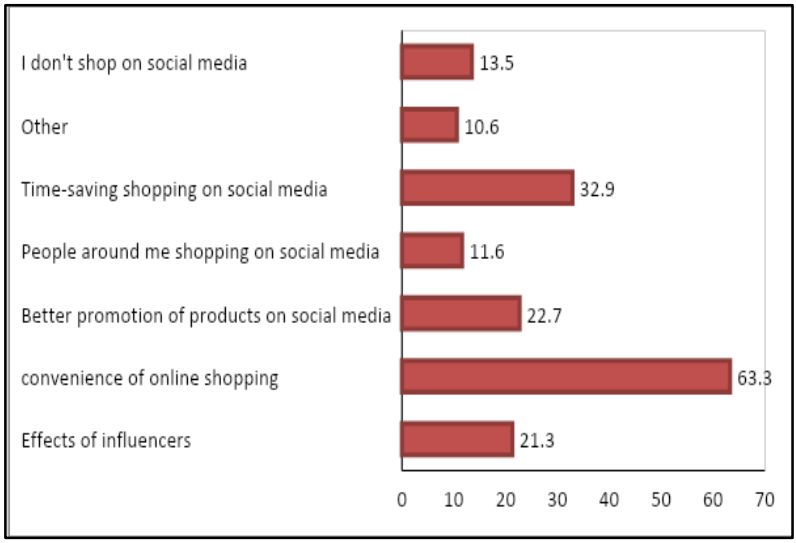
58.5% (N=121) of the students think that their shopping on social media has increased during the Covid-19 pandemic, while 22.7% (N=47) think that it has not. 18.8% (N=39) stated that their shopping did not change.

Graph 9: Data on the sector in which students consume the most on social media during the Covid-19 pandemic



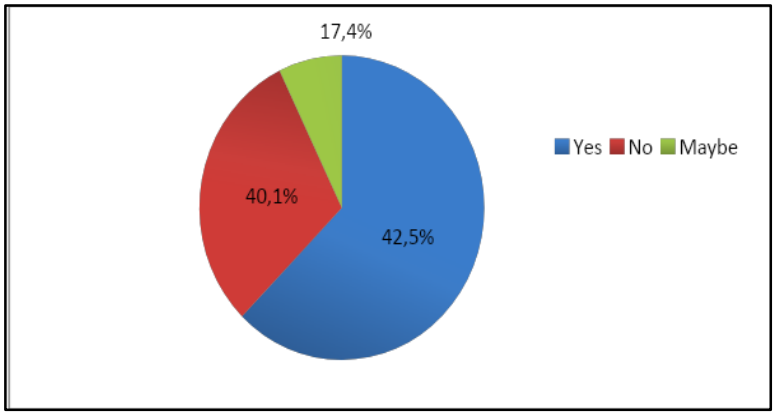
Students, respectively, through social media during the Covid-19 pandemic; clothing (N=113), food (N=29), technology (N=25), other consumptions (N=10). It has been revealed that they consume the least in the health sector (N=5). 12.1% (N=25) of the students stated that they do not shop on social media.

Graph 10: Data on the reasons for the increase in shopping made by students on social media during the Covid-19 pandemic



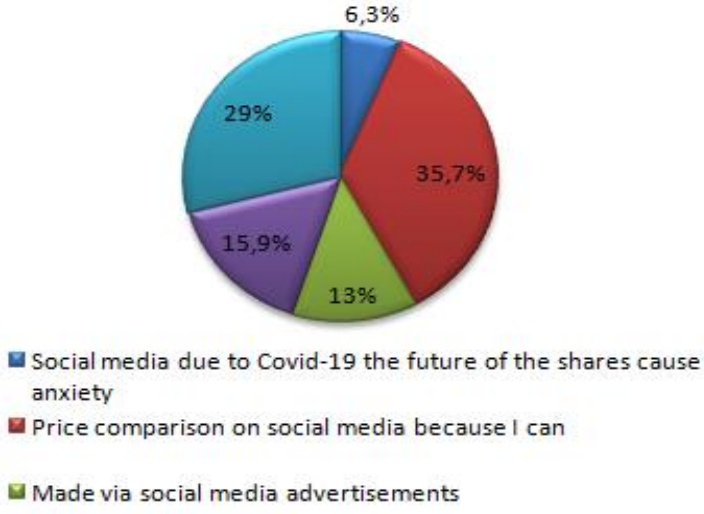
One of the reasons for the increase in the shopping made by students on social media during the Covid-19 is the convenience of online shopping. Therefore, this information also provides an answer to the third research question. In addition, students think that shopping on social media allows them to save time. Shopping on social media and other reasons affected the shopping of students on social media the least during the pandemic.

Graph 11: "Did social media affect your savings habits during the Covid-19 pandemic? graph of their answers to the question



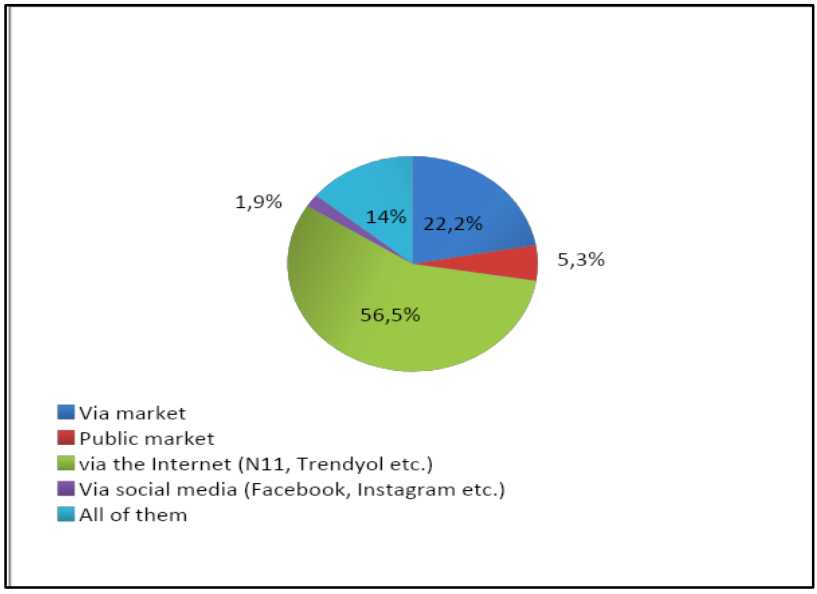
42.5% (N=88) of the students think that social media affects their saving habits during the Covid-19 pandemic, while 40.1% (N=83) think that it does not.

Graph 12: What are the reasons for your savings to increase thanks to social media during the Covid-19 pandemic process? graph of their answers to the question



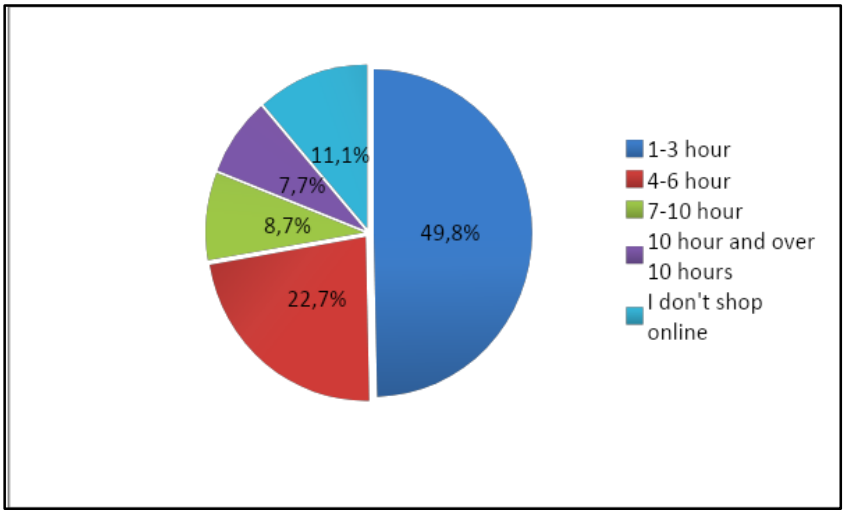
The reason why 35.7% (N=74) of the students have increased their savings thanks to social media during the Covid-19 pandemic is that they can compare prices on social media. 29% of the students (N=60) think that their savings do not increase thanks to social media.

Graph 13: Information on how students do their shopping during the Covid-19 pandemic.



During the Covid-19 pandemic, 56.5% (N=117) of the students mostly do their shopping via the internet, and 22.2% (N=46) do their shopping via the market. It is seen that students shop at least on social media during the Covid-19 pandemic process. According to these results, it is seen that the fourth research question was also answered.

Graph 14: Data on online shopping intensities of students during the Covid-19 pandemic



When the online shopping intensities of students during the Covid-19 pandemic are examined, 49.8% (N=103) 1-3 hours, 22.7% (N=47) 4-6 hours, 8.7% (N=18) 7-10 hours, 7.7% (N=16) 10 hours or more. 11.1% of the students do not shop online.

6. Conclusion and Evaluation

This research, which examines the effect of social media on consumer decisions during the Covid-19 pandemic, was conducted for students who continue their education at Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University. In the study, questions were asked to measure the socio-demographic characteristics of the students, which communication tools and how often they used during the Covid-19 pandemic, which social media accounts they used the most, the average daily time they spent on social media, why they used social media and the effect of social media on consumer decisions.

According to the research data, students regularly use the internet and social media every day during the Covid-19 process. Most students spend 4-6 hours a day on social media. Students use social media to have more fun, to have a good time and to follow the agenda. Students use Instagram application the most and Facebook application the least. According to the research data, most of the students think that the use of social media affects consumer behavior. During the pandemic period, most of the students stated that the use of social media changed their consumption habits and their shopping on social media increased.Most of the students spent the most on their clothing needs through social media

during the pandemic period. Students who think that it is easy to shop online through social media also think that they save time when they shop through social media. Most of the students stated that social media affected their saving habits during the Covid-19 period and their savings increased because they could compare prices on social media.

In line with this information, it is concluded that the use of social media during the Covid-19 process affects the consumption habits of students. It is predicted that social media tools will undergo change and transformation in the coming years, and that consumption and consumption habits will develop with the emergence of new platforms. Therefore, it is important to keep this topic up to date.

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