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# Exploring the Advantages of Using Social Media in the Romanian Retail Sector

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**Abstract:** The emergence of social media led to major changes in the manner in which retailers accomplish their daily profession, particularly since they provide traders with platforms for business development and brand improvement. In spite of this, little is known about their impact and influence on retail businesses. Research on retailers' perceptions concerning social media is scarce and fragmented, which justifies the current increasing focus of scholars and practitioners on this subject. In this study, a quantitative research design was utilized, aiming to identify the advantages of social media as perceived by retailers in Romania. The findings confirm the hypotheses, acknowledging that Romanian retailers perceive social media as offering great advantages for individuals employed in the retail sector. The practical implications of our research were grouped according to the analyzed aspects, as follows: gathering information, content creation, and customer communication, approached as advantages of adopting social media in retail. This study contributes to the limited literature on social media and the perceived advantages of Romanian retailers, which has implications for further research in this field of knowledge.

**Keywords:** social media; retailer; customer; information; communication; user-generated content

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## 1. Introduction

The digital revolution is accompanied by social impacts [1] that result in part from the improved communication and collaboration tools offered by social media. Social media holds immense significance in the era of the digital economy, particularly due to its revolutionary impact on the way businesses and consumers interact. Overall, social media's significance in the digital economy lies in its ability to connect businesses with a global audience, foster engagement and loyalty, harness data for insights, provide cost-effective marketing opportunities, and shape brand reputation [2,3]. Embracing social media as part of a comprehensive digital strategy has become essential for organizations to thrive and succeed in today's digital landscape.

Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, TikTok, and other social media sites have reached an unprecedented scale and are on a permanent rise. The desire to socialize online is unprecedented. The number of people who have accounts on these social platforms is in the order of billions. That is precisely why companies have found it opportune to create an official account on one, if not more, or even all of these social media sites. Thus, business organizations are taking advantage of this to create and share information with customers and benefit from this seamless communication instantly and easily [4].

Social media platforms and applications are used to promote brands and businesses and engage with potential and actual customers [5,6]. The use of social media platforms is one of the most important options for companies to capture relevant and valuable

information about consumers and their shopping experiences [7]. Consumers, in turn, can obtain information about the company, brands, and products that can be leveraged during the purchase decision process [8].

The role of social media became even more important during the pandemic. The use of social media by retailers during and after the COVID-19 pandemic has been the subject of several scientific studies. These studies [9–11] have shown that social media enhances information exchange by increasing customer awareness, facilitating optimal decision making, and stimulating consumer engagement.

In this frame of reference, social media is particularly important for the retail sector because of the intense competition between retailers for consumer attention and engagement on digital channels [12,13]. Retailers' priority is no longer to increase the number of customers but rather to improve their experience, whether it is online, in the physical store, or on various social media channels. The key is engaging the consumer on a personal level with their brand and understanding how the consumer perceives that brand.

However, research on the implications of social media for the retail sector remains scarce. We have noticed a dearth of research that specifically focuses on organizations in the retail sector and that seeks to determine the relationship between perceived advantages and the use of social media for specific purposes, such as obtaining information, creating content, or communicating with the customer. Although these aspects are addressed in the literature [14–22], either these aspects are treated separately, not in an integrated approach, or they are not addressed in relation to the advantages perceived by retailers.

Also, while most of the studies associated with the subject of social media in retail have mainly focused on approaches related to its impact on the decision-making process or the purchasing behavior of consumers [17,23–26], less attention has been given to the perspective of retailers. This suggests that addressing aspects related to retailers' perceptions of the implications of social media adoption requires further attention. Moreover, few scientific articles [27–31] have explored social media from the perspective of retailers present in the Romanian market.

To cover these gaps identified in the literature, the objective of this paper is to investigate how social media affect Romanian retailers. Taking into consideration this contribution of our study, which is also an element of originality for research in the field in Romania, the main purpose of our research is to explore the benefits of utilizing social media platforms in the retail industry in Romania. To accomplish this purpose, specific research objectives have been established:

- Objective 1 (O1): To identify the frequency of work-related use of various social media platforms.
- Objective 2 (O2): To examine the impact of the use of social media on the advantages perceived by retailers.

The paper is divided into six sections. After this Introductory part comes the section on Theoretical Framework and Hypothesis Development. This section is dedicated to the presentation of the main approaches from the literature related to the research variables (advantages of social media, obtaining information, creating content, and communicating with customers) in order to support and argue the research hypotheses. Then follows the section called Research Design, which presents the research methodology carried out among Romanian retailers. The Section 4 comprises descriptive statistics on the usage and advantages of social media platforms, as well as the multiple regression analysis used to test the hypotheses. The paper then continues with the Section 5, which includes both presenting the correlation of the results of our research with those of other studies, as well as the main theoretical implications of our study. The article ends with the Conclusions part, which reiterates the main contributions of our paper but also presents the limitations and future research directions.

## 2. Theoretical Framework and Hypothesis Development

### *2.1. Advantages of Using Social Media in Retail*

As presented in the literature [21], social media offers significant opportunities for organizations through improved brand awareness and increased visibility. As indicated by other studies [20,22], the use of social media tools can lead to increased website traffic, which is associated with higher e-commerce sales. Lastly, social media usage, both for work-related and social-related purposes, enhances work performance, improves teamwork and employees' effectiveness, and facilitates fast recruitment [32].

As most studies indicate [25,26,33–38], marketers who use social media as part of their marketing strategy use social applications and channels for customer-related purposes and report clear benefits in improving customer relationships and market communication, improving after-sales service, and gaining customer feedback and insights. Although there is not much difference between large, medium, and small companies, it is noted that large firms use social web tools for branding and small firms for customer service [36].

Social media, through its characteristics, allows business organizations operating in retail to capitalize on the opportunities associated with these channels and applications, related to obtaining valuable feedback from customers [39], profoundly changing the brand–consumer interaction and value co-creation [40,41], and augmenting the communication and information sharing process [42–44].

Obviously, these advantages of using social media are perceived differently by retailers depending on the objectives for which these channels and applications are used and the ways in which they are adopted. Considering the advantages of using social media presented in the literature, in our research, we focus on the opportunities offered by social media related to obtaining information, communicating with customers, and creating content.

### *2.2. Obtaining Information through Social Media Channels*

The use of social media to obtain information about consumers, market development, trends, and innovations in the field has become a necessity in the modern retail industry. By monitoring conversations and interactions with consumers and other market players on social platforms, retailers can gather information on new consumer preferences and demands [43], as well as changes brought about by innovations and industry trends [45].

It is vital for retailers to be aware of customer attitudes and feelings to increase consumer satisfaction. Especially during the isolation period caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, people's lives changed considerably [46]. Social media platforms were increasingly used, and social media became the main way for people to connect with the outside world, expressing and sharing opinions, as shown in a recent study [47]. This massive amount of data has provided and continues to provide valuable feedback to companies regarding trends, information, buying, consumption, or product usage habits, behaviors, and the motives behind them [39]. By understanding these messages, companies can better understand their customers and configure offers related to their needs.

As presented in the literature [5,14,43], social media tools can also be successfully used to research and understand the market. The use of specific social media channels can be carried out to not only identify business opportunities, gain market insights, and create new business contracts and partnerships, but also to build online communities with business partners, exchange information, and allow suppliers to understand their customers and adapt the offer to their needs.

Considering these aspects presented in the literature regarding the use of social media to obtain information, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**Hypothesis 1 (H1).** *Using social media to obtain information will have a significant and positive effect on perceived advantages of retailers.*

### *2.3. Creating Content Using Social Media Applications*

Using social media to create content offers retailers a wide range of benefits, as exposed in the literature, from disseminating relevant content to potential customers, arousing their interest, generating traffic to the website, and generating sales [15], to engaging them in an accountable relationship with retailers through content creation in the form of ratings, reviews, and testimonials [48]. Another study [16] suggests that utilizing social media to create personalized and interactive content can enhance the perceived benefits for consumers and contribute to the perceived advantages for retailers.

Social media channels and applications have a powerful influence on brand–consumer interactions [47]. Social networks influence the continuous engagement and participation of customers. This is mainly due to users' ability to communicate in real time and asynchronously with others [49]. The power of shaping the brand image has been transferred from the marketers to the online connections of the consumers [50]. Social media in brand–consumer communication can be described as a feeder of information [51] that influences current and future customers. Buyers access social media with the intention of sharing their experience of a brand, a product, a service, a store, and various other aspects of retailing, in general, thereby directly influencing colleagues, friends, and acquaintances through social media channels.

Co-creation is the result of this interaction between the retailer and the consumer, facilitated by social media [52]. Co-creation has been defined as a [41] collaborative activity in which customers actively contribute to the creation of brand identity and image, as well as idea generation, information dissemination, and product and service creation or transformation. This special interaction also facilitates the creation of user-generated content (UGC), such as product reviews, ratings, product descriptions, consumer-generated advertising via personal blogs, etc.

Through social media, companies can monitor customers, analyze their feedback to improve products, collaborate with them to solve problems, encourage them to express their experiences, and share information with other customers and prospects. All these are perceived as advantages of using social media by brands that co-create with consumers, allowing them to build a deeper emotional relationship and giving customers the opportunity to participate in a unique retail experience [45].

Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**Hypothesis 2 (H2).** *Using social media to create content will have a significant and positive effect on the perceived advantages of retailers.*

### *2.4. Communicating with Customers through Social Media*

The transition to social media ultimately involves a reconfiguration of the relationship with customers. The presence of both business companies and their customers on social media platforms has generated a change in the way organizations interact with their customers. As presented in the literature [17,18], social media can no longer be used only to inform and initiate conversations but also to respond and obtain customers' feedback. Nowadays, customers provide feedback, ask questions, and expect quick and personalized responses to their specific problems. In addition, customers post texts, images, and videos, rate products and companies, and share with others their opinions about brands [53].

Social media provides a platform for immediate and direct communication between retailers and customers. As a recent study indicates [19], social media enables companies to connect with their customers, improve awareness of their brands, influence consumer attitudes, receive feedback, and help build customer loyalty. Retailers can use social media to address customer inquiries, provide support, and resolve issues promptly. This enhances customer satisfaction and builds a positive brand image.

Social media allows retailers and their customers to share information in different ways. Apps and social networks are new communication channels for retailers, allowing them to become more transparent and accessible [42]. Retailers all over the world are trying

to use the power of social networks to change the way they do business, especially when it comes to making connections, gaining trust, and getting more consumers to use their products [44]. Social media platforms allow retailers and customers to interact with each other at the same time, unlike retailers' websites, which allow consumers to communicate with each other only one way [54]. Social networks facilitate the gathering, connection, interaction, and participation of customers with retailers. This means that these retailers can share important information with their customers on social media platforms, which appeals to most consumers because they do not have to access retailers' websites to get this information [40,55].

Taking into account how retailers adopt social media for customer communication, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**Hypothesis 3 (H3).** *Using social media to communicate with customers will have a significant and positive effect on the perceived advantages of retailers.*

## 3. Research Design

The main objective of this study is to explore the benefits of using social media platforms in the retail industry in Romania. A quantitative research design was adopted for this study. The research was exploratory, which is used to discover relationships, interpretations, and characteristics of subjects that suggest new theories and define new problems [56].

Data for this study were collected through an online survey, which is a commonly used method in the social sciences to study societal behavior and test theories [57]. The measuring instrument was a questionnaire divided into four sections. The first section collected data regarding the respondents' employment profiles and demographics such as gender, age, and level of education. The second section consisted of questions about the frequency of social media use among respondents. The third section of the questionnaire consisted of 15 statements regarding the use of social media platforms in retail business. The fourth section included 18 statements about the advantages of social media for retailers. An overview of the constructs and items is presented in Table 1. All items were measured on a five-point Likert scale as follows: Strongly agree (5), agree (4), neither agree nor disagree (3), disagree (2), and strongly disagree (1) [56,57]. The five-point Likert scale was chosen because it strikes a balance between simplicity, interpretability, and statistical analysis, making it a widely utilized and beneficial tool for measuring attitudes and perceptions in research studies.

**Table 1.** Construct and items used in this study.

| Construct | Item | Contents | References |
|---|---|---|---|
| Obtaining information | OIN1 | Get information about market developments | dos Santos and Duffett, 2021 [14]; Johnson and Van Zyl, 2022 [43]; de Oliveira et al., 2020 [45]. |
| | OIN2 | Learn about new innovations in retailing | |
| | OIN3 | Get news about in-store technology | |
| | OIN4 | Track retail trends | |
| | OIN5 | Receive advertising newsfeeds | |
| Creating content | CCO1 | Upload products/services images and descriptions | Lu and Miller, 2019 [15]; Chen et al., 2022 [16]; Scholastica Crowley et al., 2020 [48]. |
| | CCO2 | Advertise for free via share/like/reviews and comments | |
| | CCO3 | Drive more traffic to website | |
| | CCO4 | Send customers the link to the store's website to obtain information | |
| | CCO5 | Advertise to a specific group of potential customers | |

**Table 1.** *Cont.*

| Construct | Item | Contents | References |
|---|---|---|---|
| Communicating with customers | CCU1 | Interact with customers about products/services | Gutierrez et al., 2023 [17]; Zhou et al., 2022 [18]; Jamil et al., 2022 [19]. |
| | CCU2 | Inform existing customers about promotional campaigns | |
| | CCU3 | Get customers feedback on current products/services | |
| | CCU4 | Respond to customer complaints | |
| | CCU5 | Initiate conversations between customers/clients | |
| Advantages of social media | ASM1 | Quicker task completion | Dolega et al., 2021 [20]; Yogesh et al., 2021 [21]; Heiens and Narayanaswamy, 2021 [22]; Dantas et al., 2022 [32]; Johnson and Van Zyl, 2022 [43]; de Oliveira et al., 2020 [45]. |
| | ASM2 | Improved internal communication amongst employees | |
| | ASM3 | Fast recruitment of new employees | |
| | ASM4 | Improved teamwork | |
| | ASM5 | Increased operating efficiency | |
| | ASM6 | Increased employees' effectiveness | |
| | ASM7 | Increased customers base | |
| | ASM8 | Extending customers' access to promotions | |
| | ASM9 | Increased retail knowledge | |
| | ASM10 | Increased brand awareness | |
| | ASM11 | Obtaining information about sales trends | |
| | ASM12 | Sales to customers who cannot otherwise be attracted | |
| | ASM13 | Increased offerings of product/service | |
| | ASM14 | Referrals through positive comments/reviews by customers | |
| | ASM15 | Visualization of products/service offerings for customers | |
| | ASM16 | Increased website traffic | |
| | ASM17 | Increased customer loyalty | |
| | ASM18 | Increased business visibility | |

The target population for this survey comprised people employed in the retail sector in Romania. According to the Romanian National Institute of Statistics [58], total employment in the activity of wholesale and retail trade and repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles in 2021 was 1,369,000 persons. Due to the size of the population and the unavailability of a complete sample frame, the approach selected for this research was convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique that is used to select participants because they are often readily and easily available [59]. The sample size consisted of 385 people employed in the retail sector in Romania.

Table 2 summarizes the demographic information and the employment profiles of the respondents.

**Table 2.** Demographic and employment profile of the respondents.

| Variable | Category | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 162 | 42.1 |
| | Female | 223 | 57.9 |
| Age | 18–25 years | 190 | 49.4 |
| | 26–35 years | 70 | 18.2 |
| | 36–45 years | 60 | 15.6 |
| | 46–55 years | 54 | 14.0 |
| | 56–65 years | 11 | 2.9 |
| Last diploma obtained | Baccalaureate | 223 | 57.9 |
| | Bachelor | 86 | 22.3 |
| | Master | 37 | 9.6 |
| | None | 39 | 10.1 |

**Table 2.** *Cont.*

| Variable | Category | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| Store type | Convenience store | 102 | 26.5 |
| | Discount store | 59 | 15.3 |
| | Supermarket | 31 | 8.1 |
| | Hypermarket | 46 | 11.9 |
| | Specialty stores | 81 | 21.0 |
| | E-commerce stores | 66 | 17.1 |
| Job position | Employee | 270 | 70.1 |
| | Manager | 77 | 20.0 |
| | Owner | 38 | 9.9 |
| Number of years employed | 0–5 years | 285 | 74.0 |
| | 6–10 years | 49 | 12.7 |
| | 11–15 years | 26 | 6.8 |
| | 16–20 years | 12 | 3.1 |
| | Over 20 years | 13 | 3.4 |

To collect data, we used Google Forms, a survey administration software. An email including the link to the survey will be forwarded to the students of the Bucharest University of Economic Studies who will enroll as volunteers to assist people employed in the retail sector in Romania in responding to the survey. Data were collected over a two-week period in March 2023 and converted into SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) for further analysis.

## 4. Results

The first part includes findings on the use of social media platforms for work activities and their frequency of use. The second part consists of descriptive statistics about the usage and advantages of social media platforms. The third part investigates the reliability of the scale and the correlation between constructs. The fourth part includes the multiple regression analysis used to test the hypothesis.

### *4.1. Social Media Platforms Usage for Work Activities*

This section reports the main social media platforms and their frequency of use for work activities in the retail sector in Romania (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Social media platform used for work activities.

| Social Media Platform | Frequency (%) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Never | Seldom | Occasionally | Usually | Always |
| Facebook | 28.6 | 13.8 | 14 | 19 | 24.7 |
| YouTube | 40 | 14.5 | 22.6 | 9.6 | 13.2 |
| WhatsApp | 8.3 | 2.9 | 6.2 | 22.3 | 60.3 |
| Instagram | 34.5 | 12.7 | 18.2 | 12.2 | 22.3 |
| TikTok | 47.5 | 16.9 | 14.3 | 5.5 | 15.8 |
| LinkedIn | 51.2 | 15.3 | 17.1 | 8.8 | 7.5 |
| Other platforms | 33 | 16.4 | 18.4 | 12.2 | 20 |

Table 3 shows that 60.3% of the respondents always use WhatsApp for work-related activities, followed by Facebook (24.7%), Instagram (22.3%), other platforms (20%), TikTok (15.8%), and YouTube (15.8%). The majority of respondents reported that they occasionally use YouTube (22.6%), followed by other platforms (18.4%), Instagram (18.2%), and LinkedIn (17.1%). Furthermore, 51.2% of the respondents never use LinkedIn for personal activities, followed by TikTok (47.5%) and YouTube (40%).

*4.2. Descriptive Statistics for Use of Social Media and for Advantages of Social Media*

To provide descriptive statistics for social media use and the advantages of social media, four new variables were created. Those new variables will also be included in multiple regression analysis to test the proposed hypothesis. The new variables were obtained by aggregating all the items that define a construct (see Table 1). The statistical function median was selected to compute new variables (constructs) because all existing variables (items) were measured on a Likert scale. The items of each construct are ordinal variables, and the median is the appropriate central tendency measure for this type of variable [60]. However, it is often advantageous to treat ordinal data in a quantitative manner by assigning ordered scores to the categories [61]. The new combined variables were used for the descriptive statistics presented in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Descriptive statistics for new variables.

| Construct | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|---|---|
| Obtaining information | 4.06 | 0.901 |
| Creating content | 3.82 | 1.161 |
| Communicating with customers | 4.16 | 0.953 |
| Advantages of social media | 4.25 | 0.738 |

All the constructs displayed in Table 4 had mean scores of 3.82 and above, indicating that the respondents agreed with the statements regarding social media use and advantages for people employed in the retail sector in Romania. On average, the construct creating content had the lowest overall mean score of 3.82, while the construct advantages of social media had the highest overall mean score of 4.25. Furthermore, the standard deviations for most of the constructs were relatively low (less than 1), which indicates that there was not a great deal of dispersion between the responses related to these constructs. However, creating content returned a standard deviation of 1.161, indicating that there was some variation around the mean score returned.

*4.3. Reliability of the Scale and Correlation between Variables*

Reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha coefficients (Table 5). When using Likert-type scales, it is imperative to calculate and report Cronbach's alpha coefficient for internal consistency and reliability for any scales or subscales [62].

**Table 5.** Reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha).

| Construct | Cronbach's Alpha |
|---|---|
| Obtaining information | 0.842 |
| Creating content | 0.917 |
| Communicating with customers | 0.868 |
| Advantages of social media | 0.948 |
| Overall reliability | 0.958 |

Reliability analysis revealed that the entire scale and each construct tested are valid and reliable because Cronbach's alpha coefficients are greater than 0.8 [63].

In order to determine the correlation between the dependent variable (advantages of social media) and the independent variables (obtaining information, creating content, and communicating with customers), a bivariate correlation analysis was performed. The Pearson correlation coefficient (r) is a measure of the strength of the association between two variables and the direction of the relationship.

The correlations between the variables under investigation in this research are displayed in Table 6.

**Table 6.** Pearson correlation coefficients.

| | AVS | OIN | CCO | CCU |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Advantages of social media | 1 | | | |
| Obtaining information | 0.529 ** | 1 | | |
| Creating content | 0.477 ** | 0.528 ** | 1 | |
| Communicating with customers | 0.515 ** | 0.438 ** | 0.531 ** | 1 |

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results of Table 6 indicated a significant correlation between all variables at a significance level of 0.01. According to Hinkle et al. [64], the correlation coefficient between 0.30 and 0.50 can be interpreted as a low positive (negative) correlation and between 0.50 and 0.70 as a moderate positive (negative) correlation. Therefore, there was a moderate positive correlation between advantages of social media and obtaining information (r = 0.529, N = 385, $p < 0.001$). The same moderate positive correlation was found between advantages of social media and communicating with customers (r = 0.515, N = 385, $p < 0.001$). However, there was a low positive correlation between advantages of social media and creating content (r = 0.477, N = 385, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, obtaining information collection had moderate direct correlations with creating content (r = 0.528, N = 385, $p < 0.001$) and a low positive correlation with communicating with customers (r = 0.438, N = 385, $p < 0.001$). A moderate direct relationship was found between Creating content and communicating with customers (r = 0.531, N = 385, $p < 0.001$).

### *4.4. Multiple Regression Analysis*

A standard multiple regression analysis (forced entry) was performed between the dependent variable (Advantages of social media) and the independent variables (obtaining information, creating content, and communicating with customers). Forced entry (or enter, as it is known in SPSS) is a method in which all of the independent variables are entered into the regression model simultaneously [65].

In multiple regression analysis, four assumptions are made [66]: linearity of the relationship between dependent and independent variables, constant variance of the error terms (homoscedasticity), normality of the error term distribution, and independence of residuals.

The assumptions were tested by examining normal probability graphs of residuals and scatter diagrams of residuals versus predicted residuals. No violations of normality, linearity, or homoscedasticity of residuals were detected.

The presence of substantial intercorrelations (multicollinearity) among predictors was also examined. SPSS Output provides the variance inflation factor (VIF) and tolerance statistics for independent variables (Table 7).

**Table 7.** Collinearity statistics.

| Variable | Tolerance | VIF |
|---|---|---|
| OIN | 0.687 | 1.457 |
| CCO | 0.610 | 1.640 |
| CCU | 0.684 | 1.462 |

The smallest value of VIF indicates the absence of multicollinearity. According to Gareth et al. [67], a VIF value that exceeds 5 or 10 indicates a problematic amount of collinearity. Tolerance is calculated as 1 divided by the VIF, and a value below 0.2 indicates a potential problem [68]. As is evident in Table 7, the VIF values are all well below 5 and the tolerance statistics are all well above 0.2; therefore, there is no collinearity within independent variables.

Independence of residuals can be tested with the Durbin–Watson test, which tests for serial correlations between errors. Specifically, it tests whether adjacent residuals are

correlated. According to Field [65], the value of the Durbin–Watson test can vary between 0 and 4, with a value of 2 meaning that the residuals are uncorrelated. The value of the Durbin–Watson test is 1.933, which is so close to 2 that the assumption has been met.

Table 8 shows the summary of the regression model and the overall fit statistics. The multiple correlation coefficient R is one measure of the quality of the prediction of the dependent variable (advantages of social media). A value of 0.627 indicates a good level of prediction. R Square (also called the coefficient of determination) is 0.394, meaning that 39.4% of the variance in advantages of social media can be explained by the variances in the independent variables obtaining information, creating content, and communicating with customers.

**Table 8.** Model summary and ANOVA.

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 0.627 | 0.394 | 0.389 | 0.57687 | 82.403 | <0.001 |

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) proves the statistical significance of the regression model. SPSS output indicates that independent variables statistically significantly predict the dependent variable, F (3, 381) = 82.4033, $p < 0.001$ (the regression model is a good fit to the data).

The findings of the multiple regression analysis are presented in Table 9.

**Table 9.** Summary of hypothesis.

| Hypothesis | Regression Weights | Standardized Coefficients Beta | t-Value | *p*-Value [1] | Result |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| H1 | OIN→ASM | 0.321 | 6.659 | <0.001 ** | Accepted |
| H2 | CCO→ASM | 0.152 | 2.976 | 0.003 * | Accepted |
| H3 | CCU→ASM | 0.294 | 6.087 | <0.001 ** | Accepted |

[1] * significant at $p < 0.05$, ** significant at $p < 0.001$.

## 5. Discussion

The research findings on the role of social media in the retail sector offer valuable insights to academics, practitioners, and decision makers. The findings of our research suggest that retailers should develop a comprehensive social media strategy that encompasses obtaining information, creating content, and communicating with customers. By incorporating these elements into their social media approach, retailers can maximize their perceived advantages and enhance their overall performance.

In terms of theoretical implications, our study emphasizes the significance of actively monitoring social media channels to gather market intelligence, analyze competitors, and identify customer preferences. This information should be used to improve decision making and enhance customer satisfaction. The research also highlights the importance of focusing on generating compelling content that resonates with the target audience of retailers using social media platforms to enhance brand visibility. Additionally, maintaining active communication with customers through social networks, including responding to enquiries and feedback, is crucial to fostering meaningful interactions and promoting customer satisfaction, loyalty, and brand advocacy.

The results of the research are consistent with the results of other similar studies in the field [14,17,20,43,45,48,54] and complement the few approaches in the literature [1,27–31] that present some aspects regarding the adoption of social media in the Romanian business environment.

Although our research is based on only some of the variables considered by other similar models [14,43,48] that investigate different aspects related to retailers' adoption of social media, our study remains relevant. This is because our research explores the

interdependence between the advantages and attributes associated with various methods of using social media. Additionally, our research focuses on several specific dimensions of the adoption of social media by retailers.

For instance, despite utilizing qualitative research and concentrating on a specific subset of retailers (independent retailers within the food sector), a recent study [14] indicates the equivalent significance of employing social media for communication and information acquisition, similar to our own research. Regarding the issue of obtaining information through social media channels, although there is little discussion in the literature on the role of social media in driving innovation, our research design (as depicted in Table 1) highlights the role of social media in gathering information on industry trends that facilitate innovation. Similarly to another study [45], we argue that firms should strive to use customer-centric interactions as a way to capture knowledge and use it in the innovation process rather than as a way to exclusively create value for the customer. Harnessing social media to acquire fresh ideas, as well as collaborate and refine ideas with customers, presents an intriguing avenue for enhancing organizational innovation processes and outcomes.

Another special side of social media that we addressed in our research is related to creating content not only by the retailer but also by the customers, through reviews and ratings. Although it refers specifically to Facebook, another study in the field [48] shows that one of the factors that leads to increased online sales, improved customer satisfaction, and, above all, increased user confidence is precisely the query and review system, reinforcing the ideas presented in our research.

In terms of customer communication, another study [17], although it uses social exchange theory, shows that brands must establish strong relationships through high-quality consumer–brand interactions to significantly increase purchase intentions. This confirms the importance of two-way communication with clients through social media, which we indicated in our study.

## 6. Conclusions

Today's communication is changing every day. Currently, the use of virtual technologies is increasingly influential in decision making in retail businesses, and with the rise of web 2.0, it is vitally important to use social networks as a means of communication to interact with customers and be consistent with current information trends. Business organizations need to be updated with the latest information trends of our era, which implies managing social media networks, platforms, and applications in order to be in direct contact with their clients, in a different way, so that they can become highly personalized in addressing and fulfilling the needs of their consumers.

In this context, the main contribution of our study refers to emphasizing the role of social media from the perspective of retailers. After critically reviewing the advantages of using social media presented by both scholars and practitioners, the focus moved to three major opportunities that social media provides: Obtaining information, communicating with customers, and creating content. As we have shown in this article, these dimensions of social media have been less approached in the scientific literature in relation to the perception of Romanian merchants; thus, our study represents an element of originality for the research in Romania. All three hypotheses developed for our research were confirmed. Therefore, using social media to obtain information, create content, and communicate with customers will have a significant and positive influence on the advantages perceived by retailers.

The findings emphasize the strategic importance of social media for retailers in Romania. The results of our research can be used to make recommendations to retailers. Therefore, retailers should prioritize and integrate social media into their overall strategies. The practical implications of our research can be grouped according to the analyzed aspects, as follows:

- Gathering information: Retailers should actively monitor and engage with social media platforms to gather market insights, information about competitors, and customer

preferences. This information can be used to develop decision-making processes, improve product offerings, and enhance customer satisfaction.

- Content creation: Retailers should focus on generating relevant and engaging content that resonates with their target audience, about which they can also collect information through social media, as shown in the above lines. By leveraging social media platforms to share valuable content, retailers can increase brand visibility and attract customer attention.
- Customer communication: Retailers should actively engage with customers on social media platforms, respond to their enquiries and feedback, and foster meaningful interactions. This can enhance customer satisfaction, loyalty, and brand advocacy.

During the development of the research, there were limitations, such as the lack of research papers focused on the connection between the variables used in our research and the background of previous studies on the specific topic of retailers in Romania: This was the main reason for using studies carried out in other countries. There was also a deficiency in the size of the population and the unavailability of a complete sample frame, which constrained the researchers to select convenience sampling as the approach for this research.

As was mentioned before, the model in our research explains only 39.4% of the variance in the advantages of social media. This indicates that there are other factors beyond the independent variables (obtaining information, creating content, and communicating with customers) that influence the dependent variable. Here are some potential additional factors that could contribute to the remaining 60% of the variance: the competitive landscape, technological infrastructure, consumer behavior and demographics, organizational resources and capabilities, the regulatory environment, and external factors such as economic conditions and cultural norms.

It is important to note that the specific factors influencing the advantages of social media in the Romanian retail sector may vary and would require further investigation. Conducting additional research, including qualitative studies or exploring other variables, could help identify and understand these additional factors more comprehensively. Thus, it would be appropriate for future research to be carried out on a larger sample and to take into account other variables than those considered in our study. Thus, other independent variables, such as the use of social media for promotion, customer involvement, or employee involvement, could be considered. Additionally, future studies can select specific social media platforms as the focus of study or may focus on specific types of retailers. Furthermore, research is needed using different countries and industries and in the context of B2B or B2B2C business models.

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