**RESEARCH ARTICLE**                                  **Open Access**

# Presenting a Systemic Model for the Effectiveness of Marketing Communication Activities in Social Networks

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**Abstract**
Retailers need to take care of their customers and attract new customers through introducing and advertising their products, considering that social network marketing communication has created a new and profound transformation in businesses. Retailers need to exploit and be more effective. Making their connections in the created space. Therefore, in this research, we present a model for the effectiveness of marketing communication in social networks for the first time in the retail industry in Iran. The statistical population of the research was determined by using targeted sampling among experts, including academic professors and marketing managers of retail companies, and using coding in the software, four main themes were extracted from interviews with the statistical population and related to the subject of research and information. Among the researcher's notes, the codes (concepts) of branding, brand preference, sales increase, word of mouth, and commercial advertising have been the most frequent. This model can be used by retail owners and business managers to create a sustainable competitive advantage through social networks, increasing the effectiveness of market communication.
**Keywords:** *Marketing communications, Social networks, Theme analysis*

## Introduction

The increasing use of social networks, especially for product marketing purposes, is unquestionable and causes a huge transformation in the way marketing communication is shaped and its effectiveness (Nam, 2022: 223). In fact, social networks provide a good opportunity for marketers to establish two-way communication with customers beyond traditional methods (Nazari & Saeid Kiani, 2022: 34). The important issue in this regard is that marketing communication through social networks is an opportunity for entrepreneurs, start-ups, marketing managers, brand managers and all those who somehow play a role in the development of their business (Hakimpour et al., 2021: 41). According to the review of all the articles of the Development Management Journal since 2007, whose research area was "social media marketing" and "strategies of mass communication websites", it was found that, in general, the emphasis of most researchers on the impact of marketing communication on issues such as: acceptance Advertising and brand strength, measuring the effectiveness of interactive media, measuring the effectiveness of

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integrated marketing communications, the effectiveness of marketing communications in commercial markets, the effectiveness of advertising media on consumer behavior, increasing the effectiveness of marketing communications, the impact of the Internet on integrated marketing communications, The effect of emotional intelligence of employees on the effectiveness of marketing and similar has been (Yousefi & Haddad zadeh, 2021: 73). These researches have either measured the effectiveness or only measured the impact of marketing communications on one dimension, and none of them have comprehensively studied the effective factors of social network marketing communications; therefore, there is no one-size-fits-all model of the effectiveness of marketing communications in social networks (Tuten, 2021: 37). The importance of this issue can be examined from the point of view that basically, with correct and targeted marketing in social networks, customers' problems can be understood to a great extent and the investment to solve the problems can also be turned into profit (Negahdari nia, 2020: 118). This is what shows business owners how an audience feels about their brand and what kind of feedback they get after encountering this brand (Stoddard, 2022: 107). Therefore, by using analysis tools such as access rate, sales rate and interaction with the audience, it was far more accurate and better evaluated (Shaun, 2022: 44). Marketing with an emphasis on social networks helps business owners to reach correctly targeted audiences using targeted advertising (Krasniak, 2021: 66). The second importance of this issue is that in social networks, it is possible for business owners to communicate with potential customers, and it is easy to attract them by sending messages and sell brands and brands with minimal effort. The cost of development (Zahay et al., 2022: 95).

The necessity of reviewing this article is that, basically, the successful encounter of businesses with social networks requires an understanding of the strategic thinking of managers in this field, because without familiarity with this thinking, it is not possible to analyze the use and non-use of these networks by businesses in the country. Therefore, investigating the effectiveness of marketing communication activities in social networks prompted researchers to form this research.

With these preliminaries, the current research tries to provide a comprehensive model for the effectiveness of marketing communications in social networks, using thematic analysis, and to answer the question: What is the model of the effectiveness of marketing communications activities in social networks? The aim of the current research is to design a model of the effectiveness of marketing communications in social networks in the retail industry, and its main question is to identify key factors on the effectiveness of marketing communications in social networks.

## Literature Review

Some of the most important researches based on social media marketing are briefly reviewed below:

-Ghorbi et al (2022) in an article with title: "Investigating the Effect of Social Media Marketing Activities on Repurchase Intention and Sustainable Social Communication (Case Study: Atiesaz Iranian Company in Mashhad)" conclued that Social media marketing activities have a direct, positive and significant effect on repurchase intention and sustainable social connection and customer satisfaction. Also, the results of mediating variables also show that customer experience and perceived value have a positive and direct effect on customer satisfaction. On the other hand, no significant relationship has been observed between customer identity variables and customer satisfaction.

-Khezri et al (2022) in an article with title: "The effect of social media marketing and perceived customer value on customer

satisfaction with the mediating role of brand image and advertising costs in the hotel and maritime tourism services industry" argued that social media marketing and customer perceived value have a significant effect on customer satisfaction. The effect of social media marketing and customer perceived value was also confirmed through the mediating role of brand image variables and advertising costs on the final dependent variable of customer satisfaction.

-Deheshti et al (2022). In an article with title:"The role of social media marketing on purchasing intention and loyalty of sport recreational centers customers based on the Uses & gratification theory" cocnlued that the components of use and satisfaction have a significant relationship with satisfaction, also satisfaction has a significant relationship with purchase intention and loyalty, and purchase intention has a significant relationship with customer loyalty. It seems that the theory of use and satisfaction can be used effectively in measuring the level of customer satisfaction as well as the purchase intention and loyalty of sports complexes.

-Seifollahi & Eskandari (2021) in an article with title: "Social media marketing and consumer buying intentions; mediation of brand Image and awareness" argued that social media marketing has a direct effect on customers purchasing intention and through the mediator role of brand image, and brand awareness affects customers' purchasing intention.

-Abdoli et al (2021) in an article with title: "The Effectiveness of Social Media Marketing Model with Combined Approach (Case Study: Tehran Milk Industry Experts and Policymakers)" argeud that the final indicators of social media marketing have been presented in the form of a paradigmatic model of causal conditions, background conditions, social media marketing phenomenon, strategies and actions, intervening conditions and social media marketing consequences. 37 categories

with 132 indicators were identified in the quantitative stage, in two rounds. The first round of fuzzy Delphi (6 categories and 33 indicators) and the second round (4 categories and 28 indicators) were removed, leaving 27 categories with 72 questions.

-Khojasteh et al (2021) in an article with title: "Designing an Ethical Social Media Marketing Model in Small and Medium Enterprises" conclued that Ethical factors related to the market, social media ethical marketing goals, social media audience, type of business are the causal factors. Social media strategies in displaying and selling products and services in the target market, content marketing strategy, word-of-mouth advertising (WOM), gamification, marketing of influential and respected people, increasing moral awareness and partnership with the brand as a fashion research model strategy. They commented. Intervening conditions and background conditions were also among the other components of this model, which, by influencing the strategy, provided the basis for achieving the main phenomenon of this model.

-Popova et al (2021) in an article with title: "Digital Marketing of Social Networks as a Factor for Sustainable Business Development during the Covid-19 Pandemic" conclued that Due to the prevalence of the corona virus in the past three years, many business companies, especially small companies, use social media marketing to manage their costs and attract more customers, and since these types of businesses are facing a lack of financial resources. And they often need to keep their costs down, social media marketing is considered the best tool for home businesses to achieve their goals.

-Ravi (2021) in an article with title:"Social Media Marketing: A Conceptual Study" ar gued that the structural features and network connections affect our interactions between customers, increase the level of participation and ultimately lead to the strengthening of the consumer's interest in the product. In today's

market, social media has started a faster movement to serve companies.

In general, in Table 1, some of the most important researches and researches with the focus and keywords of social media marketing and their indicators have been included.

Table 1

*A number of articles with keywords related to social media marketing*

| Year | Number of articles with the word "social media" | Number of related articles with details about "Social Media Marketing" | Relevant keywords in "Social Media Marketing" articles | Research type | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Quantity | Quality |
| 2021 | 23 | 13 | social media, brand, online, online marketing, social media marketing, facebook, twitter, company, CSR, social networking | 8 | 5 |
| 2020 | 14 | 5 | mass media, social media, consumer goals, relationships, digital media, social theory, firm, consumer | 3 | 2 |
| 2019 | 10 | 5 | Mass communication media, consumer behavior, interaction, credit, credibility, public relations | 3 | 2 |
| 2018 | 9 | 6 | Social media websites, index, culture, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, collaboration, enterprise, user-generated content | 5 | 1 |
| 2017 | 6 | 6 | Advertising, ethics, cross-cultural, viral, trademark, marketing, brand attitude | 4 | 2 |
| 2016 | 6 | 3 | Public relations marketing, social media, advertising, consumer-oriented marketing | 0 | 3 |
| 2015 | 1 | 1 | Consumer recommendations, online shopper reviews, online word of mouth, perceived credibility, product reviews, website promotion | 1 | 0 |
| Total | 69 Articles | 39 (article related to social media marketing keywords | | 24 | 15 |

## Theoretical Framework

Digital marketing communications is marketing to determine and reach human needs. One of the shortest definitions of marketing is fulfilling needs in a profitable way (Rodrigues, 2021: 17). Marketing communications are tools that companies use to inform, persuade, and remind customers about their products and services. Marketing communications are very important in the marketing of companies' products and services. Companies with better marketing communications are more successful than other companies (Zitkin et al., 2021: 56). Meanwhile, the digital age has changed the expectations of customers from communication with brands. Before social media, mass media communication channels such as television and radio allowed brand managers to talk to consumers. The expansion of social media is the beginning of a revolution in the field of communication, which has made consumers expect a brand to interact with them in a way that all aspects of this conversation, including timing, channel and content, are controlled by the consumer (Majidian et al., 2021: 276). But when consumers feel they've been mistreated, that same discourse can be detrimental to a brand's mental standing. The dangers of customer service missteps are frequently shared on the evening news and spread across social media channels. For example, Dave Carroll's United Breaks "Guitars" video has gone viral on YouTube, turning a budding singer into a household name. Such an example shows the power of social networks. Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter have attracted more than 90% of teenagers and young adults and account for a quarter of all Internet traffic (Apple et al., 2021: 81).

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## Marketing in social networks

Social media marketing is the process of promoting websites, products, and services through online social channels and building relationships with current or potential consumers, providing marketers with significant opportunities to reach consumers. In their social communities and creating personal connections with them. Social media marketing practices are part of the advertising

mix in the new communication paradigm (Chahal et al., 2019: 196). In general, marketing based on social networks is a set of marketing activities that uses social relationships formed between people to increase the organization's sales. Different examples of network-based marketing include word-of-mouth marketing, innovation diffusion, viral marketing (Wong et al., 2022: 340).

## Social networks and marketing communications

The growing trend of using social networks in different cultures and countries has seen an exponential increase in the levels of online communication worldwide, ranging from consumer-to-consumer interactions, consumer-to-business interactions, company-to-consumer interactions, and company-to-consumer interactions in CMSE (Continuity social environments through computers) (Peruta & Shields, 2018: 179). Emerging digital media technologies, especially the Internet, social networking websites (eg: Facebook, LinkedIn, Snapchat), mass communication websites (eg: YouTube, Flickr) and mobile networks (based on Web 2.0) market and dynamics Companies have transformed business by changing competitive positions. Social media websites have changed the rules of the game for marketers to understand online consumer behavior in social networks. Marketers try to understand the business strategy for survival in social environments and create several methods to identify the behavior of buying goods and services using decision-making patterns (Wang, 2020: 3).

## Mass communication tools and social networks used by companies

Over the years, the use of social networks and social networking sites (SNS) has indirectly increased, leading to social media advertising as a strategy for companies to increase visibility, sales, value, and customer engagement. Hence, social networks have become a key component in marketing, advertising and communication. However, companies have faced several challenges on how to use these networking sites to sell and reach customers. Hence, research on social networks and SNS usage examines the impact of social media, social relationships, and marketing activities (Larimo et al., 2021: 57).

## Methodology

The current research is practical in terms of purpose. In terms of the method, it is descriptive and the research was done in the retail industry (chain stores) using the qualitative method of thematic analysis. To implement the qualitative research methods; That is, the theme analysis theory, the statistical community consisting of experts in the field of social networks marketing, including professors and experts active in this field, has been selected and the theoretical sampling method has been used. Theoretical sampling is sampling based on emerging concepts derived from data. It should be noted that theoretical sampling continues until the categories reach theoretical saturation; the meaning of theoretical saturation is a stage in which no new data appears in relation to the category and the relationships between the categories are established and confirmed (Edwards, 2021: 47-49). In this regard, 15 experts in the field of social network marketing, including professors and experts (experts active in the retail industry of chain stores) have been interviewed. The interview questions are open-ended and things like: the objectives of marketing communication and the effectiveness factors of social network marketing communication have been examined and the interview process has been recorded and implemented.

### Qualitative analysis (thematic analysis)

Thematic analysis is a method to determine, analyze and express the patterns (themes) in the data. At a minimum, this method organizes the data and describes it in detail; but it can go beyond this and interpret different aspects of the research topic. Qualitative approaches are very diverse, complex and subtle. Thematic analysis is the first method of qualitative analysis that researchers must learn. Because this method provides the basic skills needed to implement many other methods of qualitative analysis.

**Data analysis steps using thematic analysis method**

The process of thematic analysis begins when the analyst considers patterns of meaning and topics of potential interest. This analysis involves a continuous back-and-forth between data sets and coded summaries and analysis of the resulting data. Writing the analysis starts from the very first stage. In general, there is no unique way to start a study on thematic analysis (Weraas, 2022: 13-14).

**The six stages of theme analysis**

**Step 1.** Getting to know the data: In order for the researcher to get to know the depth and scope of the content of the data, it is necessary to immerse himself in them to some extent. Data immersion typically involves "repeating the data" and reading the data actively (ie, looking for meanings and patterns).

**Step 2.** Creating initial codes: The second step begins when the researcher has read the data and become familiar with them. This step involves creating initial codes from the data. Codes introduce characteristics of the data that the analyst finds interesting. Coded data differ from the units of analysis (themes). Coding can be done manually or through software programs. If coding is done manually.

**Step 3.** Searching for themes: This step includes categorizing different codes into potential themes and sorting all coded data summaries into specified themes. In fact, the researcher begins the analysis of his codes and considers how different codes can be combined to create an overall theme.

**Step 4.** Revising themes: The fourth step begins when the researcher creates a set of themes and revises them. This stage includes two stages of reviewing and refining the themes. The first step includes a review at the level of coded summaries. In the second step, the validity of the themes in relation to the data set is considered. If the theme map works well, then you can move on to the next step; but if the map does not match the data set well, the researcher should go back and continue coding until a satisfactory thematic map is created. At the end of this stage, the researcher should have sufficient knowledge of what the different themes are, how they fit with each other, and the whole story they tell about the data.

**Step 5.** Defining and Naming Themes: The fifth step begins when there is a satisfactory map of themes. In this stage, the researcher defines and revises the topics presented for analysis, then analyzes the data inside them. By means of definition and review, the nature of what a theme discusses is determined and the issue of which aspect of data each theme contains is determined.

**Step 6.** Preparing the report: The sixth step begins when the researcher has a set of well-defined themes. This stage includes final analysis and report writing (Edwards, 2021: 76-79). Figure (2) shows the six stages of theme analysis.
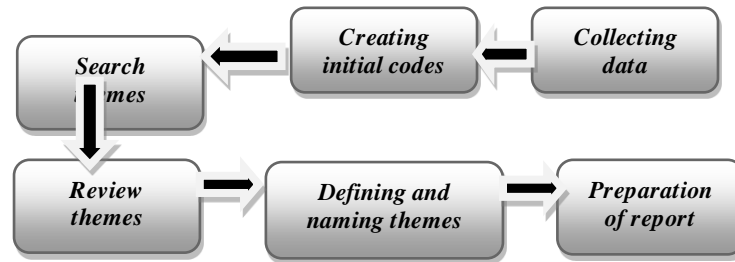
Figure 1. *The six stages of theme analysis (theme) (source: Braun & Clark, 2021)*

Therefore, in the theme analysis section, the questions of the interview questionnaire were used to determine the partial themes, and the partial themes were identified in the Max Kyuda software. Finally, Excel software was used to arrange the output obtained from the interview. The same details were given to 15 experts with demographic information in Table (2).

## Findings

The demographic information of the interview participants is shown in Table (2).

Table 2
*Demographic characteristics of experts*

| Category | Abundance percentage | Abundance | Demographic information |
|---|---|---|---|
| Less than 35 | Age | 3 | 20 |
| 35-50 | | 11 | 73.33 |
| Above 50 | | | |
| Total | | 1 | 6.66 |
| BS | Education | | |
| Masters | | 15 | 100 |
| Ph.D | | 1 | 6.66 |
| Total | | 8 | 53.3 |
| 1-5 | Precedent | 6 | 40 |
| 5-20 | | 15 | 100 |
| Above 20 | | 2 | 15.33 |
| Total | | 9 | 60 |

In this research, the following factors have been considered to measure validity:

**Research validity Long-term involvement and continuous observation:** Immersion (long-term involvement) is one of the important actions of the researcher in the research process. In this way, the researcher is fully involved in the research, establishes a correct and appropriate relationship with the participants and is receptive to the deep concepts that are revealed in the study process. If a long-term engagement is established in the field of research, continuous in-depth observation is provided. This also probably increases the creation of scientific accuracy (Adams, 2022: 51-53). The current research has been conducted for about 2 and a half years, and during this period, the contact number and communication of the researcher with the participants has been there so that they trust the researcher and most likely tell the truth or correct the previous cases if needed. In order to create assumptions for a deeper investigation and analysis.

**Peer Review by colleague:** Peer review is an interaction between the researcher and other people who have experience in the field of research methods (for example: research

associates, study consultants) and provide guidance for research design, data collection and data analysis. In this research, to conduct an audit, by presenting a summary of the interview notes to a number of members, as well as sending the final model, an opinion was taken from the members.

**Peer Review by Contributors:** A quality control process designed to improve the scientific accuracy and credibility of the researcher's recorded research interview. Peer review also contributes to the important quality control process in qualitative studies during the course of the study. In addition, the participants have had an opportunity to criticize their statements for more accuracy (Kumar, 2019: 117). For review by the participants, one of the interview questions allows the participant to state if a point was forgotten or could not be raised in the previous questions. In addition, communication channels including email and contact numbers were provided to the participants so that in case of changing their opinions or finding new points, they would provide it to the researcher within a certain period of time.

**The fourth method is the triangulation technique:** triangulation refers to the use of multiple sources of data to draw conclusions about what constitutes the truth. The purpose of triangulation is to overcome the main (intrinsic) orientations that result from using a method, an observer or a theory in studies. Applying multiple approaches in a study can lead to increasing the trust and credibility of information; because the strength of one method covers the weakness of another method. Also, researchers use various triangulation methods in order to verify the findings or ensure their completeness. Two types of triangulation methods for qualitative research are:

a) Triangulation of data sources: to use multiple sources of data in the study; for example: Interviews with nurses and patients refer to the same topic (Chilisa, 2019: 93-96).

In the current research, interviews with professors in the university field and interviews with experts who are active in the field of work and experience actually induce the triangle of data sources.

b) Researcher triangulation: using more than one researcher to collect, analyze, analyze or interpret data.

In the case of researcher triangulation, several interviews were analyzed for reliability and accuracy by the supervisor.

## Reliability of Research

Reliability refers to the consistency of research findings. In the qualitative method, using semi-structured interviews, participants' opinions are obtained and required data is collected. The reliability of the interview is discussed in stages such as interview situation, transcription and analysis. In this research, the reliability of the qualitative method is controlled through the preparation and use of a written framework for the interview. This codified framework is used in all interviews after the approval of professors and ensuring its effectiveness in covering the objectives. Interviews with professors, managers and marketing experts of the mentioned retail companies are recorded.

In order to perform a qualitative analysis of the effectiveness of marketing communication activities in social networks with the theme analysis approach, first the conducted interviews were entered into a word file and then the text of the interviews was read again and again by the researcher in order to get a complete familiarity with the interview text and in coding The least error occurs. Finally, after knowing the text of the interviews and entering the texts into the Max Kyuda software, the coding process began in the Max Kyuda software. In this way, by reading the text of the interviews and comparing it with other parts, meaningful propositions were identified, which contain important and

meaningful information related to the research question.

In the following, a code was assigned to each of the meaningful propositions that the meaning of that proposition or theme is meaningful (Figure 3). After the completion of coding, all meaningful themes were extracted according to figure (4). It was re-transcribed along with sub-themes so that a decision could be made for the next classification. The themes were studied and compared many times so that

the codes that had the most similarities and could create a single meaning together were placed in a category and grouping, and classes of codes were created that were assigned to these classes and The grouping created, the theme term was assigned. In the end, all themes were placed in a specific category. After coding, sub-themes were extracted and finally, after categorizing and clustering the sub-themes, the main themes were created.
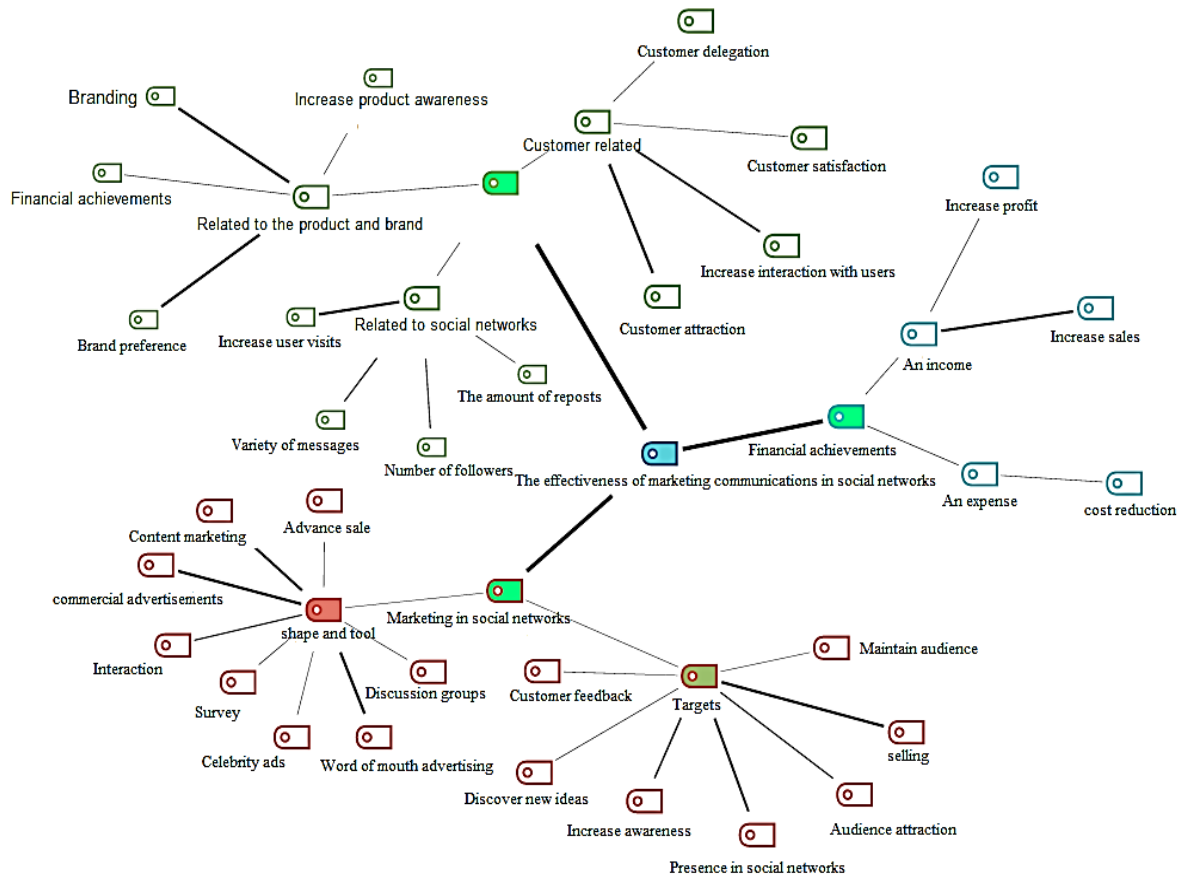


Figure 2. *Themes network and connecting themes with each other*

Table 3.

*The main and sub-themes of the effectiveness of social media marketing communications*

| The main theme | Sub-theme | Code (concept) | Abundance code |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Marketing in social networks** | Targets | Maintain audience | 7 |
| | | Sale | 50 |
| | | Audience attraction | 27 |
| | | Presence in the social network | 46 |
| | | Increasing awareness (company, product brand) | 32 |
| | | Discover new ideas | 9 |
| | | Get feedback from customers | 9 |
| | Shapes and tools | Discussion groups | 7 |
| | | Word of mouth advertising | 47 |
| | | Influential and famous people | 5 |
| | | Survey | 10 |
| | | Interaction | 20 |
| | | Commercial advertisements | 47 |
| | | Content marketing | 40 |
| | | Advance sale | 3 |
| Non-financial achievements of marketing communication in social networks | Customer related | Costumer loyalty | 2 |
| | | Customer satisfaction | 6 |
| | | Increase interaction with customers | 20 |
| | | Customer attraction | 27 |
| | Related to the product | Increase product awareness | 7 |
| | | Branding | 66 |
| | | Increase brand awareness | 7 |
| | | Brand preference | 66 |
| | Related to social networks | The amount of reposts | 3 |
| | | Number of followers | 13 |
| | | Variety of messages | 13 |
| | | Increase in users/visits | 26 |
| Financial achievements of marketing communication in social networks | An income | Increase profit | 14 |
| | | Increase sales | 50 |
| | An expense | Reduce costs | 137 |

Based on the stated contents, the schematic model of the research can be shown as Figure 3:
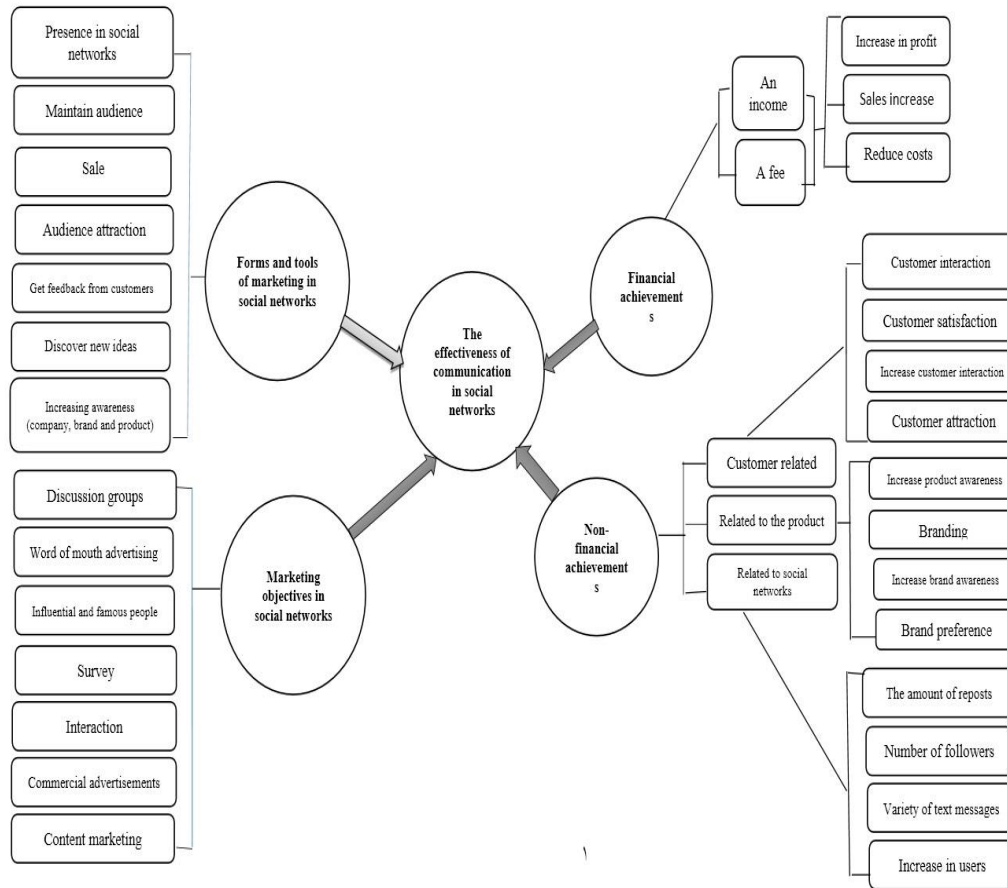
Figure 3. *Conceptual model extracted*

## Conclusion and Suggestions

A lot of research has been done about social networks and its impact on business; but despite the abundance of these studies, specific researches that comprehensively examine the effectiveness of social network marketing communications in businesses are very limited. Therefore, this research examines the factors affecting the effectiveness and objectives of marketing communication and how it is coordinated with social networks in businesses. The process of this research was such that according to the interviews and their analysis in the Max Kyuda software, 3 main themes, 7 sub-themes and 30 codes (concepts) were identified for the effectiveness of marketing communication in social networks, which are shown in Table (3). ) is given among the identified codes (concepts) cost reduction

has the most frequency, which shows itself due to the availability of social networks for companies and their customers and the ease of use for companies and the low cost of communications. Marketing, in which cost reduction is one of the most important financial achievements in social networks for companies. In the second place are the frequency of branding codes and brand preference, which is often repeated with researches such as Krasniak (2021), whose results show a two-way relationship. Between consumers and companies in mass communication websites and blogging, market growth increases brand loyalty and company value. And with the results of the research of Prota and Shields (2018), which is in the field of company value, and also with the research of Nam (2022) and Majidian and others

(2021), Maleki and Shahriari (2016), Popova and others (2020) 1) Wang et al. (2022) is in line with the third rank of sales frequency and sales increase. Khujasteh and others, 2021). It is consistent with Khazri and others (2022) and (Hakimpour and others, 2022). According to the stated codes and other codes that are the result of expert interviews, it is concluded that social networks have an interactive nature so that these networks they have made a big change in the field of internet business and have become a place for advertising companies. Therefore, knowing the opportunities and challenges of using social networks in business and marketing matters seems necessary. Among the opportunities, we can mention the interaction and the creation of a two-way relationship with the customer that business owners can get feedback from customers through social networks. Social networks created new business models that sell some businesses online. Considering that the aim of the research was to provide a model of the effectiveness of marketing communication activities in social networks, it is expected that the model presented in this research will be validated by other researchers and its effective components will be extracted.

According to the obtained model, all actors in the retail industry should use it in a practical way in order to create a competitive advantage. In order to complete and expand the current research, it is suggested to conduct the following researches.

1. In future researches, the design of the marketing communication effectiveness model should be investigated in other social networks besides Instagram.

2. The models obtained in the research conducted in different social networks should be compared.

3. Research that provides a model to measure the effectiveness of marketing communications in social networks is very necessary.

4. Other data analysis methods should be used in future researches.

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