ABSTRACT: The purpose of this study was to explore the scientific literature on the state of SMEs SMM in Kazakhstan. The rationale of the study was the development and sustainability of SMEs in the Central-Asian country as well as their more effective SMM communications. The research methodology implemented a narrative literature review with a thematic analysis as a research method. The results showed that SMEs are high on the radar of the Kazakhstani government. It supports them with various state programs and public financial companies. The development of SMEs would promote the Made in Kazakhstan production and would significantly reduce imported equivalents goods. Thus, unemployment among young people would decrease. SMM has fertile ground because Kazakhstan has high internet and social media penetration. The paper contributes to the research of the SMEs from SMM perspective. The topic is understudied in the context of Kazakhstan.

KEYWORDS: social media marketing, SMM sales funnel, small and medium-sized enterprises, Kazakhstan, linear funnel, circular funnel

INTRODUCTION

Kazakhstan is one of the most intensely working Central-Asian countries to develop the small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) backbone of its economy. Drucker (2009) shared that small companies represent the main driver of economic development and constitute the spine of socio-economic progress. The Kazakh government works to stimulate the establishment and development of SMEs. In 2019, nearly 40% of the total labour force in Kazakhstan was employed in SMEs. The government also uses this measure to fight unemployment among young people. The "largest number of unemployed prevails at the age of 29-34 years old, accounting for 28% (122.9 thousand) of the total number of unemployed" (Zholdaskyzy, 2019, para. 21). Financially, Kazakhstani SMEs are heavily dependent on high-interest rate bank loans. Thus, they build more than 80% of the banks' business portfolios (Filipov, 2020). The number of small and medium-sized enterprises amounted to 1.3 million in 2018. For the period January – December during the same year these SMEs contributed to Kazakhstan's GPR KZT 26.5 trillion. Small enterprises contributed to the highest revenue volume – KZT 18.2 trillion, which makes 68.7% (Kursiv.kz, 2019). For 2019 the most attractive business for SMEs was the trading sector is the most attractive for business. Most of all new small enterprises are either in the wholesale or retail trade constituting 35.3%, or 16.2 thousand units (Fiprom.kz, 2019). The entrepreneurs make the most substantial part of the SMEs 65.5%. However, there is a decline with -4.4% in the SMEs in 2019 compared to the same period in 2018. The quick conception...
of an SME goes together with a quick demise in most cases because of insufficient funding for traditional advertising or lack of expertise in effective social media marketing.

Social media is the most dynamically developing media market in Kazakhstan. Social Network Sites (SNS) dominate the media environment leading to changes in the psychology of information dissemination and delivery. Blogger influencers hold the lead as information sources (Vechkinzova et al., 2019). This development is strongly motivated by the high penetration of internet in Kazakhstan – above 70%. Social media in Kazakhstan has continued increasing its role as one of the leading sources of information, from 10% in 2010 to 47% six years later. For that period, the use of social media Kazakhstan was more common than in Germany (EBRD, 2016).

Problem statement

Despite being of great importance SMEs for the Kazakh economy, many of them have the unfortunate fate like SMEs in other countries around the world where "over 50% of the small-medium companies die before a period of 10 years" (Adnan, 2019), para. 8). Being able to communicate the product and services the SME offers effectively is of crucial importance for its survival. Unfortunately, SMEs in Kazakhstan face the same problems as SMEs in other parts of the world – limited financial resources and time, insufficient SMM expertise, and low organizational visibility constraints. The lack of sufficient funding for SMEs springs forms several facts. First, small and medium-sized enterprises face higher demands in accessing available public or private funds compared to big businesses, especially in developing countries like Kazakhstan. Second, the more significant number of SMEs are not listed in stock exchanges, which cuts their access to capital markets (Dong & Men, 2014). Primary sources of funding of SMEs fall in the two big categories of formal funding and informal funding sources.

Insufficient SMM expertise the second drawback for SMEs, because social media is an environment of relationships and not that much of simple transactions. Based on this, there are several features, which presses SMEs' owners to have high expertise, particularly in social media marketing. The owner exerts more substantial control over the whole management of the enterprise. Unfortunately, managing owners rely on general and unsystematic knowledge and skills but lack focused expertise in social media marketing. Second, SMEs owners as the face and voice of the enterprise are in the position to establish contacts through which to develop the SME's network of partners as well as clients. However, networking as a strategic approach must be performed in a structured and persistent way on a personal, business and social media level.

"Social or business networks on the web may allow the individual/manager to construct a network by selecting the contacts, even though the contacts have never met. In this case, networking is assumed to be an appropriate tool for SME marketing" (Nakara et al., 2012, p. 392). Low organizational visibility affects both the public image of the enterprise as well as its bottom-line. Social media marketing facilitates an SME to stand out from the competitive crowd and helps it increase its social media funnel clients base. Thus, the enterprise has better chances of survival.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to explore the scientific literature on the nature of social media marketing sales funnel (SMMF) and SMEs within the Kazakhstani context. A social media marketing funnel is the process of designing the consumer journey and leading through it in such a way that it has positive effects on SMEs' visibility and bottom-line. The rationale for this study was the increased focus of the Kazakhstani government to stimulate entrepreneurship and SME development and ensuring their
sustainability. Second, social media marketing is a more cost-effective promotional approach compared to traditional media advertising and promotions and in the Kazakhstani context. Third, the penetration of social media is in Kazakhstan is very high and holds enormous potential for the SMEs. Third, at the time of the publication, there was little research exploring the SMM funnel and SMEs separately in the context of the largest country in Central Asia.

Research Questions
The research poses two questions to address the research problem, namely the overarching research question: what scientific literature exists on the social media marketing funnel and the state of development of SMEs in Kazakhstan. To answer this question, the following narrower research questions were asked:

RQ1. What is the state of development of SMEs in Kazakhstan?
RQ2. What is the contemporary structure of a social media marketing sales funnel?

METHODOLOGY
The research implemented a narrative literature review as a method of analysis. A literature review is a study in its own right (Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2016; van Wee & Banister, 2016). As a methodology, the literature review falls in the mixed-method research area. The literature review traditionally provides an up-to-date overview of the existing scientific literature in a specific area of knowledge. It is "a rigorous process of critical reading through, reflecting on, and sorting of various sources of scientific value. It aims to identify the essential attributes of the topic under research" (Filipov, 2019, p. 955).

It helps researchers with offering a valuable base for their more specific and empirically oriented inquiries. The current study implemented a narrative literature review as the most appropriate research methodology. It was valuable for exploring the research problem because the latter is an intersection of scientific knowledge across disciplines of business strategy, marketing, and media and communications. The methodological value of the narrative literature review is that it facilitates the mapping of intersecting themes (Snyder, 2019). Therefore, the research method employed in the article is thematic analysis.

Thematic analysis (TA) is a flexible and useful qualitative research method to explore already existing knowledge patterns on a particular subject from various sources. "It is a method for identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set" (Nowell et al., 2017). TA helps to explore findings and meanings across a whole dataset or to examine in greater depths one specific aspect of a phenomenon and to define common themes (Braun & Clarke, 2012). It allows for implementing an inductive approach and let the themes emerge from the data.

Literature review
Nature and types of SMEs
Small and medium-sized enterprises (SME), from an economic perspective, are the core of a national economy. They "represent over 99% of the total number of enterprises in most economies" (Neagu, 2016, p. 333). SMEs play an essential role in creating a more diverse and competitive economy. They positively affect the development of a country by:
1. providing jobs;
2. focusing on innovative processes, both in technology and in management;
3. being a source of entrepreneurship abilities;
4. put a contribution in forming goods and services;
5. achieving fundamental long-term goals of a government;
They employ the most workforce on a local and national level and contribute the highest portion of taxes to the gross public revenue (GRP). Thus, SMEs become a driving force of economic development and social-economic progress (Druker, 2009). The European Commission stated that the SMEs are the backbone of the European Union (EU) economy (EU, 2019).

Since 2014 European SMEs have constituted 99% of all European enterprises. They created almost 85% of the new jobs on the labour market in the EU. "The European Commission considers SMEs and entrepreneurship as key to ensuring economic growth, innovation, job creation, and social integration in the EU" (Gouardères, 2019, p. 1).

SMEs can be broadly classified as traditional and modern (entrepreneurial) enterprises. The traditional SME is, in most cases, an inherited business, which operates on a small market and exists on the principle of the habit and less on a strategic business and communication decisions. The "small traditional enterprise, that, mostly, doesn't have a long way strategy, but a small marketplace, the process of making goods being inherited from generation to generation" (Neagu, 2016, p. 332). Contrary to the traditional SME, the entrepreneurial one is an enterprise set up with the long-term goal of expansion and growth by creating a blue ocean of opportunities.

Therefore, the entrepreneurship spirit of the modern SME "represents the specific style and method about strategic guidance, decision making, and implementation" (Lan & Wu, 2010, p. 54) of sustainable management. This type of management is influenced by factors such as the economic sector, local or regional market, the competitiveness of the business offer, etc. (Lazăr et al., 2006).

From a sociological perspective, SMEs build the middle class as the most viable segment in the structure of a society. Therefore, it can be claimed that the SMEs not only build up the middle class of society but also help to uphold the stability in a country. Neagu (2016) claimed that the existence of a well-established and sustained middle class narrows the social and economic inequalities and helps for a more even distribution of power. Despite the positive economic and social impacts SMEs have, they face serious challenges. Insufficient funding makes them vulnerable to market tremors or economic crises. He distinguishes several weaknesses of SMEs, such as:

1. lack of sufficient and flexible funding, which leaves them vulnerable to economic downturns;
2. a high degree of dependence on a small pool of customers;
3. lack of access to affordable integrated marketing communications services; low access to new technologies;
4. insufficient business and managerial knowledge and skills;

The lack of financial resources strongly influences integrated marketing communication (IMC) activities, which reflects on their market position. "Companies find it particularly seductive to pull funds out of [IMC] during economic downturns" (Shimp & Andrews, 2018, p. 239). A second challenge is the lack of sufficient entrepreneurial competencies and understanding of broader economic national and international developments blunt SMEs' competitive cutting edge. "A perceived lack of capabilities remains one of the most frequently cited barriers for people to start a business" (OECD, 2018, p. 4). Such a situation directly threatens the long-term viability of an SME.

To overcome their lack of financial support for traditional IMC initiatives, SMEs can rely on social media marketing. For example, traditional advertising as the quickest communication strategy is a rather financially challenging compared to advertising in social media. Advertising rates in social networking sites (SNS) are lower in comparison to traditional media (Ohajionu & Mathews, 2015).
Small and medium-sized enterprises in Kazakhstan

The development of SMEs in Kazakhstan has been high on the agenda of the government. Kazakhstani SMEs help with creating new jobs and keeping unemployment in the country low. They are much more flexible and mobile in their functioning and production. SMEs in Kazakhstan function as "a shock absorber in the economy, helping to avoid the sharp unemployment during the crisis" (Nurseiit & Nurseiit, 2013, p. 59).

Bimendiyeva (2018) argued that at the dawn of Kazakhstan's Independence, small and medium-sized businesses were identified in Kazakhstan as the most critical sector of the economy. As early as 1997 the Small Business Development Fund JSC (after 2007 renamed to DMAU) was established with a decree of the First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan to provide financial and non-financial support to SMEs. The SMEs in Kazakhstan have been at a stage of active development. The volume of production of the Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise sector in Kazakhstan reached 26.5 trillion KZT ($65.2 million) for 2018. It was an increase with 1.2% compared with 2017. Small enterprises provide 18.2 trillion KZT, and Medium-sized enterprises added 5.2 trillion KZT. At the end of 2019, Kazakhstani SMEs contributed 28.5% share to the GDP of Kazakhstan (Seilkhanov, 2019). Unfortunately, in 2019, the number of SMEs decreased with -4.4% (Finprom.kz, 2019).

To support the start-up of small and medium-sized enterprises, the Kazakh government facilitates financially, analytically and logistically SME entrepreneurship. It has introduced several programs with which to stimulate SMEs in various regions in the country. The flagship one is the state program Business Roadmap 2020. It is considered as one of the most important economic tools for implementing the policy of business development in the country. The Program aimed at ensuring sustainable and balanced growth of regional entrepreneurship in non-primary sectors of the economy, as well as to preserve and create new jobs, support new business initiatives, improve the business sector, and support export-oriented industries.

The National Chamber of Entrepreneurs of Kazakhstan Atameken, as part of the second direction of the Program for the Development of Productive Employment and Mass Entrepreneurship for 2017-2021 Enbek implements the Bastau Entrepreneurship Fundamentals Project (BEFP). It is a subprogram designed to stimulate entrepreneurship in rural regions as well as in cities. The goal of the BEFP is to train self-employed and unemployed people to become entrepreneurs. Thus, it aims to increase the economic activity of the young labour force (National Chamber of Entrepreneurs Atameken, 2019).

The economy of Simple Things is another programme of the Ministry of Industry and Infrastructure Development, which focuses on developing light manufacturing, construction, and furniture industries. The Ministry has allocated KZT 600 billion to increase the domestic production of nearly 250 names of goods. Thus, it is expected their imports to be reduced from 82% to 59%. As a result of the domestic production, the government expects to have 16,000 permanent new jobs created by 2025 (Economics of simple things, 2019).

Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing (SMM) is the leading approach within the digital marketing framework (Barefoot & Szabo 2010). It implements communication activities via various social media (blogs, micro-blogs, online communities, forums, etc.) and social network sites (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn etc.), which provide valuable content and experiences. "Social media in marketing is all about using the natural conversational platforms of people for building relationships with them in order to satisfy their needs" (Nadda et al., 201), p. 362). SMM is also a process of empowering individuals or organizations to promote their product and services to potentially more significant, compared to mainstream media, for example,
pool of customers. Various communities exist in such a pool and SMM helps to effectively listen to the wishes and concerns, communicate to reach an understanding, and build beneficial relationships.

SMM activities include advertising, entertainment, interaction, customization, and Word-of-Mouth communication, purchase intention, and purchase (Jo, 2013; Koivulehto, 2017). Thus, SMM provides a proactive and conversational approach to an SME to engage with its customers in a productive dialogue and sharing experience. It "can boost customer loyalty by offering individuals the possibility to personalize their online experience or customize products they buy" (Constantinides, 2014, p. 48). It is something traditional advertising, for example, has not been able to provide due to its asymmetrical nature of communication. However, to achieve symmetrical communication and interaction, social media optimization needs to be performed. Social media optimization is the process of proactive sharing and mashup of content and engagement on social media (Bhargava, 2010). SMM has become a leading source for informed decisions, which organizations need to increase their brand awareness, customer base and conversions. For the customer, the SMM engagement helps them to make qualified purchasing choices. Sulistiyo (2019) wrote that E-commerce is highly recommended to SMEs sales strategy, and what should be in focus in sales and marketing of small and medium-sized enterprises is developed marketing strategy, consumable and exciting content that attract consumers. SMM has advantages, which enable SMEs to be competitive and allow them to keep the enterprise on the customer's radar. However, social media marketing also has its disadvantages, which prevent small and medium-sized enterprises from developing their potential effectively.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantage</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cost-effective</td>
<td>Minimizing initial investment in setting up a page or profile; geo-targeting and free Word-of-Mouth (WoM);</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social interaction</td>
<td>High intensity of online socialization;</td>
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<td>Interactivity</td>
<td>Interacting with user-generated, curated, or chat-bot transmitted content, which motivates an experiential exchange process;</td>
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<td>Market targeting</td>
<td>Better demographically, psychologically, and geodemographically segmented audiences;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Customer-centric service</td>
<td>Satisfying customers' needs by direct contact almost in real-time;</td>
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<tr>
<th>Disadvantage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Time intensive</td>
<td>SMM activities depend on sufficient investment of time in strategically selected social media channels, where the enterprise and its audience effectively interact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trademark &amp; copyrights</td>
<td>Protecting an SMEs tangible and intangible property from illegal third party monetary or non-monetary profit;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privacy &amp; security</td>
<td>Minimizing exposure to legal actions related to collecting, using, and maintaining personal data – General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User-generated content (UGC)</td>
<td>The potential risk of becoming subject to legal liability for using UGC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative reviews</td>
<td>Highly damaging the online public image and reputation</td>
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Figure 1 Social Media Marketing Advantages and Disadvantages for SMEs
(Sources: Author's classification)

Choi et al. (2014), in their extensive literature review, identified some core internal and external challenges SMEs face in their marketing activity. Some of the critical external constraints are limited financial and human resources, which results in a lack of time and adequate market information. The main internal challenge is the owner-managers’ focus on short-term sales objectives. Unfortunately, they are not incorporated into a bright, integrated marketing plan. It is a result of a lack of marketing and SMM expertise. As a result, SMEs perform symptomatic, ineffective activities with dissatisfying results. Globally, SMEs face challenges with implementing social media marketing. The 2019 Small Business Marketing Trends Report indicated that nearly one-third of SMEs would not use digital marketing. Two were the main reasons for twenty-two per cent of the SMEs to cut on their digital marketing – lack of time
and resources. The stark reality put high pressure on both traditional and entrepreneurial small and medium-sized enterprises. They have to find effective ways to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of their SMM by implementing new technologies. However, promotion on social media "continues to play a strong role in small business. Forty-eight per cent of small businesses plan to use social media as one or more of their marketing tactics in 2019" (Bihman, 2019, para. 6). Attracting new clients and keeping existing ones is one of the overarching goals SMEs set in 2019.

![Figure 2 Digital marketing tools used by SMEs 2019](Adapted from Bihman, 2019)

Additional to the mentioned above, just 28% of the SMEs had driving sales as their top goal. It can be argued that this low number implies a lack of know-how of performing social media marketing, or it goes deeper into the heart of the SME purpose of existence. "Companies that lead with purpose and build around it can achieve continued loyalty consistency, and relevance in the lives of consumers" (O'Brien et al., 2019, p. 7).

**Social Media Marketing Strategy**

Social media marketing strategy relies on the general concept of strategy, which incorporates a SMART objective set to provoke an intended behaviour form a specific audience. Porter (1996) defines strategy as a process of building and keeping a specific and value-delivering position of a company. Mintzberg (1987) describes strategy as a specific mix of the 5Ps plan, ploy, perspective, pattern, and position. Within the context of strategy, social media strategy targets online audiences via social media or social network sites to achieve communication, relationship or business goals.

Woodard et al. (2013) defined a digital business strategy as planned actions company undertakes in its virtual environment to deliver value. Given the definitions above social media strategy is "a goal-directed planning process for creating user-generated content, driven by a group of Internet applications, to create a unique and valuable competitive position" (Effing and Spil, 2016). A more specific definition of SMM strategy provides Clampitt (2018) defines it as the process of "an assessment of the ever-changing competitive landscape [on which] big picture choices and coordinating these choices into a coherent path foreword, [results] in an orchestrated set of tactics" (p. 16). The social media marketing strategy is realized within the social media marketing funnel whose built blocks are the different social media channels and network sites. Chanthinok, Ussahawanitchakit and Jhundra-Indra (2015) defined the SMM strategy as plan part of an overall marketing activity, which integrates the online implementation of sales, promotions, public relations, advertising, and customer service in the virtual environment to deliver superior performance.
Social Media Marketing in Kazakhstan

Social media marketing has fertile ground in Kazakhstan, which can help the promotional activities of the SMEs. GSM Association (2019) put Kazakhstan in the group of mobile and internet advanced countries, increasing its connectivity to 65.7 with 12.3 scores for the period 2014-2018 (Bahia and Suardi, 2019). For less than a year (April 2019 and January 2020), the social media users in Kazakhstan increased with 1.9 million reaching 9.50 million users (Kemp, 2020). Thus with 51% social media penetration, social networking sites have become the leading communication channel, particularly for young people in Kazakhstan. For 2018 the most popular SNS in Kazakhstan were Vkontakte (VK) (71%), Instagram (59%), and Youtube (54%), regardless of the city and the age group (BRIF Research Group, 2017).

The social media market in Kazakhstan was divided among six social media networks and micro-sharing sites in the period of November 2018 – November 2019. The social network with the highest market share in Kazakhstan was Pinterest, and Twitter took the last position according to Global Stats. The data indicate that the potential of social media marketing is not used to the fullest, and there is enough space to enlarge the market. The 2018 Global Digital revealed that Kazakhstan demonstrated an 87% increase in 2018 of social media users compared to 2017. The active social media users in Kazakhstan are 5.8 million, of which 2.5 million are mobile users (Kemp, 2018). The high internet penetration, as well as the relatively high number of active social media users in Kazakhstan, predispose stimulating conditions for SMEs to use social media as one of the top online marketing strategies to build their brand, increase their customers' base, and to drive sales. The results of a survey, the Change PR Kazakhstan Agency (2019) conducted among the 23 PR agencies in Kazakhstan showed that the larger part of the industry expected improvement of the PR market in 2019-2020.

The main driving force would be digital public relations. Within the digital PR services of the highest demand would be social media marketing, targeted advertising, influencer marketing, and SEO marketing. It opens many opportunities for SMEs to activate their social media marketing efforts. However, they have to be aware of the reality that social media marketing hardly follows the principles of traditional marketing. It requires a better understanding of social media marketing concepts. Often representatives of small and medium-sized businesses are still doing online business the old way. However, under such circumstances, it will be hard to develop the necessary managerial or digital business processes needed for an SME' growth (Kudrayshova, 2019).

Concerning this, SMEs in Kazakhstan can benefit significantly taking a strategic approach for their social media marketing activities. For example, trying to reach young people (15-24 years of age) in Kazakhstan requires a deep understanding of how to build and run social funnels in Vkontakte (VK) (71%) and Instagram (59%) as the two most preferred social media among these two age groups. "On average,
young people in Kazakhstan are subscribed and use two or more networks (BRIF, 2017), para 3). Two years later, in 2019, VK kept its leading position with nearly 1.8 million active users. Instagram followed with slightly above 1 million active users. Facebook was the third most used SNS by 413,026 active users, and only 28,000 Kazakhstani citizens used Twitter (Dubovaya, 2019). Three were the primary activities users performed in SNS. First, they commented on other's posts. Second, users developed new acquaintances. Moreover, last, they participated in various discussions.

Social Media Marketing Funnel

A social media marketing funnel is based on the traditional marketing funnel, which consists of four stages Awareness, Interest, Desire, Action (AIDA model). However, the AIDA model is very much aligned with traditional advertising, which relies heavily on a vertical relations between a company and its customers. It is a hierarchical model, in which marketers work towards having effects on the customer. These relations are built on the segmentation and targeting of individual customers into homogeneous groups. However, the majority of the individuals in these groups have little or no mutual interests. Marketers divide them based on the individual's demographic, geodemographic, psychographic, and behavioural similarities. Despite being fundamental processes traditional segmentation and targeting fail to recognize that "customers are socially connected in horizontal webs of communities. Today, communities are the new segments" (Kotler et al., 2017, p. 47). Therefore, the traditional AIDA model cannot be as effective as it used to be. Communities form naturally on the bases of stakes of interest, which keep the community members together in a secure from corporate irrelevant traditional advertising and online spamming. However, there are many micro-moments, which appear in the customer's purchase life. They have pushed for a change in nowadays marketing communications.

The core reason for the change in the buying process is social media. It freed communication and empowered the consumer, which big brands have to realize. Communication has become symmetrical and all-pervading. As a result, it has flattened the buying process by opening many points of entry and exit from the communication and the buying process. Therefore, traditional marketing and sells models get upgraded and evolve in more adequate frameworks. Social media marketing funnel becomes the online marketing environment where customers take their buyer's journey. Rogers (2011) proposed a social media marketing version of an AIDA marketing funnel, which consists of seven stages of commitment Awareness, Consideration, Preference, Action, Loyalty, and Advocacy. Every stage of the funnel requires specific and adequate to the stage activities such as listening, reach, conversation, conversion, and nurturing to motivate desired behaviours in each one. We would point that communication holds the integrity of the funnel and is required at every stage of the funnel. Its core functions are:

1. awareness,
2. information,
3. education,
4. persuasion,
5. changing/preserving attitudes, and
6. changing/preserving behaviours.

Thus the social funnel is a more sophisticated and dynamic set of consumer-targeted engaging activities across social media channels such as Facebook, Instagram, VK, etc.

The funnel sophistication lies in the process of systematic "identifying and capturing consumer interactions across a variety of social media channels, aggregating this activity in a social customer relationship management (SCRM) infrastructure, and continually mining this insight to deliver relevant
content to the right social profile at the right time (Awareness, 2011, p. 6). These interactions indicate the importance of the consumers' end-to-end experience (Armstrong, 2015, p. 3) and the ultimate goal to bring the customer to the point of a purchase decision. The contemporary social media marketing sales funnel avoids the linearity of the buyers’ journey. It interprets it as a circular one. McKinsey & Company’s decision-making model of the buyer's journey consists of the four stages: an initial consideration; a functional evaluation, a moment of purchase, and post-purchase experience. Closing a deal in social media is a less straightforward process. In the initial stage, the customer considers the offers of several brands. After the initial consideration, the customer moves to the exploration stage. The selection happens based on the customer's perception, and expectations form the brand motivated by their brand exposure. At stage two, customers actively evaluate the offers benchmarked to their needs and wants. They collect information about the offered products or services. Reaching the point of information saturation, customers select the brand for their purchase. The last stage involves experiencing the product and sharing this experience online. If the customers are satisfied, then they go through the loyalty loop for their follow-up purchases. Loyal customers take a short-cut route in the buying process. The positive experience, in combination with loyalty, minimizes the evaluation and decision time for a purchase.

![McKinsey's Circular Model of Buyer's Decision Journey](source: Agarwal, Brar, Elzinga, & Tyagi, 2019)

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

*RQ1.* What is the state of development of SMEs in Kazakhstan?

The result of the narrative literature review shed light on the state of development of SMEs in Kazakhstan. It can be assumed that SMEs receives much support from the Kazakhstani government. First, it has established macro-instruments such as state programs and subprograms to help entrepreneurship exclusively in the country. These state programs aim to develop specific regions and industries. It will help to decrease the unemployment amongst young people, particularly the most vulnerable age group of 29-34. Third, the SMEs build the middle class in Kazakhstan, thus developing a sustainable Made in Kazakhstan economy. Certain sub-programs provide entrepreneurship education to ensure SMEs' longevity on the market as well as small and medium enterprises growing too big ones.

Despite the efforts of the government, SMEs in Kazakhstan continue facing financial challenges. The analytical portal Finprom.kz (2019) claimed that one of the significant problems SMEs face is the lack of affordable credits, specifically for business development and start-up projects on the outskirts of the
cities. Banks are not motivated to lend credits, and at the end of 2019, the credits for SMEs decreased to 4.1%.

The lack of fresh funding for the SMEs affects both their performance and promotion activities. Therefore, SMEs need to make more effective use of social media marketing. The investments in SMM are lower compared to traditional marketing instruments such as mainstream media advertising. However, sustaining marketing effectiveness requires a more in-depth knowledge of the customer's journey through the SMM funnel.

**RQ2. What is the contemporary structure of a social media marketing sales funnel?**

The contemporary structure of social media marketing sales funnels different forms. It highly depends on the stage of cultural and business development of a market. The funnel evolved from a linear to a circular process abundant with many touchpoints of entrance and exit. The linear model consists of 5 stages of listening, reaching, conversation, conversion, and nurturing. The circular one focuses on the mental stages of the purchasing decision-making. The circular one offers short-cuts for loyal customers. Thus, more and repeating purchases occur. However, the principle of the vast and open funnel is critical to keep in mind here. The deep internet and social media penetration in Kazakhstan provides stimulating conditions for the strategic building of effective SMM funnels by the small and medium-sized enterprises.

**CONCLUSION**

The interdisciplinary field of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises social media marketing in Kazakhstan has many uncharted scientific territories. The narrative literature review located wide gaps in scientific research specifically of SME's social media marketing activities. With few exceptions, further research can explore the effectiveness of various social network sites such as Instagram, VK, or Facebook for building an SMM funnel. It will be of high scientific value to study the behaviour of customers within the funnel. What attracts them as well as what makes them leave the funnel. Another direction of inquiry could be the cultural and social influences, which impact the purchasing decision-making of customers. From SMEs perspective, the exploration of the entrepreneurship mindset is worth exploring. It has a direct connection with the development of a business plan. Integrated marketing communications comprise a crucial aspect of if it and predetermines the relative sustainability of an SME.

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