

Social media — an effective tool to influence purchase decisions of students — a case study at a public Higher Education Institution in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

Social media platforms provide companies with vast consumer markets, where students openly share their preferences and opinions, allowing marketers to observe and even guide their choices. As social media content spreads rapidly, it fosters conformity in consumer behaviour, with students often influenced by the opinions and feedback of their peers and online communities. The aim of this study is to understand the extent to which social media influences the way in which students make purchasing decisions. While significant research has examined consumer decision-making, the specific impact of social media remains underexplored. Therefore, this study investigates the influence of social media on student purchasing behaviour, highlighting how social networks shape consumer attitudes and decisions among students. A quantitative research approach was employed, using a structured survey administered to 380 students from five campuses of Institution X- a public Higher Education Institution. The survey examined demographics and social media interactions, with data analysed using IBM SPSS Version 22. Findings revealed that online discussions and user feedback significantly influence students' purchasing decisions. A significant number of respondents expressed trust in user-generated content on social media, such as reviews, recommendations, and personal experiences shared by other users. The study concludes that social media plays a critical role in shaping student consumption behaviour, providing a powerful platform for retail businesses to engage with young consumers. Students frequently rely on online reviews and peer opinions to inform their choices, underscoring the importance for brands to actively manage their social media presence.

Keywords: Social media, student purchasing-decisions, social media marketing, university student buying-behaviour, Retail marketing



INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Social media allows for individuals to use content on the internet as well as share content among various social networks. The internet has drastically changed the medium of traditional marketing and its approaches and has introduced marketers to a new digital world. The study seeks to understand the extent to which social media mediums have an impact or influence over the way in which students make purchase decisions. Social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter have become popular social networking platforms for global consumer markets (Khanom 2023). The internet has drastically augmented and transformed the medium of traditional marketing and its approaches and has introduced marketers to a new digital world. Therefore, the study explores how social media platforms influence students' purchasing decisions and to what extent they impact their choices. Social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter have become popular social networking platforms for global consumer markets (Florenthal, 2019; Khanom, 2023). Whilst a significant amount of research has been undertaken into the reasons behind purchasing decisions made by consumers (Zhang & Dong, 2020; Mbete & Tanamal, 2020; Kumar *et al.*, 2021; Yeo *et al.*, 2022) the influential role social media plays and the subsequent impact on student buying behaviour still needs to be determined. Social media has transformed the role of retailers by enabling real-time customer engagement, personalized marketing, seamless social commerce, influencer collaborations, improved distributor communication, and data-driven decision-making. According to Statista 2023, in a survey conducted regarding the digital population in South Africa 43,48 % make up active internet users, whilst 25.8% comprises of active social media users. In the last decade, the digital population has grown, the number of mobile internet users in South Africa also increased to almost 47.8 million (Cowling, 2023). In 2022, 47, 8 million South Africans (Bhanye *et al.*, 2023) used social media and the most popular platform was WhatsApp. Other popular social networking sites also displayed a positive incline with Facebook being adopted by 87.2% of the population, Instagram with 70.5% and Twitter 60.3% (Statista, 2023). Social media remains a dominant force within the digital landscape. There is a significant increase in the amount of time spent on social media platforms during and post the COVID-19 pandemic (Barysevich, 2020; Parlak Sert & Başkale, 2023). According to McInnes (2023), some of the main reasons why south Africans use social media include: keeping in touch with friends and family 61.9%, finding inspiration for things to do and buy 42.5 %, finding products to purchase 35.7%, seeing content from brands 33.7% and following influencers 26.1 %. An indication of the sheer magnitude of online social network users, which is also rapidly increasing. With the broad reach that social media hosts, students are highly influenced by what is broadcasted on the net. Social media can direct the way in which consumers make purchases, be it because of negative or positive reviews, posts, and tweets.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

AIM

The aim of this study is to understand the extent to which social media influences the way in which students make a purchase decision.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the research study are to determine the effects of social media especially on student buying behaviour, the variables that affect a purchase decision and to what extent social media platforms affect a student's decision to purchase.

LITERATURE REVIEW

THE NEW ECONOMY

The marketing communication landscape has changed drastically over the past few years in respect of the way that businesses communicate with their consumers. This has indeed brought about a new economic order that is commonly referred to as the New Economy or Digital Economy (Nesterenko, Miskiewicz & Abazov, 2023). The digital economy is an economy which is based on multiple digital technologies found today (Shah *et al.*, 2024). The digital economy is an important driver which relies solely on information technology and data; of which its aim is to increase economic activity by creating and transforming information to a transaction. Digital computing thereby originates from the digital economy whereby digital platforms are used to support internet-based businesses (Kholiavko *et al.*, 2021). The digital economy can be deemed as a contributing factor towards growing the economy. The activity of which goods and services are communicated via digital technologies may include, however, not limited to, the internet, social media, digital payments, and or digital automation. The introduction of artificial intelligence can also be considered an essential consideration of the digital economy (Sturgeon, 2021). This new economic order encompasses knowledge and information. The new economy or digital economy relies on high-speed networks and internet applications.

The internet has become one of the most strategic business and communication resources of the new economy as it allows for students to function in an environment that has no geographical or time restrictions (Suleiman *et al.*, 2020). The internet as a business tool has created a new marketplace, whereby students do not need to physically visit a store to purchase a product or service (Costa Climent, Haftor & Chowdhury, 2022). The result of this has created an environment in which delivery of experiences has become important. Digital communication was initially launched to grow brands, new and existing and to strengthen consumer relationships in the marketplace. Digital communication now facilitates and shares consumer experiences that effectively communicate the essence, value and other vital information about the product, service, and brand. Businesses are destined to be winners in the modern competitive situation, if they understand that consumers do not only want goods and services but appreciate and value relevant experiences which excite them and make them feel good (Nesterenko, Miskiewicz, & Abazov, 2023).

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media can be described as an internet-based service which allows people to communicate with each other about their personal and mutual interests and activities (Duong, 2020). Online sites and online applications, which gain value through user participation and interaction, can be termed as social media. However, for online sites and applications to be referred to as social media sites, it should comprise of independent members, should not be time and place restricted and allow for interaction between students (Khanom, 2023). As cited by Kotler and Armstrong (2021), using social media can present students with both advantages and disadvantages. Social media can be targeted and personal allowing marketers to create a tailor-made offering. Social media also offers the benefit of being interactive, ensuring that engagement and conversations are relevant and immediate.

SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES (SNS'S)

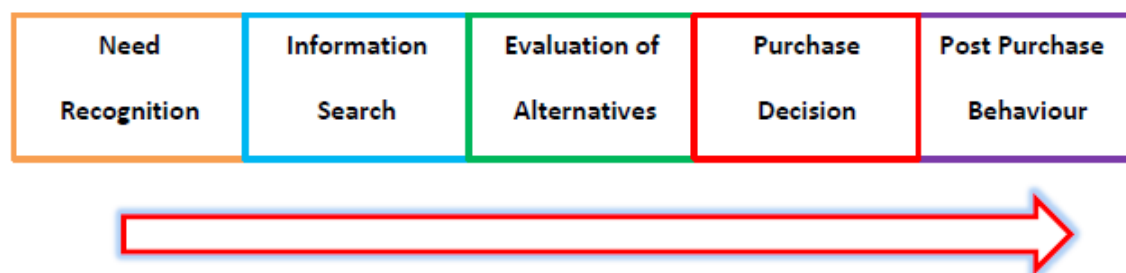
Social networking sites are fast becoming the new phenomenon which has gained significant growth over the last few years for students (Bessarab *et al.*, 2025). Social networking sites are the new and trendy marketing and branding tools that offer companies good advertising and marketing of goods, services, and brands (Su & Huang, 2021). The introduction of the term 'social network' by JA Barnes in 1954 was a pivotal moment in understanding how people connect and interact, highlighting the fundamental role of social structures in shaping relationships and influencing behaviour (Freeman, 2004). These networking sites allow students to create a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system. Social networking sites offer users the opportunity to create a profile that displays friends, who are also members of the social networking site, share videos and photographs, post comments and use instant messaging technology (Du Plessis, 2010: 386; Garg & Pahuja, 2020; Fyfield, Henderson & Phillips, 2021). Social networking sites, creates, and establishes platforms for individuals to stay connected with others. Social networking

sites provide students with the valuable benefit of not only connecting with peers but also enhancing their knowledge. These platforms enable students to stay informed and updated about topics of personal and academic interest, such as the latest research, news, and trends. This access to real-time information fosters continuous learning, encourages engagement with diverse perspectives, and allows students to stay ahead in their field of study. The ability to engage with relevant content and communities also supports intellectual growth and the development of critical thinking skills, making social networking sites a crucial tool for modern education. (Malik, Ahmad, Kamran, Aliza, & Elahi, 2020). This engagement is maintained through the means of socialising and interacting with users of social networking sites. Social networking site users often belong to the same community; therefore students prefer this communication tool to organise and arrange their lives around one another (Yu & Leung, 2024). In 1997 the first social networking site was launched and was called SixDegrees.Com (Elsaid, 2022). This social networking site offers students the ability to create profiles, connect with friends and surf their friends list. This social networking application later extended to social networking sites like MiGente, Friends Black Planet. Thereafter in 2001 the application Ryze.com was launched, allowing business networks to be leveraged. Following this the release of Friendster, Myspace and Facebook which turned social networking into a global phenomenon (Du Plessis, 2010; Chesher, 2020).

Social network marketing provides students with better customer experiences by offering personalized engagement, real-time information, and interactive communication, while also lowering marketing costs and enabling a wider reach and higher engagement levels (Al-Azzam & Al-Mizeed, 2021). Social media has increased in its use and has become an essential part of our life (Ausat, 2023). Students using social media platforms use websites for commercial activities, which include but not limited to buying and selling (Chen, 2016). In the social media space, an example of Facebook can be seen as the platform used for a transaction to take place. Research has shown that some businesses have joint social network sites to ensure that they also benefit from social media interaction (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2021).

CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

Understanding consumer behaviour is the most essential task of marketing management, However, it is never straightforward (Leonov *et al.*, 2023). Consumer buyer behaviour refers to the buying behaviour of the final consumer in respect of households and individuals who buy goods and services for personal use (Kotler & Keller, 2021). All the final consumers combine to make up the consumer market. Consumers globally vary in terms of age, education level, income, lifestyle, and tastes (Park, 2020). How these diverse consumers relate to one another and to the world around them affects their choices of products, services, brands, and organisations (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010; Kotler & Keller, 2021). Consumers make numerous buying decisions every day. Many companies research consumers buying habits to understand them better and to answer their questions like; what consumers are buying, when and where they buy, how and how much are they buying and why do they buy. From studying the consumers purchasing behaviour organisations can gain understanding of how consumers react and behave, however this can be challenging as consumers are not always aware of why they behave the way they do (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010; Saura *et al.*, 2020).



Source: (Kotler and Armstrong 2010).

FIGURE 1- THE CONSUMER PURCHASE DECISION PROCESSES

Consumer decision-making processes are complex, involving stages from 'need recognition' to 'post purchase' activities (Ismail, Dora, & Hidajat, 2024). This poses several limitations to marketers. The advent of online shopping significantly influenced the way students transacted with suppliers of goods or services (Rahman *et al.*, 2018). The consumer decision-making process is complex, involving stages from need recognition to post-purchase activities, which poses limitations for marketers trying to understand and influence consumer behaviour. The advent of online shopping has had a significant impact on how students interact with suppliers, as the digital landscape allows for quicker, more informed decision-making. The relationship between the decision-making process and online shopping is that the latter simplifies and accelerates the stages: students recognize needs through targeted advertisements, search for information instantly, evaluate alternatives using reviews and comparisons, and make purchases with fewer barriers like time and location. This shift requires marketers to adapt traditional models of consumer behaviour to account for the ease and immediacy introduced by online shopping (Rahman *et al.*, 2018).

The level of purchase involvement is the degree of intensity of interest that a buyer shows for a certain product in a particular purchase decision (Iyer, Blut, Xiao, & Grewal, 2020). There are several types of consumers purchase decision processes which have various levels of involvement as highlighted below (Qazzafi, 2019):

- Nominal decision making: Nominal decision making occurs when a consumer is involved with a purchase that has an exceptionally low level of involvement. It includes problem recognition and an internal search but excludes the evaluation of each step.
- Limited decision making: Limited decision making is like that of nominal decision making however there is a limited amount of external search within limited decision making and very few alternatives are evaluated.
- Extended decision making occurs when individuals spend more time doing in-depth research on a particular product (Kotler, 2010).

Emerging digital technologies has reshaped retailing (Sharma *et al.*, 2023). Furthermore the difficulty for online retailers was that they needed to identify the main factors that trigger online shopping or shopping in physical stores, for their target customers, and address these motives accordingly. The media landscape is ever evolving, and the last three years has shifted the media landscape enormously (Alneyadi, Abulibdeh & Wardat, 2023). Word of mouth marketing has become a major influencer on the internet via social media, microblogging and blogging sites (Varghese & Agrawal, 2021). Bloggers have recently become a major influencer in consumers purchasing decisions, as consumer's views and opinions on products and services are published and viewed in vast numbers over the internet (Chu, Liu, Chen, Ding, & Tao, 2022). Microblogging tends to drive brand perception. When brands feel they can no longer control their message they take to social media sites and microblogging to be a part and manage the conversations around their brands (Chu, Liu, Chen, Ding, & Tao, 2022). Another avenue of extended decision making is social media influencers. The social media influencers make regular posts regarding a topic on their choice of social media platform. These posts are watched by engaged followers and in turn brands are aligned as social media influencers are believed to create a trend and encourage followers to make a purchase (Geyser, 2023).

THE IMPACT OF ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORKS ON CONSUMER PURCHASE DECISION

Most consumers belong to different online groups, these groups can change consumers purchasing decision behaviour. Joint decision making (making a decision with a family member or friend) can be defined as "consumers that make their decisions within the environment that has family, friends and co-workers" (Evans et al, 2009). Traditionally, consumers made their purchase decisions based on information received through mass media channels such as newspapers, television, and advertising. However, with the rise of online social networks, the decision-making process has shifted significantly. These networks, particularly through user-generated content, peer recommendations, and influencer marketing, now play a critical role in shaping consumer behaviour. Key aspects of social networks that influence purchase decisions include social proof (reviews, ratings, and testimonials), peer influence (friends and family recommendations), and targeted advertising that personalizes content based on users' preferences and behaviours (Rachmad, 2024). These elements provide consumers with more authentic, real-time insights, allowing

them to make more informed decisions compared to traditional media sources. Thus, the power of social networks to affect consumer decisions lies in their ability to foster trust, create a sense of community, and provide immediate access to a broad range of opinions and information (Rachmad, 2024).

Social media has transformed the decision-making process by effectively bypassing traditional decision-making processes and influencing an immediate purchase (Moodley & Machela, 2022). The main shopping motives that underpin contemporary shopping are “convenience,” “information seeking,” “immediate possession,” “social interaction” and “variety seeking” (Akram, Junaid, Zafar, Li, & Fan, 2021). Social media has created a landscape which supports the socialisation of information and as a result has enhanced the communication flow by making it easier and allowing for more people to spread useful information to a vast audience online, which results in global transacting (Dann & Dann, 2011; Nurhandayani, Syarief & Najib, 2019).

TRUST IN SOCIAL MEDIA CONNECTIONS

Brand trust is based on public perception, brand reputation, product service and quality and customer experience (Hasan, Siam, & Haque, 2023). The role of trust in online interactions as described by (Hurwitz, 2012) is essential to create a positive and helpful online community. When trust is established, it leads to increased engagement and growth.

Trust is a critical element that influences shoppers' purchase decisions (Azhar, Husain, Hamid, & Rahman, 2023).

SOCIAL MEDIA DRIVES PURCHASES

Consumers who search for information on social networking sites and share information with others engage in online word of mouth communication. According to Finance online (2023), 69% of Twitter users are more likely to buy a company's product when they see a Twitter advertisement. With 55.2% of users from Facebook consider making a purchase (Zote, 2023). Social media is fast becoming a trusted, authentic, and growing platform for consumers to find information and make purchase decisions (Varghese & Agrawal, 2021). A significant percentage (61%) of users of a social networking account have made purchases based on recommendations found on blogs.

UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

The United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a framework for addressing critical global challenges such as poverty, environmental degradation, and inequality. While these goals are primarily targeted at governments, parastatals, and certain organizations, they can also intersect with student buying behaviour in meaningful ways. Social media platforms, in particular, play a significant role by promoting, gathering, and sharing student insights, opinions, and thoughts about various brands (Culnan, McHugh & Zubillaga, 2010). Sustainability fits into this study by exploring how social media can be used to influence student purchasing decisions in alignment with the SDGs. Through social networks, students can engage with brands that prioritize sustainability, share their preferences for eco-friendly products, and advocate for ethical business practices. This influence underscores the growing importance of sustainability in student consumption patterns and highlights how social media can drive behaviour that supports the broader objectives of the SDGs (Rodriguez-Sanchez, 2023).

According to the United Nations (2023), the following SDGs align with social media marketing: Goal 4: (Quality Education) social media is used to promote educational content and awareness, making quality education more accessible and engaging; Goal 5: (Gender Equality) social media is a powerful platform for raising awareness of gender equality issues, inclusivity, and promoting initiatives that empower female students; Goal 8: (Decent work and Economic Growth) social media is effective as a promotional tool, supporting economic growth and connecting businesses and marketers with students; Goal 12: (Responsible Consumption and Production) social media is used to promote sustainable products and practises, encouraging responsible consumer behaviour amongst students;

METHODOLOGY

For this study, the quantitative approach was used and the non- probability sampling technique was employed. The convenience sampling method determined the sample and the study group consisted of the students based at Institution X’s five campuses (Ethical clearance reference number HSS/0743/014M). A structured and closed ended survey was administered amongst 380 students. Section A of the survey helped to determine the demographics of the students and section B was based on the student’s interaction with social media. The statistical analysis for the study was done through IBM SPSS 22 version. To determine the reliability and validity of this study, Cronbach’s Alpha was used. It was established that the scale was reliable and Cronbach’s Alpha is > 0.7 ($\alpha = 0.806$, $n = 13$). This value indicated that there is a high degree of internal consistency amongst the items tested. The acceptable value of Cronbach’s alpha is between 0.65 and 0.8” (Goforth 2015: 1-2). The reliability scores for all sections of the instrument exceeded or approximated the recommended Cronbach’s alpha value. Personally administered questionnaires were used to collect data from students of Institution X. The questionnaire was used to obtain information from the students regarding their interaction with social media and the influence it has over them when making a purchasing decision. It also looked at determining the factors that students consider when making a purchase, the variables that affect decision-making and lastly do the opinions of others affect a student’s decision to purchase?

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Figure 2 represents how many products or services the respondents purchased due to advertisements viewed on social media sites.

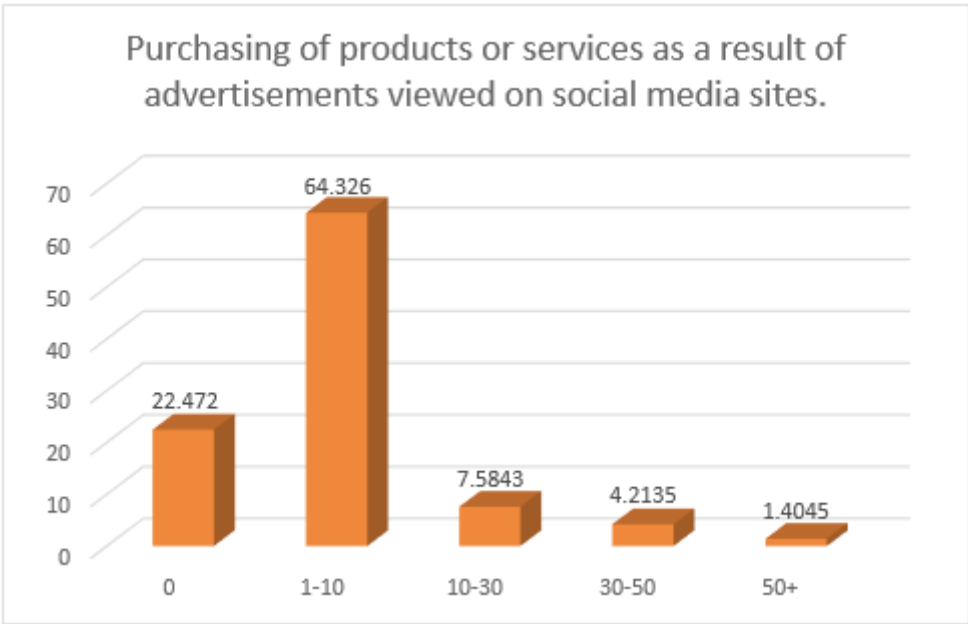


FIGURE 2: PURCHASING OF PRODUCTS OR SERVICES BECAUSE OF ADVERTISEMENTS VIEWED ON SOCIAL MEDIA SITES.

The data from Figure 2 reveals that a significant portion of participants (64.3%) have purchased items as a result of viewing advertisements on social media, highlighting the platform’s effectiveness in influencing consumer behaviour. This underscores the importance for small businesses to leverage social media, as it not only allows for wider reach but also enhances brand visibility and consumer engagement. The statistics from Learner (2018) further support this, with 46% of consumers engaging more with advertisements on social media than on TV, and 73% of consumers being influenced by a brand’s social media presence when making a purchase decision. Therefore, investing in social media can offer small businesses an opportunity to connect directly with potential customers and influence their purchasing decisions, making it a vital tool for growth in today’s digital economy. Figure 2 also graphically illustrates that 7.6 % of the respondents purchased between 10-30 items, 4.2% of the respondents purchased between 30-50 items and 1.4%

purchased over 50 items. Median = .00; Skewness = 1.062 with standard error = .130; Kurtosis = -.877 with standard error = .259. It is imperative for small businesses to invest in social media, as 46% of consumers watch more ads on social media than on TV, with 73% of consumers being influenced by a brands social media presence when making a purchase decision.

Figure 3 below represents respondent's attention towards advertisements on social media.

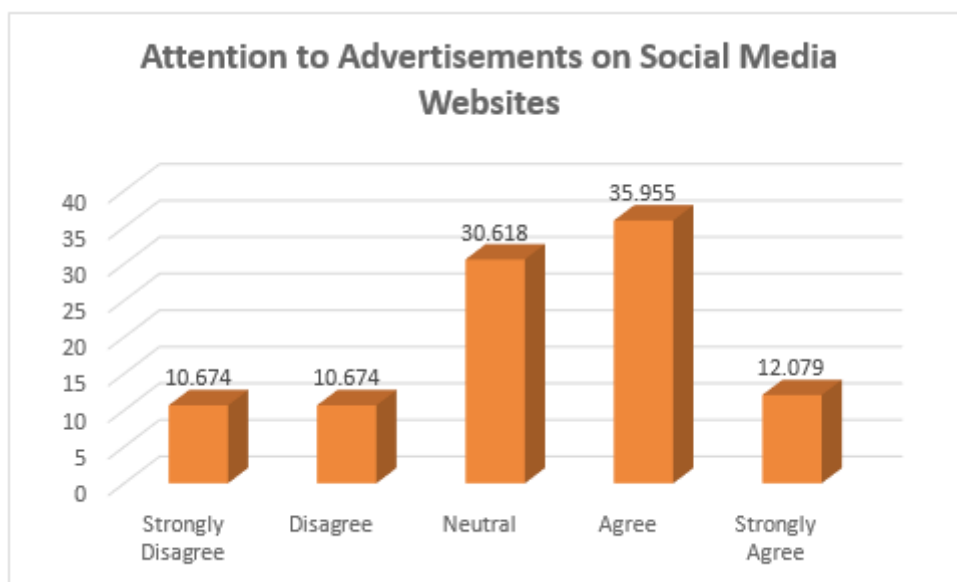


FIGURE 3: ATTENTION TO ADVERTISEMENTS ON SOCIAL MEDIA WEBSITES

The data reveals an interesting relationship between attention to social media advertisements and actual purchasing behaviour. While 48% of respondents indicated that they pay attention to social media ads (36% agreeing and the remainder strongly agreeing), 64.3% of participants reported purchasing items after being exposed to a social media ad. This discrepancy suggests that while a significant proportion of respondents acknowledge engaging with social media ads, a higher percentage ultimately make purchases based on that exposure. This can be attributed to the persuasive and targeted nature of social media advertisements, which not only capture attention but also drive action through personalized content and direct calls to action.

The remaining 10.7% of respondents disagreed with paying attention to these ads, while 30.6% were neutral. Despite this, the high conversion rate—64.3%—demonstrates that attention to ads may not be the only factor influencing purchasing decisions; trust in the platform, the relevance of the products, and the convenience of online purchasing could also play significant roles in driving consumer behaviour.

This aligns with the findings by Sheikh (2023), who stated that approximately 71% of social media users have made a purchase due to advertisements viewed on these platforms. The impact of social media advertisements extends beyond mere attention, as they influence purchasing decisions even when users are not fully engaged with the advertisement content, highlighting the increasing power of social media in shaping consumer behaviour.

Median = .00; Skewness = 1.312 with standard error = .130; Kurtosis = -.281 with standard error = .259.

Figure 4 below represents the respondents view on comments, posts and reviews affecting their decision to purchase.

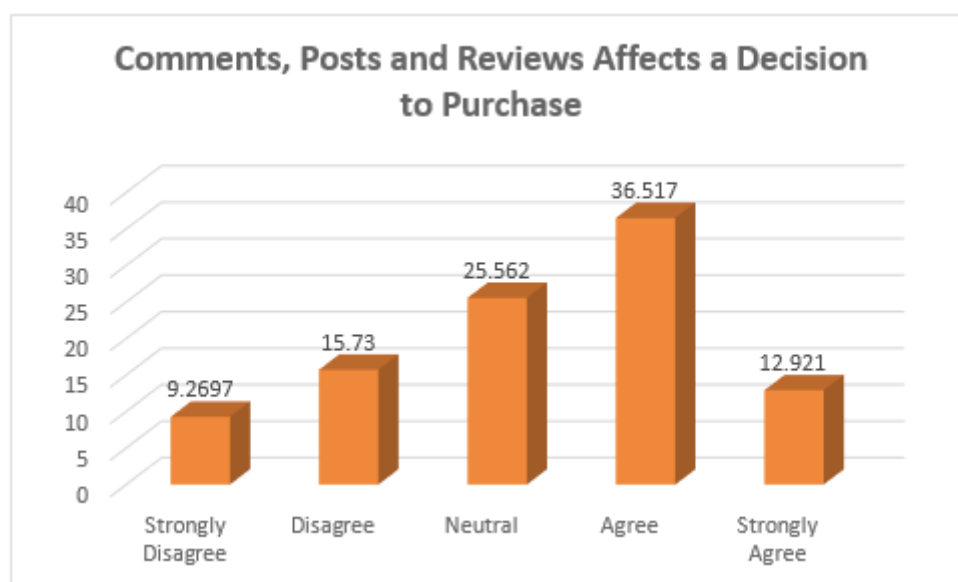


FIGURE 4: COMMENTS, POSTS AND REVIEWS AFFECTS A DECISION TO PURCHASE

According to Figure 4, 36.5% had agreed that comments, posts, and reviews via social media websites affected their decision to purchase with 12.9% strongly agreeing. However 15.7% had disagreed and 9.3% strongly disagreed with 25.6% remaining neutral ($n=356$). Median = 3; Skewness = $-.431$ with standard error = $.130$; Kurtosis = $-.627$ with standard error = $.259$. According to a survey conducted by Dimensional Research (Gesenhues, 2012) on behalf of MarTech in 2013, an overwhelming 90% of the respondents indicated that reading online reviews influenced their buying decision.

INFORMATION FOUND ON SOCIAL MEDIA WEBSITES TRIGGERS A PURCHASE

Figure 5 below represents the respondents view on information found on social media websites trigger a purchase.

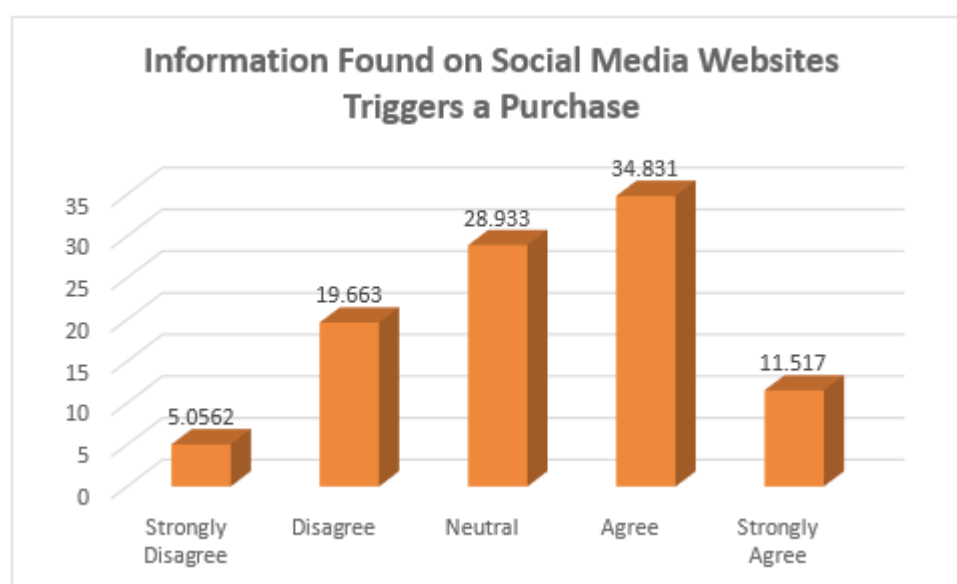


FIGURE 5 INFORMATION FOUND ON SOCIAL MEDIA WEBSITES TRIGGERS A PURCHASE

Figure 5 illustrates the types of information found on social media websites that trigger a purchase, highlighting the influence of both Firm-Generated Content (FGC) and User-Generated Content (UGC).

Figure 5 above reveals that almost 34.8% of the respondents feel that information found on social media websites triggers a purchase with 19.7% disagreeing. In Figure 5 the results display that 103 (28.9%) of the respondents remained neutral with 41 (11.5%) respondents strongly agreeing and 18 (5.1%) strongly disagreeing (n=356). Median =3; Skewness = -.261 with standard error =.130; Kurtosis =-.654 with standard error =.259

CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to explore the influence of social media on students' purchasing decisions. The findings suggest that social media platforms play a significant role in shaping consumer behaviour, particularly among students. While discussions on products and services with brand followers and the feedback from other individuals on social networks influenced students' purchasing decisions, it was noted that the specific types of products purchased were not directly explored in this study. Future research could benefit from focusing on the types of products or services that students are more likely to purchase due to social media influence.

The study also highlighted the importance of online forums in accessing product and service information. Approximately 24% of respondents indicated that they used online forums as a primary source for gathering consumer knowledge. Forums are a valuable tool for consumers to stay informed about trends, make recommendations, and discuss products in a communal setting (Infante & Mardikaningsih, 2022).

Regarding the credibility of information on social media, the results showed that 103 respondents agreed that information about products, services, or brands is perceived as more credible on social media due to its being outside the company's direct control. However, a considerable proportion (122 respondents) remained neutral on this issue, suggesting that the perceived credibility of social media content varies among individuals.

Finally, exposure to brands, products, or services through social media platforms significantly affected students' purchasing decisions, with 128 respondents agreeing that social media exposure influenced their choices. These findings emphasize the power of social media in the modern consumer decision-making process and suggest that businesses should invest in maintaining an active and authentic presence on social media to better engage with their target audiences.

Social media has become a prominent and influential tool in both networking and business communication, exerting a substantial effect on students' purchasing decisions. The findings of this study indicate that social media platforms significantly influence students as they make purchasing choices. In this context, it is important to define the term "views" as opinions or assessments shared online by individuals regarding specific products, services, or brands. These opinions, whether positive or negative, play a pivotal role in shaping students' decisions as they seek additional information about the products or brands under consideration, often relying on feedback from peers, friends, and family.

Although the study did not specifically address Web 2.0 technology, it is critical to recognize that advancements in digital technology have facilitated increased interaction and engagement among users, thereby enhancing the time students spend online. The proliferation of Web 2.0 technologies has enabled individuals to actively contribute to the dissemination of information, including sharing reviews and recommendations, which further impacts students' decision-making processes. This shift has fostered a dynamic digital environment where users can engage in two-way communication with brands and other consumers.

Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of both Firm-Generated Content (FGC) and User-Generated Content (UGC) in influencing students' purchasing decisions. Social media platforms enable brands to present promotional content while simultaneously offering users the opportunity to share their experiences and feedback. Negative reviews, while potentially detrimental to a brand's reputation, should not be disregarded; rather, they should be viewed as an opportunity for businesses to engage with consumers, address their concerns, and improve the product or service. A timely and respectful response to criticism can thus contribute to the re-positioning of the brand and enhance customer loyalty.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Social media provides students with a familiar and accessible platform for real-time engagement and interaction. It offers students a valuable mechanism for appraising and assessing campus facilities, academic programs, policies, and administrators, alongside interactions with their peers. This real-time exchange of information fosters a dynamic environment in which students can actively engage with various aspects of their academic and social experiences. Therefore, social media can be considered a catalyst for increased multitasking behaviours, where students manage a variety of daily tasks and activities simultaneously—an aspect that is central to contemporary digital lifestyles. This phenomenon, often referred to as *digital juggling*, reflects the growing integration of digital technologies into daily routines, enabling students to balance academic responsibilities, social interactions, and consumer behaviour within a single platform.

To accurately understand how social media influences students' purchasing decisions, organizations must recognise the significant role that mobile connectivity plays in this context. The increasing accessibility of smartphones equipped with 3G and 4G technologies has allowed more individuals, particularly students, to remain perpetually connected to social media platforms. This continuous connectivity enables instantaneous access to product information, recommendations, and reviews, which, in turn, shapes their decision-making processes. Therefore, the expansion of mobile internet access among students is pivotal for marketers to consider in their strategies. Marketers must adapt to this shift by recognizing that students, as digital natives, are highly influenced by peer opinions and real-time feedback from social media platforms (Kant, 2025).

The implications for marketing strategies are clear: organizations must prioritize mobile-friendly social media campaigns that cater to students' multitasking behaviours and ensure their content is accessible, engaging, and timely. Given that students often interact with social media while managing multiple activities, marketers should aim to create seamless and integrated marketing experiences that can be consumed across various devices and contexts.

In conclusion, the growing prominence of social media in students' daily lives presents a unique opportunity for marketers to connect with this demographic. By understanding the influence of mobile technology and social media interactions, organizations can refine their marketing strategies to better align with students' digital behaviours, ultimately enhancing their engagement and influence over purchasing decisions (Kant, 2025).

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