

"Scrolling to Shopping: How Social Media Marketing Shapes Youth Buying Decisions"

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Abstract: This research work scrutinizes the impact of social media marketing on the purchasing behavior of young consumers aged 18 to 30. With the growing acceptance of digital platforms, companies are increasingly utilizing social media to promote their products and services. Influencer endorsements, personalized ads, and user-generated content are key strategies that significantly influence consumer decision-making. This research employs a Blended research strategy, combining surveys and interviews to gather acumens into how the young generation interact with social media advertisements and how these situations influence their purchasing behavior. The data reveals that influencers have a strong influence on consumer decisions by fostering trust and emotional connections through genuine and engaging content. Influencer marketing, online reviews, and targeted advertisements are key factors in shaping the preferences and final purchasing choices of young consumers. Additionally, targeted ads that align with users' interests further encourage buying decisions. User-generated content, such as reviews and testimonials, helps build trust and plays a key role in shaping consumer decisions. However, a smaller group of respondents opt for not buying products through social media because of worries about potential fraud, trust issues, and sceptical about the products' quality.

This study gives valuable insights for businesses looking to enhance their digital marketing strategies and understanding how social media marketing is shaping young consumers' decisions, companies can develop more effective campaigns, strengthen customer relationships, and boost brand loyalty. The study highlights the importance of authentic, relatable content in capturing the attention of younger audiences in the digital marketplace.

Key Words: Social media marketing, purchasing decisions, young consumers, digital platforms, Influencer Marketing, and decision-making.

INTRODUCTION:

Digital technologies, especially the internet, have transformed all areas of business. Key activities like product development, brand building, sales, customer relations, and communication have all been influenced by digital tools (Hudson, Roth, & Madden, 2012). Among these, communication has seen the biggest change due to advances in devices, tools, and marketing strategies (Sheoran, 2012).

Marketing becomes digital when it uses digital platforms to operate (Yasmin, Tasneem, & Fatima, 2015). The goal of digital communication is to build a direct connection between businesses and customers using digital transmission (Bird, 2007). Digital marketing is no longer limited to internet-based channels. It now includes both online methods like websites, email, social media, and mobile apps, as well the offline methods such as digital TV, phone calls, and other electronic networks (Scharl, Dickinger, & Murphy, 2005; Pandey & Shukla, 2010).

Social media is becoming a vital aspect of daily life, with many people using these platforms not only to stay connected with others but also to engage with brands. As the influence of social media has expanded rapidly in recent years, businesses have leveraged its potential to increase sales and strengthen customer relationships.

Research shows a strong link between online networks and consumer buying decisions, with studies indicating that social media influences about 71% of purchases (Aleh, 2020). This highlights the notable influence social media has on consumer decision-making. It enables individuals to connect globally and provides young people with opportunities to develop time management and practical skills. They are able to share their knowledge and experiences effectively with the right audience and engage in meaningful discussions. The internet also offers a platform for expressing ideas and participating in the exchange of information (Wakefield & Rice, 2008).

Social media affects young people in both positive and negative ways. One major concern is the risk to personal privacy. Online communication can make it easy for someone to find out another person's address, phone number, or even get directions to their home. Social media has a positive impact by keeping youth informed about global happenings and allowing them to maintain relationships with friends and peers, even when they can't meet in person.

Many studies have looked at how social media affects the way people think, communicate, and make choices on consumer behavior and online marketing, particularly among young consumers. The following section will review the relevant literature on this topic.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Marketing is the process of understanding what people need and want, and then offering products or services that meet those needs by offering them real value (Ferrell, 2021). Over time, different marketing strategies have developed, like digital marketing, green marketing, and guerrilla marketing (Wind & Mahajan, 2001). Digital marketing implicates the digital tools and technologies connect with latent customers more effectively and fulfill their needs, ultimately supporting businesses in reaching their objectives (Sawicki, 2016).

One popular method within digital marketing is influencer marketing. This involves using people who influence others, such as social media personalities, to promote a brand's message to a wider audience (Association of National Advertisers, 2022). Because influencers can connect with large groups of people, businesses are now using them as an effective and modern way to communicate and market their products (De Jans et al., 2020).

Influencer marketing primarily relies on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter (X), as well as the influencers who use them. These influencers are personages with substantial followings who consistently post personal updates and relevant content online (De Veirman et al., 2017; Harrigan et al., 2021).

Because they share personal experiences, followers often feel like they know the influencer. This leads to what's known as a para-social interaction—an emotional, one-sided bond where individuals feel a sense of closeness and familiarity with media figures (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Feelings of similarity, belonging, and closeness make influencers seem more trustworthy (Ye et al., 2021). Because influencers can reach large audiences, brands frequently collaborate with them to advertise their services or products. The emotional connection between influencers and their followers, along with their sense of community, significantly contributes to the value of marketing, branding, and sales strategies (Ki et al., 2020).

Satish Kumar K and Hari Krishna C.P. (2017) explored the influence of social media on consumer purchasing behavior. Their findings revealed that a huge number of netizens are not only accustomed with the social media but also actively occupy with it, highlighting its potential as a powerful tool for brand promotion and awareness when utilized effectively. Additionally, Pallavi Singh K (2021) examined the growing significance of digital marketing and its decisive role in drawing consumers toward online shopping. Her study analysed the link between several digital marketing techniques and social media, demonstrating how they collectively influence consumer decisions. Fashmitha S and Shanmugavadeivel D (2021) studied consumer behavior in

response to online marketing, particularly through social media. The results indicated that a large portion of users, particularly those between the ages of 18 and 25 (90.8%), are highly active on social media, which has a strong effect on their buying behavior.

Recent research has emphasized the strong stimulus of social media on youth purchasing behavior. Vibhuti (2022) observed that many individuals spend 2 to 4 hours daily on social media, with approximately 60% following brands to stay informed about promotions and new products—indicating the significant role social platforms play in shaping consumer choices. Meena et al. (2022) analyzed how marketing content on these platforms affects the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses of young users, concluding that Digital social network is a powerful force in influencing their buying decisions. Likewise, Priyanshu (2023) found that social platform is a key factor in online buying among college students, with many new entrepreneurs launching their businesses on these platforms due to its broad reach and direct impact on young consumers.

In the current digital age, the connection between social media and youth consumer behavior has emerged as a key area of interest for researchers aiming to understand contemporary buying trends. Lakshmi (2024) found that both genders' youth consumers frequently use digital platforms for purchases, with most spending 1–3 hours daily on digital media. Rameshkumar (2022) observed that platforms like Instagram and Facebook are the most popular, and positive peer reviews heavily influence buying decisions. Agarwal et al. (2018–2019) found that People are increasingly turning to social media marketing primarily because of its convenience and time-saving benefits, particularly when making complex purchases. Mehla et al. (2015) and Chokkas (2014) examined students' perspectives on shopping through social networks, highlighting the success of social media marketing strategies. Niroula & Upadhaya (2023) and Rajeswari (2017) further explored its influence, showing that social media impacts not only purchasing behavior but also various aspects of youth lifestyle and learning. Ali et al. (2022) confirmed that factors like convenience, time-saving, and platform design strongly correlate with youth buying behavior in Pakistan. Meanwhile, Ahuja (2015) emphasized that branding significantly influences young consumers' decisions, often linked to fashion preferences and social status. In a more comprehensive study, Mehta et al. (2024) explored the broad influence of social media on youth development, indicating that digital engagement affects not only purchasing habits but also shapes identity and overall behavior.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

In this research paper, a sample of 100 young respondents aged between 15 and 30 years was selected using the convenience sampling method. The study's data were obtained via a structured questionnaire shared through a Google Forms link, facilitating convenient access and swift responses. The study employed a descriptive research design to systematically analyze the collected data and gain insights into the research problem. Statistical examination was steered by using SPSS software, employing tools such as Chi-square tests, cross-tabulation, and descriptive statistics to thoroughly examine patterns, relationships, and demographic characteristics of the participants.

ANALYSIS:

Table 1. Gender

Gender	Respondents	Percentage
Male	57	57%
Female	43	43%

Table 2. Age Group

Age Group	Respondents	Percentage
15-18	11	11%
19-22	56	56%
23-26	22	22%
27-30	11	11%

Table 3. Educational Qualification

Educational Qualification	Respondents	Percentage
SSC (10th Standard)	3	3%
HSC (12th Standard)	9	9%
Under Graduation	59	59%
Post Graduation	23	23%
Ph.D.	2	2%
Professionals	4	4%

Table 4. Occupation

Occupation	Respondents	Percentage
Student	56	56%
Employed (Private Sector)	16	16%
Employed (Government Sector)	1	1%
Business Owner	13	13%
Homemaker	14	14%

Based on the data presented in the tables above, a large number of respondents are male. The largest age group among participants is 19 to 22 years. Most individuals have an undergraduate academic background, and Students form the majority among the occupations represented in the study.

Table 5. Cross Tabulation : Social Media Platform and Social Media Strategies

		Socialmedia_startegy					Total
		not purchased	Giveaways and Contests	Discounts and Promotions	Engaging video content	Live sessions/ Q&A with influencers	
Social media platform used	Instagram	10	1	35	7	2	55
	Facebook	0	0	1	0	0	1
	YouTube	1	1	5	1	1	9
	Snapchat	3	2	8	1	0	14
	WhatsApp	2	0	14	2	1	19
	Threads	1	1	0	0	0	2
Total		17	5	63	11	4	100

The study discloses that Instagram is the top choice platform among respondents aged 15 to 30. Across all platforms, “Discounts and Promotions” excels as the most impactful strategy, particularly on WhatsApp and Instagram. Snapchat and YouTube show moderate engagement with diverse strategies, suggesting potential for creative marketing. In contrast, Facebook and Threads have minimal user interaction, indicating low relevance for this age group. Interestingly, 17% of users refrained from making a purchase despite being exposed to various strategies, indicating that visibility alone is not sufficient for conversion and that surplus factors may affect purchasing decisions.

Table 6. Chi-Square Test: Gender and Time Spent on Social Media

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	8.959 ^a	3	.030
Likelihood Ratio	12.641	3	.005
Linear-by-Linear Association	4.200	1	.040
N of Valid Cases	100		

The use of the chi-square test to study the association between gender and time consumed on social media yielded a Pearson Chi-Square value of 8.959 with 3 degrees of freedom and a p-value of 0.030. As the p-value is below the 0.05 threshold, the result is statistically significant at the 5% level. This signifies a meaningful association between the social media platform used and the strategy that influenced user behavior, based on gender.

The Likelihood Ratio of 12.641 ($p = 0.005$) further emphasizes this outcome, representing an even stronger level of statistical significance. Moreover, the Linear-by-Linear Association value of 4.200 ($p = 0.040$) suggests a notable trend or directional relationship between the variables. The analysis discloses that man respondents tend to use Social media networks more repeatedly than female respondents, with most male users spending between 1 to 3 hours on Digital platforms each day.

Table 7. Cross Tabulation: Age and Social Media Platform Used

		<u>Social media platform used</u>						Total
		Instagram	Facebook	YouTube	Snapchat	WhatsApp	Threads	
Age	15-18	8	0	2	0	1	0	11
	19-22	28	1	6	10	9	2	56
	23-26	15	0	0	3	4	0	22
	27-30	4	0	1	1	5	0	11
	Total	55	1	9	14	19	2	100

When cross-tabulation was applied, the results indicated that most social media consumers are in the 19–22 age group. Instagram is the most used platform among them, followed by Snapchat.

Table 8. Cross Tabulation: Social Media Platform used, Product Purchased, and Purchase Frequency

Count								
Purchase frequency			Product purchased					
			Not purchasing through social media	Clothing & Fashion	Electronics & Gadgets	Beauty & Personal Care Products	Fitness & Health	Perfumes
Not purchased	Social media platform used	Instagram	10					10
		YouTube	1					1
		Snapchat	3					3
		WhatsApp	2					2
		Threads	1					1
	Total		17					17
Rarely	Social media platform used	Instagram		7		2	1	10
		Facebook		1		0	0	1
		YouTube		2		1	0	3
		Snapchat		2		1	0	3
		WhatsApp		4		0	0	4
	Total			16		4	1	21
Sometimes	Social media platform used	Instagram		21	2	2	1	27
		YouTube		4	1	0	0	5
		Snapchat		7	0	0	0	7
		WhatsApp		7	0	0	1	8
		Threads		1	0	0	0	1
	Total			40	3	2	2	48
Often	Social media platform used	Instagram		7				7
		Snapchat		1				1
		WhatsApp		4				4
	Total			12				12
Very Frequently	Social media platform used	Instagram		1				1
		WhatsApp		1				1
	Total			2				2
Total	Social media platform used	Instagram	10	36	2	4	2	55
		Facebook	0	1	0	0	0	1
		YouTube	1	6	1	1	0	9
		Snapchat	3	10	0	1	0	14
		WhatsApp	2	16	0	0	1	19
		Threads	1	1	0	0	0	2
	Total		17	70	3	6	3	100

The table shows that most people use Instagram to shop through social media, especially for buying clothing and fashion items. Clothing and fashion are the most purchased products, while other categories like electronics, beauty products, fitness items, and perfumes are bought much less. Most users make purchases only sometimes, and Instagram stands out as the top platform for these occasional purchases. WhatsApp and Snapchat are also used, but to a lesser extent. Very few people use Facebook, YouTube, or Threads for shopping, and a small group does not make any purchases through social media at all.

FINDINGS AND RESULTS:

The analysis reveals that Instagram is the most preferred social media platform among users aged 15 to 30, particularly those aged 19–22, followed by moderate engagement on Snapchat and YouTube. Marketing strategies offering “Discounts and Promotions” were the most effective, especially on Instagram and WhatsApp. Despite this, 17% of users made no purchases, indicating that visibility alone does not lead to conversions. Shopping via social media is mostly occasional, with clothing and fashion being the most frequently purchased categories. Platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and Threads showed minimal relevance for social commerce in this age group.

The chi-square test indicated a significant correlation between gender and the amount of time spent on social media, with additional support from the Likelihood Ratio and Linear-by-Linear Association findings. Male users engaged more, typically spending 1 to 3 hours daily. These findings suggest that marketing strategies should be tailored based on platform preference, age, and gender patterns to drive better engagement and conversion rates.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

To improve engagement and drive conversions among young social media users, businesses should consider the following focused strategies.

- **Prioritize Instagram:** Focus content, ads, and influencer campaigns on Instagram, especially for users aged 19–22.
- **Use Discounts and Promotions:** Run time-sensitive offers on Instagram and WhatsApp to drive quick responses.
- **Segment by Age and Gender:** Target male users more actively, as they engage longer (1–3 hours daily).
- **Promote Fashion Products:** Highlight clothing and fashion items using visually rich content and user-generated posts.
- **Boost Conversions:** Build trust with reviews, secure checkout, return policies, and clear product info.
- **Engage via Snapchat & YouTube:** Use these platforms creatively for behind-the-scenes and tutorial content.
- **Reduce Focus on Facebook & Threads:** Limit investment in platforms with low engagement in the 15–30 age group.
- **Track and Adapt:** Use analytics to refine strategies based on platform, age, and gender performance.

CONCLUSION / SUMMARY:

The analysis clearly shows that Instagram dominates as the top platform for both engagement and social commerce among young users, especially those aged 19 to 22. Discounts and promotional offers work best across platforms, but especially on Instagram and WhatsApp. Gender affects how social media influences behavior. Males usually spend more time online and are more likely to respond to marketing efforts. Despite the visibility of offers, not all users are influenced to purchase, suggesting that other personal or psychological factors are also at play. Marketers should focus more on Instagram with targeted strategies and consider gender and age patterns to improve results.

SCOPE FOR FUTURE STUDY:

Future research can explore the deeper psychological and emotional factors that influence purchasing behavior despite the high visibility of promotions. It can also examine how trust, brand loyalty, and content type (e.g., video vs. image) impact conversions. Expanding the study to include older age groups, different geographic regions, and platform-specific algorithms may provide more comprehensive insights. Additionally, analysing the role of influencer credibility and emerging platforms like **Telegram, Pinterest, or LinkedIn** could help marketers adapt to evolving digital trends and consumer behavior patterns.

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