

A Study on the Impact of Digital Marketing on Consumer Buying Behaviour among College Students

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Abstract

Digital marketing has become an important part of the marketing process as college students increasingly interact with brands through social media, search engines, video platforms, online reviews and personalized advertisements. This study examines the impact of digital marketing on the buying behaviour of college students, with specific attention to exposure, preferred digital platforms, online purchase frequency, advertising influence, online reviews and personalized promotional messages. For demonstration of primary-data analysis, an illustrative data set of 100 college students is used. Data are presented through percentage analysis and descriptive interpretation. The model results indicate that social media advertisements are the most influential digital marketing tool, while online reviews and personalized advertisements also affect purchase decisions. The study suggests that marketers should provide credible information, relevant content, transparent offers and engaging digital experiences to attract and retain student consumers. The primary-data figures in this paper are illustrative and should be replaced with the researcher's actual questionnaire responses before academic submission.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Consumer Buying Behaviour, College Students, Social Media Marketing, Online Advertising

1. Introduction

Digital marketing refers to the use of internet-based and digital communication channels to promote products, services and brands. The growth of smart phones, social media platforms, search engines and e-commerce has changed the way consumers discover information, compare alternatives and make purchase decisions. College students form an important consumer group because they are active users of digital platforms and are frequently exposed to marketing messages while using mobile applications and websites.

The consumer buying process is influenced by several factors, including awareness, perceived value, trust, reviews, recommendations, price and promotional offers. Digital marketing can affect these stages by providing product information, demonstrations, customer reviews, personalised recommendations and limited-time offers. Social media also allows consumers to interact with brands and other users before and after a purchase.

This study focuses on college students and examines how digital marketing exposure is associated with their buying behaviour. The study considers the platforms used by students, the frequency of online purchases, the digital marketing tools that attract them most, and their perceptions of online reviews and personalized advertisements

2. Review of Literature

Mangold and Faulds (2009) described social media as an important element of the promotional mix because it enables consumers to communicate with one another as well as with organisations. This makes social media particularly relevant to consumer information search and brand communication.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) discussed the growing role of social media in organisational communication and highlighted the need for organisations to understand how users interact with digital platforms. Their work supports the importance of studying digital consumer engagement.

Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2022) explained that digital marketing integrates online channels, data and customer engagement activities to support marketing objectives. Digital channels allow marketers to target audiences, measure responses and personalize communication.

Kotler and Keller (2016) emphasised the importance of understanding consumer behaviour and the factors that influence purchase decisions. In a digital environment, information, reviews, communication and perceived value can operate together during the consumer decision-making process.

3. Research Methodology

Statement of the Problem

College students are exposed to a large number of digital marketing messages every day. Although such communication can provide useful product information and convenient purchase opportunities, excessive or poorly targeted advertising may not always lead to positive consumer responses. It is therefore useful to understand which digital marketing tools influence students most strongly and how such exposure relates to their buying behaviour.

Objectives of the Study

- To study the level of digital marketing exposure among college students.
- To identify the digital platforms most frequently used by college students.
- To examine the influence of digital marketing on students' online purchase behaviour.
- To identify the digital marketing tools that have the greatest influence on purchase decisions.
- To study the role of online reviews and personalised advertisements in consumer buying behaviour.
- To offer suggestions for improving digital marketing effectiveness among student consumers.

Research Design

A descriptive research design is adopted to examine the relationship between digital marketing exposure and consumer buying behaviour.

Source of Data: Primary data are represented through a model structured questionnaire designed for college students. Secondary literature is used only to provide conceptual background.

Sample Size: 100 college students are used for the illustrative primary-data analysis.

Sampling Method: Convenience sampling is assumed for the model database because respondents are selected from an accessible student population.

Data Collection Tool: A structured questionnaire containing demographic questions and five-point opinion statements is proposed.

Data Analysis: Percentage analysis and descriptive interpretation are used. The figures below are illustrative model data and are not claims about a real respondent group.

Scope: The study is limited to college students and focuses on digital marketing exposure, social media, online advertising, online reviews, personalised advertising and purchase behaviour.

4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The following tables present an primary-data database of 100 college students. Percentages are calculated on the basis of 100 respondents

Table 1: Gender-wise Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Male	48	48%
Female	50	50%
Other / Prefer not to say	2	2%
Total	100	100%

The model distribution shows that female respondents constitute 50% of the sample, male respondents 48%, and 2% selected other or preferred not to say. The distribution provides representation across gender categories.

Table 2: Age-wise Distribution of Respondents

Age Group	Number of Respondents	Percentage
18–19	22	22%
20–21	46	46%
22–23	27	27%
24 and above	5	5%
Total	100	100%

The largest group in the model sample is 20–21 years, representing 46% of respondents. This indicates that the analysis is mainly reflective of students in the middle years of college.

Table 3: Daily Exposure to Digital Marketing

Daily Digital Marketing Exposure	Number	Percentage
Less than 1 hour	8	8%
1–2 hours	28	28%
2–4 hours	44	44%
More than 4 hours	20	20%
Total	100	100%

A total of 64% of the model respondents report exposure of more than two hours per day, indicating substantial contact with digital marketing messages. This creates a strong context for studying its possible influence on buying behaviour.

Table 4: Most Used Digital Platform

Main Digital Platform	Number	Percentage
Instagram	38	38%
YouTube	27	27%
WhatsApp	14	14%
Facebook	8	8%
Search engines	7	7%
Other	6	6%
Total	100	100%

Instagram is the most frequently selected platform in the model database at 38%, followed by YouTube at 27%. This suggests that visually rich and video-based platforms may provide important channels for reaching student consumers.

Table 5: Frequency of Online Purchases

Online Purchase Frequency	Number	Percentage
Never	7	7%
Rarely	29	29%
Sometimes	43	43%
Frequently	17	17%
Very frequently	4	4%
Total	100	100%

The model results show that 64% of respondents purchase online sometimes or more frequently. This indicates that online buying is a relevant part of consumer behaviour within the illustrative student sample.

Table 6: Most Influential Digital Marketing Tool

Digital Marketing Tool	Number	Percentage
Social media advertisements	34	34%
Influencer recommendations	23	23%
Search advertisements	16	16%
Discount / coupon messages	18	18%
Email marketing	4	4%
Content / reviews	5	5%
Total	100	100%

Social media advertisements receive the highest share at 34%, followed by influencer recommendations at 23%. Discount and coupon messages account for 18%, while search advertisements account for 16%. This indicates that social and recommendation-based communication may be particularly influential among the model respondents.

Table 7: Perceived Influence on Purchase Decisions

Perceived Influence of Digital Marketing	Number	Percentage
Very high	19	19%
High	42	42%
Moderate	30	30%
Low	7	7%
Very low	2	2%
Total	100	100%

A combined 61% of the model respondents perceive digital marketing as having a high or very high influence on their purchase decisions. Only 9% report low or very low influence, suggesting a generally positive perception of digital marketing's role.

Table 8: Influence of Online Reviews

Opinion on Online Reviews	Number	Percentage
Strongly agree	21	21%
Agree	49	49%
Neutral	22	22%
Disagree	6	6%
Strongly disagree	2	2%
Total	100	100%

Seventy percent of the model respondents agree or strongly agree that online reviews influence their purchase decisions. This highlights the importance of review credibility and user-generated information in digital consumer behaviour.

Table 9: Influence of Personalised Advertisements

Opinion on Personalised Advertisements	Number	Percentage
Strongly agree	17	17%
Agree	38	38%
Neutral	27	27%
Disagree	14	14%
Strongly disagree	4	4%
Total	100	100%

Fifty-five percent of the model respondents agree or strongly agree that personalised advertisements influence their purchase decisions. The result suggests that relevance and personalisation can improve the attention given to digital marketing messages, although a sizeable neutral or negative group remains.

Table 10: Satisfaction with Online Purchases

Post-purchase Satisfaction	Number	Percentage
Very satisfied	16	16%
Satisfied	49	49%
Neutral	24	24%
Dissatisfied	9	9%
Very dissatisfied	2	2%
Total	100	100%

In the model dataset, 65% of respondents report being satisfied or very satisfied with online purchases. This indicates that digital marketing can support purchase activity, but marketers must ensure that product quality and service delivery match promotional expectations.

5. Major Findings

- The study comprises 100 college students, with male and female respondents represented in almost equal proportions.
- A considerable proportion of students are regularly exposed to digital marketing content. About 64% of the respondents spend more than two hours per day viewing or interacting with digital marketing content.
- Among the digital platforms considered in the study, Instagram and YouTube are the most commonly used platforms among the respondents.
- Online purchasing is relatively common among the students, with 64% indicating that they purchase products online either sometimes, frequently, or very frequently.
- Social media advertising is identified as the digital marketing method that has the greatest influence on the respondents' purchasing behaviour.
- Approximately 61% of the respondents believe that digital marketing has either a high or very high impact on their purchasing decisions.
- Customer reviews play an important role in online buying decisions. Around 70% of respondents agree or strongly agree that online reviews influence their decision to purchase a product.
- Personalised advertisements also have a noticeable effect on consumer behaviour, with 55% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that personalised advertising influences their purchase decisions.
- Overall satisfaction with online purchases is positive, with 65% of respondents stating that they are either satisfied or very satisfied with their online purchasing experiences.

6. Suggestions

- Digital marketers should concentrate their promotional activities on social media platforms that are frequently accessed by college students.
- Online advertisements should communicate product details accurately and include clear pricing, realistic images and relevant information to help consumers make informed decisions.
- Businesses should encourage authentic customer feedback and handle negative reviews politely and professionally in order to strengthen consumer confidence.

- Influencer marketing strategies should give greater importance to the influencer's credibility, expertise and relevance to the target audience rather than focusing only on the number of followers.
- Personalised advertisements should be designed according to consumers' interests and requirements while avoiding excessive targeting that may make users feel uncomfortable.
- Promotional campaigns involving discounts, coupons and special offers should clearly state their conditions so that customers understand the actual benefits before making a purchase.
- Companies should regularly evaluate customer satisfaction after an online purchase. Effective digital promotion should be supported by reliable products, good service and a satisfactory overall customer experience.

7. Conclusion

Digital marketing has emerged as an important factor shaping the purchasing behaviour of college students. The findings of this study suggest that digital platforms provide students with opportunities to discover products, compare alternatives, access customer opinions and make purchasing decisions.

Among the different digital marketing approaches examined, social media advertisements appear to have a particularly strong influence on the respondents. Online reviews, influencer recommendations and personalised advertisements also contribute to the way students evaluate products and decide whether to purchase them. The findings further indicate that online purchasing has become a common activity among a significant proportion of the respondents. The study therefore highlights the importance of developing digital marketing strategies that are informative, trustworthy, relevant and customer-oriented. Marketers targeting college students should understand their digital habits and communicate through platforms that they regularly use. At the same time, promotional efforts should be supported by genuine product quality and satisfactory customer service. Overall, the study indicates that digital marketing can play a meaningful role in influencing the buying behaviour of college students. However, the effectiveness of digital promotion ultimately depends on the credibility of the information provided and the quality of the customer's actual purchasing experience.

8. References

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