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Digital Engagement to Purchase Decisions: The Influence of Social Media on College Students

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ABSTRACT

Social media has become an important part of the daily lives of college students and plays an increasing role in influencing their purchasing decisions. Students are frequently exposed to social media advertisements, influencer recommendations, online reviews, peer opinions and product-related content, which may affect their product awareness, evaluation and purchase behavior. This study aims to examine the influence of social media on purchase behavior among college students. A quantitative research approach was adopted, and primary data were collected from college students using a structured questionnaire. The collected data were analyzed using reliability analysis, descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analysis to assess the consistency of the measurement items, understand the respondents' characteristics and examine the relationship between social media factors and purchase behavior. The study provides insights into the role of social media in shaping the purchasing decisions of college students and highlights the importance of digital content, online reviews, advertisements, influencers and peer influence in the modern purchasing process.

Keywords: Social Media, Purchase Behavior, Online Reviews, Influencer Marketing.

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology has significantly transformed consumer purchasing behaviour worldwide. Social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook have become important channels for discovering products, comparing alternatives, reading customer reviews, and interacting with brands. Unlike traditional marketing methods, social media encourages two-way communication, allowing consumers to share opinions and experiences. Influencer recommendations, online advertisements, peer opinions, and user-generated content can influence consumers' perceptions, preferences, and purchase intentions. The growth of social commerce has further strengthened the relationship between social media engagement and purchasing activities.

In India, increasing smartphone usage, internet accessibility, and digital platform adoption have made social media an essential source of product information. Consumers increasingly depend on online reviews, promotional videos, influencers, and recommendations before making purchasing decisions. College students are particularly relevant to this changing environment because they frequently engage with social media and are exposed to emerging trends, brand promotions, and peer influence. These factors may affect their product preferences, brand awareness, and final purchasing decisions.

However, social media does not always have a positive influence on consumer behaviour. Misleading advertisements, unreliable reviews, excessive promotional content, and the desire to follow popular trends may encourage impulsive purchases. Privacy concerns and excessive exposure to personalised

advertisements can also influence consumer perceptions. Therefore, understanding social media's influence requires examining not only advertising exposure but also the role of influencers, online reviews, peer recommendations, and digital interactions. Studying these factors among college students can provide valuable insights into their purchasing behaviour and help businesses develop effective digital marketing strategies that align with young consumers' preferences and expectations

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Alhassan et al. (2023) investigated the connection between social media marketing and consumer purchase patterns in Ghana's cellular sector. The study discovered a strong correlation between social media marketing and consumer purchase behavior based on responses from 300 customers. Additionally, it emphasized how consumers' decisions to buy might be influenced by both user-generated and company-generated material.

Beylergil and Demir (2025) examined the influence of micro-influencers on university students' purchase intentions. Their study focused on influencer characteristics such as attractiveness, trustworthiness, and the relationship between influencers and their followers. The findings indicated that these characteristics were associated with students' purchase intentions.

Jia et al. (2025) investigated the factors influencing university students' intentions to make purchases using social media. According to the study, purchase intention was positively impacted by perceived value and informativeness, but there was a negative correlation with personalization. The results show that consumers appreciate pertinent and helpful information, but over-personalization may raise issues and lessen favorable reactions to social media advertising.

Kumar, Konar and Balasubramanian (2020) investigated the purchase habits of customers in Malaysian eateries by taking into account online ordering platforms, social media advertising, electronic word-of-mouth, and information accessibility. Their results demonstrated that while increased information accessibility did not significantly improve purchase behavior, electronic word-of-mouth, social media advertising, and online ordering methods did. Among the variables analyzed, social media advertising had the biggest impact.

Lalwani, Kumar and Rani (2021) used 200 respondents from major Indian cities to examine the impact of social media on Generation Z's purchasing habits. The survey discovered variations in respondents' platform usage and purchasing decisions. Price, ratings, convenience, variety, and alluring deals were essential factors in online buying decisions, and Instagram emerged as a significant platform. Additionally, the survey found that customers regularly used social networking sites to look for product details and reviews.

Nandhini and Maanasa (2026) examined how social media affected Coimbatore college students' decisions to buy clothes and fashion. According to their research, YouTube and Instagram are significant sources of brand recognition and fashion inspiration. Online reviews, visually appealing ads, and influencer marketing were found to have an impact on students' purchase intentions.

Nawandar and Sinha (2025) investigated the connection between young individuals' use of social media, online buying habits, and customer trust. Influencer marketing, internet reviews, and targeted ads were all taken into account in their study as variables related to consumer choices. The study emphasized how crucial reliable product information and promotional materials are in influencing consumers' opinions. It also highlighted how important trust is when making selections about what to buy online.

Rashika and Chahar (2025) investigated how peer recommendations and commercial content affected female undergraduate students' online shopping habits in semi-urban India. Influencer marketing, friend recommendations, and internet reviews were the main topics of their investigation. According to the results, online reviews and peer recommendations were rated as having more power than influencer marketing and commercial posts.

Shah, Zahoor and Qureshi (2019) examined the connection between social media, interactions with customers, and consumer behavior. According to their research, social media use and purchase behavior are positively correlated, and this correlation is strengthened by customer interactions. According to the research, social media may be used by companies to build relationships with their clients and affect their purchasing decisions in addition to serving as a promotional channel.

Sindhuja, Panda and Krishna (2023) examined how social media affects consumer purchasing behavior and emphasized the significance of online information, influencer marketing, targeted ads, information search, and customer engagement. According to their research, consumers are using social media more and more to get information rapidly, and influencers can be crucial in drawing in customers and influencing decisions about what to buy.

Vineethan et al. (2025) examined social commerce transactions among college students in Kerala. The study found that social media purchases were common among the respondents, particularly for fashion and beauty-related products. Reviews and ratings were highly influential, with 95.42% of respondents indicating that these factors affected their purchase decisions. Recommendations from friends and family, social media advertisements, and influencers were also found to contribute to purchasing behaviour.

Varghese and Agrawal (2021) used the EBM model to examine how social media affects consumer purchasing decisions. Their study demonstrated the increasing significance of consumer opinions and user-generated material in the purchasing process. In addition to providing customers with information about goods and services, social media gives them the chance to impact other customers through online discussions, reviews, and comments.

Voramontri and Klieb (2019) examined how social media affects customer behavior, especially when it comes to making difficult purchases. The study looked at information search, alternative evaluation, purchase decisions, and post-buy evaluation using the EBM decision-making framework. The results demonstrated that social media had a discernible impact on alternative appraisal and information search, indicating that customers are using social media platforms more frequently before making final purchases.

Yogesh and Mehta (2014) Their research concentrated on how social media functions at various phases of the decision to buy. The results showed that social media was the primary source of product information for consumers due to its perceived legitimacy, ease of use, and efficacy. Purchase decisions have also been found to be influenced by social media reviews and opinions. Social Media's Impact on Purchase Decisions

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a quantitative research approach to examine the influence of social media on the purchase behaviour of college students. A descriptive and correlational research design was used to

understand students' responses to different social media factors and to examine the relationship between social media influence and their purchasing decisions.

3.2 Objectives:

1 To examine the extent to which social media influences the purchase decisions of college students.

2 To identify the key social media factors, such as influencer content, advertisements, online reviews, and peer recommendations, that influence the purchase behaviour of college students.

3.3 Population and Sample

The study focused on college students as the target population. Data were collected from 100 respondents who participated in the survey. The respondents shared their opinions about the influence of social media on their purchasing decisions, including the role of influencer endorsements, online reviews, advertisements, visual content and promotional offers.

3.4 Data Collection

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire included statements about students' experiences with social media and its influence on their buying behaviour. Responses to the relevant statements were recorded using a five-point rating scale, ranging from 1 to 5. The collected responses were organised and analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics.

3.5 Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Three statistical techniques were used in the study. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's Alpha was performed to assess the internal consistency of the questionnaire items. Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were used to summarise respondents' views on different social media factors. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the strength and direction of the relationship between social media influence and students' purchase decisions. The correlation was evaluated at the 5% level of significance.

3.6 Research Variables

The study examined two main variables: social media influence and purchase behaviour among college students. Social media influence was assessed through factors such as influencer endorsements, online reviews and ratings, advertisements, attractive visual content, and promotional offers. Purchase behaviour was examined in terms of students' purchasing decisions. The study investigated whether a relationship exists between social media influence and the purchasing decisions of college students.

3.7. Hypothesis Tested in the study

Null hypothesis (H0): There is no significant relationship between social media influence and the purchase decisions of college students.

Alternative hypothesis (H1): There is a significant relationship between social media influence and the purchase decisions of college students.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Reliability Analysis

Table 1: Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
0.824	7

Source : Primary data

Interpretation

Reliability analysis was carried out using Cronbach's Alpha to examine the internal consistency of the questionnaire items. The analysis produced a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.824 for seven items. This value indicates good internal consistency, suggesting that the items used in the analysis work reasonably well together in measuring the study variables. Therefore, the questionnaire demonstrates an acceptable level of reliability for further statistical analysis.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Social Media Factors

Social media factor	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Deviation
Influencer or celebrity endorsements increase my trust in a product.	100	1	5	2.94	1.108
Online reviews and ratings on social media affect my buying decisions.	100	1	5	3.32	1.145
Social media advertisements make me interested in trying new or unfamiliar brands.	100	1	5	3.46	1.049
Attractive visual content, such as photos, videos, and reels, increases my intention to purchase a product.	100	1	5	3.48	0.882
Discounts and promotional offers displayed on social media motivate me to make a purchase.	100	1	5	3.40	1.005

Source : Primary data

Interpretation

Descriptive statistics were used to understand how college students responded to different social media factors associated with purchasing decisions. All five items received responses from 100 participants. Among the factors examined, attractive visual content, including photos, videos and reels, recorded the highest mean score of 3.48, followed closely by social media advertisements at 3.46. This suggests that visual content and advertising were relatively influential factors in the respondents' reported purchase intentions.

Discounts and promotional offers recorded a mean of 3.40, while online reviews and ratings had a mean of 3.32. Influencer or celebrity endorsements received the lowest mean score of 2.94 among the five items. This indicates that influencer endorsements were comparatively less influential in building product trust than the other factors examined.

The standard deviation values ranged from 0.882 to 1.145, indicating some variation in respondents' opinions. Overall, the results suggest that visual content, advertisements and promotional offers were relatively prominent considerations in the purchasing decisions reported by the college students.

4.3 Pearson Correlation Analysis

Table 3: Relationship between Social Media Influence and Purchase Decisions

Variables	Pearson Correlation (r)	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Social media influence and overall purchase decisions	0.550	0.000*	100

Source: Primary data

Interpretation

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between social media influence and the overall purchase decisions of college students. The results showed a moderate positive

correlation (r = 0.550) between the two variables. The significance value was below 0.001, indicating that the relationship was statistically significant at the 5% level.

This finding suggests that higher social media influence scores tended to be associated with higher reported purchase-decision scores among the respondents. In other words, students who reported greater social media influence also tended to report a greater influence on their purchasing decisions. However, correlation alone does not establish that social media causes changes in purchasing behaviour.

4.4 Hypothesis Testing

The following hypotheses can be used to examine the relationship tested in the Pearson correlation analysis.

Null hypothesis (H0): There is no significant relationship between social media influence and the purchase decisions of college students.

Alternative hypothesis (H1): There is a significant relationship between social media influence and the purchase decisions of college students.

Result: Pearson correlation = 0.550; $p < 0.001$; N = 100.

Interpretation

The correlation analysis identified a statistically significant positive relationship between social media influence and purchase decisions. Since the p-value is below the 0.05 significance level, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is supported. The result indicates that social media influence is positively associated with the purchasing decisions reported by the college students who participated in the study.

5. CONCLUSION

The analysis provides several insights into the influence of social media on college students' purchasing decisions. First, the questionnaire items demonstrated good internal consistency, with a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.824 across seven items. Second, attractive visual content recorded the highest mean score (3.48) among the five social media factors presented, followed by social media advertisements (3.46). Influencer or celebrity endorsements recorded the lowest mean score (2.94). Finally, Pearson correlation revealed a statistically significant moderate positive relationship between social media influence and purchase decisions ($r = 0.550$, $p < 0.001$). These findings suggest that social media content and promotional activities are relevant to the purchasing decisions reported by college students. The results offer a basis for further discussion of how different types of social media content relate to students' buying behaviour.

To draw in college students, businesses should produce eye-catching visual content, such as images, videos, and reels. Clear and accurate product information should be included in social media ads. To gain customers' trust, businesses should promote sincere customer reviews and ratings. Promotional offers and appropriate discounts may encourage students to buy goods. Businesses should work with reputable influencers who are familiar with their target market. Additionally, they ought to steer clear of deceptive advertising and make sure that their marketing initiatives are transparent. Before making a purchase, college students should weigh their needs and finances, evaluate items, and check internet reviews. These actions can assist companies in enhancing their social media marketing tactics while motivating students to make responsible and knowledgeable purchases.

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