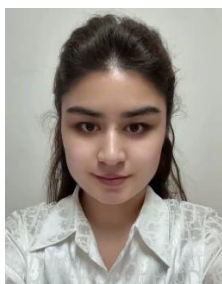


HOW SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING INFLUENCES CONSUMER PURCHASE DECISIONS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY



Alijonova Mohirabonu

Tashkent State University of Economics &

Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia

Management, 4th-year student

Email: mohirabonualijonova2@gmail.com

Scientific Supervisor:

1. Chairul Furqon

Email: c_furqon@upi.edu

2. Azamjon Tulaboev

a.tulaboev@tsue.uz

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2591-1148>

Abstract

Through consumer perceptions, experiences, and motivations, this study aims to investigate how social media marketing affects consumer purchasing behavior. Unlike other studies, which used quantitative research, this study employed a qualitative research design to enhance the comprehension of consumer behavior. The study employed a semi-structured interview technique to collect data from 13 social media users with experience in purchasing products advertised via social media. The research used thematic analysis to identify the following themes: visual content attractiveness, social proof, trust and credibility, emotional engagement, and promotional influence. The study discovered that the appeal of visual content significantly impacts consumer behavior, whereas social proof is essential for fostering consumer trust in a specific product. The study also found that trust and authenticity are important factors that affect how people act as consumers. Emotional engagement, on the other hand, builds a strong connection between the consumer and the brand. The study also discovered that promotional influence significantly affects consumer behavior, though to a lesser extent than other factors. The study provides a more in-depth look at how social media marketing affects how people act, which is important for businesses to know when making marketing plans.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing; Consumer Purchase Decision; Qualitative Study; Thematic Analysis; Consumer Behavior

Introduction

In recent years, the rapid growth of digital technology has had a big effect on how marketing is done and how people act. One of the most notable impacts is the rise and dominance of social media in communication, interaction, and business practices. Social media sites such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube

have become popular not only in social interaction but also in marketing and business practices. This has greatly impacted the way marketing is done, from a one-way communication style to a more interactive and consumer-based marketing style (Stephen, 2016; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Social media marketing is one of the most important strategies in the digital age, especially in the competitive business environment. This is because social media lets businesses share content, talk to customers, and make online communities. These practices help companies understand consumers, build relationships, and connect with them more effectively. Moreover, social media enables consumers to access a wide range of information, including product reviews and recommendations, which impact their perception and behavior in the market (Voorveld et al., 2018). Consumer purchase decision is a complex activity in which consumers assess different alternatives before taking a final decision regarding their choice of product or service. When it comes to social media, several elements shape consumer buying choices, such as the appeal of the content, the level of trust in the brand, the influence of peers, and the emotional reaction to marketing messages. As a result, social media marketing has become an essential instrument for influencing consumer behavior and guiding their purchasing choices (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). Research has indicated that social media marketing plays a crucial role in influencing consumer purchasing choices. Nonetheless, the majority of these studies have predominantly utilized quantitative methods to explore how social media marketing affects consumer behavior and purchasing decisions. The primary goal of quantitative research is to evaluate the connections between variables, which has led many researchers to fall short in achieving a thorough understanding of consumer behavior and their reactions to social media marketing. This has necessitated the need for a qualitative study, which seeks to explore consumer behavior and their response to social media marketing in a comprehensive manner. This research aims to investigate how social media marketing affects consumer purchasing choices through a qualitative approach. It intends to determine the influence of social media marketing on consumer behavior and ultimately their buying decisions. The results of this study are anticipated to be highly valuable in gaining insights into consumer behavior and, ultimately, developing a thorough understanding of how consumers respond to social media marketing.

Social Media Marketing

Organizations utilize social media marketing as a strategy to enhance the visibility of their products, services, and brands on social media platforms. The various activities involved in social media marketing include creating engaging content, information sharing, interacting with consumers, and building communities. Through social media marketing, various organizations are able to reach a wider audience and interact with consumers. This makes social media marketing a successful marketing strategy compared to other marketing approaches. According to

recent studies, social media marketing has various important elements. The elements include creating engaging content, information sharing, interacting with consumers through connecting, and building communities. Creating engaging content involves creating attractive and relevant information for consumers. The information created is supposed to reflect the organization's brand. Information sharing is used for spreading information among consumers. Interaction involves interacting with consumers through connecting. Lastly, community building is used for creating a sense of belonging among consumers.

In addition, social media marketing is a significant marketing strategy used by various organizations. The strategy is used for influencing consumers' perceptions and attitudes. For instance, social media marketing can influence consumers' perceptions through visually attractive information. The information is used for creating a connection with consumers. The information can also be used for building trust with consumers. Furthermore, social media marketing can influence consumers through user-generated information. The information is used for creating a sense of belonging among consumers. The information can also be used for building trust with consumers. Consequently, utilizing social media marketing proves to be an effective approach for swaying consumer behavior. This perspective is endorsed by De Veirman et al. (2017) and Sokolova & Kefi (2020), who recognize social media marketing as a potent marketing tactic.

Purchase Decision

The decision-making process for purchasing involves choosing from various options, where a consumer decides on a specific product or service based on their particular needs, desires, and the information available to them. This process consists of several stages: recognizing a problem, searching for information, evaluating different options, making the purchase decision, and reflecting on the purchase afterward. In the digital age, social media serves as a significant source of information, influencing multiple stages of the purchasing decision process (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Within the sphere of social media, a variety of factors play a role in shaping consumer purchasing decisions. The factors influencing consumer purchase decisions through social media include the degree of attractiveness of the content, the degree of credibility of the information, consumer responses, and emotional responses to the messages. The positive or negative information may influence the consumer to buy or avoid a particular product (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Moreover, trust is crucial in influencing consumer purchasing choices. The consumer may be willing to buy a particular product from a brand if he or she trusts the brand. Social media enables a consumer to communicate directly with a brand or other users, which may increase or decrease the trust of a consumer. Therefore, grasping how social media affects trust is crucial for understanding consumer purchasing behavior (Hajli, 2015).

Research Propositions

Since this study adopts a qualitative approach, research propositions are used instead of hypotheses to guide the exploration of the research problem. These propositions, derived from the current body of literature, are designed to steer the approach to data collection and analysis.

The research propositions of this study are as follows:

P1: Social media marketing influences consumer purchase decisions through content creation, content sharing, interaction, and community building.

P2: People are more inclined to decide on purchases when social media posts are visually appealing, engaging, and pertinent to their interests.

P3: Consumer buying choices are significantly influenced by trust, which is shaped by reviews, recommendations, and endorsements from influencers.

P4: Personal experiences and emotional reactions play a role in influencing how social media marketing affects consumer purchasing choices.

Methods

This study seeks to employ a qualitative research approach to explore how social media marketing affects consumer purchasing choices by examining their perceptions, experiences, and motivations. The research design incorporates semi-structured interviews for data collection, offering the flexibility for participants to share their perspectives while maintaining a focus on achieving the study's goals. Participants were chosen using a purposive sampling technique, with criteria including being active on social media platforms like Instagram or TikTok, exposure to brand-related content, and having made purchase decisions influenced by social media marketing. To reach data saturation, where no new significant insights arise from the interviews, it was determined that 12 to 15 participants would be necessary, as recommended by Creswell (2016). Interviews were carried out either in person or via the internet, depending on participant availability, and each session lasted about 20 to 30 minutes. With participants' consent, the interviews were recorded, forming the foundation of the research. The collected data underwent thematic analysis, a method that involves identifying, coding, and categorizing data to uncover patterns or themes within the research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data analysis process included several stages: familiarizing with the data, initial coding, developing themes, and interpreting the findings in relation to the research objectives. To ensure the research's credibility, techniques such as member checking were employed to verify its reliability, which included thorough documentation of the research process. This research design facilitates a deeper insight into how social media marketing affects consumer purchasing decisions, offering a level of understanding that quantitative research cannot provide, as it allows for a comprehensive exploration of the research subject.

Results and discussion

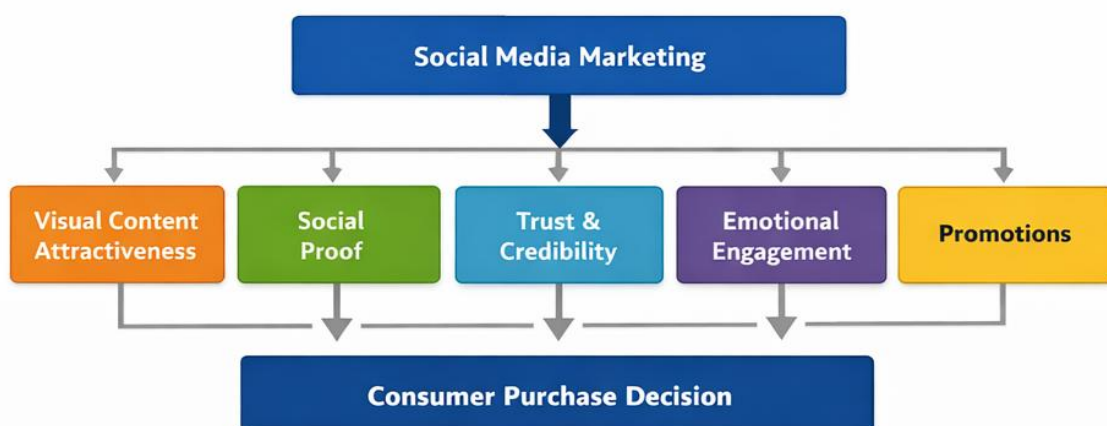
Respondent Characteristics

This study involved conducting semi-structured interviews with 13 individuals. Participants were chosen using purposive sampling criteria, requiring them to be active on social media and have experience making purchase decisions influenced by social media content. Most participants were between 18 and 30 years old, highlighting the active engagement of younger consumers on social media platforms. The gender distribution among participants was nearly equal, comprising both males and females. Most of the participants of this research reported that they used Instagram and TikTok as social media platforms to access information about products, mainly food, beverage, fashion, and lifestyle products. All of the participants of this research agreed that they made at least one purchasing decision based on social media marketing, which indicates that social media plays an important role in shaping consumer behavior in the current digital world (Maulid et al., 2022).

Thematic Analysis Results

Through thematic analysis of the interview data, five principal themes emerged, shedding light on the ways social media marketing affects consumer purchasing decisions. These themes include visual content attractiveness, social proof, trust and credibility, emotional engagement, and promotional influence. These themes are interconnected and collectively contribute to shaping consumer perceptions and decision-making processes.

Figure 1. Thematic Framework Diagram



Visual Content Attractiveness

This indicates that the attractiveness of the content of the images is one of the most influencing factors in attracting consumer attention and creating interest in purchasing the product. The respondents stated that high-quality images, creative videos, and beautiful presentations are some of the factors that affect their perception of a product.

One respondent stated:

“If the content looks aesthetic and well-designed, I feel like the product is premium, so I become more interested to try it.”

Another respondent explained:

“Short videos on TikTok are very powerful. If the product looks satisfying or trendy, it immediately grabs my attention.”

Furthermore, some of the respondents mentioned that consistency in the content of the images also plays a role in creating a positive brand image. The findings suggest that creating content is a fundamental component of social media marketing, serving as the initial interaction point between consumers and products.

Social Proof

Social proof has been recognized as a vital element in shaping consumer choices in the marketplace. The respondents stated that reviews, comments, likes, and shares give a level of validation and reduce uncertainty in evaluating a product. The respondents also stated that they rely on what other consumers have gone through before buying a product.

One respondent mentioned:

“Before buying, I always check the comments and reviews. If many people say it’s good, I feel more confident.”

Another respondent stated:

“If a product is viral or many people are talking about it, I get curious and want to try it too.”

Additionally, it has been identified that consumer perception is significantly influenced by influencer recommendations. The respondents stated that they mostly rely on what the influencer has to say, as long as it appears genuine and relatable. This shows that content sharing and interaction in a community greatly contribute to consumer decision-making, as it gives a level of social validation.

Trust and Credibility

Trust and credibility were identified as critical factors in the purchase decision process. Respondents indicated that they are more likely to purchase products from brands that appear transparent, honest, and consistent in their communication. Trust is built through clear product information, genuine customer reviews, and active engagement with consumers.

One respondent explained:

“I trust brands that show real customer experiences, not just advertisements.”

Another respondent noted:

“If the brand replies to comments and interacts with customers, I feel more confident to buy.”

However, respondents also expressed skepticism toward overly promotional or unrealistic content. Some participants mentioned that excessive editing or exaggerated claims reduce their trust in a brand. For example:

“If everything looks too perfect, I feel like it’s not real, so I don’t trust it.”

These findings indicate that authenticity and transparency are essential elements in building trust through social media marketing.

Emotional Engagement

Emotional engagement was also found to significantly influence consumer purchase decisions. Respondents reported that content that evokes emotions such as excitement, curiosity, or desire can motivate them to explore products further and eventually make a purchase.

One respondent stated:

“Sometimes I buy something just because the video makes me feel excited or even hungry.”

Another respondent mentioned:

“If I can relate to the content, like it matches my lifestyle, I feel more connected to the brand.”

Storytelling and lifestyle representation were identified as effective strategies for creating emotional connections. The results indicate that social media marketing affects both logical assessments and emotional reactions, which are crucial in the decision-making process.

Promotional Influence

Promotional strategies such as discounts, limited-time offers, and special deals were found to increase consumer motivation to purchase. Survey participants reported that promotions instill a sense of urgency and prompt immediate action.

One respondent explained:

“If I see a discount and I already like the product, I will buy it immediately.”

However, several respondents emphasized that promotions alone are not sufficient to influence purchase decisions. Instead, promotions are more effective when combined with other factors such as attractive content, positive reviews, and trust in the brand. This indicates that promotional tactics should be seamlessly incorporated into the broader social media marketing strategy.

Discussion

The findings of the research indicate that social media marketing plays a crucial role in shaping consumer purchasing choices, influenced by several elements such as the appeal of visuals, social validation, trust, emotions, and marketing tactics. This aligns with other research highlighting the significance of engaging content and consumer interaction in affecting purchasing decisions (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). The study's findings indicate that social proof plays a crucial role in influencing

consumer purchasing choices, aligning with other research that highlights the significance of credibility in social media marketing (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Nevertheless, the findings of the study stand apart from other quantitative research by offering a more profound insight into consumer behavior and their reactions to social media content, marking a noteworthy advancement in this area of research. Furthermore, the study's findings indicate that emotions have a substantial impact on consumer behavior, aligning with other research that highlights the significance of consumer experience in shaping such behavior (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). The findings of the study indicate that trust significantly impacts consumer behavior, aligning with other research that highlights the crucial role of consumer experience in shaping such behavior (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). The findings of the study indicate that trust significantly impacts consumer behavior, aligning with other research that highlights the crucial role of consumer experience in shaping such behavior (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). To sum up, the findings of the research have offered a thorough insight into how social media marketing affects consumer buying choices, making a notable contribution to this area of study.

Conclusion

The research concludes that social media marketing significantly influences consumer purchasing decisions through a combination of interconnected elements, including the appeal of visual content, social validation, trustworthiness, credibility, emotional involvement, and marketing tactics. The results showed that consumers are highly responsive to visually appealing content, which generates initial interest in the product and influences their perceptions in a favorable way. In addition, consumers are highly influenced by social proof, which reduces their uncertainty in decision-making. Trust and credibility are also very important factors in generating purchase behavior in consumers, as they are highly likely to purchase products from brands that are authentic, transparent, and highly engaged. Emotional engagement is also an important factor in shaping consumer behavior, as it creates a link between consumers and brands. Promotional strategies are also an important factor in generating purchase behavior in consumers, but they are used in conjunction with trust and attractive content. This study seeks to offer a more profound understanding of how social media marketing affects consumer behavior, setting it apart from earlier quantitative research. Consequently, businesses can develop genuine, engaging, and consumer-focused social media marketing strategies to impact consumer purchasing decisions. It is suggested that future research should increase the sample size, investigate various industries, and consider different cross-cultural settings to achieve a thorough comprehension of social media marketing.

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Appendix

Appendix A. Interview Guide

The following semi-structured interview questions were used to collect data from respondents. The questions were designed to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and motivations related to social media marketing and purchase decisions.

Section A: General Information

How often do you use social media?

Which social media platforms do you use most frequently?

Section B: Experience with Social Media Marketing

3. Have you ever purchased a product after seeing it on social media?

4. Can you describe your experience when buying a product influenced by social media?

Section C: Content Influence

5. What type of social media content attracts your attention the most (e.g., photos, videos, influencers, reviews)?

6. What makes you interested in a product when you see it on social media?

Section D: Trust and Credibility

7. What makes you trust a brand on social media?

8. What makes you doubt or not trust a brand on social media?

Section E: Purchase Decision

9. What factors influence your final decision to buy a product?

10. Do promotions (discounts, special offers) affect your decision? How?

Appendix B. Sample Interview Transcript

Respondent 1 (R1)

Age: 23

Platform: Instagram & TikTok

Interviewer: How often do you use social media?

R1: I use social media every day, especially Instagram and TikTok.

Interviewer: Have you ever purchased a product after seeing it on social media?

R1: Yes, many times. Usually food or drinks that look interesting.

Interviewer: What kind of content attracts your attention?

R1: I like aesthetic photos and short videos. If the video looks satisfying, I want to try the product.

Interviewer: What makes you trust a brand?

R1: I check the comments and reviews first. If many people say it's good, I trust it more.

Interviewer: What makes you not trust a brand?

R1: If the content looks too edited or unrealistic, I feel like it's fake.

Interviewer: What makes you finally decide to buy?

R1: If the product looks good, has good reviews, and sometimes if there is a discount.

Appendix C. Coding and Thematic Analysis

The following table presents examples of codes and themes identified during the data analysis process.

Code	Description	Example Quote	Theme
Aesthetic Content	Visually appealing images/videos	"If it looks aesthetic, I want to try it"	Visual Content Attractiveness
Short Video Appeal	Influence of TikTok/Reels videos	"Short videos really catch my attention"	Visual Content Attractiveness
Customer Reviews	Importance of comments and feedback	"I always check reviews before buying"	Social Proof
Influencer Trust	Trust in influencers	"I trust influencers I follow"	Social Proof
Brand Authenticity	Honest and transparent communication	"I trust brands that show real experiences"	Trust & Credibility
Skepticism	Doubt toward overly perfect content	"If it looks too perfect, I don't trust it"	Trust & Credibility
Emotional Reaction	Feeling excited or curious	"The video makes me feel excited"	Emotional Engagement
Promotion Effect	Influence of discounts/offers	"If there's a discount, I buy faster"	Promotional Influence