

The role of social media on online shopping behavior and consumer trust: A study on young adults

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Abstract

Social media has transformed consumer behavior, particularly among young adults (18-25), influencing online shopping habits and trust in brands. This study examines the role of influencer marketing, online reviews, and targeted advertisements in shaping consumer trust and purchase decisions. Using a survey-based approach with 200 participants, the findings indicate that frequent social media users are more inclined to shop online and trust brands endorsed by influencers. However, trust remains fragile and can be easily eroded by negative reviews or inauthentic influencer partnerships. The study underscores the importance of authenticity in maintaining consumer trust, offering valuable insights for brands seeking to enhance engagement and credibility in digital commerce.

Keywords: Social media; Online shopping behavior; Consumer trust; Young adults; Influencer marketing; Digital marketing; Brand trust.

1. Introduction

This study examines how social media features such as influencer marketing, online reviews, and targeted advertisements impact purchasing decisions, spending habits, and brand loyalty among young adults (18-25). Through surveys and qualitative methods, the research investigates the relationship between social media engagement and consumer trust, offering insights for online retailers, marketers, and policymakers to enhance trust-based online shopping experiences. Social media has transformed digital commerce, particularly for young adults who are highly engaged users. Platforms serve as more than communication tools—they shape purchasing decisions through peer recommendations, influencer endorsements, and algorithm-driven advertising.

Grounded in social influence theory, which highlights the impact of social networks in shaping consumer choices, and trust formation in digital environments, this study explores how digital connectivity influences trust in online shopping. Trust is critical in e-commerce, encompassing vendor reliability, transaction security, and product authenticity. By examining these factors, the research provides actionable insights to foster a more trustworthy online marketplace. The study integrates multiple theories to explain consumer behavior: Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) connects attitudes, norms, and perceived control with online shopping Purpose; Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) emphasizes the role of influencers in shaping behavior; Trust Transfer Theory explains how trust moves from social media to online retailers; Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) details how consumers process social media information.

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) explores how online communities shape trust and shopping preferences. These theories frame how social media engagement, influencer credibility, and algorithmic exposure impact trust and consumer decisions. Despite the increasing impact of social media on shaping Customer habits, its influence on online

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shopping trust remains underexplored. This study addresses: How does social media impact online shopping behavior and consumer trust among young adults, considering the role of influencers, algorithmic personalization, and data privacy concerns? Given that young adults are both dominant social media users and key online consumers, understanding their trust mechanisms is crucial for businesses. This research seeks to uncover patterns that can inform marketing methods and enhance customer confidence in online markets.

1.1. Aim and Objectives of the Study

1.1.1. Aim of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the influence of social media on online shopping behavior and consumer trust among young adults. This research aims to understand the way social media platforms affect purchasing decisions, brand perceptions, and trust in online shopping environments within this demographic.

1.1.2. Objectives of the Study

- To examine the impact of social media usage on online shopping behavior.
- To analyze the impact of social media on consumer trust.
- To assess the relationship between social media on online shopping behavior.
- To assess the relationship between social media and consumer trust.

1.2. Research Questions/Hypothesis

1.2.1. Research Questions

- How does social media usage influence online shopping behavior within young adults?
- To find the impact of consumer trust on online shopping behavior.

1.2.2. Hypothesis

- H_{01} : There is no significant influence of social media engagement on online shopping behavior.
- H_{02} : There is no significant impact of social media on consumer trust.
- H_{03} : There is no significant relationship between social media and online shopping behavior.
- H_{04} : There is no significant relationship between social media and consumer trust.

1.3. Need and Significance of the Study

In the modern digital era, social media has evolved into a ubiquitous aspect of life, particularly among young adults. This demographic, often characterized by their tech-savviness and active online presence, is a significant force in the online shopping market. However, despite the widespread utilization of social media and its apparent influence on consumer behavior, there remains a critical need to comprehensively understand how these platforms impact online shopping behavior and consumer trust.

2. Review of Literature

The digital revolution has significantly transformed consumer behavior, particularly among young adults who are highly active on social media. These platforms influence not only how young consumers seek information and entertainment but also how they engage in online shopping. The role of social media in shaping purchasing behavior and trust in e-commerce has become a critical focus for researchers and marketers. This study examines how digital interaction, brand collaborations, consumer-created content, and targeted advertisements impact online shopping behavior and customer confidence. Digital platforms significantly impact buyer choices, particularly in industries like fashion (Dai et al., 2024). Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok shape shopping decisions through influencers, advertisements, and peer reviews, leveraging psychological drivers like social approval and FOMO. Targeted advertising and algorithm-driven content further personalize consumer experiences, reinforcing purchasing behaviors.

Trust is a crucial factor in online shopping. Manzoor et al. (2020) found that social media marketing significantly impacts purchase intentions (69.6%) and customer trust (65.8%), with trust itself influencing purchase decisions by 70%. Dogbe et al. (2019) highlighted how perceived risks in e-commerce can be mitigated by trust, improving mobile shopping adoption. Similarly, Pandowo et al. (2024) demonstrated that social media engagement enhances trust, which directly influences purchasing behavior.

Several studies emphasize the impact of perceived value and consumer trust in online shopping. Lim et al. (2014) found that both factors drive online shopping behaviors, while Hajli (2014) confirmed that social media plays a crucial role in shaping consumer trust and buying choices. McKnight et al. (2002) introduced a trust-building model that highlights the significance of early consumer trust in online transactions, highlighting perceived integrity and security assurances.

The effective implementation of social media marketing strengthens customer interaction and brand commitment. Smith (2014) and de Vries et al. (2012) showed that interactive and vivid social media content increases user engagement, trust, and positive brand perception. Kim and Ko (2012) showed that social media marketing enhances customer equity in luxury fashion by leveraging entertainment, engagement, and word-of-mouth strategies. Hanaysha (2022) further confirmed that informativeness and interactivity positively influence brand trust, which mediates purchasing decisions.

Studies focused on specific demographics highlight unique factors influencing online shopping behavior. Isabel et al. (2005) explored the influence of social media on teenage consumer decisions, while Kaushik and Prativindhya (2019) examined Indian consumers' preferences in the electronics sector, identifying perceived risks and competitive pricing as key determinants. Anirvinna et al. (2021) analyzed young students' online shopping habits, finding a strong correlation between social media marketing, secure payment options, and exchange policies in driving purchase decisions.

Overall, the literature underscores the complex relationship between social media engagement, trust formation, and buying behavior, offering key insights for e-commerce brands seeking to build consumer trust and boost sales.

3. Material and method

3.1. Research Design

A quantitative approach was employed to collect data from young adults. Participants completed a structured questionnaire measuring social media usage, online shopping behavior, and consumer trust.

3.2. Participants

3.2.1. Age Range

The study focused on young adults aged 18-25 years. This age range is selected as a result of extensive social media participation and digital shopping trends activity typically observed within this demographic.

3.2.2. Gender

The sample aimed to include a balanced representation of genders (male, female, and non-binary) to ensure diverse perspectives and experiences are captured.

3.2.3. Education Level

Participants were drawn representing diverse educational levels, such as high school completers, university students, and individuals holding bachelor's or advanced degrees. This diversity will help assess how education level might influence social media usage and consumer trust.

3.2.4. Geographic Location

Participants were recruited from various geographic locations to capture a broad spectrum of social media usage and online shopping behaviors. Efforts were made to include urban, suburban, and rural areas to account for geographic differences.

3.3. Sample

3.3.1. Sampling Technique

Purposive Sampling was used and employed for participant selection from universities and social media platforms.

3.3.2. Sample Size

The study surveyed 200 young adults (18-25) with diverse demographics and social media usage. Participants actively engaged with platforms like Instagram and TikTok, providing insights into how social media influences online shopping behavior and consumer trust.

3.3.3. Inclusion Criteria

- Participants must be proficient in English.
- Participants must be between 18 and 25 years old.

3.3.4. Exclusion Criteria

- Inconsistent Internet Access.
- Individuals who are skeptical about making purchases online.

3.4. Measures and Instrumentation

- **SOCIAL MEDIA** - Social Media Use Scale. The SMUS was developed by Lin, Wang, and Chen (2016).
- **ONLINE SHOPPING BEHAVIOUR** – The Online Shopping Behavior Scale was adapted from Gefen and Straub (2004).
- **CONSUMER TRUST** - The Trust Scale was adapted from Gefen and Straub (2004).

3.5. Procedure

The study follows a structured process to examine social media's influence on online shopping behavior and consumer trust among young adults (18-25). It begins with a literature review to establish a theoretical framework. A structured questionnaire covering social media engagement, shopping behavior, and trust was developed. The finalized survey will be distributed online to 200 participants via purposive sampling. Data was examined through descriptive and inferential statistical methods, incorporating correlation and regression analyses. Results will inform recommendations for businesses and policymakers, culminating in a report on insights and practical implications.

3.6. Data Analysis

3.6.1. Descriptive Statistics

This study adopted a thorough data analysis framework, incorporating both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics, such as the mean and standard deviation, were adeptly utilized to present a concise summary of the sample's characteristics and the central variables under examination. These descriptive statistics facilitated a clear understanding of the data's central tendencies and variability.

3.6.2. Inferential Statistics

Applied Regression and Correlational Analysis to analyze the impact of independent variable on the dependent variable, enabling the rigorous testing of hypotheses and allowing for valuable insights and conclusions to be drawn about the broader population from which the sample was drawn.

4. Results and Analysis

Table 1 Descriptives of the Study

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Social media	200	3.1923	0.34870
Online shopping behavior	200	78.9750	20.74212
Consumer trust	200	59.0900	11.69383
Valid N (listwise)	200		

Table 1 summarizes key research variables: social media use, online shopping behavior, and consumer trust among 200 young adults.

- Social media: Mean = 3.19, SD = 0.35, indicating consistent usage patterns.
- Online Shopping Behavior: Mean = 78.98, SD = 20.74, showing high variability in shopping activity.
- Consumer Trust: Mean = 59.09, SD = 11.69, reflecting moderate trust with some variation.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics and Correlation between social media and online shopping behaviour

	Variables	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3
1.	Social media	200	3.1923	0.34870	-	-	-
2.	Online Shopping Behaviour	200	78.9750	20.74212	0.37**	-	-
3.	Consumer Trust	200	59.0900	11.69383	0.35**	0.33**	-

Note. **p < 0.01

Table 2 presents key findings:

- Social media: Mean = 3.19, SD = 0.35, indicating consistent usage.
- Online Shopping Behavior: Mean = 78.98, SD = 20.74, showing high activity with wide variability.
- Consumer Trust: Mean = 59.09, SD = 11.69, reflecting moderate trust.

Correlation analysis shows moderate positive relationships:

- Social media & Online Shopping ($r = 0.37$)
- Social media & Consumer Trust ($r = 0.35$)
- Online Shopping & Consumer Trust ($r = 0.33$)

All relationships exhibit statistical significance at the $p < 0.01$ level, confirming reliable associations.

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics and Correlation between online shopping behaviour and consumer trust

	Variables	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3
1.	Social media	200	3.1923	.34870	-	0.341**	0.301**
2.	Online Shopping Behaviour	200	78.9750	20.74212	0.341**	-	0.228**
3.	Consumer Trust	200	59.0900	11.69383	0.301**	0.228**	-

Note. **p < 0.01

There is a moderate positive correlation between social media and Online Shopping Behavior ($r = 0.341$, $p = 0.000$), indicating that greater social media engagement corresponds with higher online shopping activity suggesting that higher shopping activity may be associated with increased consumer trust. All relationships are statistically significant ($p < 0.01$), confirming reliable trends.

Table 4 Regression Analysis between Social Media and Online Shopping Behavior

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	8.071	12.593		0.641	0.522	14.52	29.90
	SOCIAL MEDIA	22.211	3.922	0.373	5.664	0.000		
	R	0.373						
	R ²	0.139						

a. Dependent Variable: Online shopping behavior

This regression analysis predicts Online Shopping Behavior based on Social Media usage.

- Unstandardized coefficient (B) = 22.211 (SE = 3.922) → A one-unit increase in Social Media use leads to a 22.211 increase in Online Shopping Behavior.
- Standardized coefficient (Beta) = 0.373 → Indicates a moderate positive relationship.
- Significance level (p) = 0.000 → Statistically significant at $p < 0.01$.
- t-value = 5.664 → Supports the significance of the relationship.
- 95% Confidence Interval: [14.52, 29.90] → True effect likely falls within this range.
- R = 0.373, R² = 0.139 → social media explains 13.9% of the variance in Online Shopping Behavior, suggesting other influencing factors.

Table 5 Regression Analysis between Social Media and Consumer Trust

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	20.896	7.149		2.923	0.004	7.60	16.33
	SOCIAL MEDIA	11.964	2.226	0.357	5.374	0.000		
	R	0.357						
	R ²	0.127						

a. Dependent Variable: Consumer Trust

This regression analysis examines the impact of social media on Consumer Trust.

- Unstandardized coefficient (B) = 11.964 (SE = 2.226) → A one-unit increase in Social Media use raises Consumer Trust by 11.964.
- Intercept = 20.896 (SE = 7.149) → Predicted Consumer Trust when Social Media usage is zero.
- Standardized coefficient (Beta) = 0.357 → Indicates a moderate positive relationship.
- Significance level (p) = 0.000 → Highly significant ($p < 0.01$).
- t-value = 5.374 → Confirms the statistical significance.
- 95% Confidence Interval: [7.60, 16.33] → Likely range of the true effect.

R = 0.357, R² = 0.127 → social media explains 12.7% of the variance in Consumer Trust, suggesting other influencing factors.

5. Conclusion

This research examined how social media affects the online shopping habits and trust in consumers among young adults. The findings indicate that social media exerts a notable yet moderate influence on both aspects. Social media

platforms, especially via endorsements by influencers, content created by users, and targeted ads, are crucial in guiding the buying choices of young adults.

5.1. Implications

5.1.1. For Influencers and Content Creators

Maintain Authenticity: Since trust is a key factor, influencers must be transparent and genuine with their audiences. Over-promotion or promoting products they don't truly believe in can lead to mistrust, which can negatively impact their influence and the brands they represent.

5.1.2. Implications for Small and New Businesses

Opportunity to Build Relationships: Small businesses and startups can leverage social media to foster connections with their intended audience. Since young adults prefer authentic, personal connections, small brands can excel by engaging with consumers directly and sharing their brand journey and story.

5.2. Limitations

Limited Generalizability The study focuses on young adults restricting the applicability of the findings to other age groups. Different age groups (e.g., older adults or teenagers) may engage with social media differently, and their online shopping behaviors and trust factors could vary significantly.

Unexplored Moderating Variables The research does not explore other potential moderating variables that could influence the connection between social media, online shopping behavior, and consumer trust, such as gender, income level, education, or digital literacy. These factors could significantly alter how individuals interact with social media and make online shopping decisions.

Its limitations suggest the need for further exploration into other factors, broader population groups, and more in-depth investigations into trust dynamics.

5.3. Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the outcomes of the empirical analysis, a number of recommendations for future research are outlined below. The investigation of social media marketing is somewhat shaped by drawing on theories and empirical findings from other disciplines. For upcoming studies, it would be more advisable to create alternative models and strategies to determine which model has the most effective alignment. Moreover, as this research centers on the elements affecting consumers' general buying preferences in the context of social media marketing, future studies should explore the variations in population demographics. This could include examining how gender or age differences affect the impact of social media on consumers' purchasing intentions. The choice of different social media platforms might also play a role in influencing consumers' buying intentions. Additionally, this study did not account for external factors related to the products themselves. Future research might incorporate these elements alongside the role of social media marketing in shaping consumers' purchasing decisions.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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