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IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON BRAND PERCEPTION AND PURCHASE DECISION

Swati Kulkarni[1], Bharath S[2]
[1]*Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce and Management, Yenepoya Deemed to be University, Banglore*
[2]*Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce and Management, Yenepoya Deemed to be University, Banglore*

ABSTRACT
This paper examines the influence of social media on consumer purchase decisions and brand perception. It defines, classifies, and highlights the primary functions of social media, and analyzes its role at each stage of the consumer decision-making process – problem recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, purchase choice, and post-purchase behaviours. The study demonstrates that social media significantly shapes consumer behavior, brand attitudes, and brand perception through content sharing, social validation, and interactive engagement. Emerging challenges and future research directions, such as artificial intelligence, virtual reality, cross-platform integration, and corporate social responsibility, are also discussed. Overall, social media not only offers new avenues for influencing purchase behavior but also plays a critical role in shaping how consumers perceive and relate to brands. To remain competitive, brands must innovate in information dissemination, engagement strategies, and perception management across social platforms.

KEYWORDS: *Purchase Decisions, Brand Perception, Social Media, Engagement Strategies*

INTRODUCTION

With the rapid advancement of Internet technology, social media has become an integral part of modern society. From early blogs and forums to contemporary platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, social media has evolved rapidly, now reaching over 4 billion users worldwide—more than 50% of the global population. Traditionally, consumers relied on advertisements, friends' recommendations, and product reviews when making purchase decisions. Today, social media has transformed this process by providing richer, more diverse information, including user-generated content, product reviews, and influencer recommendations, all of which influence not only purchasing choices but also consumers' perception of brands.

Social media also allows companies to engage directly with consumers, enabling more precise, interactive, and personalized marketing. These interactions shape brand perception, enhancing trust, credibility, and loyalty. Understanding the impact of social media on both purchase behavior and brand perception is therefore of significant practical importance. It can help businesses optimize marketing strategies, strengthen brand image, improve competitiveness, and provide consumers with a more informed, convenient, and tailored shopping experience. This paper systematically reviews existing research, analyzes social media's influence at each stage of the consumer decision-making process, and discusses emerging challenges and future directions in social media marketing, with a focus on enhancing brand perception and consumer engagement.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Social media platforms significantly shape consumer behavior by providing interactive and personalized content. Hanaysha (2022) found that informativeness, perceived relevance, and interactivity in social media marketing positively affect purchase decisions. These features enhance consumer engagement and influence their buying choices. Kothari et al. (2025) examined the impact of social media advertising on consumer behavior, highlighting the importance of credibility, perceived authenticity, and sustainability. Their study suggests that these factors enhance consumer purchase intentions and overall satisfaction. Chen et al. (2022) investigated the impact of online product reviews on purchasing decisions using eye-tracking methods. They found that positive reviews increase purchase likelihood, while negative reviews can deter potential buyers, emphasizing the importance of review credibility.

Frontiers Kutz (2024) explored how social media influencers affect consumer purchasing decisions. The study concluded that influencer authenticity and trustworthiness significantly influence consumer behavior, especially among younger demographics. Qiao (2025) analyzed the relationship between brand perception and consumer behavior on social media. The research highlighted that interactive and personalized content on social media platforms positively impacts brand perception and consumer loyalty. The study by Gad (2026) focused on the Egyptian market, examining how social media marketing influences purchase decisions through customer experience. The findings indicated that positive customer experiences on social media platforms lead to higher purchase intentions. Manner (2017) emphasized the role of social media marketing in enhancing brand awareness. The study found that consistent and engaging content on social media platforms increases brand visibility and consumer recognition. Jun and Tan (2025) explored how social media marketing influences consumer decision-making in Ivory Coast. Their research highlighted the significance of social media in shaping consumer perceptions and purchasing behavior in the digital age. Sharkasi and Rezakhah (2023) examined the role of parasocial relationships

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in influencing purchase intentions. Their study found that consumers develop one-sided relationships with influencers, which significantly affect their purchasing decisions. Bogdan et al. (2025) investigated the mediators between eWOM credibility and purchase intention. The study revealed that perceived product quality, emotional response to eWOM, and perceived buying risk mediate the relationship between eWOM and purchase intention.

Social Media

Social Media (SM) is an Internet-based platform that enables users to create, share, and exchange content. It encompasses diverse tools designed to facilitate user interaction, information dissemination, and the shaping of brand perception. The core features of social media include User-Generated Content (UGC), interactivity, and immediacy. UGC refers to information created and shared by users in the form of text, images, videos, and more; interactivity emphasizes communication and feedback between users; and immediacy reflects the rapid and widespread dissemination of information, which can directly influence how consumers perceive brands.

Social media platforms can be categorized by their functions and usage: social networks, microblogging platforms, photo and video sharing platforms, blogs and content communities, instant messaging applications, and interest-based social platforms.

Key Functions of Social Media

Social media serves multiple roles that not only enhance user experiences and interactions but also shape brand perception:

- **Information Sharing:** Users share opinions, experiences, and insights via text, images, and videos. This content can significantly influence consumer perceptions of brands and products.
- **Social Interaction:** Likes, comments, shares, and direct messaging facilitate engagement with both peers and brands, building trust and shaping brand credibility.
- **Entertainment:** Platforms provide videos, games, music, and live streams. Brands leveraging entertaining content can strengthen positive consumer associations and improve brand recall.
- **Content Creation and Presentation:** Users showcase creative work, from photography to video production, influencing public perception of personal and brand identities.
- **Online Shopping and Marketing:** Social media serves as a vital tool for e-commerce and marketing. Businesses use ads, promotions, and product demonstrations to engage consumers, shape brand perception, and influence purchase decisions.

Main Factors Influencing Purchasing Decisions and brand perception

Consumers' purchasing decisions are influenced by personal, social, and psychological factors, all of which shape not only buying behavior but also brand perception.

1. Personal Factors

- **Demographic Characteristics:** Age, gender, income, occupation, and education influence consumers' preferences and perceptions of brands. For example, higher-income consumers may associate luxury brands with status.
- **Lifestyle:** Consumers' lifestyles and hobbies affect both their purchase choices and how they perceive brands. Health-conscious individuals may favor brands promoting organic or fitness-related products, enhancing brand alignment with their values.
- **Personality and Self-Concept:** Personality traits (e.g., adventurousness, conservatism) and self-image guide product selection and shape perceptions of brands that reflect or reinforce their identity.

2. Social Factors

- **Family:** Family opinions and roles influence purchase decisions and perceptions of trusted brands.
- **Reference Groups:** Friends, colleagues, and social circles impact brand evaluation through social validation, especially for high-risk or high-value purchases.
- **Social Roles and Status:** Consumers' societal roles and status affect brand choices, as brands are often used to communicate identity and social position.

3. Psychological Factors

- **Motivation:** Intrinsic drives, including physiological, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization needs, guide purchasing behavior and brand preference.
- **Perception:** How consumers perceive product features, advertising, and overall brand image strongly influences purchase decisions.
- **Learning:** Past experiences and acquired information shape future choices; positive brand interactions enhance loyalty, while negative experiences can alter perception.
- **Beliefs and Attitudes:** Consumers' beliefs and overall attitudes toward products and brands play a critical role in shaping both purchasing behavior and brand perception.

Impact of social media on purchasing decisions and brand perception Social media has become a critical driver of both brand perception and consumer purchase decisions. By providing platforms for user-generated content, peer reviews, influencer endorsements, and brand promotions, social media shapes how consumers perceive a brand's credibility, quality, and relevance. Positive interactions, engaging content, and authentic testimonials enhance brand trust and create favorable perceptions, while negative feedback or poor engagement can diminish consumer confidence. In this way, social media acts as a powerful intermediary, influencing the way consumers recognize needs, evaluate alternatives, and form opinions about brands even before making a purchase.The influence of social media continues throughout the purchase journey, affecting information search, option evaluation, and final decision-making. Consumers increasingly rely on reviews, ratings, social recommendations, and real-time brand interactions to guide

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their choices. By integrating targeted promotions, responsive customer service, and interactive engagement, brands can strengthen their perceived value and loyalty, encouraging purchases. Post-purchase sharing and word-of-mouth further reinforce brand perception, creating a feedback loop where social media both informs decisions and cultivates long-term consumer trust and preference.

Challenges and Future Research Directions

Social media offers brands unparalleled opportunities to engage consumers and influence purchasing decisions, but it also presents significant challenges that impact brand perception. One major challenge is information overload and intense competition. With vast amounts of content available on social platforms, it is increasingly difficult for a brand's message to stand out. Consumers may overlook brand communications unless they are creative, relevant, and strategically targeted, directly affecting how the brand is perceived and its ability to drive purchase decisions.

Another critical challenge is content quality and creativity. Consumers are becoming less receptive to conventional advertising and are more likely to engage with content that is entertaining, informative, or emotionally appealing. Brands must continuously innovate their content to capture attention, build a strong emotional connection, and enhance positive brand perception, which in turn increases consumer engagement and loyalty.

Social Trust and Word-of-Mouth Management also play a pivotal role in shaping brand perception. User reviews, testimonials, and online discussions often carry more weight than official brand messages. Brands must actively monitor and respond to feedback, addressing concerns and reinforcing credibility. Effective management of online reputation strengthens trust, positively influences brand perception, and can encourage consumers to make confident purchase decisions.

Data privacy, security, and platform dynamics further challenge brands. As consumer awareness of data protection grows, brands must adhere to strict privacy standards and maintain transparency in data usage to build trust. At the same time, frequent updates to platform algorithms can affect content visibility and consumer engagement. Brands that adapt quickly to these changes maintain consistent exposure, protecting both brand perception and consumer confidence during the purchase journey.

Future research offers promising avenues to enhance brand perception and social media marketing effectiveness. Artificial intelligence and big data can provide insights into consumer behavior and optimize personalized marketing strategies. Virtual and augmented reality can create immersive brand experiences, deepening emotional connections. Research on cross-platform integration, content innovation, influencer marketing, and sustainability communication can further help brands craft compelling narratives, strengthen consumer trust, and positively influence purchasing decisions. By addressing these challenges and leveraging emerging opportunities, brands can maximize their impact on both perception and purchase behavior.

CONCLUSION

This paper provides a comprehensive overview of how social media influences both consumer purchase decisions and brand perception. By examining the definitions, classifications, and key functions of social media, it becomes clear that social platforms serve as powerful tools for shaping consumer attitudes and behaviors. Through content dissemination, social validation, and real-time interaction, social media not only guides consumers' decision-making processes but also actively shapes how they perceive and relate to brands.

In the **Problem Identification Stage**, social media triggers awareness of needs and potential solutions, influencing the initial perception of brands. Targeted advertisements, promotions, user-generated content, and influencer recommendations draw attention to products while simultaneously enhancing brand recognition and credibility. This early interaction helps consumers identify brands that align with their preferences and values, setting the stage for informed purchase decisions.

During the **information search and alternatives evaluation stages**, consumers leverage social media to access reviews, ratings, comparisons, and peer recommendations. This abundant information allows consumers to make more rational choices while forming nuanced perceptions of brands' quality, reliability, and trustworthiness. Social networks, forums, and official brand accounts also provide interactive engagement, reinforcing positive brand perception and shaping the evaluation of competing options.

In the **post-purchase stage**, social media continues to influence consumer behavior and brand perception. Sharing product experiences, posting reviews, and participating in brand communities strengthen brand loyalty and encourage word-of-mouth promotion. At the same time, brands that maintain active engagement and responsive customer service enhance consumer satisfaction and reinforce positive perceptions. Overall, social media acts as a continuous feedback loop, guiding purchase decisions while shaping long-term consumer perceptions and loyalty toward brands.

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