

# International Journal of Research in Marketing Management and Sales

E-ISSN: 2663-3337  
P-ISSN: 2663-3329  
[www.marketingjournal.net](http://www.marketingjournal.net)  
IJRMMS 2025; 7(1): 336-344  
Received: 12-03-2025  
Accepted: 15-04-2025

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## The influence of social media on consumer behaviour: A multi-dimensional study of purchase intention, product selection, brand awareness, and buying behaviour

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**DOI:** <https://www.doi.org/10.33545/26633329.2025.v7.i1d.245>

### Abstract

**Purpose:** This study investigates the influence of social media on four critical dimensions of consumer behaviour-purchase intention, product selection, buying behaviour, and brand awareness-by employing quantitative analysis and theoretical interpretation.

**Methods:** Using Mann-Whitney U tests, and Friedman tests, this research examines statistically significant differences among variables. Behavioural theories *viz*; Theory of Planned Behaviour, Social Learning Theory, and Mimetic Theory provide theoretical support.

**Key Findings:** Brand awareness emerged as the most influenced factor by social media, followed by product selection and purchase intention. Analysis revealed that female consumers are more influenced by social media, particularly in buying behaviour. Peer reviews and social proof were stronger motivators than influencer content or direct advertisements. Social media content increased brand recall, comparison-based selection, and exploration intent.

**Implications:** Results highlight social media's strategic potential in consumer engagement, suggesting that marketers should invest in authentic, user-generated content and peer-led promotions over conventional advertisements.

**Keywords:** Consumer behaviour, purchase intent, brand awareness, buying behaviour, theory of planned behaviour, hierarchy of effects model

### 1. Introduction

In the rapidly evolving digital landscape, social media has emerged as one of the most influential forces shaping consumer behaviour. With billions of active users across platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and TikTok, brands now find themselves immersed in a dynamic environment where traditional marketing practices are being replaced by interactive, consumer-driven dialogues (Campbell *et al.*, 2011; Kozinets *et al.*, 2008) [6, 12]. This shift has not only altered how brands communicate but has also empowered consumers, transforming them into active participants and co-creators in the marketing process. Through digital interactions, consumers shape brand identities, influence brand perception, and ultimately contribute to the diffusion of brand meaning (Merz *et al.*, 2009; Muñiz & Schau, 2005) [14, 15, 15].

As social media continues to dominate as a marketing channel, its impact on key consumer behaviour factors-such as brand awareness, purchase intention, product selection, and buying behaviour-has become undeniable. The role of social media in guiding consumers through the stages of the purchase decision-making process, as outlined in the Hierarchy of Effects (HOE) model (Lavidge and Steiner, 1961) [13, 13], is crucial. From raising awareness to fostering emotional connections and encouraging purchase intention, social media platforms serve as powerful tools for brands looking to build lasting relationships with their audiences.

However, while the positive impacts of social media on consumer behaviour are well documented, challenges remain. Overexposure to repetitive or irrelevant content can cause consumer fatigue, potentially damaging brand image and hindering consumer engagement (Jamali & Khan, 2018) [11, 11]. On the other hand, the power of digital word-of-mouth (WoM) has shown that consumer recommendations and peer influence can significantly enhance brand visibility and credibility, offering brands a unique opportunity to leverage social

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platforms for organic growth (Hutter *et al.*, 2013) <sup>[10]</sup>. This study delves into the intricate dynamics of social media's influence on consumer behaviour, with a particular focus on its impact on brand awareness, purchase intention, product selection, and buying behaviour. By analysing both the positive and negative outcomes of social media engagement, this research aims to provide actionable insights for marketers, offering a comprehensive understanding of how brands can optimize their social media strategies to drive consumer decision-making and build lasting brand loyalty.

With a firm foundation in both theory and empirical analysis, this paper explores the complex interaction between social media content, consumer psychology, and behavioural outcomes. It aims to uncover key insights that will help marketers navigate the digital marketplace and build more effective, consumer-centric brand strategies. As the boundaries of traditional marketing continue to blur in this social-media-driven world, understanding these influences becomes imperative for any brand seeking to thrive in the modern era of marketing.

## 2. Literature Review

The advent of social media has revolutionized the marketing landscape, transforming the way brands communicate, engage, and build relationships with consumers. Social media marketing (SMM) refers to the strategic use of platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and TikTok to promote products, services, and brand values through interactive and user-centered content. Rise of social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, YouTube) as pivotal spaces for marketing communication. Shift from one-way traditional marketing to interactive, consumer-driven dialogues (Campbell *et al.*, 2011; Kozinets *et al.*, 2008) <sup>[6, 12]</sup>. Importance of peer-to-peer influence and customer engagement on digital platforms.

### Consumers as co-creators of Brands

Emergence of Service-Dominant Logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2004) <sup>[18, 18]</sup>, value is co-created through stakeholder interaction, not embedded in products alone. Social media fosters brand communities, giving consumers power to shape brand value (Merz *et al.*, 2009; Muñiz & Schau, 2005) <sup>[14, 15, 15]</sup>. Active consumer participation in brand storytelling and diffusion of brand meaning.

### Social Media's Role in the Purchase Decision-Making Process

Hierarchy of Effects (HOE) Model (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961) <sup>[13, 13]</sup> identifies sequential consumer response stages: Cognitive (awareness), Affective (attitude), Conative (intention). Involvement level alters the speed and sequence of these phases (Bliemel & Kotler, 2001; Zaichkowsky, 1985) <sup>[5, 5, 19]</sup>. Social media supports each phase by enhancing brand exposure, emotional engagement, and decision intent.

### Social media influence on Purchase intention

Purchase intention refers to a consumer's likelihood or willingness to buy a particular product based on various psychological, informational, and social influences. The formation of purchase intention is understood as a progressive and structured psychological process, as outlined in the Hierarchy of Effects (HOE) model. This framework illustrates that consumers move through distinct

phases-beginning with awareness, then knowledge acquisition, followed by emotional alignment (liking), preference, and conviction-before arriving at an actual purchase decision. Each stage reflects a deeper level of consumer engagement, with the final purchase behaviour representing a culmination of both cognitive evaluation and emotional investment (Barry & Howard, 1990; Smith *et al.*, 2008) <sup>[4, 4, 17]</sup>.

### Social Media Influence on Brand Awareness

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube facilitate direct interactions between brands and consumers, transforming consumers from passive recipients of marketing messages into active participants and co-creators of brand narratives (Hutter *et al.*, 2013) <sup>[10]</sup>. Active participation and emotional connection (brand page commitment) to social media brand activities notably enhanced consumers' cognitive recognition of brands. According to (Jamali & Khan, 2018) <sup>[11, 11]</sup>, brand awareness is deeply rooted in consumer experience and familiarity with brand-related content, which is increasingly shaped by digital interaction.

Brand awareness is critical in consumer decision-making, functioning as the initial cognitive stage in the hierarchy of effects (HOE) model. Increased brand awareness ensures that a brand remains within the consumer's consideration set, significantly affecting subsequent purchase decisions. Higher brand awareness generated through active social media engagement facilitates stronger brand recall and recognition, which subsequently influences consumer attitudes and purchase intentions (Cheung *et al.*, 2019; Hutter *et al.*, 2013) <sup>[7, 10]</sup>.

### Annoyance and its negative association

Repetitive or irrelevant content can lead to consumer fatigue, negatively affecting brand perception and awareness. Overexposure to the same message may alienate users and reduce their engagement with the brand (Jamali & Khan, 2018) <sup>[11, 11]</sup>. Annoyance negatively affects brand page commitment and reduces positive word-of-mouth, thereby indirectly diminishing brand awareness.

### Word of Mouth

Digital word of mouth (WoM) is identified as another critical factor enhancing brand awareness. Consumers sharing positive experiences with their peers amplify brand visibility (Jamali & Khan, 2018) <sup>[11, 11]</sup>. Positive word-of-mouth within social networks enhances the credibility and reliability of brand information, which traditional marketing channels might lack (Hutter *et al.*, 2013; Jamali & Khan, 2018) <sup>[10, 11, 11]</sup>. Brands can substantially benefit from effectively managed social media activities. However, managers must remain mindful of the delicate balance required to maintain engagement without causing annoyance (Hutter *et al.*, 2013) <sup>[10]</sup>. This balance involves understanding and respecting the interactive norms inherent to social media communities.

### 3. Statement of the Problem

In recent years, the growing influence of social media has significantly altered consumer behaviour, particularly among youngsters. Youngsters, as a key demographic group, are increasingly exposed to social media platforms where they interact with various brands and products. This exposure is shaping their buying decisions. It is the need of

the day that the businesses understand this influence to remain competitive. With the growing integration of advertisements, influencer endorsements, product reviews, and targeted content on platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook, young consumers are increasingly exposed to various stimuli that influence their buying decisions. Despite this evident trend, there remains a lack of comprehensive understanding regarding the extent to which social media affects the buying behaviour of this demographic. Questions arise as to what specific aspects of social media such as peer influence, influencer marketing, brand presence, or user-generated contents play the most significant role in shaping their preferences and decisions. For businesses to create effective marketing strategies, they must first understand how factors such as brand awareness, product consideration, and purchase intention are impacted by social media. As youngsters spend a considerable amount of time on these platforms, it is crucial to determine whether their attitudes toward social media marketing directly affect their purchasing decisions. Moreover, understanding the role of trust, engagement, and interaction on these platforms is essential for businesses to effectively target this group. This study is designed to explore and address this gap by investigating the relationship between social media marketing and the buying behaviour of youngsters. The findings will provide valuable insights for businesses seeking to tailor their social media strategies to better engage with and influence young consumers.

#### 4. Objectives of the Study

- To identify the key factors in social media marketing that effectively influence the buying behaviour of youngsters.
- To assess how social media marketing influences product consideration and evaluation by youngsters.
- To examine the role of social media marketing in shaping the purchase intentions of youngsters.
- To study the role of social media marketing on brand awareness among youngsters.

#### 5. Methodology

The present study is descriptive study among of youngsters in Thiruvananthapuram district. From the Population 110 number of samples has been selected for the study on convenience basis. The data collected using structured questionnaire and using independent samples t-tests, Mann-Whitney U tests, and Friedman tests, this research examines statistically significant differences among variables across gender, influence dimensions, and consumer preferences. Behavioural theories such as the Theory of Planned Behaviour, Social Learning Theory, Mimetic Desire Theory, and the Hierarchy of Effects Model provide theoretical support

#### 6. Analysis and Discussion

##### (i). Demographic Profile

This table shows the demographic profile of respondents

**Table 1:** Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Variable	Group	No of Respondents	Percentage
Age	Below 20 years	55	50.0
	21 years- 25 years	40	36.4
	26 years-30 years	15	13.6
	Total	110	100.0
Gender	Female	96	87.3
	Male	14	12.7
	Total	110	100.0
Marital Status	Single	95	86.4
	Married	15	13.6
	Total	110	100
Educational Qualification	Up to Plus Two	55	50.0
	Post Graduated	12	10.9
	Graduated	37	33.6
	Technical & Professional	6	13.5
	Total	110	100
Occupation	Student	83	75.5
	Non-Govt. Employee	17	15.5
	Govt. Employee	3	2.7
	Business & Others	7	6.3
	Total	110	100.0

**Source:** Primary Data

The table 1 shows that male respondents are 14 (12.7%) and female respondents are 96 (87.3%). It is found in the analysis that majority of the respondents are female. Because the data are collected from college students. The table 4.1 shows that out of 110 respondents are between 18-20 years old (50%) age group between 26-30 are relatively few (13%). A small percentage are in the age range between 21-25 (36%). This indicated a predominantly young age group in the sample. Marital Status shows that single respondents are 95(86.4%) and married respondents are 15(13.6%). It is found in the analysis that majority of the respondents are single. Because the data are collected from college students. The above table 4.1 shows that the largest

group of the respondents has completed plus two (50%) followed by Graduation (46%), Post-Graduation education is reported by (11%), while SSLC constitute a smaller group (4%). Others (5%). The table also shows that student respondents are 83 (76%), non-government employees are 17(15%), government employees are 3(3%), Business and others are 7(6.3%). It can be understood from the table that the sample population is dominated by students with smaller representation of other professions.

##### (ii). Influence of Social Media on Consumer Behaviour

**H0:** Opinion regarding the Influence of Social Media on Consumer Behaviour are equal to Average level

**Table 2:** Chi-square test for Specified value (Average = 3) of Statements on Influence of Social Media on Consumer Behaviour

Factors of Social Media Influence	Mean	SD	Chi-Square	P-Value
On Buying Behaviour	3.1545	.79258	2.045	0.043*
On Purchase Intention	3.1949	.76997	2.655	0.009**
On Product Selection	3.2909	.79084	3.858	< 0.001**
On Brand Awareness	3.4919	.81155	6.357	< 0.001**
Over all Influence	2.9630	0.63813	0.609	< 0.001**

**Note:** \*\* denotes significant at 1% level, \* denotes significant at 5% level

Since P value is less than 0.01, the null hypothesis is rejected at 1% level of significance with regard to all the Statements on Social Media Influence on Purchase Intention, Product Selection, Brand Awareness and Buying Behaviour. The chi-square test results indicate that social media has a statistically significant influence across all four examined factors: buying behaviour, purchase intention, product selection, and brand awareness. Brand awareness scored the highest mean (3.49), with a highly significant p-value (<0.001), suggesting that social media plays a dominant role in enhancing consumer familiarity and recall of brands. Product selection (Mean=3.29) also showed strong influence with a very significant p-value (<0.001), implying that social media is instrumental in guiding consumers to choose between different products or brands, often based on reviews, comparisons, and social proof. Purchase intention (Mean=3.19) exhibited significant results ( $p=0.009$ ), confirming that exposure to social media content positively contributes to forming consumers' willingness or plans to buy a product. Buying behaviour (Mean=3.15),

although the lowest among the four, still showed significant impact ( $p=0.043$ ). These results underscore the pivotal role of social media as a comprehensive marketing tool that extends beyond engagement to tangible consumer decision-making outcomes. With brand awareness and product selection at the forefront of influence, marketers are encouraged to invest in quality content, strategic branding, and user engagement strategies. The significance across all factors reflects a consumer landscape that is increasingly social-media-driven, information-oriented, and influence-sensitive. This presents a positive outlook for brands leveraging digital platforms to build deeper connections and foster loyalty among their target audiences.

### (iii). Gender differences in Social Media on Consumer Behaviour

**H0:** There is no significant difference between Male and Female with respect to the Influence of Social Media on Consumer Behaviour

**Table 3:** Mann Whitney U test for significant difference between Male and Female with respect to the Influence of Social Media on Consumer Behaviour

Factors of Social Media Influence	Mean Rank of Social Media Influence		Z value	P value
	Male	Female		
On Buying Behaviour	51.99	79.54	335.5	0.003*
On Purchase Intention	53.24	71.00	455.0	0.051
On Product Selection	54.13	64.93	540.0	0.236
On Brand Awareness	54.30	63.71	557.0	0.301
Overall Media Influence	53.07	72.18	438.5	0.036*

**Note:** \* denotes significant at 5% level

Since P value is less than 0.05, null hypothesis is rejected at 5% level regarding Factors of Social Media Influence on Overall consumer behaviour. Hence there is significance difference between male and female Consumers regarding the Factors of social media influence on overall consumer behaviour. This table compares the mean ranks of male and female respondents across different dimensions of social media influence using the Mann-Whitney U Test (non-parametric test appropriate for comparing two independent groups). The inferential statistics about Buying Behaviour (Mean Rank: Male (51.99), Female (79.54),  $Z=335.5$ ,  $p$ -value>0.001) shows that the difference between male and female consumers are Statistically significant. Female respondents are significantly more influenced by social media in terms of actual buying behaviour compared to males. Purchase Intention (Mean Rank: Male (53.24), Female (71.00),  $Z=455.0$ ,  $p$ -value is=0.051 → Not statistically significant at 5% level (but borderline). Females

tend to show a higher purchase intention influenced by social media, though the difference is only marginally significant. Product Selection (Mean Rank: Male (54.13), Female (64.93),  $Z=540.0$ ,  $p=0.236$  shows there is no significant gender difference in how social media influences product selection. Brand Awareness (Mean Rank: Male (54.30), Female (63.71),  $Z=557.0$ ,  $p=0.301$  shows both genders are similarly influenced in terms of brand awareness via social media. Overall Media Influence (Mean Rank: Male (53.07), Female (72.18),  $Z=438.5$ ,  $p=0.036$  → Statistically significant. Overall, female respondents are more influenced by social media than males across all combined dimensions.

### (iv). Influence of Social Media on Buying Behaviour

**H0:** There is no significant difference among mean ranks of

#### Influence of Social Media on Buying Behaviour

**Table 3:** Friedman test for significant difference among mean ranks of statements of Influence of Social Media on Buying Behaviour

Influence of Social Media on Buying Behaviour	Mean Rank	Chi-Square value	P value
Social media influences my decision to purchase products.	5.60	75.795	< 0.001**
I am more likely to buy a product after seeing positive reviews on social media.	6.06		
Social media advertisements encourage me to make impulse purchases.	4.30		
I often purchase products that I come across on social media platforms.	4.79		
Recommendations from influencers on social media affect my purchasing behaviours.	4.31		
I tend to follow purchasing trends I see on social media.	5.63		
Social media promotions (e.g., discounts, offers) motivate me to buy products.	5.25		
Social media content helps me explore new brands that I hadn't considered before.	4.03		
I trust product recommendations on social media more than other online sources.	5.02		
My shopping habits have changed because of what I see on social media.	5.60		

**Source:** Primary data, \*\* Denotes significant at 1% level

Table 4 shows the mean ranks of the Influence of social media on Buying Behaviour. The most influential factor is “I am more likely to buy a product after seeing positive reviews on social media” (Mean Rank: 6.06), indicating that peer and user feedback plays a strong role in shaping buying decisions. Other highly ranked influences include, following purchasing trends on social media (5.63), General influence of social media on purchase decisions (5.60), Changed shopping habits due to social media (5.60), and Motivation from social media promotions like discounts (5.25). Mid-range influence is seen in trusting recommendations on social media more than other online sources (5.02), and impulse purchases encouraged by social media advertisements (4.30). Relatively lower influence is observed in Purchasing products directly seen on social media (4.79), Influencer recommendations affecting purchase (4.31), and social media helping to discover new brands (4.03) – the least influential factor. The social influence theory of Deutsch & Gerard, (1955) [8] state that Consumers trust the opinions, experiences, and reviews of others (peers or strangers) online, believing these are credible sources for making purchase decisions. We can infer the Petty & Cacioppo (1986) [16] theory of elaboration likelihood model from this finding. It supports that positive reviews and content can act as peripheral cues (like a likeable influencer or an appealing discount offer)

influencing consumers when they are not deeply involved in processing the purchase decision. As per the theory of Bandura (1977) [3]. Social Learning Theory, Consumers model the behaviour of others-especially influencers or peers they admire. Seeing others use and endorse products increases the likelihood of imitation. Ajzen's (1991), Theory of Planned Behavior states that Positive social media content shapes attitudes (like a brand), social norms (others are buying it), and perceived ease (click to purchase), all of which predict actual buying behaviour. The findings support this theory of planned Behaviour. Overall, the findings suggest that social proof (like reviews and trends) is a stronger motivator than direct promotional content or influencer marketing. Consumers are more likely to be persuaded by what others say and do on social platforms rather than simply being exposed to new products or advertisements. This emphasizes the importance of authentic user-generated content and trend alignment in marketing strategies.

#### (v). Influence of Social Media on Purchase Intention

**H0:** There is no significant difference among mean ranks of

#### Influence of Social Media on Purchase Intention

**Table 5:** Friedman test for significant difference among mean ranks of statements of Influence of Social Media on Purchase Intention

Influence of Social Media on Purchase Intention	Mean Rank	Chi-Square value	P value
I am more inclined to buy a product after viewing it on social media.	4.19	42.582	< 0.001**
The information I find on social media influences my future purchasing decisions.	5.23		
Social media posts create a strong intention to purchase products I am interested in.	4.74		
My intention to buy a product increase when I see it recommended by social media influencers.	5.10		
Social media posts from brands make me consider purchasing their products.	5.75		
I plan to purchase products that have been positively reviewed by my social media connections.	4.34		
When I see a product multiple times on social media, I am more likely to buy it.	5.12		
Social media increases my intention to buy products I was already considering.	4.03		
I am likely to explore more about a product after encountering it on social media.	5.35		
Social media interactions (likes, comments, shares) increase my intention to purchase a product.	5.19		

**Source:** Primary data, \*\* Denotes significant at 1% level

Table 5 depicts the influences of social media on purchase intention. The Friedman test result ( $\chi^2=42.582$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) indicates a statistically significant difference among the mean ranks of various statements measuring how social media influences purchase intention. Therefore, the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) is rejected at the 1% level of significance. The highest-ranked factor is: “Social media posts from brands make me consider purchasing their products” (Mean Rank=5.75) This highlights the direct persuasive power of brand messaging on social platforms. Other high-ranking

factors include: “I am likely to explore more about a product after encountering it on social media” (5.35) “The information I find on social media influences my future purchasing decisions” (5.23) “Social media interactions (likes, comments, shares) increase my intention to purchase” (5.19). These findings show that informational exposure, repetitive visibility, social engagement, and influencer endorsements all enhance purchase intention. As per the Mimetic Desire Theory Humans do not desire objects independently; instead, we desire things because others

desire them-we imitate desires of others, not just their actions. When users see influencers, celebrities, or peers engaging with or desiring a product, they are more likely to mimic that desire, believing the object (product) is inherently valuable. These findings show that informational exposure, repetitive visibility, social engagement, and

influencer endorsements all enhance purchase intention.

#### (vi). Influence of Social Media on Product Selection

**H0:** There is no significant difference among mean ranks of

#### Influence of Social Media on Product Selection

**Table 6:** Friedman test for significant difference among mean ranks of statements of Influence of Social Media on Product Selection

Influence of Social Media on Product Selection	Mean Rank	Chi-Square value	P value
Social media helps me compare different products before making a purchase decision.	6.30	54.145	< 0.001**
I rely on social media to gather information about various product options.	5.43		
Social media influences the specific brand or model of product I choose.	5.41		
I often select products that have high ratings or reviews on social media platforms.	6.26		
Recommendations from social media influence my choice between competing products.	5.59		
I tend to choose products that are trending or popular on social media.	5.25		
I prefer products that are frequently endorsed by influencers on social media.	4.40		
Social media posts from my friends or network help me decide which products to buy.	5.10		
I select products based on social media advertisements more than traditional media advertisements.	5.93		
My choice of products is often guided by the features highlighted in social media promotions.	5.34		

**Source:** Primary data, \*\* Denotes significant at 1% level

The table 6 shows the social media factors influencing on product selection. The Friedman test result ( $\chi^2=54.145, p<0.001$ ) indicates that there is a statistically significant difference among the mean ranks of various factors influencing product selection via social media. Therefore, the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ : No significant difference among mean ranks) is rejected. The top Influencers are Social media helps me compare different products before making a purchase (Mean Rank=6.30), I often select products with high ratings or reviews on social media (Mean Rank=6.26), I select products based on social media ads more than traditional ads (Mean Rank=5.93). The theory of mimetic desire theory, social learning theory, and theory of planned behaviour can be observed from this finding also.

Individuals form desires by imitating others. The popularity and endorsement of certain products on social platforms stimulate consumers to desire and choose the same. Consumers observe and imitate the behavior of others-especially influencers and peers-on social media, which guides product selection. Behavioral intention is shaped by attitude, social influence, and perceived control. Social media contributes to the subjective norm, influencing individuals' choices based on others' visible actions.

#### (vii). Influence of Social Media on Brand Awareness

**H0:** There is no significant difference among mean ranks of

#### Influence of Social Media on Brand Awareness.

**Table 7:** Friedman test for significant difference among mean ranks of statements of Influence of Social Media on Brand Awareness

Influence of Social Media on Brand Awareness	Mean Rank	Chi-Square value	P value
Social media has increased my awareness of new brands and products.	6.02	300.099	< 0.001**
I discover new brands through social media more than through other sources.	6.13		
Social media content makes me more aware of different brands in a product category.	6.28		
I am more likely to recognize brands that I see frequently on social media.	6.02		
Social media helps brands stay in my mind when I'm shopping for related products.	5.70		
Social media improves my understanding of the values and identity of various brands.	5.47		
I am more aware of brand promotions and events due to social media.	5.95		
I often recall brands I have seen on social media when shopping online or in-store.	5.93		
Brands with a strong social media presence are more memorable to me.	5.93		
Social media content helps me differentiate between brands in a crowded marketplace.	5.60		

**Source:** Primary data, \*\* Denotes significant at 1% level

The table 7 shows the social media factors influence on brand awareness. The Friedman test results ( $\chi^2=300.099, p<0.0001$ ) reveal a statistically significant difference among the mean ranks of different factors related to the influence of social media on brand awareness. Therefore, the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ : There is no significant difference among mean ranks) is rejected. The highest-ranked factors are “Social media content makes me more aware of different brands in a product category” (Mean Rank=6.28), “I discover new brands through social media more than through other sources” (Mean Rank=6.13). this suggest that content exposure and discovery play a critical role in shaping brand awareness. These findings are supported by Mere Exposure Effect by Zajonc (1968) [20], Bandur’s Social

Learning Theory and Hierarchy of effects model by Lavidge & Steiner (1961) [13, 13]. Repeated exposure to brand content on social media increases familiarity, making users more likely to recall and prefer these brands. Social media enhances brand salience, a key component of brand equity. As users interact with content, their ability to recall, recognize, and associate values with a brand improves. The awareness stage is the first step toward brand engagement. Social media serves as a powerful tool to create that initial awareness and move users through the cognitive and affective stages of the consumer decision journey.

The findings highlight that social media is a dominant channel for brand discovery, recall, and differentiation, outperforming traditional media in brand awareness. This

effect is amplified through frequent exposure, influencer communication, and peer interaction, aligning with psychological theories of behavior, brand recognition, and learning. To capitalize on this, brands should maintain a consistent and engaging social media presence to remain top-of-mind in competitive marketplaces.

## 7. Observations & Findings

### 1. Purchase Decisions and Social Media

- The social influence theory of Deutsch & Gerard, (1955)<sup>[8]</sup> state that Consumers trust the opinions, experiences, and reviews of others (peers or strangers) online, believing these are credible sources for making purchase decisions.
- We can infer the Petty & Cacioppo (1986)<sup>[16]</sup> theory of elaboration likelihood model from this finding. It support that positive reviews and content can act as peripheral cues (like a likeable influencer or an appealing discount offer) influencing consumers when they are not deeply involved in processing the purchase decision.
- As per the theory of Bandura (1977)<sup>[3]</sup>. Social Learning Theory, Consumers model the behaviour of others-especially influencers or peers they admire. Seeing others use and endorse products increases the likelihood of imitation.
- Ajzen's (1991), Theory of Planned Behavior states that Positive social media content shapes attitudes (liking a brand), social norms (others are buying it), and perceived ease (click to purchase), all of which predict actual buying behaviour. The findings support this theory of planned Behaviour.
- Overall, the findings suggest that social proof (like reviews and trends) is a stronger motivator than direct promotional content or influencer marketing. Consumers are more likely to be persuaded by what others say and do on social platforms rather than simply being exposed to new products or advertisements. This emphasizes the importance of authentic user-generated content and trend alignment in marketing strategies.

### 2. Purchase Intention and Social Media

- As per the Mimetic Desire Theory, people do not desire objects independently; instead, they desire things because others desire them-People imitate desires of others, not just their actions. When users see influencers, celebrities, or peers engaging with or desiring a product, they are more likely to mimic that desire, believing the object (product) is inherently valuable. These findings show that informational exposure, repetitive visibility, social engagement, and influencer endorsements all enhance purchase intention.
- Consumers on social media are not only learning what to buy and how to behave from influencers and peers (Social Learning Theory), but they are also developing the desire to buy those products by mimicking others' desires (Mimetic Desire Theory).

### 3. Product Selection and Social Media

- The Social media helps to compare different products before making a purchase and can select products with high ratings or reviews on social media.
- Social media ads are more influential than traditional ads.
- The theory of mimetic desire theory, social learning

theory, and theory of planned behaviour can be observed. Individuals form desires by imitating others. The popularity and endorsement of certain products on social platforms stimulate consumers to desire and choose the same. Consumers observe and imitate the behavior of others-especially influencers and peers-on social media, which guides product selection. Behavioral intention is shaped by attitude, social influence, and perceived control. Social media contributes to the subjective norm, influencing individuals' choices based on others' visible actions.

### 4. Social Media and Buying Behaviour

- Social media significantly influences buyer behaviour, especially when content includes positive reviews, trending products, and user-generated content.
- Brand content and repeated exposure build purchase intention. The more frequently a product appears in the feed, the higher the likelihood of purchase.
- Product selection decisions are shaped more by user reviews, social comparisons, and product visibility rather than influencer endorsements.
- Brand awareness is deeply impacted by social media presence, with users recalling brands seen on social media more than those encountered via traditional media.
- Impulsive buying is less influenced by social media ads, suggesting buyers are becoming more conscious and research-oriented before purchases.
- Influencer endorsements have moderate impact, indicating consumers may trust peer reviews and brand-generated content more.
- Mere exposure effect (Zajonc, 1968)<sup>[20]</sup>, Aaker's Brand Equity Model (1991), Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977)<sup>[3]</sup>, Mimetic Desire (Girard, 1961)<sup>[9]</sup>, and Lavidge & Steiner's Hierarchy of Effects Model (1961)<sup>[13, 13]</sup> are relevant in interpreting these behaviours.

### 5. Social Media and Brand Awareness

- Content Exposure Significantly Enhances Brand Awareness: The Social media content makes consumers more aware of different brands in a product category indicating that consistent content exposure is a crucial driver of brand recall and recognition.
- Social Media is a Primary Source of Brand Discovery: Consumers agree that they discover new brands through social media more than through other sources reflects how platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube serve as key entry points for consumers to explore and engage with unfamiliar brands.
- Repeated Exposure Builds Brand Salience: The findings support the Mere Exposure Effect (Zajonc, 1968)<sup>[20]</sup>, suggesting that repeated interactions with brand content on social media increase familiarity, preference, and recall, which are essential for strengthening brand salience and equity.

### 8. Suggestions Based on Findings

#### 1. Prioritize Brand Awareness Campaigns on Social Media

Since brand awareness had the highest mean score and was most significantly influenced by social media, businesses should focus on creating consistent, engaging, and visually appealing content that strengthens brand identity.

Leveraging platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube to tell the brand story, showcase values, and stay top-of-mind will ensure long-term consumer recall and trust.

## 2. Leverage Influencer Marketing & User Reviews for Product Selection

Given that product selection was also strongly influenced, it's crucial to use social proof to guide consumer choices. Partnering with influencers, encouraging genuine customer reviews, and sharing user-generated content can significantly impact how consumers evaluate and choose between competing products. Encourage and amplify user-generated content, testimonials, and peer reviews to build trust and drive action.

## 3. Targeted Campaigns Toward Female Consumers

Since females are more influenced by social media in their buying decisions, marketers should design content and promotions tailored to female preferences, including influencer collaborations, product demos, and emotionally appealing campaigns.

## 4. Gender-Neutral Strategies for Product and Brand Messaging

Given that product selection and brand awareness are equally influenced across genders, companies should maintain inclusive and diverse messaging in their branding and product showcase strategies to appeal to a broad consumer base.

## 5. Enhance Repetitive and Strategic Exposure

Use remarketing strategies to repeatedly show products across different formats and platforms, leveraging Zajonc's Mere Exposure Effect.

## 6. Focus on Peer Recommendations

Shift focus from only influencers to relatable peer endorsements, group discussions, and micro-influencers for authenticity.

## 7. Boost Informative and Comparative Content

Provide side-by-side comparisons, expert analysis, and product walkthroughs to aid informed decision-making.

## 8. Invest in Brand Storytelling

Communicate brand identity and values creatively to establish emotional bonds with consumers, enhancing recall and affinity.

## 9. Utilize Interactive Features

Use likes, shares, and comment sections to improve engagement and social proof-boosting purchase intentions.

## 10. Combine Promotions with Trust Signals

Discounts and offers should be complemented with verified reviews and community trust-building.

## 11. Educate Rather Than Persuade

Today's buyers want to *understand* before they *buy*. Educational, behind-the-scenes, and process-oriented content wins attention.

## 12. Measure and Respond to Consumer Behaviour

Track consumer interaction with social media posts to tailor content more effectively.

## 13. Strengthen Omnichannel Integration

Ensure a seamless experience from social media to e-commerce platforms to reduce friction in the buying journey.

## 9. Conclusion

The present study reveals the profound and multidimensional influence of social media on consumer decision-making, spanning across buying behaviour, purchase intention, product selection, and brand awareness. The analysis confirms that social media platforms have evolved beyond mere communication tools to become strategic marketplaces where brand visibility, peer influence, and consumer trust converge to shape purchasing decisions. The Friedman test results consistently indicate significant variation in how consumers respond to different social media stimuli, validating the hypothesis that various dimensions of social media differently impact the consumer journey. Among the notable findings, the influence of positive reviews, frequent exposure to product content, and interactive brand posts emerges as key drivers of both purchase intention and buying behaviour. Consumers increasingly rely on social media not only for discovering new products and brands but also for making informed comparisons and final decisions. The dominance of peer-generated content and high engagement posts underscores the growing importance of trust and relatability in marketing communications. Interestingly, while influencers do have a role, it appears that their impact is relatively moderate compared to that of authentic reviews and friend-based recommendations. This shift points to a more discerning and research-oriented consumer base that values transparency and social proof over glamour and celebrity appeal.

Furthermore, social media's role in enhancing brand awareness cannot be overstated. Consumers are more likely to recall and recognize brands that maintain a consistent, engaging, and value-driven presence on social platforms. This reinforces theoretical frameworks such as Zajonc's Mere Exposure Effect, Aaker's Brand Equity Model, and Girard's Mimetic Desire, illustrating how repetitive exposure, perceived value, and aspirational association collectively shape consumer preferences. Based on these insights, marketers and brands are encouraged to adopt strategies that foster community engagement, promote peer recommendations, and provide informative and personalized content. Social media campaigns should shift from persuasion to education, ensuring that consumers feel informed, empowered, and aligned with the brand's identity and values. Incorporating interactive elements, leveraging micro-influencers, and prioritizing transparency can further enhance consumer trust and loyalty.

In conclusion, the dynamic ecosystem of social media presents both challenges and opportunities for modern marketing. As consumer behaviour continues to evolve with technology, brands must remain adaptive, authentic, and consumer-centric in their approach. With strategic use of social media tools and a deep understanding of consumer psychology, businesses can not only influence but also inspire lasting relationships with their customers. Moving forward, there is strong hope that social media will continue to bridge the gap between consumers and brands, fostering a marketplace that is more engaging, personalized, and impactful than ever before.

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