

How do Brands Use Social Media to Influence Consumer Purchasing Behavior?

As the number of social network users continues to grow, consumer shopping behavior is increasingly impacted by businesses' digital marketing tactics. Understanding the extent of influence that social media has on consumer shopping behavior is essential for businesses and marketers to develop effective social media marketing strategies to further increase sales. With 4.2 billion users, social media has become one of the most powerful marketing tools. Knowing how to create effective campaigns to better advertise to target markets is the ultimate key to grabbing users attention. In this paper we will draw conclusions around media marketing by breaking down pieces of a mock research survey. A 12-question survey was designed using Google Forms. There were 84 participants ranging between 18 and 60+ years of age. The majority of respondents aged from 18-25 years old (67.9%). The participants most used social media channels were Instagram (85.7%), Tik Tok (57.1%), and coming in third: Facebook (35.7%). The overwhelming majority of the study group preferred shopping online rather than offline, and of these 84 respondents, 52 of them stated they were somewhat likely to buy from a brand through social media. Online questionnaires offer the advantage of reaching people who regularly use the Internet: a vital population to this study. The questions looked at participants' buying behavior and how social media advertising impacts consumer's online spending.

So how do businesses social media marketing strategies influence attitudes and behaviors of users? When asked what marketing tactics people find most convincing when social shopping, more than half of participants noted that honest product reviews from friends and strangers alike will seal the deal. Positive comments from real people who have already tried the product or service builds emotional trust and seems to have the strongest persuasive effect on the survey participants. I never thought referrals would beat out price points as the biggest influence of product recommendation on

social media. I reflected on my own social shopping behavior compared to my data collection and realized how quickly my attention is lost when I see negative product reviews online.

Furthermore, many survey participants emphasized the importance of product review authenticity, and the debate between customer reviews vs. influencer endorsements sparked. Both are sharing their experiences, but whose word is more “influential”? The 18-25 year old demographic leaned towards public influencer product reviews heavily persuading their purchasing intentions on social media, while my 25-60 year old crowd appreciated peer-generated evaluations to help them make social shopping decisions. I personally believe the credibility of an influencer's assessment of a product or service isn't the most trustworthy. Although a big social media following is more likely to influence business sales online, are the claims being made true? Gray areas arise when paid ads and sponsorships are added into the mix. A nice sum of money could manipulate any influencer's opinion about a product, so it's hard to say whether these microcelebrities are telling audiences the whole truth. Overall: money is a valuable tool, and many are willing to splurge when there's positive product reviews from reliable and trustworthy people.

I asked survey participants if social media ads involving promotions, deals, and discounts entice them to purchase from new brands. 69% of respondents said yes (58 people), and the other 31% answered no (26 people). The question was written to further evaluate why price specials spark user attention, or why they do not. From the 85 survey samples, the answers of those who said yes and no to this question were indistinguishable. Those who answered yes all agreed that good sales and low prices are always eye-catching. It makes the consumer feel like they're getting a bang for their buck. When we're exposed to a new brand on social media, it's hard to know the quality of their product and/or service without prior brand knowledge. Survey feedback showed that special promotions, deals, and discounts justify new brand purchasing behavior because trying something new out and not liking it stings less when you're paying a fraction of the price.

Product value was another huge factor baked into special price offerings when social shopping. Do the benefits of this product outweigh the cost? In the previous paragraph, I mentioned that many disregard the price tag if a trustworthy referral is present, but how do users know if this new brand's social media marketing is the real deal? Users' skepticism might suppress the willingness to spend the original price, but tempt them to purchase an item at a discounted price. This is why one-of-a-kind deals from a new brand on social media are striking and attract new customers.

On the contrary, the other half of respondents who answered no worry about the reliability of the social media ads, and almost always assume new brand promotions are a scam. With the excessive use of phishing scams and their sophisticated manipulation tactics, many social media users are most concerned about their privacy. The abuse of personal information and unreliable/sketchy payment methods many new social shopping brands warrant stray new customers away. Not everything is what it appears, and many survey participants feel they're always one click away from being hounded by multiple entities with ill, unprofessional intentions. People like comfortability in their social shopping behavior, so it's important for new brands to promote ethical business practices to gain users' trust from the very beginning. I was shocked to see that the majority of respondents who answered no were within the 25-60 year old age range. I believe this is in part due to Generation Z's familiarity with social media and the false sense of protection it has provided us. We have never known a time without it, and I think it has led us to be easily deceived by social shopping scams.

To bounce off of the idea of scammer companies, 75% of survey participants between ages 18-25 said a brand's social media presence greatly affects their online purchasing decisions. The recurring theme of this data analysis is business-to-consumer (B2C) trust. How well brands utilize social media platforms for marketing was a deal breaker for many social shoppers. Many argued that the amount of followers a brand's account has and how frequently they post builds credibility, and without it the attention on their product or service was hindered. One participant said "If not a lot of

people are engaging after a few years/months of promoting on social media, then it might not be a good product.” It’s funny that so many of us describe a business with no social media presence as “fishy” or deceitful, but also quite understandable when almost everything we do is done online amidst the height of a digital revolution.

There are many moving parts that construct our purchasing behavior on social media. As social media marketing trends drastically rise, brands competitive marketing strategies grow stronger and more enticing than consumers could ever imagine. As results from my questionnaire showed, the biggest characteristic that teeters consumers' purchasing behavior is their trust in a company. This includes a businesses social media presence, authenticity, user reliability, and their use of advertising with savvy price points to maximize their customer base. If I had to further conduct this research, I would begin studying how the fluctuation of time spent on social media and how our motives for using social platforms can alter purchasing behavior patterns on a deeper level.