

Measuring Social Media's Impact on Impulse Buying Behavior

Hitanshi Goel¹, Nidhi Sharma^{2,*}

Abstract

This study investigates the influence of social media on impulse buying behavior, focusing on how various platforms drive spontaneous purchases and the psychological and demographic factors that contribute to this behavior. Using a mixed-method approach, the research combines quantitative surveys with qualitative insights to offer a comprehensive analysis. We explore how different types of content, such as targeted advertisements, influencer endorsements, and user-generated media, impact consumer impulses. The study examines the role of emotional triggers and cognitive biases in shaping purchasing decisions made through social media channels. Our findings reveal a significant correlation between social media exposure and increased impulse buying, with demographic factors such as age, income, and gender acting as moderators of this relationship. Additionally, the research highlights the role of consumer attitudes toward brand authenticity and trust in shaping purchasing behavior. These results are valuable for marketers looking to optimize digital strategies, providing insights on how to engage consumers effectively. However, the study also raises important ethical considerations regarding data privacy and consumer trust, urging marketers to balance marketing effectiveness with responsible practices in the digital landscape.

Keywords: Social media, impulse buying, fear of missing out (FOMO), social media communities (SMCs), marketing strategies

INTRODUCTION

In the digital landscape, social media has evolved into a powerful driver of consumer behavior, influencing everything from product discovery to purchase decisions. Impulse buying, defined as unplanned purchases often triggered by situational or emotional cues, has grown significantly due to social media's reach and persuasive capabilities. Platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok use targeted advertisements, influence endorsements, and curated content to create a seamless path from desire to purchase. The present study explores how social media amplifies impulse buying tendencies and the underlying psychological mechanisms, such as emotional arousal, social comparison, and FOMO (fear of missing out).

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Impulse buying on social media often involves limited consideration of consequences, as emotional drivers tend to override rational decision-making. Brands and advertisers capitalize on this tendency, leveraging visually appealing content that is tailored to individual users through sophisticated algorithms. This study aims to bridge gaps in existing research by examining both the cognitive and social dimensions of impulse buying in the context of social media, providing insights for effective digital marketing strategies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent studies have reinforced the understanding that social media plays a crucial role in influencing impulse buying behavior. Singh et al. [1] examined the relationship between social media communities (SMCs) and impulse buying intention (IBI), showing that these communities foster a sense of belonging and social influence, leading to increased impulsive purchases. SMCs act as digital ecosystems where users connect, interact, and validate each other's purchasing decisions, making them powerful drivers of impulse buying behavior.

Vazquez et al. [2] emphasized the role of user-generated content (UGC) in shaping consumer perceptions and impulsive buying decisions. Their study revealed that UGC, such as customer reviews and photos, fosters trust and provides authentic product representation, thereby increasing purchase intention among consumers. The persuasive power of UGC highlights the importance of community validation in online shopping contexts.

According to Muralidharan [3], personalized content generated by artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning has transformed social media marketing by enhancing targeting accuracy. This technology enables platforms to deliver content that closely aligns with user preferences, increasing the likelihood of impulse buying. AI-driven personalization creates a seamless shopping experience, encouraging consumers to make unplanned purchases through tailored recommendations.

Yang et al. [4] explored the influence of visual appeal on social media, concluding that visually captivating posts increase the emotional impact of advertisements, particularly on platforms like Instagram and TikTok, where aesthetics is central to user engagement. Their findings indicate that the design and presentation of content significantly affect impulsive buying tendencies, as visually appealing content generates stronger emotional responses.

In a recent meta-analysis, Zafar et al. [5] investigated the psychological mechanisms driving impulse buying on social media, identifying factors such as scarcity cues, time-sensitive promotions, and FOMO. These factors leverage psychologically trigger to create a sense of urgency, increasing the likelihood of impulsive purchasing. Zafar et al.'s [5] findings underscore the effectiveness of time-limited offers and limited-quantity messages in generating immediate consumer action.

These recent studies expand upon previous literature by illustrating the evolving and dynamic nature of social media's impact on consumer behavior. This body of work underscores the combined influence of community dynamics, UGC, AI-driven personalization, visual appeal, and psychological triggers in enhancing impulse buying behavior on social media.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes a descriptive research design to analyze social media's impact on impulse buying behavior among a sample population of 150 individuals, comprising friends, family, and college mates. A structured survey, administered via Google Forms, gathered data on social media usage, impulse buying frequency, and demographics [6]. The survey design incorporated both Likert scale and open-ended questions to capture quantitative data and qualitative insights. Convenience sampling was employed, focusing on participants with active social media engagement [7].

Data Collection Instruments

Data was collected through a structured questionnaire, alongside literature reviews of existing studies [8, 9]. Google Scholar was used as a primary tool for secondary data sources, while Google Forms facilitated the survey. The study took place over a two-month period from April to May 2024.

Data Analysis

From Figure 1, we know that our key age demographic is above 18 years of age. As seen in Figure 2, our key education demographic has at least a bachelor's degree. Figure 3 shows that our gender demographic is equally distributed between males and females.

Age
102 responses

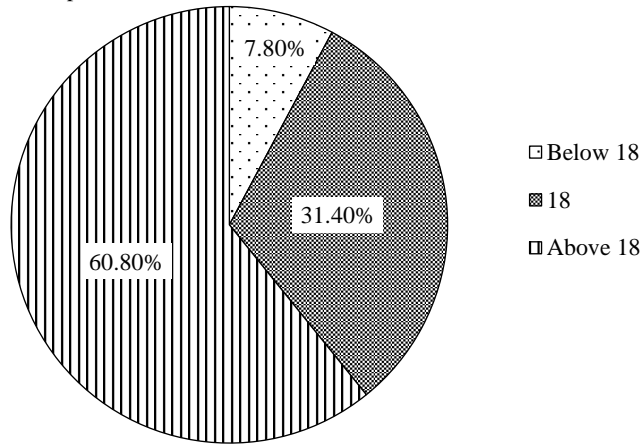


Figure 1. Key age demographic.

Qualification
102 responses

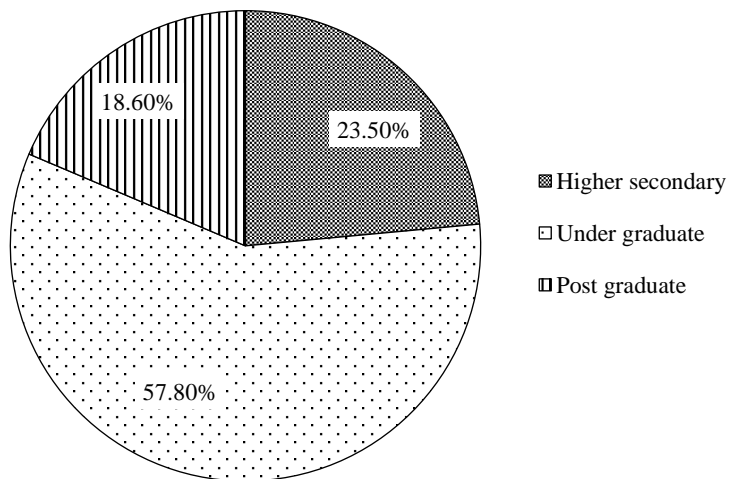


Figure 2. Key education demographic has at least a bachelor's degree.

Gender
102 responses

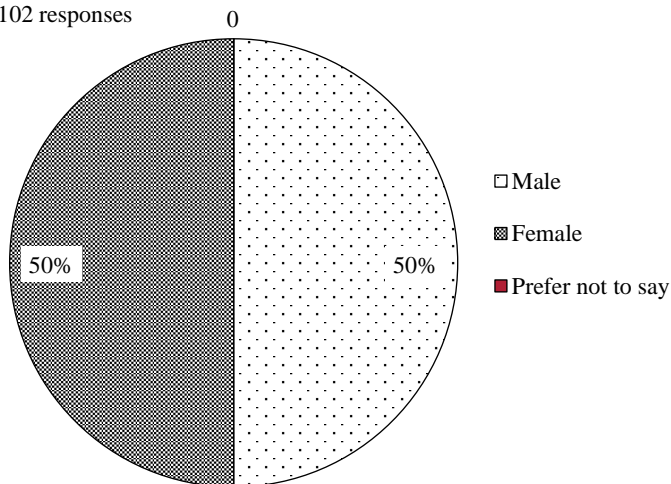


Figure 3. Key gender demographic is equally male and female.

The interpretation we got from Figure 4 is unplanned purchases as a result of social media 19.6% of respondents are always influenced, 17.6% are influenced often, 33.3% are sometimes influenced, 15.7% are rarely influenced, and 13.7% are never influenced.

The interpretation we got from Figure 5 is influence on your impulse buying behavior are due to social media 16.7% of respondents are influenced due to Facebook, 60.8% are influenced by Instagram, 8.8% are influenced by Twitter, 1% are influenced by Tik Tok, and 12.7% are influenced by other platforms.

How frequently do you find yourself making unplanned purchases as a result of social media influence?

102 responses

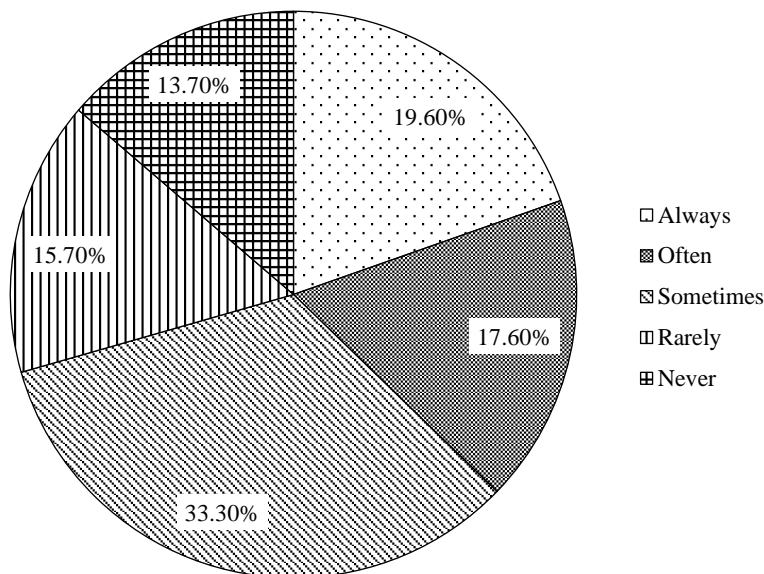


Figure 4. Unplanned purchases.

Which social media platform do you believe has the most significant influence on your impulse buying behavior?

102 responses

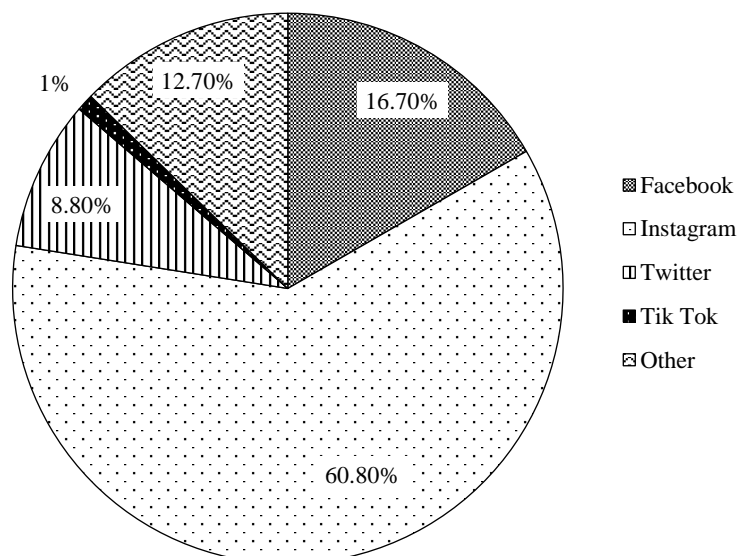


Figure 5. Impulse buying behavior.

The description we got from Figure 6 is that advertisements have a positive impact. According to the survey people are influenced by advertisements and do buy the products. And sometimes the advertisement is engaging people to buy the products before even planning for it.

The interpretation we got from Figure 7 is that 48% of people follow the brands or influencers on social media platform, 28.4% of people maybe follow the brands or influencers on social media platform, and 23.5% people do not follow the brands or influencers on social media platform

When you see a product or service advertised on social media, how likely are you to make a purchase without prior planning?
102 responses

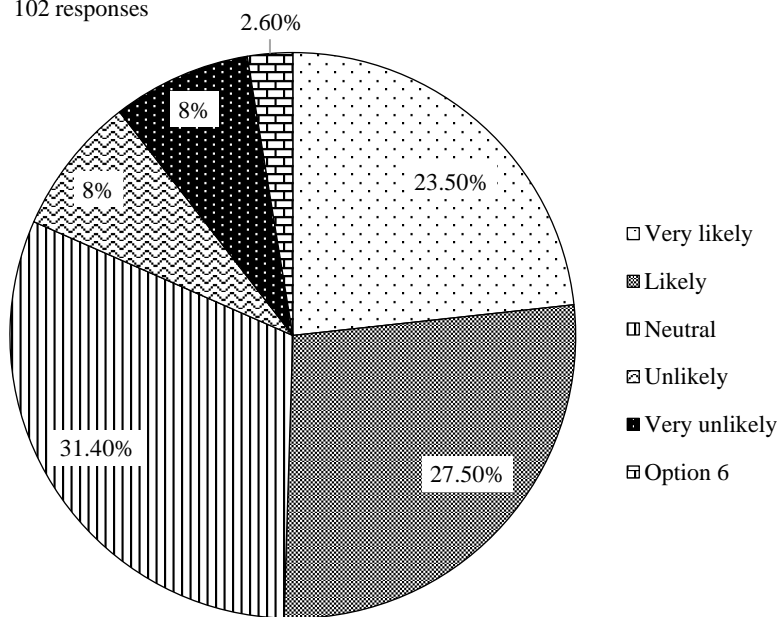


Figure 6. Service advertised on social media.

Do you follow brands or influencers on social media platforms?
102 responses

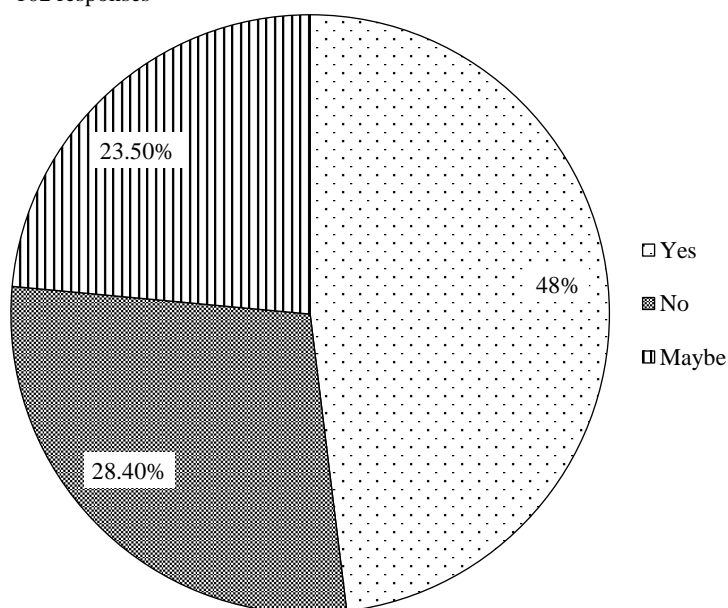


Figure 7. Influencers on social media platform.

The interpretation we got from Figure 8 of people engaging with sponsored or promoted posts as a result of social media is 23.5% of respondents are always influenced, 19.6% are influenced often, 28.4% are sometimes influenced, 11.8% are rarely influenced, and 16.7% are never influenced.

The interpretation we got from Figure 9 is 43.1% of the individuals purchase products because they saw it on a social media platform, 36.3% of the individuals do not purchase product because they saw it on a social media platform, 20.6% of the individuals maybe purchase product because they saw it on a social media platform.

How often do you engage with sponsored or promoted posts on social media?
102 responses

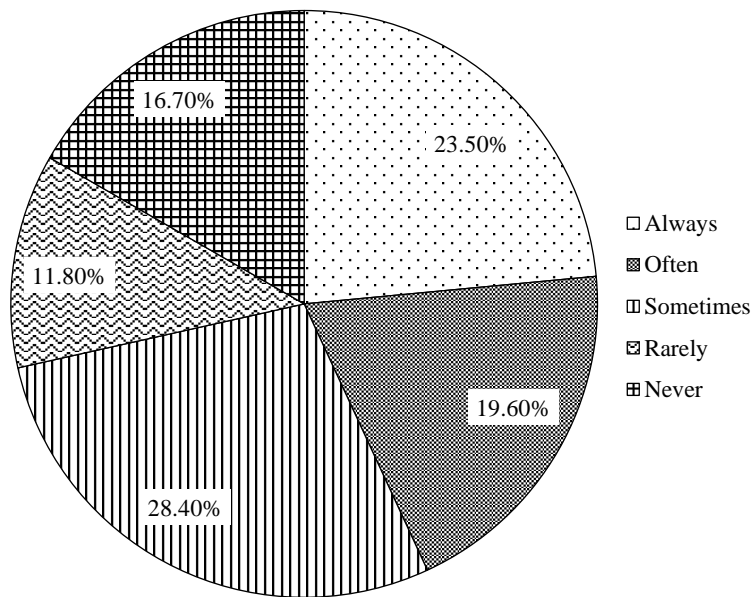


Figure 8. Promoted posts on social media.

Have you ever purchased a product solely because you saw it featured on a social platform?
102 responses

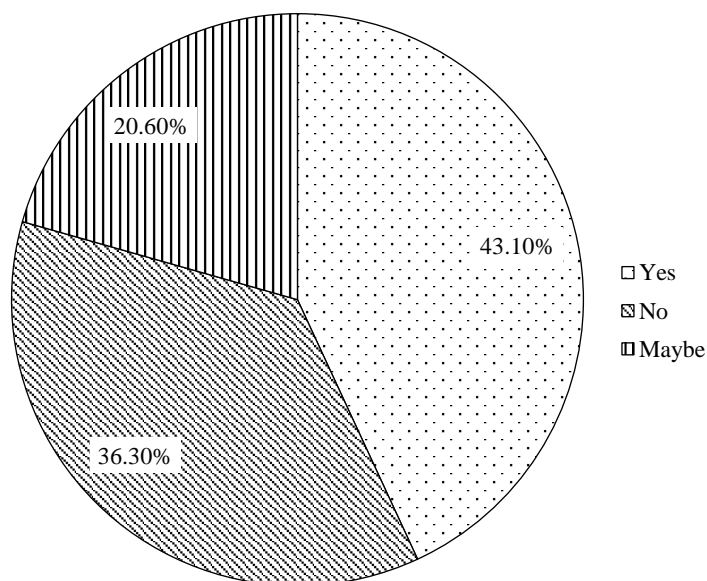


Figure 9. Individuals purchase products.

Interpretation from Figure 10 we got from respondents, if they would share post, if they find appealing social media: 22.5% of respondents are most likely, 16.7% are likely, 28.4% are neutral, 10.8% are unlikely, and 21.6% are very unlikely.

The interpretation we got from Figure 11 is 43.1% of the individuals feel FOMO due to social media platform, 43.1% of the individuals do not feel FOMO due to social media platform, 43.1% of the individuals maybe feel FOMO due to social media platform.

How likely are you to share or repost a product or service that you find appealing on social media?
102 responses

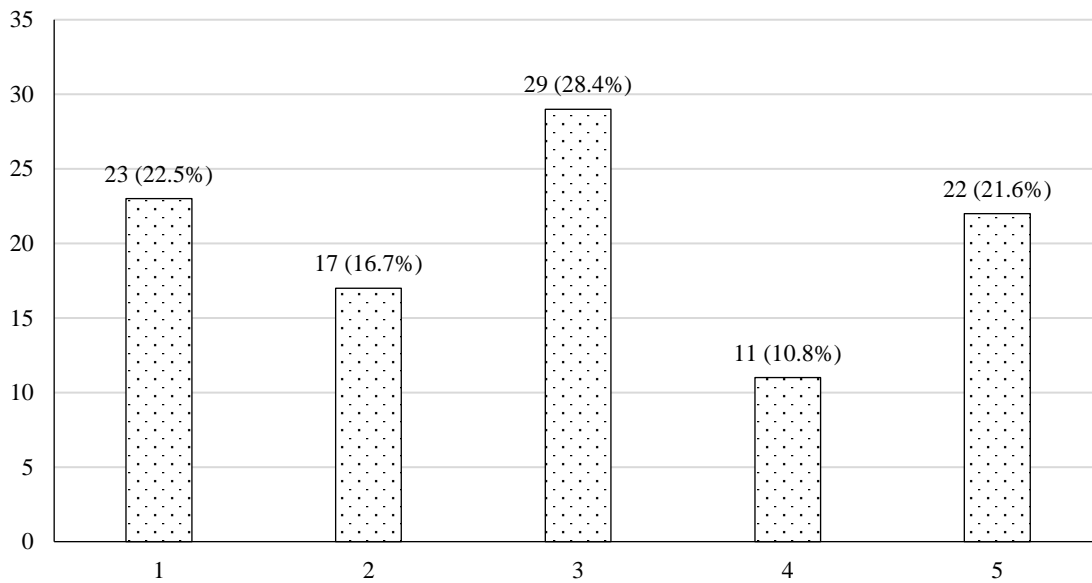


Figure 10. Appealing social media.

Do you think that social media platforms create a sense of urgency or FOMO (fear of missing out) that influence your impulse buying behavior?
102 responses

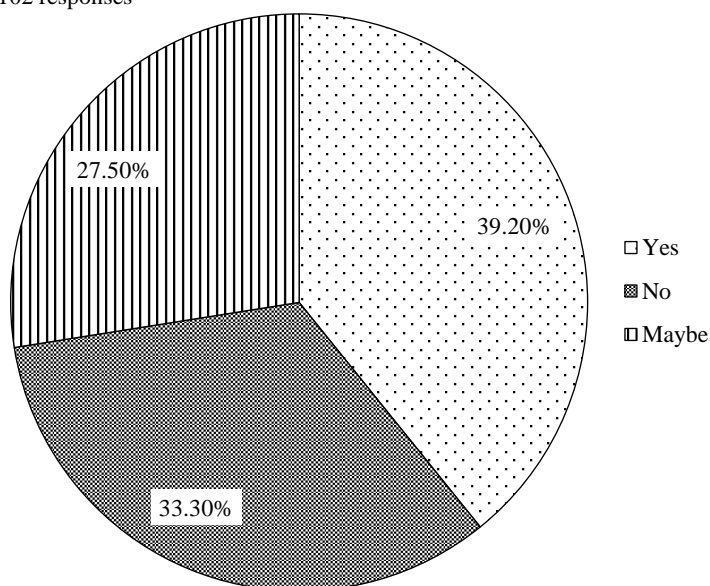


Figure 11. FOMO (fear of missing out) due to social media platform.

One a scale of 1 to 5, how much do you think social media impacts your impulse buying behavior?

102 responses

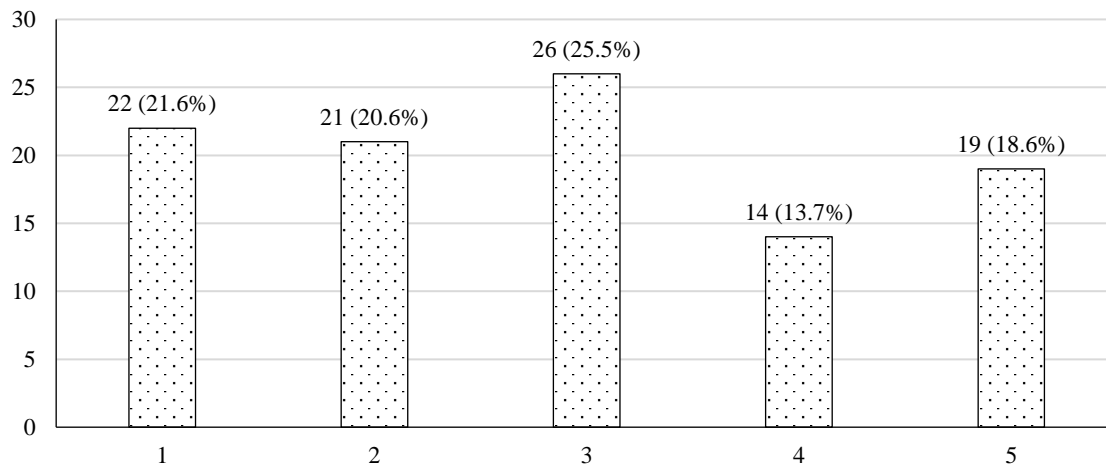


Figure 12. Social media impacts on impulse buying behavior.

Interpretation from Figure 12 we got on how social media impacts the respondents' impulse buying behavior: 21.6% of respondents are most likely, 20.6% are likely, 25.5% are neutral, 13.7% are unlikely, and 18.6% are very unlikely.

FINDINGS

The data reveals that the majority of participants, aged 18 years and above, engage with social media daily, with significant exposure to targeted content and influencer marketing. Findings suggest that 60.8% of respondents are influenced by Instagram, while platforms such as Facebook (16.7%) and Twitter (8.8%) play lesser but notable roles. The analysis also indicates a gender difference, with female respondents demonstrating a higher susceptibility to impulsive purchases influenced by social media. Prominent themes from the data include emotional responses to advertisements, social comparison, and the impact of influence credibility on consumer decision-making. Approximately 43.1% of respondents admitted to making purchases due to social media exposure, indicating a direct link between digital exposure and purchasing actions. Additionally, respondents cited FOMO and visually engaging content as primary motivators for impulse buying.

The study reveals a strong positive correlation between social media exposure and impulse buying behavior, with consumers frequently exposed to platform-specific content exhibiting higher tendencies toward spontaneous purchases. Psychological factors such as social comparison, emotional arousal, and cognitive biases contribute significantly to this behavior.

Key Findings

- *Platform Influence:* Instagram exerts the strongest influence on impulse buying, particularly among younger demographics.
- *Content Type:* Sponsored posts, influencer endorsements, and user-generated content each have varying impacts, with influencer content showing the highest effect on purchasing behavior.
- *Demographic Moderators:* Age, income, and gender were found to moderate social media's influence, with younger consumers, women, and individuals with disposable income more susceptible to impulsive purchases.

These findings underscore the importance of social media marketing strategies that capitalize on targeted advertisements and influence partnerships to stimulate consumer impulses effectively [10].

DISCUSSION

The study's results align with prior literature indicating that social media amplifies impulse buying behavior through targeted content and social cues. Platforms like Instagram and Facebook facilitate instant shopping by presenting personalized, appealing content that taps into users' emotions. The prevalence of FOMO, particularly among younger demographics, highlights the effectiveness of urgency-driven content in triggering immediate purchases.

For marketers, these insights stress the value of strategic partnerships with influencers and the use of engaging visuals in campaigns. Ethical considerations, however, remain critical; the intensity of personalized targeting raises concerns regarding data privacy and consumer autonomy. Brands must balance impulse-stimulating strategies with ethical practices that protect consumer trust

CONCLUSION

This research provides a comprehensive look at the impact of social media on impulse buying behavior, demonstrating platform-specific content, demographic factors, and psychological drivers significantly influence consumer tendencies toward spontaneous purchases. The study offers actionable insights for digital marketers aiming to optimize strategies for consumer engagement while emphasizing the importance of ethical considerations in data use and consumer privacy.

The findings suggest that while social media can effectively stimulate impulse buying through targeted, visually appealing content, responsible marketing practices are essential to ensure long-term consumer trust. Future research could further explore the role of technological advances in personalization, such as AI-driven targeting, and examine potential regulatory frameworks for consumer protection in digital marketing.

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