

Impact of Social Media Contents on Consumer Product Selection: Click & Order, Click Only Business Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The rapid proliferation of social media has transformed consumer decision-making processes across both physical and digital retail environments. This study examines the impact of social media content on consumer product selection, comparing brick-and-mortar and click-and-order business contexts. Using a qualitative design, data were collected through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) involving 30 participants, including students, jobholders, and online business owners. Using thematic analysis, six key themes emerged: (1) social media as a product discovery outlet, (2) peer recommendations and influencer effects, (3) impact on physical shopping, (4) influence on online purchasing, (5) preference for specific content types, and (6) skepticism and trust issues. Findings reveal that social media serves as a primary catalyst for product discovery, with platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube shaping both online and offline purchase intentions. Consumers rely heavily on user-generated content, influencer endorsements, and interactive formats such as short videos and testimonials, while also increasingly skeptical of sponsored content. The results indicate that social media influences all stages of the consumer journey—from awareness to purchase—though its effects differ between traditional and digital retail channels. This study contributes to the literature on digital consumer behavior, social commerce, and omnichannel retailing, offering actionable insights for marketers to design platform-specific, authentic, and engaging content strategies. The findings also provide strategic guidance for retailers seeking to integrate social media-driven engagement into holistic omnichannel experiences that enhance customer trust, satisfaction, and brand loyalty.

Keywords: Brick-And-Mortar, Click-And-Order, Qualitative, Social-Media, Product-Choice, Consumer Behavior

INTRODUCTION

The dramatic and rapid shift in consumer behavior, driven by social media, is not to be taken lightly. Such channels have redefined how customers learn, evaluate offerings, and make purchases, erasing the line between digital and physical retailing. Social media has become a pivotal influence on consumer perceptions and purchase intentions, both online and offline (Appel, Grewal, Hadi, & Stephen, 2020). Nowadays, customers use social networks as a primary source of brand information and interact with user-generated content (UGC) (Fatima, K., & Khan, R. H., 2024), such as reviews, unboxing videos, customer testimonials, influencer endorsements, and peer reviews, which significantly impact their purchasing journeys.

Recent research has also revealed that social media can influence all stages of the consumer decision-making process, from problem recognition and information search to post-purchase evaluation (Godey et al., 2016; Shareef et al., 2019). The influence of images, interactive stories, and tailored ads typically shapes consumer choices, prompting businesses to think carefully and strategically about how they develop their social media

communication. Nevertheless, although there is extensive research on the role of social media in online shopping, relatively few comparative studies have examined its influence in both traditional shops and online stores (Vivian et al., 2025).

Understanding the subtle influences of social media on retail consumer behavior in both formats is critical (Islam, et al., 2025). As the gap between online and offline shopping is vanishing stores do not represent isolated places, but rather part of an omnichannel experience where customers might research online for product information through social media and (then) experiment products in store or vice versa: physically discovering products before buying them online a behavior coined showrooming and webrooming (Verhoef, Kannan, & Inman, 2015). As e-commerce continues to grow, retailers must adapt and understand how social media influences consumer shopping habits and expectations across all online platforms. This study employs a mixed-methods approach to examine the factors that influence social media's role in consumer decision-making for click-and-mortar businesses. This research aims to provide practical guidance for marketing practitioners and retailers by identifying key factors that drive the effectiveness of channels/types of content and interaction modes. Findings from this study can assist firms in managing customer experience programs, allocating resources more efficiently, and, at a broader level, managing firm-customer relationships in an environment of increasing marketplace competitiveness and evolution. In the contemporary digital era, where consumers are increasingly online, social media has evolved from a mere mode of communication to a powerful driver of purchasing behavior (Rahman, et al., 2018). Increasingly, shoppers depend on social platforms to help them find, discuss, and ultimately decide what to buy—in both physical (brick-and-mortar) stores and web-based “click-and-order” platforms—highlighting the Importance of social media across retail formats. Even though e-commerce and omnichannel retail strategies have reached a remarkable level, an integrative perspective on social media's role across retail formats remains very limited. As such, further research is required to bridge this gap and provide insight into how social media affects consumer behavior.

Given the backdrop, the current study examines how social media influences consumer product choice and how customers' interactions with brands at physical and virtual purchase points affect them. Utilizing a focus group discussion method involving 30 participants, industry-specific findings are provided on channels, types of content, and ways to engage that will most effectively influence consumers' buying decisions.

Research Objectives

- To understand the impact of social media on consumers' purchase behavior at different stages: Pre-purchase, evaluation, and purchase.
- To investigate the influence of social media engagement on decision-making for brick-and-mortar shoppers and online consumers.
- To establish which social media platforms, content types, and tone of voice are most effective with today's consumers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media and Consumer Decision-Making

Social media has revolutionized how conventional customers make purchasing decisions. It has empowered customers with instantaneous access to information, leading to a demand for two-way conversations with brands and their presence, as well as increased transparency in accessing and comparing prices, including social norms set as benchmarks by peers (Mangold, G., & Faulds, D., 2009). Social media applications, such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook, have become increasingly crucial for socializing, product category discovery and evaluation, and determining when to make a purchase (Appel, Grewal, Hadi, & Stephen, 2020). Research by Godey et al. (2016) also highlighted that social media marketing strategies, including online communities, entertainment content, and brand participation, impact brand equity and consumer behavior. Consumers now rely more than ever on peer reviews, influencer endorsements, and social media advertorials to make purchasing decisions, transitioning from conventional marketing and product support to user-generated content (Shareef et al., 2019; Haque, M. Z., & Khan, R. H., 2020).

Influence of Content Formats and Channels

Variations in content for different social media channels (such as videos, live streams, stories, and reels) significantly impact consumer engagement and purchasing behavior. Short-form video engages with the consumer's emotions faster and facilitates quicker CFM decisions (Lim, Y.F., and Hu, K., 2022). Furthermore, social marketing on Instagram and YouTube is more effective at influencing purchase intentions among youth (De, V., Cauberghe, H., 2017). The reach of such formats varies across demographic segments and shopping

situations, leading marketers to carefully craft content strategies based on consumer behavior and preferences (Vivian, Bhushan, & Bhojanna, 2025; Fatima, K., & Khan, R. H., 2024).

Brick-and-Mortar vs. Click-and-Order: Changing Retail Dynamics

The rise of omnichannel retailing has further blurred the divide between brick-and-mortar and online retail. Customers' basic expectation is that digital and physical experiences are integrated, and a fundamental part of that integration is the position of social media as the bridge between browsing and buying (Verhoef, Kannan, & Inman, 2015). Other behavioral phenomena, such as showrooming (looking at products in-store and purchasing online) and webrooming (searching online and purchasing in-store), illustrate how social media-enabled information seeking influences purchase paths across both platforms (Flavián, Gurrea, and Orús, 2020). Social media is often the platform where consumers first discover products, validate them through reviews, and choose a channel based on convenience, price, and perceived risk.

E-commerce Expansion and the Role of Social Media

The explosive growth of e-commerce, especially after 2020, has required digital channels for retailers (Sivarajah, Irani, Gupta, & Mahroof, 2020). Retailers implementing social commerce initiatives, allowing consumers to purchase directly through Instagram or Facebook shops, can better meet consumers' needs, as social media-based consumption behaviors influence consumer needs (Doaa Herzallah, F. Liébana-Cabanillas, F. Muñoz-Leiva, and C. Zarco, 2025). Traditional retailers have not disappeared, and influenced by many elements and factors (Khan, R. H., & Aditi, F. N., 2020); on the contrary, the experience economy has rendered physical stores experiential centers, where social media frequently adds value to the pre- and post-shopping activities (Pantano & Vannucci, 2019).

Research Gaps and Need for Mixed-Methods Approaches

Although extensive literature exists on social media marketing and e-commerce separately, less research has examined differences in social media usage between traditional and online shopping. Furthermore, prior research has focused exclusively on purchase behavior or customer perceptions, underscoring the need for a mixed-methods approach to bridge depth and breadth (Vivian et al., 2025). The paper aims to enrich this knowledge gap by combining qualitative and quantitative information. It provides clues to social media's contribution to product choice across retail formats and informs firms on where to head in building their customer experience strategy.

Theoretical and Methodological Gaps

Previous work frequently compartmentalizes the influence of social media across online and offline dimensions, ignoring the integrated nature of 21st-century retailing (Kumar et al., 2023). Qualitative measures, such as 'focus groups', can help understand complexity with quantitative tools. Researchers have suggested that these are another essential tool for dissolving complexity (John W. C., Vicki L. Clark, 2023). For example, focus group discussions (FGDs) reveal the hidden motives behind social media use, such as seeking social confirmation throughout the entire product choice process. This analysis highlights social media's phase-change effect on consumer behavior, influencing them across all touchpoints of the retail environment. However, links regarding how specific platform strategies impact hybrid consumer journeys are still missing. By exploring these gaps through a mixed-methods perspective, this research contributes to theories of omnichannel retailing and provides practical implications for marketers.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

We deployed a qualitative method, specifically, focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted to determine how social media experiences impact customers' decision-making when selecting products in both online and brick-and-mortar environments. Thematic Analysis was employed to identify, analyze, and report on the common themes and insights derived from participants' stories. This approach was suitable for accessing the subtle, socially constructed notions that consumers attach to their social media interactions and brand purchasing behaviors.

Participant Selection

We purposively selected 30 participants to achieve a diverse sample across age, occupation, shopping practices, and levels of digital engagement. They shared a sample that they felt represented the entire spectrum of consumers, from digitally native young adults to older shoppers who integrated both physical and online retail into their

shopping routines. The online platforms and personal networks served as the sampling locations, and all participants enrolled voluntarily.

Table 1. Focus Group – 1 Participants Details		
Participant's code	Description	Year/Experience
STD01	Student, Undergrade	1 st
STD02	Student, Undergrade	2 nd
STD03	Student, Undergrade	3 rd
STD04	Student, Undergrade	4 th
STD05	Student, Undergrade	2 nd
STD06	Student, Undergrade	2 nd
STD07	Student, Undergrade	2 nd
STD08	Student, Undergrade	2 nd
STD09	Student, Postgrad	1 st
STD10	Student, Postgrad	2 nd
STD11	Student, Postgrad	2 nd
STD12	Student, Postgrad	3 rd
STD13	Student, Postgrad	3 rd
STD14	Student, Postgrad	2 nd
STD15	Student, Postgrad	2 nd

Table 2. Focus Group – 2 Participants Details		
Participant's code	Description	Year/Experience
JH01	Job Holder, E-commerce	5+
JH02	Job Holder, E-commerce	7+
JH03	Job Holder, E-commerce	10+
JH04	Job Holder, E-commerce	8+
JH05	Job Holder, E-commerce	5+
JH06	Job Holder, Digital Ads	5+
JH07	Job Holder, Digital Ads	10+
JH08	Job Holder, Digital Ads	3+
JH09	Job Holder, Digital Ads	3+
JH10	Job Holder, Digital Ads	5+

Table 3. Focus Group – 3 Participants Details		
Participant's code	Description	Year/Experience
OWN1	Owner, Online Business	3+
OWN1	Owner, Online Business	5+
OWN1	Owner, Online Business	1+
OWN1	Owner, Online Business	4+
OWN1	Owner, Online Business	5+

Data Collection

Data were obtained through several focused semi-structured group discussion meetings lasting 60–90 minutes. Moderator-led discussions took place in person or via virtual meeting software and were audio-recorded for verification. The FGD guide was composed of open-ended questions around identified domains:

Social media as a product discovery outlet; the influence of peer recommendations and influencers; the impact on brick-and-mortar shopping behavior; the impact on click-and-order (online shopping) behavior; preferences for specific content types; challenges; skepticism; and trust issues. The authors encouraged participants to provide narratives of their personal and detailed experiences and views. Each unique statement was a single piece of data for analysis and coded based on the emerging themes.

Data Analysis

The interviews were tape recorded, then transcribed verbatim, and a thematic analysis was conducted using the six-phases approach of Braun and Clarke (2006):

1. Familiarization with data
2. Generating initial codes
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Producing the report

Individual comments from the respondents on all these predetermined themes were categorized, and representative quotes were added to validate the readings. The data were manually analyzed, and credibility was established through peer debriefing and investigator triangulation to maximize the coherence and accuracy of theme identification.

Analysis

The FGD with 30 participants was used to investigate how social media affects customers' decision-making when choosing products in both offline and online markets. Respondents were diverse, spanning various age groups, diverse occupations and types of work, and differing shopping habits. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. Responses were classified into six primary themes. Individual participants' reports are recorded to provide the most complete account possible.

Social Media as Product Discovery Outlet

They also shared details about their experiences with social media, using it to spread the word about new products.

P1: "I discover many gadgets or fashion stuff through Instagram stories.

P2: "I typically see products on TikTok before I see them in stores."

P3: "Whenever I open YouTube, unboxing videos let me know of all the latest tech products."

P4: "I see much stuff on Facebook marketplace ads with things I wish I could search for later."

P5: "Pinterest shows me ideas of home I things I seek to purchase."

Interpretation: Social media is a central channel for product discovery and often precedes traditional marketing.

Influence of Peer Recommendations and Influencers

P6: "I rely more on influencer reviews than brand advertisements."

P7: "User reviews of Instagram posts affect my purchase decision to a large extent."

P8: "I am more likely to buy the trending product on TikTok."

P9: "Browsing through friends' shares on products is adding more trust than random ads."

P10: "I will buy from it if a favorite influencer shares about it."

Interpretation: Peer influence and social validation are important for consumers' confidence and product purchasing.

Impact on Brick-and-Mortar Shopping Behavior

Participants reflected on how social media affects their in-store shopping choices.

P11: "I research a product on Instagram before I go into a store to check it out."

P12: "Sometimes I visit a shop because I had previously seen a product online."

P13: "If I see some clothes online, I still need to try them on in the shop."

P14: "Social media helps me find stores that sell the kinds of clothing/brands I see online."

P15: "Social media is now just like a window; you see a product, and you go and validate it in a shop."

Interpretation: Social media complements physical shopping in terms of pre-visit decision-making and store choice.

Impact on Click-and-Order (Online Shopping) Behavior

Participants explained how social media directly influences their online purchasing decisions.

P16: “I tap on Instagram ads and purchase without thinking.”

P17: “I have bought a few things from Facebook shop recommendations on impulse.

P18: “I see a product on TikTok, I Google it as soon as I am finished watching the video.”

P19: “Instagram has a checkout feature that makes it simple to purchase directly within the app.”

P20: “I trust Amazon reviews, but social media always makes me feel like I need to buy faster.”

Interpretation: Social media use drives online shopping, fostering spontaneous, convenient purchasing behavior.

Preference for Specific Content Types

Respondents discussed the types of social media content that most influenced their choices.

P21: “Fast Instagram reels of a real product in use are very influential.”

P22: “I like influencer vlogs that talk about the good and bads of the product.”

P23: “I usually feel safer buying when I watch customer testimonial videos.”

P24: “I like to compare the product on YouTube before I decide to buy one.”

P25: “Interactive stories or polls about products make me feel involved.”

Interpretation: Short videos, testimony, and interactive media were the three most efficient media for pulling people to buy and encouraging them to act.

Challenges, Skepticism, and Trust Issues

Some participants expressed concerns about the reliability of information on social media.

P26: “Sponsored content is too slick, I wonder.”

P27: “I feel like everything on social media is fake, so before buying something, I double-check.”

P28: “Sometimes influencers promote because of money, not because they truly believe in the products.”

P29: “I cross-check by reading reviews on many platforms before buying.”

P30: “Due to false advertisements, I am afraid to shop through links directly on social media anymore.”

Interpretation: Consumers have become increasingly savvy in their purchasing decisions, underscoring the importance of genuine, transparent marketing.

Synthesis of Insights

The focus group results suggest that social media is more than just another touchpoint during the consumer journey; it is a touchstone for how consumers are exposed to and consider products, and an important (though differently patterned) interface among how store and online consumers identify, assess, and purchase items. Retailers and brands need to be aware that different content types resonate with different audience segments, that credibility is influenced by affability, and that effective influence is influenced by credibility. It is a primary channel for discovery, refocusing trust towards PW reviews and influencers. Furthermore, it serves two purposes: supporting in-store shopping and driving direct online purchases, which require inspiring, authentic visual content to change today’s consumers’ behavior. It is also met with an increasingly skeptical audience, which demands greater transparency and authenticity from brands. Learning reinforces the importance of an omnichannel approach, where social media, physical stores, and e-commerce channels work together to shape consumer purchasing behavior. Retailers embracing ‘interesting’ content, building authentic social endorsements, and ensuring an integrated cross-channel experience can succeed in the future of retail.

The thematic analysis of responses from 30 individuals demonstrated the influence of social media on the consumer decision process across brick-and-mortar, click-and-order, and click-only models. Here are the summarized insights: Participants primarily discovered new products (e.g., gadgets, fashion, home I) through Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Pinterest. Social media proved to be where products landed before they hit brick-and-mortar stores or traditional advertising campaigns, serving as a “window” to trends. Consumers made purchase decisions on products (such as clothing and tech) after researching them on social media and visiting physical stores to assess quality or try them. Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok helped people find stores that carried brands or products they had seen online. Even for products found online, in-store validation (e.g., trying on clothes) remained important, as it combined digital and physical experiences.

Impulse buying was motivated by social media features such as Instagram’s in-app checkout, TikTok’s shoppable ads, and Facebook’s Shop recommendations. Urgency was driven by trends (such as the “TikTok-made-me-buy-it” culture) and by frictionless purchasing pathways. Users frequently searched for products on Google

after discovering them on social media, leading to quick online transactions. Cynicism about sponsored posts, fake reviews, and influencer promotions suppressed consumers' willingness to complete purchases via the links in those social media ads. Before purchasing from digital-only retailers, participants frequently cross-referenced reviews on third-party sites. Real formats, such as customer reviews, unboxing videos, and influencer reviews, were important trust elements in the click-on-only models.

Short videos (Instagram Reels, TikTok), interactive polls/stories, or comparative reviews (YouTube) performed best. This reveals that users appreciated product transparency, with "real" demos (e.g., unboxing videos) moderating perceived risk, particularly for online-only purchases. Friends' shares and user reviews were more trusted than brand ads across all models. Internet-famous products on TikTok or Instagram were major drivers of purchase across both physical and online channels. Influencers guided decisions but were skeptical if perceived as inauthentic, as if they were "selling for money."

IMPLICATIONS

Academic Implication

The study contributes to the body of knowledge in consumer behavior, social media marketing, and retail strategy by examining the subtle differences between online and offline consumer decision-making processes. When applied, mixed-methods research provides deeper insights into how social media influences shopping behavior and mental well-being. This can shape future researchers to delve deeper into the intersection between digital engagement and retail outcomes. The study also lays the groundwork for comparative research on emergent social commerce and established retail channels. It provides a route for longitudinal examination of consumer loyalty, trust, and the structure of content engagement. Academics can use this platform to study the long-term effects and cross-cultural differences in these platform-specific behaviors. The mixed-methodology approach further demonstrates that combining qualitative and quantitative techniques is beneficial for future consumer studies. This research makes several contributions to literature by providing a current understanding of social media-influenced customer shopping behavior in both offline and online retailer settings. It recommends further investigation into how new digital marketing approaches alter traditional retail models and impact consumer behavior. Researchers could replicate and extend such research longitudinally across cultures and platforms.

Practical Implications

The paper offers actionable guidance to enhance customer acquisition and retention through social media for retail and marketing managers and decision-makers. It forces marketers to adjust content formats (such as short videos, honest reviews, and influence partnerships) according to what consumers want. In addition, managers will need to recognize the dual impact of social media on the process, which helps drive brick-and-mortar shopping and speeds up online purchases. To capitalize on the evolving transformation of today's marketing toolbox, marketing budgets should be allocated primarily towards high-engagement platforms and formats. At the same time, transparent and credible brand personas should be developed online, enabling consumers to become less suspicious. Managers can also leverage these findings to develop omnichannel strategies that synchronize in-store visits with online browsing. This study highlights the significance of aligning social media messaging and involvement with prevailing consumer expectations for managers and marketing strategists. Managers are also encouraged to focus on creating genuine, engaging, visually exciting content that reflects their target audience's interests and insights. Equally important is the strategic distribution of resources among platforms and formats that have the most tremendous impact on consumer attention. Creating holistic omnichannel strategies that tie social media engagement to digital, online, and in-store experiences can also drive brand loyalty and satisfaction.

For retailers, the study recommends practically weaving social media touchpoints into their customers' shopping experience. The high street can drive in-store social engagement (e.g., via QR codes linking to UGC or live social campaigns) to connect with both the physical and digital shopping worlds. E-commerce brands have turned to real-time social proof, influencer partnerships, and visual storytelling to boost conversion rates. Additionally, practical effects may include staff training to support socially literate consumers online and offline, as well as new loyalty programs that reward social behavior and purchasing, thereby building customer relationships and fostering brand advocacy. Leveraging Social Commerce, businesses should strive to develop programs that seamlessly blend social media interactions and shopping. Physical locations can add a digital element by including QR codes that direct shoppers to a social media promotion or encourage them to post about their in-store visit. To gain traffic and conversions, online marketplaces must use UGC, live reviews, and influencer endorsements. Retailers will also need to continually monitor customer feedback on social media to adjust their offerings and the customer journey, resulting in a more individualized and dynamic customer experience.

So, the company ought to do the following to get a better strategic position:

Leverage social media to drive foot traffic by highlighting in-store exclusives or aligning online content with in-store inventory (Brick-and-Mortar).

Optimize shoppable ads and seamless checkout features to capitalize on impulse buying (Click-and-Order).

Prioritize authentic content (e.g., user testimonials) and transparency to overcome trust deficits (Click-Only).

CONCLUSION

This study aims to expand knowledge on the impact of social media on consumer product decision-making in multi-channel retail. By filling this research gap (i.e., limited comprehensive studies have examined physical store shopping alongside online purchasing behavior on social media), the research findings offer new perspectives on consumer interactions in the digital era. Based on a combined methodological strategy and focus group discussions, it is demonstrated that social media has a significant impact on all stages of the consumer decision-making process, including product discovery, evaluation, and final purchase decisions. Whether they shopped in-store or online, participants placed great trust in user-generated content, influencer recommendations, and social proof. Nevertheless, some subtleties were observed: physical store customers were more inclined to use social media as a source of pre-purchase information. At the same time, promotions and peer recommendations have a greater impact on online buyers during the decision-making process. By comparing brick-and-mortar and click-and-order media environments, the research reveals that significant differences exist in how consumers incorporate social media information and news into their transaction behavior, with implications for retailers and marketers. The results suggest the development of customized social media content tailored to consumer shopping channel preferences, platform engagement behaviors, and content format preferences.

In summary, the findings from this research contribute to the academic knowledge based on digital consumer behavior and have implications for retail, which is rapidly evolving in practice. By applying these insights to more targeted, platform-specific, and channel-integrated marketing, retailers are more likely to improve customer experience, build brand loyalty, and gain a competitive edge in both the physical and digital marketplace. These results will enable future research to investigate cross-cultural differences, new social commerce platforms, and the long-term effects of social media influence on consumer loyalty and brand trust.

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