



SOCIAL MEDIA AS A DETERMINANT OF BOOK PURCHASING BEHAVIOUR: AN EMPIRICAL AND THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract: *As digital communication technologies have expanded, they have reshaped the way consumers connect with cultural products, with a notable impact on how books are discovered and consumed. Social media platforms now function as key environments where discovery, evaluation, and purchasing decisions are shaped through interaction, visibility, and collective feedback. As a result, consumer behaviour is increasingly influenced by socially embedded digital experiences rather than solely by individual preferences or traditional sources of information. This paper examines the mechanisms through which social media shapes book purchasing behavior, focusing on perceived authenticity, emotional engagement, and social validation. The findings highlight the growing complexity of decision-making in algorithm-driven environments, suggesting that purchasing choices are embedded within broader systems of influence that operate through both cognitive and affective processes.*

JEL classification: M31, M37, D91, O33, L82

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1. INTRODUCTION

The ongoing digital transformation has significantly changed how consumers identify, assess, and purchase products. In recent years, rapid technological development and the widespread adoption of mobile devices have contributed to a shift toward digital consumption, transforming the traditional ways in which consumers engage with brands. Social media platforms have



become key spaces of influence, where information, user interaction, and marketing messages intersect in real time. Within these environments, content is not only consumed but continuously produced, shared, and evaluated by users, creating complex feedback loops that shape perception and behavior.

Within this evolving landscape, the publishing industry has experienced a particularly significant transformation. Historically, book purchasing decisions were largely influenced by institutional gatekeepers such as publishers, critics, and bookstores, as well as by individual preferences formed through deliberate information search. However, the rise of social media has disrupted these traditional structures, shifting the focus toward decentralized and user-driven forms of discovery. Today, books are increasingly encountered through algorithmically curated feeds, viral content, and peer recommendations, which often precede any intentional search for information.

As a result, book purchasing decisions are no longer driven solely by literary merit or authoritative recommendations but are increasingly influenced by exposure, visibility, and social dynamics. Short-form video content, online reviews, and community-driven platforms such as TikTok and Instagram have introduced new forms of engagement, where visual appeal, emotional resonance, and perceived authenticity play a central role. These platforms facilitate rapid dissemination of content, allowing certain titles to gain popularity in a relatively short period of time, often independent of traditional marketing efforts.

In this context, the decision-making process becomes less linear and more context-dependent, shaped by continuous interaction with digital content. Consumers are not only influenced by the information they receive but also by how that information is framed, validated, and reinforced within their online networks. The interplay between algorithmic exposure, social validation, and emotional engagement creates a complex environment in which preferences are formed and decisions are made, often in subtle and implicit ways.

This study investigates the degree to which social media affects consumers' decisions to purchase books, while also exploring the psychological and behavioral factors that underpin this influence. By combining theoretical frameworks with empirical analysis, it aims to offer a more thorough understanding of how digital environments shape modern consumer behavior, particularly in relation to cultural consumption.



2. LITERATURE REVIEW

To grasp how social media influences book-buying patterns, one must go over the theoretical and practical literature on social media influence, consumer behavior, and digital marketing. The following sections explore the main ideas and theoretical perspectives that define how online settings influence consumer decision-making, emphasizing social influence, emotional engagement, online buying behavior, and marketing approaches.

2.1 The Digital Transformation of Marketing Practices

Marketing has shifted from a mainly transactional approach to one that focuses more on relationships and customer experience. This transformation has also redefined the role of digital technologies, making them an essential component of modern marketing strategies and customer engagement (Belostecinic & Eudochia, 2023). According to Philip Kotler and Kevin Lane Keller (2008), marketing can be understood as a process through which individuals satisfy their needs by exchanging value. In the digital era, however, this process is increasingly influenced by technology, which requires businesses to constantly adapt to fast-changing market conditions. Organizations are therefore expected to combine technological innovation with a human-centered approach that creates value for both businesses and consumers (Kotler et al., 2021). This evolution reflects the broader transition from traditional marketing practices to digitally integrated marketing systems (Durmaz & Efendioglu, 2016).

Recent studies highlight that digital environments support real-time communication, personalized experiences, and decision-making based on data (Chaffey & Smith, 2017; Ryan, 2020; Gelashvili, 2021). In this context, consumers are no longer passive recipients of information but active participants in the creation of value, shaping brand image through their content and interactions.

2.2. Digital Marketing Mix and Consumer Experience

The traditional marketing mix has been extended in the digital context to incorporate additional dimensions such as user experience, automation, and social validation. Product strategies now focus on personalization and user-centered design (Tiago & Veríssimo, 2014), while pricing strategies integrate behavioral economics principles, including cognitive biases and perceived value (Kahneman, 2012).



Distribution has shifted toward omnichannel digital ecosystems, where accessibility and convenience are critical (Kingsnorth, 2022). Promotion strategies increasingly rely on storytelling, influencer collaborations, and interactive content (Rowles, 2019). Creating meaningful stories that resonate with consumers has become just as important as communicating product features (Godin, 2019). These transformations reflect a broader shift toward experiential marketing, where emotional engagement plays a central role.

2.3. Social Media as a Behavioral Influence Mechanism

Social media platforms can be understood as complex socio-technical systems that shape consumer behaviour through a combination of interaction, visibility, and algorithmic curation. These platforms do not merely act as channels for information dissemination; rather, they actively structure the way content is presented, prioritized, and interpreted by users. Content that generates emotional reactions and encourages sharing is more likely to spread rapidly across social media platforms, increasing product visibility and consumer awareness (Berger, 2015). Through personalized feeds and recommendation algorithms, individuals are continuously exposed to content that aligns with their interests, reinforcing certain preferences and influencing how products are perceived. In this context, Ahsan et al. (2023) highlight that social media marketing strategies are important not only for influencing immediate consumer reactions but also for supporting long-term customer satisfaction and building stronger relationships over time.

Within these digitally mediated environments, the role of influencers has gained considerable attention in academic literature. Influencers are increasingly recognized as key actors in the communication process, positioned between brands and consumers in a way that allows them to translate promotional messages into more relatable and accessible forms. Studies have shown that influencers can enhance trust and credibility by presenting content in a manner that appears authentic and aligned with their personal experiences (Clarke, 2020). This perceived authenticity is particularly important, as it differentiates influencer communication from traditional advertising, which is often viewed as more overtly persuasive. By leveraging relatability, storytelling, and consistent interaction with their audience, influencers can generate higher levels of engagement and significantly impact purchasing behavior. Beyond influencing purchasing decisions, social media has also transformed customer relationship management by



facilitating continuous interactions between brands and consumers. These interactions strengthen customer engagement and contribute to long-term relationship building in digital environments (Perez-Vega et al., 2022).

2.4. Theoretical Foundations

To better understand the influence of social media on consumer behaviour, several theoretical perspectives offer useful explanations. One of the most important is parasocial interaction theory, which explains how individuals form one-sided relationships with media figures (Horton & Wohl, 1956). In the context of social media, this theory is especially relevant, as influencers often create a sense of personal connection by using direct communication, sharing personal experiences, and interacting frequently with their audience. As a result, followers may perceive these relationships as genuine and emotionally meaningful, even in the absence of real reciprocity. This perceived closeness increases trust and enhances the persuasive power of influencer-generated content (Chetioui et al., 2020).

Closely aligned with this viewpoint is social influence theory, which proposes that individuals modify their behaviour in response to the attitudes and actions of others. Within digital environments, this effect is amplified through visible engagement metrics such as likes, shares, and comments that serve as indicators of popularity and trustworthiness. Empirical evidence suggests that these forms of social proof play a significant role in shaping purchase intentions, as consumers frequently look to the behaviour of others when making decisions, particularly under conditions of uncertainty (Lindstrom, 2016; Andrews et al., 2023). The effectiveness of social proof in digital environments is further reinforced by visible engagement indicators, such as likes, comments, ratings, and reviews, which reduce perceived risk and increase consumers' confidence in their purchasing decisions (Sanak-Kosmowska, 2021).

At the same time, brand attachment theory highlights the importance of emotional ties between consumers and brands, suggesting that stronger emotional connections are associated with higher levels of loyalty and a greater likelihood of repeated purchasing behaviour. Social media platforms support the development of these connections by enabling continuous interaction, personalized communication, and the creation of shared experiences. Through these mechanisms, consumers develop a sense of familiarity and identification with brands, which reinforces long-term engagement (Hemsley-Brown, 2022; Jun et al., 2023).



In addition, social validation plays a central role in shaping consumer perceptions in online environments. Users frequently rely on the reactions and feedback of others to evaluate the credibility and value of products, particularly when direct experience is limited. High engagement levels can signal quality and desirability, reduce perceived risk and increase confidence in the decision-making process (Zhang et al., 2017; Li et al., 2021).

Although originally developed for traditional marketing contexts, the AIDA model (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action) continues to offer valuable insights into consumer behaviour, particularly when adapted to reflect the characteristics and dynamics of digital communication channels. In social media contexts, attention is captured through visually appealing content, interest is maintained through relevance and storytelling, desire is stimulated through emotional engagement and social proof, and action is facilitated by simple and accessible purchasing options. This reflects a more fluid and interactive decision-making process shaped by the characteristics of digital environments (Djubair & Wong, 2022).

2.5. Synthesis of Key Findings

While the literature clearly supports the significant impact of social media on consumer behaviour, many studies tend to be either overly broad or fragmented across various academic fields. Many studies focus on isolated aspects such as influencer marketing, engagement metrics, or digital communication strategies, without fully integrating the underlying psychological mechanisms that drive consumer responses. As a result, there is a limited understanding of how cognitive, emotional, and social factors interact within digital environments to shape purchasing decisions.

In the specific context of book consumption, this gap becomes even more evident. Compared to other product categories, cultural products such as books involve more complex decision-making processes, often influenced by identity, personal values, and symbolic meaning. However, relatively few studies explore how these dimensions are reshaped within social media ecosystems, where exposure to content is continuous and often algorithmically curated.

Furthermore, existing research rarely examines how individual actors, such as authors, actively position themselves within these digital environments. While brands and companies have been extensively analysed, the strategic use of social media by authors as both content creators and influencers remains underexplored. This represents an important gap, particularly in



understanding how personal branding and digital presence contribute to consumer engagement and purchasing behaviour.

This study addresses these limitations by combining established theoretical frameworks with empirical investigation, offering a more integrated perspective on how social media influences book purchasing decisions. By linking psychological theories with observable behavioural patterns, the research contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of consumer behaviour in contemporary digital contexts.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a mixed-methods approach designed to capture both the depth of individual perceptions and the broader patterns of consumer behaviour. The study follows a sequential exploratory design, consisting of two complementary phases: an initial qualitative stage aimed at identifying key themes and variables, followed by a quantitative stage intended to test relationships and validate findings. This structure ensures both analytical rigor and conceptual depth, while also allowing for replication through clearly defined procedures.

The qualitative phase was conducted using focus group discussions, selected as an appropriate method for exploring attitudes, perceptions, and underlying motivations. A total of 18 participants, aged between 18 and 45, were recruited based on their active use of social media and prior experience with purchasing books. The study was carried out on March 4, 2025, within an academic setting. Participants were divided into two groups (10 and 8 individuals), allowing for more dynamic interaction and balanced participation. Discussions were guided by a semi-structured interview framework covering topics such as book discovery channels, the perceived role of influencers, trust in online recommendations, and the impact of visual content. All sessions were systematically recorded and subsequently transcribed to ensure an accurate representation of the data collected. The resulting transcripts were then subjected to a thematic analysis, a method that involves several stages, including the careful coding of the data, the organization of codes into meaningful categories, and the in-depth interpretation of recurring patterns and themes. This analytical approach enabled the identification of key insights and underlying structures within participants' responses.

Based on the insights identified in the initial phase, the research progressed to a quantitative stage, which involved the use of a structured questionnaire distributed online via social media



channels to capture measurable data from participants. The sampling method used was snowball sampling, targeting individuals aged 18 and above, residing in Romania, and actively using social media. The final sample consisted of 176 respondents. The questionnaire included closed-ended questions, primarily based on Likert-scale measurements (1–5), designed to assess key constructs such as social media exposure, perceived influencer credibility, trust in reviews, and purchase intention.

Several hypotheses were formulated to guide the quantitative analysis, including:

(H1) social media exposure significantly influences book purchasing behaviour;

(H2) perceived influencer credibility positively affects purchase intention;

(H3) trust in online reviews is positively associated with purchasing decisions;

(H4) demographic factors (such as age) influence responsiveness to social media content.

The collected data were processed and analysed using SPSS statistical software. A range of statistical techniques was employed to address the research objectives. Specifically, chi-square tests were conducted to assess the relationships between categorical variables, while independent samples t-tests were used to evaluate differences in purchase intentions between distinct groups. Additionally, analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied to examine variations across different demographic segments. Statistical significance for all analyses was determined using a threshold of $SIG < 0.05$.

The methodological design was structured to ensure transparency and replicability, with clear definitions of sampling procedures, data collection methods, and analytical techniques. This allows future researchers to replicate the study in similar or different contexts and contributes to the robustness and validity of the research findings.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section outlines the study's findings in a systematic manner, starting with the quantitative results, followed by qualitative insights, and concluding with an integrated interpretation of both datasets. This structure facilitates a clearer understanding of how statistical trends correspond with individual perceptions and experiences.



4.1 Quantitative Results

The quantitative analysis provides a broad overview of how social media influences book purchasing behaviour across the sample of 176 respondents. The results indicate that social media plays a statistically significant role in shaping consumer decisions, particularly through exposure, perceived credibility, and engagement.

Firstly, Chi-square analysis revealed a significant association between the frequency of social media usage and the likelihood of purchasing books based on online content ($SIG < 0.05$). Respondents who reported daily or frequent exposure to platforms such as Instagram and TikTok were considerably more likely to have purchased books via recommendations encountered online. This suggests that repeated exposure increases familiarity and reduces the psychological distance between the consumer and the product.

Secondly, the independent samples t-test highlighted significant differences in purchase intention between respondents exposed to influencer-generated content and those who were not ($SIG < 0.05$). Individuals who actively followed book-related content creators demonstrated higher levels of trust and a greater likelihood of acting on recommendations. This finding reinforces the importance of perceived credibility in digital environments.

Additionally, ANOVA results indicated statistically significant differences across age groups ($SIG < 0.05$), with younger respondents (18–25) showing a higher susceptibility to social media influence. This segment reported greater engagement with short-form video content and a stronger tendency to make impulse purchases based on visually appealing or emotionally engaging posts.

Furthermore, correlational analysis suggests a positive relationship between trust in online reviews and purchase intention, as well as between perceived authenticity and engagement. These findings confirm that trust and authenticity function as key mediators in the decision-making process.

4.2 Qualitative Findings

The qualitative phase provides deeper insight into the mechanisms underlying these statistical relationships, revealing how individuals interpret and respond to social media content in real-life contexts.



Participants consistently described social media as a primary discovery channel for books, often replacing traditional sources such as bookstores or literary reviews. Unlike intentional search behaviour, discovery was frequently described as accidental or incidental, occurring while scrolling through feeds. For example, several participants mentioned encountering books through TikTok videos that presented visually appealing content or emotional reactions, rather than detailed descriptions.

A recurring theme in the discussions was the importance of authenticity. Participants expressed skepticism toward content perceived as overly promotional, while emphasizing trust in influencers who shared personal experiences or balanced opinions. One participant noted that they were more likely to purchase a book when the recommendation felt “real” rather than scripted. This reinforces the quantitative finding that credibility significantly influences purchase intention.

Another key insight relates to the role of social validation. Participants frequently referred to engagement indicators such as likes, comments, and shares as signals of a book’s popularity and perceived value. Books that appeared repeatedly across different posts or accounts were considered more trustworthy, even in the absence of detailed evaluation. This highlights how collective behaviour shapes individual perception.

Emotional engagement also emerged as a critical factor. Content that evoked strong emotional responses, such as relatability, excitement, or curiosity, was more likely to influence purchasing decisions. Participants often described feeling “drawn” to books based on how they were presented, rather than on their actual content. This suggests that affective responses play a central role in shaping consumer behaviour.

4.3 Integrated Discussion

When the quantitative and qualitative findings are considered together, a clear and consistent pattern emerges. Social media influences book purchasing behaviour through a combination of three interconnected mechanisms: exposure, trust, and validation, all of which are reinforced by emotional engagement.

Exposure increases familiarity and awareness, particularly through algorithm-driven content that repeatedly presents certain books to users. Trust is established through perceived authenticity, especially in influencer-generated content, while validation is provided through



engagement metrics that signal popularity and credibility. These elements interact dynamically, creating a feedback loop in which visibility leads to engagement, and engagement further increases visibility.

Importantly, the findings suggest that consumer decision-making in digital environments is no longer linear or purely rational. Instead, it is shaped by continuous interaction with content, where emotional and social cues play a decisive role. This challenges traditional models of consumer behaviour and highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of decision-making processes in digital contexts.

4.4 Future Research Directions

The findings of this study suggest several important directions for future research and highlight the need for a more nuanced and longitudinal understanding of the relationship between social media and consumer behaviour. One key area involves examining the long-term effects of social media exposure on reading habits. While this study captures immediate influences on purchasing decisions, it remains unclear whether repeated exposure to book-related content such as recommendations, reviews, or viral trends that leads to lasting changes in consumer preferences, reading frequency, or genre choices over time.

Another important direction concerns the role of different social media platforms and content formats. As digital environments vary significantly, the mechanisms of influence may differ across platforms. For example, short-form video content may have a more immediate and persuasive impact, while written reviews or long-form discussions may encourage more reflective decision-making. Future research could explore how these formats influence not only purchase intentions but also trust, engagement, and perceived credibility.

Cross-cultural research also offers valuable opportunities to expand these findings. Differences in social media use, cultural norms, and consumption patterns may shape how individuals respond to online content, affecting the generalizability of current results. In addition, the growing influence of technologies such as artificial intelligence and personalized recommendation systems deserves further attention, particularly regarding their impact on consumer autonomy and content diversity.

Finally, future studies should consider the role of individual differences, including personality traits, digital literacy, and prior reading habits. These factors may influence how consumers



interpret and respond to social media, providing a more detailed understanding of behaviour in digital contexts.

Future research could also investigate the combined effects of social media algorithms, influencer credibility, and personalized recommendation systems in shaping book purchasing decisions across different consumer segments.

LIMITATIONS

Despite its contributions to understanding the link between social media and consumer behaviour, this study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. First, the use of a non-probability sampling method, specifically the snowball technique, limits the generalizability of the findings. Since participants were recruited through existing networks, the sample may be biased toward individuals with similar characteristics, interests, or levels of social media engagement. As a result, the findings may not accurately reflect the behaviours and attitudes of the broader population.

Second, the study is situated within a specific geographical context, which may shape both social media usage patterns and consumer behaviour. Cultural norms, economic conditions, and local digital ecosystems can all influence how individuals interact with online content and make purchasing decisions. Consequently, the applicability of the findings to other cultural or regional settings may be limited, and caution should be exercised when attempting to generalize the results beyond the studied context.

Furthermore, the reliance on self-reported data introduces the potential for response bias. Participants may unintentionally misreport their behaviours due to memory limitations, or they may consciously provide socially desirable responses rather than accurate accounts of their actions. This discrepancy between reported and actual behaviour is a well-recognized limitation in consumer research and may affect the validity of the conclusions drawn.

The qualitative component of the study, while offering valuable depth and contextual understanding, is based on a relatively small sample size. Although this approach allows for rich, detailed insights into individual experiences, it may not capture the full range of perspectives present within the broader population. As such, the qualitative findings should be interpreted as exploratory rather than fully representative.



Finally, the study uses a cross-sectional design, which examines consumer behaviour at a single point in time. This approach does not reflect the fast-changing nature of digital environments, where platforms, algorithms, and user behaviours are continuously evolving. As a result, the findings may not fully reflect longer-term trends or shifts in influence. Future research would benefit from adopting longitudinal designs, which would allow for the examination of how social media influences develop, fluctuate, and persist over time, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of these processes.

CONCLUSIONS

This study provides a comprehensive examination of how social media influences book purchasing behaviour, demonstrating that contemporary consumer decisions are increasingly embedded within digitally mediated environments. The findings show that social media does not function merely as a communication channel, but as an active system that structures attention, shapes perception, and guides behaviour through continuous exposure to curated content.

By integrating quantitative and qualitative evidence, the research identifies a consistent mechanism underlying purchasing decisions, based on the interaction between exposure, trust, social validation, and emotional engagement. The quantitative results confirm that frequent social media usage, perceived influencer credibility, and trust in online reviews significantly influence purchase intention. These patterns are further explained by qualitative insights, which reveal how consumers interpret content, respond to perceived authenticity, and rely on collective feedback when evaluating books.

A key contribution of this study lies in highlighting the non-linear and context-dependent nature of decision-making in digital environments. Consumers do not follow a traditional, rational sequence of evaluation; instead, their preferences are gradually shaped through repeated exposure, emotional resonance, and socially reinforced signals of value. This suggests that consumer behaviour in the context of book consumption is increasingly influenced by subtle, often implicit processes that operate within algorithm-driven ecosystems.

Furthermore, the study contributes to the existing literature by bridging theoretical frameworks with empirical findings, offering a more integrated perspective on how psychological and social mechanisms function in digital contexts. By focusing specifically on book consumption, it



extends current research beyond general consumer behaviour and provides insights into the dynamics of cultural product consumption.

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