

Influence of Social Media on Consumer Decisions Regarding the Purchase of Food Products

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Abstract

Social media plays a crucial role in influencing consumer purchasing decisions, particularly in the context of food products. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and other social networks offer consumers easy access to a wealth of information, including reviews, recommendations, and insights from other users. As more consumers turn to online sources for information and shopping, it becomes essential for food companies to develop and execute digital marketing strategies that not only enhance product visibility but also foster consumer trust.

The main objective of this study is to examine the impact of company activity on social media on consumers' decisions to purchase food products. Additionally, the study aims to explore whether socio-demographic factors influence consumers' attitudes toward food marketing on social media and how these factors affect the choice of social media platforms used to gather information about food products. To gather data, a survey was conducted, and the results were analyzed using descriptive statistics, frequency distribution, variance analysis, and regression techniques. Total of 156 respondents participating in the research. The findings revealed that company activity on social media significantly influences consumer purchasing decisions concerning food products. Furthermore, socio-demographic characteristics were found to affect the types of social media most commonly used by respondents for obtaining food-related information.

Keywords: social media, consumer behavior, purchase decision, food products

Introduction

The development of new technologies and communication channels has greatly influenced the evolution of marketing and the application of marketing activities by companies (Kotler et al., 2021). Among these, the Internet has had—and continues to have—the most significant impact, transforming the ways people communicate and how businesses operate (Bala & Verma, 2018). Marketing is broadly defined as a set of activities undertaken by companies from the development of a product or service to its ultimate consumption by users (Caiazza & Bigliardi, 2020). Consumers typically choose companies that are more recognizable, both in terms of brand name and the quality of products or services offered, highlighting the importance of reputation in the consumer decision-making process (Purwanto, 2022). As marketing has evolved, scholars have questioned the relevance of traditional models like the 4Ps in the context of digital transformation. As Wani (2013) argues, “the 4Ps framework has become increasingly inadequate in the digital age, prompting a shift toward the SAVE model, which better reflects the realities of value-based and customer-centric marketing”.

Technological advancement has shaped marketing into a more dynamic, data-driven discipline known as digital marketing—a new form of communication that enables companies to connect with consumers more effectively through digital channels (Kotler et al., 2021; Bala & Verma, 2018). As consumers increasingly turn to online platforms to gather information and shop, it is essential for food companies to carefully develop digital marketing strategies that not only enhance visibility but also build trust among consumers (Pathan et al., 2021; Choi & Lee, 2019). Digital content plays a central role in this process, as it shapes consumer perceptions, facilitates engagement, and drives

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purchasing behavior. As Jiang and Wang (2020) point out, “well-crafted digital content not only informs but also emotionally connects with consumers, significantly influencing their attitudes and purchase intentions towards food products” (p. 85). Digital marketing encompasses various approaches such as social media marketing, email marketing, and relationship marketing (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019), all aimed at increasing profitability by attracting new and retaining existing customers (Sokolova & Titova, 2019).

Among these approaches, social media marketing stands out as one of the most powerful tools in digital marketing. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and others offer consumers access to information, reviews, recommendations, and shared experiences from other users, which play a significant role in shaping purchasing decisions, especially for food products (Kapoor, Tammi, & Gupta, 2019). Social media enables companies to communicate directly with consumers, increasing the potential for building strong relationships and brand loyalty (Hutter et al., 2013). Consumers rely on others’ experiences—shared through comments, photos, and videos—which significantly influence their perceptions of products and decisions to purchase (Zhang & Lee, 2020). As Tao and Li (2021) note, “social media not only affects consumers’ attitudes toward food products, but also plays a pivotal role in shaping their purchase intentions in online environments”. Nguyen and Simkin (2021) emphasize, “social media has transformed the food and beverage industry by turning consumer interaction into a strategic asset, where engagement and visibility directly correlate with purchasing behavior”.

Moreover, interaction on social media allows companies to analyze user activity and preferences, enabling the creation of highly personalized marketing campaigns (Tomašek, 2019; Stojanović, 2022). As Vasquez and Yun (2021) explain, “higher levels of consumer engagement on social media platforms significantly increase the likelihood of progressing through each stage of the decision-making process, particularly in the food industry”. Social factors also influence social media marketing effectiveness. By observing user interactions, companies can identify key influencers or brand ambassadors who have the power to sway specific target audiences (Andrić, 2020). Understanding cultural norms, values, and social trends helps companies design content that resonates with their audience (Gajjar, 2013; Andrić, 2020).

In this context, social media marketing is not a new philosophy, but rather an advanced channel for communication between companies and their environment—one that allows for real-time feedback, personalized interaction, and influence over consumer behavior (Veleva & Tsvetanova, 2020). The integration of digital strategies in food marketing is especially important, as trust and social validation significantly impact consumer choices. The aim was to determine whether a company’s activity on social media influences purchasing decisions for food products, and whether socio-demographic characteristics affect consumer attitudes towards food product marketing on social media.

Material and methods

The first part of the research involved collecting secondary data and information about digital marketing and consumer behavior, which was obtained by gathering and reviewing available scientific literature. Primary data was collected through research conducted using a Google Form, with a total of 156 respondents participating. They answered thirty-two questions. The survey was conducted via social media from March 27 to April 2, 2024.

Respondents of various ages, education levels, monthly incomes, and employment statuses participated in the study, which was based on a random sampling method. Most of the questions in the survey were closed-ended, and responses were offered using yes/no options as well as a 5-point Likert scale.

Consumer attitudes toward the marketing of food products on social media were rated using the Likert scale from 1 to 5, where the numbers were assigned the following nominal values: 1 – strongly disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 – neither agree nor disagree, 4 – agree, 5 – strongly agree.

All statistical analyses were conducted using the SPSS statistical software. The survey results were analyzed using descriptive statistics, analysis of variance (ANOVA), and regression analysis. In order to examine the

impact of company activity on social media and the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents on their attitudes regarding the marketing of food products on social media — as well as the type of social media most frequently used for gathering information about food products — multiple linear regression analysis was employed.

Results and discussion

Demographic variables play a crucial role in understanding the structure of the sample, given that consumer behavior can significantly vary across demographic segments when faced with the same market conditions. According to Slišković et al. (2014), demographic factors such as household income and gender significantly influence consumers' tendencies toward impulsive buying. Women, for instance, demonstrated higher levels of both cognitive and affective impulsivity compared to men.

Similarly, Urošević, Kocić, and Dukić (2023) found statistically significant differences in consumer attitudes toward impulsive buying depending on their demographic characteristics, including age, income, and level of education.

Table 1 provides an overview of the main socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents

Socio-demographic characteristics	Total	%
Sex		
Male	39	25
Female	117	75
Age		
<20	28	18
21-30	79	50,6
31-40	15	9,6
41-60	32	20,5
>60	12	7,7
Education level		
No formal qualification	6	3,8
Secondary school diploma	43	27,6
Associate degree	7	4,5
Higher education	26	16,7
Bachelors degree	43	27,6
Masters degree	30	19,2
Doctoral degree	1	0,6
Employment status		
Student	59	37,8
Employed	71	45,5
Unemployed	19	12,2
Retired	7	4,5
Monthly income (KM)		
<500	12	7,7
501-1.000	25	16
1.001-2.000	59	37,8
>2.000	60	38,5

A total of 156 respondents participated in the research. The share of female participants was higher, accounting for 75%, while male participants made up 25%. Regarding age structure, 18% of respondents were in the group under 20 years of age. The largest portion of respondents belonged to the 21–30 age group, comprising 50.6% of the total. The smallest share (7.7%) was in the age group over 60, while 9.6% were in the 31–40 age group. Respondents aged 41–60 made up 20.5%.

The educational level of respondents significantly influences their purchasing behavior. The largest number of respondents held a secondary school diploma (27.6%) and a completed bachelor's degree (also 27.6%). These were followed by respondents with a completed master's degree (19.2%) and those with higher professional qualifications (16.7%). Respondents with post-secondary school qualifications made up 4.5%, while those without any qualifications (unskilled workers) represented 3.8%. The smallest percentage (0.6%) consisted of respondents with a doctoral degree.

Employment status is another factor influencing purchasing decisions. According to employment status, the largest group in the study was employed individuals, accounting for 45.5%. Of the total number surveyed, 12.2% were unemployed. A significant portion

of the respondents were students (37.8%), while the smallest percentage (4.5%) were retirees.

Consumer purchasing power is a key factor affecting purchasing decisions. The survey gathered data on purchasing power through household monthly income. According to the survey responses, the smallest share (7.7%) had a monthly income of up to 500 KM. Monthly incomes ranging from 501 to 1.000 KM were reported by 16% of respondents. Those earning between 1,001 and 2.000 KM made up 37.8%, while the largest percentage (38.5%) had incomes over 2.000 KM.

Social media represents an essential communication channel between companies and consumers. Company activities on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, and others can influence consumer perceptions and purchasing decisions. This section of the paper describes how a company's presence and activity on social media shape consumer decisions regarding the purchase of food products. Recent studies have highlighted the significant role of social media in influencing consumer behavior, particularly in the food sector. For instance, Kamarudzaman et al. (2024) conducted a systematic review revealing that social media platforms significantly affect consumer eating behavior, with younger demographics being particularly susceptible to unhealthy food promotions. Similarly, Gonçalves et al. (2024) found that digital influencers on social media platforms play a crucial role in shaping online purchasing decisions, emphasizing the importance of brand engagement and knowledge in the fast-food industry.

Furthermore, research by Salleh et al. (2021) focused on Malaysian university students, indicating that platforms like YouTube have a substantial impact on food popularity among students, with visual content influencing their food choices. These findings underscore the necessity for companies to leverage social media strategically to influence consumer decisions effectively. A regression analysis was conducted to determine the impact of company activity on social media on consumer decisions related to food product purchases (Table 2).

Table 2. The Impact of Company Activities on Social Media on Consumer Decisions Regarding the Purchase of Food Products

	The activity of companies on social media	
	p	R ²
1. I often purchase food products after seeing them on social media.	.000	.141
2. After seeing a food product on social media, I often research it further before making a final purchase decision.	.000	.178
3. I read reviews and recommendations for food products on social media before making a purchase decision.	.000	.117
4. I am inclined to experiment with new food products after seeing them on social media.	.000	.134
5. dvertisements and promotions of food products on social media often influence my purchasing decisions.	.000	.114
6. My friends and family share recommendations for food products on social media that encourage me to make a purchase.	.000	.077

The bolded values indicate the presence of statistical significance in the difference of response distribution at $p < 0.05$; R² – coefficient of determination (interpreted as the proportion of the variance in the dependent variable that can be attributed to the variance in the independent variable).

Statistical significance was confirmed for the influence of company activities on social media on consumer decisions regarding the purchase of food products for all statements in the previous table. The coefficient of determination R² indicates how much a certain

factor explains the changes in behavior or decision-making. In this case, it refers to the extent to which company activity on social media influences consumer decisions regarding food product purchases. For the first statement, “*I often purchase food products after seeing them on social media,*” the R^2 is 0.141, meaning that 14.1% of the total variability in the decision to purchase food products is explained by company activity on social media. However, the remaining 85.9% is influenced by other factors.

The R^2 value for the statement “*After seeing a food product on social media, I often research it further before making a final purchase decision*” is 0.178, indicating that 17.8% of the variability in purchasing decisions is explained by company activity. The third statement, “*I read reviews and recommendations for food products on social media before making a purchase decision,*” shows that 11.7% of the total variability in purchasing decisions is explained by social media activity. For the statement “*I am inclined to experiment with new food products after seeing them on social media,*” it was found that 13.4% of the variability in purchasing decisions is explained by social media activity. The next statement, “*Advertisements and promotions of food products on social media often influence my purchasing decisions,*” has a coefficient of determination of 11.4%. Finally, the statement “*My friends and family share recommendations for food products on social media that encourage me to make a purchase*” has an R^2 of 0.077, indicating that only 7.7% of the variability in purchasing decisions is explained by company activity. This suggests that, in this case, company activity is the least influential in shaping consumer decision-making.

Socio-demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, education level, and income, play a significant role in shaping consumer behavior on social media. Understanding how these characteristics influence the choice of social media platforms used for gathering information about food products is a priority for companies aiming to create value in the market. A regression analysis was conducted to determine the impact of socio-demographic characteristics on the type of social media most frequently used to seek information about food products (Table 3).

Table 3. The Influence of Respondents' Socio-Demographic Characteristics on the Type of Social Media Most Frequently Used to Obtain Information About Food Products

	Gender	Age group	Education level	Employment status
Facebook	.232	.136	.264	.018
Instagram	.018	.001	.139	.292
X	.441	.515	.035	.633
LinkedIn	.045	.851	.024	.637
TikTok	.045	.851	.024	.637
Youtube	.732	.067	.406	.198
WhatsApp	.760	.006	.443	.397
Snapchat	.699	.822	.605	.757
Google	.306	.177	.368	.867
None	.735	.804	.548	.920

The bolded value indicates the presence of statistical significance in the difference of response distribution for $p < 0.05$.

A statistically significant influence was observed for gender when it comes to Instagram (Sig = 0.018), LinkedIn (Sig = 0.045), and TikTok (Sig = 0.045). In short, gender may influence the use of Instagram through different behavioral patterns, preferences in using platform features, and interactions with marketing content (Tomašek, 2019; Andrić, 2020). Gender differences may affect how companies address their target group via Instagram, taking into account the interests and needs of male and female users.

Depending on age, respondents differ in their choice of social media platforms, particularly regarding Instagram (Sig = 0.001) and WhatsApp (Sig = 0.006). A statistically significant impact was also found for the respondents' education level on their choice of social networks X (Sig = 0.035), LinkedIn (Sig = 0.024), and TikTok (Sig = 0.024). Additionally, the employment status of respondents influences the choice of social media when it comes to Facebook (Sig = 0.018). Employment status impacts Facebook usage in several ways: through professional networking, targeted marketing campaigns, time spent on the platform, and using Facebook for business activities (Hall, 2024). Different employment statuses determine how and how much users engage with Facebook, as well as the types of content they view. Among other things, marketing campaigns can be tailored according to the employment status of users.

Age, gender, education, and income are factors that have a significant impact on consumer attitudes towards food product marketing on social media. A regression analysis identified the influence of the respondents' socio-demographic characteristics on their attitudes towards food product marketing on social media (Table 4).

A statistically significant impact was found regarding gender when it comes to the statement "I regularly use social media to get information about food products" (Sig = 0.000), as well as the statement "I often use social media to get information about

Table 4. The Influence of Respondents' Socio-Demographic Characteristics on Their Attitudes Towards Food Product Marketing on Social Media

	Gender	Age group	Education level	Employment status
1. Social media significantly influences my decision to purchase food products.	.057	.449	.230	.642
2. I regularly use social media to get information about food products..	.000	.397	.210	.692
3. I frequently use social media to get information about food products.	.000	.385	.282	.676
4. The information I find on social media plays a key role in my research before I purchase a specific food product.	.126	.672	.465	.221
5. Regularly updated social media with relevant content positively influences my perception of the company as a source of useful information.	.328	.741	.003	.774
6. Product reviews I see on social media affect my opinion about certain food products	.959	.092	.036	.723
7. The presence of a food company on social media contributes to a positive impression of their products.	.054	.240	.025	.544
8. Communication with consumers on social media is important when making decisions about purchasing food products	.422	.795	.007	.432
9. Ads and sponsorships on social media grab my attention and influence my purchasing behavior.	.345	.981	.134	.170
10. Influencers on social media have a significant influence on my choice of food products.	.009	.529	.944	.651
11. My participation in company campaigns, whether creating content, voting, or sharing personal experiences with a food product, creates a sense of connection and community, which positively influences my purchasing decision.	.261	.331	.373	.895

Bolded values indicate the presence of statistical significance in the difference in response distribution for $p < 0.05$.

food products” (Sig = 0.000), followed by the statement “The presence of a food company on social media contributes to a positive impression of their products” (Sig = 0.054) and “Influencers on social media have a significant impact on my choice of food products” (Sig = 0.009).

The age group does not have a statistically significant impact on attitudes towards food product marketing on social media. However, statistical significance was found regarding the impact of the respondents’ educational level on their attitudes towards food product marketing on social media when it comes to the statement “Regularly updated social media with relevant content positively influences my perception of the company as a source of useful information” (Sig = 0.003), followed by the statement “Product reviews I see on social media have an impact on my opinion about certain food products” (Sig = 0.036). The regularity of updates on the company’s social media and consumer reviews on social platforms are influenced by the consumers’ educational level, making it important to understand socio-demographic characteristics, as they facilitate the creation of an adequate digital experience. These results align with the research of Stojanović (2022), Slišković et al. (2014), and Dominici et al. (2021.), which emphasize the importance of the environment in the purchase process, reflected through interaction with the company and other consumers. Additionally, the physical environment plays an important role, which in the case of social media is enabled by carefully designing profiles and posts for the target group.

“The presence of a food company on social media contributes to a positive impression of their products” (Sig = 0.025) and “Communication with consumers on social media is important when making decisions about purchasing food products” (Sig = 0.007) are statements for which the educational level was found to have an effect on the mentioned attitudes. When it comes to the respondents’ employment status, the study found no statistically significant impact on their attitudes towards food product marketing on social media (Table 3).

Conclusion

The general conclusion of this study is that, within the examined sample, the activity of companies on social media for marketing purposes has an impact on consumers’ purchasing decisions regarding food products. Furthermore, socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents do not influence the type of social media most commonly used for obtaining information about food products, but these characteristics do affect respondents’ attitudes towards food product marketing on social media. The most significant factor influencing respondents’ purchasing decisions is exposure to food products on social media. Additionally, gender and educational level have the greatest impact when choosing a social media platform. Among other findings, no statistically significant impact was found from socio-demographic characteristics on respondents’ attitudes towards food product marketing on social media, but it was found that gender and educational level do influence respondents’ attitudes towards this marketing.

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