

Customers' Reviews on Social Media and Purchase Decision: The Moderating Role of Age

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Abstract

In the digital marketplace, social media reviews have become a critical source of information for consumers. While their general influence on purchase decisions is well-established, it remains less clear whether this influence is uniform across all consumer demographics. This study specifically investigates the role of age as a potential moderator in the relationship between social media reviews and purchase decisions. This study employed a quantitative, causal-comparative design. Data were collected from 193 participants, selected via convenience sampling, using a structured questionnaire. The instrument demonstrated satisfactory reliability as confirmed by Cronbach's Alpha. The analysis revealed a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between social media reviews and purchase decisions. The overall regression model was significant and explained a substantial portion of the variance in purchase behavior. However, the interaction term between social media reviews and age was not statistically significant, indicating that the strength of the relationship between reviews and purchase decisions does not change with the consumer's age. The findings confirm that social media reviews are a powerful and significant predictor of purchase decisions. However, age does not act as a moderating variable in this relationship. The impact of reviews is consistent across the different age groups within the studied population, suggesting that the

persuasive power of social media word-of-mouth is a universal factor, at least among younger adults.

Keywords: Age, Customers, Decision, Media, Purchase, Reviews, Social

Introduction

The rapid evolution of the digital world has significantly reshaped consumer behavior, with social media playing a central role in influencing opinions and guiding buying choices (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). One of the most impactful elements in this shift is the rise of customer reviews shared on social platforms. These reviews have become a trusted source of information for online shoppers, helping them assess various aspects such as product quality, reliability, and value for money, and brand trustworthiness (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006).

Unlike traditional advertising, reviews on social media are often seen as more genuine, relatable, and based on real user experiences (Dellarocas, 2003). This authenticity makes them a powerful part of the decision-making journey for consumers, who are more inclined to trust feedback from other users than from companies themselves (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010). Whether found in Facebook discussions, Instagram stories, YouTube videos, or online community threads, these reviews are increasingly influencing what people buy, how quickly they decide, how much they are willing to spend, and which brands they support (Hudson et al., 2015).

However, the sheer volume of online reviews does not guarantee their effectiveness. The impact of a review depends largely on its clarity, tone, relevance, and credibility. Emotional storytelling especially when linked to customer service experiences can play a major role in forming lasting impressions of a brand (Ismagilova et al., 2020).

This study seeks to investigate the role of customer reviews on social media in shaping online purchase decisions, with Age considered as a moderating factor. It focuses on key dimensions such as perceived product quality, user experience, time-saving benefits, pricing judgments, and overall brand image. The outcomes aim to provide valuable insights for businesses looking to improve their digital strategies and build stronger connections with consumers through thoughtful review engagement.

Literature Review

In today's digital age, social media platforms have transformed into powerful tools for consumer engagement and decision-making. One of the most influential elements shaping consumer behavior is the availability of customer reviews shared through platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and online forums. These reviews, often regarded as modern word-of-mouth, play a significant role in shaping perceptions about product quality, brand credibility, and overall satisfaction. As consumers increasingly rely on peer feedback before making purchase decisions, understanding the impact of online reviews becomes crucial for businesses aiming to influence buyer behavior. This literature review explores existing research

on how customer reviews on social media affect consumer purchasing decisions, highlighting key patterns, influencing factors, and the psychological mechanisms behind this influence.

Serang (2019) conducted a study titled “The Effect of Brand Awareness and Quality Perception on Customer Satisfaction through Purchasing Decisions: A Case Study of Maros Muslim University Students”. Using a quantitative methodology, data were collected via questionnaires from students who had purchased Honda or Yamaha motorcycles. Path analysis using SPSS revealed that brand awareness and quality perception significantly influence purchasing decisions, which in turn affect customer satisfaction. The study concluded that enhancing both brand awareness and perceived product quality can improve customer satisfaction in the motorcycle market.

Rai and Mehrotra (2014) examined “Social Commerce Constructs and Consumer’s Intention to Buy”, exploring how different social commerce factors impact consumers’ online purchase intentions. A quantitative approach was used with an online survey of social media users in India. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) via SmartPLS showed that reviews, ratings, social interactions, and trust significantly shape consumers’ buying intentions. The study emphasized that businesses must foster trust and encourage active customer engagement through peer reviews to succeed in social commerce environments.

Rusmaha and Wulandari (2020) studied “The Effect of Brand Image, Service Quality, and Customer Value on Customer Satisfaction” among 150 Islamic bank customers in Indonesia using quantitative methods. Multiple linear regression in SPSS revealed that service quality and customer value positively influence customer satisfaction, whereas brand image showed no significant effect. The study highlighted that prioritizing service efficiency and delivering tangible value is more effective in satisfying customers than focusing solely on brand image.

Gómez-Rico, Molina-Collado, Santos-Vijande, Molina-Collado, and Imhoff (2022) conducted “The Role of Novel Instruments of Brand Communication and Brand Image in Building Consumers’ Brand Preference and Intention to Visit Wineries”. Data from 486 winery visitors in Spain were collected using structured self-administered questionnaires, and analyzed using PLS-SEM. Results indicated that both brand communication (including advertising, sponsorship, social media, CSR) and brand image (functional, affective, reputation) significantly enhance brand preference, which positively affects consumers’ intention to visit wineries. Brand image partially mediated the relationship between communication and preference, highlighting the importance of multidimensional brand communication strategies.

Erkan (2016) explored “The Influence of Electronic Word of Mouth in Social Media on Consumers’ Purchase Intentions” using a mixed-method approach at Brunel University. The first phase involved a survey of 384 UK students analyzed via SEM in AMOS 20, while the second phase compared the impact of eWOM from familiar versus anonymous sources using multiple regression in SPSS and thematic analysis of 10 in-depth interviews. Findings indicated that information quality, credibility, usefulness, and consumer attitude significantly impact purchase intentions through eWOM. Interestingly, anonymous online reviews were found to have a stronger influence than recommendations from familiar sources, due to their detailed and abundant information.

While previous research has extensively examined brand awareness, brand image, service quality, and social commerce constructs in influencing consumer purchase intentions and satisfaction, there remains a limited focus on the independent effect of customer reviews on actual purchase decisions. Studies like those of Rai & Mehrotra (2014) and Erkan (2016) incorporate reviews as part of broader constructs such as social commerce or electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), rather than treating them as standalone, measurable variables. Furthermore, most research emphasizes purchase intentions rather than actual purchasing behavior, and much of the evidence comes from developed economies or specific digital platform users, limiting the generalizability of findings.

Although customer reviews are widely acknowledged as influential, there is a scarcity of studies that directly measure their independent impact on actual purchase decisions across diverse product categories and consumer demographics. This gap highlights the need for focused research to isolate the effect of customer reviews on purchase behavior, considering potential moderating variables such as age, experience, or cultural context.

Research Methodology

This study employs a quantitative descriptive and causal-comparative research design to examine the impact of customer reviews on social media on consumers' purchase decisions, while also testing Age as a moderating variable. Primary data were collected through a printed structured questionnaire, which was distributed personally to the participants. The questionnaire included multiple-choice and Likert-scale items focusing on social media usage, trust in customer reviews, and the influence of those reviews on purchase behavior. A non-probability convenience sampling method was used to select participants, targeting individuals students who actively use platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube and have made at least one purchase based on online reviews. Using students aged is a strategic choice. This group are digital natives who are active shoppers, making them the perfect test subjects. Crucially, studying age within this seemingly similar group is a powerful test. If age doesn't moderate here, among peers, it strongly proves that the power of social media reviews is truly universal for the youth market. The study initially aimed to collect 200 valid responses, and a total of 193 responses were successfully collected and analyzed. The collected data were interpreted using descriptive statistical tools, including frequency, percentage, and mean, along with correlation analysis to explore the relationships between customer reviews and purchase decisions. All participants were clearly informed about the purpose of the research, and participation was entirely voluntary. The responses were kept strictly confidential and were used solely for academic purposes. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, voluntary participation, and confidentiality of responses, were rigorously maintained throughout the research process.

Reliability of the Instrument

The reliability of the questionnaire was tested using Cronbach's Alpha, and the results indicated a satisfactory level of internal consistency:

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.812	5

This suggests that the questionnaire is reliable for measuring the constructs of interest in this study.

Results

The details analysis of survey data on Customers’ Reviews on Social Media and Purchase Decision: The Moderating Role of Age are highlighted below

Table 1: Demographic Information

Variable		Category	Frequency	Percent (%)	
Gender		Male	59	30.6	
		Female	134	69.4	
Education		High School	22	11.4	
		Bachelors	171	88.6	
Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age	193	18.00	30.00	21.47	2.67

The demographic data indicate that the majority of respondents were female (69.4%), while males represented 30.6% of the sample. Most participants held a bachelor’s degree (88.6%), with a smaller portion having completed high school (11.4%). The age range of respondents was from 18 to 30 years, with a mean age of 21.47 years and a standard deviation of 2.67, reflecting a young adult population.

Table 2: Relationship between Variables

Variable	IV	MOD	Purchase
Review on social media	1		
Age (IV*Age)	0.873** (p = 0.000)	1	
Purchase Decision	0.664** (p = 0.000)	0.587** (p = 0.000)	1

The table illustrates a model analyzing the drivers of a consumer's purchase decision, highlighting the roles of social media reviews, age, and their interaction. The primary and most direct influence comes from reviews on social media, which is designated as the independent variable (IV). The strong positive correlation (0.664) with the purchase decision indicates that more positive reviews are significantly associated with a higher likelihood of purchase. However, the model introduces a crucial nuance: the consumer's age does not act as a standalone predictor but rather as a moderating variable (MOD). This is confirmed by the

highly significant interaction term ($IV*Age = 0.873$), which shows that the relationship between social media reviews and purchase decisions is not uniform across all consumers. Instead, the impact of reviews becomes stronger for older individuals. In other words, as age increases, the power of a social media review to sway a purchase decision is significantly amplified. While both the direct review-purchase link and the moderating effect of age are statistically significant, the stronger correlation for the interaction term suggests that understanding this age-based amplification is critical for fully explaining consumer behavior in this context.

Table 3: Multicollinearity Test

(Constant)	Tolerance	VIF
Review on social media	.238	4.202
Age (IV*Age)	.238	4.202

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase Decision

The multicollinearity test results indicate a significant problem within the regression model. Both the "Review on social media" variable and the "Age (IVAge)" interaction term have a Tolerance value of 0.238 and a Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) of 4.202. A common rule of thumb is that a VIF value above 5 (and some conservative thresholds use a value above 10) signals severe multicollinearity, while a Tolerance value close to 0 confirms it. With a VIF of 4.202, the multicollinearity is high and approaching a severe level. This high VIF means that the two predictors are highly correlated with each other, making it difficult for the regression model to uniquely estimate their individual effects on the purchase decision. This is an expected result when an interaction term (IVAge) is included in the model, as the interaction term is inherently a function of the original variable. To properly interpret the model and avoid misleading conclusions, it is essential to mean-center the "Review on social media" and "Age" variables before creating the interaction term, which would help reduce this multicollinearity and provide more reliable estimates for each predictor's contribution.

Table 4: Normality Test

	N	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Review on social media	193	-.737	.175	2.600	.348
Age (IV*Age)	193	-.155	.175	.603	.348
Purchase Decision	193	-.949	.175	1.731	.348

The above table provided for the normality test offer insights into the shape of the distribution for each variable, using skewness and kurtosis as key indicators. For a normal distribution, we expect values near zero for both statistics. Beginning with skewness, which measures the symmetry of the distribution, all three variables show negative values. The "Purchase Decision" variable has the most pronounced negative skew (-0.949), indicating that the data distribution is skewed to the left, meaning a cluster of responses is on the higher end of the scale. The "Review on social media" variable also shows a moderate left skew (-0.737), while "Age (IV*Age)" is very close to symmetric (-0.155). Regarding kurtosis, which measures the

"tailedness" and peak of the distribution compared to a normal bell curve (where the expected value is 0), all three variables show positive kurtosis. This indicates that their distributions are leptokurtic, meaning they have heavier tails and a sharper peak than a normal distribution. The "Review on social media" variable has a notably high kurtosis value of 2.600, suggesting a significant concentration of data around the mean with more extreme outliers. In summary, while the "Age" variable is approximately normal in its symmetry, all variables, particularly "Review on social media" and "Purchase Decision," deviate from a perfect normal distribution based on their skewness and kurtosis. For many statistical analyses, however, these levels of non-normality are often considered acceptable unless they are extremely severe.

Table 5: Moderating Test

Model Summary^b						
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.664 ^a	.441	.435		.39118	1.899
a. Predictors: (Constant), Review on social media, Age (IV*Age)						
b. Dependent Variable: Purchase Decision						
ANOVA^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	22.933	2	11.467	74.934	.000 ^b
	Residual	29.074	190	.153		
	Total	52.008	192			
a. Dependent Variable: Purchase Decision						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Review on social media, Age (IV*Age)						
Coefficients^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.743	.271		2.739	.007
	Review on social media	.828	.145	.637	5.729	.000
	Age (IV*Age)	.002	.006	.031	.276	.783
a. Dependent Variable: Purchase Decision						

This output presents the results of a regression analysis testing whether age moderates the relationship between social media reviews and purchase decisions. The model, which includes both the direct effect of social media reviews and the interaction term (Review * Age), is statistically significant overall, as shown by the highly significant F-statistic (F = 74.934, p = .000) in the ANOVA table. The model explains a substantial portion of the variance in purchase decisions, with an R Square of .441, meaning that 44.1% of the variability in consumers' purchase decisions can be accounted for by the combined influence of social media reviews

and the interaction between reviews and age. However, a deeper look at the Coefficients table reveals the critical finding: the proposed moderation effect is not supported. While the direct effect of "Review on social media" is strong, positive, and statistically significant ($B = .828$, $p = .000$), the interaction term "Age (IV*Age)" is not significant ($B = .002$, $p = .783$). This non-significant p-value indicates that the strength of the relationship between social media reviews and purchase decisions does not change depending on the consumer's age. In other words, age does not act as a moderator in this model. The significant relationship shown in the initial correlation table was likely capturing the main effect of reviews, not a true interaction. Therefore, the conclusion is that social media reviews are a powerful and significant predictor of purchase decisions, but their influence is consistent across different age groups and is not amplified or diminished by a person's age.

Conclusion

Based on the comprehensive statistical analysis, the study concludes that while social media reviews are a potent and statistically significant driver of purchase decisions, the hypothesized moderating role of age is not supported. The overall regression model was significant and robust, explaining a substantial portion of the variance in purchase decisions. The direct effect of social media reviews was strong, positive, and highly significant, confirming that favorable reviews consistently lead to a higher purchase intent. However, the interaction term between reviews and age was not statistically significant. This definitive result indicates that the influence of social media reviews on consumer purchase decisions is stable and consistent across different age groups. Age does not strengthen or weaken this relationship. Therefore, for the context of this study, marketers can confidently consider social media reviews as a universally effective marketing lever, whose impact is not contingent upon the age of their target audience.

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