

## Impact of Social Media on Purchase Decisions: A Case Study of Pokhara Valley

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### Abstract

**Background:** In the modern digital landscape, the consumer purchase decision process has been transformed by the influence of social media. This evolution has also led to a paradigm shift in marketing strategies.

**Objectives:** This research aimed to assess the impact of social media influencers on purchase decisions with special reference to Pokhara Valley.

**Methods:** This study was conducted in the Pokhara Valley of Nepal, involving 250 respondents. The research utilized a quantitative approach with a descriptive research design. Primary data was collected through a self-administered survey questionnaire. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) to examine the impact of independent variables on the dependent variable. The study took place in 2023, spanning three months from January to April.

**Results:** The results revealed that online communities have a positive and significant impact on purchase decisions ( $\beta = 0.202$ ,  $p = 0.006$ ). Similarly, perceived usefulness ( $\beta = 0.172$ ,  $p = 0.019$ ), ratings and reviews ( $\beta = 0.234$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ), and trust ( $\beta = 0.140$ ,  $p = 0.035$ ) significantly influence purchase decisions in a positive manner. However, recommendations and referrals do not have a significant impact on purchase decisions.

**Conclusion:** This study concluded that individuals who actively participate in online communities, perceive social media as useful for product information and purchasing, rely on ratings and reviews, and place trust in the platform are more likely to make purchase decisions based on their online experiences. Understanding these factors and their implications can guide businesses and marketers in tailoring their strategies to effectively engage with consumers and drive purchasing behaviour.

**Keywords:** Online communities, perceived usefulness, purchase decision, ratings and reviews, social media

**JEL Classification:** D12, L82, O33, M3

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## **Introduction**

The process of the consumer purchase decision is a multi-faceted journey that individuals undertake when evaluating and selecting products or services to fulfill their needs and desires. It involves a series of stages, from recognizing a need or wants to research available options, comparing features and benefits, assessing the perceived value, and ultimately making a choice (Qazzafi, 2019). Factors influencing this decision-making process range from personal preferences and past experiences to external influences such as social recommendations, advertising, and reviews. In today's digital age, the advent of online shopping and the pervasive presence of social media have added new dimensions to this process, reshaping how consumers gather information, interact with brands, and ultimately make their purchasing choices.

Social media is an unrivaled power impacting human behaviors and preferences in the digital era, as connectedness transcends geographical borders and information flows incessantly. As the virtual landscape becomes increasingly intertwined with our daily lives, it is imperative to unravel the intricate web of influences that guide our buying choices. The advent of social media has revolutionized the way consumers engage with brands and products. Today, platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok have evolved into multifaceted spaces where individuals not only connect with friends but also seek inspiration, share experiences, and discover new products or services (Leparoux et al., 2019). This transformation has led to a paradigm shift in how businesses strategize their marketing efforts. Social media benefits both companies and consumers by saving time, enabling quick product searches and purchases, comparing prices, and analysing ratings and reviews (Huang et al., 2009). It also helps consumers find products according to their requirements and budget, ensuring product quality and usefulness. Approximately 80% of online marketers have asserted that social media influencers serve as dependable endorsers, propelling their businesses to elevated heights (Dhanesh et al., 2022). The evidence also validates the effectiveness of social media influencers in motivating consumers' purchase intentions.

Different factors including trust, perceived usefulness, recommendations and referrals, online communities, and ratings and reviews play important roles on how social media affects on purchase intentions. These constructs hold the potential to unveil fresh, valuable insights for marketers and practitioners, enabling the development of potent promotional strategies that positively shape consumers' decision-making concerning products and services. Despite the significance of appraising the pivotal role of social media influencers, the association between consumers' intentions, and the impacts of these influencers remains unverified. Therefore, this study seeks to bridge this gap in the existing literature by examining and validating these relationships. This research aims to assess the impact of social media influencers on purchase decisions with special reference to Pokhara Valley.

## Review of Literature

Different theories are related to how social media influencers (such as trust, perceived usefulness, recommendations and referrals, online communities, and ratings and reviews) affect the purchase decisions of individuals. The Technology Acceptance Model, developed by Fred Davis in 1989, focuses on understanding how users accept and adopt technology. Perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are central constructs in TAM. Therefore, the perceptions of the usefulness of social media may influence their purchase intentions. The Theory of Planned Behavior, proposed by Icek Ajzen, is also used to predict, and understand human behavior in specific contexts. It suggests that behavioral intentions are influenced by attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms (social influences), and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 2012). Trust, recommendations, and referrals could fit into the subjective norm's component, as social influence plays a significant role in purchase decision-making.

Social Influence Theory focuses on how individuals' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are influenced by others. This theory explains how online communities, recommendations, and referrals affect the individual's purchase decisions (Trenz et al., 2018). Further, Network Theory explores the relationships and interactions between individuals within a network. Social media platforms create interconnected networks where information and opinions flow. This theory helps explain how online communities spread information, how certain users become influential within networks, and how these dynamics impact purchase decisions (Sih et al., 2009).

The purchasing decision process involves integrating information to assess multiple options and ultimately selecting one (Asnawati et al., 2022). Generally, consumers strive to purchase their preferred brand and their choice is guided by factors like the product itself, the brand, timing of purchase, quantity bought, and payment method. The decision-making process encompasses evaluating different choices, leading to a decision to either purchase or not. Consumers need available alternatives when making this decision, and they often seek various information sources (Omar & Atteya, 2020).

Fernández-Bonilla et al. (2022) explore the significance of trust within the context of e-commerce environments, emphasizing the substantial impact of a buyer's or platform's trustworthiness on their purchase intentions in online settings. Similarly, Ebrahim, (2020) highlights the importance of trust in digital spaces, it's evident that trust plays a direct role in shaping consumers' willingness to participate in making purchase decisions. Yang et al. (2019) observed that consumer behavior is positively impacted by trust that has been built by social media. Kim et al. (2017) explored the domain of influencer marketing on social media and its impact on perceived usefulness. The study revealed that the credibility and perceived expertise of influencers contribute to enhancing the usefulness of product information shared through social media platforms, consequently influencing consumers' intentions to make purchases. Similarly, Ali (2018) conducted a study focusing on the influence of the perceived usefulness of social media on consumers' purchase intentions. Their findings indicated that when

individuals perceive social media as useful for obtaining information about products and services, their intention to make purchases is positively affected. Wang et al. (2023) found that personalized recommendation systems, recommendation mode, and information arrangement were the most influential factors for consumers' purchasing decisions.

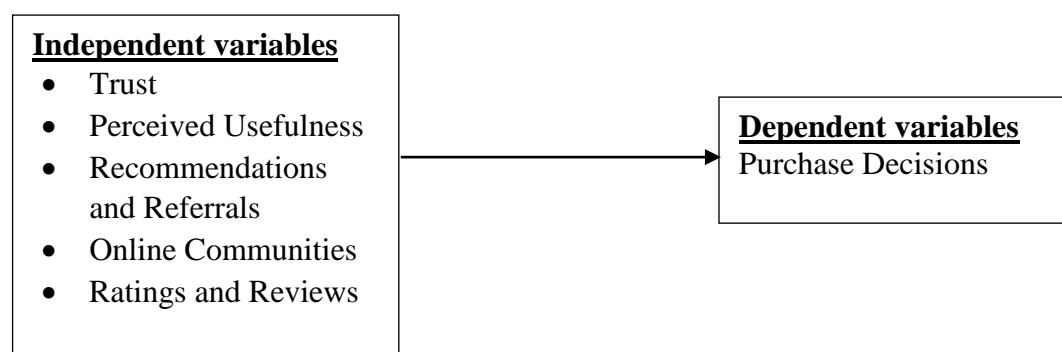
The study conducted by Bagozzi and Dholakia (2002) mentioned that online communities and Internet forums are social environment that facilitate the social interaction of individuals and allow people to obtain information for products and services and to support each other (Lu et al., 2010). Other studies have highlighted the importance of reviews on customers' purchase decision making process. Constantinides and Holleschovsky (2016) observed that the online reviews made by the customers have significant impact on purchase decisions. Chen et al. (2004) examined the effects of recommendations and consumer feedback on sales, using data collected from Amazon.com. The findings reveal that increased recommendations do lead to higher sales on Amazon.com.

The relevance of research conducted in a specific location and time is limited to its specific subject matter and may not apply to different places or times. After reviewing the existing literature, it was observed that there is a lack of studies on the impact of social media on consumer purchasing decisions specifically in the Nepalese context. Most of the existing research on the effects of social media on consumer behavior has been conducted in Western or developed countries. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by focusing on Nepalese customers, aiming to provide insights into their unique behaviors and preferences.

People's buying decisions are affected by various factors. In this study, the following conceptual framework is used to show the linkage between independent variables and dependent variable.

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual Framework*



**Materials and Methods**

This research was carried out within Pokhara Valley, Nepal. The survey was conducted amongst 250 respondents, out of which only 202 responses were valid. A convenience sampling technique was used in this study, where a sample of individuals easy to contact were selected. It follows a quantitative approach, and it employs a descriptive research design.

This study depends on primary data sources, which were obtained through the utilization of a self-administered survey questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of two sections. The initial section gathers demographic information such as gender, age, education, occupation, and income level. The subsequent section focused on measuring the information related to social media and purchase decisions, employing a five-point Likert scale for measurement. The researchers used Google Form to create the questionnaire and the link to the questionnaire was distributed to the respondents using emails, messengers, and other social media to collect information.

Various statistical methods were employed to analyse the data. Descriptive statistics, including percentage analysis and mean score analysis, were utilized to describe the demographic characteristics and perceptions of respondents. Additionally, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) was employed to investigate the influence of independent variables on the dependent variable. The research was undertaken in the year 2023, and the necessary information was gathered over a span of three months, specifically from Jan to April 2023.

**Result and Discussion**

**Table 1**

*Socio-Demographic Profile*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Gender	Male	95	47
	Female	107	53
Age	Below 20	34	16.8
	20-30	146	72.3
	Above 30	22	10.9
Education	S.E.E/ S.L.C. or Below	5	2.5
	Intermediate Level	80	39.6
	Graduate	88	43.6
	Postgraduate	29	14.4
Occupation	Student	110	54.5
	Full time employee	50	24.8
	Entrepreneur	22	10.9
	Unemployment	20	9.9
Income	Below 20,000	119	58.9
	20,000-39,999	36	17.8
	40,000-59,999	18	8.9
	60,000 and above	29	14.4
<b>Total</b>		<b>202</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Based on authors' calculation and field survey, 2023.*

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic analysis of the sample population in the distribution of gender, age, education, occupation, and income levels. The sample population is relatively balanced in terms of gender, with 47% male respondents and 53% female respondents. Regarding age groups, the majority of participants (72.3%) fall between the ages of 20 and 30, indicating a significant presence of young adults. In terms of education, the majority of the respondents (43.6%) hold a graduate degree, while a

small proportion (2.5%) have S.E.E/ S.L.C. or below education. Additionally, a significant portion (54.5%) are students and a majority of the respondents (58.9%) have an income below 20,000.

**Table 2**

*Descriptive Statistics*

<b>Constructs</b>	<b>Average Mean Score</b>
Trust (T)	2.92
Perceived Usefulness (PU)	3.53
Recommendations and Referrals (R)	3.4
Online Communities (OC)	3.71
Ratings and Reviews (RR)	3.48
Purchase Decisions (PD)	3.48
<b>Overall Mean Score</b>	<b>3.42</b>

*Source: Based on authors' calculation and field survey, 2023.*

N=202; Scales: 1= Strongly Disagree, 3=Neutral, 5 = Strongly Agree

Table 2 shows the overall mean score and Table A1 (in annex) shows the mean score of all measurement items related to trust, perceived usefulness, recommendations and referrals, online communities, rating and reviews, and purchase decisions. The mean value of trust ranges from 2.64 (minimum; T3) to 3.10 (maximum; T5), with an average mean value of 2.92. This indicates that the overall responses for trust were almost neutral. The mean value of perceived usefulness ranges from 3.37 (minimum; PU1) to 3.91 (maximum; PU4), with an average mean value of 3.53. This indicates that the overall responses for perceived usefulness were positive (Agree). The mean value of recommendations and referrals ranges from 3.06 (minimum; R2) to 3.62 (maximum; R4), with an average mean value of 3.40. This indicates that the overall responses for recommendations and referrals were positive (agree). The mean value of online communities ranges from 3.61 (minimum; OC1) to 3.80 (maximum; OC3), with an average mean value of 3.71. This indicates that the overall responses for online communities were positive (Agree). The mean value of ratings and reviews ranges from 2.94 (minimum; RR2) to 3.83(maximum; RR3), with an average mean value of 3.48. This indicates that the overall responses for ratings and reviews were positive (agree). Finally, the mean value ranges from 3.29 (minimum; PD3) to 3.65 (maximum; PD2), with an average mean value of 3.48. This indicates that the overall responses to purchase decisions were positive (agree).

### **Structural Equation Modelling**

In this study, the researchers employed the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) approach to investigate the connections between the variables under study. The research framework consisted of two distinct models: the measurement model and the structural model. The measurement model was used to assess the reliability and validity of the measured variables, while the structural model was employed to analyse the relationships and interactions between the latent constructs in the study.



### Measurement Model

Initially, 24 items (T1 to T4, PU1 to PU4, R1 to R4, OC1 to OC4, RR1 to RR4, and PD1 to PD4) used to measure the constructs were used in the measurement model as shown in Table A1. The reliability and validity of all the constructs were established with 20 items only after the removal of 4 items (T4, PU4, R1, and PD4). The reliability and validity of the constructs are given below.

### Construct Reliability

Construct reliability was evaluated using Composite Reliability (CR). Table 3 reveals that all the CR values range from 0.742 to 0.837. All the values are above 0.70, which confirms the reliability of the scales (Hair et al., 2011).

**Table 3**

*Reliability Test and Convergent Validity*

Constructs	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Online Communities (OC)	0.837	0.563
Perceived Usefulness (PU)	0.742	0.493
Recommendations and Referrals (R)	0.795	0.567
Ratings and Reviews (RR)	0.784	0.477
Trust (T)	0.770	0.533
Purchase decision (PD)	0.787	0.555

*Source: Based on authors' calculation and field survey, 2023.*

### Construct Validity

Construct validity refers to the degree to which a measurement accurately measures the specific concept it is intended to represent within a study. Two essential aspects of construct validity are convergent validity and discriminant validity.

### Convergent Validity

Convergent validity refers to the extent to which the items used to measure a specific construct effectively represent the underlying concept they are intended to assess. It is established when these items account for at least 50% of the variability in the latent construct being measured. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) statistic is used to evaluate convergent validity. Table 3 reveals that four constructs (OC, R, T, and PD) have AVE values greater than the recommended threshold of 0.50, and the remaining two constructs- PU and RR, have AVE values of 0.493 and 0.477 respectively. According to Hair et al. (2019), when the Composite Reliability (CR) exceeds 0.70 and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is higher than 0.40, there is no need to worry about convergent validity. Therefore, in this study, since both the CR and AVE values meet these criteria, it can be concluded that the model demonstrates convergent validity.

**Discriminant Validity**

Discriminant validity assesses how different constructs in a study are distinct from each other. Two different methods - Fornell & Larcker Criteria and Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) were used to establish discriminant validity.

**Fornell and Larcker Criteria**

Table 4 exhibits the result of Fornell and Larcker's criteria. The diagonal values represent the square root of AVE, and the other values represent the correlation values. Here, the square root of OC is 0.750, PD is 0.745, PU is 0.702, R is 0.753, RR is 0.691, and T is 0.730, which are greater than the correlation values. Thus, discriminant validity is confirmed in the study.

**Table 4**

*Discriminant Validity – Fornell and Larcker’s Criteria*

	<b>OC</b>	<b>PD</b>	<b>PU</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>RR</b>	<b>T</b>
OC	0.750					
PD	0.403	0.745				
PU	0.353	0.415	0.702			
R	0.346	0.407	0.351	0.753		
RR	0.387	0.481	0.405	0.546	0.691	
T	0.119	0.332	0.309	0.382	0.334	0.730

*Source: Based on authors’ calculation and field survey, 2023.*

Table 5 presents the result of Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio used to assess discriminant validity. All the HTMT ratio values are less than the required threshold value of 0.85 or less. This confirms the discriminant validity of the constructs.

**Table 5**

*Discriminant Validity – HTMT Ratio*

	<b>OC</b>	<b>PD</b>	<b>PU</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>RR</b>	<b>T</b>
OC						
PD	0.560					
PU	0.528	0.669				
R	0.487	0.641	0.632			
RR	0.538	0.767	0.708	0.848		
T	0.286	0.547	0.622	0.689	0.574	

*Source: Based on authors’ calculation and field survey, 2023.*

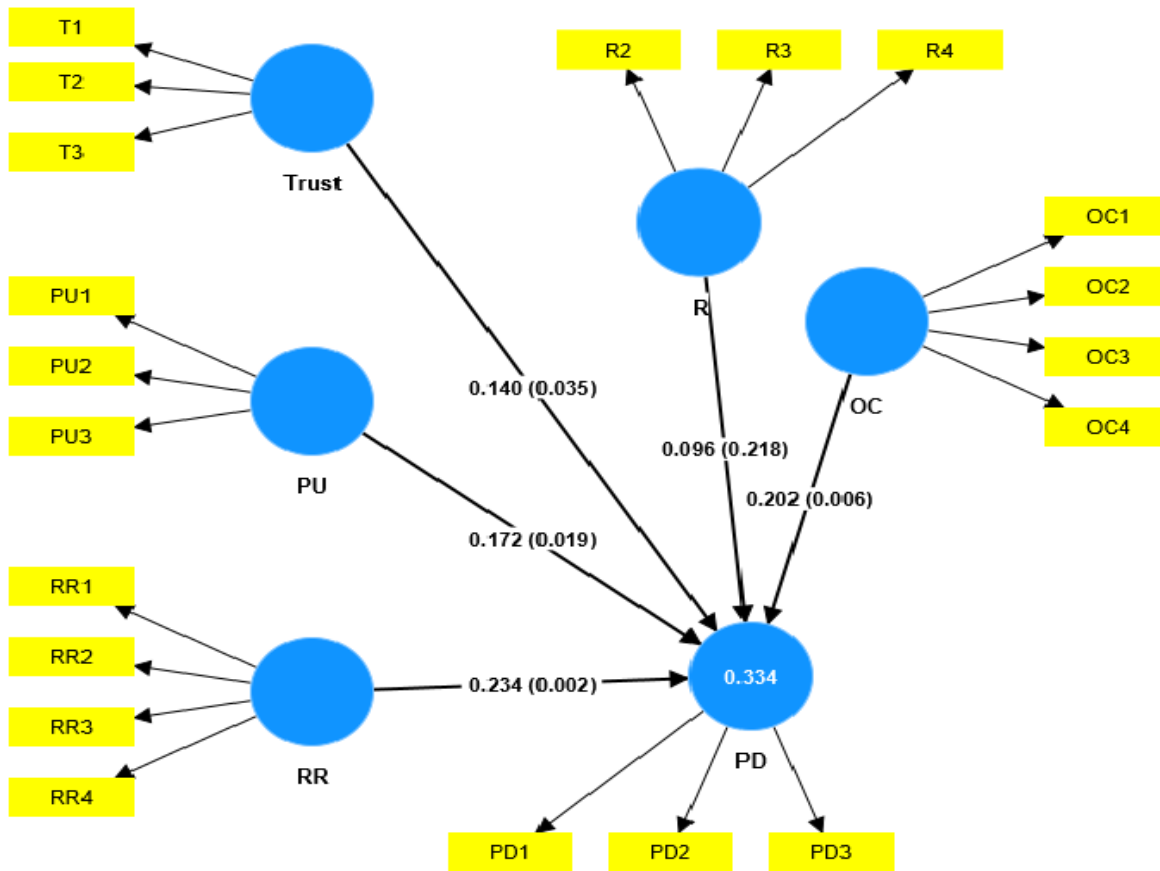
**Structural Model**

After confirming the reliability and validity of the constructs, a structural model is used to assess the influence of independent variables on purchase decisions. Figure 2 portrays the path analysis, and the results of the path analysis is given in Table 6.



**Figure 2**

*Path Diagram*



**Table 6**

*Results of Path Analysis*

Relationship	Coefficient	T statistics	P values
Online communities -> Purchase decisions	0.202	2.739	0.006*
Perceived usefulness -> Purchase decisions	0.172	2.345	0.019*
Recommendations -> Purchase decisions	0.096	1.232	0.218
Ratings and reviews -> Purchase decisions	0.234	3.098	0.002*
Trust -> Purchase decisions	0.140	2.105	0.035*

*Source: Based on authors' calculation and field survey, 2023.*

Table 6 shows the outcomes of a path analysis, which aims to examine the impact of different variables (online communities, perceived usefulness, recommendations and referrals, ratings and reviews, and trust) on purchase decisions. From the table, it is evident that online communities positively and significantly influence purchase decisions (beta = 0.202, t = 2.739, P-value = 0.006). Similarly, perceived usefulness positively and significantly influences purchase decisions (beta = 0.172, t = 2.345, P-value = 0.019). Ratings and reviews positively and significantly influence purchase decisions (beta = 0.234, t = 3.098, P-value = 0.002), and trust positively and significantly influences purchase decisions (beta = 0.140, t = 2.105, P-value = 0.035). On the other hand, recommendations and referrals (R) do not significantly influence purchase decisions (P-value > 0.05).

### **Conclusion and Suggestions**

This study examined the impact of various factors related to social media on purchase decisions within the context of Pokhara Valley. The path analysis revealed that several independent variables exert substantial influence on consumers' purchase decisions. Online communities, perceived usefulness, ratings and reviews, and trust all demonstrated statistically significant positive relationships with purchase decisions. This implies that individuals who actively participate in online communities, perceive social media as useful for product information and purchasing, rely on ratings and reviews, and place trust in the platform are more likely to make purchase decisions based on their online experiences. Interestingly, recommendations and referrals did not exhibit a significant impact on purchase decisions, suggesting that while peer opinions might be important, they might not be as influential as other factors in this specific context.

In conclusion, this study highlights the complex interplay of various factors influencing purchase decisions in the context of social media within Pokhara Valley. This study suggests that policymakers should promote digital literacy, foster the growth of trustworthy online communities, promote the perceived usefulness of social media, encourage the use of online review and rating systems, and build trust in online platforms to create a safe and responsible online environment for consumers. Understanding these factors and their implications can guide businesses and marketers in tailoring their strategies to effectively engage with consumers and drive purchasing behavior. Further research can continue to explore these dynamics and how they might evolve.

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**Table A1**

Items code	Statements	Mean	SD
<b>Trust</b>			
T1	Promises made on social media are reliable	2.92	.758
T2	Information provided by social media are trustworthy	3.04	.765
T3	Social media protects the privacy of users	2.64	.958
T4	Products purchased from social media are delivered timely	3.10	.858
<b>Perceived Usefulness</b>			
PU1	Product information is readily and easily available on social media	3.37	.856
PU2	Social Media enables one to buy the desired product	3.44	.765
PU3	Payment for online purchase via social media is easy and secured	3.41	.877
PU4	Online shopping using social media saves our time	3.91	.901
<b>Recommendations and Referrals</b>			
R1	I usually seek friend's recommendation before making an online purchase	3.50	.899
R2	Recommendation made on online products are usually reliable and trustworthy	3.06	.808
R3	Recommendation and referral influence my purchase decision	3.44	.834
R4	Recommendation and referral allow quick and easy online purchase	3.62	.697
<b>Online Communities</b>			
OC1	Group discussion (online communities) generates ideas for the proper purchase of the product	3.61	.767
OC2	Group discussion helps to provide a comprehensive comparison among different products to enable effective purchase	3.73	.690
OC3	Group discussion helps to provide information on alternative products more easily	3.80	.654
OC4	Group discussion helps to provide ideas on genuine products that are sold online	3.71	.697
<b>Ratings and Reviews</b>			
RR1	The ratings and reviews about the product on social media are relevant	3.36	.847
RR2	The ratings and reviews about the product on social media are true and accurate	2.94	.835
RR3	Positive reviews on social media encourage purchase decision	3.83	.706
RR4	Purchase decisions are influenced by the product's rating	3.81	.777
<b>Purchase Decisions</b>			
PD1	Social Media helps to make better decisions while purchasing products	3.55	.798
PD2	Social Media persuades in buying online products	3.65	.684
PD3	I am usually attracted to and lured by the advertisement of the online products	3.29	.923
PD4	I usually prefer to shop online as I can find multiple options	3.45	.936
<b>Overall Mean Score</b>		<b>3.42</b>	