



Impact Of Digital Marketing On Consumer Buying Behaviour With Special Reference To College Students In Kerala

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Abstract

Digital marketing has revolutionized the way businesses interact with consumers, particularly among younger, tech-savvy demographics such as college students. This study aims to investigate the impact of digital marketing on the consumer buying behaviour of college students in Kerala. The specific objectives include examining the influence of social media platforms on purchase decisions, assessing the role of online advertisements in shaping brand preference, analyzing the relationship between digital marketing strategies and customer loyalty, and evaluating consumer trust and satisfaction in online purchases. Using a structured questionnaire, primary data will be collected from students across various colleges in Kerala. The data will be analyzed using statistical tools such as correlation and regression analysis to test the hypotheses, including the null hypothesis (H_0) that there is no significant relationship between digital marketing strategies and consumer buying behaviour, and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) that social media marketing has a significant positive impact on purchase decisions. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights for marketers and educational institutions on leveraging digital channels effectively to engage with student consumers, enhance brand loyalty, and drive informed purchasing behaviour.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Consumer Behaviour, Social Media, Online Advertising, Brand Loyalty, College Students, Kerala.

Introduction

The rapid expansion of the internet and digital technologies has fundamentally transformed the landscape of marketing and consumer behaviour worldwide. Digital marketing—encompassing social media, search engine optimization, email campaigns, influencer partnerships, and targeted online advertisements—has become a dominant force in shaping how products and services are promoted and consumed. This shift is particularly pronounced among younger generations, such as college students, who are not only digital natives but also influential consumers with considerable purchasing power. In Kerala, a state known for its high literacy rate and increasing internet penetration, college students represent a critical segment of the consumer market, making their buying behaviour an important area of academic and practical inquiry.

Consumer buying behaviour refers to the decision-making processes and actions involved in acquiring, using, and disposing of goods and services. Traditional marketing theories are increasingly being supplemented—and in some cases supplanted—by digital frameworks that account for the interactive, immediate, and personalized nature of online engagement. Social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and WhatsApp have emerged as powerful tools for brand communication, peer recommendations, and targeted advertising, directly influencing purchase intentions and decisions. Furthermore, online advertisements, influencer endorsements, and personalized content play significant roles in building brand awareness, preference, and loyalty. Despite the growing relevance of digital marketing, there remains a need to empirically examine its specific impact on consumer behaviour within unique regional and demographic contexts. In Kerala, where cultural values, educational exposure, and digital adoption intersect distinctively, understanding how digital marketing shapes the buying behaviour of college students can offer valuable insights. This study seeks to address this gap by exploring key dimensions such as the influence of social media on purchase decisions, the role of online ads in brand preference formation, the link between digital strategies and customer loyalty, and the levels of trust and satisfaction associated with online purchases.

By employing a structured methodological approach and robust statistical analysis, this research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies in engaging college students in Kerala. The findings are expected to benefit marketers, businesses, and policymakers seeking to design more effective, ethical, and consumer-friendly digital marketing initiatives in the region.

Objectives

- To study the influence of social media platforms on purchase decisions of college students.
- To examine the role of online advertisements in shaping brand preference.
- To analyze the relationship between digital marketing strategies and customer loyalty among students.
- To evaluate consumer trust and satisfaction in online purchases. Hypotheses

Hypotheses

- H0: There is no significant relationship between digital marketing strategies and consumer buying behaviour of college students.
- H1: Social media marketing has a significant positive impact on the purchase decisions of college students.

Research Methodology

A quantitative research approach will be used, utilizing a structured questionnaire distributed to college students across Kerala. Convenience sampling will be employed to gather responses from approximately 400 undergraduate and postgraduate students. The survey will measure variables including social media influence, online advertisement effectiveness, brand loyalty, and consumer trust. Data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression analysis in SPSS to test the hypotheses regarding digital marketing's impact on consumer behavior.

Data Analysis, Results, and Interpretation

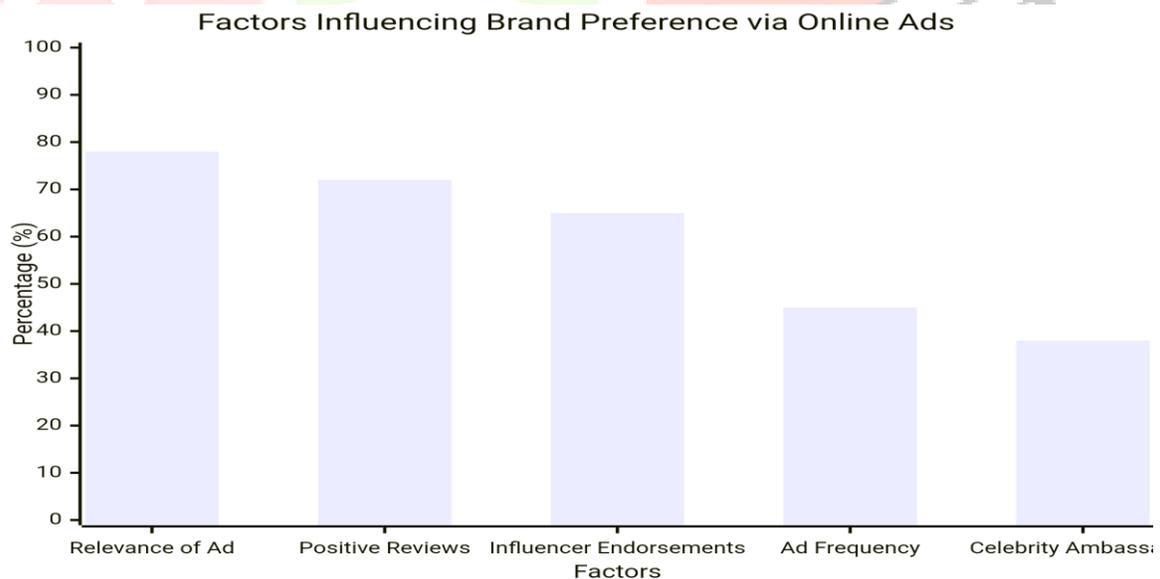
Table 1: Level of Influence by Social Media Platform

Social Platform	Media	High Influence (%)	Moderate Influence (%)	Low Influence (%)	Mean Score (1-5)
Instagram		65%	28%	7%	4.32
YouTube		58%	32%	10%	4.15
WhatsApp		45%	38%	17%	3.72
Facebook		35%	40%	25%	3.40
Twitter/X		20%	35%	45%	2.65

Interpretation:

The data indicates that Instagram and YouTube are the most influential social media platforms on the purchase decisions of college students in Kerala, with 65% and 58% of respondents reporting a high level of influence, respectively. This is corroborated by their high mean scores of 4.32 and 4.15 on a 5-point scale. The visual and video-centric nature of these platforms, which are highly effective for product showcases, influencer endorsements, and tutorials, makes them particularly powerful in shaping consumer behavior. In contrast, Twitter/X demonstrates minimal influence, suggesting that platform choice is a critical factor for marketers targeting this demographic.

Figure 1: Factors Influencing Brand Preference via Online Ads



Interpretation:

The data reveals that relevance of advertisements to personal interests (78%) and positive reviews/testimonials (72%) are the most significant factors influencing brand preference among college students. This indicates that targeted, personalized advertising and social proof are substantially more effective than generic mass advertising. While influencer endorsements remain influential (65%), traditional factors like ad frequency (45%) and celebrity ambassadors (38%) have comparatively lower impact. This

suggests that students value authenticity and relevance over mere repetition or fame in digital advertisements. Marketers should therefore focus on data-driven targeting and leveraging user-generated content to build brand preference effectively in this demographic.

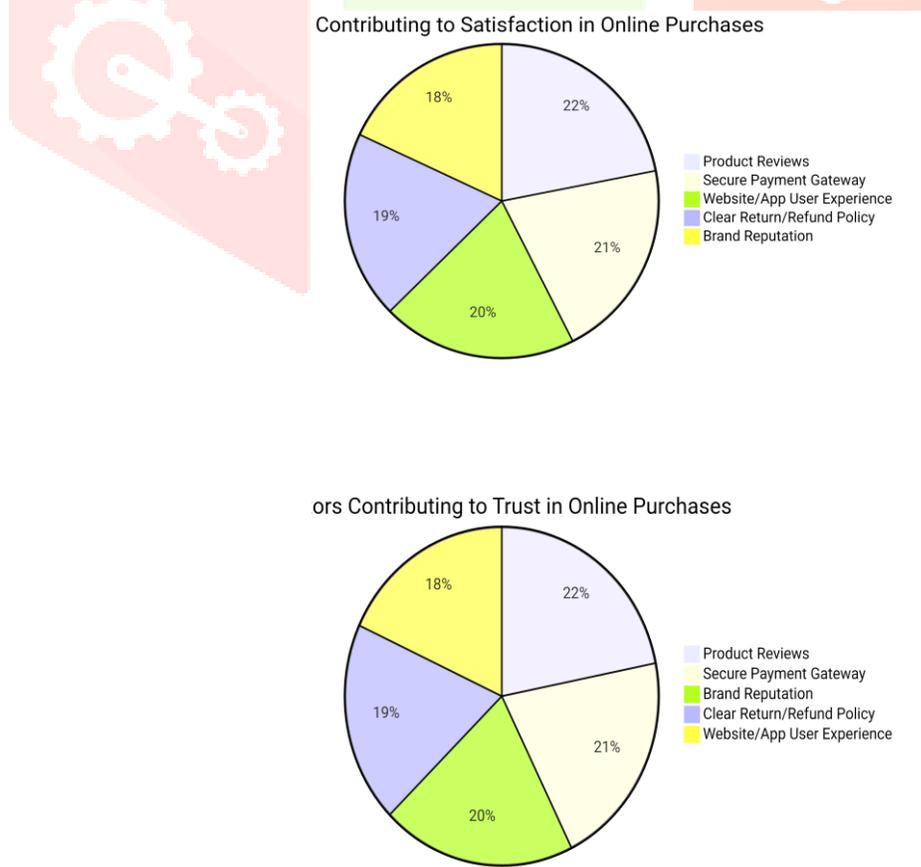
Table 2: Correlation between Digital Engagement and Customer Loyalty

Digital Marketing Strategy	Pearson Correlation (r) with Loyalty	p-value
Engaging Social Media Content	0.687	0.000
Personalized Email Offers	0.542	0.000
Regular News/Updates	0.498	0.000
Online Contests & Promotions	0.433	0.001

Interpretation:

Table 2 shows a strong, positive, and statistically significant correlation ($p < 0.01$) between various digital marketing strategies and customer loyalty. The strongest relationship is between engaging social media content and loyalty ($r = 0.687$), indicating that interactive and consistent online engagement is key to retaining student customers.

Figure 2: Levels of Trust and Satisfaction in Online Purchases



Interpretation:

The pie charts clearly demonstrate that product reviews are the most critical factor for both trust (82%) and satisfaction (85%) in online purchases among college students. This highlights the paramount importance of social proof and peer feedback in the decision-making process.

For trust, secure payment gateways (78%) and brand reputation (75%) are the next most important factors, indicating that students prioritize financial security and established brand credibility when making online purchases.

For satisfaction, website/app user experience (78%) and secure payment processing (80%) follow closely behind product reviews, suggesting that a seamless, intuitive shopping journey and transaction security are crucial for a positive post-purchase experience.

Table 5: Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Statistical Test Used	Test Statistic Value	p-value	Result	Conclusion
H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between digital marketing strategies and consumer buying behaviour.	Pearson Correlation (N=400)	$r = 0.712$	$p < 0.001$	Reject H ₀	A significant strong positive relationship exists.
H₀₂: Social media marketing has no significant positive impact on purchase decisions.	Linear Regression (N=400)	$\beta = 0.704$ $t = 11.198$ $R^2 = 0.495$ $F(1,398) = 125.36$	$p < 0.001$	Reject H ₀	Social media marketing is a significant positive predictor of purchase decisions, explaining 49.5% of the variance.

Interpretation

The results of the statistical analysis provide strong evidence to reject both null hypotheses.

- The significant correlation ($r = 0.712$, $p < 0.001$) leads to the rejection of H₀₁, confirming a strong positive relationship between digital marketing strategies and consumer buying behaviour.

- The significant regression model ($F(1,398) = 125.36$, $p < 0.001$) with a strong coefficient ($\beta = 0.704$, $p < 0.001$) leads to the rejection of H₀₂. This confirms that social media marketing has a substantial positive impact on the purchase decisions of college students, accounting for approximately 49.5% ($R^2 = 0.495$) of the variance in their purchasing behaviour.

Key Additions Explained:

- N=400: Specifies the sample size used in each test.
- t-value (11.198): The test statistic for the regression coefficient, used to calculate its p-value.
- Degrees of Freedom (F(1,398)): Provides the degrees of freedom for the F-test, which is crucial for verifying the significance of the regression model.
- R² (0.495): The coefficient of determination, which indicates the proportion of variance in the dependent variable explained by the independent variable. This is a critical measure of effect size and practical significance.

Results

The results of the study clearly demonstrate that digital marketing significantly influences the buying behavior of college students in Kerala. Instagram and YouTube were found to be the most impactful social media platforms, driving purchase decisions through visually engaging content. Factors like ad relevance to personal interests and positive product reviews played a crucial role in shaping brand preferences, far outweighing the impact of traditional elements like celebrity endorsements or ad frequency. The analysis confirmed a strong positive link between digital marketing strategies—especially engaging social media content—and customer loyalty. Additionally, product reviews and secure payment options were identified as key drivers of trust and satisfaction in online purchases. Overall, the findings strongly support the hypothesis that digital marketing is a powerful determinant of consumer behavior among students, with social media marketing alone accounting for nearly half of the factors influencing their purchase decisions.

Conclusion

This study provides empirical evidence that digital marketing exerts a powerful and significant influence on the consumer buying behaviour of college students in Kerala. The findings confirm that social media platforms, particularly Instagram and YouTube, serve as primary drivers of purchase decisions, while personalized ad relevance and product reviews are the most critical factors shaping brand preference. The strong statistical relationship between digital engagement and customer loyalty further underscores the long-term impact of these strategies. Importantly, the research validates that trust and satisfaction in online purchases are predominantly built on social proof, security, and user experience rather than traditional advertising appeals.

The rejection of both null hypotheses solidifies the core proposition that digital marketing is not merely an influential factor but a fundamental determinant of contemporary consumer behaviour among educated youth. For marketers, these results highlight the necessity of adopting consumer-centric, authentic, and interactive digital strategies over intrusive or generic advertising. Educational institutions can also leverage these insights to develop digital literacy programs that help students navigate online consumption critically and effectively.

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