

CLICKS, PREFERENCES, AND PERCEPTIONS: HOW STUDENTS ENGAGE WITH SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

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ABSTRACT

With an emphasis on understanding their preferences, behaviors, and perceptions, this study investigates how students engage with social media marketing. Social media has emerged as a central medium for marketing communication, with students representing a highly active user group. However, their responses to personalized and targeted advertising vary due to factors such as trust, relevance, and privacy concerns. The study, which involved 260 college students in Coimbatore, used Simple percentage analysis, Descriptive analysis, Mean ranking, Chi-square and ANOVA to evaluate how demographic factors influence students' engagement with and perceptions of social media marketing.

KEY WORDS

Social Media Marketing, Student Engagement, Social Media Platforms, Targeted Advertising

INTRODUCTION

Social media has become a powerful medium for marketing communication, shaping how brands interact with audiences. Students are among the most active users, influencing online trends and brand perceptions. With the rise of personalized and targeted advertising, understanding student responses has become essential. Their preferences, trust levels, and privacy concerns affect engagement with marketing campaigns. This study explores students' engagement with social media marketing and their preferred platforms. The findings aim to contribute to a deeper understanding of digital consumer behavior and help marketers design strategies that are both effective and student-centric.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

With the increasing use of social media among students, marketers are investing heavily in personalized and targeted advertising. However, there is limited understanding of how students engage with these marketing strategies, which platforms they prefer, and how their perceptions are influenced by factors such as trust, relevance, and privacy concerns. This gap in knowledge makes it challenging for marketers to design effective campaigns that resonate with student audiences. Therefore, this study aims to examine students' engagement, preferences, and

perceptions regarding social media marketing and to analyze the influence of demographic factors on their responses.

OBJECTIVES

- ❖ To identify the most preferred social media platforms among students for marketing interactions and to assess students' attitudes toward personalized and targeted advertising on social media platforms.
- ❖ To examine if demographic factors (e.g., age, gender, field of study, geographical location) influence students' perceptions of social media marketing in higher education.

NEED OF THE STUDY

Social media has become a key platform for communication and information sharing, particularly among students who are highly active digital users. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube are increasingly used by marketers for personalized and targeted advertising. However, there is limited understanding of how students engage with these marketing strategies, their platform preferences, and the factors influencing their perceptions, including trust, relevance, and privacy concerns. Demographic factors such as age, gender, field of study, and location also play a role in shaping students' responses to social media marketing, yet these variables are often underexplored. Understanding student engagement is essential for marketers to design effective campaigns that capture attention, foster interaction, and build brand trust. This study aims to examine students clicks, preferences, and perceptions regarding social media marketing, providing insights that will benefit marketers, researchers, and educators in understanding digital consumer behavior and improving marketing strategies for this influential demographic.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1) Area of study	Coimbatore District, Tamilnadu
2) Sample size	260 respondents
3) Sampling method	Simple random sampling
4) Data collection	Primary data and secondary data
5) Period of study	June 2025 – September 2025
6) Analysis Tools	Simple percentage analysis, Descriptive Statistics, Chi-square, Mean Ranking, ANOVA

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The sample of this study has been restricted to 260 respondents. This study is purely based on the information supplied by the respondents in Coimbatore district. The findings of the study are not applicable to any other area.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the study titled "*Student Perception of Social Media Marketing*", Ferhataj (2024) explores how students perceive and engage with social media marketing and the platforms they prefer. The research collected primary data from 163 students of the Mediterranean University of Albania using a structured questionnaire. Descriptive research methods, including percentage analysis and mean ranking, were applied to analyze the data, while secondary data were sourced from journals, books, and online articles. The study finds that students generally have a positive perception of social media advertising and actively follow companies online, indicating that social media platforms are effective channels for reaching this demographic.

In the study titled "*Enhancing Student Engagement Through Social Media*", Gulzar (2022) examines the influence of social media usage on students' creativity and academic engagement. Primary data were collected from 200 college students using surveys, and statistical tools like correlation and regression analysis were applied. The findings suggest that active use of social media positively impacts students' engagement and motivation, highlighting its potential for both academic and marketing purposes.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

PERCENTAGE ANALYSIS

Demographic profile of the Respondents

Table 1

Demographic profile of the Respondents

Demographic factor	Group	Frequency	Percentage
Age	18-21	218	83.8
	21-25	15	5.8
	25-30	11	4.2

	ABOVE 30	16	6.2
	Total	260	100
Gender	Male	72	27.7
	Female	188	72.3
	Total	260	100
Educational level	UG	212	81.5
	PG	37	14.2
	PhD	11	4.2
	Total	260	100
Residential Area	Urban	134	51.5
	Semi-Urban	59	22.7
	Rural	56	21.5
	Semi-rural	11	4.2
	Total	260	100

(Source: Primary data)

- ❖ 83.8 per cent of the respondents belong to the age group 18 to 21 years.
- ❖ 72.3 per cent of the respondents are female.
- ❖ 81.5 per cent of the respondents were undergraduates.
- ❖ 51.5 per cent of respondents reside in urban areas.

CHI SQUARE

Most used social media platform

Table 2

Most used social media platform

Demographic profiles	Groups	Most used social media platform										Chi. square	Sig.
		P1		P2		P3		P4		Total			
		No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%		
Age	18-21	154	70.6	24	11.1	37	16.9	3	1.3	218	100	21.030	0.013
	21-25	10	66.7	5	33.4	0	0	0	0	15	100		
	25-30	6	54.5	3	27.2	2	18.2	0	0	11	100		
	Above 30	8	50.0	7	43.7	1	6.2	0	0	16	100		
Gender	Male	64	88.9	6	8.4	2	2.8	0	0	72	100	20.455	0.000
	Female	114	60.6	33	20.2	38	20.2	3	1.5	188	100		
Educational level	UG	152	71.6	24	11.3	34	16.1	2	1.0	212	100	15.602	0.016
	PG	21	56.7	10	27.0	5	13.5	1	2.7	37	100		
	PhD	5	45.4	5	45.4	1	9.1	0	0	11	100		
Residential Area	Urban	98	73.1	16	11.9	18	13.4	2	1.5	134	100	9.065	0.431
	Semi-Urban	36	61.1	12	20.3	10	16.9	1	1.6	59	100		
	Rural	39	69.6	7	12.5	10	17.8	0	0	56	100		
	Semi-Rural	5	45.4	4	36.3	2	18.1	0	0	11	100		

(Source: Primary data)

- ❖ Chi-square analysis has been used to assess whether demographic factors such as age, gender, educational qualification, and residential area are significantly associated with the most used social media platform.
- ❖ The analysis reveals that at a 5% significance level, age, gender, and educational qualification have a significant association with the most used social media platform. However, residential area has no significant association with the most used platform. Hence, the null hypothesis has been rejected for age, gender, and educational qualification, and accepted for residential area.
- ❖ This suggests that preferences for social media platform usage vary across different age groups, genders, and education levels, while remaining largely consistent across residential areas. The findings indicate that other variables, such as user interests, platform features, or peer influence, may also play an important role in determining social media platform preferences.

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Respondents' Attitude Toward Brand Loyalty on Social

Table 3

Respondents' Attitude Toward Brand Loyalty on Social

Statement	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	S.D
Do you believe social media marketing is more engaging than traditional marketing for students?	260	1.00	5.00	2.4192	0.92018
Do you think brand promotions on social media help in creating loyalty among customers?	260	1.00	5.00	3.1615	0.89013
Do you feel more connected when a brand shares user-generated (e.g., customer photos or stories)?	260	1.00	5.00	2.5115	0.92366

(Source: Primary data)

In accordance the mean rating in table 4.2.1, the majority of students, the table presents the descriptive statistics of students’ perceptions of social media marketing across three aspects, based on responses from 260 participants. The results show that on a 5-point scale, students moderately agree that brand promotions on social media help in creating loyalty among customers (Mean = 3.16, SD = 0.89). However, they are less convinced that social media marketing is more engaging than traditional marketing (Mean = 2.41, SD = 0.92) or that user-generated content makes them feel more connected to a brand (Mean = 2.51, SD = 0.92). Overall, the findings indicate that while students somewhat recognize the role of social media promotions in fostering customer loyalty, they are comparatively less engaged by user-generated content and are still not fully convinced that social media marketing surpasses traditional methods in effectiveness.

ANOVA

Agreeability score of the respondents towards the type of content in your preference with a brand

Table 4

Agreeability score of the respondents towards the type of content in your preference with a brand

Demographic profiles	Groups	Agreeability score of the Respondents towards the types of content in your preference with a brand					
		N	Mean	SD	F value	Sig. value	S/NS
Age	18-21	218	2.7706	.75316	2.752	.043	S
	21-25	15	2.7200	.86123			
	25-30	11	2.8000	.73212			

	Above 30	16	2.2125	.67119			
Gender	Male	72	2.6389	.93063	1.576	.210	NS
	Female	188	2.7713	.68555			
Educational level	UG	212	2.7377	.76554	.765	.466	NS
	PG	37	2.7946	.81716			
	PhD	11	2.4727	.41253			
Residential Area	Urban	134	2.7015	.72661	.238	.870	NS
	Semi-Urban	59	2.7593	.74721			
	Rural	56	2.7964	.7558			
	Semi-Rural	11	2.6909	1.25973			

(Source: Primary data)

- ❖ ANOVA has been used to test whether the agreeability scores regarding content-type preferences associated with a brand differ significantly among the respondents classified based on demographic profile. The agreeability scores of the respondents show a significant difference on key attributes of content-type preferences when classified based on age. Specifically, respondents aged 25–30 reported the highest mean score (2.8000), while those aged above 30 reported the lowest (2.2125), with a significance value of 0.043 (< 0.05). The agreeability scores of the respondents show no significant difference on key attributes of content-type preferences when classified based on gender, educational qualification, and area of residence.

Mean Ranking

Influence of social media platforms in brand promotions

Table 5

Influence of social media platforms in brand promotions

Particulars	N	Mean	Rank
Instagram	260	2.043	V
YouTube	260	2.5654	IV

TikTok	260	3.1615	III
Facebook	260	3.1923	II
Pinterest	260	3.1692	I

(Source: Primary data)

The mean ranking analysis (3.1092) reveals that Respondents perceive Instagram as the most influential platform for brand promotions. However, Facebook (Mean = 3.1923) and TikTok (Mean = 3.1615) are also considered highly impactful, indicating a strong preference for platforms that offer visual and interactive content. YouTube, with a mean score of 2.5654, is seen as moderately influential, suggesting that while long-form video content is valuable, it is less preferred compared to short-form and highly visual formats. Pinterest, with the lowest mean score (2.043), is perceived as the least effective in influencing brand engagement. The findings suggest that while platforms like Instagram and Facebook are dominant in shaping customer perceptions, others like Pinterest are less effective, underscoring the importance of dynamic and visual content in successful brand promotion strategies.

SUGGESTIONS

- ❖ Brands targeting students on social media should focus on creating personalized and interactive content that aligns with their interests and preferences. Utilizing videos, quizzes, polls, and stories can enhance engagement, while collaborating with micro-influencers helps build trust and credibility within student communities. Additionally, optimizing the timing and frequency of posts ensures that content reaches students when they are most active, increasing the likelihood of clicks and meaningful interactions.
- ❖ Furthermore, brands should prioritize value-driven and educational content that informs as well as entertains, strengthening brand perceptions and fostering loyalty. Monitoring feedback through comments, reactions, and shares allows marketers to adapt strategies according to student responses. Transparency and ethical practices in advertising are also essential, as students respond positively to authenticity, which can ultimately enhance long-term engagement and brand connections on social media platforms.

CONCLUSION

The study on “Clicks, Preferences, and Perceptions: How Students Engage with Social Media Marketing” highlights the significant role social media plays in shaping students’ brand interactions and engagement patterns. Findings indicate that students are highly responsive to personalized, interactive, and visually appealing content, which increases click-through rates and strengthens brand connections. Platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook emerge as the most preferred channels for marketing communication among students, while demographic factors like age and field of study moderately influence engagement patterns. The research also underscores the importance of ethical and transparent marketing practices, as authenticity fosters trust and long-term loyalty. For marketers, these insights provide actionable strategies to optimize content delivery, timing, and platform selection to maximize engagement with the student demographic. Overall, the study confirms that social media is not only an effective marketing tool but also a platform that can meaningfully enhance student-brand relationships when approached strategically.

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