

The Impact Of Social Media On Consumer Shopping Habits Among Teenagers

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ABSTRACT

The development of social media in the last decade has changed the consumption behavior of teenagers, with platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube becoming the main space for forming opinions and lifestyles. Teenagers, as digital natives, are exposed to intense visual and audio-visual content curated by algorithms, which often form consumption standards based on social image, not functional needs. This phenomenon is further strengthened by the role of influencers who promote products through personal narratives that are often not recognized as advertisements. Teenagers tend to adopt impulsive consumption patterns due to social pressure and the strong influence of endorsements on social media, which further blurs the line between entertainment and marketing. This leads to faster and more emotional changes in shopping patterns, and encourages them to buy goods for social image. In addition, low digital and financial literacy among teenagers increases their vulnerability to manipulative marketing, which influences their purchasing decisions. This study aims to understand how social media, through influencers, influences teenagers' shopping habits, as well as the importance of digital and social literacy in helping teenagers make wiser and more rational consumption decisions. A descriptive qualitative approach is used to explore teenagers' consumption experiences, with a focus on understanding the impact of social media on developing consumption patterns.

Keywords: Digital-Consumption; Social-Media Influence; Teen-Behavior

INTRODUCTION

The development of social media in the last decade has revolutionized the way individuals, especially teenagers, interact and access information. Platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube are no longer just communication tools, but have become cultural spaces that shape public opinion and lifestyle. Teenagers, as digital natives, are highly exposed to an intense flow of visual and audio-visual information, which is often curated through algorithms to increase user engagement. According to a report by Asmarantika et al (2022), more than 95% of teenagers aged 13–18 years in Indonesia have access to at least one social media platform, with an average usage duration of more than three hours per day. This figure shows that social media is not just a means of communication, but an integral part of daily routines that can influence mindsets and consumption behavior.

More than just technological developments, the expansion of social media has also created an ecosystem that allows for the commercialization of personal life. Influencers, brand ambassadors, and paid content now dominate teenagers' timelines with veiled messages that indirectly influence purchasing decisions. This phenomenon blurs the line between entertainment and advertising, and teenagers who do not yet fully develop



critical thinking skills are often the main targets of aggressive digital marketing strategies. As stated by Syifa & Irwansyah (2022), teenagers have a high level of vulnerability to media influence because their identities are still developing. In this context, the rapid growth of social media not only creates opportunities but also presents major challenges in forming a generation of consumers who are aware, critical, and not easily influenced by consumer narratives that are packaged attractively.

The phenomenon of teenagers as potential consumers cannot be separated from their increasing purchasing power, both directly and through their influence on parents' purchasing decisions. In the digital era, teenagers have a strategic role in the market because they are not only the current target consumers, but also the shapers of future trends and preferences. This is supported by a study by Zebua et al (2023) which states that Gen Z has a significant influence on family spending, especially in categories such as clothing, fast food, and technology products. Continuous exposure to attractively packaged promotional content makes teenagers increasingly familiar with the digital consumption process, from product searches to online transactions, which are often carried out impulsively without mature rational consideration.

However, this development also carries risks. The lack of digital and financial literacy among teenagers makes them vulnerable to manipulative marketing practices, such as covert endorsements and advertisements disguised as entertainment content. According to research by Bulmer et al (2024), the majority of teenagers are not yet able to clearly distinguish between advertisements and organic content, which makes them more easily influenced by consumerist narratives. When trends and social validation in the media become benchmarks in determining what is worth buying, consumption decisions shift from needs to image. This condition indicates that although teenagers have the potential to be a profitable market, they are also the group that needs critical education the most so as not to get caught up in unhealthy and materialistic consumption patterns.

The power of content disseminated by influencers lies in the emotional closeness and perception of authenticity they build with their audiences, especially teenagers. Compared to conventional advertising, content produced by influencers tends to be more persuasive because it is packaged in a relatable personal narrative and is often not realized as a promotion. According to a study conducted by Derajat et al (2025), influencers who have a high number of followers and are considered credible can significantly increase consumer purchase intentions, especially among teenagers who are still in the process of forming their self-identity. When an idol or digital public figure promotes a product, teenagers tend to accept the information without critical evaluation, due to the emergence of the bandwagon effect and the need for high social validation in this age group.

This tendency is exacerbated by social media algorithms designed to amplify exposure to similar content, creating an echo chamber effect that reinforces consumer values. In this context, adolescents' consumption choices are no longer purely based on individual needs or preferences, but are shaped by repeated exposure to certain lifestyle standards that are massively promoted. This is in line with the concept of "aspirational consumption" explained by Sartika et al (2024), where individuals are driven to purchase goods or services to reflect their idealized social status. As a result, adolescents not only develop unhealthy consumer habits, but also experience psychological pressure to always follow trends, even if it is beyond their financial capabilities.

The digital transformation driven by social media has pushed for a shift from traditional shopping patterns to instant and emotional digital experience-based shopping patterns. Teenagers now no longer rely on physical stores, catalogs, or advice from people

close to them, but rather trust short reviews, unboxing videos, and testimonials from fellow users they meet online. Research by Hadi & Zakiah (2021) shows that more than 60% of Gen Z consumers search for products for the first time through social media, not search engines or e-commerce sites. This indicates that social media is not only a marketing channel, but also an information search ecosystem that significantly shapes teenagers' shopping preferences. In this context, shopping decisions tend to be faster and more impulsive because they are driven by constant product visualization and social influence.

Furthermore, this change in shopping patterns creates a new phenomenon in the form of a consumption culture that is oriented towards trends and self-image. Features such as "swipe up to buy" and "shop the look" make the purchasing process so easy and integrated into the social media experience, that the boundaries between needs and wants become blurred. This leads to a shift in values in the consumption process, where the meaning of "shopping" is no longer centered on the function of goods, but on how these goods can strengthen social identity in cyberspace. As stated by Junita et al (2025), modern consumption increasingly emphasizes symbolic aspects rather than functional ones. Ultimately, teenagers as active users of social media are in the vortex of a highly visual, fast, and often uncritical consumption culture, which demands a new understanding in fostering digital literacy and consumer ethics from an early age.

METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to deeply understand the influence of social media on adolescent shopping habits. The subjects of the study were adolescents aged 15–18 years who actively use social media such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. The selection was carried out purposively in several high schools in region 3 of Palembang, to reflect various social backgrounds. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews and participant observation, in order to explore the experiences and consumer behavior of adolescents directly. The researcher as the main instrument was assisted by interview guidelines and field notes. To maintain the validity of the data, triangulation of sources and techniques was used. The analysis was carried out with thematic analysis, through the process of coding, categorizing, and interpreting the patterns of meaning that emerged, resulting in a comprehensive picture of the role of social media in shaping adolescent consumer behavior

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Social Media in Shaping Teenage Consumption Patterns

1. Influencers as Agents in Forming Consumption Preferences

Social media has created a new landscape in the marketing world, where influencers play a key role in shaping consumption preferences, especially among teenagers. Unlike conventional advertising which is one-way and tends to be formal, influencers build more interpersonal communication, as if they are in the same social circle as their followers. This strategy is effective because it creates a sense of closeness and trust, which are important foundations in shaping consumer perceptions. One source stated,

"I trust more if a product is recommended by a celebrity I follow, because it seems like they really use the item in their daily life, not just promoting it."

This quote reflects how the perception of authenticity is a key value that differentiates influencers from traditional forms of promotion. In this case, the image of

influencers as “real” and relatable figures makes them cultural authorities who influence consumption choices, both consciously and unconsciously.

The role of influencers also shows a shift in the logic of adolescent consumption, from previously being oriented towards use value to being oriented towards sign value, as stated by Dwi Putra (2023). Consumption is no longer just about fulfilling needs, but has become a means to display social identity and gain validation in the digital space. Another informant said,

"Sometimes I buy things not because I really need them, but because they're trending on TikTok or because they're worn by artists I follow."

This statement confirms that teenagers' consumption choices are heavily influenced by the desire to appear relevant and liked in their digital communities. In this context, influencers become a kind of “gatekeeper” of tastes and social norms that apply in the online realm, replacing the role of traditional mass media in setting lifestyle standards.

Sociologically, this phenomenon is closely related to the concept of cultural intermediaries put forward by Bourdieu, where influencers act as a bridge between commercial products and the symbolic value attached to them. They not only sell goods, but also sell certain lifestyles, self-images, and social aspirations. Their credibility is built not through formal authority, but through everyday performativity that is strategically constructed on social media. Through seemingly casual but carefully curated posts, they shape a reality that influences teenagers' perceptions of what is considered “cool”, “hip”, or “worthy of imitation”. This is reinforced by a study by Wilska et al (2023), which shows that influencers build influence through digital intimacy narratives, which blur the boundaries between personal life and promotion, so that the audience feels like they are part of the influencer's life itself.

Thus, it can be concluded that influencers play a strategic role in shaping adolescent consumption decisions, through a combination of constructed authenticity, symbolic proximity, and aspirational narratives. This change shows that consumption in the digital era is not merely an economic activity, but also a complex social and cultural process, where identity, status, and social affiliation are at stake. In this realm, influencers are no longer just product promoters, but new socialization agents who greatly influence the formation of values and preferences of the younger generation. Therefore, it is important for educators, policy makers, and parents to understand this dynamic, in order to provide critical digital literacy for adolescents in dealing with the flood of information and lifestyle representations that do not necessarily match their reality or needs.

2. Repeated Exposure and Normalization of a Consumptive Lifestyle

In this digital era, social media has become an important part of everyday life, especially for teenagers. In addition to being a platform for communicating and sharing information, social media also plays a major role in shaping the perception, identity, and consumption patterns of its users. One of the phenomena that emerges is repeated exposure to consumer products and lifestyles, which in turn can lead to the normalization of an unrealistic lifestyle that is not in accordance with the individual's economic capabilities.

Observations show that social media algorithms play a significant role in creating repeated exposure to consumer content, especially those featuring luxury products and lifestyles. When teenagers interact with certain content, either by liking, saving, or simply watching it, the algorithm will process the data and automatically present similar content

continuously. This cycle creates an echo chamber effect, where teenagers are only exposed to a consumerist lifestyle, reinforcing the notion that having branded goods, the latest gadgets, or vacationing to exotic places is something that is commonplace and even a measure of social success. In the long term, this leads to the normalization process of a consumerist lifestyle that is not only accepted, but also considered ideal.

Scientifically, this phenomenon can be explained through the concept of social comparison theory from Leon Festinger (1954), which states that individuals tend to judge themselves by comparing themselves to others. On social media, teenagers see other people's lives that appear perfect and full of luxury, which then becomes their standard of achievement. This process is reinforced by algorithms that continue to display similar content, creating the perception that a luxurious lifestyle is a social norm. In addition, according to research by Arghashi (2025), adolescents' exposure to consumer content on social media is closely related to an increased need for external validation, which can encourage them to make impulsive purchases for self-image.

In an interview with a 17-year-old respondent, it was stated:

"At first, I just watched unboxing videos for fun, but over time, they started appearing frequently on FYP. Eventually, I felt like I had to have one so I wouldn't miss out."

This statement illustrates how algorithms encourage constant exposure, forming the perception that ownership of a particular product is no longer a choice, but rather a social necessity.

This condition also has psychological impacts. Teenagers who are unable to follow this lifestyle are at risk of experiencing stress, social anxiety, and low self-esteem. They feel less valuable if they do not have trendy items, even though their economic reality may not support it. This is in line with the findings of Azizah (2020) which show that the more often someone sees other people's lives on social media, the more likely they are to feel that their life is inadequate.

Thus, social media is no longer just a platform for sharing information or entertainment, but has become a digital structure that actively influences the way people think, feel, and act, especially in terms of consumption. Therefore, it is important for teenagers to have digital literacy and critical awareness of how algorithms work and the psychological impacts they cause, so that they are not easily trapped in an unhealthy consumption cycle.

Teenagers' Adaptive Strategies to the Consumptive Influence of Social Media

1. Critical Awareness and Efforts to Limit Exposure to Consumptive Content

Some teenagers show critical awareness of the negative impacts of social media, especially in influencing consumption patterns that tend to be impulsive and consumptive. This phenomenon can be explained through the theory of social comparison (Festinger, 1954) in Kairupan (2024), which shows that individuals tend to compare themselves with others, especially in the context of social media which often shows off a luxurious and consumptive lifestyle. Many teenagers feel pressured to follow the standard of living displayed by influencers or celebrities on social media, which often encourages consumptive behavior without careful consideration. However, some teenagers show critical awareness that arises from personal experiences, such as regret after making impulsive purchases, as well as the influence of the surrounding environment that emphasizes the importance of wise financial management. One respondent in an interview said,

"After buying things I didn't really need a few times, I realized that I was just influenced by what I saw on Instagram. So, now I'm starting to choose more useful Sayans, which don't just sell goods or a luxurious lifestyle."

In response to these consumer pressures, some teenagers have begun to implement more conscious restriction strategies, such as reducing the time spent on social media and choosing not to follow Sayan-Sayan who often promote a consumer lifestyle. These restrictions aim to reduce exposure to content that can worsen their consumer impulses. According to research by Alfian (2024), excessive use of social media can increase feelings of anxiety and self-dissatisfaction, which in turn worsens the tendency to buy goods impulsively. One in-depth interview noted,

"Now I check my expenses more often and try to make a budget every month. Usually, when I use social media, I prefer to see content that can increase my knowledge, not content that makes me want to buy things."

Although these steps are still simple and have not been implemented systematically, they reflect the potential for building self-control and resistance to social media algorithms that tend to increase exposure to promotional content. Social media algorithms are indeed designed to maximize user interaction with content that they find interesting, often focusing on certain products or lifestyles that can influence consumption decisions. However, the strategies implemented by these teenagers show efforts to mitigate these negative effects. As stated by Yusran et al (2025), social media algorithms not only create space for social interaction but also increase consumer behavior, which makes critical awareness important as a form of resistance.

This critical attitude indicates an opportunity to develop digital and financial literacy among teenagers. This learning is very relevant in today's digital era, where information and advertising are very easy to access. With the right educational support, teenagers can be trained to be wiser in dealing with digital consumer pressures, as well as develop more mature financial management strategies. This will not only help them in managing their personal finances, but also form healthier and more controlled consumption behavior in dealing with the rapid development of social media and digital marketing.

Thus, although the initial steps taken by teenagers in limiting exposure to consumptive content are still simple, this is an important indicator that critical awareness of the negative impacts of social media is starting to develop. If supported by appropriate educational programs, this awareness has the potential to become a basis for teenagers in forming more responsible and independent digital behavior.

2. The Role of Digital and Social Literacy in Directing Rational Consumption

Increasing digital and social literacy plays a very important role in directing teenagers towards more rational consumption patterns. High digital literacy allows teenagers to not only be passive consumers of social media, but also become smart and selective users in receiving information. According to research conducted by Milyane et al (2023), teenagers who have good digital skills are better able to assess the information they find on the internet and tend to be more critical of advertising or promotional content. They can compare prices, read product reviews from various sources, and discuss with peers or family before making a purchasing decision. This indicates an effort to make decisions based on rational considerations, rather than driven by emotional impulses or trends that are developing on social media.

On the other hand, social literacy also plays a major role in shaping adolescent consumption patterns. Adolescents who grow up in an environment that often discusses the use of money and the impact of social media on their spending tend to have better control over their consumption. Jusmirad et al (2023), an expert in literacy education, argues that social literacy is not only about the ability to read and write, but also about the ability to understand the social context and social impact of decisions made. Adolescents who receive support from their families, teachers, and school communities are better able to evaluate their consumption decisions in a broader context, including their impact on their social lives.

In interviews with several teenagers, it was seen that they have a habit of discussing the impact of online shopping with their friends. A 17-year-old teenager, let's call her Rina, said,

"I usually check the price on several websites and read reviews from people who have bought it, then I decide whether to buy it or not. My friends also often give me advice on items that are worth it and not."

This statement shows that teenagers are increasingly accustomed to using technology to access more in-depth information before making purchasing decisions.

Furthermore, the results of a study by Qurniawati & Nurohman (2018) show that social interaction in the community, both family and peers, has a significant impact on adolescent consumption decision-making. This social support has a positive influence in developing awareness of the value of money and the impact of consumption on their lives, as well as reducing the tendency to get caught up in impulsive consumption that is often triggered by advertising or social media promotions.

Thus, both digital and social literacy act as tools that help teenagers manage the influence of social media and make more rational decisions in consumption. These two factors work synergistically to shape teenagers' resilience to consumer temptations, so that they can be wiser in managing money and making healthier consumption choices in this fast-paced digital era.

CONCLUSIONS

Social media, especially through influencers, has changed adolescent consumption patterns by creating more personalized communication and building trust. Influencers not only promote products, but also lifestyles and social aspirations, which encourage adolescents to choose goods based on identity and social validation, rather than functional needs. Social media algorithms reinforce repeated exposure to consumer content, creating a social norm that a luxurious lifestyle is the standard to follow. This causes adolescents to feel pressured to buy goods for social status, often without considering their economic ability. Some adolescents are beginning to show critical awareness of the influence of social media and are trying to limit exposure to consumer content by reducing online time and choosing more positive Sayan. Good digital literacy allows adolescents to be more selective in receiving information and making rational purchasing decisions. In addition, social literacy obtained through family and peer support helps them understand the social impact of their consumption decisions. Adolescents who have good social literacy are better able to assess the value of money and avoid impulsive purchases. With this understanding, they can be wiser in managing their finances and reducing the negative impact of digital advertising. Therefore, digital and social literacy play an important role in shaping healthier and more controlled adolescent consumption patterns in this digital era.

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