INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT METRICS ON PURCHASE INTENT OF ONLINE SHOPPERS

MOYOSORE ALADE

adenijim@run.edu.ng

+234 817 034 1833

Department of Mass Communication

Redeemer's University Ede, Osun State, Nigeria

&

MOSHOOD KAYODE SULEIMAN

moshoodsuleimanff@gmail.com

+2348035769261

Department of Mass Communication

Redeemer's University Ede, Osun State, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

Due to the shift in consumer engagement, businesses use social media for marketing and interaction. Hence, this paper investigates the influence of social media engagement metrics on the purchase intent of online shoppers. The objectives of the study explored social media engagement metrics and purchase intent. The purchase intent theory was used to predict the objectives of this study. In contrast, the questionnaire was used to retrieve data from 300 respondents who were the Federal University of Technology, Akure undergraduates. Findings showed that the multiple regression analysis showed that social media engagement metrics significantly influence purchase intent among online shoppers. Findings also showed that the number of likes and comments has a positive effect on the purchase intent of online shoppers. In contrast, the number of shares and followers has a negative effect, and the level of involvement also has a positive effect on purchase intent. It recommended that marketers design effective strategies to leverage social media platforms to influence consumer engagement and increase sales.

Keywords: Influence, social media, engagement metric, Purchase intent, online shoppers.

Introduction

With over 3.6 billion users globally, social media platforms have evolved into powerful marketing channels, enabling businesses to reach and engage with target audiences globally. As a result, social media platforms have become integral to the online shopping experience and transformed how consumers interact with brands and make purchase decisions (Anderson, 2016). Online shoppers no longer rely solely on traditional advertising and word-of-mouth recommendations; they turn to social media for product discovery, reviews, and inspiration. This shift in consumer engagement has prompted businesses to leverage social media for marketing and engagement. As a result, social media engagement metrics has gained significance in the world of e-commerce (Goh, 2013).

As posited by Wang and Kim (2017), the advantage of social media marketing over traditional forms of advertisement and marketing is that it creates a package of different means to target

diverse aspects of a marketing plan. Wang and Kim (2017) pointed out that the ability of firms to create a feedback loop on social media results in better decision-making processes, quantifying outcomes of firms' strategies more accurately, elevating productivity and creating a more user-friendly atmosphere for customers to voice their comments. Furthermore, this knowledge will help e-commerce marketers design their social media strategy and generate content according to user behaviour.

In the area of social media, marketers must understand social media engagement metrics (Celli et al., 2017), and to attach the power of social commerce, it is necessary to study the process and uniqueness of how consumers behave in this setting (Kang, 2014. Zoha, 2016). While the existing literatures such as Celli et al., 2017; Kang, 2014.; Zoha, 2016 highlight the importance of social media engagement and purchase intent, it falls short of comprehensively analyzing how individual engagement metrics, such as likes, comments, and shares, directly affect a consumer's purchase likelihood. Hence, this is the gap that this study wants to fill by investigating the influence of social media engagement metrics on the purchase intent of online shoppers.

Statement of the Problem

While the significance of social media in shaping consumer behaviour is undeniable, a substantial gap exists in understanding how social media engagement metrics influence the purchase intent of online shoppers. As businesses increasingly allocate resources to their social media strategies, it becomes paramount to assess the effectiveness of these efforts in driving consumer purchasing decisions. Existing literature (Agmeka et al., 2019; Ahmad et al., 2019) often needs to delve into the granular aspects of engagement metrics, such as likes, comments, shares, and click-through rates, and how they affect purchase intent. However, Forrester Research (2007) observes that interaction with social media was unrelated to purchase intention.

This gap in knowledge hinders businesses and marketers from fully capitalizing on their social media efforts to drive conversions and revenue. Hence, this research aims to bridge this gap by investigating the influence of social media engagement metrics on the purchase intent of online shoppers. In line with this argument, the objectives of this study examined social media engagement metrics and purchase intent.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Social Media Engagement Metrics

Social media engagement metrics encompass a wide range of quantitative and qualitative indicators that reflect how users interact with a brand's content on social media platforms. Common engagement metrics include likes, comments, shares, click-through rates, followers, and mentions. These metrics serve as key performance indicators (KPIs) for businesses to assess the effectiveness of their social media campaigns (Smith, 2017). Understanding the significance of each engagement metric and how they collectively contribute to brand visibility and customer engagement is crucial for businesses looking to harness the power of social media for marketing. Furthermore, Kotler & Armstrong (2016) consider how various engagement metrics contribute to the decision-making process of online shoppers:

➤ **Likes and Favorites:** Likes and favorites are among the most basic forms of engagement on social media platforms. They represent a user's approval or positive sentiment towards a post or product. Research has suggested that a high number of likes can serve as social proof, indicating that a product or brand is well-received by others (Kotler & Armstrong 2016). This social proof can positively influence an online shopper's perception of the product or brand, potentially increasing their purchase intent.

➤ **Comments and Reviews:** Comments and reviews provide valuable user-generated content that can significantly impact purchase intent. Positive comments and reviews can enhance a product's credibility and trustworthiness. A study by Kotler & Armstrong (2016) found that positive comments and reviews on social media can directly boost purchase intent.

➤ **Shares and Retweets:** Shares and retweets indicate that users find a post or product interesting enough to share with their own networks. This action according to Kotler & Armstrong (2016) extends the reach of the content and increases its visibility. When a post garners numerous shares, it can create a sense of excitement and urgency around a product, potentially spurring purchase intent.

➤ **Click-Through Rates:** Click-through rates (CTRs) measure the percentage of users who click on a link or call-to-action button in a social media post to access additional information or make a purchase. Jährig, et al (2017) says high click-through rates suggest that the content is engaging and persuasive. A study by Jährig, et al (2017) found that posts with higher click-through rates were more likely to lead to a purchase.

➤ **Followers and Subscribers:** The number of followers or subscribers a social media account has can influence purchase intent. A large following can signal the popularity and trustworthiness of a brand or influencer. Users may be more inclined to consider a product recommended by an account with a substantial following (Jährig et al, 2017). However, the quality of followers is also important; genuine and engaged followers are more likely to convert into customers (Kotler & Armstrong, 2016).

➤ **Mentions and User-Generated Content:** When users mention a brand or product on social media or create user-generated content related to it, they contribute to its visibility and credibility. This type of organic endorsement can significantly influence purchase intent, as it reflects authentic experiences and recommendations from peers (Kotler & Armstrong, 2016). Brands that encourage and feature user-generated content can harness its power to influence potential buyers.

Purchase Intent

Purchase intent, in the context of online shopping, refers to a consumer's inclination or readiness to make a purchase. Linjuan (2013) says it is a critical precursor to the actual conversion of a website visitor into a customer. Purchase intent can be influenced by various factors, including product quality, pricing, reviews, and brand reputation (Linjuan, 2013). The role of social media in shaping purchase intent according to Linjuan (2013) has gained

increasing attention, as consumers often use these platforms to seek product information, read reviews, and engage with brands before making purchasing decisions. Similarly, Kang (2014) argue that purchase intent, in the context of social media engagement metrics, refers to the likelihood or inclination of an individual to make a purchase as a result of their interactions and engagement with content, products, or brands on social media platforms. Kang (2014) says it is a key indicator of a consumer's readiness to transition from being a passive observer or casual browser to an active buyer.

Impact of Social Media on Purchase Intent
Ahmadet al (2019) observed that there is a relationship between social media and consumer behavior, with a focus on brand awareness, customer loyalty, and information-seeking behavior. Ahmadet al (2019) maintains that social media platforms can significantly impact consumers' purchase intent by creating brand awareness, fostering trust, and providing easy access to product information and reviews. However, the specific influence of engagement metrics on purchase intent remains an underexplored area. Social media platforms serve as hubs for product discovery and research. Consumers often turn to platforms like Instagram, Pinterest, and YouTube to explore new products, services, and trends (Ahmadet al 2019). These platforms are filled with visually appealing content that showcases products in action. Influencers and content creators provide reviews and tutorials, helping consumers make informed decisions.

Theoretical framework:-Purchase Intent Theory
Ajzen (1985) held that customers' purchase intentions, which may be thought of as the subjective tendency of consumers to choose a particular product, are composed of consumers' attitudes toward a particular product or brand paired with the impact of external circumstances. It has also been demonstrated to be a significant consumer behavior predictor (Bodhi et al, 2022). Purchase Intent Theory, according to Bodhi et al, (2022) is a psychological model that explores the cognitive and emotional processes that influence an individual's intention to make a purchase.

Cao et al (2018) mention that one of the core components of this theory is the individual's attitude toward a specific product or brand. This attitude is shaped by their beliefs, emotions, and overall perception of the offering. A positive attitude is more likely to result in purchase intent (Cao et al 2018). As clearly observe by Bodhi et al, (2022) consumers evaluate the perceived value of a product or service concerning its price. If they believe that the benefits outweigh the costs, purchase intent is more likely to be high (Bodhi et al, 2022). Purchase Intent Theory also takes into account the influence of social factors. These include the opinions and behaviors of friends, family, and reference groups. If these groups have a positive view of the product or brand, it can positively affect purchase intent (Cao et al, 2018).

Thus, this theory is relevant to this study because it acknowledges that an individual's perception of their ability to perform the purchase action can influence intent. Inline, social media content, particularly product reviews, demonstrations, and endorsements, shapes consumers' attitudes toward products and brands. High levels of engagement with positive social media content can contribute to a more favorable attitude, increasing purchase intent. Therefore it is believed that when users engage with posts that highlight the value

proposition, they are more likely to perceive a favorable balance between benefits and costs, positively affecting purchase intent. Engagement metrics, such as likes, shares, and comments, provide social proof; hence the need to examine whether social media engagement metrics influence the purchase intention of online shoppers.

METHODOLOGY
Data Collection:
The survey method was adopted to collect data from 300 online shoppers who were undergraduates of the Federal University of Technology, Akure, and use social media platforms regularly. Respondents were purposively selected based on the justification that they had engaged with brands on social media before the study time. Items in the survey requested respondents to rate their purchase intent for different product categories, such as clothing, electronics, books, etc., on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means very unlikely and 5 means very likely. Respondents were also requested to identify their level of involvement with each product category, which is the degree of interest or importance attached to such product/brand on a scale of 1 to 5, where one means very low and 5 means very high. Also, respondents were requested to provide their social media engagement metrics for each category, such as the number of likes, comments, shares and followers they have or receive on their social media posts related to that product category.

Data Analysis
This study employed the use of spreadsheet software to organize and clean the data collected from the survey. Similarly, statistical software was used to perform simple and multiple regression analysis on the prepared data. R-squared, adjusted R-squared, F-test, t-test-value, standard error, confidence interval, were used to test the significance and validity of the regression model and table was used to display and summarize data.
The formula that was used to specify the regression mode is thus:
$$=\beta_0+\beta_1 x_1+\beta_2 x_2+...+\beta_k x_k+\epsilon$$
Where:

Y is the purchase intent for a given product category
β_0 is the intercept or constant term
β_1 to $\beta_5 x$ are the regression coefficients or slopes
X_1 to X_5 are the independent variables or predictors
X_1 is the number of likes
X_2 is the number of comments
X_3 is the number of shares
X_4 is the number of followers
X_5 is the level of involvement
ϵ is the error term or residual

RESULTS

Table 1: descriptive statistics of purchase intent and social media engagement metrics by product category

Product category	Purchase intent	Likes	Comments	Shares	Followers	Involvement
Clothing	3.52(0.8)	25.43(12.3)	8.21(4.56)	6.32(3.4)	54.67(23.7)	3.67(0.98)
Electronics	3.28(0.9)	18.76(9.87)	6.54(3.6.)	4.87(2.9)	43.21919.5)	3.43(1.02)
Books	3.76(0.8)	22.65(11.4)	7.65(4.32)	5.76(3.2)	48.54(21.6)	3.87(0.95)
Cosmetics	3.43(0.8)	24.54(12.6)	7.98(4.54)	6.12(3.5)	51.32(22.4)	3.54(0.97)
sports	3.21(0.9)	19.87(10.3)	6.76(3.76)	5.21(3.12)	45.65(20.32)	3.21(1.01)

Field survey, 2023

Note: the values in parentheses are the standard deviations

Table 2: Regression coefficients and statistics of the regression model

Variables	Coefficient	Standard error	t-value	p-value	95% confidence interval
intercept	0.54	0.23	2.35	0.02	[0.09,0.99]
likes	0.03	0.01	2.65	0.01	[0.01,0.05]
comments	0.04	0.01	3.21	0.00	0.02,0.06]
Shares	0.02	0.001	-1.76	0.08	[-0.04,0]
followers	0.01	0.2	1-1-	1-1-	1-1-1

Field survey, 2023

Discussion of Findings

This paper examined the influence of social media engagement metrics on the purchase intent of online shoppers. The results of the multiple regression analysis showed that social media engagement metrics significantly influence purchase intent among online shoppers. This result supports the argument of Anderson (2016), who argues that the advent of the internet and social media platforms has transformed how consumers interact with brands and make purchase decisions. Anderson (2016) maintains that social media has revolutionized how people connect and share their lives and how they shop. In line with this finding, Kang (2014) believes that social media is a dynamic tool to lift online sales. Also, this finding supports the assumption of the purchase intent theory, which showcases the consumer propensity to purchase. It acknowledges that an individual's perception of their ability to perform the purchase action can influence intent. Social media content shapes consumers' attitudes toward products and brands, particularly product reviews, demonstrations, and endorsements. High levels of engagement with positive social media content can contribute to a more favourable attitude, increasing purchase intent. Therefore, it is believed that when

users engage with posts that highlight the value proposition, they are more likely to perceive a favourable balance between benefits and costs, positively affecting purchase intent.

Similarly, findings showed that the number of likes and comments has a positive effect, while the number of shares and followers has a negative effect. The level of involvement also has a positive effect on purchase intent. The regression model explains about 42% of the purchase intent variation, indicating a moderate fit. The regression coefficients are all statically significant at the 0.05 level, except for the number of shares, which is marginally significant at the 0.08 level. Thus, the result contradicts the findings by Forrester Research 2007, which observed that interaction with social media was unrelated to purchase intention. However, this research has established a relationship between social media and purchase intention. Therefore, social media platforms can significantly influence consumers' purchase intent by creating brand awareness, fostering trust, and providing easy access to product information and reviews.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper explored the influence of social media engagement metrics on the purchase intent of online shoppers. The study's findings showed that social media engagement metrics significantly influence purchase intent among online shoppers. Thus, the paper concludes that social media engagement metrics vary depending on the consumer's product category and level of involvement. For instance, consumers more involved with a product category tend to have higher purchase intent than those less involved. Similarly, consumers who receive more likes and comments on their social media posts related to a product category tend to have higher purchase intent than those who receive fewer likes and comments. However, consumers with more shares and followers on their social media posts related to a product category tend to have lower purchase intent than those with fewer shares and followers. This may be because more shares and followers indicate more exposure and competition, which may reduce the uniqueness and attractiveness of the product.

This paper recommends that marketers should design effective strategies to leverage social media platforms to influence consumer engagement and increase sales. For example, marketers should encourage consumers to like and comment on their social media posts related to their products, as this can increase their purchase intent. Marketers should also segment their target market based on their level of involvement with their product category and tailor their social media content accordingly. Marketers should also monitor and manage their social media reputation, as too many shares and followers may have a negative impact on their purchase intent.

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