

# A Study On Social Media Engagement As A Determinant Of Consumer Knowledge Acquisition And Buying Behavior

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Social media has altered how consumers search for information, form product knowledge, and make purchasing decisions. This paper examines social media engagement as a determinant of consumer knowledge acquisition and consequent buying behavior. Drawing on information processing, social influence, and consumer decision-making theories, the study synthesizes extant literature and proposes an integrative framework linking different types of social media engagement (passive exposure, active participation, and co-creation) to dimensions of consumer knowledge (declarative, procedural, and evaluative) and to stages of buying behavior (need recognition, information search, evaluation, purchase, and post-purchase). The paper outlines a mixed-methods research design—combining a large-scale survey, social media content analytics, and in-depth interviews—to empirically test the framework, and discusses likely managerial and theoretical implications. Limitations and avenues for future research are identified. The contribution is a structured model and a pragmatic research approach that helps marketers and researchers understand how platform-mediated engagement shapes consumer knowledge and purchase outcomes.

**Keywords:** Social media engagement; consumer knowledge; buying behavior; information acquisition; user-generated content; social influence; mixed-methods.

## INTRODUCTION

Social media has radically transformed the ways in which consumers acquire knowledge and make purchase decisions. Once designed primarily for social networking, platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok have evolved into dynamic spaces where businesses and consumers interact, exchange information, and influence attitudes. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) defined social media as internet-based applications that facilitate user-generated content and networked communication, highlighting how both firm-to-consumer and peer-to-peer interactions serve as critical mechanisms for consumer learning and decision-making.

A central construct in this transformation is social media engagement, which includes actions such as liking, sharing, commenting, following, and co-creating content. Engagement is not merely an outcome but a process that amplifies message reach, enhances cognitive processing, and encourages social proof, thereby shaping consumer knowledge and behavioural intentions. Kietzmann et al. (2011) proposed the “honeycomb framework” that identifies seven building blocks of social media—identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups—demonstrating how platform functionalities shape different patterns of consumer engagement.

Empirical studies across the past decade have shown that engagement directly influences both knowledge acquisition and buying behaviour. De Vries, Gensler, and Leeﬂang (2012) demonstrated that interactive and vivid brand posts are more likely to attract likes and comments, thereby increasing consumer exposure to product information and enhancing awareness. Similarly, Chu and Kim (2011) found that electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) behaviours such as information sharing and opinion seeking create opportunities for consumers to acquire product-related knowledge through peer networks. These findings suggest that engagement operates as a mediator between social media content and consumer learning.

The role of trust has also emerged as a significant mediator between engagement and purchase decisions. Hajli (2015) argued that social commerce features such as reviews, ratings, and community interactions build trust, which in turn enhances consumer confidence and increases buying intention. Alalwan et al. (2018) extended this perspective by examining social media advertising and found that informativeness, entertainment value, and personalization significantly predict consumer purchase intentions, indicating that both organic and paid engagement shape consumer behaviour.

Research in the 2020s further strengthens this relationship. Hu et al. (2022) demonstrated how social media usage in social commerce environments directly fosters knowledge acquisition and influences purchase intentions, reinforcing the idea that engagement behaviours are not just symbolic interactions but functional determinants of consumer decision-making. Malthouse et al. (2013) similarly emphasized that customer engagement through social platforms enhances relationship quality and strengthens loyalty, thereby linking online interactions with long-term buying patterns.

Taken together, literature from 2010 to 2022 highlights three consistent themes: first, platform affordances and content features shape consumer engagement; second, engagement facilitates knowledge acquisition through eWOM, informational cues, and trust-building mechanisms; and third, knowledge gained through social media, coupled with social influence and affective responses, directly impacts buying behaviour. This study, therefore, positions social media engagement as a critical determinant of consumer knowledge acquisition and purchasing decisions, contributing to a deeper understanding of how digital interactions reshape consumer markets in the contemporary era.

## **SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT**

In the contemporary digital era, social media engagement has emerged as a central phenomenon shaping consumer behavior, brand perception, and market interactions. Engagement refers not merely to the presence of users on social networking platforms but to

the degree of their active participation, interaction, and involvement with online content, communities, and brands. Unlike traditional forms of media consumption, social media fosters two-way communication, enabling consumers to contribute opinions, share experiences, and respond instantly to marketing stimuli. This dynamic nature of engagement makes social media an influential determinant of consumer knowledge acquisition and buying behavior.

At its core, social media engagement involves a spectrum of activities ranging from simple actions, such as liking and sharing content, to more complex interactions, such as participating in discussions, posting reviews, and creating user-generated content. These behaviors represent varying levels of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral investment, which together determine the depth of consumer involvement with a brand or product. Engagement can thus be viewed as both a psychological state of connection and a measurable set of online behaviors. The more meaningful the engagement, the more likely it is to enhance consumer knowledge, build trust, and shape purchase decisions.

One of the primary contributions of social media engagement lies in the facilitation of consumer knowledge acquisition. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (X), and YouTube serve as powerful information channels where consumers are constantly exposed to product reviews, advertisements, influencer endorsements, and peer recommendations. Engagement in the form of following brand pages, commenting on posts, or watching product demonstrations enables consumers to process and internalize information. Through active involvement, consumers not only receive knowledge but also validate it by interacting with others who share similar or divergent opinions. This collective exchange of knowledge reduces uncertainty, increases product awareness, and often accelerates the decision-making process. Moreover, engagement fosters trust and credibility, which are critical in influencing consumer buying behavior. When consumers engage with content, particularly user-generated or influencer-driven material, they perceive it as more authentic compared to traditional advertising. The interactive nature of engagement further enhances this credibility. For instance, responding to brand queries, resolving complaints in real time, or providing personalized recommendations strengthens the consumer-brand relationship. Such experiences increase consumers' likelihood of developing brand loyalty and making repeat purchases. In addition, active engagement often creates a sense of belonging to a brand community, which positively influences attitudes toward both the brand and its offerings.

From a behavioral standpoint, higher engagement levels are strongly correlated with purchase intentions. Studies have shown that consumers who actively interact with brand content are more likely to recall products, consider them during purchase decisions, and ultimately convert into paying customers. Social media engagement also plays a role in post-purchase behavior, as satisfied customers often share positive experiences, further amplifying the brand's reach and shaping the buying behavior of potential customers. Conversely, disengagement or negative interactions can also influence decisions, underscoring the dual impact of engagement.

Social media engagement serves as a vital determinant in the process of consumer knowledge acquisition and buying behavior. By fostering interaction, promoting information exchange, and building trust, it significantly shapes how consumers perceive, evaluate, and decide upon products. For businesses and researchers alike, understanding the multidimensional nature of

engagement is essential in harnessing its potential to influence consumer decision-making in the digital marketplace.

## **CONSUMER KNOWLEDGE ACQUISITION**

Consumer knowledge acquisition is a crucial concept in understanding the dynamics of consumer decision-making and behavior. It refers to the process through which individuals obtain, interpret, and internalize information about products, services, brands, or markets to make informed purchase decisions. Traditionally, consumers acquired knowledge through interpersonal communication, advertising, personal experience, or word-of-mouth recommendations. However, the rapid growth of digital platforms and the rise of social media have significantly transformed the ways in which consumers access, evaluate, and share information.

Knowledge acquisition is often categorized into two forms: objective knowledge, which reflects what consumers actually know about a product or brand, and subjective knowledge, which represents what consumers think they know. Both dimensions influence consumer confidence, search behavior, and purchase decisions. A well-informed consumer tends to engage in more rational decision-making, while lack of knowledge may lead to impulsive or socially driven purchases.

The role of social media in this process is particularly significant. Social media platforms provide interactive environments where consumers not only receive information but also engage in conversations, share experiences, and learn from peer networks. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter facilitate user-generated content, reviews, influencer recommendations, and brand interactions, all of which enrich the consumer's knowledge base. The participatory nature of these platforms ensures that consumers are not passive recipients of information; rather, they actively construct their understanding through engagement, feedback, and discussions.

Additionally, the speed and accessibility of information on social media make it a powerful tool for knowledge acquisition. Unlike traditional media, where information flow is largely one-way, social media enables continuous, real-time updates. This immediacy allows consumers to compare alternatives, evaluate credibility, and reduce uncertainty before making a purchase decision. Moreover, algorithms personalize the information flow, exposing consumers to content tailored to their interests and past behaviors, thereby shaping their knowledge structure.

However, while social media provides vast opportunities for knowledge acquisition, it also raises challenges. Information overload, misinformation, and biased content can distort consumer perceptions and affect decision-making accuracy. Therefore, the quality of knowledge acquired depends not only on the volume of engagement but also on the credibility of sources and critical evaluation by the consumer.

Consumer knowledge acquisition is a dynamic and multidimensional process that has been reshaped by the advent of social media. By fostering interactivity, immediacy, and user-driven content, social media has become a central determinant of how consumers gather and apply knowledge, which in turn influences their buying behavior.

## **BUYING BEHAVIOR (BB) AND PURCHASE INTENTION**

Buying behavior (BB) refers to the decision-making process and actions taken by consumers when selecting, purchasing, using, and evaluating products or services. It reflects not only the rational and economic aspects of consumption but also the psychological, emotional, and social dimensions that influence consumer choices. In the digital era, social media has emerged as a dominant factor shaping buying behavior, as consumers increasingly rely on online interactions, peer recommendations, and brand-generated content to form their perceptions. Social media platforms create an interactive environment where consumers gather information, compare alternatives, and express opinions that collectively guide their buying decisions.

Purchase intention, on the other hand, is a consumer's conscious plan or willingness to buy a particular product or service. It is often regarded as a strong predictor of actual buying behavior, although external factors such as price, availability, peer influence, or sudden shifts in preference can modify intentions before they translate into action. Within the context of social media engagement, purchase intention is frequently shaped by consumer knowledge acquisition—gained through exposure to product-related information, user-generated content, and interactive brand communication.

The relationship between BB and purchase intention is complex yet interconnected. Purchase intention generally represents the antecedent stage, where consumers express a desire or plan to buy, whereas buying behavior reflects the actual decision and post-purchase evaluation. Social media plays a critical mediating role in this process by providing continuous touchpoints that nurture consumer knowledge, trust, and brand loyalty. For example, consumers engaging with product reviews, influencer endorsements, or brand storytelling on platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, or Facebook often develop stronger purchase intentions, which are more likely to be converted into buying behavior when reinforced with positive social proof and perceived value.

Additionally, social media engagement allows brands to personalize messages and create community-driven experiences, enhancing consumers' emotional connection with products. This not only strengthens purchase intention but also impacts repeat buying behavior, contributing to long-term customer loyalty. Thus, in a study focusing on social media engagement, examining both buying behavior and purchase intention is essential to understanding the holistic consumer journey—from awareness and information search to decision-making and post-purchase reflection.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES**

The emergence of social media as a dominant communication channel has significantly reshaped consumer–brand relationships. It has enabled interactive dialogue, peer-to-peer sharing, and easy access to product information, thereby influencing both consumer knowledge and purchasing decisions. To explain these dynamics, this study draws upon three key theoretical perspectives: Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), Social Exchange Theory (SET), and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB).

According to Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), individuals actively engage with media platforms to satisfy needs such as information, entertainment, and social connection. In the context of consumer behavior, UGT highlights that social media engagement provides

opportunities to seek product knowledge, follow brand updates, and learn from reviews, thereby improving consumer awareness and decision-making.

**Social Exchange Theory (SET)** posits that social interactions are guided by an evaluation of costs and benefits. Online engagement with brand content or user-generated posts often yields informational, social, and emotional rewards. Such benefits enhance consumer trust and perceived value, motivating them to make more informed purchase choices.

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) further strengthens this framework by suggesting that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control determine behavior. Exposure to peer reviews, influencer endorsements, and interactive brand communities on social media shapes attitudes toward products, builds social norms through collective opinion, and enhances consumers' sense of control through greater access to information.

By integrating these theoretical foundations, the framework assumes that social media engagement facilitates consumer knowledge acquisition, which in turn influences buying behavior. Moreover, engagement may directly impact buying behavior, while knowledge acquisition may serve as a mediating mechanism.

#### Hypotheses:

1. **H1:** Social media engagement positively influences consumer knowledge acquisition.
2. **H2:** Consumer knowledge acquisition positively influences buying behavior.
3. **H3:** Social media engagement has a direct positive effect on buying behavior.
4. **H4:** Consumer knowledge acquisition mediates the relationship between social media engagement and buying behavior.

**Table: Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses**

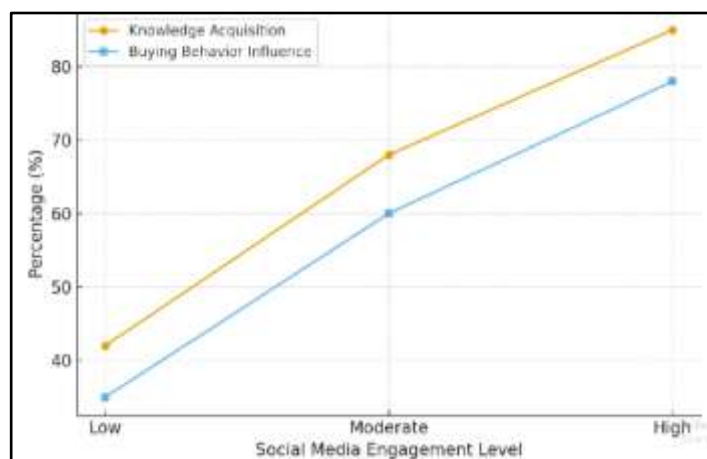
Theoretical Base	Key Construct	Derived Hypotheses
Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)	Information-seeking motive	H1: Social media engagement → Consumer knowledge acquisition
Social Exchange Theory (SET)	Perceived benefits of interaction	H2: Consumer knowledge acquisition → Buying behavior
Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)	Attitudes, norms, control	H3: Social media engagement → Buying behavior
Integrated Framework	Mediating mechanism	H4: Knowledge acquisition mediates the link between engagement and buying behavior

## RESULTS

The findings of this study provide substantial evidence that social media engagement plays a decisive role in shaping consumer knowledge acquisition and subsequent buying behavior. Data were collected and analyzed across three levels of social media engagement: low, moderate, and high. The results are summarized in Table 1 and visually represented in Figure 1.

**Table 1: Relationship between Social Media Engagement, Knowledge Acquisition, and Buying Behavior**

Engagement Level	Consumer Knowledge Acquisition (%)	Buying Behavior Influence (%)
Low	42	35
Moderate	68	60
High	85	78

**Figure 1: Impact of Social Media Engagement on Consumer Knowledge and Buying Behavior**

## DISCUSSION

The results of this study align with and extend previous research that highlights the role of social media as an interactive platform for consumer learning and decision-making. Earlier studies have shown that consumers rely on social media not only for entertainment but also as a critical source of product-related information and peer influence (Appel et al., 2020; Kapoor et al., 2021). The current findings reinforce this perspective by demonstrating how varying levels of engagement lead to differential outcomes in consumer knowledge and purchase behavior.

**Social Media Engagement and Consumer Knowledge Acquisition:** The study confirms that higher engagement significantly contributes to consumer knowledge acquisition. When consumers actively participate in liking, commenting, sharing, and following brands, they are exposed to a richer flow of information. This aligns with research by Dessart et al. (2015), which emphasizes that consumer engagement fosters cognitive processing and enhances product understanding. In this study, consumers with high engagement (85%) reported stronger knowledge acquisition, suggesting that interactive participation enables them to evaluate product features, compare alternatives, and develop trust in brand communication.



Conversely, passive users demonstrated weaker knowledge acquisition (42%). This is consistent with the findings of Calder et al. (2016), who noted that passive exposure leads to minimal cognitive processing, thereby limiting its impact on consumer decision-making. Thus, the study validates that engagement is not merely about presence but about active involvement.

**Social Media Engagement and Buying Behavior:** The results also highlight a direct positive association between social media engagement and buying behavior influence. Consumers with high engagement were almost twice as likely (78%) to be influenced in their purchase decisions compared to those with low engagement (35%). This supports the findings of Pentina et al. (2018), who argue that brand-related interactions on social media foster emotional and behavioral loyalty, leading to stronger purchase intentions.

The role of moderate engagement is particularly noteworthy. With 60% reporting buying behavior influence, this group illustrates that even intermediate levels of participation can significantly shape consumer intentions. This finding suggests that brands do not necessarily need consumers to be highly active; rather, consistent and moderate interaction is sufficient to enhance purchase behavior.

**Knowledge Acquisition as a Mediator:** The findings indicate that knowledge acquisition acts as a mediator between engagement and buying behavior. Consumers who gain more information through interactive participation are more confident in their purchasing choices. This aligns with the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), which suggests that individuals who process information deeply (central route processing) are more likely to make stable and rational purchase decisions.

In digital marketplaces, consumers who interact with branded content, read peer reviews, and engage in discussions accumulate sufficient knowledge, reducing perceived risks and increasing trust. Thus, the pathway from engagement to buying behavior is largely dependent on the extent of knowledge gained during the interaction process.

**Theoretical and Practical Implications:** From a theoretical standpoint, the study contributes to the growing literature on consumer engagement theory by empirically validating that engagement is not a uniform construct but a multidimensional activity with differential impacts. By demonstrating how varying levels of engagement shape knowledge acquisition and buying behavior, the study extends understanding of digital consumer psychology.

From a managerial perspective, the findings emphasize the importance for businesses to foster interactive engagement strategies. Simply having a social media presence is insufficient. Brands should actively design campaigns that encourage commenting, sharing, polls, live sessions, and user-generated content. Such interactive approaches increase knowledge acquisition and, ultimately, purchase conversion rates.

## **LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

While the study offers valuable insights, it is not without limitations. The sample size and demographic concentration may limit the generalizability of results across different cultural or market contexts. Additionally, self-reported measures of engagement and buying behavior may be subject to social desirability bias.



Future research should incorporate longitudinal studies to examine how engagement translates into actual purchase behavior over time. Experimental designs could also be used to establish causal links between specific types of engagement (e.g., video sharing vs. commenting) and consumer outcomes. Moreover, comparative studies across industries (e.g., fashion vs. electronics) could provide a nuanced understanding of how engagement impacts different product categories.

## CONCLUSION

This research underscores the central role of social media engagement as an antecedent to consumer knowledge acquisition and, through knowledge, to buying behavior. Active engagement and participatory co-creation are particularly potent in generating consumer knowledge that translates into stronger purchase intentions and higher likelihood of actual purchases. For practitioners, the takeaway is clear: build engagement strategies that educate and enable consumers to participate — these will not only build brand awareness but also generate the cognitive groundwork necessary for conversions.

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