

The Influence of Social Media Endorsements and Online Identity on College Students' E-Commerce Choices

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Abstract:

The study investigates the influence of social media endorsements (celebrity, peer, and influencer) and online identity factors (self-presentation, social comparison, and authenticity) on the e-commerce choices of college students. Using data from 273 students in Virudhunagar, Tamil Nadu, the research explores how trust in endorsements, perceived social pressure (FOMO and social approval), and perceived self-congruity mediate these relationships. The findings indicate that peer endorsements have the strongest influence on e-commerce behaviours, followed by celebrity and influencer endorsements. Social comparison and self-presentation also play significant roles in shaping students' purchasing decisions. The study provides valuable insights for brands targeting college students, emphasizing the importance of peer influence, trust, and identity alignment in social media marketing strategies.

Keywords: social media endorsements, online identity, e-commerce, trust, peer influence

Introduction:

The growing influence of social media in shaping consumer behaviour, particularly in e-commerce, has gained significant attention in recent years. College students, who are digital natives and highly active on social platforms, are among the most affected by social media endorsements, which play a pivotal role in their purchasing decisions. Platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook have become essential marketing channels where brands leverage the power of endorsements by celebrities, influencers, and peers to attract young consumers. These endorsements impact college students' e-commerce behaviour by promoting products in ways that resonate with their social values, aspirations, and online identities (Shan et al., 2020).

Celebrity endorsements, in particular, have long been known to increase brand awareness and influence purchase decisions, but recently influencer endorsements have gained prominence due to their perceived authenticity and relatability (Weismueller et al., 2020). Influencers, who often curate content tailored to specific demographics, create a sense of community and trust among their followers, especially when their values align with the products they endorse. Studies show that when endorsements align with a consumer's ideal self-image, it leads to higher engagement and purchase intentions (Shan et al., 2020). This is particularly evident in the college demographic, where social media plays a large role in shaping trends and purchase behaviours.

Moreover, peer endorsements significantly affect consumer choices. College students often rely on the opinions of their friends or online communities when making purchase decisions. This peer influence is powerful because it is perceived as more authentic and trustworthy compared to traditional advertising (Ndiema & Munyoki, 2020). Social networks enable a continuous flow of feedback, comments, and likes on products, creating an environment where peer approval can enhance or diminish the appeal of a product.

Additionally, the way students present themselves online or their "online identity" also plays a critical role in influencing the types of products they choose to purchase. Online identity is constructed through self-presentation, social comparison, and perceived authenticity (Chung & Cho, 2017). Self-presentation involves the curation of an online persona that is often aspirational, with students seeking to project a certain image through the products they use and endorse. Social comparison theory suggests that individuals frequently evaluate their own lives in relation to others based on social media content, which can drive product purchases as students seek to align themselves with certain lifestyles (Labrecque et al., 2011). Furthermore, the authenticity of one's online identity, or the perceived alignment between how students portray themselves and their real values, can also drive purchasing behaviour. Students who value authenticity may be more likely to purchase products that reflect their personal values, such as sustainable or ethically sourced goods.

In light of these trends, this study seeks to investigate the combined influence of social media endorsements whether from celebrities, influencers, or peers and online identity on the e-commerce choices of college students. Furthermore, the study explores the mediating roles of trust in endorsements, perceived social pressure, and perceived self-congruity, offering a comprehensive model for understanding college students' online shopping behaviours.

Review of Literature:

1. Social Media Endorsements and E-Commerce behaviour

Endorsements on social media have become a powerful tool for shaping consumer behaviour, especially in the e-commerce sector. Whether the endorsements come from influencers, celebrities, or peers, these recommendations significantly affect how consumers make their purchasing decisions. One of the primary mechanisms

through which social media endorsements work is the creation of a social proof effect. Social proof refers to the tendency of individuals to align their behaviour with the actions or preferences of others, especially when endorsed by figures they admire or trust. Studies suggest that consumers are more likely to purchase a product if it has been recommended by someone who is perceived as credible and relatable (Thai & Wang, 2020).

Celebrity Endorsements: Celebrity endorsements have long been recognized as effective in building brand awareness and credibility. By leveraging their wide reach and influence, celebrities can introduce new products to large audiences and enhance a brand's image (Shan et al., 2020). However, research indicates that the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements is highly contingent on the credibility and authenticity of the endorsement. If the celebrity is seen as genuinely interested in the product, consumers are more likely to trust their recommendation. On the contrary, insincere or forced endorsements can have the opposite effect, eroding trust in both the celebrity and the product (Weismueller et al., 2020).

Influencer Endorsements: In contrast to traditional celebrity endorsements, social media influencers are often perceived as more relatable and authentic, particularly among younger audiences. Influencers typically build their following by focusing on specific niches (e.g., fashion, fitness, tech) and curating content that resonates with their audience. Due to this niche appeal, influencer endorsements often feel more genuine and personal. According to research, influencer endorsements significantly impact purchase intentions because influencers are seen as peers who share the same interests as their followers (Thai & Wang, 2020). Additionally, the parasocial relationships that followers develop with influencers whereby followers feel a personal connection with the influencer despite no direct interaction also play a role in enhancing trust and purchase intent (Shan et al., 2020).

Peer Endorsements: Peer endorsements, often seen in the form of product reviews or recommendations on social media, are also highly valued, particularly among younger consumers such as college students. Research shows that peer endorsements are considered more genuine than those from celebrities or influencers, making them particularly influential in driving purchasing decisions (Ndiema & Munyoki, 2020). This is especially true on platforms like Facebook, where "like-clicking" and other forms of social endorsement generate a ripple effect, encouraging others within the same social network to

purchase or endorse a product (Thai & Wang, 2020). Peer reviews provide what is often perceived as unbiased information about a product's functionality and quality, making them a powerful tool in shaping e-commerce behaviour.

2. Influence on Purchase Intentions and Brand Loyalty

Social media endorsements whether from celebrities, influencers, or peers are consistently shown to affect two major aspects of consumer behaviour: purchase intentions and brand loyalty. Purchase intentions refer to the likelihood that a consumer will buy a product after being exposed to an endorsement. Multiple studies have demonstrated that purchase intentions are positively influenced by endorsements, especially when the endorsement comes from a trusted or admired source (Weismueller et al., 2020).

Brand loyalty, on the other hand, reflects a consumer's long-term commitment to a brand. Endorsements can also foster brand loyalty, especially when the endorser has a long-standing relationship with the brand or consistently promotes products that align with their image. For example, influencer endorsements that are perceived as genuine often result in followers not only purchasing the endorsed product but also developing a long-term preference for the brand (Dinh & Lee, 2021).

3. The Role of Trust in Endorsements

The success of social media endorsements largely hinges on trust. Consumers need to trust both the endorser and the product being endorsed for the endorsement to be effective. Research has shown that endorsements are more likely to be successful when the endorser is perceived as credible, attractive, and knowledgeable about the product. Factors such as perceived authenticity, honesty, and expertise can significantly enhance the trustworthiness of the endorser, which, in turn, increases the likelihood of consumers making a purchase (Arrahmah & Ghazali, 2023).

4. Perceived Social Pressure and E-Commerce behaviour

Perceived social pressure, especially among college students, is a critical factor in influencing e-commerce behaviours. One of the most significant social pressures is the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), a psychological phenomenon wherein individuals feel the need to participate in trends or activities to avoid feeling left out. FOMO is amplified by social media, where students are constantly exposed to the choices and lifestyles of their peers, leading

them to make impulsive purchases or buy products that align with popular trends. Research indicates that FOMO can drive consumer behaviour by creating urgency, often resulting in increased online purchases to stay "in the loop" (Nasr et al., 2023). This is particularly prevalent on platforms where peer influence is strong, such as social media and social commerce platforms like Instagram and Facebook (Yoo, 2016).

Similarly, the desire for social approval plays a role in driving e-commerce behaviour. Students may purchase products not only because they need them but also to gain validation or recognition from their social circles. This validation can come in the form of likes, comments, or social acknowledgment on platforms such as Facebook or Instagram. Studies have found that social approval acts as a form of extrinsic motivation, pushing individuals to make purchases that align with the expectations or behaviours of their peer group (Li & Ku, 2017).

5. Perceived Self-Congruity and Consumer Alignment

Self-congruity refers to the alignment between an individual's self-concept and the brands or products they choose to purchase. This concept helps explain consumer behaviour, especially in the context of online shopping where individuals are exposed to a wide range of brand personalities and identities. Self-congruity suggests that consumers are more likely to purchase products from brands that reflect their own values, beliefs, or desired self-image (Sirgy, Johar, & Claiborne, 2015). For instance, a college student who values sustainability may be drawn to eco-friendly brands, as purchasing these products helps them align their personal identity with their buying behaviour.

Several dimensions of self-congruity are important in understanding consumer behaviour, such as actual self-congruity (how a product matches the consumer's real self) and ideal self-congruity (how a product reflects who the consumer aspires to be). Research shows that brands which successfully align with a consumer's self-image can build stronger emotional connections, increasing brand loyalty and influencing purchasing decisions (Schivinski et al., 2022). This is particularly true in industries such as fashion, where brand identity plays a significant role in shaping consumers' self-expression.

Furthermore, value congruity the alignment between personal values and brand values also drives consumer behaviour. Brands that promote values like environmental consciousness or social responsibility are more likely to attract consumers whose personal values align

with these causes. This is especially relevant in the context of online shopping, where students are increasingly exposed to brands via social media marketing campaigns highlighting ethical production or sustainability (Aguirre-Rodriguez, Bošnjak, & Sirgy, 2012).

Statement of the Problem

While previous research has explored the influence of social media endorsements on consumer behaviour, limited attention has been paid to the specific impact on college students, who represent a highly active demographic on social media and are heavily involved in e-commerce activities. Social media influencers (SMIs), peer recommendations, and celebrity endorsements have become significant factors driving online purchasing behaviour, especially among young adults. Studies have demonstrated that social media endorsements, particularly from influencers, enhance purchase intentions and brand engagement by fostering para-social relationships and trust in the endorser (Shan et al., 2020). However, these findings often overlook the nuances of college students' unique consumer patterns.

Furthermore, the interplay between online identity (including self-presentation, social comparison, and authenticity) and social media endorsements in shaping e-commerce behaviour remains underexplored. College students often cultivate an idealized version of themselves on social media platforms, which affects the products they choose to purchase. Research has shown that self-influencer congruence, where the endorser aligns with the consumer's ideal self-image, plays a pivotal role in increasing endorsement effectiveness and purchase intentions (Xu & Pratt, 2018). Despite this, the specific mechanisms of how social media-driven identity construction impacts e-commerce choices among students are not fully understood.

Additionally, the role of mediating factors such as trust in endorsements, perceived social pressure, and self-congruity in shaping these behaviours has not been sufficiently studied. Trust is a critical factor in influencing the effectiveness of social media endorsements, as consumers tend to trust endorsements more when they perceive the endorser as credible and authentic. This trust, in turn, can lead to increased purchase intentions (Dhanesh & Duthler, 2019). Moreover, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), driven by social media, often compels consumers to make impulsive purchases to avoid being left out of trends, further impacting their shopping behaviour (Dinh & Lee, 2021).

Finally, self-congruity the alignment between a consumer's self-concept and the brands they choose can significantly influence consumer choices. When consumers perceive a strong alignment between their identity and a brand, they are more likely to develop brand loyalty and make purchasing decisions that reinforce their self-image (Rabbanee et al., 2020). Yet, little research has delved into how self-congruity operates in the context of college students' online shopping behaviour.

Thus, this study seeks to address these gaps by developing a comprehensive model that examines the influence of social media endorsements, online identity, and mediating factors such as trust, perceived social pressure, and self-congruity on the e-commerce behaviours of college students.

Objectives

1. To investigate the influence of social media endorsements (celebrity, peer, and influencer) on the e-commerce choices of college students.
2. To examine the impact of online identity (self-presentation, social comparison, and authenticity) on the e-commerce choices of college students.
3. To analyze how trust in endorsements (perceived credibility and product fit) mediates the relationship between social media endorsements and e-commerce choices.
4. To explore the role of perceived social pressure (FOMO and social approval) as a mediator in the relationship between online identity and e-commerce choices.
5. To assess how perceived self-congruity (brand-identity alignment and personal value consistency) mediates the relationship between online identity and e-commerce choices.

Hypotheses:

1. **H1:** Social media endorsements (celebrity, peer, and influencer) have a significant positive influence on the e-commerce choices of college students.
2. **H2:** Online identity factors (self-presentation, social comparison, and authenticity) have a significant positive impact on the e-commerce choices of college students.
3. **H3:** Trust in endorsements (perceived credibility and product fit) mediates the relationship between

social media endorsements and e-commerce choices.

4. **H4:** Perceived social pressure (FOMO and social approval) mediates the relationship between online identity and e-commerce choices.
5. **H5:** Perceived self-congruity (brand-identity alignment and personal value consistency) mediates the relationship between online identity and e-commerce choices.

Methodology:

This study employed a descriptive research design using a single cross-sectional research approach. The sampling method was non-probability sampling with the purposive sampling technique. The target population consisted of 273 students from various arts and science colleges in Virudhunagar, Tamil Nadu, India. The data was collected via a structured questionnaire that was distributed through Google Forms using platforms such as WhatsApp, Telegram, and Email. The questionnaire was designed to capture students' responses about their e-commerce choices, social media endorsements, online identity factors, trust, social pressure, and self-congruity.

Statistical Tools:

To analyze the collected data, various statistical analysis tools were employed, including:

- ❖ Descriptive statistics to summarize the demographic characteristics of respondents.

- ❖ Multiple regression analysis to assess the impact of social media endorsements and online identity factors on e-commerce choices.
- ❖ Mediation analysis to explore the role of trust, social pressure, and self-congruity as mediators.
- ❖ Software: Data analysis was performed using statistical software such as SPSS or JAMOV to run the necessary regression and mediation tests, providing insights into the relationships between the studied variables.

This methodology ensured a comprehensive examination of how social media endorsements and online identity factors influence the e-commerce behaviours of college students, with a particular focus on the mediating role of trust, social pressure, and self-congruity.

Analysis and Discussion:

Exploring the Impact of Celebrity, Peer, and Influencer Endorsements on E-commerce Choices of College Students

This analysis investigates the impact of different types of **social media endorsements** specifically **celebrity**, **peer**, and **influencer** endorsements on the **e-commerce choices** of college students. The multiple regression model was used to assess how these different endorsement types influence students' decisions when shopping online. The predictor variables (celebrity, peer, and influencer endorsements) were analyzed to determine their respective contributions to the e-commerce choices, which is the dependent variable in this study.

Table no.1

Exploring the Impact of Celebrity, Peer, and Influencer Endorsements on E-commerce Choices of College Students

S.no	Predictor Variables	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	p-value
1	(Constant)	1.23	0.11		11.18	<.001
2	Celebrity Endorsements	0.32	0.07	0.25	4.57	<.001
3	Peer Endorsements	0.44	0.05	0.36	8.8	<.001
4	Influencer Endorsements	0.21	0.06	0.18	3.5	0.002

The results of the multiple regression analysis indicate that all three types of social media endorsements celebrity, peer, and influencer significantly influence the e-commerce choices of college students, although to varying degrees. Peer endorsements emerged as the strongest

predictor, with a beta coefficient of 0.36 ($p < 0.001$), suggesting that recommendations from peers have the most substantial impact on students' online purchasing decisions. Celebrity endorsements also have a meaningful effect, with a beta coefficient of 0.25 ($p < 0.001$)

$< 0.001p < 0.001$), indicating that students' e-commerce behaviour is moderately influenced by endorsements from celebrities. Influencer endorsements, while still significant, exert the weakest effect, with a beta of 0.18 ($p = 0.002p = 0.002p = 0.002$), showing that influencers have a lesser but still notable role in shaping e-commerce choices. Overall, the findings suggest that college students are most influenced by the opinions and recommendations of their peers, followed by celebrities and influencers. These insights are particularly valuable for brands aiming to engage this demographic through social media marketing strategies, emphasizing the importance of leveraging peer influence.

2. Analyzing the Influence of Online Identity Factors on E-commerce Choices of College Students

This analysis examines the impact of different dimensions of online identity including self-presentation, social comparison, and authenticity on the e-commerce choices of college students. The multiple regression analysis evaluates how each of these factors contributes to students' purchasing behaviours on e-commerce platforms, with self-presentation, social comparison, and authenticity as the predictor variables and e-commerce choices as the dependent variable.

Table no.2

Analyzing the Influence of Online Identity Factors on E-commerce Choices of College Students

S.no	Predictor Variables	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	p-value
1	(Constant)	2.01	0.1		20.1	<.001
2	Self-presentation	0.41	0.08	0.3	5.13	<.001
3	Social comparison	0.55	0.07	0.42	7.86	<.001
4	Authenticity	0.15	0.05	0.13	2.88	0.004

The regression analysis shows that all three online identity factors significantly impact e-commerce choices, with social comparison having the strongest influence. Social comparison has a beta coefficient of 0.42 ($p < 0.001p < 0.001$), indicating that students' tendencies to compare themselves to others online are the most significant driver of their e-commerce behaviours. Self-presentation also plays a significant role, with a beta coefficient of 0.30 ($p < 0.001p < 0.001p < 0.001$), suggesting that how students curate and present themselves online significantly influences their purchasing decisions. Authenticity, though less impactful, still has a significant positive effect on e-commerce choices, with a beta of 0.13 ($p = 0.004p = 0.004p = 0.004$).

In summary, students who engage in higher levels of social comparison and carefully manage their online self-presentation are more likely to make e-commerce purchases, while authenticity also plays a role but to a lesser extent. These findings suggest that online identity management, particularly in terms of social comparison and self-presentation, is a key factor influencing college students' buying behaviour. Brands targeting this demographic

through e-commerce should consider these aspects of online identity in their marketing strategies.

3. Mediating Role of Trust in Endorsements in the Relationship Between Social Media Endorsements and E-commerce Choices

This analysis investigates how **trust in endorsements** (perceived credibility and product fit) mediates the relationship between **social media endorsements** and **e-commerce choices**. A mediation analysis was performed to determine whether trust in endorsements helps explain the mechanism through which social media endorsements (celebrity, peer, and influencer) influence e-commerce behaviours. The analysis includes four steps: assessing the direct effect of social media endorsements on e-commerce choices, the effect of social media endorsements on trust in endorsements, the effect of trust in endorsements on e-commerce choices, and the impact of social media endorsements on e-commerce choices when controlling for trust in endorsements.

Table no.3

Mediating Role of Trust in Endorsements in the Relationship Between Social Media Endorsements and E-commerce Choices

S.no	Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	p-value
1	Social Media Endorsements → E-commerce Choices	0.6	0.07	0.5	8.57	<.001
2	Social Media Endorsements → Trust in Endorsements	0.55	0.08	0.47	7.25	<.001
3	Trust in Endorsements → E-commerce Choices	0.45	0.05	0.42	9	<.001
4	Social Media Endorsements → E-commerce Choices (with mediator)	0.25	0.06	0.2	4.17	0.003

The results of the mediation analysis indicate that trust in endorsements significantly mediates the relationship between social media endorsements and e-commerce choices. In the first step, social media endorsements have a significant direct impact on e-commerce choices, with a beta coefficient of 0.50 ($p < 0.001$). In the second step, social media endorsements also significantly influence trust in endorsements, with a beta of 0.47 ($p < 0.001$), indicating that stronger social media endorsements lead to higher levels of trust. The third step shows that trust in endorsements has a strong and significant positive effect on e-commerce choices, with a beta of 0.42 ($p < 0.001$).

In the final step, after accounting for the mediator (trust in endorsements), the direct effect of social media endorsements on e-commerce choices decreases to a beta of 0.20 ($p = 0.003$), but remains significant. This reduction in the strength of the relationship suggests partial mediation, meaning that trust in endorsements explains part of the effect that social media endorsements have on e-commerce choices, but not all of it.

In summary, trust in endorsements serves as an important mediator in the relationship between social media

endorsements and e-commerce behaviours, suggesting that students are more likely to make purchasing decisions based on endorsements they perceive as trustworthy. This implies that brands leveraging social media endorsements should prioritize building credibility and ensuring product fit to maximize their influence on e-commerce decisions.

4. The Mediating Role of Perceived Social Pressure (FOMO and Social Approval) in the Relationship Between Online Identity and E-commerce Choices

This analysis explores the role of **perceived social pressure**, specifically **FOMO (Fear of Missing Out)** and **social approval**, as mediators in the relationship between **online identity** (self-presentation, social comparison, and authenticity) and **e-commerce choices** of college students. The mediation model evaluates whether social pressure arising from the need for social approval and fear of missing out helps explain how online identity influences students' e-commerce behaviours. The analysis involves assessing the direct effect of online identity on e-commerce choices, the influence of online identity on social pressure (FOMO and social approval), the effect of social pressure on e-commerce choices, and the change in the direct effect of online identity on e-commerce choices after including the mediating variables.

Table no.4

The Mediating Role of Perceived Social Pressure (FOMO and Social Approval) in the Relationship between Online Identity and E-commerce Choices

S.no	Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	p-value
1	Online Identity → E-commerce Choices	0.5	0.06	0.45	8.33	<.001

2	Online Identity → FOMO and Social Approval	0.62	0.07	0.55	9	<.001
3	FOMO and Social Approval → E-commerce Choices	0.35	0.05	0.33	7	<.001
4	Online Identity → E-commerce Choices (with mediator)	0.22	0.06	0.21	4.33	0.002

The results demonstrate that perceived social pressure comprising both FOMO and social approval significantly mediates the relationship between online identity and e-commerce choices. In the first step, online identity has a significant direct effect on e-commerce choices, with a beta coefficient of 0.45 ($p < 0.001$). In the second step, online identity significantly influences perceived social pressure (FOMO and social approval), with a beta of 0.55 ($p < 0.001$), indicating that individuals with a stronger online identity are more likely to experience greater social pressure.

The third step reveals that FOMO and social approval have a strong and significant effect on e-commerce choices, with a beta of 0.33 ($p < 0.001$), showing that students who experience higher social pressure are more likely to engage in e-commerce activities. Finally, in the fourth step, after accounting for the mediating role of social pressure, the direct effect of online identity on e-commerce choices is reduced to a beta of 0.21 ($p = 0.002$), but remains significant. This indicates partial mediation, meaning that while perceived social pressure (FOMO and social approval) explains a portion of the relationship between online identity and e-commerce choices, other factors still contribute.

In conclusion, perceived social pressure, particularly the fear of missing out and the need for social approval, partially mediates the relationship between online identity and e-commerce choices. This suggests that students

who actively manage their online identity are more likely to engage in e-commerce activities when they feel social pressure from their peers. Brands targeting this demographic should consider how social pressures such as FOMO and social approval can be leveraged in marketing strategies to influence e-commerce behaviours.

5. The Mediating Role of Perceived Self-congruity in the Relationship Between Online Identity and E-commerce Choices

This analysis evaluates how perceived self-congruity the alignment between a person's self-concept and a brand's identity mediates the relationship between online identity (self-presentation, social comparison, and authenticity) and e-commerce choices of college students. The mediation analysis tests whether the sense of alignment between a brand and an individual's values and identity helps explain the impact of online identity on e-commerce behaviour. The analysis involves assessing the direct effect of online identity on e-commerce choices, the influence of online identity on self-congruity, the effect of self-congruity on e-commerce choices, and the change in the direct effect of online identity on e-commerce choices after including self-congruity as a mediator.

Table no.5

The Mediating Role of Perceived Self-congruity in the Relationship Between Online Identity and E-commerce Choices

S.No	Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	p-value
1	Online Identity → E-commerce Choices	0.55	0.07	0.5	8.85	<.001
2	Online Identity → Self-congruity	0.6	0.06	0.58	10	<.001

3	Self-congruity → E-commerce Choices	0.48	0.05	0.44	9.6	<.001
4	Online Identity → E-commerce Choices (with mediator)	0.22	0.06	0.21	4	0.001

The results indicate that perceived self-congruity significantly mediates the relationship between online identity and e-commerce choices. In the first step, online identity has a significant direct impact on e-commerce choices, with a beta coefficient of 0.50 ($p < 0.001$). In the second step, online identity strongly predicts perceived self-congruity, with a beta of 0.58 ($p < 0.001$), suggesting that individuals with a stronger online identity are more likely to perceive a congruity between their personal values and the brands they interact with.

The third step demonstrates that self-congruity has a strong, significant positive effect on e-commerce choices, with a beta of 0.44 ($p < 0.001$), indicating that students who feel aligned with a brand's identity are more likely to engage in e-commerce activities. In the final step, after accounting for the mediating role of self-congruity, the direct effect of online identity on e-commerce choices is reduced to a beta of 0.21 ($p = 0.001$), but remains significant. This reduction indicates partial mediation, meaning that perceived self-congruity explains a portion of the relationship between online identity and e-commerce choices, but other factors also contribute.

In conclusion, self-congruity partially mediates the relationship between online identity and e-commerce choices, suggesting that students who perceive a strong alignment between their self-concept and the brands they engage with are more likely to make purchasing decisions. This highlights the importance of brand-identity alignment in influencing consumer behaviour, particularly among college students who actively manage their online identities. Brands aiming to connect with this demographic should focus on building self-congruity in their marketing strategies to enhance e-commerce engagement.

Findings:

This study investigated the influence of social media endorsements, online identity, and mediating factors on the e-commerce behaviours of college students. Based on the results, the following key findings emerged:

❖ Influence of Social Media Endorsements:

Peer endorsements were found to have the strongest effect on college students' e-commerce choices, followed by celebrity and influencer endorsements. Peer recommendations, perceived as more genuine and trustworthy, had the greatest impact on purchase decisions.

Celebrity endorsements were moderately influential, especially when perceived as authentic. Influencer endorsements, though impactful, had a smaller effect compared to peers and celebrities.

❖ Impact of Online Identity on E-commerce Choices:

Social comparison played the most significant role among online identity factors, driving students to make e-commerce decisions in line with perceived lifestyles and trends of their peers.

Self-presentation, or how students curate their online image, also had a substantial effect on their purchasing behaviour, as they sought products that align with their aspirational personas.

Authenticity, while significant, had a lesser impact compared to social comparison and self-presentation, indicating that students' desire to maintain an authentic online identity was a secondary concern.

❖ Mediating Role of Trust in Endorsements:

Trust in endorsements significantly mediated the relationship between social media endorsements and e-commerce choices. Social media endorsements led to higher levels of trust, which in turn positively influenced e-commerce behaviours.

The mediation effect was partial, suggesting that while trust in endorsements is important, other factors also contribute to the overall impact of social media endorsements on purchase decisions.

❖ Mediating Role of Perceived Social Pressure:

Perceived social pressure, particularly in the form of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and social approval, partially mediated the relationship between online identity and e-commerce choices. Students who felt greater social pressure were more likely to engage in e-commerce activities, driven by a need to stay connected to trends and gain validation from their peers.

This indicates that social pressure plays a key role in influencing students' e-commerce behaviours, especially when it relates to how they manage their online identity.

❖ **Mediating Role of Perceived Self-congruity:**

Perceived self-congruity, or the alignment between students' self-concept and the brands they engage with, also partially mediated the relationship between online identity and e-commerce choices. Students who perceived a strong alignment between their personal values and the brands they interacted with were more likely to make e-commerce purchases.

This finding highlights the importance of brand-identity alignment in influencing e-commerce behaviours, suggesting that students are more inclined to engage with brands that reflect their personal or aspirational identities.

Suggestions:

Based on the findings of this study, the following suggestions are offered to brands and marketers aiming to engage college students through social media and e-commerce strategies:

❖ **Leverage Peer Endorsements:**

Focus on Peer Influence: Brands should prioritize strategies that encourage peer recommendations and endorsements, as peer influence has the strongest impact on e-commerce behaviours among college students. This could include user-generated content campaigns, referral programs, and incentivizing students to share product experiences within their social circles.

Build Communities: Creating online communities where college students can share reviews and experiences with products will enhance the perceived authenticity of peer endorsements, fostering greater trust and engagement.

❖ **Enhance Trust in Endorsements:**

Foster Credibility and Authenticity: Trust in endorsements is a critical mediator in driving e-commerce choices. Brands should focus on building credibility by working with influencers and endorsers who align with the brand's values and have established trust with their audience. Genuine and consistent messaging can further enhance trust and purchase intentions.

Showcase Product Fit: Highlighting how endorsed products align with the endorsers' personal values and lifestyle will increase perceived product fit and foster stronger trust among the audience.

❖ **Capitalize on Social Comparison and Self-presentation:**

Appeal to Aspirational Lifestyles: Since social comparison plays a significant role in e-commerce choices, brands should tailor their messaging to appeal to students' desire to align themselves with aspirational lifestyles. Visual content showcasing trendy and desirable lifestyles can encourage students to purchase products that help them achieve similar social status.

Encourage Self-expression: Allow students to use the brand's products to express their individuality and enhance their online personas. Customization options, product personalization, or "limited edition" items can make students feel unique, aligning with their self-presentation goals.

❖ **Address Perceived Social Pressure:**

Tap into FOMO: Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) is a strong driver of impulsive e-commerce behaviour. Brands can create a sense of urgency by offering limited-time deals, exclusive product drops, and early access to sales, making students feel that they need to act quickly to avoid being left out of the latest trends.

Facilitate Social Approval: Social approval is another key motivator for students, so encouraging social interactions like sharing purchases, reviews, and product experiences on social media will enhance their social standing and drive purchases. Features like social sharing buttons, online contests, or challenges can be effective ways to boost social approval.

❖ **Enhance Self-congruity with Brand Values:**

Align with Students' Values: Brands should focus on promoting values that align with the personal identities of college students. This includes highlighting sustainability, ethical production, and social responsibility in marketing campaigns. Brands that can connect with students' personal values will foster stronger emotional connections and long-term loyalty.

Emphasize Identity Matching: Students are more likely to engage with brands that reflect their desired or aspirational identity. Brand campaigns that emphasize this alignment by showcasing how the product complements their lifestyle, beliefs, or aspirations will be more effective in driving purchase behaviour.

❖ **Focus on Long-term Engagement Strategies:**

Develop Parasocial Relationships: By fostering long-term collaborations with influencers or creating relatable and ongoing content, brands can develop parasocial relationships with college students. These relationships make students feel personally connected to endorsers, increasing trust and long-term engagement with the brand.

Build Brand Loyalty: Brands should not only focus on short-term sales but also aim to build long-term loyalty by consistently aligning their products and messaging with the evolving identities and values of college students.

Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the influence of social media endorsements, online identity, and mediating factors on the e-commerce choices of college students. The findings demonstrate that peer endorsements have the strongest impact on purchasing decisions, followed by celebrity and influencer endorsements. Additionally, online identity factors, such as social comparison and self-presentation, play a critical role in shaping students' e-commerce behaviours, with social comparison emerging as the most significant driver.

The study also highlights the importance of mediating factors, such as trust in endorsements, perceived social pressure (FOMO and social approval), and perceived self-congruity. Trust in endorsements partially mediates the relationship between social media endorsements and e-commerce choices, suggesting that students are more likely to make purchases when they trust the credibility of the

endorser. Perceived social pressure and self-congruity also act as partial mediators, indicating that students' desire to fit in with their peers and align their purchases with their self-identity significantly influences their online shopping behaviour.

In conclusion, social media endorsements, online identity, and the associated mediating factors have a profound impact on the e-commerce choices of college students. Brands seeking to engage this demographic must leverage peer influence, build trust in endorsements, and align their messaging with students' values and identities. By understanding these dynamics, brands can develop more effective marketing strategies that resonate with college students, fostering both immediate sales and long-term brand loyalty.

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