



The role of social media in shaping purchasing decisions in Phnom Penh, Cambodia

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Abstract. The rapid evolution of social media has transformed consumer behavior, making it a critical tool for influencing purchasing decisions in the digital age. This study, titled *"The Role of Social Media in Shaping Purchasing Decisions in Phnom Penh, Cambodia"* by addressing two key research questions: (1) What are the key factors in social media that influence consumer purchasing decisions in the digital age? (2) What are the challenges in purchasing through social media? To achieve this, a systematic methodology was employed, encompassing sample design, data collection, and statistical analysis. SPSS was used to conduct descriptive statistics, regression, and factor analysis. Additionally, reliability testing, such as Cronbach's Alpha, was conducted to ensure the consistency of survey responses. Based on a survey of 394 participants, where 58.9% were men and 41.1% were women, with a significant proportion aged 26-30, results showed that social media usage was prevalent, with most respondents engaging daily. Findings revealed that all key factors in social media such as social media engagement, influencer credibility, peer recommendations, level of consumer awareness, digital literacy, and consumer protection mechanisms had a significant influence on purchasing decisions, as reflected in a Model Summary of Regression shown R-value 84%, R-square 70.6%, and Adjust R-square 70.1% with significance <0.001 . Based on Regression Coefficient showing P-value of all independent variables are <0.01 which selecting a significance level 1% to accept. In addition, a key challenge identified in the survey is the discrepancy between advertised and actual products on social media, which undermines consumer trust. This issue highlights the need for accurate product representation, stricter ad transparency, and stronger return and refund policies to restore buyer confidence in social commerce. This research highlights the growing impact of social media in consumer behavior and provides insights into the challenges and opportunities for businesses and consumers in the digital marketplace.

Keywords: social media, purchasing decision, social media engagement, influencer credibility, peer recommendation.

Introduction

In the digital age, social media has become a powerful tool for communication, connection, and influence, transforming the way individuals interact with each other and with businesses (Andreas M. Kaplan, Michael Haenlein, 2010). In Cambodia, a country with a rapidly growing internet user base, social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok are increasingly influential in everyday life. These platforms are not only spaces for social interaction but also essential avenues for businesses to engage with consumers (Ly, B., & Ly, R., 2023).

The role of social media in shaping purchasing decisions is particularly significant in Cambodia, where traditional media channels are gradually being overshadowed by digital alternatives. With the rise of e-commerce and online shopping, social media has become a critical platform for businesses to advertise, promote products, and build brand loyalty. Consumers are now turning to social media for product recommendations, reviews, and influencer endorsements, all of which play a crucial role in influencing their buying choices (Duffett, 2017).

This thesis explores the impact of social media on consumer behavior in Cambodia, focusing on how platforms affect the decision-making process for purchases. By analyzing trends, user engagement, and marketing strategies, this research aims to provide insights into the ways social media shapes consumer preferences and buying patterns in the Cambodian market. Ultimately, this study seeks to

understand the evolving role of digital platforms in the economy and how businesses can leverage social media to effectively influence purchasing decisions.

The rapid adoption of social media in Cambodia has significantly altered the way consumers discover, research, and make purchasing decisions. With over 11 million internet users and social media platforms such as Facebook and TikTok being widely used, businesses have increasingly turned to these digital spaces to market their products (KEMP, 2024). The rise of e-commerce, along with the integration of shopping features within social media platforms, has provided consumers with easier access to a wide array of products and services (Duffett, 2017).

The research seeks to address the following questions: What are the key factors in social media influences consumer purchasing decisions in digital age? What are the challenges in purchasing through social media? The objectives of this study are as follows: To analyze the key factors in social media that influence consumer purchasing decisions in the digital age. To examine the challenges in purchasing through social media.

Previous studies have shown that social media factors such as online reviews, influencer marketing, and digital advertising significantly affect consumer purchasing behavior (Duffett, 2017; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). However, limited research has focused on Cambodia, especially Phnom Penh, where social media and e-commerce usage are rapidly growing. As Cambodia's main economic center, Phnom Penh provides valuable insight into consumer behavior and social commerce trends, helping businesses develop more effective digital marketing strategies.

Literature review

Social media engagement refers to the degree of interaction consumers have with social media content through activities such as liking, sharing, commenting, viewing, and participating in online discussions. According to the Engel, Kollat, and Blackwell (EKB) consumer decision-making model, consumers actively seek and evaluate information before making purchasing decisions. Social media platforms facilitate this process by exposing users to continuous streams of product information, advertisements, reviews, and promotional content. Higher levels of engagement increase consumers' familiarity with products and brands, thereby influencing their purchasing decisions.

In addition, the interactive nature of social media allows businesses to maintain direct communication with consumers, increasing consumer involvement and emotional connection with brands. Previous studies by Gupta and Chopra (2020) found that social media engagement significantly enhances consumer-product interaction and purchase likelihood. In Phnom Penh, where Facebook and TikTok are widely used for business promotion and online shopping, frequent exposure to product-related content may strongly influence consumer purchasing behavior.

Influencer credibility refers to consumers' perceptions of an influencer's trustworthiness, expertise, authenticity, and reliability when promoting products or services online. According to source credibility theory, consumers are more likely to accept information and recommendations from sources they perceive as credible and knowledgeable. Influencers with strong credibility reduce consumer uncertainty and perceived risk during the purchasing decision-making process.

Social media influencers often act as opinion leaders who shape consumer attitudes through product reviews, demonstrations, and personal experiences. Previous studies by Singh (2021) and Gonçalves et al. (2024) found that influencer credibility positively affects consumer trust and purchasing behavior. In the Cambodian context, social media influencers are increasingly influential, particularly among younger consumers who frequently rely on influencer recommendations before purchasing products online.

Peer recommendation refers to product-related suggestions, reviews, and experiences shared among consumers through electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), user-generated content, and online social interactions. According to social influence theory, consumers tend to rely on the opinions and experiences of peers when evaluating products and making purchasing decisions.

Peer recommendations reduce perceived risk and increase consumer confidence by providing real-life experiences from other users. Consumers often perceive peer-generated information as more trustworthy than traditional advertising because it is viewed as independent and experience-based. Previous studies by Cheung and Thadani (2012) found that electronic word-of-mouth significantly influences consumer attitudes and purchasing intentions. In Phnom Penh, consumers actively engage with product reviews, comments, and recommendations on Facebook and TikTok before making purchases, making peer influence an important factor in shaping purchasing decisions.

Consumer awareness refers to the extent of consumers' knowledge and understanding regarding products, brands, pricing, and their rights as consumers. Higher consumer awareness enables individuals to evaluate products more effectively, compare alternatives, and make informed purchasing decisions.

Consumers who possess greater product and brand awareness are better able to identify product quality, pricing fairness, and market alternatives. According to Aaker (1996), brand awareness strengthens consumers' familiarity and confidence toward products, increasing the likelihood of purchase. In Cambodia's growing digital marketplace, consumer awareness plays a significant role in helping consumers navigate large volumes of online product information and advertisements presented on social media platforms.

Digital literacy refers to consumers' ability to effectively access, evaluate, understand, and utilize digital information and technologies. In online purchasing environments, digital literacy helps consumers assess the credibility of online information, identify trustworthy sellers, and protect themselves from misleading advertisements or online fraud.

According to the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), consumers are more likely to adopt online purchasing technologies when they perceive them as useful and easy to use. Consumers with stronger digital literacy are generally more confident in conducting online transactions and evaluating digital content. Previous studies by Cahyono and Rizqi (2024) found that digital literacy significantly affects online purchasing behavior. In Phnom Penh, where online shopping and social commerce continue to expand rapidly, digital literacy has become increasingly important in shaping purchasing decisions.

Consumer protection mechanisms refer to policies, safeguards, transparency measures, and dispute resolution systems designed to protect consumers during purchasing transactions. In online marketplaces, consumer protection mechanisms help reduce perceived risk and increase confidence in online purchasing activities.

Consumers are more likely to purchase products online when they believe there are adequate protections against fraud, misleading advertisements, and unfair business practices. According to Kim, Ferrin, and Rao (2008), perceived safety and transaction security positively influence online purchasing behavior. In Cambodia, concerns regarding product authenticity, misleading advertisements, and refund difficulties remain common challenges in social commerce. Therefore, stronger consumer protection mechanisms may significantly enhance consumer confidence and purchasing decisions in online environments.

Summary of Previous Study

Table 1. Summary of Previous Study

Summary of Theory	Authors (Year)
<i>CPD: Consumer Purchasing Decision</i>	
Purchase intention	(Muhammad Usman Riaz, Luo Xiao Guang, Maria Zafar, Fakhar Shahzad, 2020)
Consumer trust	(Dan J. Kim, Donald L. Ferrin, H. Raghav Rao, 2008)
Product preference	(Uwera, 2022)
RSM: The role of social media in shaping purchasing decisions	
SME: Social media engagement in shaping purchasing decision	(Sachin Gupta, Chahat Chopra, 2020) (Maria José Angélico Gonçalves, Adriana Oliveira, António Abreu, Anabela Mesquita, 2024)
IFC: Influencer credibility in shaping purchasing decision	(Singh, 2021) (Maria José Angélico Gonçalves, Adriana Oliveira, António Abreu, Anabela Mesquita, 2024) (Lie Ao, Rohit Bansal, Nishita Pruthi, Muhammad Bilawal Khaskheli, 2023)
PRD: Peer recommendations in shaping purchasing decision	(Lackermair, G., Kailer, D., and Kanmaz, K, 2013) (Mudambi, S., and Schuff, D., 2010)
LCA: Level of consumer awareness in shaping purchasing decision	(Suraiya Ishak, Nur Faridah M. Zabil, 2012) (AAKER, 1996) (Asshidin, N. H. N., Abidin, N., & Borhan, H. B., 2016)
DLC: Digital literacy in shaping purchasing decision	(Tomy Dwi Cahyono, Reza Muhammad Rizqi, 2024) (Afrin Shirzadi, Leila Namdarian, Mohammadreza Khoshneshin-Langrudi, 2022)
CPM: Consumer protection mechanisms in shaping purchasing decision	(Patrizia Gazzola, Gianluca Colombo, Roberta Pezzetti, Luminița Nicolescu, 2017) (Tao Chen, Premeratne Samaranayake, XiongYing Cen, Meng Qi, Yi-Chen Lan, 2022)
Hypothesis and Sub Items	Authors (Year)
(SME) H1: The social media engagement has a significant impact in shaping purchasing decisions in Phnom Penh, Cambodia	
Time spent on social media	(Heinrichs, J. H., Lim, J., & Lim, K., 2011)
Type of social media platform	(Andreas M. Kaplan, Michael Haenlein, 2010)
Type of content	(Tsai, W. S., & Men, L. R., 2017)
Demographic variances	(Kumar, A., & Lata, R., 2021)
(IFC) H2: The influencer credibility has a significant impact in shaping purchasing decisions in Phnom Penh, Cambodia	
Trustworthiness	(Maria José Angélico Gonçalves, Adriana Oliveira, António Abreu, Anabela Mesquita, 2024)
Expertise	(Kancharla Laveen Kumar, Pulidindi Venugopal, S. Aswinipriya, S. Anjani Devi, 2022)
Relatability and Authenticity	(Elmira Djafarova, Chloe Rushworth, 2017)
Social Proof	(Noémie Gelati, Jade Verplancke, 2022)

Long-term Relationship with Brands	(Hughes, C., Swaminathan, V., & Brooks, G., 2019)
(PRD) H3: The peer recommendation has a significant impact in shaping purchasing decisions in Phnom Penh, Cambodia	
Reviews (eWOM)	(Cheung, C. M. K., & Thadani, D. R., 2012)
User-generated content (UGC)	(Smith, A. N., Fischer, E., & Chen, Y., 2012)
Social Influence	(Cialdini, R. B., & Goldstein, N. J., 2004)
Group Identity (Materialism)	(Kasser, T., & Ryan, R. M., 1996)
Perceived similarity	(AAKER, 1996)
(LCA) H4: The level of consumer awareness has a significant impact in shaping purchasing decisions in Phnom Penh, Cambodia	
Knowledge of product	(Alba, J. W., & Hutchinson, J. W., 1987)
Brand awareness	(Macdonald, E. K., & Sharp, B. M., 2000)
Price awareness	(Monroe, K. and Krishnan, R., 1985)
Comparison shopping skills	(Bettman, J. R., Luce, M. F., & Payne, J. W., 1998)
(DLC) H5: The digital literacy has a significant impact in shaping purchasing decisions in Phnom Penh, Cambodia	
Ability to evaluate information accuracy	(Metzger, M. J., & Flanagin, A. J., 2013)
Identify credible source	(Metzger, M. J., Flanagin, A. J., & Medders, R. B., 2010)
Online Payment Systems	(Laudon, K. C., & Traver, C. G., 2020)
Understanding of Online Security and Privacy	(Smith, H. J., Dinev, T., & Xu, H., 2011)
(CPM) H6: The consumer protection mechanism has a significant impact in shaping purchasing decisions in Phnom Penh, Cambodia	
Dispute Resolution Systems	(Zou, W., Zhang, Z., & Chen, X., 2015)
Confidence in Legal Framework	(Chen, Z., & Dubinsky, A. J., 2003)
Perceived Safety of Online Transactions	(Kim, D. J., Ferrin, D. L., & Rao, H. R., 2008)
Prevention of Unfair Trade Practices	(Bansal, R., & Gupta, P., 2020)

Based on a prior review of the literature, the current study intends to determine the key factors in social media influences consumer purchasing decisions in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The independent variables in this study are social media engagement, influencer credibility, peer recommendation, level of consumer awareness, digital literacy, and consumer protection mechanisms, while the dependent variable is purchasing decisions. Consequently, rather than adopting a single conceptual framework from a particular author, this study combines insights and elements from multiple authors and studies reviewed in the empirical section.

Based on the statement of the problem, this study aims to examine the role of social media in shaping purchasing decisions in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, with the hypotheses presented as follows:

H1: The social media engagement has a significant impact in shaping purchasing decisions in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

H2: The influencer credibility has a significant impact in shaping purchasing decisions in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

H3: The peer recommendation has a significant impact in shaping purchasing decisions in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

- H4: The level of consumer awareness has a significant impact in shaping purchasing decisions in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.
- H5: The digital literacy has a significant impact in shaping purchasing decisions in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.
- H6: The consumer protection mechanism has a significant impact in shaping purchasing decisions in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

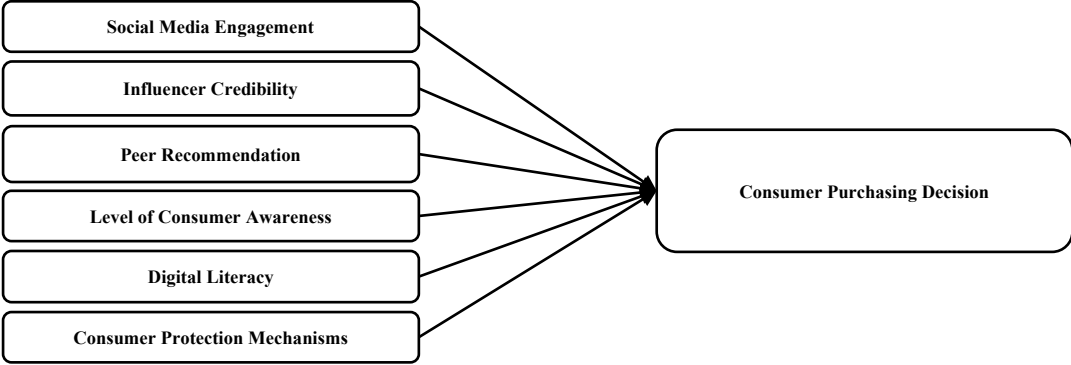


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Research methodology

This study employed a quantitative research approach to examine the role of social media in shaping purchasing decisions among consumers in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Quantitative research was considered appropriate because the study aimed to measure the relationships between multiple independent variables and consumer purchasing decisions using statistical analysis.

The study utilized a non-probability convenience sampling method. Respondents were recruited through online questionnaire distribution via social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. The survey targeted individuals who actively use social media and have experience purchasing products or services through online platforms.

To ensure the relevance of respondents, several screening criteria were applied. Participants were required to: (1) reside in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, (2) actively use at least one social media platform, and (3) have prior experience purchasing products through social media or online platforms. Participation in the survey was voluntary.

The sample size was determined using Cochran’s sample size formula for large populations. Based on the estimated population of social media users in Phnom Penh and a 95% confidence level, the minimum recommended sample size was approximately 385 respondents. A total of 394 valid responses were collected and analyzed in this study.

Primary data were collected through a structured online questionnaire consisting of demographic questions, social media usage behavior, and measurement items related to social media engagement, influencer credibility, peer recommendation, consumer awareness, digital literacy, consumer protection mechanisms, and purchasing decisions. Secondary data were obtained from academic journals, books, previous studies, and internet sources to support the theoretical and empirical analysis.

The collected data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, exploratory factor analysis, multiple regression analysis,

ANOVA, and regression coefficient analysis were conducted to examine the relationships between variables and test the proposed hypotheses.

Findings

According to table 2, the researcher additionally assessed the instrument's dependability using 394 respondents to make sure it was reliable. The research problem and relevant statistical techniques serve as the foundation for the construction of the research instrument. Each variable is connected to the others, and the independent and dependent variables are in line with one another. Additionally, nominal and interval scales are used for data collecting. The nominal scale, which included questions about respondents' age, gender, occupation, education, and use of social media, was computed. Respondents use rating scales ranging from 1 to 5 to calculate the interval scales. As an illustration, "strongly disagree" would score one, "disagree" might score two, "somewhat agree" might score three, "agree" might score four, and "strongly agree" might score five.

To ensure the accuracy, consistency, and validity of the research instrument, reliability and validity analyses were conducted prior to hypothesis testing and regression analysis. The questionnaire items were developed based on previous studies and established theoretical frameworks related to social media and consumer purchasing decisions.

Reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient to evaluate the internal consistency of the measurement items. According to Hair et al. (2019), a Cronbach's Alpha value above 0.70 indicates acceptable reliability. As presented in Table 2, all constructs exceeded the recommended threshold, indicating acceptable to good reliability levels. Specifically, Social Media Engagement recorded a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.745, Influencer Credibility recorded 0.771, Peer Recommendation recorded 0.831, Level of Consumer Awareness recorded 0.746, Digital Literacy recorded 0.761, Consumer Protection Mechanism recorded 0.841, and Purchasing Decision recorded 0.726.

In addition to Cronbach's Alpha analysis, item-total statistics were examined to evaluate the internal consistency of individual measurement items. Corrected Item-Total Correlation values for all items exceeded the recommended minimum threshold of 0.30, indicating satisfactory correlations between individual items and their respective constructs. For example, the Social Media Engagement construct recorded corrected item-total correlation values ranging from 0.415 to 0.682, demonstrating acceptable internal consistency among the measurement items.

Table 2. Reliability Testing (Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha)

Variable	Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Interpretation
Social Media Engagement	4	0.745	Acceptable
Influencer Credibility	5	0.771	Acceptable
Peer Recommendation	5	0.831	Good
Level of Consumer Awareness	4	0.746	Acceptable
Digital Literacy	4	0.761	Acceptable
Consumer Protection Mechanism	4	0.841	Good
Purchasing Decision	3	0.726	Acceptable

To further assess construct validity, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy recorded a value of 0.922, which exceeded the

recommended minimum threshold of 0.60, indicating excellent sampling adequacy for factor analysis. Furthermore, Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity was statistically significant (Chi-Square = 4957.944, df = 406, $p < 0.001$), confirming that the correlation matrix was suitable for factor analysis.

These findings indicate that the measurement items used in this study were both reliable and valid for evaluating the relationships between social media factors and purchasing decisions among consumers in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Table 3 shows that out of the 394 respondents, the largest percentage (137 respondents, or 34.8% of the total) were between the ages of 26 to 30. With 132 responses, or 33.5% of the total, respondents between the ages of 18 to 25 made up the second-highest percentage of respondents. Additionally, there are 105 respondents (26.6%) in this survey who are between the ages of 31 and 40, and 20 respondents (5.1%) who are beyond 40.

Table 3. Age of Respondents

		Age	
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	From 18-25	132	33.5
	From 26-30	137	34.8
	From 31-40	105	26.6
	Over 40	20	5.1
	Total	394	100.0

Table 4: A total of 394 people took part in the study as responders. According to the results, 232 individuals, or 58.9% of the 394 respondents, are male, and 162 individuals, or 41.1%, are female.

Table 4. Gender of Respondents

		Gender	
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Male	232	58.9
	Female	162	41.1
	Total	394	100.0

Table 5 shows that 394 people in total took part in the survey. A bachelor's degree is the most common level of education, as indicated by the table and figure below, which represent 228 respondents (57.9%) of the entire survey. With 156 respondents (39.6%) of the entire survey, master's degrees rank second in terms of educational attainment. Additionally, 9 respondents, or 2.3%, are high school graduates, and only one respondent, or 0.3%, hold a PhD.

Table 5. Education of Respondents

		Education	
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	High School	9	2.3
	Bachelor	228	57.9
	Master	156	39.6

	PhD	1	0.3
	Total	394	100.0

Table 6: A total of 394 people took part in the study as responders. With 253 respondents, employee have the largest frequency (64.2%), according to the table below. With 107 responders out of 394, business owner had the second-highest frequency (27.2%). Additionally, 8.4% of the participants in 33 frequencies are student and as a result, housewife have 1 frequency, or 0.3%. The responses to the questionnaire primarily demonstrate that the employee and business owner are actively involved in social media and purchasing.

Table 6. Occupation of Respondents

Occupation			
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Student	33	8.4
	Employee	253	64.2
	Business Owner	107	27.2
	Housewife	1	0.3
	Total	394	100.0

Table 7: A total of 394 people took part in the study as responders. With 168 respondents, income 600\$ - 1000\$ have the largest frequency (42.6%), following by income 0\$ - 500\$ with 117 responders out of 394 (29.7%) had the second-highest frequency (27.2%). Additionally, 27.2% of the participants in 109 frequencies are income over 1000\$.

Table 7. Income of Respondents

Income			
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	0\$ - 500\$	117	29.7
	600\$ - 1000\$	168	42.6
	1000\$ +	109	27.2
	Total	394	100.0

Table 8. Social Media Use of Respondents

Social Media Use			
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Yes	392	99.5
	No	2	0.5
	Total	394	100.0

Table 9. Model Summary

Model Summary	
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Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimated
1	.840a	.706	.701	.28900

- a. Predictors: (Constant), CPM, IFC, SME, LCA, PRD, DLC
b. Dependent Variable: CPD

Multiple R-value is 0.840 meaning that the strengths of relation between dependent variable (Y) and independent variables (X) is very high (84%).

The R-square = 0.706, explains the ability of this regression model and is used to measure the correlation and describing of the proportion of variation in variables. This statistic indicates that the model explains 0.706 percent of the DV is explained by the IVs for 70.6%, i.e., only 29.4% (100-70.6) of the IVs have no mentioned in the model (29.4%) is called error-terms.

Adjusted R2 value is 0.701 meaning that the dependent variable (DV) and independent variables (IV) commonly arranged the model for 70.1%.

ANOVA Test

Table 10. ANOVA Test

ANOVAa						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	77.585	6	12.931	154.818	<.001b
	Residual	32.323	387	.084		
	Total	109.909	393			

- a. Dependent Variable: CPD
b. Predictors: (Constant), CPM, IFC, SME, LCA, PRD, DLC

ANOVA-Test (F-Test) = 154.818, with a p-value of 0.001b < 0.01 is displayed in Table 10. When the ANOVA value is significant, it indicates that the outcome of the predictor analysis is connected to the population score. In other words, the dependent variable "Customer Purchasing Decision" is significantly influenced by the independent variable "Social Media Engagement, Influencer Credibility, Peer Recommendation, Level of Consumer Awareness, Digital Literacy, Consumer Protection Mechanism".

Table 11. Regression Coefficient

Dependent Variable	R = 0.840	F = 154.818			
Key factors in social media that influence consumer purchasing decisions	R2 = 0.706	Sig. < 0.001b			
	R-Adjust = 0.701				
Independent Variable	Regression Coefficient	t-value	P-value	Collinearity	
				Tolerance	VIF
Social Media Engagement	.138	3.449	<.001	.475	2.106
Influencer Credibility	.184	5.624	<.001	.707	1.414

Peer Recommendation	.174	4.443	<.001	.497	2.011
Level of Consumer Awareness	.205	4.797	<.001	.417	2.399
Digital Literacy	.140	3.061	.002	.361	2.771
Consumer Mechanism	.211	4.860	<.001	.404	2.476

Based on table 11, Social Media Engagement (p-value < 0.001), Influencer Credibility (p-value < 0.001), Peer Recommendation (p-value < 0.001), Level of Consumer Awareness (p-value < 0.001), Digital Literacy (p-value = 0.002), and Consumer Protection Mechanism (p-value < 0.001 are all very highly significant, according to Table 11 above. It was found that the dependent variable, the key factors in social media that influence consumer purchasing decisions, are very highly strongly correlated with all independent variables that had mentioned.

Discussion

H1: Social Media Engagement and Purchasing Decision.

The findings of this study revealed that social media engagement has a significant positive influence on purchasing decisions among consumers in Phnom Penh, Cambodia ($\beta = 0.138, p < 0.001$). This result indicates that consumers who actively engage with social media platforms through activities such as liking, commenting, sharing, and viewing content are more likely to be influenced in their purchasing decisions.

The result supports the Engel, Kollat, and Blackwell (EKB) consumer decision-making model, which explains that consumers actively search for and evaluate information before making purchasing decisions. Social media platforms provide consumers with continuous exposure to product advertisements, promotional campaigns, reviews, and interactive brand communication, which may increase product familiarity and consumer interest.

This finding is consistent with previous studies by Gupta and Chopra (2020), who found that higher social media engagement strengthens consumer interaction with brands and increases purchasing likelihood. In the context of Phnom Penh, where Facebook and TikTok are widely integrated into consumers’ daily activities, users are frequently exposed to product-related content and live-selling activities, which may strongly influence their purchasing behavior.

H2: Influencer Credibility and Purchasing Decision.

The findings demonstrated that influencer credibility significantly influences purchasing decisions among consumers in Phnom Penh, Cambodia ($\beta = 0.184, p < 0.001$). This suggests that consumers are more likely to purchase products recommended by influencers whom they perceive as trustworthy, knowledgeable, authentic, and reliable.

The result aligns with source credibility theory, which explains that individuals are more likely to accept recommendations and information from credible sources. Influencers often function as opinion leaders on social media platforms by sharing product experiences, reviews, and demonstrations that shape consumer attitudes and purchasing behavior.

This finding is consistent with previous studies conducted by Singh (2021) and Gonçalves et al. (2024), which found that influencer credibility positively affects consumer trust and purchasing behavior. In Cambodia, influencer marketing has become increasingly popular, especially among younger social

media users who actively follow local influencers, content creators, and online sellers on Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram. As a result, influencer credibility plays an important role in reducing consumer uncertainty and increasing confidence toward products and services.

H3: Peer Recommendation and Purchasing Decision.

The findings revealed that peer recommendation has a significant positive influence on purchasing decisions among consumers in Phnom Penh, Cambodia ($\beta = 0.174$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that consumers are strongly influenced by recommendations, reviews, comments, and experiences shared by peers through social media platforms.

The result supports social influence theory, which suggests that individuals are influenced by the opinions and behaviors of others when making decisions. Peer recommendations, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), and user-generated content provide consumers with real-life experiences that may reduce perceived risk and improve purchasing confidence.

This finding is consistent with the studies of Cheung and Thadani (2012), who concluded that online reviews and peer recommendations significantly influence consumer purchasing behavior. In Phnom Penh, consumers commonly review comments, ratings, and shared experiences on Facebook pages, TikTok videos, and online communities before purchasing products. This behavior reflects the growing reliance on peer-generated information in Cambodia's digital marketplace.

H4: Level of Consumer Awareness and Purchasing Decision.

The findings showed that the level of consumer awareness has a significant positive influence on purchasing decisions among consumers in Phnom Penh, Cambodia ($\beta = 0.205$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that consumers with greater knowledge regarding products, pricing, brands, and consumer rights are more capable of making informed purchasing decisions.

The result supports previous studies by Aaker (1996) and Asshidin et al. (2016), which found that consumer awareness enhances consumers' ability to evaluate products and compare alternatives effectively. Consumers who possess higher levels of awareness are generally more confident in identifying product quality, assessing pricing fairness, and recognizing trustworthy sellers.

In the Cambodian context, social media platforms expose consumers to large amounts of advertising and promotional content daily. As online shopping continues to grow in Phnom Penh, consumer awareness becomes increasingly important in helping consumers distinguish between reliable and misleading product information. Therefore, consumers with stronger awareness are more likely to make rational and informed purchasing decisions.

H5: Digital Literacy and Purchasing Decision.

The findings indicated that digital literacy has a significant positive influence on purchasing decisions among consumers in Phnom Penh, Cambodia ($\beta = 0.140$, $p = 0.002$). This result suggests that consumers who possess stronger digital skills are more capable of evaluating online information, identifying trustworthy sellers, and conducting online transactions confidently.

The finding is consistent with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which explains that consumers are more likely to adopt digital platforms when they perceive them as useful and easy to use. Consumers with higher levels of digital literacy are generally better equipped to navigate social media

platforms, compare products, evaluate online reviews, and recognize misleading advertisements or fraudulent activities.

This finding supports previous studies by Cahyono and Rizqi (2024), which found that digital literacy significantly affects online consumer behavior. In Phnom Penh, where social commerce and online purchasing activities are rapidly expanding, digital literacy plays an increasingly important role in helping consumers make safe and informed purchasing decisions within digital environments.

H6: Consumer Protection Mechanism and Purchasing Decision.

The findings revealed that consumer protection mechanisms have a significant positive influence on purchasing decisions among consumers in Phnom Penh, Cambodia ($\beta = 0.211$, $p < 0.001$). Among all independent variables, consumer protection mechanisms demonstrated one of the strongest influences on purchasing decisions.

This result suggests that consumers are more willing to purchase products online when they perceive that adequate protections, transparency, and dispute resolution systems are available. Consumer protection mechanisms reduce perceived risk and increase confidence in online transactions, particularly in social commerce environments where concerns regarding fraud, misleading advertisements, and product quality remain common.

The finding is consistent with Kim, Ferrin, and Rao (2008), who found that transaction security and perceived safety positively influence online purchasing behavior. In Cambodia, many consumers experience concerns related to inaccurate product representation, refund difficulties, and unreliable online sellers. Therefore, stronger consumer protection measures such as transparent product information, return policies, and trustworthy payment systems may significantly enhance consumer confidence and purchasing decisions in social media marketplaces.

Conclusions

This study examined the role of social media in shaping purchasing decisions among consumers in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The findings revealed that social media engagement, influencer credibility, peer recommendation, level of consumer awareness, digital literacy, and consumer protection mechanisms all have significant positive influences on purchasing decisions.

The results highlight the increasing importance of social media platforms in Cambodia's digital marketplace, where consumers frequently rely on online information, influencer content, peer reviews, and digital interactions when making purchasing decisions. Among the examined variables, consumer protection mechanisms and consumer awareness demonstrated relatively stronger effects, suggesting that consumers place considerable importance on transaction safety, product transparency, and informed decision-making in online purchasing environments.

This study contributes to the growing body of research on social commerce and consumer behavior in developing digital economies, particularly within the Cambodian context. The findings may assist businesses, marketers, and policymakers in developing more effective digital marketing strategies and improving online consumer protection practices.

Future studies may expand the research by including additional variables such as consumer trust, purchase intention, brand loyalty, or platform-specific behavior, as well as broader geographical areas beyond Phnom Penh.

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