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Social Media Influence on Consumerism Trends Among College Students

Ayatullah Maulidy[1*], Abdul Wahid Zaini[2], M. Aqil Fahmi Sanjani[3]
[1]Universitas Islam Negeri Walisongo Semarang, Indonesia
[2]STAI Raden Abdullah Yaqin Mlokorejo, Indonesia
[3]Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: ayatullahmaulidy@gmail.com
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Abstract:

The development of social media in the digital era has had a significant impact on individual consumption patterns, including among college students. Social media is not only a means of communication and entertainment, but also a strategic space for digital marketing practices that can shape consumer behavior on a massive scale. This study aims to analyze how social media shapes student consumer behavior in higher education, particularly in the context of campus life. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. Data analysis is carried out in stages through data presentation, data reduction, and drawing conclusions based on an interactive model. The results show that student consumer behavior is formed through four main factors: structured and systemic influencer marketing, massive promotion through various social media platforms, the formation of virtual student communities that encourage collective consumption practices, and the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) phenomenon that triggers social anxiety. These findings imply the importance of preventive measures to educate students to be wiser in using social media, as well as developing digital literacy that can curb the rate of excessive consumerism that has the potential to impact psychosocial conditions.

Key Words: *Social Media, Consumerism, Students, Influencer Marketing, FoMO*

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INTRODUCTION

In the postmodern era, consumer culture can be considered a central element supporting the capitalist system (Kumar, 2020). It contains a culture filled with various forms of illusion, fantasy, and distortion of reality, which are then socially constructed through economic communication such as advertising, visualization, and mass media as symbolic representations of the power of capitalism (Hall, 2024; Törnberg & Uitermark, 2022). Thus, the consciousness that is formed is ultimately false or inauthentic. Social media is an internet-based platform that provides users with a space to represent their identity, interact, collaborate, and share information with other users, thereby forming a virtual social network. In the context of social media, three main dimensions reflect the

meaning of social activity: cognition, communication, and collaboration (Rafiq, 2020). Changes in lifestyle and broader access to digital media and online marketing have increased individual vulnerability to various advertising and marketing strategies tailored to their personal preferences and desires. Advertisements that consistently display idealized representations of certain lifestyles contribute to shaping individuals' social constructs regarding what is considered essential and desirable in everyday life (Ghahramani et al., 2022; Sebastian & Yuwono, 2025; Sigler & Wachsmuth, 2020). Ultimately, this can lead to negative impacts. Students, for example, may be encouraged to adopt a consumptive and hedonistic lifestyle that tends to be oriented towards luxury, but does not produce significant or constructive results. This phenomenon can also be viewed as a form of waste of resources that have value and benefit.

Consumerism has become a growing concern in modern society, particularly among students. Consumerism has evolved beyond basic needs to encompass desires for status, luxury, and a lifestyle defined by material wealth. Media, particularly social media platforms, play a significant role in shaping these desires and reinforcing consumer behavior. The constant exposure to advertisements and curated lifestyle content on social media creates an idealized view of success and happiness, which students may adopt as part of their identity. This digital age, characterized by pervasive connectivity, has led to a rise in what has been termed "hyperreality," where the distinction between reality and mediated images becomes blurred, thus influencing students to pursue materialistic goals.

The role of social media in influencing consumerism has garnered attention in various scholarly discussions. Researchers have highlighted that media, particularly social media, significantly contribute to shaping consumer values and attitudes. Hall (2024) argues that advertisements, visual content, and online marketing are central in promoting consumerist behavior by presenting idealized lifestyles. Social media has accelerated the shift towards a more individualized consumer culture, where consumption becomes an expression of identity (Saharani & Diana, 2024). Social media platforms, such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube, not only provide entertainment but also serve as avenues for commercial persuasion. Yuwono (2025) discusses how advertising on these platforms creates a constant pressure to consume, further reinforcing consumer habits—the dual impact of social media, which simultaneously offers convenience and exacerbates materialistic tendencies.

The student demographic has been impacted by the growing influence of social media on their consumer behaviors in contemporary society. University students, as digital natives, interact with social media on a daily basis, absorbing content that influences their purchasing decisions. These students are often seen adopting lifestyle trends promoted on platforms like Instagram and TikTok, which in turn shape their consumption patterns. Many students actively participate in online shopping communities, frequently engaging with e-

commerce platforms such as Shopee, where promotional offers, flash sales, and installment schemes like "Shopee PayLater" are commonly used. This trend highlights the increasing role of social media in bridging online marketing with real-life consumer actions. Additionally, students' desire to display a certain social status through consumption is often driven by these platforms, which portray an idealized version of a prosperous lifestyle. The pressure to conform to these ideals can result in a shift towards materialism and hedonism, influencing students' financial decisions.

A range of studies has explored the connection between media consumption and consumerist behavior, particularly among university students. For instance, Campbell (2020) and Manzotti (2023) discuss how media representations shape individual identities, emphasizing the phrase "I shop, therefore I am," which highlights how consumption defines one's identity. Bauman (2020) offers a sociological perspective, describing modern consumerism as a cultural force that redefines individual value in terms of consumption capacity. Research by Zakiyah et al. (2024) highlights the social pressure created by consumer culture, suggesting that advertising through social media has a direct effect on young people's attitudes toward material wealth. Auvarda (2022) examines the shift in marketing strategies with the rise of social media, highlighting how e-commerce utilizes these platforms for personalized advertising. According to Pujiono et al. (2022), the impact of social media extends beyond consumption, influencing students' psychological well-being. Moreover, studies by Ruslita & Seran (2025) highlight how social media cultivates a consumerist mindset among students, especially in developing countries, which further fuels the phenomenon.

Despite extensive research on consumerism and social media, a significant gap remains in understanding how these influences specifically shape student behavior, particularly in non-Western contexts like Indonesia. While previous studies have analyzed the impact of social media on consumer behavior in general, few have focused on university students in a region where digital consumerism is rapidly expanding, yet often underexplored. The novelty of this study lies in its specific focus on how social media platforms, such as Instagram, Shopee, and TikTok, influence consumerism among university students. Existing research often overlooks the influence of socio-cultural dynamics in shaping how students adopt consumerist behaviors through these platforms. By addressing this gap, the study provides insights into how digital media intersects with the socio-cultural environment of Indonesian university students and how it drives their consumption habits.

The primary objective of this study is to investigate how social media platforms influence the development of consumerist behavior among students at Walisongo Islamic State University, Semarang. Specifically, the research aims to investigate the impact of social media platforms on students' perceptions of consumption, social status, and material wealth. It aims to understand the

relationship between students' online interactions, exposure to digital marketing, and their consumer decisions. This study will examine how social media promotes a sense of belonging and identity through consumerism, with a focus on the roles of e-commerce platforms, advertisements, and influencer culture. Additionally, the research will examine how these behaviors align with students' aspirations, societal expectations, and the changing landscape of consumer culture in Indonesia.

The originality of this research lies in its comprehensive examination of the intersection between social media, consumerism, and student behavior in a rapidly digitalizing Indonesian context. While previous studies have explored the broader impact of media and advertisements on consumer behavior, few have specifically examined the influence of social media on students' purchasing habits within the unique socio-cultural context of Indonesian universities. By combining sociological theories of consumerism with current trends in social media and digital marketing, this study argues that social media not only influences students' consumer behaviors but also plays a central role in constructing their identities through consumption. The idea that social media platforms are not just passive channels for marketing but active spaces that shape individual perceptions of success, status, and fulfillment through consumerism. Thus, this research contributes to the growing body of literature on digital consumerism, providing valuable insights into the transformative effects of social media on student culture in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research focuses on exploring the experiences and perceptions of individuals involved in various activities as students at the Islamic State University Walisongo Semarang. The primary material object of this study is the lived experiences of students specifically within the context of educational practices. The research employs a qualitative method to gain a deeper understanding of the subjective experiences and social phenomena associated with the educational processes at the institution (Sale, 2022). A phenomenological approach is employed to investigate how individuals experience and interpret their environment, offering insights into the meanings they attach to their activities and interactions within the university setting. The study is qualitative, meaning it seeks to provide detailed descriptions and in-depth analysis of participants' lived experiences rather than quantifying these experiences.

Data collection was conducted using three key techniques: observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was employed to gather firsthand accounts of participants' behaviors and interactions within the university environment, offering a naturalistic view of the research setting. This allowed the researcher to observe the daily practices, interactions, and activities of individuals without intervening or influencing the natural flow of events.

Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a diverse range of participants, including students, faculty members, and staff. Documentation was utilized to complement the observational and interview data, with the researcher reviewing various personal documents, official records, photographs, and other relevant materials.

Data analysis in this study employed the approach outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994), a widely used method in qualitative research (Hall & Liebenberg, 2024). The process began with data reduction, which involved summarizing and selecting relevant information from the extensive data collected through interviews, observations, and documents. The data was organized into meaningful categories or codes, based on emerging themes from the data. The third step involved data display, where the data was organized in charts, graphs, or matrices to visualize the findings and identify key trends and patterns. Finally, the researcher conducted a conclusion drawing and verification process, which involved interpreting the results in light of the research questions and ensuring the accuracy and credibility of the findings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Influencer Marketing

Influencer Marketing is one of the marketing agencies carried out by several groups in a planned and systemic manner to promote something so that it can be followed by the general public, especially students of Walisongo State Islamic University, Semarang. In fact, influencer marketing is of course closely related to social media because it aims to promote a brand or product so that customers buy it. Of course, Influencer Marketing must also have sources or references so that brands and products can be purchased by the general public, such as; environmental conditions, social environment, segments and target markets, to suspecting a person's psychology.

This, as conveyed by Nd, who said that "my interest in using the Shopee application, is that when I use Shopee I will get a discount, especially when the same date and month are; 1.1 2.2 3.3 (w-Nd)". This statement shows that social media is very decisive for the formation of consumptive behavior character, especially when the promotion is carried out by influencers who have a lot of followers. Likewise, In, also said that "When I play games, especially; Mobile Legend. To get skins, of course, I have to top-up first, I got this information from social media; Instagram (w-In)". In this, the informant's expression is very related to social media as a forum for influencer marketing. Promos must be given so that their platform gets added value in front of its customers. Therefore, influencer marketing as a marketing technique on social media has a great influence on behavior formation. There is a big role of influencers in influencing

their customers so that they are drugged by the invitation to buy products, and brands. It can be seen in social media applications, some of which show posts that show invitations to the general public.

Figure 1. Promotion by Infuencer

Figure 1 shows that in the Digital Era 5.0 is a valuable asset for digital marketing, especially for influencers. This indicates the important role of influencers to make the digital market competition more effective. Influencers must manage their digital marketing well and neatly so that their marketing can be affordable to the public. Not only thinking about attractive designs, influencers must have a way of building public trust, some understanding of consumer behaviors such as consumer desires, and public behavior. Therefore, the impact of social media in this case plays a very important role in the success of consumptive behavior carried out by students of Walisongo State Islamic University. So that they behave irrationally-consumptively.

Massive Promotion

Promo-massive in this context can be understood as an activity in the field of marketing by stringing together market activities. With the aim of anesthetizing consumers to choose the products made so that students at the State Islamic University of Walisongo can behave consumptively. Massive-promotion is required to compete to make a slick product so that the product made is not inferior to other products. Consumptive behavior arises from unique and neat promotions. Millions of promotions have rained down on various social media platforms. This can also give rise to massive consumerism behavior because massive promotions have rained down on social media platforms.

One of the students said in his delivery, "When I see promotions on Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and WhatsApp. I want to feel like I have these items even though I don't have money. But, when I was playing social media, some of them displayed online loans so I was tempted (w-Mh)". The massive

promotions that have been seen greatly affect his mental state so that negative behavior is created. Massive-promotional power plays a very important role in this context. The emergence of massive promotions in social media is very relevant to the formation of student consumerism behavior with the aim of getting what is desired to improve social status.

One of the students said "I got information about online gambling from social media. Well, to get the goods I have to have money, to get the money yes from online gambling which appears several times in my game ads. At first I tried it after that I was tempted. Yes, even though they lost several times. But to get that item I am willing to play online gambling (w-Ms)". This statement can be understood that massive promotion has a very strong effect on the formation of behavior so that they get the goods, of course, social media as the main forum. Behaviors like this will be dangerous if not managed properly.

Figure 2. Promotion-massive

Figure 2 shows how the form of massive promotion works to drug its customers into the promotion that has been made. Of course, their foundation is obtained from social media platforms. Therefore, manufacturers will make their products have prominent luxuries so that they are drugged by their products. So they can't help but do this activity to buy, buy and buy. Of course, this kind of behavior is consumptive behavior. Thus, social media has a great influence on the formation of student behavior of the student at State Islamic University of Walisongo.

Virtual Community

A virtual community in this context is defined as several humans who gather in one scope of the internet network using social media platforms as the main container. Virtual communities emerged from various social media platforms such as; Whatsapp, Facebook, Instagram, Tiktok, and Telegram with the aim of finding discounts to buy goods with a minimum purchase as well. So

that slowly our behavior as consumers will become consumptive to consumerism based on social media platforms.

Table 1. Factors that Make Up Virtual Communities

Factor	Interview Excerpts	Report
Mutual interest	Social media is very much related to this virtual community, especially to meet the needs of games and search for information.	Student
Social interaction	I need a virtual community to interact with others. Because, I was looking for information there.	Extra-campus activists
Shared Awareness	I need virtual co-citizenship to provide the development of the times related to the development of Artificial Intelligence.	Intra-campus activist
Technology	My need for virtual communities is to use technology to interact socially	Student

Table 1 shows that virtual communities related to common interests play an important role for students so that their needs are met. Moreover, the need for game notes and information is needed to complete the events in it. While the 2nd leads to a virtual community that acts as a foundation for student interaction in using social media platforms. Regarding the information needed.

Third, it shows that the development of the times has changed drastically so that monitoring of artificial intiligence needs to be monitored. Through this virtual community, knowledge about the development of the times, especially artificial intiligence , can be known at a younger age. Regarding the four students of the State Islamic University of Walisongo need technology as a basis to move towards a virtual community with the aim of social interaction. Stability, the use of technology has an important influence in this virtual community.

Departing from the tables above, it can be understood that virtual communities have more power for social media in shaping the consumerism behavior of students of the State Islamic University of Walisongo if the tables above are not used properly. Virtual communities play a very important role, even more so in this era that is considered easy-to-use. Therefore, control over the use of social media must be more strengthened so as not to make social media fall into disrepute.

Fear of Missing Out

The occurrence of Fear of Missing Out (Fomo) is very prevalent in this era. FOMO can occur when a person is restless and anxious when missing information. So this can interfere mentally slowly. This can result in the formation of consumptive behavior of students of the State Islamic University of Walisongo. Therefore, to overcome anxiety and anxiety, it is necessary to have a forum to shelter it, namely social media. However, social media as a double-edged sword can have a fatal impact if it is not used properly. So that the

unstoppable flow of discounts can form consumptive behavior due to the use of social media.

Ry said "yes, fomo applies to those who follow the times excessively. For, people like me with a slow life yes, not really, or even unnecessarily. Even though I use social media as well (w-Ry)". The opinion above explains whether we are forever FOMO wrong? not. Life that is too rushed is sometimes what makes us even more anxious. So that social media is not only bad in the eyes of someone who lives "slowly".

One of the students explained, "FOMO is necessary. Because, the rush of social media can make us not know information, such as discounts on shopee. If I didn't know I would have lost. It is understandable that overcoming FOMO on social media as the main flow plays an important role. Missing information is a scary thing, especially when the discount has been forfeited.

FOMO that occurs among students of the State Islamic University of Walisongo has two different outcomes because they have their own views on FOMO so that their behavior can also be different. For those students whose lives are slow, they don't have much of a problem with this FOMO. However, this is much different from those who have the ambition to get information, especially about discounts on Shopee to buy an item.

Discussion

The results of this study show that influencer marketing plays a significant role in influencing consumer behaviour through social media, in line with the theory of influencer classification. Influencers can be classified based on the number of followers they have. There are several categories of influencers based on their scale of influence: nano-influencers (with less than 10,000 followers), micro-influencers (with 10,000 to 100,000 followers), macro-influencers (with 100,000 to 1 million followers), and mega-influencers (with more than 1 million followers). The role of influencer marketing in increasing brand awareness does not only depend on the number of followers that influencers have, but also on their level of involvement and credibility in building relationships with audiences, which is a crucial factor in the effectiveness of this strategy. Of course, influencers are very influential regarding this as a marketing process, therefore according to their opinion (Ariasih & Putra, 2022; Sánchez et al., 2022) With the help of influencers in promoting a product, it is believed that it can provide a high guarantee that their followers will trust and believe in the quality of the product or service advertised. Product promotion is not only related to design, target market, and other systematic aspects, but also to how to build consumer trust in the goods produced. Therefore, the role of influencers has a significant impact on the public's perception of a product being promoted.

The process of massive promotion on social media, as a form of consumer

behavior, involves bombarding consumers with advertisements. In theory, Kerr & Richards, (2021) state that advertising is a form of paid promotion that conveys a non-personal message about an idea, good, or service by an identified sponsor. Advertising plays a role in encouraging healthy competition, as it provides more complete information about products. Products promoted through advertising will have higher competitiveness compared to those that do not use ads at all (Yuwana, 2022). Innovative promotional strategies using the right media are indispensable for reaching the market and increasing sales volume, thereby generating significant profits (Zaman, 2022). Digital marketing has emerged as a marketing medium in great demand among various circles of society (Anbiya & Sofyan, 2021; Bara et al., 2021). In implementing marketing strategies, it is hoped that the message conveyed can attract the attention of consumers and encourage them to be interested in the products offered. Ideally, to attract consumers, effective messages must be able to capture attention, spark interest, evoke desire, and prompt action. One form of messaging in marketing communication is sales promotion.

Attempts at consumerist behaviour on social media to seek bonuses are endless. Only through the information obtained from the virtual community can you easily get discounts. In previous research (Soenarno et al., 2022), virtual communities have opened up new opportunities and become an alternative for individuals to expand their social networks and obtain information without the limitations of physical space. This unlimited virtual interaction allows for more intimate relationships, both on a personal and group level. In line with Chih et al. (2017), through virtual communities on social media, individuals not only consume information but also produce information that can be disseminated to other members. In this context, a person can function as both a recipient and consumer of information, while simultaneously serving as a producer and distributor of information. However, due to their unrestricted nature, virtual communities tend to experience a lack of social control, which ultimately leads to more frequent conflicts.

Findings from (Akyıl et al., 2024; Khadijah, Oktasari et al., 2023; Sutanto et al., 2020) Individuals with Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) disorder tend to have low psychological well-being, see things from a narrow perspective, and have limited social connections, which in turn can lead to stress both physically and psychologically. This finding aligns with other studies, which indicate that their interest in real-world activities and social interaction with friends has also decreased. In addition, their productivity and concentration levels can decrease due to the constant urge to check social media (Purwanto, 2024). Therefore, the focus on activities that arise from FoMo must be paid attention to, as this will have an impact on the psyche of consumers.

CONCLUSION

The researcher here concluded that social media in shaping student consumerism behavior is influenced by four things; first, Influencer Marketing is an agency that works to promote services and products. Second, Massive promotions, namely promotions that rain down on social media. Third, a virtual community is a platform filled with several people to get certain interests. Fourth, Fear of Missing out (FoMo) is a behavior that has a social impact, which makes a person feel fear and anxiety if they do not know about information. The limitation in this study lies in one research site only. Namely, in the students of the State Islamic University of Walisongo, Semarang, further research is needed on social media in shaping consumerism behavior to be more general. Therefore, further research is needed by taking more than one locus so that social media in shaping consumer behavior can be understood more deeply.

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