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## The Influence of Creative Multimedia and Social Media on Purchasing Decisions Among Newly Employed Youth: An AIDA Model Perspective

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### Abstract

The emergence of social media has become a powerful force in shaping consumer behaviour, particularly among young consumers. Drawing on the AIDA Model (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action), this study examines the purchasing decisions of newly employed youths by analysing their perspectives on social media use and the associated forms of digital social influence. The primary aim of the study is to identify the most influential social media platforms and the key social factors that affect purchasing decisions among this group. Using a qualitative research approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted to examine participants' experiences with frequently used platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and Facebook. The findings reveal that TikTok is the most dominant platform influencing purchasing behaviour due to its algorithm-driven content, creative multimedia elements, user-generated videos, and interactive features. Additionally, social factors such as peer influence, digital word-of-mouth, social proof, influencer engagement, and pre-purchase information searching were found to significantly shape purchase decisions. These findings highlight the importance of social interactions and platform design in influencing young consumers' buying behaviour and contribute valuable insights into the evolving digital consumer landscape. The findings further reinforce the relevance of the AIDA Model in understanding the role of social media in shaping purchasing decisions among newly employed youth.

**Keywords:** AIDA Model; Creative multimedia; Newly employed youth; Online purchasing behaviour; Social influence; Social media

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## Introduction

In recent years, the rapid growth of social media has greatly influenced how consumers discover, evaluate, and make purchasing decisions. Various online platforms are rapidly influencing young consumer purchasing preferences, especially digital natives such as the young generation. Young consumers are especially vulnerable to the impact of social media on their purchasing decisions because they are one of the most digitally active groups. Platforms like Facebook, X, Instagram, and TikTok provide continuous exposure to user-generated material, peer reviews, influencer content, and advertisements, all of which affect consumer perceptions and purchase intentions (Ayob et al., 2024; Ayoubi & Naweer, 2024; Rahman et al., 2025; Shi & Ismail, 2021). Since social media has become a crucial necessity in this digital age, more people access social media to get what they need. To embrace this era, organisations must promote, advertise, and sell their products and services to different demographics of people in Malaysia and people around the world (Bakly et al., 2024; Shi & Ismail, 2021).

Social media has progressively established itself as a fundamental driver of consumption engagement among Malaysian youth, largely attributable to their escalating reliance on digital technologies. These platforms serve not only as channels for interpersonal communication but also as critical resources for information gathering, trend analysis, and evaluation prior to purchase. Additionally, the interactive functionalities—such as likes, shares, and comments—play a crucial role in contemporary online marketing, facilitating organisations' ability to gauge audience engagement and strategically tailor their offerings to effectively influence and attract potential consumers.

Despite Malaysia's alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 12 on Responsible Consumption and Production (RCP), consumption practices among youths continue to be shaped by patterns of overconsumption, immediacy, and digitally driven consumer culture (Ayob et al., 2024; Barbu Kleitsch & Drămnescu, 2025; Hasim et al., 2020). Within contemporary media environments, social media platforms and creative multimedia content—including influencer marketing, visual storytelling, and algorithmically curated advertising—play a significant role in framing consumption as aspirational, trend-oriented, and continuously renewable (Ayob et al., 2024; Prasanna & Priyanka, 2024). As a result, the persuasive affordances of creative multimedia may inadvertently undermine sustainability objectives by normalising excessive consumption and shortened product life cycles (Hasim et al., 2020; Theocharis & Tsekouropoulos, 2025). Given the centrality of digital media in youths' everyday lives, their consumption practices hold critical implications for sustainable digital consumption and production systems in Malaysia.

However, scholarly attention to how creative multimedia shapes youths' perceptions, meanings, and practices of responsible consumption and production remains limited (Putri & Rahayu, 2025; Theocharis & Tsekouropoulos, 2025). By examining how social media platforms and online social factors influence the purchasing decisions of newly employed youth, this study provides insights into the mechanisms shaping contemporary consumption behaviour. Addressing this gap is essential for advancing interdisciplinary scholarship at the intersection of sustainability, media, and youth culture, and for informing the development of more effective, media-based sustainability interventions. In this study, creative multimedia is defined as the integration of short-form video, algorithmically curated audio, and interactive digital storytelling prevalent on platforms like TikTok and Instagram.

### ***Scope of Study***

This research targets young consumers aged between 21 and 23 years who have recently entered the labour market and actively engage with social media platforms in Malaysia. The study specifically investigates the influence of four predominant platforms—TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and X—on their online purchasing behaviours. This specific age range (21–23) represents the critical 'early career entry' phase, where newly found financial independence first intersects with established digital consumption habits. The scope is delineated to focus on social and psychological factors such as peer influence, influencer marketing, social proof, and the fear of missing out (FOMO). Employing a qualitative methodology, the research utilises semi-structured interviews to capture the nuanced perspectives and lived experiences of participants. Rather than aiming for statistical generalizability, the study seeks to develop a contextualised understanding of consumption patterns within this distinct demographic segment.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Consumer Purchase Decisions***

According to Shi & Ismail (2021), purchase refers to the act of acquiring an asset, property, or right by exchanging a predetermined amount of money for the desired product or service. This process involves an individual taking possession of the item or service in question after completing the financial transaction. Several factors influence a consumer's purchase intention, as highlighted by Younus et al. (2015), who emphasise that these factors can vary depending on individual preferences, external stimuli, and situational circumstances.

In the context of modern retail, Ayoubi & Naweer (2024) note that the convenience offered by online shopping, coupled with the precision of targeted social media advertising, has significantly altered consumer behaviour. These platforms enhance the accessibility of purchasing processes while enabling real-time transactions through integrated social media functionalities. Consumers are able to

complete purchases directly within these platforms, reducing barriers between product discovery and acquisition. Moreover, the convenience of identifying, assessing, and purchasing products has contributed to higher levels of impulse buying and fostered closer relationships between consumers and brands. Consequently, social media functions as a significant channel in shaping purchasing behaviour and improving the efficiency of the overall buying process.

### ***Consumer Purchase Decision Influenced by Social Media Factors***

Social media has increasingly become a significant factor in influencing consumer attitudes and behavioural patterns, particularly through the impact of peer interactions and social influence. According to Shi & Ismail (2021), individuals are more inclined to purchase products endorsed by peers due to the psychological principle of social proof—where people tend to conform to the behaviour of others under the assumption that such behaviour reflects correct action. On platforms like Facebook and Instagram, the visibility of peer actions through likes, comments, tags, and shares amplifies this effect by signalling approval and acceptance. Osman & Shamsuddin (2023) further argue that this peer-driven endorsement fosters relational trust, especially among younger consumers, who often view their online communities as credible sources of guidance in the decision-making process.

In parallel, influencers and content creators have become central agents in shaping brand perception and enhancing consumer trust. Unlike traditional celebrities, influencers often cultivate niche audiences and engage with followers in a more personalised and interactive manner, thereby increasing the perceived authenticity of their endorsements (Manzoor et al., 2020). Influencers leverage their perceived expertise, lifestyle congruence, and emotional relatability to promote products in a manner that aligns with the interest and desire stages of the AIDA Model. Ayoubi & Naweer (2024) emphasise that influencer marketing strategies are particularly effective when influencers maintain transparency and consistent messaging, as these traits foster brand trust and positively affect purchasing intentions.

User-generated content (UGC) further reinforces this ecosystem by serving as a powerful form of decentralised brand communication. UGC—such as product reviews, testimonials, unboxing videos, and usage demonstrations—provides consumers with perceived authentic insights into product performance and value (Liaw et al., 2022; Putri & Rahayu, 2025). Cox et al. (2009) demonstrated that UGC plays a critical role in influencing travel-related decisions by offering relatable and credible experiences that consumers find more trustworthy than corporate advertising.

Another compelling factor influencing consumer behaviour in the social media context is the psychological phenomenon known as the fear of missing out (FOMO). This refers to a consumer's

anxiety over the possibility of missing an opportunity or social trend, which often results in impulsive purchasing behaviour. Marketers frequently exploit FOMO by employing tactics such as limited-time offers, exclusive product launches, and viral trends (Barbu Kleitsch & Drămnescu, 2025). Hasim et al. (2020) found that Malaysian Generation Y consumers are particularly vulnerable to such stimuli, with impulsive purchases often driven by the perceived enjoyment associated with owning trending items and the social validation received through public acknowledgement of those purchases. This sense of urgency is further reinforced by real-time engagement metrics—such as view counts, reaction emojis, and comment threads—that collectively simulate widespread popularity and desirability, compelling users to act quickly to avoid exclusion.

Taken together, these dimensions of social influence—peer validation, influencer endorsement, user-generated content, and FOMO—interact synergistically on social media platforms to shape consumer decision-making. They contribute to a persuasive digital environment where emotional, psychological, and social factors converge, significantly influencing the trajectory from awareness to action.

### ***Newly Employed Youth***

Newly employed youth represent an important consumer segment due to their high level of digital engagement and distinctive purchasing behaviour (Dinesh & Divyabharathi, 2023). Their technological fluency significantly shapes how they interact with brands and make consumption decisions (Ayoubi & Naweer, 2024). The consumption behaviour of newly employed youth is characterised by strong brand awareness, technological proficiency, and sensitivity to social values (Theocharis & Tsekouropoulos, 2025). This demographic demonstrates a preference for brands that align with their personal identities, ethical standards, and lifestyle aspirations, including sustainability and social responsibility, often influenced by creative multimedia content such as short-form videos, influencer-driven storytelling, and interactive digital media on social platforms (Ayob et al., 2024; Ayoubi & Naweer, 2024; Prasanna & Priyanka, 2024).

Social media plays a central role in brand discovery and engagement among newly employed youth. Influencer marketing and user-generated content (UGC) on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube are particularly influential, as influencers are perceived as relatable and authentic sources of information (Putri & Rahayu, 2025). Peer recommendations, reviews, and shared experiences influence trust, interest, and desire toward brands within social media contexts (Ayob et al., 2024; Ayoubi & Naweer, 2024; Hausmann et al., 2017).

## ***Theoretical Framework***

The AIDA Model, which comprises Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action, is a well-established framework in marketing communication and consumer behaviour research (Giraffe Social, 2025). Developed by E. St. Elmo Lewis, the model explains the sequential stages consumers typically undergo before making a purchase decision (Lanier, 2025). Due to its clear structure and behavioural relevance, the AIDA Model has been widely applied in advertising, branding, and digital marketing strategies, including social media campaigns (Iwamoto, 2023).

The initial stage, problem recognition, aligns with the attention phase of the AIDA framework. Social media platforms stimulate this stage by presenting users with a constant stream of visually engaging content, influencer promotions, and algorithmically curated advertisements. These stimuli often prompt individuals to identify previously unacknowledged needs or aspirations. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok expose users to content aligned with their interests and behaviour, thereby increasing the probability of capturing attention and initiating the consumer journey (Ayob et al., 2024; Ayoubi & Naweer, 2024).

Following the recognition of a need, consumers typically engage in the information search stage, which corresponds to the interest phase of the AIDA Model. Social media facilitates this process by offering immediate access to peer reviews, instructional content, expert opinions, and branded materials. These sources are often perceived as credible and accessible, particularly among younger demographics who prioritise authenticity and peer validation. For example, newly employed youths frequently consult community-driven platforms like TikTok and Instagram to explore product information that resonates with their interests (Cox et al., 2009; Jumali & Mustaffa, 2023).

The third stage, the evaluation of alternatives, aligns with the desired component of the AIDA Model. Social media platforms support this phase by enabling users to compare multiple brands and offerings through influencer recommendations, review videos, and user-generated testimonials. These features play a pivotal role in shaping consumer preferences and cultivating desire for specific products. This stage is particularly relevant for digital-native young adults, who often rely on visually rich and narrative-based content when considering their purchasing options (Ayob et al., 2024; Ayoubi & Naweer, 2024; Varghese & Agrawal, 2021).

The Action stage of the AIDA Model is reflected in the purchase decision, which is increasingly facilitated by social media's integrated e-commerce features. Consumers can now proceed from product discovery to transaction within a single platform, aided by functionalities such as "Shop Now" buttons, in-app payment systems, and time-limited promotional offers. This seamless integration reduces friction in the purchasing process and encourages more immediate decision-making. Additionally, constant exposure to promotional stimuli can lead to impulsive purchases, particularly among users experiencing

cognitive fatigue from decision overload (Ayoubi & Naweer, 2024; Hasim et al., 2020; Manzoor et al., 2020).

Post-purchase behaviour, the final stage in the decision-making process, is also significantly shaped by social media engagement. Consumers frequently share their product experiences through reviews, unboxing videos, or social media posts, thereby influencing the purchase decisions of others. Such user-generated content and social media interactions contribute to brand credibility and customer satisfaction, while reinforcing brand loyalty (Ayob et al., 2024; Ayoubi & Naweer, 2024; Manzoor et al., 2020). For businesses, this stage offers opportunities to cultivate brand advocates and generate organic promotion.

The extensive exposure to options on social media can contribute to decision fatigue, particularly among young consumers, increasing the likelihood of impulsive choices that may conflict with long-term goals and values. The real-time, algorithm-driven environment of social media often accelerates the decision-making process in ways that bypass critical evaluation, potentially reducing post-purchase satisfaction and increasing the likelihood of buyer's remorse (Hasim et al., 2020; Hausmann et al., 2017).

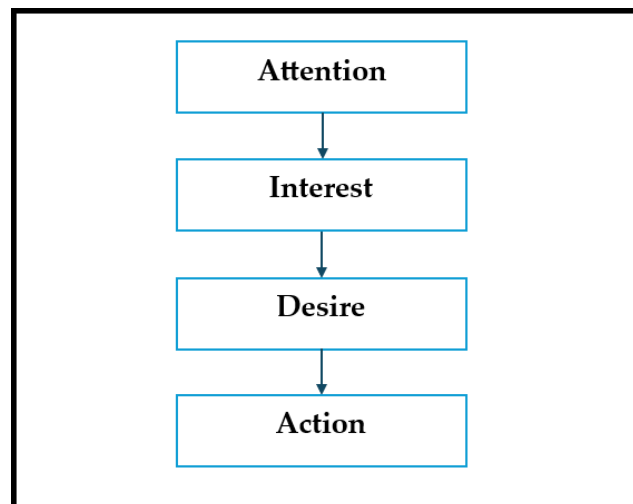


Figure 1. AIDA Model (Attention, Interest, Desire & Action) Developed by E. St. Elmo Lewis (Adopted from Lanier, 2025)

## Methodology

### *Data Collection Method*

This study employed semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method due to their capacity to generate in-depth and nuanced insights that could not be adequately captured through fully structured questionnaires. This approach offers a methodological balance by combining the systematic

nature of structured interviews with the flexibility associated with unstructured formats. An interview guide comprising open-ended questions was designed to examine participants' engagement with social media, the types of content they interact with, their purchasing behaviours, and the social influences shaping their decisions. The adaptable nature of semi-structured interviews enabled the researchers to probe emerging themes and clarify responses, resulting in rich qualitative data that reflected participants' individual experiences and contextual perspectives.

Before formal data collection commenced, a pilot test involving two informants was conducted to assess the clarity, coherence, and overall suitability of the interview guide. This step ensured that the questions were easily understood, logically organised, and aligned with the objectives of the study, while also facilitating the generation of detailed and meaningful responses. Pilot testing is a well-established practice in qualitative research, as it contributes to the reliability and validity of the research instrument. In addition, this process enhanced the researchers' confidence in conducting the interviews and allowed for refinement to improve the relevance and precision of the questions.

Interviews were carried out either face-to-face or through video conferencing platforms, depending on participants' availability and geographical constraints. Ethical considerations were strictly observed, with informed consent obtained from all participants prior to audio recording. Each interview was recorded with permission to ensure accurate transcription and rigorous analysis.

### ***Sampling of Research Participants***

This study adopts purposive sampling, commonly referred to as judgemental or selective sampling, as the primary sampling strategy. As a non-probability sampling method, it involves the deliberate selection of eight participants who possess characteristics deemed essential to fulfilling the objectives of the research. Specifically, participants were chosen based on their employment status (full-time, part-time or freelance), age range (21 to 23 years), and regular use of social media platforms in making purchasing-related decisions. Such a sampling approach is widely regarded as appropriate for qualitative research, as it prioritises depth of understanding over statistical generalisability and enables the collection of detailed, context-specific insights from a targeted group.

Purposive sampling is commonly employed in qualitative studies to ensure that participants selected are particularly knowledgeable and relevant to the phenomenon under investigation. Before data collection commenced, all participants were provided with an informed consent form that clearly explained the purpose of the study, the extent of their involvement, and the voluntary nature of their participation. Consent was also obtained for the use of interview data for academic analysis and possible

dissemination. Throughout the research process, ethical standards were strictly upheld to safeguard confidentiality, ensure transparency, and respect participants' autonomy.

Overall, the study is based on a carefully defined group of young individuals who meet the specified inclusion criteria. This methodological approach supports an in-depth examination of consumer decision-making among newly employed youth, with particular attention given to the role of social media within contemporary digital and social environments.

Table 1. Informant demographics

Informant	Gender	Age	Occupation	Company Name	Employment Type	Salary Range (RM)
1	Female	23	Part-time worker	Black Canyon	Part-time	0 - 1000
2	Female	23	Part-time worker	Nando's	Part-time	0 - 1000
3	Female	22	Full-time worker	Klinik Aqwa Care	Contract	10001-2000
4	Female	22	Part-time worker	Self-employed	Part-time	0 - 1000
5	Female	21	Part-time worker	Kelas Mengaji Sharifah Ustazah	Part-time	0 - 1000
6	Female	22	Full-time worker	Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA)	Full-time	0 - 1000
7	Male	22	Freelancer	Grab Holdings	Freelance	0 - 1000
8	Male	21	Freelancer	Lalamove	Freelance	0 - 1000

### ***Ethical Consideration***

Ethical principles were carefully upheld throughout the data collection phase to protect the rights, dignity, and welfare of the participants. Before taking part in the study, all eight participants were issued a detailed informed consent form that explained the purpose of the research, the voluntary basis of participation, the procedures involved, and their rights as participants, including the option to withdraw from the study at any point without penalty. To maintain confidentiality and anonymity, all identifying information was excluded from the interview transcripts, and pseudonyms were used when presenting the research findings. In addition, audio recordings and transcribed data were securely stored, with access restricted solely to the primary researcher. Collectively, these ethical measures ensured respect for participant autonomy and privacy and ensured that the study adhered to recognised ethical standards in qualitative research.

## Data Analysis

### ***Attention: Algorithmic Exposure and Daily Habit***

A central observation concerns the dominance of TikTok in their daily media consumption. Most informants reported spending several hours per day on the platform, with Informant 4 noting, “*I spend roughly about four to five hours on TikTok daily,*” while Informant 7 estimated “*three to four hours a day,*” and Informant 8 reported using the platform for “*around six hours a day.*” This habitual and prolonged exposure positions TikTok as a primary channel through which young consumers regularly encounter product-related content. This aligns with Jumali & Mustafa (2023) assertion that TikTok’s popularity is fuelled by its dynamic, video-based format, while Jiménez-Barreto et al. (2020) highlight the ways platform design shapes user perceptions. Consequently, TikTok has become a highly influential platform where purchasing cues are frequently embedded within users’ everyday engagement patterns.

### ***Interest and Desire: The Power of Authenticity and UGC***

Purchasing decisions influenced by social media content also emerged strongly in the interviews. Several informants reported buying products directly after encountering convincing reviews or demonstrations on TikTok. For example, Informant 4 explained purchasing a glass air fryer after being persuaded by a video emphasising its benefits, while Informant 3 indicated that beauty products—particularly those from the Skintific brand—were common purchases prompted by social media exposure. Similarly, Informant 5 described buying a soap product after encountering repeated promotions on their “*For You Page.*” These examples illustrate how user-generated content (UGC), especially when perceived as authentic and relatable, can trigger immediate purchasing behaviour. This finding is consistent with Ayoubi & Naweer (2024), Bilgin (2018) Tsai & Men (2014), who argue that social media fosters impulse buying by combining peer influence, interactive content, and persuasive visual demonstrations.

The types of content that most effectively encourage purchases were also clearly identified. Informants frequently emphasised the influence of unboxing videos, product comparisons, testimonials, and honest influencer reviews. Informant 1 highlighted the persuasive power of “*unboxing, side-by-side comparisons, and honest influencer reviews,*” while Informant 2 preferred “*testimonial videos and visible product transformations.*” Informant 8 further emphasised influencer credibility, particularly when influencers provided store links, promotional information, or price details. These responses echo findings by Cox et al. (2009), Manzoor et al. (2020), Shi & Ismail (2021), who identify UGC—particularly visually rich, experiential content—as a critical factor in enhancing consumer trust. The interviews clearly demonstrate that newly employed youth are persuaded more by transparent and experience-based content than by traditional advertising. The preference for unboxing and testimonials

demonstrates the 'Interest' and 'Desire' stages, where creative multimedia content builds trust through perceived authenticity.

Another important finding relates to platform relevance and the role of algorithmic targeting in shaping exposure to product content. Informant 1 described TikTok as “*the most influential because the 'For You Page' algorithm suggests content based on my interests,*” while Informant 3 observed that TikTok contains “*up-to-date content*” and attracts greater brand investment, resulting in widespread exposure to promotional material. These observations highlight how personalised algorithms ensure that platform content aligns closely with individual consumer preferences, increasing the likelihood of purchase. This pattern reflects findings by Bilgin (2018) and Goswami et al. (2013), who argue that behavioural targeting enhances ad relevance and strengthens the persuasive power of social media platforms.

The influence of algorithmic repetition on purchase decisions was also clearly evident. Several informants acknowledged that persistent exposure to advertisements or product content eventually motivated them to buy the item. Informant 1 recalled purchasing earbuds after repeatedly seeing the product promoted, while Informant 4 described how searching for a hair dryer resulted in their feed becoming saturated with related content, ultimately influencing their decision to buy. Although these recommendations appeared organic, the consistency of exposure suggests strong algorithmic filtering based on previous user interactions. This aligns with research by Ayoubi & Naweer (2024), Hasim et al. (2020) and Hausmann et al. (2017), which shows that algorithm-driven repetition increases familiarity, encourages impulse buying, and subtly shapes consumer intentions. The interviews, therefore, illustrate how algorithmic content feeds function as persuasive mechanisms rather than neutral entertainment sources.

### ***Action: Frictionless In-App Purchasing***

Overall, the findings demonstrate that social media—particularly TikTok—plays an extensive and multifaceted role in influencing the purchasing decisions of newly employed youth. The transition to 'Action' is accelerated by creative multimedia features like 'Yellow Bags' and 'Shop Now' buttons which streamline the final decision. These insights highlight the commercial power of social media platforms and reinforce the importance of authenticity, personalisation, and technological design in understanding youth consumer behaviour.

### **Social Factors That Influence Newly Employed Youth Buying Decisions Using Social Media**

Based on the analysis of the interview data, the findings reveal that purchasing decisions among newly employed youth are strongly influenced by a range of social factors when engaging with social media

platforms. These influences extend beyond individual preferences and are shaped by peer interactions, community trends, perceived authenticity of online content, and visible engagement cues such as likes, comments, and reviews. Collectively, these factors contribute to how trust, confidence, and motivation to purchase are formed. Figure 4.2 presents an overview of the key themes that emerged from the data. The following subsections discuss each theme in detail.

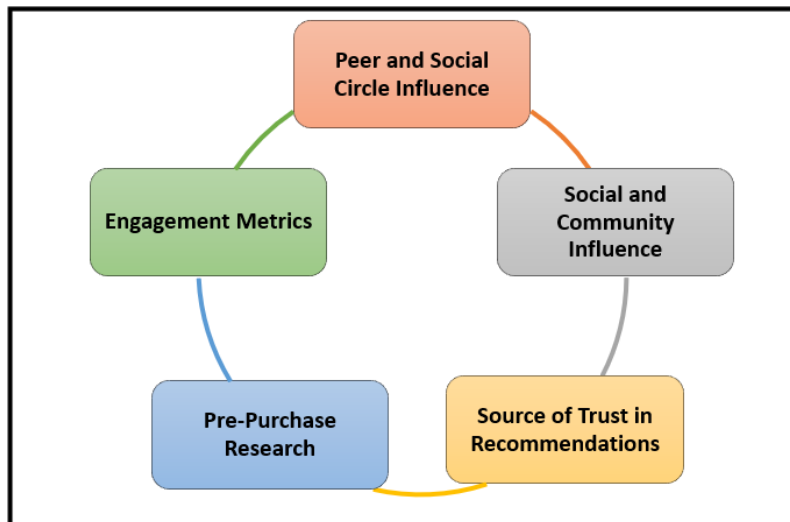


Figure 2. Key Themes of Digital Social Factors That Influence Online Buying Decision

### Peer and Social Circle Influence

The interviews revealed several interconnected social factors that shape the purchasing decisions of newly employed youth, highlighting the role of peer influence, online community norms, and the dynamics of social media engagement. One of the most prominent themes was the influence of friends, colleagues, and social circles, with the majority of informants acknowledging that the product choices of people around them significantly affected their own decisions. Informant 1 explained, *“I get easily influenced when my friends post about products they use, especially if they are fellow designers,”* while Informant 2 similarly noted, *“We love sharing must-have items each month after getting our salary.”* These patterns illustrate how social validation from trusted peers can guide consumption choices, a trend that aligns with previous research indicating that young consumers often look to peers for reassurance and alignment in their purchasing behaviour (Cox et al., 2009; Manzoor et al., 2020; Osman & Shamsuddin, 2023; Shi & Ismail, 2021).

### Social and Community Influence

A related theme was the influence of social and online community trends, where viral products and collective behaviours acted as strong motivators for purchases. Informant 1 shared, *“When mechanical keyboards were trending, almost all my friends bought one. I followed suit to feel included,”* demonstrating the desire for belonging within peer communities. Informant 4 similarly described

purchasing a viral snack—Cik B salmon skin—*“because it was so viral and I really wanted to taste how it tasted,”* despite its high price. Additionally, Informant 3 highlighted how emotional, personal, and experience-based comments within online communities contributed to more confident buying decisions. These insights reflect how online and offline communities help establish shared norms of desirability, reinforcing the significance of group identity in shaping consumption patterns, consistent with findings by Ayoubi & Naweer (2024) and Bilgin (2018).

### **Source of Trust in Recommendations**

Trust in social media recommendations emerged as another important factor. Informants distinguished between influencer endorsements and real user testimonials, often favouring the latter for their perceived authenticity. Informant 1 stated, *“I trust real user testimonials more than influencer content—they feel more genuine,”* whereas Informant 2 and Informant 5 emphasised the need to verify influencer reviews by checking comment sections and tagged user posts. Informant 5 noted, *“Influencers are already being paid... Real users are more honest,”* highlighting concerns regarding commercial bias. These reflections reinforce findings in existing literature that youth consumers place greater trust in unfiltered user-generated content due to its relatability and authenticity (Ayoubi & Naweer, 2024; Jiménez-Barreto et al., 2020; Manzoor et al., 2020)

### **Pre-Purchase Research**

Another consistent pattern across interviews was the importance of pre-purchase research through reviews, testimonials, and cross-platform comparisons. Informant 3 described a detailed approach involving reviews across Shopee, TikTok, and Instagram, emphasising the need for *“at least 100 reviews”* before buying a product. Informant 4 also reported reading reviews and watching unboxing videos, particularly when items were expensive, while Informant 7 routinely consumed multiple testimonial videos before deciding. These behaviours demonstrate the role of social proof in reducing uncertainty and perceived risk, supporting previous findings that reviews and user experiences significantly influence consumer confidence (Bilgin, 2018; Jumali & Mustaffa, 2023; Varghese & Agrawal, 2021).

### **Viral Trends and Lifestyle Aspirations**

Two additional social forces—viral trends and lifestyle aspirations—were also found to shape consumer decisions. Viral trends often created curiosity or a desire for inclusion, leading Informant 1 to purchase a digital planner *“just to try what everyone was raving about,”* while Informant 2 bought a Korean cushion foundation after seeing friends share their makeup results online. Lifestyle identification also played a role, particularly among those who followed influencers whose style aligned with their personal aspirations. Informant 1 explained how following a food-content influencer encouraged them to buy similar kitchen items, while Informant 3 noted that Muslimah fashion influencers shaped their

choices, especially those from Indonesia, whose styles were perceived as more diverse and affordable. These examples demonstrate how influencer lifestyles can translate into aspirational consumer behaviour, consistent with studies by Hasim et al. (2020).

### **Engagement Metrics**

Finally, the interviews highlighted the importance of engagement metrics—likes, comments, shares, and views—as signals of product reliability. Informant 4 emphasised the comments section as the most meaningful source of feedback, arguing that likes and shares may not reflect genuine user experiences. Meanwhile, Informant 7 considered likes, views, and comments collectively, noting that low engagement levels reduced their likelihood of purchasing a product. Informant 3 also described sharing positive product experiences as a way of contributing back to the community. These findings highlight how engagement metrics function as social proof, shaping perceptions of popularity and reliability while also triggering fear of missing out (FOMO), particularly among younger consumers (Hasim et al., 2020; Shi & Ismail, 2021)

In summary, the findings indicate that the purchasing decisions of newly employed youth are shaped not only by direct exposure to products but also by a complex interplay of social interactions, peer validation, community norms, authenticity cues, and digital engagement patterns. These social dynamics create a persuasive and interconnected environment in which young consumers feel informed, influenced, and socially supported in their purchasing behaviours.

## **Discussion And Conclusion**

### ***Dominant Social Media Platforms That Influence Purchasing Decisions***

The findings indicate that TikTok is the most influential platform in shaping the purchasing decisions of newly employed youth. The dominance of TikTok suggests that the 'Creative Multimedia' environment—specifically its chaotic and saturated nature—acts as both a form of entertainment and a source of consumer friction. This supports Jumali & Mustaffa (2023), who highlighted TikTok's rise due to its engaging, video-based content. Informants in this study confirmed daily engagement with these platforms, showing that high usage correlates with frequent exposure to product promotions and consumer content. According to the AIDA Model, these platforms effectively capture attention and generate desire through repeated and visually appealing content.

One major insight was the impact of user-generated content (UGC), such as unboxing videos, side-by-side comparisons, and authentic testimonials, in shaping purchasing behaviour. This reflects previous studies by Manzoor et al. (2020) and Shi & Ismail (2021), who found that UGC builds trust and confidence among consumers, especially when compared to traditional advertising. Informants

showed a clear preference for content that is honest, relatable, and visually demonstrative, which is consistent with the AIDA Model's "Interest" and "Desire" stages.

Furthermore, the study highlighted the role of platform algorithms in influencing purchase intent. Algorithms that personalise content—such as TikTok's "For You Page" or Instagram's suggested posts—amplify product visibility through behavioural targeting (Goswami et al., 2013; Hasim et al., 2020). Informants reported that repeated exposure to the same product increased familiarity and ultimately led to purchasing decisions. This aligns with the concept of impulse buying and the persuasive effect of repeated messaging, especially when the content appears relevant and timely.

Features such as clickable links (e.g., TikTok's Yellow Bag), comment sections, and saving posts were also cited as tools that enhance the buying journey. These features support the transition from desire to action in the AIDA Model by offering convenience and real-time engagement with the product. Overall, social media platforms function as integrated ecosystems that combine content, convenience, and community to influence youth purchasing decisions.

### ***Social Factors That Influence Newly Employed Youth Buying Decisions Using Social Media***

The findings also revealed several social factors that shape consumer behaviour among newly employed youth. Peer and social circle influence emerged as a strong theme, with informants stating that they were influenced by product recommendations and trends shared by friends or coworkers. This supports the findings of Cox et al. (2009) and Osman & Shamsuddin (2023), who emphasised that peers play a significant role in shaping consumer decisions, especially among young adults who seek validation and group belonging.

Social and community influence, particularly through viral trends, was also a key factor. Informants shared examples of buying products simply because they were popular within their social circles. This highlights how digital communities can create perceived norms and pressures to conform, especially in youth subcultures. Ayoubi & Naweer (2024) argue that such communities contribute to the formation of shared consumption patterns, often driven by the desire to participate or "not miss out" (FOMO).

Another important aspect was the source of trust in recommendations. While influencers were acknowledged as persuasive, both informants expressed a stronger reliance on real user feedback, particularly through comment sections and peer testimonials. This aligns with Jiménez-Barreto et al. (2020) and Manzoor et al. (2020), who found that authenticity and transparency in content are more

effective in building trust than curated brand messaging. As observed by industry perspectives, for Gen Z, authenticity functions as the primary persuasive currency, where social proof outweighs polished brand narratives.

Pre-purchase research was also consistent behaviour, with both informants describing habits such as reading reviews, watching YouTube testimonials, and checking customer feedback on e-commerce platforms. These behaviours reflect a cautious yet informed approach to purchasing, particularly among consumers managing tight budgets, as in the case of part-time student workers. Varghese & Agrawal (2021) suggest that such research is a way of mitigating risk and ensuring value for money.

Lifestyle aspiration and engagement metrics (likes, comments, shares) further shaped consumer choices. Informants admired certain influencers' lifestyles and made purchases to emulate them, reflecting the influence of aspirational consumption. At the same time, they used engagement signals as a form of social proof, validating whether a product was worth buying. This finding supports Hasim et al. (2020), who argue that high engagement creates a bandwagon effect and increases consumer confidence.

### ***Synthesis of Findings Using the AIDA Model***

This study can be coherently synthesised using the AIDA Model. Social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, which emerged as dominant platforms among the informants, effectively capture attention through algorithm-driven content feeds and visually engaging short-form videos. Interest and desire are sustained through repeated exposure to user-generated content, peer recommendations, and authentic testimonials, all of which enhance consumer trust and perceived relevance. The progression towards action is facilitated by in-app purchasing features, clickable links, and interactive comment sections that reduce friction within the buying process. However, the findings indicate that the AIDA Model does not operate in a strictly linear manner within digital environments. Instead, algorithmic repetition, social validation, and community engagement create cyclical interactions that move users fluidly between stages prior to a final purchase decision. While the AIDA model remains relevant, the repetition of product endorsements across numerous creators creates a 'saturation paradox,' where excessive content can complicate rather than streamline the consumer journey. This highlights the continued relevance of the AIDA Model while also demonstrating its adaptive application within contemporary social media ecosystems.

### ***Contributions and Implications of the Study***

This study reinforces the understanding that purchasing decisions among newly employed youth are shaped by a complex interaction of platform design, social validation, peer influence, and algorithmic exposure. The digital consumer journey is no longer linear; rather, it is characterised by continuous engagement with authentic content, trusted peer opinions, viral trends, and intuitive in-app features that streamline the transition from product discovery to purchase. The findings demonstrate that social media functions not only as an entertainment space but also as a strategic commercial ecosystem that subtly but powerfully shapes youth consumption patterns.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study supports and extends the applicability of the AIDA Model within digital environments. Platforms such as TikTok excel at capturing attention through algorithmically tailored content feeds, sustaining interest and desire through user-generated content, testimonials, and viral trends, and guiding users towards action through embedded purchasing tools. However, the findings also indicate that AIDA no longer operates in a strictly linear sequence. Instead, algorithmic repetition, social validation, and peer engagement create cyclical loops that move users fluidly between stages before a final purchasing decision is made.

This study also acknowledges certain contextual limitations. The focus on newly employed youth—most of whom were active predominantly on TikTok—restricted the breadth of insights across other platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and X. Additionally, as informants are new entrants to the workforce, many prioritise financial stability and therefore adopt more cautious spending behaviours, reducing the presence of impulsive purchasing patterns within the sample. These factors may influence the generalisability of the findings.

Practically, the results offer valuable implications for marketers, digital strategists, and small business owners aiming to engage young working consumers (Hsu, 2024; Yadav et al., 2025). Marketing approaches directed at this demographic should emphasise authenticity, relatability, and social proof rather than relying on polished or highly commercialised advertising (Ayob et al., 2024; Tristante et al., 2021). Furthermore, the findings highlight important considerations for platform developers and digital policymakers. The ethical implications of algorithmic targeting warrant closer scrutiny, particularly as repeated content exposure may encourage impulsive behaviour or contribute to unrealistic lifestyle expectations. Given that newly employed youth may possess limited financial literacy or purchasing experience, interventions such as transparency in sponsored content, enhanced content moderation, and strengthened digital education initiatives could help mitigate risks of overconsumption or purchase regret.

In conclusion, this study offers a nuanced understanding of how social media ecosystems influence the purchasing behaviour of digitally active youth in Malaysia. It underscores the centrality of authenticity, community dynamics, and personalised engagement, while emphasising the need for more ethically informed digital practices. This study does not directly measure responsible consumption, it also offers relevant insights for SDG 12 by highlighting how social media influences purchasing decisions among newly employed youth. The findings suggest that social media plays a significant role in shaping consumption behaviour, which has implications for initiatives seeking to promote more responsible and sustainable consumption patterns within this demographic. These contributions establish a foundation for future research and practical strategies that respond to the evolving behaviours and vulnerabilities of young consumers in the digital age.

### ***Research Limitations and Recommendations***

This study is limited by its small sample size, as it is based on in-depth interviews with only eight informants, which restricts the generalisability and transferability of the findings. The limited number of informants may not fully represent the diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, geographic locations, and employment contexts of newly employed youth in Malaysia. Consequently, certain perspectives, media usage patterns, and purchasing behaviours may be underrepresented. As such, the findings should be interpreted as exploratory, offering preliminary insights rather than broad conclusions.

Future research is recommended to include a larger and more diverse sample to enhance the robustness and generalisability of findings. Expanding informant demographics across different regions, employment sectors, and socioeconomic backgrounds would provide a more comprehensive understanding of social media's influence on purchasing behaviour among newly employed youth. Additionally, adopting mixed method approaches by integrating qualitative and quantitative methods could strengthen analytical depth and enable more comprehensive validation of results.

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