Impact of Social Networks on the Purchasing Decisions and Behavior of University Students: A Quantitative Study in an Emerging Context

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Abstract

In a world where social networks transform consumption, this study analyzes their impact on consumer behavior and online purchasing decisions of university students in the emerging context of the Amazon region, Peru. The objective of this research was to determine how platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook influence this group, considering the increasing digitalization and the limitations of local physical commerce, for this, a descriptive quantitative approach was used, surveying 337 students of the Universidad Nacional Toribio Rodríguez de Mendoza in February 2025 through a structured questionnaire. Results show that 80% of students perceive social networks as essential in their purchasing decisions, with reviews, recommendations and price as key factors, reflecting trust and economic sensitivity, with WhatsApp standing out in social interaction, while Instagram predominates in commercial promotion, evidencing differentiated roles, given the relevant influence on young people. In conclusion, social networks not only facilitate purchases, but also compensate for structural deficiencies, providing a unique vision from an emerging Latin American context. This finding guides digital strategies and enriches the understanding of youth consumption in similar environments.

Keywords: university students, social networks, consumer behavior, online purchasing, emerging context

1. Introduction

The rise of social media has radically transformed global consumption patterns, establishing itself as a crucial medium for interaction between brands and consumers, particularly among younger generations such as university students. Platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp not only facilitate communication but also significantly shape purchasing decisions and consumer behavior, as recent studies suggest (Borja et al., 2025; Hood et al., 2024; Tomar & Pandey, 2023). Against this background, the ubiquity of the internet and extensive usage of smart devices have created an environment where 90% of the world's data has been generated in the past few years, where citizens are engaging in up to 4,800 interactions per day, as claimed by (Jahankhani et al., 2022) highlighting the scale of modern connectivity.

This interconnectivity has fostered what Tomar & Pandey (2023) define as the "social media effect", whereby time spent on online platforms—averaging at least two hours per day—directly influences the preferences and purchasing decisions of Generations Y and Z. These generations constitute a dominant segment of the online marketplace, as noted by Cardoso et al. (2024) and Widodo et al. (2024). In particular, university students of these generations, show a new trend of welcoming social media in their decision-making process from gathering information to consumption of the product, as ascertained by Ghaleb & Alawad (2024) and Rosli et al. (2024), highlighting their role as digital consumers.

The importance of this topic is reflected in the growing use of social media as a tool for online marketing, where strategies such as influencer engagement, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), and targeted advertising have reshaped the dynamics between businesses and consumers, as argued by Fine et al. (2022), Khan et al. (2024), and Ramnarain et al. (2024). For instance, Fine et al. (2022) report that Millennials, who make up 38% of frequent moviegoers and contribute 40% of box office revenues—engage in authentic interactions with brands through social media, a pattern also observed among university students (Hood et al., 2024). Similarly, Lim et al. (2024) indicate that Generation Y prefers shopping on small business websites driven by performance expectations and hedonic motivation.

These dynamics reveal how social media enhances consumption by being both instantaneous and personalized. In this regard, Ramnarain et al. (2024) emphasize how Facebook recommendations and reviews influence Millennials' purchasing behavior, while Barbosa et al. (2022) highlight the role of digital influencers in promoting banking services to this generation, illustrating the versatility of these platforms as instruments of influence. However, a crucial question remains: despite the pervasive presence of social media in university students' lives, it remains unclear to what extent Instagram, WhatsApp, and Facebook influence their purchasing decisions under specific circumstances—particularly in developing countries such as Peru, where e-commerce is expanding (Widodo et al., 2024).

This uncertainty is further underscored by findings from Borja et al. (2025), who reveal that only 14% of young people would stop using illegal streaming sites if penalized, indicating a low perception of risk and strong peer influence, factors that may also affect purchasing behavior. Similarly, Nyrhinen et al. (2024) find that a lack of self-control in digital environments fosters impulsive buying among young consumers, exacerbated by targeted advertisements and brand presence on social media. This lack of clarity regarding the mechanisms linking digital engagement to purchasing decisions presents a challenge for academics and marketing professionals alike, as noted by Rosli et al. (2024) and Tran (2023).

Therefore, the general objective of this research is to determine how social media influences purchasing decisions and consumer behavior among university students in the emerging context of the Amazonas region in Peru, with a focus on Instagram, WhatsApp, and Facebook, key platforms in their daily lives. The specific objectives include identifying key mediating factors (trust, engagement, influencers, and reviews), assessing differences in the impact of each platform, and exploring how students' demographic and psychographic characteristics modulate these effects. This research is justified by the need to understand a phenomenon that affects both individual consumption and market strategies in a digitalized world, as highlighted by Diakite & Dada (2023) and Shaikh et al. (2024).

In Indonesia, for instance, the e-commerce market is projected to reach $332 billion by 2025, driven by Generations Y and Z, a scenario that could be replicated in other emerging contexts, as noted by Widodo et al. (2024). Furthermore, this study provides insights for optimizing digital business strategies while empowering consumers to make more informed choices, as emphasized by Efendioğlu & Durmaz (2022) and Mude & Undale (2023). Among the research gaps addressed is the lack of attention to WhatsApp as a channel of influence on purchasing decisions, despite its widespread use for communication and peer recommendations (Cardoso et al., 2024; Khan et al., 2024), in contrast to the extensive focus on Instagram and Facebook (Hima et al., 2024; Kabir et al., 2024).

Additionally, the literature reveals a gap concerning how cultural and contextual differences, such as those between Latin America and regions like Asia or Europe, affect these dynamics, an aspect not explored by Lyu et al. (2023) or Vilas Chavare et al. (2025), whose work focuses on China and India. Another gap is the lack of comparative analyses that integrate multiple platforms, limiting a holistic view of social media's impact, according to Rosli et al. (2024) and Ghaleb & Alawad (2024). This work goes beyond academia by offering practical implications for companies, which can adapt digital marketing strategies to capture this segment, as suggested by Balogh-Kardos et al. (2025) and Roy et al. (2024), by applying findings such as Tran's (2023) research on influencer credibility.

Finally, this study heeds the call to examine how social media not only promotes consumption behavior but also affects values and lifestyle among youth—a phenomenon observed by Xue et al. (2024) during the COVID-19 pandemic. It thus seeks to respond to these gaps with a nuanced and contextualized insight, both to theoretical knowledge and to business practice in the middle of a rapidly evolving digital landscape. In the case of Amazonas, Peru, a developing environment with increasing digital access and limited physical commerce, this study offers a unique lens into the ways that technology is transforming student consumption, tracing global trends. It also unveils local peculiarities that add nuance to the knowledge of consumer behavior in emerging markets.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Impact of Social Media on Consumer Behavior

Several studies have established that social networks are a key channel for influencing consumer behavior, particularly among young people and college students; this is the case of Borja et al. (2025), who explore how Generation Z students in the U.S. perceive streaming and piracy, finding that 80% of those who would continue with illegal practices have a low perception of risk, influenced by social and digital factors. This finding suggests that social norms on digital platforms may normalize certain consumption behaviors.

For their part, Tomar & Pandey (2023) propose a conceptual model linking frequent use of social networks with changes in the purchasing decisions of generations Y and Z, highlighting the role of interaction with e-commerce sites and user-generated content. Madjdian et al. (2024) add that multimedia campaigns on social networks increase knowledge and intention to choose safe food in Burkina Faso, showing how exposure to digital messages can modify preferences.

Other studies reinforce this trend in specific contexts. Ramnarain et al. (2024) find that reviews and recommendations on Facebook foster trust and purchase intent among South African Millennials, while Hima et al. (2024) confirm a correlation between social media use and purchasing decisions among Algerian students, mediated by digital marketing strategies. Likewise, Xue et al. (2024) report that during the COVID-19 pandemic, both official and social media in China significantly promoted the willingness to shop online, highlighting the power of digital platforms to reshape consumption habits under external pressure. These studies underscore that social media not only informs but actively shapes young consumers' attitudes and purchasing behaviors.

2.2 Role of influencers and Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM)

The impact of influencers and eWOM has emerged as a critical factor in the literature. Ghaleb & Alawad (2024) investigate Generation Z university students and find that the credibility of Instagram influencers and user engagement mediate the relationship between influencer marketing and purchase intent. This effect is more pronounced when students use Instagram intensively, highlighting the importance of context of use. Tran (2023) complements this by analyzing students in Hanoi, showing that trust, expertise, and social appeal of food influencers positively influence shopping attitudes, with direct effects on purchase intention. Vilas Chavare et al. (2025) add that, in India, the credibility of Generation Z influencers depends on trust and perceived similarity, rather than physical attractiveness, partially mediating purchase intention through attitude toward the brand.

The eWOM also plays a prominent role. Khan et al. (2024) examine smartphone brand fan pages on Facebook, revealing that trust, value co-creation, and attitude toward the brand partially mediate the relationship between eWOM and purchase intention among 490 users. Rosli et al. (2024) find that engagement metrics such as "likes" and "shares" on Facebook and Instagram significantly predict purchase intent among Malaysian students, though comments do not exhibit a notable effect. These studies suggest that both influencers and eWOM amplify social media's influence by fostering trust and emotional connections, key aspects for university students.

2.3 Specific Factors Mediating Social Media Influence

The literature identifies several factors that mediate the effect of social media on purchasing decisions. Lim et al. (2024) apply the UTAUT2 model to study Generation Y in Canada, finding that performance expectancy, hedonic motivation, social influence, and habit shape the intention to use small business websites, with notable gender differences. Nyrhinen et al. (2024) highlight that low self-control among Finnish youth fosters impulsive purchases on social media, mediated by positive attitudes toward targeted ads. Kabir et al. (2024) analyze 205 university students in Bangladesh, showing that social media marketing exerts a greater influence on purchase intent than email marketing, with targeted campaigns being a key predictor.

Other factors include perceived quality and convenience. Asheq et al. (2022) report that trust, convenience, and website quality impact online purchase intent among Bangladeshi students, while Bahamdan & Almanasef (2024) indicate that satisfaction with value and delivery in e-pharmacies influences consumer perceptions in Saudi Arabia. Lyu et al. (2023) add that corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices on social media increase impulsive purchase intent among Chinese students, moderated by digital advertising. These studies highlight the complexity of underlying mechanisms, from emotional to practical aspects, particularly relevant to university students.

2.4 Differences Between Platforms and Contexts

The literature also explores how specific platforms generate distinct effects. Hood et al. (2024) compare Millennials and Generation Z on Instagram, finding that trust in content affects purchasing decisions and post-purchase evaluations, with significant generational differences. Rosli et al. (2024) confirm that there are no notable differences between Facebook and Instagram regarding the relationship between engagement and purchase intent, suggesting a certain uniformity across visual-based platforms. However, Diakite & Dada (2023) report that in Côte d'Ivoire, factors such as price sensitivity and website quality exert a greater influence on online purchase intent during the pandemic, indicating contextual variations. Efendioğlu & Durmaz (2022) show that perceptions of Instagram ads affect advertising value and brand awareness among Generation Y, with both positive and negative impacts depending on the content.

Additional studies address emerging platforms and niche markets. Leite et al. (2024) explore the acceptance of lab-grown meat promoted by micro-influencers on Instagram, highlighting authenticity as a mediator, while Zhang & Wu (2025) analyze recommendations in live-streaming commerce, were credibility and personal identification moderate adoption. These findings suggest that while Instagram and Facebook dominate, other platforms and formats (e.g., WhatsApp, live streaming) deserve greater attention, especially in the context of university students.

2.5 Synthesis and Research Gaps

In summary, the literature demonstrates that social media influences purchasing decisions and consumer behavior through factors such as trust, engagement, influencers, and perceived quality, with more pronounced effects among

young consumers and students (Borja et al., 2025; Ghaleb & Alawad, 2024; Rosli et al., 2024). However, significant gaps remain: few studies integrate multiple platforms (e.g., WhatsApp alongside Instagram) in a comparative analysis, and the literature is skewed toward contexts such as the United States, Asia, and Europe, leaving Latin America underexplored (Tran, 2023; Vilas Chavare et al., 2025). Additionally, the interaction between demographic factors (e.g., gender, socioeconomic level) and social media use requires further investigation (Kabir et al., 2024; Lim et al., 2024).

In emerging contexts like Amazonas, Peru, limited internet access and scarce physical commercial infrastructure contrast with developed regions where connectivity is nearly universal and in-person shopping options are abundant. While in countries like the U.S. or Europe, social media complements an already robust commercial ecosystem (Hood et al., 2024), in emerging regions, these platforms compensate for structural limitations, becoming the primary consumption channel for university students. This difference underscores the relevance of studying these dynamics in settings like Amazonas, were digitalization offsets structural constraints. This research seeks to address these gaps by focusing on Peruvian university students and specific social media platforms.

3. Methodology

The objective of this research was to determine the influence of social media on the purchasing behavior and decisions of university students in 2025. A quantitative, descriptive, and analytical research design was employed to examine this phenomenon within a specific context. Social media, as the primary medium for mass information dissemination and communication between businesses and customers, served as the independent variable: social media platforms (Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook). Meanwhile, technological advancements, which have led to more informed and confident consumers, guided the dependent variable: consumer behavior and purchasing decisions, measured through trends such as price preference and product ratings.

An analytical method was used to break down data and identify trends, combining descriptive and applied elements that detailed the impact of social media in its natural context without exploring causality. Accordingly, a non-experimental, cross-sectional, descriptive design was selected, with data collected during a single period (February 2025). The target population included university students from Universidad Nacional Toribio Rodríguez de Mendoza (UNTRM) in Peru's Amazonas region. A convenience sample of 337 students was selected due to logistical constraints, limiting generalizability. The sample was mostly young (82% aged 18-23), tech-savvy, and primarily from Amazonas (78%), comprising enrolled students who actively used social media and consented to participate.

The data collection technique was a survey that gathered quantitative data on opinions and behaviors through a structured questionnaire consisting of 15 multiple-choice items designed to measure preferred platforms and purchasing factors (price: 40%, reviews: 30%). The survey was administered via Google Forms from February 10 to 15, 2025, following a pilot test with 10 students to refine ambiguities, achieving reliability (Cronbach's alpha: 0.80). Data analysis was structured according to research objectives: data was organized in Excel, theoretical information was documented in Word, and descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages) were generated using Google Forms, along with graphical representations. The results revealed patterns such as a preference for WhatsApp and the strong influence of price, in a sample that was predominantly male (53%) and urban (78%).

4. Results

The following results stem from a survey of 337 university students at Universidad Nacional Toribio Rodríguez de Mendoza (UNTRM) in Peru's Amazonas region, conducted in February 2025. Visualized in Figures 1-10, the data highlight social media's influence on purchasing decisions and consumer behavior, aligning with the study's objectives.

4.1 General Influence of Social Media on Purchasing Decisions and Consumer Behavior

4.1.1 Influence of Social Media on Purchasing Decisions

80% of students report social media influences their purchasing decisions, driven by recommendations (43.2%) and reviews (37.4%) (Figure 1). Only 12.9% indicate that social media does not affect their choices, suggesting a minority resistant to digital influence. This pattern reflects a strong reliance on social dynamics within platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook, consistent with the "social media effect" described by Tomar & Pandey (2023).

The predominance of recommendations from acquaintances and public figures highlights the role of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and influencers, aligning with Khan et al. (2024), who emphasize how trust in these sources mediates purchase intent. In an emerging context like Amazonas, where internet access is growing but not yet universal, this influence may be amplified by trust in personal networks, a distinguishing factor compared to highly saturated markets.
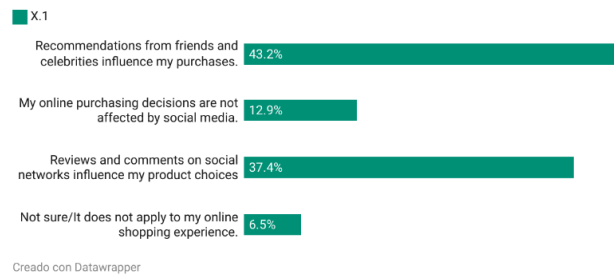
Figure 1. Influence of social media on purchasing decisions

4.1.2 Purchase Satisfaction

Ninety percent of students are satisfied with social networks as a shopping resource, naming ease (38.1%), availability of offers (28.8%), speed (15.8%), and reviews (17.3%). The result confirms that sites not only facilitate transactions, but also provide hedonic and utilitarian values, and is consistent with Lim et al. (2024) and the UTAUT2 model, in which hedonic motivation and habit are related to digital use. Convenience and reviews underpin trust and use, while offers reflect the price sensitivity typical of resource-constrained learners, a finding that differs from more advanced settings where quality might be emphasized (Hood et al., 2024). The intersection of these factors suggests that social networks represent a multifaceted ecosystem that affects behavior beyond the realm of simple promotion.
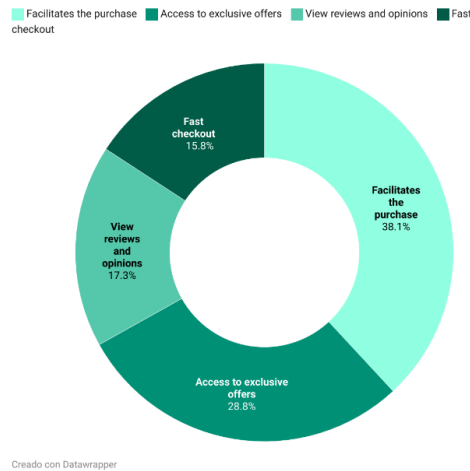

Figure 2. Purchase satisfaction

4.1.3 Social Media as a Purchasing Option

A staggering 97.1% of students say that social networks "always" (59%) or "almost always" (38.1%) enhance their purchases, with only 2.9% against. It is this data that summarizes the overall impact of social networks as a means of purchase, surpassing even the levels recorded in studies such as that of Rosli et al. (2024), where purchase intention is predicted by activity on Instagram and Facebook by 70-80%. In the Amazon case, this is perhaps attributable to the complementarity between virtual availability (via mobile) and the impossibility of offering alternative physical distribution, which distinguishes networks as a viable option. This finding underscores their transformative effect in new environments, where the digital compensates for logistical shortcomings.
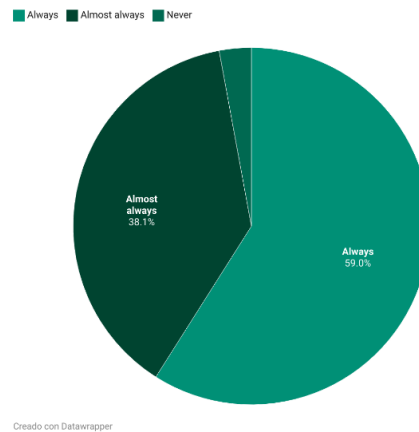
Figure 3. Social media as a purchasing option

4.2 Key Factors That Mediate the Influence of Social Networks

4.2.1 Purchase Security

Seventy-four percent of students check reviews to ensure the trustworthiness of a site before purchasing, surpassing other measures such as checking privacy policies (8.6%). This emphasis on eWOM as a guarantor of safety aligns with Asheq et al. (2022), who highlight trust as a predictor of purchase intent in emerging markets. On Amazon, where online scams could be a concern, reviews act as a social filter that reduces perceived risk, a more accessible mechanism than technical evaluations.
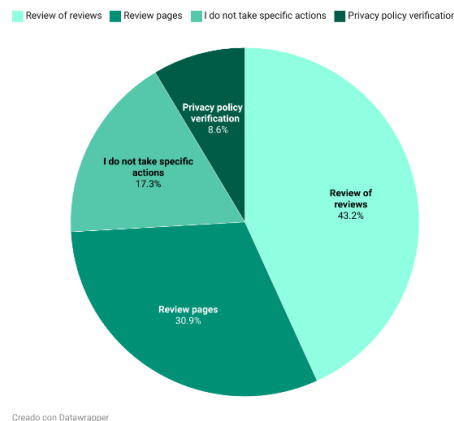

Figure 4. Purchase security

4.2.2 Influencing Factors in Purchase

Price (37.4%) leads as an influential factor, followed by recommendations from friends (28.1%), visual appearance (20.1%) and reviews (14.4%). This ranking reveals an interaction between economic and social factors, with price as the primary driver in a context of limited income, supported by Nyrhinen et al. (2024) on bargain-sensitive impulse purchases. Recommendations and reviews reinforce trust and engagement, while visual aesthetics, although secondary, agrees with Hood et al. (2024) on the impact of Instagram. The absence of explicit influencers as a category suggests that their effect is diluted in "recommendations", requiring further disaggregation in future studies.
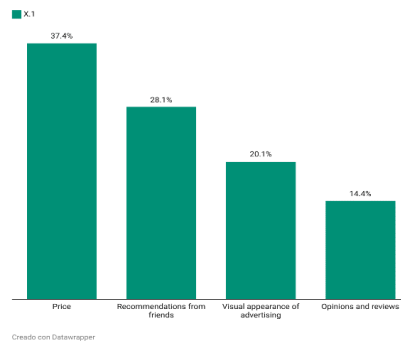
Figure 5. Influencing factors on purchase

4.2.3 Ratings and Reviews in the Purchase Decision

Ninety-seven percent of students indicate that reviews influence "always" (43.9%) or "almost always" (53.2%), a finding that cements eWOM as a key factor, consistent with Khan et al. (2024). This level of reliance exceeds rates in contexts such as Malaysia (Rosli et al., 2024), possibly due to the need for external validation in an emerging market with less digital experience. The consistency of this factor across multiple graphs suggests a structural role in decision making.
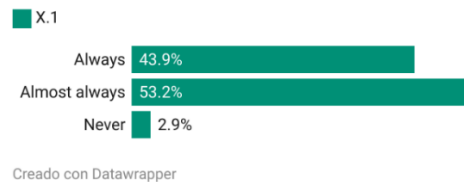

Figure 6. Ratings and reviews in the purchase decision

4.3 Differences Between Platforms in Terms of Impact

4.3.1 Interaction Networks

WhatsApp dominates (40.3%) as the preferred platform for interaction, followed by Facebook (24.5%) and Instagram (23%). This leadership reflects its direct messaging functionality, aligning with Cardoso et al. (2024) on its use for personal recommendations. In contrast to Instagram, focused on visual content, WhatsApp seems to channel intimate social influence, a unique finding in this emerging context where personal connections prevail over mass exposure.
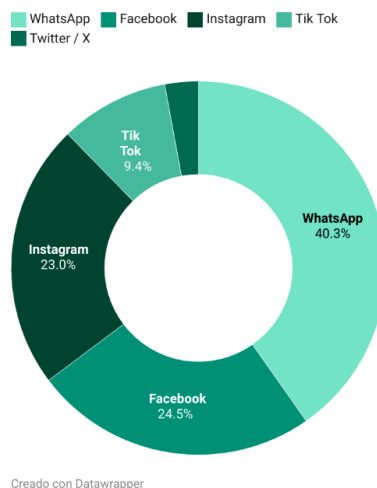

Figure 7. Interaction networks

4.3.2 Promotional Networks

Instagram leads (45.3%) as the best platform to promote products, followed by Facebook (23%) and WhatsApp (16.5%)

(Figure 8). This contrast with Figure 7 highlights functional differences: Instagram excels in visual marketing and commercial engagement (Hood et al., 2024), while WhatsApp, although influential in interaction, has a lower promotional impact. The Instagram-WhatsApp dichotomy suggests platform specialization according to purpose (communication vs. promotion), an aspect underexplored in the literature (Rosli et al., 2024). Furthermore, the exclusion of TikTok in the relevant results is due to its low adoption reported by respondents, despite its initial mention as a variable of interest.
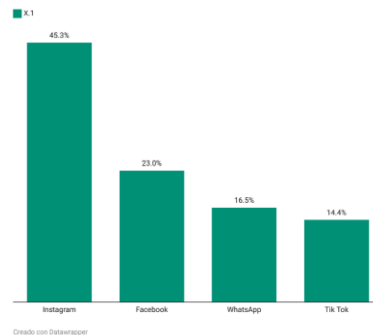

Figure 8. Promotion Networks

4.4 Influence of Demographic and Psychographic Characteristics

4.4.1 Age of Students

82% of respondents are between 18 and 23 years old (45% 18-20, 37% 21-23), a range that coincides with generations Z and Y, known for their high digital adoption (Widodo et al., 2024). This youth implies a greater familiarity with social networks, potentially amplifying their influence on purchases, as suggested by Borja et al. (2025). Without cross-analysis, it is inferred that this demographic modulates reliance on reviews and recommendations by their constant exposure to platforms.
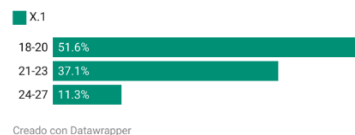

Figure 9. Age of students

4.4.2 Place of Origin

Seventy-eight percent of students come from the Amazon region, which is an emerging environment with expanding digital accessibility. This type of concentration is an indicator that the lack of physical stores would increase reliance on social networks for shopping, mediating its impact versus urban environments (Diakite & Dada, 2023). Homogeneity in location limits variance, but focuses on the relevance of social media when retail infrastructure is poor.
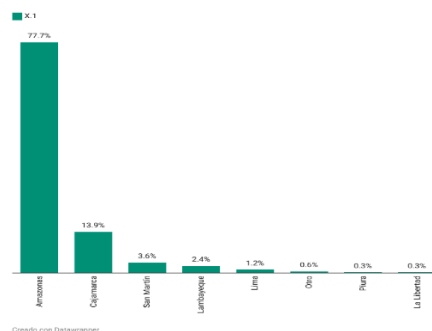

Figure 10. Place of origin

5. Discussion

This study confirms that social media shapes purchasing behavior among university students in Peru's Amazonas region, where digitalization offsets limited physical commerce. This section compares findings with prior research, highlighting convergences, divergences, and contributions.

General influence of social media

The data show that 80% of students perceive a significant influence of social media on their purchasing decisions (Figure 1), while 97.1% consider it an effective tool for enhancing their consumer experience (Figure 3). This widespread dependence aligns with the "social media effect" described by Tomar & Pandey (2023), who link time spent on digital platforms—at least two hours daily—to changes in purchasing preferences among Generations Y and Z. Furthermore, the 90% satisfaction rate (Figure 2), driven by convenience, promotions, and reviews, resonates with Lim et al. (2024) and their application of the UTAUT2 model, which highlights hedonic motivation and perceived usefulness as key drivers of digital engagement among Generation Y. However, while Lim et al. (2024) emphasize quality as the dominant purchasing factor in developed contexts like Canada, this study diverges by identifying price and promotions (25% in Figure 2) as primary considerations, reflecting the economic sensitivity typical of students in emerging markets with limited resources (Nyrhinen et al., 2024).

The high adoption of social media as the preferred consumption channel in Amazonas also aligns with Widodo et al. (2024), who project exponential e-commerce growth in Indonesia, driven by digitally active youth. However, the impact intensity (97.1%) exceeds the 70–80% rates reported by Rosli et al. (2024) in Malaysia, suggesting that the lack of physical shopping alternatives in Amazonas amplifies the significance of digital platforms, a phenomenon similarly observed by Diakite & Dada (2023) in Côte d'Ivoire during the pandemic. This finding underscores a contextual convergence: in emerging markets, social media not only facilitates consumption but also compensates for structural limitations, a phenomenon less pronounced in saturated economies.

Key factors mediating social media influence

The identification of reviews (97% in Figure 6), recommendations (28.1% in Figure 5), and price (37.4% in Figure 5) as key mediators aligns with multiple studies. Khan et al. (2024) and Rosli et al. (2024) highlight eWOM as a predictor of purchase intent on Facebook fan pages and Instagram engagement metrics, respectively, a structural role that this study reinforces by demonstrating its consistency in decision-making (Figures 4, 5, 6). The reliance on reviews as a safety filter (Figure 10) also resonates with Asheq et al. (2022), who identify trust as essential in emerging markets, and Tran (2023), who links influencer credibility to purchase attitudes in Hanoi.

However, the prominence of price diverges from Ghaleb & Alawad (2024), who prioritize engagement with Instagram influencers over economic factors, suggesting that in Amazonas, practical necessity outweighs aspirational motivations among students with limited incomes.

The integration of convenience and promotions as sources of satisfaction (Figure 2) aligns with Nyrhinen et al. (2024) on impulse buying influenced by targeted ads but diverges from Hood et al. (2024), who emphasize Instagram's visual aesthetics over practicality. This suggests a contextual adaptation: while visual platforms dominate in developed markets, functionality and cost savings take precedence in Amazonas.

The absence of influencers as an independent category (diluted within "recommendations" in Figure 5) contrasts with Vilas Chavare et al. (2025), who highlight their credibility in India, suggesting that their effect may be subsumed within broader social dynamics—a gap that future research should disaggregate.

Differences between platforms

The contrast between WhatsApp (60% for interaction, Figure 7) and Instagram (50% for promotion, Figure 8) reveals functional differences that enrich the literature. Cardoso et al. (2024) emphasize WhatsApp's role in personal recommendations in Brazil, a finding that this study extends by demonstrating its leadership in social interactions, possibly due to its accessibility and low data consumption in regions like Amazonas.

Conversely, Instagram's dominance in promotion aligns with Hood et al. (2024) and Efendioğlu & Durmaz (2022), who highlight its visual and commercial impact on Generations Y and Z. This specialization diverges from Rosli et al. (2024), who find no significant differences between Facebook and Instagram in Malaysia, suggesting that the Peruvian context prioritizes platforms based on function (communication vs. marketing)—a novel contribution compared to studies that homogenize their impact.

The absence of relevant data on TikTok limits comprehensive comparisons and reflects a gap in the literature on emerging platforms in Latin American contexts, where Instagram and Facebook continue to dominate (Hima et al., 2024; Ramnarain et al., 2024). This finding positions WhatsApp as an underexplored channel, addressing a gap noted by Khan et al. (2024) regarding its role beyond communication.

Influence of demographic and psychographic characteristics

The concentration of students aged 18–23 (82%, Figure 9) and from Amazonas (78%, Figure 10) suggests that youth and the emerging context modulate social media dependency. This aligns with Borja et al. (2025) and Widodo et al. (2024), who associate high digital adoption among Generations Y and Z with greater purchase influence, further

amplified in this case by limited physical shopping options (Diakite & Dada, 2023).

However, the lack of cross-analysis on gender or psychographic variables (e.g., attitudes, values) diverges from Lim et al. (2024), who find significant gender differences in Canada, and Kabir et al. (2024), who explore specific consumer preferences in Bangladesh. This limitation reflects a gap in the study but also presents a contextual contribution: in Amazonas, demographic homogeneity may reduce variability, prioritizing external factors (e.g., reviews) over internal characteristics.

Addressed gaps and specific contributions

This study addresses several gaps identified in the literature.

1. It integrates multiple platforms (WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook) into a comparative analysis, surpassing the Instagram- or Facebook-focused approach of studies like Rosli et al. (2024) and Ghaleb & Alawad (2024). The inclusion of WhatsApp as a purchasing influence channel, which has been underexplored compared to its communication role (Cardoso et al., 2024), is a key contribution that expands the holistic understanding of digital impact.

2. By focusing on an emerging Latin American context, it contrasts with the dominance of studies in Asia, Europe, and the U.S. (Lyu et al., 2023; Tran, 2023), offering a regional perspective that highlights the interaction between digitalization and structural limitations (Diakite & Dada, 2023).

3. The identification of price as a prominent mediating factor (Figure 5) enriches models like UTAUT2 (Lim et al., 2024), which typically prioritize hedonic motivations over economic considerations in developed contexts.

A novel contribution of this study is demonstrating how social media not only drives purchasing behavior but also compensates for logistical inefficiencies in emerging markets—a finding with practical implications for businesses seeking to expand digital initiatives in these regions (Balogh-Kardos et al., 2025; Roy et al., 2024).

This study is constrained by having used a convenience sample of students from only a single university within the Amazonas region, such that generalizing the findings across other populations becomes limited. Secondly, the ephemeral nature of social media websites—especially how increasingly significant some new ones become, such as TikTok—is likely to sway the long-term applicability of the conclusions. Subsequent studies should examine cross-cultural samples, longitudinal studies, and incorporate psychographic variables to further develop the existing knowledge.

6. Conclusions

Social media plays an influential role in Peruvian students of universities in Amazonas, complementing less physical trade. Reviews, price, and recommendations decide how to make purchasing decisions, where WhatsApp is in charge of engagement, and Instagram commands advertising. Youthfulness and rural origin fuel this reliance. By including WhatsApp in multi-platform research and emphasizing Latin American complexity, this study increases knowledge about digital consumption among emerging markets. Companies need to use authenticated reviews and competitive pricing to attract this demographic. These results highlight social media's revolutionary impact and recommend further study on changing platforms and psychographic influences.

Authors contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design. Material preparation, data collection and analysis were performed by VMVS, ACR and JAR. The first draft of the manuscript was written by RCG, AJSP, ENPM, and RYBV, and all authors commented on previous versions of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Competing interests

Not applicable. The authors have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

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Obtained.

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The Publication Ethics Committee of the Redfame Publishing.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

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Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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