

SMART PARENTING: HOW SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCES THE PURCHASE DECISIONS OF KIDS' LEARNING APPS

Kiruthika N * Rajam K * *

INTRODUCTION:

Social media has become an integral part of daily life, shaping how consumers discover, evaluate, and purchase products, including children's learning applications. As educational technology evolves, parents increasingly rely on platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook for reviews, recommendations, and promotions. This shift presents opportunities and challenges for marketers aiming to engage consumers in a competitive digital environment. Research underscores social media's critical role in product discovery and decision-making. Macías Urrego et al. (2024) found that students and graduates used platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook to gather purchase information, often consulting reviews on Google and Amazon. These findings highlight the need for personalized marketing strategies based on consumer behavior rather than demographics, as platform preferences are driven more by personal choice than by age. Similarly, Yang (2024) examines how social media shapes purchasing behavior across all decision-making stages, including problem identification, information search, evaluation, purchase, and post-purchase engagement. Social media influences these stages through content sharing, social validation, and interactive user experiences that shape perceptions and boost engagement.

Waheed et al. (2021) highlight the reputation of trust mechanisms and advanced technological features in fostering positive consumer interactions. Innovations that build trust provide marketers with valuable tools in an increasingly competitive marketplace. The intersection of social media and educational technology is significant, as parents rely on social networks for insights into educational apps. Influencer endorsements, peer reviews, and targeted advertisements play key roles in helping parents make informed decisions, underscoring the importance of trust, credibility, and authenticity in marketing. Social media platforms offering personalized content and advertisements allow marketers to connect meaningfully with consumers. This paper examines the influence of social media advertisements on parents' decisions regarding children's learning apps, focusing on

* Ph.D. Research Scholar (Full-Time), PG and Research Department of Commerce, Srimad Andavan Arts and Science College (Autonomous), Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu, India.

* * Assistant Professor & Research Supervisor, PG and Research Department of Commerce, Srimad Andavan Arts and Science College (Autonomous), Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu, India.

influencer endorsements, user-generated reviews, and parental satisfaction. Drawing on social constructivism and interconnectedness, the study explores how social media and mobile applications function as learning environments. The findings aim to inform marketing practices and enhance engagement strategies in a dynamic digital landscape. In conclusion, social media plays a vital role in shaping purchasing decisions, especially for children's learning apps. It equips marketers with powerful tools to engage parents in meaningful ways. However, as content grows abundant, maintaining trust and credibility remains crucial for effective social media advertising strategies.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In today's digital age, children are constantly exposed to various forms of media, significantly impacting their cognitive development, social behaviors, and overall well-being. The pervasive presence of online content shapes how children perceive the world, interact with others, and develop their key life skills. Therefore, it is essential for parents to actively engage in their children's online experiences by fostering critical thinking, teaching them to differentiate between reliable and unreliable information, and encouraging discussions about media violence and its effects. Promoting healthy screen time habits is also necessary to mitigate risks such as sleep deprivation, obesity, and decreased physical activity. Parents play a crucial role in guiding children's social media interactions by maintaining open communication, supporting them through mistakes, and emphasizing self-respect and responsibility in the digital world. When used appropriately, technology can enhance creativity, learning, and self-expression, shaping a more informed, resilient, and well-rounded generation capable of navigating virtual and real-world challenges (Paul, 2015).

Research further explores how children's media consumption influences various aspects of their lives. Montazami et al. (2022) found that parents emphasize educational standards over trendy terms when choosing apps for their children, making educational apps a dominant medium for delivering content. It is essential to understand how parents select apps and what features they consider indicative of quality, as well-designed apps can enhance children's learning experiences. In an online study, parents evaluated ten mock math apps mimicking the App Store presentation format. Five apps included educational benchmarks such as feedback mechanisms, while the other five relied on terminology like "interactive." Parents judged whether they would download the app, their willingness to pay for it, and their reasons for these decisions. Results indicated that parents preferred apps aligned with their children's educational needs rather than those relying on vague buzzwords. These findings underscore the importance of clear, measurable features that facilitate learning. Further studies explore evolving digital interactions and media use. Dastane et al. (2024) identified key drivers of customer value perception in educational apps to improve digital

start-ups' value propositions. Setyarini et al. (2023) demonstrated that media literacy frameworks promote social consciousness in English as a Foreign Language pupils. Jiang and Ngien (2020) found that Instagram use does not directly impact social anxiety; instead, social comparison and self-esteem act as mediators, demonstrating complete mediation effects. This highlights the importance of addressing intermediate factors in health campaigns to promote emotional well-being in the digital age.

Kalogiannakis (2017) emphasized the need to critically evaluate educational apps to ensure they align with educational standards and foster meaningful cognitive development. Wernholm and Reneland-Forsman (2019) identified participatory roles shaping children's critical awareness and self-representation online. Kucirkova et al. (2018) reported that parental concerns about digital media vary based on children's age and gender, influencing media consumption decisions. Clarke-Pearson et al. (2011) emphasized the importance of parental guidance and supervision due to adolescent engagement with social media. Trevino and Morton (2019) explored how social media influences children's purchasing habits and brand engagement, highlighting the need for parental involvement. As digital technologies evolve, children increasingly consume online content, influencing their brand interactions and product preferences.

A study exploring children's social media habits found that the content they engage with often impacts purchasing decisions, increases demand for trending products, and inspires new product development for younger audiences. The study suggests that brand managers should focus on platforms frequented by children to tailor marketing strategies and create content that aligns with children's motivations, such as entertainment and recognition. Encouraging children to document brand experiences through challenges or incentives fosters engagement and brand loyalty.

Concerns about influencer marketing's persuasive power on children are also raised. Veirman et al. (2019) warned that due to limited advertising literacy, children are highly susceptible to influencer marketing, which frequently features child vloggers promoting products through engaging sponsored content. Despite its growing influence on children's brand preferences, research on its impact remains scarce. This review explores influencers' persuasive power, societal and policy implications, and recommendations to empower children with critical advertising awareness. Feijoo et al. (2021) found children often struggle to recognize social media ads, emphasizing the need for clearer labeling and advertising literacy education. As technology continues to evolve, these insights highlight the importance of continued research, parental involvement, and educational initiatives to ensure safe and beneficial digital engagement for children. Parental involvement is essential to guiding children online, fostering trust through open communication and encouraging informed, responsible

digital choices. Teaching children to recognize sponsored content and distinguish between authentic recommendations and paid promotions is critical in building their media literacy. Equally important is guiding children to develop self-regulation skills to manage their screen time and prioritize physical activities and social interactions beyond the virtual world. Moreover, understanding the motivations behind children's media consumption is key to fostering positive engagement. Children often seek entertainment, social connection, or recognition when engaging with online content. By understanding these motivations, parents, and educators can guide children toward content that supports their development and aligns with their educational goals. Collaborative activities, such as co-viewing educational videos or engaging in discussions about online content, help children critically analyze media messages and build discerning consumption habits. Educational institutions also play a vital role in promoting media literacy. Integrating digital citizenship and critical thinking into school curriculums prepares children to navigate online environments responsibly. Teachers can provide students with tools to evaluate content credibility, recognize persuasive techniques, and understand the implications of sharing personal information online. Schools can also collaborate with parents to create consistent messaging about safe online behavior and responsible media use. In conclusion, the evolving digital landscape presents both opportunities and challenges for children's development. While technology offers avenues for creativity, learning, and self-expression, it also necessitates a proactive approach to ensure safe and beneficial engagement. Continued research, parental involvement, and educational initiatives are essential in empowering children to navigate digital environments confidently and responsibly. By fostering media literacy, promoting healthy screen habits, and guiding social media interactions, parents and educators can help shape a generation equipped to succeed in both virtual and real-world settings.

OBJECTIVES

J To study how advertisements and promotions on social media platforms impact parents' likelihood of buying children's learning apps.

J To determine parents' satisfaction with the learning apps they have purchased as a result of social media recommendations.

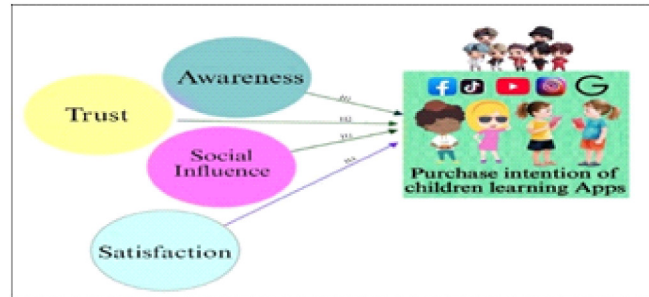
METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research to explore children's learning through social media. A descriptive design was used, with a convenience sample drawn from Trichy City. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire, which was distributed to both students and parents. The questionnaire covered demographics, reasons for social media use, shared information, and its impact on various life aspects. The study involved 388 respondents, with the sample

size determined through a pilot survey. Data processing and interpretation followed standard analysis methods for both quantitative and qualitative data.

RESULTS

Fig-1: Conceptual Model



Source: Author's Compilation (Using Photoshop)

Table 1: Explanation of the Key Dimensions Impacting the Purchase Intension of Children's Learning Apps through social media: Awareness, trust, Social Influence, and Satisfaction

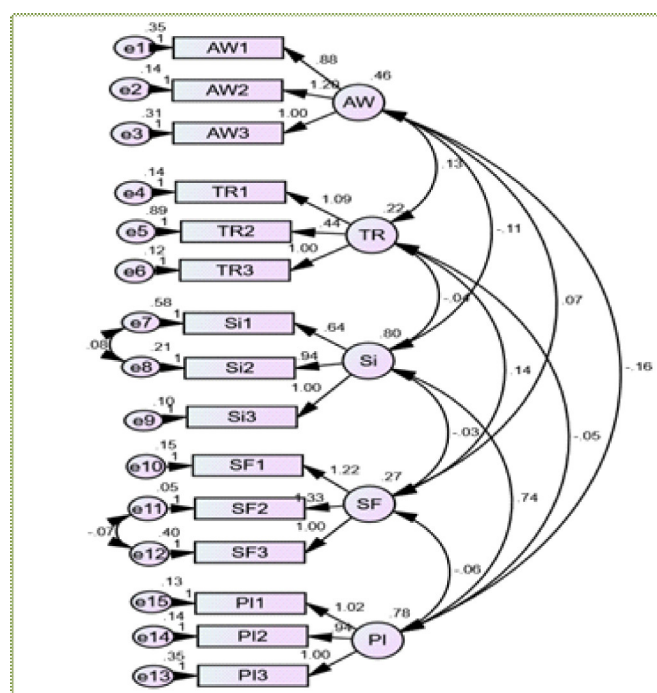
Items	Variables	Factors
I frequently see advertisements for children's learning apps on social media	AW1	Awareness
I have become aware of new children's learning apps because of social media	AW2	
Social media has made me more knowledgeable about children's learning app options	AW3	
I trust social media recommendations for children's learning apps.	TR1	Trust
I find reviews from influencers or educators on social media credible.	TR2	
I feel that social media provides accurate information about children's learning apps.	TR3	
I consider the opinions of friends or family when choosing a learning app.	SI1	Social Influence
Seeing influencers or educators recommend a learning app influences my decision to purchase it.	SI2	
Social media discussions influence my interest in children's learning apps.	SI3	
I am satisfied with the children's learning apps I have purchased based on social media promotions.	SF1	Satisfaction
Children's learning apps promoted on social media meet my expectations.	SF2	
I would recommend a learning app I bought from a social media recommendation.	SF3	
I am likely to purchase a children's learning app if I see it recommended on social media.	PI1	Purchase Intension
Social media promotions make me want to buy children's learning apps	PI2	
The more I see a learning app advertised on social media, the more likely I am to purchase it.	PI3	

Source: Author's Compilation

Confirmatory Factor analysis:

The model demonstrates a strong fit with the data, meeting the thresholds suggested by Hair et al. (2014). The p-value of 0.000 and chi-square statistic of 2.278 highlight a clear difference between the predicted and actual covariance matrices. Key fit indices, including a GFI of 0.943, TLI of 0.963, RMSEA of 0.057, AGFI of 0.913, NFI of 0.952, and SRMR of 0.0541, all indicate an excellent model fit. These results confirm the model's robustness in explaining the observed data.

Fig 2: Confirmatory Factor Analysis (purchase intension)



Source: Author's Compilation (Using AMOS)

Table 2: Estimated Correlation between Attitude, Utility, Risk, Learning, and Children's learning outcome through social media

correlations		Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
AW	<--> SF	.075	.021	3.535	***
AW	<--> Si	-.109	.035	-3.108	.002
AW	<--> TR	.135	.022	6.016	***
TR	<--> SF	.137	.020	6.986	***
TR	<--> Si	-.044	.025	-1.733	.003
Si	<--> SF	-.030	.026	-1.163	.045
AW	<--> PI	-.162	.036	-4.501	***
TR	<--> PI	-.051	.025	-2.046	.041
Si	<--> PI	.736	.062	11.799	***
SF	<--> PI	-.063	.026	-2.438	.015
e8	<--> e7	.082	.022	3.804	***
e12	<--> e11	-.065	.025	-2.634	.008

Source: Author's Compilation

The analysis reveals intricate relationships among variables, shedding light on parental decision-making for learning apps. A weak positive correlation (0.075, $p < 0.001$) between awareness (AW) and satisfaction (SF) indicates a slight connection between information exposure and satisfaction. Conversely, awareness (AW) and social influence (SI) exhibit a moderate negative correlation (-0.109, $p = 0.002$), suggesting that heightened awareness may dilute social influence. A positive correlation between awareness (AW) and trust (TR) (0.135, $p < 0.001$) emphasizes that informed parents may perceive higher credibility in apps. Trust (TR) correlates positively with satisfaction (SF) (0.137, $p < 0.001$), linking perceived utility with contentment. However, trust (TR) and social influence (SI) display a moderate negative correlation (-0.044), hinting at nuanced risk perceptions. Notably, social influence (SI) strongly drives purchase intention (PI) (0.751, $p < 0.001$), underscoring its dominant role, while awareness (AW) and trust (TR) show weaker, albeit significant, effects on decision-making.

Table 3: Reliability Analysis

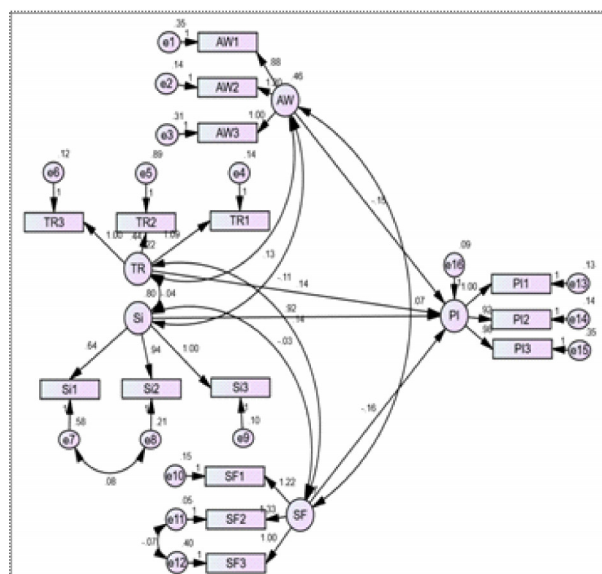
Factors	Items	Mean	Median	St.d Deviation	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha	CR
Awareness	AW1	2.72	3.00	.839	0.679	.839	0.861
	AW2	2.80	3.00	.899			
	AW3	2.70	3.00	.881			
Trust	TR1	4.01	4.00	.639	0.643	.783	0.843
	TR2	3.22	3.00	.966			
	TR3	4.12	4.00	.588			
Social influence	Si1	2.46	2.00	.954	0.675	.857	0.857
	Si2	2.23	2.00	.954			
	Si3	2.14	2.00	.945			
Satisfaction	SF1	3.88	4.00	.749	0.544	.819	0.765
	SF2	3.88	4.00	.733			
	SF3	3.90	4.00	.824			
Purchase intension	PI1	2.06	2.00	.971	0.796	.915	0.921
	PI2	2.00	2.00	.911			
	PI3	2.31	2.00	1.063			

Source: Author's Compilation

The analysis confirms robust reliability and validity across factors. The attitude factor explains 67.9% variance (AVE = 0.679) with strong internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.839$, CR =

0.861). Similarly, the utility factor demonstrates solid reliability (AVE = 0.643, α = 0.783, CR = 0.843). Risk factors and language factors also exhibit excellent consistency (risk: α = 0.857, CR = 0.857; language: α = 0.819, CR = 0.765). Children's learning outcomes through social media factors are particularly reliable (AVE = 0.769, α = 0.915, CR = 0.921), highlighting robust construct measurement.

Figure 3: Structural equation model (purchase intention of Children's learning apps)



Source: Author's Compilation (Using AMOS)

According to Hair et al. (2014), the framework demonstrates a good fit. The chi-square test statistic is 2.278 with a p-value of 0.000, indicating a significant difference between the actual and predicted covariance matrix. The Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) is 0.943, showing an excellent fit. The Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) of 0.963 and RMSEA of 0.057 both indicate good model fit, as they fall within acceptable ranges. The SRMR value of 0.0541 further confirms a strong fit.

Table 4: Hypotheses results

Path	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Sig	Hypotheses
P I <- A W	-.154	.043	-3.569	***	Highly Significant	H1
P I <- T R	.141	.080	1.763	.018	Significant	H2
P I <- S i	.924	.035	26.388	***	Highly Significant	H3
P I <- S F	-.161	.061	-2.639	.008	Significant	H4

Source: Author's Compilation (Using AMOS)

Based on the analysis of relationships among the constructs, p-values for Hypotheses 1 (awareness) and 3 (social influences) were below 0.01, indicating statistical significance at the 1% level. Hypotheses 2 (trust) and 4 (satisfaction) showed significance at the 5% level. These results support the acceptance of all four hypotheses.

DISCUSSION

A study of 388 parents in Trichy reveals complex interactions between social media influences and their decisions to purchase educational apps. While awareness (AW) and trust (TR) show weak negative correlations with purchase intention (PI), social influence (SI) has a strong positive correlation (0.736, $p < 0.001$), highlighting its significant impact.

CONCLUSION

This study discovers the multifaceted impact of social media on parents' purchase intentions for children's learning apps in Trichy. While social media effectively raises awareness, it does not directly influence purchase decisions. Instead, social influence emerges as a critical factor, with parents heavily relying on peer recommendations and endorsements from trusted influencers or educators. This underscores the significance of personal connections and direct credibility over generalized online suggestions in shaping consumer behavior. The findings also reveal a slight negative correlation between satisfaction with previous app purchases and the likelihood of exploring new alternatives. This suggests parental loyalty to familiar, proven solutions unless new apps offer clear, compelling advantages. Additionally, the oversaturation of app promotions on social media may contribute to decision fatigue or apathy, further complicating the decision-making process. For marketers, these insights highlight the importance of prioritizing peer-driven endorsements and collaborations with credible figures on networks such as Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook. Personalized and targeted advertising that emphasizes unique features can help differentiate products. Furthermore, fostering trust through transparent reviews and addressing satisfaction dynamics will be crucial for driving purchase decisions and ensuring long-term customer retention. These strategies will enable marketers to align more effectively with parental preferences and expectations.

REFERENCES

1. Dastane, O., Fandos-Roig, J. C., & Sánchez-García, J. (2024). It's free! Still, would I learn? Unearthing perceived value of education apps for better entrepreneurial decisions. *Management Decision*, 62(8), 2558-2577. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MD-09-2022-1292>
2. De Veirman, M., Hudders, L., & Nelson, M. R. (2019). What is influencer marketing and how does it target children? A review and direction for future research. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, 498106. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02685>
3. Feijoo, B., Bugueño, S., Sádaba, C., & García-González, A. (2021). Parents' and

- children's perception of social media advertising. *Comunicar: Media Education Research Journal*, 29(67), 93-103. <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5287-3813>
4. Jiang, S., & Ngien, A. (2020). The effects of Instagram use, social comparison, and self-esteem on social anxiety: A survey study in Singapore. *Social Media + Society*, 6(2), 2056305120912488. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120912488>
5. Kucirkova, N., Littleton, K., & Kyparissiadis, A. (2018). The influence of children's gender and age on children's use of digital media at home. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 49(3), 545-559. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjet.12543>
6. Macías Urrego, J. A., García Pineda, V., & Montoya Restrepo, L. A. (2024). The power of social media in the decision-making of current and future professionals: A crucial analysis in the digital era. *Cogent Business & Management*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2024.2421411>
7. Montazami, A., Pearson, H. A., Dubé, A. K., Kacmaz, G., Wen, R., & Alam, S. S. (2022). Why this app? How parents choose good educational apps from app stores. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 53(6), 1766-1792. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjet.13213>
8. O'Keeffe, G. S., Clarke-Pearson, K., & Council on Communications and Media. (2011). The impact of social media on children, adolescents, and families. *Pediatrics*, 127(4), 800-804. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2011-0054>
9. Papadakis, S., & Kalogiannakis, M. (2017). Mobile educational applications for children: What educators and parents need to know. *International Journal of Mobile Learning and Organisation*, 11(3), 256-277. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJMLLO.2017.10003925>
10. Paul, H. (2015). Screen smart parenting: How to find balance and benefit in your child's use of social media, apps, and digital devices by J. Gold. *Child & Family Behavior Therapy*, 37(2), 163-173. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07317107.2015.1035994>
11. Saleem, T., & Khan, B. (2023). Exploring the efficacy of children's media use in enhancing L2 vocabulary acquisition. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 32, 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669760.2023.2261501>
12. Setyarini, S., Salim, H., & Purnawarman, P. (2023). Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS)-based literacy media: An innovative learning strategy to promote the secondary students' social awareness. *Forum for Linguistic Studies*, 5(2), 1706. <https://doi.org/10.59400/FLS.v5i2.1706>
13. Trevino, T., & Morton, F. (2019). Children on social media: An exploratory study of their habits, online content consumption, and brand experiences. *Journal of Digital & Social Media Marketing*, 7(1), 88-97. <https://doi.org/10.69554/MWBW4195>
14. Waheed, A., Zhang, Q., Farrukh, M., & Khan, S. Z. (2021). Effect of mobile social

- apps on consumers' purchase attitude: Role of trust and technological factors in developing nations. Sage Open, 11(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211006714>
15. Wernholm, M., & Reneland-Forsman, L. (2019). Children's representation of self in social media communities. Learning, Culture and Social Interaction, 23, 100346. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lcsi.2019.100346>