

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF ONLINE MARKETING STRATEGIES ON ADOLESCENT'S EMOTIONAL RESPONSE AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

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Abstract:

This research paper focuses on the psychological effects of online marketing strategies on adolescents, considering their emotional responses and consumer behaviours. In some years, especially after pandemic, marketers are prominently using digital platform to influence consumer choices. Its more common among young individuals who are increasingly active on social media and digital platforms. Adolescents, as a vulnerable demographic, may be particularly susceptible to the persuasive techniques employed in online marketing, such as emotional appeals, influencer endorsements, and targeted advertisements. This study aims to understand how these marketing strategies shape adolescents' emotions, attitudes, and purchasing decisions. This research study understands the relationship between online marketing content and adolescent emotional responses, as well as the broader implications for consumer behaviour. The findings highlight the critical role of emotional engagement in shaping consumer decisions and underscore the need for ethical considerations in digital marketing targeted at young audiences.

Keywords: *Online Marketing Strategies, Adolescent Consumer Behaviour, Emotional Response, Emotional Engagement.*

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Introduction:

In the age of digitalization, online marketing has emerged as one of the most influential tools for shaping consumer behaviour, particularly among younger audiences. Adolescents, being in a critical stage of psychological and emotional development, are especially vulnerable to the persuasive tactics used in online advertising. These include the use of emotional appeals, influencer endorsements, and personalized content.

Online marketing has become an integral part of the adolescent experience, as more young people spend time on social media platforms and digital spaces. As brands increasingly target this demographic, they utilize a variety of online marketing strategies—such as influencer marketing, personalized ads, social media campaigns, and gamification techniques. The impact of these strategies on adolescents' psychological development, decision-making, and self-esteem remains an area that requires deeper exploration. This paper understands how online marketing strategies affect adolescent emotional responses and consumer behaviour.

Review of Literature:

- ✓ **Radnai Viktória (2017)**, in the dissertation titled, ‘Psychological effects of advertising on schoolchildren and teenagers’ stated that, “Generation Z is starving for everything, they want to get all the new information quickly. However, young consumers are able to separate the unwanted messages, and can attract their attention to other brand-related advertisements. Since this generation is aware of almost all kind of brands, can set apart the unreliable ones. Hereby, big brands have to understand adolescents’ behaviour, their actions, if they want to create the best commercials to capture their attention.”
- ✓ **Adnan Veysel Ertemel and Ela Ari (2020)**, in their research article, ‘A Marketing Approach to a Psychological Problem: Problematic Smartphone Use on Adolescents’ mentioned that, “Technology platforms have been creating increasingly more addictive experiences that result in spending prolonged periods of time on screens, which ultimately leads to more profitability in the attention economy. Some of these addictive features include the lack of stop sign facilitated by infinite scroll feature, the hooking technique that relies mainly on the unconscious and employs mechanisms like variable rewards. Problematic smartphone use increasingly becomes more of a concern globally especially among adolescents.”
- ✓ **Dr. Mayur Chaudhary, S. P. Anusuya, Yasaswi Sowbhagya Peddi, Sreenu Thalla, Dr. Prathima. P (2023)**, in their research paper, ‘The Psychological Impact of Influencer Marketing on Self-Destructive Behaviour and Poor Mental Health Outcomes in the Teenage’ mentioned that, “People may now access a wealth of knowledge from a variety of materials because of the dramatic rise in social networking usage in this current era. Recent technology advancements have made it possible for digital influencers to forge strong relationships with their followers. Such connections have had an impact on children's behaviours, mindsets, and decisions in a particular manner or else.”
- ✓ **American Psychological Association (2023)**, in their article titled, ‘Health advisory on social media use in adolescence’ stated that, “Using social media is not inherently beneficial or harmful to young people. Adolescents’ lives online both reflect and impact their offline lives. In most cases, the effects of social media are dependent on adolescents’ own personal and psychological characteristics and social circumstances— intersecting with the specific content, features, or functions that are afforded within many social media platforms. In other words, the effects of social media likely depend on what teens can do and see online, teens’ preexisting strengths or vulnerabilities, and the contexts in which they grow up.”
- ✓ **Shiqi Xu (2024)** in the research paper titled, ‘The Impact of Social Media on Consumer Psychology and Behavior’ concluded that, “The rapid development of social media has presented new opportunities and challenges for businesses and consumers alike. In this new social environment, consumer psychology and behaviour are influenced by multiple factors. The deep engagement of consumers and their interactions with businesses have led to various changes in consumer psychology and behaviour, such as increased consumer proactivity and loyalty, a more rational decision-making process, and influences from participatory culture and herd mentality. In response to these significant changes, businesses should continuously improve their social media marketing strategies to attract consumers to make purchases, enhance the conversion of

loyal users, and elevate consumer awareness and recognition of the brand.”

While research has been conducted on online marketing's effects on consumer behaviour and marketing strategies, there is a limited focus on the psychological impact these strategies have specifically on adolescents, a group particularly sensitive to external influences.

Significance of the Study:

This research will contribute to the understanding of how online marketing affects adolescent psychology, expanding the field of consumer psychology by focusing on this vulnerable demographic. The findings will inform marketing practices, potentially guiding more ethical and responsible online advertising practices targeted at adolescents. It will also provide valuable insights for parents, educators, and psychologists concerned with adolescents' mental health in the digital age.

Statement of Problem:

Adolescents, due to their developmental stage, may not fully understand or recognize the impact of online marketing. Adolescents' exposure to online marketing raises concerns about their vulnerability to emotional manipulation and the long-term effects on their purchasing behaviour and self-perception. The need for a deeper understanding of these psychological impacts is crucial for both marketers and policymakers. This paper aims to provide an in-depth understanding of these impacts by analysing secondary data from relevant studies.

Objectives:

- To study the psychological effects of online marketing strategies on adolescents.
- To understand the relationship between emotional responses and consumer behaviour in adolescents.
- To identify ethical concerns in marketing strategies targeting young consumers.

Research Methodology:

The research study is based on secondary data. Therefore, the data is collected from secondary sources such as various reports, bulletins, journals, magazines, newspaper articles, published sources, research publications, websites, blogs and online database.

Limitations:

The research study is completely based on secondary data and due to time constraints, it fails to examine the actual impact of online marketing strategies on adolescents. This paper lacks to study the cultural and socio-economic differences based on geographical regions as an influence on adolescents' psychology.

Online Marketing Strategies Targeting Adolescents:

Adolescence is a critical period of development where individuals are forming their self- concept and identity. Social media platforms, in particular, provide a space for adolescents to seek validation, influence their social groups, and explore consumer identities. As a result, adolescents may be more vulnerable to marketing messages that align with their desires for popularity, acceptance, and self-esteem.

Online marketing strategies aimed at adolescents typically involve:

- **Influencer Marketing:** The endorsement of products by individuals' adolescents admires or relate to on platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. Influencers often create an emotional connection that resonates with their followers, shaping attitudes towards the brands they promote.
- **Targeted Advertising:** Using data-driven algorithms, brands deliver personalized content based on adolescents' online behaviours, such as search history or social media activity. These ads are tailored to evoke emotional responses that resonate with specific interests or desires.
- **Emotional Appeals:** Advertisements often use emotional triggers such as nostalgia, humour, excitement, or social belonging to create an emotional bond with the product. These emotions are potent in shaping adolescents' purchasing decisions and brand loyalty.
- **Social Media Campaigns and Peer Influence:** Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube are not only entertainment hubs but also places where adolescents are exposed to brands and trends endorsed by their peers. Social proof (i.e., seeing others participate in a product or trend) influences adolescent behaviour and emotional response to online marketing.

Psychological Effects of Online Marketing on Adolescents:

- **Body Image and Self-Esteem:** Marketing strategies that emphasize beauty, success, and material possessions can negatively impact adolescents' body image and self-esteem. Advertisements often promote unrealistic beauty standards and ideals, leading to dissatisfaction with one's own appearance.
- **Materialism and Consumerism:** Adolescents exposed to heavy marketing might develop materialistic values, viewing possessions as a means to gain social status and happiness. Studies have shown that excessive exposure to consumerist content can lead to shallow life satisfaction.
- **Peer Influence and Social Comparison:** The need to "fit in" with peers can drive adolescents to follow trends promoted in marketing campaigns, even if it contradicts their personal values or interests. Social comparison theory suggests that adolescents are particularly vulnerable to comparing themselves with idealized images in advertisements, leading to anxiety and insecurity.

The Psychology of Emotional Response to Marketing:

Research indicates that adolescents are particularly susceptible to emotional appeals in advertising due to their developmental stage. According to **Lamb et al. (2019)**, emotional engagement plays a significant role in adolescent consumer decision-making. When marketing messages elicit emotions like happiness, excitement, or fear, they can create a sense of urgency or desire, influencing consumer behaviour. **Tatar (2020)** found that emotional responses are more likely to lead to impulse purchases and brand attachment in adolescents compared to older demographics.

Adolescent Consumer Behaviour:

Adolescence is a period of identity formation, making young individuals more impressionable to marketing messages that reflect or shape their self-concept. **Fischer & Gainer (2017)** suggest that adolescents often form their purchasing decisions based on peer influence, social media trends, and emotional connection to the brand. As a result, online marketing strategies that capitalize on these emotional triggers often lead to brand loyalty and

repeat purchases.

Ethical Considerations in Marketing to Adolescents:

While effective, marketing aimed at adolescents raises ethical questions. Critics argue that the use of emotional manipulation and personalized marketing techniques exploits the cognitive and emotional vulnerabilities of young consumers. **Smith et al. (2018)** emphasize the need for ethical guidelines to prevent the exploitation of adolescents' limited ability to critically assess marketing messages.

Findings:

Secondary data confirms that emotional engagement is a central component of online marketing directed at adolescents. Studies consistently show that advertisements which elicit strong emotional responses, such as excitement or a sense of belonging, lead to more positive brand attitudes and increased purchase intent. Data suggests that influencer marketing has a particularly strong emotional impact on adolescents. Adolescents are more likely to trust and emulate influencers they perceive as relatable, which increases their likelihood of purchasing the endorsed products. Targeted advertising also plays a key role in shaping adolescent consumer behaviour. By using data collected from social media and browsing history, advertisers are able to create ads tailored to adolescents' specific interests. Studies show that personalized ads are more likely to trigger emotional responses, such as excitement or fear of missing out (FOMO), which directly influence adolescents' purchasing decisions. The review of secondary data also highlights significant ethical concerns. Many studies point out the potential harm caused by exposing vulnerable adolescents to manipulative marketing tactics.

The analysis of secondary data clearly indicates that online marketing strategies significantly affect adolescent emotional responses and consumer behaviour. Emotional appeals, particularly those that leverage social influence and peer pressure, strongly shape adolescents' purchasing decisions. This emotional engagement fosters brand loyalty, often leading to impulse buying and repeat purchases.

However, these findings also underscore the ethical challenges of marketing to adolescents. Many marketing strategies rely on manipulating young consumers' emotions to drive sales, without considering the long-term psychological effects. The vulnerability of adolescents to such strategies raises important questions about the need for stricter regulations to protect young consumers.

Conclusion:

This research highlights the significant impact of online marketing strategies on adolescents' emotional responses and consumer behaviour. Emotional engagement, influencer marketing, and targeted ads are highly effective in shaping adolescent purchasing decisions. However, these practices raise ethical concerns about the manipulation of vulnerable consumers. There is an urgent need for ethical guidelines and regulatory measures to ensure that digital marketing respects the well-being of young people.

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