Digital Engagement without Online Purchasing? Age Differences in Gin Channel Choice in Italy

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Abstract

Younger consumers are frequently portrayed as inherently digital and online-oriented buyers. However, empirical evidence suggests that digital engagement does not necessarily translate into online purchasing behavior, particularly in multichannel and food-related contexts. This study investigates purchasing channel choices among gin consumers in Italy, a market characterized by gradual development, strong social connotations, and increasing digital visibility. Using data from a nationwide online survey (n = 945 gin drinkers), we examine how sociodemographic characteristics, consumption habits, and social media engagement relate to channel selection. Results show that younger consumers, despite higher levels of social media use, are significantly less likely to purchase gin online and predominantly rely on supermarkets. In contrast, middle-aged consumers display stronger interest in premium products and a greater propensity toward online purchasing. Moreover, time spent on social media is negatively associated with online channel choice, challenging the assumption that digital natives are systematically online buyers.

Keywords: Gin market; Channel choice; Online purchasing; Digital engagement; Age difference

1. Introduction

In recent years, consumer behavior research has increasingly portrayed younger consumers as inherently digital and online-oriented buyers [1]. High levels of digital literacy, pervasive use of social media, and constant exposure to online content have often been interpreted as direct predictors of online purchasing behavior [2]. However, this assumption may oversimplify the relationship between age, digital engagement, and actual transaction choices, as empirical evidence suggests that digital engagement often influences pre-purchase stages rather than final purchasing behavior, particularly in multichannel and food-related contexts [3]. This apparent mismatch between digital engagement and purchasing behavior calls for a more nuanced understanding of how consumers navigate across channels.

In this perspective, the growing body of literature on multichannel and omnichannel retailing suggests that consumers frequently separate information search from purchase decisions [4, 5]. Digital channels and social media are often used for inspiration, while physical retail formats continue to play a central role at the point of purchase [6, 7, 8, 9, 10]. This distinction is especially relevant for food and beverage products, where routine purchasing habits, immediacy, and contextual factors remain highly influential [11]. In this domain, consumption choices are also shaped by the interplay

between hedonic and health-oriented motivations, as well as by the importance attributed to extrinsic product attributes [12]. This complexity becomes even more critical when focusing on younger consumers, who are often assumed to translate their high digital engagement into online purchasing behavior.

Within this debate, younger consumers represent a particularly interesting and underexplored segment. While they are among the most active users of digital platforms [13, 14]. Several studies suggest that digital engagement does not necessarily translate into higher online purchasing, especially for products characterized by occasional consumption, social connotations, or regulatory constraints, such as alcoholic beverages [4, 15, 16]. As a result, the widespread equation "young consumers = online buyers" deserves closer empirical scrutiny.

In this context, identifying a suitable empirical setting becomes crucial to test the apparent disconnect between digital engagement and purchasing behavior. Gin is a particularly suitable case study for testing young consumers' preference for online shopping. Positioned at the intersection of experimentation, social consumption, and everyday retail availability, the category enables the analysis of how younger consumers move across supermarkets, online environments, and specialty stores. Gin consumption is increasingly shaped by digital communication and social media narratives, which play a central role in influencing perceptions and meanings, though they do not necessarily translate into online purchasing behavior.

This perspective is especially relevant in the Italian context, where interest in gin has developed more gradually and later than in early-mature markets such as the United Kingdom and Northern Europe. In Italy, the expanding appeal of gin among younger consumers is closely linked to the emergence of locally rooted products that reinterpret traditional ingredients and regional identities, further reinforcing the hybrid nature of the category, combining experimentation, social consumption, and broad retail accessibility [17]. This pattern stands in contrast to the documented decline in younger consumers' interest in wine, which has been attributed to changing lifestyles, shifting socialization practices and a weakening symbolic attachment to traditional alcoholic beverages [18]. The increase of Italian craft gin brands can be framed within the expansion of the spirits sector through the use of distinctive ingredients and fabrication narrative on geographically embedded resources to construct unique product identities Therefore, the incorporation of Mediterranean herbs, citrus fruits and plants can be interpreted as a form of "place-based branding," whereby the product becomes a vehicle for expressing regional culture and biodiversity [19, 20] and consumers attribute value to products that embody geographical origin and cultural heritage [21, 22]. Gin's strong association with cocktail culture further reinforces this dimension, positioning it within social and experiential consumption contexts characterized by customization, conviviality and taken together all these elements reinforce

the hybrid nature of gin as a category, which embodies experimentation in flavors and recipes, sociability through cocktail culture. Unlike more traditional alcoholic beverages, whose consumption is often governed by established contexts, gin benefits from a flexible consumption occasion, allowing it to bridge artisanal production, fashionable lifestyles and mass-market availability.

In this respect, gin appears to respond more effectively to younger consumers' demand for novelty, flexibility, and identity expression, positioning itself as a contemporary alternative within the alcoholic beverage landscape.

Taken together, these elements highlight a gap between digital engagement and actual purchasing behavior, particularly among younger consumers and in product categories characterized by hybrid consumption patterns.

Against this background, the present study focuses explicitly on young gin consumers to examine how sociodemographic characteristics, consumption habits, and digital engagement jointly shape purchasing channel choices. By integrating channel choice more explicitly into the analysis of youth consumption behavior, this paper aims to contribute to the literature in two main ways. First, it provides empirical evidence on whether younger consumers can genuinely be considered online-oriented buyers in the gin market. Second, it sheds light on the role of social media and digital engagement in shaping pre-purchase versus transaction-stage decisions.

By doing so, the study makes three specific contributions to the literature. First, it challenges the widespread assumption that younger consumers are inherently online-oriented buyers by providing empirical evidence from a real consumption context. Second, it disentangles digital engagement from actual purchasing behavior, showing that social media exposure does not translate into online channel choice. Third, it contributes to multichannel consumer research by highlighting the role of product-specific and life-cycle factors in shaping channel decision**.**

2. Literature background

Young consumers are widely described as digitally native, permanently connected, and deeply embedded in social media ecosystems [23]. Digital platform structure large portions of their everyday lives, mediating not only social interaction but also access to information and symbolic consumption practices [24]. Within this framework, younger cohorts are frequently portrayed as natural adopters of digital technologies and, by extension, as structurally inclined toward online purchasing channels [1, 25]. This narrative has become increasingly dominant in both academic and managerial discourse, often reinforcing the implicit assumption that digital exposure and transactional behavior are closely aligned [4, 1].

However, some researcher problematizes this linear interpretation, highlighting how digital engagement often remains confined to symbolic, informational, or pre-purchase stages, while actual transaction decisions continue to be shaped by contextual, product-specific, and situational factors [11, 3]. High levels of digital engagement do not necessarily translate into a systematic preference for online purchasing, nor do they imply a reduced role for physical retail environments.

Some studies highlight a persistent disconnect between digital familiarity and actual buying behavior, suggesting that young consumers selectively appropriate digital tools, especially for food and beverage, depending on the stage of the decision-making process and the nature of the product [26; 27, 28; 29]. In this perspective, social media platforms function primarily as symbolic arenas where meanings, tastes, and consumption-related identities are negotiated, while the act of purchasing may still be anchored in more traditional channels [30, 31, 32]. This phenomenon is consistent with evidence of an attitude–behavior gap, whereby stated preferences and intentions may diverge from actual choices, especially in food and beverage markets characterized by habitual routines and contextual constraints [33].

Supermarkets, in particular, continue to occupy a pivotal position due to their embeddedness in daily life, their capacity to accommodate unplanned purchases, and their compatibility with time-constrained consumption contexts [34]. The persistence of physical retail should not be interpreted as a rejection of digitalization. Rather, it reflects the differentiated roles that channels play depending on product characteristics and situational factors [35].

Alcoholic beverages provide a particularly rich context in which to explore these dynamics [36, 37, 18, 38].

The expanding literature on social media influencers further complicates the relationship between digital engagement and purchasing behavior. Numerous studies document the ability of influencers to shape consumer attitudes, preferences, and purchase intentions by leveraging credibility, identification, and perceived authenticity [39, 40, 41, 42]. Meta-analytical evidence confirms that influencer marketing can be effective, particularly when trust and product–endorser fit are high [43]. However, other contributions emphasize that influencer-driven engagement often stimulates interest, curiosity, or aspirational desire without necessarily translating into concrete purchasing behavior, especially in categories subject to normative constraints or situational barriers [44, 45].

In alcohol-related contexts, this gap between influence and action appears particularly salient. Social media content contributes to shaping imaginaries of consumption, reinforcing associations with sociability, experimentation, and lifestyle positioning [32]. At the same time, some studies highlight how alcohol consumption is deeply embedded in life-course dynamics and age-specific socialization processes, with patterns of initiation, frequency, and symbolic meaning varying significantly across

cohorts [46]. Early exposure and peer-group influence have been identified as key drivers in the formation of drinking norms among younger individuals, particularly in contexts where alcohol functions as a marker of belonging and identity construction [47, 48]. Conversely, more mature consumers tend to display more stabilized routines and attribute-based evaluations, often linked to quality cues, origin, and brand reputation [49, 50].

Yet, empirical evidence suggests that such influence operates primarily at the pre-purchase stage, affecting awareness, consideration, and perceived value rather than channel choice or final transaction. This finding aligns with earlier research on alcohol advertising and counter-advertising, which demonstrates that media exposure can modify attitudes and norms without producing proportional changes in actual consumption behavior [51, 52].

Taken together, the literature suggests that digital engagement should not be equated with transactional orientation [3]. Social media influence is multifaceted, indirect, and strongly stage-specific, interacting with product symbolism, consumption context, and individual dispositions [4, 53].

These insights are particularly relevant for hybrid categories, such as gin, that combine elements of experimentation, social consumption, and everyday retail accessibility [37, 29]. By explicitly integrating purchasing channel choice into the analysis of youth consumption behavior, the present study responds to calls for more nuanced, category-sensitive approaches and contributes to a more critical understanding of the limits and possibilities of digitalization in contemporary food and beverage markets [35].

3. Materials and Methods

The study adopts a non-probability sampling approach, with respondents recruited on a convenience basis according to criteria of accessibility and availability. Data were collected through a nationwide online survey of Italian gin consumers conducted between June and September 2025. The questionnaire was administered via Google Forms and disseminated through multiple social media channels, which are widely used in social science research as effective tools for participant recruitment due to their broad reach [54].

Survey dissemination combined public posts and targeted invitations circulated through the authors' networks, with repeated sharing over time to enhance participation. Respondents were also encouraged to further distribute the survey within their personal networks, resulting in a combined convenience–snowball sampling strategy. This approach is commonly adopted in exploratory consumer research aimed at identifying behavioral patterns and socio-demographic heterogeneity rather than producing statistically representative estimates.

Several measures were implemented to mitigate potential sampling and reporting biases. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, attitudinal constructs were measured using validated Likert-type scales, and consistency checks were applied to identify and exclude incomplete or unreliable responses. In addition, dissemination across heterogeneous networks helped limit the over-representation of specific social groups. Accordingly, the study does not aim for population representativeness but rather to capture structured behavioral patterns within the sampled population. A total of 945 questionnaires by gin consumers were collected, while 143 non-gin respondents were not considered.

The empirical strategy is designed to investigate systematic differences in consumption behavior and purchasing channel choice across consumer segments. In particular, the analysis focuses on three dimensions: (i) socio-demographic characteristics, with a specific emphasis on age groups; (ii) consumption-related habits and preferences; and (iii) patterns of social media use and perceived digital influence.

The dataset is used to test two core hypotheses. First, whether younger consumers are more likely to engage in online purchasing. Second, whether higher levels of social media engagement are associated with online channel choice. These hypotheses allow for a direct empirical assessment of the commonly assumed link between digital nativity and online purchasing behavior.

To address these research questions, the analysis relies on chi-square tests of association, which are particularly suitable for examining relationships between categorical variables and for identifying statistically significant differences across groups [55]. This method allows for a systematic comparison of purchasing behaviors, consumption patterns, and digital engagement across age cohorts.

In addition, cross-tabulation analyses are used to explore the interaction between variables, including controlling for age effects when examining the relationship between social media engagement and purchasing behavior. This approach enables a more nuanced interpretation of observed associations and helps isolate the role of key explanatory factors.

Given the objective of identifying structured behavioral differences rather than estimating causal relationships, the analysis focuses on descriptive and associative statistical techniques [56]. This approach is consistent with multichannel consumer research, where the emphasis is on detecting patterns, segment heterogeneity, and behavioral regularities across groups.

This methodological framework enhances the interpretability of differences across consumer segments and allows for a robust empirical assessment of the relationship between age, digital engagement, and purchasing channel choice.

4. Results

The sample is composed of 945 gin-drinkers of age 18 or older. Table 1 summarizes the socio-demographic characteristics of the sample. The sample shows a strong prevalence of female respondents; therefore, the results may be affected by a gender imbalance and may not be fully generalizable to the population of Italian gin consumers.

Table 1: Characteristics of the sample

Variable	Class	Observations
Age	18-25	657
	26-35	135
	36-50	102
	51 or older	51
Sex	Male	258
	Female	687
Education	Middle school diploma	41
	High school diploma	585
	Bachelor's degree	216
	Master's degree or higher	103

The first part of the questionnaire examined differences in gin consumption across age groups. The main results are reported in Table 2. Data support the conclusion that gin consumption variables change with age. χ^2 association tests allowed us to reject the null hypothesis of independence between age and all gin consumption variables (Table 2).

Table 2:Sample statistics of gin consumption (percent values, numbers in parentheses are p-values from a $\chi 2$ association test)

	Age groups				
	18-25	26-35	36-50	51+	Total
How often do you drink gin? (0.001)					
Never/Rarely	48.2	33.3	43.1	62.7	46.3
Once a month	20.1	18.5	15.7	19.6	19.4
Twice a month	14.8	20.0	13.7	2.0	14.7
Once a week	12.9	23.0	18.6	13.7	15.0
More than once a week	4.0	5.2	8.8	2.0	4.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
What is your favorite gin? (0.001)					
Don't know	25.7	11.9	12.7	15.7	21.8
No preferences	26.0	16.3	13.7	27.5	23.4
International brands	29.4	21.5	15.7	13.7	25.9
Local or national brands	4.1	7.4	10.8	11.8	5.7
Premium / craft	14.8	43.0	47.1	31.4	23.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

What is your most important driver when purchasing gin? (0.001)					
1. Price	76.7	54.1	41.2	33.3	67.3
2. Packaging	4.4	5.9	3.9	3.9	4.6
3. Friends, Experts	3.2	5.9	14.7	13.7	5.4
4. Alcohol content	0.5	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.4
5. Ingredients, Flavor	2.1	8.1	8.8	7.8	4.0
6. Brand	11.6	19.3	20.6	27.5	14.5
7. Origin	1.5	5.9	9.8	13.7	3.7
8. Social media promotion	0.0	0.0	1.0	0.0	0.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Are you willing to pay a price premium for a premium gin? (0.001)					
No, I always look for best prices	16.1	9.6	5.9	9.8	13.8
I am not interested in premium gin	17.2	6.7	6.9	7.8	14.1
Up to a point	45.8	52.6	49.0	37.3	46.7
Always	9.9	21.5	27.5	27.5	14.4
Only if advised by a trusted source	11.0	9.6	10.8	17.6	11.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
What brought you to drinking gin? (0.001)					
Personal curiosity	7.6	15.6	11.8	39.2	10.9
Friends/social context	63.0	55.6	57.8	45.1	60.4
Experiences in bars/locals	27.7	28.1	28.4	15.7	27.2
Packaging and design	1.2	0.0	1.0	0.0	1.0
Post or stories on social media	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3
Influencers or brand ambassadors	0.0	0.7	1.0	0.0	0.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Consumers aged between 18 and 25 drink gin less often than all other groups except consumers aged 51 or older. They are more focused on price, less willing to pay a premium for quality gin, more influenced by social context, and less interested in origin, branding, and even quality.

As expected, age groups differ in the use of social media. Data in Table 3 suggest that younger respondents use different media. Age group 18-25 is keener on TikTok, 26-35 is associated with Instagram, while older respondents are with Facebook. Also, younger respondents spend more time on social media, on average. Middle-aged groups are more likely to be exposed to gin advertising and promotion on social media than others.

Table 3: Use of social media (percent values, numbers in parentheses are p-values from a $\chi 2$ association test)

	Age group				
	18-25	26-35	36-50	51+	Total
What social media do you use? (0.001)					
1. No social media	0.3	3.7	2.9	13.7	1.8

2. Instagram	15.1	32.6	11.8	13.7	17.1
3. Facebook	0.3	2.2	10.8	21.6	2.9
4. Instagram, TikTok	43.1	19.3	2.9	0.0	33.0
5. Instagram, Facebook	0.8	4.4	32.4	7.8	5.1
6. TikTok	12.5	2.2	2.9	2.0	9.4
7. All	28.0	35.6	36.3	41.2	30.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
How much time do you spend on social media? (0.001)					
Zero	0.3	3.7	2.9	13.7	1.8
Less than 1 hour	2.0	8.1	22.5	39.2	7.1
Between 1 and 2 hours	30.4	46.7	60.8	35.3	36.3
Between 2 and 4 hours	44.6	28.9	10.8	5.9	36.6
More than 5 hours	22.7	12.6	2.9	5.9	18.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Are you exposed to gin advertising on social media? (0.001)					
Never	15.1	12.6	8.8	33.3	15.0
Seldom	35.2	25.2	25.5	33.3	32.6
Sometimes	38.5	43.7	35.3	21.6	38.0
Often	8.7	13.3	25.5	11.8	11.3
All the times	2.6	5.2	4.9	0.0	3.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

The dataset can be used to test the study hypothesis about young consumers and online purchases. Table 4 illustrates the distribution of respondents by age and preferred shopping outlet for gin (bars, locals, and other social outlets are excluded). A χ^2 association test rejected the null hypothesis of independence between age and shopping outlet at a 99% confidence level.

Table 4: Preferred shopping outlet for gin, by age group (percent values)

	Age group				
Shopping outlet	18-25	26-35	36-50	51+	Total
None of these options	40.2	36.3	25.5	35.3	37.8
Supermarkets	46.9	33.3	30.4	31.4	42.3
Specialty stores	10.2	17.0	30.4	29.4	14.4
Online	2.6	12.6	12.7	3.9	5.2
Other stores	0.2	0.7	1.0	0.0	0.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Supermarkets are age group 18-25 preferred shopping outlet. Only 2.6 per cent of youngest respondents prefer online shopping, the lowest results among the age group. This result might be explained either by a preference for "anonymous" shopping outlets, that allow young consumers to access gin without discovering their preferences to family or by social consumption resulting in

opportunity purchasing rather than in planned behavior. Yet, further research is needed to support these speculations. Noticeably, age groups 26-35 and 36-50 exhibit a relative preference for online purchases.

The second study hypothesis is that engagement in social media is associate with online consumption. As expected, the data in Table 5 do not support the hypothesis. Because younger respondents spend more time on social media and have the lower share of online purchases, we found a negative association between the two variables (p-value of χ^2 association test 0.001).

Table 5: Preferred outlet by time spent on social media (per cent values)

Time spent on social media per day	Preferred shopping outlet					
	No purchase	Supermarket	Specialty store	Online	Other	Total
Zero	29.4	41.2	23.5	5.9	0.0	100.0
Less than 1 hour	31.3	31.3	28.4	9.0	0.0	100.0
Between 1 and 2 hours	35.0	36.4	19.8	8.2	0.6	100.0
Between 2 and 4 hours	37.9	50.3	8.7	2.9	0.3	100.0
More than 5 hours	46.5	42.4	8.7	2.3	0.0	100.0
Total	37.8	42.3	14.4	5.2	0.3	100.0

To control for the age effect, we compute the percentage of respondents who prefer to shop for gin online (vs. other outlets) by age group and time spent on social media. Results are reported in Table 6. Even within age groups, the association between online shopping and time spent on social media is not supported.

Table 6: Per cent share of respondents preferring online shopping by age group and time spent on social media per day

Time spent on social media per day	Age Group			
	18-25	26-35	36-50	51+
Zero	0.0	20.0	0.0	0.0
Less than 1 hour	23.1	0.0	4.3	10.0
Between 1 and 2 hours	3.5	17.5	16.1	0.0
Between 2 and 4 hours	2.0	5.1	18.2	0.0
More than 5 hours	0.7	17.6	0.0	0.0

Finally, we investigated if younger consumers were more affected by social media campaigns than older respondents. Table 7 does not support any association between age and the self-reported effect (p-value of χ^2 association test 0.085). Yet, when asked if social media affect gin consumption of youngest generations, the perception of elder respondents is of a larger effect than younger ones (Table 8, p-value of χ^2 association test 0.001).

Table 7: Do you think social media affected your gin choice? (per cent values by age group)

	Age Group				
	18-25	26-35	36-50	51+	Total
Not at all	63.0	51.9	49.0	58.8	59.7
Marginally	21.8	25.9	26.5	19.6	22.8
A little	12.0	16.3	15.7	11.8	13.0
Quite	1.4	3.0	3.9	3.9	2.0
Completely	1.8	3.0	4.9	5.9	2.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 8: Do you think that social media shape gin consumption of young people? (per cent values)

	Age group				
	18-25	26-35	36-50	51+	Total
Not at all	7,2	5,2	2,0	3,9	6,1
Marginally	32,6	27,4	13,7	9,8	28,6
A little	10,0	7,4	10,8	15,7	10,1
Quite	37,1	39,3	54,9	41,2	39,6
Completely	13,1	20,7	18,6	29,4	15,7
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

5. Discussion

The analysis confirms that age plays a central role in shaping gin consumption patterns, preferences, and purchasing behavior. The rejection of the null hypothesis of independence between age and all gin consumption variables indicates that gin consumption is not homogeneous across cohorts but evolves significantly over the life course, age is a key discriminating variable in the gin market as it emerges also by the existing literature on alcohol consumption that showed how it can be attributed to a range of demographic and social factors [57].

In this paper, younger consumers (18–25) are found to be occasional gin drinkers, with lower consumption frequency than middle-aged groups. Their behavior is strongly price-oriented and socially driven: they show partial interest in premium products, brand reputation, origin, and product quality, while the social setting is the dominant driver of drinking [58, 59]. This profile suggests that gin is primarily consumed as a social good. As age increases, consumption patterns become more controlled and thoughtful. Respondents in the 26–35 and 36–50 age groups drink gin habitually, show stronger preferences for premium products, and are more willing to pay a premium price for quality. These consumers also attach greater importance to brand, origin, and expert recommendations, indicating a shift from opportunistic consumption toward a more informed and intentional purchasing process. Consumers aged 51 or older, while drinking gin less frequently, appear relatively quality-oriented, proposing a mature drinking style driven more by curiosity and experience than by social influence. Interestingly, higher time spent on social media does not result into greater exposure to

gin-related advertising. Instead, respondents in the mid-age groups report higher exposure to gin promotion on social media. This outcome is consistent with alcohol brands' preference for targeting consumers with greater purchasing power and a greater willingness to pay a premium for quality rather than those with the highest social media engagement [60, 61].

The results challenge the common assumption that younger consumers are more inclined toward online purchasing. Despite their high social media engagement, respondents aged 18–25 show the lowest preference for online shopping and rely primarily on supermarkets for gin purchases. This pattern may reflect a preference for familiar, "anonymous" purchasing environments or the predominantly social nature of gin consumption among this age group, leading to opportunity rather than planned purchases. Then, supermarkets are a convenient and anonymous source of low-priced gin. However, this conclusion remains speculative and warrants further investigation.

In contrast, consumers aged 26–35 and 36–50 exhibit a stronger preference for online shopping, consistent with their higher interest in product differentiation, premium offerings and planned consumption. This supports the idea that online purchasing is associated more with involvement and product knowledge than with age per se.

The second study hypothesis, testing a positive relationship between social media engagement and online consumption, is clearly not supported. On the contrary, a negative association emerges. Respondents who spend more time on social media are less likely to purchase gin online. Importantly, this relationship persists even after controlling for age, indicating that social media engagement and online purchasing are not complementary behaviors in this context. The analysis of perceived social media effect reveals an interesting asymmetry. Self-reported influence of social media on personal gin choices does not differ significantly by age, with most respondents reporting limited or no impact. However, when evaluating the influence of social media on younger generations, older respondents perceive a substantially stronger effect than younger consumers themselves.

This divergence suggests the presence of a perception bias, whereby individuals tend to moderate media influence on their own behavior while attributing greater exposure to others, particularly younger people. This might be an additional motivation explaining why younger consumers are not a primary target for gin's online advertising campaign. It also suggests that the impact of social media marketing may be indirect or unconscious.

The findings highlight the importance of age-based segmentation in the gin market: younger consumers appear less responsive to quality cues, branding, and digital commerce, while middle-aged consumers represent the most attractive segment for premium products and online channels.

6. Conclusion

This study contributes to the literature on multichannel consumer behavior by providing empirical evidence that younger consumers cannot be uncritically characterized as online-oriented buyers. The findings point to a clear distinction between digital engagement and actual purchasing behavior, suggesting that the commonly assumed correspondence between younger age cohorts and online purchasing does not systematically hold in real consumption contexts.

From a managerial standpoint, the results highlight the importance of adopting more articulated and channel-specific strategies. While digital environments play a relevant role in shaping awareness and pre-purchase processes, physical retail channels continue to retain a central function at the transaction stage, particularly for younger consumers. This evidence calls for moving beyond simplified, age-based segmentation and for developing approaches that more carefully account for consumption patterns and product-specific characteristics.

The study is not without limitations. In particular, the use of non-probability sampling and self-reported data may constrain the generalizability of the results. Future research could address these aspects by relying on more representative samples and by extending the analysis to different product categories, in order to assess the robustness and broader applicability of the findings.

Overall, the study offers evidence that age and digital engagement influence consumer behavior along distinct dimensions, contributing to a more refined understanding of multichannel dynamics within the food and beverage sector.

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