

EXPRESSIONS OF PURCHASE INTENT IN ENGLISH-LANGUAGE FACEBOOK RETAIL DISCOURSE

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Key words: *purchase intent, English-language Facebook retail discourse, online retail, customer–brand interactions, discourse-pragmatic approach.*

Social media have become essential channels for retail communication, shaping how consumers express purchase intent and how brands respond to these signals. Understanding the mechanisms of communicating purchase intent is important both for linguistic research in discourse and pragmatics and for online retail practice. This study examines modes of expressing purchase intent and brand responses in English-language Facebook retail discourse, focusing on customer-brand interactions on the official page of the American retailer Macy's, a chain of department stores known for regular large-scale promotions. The research analyzes syntactic constructions, lexical choices, and discourse markers in combination with pragmatic functions, focusing on how customers explicitly declare purchase intent, articulate their needs and desires, and demonstrate readiness to buy. Using a qualitative discourse-pragmatic approach, ten principal modes of expressing purchase intent were identified, forming a continuum from direct statements to indirect, context-dependent signals. The findings indicate that customers use statements of intent, emotional expressions, and indications of forthcoming actions, which, under the influence of social and situational factors, convey varying degrees of certainty, emotionality, and commitment. Brand responses often mirror customer tone, confirm product availability, or provide guidance, facilitating audience engagement and supporting a positive consumer experience. Factors such as brand reputation, seasonal promotions, and the nature of the customer–brand relationship influence both the expression and interpretation of purchase intent. These results enhance understanding of communication dynamics in online retail and highlight directions for further research into how sectoral specificity and platform features affect the translation of purchase intent into actual sales.

ВИРАЖЕННЯ КУПІВЕЛЬНОГО НАМІРУ В АНГЛОМОВНОМУ РИТЕЙЛОВОМУ ДИСКУРСІ FACEBOOK

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Ключові слова: купівельний намір, англомовний ритейловий дискурс Facebook, онлайн-ритейл, взаємодія «споживач–бренд», дискурсивно-прагматичний підхід.

Соціальні медіа стали ключовими каналами комунікації у сфері роздрібно́ї торгівлі, формуючи способи, якими споживачі виражають купівельний намір, а бренди реагують на ці сигнали. Розуміння механізмів комунікації купівельного наміру має значення як для лінгвістичних досліджень у галузі дискурсу та прагматики, так і для практики онлайн-ритейлу. Метою цього дослідження є аналіз способів вираження купівельного наміру та відповідей брендів в англомовному ритейловому дискурсі Facebook, зокрема у взаємодіях «споживач–бренд» на офіційній сторінці американського ритейлера Macy's, мережі універсальних магазинів, відомої регулярними масштабними акціями. Дослідження розглядає синтаксичні конструкції, лексичний вибір і дискурсивні маркери у поєднанні з прагматичними функціями, зосереджуючись на тому, як покупці прямо декларують намір придбати товар, формулюють свої потреби й бажання, демонструють готовність до покупки. Використовуючи якісний дискурсивно-прагматичний підхід, виокремлено десять основних способів вираження купівельного наміру, що утворюють континуум від прямих заяв до непрямих, контекстно зумовлених сигналів. Результати дослідження свідчать, що покупці застосовують твердження про намір, емоційні висловлювання та вказівки на майбутні дії, які під впливом соціальних і ситуативних чинників передають різний ступінь категоричності, емоційності та зобов'язання. Відповіді бренду зазвичай віддзеркалюють тон повідомлення, підтверджують наявність товару або надають поради, що сприяє залученню аудиторії та позитивному споживчому досвіду. Такі чинники, як-от репутація бренду, сезонні знижки та характер взаємин «клієнт–бренд», впливають на спосіб вираження і на інтерпретацію купівельного наміру. Результати дослідження поглиблюють розуміння комунікаційної динаміки в онлайн-торгівлі та відкривають перспективи подальших досліджень впливу галузевої специфіки та особливостей платформи на реалізацію намірів у фактичні покупки.

Introduction. In the contemporary retail environment, social media platforms have evolved into pivotal arenas for brand-consumer interaction (Hudson et al., 2016; Yoo, 2024). Retailers use platforms such as YouTube, X, Instagram, and Facebook not merely as advertising channels but as interactive spaces where potential buyers can express interest, navigate their preferences, and publicly commit to consumption. Within these spaces, expressions of purchase intent serve as critical indicators of consumer engagement and valuable signals for sales forecasting, targeted marketing, and brand community building (Gutierrez et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2025).

Purchase intent (also known as *buying intent* or *purchase intention*) refers to a consumer's expressed inclination, willingness, or decision to acquire a

product or service (Bhasin, 2025; Hanaysha, 2022). While traditionally measured through surveys or behavioral tracking, purchase intent in social media discourse emerges through natural, spontaneous user-generated utterances, often shaped by platform affordances, interpersonal dynamics, and brand interactivity.

Social media retail discourse offers a particularly fertile ground for examining expressions of purchase intent. The interactive affordances of these platforms, such as comment-reply threads, emojis, and asynchronous but still conversational exchanges, enable consumers to post short, emotion-charged messages reacting to promotions.

This research is relevant due to the growing importance of identifying consumer intention signals in real-time, user-generated discourse.

While marketing and communication studies have addressed purchase intent as a psychological construct or predictor of buying behavior (Khan et al., 2023; Ma et al., 2022; Nidal & Albaity, 2024; Peña-García et al., 2020; Sobgo et al., 2025), little attention has been paid to its linguistic and pragmatic realization in brand–consumer interactions on social media.

The purpose of this study is to identify, classify, and analyze the ways in which purchase intent is expressed in English-language consumer comments responding to promotional retail content on social media. The research considers syntactic patterns, lexical choices, and discourse markers alongside the pragmatic functions of these utterances, examining how customers assert intent, communicate desire, or signal commitment. By drawing on discourse analysis (Canning & Walker, 2024) and speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1976), the study provides a comprehensive understanding of how purchase intent is publicly conveyed online, offering insights relevant to both linguistic research and social media marketing practice.

Materials and methods. This study examines consumer comments posted under promotional content on the official Facebook page of Macy’s, Inc. (2022), one of the largest and most recognizable U.S. department store chains. Macy’s was chosen due to its highly active and interactive Facebook presence, with approximately 2.5 million followers and frequent promotional campaigns generating rich consumer engagement (Macy’s, n.d.). The volume and diversity of user comments on Macy’s page provide an ideal context to explore the linguistic and pragmatic realization of purchase intent in authentic English-language social media retail discourse.

Data were collected over a three-month period (mid-May to mid-August 2025). Only publicly visible comments under the original promotional posts were included, in accordance with ethical standards for social media research. A purposive sample of 270 comments exhibiting explicit or implicit purchase intent was selected for detailed qualitative analysis. This sample size was sufficient to capture a diverse range of syntactic, lexical, and pragmatic patterns while remaining manageable for in-depth coding. Threaded brand responses to these comments were also collected to capture interactional dynamics.

The study employs a qualitative discourse-pragmatic approach (Félix-Brasdefer, 2015) to analyze expressions of purchase intent, focusing on how consumers deploy linguistic and interactional resources in English-language digital retail conversations. The unit of analysis is the purchase intent expression, defined as any communicative act signaling the consumer’s inclination or decision to acquire a product, whether stated directly or implied.

Analysis addresses two key dimensions: (1) linguistic features, including syntactic constructions, lexical choices, intensifiers, and nonverbal elements such as emoji use; and (2) pragmatic functions, focusing on the illocutionary force of expressions and their role within the unfolding interaction.

Results and discussion. The analysis of consumer comments on Macy’s Facebook page reveals a rich variety of linguistic and pragmatic resources used to express purchase intent. These expressions vary in their degree of explicitness, grammatical structure, and affective intensity. Macy’s brand responses frequently mirror the tone of the customer’s comment, confirm product availability, or provide direct calls to action, reinforcing consumer engagement.

To systematically present these findings, the identified modes of purchase intent expression are grouped from the most explicit and direct forms to more nuanced and indirect manifestations. This progression reflects how consumers articulate their intent publicly from clear commitments to more subtle, interactionally refined expressions.

1. Product Need: This is the most overt mode of expressing purchase intent, where customers explicitly communicate a necessity for a specific product. These expressions typically use strong commissive language with verbs like need or intensified variants such as need to get, which convey increasing levels of urgency and personal commitment. They are often combined with the product name and further amplified by adverbs such as really, capitalization, repetition, exclamation marks, or positive emojis like red hearts or heart eyes to heighten emotional engagement.

Additionally, they may incorporate positive evaluative adjectives (e.g., sweet, pretty) or other lexical items that serve to enhance the perceived appeal of the desired product or the overall brand experience. Although framed as statements of need, these utterances function pragmatically as indirect commissives (Searle, 1975), clearly signaling the customer’s intention to purchase. For example:

Customer (Shelia): *So pretty, I need to get a pair!*

Macy’s: *You can’t go wrong with any of them, Shelia! - Drew at Macy’s* (Macy’s, 2025, June 30);

Customer (Shannon): *I need new pots and pans!*



Macy’s: *It’s a sign, Shannon! - Jay at Macy’s* (Macy’s, 2025, July 31).

2. Product Desire: This mode captures explicit expressions of desire that are somewhat less forceful than statements of need, reflecting preference rather than necessity. Customers typically use the verb want paired with the product name to signal interest. Notably, the past tense I wanted can indicate revived or ongoing desire, suggesting

the feeling remains current despite the past form. These expressions are often intensified by adverbs like *so* and pronouns such as *all*, which broaden the scope to include multiple items rather than a single product. Exclamations and positive emojis further convey enthusiasm and strong personal inclination. Although these utterances clearly communicate desire, they do not constitute direct commitments; these are classic indirect commissives. Unlike statements of need, want-based utterances emphasize preference and positive attitude, motivating purchase without necessarily implying urgency or obligation. For example:

Customer (Shannon): *I want the bed!*

Macy's: *Fantastic pick, Shannon!* - Carlos at Macy's (Macy's, 2025, June 27);

Customer (Michelle): *i wanted all of them*

Macy's: *They're all beautiful in their own way!*
♥♥ - Dakota at Macy's (Macy's, 2025, July 9).

3. Imminent Shopping: These utterances convey that the speaker is in the process of, or on the verge of, purchasing. They typically use the present continuous with dynamic verbs denoting shopping-related movement or acquisition (e.g., shopping, picking up, running, getting), as well as present perfect constructions that signal imminent action following a completed preparatory step. Both forms often appear elliptical, lacking an explicit subject and auxiliary, and are accompanied by spatial markers (e.g., *there*, *the store*) and temporal markers (e.g., *now*) to emphasize immediacy and ongoing engagement. Another structural subtype includes prepositional phrase fragments functioning as independent utterances (e.g., *On my way!*), expressing current movement toward the point of purchase. These expressions are often exclamatory, intensifying enthusiasm. Across these patterns, the pragmatic function is representative (Searle, 1976), signaling urgency and readiness to act, and prompting timely brand responses to maintain consumer engagement. For example:

Customer (Kym): *getting mine now*

Macy's: *We can't wait to see how you style them!*
- Dakota at Macy's (Macy's, 2025, June 30);

Customer (Wendy): *On my way!!*

Macy's: *See you there!* ♥♥ - Dakota at Macy's (Macy's, 2025, July 31).

4. Future Purchase Commitment: This category covers utterances that indicate planned or intended purchases, typically using modal verbs (e.g., *will*) or modal phrases (e.g., *be going to + verb*), as well as other future-tense constructions to signal forward-looking intentions. Common patterns include the future indefinite or future continuous forms with verbs denoting shopping-related actions or acquisition (e.g., *buy*, *pick up*, *grab*, *look for*, *check*), often combined with temporal markers

(e.g., *tonight*, *this weekend*) to emphasize imminent shopping activity. Intensifiers like *definitely* further strengthen the intent by conveying certainty and firm commitment, transforming a simple plan into an emphatic pledge. Functioning as explicit commissives (Searle, 1976), these utterances openly commit the speaker to a future purchase and pragmatically invite brand confirmation or encouragement, thereby reinforcing customer engagement and purchase likelihood. For example:

Customer (Hope): *I'll take those shades*

Macy's: *They're so stylish!* - Jordan at Macy's (Macy's, 2025, June 18);

Customer (Lisa): *I'll be going this weekend to look for summer dresses*

Macy's: *See you soon, Lisa!* - Nick at Macy's (Macy's, 2025, July 24).

5. Must-Have Product: This category includes utterances that present a product, sale, or event as indispensable, non-negotiable, or inevitable. The hallmark feature is the modal verb *must* in its deontic sense of strong necessity or recommendation, often realized in elliptical forms with omitted subjects (e.g., *must have + product name*) or as nominal compounds (e.g., *a must-see*, *a must-go*), which act as intensifying evaluators. Such forms convey heightened necessity and urgency, combining evaluative judgment with an implicit purchase commitment. Pragmatically, they function as emphatic endorsements that generate social and personal pressure to act, framing the product or event as too valuable to miss and thereby amplifying purchase intent. These utterances can be characterized as hybrid acts (Hancher, 1979) that simultaneously express positive evaluation, signal the speaker's tentative commitment to engage with the product, and indirectly encourage others to do the same, thus combining personal stance with social influence. Brand responses typically mirror and reinforce this positive stance, validating the implied action and sustaining consumer engagement. For example:

Customer (Lisa): *Must have that dress*

Macy's: *That dress is glorious!* - Rey at Macy's (Macy's, 2025, May 28);

Customer (Shelia): *This sale is a must-go*

Macy's: *You said it best, Sheila!* - Jordan at Macy's (Macy's, 2025, July 24).

6. Unmissable Brand Sale: This category comprises customer utterances that communicate a strong commitment to a brand's sales events, signaling loyalty, enthusiasm, and ongoing engagement. These typically use the verb *miss* combined with either the negative modal *can't*, indicating the customer's inability or unwillingness to forego the event. They may also employ the negative adverb *never*, signaling habitual engagement

and regular attendance (e.g., *I never miss sales at Mac's*). Some utterances begin with the emphatic particle *No*, reinforcing both the speaker's strong commitment and emotional intensity. Emotional force is further amplified through capitalization, punctuation, repetition, exclamation marks, and emojis. Pragmatically, these expressions function primarily as representatives, committing to the truth of ongoing engagement. Their expressive features convey excitement, devotion, and loyalty, and some carry a mild commissive undertone, implying future attendance. Brands usually respond with brief appreciative acknowledgments that validate loyalty and encourage further engagement. For example:

Customer (Janice, top fan): *No. I CAN'T. MISS. MY. MACY'S. SALE. I. SHOP. For. MACY'S. Yeárs. An. Year. Family. For. Me. Love. I. Like*

Macy's: *We appreciate you, Janice! - Nick at Macy's* (Macy's, 2025, July 24);

Customer (Michele): *I never miss a great sale at Mac's* ❤️ ❤️

Macy's: *A great sale is too good to pass up on, Michele! - Nick at Macy's* (Macy's, 2025, July 24).

7. Anticipatory Purchase: These utterances convey consumers' eagerness, excitement, and emotional investment regarding forthcoming products, sales, or shopping events. Common patterns include elliptical forms omitting subjects, such as *can't wait for + noun phrase* or *can't wait to + verb*, expressing customer anticipation. These may be intensified with modifiers (e.g., *beyond excited*, *so excited*) or positive evaluative adjectives (e.g., *awesome*, *amazing*), often accompanied by exclamation marks to convey heightened emotional intensity. Syntactic variations include progressive forms (e.g., *I'm getting so excited*) and explicit temporal markers (e.g., *on Saturday morning*). Some expressions combine anticipation with personal plans or social engagement, adding a relational dimension. Pragmatically, these utterances function as expressives (Searle, 1976), conveying the customer's emotional state, and often carry an implicit commissive component, signaling planned or anticipated future action. Brand responses typically acknowledge and reciprocate this enthusiasm, reinforcing relational engagement. For example:

Customer (Rose): *I'm beyond excited for this sale, can't wait to score some amazing deals on Saturday morning!*

Macy's: *We're looking forward, Rose! We hope you have a great Saturday!* - Drew at Macy's (Macy's, 2025, July 24);

Customer (Chau): *Cant wait for the wallet to show up*

Macy's: *We're just as excited!* ❤️ - Jordan at Macy's (Macy's, 2025, June 9).

8. Temporal Purchase Framing: This mode encompasses customer utterances that present purchases or shopping activities as timely, appropriate, or overdue. Core patterns include *It's time + verb* and *It's time for + noun phrase*, often appearing in elliptical forms (e.g., *Time to/for*). These constructions may occur in seasonal, social, or personal contexts (e.g., *It's time for back-to-school shopping!*), strengthened by positive evaluative adjectives (e.g., *great*, *perfect*) or by intensifiers (e.g., *absolutely*, *definitely*). Exclamation marks, emojis like red hearts, and orthographic stylization (e.g., capitalization, elongation, playful suffixes) enhance affective impact and convey excitement or personal investment. Within this pattern, a notable stylistic subtype consists of incomplete or purely nominal statements that foreground the object or activity, creating immediacy and enthusiasm (e.g., *Shopping time!*). Such expressions may also include positive brand evaluations, linking the timing of the purchase with loyalty or appreciation. Pragmatically, they function as representatives, asserting the appropriateness of the action at the present moment, while some carry an implicit commissive element, indicating intent to act. Brand responses typically acknowledge and reinforce both the temporal framing and the positive sentiment, thereby validating the timing and fostering relational engagement. For example:

Customer (Wendy): *It's definitely time for a trip to Macy's* ❤️

Macy's: *We couldn't agree more, Wendy—Back-to-school shopping just got a lot more fun!* ❤️ - Carlos at Macy's (Macy's, 2025, July 16);

Customer (Christine): *shoe shopping timeee*

Macy's: *We hope you spoil yourself, Christine! - Jay at Macy's* (Macy's, 2025, June 30).

9. Tentative Purchase Intent: These utterances signal interest, willingness to try, or preliminary consideration of a product without firm commitment. They are often marked by modal verbs, such as *would*, *may*, or *might*, combined with base verbs denoting acquisition or shopping actions (e.g., *I'd buy*, *I may take*, *I might try it*), or by expressions of thinking and contemplating that convey curiosity (e.g., *I'm thinking about getting one*). Such utterances may also appear in elliptical form, omitting the subject or modal verb (e.g., *Would love to try*, *Love to try*). Some begin with an explicit positive product or brand evaluation, followed by a tentative intent statement, which strengthens the appeal while keeping the commitment open-ended. Pragmatically, these utterances function as indirect commissives or representatives, expressing a positive orientation toward purchase and a readiness to explore options while allowing space for further evaluation and decision-making. Brand responses

are typically concise affirmations or encouraging remarks, designed to reinforce customer interest without creating a sense of pressure. For example:

Customer (Nastasha): *May pick up the YSL cologne for my other half*

Macy's: *This is your sign! - Rey at Macy's* (Macy's, 2025, June 9);

Customer (Caseanna): *This looks amazing! I would like to try*

Macy's: *We think you'd love it, Caseanna! - Rey at Macy's* (Macy's, 2025, July 30).

10. Promotional Offer Acceptance: This category includes brief, elliptical expressions such as Yes, please, which allow consumers to signal agreement, desire, or purchase intent without explicitly stating it. These utterances may follow the nomination of the promotion or product and rely on shared knowledge of the offer, enabling customers to convey intent efficiently while prompting the brand to acknowledge and reinforce the message. They function primarily as representatives, expressing the speaker's stance toward the product or promotion, and may carry an implicit commissive component, suggesting likely follow-up action, such as making a purchase. Their brevity and reliance on contextual cues make them particularly effective in online retail discourse, where speed and mutual understanding are valued. For example:

Customer (April): *Yes please*

Macy's: *We've got you covered, April! - James at Macy's* (July 31, 2025);

Customer (Vanya): *Lowest Prices of Summer? Yes, please...*

Macy's: *We've got you covered, Vanya! ❤️ - Jordan at Macy's* (Macy's, 2025, June 27).

The ten modes form a pragmatic spectrum in which customers calibrate explicitness, affect, and commitment according to context, social norms, and promotional cues. Minimal forms leverage shared knowledge, mid-range expressions incorporate temporal, anticipatory, or loyalty framing, and maximal forms assert unequivocal purchase commitment. This continuum highlights how English-language online retail discourse combines subtlety, efficiency, and persuasive force, offering brands insight into consumer behavior and practical strategies for engagement that respond to both overt and implicit purchase intent signals.

Conclusions. The ten identified ways of expressing purchase intent illustrate the flexibility of customer language in English online retail spaces. Customers select different forms of expression to match the level of certainty, involvement, and social context of their interaction. Some expressions convey a strong and immediate decision to buy, while others communicate interest, curiosity, or a willingness to consider a purchase without making

a firm commitment. This variety reflects how digital retail communication blends direct transactional language with more conversational and socially oriented exchanges.

Such expressions are influenced not only by individual intent but also by broader factors, including brand reputation, seasonal promotions, peer interaction in public comment threads, and the perceived relationship between customer and retailer. In this environment, even short statements or brief reactions can carry significant meaning when interpreted in context, including the brand's marketing message or the timing of the post.

Awareness of these different types of purchase intent helps brands recognize customer needs and design more targeted, responsive engagement strategies. Businesses that can accurately identify both clear and indirect buying signals can provide better service and build long-term loyalty.

Further research could examine how retailers tailor their replies to each type of expression and whether certain responses are more effective at converting intent into actual sales. Comparative studies across multiple platforms and retail sectors could reveal how communication styles vary in relation to audience demographics, platform norms, and product categories, offering a richer understanding of how online purchase intent is expressed and acted upon in English online retail spaces.

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Отримано: 28.08.2025

Прийнято: 30.09.2025

Опубліковано: 30.10.2025

