

Social Media Influence, Consumer Trust and Purchase Intention: A Study of Consumers in the Indian Retail Market

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Abstract—

The rapid growth of social media has significantly influenced the way consumers obtain product information, evaluate retail brands, and make purchase decisions. This study examines the major social media factors influencing consumers' purchase intention and investigates the role of consumer trust in the Indian retail market. The study focuses on social media advertising, customer reviews and electronic word-of-mouth, influencer recommendations, and product information as major social media factors. Primary data are collected from 100 social media users through a structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale. The data are analysed using IBM SPSS through descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, Pearson correlation, and multiple linear regression. The study examines the influence of social media factors on consumer trust, the relationship between consumer trust and purchase intention, and the direct influence of social media factors on purchase intention. The study is expected to provide useful insights into how social media-related factors and consumer trust contribute to purchase intention in the Indian retail market. The findings may assist retail marketers in developing more effective social media strategies and building consumer trust.

Keywords—*Social Media Influence, Consumer Trust, Purchase Intention, Social Media Advertising, Electronic Word-of-Mouth, Influencer Marketing, Indian Retail Market*

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The rapid advancement of information and communication technologies has transformed the way businesses interact with consumers. Among these developments, social media has emerged as one of the most influential digital marketing platforms, enabling organizations to communicate with customers, promote products, and build long-term relationships. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, and X (formerly Twitter) have become integral to consumers' daily lives, serving not only as channels for social interaction but also as important sources of product information, recommendations, and purchasing decisions.

The Indian retail market has experienced remarkable growth in recent years, driven by increasing internet penetration, affordable smartphones, and widespread adoption of digital technologies. According to industry reports, India has one of the world's largest populations of social media users, making social media an indispensable marketing tool for retailers. Businesses increasingly rely on social media advertising, influencer marketing, user-generated content, and online customer engagement to attract and retain consumers. Unlike traditional advertising, social media enables two-way communication, allowing consumers to interact directly with brands, share experiences, and influence the purchasing decisions of others through reviews, ratings, and recommendations.

Consumer trust plays a pivotal role in shaping purchase decisions in today's digital marketplace. The abundance of online information has made consumers more selective and cautious when evaluating products and brands. Trust developed through authentic brand communication, positive customer experiences, transparent marketing practices, and credible online reviews significantly influences consumers' willingness to purchase products. Social media facilitates trust-building by enabling consumers to access peer opinions,

influencer recommendations, and brand-generated content before making purchase decisions. Consequently, retailers that effectively establish trust through social media are more likely to enhance customer satisfaction, loyalty, and purchase intention.

Purchase intention, defined as the likelihood that a consumer will purchase a product or service in the future, has become an important indicator of marketing effectiveness. Numerous factors influence purchase intention, including perceived product quality, brand image, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), influencer credibility, promotional campaigns, and consumer trust. As consumers increasingly rely on social media platforms to gather product information and evaluate alternatives, understanding the relationship between social media influences, consumer trust, and purchase intention has become essential for retailers seeking to develop effective marketing strategies.

Although previous studies have examined the effects of social media marketing, influencer endorsements, electronic word-of-mouth, and consumer trust on buying behaviour, many have focused on specific industries, international markets, or individual social media platforms. Moreover, relatively fewer studies have comprehensively examined how social media influences consumer trust and subsequently affects purchase intention within the context of the Indian retail market. Given the dynamic nature of consumer behaviour and the rapid evolution of digital marketing practices, there is a continuing need to investigate these relationships in the Indian context.

The present study seeks to address this research gap by examining the influence of social media on consumer trust and purchase intention among Indian retail consumers. Specifically, the study investigates whether social media influences directly affect purchase intention and whether consumer trust mediates this relationship. The findings are expected to contribute to the growing body of literature on digital marketing and consumer behaviour while providing practical insights for retailers and marketing professionals in

designing effective social media strategies that enhance consumer trust and stimulate purchase intentions.

The study is significant from both academic and managerial perspectives. Academically, it enriches the existing literature by examining the interplay among social media influences, consumer trust, and purchase intention in the Indian retail environment. From a managerial perspective, the findings will help retailers, digital marketers, and brand managers understand the role of social media in shaping consumer perceptions and purchasing behaviour, thereby enabling them to formulate strategies that strengthen customer trust, improve engagement, and increase sales performance.

1.2 Research Problem

The increasing use of social media has changed the way consumers obtain product information and make retail purchase decisions. Consumers are exposed to advertisements, reviews, recommendations, and product-related content through various social media platforms. However, the extent to which such social media influences consumer trust and purchase intention is not uniform. While previous studies have established relationships between social media marketing, trust, and purchase intention, there is a need to examine these relationships in the context of the Indian retail market. Therefore, this study seeks to understand how social media influences consumers, how it contributes to consumer trust, and whether such trust affects their purchase intention.

1.3 Scope of the Study

The study focuses on examining the influence of social media on consumer trust and purchase intention in the Indian retail market. It covers consumers aged 18 years and above who actively use social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp and have experience in purchasing retail products. The study specifically considers social media advertising, electronic word-of-mouth, influencer recommendations, and brand engagement as important social media influences. Consumer trust is examined as a mediating factor between social media influence and purchase intention.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The study is significant as social media has become an important source of product information and a major influence on consumer decision-making. It provides insights into how social media influences consumer trust and purchase intention in the Indian retail context. The findings may contribute to the existing literature on digital marketing and consumer behaviour and help retailers and marketers develop effective social media strategies, strengthen consumer trust, and enhance consumers' intention to purchase.

1.5 Objectives

- To identify the major social media factors influencing consumers' purchase intention.
- To examine the influence of social media on consumer trust in retail brands.
- To examine the relationship between consumer trust and purchase intention.
- To analyse the direct influence of social media influence on purchase intention.

1.6 Hypotheses of the Study

H0₁: Social media influence has a significant positive effect on consumer trust in the Indian retail market.

H1₁: Social media influence has no significant positive effect on consumer trust in the Indian retail market.

H0₂: Consumer trust has a significant positive effect on purchase intention among consumers in the Indian retail market.

H1₂: Consumer trust has no significant positive effect on purchase intention among consumers in the Indian retail market.

1.7 Research Methodology

1.7.1 Research Design

The study adopts a quantitative research approach with a descriptive and explanatory research design. A cross-sectional survey is used to examine the relationship between social media influence, consumer trust, and purchase intention.

1.7.2 Source of Data

The study uses both primary and secondary data. Primary data are collected through a structured questionnaire, while secondary data are obtained from journals, books, research articles, and other relevant sources.

1.7.3 Population of the Study

The population comprises Indian consumers aged 18 years and above who use social media and have experience in purchasing retail products and mainly focuses respondents from Idukki District, Kerala, India.

1.7.4 Sampling Technique

A purposive sampling technique is used to select respondents who actively use social media and have experience with retail purchases. Data are collected through an online questionnaire. A five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree is used.

1.7.5 Sample Size

A sample of 100 respondents were selected for the study. A pilot study is conducted to assess the clarity and reliability of the questionnaire.

1.7.6 Variables of the Study

Social media influence is the independent variable, consumer trust is the mediating variable, and purchase intention is the dependent variable. Social media influence includes advertising, e-WOM, influencer recommendations, and brand engagement.

1.7.7 Data Analysis

The data is analysed using IBM SPSS. Frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, correlation, and regression analysis are used.

1.8 Limitations of the Study

The study is restricted to Indian consumers, so the findings may not be generalizable to consumers in other countries.

The use of purposive sampling may limit the representativeness of the sample and may introduce sampling bias.

The study relies on self-reported responses, which may be influenced by respondents' perceptions and personal biases.

The cross-sectional nature of the study captures consumer behaviour at a particular point in time and may not reflect future changes in social media trends.

The study focuses mainly on social media influence, consumer trust, and purchase intention, while other factors such as price, product quality, brand image, and perceived risk may also affect purchase intention.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Kumar et al. (2023) examined the effect of eWOM on consumers' purchase intention towards private-label brands on Indian e-commerce platforms. Using data from 437 respondents and structural equation modelling, the study found that eWOM significantly influenced purchase intention. The study is particularly relevant to the present research because it provides empirical evidence from the Indian context and demonstrates the importance of online consumer-generated information in purchase decisions.

Shafiq et al. (2023) examined the influence of social media marketing on customer trust and satisfaction among 310 respondents in Pakistan. Using SPSS and SmartPLS-SEM, the study found significant positive relationships among social media marketing, eWOM, customer engagement, customer trust, and customer satisfaction. The study supports the role of social media marketing in building consumer trust and favourable customer outcomes.

Alkan and Ulas (2023) investigated the relationship between trust in social media influencers and purchase intention. The study demonstrated the importance of trust in social media influencers in shaping consumers' purchase intentions. The findings highlight influencer credibility and trust as important elements of social media marketing effectiveness.

Trianasari et al. (2023) examined the influence of social media marketing and influencer endorsement on purchase intention, considering brand image and trust. The findings indicated that trust and brand-related perceptions play an important role in explaining how social media marketing and influencer activities influence consumers' purchase intentions.

Hien and Nhu (2022) examined the effect of digital marketing transformation on purchase intention among 210 B2B customers. Using PLS-SEM, the study found that three forms of digital marketing significantly influenced customer attitudes, while brand awareness moderated the relationship between attitude toward digital marketing and purchase intention. The study emphasized the importance of digital marketing and brand-related factors in influencing purchase intention.

Karunasingha and Abeysekera (2022) examined the mediating role of trust between social motivation and online purchase intention in Sri Lanka's fashion industry. The findings showed that social motivation positively influenced trust and purchase intention, while trust positively influenced purchase intention. Trust was also found to partially mediate the relationship between social motivation and purchase intention.

Wang et al. (2022) conducted a meta-analysis of 19 studies to examine the relationship between trust and purchase intention in social commerce. The findings confirmed that trust positively influences consumers' purchase intention. The study

further found that trust in sellers had a stronger effect than other forms of trust, demonstrating the central role of trust in social commerce purchase decisions.

Rahaman et al. (2022) investigated the relationship between eWOM information and purchase intention among social media users. The study examined information quality, credibility, usefulness, and ease of use and found that these characteristics contributed to consumers' adoption of eWOM information and purchase intention. The findings reinforce the importance of credible social media information in influencing consumer behaviour.

Jith et al. (2022) investigated electronic word-of-mouth and consumer purchase decision-making in the digital economy of Kerala. The study examined eWOM as a potential trust factor in consumer decision-making. The findings provide useful evidence from the Kerala context regarding the role of online word-of-mouth and trust in shaping consumer purchase behaviour.

Emini and Zeqiri (2021) examined the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention among 334 consumers in Kosovo. Using structural equation modelling, the study found a positive indirect effect of social media marketing on purchase intention. Brand engagement fully mediated the relationship, whereas brand awareness did not show a significant mediating effect. The study highlighted the importance of consumer engagement in converting social media marketing activities into purchase intention.

Diventy et al. (2021) investigated social media marketing, eWOM, purchase intention, and purchase decisions among 125 Instagram followers of Kopi Si Budi in Surakarta. The study found that social media marketing did not directly influence purchase intention, whereas eWOM significantly influenced purchase intention. However, social media marketing influenced purchase decisions indirectly through purchase intention. The findings suggest that the influence of social media marketing may vary according to the consumer outcome examined.

Leong et al. (2021) examined the influence of social media eWOM information on purchase intention. The study found that information quality, credibility, usefulness, and information needs influenced consumers' responses to eWOM and their purchase intention. The findings demonstrate the importance of credible and useful social media information in consumer decision-making.

Sembada and Koay (2021) investigated consumers' intention to purchase lifestyle products through Instagram shops. The study highlighted the importance of perceived behavioural control and trust in social media purchasing behaviour. The findings indicate that consumer trust is an important consideration in encouraging consumers to purchase products through social media stores.

Dastane (2020) investigated the impact of digital marketing on online purchase intention among 202 Malaysian e-commerce consumers. The study found that digital marketing had a significant positive effect on online purchase intention, whereas customer relationship management did not significantly mediate the relationship. The findings highlighted the importance of digital marketing in influencing online consumer behaviour.

Dabbous et al. (2020) examined the antecedents of purchase intention in social commerce and the mediating role of trust. The study found that consumer engagement and brand awareness influenced purchase intention through trust, while social interactions had a direct positive effect on purchase intention. The findings emphasize the importance of trust as a mechanism linking social commerce activities with purchase intention.

Lăzăroiu et al. (2020) examined consumer decision-making on social commerce platforms, focusing on online trust, perceived risk, and purchase intention. The study highlighted trust as an important factor in online purchase decision-making and emphasized the role of social commerce characteristics and information credibility in shaping consumers' purchase intentions.

Chu and Kim (2011) examined the determinants of consumer engagement in electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) on social networking sites. The study found that tie strength, trust, and normative and informational interpersonal influence positively influenced eWOM behaviour. The findings established the importance of social relationships and trust in shaping consumer interactions on social media.

2.1 Research Gap

The reviewed literature indicates that social media significantly influences consumer behaviour, trust, and purchase intention through factors such as social media marketing, eWOM, influencer recommendations, and consumer engagement. However, most previous studies have examined these factors separately and have focused on specific countries, industries, or platforms. Although some Indian studies have examined eWOM and purchase behaviour, there is scope for an integrated study of social media influence, consumer trust, and purchase intention in the broader Indian retail market. Therefore, the present study examines the influence of major social media factors on consumer trust and purchase intention and the relationship between consumer trust and purchase intention among Indian retail consumers.

III. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

This chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of the data collected from the respondents for the study on social media influence, consumer trust, and purchase intention in the Indian retail market. The collected data were systematically analysed using appropriate statistical techniques to address the objectives of the study. The analysis includes descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, correlation analysis, and regression analysis. The results are presented in tables and interpreted to understand the influence of social media factors on consumer trust and purchase intention.

TABLE I. DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

Demographic	Frequency	Percentage
Age 18–25	40	38%
Age 26–33	32	30%
Age 34–40	12	11%
Age 41–48	10	9%
Above 48	12	12%
Male	58	55%
Female	48	45%
Student	42	40%
Private-sector employee	26	25%
Homemaker	10	10%
Business/Self-employed	12	11%
Government employee	8	8%

Other	8	6%
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Source: Primary Data

Interpretation: The sample is dominated by young adults (18–33), with students and private-sector employees forming the largest occupational groups. Instagram is the most used platform among these demographics.

TABLE II. RELIABILITY ANALYSIS (CRONBACH'S ALPHA)

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha
Social Media Influence	0.86
Consumer Trust	0.88
Purchase Intention	0.84

Interpretation: All constructs demonstrate high internal consistency ($\alpha > 0.7$). This confirms the reliability of the measurement scales used in the study

TABLE III. SOCIAL MEDIA FACTORS — MEAN, SD, AND RANKING

Factor	Mean	SD	Rank
Customer reviews influence evaluation	4.6	0.52	1
Positive reviews affect choice	4.5	0.55	2
Attractive ads increase interest	4.4	0.60	3
Influencer recommendations increase interest	4.3	0.65	4
Product videos help understanding	4.2	0.70	5

Source: Primary Data

Interpretation: Customer reviews are the most influential factor, followed closely by positive reviews and advertisements. Influencers and product videos also play a role but rank lower.

TABLE IV. CONSUMER TRUST — MEAN AND SD

Trust Factor	Mean	SD
Trust genuine reviews	4.5	0.55
Trust reliable brands	4.4	0.60
Positive info increases trust	4.3	0.62
Confidence in trusted brands	4.4	0.58

Source: Primary Data

Interpretation: Consumer trust is consistently high across all measures, with genuine reviews and reliable brands being the strongest contributors. This highlights the importance of credibility in social media communication.

TABLE V. PURCHASE INTENTION — MEAN AND SD

Purchase Intention Item	Mean	SD
Consider influencer recommendations	4.2	0.68
Confident purchasing trusted brands	4.4	0.60
Social media helps identify trustworthy brands	4.3	0.65

Source: Primary Data

Interpretation: Purchase intention is strongly linked to trust in brands, while influencer recommendations have a moderate effect. Social media plays a key role in helping consumers identify trustworthy brands.

TABLE VI. PEARSON CORRELATION MATRIX

Variables	Social Media Influence	Consumer Trust	Purchase Intention
Social Media Influence	1	0.72	0.68
Consumer Trust	0.72	1	0.75
Purchase Intention	0.68	0.75	1

Source: Primary Data

Interpretation: Strong positive correlations exist among all variables. Consumer trust shows the strongest relationship with purchase intention, confirming its mediating role.

TABLE VII. MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Predictor	β	Sig.
Social Media Influence $\rightarrow$ Consumer Trust	0.42	$p < 0.01$
Consumer Trust $\rightarrow$ Purchase Intention	0.48	$p < 0.01$
Social Media Influence $\rightarrow$ Purchase Intention	0.30	$p < 0.05$

Interpretation: Social media significantly influences consumer trust, which in turn strongly predicts purchase intention. The direct effect of social media on purchase intention is weaker compared to the trust pathway.

TABLE VIII. HYPOTHESIS TESTING RESULTS

Hypot hesis	Path Tested	β	t- value	p- value	Decision
H ₁	Social Media Influence → Consumer Trust	0.42	6.12	<0.01	Supported
H ₂	Consumer Trust → Purchase Intention	0.48	7.05	<0.01	Supported

Interpretation: H₀: Social media influence has a significant positive effect on consumer trust in the Indian retail market. The results show that social media influence has a positive and statistically significant effect on consumer trust ($\beta = 0.42$, $t = 6.12$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that an increase in social media influence is associated with an increase in consumers' trust in retail brands. Since the p-value is below 0.01, the relationship is statistically significant. Therefore, H₁ is accepted. H₀: Consumer trust has a significant positive effect on purchase intention among consumers in the Indian retail market. The results indicate that consumer trust has a positive and statistically significant effect on purchase intention ($\beta = 0.48$, $t = 7.05$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that consumers who have greater trust in retail brands are more likely to develop an intention to purchase their products. As the p-value is below 0.01, the relationship is statistically significant. Therefore, H₂ is accepted.

IV. FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This chapter presents a comprehensive summary of the study's results, integrating demographic insights, statistical analyses, and hypothesis testing outcomes. The purpose of this section is to consolidate the key findings derived from the survey data and provide clarity on how social media influences consumer trust and purchase intention in the Indian retail market. By examining demographic patterns, evaluating the reliability of constructs, and testing the proposed hypotheses, this chapter highlights the major social media factors shaping consumer behavior. The findings are organized into three parts: demographic analysis, objective-wise results, and hypothesis testing, each accompanied by short interpretations to ensure clarity and relevance for academic and managerial applications.

4.1 Findings

4.1.1 Demographic Findings

1. Most respondents were young adults aged 18–33, making up nearly 70% of the sample.
2. Students formed the largest occupational group, followed by private-sector employees.
3. Males slightly outnumbered females, though both genders were well represented.
4. Instagram was the most frequently used platform among younger respondents, while Facebook and WhatsApp were more popular among older respondents and homemakers.

4.1.2 Objective-wise Findings

1. Objective 1 (Major social media factors influencing purchase intention): Customer reviews ranked highest in influence, followed by positive reviews, advertisements, influencer recommendations, and product demonstration videos.
2. Objective 2 (Influence of social media on consumer trust in retail brands): Social media content, particularly genuine reviews and reliable brand communication, significantly enhanced consumer trust. Positive information and consistent brand presence also contributed to higher confidence levels.
3. Objective 3 (Relationship between consumer trust and purchase intention): Consumer trust showed a strong positive correlation with purchase intention. Regression analysis confirmed that trust was the strongest predictor of purchase decisions.
4. Objective 4 (Direct influence of social media on purchase intention): Social media influence had a significant direct effect on

purchase intention, though weaker compared to the indirect effect mediated by trust.

4.1.3 Hypothesis Testing Findings

1. H₁: Social media influence has a significant positive effect on consumer trust in the Indian retail market.
Finding: Supported ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.01$). Interpretation: Social media interactions, especially reviews and brand communication, enhance consumer trust significantly.
2. H₂: Consumer trust has a significant positive effect on purchase intention among consumers in the Indian retail market. Finding: Supported ($\beta = 0.48$, $p < 0.01$). Interpretation: Trust is a critical determinant of purchase intention, confirming its role as both a direct driver and a mediator in consumer decision-making.

4.2 Conclusion

This study set out to examine the role of social media in shaping consumer trust and purchase intention in the Indian retail market. The findings demonstrate that social media platforms, particularly Instagram, have become central to consumer engagement, especially among younger demographics. Customer reviews emerged as the most influential factor, followed by advertisements, influencer recommendations, and product demonstration videos. These elements collectively shape consumer perceptions and decisions, highlighting the importance of peer-generated content and credible brand communication.

The analysis confirmed that social media significantly enhances consumer trust and trust itself is the strongest predictor of purchase intention. While social media has a direct impact on purchase decisions, its influence is magnified when mediated through trust. This underscores the critical role of transparency, authenticity, and reliability in digital marketing strategies.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on digital consumer behavior by validating the mediating role of trust in the relationship between social media and purchase intention. Practically, the results provide actionable insights for retail marketers: investing in authentic customer reviews, credible influencer partnerships, and informative brand communication can strengthen trust and drive consumer purchases.

In conclusion, social media is not merely a promotional tool but a trust-building mechanism that directly and indirectly shapes consumer purchase behavior. For Indian retail brands, leveraging this dynamic effectively can lead to stronger consumer relationships, enhanced brand credibility, and sustainable growth in an increasingly digital marketplace.

4.3 Suggestions

1. Strengthen credibility through reviews: Retail brands should actively encourage genuine customer reviews on social media, as these were found to be the most influential factor in shaping consumer trust and purchase intention.
2. Leverage influencer partnerships wisely: Collaborations with influencers should focus on those who align with brand values and have established credibility, since influencer recommendations showed moderate but significant impact on purchase decisions.
3. Invest in informative content: Product demonstration videos, tutorials, and brand-led information posts can enhance consumer understanding and confidence, making social media a reliable source of product knowledge.
4. Build trust through transparency: Consistent, positive, and authentic communication from retail brands on social media

strengthens consumer trust, which in turn drives purchase intention more effectively than direct advertising alone.

5. Target platform-specific strategies: Instagram campaigns should be prioritized for younger consumers, while Facebook and WhatsApp can be used to engage older demographics and homemakers, ensuring tailored communication across platforms.

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