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The impact of social media marketing on customer buying decisions in retail

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ABSTRACT

Social media has revolutionized the way consumers interact with brands and make purchasing decisions. This research delves into how social media marketing (SMM) strategies influence consumer behaviour, particularly within the retail sector. With the widespread use of platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, and YouTube, companies are reshaping their marketing efforts to meet consumers where they spend their time. The study combines theoretical frameworks, real-life case studies, and empirical research findings to explore the relationship between social media engagement and buying decisions. The goal is to provide insights and practical recommendations for retailers to harness the power of social media effectively.

INTRODUCTION

In the rapidly evolving digital era, social media has emerged as a transformative force in reshaping the interaction between businesses and consumers. Unlike traditional marketing methods that relied on static messaging and limited feedback channels, social media marketing (SMM) fosters two-way communication, real-time engagement, and personalized experiences. This digital shift has significantly influenced consumer behaviour, especially in the retail sector where buying decisions are often driven by online visibility, peer validation, and influencer recommendations. Today's consumers are constantly connected, scrolling through platforms like Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube, where brand messages are subtly woven into their everyday content consumption. This constant exposure has altered the traditional customer journey—awareness, consideration, and decision-making now often occur entirely within the digital realm. As a result, retail businesses must not only maintain an online presence but also strategically craft social content that is engaging, credible, and value-driven. This study seeks to uncover the underlying mechanisms through which SMM affects purchasing behaviour. By analyzing consumer perceptions, exploring the role of influencers and peer reviews, and evaluating strategic approaches used by brands, the research aims to provide actionable insights for retail marketers. The objective is to better understand how social media can be effectively leveraged to drive customer engagement and ultimately influence buying decisions.

Objectives:

- To analyse the influence of social media on customer buying decisions.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of different SMM strategies.
- To identify key success factors and challenges in implementing SMM.
- To understand the role of influencers and peer-generated content in retail marketing.
- To provide actionable recommendations for retail marketers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous studies have explored the influence of social media on consumer behaviour. Mangold and Faulds (2009) highlighted that social media is a hybrid component of the promotional mix, enabling companies to reach and interact with consumers more organically. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) categorized social media into six types: collaborative projects, blogs, content communities, social networking sites, virtual game worlds, and virtual social worlds. A study by Nielsen (2022) revealed that 92% of consumers trust peer recommendations over traditional advertising. These findings underscore the importance of credibility and community in influencing buying decisions.

Important Theories:

- **AIDA Model (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action):** SMM helps brands gain attention through visuals, build interest through content, create desire via influencer testimonials, and drive action through calls-to-action.
- **Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991):** Suggests that attitudes toward behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control influence intentions and actions.

- **Social Proof Theory (Cialdini, 1984):** Indicates that people conform to the actions of others, making likes, shares, and comments vital trust indicators.
- **Uses and Gratifications Theory:** Consumers actively seek out social media content to fulfil specific needs such as information, personal identity, integration, and social interaction.

Success Factors in Social Media Marketing:

- **Authentic Content:** Consumers value transparency and genuine messaging.
- **Consistent Engagement:** Regular posting and timely responses enhance brand credibility.
- **Visual Appeal:** High-quality images and videos outperform text-based posts.
- **Influencer Marketing:** Influencers bridge the gap between brands and consumers.
- **Data-Driven Campaigns:** Analytics enable marketers to refine targeting and messaging strategies.

Challenges and Risks:

- **Negative Publicity:** Viral backlash can damage brand reputation.
- **Algorithm Changes:** Platforms frequently update algorithms, affecting content reach.
- **Consumer Privacy:** Misuse of data can lead to loss of trust and legal implications.
- **Content Overload:** Standing out in a saturated market is increasingly difficult.
- **ROI Measurement:** Directly linking social media efforts to sales remains complex.

METHODOLOGY

To achieve the research objectives, a mixed-method approach was adopted, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of social media marketing on consumer purchasing behaviour in the retail sector. The study utilized an exploratory and descriptive design to capture a broad spectrum of consumer responses and interpret them meaningfully. The exploratory component helped identify patterns and key themes, while the descriptive element quantified the extent of influence that social media marketing strategies have on customer decisions.

Sampling Technique

A random sampling method was employed to ensure unbiased representation. The sample consisted of 30 active social media users, selected from urban regions where digital engagement is typically high. Participants included individuals who had made at least one online or offline retail purchase influenced by social media content.

Data Collection Tools

Primary data was gathered using structured questionnaires and online surveys. These instruments were designed to assess variables such as consumer trust, frequency of engagement with brand content, and the perceived effectiveness of different marketing formats (e.g., influencer posts, paid ads, customer reviews). Data Analysis Techniques

- **Quantitative Data** was analysed using **Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)** to identify trends, correlations, and statistical significance.
- **Qualitative Data** derived from open-ended responses was interpreted using **thematic analysis**, which involved coding and categorizing recurring patterns related to consumer motivations and behaviours.

Scope and Limitations

This study primarily focused on urban consumers who have regular access to the internet and are active users of social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok. The research captures the perceptions and behaviours of consumers who are digitally engaged and exposed to frequent social media marketing efforts. The study is limited to a sample size of 30 respondents, which may affect the generalizability of the results to a broader population. While this sample provides in-depth insights into current trends, a larger and more diverse group could yield more representative outcomes.

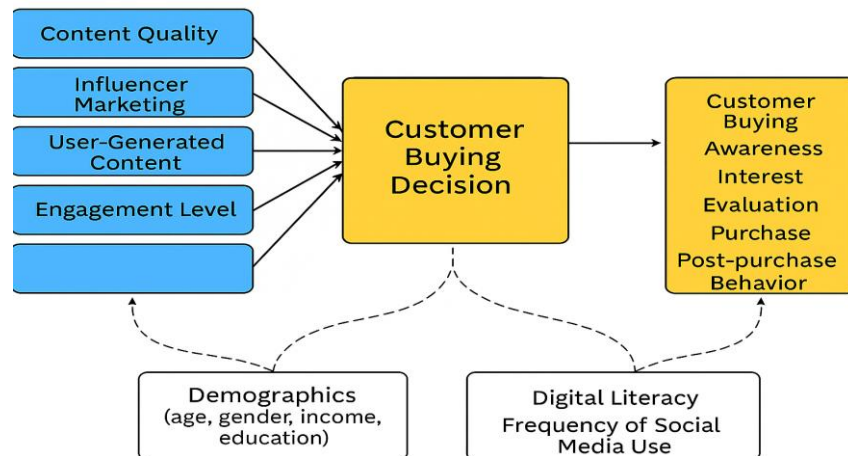
Survey data

Name	Platform	Influences	Time Spend	Influencer Impact	Trust UGC	Recommend score
Ansh Sharma	Instagram	Product videos/demos	4	4	3	5
Vishu Upadhyay	Instagram	Product videos/demos	4	10	1	1
Anu Kumar	Facebook	Influencer posts	2	4	3	2
Zishan Alam	Instagram	Product videos/demos	1	10	4	3
Adarsh kumar Singh	Twitter	Customer reviews	4	4	3	4
Chandan kumar	YouTube	Customer reviews	4	10	5	1
Rahul Kumar	Twitter	Product videos/demos	4	4	4	4
Neha Singh	YouTube	Influencer posts	1	6	4	5
Megha Gupta	Twitter	Customer reviews	1	6	3	5
Janvi Patel	Twitter	Influencer posts	3	10	5	5
Arjun Tomar	Instagram	Product videos/demos	1	4	5	5
Keshav Nagar	Facebook	Influencer posts	1	10	5	5
Archana Sharma	Instagram	Product videos/demos	3	4	4	2
Aditya	YouTube	Customer reviews	3	10	5	4
Rajiv kumar	Facebook	Customer reviews	1	4	3	5
Chandan kumar	Instagram	Influencer posts	3	10	4	1
Sudarshan prasad	YouTube	Product videos/demos	3	4	3	3
Rajesh Patel	TikTok	Product videos/demos	1	6	1	2
Kartikey	Instagram	Influencer posts	2	6	4	3
Karan raj	Facebook	Discount or offer posts	1	10	4	2
Aryan Pagel	Facebook	Customer reviews	3	4	5	3
Sachin Verma	YouTube	Influencer posts	3	10	5	5
Umesh	Instagram	Product videos/demos	1	4	5	1
Sachin Verma	YouTube	Product videos/demos	3	10	5	5
Prince Kumar	Instagram	Customer reviews	4	4	3	1
Ishu Yadav	Instagram	Customer reviews	2	10	5	2
Pawan Kumar Jha	YouTube	Customer reviews	4	4	2	3
RUPESH	Instagram	Customer reviews	4	6	5	3
Brijesh kumar Maurya	Instagram	Customer reviews	2	6	5	2
Rahul Kumar	Twitter	Branded advertisements	4	10	4	3

SUMMARY OUTPUT					
<i>Regression Statistics</i>					
Multiple R	0.267422				
R Square	0.071515				
Adjusted R Square	-0.03562				
Standard Error	1.513755				
Observations	30				
ANOVA					
	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Significance F</i>
Regression	3	4.588849	1.529616	0.667531	0.579598
Residual	26	59.57782	2.291455		
Total	29	64.16667			

	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Lower 95%</i>	<i>Upper 95%</i>	<i>Lower 95.0%</i>	<i>Upper 95.0%</i>
Intercept	2.910575	1.272378	2.287507	0.030548	0.295163	5.525986	0.295163	5.525986
Time spend	-0.19842	0.23853	-0.83183	0.413083	-0.68872	0.29189	-0.68872	0.29189
Influencer impact	-0.0484	0.104005	-0.46534	0.645564	-0.26218	0.165388	-0.26218	0.165388
Trust UGC	0.280176	0.25519	1.097913	0.282307	-0.24437	0.804726	-0.24437	0.804726

Conceptual Framework



CONCLUSION

The findings of this study clearly highlight the significant role that social media marketing (SMM) plays in shaping consumer buying behaviour in the retail sector. As digital platforms continue to dominate how people consume information and interact with brands, social media has evolved into a powerful tool that not only creates brand awareness but also deeply influences purchase decisions. From visually engaging advertisements to influencer endorsements and peer-generated content, each element of SMM contributes to building trust, encouraging engagement, and ultimately driving sales. The interactive nature of social media allows brands to create more personalized, relatable, and timely connections with consumers, making traditional marketing strategies less effective in comparison. This research confirms that modern consumers often rely more on the experiences and opinions shared online by peers or influencers than on direct brand messaging. Therefore, to remain competitive in today's retail landscape, companies must continuously adapt their strategies to stay aligned with platform trends, user expectations, and technological advancements. In conclusion, social media marketing is no longer optional—it is essential. Retail businesses that leverage it strategically are more likely to build brand loyalty, enhance consumer trust, and influence purchasing behaviour in a meaningful way.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Invest in influencer partnerships that align with brand values.
- Use analytics tools to measure campaign effectiveness and adjust strategies.
- Encourage user-generated content to build trust and community.
- Prioritize transparency and responsiveness to foster loyalty.
- Stay updated with platform trends and algorithm changes to maintain visibility.

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