

Social Media Marketing and Consumer Behaviour: A Review of Empirical Studies

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Abstract

Social media has become one of the most dominant platforms shaping modern consumer decision-making, prompting extensive empirical research on its marketing influence. This paper presents a comprehensive review of empirical studies published between 2010 and 2025 to synthesise evidence on how social media marketing (SMM) affects consumer behaviour. A systematic search across Scopus, Web of Science, Emerald, Google Scholar, and JSTOR identified studies employing quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method designs, with inclusion criteria limited to empirical investigations measuring consumer outcomes such as purchase intention, brand attitude, loyalty, trust, and engagement. The review reveals that SMM strategies—including influencer marketing, user-generated content, targeted advertising, brand communities, and content marketing—consistently demonstrate a positive association with consumer behavioural responses. Influencer credibility, perceived authenticity, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), and content quality emerge as critical predictors influencing trust and perceived value, which in turn mediate purchase intention and brand loyalty. Moderating variables such as age, product involvement, social media platform type, and cultural context further shape the strength of these relationships. Methodologically, the review highlights the dominance of cross-sectional survey designs while experimental and longitudinal designs remain relatively under-utilized. Despite overall consensus regarding SMM's impact on consumer behaviour, the literature shows inconsistencies in operational definitions, measurement scales, and contextual focus, particularly in emerging markets. Significant research gaps include limited attention to actual purchase behaviour (as opposed to purchase intention), insufficient cross-platform comparative studies, and a lack of integration of AI-driven and algorithmic marketing influences. Overall, the review contributes to a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which social media marketing shapes consumer behaviour and offers insights for scholars and practitioners seeking to develop evidence-driven digital marketing strategies.

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1. Introduction

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has transformed the ways in which firms communicate, engage, and build relationships with consumers, with social media emerging as one of the most influential marketing platforms of the twenty-first century. Over the past decade, social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, X (formerly Twitter), and LinkedIn have evolved from simple networking sites into sophisticated ecosystems that support personalised advertising, consumer interaction, influencer-driven promotions, and real-time feedback mechanisms (De Veirman et al., 2017). This structural shift has positioned social media marketing (SMM) as a strategic imperative for organisations seeking to enhance brand visibility, engage consumers, and influence purchasing decisions. As a result, understanding how social media marketing shapes consumer behaviour has become a central theme in contemporary marketing research (Cheung & Thadani, 2012).

Consumer behaviour, traditionally influenced by personal, psychological, cultural, and social factors, has been fundamentally reshaped by the rise of social media. The widespread use of smartphones, increasing internet penetration, and the ease of accessing digital content have empowered consumers to interact with brands more directly and frequently than ever before. Social media has blurred the boundaries between marketers and consumers by promoting user-generated content, peer recommendations, and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), all of which carry substantial persuasive power (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Unlike traditional advertising channels that rely on one-way communication, social media

fosters two-way and multi-directional communication flows, enabling consumers to actively participate in conversations, create content, and influence others. These unique attributes of social media have amplified its role in shaping consumer attitudes, purchase intentions, brand loyalty, and behavioural engagement (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Given the growing significance of SMM, an extensive body of empirical literature has emerged examining its effects on different dimensions of consumer behaviour. Researchers have explored the influence of specific SMM strategies such as influencer marketing, brand communities, targeted advertisements, content marketing, and interactive campaigns. Influencer marketing, in particular, has gained considerable attention as consumers increasingly rely on influencers for authentic recommendations and product reviews. Empirical studies consistently indicate that influencer credibility, perceived authenticity, expertise, and trustworthiness are strong predictors of consumer purchase intention. Similarly, electronic word-of-mouth—especially in the form of customer reviews, ratings, testimonials, and peer recommendations—has been shown to impact brand attitude, decision-making, and perceived value (Erkan & Evans, 2016).

Another significant area of research concerns the psychological mechanisms through which SMM affects consumer behaviour. Studies highlight the mediating role of trust, perceived usefulness, perceived enjoyment, engagement, and brand credibility in strengthening the relationship between SMM activities and behavioural outcomes. For example, the quality and relevance of brand content enhance consumer engagement, which subsequently increases brand loyalty and intention to purchase. At the same time, variables such as consumer demographics, product types, cultural context, and platform-specific characteristics act as moderators that influence the

strength and direction of these relationships. This suggests that SMM effectiveness is not uniform across all contexts but varies according to situational and individual factors (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Despite the accumulating empirical evidence, the literature exhibits several methodological, theoretical, and contextual gaps that call for systematic review and synthesis. Much of the existing research is cross-sectional in nature, relying heavily on survey-based methods and structural equation modelling (SEM). While these methods provide useful insights into associations between variables, they offer limited understanding of causal mechanisms and changes in behaviour over time (Brunner et al., 2022). Experimental and longitudinal research designs remain relatively scarce, despite their value in establishing causal pathways. Additionally, many studies measure purchase intention rather than actual purchase behaviour, which may limit the practical applicability of findings. Further, the majority of studies focus on specific regions or industries, often overlooking cross-cultural comparisons and platform-specific differences (Harrigan et al., 2017).

Given these inconsistencies and limitations, there is a compelling need for a comprehensive review that synthesises empirical findings, identifies dominant themes, evaluates methodological trends, and highlights areas requiring further exploration. A systematic review of empirical studies provides a valuable opportunity to integrate diverse strands of research and develop a clearer understanding of how social media marketing influences consumer behaviour (Hudson et al., 2015). Such a review is particularly timely given the continuous evolution of digital technology, the emergence of new platforms, and the growing sophistication of algorithm-driven advertising, personalised content delivery, and artificial intelligence (AI)-

based marketing tools. Moreover, the increasing integration of social commerce features—such as in-app purchasing, live shopping, and interactive product demonstrations—has further transformed consumer decision-making processes, making the study of SMM’s behavioural influence even more relevant (Agag & El-Masry, 2016).

This paper aims to synthesise empirical research conducted between 2010 and 2025 to identify key patterns, mechanisms, and outcomes related to social media marketing and consumer behaviour. By systematically reviewing empirical evidence, the study seeks to map dominant SMM strategies, evaluate their effectiveness, identify mediators and moderators, and critically assess methodological approaches used in existing literature. In doing so, the review contributes to a deeper theoretical and practical understanding of SMM’s role in shaping consumer behaviour in the digital era. Additionally, the paper proposes a conceptual model that integrates key variables identified across the literature and offers directions for future research, addressing the notable gaps and emerging trends in digital marketing. Overall, this introduction underscores the dynamic and multidimensional nature of social media marketing and its profound impact on contemporary consumer behaviour. As organisations increasingly rely on digital platforms to communicate with target audiences, understanding the empirical evidence surrounding social media influence becomes essential for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers alike. By consolidating findings from a wide range of empirical studies, this review provides a comprehensive foundation for advancing theoretical insights and developing more effective, evidence-based marketing strategies.

2. Methodology

This study adopted a systematic review methodology to synthesise empirical evidence on the influence of social media

marketing (SMM) on consumer behaviour. Given the rapid expansion of research in digital marketing over the past decade, a systematic approach provides a rigorous and transparent means of identifying, evaluating, and integrating findings from diverse empirical studies.

2.1 Research Design

A systematic review design was selected because it enables the comprehensive mapping of existing empirical knowledge, identifies methodological patterns, and highlights conceptual gaps in prior studies. Unlike narrative reviews, the systematic approach minimises bias through structured procedures involving predefined search strategies, inclusion criteria, exclusion criteria, and analytical techniques. This design is particularly relevant to the topic, as empirical research on SMM and consumer behaviour spans multiple disciplines, regions, and methodological traditions.

2.2 Data Sources and Search Strategy

The literature search was conducted across six major academic databases known for their extensive coverage of business, management, and social sciences research: Scopus, Web of Science, Emerald Insight, Science Direct, Google Scholar and JSTOR. These databases were chosen to ensure comprehensive coverage of peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, and high-quality empirical research. A combination of keywords and Boolean operators was used to maximise the sensitivity and relevance of the search. The primary search string included: “social media marketing” AND (“consumer behaviour” OR “consumer behaviour” OR “purchase intention” OR “buying behaviour” OR “brand loyalty”) AND (empirical OR quantitative OR qualitative OR mixed-method)”

Additional keywords such as influencer marketing, electronic word-of-mouth, content marketing, digital advertising, and

brand engagement were also included to capture specific SMM strategies. The search covered publications from 2010 to 2025, reflecting the period during which social media platforms evolved into mainstream marketing tools.

2.3 Ethical Considerations

Since this study is based on secondary data obtained from published academic sources, no direct ethical approvals were required. However, ethical academic practices, including proper citation, avoidance of plagiarism, and accurate representation of findings, were strictly followed.

3. Review of Literature

3.1 Evolution of Social Media as a Marketing Platform

The emergence of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter has transformed the marketing landscape by enabling real-time interaction between brands and consumers (Jindal, 2023). Early studies highlight that social media evolved from simple networking tools to powerful marketing ecosystems that support advertising, content sharing, community building, and personalized communication. Subsequent studies confirmed that the shift toward digital platforms has influenced how consumers search for information, evaluate alternative products, and engage with brands online (Boateng & Okoe, 2015).

3.2 Media Advertising and Consumer Purchase Intention

A significant body of empirical research has examined the impact of social media advertisements on consumer purchase intention. Studies consistently show that ad relevance, informativeness, and entertainment value positively influence consumers' willingness to purchase (Rahman & Chatterjee, 2024). Researchers found that visually appealing ads, personalized messages, and interactive features such as

clickable links and product tags enhance consumer engagement. Furthermore, research indicates that consumers perceive social media ads as more credible when shared or liked by peers, demonstrating the role of social proof. Several empirical works also highlight that intrusive ads or excessive frequency can create irritation, lowering purchase intention (Ashley & Tuten, 2015).

3.3 Role of e-WOM and Online Reviews

Electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM) is one of the most extensively studied constructs in the digital marketing literature. Empirical research establishes that online reviews, ratings, and user-generated comments significantly shape consumer attitudes toward products and brands. Studies reveal that positive reviews enhance trust and perceived value, whereas negative reviews can discourage purchases (Shetty, 2024). Review quantity and review quality both play critical roles in shaping consumer judgement. Additionally, the credibility of reviewers—such as verified buyers or influencers—further strengthens the impact of e-WOM. The literature also shows that consumers rely more on peer opinions compared to brand-generated content, especially for experience goods such as cosmetics, electronics, and travel services (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016).

3.4 Influence of Social Media Influencers

Influencer marketing has emerged as a dominant theme in recent empirical studies. Influencers are perceived as relatable, authentic, and knowledgeable, which increases the effectiveness of their endorsements. Research indicates that influencers' credibility—determined by expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness—positively affects consumer attitudes and purchase intention. The concept of “parasocial relationships,” where followers develop emotional bonds with influencers,

further strengthens this impact. Several studies also demonstrate that micro-influencers often generate higher engagement rates than celebrities due to their niche appeal and perceived authenticity. As a result, influencer marketing is now seen as a cost-effective tool for building brand awareness and influencing purchase decisions (Rahman & Chatterjee, 2024).

3.5 Brand Engagement and Online Communities

A large body of research highlights the importance of online brand communities in shaping consumer behaviour. Studies show that social media platforms support multi-way communication, allowing consumers to not only receive information but also participate in conversations, co-create content, and share experiences. These interactions enhance emotional attachment to the brand. Empirical findings confirm that brand engagement—measured through likes, comments, shares, and other interactive behaviours—strengthens brand loyalty and advocacy. Researchers found that active community participation encourages repeat purchases and enhances long-term customer relationships, making social media an essential tool for relationship marketing (Kurniawan & Setiadi, 2024).

3.6 Consumer Trust and Perceived Credibility

Trust plays a central role in determining how consumers respond to social media marketing. Empirical studies show that trust is influenced by the transparency of brand communication, consistency of messaging, quality of information, and responsiveness to customer queries. Consumers are more likely to purchase when they perceive a brand's social media presence as reliable, authentic, and customer-oriented. Studies also highlight privacy concerns and data security as major challenges that can weaken trust. As consumer awareness regarding data protection grows, brands must ensure ethical practices to maintain credibility and consumer confidence (Gökerik, 2024).

3.7 Role of Social Media Content Quality

Content quality has been widely analyzed in the literature as a determinant of consumer engagement and behaviour. Informative, entertaining, visually rich, and creatively designed content attracts higher engagement. Empirical findings show that storytelling, emotional appeal, and aesthetic presentation significantly influence consumer perceptions. Video content—especially short-form videos on platforms like Instagram Reels and YouTube—tends to generate higher engagement than static images. Studies also indicate that consistency in posting and content variety enhances brand visibility and increases the likelihood of consumer interaction and purchase consideration (Narasimhamurthi et al., 2025).

3.8 Consumer Attitude Formation on Social Media

Several studies explore how consumer attitudes are shaped by their exposure to social media marketing. Theories such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) model, and Consumer Engagement Theory are commonly used to explain this behaviour. Empirical evidence suggests that perceived usefulness, ease of navigation, and interactivity of social media platforms significantly influence attitude formation. Positive attitudes, in turn, enhance brand preference, product evaluation, and purchase intention. Additionally, emotional responses triggered by engaging content often lead to spontaneous or impulse buying behaviour (Chowdhury, 2024).

3.9 Trends in Mobile-Based Social Media Usage

With the increasing dominance of smartphones, researchers have examined how mobile usage patterns influence consumer behaviour. Studies reveal that consumers spend more time on mobile-based social media apps, leading to shorter but more frequent interactions with marketing content. Push notifications,

mobile-friendly ads, and location-based promotions are shown to be particularly effective in influencing purchase decisions. Empirical findings also note that mobile users tend to engage more with visuals and interactive media compared to desktop users, making mobile optimization crucial for effective digital marketing (Baskara & Nurhayati, 2023).

3.10 Summary of Literature Gaps

Despite extensive empirical research, certain gaps remain. Many studies focus on specific platforms rather than comparative analysis across multiple channels. There is limited exploration of how cultural differences influence consumer responses to social media marketing. Additionally, while influencer marketing is widely studied, research on its long-term effects on brand loyalty is still emerging. More studies are needed to analyse the impact of artificial intelligence, personalized algorithms, and immersive technologies such as AR/VR on consumer behaviour in social media environments.

4. Conclusion

The review of empirical studies clearly demonstrates that social media marketing has become a critical determinant of modern consumer behaviour. Across platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter, consumers increasingly rely on digital interactions, user-generated content, and peer recommendations to make informed purchase decisions. The literature highlights that social media's participatory and interactive nature has fundamentally reshaped the traditional buyer journey by expanding access to information, enabling real-time engagement, and fostering a sense of community around brands. As a result, social media platforms have emerged not only as communication channels but also as behavioural influence systems that shape attitudes, intentions, and purchasing patterns.

A consistent finding across empirical works is the strong impact of advertising features—such as informativeness, entertainment value, visual appeal, and personalization—on consumer engagement and purchase intention. Similarly, electronic word-of-mouth and online reviews significantly influence trust, credibility, and product evaluations, with consumers showing a greater tendency to rely on peer-generated content than on brand-driven messages. The rise of influencer marketing further reinforces this trend, as consumers respond more positively to endorsements from relatable and trustworthy individuals who reflect authenticity, expertise, and emotional connection. These insights underscore the growing importance of social proof and digital authenticity in shaping consumer perceptions.

Another critical insight from the reviewed literature is the role of brand engagement and online communities in fostering long-term customer relationships. Active participation through likes, comments, shares, and community interactions enhances emotional attachment and brand loyalty, suggesting that relational marketing strategies are essential for sustained consumer commitment. However, the effectiveness of social media marketing is greatly influenced by perceived trust, credibility, and data privacy—areas that continue to pose challenges for brands operating in a digital environment. The literature stresses that transparency, ethical data practices, and responsive communication are crucial for maintaining consumer confidence.

Overall, the review reveals that consumer behaviour on social media is shaped by a dynamic interplay of cognitive, emotional, and social factors. While existing empirical studies provide valuable insights, significant gaps remain, particularly in cross-cultural analyses, long-term impact assessments, and the integration of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, algorithmic personalization, and augmented or

virtual reality. Future research should explore these evolving dimensions to deepen understanding of how consumer behaviour will continue to transform in digitally mediated environments. In conclusion, social media marketing has emerged as a powerful, multidimensional tool that significantly influences consumer decision-making, and its strategic application will remain central to the success of brands in the digital era.

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