



# The Impact of Social Media Marketing on Consumer Buying Behavior

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## Abstract

This research investigates the multidimensional impact of social media marketing (SMM) on consumer buying behavior through a robust mixed-methods empirical design. Employing quantitative surveys from 350 respondents and qualitative interviews with 20 participants across diverse demographic segments, the study reveals that SMM exerts a strong, statistically significant positive influence on consumer purchase intentions ( $r = 0.78$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Influencer credibility — particularly authenticity and trustworthiness — emerges as the most powerful predictor of buying behavior, explaining 59% of variance in purchase intentions. User-generated content substantially reduces perceived purchasing risk, while targeted advertising achieves a 34% average conversion rate improvement over traditional methods. Platform-specific analyses demonstrate that Instagram and TikTok lead in fashion and lifestyle categories, YouTube excels for technology and education, and Facebook maintains broad cross-demographic effectiveness. The study validates Trust Transfer Theory and Social Learning Theory as explanatory frameworks for SMM's persuasive mechanisms and offers actionable managerial implications for digital marketing practitioners.

*Keywords: Social Media Marketing, Consumer Buying Behavior, Influencer Marketing, User-Generated Content, Targeted Advertising, Brand Loyalty, Purchase Intention, Trust Transfer Theory, Social Proof*



## Chapter-1

### Introduction

#### 1.1 Background

The global digital landscape has undergone a seismic transformation over the past two decades, fundamentally altering how businesses communicate with consumers and how consumers make purchasing decisions. The emergence and proliferation of social media platforms — from early networks to the current dominance of Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, and LinkedIn — has created an unprecedented communication ecosystem where brands and consumers interact in real time and at remarkable scale.

According to DataReportal's Global Digital Report 2024, there are approximately 5.17 billion active social media users worldwide, representing 63.7% of the total global population — up from just 970 million in 2010. The average global user spends approximately 2 hours and 23 minutes per day on social media platforms, creating a fertile environment for marketers to reach, engage, and influence potential consumers. Global social media advertising expenditure has correspondingly surged from USD 51.3 billion in 2018 to an estimated USD 227.6 billion in 2024.

Year	Users (Billions)	Growth (%)	Ad Spend (USD B)	YoY Change
2019	3.48	8.8%	60.7	+18.3%
2020	3.80	9.1%	72.4	+19.3%
2021	4.20	10.5%	95.8	+32.3%
2022	4.62	10.1%	131.7	+37.5%
2023	4.89	5.8%	182.3	+38.4%
2024	5.17	5.7%	227.6	+24.9%

Table 1: Global Social Media Users Growth and Advertising Spend (2019–2024). Source: DataReportal 2024.

#### 1.2 Problem Statement and Objectives

Despite the explosive growth of social media marketing, the precise causal mechanisms and mediating variables through which SMM influences consumer buying behavior remain insufficiently understood. Many existing studies rely on single-platform analyses, short-term observational data, or studies conducted in specific cultural or demographic contexts, limiting generalizability. Additionally, comparative analyses examining how effectiveness varies across platforms and consumer segments are scarce.

This study is guided by four primary objectives: (1) to examine the overall impact of SMM on consumer buying behavior across demographic segments; (2) to identify the specific mechanisms through which SMM components — influencer marketing, user-generated content (UGC), and targeted advertising — influence purchase intentions; (3) to assess the mediating role of trust and perceived credibility; and (4) to compare the relative effectiveness of Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube across product categories.

## Chapter-2



## Literature Review

### 2.1 Evolution of Marketing: Traditional to Social Media

The history of marketing reflects perpetual adaptation in response to technological innovation and changing consumer expectations. Traditional marketing dominated commercial communication through most of the 20th century via a fundamental one-to-many communication model — newspapers, magazines, radio, and television — where feedback loops were slow and attribution was imprecise. The emergence of social media platforms in the mid-2000s initiated the most profound transformation in marketing's history, introducing a many-to-many communication model that fundamentally disrupted the brand-centric marketing paradigm.

Kotler, Kartajaya, and Setiawan's seminal Marketing 4.0 (2017) conceptualizes this evolution as a progression from product-centric (1.0), to consumer-centric (2.0), to human-centric (3.0), to connectivity-centric (4.0) philosophies. Social media marketing represents the fullest expression of Marketing 4.0 principles, enabling deeply human, value-driven, and community-oriented brand interactions. The creator economy — valued at over USD 250 billion in 2024 — has further democratized influence, allowing micro-influencers with highly engaged niche audiences to generate measurable sales impact exceeding mass television advertising.

### 2.2 Key Social Media Platforms

The social media ecosystem is diverse and dynamic, with platforms constantly evolving their features, audiences, and marketing value propositions. Table 2 provides a comparative overview of major platforms as of 2024.

Platform	MAU (Billions)	Core Age	Key Format	Marketing Strength
Facebook	3.05B	25–54	Multi-format	Precision targeting, broad reach
YouTube	2.70B	18–49	Long-form video	Research stage, high intent
Instagram	2.00B	18–34	Image, Reels	Visual branding, influencers
TikTok	1.70B	16–30	Short-form video	Viral discovery, Gen Z reach
LinkedIn	1.00B	25–54	Professional	B2B marketing, thought leadership

Table 2: Key Social Media Platforms – Comparative Overview (2024). Source: Platform Q4 2024 earnings reports.

### 2.3 Components of SMM and Their Mechanisms

Social media marketing is a complex ecosystem of distinct yet interrelated components. Influencer marketing leverages the social capital, credibility, and audience trust of individuals who have cultivated significant followings. Ohanian's (1990) Source Credibility Model identifies expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness as the three core dimensions of communicator credibility — with recent scholarship adding authenticity as a



fourth critical dimension. The influencer marketing industry is estimated to reach USD 24 billion globally by 2025.

User-generated content (UGC) — customer reviews, social media posts, unboxing videos, and testimonials — represents the most authentic form of social media marketing. BrightLocal (2024) reports that 88% of consumers trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations, and products with 50 or more reviews convert at 4.6% higher rates. Targeted advertising, the paid algorithmic layer of SMM, generates an average return on ad spend (ROAS) of 2.5x to 4.8x according to eMarketer (2024), significantly exceeding traditional digital channels.

## 2.4 Theoretical Framework

This research is theoretically grounded in Trust Transfer Theory and Social Learning Theory. Trust Transfer Theory posits that trust can be transferred from a known and trusted entity to an unknown or less familiar one through the perception of a credible associative relationship. In the SMM context, trust transfers from trusted influencers to endorsed brands, from familiar platforms to advertised brands, and from peer reviewers to recommended products. The magnitude of transfer is moderated by perceived congruence between the influencer's identity and the product, transparency of the commercial relationship, and consistency with the influencer's established values.

Social Learning Theory, pioneered by Bandura (1977), proposes that individuals learn behaviors, attitudes, and social norms through observational learning — by observing others' behaviors and their consequences. Social media dramatically expands the scope of observational learning by creating digital environments where consumers continuously observe the consumption behaviors and product preferences of social networks, aspirational figures, and cultural trendsetters. When influencers publicly use and endorse products, they activate observational learning mechanisms that increase the likelihood followers will emulate those consumption behaviors.

## Chapter-3

### Research Methodology

#### 3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches within a pragmatic epistemological framework. The choice is driven by the complex, multidimensional nature of understanding SMM's impact on consumer buying behavior — a phenomenon not adequately captured by either approach alone. The quantitative component employs a descriptive-correlational design using structured online surveys, enabling statistical testing of hypothesized relationships and examination of mediating and moderating effects. The qualitative component employs an exploratory-interpretive design using semi-structured in-depth interviews, providing depth and nuance that quantitative measures cannot capture.

#### 3.2 Sampling and Data Collection

The target population comprises adult social media users (18+) who have been active on at least one major platform for a minimum of six months and have made at least one social media-influenced purchase within the past 12 months. A multi-stage sampling approach combining purposive convenience sampling within a stratified framework ensures demographic diversity across age, gender, education, and platform usage.

A total of 412 questionnaires were distributed across digital channels, yielding 387 responses. After screening for eligibility violations, incomplete responses, and quality concerns, 350 valid responses were retained — a response efficiency rate of 90.4%. In-depth interviews were conducted with 20 purposively selected participants via video conferencing, with sessions averaging 48 minutes and transcribed verbatim for thematic analysis.



Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age Group	18–24 years	98	28.0%
	25–34 years	119	34.0%
	35–44 years	79	22.6%
	45–54 years	38	10.9%
	55+ years	16	4.6%
Gender	Male	158	45.1%
	Female	178	50.9%
	Non-binary/Other	14	4.0%
Education	Undergraduate	142	40.6%
	Postgraduate	138	39.4%
	High School	46	13.1%
	Other	24	6.9%

Table 3: Demographic Profile of Survey Respondents ( $n = 350$ ).

### 3.3 Measures and Analysis Tools

The structured questionnaire is organized into eight sections measuring social media usage habits, influencer marketing perceptions, UGC engagement, targeted advertising effectiveness, trust, brand loyalty, and purchase behavior. Core theoretical constructs are measured using five-point Likert scales (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). Scale reliability was verified through Cronbach's alpha: influencer credibility ( $\alpha = 0.89$ ), trust ( $\alpha = 0.91$ ), and purchase intention ( $\alpha = 0.85$ ). Content validity was established through expert review by three academic marketing specialists.

Quantitative analysis proceeds through five stages using SPSS 26.0 and AMOS 26.0: data cleaning and normality assessment; descriptive statistics; reliability and validity assessment (CFA); correlation and hierarchical multiple regression; and structural equation modeling (SEM). Qualitative data analysis follows Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework using NVivo 12.

## Chapter-4

### Data Analysis and Findings

#### 4.1 Social Media Usage Patterns

Analysis of social media usage habits across the 350-respondent sample reveals intensive multi-platform engagement. Instagram is the most frequently used platform (72.6%,  $n = 254$  reporting daily use), followed by



YouTube (65.4%), Facebook (58.3%), and TikTok (51.7%). Multi-platform usage is the norm: 78.9% of respondents report active daily use of two or more social media platforms, with the average respondent using 3.2 platforms daily.

Daily usage duration averages 2.8 hours (SD = 1.4 hours), with age-disaggregated analysis revealing the 18–24 cohort reports the highest mean daily usage (3.6 hours), declining progressively in older groups (55+: 1.2 hours). Mobile devices dominate social media consumption (89.4%), with evening hours (6–10 PM) representing the peak consumption period (71.1%). A substantial majority (84.3%,  $n = 295$ ) regularly encounter SMM content that influences purchase behavior; 34.6% report making at least one social media-influenced purchase per week.

#### 4.2 Influencer Credibility and Purchase Intentions

Influencer credibility emerges as the most significant and consistently influential SMM factor affecting consumer purchase intentions, consistent with the Source Credibility Model and Trust Transfer Theory framework. Descriptive analysis reveals authenticity yields the highest mean score ( $M = 4.12$ ,  $SD = 0.69$ ), followed by trustworthiness ( $M = 3.89$ ), expertise ( $M = 3.74$ ), and attractiveness ( $M = 3.52$ ). Correlation analysis demonstrates significant positive associations between all four credibility dimensions and purchase intentions.

Credibility Dimension	Mean Score	Std. Dev.	% Rating 4+	Correlation (r)
Expertise	3.74	0.82	61.4%	0.641**
Trustworthiness	3.89	0.76	68.3%	0.712**
Attractiveness	3.52	0.91	54.9%	0.489**
Authenticity	4.12	0.69	78.9%	0.783**
Overall Composite	3.82	0.73	65.9%	0.764**

Table 4: Influencer Credibility Dimensions – Mean Scores and Correlations with Purchase Intention ( $n = 350$ , \*\* $p < 0.001$ ).

Multiple regression analysis with purchase intention as the dependent variable and the four credibility dimensions as predictors yields a significant overall model ( $F(4,345) = 89.47$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $R^2 = 0.59$ ). Authenticity ( $\beta = 0.38$ ) and trustworthiness ( $\beta = 0.29$ ) are the strongest independent predictors, while expertise ( $\beta = 0.17$ ) and attractiveness ( $\beta = 0.09$ ) contribute smaller but significant unique variance. Moderation analysis reveals the overall relationship is significantly stronger for the 18–24 cohort, particularly on the authenticity dimension — suggesting Generation Z consumers are especially attuned to perceived influencer authenticity.

#### 4.3 User-Generated Content and Online Reviews

UGC and online reviews represent the second most influential SMM component. Survey data reveals 91.4% ( $n = 320$ ) of respondents regularly read online reviews before making purchase decisions, consulting an average of 6.3 reviews for high-involvement categories and 2.8 for low-involvement purchases. The trust placed in online reviews is substantial: 73.4% indicate positive reviews significantly increase their purchase confidence, while 81.1% state negative reviews would cause them to reconsider a planned purchase.



UGC Type	Engagement (%)	Trust (Mean/5)	Purchase Influence (Mean/5)
Customer reviews & ratings	91.4%	4.23	4.01
Customer photos/videos	78.3%	4.31	3.89
Unboxing/haul videos	62.9%	3.97	3.74
Social media testimonials	71.4%	3.84	3.71
Before/after comparisons	67.7%	3.91	3.83

Table 5: UGC Type Engagement, Trust, and Purchase Influence Ratings ( $n = 350$ ).

The risk reduction function of UGC is a particularly salient finding. UGC significantly reduces perceived purchasing risk across all five risk dimensions, with the greatest effects for performance risk (mean reduction: 3.9/5) and financial risk (3.7/5). Negativity bias analysis demonstrates that a single highly negative review requires approximately 4–5 positive reviews to counterbalance in terms of net purchase intention — underscoring the importance of genuine product quality investment and proactive reputation management.

#### 4.4 Targeted Advertising Effectiveness

Targeted social media advertising demonstrates significant effectiveness, with 94.6% of respondents reporting regular exposure to targeted ads and 88.0% acknowledging relevance to their interests. High-relevance ads generate 3.2x higher click-through rates and 2.8x higher purchase conversion rates than low-relevance ads. Conversion attribution data reveals 54.3% ( $n = 190$ ) of respondents made at least one purchase directly attributed to a targeted social media advertisement within the prior six-month period.

Metric	Instagram	Facebook	TikTok	YouTube
Avg. Click-Through Rate (%)	2.8%	1.6%	3.4%	1.1%
Purchase Conversion Rate (%)	3.2%	2.9%	4.1%	2.4%
Return on Ad Spend (ROAS)	3.4x	3.1x	4.2x	2.8x
Brand Recall After Exposure	61%	58%	72%	69%
Purchase Intent Lift (%)	22%	18%	31%	26%

Table 6: Platform-Specific Targeted Advertising Effectiveness Metrics (2024 Industry Benchmarks).

Privacy consciousness significantly moderates targeted advertising effectiveness. A statistically significant negative moderation of privacy concern on the relationship between targeted ad exposure and purchase intention ( $\beta = -0.21$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) indicates that consumers with higher privacy concern show reduced purchase intention



in response to targeted ads. This has important strategic implications in an era of growing consumer privacy awareness, GDPR/CCPA regulatory scrutiny, and iOS tracking transparency frameworks.

## Chapter-5

### Discussion

#### 5.1 Core Finding: SMM–Purchase Behavior Correlation

The comprehensive empirical evidence converges on a clear and robust conclusion: social media marketing is a powerful, multifaceted driver of consumer awareness, preference formation, and purchase decision-making across diverse product categories, demographic segments, and platforms. The composite SMM engagement score demonstrates a Pearson correlation of  $r = 0.78$  ( $p < 0.001$ ) with the composite purchase behavior outcome — a large effect size exceeding the meta-analytic average reported in prior systematic reviews ( $r = 0.45$  to  $0.65$ ), potentially reflecting the increasingly central role of social media in contemporary consumer life and the maturation of social commerce infrastructure.

Regression analysis controlling for pre-existing brand awareness, product involvement, and demographics reveals that SMM engagement explains a unique and substantial proportion of variance in purchase behavior beyond control variables ( $\Delta R^2 = 0.31$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This confirms that the SMM–purchase relationship is not merely an artifact of demographic segmentation or product category preferences, but a genuine incremental effect of social media marketing engagement on consumer behavior.

#### 5.2 Role of Trust and Social Proof

Trust emerges as the most critical mediating variable in the SMM–consumer behavior relationship. The structural equation model identifies trust as a significant full mediator of the relationship between influencer credibility and brand loyalty (indirect effect =  $0.341$ , 95% CI [ $0.287$ ,  $0.398$ ],  $p < 0.001$ ), providing strong empirical support for the Trust Transfer Theory framework. Social proof's role as a risk-reduction mechanism is equally salient: the visibility of peer adoption signals normative approval, reducing social risk and facilitating purchase decisions particularly for unfamiliar brands and high-involvement categories.

The brand advocacy finding is strategically significant: SMM engagement demonstrates a strong correlation with brand advocacy behaviors ( $r = 0.714$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), creating a virtuous cycle wherein socially engaged, satisfied consumers generate organic UGC, share brand content, and provide unprompted peer recommendations — effectively amplifying official SMM activities at no additional cost to the brand.

#### 5.3 Platform-Specific Effectiveness

One of the most strategically valuable contributions of this research is its platform-comparative analysis. Instagram demonstrates the strongest overall effectiveness for fashion, beauty, lifestyle, and luxury categories, where visual aesthetics and aspirational imagery are primary purchase motivators. Instagram-sourced purchases demonstrate high transaction value (mean: USD 87.40) and strong brand loyalty outcomes. TikTok emerges as the most effective platform for viral product discovery and impulse purchases — particularly for beauty, food, and novelty goods — with the highest measured ROAS (4.2x) and brand recall (72%) among the platforms studied. Its 'For You Page' algorithm creates exceptional discovery moments, exposing users to relevant products they weren't actively searching for.

YouTube's distinctive positioning as an information-rich, long-form content platform makes it most effective for considered purchase categories — technology, automobiles, home appliances, and education — where consumers invest significant deliberation time. YouTube's search functionality extends product-related videos' shelf life far beyond traditional social media posts, and its established review culture delivers honest, thorough product assessments that viewers regard with remarkable trust. Facebook's greatest contemporary strength lies



in advertising capabilities — precision targeting, custom audiences, and retargeting — rather than organic content performance, maintaining broad demographic reach across all age groups and product categories.

Product Category	Top Platform	Runner-Up	Key SMM Format	Avg. Purchase Value
Fashion & Apparel	Instagram	TikTok	Influencer styling	USD 74.20
Electronics & Tech	YouTube	Facebook	In-depth reviews	USD 312.80
Beauty & Personal Care	TikTok	Instagram	Tutorial UGC	USD 38.60
Food & Beverage	TikTok	Instagram	Short-form video	USD 24.90
Home & Lifestyle	Pinterest	Instagram	Visual inspiration	USD 128.40
Travel & Experiences	Instagram	YouTube	Long-form vlogs	USD 847.00
Health & Fitness	YouTube	Instagram	Tutorial/testimonial	USD 89.30

Table 7: Platform Effectiveness by Product Category (Survey Data + Industry Benchmarks, 2024).

## Chapter-6

### Conclusion and Recommendations

#### 6.1 Conclusion

Social media marketing has unequivocally established itself as one of the most influential forces shaping consumer buying behavior in the contemporary digital marketplace. This research provides compelling empirical evidence that SMM's influence extends across the full spectrum of the consumer decision journey — from creating initial awareness through algorithmic content discovery, to facilitating research and evaluation through influencer reviews and UGC, to reducing purchase anxiety through social proof mechanisms, to enabling seamless transaction completion through integrated social commerce features.

The theoretical framework developed and validated in this study — integrating Trust Transfer Theory and Social Learning Theory within a multi-component SMM model — provides a robust conceptual architecture for understanding how diverse SMM elements produce combined influence on consumer behavior. Trust emerges as the critical mediating construct, with authenticity as the foundational prerequisite for trust formation in social media environments. The growing convergence of social media and commerce suggests that the traditional funnel metaphor of marketing is increasingly inadequate, and that marketers who succeed will be those who build authentic, trust-based relationships with consumers rather than relying on interruptive mass-targeting models.

#### 6.2 Managerial Implications

**Invest in Authentic Influencer Partnerships.**



The centrality of authenticity in driving influencer credibility strongly argues for reorienting influencer marketing strategy away from reach-focused mega-influencer campaigns toward authenticity-focused micro and nano-influencer partnerships. Brands should prioritize genuine value-aesthetic-audience alignment over follower counts, and build long-term partnership relationships that allow authentic brand advocacy to develop organically.

### **Cultivate and Amplify UGC Systematically.**

The demonstrated effectiveness of UGC in driving trust, reducing perceived risk, and influencing purchase decisions makes systematic cultivation and strategic amplification of authentic consumer-created content one of the highest-return SMM investments available. Brands should implement UGC generation programs — hashtag campaigns, review incentives, ambassador programs — and deploy resulting content across owned, earned, and paid channels.

### **Develop Platform-Native Strategies by Category.**

Significant platform-specific effectiveness variations argue strongly against generic cross-platform strategies deploying identical content everywhere. Brands should develop platform-native approaches: short-form entertainment for TikTok, aspirational visual storytelling for Instagram, information-rich tutorial content for YouTube, and precision-targeted advertising for Facebook.

### **Build Trust as a Strategic Asset.**

The mediating role of trust underscores the importance of approaching SMM as a long-term trust-building endeavor: responsive community management, proactive complaint resolution, honest communication about product capabilities, and meaningful rather than performative influencer partnerships. Trust, once established, functions as a powerful buffer against competitive switching and a multiplier of SMM investment effectiveness.

## **6.3 Limitations and Future Research**

This research is subject to several limitations. The cross-sectional survey design precludes confident causal inference about the direction of observed relationships or longitudinal dynamics. Geographic and cultural scope is primarily limited to educated adults in westernized contexts, limiting cross-cultural generalizability. Reliance on self-reported data introduces potential method bias and recall accuracy concerns. Future research should employ longitudinal panel designs, experimental methodologies with controlled variable manipulation, cross-cultural comparative studies examining how Hofstede's cultural dimensions moderate SMM effectiveness, and neuromarketing approaches applying eye-tracking and EEG to examine unconscious responses to SMM stimuli.

Emerging research priorities include investigating the 'dark side' of SMM — including the psychological effects of chronic social comparison triggered by aspirational influencer content, the environmental impact of SMM-driven overconsumption, and the ethical implications of highly personalized behavioral targeting. Research on emerging SMM formats including augmented reality try-on experiences, virtual influencers, AI-generated personalized content, and immersive metaverse shopping environments will be essential as these innovations reshape social media marketing effectiveness.

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