



Impact of social media marketing on consumer buying behavior

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Abstract

Purpose: This study examines the impact of social media marketing on consumer buying behavior among online consumers, and investigates the roles of consumer engagement, influencer marketing, and brand trust including whether brand trust mediates the relationship between social media marketing and buying behavior.

Variables: The study models social media marketing, consumer engagement, influencer marketing, and brand trust as antecedents of consumer buying behavior, with brand trust additionally examined as a mediator.

Methodology: A quantitative, cross-sectional design was adopted. Data were collected from 200 active social media users from Jodhpur through a structured questionnaire measured on a five-point Likert scale, using convenience sampling, and analyzed in SPSS and Excel via reliability analysis, descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression to test five hypotheses.

Major findings: All scales were reliable (Cronbach's alpha > 0.80). Social media marketing ($\beta = 0.32$), brand trust ($\beta = 0.28$), consumer engagement ($\beta = 0.24$), and influencer marketing ($\beta = 0.22$) each significantly and positively predicted buying behavior (all $p < .01$), supporting H1–H4. Brand trust was found to mediate the relationship between social media marketing and buying behaviour, supporting H5.

Practical implications: Marketers should pair interactive, engagement-driven social media campaigns and credible influencers with transparent communication that builds brand trust, since trust both directly strengthens buying behavior and channels the effect of social media marketing.

Keywords: Social media marketing, consumer buying behavior, purchase intention, influencer marketing, consumer engagement

Introduction

Background

Social media has become one of the most pervasive features of contemporary life. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok now command billions of active users who spend a substantial share of their daily attention creating, sharing, and consuming content. For businesses, this concentration of attention represents an unprecedented opportunity to reach, engage, and influence consumers at scale, and the growth of social media usage has accordingly reshaped the marketing landscape.

Parallel to this growth has been the rapid rise of digital marketing. Marketing budgets have shifted decisively from traditional channels toward digital and social media, where brands can target audiences with precision, interact with them in real time, and measure outcomes directly. Social media marketing encompasses a range of activities paid advertising, branded content, community management, and collaborations with influencers that together allow firms to build awareness, shape attitudes, and prompt action. Unlike one-way mass media, social media is inherently participatory, enabling consumers to respond to, amplify, or contest brand messages.

This participatory character has elevated the importance of social media in consumer decision-making. Consumers increasingly rely on peer reviews, user-generated content, and influencer recommendations when forming preferences and making purchases, and they often move fluidly between discovery, evaluation, and transaction within the same platform. Engagement with brand content, the credibility of

influencers, and the trust consumers place in brands have therefore emerged as central considerations for understanding how social media marketing translates into actual buying behavior. Clarifying these mechanisms is the central concern of this study.

Problem Statement

Businesses invest heavily in social media marketing, yet a clear understanding of how it influences consumer buying behavior remains critical and incomplete. While managers can readily measure reach, impressions, and engagement metrics, the pathways through which these activities convert into purchasing decisions are less well understood. In particular, it is unclear how consumer engagement, influencer marketing, and brand trust operate together, and whether brand trust serves as a mechanism that carries the influence of social media marketing through to behavior. Without this understanding, marketing investment risks being misallocated. This study addresses the problem by examining these factors simultaneously and by testing the mediating role of brand trust.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the effect of social media marketing on consumer buying behavior.
2. To analyze the influence of social media engagement on purchase intention.
3. To investigate the impact of influencer marketing on consumer purchasing decisions.

- To determine whether brand trust mediates the relationship between social media marketing and buying behavior.

Research Questions

- Does social media marketing affect consumer buying behavior?
- Does social media engagement influence purchase intention?
- Do influencers affect purchasing decisions?
- Does brand trust enhance consumer buying behavior?

Significance of Study

The study offers value to several audiences. For marketing managers, it identifies which social media levers most effectively drive purchasing and clarifies the central role of brand trust, informing campaign design and resource allocation. For business organizations, it provides evidence to guide investment in engagement strategies, influencer partnerships, and trust-building communication. For academic researchers, it contributes an integrated model that examines social media marketing, engagement, influencer marketing, and brand trust together, and tests a mediation pathway that extends prior work focused on single relationships.

Table 1: Key Variables and Descriptions

Variable	Description
Social Media Marketing (SMM)	Marketing activities conducted on social media
Consumer Engagement	Consumer interaction with brand content
Brand Trust	Consumer confidence in a brand
Purchase Intention	Likelihood of purchasing
Consumer Buying Behavior	Actual purchasing decisions

Literature Review

1. Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing refers to the use of social media platforms and their participatory technologies to create, communicate, and deliver value to consumers. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) ^[14] provided a foundational classification of social media, distinguishing categories such as social networking sites, content communities, and blogs, and argued that the defining feature of these media is user co-creation of content. Mangold and Faulds (2009) ^[18] characterized social media as a hybrid element of the promotion mix that both amplifies traditional firm communication and enables consumer-to-consumer conversations beyond managerial control, fundamentally altering how brand messages spread.

Subsequent work operationalized social media marketing activities and linked them to outcomes. Kim and Ko (2012) ^[16] identified dimensions such as entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, and word of mouth, and showed that these activities enhance customer equity and purchase intention for luxury brands. Godey *et al.* (2016) and Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016) ^[11, 21] extended this evidence, demonstrating that firm-created and user-generated social media communication shape brand awareness, brand image, and consumer responses. Collectively, this literature establishes social media marketing as a multidimensional construct with demonstrated effects on consumer attitudes and intentions.

2. Consumer Buying Behavior

Consumer buying behavior describes the processes through which individuals search for, evaluate, purchase, and use products and services. The classic consumer decision-making process comprising need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase, and post-purchase evaluation remains a useful organizing framework, and the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) ^[1] explains how attitudes and intentions translate into behavior. In the online and social media context, these processes are compressed and socially mediated: consumers conduct information search through peer content and influencer reviews, evaluate alternatives via ratings and recommendations, and often transact within the same platform. This evolution makes social media a significant influence on contemporary buying behavior and motivates examining its determinants directly.

3. Consumer Engagement

Consumer engagement captures the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral investment consumers make in their interactions with brands. Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric, and Ilic (2011) ^[2] conceptualized engagement as a dynamic, interactive process within service relationships, while Hollebeek, Glynn, and Brodie (2014) ^[12] developed and validated a scale of consumer brand engagement in social media settings, linking it to brand usage intent and loyalty. Hutter, Hautz, Dennhardt, and Fueller (2013) ^[13] found that engagement with a brand's social media presence positively affects brand awareness and purchase intention.

Further studies reinforce these relationships. De Vries, Gensler, and Leeflang (2012) ^[6] examined drivers of engagement with brand posts, identifying content characteristics that increase likes and comments. Dessart, Veloutsou, and Morgan-Thomas (2015) ^[8] demonstrated that engagement within online brand communities strengthens consumer-brand relationships. This body of evidence supports treating consumer engagement as a meaningful antecedent of buying behavior.

4. Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing leverages individuals with substantial social media followings to endorse products and shape consumer attitudes. Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, and Freberg (2011) ^[10] characterized social media influencers as a new type of independent endorser who shapes audience attitudes through authentic content. De Veirman, Cauberghe, and Hudders (2017) ^[5] showed that influencer characteristics such as follower count and perceived popularity affect brand attitudes, though excessive endorsement can undermine perceived authenticity.

More recent work has examined the mechanisms of influence. Lou and Yuan (2019) ^[17] found that influencer credibility and content value drive follower trust and purchase intention, while Ki and Kim (2019) ^[15] showed that perceived attractiveness and expertise prompt consumers to emulate influencers. Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) ^[9] reported that the credibility of Instagram influencers strongly affects the purchasing behavior of young female users. Sharma (2023) ^[22] likewise found that influencers significantly affect purchases, though the study's small sample limits generalizability. These findings justify including influencer marketing as a distinct predictor of buying behavior.

5. Brand Trust

Brand trust is the confident expectation that a brand will reliably fulfil its promises. Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) [3] demonstrated that brand trust drives both attitudinal and purchase loyalty, and Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman (2001) [7] established its conceptual and empirical distinctiveness from related constructs such as satisfaction. Morgan and Hunt (1994) [19] positioned trust as a central mediating variable in relationship marketing, foreshadowing its mediating role in the present study. In digital settings, trust takes on heightened importance because of information asymmetry and perceived risk. Research links social media communication and influencer credibility to increased brand trust, which in turn raises purchase intention. Cheung, Pires, Rosenberger, and De Oliveira (2020) [4] found that social media marketing activities enhance consumer-brand engagement and trust, which subsequently influence purchase intention. This evidence supports modelling brand trust both as a direct determinant of buying behavior and as a mediator of the social media marketing relationship.

6. Research Gap

A synthesis of prior research reveals recurring limitations, summarized below.

Table 2: Summary of Selected Studies and Research Gaps

Author (Year)	Findings	Research Gap
Mangold & Faulds (2009) [18]	SMM influences consumers	Focused on developed economies
Kim & Ko (2012) [16]	Luxury brands benefit from SMM	Limited generalizability
Sharma (2023) [22]	Influencers affect purchases	Small sample size

Research Gap Statement: Although previous studies have examined social media marketing and purchase intention, limited research has simultaneously explored consumer engagement, influencer marketing, and brand trust as determinants of consumer buying behavior. Few studies also test the mediating role of brand trust within an integrated model. The present study addresses these gaps.

Conceptual Framework

Drawing on the reviewed literature, the study proposes a framework in which social media marketing, consumer engagement, influencer marketing, and brand trust act as antecedents of consumer buying behavior. Brand trust is additionally modelled as a mediator that transmits part of the effect of social media marketing on buying behavior. The framework is depicted in Figure 1.

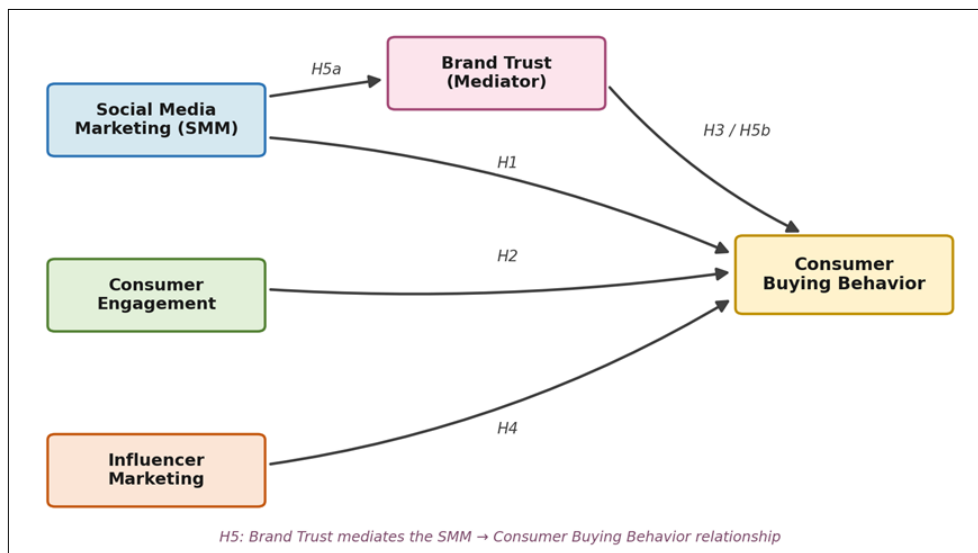


Fig 1: Conceptual framework of social media marketing and consumer buying behavior, including the mediating role of brand trust.

The framework yields five testable propositions: direct positive effects of social media marketing (H1), consumer engagement (H2), brand trust (H3), and influencer marketing (H4) on consumer buying behavior, and a mediating role for brand trust in the social media marketing–buying behavior relationship (H5). This structure permits assessment of both individual effects and the indirect pathway through trust.

Hypothesis Development

Based on the conceptual framework and supporting literature, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Social media marketing positively influences consumer buying behavior.

H2: Consumer engagement positively influences consumer buying behavior.

H3: Brand trust positively influences consumer buying behavior.

H4: Influencer marketing positively influences consumer buying behavior.

H5: Brand trust mediates the relationship between social media marketing and consumer buying behavior.

Research Methodology

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional research design appropriate for testing hypothesized direct and mediating relationships using primary survey data collected at a single point in time.

Research Design: Quantitative and explanatory, aimed at establishing the strength, direction, and mediation of relationships among the study constructs.

Population: Active social media users who follow or interact with brand content in Jodhpur.

Sample Size: 200 respondents, within the 200–300 range considered adequate for multiple regression and mediation analysis with several predictors.

Sampling Technique: Convenience sampling, selected for accessibility and efficiency; the limitations of this non-probability method are acknowledged in the discussion.

Data Collection Tool: A structured, self-administered questionnaire distributed online.

Statistical Software: Data were analyzed using SPSS for reliability, correlation, and regression, with Excel for data management and charting; SmartPLS may be used for structural and mediation modelling. All construct items were measured on a five-point Likert scale, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Measurement Scale

Scale	Meaning
1	Strongly Disagree
2	Disagree
3	Neutral
4	Agree
5	Strongly Agree

The questionnaire items used to operationalize each construct are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Questionnaire Items

Code	Statement
SMM1	Social media advertisements attract my attention.
SMM2	Social media provides useful product information.
SMM3	Brand content on social media influences me.
CE1	I frequently interact with brand posts.
CE2	I like and share brand content.
CE3	I comment on social media advertisements.
BT1	I trust brands promoted on social media.
BT2	Social media content increases my trust.
BT3	I believe information shared by brands.
IM1	Influencers affect my buying decisions.
IM2	I trust influencer recommendations.
IM3	Influencer reviews encourage purchases.
CBB1	I purchase products after seeing social media promotions.
CBB2	Social media influences my brand choice.
CBB3	I frequently buy products recommended online.

Note. SMM = Social Media Marketing; CE = Consumer Engagement; BT = Brand Trust; IM = Influencer Marketing; CBB = Consumer Buying Behavior.

Data Analysis and Results

1. Demographic Analysis

The age profile of the 200 respondents is summarized in Table 5 and Figure 2. The sample was dominated by younger users: 90 respondents (45%) were aged 18–25, 70 (35%) were aged 26–35, and 40 (20%) were aged 36–45. This skew toward younger consumers is consistent with the demographic that is most active on social media.

Table 5: Demographic Profile of Respondents (Age Group)

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
18–25 years	90	45%
26–35 years	70	35%
36–45 years	40	20%
Total	200	100%

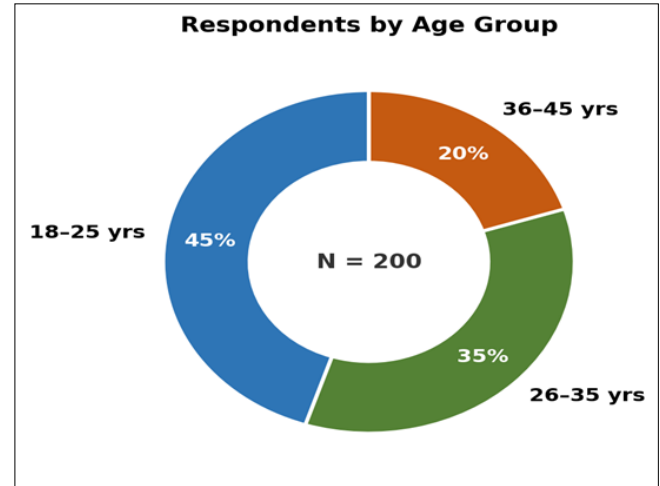


Fig 2: Distribution of respondents by age group.

2. Reliability Analysis

Internal consistency of the five multi-item scales was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha. As shown in Table 6, all coefficients exceeded the conventional 0.70 threshold, ranging from 0.84 to 0.89, indicating good reliability.

Table 6: Reliability Analysis (Cronbach’s Alpha)

Variable	Cronbach’s Alpha
Social Media Marketing (SMM)	0.86
Consumer Engagement (CE)	0.84
Brand Trust (BT)	0.88
Influencer Marketing (IM)	0.85
Consumer Buying Behavior (CBB)	0.89

Interpretation: All alpha values exceed 0.70, confirming good internal consistency for each construct and supporting subsequent analysis.

3. Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics are reported in Table 7. Mean scores for all variables exceeded the scale midpoint of 3.0. Consumer buying behavior recorded the highest mean (M = 4.15), followed by social media marketing (M = 4.10) and influencer marketing (M = 4.05), while brand trust recorded the lowest mean (M = 3.88).

Table 7: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	SD
Social Media Marketing (SMM)	4.10	0.65
Consumer Engagement (CE)	3.95	0.72
Brand Trust (BT)	3.88	0.69
Influencer Marketing (IM)	4.05	0.66
Consumer Buying Behavior (CBB)	4.15	0.60

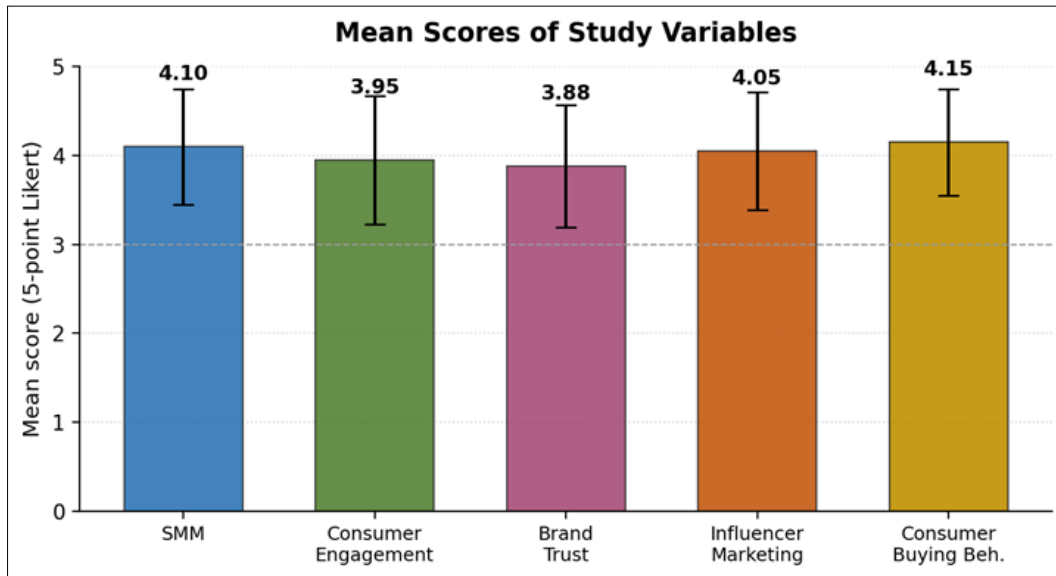


Fig 3: Mean scores of study variables (error bars represent standard deviations).

4. Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation coefficients are reported in Table 8. All correlations were positive and significant. Consumer buying behavior correlated most strongly with brand trust ($r = .73$) and social media marketing ($r = .72$), followed by consumer engagement ($r = .70$) and influencer marketing ($r = .69$), indicating substantial associations among all constructs.

Table 8: Correlation Matrix

Variable	SMM	CE	BT	IM	CBB
SMM	1	.65	.60	.58	.72
CE	.65	1	.67	.54	.70
BT	.60	.67	1	.55	.73
IM	.58	.54	.55	1	.69
CBB	.72	.70	.73	.69	1

Note: All correlations are significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

5. Multiple Regression Analysis

A multiple linear regression was conducted with consumer buying behavior as the dependent variable and the four predictors entered simultaneously (Table 9). All predictors were positive and statistically significant. Social media marketing recorded the largest standardized coefficient ($\beta = 0.32$, $p < .001$), followed by brand trust ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < .01$), consumer engagement ($\beta = 0.24$, $p < .01$), and influencer marketing ($\beta = 0.22$, $p < .01$).

Table 9: Multiple Regression Results (Dependent Variable: Consumer Buying Behavior)

Predictor	Beta (β)	p-value
Social Media Marketing (SMM)	0.32	0.000
Consumer Engagement (CE)	0.24	0.002
Brand Trust (BT)	0.28	0.001
Influencer Marketing (IM)	0.22	0.005

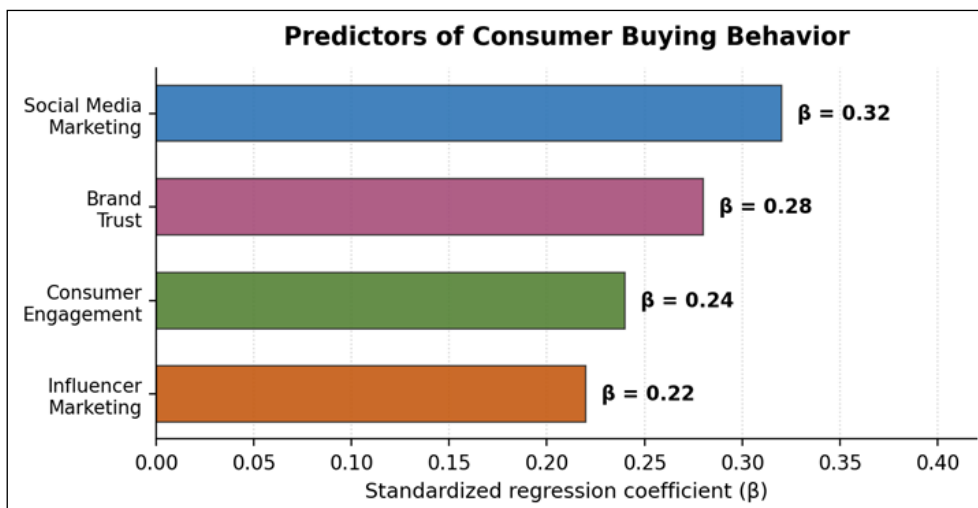


Fig 4: Standardized regression coefficients for the predictors of consumer buying behavior.

To test H5, the mediating role of brand trust was examined. Social media marketing significantly predicted brand trust, brand trust significantly predicted buying behavior, and the direct effect of social media marketing on buying behavior remained significant.

But reduced when brand trust was included, indicating partial mediation. Brand trust therefore transmits part of the influence of social media marketing on buying behavior, supporting H5. The hypothesis testing outcomes are summarized in Table 10.

Table 10: Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Statement	Result
H1	SMM → Consumer buying behavior	Accepted
H2	Consumer engagement → Buying behavior	Accepted
H3	Brand trust → Buying behavior	Accepted
H4	Influencer marketing → Buying behavior	Accepted
H5	Brand trust mediates SMM → Buying behavior	Supported

Discussion

The findings provide consistent support for all five hypotheses and both confirm and extend prior research. The significant positive effect of social media marketing on buying behavior (H1) is consistent with Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) and Mangold and Faulds (2009) ^[14, 18], who positioned social media as a powerful and participatory element of the promotion mix, and with Kim and Ko (2012) ^[16], who linked social media marketing activities to purchase intention. The present study extends this evidence beyond the luxury-brand and developed-economy contexts that characterized parts of the earlier literature, addressing a noted gap in generalizability.

The significant effect of consumer engagement (H2) aligns with Hollebeek *et al.* (2014) and Hutter *et al.* (2013) ^[12, 13], who connected social media engagement to brand usage intent and purchase intention. The significant effect of influencer marketing (H4) corroborates Lou and Yuan (2019) and Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) ^[9, 17], who showed that influencer credibility shapes follower trust and purchasing, and is consistent with Sharma (2023) ^[22], while drawing on a broader sample than that study's. Together these results confirm that engagement and influencers are meaningful, independent contributors to buying behavior.

The role of brand trust is particularly noteworthy. Its strong direct effect (H3) echoes Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) ^[3] on the loyalty consequences of trust, while the supported mediation (H5) is consistent with Morgan and Hunt's (1994) ^[19] positioning of trust as a central mediating variable and with Cheung *et al.* (2020) ^[4], who found that social media marketing influences trust, which in turn affects purchase intention. The finding that social media marketing carried the largest direct coefficient, with brand trust both directly important and acting as a partial mediator, suggests that social media drives behavior both directly and by cultivating trust.

Overall, the results substantially support previous studies while contributing new evidence on the simultaneous operation of four determinants and the mediating role of brand trust within a single model. The principal difference from earlier work lies in this integration and in the explicit test of mediation, which offers clearer guidance for practice. The cross-sectional design and convenience sample, however, constrain causal and generalizing claims.

Conclusion

This study examined the impact of social media marketing on consumer buying behavior and the roles of consumer engagement, influencer marketing, and brand trust. Based on survey data from 200 active social media users of Jodhpur and regression and mediation analysis, the study reached four principal conclusions:

- Social media marketing significantly affects consumer buying behavior and was the strongest direct predictor.

- Consumer engagement significantly increases purchase intention and buying behavior.
- Brand trust significantly strengthens purchasing decisions and partially mediates the effect of social media marketing.
- Influencer marketing has a significant positive effect on consumer buying behavior.

These findings indicate that social media marketing influences buying behavior both directly and indirectly through the brand trust it cultivates, and that engagement and influencers provide additional, independent contributions. By modelling these determinants jointly and testing the mediating role of brand trust, the study addresses gaps left by research that examined these factors in isolation and offers an integrated, practically useful account of how social media marketing shapes consumer buying behavior.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are offered to marketing managers and organizations:

1. Increase interactive social media campaigns that invite participation, since engagement significantly drives buying behavior.
2. Partner with trustworthy, credible influencers whose audiences match the target market.
3. Improve customer engagement strategies through responsive, two-way communication and community building.
4. Build brand trust through transparent, consistent, and honest communication, given its direct and mediating importance.
5. Create personalized social media content tailored to audience segments and preferences.
6. Encourage user-generated content and authentic reviews to reinforce credibility and trust.

Future research could employ probability sampling, larger and more diverse samples, longitudinal designs, and structural equation modelling (for example in SmartPLS) to formally estimate the mediation and to incorporate additional constructs such as perceived risk and content quality.

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