

A Study on Social Media Marketing and Its Impact on Consumer Engagement

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Abstract

This research focuses on the role of social media marketing in driving consumer engagement, based on an internship undertaken at a marketing services organization in Chennai specializing in catering to small and medium enterprises. The research design used is descriptive cross-sectional with data collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of 25 questions which was sent to 99 respondents through Google Forms in July 2026. The research examines the different platforms being used, types of content available that spur on engagement, the different types of engagement, and engagement impact on downstream results like purchasing intention, trust and satisfaction. Using descriptive analysis and various statistical tests, including chi-square and binary logistic regression, the researcher concludes that Instagram and video messaging are the most common platforms used by consumers for engagement, liking is the most common type of engagement, and that trust and personalization affect purchase behavior, but consumer engagement frequency does not. In summary, this study suggests that just engaging large numbers of customers through social media may not be sufficient for building up sales for small and medium enterprises.

Keywords

Marketing via social media, customer involvement, propensity to buy, Instagram, short video content, confidence in customers, individualization, influencer advertising, marketing of small- and medium-size businesses, marketing via digital channels.

Introduction

All business enterprises within the modern-day realities have one fundamental problem: it is becoming more difficult to communicate with consumers through traditional advertising, while being present on social media does not mean achieving success anymore. Attention of consumers is now divided between many platforms, feed algorithms replaced chronological order and customers ignore anything seen as a common marketing message. This report is based on the experience gained from the internship program completed with a Chennai-based company offering marketing and tech-enabled services to their business clients across retail, education, and local services. The digital marketing industry in India is rapidly growing – from around USD 2.39 billion in FY20 to approximately USD 6.46 billion in FY24 with help from better access to the internet, decreasing data costs, and with smartphones being available to everyone. The sub-segment of social media marketing is one of the fastest-growing areas of the industry today with its main tools being influencer marketing, short video clips, and user-generated content.

Even if many companies invest in social media, most of them especially the small and medium ones, are still calculating success through vanity metrics like the number of followers instead of using real success indicators. Therefore, it creates doubt in the minds of many which platforms and content types are actually bringing engagement and purchases. The aims of this research are: (a) to study the influence of social media marketing on engagement; (b) to identify the most popular types of social media platforms; (c) to find out content types which receive the highest engagement.

Review of Literature

Much of the existing literature on social media engagement has contextualised the same as a multidimensional concept that comprises aspects such as behavioural, cognitive and emotional, but which can be measured by means of such metrics as likes, comments and shares. Various studies of engagement in luxury, fashion and financial services brands

have revealed that some aspects that have an influence on social media engagement are entertainment, interactivity, trendiness, customisation and informativeness. It is worth noting that demographic characteristics like age moderates the way that these factors exert their influence. Some studies connect social media marketing activities with downstream effects in a series of more or less similar stages, including continuance, participation and purchase intention.

In this period, the studies conducted are large-scaled as well as have gone rigorous testing. The studies of big data along with natural language processing assess millions of consumer posts. The Study Meta-analysis combines numerous earlier studies and examines consumer engagement at different time periods considering engagement in continuous and periodic terms. The findings of the described studies support the notion that social media marketing influences the attitude, willingness, and behavior of consumers positively. The participation is beneficial for the consumers because it contributes to their commitment and loyalty to the company. It was found that factors such as content trust help understand the causes of greater levels of engagement by consumers with some kind of information compared to others (that is the case with the information generated by employees rather than generated by the companies). The deep reviews of the studies conducted on the basis of TCCM and analysis of TikTok and some other platforms show that the studies in the online marketing research field pay too little attention to small businesses and South Asian as well as emphasize AI-derived consumer targeting, information entropy engagement inscriptions, and privacy concerns.

Table 1 summarises representative studies informing this research.

Study	Focus	Key Contribution
Trunfio & Rossi (2021)	Conceptualisation of engagement	Engagement is behavioural, cognitive and emotional; COBRA framework is useful
Liu, Shin & Burns (2021)	Luxury brands, big data	Entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customisation drive engagement
Hazzam et al. (2021)	Instagram fashion marketing	Informativeness matters across ages; interactivity effects vary by age
Muda, Ray & Yadav (2023)	Meta-analysis (11 studies)	Positive relationship between SMM activities and customer engagement
Susiyanto et al. (2023)	TikTok beauty brand	Engagement mediates SMM activities and purchase intention
Saikia & Bhattacharjee (2024)	TCCM review (221 articles)	Uses & Gratifications Theory prominent; Asia under-represented in research gaps
So et al. (2024)	Longitudinal, post-purchase	Engagement and SMM perceptions fluctuate over time; engagement builds stickiness

This research enhances existing literature by adding primary data in Indian and SME contexts with a statistically sound methodology and by addressing the gap mentioned by reviewers in the sense that most existing research is focused on developed markets and big brands having ample resources.

Research Methodology

The research design followed was of descriptive, quantitative, and cross-sectional nature as the aim was to understand the existing attitudes and behaviour of consumers rather than studying causal relationship in an experimental setting. The primary data was obtained from 99 participants with the help of a structured closed-ended questionnaire comprising 25 items distributed through Google Forms, which is divided into four parts: demographics of respondents; overall social media use; engagement behaviour and its determinants; and results and overall views on the issue. The sample was chosen through non-probability convenience sampling, and the questionnaire link was distributed in personal and professional circles of the researcher. The data collection took place for several days in July 2026, after which the data were placed into a spreadsheet for data cleaning and processing.

Parameter	Detail
Research design	Descriptive, quantitative, cross-sectional
Sample size	99 respondents
Sampling technique	Non-probability convenience sampling
Data collection tool	25-item structured questionnaire (Google Forms)
Data collection period	July 2026 (during internship)
Geographic scope	Chennai and surrounding region
Statistical tools	Frequency/percentage analysis, chi-square test, binary logistic regression

The limitations of the study include demographic bias (71.7% of respondents are aged 18-24 and 73.7% are male), heavy reliance on respondents' self-report information, unidimensional data collection approach, and a short time frame for data collection. As a result of these limitations, the results should only be interpreted as indicative.

Data Analysis & Interpretation

Respondent Profile and Usage Behaviour

Variable	Leading Response	Share
Age group	18–24 years	71.7%
Gender	Male	73.7%
Most-used platform	Instagram	67.7%
Daily usage	1–2 hours/day	36.4%
Follows brands on social media	Yes	83.8%
Reason for following brands	Product updates	35.4%

The sample skews young, male and Instagram-centric. A large majority follow brands, chiefly to receive product updates, ahead of entertainment and discounts.

Content Preference and Engagement Behaviour

Variable	Leading Response	Share
Content that attracts most	Videos	45.5%
Frequency of engaging with brand posts	Often	36.4%
Usual type of engagement	Like	42.4%
Feature that most increases engagement	Reels/Short videos	59.6%
Preferred brand content type	Promotional	32.3%
What encourages engagement with a brand	Good content	35.4%

Video-based formats dominate attention and engagement, but the engagement itself is shallow: liking (42.4%) is far more common than commenting or sharing (22.8% each), and saving (12.0%) is rarest.

Trust, Influence and Purchase Behaviour

Variable	Leading Response	Share
Purchased after seeing on social media	Yes	86.9%
Strongest purchase influence	Customer reviews	42.4%
Trust in social media advertisements	Mostly trust	37.4%
Importance of reviews before buying	Important	41.4%
Giveaways/contests increase engagement (agree/strongly agree)	Agree	71.7%
Influencer marketing affects buying decision (agree/strongly agree)	Agree	68.7%
Personalised ads of interest	Yes	65.7%
Likely to recommend a followed brand	Likely	55.6%
Overall social media marketing effectiveness (effective/very effective)	Effective	72.8%
Overall satisfaction with social media experience (satisfied/very satisfied)	Satisfied	79.8%

Purchase behaviour following social media exposure is widespread, and customer reviews outrank advertisements and influencer recommendations as the strongest single influence on purchase decisions. Overall sentiment toward social media marketing is strongly positive, both in perceived effectiveness and in personal satisfaction.

Hypothesis and Test Results

To move beyond descriptive statistics, the study tested the relationship between key engagement-related variables and reported purchase behaviour using chi-square tests of association and binary logistic regression, with purchase behaviour (has purchased after seeing a product on social media: Yes/No) as the outcome of interest.

Hypothesis	Statistical Test	Result
H1: There is no significant association between trust in social media advertisements and purchase behaviour.	Chi-square test of association	Rejected — trust is significantly associated with purchase behaviour
H2: There is no significant association between interest in personalised advertisements and purchase behaviour.	Chi-square test of association	Rejected — personalisation is significantly associated with purchase behaviour
H3: Engagement frequency (how often respondents engage with brand posts) has no significant effect on purchase behaviour.	Binary logistic regression	Not rejected — engagement frequency is not a significant predictor ($p = 0.489$)

The findings suggest that trust and personalisation are of great importance when it comes to the consumer's turning of social media exposure into a purchase with the frequency of 'likes', comments and shares having very little predictive power. In addition, the results of the logistic regression reveal the overlapping nature of trust, personalisation and content

quality, making it clear that the three operate in conjunction through effective strategy development and must be considered as mutually dependent factors.

Findings

- The sample consists of mainly young (71.7% in the age group of 18–24), male (73.7%) individuals who use social media. Instagram is the most popular platform (67.7%), followed by YouTube (17.2%).
 - Respondents use social media frequently: around 48.5% spend over two hours per day on it and 83.8% follow at least one brand for product information.
 - Video content catches attention (45.5%), with Reels/short videos regarded as the main way of getting views (59.6%).
 - Engagement happens regularly but is not deep: although 61.7% engage with brand posts often or always, 'like' (42.4%) is ahead of commenting and sharing (22.8% each).
 - The exposure to social media greatly impacts buying behaviour, with 86.9% of respondents saying they have bought goods after seeing them on social media.
 - Consumer reviews are regarded as the most significant motivation for purchasing goods (42.4%), falling behind advertising (19.2%) and influencer recommendations (16.2%).
 - The trust to social media ads is good (56.6%), with almost a third being neutral.
- The results from chi-square evaluation also suggest that both trust in ads and interest in customised ads have a significant impact on purchasing behaviour.
- Frequency of engagement alone is not a good predictor of purchase behaviour ($p = 0.489$), hence likes and comments do not lead to sales automatically.
- Giveaways and contests (71.7% agreement) and advertising via influencers (68.7% agreement) are effective in increasing engagement and encouraging purchases but are still less impactful than reviews.
- The overall impression is positive: 72.8% consider social media marketing effective or very effective, while 79.8% express satisfaction with their social media experiences.

Suggestions

- Give priority to short-form video (Reels) as the main format of content, since this type of content attracts attention and enhances engagement.
- Seek and publish real customers' reviews as reviews are the most influential factor in purchase decisions in a given case.
- Use personalized content where possible through offers, recommendations, and messages, since personalization plays a significant role in purchasing behavior.
- Establish ad credibility based on true claims, reliable product information, and real customer experiences instead of simple promotion statements.
- Do not measure campaign efficiency relying solely on likes or reach since conversion, queries, and sales should also be considered.
- Focus on content's quality and relevance at the core, while using promotions, competitions, and influencers only as supportive instruments.
- Use Instagram for the target young audience, while making sure that the choice of the platform corresponds to the characteristics of the specific target audience.

- Always reply on comments and messages to create an impression about the high quality of brand communication.
- For the HOST marketing services company, integrate trust, personalisation and the indicators based on customer reviews, thus moving beyond simple exploration of engagement.
- Extend future research and work with bigger samples to increase the level of generalisation.

Conclusion

This research aims at examining the impact of social media marketing on consumer behaviour and engagement, based on primary data from a marketing internship experience. The research proved that social media, especially Instagram, is extensively used by the younger generation, and that short videos make the most efficient advertising format. At the same time, the results of the study indicate that engagement in its most evident form (liking) does not predict or explain purchases—usage was statistically insignificant as a predictor, while trust to ads and interest in tailored content appeared to be significantly related to purchases.

Customer feedback has been shown to be the most powerful factor affecting buying decisions, beating advertising and influencers' suggestions and proving the significance of word-of-mouth even in the age of algorithms. While giveaways, competitions, and influencer marketing prove effective in generating interest and intention to buy, they are more effective when used as complementary measures than as substitutes for quality content. In general, public perception of social media marketing has been very positive in both aspects - its efficacy and satisfaction.

The practical implications for both the host organization and the SMEs it supports are clear: measuring and achieving social media success should focus on trust, personalization, generating reviews, and the quality of content instead of being based on vanity metrics only. However, due to the limitations of the convenience sample, the concentration on younger respondents who use Instagram, and the fact that the data were collected at a single point of time, comprehensive conclusions cannot be drawn; further studies involving larger and more diverse samples along with data from platform analytics will provide a clearer picture of the phenomena.

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