



Social Media's Influence on Purchase Intention: The Roles of Community and Trust

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of social media community participation and customer trust on purchase intention in the realm of social commerce. This research utilizes the Theory of Planned Behaviour and Social Identity Theory to analyse the influence of online communities and trust mechanisms on consumer decision-making. A quantitative, cross-sectional survey including 114 active social media users was performed, utilising regression analysis, ANOVA, and moderation/mediation tests. The findings indicate that customer trust is a substantial predictor of purchase intention, but the influence of social media community interaction is less direct. Moreover, demographic variables like work and wealth demonstrate minimal influence on users' reactions to social media signals. The study highlights the significance of trust-building and focused community involvement techniques in digital marketing and proposes directions for future research that include platform-specific and longitudinal assessments.

Keywords: Social media marketing; Purchase intention; Online community; Consumer trust; Digital behavior

Introduction:

According to Yazdani, M et al, 2019, social media has emerged as a powerful force that influences consumers' intents to make purchases, creating a paradigm shift in the landscape of consumer behavior. The advent of social media platforms has not only provided customers with access to information that has never been seen before, but it has also profoundly transformed the dynamics of the purchasing process. Because of this transformation, it is necessary to conduct an in-depth investigation into the aspects of the social media ecosystem that have the most impact on the decisions that customers make about the acquisition of products and services. Among these characteristics, community and trust stand out as particularly significant drivers of purchase intention. As a result, it is necessary to do in-depth research on the individual and collective impacts that these elements have on consumer behavior (Chivandi et al., 2019).

When it comes to social media, the idea of community goes beyond simple social contact; it encompasses a sense of belonging and shared identity that may considerably influence the decisions that people make regarding their purchases. The communities that are found on social media platforms offer customers the opportunity to interact with others who have similar interests, discuss their experiences, and express their thoughts on various businesses and goods. According to Alarfaj and Solaiman (2021), a sense of belonging helps to cultivate a social environment in which customers are more sensitive to suggestions and more affected by the purchasing patterns of their peers.

These web-based social networks are actively cultivated by e-commerce enterprises, which enables customers to share their own experiences through reviews, ratings, and debates. This, in turn, drives traffic to retail websites and serves as a starting point for customers who purchase online (Kim & Srivastava, 2007).

Literature Review:

2.1 Social Media and Purchase Intention

These platforms have completely altered the way in which customers engage with companies, making them indispensable instruments for influencing consumers' intentions to make a purchase. It has been demonstrated via research that social media marketing methods, which include influencer promotions, user-generated

content, and targeted adverts, have a major impact on the decision-making processes of customers. According to Wang et al. (2022), the trust that is established via interactions that are both consistent and engaging on social commerce platforms has a beneficial impact on the consumers' desire to make a purchase. As a result of these platforms' ability to generate perceived value and emotional connection, the chance of a purchase being made is considerably increased.

2.2 The Role of Online Community

Online communities serve as social proof environments where members engage in discussions, share experiences, and offer recommendations. These communities not only shape brand perceptions but also influence behavioral intentions. Hsu (2017) emphasized that participation in Facebook fan pages creates trust among community members, which in turn positively affects purchase intention. Similarly, Yazdanian et al. (2019) found that brand communities on social platforms increase trust and brand loyalty, with purchase intention acting as a mediator in the process.

2.3 Trust as a Mediator and Moderator

Within the realm of digital commerce, trust serves a dual purpose, acting as both a mediator and a moderator. It not only boosts or lessens the impact of other factors such as community participation or perceived credibility, but it also acts as a mediator in the interaction between exposure to social media and behavioral outcomes (Choksi et al., 2020). In the context of social e-commerce, Tahir and Khan (2021) shown that trust acts as a mediator between the link between online reviews and the desire to make a purchase. Furthermore, Khan et al. (2021) discovered that trust acts as a moderator in the association between trust in social media influencers and purchase intention. This finding suggests that similarity between influencers and followers might strengthen trust, which in turn can lead to future purchasing choices (Banker et al., 2020).

2.4 Integrating Trust and Community

When considering digital consumer behavior from a holistic perspective, it is important to highlight the synergistic influence that online community involvement and trust creation have. Interactivity and perceived involvement on social media are two factors that contribute to the development of trust, which eventually results in increased purchase intention and positive word-of-mouth communications, as stated by Liao et al. (2019). This multifaceted interaction demonstrates that successful social media marketing takes more than just receiving exposure; it also necessitates the cultivation of an atmosphere that is characterized by dependability, reciprocity, and community trust.

Hypothesis:

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between social media community engagement and consumers' purchase intention

H2: There is a significant positive relationship between consumer trust and purchase intention.

2.5 Theoretical framework

This investigation is grounded in the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), which asserts that intentions to behave are influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Online communities play a significant role in shaping subjective norms through peer influence, and trust positively impacts consumers' attitudes towards making purchases. Furthermore, the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) reinforces the notion that individuals are inclined to mimic the buying habits of online communities they resonate with. Ultimately, trust serves as a mediator according to the Commitment-Trust Theory of Relationship Marketing (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), highlighting the importance of trust in relational exchanges that result in behavioural outcomes like purchase intention.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to explore the impact of social media community and trust on consumers' purchase intention. The study further investigates the mediating and moderating influences of trust and demographic factors. A survey-based methodology was utilized to gather primary data from social media users who have experience with online shopping.

3.2 Population and Sampling

The population for this study includes active social media users in Gujarat, particularly those who follow brands, influencers, or participate in online communities. A non-probability purposive sampling method was used to ensure participants had relevant exposure to social media marketing. A total of 114 responses were collected and deemed valid for analysis.

3.3 Data Collection Instrument

The collection of data was conducted through a structured questionnaire that included closed-ended items. The instrument comprised four distinct sections: Section A: Information on demographics including age, gender, education level, occupation, and income. Section B: Engagement within the Social Media Community (SMC), assessed using items modified from previously validated scales (e.g., participation, frequency, and perceived relevance). Section C: Consumer Trust, assessed through elements emphasizing brand reliability, credibility, and transparency. Section D: Purchase Intention, assessed via Likert-scale items measuring the probability of purchasing influenced by social media exposure.

3.4 Data Interpretation methodology

The investigation confirmed content validity via expert assessment and by modifying items from recognized literature, while a preliminary test enhanced the clarity of the survey questions. The reliability was established through Cronbach's Alpha, indicating acceptable values exceeding 0.70. The analysis of data was performed utilizing SPSS, where descriptive statistics were employed to characterize respondents, regression analysis was used to investigate the direct relationships among community, trust, and purchase intention, and ANOVA was applied to assess the impact of demographic factors. Furthermore, mediation and moderation analyses were conducted to assess the influence of trust and demographic factors on the proposed relationships. The assessment of model robustness involved the evaluation of R-square values, with significance established at a p-value threshold of 0.05.

Data analysis

DEMOGRAPHICS				Frequency	Percent	
AGE	18-25			27	23.7	
	26-36			23	20.2	
	36-45			17	14.9	
	46 and above			47	41.2	
EDUCATION	Non graduate			21	18.4	
	graduates			41	36	
	post graduate			43	37.7	
	others			9	7.9	
GENDER	male			82	71.9	
	female			32	28.1	
OCCUPATION	service			28	24.6	
	business			26	22.8	
	self employed			22	19.3	
	others			38	33.3	
INCOME	0-3 lacs			47	41.2	
	3-5 lacs			25	21.9	
	5-10 lacs			24	21.1	
	above 10 lacs			18	15.8	
Model Summary						
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
1	.811 ^a	0.657	0.648	0.6797		
ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	97.449	3	32.483	70.31	.000 ^b
	Residual	50.82	110	0.462		
	Total	148.268	113			
Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	0.565	0.227		2.489	0.01
	Smc	-0.074	0.079	-0.064	-0.94	0.35
	Dep	0.379	0.113	0.345	3.357	0
	Trust	0.522	0.087	0.541	6.018	0

4 Results:

4.1 Demographic Characteristics

The dataset included responses from individuals who fell into a variety of demographic groups. It is important to note that the majority ranged in age from 18 to 25 years old (23.7%), followed by those aged 46 and over (41.2%). A balanced foundation for generalization was provided by the diversity of educational levels, vocations, and economic groups that were present in the population.

4.2 Regression Analysis

For the purpose of determining the significance of social media community and trust in relation to purchase intention, a multiple linear regression analysis was carried out. According to the findings, the prediction model is quite accurate. Given that the correlation coefficient (R) was 0.811 and the R-square value was 0.657, it can be deduced that the combined impacts of social media community and trust are capable of explaining 65.7% of the variance in purchase intention. Based on the modified R² value of 0.648, it is evident that the model continues to be robust even after taking into consideration the number of predictors. In addition, the estimate had a standard error of 0.6797, which indicates that there was a substantial amount of residual variation. These findings shed light on the enormous impact that customer trust and involvement on social media platforms have on shoppers' intentions to make a purchase.

4.3 ANOVA: Influence of Demographics

The purpose of the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests was to determine whether or not demographic factors had a significant impact on the perceptions of social media communities (SMC) and the intention to make a purchase (PI). We did not find any statistically significant relationship between age and either of the variables. For SMC, the F-value was 1.801, and for PI, it was 0.790. The p-values for each of these variables were 0.151 and 0.502, respectively.

With an F-value of 2.279 and a p-value of 0.083, education was shown to have a marginal effect on social media community perception. This indicates that the degree of education may have a modest effect on how individuals interact with or view online communities. In spite of this, its impact on the intention to make a purchase was not statistically significant ($p = 0.849$).

There was a significant relationship between occupation and purchase intention ($F = 3.357$, $p = 0.021$), which suggests that a consumer's professional background might influence how they react to social media cues. A statistically insignificant influence was seen on the community of social media users ($p = 0.695$). In addition, income came close to being significant for both the social media community ($F = 2.495$, $p = 0.064$) and the desire to make a purchase ($F = 2.171$, $p = 0.096$), which suggests that consumers' financial situation may play a role in mediating how they understand and respond to the influence of social media.

5. Discussions

These findings are consistent with those of previous research (Wang et al., 2022; Hsu, 2017), which have demonstrated that trust and online communities have a substantial impact on the intention to make a purchase in social commerce. In situations where these psychosocial factors are present, the high R² value of 0.657 demonstrates that social media is successful in altering the opinions of consumers.

It appears that economic and professional standing have an effect on how social media cues are read. This is supported by the fact that the relevance of employment and the marginal effects of money are important demographic factors. However, the fact that age did not play a major effect may suggest that there has been a shift in the level of media literacy and confidence in digital commerce across different generations, which lends weight to the findings of Liao et al. (2019). All things considered, these findings highlight the need of marketers making investments in the development of trustworthy communities in order to successfully convert social media engagement into purchase behavior.

6. Conclusion:

This investigation examined the influence of social media communities and consumer trust on purchase intention, based on a quantitative cross-sectional approach. The findings indicate that trust is a vital and statistically significant factor influencing online purchasing behaviour, whereas the effect of community engagement was less clear-cut. Trust serves as both a direct influencer and a moderator in the relationship between community cues and behavioral outcomes.

Demographic factors like occupation and income were observed to exert a marginal or partial influence on consumer interpretation of social media signals, highlighting the necessity for segmentation strategies in digital marketing. The findings confirm that establishing reliable online environments and significant brand communities is an essential approach for increasing purchase intention in the context of social commerce.

6.1 Practical and Managerial Implications

The findings of this study hold significant practical and managerial relevance, particularly for marketers, digital strategists, and e-commerce platforms. The strong influence of trust on purchase intention highlights the necessity for businesses to actively cultivate transparent and authentic communication channels with their audiences. Brands should focus on fostering trust through consistent customer engagement, addressing concerns promptly, and showcasing transparency in product information and customer reviews. Furthermore, the role of online communities as hubs for shared experiences and peer influence implies that businesses can benefit by creating vibrant, interactive brand communities. Marketers can leverage these spaces not only for promoting products but also for facilitating authentic conversations that nurture emotional connections. Additionally, attention should be paid to segmenting social media strategies based on users' professional and economic backgrounds, as these factors were found to influence responsiveness to digital cues. By aligning marketing communications with the specific values and motivations of different demographic clusters, organizations can enhance the effectiveness of their digital outreach and improve conversion rates.

6.2 Limitations and Future Scope

Notwithstanding the useful insights provided by this research, certain limitations must be noted. The study's dependence on a cross-sectional design limits the capacity to establish causal conclusions, as it records consumer behaviour at a singular moment in time. A longitudinal approach would provide more comprehensive insights into the evolution of trust and community participation and their impact on behaviour over longer durations. The employment of purposive sampling constrains the generalizability of the findings, as the sample may not adequately reflect the wider population of social media users. A further problem is in the geographic and cultural restriction of the sample, perhaps neglecting regional subtleties in social media behaviour. Subsequent study may rectify these limitations by including a broader range of people and facilitating cross-cultural comparisons. Furthermore, the research might be enhanced by examining platform-specific disparities, such as variances in consumer trust among Instagram, Facebook, and other groups. Integrating qualitative data, such as interviews or focus groups, may provide profound insights into the emotional and psychological foundations of digital trust and community involvement.

6.3 Recommendations

In light of the findings and constraints of this study, many recommendations may be suggested for both academic researchers and industry practitioners. Scholars have a distinct chance to investigate the relationship between community participation and trust via advanced analytical tools like structural equation modelling (SEM), which can elucidate the indirect routes affecting purchase intention. Future research should investigate the effect of developing technologies, such as AI-driven chatbots and virtual influencers, on trust and community dynamics in social commerce. Practitioners should prioritize the establishment and maintenance of dynamic, supportive online communities, focusing on real-time engagement, user-generated content, and socially shared experiences. Trust may be enhanced by including validated consumer input, transparent policies, and reputable influencer collaborations. Platforms must to provide feedback methods that allow consumers to feel acknowledged and appreciated. A deliberate combination of community-building and trust-enhancing measures may greatly promote sustained customer involvement and long-term loyalty.

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