



VAASAN AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU
UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

FIRDOSH PATHAN & BAROT VAISHALIBEN MIHIR

Impact Of Social Media On Consumer Behaviour

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VAASAN AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU
VAASA UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES
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Author : Firdosh Pathan and Vaishali Mihir Barot
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Firdosh Pathan & Vaishali Mihir Barot

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VAASAN AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU
VAASA UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES
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ABSTRACT

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People use social media as their main platform to meet brands and choose what to buy in our contemporary digital world. Trust functions as a fundamental factor in platform interactions because it affects customer trust in brands as well as their commitment to companies. Through analysis of user-generated content with influences and brand ethics and privacy elements in trust development, this thesis finds how social media builds consumer trust. Research findings show that trust is still a fundamental element for sustainable consumer-brand relationships, while digital ethics stands as an essential topic for the current market environment.

The research method included both qualitative interviews and quantitative survey data to study these themes. The study shows that customers need clear practices along with responsible data usage together with genuine communication for building and sustaining trust in brands. This research presents efficient methods that businesses and influencers, together with policymakers, should implement to build trust through ethical marketing practices while engaging actively with consumers. The findings presented by this study contribute to digital marketing discussions through their emphasis on authentic practices and consumer privacy for building enduring brand connections.

Keywords: Social Media, Consumer Trust, Influencer Marketing, Digital Privacy, Brand Engagement

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1 INTRODUCTION

The fast-paced growth of social media platforms has transformed traditional consumer behaviour patterns, which now affect the way clients interact with businesses, find product advice, and choose their purchases. The digital platforms Facebook and Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter have progressed from their roles as communication venues to appear as strong marketing tools that affect public belief and brand trust. The modern digital platform relies heavily on user-generated material together with influencer marketing combined with personalized promotions to direct consumer choices as reported in Kaplan and Haenlein (2015).

Social media delivers benefits in brand exposure and customer experience, but users continue to be troubled by excessive information and privacy dangers as well as authenticity matters. The transparent ethical issues surrounding digital marketing appear because consumers make choices based on peer recommendations along with influencer approvals and programmatic advertisements (Dwivedi, Kapoor, & Chen, 2015). Many companies extracting personal data to make targeted advertisements create new privacy issues as well as security risks (Nielsen, 2021).

Analysing the full scope of social media influence on consumer conduct becomes essential because it requires the evaluation of essential purchasing triggers in modern digital markets. This research investigates the complete impact social media has on consumer decision-making and the presence of influencers within online marketing alongside all associated ethical issues. The study provides meaningful business intelligence that guides digital market strategy development for companies and policymakers while supporting marketers in their business decisions.

1.1 Background and Perspectives of the Topic Selection

The behaviour of consumers changed dramatically through social media because it offers immediate opportunities to engage with brands along with sharing information and brand interactions. Facebook, together with Instagram, TikTok and

Twitter, work as powerful networks that direct consumer choices about product purchases. Social media allows users to create content and influencers to market brands through personalized advertisements, thus creating consumer-brand connections that shape trust levels, brand loyalty, and purchase decisions.

Social media creates significant behavioural changes for consumers by changing their brand views, steering their buying choices, and strengthening their customer interactions. The percentage of people who rely on electronic assessments and peer suggestions together with influencer advice has steadily increased because digital networks direct modern buying decision processes (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2015; Goyal, 2018). Social media strengthens brand recognition and customer commitment, yet multiple security threats, bogus endorsements, and excessive data continue to pose substantial problems to businesses.

The widespread impact of social media on consumer decision-making requires business organizations and both marketing departments, and government officials to study these behavioural mechanisms. The study investigates both the fundamental aspects that drive consumer decisions through social media platforms and the function of influencers, as well as the moral and privacy aspects related to data collection in personalized marketing. Through this approach, the research will generate findings to enhance digital marketing strategy effectiveness alongside transparency and trust for consumers.

1.2 Problem statement

The general movement of social media toward consumer decision dominance brings mixed advantages and obstacles to the table. Dedicated platforms offer services to 4.8 billion active users across the globe in 2023 (Statista, 2023), thus becoming essential tools for brand-user contact and communication. Digital marketing strategies show distinct levels of performance based on the conditions surrounding social proof aspects and personalization techniques derived from algorithms, as well as how credible influencers appear to their audience.

The significant issue with online endorsements is deciding whether they come from genuine sources. People tend to seek purchase recommendations from influencers alongside user-generated content, but the abundance of sponsored content makes them doubt how transparent the recommendations truly are. The data-based advertising system using algorithms to reach customers generates multiple ethical problems about user data protection together with security complications and potential deceptive advertising resulting from automated targeting practices (Dwivedi et al., 2015). The insufficient understanding consumers have about how their data gets used makes biased recommendation programs more likely while reducing consumers' trust in online marketing practices.

The way consumers react to social media marketing adjustments relies heavily on population makeup differences along with cultural backgrounds. Consumer demographic makes a difference when it comes to marketing strategies because age of Millennials and other younger age groups use influencer marketing actively, yet older generations trust peer review platforms and traditional ads more (Nielsen, 2021). The investigation tries to study these obstacles through research about social media-based behavioural changes of customers and influencer marketing practices as well as digital advertising ethical questions. Businesses can maximize their marketing techniques effectively while protecting consumers by grasping these market processes.

1.3 Purpose Objectives and Research Methods

The goal of this research investigates how social media affects behaviour changes in consumers through identification of critical variables which guide purchase behaviour and build brand relationships and trust. The research investigates consumer viewpoint development through user-generated content while analysing influencer marketing effects and targeted advertising and their linked ethical and privacy issues in digital marketing.

The main goals of this study are:

- To analyze the impact of user-generated content (e.g., reviews, testimonials) on consumer trust in brands.
- To examine how authenticity affects consumer trust and purchase decisions.
- To find key strategies that brands can use to build long-term consumer trust on social media.

The study applies qualitative methods that involve content analysis together with interview sessions to discover consumer trust-enhancing strategies. Secondary data obtained from academic journals combined with industry reports and case studies will reinforce the research findings. The proposed research will examine brand engagement practices across Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube since they are among the primary social media platforms used for this purpose.

1.4 Key Concept and Framework

This research examines multiple important theoretical constructions to study the development of social media marketing trust among consumers. The research integrates these theoretical frameworks to set up complete knowledge about social media marketing trust patterns between consumers.

- **Trust Theory:** The Trust Theory analyzes different methods people build trust through digital relationships and keep this relationship dynamically.
- **Social Exchange Theory:** Explains the reciprocal nature of consumer-brand relationships in social media engagements.
- **Influencer Impact Framework:** The Influencer Impact Framework evaluates how influences affect consumer beliefs and trust establishment processes.

1.5 Justification and Significance of the Study

The rise of social media dependence for consumer activation and brand interaction and decision-making requires evaluation of social media effects on consumer trust along with behavioural patterns. Academic research finds value in this investigation because it studies the connections between brand authenticity and influencer marketing and personalized advertising alongside digital marketplace privacy concerns. This research supports theories of Trust and Elaboration Likelihood Model and Social Exchange to set up a theoretical framework that handles online consumer choices. The study investigates significant privacy rights as well as ethical marketing issues through its examination of ethical digital marketing approaches.

The research provides practical business advantages by recognizing the essential elements which augment customer trust together with brand devotion. Research results on transparency levels together with micro-influencer use and engagement activities will guide marketers to develop better social media approaches for sustaining their customer base. This research gives recommendations about responsible data practices as well as guidelines for working with influencers and supporting continuous consumer trust. The data from this study enables policymakers to develop laws that sustain moral digital marketing standards. Research must investigate differences across social platforms in addition to tracking enduring behavioural changes of consumers to build complete knowledge about social media influence evolution.

1.5.1 Academic and Professional Relevance

Business success relies heavily on customer trust since it helps companies support their client base while increasing brand loyalty and generating revenue. The research presents an extensive analysis that enhances the current knowledge about trust development practices in digital marketing environments. The research expands academic understanding of how consumers think in the current digital era. The study expands academic knowledge about social media marketing approaches

together with their performance outcomes. The study also presents valuable information about how trust-related factors, privacy elements, and authentic behaviour influence consumer perspectives.

1.5.2 Practical Contributions for Businesses

Knowledges about what builds trust in customers enable businesses to implement better marketing approaches together with enhanced customer relationships. Research results will offer necessary guidance to brand managers and digital strategists and marketers for enhancing their social media engagement strategies. Advertisers use consumer engagement patterns to enhance their marketing strategy optimization methods. The research study delivers evidence-based brand trust development strategies and customer loyalty strategies. This study evaluates ethical variables in personalized advertising partnerships with influencers and shows ethical standards for business marketing conduct.

1.5.3 Personal Professional Development

My understanding of trust-building strategies in digital marketing for consumers will improve my analysis skills and brand management capabilities to become a business professional. My academic development together with practical skills for international business will receive help from this research. The study delivers essential information about data privacy issues which aid authorities in creating protective policies for consumers. This highlights the need for transparent and ethical digital marketing practices. The research puts forth recommendations which guide leaders of businesses and policymakers alongside academics regarding changes in social media consumer behaviour trends.

1.6 Research Problem and Research Questions

Many brands encounter difficulties with social media marketing because they do not build genuine trust relations with their customers. The consumer trust was eroded because of deceptive advertising practices and counterfeited influencer

partnerships as well as privacy threats in social media. The research aims to tackle this problem through finding reliable trust strategies which function in social media settings.

Brand trust of consumers strongly depends on user-generated content because comments from actual users function as proof to guide buying choices. The credibility of products improves through positive UGC, but negative comments might lead potential customers to avoid purchase decisions therefore making transparency essential for brand interactions. Illuminating influencers who show true authenticity collect trust from consumers because audiences choose to engage in brands which their influencers stand for honestly and genuinely. The establishment of enduring trust between brands and customers requires ethical influencer collaboration together with personalised marketing approaches along with interactive content that leads to enhanced consumer-brand relationships in digital environments.

Below are the research questions we are working on:

1. How does user-generated content (e.g., reviews, testimonials) impact consumer trust in brands?
2. How does influence of authenticity affect consumer trust and purchase decisions?
3. What strategies can brand use to build long-term consumer trust on social media?

The study looks to show recommendations for businesses that will empower them to build improved consumer trust in their social media marketing practices.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

The research depends on surveys and interviews together with consumer feedback, but these methods tend to be subjective in nature. Respondents tend to show social desirability bias through their answers because they present responses that appear favourable instead of their real experiences. The research initiative draws infor-

mation from various countries, yet its obtained data might not accurately stand for consumer behavioural trends across the board. The findings might lose their ability to apply to broader situations because of this limitation.

The research examines Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and Twitter platforms but does not include LinkedIn, Snapchat, or YouTube in its analysis. The analysis does not reveal the entire effect that alternative digital channels have on consumer behaviour patterns. Changes in social media marketing trends might occur due to new emerging technologies and algorithm adjustments alongside regulatory developments after this study's publication. Pursuing studies to reassess initial results should become necessary due to the development of new digital marketing strategies.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The main goal of this section involves researching previously conducted studies about social media's effects on consumer conduct. Social media platforms are now essential components of consumer's everyday routines which affect both their purchasing decisions together with brand engagement levels along with the aspects of trust and authenticity belief. The literature review investigates consumer behavior through social media by examining influencer power and trust-building privacy issues and marketing approaches. Social media influencers changed traditional advertising practices by providing brands with new opportunities to connect with strongly involved audiences through mutual partnership. Hudders, De Jans and De Veirman (2021) establish a comprehensive framework for understanding influencer commercialization approaches that optimizes brand reach while engaging consumers according to their study.

The widespread use of social media in everyday life causes major changes to standard consumer choice decision-making methods. Traditional marketing strategies did not match up with modern customer activities because consumers now actively take part in how brands get perceived in society. Social media platforms help users engage brands by sharing their opinions and affecting peer decisions through both reviews and content generated by users (Dwivedi et al., 2015). A participatory social system transfers business authority to consumers who demand businesses take ownership of their messages and customer support interactions. Today's consumers want brands to provide unique interactions that combine openness and interactive sessions instead of basic advertising to them.

Advanced technology developments featuring AI-based recommendation systems and live social media engagement consistently reshape industry standards for what customers expect to receive from brands. Because algorithms study how users interact with the content, they receive they can create custom materials based on personal preferences which leads to purchase decisions (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2015).

Organisational marketing strategies that run through data insights help companies make better decisions about their advertisement placement as well as improve their target audience databases and generate superior engagement results. This method generates privacy-related concerns along with issues about proper data usage ethics and customer manipulation. Electronic enterprises need adaptive methods to protect both consumer connections alongside ethical marketing methods as well as confidence-building techniques for keeping their digital market position.

2.1 Evolution of Social Media in Consumer Decision-Making

When social media did not exist, consumers made their buying choices by depending on classic marketing tools such as television commercials along with newspaper-items and radio programs and in-store placements and personal references. Customers depended on professional ability gained through catalogues and brand ambassadors and industry professionals to make their purchases. Businesses predominated over marketing communication while consumers simply received passive information through non-interactive means within this system. Facebook Business (2022) confirmed that businesses can effectively reach consumers through social media tools because well-planned marketing strategies result in better brand-consumer engagement.

When social media platforms arrived on the scene consumer behaviour experienced a significant transformation because it became dominated by peer-generated decisions. Through social media platforms including Facebook and Instagram alongside YouTube and TikTok consumers receive an opportunity to communicate with brands while they also share their opinions to direct friends and followers toward their buying decisions. Social media has triggered essential changes that include the following three major developments:

- **Instant Access to Information:** People do not need to visit stores physically or depend on brand advertisements for obtaining product information. People can

obtain authentic product information through real-time social media videos which lead them toward well-informed purchases.

- **Social Influence and Peer Recommendations:** Modern customers form buying choices after getting product endorsements from their friends along with influencers and user-created networks online. Customers now avoid traditional advertising alone by searching for reviews from other users on sites including Amazon, Yelp, and Reddit and ratings along with user-generated content on such platforms. Digital markets have strengthened the significance of organic consumer recommendations as a marketing strategy.
- **Personalised Advertising and Consumer Engagement:** Social media algorithms watch users through tracking their online activities and their search patterns which enables them to produce personalised advertising content. The personalised approach in marketing enables businesses to achieve improved results because they can reach their target audience with direct communication.

The current marketing environment required traditional marketing approaches to undergo necessary changes. Brands substituted their traditional mass media platforms (TV, radio, billboards) with various engagement-led approaches such as influencer marketing and interactive campaigns and real-time brand interactions. The survival of businesses depended on their willingness to accept social media because those who joined gained market advantage by engaging directly with their audience. Tuten and Solomon (2017) highlighted that effective social media marketing hinges on building relationships, encouraging participation, and fostering community engagement.

2.2 Social Media and Consumer Purchase Decisions

Modern consumers have changed their shopping behaviour because of social media because they now choose digital-based buying experiences over conventional brick-and-mortar retail visits. Every sequence in consumer decision-making receives

shape from social media platforms while these networks steer product belief and evaluation before steering purchase decisions. Fundamental to understanding consumer decisions exists a commonly accepted five-step model that describes consumer processes. Djafarova and Trofimenko (2019) confirmed how the credibility and attractiveness levels along with authenticity of chosen influencers directly affect consumers' buying choices. The research established that consumers will buy promoted products from influencers they see as trustworthy and relatable.

Social media users use electronic word-of-mouth as a strong and influential mechanism which shapes consumer attitudes while guiding their purchasing decisions. According to Cheung and Thadani (2012) consumers trust peer opinions found in eWOM since they consider this content credible and unbiased which prominently affects their trust and decision-making process. According to their integrative model users respond to recommendations through two essential factors: content quality and information credibility. The positive effect of eWOM generates brand visibility and performs a key role in connecting consumer actions towards actual purchasing decisions.

Customer problem recognition begins when consumers notice wants or needs within their environment. The problem recognition stage receives acceleration from social media channels through advertisement targeting alongside the content of influencers and viral popular culture movements. TikTok beauty influencers often share fresh skincare patterns which motivates their audience to test previously unknown products.

During the Information Search phase customers explore product details together with product evaluations and suggestion sources. Social media provides unbranded information access which contrasts with the traditional marketing system that exclusively controlled information. Users on YouTube and Instagram can review product demos and unboxing videos along with user reviews through these platforms before buying.

Social media shows products next to one another based on current peer endorsements and immediate reactions. Reddit users together with members of Facebook Groups and participants in Twitter polls base their decisions on firsthand customer feedback instead of promotional material. The appearance of visual content serves as the foundation for how consumers perceive goods while they make their purchase choices on social media sites. High-quality visuals consisting of images and videos according to Autio (2020) produce emotional activations which boost consumer involvement and brand memorability. Through visual content users receive twofold benefits because such stimuli capture their attention and present complex information in an easier format to speed up purchase decisions. Visual platform users especially on Instagram and TikTok tend to make instant purchases based on attractive visuals instead of reviewing full descriptions of products.

Social commerce tools like Instagram Shopping and TikTok Shop and Facebook Marketplace create simple buying processes which minimise the time gap between choosing a purchase and completing it. Blocking time-limited sales promotions which influencers promote through discount codes boosts sales conversions.

People who buy things often publish their purchase experiences through various online channels after completing their transaction. Future purchasers make their decisions based on the unboxing videos together with product reviews and customer testimonials which appear on social media platforms. Brand loyalty grows through positive customer recommendations yet negative feedback can swiftly hurt the reputation of a brand. Amazon together with Sephora routinely interacts with customer reviews to handle how consumers perceive their products after purchase.

Gen Z customers make their purchasing choices primarily through social media platforms. According to research, 85% of Gen Z buyers allow social media platforms to influence which products they purchase and TikTok alongside Instagram hold top positions in this process. A substantial 42% of Gen Z users check TikTok for product and service information before they buy major products. Social media continues to

establish itself as the primary power through which younger generations find products and make buying decisions.

2.3 The Role of Influencers in Shaping Consumer Behaviour

The method of influencer marketing stands for an efficient approach to influence how consumers conduct themselves. Social media influencers set up trust through direct audience interactions which results in more effective persuasive power for their recommendations. Businesses now often collaborate with influencers to improve brand visibility and both brand reputation and consumer participation rates.

Studies performed during recent times prove influencer marketing serves as an effective tool to drive consumers toward buying choices. Nielsen (2021) discovered that people view influencer suggestions as more genuine and approachable than conventional promotions. The dedicated fan base of micro- and nano-influencers results in better engagement rates than what macro- and mega-influencers typically achieve which proves the effectiveness of market targeting strategies.

The advantages of influencer marketing do exist but several ethical problems along with challenges create attention-demanding issues. The level of credibility supported by influencers stands as a big concern in this marketing strategy. Not all influencers keep authenticity in endorsements because some choose profits primarily when promoting products, they either refuse to use or do not believe in. The practice leads to decreased consumer trust since Statista (2023) documented that more than half of consumers doubt influencers who endorse multiple brands in regular intervals.

Influencer marketing faces a major challenge because of fake follower manipulation along with engagement manipulations committed by influencers. The practice of using fake follower bots combined with participation groups serves to fool brands into funding unproductive advertising ventures. According to a Hype Auditor (2023) survey many Instagram influencers hold extensive fake follower networks thus re-

quiring brands to prove strict evaluation procedures for influencer selection in marketing initiatives.

The influence marketing practice on Instagram platforms significantly influences how consumers view different brands. According to De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders (2017) social media influencers with more followers gain higher credibility ratings from consumers in regard to both their personal brand and the brands they endorse. The research established that promoting a large variety of unrelated products through influencer endorsements can generate negative brand perception within consumers. The success of an influencer endorsement becomes stronger when followers view honest support that matches their identity because authenticity drives enduring consumer-brand connections.

Entity integrity in influencer marketing depends on organisations that practice open and ethical measures. The successful implementation of this marketing approach depends on building lasting partnerships with legitimate influencers along with transparent sponsorship notices together with performance assessment tools based on data analysis. Businesses that resolve these consumer-related issues will be able to exploit influencer marketing potential combined with genuine relationships between businesses and their audience.

2.4 Trust and Credibility in Social Media Marketing

People who use social media platforms need honesty and genuineness from brands when they interact with them, so trust becomes essential in social media marketing. Studies show that users prefer personal recommendations from peers as well as user-generated content instead of traditional marketing which requires ethical approaches from businesses to sustain their brand image. Confidence in social media platforms gets jeopardised because of deceptive influencer advertisements along with privacy breaches or differences between advertised and actual content. Corporate brands need to take instant corrective steps by providing public statements about errors together with solid ethical brand relations and transparent sponsor-

ship disclosure practices. The recovery of trust depends on completely transparent communication which engages consumers instantly and includes endorsements by trusted independent authorities.

Through social media communication consumers form brand perceptions which greatly depend on how truly credible and authentic a brand appears to them. Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016) demonstrated how firm-produced content alongside user-direct content operates as different elements which together influence brand perception mechanics. Brands should adopt long-term measures which include improving privacy standards together with responsible influencer relationships and applying social responsibility fund distribution to rebuild mistrust from their customer base. The process of regaining consumer trust becomes possible through face-to-face communication between brands and customers while brands address specific consumer issues to prove genuine allegiance to ethics. To preserve reputation brands should use crisis management strategies which mean actively dealing with false information along with regularly presenting their brand message. Strict ethical marketing along with open communication and ongoing engagement make up a proactive approach which helps brands preserve trust with consumers in evolving digital environments.

2.4.1 Importance of Trust in Consumer Behavior

Multiple studies prove that trust directly affects consumer interaction with brands and their loyalty towards products and their purchasing behavior. Nielsen (2021) reveals that 81% of consumers place greater trust in recommendations coming from friends and family as well as influencers instead of standard brand marketing material. Users open to brand content through activities like liking posts along with sharing them while leaving comments. Consumers keep buying from trusted brands they have bought from before. The brand receives recommendations from users which generates natural market expansion. Trust breakdown results in serious negative outcomes which produce damaging reviews while losing customers and damaging reputations.

2.4.2 Factors That Influence Trust in Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing trust from consumers depends on multiple essential factors which include transparency, authenticity, consistency, User-Generated content (UGC), and customer Reviews. People expect brands to support open communication about their products as well as their prices and business relationships. The disclosure of sponsored content and advertisements needs to be clear to consumers because this prevents them from being misled (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2015). Companies use deceptive marketing tactics including fake advertisements together with concealed fees which results in the loss of customer trust in their brand identity.

The communication of authentic brands is still truthful and progressive with their audience base. The public values content that adopts an authentic and relatable style more than carefully produced or commercial content. When influencers promote products that they use they show better trust relationships with their audience. Social media platforms recognize brands with uniform and high-quality messaging across platforms because they stand out as more dependable. Unharmonious messages often lead to confused customers while destroying their trust in the brand.

Users tend to believe in authentic feedback from other platform members instead of promotional content created by brands. Reviews together with testimonials and social media discussions effectively figure out how consumers view brands and their trustworthiness (Goyal, 2018).

2.4.3 Challenges in Maintaining Trust in Social Media Marketing

Social media creates multiple trust-building possibilities but simultaneously exposes consumers to risks which may break their trust. Some companies create false positive reviews and pay influencers to generate inauthentic endorsements according to Dwivedi et al. (2015). Social media platforms build their content recommendation system through algorithms that occasionally prefer to display ads that paid compa-

nies produce while hiding authentic consumer opinions (Statista, 2023). Viral negative reviews together with scandals can easily destroy trust and credibility that took years to develop. Businesses should set up ethical standards along with transparent conduct to build enduring trust and sustain consumer confidence.

2.5 The Role of Social Media Algorithms in Shaping Consumer Behaviour

A fundamental part of social media algorithms affects how people behave because these systems generate customised material by analysing both user-related actions and past choices. People become more engaged through system recommendations of content tailored to their specific interests even though these algorithms develop confined spaces that block users from meeting different views. Consumer preferences along with purchasing behaviours strengthen due to this phenomenon yet it creates the risk of incorrect information influencing decision-making. The recommendation systems used by Facebook and TikTok receive criticism mainly because they choose content based on user engagement while often spreading false information and radical posts to increase customer retention.

Social media algorithms trigger multiple ethical concerns that span from privacy matters with user data to unspecified activities affecting consumers as well as from transparency issues. Facebook has endured intense criticism about its impact on political thoughts and its spread of incorrect information and young users face criticism from TikTok supporters because its recommendation system might trap teenagers into unhealthy content habits. The delivery of custom-tailored advertisements through consumer data collection triggers two main problems about privacy breach and unethical marketing. Solving these problems depends on social media platforms showing more information alongside government regulation and algorithms designed to support fair content sharing while safeguarding user perspectives and encouraging smart consumer selection (Dwivedi et al., 2021).

2.5.1 Personalisation and Content Curation

Through algorithms, social media networks collect complete databases of user data that span from the history of views to likes and engagement activities to create individualised product recommendation systems (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2015). The recommendation systems powered by AI at Instagram and TikTok present specific advertisements and influencer content that match each user's preferences. The customised recommendation method drives better conversion rates because individuals show increased interest in products that match their personal choices (Nielsen, 2021).

2.5.2 Echo Chambers and Consumer Choices

The automated content recommendation process through algorithms leads users to meet only repetitive content from a single perspective. The consumer behaviour pattern of brand loyalty appears from this situation, yet it simultaneously restricts customers from discovering new products or alternative brands (Goyal, 2018). The formation of unconscious consumer brand preferences about specific products leads to reduced exploration of new alternatives.

2.5.3 Vitality and Impulse Buying

Consumer purchase behaviour of viral trends receives considerable influence because of how social media algorithms function to generate viral growth. The algorithm-driven system of platforms selects trending content which makes products spread like wildfire across the platform. The "For You" page on TikTok and Instagram Reels sections displays trending products that drive consumers to make spontaneous purchases (Statista, 2023). Products gain a sense of scarcity because of their viral popularity which leads consumers to make fast buying choices.

2.5.4 Ethical Concerns and Transparency

The quest for increased marketing success created social media algorithms but these advancements raised questions about data ethics and user visibility of information processing. The process by which online activity shapes displayed advertisements stays hidden from most consumers who express concerns that their data privacy and personal influence may be at risk (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2015).

Social media organisations now face pressure to reveal data collection activities as well as protect the privacy rights of consumers because of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Marketers together with consumers need to understand social media algorithms to function properly in the digital space. Businesses need to set up an equilibrium between personalised content recommendations and ethical data handling to defend consumer trust since AI steals the spotlight in digital content management. People should gain awareness about how algorithms shape their shopping choices so they can better understand their transaction decisions.

2.6 Consumer Engagement and Brand Loyalty in Social Media Marketing

The loyalty of customers towards brands stems from active participation on social media platforms which build more effective connections between businesses and their followers. WOM influences customer decisions in regular and online contexts with equal importance. De Matos and Rossi (2008) demonstrated that WOM has a positive influence on consumer attitudes which leads to strong purchase decisions. When users find recommendations on social media, they build trust with one another and increase brand connection. Brands which make ongoing contact with customers through customised communications along with social group development programs and audience-submitted material set up greater consumer trust levels. Companies that organise customer appreciation initiatives and deliver interactive brand experiences stimulate repeated purchases while earning brand loyalty from

customers. Positive engagement does not break brand belief, but negative engagement such as discounting customer service and social media criticism leads to major brand belief damage and prevents potential customers. Every single unfavourable viral customer complaint affects consumer trust rapidly therefore companies need compelling reputation management paired with right response systems to keep their loyal customers.

Several branding organisations have achieved successful outcomes by using social media for developing continuous consumer relationships. Extended user-generated content and rewards strategies let Starbucks build and support an engaged virtual community that comes from their users. Nike uses inspirational content together with athlete partnerships and immediate customer feedback responses which fortifies its brand loyalty systems. The failure of brands to correctly handle consumer concerns through effective responses will lead them to lose their audience. Typically, customer engagement loyalty needs businesses to support proactive customer interactions along with effective crisis management through transparent and professional handling of positive and negative engagement.

2.6.1 Understanding Consumer Engagement on Social Media

Social media platforms enable consumer engagement through the level of interaction that exists between buyers and companies. Plain transactions on social media stand for only a basic aspect of consumer engagement while the full scope includes this and various other elements. Branded content on social media platforms has become the essential strategy for developing genuine customer engagement. The key elements of successful branded content strategies according to Ashley and Tuten (2015) include storytelling elements and both entertainment features and user involvement for establishing audience emotional bonding.

Consumer engagement rates increase dramatically when brands post authentic creative content according to research from their study. These metrics matter in current digital marketing practices. Customers presently want to engage with brands

beyond exploring product details so they seek interactive experiences which suit their personal beliefs and way of living. According to Twitter Marketing (2022), consumers on Twitter are more likely to engage with timely, concise, and witty brand content, especially during trending events or live discussions.

- Participation levels can be measured by brand-related likes and shares together with consumer comments.
- Direct messaging and customer inquiries – Showing personal interest in the brand.
- User-generated content (UGC) describes when consumers generate and distribute branded content through product reviews and testimonials among other content.
- The engagement of consumers in brand-sponsored events along with their participation in forums and online discussions stands for brand community participation for the brand. The research shows that greater brand loyalty stems from high engagement because consumers build strong emotional ties with brands (Dwivedi et al., 2015).

2.6.2 Factors Driving Consumer Engagement on Social Media

The social media interactions of consumers are shaped by multiple different influencers. Goyal (2018) shows that customers choose content that matches their interests past actions and personal preferences. The use of AI recommendations allows brands to create customized customer experiences which results in better engagement. Brands build stronger trust through their ability to supply swift replies to client inquiries as well as handle complaints and feedback. Nielsen (2021) writes down that 79% of consumers demand companies to respond to their inquiries through social networks within the next 24 hours.

The algorithm on TikTok for Business (2023) delivers personalized content that creates emotional connections with users thus generating high levels of engagement and spur impulsive buying impulses. Participation from consumers increases through interactive features that combine polls with quizzes together with giveaways alongside interactive stories. The engagement tools featured on Instagram and TikTok such as AR filters allow consumers to improve their platform interaction. Voorveld et al. (2018) emphasize that engagement levels and advertising effectiveness differ significantly across platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter due to their structural characteristics and user motivations. According to Instagram Insights (2023), consumers engage most with content that features interactive elements such as polls, reels, and behind-the-scenes stories.

2.6.3 Brand Loyalty in the Age of Social Media

Brand loyalty in social media reduces to powerful connections between brands and customers who create a community of trusted supporters. Through social media platforms, brands prove specific brand communities that connect loyal customers and make them feel important. Brands that use interactive content together with audience discussions and tailored experiences develop emotional bonds that drive consumers to buy repeatedly. Consumers who experience a sense of exclusivity grow deeply loyal, so they become brand advocates more readily.

Brands that reward devoted customers with special benefits receive the best results: exclusive treatments combined with individualised promotions along with customised material. Through loyal programs plus exclusive promotions, businesses show consumers their value which promotes sustained customer relationships. Customers who feel satisfied with their brand experiences become active brand supporters who promote positive comments through social networking platforms. The ongoing maintenance of brand loyalty depends on sustained customer interaction combined with product adjustments to changing consumer behaviour and steady production of value to sustain long-term customer loyalty.

2.7 Future Trends in Social Media Marketing

Future social media marketing will advance through modern technologies as well as consumer market changes and more rigorous regulation enforcement. Future user experiences will become rich thanks to artificial intelligence combined with augmented reality alongside personalised content which offers interactive marketing that uses data-driven insights. Brands need to set up authenticity through consumer engagement and ethical marketing methods because changing expectations from customers require it to keep trust. The implementation of tighter data privacy rules forces businesses to develop open and responsible methods using insights for marketing initiatives. Companies aiming to stay competitive need permanent adaptation to current market trends to support innovative marketing efforts that address modern digital changes (Statista, 2023).

2.7.1 The Rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Marketing

Artificial intelligence through social media marketing transforms the customer experience by improving how business integrates with marketing strategies effectively. Virtual assistants with AI technology generate instant customer support which strengthens user satisfaction and minimizes reply to times. The automated systems process standard customer inquiries with speed which enables businesses to concentrate on more intricate customer needs. Prospective customer engagement and brand relationships improve when AI improves communication processes in customer service.

AI powers predictive analytics while delivering advanced content personalization so brands can predict customer behavior patterns to share highly relevant material. AI algorithms evaluate users' activities and past choices through their browsing behaviors to generate personalized product and advertisement suggestions. What results from this personalized experience is greater user involvement alongside superior customer happiness and it leads to higher revenue generation. Businesses using AI

efficiently in their operations will secure an advantage in the evolving digital marketing domain.

2.7.2 Growth of Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) Experiences,

Social media marketing receives a radical transformation from augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) which enable immersive interactive experiences that boost consumer engagement. Sephora among other fashion and beauty brands enables customers to virtually test their makeup products through digital try-on features before buying. AR-based product visualisation allows buyers to preview items in their actual environments so that they obtain better information for their purchasing choices. The implementation of these technologies enhances shopping convenience boosts customer trust and diminishes product returns. Brands that successfully implement the advancing developments of AR and VR technology will produce tailored and interactive marketing methods that keep customer commitment while delivering better sales outcomes.

2.7.3 Voice Search and Social Commerce

Voice assistants such as Google Assistant and Alexa encourage consumers to adapt their product search activities to voice command interfaces. Social media platforms now offer customers the ability to buy products directly through their applications which is gaining traction. TikTok Shop and Instagram Shopping provide consumers with simple ways to buy items.

2.7.4 Increased Focus on Privacy and Ethical Marketing

To keep their consumer support brands must show clear ethical data handling practices supported by full transparency about their data operations. The implementation of GDPR and CCPA has made companies responsible for explaining their practices involving consumer data collection and storage to audiences. The recent regulations require businesses to develop responsible marketing procedures because

they highlight consumer rights to consent and privacy protection. Companies who fulfil data regulations while showing their data practices publicly improve their reputation while building enduring consumer relationships since customers now prioritise data security (Nielsen, 2021).

2.7.5 The Shift Towards Micro-Influencers and Community-Based Marketing

People today select authentic influencers from niche audiences instead of big-name celebrities to promote products to them. Brands now choose population segments of devoted consumers instead of targeting the entire market with their advertising efforts. The research shows that micro-influencers will control digital marketing approaches in the following years due to their better ability to prove trust and engage audiences.

Modern marketing trends show a rising consumer need for real-life relationships between influencers and their audiences through micro-influencers and community promotions. The dedicated audience of micro-influencers enables stronger authentic relationships with their viewers because their total numbers are still lower than those of major influencers. The deep connections between micro-influencers and their followers lead to recommendations that create higher effects on their audiences. The transformation allows brands to access specific consumer sectors and produces genuine location-based marketing initiatives that deliver powerful responses to individual taste preferences.

In conclusion, peer recommendations, influencer marketing, and customized content are some of the ways that social media affects customer buying decisions. Successful marketing campaigns require credibility and trust, while transparency and genuineness provide value. Ethical and privacy concerns emphasize the necessity of appropriate data handling procedures. Digital marketing tactics will continue to change because of AI, AR/VR, voice search, and social commerce. To remain competitive, organizations need to use latest technology and adjust to changing trends.

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

The study of social media's impact on consumer behavior needs both organized theoretical constructs and precise research strategies. The presented chapter includes essential theoretical views that explain how social media influences consumer interaction choice processes and trust development. This research incorporates tested theories to build an extensive analytical structure that studies digital consumer behavior. The research method details how the study employs qualitative methods to study consumer experiences through its description of data collection methods sampling approaches and analytical procedures. The defined research method generates comprehensive findings about the effects that digital communication has on brand relationship development and consumer buying behavior. Consumers need trust before they choose online shopping due to the inability to physically examine products. Gefen, Karahanna, and Straub (2003) explain that adding trust components transforms the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to better analyze consumer activities online.

3.1 Theoretical Framework

Analyzing social media's effects on consumer behavior depends on this study's strong theoretical foundation. The foundation combines six fundamental theories to create an organized system for examining consumer involvement while handling decision-making and trust generation between digital consumers. Consumer behavior analyses in social media depend on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Model as well as the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), and Social Exchange Theory (SET) and Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) and Trust Theory in Social Media Marketing. Social media platforms receive unique psychological social and emotional insight into user behavior through individual theoretical frameworks. These theories create a comprehensive framework that allows researchers to study social media marketing methods as they influence consumer behavior patterns.

3.1.1 The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Model

Seniors Mehrabian and Russell (1974) established the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Model to describe how environmental stimulus impacts mind and emotional states which then trigger behavioural responses. Social media marketing depends on stimuli such as promotional content from business influencer promotions and customer conversations because they figure out how users both understand their options and decide what to do. The organism stands for the internal reactions of consumers, which include their psychological, emotional, and cognitive responses to stimuli. Consumer actions, which include liking a post sharing content and making purchases, appear from the response process. Kamboj et al. (2018) applied this model to social media brand communities and demonstrated that stimuli such as engaging content and interactive features trigger cognitive and emotional reactions (organism), which then influence behavioural responses like brand loyalty and advocacy.

The AIDA model finds its practical use in social media marketing through visually appealing Instagram campaigns. Hence, consumers react to both the visual attractiveness and presence of a famous social media influencer in promotional content by experiencing positive emotions while regarding the brand with credibility. The way consumers perceive the content effects their buying decisions, thus leading them to engage more often. Research findings (Kim & Johnson, 2016) prove that emotions play a vital role in digital marketing's effects on consumer actions. A successful S-O-R Model application allows marketers to develop stimulation designs that control consumer engagement responses for better brand traction and product sales.

3.1.2 The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

According to TPB, the Theory of Planned Behaviour, which Ajzen (1991) developed, explains consumer decision-making processes. TPB demonstrates that behavioural intentions develop through three key elements, which include attitudes, subjective

norms, and perceived behavioural control. Consumers evaluate behaviours in their attitudes while subjective norms stem from peer and online community social influences, and perceived behavioural control stands for the ease or difficulty of performing the behaviour.

TPB provides an understanding of how consumer purchase choices are affected by peer-related engagement through social media recommendation systems. The evaluation process of young consumers depends heavily on peer validation when influencers endorse products (Shin, 2020). Liu et al. (2019) show that consumer choices are heavily influenced by social proof elements like likes and shares through their research that proves these elements strengthening subjective norms. The exploration of online purchasing behaviour based on TPB examines the three key factors, which include attitudes alongside social validation and ease of access.

3.1.3 The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)

According to Petty and Cacioppo (1986) in their Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) there exist two primary routes for persuasion known as the central route and the peripheral route. Consumers who use the central route process information deeply by thoroughly examining product details expert reviews and consumer feedback. The peripheral route functions through surface-level cues that include celebrity endorsements combined with attractive visual appeal and popularity in social media.

Social media marketing platforms use these two different persuasion methods to affect consumer behaviour. A consumer interested in a premium smartphone model will perform central-route processing by studying technical details and professional product reviews. A non-committed Instagram user usually responds to advertisement information based solely on its visual appeal and popular influencer endorsement. The combination of both central-route and peripheral-route processing techniques by brands fosters largest consumer participation rates according to Daugherty and Hoffman (2014). ELM analysis helps this research understand how

different degrees of consumer involvement affect their responses to social media marketing content.

Social media marketing strongly depends on the Elaboration Likelihood Model when it shows the need to create content suitable for varied consumer engagement points. Consumers need various levels of information detail for decision-making yet other consumers respond more strongly to brief visual content. Brands should use their knowledge of the two persuasion routes to set up communication approaches that service audiences with different degrees of involvement.

3.1.4 Social Exchange Theory (SET)

According to Social Exchange Theory (SET) which Blau (1964) created human relationships depend on evaluating the benefits against costs. Social media consumers show brand interaction when they believe brand benefits exceed their costs. People who use social media platforms expect worth in return for their joining activities which can include unique content and price reductions or loyalty benefits and individualised communication. Sellers who give discounted offers to their social media followers typically experience better engagement outcomes alongside higher customer loyalty numbers. Brand interaction becomes more favoured when customers experience quick replies and helpful information from brands since it leads to better overall interactions.

Social Exchange Theory emphasises keeping extended social connections with consumer audiences. Brands that deliver sustained value while developing community feelings between themselves and customers set up devoted customer bases among their audience. A brand strengthens its connection with its followers through consistent sharing of user-created media content alongside hosting social media interactive events. The Social Exchange Theory shows the essential role of delivering substantial value to consumers who will exchange with their engagement. Brand relationships with their audience require sustained focus on trust building together with reward delivery and community establishment to achieve enduring loyalty.

3.1.5 Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)

According to Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1973), the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) centres its research on the active behaviour of people who select media content to address their needs. Social media platforms allow consumers to meet different psychological and social needs according to UGT perspectives.

Brands gain consumer engagement through social media because users want to get information while seeking entertainment and desire social interaction and personal identity expressions. Some consumers support brand followings to gain product updates in addition to tutorials and product reviews (information seeking). Users interact with brands through their content to find entertaining videos that may be creative or humorous in nature. Social engagement stands as a main motivational force because people delight in tandem communication with similar individuals or taking part in branded communities. Some users subscribe to companies whose philosophies and life choices reflect their own by using social networks for self-representation purposes.

The motivation patterns of consumers on social media can be effectively explained by Utilisation and Satisfaction Theory. Brands can develop content that activates their audience by knowing what their target users specifically need. A brand targeting young adults selects entertaining social media content for sharing with their audience, but professionals need informative educational social media experience from the brand. The COBRAs framework by Muntinga, Moorman, and Smit (2011) categorizes consumer engagement on social media into consuming, contributing, and creating, emphasizing that motivations like entertainment, information seeking, and social interaction influence these behaviours and guide brands in tailoring content to users' psychological and social needs.

3.1.6 Trust Theory in Social Media Marketing

Consumer behaviour in digital environments heavily depends on trust because of its essential role in social media marketing practices. According to Trust Theory described by Gefen et al. (2003), consumers set up online trust by following specific protocols, which then affects their interaction with online platforms as well as their purchasing behaviour.

A customer's trust in social media marketing develops through the combination of open communication, truthful interactions, and secure environments. A key trust-building ingredient stems from brands that provide plain and open communication by describing their product's pricing structures and all their policies to customers. The achievement of authentic marketing relies on real customer endorsements from both ordinary users and influencer partnerships that deliver genuine, unforced trustworthiness. Security stands as a vital requirement because consumers need to believe that their digital information is still safe while they deal with online brands.

When a brand proves visible behind-the-scenes information alongside active customer support and original customer photo use it wins the trust of its consumer base. A brand that offers secure payment methods combined with transparent privacy procedures will reassure shoppers enough to complete their transactions. According to Trust Theory, it is essential to prove reliable bonds while sustaining trust with customers through social media advertising. Through efforts that build transparency and security along with authentic communication brands set up positive reputations which leads consumers to become loyal for extended periods.

A framework based on six fundamental theories explains the complete connection between social media and its effects on consumer buying behaviours. External stimuli according to the S-O-R Model generate internal states which result in behavioural responses. TPB demonstrates that planned decisions result from how people perceive control in their social environment alongside their personal beliefs about the situation along with the views of important groups within their network. Ac-

According to the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), people process information through central or peripheral routes which require custom-made content implementation. Consumer engagement requires Social Exchange Theory (SET) to provide values that satisfy the participants. The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) investigates many reasons why people behave as they do on social media platforms. Consumers build trust by relying on the Trust Theory, which places equal importance on revealing information, supporting genuine identity, and implementing security protocols.

These theories create an effective base for studying how social media marketing influences consumer activity. The research methodology, with data collection methods along with the analytical approach, constitutes the following section.

3.2 Research Methodology

The examination of social media's influence on consumer conduct uses a qualitative investigation approach. The method of qualitative research works best in this research scenario to generate deep, comprehensive insights into consumer experiences along with understanding their beliefs and motivations. Due to the intricate nature of consumer actions and trust formation processes on social media platforms, qualitative research enables researchers to buy comprehensive context-driven insights. Semi-structured interviews within this research allow participants to offer detailed insights about their social media interaction experiences between brands and influencers across Facebook Instagram TikTok and Twitter. Purposive sampling allows researchers to choose participants from social media groups to collect significant data. As Denzin and Lincoln (2011) emphasize, qualitative methods prioritize context, meaning, and participant perspectives, allowing researchers to construct rich, narrative-driven insights.

The research makes use of thematic analysis with NVivo software to detect important patterns within the collected data. The research approach checks authentic customer interactions within ethical limitations which provide complete disclosure

and protect confidential information alongside concealing participant identities. The research findings present an extensive theoretical point of view about how social media influences consumer trust buying choices and participant engagement levels in digital industries.

3.2.1 Research Design

The research investigates social media marketing effects on consumer conduct through qualitative methods. Qualitative methods deliver a comprehensive understanding of customer psychological processes and behavioral explanations thus suitable for analyzing digital patterns (Creswell, 2014). The research team performs purposive sampling to interview active social media users through semi-structured methods. Through thematic analysis conducted using NVivo software researchers show main patterns to achieve a systematic examination of research results.

The research supports full ethical compliance by getting participant consent and preserving their anonymity. The research data follows institutional ethical guidelines for secure storage. The research methodology delivers extensive knowledge about social media marketing effects on consumer conduct which provides useful information for theoretical and practical digital marketing strategy development.

3.2.2 Data Collection Methods

The study uses semi-structured interviews as its main research method to conduct comprehensive investigations about consumer interactions with social media marketing. Semi-structured interviews offer participants the chance to reveal thorough information following structured questioning, so interviewers support data consistency across different respondents. Researchers developed interview questions through their extensive evaluation of consumer behavior literature and digital marketing literature that focused on meeting research requirements. A preliminary test involving a limited number of participants helped improve the clarity and relevance of questions as well as their effectiveness before collecting extensive data.

Research credibility grows deeper using secondary data sources which include information from industry reports together with academic studies. Multiple diverse data sources enable researchers to achieve complete insights about social media marketing's effect on customers' decision-making trust development and relationship engagement.

3.2.3 Primary Data- Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews enable participants to express their individual experiences through natural discussion between interviewer and respondent. This research method allows participants to delve into complex subjects concerning consumer trust and influencer impact along with brand engagement because it provides an open-ended format that avoids restrictive response options (Kvale, 2007). A series of open-ended survey questions leads the participants through essential discussion areas, including:

- **Consumer Engagement:** How do consumers interact with brands on social media?
- **Influencer Impact:** How do consumers perceive recommendations from influencers?
- **Brand Trust:** What factors contribute to or weaken trust in social media marketing?
- **Privacy Concerns:** How do consumers feel about data collection and targeted advertising?
- **Decision-Making:** What role does social media play in purchase decisions?

The interview duration should span from 30 to 45 minutes using Zoom or Microsoft Teams as video conferencing platforms. The research technique provides participants with easy access along with enabling the researcher to monitor non-verbal signs during the process of building relationships with interviewees.

3.2.4 Secondary Data Collection

The research combines data obtained through interviews with available secondary materials for enriched results. The researcher relies on diverse sources to confirm their findings including professional reports from Statista and Nielsen combined with existing literature and social media case studies. Secondary data helps researchers show research context and it helps in interpreting first-hand data to create an in-depth knowledge base.

3.2.5 Sampling Strategy

This research selects its participants through purposive sampling because they show continuous social media interaction with brands and influencers. The researcher selects participants in purposed sampling because this non-probability sampling method focuses on individuals who prove characteristics relevant to the study (Patton, 2015). This method delivers samples filled with real-world participants with personal knowledge about the research subject matter which results in more valuable and detailed information.

- **Target Population:** This research analyzes social media users ranging from 18 to 45 years old since they stand for the highest active segment on Facebook Instagram TikTok and Twitter (Statista, 2023). The researchers use these selection criteria to figure out their participant pool for the study.
 - **Age Group:** 18–45 years old.
 - **Geographic Diversity:** Participants from both developed and emerging markets to capture a range of perspectives.
 - **Social Media Usage:** Frequent users of the aforementioned platforms.
 - **Consumer Behavior:** Individuals who have made buying decisions influenced by social media.

- **Sample Size:** The research study selected 51 participants as participants. The research approach defines this sample size as proper since its fundamental exploration relies on producing rich and deep details instead of relying on numbers. A reduced participant number enables researchers to perform in-depth analysis which comprehensively investigates individual research subjects.

3.2.6 Data Analysis Techniques

The main data analysis methodology of this study is thematic analysis. The thematic analysis stands for one of the most popular qualitative research methods that discover patterns and relevant themes along with significance within qualitative information (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The flexible analysis process outlined in this method makes it perfectly suited for this study because it allows the researcher to uncover important insights that appear directly from the data collection.

- **Familiarization with Data:** The researcher transcribes the interviews and reviews the responses to gain a thorough understanding of the data.
- **Coding Process:** Key phrases, patterns, and recurring themes in participant responses are named and coded.
- **Categorization:** Similar themes are grouped under broader categories, such as trust, engagement, and decision-making.
- **Interpretation:** The findings are analyzed and interpreted about the research goals and theoretical framework.

3.2.7 Ethical Considerations

Qualitative research depends on ethical integrity when studying individual experiences because ethical integrity ensures both the credibility and trustworthiness of studies (Creswell, 2014). The research supports ethical principles by starting with informed consent procedures as its first step. The consent form shows a full under-

standing of the research goals while listing necessary procedures and all dangers together with the freedom to take part voluntarily. Transcription recording authorization demands participants' explicit consent before researchers can proceed with the recording process and protect their autonomy. The research protects both identity anonymity and confidentiality by renaming raw participant information for the secure protection of their real names. Secure storage facilities protect the recordings and transcripts, so the researcher maintains sole access to prevent any harm or unauthorized information release.

The research participants maintain their ability to leave the study whenever they want without experiencing penalties which demonstrates their freedom to decide their participation. The study informs participants about their right to withdraw before they start their research involvement. Every step toward neutral data research is taken by the researcher through non-leading questions and objective data process procedures. The researcher utilizes objective methods to analyze responses correctly to capture genuine participant views without being influenced by pre-existing assumptions. The research integrity gets improved by these ethical concerns while the environment transitions into a space where respect, transparency and trust prevail.

3.3 Data Presentations

The research data presentation uses structured arrangements to achieve both clarity and coherence that ensures a detailed understanding of discovered findings. The data structure groups information into two essential sections regarding participant demographics together with thematic analysis. The initial section shows participant demographic statistics which demonstrate sample diversity. The data collection includes precise information about participant age alongside gender identification and their main social media interactions to represent multiple viewpoints through its results. The next analysis section examines five main findings that stemmed from interview responses about trust and credibility alongside influencer effect engagement forces privacy elements and choice influences. Direct participant quotes serve

to both demonstrate and enrich every theme through their qualitative examination of user experiences. Using this research design methodology both improves study transparency and strengthens the connection between research data and the theoretical model. The research method organizes data in a specific structure to create usable results that come straight from consumer reality.

3.3.1 Participant's Demographics

Active social media user participants in this research were chosen to form a representative group with varied demographic characteristics. The study included 51 participants to achieve equal representation among different age groups and genders and main social media platforms. The research includes participants between the ages of 18 years old and 45 years old to examine younger digital natives alongside older more experienced social media users. This research includes male and female participants as well as participants who identify as non-binary if they are present within the studied sample. Participants in this study are located throughout developed and emerging market regions to articulate global social media practices. The research sample consists of users who frequently engage with Instagram and TikTok in addition to Facebook and Twitter platforms to produce findings about primary digital spaces. The diverse representativeness of participants strengthens research data and enables a thorough investigation of social media usage patterns by different population segments. The study incorporates diverse participants who represent different social media backgrounds, thus making sure its observations align with the full social media environment.

3.3.2 Thematic Data Presentation

The thematic data evaluation contains five essential themes that stem from primary data analysis alongside secondary research data. The examination of social media behavior toward consumers presents five fundamental aspects that illuminate the entire impact of social media on consumer conduct. The research draws support from original statements made by study participants which present genuine infor-

mation about their interactions with social media. People stressed the need for open communication and real influencer recommendations when creating trust, yet they showed worries about personal data security and interest-based advertising capabilities. Guest engagement choices, together with immediate brand interactions served as main contributors to audience involvement whereas social proof elements including consumer reviews contributed heavily to purchase determination. The study achieves a comprehensive outlook on consumer-brand social media interaction through its designation of several defined themes that organize the collected data.

Qualitative research methodology serves as the method to investigate social media's effects on consumer behavior. The research investigates consumer engagement along with trust and decision-making processes by using thematic analysis analysis of semi-structured interviews. The combination of purposive sampling and NVivo software maintains accurate data collection and transparent and reliable analysis. The study upholds its credible findings by following ethical research procedures. The following section will explain the research process and its limitations together with anticipated contributions from the study.

Researchers used NVivo software to develop the five themes discovered in this study through systematic thematic analysis. The reviewer used initial codes to discover recurring patterns of response data in participant interviews which were both transcribed and reviewed previously. The researcher organized initial codes into broader themes which directly answered the research questions to maintain study objective alignment. The five themes were chosen from participant discussions because they appeared frequently and held significant relevance to the study. Through a research question-based analysis the authors obtain valuable insights regarding how social media marketing affects consumer behavior that benefits both academic scholars and industry practitioners.

4 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

This section thoroughly investigates how social media platforms affect customer trust through an evaluation of gathered information. The evaluation centres its analysis on four main aspects, which include user-generated content effects and influence authenticity, brand engagement, and privacy worries that affect consumer trust. The research structure relies on survey results along with qualitative interview methods to build a complete view of what consumers believe about these matters. Multiple statistical and thematic analysis methods have performed the interpretation work on the gathered data sets.

This chapter studies various elements that serve to explain how social media affects consumer trust by identifying patterns within the data. The study results will be displayed with quantitative descriptive measurements in addition to assessing subjective meanings to explain consumer perception patterns. This study identifies major trends that supply businesses and marketers with strategic principles toward improving trust-building activities within digital platforms.

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The research surveyed 51 participants to understand the relationship between social media marketing and consumer trust dynamics. The section displays demographic details about survey respondents who allow understanding of their fundamental backgrounds together with social media behavioural patterns. The following analysis creates a setting that helps understand results discovered later. Survey participants demonstrate wide adoption of social media because it influences both their interpersonal communication and their choices. A structured overview emerges from checking the tables that display the information about participant ages combined with gender identification along with educational qualifications and social media frequency habits.

Category	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Male	27	53 %
Female	24	47 %
Age 18–25	14	27 %
Age 26–35	22	43 %
Age 36–45	10	20 %
Age 46+	5	10 %
Use Social Media Daily	48	94 %
Use Social Media Weekly	3	6 %

Table 1. Demographic Overview

A combined 76% of respondents either strongly trust or occasionally trust UGC, demonstrating its importance in the decision-making process. Consumers perceive reviews from fellow users as more credible and unbiased compared to brand-created content.

Usage of social media	Yes	No
No. of respondent	51	0

Table 2. Usage of Social Media



Figure1. People using social media

From the information presented in the above table and figure, all 51 respondents reported using social media and nobody stated otherwise. This means that out of the total population, 100% have used social media one way or the other, an indication of the important role it has played in the daily lives of the people concerned. This indicates its prevalence and importance as a means through which people communicate, release information to others, and connect with society. It would appear from this that there is some level of dependence on the use of social media among the respondents.

Influenced by social media	Rarely	Occasionally	Frequently	Always
No. of respondent	3	7	15	26

Table 3. How Often Social Media Influencers are Followed

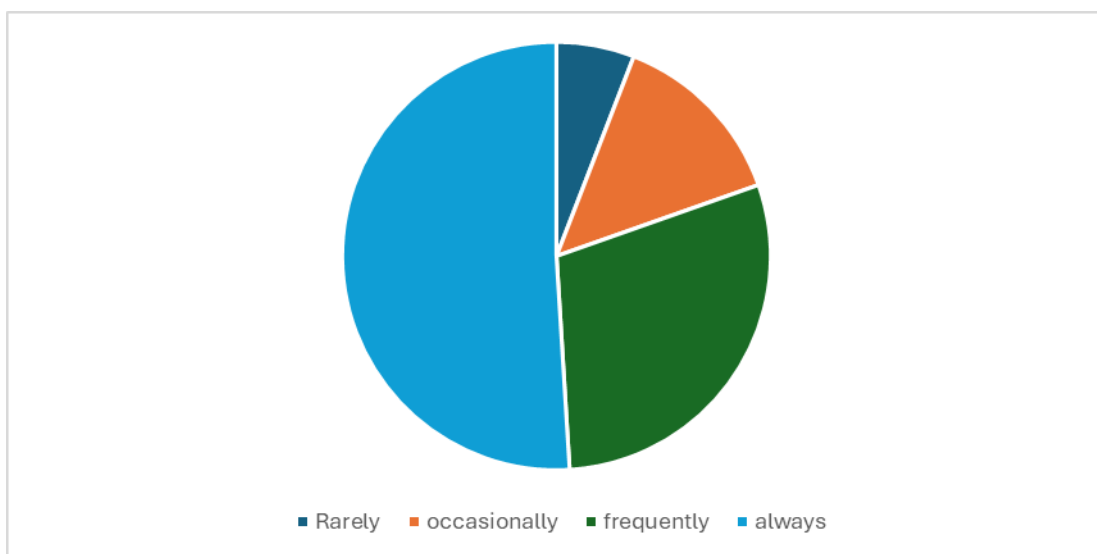


Figure 2. Follow Frequency

The data shown in Table 2 is scattered in terms of the level of engagement with social media influencers, whereby only a small cluster of 3 reported rarely following influencers, indicating minimal impact; while 7 reported that they engage with influencer content occasionally, suggesting an impact which may be moderate. Meanwhile, 15 reported frequent following of influencers, which demonstrated a great level of impact and dependence on recommendations. The largest, representing 26 participants, always follows social media influencers. This is what shows the strong and consistent influence of social media influencers in influencing behaviour and decisions. The dispersion illustrates the different levels of reliance and trust one has in influencer content.

Trust on Recommendations	Yes	No	Sometimes	Depends on Influencers
Response	9	8	8	26

Table 4. Trust Recommendations by Social Media Influencers

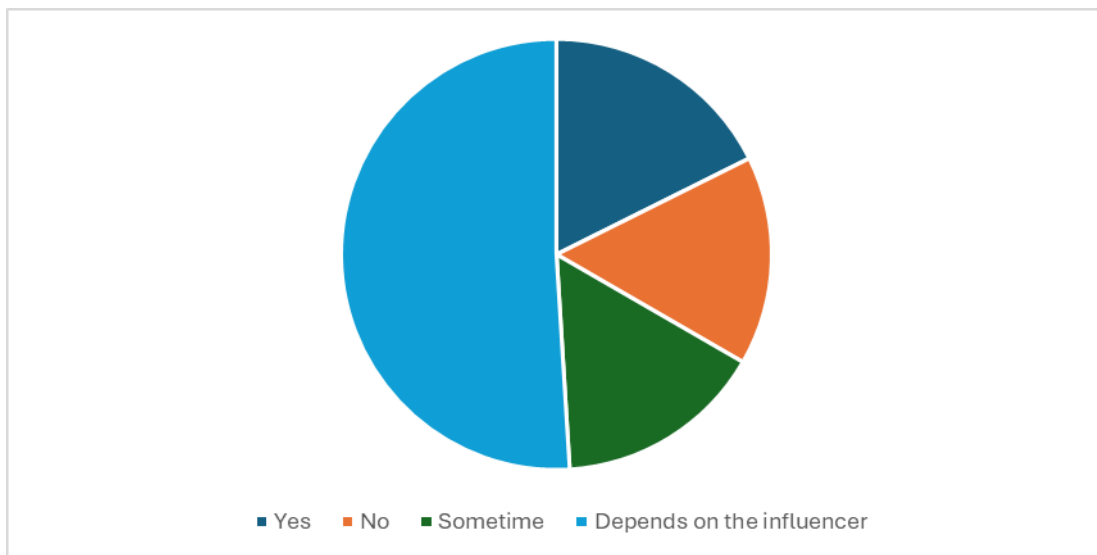


Figure 3. Social Media Influencer Recommendation Trustworthiness

The results are very divided on whether to trust influencers. Some say they will make recommendations; 8 respondents say they would not at all; another 8 have undetermined responses as they say "sometimes." A large number of 26 say they will trust it depending on the influencer. It can be derived that though some highly consider influencers' endorsements, a lot of them consider an influencer's credibility before decisions are made. Overall, there isn't any trust in influencers. People's trust highly depends on who the influencer is, so that means people don't trust influencers blindly.

Categories	Shopping	Chatting	Information	Make friends	Other
Responses	17	10	7	15	2

Table 5. The Use of Social Media by Respondents

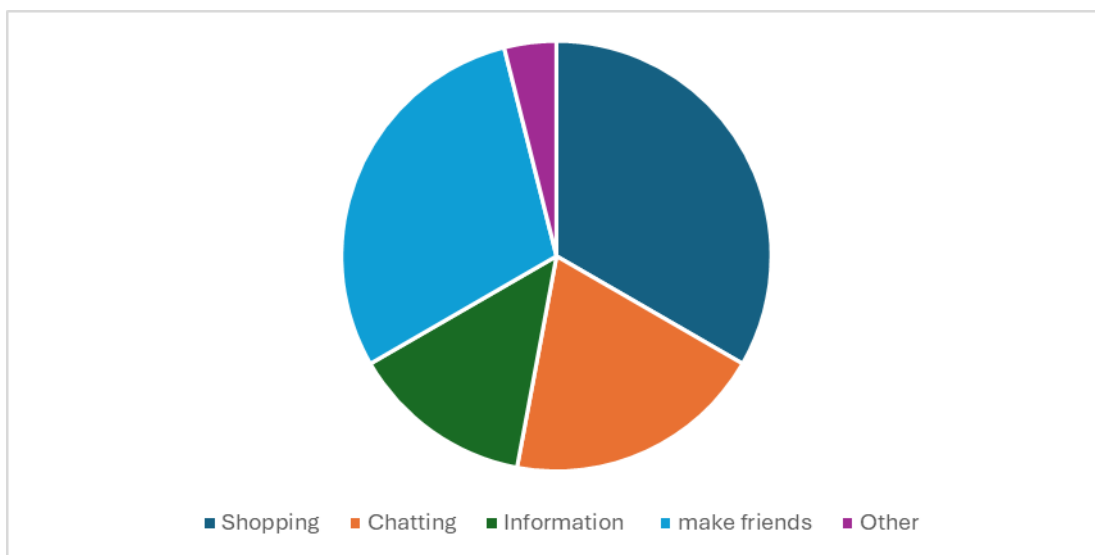


Figure 4. Purpose of using social media

Above table and figure illustrates the activities for which the respondents claim to have used social media. Shopping, as reported by 17 respondents, is the most dominant activity. It shows the influence of social media on consumer behaviour. The importance of making friends cannot be underestimated. Fifteen said to be making friends, while conversations with ten responders show the role that social media has played in communication. Seven participants replied that they wanted to get information, which represents average interest. Finally, two participants mentioned other uses of social media; therefore, these applications were specialized or others.

Time Spent	0 hour	1–5 hours	5–10 hours	More than 10 hours
Responses	0	25	20	6

Table 6. Time Spent on Social Media

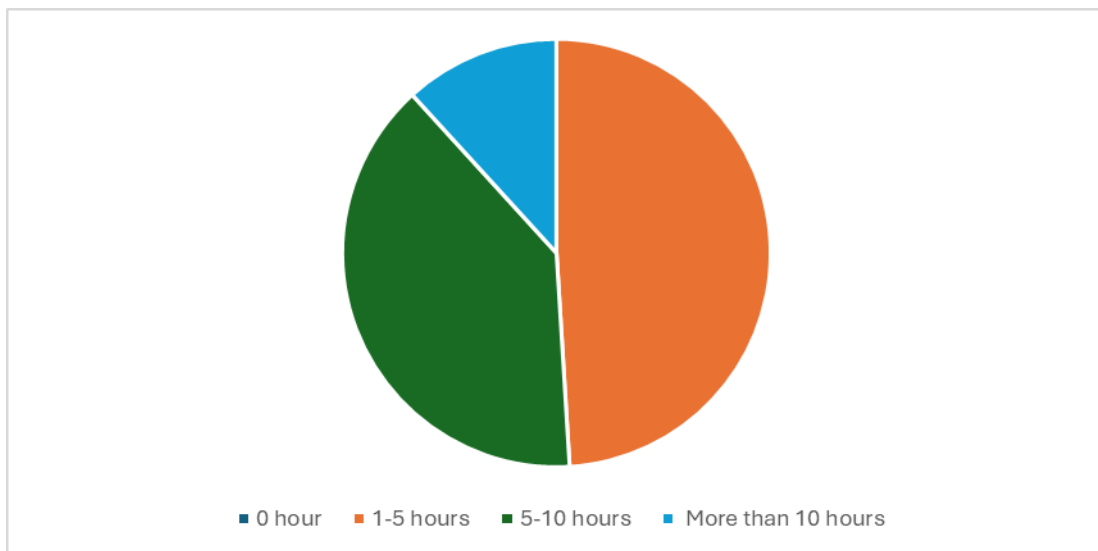


Figure 5. Time being spent on social media

The highest number of 25 respondents spend between 1 and 5 hours daily on social media, reflecting a level of moderation in their use. Further, an equal number of 20 falls in the next category, using it for 5-10 hours, which indicates higher usage. Only 6 respondents reported more than 10 hours, reflecting the intensive use segment. No respondent reportedly spent zero time on social media; this again shows how deeply engraved it is in everyday life. This would then show various levels of usage with most users falling into moderate to high usage categories.

Moods	More Connected	Cause anxiety	Inspire	Feels Inadequacy
Responses	15	10	15	11

Table 7. How Social Media Affects the Mood of Users

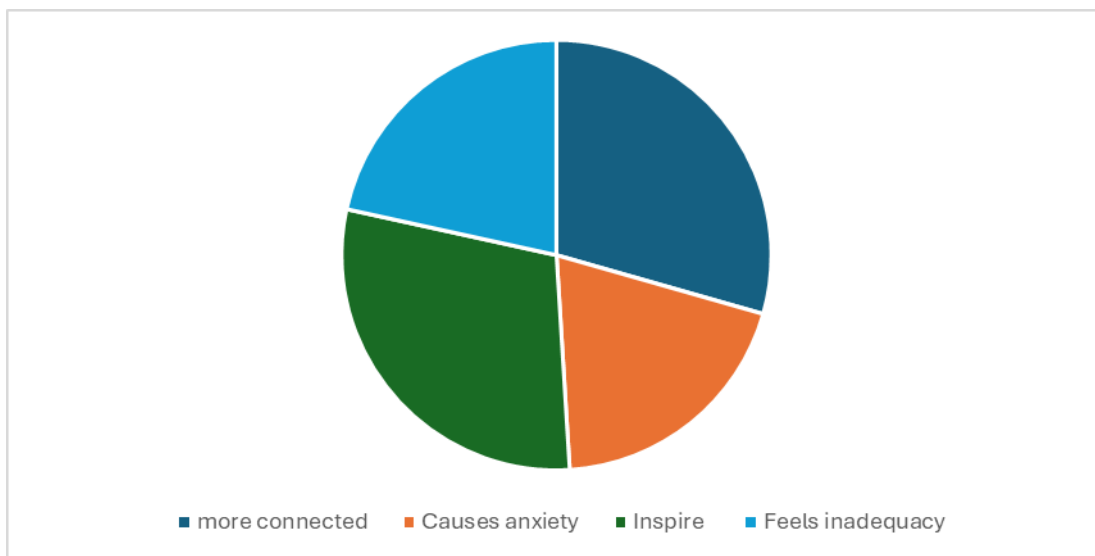


Figure 6. Social Media Mood Impact

The presented table and figure portray different emotional changes that social media creates among its users. It is observed that 15 users are found to be more connected and another 15 are inspired, which falls under the category of positive emotions. On the other hand, anxiety contributes to a negative emotional response for 10 users, whereas inadequacy affects 11 users. In this way, the apparent connection and inspiration to many through social media use make it very clear that it also provides a venue for great anxiety and feelings of inadequacy in its users. Reactions to this, which seem to go both ways, underlie how social media can be at once complex and yet varied in its impacts on individual moods.

Categorise	yes	sometimes	rarely	no
Response	27	10	7	7

Table 8. Feel Pressure to Portray a Certain Image of Social Media

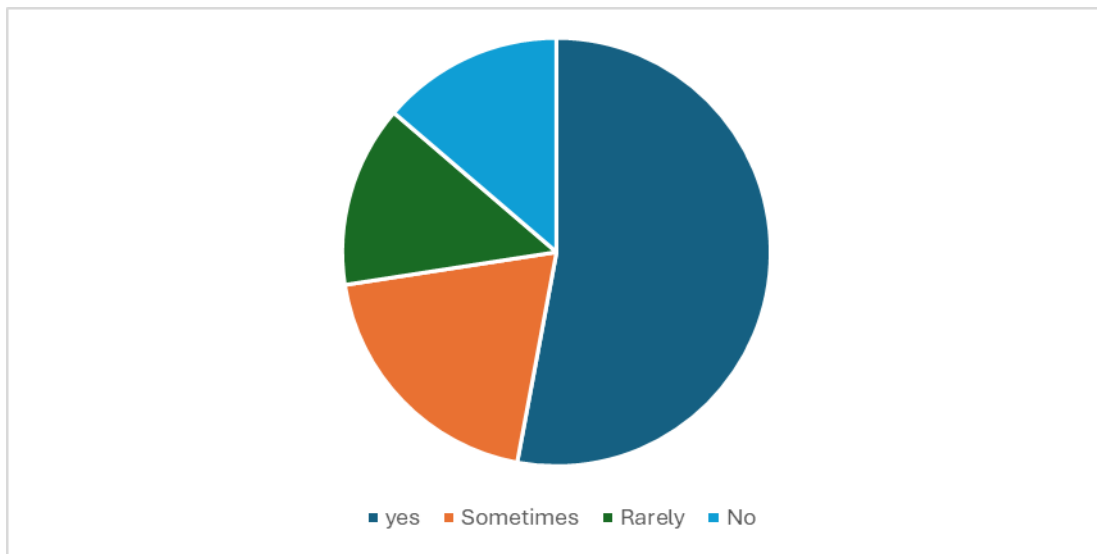


Figure 7. Amount of pressure felt to post image

As shown in Table 8 and Figure 7, while having a significant impact on self-presentation, one-quarter of users-27-feel under pressure to present an image on social media. Another ten respondents sometimes feel concerned about their online persona and this pressure. It would appear that a minority of users seem to remain unaffected; seven respondents feel this pressure only a little, and a further seven do not feel any pressure at all. In light of everything that was previously discussed, data shows how different magnitudes of social pressure different levels of individuals go through on social media platforms.

Items	Apparel	Beauty Products	Gadgets	Beverages and Food	Home Improvement	Travel Packages	Gym equipment	other
Responses	11	6	10	16	2	4	2	0

Table 9. Kinds of Products Bought Because of Influencer's Advice

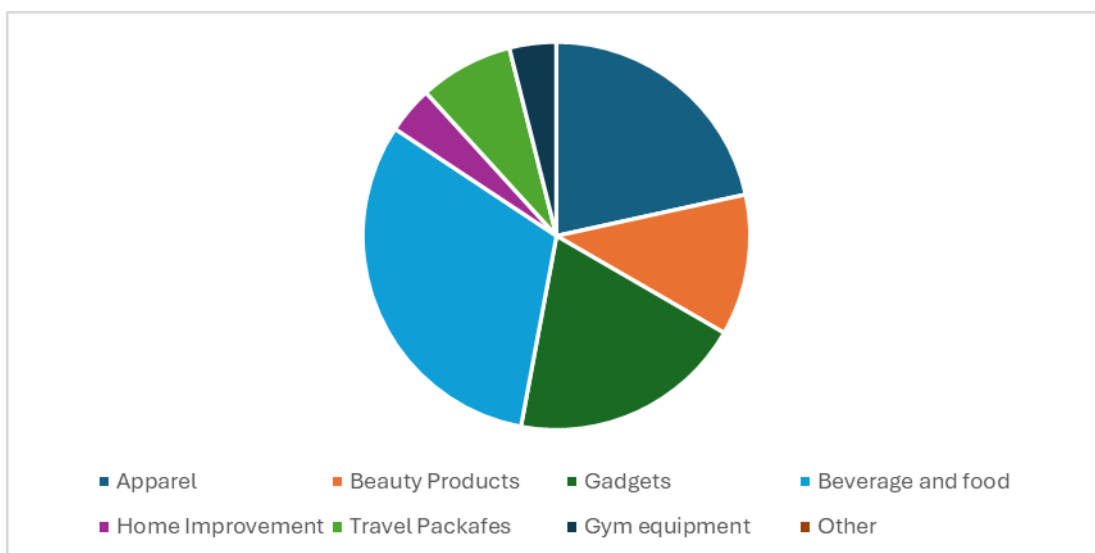


Figure 8. Types of Products Purchased as a Result of Influencer's Recommendation

Table 9 shows the impact of social media on the decisions to purchase. Beverages and food goods have the highest with 16 purchases, followed by clothing with 11 and technology at 10. Therefore, these are highly affected. Beauty goods purchases with 6 shows a high influence. The vacation package purchases constitute four, while the gym equipment and house remodelling constitute two each. The fact that no responders bought anything from the category "other" underlines special niches in which the power of influencers is huge.

Categorise	Friends or Family	Sponsored posts	SM platform recommended	Online search	Influencer's collaborates	Other
Responses	12	10	8	16	5	0

Table 10. Find New Social Media Influencers

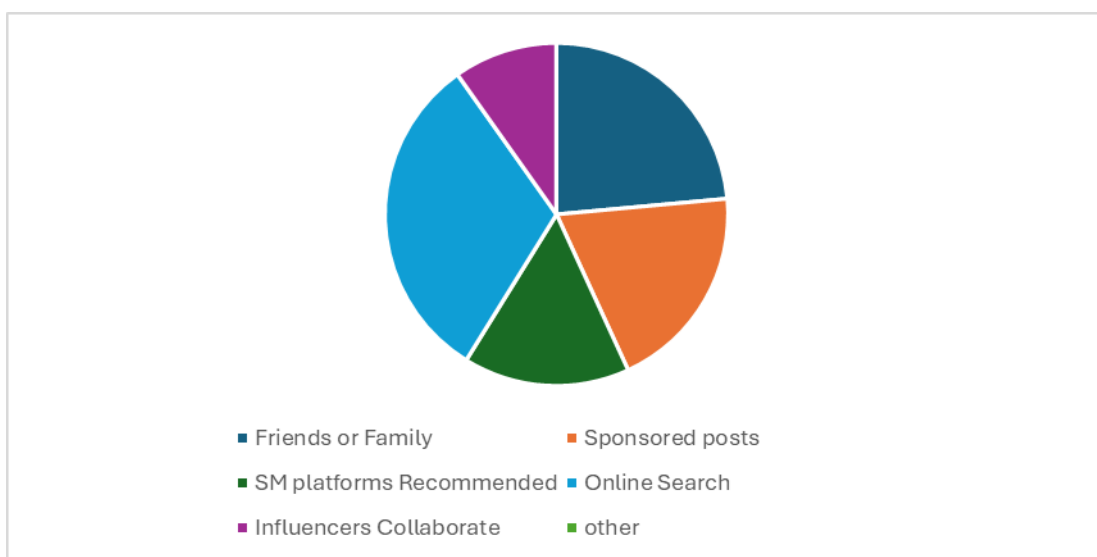


Figure 9. Seek New Influencers on Social Media

Table 10 depicts how the respondents usually get to know about new social media influencers. This is followed by the friends and family recommendations, representing 12 responses, indicating how powerful personal networks can be in such aspects. The third most relevant means of finding the social media influencers was from the sponsored posts contributed by 10 of the subjects. Next are recommendations from the social media platforms, showing how algorithms play a role in discovering influencers, with 8 responses. The lowest number of respondents, 5, was regarding collaborations with other influencers. Other means make zero.

Influencer Credibility Boost	Yes	No	Dependence on products	Not sure
Responses	33	5	10	3

Table 11. Influencers Boost Products' Credibility

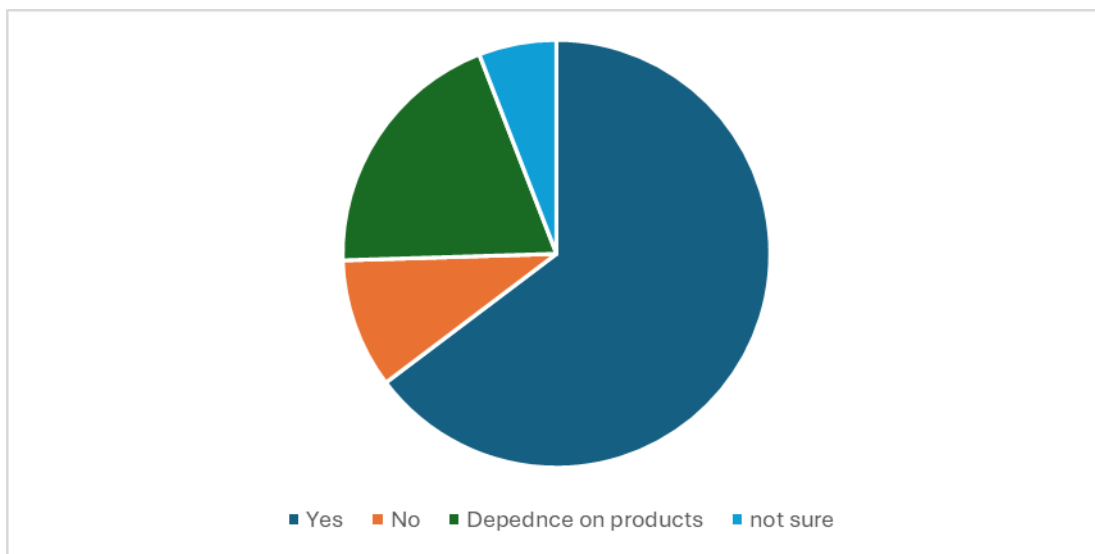


Figure 10. Enhance Products' Influencer Credibility

Influence of influencers on the credibility of products. Fully 33% believe that influencers add to the credibility of products, underlining their important roles in marketing. Ten believe this is dependent on the nature of the product in question and modalities of trust. Just five disagree that influencers add credibility, while three express deep scepticism in their uncertainty. The general trend of the findings reveals one astonishing thing: just how influential influencers are in shaping customer perceptions about products, given that most customers take them as a reliable source.

Regretted	Yes	No	N/A
Responses	38	11	2

Table 12. Regret Buying Influencer Products

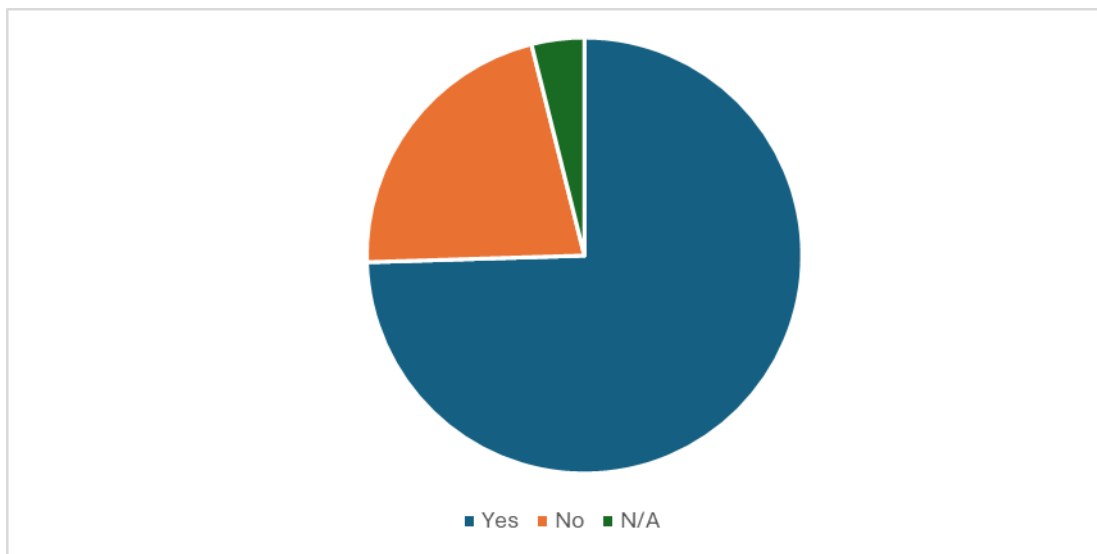


Figure 11. Feel Remorse Purchasing Goods from An Influencers' Endorsement

Table 12 illustrates that an overwhelming majority of the respondents, 38, regret having made purchases based on the products recommended by influencers and may suggest some flawed or inferior recommendations. Meanwhile, 11 had no regrets about their purchases, thus pointing to positive experiences associated with influencer recommendations. There were 2 "N/A" responses, likely to mean that either the people have never purchased any product recommended by influencers or they don't have an opinion in this regard. This information underlines the mixed outcomes of influencer marketing, proving the fact that even while it could serve as a highly powerful driver of purchases, it will also have the potential to lead to dissatisfaction and buyer's remorse.

Brand openness by influencer	Yes	No	Sometime	Not sure
Responses	10	27	9	5

Table 13. Influencers' Brand Transparency Varies

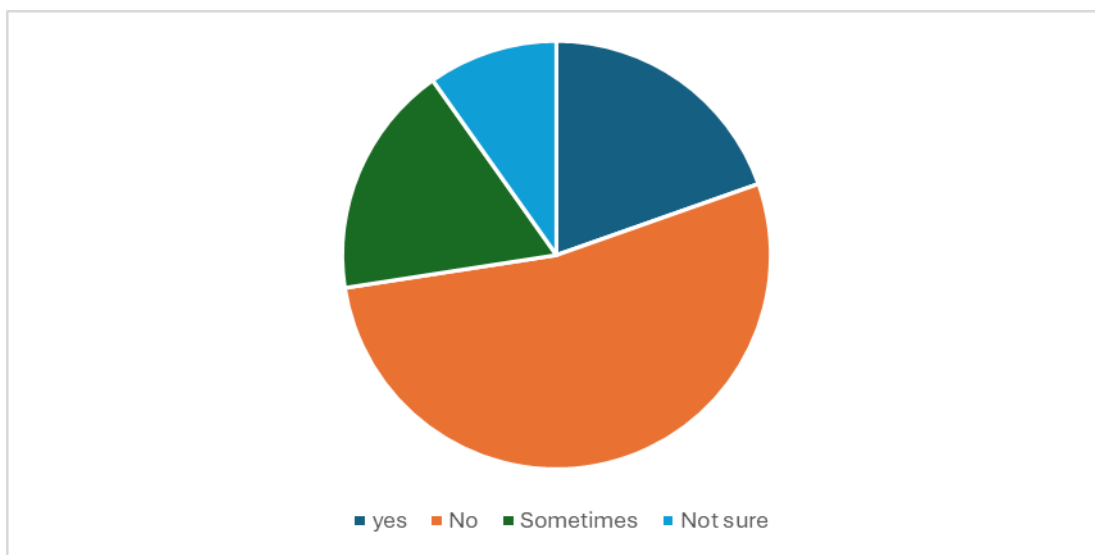


Figure 12. Influencers Show Varying Disclosure Accounts Of Influencers' Products.

Table 13 and Figure 12 show that there is significant disagreement in how much transparency influencers show when it comes to revealing their brand representations. The majority of the respondents believe that there is a lack of transparency on the part of the influencers about their representation of the brand. This is not indicative of healthy trust within the influencer marketing space. This fact is also corroborated by men who believe that, yes, influencers are transparent and therefore exhibit some level of credibility within the space. Nine believe that influencers sometimes are transparent, meaning there is inconsistency in disclosure practices. It includes 5 "Not sure" respondents who were uncertain or uninformed about the transparency of influencers. This is a positive sign that more transparency standards are to emanate from the influencers themselves to build trust and authenticity with

their audience, such that indeed, the endorsements one might hear from an influencer are not hidden and thus disclosed transparently.

Platforms	Facebook	Instagram	YouTube	Twitter	TikTok	Snapchat	Pinterest	Other
Responses	15	7	14	2	8	2	2	1

Table 14. Platforms to Choose Social Media Influencers

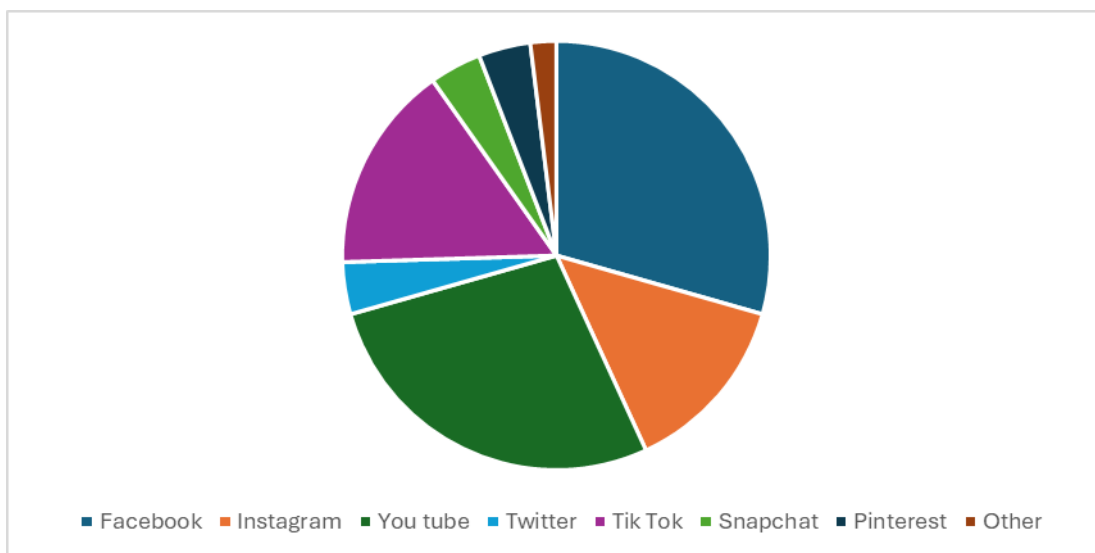


Figure 13. Tools for Selecting Social Media Influencers

Table 14 shows good representations of different platforms by respondents about choosing social media influencers. Leading the pack is Facebook, with 15 respondents showing the influence and reach of the giant. Next would be YouTube, with 14 respondents to visually show and tell in-depth reviews. Not too far is TikTok, at 8 out of the total number of its respondents, reflecting the trend of short, captivating videos. Instagram follows, with 7 out of its total number of respondents, showing influence within lifestyle and visual appeal. Twitter, Snapchat, and Pinterest were

each represented by 2 respondents; hence, showing that they had niche yet specific uses. Only 1 respondent identified other platforms. Such a division indicates the diversity of preference among users when the dominant ones would be Facebook and YouTube, which base the selection for influencers.

Authenticity matters	Yes	No	IT depends	Not sure
Responses	6	30	11	4

Table 15. Follow Influencers for Authenticity

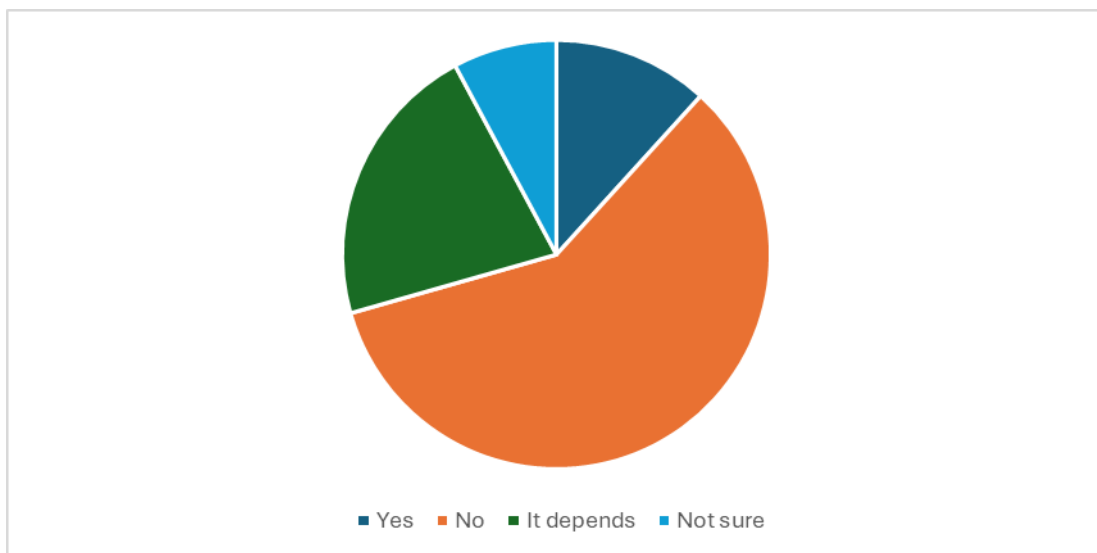


Figure 14. Influence Imitators Who Are Authentic Social Media Influencers.

Table 15 shows that most of them have a disregard for authenticity when it comes to influencing: 30. On the contrary, 6 shows that authenticity matters; hence, there is a smaller proportion that cares about the genuinely of content. Other respondents, 11 in number, feel that it depends on the occasion, and this here means conditional trust. While 4 respondents were generally unsure, meaning they were not certain or care less about authenticity. This shows that, though there might be several consumers for whom authenticity matters, the greater proportion do not con-

sider authenticity important or are situationally influenced by other factors when it comes to choosing which influencers to follow.

Taking Decisions	Yes	No	Depends on products	Not sure
Responses	10	4	35	2

Table 16. Believing Social Media Influencers for Making Purchasing Decisions

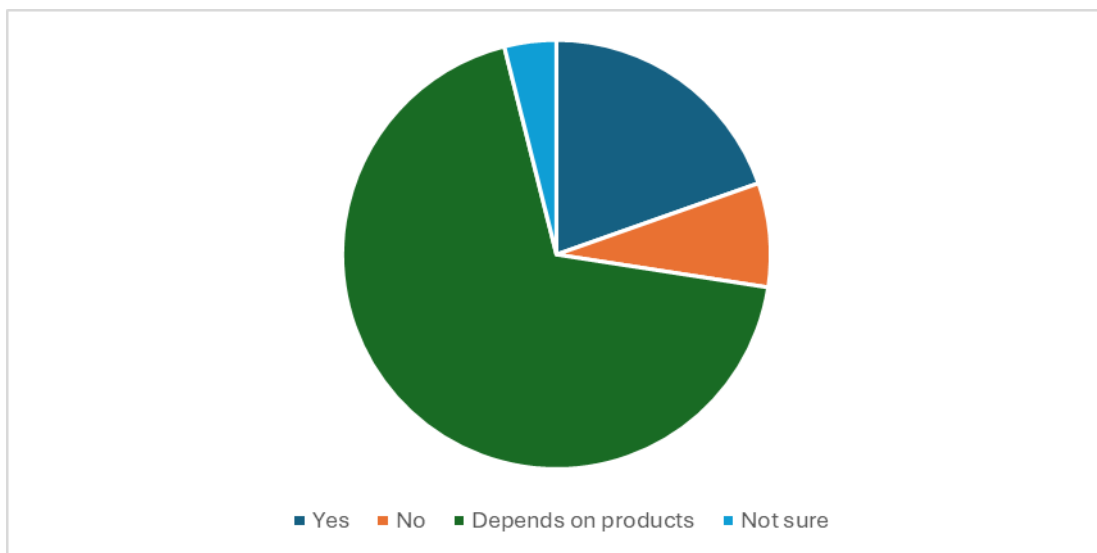


Figure 15. Trusting Social Influencers to Make Relevant Purchasing Decisions

Table 16 presents inconsistent levels of trust in the use of social media influencers in making purchasing decisions. Thirty-five responded that it depends on what type of product, as an indication that they rely on the opinions of influencers conditionally. An interest in consistent reliance on influencers' recommendations was recorded at only 10 and 4 respondents, who do not rely on them. Further, 2 respondents were uncertain if any influence exists with regard to changing their purchasing decisions. The above information shows that, while influencers hold a certain degree of

power in their recommendations, the majority of consumers do think more critically about those recommendations based on the product at hand.

Options	Yes	No	Sometime	Not sure
Responses	23	21	5	2

Table 17. Trust in Social Media Influencer Endorsements

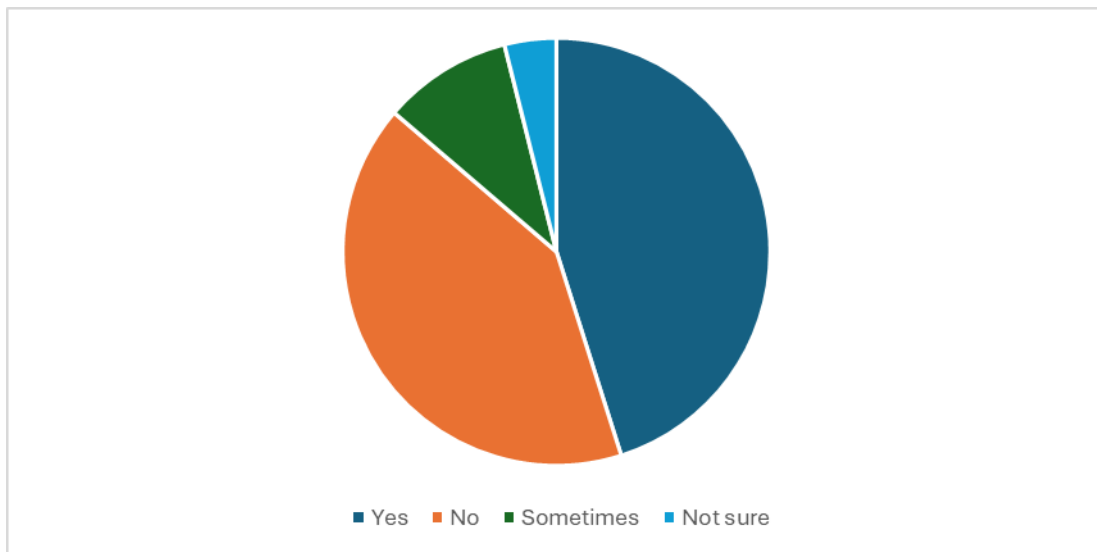


Figure 16. Trust in Social Media Influencer Endorsements

Table 17 indicates the tendency towards mixed perceptions in representing products by social media influencers. Of the total respondents, 23 believe that influencers represent the exact product they advertise, showing a rational level of belief in them. On the other hand, the number of respondents who disbelieve influencers' advertisements amounts to 21, which again reflects high scepticism. Five responded that they believe that influencers represent their product rightly sometimes. This means that people trust the influencer or product conditionally. Meanwhile, 2 of the respondents are undecided, which means they cannot be so sure or lack any opinion on the subject. This information outlines that the perception of the credibility of social media influencers is divided.

Options	Authenticity	Expertise	Creating engaging content	Reputation	Interest	Appeal	No. of followers	Other
Responses	8	8	9	7	6	5	7	1

Table 18. Qualities Expected from Social Media Influencers

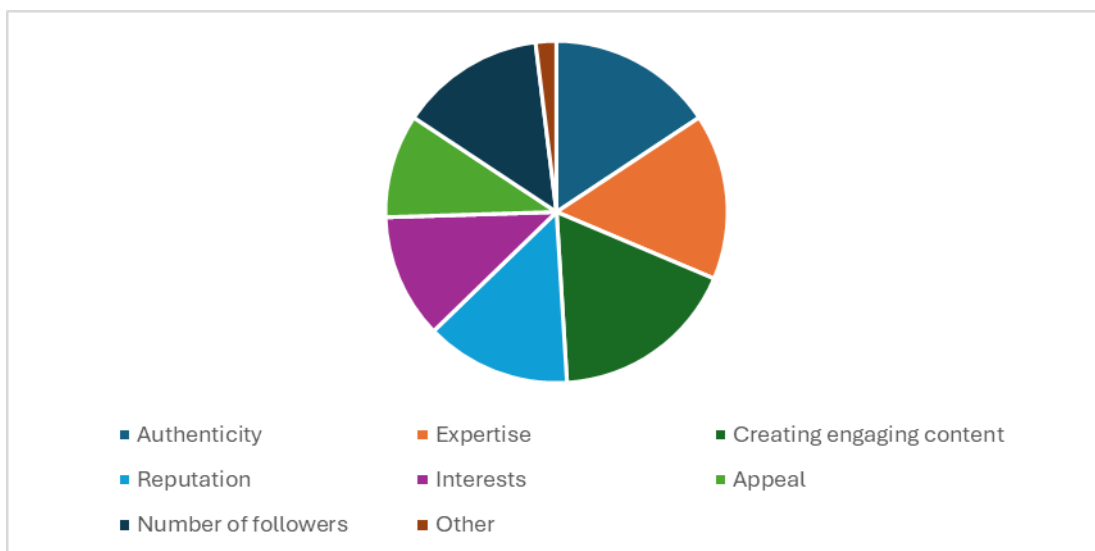


Figure 17. Expected Characteristics Of Social Media Influencers.

Table 18 summarises the characteristics expected from social media influencers. Creating engaging content received the highest rating, while authenticity and expertise were rated as equals with 8 responses each. These portray the characteristics of an authentic and knowledgeable influencer. Reputation and number of followers follow next in importance, both rated by 7 respondents, to show credible and popular influencers. Interest and appeal get 6 and 5 votes, respectively. Only one said "other." It follows, in plain language, that audiences balance a range of expecta-

tions: the quality of the content, the authenticity, and the popularity of the influencer.

Impact of SM while purchasing	Yes	No	Sometime	Depends on the products
Responses	30	12	2	7

Table 19. The Impact of Social Media Influencers on Consumer Purchasing Decisions

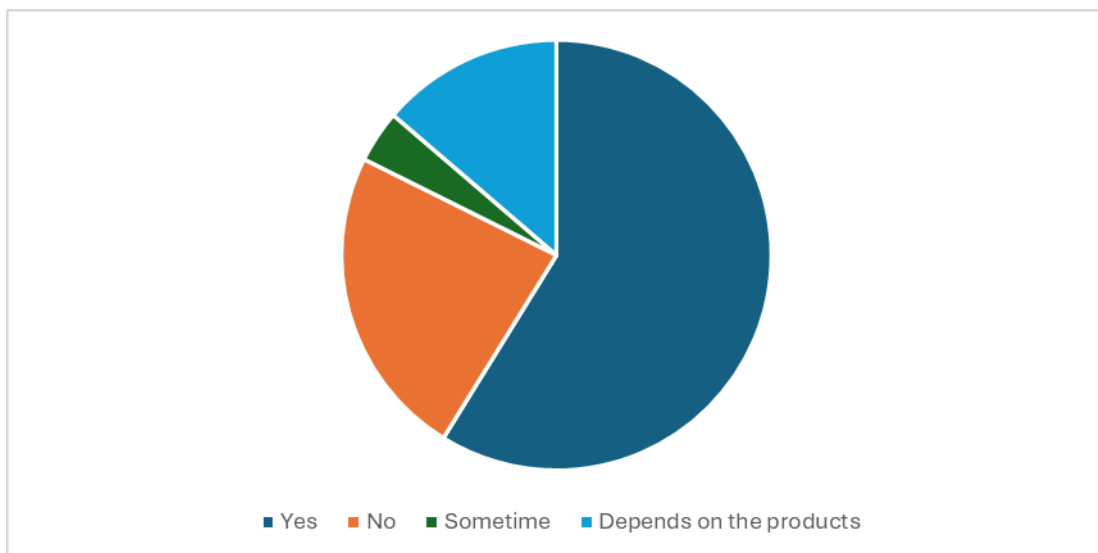


Figure 18. The Impact of Social Media Influencers on Consumer Purchasing Decisions

Table 19 represents the fact that social media influencers are influential in consumer purchasing behaviour. Of the total respondents, the highest affirmed indeed that it is the influencer who influences their buying behaviour and goes to prove the effectiveness of influencer marketing. On the other side, 12 stated that influencers do not affect their decision to buy a product or not, and such consumers are immune to influencer marketing. Of these, 7 respondents feel that it depends on the product at hand, believing or not believing in what influencers say concerning the product. Only 2 of the respondents are influenced at times, showing that they are swayed

from time to time. Overall, data underlines the important yet not universal role that influencers play in shaping consumer behaviours

Disappointed Influencer(s)	by	Yes	NO
Responses		40	11

Table 20. Consumer Experiences with Influencer-Recommended Products



Figure 19. Consumer Experiences with Influencer-Recommended Products

Table 20 illustrates that 40 were disappointed with purchasing something about which social media influencers gave positive recommendations, indicating that there is either a credibility or accuracy problem with the endorsements that influencers make. Respondents who do not disappoint total 11, which indicates some influencers give reliable recommendations. This disparity underlines the critical evaluation that needs to take place when one considers buying something promoted through social media, and how influencers themselves are likewise duty-bound to make sure that any promotions they do for any product or service are honest and correct, lest they lose the trust of those who follow them.

Micro-influencers over celebrity influencers	Yes	No	Depends on Products	Not sure
Responses	23	13	10	5

Table 21. Prefer Buying Products Endorsed by Micro-influencers Over Celebrity Influencers

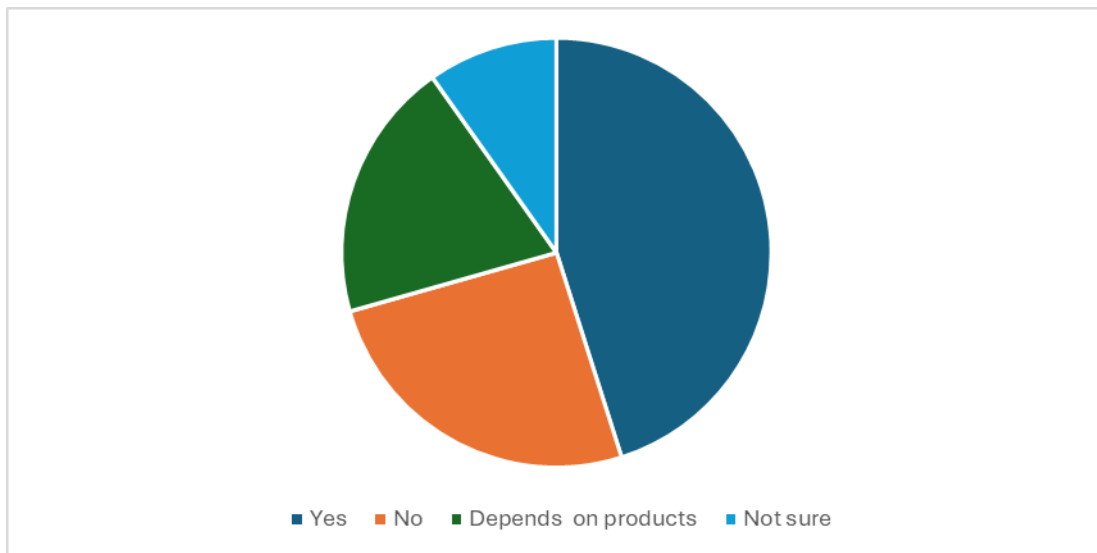


Figure 20. Micro-influencer Preference: Buying Endorsed Products over Celebrity Influencers.

Table 21 shows that the products endorsed by micro-influencers are more popular among the respondents than those endorsed by celebrities. As many as 23 prefer micro-influencers for perceived authenticity and relatability. On the contrary, 13 of them like to purchase products endorsed by celebrities, probably out of attraction to their wider celebrity fame and perceived credibility. Ten said it would depend upon the products for which the endorsements are being made, showing selective trust in the kind of products. Five are indifferent, which may indicate uncertainty or a lack of concern over the influencer type. From this chart, a formidable trend can

be built up for trusting micro-influencers with endorsements since these are closer to their niche audiences.

Terms of brand awareness and loyalty	Engagement	Connection	Targeting
Responses	17	18	16

Table 22. The Role of Social Media in Building Brand Awareness and Loyalty

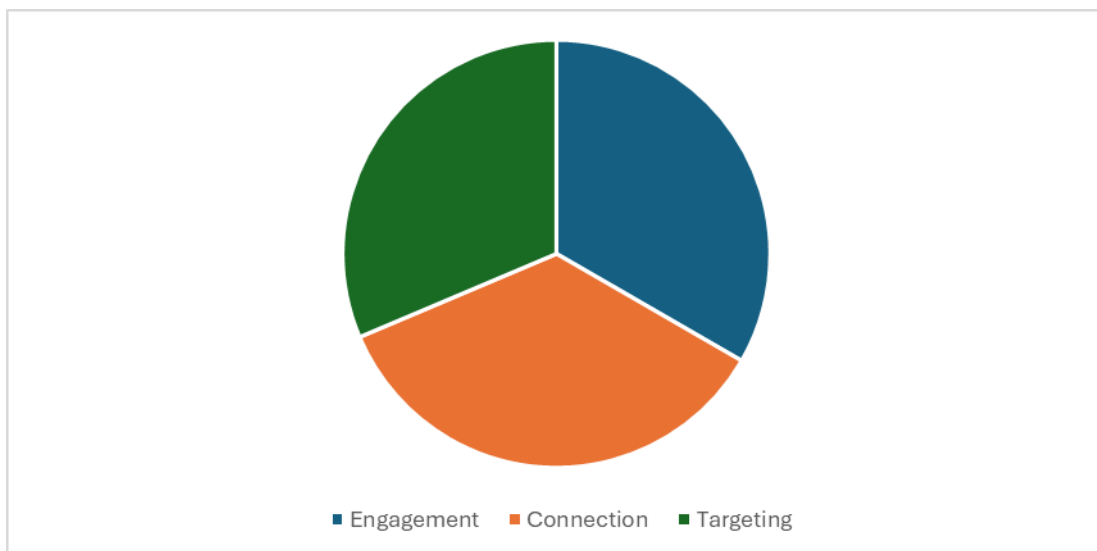


Figure 21. The Role of Social Media in Building Brand Awareness and Loyalty

Table 22 depicts that social media does have a big impact on brand awareness and loyalty. When it comes to connecting with the audience, it has the highest rating, with 18 responses, because social media helps connect a brand with its customers and consumers. Engagement got a rating of 17 responses as most interactive content increases brand presence. Targeting has received 16 responses, as targeting any group becomes necessary for building loyalty. This data reflects not only a multilayered approach to raising brand awareness but also to making well-informed and long-lasting relations with consumers.

Options	Innovation	Insights	Betterment	Engagement
Responses	10	20	6	15

Table 23. Consumer Responses via Social Media and Their Role in Improving Products and Services

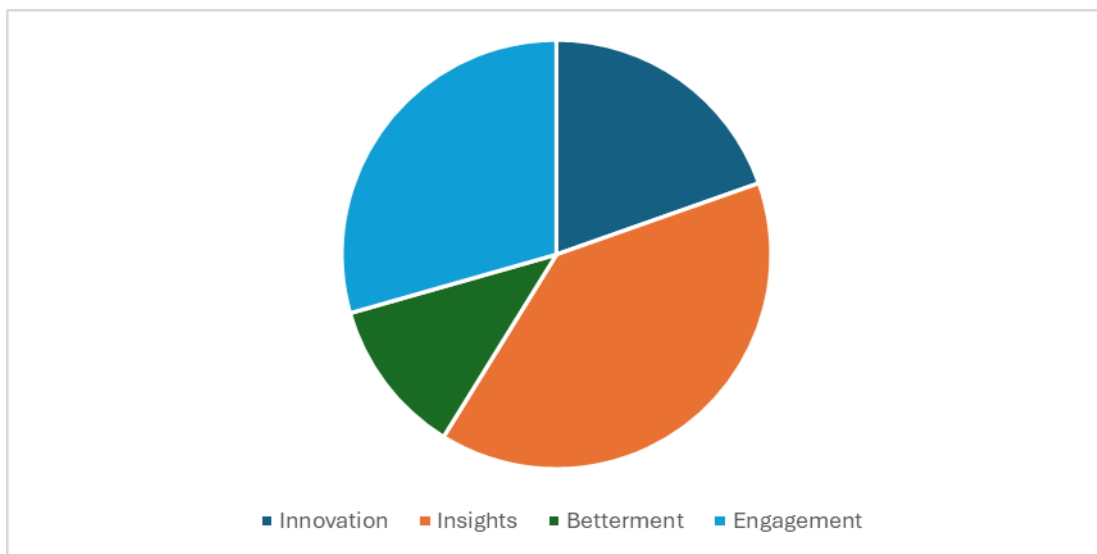


Figure 22 Consumer Responses via Social Media and Their Role in Improving Products and Services

What are the ways through which social media may influence consumer response in improving their products and enhancing their services? Creating insight is the highest at 20, creating insight that through social media, one can keep track of what consumers' needs and likes are. This is followed by engagement with 15 responses that, through active communication, lead to customer loyalty and feedback. Innovation is also driven, represented by 10 responses, because consumer interactions via social media drive new ideas and product development. Concluding the contributions observed through social media is the direct improvement in products and services, represented by 6 respondents, since this represents the overall positive contribution of quality and offering better services.

4.2 Influence of Influencer Authenticity on Consumer Trust

Influencer marketing is a growing strategy used by brands to establish trust with consumers. The study analyzed how influencer authenticity (e.g., transparency, genuine brand usage, and ethical promotion) affects consumer perception. Consumer trust heavily depends on the authenticity levels shown by influencers. Within this research, authenticity means how well influencers are trusted for their honest approach and their trustworthy behavior. People rely on trust social influencers who present themselves authentically and steadily. Survey participants show stronger involvement with influencers who give authentic personal stories and answer user questions and limit their promotional behavior. The research findings support earlier studies proving that authenticity promotes consumer engagement while boosting purchase intentions (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Influencer Authenticity & Trust	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Trust Influencers Fully	9	18 %
Trust Influencers Sometimes	26	51 %
Skeptical of Influencer Endorsements	16	31 %

Table 24. Influence of Influencer Authenticity on Consumer Trust

Research discovers that influencers strongly influence trust, but the majority of respondents (82%) do not place complete trust in endorsements from such sources. Users express selective trust practices toward influencers because of how genuine the influencers appear regarding brand promotions. Research findings demonstrated that how influencers share their sponsored relationships and sustainable sponsorships directly affects their public credibility.

4.3 Consumer Privacy Concerns and Trust in Social Media Marketing

Privacy issues developed into a primary factor that affected social media marketing trust levels. The survey participants raised questions about data protection along with sponsored ad visibility and proper management of personal data. Consumer trust highly depends on transparent data collection protocols and honorable marketing approaches, according to the received analysis. Brands that express their privacy guidelines in a detailed manner experience more optimistic involvement from their audiences. Existing research confirms the vital role of ethical data management in digital marketing since this study presents the same results (Bandyopadhyay, 2019).

Privacy Concern	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Concerned About Data Tracking	38	75 %
Indifferent	8	16 %
Unconcerned	5	9 %

Table 25. Consumer Privacy Concerns and Trust

Survey participants who felt uneasy about data privacy made up 75% of the total respondents. Consumers demonstrate discomfort about brands gathering personal information because companies do not properly disclose their data collection policies. Digital marketing tactics face high levels of distrust because users need transparent explanations about data handling.

4.4 Brand Engagement and Consumer Loyalty

The process of customer brand interaction functions as a primary factor for creating loyal customer relationships. Customer-brand interaction increases the strength of bonds, thus leading to long-term commitments, according to available data. The nature of social media brand interaction influences people to create positive brand perceptions while fostering loyalty among consumers. Researched evidence confirms that client-focused brand contact approaches help extend consumer business relationships.

Highly Engaged & Loyal	19	37 %
Occasionally Engaged	21	41 %
Rarely Engage with Brands	11	22 %

Table 26. Level of Brand Engagement & Loyalty Frequency Percentage (%)

A brand that dedicates its resources to engaging consumers through comments and personalized responses alongside interactive content will establish dependable relationships supported by loyal customer behavior. Survey data suggests that 37% of respondents demonstrate this engagement.

4.5 Summary of Key Findings

- A high percentage of 76% depend on user-generated reviews and testimonials before making purchasing decisions.
- The effectiveness of influencer marketing depends on genuine content since consumers trust influencers only 18% of the time, yet make combined decisions based on influencer trustworthiness at a rate of 51%.
- Consumer trust faces an important challenge from privacy concerns because 75% of respondents worry about tracking their data and personalized advertising.

- Social media interaction effectiveness makes brands more loyal to consumers because 37% of respondents show strong engagement with brands on such platforms.

4.6 Conclusion

The research evaluates social media marketing trust from consumers through explorations of user content effects along with influencer credibility and privacy rights relationship combined with brand interaction elements. Data transparency, together with credibility factors and brand interactivity, work to construct trust between consumers and brands. Effective consumer trust management in social media business requires businesses to implement ethical practices as well as establish transparent privacy standards and live up to their brand commitments through genuine engagement. According to the following chapter, businesses and policymakers need strategic recommendations to build trust mechanisms in social media marketing.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The chapter delivers an extensive overview of research outcomes that relate to research variables and study aims. The research explores social media effects on consumer trust through investigations of user-generated material, along with influencer genuineness and privacy protection, and brand-community interactions. The presented chapter contains actionable advice specifically for businesses and their marketers and influencers, alongside social media platforms that stem from this study's discoveries. This section both recognizes the academic value of the research and acknowledges its constraints before proposing new directions for research that could improve knowledge in this field.

5.1 Summary of the Study

The authors examined how social networks influence trust levels between consumers by studying user-shared content together with influencer credibility and privacy management system and brand-to-consumer interactions. Knowledge of these elements proves vital for business success in modern digital markets where social media controls consumer perspectives.

The research used a mixed-methods method that connected quantitative survey results with qualitative findings to obtain complete consumer behavior information. The researchers collected information from various participants who evaluated their social media marketing trust levels throughout the research. Multiple statistical and thematic evaluation approaches helped analyze research findings to produce comprehensive results about consumer sentiment with accuracy.

Social media marketing trust receives its dominant influence from three determining factors, which include transparent communication along with genuine content delivery and maintaining ethical standards. People interact strongly with brand influences when they show truthful behavior and give authentic information while protecting privacy. Social media provides businesses with various opportunities, but

businesses must address the problems of false information dissemination and privacy and trust issues. The gathered data provides essential groundwork for creating actionable guidelines that assist businesses alongside their influencers and policy-makers in developing better trustworthiness in digital marketing. According to Lambert and Stephen (2016) digital marketing along with social media and mobile marketing have undergone evolutionary changes between 2000 and 2015 whereas research should concentrate on how social media strategies and consumer involvement function in mobile platforms.

5.2 Key Findings and Answer to the Research Questions

I. How does user-generated content affect consumer trust?

This research shows that consumer trust takes shape substantially from user-generated content (UGC). Reviews, testimonials, and unprompted user discussions about products gain stronger credibility than content produced by brands in consumers' minds. Consumer trust improves when UGC posts present authentic first-hand insights, yet any deceptive content can lead to negativity against the brand. The research validates that brands that use UGC to maintain interactive communication with customers build stronger consumer-brand relations.

II. How does influencer authenticity impact consumer trust?

The researchers discovered that authentic influencers enhance trust through their work. Consumers show increased trust toward influencers who maintain open communication, show genuine product use and practice moral promotional activities. Trust relationships between influencers and their followers become more solid when influencers share personal experiences and field follower questions while avoiding an excessive number of brand sponsorships. The study confirms previous research linking authentic perception to purchase intention development.

III. What trust-building strategies can brand use in social media marketing?

The research reveals multiple brand strategies that enhance trust relations with consumers according to the study results.

- The disclosure of sponsored content allows advertisements to remain transparent to maintain credibility.
- Helping consumers trust the brand occurs by actively interacting and addressing their comments through feedback.
- Products deliver better trust levels when consumers receive ethical data protection and clear information about privacy practices.
- When brands tell their authentic stories through real-life stories about their customers, this strengthens the emotional bonds between brands and their audiences.

Digital marketing strategies prove that ethical consumer-oriented strategies bring success in today's digital environment.

5.3 Practical Recommendations

This section utilizes research evidence to deliver practical guidelines that stakeholders at companies and influencers and social media platforms should follow to improve digital marketing trust among consumers.

1. Recommendations for Companies and Marketers

- Businesses should maintain open disclosure of sponsored content while making their material match both the influencer's identity profile along their audience base. Customers show better trust toward brands that disclose transparent marketing methods.
- User-generated content (UGC) should be leveraged by allowing satisfied customers to post reviews and share testimonials and social media content

that increases credibility levels. Brands need to actively participate with UGC to enhance their relationships with consumers.

- Establish clear data collection practices and follow all privacy regulations through proper implementations of ethical data privacy standards. Companies that openly share details about their data utilization create a sense of confidence among their audience while building stronger relationships with their customers.
- Entrepreneurial social media platforms enable brands to answer client questions and feedback, which makes businesses more relatable while deepening customer involvement.

2. Recommendations for Influencers

- Social entrepreneurs must participate in brand deals exclusively with products that match their true values and genuine perspectives. The trust of consumers depends on authenticity since they will abandon influencers who constantly promote unconnected or numerous sponsored products.
- Conducting regular interactions with followers helps develop trust between followers and influencers. To establish reliability through connection with followers, Influencers need to address comments, ask questions, and provide personal details in their content.
- Posting events or details about sponsored collaborations becomes more authentic through the direct disclosure of these partnerships by the influencer.

3. Recommendations for Social Media Platforms

- The platforms must strengthen their functionality to identify sponsored material and advertisements so customers can distinguish promotions from original content.

- Better trust develops when organizations make their data-sharing practices transparent to their customers.
- The platforms need to design policies that boost ethical influencer advertising through credibility verification and the prevention of deceptive promotional practices.

Improvements in trust experiences depend on brands, alongside influencers and social media platforms, to implement these recommendations, which produce better customer relationships and engagement results.

5.4 Academic Contributions

Academic research benefits from this study because it demonstrates how social media marketing affects trust between consumers regarding user-generated content, together with influencer authenticity and privacy issues. Research on digital marketing strategies exists, but this study merges different trust-building elements in social media spaces to achieve a detailed analysis.

The research investigates influencer authenticity as a significant element in trust development, which stands as a primary academic work. The trust-building process between influencers and followers occurs through their interactive approach combined with moral conduct and content that relates to user experiences. Research shows how influencers gain consumer perception by being authentic, along with being transparent and practicing ethical promotions while broadening the theoretical understanding of this marketing model.

Laboratory research confirmed the existing connection between privacy worries and trust in line with scholarly investigations about digital marketing data protection. Data transparency along with social media policies that prioritize responsibility establish ethical data management standards which protect consumer trust.

The research combines trust theory and social influence theory and digital marketing theory to provide academic value by presenting a complete framework. The research findings provide scholars and practitioners with guidance for enhancing their knowledge about strategies to build trust online in consumer behavior and marketing ethics, and digital communication research.

5.5 Limitations of the Study

Several limitations exist in this study that researchers must consider before they determine the study's validity. A significant constraint involves both limited participant numbers alongside restricted demographic representation because the collected data comes from particular people who might not represent general consumer patterns through their actions. Customers may lack complete trust formation and understanding because current data collection methods mainly use surveys and qualitative methods. An overall approach to various social media channels was used in this study, even though trust formation mechanisms could potentially differ widely across platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and LinkedIn. The study failed to examine critically the effects of external factors together with changing digital marketing patterns and emerging technologies. Extended research needs to deal with these knowledge gaps to achieve a better understanding of consumer trust toward social media marketing.

- The distribution of selected participants among different demographics and the number of participants studied frame generalization boundaries.
- The trust factors may remain invisible when researchers conduct surveys and collect qualitative insights for data collection purposes.
- Social media platforms exist with distinctive trust characteristics depending on their specific platforms.

- The research did not undertake thorough examinations of market trends together with privacy regulations and technology shifts that affect external factors.

5.6 Suggestions for Future Research

Social media marketing development offers multiple opportunities that researchers can use to expand upon the results of this study. The study's results need broader acceptance by increasing both the size and diversity of participants in the research. Future research should prioritize individual social networking sites since they harbor distinctive trust elements where Instagram relies on visuals rather than Twitter utilizing instant interactions. Scientists should undertake research that investigates how influencer marketing impacts consumer trust through periods and the effects of social media trends and scandals on trust stability. The application of artificial intelligence together with machine learning technologies in influencing consumer trust deserves research investigation because these enhancing methods become increasingly prevalent in marketing through influencers. Research on trust in social media marketing between different cultural regions would show how marketing strategies need adaptation according to audience demographics.

- Larger and more diversified sample sizes will increase generalizability.
- Platform-specific research to better understand trust processes across diverse social networks.
- Longitudinal investigation to see how influencer trust changes over time.
- The impact of AI and machine learning on personalized marketing and trust building.
- Cross-cultural analyses are used to compare trust attitudes across regions.

5.7 Final Thoughts

This study underscores the importance of authenticity, transparency, and ethical marketing in cultivating consumer trust in digital environments. As social media evolves, businesses, influencers, and platforms must modify their strategies to align with customers' increasing demands for transparency, data security, and substantive interaction. Executing the recommendations outlined in this report can assist digital marketers in cultivating robust, trustworthy relationships with their audiences, thereby enhancing brand loyalty and sustaining long-term customer engagement.

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