

Social media marketing and consumer purchase decisions: A preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses (PRISMA) based systematic review of marketing strategies, consumer trust, and brand loyalty

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ABSTRACT

Social media marketing has become a critical digital marketing strategy for influencing consumer purchase decisions; however, existing evidence remains fragmented regarding the relative effectiveness of different social media marketing strategies and the roles of consumer trust and loyalty. Previous reviews have largely focused on isolated dimensions, such as influencer marketing, customer engagement, or trust in social commerce, providing limited integrated evidence on the broader influence of social media marketing. This study systematically reviewed empirical evidence published between 2020 and 2025 to identify the most effective social media marketing strategies and examine how consumer trust and loyalty influence consumer purchase decisions. The review was guided by the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) Theory and followed the PRISMA 2020 guidelines. A total of 19,948 records were identified from Scopus, Google Scholar, Emerald Insight, and SpringerLink, of which 32 empirical studies met the inclusion criteria after systematic screening, eligibility assessment, and methodological quality appraisal using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) (2018). Thematic synthesis identified two overarching themes. First, social media marketing activities, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), influencer marketing, consumer engagement and personalization, and brand image were the most effective strategies influencing consumer purchase decisions. Second, brand trust, brand loyalty, consumer trust, and information credibility emerged as the principal mechanisms linking social media marketing to purchasing behaviour, with brand trust representing the most consistent pathway. This review provides an updated synthesis of recent empirical evidence, extends existing literature by integrating multiple social media marketing strategies and trust-related mechanisms within a single review, and offers evidence-based guidance for researchers and practitioners seeking to enhance consumer purchase decisions through social media marketing. The study concludes that integrated, informative, interactive, credible, and trust-oriented social media marketing strategies can strengthen consumer purchase decisions, while organizations should tailor these strategies to their target audiences, products, and market contexts. Future research should employ longitudinal and mixed-method designs and examine emerging social media technologies and contextual factors to strengthen understanding of consumer behaviour.

Keywords: Brand Loyalty; Consumer Purchase Decisions; Consumer Trust; Marketing Strategies, Social Media Marketing

I. INTRODUCTION

Social media has changed the world of marketing as it has moved business–consumer interaction from a broadcast model to an interactive, relationship-based one. Social media marketing is a strategic element of digital marketing today, enabling companies to distribute information, engage with customers, foster user-generated content, and develop lasting relationships via platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and X (Twitter) (Hanaysha, 2022; Manzoor et al., 2020). The growing global adoption of the internet and the use of smart phones have made social media a key source for organisations to sway consumers' buying behaviour and enhance their competitive edge.

Due to the increasing significance of social media marketing, a large body of literature exists examining the impact of social media marketing on consumer behavior. Social Media Marketing (SMM) is generally found to have a positive impact on purchase intention as well as through interactive marketing activities, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) marketing, influencer marketing, consumer engagement, and brand image (Leong et al., 2021; Zhao et al., 2020; Hasan & Sohail, 2021; Alnaser et al., 2024). There is conflicting evidence in the Literature on the relative effectiveness of these strategies, however. Some research points to the informative and interactive nature of content as the most significant factors impacting the intention to purchase (Hanaysha, 2022; Thomas, 2024), while others highlight the importance of the credibility of influencers, eWOM, or personalized engagement (Özbölük & Akdoğan, 2022; Babu et al., 2024; Deepika & Massand, 2025). Likewise, scholars also have varying views on the contribution of the brand constructs: one study found that brand image plays a more consistent and significant role than brand awareness in purchasing (Ali & Naushad, 2023) while another study indicated the opposite (Ardiansyah & Sarwoko, 2020).

In addition to marketing strategies, recent studies have identified that consumer trust and loyalty are important mechanisms explaining how social media marketing is related to purchase decisions. It has been found that social media marketing enhances the trust in brands, consumer trust, credibility of information and brand loyalty, which further boosts consumers' confidence and purchase intention (Azhar et al., 2023; Karunasingha & Abeysekera, 2022; Walean et al., 2025). However, the relative significance of these pathways is yet to be confirmed, with some research suggesting that brand trust is the stronger link to consider, while others indicate that information credibility or consumer loyalty may be more important factors in purchase behaviour (Leong et al., 2021; Ngo et al., 2024; Shian et al., 2025). Such inconsistencies highlight the need for a synthesis of the recent empirical evidence.

While there have been a number of evidence syntheses that have focused on parts of this topic, they are limited. Previous studies have been conducted on influencer marketing (Kanaveedu & Kalapurackal, 2022), credibility of social media influencers (Sesar et al., 2022), influencers' role in customer engagement and purchase intention (Ao et al., 2023), or trust in social commerce (Wang et al., 2022; Lăzăroiu et al., 2020). As a result, there has been little focus on integrating the overall impact of social media marketing tactics on consumers' buying decisions, while also analyzing the importance of consumer trust and loyalty. This gap is significant especially in the context of the social media platforms and digital consumer behaviour which is developing at an increasing pace between 2019 and 2025.

This systematic review aims to fill these gaps by pulling together evidence from 32 empirical studies published from 2020 to 2025 following Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA). The study concentrates on empirical research analyzing the impact of social media marketing on purchase decision with a special consideration of social media marketing strategies that have the most significant effect on purchase decision and the role of consumer trust and consumer loyalty in social media marketing. Through the incorporation of evidence from a broad range of industries and geographic locations, the review offers an up-to-date view of recent advances in social media marketing, expands on existing knowledge beyond the scope of single-topic reviews, and offers evidence-based guidance for researchers and practitioners who want to create more successful digital marketing strategies.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Despite the widespread adoption of social media marketing by businesses, organizations continue to face challenges in identifying the strategies that most effectively influence consumer purchase decisions and build consumer trust and loyalty (Hanaysha, 2022; Hasan & Sohail, 2021). Although empirical studies consistently report positive effects of social media marketing, the evidence is dispersed across different industries, platforms, and geographical contexts, with studies emphasizing different marketing strategies and behavioural mechanisms (Leong et al., 2021; Zhao et al., 2020; Azhar et al., 2023). Consequently, marketers lack a consolidated evidence base to guide strategic decision-making, which may result in ineffective allocation of marketing resources and reduced returns on social media marketing investments.

Previous evidence syntheses have examined specific aspects of social media marketing, including influencer marketing (Kanaveedu & Kalapurackal, 2022), influencer credibility (Sesar et al., 2022), customer engagement (Ao et al., 2023), and trust in social commerce (Wang et al., 2022; Lăzăroiu et al., 2020). However, these reviews primarily focused on individual dimensions of social media marketing rather than synthesizing the broader empirical evidence on which social media marketing strategies most effectively influence consumer purchase decisions while simultaneously examining the roles of consumer trust and loyalty. Therefore, this systematic review addresses these gaps by synthesizing empirical evidence published between 2020 and 2025 to identify the most effective social media marketing strategies influencing consumer purchase decisions and to examine how consumer trust and loyalty shape this relationship. By addressing these gaps, this review provides an updated and comprehensive understanding of consumer behaviour in social media marketing. The findings contribute to digital marketing literature and provide evidence-based insights for practitioners seeking to design more effective social media marketing strategies.

1.2 Research Objectives

- i. To identify the social media marketing strategies that most effectively influence consumer purchase decisions.
- ii. To examine how consumer trust and loyalty influence the relationship between social media marketing and consumer purchase decisions.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

This study is based on the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) Theory originally developed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974). The theory is that it is the external environment stimuli (Stimulus) that affect the cognition and emotions (Organism) of the individual, which in turn determine the behavioral response (Response) (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). The SOR theory is applied in marketing to understand how stimuli in the environment affect consumer

perception, attitude and emotion, which in turn affect their buying behavior (Riaz et al., 2021; John et al., 2025). In this research, these marketing strategies in social media (social media marketing activities, eWOM, influencer marketing, consumer engagement, personalisation, and brand image) are considered as stimuli. The organism is consumer trust and brand loyalty, which is consumers' internal psychological assessment and emotional reaction to such marketing stimuli. This creates a reaction, which shows in consumer buying.

Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that the theory could explain why, and how, social media marketing can have an impact on consumers' purchasing behavior through trust and loyalty factors (Azhar et al., 2023; Riaz et al., 2021). The SOR theory was chosen as it provides a complete understanding of consumer behaviour by incorporating external marketing stimuli, internal psychological processes and behavioural consequences. This is especially pertinent to the domains of digital marketing and social media platforms, where consumer behaviour, perceptions, and trust are key determinants in their purchasing decisions (John et al., 2025; Walean et al., 2025). However, there are some drawbacks to the SOR theory. While the theory assumes that consumer behaviour goes from stimulus to response in a fairly linear manner, consumer decision-making could be modified by other factors like cultural differences, individual characteristics, technological changes, etc. (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Moreover, the theory doesn't take into consideration the dynamic and interactive nature of social media platforms, where the consumers can also be information receivers and content creators. However, SOR theory can be still used as a theoretical lens in this study since it is suitable to understand the relationship between SMM, consumer trust and consumer loyalty and how it can influence consumer purchasing decisions.

2.2 Empirical Literature Review

2.2.1 Social Media Marketing Strategies Influencing Consumer Purchase Decisions

The various studies consistently show that SMM has a positive impact on consumer buying behavior, though there are variations in the levels of effectiveness among the marketing strategies. Empirically, it has been found that in different countries and industries, social media marketing activities, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), influencer marketing, consumers' engagement, personalization and brand related factors are important determinants of consumer purchasing behaviour.

The majority studies conclude that SMM that is informative, interactive and personalized has a huge positive impact on consumer purchasing decisions. Similarly, in a quantitative survey conducted in Malaysia, Hasan and Sohail (2021) discovered that social media marketing had a positive impact on consumers' buying decision of both local and overseas brands. Likewise, Hanaysha (2022) found that informative and interactive social media marketing features play a significant role in improving purchase decisions with the aid of brand trust among fast-food consumers in Malaysia using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). Alnaser et al. (2024) and Ali and Naushad (2023) found similar results in Palestine and India respectively, suggesting that social media marketing enhances consumers' intention to buy through brand perceptions.

The relevance of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is also found to be quite similar across studies. Consistent with Leong et al. (2021) in Malaysia, Ngo et al. (2024) in Vietnam, and Zhao et al. (2020) in China, information quality, credibility, and information adoption are found to significantly impact purchase intention. Similarly, Winarno and Indrawati (2022) and Jasin (2022) found that eWOM positively influences purchase intention both directly and indirectly via brand image. Evidence about the influencer marketing is also predominantly positive; both Özbölük and Akdoğan (2022) in Türkiye and Babu et al. (2024) in India reported that the credibility of influencers significantly affects purchase intent, especially among the Generation Z. This is consistent with Nofela (2022) who found that influencer endorsers have a significant effect on purchase intention on TikTok Shop.

However, there is some controversy over the relative effect of the various marketing strategies. Though Hanaysha (2022) found there is no significant difference between entertainment content and purchase decisions, Deepika and Massand (2025) found entertainment as part of the purchase intention of the Gen Z customers. Likewise, Ardiansyah and Sarwoko (2020) stated that brand awareness alone was not enough to understand their purchasing decisions, while Ali and Naushad (2023) and Sanny et al. (2020) indicated that brand image had the greatest influence on purchasing behaviour.

The methodologically sound empirical evidence was seen in that the majority of the studies used quantitative survey designs with large samples and advanced analytical techniques, like SEM and PLS-SEM, which strengthened the reliability of the relationships reported. But the evidence also has a number of limitations. The majority studies on this topic were conducted using a cross-sectional design and non-probability sampling, which prevented the development of causal conclusions and made the results difficult to generalize. In addition, a number of studies were specific to a product, an industry or a country, limiting the generalization of the results to other consumer markets. The empirical findings suggest that social media marketing affects consumers' buying decisions in a positive manner by using various strategies, which can complement each other. The present review, however, addresses these differences in the relative effectiveness of specific strategies and their context applicability by synthesizing recent empirical evidence into one comprehensive review.

2.2.2 Consumer Trust and Loyalty in Social Media Marketing

Consumer confidence and consumer loyalty are consistently singled out as a key pathway by which social media marketing impacts on purchases. The literature reviewed shows that trust in the literature is generally considered to have a positive impact on the consumer's confidence in the brand and online shopping environment, resulting in greater intentions to purchase and longer-term consumer relationships. Brand trust was consistently found to be the main mediating process in several studies. In Pakistan, Manzoor et al. (2020), in Malaysia Hanaysha (2022), and in Bangladesh Azhar et al. (2023) reported that social media marketing helps to build brand trust and consequently to increase purchase intention. Karunasingha and Abeysekera (2022) found similar results in Sri Lanka and Chan et al. (2020) showed that consumer trust has a significant positive impact on consumer online buying. Research has also shown that brand loyalty will enhance the long-term effectiveness of social media marketing. Walean et al. (2025) conducted a study in Indonesia and revealed that social media marketing can help create greater brand loyalty, which in turn helps support purchasing decisions and repeat buying behavior. Kurniawan and Tanujaya (2024) and Shian et al. (2025) also discovered similar findings.

Trustability of information was also identified as a key factor in credibility. Credible and useful online information positively contributes to consumer trust and purchase intention, as shown in the studies of Leong et al. (2021), Ngo et al. (2024), and Zhao et al. (2020). In the same vein, Özbölük and Akdoğan (2022) discovered that the credibility of influencers significantly enhances the confidence of consumers in their recommendations. However, there is disagreement about which is the prevailing trust mechanism. Some studies cited brand trust as the most important determinant of purchase intention, others mentioned consumer trust, while information credibility or brand loyalty were the most important determinants per study context and product category. The distinctions indicate that trust mechanisms can vary between industries and electronic environments, and not be the same in each consumer context.

The empirical study has a number of methodological strengths, such as the use of validated measurement scales, large sample sizes and sophisticated analysis techniques. But most used cross-sectional survey designs which precluded causal inferences, and most used convenience samples, which also affect external validity. In addition, few studies examined long-term consumer behaviour and new social media. The empirical literature shows that trust and loyalty play a key role in the relationship between social media marketing and consumers' purchasing decisions. The present systematic review aims to fill this gap, though, as evidenced by the lack of studies focusing on particular constructs and their relative impacts, as well as the predominance of context-specific studies, a comprehensive synthesis of recent empirical evidence across industries and geographical settings is needed.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a systematic literature review design guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 framework to synthesize empirical evidence on the influence of social media marketing on consumer purchase decisions. The four PRISMA stages, identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion, were followed as recommended by Page et al. (2021) to ensure a transparent, systematic, and reproducible review process while minimizing selection bias. The identification stage involved a structured search of four electronic databases: Scopus, Google Scholar, Emerald Insight, and SpringerLink. The search focused on empirical studies published between 2020 and 2025 to capture recent developments in social media marketing and consumer behaviour. Database-specific search strings were developed using Boolean operators (AND, OR) and adapted to the indexing requirements of each database. The primary search string used was: ("social media marketing" OR "social media" OR "digital marketing") AND ("purchase decision" OR "purchase intention" OR "consumer behavior" OR "buying behavior") AND ("consumer trust" OR "brand trust" OR "brand loyalty" OR "customer loyalty"). Minor modifications were applied where necessary to improve retrieval across individual databases.

The screening was done by the researcher based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Screening was done in two phases. Titles and abstracts were first screened to determine potentially relevant studies. Second, the full texts of articles were assessed to decide whether they met the criteria for inclusion. The studies included had to be (i) written in English, (ii) empirical journal articles, (iii) investigate the effect of SMM on consumer purchase decisions, purchase intention, consumer trust, brand loyalty, and (iv) published between 2020 and 2025. Review papers, conceptual papers, conference papers, book chapters, editorials, dissertations, duplicate publications, non-English research papers and papers that provided insufficient methodological information were excluded. The predefined screening criteria were applied in a consistent manner during the review process.

The methodological quality of included studies was appraised by using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) (2018). The research designs of all studies included were quantitative, so the quantitative MMAT criteria were used. First, each study underwent a review with the two MMAT screening questions to ensure that the study was appropriate for appraisal. Eligible studies were then appraised using five methodological quality criteria (S1-S5) that evaluate the appropriateness of the sampling strategy, representativeness of the sample, measurements adequacy, risk

of non-response bias and appropriateness of statistical analysis (Hong et al., 2018). All criteria were scored as "Yes" or "No" and results were recorded in a standardized quality appraisal table highlighting the study design, screening questions, each criterion, overall quality assessment and remarks. The quality appraisal was done to assess the methodological rigor of the included studies and to inform in the interpretation of the synthesized results, and not to exclude studies from the review.

To achieve uniformity in data collection, a standardized data extraction form was created. Details collected from each study comprised author(s), year, country, context of the study, study design, sample characteristics, theoretical framework, variables studied, analytical techniques, and findings and conclusions. Thematic synthesis proposed by Thomas and Harden (2008) was used to synthesize the data extracted. Study findings were first coded then thematic development was done both descriptively and analytically according to the study objectives. The synthesized findings were then grouped into two main themes: (i) strategies that affect consumer purchase decisions in relation to social media marketing and (ii) the role of consumer trust and loyalty in social media marketing. Additionally, a comparative analysis was used to highlight the agreements and disagreements, strengths and weaknesses in methodology of the included studies. The included studies showed significant variations in study settings, research designs, measurement instruments, methods of analyses, and outcome variables, and it was not possible to perform a formal meta-analysis. Therefore, a qualitative thematic synthesis was seen as the best approach to synthesising and interpreting the empirical evidences.

The study selection process has been described with the PRISMA 2020 flow diagram showing the number of records identified, screened, excluded and included at each stage of the study selection procedure. A similar approach was used by (Jonas, 2025). Ethical issues were considered, with all sources accurately cited and full credit given to original authors and use of academic honesty principles followed. Only published secondary data was used in the review, so no ethical approval/ informed consent was necessary. This review has a number of drawbacks. Single reviewer bias could occur in the screening, study selection, data extraction and quality appraisal despite the use of pre-defined protocols and standard procedures. Second, language bias and exclusion of other than English publications might have led to the omission of relevant studies published in other languages. Third, as only empirical studies published from 2020 to 2025 were included in the review, this may restrict historical comparisons. Finally, the included studies were heterogeneous, and it was not possible to calculate pooled effect sizes across studies. The reviewers used the PRISMA framework and quality assessment using the MMAT to perform the review systematically, which improves the transparency, reliability, and credibility of the review findings.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings

4.1.1 Study Selection

The study selection process followed the PRISMA 2020 guidelines. After screening the retrieved records and assessing full-text articles against the predefined eligibility criteria, 3 empirical studies published between 2019 and 2025 were included in the qualitative synthesis. Studies were excluded if they were review or conceptual papers, duplicate publications, non-English articles, or did not directly examine the influence of social media marketing on consumer purchase decisions. The selection process is presented in the PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1)

4.1.2 Quality Appraisal of Included Studies

Methodological quality was assessed using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT, 2018). Most included studies demonstrated moderate to high methodological quality. Common strengths included clearly defined research objectives, appropriate quantitative survey designs, and robust statistical analyses such as Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM), regression analysis, and path analysis. The most common methodological limitation was the use of convenience or purposive sampling, which may limit the generalizability of findings. Furthermore, relatively few studies explicitly discussed nonresponse bias. Nevertheless, the overall methodological quality was considered sufficient to support thematic synthesis.

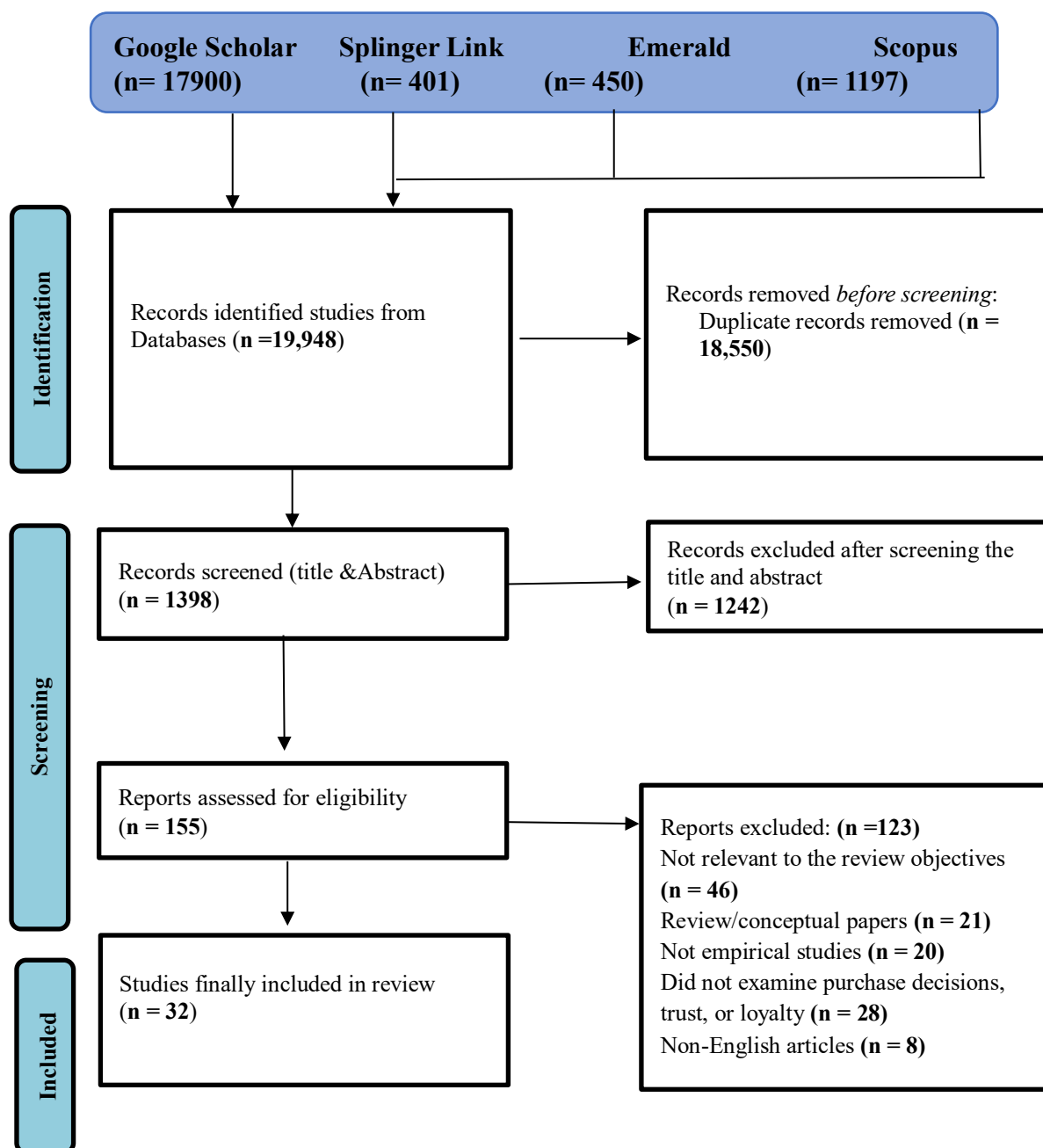


Figure 1

PRISMA Flow diagram of the article's selection process.

Source: Author's Construct (Page et al., 2021)

4.1.3 Thematic Synthesis

Social Media Marketing Strategies that Influence Consumer Purchase Decisions: Thematic synthesis revealed five interrelated strategies of social media marketing which affect the purchase decision of consumers in the studies included. These strategies include social media marketing activities, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), influencer marketing, consumer engagement and personalization, and brand image and brand awareness. While the strategies were explored in various industries, consumer groups, and geographical contexts, the evidence consistently demonstrates that the strategies have a positive effect on consumers' purchase intentions and purchase decisions in various but complementary ways. The combination of these themes highlights that the value of social media marketing goes beyond promotional communication as it enables the exchange of information, reinforces brand perceptions, and builds consumers' confidence during the purchase decision.

Social Media Marketing Activities: The most consistent activity that crossed the studies included in this report affecting consumer purchases was social media marketing. The evidence suggests that marketing activities through social media, such as providing information, facilitating interactive communications, creating relevant ads, customization and entertainment, overall have a positive effect on consumers purchase intention and purchase decisions. It was noticed that this relationship exists across many different industries, such as cosmetics, skincare, tourism, retail, food services, shopping malls, social commerce, and e-commerce and indicates that social media marketing activities are effective in different market contexts (Alnaser et al., 2024; Harvina et al., 2022; Dai et al., 2024; Sanny et al., 2020; Hanaysha, 2022; Raniya et al., 2023; Jasin, 2022; Manzoor et al., 2020).

The most constant dimension of social media marketing in all the synthesized evidence is informative content that is relevant. Interactive communication and customized marketing messages were also found to be closely related to a higher purchase intention, suggesting that consumers react more positively to marketing activities they can actively participate in and that are providing useful information. Although entertainment was also found in a few studies as a part of social media marketing, it is less consistently connected with purchase decisions than informational and interactive (Hanaysha, 2022; Deepika & Massand, 2025; Thomas, 2024; Walean et al., 2025).

The results also show that there are direct and indirect effects of the consumer purchase decision towards social media marketing activities. Several studies found that social media marketing activities had a direct and significant association with purchase intention, while other studies showed that the activities of SMM had an indirect impact by strengthening consumers' evaluations of brands and purchasing environments before impacting purchase intentions (Ali & Naushad, 2023; Azhar et al., 2023; Harvina et al., 2022; Shian et al., 2025). As a whole, the synthesized evidence reveals that the main strategic factor underpinning purchase decisions of consumers is social media marketing activities, which is the platform for other factors synthesized in this review to be played. **Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM):** Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) became an important tool for consumer buying decision. The studies included here show that users' generated content, online reviews, recommendations, and sharing of their experiences serve as a major basis for their assessment of products or services when using social media. In all the evidence, eWOM had a positive impact on purchase intention, by making product-related information more available, credible, and useful (Leong et al., 2021; Zhao et al., 2020; Ngo et al., 2024; Winarno & Indrawati, 2022; Jasin, 2022).

The synthesis also reveals that the quality and credibility of information being shared, is a significant determinant of the effectiveness of eWOM. The importance of information quality, credibility, relevance and usefulness continued to come out as the most prominent information properties that affect consumers' intention to purchase online information. Additionally, several studies found that the information adoption is another key behavioural consequence that mediated the relationship between high-quality eWOM and purchase intention. It indicated that the consumers not only accessed the information but also evaluated it and used it to inform their purchasing decisions (Leong et al., 2021; Ngo et al., 2024; Zhao et al., 2020).

Thus, the results suggest that eWOM is one of the key social media marketing strategies since it provides consumers with credible peer-generated information to support their informed decision-making. **Influencer Marketing:** Another key strategy that impacted consumer buying decisions is the rise of influencer marketing, especially in digital or social commerce. The results of synthesized evidence suggest that the credibility of influencers is the main determinant of effectiveness of an influencer marketing. When influencers are seen as credible, authentic, and knowledgeable, consumers are more likely to make a purchase, underscoring the significance of source credibility in social media marketing (Özbölük & Akdoğan, 2022; Babu et al., 2024).

The results also indicate that the relationship set up by the influencers and consumers enhances the influencer marketing. Research on influencer characteristics found that consumers' purchase intentions were positively affected by their psychological proximity to the influencers, inspiration, and credibility, but that some influencer characteristics did not have the same effect on all consumer groups. The evidence suggests that overall, influencer marketing does aid in the buying process of consumers when the influencer is viewed as credible and reliable in terms of providing information about a product. **Engagement and Personalization:** Consumer engagement and personalization were

identified as complementary strategies that will make the social media marketing more effective. The studies included in this paper consistently show that interactive communication, personalized messages, and active consumer participation enhance consumers' purchase intention by making marketing messages more relevant and increasing consumers' engagement with brands (Thomas, 2024; Matin et al., 2020; John et al., 2025; Deepika & Massand, 2025; Dai et al., 2024).

In all of the studies that were reviewed, the need for personalized marketing content came up again and again as one of the top factors that influenced people to buy. The consumers were more receptive to marketing activities designed to their interests, preferences and information needs, as opposed to the marketing messages sent to everyone. Consequently, engaging consumers by communicating with them, involving them in online communities and engaging in B2C relationship also always increased consumers' willingness to buy products via social media. So the research shows that personalization and engagement are a powerful way to enhance the effectiveness of social media marketing by fostering more meaningful interactions with the consumer and the brand. Brand Image and Brand Awareness: Important brand outcomes related to social media marketing strategies were brand image and brand awareness. In all the studies included, social media marketing improved the brand image of the consumers, which in turn led to an increased purchase intention and purchase decision. These results indicate that social media marketing is not just a tool for conveying product-related information but also influences positive consumer attitudes towards brands in various market situations (Ali & Naushad, 2023; Harvina et al., 2022; Jasin, 2022; Sanny et al., 2020; Kurniawan & Tanujaya, 2024).

The data on brand awareness was less consistent. While overall there was a positive impact on the brand awareness, the effect on purchasing was not consistent in the studies included. One of the findings in particular was that raising brand awareness is not necessarily correlated with an increase in purchase intention, meaning that brand awareness is an important initial outcome of social media marketing, but it is not enough to directly impact consumer purchasing behaviour (Ardiansyah & Sarwoko, 2020). The Role of Consumer Trust and Loyalty in Social Media Marketing: The thematic synthesis resulted in four interrelated mechanisms between social media marketing and consumer trust and brand loyalty: brand trust, brand loyalty, consumer trust, and information credibility. Overall, the results suggest that social media marketing is not just about promoting products; it's about building trust and trustworthy relationship with consumers. All the studies included in the review consistently found that these mechanisms increased purchase intention and purchase decisions, although in some contexts and in some industries they were more important than others.

Brand Trust: The mechanism that proved to be the most powerful in the relationship between SM marketing and consumer purchasing decisions was brand trust. The evidence consistently indicated that the brand trust was reinforced by social media marketing by creating informative content, interactive communication, credible information and positive brand experiences. Higher brand trust was then found to be correlated with higher purchase intention in various industries, such as cosmetics, skin care, tourism, retail, fast food or social commerce (Azhar et al., 2023; Hanaysha, 2022; Harvina et al., 2022; Sanny et al., 2020; Shian et al., 2025 or Chan et al., 2020).

Results also revealed that brand trust was often a mediating link between social media marketing and purchase results. Social media marketing did not directly influence consumers' behaviours, but increased their purchase intention by first building their confidence in brands (Karunasingha & Abeysekera, 2022; Manzoor et al., 2020; Zhao et al., 2020; Alnaser et al., 2024). Brand trust overall was the most consistent construct related to trust found in the literature reviewed. **Brand Loyalty:** Another major result of a successful social media marketing was brand loyalty. The evidence synthesis reveals that social media marketing can increase brand loyalty by sustaining the engagement of the consumers and maintaining positive brand relationships. Positive relationship between increased brand loyalty and stronger purchase intention and repeat purchasing behaviour was observed in all market conditions (Azhar et al., 2023; Walean et al., 2025; Kurniawan & Tanujaya, 2024; Shian et al., 2025; Khan et al., 2021). Brand loyalty was also found in several studies to be in tandem with brand trust, further enhancing consumers' purchase intent and commitment to brands. Loyalty was explored as a mediator and an outcome, and the overall results showed that brand loyalty was always associated with better consumer purchasing behaviour.

Consumer Trust: In addition to trust towards brands, the synthesis revealed that trust is a significant outcome of social media marketing environments. According to the studies examined, this confidence was boosted with transparent communication, information and interactive experiences and supportive online communities. The findings were generally that more consumers trust took to greater purchase intentions, in different digital marketing settings (Manzoor et al., 2020; Chan et al., 2020; Matin et al., 2020; Raniya et al., 2023). The results also indicate that brand interactions, online communities and social commerce engagement reinforced consumer trust and helped to reduce uncertainty and increase consumer confidence in online purchases.

Information Credibility: Another mechanism found to be important in building consumer trust in social media marketing is information credibility. In all the studies included, consumers were more likely to trust and take action on social media if they found the information to be accurate, credible, relevant, and useful. Information quality and

credibility consistently improved purchase intention especially in the research on electronic word of mouth (eWOM) and online consumer reviews (Leong et al., 2021; Ngo et al., 2024; Zhao et al., 2020).

In the same vein, research on influencer marketing revealed that source credibility facilitated consumers' trust in product recommendations and had a positive impact on purchase intention (Özbölük & Akdoğan, 2022; Babu et al., 2024). In conclusion, the results suggest that credible information is a key element in building consumer trust and enhancing the effectiveness of social media marketing. Thematic synthesis showed that social media marketing is a factor that can impact consumer buying decision by creating several types of trust and loyalty. Out of the found mechanisms, brand trust was the most consistently supported mechanism, followed by brand loyalty, consumer trust, and information credibility. These mechanisms combine to boost consumer trust toward brands and online buying contexts, so as to enhance purchase intentions and consumer–brand relationships.

4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 Social Media Marketing Strategies Influencing Consumer Purchase Decisions

The review shows that social media marketing strategies are always found to affect the purchase decision of the consumers; informative and interactive marketing activities, electronic word of mouth (eWOM), influencer marketing, consumer engagement and personalization, and positive brand image are found to be the most effective strategies in the studies included. These findings taken together suggest that consumers are more positive towards marketing strategies that offer credible information, allow interaction and evoke meaningful brand experiences as opposed to purely promotional messages. In all of the evidence reviewed, information-, interaction- and relationship-building strategies were found to be more strongly associated with purchase intention than passive, entertainment marketing activities. This means social media is no longer seen as just an advertising platform, but consumers have come to see it as an information and engagement platform.

The results mostly agree with other studies not covered by this review. For instance, Kanaveedu and Kalapurackal (2022) mention in their systematic review that influencer marketing and consumer engagement are important factors affecting consumers' behaviour and Lăzăroiu et al. (2020) point to online trust, perceived risk, and social commerce interactions as important determinants of purchasing behaviour. While generally, social media marketing has a positive effect, a differential effect was found on the effectiveness of certain strategies. Informative, interactive, and personalized content consistently evidenced stronger influence on purchase intention (Hanaysha, 2022; Thomas, 2024; Deepika & Massand, 2025), while entertaining content in some contexts significantly influenced purchase intention or had no effect at all (Hanaysha, 2022). Likewise, while social media marketing generally improved brand awareness, its impact on buying decisions was not always as consistent as brand image (Ali & Naushad, 2023; Ardiansyah & Sarwoko, 2020; Sanny et al., 2020), suggesting that the efficacy of certain social media marketing tactics might vary depending on the type of product and the market conditions.

The results may be explained by the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theory which suggests that an external stimulus in the environment affects a person's internal appraisal, which, in turn, affects the person's response. In this review, social media marketing strategies are considered as the stimuli, which affect consumers' cognitive and emotional evaluations through information quality, engagement, brand image and e-word of mouth. These internal assessments, in turn, lead to the behavioural outcome in terms of purchase intention and purchase decisions. The similarities found across industries and geographic areas makes the SOR framework appropriate to explain consumer behaviours in SMM settings. This review adds to the literature by synthesizing the findings of the recent empirical studies that suggest that several social media marketing strategies act in a complementary, not in an independent way, in order to affect consumers' purchase decisions. The synthesis does not reveal a single dominant strategy, but rather the impact each has on the others, and how combined, informative content, credible peer communication, interactive engagement, personalisation and positive brand perceptions generate effective purchasing outcomes.

From a practical point of view, the findings indicate that integrated social media marketing strategies based on the premise of high-quality information and consumer interaction, enabling creation of authentic user-generated content and enhancing the brand image are to be used for the benefit of the organizations. Complementary strategies are more likely to positively influence purchase intention and increase the effectiveness of digital marketing under various market conditions for businesses that focus on these strategies.

4.2.2 The Role of Consumer Trust and Loyalty in Social Media Marketing

The results show that social media marketing exerts an impact on consumers' purchase decisions, and brand trust, brand loyalty, consumer trust and information credibility are found to be important mechanisms in this relationship. Of these, brand trust was the most consistent pathway; meaning that successful social media marketing has a positive impact on consumers' level of trust in brands, which in turn increases their intention to purchase and leads to long-term loyalty. This means that social media marketing is best when it's not just about brand awareness, it's about building trust-based relationships. The results agree with prior research which highlighted the importance of trust and loyalty in the social media marketing. For instance, Sohail et al. (2020) reveal that there is a significant

positive relationship between social media marketing and brand trust as well as brand loyalty, and Jibril et al. (2019) show that online brand communities build consumer-brand loyalty through social media usage. Likewise, the study of Banerji and Singh (2024) found that social media marketing activities encourage customer loyalty in the ecommerce industry, and the study of Uthman and Marie (2025) revealed that trust, commitment, and customer satisfaction contribute to customer loyalty. All of these studies agree with this review and reveal that regardless of the industry or geographical location, trust and loyalty are key results of successful social media marketing.

Some differences were found in terms of how trust and loyalty affect consumer behaviour, however. Although the majority of studies showed that brand trust is the major mediator between social media marketing and purchase intention (e.g., Azhar et al., 2023; Harvina et al., 2022; Shian et al., 2025), consumer trust, information credibility, or brand loyalty were found to be more significant paths under specific marketing situations (e.g., Ngo et al., 2024; Zhao et al., 2020; Walean et al., 2025). These differences indicate that the relative importance of the trust-related mechanisms might not be the same across industries, products and social media settings. The results have shown that it is in line with the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theory that external marketing stimuli affects consumers' internal psychological state before their behaviours are induced. In this review social media marketing activities will be identified as external stimuli which will further increase the consumers' trust, loyalty and confidence, which in turn will lead to positive purchasing behaviour. The findings thus provide additional evidence for the SOR framework as a model that explains the relationship between social media marketing and consumer buying decisions via psychological responses.

This review adds to the literature, as it incorporates new empirical findings and makes the point that trust and loyalty can be thought of as complementary mechanisms rather than separated results of SMM. The review offers a more holistic picture of the psychological mechanisms underlying the effects of social media marketing on consumer buying behaviours, by combining evidence from various sectors and nations. Practically speaking, the results indicate a need to emphasize strategies that can help organizations engage consumers in a way that increases trust and long-term loyalty based on transparent communication, credible content, authentic engagement and consistent brand experiences. These will probably result in a boost of consumer confidence, purchase intent, and sustainable consumer relationships.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This systematic review aimed to analyse the impact of social media marketing on consumer purchasing decision by synthesising evidence from 32 empirical studies published between 2019 and 2025. The results show that all social media marketing elements are important in determining consumers' purchasing behaviour, and that informative and interactive social media activities, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) social media, influencer marketing, consumer engagement and personalization, and positive brand image are the most important ones that affect consumers' purchase intention and purchase decisions. Together, these strategies improve the consumer's ability to get information, interact with brands, and assess products – and purchase them.

The review has also revealed that brand trust, brand loyalty, consumer trust and information credibility are key mechanisms that affect consumer behaviour in the context of social media marketing. Of these, brand trust proved to be the most stable relationship between SMM and purchase intention, and brand loyalty strengthened the relationship between consumers and brands. Altogether, these insights emphasize that successful social media marketing is not just about promotion; it's about establishing trust, credibility, and authentic connections with consumers. This review article makes a valuable and important contribution to the literature that synthesizes recent empirical findings from a variety of sectors and locations. The results provide feedback for researchers looking to further develop research on digital consumer behaviour and for practitioners looking to create better social media marketing strategies. Organizations that focus on integrated marketing activities that foster trust, engagement, and positive brand perceptions can reinforce consumer purchase decisions and cultivate long-term, sustainable relationships with customers.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this systematic review, organizations should adopt integrated social media marketing strategies that combine informative and interactive content, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), influencer marketing, personalization, and consumer engagement to strengthen consumer purchase decisions. Marketers should prioritize transparent communication, credible information, authentic interactions, and positive user-generated content to build brand trust and loyalty, which emerged as important mechanisms linking social media marketing with consumer purchasing behaviour. Organizations should also monitor online reviews and consumer feedback and tailor their social media strategies to the characteristics of their target audiences, product categories, and market contexts, given that the effectiveness of specific strategies varies across consumer segments and settings.

From a theoretical perspective, future research should continue applying the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theory to explain how social media marketing stimuli influence consumers' internal psychological responses and subsequent purchase decisions. Researchers should also extend existing theoretical models by examining additional mediating and moderating factors, including perceived value, brand attachment, consumer engagement, cultural differences, and platform characteristics. Such extensions could provide a more comprehensive explanation of the psychological and contextual mechanisms underlying consumer behaviour in social media environments.

Future research should employ longitudinal and mixed-method research designs to examine how the influence of social media marketing on consumer purchase decisions develops over time and to provide deeper insights into underlying behavioural mechanisms. Further research should also investigate emerging social media technologies and platform features, including artificial intelligence-driven marketing and social commerce, and examine how they interact with consumer trust and loyalty. Comparative research across different countries, cultures, generations, industries, and social media platforms would further strengthen the generalizability of evidence and clarify contextual differences in the effectiveness of social media marketing strategies.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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