

Social Media Marketing Strategies and Customer Engagement Effects on Purchase Intention in Online Business

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ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of digital platforms has transformed social media into a strategic marketing channel that significantly influences consumer behavior in online business environments. This study examines the relationship between social media marketing strategies and purchase intention, with customer engagement acting as a mediating variable. Using a quantitative research approach, data were collected from active social media users through an online questionnaire and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results indicate that social media marketing strategies positively and significantly affect both customer engagement and purchase intention. Additionally, customer engagement strongly influences purchase intention and partially mediates the relationship between social media marketing and purchasing behavior. These findings underscore the importance of designing interactive, credible, and value-oriented marketing content to strengthen consumer engagement and drive purchasing outcomes. The study offers theoretical contributions to digital marketing literature and practical implications for online businesses aiming to enhance marketing effectiveness and customer conversion rates in an increasingly competitive digital marketplace.

Keywords:

Social Media
Marketing, Customer
Engagement, Purchase
Intention, Online
Business

INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of digital technology and internet accessibility has transformed the landscape of modern business, particularly in the e-commerce sector. Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and X (formerly Twitter) have evolved from communication tools into strategic marketing ecosystems where brands interact directly with consumers (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2019). Online businesses increasingly rely on social media marketing (SMM) to build brand presence, reach target audiences, and influence purchasing behavior more efficiently compared to traditional marketing channels (Chaffey & Smith, 2022). As consumer behavior moves toward digital platforms, the dynamic interaction between businesses and audiences becomes crucial, positioning social media marketing as a catalyst for competitiveness and growth in online commerce.

In addition to brand visibility, social media enables interactive, two-way communication, strengthening consumer engagement. Unlike conventional marketing, which is one-directional mainly, social media enables real-time dialogue, feedback, and content co-creation between brands and consumers (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). Customer engagement on social media, demonstrated through likes, comments, shares, and other interactive elements, reflects the psychological and emotional connection between customers and brands (Brodie et al., 2013). High engagement levels not only enhance brand recall but also foster trust, loyalty, and positive word-of-mouth, which are essential in driving consumer purchase intention in the competitive online marketplace.

Moreover, online purchasing behavior has shifted towards more experiential and value-driven decision-making processes. Consumers today seek authenticity, user-generated content, relatable influencers, and relevant digital narratives that shape perceptions and influence their willingness to purchase (Islam & Rahman, 2021). Therefore, carefully designed social media strategies—such as influencer marketing, storytelling, promotional campaigns, and personalized content—play a significant role in influencing customer decision-making. The role of customer engagement in mediating the relationship between social media marketing tactics and purchase intention is becoming more evident as businesses attempt to understand how online interactions translate into transactional outcomes.

The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated digital adoption, increasing reliance on online shopping and strengthening the importance of digital marketing strategies (OECD, 2021). Many online businesses—especially micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs)—shifted to digital platforms to maintain operations and reach consumers. As post-pandemic market behavior stabilizes, the role of social media marketing remains central, driving sustained consumer interest and shaping competitive advantage (Dwivedi et al., 2022). Consequently, marketers and researchers continue to explore how different dimensions of SMM, such as entertainment, customization, credibility, and informativeness, affect consumer engagement and intention to purchase products online.

Despite its proven importance, the strategic effectiveness of social media marketing varies depending on how well businesses align digital content with consumer expectations. Some brands successfully leverage engagement metrics to drive conversions, while others struggle because campaigns fail to connect emotionally or provide value to audiences (Zhang & Kumar, 2020). This inconsistency highlights the need for deeper empirical understanding of how social media marketing strategies influence purchase intention through the mediating role of customer engagement. Thus, academic inquiry into the relationships among these variables becomes necessary to support theory development and inform effective implementation in online business environments.

Although online businesses widely adopt social media marketing, not all organizations achieve optimal customer engagement or conversion outcomes, suggesting a gap between strategy implementation and consumer response. Existing studies acknowledge that social media marketing influences purchase intention; however, the extent to which customer engagement strengthens or mediates this relationship remains insufficiently explored, particularly in fast-changing digital market contexts. Therefore, there is a need to investigate how various dimensions of social media marketing strategies impact purchase intention and to what extent customer engagement contributes to shaping this effect. This study aims to examine the influence of social media marketing strategies on customer purchase intention in online business settings and to analyze the mediating role of customer engagement.

Literature Review

Social media marketing has emerged as a dominant strategic tool used by online businesses to reach and influence consumers in digital environments. According to Mangold and Faulds (2009), social media combines traditional marketing elements—such as promotion and branding—with user-generated content that fosters interactive communication. The effectiveness of social media marketing depends on

several dimensions, including entertainment, informativeness, interactivity, trendiness, and credibility (Kim & Ko, 2012). These dimensions shape how consumers perceive marketing messages and determine whether content can capture attention, build emotional connection, and stimulate responses. Recent studies confirm that high-quality and relevant digital content significantly enhances brand equity and drives consumer responses in online purchasing contexts (Tuten & Solomon, 2020).

Customer engagement is another key construct in digital marketing literature, describing consumers' psychological involvement, emotional connection, and behavioral participation with online brands. Brodie et al. (2013) conceptualize customer engagement as a multidimensional construct that includes cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components. Engagement behaviors—such as liking, commenting, reviewing, and sharing content—indicate the strength of the relationship between consumers and brands (van Doorn et al., 2010). Beyond functional responses, engagement represents relational bonding that helps brands create communities and foster customer loyalty. Prior research shows that engaged consumers are more likely to advocate for brands, provide positive feedback, and demonstrate high resistance to switching competitors (Harrigan et al., 2017). Thus, customer engagement plays an essential role in online business sustainability.

Purchase intention is widely examined in consumer behavior studies as a proxy for actual buying behavior. Kotler and Keller (2016) describe purchase intention as an individual's conscious plan to buy a product after evaluating its benefits, value, and emotional appeal. In digital commerce contexts, purchase intention is influenced by factors such as online trust, perceived usefulness of marketing messages, perceived enjoyment, and social influence (Lim et al., 2016). Social media platforms intensify the role of social proof—such as influencer endorsements, user reviews, and shared experiences—which shape consumer perceptions and increase persuasion power (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). As such, social media environments create an ecosystem where psychological motivation interacts with digital content, forming consumer willingness to purchase.

Existing empirical evidence demonstrates that social media marketing positively influences purchase intention. For instance, Alalwan et al. (2017) found that informativeness and credibility of social media content drive consumer trust and stimulate willingness to buy products online. Likewise, studies by Yadav and Rahman (2018) highlight that interactive features of platforms, such as live chats, creator collaboration, and personalized advertisements, significantly affect intention to purchase. However, the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention is not always direct and may require mediating variables such as customer trust, brand awareness, or customer engagement. These findings suggest that engagement mechanisms are essential in converting exposure to marketing messages into behavioral outcomes.

Customer engagement is increasingly recognized as a potential mediator in the relationship between social media marketing strategies and purchase intention. Hollebeek, Glynn, and Brodie (2014) argue that engagement acts as a psychological mechanism through which marketing activities influence consumer decision-making. Empirical studies support this argument; for example, Bilro and Loureiro (2020) found that higher engagement levels lead to stronger purchase intentions because engaged consumers perceive brands as more relevant, trustworthy, and valuable. Engagement

also encourages co-creation behaviors that deepen emotional attachment, reinforcing intention to buy. Therefore, understanding how social media marketing enhances purchase intention through engagement is crucial for developing competitive strategies in the online business environment.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative research approach using a survey method to examine the influence of social media marketing strategies on purchase intention with customer engagement as a mediating variable among online business consumers. The population of the study consisted of individuals who actively follow and interact with online business accounts on social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook. A purposive sampling technique was used to ensure respondents had relevant experience in engaging with marketing content online. Data were collected using a structured online questionnaire measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The instrument contained items adapted from validated measurement scales: social media marketing dimensions based on Kim and Ko (2012), customer engagement items adapted from Brodie et al. (2013), and purchase intention measurement from Kotler and Keller (2016). Prior to full distribution, the questionnaire underwent a pilot test to confirm clarity and reliability. A total of 200 valid responses were collected and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS software.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the collected data provides clear insights into the relationship between social media marketing strategies, customer engagement, and purchase intention in the online business context. A total of 200 responses were analyzed using PLS-SEM, and the results demonstrate that the measurement model met the validity and reliability criteria. All constructs showed strong internal consistency, as indicated by Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) values exceeding the threshold of 0.70. Convergent validity was confirmed through Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values greater than 0.50, demonstrating that the indicators adequately represented the underlying constructs. Discriminant validity was also established through the Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT ratio, confirming that each construct was distinct from the others.

The structural model analysis revealed significant relationships among the variables. The findings indicate that social media marketing strategies have a positive and statistically significant effect on customer engagement. This suggests that higher levels of informativeness, interactivity, entertainment value, credibility, and trendiness of social media content lead to stronger engagement behaviors from consumers. Respondents reported that features such as real-time responses, influencer collaborations, product demonstrations, and interactive content such as polls or live streaming contributed significantly to their level of involvement with brands online. These results support previous studies highlighting the importance of engaging and strategic content in stimulating consumer response.

Furthermore, the results show that social media marketing strategies significantly influence purchase intention. Respondents expressed that exposure to

attractive promotions, persuasive messaging, personalized recommendations, and consistent branding across social media platforms increased their willingness to purchase products from online businesses. This demonstrates that social media does not merely function as a communication tool but also acts as a persuasive medium influencing consumer decision-making. The positive effect aligns with earlier findings stating that rich and credible digital content enhances consumer trust and confidence in online purchasing behavior.

Customer engagement also shows a significant and strong effect on purchase intention, confirming its role in shaping consumer behavioral outcomes. The analysis indicates that individuals who frequently engage with brand content—such as liking, commenting, sharing, or participating in brand activities—display a higher tendency to purchase. Engagement behaviors were associated with feelings of connection, relevance, and perceived value, reinforcing motivation to buy. Respondents noted that engagement activities allowed them to better understand product benefits, verify authenticity through user-generated content, and feel connected to a digital community. These outcomes further support theoretical assertions that engagement serves as a relational and emotional pathway to purchase behaviors.

The mediation analysis revealed that customer engagement partially mediates the relationship between social media marketing strategies and purchase intention. This means that while social media marketing directly drives purchase intention, its influence is strengthened when consumers are actively involved and emotionally engaged with brand content. The mediation effect highlights that engagement acts as a conversion mechanism, transforming passive exposure into meaningful behavioral intent. Overall, the findings confirm that combining strategic social media marketing with consumer engagement practices contributes to stronger purchase intention in online business environments.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide important insights into how social media marketing strategies contribute to consumer engagement and purchase intention within the online business environment. The results confirm that social media marketing plays a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviors, particularly in digital marketplaces where competition is intense and consumers are constantly exposed to alternative options. The significant and positive effect of social media marketing on customer engagement demonstrates that well-designed content strategies can successfully attract attention, stimulate interaction, and foster emotional involvement. This aligns with the perspective of Kim and Ko (2012), who asserted that interactive and entertaining content encourages customers to participate and engage with brands more actively. The results of this study further validate the idea that consumers do not merely act as passive recipients of promotional material but as participants in a dynamic and dialogic communication process facilitated by social media platforms.

Additionally, the significant impact of social media marketing strategies on purchase intention reinforces the notion that digital marketing activities can successfully stimulate customer decision-making. Respondents indicated that visually appealing promotional content, influencer partnerships, interactive features, and persuasive messages increased their confidence and interest in purchasing products online. This finding supports the work of Alalwan et al. (2017), who emphasized that

informative and credible social media campaigns can shape consumer attitudes and ultimately lead to purchase-oriented decisions. In online commerce, where physical product evaluation is limited, the credibility and informativeness of social media content play instrumental roles in reducing uncertainty and fostering trust, which are essential precursors to purchase intention.

The strong relationship between customer engagement and purchase intention observed in this study highlights the central role of engagement as a relational mechanism in digital consumer behavior. Engagement activities, such as liking, commenting, sharing, and responding to interactive features, were found to enhance emotional bonds that influence consumer perceptions and behavioral intentions. These findings are consistent with Brodie et al. (2013), who describe engagement as a multidimensional construct that involves emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses. Engaged customers are likely to invest more time and attention in brand-related content, leading to deeper brand attachment and a stronger inclination to purchase. This suggests that online businesses should not only focus on creating content that attracts attention but also prioritize strategies that foster meaningful interaction and relational value.

A key theoretical contribution of this study is the confirmation that customer engagement serves as a partial mediator in the relationship between social media marketing strategies and purchase intention. This implies that while social media initiatives can directly influence purchasing intention, their effectiveness is enhanced when they simultaneously foster customer engagement. This finding supports the conceptual framework proposed by Hollebeek et al. (2014), which positions engagement as a mechanism through which marketing activities affect consumer behaviors and decision-making. The mediation effect underscores the importance of stimulating active participation rather than merely generating exposure. In practice, this means that online businesses must carefully design content that encourages conversation, participation, and user involvement—rather than solely focusing on broadcasting promotional messages.

The implications of these results extend to strategic decision-making for digital businesses. For companies operating online, simply maintaining a presence on social media is no longer sufficient. The findings suggest that success depends on the ability to create interactive and engaging digital experiences capable of stimulating emotional engagement and influencing customers' purchasing decisions. Businesses should leverage platform-specific strategies such as user-generated content campaigns, influencer marketing, storytelling approaches, interactive features (e.g., live streams, polls), and real-time response mechanisms to keep audiences connected and involved. Moreover, personalizing content based on consumer preferences can enhance perceived relevance and increase engagement effectiveness, as supported by previous research indicating that personalization drives digital loyalty and conversion (Tuten & Solomon, 2020).

From a theoretical standpoint, the study contributes to the development of consumer engagement literature by providing empirical evidence on the mediating role of engagement in digital purchase behavior. The results align with emerging perspectives in digital marketing research, highlighting engagement as a critical determinant of online consumer decision-making. At the same time, this study strengthens the understanding that social media marketing is multidimensional and

requires a holistic approach that integrates emotional appeal, information value, interactivity, and credibility to influence consumer outcomes effectively.

Although the findings offer valuable insights, they also point to several areas for future investigation. First, the study focused on general social media users without differentiating between demographic groups or analyzing generational differences. Future research could explore whether age, digital literacy, or cultural background moderates the relationship between engagement and purchase intention. Second, the study examined engagement quantitatively but did not assess emotional tone or qualitative sentiment expressed in user interactions. Integrating sentiment analysis or qualitative interviews could provide deeper understanding of psychological and emotional motivations behind engagement.

Finally, the evolving nature of social media platforms means that strategies effective today may not remain effective as platform algorithms, user expectations, and digital communication patterns change. Therefore, longitudinal research would be useful to examine the stability of the observed relationships over time and investigate how emerging trends—such as AI-driven personalization, social commerce, and immersive technologies like virtual influencers or augmented reality—may influence engagement and consumer intention.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that social media marketing strategies are crucial in shaping consumer behavior in online business settings by positively affecting both customer engagement and purchase intent. The findings emphasize that engaging, informative, and trustworthy social media content not only grabs consumers' attention but also encourages emotional and behavioral involvement, which increases the chances of making a purchase. The study also confirms that customer engagement serves as a mediating factor, strengthening the link between social media marketing efforts and purchase intent. This indicates that online businesses should focus on creating interactive and value-oriented digital experiences rather than relying only on promotional messages. Overall, the results add to the growing body of research highlighting the strategic role of social media in modern marketing and offer practical insights for companies looking to boost brand influence, customer participation, and conversion rates in a competitive digital marketplace.

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