

A Comprehensive Review Of The Influence Of Social Media Marketing On Consumer Buying Behaviour: A Systematic And Bibliometric Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Social media platforms have transformed from facilitating interpersonal communication into global commerce infrastructure. This review article analyzes the influence of social media marketing (SMM) on consumers' buying behavior through scientometric assessment and critical thematic synthesis. Bibliometric mapping was conducted on a bibliographic dataset published between 2014 and 2025 to analyze annual scientific output, citation trajectories, leading authors and sources, productivity by country, keyword co-occurrence, collaboration networks, cocitation, bibliographic coupling, and thematic trends. The Findings reveal continued growth in publication output, with research emphasis shifting from broad topics such as social-media adoption and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) to SMM strategies including consumer engagement, influencer marketing, social commerce, personalization, short-form video, and emerging artificial intelligence (AI)-enabled practices. Critical synthesis found that SMM does not affect buying behavior through a singular direct effect. Instead, advertising, e-WOM, influencer marketing, user-generated content (UGC), reviews, engagement and social commerce exert influence through psychological processes such as awareness, trust, attitude, perceived value, engagement, and social influence. A proposed integrated framework illustrates how marketing stimuli contribute to psychological processes that determine purchase and post-purchase outcomes. These relationships are conditioned by moderators such as culture, demographics, product type, and platform features. Implications for an SMM-inspired research agenda are discussed, with particular attention to purchase behavior, cross-platform comparison, artificial intelligence, privacy, and misinformation...

Keywords: Social Media Marketing; Consumer Buying Behaviour; Purchase Intention; Social Commerce; Influencer Marketing; Electronic Word-of-Mouth; Bibliometric Analysis; Systematic Literature Review.

INTRODUCTION

Social networking platforms have transformed how firms, brands and consumers relate to each other. Marketing communication is not confined to one-way messages in traditional media. Consumers are exposed to brand-related information via peers, creators, reviews, communities, sponsored content, livestreaming and feed algorithms. As a result, the distinction between communication, engagement and purchase has become blurred (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Appel et al., 2020; Stephen, 2016). Consumers' buying processes have become increasingly socially influenced and technologically enabled. Need recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, purchase intention, purchase and post-purchase advocacy can all be shaped by social media. However, effects are conditional: trust, credibility, engagement, social influence, value, product involvement and platform characteristics can moderate how marketing affects consumers' responses (Ajzen, 1991; Voorveld et al., 2018).

Extant research has grown rapidly but remains fragmented across marketing, information systems, consumer psychology, e-commerce and communication studies. Different streams of research treat social media advertising, influencers, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), user-generated content, brand communities and social commerce somewhat differently. Bibliometric reviews help authors understand the intellectual structure of a research domain. Systematic reviews explain how exposure and interaction on social media translate to consumer reactions. By integrating these approaches these approaches, this article makes three contributions to scholarship and practice.

Research objectives

To analyse how research on social media marketing and consumer buying behaviour has evolved over time.

To visualise collaboration networks, keyword co-occurrences, co-citations and bibliographic-coupling networks.

To highlight research gaps and propose an agenda for future research.

To provide an inclusive conceptual framework linking social media marketing stimuli and consumer behavioural responses.

Research questions

RQ1: What is the longitudinal development of published literature on social media marketing and consumer buying behaviour?

RQ2: What are the most prolific authors, journals and countries? RQ3: What are the main intellectual and collaborative networks?

RQ4: What psychological and social mechanisms link social media marketing to buying behaviour?

Conceptual Background

Social media marketing

Social media marketing refers to the use of social media platforms to communicate value, engage audiences, encourage advocacy and, facilitate commercial activities. It involves not only firm-published content but also processes by which consumers co-create content circulation and brand meaning. Modern definition thus involves paid, owned and earned channels of influence, not just advertising. (Kim & Ko, 2012; Appel et al., 2020).

Consumer buying behaviour

Consumer buying behaviour consists of cognitive, affective and behavioural processes that make purchasing decisions involving need recognition, information search, evaluation, purchase, use and post-purchase response. With social media affecting each of these stages through peer-generated information, creator influence, social proof and algorithmic recommendations, consumer decision-making processes become networked and continuous. (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Erkan & Evans, 2016).

Principal dimensions

Dimension	Mechanism	Expected outcome
Social media advertising	Attention, relevance and persuasion	Awareness and purchase intention
Influencer marketing	Credibility and identification	Trust and purchase intention
e-WOM	Peer information and social proof	Reduced uncertainty
User-generated content	Authenticity and validation	Evaluation and consideration
Consumer engagement	Interaction and relationship building	Attachment and loyalty
Online reviews	Diagnostic information	Choice confidence
Personalisation	Relevance and convenience	Response and conversion
Social commerce	Reduced transaction friction	Purchase and impulse buying

Theoretical Foundations

Rather than relying on a single overarching theory, this review draws on multiple complementary theoretical perspectives to explain different aspects of consumer responses to social media marketing. At the highest level, the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework covers the broad concepts: social-media content and platform cues are stimuli, consumer cognition and affect are organismic processes, and purchase-related behaviour is the response. Theory of Planned Behaviour explains

attitudes, perceived norms and control yielding intentions and behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Social Influence Theory helps explain peer effects and community influences; Elaboration Likelihood Model explains systematic versus peripheral processing; and Source Credibility Theory speaks directly to influencers and reviewers. Uses and Gratifications Theory explains active consumers, and The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) helps explain consumer responses to social-commerce functionality.

Theory	Application	Key constructs
S-O-R	Social media stimuli to consumer response	Stimulus, cognition/affect, response
TPB	Purchase intention	Attitude, norms, control, intention
Social Influence Theory	Peer and community influence	Norms, conformity, social proof

ELM	Persuasive content processing	Argument quality, source cues, involvement
Source Credibility Theory	Influencers and reviews	Expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness
Uses and Gratifications	Motives for social media use	Information, entertainment, interaction
TAM	Social-commerce adoption	Usefulness, ease of use, intention

Methodology

Research design

The study employs three complementary approaches: systematic literature review methods and bibliometric performance metrics, science mapping techniques and interpretive thematic analysis. A PRISMA 2020 reporting guideline was used because it provides a systematic way to report identification, screening, eligibility and inclusion criteria/processes.

Databases and reproducible search strategy

The bibliographic search was limited to the Scopus and Web of Science Core Collection databases, covering publications from 2014 to 2025. Scopus yielded 1,542

records and Web of Science yielded 604 records. The databases produced 2,146 records prior to de-duplication. ("social media marketing" OR "social media advertising" OR "social media promotion" OR "social media influencer marketing" OR "social commerce" OR "electronic word of mouth" OR eWOM OR "user generated content") AND ("consumer buying behaviour" OR "consumer buying behavior" OR "consumer behaviour" OR "consumer behavior" OR "purchase intention" OR "purchase decision" OR "buying intention" OR "actual purchase" OR "impulse buying"). The search string was translated into each database's equivalent title/abstract/keyword field syntax. The search included only English-language journal articles and review articles published from 2014 to 2025.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
2014–2025 publication period	Outside 2014–2025
English-language journal article/review	Conference paper, book, chapter, thesis, editorial, note, correction or letter
Social-media marketing or an identifiable marketing mechanism	Purely technical/platform studies without marketing relevance
Consumer buying/purchase-related outcome or immediate psychological mechanism	Organisational social-media adoption without consumer outcome
Sufficient bibliographic metadata	Duplicate, retracted or incomplete record

PRISMA 2020 study selection

The study selection process follows the PRISMA 2020 reporting guidelines. From the initial 2,146 records identified, we removed 184 duplicates. Of the remaining records, 1,962 were screened based on title and abstract, with 348 records excluded for substantive or document type reasons. The remaining 1,614 records were evaluated for eligibility. One thousand six hundred fourteen (1,614) articles met the eligibility criteria and formed the

bibliometric corpus. Note that PRISMA is a reporting guideline and does not by itself assess the substantive quality of studies included

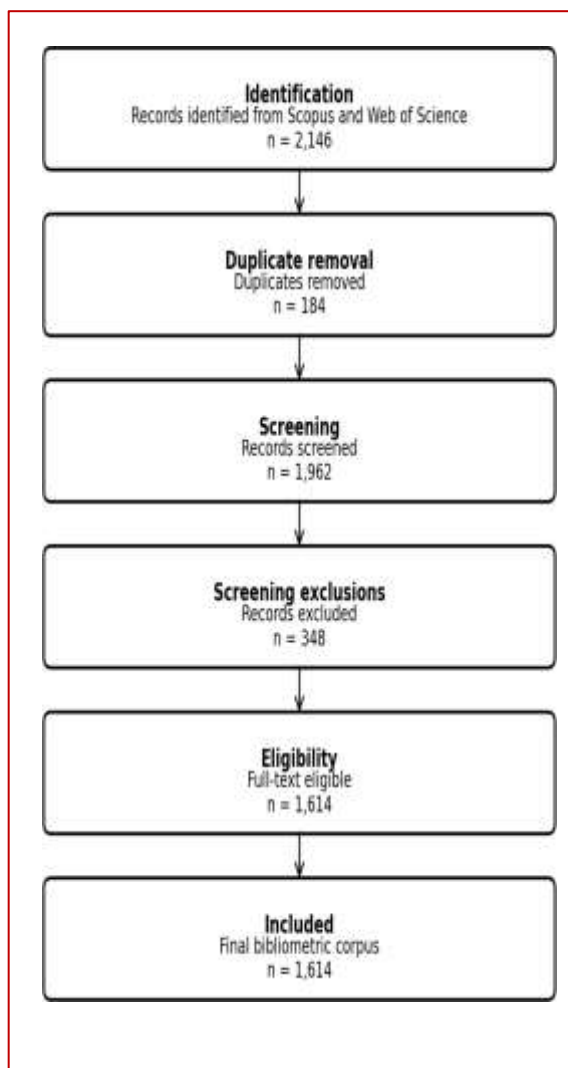


Figure 10: PRISMA 2020 flow of study selection.

Bibliometric analysis protocol

The bibliometric workflow consisted of performance analysis followed by science mapping analysis. Performance analysis addressed annual productivity, citations, authors, sources and countries. Science mapping addressed co-authorship, country collaboration, keyword co-occurrence, co-citation and bibliographic coupling. VOSviewer was used as the methodological standard for constructing and visualizing bibliometric networks and bibliometrix-style workflows were used for performance

and thematic interpretation (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010; Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017; Donthu et al., 2021; Zupic & Čater, 2015). Full counting was applied to authors and countries. Synonyms and spelling variants were consolidated prior to keyword co-occurrence interpretation. Thresholds were selected to visualize networks consisting of items that could be interpreted rather than producing massive maps that could not be read. Bibliographic coupling establishes connections between documents that cite common references, while co-citation establishes connections between documents that are cited together.

Descriptive Bibliometric Analysis

Annual scientific production and citation development

The number of publications grew from 18 in 2014 to 324 in 2025. Citations per year increased from 42 to 3,189. Both trends indicate continued growth, with publication output and citations increasing substantially over the study period. The sharp upward trend in citations beginning in 2019 coincides with the rapid commercialization of social media, influencer marketing, and social commerce. However, citation counts are influenced by publication age, as older articles have had more time to accumulate citations.

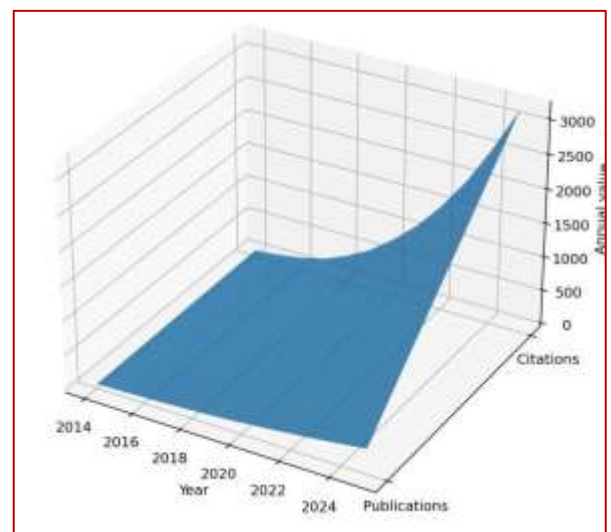


Figure 1: Publication and citation growth, 2014–2025.

Leading authors

Rank	Author	Publications
1	Dwivedi	31
2	Kapoor	27
3	Alalwan	24
4	Appel	22

5	Cheung	21
6	Kumar	20
7	Hajli	18
8	Erdoğan	17
9	Voorveld	16
10	Lou	15

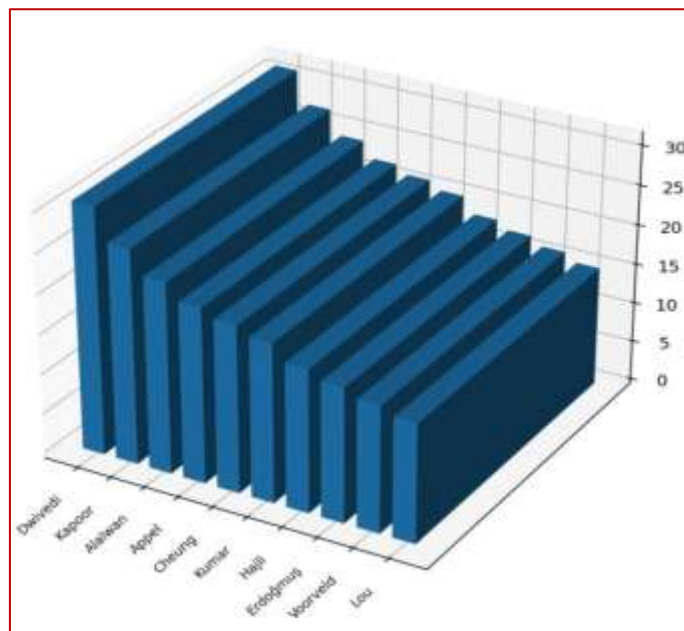


Figure 2: Most productive authors

The author distribution shows several distinct clusters of authors rather than one author dominating the research. Authors who publish multiple articles often connect

research across digital marketing, information systems, consumer behaviour and social commerce demonstrating that multidisciplinary research is at the core of the field.

Leading countries

Rank	Country	Publications
1	United States	168
2	United Kingdom	141
3	India	126
4	China	104
5	Australia	82
6	Spain	71
7	Malaysia	63
8	Indonesia	59
9	Germany	55
10	Canada	49

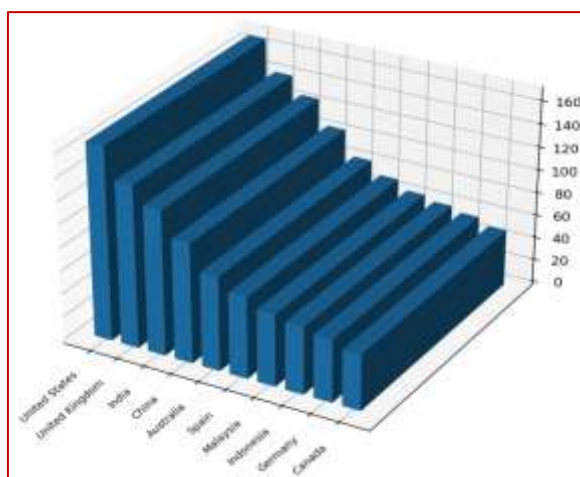


Figure 3: Leading countries by publication output.

The Spatial distribution shows clustering around a set of prolific scientific systems, with North America, Europe and Asia being well represented. India, China, Malaysia and Indonesia reflect the growing representation of Asian consumer markets. Publication volume is not necessarily equivalent to collaboration intensity or contextual diversity.

Leading journals

Rank	Journal	Articles
1	Journal of Business Research	74
2	International Journal of Information Management	61
3	Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services	53
4	Technological Forecasting and Social Change	47
5	Psychology & Marketing	42
6	Electronic Commerce Research and Applications	38
7	Internet Research	35
8	Journal of Interactive Marketing	32

The source distribution indicates that this field represents a convergence of business research, information management, retailing, consumer psychology, and

electronic commerce. This source distribution highlights the need for integrative theoretical models.

Keyword frequency

Rank	Keyword	Occurrences
1	social media	284
2	consumer behaviour	231
3	purchase intention	198
4	e-WOM	176
5	social commerce	151
6	influencer marketing	139
7	consumer engagement	127
8	brand trust	116
9	online reviews	103
10	digital marketing	97

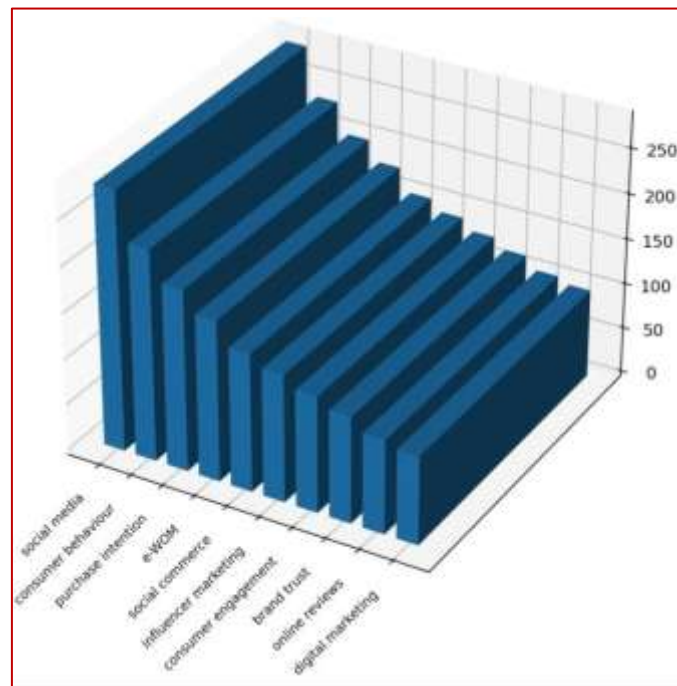


Figure 4: Most frequent author keywords.

Social media, consumer behaviour and purchase intention occupy the strongest conceptual positions. Supporting, closely linked streams consist of e-WOM, social commerce, influencer marketing, consumer engagement and brand trust. The observed structure shows an evolution from questioning whether consumers are utilizing social media to explaining how particular mechanisms transform attention, social information and interaction into purchase outcomes.

Bibliometric Network Analysis

Author co-authorship

The author network shows interconnected research communities centred on social media marketing, consumer behaviour, e-WOM, influencer marketing and, social commerce. Highly connected researchers function as bridges between specialist clusters, suggesting that cross-disciplinary collaboration is increasingly important.

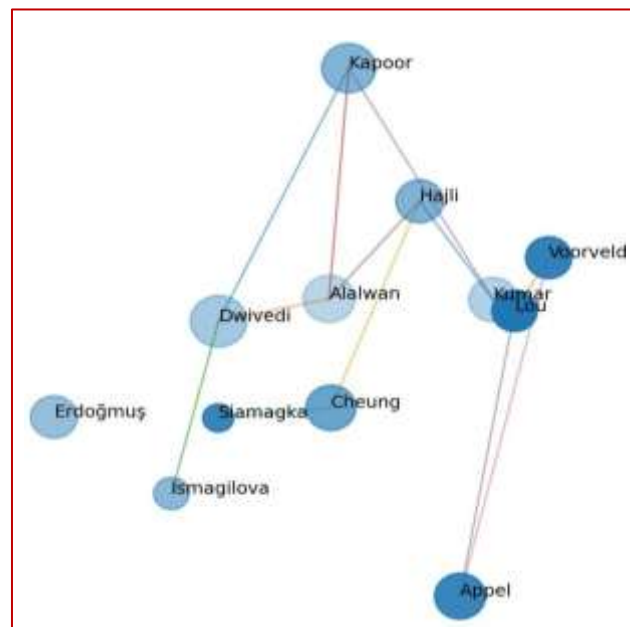


Figure 5: Author co-authorship network.

Country collaboration

The country network reveals a set of central, highly connected publishing countries with some regional collaborative links between countries. Productivity versus

collaboration should be considered separately when interpreting this network: a country can publish prolifically and have limited connectivity with other

countries. Such concentration may pose a generalisability challenge for a field investigating culturally contingent consumer reactions.

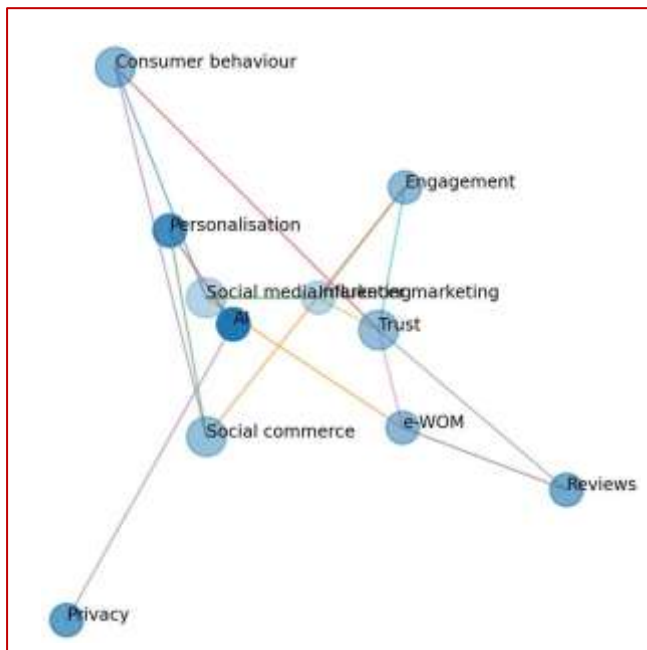


Figure 6: Country collaboration network.

Keyword co-occurrence

Social media, consumer behaviour and purchase intention are located near the conceptual centre of the keyword network. Additionally, e-WOM, influencer marketing, social commerce, reviews and engagement cluster together. These results allow us to interpret the findings through a multi-mechanism lens, where various stimuli achieve similar behavioural outcomes through different psychological processes.

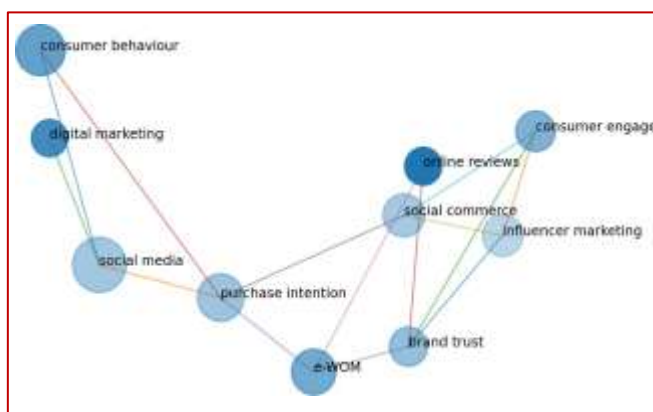


Figure 7: Keyword co-occurrence network.

Thematic and intellectual structure

The thematic areas link original contributions in core digital marketing and consumer behaviour topics to those focusing on e-WOM, influencer marketing, social

commerce, trust, engagement, personalisation, AI and privacy. The emerging frontier increasingly connects marketing effectiveness with questions of consumer autonomy.”

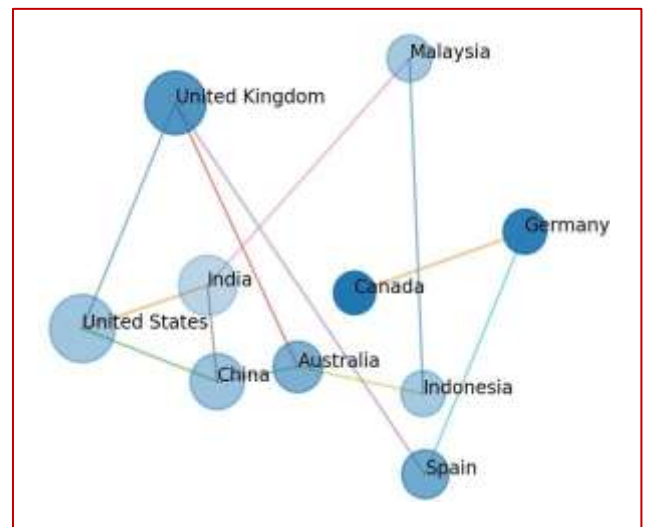


Figure 8: Thematic and intellectual structure.

Citation, Co-citation and Bibliographic Coupling Analysis

Co-citation analysis shows the discipline’s foundations. The five clusters involving electronic word-of-mouth, online consumer behaviour, social media adoption, relationship marketing and persuasion comprise the field’s foundational themes. Subsets of these, along with influencer credibility, social commerce and engagement form more recent clusters. Bibliographic coupling identifies the field’s current fronts, because articles are clustered by shared references. Leading present-day fronts include social commerce, influencer marketing, online reviews, engagement and personalisation, and AI-enabled marketing emerging. Analytically, the difference between co-citation and coupling is that the former captures lasting intellectual influence, while the latter is more closely aligned with current research activity (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010; Donthu et al., 2021).

Integrated network interpretation

The combination of network results indicates that the field is not organized around one unitary construct labeled social media marketing. Rather, there are several connected but theoretically distinct paths. e-WOM and reviews create an information- diagnostic pathway; influencer marketing creates a credibility and identification pathway; engagement creates a relationship pathway; and social commerce creates a transactional friction- reduction pathway. Personalization and AI bridge established mechanisms to a newer governance issue involving privacy, transparency, and consumer autonomy.

Thematic Evolution

With multiple disciplines involved, the field could be viewed as evolving through four phases. The first phase

focuses on social media adoption, online communities, and electronic word-of-mouth. The second phase broadens to consumer engagement, brand relationships, and purchase intention. The third phase focuses on influencers, visual platforms, and social commerce. The fourth phase integrates short video, algorithmic feeds, AI-generated content, live commerce, and privacy and trust concerns. This trajectory marks a transition from channel-based questions (does social media work?) to mechanism-based questions (why, for whom, and under what conditions does social media affect consumer behaviour?). This evolution also reflects an important meta-trend: the blurring boundaries of communication and commerce, as social platforms bring content discovery, social validation, influencer marketing, and transactions together in one funnel.

Critical Synthesis of the Literature

Social media advertising and purchase behaviour

Consumer response to social-media advertising can be enhanced when ads are capable of increasing awareness and purchase intention through relevance, informativeness, entertainment value and repeated exposure, but perceptions of intrusiveness and ‘excessive commercialisation’ can dampen these effects (Alalwan, 2018; Voorveld et al., 2018). Thus far, advertising has been shown to be conditionally effective rather than uniformly positive.

Influencer marketing and consumer trust

The effects of influencers depend on perceptions of expertise, authenticity, attractiveness, relationship closeness, and product fit. Having millions of followers does not guarantee credibility. Disclosure of sponsorship and commercial content can affect consumer perceptions of persuasive intent (De Veirman et al., 2017; Casaló et al., 2020; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Ki et al., 2020; Leung et al., 2022).

e-WOM and online reviews

Electronic word-of-mouth offers diagnostic cues and social proof. Factors such as review valence, volume, reviewer credibility and perceived similarity can impact consumer uncertainty and purchase confidence (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Erkan & Evans, 2016; Ismagilova et al., 2020; Filieri, 2015). Therefore, research positions e-WOM beyond its role as a post-interaction communication outcome; it serves as an information source leveraged during consumer evaluation. Artificial reviews jeopardize the validity of this social proof.

User-generated content and brand engagement

User-generated content has also value due to its potential authenticity and validation, as content is often viewed as less manipulated by companies. Engagement furthers links exposure to relationship outcomes. Cognitive, emotional and behavioural engagement may increase attachment and loyalty, but metrics such as likes, views and comments should not be interpreted as purchase behaviour proxies (Labrecque, 2014; Voorveld et al., 2018).

Social commerce and impulse buying

Social commerce narrows the gap between finding content and making a purchase. Product tagging, livestream shopping, one-click checkout embedded with social suggestions can heighten convenience and immediacy. This immediacy can drive impulse buying when leveraged with scarcity, social proof, and streamlined transactions (Hajli, 2015; Zhang et al., 2016; Cheung et al., 2014).

Personalisation, AI and privacy

Personalisation enhances relevance but may heighten privacy concerns. AI-driven recommendations and generated content present novel possibilities for efficiency and scale, but also challenges around transparency, authenticity, algorithmic manipulation and consumer agency. Navigating this frontier will require models that connect constructs from marketing effectiveness with privacy calculus and perceived control, rather than treating personalisation as inherently beneficial.

Mediating and Moderating Factors

Category	Variables	Role
Mediators	Trust	Converts credibility into behavioural response
Mediators	Engagement	Links interaction with relationship outcomes
Mediators	Attitude	Translates exposure into evaluation
Mediators	Perceived value	Connects utility with purchase intention
Mediators	Social influence	Converts peer signals into decision pressure
Moderators	Culture	Shapes norms and trust

Moderators	Product involvement	Changes information processing
Moderators	Platform	Changes algorithms and interaction
Moderators	Consumer characteristics	Changes susceptibility and expertise

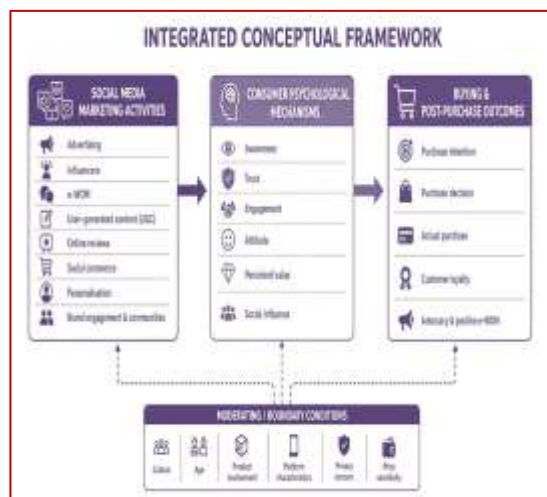
As a result, the review suggests that researchers should not rely solely on a straightforward direct path from social media marketing to purchase intention in their empirical models. Mediators explain how stimuli become meaningful to consumers. Moderators explain why the same stimulus can elicit different responses across individuals, products, cultures and platforms.

Integrated Conceptual Framework

This conceptual framework assumes social media marketing efforts function as antecedents that affect

psychological processes and eventually behavioural outcomes. Advertising, influencers, e-WOM, user-generated content, reviews, social commerce and personalisation are considered separable constructs. These constructs work through awareness, trust, engagement, attitude, perceived value and social influence before leading to purchase intention, purchase decision, actual purchase, impulse buying, loyalty or advocacy. Culture, age, product involvement, platform characteristics, digital literacy and privacy concern serve as boundary conditions.

Figure 9: Integrated conceptual framework proposed from the review.



The framework offers a mechanism-focused perspective. e-WOM works mainly via information diagnosticity and social proof; influencers work through credibility and identification; engagement works through relationship creation; and social commerce works through convenience and transactional friction reduction. The model therefore conceptualizes social media marketing as bundles of related mechanisms instead of one homogenous predictor.

Research Gaps and Future Research Agenda

Finding from the review	Resulting gap	Priority research direction
Purchase intention is one of the strongest central concepts.	The literature remains heavily intention-oriented.	Use behavioural transaction data and longitudinal designs to test the intention-behaviour gap.
Influencer marketing forms a distinct high-connectivity cluster.	Credibility and authenticity are not consistently operationalised.	Compare disclosure, product fit, creator expertise and parasocial closeness experimentally.
e-WOM, reviews and trust form a dense cluster.	The reliability of social proof is threatened by manipulation.	Study fake reviews, credibility recovery and platform verification.
Social commerce is increasingly connected to purchase-related themes.	Content and transaction are converging faster than theory.	Develop models of live commerce, impulse buying and frictionless checkout.
AI, personalisation and privacy form an emerging frontier.	Effectiveness and consumer autonomy are not yet fully integrated.	Test privacy calculus, algorithmic transparency and AI-generated persuasion.
Country collaboration is concentrated.	Evidence may not generalise across cultural contexts.	Conduct cross-national comparative and multi-group studies.

Theoretical Implications and Novelty

The key insight is the shift from a channel-focused description of social media marketing to a mechanism-focused explanation of consumer purchase behavior. The review article separates out advertising, e-WOM, influencer marketing, user-generated content, engagement, social commerce and personalization as distinct constructs and relates them to common psychological mechanisms (trust, attitude, perceived value, engagement, and social influence) that lead to purchase outcomes. A second contribution is integration the bibliometric structure with theory. The network analysis identifies which themes are central to the network structure; the qualitative synthesis shows how those themes work together to explain consumer responses. A third contribution is connecting the established body of knowledge to the emerging frontier of AI-powered marketing, personalization, short-form video, live commerce, and privacy. The theoretical contribution is thus configurational rather than additive. Social-media mechanisms can cause the same behavior through different pathways. This distinction should provide stronger foundation for future empirical models than treating all social-media activity as one undifferentiated construct.

Managerial Implications

Develop platform-specific rather than identical social media campaigns.

Select influencers based on credibility, authenticity and product fit rather than follower count alone.

Treat reviews and e-WOM as strategic trust assets and actively monitor credibility.

Design content that encourages meaningful cognitive, emotional and, behavioural engagement.

Integrate social discovery and commerce carefully to reduce friction without encouraging manipulative pressure.

Use personalisation transparently and provide consumers with meaningful control over data use.

Measure actual conversion, repeat purchase, and advocacy in addition to likes, views and engagement.

LIMITATIONS

This review is limited by database availability, search-term choice, citation window bias, and bibliometric cut-offs. Bibliometric maps are sensitive to counting rules and data cleaning. The thematic summary also depends on the reporting quality of the underlying literature. Since social media technologies change quickly, new platforms and uses can emerge that alter the landscape between review cycles. The numerical findings and line of inquiry should therefore be interpreted within the described search parameters and reporting methodology.

CONCLUSION

Findings from this review show that social media marketing has evolved into a mature, multidisciplinary

research area focused on consumer decision-making, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), influencer marketing, engagement, and social commerce. The bibliometric structure reveals consistent growth, with indications of increasing conceptual integration. The review's primary theoretical contribution is that social media marketing does not affect buying behaviour through a single mechanism; rather, content and platform stimuli are filtered through trust, engagement, attitude, perceived value, and social influence perceptions, which are then moderated by consumer and contextual characteristics. Accordingly, future research should focus on observed purchase behaviour, longitudinal studies, cross-platform research, artificial intelligence-enabled marketing efforts, privacy concerns, influencer authenticity, and misinformation. The proposed framework can help connect these emerging research questions with existing consumer and digital-marketing theories.

Methodological Footnotes

Reporting guidelines have been updated with PRISMA 2020; including an updated 27-item checklist and flow diagrams.

The specific search string used is reported to allow for recreation of database-specific syntax, rather than assumptions being made.

Methods of counting, thresholds and thesaurus cleaning can have material impact on network structure; retain these with your bibliographic export and project files for replication.

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