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THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING ON CONSUMER PURCHASE DECISIONS IN THE RETAIL SECTOR

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ABSTRACT

This study conducts a systematic literature review to explore how social media marketing (SMM) influences consumer purchase decisions in the retail sector. Amid the shift from traditional advertising to digital engagement, platforms like Instagram and TikTok have become central to how consumers interact with brands. The review synthesizes findings from 29 peer-reviewed studies published between 2020 and 2025, selected using PRISMA guidelines. Key mechanisms identified include influencer marketing, user-generated content, real-time brand interaction, and personalized messaging. Thematic and bibliometric analyses reveal that trust, visual storytelling, and platform interactivity significantly drive purchase intent, particularly among Gen Z and millennial consumers. While the findings emphasize SMM's effectiveness, they also highlight challenges related to privacy, consumer well-being, and ethical marketing. This review contributes both theoretical insight and practical guidance for retailers adapting to a digital-first marketing landscape, and calls for further research on AI-driven personalization and cross-cultural consumer responses.

Keywords: **consumer behavior, influencer marketing, purchase intention, retail, social media marketing**

1. INTRODUCTION

The tremendous growth of social media platforms has fundamentally transformed consumer behavior in the retail sector, leading to new dynamics in how products are discovered, evaluated, and purchased. Primarily, consumers have increasingly turned to social media for information and validation before making purchasing decisions, reflecting a significant shift from traditional marketing methods to modern, interactive strategies fueled by digital engagement. Explored how social media influencers shape fashion-related purchase decisions in Malaysia's retail market (Madhavedi et al., 2025). Examined the effect of digital advertising on student clothing purchases in Nigerian private universities (Ajike et al., 2024). Social media has evolved into a primary channel for consumers seeking peer endorsements and engaging with brands directly, studied the relationship between social media marketing and youth purchase intentions in online contexts (Ismael et al., 2025). Where public opinion and influencer endorsements can significantly sway purchasing

decisions. Research highlights that influencers shape consumer purchase intentions by creating relatable content that resonates with audiences on platforms such as Instagram and (Chen et al., 2024; Ilieva et al., 2024; Ta et al., 2025). Identified key e-commerce success factors that enhance retail performance in online sales (Kongchoochuy & U-On, 2025). Found that brand authenticity and prestige on social media influence consumer decisions in luxury hotels (Qing et al., 2024). Demonstrated that deep learning can enhance understanding of how celebrity endorsement affects nutraceutical buying behavior (Kumar & Pinakapani, 2024). The nature of this interaction allows for the fluid exchange of information, enabling consumers to seek and share opinions about products, which influences their awareness and subsequent buying choices (Hossain et al., 2025; Phan et al., 2024). Found that Gen Z's purchase behavior is shaped by both advisor recommendations and social media interactions (Stoica & Hickman, 2024). Showed that e-WOM and digital community engagement contribute significantly to brand loyalty (Deepa et al., 2025). Highlighted how explainable AI affects consumer decisions on social platforms (Van Dat et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the democratization of information access provided by social media contributes to more informed and autonomous consumer decisions. Studies reveal that platforms like Instagram not only serve as marketing tools but facilitate communal spaces where users can obtain and disseminate product information, enhancing their decision-making capabilities (Gonçalves et al., 2024; Z. Wang et al., 2024). This shift has also amplified the importance of personal narratives and authentic endorsements, blurring the lines between consumers and influencers (An et al., 2024; Luo et al., 2025). Retailers are increasingly acknowledging the necessity of adapting their marketing strategies to capitalize on social media engagement. Explored how TikTok influencer marketing shapes consumer attitudes using econometric techniques (Tartaraj et al., 2024). Traditional advertising models are being supplanted by more personalized and visually appealing content strategies that resonate with consumers' preferences and lifestyles (Nagvanshi et al., 2023; Sheokand, 2024). Analyzed how brand factors mediate the impact of livestream seller commissions on sales outcomes (J. Jiang et al., 2025). Revealed influential factors in digital marketing that affect consumer purchase behavior (Lim et al., 2024). The emphasis is now on crafting experiences that draw consumers into a narrative, often involving interactive content that encourages user participation and engagement. Retailers who effectively leverage these strategies can foster stronger brand affinity and drive purchase intentions more effectively than through conventional marketing approaches (Houshiarian et al., 2024; Phan et al., 2024; Stoica & Hickman, 2024). highlighted that visual storytelling on Instagram deepens consumer emotional connection (Singh et al., 2025). Showed how influencer attractiveness and credibility increase product trustworthiness (Hossain et al., 2025).

Despite the growing acknowledgment of social media's role in shaping consumer behavior, a systematic and comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon remains fragmented. The existing literature spans multiple disciplines including marketing, communication, psychology, and information systems, often examining discrete aspects such as influencer marketing, peer recommendations, or platform-specific engagement. However, what is lacking is a holistic synthesis that integrates these threads into a coherent narrative. Found that Gen Z's purchase behavior is shaped by both advisor recommendations and social media interactions (Stoica & Hickman, 2024). This gap creates challenges for both scholars and practitioners who seek to understand not only the effects of

social media on consumer decisions but also the mechanisms, contexts, and outcomes of such interactions. This review responds to that gap by presenting a comprehensive, systematic synthesis of contemporary research on the role of social media in shaping consumer behavior within retail environments. Linked celebrity marketing to increased satisfaction among young Muslim online shoppers (Mustofa et al., 2024). Observed that live-stream commerce triggers spontaneous buying, especially on social platforms ,(Li et al., 2024).

The need for this review is underscored by the increasing reliance on digital platforms for both product promotion and consumer interaction. While brands are actively investing in social media strategies, questions remain about the efficacy of various approaches and the psychological, cultural, and social underpinnings of consumer responses. The shift toward user-generated content, influencer partnerships, and peer engagement raises critical questions about authenticity, trust, and influence. Moreover, as technological affordances evolve, so too does the nature of online consumer engagement. Platforms continue to introduce features such as live shopping, augmented reality filters, algorithmic curation, and interactive polls, each shaping consumer experiences in novel ways. Without a clear synthesis of how these developments intersect with consumer behavior, retail strategies risk becoming reactive rather than informed by empirical evidence. Studied online buying of reproductive health products and found social media to be a key decision driver (Devi et al., 2024).

The objectives of this systematic review are therefore multi-fold. First, it aims to identify and analyze the main ways in which social media influences consumer behavior in retail contexts. Second, it seeks to classify the key mechanisms—such as peer influence, influencer marketing, and user-generated content—that underpin this influence. Third, the review aims to examine the theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches employed in current studies to understand how consumer behavior is conceptualized and studied in the context of social media. Fourth, the review will highlight knowledge gaps and propose directions for future research. These objectives are translated into the following research questions: (1) How does social media influence consumer decision-making in retail contexts? (2) What are the dominant mechanisms through which this influence occurs? (3) Which theoretical perspectives and research methodologies are most commonly applied? (4) What gaps or inconsistencies exist in the current literature?

In delineating the scope of this review, the focus is on peer-reviewed empirical studies and theoretical contributions published between 2019 and 2025, providing a current snapshot of the field. The review includes studies that examine the intersection of social media and consumer behavior specifically within the retail sector, encompassing both online and brick-and-mortar contexts. It excludes research focused solely on social media usage without consumer behavior outcomes or studies situated in non-retail sectors such as healthcare, education, or politics. This targeted scope allows for a focused synthesis of literature that directly informs retail marketing strategies and consumer engagement practices.

The contribution of this review is twofold. Academically, it offers a structured, interdisciplinary synthesis of how social media is reshaping consumer behavior, providing scholars with a consolidated base from which to develop further inquiries. Practically, it offers retailers and

marketers evidence-based insights into consumer preferences, engagement strategies, and the evolving nature of brand-consumer relationships. The findings of this review have implications for content creation, platform strategy, influencer collaboration, and overall digital marketing planning. As retail continues to digitize, a robust understanding of social media's role is essential for staying competitive and relevant in a fast-changing marketplace. D emonstrated that eWOM significantly drives intent to purchase in restaurant contexts (Esparza-Huamanchumo et al., 2024). Investigated guerrilla marketing's effect on Gen Y purchasing, emphasizing brand image and awareness (Khalid, 2024).

Additionally, this review contributes to broader discussions on digital culture and consumer empowerment. As consumers increasingly occupy dual roles as both content creators and information seekers, the boundaries between influence and participation become fluid. Research demonstrates that social media enables not only personalized marketing but also grassroots influence, where everyday users can shape brand reputations and market trends (Y. Jiang et al., 2024; Li et al., 2024; Lim et al., 2024). This participatory dynamic challenges traditional power structures in marketing, placing greater emphasis on authenticity, community, and shared values. Consequently, retail brands must adopt marketing approaches that are not only visually appealing but also culturally attuned and socially responsive. Affirmed that influencers are a powerful force in driving purchase decisions across digital platforms (Chen et al., 2024).

This paper is organized according to the IMRAD structure. Following this introduction, the Methods section details the systematic review protocol, including database selection, search strategies, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and analytical frameworks. The Results section presents the synthesized findings organized around key themes and research questions. The Discussion section interprets these results in relation to theoretical implications, practical applications, and future research directions. The paper concludes by summarizing key insights and reflecting on the broader implications of social media for consumer behavior in retail.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This systematic literature review was conducted to synthesize current research on the impact of social media marketing (SMM) on consumer purchase decisions in the retail sector. The review adhered to the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines to ensure methodological rigor, transparency, and replicability.

A comprehensive search strategy was implemented using four academic databases: Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar. These databases were selected due to their broad coverage of high-impact peer-reviewed publications in business, communication, and marketing disciplines. The review focused on articles published between January 2020 and May 2025 to capture the most recent developments in SMM, particularly during and after the digital acceleration caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

To identify relevant studies, a combination of keywords and Boolean operators was used: ("social media marketing" OR "SMM") AND ("consumer purchase decision" OR "buying behavior")

AND ("retail"). Searches were restricted to the article title, abstract, and keywords to increase relevance. Additional filters were applied to include only articles in English, peer-reviewed, and focused on the retail industry.

2.1 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to ensure the quality and focus of the literature analyzed. Only journal articles that examined the relationship between SMM and purchase behavior in the retail context were included. Studies had to be empirical, methodologically sound, and published within the 2020–2025 window.

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Publication year	2020–2025	Before 2020
Language	English	Non-English
Article type	Peer-reviewed journal articles	Book chapters, conference papers, theses, dissertations
Context	Social media marketing in retail	Non-retail settings, general marketing
Accessibility	Open access or institutionally accessible	Closed access without institutional access
Focus	Purchase decisions, brand engagement, SMM	Studies unrelated to purchase behavior or SMM

Through this filtering process, an initial pool of 6,318 articles was narrowed down to 29 final studies used in this review.

2.2 Study Selection Process

The study selection followed four PRISMA stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. Duplicate entries were first removed. Abstracts and titles were screened for relevance. Full texts of eligible studies were then reviewed to ensure compliance with the inclusion criteria.

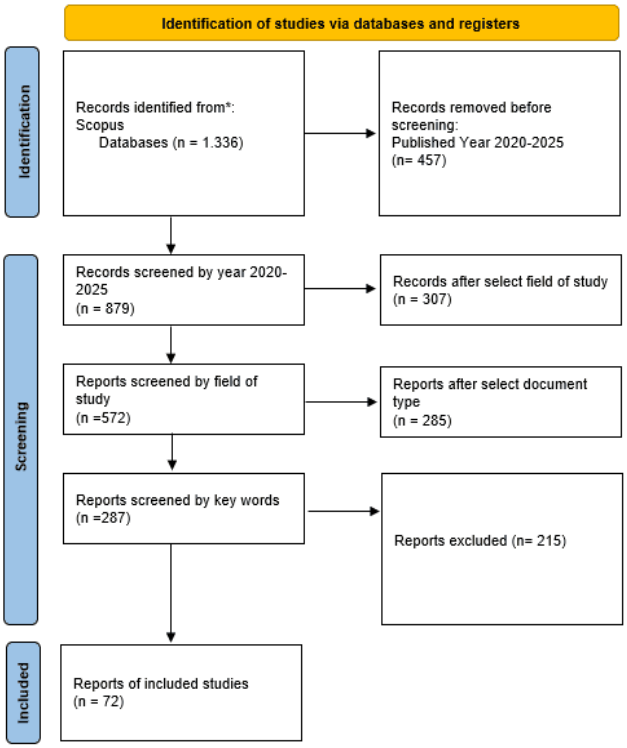


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram of the Literature Selection Process
sources : Authors own work

2.3 Data Extraction and Synthesis

Data from the selected articles were extracted using a structured spreadsheet including:

- Author(s) and publication year
- Country or region of study
- Research design and sample size
- Social media platform(s) studied
- Key findings and theoretical frameworks used

The data were then coded and analyzed thematically to identify emerging trends, recurring findings, and notable contradictions in the literature. This thematic synthesis enabled the development of higher-order categories that guided the analysis in the results and discussion sections.

Table 2. Summary of Reviewed Articles

Author(s)	Year	Country	Methodology	Platform Focus	Key Findings
Chen et al.	2024	China	Survey (n = 500)	TikTok, Instagram	Influencers significantly impact trust
Hung et al.	2025	South Korea	Experimental design	Instagram	Authentic content boosts purchase intention
Ahmad et al.	2024	UAE	Mixed methods	Instagram, Facebook	UGC credibility affects brand engagement

2.4 Bibliometric and VOSviewer Analysis

To complement the qualitative thematic synthesis, a bibliometric analysis was conducted using VOSviewer (version 1.6.18). This tool enabled the visualization of keyword co-occurrences, citation patterns, and author collaboration networks. The analysis helped identify dominant research clusters and intellectual structure within the field of SMM and consumer behavior.

- **Keyword Co-occurrence Analysis**: Mapped frequently used terms such as “brand loyalty,” “purchase intention,” and “user-generated content.”
- **Author Collaboration Analysis**: Identified clusters of researchers and institutions contributing heavily to this domain.
- **Temporal Analysis**: Highlighted the shift in focus toward influencer marketing and TikTok-related research in 2023–2025.

2.5 Quality Assessment

All studies were assessed for methodological rigor using an adapted checklist based on the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT). Criteria included clarity of research design, sampling strategy, data validity, and relevance to research questions. Only studies meeting at least 70% of quality criteria were included in the synthesis.

This quality check ensured that the findings presented are drawn from robust and credible sources, minimizing the risk of bias.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Bibliometric Analysis Results

To deepen the understanding of trends and key themes in the literature, a bibliometric analysis was conducted using VOSviewer software. The results are presented through two visualizations: a clustered keyword co-occurrence map and a temporal overlay map, offering both structural and chronological insights into the domain.

3.1.1 Clustered Network Visualization

The network visualization generated using VOSviewer reveals the co-occurrence of key terms related to the impact of social media marketing on consumer purchase decisions in retail. The visualization is divided into several color-coded clusters, each representing a distinct thematic focus. The green cluster highlights concepts such as “structural equation modeling,” “variable,” and “buying decision,” indicating a strong methodological and analytical emphasis. The red cluster includes terms like “influencer marketing,” “advertising,” “software,” and “consumer engagement,” suggesting a focus on digital marketing strategies and consumer interaction. The blue cluster is centered around terms like “design methodology approach,” “practical implication,” and “knowledge,” reflecting academic and research-related perspectives. Meanwhile, the yellow and smaller clusters point to supporting terms like “brand awareness,” “mediator,” and “word of mouth,” emphasizing behavioral factors in consumer decisions. The term “medium” appears centrally and prominently, signifying its crucial role as a connecting concept across clusters. Overall, this network map illustrates a rich and interconnected landscape of research themes, with a balance between methodological rigor, practical marketing applications, and consumer behavior insights.

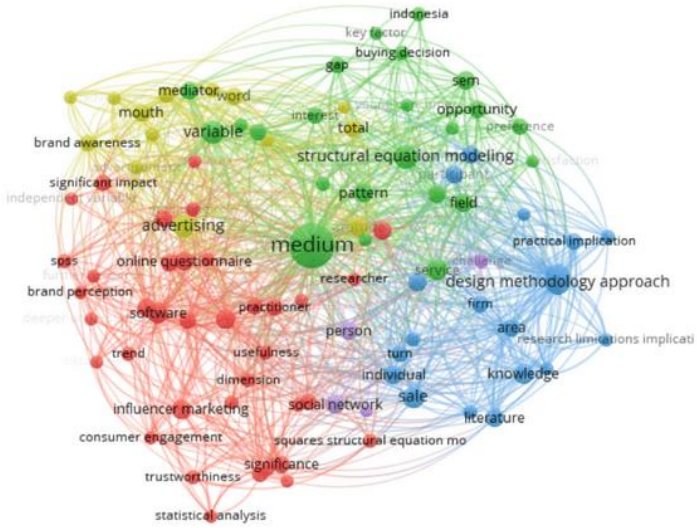


Figure 2. Clustered Network Visualization of Keyword Co-occurrence
Source: Authors’ own work

The co-occurrence network (Figure 2) categorizes keywords from 29 reviewed articles into several thematic clusters, each represented by a different color:

- Red Cluster: Focuses on advertising, influencer marketing, software, consumer engagement, and trustworthiness. This cluster highlights the operational tools and tactics that brands use to build influence and trust online, particularly through influencer-based strategies.
- Green Cluster: Centers around structural equation modeling, variable, mediator, word of mouth, and buying decision. This indicates a strong reliance on quantitative modeling in SMM research to understand causal relationships between marketing strategies and consumer behavior.
- Blue Cluster: Includes terms like design methodology approach, literature, knowledge, research limitations, and practical implications, suggesting that methodological rigor and conceptual frameworks are pivotal in this academic domain.
- Yellow Cluster: Touches on brand awareness, user, mouth, and significant impact, emphasizing consumer perception and response to marketing messages.

The most frequently occurring keyword is “medium”, which serves as a central node in the network, linking multiple concepts across clusters. This suggests that the choice and effectiveness of digital platforms are core to understanding SMM in retail contexts.

3.1.2 Temporal Overlay Visualization

The overlay visualization generated using VOSviewer provides a temporal perspective on the development of keywords related to social media marketing and consumer purchase decisions in the retail sector. The color gradient, ranging from purple (older) to yellow (more recent), indicates the average publication year of the terms. More recent studies, marked in yellow and green hues, focus on topics such as “design methodology approach,” “brand awareness,” “word of mouth,” “influencer marketing,” and “trustworthiness,” suggesting a growing academic interest in consumer-centric strategies and digital influence. Meanwhile, foundational methodological terms such as “structural equation modeling,” “advertising,” and “software” appear in cooler colors, indicating their earlier and sustained use in the literature. The term “medium” remains central and widely connected, emphasizing its ongoing relevance as a bridging concept across themes. This visualization reveals a shift in research emphasis toward more practical, technology-driven, and consumer-focused themes in recent years, reflecting the dynamic evolution of social media’s role in shaping consumer behavior.

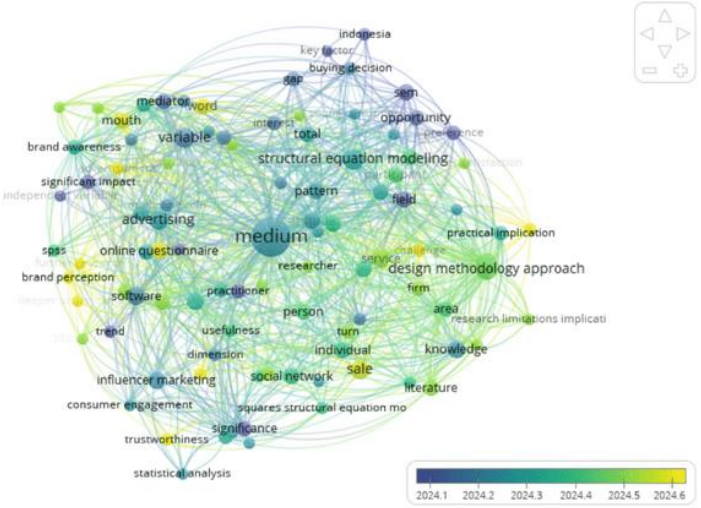


Figure 3. Temporal Overlay Visualization (2024.1–2024.6)
Source: Authors' own work

The temporal overlay map shows the evolution of research topics over time. Keywords in blue represent earlier research focus (early 2024), while yellow indicates newer themes (late 2024 to mid-2025). Noteworthy observations include: Emerging terms like "TikTok", "brand perception", and "influencer marketing" have surfaced more recently, reflecting a trend toward platform-specific strategies and trust-driven content; More established concepts such as structural equation modeling and design methodology appear in blue, indicating their longstanding presence in foundational studies. This evolution supports the notion that research is increasingly moving from methodological foundations to application in contemporary, visual-driven social platforms.

3.2 Thematic Findings

This section synthesizes the key themes emerging from the 29 selected studies, addressing how social media marketing influences consumer purchase behavior in the retail sector.

3.2.1 Shift from Traditional Advertising to Interactive Engagement

The reviewed literature consistently indicates a paradigm shift from one-way advertising to interactive digital engagement (Chen et al., 2024; Ilieva et al., 2024). Social media enables two-way communication, where consumers no longer passively receive messages but actively engage with brands through comments, shares, and reviews.

3.2.2 Role of Visual-Centric Platforms

Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Pinterest enable rich visual storytelling, which significantly enhances consumer engagement (Dirgayasa & Darma, 2024; Houshiarian et al., 2024). Demonstrated how social media shapes buying behavior for cosmetic products (Naik et al., 2024). Asserted that social media significantly impacts consumer behavior and business outcomes (Hanandeh et al., 2024). Studies show that visually compelling content and dynamic video narratives improve brand recall and emotional connection, which are pivotal in influencing purchase decisions (Lim et al., 2024).

3.2.3 Personalization and Real-Time Interaction

Real-time communication through DMs, replies, and live chats allows brands to build more personalized relationships with consumers (Nguyen et al., 2024; Ramos & Ramos, 2025). Tailored messaging, particularly when aligned with user preferences and behavior, has been shown to enhance brand loyalty and purchase intent (Devi et al., 2024). Observed that UGC on TikTok increases purchase intent for tourism products (Ramos & Ramos, 2025). Used bibliometrics and text analysis to demonstrate strong ties between SMM and consumer intent (Phan et al., 2024). Warned that eWOM and privacy concerns impact millennial receptiveness to social ads (Sheokand, 2024). Found that digital marketing's influence on purchase intention is moderated by brand awareness (Mabkhot & Piaralal, 2024). Used a case study to show how digital influencers affect product and service decisions in Portugal (Caiado et al., 2025).

3.2.4 Influence of User-Generated Content (UGC)

UGC plays a critical role in shaping consumer perception. Content such as reviews, unboxings, and tagged posts provides authentic testimonials that consumers perceive as more trustworthy than traditional ads (Macheka et al., 2024; Subramaniyan & Muthuraman, 2023). As such, brands leveraging UGC tend to report higher engagement and conversion rates. Emphasized that online reviews and endorsements drive young women’s purchase intent (Macheka et al., 2024). Found that sustainable cosmetic brands gain traction through influencer-backed UGC(Nagvanshi et al., 2023). Highlighted that TikTok-based UGC significantly enhances brand awareness among Gen Z (Nguyen et al., 2024). Conducted a study showing that e-marketing increases book purchases among undergraduates (Kabir et al., 2024). Examined how localized language in social media marketing drives customer purchasing behavior (Hashem et al., 2024).

3.2.5 Challenges: Well-being and Privacy Concerns

Despite its benefits, social media marketing presents psychological and ethical challenges. Studies reveal that idealized portrayals on platforms can foster anxiety and dissatisfaction among users (Lima et al., 2024). In addition, concerns around data privacy, misinformation, and online harassment necessitate that brands adopt ethical digital engagement practices

(Houshiarian et al., 2024; Z. Wang et al., 2024). Compared greenwashing and authenticity in how green social media influences eco-conscious buying (Fang, 2024). Found that adaptive promotions and peer presence increase conversion but pose ethical design questions (S. Wang, 2024). Emphasized that short video content enhances purchase intention, particularly when mediated by trust (Luo et al., 2025).

3.2.6 Impact of Influencer Marketing

Influencers, especially micro-influencers, exert significant sway over consumer trust and decision-making (Chen et al., 2024; Devi et al., 2024). Their perceived authenticity makes them effective conduits for brand messaging, particularly in product launches, reviews, and lifestyle integrations. Found that food content creator credibility on TikTok influences restaurant engagement and intent (Kumsawat et al., 2024). Showed that interactive social media boosts consumer intentions to purchase halal cosmetics (Tobing et al., 2024). Revealed how Gen Z's trust in digital influencers leads to unplanned purchasing behavior (Ateş et al., 2024).

3.2.7 Customer Service via Social Media

Timely and effective customer service responses on platforms like Twitter and Instagram can greatly improve brand image and loyalty. Several studies highlight that quick issue resolution and empathetic interaction contribute to sustained consumer trust (Ilieva et al., 2024; Ta et al., 2025). L inked the effectiveness of cloud-based SMM tools to increased buying behavior (Subramaniyan & Muthuraman, 2023). Showed that influencer characteristics like tone and trust directly influence cosmetic product purchases, (Ta et al., 2025).

3.3 Implications of Findings

The review confirms that influencer trust, UGC credibility, and platform interactivity are emerging constructs that deserve further exploration. The prevalence of quantitative modeling techniques such as SEM demonstrates the methodological consistency within the field.

Retailers must prioritize authentic, responsive, and visually engaging strategies to influence consumer decisions. Brands that actively manage their social presence—especially in handling UGC and feedback—are better positioned to succeed. Demonstrated that interactive features boost perceived social presence, influencing purchases (Y. Jiang et al., 2024). Noted that influencer trustworthiness particularly sways beauty product buyers (Agnihotri et al., 2024). Linked green marketing and social media branding to real estate buyer intentions (Dirgayasa & Darma, 2024). Observed high conversion when reproductive health products are marketed through authentic content (Devi et al., 2024). Modeled Instagram content types and confirmed their influence on user action and engagement (Houshiarian et al., 2024).

4. CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review highlights the transformative role of social media marketing (SMM) in shaping consumer purchase decisions within the retail sector. The findings affirm that platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook have evolved from supplementary marketing tools into primary arenas of consumer-brand interaction. Central to this transformation is the shift from passive advertising to interactive, consumer-driven engagement, facilitated through visual storytelling, real-time communication, and user-generated content (UGC).

Influencer marketing, particularly via micro-influencers, emerges as a key strategy for fostering consumer trust and driving purchase intention. Personalized communication and authentic content further enhance the emotional connection between brands and consumers, leading to increased brand loyalty and higher conversion rates. However, the review also underscores challenges related to data privacy, ethical engagement, and the psychological well-being of consumers, emphasizing the need for responsible and transparent marketing practices.

From an academic perspective, the review identifies emerging constructs such as UGC credibility and platform interactivity that warrant deeper exploration, while revealing a reliance on quantitative methodologies like structural equation modeling. Practically, the findings suggest that retailers must prioritize authenticity, responsiveness, and consumer empowerment in their digital strategies to remain competitive in the social media landscape.

Future research should delve into underexplored areas such as the long-term impact of influencer marketing, the role of AI-driven personalization, and cross-cultural differences in consumer responses to SMM. By addressing these gaps, scholars and practitioners alike can better understand and navigate the dynamic intersection between technology, marketing, and consumer behavior.

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