

# **Liberating the Digital Consumer: A Study on Perception and Influence in Social Media Marketing**

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## **Abstract**

The digital consumer has become a powerful and changing force in today's interconnected world, changing how businesses design, talk about, and deliver their products. The rise of social media sites has changed not only how brands market themselves but also how they interact with customers. This paper, titled "Liberating the Digital Consumer: A Study on Perception and Influence in Social Media Marketing," explores the changing ways that consumers think about things because of social media and how these thoughts affect their decisions, loyalty, and support for brands. The research utilizes both primary and secondary data to investigate the multifaceted dimensions of consumer empowerment in the digital age.

This research employs a survey-based research design to elucidate the principal factors influencing consumer perception, authenticity of content, influencer credibility, brand transparency, and congruence with social and cultural values. Social media sites are places where people can talk each other, and trust and relatability are more important than traditional persuasive techniques. The study is descriptive in nature. The total population is restricted to the Kozhikode district of Kerala.

This paper contends that the "liberation" of the digital consumer presents both a challenge and an opportunity for makers. This study enhances the comprehension of social media marketing as not only a promotional instrument but also a platform for co-creating value with empowered consumers, facilitating a more democratic and participatory digital economy.

**Keywords:** Digital Consumer, Social Media Marketing, Consumer Perception, Social Media Influence

## **Introduction**

The advent of social media has revolutionized the way consumers interact with brands, products, and services, profoundly impacting their perceptions, attitudes, and purchasing decisions. As digital platforms continue to evolve and proliferate, consumers are increasingly empowered, with the ability to access vast amounts of information, share experiences, and influence others. This shift has transformed the traditional marketing landscape, underscoring the need for a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics of social media influence. This study, “Liberating the Digital Consumer: A Study on Perception and Influence in Social Media Marketing,” seeks to explore the multifaceted relationship between social media marketing efforts and consumer behaviour, examining how perceptions are shaped, attitudes are formed, and purchasing decisions are influenced. By investigating the intricacies of social media’s impact on digital consumers, this research aims to provide valuable insights for marketers, enabling them to develop effective strategies that resonate with, engage, and ultimately liberate the digital consumer in a rapidly changing and increasingly interconnected world.

## **Review of Literature**

**Deepak Srivastava et al. (2025)** examined the role of social media dependence in shaping consumer behaviour and found that higher dependence significantly strengthens social influence and consumer trust, which in turn enhances purchase intention. Their study highlights that digital communities function as persuasive

environments where collective opinions shape individual buying decisions.

**Jyotsna P. N. and K. Poorna (2025)** explored the influence of digital media influencers on customer behaviour and market reach. Their study concludes that influencers impact consumers primarily by establishing credibility, relatability, and trust, thereby enhancing persuasive effectiveness and influencing purchase intention.

**Aceson Chan (2025)** investigated the impact of social media exposure on consumer behaviour, particularly among younger demographics. The findings reveal that younger consumers are highly responsive to influencer-generated content and are more likely to translate social media exposure into purchase decisions due to their sensitivity to trends and social validation.

**Isabelle Hsu (2024)** analysed social media marketing strategies and their influence on purchasing behaviour. The study emphasises the growing role of influencers, TikTokmarketing, and electronic word of mouth in shaping consumer perceptions and driving purchase outcomes, especially in visually driven product categories.

**Kumar and Singh (2022):** This study explores customer engagement in social platforms, highlighting how digital consumers seek identity expression, emotional resonance, and social belonging through online interactions. Their study indicates that engagement is not limited to liking or commenting but includes deeper

psychological involvement where consumers internalize brand messages and integrate them into self-identity.

**Dwivedi et al. (2021):** The study provides a comprehensive review of digital and social media marketing research, highlighting the emergence of empowered and participatory digital consumers. They argue that advances in technology have shifted consumers from passive recipients to active agents who co-create, reinterpret, and disseminate brand meaning in online environments. The review identifies key trends such as the rise of micro-influencers, interactive brand storytelling, algorithm-driven content creation, and the convergence of entertainment and commerce.

**Chen (2021):** The researcher examined how platform design architecture shapes the psychological pathways through which consumers interpret marketing messages on social media. The study found that interface complexity, recommendation algorithms, and hyper-personalised content streams foster a sense of informational overload, which paradoxically increases consumers' reliance on heuristic cues such as likes, shares, and influencer endorsements.

**Phua, Jin, and Kim (2020):** The study examines the relationship between social media typologies and consumer behaviour, revealing that different platforms activate different modes of consumer perception. Instagram fosters aspirational identity-building, TikTok encourages trend-following behaviour, and Facebook supports community-based validation. Their study shows that digital

consumers strategically choose platforms depending on the emotional experience they seek.

**Vázquez and Santos (2020):** This study explored the rise of digital empowerment among consumers and analysed how social media facilitates participatory behaviours such as co-creation, brand activism, and peer-to-peer influence. Their work argued that digital consumers increasingly perceive themselves not merely as recipients of marketing messages but as active meaning-makers who shape brand narratives through commentary, reinterpretation, and collective criticism. The study emphasised that modern consumers are liberated through connectivity, gaining the ability to publicly challenge manipulative marketing practices.

**Hollebeek and Belk (2019):** Their research examined how immersive content formats—such as live video streams, stories, and influencer-led digital narratives—reshape consumer perception by creating highly affective engagement experiences. Their study showed that emotional resonance, narrative authenticity, and perceived social closeness significantly increase consumers' susceptibility to social media influence. Importantly, they argued that social media does not merely convey information but constructs symbolic spaces where consumers form identity-based attachments to brands and online communities.

**Kim and Song (2018):** This study analysed the evolution of consumer perception in relation to social media advertising transparency, focusing especially on influencer disclosure practices.

Their findings revealed that consumers increasingly expect authenticity and honesty from digital endorsements, and when influencers disclose sponsorships openly, it enhances—not reduces—trust. The study explained that modern digital consumers interpret transparency as a signal of ethical behaviour and personal integrity, which improves both brand perception and influencer credibility.

**Ismail (2017):** The researcher investigates how consumers perceive social media marketing activities, revealing that perceived entertainment, interactivity, and trendiness significantly shape brand loyalty and engagement. His findings show that consumers respond more positively to brands that adopt a participatory communication style rather than a broadcast-style promotional approach. Social media elements such as storytelling, gamification, and interactive features contribute to a sense of relationship-building, making consumers feel more connected and valued.

**Munar and Jakobsen (2017):** Their research investigated the influence of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) on digital consumer perception, specifically in high-involvement purchase contexts such as travel and technology products. They found that online reviews possess a unique persuasive force because consumers perceive them as authentic peer-generated information rather than marketer-created narratives. The study highlighted that credibility, message depth, and perceived reviewer expertise significantly affect consumer decision-making.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Social media profoundly influences consumer-brand interactions, shaping perceptions and driving purchase decisions. There's a critical gap in understanding social media's impact on consumer behaviour and how marketing efforts translate into outcomes. With characteristics like interactivity, user-generated content, and influencer ecosystems, social media significantly affects consumer choices. Deciphering this influence is vital for marketers to optimize strategies and connect with empowered digital audiences, highlighting the need for deeper insights into social media's role in shaping the digital consumer's journey.

## **Objectives of the Study**

This study aims to explore digital consumers' perceptions of brands and marketing on social media, study's the influence of social media marketing on consumer behavior and purchase decisions, evaluate the role and effectiveness of social media influencers, and understand factors empowering digital consumers through social media. The research seeks to provide insights into shaping effective marketing approaches in dynamic digital ecosystems.

## **Methodology**

The study was conducted in Kozhikode district in Kerala. The primary data was collected from 250 sample individuals in Kozhikode district through well-structured questionnaires during August and September 2025. The percentage analysis and graph used for analysis of the data.

**Table 1**

1. Social media marketing affects decision-making when buying products online

<b>Response Category</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Strongly Agreed	10.4%
Somewhat Agreed	46%
Neutral	36.4%
Somewhat Disagreed	4.4%
Strongly Disagreed	2.8%

2. Trust in product recommendations from social media marketing

<b>Response Category</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Strongly Agreed	8%
Somewhat Agreed	46.4%
Neutral	31.2%
Somewhat Disagreed	9.6%
Strongly Disagreed	4.8%

**Table 2:** Factors Influencing Purchase Decisions

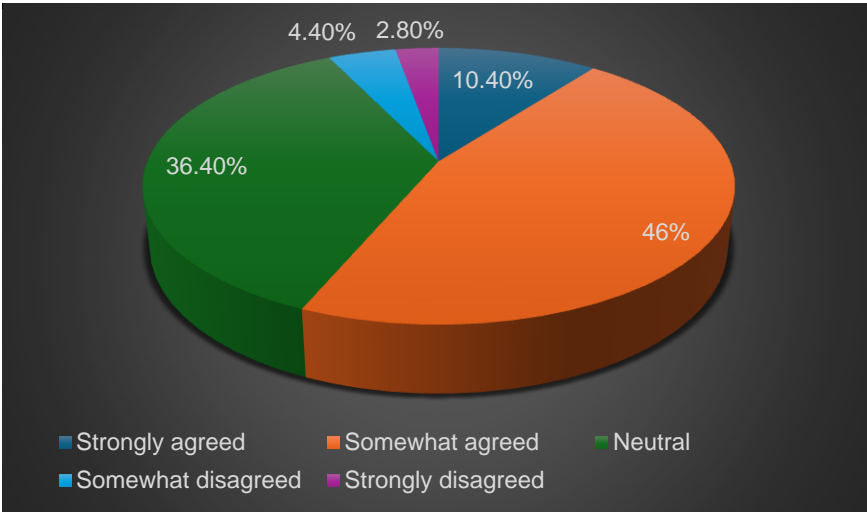
<b>Factor</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Influencer Endorsement	51.6%
Reviews	8.8%
Price	39.6%

**Table 3:** Trusted Sources for Product Information

<b>Source</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Social Media	32%
Online Reviews	30%
Friends and Family	20%
Brand Websites	17.2%
Other	0.8%

### Chart 1.1

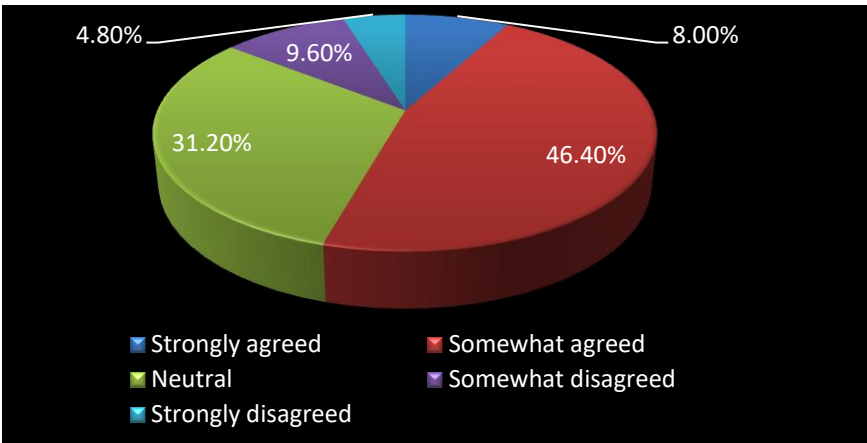
#### Social media effect on online buying



**Interpretation:** From this, we can conclude that a majority of people believe social media marketing has some influence, with the largest group somewhat agreeing. There is a relatively smaller group who are neutral or disagree with this statement.

### Chart 1.2

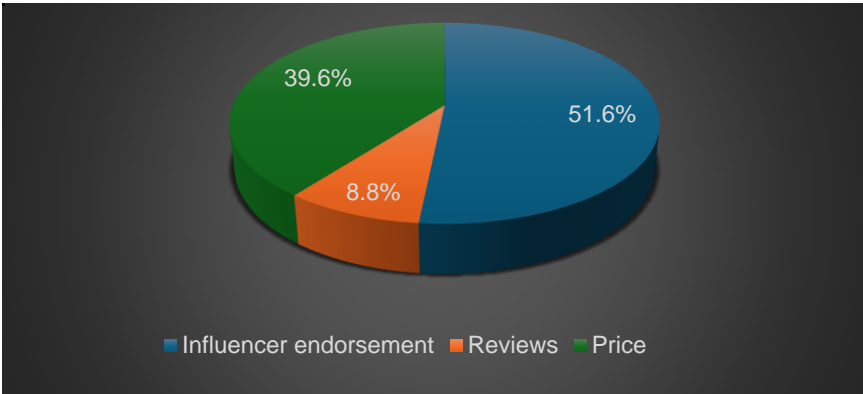
#### Trust in influencers on social media



**Interpretation:** Overall, the chart shows that while a decent number of people trust influencer recommendations (whether strongly or somewhat), a notable portion remains neutral.

### Chart 2.1

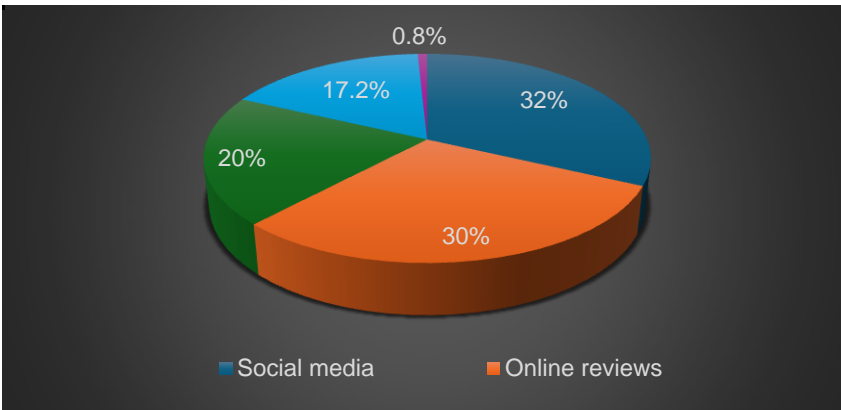
**Factors consider while making purchases**



**Interpretation:** In conclusion, most respondents acknowledge that social media marketing has some influence on their purchasing decisions, with the largest group stating it has an effect sometimes or always.

### Chart 3.1

**Trusted sources for product info**



**Interpretation:** Overall, people put the most trust in social media and online reviews, while brand websites and other sources are considered less reliable.

### **Findings**

The study reveals that consumers today are significantly influenced by social media marketing in shaping their preferences and purchase behaviour. The rise of digital platforms has created a space where influencers play a vital role in impacting consumer decisions, as their content and endorsements are often perceived as authentic and relatable compared to traditional advertising. Consumers increasingly rely on product information shared on social media, demonstrating higher levels of trust in peer reviews, influencer recommendations, and brand interactions online. This indicates a shift in consumer perception, where social media not only serves as a marketing tool but also as a trusted source of information and guidance in the decision-making process, ultimately liberating consumers by giving them access to diverse opinions and empowering them to make informed choices.

### **Suggestions**

It is suggested that businesses and marketers should focus on building genuine connections with consumers by prioritizing authenticity, transparency, and engagement over aggressive promotional tactics. Since consumers trust social media content, especially from influencers, brands should carefully collaborate with credible voices who align with their values and audience expectations. At the same time, encouraging user-generated content,

reviews, and interactive campaigns can strengthen consumer trust and brand loyalty. It is also recommended that companies adopt a consumer-centric approach by providing personalized and value-driven content, ensuring that marketing efforts feels more like conversations than advertisements. By embracing these strategies, brand can effectively harness the liberating power of social media while respecting the autonomy and influence of digital consumers.

### **Conclusion**

The study concludes that social media has transformed the traditional marketer-consumer relationship into a more interactive and consumer driven space. Consumers are no longer dependent on one-way communication from brands but instead actively seek, evaluate, and share product information through digital platforms. The findings confirm that social media marketing, particularly influencer-driven content and peer recommendations, plays a critical role in shaping purchase decision, as consumer place greater trust in these sources compared conventional advertising. This shifting highlights the growing autonomy of the digital consumer, who is now empowered to make informed choices based on diverse perspective and authentic experiences. Ultimately, the liberation of the digital consumer reflects a marketing ecosystem where influence is shared, trust is paramount, and consumers hold significant power in determining brand value and success.

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