

Impact of Customer's Social Media Dependence and Social Influence on Trust Cognition and Purchase Behaviour

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Abstract

As digital platforms become more common, people are using social media more and more to find out about products, read reviews, and make buying choices. Peer relationships, brand messages & how trustworthy people think internet material is all affect this dependency. Understanding how these social elements shape trust and purchase decisions is vital for marketers aiming to optimize online strategies. This study explores how customers' dependence on social media and social influence (SI) affect their trust cognition (TC) & purchase behavior (PB). Using quantitative methods, data was collected from 141 respondents through structured questionnaires. The study examines the two key dimensions—social media dependence (SMD) & social influence (SI)—and their impact on trust cognition (TC) & actual purchasing decisions. Comparative analysis & appropriate statistical tests (t-test, correlation, regression) were used to test the hypothesis & establish relationships. The findings suggest a significant positive relationship between social media engagement as well as consumer trust, which in turn impacts purchase behavior (PB).

Keywords: Customer, Social Media, Dependence, Social Influence, Trust, Purchase Behaviour

Introduction

In today's digital world, social media is no more just a way to talk to people; it's a strong force that shapes how people think about things, builds trust, and makes them buy things. Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok are no longer simply places to have fun or connect with friends. They are now important parts of the consumer experience that affect how consumers find items, judge the legitimacy of brands, and ultimately decide what to purchase (Mehta, A., 2018). These platforms are very interactive, immediate, and visually appealing, which has made the time between seeing an ad and taking action much shorter.

People who buy things nowadays are no longer just passive receivers of brand messages; they are now active participants in establishing brand meaning. They talk about their experiences with products, write reviews, create content, and influence the choices of their peers (Abdollahbeigi, et.al., 2018) . This makes the social media environment (SME) a complex web of interactions that continuously changes how people behave and how much confidence they have in each other. Researchers and marketers call this trend "social media dependence (SMD)," which means that people are relying more and more on social media to get knowledge about products, validate their choices, and even find emotional consolation when making judgments about what to buy.

This reliance isn't just a personal issue; it happens in a larger social context where peers, influencers, and online groups have a lot of power. Social influence (SI) is the outside pressure or persuasion that may change people's choices, attitudes, and purchasing habits. The contemporary digital shopper typically thinks about not just what a thing does, but also how other people see it in their online connections. Likes, shares, comments, endorsements from influencers, and other social proof tools are becoming very important signs of trustworthiness and value (Gupta, V., 2018).

Trust cognition is the person's view of a brand's dependability, authenticity, and integrity in a virtual setting. This is at the heart of these events. In old stores, buyers could touch and feel the things and talk to people in person to build trust. Online trust, on the other hand, is mostly built via indirect signals like customer reviews, star ratings, algorithmically recommended content, and influencer stories (Siddiqui, A., et.al., 2021). So, trust cognition is a key role in whether or not a customer goes from looking to buying.

This study endeavors to investigate the interconnected impact of social media dependence (SMD) & social influence (SI) on trust cognition (TC), and how that, in turn, influences purchasing behavior (PB). It aims to examine whether individuals who are highly engaged with or reliant on social media are more likely to develop cognitive trust and show stronger buying intent or frequency. It further explores if trust acts as a mediating variable in this relationship, offering a deeper understanding of the digital consumer psyche.

As the market becomes more and more driven by digital contact and virtual engagement, it is important for companies, marketers, and researchers to grasp these psychological and behavioral dynamics. As people's digital habits change, especially after the COVID-19 epidemic sped up online interaction, firms need to change their methods to develop trust and get people to buy things online (Srivastava, et.al., 2022). The findings of this research may help you come up with focused marketing plans, improve your interactions with customers, and build trustworthy brand personas on social media.

The research adds to the growing area of digital marketing and consumer behavior by concentrating on three main ideas: social media reliance, social influence, and trust cognition. It not only provides real-world data to current ideas, but it also shows how people are making decisions in digital-first situations. In a time where consumer trust is earned, not given, and is mostly based on online interactions, community feedback, and social validation, the findings of this study are extremely important.

Literature Review

The growth of social media as a business ecosystem has had a big effect on how people connect with businesses, trust them, and decide what to buy. This literature review brings together empirical and conceptual studies from the previous ten years, concentrating on four main ideas: social media reliance, social influence (SI), trust cognition (TC), and buying behavior.

Andreassen et al. (2017) say that using social media too much might make people often interact with brand material, which can change how they make decisions. People who are addicted to social media don't only act in a certain way; they also think in a certain way, looking for emotional satisfaction from these sites (Kuss., et.al., 2015). (Chen et.al., 2022) more recent study shows that high engagement on sites like Instagram is linked to impulsive buying because of algorithm-driven content and constant exposure to marketing cues. Social influence (SI), especially from friends and influencers online, is a big aspect of how customers see things. Cialdini (2016) came up with six rules for persuading people. Two of these rules, social proof and authority, are often used in digital marketing. According to (De Veirman et al. 2017), the trustworthiness of an influencer and the number of followers they have have a direct impact on how much faith the audience has in them and what they purchase. (Djafarova et al., 2019) also spoke about how micro-influencers, even if they have less followers, are more trusted by specialized audiences. Trust is still a key part of how people act online. According to (Gefen, et.al., 2015), confidence in online sellers rests on how honest, capable, and kind they seem to be, and these factors are becoming more influenced by social media signals. Lim et al. (2020) discovered that things like live chats, reviews, and user comments might assist build cognitive trust, particularly when interacting with businesses that are new or unfamiliar to you. At the same time, Hajli et al. (2015) said that trust is what links social media use with the desire to buy anything.

Cheung et al. (2015) say that user-generated material, such ratings, unboxing videos, and testimonials, is like digital word-of-mouth, which is important for building trust. Their results support the social influence hypothesis, which says that people make choices based on what they think other people think, especially when they are unsure. (Ismagilova et al., 2020) did a meta-analysis that showed that electronic word-of-mouth has a big effect on trust and buying behavior in all sectors. Each platform encourages its own way of interacting. For example, Lu and Fan (2023) discovered that platforms with a lot of pictures, like Instagram and TikTok, make people feel more emotionally involved, which makes them trust them quicker than platforms with a lot of text. Platforms like Facebook, on the other hand, are better for writing thorough evaluations and fostering relationships over time (Shan et al., 2019). These disparities across platforms mean that trust-building techniques need to be tailored to each one.

Several research have shown that trust cognition acts as a link between social cues and conduct. Alalwan et al. (2017) discovered that trust affects the link between how beneficial people think social media adverts are and how likely they are to buy something. Mukherjee and Nath (2021) also found that confidence in a brand that is built on social media has an indirect effect on how often people buy from that company and how loyal they are to it. Studies done after 2020 show that people are moving toward purchasing things online. (Jain., et.al., 2023) observed that people, especially Gen Z, are relying more on social media to find products and build trust. This tendency has made social influence even more important for low-involvement goods like cosmetics and clothes. On the other hand, Chen et al. (2024) found that trust cognition is very important in categories with a lot of engagement, and it is commonly developed via expert evaluations and long-form material. AI-driven customization is changing how people think about trust. Kumar and Gupta (2022) say that algorithmic curation makes echo chambers stronger. In

echo chambers, people see the same brand or influencer over and over again, which makes them seem more trustworthy. But they also warn against too much automation, as customers may not like talking to machines and lose confidence.

Over the course of ten years of changing study, the literature shows that social media reliance and social influence are major psychological and behavioral factors that affect how people think about trust. Trust, in turn, is a vital factor that affects the chance of a purchase. Combining social proof, peer reviews, and influencer endorsements with platform-specific methods has changed the way conventional marketing works. As new technologies like AI continue to change how people build trust, future research has to keep looking at how algorithmic interaction and changing consumer preferences will effect the trust-purchase relationship in digital commerce.

Research Methodology

This study used a descriptive as well as analytical research method that is useful for figuring out how social media reliance, social influence (SI), trust cognition (TC), and buying behavior are related to each other. A quantitative research method was used to make sure that the results were fair and statistically sound. Utilized simple random sampling to get a representative sample of 141 people who responded. We employed a systematic questionnaire to collect data, which made it possible to compare and be consistent across answers. SPSS version has been to analyze the data. By using a number of statistical methods, such as descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, regression analysis, and independent t-tests, to evaluate the hypotheses and come up with new ideas.

Research Objectives

- To examine the impact of customers' social media dependence (SMD) & social influence (SI) on trust cognition (TC).
- To analyze how trust cognition (TC) mediates the relationship between social media dependence (SMD)/social influence (SI) & purchase behavior (PB).

Research Hypotheses

- H01: There is a significant relationship between social media dependence (SMD) & trust cognition (TC).
- H02: Social influence (SI) significantly impacts trust cognition.
- H03: Trust cognition (TC) significantly impacts purchase behavior.
- H04: There is a significant difference in purchase behavior (PB) across different levels of social media dependence (SMD).

Table 1: Demographic Profiles (Respondents)

Variables Taken	Categories Taken	Frequency (N = 141)	Percentages (%)
Gender (G)	Male (M)	71	50.42%
	Female (f)	70	49.6%
Age Group (AG)	18 to 25	56	39.70%
	26 to 35	48	34.01%
	36 to 45	25	17.70%

	> 45	12	8.50%
Social Media Use (SMU)	<1 hour/day	18	12.80%
	1 to 3 hours/day	59	41.80%
	3 to 5 hours/day	42	29.80%
	>5 hours/day	22	15.61%

Table 2: Reliability Test (Cronbach's Alpha)

Constructs	No. of Item (s)	Cronbach's Alpha Value	All constructs have Cronbach's alpha > 0.70, indicating good internal consistency.
Social Media Dependence (SMD)	5	0.8141	
Social Influence (SI)	4	0.7890	
Trust Cognition (TC)	5	0.8421	
Purchase Behaviour (PB)	4	0.8011	

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics

Variable (s)	Mean Values	Std. Deviation
Social Media Dependence (SMD)	3.842	0.680
Social Influence (SI)	3.660	0.711
Trust Cognition (TC)	3.911	0.741
Purchase Behaviour (PB)	3.790	0.690

Table 4: Correlation Matrix

Variable (s)	1	2	3	4
1. Social Media Dependence (SMD)	1			
2. Social Influence (SI)	0.5821**	1		
3. Trust Cognition (TC)	0.6010**	0.6470**	1	
4. Purchase Behaviour (PB)	0.5410**	0.5160**	0.7031**	1

p < 0.01 ; All variables are positively correlated. Trust cognition is strongly related to purchase behavior.

Table 5: Regression Analysis (Model 1: Predicting Trust Cognition)

Predictor	β	t	Sig.	$R^2 = 0.5460$, $F = 82.140$, $p < 0.01$
Constant	-	-	0.0000	
Social Media Dependence (SMD)	0.3470	5.430	0.0000**	
Social Influence (SI)	0.4190	6.120	0.0000**	

Dependent Variable: Trust Cognition; Independent Variables: Social Media Dependence, Social Influence

Table 6: Regression Analysis (Model 2: Predicting Purchase Behaviour)

Predictor	β	t	Sig.	$R^2 = 0.4950$, $F = 165.70$,
Constant	-	-	0.0000	

Trust Cognition (TC)	0.7031	12.870	0.0000**	p < 0.01
<i>Dependent Variable: Purchase Behaviour; Independent Variable: Trust Cognition</i>				

Table 7: Independent Samples t-Test: Based on Social Media Usage Time

Social Media Use Time	Mean Purchase Behaviour	Std. Dev.	t = 3.120, df = 1309, p = 0.002
≤3 hours/day	3.611	0.621	
>3 hours/day	3.980	0.731	
People who spend more time on social media show significantly higher purchase behavior.			

Table 8: Comparative Analysis

Variable	Low SMD Group (n=61)	High SMD Group (n=80)	Difference	Significance
Trust Cognition	3.650	4.101	0.450	p < 0.01
Purchase Behaviour	3.560	4.021	0.460	p < 0.01
<i>SMD = Social Media Dependence</i>				

Findings & Recommendations

- The reliance on social media and social influence profoundly affects trust cognition, highlighting the need for purposeful participation on digital platforms.
- Trust cognition is a significant predictor of purchasing behavior, emphasizing its pivotal significance in consumer decision-making.
- Consumers exhibiting elevated social media involvement demonstrate increased trust and a higher propensity to make purchases, highlighting the need of sustaining an active and relevant online presence.
- A significant disparity in purchasing behavior correlates with the duration of users' social media interaction, indicating that time-based engagement patterns have to be used.
- A comparative investigation indicates that those with more social media dependency have increased trust and elevated purchase behavior.
- Businesses have to invest in the development of real, user-generated content to bolster trust perception and credibility among their audience.
- Influencer marketing techniques have to concentrate on micro-communities and specific groups exhibiting elevated engagement levels for enhanced effect.
- Monitoring and identifying high-dependence consumers enables organizations to execute tailored remarketing and loyalty efforts.
- Promoting client evaluations, testimonials, and peer endorsements may enhance social impact and establish trust.

- Real-time interaction via narratives, live broadcasts, and participatory material may enhance emotional bonds and foster trust.
- Personalization informed by social media activity may enhance content distribution and increase purchase intent.
- Brands must maintain transparency and consistency across channels to foster enduring trust and customer loyalty.

Conclusion

The current research examined at all the complicated ways that social media dependency (SMD), social influence (SI), trust cognition (TC), and consumer purchasing behavior (PB) are connected. The results show that social media dependency (SMD) as well social influence (SI) are both statistically significant predictors of trust cognition (TC). Trust cognition (TC), in turn, plays a key role in influencing buy intentions and actual customer behavior. In a digital world where people are always connected, browsing, sharing, and consuming material, trust is no longer built via face-to-face contacts but through virtual indicators and social validation from peers and influencers. The study shows that people are using social media more and more to help them make decisions, especially when it comes to comparing brands and goods. Customers gain cognitive trust via things like reviews, suggestions from influencers, or the perceived popularity of a business on social media. This trust may either speed up or slow down their route to buy. Also, the comparison and regression studies show that people who are more dependent on social media are more likely to be influenced by others. This makes it even more important for digital marketing strategies to focus on material that is credible, consistent, and real. From a theoretical point of view, the research supports the idea that social media is a place where both internal variables (dependency) and external elements (impact) come together to create customer trust, which is essential for successful transactions. It fits with current views about how people behave online and contributes to the expanding body of information about the psychological factors that affect trust and purchasing behavior (PB) online.

In terms of practicality, the findings provide marketers, companies, and content producers useful information that they can use. In a time when it's hard to earn and simple to lose customer trust, companies need to provide content that is open, real, and accessible to their target audience. To build trust and establish a socially reinforced sense of worth, you need to use user-generated content, influencer partnerships, interactive interaction, and peer evaluations in a smart way. Brands should also find users who are very dependent on them and reach out to them through personalized messages, loyalty programs, and community-based platforms. These users are more likely to buy something and convince others to do the same. Also, the study's findings show that standard marketing measurements like impressions and reach may not be enough to measure success in a world where social media is so important. Instead, performance assessment systems should include measures that measure trust, engagement, sentiment, and impact. Brands that know how to build and keep trust via social interactions are more likely to keep customers coming back and have a long-lasting online presence.

This research shows that trust cognition (TC) is not something that happens on its own; it is the result of constant contact, validation, and participation in digital social settings. Businesses must

change their methods to build real connections as customers change how they use things and what they expect from them. Marketers and companies may not only adapt but also do well in the digital marketplace, which is becoming more social and trust-dependent, by recognizing the strong effects of social media dependency (SMD) and social influence (SI).

Future Research Scope

Future research may examine at how social media affects trust in different parts of the world by comparing cultures. It is best to do longitudinal study to see how trust and buying habits evolve over time. Also, exploring individual platforms, like Instagram, YouTube, or WhatsApp, might give you a better idea of how people use them. Investigating at how influencer credibility, algorithmic personalization, and emotional involvement affect trust might add even more to the area. Researchers could further investigate at how worries about privacy affect trust and conduct online.

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