

Strategic Social Media Marketing: Analyzing Platform-Specific Consumer Preferences and Behavior

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The emergence of online marketplace on social media platforms has altered conventional online shopping by fostering a more interactive and immersive consumer experience. Unlike conventional e-commerce platforms, where consumers actively search for specific products, social networking applications proactively present product information to users, irrespective of their immediate needs.

Objectives: This transformative shift highlights the growing importance of understanding consumer preferences to develop innovative strategies for effective product positioning in the digital marketplace. The integration of Artificial Intelligence, particularly through intelligent chatbots powered by natural language processing, has further enhanced the ability of businesses to interact seamlessly with consumers.

Methods: This research employs a descriptive research design, analysing data from 406 samples using SPSS and AMOS, to uncover the key factors driving the popularity of online marketplace on social media platforms. The research work emphasizes the strategic role of Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMA), such as the utilization of chatbots and diverse payment options, in improving the consumer shopping experience.

Results: By leveraging these tools, businesses can interact with Consumers more efficiently, optimize their performance, and significantly reduce operating costs. This research work offers practical insights for businesses seeking to strengthen their presence and competitiveness in the fast-changing online marketplace on social media platforms.

Keywords: Social media, online marketplace on social media platforms, Intention to purchase, SMMA.

INTRODUCTION

Social networking applications are used by billions of people worldwide. According to a global statistical report published by Kepios, as of January 2023, there were approximately 4.76 billion users of online marketplace on social media platforms worldwide. The total number of social media users increased by 137 million during 2022, with around 23 million new users joining social networking sites in the last three months of the year—October, November, and December 2022. As of January 2023, more than 59.4% of the global population actively engaged with online marketplace on social media platforms. This percentage includes children who may not have access to mobile phones or laptops, meaning that when considering only the population aged 18 and above, 77.8% of the global population were active social media users. The demographic breakdown shows that female users account for 46.3% of the total social media user base, while male users make up 53.7%. The report also highlighted that, on average, an individual spends 2 hours and 31 minutes per day on social networking applications. Furthermore, individuals were found to be using at least seven different social networking applications each month (Arrigo et al., 2021).

Social media encompasses web-based platforms that enable users to create, share, and engage with diverse content formats, including text, images, and audio, in an easy and accessible way. These platforms also play a significant role in entrepreneurial development, providing opportunities for businesses to market their products, increase sales, and attract potential Consumers (Wang, 2015). The rapid growth in social media users has enabled vendors to establish

low-cost, direct communication channels with consumers through these platforms. This increased communication capability has allowed vendors to interact with large audiences regarding their products and promotional activities, significantly enhancing the effectiveness of their marketing strategies (Vonoga, 2021). As a result, the impact of vendor-consumer relationships has been greatly amplified within the online marketplace on social media platforms.

A 2024 survey by the Ministry of Communication revealed a growing trend among social networking application users to engage in both buying and selling within online marketplace on social media platforms. Purchase intention through social networking applications reflects a consumer's readiness and preference to purchase products or services directly via social media platforms. This behavior is influenced by various factors, including social influence, user experience, personalized recommendations, and the ease of transaction. Social networking applications such as Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp have evolved beyond engagement tools to serve as powerful e-commerce platforms, integrating features like shoppable posts, in-app checkouts, and influencer-driven marketing. Consumers are increasingly making purchase decisions based on reviews, recommendations, and targeted advertisements, leading to a seamless blend of social interaction and online shopping. Earlier, while doing online shopping the consumers have to feed the product name, which they want to buy. Upon which from the list of related products, consumers may compare and purchase the products they need. At online marketplace on social media platforms, regardless of the consumer need, all information along with its photograph or video will be sent to the consumers through social networking applications (Geho, & Dangelo, 2012). Today's consumers are more technologically savvy and have greater exposure to digital platforms and gadgets, which enhances their ability to make informed choices regarding brands, products, and vendors (Abd Aziz & Abd Wahid, 2018). This shift in consumer behavior presents both challenges and opportunities for vendors. To thrive in the consumer centric social media, sellers must comprehend the aspects that influence purchase intentions and leverage them as strategic opportunities. By understanding and addressing these intentions, businesses can better attract and retain Consumers, ultimately enhancing their competitiveness in the social media-driven market.

Therefore, it is essential for the vendors to understand the consumer preferences before exhibiting their products through online marketplace on social media platforms. Understanding the individual needs of the consumer demonstrates the structure of those demographics and behavioral variables. Hence, it is essential to research work both individually and in groups concerning the intention to purchase through online marketplace on social media platforms.

With the rapid evolution of social media and its growing role in consumer purchasing behavior, the future of marketing is increasingly reliant on social networking applications (Vinav, 2023). Thus, finding the consumers' preferences from the selected social networking applications, provides a breakthrough for developing innovative strategies to position their product line in the market. Therefore, this research work aims to explore consumer purchase intention within online marketplace on social media platforms, providing valuable insights into the factors influencing their buying behavior. By examining the key determinants of purchase intention, including Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMA), Brand Equity (BE), and Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM), this research adds valuable insights to the existing body of literature on social media commerce. It offers a deeper understanding of how consumers interact with and make purchasing decisions through social media platforms, ultimately helping businesses refine their marketing strategies for enhanced Consumer engagement and sales growth.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The research work reviewed various conceptual and empirical literatures to inherit in-depth knowledge regarding the research work concept, issues identified by various researchers and to find the research gap for the current research work. Extensive review of Literatures was conducted from various leading academic research database such as Web of Science, ScienceDirect, Scopus, and PubMed to identify the relevant literature for the research work.

According to Bilgin, (2018), the social networking applications can be utilized by an organization as a platform to carry out their direct marketing plans called as SMMA. The SMMA have been evaluated as the company's take-off tool by kim & ko, (2010). Therefore, the business that does not actively involved in social media marketing losses its prospect of getting connected with the Consumer directly. The SMMA were further classified as firm-created and user-created to promote the brand's equity. Bilgin, (2018) has identified SMMA as Entertainment, Interaction, Trendiness, Advertisement and Customization. The SMMA using creative and appropriate contents might predict

the consumers Intention to purchase in the near future according to Kim, & Ko, (2012). Hence the first and fourth hypothesis for the research work is formulated as follows:

H1: Higher the SMMA, the better the Brand Equity.

H4: Higher the SMMA, the greater the influence on Purchase Intention.

The research work by Kapoor et al., (2018), stated that from the consumers' perspective, social networking applications play a significant role in shaping their purchase intentions and influencing a company's BE. These platforms serve as interactive spaces where brand perceptions are formed, trust is built, and purchasing decisions are increasingly driven by social engagement and digital interactions. BE is defined by Farquhar (1989), as the surge in attitude strength with respect to a particular brand's products. From the definition, the word attitude denotes the relationship between the product and the assessment of that particular product by an individual as per Fazio, (1986). According to Dillon et al., (2001), the BE is based on the consumers perception of the brand. The brand equities are further influenced by the company's marketing activities on both the traditional and social networking applications (Bruhn, Schoenmueller & Schäfer, 2012). Thus, based on the review, the second hypothesis is formulated as:

H2: The better the BE, deeper the EWOM.

The EWOM is defined as the consumer-to-consumer conversation using social networking sites as per Chu, & Kim, (2011). The online reviews, online recommendation and online opinions are often denoted as the EWOM. The research work by Sun et al., (2006) stated that "compared to traditional WOM, online WOM is more influential due to its speed, convenience, one-to-many reach, and its absence of face-to-face human pressure". E-WOM was recognized as one of the factors that is used to evaluate the consumers intention to purchase by Cantallops, & Salvi, (2014). Kudeshia, & Kumar, (2017) also projected that purchase Intention of the consumers were greatly influenced by the EWOM. Therefore, the fourth hypothesis formulated for the research work is as follows:

H3: The Deeper the EWOM, Higher the Purchase Intention.

From the extensive review of previous literature, the research work found that the demand for online shopping especially through social networking applications is raising radically in India. Therefore, it is vital for any vendor to look for various platforms when it comes to selling their products through online marketplace on social media platforms. Thus, finding the consumers' preferences from the selected social networking applications provides a breakthrough for developing innovative strategies to enhance their competitive edge. From the review it was evident that the research model used by Aji, Nadhila, & Sanny (2020) suit the context of the research work. Thus, the research model is proposed as follows:

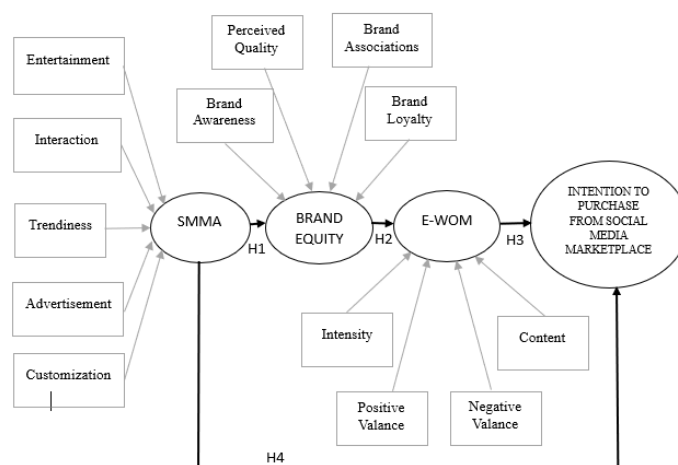


Figure 3.1: Purchase Intention from the social networking applications.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To examine the variables used for the research work, various questions were adopted from previous studies and merged as research instrument. Grounded to the objective of this research, the adopted questions were rephrased based on the objectives set for the research work. The research instrument consists of two Sections. The first section

of the research instrument is designed to gather demographic information from respondents, including their gender, age, marital status, and highest level of education. This data helps in understanding the characteristics of the research work participants and their potential influence on the research findings. The second section of the research instrument includes questions to rank among the selected social networking applications and to examine the consumer preferences among the selected social networking applications. Most of the questions from the second part are five-point Likert scaled questions ranging from 1 for strongly disagree to 5 for strongly agree.

Non-Probability sampling technique has been used for the research work since the respondents were selected based on the researcher's sample selection capabilities and not on a fixed selection process. The research using internet to collect data has become widespread due to the availability of millions of respondents online through the use of opt-in panels. Opt-in research work participant recruitment is a type of convenience sampling, commonly referred to as river sampling. (Lamm, & Lamm, 2019). Therefore, from the non-probability sampling techniques, Convenient sampling method was adopted for the research work since the research instrument was circulated using social networking applications and the respondents are requested to provide their responses to receive the desired number of responses. Therefore, the sample size desired for the research work was found to be 406 samples.

In order to analyze the collected data Statistical software such as Excel, SPSS, AMOS and SmartPLS have been used for the research work. The collected data was segregated based on the attributes using Microsoft Excel. Microsoft Excel has been used for initial data screening process and also been used to code the data as numerical so that the coded data can be used as an input file for SPSS. The SPSS has been used to get the descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage and mean values for the demographic profile and also for the questions related to the social media usage information.

The Factor Loading and Cronbach's Alpha value has been obtained using Factor Analysis and Reliability Analysis using SPSS. The AVE and the CR values have been calculated in Microsoft Excel using pre-defined formula. The off-diagonal values of the discriminant validity matrix were obtained using AMOS. The model fit indices were checked from the model fit summary using AMOS. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was conducted using AMOS to analyze the relationship between consumers' intention to purchase from online marketplace on social media platforms and its key antecedents, including SMMA, BE, and Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The demographic details of the respondents were tabulated under table 4.1. The research work contributes to gender equality and provides more inclusive research result with 49 % of the respondents as Male and 51 % of the respondents as Female. The research work includes both male and female respondents since the inclusion of only one group may not be the representative of another group. Most of respondents (73%) were in-between 20 to 30 years of age which also called as Generation Z or Gen Z category. 22% of the respondents belonged to the 31–40 age group, while 5% were above 41 years. This indicates that Gen Z respondents have greater exposure to and familiarity with technological gadgets. Thus, from the findings it was evident that Gen Z category of respondents were the important shopper's segment of the online marketplace on social media platforms. Considering the marital status of the respondents, the majority (70%) were married, while 30% were unmarried, indicating a higher representation of married individuals in the research work. Therefore, from the frequencies of the responses received it was apparent that the purchasing power of unmarried persons are higher compared to married persons. From the table 4.1, it was observed that the number of respondents with their under graduate degree (60%) was higher compared to the respondents with Post graduate (37%). Around 3% of the respondents have other educational qualifications such as diploma, polytechnic etc., Therefore from the result it was apparent that the respondents with Under graduate degrees were prone purchase more from the online marketplace on social media platforms compared to the consumers with other educational qualifications.

Table 4.1: Respondents Profile

VARIABLES	DESCRIPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Gender	Female	191	49%
	Male	197	51%
Age	18-30 years	284	73%
	31-40 years	84	22%

	41+ years	20	5%
Marital Status	Married	118	30%
	Unmarried	270	70%
Highest level of education	Under Graduate	234	60%
	Post Graduate	145	37%
	Others	9	3%

The research work identified WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube were the four massively used social networking applications in India. These social networking applications were ranked based on the highest percentage of responses received for each social networking application under each ranking category.

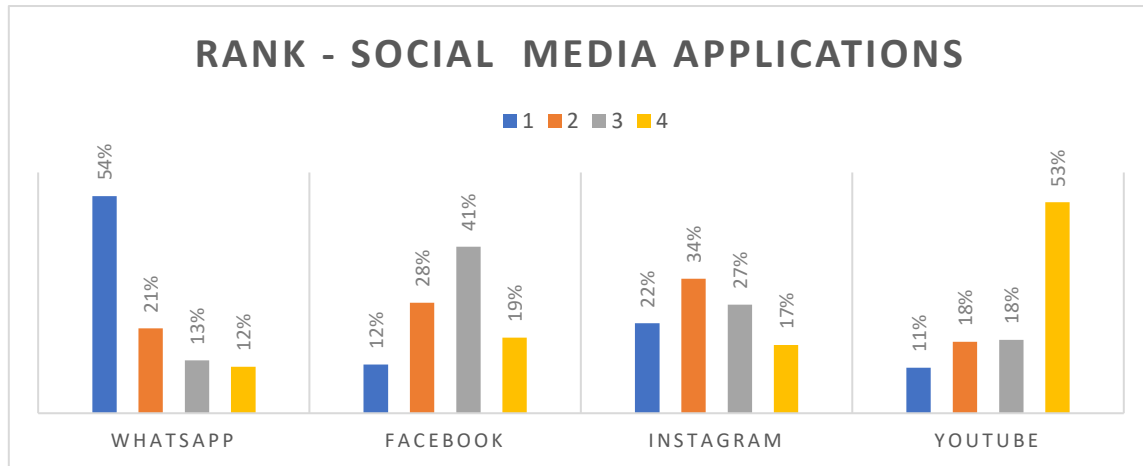


Figure 4.1: Ranking for social networking applications

From the chart it is evident that most of the respondents (54%) preferred WhatsApp and voted first rank followed by 22 % for Instagram. Facebook received 12 % and YouTube received 11 % of votes for first rank respectively. Considering second rank, maximum number of respondents (34%) casted their vote for Instagram followed by 28% for Facebook. WhatsApp and YouTube were ranked second by 21% and 18% respectively. Facebook was third ranked by 41% of respondents and Instagram with 27% of respondents. 18 % and 13% of the respondents casted third rank for YouTube and WhatsApp respectively. YouTube was the least preferred social networking application by the respondents with 53% of respondents casted fourth rank. From the data it is evident that the Consumers from the Coimbatore region prefers to purchase products from the WhatsApp compared to other social networking applications. Also, the consumers were unwilling to use YouTube while purchasing a product using social networking applications.

The research work practices confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in order to validate the variables used for the research work since the research models and the research instrument was adopted from the previous literatures (Brown, & Moore, 2012). The CFA was performed to verify the number of factors in the research instrument and to examine the pattern of unique item-factor relationship also known as the factor loadings (Othman et al., 2014). The factor loading and the mean values have to be more than 0.6 and 2.5 respectively as per the findings of Ahmad, Zulkurnain, & Khairushalimi (2016). The result of factor analysis has been displayed under table 4.2. From the result it is evident that all the Factor loadings and Mean Values used for the research work were greater than 0.6 and 2.5 respectively.

Table 4.2: Factor Analysis

Variables	Question number	Factor Loading value	Mean value
SMMA	Q1	0.78	3.81
	Q2	0.81	3.95
	Q3	0.83	4.00
	Q4	0.77	3.92
	Q6	0.81	3.80
	Q7	0.81	3.89

BE	Q8	0.78	3.90
	Q9	0.81	3.89
	Q10	0.82	3.89
	Q11	0.78	3.78
	Q12	0.73	3.68
	Q13	0.85	3.74
	Q14	0.84	3.77
	Q15	0.80	3.81
	Q16	0.81	3.84
	Q17	0.84	3.77
EWOM	Q18	0.81	3.81
	Q19	0.84	3.87
	Q20	0.80	3.81
	Q21	0.83	3.84
	Q22	0.83	3.82
	Q23	0.84	3.73
	Q24	0.85	3.81
	Q25	0.84	3.88
	Q26	0.82	3.73
	Q27	0.83	3.83
Intention to purchase	Q28	0.82	3.90
	Q29	0.83	3.94
	Q30	0.87	4.87
	Q31	0.91	3.88
	Q32	0.90	3.99
	Q33	0.90	3.93

* Some of the questions with factor loading values less than 0.6 were removed.

The internal consistency of the scale was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha, with an acceptable range of 0.7 to 0.95 (Sürücü and Maslakçı, 2020). To assess the item variance within the construct, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was calculated, while the overall reliability of the items across the model was confirmed using Composite Reliability (CR) values. For a measurement model to be considered reliable, the AVE values should exceed 0.5, and the CR values should be greater than 0.7. Consequently, the reliability of the measurement model in this research work was assessed based on the AVE, CR, and Cronbach's Alpha values. The results showed that the AVE, CR, and Cronbach's Alpha values for all variables were within the acceptable range, indicating that the measurement model developed for this research work was highly reliable.

Table 4.3: Questionnaire Reliability

Variable	AVE	CR	Cronbach's Alpha
SMMA	0.64	0.95	0.94
BE	0.67	0.96	0.94
EWOM	0.69	0.94	0.90
Intention to purchase	0.80	0.94	0.92

Discriminant validity of the instrument was assessed using the correlation matrix. In this matrix, the diagonal values represent the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each variable, while the off-diagonal values represent the correlation coefficients between different variables. The instrument is considered to have high discriminant validity if the diagonal values are greater than the corresponding off-diagonal values. Table 4.4 clearly indicates that the diagonal values surpass the off-diagonal values, demonstrating the high validity of the measurement instrument used in this research work.

$$\text{Square root of AVE} = \{(\sum_{i=1}^k \lambda_i)^2 / k\}^2$$

Table 4.4 Validity of Measures

	SMMA	BE	EWOM	IP
SMMA	0.894427			
BE	0.686	0.8		
EWOM	0.595	0.622	0.818535	
IP	0.758	0.764	0.653	0.830662

The Model fit indices were checked to find the correlations between the variables of the research model (Smith, & McMillan, 2001). The tables 4.5 exhibits the actual model fit indices and their threshold values for all the indices.

Table 4.5: Fit indices

Indices	Values	Threshold Values
CFI	0.928	>0.9
GFI	0.874	>0.9 Good fit; >0.85 permissible
AGFI	0.871	>0.85
NFI	0.892	>0.9 Good fit; >0.85 permissible
TLI	0.923	>0.9
CMIN/DF	2.762	<3
RMSEA	0.067	<0.08

The research work employed Likert scaled questions for both the dependent and independent variables for the model chosen for the research work. Thus, the data collected were continuous in nature. Based on the previous works, it was established that when both dependent and independent variables are continuous, Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) analysis is appropriate for the research work (Hair et al., 2017). Accordingly, the software AMOS was utilized, as the research work adopted the Covariance-Based SEM (CB-SEM) approach (Hair et al., 2014). To examine the structural model, SEM analysis was conducted using the Bootstrapping method with 5,000 iterations at a 90 percent confidence level, applying bias-corrected intervals for greater accuracy in the results.

The result of the analysis, including the standardized co-efficient, Standard Error and Hypothesis Testing results were tabulated under Table 4.6.

Table 4.6: Result of SEM Analysis

Path	Co-efficient	SE	P	Hypothesis
SMMA – BE	0.912	0.053	***	Significant
BE – EWOM	0.958	0.080	***	Significant
EWOM - IP	0.856	0.065	***	Significant
SMMA - IP	0.119	0.054	0.043	Significant

***P<0.001

From the hypothesis testing it was evident that the SMMA has substantial positive impact on both BE with β value as 0.912, p value less than 0.001 and Intention to Purchase with β value as 0.119, p value less than 0.05. The analysis further reveals that BE exerts a dominant influence on EWOM with β value 0.958 and p value less than 0.001. Additionally, according to the third hypothesis, the EWOM has positive impact on Intention to Purchase with β value less than 0.856, and P value less than 0.001. Thus, the overall result confirmed that the four hypotheses formulated for the research work were significant and well supported.

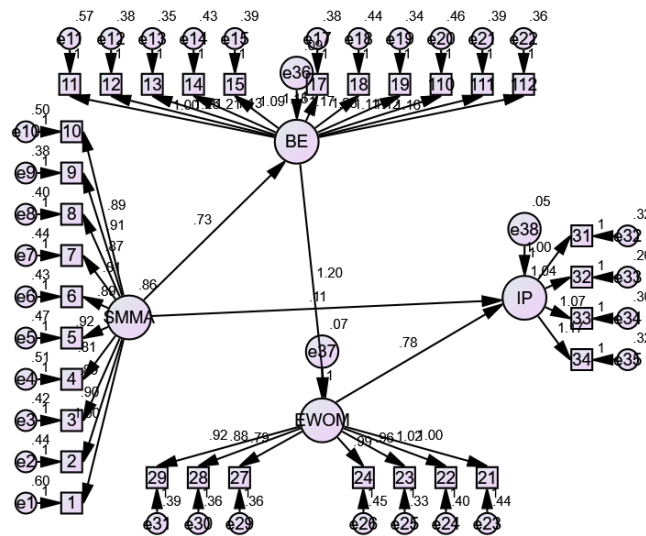


Figure 4.2: Analyzed Research Model

The research work highlights that WhatsApp is the leading social media platform for purchasing products, which aligns with findings from other research showing that WhatsApp's direct messaging and community features create a more personal, trusted environment for transactions. This is supported by studies indicating that personalized communication fosters stronger Consumer relationships and influences purchase behavior (Jamil et al., 2022; Ibrahim et al., 2021). Instagram, ranking second, capitalizes on its visual content and influencer culture, which has been linked to increased brand awareness and purchase intentions. According to studies, platforms that emphasize visual storytelling—such as Instagram—are highly effective for engaging consumers, especially in industries like fashion, beauty, and lifestyle (Jamil et al., 2022). Facebook, ranked third, remains significant due to its broad user base and diverse functionalities, such as marketplace features, ads, and group interactions. Its versatility allows for targeted advertising and community building, which are crucial for fostering brand loyalty (Agarwal, & Gulla, 2022). The findings that YouTube is the least favored platform for purchasing products reflect broader research on consumer behavior, which suggests that YouTube is more of a discovery and inspiration tool than a direct sales channel. While it influences purchasing decisions through product reviews and tutorials, the platform's design and focus on long-form video content make it less conducive to quick purchasing decisions.

The online marketplace on social media platforms has become a crucial battleground for businesses, as they strive to capture the attention and loyalty of consumers. This research work examines the intricate relationships between social media marketing activities, BE, and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), and their collective influence on consumers' purchase intentions. (Phan et al., 2020) (Sardar et al., 2021). The findings suggest that BE, or the level of awareness and perception that social media users have towards a particular brand, is a critical factor influencing their purchase decisions. Effective social media marketing strategies can enhance BE, thereby amplifying the impact of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Gulumbe et al., 2017) (Phan et al., 2020). As social media users become more aware of a brand through targeted marketing efforts, they are more likely to engage in electronic word-of-mouth, discussing various aspects of the products such as variety, quality, and price, which further influences their intention to purchase. (Phan et al., 2020). These interconnected dynamics highlight the importance of strategic social media marketing in fostering BE and leveraging electronic word-of-mouth to drive consumer purchase intentions. By comprehending these complex relationships, businesses can better tailor their social media strategies to optimize consumer engagement and sales outcomes. (Gulumbe et al., 2017) (Sardar et al., 2021) (Godey et al., 2016). This research builds upon the growing body of literature that has explored the influence of social media marketing on brand-related outcomes, such as BE and consumer behavior (Nuji et al., 2023) (Godey et al., 2016).

CONCLUSION

As social networking applications continue to gain prominence in the business landscape, this research sought to explore consumer preferences within the online marketplace on social media platforms, focusing on the role of social networking applications on consumers' purchase intentions. The research work revealed a positive correlation

between demographic factors and social media usage among consumers of online marketplace on social media platforms.

The results indicate that WhatsApp emerged as the most preferred social networking application for shopping, with consumers showing a willingness to make purchases influenced by SMMA and the perceived BE. Among various product categories, garments were the most favoured by consumers in the online marketplace on social media platforms. As consumers' experience with social media shopping increases, their perceived risks diminish, leading to a stronger intention to purchase from these platforms. Additionally, social media influencers play a significant role in shaping consumer behaviour, with many consumers opting to buy products based on influencer recommendations.

For first-time consumers in the online marketplace on social media platforms, it is advisable to carefully select the appropriate social media platforms for their purchases and to compare prices and quality across different vendors before making a purchase decision. With respect to the research findings, it is advised that sellers in the online marketplace on social media platforms actively leverage social media marketing strategies and prioritize delivering high-quality products to strengthen their brand image and credibility. Furthermore, vendors can utilize chatbots and integrated payment options available within social networking applications to improve the shopping experience. Partnering with social media influencers can also help vendors reach a broader Consumer base in the online marketplace on social media platforms.

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