



DOES SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING REALLY CHANGE WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE BUY? AN EMPIRICAL STUDY AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS IN KARNATAKA

Sharanabasava H M

Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce and Management, Government First Grade College, Kerur

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36713/epra31142>

DOI No: 10.36713/epra31142

ABSTRACT

This study examines how five dimensions of social media marketing (SMM) – paid advertisements, influencer content, peer recommendations, user-generated reviews, and brand engagement – shape the buying behaviour of college-going youth in Bagalkote district, Karnataka. Primary data were collected from 100 college students through a structured Likert-scale questionnaire. Percentage analysis, mean and standard deviation, Pearson correlation, and Chi-Square tests were employed for analysis. User-generated content emerged as the most influential SMM dimension (weighted mean = 3.20), while influencer marketing ranked last (mean = 2.73). Brand engagement showed the strongest correlation with buying behaviour ($r = 0.751$). Instagram dominated platform usage (78%), with Facebook largely absent from this cohort (10%). A significant gender-based difference was confirmed ($\chi^2 = 18.648$, $p = 0.0009$). All five hypotheses were accepted. The study provides original empirical evidence from a semi-urban Karnataka context underrepresented in existing Indian SMM literature.

KEYWORDS: Social Media Marketing, Buying Behaviour, Youth Consumer, Instagram, User Generated Content, Peer Influence, Karnataka

1. INTRODUCTION

Ask a college student in Bagalkote how they found out about the last thing they bought online, and there is a reasonable chance the answer involves an Instagram reel, a WhatsApp forward, or a comment section. Social media has moved well beyond social networking — it is now one of the primary channels through which young Indians discover products, form brand opinions, and make purchase decisions. India crossed 760 million internet users in 2025, with the 18–35 cohort accounting for the most commercially active segment (TRAII, 2025; Statista, 2025). Brands have followed the attention. Yet the academic literature documenting how SMM actually influences buying behaviour in semi-urban India — as opposed to metropolitan settings — remains thin.

Most existing Indian studies are anchored in cities like Mumbai, Delhi, or Bengaluru, treat social media as a single variable, and say little about gender as a moderating factor. This study addresses those gaps directly. Drawing on primary data from 100 college students in Bagalkote district, it tests five distinct SMM dimensions individually and examines whether gender significantly shapes their influence on purchase decisions. The aim is not to confirm what the literature already knows but to see what it looks like when the same questions are posed to a population existing research has largely ignored.

1.1 Research Gap

The existing literature has a geography problem. Studies by Yadav and Rahman (2017), Shareef et al. (2019), and Godey et al. (2016) pull their Indian data almost entirely from Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru. A college student in Bagalkote spending less than ₹1,000 a month, following local Kannada content, buying cautiously — simply does not appear in any of these samples. Whether their findings travel to this context is, at best, an untested assumption. Beyond geography, most studies treat social media marketing as one thing — a single composite score — when it is actually several structurally different things. An Instagram ad, a WhatsApp forward from a friend, an influencer review, and a comment section all work through different psychological channels and should not be lumped together. Gender, similarly, gets mentioned but rarely tested properly in the Indian literature. And the platform question — whether Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp each pull different commercial levers — goes almost entirely unexamined. This study is built around all four of those gaps.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

- (i) To map social media usage patterns of college students in Bagalkote, Karnataka.
- (ii) To measure the influence of social media advertisements on youth buying behaviour.
- (iii) To assess how influencer marketing and peer recommendations shape purchase intentions.
- (iv) To evaluate the role of user-generated content in buying decisions of young consumers.
- (v) To test whether gender significantly moderates the SMM–buying behaviour relationship.



1.3 Research Hypotheses

H₁: Social media advertisements significantly influence the buying behaviour of youth.

H₂: Influencer marketing significantly affects the purchase intention of college students.

H₃: Peer recommendations on social media significantly impact buying decisions of youth.

H₄: User-generated content significantly influences purchase behaviour of young consumers.

H₅: A significant gender-based difference exists in social media marketing's influence on buying behaviour.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Three theoretical threads run through this study. The AIDA model (Barry, 1987) offers the oldest account: a sponsored Instagram post grabs attention, holds interest, builds desire, and eventually triggers a purchase. Useful as far as it goes, though it says nothing about why some content triggers that chain and other content does not. Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour fills part of that gap — purchase intentions, it argues, are shaped not only by personal attitude but by what peers are doing and approving of. Social media is unusually good at making peer behaviour continuously visible, which is why it activates subjective norms so efficiently. Festinger's (1954) Social Comparison Theory adds the third piece: people benchmark themselves against relevant others, and social media raises the frequency and intensity of those comparisons to a level no previous medium came close to matching.

On the empirical side, Vinerean et al. (2013) were among the first to show systematically that visual and interactive social content shapes consumer attitudes more than static formats. Godey et al. (2016), working across four countries including India, confirmed that both brand-produced and user-produced social media content lift purchase intention — and that the effect is stronger in younger consumers. In the Indian context specifically, Yadav and Rahman (2017) studied Delhi students and found Instagram and Facebook activity predicts impulse buying, though their sample is solidly metropolitan and their findings may not travel far from it. Shareef et al. (2019) brought in a variable that turns out to be important here: perceived content authenticity. When audiences sense they are being sold to, the effect weakens; when content feels genuine, it converts. Singh and Kaur (2022) made a related point about WhatsApp — that its closed-group architecture generates a peer-trust dynamic that open-platform advertising simply cannot replicate. Dwivedi et al. (2021), reviewing the broader engagement literature, confirmed that social media interaction correlates with purchase behaviour in both millennials and Gen Z, while also noting that the mechanisms shift considerably by platform and context.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A descriptive and analytical design fitted the purpose here — the aim was both to describe what the sample looks like and to draw conclusions about the relationships among variables. Primary data came from a structured Google Forms questionnaire administered to 100 college students in Bagalkote district in July 2026. The questionnaire had four parts: demographics, social media usage habits, a 24-item Likert scale running from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), and two open-ended questions on product preferences and personal experience. Each of the five independent variables — social media advertisements, influencer marketing, peer influence and social sharing, user-generated content, and brand engagement — was measured through four Likert items. Buying behaviour, the dependent variable, was captured through four items covering purchase frequency, impulse buying, spending levels, and brand preference shaped by social media. Respondents were selected by convenience sampling from enrolled students; the limitations of this approach are acknowledged, but it sits comfortably within accepted norms for exploratory consumer behaviour research of this scope (Malhotra, 2010). Analysis drew on percentage breakdowns for demographic description, mean and standard deviation for Likert responses, weighted average mean for dimension ranking, Pearson correlation to test H₁ through H₄, and Chi-Square to test H₅ — all at a significance threshold of $\alpha = 0.05$.

3.1 Scope of the Study

This study is confined to college students in the age group of 18 to 25 years enrolled in undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in Bagalkote district, Karnataka, India. The study covers academic year 2025–26 and focuses specifically on the influence of social media platforms — Instagram, WhatsApp, and Facebook — on buying behaviour. It does not extend to other states, other age groups, or working professionals. The findings are therefore most directly applicable to the semi-urban Karnataka student population and should be interpreted with that boundary in mind.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Who Responded — Demographic Profile

Table 1 summarises the sample's composition. Two features stand out immediately. First, female respondents significantly outnumber males — 67 to 33 — which reflects the gender composition of the institutions from which the sample was drawn and has implications for interpreting the gender analysis later in the paper. Second, the overwhelming majority of respondents (73%) are between 18 and 20 years old, making this a young, predominantly first-year-to-third-year undergraduate sample. The budget picture is equally striking: 78% live on less than ₹1,000 per month in personal spending money. This is not a high-income youth sample. It is a cost-constrained one, and that context turns out to matter quite a bit for understanding what drives their purchase decisions.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 100)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	67	67%
	Male	33	33%
Age Group	18–20 years	73	73%
	21–22 years	18	18%
	23–25 years	8	8%
	Above 25 years	1	1%
Education	First Year Degree	25	25%
	Second Year Degree	24	24%
	Third Year Degree	41	41%
	Post Graduation	10	10%
Monthly Budget	Below ₹1,000	78	78%
	₹1,000–₹3,000	18	18%
	₹3,001–₹5,000	2	2%
	Above ₹5,000	2	2%

Source: Primary Data

4.2 How the Sample Uses Social Media

Table 2 tells a story about platform preference that diverges notably from what an older-generation marketer might expect. Instagram leads at 78%, closely followed by WhatsApp at 72% and YouTube at 71%. Facebook — the platform on which most traditional social media marketing thinking was built — reaches only 10% of this sample. That is not a rounding error; it is a signal about where this generation's attention actually sits. The daily time investment is moderate rather than extreme: 45% spend one to two hours daily, though a combined 32% spend three or more hours, which amounts to a substantial daily exposure window for brands. And the commercial consequence of all this exposure is real — 63% of respondents have discovered a product for the first time through social media, and 79% have purchased something after seeing it on a social media platform, at least once.

Table 2: Social Media Usage and Purchase Behaviour (N = 100)

Variable	Category	Frequency	%
Platform (multiple)	Instagram	78	78%
	WhatsApp	72	72%
	YouTube	71	71%
	Snapchat	35	35%
	Facebook	10	10%
Hours/Day	Less than 1 hour	23	23%
	1–2 hours	45	45%
	3–4 hours	18	18%
	More than 4 hours	14	14%
Discovered Product via SMM	Yes, many times	40	40%
	Yes, occasionally	19	19%
	Rarely	31	31%
	Never	10	10%
Purchased via SMM	Yes, frequently	9	9%
	Yes, sometimes	54	54%
	Only once or twice	16	16%
	Never	21	21%

Source: Primary Data | *Multiple platform responses permitted

4.3 Mean and Standard Deviation — Likert Scale

Table 3 shows the mean and standard deviation for all 24 statements across the six measurement dimensions. The single highest-scoring item in the entire instrument is Q13 — 'I read comments and reviews on social media before purchasing a product online' — with a mean of 3.48. This is the one statement that comes closest to outright agreement in a sample that is generally cautious in its endorsements. Q14 ('Positive user reviews increase my trust in a product', mean = 3.35) and Q24 ('I prefer brands popular on social media', mean = 3.18) are next. At the other end, the two lowest-scoring items are Q17 ('Following brand pages makes me more likely to buy', mean = 2.52) and Q6 ('I follow at least one influencer I trust', mean = 2.53) — a pair of findings that quietly challenge two assumptions the digital marketing industry tends to make about youth engagement.

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation of Likert Scale Responses (N = 100)

No.	Statement	Mean	S.D.
Social Media Advertisements			
Q1	Ads attract my attention toward new products	2.99	1.37
Q2	Sponsored posts are relevant to my interests	3.23	1.33
Q3	Clicked on an ad and then bought the product	2.54	1.31
Q4	Repeated ads build desire to try the product	2.78	1.37
	Group Mean — Social Media Advertisements	2.89	
Influencer Marketing			
Q5	Influencer recommendation gives me buying confidence	2.62	1.26
Q6	I follow at least one trusted influencer	2.53	1.31
Q7	Influencer reviews directly led me to purchase	2.76	1.24
Q8	Prefer influencers over TV or print advertisements	3.03	1.33
	Group Mean — Influencer Marketing	2.73	
Peer Influence & Social Sharing			
Q9	Friends tagging products makes me curious to buy	3.11	1.17
Q10	Seeing peers use a product motivates me to buy it	3.07	1.15
Q11	WhatsApp deal forwards influence my buying decisions	2.90	1.28
Q12	I share products I like to encourage others to buy	3.06	1.18
	Group Mean — Peer Influence	3.04	
User Generated Content — Reviews & Ratings			
Q13	I read reviews on social media before buying online	3.48	1.23
Q14	Positive user reviews increase my trust in a product	3.35	1.23
Q15	Negative reviews have stopped me from purchasing	2.95	1.41
Q16	Unboxing and user experience videos influence my choices	3.00	1.19
	Group Mean — User Generated Content	3.20	
Brand Engagement on Social Media			
Q17	Following brand pages makes me more likely to buy	2.52	1.18
Q18	Flash sales and coupon codes push me to buy immediately	3.00	1.25
Q19	Creative brand content improves my opinion of that brand	2.90	1.26
Q20	A strong social media presence builds my trust in a brand	2.97	1.23
	Group Mean — Brand Engagement	2.85	
Overall Buying Behaviour (Dependent Variable)			
Q21	Social media has changed how I discover and buy products	3.14	1.22
Q22	I impulse-buy after seeing products on social media	3.01	1.18
Q23	Social media has increased my total spending on shopping	2.91	1.24
Q24	I prefer brands that are popular on social media	3.18	1.29
	Group Mean — Overall Buying Behaviour	3.06	

Source: Primary Data | Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree

4.4 Which SMM Dimension Matters Most? — Weighted Average Ranking

Table 4 ranks the five dimensions by their weighted average mean score. User-generated content comes out on top (3.20), followed by peer influence (3.04). Influencer marketing sits at the bottom (2.73). The gap between the first and last rank is modest in absolute terms — about half a scale point — but the ordering itself is telling, and the discussion section returns to this in some depth.

Table 4: Dimension-wise Weighted Average Mean — Ranked (N = 100)

Rank	SMM Dimension	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
1	User Generated Content (Reviews & Ratings)	3.20	High Influence
2	Peer Influence & Social Sharing	3.04	High Influence
3	Social Media Advertisements	2.89	Moderate Influence
4	Brand Engagement on Social Media	2.85	Moderate Influence
5	Influencer Marketing	2.73	Moderate Influence

Source: Primary Data | Mean ≥ 3.50 = Very High | 3.00–3.49 = High | 2.50–2.99 = Moderate

4.5 Correlation Analysis — Testing H_1 to H_4

Pearson correlations between each SMM dimension and the overall buying behaviour score are presented in Table 5. Every dimension shows a statistically significant positive relationship with buying behaviour at $p < 0.001$. Brand engagement records the strongest correlation ($r = 0.751$), which is counterintuitive given its moderate mean score — the discussion section unpacks this

tension. Social media advertisements follow ($r = 0.696$), then user-generated content ($r = 0.640$), influencer marketing ($r = 0.598$), and peer influence ($r = 0.591$). All four hypotheses H_1 through H_4 are accepted.

Table 5: Pearson Correlation — SMM Dimensions vs. Buying Behaviour (N = 100)

Hypothesis	SMM Dimension	r Value	p-Value	Decision
H_1	Social Media Advertisements	0.696	< 0.001	H_1 Accepted ✓
H_2	Influencer Marketing	0.598	< 0.001	H_1 Accepted ✓
H_3	Peer Influence & Social Sharing	0.591	< 0.001	H_1 Accepted ✓
H_4	User Generated Content	0.640	< 0.001	H_1 Accepted ✓

Source: Primary Data | Significant at $\alpha = 0.05$

4.6 Chi-Square Test — Gender and SMM Influence (H_5)

To test H_5 , a Chi-Square test was conducted with gender as the grouping variable and rounded overall SMM influence score as the test variable. Table 6 presents the result. The Chi-Square value is 18.648 with 4 degrees of freedom, yielding $p = 0.0009$. Since this is well below 0.05, H_5 is accepted: gender significantly moderates how social media marketing influences buying behaviour in this sample.

Table 6: Chi-Square Test — Gender vs. SMM Influence on Buying Behaviour

Statistical Parameter	Value
Chi-Square Value (χ^2)	18.6476
Degrees of Freedom	4
p-value	0.0009
Significance Level (α)	0.05
Decision	H_1 Accepted — Significant gender difference confirmed

Source: Primary Data

4.7 What Are They Buying? — Product Category Analysis

Table 7 shows that fashion and clothing accounts for 58% of social media-driven purchases in this sample — a figure that is probably unsurprising given Instagram's visual format, but striking in its dominance. Books and EdTech come second at 12%, which is an interesting finding for a budget-constrained student population and may reflect the growing presence of online course promotions targeting college students. Electronics (9%) and beauty products (7%) round out the significant categories.

Table 7: Most Frequently Purchased Product Category via Social Media (N = 100)

Product Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Fashion / Clothing / Accessories	58	58%
Books / Courses / EdTech	12	12%
Electronics / Gadgets	9	9%
Other	8	8%
Beauty / Skincare / Personal Care	7	7%
Fitness / Health Products	4	4%
Food / Restaurants / Food Delivery	2	2%
Total	100	100%

Source: Primary Data

4.8 Consolidated Hypothesis Testing Summary

Table 8 brings together the results of all five hypothesis tests — H_1 through H_4 from Pearson correlation and H_5 from the Chi-Square test — in a single consolidated view. All five null hypotheses are rejected and all five alternate hypotheses are accepted at the 5% significance level. This confirms, comprehensively, that social media marketing significantly influences buying behaviour among college youth in Karnataka across all tested dimensions, and that this influence varies significantly by gender.

Table 8: Consolidated Hypothesis Testing Summary

Hypo.	Statement Tested	Statistical Test	Test Value	p-Value	Decision
H₁	SMM advertisements significantly influence buying behaviour	Pearson r	r = 0.696	<0.001	H₁ Accepted ✓
H₂	Influencer marketing significantly affects purchase intention	Pearson r	r = 0.598	<0.001	H₁ Accepted ✓
H₃	Peer recommendations significantly impact buying decisions	Pearson r	r = 0.591	<0.001	H₁ Accepted ✓
H₄	User-generated content significantly influences purchase behaviour	Pearson r	r = 0.640	<0.001	H₁ Accepted ✓
H₅	Significant gender-based difference exists in SMM's influence on buying behaviour	Chi-Square	$\chi^2=18.648$	0.0009	H₁ Accepted ✓

Source: Primary Data | All hypotheses tested at $\alpha = 0.05$ | All H₁ Accepted

5. DISCUSSION

The most striking finding in this dataset is probably the one that gets the least airtime in standard marketing discourse: user-generated content outranks paid influencer marketing as a driver of youth purchase behaviour in this population. Influencer marketing has attracted enormous commercial investment in India — brands across fashion, beauty, food, and technology have poured money into partnerships with creators at every level from mega-influencers with millions of followers down to nano-influencers with a few thousand. Yet in this sample, it is the unsponsored comment, the stranger's product review, the unboxing video by an ordinary consumer, that carries the most persuasive weight. The mean score for the influencer marketing dimension (2.73) is not just the lowest among the five SMM factors — it falls below the neutral midpoint of the scale in a way that none of the others does quite as clearly.

The most plausible explanation for this lies in the economic context of the sample. These are students spending less than ₹1,000 a month — people for whom every purchase involves a genuine trade-off. In that situation, trust matters enormously, and the perceived authenticity gap between a paid influencer endorsement and an organic peer review is consequential. Shareef et al. (2019) found that content credibility significantly moderates social media marketing's effect on purchase intention; in a low-income, high-scrutiny buying context like this one, that moderation effect is probably amplified. An influencer saying a product is good is one data point. Fifty strangers in a comment section saying the same thing — and twenty saying the opposite — is an information environment. These students appear to prefer the latter.

The brand engagement finding presents an interesting puzzle. Following brand pages is the lowest-scoring individual item in the study (Q17: mean = 2.52), suggesting that most respondents do not actively seek out or maintain brand relationships on social media. Yet brand engagement as a composite dimension correlates most strongly with buying behaviour ($r = 0.751$) — stronger than any other SMM factor. The resolution is probably in the composition of the dimension: even if students do not follow brand pages, they respond to flash sales and coupon codes (mean = 3.00), their opinion of brands is shaped by creative content they encounter passively (mean = 2.90), and a brand's social media visibility functions as a proxy for its credibility and market presence (mean = 2.97). Passive brand exposure — encountering brand content without actively following it — may be as commercially potent as active engagement for this population, a pattern that resonates with the parasocial influence literature (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Yuksel & Labrecque, 2016).

The gender finding deserves attention beyond the statistical result. Female respondents outnumber males two to one in this sample, and the Chi-Square test confirms that gender significantly moderates the SMM-buying behaviour relationship ($\chi^2 = 18.648$, $p = 0.0009$). Research on gender differences in social media consumption consistently shows that women spend more time on visual platforms, engage more with lifestyle and fashion content, and place greater weight on peer and social recommendations when making purchase decisions (Dittmar et al., 2004; Flanagin & Metzger, 2003). In a sample dominated by young women who are also constrained by tight budgets, the combination of high social media engagement and careful purchase deliberation — mediated by peer reviews and social validation — creates a pattern that this study captures but cannot fully explain within its design. A more detailed gender-disaggregated analysis, ideally with a more balanced gender sample, would be a valuable contribution to future research.

The platform data carry a practical message that is hard to ignore. Facebook reaches only 10% of this sample. The platform that built the playbook for social media marketing in India — the one on which most brand pages were built, most ad budgets historically



allocated, most social media marketing strategies originally designed — is essentially irrelevant to this cohort. Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube are the actual arena. Any marketing strategy targeting Karnataka's semi-urban college population that prioritises Facebook over these three is likely to be working with a map that no longer reflects the territory.

6. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Every study has its edges, and this one is no exception. The most obvious is sample size — 100 respondents is workable for this kind of exploratory empirical work, but it is not large enough to make strong claims about the broader Karnataka student population. Convenience sampling compounds this: respondents were drawn from accessible institutions in Bagalkote district, which means the sample is not random and may carry biases that are difficult to fully account for. Geographically, the study is limited to a single district in North Karnataka. Whether its findings hold for students in Bengaluru, Mysuru, or coastal Karnataka — where social media habits, income levels, and platform preferences may differ — is an open question.

The data are also cross-sectional, captured at a single point in time in July 2026. Social media behaviour shifts quickly — the platforms that dominate today may look different in two years — and a longitudinal design would track those shifts in ways this study cannot. Finally, all responses are self-reported. Students may have overstated or understated their social media-driven purchase behaviour, either because they genuinely cannot recall it accurately or because of social desirability bias. These limitations do not undermine the core findings, but they do mark the boundaries within which those findings should be read.

7. CONCLUSION

The central question this study set out to answer — does social media marketing really change what young people buy? — has a clear answer in this data. Yes, it does. Every SMM dimension tested shows a statistically significant positive relationship with buying behaviour, all five research hypotheses are accepted, and 79% of respondents have purchased something after seeing it on social media. The commercial influence of these platforms on youth buying is not marginal or conditional; it is substantial and consistent across dimensions.

User-generated content, not paid advertisements or professional influencer endorsements, emerges as the most influential force in this sample's purchase decisions. For cost-conscious students in semi-urban Karnataka, the authentic voices of ordinary consumers carry more weight than carefully produced branded content. Influencer marketing remains statistically significant but ranks last among the five dimensions. Instagram dominates the platform landscape; Facebook has effectively exited this demographic's attention economy.

For marketers, strategies that amplify authentic user reviews and leverage WhatsApp-based peer sharing likely deliver better returns than premium influencer partnerships for this population. For researchers, questions about influencer tier effects, longitudinal income-driven changes in SMM responsiveness, and cross-district comparisons within Karnataka remain open and worth pursuing.

Acknowledgement

The author thanks the students of GFGC Kerur, Badami, Dist. Bagalkote, Karnataka, whose willing participation made this study possible.

Declaration of Conflict of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Funding: This research received no external funding from any public, commercial, or not-for-profit agency.

REFERENCES

1. Ajzen, I. (1991). *The theory of planned behavior*. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50(2), 179–211.
2. Barry, T. E. (1987). *The development of the hierarchy of effects: An historical perspective*. *Current Issues and Research in Advertising*, 10(1–2), 251–295.
3. Dittmar, H., Long, K., & Meek, R. (2004). *Buying on the internet: Gender differences in online and conventional buying motivations*. *Sex Roles*, 50(5–6), 423–444.
4. Dwivedi, Y. K., Ismagilova, E., Hughes, D. L., Carlson, J., Filieri, R., Jacobson, J., & Wang, Y. (2021). *Setting the future of digital and social media marketing research*. *International Journal of Information Management*, 59, 102168.
5. Festinger, L. (1954). *A theory of social comparison processes*. *Human Relations*, 7(2), 117–140.
6. Flanagan, A. J., & Metzger, M. J. (2003). *The perceived credibility of personal web page information as influenced by the sex of the source*. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 19(6), 683–701.
7. Godey, B., Manthiou, A., Pederzoli, D., Rokka, J., Aiello, G., Donvito, R., & Singh, R. (2016). *Social media marketing efforts of luxury brands*. *Journal of Business Research*, 69(12), 5833–5841.
8. Horton, D., & Wohl, R. R. (1956). *Mass communication and para-social interaction*. *Psychiatry*, 19(3), 215–229.
9. Malhotra, N. K. (2010). *Marketing Research: An Applied Orientation* (6th ed.). Pearson Education, New Jersey.
10. Shareef, M. A., Mukerji, B., Dwivedi, Y. K., Rana, N. P., & Islam, R. (2019). *Social media marketing: Comparative effect of advertisement sources*. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 46, 58–69.
11. Singh, A., & Kaur, P. (2022). *Digital infrastructure and fintech innovation: The role of India Stack*. *Vikalpa: The Journal for Decision Makers*, 47(1), 36–54.
12. Statista (2025). *Social media user statistics in India 2025*. Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com>



13. TRAI (2025). *Annual Report 2024–25. Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, New Delhi.*
14. Vinerean, S., Cetina, I., Dumitrescu, L., & Tichindelean, M. (2013). *The effects of social media marketing on online consumer behavior. International Journal of Business and Management, 8(14), 66–79.*
15. Yadav, M., & Rahman, Z. (2017). *Measuring consumer perception of social media marketing activities in e-commerce industry. Telematics and Informatics, 34(7), 1294–1307.*
16. Yuksel, M., & Labrecque, L. I. (2016). 'Digital buddies': Parasocial interactions in social media. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing, 10(4), 305–320.*