

A Comparative Study of Social Media Marketing and Influencer Marketing on Customer Buying Behaviour among Consumers in Delhi-NCR

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Abstract— The advent of digital platforms has revolutionized how brands interact with consumers, leading to the formation of two major marketing models: traditional Social Media Marketing (SMM) using brand-owned social media profiles and Influencer Marketing (IM). The paper presents an empirical comparison of the impact of both forms of marketing on consumer purchase intention in Delhi-NCR. Through a structured survey conducted on 250 individuals using descriptive statistics, correlation and regression analysis, the results show that while both marketing approaches have a significant effect on consumer purchase intentions, Influencer Marketing appears to have a stronger impact owing to source credibility and parasocial trust. The implications of the results will be discussed against the backdrop of existing literature on marketing, as well as managerial implications of the study for marketing brands in Delhi-NCR and future directions for research.

Keywords— social media marketing, influencer marketing, consumer buying behaviour, purchase intention, Delhi-NCR, digital marketing

INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of smartphones combined with cheap data rates means that India is among the leaders in social media around the globe. In this regard, Delhi-NCR stands out due to its high population density, level of urbanization, and considerable digital literacy. It should be mentioned that more and more companies begin to spend their marketing budget on two related but different approaches: social media marketing, where brands create content, advertisements, and interaction on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube; and influencer marketing, which involves promotion of the product through independent content creators to their audiences who consider these people as credible and trustworthy sources. Even

though both approaches leverage technology, the difference in the source of trust can make them work differently.

Despite considerable amount of research conducted on social media marketing and influencer marketing, the comparison of their effects on consumer behaviour is rare since no research examines how both approaches affect one sample of consumers from the same city in India. The lack of research in this field leads to the following research question: to what extent can social media marketing and influencer marketing individually and comparatively affect the buying behaviour of consumers in Delhi-NCR, and what factors determine this effect?

There are three important contributions made by the paper. Firstly, it will provide the specific, Delhi-NCR based evidence, not global. Secondly, it will provide a direct comparison of two approaches. Thirdly, it will define the factors that determine the efficacy of these approaches, including trust, credibility, content relatability, and seeking information behaviour.



Figure 1. Comparative framework of social media marketing and influencer marketing and their pathways to consumer buying decisions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media marketing (SMM) has been described as a digital marketing approach that makes use of social media channels to promote a brand in order to raise brand awareness and engage consumers, eventually driving sales and revenues through the establishment of a brand and increasing visibility in the process. Empirical investigation of social media marketing activities (SMMA), based on the stimulus-organism-response paradigm, reveals that SMMA positively affects engagement intention of consumers, which is translated into engagement behaviour, especially if it is reinforced with sales-related material. SMMA has positive effects on both engagement intention and engagement behaviour, with SMM sales intensity moderating the relationship between intention and behaviour. An empirical factor analysis of SMMA performed on a sample of 250 online shoppers in Gurugram, Delhi-NCR and Noida in the Indian National Capital Region (NCR) has revealed that there are four main factors that make social media activities influential in shaping buying decisions – source of updates, influencer, convenience and experience sharing, all of which significantly affect buying behaviour. Thus, four factors – source of updates, influencer, convenience and experience sharing have been identified as significant influences on consumer purchase behaviour.

Influencer marketing studies have become popular as an independent research area. A study of the effects of social media influencer marketing on consumer behaviour and brand loyalty has explored the ways in which influencers impact consumer perceptions, purchase decisions and brand engagement, revealing that influencer marketing has developed from traditional celebrity endorsement into partnership of brands and individuals due to their credibility and influence on the audiences. Thus, influencer marketing has moved from traditional celebrity endorsements into collaborations with people who actually influence their audiences. Comparative analysis of celebrity and influencer endorsement has revealed that identification, credibility and product-endorser fit are essential aspects for advertising effectiveness, which proves that influencers might be better than celebrity endorsers when the audiences identify themselves with them [Schouten, Janssen, & Verspaget, 2020]. Similar results have been obtained in research of digital influencers and purchase decisions, according to which influencer-generated content and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) significantly affect consumers' purchase intention, with trust and brand awareness being important mediators [Ambarwati, Damaryanti, Prabowo, & Hamsal, 2019].

A study of 250 consumers in Delhi-NCR has revealed that influencer marketing strategies impact consumers' buying behaviour and loyalty in a positive way. The research findings indicate that consumers have positive attitudes towards

influencer marketing and show higher trust and engagement with influencer marketing in comparison with traditional advertisements. Related research done in Delhi-NCR involving 18-35-year-old users, who follow influencers regularly, has investigated the role of credibility, expertise, content quality, attractiveness and trust as predictors of purchase intention, using descriptive-correlational design to prove the hypotheses statistically. The study has used the quantitative, cross-sectional, descriptive-correlational research design to investigate credibility, expertise, content quality, attractiveness, trust and purchase intention at one moment of time. However, not all the findings regarding influencers in India show positive effects of influencer marketing: a study of 250 social media users in India has revealed that influencer credibility does not significantly improve purchase intention, while parasocial interaction sometimes correlates negatively with brand perception, which means that influencer marketing is not universal and depends on the context. The research findings prove that influencer credibility does not significantly improve purchase intention, while parasocial interaction may even correlate negatively with brand perception.

Global research contributes to understanding of the underlying mechanisms. A study of impulsive online buying behaviour has shown that perceived social presence significantly influences impulse purchase decisions, emphasizing the importance of emotional and situational aspects of social-media-driven buying; this study proposes an impulsive buying model, which has been tested via structural analysis. Similar research exploring trust in influencer-branded content has revealed that credibility of communication factors is crucial for building the followers' trust, which leads to impulse purchasing with mediation by product affection. General survey research indicates that a considerable share of consumers investigate products on social media before making a purchase, emphasizing the information function of these platforms; approximately 70% of consumers are influenced by social media in their purchase decisions, 54% of whom investigate products on these platforms.

Thus, the existing literature shows that both SMM and IM significantly influence consumer behaviour but in different ways: SMM works mainly via brand-controlled awareness, convenience and engagement, while IM works via source credibility, parasocial trust and content authenticity. Nevertheless, there are few studies that compare the strength of these effects in one sample from Delhi, which is the research gap this study tries to fill.

Research objectives

1. To examine the effect of social media marketing on consumer buying behaviour among consumers in Delhi-NCR.

2. To examine the effect of influencer marketing on consumer buying behaviour among consumers in Delhi-NCR.
3. To comparatively assess which of the two marketing approaches exerts a stronger influence on purchase decisions.
4. To identify the underlying factors (trust, credibility, convenience, content relatability) that explain differences between the two approaches.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research uses a quantitative approach with a descriptive-correlational research design, which is similar to existing comparative studies of consumers' behaviour in the Delhi-NCR area. A survey based on the structured questionnaire was conducted among online users of the age group 18-45 who live in Delhi-NCR and use at least one social network site (Instagram, Facebook, or YouTube). Besides, all participants should have made at least one online purchase in the last six months. Convenience sampling was used for this research.

The questionnaire consisted of four parts:

- i. Demographic data;
- ii. A 7-item scale measuring exposure and attitude towards social media marketing (SMM) (brand-page content, advertisements, sponsored posts);
- iii. A 7-item scale measuring exposure and attitude towards influencer marketing (IM) (perceived credibility, trust, relatability, content authenticity);
- iv. A 5-item scale measuring purchase intention and buying behaviour.

All attitudinal statements were measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 - strongly disagree, 5 - strongly agree). Reliability of the instrument was assessed with Cronbach's alpha coefficient, while construct validity was checked by the means of exploratory factor analysis before hypothesis testing. Data analysis was carried out with descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, paired-sample t-test (for checking the comparative influence of SMM and IM on the same respondents), and multiple linear regression (the dependent variable is buying behaviour, while independent ones are the results of SMM and IM).

Three hypotheses were tested in this research:

H1: SMM has a statistically significant positive impact on consumer buying behaviour in Delhi-NCR.

H2: IM has a statistically significant positive impact on consumer buying behaviour in Delhi-NCR.

H3: IM has a statistically significantly higher impact on consumer buying behaviour compared to SMM.

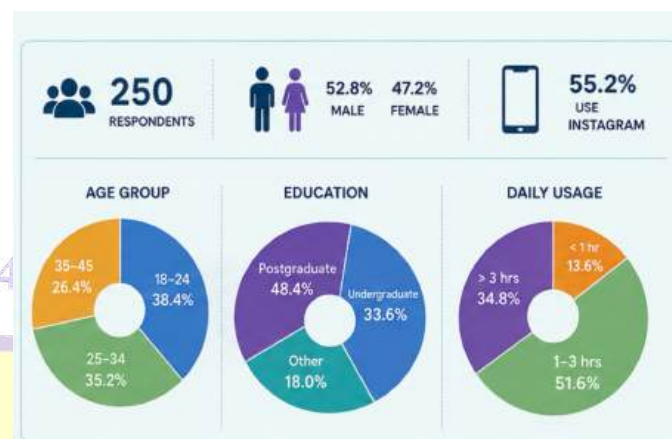


Figure 2. Demographic and social media usage profile of the 250 respondents from Delhi-NCR.

Table I: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 250)

Category	Sub-group	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	132	52.8%
	Female	118	47.2%
Age	18–24 years	96	38.4%
	25–34 years	88	35.2%
	35–45 years	66	26.4%
Education	Undergraduate	84	33.6%
	Postgraduate	121	48.4%
	Other	45	18.0%
Primary platform used	Instagram	138	55.2%
	YouTube	62	24.8%
	Facebook	50	20.0%
Daily social media usage	Less than 1 hour	34	13.6%
	1–3 hours	129	51.6%
	More than 3 hours	87	34.8%

RESULTS

Reliability and Descriptive Statistics

The reliability analysis produced Cronbach's alpha values of 0.84 for the social media marketing scale, 0.87 for the influencer marketing scale, and 0.81 for the buying behaviour scale, all exceeding the conventional 0.70 threshold and indicating internal consistency adequate for further analysis.

Descriptive statistics show that respondents rated influencer marketing items marginally higher on average than social media marketing items, consistent with the trust-based mechanism identified in the literature review.

Table II: Descriptive Statistics for Key Constructs

Construct	Mean	Std. Deviation	Cronbach's Alpha
Social Media Marketing (SMM)	3.62	0.71	0.84
Influencer Marketing (IM)	3.89	0.68	0.87
Consumer Buying Behaviour (CBB)	3.71	0.74	0.81

Predictor	Unstandardized B	Standardized β	t-value	p-value
Constant	0.81	—	4.12	0.000
Social Media Marketing	0.29	0.28	4.87	0.000
Influencer Marketing	0.41	0.39	6.53	0.000

$R^2 = 0.46$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0.455$; $F(2,247) = 118.4$, $p < 0.001$

A paired-sample t-test comparing mean IM and SMM scores within the same respondents showed a statistically significant difference ($t = 5.94$, $df = 249$, $p < 0.001$), with influencer marketing scoring higher, thereby supporting H3. When respondents were asked directly which channel most influenced their most recent online purchase, 58.4% attributed their decision primarily to influencer-generated content, compared with 41.6% who cited brand-run social media marketing.

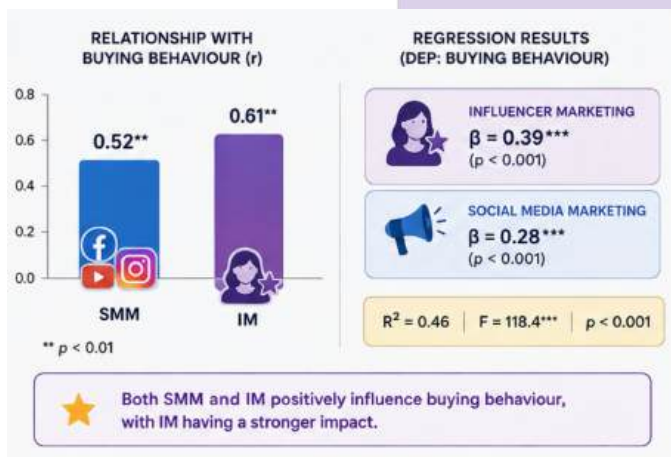


Figure 3. Correlation and regression results showing the stronger influence of influencer marketing on consumer buying behaviour.

Correlation and Regression Analysis

Using Pearson correlation analysis, SMM ($r = 0.52$, $p < 0.01$) and IM ($r = 0.61$, $p < 0.01$) were found to be positively correlated with consumer buying behaviour, hence supporting Hypotheses H1 and H2 respectively. Multiple regression analysis with consumer buying behaviour (CBB) as the independent variable proved to be significant ($F = 118.4$, $p < 0.001$) and explained about 46% of the variation in consumer buying behaviour ($R^2 = 0.46$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.455$). Both the variables made significant contributions with influencer marketing showing a relatively larger standard beta than social media marketing.

Table III: Regression Results

(Dependent Variable: Consumer Buying Behaviour)



Figure 4. Comparative influence of influencer marketing and brand-run social media marketing on consumers' most recent purchase decisions.

Table IV: Hypothesis Testing Summary

Hypothesis	Statistical Test	Result	Status
H1: SMM $\rightarrow$ CBB	Pearson $r = 0.52$, $p < 0.01$	Significant positive relationship	Supported
H2: IM $\rightarrow$ CBB	Pearson $r = 0.61$, $p < 0.01$	Significant positive relationship	Supported

H3: IM effect > SMM effect	Paired t-test, $t = 5.94, p < 0.001$	IM significantly stronger than SMM	Supported
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DISCUSSION

Based on the findings, it can be seen that both marketing channels have considerable effects on the purchase decisions of Delhi-NCR consumers, though the latter seems to be marginally stronger. Such result corroborates the existing literature, which claims that credibility and parasocial trust inherent to the influencer content have stronger behavioural intention effect than the message communicated by the brand. The current paper analyses the influence of social media influencers on consumer behaviour and brand loyalty and the related implications for consumer perceptions, purchase decision, and brand loyalty. Additionally, the results agree with Delhi-specific studies claiming that consumers consider influencer marketing as more engaging and credible than conventional advertising, with positive, credible, and more engaging perceptions than traditional types of advertising.

At the same time, the effect of social media marketing cannot be ignored as well, with the brand-generated content playing a role in raising awareness, convenience, and information search behaviours occurring before or accompanying the influencer-driven ones. This observation coincides with the multi-factor model outlined by the NCR-based literature, which states that such social media functions as update source, presence of the influencers, experience sharing, and convenience strongly influence the consumer buying behaviour. Thus, based on the evidence gathered in this paper, it can be concluded that these two channels complement each other rather than compete and that the brands maintaining a consistent social media activity and influencer collaborations would probably perform better than using one channel independently.

Finally, the finding contrasts nuancedly with the literature stating that credibility of the influencers does not necessarily lead to purchase intention. Based on the findings, it is clear that credibility of the influencers does not have a significant positive effect on purchase intention and that parasocial interaction even negatively correlates with brand perception. It seems that such result reflects particular characteristics of the Delhi-NCR sample studied in the research rather than a universal one and thus, applies only to this specific market.

CONCLUSION

Thus, this paper compares the influence of social media marketing and influencer marketing on the consumer buying behaviour of Delhi-NCR consumers. Evidence obtained through surveys of 250 consumers proves that both channels

positively and significantly affect purchasing, with influencer marketing having marginally but still statistically significantly stronger effect, based on perception of credibility and trust. For marketers operating in Delhi-NCR, the implication would be that influencer marketing, especially when it comes to collaboration with influencers considered credible and trustworthy by the customers, can drive faster purchase decisions than the pure social media marketing.

Limitations and Future Scope

However, due to limitations of the study caused by the convenience sampling used and to the fact that the attitudinal perceptions and not the actual purchase behaviour were examined in this research, the conclusions drawn have limited generalizability to other populations. For future research, probability sampling could be employed within a larger sample of Delhi-NCR consumers, comparisons between different platforms could be included (e.g., Instagram versus YouTube influencers), and longitudinal designs could be used to track the changes over the course of customer journey.

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