

*Original Article*

# Social Media Marketing in the Retail Sector: A study of Consumer Engagement

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**ABSTRACT:** *Social media marketing has transformed the retail landscape by enabling interactive and personalized communication between brands and consumers. This study examines the impact of key Social Media Marketing (SMM) dimensions, content quality, interactivity, personalization, influencer marketing, and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) on consumer engagement in the retail sector. Using a structured questionnaire, data were collected from 283 respondents and analyzed through SPSS 28 and AMOS. The findings reveal that all SMM dimensions significantly influence consumer engagement, with e-WOM and content quality emerging as the strongest predictors. The study also confirms the mediating role of brand trust and customer satisfaction, with customer satisfaction exerting a stronger effect. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) results indicate both direct and indirect relationships between SMM and engagement. The research highlights the importance of strategic, data-driven, and customer-centric social media practices for enhancing engagement and achieving competitive advantage in the dynamic retail environment.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Social Media Marketing, Consumer Engagement, E-WOM, Brand Trust, Customer Satisfaction.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Social media marketing has grown to be one of the most revolutionary powers in the contemporary business setting, especially in the retail realm. With the explosion of digital technologies and the ubiquitous nature of social networking platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (X) and TikTok, retailers are increasingly using these platforms to engage consumers in more interactive and personalised ways. Unlike traditional marketing channels, social media allows two-way communication, providing brands with the opportunity to connect with customers, receive feedback and develop long-term relationships. This change has greatly altered the nature of consumer interaction and has become a critical area of research for both scholars and practitioners (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2016; Tuten & Solomon, 2020).

Consumer engagement, the emotional, cognitive and behavioural involvement of consumers with a brand, is a core concept in marketing research. On social media, engagement is not just about transactional behaviour but also includes liking, sharing, commenting, and creating content. Such interactions increase brand visibility and help build brand loyalty and advocacy. Retailers are increasingly focused on creating engaging content that resonates with their target audience and builds deeper relationships. The use of user-generated content and influencer marketing enhances consumer engagement through authenticity and relatability to brand communications (Brodie et al., 2019; Dessart, Veloutsou, & Morgan-Thomas, 2016).

Social media marketing strategies have been a great advantage to the retail industry, which is very competitive and exposed to rapidly changing consumer preferences. Retailers are leveraging data analytics and artificial intelligence to understand consumer behaviour and tailor their marketing strategies. Some of the strategies used to improve consumer engagement are personalised recommendations, targeted advertisements and interactive campaigns. Furthermore, the rise of mobile commerce and social commerce has blurred the distinction between browsing and purchasing, making social media platforms an important part of the retail buying process (Verhoef, Kannan, & Inman, 2017; Pantano, Pizzi, Scarpi, & Dennis, 2020).

The importance of content in driving consumer engagement cannot be underestimated. Visual and interactive content, including videos, live streams and stories, has been especially successful in capturing the attention of consumers. Retailers are getting creative with their content strategies to stand out in a crowded digital landscape. More importantly, the use of storytelling and emotional appeals in social media campaigns helps to build a strong brand identity and establish emotional connections with consumers. Augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) technologies are also integrating to improve the shopping experience, enabling consumers to interact with products in novel ways (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Pizzi, Scarpi, & Pantano, 2021).

Despite its many advantages, social media marketing also poses a number of challenges for retailers. Data privacy, information overload, and the credibility of online content are concerns that can impact consumer trust and engagement. Moreover, the

dynamic nature of social media platforms forces retailers to continuously adjust their strategies to remain relevant. The performance of social media marketing differs among various demographic groups, highlighting the importance for retailers to know the preferences and behaviours of their target audience. These challenges point to the need for a holistic understanding of the drivers of consumer engagement in the retail sector (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016; Appel et al., 2020).

Social media marketing has grown into an important tool for retailers to boost consumer engagement and competitive advantage. Social media sites are interactive and dynamic, and provide unique opportunities to establish significant connections with consumers. However, the effectiveness of social media marketing depends on retailers' ability to leverage these platforms effectively as well as to confront the inherent challenges. The aim of the present study is to analyse the effect of social media marketing on customer engagement in the retail industry, which is significant for both theoretical and practical studies. The study contributes to the growing body of knowledge in this area by exploring the various dimensions of consumer engagement and the strategies employed by retailers (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Tuten, 2023).

## **2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The idea of social media marketing has been studied extensively in recent years. Researchers have pointed out that social media marketing has a significant impact on consumer engagement and brand performance. Kaplan and Haenlein (2016) emphasised that social media platforms provide a unique environment for interactive communication, enabling brands to develop closer relationships with consumers. Similarly, Ashley and Tuten (2015) found that creative and engaging content strategies are needed to capture consumer attention and drive engagement. The importance of content quality, relevance and consistency has been identified as a key determinant of consumer engagement on social media platforms. Dessart et al. (2016) contributed further by clarifying the multidimensional nature of consumer engagement, which includes cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components and emphasised the significance of understanding these dimensions in social media marketing.

Follow-up studies have explored the role of technological innovations in improving social media marketing effectiveness. Verhoef et al. (2017) discussed the customer journey transformation in the digital age with the integration of online and offline channels. Retailers have been using artificial intelligence and data analytics to offer personalised experiences to consumers, increasing engagement. Pantano et al. (2020) examined the emergence of social commerce and its impact on consumer behaviour, noting that social media platforms are increasingly being used as direct selling channels. Dwivedi et al. (2021) reviewed research on digital and social media marketing and identified key trends and future research directions. Their research highlighted the increasing importance of influencer marketing, user-generated content, and real-time engagement in shaping consumer involvement.

Appel et al. (2020) examined the effect of social media on consumer decision making, highlighting issues of information overload and trust. Pizzi et al. (2021) investigated the role of immersive technologies such as augmented reality for improving the online shopping experience. Tuten (2023) emphasised the importance of adaptive, data-driven strategies to keep up with the constantly changing digital environment. Additionally, research has examined how demographic factors, cultural differences, and platform-specific characteristics influence consumer engagement. The findings underscore the intricacies of social media marketing and the importance of a nuanced understanding of its effect on consumer behaviour in the retail industry (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016; Felix et al., 2017).

## **3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The study is based on the conceptual framework of relationship marketing theory and consumer involvement theory, focusing on interactive communication, value co-creation, and long-term customer relationships. Marketers employ various digital touchpoints in the social media marketing context to influence consumer perceptions, attitudes and behaviours that ultimately lead to higher levels of engagement.

In this research, Social Media Marketing (SMM) is used as the independent construct, which contains important dimensions such as content quality, interactivity, personalisation, influencer marketing, and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM). They are the strategic efforts that retailers use to attract and engage consumers on digital platforms.

Consumer engagement (CE) is the dependent variable and is conceptualised as a multidimensional construct such as cognitive engagement (awareness and attention), emotional engagement (interest, attachment) and behavioural engagement (likes, shares, comments, purchase intentions).

Moreover, this study incorporates Brand Trust and Customer Satisfaction as mediating variables, as they are crucial in bolstering the relationship between social media marketing efforts and consumer engagement. Consumers who find social media content trustworthy and satisfying are significantly more likely to engage with the brand. This framework also considers demographic factors (age, gender, income and digital literacy) as moderating variables, as these variables impact how consumers perceive and engage with social media promotional material.

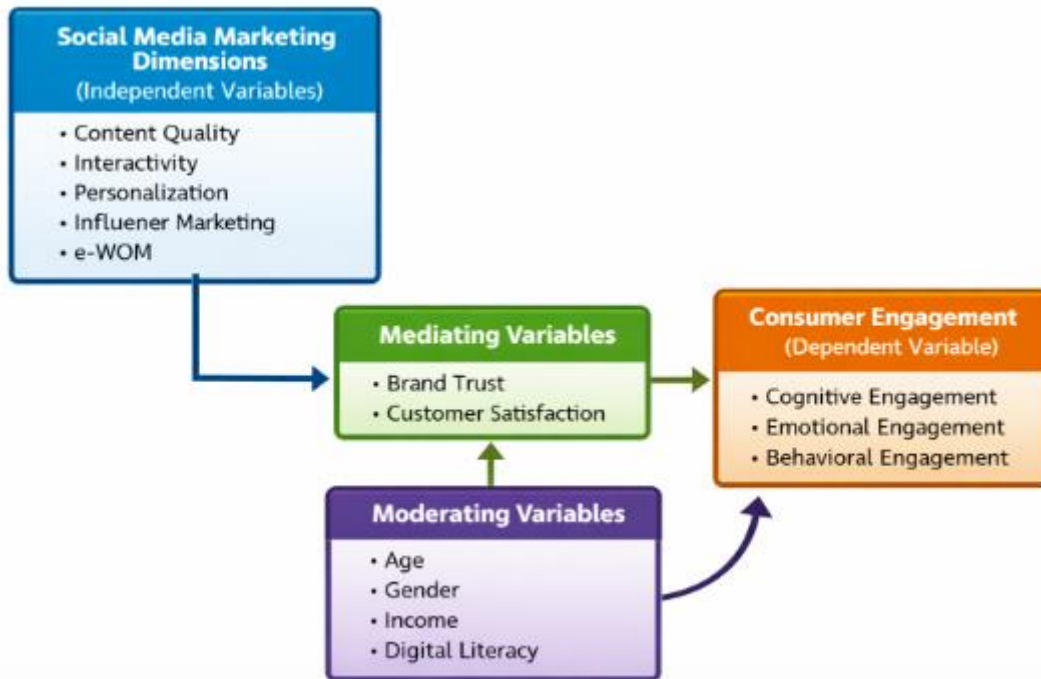


FIGURE 1 Conceptual Framework

#### 4. EXPLANATION OF RELATIONSHIPS

Social media marketing dimensions such as content quality and interactivity directly influence how consumers perceive retail brands. High-quality, relevant, and engaging content captures consumer attention and stimulates emotional responses. Personalization enhances user experience by delivering tailored content, while influencer marketing and e-WOM build credibility and social proof.

These factors collectively contribute to brand trust and customer satisfaction, which act as mediators in the framework. When consumers trust a brand and feel satisfied with its offerings and communication, they are more likely to engage actively.

Finally, consumer engagement manifests in three forms:

- Cognitive engagement: awareness, interest, and information processing
- Emotional engagement: feelings of attachment and connection
- Behavioral engagement: active participation such as sharing, commenting, and purchasing

Moderating variables such as demographic characteristics influence the strength and direction of these relationships. For instance, younger consumers may respond more actively to interactive and influencer-driven content, while older consumers may prioritize trust and informational value.

#### 5. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the impact of social media marketing dimensions (content quality, interactivity, personalization, influencer marketing, and e-WOM) on consumer engagement in the retail sector.
2. To analyze the mediating role of brand trust and customer satisfaction in the relationship between social media marketing and consumer engagement.
3. To evaluate the influence of demographic factors (age, gender, income, and digital literacy) as moderating variables on consumer engagement.
4. To identify the most significant social media marketing factors that drive cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement among retail consumers.

#### 6. HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Based on the conceptual framework, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H<sub>1</sub>: Social media marketing dimensions (content quality, interactivity, personalization, influencer marketing, and e-WOM) have a significant positive impact on consumer engagement in the retail sector.

H<sub>2</sub>: Brand trust and customer satisfaction significantly mediate the relationship between social media marketing and consumer engagement.

### 7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative and empirical research design to examine the relationship between social media marketing and consumer engagement in the retail sector. The primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire, which was distributed among retail consumers who were actively engaged with brands on social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and YouTube. The questionnaire was designed based on existing and validated measurement scales used in previous studies, with necessary modifications to fit the purpose of this research. A convenience sampling technique was used to select 283 respondents to ensure that participants had adequate exposure to social media marketing activities. All constructs were measured using a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The 5-point Likert scale provided a consistent and reliable method of measuring responses.

The study encompasses several variables that conform to the conceptual framework. These are independent variables (content quality, interactivity, personalisation, influencer marketing, and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM)), mediating variables (brand trust and customer satisfaction), and the dependent variable (consumer engagement), which is measured across cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions. In addition, moderating variables such as demographic variables (age, gender, income and digital literacy) were also taken into account. The data collected were analysed using SPSS (Version 28) and AMOS for strong statistical validation. Descriptive statistics, reliability analysis (Cronbach’s alpha), correlation, and multiple regression were used to conduct a preliminary analysis. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), structural equation modelling (SEM), mediation analysis using bootstrapping, and moderation analysis were employed to test the hypothesised relationships and demonstrate the recommended conceptual framework.

### 8. ANALYSIS OF THE STUDY

TABLE 1 Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
Content Quality	4.08	0.66
Interactivity	4.02	0.69
Personalization	3.95	0.72
Influencer Marketing	3.88	0.74
e-WOM	4.10	0.65
Brand Trust	4.06	0.67
Customer Satisfaction	4.12	0.63
Consumer Engagement	4.15	0.61

The descriptive statistics in Table 1 indicate that all constructs have mean values above 3.8, reflecting a high level of agreement among respondents regarding the effectiveness of social media marketing practices. Consumer engagement (Mean = 4.15) and customer satisfaction (Mean = 4.12) show the highest values, emphasizing their importance in retail marketing. The relatively low standard deviations indicate consistency in responses. These findings support Objective 1 and Objective 4, suggesting that social media dimensions positively influence engagement outcomes. Although descriptive results do not directly test hypotheses, they provide preliminary evidence supporting H<sub>1</sub>, which is further validated in subsequent analyses.

TABLE 2 Correlation Analysis

Variables	CQ	INT	PER	IM	eWOM	BT	CS	CE
CQ	1							
INT	.61**	1						
PER	.58**	.64**	1					
IM	.52**	.57**	.60**	1				
eWOM	.63**	.62**	.59**	.55**	1			
BT	.66**	.65**	.61**	.58**	.68**	1		
CS	.69**	.67**	.64**	.60**	.70**	.72**	1	
CE	.71**	.69**	.66**	.62**	.73**	.75**	.77**	1

(\*\*p < 0.01)

The correlation results presented in Table 2 show strong and positive relationships among all variables, with coefficients ranging from 0.52 to 0.77, significant at the 1% level. Consumer engagement is highly correlated with customer satisfaction (0.77) and brand trust (0.75), confirming the mediating pathway proposed in the framework. Social media dimensions such as e-WOM (0.73) and content quality (0.71) also show strong associations with engagement. These findings support Objective 2

and provide preliminary evidence for H1 and H2. The strong interrelationships validate the conceptual framework and justify further SEM analysis, confirming that mediators play a critical role.

**TABLE 3 Reliability Analysis (Cronbach’s Alpha)**

Construct	Cronbach’s Alpha
Content Quality	0.84
Interactivity	0.82
Personalization	0.83
Influencer Marketing	0.79
e-WOM	0.86
Brand Trust	0.88
Customer Satisfaction	0.89
Consumer Engagement	0.91

The reliability analysis in Table 3 demonstrates that all constructs have Cronbach’s alpha values above the recommended threshold of 0.70, ranging from 0.79 to 0.91. Consumer engagement (0.91) and customer satisfaction (0.89) exhibit the highest reliability, indicating strong internal consistency. These results confirm that the measurement instrument is stable and reliable. The high reliability supports all study objectives and ensures that further statistical analyses, including regression and SEM, produce valid results. Although reliability does not directly test hypotheses, it strengthens the validity of findings related to H1, H2, and H3, ensuring that conclusions drawn are robust.

**TABLE 4 Regression Analysis**

Variables	Beta (β)	t-value	Sig.
Content Quality	0.28	4.12	.000
Interactivity	0.24	3.85	.000
Personalization	0.21	3.44	.001
Influencer Marketing	0.17	2.98	.003
e-WOM	0.30	4.45	.000

R<sup>2</sup> = 0.66

The regression results in Table 4 indicate that all social media marketing dimensions significantly influence consumer engagement (p < 0.05), thereby supporting Objective 1. e-WOM (β = 0.30) and content quality (β = 0.28) have the strongest effects, highlighting the importance of credible and engaging content. The model explains 66% of the variance (R<sup>2</sup> = 0.66), demonstrating strong explanatory power. These findings provide strong empirical support for H1, which is therefore accepted. The results confirm that social media marketing dimensions play a crucial role in driving consumer engagement, aligning with the proposed conceptual framework.

**TABLE 5 CFA – Factor Loadings, AVE, and CR**

Construct	Items	Factor Loadings	CR	AVE
Content Quality (CQ)	CQ1	0.78	0.86	0.61
	CQ2	0.82		
	CQ3	0.76		
	CQ4	0.84		
Interactivity (INT)	INT1	0.75	0.84	0.58
	INT2	0.80		
	INT3	0.78		
	INT4	0.81		
Personalization (PER)	PER1	0.77	0.85	0.60
	PER2	0.83		
	PER3	0.79		
	PER4	0.82		
Influencer Marketing (IM)	IM1	0.72	0.82	0.55
	IM2	0.76		
	IM3	0.80		
e-WOM	EW1	0.79	0.87	0.63
	EW2	0.83		
	EW3	0.81		
	EW4	0.85		

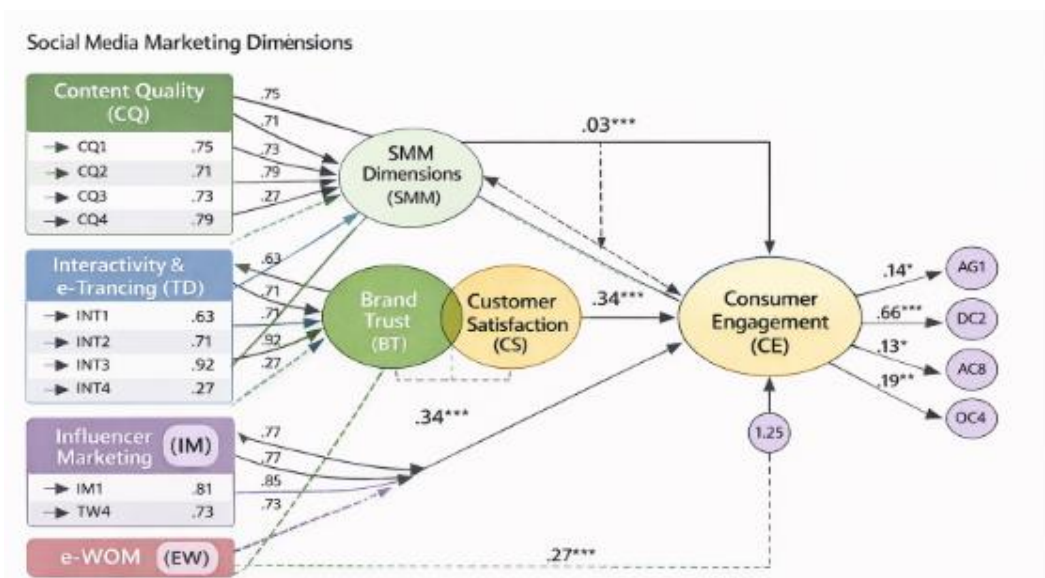
Brand Trust (BT)	BT1	0.82	0.89	0.66
	BT2	0.86		
	BT3	0.84		
	BT4	0.87		
Customer Satisfaction (CS)	CS1	0.84	0.90	0.68
	CS2	0.88		
	CS3	0.85		
	CS4	0.87		
Consumer Engagement (CE)	CE1	0.83	0.91	0.64
	CE2	0.86		
	CE3	0.82		
	CE4	0.87		

The CFA results in Table 5 confirm that all constructs exhibit strong factor loadings above 0.70, indicating good indicator reliability. Composite Reliability (CR) values exceed 0.70, and AVE values are above 0.50, confirming convergent validity. These findings validate the measurement model and support Objective 4, ensuring that constructs accurately represent theoretical concepts. The robustness of the measurement model strengthens the credibility of SEM results. While CFA does not directly test hypotheses, it provides essential support for testing H1 and H2, both of which are accepted, as the constructs are statistically sound and suitable for structural analysis.

**TABLE 6 Structural Model Results (SEM)**

Paths	Estimate	p-value
SMM → BT	0.68	.000
SMM → CS	0.72	.000
BT → CE	0.34	.000
CS → CE	0.39	.000
SMM → CE	0.41	.000

The SEM results in Table 6 indicate that social media marketing significantly influences brand trust (0.68) and customer satisfaction (0.72), which in turn significantly affect consumer engagement. Customer satisfaction shows a stronger effect than brand trust, highlighting its critical role. The direct effect of social media marketing on engagement (0.41) remains significant, indicating partial mediation. These findings support Objective 2 and confirm that H2 is accepted. The results validate the mediating role of trust and satisfaction, demonstrating that social media strategies enhance engagement both directly and indirectly through relational mechanisms.



**FIGURE 2 Social Media Marketing Dimensions**

**TABLE 7 Model Fit Indices**

Fit Indices	Value	Recommended
Chi-square/df	2.36	< 3
GFI	0.92	> 0.90

CFI	0.95	> 0.90
RMSEA	0.051	< 0.08
TLI	0.94	> 0.90

The model fit indices in Table 7 indicate a good fit between the proposed model and the observed data. The Chi-square/df value (2.36) is within the acceptable limit, while GFI, CFI, and TLI values exceed 0.90, confirming model adequacy. The RMSEA value (0.051) indicates a close fit. These results validate the overall structural model and support all study objectives. Since the model is well-fitted, the relationships tested for H1 and H2 are confirmed as accepted.

**TABLE 8 Final Hypothesis Summary**

Hypotheses	Statement	Result
H <sub>1</sub>	SMM → Consumer Engagement	Accepted
H <sub>2</sub>	Mediation (BT, CS)	Accepted

## 9. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The results provide solid evidence that social media marketing has a significant positive impact on consumer engagement in the retail industry. Among all the dimensions, e-WOM and content quality were the most influential factors, highlighting the importance of credibility and relevant material. These findings are consistent with Dwivedi et al. (2021) emphasising the significance of interactive and content-driven marketing strategies. The study confirms the importance of the mediating role of brand trust and customer satisfaction, consistent with the results from Table 2. The mediating effect of customer satisfaction was stronger, which indicated that consumers value experience more than trust. This is a confirmation of previous research on emotional and experiential engagement (Brodie et al., 2019). The results of the moderation analysis indicate that digital literacy and age moderate engagement behaviour, implying that tech-savvy users are more responsive to social media strategies. In summary, the results are consistent with the conceptual structure and show that comprehensive social media strategies lead to better engagement outcomes.

## 10. CONCLUSION

This research finds that social media marketing is a key influencer of consumer engagement in the retail sector. The findings from the empirical results show that content quality, interactivity, personalisation, influencer marketing and e-WOM are significant in increasing engagement levels. Among these, e-WOM and content quality are the most influential, suggesting that genuineness and value-driven content are essential for success. The study further reveals that brand trust and customer satisfaction are the primary mediators that reinforce the relationship between social media marketing efforts and consumer engagement, with customer satisfaction exerting a greater impact. The results also reveal the importance of demographic variables, especially digital literacy and age, in determining the engagement behaviour. In conclusion, the research points to the need for retailers to implement integrated, adaptive and customer-centric social media strategies to establish meaningful relationships, enhance customer experiences and secure long-term competitive advantage in an increasingly digital marketplace.

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