

# Research Proposal

**Course:** Critical Literature Review

**Course Code:** LCDB7009

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## Topic

### ***“The Impact of Social Media Marketing on Consumer Purchase Behaviour”***

#### Introduction

Social media has become one of the most important channels through which businesses reach and influence customers. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok and Facebook allow firms to run targeted advertising, work with influencers, and encourage user-generated content, all of which shape how consumers discover, evaluate and ultimately purchase products (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). A large and fast-growing body of business and marketing research has examined this relationship, but findings are scattered across different platforms, product categories and consumer segments (Zahoor and Shah, 2024). This review will bring together this literature to build a clearer picture of how, and under what conditions, social media marketing shapes consumer purchase behaviour.

#### Research Aim, Objectives and Questions

**Aim:** To critically review and synthesise the existing literature on social media marketing and consumer purchase behaviour, to understand how social media marketing activities influence consumers' purchase decisions, and to identify gaps that could inform further research.

#### Objectives:

- **O1:** To review the key concepts and theories underpinning social media marketing and consumer purchase behaviour.
- **O2:** To examine how specific social media marketing activities — advertising, influencer marketing and user-generated content — influence consumer purchase intentions (Godey et al., 2016).
- **O3:** To identify the role of trust, brand engagement and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in shaping consumer buying decisions on social media (Erkan and Evans, 2016; Hollebeek, Glynn and Brodie, 2014).
- **O4:** To identify gaps in the current literature and propose tentative research questions for further study, e.g. on differences across product types, platforms or consumer age groups.

#### Questions:

- **RQ1:** What are the key theories and concepts that explain how social media marketing influences consumer purchase behaviour?
- **RQ2:** How do specific social media marketing activities (advertising, influencer marketing, user-generated content) influence consumers' purchase intentions?
- **RQ3:** What role do trust, brand engagement and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) play in shaping consumers' purchase decisions on social media?
- **RQ4:** What gaps exist in the current literature — e.g. across different platforms, product categories or consumer age groups — that warrant further research?

## Approach: Narrative Literature Review

This proposal follows a Narrative Literature Review approach throughout (rather than a systematic review or meta-analysis). A narrative review was selected because the topic is broad and still evolving, drawing on studies with very different methods (surveys, experiments, conceptual papers) and across many platforms and product categories. A narrative approach allows these diverse sources to be brought together thematically — around marketing activities, consumer response mechanisms and outcomes — rather than being restricted to a single, narrowly defined search protocol. The review will still follow a clear, transparent and traceable process for identifying and selecting sources, to keep it credible and replicable in outline even though it is not a formal systematic review.

## Excel File (Part 2)

An accompanying Excel workbook has been prepared with columns mapped directly to the objectives above: Author, Year, Title, Source, Summary, Keywords, and Objective Addressed (O1–O4). This will form the working base for the full narrative synthesis in Part 2 and the annotated bibliography in Part 3 and is designed to be extended as further sources are added.

## Theoretical Background — Theories

The narrative review will draw on four complementary theories and frameworks:

- **Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991):** explains purchase intention as a function of attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control — widely used to explain how social media content shapes buying intentions.
- **Social Media Classification Framework (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010):** the foundational conceptual framework describing what social media is and how it differs from traditional marketing channels.
- **Consumer Brand Engagement Theory (Hollebeek, Glynn and Brodie, 2014):** explains how consumers' cognitive, emotional and behavioural engagement with brands on social media develops and affects loyalty and purchase.
- **Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) Theory (Erkan and Evans, 2016):** explains how peer reviews, comments and recommendations shared on social media are adopted by consumers and translated into purchase decisions.

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