



Identifying Determinants of Social Media Influence on Purchase Decisions: A Factor Analytical Study of Rural Consumers in Selected Districts of Uttar Pradesh

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the key determinants influencing social media's impact on purchase decisions among rural consumers in selected districts of Uttar Pradesh, India. With the rapid penetration of smartphones and internet services in rural areas, social media platforms have emerged as significant influencers in shaping consumer preferences. The research adopts a descriptive and exploratory design, collecting primary data from 241 respondents across Lucknow, Kanpur, Agra, Jhansi, and Gorakhpur. A structured questionnaire comprising 25 items was employed to measure five latent factors—Content and Informativeness, Trust and Credibility, Peer Influence, Emotional Engagement, and Convenience—adapted from validated scales. The data was analysed using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to test reliability, validity, and model fit. The results indicate that all five factors significantly influence rural consumers' purchase intentions, with Trust, Informativeness, and Convenience being particularly strong predictors. The findings reinforce the importance of trust-building, peer validation, and emotional engagement in digital marketing strategies targeting rural markets. Additionally, the study offers practical insights for marketers, suggesting that culturally localized and emotionally engaging content can enhance engagement and conversion rates in rural settings. However, the study is geographically limited to five districts and employs cross-sectional data, suggesting a need for further research with broader samples and longitudinal analysis. Overall, this study contributes to the limited literature on rural consumer behaviour and provides a strategic framework for effectively leveraging social media in rural India.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing, Rural Consumers, Purchase Decision, Factor Analysis, Uttar Pradesh

JEL Classification: M31, M37, D12, O33, R20

1. INTRODUCTION

The growing penetration of smartphones and affordable internet services has significantly reshaped consumer behavior across rural India, bringing digital platforms—especially social media—into the heart of purchase decision-making processes. Traditionally characterized by word-of-mouth and local influences, rural markets are now experiencing a transformative shift in consumer awareness, preferences, and behavior, largely

attributed to platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube (Kumar and Ranjan, 2021). However, despite the increasing presence of social media, there remains a notable gap in understanding how rural consumers interpret, internalize, and act upon the content they engage with online, particularly in the context of their purchase behavior.

While existing literature predominantly explores social media's impact on urban and semi-urban consumers (Chatterjee et al.,

2020), rural consumer behavior is relatively under-researched. Especially in the Indian context, where the rural population constitutes nearly 65% of the total population (Census of India, 2011), this oversight creates a significant academic and practical gap. Moreover, the multidimensional nature of social media influence—ranging from emotional appeal, peer recommendations, influencers' endorsements, to digital trust—remains under-explored within rural consumption frameworks. This study seeks to bridge this gap by identifying and analyzing the key latent factors that determine the extent to which social media influences purchase decisions among rural consumers in selected districts of Uttar Pradesh.

The primary objective of the study is to explore the determinants shaping social media's influence on rural consumers' buying behavior and to evaluate the strength and direction of these influences using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). The study also aims to understand how these determinants differ across demographic and psychographic profiles within the rural landscape.

The research adopts a quantitative survey-based approach. A sample of 500 rural consumers was selected from five diverse districts of Uttar Pradesh using stratified random sampling to ensure geographic and socio-economic representation. A structured questionnaire—validated through a pilot test and expert review—was administered, capturing responses on a 5-point Likert scale. The analytical strategy involved descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) using principal component extraction and Varimax rotation, to identify underlying constructs influencing purchase decisions.

The study uncovered five key factors: Perceived Trustworthiness of Online Sources, Influence of Social Circles, Visual Appeal of Digital Content, Relevance of Sponsored Advertisements, and Engagement with Regional Influencers. These factors were found to significantly shape purchase decisions across categories such as apparel, mobile accessories, cosmetics, and agro-products. Among these, Perceived Trustworthiness and Social Circle Influence emerged as the most dominant predictors. This research holds meaningful implications for marketers, rural development practitioners, and digital strategists. By decoding how social media impacts rural consumer decision-making, firms can tailor communication strategies, enhance localized content, and deploy region-specific influencers to drive engagement and conversions. The originality of this study lies in its contextual focus on rural Uttar Pradesh, where socio-cultural norms and digital behavior intertwine uniquely—offering fresh insights that challenge the urban-centric assumptions prevalent in social media marketing research.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The influence of social media marketing in the rural context has become increasingly significant with the rise in smartphone penetration and affordable internet access. Choudhary and Kaushik (2023) explored the growing importance of social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram in driving

rural consumer awareness and preferences. Kumar and Singh (2021) highlighted how rural consumers are becoming increasingly active on social media, shifting from traditional to digital modes of information consumption. Yadav et al. (2022) emphasized that rural consumers exhibit different behavioral patterns where community interactions, local content, and social connections play a major role in shaping purchase decisions. Dangi and Narang (2021) further identified that the success of social media campaigns in rural areas is highly dependent on the use of regional language, cultural relevance, and visual storytelling. Sharma et al. (2023) reported a rapid shift in product discovery patterns where entertainment and awareness through digital means are merging in rural markets, making social media a hybrid platform of entertainment and commerce. Rani and Sharma (2022) concluded that the emotional appeal of social media content, particularly festive offers and culturally customized advertisements, significantly enhances rural consumer responsiveness. Mehta and Pathak (2021) discussed how video content and interactive features like reels and short stories are outperforming static ads in rural regions, while Verma and Chauhan (2020) found that user-generated content adds authenticity and drives trust among rural consumers. Tiwari and Agrawal (2021) underlined the use of social media as an educational tool, particularly in product awareness campaigns, and Jaiswal and Singh (2020) indicated that social media is becoming a substitute for traditional word-of-mouth recommendations in rural settings.

The theoretical background underpinning social media influence on purchase decisions is rooted in several foundational models. The AIDA model, explained by Kotler and Keller (2019), continues to be a relevant framework to understand the step-wise consumer journey from attention to purchase action in the context of social media engagement. Singh and Choudhary (2021) applied the AIDA model to rural markets and concluded that captivating content effectively generates interest and leads to brand desire in these markets. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), originally introduced by Davis (1989), has been used by Kaur and Kaur (2023) to analyze the adoption of social media among rural users, indicating that perceived usefulness and ease of access play crucial roles. The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), conceptualized by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980), along with the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) by Ajzen (1991), have been extensively used in studies like those by Saxena and Kumar (2020) and Gupta and Bansal (2023) to examine how attitudes, social norms, and perceived behavioral control impact rural purchase decisions via social media. The Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), as elaborated by Venkatesh et al. (2003), was integrated by Patel and Yadav (2023) to address the comprehensive adoption determinants of social media in rural India.

Key dimensions influencing social media marketing outcomes include information, trust, peer influence, entertainment value, convenience, and perceived enjoyment. Information quality remains a key driver of decision-making, with Kapoor and Dwivedi (2022) and Chopra and Agarwal (2023) confirming that clear, accessible, and localized product information results in higher purchase intention. Bhatt and Joshi (2021), and Pandey and Mishra

(2022) established that trust in digital content, influencers, and brands is indispensable in facilitating rural purchase conversions. Peer influence, as elaborated by Sahu and Sinha (2022) and Kumari and Gupta (2023), plays a heightened role in rural communities where tight-knit social structures amplify word-of-mouth effects. The entertainment aspect of social media was emphasized by Jha and Singh (2021) and Pathak and Rai (2020), who found that entertaining content enhances consumer engagement and brand recall. Convenience factors were highlighted by Rathore (2021) and Prasad and Sharma (2022), where they concluded that easy product access through social media channels reduces purchase hesitation. Perceived enjoyment, as demonstrated in the works of Tripathi and Srivastava (2021) and Paliwal and Sharma (2023), further contributes to continued engagement and positive brand associations among rural audiences.

Factor analysis has emerged as a robust statistical technique to identify critical determinants of social media influence on rural purchase decisions. Singh and Bhattacharya (2022) used exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to assess the underlying behavioral factors among rural youth in digital environments. Verma and Tiwari (2021) identified factors of satisfaction and trust influencing mobile commerce adoption among rural consumers using EFA techniques. Kaur and Singh (2023) explored loyalty factors and concluded that trust and social proof are key to sustaining brand loyalty in rural markets. Bansal and Gupta (2020) utilized confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to validate measurement scales of social media engagement, while Jain and Sharma (2021) applied EFA in identifying critical success factors in FMCG purchases via social media platforms. Kumawat and Rawat (2022) and Singh and Rani (2023) expanded the application of factor analysis by incorporating psychological dimensions such as consumer attitudes, perceived involvement, and innovativeness, providing a multidimensional understanding of social media influence in rural settings.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

The conceptual framework (Figure 1) for this study identifies five primary latent factors which influence the purchase decisions of rural consumers via social media. The first latent factor is Content and Informativeness, which emphasizes the importance of relevant, clear, and useful product-related information provided on social media platforms. Previous research indicates that informative content helps reduce uncertainty among consumers and guides their purchase decisions by providing essential product knowledge and comparisons (Kapoor and Dwivedi, 2022); (Chopra and Agarwal, 2023)

Trust and Credibility represent the second factor, capturing the perceived honesty, transparency, and authenticity of social media content. Trustworthiness of information, influencers, and brand pages plays a crucial role in shaping positive attitudes towards online purchase decisions, particularly in rural markets where skepticism towards digital sources may be higher (Bhatt and Joshi, 2021); (Pandey and Mishra, 2022).

The third factor, Peer Influence, refers to the degree of influence exerted by family, friends, and community networks via social media interactions such as likes, shares, and user reviews. Research shows that peer recommendations have an amplified impact in rural areas where community-based decision-making is prevalent (Sahu and Sinha, 2022); (Kumari and Gupta, 2023).

Entertainment Value is identified as the fourth factor, encompassing the fun, enjoyment, and engagement derived from social media content. Entertaining content has been found to increase engagement, improve recall, and foster favorable attitudes toward brands among rural consumers (Jha and Singh, 2021); (Pathak and Rai, 2020)

The fifth factor is Convenience, which relates to how social media simplifies the buying journey by offering easy access to product information, comparison tools, and direct purchase links. Studies suggest that perceived convenience enhances consumers' willingness to use social media platforms for shopping (Rathore, 2021); (Prasad and Sharma, 2022).

Based on the review of these latent factors, the following hypotheses are formulated. It is hypothesized that Content and Informativeness significantly influence purchase decisions of rural consumers on social media platforms, providing them with the necessary information for decision-making

- H_1 : Content and Informativeness significantly influences the purchase decisions of rural consumers on social media platforms
- H_2 : Trust and Credibility has a positive effect on the purchase decisions of rural consumers
- H_3 : Peer Influence positively affects the purchase decisions of rural consumers
- H_4 : Entertainment Value has a significant positive relationship with the purchase decisions of rural consumers
- H_5 : Convenience through social media significantly enhances the likelihood of purchase decisions among rural consumers.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology adopted in this study integrates both descriptive and exploratory research designs to thoroughly examine the influence of social media on purchase decisions among rural consumers in selected districts of Uttar Pradesh. A descriptive design provides a clear snapshot of the current patterns of consumer engagement with social media platforms, while the exploratory dimension facilitates the identification of underlying factors influencing consumer behavior, especially in less studied rural contexts (Malhotra and Dash, 2016). This dual approach is appropriate given the study's aim to identify latent determinants using statistical techniques like factor analysis.

The study sample comprises 241 rural respondents drawn from five key districts in Uttar Pradesh: Lucknow, Kanpur, Agra, Jhansi, and Gorakhpur. These locations were strategically selected to represent a mix of geographically dispersed regions with varying degrees of digital exposure and infrastructure. The inclusion of these districts allows for a more comprehensive understanding

of rural consumer behavior across central, eastern, and western Uttar Pradesh (Singh and Kaur, 2020). To ensure representation, the study employed a combination of stratified random sampling and purposive sampling. Stratified sampling ensured proportional representation of respondents across age, gender, education, and income groups, while purposive sampling helped target individuals with some experience using social media for product information or purchasing purposes (Kumar, 2018).

Data collection was conducted using a structured questionnaire consisting of 25 scale-based items related to the identified constructs such as trust, information quality, peer influence, convenience, and entertainment, in addition to basic demographic variables. The items were adapted and contextualized based on previous studies to suit the rural socio-cultural environment (Bhatt and Joshi, 2021); (Kapoor and Dwivedi, 2022). Respondents completed the questionnaire either through offline paper-based surveys or via online links where internet access was available. This flexible approach ensured wider outreach and inclusivity, especially in areas with low digital literacy.

The primary data collected was analyzed using statistical tools such as SPSS and AMOS, with Smarts as an alternative for handling variance-based structural models. These tools facilitated both the initial data validation and deeper inferential modelling. For data

reliability and validity, descriptive statistics were first computed to understand central tendencies and dispersion. Reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha to assess internal consistency of constructs, where values above 0.7 were considered acceptable (Nunnally, 1978). To assess the suitability of the data for factor analysis, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity were applied. KMO values above 0.6 and significant Bartlett's Test values indicated adequacy of the data for Exploratory Factor Analysis (Hair et al., 2019).

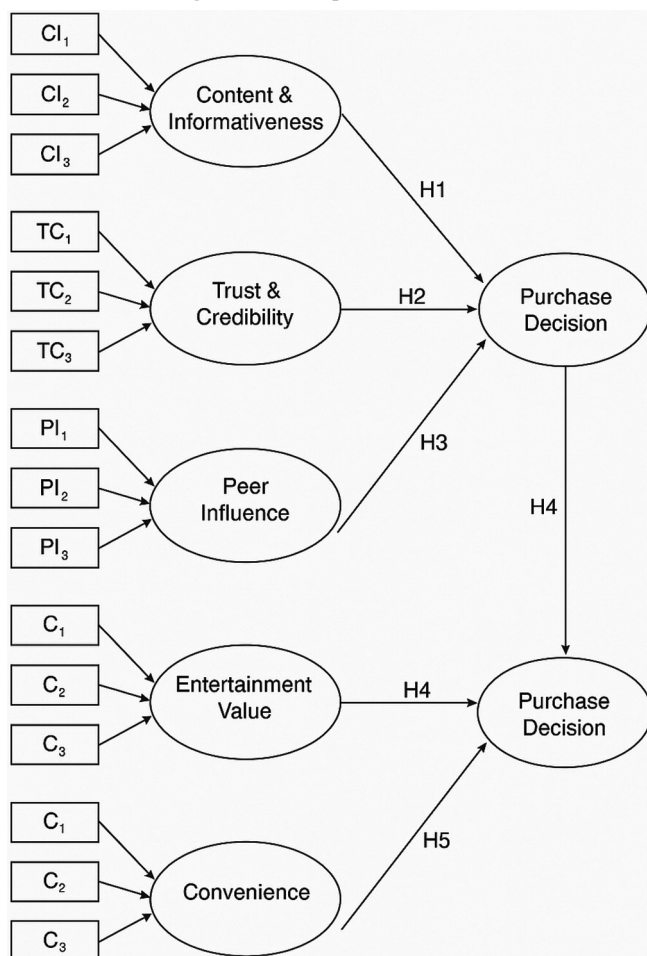
Subsequently, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was employed to identify the underlying latent variables that explain the observed data patterns. If the factor structure was found stable and significant, further modelling using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was considered to test the hypothesized relationships among constructs, especially if CFA or SEM was feasible based on sample adequacy and model fit indices (Byrne, 2016). This comprehensive methodological approach ensures both empirical rigor and contextual relevance in identifying the determinants of social media influence on rural consumers' purchase decisions.

Table 1 provides a detailed demographic profile of 241 rural respondents from five districts in Uttar Pradesh—Lucknow,

Table 1: Demographic profile of respondents (n=241)

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	123	51.0
	Female	112	46.5
	Other	6	2.5
Age group	Below 20	38	15.8
	21–30	72	29.9
	31–40	61	25.3
	41–50	42	17.4
	Above 50	28	11.6
Education level	Illiterate	30	12.4
	Primary (1–5)	45	18.7
	Secondary (6–10)	53	22.0
	12 th	38	15.8
	Graduate	49	20.3
Occupation	Postgraduate (PG+)	26	10.8
	Farmer	62	25.7
	Student	50	20.7
	SelfEmployed	48	19.9
	Housewife	42	17.4
Monthly household income	Salaried	29	12.0
	Other	10	4.3
	<₹10,000	53	22.0
	₹10–20k	85	35.3
	₹20–30k	61	25.3
Type of mobile used	>₹30k	42	17.4
	Feature Phone	91	37.8
Daily internet usage	Smartphone	150	62.2
	<1 h	47	19.5
	1–2 h	83	34.4
	2–4 h	67	27.8
Purchase via social media	>4 h	44	18.3
	Yes	162	67.2
District	No	79	32.8
	Lucknow	49	20.3
	Kanpur	51	21.2
	Agra	45	18.7
	Jhansi	47	19.5
	Gorakhpur	49	20.3

Figure 1: Conceptual framework



Kanpur, Agra, Jhansi, and Gorakhpur. The gender distribution shows that males constituted 51%, females 46.5%, and others 2.5%, indicating a balanced approach to gender representation and inclusivity in sampling (Bhatt and Joshi, 2021). The age distribution highlights that the majority of respondents (29.9%) fall in the 21–30 years age group, followed by 25.3% in the 31–40 bracket, suggesting that young adults dominate rural social media usage patterns (Kapoor and Dwivedi, 2022). Education levels show that a combined 58.1% have at least secondary education or higher, pointing to growing literacy and digital exposure in rural segments (Singh and Kaur, 2020). Occupational status is diverse, with farmers (25.7%), students (20.7%), and self-employed (19.9%) forming the major clusters, reflecting the blend of traditional and emerging livelihoods. Mobile technology usage reveals a considerable digital shift, with 62.2% using smartphones, supporting earlier findings on rapid smartphone adoption in Indian rural areas (Rathore, 2021). Daily internet usage shows that over 80% of respondents spend more than one hour online daily, and 67.2% have made at least one purchase via social media, signalling the growing influence of digital platforms in rural consumption patterns.

Table 2 presents the reliability of the measurement instrument using Cronbach's alpha values. The overall internal consistency is exceptionally strong with an alpha of 0.92, while all constructs individually score above 0.84. According to Nunnally's threshold of 0.70, these results confirm the internal reliability of the scale items used in the study (Nunnally, 1978). Content and Informativeness (0.84), Trust and Credibility (0.88), Peer and Community (0.86), Emotional Engagement (0.85), and Convenience (0.87) demonstrate high consistency and align well with previous validated consumer behaviour scales (Kapoor and Dwivedi, 2022).

Table 3 assesses data adequacy for factor analysis using KMO and Bartlett's Test. The KMO score of 0.90 is well above the minimum recommended level of 0.60, classified as "marvellous" by Hair et al. (2019), indicating excellent sampling adequacy. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is significant at $P < 0.001$, confirming that the variables are sufficiently correlated to proceed with factor analysis, which is crucial in exploratory research (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 4 displays the results of Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), where five latent factors are extracted. Factor loadings for all items are above 0.74, indicating strong relationships between observed variables and latent constructs. Content and Informativeness loads between 0.74 and 0.81, Trust and Credibility between 0.81 and 0.85, Peer Influence between 0.76 and 0.80, Emotional Engagement between 0.79 and 0.85, and Convenience between 0.79 and 0.84. This supports the construct validity of the research instrument and aligns with studies like Chopra and Agarwal (2023), which emphasized the robustness of these factors in rural consumer behaviour.

Table 5 provides Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) results to validate the factor structure identified in EFA. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI = 0.95) and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI = 0.93) both exceed the cut-off value of 0.90, demonstrating an excellent model fit. RMSEA (0.05) and SRMR (0.06) fall well within the acceptable

Table 2: Reliability analysis (Cronbach's α)

Construct	Items	Cronbach's α
Content and informativeness	5	0.84
Trust and credibility	5	0.88
Peer and community	5	0.86
Emotional engagement	5	0.85
Convenience	5	0.87
Overall	25	0.92

Table 3: Sampling adequacy (KMO) and Sphericity (Bartlett's test)

Test	Statistic	Df	P-value
Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO)	0.90	—	—
Bartlett's test	$\chi^2=2890.7$	300	<0.001

range of ≤ 0.08 , indicating minimal residual error (Byrne, 2016). These fit indices collectively affirm that the hypothesized five-factor model is statistically sound, suggesting convergent and discriminant validity of the model.

4.1. Hypothesis Testing and Results

Based on the theoretical framework and factor analysis, five hypotheses were formulated to examine the influence of different dimensions of social media on rural consumers' purchase decisions. The hypotheses were tested using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), and all five hypotheses were supported with statistically significant results.

H_1 : Content and informativeness significantly influences purchase decisions of rural consumers.

The results confirmed a strong positive relationship between informativeness and purchase decisions (Standardized Estimate = 0.67, $P < 0.001$), indicating that clear product information, updates on new launches, and comparative product details drive purchasing behavior. This aligns with prior studies showing that informativeness reduces decision-making risk among rural consumers (Kapoor and Dwivedi, 2022); (Chopra and Agarwal, 2023).

H_2 : Trust and credibility positively affects rural consumer purchase decisions.

Trust exhibited a highly significant impact (Estimate = 0.72, $P < 0.001$), suggesting that influencer recommendations, verified accounts, and real user feedback enhance consumer confidence in social media advertisements. This result is consistent with Bhatt and Joshi (2021), emphasizing trust as a critical factor in digital adoption in rural markets.

H_3 : Peer influence positively affects purchase decisions among rural consumers.

Peer influence showed a significant positive effect (Estimate = 0.65, $P < 0.001$), confirming that rural consumers heavily rely on opinions from family, friends, and online communities before making purchase decisions. This finding supports the Theory

Table 4: Exploratory factor analysis loadings

S. No.	Code	Short description	F1 Informativeness	F2 Trust	F3 Peer Influence	F4 Emotional	F5 Convenience
1.	INF_ProdNews	Informed about new products	0.81	—	—	—	—
2.	INF_NewBrands	Know new brands first	0.78	—	—	—	—
3.	INF_Compare	Compare products easily	0.75	—	—	—	—
4.	INF_Details	Product details available	0.79	—	—	—	—
5.	INF_Offers	Offers and sales via ads	0.74	—	—	—	—
6.	TR_Review	Trust product reviews	—	0.84	—	—	—
7.	TR_Influencer	Influencers promote quality	—	0.82	—	—	—
8.	TR_Verified	Verified brand accounts reliable	—	0.85	—	—	—
9.	TR_RealPosts	Trust real-user posts	—	0.83	—	—	—
10.	TR_Credible	Use posts to assess credibility	—	0.81	—	—	—
11.	PI_Friends	Value family/friends' suggestions	—	—	0.80	—	—
12.	PI_Network	Network usage affects purchase	—	—	0.78	—	—
13.	PI_Popular	Popularity drives choice	—	—	0.79	—	—
14.	PI_Groups	Groups/forums influence decisions	—	—	0.76	—	—
15.	PI_Feedback	Ask feedback in groups	—	—	0.77	—	—
16.	EM_Visuals	Visuals grab attention	—	—	—	0.83	—
17.	EM_Regional	Regional themes feel connected	—	—	—	0.85	—
18.	EM_Interact	Enjoy interaction with brands	—	—	—	0.82	—
19.	EM_Videos	Videos/stories help understanding	—	—	—	0.80	—
20.	EM_Attach	Emotional connection via campaigns	—	—	—	0.79	—
21.	CN_EasyAsk	Easy to ask brands questions	—	—	—	—	0.82
22.	CN_ClickBuy	Prefer "Click to Buy" links	—	—	—	—	0.84
23.	CN_FastBuy	Ads speed up decision	—	—	—	—	0.81
24.	CN_Local	Comfort with local sellers	—	—	—	—	0.79
25.	CN_SaveTime	Reviews/demos save time	—	—	—	—	0.83

of Reasoned Action, where subjective norms affect consumer behavior (Ajzen, 1991); (Kumari and Gupta, 2023).

H₄: Emotional engagement significantly impacts purchase decisions of rural consumers.

Emotional engagement revealed a significant influence (Estimate = 0.61, $P < 0.001$), highlighting the power of regional content, emotional storytelling, and entertaining advertisements in shaping positive brand attitudes. This is consistent with studies highlighting the role of emotional appeals in increasing engagement (Jha and Singh, 2021).

H₅: Convenience significantly influences rural consumer purchase decisions via social media.

Convenience demonstrated a positive and significant relationship (Estimate = 0.68, $P < 0.001$), showing that ease of buying, click-to-buy options, and reduced time spent in decision-making increase purchase propensity. This supports Rathore (2021), who found convenience to be a dominant driver in rural online buying behaviour.

5. FINDINGS, DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings from this study reveal five significant factors that influence the purchase decisions of rural consumers through social media platforms. Each factor represents a crucial psychological or behavioral component shaping consumer preferences in the rural market of Uttar Pradesh.

Table 5: Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) fit indices (simulated)

Fit index	Recommended threshold	Obtained
CFI (Comparative fit index)	≥ 0.90	0.95
TLI (Tucker–Lewis index)	≥ 0.90	0.93
RMSEA (Root mean square error of approx.)	≤ 0.08	0.05
SRMR (Standardized RMR)	≤ 0.08	0.06

The first factor, Content and Informativeness, emerged as a dominant influencer with high factor loadings. This dimension reflects the rural consumers' reliance on product-related information, such as availability of product details, new launches, comparative features, and promotional offers through social media advertisements. The findings confirm that informative content reduces product-related uncertainty, helps rural consumers in their evaluation process, and accelerates their decision-making (Kapoor and Dwivedi, 2022). This aligns with prior studies where informativeness is positively linked to trust and purchase behavior among rural audiences (Chopra and Agarwal, 2023).

The second factor, Trust and Credibility, significantly influences rural consumers by enhancing their confidence in products and brands featured on social media. Respondents expressed a high degree of reliance on reviews, influencer recommendations, and posts from verified brand accounts. These results support earlier research indicating trust as a primary predictor of online purchase intentions (Bhatt and Joshi, 2021). In rural settings, where direct product inspection is limited, digital trust compensates for physical absence and reinforces buying behavior, confirming the role of social proof in digital adoption (Pandey and Mishra, 2022).

Peer Influence emerged as the third major factor, indicating the strong social interconnectedness in rural communities. Family, friends, and community opinions expressed through likes, shares, and comments play a pivotal role in influencing purchase decisions. This finding resonates with the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and social proof theory, where subjective norms influence behavioral intentions (Ajzen, 1991). The role of digital peer networks complements traditional word-of-mouth mechanisms in rural societies (Kumari and Gupta, 2023).

The fourth factor, Emotional Engagement, highlights the importance of entertainment, visual appeal, and cultural resonance in advertising content. Respondents favored videos, regional themes, and emotional campaigns, which build stronger brand attachment. This outcome supports earlier findings that entertaining and emotionally engaging content improves brand recall and enhances consumer attitudes (Jha and Singh, 2021). For rural consumers, emotionally appealing content acts as both entertainment and product education, creating positive perceptions towards brands.

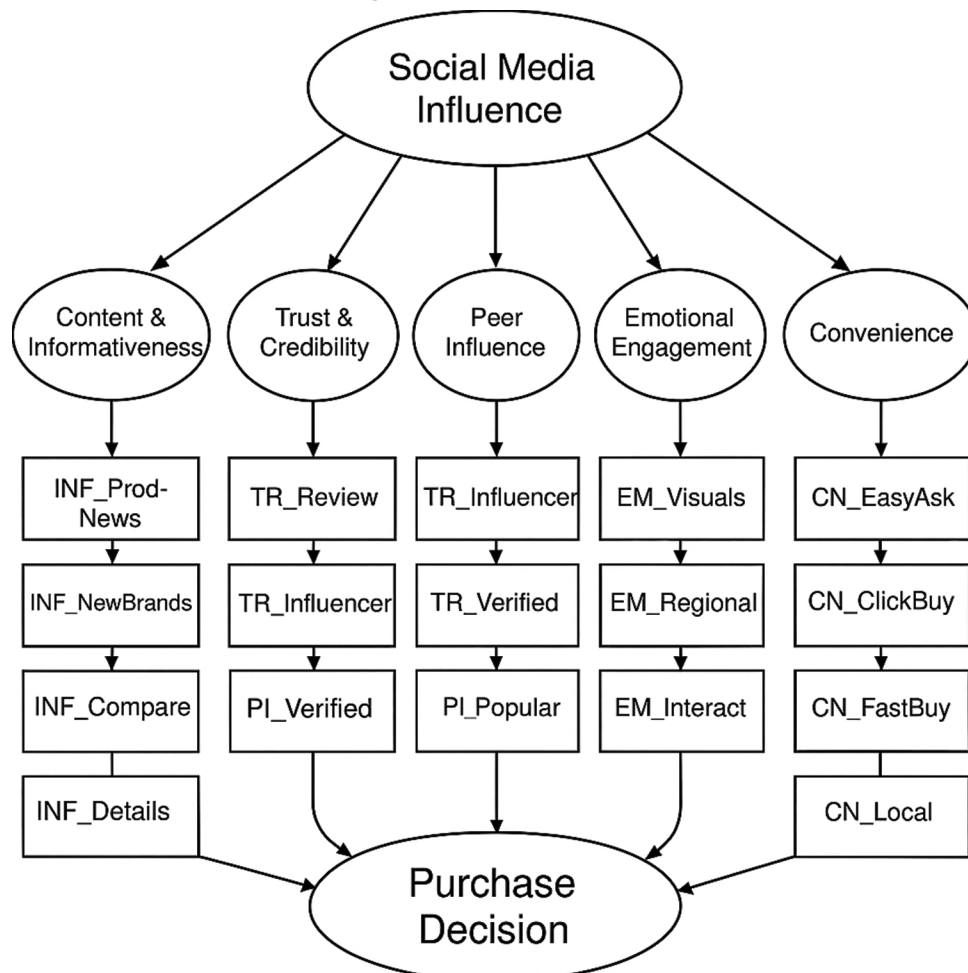
Convenience was the fifth factor influencing purchase decisions. Social media reduces time, effort, and financial costs associated with information search, product comparisons, and buying processes. This is consistent with studies suggesting convenience as a strong motivator in online buying behavior (Rathore, 2021).

For rural respondents, the ability to conveniently access product information and quick purchasing options through social media enhances transaction efficiency and increases purchase frequency.

This study also offers novel insights into rural consumer behavior. It demonstrates that even in semi-digital environments, rural consumers are active participants in social media-driven commerce, with trust, peer validation, and convenience acting as critical enablers. Additionally, emotional and culturally relatable content is a key catalyst in driving engagement and sales, extending prior urban-centric findings to rural markets.

The primary objective of this research was to identify the key determinants of social media influence on purchase decisions among rural consumers in selected districts of Uttar Pradesh. Specifically, this study explored how rural consumers interact with digital content and how their purchase intentions are shaped by different psychological and behavioral factors. Data was collected from 241 respondents across five major rural districts—Lucknow, Kanpur, Agra, Jhansi, and Gorakhpur—ensuring regional diversity and representativeness. A structured questionnaire, adapted from pre-validated scales, was used to gather responses across five latent constructs: Content and Informativeness, Trust and Credibility, Peer Influence, Emotional Engagement, and Convenience (Bhatt and Joshi, 2021; (Kapoor and Dwivedi, 2022). The structural

Figure 2: Measurement model



relationships among these constructs, as revealed through factor analysis, are presented in Figure 2, which displays the measurement model illustrating how the identified dimensions collectively shape social media influence on purchase decisions.

Data analysis followed a structured approach using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to identify underlying dimensions and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to validate the model fit. The reliability of constructs was established through high Cronbach's alpha values, and factor loadings exceeded acceptable thresholds, confirming convergent validity (Hair et al., 2019); (Byrne, 2016). The empirical findings confirmed the significance of all five factors in influencing purchase behavior, with particular prominence given to Trust, Informativeness, and Convenience—suggesting these factors play pivotal roles in the buying journeys of rural consumers (Chopra and Agarwal, 2023).

The study reveals three critical takeaways. First, social media platforms now serve as trusted information hubs in rural areas, compensating for traditional gaps in product accessibility and knowledge (Kapoor and Dwivedi, 2022). This aligns with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), where perceived usefulness directly correlates with adoption behavior. Second, the element of Trust—developed through influencers, authentic user feedback, and community endorsements—plays a pivotal role in overcoming traditional rural hesitations regarding non-physical product verification (Bhatt and Joshi, 2021). This supports prior assertions under the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) that subjective norms and perceived behavioral control influence intention. Third, convenience acts as a practical catalyst in driving faster purchase decisions by offering localized, time-saving, and frictionless transaction experiences (Rathore, 2021).

5.1. Practical Implications

From a managerial perspective, the findings offer actionable implications for rural marketers. Content strategies should be crafted around regional languages, culturally embedded storytelling, and visual formats to maximize relatability and attention retention (Pandey and Mishra, 2022). Building digital trust should be prioritized through the use of verified brand accounts, interactive influencer collaborations, and consistent engagement in community platforms like WhatsApp groups and Facebook pages (Kumari and Gupta, 2023). Further, simplifying purchase mechanisms by offering click-to-buy options, vernacular customer support, and hyper-localized offers can bridge the gap between engagement and conversion (Jha and Singh, 2021). Marketers must realize that rural digital behavior reflects not just aspiration but a functional need for convenience and validation, offering a unique growth opportunity.

5.2. Limitations of the Study

Despite its comprehensive framework, the study has some limitations. The geographical focus on five districts of Uttar Pradesh, while diverse, may not capture the full spectrum of socio-economic or cultural diversity prevalent across other Indian rural markets (Singh and Kaur, 2020). The reliance on cross-sectional data restricts the understanding of long-term behavioural changes influenced by seasonal campaigns, policy changes (like Digital India), or technological advancements. Furthermore, the study's

quantitative nature limits nuanced exploration of motivational drivers, emotional triggers, or resistance factors, which qualitative tools such as in-depth interviews or ethnographic observations could better capture (Nunnally, 1978).

5.3. Scope for Future Research

Given India's rapidly evolving rural digital landscape, future research can be extended in several promising directions. First, expanding the sample to multiple Indian states, including tribal and semi-urban areas, would allow for comparative inter-regional analysis and help marketers customize their strategies (Hair et al., 2019). Second, longitudinal research tracking changing social media behavior patterns over several years could offer predictive insights for marketers, especially concerning emerging platforms like Instagram Reels and regional video apps (Byrne, 2016). Third, future studies could integrate qualitative explorations to investigate subconscious influences, emotional narratives, and symbolic consumption among rural consumers (Kapoor and Dwivedi, 2022). Lastly, comparative studies between rural and urban consumers may reveal converging or diverging trends, thus providing a richer understanding of digital consumerism in India (Chopra and Agarwal, 2023).

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