

INFLUENCING CONSUMERS' PURCHASE INTENTIONS VIA INSTAGRAM: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract:

In an era dominated by digital connectivity, Instagram has become an important platform for shaping consumer behavior and influencing purchase intentions. This systematic literature review (SLR) synthesizes findings from 112 peer-reviewed studies, published between 2015 and 2025, to identify the primary antecedents that influence purchase intentions on Instagram. Using the PRISMA framework, the review categorizes key drivers such as electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), trust, value, credibility, content quality, user engagement, and parasocial interactions. Methodological trends indicate a predominance of quantitative research, particularly online surveys and experimental designs, while the Parasocial Interaction Theory (PSI) stands out as the most frequently applied theoretical lens. The review also explores the differential impact of influencer marketing and paid advertisements, emphasizing authenticity, content relevance, and interactivity as critical determinants of effectiveness. Practical implications for marketers include strategic content customization, leveraging influencer relationships, and optimizing ad formats to enhance user experience and drive conversions. Finally, the study highlights current research gaps and suggests future directions, particularly the need to examine other social media platforms, content types, and cross-generational responses. This SLR contributes to both academic research and practical implications in digital marketing by offering a comprehensive, evidence-based understanding of how consumers' purchase intentions can be influenced on Instagram.

Keywords: Instagram; social media; consumer behavior; purchase intention

1. Introduction

In the context of an increasingly digitized world, social media platforms have become essential tools for driving consumers' interactions with brands and influencing their purchase decisions. Among these platforms, Instagram has emerged as a particularly influential channel, shaping consumer beliefs, attitudes and behaviors. Also, Instagram plays a critical role in influencing users' purchase intentions, an area of growing interest to marketers and researchers alike.

As of January 2025, Instagram's advertising potential has reached unprecedented levels, with 1.74 billion users exposed to ads on the platform, representing more than 21% of the global population (DataReportal, 2025). Furthermore, Instagram maintains its position as the third most utilized social networking site worldwide. The platform's advertising reach continues to grow rapidly, with an increase of 90.8 million users (+5.5%) from January 2024 to January 2025 alone (DataReportal, 2025). These figures emphasize Instagram's expanding influence on consumer behavior and highlight the platform's strategic value for businesses aiming to drive purchase intention.

Given the widespread adoption and influence of Instagram as a marketing and communication platform, understanding the antecedents of purchase intentions in this environment has become a research priority. A growing body of literature highlights various potential drivers - such as trust (e.g., Jin, Ryu & Muqaddam, 2021; Kim, Leung & McKneely, 2023), value (e.g., Kim, Chung & Fiore, 2025; Wei et al, 2025), credibility (e.g., Lee & Kim, 2020; Yang, Kim & Tanoff, 2020), content quality (e.g., Eman & Refaie, 2023; Ryu, 2024), user engagement (e.g., He, You & Mao, 2024; Kusumasondjaja, 2020), and emotional resonance (e.g., Farivar, Wang & Yuan, 2021; Jansom & Pongsakornrunsilp, 2021) - as influential in shaping consumer responses. Despite these insights, existing research often addresses these factors in isolation or within fragmented frameworks. Comprehensive and integrative syntheses that systematically map these antecedents remain underdeveloped, limiting our ability to understand the full complexity of purchase intention formation in this particular social media context. Although prior literature reviews have explored influencer marketing or general social media usage (Rowley & Keegan, 2020), no study to date has offered an integrative view of antecedents to purchase intention specifically on Instagram, despite its visual and interactive affordances that distinguish it from other platforms.

This systematic literature review (SLR) aims to address this gap by identifying, analyzing, and synthesizing existing research on the antecedents of purchase intention in the context of Instagram. By doing so, the review contributes to a deeper theoretical understanding and offers practical implications for marketers seeking to optimize their strategies on the platform.

2. Research purpose and methodological approach

This SLR aims to bring together the main results and analyses that exist in the specialized literature regarding consumer behavior on social media and, more specifically, the antecedents of purchase intentions. The study mainly analyzes the social network Instagram, one of the most used social networks by brands for product presentation and creating a relationship with their customers.

The integration of important discoveries from earlier studies was carried out following the PRISMA model framework (Tricco et al, 2018) as a methodological reference. The PRISMA methodology comprises five phases, which are outlined below:

Phase 1: Database research

Firstly, we utilized Web of Science as the primary database to find articles associated with the following sets of keywords: social media, Instagram, purchase intention and consumer behavior. We considered articles indexed in the Science Citation Index Expanded (SCIE) & Social Science Citation Index (SSCI). The primary

subjects we were interested in included economics, business, psychology, communication, social sciences, management, or computer science. In this first stage, we discovered 260 pertinent articles.

Phase 2: Improvement based on the quality of sources.

After completing the initial phase, we established a refinement process to improve the quality and reliability of our sources by choosing papers published by well-known academic publishers like Elsevier, Taylor & Francis, Emerald, Springer, Sage, Wiley, or MDPI. These publishers are acknowledged for their stringent peer-review procedures, which enhance the dependability of the papers in our database. By utilizing this criterion, we reduced our database to a group of 180 studies.

Phase 3: Narrowing Down Publications According to Content

From this dataset, our aim was to eliminate studies that do not closely align with our research objectives. The research design was not a critical factor; thus, we accepted studies utilizing different methodologies, including quantitative, qualitative, and experimental methods. We identified irrelevant articles by reviewing their titles and abstracts, specifically removing any studies that did not address the relationship between social media activities (on Instagram) and consumer behavior and purchase intention. Following this screening, we identified 112 studies that met all the specified criteria.

Phase 4: Analysis of pertinent data

The final selection of studies was systematically analyzed and organized into a summary table. This table included essential details such as author names, publication year, journal, and publisher. It also outlined the main objectives or hypotheses, the research methodologies used, and the integrated conceptual theories that informed each study.

Phase 5: Compiling the results

The concluding phase involved gathering information on the hypotheses, research methodologies, and findings from all the studies in a way that allowed us to draw clear conclusions based on empirical evidence about the relationship between social media activities and consumer purchase intentions. Additionally, we identified several gaps in existing literature while also highlighting the practical implications that such a study can bring to the field.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Main features of the research

Out of the 112 studies included in our SLR (see Table 1) a considerable amount was released by Emerald (25.9%) and by Elsevier (24.1%). followed by 5 other prominent publishers, including Taylor & Francis, SAGE, MDPI, Wiley, and Springer. This concentration of publications within well-established publishing houses emphasizes the legitimacy and importance of this research domain.

In terms of outlet distribution, the Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, and International Journal of Advertising - both top tier journals (i.e., first quartile in terms of impact factors according to Web of Science) - emerged as the most recurrent sources, reflecting the relevance of the topic across consumer studies and marketing communication research.

A temporal analysis of publication trends further reveals a substantial increase in scholarly output over the past decade. While only ten articles were published

between 2015 and 2019, this number surged significantly in the following years, culminating in 41 articles published in the 2024–2025 period alone. This ascending trajectory illustrates a growing academic response to the increasingly influential role of Instagram in shaping consumer-brand relationships. The observed trend also reflects a broader recognition of Instagram's strategic importance in understanding and influencing consumer behavior through digital environments.

Table 1. Included papers in the SLR

Journal	No. of articles
Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services	9
International Journal of Advertising	7
Sustainability	6
Journal of Business Research	6
Computers in Human Behavior	3
Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management	3
Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing	3
Psychology & Marketing	3
Other journals (with one or two paper each)	69
Publisher	
Emerald	29
Elsevier	27
Taylor & Francis	25
SAGE	11
MDPI	9
Wiley	7
Springer	4
Year published	
2024-2025	41
2022-2023	40
2020-2021	21
2018-2019	8
2015-2017	2

3.2 Research approaches and methodologies

The methodologies and research approaches used in the studies varied considerably (see Table 2). Over 43% of the studies (49 out of 112) relied on online surveys as their primary research method, while 35 studies employed experimental research design. The remaining studies either focused on in-depth interviews as a data collection method or were more theoretical or conceptual in nature, offering valuable recommendations for future research.

The use of online questionnaires for data collection is an accessible method that gathers attitudes, opinions, and motivations from the individual's self-reported perspective. While these questionnaires can provide researchers with valuable primary data, they necessitate further validation by integrating other research methods that capture cause-and-effect relationships in real time within the online environment. Consequently, a significant number of articles in the analyzed database favored experimental research for this reason.

Table 2. Distribution of articles based on methodological approaches

Method	No. of articles
Online surveys	49
Experiments	35
In-depth interviews	10
Observation (Content analysis)	7
Theoretical / Conceptual	6

3.3. Integrated theories

The researchers based their hypotheses on a series of theories frequently found in specialized literature, which would add consistency and feasibility to the study (see Table 3). Among these theories, the most present was the Parasocial Interaction Theory (PSI) mentioned in 13 of the 112 studies. Parasocial Interaction (PSI) refers to the one-sided, psychological relationship that individuals develop with media figures, such as celebrities, characters, or influencers. This theory suggests that people can form real emotional connections with media personalities, even though the interaction is not reciprocal. It's widely used in media studies and marketing, as it helps explain how and why individuals become loyal to particular media figures or brands (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Other popular theories were the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), which is often applied in social psychology and consumer behavior studies to predict actions, as it states that people's intention to engage in a particular behavior is shaped by their attitude towards the behavior and social pressure (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980); Stimulus - Organism - Response Theory (SOR), which explains how environmental stimuli influence an individual's internal state (organism) and, in turn, how this affects their behavior (response) (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) explains how users come to accept and use technology. According to this model, two primary factors determine technology adoption: perceived ease of use (how easy the technology is to learn and use) and perceived usefulness (how much the technology enhances performance or productivity) (Davis, 1985).

Table 3. Distribution of studies by integrated theories

Theories	No. of articles
Parasocial interaction/relationship Theory (PSI)	13
Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)	5
Stimulus - Organism - Response Theory (SOR)	5
Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) & UTAUT	5
Uses & Gratifications Theory (U&G)	4
Social Identity Theory	4
Information Adoption Model (IAM)	3
The Social Capital Theory	2

3.4. Main topics

3.4.1 Antecedents of purchase intention

Social media usage is a key factor influencing ultimate purchase intentions (Copeland & Zhao, 2020). Research demonstrates that Instagram usage, along with peer communication and the brand-consumer relationship, significantly impacts electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Delafróoz, Rahmati & Abdi, 2019). eWOM is essential, as Herzallah, Liébana-Cabanillas & Muñoz-Leiva (2024) have shown that

recommendations made on Instagram are more effective in enhancing users' motivation to purchase products than on any other social platform. This notion is further supported by Mazzarolo, Mainardes & Innocencio (2021), who highlight entertainment, utility, and social interaction as predictors of user satisfaction on Instagram, and that the continuous relationship with other users might lead to users endorsing the brands presented to them. Moreover, users' sense of belonging to a brand community has a positive impact on their purchase intentions (Gaber, Elsamadicy & Wright, 2021). Park & Namkung (2022) argue that there are four sub-dimensions of Instagram marketing activities affecting brand equity and brand loyalty: interaction, trendiness, entertainment and customization.

People have diverse motivations for using Instagram. Balabanis & Chatzopoulou (2025) indicate that active seekers tend to prefer informational content, while casual browsers lean towards entertaining posts. Additionally, a recently popular genre of content focuses on mindfulness, which has been shown to generate higher engagement and enhance the intention to purchase products (He, You & Mao, 2024). Furthermore, it has been noted that consumers who encounter Instagram content and experience a high Fear of Missing Out are more likely to develop favorable attitudes towards online products (Neumann, Huddleston & Behe, 2021).

Parasocial relationships and interactions represent a significant focus in research concerning Instagram and consumer behavior. The nature of Instagram accounts, along with the content and social presence they project, directly impacts the perceived trustworthiness of a brand (Jin, Ryu & Muqaddam, 2021). A stronger parasocial relationship correlates with increased purchase intention among Instagram followers (Farivar, Wang & Yuan, 2021). Attitudes toward brands and their content are affected by perceived credibility (Lee & Kim, 2020). Both brand trust and brand identification mediate the relationship between social bonding and purchase intention, with brand identification being notably stronger among Generation Z (Kim, Leung & McKneely, 2023). Furthermore, credibility and content quality enhance consumer trust in a post, fostering positive attitudes toward branded products (Yang, Kim & Tanoff, 2020) and also influencing the intention to explore and purchase tourism products (Eman & Refaie, 2023).

However, some authors (Teo, Leng & Phua, 2019) argue that social influence on Instagram is limited, suggesting that marketers should prioritize the quality of their visual content to effectively impact consumer responses. Research by Ryu (2024) indicates that posts with high image resolution enhance the brand's perceived credibility, which in turn influences engagement and purchase intentions. Supporting this view, Kusumasondjaja (2020) asserts that visually expressive and aesthetically pleasing content is more engaging. In fact, studies have shown that digital visual engagement does affect purchase intentions, even when the visual complexity is relatively low (Farhat et al, 2024).

The complexity of new technologies can be overwhelming for some consumers, and research indicates that purchase intentions are influenced by the perceived ease of use of an app (Fard & Marvi, 2020). Consumers' perceptions of the ease and security of transactions on social media platforms correlate with their level of trust, particularly when they feel they have unrestricted control over their purchasing choices (Sembada & Koay, 2021). Interestingly, the ability to make purchases directly on Instagram using the Checkout button does not appear to enhance impulse-buying behavior; instead, active social interactions have a more significant

impact on this behavior (Ryu, 2024). Additionally, some researchers (Herzallah et al, 2022) suggest that factors such as gender, age, and experience may moderate purchase intentions more than ease of use does.

All the findings mentioned are important considerations for achieving Instagram satisfaction among consumers, as this influences app visitation and revisitation (Öksüz et al, 2025). Additionally, a positive attitude toward Instagram impacts consumers' purchase intentions (Um, 2022).

3.4.2. Influencer marketing

The role of influencers in promoting brands, especially on Instagram, is a topic that has received considerable attention in the literature. Recently, influencer marketing has emerged as a separate field within social media marketing, with many studies suggesting that it helps cultivate positive attitudes towards products and brands (Belanche et al, 2021). Research shows that "Instafamous" profiles have a greater impact on purchasing behavior compared to traditional celebrities, particularly among younger female audiences (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Moreover, it has been established that consumers' attitudes toward influencers directly affect their purchase intentions. These attitudes are influenced by factors such as perceived similarities, the influencers' competence, and the sense of connection that followers feel with them (Magano et al, 2022).

Trustworthiness is reported to be vital for Instagram influencers and is a key predictor of followers' intentions to buy (Kareem & Venugopal, 2023). Alongside perceived expertise, authenticity and credibility significantly shape brand attitudes, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) intention, and purchase intent (Lee & Johnson, 2021). Followers' perceptions of an influencer's authenticity play a crucial role in their attitudes towards the brands being promoted (Roth-Cohen, Segev & Liu, 2024).

Another important factor is the attractiveness of influencers, which greatly influences purchase intentions by fostering parasocial interactions (Jansom & Pongsakornrunsilp, 2021). These interactions are important in shaping consumers' buying decisions (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020) and effectively position the influencer as an opinion leader (Fernandes & Tille, 2023). The concept of opinion leadership is significant, as it directly relates to the intention to purchase and the likelihood of seeking out opinions (Al-Harbi & Badawi, 2022).

However, some researchers argue that only those followers who are highly engaged with a product tend to develop parasocial relationships with influencers (Balaban, Szabolics & Chirica, 2022). Posts from influencers who are perceived as genuine not only lead to fewer upward comparisons but also enhance followers' self-esteem and well-being, ultimately boosting purchase intentions (Claeys, Charry & Tessitore, 2024). Furthermore, the effectiveness of influencers is heightened when they clearly indicate whether their recommendations are sponsored, enhancing overall engagement levels (Saternus, Mihale-Wilson & Hinz, 2024).

Research indicates that the number of followers an influencer has positively correlated with their perceived attractiveness, trustworthiness, and purchase intention (Weismueller et al, 2020). However, another study suggests that influencer attractiveness doesn't directly impact purchase intention; rather, brand attachment serves as a crucial mediating factor in this relationship (Kim & Park, 2023).

Consumers tend to view advertisements shared by influencers as more valuable when they combine infotainment and credibility (Herando & Martin-De

Hoyos, 2022). Additionally, the entertainment value of such posts is linked to increased levels of customer engagement (Ao et al, 2023).

3.4.3 Ads

As previously mentioned, the content consumers encounter on Instagram has a significant impact on their behavior. In addition to organic posts, brands also utilize paid content, including advertisements, on social networks. Companies invest considerable amounts in these paid advertisements to reach their target audiences. Some researchers have analyzed the effects of paid content on purchasing behavior, concluding that this type of content can trigger impulsive and compulsive buying (Sharifi et al, 2022).

Moreover, trust plays a crucial role in advertising, similar to its importance in influencer marketing. One study found that disclosures in ads enhance trust in the brand, which in turn affects purchase intentions (Naderer, Matthes & Schäfer, 2021). Additionally, ad recognition indirectly influences perceived trustworthiness and expertise, strongly mediating purchase intentions (Ghosh & Islam, 2023). However, another study indicated that trust in advertising does not significantly impact purchase intentions (Karamchandani, Shukla & Shukla, 2025).

Research suggests that males and females react differently to advertisements (Wei et al, 2025). Women's purchase intentions are significantly influenced by ads that emphasize entertainment, while men tend to respond more positively to ads that highlight product values. Nonetheless, both genders are attracted to informative and creative ads. Interactive advertisements effectively create entertainment and aesthetic experiences, contributing to the utilitarian, hedonic, and social values of a brand (Kim, Chung & Fiore, 2025). Furthermore, women are particularly interested in ads promoting eco-friendly lifestyle products (van Gogh, Poels & Walrave, 2024). A notable drawback of advertisements is that they often promote idealized, unattainable body types, which can negatively impact women's purchasing behavior (Ferdousi et al, 2024).

In terms of ad formats, Lin et al (2020) found that a story format is generally more effective than a static post and a 6-second ad is more impactful than longer ads. This idea is supported by (Kim, Chung & Fiore, 2023) who claim that Instagram Stories are more interactive than traditional ads, offering both hedonic and utilitarian value affecting purchase intention

4. Theoretical and practical implications

Our SLR points out several gaps in the current research, emphasizing potential directions for future investigations. Future research should explore the effectiveness of various content formats and types and their influence on purchase intent. Furthermore, there is a need for additional exploration into the efficacy of influencer marketing across different product categories and generations. The impact of contextual factors of ads, such as posting times and content strategies, on consumers' purchase intentions should also be examined across various social networking platforms and industries. Moreover, researchers might investigate how user-generated content, which is increasingly popular for brand promotion on platforms like Instagram, affects perceived authenticity, engagement levels, and subsequently, purchase behavior. Lastly, future investigations should explore differences in various antecedents' impact on purchase intention and consumers'

online behavior depending on the most popular social networking sites (e.g., Instagram vs. Facebook vs. TikTok).

On the other hand, this SLR offers valuable insights for practitioners seeking to enhance the effectiveness of their content strategies on platforms like Instagram. By systematically identifying and synthesizing the main antecedents that influence consumer purchase intention, our SLR serves as a practical guide for marketers aiming to craft content to obtain favorable consumer responses. It highlights the psychological, emotional, and social drivers that shape user engagement and decision-making, stimulating purchase behavior. Given the profound impact social media has on consumer behavior, it is essential for marketing professionals to stay updated on the newest trends, consumer expectations, and social network sites dynamics. This review, therefore, contributes not only to academic understanding but also to the practical toolkit of marketers, helping them ensure that their strategies remain relevant, data-driven, and aligned with evolving consumer behaviors in the digital age.

5. Conclusions

This SLR consolidates current academic knowledge on the antecedents of purchase intentions on Instagram. The analysis of 112 peer-reviewed articles, guided by the PRISMA framework, reveals that Instagram plays an important role in influencing purchasing decisions through various mechanisms, including user engagement, influencer marketing, and targeted advertising.

The findings suggest that electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), trust, value, credibility, parasocial interactions, content quality, and customized brand experiences are central drivers of purchase intention. Among theoretical frameworks, the Parasocial Interaction Theory emerged as the most widely adopted, reflecting the growing relevance of influencer-consumer relationships in shaping consumer attitudes and behaviors.

Influencer marketing was shown to be highly effective, particularly when influencers are perceived as authentic, trustworthy, and relatable. Visual storytelling is another powerful tool for fostering engagement and purchase intent, with content relevance, entertainment, and informativeness being the key factors for success.

Interestingly, while technological factors like ease of use and platform security are important, they play a supportive rather than a primary role in influencing purchase behavior. Emotional, social, and aesthetic factors weigh more heavily in the decision-making process.

Despite the growing interest in the topic, several important gaps remain. Further research is needed to explore content format preferences, cross-generational behaviors, and user-generated content in greater depth.

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