

The Role of Social Media in Enhancing Customer Trust and Purchase Decision-Making in Electronic Marketing

Edris Farahmand

Department of Information Technology Management, E-Business. Kermanshah, Razi University, Iran.

Edris.farahmand1990@gmail.com. Orcid code: 0009-0000-6679-9060

Mehdi Hosseinpour

Department of Interdisciplinary Sciences, Faculty of Strategic Technologies. Kermanshah, Razi University,

Iran. m.hosseinpour@razi.ac.ir. Orcid code: 0009-0005-2292-2940

ABSTRACT:

The rapid growth of information and communication technologies and the increasing expansion of social media have led to fundamental changes in marketing practices and customer purchasing behavior. In this context, electronic marketing, as one of the most significant outcomes of these transformations, faces challenges such as the absence of face-to-face interaction, increased perceived risk, and uncertainty in purchase decision-making. Under such conditions, customer trust plays a decisive role in facilitating purchase decisions and forming sustainable relationships between customers and brands. By providing an interactive and social platform, social media can influence online purchase decisions through strengthening customer trust. The purpose of this study is to examine the role of social media in enhancing customer trust and to analyze the effect of this trust on purchase decision-making in the context of electronic marketing. The research is applied in terms of purpose and descriptive-analytical in nature, conducted using a quantitative approach. Data were collected through a survey using a standardized questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale. The statistical population included customers using electronic marketing services and online stores active on social media, and sampling was conducted through non-random convenience sampling. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data and test the relationships among variables. The findings indicate that social media have a positive and significant effect on customer trust and that marketing activities based on these media can significantly enhance customer trust. Moreover, the results show that customer trust is a multidimensional construct comprising perceived honesty, competence, reliability, and benevolence, all of which are influenced by social media interactions. In addition, the results demonstrate that social media directly affect customer purchase decisions, and customer trust also plays a positive and significant role in facilitating purchase decision-making. Overall, the findings indicate that customer trust plays an important mediating role in the relationship between social media and purchase decision-making. These findings can be useful for managers and practitioners in electronic marketing in designing effective trust-based strategies on social media.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: 01/04/2026

Accepted: 01/08/2026

KEY WORDS:

*Social Media,
Customer Trust,
Purchase Decision-
Making,
Electronic Marketin.*

I. Introduction

The rapid developments in information and communication technologies in recent years have brought about fundamental changes in communication methods, consumption patterns, and market structures. One of the most important consequences of these developments is the expansion of electronic marketing and, in particular, the prominent role of social media in interactions between organizations and customers. As an interactive platform, social media provide unprecedented opportunities for information exchange, attitude formation, and mutual influence between users and brands, making them one of the main pillars of marketing activities in the digital environment [2].

Despite advantages such as broad access, cost reduction, and increased interaction speed, electronic marketing faces specific challenges. One of the most important challenges is the lack of face-to-face interaction and increased uncertainty in the purchase process, which can raise customers' perceived risk. Under such conditions, customer trust plays a fundamental role in reducing ambiguity, strengthening relationships, and facilitating purchase decisions in online environments. Research shows that without the formation of trust, even the most attractive marketing activities do not necessarily lead to purchase behavior (Yazdani-Kachuei et al., 2021). Through mechanisms such as sharing consumer experiences, enabling comments, and allowing direct interaction with brands, social media provide a suitable context for trust formation. Unlike traditional media, customers in this space are not only message recipients but also active participants in content generation and dissemination. This characteristic has led many consumers to perceive social media content as more credible and reliable than official advertising messages, thus influencing their attitudes, confidence, and trust toward brands (Barreto, 2014).

Customer trust in electronic marketing is a multidimensional concept referring to consumers' perceptions of brand honesty, competence, and responsibility. Domestic studies show that trust plays an important mediating role in the relationship between social media marketing activities and outcomes such as brand loyalty, customer satisfaction, and purchase intention. For example, Bakri (2019) showed that social media marketing indirectly enhances brand loyalty through customer trust. Other studies also emphasize the role of trust in increasing brand equity and positive customer responses (Amousi & Zaki-Pour, 2021).

On the other hand, customer purchase decision-making is a complex, multi-stage process influenced by cognitive, social, and communicative factors. In the context of social media, customers evaluate other users' experiences, compare alternatives, and assess brand credibility before purchasing. Research indicates that social media content, particularly when it includes

recommendations, reviews, and real user interactions, can significantly influence consumers' purchase intentions (Savitri et al., 2022).

In this context, trust created through these interactions facilitates customers' transition from the evaluation stage to the final decision stage. Despite numerous studies on social media marketing, there remains a research gap in explaining the simultaneous relationship among social media, customer trust, and purchase decision-making. Many domestic studies focus on outcomes such as brand loyalty, brand equity, or customer engagement (Elahverdi & Landran-Esfahani, 2022), while the role of customer trust as a connecting mechanism between social media activities and purchase decisions has received less integrated attention.

Furthermore, the specific market conditions of Iran—including widespread social media penetration, increased competition among online businesses, and customers' sensitivity toward brand credibility and honesty—highlight the need for localized research in this field. Many online retailers, despite active social media presence, have failed to achieve the desired impact on customer purchase decisions due to the lack of trust-based strategies (Najad-Farahani, 2016).

Accordingly, the main issue of this study is how social media can enhance customer trust in electronic marketing and what role this trust plays in customer purchase decision-making. Addressing this issue can help clarify the actual role of social media in reducing perceived risk, increasing assurance, and guiding consumer purchase behavior.

The aim of this study is to explain the role of social media in enhancing customer trust and to analyze the effect of this trust on purchase decision-making in electronic marketing, based on credible domestic and international studies. It is expected that the findings will enrich theoretical literature and provide practical guidance for managers and online business practitioners in designing effective trust-based strategies on social media.

II. Importance and Necessity of the Research

In recent years, social media have become one of the most important platforms for communication, information dissemination, and social, economic interactions, and their role in electronic marketing has increasingly attracted attention from researchers and business managers. The expansion of social media usage has not only transformed interpersonal communication but has also fundamentally changed consumer decision-making patterns, brand evaluation methods, and trust formation in online environments (Aghili & Manouchehri, 2018).

From an electronic marketing perspective, one of the most important challenges is the lack of face-to-face interaction and the increased perceived risk in the purchase process. Customers face uncertainty about product quality, seller credibility, and information accuracy. In such conditions,

customer trust plays a pivotal role in reducing risk and facilitating purchase decisions. This importance is amplified by the fact that a significant portion of brand–customer interactions now take place on social media, where official brand information and user-generated content simultaneously influence customer judgments (Yazdani-Kachuei et al., 2021).

The necessity of this research lies in the social-media-driven environment where trust is formed not only through official organizational messages but also through interactions, shared experiences, and social influence. Studies examining the impact of social media content on purchase behavior show that user recommendations and reviews may have a stronger influence on purchase intention than direct advertising (Zarmehr & Shir-Khodaei, 2017). These findings suggest that trust in social media environments is inherently social and interactive and cannot be analyzed solely through traditional marketing models.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to enriching the literature on social media marketing and customer trust by offering an integrated framework. While many studies examine social media, trust, or purchase decision-making separately, few have simultaneously analyzed the role of social media in enhancing trust and the effect of trust on purchase decisions. Thus, this research helps bridge this theoretical gap.

From a practical standpoint, the findings are highly relevant for online business managers and electronic marketing practitioners. Many organizations invest heavily in social media presence but fail to achieve expected sales outcomes due to a lack of understanding of trust-building mechanisms. Domestic studies show that social media marketing activities lead to positive outcomes only when they enhance trust and relationship quality with customers (Elahverdi & Landran-Esfahani, 2022).

Moreover, in highly competitive online markets, customer trust can serve as a sustainable competitive advantage. Customers who trust a brand are more likely not only to purchase but also to recommend it to others and maintain long-term relationships. Therefore, the present research provides a scientific basis for strategic decision-making in competitive digital environments.

III. Research Questions

1. What role do social media play in forming and strengthening customer trust in electronic marketing?
2. What are the components of customer trust in electronic marketing, and how are they influenced by social media interactions?

3. How do social media marketing activities affect customer purchase decision-making in online environments?

4. What role does customer trust play in purchase decision-making in electronic marketing?

Research Methodology

This research is applied in terms of purpose and descriptive–analytical in nature. Given that the main objective is to explain the role of social media in enhancing customer trust and its effect on purchase decision-making, a descriptive–analytical approach enables systematic examination and interpretation of relationships among variables. The study adopts a quantitative approach and is cross-sectional in terms of time, with data collected at a single point.

The statistical population includes customers who use electronic marketing services and online stores active on social media and who have experience interacting with brand marketing activities and online purchases. Due to the large population and access limitations, convenience sampling was used.

Data were collected using a standardized questionnaire developed based on theoretical literature and prior studies. The questionnaire included items related to social media marketing activities, customer trust, purchase decision-making, and demographic characteristics, measured on a five-point Likert scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.”

Content validity was assessed through expert review, and reliability was evaluated using Cronbach’s alpha. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics and inferential analyses to test direct and mediated relationships among variables.

IV. Findings

Research Question 1

The Role of Social Media in Customer Trust

Results indicate a positive and significant effect of social media on customer trust ($\beta = 0.54$, $t = 7.82$, $p < 0.01$). This finding highlights the role of social media in enhancing transparency, interaction, and trust formation in online contexts.

Research Question 2

Components of Customer Trust

Social media interactions positively and significantly affected all trust components: perceived honesty ($\beta = 0.61$), competence ($\beta = 0.48$), reliability ($\beta = 0.52$), and benevolence ($\beta = 0.45$). The strongest effect was observed for perceived honesty, emphasizing the importance of transparency and brand responsiveness.

Research Question 3

Effect on Purchase Decision-Making

Social media marketing activities had a positive and significant effect on purchase decision-making ($\beta = 0.49$, $t = 6.95$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that social media content and interactions facilitate customer decision processes.

Research Question 4

Role of Customer Trust

Customer trust exerted a strong positive effect on purchase decision-making ($\beta = 0.58$, $t = 8.26$, $p < 0.01$), confirming its critical role in reducing perceived risk and converting positive attitudes into actual purchase behavior.

V. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings demonstrate that social media function not merely as informational or promotional tools but as social platforms that foster interaction, reduce uncertainty, and build customer trust. Social media marketing directly influences trust and purchase decisions, while trust itself plays a pivotal mediating role in transforming marketing activities into actual buying behavior.

From a managerial perspective, the results suggest that investment in social media must be accompanied by trust-building strategies centered on transparency, responsiveness, and meaningful engagement. By focusing on these dimensions, organizations can leverage social media to establish sustainable customer relationships and enhance purchase outcomes.

Overall, this study provides an integrated framework for understanding the interplay between social media, customer trust, and purchase decision-making in electronic marketing and offers a foundation for future research employing longitudinal or mixed-method approaches.

References

- [1]. Amousi, N., & Zaki-Pour, M. (2021). The effect of brand mental associations on brand equity with the mediating role of green trust and satisfaction. *Journal of Development and Transformation Management*, 13(44), 83–91.
- [2]. Bakri, M. (2019). The effect of social media marketing on brand loyalty considering the mediating role of customer trust. *Proceedings of the First International Conference on Modern Challenges and Solutions in Industrial Engineering, Management, and Accounting*, 1–11.

- [3].Barreto, A. M. (2014). The word-of-mouth phenomenon in the social media era. *International Journal of Marketing Research*, 56(5), 631–654.
- [4].Savitri, C., Hurriyati, R., Wibowo, L., & Hendrayati, H. (2022). The role of social media marketing and brand image on smartphone purchase intention. *International Journal of Data and Network Science*, 6(1), 185–192.