

Impact of Social Media Engagement on Consumer Trust in Online Apparel Brands: A Comparative Study of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram

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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of social media has fundamentally transformed marketing communication strategies in the online apparel industry. Brands may influence consumer views and trust by interacting with consumers through social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. The current study looks at how social media engagement metrics affects the development of customer trust for five Indian online clothing brands: Craftsvilla, Voonik, Limeroad, IndiaRush and Stalkbuylove. The study examines important engagement metrics, such as the quantity of posts, reactions, comments, likes, favorites, and tweets, using a quantitative research design and secondary data gathered from official brand accounts. Multiple regression analysis is employed to test eight hypotheses relating social media to customer trust across platforms. The findings reveal that posting frequency and consumer interaction metrics significantly influence trust formation, though the magnitude of impact varies by platform. Facebook engagement through reactions and comments strongly contributes to trust, Twitter engagement emphasizes responsiveness and immediacy, while Instagram engagement highlights the role of visual approval through likes. The study contributes to the existing literature by providing a comparative, multi-platform analysis of trust generation in the context of online apparel brands in an emerging market. For fashion marketers looking to maximize platform-specific social media tactics in order to establish and maintain customer trust, the findings provide insightful managerial implications.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing, Consumer Trust, Online apparel brands, Engagement Metrics.

Introduction

Social media has become a key avenue for marketing communications, radically changing how businesses engage with customers in online spaces (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Social networking platforms' growing popularity has made it possible for companies to communicate with customers in real time and through user-generated content, changing their attitudes, perceptions, and trust (Hajli, 2014). Since customers cannot physically verify things in the online clothing market, trust plays a crucial role in determining consumer behavior and the development of enduring brand relationships (Pavlou, 2003).

Due to increased rivalry among online clothing manufactures brought about by the expansion of e-commerce, trust is now a crucial factor in consumer decision-making (Gefen, Karhanna, & Straun, 2003). Clothing brands can lower perceived risk by using social media sites like Facebook, Instagram,

and Twitter to communicate social approbation, transparency, and trustworthiness through engagement data (Kim & Ko, 2012). According to earlier studies, customers are depending more and more on social media indicators like, comments, and shares to gauge a brand's credibility online (Erkan & Evans, 2016). Facebook's rich content formats and interactive features continue to make it one of the most popular venues for brand consumer connection. (Godey et al., 2016). Through social proof and relational communication processes, the volume of Facebook posts, reactions, and comments indicated the degree of brand activity and customer involvement, which can affect perceptions of trust. (Dessart, Veloutsou-Thomas, 2015) Research shows that regular and engaging Facebook communication improves relationships and customer trust (Kim & Ko, 2012). Because Twitter prioritizes immediacy, brevity, and real-time connection over other platforms, it is especially pertinent for customer service and brand reaction (Rapp et al. 2013). A brand's openness to communication and transparency—two essential elements of building trust in online markets is reflected in the quantity of tweets, favorites and answers (Kent & Taylor, 2002). According to earlier studies prompt and engaging Twitter conversation lowers ambiguity and increases perceived brand confidence (Cheung, Lee, & Rabjohn, 2008).

Instagram has become a well-known visual -focused medium, particularly in the fashion and clothing sector, where representations of beauty and lifestyle are crucial (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Likes and posts are examples of engagement indicators that act as outward social validation cues that affect consumers' emotional attachment to and trust in fashion brands (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Instagram's visual involvement improves perceived quality and authenticity, making up for the absence of physical product encounters (Godey et al., 2016).

Even with a wealth of data on social media marketing, comparative studies that look at how platform-specific interaction indicators affect consumer trust across various social media platforms are still lacking, especially in developing nations like India (Haji, 2014). Separate outcome variable existing research frequently concentrates on purchase intention or brand equity (Kim & Ko, 2012). Additionally, despite their strong social media presence and quick growth, Indian online clothing firms have received little notice (Rapp et al., 2013).

In order to fill up these gaps, the current study looks at how social media engagement indicators affect customer trust on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter for five India online clothing brands: IndiaRush, Voonik, Craftsvilla, Limeroad, and (Godey et al., 2016). The study adds to the body of knowledge on social media marketing by providing a platform-specific, trust-focused analysis in the context of online clothing by empirically testing eight hypotheses across platforms (Erkan & Evans, 2016).

Research Objective

- To study social media presence of 5 online companies across 3 online platform

Literature Review

• Social Media Marketing and Consumer Engagement

The use of social networking sites to generate, convey, and provide value to customers through interactive interaction is known as social media marketing (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). According to earlier research, social media helps brands transition from one-way to relationship-based engagements, which increases trust and engagement (Hajli, 2014). Observable indicators like posts, comments, shares, and replies are frequently used to gauge social media engagement and show different degrees of customer interaction (Dessart et al., 2015). According to consumer engagement theory, increased connection strengthens relationships and produces positive brand outcomes like loyalty and trust. Engagement metrics indirect of customer satisfaction and brand dependability in online retail setting (Kim & Ko, 2012). Across all industries, research continuously demonstrates a positive correlation between social media use and results related to trust (Godey et al., 2016).

• Consumer Trust in Online Contexts

The conviction that a brand is trustworthy, sincere, and able to deliver on its commitments is known as consumer trust (Gefen et al., 2003). Because of the significant perceived risk associated with product quality, fit, and delivery trust is especially crucial in online garment retailing (Pavlou, 2003). Through peer feedback, open communication, and social cues, social media interactions help to lessen uncertainty (Hajili, 2014).

According to earlier research, trust acts as a mediator in the relationship between social media marketing efforts and consumer behavioral outcomes like loyalty and purchases intention (Erkan & Evans, 2016). In social media settings, responsiveness, consistency in communication, and obvious peer support all affect the development of trust (Cheung et al., 2008).

- **Facebook Engagement and Trust**

Consumer trust is significantly shaped by Facebook engagement metrics, such as posts, reactions and comments (Kim & Ko, 2012). Frequency of posting increases perceived reliability by reflecting brand commitment and activity (Godey et al., 2016). According to cheung et al. 2008, reactions and comments serve as social proof mechanisms that impact credibility assessments and observational learning.

According to research, interactive Facebook communication improves relationship quality and transparency, which raises trust levels (Dessart et al ., 2015). Facebook comments in the clothing industry facilitate brand responses and peer discussion, enhancing relations trust (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

- **Twitter Engagement and Trust**

Twitter is a potent tool for fostering trust because it allows for dialog communication through tweets, favorites, and replies (Kent & Taylor, 2002). According to studies, tweeting frequently improves brand transparency and accessibility while lowering perceived risk (Rapp et al., 2013). Favorites and responses convex support and promptness both of which enhance perceptions of trust (Erkan & Evans, 2016).

According to additional research, public interactions on Twitter increase trust by letting customers see how responsive a brand is to criticism and grievances (Cheung et al., 2008). This openness is particularly crucial in online clothing marketplaces where customer satisfaction is a top priority (Kim & Ko, 2012).

- **Instagram Engagement and Trust**

Instagram has a significant impact on fashion and clothing marketing because of its visual focus (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). According to Lou and Yuan 2019, engagement metrics like likes and posts act as social and emotional validation cues that affect trust. Brand legitimacy and perceived quality are improved by visual consistency and strong involvement (Godey et al., 2016).

Research Gap

Few studies compare Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram with customer trust as the main outcome, despite previous research demonstrating the significance of social media involvement (Hajli, 2014). Furthermore, there is still a dearth of empirical data on Indian online clothing brands (Rapp et al., 2013). By platform-specific engagement indicators in an emerging market setting the current study fills these gaps (Godey et al., 2016).

- **Research Design**

As the researcher establishes the issue statement, finds the gaps, and develops the research objectives, the initial step of this study is exploratory. It looks at the list of many factors that affect online buying intentions either directly or indirectly.

- **Research Methodology**

5 online clothing companies are the subject of a social media analysis that looks at the total amount of posts, comments, reactions, and shares they have made over the course of a month on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. An additional purpose of the study was to determine how brand social media participants affect online purchase intentions via fostering trust. Twenty online clothing companies were identified by the internet and Mobile association of India. %companies with specific focus on clothing only and respectable social media presence were selected from the list.

Voonik, Craftsvilla, Limeroad, IndiaRush, and Stalkbuylove are the 5 clothing brands that were chosen. Data from Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter company pages for the aforementioned brands is extracted using the Quaintly tool. Numerous premium and free social media analytics solutions are available, including Quaintly, Hoot suite, Buffer, and SEMrush. All these various tools provide competitor insight and also helps in benchmarking their performance against their competitors. Quaintly is utilized to extract consumer interaction data for the five e-brands that were discovered over the course of one month, from November 30 to December 30, 2025, in terms of the number of posts likes, shares, and comments.

“The number of shares of the posts can be used to gauge trust”. The eight hypotheses listed below have been developed for this study framework:

- H₁:** The number of posts that 5 online clothing retailers share on Facebook directly and significantly affects the development of consumer trust.
- H₂:** Consumer trust in Facebook postings from 5 online clothing brands is directly and significantly impacted by the quantity of reactions on those posts.
- H₃:** A higher number of comments on posts made by 5 online clothing brands on Facebook directly and significantly affects the development of consumer trust.
- H₄:** The quantity of tweets that 5 online clothing brands post on Twitter directly and significantly affect the development of consumer trust.
- H₅:** A higher number of favorites on tweets from 5 online clothing brands directly and significantly affects the developments of consumer trust.
- H₆:** Customers trust in 5 online clothing brands is directly and significantly impacted by the quantity of comments left on their tweets.
- H₇:** The quantity of posts that 5 online clothing retailers share on Instagram directly and significantly affects the development of consumer trust.
- H₈:** The quantity of posts that 5 online clothing retailers share on Instagram directly and significantly affects the development of consumer trust.

Analysis and Findings

The researcher performed a secondary investigation on 5 online clothing companies to confirm the effect of social media on establishing brand credibility. This supplementary investigation was carried out on 3 social media sites Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram for a month. Quaintly was the tool for 5 brands - Craftsvilla, Limeroad, India rush, Voonik and StalkbuyLove- all of the brand's postings, likes on each post, comments received, and shares are retrieved. Multiple regression analysis was the statistical method used to determine how independent variables, such as likes, comments, and post count, affected the dependent variable or hope frequently a post was how frequently a post was shared. Among customers, sharing a post is associated with increased trust. Customers will only share a post if they have faith in the brand and are aware of its dependability. The eight hypotheses listed in the previous chapter were developed for the study framework.

Regression Analysis & Hypothesis Testing

• Craftsvilla

Over the course of a month Craftsvilla produced 299 posts on Facebook, 124 on Twitter, and 90 on Instagram. The R² is 0.556 and the corrected R² is 0.507. The regression model accounts for 55% of the volatility in the data. “The F-test results further show that there is a linear relationship between the variables”. Every variable has been found to have a direct and favorable effect on trust. “Reactions” typically affect trust the most (beta- 0.722). The model accounts for 71% of the variance. The beta values for replies, favorites, and posts show a favorable impact on trust-building. With positive beta values for the both independent variables, the regression model developed for Instagram accounts for 34% of the variance. All eight of the Craftsvilla hypotheses are eligible for acceptance above.

The MLR model for Craftsvilla

Items	Facebook	Twitter	Instagram
The total Volume of Posts	299	124	90
Total amount of reactions/Likes and Favorites	1,669,0004	607	128,247
The total number of replies and comments	11,723	36	530
The total number of Shares	26,180	196	-
Adjusted R ²	0.507	0.674	0.346
R ²	0.556	0.710	0.391

• Indiarush

Over the course of a month, Indiarush produced 121 posts on Facebook, 89 on Twitter, and 80 Instagram. The R² is 0.463 and the corrected R² is 0.403. The regression model accounts for 46% of the variance in the data. There is a clear and favorable influence on trust found in each variable.

"Reactions" typically affects trust the most ($\beta=0.452$). On twitter, the variance explained by the model is 38%. The development of trust on Twitter is influenced by 66 other factors. The development of trust is positively impacted by the beta values for posts and favorites. However, the answers' beta value is negative (-0.143), indicating that the dependent variable is negatively impacted. With positive beta values for both independent variables, the regression model developed for Instagram accounts for 82% of the variance. Based on the debate above, every other hypothesis for Indiarush is eligible for acceptance, with the exception of H6.

The MLR model for Indiarush

Items	Facebook	Twitter	Instagram
The total Volume of Posts	121	89	18
Total amount of reactions/Likes and Favorites	14762	41	1756
The total number of replies and comments	459	4	46
The total number of Shares	348	22	-
Adjusted R2	0.403	.384	.818
R2	0.463	.445	.830

• Limeroad

In a single month, Limeroad produced 104,52, and 44 posts on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter respectively. The R2 is 0.757 while the corrected R2 is 0.731. The regression model for Facebook accounts for 76% of the variance in the data. A direct and favorable effect on trust as determined by responses and remarks. Nonetheless, the findings indicate that posts had a detrimental effect on building trust. "Reactions" typically affects trust the most ($\beta=0.893$). The model explains 99.1% of the volatility on Twitter. "Posts and comments have a negative beta coefficient, while favorites have a positive beta coefficient". With positive beta values for both posts and likes on trust generation, the regression model developed for Instagram accounts for 18% of the variance. All of the other hypotheses for Limeroad are eligible for acceptance based on the discussion above, with the exception of H1, H4, and H6.

The MLR model for Limeroad

Items	Facebook	Twitter	Instagram
The total Volume of Posts	105	52	44
Total amount of reactions/Likes and Favorites	893395	130	31582
The total number of replies and comments	3267	303	123
The total number of Shares	2946	27	-
Adjusted R2	0.731	0.991	0.185
R2	0.757	0.992	0.241

• Stalkbuylove

In a single month, Stalkbuylove produced 56,39, and 75 posts on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, respectively. R2 has a value of 0.998. The regression model for Facebook explains 99% of the variance in the data. Reactions and comments are found to have a direct and beneficial effect on trust. Nonetheless, the findings indicated that posts have a detrimental effect on building trust. "Comments" typically have the biggest effect on trust ($\beta=0.956$). Ninety percent of the volatility on Twitter can be explained by the model. "The development of trust is negatively impacted by the variable replies". 29% of the variance is explained by the regression model developed for Instagram. "Stalkbuylove's Instagram posts have the highest beta coefficient value (51.79)". All of the other theories for stalkbuylove are eligible for acceptance based on the debate above, with the exception of H6 in turn.

The MLR model for Stalkbuylove

Items	Facebook	Twitter	Instagram
The total Volume of Posts	56	39	75
Total amount of reactions/Likes and Favorites	6500	358	94475
The total number of replies and comments	10182	1	2241
The total number of Shares	469	78	-
Adjusted R2	0.998	0.895	0.236
R2	0.998	0.906	0.286

• Voonik

Over the course of a month Stalkbuylove produced 136 posts on Facebook, 100 on Twitter, and 35 on Instagram. The data variance for Facebook is 61% explained by the model of regression. Reactions and remarks have been found to have a direct and beneficial effect on trust. "Posts" typically have the biggest influence on building trust ($\beta = 1.155$). Only 9% of the volatility on Twitter can be explained by the model. "Compared to likes, posts have a low impact for Voonik ($\beta = 0.026$)". Despite posting 100 messages on Twitter, Voonik was still unable to win over customers' trust. 62% of the variance is explained by the regression model developed for Instagram. All of the other hypotheses for Voonik are eligible for acceptance based on the discussion above, with the exception of H6.

The MLR model for Voonik

Items	Facebook	Twitter	Instagram
The total Volume of Posts	136	100	35
Total amount of reactions/Likes and Favorites	33874	30	11062
The total number of replies and comments	372	0	171
The total number of Shares	394	4	-
Adjusted R2	0.567	0.091	0.547
R2	0.609	0.026	0.623

Discussion

Social media platforms were being used by the five clothing e- brands to increase consumer brand trust. Given that all of the brands' H1, H2, and H3 hypotheses were accepted, Facebook emerged as the most popular platform for fostering trust.

The website Craftsvilla has the most shares in a month (26,180), despite having the most posts (299). Only Craftsvilla's brand received acceptance for each of the eight assumptions. "With the most posts and followers (64,13,254), no other brand is even comparable to craftsvilla". Stalkbuylove's massive following (943,530) helped them receive a respectable amount of likes and reactions on just 56 posts. With 5,31,702 followers, IndiaRush has the fewest of all the e-brands under study. Stalkbuylove, IndiaRush, Voonik, and Limeroad reject the H6 hypothesis for Twitter. This illustrates how answers to company tweets have a detrimental impact on building consumer trust. Because anyone may reach anyone on Twitter, "Twitter has become a platform to raise complaints and customer grievances; therefore, this negative impact is a result of customer complaints and grievances raised on Twitter". The most trusted account on Instagram is Stalkbulove which is followed by Craftsvilla, Voonik, Limeroad, and IndiaRush.

Conclusion

In this study, five Indian online clothing brands-Stalkbuylove, Voonik, Limeroad, Craftsvilla, and IndiaRush- were studied to see how social media engagement indicators affected the development of consumer trust on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The results offer compelling empirical proof that social media use is important for building trust, while the extent and direction of this influence differ for different platforms and brands.

The findings unequivocally show that Facebook was the best platform for building customer trust. It is clear from the acceptance of hypothesis H1, H2, and H3 for each of the 5 brands that the building of trust on Facebook is greatly influenced by posting frequency, reaction, and comments. This implies that relational communication and social validation- two things that are essential for establishing trust in online clothing retailing- are improved by Facebook's interactive and community-driven outperformed all other Branson Facebook, posting the most (299) and receiving the most shares (26,180) in a single month.

Due to its consistent and strategically integrated approach to social media participation Craftsvilla was the only company for whom all eight hypotheses were approved. Craftsvilla had the most followers (6,413,254), which further demonstrated its power to turn interaction into results that build trust.

Additionally, Stalkbuylove performed well, especially on Instagram, where it became the most reputable brand out of the 5. Stalkbuylove's large following (943,530) allowed it to receive a lot of likes and reactions on Facebook, even though it only had 56 posts, which is less than Craftsvilla's. This suggests that interaction quality can occasionally make up for a lower posting frequency. On the other

hand, IndiaRush, which has the fewest followers (531,702), demonstrated very low levels of engagement, indicating that the number of followers affects the visibility and ability to establish trust of social media information.

The results from Twitter show a different trend. For Stalkbuylove, IndiaRush, Voonik, and Limeroad, Hypotheses H6, which looked at how Tweet comments (replies) affected customer trust, was rejected. This implies that Twitter responses can negatively affect these brands' ability to build trust. Twitter serves as an open complaint and grievance redressed forum, unlike Facebook and Instagram, where users can openly voice concerns about poor product quality, delayed deliveries, or unsatisfactory customer services. Higher response rates could therefore indicate unfavorable sentiment rather than constructive interaction, which would undermine customer confidence. This platform-specific behavior demonstrates that the type and tone of engagement are just as significant as engagement metrics, which may not always result in favorable trust consequences.

The most trusted brand on Instagram was Stalkbuylove, which was followed by Craftsvilla, Voonik, Limeroad, and IndiaRush. Instagram's visual focus and lifestyle-driven messaging, which are closely related to the clothing sector, are responsible for the platform's excellent trust results. Instagram likes are strong social validation indicators that affect the desirability and legitimacy of a brand. According to the results, visual engagement is essential for fostering emotional trust in online fashion firms.

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Instead of using a standard social media strategy, online clothing firms should implement platform-specific engagement tactics, according to management. Facebook tactics should prioritize engaging communication and regular posting. To increase emotional trust, Instagram campaigns should emphasize visually appealing content and influencer-style interaction. Proactive customer service and prompt complaint resolution should be the top priorities of Twitter campaigns in order to avoid negative responses and avoid negative responses undermining trust.

This study's result emphasizes that social media interaction is a strategic trust-building tool in online clothing commerce, not only a promotional activity. Brands are more likely to increase consumer trust and maintain a competitive edge in digital marketplaces if they manage engagement metrics well while preserving good consumer interactions.

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