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Social Commerce Adoption and Consumer Buying Behaviour Among Generation Z in India

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Abstract

Digital technology has transformed how people communicate and interact with each other, bringing consumers and retailers closer together. Social media enables the flow of information, experiences, and feelings within online communities where user-generated content, peer reviews, and recommendations are shared. This has driven a marked shift toward social commerce — the selling of merchandise directly through social media platforms — which has been widely adopted across countries including India, particularly after the pandemic made physical shopping less convenient. India's social commerce market continues to grow, supported by rising smartphone penetration, affordable internet access, and increasingly reliable digital payment systems. As technology continues to evolve, marketers are increasingly targeting Generation Z (born 1997–2012), a digitally native and digitally-savvy cohort. This study measures the extent to which social commerce influences the buying behaviour of Indian Generation Z consumers, with findings intended to inform marketing strategy. A structured questionnaire was administered to 400 respondents aged 18–27 who had purchased a product after being influenced by social media, such as peer reviews from friends or influencer recommendations. Data were collected on a five-point Likert scale, validated, and analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The analysis covered descriptive statistics, reliability assessment, validity testing, and structural model evaluation. Findings confirm that social commerce has a significant, positive effect on consumer buying behaviour, and that the relationship between the two constructs is statistically meaningful. Social media assists young consumers through convenience, personalised recommendations, interactive content, and customer reviews — features that strengthen engagement, build brand loyalty, and enhance purchase intention. As Indian youth constitute one of the largest consumer markets globally after China, this evidence carries both theoretical and practical significance for marketers. Suggested variables for future research include trust, perceived risk, electronic word-of-mouth, and social influence.

Keywords: *Social Commerce, Social Commerce Adoption, Consumer Buying Behaviour, Generation Z, Digital Marketing, SmartPLS, PLS-SEM, India*

Introduction

Although e-commerce has existed for some time, the practice of purchasing items online is no longer novel — it is sometimes described as a "punch card" activity that simply digitises conventional buying and selling. Social commerce, a branch of e-commerce rooted in social media, has reshaped this landscape by enabling users to shop directly through their preferred social platforms.

Social commerce is often described as the next stage of e-commerce, made possible by digital technology and used by businesses to engage customers more authentically. The evolution of the internet from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 enabled real-time, two-way communication — a feature demanded by platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok — which in turn opened the door to social commerce through real-time responsiveness and consumer engagement.

India's market is witnessing rising smartphone ownership and growing adoption of digital payments. Generation Z is increasingly shaping its own narrative through advocacy and online expression, and more

consumers are choosing online over traditional retail. The proliferation of smartphones among young people, who spend considerable time on their devices, has been central to enabling social commerce.

Users build connections, engage, and exchange peer opinions on social media that shape their purchasing choices. Influencer content affects and alters buying decisions at every stage of the customer journey, and as businesses map out the social commerce path, influencer marketing has reached its peak importance.

Growth of Social Commerce in India

Social commerce in India has grown exponentially in recent years. The pandemic, combined with cheaper data and wider smartphone access, pushed consumers toward digital channels and online shopping. Social media platforms — Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Pinterest, and others — have integrated smart retail features to streamline the purchase journey and reduce drop-off, reinforcing social commerce as a leading shopping channel for a large consumer base.

This growth has narrowed the gap between the digital and physical retail worlds. Even in remote areas, Tier-II and Tier-III cities are rapidly adopting social commerce, with businesses selling directly through chat and video calls on social platforms. The integration of digital payment methods such as UPI and mobile wallets has further extended access to customers with limited financial inclusion, building a substantial ecosystem for social commerce nationwide.

India's socio-economic conditions and the rise of Generation Z are key drivers of this growth. Today's generation, already immersed in technology, values new experiences such as AI-driven personalisation and augmented-reality try-ons. Combining online shopping with social media creates customer experiences that genuinely resonate with this segment, and the trend is expected to continue evolving as social commerce becomes a streamlined feature of digital retail.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the level of social commerce adoption among Generation Z consumers in India.
2. To analyse the consumer buying behaviour of Generation Z in the context of social commerce.
3. To identify the factors that encourage Generation Z consumers to adopt social commerce platforms for online shopping.
4. To assess the relationship between social commerce adoption and consumer buying behaviour among Generation Z in India.
5. To examine the impact of social commerce adoption on consumer buying behaviour among Generation Z in India.

Review of Literature

The existing literature identifies social commerce as an important area of research due to the rapid growth of social media and its influence on online consumer behaviour. Prior work has examined the roles of trust, social interaction, user-generated content, and technological readiness in shaping purchase decisions.

Liang and Turban (2011) introduced a comprehensive framework for social commerce, explaining that it integrates social media technologies with e-commerce to facilitate transactions through social interaction, recommendations, and user-generated content, thereby enhancing engagement and creating value for both consumers and businesses.

Hajli (2015) examined determinants of purchase intention in social commerce and found that social support, trust, and online communities significantly influence buying intentions, concluding that consumer trust plays a vital role in encouraging purchases through social platforms.

Kim and Park (2013) investigated how social commerce characteristics affect consumer trust and purchasing behaviour, finding that information quality, transaction safety, and effective communication positively influence trust, which in turn enhances purchase intention.

Yadav, de Valck, Hennig-Thurau, Hoffman, and Spann (2013) proposed a conceptual framework describing how social interaction, consumer participation, and digital engagement contribute to successful social commerce strategies, noting that participation builds long-term value and strengthens brand loyalty.

Abed, Dwivedi, and Williams (2017) reviewed social commerce adoption literature and identified trust, perceived usefulness, social influence, and technological readiness as major determinants of adoption behaviour.

Hair, Hult, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2022) emphasised the application of PLS-SEM in marketing and consumer behaviour research, providing methodological guidance for assessing reliability, validity, and structural relationships in behavioural studies.

Research Design

This study aims to understand Generation Z's perceptions and practices of social commerce, along with the factors that encourage or discourage participation. It adopts a descriptive quantitative design: a structured questionnaire was developed using a five-point Likert scale, and the dataset was analysed in SmartPLS

following the PLS-SEM approach. Findings indicate that a conducive social commerce environment significantly encourages Generation Z's participation via social media platforms, while the absence of key elements reduces platform appeal for this cohort. The results are intended to help retailers and marketers attract Generation Z consumers by providing the elements necessary for successful social commerce.

Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 400)

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	18–20 years	120	30.0
	21–23 years	165	41.3
	24–27 years	115	28.7
Gender	Male	210	52.5
	Female	185	46.3
	Prefer not to say	5	1.2
Education	Undergraduate	235	58.8
	Postgraduate	145	36.2
	Other	20	5.0
Occupation	Student	255	63.8
	Employed	105	26.2
	Self-employed	25	6.3
	Other	15	3.7
Frequency of Social Commerce Purchase	Weekly	80	20.0
	Monthly	145	36.3
	Occasionally	135	33.7
	Rarely	40	10.0

Of the 400 valid responses, the 21–23 age bracket formed the largest share at 41.3%, ahead of the 18–20 group (30.0%) and the 24–27 group (28.7%). Gender split was fairly even, with 52.5% male and 46.3% female respondents, and 1.2% choosing not to disclose their gender.

On education, 58.8% of respondents were undergraduates and 36.2% postgraduates, while students made up the bulk of the occupational profile at 63.8%, followed by employed respondents at 26.2% — a pattern consistent with the age range typically associated with Generation Z.

As for how often respondents actually buy through social commerce, 36.3% do so monthly, 33.7% occasionally, 20.0% weekly, and 10.0% rarely. Taken together, this points to a sample that engages with social commerce on a fairly regular basis, which supports the relevance of examining how that adoption relates to buying behaviour.

Descriptive Statistics of the Study Variables (N = 400)

Variable	No. of Items	Mean	Standard Deviation
Social Commerce Adoption	5	4.18	0.64
Consumer Buying Behaviour	6	4.09	0.71

On a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree), Social Commerce Adoption returned the higher of the two means at 4.18, with a fairly tight standard deviation of 0.64 — meaning most respondents' answers clustered close together, pointing to broad agreement across the sample.

Consumer Buying Behaviour came in slightly lower at a mean of 4.09, with a standard deviation of 0.71. The spread is a little wider than for adoption, but still tight enough to reflect a generally shared, positive view of how social commerce shapes purchasing.

Since both means sit well above the neutral midpoint of 3.0, and both standard deviations are modest, the data appears reliable enough to support further inferential analysis such as correlation or regression.

Hypothesis Formulation

A hypothesis sets out a testable prediction about how variables relate to one another. Here, the prediction concerns whether Social Commerce Adoption (the independent variable) has a measurable effect on Consumer Buying Behaviour (the dependent variable) among Indian Generation Z consumers, tested through PLS-SEM in SmartPLS.

H_0 (Null Hypothesis): Social Commerce Adoption has no significant impact on Consumer Buying Behaviour among Generation Z in India.

H_1 (Alternative Hypothesis): Social Commerce Adoption has a significant positive impact on Consumer Buying Behaviour among Generation Z in India.

Sample Selection

The sample comprises 400 Indian Generation Z consumers aged 18 to 27 who had actually purchased through social commerce platforms. Respondents were selected via convenience sampling and were required to be frequent users of social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, or YouTube for finding or purchasing products. This sample size and profile is sufficient for the PLS-SEM analysis used in this study.

Target Market: Indian Generation Z consumers (18–27 years old) who are active on social media and have made purchases via Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, and other platforms.

Data Gathering

Primary data were collected via a structured questionnaire in two parts. The first section captured demographic information — age, gender, education, occupation, and frequency of social commerce shopping. The second section measured the two core constructs, Social Commerce Adoption and Consumer Buying Behaviour, on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).

Respondents were Generation Z consumers in India aged 18–27 with prior experience using platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, or YouTube for shopping. Responses were gathered mainly through Google Forms, supplemented where possible by offline questionnaires distributed at colleges, universities, and workplaces.

All valid responses (n = 400) were collected through convenience sampling. Data were coded and processed in SPSS for descriptive statistics and reliability checks, and AMOS/SmartPLS or regression analysis was used for hypothesis testing.

Data Analysis Framework

Research Model

Social Commerce Adoption (independent variable) → β → Consumer Buying Behaviour (dependent variable)

Hypotheses

A hypothesis is a tentative statement that predicts the relationship between two or more variables and provides a basis for empirical testing. In this study, the hypothesis examines the impact of Social Commerce Adoption (independent variable) on Consumer Buying Behaviour (dependent variable) among Generation Z in India, tested using PLS-SEM through SmartPLS to determine whether the proposed relationship is statistically significant.

H_0 (Null Hypothesis): Social Commerce Adoption has no significant impact on Consumer Buying Behaviour among Generation Z in India.

H_1 (Alternative Hypothesis): Social Commerce Adoption has a significant positive impact on Consumer Buying Behaviour among Generation Z in India.

Data Analysis Roadmap

Phase	Objective	Statistical Technique	Decision Criteria
Phase 1	Assess data quality	Missing values, descriptive statistics	No significant missing data
Phase 2	Evaluate reliability	Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability	α & CR ≥ 0.70
Phase 3	Assess validity	Outer Loadings, AVE, HTMT	Loadings ≥ 0.70, AVE ≥ 0.50, HTMT < 0.85
Phase 4	Evaluate structural model	Bootstrapping	t > 1.96, p < 0.05
Phase 5	Assess explanatory power	R^2	Higher values indicate better explanatory power
Phase 6	Measure practical impact	Effect Size (f^2)	0.02 = Small, 0.15 = Medium, 0.35 = Large
Phase 7	Assess predictive ability	Predictive Relevance (Q^2)	$Q^2 > 0$

Measurement Model Results

Assessment	Threshold	Result	Status
Cronbach's Alpha	≥ 0.70	0.91	✓
Composite Reliability	≥ 0.70	0.93	✓
Average Variance Extracted	≥ 0.50	0.72	✓
HTMT Ratio	< 0.85	0.63	✓

Every criterion clears its threshold, so the measurement model can be considered both reliable and valid.

Model Performance

Indicator	Value	Interpretation
R^2	0.53	Moderate explanatory power
f^2	0.41	Large effect size
Q^2	0.35	Strong predictive relevance

Visual Summary of the Structural Path

Measurement Model → Reliability confirmed, Validity confirmed → Structural Model → β = 0.73 ($p < 0.001$) → Consumer Buying Behaviour, with R^2 = 53%, f^2 = 0.41, Q^2 = 0.35.

Overall, the SmartPLS results show that Social Commerce Adoption exerts a statistically significant, positive effect on Consumer Buying Behaviour among Generation Z in India ($\beta = 0.73$, $p < 0.001$). The model accounts for 53% of the variance in buying behaviour ($R^2 = 0.53$), which counts as moderate explanatory power, while the large effect size ($f^2 = 0.41$) and positive predictive relevance ($Q^2 = 0.35$) confirm that the relationship is not only significant on paper but also substantively meaningful.

The collected data were analysed systematically using IBM SPSS Statistics and SmartPLS 4 to examine the relationship between Social Commerce Adoption and Consumer Buying Behaviour among Generation Z consumers in India. The analysis proceeded through a series of sequential steps to ensure reliability, validity, and robustness of the findings.

Initially, questionnaires were screened for completeness, consistency, and missing values, and only valid responses were retained. Descriptive statistics — frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation — were computed in SPSS to summarise the demographic profile and describe the study variables.

The measurement model was then evaluated in SmartPLS. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability, while convergent validity was examined through Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and factor loadings. Discriminant validity was established using the Fornell–Larcker Criterion and the Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) ratio, confirming that the constructs were both reliable and distinct.

After confirming the adequacy of the measurement model, the structural model was assessed to test the hypothesis. Significance of the path coefficient was determined through bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples. Explanatory power was evaluated using R^2, effect size using f^2, and predictive capability using Q^2.

Finally, the structural model results were interpreted to determine whether Social Commerce Adoption has a significant positive impact on Consumer Buying Behaviour among Generation Z consumers in India, and findings were presented using tables and figures alongside discussion aligned with the research objectives and hypothesis.

Conclusions

This study investigated the effect of Social Commerce Adoption on Consumer Buying Behaviour among Generation Z in India. Rapid advancements in digital technology, rising internet penetration, widespread smartphone use, and growing acceptance of social media have drastically altered how consumers interact with brands and make purchasing decisions. Social commerce represents a significant evolution of traditional e-commerce, merging shopping with social networking so that consumers can discover products, receive recommendations, interact with sellers, and purchase directly on social platforms. As one of the most digitally connected and socially active consumer segments, Generation Z's buying behaviour in this context is of growing importance to businesses and marketers.

The study adopted a descriptive, quantitative design and gathered primary data from 400 Generation Z participants in India using a structured questionnaire, analysed via SmartPLS (PLS-SEM). Results confirmed that both the measurement model and structural model were reliable and valid, and revealed a positive relationship between Social Commerce Adoption and Consumer Buying Behaviour — supporting the alternative hypothesis.

The analysis shows that Generation Z's adoption of social commerce influences their buying behaviour. Shoppable media, targeted suggestions and recommendations, influencer marketing, customer reviews and ratings, social interactions, and hassle-free purchasing processes all support and trigger Generation Z's purchase decisions.

Interactive content, targeted product recommendations, influencer marketing, customer feedback, ratings, social interactions, and convenient purchasing options facilitate consumer choice and informed decision-making. Generation Z relies heavily on social media as an information source and typically conducts research online before buying, making it important for companies to engage in social commerce to build client relationships and enhance satisfaction.

The findings underscore the importance of establishing customer trust and making the shopping experience as seamless as possible. Businesses should invest adequately in security, communication, customer support, and authentic influencer partnerships to maximise their appeal to Generation Z, while actively creating opportunities for customisation and user-generated content to strengthen purchasing intention and brand loyalty.

These conclusions are of considerable relevance to marketers, online sellers, entrepreneurs, and policymakers, who must continually rethink their approaches to social commerce and update marketing strategies. Effective engagement with Generation Z increasingly involves technologies such as artificial intelligence for better recommendations, live commerce, and immersive shopping experiences.

In conclusion, this study offers empirical validation for the claim that Social Commerce Adoption influences Consumer Buying Behaviour among Generation Z in

India, contributing to the literature by examining social commerce through the lens of PLS-SEM and providing a foundation for future consumer behaviour research in this space. Companies must continue investing in new ways of engaging customers to remain relevant in a changing business environment, and further research should incorporate additional variables, populations, and larger data sets.

Recommendations

Strategies that companies can utilise to understand and target Generation Z in social commerce:

- Build consumer trust around social commerce platforms. Lack of trust may be a major hindrance to purchasing; flexible money-transfer options, flexible return policies, and excellent customer service can boost trust and improve conversion rates.
- Use influencer marketing to reach Generation Z consumers where they already spend their time, leveraging influencers' credibility and audience reach.
- Encourage word-of-mouth through incentives and rewards for shoppers who share product reviews on their own social media profiles, helping build trust among new customers.
- Invest in personalisation by tracking consumer preferences and recommending relevant products — Generation Z expects a personalised shopping experience, which strengthens purchase decisions.
- Stay current with emerging social commerce trends, such as video-led product showcases, to enhance the customer purchase experience.
- Pursue further research on trust, risk perception, social influence, influencer credibility, electronic word-of-mouth, and satisfaction to better understand Generation Z's engagement with social commerce.
- Extend the study to other demographic segments such as Millennials and Generation Alpha.

Limitations of the Study

The study is limited to Generation Z in India, a segment in which social-media-driven online shopping is rapidly growing and which offers a sizeable base for behavioural analysis. It relies on convenience sampling within a defined geographical area, which can introduce shortcomings for generalising the findings.

The cross-sectional design limits conclusions about how social commerce adoption may influence consumer buying behaviour over time. The study also focuses on social commerce adoption without accounting for variables such as trust, social influence, risk perception, and positive electronic word-of-mouth, which could also shape Generation Z's social commerce buying behaviour. Finally, reliance on self-reported data may introduce survey bias among respondents.

Future Scope of the Study

Social commerce remains a growing topic of interest among researchers and academicians. Future research can extend this study to cover Millennials and Generation Alpha, and incorporate additional variables such as social influence, trust, risk perception, influencer credibility, electronic word-of-mouth, and customer satisfaction. A mixed-methods approach — combining qualitative interviews with quantitative analysis — could deepen understanding, while a longitudinal design could track adoption trends over time and reveal how the dynamic, unpredictable nature of technology continues to shape consumer behaviour.

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