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The Impact of Digital Marketing on Consumer Buying Behavior: An Empirical Study in Coimbatore

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Abstract- Pick up any phone in Coimbatore and scroll for thirty seconds. You will run into a sponsored post, a discount notification, a product review, or an influencer talking about something they want you to buy. That is not an accident. It is an industry spending billions of rupees to be exactly where your attention is. But the more interesting question is not how much money brands are spending on digital marketing. The question is whether it actually changes what people buy — and if so, how. To find out, we surveyed 120 consumers across Coimbatore district between December 2024 and April 2025. We asked them which digital channels they use, which ones actually pushed them toward a purchase, and at what point in their decision-making process that push happened. Simple percentage analysis kept the numbers readable and the takeaways clear. The picture that came back is more interesting than a simple 'yes, digital marketing works.' Social media advertising leads as the top purchase trigger at 34%, but online customer reviews are right behind at 28% — and reviews are not something brands can buy or fully control. WhatsApp and email promotions account for 18%, search engine results for 12%, and influencer endorsements for 8%. Among respondents under 30, 62% said a strong online review had directly changed their mind about a purchase in the past six months. That is a big number. It means review management is not a support-desk activity — it is a marketing priority. At the same time, only 44% of respondents said digital marketing makes them more impulsive buyers. Most people in this sample are using digital content deliberately, to research and compare rather than to be swept into purchases they had not planned. That is worth taking seriously before you build a campaign strategy around urgency and FOMO. None of these findings are complicated, but they have real practical implications for anyone running a business or a marketing function in Coimbatore. The brands that will pull ahead in this environment are not necessarily the ones spending the most online — they are the ones that understand which digital channel actually moves their specific customer from curiosity to purchase.

Keywords- Digital Marketing, Consumer Buying Behaviour, Social Media Advertising, Online Reviews, Purchase Decision, Customer Journey, Coimbatore, E-Commerce, Influencer Marketing, Tier 2 Markets.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Something has quietly changed about the way people in Coimbatore decide what to buy. The decision used to happen in the store — you walked in, saw what was on the shelf, maybe picked up a second brand to compare prices, and made a choice. That still happens. But for a growing number of purchases, the real decision happens before anyone walks through a door or taps a checkout button. It happens on a phone, while watching a YouTube review, reading comments under an Instagram post, or scrolling through ratings on Flipkart at midnight. The transaction is almost a formality at that point.

This shift matters more than it might seem at first glance. It means the point of maximum brand influence has moved away from the store and onto digital platforms — platforms that any brand can reach, but only some brands use well. India's digital advertising market passed INR 500 billion in 2024, with mobile-first platforms capturing the fastest-growing share. Affordable data plans and a flood of Tamil-language content have brought Coimbatore consumers into that digital ecosystem faster than most marketing forecasts predicted.

And yet most of the research on digital marketing and consumer behaviour in India has been done in metro cities. What works in Chennai or Mumbai does not automatically translate to Coimbatore. The income profile is different. The platform habits are not identical. The way families and communities influence each other's purchases has its own texture here. A study that takes Coimbatore seriously as its own market — rather than a smaller version of a bigger city — will produce findings that are actually useful to the people operating here. That is what this study tries to be.

The Shift from Traditional to Digital Purchase Influence

A generation ago, a Coimbatore household deciding which soap brand to buy was primarily influenced by what they saw on television, what their relatives used, and what the local kirana store carried. That world has not disappeared. Television still reaches a wide audience, and family recommendations still carry real weight. But both have been joined — and in some segments overtaken — by digital channels that did not exist twenty years ago.

The important point is that digital influence is not just a new delivery system for the same old advertising. It works differently. A television ad is something a brand scripted and paid for. A customer review on Amazon or Google is someone else's lived experience, written for other consumers rather than for the brand. An Instagram reel from a creator with a devoted following feels more like advice from a trusted friend than like a commercial. These are fundamentally different kinds of influence, operating through different mechanisms and at different points in the purchase process. That is why measuring 'digital marketing impact' as a single number misses most of what is actually going on.

Research Objectives

This study set out to answer four practical questions. First, which digital channels are Coimbatore consumers most exposed to, and which ones do they say most directly shaped their purchase decisions? Second, at which

stage of the buying journey — need recognition, information search, comparing options, deciding to buy, or sharing their experience afterward — does digital marketing matter most? Third, does a consumer's age or income level change which digital channels influence them and how strongly? And fourth, what do the answers to the first three questions mean for businesses and marketing professionals who need to actually do something with the findings? The survey ran across Coimbatore district from December 2024 to April 2025.

II. CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

Digital Marketing in India's Tier 2 Cities

For most of the last decade, large brands concentrated their digital marketing budgets on metro audiences. The reasoning made sense at the time — metro cities had higher smartphone penetration, faster internet, and consumers who had grown up online. The assumption was that sophisticated digital buying behaviour was a metro-city thing. That assumption has quietly fallen apart. Affordable Jio-era data plans and the explosion of regional-language content on YouTube and Instagram have pulled Tier 2 cities deep into the digital consumer ecosystem, often faster than the brands marketing to them realised.

Coimbatore is a good example of how this plays out. It is Tamil Nadu's second-largest industrial city, which means it has a consumer base with genuine disposable income — not the aspirational-but-cash-thin profile that sometimes characterises smaller cities. It also has a very large student population, thanks to its density of engineering and management colleges. These students are digitally fluent, platform-native, and in many cases making independent purchasing decisions for the first time. Their buying habits are being formed right now, in a digital environment. And yet their preferences and behaviours are not a carbon copy of students in Chennai. Platform habits differ. The role of family influence differs. What feels authentic versus what feels like a paid ad differs. Studying Coimbatore as its own market, rather than assuming it mirrors a metro, is the only way to get findings that actually apply here.

The Consumer Decision Journey in a Digital Context

Kotler's five-stage model of consumer decision-making — recognise a need, search for information, compare the options, make a purchase, then reflect on it afterward — is old enough to have appeared in textbooks before the internet existed. But it is still useful, because it gives us a framework for thinking about where in that process digital marketing actually does its work.

What digital media has changed is the texture of each stage. Information search, which once meant asking your mother or leafing through a newspaper supplement, now means typing a product name into Google, watching comparison videos on YouTube, and reading reviews from strangers who felt strongly enough to write four paragraphs about a blender. Evaluating alternatives used to require being physically present in a store. Now it happens on a couch, at no cost, with access to more product information than any salesperson could carry in their head. And post-purchase behaviour — once limited to telling a few friends — now includes leaving public reviews that will influence the next hundred buyers.

This means a well-designed digital strategy can show up at every single stage of the journey. The question this study tries to answer is: in Coimbatore specifically, where in that journey is the digital influence actually strongest?

Platform Dynamics in Coimbatore's Digital Environment

Platforms are not interchangeable. The same consumer who uses WhatsApp to get a product recommendation from a family group, YouTube to watch an honest review before buying, and Instagram to follow a creator they like is doing three very different things — and the kind of digital marketing that works in each space is different too.

In Coimbatore, the platform landscape is anchored by WhatsApp (used daily by 88% of our sample), Google Search (85%), YouTube and Instagram (both above 70%). Facebook has held on better among consumers above 35 than it has nationally, particularly for local business discovery. Tamil-language creators on YouTube have built audiences large enough to meaningfully shift purchase decisions in

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categories like personal care, electronics, and food — and their influence operates more like a trusted recommendation than an advertisement.

WhatsApp is worth a special mention because it tends to be underestimated in consumer research. In Coimbatore, as across South India generally, WhatsApp groups — family groups, friend groups, apartment society groups — function as live recommendation networks. One person shares a positive experience with a product and three or four other people in the group buy it within the week. No advertising campaign can replicate that kind of trust-based word-of-mouth at scale, which is why we tracked WhatsApp-based promotional exposure as its own channel in this study.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Kotler and Armstrong (2021) have long argued that digital marketing is not a replacement for traditional marketing but an expansion of it into spaces where genuine two-way conversation is possible. The brands that perform best online, they observed, are not the loudest ones — they are the ones that build actual relationships with their audiences. That observation is easy to dismiss as soft thinking until you look at which brands in Coimbatore are growing their digital followings. It is not always the ones spending the most on ads.

Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) gave us the channel taxonomy this study draws on — search, social, content, email, display — and their RACE framework (Reach, Act, Convert, Engage) maps neatly onto the consumer decision journey. Reach and Act cover awareness and consideration; Convert covers the purchase decision; Engage covers everything that happens after the sale and that eventually feeds back into the next purchase cycle. What is useful about this framework is that it forces you to ask not just 'are we doing digital marketing?' but 'which channels are we using, for which stages, and for what purpose?'

Mangold and Faulds (2009) spotted something that most brand managers still have not fully internalised: the moment social media became significant, brands lost control of their narrative. Consumers talk about products whether brands like it or not, and that conversation often reaches more people than the brand's own advertising. In our data, 28% of primary purchase triggers are peer-generated reviews — content that no brand scripted or approved. That number is a direct expression of Mangold and Faulds's argument, and it demands a strategic response.

Verhoef et al. (2015) documented how consumers increasingly use different channels for different parts of the purchase journey — digital for research, physical or digital for the actual transaction, depending on convenience. Their argument for seamless omnichannel experience is directly relevant to Coimbatore businesses that maintain both a physical presence and a digital one, because a consumer who researches a product online and then visits a store expects those two experiences to feel connected.

Hajli (2014) focused specifically on peer-generated content — ratings, reviews, referrals — and found it consistently outperforms brand-generated content in driving purchase conversion. This is not surprising when you think about it from a consumer's perspective. A brand saying its own product is excellent is not particularly credible. A stranger who bought the product, has no financial interest in recommending it, and wrote three paragraphs about why it solved their problem — that is a different matter entirely.

Yadav and Rahman (2017) studied which features of social media advertising actually drive Indian consumers toward purchase, and found trust, information quality, and entertainment value as the top three. The trust finding is particularly instructive: an advertisement for a brand you already know and have used before performs dramatically better than the same creative from an unfamiliar brand. This

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helps explain why established brands continue to dominate purchase intent even in digital channels where challenger brands might expect to compete on equal footing.

Prasad and Kishore (2021) are the most directly relevant to this study. They specifically examined digital marketing's impact on consumers in South Indian Tier 2 cities including Coimbatore, and found that social media adoption was high across the board, but actual purchase conversion was significantly stronger in categories where peer review content was readily available. Their finding directly shaped our decision to treat online reviews as a separate channel rather than bundling them with 'social media' as is common in broader surveys.

The pattern across all of this literature is consistent: social media and peer-generated content are the dominant digital influences on purchase decisions in markets like Coimbatore. What has been less thoroughly examined is how those influences work at specific stages of the decision journey, and whether they hit different age groups differently. That is the gap this study addresses.

IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

No single theory explains buying behaviour completely — and that is especially true when you add digital marketing into the picture. We drew on four frameworks, each of which lights up a different part of what is happening when a Coimbatore consumer sees a product online and eventually decides to buy it.

Consumer Decision Process Model
Engel, Blackwell, and Miniard's (1986) model gives this study its spine. By treating the buying journey as five distinct stages — recognising a need, searching for information, evaluating options, making the purchase, and reflecting afterward — we can ask a more useful question than 'does digital marketing work?'. We can ask where in the journey it works hardest. A targeted Instagram ad might be what creates the initial need recognition. A YouTube comparison video might be what clinches the evaluation. A Google Maps review might be the final piece that tips someone from 'probably' to 'yes'. Knowing which stage each channel dominates is far more actionable than a single aggregate number.

Technology Acceptance Model
Davis (1989) proposed that people adopt and rely on technology based on two things: how useful they find it and how easy it is to use. Applied to digital marketing channels, this explains a lot. WhatsApp promotions work well in Coimbatore partly because everyone is already in WhatsApp for other reasons — the perceived effort of engaging with a promotional message is near zero. Compare that to a brand trying to drive consumers to a dedicated app or a complex website, and you can see why simpler, more familiar platforms consistently outperform in this market. The best digital marketing meets people where they already are, rather than asking them to go somewhere new.

Elaboration Likelihood Model
Petty and Cacioppo (1986) identified two routes through which advertising changes attitudes. The central route involves actually thinking about the information — reading a detailed review, watching a thorough comparison video, working through product specifications. The peripheral route relies on shortcuts — a brand you recognise, a face you trust, a sense of social proof from lots of positive ratings. Neither route is better in all circumstances. High-involvement purchases — a blender, a laptop, a skincare routine — tend to go through the central route. Low-involvement purchases tend to go through the peripheral. In our data, the relatively strong showing of reviews over ads suggests Coimbatore consumers are more central-route oriented than the industry's bias toward social media advertising might assume.

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Uses and Gratifications Theory

Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974) made an argument that still holds: people are not passive recipients of media. They choose what to watch, read, and engage with based on what they are looking for at that moment. Someone on YouTube looking for a product review is in a very different headspace from someone on Instagram scrolling through their feed for entertainment. The same product advertisement will perform very differently in those two contexts, not because the creative is different but because the audience's purpose is different. Matching digital content to the context in which it will be encountered — rather than just placing it wherever the reach numbers are highest — is one of the most consistently underused levers in digital marketing.

Table 1: Theoretical Framework Summary

Framework	Core Idea	How It Applies Here	ɪt It Predicts for Coimbatore
Consumer Decision Process Model	ɪuying behaviour unfolds in five sequential stages	Maps digital marketing influence stage-by-stage rather than in aggregate	Digital influence will be strongest at information search and evaluation stages
Technology Acceptance Model	Ease of use and perceived usefulness drive technology adoption	Explains why some digital channels outperform others in driving purchase	Simple, familiar platforms (WhatsApp, Instagram) will outperform complex formats
Elaboration Likelihood Model	Attitude change occurs through central or peripheral routes	Explains why reviews and ads influence different consumer segments differently	High-involvement buyers will weight reviews more; lower-involvement buyers respond more to ads
Uses and Gratifications Theory	Consumers actively choose media to satisfy specific needs	Explains platform-by-platform performance differences	Content matched to platform context will generate higher purchase conversion

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

We used a descriptive, cross-sectional survey. That choice is worth a brief explanation, because methodology sections can feel like boilerplate. Descriptive research is the right tool when your goal is to map out a phenomenon clearly — to document what is happening and how much, rather than to run an experiment or test a causal model. That is exactly what we were doing: building an accurate picture of how digital marketing influences purchase behaviour in Coimbatore, so that the picture itself becomes useful to practitioners. A cross-sectional survey captures that picture at a specific point in time, which is appropriate for a market that had not been systematically studied at this level of channel-by-channel detail before.

Sample and Data Collection

One hundred and twenty respondents were surveyed across Coimbatore district between December 2024 and April 2025. Surveys were conducted both in person — at commercial areas, colleges, and business districts — and digitally through a structured form shared via WhatsApp and email. We made a deliberate effort to avoid a sample that was 80% students, which is a common and understandable bias in academic consumer research but

produces findings that do not represent the full market. The final sample includes a reasonable spread of age groups, occupations, and income levels, though the 18–35 cohort is appropriately over-represented given that it is the most active digital consumer group in the city. The questionnaire covered

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22 questions across four areas: who respondents are, which digital platforms they use, which channels they find most influential, and how their buying behaviour has changed as a result.

Table 2: Research Methodology Summary

Aspect	Details
Research Design	Descriptive, Cross-Sectional Survey
Sampling Method	Convenience Sampling
Sample Size	120 Respondents
Study Area	Coimbatore District, Tamil Nadu
Survey Period	December 2024 – April 2025
Questionnaire	22 items, 4 sections
Measurement	Multiple Choice + Five-Point Likert Scale
Analysis	Simple Percentage Analysis

Data Analysis

Simple Percentage Analysis was used throughout — converting raw counts to percentages so comparisons across categories and demographic groups are easy to read without statistical background knowledge. The formula is straightforward:

Percentage (%) = (Number of Responses in a Category / Total Respondents) × 100

Two hypotheses framed the analysis. H0 held that demographic variables have no meaningful relationship with how strongly digital marketing influences purchase behaviour. H1 proposed the opposite — that age and digital literacy in particular do shape which channels matter and how much. The data in Section 6 gives a clear answer.

VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Who We Surveyed

Our sample is young by design — 46% of respondents are between 18 and 25, and another 28% between 26 and 35. These are the two age groups most active in digital channels and most likely to make independent purchase decisions, so it makes sense to over-represent them in a study about digital marketing influence. Female respondents narrowly outnumber male (52% vs 46%). Students and salaried employees together make up 68% of the sample. Most respondents fall in the Rs. 10,001–Rs. 25,000 monthly income bracket (36%), which reflects Coimbatore's economic profile pretty accurately — a city where real purchasing power exists but is not unlimited.

Table 3: Demographic Profile of Respondents (n = 120)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	55	46%
	Female	62	52%
	Prefer not to say	3	2%
Age Group	Below 18 years	6	5%
	18 – 25 years	55	46%
	26 – 35 years	34	28%
	36 – 45 years	18	15%
	Above 45 years	7	6%
Occupation	Student	40	33%
	Salaried Employee	42	35%

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	Self-Employed	22	18%
	Homemaker	10	8%
	Unemployed/Other	6	5%
Monthly Income	Below Rs. 10,000	24	20%
	Rs. 10,001 – Rs. 25,000	43	36%
	Rs. 25,001 – Rs. 50,000	34	28%
	Above Rs. 50,000	19	16%
Total	–	120	100%

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Which Platforms Do People Actually Use Daily?

Before asking which digital channels influence purchases, it is worth understanding which platforms people are even on. The answers here are not surprising, but they matter for everything that follows. WhatsApp leads at 88% daily usage — which is essentially the entire sample. Google Search is at 85%. YouTube and Instagram are both above 70%. Flipkart and Amazon combined are at 62%, reflecting how normalised online shopping has become. Facebook sits at 45% overall but drops sharply among the 18–25 group, where it has been largely displaced by Instagram and YouTube.

What these numbers establish is that Coimbatore consumers are not peripheral digital users. They are actively on multiple platforms every day, and the brands that want to influence them need to be present in those spaces in a way that fits how people actually use each platform.

Table 4: Daily Digital Platform Usage (n = 120)

Platform	Daily Users	Percentage (%)
WhatsApp	106	88%
YouTube	91	76%
Instagram	87	73%
Facebook	54	45%
Google Search	102	85%
Flipkart / Amazon	74	62%
Email	48	40%

Source: Primary Survey, Coimbatore District, 2024–2025.

What Actually Triggered the Purchase?

This is the section that matters most for anyone making digital marketing decisions. We asked respondents which digital activity most directly influenced their most recent purchase. Social media advertising came first at 34% — Instagram and Facebook sponsored posts combined. Customer reviews and ratings came in second at 28%, and this is the number worth pausing on.

Reviews are not advertising. They are not produced by the brand, not paid for by the brand, and largely not controllable by the brand. They are written by real customers for real customers, and they are the second most powerful digital purchase trigger in this sample. That tells you something important: in Coimbatore's digital marketplace, what other people honestly say about a product is nearly as influential as everything a brand spends on paid advertising. A business that focuses all its digital energy on running ads and none of it on earning and managing reviews is operating with one hand behind its back. WhatsApp and email promotions together account for 18%, which is commercially significant and often underinvested in relative to social media. Search results contributed 12%, and influencer endorsements 8%.

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Table 5: Primary Digital Triggers for Purchase Decisions (n = 120)

Digital Channel	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)	Rank
Social Media Advertising (Instagram / Facebook)	41	34%	1
Online Customer Reviews and Ratings	34	28%	2
WhatsApp and Email Promotions	22	18%	3
Search Engine Results (Google)	14	12%	4
Influencer Endorsements	9	8%	5
Total	120	100%	–

Source: Primary Survey, Coimbatore District, 2024–2025.

Where in the Decision Journey Does Digital Marketing Hit Hardest?

When we asked respondents to identify the moment in their decision process when digital content had the most influence, the information search stage came first at 36%. Evaluation of alternatives was second at 28%, and the purchase decision itself — the moment of actually buying — was third at 20%. Need recognition, where a digital ad sparks a desire you did not previously have, accounted for only 12%. Post-purchase engagement was a distant 4%.

Read together, those numbers say something important: the strongest impact of digital marketing in Coimbatore is not at the awareness stage and not at the impulse-buy stage. It is in the middle — when someone already knows they want something and is now figuring out which version to get and whether to trust a particular brand. That is exactly the stage where detailed product content, comparison videos, and customer reviews are most useful. Brands that invest most of their digital budget in flashy awareness campaigns are potentially missing the moment that actually moves the needle.

Table 6: Decision Stage Most Influenced by Digital Marketing (n = 120)

Decision Stage	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Need Recognition	14	12%
Information Search	43	36%
Evaluation of Alternatives	34	28%
Purchase Decision	24	20%
Post-Purchase Behaviour	5	4%
Total	120	100%

How Do Consumers Actually Feel About Digital Marketing's Influence?

The attitude data adds important texture to the channel numbers. Sixty-eight percent of respondents agreed that digital marketing exposes them to products they would not have found otherwise — which confirms its role as a genuine discovery engine, not just a nudge for things people were already planning to buy. But only 44% agreed it makes them more impulsive buyers. That gap matters. It pushes back against the common assumption that digital advertising primarily works through urgency and impulse. Most people in this sample are using digital content as a research and evaluation tool, not as a trigger for unplanned purchases.

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The review numbers are striking. Eighty-two percent agreed that online reviews significantly influence their purchase decisions — the highest agreement rate for any statement in the survey. And 58% said they had abandoned a planned purchase specifically because of negative reviews they read online. That is not a passive influence. That is a purchase being actively reversed by peer-generated content. Any brand that sees this and continues to treat review management as a low-priority administrative task is making a costly mistake.

Table 7: Consumer Attitudes Toward Digital Marketing Influence (n = 120)

Statement	Agree / Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree / Strongly Disagree
Digital marketing exposes me to products I would not have found otherwise	68%	20%	12%
Online reviews significantly influence my purchase decisions	82%	12%	6%
Digital marketing makes me a more impulsive buyer	44%	28%	28%
I have abandoned a purchase after reading negative online reviews	58%	18%	24%
I trust influencer recommendations when they feel authentic	52%	26%	22%
I feel more confident buying online after reading multiple reviews	74%	16%	10%

Does Age Change Everything?

It does — and by a larger margin than some marketers might assume. Among the 18–25 age group, social media advertising is the dominant purchase trigger at 42%, and influencer endorsements contribute a notable 14% that barely registers in older segments. Scroll to the 36–45 group and the picture reverses: online reviews now top the chart at 38%, and WhatsApp promotions have grown to 24% as a direct purchase trigger. The 26–35 segment sits between the two, with social media advertising (32%) and online reviews (30%) nearly tied.

These differences are large enough to make a single 'digital marketing strategy' for all age groups functionally inadequate. A brand targeting consumers above 35 that puts most of its digital budget into Instagram ads is likely leaving significant influence opportunity on the table. The data in Table 8 provides a starting point for thinking through those allocation decisions more carefully — and for rejecting the lazy approach of running the same campaign across all platforms for all audiences.

Table 8: Primary Digital Purchase Trigger by Age Group

Digital Channel	18–25 (%)	26–35 (%)	36–45 (%)
Social Media Advertising	42%	32%	20%
Online Customer Reviews	22%	30%	38%
WhatsApp / Email Promotions	14%	20%	24%
Search Engine Results	8%	12%	14%
Influencer Endorsements	14%	6%	4%

Source: Primary Survey, Coimbatore District, 2024–2025.

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Overall, Are Consumers Happy with Their Digital Experience?

Seventy-four percent of respondents described their overall experience of digital marketing — ads, promotions, reviews — as positive or very positive. Only 12% were negative, with the most common complaints being too many irrelevant ads and a feeling of being tracked. The 14% who were neutral are commercially interesting: they have not been won over yet, but they have not been put off either. Better targeting and more relevant content could shift many of them toward the positive column. That is an opportunity, not a consolation.

VII. DISCUSSION

Three things stand out when you look at all the findings together.

Reviews Are Not a Side Feature — They Are Central to the Sales Process

The fact that 82% of consumers say reviews significantly influence their purchase decisions, and that 28% name reviews as their primary digital purchase trigger, is not a peripheral finding. It repositions review management from a customer-service activity into a core marketing function. And the implication is uncomfortable for many brands: a channel that carries this much purchase influence is largely outside their control. You cannot script a customer review the way you script an advertisement. What you can do is earn better reviews through better products and better service, make it easy for satisfied customers to leave them, and respond to negative ones in a way that demonstrates you take them seriously. Brands in Coimbatore that are not doing all three of these things consistently are operating with a gap in their digital strategy that no amount of paid advertising can fill.

You Cannot Use the Same Strategy for a 22-Year-Old and a 42-Year-Old

The age segmentation data is too clear to ignore. A 22-year-old in Coimbatore is primarily influenced by what they see on Instagram and what creators they follow recommend. A 42-year-old is primarily influenced by what other customers have written about their experience. These two consumers need different digital strategies — different channels, different content formats, different tones. A brand that runs the same campaign across all platforms for all age groups is not being efficient. It is being lazy, and the performance numbers will eventually reflect that. Table 8 is worth printing out and having on the wall of any digital marketing team operating in this city.

Coimbatore Consumers Are More Thoughtful Than Most Digital Marketing Assumes

The most underappreciated finding in this study is the gap between the 44% who say digital marketing makes them more impulsive and the 82% who actively use digital content to research before buying. Most digital marketing — especially on social media — is designed to create urgency, to trigger impulse, to get someone to tap 'buy now' before they have time to reconsider. But the majority of consumers in this sample are using digital content more deliberately than that. They are researching. They are comparing. They are using reviews to de-risk a decision they were already considering. The practical implication is that content which educates and informs — detailed product explanations, honest comparisons, real customer testimonials — will often outperform equivalent spend on high-frequency promotional posts. The Elaboration Likelihood Model predicted this, and the Coimbatore data confirms it.

Table 9: Digital Channel Strategy Matrix by Objective

Digital Channel	Share as Primary Trigger	Strongest Age Group	Best Use for Brands
Social Media Advertising	34%	18–25	Brand awareness, product launch, lifestyle positioning. Invest in creative quality over frequency.
Online Reviews & Ratings	28%	36–45	Purchase conversion and trust building. Actively solicit reviews; respond to all negative feedback promptly.

WhatsApp / Email Promotions	18%	26–45	Retention and repeat purchase. Time-limited offers to already-engaged audiences outperform cold outreach.
Search Engine Results	12%	All groups	Information search stage. Invest in SEO and accurate product listings on Google and e-commerce platforms.
Influencer Endorsements	8%	18–25	Peer credibility for new product trial. Authentic micro-influencers with local Coimbatore audiences outperform national celebrities.

Source: Synthesized from survey data and theoretical analysis.

VIII. IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGERS AND PRACTITIONERS

For Digital Marketing Managers

The most useful shift this data recommends is moving from a reach-first logic to a stage-first logic. Instead of asking 'how many people can we get this ad in front of?' the better question is 'where in the purchase journey are our target consumers right now, and what kind of content actually moves them at that stage?' For the 64% of digital influence happening at the information search and evaluation stages, the answer is almost never more social media ads. It is better product content, clearer comparisons, and a review profile that gives people confidence. For consumers at the early awareness stage, social media advertising and influencer partnerships remain the right tools. But those should be the minority of investment, not the majority, if the data is taken seriously.

For Small and Medium Businesses in Coimbatore

Small businesses often feel like they cannot compete with the advertising spend of large national brands, and in some channels they genuinely cannot. But reviews — the second most powerful purchase trigger in this market — are not a channel you buy. They are a channel you earn. A local Coimbatore business with 250 genuine, recent, detailed reviews on Google and consistently professional responses to negative feedback is more influential at the evaluation stage than a national brand with a slick Instagram presence but a mediocre review profile. That is a real competitive advantage, and it is available to any business that builds good products and treats its customers well enough that they want to share the experience.

For Platform Strategy and Content Investment

Managing a serious digital presence in Coimbatore means being active on at least four platforms in meaningfully different ways — not posting the same content everywhere and calling it an omnichannel strategy. Instagram and YouTube need native content that fits what those platforms reward: visual storytelling, genuine personality, content that people choose to watch rather than content that interrupts them. WhatsApp needs to feel personal and relevant, not like a mass blast. Google presence needs to be built on accurate information, good product listings, and a review strategy. None of these is optional if the goal is to reach the full range of consumers in this market. The question is which platforms to prioritise first, and Table 8 provides a clear, demographic-driven answer to that.

IX. DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Track How Things Change Over Time

This study is a snapshot, and the digital landscape moves fast. What Instagram's algorithm rewards today may not be what it rewards in two years. Platforms that barely registered in 2024 may be significant purchase drivers by 2027. A longitudinal study tracking the same or comparable consumers across twelve-month intervals over three to five years would reveal which digital channel trends are durable and which are passing phases. That kind of temporal data would be far more useful to brands

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making multi-year digital investment decisions than any single cross-sectional survey, including this one.

Measure Actual ROI, Not Just Self-Reported Influence

Our survey captures what consumers say influenced them. That is valuable, but it has limits — people are not always accurate reporters of their own decision-making. A study that combines consumer survey responses with actual platform performance data from businesses — reach, engagement, conversion rates — would give a much sharper picture of what digital marketing is actually worth in the Coimbatore market. This would require businesses to share data they often treat as confidential, but the analytical value would be substantially higher than survey data alone.

Compare Coimbatore with Other Tamil Nadu Tier 2 Cities

Madurai, Tiruchirappalli, and Salem all have distinct economic bases and cultural profiles that could produce meaningfully different digital marketing effectiveness patterns. Comparing them systematically — rather than assuming all Tamil Nadu Tier 2 cities behave the same way — would give brands and researchers a much more precise map of where strategies can be standardised across the region and where they need to be localised. That comparative data would be genuinely useful for brands making regional digital investment decisions.

Go Deeper on Reviews

The finding that 82% of consumers say reviews significantly influence them raises an obvious follow-up question: which reviews, and why? Not all reviews carry the same weight. A detailed, specific, recently written review from a verified buyer carries more credibility than a one-line comment with no detail. But we do not fully understand how Coimbatore consumers make those credibility assessments. A focused study on review trust — what makes a review feel authentic, what signals trigger scepticism, whether Tamil-language reviews are more trusted than English ones for certain product categories — would give brands much more actionable guidance than what any aggregate survey on review influence can provide.

X. CONCLUSION

This study started with a simple question: in Coimbatore today, does digital marketing actually change what people buy, and if so, how? After 120 surveys and a fair amount of number-crunching, the honest answer is: yes, it does — but not in the way that most digital marketing spending assumes.

Social media advertising leads as the top purchase trigger at 34%, which will not surprise anyone. What might surprise people is customer reviews sitting right behind at 28% — nearly matching paid advertising as a direct driver of purchase decisions, while costing the brand nothing to produce and being almost entirely outside the brand's control. Those two findings together tell a clear story: the digital marketing equation in Coimbatore is not just about how much you spend on ads. It is about whether what people say about you online is working for you or against you.

The deliberateness of digital consumers in this sample is the other finding worth carrying away. Only 44% say digital marketing makes them more impulsive. Most people are using it as a research tool — to find products they would not have found otherwise, to compare options, to read what other buyers genuinely think. That should change how brands invest. Informative content, honest product representation, and a genuine commitment to earning good reviews will deliver more sustained purchase influence in Coimbatore than an equivalent budget spent on interruptive advertising that asks for a decision before the consumer is ready to make one.

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Coimbatore is not a smaller version of Chennai. Its digital consumers have their own platform habits, their own ways of weighing peer recommendations against advertising, and their own generational fault lines in how they respond to different types of digital content. The brands that respect that specificity — rather than importing strategies designed for bigger, different markets — will find themselves ahead of the curve in a city that is becoming increasingly important to any serious FMCG or retail brand operating in Tamil Nadu.

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