

# Psychological Drivers of Women's Buying Behavior in Social Media Environments

Ritesh Tiwari<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Anuj Sharma<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar Arni School of Management

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Arni School of Management

## Abstract:

This article examines psychological drivers that shape women's buying behaviour in social media environments. Drawing on established theories from social psychology and consumer behaviour (Theory of Planned Behavior; Elaboration Likelihood Model; Social Identity Theory; Social Comparison Theory), we develop a multi-mediator model where social influence, trust in influencers/peers, social presence, emotional gratification (enjoyment, hedonic motivation), Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), and self-congruity jointly influence purchase intentions and actual purchase behaviour. We propose that these effects are mediated by perceived usefulness and perceived trust, and moderated by product involvement and platform type (visual vs. text-based). The paper outlines a rigorous empirical strategy (survey with validated scales, structural equation modelling, bootstrapped mediation, multi-group tests) to test hypotheses, discusses expected findings and managerial implications, and identifies limitations and future research avenues. The contribution is twofold: (1) integrating multiple psychological constructs into a coherent model focused specifically on women in social media contexts; (2) offering actionable insight for marketers and platform designers to ethically harness social psychological drivers without exploiting vulnerabilities.

**Keywords:** Women consumers; social media commerce; psychological drivers; FOMO; influencer trust; social presence; purchase intention; SEM

## 1. Introduction

Social media platforms have become central marketplaces where product discovery, endorsement, and purchase decision processes interweave with social interaction. Women constitute a substantial and heterogeneous consumer segment on social platforms — they are often both highly active users and primary household purchasers in many markets. Understanding *why* and *how* women make purchase decisions on social media therefore has direct theoretical and managerial importance. Psychological drivers — such as social influence, trust, emotional gratification, identity congruence, and social comparison tendencies — operate differently in mediated, socially rich environments than in traditional retail contexts. Platform affordances (e.g., visual feeds, live streaming, ephemeral stories) amplify social cues and emotional triggers, potentially intensifying effects such as FOMO or peer endorsement. This study asks: Which psychological constructs most strongly predict women's buying intentions and behaviour on social media, how do they operate (paths/mediators), and under what conditions (moderators)? To answer these questions, this paper synthesizes relevant theory, proposes a testable model with clear hypotheses, and outlines an empirical strategy suitable for submission to a Scopus-indexed journal. The model is intended to be adaptable across regions; researchers can calibrate sampling and measurement to local contexts.

## 2. Literature review and theoretical foundations

This section provides a concise synthesis of literatures that inform the model.

### 2.1 Core theoretical anchors

- **Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)** — Intentions predict behavior; attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control shape intentions. TPB is useful to structure how social norms (peer/influencer endorsement) and perceived control (ease of purchasing on platform) influence women's purchase intentions. (Ajzen, 1991)
- **Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)**  
— Persuasion occurs via central (message quality) or peripheral (source cues) routes. Social media often activates peripheral cues (influencer credibility, likes), affecting low-involvement purchases. (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986)
- **Social Identity Theory & Self- Congruity** — Consumers prefer products congruent with their salient social identity; social media reinforces identity cues and group membership relevant to female consumer segments. (Tajfel & Turner tradition)
- **Social Comparison Theory** — Upward/downward comparisons on social feeds can drive aspirational purchases or discouragement. (Festinger, 1954)

### 2.2 Key psychological constructs in social commerce

- **Social Influence / Subjective Norms:** Endorsements by peers and influencers produce normative pressure and informational cues; for women, peer recommendations often carry high weight in categories like fashion, beauty, childcare.
- **Influencer/Source Trust and Credibility:** Trust in the recommending source mediates the route from endorsement to purchase. Authenticity is critical; perceived sponsorship can reduce effectiveness.
- **Social Presence:** The feeling that others are “co-present” (live streams, comments) heightens emotional arousal and perceived immediacy—boosting impulsive buying.
- **Emotional Gratification (Perceived Enjoyment/Hedonic Motivation):** Enjoyment derived from browsing and interacting can convert engagement into purchases especially in low-involvement contexts.
- **FOMO (Fear of Missing Out):** The apprehension of missing a desirable event or deal motivates quicker, sometimes impulsive, purchase decisions—amplified by limited-time stories and flash sales. (Przybylski et al., 2013)
- **Self-Congruity / Identity Fit:** Products that reflect a woman's self-image or aspirational identity increase willingness to buy.
- **Perceived Usefulness/Perceived Ease (PU/PE):** Borrowed from Technology Acceptance perspectives — if social commerce features are useful and easy, conversion is more likely.

### 2.3 Mechanisms and gaps

Prior research often isolates single drivers (e.g., influencer trust) while not modelling concurrent psychological processes and boundary conditions. This paper bridges that gap by proposing a model where social cues, emotions, and identity constructs act simultaneously, with mediators (trust, perceived usefulness) and moderators (product involvement, platform type)

## 3. Theoretical framework and hypotheses

Figure (proposed): **Psychological Drivers**

→ (mediators: **Trust, Perceived Usefulness**) → **Purchase Intention** → **Purchase Behaviour**;  
moderators: Product Involvement, Platform Type; mediators also subject to serial mediation with FOMO and Social Presence.

**H1 (Social Influence).** Social influence (peer recommendations and normative cues) has a positive effect on women's purchase intention on social media. **H2 (Influencer/Peer Trust).** Trust in the

source (influencer/peer) mediates the relationship between social influence and purchase intention.

**H3 (Social Presence → FOMO).** Higher perceived social presence on a platform increases FOMO, which in turn increases impulsive purchase intention. **H4 (Emotional Gratification).** Perceived enjoyment positively influences purchase intention; this effect is stronger for hedonic product categories.

**H5 (Self-Congruity).** Self-congruity moderates the effect of social influence on purchase intention: when self-congruity is high, the effect is stronger. **H6 (Perceived Usefulness).** Perceived usefulness of social commerce features (e.g., in-app checkout, product tags) mediates the relationship between platform affordances and purchase behaviour. **H7 (Moderation by Product Involvement).** Product involvement moderates the influence of peripheral cues (e.g., likes, number of comments): for low-involvement products, peripheral cues have stronger effects; for high-involvement products, central cues (detailed reviews) matter more.

### 3. Research design and methodology

#### 3.1 Research approach

A cross-sectional survey design with structural equation modelling (SEM) to test direct, indirect (mediated), and moderated effects. For richer inference, a mixed-method variant could incorporate experimental manipulations (e.g., influencer vs. peer endorsement; scarcity cue vs. control) or longitudinal tracking of actual purchases.

#### 3.2 Sample and sampling

- **Target population:** Women aged 18–55 who have used social media for product discovery in the past 6 months.
- **Sampling frame:** Online panel or purposive convenience sampling augmented with quota controls for age, urban/rural, and socioeconomic status.
- **Sample size:** For SEM, a minimum of 200–400 is recommended depending on model complexity; a pragmatic target of  $N = 400$  provides robust power for multi-group tests and bootstrapped mediation. (Researchers may calculate sample size via power analysis for SEM using anticipated effect sizes.)

#### 3.3 Measures (recommended scales and items)

All items on 5- or 7-point Likert scales. Use validated scales when available and adapt language for social media context.

- **Purchase Intention:** 3–4 items adapted from standard consumer behaviour scales.
- **Actual Purchase Behaviour:** Self-reported recent purchases via social media (binary/count + recency). If possible, ask for frequency in last 3 months.
- **Social Influence / Subjective Norms:** Items measuring perceived peer pressure and endorsement impact.
- **Influencer/Peer Trust:** Adapt McKnight et al. style trust items to influencer context (competence, integrity, benevolence).
- **Social Presence:** Items measuring perceived “real-time” co-presence and conversational immediacy.
- **FOMO:** Use Przybylski et al. (2013) FOMO scale adapted to shopping context.
- **Perceived Enjoyment / Hedonic**

**Motivation:** Standard scales adapted from Venkatesh et al. (UTAUT2 hedonic items).

- **Self-Congruity:** Measures of perceived fit between product image and self-image.
- **Perceived Usefulness / Ease:** TAM items adapted to social commerce features.
- **Control variables:** Age, education, income, prior online shopping experience, platform usage intensity, product category.

### 3.4 Data collection procedure

Online questionnaire with informed consent and attention checks. Pretest items on a small pilot (n=30–50) to ensure clarity. Ethical considerations: privacy and avoidance of targeting sensitive groups.

### 3.5 Data analysis strategy

1. **Descriptive statistics** and reliability (Cronbach's alpha/omega).
2. **Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)** (if scale adaptation), followed by **Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)** for measurement model fit.
3. **SEM** to test hypothesized structural paths. Report fit indices (CFI, TLI, RMSEA, SRMR).
4. **Bootstrapped mediation tests** (e.g., 5,000 samples) for indirect effects.
5. **Multi-group analysis** or interaction terms to test moderators (product involvement, platform type).
6. **Robustness checks:** Common method bias (Harman's single factor; marker variables), alternative model specification, and sensitivity analyses by demographic segments.

## 4. Expected (hypothetical) results and interpretation

Because this is a proposed empirical study, concrete data are not yet available. However, based on prior literature and theory we would expect:

- Social influence and influencer trust to show strong positive associations with purchase intention, especially for low-involvement and hedonic products.
- Social presence to increase FOMO, which would mediate impulsive purchase intentions.
- Perceived enjoyment would contribute both directly to intention and indirectly by increasing time spent and exposure to promotional cues.
- Self-congruity would strengthen the influence of endorsements for identity-relevant products (fashion, beauty), reducing the reliance on peripheral cues.
- Perceived usefulness (in-app checkout, saved cards) would directly increase conversion from intention to actual purchase.

Implications: Platforms and marketers gain most by balancing authenticity (to maintain trust) with features that reduce friction (to convert intentions). Excessive scarcity tactics risk short-term gains but long-term trust erosion.

## 5. Managerial implications

1. **Promote authentic micro-influencers** whose follower demographics align with target female segments; authenticity preserves trust.
2. **Design social presence features** (live Q&A, real-time comments) but combine them with transparent information (reviews, return policies) to avoid misleading urgency.
3. **Segment marketing by involvement:** Use influencer and peripheral cues for low-involvement, hedonic goods; invest in detailed information and peer reviews for high-involvement purchases.
4. **Ethical use of scarcity/FOMO:** Apply limited-time promotions responsibly and clearly state terms to avoid manipulative outcomes.
5. **Reduce checkout friction** (one-click purchase, saved addresses) to increase conversion once intention exists.

## 6. Limitations and future research

- **Cross-sectional design** limits causal claims; longitudinal or experimental designs would strengthen causal inference.
- **Self-reported purchase behaviour** can suffer from recall bias; integrating platform logs would improve validity.
- **Cultural variation:** Psychological drivers vary by culture; replication across countries is recommended.

- **Platform differences** (e.g., Instagram vs. WhatsApp) require tailored study; future work should test platform affordance interactions.

## 7. Conclusion

This paper proposes a comprehensive, theory-driven model of psychological drivers shaping women's buying behaviour in social media environments. By integrating social influence, trust, social presence, FOMO, enjoyment, and self-congruity — and by modeling mediation and moderation processes — researchers and practitioners can better predict and ethically influence purchasing outcomes. The outlined empirical strategy provides a practical roadmap for rigorous testing and meaningful managerial insights.

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