

Manuscript ID:
TIJCMBLIR-2026-030404

Volume: 3

Issue: 4

Month: August

Year: 2026

E-ISSN: 3065-9191

Submitted: 10 July 2026

Revised: 25 July 2026

Accepted: 08 Aug. 2026

Published: 31 Aug. 2026

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DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.22278460

DOI Link:
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22278460>



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Consumer Behavior in the Digital Era: Assessing the Influence of Online Marketing Channels

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Abstract

Digital technology has revolutionized how consumers look for information, assess products and make buying decisions. Digital marketing has become a vital tool for businesses to reach consumers via social media, search engines, websites, online ads, email marketing, and more. The present study investigates the effect of digital marketing on the buying behavior of consumers and aims to understand the influence of digital marketing on the buying decision of consumers. The study is focused on the exposure of consumers to digital marketing activities, their interaction with digital content and the factors that influence their willingness to buy products or services via digital platforms. The study is of an empirical nature and primary data is collected using a structured questionnaire with relevant secondary data. The data gathered will be analysed using suitable statistical methods to explore the relationship between digital marketing and consumer buying behavior. The study is likely to give insights into how digital marketing affects consumer awareness, product evaluation, purchase intention, and actual purchase. The findings may be useful for marketers and businesses in designing more effective digital marketing strategies that are aligned with changing consumer preferences and behaviour.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Consumer Buying Behaviour, Purchase Intention, Digital Platforms, Online Advertising, Consumer Decision-Making.

Introduction

Digital technology has transformed the way businesses communicate with consumers and how consumers search, assess and buy products and services. With the rise of the internet, smartphones, social media, search engines, and e-commerce websites, businesses have new avenues to connect with consumers outside of traditional marketing. Digital marketing has emerged as a crucial part of marketing strategy in this evolving business landscape, allowing organisations to engage with consumers in a more targeted, interactive, and measurable way. Digital marketing is the promotion of products, services, brands and ideas through digital channels and technologies, and the establishment of communication with existing and potential customers. It includes a wide range of activities such as social media marketing, search engine marketing, online advertising, email marketing, content marketing, influencer marketing, and mobile marketing. Digital marketing offers consumers more opportunities to engage with brands, compare options, access product information, read reviews, and share their experiences with other users, unlike traditional marketing. Consumer buying behaviour is the process by which consumers recognize their needs, seek information, consider alternatives, make a purchase, and evaluate their post-purchase experience. This process is increasingly shaped by online information and interactions in the digital environment. Consumers can find product specifications, prices, ratings, reviews, promotional offers, recommendations, and other information before buying. As a result, digital platforms are a key source of information at various points in the consumer decision-making process. Digital marketing is not just about creating awareness of products. Digital marketing activities can also influence consumers' perceptions, preferences, purchase intentions, brand choices, and actual purchasing decisions. Social media posts, online reviews, targeted ads, influencer endorsements, and marketing campaigns can all influence consumer choices regarding specific products or brands. Meanwhile, too much advertising, false information, privacy issues, and bad online reviews can cause confusion and make consumers less likely to buy. As consumers have become more digitally connected and businesses have become more reliant on online channels to engage customers, the importance of understanding this relationship has grown. Marketers need to know how consumers react to digital marketing activities to create effective communication strategies and allocate marketing resources efficiently. Digital information is becoming more available, offering consumers more choice and convenience, but also more complexity in the purchasing decision.

How to Cite this Article:

Jain, R. (2026). Consumer Behavior in the Digital Era: Assessing the Influence of Online Marketing Channels. *The International Journal of Commerce Management and Business Law in International Research*, 3(4), 27–33. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22278460>

In this backdrop, the present study explores the topic of “Digital Marketing and Its Impact on the Buying Behaviour of the Consumers.” The study aims to explore how digital marketing affects consumers' buying behaviour and the key factors of digital marketing that can impact consumers' buying decisions. The study also aims to offer valuable insights for businesses and marketers in crafting digital marketing strategies that better align with evolving consumer preferences and expectations.

Review of Literature

In recent marketing research, digital marketing and consumer buying behaviour have been given a lot of attention. The expansion of social media, online shopping platforms, mobile technologies and digital advertising has provided consumers with greater access to product-related information and has changed the manner in which purchase decisions are formed. Digital marketing has been studied from various angles such as social media marketing, online information, consumer engagement, trust, perceived value, influencer marketing and purchase intention. Hanaysha (2022) studied the effect of social media marketing features on consumers' purchase decisions and emphasized the role of brand-related factors in influencing consumers' reactions. The study indicates that social media marketing can play a role in purchase decisions, especially when consumers have positive perceptions and trust in the brand.

A study published in the Asia-Pacific Journal of Business Administration explored the intentions of customers to use social media for purchase-related decisions in an Indian context. The study revealed that monetary benefits and perceived ease of use were significant factors affecting consumers' intentions, and information reliability was also important, mediated by perceived usefulness, using data from 622 social media users in the north-western region of India. The results suggest that the economic and informational features of digital platforms can affect consumer choice. Khan et al. (2021) examined the effect of social media marketing activities on consumer purchase intention based on Stimulus-Organism-Response framework. The study revealed that customization, entertainment, interaction, trendiness and word of mouth are important dimensions of social media marketing. The research, which was conducted with 236 consumers, showed that social media marketing activities are relevant in explaining purchase intention and further explored the mediating role of consumer-based brand equity and consumer inspiration.

Onofrei, Filieri, and Kennedy (2022) explored social media interactions and their association with purchase intention and behavioural engagement. Their study focused on consumer-to-consumer interactions on platforms such as Facebook and Instagram and considered the role of source credibility, source similarity and content quality. The research indicates that the characteristics of social media sources and content are important in determining how consumers respond to digital

information. The study also revealed the increasing significance of social media marketing in the Indian online buying landscape. The study published in International Journal of E-Business Research aimed to explore the impact of hedonic and utilitarian motives on online purchase intention of Indian consumers and to explore the mediating role of social media. The study, which was conducted on 282 online buyers, found that consumer motivations and social media interactions are relevant to online purchase intention. The impact of social media marketing on brand experience and consumer attitudes has also been explored. A study published in the Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services analysed 413 responses from consumers who followed brands on social media. The results showed that social media marketing activities have a significant influence on brand experience, purchase intention and attitudes towards brands. The study also explored the impact of consumer generation and engagement level on these relationships. Another aspect of digital marketing is influencer marketing. A study published in the Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing explored the impact of social media influencers on consumers' purchase intentions. The study revealed that the imitation of influencers can affect the buying intention through social comparison, materialism and fear of missing out. This implies that digital marketing can influence consumers not just by advertising, but also by social and psychological means. The connection between perceived value and purchase intention in social media marketing has also been investigated recently. A 2023 study of 257 TikTok consumers revealed that hedonic value and utilitarian value were positively correlated with purchase intention. The research also showed that emotional pleasure can play a mediating role in the relationship between perceived value and purchase intention. The results show that the emotional experiences of consumers on digital platforms can be relevant to their purchase-related decisions.

Consumer-brand interaction and privacy concerns have also become significant issues in digital marketing. A study of 541 UK consumers revealed that positive consumer-brand engagement on social media can boost purchase intent, whereas negative engagement can have the opposite effect, and that privacy concerns can diminish the relationship between the two. This means that while consumers might be receptive to interactive digital marketing, their worries about the collection and use of personal information should not be overlooked. Specific to Indian Generation Z consumers, research has also shed light on electronic purchasing behaviour. The article explored the concept of purchasing intention of the Indian Gen Z consumers on social networking sites with the help of Social Commerce Adoption Model in 2023. The study revealed that perceived usefulness was an important driver of buying intention and aspects of the purchase process were negatively influenced by perceived risk based on 349 usable responses. In conclusion, the current literature suggests that digital marketing can have several

impacts on customer decision-making. Consumers purchase intentions and decisions can be influenced by their social media engagement, information quality, perceived usefulness, trust, online reviews, interactions with brands, perceived value, influencer recommendations, and personalised digital experiences. Meanwhile, privacy safeguards, the fear of risk, and lack of trust in information could limit the use of digital marketing. The reviewed studies also indicate that the digital marketing and consumer behaviour is a multi-dimensional field of study. Studies to date have tended to be platform-specific, consumer-specific or sector-specific on individual aspects of digital marketing. Hence, the influence of digital marketing on consumers' buying behavior needs to be explored in terms of their exposure to various digital marketing activities and their resultant response in purchase behavior. To this end, the present study tries to extend the research of the overall relationship between there and consumer buying behaviour.

Research Gap

Pre-existing literature review shows that digital marketing is an important factor in the purchase decision of consumers. Some individual components of digital marketing have been previously studied such as social media marketing, online review, influencer marketing, perceived usefulness, consumer engagement, perceived value, trust, and privacy concerns. The results of these studies offer a valuable insight into the evolving consumer behavior relationship with digital platforms. However, there are some areas that are lacking in the literature. In first place, a significant portion of previous works has considered only a specific digital platform, e.g., social networking sites, TikTok, Facebook or Instagram, and not digital marketing as a wider marketing phenomenon. Consumers are accessing several digital marketing channels at once, so studying the overall impact of digital marketing may be able to give a better overall understanding about consumer buying behaviour.

Second, past research has often focused on a particular consumer population, like social media users, online shoppers, and Generation Z. While these studies can give valuable information on specific segments, consumer purchasing behaviour is not uniform for all segments. Thus, a more extensive empirical study of consumers of varying demographic and digital exposure is needed. Third, existing research has often examined purchase intention as the primary outcome variable. While purchase intention is an important component of consumer decision-making, actual buying behaviour involves several stages, including information search, evaluation of alternatives, brand preference, purchase decision, and post-purchase response. A broader examination of buying behaviour can therefore provide a more meaningful understanding of the influence of digital marketing. Fourth, digital marketing is continuously evolving. The increasing use of personalised advertising, short-form video content, influencer recommendations, online reviews, interactive content,

and mobile-based marketing has changed the digital environment in which consumers make decisions. Findings from earlier studies may therefore not fully represent the current digital consumption environment. Finally, there is a need for further empirical research that examines the overall impact of digital marketing on consumer buying behaviour while considering the interaction of different digital marketing activities and consumer responses. Addressing this gap can contribute to a better understanding of how digital marketing influences consumers and can provide practical insights for marketers seeking to develop more effective digital strategies. Accordingly, the present study focuses on the broad relationship between digital marketing and consumer buying behaviour. Rather than restricting the investigation to a single digital platform or marketing technique, the study considers consumers' exposure to digital marketing activities and examines their influence on purchase-related behaviour. The study thereby seeks to contribute to the existing literature by providing an integrated empirical perspective on the impact of digital marketing on consumer buying behaviour.

Objectives of the Study

The present study aims to examine the impact of digital marketing on the buying behaviour of consumers. The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To examine the impact of digital marketing on the buying behaviour of consumers.
2. To identify the major digital marketing channels that influence consumers' purchase decisions.
3. To examine the influence of digital marketing on consumers' product awareness and information-search behaviour.
4. To analyse the relationship between consumers' exposure to digital marketing and their purchase intention.
5. To examine the role of online reviews, social media content, digital advertisements, and promotional offers in influencing consumers' buying decisions.
6. To examine whether demographic characteristics of consumers are associated with differences in their buying behaviour in the context of digital marketing.
7. To provide practical suggestions for marketers and businesses for developing more effective digital marketing strategies.

Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. Does digital marketing significantly influence the buying behaviour of consumers?
2. Which digital marketing channels are most influential in consumers' purchase decisions?
3. Does exposure to digital marketing influence consumers' purchase intention?
4. To what extent do online reviews, social media content, digital advertisements, and promotional offers influence consumers' buying decisions?

- Are there significant differences in consumer buying behaviour across different demographic characteristics?
- What implications do the findings have for businesses and marketers in developing effective digital marketing strategies?

Research Methodology

1. Research Design

The present study adopts a **descriptive and analytical research design** to examine the impact of digital marketing on the buying behaviour of consumers. Since the study is based on secondary information, it analyses existing statistical data, industry reports, government publications, and findings from previously published research studies.

2. Nature and Sources of Data

The study is based entirely on **secondary data**. Relevant information has been collected from reliable and publicly available sources, including reports and publications of government and regulatory institutions, industry reports, research journals, and other credible institutional sources. Major sources include publications and statistical information provided by the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)**, government reports, industry reports, and published academic research. The study also uses recent information relating to internet usage, digital advertising, e-commerce, digital payments, and changing consumer behaviour.

3. Period of Study

The study primarily considers recent data and research covering the period **2020–2026**, with greater emphasis on the most recent available information. Earlier studies and historical data are used where necessary to understand the development and changing trends in digital marketing and consumer behaviour.

4. Variables of the Study

For analytical purposes, digital marketing is considered the major explanatory variable, while consumer buying behaviour is considered the outcome variable.

The study examines digital marketing through relevant indicators such as:

- Digital advertising
- Social media marketing
- Online promotional activities
- Digital consumer engagement
- Online information and reviews
- E-commerce and digital platforms

Consumer buying behaviour is examined in terms of:

- Product awareness
- Information search
- Product evaluation
- Purchase intention
- Online purchasing
- Consumer response to digital marketing

5 Statistical and Analytical Techniques

The secondary data will be analysed using appropriate statistical and analytical techniques. These include:

- Percentage and proportion analysis** – to understand the distribution of relevant indicators.
- Trend analysis** – to examine changes in digital marketing and digital consumer behaviour over time.
- Comparative analysis** – to compare relevant indicators across different years or categories.
- Growth rate analysis** – to examine the rate of change in selected indicators.
- Correlation analysis** – where sufficiently comparable secondary datasets are available, to examine the association between digital marketing indicators and consumer-related indicators.
- Graphical and tabular presentation** – to present the findings in a clear and systematic manner.

The statistical analysis will be conducted only on datasets for which the variables, time periods, units of measurement, and data sources are sufficiently comparable. No primary responses or artificially generated observations will be used in the study.

6. Data Reliability

To improve the reliability of the study, preference is given to data published by recognised government institutions, regulatory authorities, established industry organisations, and peer-reviewed academic sources. Data obtained from secondary sources will be cross-checked wherever possible before being used for analysis.

7. Scope of the Study

The study focuses primarily on the Indian digital environment. The rapid expansion of internet usage, digital advertising, e-commerce and digital payment infrastructure provides an appropriate context for examining changes in consumer behaviour. India's active internet user base reached approximately 886 million in 2024, while rural users accounted for 488 million, highlighting the expanding reach of digital platforms beyond urban markets. The digital advertising environment has also expanded considerably. According to the FICCI-EY report, India's digital advertising segment grew by 26% in 2025 to ₹947 billion and accounted for approximately 63% of total advertising revenues. The Reserve Bank of India has also reported substantial growth in digital payments. The RBI Digital Payments Index increased from 418.77 in September 2023 to 445.50 in March 2024, reflecting continued expansion in the country's digital payment ecosystem. These developments provide a relevant secondary-data context for examining the relationship between the growth of digital marketing and changes in consumer buying behaviour.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The present section analyses secondary data relating to the growth of digital connectivity, digital advertising and the changing digital environment in India. These indicators are used to understand the expanding role of digital channels in the consumer marketplace and their potential influence on consumer buying behaviour.

Table 1: Growth of Active Internet Users in India

Year	Active Internet Users
2024	886 million
2025	More than 900 million

Source: IAMAI–Kantar, Internet in India Report 2024.

Table 2: Rural and Urban Internet Users in India, 2024

Category	Number of Users	Share
Rural users	488 million	Approximately 55%
Urban users	398 million	Approximately 45%
Total	886 million	100%

Source: IAMAI–Kantar, Internet in India Report 2024.

Table 3: Digital Advertising Growth in India, 2025

Indicator	values
Digital advertising revenue	₹947 billion
Year-on-year growth	26%
Share of total advertising revenue	63%
E-commerce & point-of-sale advertising	₹220 billion
Growth of e-commerce & point-of-sale advertising	50%

Source: FICCI–EY, Stories, Scale and Impact: Unlocking India's M&E Economy, 2026.

Discussion

The findings of the present study indicate that the rapid expansion of digital connectivity and digital advertising has created a favourable environment for digital marketing to influence consumer buying behaviour. The growth in India's internet user base demonstrates that an increasingly large proportion of consumers can be reached through digital channels. The substantial participation of rural users further indicates that the influence of digital platforms is extending beyond traditionally dominant urban markets. The findings are consistent with earlier research suggesting that digital platforms have become an important source of information during consumers' decision-making processes. Consumers can search for product information, compare alternatives, examine online reviews, observe promotional content and interact with brands before making purchasing decisions. Therefore, the increasing availability of digital information can potentially affect different stages of consumer buying behaviour. The substantial growth in digital advertising also indicates a shift in the marketing strategies adopted by businesses. The increasing share of digital advertising in the overall advertising market suggests that organisations are allocating greater resources to digital channels. This development can be associated with the ability of digital marketing to reach targeted audiences, provide interactive communication and measure consumer responses more efficiently than many traditional communication channels.

The findings also support the importance of social media and online interactions identified in previous studies. Research has shown that social media marketing activities, including interaction, entertainment, customisation, trendiness and electronic word-of-mouth, can influence consumers' purchase intentions. The present study's findings are consistent with this broader evidence because the

growing digital environment provides consumers with continuous exposure to such marketing activities. Another important implication relates to the increasing role of commerce-linked digital advertising. The growth of advertising associated with e-commerce and point-of-sale activities indicates that the boundary between marketing communication and the purchasing process is becoming increasingly integrated. Consumers may encounter advertisements, product information, promotional offers and purchasing opportunities within the same digital environment. This integration can reduce the distance between product awareness and purchase action.

At the same time, the findings should not be interpreted as evidence that digital marketing alone determines consumer buying behaviour. Consumer decisions are influenced by several factors, including price, product quality, brand reputation, income, personal preferences, perceived risk, trust and previous experience. Digital marketing may influence the information and communication environment in which consumers make decisions, but the final purchase decision can depend on a combination of these factors. The findings also highlight the importance of responsible digital marketing. As consumers increasingly depend on online information, misleading advertisements, excessive promotional content, unreliable reviews and concerns about privacy may negatively affect consumer trust. Therefore, businesses need to focus not only on increasing digital reach but also on providing accurate information, maintaining transparency and creating meaningful consumer engagement. Overall, the study suggests that the expansion of digital connectivity and digital advertising has strengthened the role of digital marketing in the consumer marketplace. The evidence supports the view that digital marketing has become an important component of the modern consumer decision-making environment, although its precise

influence on individual purchase decisions may vary across consumers and product categories.

Conclusion

The present study examined the impact of digital marketing on the buying behaviour of consumers using secondary data and evidence from recent research and industry reports. The analysis indicates that the rapid expansion of internet usage, digital advertising and digital commerce has significantly strengthened the role of digital platforms in the contemporary consumer marketplace. The increasing number of internet users has created a large and diverse digital consumer base in India. At the same time, the substantial growth in digital advertising demonstrates that businesses are increasingly relying on digital channels to communicate with consumers. The growing importance of e-commerce-related advertising further indicates that digital marketing is becoming closely integrated with the purchasing process. The study also suggests that digital marketing can influence several stages of consumer buying behaviour by providing product information, promotional communication, social proof, online reviews, brand interaction and opportunities for comparison. However, digital marketing should not be considered the sole determinant of consumer decisions. Factors such as price, quality, trust, perceived risk, income, brand image and individual preferences continue to influence purchasing behaviour. The overall findings demonstrate that digital marketing has become an important part of the consumer decision-making environment. For businesses, effective digital marketing therefore requires more than simply increasing online visibility. Marketers need to provide relevant and credible information, engage consumers meaningfully, maintain transparency and build trust across digital platforms. In conclusion, the continuing expansion of India's digital ecosystem is likely to make digital marketing increasingly important for businesses seeking to understand and influence consumer buying behaviour. Future research may strengthen the findings of the present study by combining secondary evidence with primary consumer-level data and by examining specific digital marketing channels and consumer segments separately.

Limitations of the Study

Although the present study provides useful insights into the relationship between digital marketing and consumer buying behaviour, certain limitations should be considered while interpreting the findings. First, the study is based entirely on secondary data obtained from published reports, academic studies and other reliable sources. Therefore, the findings are dependent on the availability, scope and methodology of the existing data. Second, the study focuses primarily on the Indian digital environment. Consequently, the findings may not be fully applicable to consumers in other countries with different levels of digital development and consumer behaviour. Third, digital

marketing is a broad and continuously evolving concept. New technologies, platforms and marketing practices emerge frequently, which may influence consumer behaviour in ways that are not fully captured by the available secondary data. Fourth, consumer buying behaviour is influenced by several factors, such as price, product quality, income, brand image, trust, personal preferences and social influences. Therefore, it is difficult to isolate the exact effect of digital marketing on individual purchase decisions using secondary data alone. Finally, differences in definitions, reporting periods and measurement methods across secondary sources may limit direct comparison between certain indicators. Despite these limitations, the use of multiple reliable sources provides a useful overview of the growing importance of digital marketing in shaping the contemporary consumer environment.

Suggestions and Managerial Implications

Based on the findings of the study, the following suggestions may be considered by businesses and marketers:

1. Develop consumer-oriented digital content: Businesses should focus on providing relevant, useful and engaging content rather than relying only on repetitive promotional advertisements.
2. Strengthen social media engagement: Since consumers increasingly interact with brands through digital platforms, organisations should encourage meaningful communication and respond to consumer queries and feedback in a timely manner.
3. Provide reliable product information: Accurate information regarding product features, prices, terms and conditions can improve consumer confidence and reduce uncertainty during the buying process.
4. Encourage genuine online reviews: Online reviews can influence consumer perceptions and purchase decisions. Therefore, businesses should encourage authentic customer feedback and address negative experiences responsibly.
5. Use personalised marketing responsibly: Personalised advertisements and recommendations can improve relevance for consumers. However, organisations should ensure that consumer privacy and data protection are given adequate importance.
7. Focus on trust and transparency: Long-term consumer relationships require credibility. Digital marketing strategies should avoid misleading claims, hidden conditions and manipulative promotional practices.
8. Expand outreach beyond urban markets: The increasing participation of rural consumers in the digital ecosystem provides businesses with opportunities to develop digital marketing strategies suitable for consumers in smaller cities and rural areas.
9. Integrate digital marketing with the consumer journey: Digital marketing activities should support consumers at different stages, including

information search, product evaluation, purchase and post-purchase engagement.

10. Measure consumer response continuously: Businesses should use appropriate digital analytics to understand consumer engagement and improve marketing strategies based on actual consumer responses.
11. Adopt an integrated marketing approach: Digital marketing should be aligned with product quality, pricing, customer service and brand-building activities to create a consistent consumer experience.

The study therefore suggests that the effectiveness of digital marketing depends not only on the extent of digital exposure but also on the quality, credibility, and relevance and consumer orientation of marketing communication.

Future Scope of the Study

The present study provides a broad overview of the impact of digital marketing on consumer buying behaviour using secondary evidence. However, the subject offers considerable scope for further research. Future studies may collect primary data directly from consumers to examine their perceptions, attitudes, purchase intentions and actual buying behaviour in relation to different digital marketing activities. Such studies can provide more direct evidence regarding the relationship between digital marketing and consumer decision-making. Further research may also examine individual digital marketing channels separately, such as social media marketing, influencer marketing, search engine marketing, online reviews, mobile marketing and personalised advertising. Comparative studies can determine which channels have a stronger influence on consumers' purchase decisions. There is also scope for conducting comparative research across different demographic groups, including age, gender, income, education and occupation. Such research may help businesses develop more targeted digital marketing strategies. Future studies may further investigate the influence of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, chatbots, recommendation systems, augmented reality and voice-based commerce on consumer buying behaviour. The growing use of artificial intelligence in digital marketing is likely to create new opportunities as well as concerns relating to privacy, transparency and consumer trust. Longitudinal studies may also be undertaken to examine how consumer responses to digital marketing change over time. Such research can provide a better understanding of the long-term effects of technological developments and changing consumer preferences. Finally, future researchers may combine primary and secondary data and apply advanced statistical techniques such as structural equation modelling, mediation and moderation analysis to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms through which digital marketing affects consumer behaviour.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all those who contributed directly or indirectly to the

completion of this research paper entitled "Digital Marketing and Its Impact on the Buying Behaviour of the Consumers." I am deeply thankful to my academic colleagues, mentors, and well-wishers for their valuable guidance, encouragement, and constructive suggestions throughout the study.

Financial support and sponsorship

Nil.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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