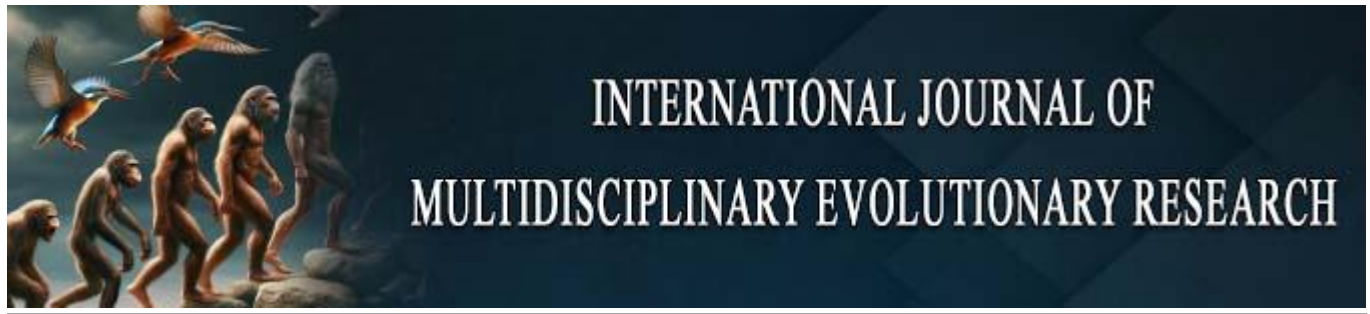




Instagram User-Generated Content and Consumer Buying Behaviour: Evidence from Young Consumers in Guntur District, India

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Abstract

Instagram user-generated content (UGC) has become an important source of product information and consumer engagement, potentially shaping purchasing decisions. This study examined the relationship between Instagram UGC and consumer buying behaviour among young consumers in Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh, India. A quantitative, descriptive research design was employed, and primary data were collected through a structured Google Forms questionnaire using convenience sampling. The final sample comprised 78 Instagram users ($n = 78$). The data were analysed using frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, Cronbach's alpha (α), Spearman's rank-order correlation (ρ), and simple linear regression (R^2). The descriptive findings indicated that 69.7% of respondents had purchased directly through Instagram posts, reels, or shopping tags either frequently or occasionally, while 94.9% searched for user reviews at least sometimes. Influencer recommendations and reviews or testimonials emerged as prominent types of influential UGC. Hypothesis testing identified significant positive associations between UGC perceptions and reported purchasing behaviour ($\rho = .77, p < .001$) as well as purchase intention ($\rho = .72, p < .001$). Confidence associated with review and unboxing videos was also positively associated with reported purchasing behaviour ($\rho = .65, p < .001$). However, review-seeking behaviour and perceived credibility relative to brand advertisements were not significantly associated with their respective outcomes ($p \geq .05$). The findings highlighted the relevance of UGC perceptions and review-based video content in understanding consumer responses to Instagram marketing. The use of convenience sampling, self-reported data, and a cross-sectional design limited generalisability and causal interpretation.

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Keywords: Consumer buying behaviour, Instagram, online reviews, purchase intention, user-generated content

1. Introduction

The growth of social media has transformed how consumers discovered products, evaluated alternatives, and made purchasing decisions. Unlike conventional marketing communication, in which product information was largely controlled by firms, social media enabled consumers to create, share, and exchange product-related experiences through reviews, photographs, videos, recommendations, and comments. This form of communication, commonly referred to as user-generated content (UGC), became an important component of digital marketing because it provided prospective buyers with information derived from other users' experiences. Such content expanded the sources of information available to consumers and introduced interpersonal recommendations and publicly visible consumer responses into the purchase decision-making process (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) ^[12].

Instagram provided a particularly relevant setting for examining UGC because its image- and video-oriented format supported product demonstrations, customer testimonials, unboxing videos, Reels, and visual representations of product usage. These formats allowed consumers to evaluate products through content that appeared closer to everyday consumption experiences than conventional advertisements. Research on Instagram-based purchasing indicated that platform content, opinion leaders, and user-generated material could contribute to impulse-purchasing responses among Generation Z consumers, although the nature of these responses varied across consumer groups (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021) ^[6]. Instagram therefore represented not only a promotional channel but also an environment in which consumer-created information, visual presentation, and social interactions could become relevant to purchase-related decisions.

The potential influence of UGC on consumer buying behaviour could be understood through the informational and social functions of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). Online reviews and recommendations allowed consumers to access other buyers' evaluations without relying exclusively on information supplied by sellers. Cheung and Thadani (2012) ^[4] explained that eWOM operated through multiple communication and influence mechanisms that shaped how consumers received and evaluated online information. Similarly, Erkan and Evans (2016) ^[8] demonstrated the relevance of information quality, credibility, and information adoption in explaining the influence of social media information on purchase intention. These findings suggested that the presence of online content alone was insufficient to explain consumer responses; the perceived usefulness and persuasiveness of that content also mattered.

The credibility of UGC was particularly important because consumers encountered product-related information from sources with different levels of expertise, familiarity, and commercial involvement. Reviews and demonstrations could reduce uncertainty by offering information about product characteristics, usage, and performance. However, the influence of such information depended partly on whether consumers considered it believable and relevant. Research on online reviews identified review-related characteristics and consumer perceptions as important elements in understanding the relationship between electronic word-of-mouth and purchasing decisions (Cheung & Thadani, 2012) ^[4]. In the Instagram context, the credibility of influencer content also required consideration because consumers could interpret recommendations differently depending on the perceived authenticity of the source and the commercial nature of the communication (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017) ^[7]. Accordingly, consumer-generated reviews, influencer recommendations, and engagement indicators needed to be considered as related but distinct features of the social media information environment.

Social engagement indicators, including likes, comments, and shares, provided additional signals through which consumers could evaluate product-related content. Such visible interactions could indicate that a post had attracted attention or generated discussion, although they did not necessarily establish the accuracy or credibility of its claims. Visual quality could also influence how consumers processed product information by making demonstrations, product features, and usage contexts easier to observe. These characteristics were relevant to Instagram because product

information was frequently presented through images and short-form videos. Djafarova and Bowes (2021) ^[6] identified visual and social media-related stimuli as relevant to Generation Z's impulse-purchasing experiences in the fashion context. Nevertheless, the importance of these mechanisms could not automatically be generalised across all products, consumer groups, or geographical settings.

Young consumers constituted a relevant population for studying these relationships because their product discovery and information-search activities frequently intersected with social media use. Instagram content could contribute to several stages of the consumer decision-making process, including awareness, information search, comparison of alternatives, purchase intention, and completed purchase. However, these outcomes were conceptually different. Searching for reviews did not necessarily indicate that a consumer trusted the information, while purchase intention did not necessarily translate into an actual transaction. Examining these dimensions separately was therefore important for understanding how UGC related to buying behaviour rather than assuming that exposure to social media content invariably resulted in a purchase.

Despite the expanding literature on social media marketing, eWOM, and Instagram-based purchasing, questions remained about how these relationships operated in specific local consumer settings. Previous research examined the role of Instagram in Generation Z's impulse purchases and the influence of online information on purchase intention (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021; Erkan & Evans, 2016) ^[6, 8]. However, findings from other geographical and product contexts could not be assumed to represent the experiences of young consumers in every Indian district. Local differences in consumer characteristics, purchasing resources, product preferences, and social media practices provided a rationale for examining these relationships in a geographically defined setting. In particular, evidence concerning Instagram UGC and buying behaviour among young consumers in Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh, remained limited within the scope of the literature reviewed for this study.

To address this gap, the present study examined the relationship between Instagram UGC and consumer buying behaviour among young consumers in Guntur District, India. It investigated the types of UGC respondents considered influential, their engagement with reviews and recommendations, their perceptions of content credibility, and the relationship between UGC perceptions, purchase intention, and reported purchasing behaviour. It also considered the role of positive engagement indicators and confidence associated with review and unboxing videos. Primary data were collected through a structured online questionnaire and analysed using descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha, Spearman's rank correlation, and simple linear regression.

The study contributed geographically contextualised evidence to the literature on social media marketing and consumer behaviour. Rather than assuming that all UGC characteristics exerted a uniform influence, it examined whether selected perceptions and behaviours were statistically associated with purchasing outcomes in the study sample. The findings were intended to provide insights for businesses seeking to understand how young consumers responded to Instagram product content and to identify areas requiring further investigation through larger, more representative samples and validated multi-item measures.

2. Review of Literature

2.1. User-Generated Content and Consumer Buying Behaviour

User-generated content (UGC) has been examined as an important source of consumer information in digital marketing and social commerce. It includes consumer-created reviews, photographs, videos, testimonials, comments, and product recommendations shared through online platforms. Unlike brand-controlled advertising, UGC can communicate product experiences from the perspective of existing users, enabling prospective buyers to evaluate products through information generated outside the firm's formal promotional activities. Geng and Chen (2021)^[10], in an empirical study of 272 social media users in China, found that the interaction quality of UGC was positively associated with purchase intention, with perceived usefulness and trust functioning as mediating mechanisms. Their findings indicated that UGC was relevant not merely because it was available, but because consumers perceived the information and interactions surrounding it as useful and trustworthy.

The relationship between UGC and consumer behaviour was also examined by Onofrei *et al.* (2022)^[13], who investigated consumer-to-consumer interactions on Facebook and Instagram. Their findings indicated that social media interactions were associated with purchase intention and behavioural engagement, while source credibility, source homophily, and content quality helped explain these relationships. This evidence suggested that consumer responses to social media content depended on both the characteristics of the message and the perceived relationship between its source and its audience.

Research on Instagram also demonstrated the relevance of platform-based content to young consumers' purchasing decisions. Djafarova and Bowes (2021)^[6] examined Generation Z consumers' impulse purchases in the fashion industry and identified Instagram-related influences within their purchasing experiences. Although their study focused on fashion and impulse buying, it provided a useful basis for examining how social media content related to broader consumer decision-making processes. However, impulse purchases represented only one aspect of buying behaviour and could not be treated as equivalent to all purchase decisions. The present study therefore considered both reported purchasing behaviour and purchase intention among young consumers in Guntur District.

2.2. Online Reviews, Recommendations, and Purchase Decisions

Online reviews and recommendations constituted an important category of UGC because they provided information about product attributes, user experiences, and perceived performance. Cheung and Thadani (2012)^[4], in their integrative review of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), explained that online consumer communication influenced decision-making through several mechanisms associated with message characteristics, information processing, and social influence. Reviews could help consumers compare alternatives and reduce uncertainty, particularly when direct product evaluation was difficult before purchase.

Erkan and Evans (2016)^[8] extended the examination of eWOM by investigating how social media information influenced consumers' purchase intentions through information adoption. Their findings highlighted the

relevance of information quality, credibility, and perceived usefulness in explaining consumers' responses to online recommendations. This indicated that exposure to product-related content and the active use of that information were distinct stages of the decision-making process. Consumers might search for reviews without necessarily accepting their recommendations or completing a purchase.

The distinction was important when examining Instagram because consumers could encounter reviews incidentally while browsing or deliberately search for them before buying. Product reviews, testimonials, and unboxing videos could provide complementary forms of information: reviews communicated evaluations, while unboxing videos and demonstrations offered visual evidence of product presentation and features. Nevertheless, the presence of these formats did not establish that each would exert an equivalent influence on purchase decisions. The relationship between review-seeking and actual buying behaviour therefore required empirical examination within the relevant consumer population.

2.3. Perceived Credibility and Consumer Trust

Perceived credibility was frequently discussed as a determinant of whether consumers accepted online reviews and recommendations. Pooja and Upadhyaya (2024)^[15] systematically reviewed 69 empirical studies on online review credibility and identified five broad categories of antecedents: source characteristics, review characteristics, consumer characteristics, interpersonal determinants within social media platforms, and product type. Their synthesis demonstrated that review credibility was multidimensional and that consumers' evaluations depended on more than the mere availability of reviews. It also highlighted the diversity of findings in this research area.

The relationship between credibility and purchase-related responses was further explored by Onofrei *et al.* (2022)^[13]. Their findings indicated that perceived source credibility and similarity between consumers and content sources helped explain social media engagement, while source and content factors contributed to the relationship between online interactions and purchase intention. Similarly, Geng and Chen (2021)^[10] found that trust and perceived usefulness helped explain the association between UGC interaction quality and purchase intention. Together, these studies suggested that credibility and trust were related but conceptually distinct: credibility concerned the perceived believability of information or its source, whereas trust concerned the willingness to rely on that source or information in a decision.

However, credibility could not be assumed to operate uniformly across platforms, product categories, or consumers. A consumer might regard user reviews as useful while remaining uncertain about the reviewer's authenticity, expertise, or commercial motives. Consequently, perceived credibility relative to brand advertisements needed to be distinguished from trust in other users' posts. This distinction informed the present study's examination of whether respondents' credibility assessments were associated with their trust in Instagram user content.

2.4. Social Proof, Engagement, and Visual Content Quality

Instagram content was characterised by visible engagement indicators, including likes, comments, and shares, alongside

images and short-form videos. These features offered consumers both social and informational cues when evaluating product-related content. Cheung and Thadani (2012)^[4] described social influence as one of the mechanisms through which eWOM could affect consumer responses. In a social media environment, engagement indicators could provide evidence of other users' attention or participation, although they did not necessarily demonstrate that the underlying information was accurate.

Onofrei *et al.* (2022)^[13] found that consumer-to-consumer social media interactions were associated with purchase intention and behavioural engagement, with source credibility, homophily, and content quality contributing to the relationships examined. Their findings supported the importance of considering interaction and content characteristics together rather than treating engagement as an isolated measure of marketing effectiveness.

Visual content also offered a means of communicating product characteristics through demonstrations, photographs, and videos. Djafarova and Bowes (2021)^[6] identified Instagram-related influences in Generation Z's fashion impulse-purchasing experiences, highlighting the relevance of platform content in this consumer context. Geng and Chen (2021)^[10] further demonstrated that the interaction quality of UGC was associated with purchase intention through perceived usefulness and trust. These findings provided a rationale for examining visual quality and review or unboxing videos as potential influences on consumers' purchasing responses.

Nevertheless, social proof, visual quality, and content credibility represented different attributes. A post could receive substantial engagement without providing useful product information, while a visually appealing video might not be perceived as authentic. Their relative importance therefore required investigation rather than being inferred from platform characteristics alone. In the present study, respondents' assessments of the importance of likes, comments, and shares and visual quality were used to identify the UGC features they considered influential.

2.5. Purchase Intention and Actual Buying Behaviour

Purchase intention and actual buying behaviour were related but distinct outcomes in the literature on social media marketing. Purchase intention reflected a consumer's stated inclination or willingness to buy, whereas buying behaviour concerned reported or observed purchasing actions. Erkan and Evans (2016)^[8] demonstrated the importance of information adoption in explaining the relationship between social media eWOM and purchase intention. Geng and Chen (2021)^[10] likewise found a positive association between UGC interaction quality and purchase intention, with perceived usefulness and trust helping to explain this relationship.

However, evidence concerning purchase intention did not automatically establish that consumers completed transactions. Consumers might express interest in a product, save a post, search for additional information, or consult friends and family before deciding whether to buy. These intervening actions were particularly relevant to social media environments, where product discovery and purchasing could occur at different times or through different channels.

Djafarova and Bowes (2021)^[6] examined impulse purchasing among Generation Z consumers in the fashion industry, thereby providing evidence relevant to the relationship

between Instagram content and purchasing actions. Their focus on impulse buying also illustrated the importance of specifying the behavioural outcome under investigation. The broader construct of consumer buying behaviour encompassed more than spontaneous purchases and included deliberate information search, comparison, and purchase decisions. Accordingly, the present study examined reported purchases following exposure to UGC alongside purchase intention and other decision-making responses.

2.6. Research Gap and Positioning of the Present Study

The reviewed literature established several relevant themes. First, UGC and eWOM were associated with purchase-related outcomes through mechanisms involving information usefulness, credibility, trust, and social interaction (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Erkan & Evans, 2016; Geng & Chen, 2021)^[10] [4, 8]. Second, research on social media interactions indicated that source and content characteristics contributed to consumer engagement and purchase intention (Onofrei *et al.*, 2022)^[13]. Third, research on Instagram and Generation Z provided evidence of platform-related influences on purchasing, particularly in the fashion context (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021)^[6]. Finally, the systematic review by Pooja and Upadhyaya (2024)^[15] showed that review credibility was influenced by multiple factors and remained a complex area of empirical investigation.

Despite these contributions, the studies reviewed addressed different platforms, populations, constructs, and purchasing outcomes. Their findings did not, by themselves, establish how Instagram UGC related to buying behaviour among young consumers in Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh. In addition, the relationships between review-seeking, perceived credibility, trust, purchase intention, and reported purchasing behaviour needed to be distinguished rather than treated as interchangeable indicators of influence.

The present study addressed this context-specific gap by examining Instagram UGC among young consumers in Guntur District, India. It investigated respondents' perceptions of UGC, their reported purchasing behaviour after exposure to such content, and the relationships between selected UGC-related measures and purchase intention. It also examined review-seeking behaviour, perceived credibility, and confidence associated with review and unboxing videos, while identifying the content features respondents considered most influential. The study thereby provided local empirical evidence that complemented previous research on UGC and social media purchasing, while recognising that its convenience sample and cross-sectional design limited the extent to which the findings could be generalised.

2.7. Objectives of the Study

The study aimed to examine the relationship between Instagram user-generated content (UGC) and consumer buying behaviour among young consumers in Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh, India. Specifically, it sought to identify the types of Instagram UGC that respondents perceived as influential in their purchase decisions; examine the relationship between UGC perceptions and reported purchasing behaviour and purchase intention; assess the relationships of review-seeking behaviour and perceived credibility with purchase-related outcomes and consumer trust, respectively; and investigate the association between confidence derived from review and unboxing videos and

reported purchasing behaviour. The study also sought to identify the UGC characteristics that respondents considered most influential in their buying decisions, particularly engagement indicators, such as likes, comments, and shares, and the visual quality of content.

2.8. Research Hypotheses

Based on the reviewed literature and the study objectives, five hypotheses were formulated to examine the relationships between Instagram UGC perceptions, review-seeking behaviour, perceived credibility, purchase intention, and reported purchasing behaviour.

H1: Instagram UGC perceptions were significantly and positively associated with reported purchasing behaviour among young consumers.

H2: Searching for Instagram reviews and UGC before purchasing was significantly and positively associated with reported purchasing behaviour among young consumers.

H3: The perceived credibility of Instagram UGC relative to

brand advertisements was significantly and positively associated with trust in other users' posts.

H4: Instagram UGC perceptions were significantly and positively associated with purchase intention among young consumers.

H5: Confidence derived from Instagram review and unboxing videos was significantly and positively associated with reported purchasing behaviour among young consumers.

2.9. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework was developed to examine the relationships between five UGC-related dimensions and consumer responses. As shown in Figure 1, UGC perceptions, review-seeking behaviour, perceived credibility, and confidence derived from review and unboxing videos were treated as explanatory variables. Reported purchasing behaviour, purchase intention, and trust in other users' posts were treated as the corresponding outcome variables.

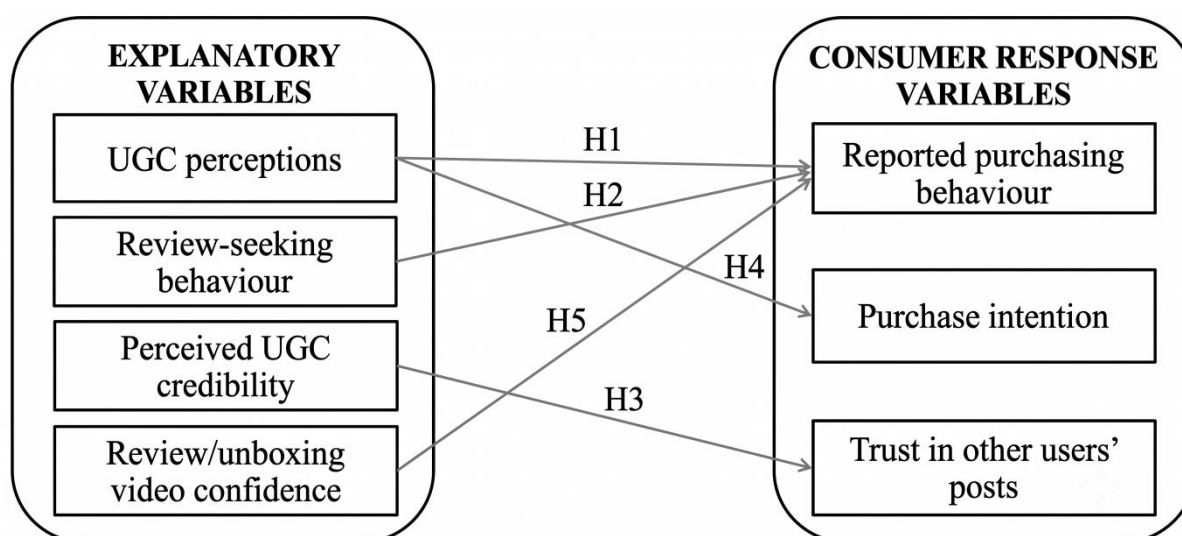


Fig 1: Conceptual framework: Instagram UGC and consumer responses among young consumers in Guntur District

The framework proposed that favourable perceptions of Instagram UGC were positively associated with reported purchasing behaviour and purchase intention. It further proposed that review-seeking behaviour was positively associated with purchasing behaviour, perceived UGC credibility was positively associated with trust in other users' posts, and confidence derived from review and unboxing videos was positively associated with purchasing behaviour. These relationships were examined using Spearman's rank correlation and simple linear regression, as appropriate to the study's analytical approach. The framework represented hypothesised associations rather than established causal relationships.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Study Area

The study employed a quantitative, descriptive research design to examine the relationship between Instagram user-generated content (UGC) and consumer buying behaviour among young consumers in Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh, India. The research focused on respondents' exposure to Instagram UGC, their perceptions of its credibility and

influence, their review-seeking behaviour, and their reported purchasing behaviour and purchase intention.

3.2. Data Collection and Sampling

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered using Google Forms between 25 August and 2 October 2026. The questionnaire comprised 25 questions covering respondents' Instagram-related purchasing experiences, preferred types of UGC, perceptions of online reviews and user posts, and purchase-related responses. A convenience sampling technique was used to recruit Instagram users from the study area. The final sample consisted of 78 respondents, and the analysis was based on the available responses for each variable or hypothesis. Consequently, the sample size varied slightly across the statistical tests because of item-level missing responses.

3.3. Measurement of Variables

The questionnaire collected information on respondents' purchasing experiences and perceptions of Instagram UGC. The measured variables included review-seeking behaviour before purchase (Q12), perceived credibility of UGC relative

to brand advertisements (Q13), perceptions of Instagram UGC (Q14, Q15 and Q18), reported purchasing behaviour following exposure to UGC (Q16), purchase intention (Q17), and confidence associated with review and unboxing videos (Q19). Additional questions captured the types of UGC and content characteristics that respondents considered influential in their buying decisions.

Items Q14–Q21 used a Likert-type response scale. Descriptive statistics were calculated for the relevant questionnaire items, while a composite UGC perception index was constructed from Q14, Q15 and Q18 for the analyses specified in the research hypotheses. The interpretation of this index was limited to the perceptions represented by those items.

3.4. Data Analysis

The collected responses were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Frequencies and percentages were calculated to summarise respondents' purchasing experiences, review-seeking behaviour and preferences for different types of Instagram UGC. Means and standard deviations were used to describe responses to the Likert-type items. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha for the eight-item Likert-scale set, based on 78 complete cases. The reported alpha coefficient was 0.92. Spearman's rank-order correlation (r_s) was used to examine the direction and strength of associations between the study variables. Simple linear regression was also used to assess the corresponding relationships and report the coefficient of determination (R^2). The analyses addressed five hypotheses (H_1 – H_5) concerning UGC perceptions, review-seeking behaviour, perceived credibility, purchase intention, and

confidence associated with review and unboxing videos. Statistical significance was evaluated at the 5% level ($\alpha = .05$, $p < .05$). The sample size (n) for each hypothesis test reflected the number of respondents with valid data for the variables included in that analysis.

3.5. Ethical Considerations and Methodological Limitations

Participation was based on responses submitted through the online questionnaire. The findings were interpreted in relation to the sampled Instagram users in Guntur District. Because convenience sampling was used and data were collected at a single point in time, the results were not treated as representative of all young consumers or as evidence of causal relationships. The analysis also relied on self-reported responses, which may have been affected by recall and response biases. In addition, Q15 contributed to the composite UGC perception index and was also used as the trust outcome in the third hypothesis. This overlap was recognised as a measurement limitation when interpreting the relevant findings.

4. Results

4.1. Respondents' Instagram Purchasing Behaviour

The study analysed responses from 78 Instagram users in Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh. The descriptive findings indicated that Instagram served as both a source of product information and a channel through which respondents encountered purchase opportunities. Reviews, testimonials, influencer recommendations and content engagement were prominent features of respondents' reported experiences. The results of the purchasing-behaviour analysis are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Selected descriptive findings on Instagram-related consumer behaviour

Indicator	Response category or finding	Percentage (%)
Purchasing through Instagram posts, reels or shopping tags	Frequently or occasionally	69.7
Searching for user reviews	At least sometimes	94.9
Most influential type of UGC	Influencer recommendations	31.6
Most influential type of UGC	Reviews and testimonials	27.6
Most influential content characteristic	Likes, comments and shares	39.5
Most influential content characteristic	Visual quality	30.3
Most influential product category	Beauty and cosmetics	36.0
Most influential product category	Fashion and apparel	29.3

As summarised in Table 1, respondents reported substantial exposure to Instagram-related purchase opportunities and a high prevalence of review-seeking behaviour. Influencer recommendations and consumer reviews emerged as the two most frequently identified forms of influential UGC. Beauty and cosmetics, followed by fashion and apparel, represented the leading product categories in the reported responses.

4.2. Influential UGC Types and Content Characteristics

Figure 2 presents the two leading UGC types identified by respondents. Influencer recommendations and reviews or testimonials occupied the leading positions, indicating that both creator-led endorsements and experience-based consumer information featured prominently in respondents' reported purchasing decisions.

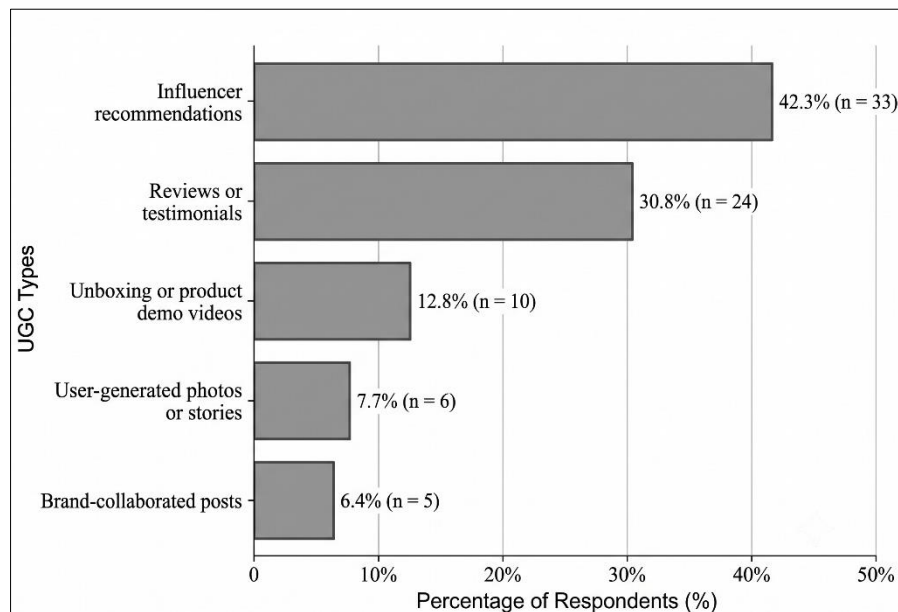


Fig 2: Instagram UGC types perceived as most influential among respondents

Figure 3 compares the two leading content characteristics reported by respondents. Engagement indicators, including likes, comments and shares, received the highest reported proportion, followed by visual quality.

indicated that respondents considered both visible social engagement and the presentation of content when evaluating Instagram material.

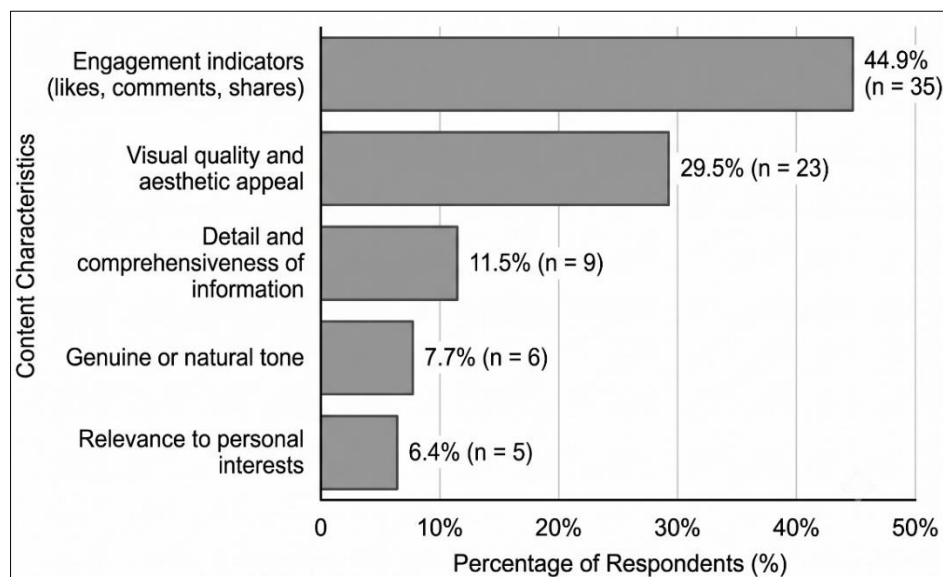


Fig 3: Instagram content characteristics perceived as influential in buying decisions

4.3. Descriptive Statistics and Scale Reliability

The descriptive analysis of the Likert-type items produced a reported grand mean of 2.49. This result indicated a relatively low overall level of agreement across the measured items, although interpretation depended on the response scale and its coding direction. The relatively low grand mean coexisted with the descriptive finding that respondents frequently encountered or sought UGC-related information. These measures captured different aspects of behaviour and perception and were therefore not interpreted as contradictory.

Internal consistency was assessed for the eight-item Likert-

scale set. The reported Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.92, based on 78 complete cases. This coefficient indicated high internal consistency among the included items. However, the reliability estimate did not, by itself, establish unidimensionality or construct validity.

4.4. Hypothesis Testing

Five hypotheses were examined using Spearman's rank-order correlation and simple linear regression. The analyses used the available observations for each variable pair, resulting in sample sizes between 75 and 77. Table 2 presents the principal results.

Table 2: Results of hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Relationship examined	Valid n	Spearman's ρ	R^2	p-value	Decision
H_1	UGC perception index and reported purchasing behaviour (Q16)	75	0.77	0.615	< .001	Supported
H_2	Review-seeking behaviour (Q12) and reported purchasing behaviour (Q16)	77	0.07	0.009	.408	Not supported
H_3	Perceived credibility of UGC relative to brand advertisements (Q13) and trust in user posts (Q15)	75	-0.08	0.002	.731	Not supported
H_4	UGC perception index and purchase intention (Q17)	75	0.72	0.518	< .001	Supported
H_5	Confidence associated with review and unboxing videos (Q19) and reported purchasing behaviour (Q16)	76	0.65	0.434	< .001	Supported

Note: Statistical significance was evaluated at the 5% level. Spearman's ρ represented the rank-order association, whereas R^2 represented the reported coefficient of determination from the regression analysis. The two statistics measured different aspects of the relationships and were not interchangeable.

The results in Table 2 supported H_1 , H_4 and H_5 , indicating statistically significant positive associations between the relevant UGC-related measures and purchase outcomes. In contrast, H_2 and H_3 were not supported because their relationships did not reach statistical significance. The findings therefore distinguished between the presence of a relationship involving perceived UGC influence or video-related confidence and the absence of statistically significant evidence for review-seeking behaviour and perceived credibility in the specified tests.

4.5. Summary of Findings

Overall, the results showed that Instagram UGC was relevant to respondents' reported purchasing experiences, with influencer recommendations, reviews and testimonials, engagement indicators, and visual quality emerging as prominent features. The inferential analysis identified significant positive associations between the UGC perception index and both reported purchasing behaviour and purchase intention. Confidence associated with review and unboxing videos was also positively associated with reported purchasing behaviour. However, review-seeking behaviour and perceived credibility relative to brand advertisements were not significantly associated with their respective outcomes in the tested relationships.

The findings were interpreted as associations rather than causal effects. In addition, Q15 was included in the UGC perception index used for H_1 and H_4 and also served as the trust outcome for H_3 . This overlap limited the independence of the constructs being compared and was considered when interpreting the hypothesis results.

5. Discussion

5.1. Influence of Instagram User-Generated Content on Purchasing Behaviour

The findings indicated that perceptions of Instagram user-generated content (UGC) were positively associated with reported purchasing behaviour among young consumers in Guntur District. H_1 was supported, suggesting that respondents who evaluated UGC more favourably also tended to report purchasing after exposure to such content. This result was consistent with the broader understanding that social media content can influence consumer decision-making by combining product information, social endorsement and opportunities for interaction. Research on influencer marketing has similarly identified relationships between content characteristics, influencer communication, source credibility and consumer responses (Pan *et al.*, 2025; Vrontis *et al.*, 2021)^[14].

The finding also supported the relevance of Instagram as a commercial communication environment in which

consumers encounter product recommendations alongside content shared by other users. Appel *et al.* (2020)^[11] discussed how social media had reshaped marketing through interconnected networks, content circulation and consumer participation. In the present study, however, the association between UGC perceptions and purchasing behaviour did not establish that UGC independently caused purchases. The cross-sectional design, convenience sampling and self-reported measures limited causal interpretation. The result was therefore interpreted as evidence of a positive relationship within the sampled respondents rather than a universal effect among young consumers.

5.2. Influencer Recommendations, Reviews and Content Characteristics

Influencer recommendations and reviews or testimonials were the most frequently identified types of influential UGC. This pattern suggested that respondents valued both content from recognisable creators and accounts of other consumers' product experiences. Influencer recommendations may combine product information with perceived familiarity, social identification and communication style. Sokolova and Kefi (2020)^[16], for example, found that influencer credibility and parasocial interaction were positively associated with purchase intention. Similarly, De Veirman *et al.* (2017)^[5] demonstrated that influencer characteristics, including follower numbers, could shape perceptions of influencers and brands, although the effects depended on the context.

The prominence of reviews and testimonials indicated that peer-generated product information remained relevant alongside influencer-led content. Online reviews can help consumers evaluate products by reducing uncertainty and making information about other buyers' experiences available before purchase. Filieri (2015)^[9] found that review helpfulness was associated with information diagnosticity and the adoption of review information. Hajli (2015)^[11] also identified the relevance of social-commerce constructs to trust and purchase intention. These studies provided a basis for interpreting the descriptive findings, although the present survey did not directly test the separate mechanisms through which reviews affected consumer evaluations.

Likes, comments and shares were the most frequently identified influential content characteristic, followed by visual quality. Engagement indicators may function as visible signals of audience attention or social approval, while visual presentation may make product attributes easier to notice and evaluate. Argyris *et al.* (2020)^[2] reported that visual congruence between influencer content and followers' interests was associated with greater engagement. Casaló *et al.* (2020)^[3] likewise identified the relevance of opinion leadership and interaction in shaping followers' responses to

Instagram influencers. The current findings were consistent with the practical importance of these content features, but they did not demonstrate that engagement counts or visual quality independently increased purchases.

5.3. Relationship Between UGC Perceptions and Purchase Intention

H4 was supported, indicating a positive association between the UGC perception index and purchase intention. The finding suggested that favourable evaluations of Instagram UGC were related not only to reported purchasing behaviour but also to respondents' stated readiness or willingness to buy. This distinction was important because purchase intention represented a psychological outcome, whereas reported purchasing behaviour concerned respondents' accounts of their actions.

The result was broadly consistent with research linking influencer-related perceptions and consumer purchase intentions. Sokolova and Kefi (2020)^[16] identified positive relationships between influencer credibility, parasocial interaction and purchase intention. Weismueller *et al.* (2020)^[17] also reported that dimensions of source credibility were relevant to purchase intention in the context of social media influencer endorsements. A recent meta-analysis by Pan *et al.* (2025)^[14] further found that the effectiveness of influencer marketing varied according to post, follower and influencer characteristics, with informational and hedonic post value particularly relevant to non-transactional outcomes such as purchase intention. These studies reinforced the relevance of examining multiple aspects of UGC rather than treating all social media content as equivalent.

Nevertheless, the composite measure used in the present study included Q14, Q15 and Q18. Because Q15 also represented trust in other users' posts and was used as the outcome for H3, the conceptual boundaries between the index and the trust construct were not entirely independent. This overlap may have affected the interpretation of the relationships involving the composite index. Accordingly, the support for H4 was considered preliminary until the index was reassessed using a theoretically justified set of non-overlapping items.

5.4. Review-Seeking Behaviour and Reported Purchasing Behaviour

H2 was not supported. Although most respondents reported searching for user reviews at least sometimes, review-seeking behaviour was not significantly associated with reported purchasing behaviour in the specified test. This finding distinguished the prevalence of information search from its relationship with a subsequent purchase outcome. Consumers may seek reviews as a routine part of decision-making without necessarily buying the product after encountering UGC.

One possible interpretation was that review-seeking reflected an information-gathering habit rather than a direct indicator of purchase readiness. Consumers might consult reviews to compare alternatives, evaluate product quality or reduce uncertainty, yet ultimately decide against purchasing because of price, product suitability or other considerations. Filieri (2015)^[9] emphasised the role of the perceived diagnosticity and usefulness of review information in its adoption. Therefore, the frequency of searching for reviews may not fully capture whether the information was judged useful, credible or persuasive.

The non-significant result did not establish that reviews were unimportant. Instead, it indicated that the particular measure of review-seeking behaviour (Q12) did not show a statistically significant relationship with the reported purchase outcome (Q16) in this sample. Future research could distinguish the frequency of review search from the perceived helpfulness, diagnosticity, valence and credibility of the reviews consulted.

5.5. Perceived Credibility and Trust in User Posts

H3 was not supported. Perceived credibility of UGC relative to brand advertisements was not significantly associated with trust in other users' posts in the tested relationship. This finding differed from studies that identified a positive role for source credibility in influencer-related purchase intention and other consumer responses (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Weismueller *et al.*, 2020)^[16, 17]. However, the difference should be interpreted cautiously because the present hypothesis examined a specific relationship between two individual questionnaire items, rather than the broader credibility pathways investigated in those studies.

The distinction between credibility and trust may be particularly important. A respondent may consider UGC more credible than brand advertising in general while remaining cautious about particular user posts. Trust may depend on the perceived expertise of the poster, the consistency of the information, the presence of detailed product evidence and the apparent commercial motivation behind the content. Influencer marketing research has also highlighted that audience responses depend on the characteristics of the message, the source and the surrounding context (Pan *et al.*, 2025; Vrontis *et al.*, 2021)^[14].

The non-significant finding therefore did not imply that credibility was irrelevant to Instagram marketing. It indicated that the available item-level measure did not provide evidence of the hypothesised positive association in this sample. Future studies could assess credibility and trust using separate multi-item constructs and examine whether perceived authenticity, sponsorship disclosure or product-specific knowledge helps explain the relationship between them.

5.6. Confidence in Review and Unboxing Videos

H5 was supported, indicating a positive association between confidence derived from review and unboxing videos and reported purchasing behaviour. This result suggested that respondents who reported greater confidence after viewing these formats also tended to report purchasing following exposure to UGC. Review and unboxing videos may provide demonstrations, product details and first-hand impressions that help consumers assess product features before making a decision.

The finding was consistent with the broader role of informative social media content in consumer evaluation. Pan *et al.* (2025)^[14] identified post characteristics, including informational value, as relevant to consumer responses. Argyris *et al.* (2020)^[2] also highlighted the role of visual content in encouraging engagement with influencer posts and endorsed brands. In practical terms, review and unboxing content may be more useful when it communicates relevant product details clearly and aligns with consumers' information needs.

However, the present study did not directly measure the informational quality of videos, the accuracy of reviewers'

claims or whether respondents subsequently verified the information. Confidence may also have reflected familiarity with the creator, presentation style or the apparent authenticity of the demonstration. The positive association should therefore be interpreted as a relationship between reported confidence and reported purchasing behaviour, rather than proof that review or unboxing videos independently caused purchases.

5.7. Overall Interpretation and Implications

Taken together, the findings indicated that the relationship between Instagram UGC and consumer buying behaviour was not uniform across all tested dimensions. UGC perceptions were positively associated with both reported purchasing behaviour and purchase intention, while confidence associated with review and unboxing videos was positively associated with reported purchasing behaviour. In contrast, review-seeking frequency and perceived credibility relative to brand advertisements did not show statistically significant relationships with their respective outcomes.

The pattern suggested that the evaluation of content and the confidence associated with particular content formats may be more closely related to purchase outcomes than the mere act of searching for reviews. Nevertheless, the study did not compare these variables in a multivariable model and did not establish their relative independent contributions. The findings therefore supported a differentiated interpretation of UGC rather than a conclusion that all forms of user-generated content had the same relationship with buying behaviour.

For businesses using Instagram, the results indicated the practical relevance of clear product demonstrations, informative reviews, credible creator communication and content that encourages meaningful engagement. The descriptive prominence of beauty and cosmetics and fashion and apparel also suggested that product-category context warranted attention in campaign design. However, because the sample was limited to 78 respondents recruited through convenience sampling in Guntur District, these implications should be applied cautiously beyond the study setting.

5.8. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Several limitations affected the interpretation of the findings. First, the study used a convenience sample of 78 respondents from one district, which limited generalisability to other regions and consumer groups. Second, the cross-sectional design and self-reported questionnaire did not permit causal conclusions or verification of actual purchasing transactions. Third, the analysis relied on item-level measures and a three-item UGC perception index, which may not have captured the full range of dimensions involved in UGC evaluation.

Fourth, Q15 was included in the UGC perception index for H1 and H4 and also served as the trust outcome for H3. This measurement overlap reduced the conceptual independence of the constructs and warranted reassessment of the relevant hypotheses using a revised index. Fifth, the reported Cronbach's alpha of 0.92 reflected internal consistency across the eight-item Likert set based on 71 complete cases; it did not, on its own, establish that all items measured a single construct. Future studies should assess reliability and construct validity separately for each theoretically defined scale.

Further research could use larger and more diverse samples, probability-based sampling where feasible, longitudinal designs or experiments to examine temporal order and causal

effects. Researchers could also distinguish review-seeking frequency from review usefulness, credibility, authenticity and information quality. Finally, studies could compare product categories and content formats and test whether engagement, source characteristics or video-related confidence mediated or moderated relationships between UGC and purchase outcomes. These approaches would help clarify the conditions under which Instagram UGC was associated with consumer purchase intention and behaviour.

6. Conclusion

The study examined the relationship between Instagram user-generated content (UGC) and consumer buying behaviour among 78 Instagram users in Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh, India. The findings revealed significant positive associations between UGC perceptions and both reported purchasing behaviour and purchase intention. Confidence associated with review and unboxing videos was also positively associated with reported purchasing behaviour. However, review-seeking behaviour and perceived credibility relative to brand advertisements did not demonstrate statistically significant relationships with their respective outcomes. Influencer recommendations, reviews and testimonials, engagement indicators, and visual quality emerged as prominent features of respondents' Instagram experiences. Overall, the findings highlighted the relevance of evaluating UGC perceptions and content formats when examining consumer responses to Instagram marketing. However, the convenience sampling method, cross-sectional design and limited sample size restricted generalisability and causal interpretation. Future research using larger samples and validated measurement scales could further clarify these relationships.

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