
Determinants of Consumer Buying Behaviour in the FMCG Sector: A Thematic Analysis of Emerging Market Dynamics

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Abstract

The Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) industry is one of the most dynamic sectors in developing economies, driven by rapid technological change, digital marketing adoption, and evolving consumer lifestyles. This study investigates the principal factors influencing consumer buying behaviour within the FMCG sector, emphasizing the growing intersection between traditional marketing variables and digital consumption trends. Through a thematic review of existing empirical research and secondary data, the study identifies six dominant factors: advertising effectiveness, brand loyalty, packaging appeal, digital marketing, social media influence, and demographic moderators. Findings reveal that contemporary consumers increasingly integrate both online and offline cues in their purchase decisions, with social networking platforms serving as a vital interface for brand trust and engagement. The paper proposes a conceptual model linking these factors to consumer purchase intentions and behavioural outcomes. Implications highlight the need for integrated marketing strategies and consumer engagement mechanisms to enhance competitive advantage in the evolving FMCG landscape.

Keywords: FMCG, consumer behaviour, digital marketing, brand loyalty, packaging, advertising, social media influence, purchase intention

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Introduction

The Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector forms the backbone of many developing economies, including India, representing essential products consumed regularly such as food, beverages, personal care, and household items. As one of the most competitive industries, FMCG companies face constant pressure to innovate and respond to rapidly changing consumer preferences, digitalization, and socio-economic transformation. In India, the FMCG sector contributes significantly to GDP and employment, emerging as the fourth-largest sector

in the economy (Saraswat, Dutta, & Saxena, 2022). Growth has been propelled by increased disposable incomes, urbanization, digital access, and rising rural demand.

Consumer buying behaviour in the FMCG sector reflects a complex interplay between psychological, social, cultural, and technological variables. Traditional determinants such as price, brand image, and product quality are now intertwined with new-age factors like social media engagement, online advertising, and influencer marketing (Rahmani & Sarma, 2023). Consequently, understanding the dynamics of FMCG buying behaviour is crucial for marketers seeking to enhance brand loyalty and sustainable growth.

1.1 Background of the Study

The FMCG sector's evolution parallels the digital transformation sweeping through global markets. Internet penetration and e-commerce platforms have changed not only *what* consumers buy but also *how* they buy. India's digital revolution, characterized by more than 850 million internet users (Saraswat et al., 2022), has catalysed a shift toward online purchasing of FMCG goods. Consumers increasingly rely on digital media to gather product information, compare alternatives, and share experiences, making digital marketing a central component of purchasing decisions (Babu, 2019).

1.2 Research Rationale

Despite abundant research on consumer behaviour, most prior studies treat influencing factors in isolation, such as advertisements or brand loyalty. Few integrate these determinants into a unified thematic framework that captures their interactive effects in modern digital ecosystems. This gap justifies a holistic synthesis of how multiple variables advertising, digital engagement, brand trust, packaging, and socio-demographics collectively shape purchase intentions in the FMCG sector.

1.3 Research Objectives

The primary objectives of this study are:

1. To identify key determinants influencing consumer buying behaviour towards FMCG products.
2. To explore the role of digital marketing and social media in shaping consumer decision-making.
3. To develop a conceptual model linking behavioural factors with purchase intentions.
4. To propose theoretical and managerial implications for marketers in emerging economies.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Understanding the determinants of buying behaviour is essential for FMCG companies seeking sustainable competitive advantage. The insights from this study can help marketers design data-driven strategies, enhance customer engagement, and optimize digital campaigns. Moreover, the proposed conceptual framework contributes to consumer behaviour literature by bridging traditional marketing theory with digital transformation contexts.

2. Thematic Literature Review

Consumer buying behaviour in the FMCG sector has been widely examined from psychological, sociological, and technological perspectives. To capture the multifaceted nature

of decision-making, this review classifies previous findings into five dominant themes: (1) advertising and promotion; (2) digital and social-media influence; (3) brand loyalty and trust; (4) packaging and ethical consumption; and (5) demographic and behavioural moderators.

2.1 Advertising and Promotional Determinants

Advertising (Farooq, S., & Maqbool, A. (2024). remains one of the most powerful stimuli shaping consumer perception and purchase intention. Early empirical studies (Khandare & Suryawanshi, 2016; Chukwu, Kanu, & Ezeabogu, 2019) confirmed that persuasive messages and creative appeal directly influence consumers' emotional responses, subsequently translating into brand preference and loyalty.

Celebrity endorsement is repeatedly identified as an effective promotional driver. Pokharel and Pradhan (2017) reported that endorsement by well-known figures enhances trust and recall, while Kaushik and Baliyan (2017) observed that celebrity credibility and expertise foster brand association, particularly among younger consumers active on social media.

Television advertising, though declining in dominance, still maintains significant persuasive strength for low-involvement FMCG products. Manandhar (2018) and Radha and Nesakumaran (2017) highlighted that visual and audio cues from TV commercials stimulate impulse buying and influence women's purchase decisions in household categories.

Collectively, these studies demonstrate that *advertising intensity and credibility* remain indispensable, yet their effectiveness increasingly depends on how well campaigns integrate with digital ecosystems.

2.2 Digital and Social-Media Influence

The digitalisation of marketing has transformed consumer engagement, positioning social-network platforms as interactive marketplaces where consumers actively co-create brand meaning. Rahmani and Sarma (2023) demonstrated that online content, influencer collaborations, and search engine marketing influence every stage of the consumer decision process. Complementing this, Srividya, Atiq, and Volety (2024) highlighted how digital platforms convert passive exposure into participatory ecosystems that enable value co-creation. Empirical evidence further confirms digital media's impact on FMCG outcomes. Raushan and Dubey (2024) reported YouTube advertising's significant effect on purchase intention, reinforcing the platform's role in enhancing brand visibility and emotional engagement. Babu (2019) observed that social media facilitates continuous feedback loops, strengthening word-of-mouth credibility. Across contexts, interactivity, trust in digital payment systems, and authenticity of online reviews consistently emerge as critical drivers of purchase confidence (Olusegun et al., 2021; Tobi et al., 2020).

Collectively, the literature positions digital marketing as both a mediator between awareness and purchase and a moderator that strengthens brand trust, suggesting that higher levels of digital engagement substantially increase consumers' likelihood of progressing from awareness to conversion.

2.3 Brand Loyalty and Perceived Quality

Brand loyalty represents an enduring relationship between consumer and company, influenced by satisfaction, trust, and perceived value. Guliyev (2020) found a strong positive correlation between brand trust and customer satisfaction in the FMCG sector, suggesting that emotional

commitment reinforces repeat purchases. Vijayalakshmi and Gurumoorthy (2019) corroborated this by showing that consumers prioritize reliability and product consistency over price variability.

Studies by Mengesha (2017) and Sudhamathi and Soniya (2017) further highlight quality consciousness especially among women consumers of personal-care and edible products as a critical antecedent of loyalty. Brand loyalty, a recurring theme in the University's consumer-behaviour research, is described as a long-term attitudinal bond driven by satisfaction and value consistency (Guliyev, 2020). Vijayalakshmi and Gurumoorthy (2019) found that loyal consumers display reduced price sensitivity. Mengesha (2017) and Sudhamathi & Soniya (2017) identified product quality and reliability as pivotal for repeat purchase, particularly in personal-care segments. (Maqbool & Atiq, 2014) similarly notes that changing lifestyles among women consumers enhance brand consciousness and preference stability.

In essence, consumers perceive trusted brands as risk-reducing mechanisms in a market saturated with alternatives. Consequently, sustaining loyalty through transparent communication and ethical branding is central to long-term profitability.

2.4 Packaging, Aesthetics, and Ethical Consumption

Packaging performs both a functional and psychological role.

Ehsan and Lodhi (2015) demonstrated that design attributes such as color, shape, and material create symbolic associations that trigger purchase behaviour. Rambabu and Porika (2020) expanded this perspective, linking sustainable and user-friendly packaging with positive consumer attitudes toward environmental responsibility.

Recent work by Srividya, Atiq, and Volety (2024) aligned packaging choices with Sustainable Development Goal 12 (responsible consumption and production), noting that ethical design and recyclability enhance brand equity.

Collectively, these findings position packaging as both a *marketing cue* and a *sustainability signal*, influencing eco-conscious consumers who integrate moral and functional criteria when choosing FMCG goods.

2.5 Demographic and Behavioural Moderators

Demographic factors age, gender, income, education, and locality—significantly moderate how marketing stimuli translate into behaviour.

Lavuri and Sreeramulu (2019) observed that education and marital status correlate with brand consciousness in personal-care categories. Saraswat et al. (2022) reported that younger consumers dominate the online FMCG market but that technology adoption among senior citizens is steadily increasing. Atiq-affiliated research (Sharma & Jhamb, 2020; Pattanayak & Dash, 2024) documented the shift to online grocery buying, marking a permanent behavioural inflexion.

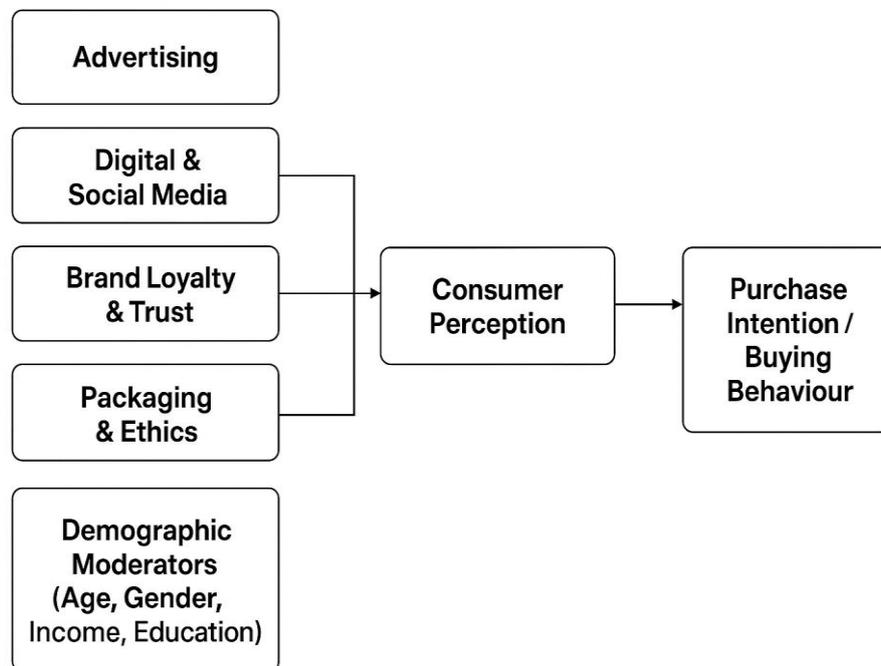
Socio-economic evolution and digital literacy thus shape not only access but also trust and frequency of purchase, illustrating that demographic context remains integral to any comprehensive behavioural model.

2.6 Synthesis of Literature

Synthesizing these themes reveals that **consumer buying behaviour in FMCG** emerges from the interaction of *marketing communication* (advertising, social media), *product perception*

(brand trust, packaging), and *contextual moderators* (demographics, technology adoption). This interdependence forms the theoretical foundation for the conceptual model proposed in the next section.

Table 1: Conceptual Framework



Source: Author's own Creation

Based on the reviewed literature, a conceptual framework is proposed to explain the relationships among the key determinants influencing FMCG buying behaviour.

3.1 Conceptual Rationale

- **Independent Variables:**
 - Advertising Effectiveness
 - Digital & Social-Media Engagement
 - Brand Loyalty & Trust
 - Packaging & Ethical Design
 - Demographic Moderators
- **Mediating Variable:**
 - Consumer Perception (information processing, trust, and attitude formation)
- **Dependent Variable:**
 - Purchase Intention / Buying Behaviour

The model posits that advertising, digital marketing, brand loyalty, and packaging directly affect consumer perception, which in turn drives purchase intention. Demographic factors moderate the strength of these relationships, particularly the link between digital exposure and actual buying behaviour.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This research adopts a descriptive-analytical design, using secondary data and thematic synthesis (Nigam, Aanchal, et al., 2024). The purpose is to consolidate and interpret existing empirical findings on the determinants of consumer buying behaviour within the FMCG sector. A qualitative meta-analysis approach is used to identify, compare, and classify influential factors from peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2010 and 2024.

4.2 Data Sources

Data were collected from reputable academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and ResearchGate, along with reports from the Indian Brand Equity Foundation (IBEF) and McKinsey & Company. Only peer-reviewed journal articles and doctoral dissertations were included to maintain reliability and academic integrity.

In total, over 65 studies were screened, and 48 were selected based on relevance to the FMCG sector and direct investigation of consumer buying behaviour or related constructs (advertising, digital media, brand trust, packaging, etc.).

4.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

- **Inclusion:**
 - Studies focusing on consumer behaviour toward FMCG or fast-moving retail products.
 - Studies published between 2010–2024.
 - Research analyzing advertising, social media, brand trust, or packaging as behavioural factors.
- **Exclusion:**
 - Studies on industrial or durable goods.
 - Articles lacking empirical or conceptual grounding.
 - Non-English language papers.

4.4 Analytical Approach

The study employed a structured thematic analysis following the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This systematic approach enabled the identification, organization, and interpretation of recurring patterns across the selected literature.

First, all 48 eligible studies were thoroughly reviewed to achieve data familiarization. Key findings, theoretical constructs, and methodological insights were extracted and documented in a coding matrix. During the second phase, initial open codes were generated inductively, capturing recurrent concepts such as advertising influence, digital engagement, brand trust, packaging appeal, and purchase intention.

In the third phase, related codes were clustered into preliminary themes based on conceptual similarity and frequency of occurrence. These themes were then reviewed and refined through iterative comparison across studies to ensure coherence and internal consistency. Phase four involved defining and naming themes, resulting in higher-order conceptual categories aligned with marketing influence, psychological drivers, digital media effects, and behavioural outcomes.

To enhance analytical rigor, constant comparative techniques were applied throughout the synthesis process, allowing similarities and divergences among findings to be systematically examined. The final phase integrated the themes into a conceptual framework illustrating relationships between marketing stimuli and consumer behavioural responses within the FMCG context.

A qualitative meta-synthesis logic was adopted to consolidate empirical evidence, identify dominant behavioural determinants, and uncover latent patterns across diverse research settings. This approach facilitated theory building while preserving contextual richness from individual studies.

4.5 Reliability and Validity

Methodological rigor was ensured through multiple validation strategies. Triangulation was achieved by synthesizing findings from diverse databases, geographical contexts, and methodological designs. Only peer-reviewed journals and doctoral dissertations were included to strengthen construct validity.

Coding reliability was enhanced through repeated reviews of extracted data and cross-verification of thematic clusters across independent literature streams (advertising, digital marketing, brand loyalty, and packaging). An audit trail documenting coding decisions and theme development was maintained to improve transparency and replicability.

Furthermore, analytical saturation was reached when no new themes emerged from additional studies, reinforcing thematic completeness. Although the research relied on secondary data, the systematic screening process, explicit inclusion criteria, and structured thematic synthesis collectively strengthen internal consistency and improve the external generalizability of findings.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Overview

The analysis of literature and thematic synthesis yielded six dominant determinants of consumer buying behaviour in the FMCG sector:

- (1) Advertising effectiveness,
- (2) Digital marketing and social media influence,
- (3) Brand trust and loyalty,
- (4) Packaging and ethical consumption,
- (5) Demographic moderators, and
- (6) post-pandemic behavioural adaptation.

These determinants interconnect dynamically, with digital transformation as the most significant meta-variable influencing all others.

5.2 Advertising Effectiveness and Consumer Persuasion

Across studies, advertising remains a cornerstone of consumer awareness and brand positioning. The review reveals that *repetitive, emotionally resonant, and credible advertisements* enhance recall and stimulate impulse buying (Chukwu et al., 2019; Manandhar, 2018).

Television advertisements, while still effective among rural and older populations, are increasingly complemented or replaced by digital campaigns tailored to segmented audiences (Somireddy, 2018; Rahmani & Sarma, 2023).

The effectiveness of advertising in the FMCG industry now depends less on frequency and more on personalisation, cross-platform presence, and authenticity. Consumers distrust exaggerated claims and favour brands that communicate transparent value propositions.

5.3 Digital and social media as Behavioural Catalysts

The rapid diffusion of the Internet and smartphones has fundamentally altered consumer pathways to purchase.

Findings show that consumers are more receptive to peer recommendations and user-generated content than to traditional advertising (Olusegun et al., 2021). Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube act as *social validation mechanisms*, allowing consumers to evaluate credibility before purchase (Raushan & Dubey, 2024).

Studies (Rahmani & Sarma, 2023; Liu & Wang, 2023) also note that digital interactions strengthen brand attachment through emotional resonance especially among young female consumers who value aesthetic content and influencer endorsement. Social media functions not merely as a promotional channel but as a trust ecosystem. The persuasive impact lies in its interactivity where consumers feel engaged, not targeted. This aligns with modern engagement theory, suggesting that relational communication drives loyalty more than transactional marketing.

5.4 Brand Loyalty, Trust, and Perceived Quality

Loyalty within FMCG categories is a reflection of both *habitual consumption* and *emotional identification*.

Studies by Guliyev (2020) and Vijayalakshmi & Gurumoorthy (2019) indicate that trust is the most influential predictor of repeat purchase intention.

Furthermore, perceived quality and brand reliability act as mediators—consumers who view brands as consistent and ethical are less price-sensitive and more willing to recommend products to peers.

The modern consumer's loyalty is multi-dimensional: it combines *rational evaluation* (value, utility, accessibility) with *emotional confidence* (identity, social proof). Thus, brand management should focus on maintaining perceived integrity through transparent communication and sustainability claims.

5.5 Packaging, Sustainability, and Visual Appeal

Packaging exerts a dual influence: as a point-of-sale attractor and as a sustainability indicator. Research (Ehsan & Lodhi, 2015; Rambabu & Porika, 2020) emphasizes that colors, shape, and eco-friendly materials generate sensory and ethical appeal.

Recent sustainable-consumption studies (Srividya et al., 2024) link packaging design to environmental consciousness, suggesting that recyclable and minimalist packaging significantly enhances brand image among millennial consumers.

Packaging has evolved from a protective container to a communicative medium, symbolizing brand values and environmental responsibility. For FMCG marketers, it serves as a tangible interface where brand promise meets consumer experience.

5.6 Demographic Moderators and Behavioural Variation

Consumer responses are filtered through demographic and psychographic characteristics. Age, income, and education influence the relative importance of advertising channels, perceived risk, and purchase frequency.

Lavuri & Sreeramulu (2019) demonstrated that educated and urban women show higher brand loyalty and online purchasing frequency, whereas rural consumers emphasize price and availability (Nayak & Parija, 2021).

Marketers must recognize heterogeneity different demographic clusters respond differently to identical stimuli. Customization and market segmentation remain critical, with predictive analytics now enabling micro-targeting based on demographic behaviour profiles.

5.7 Post-Pandemic Shift and Digital Acceleration

The COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally restructured FMCG consumption patterns. Sharma and Jhamb (2020) found that necessity-driven digital adoption accelerated online grocery shopping, establishing new behavioural norms. Consumers who once hesitated to shop online are now habitual e-buyers, valuing safety, convenience, and contactless transactions.

The pandemic catalyzed a structural shift from occasional online purchases to sustained digital dependence. For the FMCG industry, this shift signifies that omnichannel presence is no longer optional but a survival prerequisite.

5.8 Integrated Discussion

Synthesising all determinants, the study proposes that digital influence acts as the *central nervous system* of modern consumer behaviour.

Advertising, brand loyalty, and packaging all function through digital touchpoints social media, online reviews, influencer advocacy transforming linear decision processes into interactive, cyclical engagements.

The findings align with Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) and the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989), suggesting that attitude, perceived control, and trust collectively determine purchase intention.

In this context, FMCG brands must design integrated marketing communication (IMC) strategies uniting emotional storytelling, ethical branding, and digital analytics to sustain consumer connection in an information-saturated environment.

6. Managerial Implications**6.1 Strategic Marketing Integration**

The results highlight that marketing managers in the FMCG sector must adopt integrated marketing communication (IMC) strategies that align traditional and digital platforms. Television, print, and outdoor advertising remain effective for brand recall, but digital touchpoints particularly social media, influencer marketing, and e-commerce advertising are now essential for personalized engagement.

Marketing strategies should focus on storytelling-based brand positioning and content authenticity, ensuring that advertisements reflect realistic benefits and social value rather than exaggerated claims.

6.2 Leveraging Digital Ecosystems

Given the dominance of digital influence in shaping behaviour, companies should invest in data analytics, customer relationship management (CRM), and AI-driven insights to monitor engagement, sentiment, and loyalty patterns. Tools such as Google Analytics, Meta Business Suite, and consumer sentiment tracking enable marketers to tailor campaigns dynamically.

Moreover, social commerce (e.g., Instagram Shops, WhatsApp Business) is emerging as a key growth avenue. FMCG firms should optimize product display, cross-platform consistency, and responsiveness to consumer feedback.

6.3 Building Brand Trust and Long-Term Loyalty

The review reveals that trust is a pivotal mediator in purchasing decisions. Managers should strengthen consumer-brand relationships through transparency, ethical conduct, and reliability. Effective tactics include:

- Publishing ingredient transparency and sustainability credentials on packaging.
- Implementing customer loyalty programs tied to digital platforms.
- Engaging with consumers post-purchase through service chatbots and online surveys.

A trust-driven marketing framework not only fosters repeat purchases but also transforms satisfied customers into brand advocates.

6.4 Sustainable Packaging and Ethical Responsibility

Packaging is no longer merely functional; it is a communication tool for brand values. Companies should adopt eco-friendly materials, minimalistic design, and recyclable components to appeal to environmentally conscious consumers. Integrating sustainability aligns with SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) and enhances both consumer perception and regulatory compliance.

Marketers should also use eco-labeling and QR codes that link to product traceability data, reinforcing authenticity and transparency in supply chains.

6.5 Targeting Through Demographic Intelligence

Understanding heterogeneity among consumer segments is vital.

- Youth and urban populations respond more to digital advertising, influencer campaigns, and interactive experiences.
- Rural and older consumers remain more responsive to traditional media, word-of-mouth, and price-oriented promotions.

FMCG companies should adopt differentiated targeting strategies using data-driven segmentation models, tailoring message content and channel selection to demographic profiles.

6.6 Post-COVID Marketing Adaptation

The pandemic accelerated e-commerce adoption, making omnichannel retailing indispensable. FMCG firms should maintain synchronized online and offline experiences, ensuring consistent pricing, inventory visibility, and delivery reliability.

Additionally, emotional branding—focusing on safety, trust, and community support continues to resonate with post-pandemic consumers who seek reassurance alongside value.

7. Theoretical Implications

From an academic standpoint, this study contributes to the integration of classical consumer behaviour theory with digital-era dynamics.

- The conceptual model expands upon the AIDA framework (Attention–Interest–Desire–Action) by embedding social media interactivity and ethical consumption as moderating variables.
- It also reinforces the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), demonstrating how attitudes (advertising perception), subjective norms (social influence), and perceived behavioural control (digital accessibility) collectively predict purchase intention in FMCG contexts.

By synthesizing diverse strands of research, this work provides a foundation for empirical testing through structural equation modeling (SEM) and multivariate regression, offering pathways for future quantitative validation.

8. Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study is primarily based on secondary data, which limits causal inference. Future research should:

1. Conduct empirical surveys or experiments across multiple demographic clusters to quantify the relative weight of each factor.
2. Employ longitudinal designs to capture how consumer behaviour evolves post-pandemic.
3. Examine cross-cultural differences, especially between emerging and developed economies, to test the universality of the proposed model.
4. Investigate AI-driven personalization and metaverse marketing as emerging determinants of future FMCG purchasing behaviour.

Such research extensions can validate and refine the current conceptual framework, making it applicable to global marketing contexts.

9. Conclusion

The study concludes that consumer buying behaviour in the FMCG sector is influenced by a dynamic combination of advertising, digital engagement, brand loyalty, packaging innovation, and demographic context.

Digitalization has transformed consumers from passive recipients of information to active participants in brand ecosystems. Social networking platforms, e-commerce portals, and influencer endorsements now play decisive roles in shaping perception and purchase intention. The proposed conceptual model underscores the mediating role of consumer perception the cognitive and emotional bridge between marketing stimuli and behavioural outcomes. Demographic moderators such as age, gender, and income further refine these relationships. Ultimately, the findings emphasize that the future of FMCG marketing lies in integrated, ethical, and data-driven strategies that unite brand trust with digital interactivity. Marketers who adapt to these evolving paradigms are more likely to sustain customer loyalty, competitive differentiation, and long-term profitability.

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