

## A Study On Digital Marketing And Its Impact On Rural Consumer Behaviour

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores the impact of digital marketing on rural consumer behavior in Thiruvallur District. Using a descriptive research design, primary data were collected from 160 rural respondents through a structured questionnaire based on convenience sampling. The study analyzes awareness levels, adoption patterns, purchase decisions, and challenges related to digital marketing platforms such as smartphones, social media, and e-commerce. Statistical tools including descriptive analysis and multiple regression were applied using SPSS v25, and the reliability of the instrument was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.846. The findings reveal that digital marketing factors significantly influence rural consumer behavior, though challenges such as low digital literacy, distrust in online payments, and infrastructural limitations persist. The study highlights the importance of website quality, active social media engagement, and credible online advertising strategies for effectively targeting rural markets....

**Keywords:** Digital Marketing, Rural Markets, Consumer Behaviour, Online Advertising, Social Media, India

### INTRODUCTION:

The digital era has altered the methods by which businesses engage with consumers. Digital marketing differs from traditional marketing by utilizing online platforms, including websites, search engines, mobile applications, and social media, to engage broader audiences, rather than relying primarily on print, television, and physical sales channels. The defining characteristics are interactivity, personalization, cost efficiency, and global reach (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Rural areas in India constitute a significant, underutilized opportunity for marketers. About 65% of the population in India lives in rural areas (World Bank, 2022). Historically, these consumers have depended on word-of-mouth, retail outlets, and price-sensitive purchasing behaviors. With the rise of smartphone usage, reduced mobile data costs following Reliance Jio's market entry, and government programs like Digital India, rural households are gaining significant access to digital tools (IAMAI, 2023). Rural consumer behavior is distinct, shaped by factors such as price, availability, community trust, local culture, and aspirational influences (Singh & Srivastava, 2019). Digital marketing can transform

consumer behaviors by facilitating access to information, allowing for comparisons, and establishing direct connections between consumers and brands.

### Digital Marketing and Rural Consumer Behaviour

Digital marketing plays a transformative role in rural markets by creating large-scale awareness through platforms such as YouTube and Facebook, with brands increasingly using vernacular video campaigns to reach local audiences. Rural purchase decisions are shifting from reliance on shopkeepers to digital influences such as

online reviews and social media content, reflecting aspirational buying behaviour. However, trust remains a concern, with many consumers preferring cash-on-delivery due to low confidence in digital payments, highlighting the need for stronger trust-building measures. Regional-language content has proven more effective, enabling platforms like Meesho and ShareChat to successfully penetrate rural markets. Social media channels, particularly WhatsApp, significantly influence product awareness through community sharing, while e-commerce adoption is steadily rising despite logistical challenges in delivery and returns.

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Prasad, M., & Iyer, S. (2025), carried out a review of rural consumer behaviour in developing economies, specifically examining India and Bangladesh. The authors, through secondary data analysis and literature synthesis, found that the effectiveness of digital marketing is enhanced when integrated with community-based strategies, including self-help groups and farmer cooperatives. The findings indicate that cultural norms and social validation significantly influence digital adoption. The study advocates for the incorporation of social influencers and community leaders in rural campaigns to enhance acceptance.

Sharma, V., & Agarwal, P. (2024) Sharma, V., & Agarwal, P. (2024) explored the adoption of digital payments by rural households in Uttar Pradesh. The study revealed that, despite increased smartphone penetration, only 38% of rural respondents utilize UPIs, or mobile wallets, on a regular basis. Barriers identified include fear of fraud, lack of awareness, and insufficient financial literacy. Respondents indicated an increasing readiness to

adopt digital payment systems, provided they are assured of safety and supported by awareness initiatives. The research indicates that secure transaction mechanisms and financial training programs at the village level are essential for enhancing participation in rural e-commerce.

Choudhary, M. (2023) examined the impact of WhatsApp and Facebook groups on purchasing decisions in rural areas. The research indicates that peer-to-peer recommendations in community groups substantially influence rural consumers' awareness and trust in products. Over 60% of respondents acknowledged that they made at least one purchasing decision influenced by information obtained from digital groups. The study emphasizes the increasing significance of social commerce in rural areas, where digital word-of-mouth is supplanting conventional in- person referrals.

Singh, A., & Srivastava, S. (2022) researched the impact of digital marketing on rural purchasing intentions by conducting a survey with 200 respondents in Bihar. Younger rural consumers demonstrate active engagement with advertisements on YouTube and Instagram, which notably influence their selection of fashion and lifestyle products. Older respondents exhibited greater resistance to digital channels, expressing concerns regarding product quality and payment security. The research findings indicate that tailored campaigns for various age demographics are essential for enhancing digital adoption.

Krishnan, S., & Joseph, A. (2020) studied rural consumer reactions to online advertisements in Kerala, utilizing a sample of 120 respondents. The analysis indicated that trust in e-commerce platforms is significantly influenced by brand reputation and word-of-mouth recommendations. Participants demonstrated a preference for retailers possessing a robust local presence, despite initial awareness being established through online advertisements. This finding illustrates the importance of hybrid marketing strategies that integrate digital visibility with offline credibility.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

To study the perception of the respondents regarding Digital Marketing.

To examine the impact of Digital Marketing on Rural Consumer Behaviour

### HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant impact of Digital Marketing on Rural Consumer Behaviour

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted among 160 rural consumers from Thiruvallur District, selected for its agrarian–semi-urban composition and growing digital penetration. Respondents were permanent rural residents with smartphone and internet access and exposure to digital platforms such as YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Flipkart, Amazon, and Paytm. A convenience sampling method was adopted due to field accessibility constraints. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire covering demographics, digital marketing scales, and rural consumer behaviour, supplemented by semi-structured interviews with 20 participants for qualitative insights. Secondary data were sourced from government reports (TRAI, IAMAI), industry publications (KPMG, NASSCOM), and recent academic studies (2019–2025). Descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis were employed, with Cronbach's alpha used to test reliability. Data were processed using MS Excel and SPSS v25.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The reliability analysis indicated a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.846, demonstrating good internal consistency (84.6%). Among the respondents, 56.4% were male and 43.6% were female. The majority (36.8%) were aged 30–40 years, followed by 28.2% aged 20–30 years, 24.9% aged 41–50 years, and 10.1% above 50 years. Most respondents were married (62.3%), while 37.7% were unmarried. In terms of occupation, 40.8% were private employees, 18.9% were businesspersons, 16.8% were government employees, 10.9% homemakers, 6.2% students, and 6.4% belonged to other categories. Regarding education, 36.6% were graduates, 28.1% had school-level education, 20.6% had other qualifications, and 14.7% were postgraduates. Monthly income distribution showed 29.3% earning ₹20,001–30,000, 27.9% below ₹20,000, 24.2% between ₹30,001–40,000, and 18.6% above ₹40,000.

Table A: Perception about Social Media Marketing

Statement	Mean	SD
My purchasing decisions are influenced by the brand's social media material	3.53	1.148
Through their social media profiles, I communicate with brands that I appreciate	2.62	0.968
Promotions on social media encourage me to shop online	3.76	1.184

I use social media to learn about new deals and items	3.41	1.044
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Table A shows that respondents hold generally favourable views toward social media marketing. Promotions on social media strongly encourage them to shop online, and brand- related content significantly influences their purchasing decisions. However, direct interaction with brands through social media profiles remains comparatively low. Overall, rural consumers are more influenced by social media content than actively engaged with brands online.

**Table B: Perception about Online Advertising**

Statement	Mean	SD
Product information is usefully provided by online ads	3.58	1.071
Online ads are compelling and enticing to me	3.89	1.156
I browse purchasing websites because of digital advertisements	3.72	1.138
I often click on advertisements that catch my attention online	3.32	1.156

Table B reveals a positive perception of internet advertising as an effective marketing tool. Respondents find online advertisements compelling and are often motivated to visit shopping websites due to digital ads.

Advertisements are also viewed as informative and useful for product knowledge. However, actual click-through behaviour remains comparatively moderate despite the favourable attitude toward online advertisement.

**Table C: Perception about Website Quality**

Statement	Mean	SD
The website is user-friendly and simple to use.	3.62	1.163
The website has a polished and appealing appearance.	3.79	1.099
The product information on the website is accurate and comprehensive.	2.72	1.002
When I transact on this website, I feel safe.	3.48	1.085

Table C indicates that respondents consider website quality an important factor in online shopping. Visual appeal receives the strongest agreement, followed by positive perceptions of user-friendliness and transaction

safety. However, accuracy and completeness of product information receive comparatively lower agreement. Overall, rural consumers appreciate website design and ease of use but expect greater transparency and reliability in product details.

**Table D: Perception about Online Customer Reviews**

Statement	Mean	SD
Before making a purchase, I consult online reviews from customers.	3.35	1.155
I feel more confident in purchasing the goods after reading positive reviews.	3.69	1.082
I believe what other consumers have to say online.	2.92	1.102
My assessment of a product's popularity is influenced by the quantity of reviews.	3.84	1.206

Table D shows that respondents acknowledge the importance of online customer reviews in shaping their purchase decisions. The quantity of reviews strongly influences

their perception of a product's popularity, and positive reviews enhance their confidence in buying. While many consult reviews before purchasing, trust in

individual opinions remains comparatively moderate. Overall, consumers value online reviews but retain some skepticism about their authenticity.

**Table E: Perception about Influencer Marketing**

Statement	Mean	SD
Influencers that advertise items online have my trust.	3.64	1.228
I shop online because of suggestions from influencers.	3.81	1.096
The product appears more dependable because of the influencer's experience.	2.71	0.889
Before making an online purchase, I frequently look at influencer material.	3.39	1.067

Table E reveals that respondents hold a generally positive view of influencer marketing. Recommendations from influencers strongly encourage online shopping, and influencers are largely perceived as trustworthy endorsers. Many respondents also refer to influencer content before making purchases. However, expertise alone does not guarantee trust, indicating that authenticity and relatability are more influential than professional credibility among rural consumers.

A multiple regression analysis was performed to evaluate the impact influence of digital marketing factors.

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant impact of Digital Marketing on Rural Consumer Behaviour

Table F: Impact of Digital Marketing Factors on Rural Consumer Behaviour

Predictor Variable	β		t	p
(Constant)	0.521	R <sup>2</sup> = 0.701	3.02	0.003**
Social Media Marketing	0.248		4.07	0.000**
Online Advertising	0.182	F (5,114) = 58.67 (p<.001)	3.29	0.001**
Website Quality	0.325		5.59	0.000**
Online Customer Reviews	0.197		3.18	0.002**
Influencer Marketing	0.141		2.66	0.009**

\*\*p < .01

The regression model was statistically significant (F (5,114) = 58.67, p < .001) and explained 70.1% of the variance (R<sup>2</sup> = 0.701) in rural consumer behaviour, leading to the rejection of H<sub>0</sub>. All five digital marketing variables significantly influenced online purchasing decisions. Website quality emerged as the strongest predictor, followed by social media marketing and online advertising, while online customer reviews and influencer marketing also showed significant positive effects. The findings highlight that user-friendly website, engaging social media presence, credible advertisements, authentic reviews, and trustworthy influencer collaborations are crucial for effectively targeting rural consumers.

**CONCLUSION**

This study highlights the growing influence of digital marketing on rural consumer behavior in Thiruvallur

district. The findings reveal that rural consumers are increasingly aware of online platforms and are significantly influenced by social media content, video demonstrations, and peer recommendations in their purchasing decisions. Younger, educated, and middle-income respondents show higher levels of digital engagement, whereas older and less educated consumers tend to exercise caution due to concerns related to trust and limited digital literacy.

The study further identifies that regional-language content, secure payment systems, and reliable delivery services play a crucial role in shaping adoption and purchase intentions. Despite this progress, infrastructural constraints and inadequate digital literacy continue to limit the full potential of digital marketing in rural areas. However, culturally sensitive approaches and vernacular promotional campaigns can substantially enhance

engagement, build trust, and foster long-term brand loyalty.

The results confirm that all five digital marketing factors examined in the study are significant predictors of rural consumer behavior. Specifically, improvements in website quality, sustained social media engagement, credible online advertising, and trustworthy influencer partnerships emerge as essential strategies for brands

targeting rural markets. Overall, the study underscores the transformative potential of digital marketing in strengthening rural markets, provided that marketers effectively address challenges related to trust, accessibility, and local preferences, thereby enabling more inclusive and impactful consumer outreach in rural India.

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