



A Strategic Perspective on Social Trust and Consumer Purchase Intention: Conceptual Insights and Future Research Directions

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this study was to conceptually map the link between consumer purchase intention and social trust. A bibliometric technique based on information from the Scopus database was used in this investigation. A total of 376 journal papers and conferences published between 2000 and 2025 were examined, using English and relevant to the research theme. The data selection method used the PRISMA approach to guarantee the precision and applicability of the examined research. Bibliometric analysis was carried out using Bibliometrix-R and VOSviewer software to visualize research trends, thematic evolution, and the distribution of dominant keywords. The study results showed that the publication trend on social trust and purchase intention has experienced rapid growth, especially in social media, digital marketing, and e-commerce. Some of the main themes that emerged include the role of online reviews, influencer credibility, and considering how online communities contribute to the development of consumer trust. Research gaps were discovered in this study, particularly with regard to the impact of AI algorithms on social trust building and the long-term effects of digital trust on customer loyalty. Suggestions for further research include further exploration of AI-based personalization in building trust, the impact of data protection regulations on consumer trust, and more effective community-based marketing strategies.

Keywords: Social Trust, Purchase Intention, Bibliometrics, PRISMA, Purchase Decision.



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INTRODUCTION

Trust in social environments has become key to understanding consumers' decisions, especially in an increasingly complex digital ecosystem. In recent decades, digital transformation has changed the pattern of social interactions, with the presence of social media, review platforms, and online communities shaping opinions of customers regarding a good or service (Chen & Ren, 2022; Popova et al., 2019). This phenomenon showed that trust has expanded beyond conventional interpersonal relationships but has become mainstream in a broader context, including digital and algorithmic social environments (Calzada, 2023). Today's consumers rely not only on information

from brands or companies but also from peers, influencers, and AI-based recommendation systems that increasingly shape purchasing decisions ([Lăzăroiu et al., 2020](#)).

But even while research on consumer decision-making trust has expanded, several research problems still need to be solved. One of the main research problems is how trust in the digital social environment is formed and developed along with changes in technology and consumer behavior. Several studies have examined trust in e-commerce ([Fernandes et al., 2022](#); [Q. Wang et al., 2022](#)), sharing economy ([Falahat et al., 2019](#)), as well as in relation to social media ([Hajli, 2015](#); [Sheikh et al., 2019](#)), but still limited to a sectoral approach. Trust in the digital social environment is dynamic and impacted by a number of elements, including online reputation, social interactions, and the transparency of the algorithms used in digital platforms. ([Bernal & Mazo, 2022](#)). The role of trust in shaping consumer decisions is still often studied in an individual context, while the influence of the social environment in shaping beliefs and decisions is not yet fully understood holistically.

The urgency of this research is further enhanced by the paradigm shift in how consumers acquire and process information. In an environment where misinformation and disinformation are increasingly prevalent ([Banerjee & Sathyanarayana Rao, 2020](#)), understanding how trust is built and maintained is becoming increasingly important. Therefore, a comprehensive scientific mapping is needed to identify research directions that can fill the void in the body of current literature.

Regarding the research gap, two main aspects must be considered: theoretical and empirical. Theoretically, the majority of studies on trust in relation to consumer choices was still based on classical theories such as Trust Theory. ([Bachmann & Inkpen, 2011](#)) and Trust Models in E-Commerce ([Falahat et al., 2019](#)). However, this approach does not fully capture the complexity of today's evolving digital social environment, where trust can be built through algorithms, crowdsourcing, and blockchain-based verification mechanisms. ([Martín-Rojas et al., 2021](#); [Sykora et al., 2022](#)). Empirically, research limitations still examine how various forms of trust (e.g., trust in other users, platforms, or algorithmic systems) interact and influence consumer decisions in various product and service categories ([Liu et al., 2023](#)).

This study's innovation was found in the holistic approach used in mapping trust in the social environment towards consumer decisions. This research will identify key trends, emerging research topics, and opportunities for further exploration using a bibliometric approach and scientific analysis. Thus, this research provides theoretical contributions in updating the trust model in consumer decisions and offers practical implications for marketers and digital platform managers in building trust-based communication strategies.

In order to propose future research topics that can address the gaps in the literature, this study sought to answer this research question how can a conceptual framework, supported by bibliometric analysis, be developed to identify future research directions addressing the influence of social environment trust on consumer decision-making?. By taking this approach, it is believed that this findings will make a substantial contribution to the development of a more thorough knowledge of the function that trust plays in the social context.

The Role of Trust in Consumer Purchasing Decisions

When it comes to making decisions, consumers rely heavily on trust. It is a fundamental element that influences various aspects of consumer behavior. The literature consistently highlights the need for trust in facilitating a seamless online shopping experience, as consumers often engage in transactions without the ability to physically inspect the product beforehand. ([Mahliza, 2020](#); [Pratondo et al., 2023](#)).

An important aspect of trust is its direct relationship to purchasing decisions. Research shows that higher levels of consumer trust correlate with increased purchase intentions. Trustworthy sellers and credible online platforms increase consumer trust, increasing purchasing behavior. ([Rahmawati & Mangifera, 2024](#); [Ramadhan et al., 2021](#)). In addition, the perceived reliability of information from an e-commerce website informs consumer trust, mediating its influence on purchasing decisions ([Qalati et al., 2021](#)).

Next, the interaction relationship perceived risk, trust, and purchasing choices has attracted substantial attention. Consumers tend to weigh the potential risks associated with a purchase against their trust level in the seller or platform ([Hansen et al., 2018](#)). Previous studies showed that when trust increases, consumers are more probable to discount risks, promoting a positive outlook on completing a transaction. ([Setiawan et al., 2023](#)).

Social Trust Models and Theories in Consumer Purchasing Decisions

Social trust can be characterized as customers' faith in the dependability, integrity, and intentions of others in the marketplace, which significantly influences purchasing decisions ([Pham et al., 2024](#)). Various frameworks describe how social trust operates in the consumer decision-making process. The Commitment-Trust Theory suggests that dedication and trust are the cornerstones of effective relationships in consumer-to-consumer (C2C) and business-to-consumer (B2C) contexts. Findings suggested that when consumers trust their social commerce platform and the individuals within it, this trust can strengthen their purchase intentions, as they are more likely to rely on peer recommendations when making decisions ([Leong et al., 2024](#)).

Furthermore, trust transfer theory suggests that consumers can transfer the trust they have developed in one context to other related contexts. For example, trust in a social media user can extend to the brands they promote ([Wiyata, 2023](#)). According to earlier studies, when customers feel a close connection between themselves and a trusted individual in social commerce, this trust reduces the perceived danger and raises the product's perceived worth., therefore raising the possibility that a purchase will be made. ([Suleman et al., 2023](#); [Yazid et al., 2021](#)).

The Sociological Perspective on Trust provides insight into how societal context influences the dynamics of consumer trust. The level of trust in society can indicate general consumer behavioral tendencies, suggesting that higher societal trust correlates with greater consumer engagement in the marketplace ([Wang et al., 2020](#)). Trust becomes especially important in an environment where consumers must navigate information overload and varying levels of reliability in social recommendations ([Ghafari et al., 2020](#)).

METHOD

This research method uses a bibliometric analysis approach to conduct scientific mapping of the development of studies on social trust and its relationship to the consumer decision-making process. Bibliometric analysis was chosen because this approach allows for in-depth exploration of research trends, scientific collaborations, and conceptual structures that develop in academic literature. In an era where the number of scientific publications is increasing exponentially, bibliometric analysis is a handy tool for identifying key patterns, research gaps and potential avenues for further investigation within a field of study ([Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017](#)).

From 2000 to 2025, 376 papers and proceedings from the Scopus database served as the study's data sources. Scopus was selected as a data source based on its reputation as one of the largest and most trusted academic literature databases in the world. Scopus includes highly reputable journals that have undergone a rigorous peer-review process, ensuring the articles analyzed have strong academic credibility ([Donthu et al., 2021](#)).

PRISMA was used in this investigation, and known as Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses method to ensure systematic and transparent data selection. PRISMA was used to screen and select literature predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, guaranteeing that only pertinent and superior publications were examined. ([Page et al., 2021](#)).

The selection process begins with a search using keywords related to trust in the social environment and consumer decisions. Then, a filtering stage is carried out according to the keywords, abstract, and title. The keywords used in the article search were "Social Trust," "Community Trust," "Purchase Intention," and "Purchase Decision."

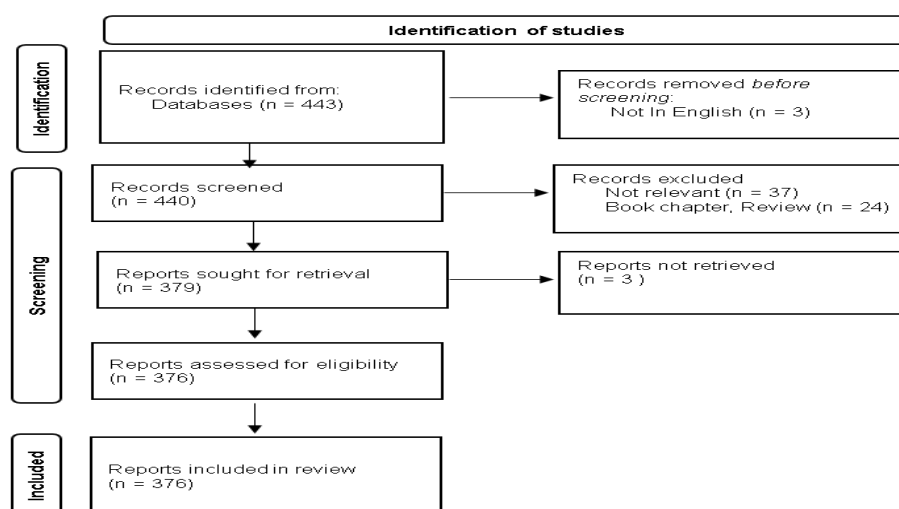


Figure 1. Data Selection Process

Articles that were irrelevant to the research theme, not available in English, or not in the form of journal articles and seminar proceedings would be excluded from the analysis. Inclusion criteria included studies that talk about the social trust and consumer decisions relationship in online and

offline contexts and articles available for full access for further analysis. The data selection process is presented in Figure 1.

Data analysis in this research, we employed bibliometric techniques that not only allow quantitative analysis of the number of publications and research development trends but also reveal patterns of relationships between concepts that underlie the study of trust in the social environment and how this concept has developed over time (Zupic & Čater, 2015).

To support the bibliometric analysis process, this study utilized Biblioshiny-R, an extension of Bibliometrix, to produce thematic maps, thematic evolution, and trend topics. It also used VOSviewer software to visualize relationships in the literature through network, overlay, and density analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview Research Data



Figure 2. Overview Research Data

Figure 2 gives a summary of the research information incorporated into the bibliometric analysis.. The data includes the number of publications, the number of authors involved, and the distribution of publications by year. This visualization provides initial insight into the development of research on trust in the social environment and its relationship to consumer decision-making.

Most Relevant Source

Table 1 below lists the top fifteen papers with the most citations that are most pertinent.

Table 1. Most Relevant Source (N=15)

Paper	DOI	Total Citations
Gefen (2000), Omega	10.1016/S0305-0483(00)00021-9	2430
Gefen & Straub (2004), Omega	10.1016/j.omega.2004.01.006	1539
Kim & Park (2013), Int J Inf Manage	10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2012.11.006	795

Lu et al. (2016), Comput Hum Behav	10.1016/j.chb.2015.11.057	794
Chen & Barnes (2007), Ind Manage Data Sys	10.1108/02635570710719034	603
Lu et al. (2010), Elect Commer Res Appl	10.1016/j.elerap.2009.07.003	532
Hajli et al. (2017), J Bus Res	10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.10.004	466
See-To & Ho (2014), Comput Hum Behav	10.1016/j.chb.2013.10.013	456
Kim & Ko (2010), J Glob Fashion Mark	10.1080/20932685.2010.10593068	447
Agag & El-Masry (2016), Comput Hum Behav	10.1016/j.chb.2016.02.038	428
Chen & Shen (2015), Decis Support System	10.1016/j.dss.2015.07.012	415
Sparks et al. (2013), Tour Management	10.1016/j.tourman.2013.03.007	411
Ng (2013), Information Management	10.1016/j.im.2013.08.002	364
Lăzăroiu et al. (2020), Front Psychol	10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00890	321
Kim & Kim (2021), J Bus Res	10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.05.024	314

Table 1 shows that research on social trust and purchase intention has received extensive attention in various disciplines, such as information management, consumer behavior, and decision support systems. This table also provides an overview of key authors who are important references in this field and reflects the dynamics of the development of academic literature from year to year.

Conceptual Structure

Figure 3 presents a thematic map that groups key concepts according to their level of development and importance in the literature. This map has several clusters that show how research topics develop and interact with each other.

One interesting finding from this thematic map is that trust emerges as a concept centered on various sub-topics, such as brand trust, social influence, consumer engagement, and online reviews. This finding shows that trust stands alone as a central concept and has a close relationship with various factors that influence consumer decisions. However, several themes are still underdeveloped but have great potential for further research, such as confidence in social commerce and AI-driven recommendations.

The findings of this thematic map confirm that research on trust in the social environment still tends to focus on traditional factors. In contrast, aspects of trust in AI-based technology, algorithm transparency, and the role of personalization in building trust still receive less attention.

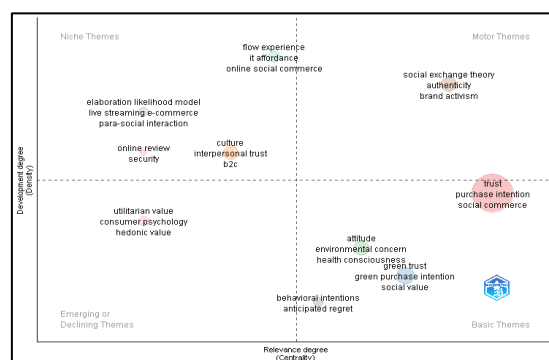


Figure 3. Thematic Map

Figure 4 illustrates the evolution of research themes over time, showing how concepts in the investigation of consumer decision-making and trust have evolved. This visualization shows that early research focused on essential factors such as customer satisfaction, brand loyalty, and service quality. Over time, more modern topics emerged, such as e-WOM, online trust, and trust in consumer reviews on social media.

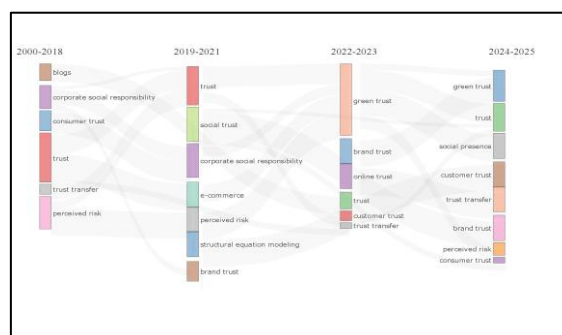


Figure 4. Thematic Evolution

These findings support that trust in social environments is increasingly influenced by digital interactions, not just by direct experiences between consumers and brands. They also indicate that the concept of trust has expanded from the business-to-consumer (B2C) realm to more complex realms such as trust in algorithms, influencers, and AI-based recommendation systems.

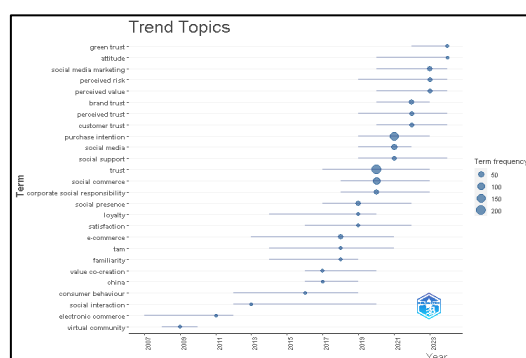


Figure 5. Trend Topics

Source: Biblishony-R output, 2025

Figure 5 presents the trend of the most researched topics in recent years and provides insight into which aspects are most relevant in the investigation of consumer decision-making and trust. This visualization shows that terms such as online trust, consumer engagement, brand authenticity, and influencer marketing are increasingly gaining attention among academics. This trend reflects a shift in trust dynamics, where consumers no longer rely solely on direct interactions with brands but also on opinions and recommendations from third parties, such as influencers or recommendation system algorithms.

This trend shows the need to understand how social media-based marketing communications, customer reviews, and AI-based systems influence consumer decisions. The research gap that can

Network, Overlay, and Density Visualization

[illegible]

Source: VosViewer Output, 2025

Next, Figure 7 on Overlay Visualization provides a dynamic perspective on how the concepts in this study have evolved over time. In this visualization, the colors used reflect the publication period of the articles, with lighter colors indicating more recent research. This analysis helps identify recent research trends as well as shifts in focus in studies related to trust in social environments and consumer decisions.

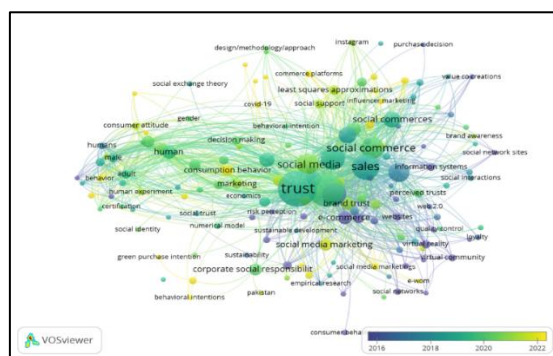


Figure 7. Overlay Visualization

Source: VosViewer Output, 2025

From the results of the Overlay Visualization, it can be seen that research on trust in the social environment initially focused more on traditional aspects such as customer satisfaction, brand loyalty, and service quality. However, there has been a shift in recent years towards topics more relevant to the digital era, such as social media marketing, influencer trustworthiness, peer recommendations, and AI-driven customer engagement. This shift reflects how digital technology has changed the landscape of consumer trust, where trust emerges from both firsthand consumer-brand interactions and social influence facilitated through digital platforms. The findings of Overlay Visualization highlight the need to explore further the role of online social trust, precisely how elements such as trust in artificial intelligence (AI), data-driven personalization, and algorithmic transparency influence consumer decisions.

Next, Figure 8 shows the Density Visualization that provides a summary of the density of research topics in this field. Lighter areas indicate concepts that have been widely researched, while darker areas indicate topics that have received less attention.

From the results of Density Visualization, it can be seen that the concept of trust is in a high-density area, which confirms that trust is among the most studied themes in scholarly works related to decision-making by consumers. In addition, online trust, trust in e-commerce, and brand trust appear to be dominant topics. On the other hand, several concepts have lower densities, such as trust in AI, recommendation systems, and user-generated content, which shows that although these themes are starting to get attention, there is still room for further exploration.

The findings from this density visualization indicate that although social trust has been extensively researched in the context of conventional marketing, there are still limitations in understanding how trust is formed and developed in increasingly complex digital interactions. For example, how AI-based social interactions and automation affect consumer trust has not been widely explained in the existing literature.

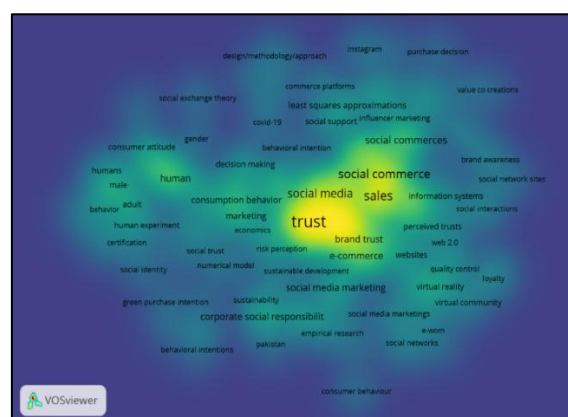


Figure 8. Density Visualization

Source: VosViewer Output, 2025

The digital transformation and the rise of complex social interactions have positioned trust as a key cornerstone of contemporary marketing. This phenomenon strengthens the argument from [Dalal et al. \(2023\)](#) and [Lăzăroiu et al. \(2020\)](#), emphasizing that social relationships, reliability perceptions, and honesty in interpersonal and digital communication influence consumers' comfort levels in making decisions. Although much previous literature has discussed trust and social influence separately in the realm of e-commerce and social media ([Akrouf & Nagy, 2018](#); [Ayuni, 2020](#); [Zhang et al., 2010](#)), there has been no systematic scientific mapping of the relationship between social trust and purchasing intentions and consumer decision-making globally.

The findings from the Most Relevant Sources (Table 1) provide a critical overview of the main publications that are the primary references in the investigation of purchase intention and social trust. The table displays the fifteen most influential scientific articles according to the average number of citations year and the overall amount of citations. The most prominent articles come from [Gefen \(2000\)](#), published in the journal *Omega*, with 2,430 citations and an average of 93.46 annually. This article provided an important foundation in the initial understanding of how trust can be built in digital context and how psychological and The effect of technological factors to user trust and, ultimately, their intention to make a purchase. The dominance of this article in citations shows that the trust model offered is very relevant and adaptive to the development of digital technology.

Next, the publication by [Gefen & Straub \(2004\)](#) also occupies an important position in the literature, totaling 1,539 citations, and shows the author's consistency in contributing important insights into trust, especially in a digital environment that relies on virtual interactions without direct physical contact. Articles from [Kim & Park \(2013\)](#) and [Lu et al. \(2010\)](#) emphasized the importance of information management and user behavior in shaping purchase intentions, expanding the perspective that trust is not only formed from technical quality but also from interpersonal perceptions and accompanying digital experiences.

This finding is significant in the context of the research objectives, as it confirms that the study of social trust and purchase intention has strong roots and continues to evolve as technology and

consumer behavior change. In addition, articles like those that are written by [Chen & Barnes \(2007\)](#), [Lu et al. \(2010\)](#), and [Hajli et al. \(2017\)](#) enrich the discourse with a more diverse approach, including variables such as e-WOM, social media, and information quality, all of which help strengthen the connection between buying intention and social trust in the digital space.

Interestingly, more recent publications such as [Lăzăroiu et al. \(2020\)](#) and [Kim & Kim \(2021\)](#) have also managed to gain significant attention in a short period of time, with high annual citation rates. This finding shows that trust and purchase intention remains a key focus in the digital transformation era, especially when consumers are faced with abundant information, uncertainty, and the need to evaluate the credibility of sources independently.

This study successfully provides thematic visualization and interpretation of the literature developed from 2000 to 2025 through a bibliometric approach. The analysis shows that scientific attention to social trust and purchase intention has increased significantly since 2019, in line with the acceleration of digital transformation and changes in consumer behavior after the pandemic.

This mapping shows that the concept of social trust cannot be separated from issues such as online reviews, peer influence, perceived credibility, and digital communities. These themes appear dominantly in the VOSviewer density and overlay visualizations, indicating the central of social factors' influence on how people perceive trust in brands and products. This finding strengthens the statement by [Dinh et al. \(2022\)](#); [Hameed et al. \(2019\)](#); [Wang et al. \(2016\)](#); [Widayat et al. \(2022\)](#), which showed that trust in virtual social environments contributes significantly to perceived value and purchasing decisions, especially among digital natives.

The thematic map and thematic evolution showed a conceptual evolution from trust initially only associated with brands or companies to a broader scope of trust in a social context: trust in online communities, influencers, and social networks where consumers are involved. This evolution is significant to understand because it reflects changes in the psychological dynamics of consumers, from previously passive and only receiving information to active consumers who seek social validation before making purchasing decisions. ([Ali Hakami & Hosni Mahmoud, 2022](#); [Heinonen, 2011](#); [Johansen et al., 2017](#)).

CONCLUSION

This study emphasizes that trust in the social environment is a dynamic factor significantly shaping consumer behavior. Understanding how trust develops within social and technological contexts enables marketers and policymakers to create effective strategies for building lasting customer relationships and fostering a transparent digital environment.

Using bibliometric analysis with VOSviewer and biblioshiny-R, the research maps trends on social trust and purchase intention over two decades, revealing that trust extends beyond individual-brand relationships to broader social interactions, including online communities and digital engagement. Theories such as Trust Transfer and Trust-Commitment explain how trust is built and transferred, while sociological perspectives highlight wider social influences.

This study meets its objectives by mapping the literature's strengths, weaknesses, and future directions, advocating for a cross-disciplinary approach that integrates psychological, social, and technological dimensions. Such an approach is essential for designing sustainable trust-building marketing strategies responsive to evolving consumer behavior in the digital era.

One of this study's primary goal was to chart the course and potential of future research and identify empirical and conceptual gaps that have not been addressed. From the bibliometric results obtained, it was found that most of the literature is still sectoral and does not touch on interdisciplinary issues.

Only a few studies integrate the neuro-marketing approach with trust or discuss trust in the context of adopting artificial intelligence-based technology, even though the development of AI and algorithms has drastically changed the form of social interaction and perception of trust. This evidence opens up opportunities for broader research, such as exploring trust in the context of personalized marketing, chatbot interactions, or decision-making in the metaverse.

This bibliometric study offers valuable insights into the evolving relationship between social trust and consumer purchase intention; however, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the analysis is constrained by the selection of databases and keywords used, which may have excluded relevant studies published outside the chosen sources or in languages other than English. This limitation could affect the comprehensiveness of the literature reviewed and potentially overlook regional or emerging perspectives. Second, bibliometric methods primarily focus on quantitative measures such as citation counts and co-authorship networks, which may not fully capture the nuanced theoretical developments or contextual factors influencing trust and consumer behavior. Consequently, the interpretative depth regarding causal mechanisms or cultural variations remains limited.

Third, the rapidly changing digital marketing environment means that recent studies may not yet have sufficient citations to appear prominently in the analysis, possibly biasing the results toward more established research. Finally, while this study proposes future research directions based on identified gaps, these recommendations should be further validated through empirical investigations to ensure their practical relevance. Despite these limitations, the study provides a structured foundation for advancing scholarship on social trust and consumer purchase intention within the dynamic marketing landscape.

The study's theoretical contributions include developing marketing literature by expanding the understanding of trust dynamics in the digital context by offering a more integrative perspective on trust, namely that trust is not only the result of consumer relationships with brands but also the result of collective dynamics in digital social spaces.

This study also strengthens previous theories, such as the trust-based decision-making model and social influence theory, by adopting a comprehensive data-driven approach. However, it also highlights how trust in the digital social environment has substantially transformed. This study fills a theoretical gap by showing that trust not only functions as a risk-reducing element in transactions but also as a factor in forming communities and social relationships that influence consumer decisions collectively. This study also finds that trust in the digital environment is increasingly

influenced by content personalization, recommendation algorithms, and engagement with influencers with high credibility, thus opening up space for further exploration of the mechanisms of trust formation and maintenance in technology-based marketing.

This research has important applications as well for industry and marketers in designing trust-based communication and marketing strategies. The results indicate that a brand's success in building trust does not only depend regarding the caliber of the goods or services offered but also on how the brand is managed in the digital social ecosystem.

Future research directions related to mainstreaming trust in the social environment towards consumer decision-making can be developed in several deeper key dimensions. One important research direction is to explore the specific factors in social interactions that most impact the development of customer trust. This study can focus on how interpersonal relationships, including family, friends, local communities, and work environments, shape perceptions of trust and ultimately influence consumer purchasing decisions. Future research can further explore how cultural elements and social norms in various societies participate in strengthening or weakening trust in marketing interactions.

Future studies should also consider the sectoral context in understanding the role of social trust on decision-making by customers. For example, is the impact of trust more significant in the service industry compared to physical products? Interpersonal trust may be more critical in the banking, healthcare, and education sectors than in the more standardized consumer goods industry. Researchers can develop more industry-specific and applicable models by understanding the sectors most affected by social trust.

Future research could also examine generational differences in building trust in social environments and how this affects purchasing decisions. Older generations may rely more on face-to-face interactions and direct recommendations, while younger generations may be more open to various social information sources. An in-depth comparative study across age groups could provide insights into how marketing strategies ought should be modified to accommodate various consumer segments.

Future research can also apply more sophisticated methodological approaches to dig deeper into the relationship between trust in social environments and consumer decision-making. For example, qualitative approaches such as ethnography and in-depth interviews can provide richer insights into how consumers build trust in everyday social interactions. Meanwhile, quantitative approaches with structural equation modeling (SEM) or field experiments can help verify the causal link between social trust variables and purchase decisions on a broader scale.

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