

# COBRAs AND PURCHASE INTENTION TOWARDS PASSENGER CARS

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## Abstract

The use of social media platforms and websites to promote a product or service is a trend for marketers. Social Media Marketing not only allows marketers to reach target market, identify ways to engage existing consumers but also to promote their content. The enthusiasm for marketers to focus on social media marketing is the change in activity of consumers in social media. There is a growing interest from the part of consumers in digital interactivity. Information technology is empowering consumers, and their role is shifting from being passive recipients of information to becoming active generators of information (Stewart and Pavlou, 2002).

**Keywords:** Consumers Online Brand Related Activities (COBRA), social media platforms, passenger cars.

## Introduction

The use of social media platforms and websites to promote a product or service is a trend for marketers. Social Media Marketing not only allows marketers to reach target market, identify ways to engage existing consumers but also to promote their content. The enthusiasm for marketers to focus on social media marketing is the change in activity of consumers in social media. There is a growing interest from the part of consumers in digital interactivity. Information technology is empowering consumers, and their role is shifting from being passive recipients of information to becoming active generators of information (Stewart and Pavlou, 2002). Consumer activity in social media has increased recently. Consumers are involving in a variety of activities ranging from consuming content, participating in discussions, and sharing knowledge with other consumers to contributing to other consumers' activities. As there is an increase in activities of consumers which was previously performed by companies, there is a transformation in the whole marketing landscape. Hence it is important for the marketers to understand the change in consumer

behaviour to make use of social media in a mutually beneficial way.

Consumers Online Brand Related Activities (COBRA) is a set of brand-related online activities on the part of the consumer that vary in the degree to which the consumer interacts with social media and engages in the consumption, contribution, and creation of media content (Schivinski, Christodoulides, & Dabrowski, 2016). Consumers are increasingly purchasing in online world and digital and social media have enveloped many of the traditional retail roles. Social media marketing has become an essential tool in every industry, and automotive brands are no different. Modern consumers, besides traditional retail trends, have kicked off their automotive research online, making digital media the new basis for automotive marketing.

Purchase intention is the preference of consumer to buy the product or service which is an indication to the marketer that the consumer will purchase a product after evaluation. Many factors affect the consumer's intention to purchase while selecting the product and the ultimate decision depends on consumers'

intention with large external factors (Keller, 2001). Purchase intention is a critical factor in understanding the buying behaviour of all products. Activities related to purchase decisions like information seeking, searching for bargains and expressing dissatisfaction about services by visiting retail store is matter of past now. Now social media have completely transformed the activities related to buying process of all products. Automobile industry is also not an exception for this, where people in the market for a new car can move through most of the steps in purchase process without ever accessing a car dealer. Hence this research focuses on the consumers' online brand related activities and how it is shaping the intention of consumers towards purchase of a product.

Adept to the adoption of SMM, automobile brands have increased their social media communications with consumers, seeking to strengthen consumer-brand relationships. Accordingly, brands communicate brand-related information on their Facebook pages, interacting with existing and potential customers to build strong and positive brand knowledge in their minds (Seo and Park, 2018). Research by Adapty a digital ad company in 2018 shows that social spend among auto marketers is trending upwards, with the vast majority of media spend (87%) dedicated to Facebook and Instagram in 2018. This aligns with car consumer trends, which show 80% of prospective car buyers begins their searches online. 53% of people use multiple devices to conduct research, especially mobile devices where social media reigns. For example, BMW and Mercedes-Benz focus on putting out photos on the platform Instagram, whereas Toyota published more posts on Facebook. These were not only photos, but videos as well. Next to Mercedes-Benz, BMW, Toyota, Citroen and Volkswagen are amongst the top 5 companies when it comes to being active and producing the most posts on social media (Walgrave 2018). Most brands do not focus on posting on Twitter. However, Tesla concentrates the most on this social network. Notably, luxury brands increasingly rely on SMM to drive consumers' online brand-related activities (COBRAs), including their consuming, contributing and creating behaviours, to strengthen consumer-brand engagement (CBE) (Arrigo, 2018; Liu et al., 2019, Man Lai Chung 2019) and loyalty intentions (Piehler et al., 2019).

Social Media provides opportunity to marketers to engage and interact with consumers justifying research interest in understanding what all activities are performed by consumers' online. AS COBRAs play an important role in shaping consumers' positive behaviours automobile brands need to understand how to influence COBRAs in Indian Context. Cristian Buzeta & Patrick De Pelsmacker & Nathalie Dens (2020) explored how social media use motivations drive consumers' online brand related activities using six dimension uses and gratification. However, empirical research on COBRA and their influence on purchase behaviour is still limited.

### The Rationale of the Study

Social media have transformed online consumer behaviour (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010), which has important consequences for firms, products and brands. Consumers are becoming increasingly influential with respect to the brands they are interacting about (Muñiz & Schau 2007; Cova & Dall' 2009). Consumers interactions with and about brands have a much stronger impact on consumer behaviour than traditional forms of marketing and advertising (Chiou & Cheng 2003; Villanueva et al. 2008). These interactions can be in any form like sharing, commenting, contributing etc. which is named as consumer online brand related activities (COBRA). COBRA is about consumer's behaviour and engagement through social media. COBRA is defined as the set of brand related online activities on the part of the consumer that vary in degree to which the consumer interact with social media and engagement in the consumption, contribution and creation of media content. Watching brand-related videos on Cadbury Dairy Milk's YouTube channel, talking about Volkswagen on Twitter and uploading pictures of their new Nike sneakers to Instagram are examples of consumers' online brand related activities (COBRAs).

McQuail's (1983) four-category classification of social media use motivations such as entertainment, integration and social interaction, personal identity, or information motivations: remuneration and empowerment provides only an understanding of general social media use, but they do not explicitly address brand-related social media use. But in current scenario it is essential for marketers to know about social media use related to brands. Evaluating the

consumers' online brand related activities will help marketers to understand whether those activities actually influence consumers when they consider purchasing a product.

Social media marketing is the way a brand/company uses social media effectively to build relationships through trust, useful content, help, and authority. (Varinder Taprial, 2012). According to Kotler (2016) purchase intention is when the consumer is stimulated by external factors and comes along to decide on purchases based on their personal characteristics and processes decision making. There are several factors that shape the purchase intention of consumers irrespective of a product or service. With the advent of multiple channels and a corresponding increase in the competition between channels, the understanding of what motivates consumers to purchase becomes increasingly important (Smith et.al 2002). Social media marketing have become the buzz word now a day. The marketers in order to build trust and long lasting relationships needs to understand what actually motivates consumers to use social media platforms and whether the brand related activities in social media platforms influence the purchase intention of consumers . There are studies focusing on motivations to use of social media in general (Jamal J. Al-Menayes, 2015; Stephanie M Jharvi, 2017; Cristian Buzeta et.al, 2020; Kristina Heinone, 2011). Several studies have already tried to analyse the relationship between motivation to use social media based on consumer online brand related activities (Muntinga, 2013; Piehler, Schade, Kleine-Kalmer, & Burmann, 2019; Saridakis, Baltas, Oghazi, & Hultman, 2016; Vale & Fernandes, 2017). Moreover, the few papers that have addressed the relationship between social media use motives and brand-related content have mainly focused on the most basic levels (i.e., interactions on social media (e.g., Gao & Feng, 2016; Phua et al., 2017). But studies focusing on impact of usage of social media by brands on purchase intention are limited. Mehedi Hasan et.al (2020) and Katja Hutter et.al (2013) conducted studies analysing impact of social media on purchase intention. Katja Hutter et.al (2013) analyzed how social media activities, in specifically the Facebook page of a car manufacturer, and user interactions with these brand related activities affect the perception of brands and ultimately influence consumers purchase decision. Mehendi Hasan

et.al (2020) developed an understanding of the antecedents of social media marketing and their effects on purchase intention, as well as the moderating influence of local and nonlocal brands on these relationships. Studies focusing on how uses and gratifications influence COBRAS and whether it is affecting the purchase decision of consumers are scarce. Hence the research is focusing on what consumers do with social media, what are the results from consumers' interactions with brands on social and how the interactions influence the purchase intention.

Social media marketing has become relevant for all products and cars are not an exception. Now a days before making a purchase not only traditional media but also social media influences the intention of consumers. Marketers have also increased their presence on social various platforms. Automobile marketers are now using Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest etc as a way to reach the targeted audience. More usage of social media platforms by consumers are actually a positive indication for the marketers so that they can focus marketing communications through these. Consumers now days not only use social media for entertainment but also for contribution and consumption which should be identified and used by marketers to analyse the behaviour. So the research focuses on the following:

Research Question 1: What are the Consumers Online Brand Related Activities in relation to the Social Media Marketing of Passenger Cars?

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between COBRAs on Facebook, YouTube & Instagram and purchase intention towards passenger cars?

## Review of literature

Cristian Buzeta.et.al (2020) in their study used a six-dimension uses and gratifications (U&G) framework, to explore how social media use motivations drive consumers' online brand related activities (COBRAs: consumption, contribution, and creation of brand-related content). The authors examined these relationships for different social media types by drawing on two previously suggested dimensions, namely their nature of connections and level of customization of

messages. Using a US-based sample ( $n = 939$ ), findings of a PLS-SEM procedure show that “traditional” U&G hardly explain social media COBRAs but Empowerment and Remuneration motives which are the two U&G specifically relevant for social media use are the most critical COBRAs drivers. Multigroup analyses suggest that the relation between U&G and COBRAs differs between social media platforms. They argued for a specific design of brand-related activities on different social media in order to incentivize users' engagement with brand-related content.

Cheung et al. (2020) examined the impact of social media marketing (SMM) efforts, including entertainment, customisation, interaction and trendiness via WeChat, on consumers' online brand-related activities (COBRAs) and their related outcomes, including on-going search behaviour and repurchase intention. Data collected in China from 433 WeChat users utilising a self-administered online survey is tested for luxury cosmetics brands. Data analysis used partial least squares–structural equation modelling which indicated that entertainment and interaction drive consumers' consuming, contributing and creating behaviours, whilst trendiness drives creating behaviour only. Inconsistent with previous research findings, customisation has a non-significant impact on consumers' consuming, contributing and creating behaviours.

Hanif (2020) analysed the effects of brand advertisement on social media and its influence on the purchase intention of different brands. The results indicate that brand advertisement had significant effects on the consumers involvement and their loyalty enhance the purchase intention, additionally the brands social media contented had a strong command on the customers with social media advertisement pages.

Piehler et al. (2019) studied four U&G (i.e., Information, Integration and Social interaction, Entertainment, Remuneration) and their relationship with COBRAs in a sample of 359 Facebook users. They, too, reported that Integration and Social interaction motives drive all three COBRAs. In contrast, they did not find a significant influence of Information motives.

Vale and Fernandes (2017) added Brand love as a seventh motivation to interact with brands in social media. In a sample of 562 football club fans of a major UEFA league on Facebook, they found that Information, Empowerment, and Brand love are the main drivers of consumption, contribution, and creation COBRAs, respectively. The need for Integration and Social interaction emerged as the second most important motivation overall, while Entertainment did not significantly influence any of the three COBRAs.

Previous studies focused on Consumer Online Related Activities in various platforms and purchase intention separately. But there are hardly studies which analysed the influence of COBRAS on purchase intention of consumers. In the current scenario when all brands are focusing more on social media promotions this research attempts to analyse the influence of social media activities of consumers and whether it is influencing the intention of consumers to purchase a car

## Research design and Methodology

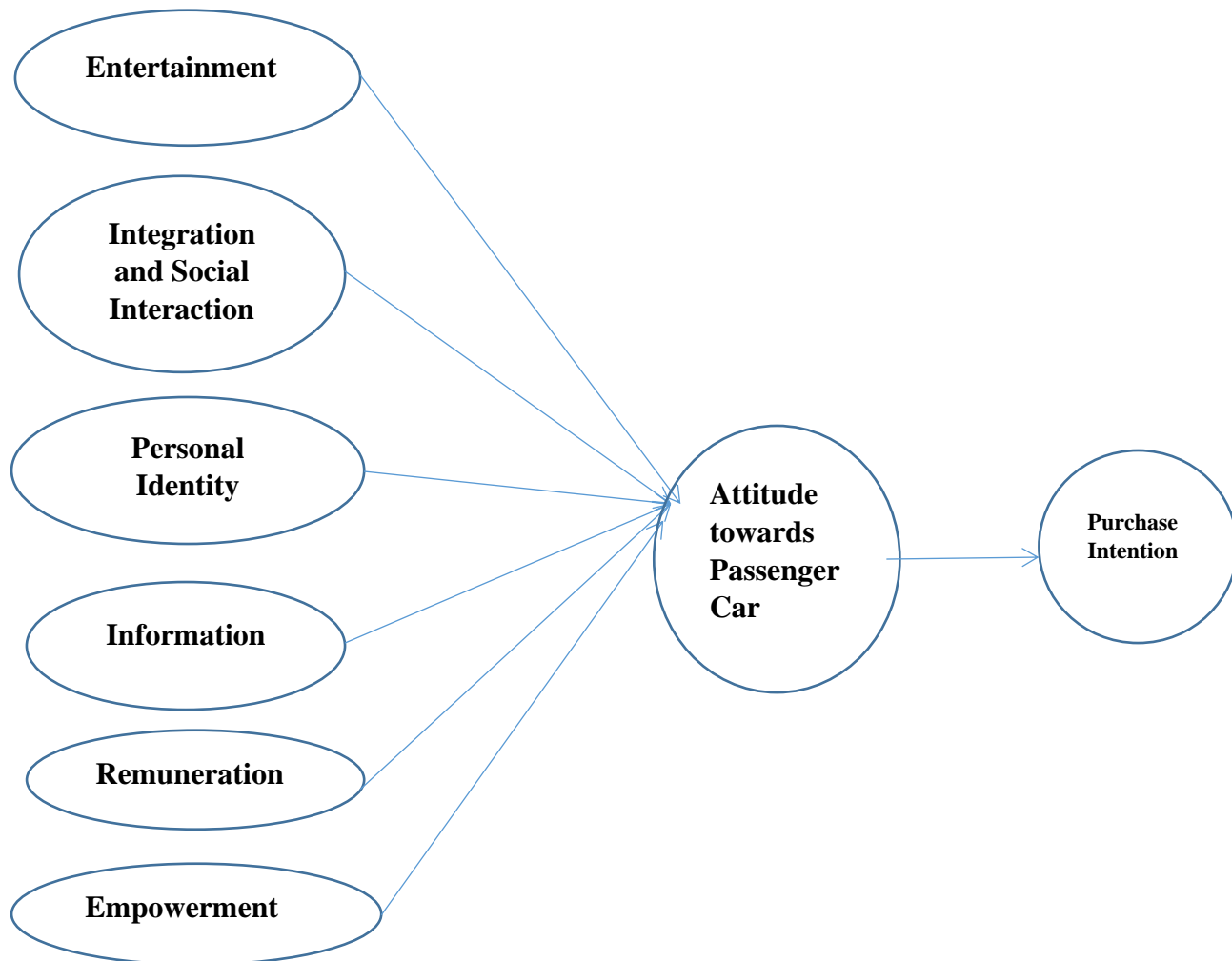
Based on the literature review the following theoretical model is proposed for the study. Research is descriptive in nature. PLS-SEM model will be used for analysing the response and drawing the conclusion. Before the advent of social media, vehicle dealers have depended on costly and ostentatious TV advertisements to help in gaining popularity for their brands. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest are among the popular social media which are driving automobile market growth. Out of various platforms research will be covering three medias-Facebook, Instagram and YouTube due to its popularity and usage base.

## Conceptual background and hypotheses development

Uses and gratifications (U&G) theory is one of the most frequently used frameworks to examine motivations for media use (e.g., Calder et al., 2009; Gao & Feng, 2016; Muntinga et al., 2011). McQuail (1983) identified four motivations: Entertainment, Integration and Social interaction, Personal identity, and Information

driving motivations of individuals' use of social media platforms. To the four dimensions by McQuail (1983) Muntinga et al. (2011) proposed to add Remuneration and Empowerment as two additional motivations uniquely related to social media usage. Research proposes six U&G categories as driving

motivations of individuals' use of social media platforms and the influence on purchase intention. Combining the dimensions of Uses and Gratification Theory and model of purchase intention following model is proposed. Each of the dimensions is explained below:



**Entertainment**

This dimension emphasises usage of social media platforms by marketers for entertainment and enjoyments by creating fun and playful consumer experiences, such as games, photos, videos and contests (Cheung et al., 2019). Thus, entertaining content is increasingly used in SMM strategies seeking to build consumers' awareness and loyalty intention (Barger et al., 2016).

**Integration and social interaction**

Based on uses and gratification literature this dimension is defined as using

social media to communicate and interact with others. Ko et al.'s (2005) research on social interaction motivation and web site duration. Their scale items included "meet people with my interests" and "keep up with what is going on". The integration and social interaction motivation covers various media gratifications that are related to other people such as gaining a sense of belonging; connecting with friends, family and society; seeking support/emotional support; and substituting real-life companionship.

### Personal Identity

Personal identity-related motivations are abundant in social media motivations literature. This dimension covers social media gratifications related to self-such as gaining insight into one's self; reinforcing personal values; and identifying with and gaining recognition from peers.

### Information

The information motivation dimension defined as using social media to seek out information or to self-educate which includes surveying what relevant events and conditions are taking place in someone's direct daily environment and in society; seeking advice and opinions; and risk reduction.

### Remuneration

This dimension of social media marketing involves people engaging in social media use. People expect to gain some kind of reward – be it economic incentives (Wang & Fesenmaier 2003), job-related benefits (Nov 2007), or personal wants such as specific software (Hars & Ou 2001).

### Empowerment

The empowerment motivation refers to people using social media to exert their influence or power on other people or companies. Wang and Fesenmaier (2003), for instance, found that 'enforcing service excellence' is a driver of participation in online travel communities, while Kaye (2007) found that people read political blogs to check whether broadcast media report events accurately.

### Hypotheses Development

1. There is significant relationship between entertainment and attitude towards passenger cars
2. There is significant relationship between integration and social interaction and attitude towards passenger cars
3. There is significant relationship between personal identity and attitude towards passenger cars
4. There is significant relationship between information and attitude towards passenger cars

5. There is significant relationship between remuneration and attitude towards passenger cars

6. There is significant relationship between empowerment and attitude towards passenger cars

7. There is significant relationship between attitude towards passenger cars and purchase intention

### Expected outcome and Benefits of the study

Research will bring out that individuals have different motivations to engage with consumer online brand-related activities on specific platforms types. Users use a variety of social media to satisfy a variety of needs. They will more likely attend to and engage with content that best matches their needs on that particular platform. Overall results will suggest motives relevant for social media use that are the critical drivers for COBRAs across the three studied social media platforms and its influence on attitude and purchase intention of users. Research will help marketers of passenger cars to understand how social media platform usage will affect the behaviour of consumers in decision making. The research will contribute to the field of consumer behaviour and social media marketing both of which are relevant in the current scenario. Only three social media platforms are covered. Further research can focus on the analysing the purchase behaviour using other theoretical models.

### Conclusion

Social media marketing significantly influences purchase intention. Purchase intention is a critical factor in understanding consumer buying behaviour. Social Media provide two-way communication, customer reviews and easy access of information about the products. It also facilitates the customers with several social networks to evaluate and compare alternatives. Now a days, customers have become more attentive towards relevancy as well as authenticity of the advertising content and the customer's recommendations are given more preferences over company generated product recommendations. Purchase intention is a

critical factor to get understanding about consumers buying behaviour. Study attempts to analyse the influence of usage of social media platforms influence purchase intention.

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