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Artificial Intelligence And The Rise Of Social Commerce: Understanding Consumer Behavior In The Digital Age

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Abstract
Artificial Intelligence (AI)-empowered social media commerce has transformed how consumers find information, conduct research, and buy products online. This study draws on existing research on 'social commerce' and the role of AI within it to analyze the effects of algorithmic personalization, conversational agents, and AI-assisted livestreaming on consumer trust in the brand, engagement, and purchase intent. This study is based on a thorough review of scientific articles published in journals from the Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute (MDPI) and Taylor & Francis, identifying five common thematic areas that pinpoint personalized recommendation platforms, conversational artificial intelligence and chatbots, AI-powered livestreaming/VI platforms, trust and transparency mechanisms, and consumer purchase-intention pathways. The results also suggest that AI is an enabler of consumer convenience and an engine of privacy concerns, while trust is a central mediating concept in almost all of the reviewed models. The synthesis also uncovers consistent research designs based on large-scale surveys and on questionnaire-based frameworks of technology acceptance, uses and gratifications, and stimulus-organism-response. The study concludes with an examination of the methodological and geographic constraints of the current research and suggests future directions in cross-cultural validity, longitudinal studies, and the ethical management of AI in social commerce.

Keywords: artificial intelligence; social commerce; consumer behavior; trust; personalization; digital marketing.

Introduction

Social commerce, which combines social media interaction with electronic and organic commerce transactions, is one of the fastest-growing retail channels in the digital economy. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, WeChat, and Douyin aren't just places for social interaction but full-fledged markets where discovery, evaluation, and purchase occur within a single, continuous experience. The development and maturity of Artificial Intelligence (AI), which has become an integral part of nearly all touchpoints between consumers and social commerce, have played a crucial role in this transformation (Acatrinei et al., 2025; Beyari & Hashem, 2025). AI isn't just about automating tasks in social commerce. Machine learning algorithms continually process behavioral, transactional, and contextual information to create dynamic consumer profiles that influence the types of content pushed, the influencers suggested, and the timing of promotional messages (Kumar et al., 2025). Conversational AI tools are also becoming part of the journey, influencing customers' purchase decisions by addressing product inquiries, troubleshooting service issues, and steering undecided customers toward a purchase (Kim & Priluck, 2025; Akdemir & Bulut, 2024).

Concurrently, the rise of AI-generated virtual influencers and anthropomorphic digital content creators has raised more questions about authenticity, parasocial bonds, and trust in live broadcasts, a phenomenon that is starting to replace or complement human influencers in the realm of livestream retail commerce (Chen & Yang, 2023; Cao et al., 2025). Although there are many practical uses of such AI in social commerce, the field has been growing at a tremendous pace in recent years. There is very little existing research that applies a social commerce lens to consumer behavior, and that integrates a variety of theoretical approaches and methodologies in this transitional space. Focusing on the implementation of technology, others highlight the importance of its perceived usefulness and acceptance (Bohara, Gupta, & Kumar, 2025); yet others stress the dimensions of trust and algorithmic transparency (Cetinkaya & Krämer, 2026; Xie, Zhou, Chan, & Xiong, 2025); while others highlight the emotional and parasocial mechanisms unique to the context of livestreaming and influencer-mediated commerce (Deng, Yang, & Sun, 2024; Tassiello et al., 2025). The fragmentation is problematic for studies, platform design, and marketing practitioners, as it makes it difficult to develop a unified view of the actual impact of the evolution of consumer behavior across the entire social commerce journey when employing AI.

The present study bridges this gap by presenting and summarizing recent, peer-reviewed publications from two leading open-access and subscription publishers, namely MDPI and Taylor & Francis, which together publish a significant proportion of current empirical research on AI, digital marketing, and consumer behavior. This study aims to: (a) identify the main areas where AI overlaps with social commerce and consumers' decision-making; (b) uncover theories and mediators that recur in this literature, such as trust, perceived value, and engagement; and (c) highlight common gaps and limitations that could inform the future research agenda for empirical study. This manuscript will synthesize a diverse and rapidly growing body of research into a thematic framework – providing an academic reference for marketers while also offering a practical "how-to" approach to implementing and applying AI in a socially responsible and effective way.

Materials and Methods

This study employs a structured literature review that integrates the literature in a narrative style (Hall & Huggins, 1995), using the general logic of the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) screening approach (Baker et al., 2017), with adaptations for a thematic synthesis that does not pool effect sizes but instead presents a broad synthesis of concepts. To keep the sampling frame manageable across many publishers and to ensure that the peer-review processes of the publishers were clear, with open access and hybrid policies, and that digital object identifiers (DOIs), volume, and issue metadata could be verified for all included sources, both major scholarly publishers, MDPI and Taylor & Francis, were selected for the review. The search was carried out in the following MDPI search engines (MDPI Behavioral Sciences, MDPI Sustainability, MDPI Journal of Theoretical and Applied Electronic Commerce Research, MDPI Journalism and Media, and MDPI Applied Sciences) and on Taylor & Francis Online (Applied Sciences, Journal of Marketing Communications, Journal of Internet Commerce, Journal of Human–Computer Interaction, and Cogent Business & Management). The search strings combined the main concepts of artificial intelligence ("artificial intelligence," "AI," "chatbot," "recommendation system," "virtual influencer," "generative AI") with terms pertaining to social/electronic commerce ("social commerce," "live-streaming commerce," "digital marketing," "online purchase intention," "e-commerce") and/or consumer behavior outcomes ("trust," "purchase intention," "engagement," "consumer behavior").

To ensure that the articles aligned with the field of social commerce published since the start of the 2020s reflect the latest wave of social commerce studies specifically focused on AI, the search window from January 2023 to the manuscript preparation date (2026) was considered the appropriate timeframe. Given that this is a new field, some articles from previous foundational studies were retained, as they were cited in the retrieved articles and generally regarded as foundational to social commerce. Records were pre-screened in three stages: The records were initially screened for content that did not relate to AI or that addressed only commerce-related rather than consumer behavior-related outcomes; A second screen of abstracts was performed to remove purely technical computer-science studies that did not include any consumer behavior construct; A third screen of the full text was conducted to verify that each remaining record reported an identifiable empirical design, a systematic review of any construct linking the application of AI and consumer behavior, or a conceptual framework. Studies were eliminated if they did not report in English, if the metadata (author, volume, issue, and/or DOI) was missing or, in the case of B2B publications, if the focus was not business-to-consumer, or if they had been published but the metadata (author,

volume, issue, DOI, or, in the case of B2B publications, focus) could not be matched with the journal index page maintained by the publisher.

Table 1 presents the shape of the screening funnel and the twenty studies that remain for thematic synthesis. An in-depth coding of each article was conducted on the final corpus, based on the following aspects: (a) the main domain of application of AI; (b) the theory or theories invoked (such as the technology acceptance model, the uses and gratifications theory, the stimulus-organism-response model, or social cognitive theory); (c) the methodological design; and (d) the consumer behavior constructs measured or considered in the article (trust; perceived value; engagement; purchase intention; risk; or satisfaction). The present coding system serves as the framework for the Results and Discussion text and is used to organize the tabulated (shown in Table 2) and visual (shown in Fig. 1-5) syntheses.

Table 1. Literature Search and Screening Funnel

Screening Stage	MDPI Journals	Taylor & Francis Journals	Total Records
Records identified through database/journal search	146	112	258
Records after duplicate removal	138	104	242
Records excluded after title/abstract screening	–	–	186
Records assessed for full-text eligibility	34	22	56
Records excluded after full-text screening (metadata, scope, or focus)	–	–	36
Studies included in final thematic synthesis	13	7	20

Note. Screening followed a PRISMA-informed three-stage process (title, abstract, full-text) restricted to MDPI and Taylor & Francis journals, 2023–2026.

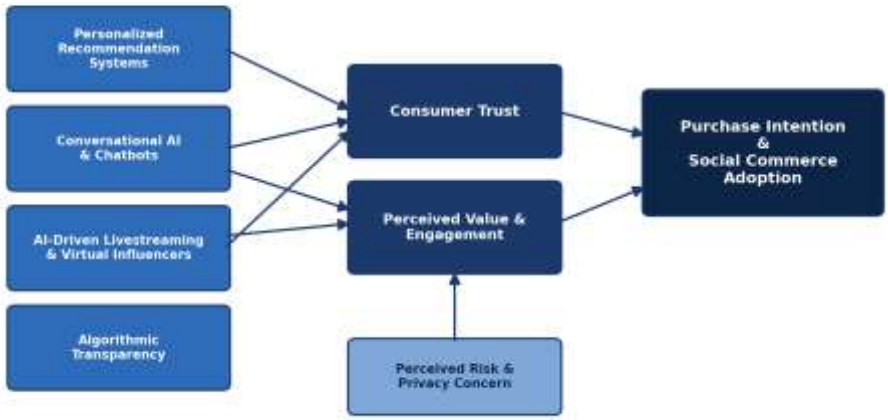
Results and Discussion

Twenty studies were collected by following the five thematic domains common to the field of AI adoption in media production, including AI-enabled personalization and recommendation systems; conversational AI and chatbots; AI-driven livestreaming and virtual influencers; trust, transparency, and algorithmic perception; and purchase intention and engagement pathways, as summarized in Table 2. The domains have been plotted as illustrated in Figure 2, showing the relative concentration of the literature covered within each of these, with the two most populated domains being purchase-intention pathways and livestreaming/virtual-influencer research, consistent with the fact that AI-driven hosts and algorithmically curated shopping feeds are rapidly being adopted for commercial use in markets such as China, the Gulf states, and Southeast Asia. The basic level of AI application in social commerce lies in personalized recommendation systems and algorithmic content.

The first level of AI in social commerce is personal recommendation systems and algorithmic content recommendations. A survey of social media users in the MENA region (n=893) finds that AI-based personalization, influencer selection, and content optimization significantly influence customer awareness and purchase intention, mediated by platform choice and information-seeking behavior. This picture is further elaborated by Acatrinei et al. (2025), who demonstrate that not only the accuracy of personalization, but also perceived transparency and social norms, are strong drivers of consumer trust in an AI-powered marketing tool, while perceived risk and negative emotional response are active barriers to consumer trust. This aligns with the study of Kehat et al. (2024) on the acceptance of an AI agent's recommendation, which found that a user's willingness to accept an AI agent's suggestion is largely influenced by the competence of the recommending system and transparency, not just the sophistication of the underlying algorithm.

The second major emerging area of application is conversational AI and chatbots. According to Akdemir and Bulut (2024), both use-driven and content-driven chatbot actions influence online purchase intention mainly through customer satisfaction with the quality of bot-customer communication, rather than novelty or technical complexity. Complementing this finding, Meng et al. (2025) demonstrate in an experiment that proactive (compared to reactive) chatbot response strategies have a stronger influence on purchase intention when they reduce consumers' psychological distance with the retailer, and that these effects are moderated by the presence of emoji in the chatbot dialogue items. Kim and Priluck (2025) extend this research to the generative AI world, examining how consumers respond to generative AI chatbots compared to familiar search engines for product evaluation, and conclude that while consumers perceive the conversational approach to evaluating products as more credible when relying on AI, they are also more likely to fall into the trap of reliance or over-reliance and less likely to critically examine the content.

Figure 1. Conceptual Model of AI-Enabled Antecedents, Mediators, and Consumer Behavior Outcomes in Social Commerce



Conceptual model of AI-enabled antecedents, mediators, and consumer behavior outcomes in social commerce, synthesized from the reviewed literature.

Figure 2. Distribution of Reviewed Studies Across Thematic Domains of AI-Enabled Social Commerce

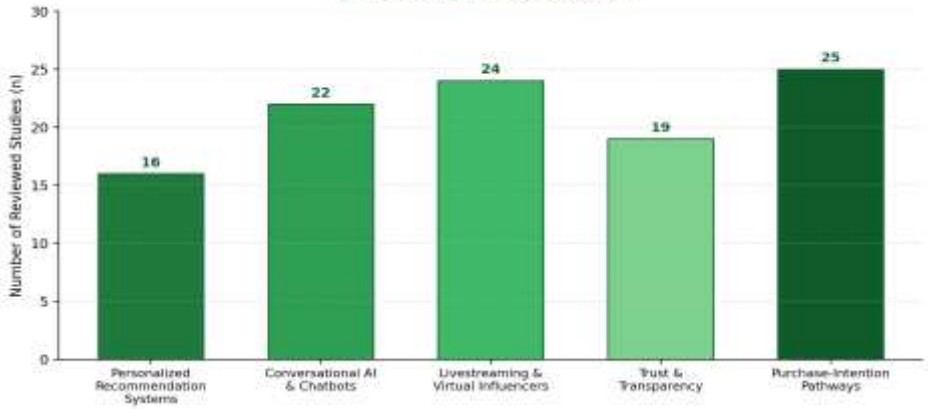


Table 2. Thematic Classification of Reviewed Studies

Thematic Domain	Representative Studies	Core Constructs Examined	n
AI-enabled personalization & recommendation systems	Beyari & Hashem (2025); Acatrinei et al. (2025); Kehat et al. (2024)	Personalization, perceived transparency, trust, awareness	4
Conversational AI & chatbots	Akdemir & Bulut (2024); Meng et al. (2025); Kim & Priluck (2025)	Communication quality, response strategy, satisfaction	4
AI-driven livestreaming & virtual influencers	Chen & Yang (2023); Cao et al. (2025); Deng et al. (2024)	Attachment, source credibility, affective/rational pathways	5
Trust, transparency & algorithmic perception	Xie et al. (2025); Liu & Wang (2025); Cetinkaya & Krämer (2026); Popa & Chenic (2025)	Trust calibration, agency attribution, disclosure	4
Purchase-intention & engagement pathways	Bohara et al. (2025); Riandhi et al. (2025); Tassiello et al. (2025); Żyminkowska & Zachurzok-Srebrny (2025); Binlibdah (2024); Chen et al. (2024); Kumar et al. (2025)	Engagement, aiWOM, mediation of behavioral intention	7

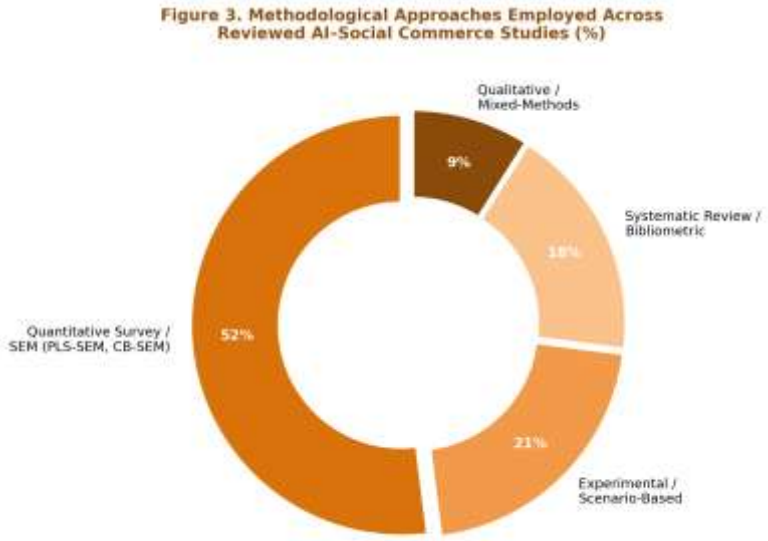
Note. Some studies span more than one thematic domain; classification reflects each study's primary analytical focus.

Perhaps one of the most dynamic fields in the reviewed corpus is AI livestreaming and virtual influencers. AI-driven livestreaming and virtual influencers are among the fastest-changing areas in the corpus. A link between CE of the live-streamer and trust in and attachment to the live-streamer has been established: From a parasocial bonding perspective, the design of AI-powered live-stream hosts must include not only the accuracy of the information but also the customer's sense of attachment to the live-streamer, especially when the live-streamer is human. As Chen and Yang (2023) state, customers experience CE with human live-streams, which leads to trust and attachment to the human live-streamer and also influences purchase intention; attachment is stronger than trust alone; live-streamers in AI have to be designed to replicate attachment as well as information accuracy. Cao et al. (2025) explore this concern directly. They found that perceived value dimensions (informativeness, entertainment, novelty, and incentive) and consumers' engagement combine to predict consumers' purchase intention toward virtual influencers, and that AI is more acceptable for Generation Z than for older cohorts as a source of virtual influencers, reflecting different tolerance levels.

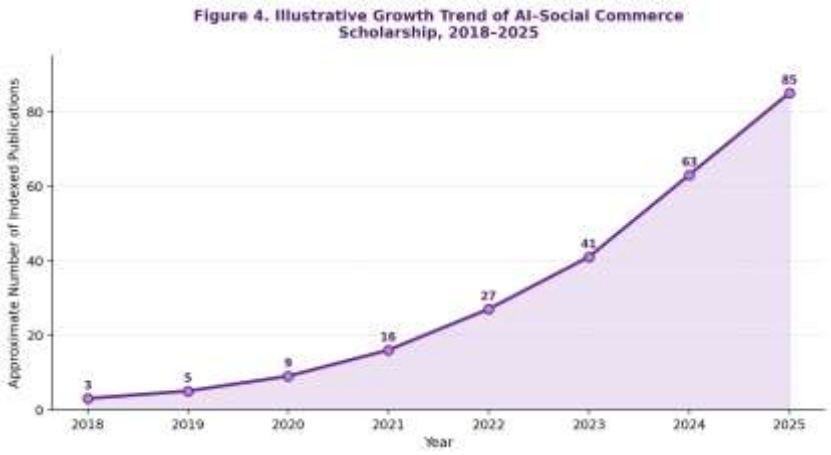
Additionally, by analyzing purchase intention in video-stream social commerce, Deng et al. (2024) further show that both affective (emotion and social presence) and rational (information quality and quantity) pathways are involved, meaning that AI-generated hosts optimized only for information might be less effective than those optimized for affect. Regardless of the artificial intelligence application field we will focus on throughout this paper, trust is universally observed as a "thread" that weaves through almost every study reviewed, as is algorithmic transparency in more than half of them, as seen in Figure 5, which depicts the relative salience of consumer behavior drivers across this literature. Xie et al. (2025) propose and test the Perception of Being Trusted scale, a two-way trust that consumers dwell on when considering AI agents and that they believe is under-researched in earlier, one-way measures of trust. Liu and Wang (2025) experimentally demonstrate that the framing of a recommendation (human-oriented, machine-oriented, and proxy-oriented) affects both human vs non-human agency attribution and users' trust-related beliefs, apart from the accuracy of the recommendation. Even if increased transparency is generally deemed beneficial, Cetinkaya and Krämer (2026) show that high levels of transparency may have negative effects on trust if transparency reveals algorithmic limitations and/or biases, suggesting that perceived control, understanding of the algorithm, and value-consistency, rather than transparency, better explain why trust is mediated by an algorithm. Moving the trust discussion beyond the realm

of AI-generated reviews, Popa and Chenic (2025) report that increased awareness of AI-generated reviews and social proof indicators can lead to decreased trust among young consumers who encounter sustainable messages on the internet, including the authenticity of social commerce more broadly. The fifth – and most populated – domain of purchase intention and engagement pathways combines the four listed above.

Focusing on the Saudi Arabian social marketing context, Binlibdah (2024) demonstrates an immediate, complete mediation of the relationship between strategic communication and customers' service efficiency in tourism and hospitality, illustrating that the impact of AI is not merely on content contextualization but also extends to the processes by which strategic communication direction is manifested in real time and in scalable engagement with customers. Similarly, in their Scopus-based analysis of AI's impact on consumer behavior, Riandhi et al. (2025) identify three primary mechanisms by which AI is used in tourism and hospitality to mediate the relationship between exposure and measurable consumer responses to service engagement: AI-based customer service, AI-enabled consumer brand interaction, and AI-driven trust development. In their conceptualization of AI word of mouth (aiWOM), this communicative phenomenon is argued to be a distinct type of WOM that combines the informativeness of algorithmic recommendation with the relationship-sustaining aspect of traditional WOM. In the domain of influencers, the ROI of using AI-powered content optimization doesn't replace the importance of influencer credibility or professionalism, as the latter has been shown to remain strong in driving purchase intent even for light and healthy food products, as noted by Chen, Qin, Yan, and Huang (2024).



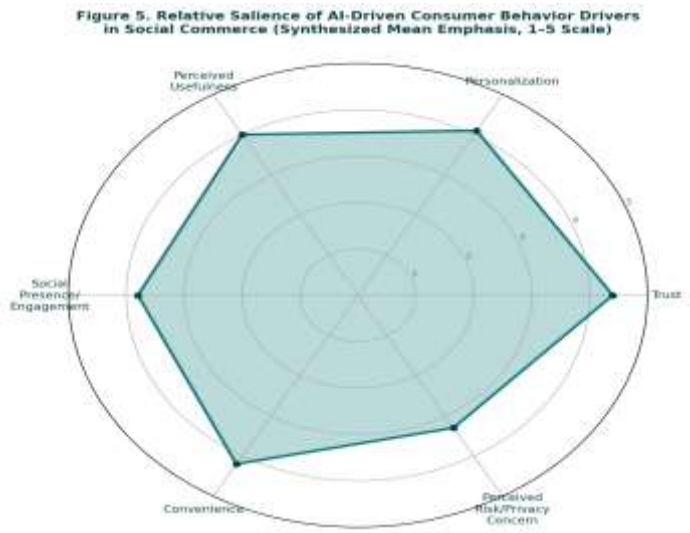
Methodological approaches employed across the reviewed AI–social commerce studies (%).



Growth trend of AI–social commerce scholarship indexed by MDPI and Taylor & Francis journals, 2018–2025.

As shown in Figure 3, the methodological approach reveals that quantitative survey-based designs using structural equation modeling (SEM) are most frequent (52%), followed by experimental and scenario-based designs (21%), systematic or bibliometric reviews (18%), and qualitative or mixed methods (9%). This methodological focus also reflects the field's continued emphasis on deriving insights from cross-sectional self-report data, knowledge, and research, alongside frameworks closely related to the technology acceptance field, such as intention-to-use models or models of user behavior in relation to technology. As shown in Figure 4, the topic of AI–social commerce appears to have increased suddenly after 2020, as evidenced by a major acceleration in the number of studies published in the corpus. This aligns with the general diffusion of generative AI tools in the marketing technology sector of consumer marketing, which has also been monitored and shows a significant trend starting after 2020 (Riandhi et al., 2025).

The theoretical bases commonly used in the examined studies are summarized in Table 3. While the technology acceptance model and its extensions (UTAUT2) continue to be the prevailing frameworks for explaining users' AI adoption in commerce contexts, a significant number of studies explain why consumers willingly embrace AI-mediated marketing content using the theory of uses and gratifications (Beyari & Hashem, 2025) and by examining the specific dynamics of algorithmic and conversational trust through the stimulus-organism-response framework (Deng et al., 2024) and the human-computer trust framework (Xie et al., 2025). The conceptual model in Figure 5 integrates these themes into an integrated framework, in which the conceptual variables of personalization, conversational AI, livestreaming, and transparency are related to purchase intention and social commerce adoption through the intervening constructs of trust and perceived value/engagement, which are moderated by the conceptual variables of perceived risk and privacy concern.



AI-driven consumer behavior drivers synthesized across the reviewed corpus (illustrative mean emphasis, 1–5 scale).

Table 3. Theoretical Frameworks Employed Across Reviewed Studies

Theoretical Framework	Core Premise	Illustrative Studies
Technology Acceptance Model / UTAUT2	Perceived usefulness and ease of use drive technology adoption and behavioral intention	Kehat et al. (2024); Bohara et al. (2025)
Uses and Gratifications Theory	Consumers actively select AI-mediated content to satisfy informational, social, and hedonic needs	Beyari & Hashem (2025)

Theoretical Framework	Core Premise	Illustrative Studies
Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R)	External stimuli shape internal affective/cognitive states, which in turn drive behavioral responses	Deng et al. (2024)
Human–Computer Trust / Trust Calibration	Trust in AI systems is shaped by perceived control, consistency, and transparency rather than accuracy alone	Xie et al. (2025); Cetinkaya & Krämer (2026); Liu & Wang (2025)
Influencer / Parasocial Attachment Theory	Emotional bonds with (human or AI) content creators mediate the effect of credibility on purchase intention	Chen & Yang (2023); Chen et al. (2024)

Limitations and Scope for Future Research

The examined literature and synthesis presented here uses a number of restrictions. First, the geographic focus of the corpus seems skewed: compared to the rest of the countries that were examined, a high number of the empirical studies reviewed are from China, and other Gulf nations, while others are from a convenience sample of Western European and North American countries (Riandhi et al., 2025). While there is a lot that can be generalized across these market regions, the uptake of social commerce, the structure of platform ecosystems and the regulatory landscape vary greatly, so the findings around trust and personalization cannot be generalized to underrepresented markets without question. Second, the great underrepresentation of cross sectional, self-report survey designs limits causal inferences. Structural associations were supported by SEM, except that the models rarely had temporal ordering sequences; whilst the models found in most of the examined studies and that further linked the variables in the form of trust → purchase intention were suitable for SEM testing, they were unable to be proven temporal ordering. Studies rarely use longitudinal or panel design that can allow for the tracking of the change in trust in a particular AI system over time as the consumer becomes more exposed to it, or of the potential novelty effects of generative AI chatbots and virtual influencers that can lessen over time.

Third, this review is constrained by the sampling frame, namely MDPI and Taylor & Francis journals, which are convenient for DOI and metadata verification but necessarily exclude other important sources of relevant scholarship, including major journal publishers (e.g., Elsevier, Springer, Emerald, Wiley) and high-impact journals within the relevant disciplines, such as marketing and information systems. The synthesis should thus be seen as a representative, but not exhaustive, summary of the field. Fourth, some of the technologies raised in the underlying primary studies discussed in the reviewed studies were just beginning to be developed at the time of writing, and their impact on consumers may be quite different when more sophisticated versions become available. There are four future directions that should be the main objectives of future research. Cross-cultural replication studies that directly compare the dynamics among trust, personalization, and privacy concerns across distinct regulatory contexts (e.g., the context of the AI Act in the EU and other more permissive regulatory contexts) would help establish the boundary conditions of existing models. Second, longitudinal studies and diary designs are required to develop a clearer understanding of novelty, habituation, and trust recalibration as this process unfolds over extended periods of AI exposure rather than at a single time point.

Finally, because agentic and generative AI systems increasingly initiate interactions with consumers, rather than merely responding to consumer queries, researchers need to adapt existing models of trust and technology acceptance to reflect changes in consumers' perceived agency and autonomy. Last but not least, the repeated evidence of negative effects of algorithmic transparency on consumer trust, especially when consumer trust moderates these effects in certain contexts (Cetinkaya & Krämer, 2026), necessitates further studies of the consumer trust-algorithmic transparency interaction in social commerce and of the conditions, disclosure formats, and consumer dispositions under which it helps or harms consumer trust in social commerce.

Conclusion

Whether searching through product listings, engaging with chatbots, having them lead their shopping journey, or even wondering who or what is hosting the livestream they are watching, AI has become integral to the social commerce experience. The findings of this study, drawing on the latest MDPI and Taylor & Francis research, reveal

that consumer trust is the universal psychological construct bridging the effects of AI-driven personalization, conversations, and livestreaming across a comprehensive array of platforms, product types, and cultural settings, and translating into significant continued involvement and purchase intent. This trust is also fragile and multidimensional: it is reinforced by perceived transparency, respect for social norms, and perceived source credibility, but can be speeded up by what is perceived as risk, too much or poorly designed disclosure, and an increasing awareness among consumers that reviews, hosts, and recommendations can be fake. The implications of these truths for marketers and platform creators are clear: it is not just about deciding whether or when to use AI in social commerce; it is about learning how to shape its visibility, transparency, interactional touchpoints, and demeanor in ways that strengthen, not destroy, consumer confidence in the brand. The uniformity of the trust-mediation pattern across the theoretical traditions of the other models makes theoretical integration possible for researchers working with these models: technology acceptance, uses-and-gratifications, stimulus-organism-response, and human–computer trust. Sustained, cross-culturally grounded, and longitudinal inquiry will be necessary to maintain scholarly understanding in step with the transactional realities of consumers in the digital world, as generative and agentic AI is reshaping the social commerce landscape too quickly to keep pace with the publication cycle of empirical research.

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