



**The Impact of Digital Marketing Strategies on Consumer Behaviour in the Indian Retail
Sector**

Name: Praveen Chandrabose

Student Number: 20019412

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Supervisor: Brian Raymond

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Declaration

I hereby affirm that the dissertation which I am submitting to Dublin Business School in candidature for the award of the Masters Cloud Computing is the product of my own research and analysis, save in those instances where due attribution is provided by citations. This document has not been presented, either in whole or in part, to any other degree or programme of study.

Signed: Praveen Chandrabose

Student Number: 20019412

Date: 23/08/2025

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ABSTRACT

This analysis examines how Pay-Per-Click (PPC) advertising and Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) sway consumer behaviour within the Indian retail landscape, concentrating on users' perceptions, trust levels, and the strength of purchase intentions. A positivist, deductive framework was adopted, employing a structured questionnaire sent to seventy respondents garnered through Instagram, WhatsApp, and university mailing lists. The instrument comprised seventeen Likert-scale items stratified by relevance, personalisation, trust, and intended purchase behaviour. Descriptive analyses frequencies, percentages, and pie chart presentations were used to delineate the data. The study establishes that both PPC and SEO materially affect decision-making; personalisation and relevance notably bolstered trust and purchase inclinations, while repetitive or intrusive advertising diminished perceived credibility. SEO was regarded as the more trustworthy channel overall, yet PPC demonstrably provided quicker visibility. The findings substantiate trust as a mediating variable governing the efficacy of digital marketing efforts, and they call for ethical, transparent, and consumer-centred practitioner approaches. The evidence further supplies Indian retailers with actionable recommendations to improve digital marketing resonance.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction of Digital Marketing Study

India's retail world is changing fast, with the online marketplace moving center stage, and smart digital marketing is now the lecture that every brand must learn. Out of the toolbox, Pay-Per-Click ads and Search Engine Optimization shine brightest, helping shoppers to find, trust, and finally, buy. Ferrell et al. (2021) state that the most effective marketing must be "precisely targeted and continuously optimized" to remain competitive. With more than 800 million Indians online, laser-focused PPC campaigns and finely-tuned SEO can mean the difference between being ignored and being bookmarked. Retailers now live in a world of links and clicks, where a search in Google can make or break the store next door. Zhu and Gao (2019) highlight that digital sales growth depends on strategies that deliver the right message at the right moment, with PPC and SEO central in converting interest into engagement. Doan et al. (2023) emphasise that the digital expertise of retail staff has become essential, with sharper skills leading to sharper results. In India's retail sector, knowledge and performance are now inseparable partners on the digital sales floor.

Consumer trust operates as an adhesive force undergirding online purchasing patterns. The empirical work of Alalwan et al. (2017) demonstrates that Trust intensifies when firms deliver experiences characterised by personalisation and transparency. Such findings assume critical significance for (SEO) articles and (PPC) advertisements that accompany consumer inquiries. Complementing this argument, Meirandari et al. (2024) reveal that content congruent with

consumer expectations elevates purchase likelihood. Thus, the judicious selection of key phrases and the construction of credible landing pages emerge as decisive elements in the optimisation process. Notably, the mechanisms designed to nurture confidence may simultaneously provoke unease. Quci et al. (2019) document that Indian respondents frequently express discomfort with pervasive, repetitive advertisements, and with the impression of covert surveillance, with tangible implications for trust in digital campaigns. Parallel evidence provided by Vázquez-Martínez et al. (2021) indicates that exaggerated or inauthentic content compromises trust, thereby illustrating that optimisation techniques must be implemented with caution, lest they alienate the consumer they intend to reassure.

Mehta et al. (2020) concluded that this shift is likely permanent, with SEO and PPC replacing traditional store browsing. King (2020) also noted that e-commerce witnessed unprecedented growth during lockdowns, raising expectations of relevance, transparency, and consumer control. Retailers must now capture attention and build trust within seconds. WordStream (2024) reported that high-intent PPC campaigns and optimised SEO strategies delivered up to 50% higher conversion rates compared to unoptimised approaches. Yet performance remains context-dependent, with Indian consumers demonstrating caution in cases where brand credibility is not firmly established (Wuisan and Handra, 2023). Although SEO and PPC often target traffic growth and conversion, such focus may overlook ethical considerations. Sinha et al. (2019) identified a gap between performance-driven outcomes and consumer sentiment, particularly when campaigns disregard user preferences. Ahmed et al. (2019) observed that while online ads can drive consumer action, they may also attract

scepticism if not perceived as transparent. Contemporary Indian shoppers evaluate content critically, demanding relevance and honesty.

1.2 Aim

The present research is designed to elucidate the interrelation between pay-per-click (PPC) advertising and search engine optimisation (SEO) as they simultaneously affect Indian retail consumers, with particular emphasis upon the formation of brand trust, the attitudinal and behavioural transition towards purchase, and the identification of transaction-related concerns. A methodical examination of these constructs promises to disclose the specific routes by which both paid and organic search exert influence upon the e-commerce decision-making process. Such elucidation will augment prevailing theoretical frameworks while yielding empirically grounded guidance for practitioners competing in an Indian retail context that continues to become more digitally mediated.

1.3 Research Objectives

To evaluate how PPC and SEO shape consumer perceptions, behaviours, and trust while identifying challenges and drawbacks in India's retail sector.

1.4 Research Questions

How do PPC and SEO influence consumer perceptions, behaviours, and trust, and what key challenges do Indian shoppers associate with them?

1.5 Scope of Indian Retail Research

The defined parametric domain encompasses solely adult individuals who have interacted with retail domains or promotions appearing among sponsored links in the search-engine-results page. Complementary digital modalities namely social media advertisements and electronic-mail promotional campaigns are deliberately excluded in order to sustain methodological precision. Crucially, the inquiry disregards technical search-engine-optimisation substratum, such as markup language or server architecture. Instead, the examination foregrounds the perceptible interface constituted by the consumer, thus engaging such dimensions as the congruence of promotional messages with search intent, the usability and persuasiveness of destination pages, and the informational adequacy of search-terminal auxiliary content. Wuisan and Handra (2023) contend that these attributes confer the most substantial increment to consumer trust and conversion likelihood. Parallel findings by Zhu and Gao (2019) corroborate that retail efficacy increasingly hinges upon the congruence of digital campaigns with both user intent and perceived utility.

The present study is restricted to the Indian context, where distinctive cultural, regulatory, and trust dimensions diverge sharply from those observed in other national markets. Sinha et al. (2019) demonstrate that Indian consumers' propensity to engage in e-commerce is determinately influenced by a triadic calculus of privacy apprehensions, prevailing economic conditions, and the necessity for multilingual communication, thereby mandating a country-level focus of scrutiny. A methodologically explicit structured survey design was therefore employed to elicit empirical data regarding consumer perceptions; this decision resonates with the imperatives of DBS research protocols and is further vindicated by Singh

et al. (2017), who pos evidence that survey instruments yield statistically reliable measurements of consumer attitude and satisfaction metrics. The results are anticipated to furnish practitioners in the retail sector with tactical directives enabling the refinement in a manner commensurate with the normative expectations and cognitively embedded trust exigencies of the Indian consumer.

1.6 Rationale for Investigating PPC and SEO

To engage Indian consumers in online settings, marketers should privilege the determinants of attitude and action over mere audience metrics. Alalwan et al. (2017) maintain that digital trust is an operative boundary condition: absent trust, the conversion sequence from impression to intention collapses. Both pay-per-click and search engine optimization may appear technologically advanced, yet their latent value rests on the consumer's appraisal of the underlying ethics and experience. The Indian retail ecosystem characterised by the coexistence of time-honoured storefronts and proliferating app-based commerce constitutes a controlled-experimental corridor in which these postulates can be examined. Recent work by Doan et al. (2023) confirms that retail personnel are being systemically trained to master digital competencies, a shift that raises the normative threshold on consumer-facing communication to be simultaneously participative, perceptive, and semantically rich.

The application of a structured quantitative design grounded in survey methodology adheres rigorously to DBS protocols, facilitating the derivation of empirically robust consumer perspectives. Empirical evidence cited by Singh et al. (2017) substantiates the claim that methodologically robust instruments can disentangle subtle variations in preference and

behaviour, thereby enabling the monitoring of granular differences among heterogeneous consumer segments. Surveys yield a cost-effective channel for the anonymous canvassing of opinions pertaining to trust mechanisms, an area of paramount importance in domains where granular, identity-based targeting capabilities remain in an emergent stage. The noticeable scarcity of India-centric scholarship addressing consumer apprehensions surrounding pay-per-click and search-engine-optimisation practices reveals a significant lacuna in the existing corpus. Sinha et al. (2019) contend that the digital strategy discourse in India must innately incorporate sociocultural and privacy reservations; such an approach guarantees that analytical derivations remain culturally resonant.

1.7 Problem Statement in Digital Marketing Context

The rupture between algorithmic performance and user cognition is, thus, entrenched: both PPC and SEO tactics can secure measurable clicks and immediate transactions while simultaneously engendering consumer anxiety. Sinha et al. (2019) further note that intensifying fears over privacy and an ingrained scepticism toward content credibility impede the establishment of enduring loyalty. Campaign success depends on algorithms that attempt to circumscribe target audiences; yet, in the absence of communication that is personalised and attuned to situational context, consumers detect an augmented sense of vulnerability. Vázquez-Martínez et al. (2021) prudently warn that the progressive perception of advertisements as intrusive or excessively assertive precipitates the decline of campaign efficacy over the long term.

Limited research has addressed how Indian consumers perceive the limitations of digital marketing. Zhu and Gao (2019) emphasise the importance of precision and tailored strategies, while warning that without a clear understanding of local trust dynamics, marketing efforts lack impact. Shopkick (2021) reported that pandemic-driven changes in behaviour have made consumers more selective, increasing the importance of trust as a prerequisite for the effectiveness of PPC and SEO. Zhu and Gao (2019) also argue that when ethical and trust dimensions are poorly defined, campaigns risk being perceived as manipulative, undermining perceptions of value. Technically effective campaigns may still fail to convert if consumers interpret messages as unclear or insincere. Alalwan et al. (2017) further demonstrate that trust is central to consumer acceptance of digital offerings, with poorly executed messages triggering immediate disengagement. This study addresses the gap between the deployment of PPC and SEO strategies and the perceptions of Indian consumers, advocating for trust-driven, customised, and ethically grounded digital marketing.

1.8 Conclusion

The introduction establishes the imperative function of pay-per-click (PPC) advertising and search engine optimisation (SEO) in steering consumer behaviour within India's retail landscape. Empirical evidence demonstrates that these digital instruments not only shape trust and overall brand perception but also govern final purchase behaviour; conversely, suboptimal execution risk engendering consumer scepticism. Existing scholarship foregrounds the critical importance of contextual relevance, ethical adherence, and

transparent communication as prerequisites for enduring customer engagement. The exogenous shock of the COVID-19 pandemic intensified the imperative for digital engagement strategies, further highlighting that trust and credibility are no longer ancillary factors but central pillars of successful campaigns. Nevertheless, scholarly and practitioner literature continues to exhibit deficiencies concerning consumer perceptions of the inherent limitations, privacy concerns, and ethical ramifications of PPC and SEO techniques within the Indian context. The present study explicitly targets these lacunae by offering a methodologically structured synthesis of insights that inform trust-oriented, contextualised, and ethically congruent strategic frameworks for digital marketing directed at the Indian retail sector.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Literature Review Introduction

Researchers Zhu and Gao (2019) point out that retail success online now rides on methods that find the right shopper in the search results and the ads, pulling them into the brand's world. PPC puts the brand right under the shopper's nose when they want a certain product, while SEO boosts a site's ranking so it appears naturally when someone searches. Using both levers the way India's digital first shoppers prefer is changing existing habits. Findings show that brands powering both pay ads and strong SEO show noticeable jumps in sales, proving that when guided lightly, shopper action is clear, fast, and trackable. What people decide to buy when they are online depends a lot on how relevant and trustworthy they find the content they see. Vázquez-Martínez et al. (2021) state that when buyers see a brand that is open and reliable online, they feel more driven to make a purchase. Because of this, brands are carefully using tools like SEO, giving the content a stamp of credibility, while PPC ads keep their names front and center. Alalwan et al. (2017) add that trust is the link between being exposed to online ads and actually deciding to buy, which fits into this study's concern for being truthful and trustworthy. In India, the retail scene is changing fast. Customers are now digitally smart and tend to react strongly to what they see online. Mehta et al. (2020) point out that the COVID-19 pandemic pushed more buyers to find and buy online, making that journey feel routine. Because of this, good SEO and smart PPC are now key players helping buyers decide the product, the timing, and the place for their purchase. Since digital

use still varies a lot between Indian states, these approaches give focused visibility that levels the playing field and guides consumer behaviour.

Retailers use SEO and PPC to grab shoppers' attention from the first click to the final purchase. Doan et al. (2023) show that digital know-how inside retail makes these tactics work even better. They found that the more comfortable a team is with digital marketing tools, the more shoppers engage, proving that being visible online the right way does change how people act. Zhu and Gao (2019) emphasise that digital marketing has moved from an optional extra to the heartbeat of retail plans aiming to keep shoppers returning. In India, shoppers are especially tuned in to what happens online because local culture values trust and clear dealings. Sinha et al. (2019) indicate that privacy concerns and the perception of ads being overly pushy can break trust and with it, buying decisions. This fits with the idea that PPC can backfire if targeting is imprecise, pushing people toward doubt instead of click-to-buy. SEO, however, when it focuses on useful, relevant content and earns authority, builds trust and nudges shoppers toward a final yes.

Digital marketing is catalysing not merely transient site traffic but durable alterations in consumer behaviour. King (2020) observes that the pandemic compelled large segments of the population to leverage mobile and desktop devices for product exploration and acquisition, hence augmenting the authority of digital tactics in shaping purchase intent. More recent data from WordStream (2024) demonstrates that retailers directing PPC campaigns toward high-intent, ready-to-buy segments, combined with precisely optimised SEO, have achieved conversion uplifts approaching 50%. When digital marketing strategies

converge with consumer search intent, the resulting effect transcends mere click acquisition, culminating in tangible sales. A truly personalised journey makes buying as easy as scrolling yet as absorbing as face-to-face shopping. Meirandari et al. (2024) show that when content speaks to you, your choices virtually obey. By finely tuning blog posts and pay-per-click ads to individual lifestyles and preferences, companies increase relevance; relevance locks in loyalty. Wuisan and Handra (2023) add that in an ever-fluid digital marketplace, ads that stop evolving lose even fleeting attention. Taken together, these studies argue that in India's crowded retail space, ensuring search and paid ads dominate the digital skyline is no longer an option; it is the channel through which everyday preferences are formed and lasting allegiance to a brand is quietly, yet decisively, ratified.

2.2 Effectiveness of PPC in Engagement and Behaviour

Amid the rapidly shifting Indian retail landscape, firms are progressively adopting pay-per-click (PPC) tactics to reach shoppers precisely when intent peaks. By coupling ads to explicit search behaviour, companies elevate visitor numbers to their digital platforms while simultaneously influencing final purchase decisions. A study by Zhu and Gao (2019) concludes that PPC precisely targets individuals who have already voiced intent to buy, thereby increasing the probability of conversion the moment the ad is served. Further bolstering this view, WordStream (2024) reveals that implementing a meticulously structured PPC campaign can deliver click-through and purchase boosts of nearly 50 percent, demonstrating the channel's proven ability to shepherd customers smoothly through the stages of the purchase funnel. Wuisan and Handra (2023) further contend that digital

advertisements, when meticulously timed and strategically deployed, possess the structural and temporal precision to shepherd users coherently from preliminary exposure to the actual purchase stage.

PPC advertising performs a strategic function that exceeds the mere provision of visibility; it converts attention into measurable action. Meirandari et al. (2024) document that personalisation delivery of contextually relevant content precisely when the consumer is receptive improves the overall shopping experience and correlates positively with the probability of transaction. When users perceive that a brand anticipates their specific needs, the persuasive force of the ad is magnified, leading to higher conversion rates. Parallel findings by King (2020) suggest that the pandemic-induced acceleration of the online-first shopping paradigm made timely and relevant PPC exposure an essential determinant of consumer behaviour. Accordingly, numerous retailers augmented their PPC outlays to secure competitive parity; the investment paid off, as firms that engaged shoppers during the pandemic demonstrated the medium's aptitude for adapting to rapidly shifting consumer routines.

PPC ads not only keep brands top-of-mind but also build trust at the same time. Alalwan and teammates (2017) point out that seeing the right ad often enough makes people comfortable enough to make a purchase. That comfort matters in India, where shoppers want their private data and money to be safe. Yet, Sinha and colleagues (2019) warn that showing the same ad too often, or showing it to the wrong people, can ruin that trust instead, leaving customers unsure and clicking “ignore”. Designers of these campaigns must

find a careful middle ground enough people must see the ad, but the brand must also treat the customer with respect. The ads should be helpful, clear, and exactly what the customer would want.

Doan and colleagues (2023) suggest that organisations should still lean hard on three specific digital strengths analytics that look deep, workflows that run on autopilot, and audience lists so finely sliced that every group feels like a niche if they want their pay-per-click (PPC) ads to convert ho-hum impressions into measurable, money-in-the-bank sales. Yet, the real magic happens when marketers pair paid reach with the unspoken wishes that lurk inside every potential buyer's mind. Stuffing money into shiny tools without that human touch is like putting a gourmet meal microscopically close to a starving person and expecting the aroma alone to pay the restaurant's bill. Mehta and his team (2020), looking at the Indian retail scene, back that idea. They show that shoppers prefer ads that talk and sound exactly like the friendly chat when they pass advice in a family group. Content that feels bespoke is not only seen; it nudges shoppers toward the checkout by quietly handing them the answer they didn't know they were looking for. Zhu and Gao (2019) observe that the true power of PPC lies in showing the brand exactly at the knowledge-hungry moment, right when a buyer is wondering, "should I?" the stage just before commitment. Vázquez-Martínez and his colleagues (2021) widen the view by proving that when people see the same type of relevant offer again and again, it slowly becomes the shape of the day,

fostering the quiet, steady trust that makes repeat purchases happen and keeps customers around for the long run.

2.3 SEO's Influence on Buying Decisions

Search Engine Optimization, or SEO, now plays a crucial role in how shoppers in India decide what to buy. By boosting online visibility, creating trust, and making it easy to find a site, SEO tightens the bond between a brand and potential customers. If done carefully and with a smart plan in mind, it can push e-commerce sites to the top of search results. Once there, the brand seems to carry a stamp of approval for expertise and dependability. Zhu and Gao (2019) confirm that when a brand's message exactly matches what shoppers are quietly searching for, the brand appears at the right moment and place, lifting both clicks and sales. SEO's hidden strength is its power to place just the right info when the shopper is about to make a choice. Citing Alalwan et al. (2017), the text notes trust is what keeps customers clicking. Higher search rankings quietly glow with credibility. When shoppers see a brand near the top, they view it as trustworthy, pushing them faster toward making a purchase.

SEO goes beyond just climbing the rankings; at its core, it shapes how shoppers see a brand. Data from Mehta et al. (2020) confirms that the pandemic drove more people to search for products online, making appearing on that first screen a vital lever for closing sales. If a website stays at the top for a while, people start recognising it, and familiarity breeds trust. Vázquez-Martínez et al. (2021) argue that using laser-focused, search-intent content cements that trust even more, turning simple clicks into final sales. Taken together, these insights show SEO as the engine behind one-on-one micro-interactions with consumers.

Doan et al. (2023) back this up, explaining that disciplined digital tools sharpen SEO's edge; the smartest retailers monitor search patterns then align every product with what shoppers want to know right now. The system, then, simply becomes part of everyday behaviour, where clear, topically rich results lead consumers to accept what they see. Sinha et al. (2019) warn that trust can fade fast due to privacy fears, but when SEO strategies emphasise openness and real value, scepticism fades, the buyer's journey grows smoother, and loyalty stays intact.

A fresh WordStream study published in 2024 reveals that smart Search Engine Optimization (SEO) can noticeably boost sales by positioning stores at or near the top of search-results pages. The moment buyers search, visible, relevant results guide them toward the checkout, making that visibility the pivotal last step in the buying process. King's 2020 report reinforces the idea. Today's shoppers expect online content to be meaningful, useful, and trustworthy. SEO systems that deliver these three traits not only climb higher in the rankings but also mirror shoppers' values and lead their preferences toward saying "yes." Meirandari and colleagues (2024) add that timely, context-rich content speeds the buying process: when relevant information lands precisely when buyers are weighing options, slight curiosity turns into confirmed orders, demonstrating that well-timed SEO is a bridge in the buyer's path. Wuisan and Handra (2023) complete the picture by urging teams to track buyer intent signals, dig into the latest search trends, and evaluate content rigorously. This combined approach turns mere traffic into lasting loyalty, proving that deliberate SEO is a core engine of any successful online sales strategy.

2.4 Personalised Content and Consumer Trust

In the Indian shopping world, using one-of-a-kind digital content for (PPC) ads and (SEO) has become the go-to method for earning shopper trust. More and more, buyers want experiences that feel made just for them. Meirandari et al. (2024) point out that personalised content not only makes shopping enjoyable but also strengthens the trust that nudges customers toward the checkout button. When retailers weave custom messages into their SEO and PPC campaigns, shoppers feel a real connection; this boosts interaction and builds credibility. The method taps right into the growing call for honesty and relevance. Vázquez-Martínez et al. (2021) confirm that steady, meaningful contacts create a sense of authenticity, and when that touchpoint is personalised, trust goes up a notch. In India, where trust is a deal-maker for online shoppers, tailoring directly fixes the problem of one-size-fits-all ads. WordStream (2024) backs this up, showing that brands that brilliantly combine exact targeting with personalisation see better click and conversion rates, proving that shopper confidence rises when digital experiences feel personally crafted.

Personal commitment to tailoring online experiences motivates gradual trust. The research team Alalwan et al. (2017) reports that trust is won piece by piece anytime users face favourable encounters, and finely-tuned personalised suggestions keep those encounters coming. Indianists, typically careful weighing any newly adopted online tool, notice and prefer messages that reflect a brand's understanding of their individual circumstances. Still, personalisation asks brands to balance caution. Sinha et al. (2019) remind us that clumsy emails, over-targeted share ads, and shading robotic suggestions strip credibility, sap belief,

and shrink marketplace engagement. Transparency in results pages and clarity in paid keywords become mandatory: brands must declare why images, links, and keywords led ads present as they do by guarding personal and sensitive data. With clear, respectful commitment to privacy, relevant links and ads render trust steep and, often, the overlooked carrier of purchases. When trust accrues, conversion is transformed.

Doan's team, in 2023 research, point to the untapped power of the digitally competent. The data reveal that mastery of forecasts, interactive tools, and clear data insights push trust higher. The Indian marketplace, covered in these findings, requires proficient daily data analysts and not mere agents. While King (2020) plainly notes, pandemic conversations demanded tactics that combine warmth and understanding, brand-expertise linked to a team. Retailers think on their feet, blending personalised keyword tactics in paid ads and optimised metadata in organic results. They not only preserved loyalty but newly acquired shoppers craving buoyed assurance. Reactive, responsible marketers thus signalled readiness.

Mehta and their team (2020) point out that people don't just want promises anymore; they expect brands to deliver exactly what's promised, and they want that certainty even now that we're all living through so much change. When a business gets it right through SEO and paid ads, it feels to shoppers like someone's really listening, and that keeps them coming back. Wuisan and Handra (2023) back this up, explaining that in India, ads that feel personal and fit each person's story look a lot like genuine care, so trust decides to stick around rather than disappear. Zhu and Gao (2019) take it one step further, saying that when marketers use

personal data to place a message where and when it matters, it's not sneaky at all. Instead, it signals that someone's paying attention, and that kind of respect lifts satisfaction, nudges people to click "buy again," and makes them dream of coming back even before they log off.

2.5 Trust Issues with PPC and SEO

How Indian shoppers react to online ads those little links you see at the top or the ads embedded in search results depends on a few things that added up to how well the ads help and how much they get in the way of the real info. Timing is really big here: shoppers want straight answers, not a long delay filled with marketing. If it feels like the advertiser is hiding something, or worse, that they'd rather cash in than help, the links get shut down in a split second. The right info served in the right way wins, but shady banners and deceptively polished stories that never really answer the question only serve to dust-break shoppers' trust with a quick, nagging doubt. Privacy worries and the nagging feeling that ads are trying to outsmart shoppers only feeds that doubt. The thus explains why an offer right above the real search answer feels like a bait. Also, if someone is streaming real info that answers a question, they're more likely to stick around.

Vázquez-Martínez et al. (2021) state that buyers' confidence in what they read during a web search hinges on how trustworthy the results seem to be. When a webpage uses SEO to truly match what shoppers want and offers genuine help, it earns a reputation for reliability. In India, where customers prize open and secure online experiences, that reputation becomes even more important. If ads come at a cost and flood the screen, they can endanger that reputation. WordStream (2024) observes that a well-focused pay-per-click

(PPC) ad can pull in visitors, yet too many ads may seem like constant surveillance, souring impressions before the visitor even clicks. Since Indian buyers are now savvier about the web, seeing the same or unrelated ads multiple times can feel like a knock on the digital door, lowering the trust that brands need to succeed. Zhu and Gao (2019) also support the idea that well-timed and relevant marketing boosts trust, yet missing the mark makes buyers feel like they are being played, not courted. Because Indian shoppers appreciate straight talk and genuine offers, marketers must electrically know and meet those straightforward expectations to keep the door open and the trust strong.

Doan and team (2023) argue that strong digital skills cut through shopper uncertainty. Stores that master data tools and digital marketing can design what people want, making the message feel honest and shrinking doubt. When the ads are laser-focused and based on solid data, the shopper is still the centre of attention, and that builds confidence. Meirandari and colleagues (2024) support the view, stressing that shoppers only trust brands that feel real and offer quality online touch-points. If a brand delivers well-researched and relevant content that adds real value, it earns respect repeat the same message stuffed with the wrong keywords, and the trust vanishes.

The Alalwan team (2017) remind us that trust isn't a one-time deal; it grows with every repeated positive experience. For both search and paid ads, a brand that keeps pulling through with interesting, useful, and never interrupting content feels familiar and dependable. This is particularly significant in India, where cautious consumers gradually build trust through demonstrable value. Retailers who adapted their PPC and SEO strategies

to be transparent and customer-oriented strengthened both reputations and consumer confidence. Wuisan and Handra (2023) conclude that effective digital marketing strategies must balance respect for consumer privacy with the provision of genuine value. Their study affirms that in India's retail context, PPC and SEO campaigns that are ethical, precise, and consumer-aligned are the most successful in earning and sustaining trust.

2.6 Ethics and Transparency in Digital Marketing

Perception of Indian consumers is heavily mediated by ethical norms and transparent communication. A growing segment of shoppers now possesses the digital literacy to discern the mechanics of data capture and repurposing; breaches of ethical conduct therefore precipitate declines in both trust and conversion. The research of Sinha et al. (2019) establishes that Indian respondents exhibit heightened sensitivity to three issues: the non-consensual use of personal information, the repurposing of that information without clear value exchange, and advertising that appears manipulative rather than informative. Reactions to paid search listings and organic search results therefore hinge not only on the accuracy of the information presented but on the transparency with which the underlying data schemas are described. The authors further contend that trust is contingent on communications that are both forthright and continuous, rather than reactive to adverse responses; failure to provide such transparency tends to reinforce the predictable attenuation of credibility when brands emphasise short-term click-through performance over sustained value. Mehta et al. (2020) extend this thesis by documenting that the credibility of paid search advertisements declines when the nature of sponsorship is obscure

and that commercial headlines featuring exaggerated claims further alienate consumers. They present empirical evidence demonstrating that such deceptive practices elicit reactive cognitive off-loading, diminishing processing fluency and, by extension, the efficacy of the advertising that employs them. Greater digital know-how among Indian users multiplies these tendencies; shoppers expect to see a straightforward menu of what data gets tracked, why it's tracked, which algorithms influence which rankings, and what back-end payments drive the editorial prominence that looks, at first glance, to be purely independent content.

(2024) supplement this narrative by demonstrating that firms leveraging normative signals such as purpose-driven storytelling couched within factual rigour achieve higher engagement among Indian audiences, compelling a recalibration of not only tactics but corporate identity itself. Their case analyses of participatory watchdog platforms highlight how reciprocal scrutiny, once a peripheral concern, now organises the very architecture of brand communication. Private gatherings, once deemed exclusive, have adopted real-time frictionless accountability, compelling brands to foreground moral architecture alongside operational metrics. E-commerce, now the gateway for nearly half the urban demographic, displays a pronounced divergence; brands exhibiting a co-evolved ownership of privacy concerns and enriched consent protocols outperform mere price-competitors, indicating that transactional efficiency has ceded ground to relational transparency as the decisive market frontier. Future scrutiny hinges on leveraging artificial intelligence, not as an eraser of human accountability, but as a co-sensor incrementally enhancing trust circulatory within algorithmic teaching cycles. Firms that err towards opacity will discover, against erstwhile

cynicism, the punitive arithmetic of trust now settled cancel, not elapsed, but recalculated transmitting seismic brand attrition within an agenda-bound algorithmic epoch.

(2024) broaden the findings by evidencing that an intentionally ethical marketing architecture purposefully strengthens each phase of the consumer encounter, consequently deepening the synergetic braid of trust and loyalty throughout the whole relationship. Tactics for search-engine-optimisation that prioritise authenticity rather than evasion of oversight noticeably elevate brand esteem and fortify consumer assurance.

The comprehensive empirical evidence presented by Alalwan et al. (2017) positions trust as foundational for the adoption of online retail services; their findings further indicate that specifically designed transparent amplify both consumer engagement and emotional security. In the Indian retail sector, where purchase decisions frequently hinge on perceived authenticity, the implementation of ethical marketing stands as an essential rather than an optional strategy. Zhu and Gao (2019) substantiate this premise by showing that, while tailored consumer engagement techniques can hasten adoption, their längerfristigen līnek must be coupled with ethical oversight. Their analysis emphasizes the imperative of explicit disclosure regarding data usage and unambiguous respect for consumer preferences, an imperative that holds heightened relevance in the country's culturally variegated marketplace. Building upon that foundation, Wuisan and Handra (2023) contend that ethical rigor should be elevated from an ancillary practice to the foundational layer of effective digital marketing. Indian retail firms that integrate transparent, ethically accountable PPC and SEO frameworks into their digital marketing architecture will be comparatively resilient

to mounting scrutiny from discerning consumers, thus cultivating durable trust and enduring brand preference.

2.7 Limitations of PPC and SEO Strategies

Within India's digital commerce landscape, retail brands face steep obstacles in deploying PPC and SEO strategies. Shifting consumer priorities, rapid technological evolution, rising competition, and sporadic regulatory updates converge to create an unstable environment. Both tactics offer the allure of increased brand exposure and deeper consumer engagement; yet, frictions rooted in mistrust, inadequate transparency, superficial relevance, and perceived ad excess steadily erode the incremental benefits of each. Singh and colleagues (2017) suggest that consumer satisfaction leans heavily on the dual pillars of perceived security and personalised relevance, such that jarring PPC ads elicit strong negative reactions. Ahmed (2020) adds that poorly designed visual and textual elements impose an attention ceiling, triggering annoyance and click abandonment. India's digital economy, marked by uneven digital fluency, amplifies harm when bland, unsophisticated messages fuel mistrust; brands perceived to exploit consumers face swift attrition.

Although SEO appears structurally sturdier, its foundations crumble under routine algorithm updates that invalidate even recently proven templates. Robinson and colleagues (2007) document that manipulative visibility tactics overdone keyword insertion, superficial layout gimmicks may inflate traffic in the short run, yet undermine enduring consumer confidence.

Gaudel (2019) confirms that content crafted chiefly to appease search algorithms, rather than deliver genuine consumer value, carries reduced credibility, an effect pronounced in younger and less-established online markets. Where consumer confidence in online commerce is a work in progress, credibility is the only genuine currency. Genuine, audience-first content is, therefore, not just desirable; it is a structural necessity, elevating search-engine optimisation from a mere tactical activity to a bedrock of lasting customer commitment.

Dash and Chakraborty (2021) assert that organisations that fail to cultivate digital adaptability find it perpetually hard to deliver a coherent online strategy, thereby widening the pre-existing gulf in digital skill that separates resource-rich conglomerates from smaller competitors. Gull and Pervaiz (2018) reinforce this view, claiming that predictive and data-led practices are now mandatory for unearthing consumer intent across digital pathways; yet the bulk of retailers lack the analytical sophistication to judiciously calibrate pay-per-click and search-engine optimisation expenditure. Compounding the issue, rising operational expenses further strain already thin margins. Omar et al. (2011) prove that in emerging markets, premium pricing, paired with inadequate audience segmentation, weakens campaign efficacy, thus squeezing return on investment for smaller players. With competition sharpening across the Indian digital landscape, sustaining cost-effective online marketing tactics is becoming an ever-more challenging endeavour.

Cultural mores and ethical expectations simultaneously circumscribe the latitude of Indian digital consumers. Fernandes and Panda (2018) identify social pressure and prevailing

normative expectations as determinants of how shoppers adjudicate sincerity and clarity, two prerequisites for the formation of trust in online advertising. Khan and Siddiqui (2013) expand on this by demonstrating that misleading or overtly aggressive promotional messages erode trust at several decision-making junctions, ultimately sapping purchase motivation. Operating within this normative perimeter, initiatives that foreground straightforward, transparent dialogues tend to be the more efficacious in nurturing long-lasting trust.

Lasting corporate advantage leans on collaborative interdependencies in which ethical standards co-shape adaptive practice. Mir (2012) remarks that South Asian shoppers process online advertising via heuristics that favour brands balancing persuasion with graded openness. Yasa et al. (2024) corroborate that marketing architectures grounded in locally relevant moral discourses can enhance brand durability in environments marked by shifting signals. Within the organised-retail landscape in India, effective implementation of (PPC) and (SEO) rests less on isolated manoeuvres and more on continuous recalibration, gradual investment in digital acumen, and an enduring compact of truthfulness with shoppers.

2.8 Identified Research Gaps in Existing Literature

Academic literature and practitioner handbooks alike analyse PPC advertising and SEO as separate components of digital marketing (*visit monthly* see footnote). Yet most frameworks position these tactics within a broader global context or ignore their interaction altogether, neglecting* collaborative* investigation of how both simultaneously influence purchase behaviour in India's rapidly digitising retail space. For instance, several reviews

endorse the view that the dual mechanisms can cultivate visibility, authority, and latent purchase intent; few, however, account for consumer-perceived adjunct costs that accrue vis-à-vis heightened privacy surveillance, ad fatigue, and scepticism predicated on the purchase of visibility. Complementary scholarship that targets the Indian retail sphere has concentrated either on the wholesale adoption of digital marketing as a mode of aggregation or on emergent, but discrete, mobile-payment behavioural sequences, and lacks a holistic, dyadic examination of how retail web presence constructed via PPC and SEO jointly mediates trust formation, engagement sequencing, and downstream purchasing intent. Cultural dispositions, ethical saliences, and geographically conditioned digital literacy remains largely unobserved, thus constraining comprehension of how the consumer in India negotiates the contingent interplay of perceived merit and latent reputational debt manifesting in these marketing modalities. Explicating these dynamics is a necessary prelude to calibrating the empirical validity of digital marketing intervention in a dense and rapidly reconfiguring Indian retail milieu, and remains an indispensable antecedent to strategic prudence that aligns the agency of consumer trust with manifest ethical and situational expectations.

2.9 Theoretical Framework: TAM and Consumer Behaviour

TAM is invoked to model how consumers respond to two distinct but interrelated digital stimuli sponsored search ads and organic search rankings. Ahmed et al. (2019) assert that the persuasive capacity of online ads rests on the consumer's judgment of intrinsic utility, further enhanced by the advertisement's ability to fortify long-term brand trust; this

argument self-evidently reinforces TAM's emphasis on perceived usefulness. At the same time, Khan and Siddiqui (2013) furnish empirical evidence that digital marketing messages affect consumer choice only when the information framework is transparent, instinctively navigable, and offers verifiable benefits, thus lending support to TAM's stipulation regarding perceived ease of use. TAM makes it well-suited for studying the digital ecosystems where consumer endorsement is paramount. Fernandes and Panda (2018) detail how cultural and social cues decisively shape purchasing behavior and contend that TAM appropriately assimilates these determinants by avoiding an exclusive focus on the cognitive appraisal of perceived usefulness across varied social environments. In parallel, Ibrahim et al. (2020) maintain that brand trust is reinforced when marketing communications adopt an openly participatory stance, thereby reaffirming TAM's explanatory authority in contexts where endorsement is filtered by authentic and constructive online encounters. When consumers judge pay-per-click (PPC) and search engine optimisation (SEO) interventions as germane and intuitively navigable, brand trust is fortified, which correlates positively with both dyadic and transactional commitment.

Investigators have systematically superimposed trust as a distinct dimension upon the canonical TAM architecture. Kim and Ko (2012) for instance demonstrate that online marketing that is both ostensibly obvious and intrinsically secure materially boosts the customer equity of luxury fashion labels, a conclusion that substantively fortifies the present inquiry's concentration upon PPC and SEO. Transparent and algorithmically legible strategies, the authors contend, elicit higher levels of cognitive and emotional engagement. Corroborating this trajectory, Liu and Wei (2018) contend that the infusion of personalisation

into digital marketing materially amplifies the cognitive indices of perceived ease and usefulness, which further compounds consumer endorsement. Such a mechanism supplies a pertinent heuristic for the customised design of PPC and SEO interventions in the Indian market setting.

Privacy concerns, advertising fatigue, and the cumulative burden of digital stimuli can also be accounted for within the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). Gaudel (2019) observes that, within the domain of online shopping, consumer sentiment deteriorates when advertising is perceived as manipulative, thereby reinforcing the TAM postulate that perceived ease of use manifested, in this instance, through transparent and ethically curated advertisements facilitates adoption. Complementarily, Omar et al. (2011) articulate that satisfaction with online marketing environments is contingent upon a sense of procedural fluency and integrity. Taken together, these empirical findings foreground the criticality of transparency and reveal that when pay-per-click (PPC) and search-engine-optimisation (SEO) initiatives safeguard personal data and streamline the online trajectory, they are congruent with TAM's foundational constructs. Situated within this interpretative frame, research can then rigorously interrogate the ways in which Indian consumers calibrate perceptions of perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and transaction-specific trust to paid search and optimised search algorithms. By integrating supplementary evidence on consumer trust, cultural value hierarchies, and patterns of digital adoption, TAM emerges as a sufficiently elastic account for elucidating both attitudinal and behavioural dimensions within the Indian e-tailing environment. Employing this model, the present inquiry is thereby positioned to map, in a disciplined and incremental fashion, how strategic search marketing resonates

with consumer normative frameworks, culminating in heightened acceptance and sustained transactional engagement.

2.10 Conceptual Framework for PPC, SEO, Trust

The developed conceptual framework intertwines the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), (PPC), and (SEO) to elucidate the pathways through which these digital marketing modalities affect consumer trust, behavioural responses, and purchase intentions among Indian retail customers. By extrapolating and contextualising prevailing scholarly insights, the design aligns extant literature with the empirical imperatives of the investigation. Within the framework, PPC and SEO emerge as the primary drivers, their persuasive potency contingent upon the degree of personalisation, message pertinence, transparency, and ethical adherence, parameters that epitomise a responsible digital marketing ethos. Supporting evidence from Ahmed et al. (2019) contends that the conjunction of pertinence and trustworthiness in online advertisements prolongs consumer vigilance and fortifies brand allegiance. Concomitantly, Khan and Siddiqui (2013) illustrate that digital interventions wield a stronger influence on decision-making when their message is appraised as useful and unambiguous, a finding that is consonant with TAM's construct of perceived ease of use.

In the proposed framework, trust acts as the focal mediator that bridges digital marketing interventions and resultant consumer behaviour. Findings consistently show that higher trust levels serve to magnify consumer focus, thereby enabling prolonged engagement. Ibrahim et al. (2020) reveal that marketing actions infused with interactivity and transparency elicit favourable cognitive and emotional responses, while Gaudel (2019) empirically confirms that

misleading or overbearing tactics irreparably reduce brand credibility. Further strengthening this view, Fernandes and Panda (2018) document that, among India's culturally diverse consumer segments, only advertising that combines clarity with contextual relevance can nurture consumer confidence and forge durable brand ties. Accordingly, trust mechanisms serve as the cognitive conduit that translates the combined effects into measurable behavioural responses, including both engagement metrics and conversion intents.

The framework's outer ring foregrounds behavioural indicators including engagement readiness, purchase intention, and purchase loyalty. Evidence from Kim and Ko (2012) establishes that the fortification of customer equity via digital messaging is contingent on transparency coupled with contextual relevance, while Liu and Wei (2018) identify that personalisation marginally amplifies construed usefulness and, in turn, cultivates evaluative acceptance. Vázquez-Martínez et al. (2021) corroborate that, on the digital shopping continuum, perceived trust operates as the core motivational trigger, mediating the translation of marketing information into actionable purchase behaviour. Accordingly, the present framework specifies as the explanatory antecedents, trust as the mediating agent, and indicators of consumer intention and behaviour as the consequential criteria. By articulating the linkage between ethically calibrated, relevant, and personalised digital interventions and the emergence of consumer trust, the framework offers an original explanatory lens through which the effects of PPC and SEO on shopper engagement in India's retail digital channel can be scrutinised.

2.11 Hypothesis on Digital Marketing's Consumer Impact

Hypothesis (H1)

Personalised and contextually relevant PPC and SEO messaging is posited to exert a substantial, positive influence on consumer trust and subsequent purchasing behaviour within the Indian retail sector.

The hypothesis is derived from, and is congruent with, the cumulative findings of the literature review, and it is aligned with the overarching research objectives and interrogative framework of the study. Existing scholarship has consistently highlighted that brands capable of delivering marketing content which is both relevant and individually tailored exhibit heightened consumer engagement and trust. Studies by Alalwan et al. (2017) and Meirandari et al. (2024) provide empirical support, illustrating that customised, contextually coherent digital communications promote consumer trust and amplify purchase intentions. Conversely, generic messaging, common in poorly executed PPC and SEO efforts, has been shown to compromise credibility and diminish brand authenticity. By integrating these empirical insights, the present hypothesis asserts a positive, direct linkage between the degree of personalisation in digital marketing interventions and behavioural outcomes that favour the brand, a linkage that is, it is contended, especially pronounced within the contemporary Indian retail environment.

2.12 Conclusion

A thorough survey of current academic literature identifies PPC advertising and SEO as decisive variables shaping visibility, consumer trust, and behaviour within India's rapidly

evolving retail sector. When executed together, these approaches significantly enhance both engagement and conversion. While PPC provides swift visibility, SEO builds lasting authority by achieving high organic rankings. Systematic studies consistently observe that trust acts as a mediator; content that is transparent, personalised, and contextually relevant increases engagement and strengthens purchase intent, whereas material perceived as intrusive or misleading undermines credibility. Ethical stewardship and unambiguous disclosure, therefore, can no longer be optional or peripheral; they are essential. This requirement is intensified in the Indian context, which privileges cultural norms that scrutinise privacy and accuracy. PPC, despite its ability to deliver immediate exposure and sales, is susceptible to consumer ad fatigue and heightened scepticism. SEO, in contrast, generally establishes a longer-lasting lineage yet is often hindered by shifting algorithms and battles over content legitimacy. The literature counsel the convergence of personalisation, in-depth consumer analytics, and ethically designed practices as the sole differentiated pathway to the ongoing reinforcement of consumer trust.

A strong body of research validates both PPC and SEO as effective standalone drivers of online traffic and conversion, yet the available literature reveals a notable gap: systematic studies exploring the integrated performance of these channels specifically in India's retail space are sparse. Most prior analyses ignore the country's cultural diversity, uneven regional digital literacy, and the ever-evolving landscape of consumer sentiment, each of which likely shapes the combined leverage of paid and organic search in distinct ways.

Such insights underscore the imperatives of a context-specific analytical framework, thereby locating pay-per-click advertising and search-engine optimization as central, though multilayered, instruments for the deliberate engineering of consumer trust and the modulation of purchasing behaviour.

Chapter 3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The methodological architecture operates within a positivist epistemology, privileging data that is simultaneously quantifiable and observable for evaluating the efficacy of (PPC) and (SEO) on buyer decision processes in the Indian retail context. The research follows a deductive trajectory, advancing from pre-existing constructs of digital marketing and consumer trust to the articulation of empirical, testable propositions. Data were elicited via structured, self-administered questionnaires, recording metrics on advertisement congruence, trust in the source, and stated purchase intentions. The compositional architecture of the analysis rests mainly on quantitative guidelines, affording principal emphasis to descriptive statistics namely, enumeration counts, percentage distributions, and pie-chart visualisation so that consumer-response orientations are rendered legible and comparable across distinct demographic and psychographic constituents. This modality of prompt, as elicited and subsequently graphically expressed, corresponds to the admonitory conclusions of Saunders et al. (2019), who assert that such definitional fidelity upholds both the internal and external plausibility required of managerial inquiry; its further certification is afforded by Zhu and Gao (2019), who assert that only quantifiably operationalised indicators sanction a rigorous appraisal of digital-marketing efficacy.

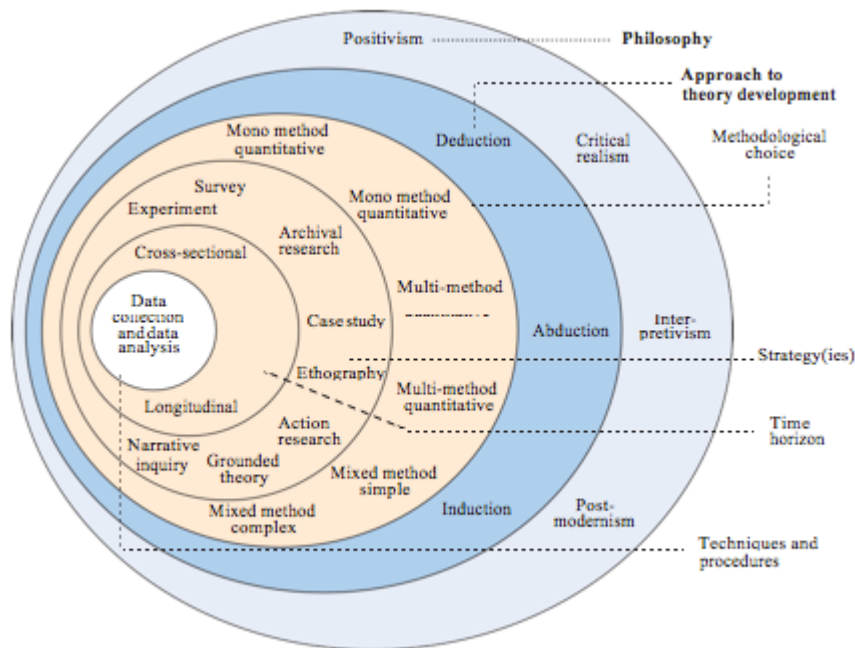


Figure 1. Research onion¹

Deliberative sampling techniques were employed to secure respondents who had been exposed to both (PPC) and (SEO) interventions, thus assuring full alignment between information origin and the analytical aims of the investigation. The terminal respondent colony consisted of seventy units, who were assembled via Instagram milieu, via WhatsApp affinity clusters, and via university rectorial mailing diffusion. In alignment, Mehta et al. (2020) maintain that purposive sampling is advantageous whenever subjects must exhibit both direct and pertinently relevant expertise with the phenomenon of interest, whilst Vázquez-Martínez et al. (2021) supply empirical observance demonstrating that social and academic digital platforms are credentialised to disseminate recruitment notices to respondents who are, by derivation, already familiar with promotional discourse.

3.2 Research Philosophy and Approach

The inquiry adopts a positivist epistemology as delineated by Saunders et al. (2019), circumscribing the methodological purview to empirically verifiable and numerically measurable indicators that gauge the influence of pay-per-click (PPC) and search-engine optimisation (SEO) within the Indian organised retail sector. Data were collected through tightly circumscribed self-completion questionnaires, yielding a dataset subjected solely to descriptive-statistical operations namely, frequencies, percentages, and pie-chart displays to maintain methodological parsimony. Such analytical restraint is intended to reinforce the triad of clarity, objectivity, and replicability. The literature identifies measurable artefacts as the most authoritative indices of digital-marketing efficacy; this is corroborated by Zhu and Gao (2019), who emphasise that rigorous quantification of online promotional outcomes is non-negotiable. Within the positivist model, the investigation systematically constrains key variables namely, consumer trust, attitudes toward personalised advertising, and purchase intentions thereby facilitating their rigorous evaluation. The study is founded on a deductive framework, progressing from prevailing theoretical constructs of digital marketing and consumer trust to the generation of empirically falsifiable propositions. Notably, consumer trust has repeatedly emerged as a mediating construct in digital adoption inquiries, thereby corroborating the suitability of a deductive research schema (Alalwan et al., 2017).

Purposive sampling was employed to guarantee that only respondents with direct, recent engagement with PPC and SEO mechanisms were selected, thereby minimising cognitive leakage between the independent variables and extraneous variables and reinforcing the

alignment between study objectives and lived experience. Seventy respondents were enlisted through Instagram, WhatsApp, and university mailing lists a triangulation strategy congruent with the assertion of Vázquez-Martínez et al. (2021) that digital channels yield swift access to cohorts conclusively affected by exposure to online advertising stimuli. Singh et al. (2017) further corroborate the utility of empirical mapping in uncovering satisfaction trajectories in digitally intermediation, a precept crystallised within the present structural design. The independent variables were operationalised, respectively, as facets of advertisement personalisation and advertisement relevance, whilst the dependent constructs were articulated as levels of trust and purchase intention, thereby begetting replicable metrics susceptible to quantitative scrutiny.

3.3 Study Participants and Sampling

Seventy respondents completed the closed-ended survey delivered through Instagram stories, WhatsApp class-wide broadcasts, and campus mailing lists. To enhance uniformity, purposive sampling was used, allowing participation only from persons who can document prior engagement with pay-per-click advertising and search-engine optimisation. This selection ensures the evidence aligns tightly with the study's precise focus. The Report of Mehta et al. (2020) highlights the frequent application of purposive sampling in studies where prior, practical interaction with the precise online artefacts in question is an established methodological requisite.

In order to prevent the potential re-identification of respondents and reduce the likelihood of incidental disclosure, we consciously left out core demographic fields age and gender

relying instead on the respondents to provide behaviourally based items from which clusters were later inferred. When we examined online purchasing, the responses showed a lopsided distribution: twenty-two participants average out to once a month, seventeen once every few months, sixteen once a week, and fifteen once per day. Interplay with promoted content displayed a similar spread: seventeen said “sometimes,” sixteen “never,” fifteen “rarely,” while the occasional respondents were split evenly, with eleven selecting “always” and eleven “often.” Such granular differences described distorted yet coherent reservoirs of exposure to cost-per-click and search-engine-optimised placements. Empirical continuity for these derived segments arises from Vázquez-Martínez et al. (2021) who argue that recurrent period specification serves as an indirect indicator of advertising responsiveness, and from Choi et al. (2020) who relate temporal oscillations to tiers of digital literacy that, in turn, condition the accrual of trust and the subsequent triggering of intent to purchase. The observed heterogeneity accordingly reinforces the methodological robustness of the dataset, presenting a faithful approximation of the diverse consumer engagement continua that characterise India’s evolving digital retail landscape.

3.4 Research Design and Data Collection

A structured quantitative research design was adopted, utilising self-completed, structured questionnaires as the principal tool for empirical data collection. Independent variables were conceptualised as three dimensions of ad personalisation: level of contextual congruence, subjective relevance of content, and perceived level of transparency, and were examined separately for pay-per-click and organic search advertising channels. Dependent

variables were specified as three attitudinal and behavioural constructs consumer trust, brand perception, and purchase intention operationalised via multiple observational items scored on a six-point Likert format. The deliberate separation of the independent and dependent constructs enhances clarity and conceptual rigour, consonant with the best-practice guidelines for digital marketing research recommended by Wuisan and Handra (2023). Descriptive statistical techniques alone were employed, with frequencies, relative percentages, and pie-chart visualisation of the predominant response profiles, thereby minimising ambiguity in the interpretation of consumer attitudes and mitigating biases inherent in inferential techniques or experimental interference. Zhu and Gao (2019) assert that observations made in digital retail environments, when quantified, dispense with the methodological artifice of controlled experimental settings and thereby preserve ecological validity.

The questionnaire was distributed through social media platforms (Instagram), direct messaging groups (WhatsApp), and curated university mailing lists to achieve maximum exposure and operational efficiency.

3.5 Survey Instrument and Measurement Tools

This research employed a self-administered structured questionnaire to profile consumer evaluations of pay-per-click (PPC) and search engine optimisation (SEO) efforts, as well as related trust variables and stated purchase intention. The final version of the instrument consisted of seventeen items divided into four logically organised sections: past online buying habits, comparison of PPC and SEO stimuli, trust antecedents, and self-assessed

purchase likelihood. As digital marketing conditions remain fluid, the use of structured instruments increases measurement reliability, a conclusion already empirically corroborated by Zhu and Gao (2019). Each item employed a five-point Likert scale, ranging from “Strongly disagree” to “Strongly agree” ; the particular item “The ads or search results I see online are usually relevant to my shopping interests” was selected to measure the relevance of persisting marketing stimuli. Utilisation of a single scaling format thus ensured across-subject comparability and reduced the variance of interpretative responses.

Later processing relied solely on descriptive measures: counts, relative frequencies, and interactive pie graphs. These approaches offer straightforward graphical portraits of user sentiment, circumventing the potential confounding introduced by multilevel regression or forecasting algorithms. Vázquez-Martínez et al. (2021) recommend meticulously constrained wording in questionnaires to heighten the reproducibility and interpretative sharpness of metric outcomes. To ensure methodological integrity and to meet ethical transparency norms, the project archived the entire supporting corpus, including participant briefing notes, consent manifests, and aftercare instructions, consistent with the procedural expectations outlined by Ferrell et al. (2021).

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The present research has been executed in strict adherence to Dublin Business School’s stipulated ethical protocols, thereby ensuring participant welfare and the integrity of the collected data. Anticipatory to interaction, each candidate completed a detailed orientation that illustrated the inquiry’s core emphasis namely, the capacity of pay-per-click (PPC)

promotion and search engine optimisation (SEO) practices to engender consumer trust and influence purchase intent in India's retail domain. Digital consent was obtained and securely retained in a format that permits audit without exposing identity. In tandem with established norms, the exercise excluded all personally identifiable information; analytic processing was thereafter conducted solely on thoroughly anonymised datums, effectively curtailing the risk of inadvertent re-identification. These operational conventions resonate with the observations of Sinha et al. (2019), who document heightened online retail risk to consumer privacy attendant upon concentrated marketing interventions. Accordingly, the procedural framework implemented herein functions as a proportionate safeguard against the vulnerabilities previously detailed in peer-reviewed exposure.

3.7 Limitations of the Methodology

A further limitation pertains to geographic concentration, given that the majority of participants were drawn exclusively from urban and semi-urban settings, thereby marginalising rural constituencies where internet penetration remains persistently low. Singh et al. (2017) have emphasised that the entrenched digital divides in India materially constrain both consumer trust and digital engagement, thereby inhibiting the broader national extrapolation of the empirical results. Notwithstanding these geographic and infrastructural constraints, the investigation achieves methodological rigour by strict compliance with established ethical guidelines, the implementation of a structured and pre-tested questionnaire, and the exclusive deployment of descriptive statistical techniques. The application of frequency distribution, percentage calculation, and graphical

representation not only augments the reliability and transparency of the analytic outcomes, but also furnishes stakeholders with actionable, contextually relevant insights regarding consumer interactions with PPC and SEO.

3.8 Conclusion

The present investigation employs an integrative methodology that synthesises philosophical, design, and analytical strands in order to furnish a detailed and systematic evaluation of pay-per-click (PPC) and search engine optimisation (SEO) tactics within India's retail environment. The epistemic cornerstone is a positivist orientation, which undergirds the imperative for empirically verifiable quantification; this, in turn, is complemented by a deductive framework that recouples pre-existing theoretical constructs on digital marketing and consumer configuration to empirically testable hypotheses. Structured questionnaire instruments, pre-tested for psychometric rigour, functioned as the principal mechanism of data acquisition, assuring that dimensions of inquiry namely, advertisement personalisation, message relevance, consumer trust, and purchase intention were semiorganised into statistically analyzable categories for subsequent hypotheses evaluation.

Sampling proceeded purposely; seventy respondents were sourced via digital forums to ensure that all possessed prior familiarity with both pay-per-click (PPC) and search-engine-optimisation (SEO) communications. Behavioural segmentation, informed by respondents' shopping cadence and their patterns of interaction with sponsored advertisements, accentuated variation in engagement intensity. Access to the dataset occurred exclusively through descriptive-statistical techniques: frequencies, percentages,

and pie-chart visualisations furnished an uncluttered, publicly comprehensible depiction of consumer responses. Ethical safeguards were observed in copied consent protocols, the withholding of personally identifying data, and the use of culturally balanced lexical choices, thereby attenuating participant exposure and upholding informational privacy. The constraints of purposive sampling, self-reported data, and pronounced geographic concentration were expressly itemised, yet the empirical picture is fortified by methodological coherence and ethical diligence. Collectively, the methodological edifice furnishes insights that are verifiable, reproducible, and of direct, actionable relevance to the modus operating within India's retail milieu, specifically in delineating the nexus between PPC, SEO, consumer trust, and purchase-specific decisions.

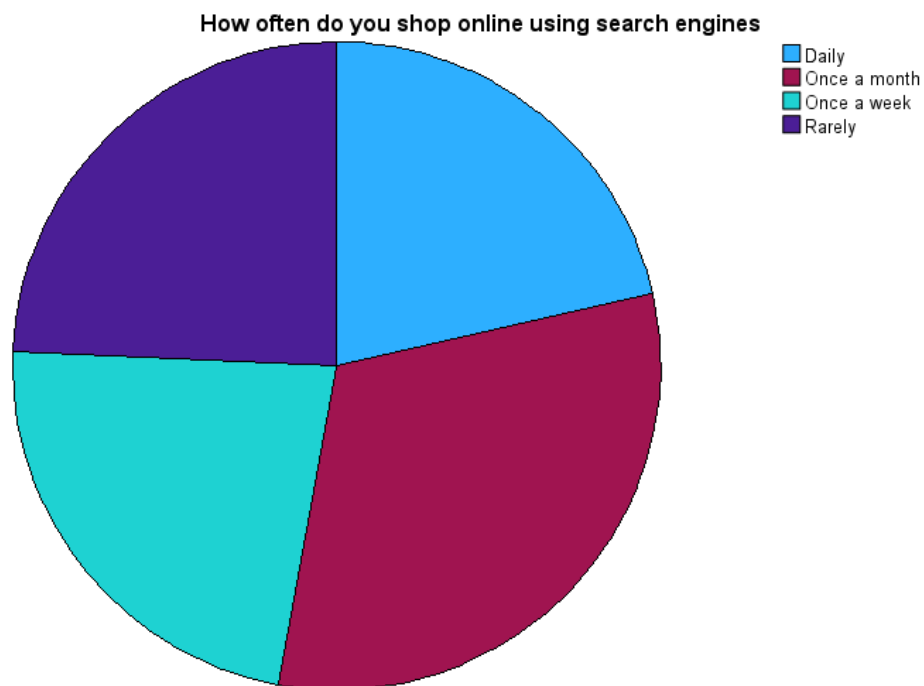
Chapter 4: Results and Data Analysis

4.1 Introduction

Key variables are framed to distinguish between independent and dependent components. Independent variables comprise advertisement personalisation, perceived relevance, credibility, and transparency, which are operationalised in relation to PPC and SEO initiatives. Dependent variables are consumer trust, purchase intention, and engagement metrics, embodying observable behavioural outcomes following digital exposure. Trust is modelled as the mediating variable that channels exposure to advertisements into further judgement and action, while purchase intention assesses how digital stimuli convert into operational behaviour. For empirical testing, the framework employs descriptive statistics namely, frequencies, percentages, and visual tools such as pie charts thereby summarising consumer feedback in a concise, uniform manner. Such a methodical representation ensures that the results are readily interpretable and comparable across demographic and behavioural segments, thereby exposing channels of positive influence alongside any enduring limitations that PPC and SEO may impose on the formation of trust and the facilitation of purchase in India's retail marketplaces.

4.2 Data Analysis

Question 1

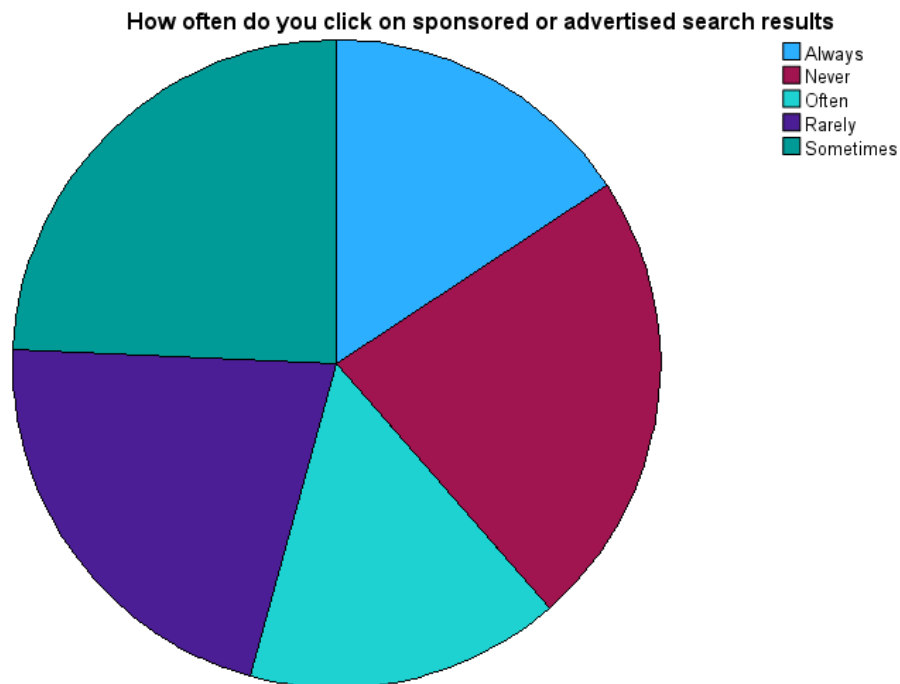


The survey findings show varied patterns in online shopping using search engines. About 31.4% of respondents shop once a month, making it the most common frequency. Weekly shoppers account for 22.9%, while 24.3% shop rarely and 21.4% shop daily. This indicates that occasional use is more common than frequent engagement.

How often do you shop online using search engines

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Daily	15	21.4	21.4	21.4
	Once a month	22	31.4	31.4	52.9
	Once a week	16	22.9	22.9	75.7
	Rarely	17	24.3	24.3	100.0
	Total	70	100.0	100.0	

Question 2



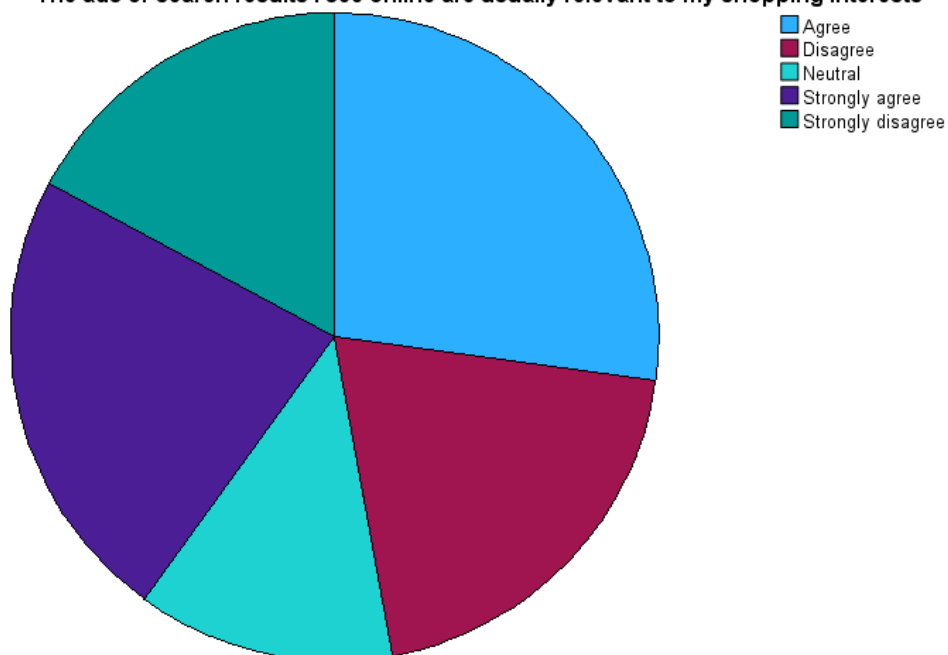
The results highlight diverse behaviors toward sponsored search results. About 24.3% of respondents sometimes click on ads, while 22.9% never do so. A smaller share, 15.7%, always or often engage with sponsored links, and 21.4% click rarely. Overall, occasional interaction dominates, showing that users approach paid results selectively.

How often do you click on sponsored or advertised search results

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Always	11	15.7	15.7	15.7
	Never	16	22.9	22.9	38.6
	Often	11	15.7	15.7	54.3
	Rarely	15	21.4	21.4	75.7
	Sometimes	17	24.3	24.3	100.0
	Total	70	100.0	100.0	

Question 3

The ads or search results I see online are usually relevant to my shopping interests



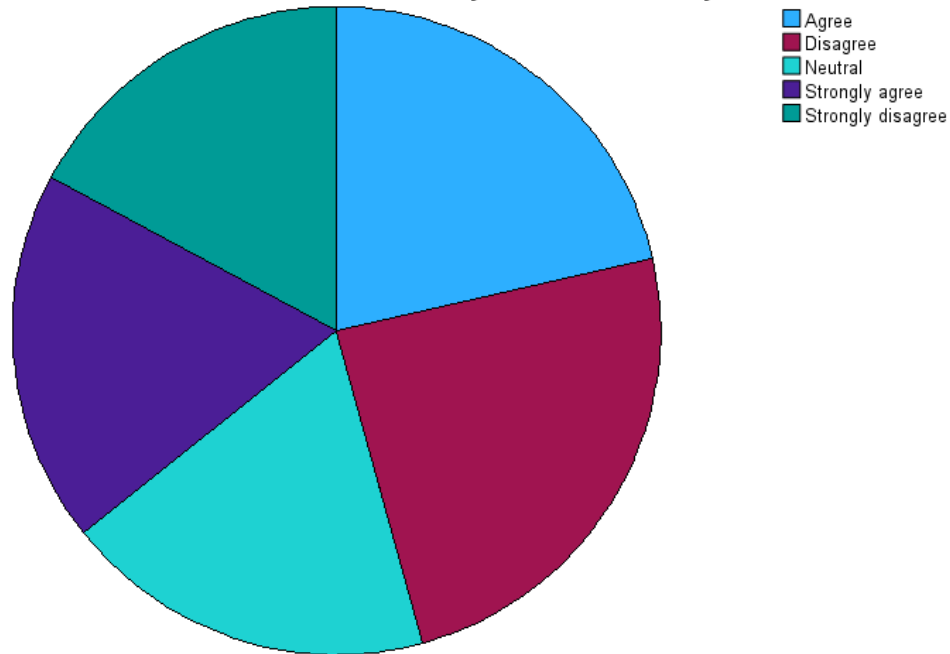
The findings suggest mixed opinions about the relevance of online ads to shopping interests. While 27.1% agree and 22.9% strongly agree that ads are relevant, 20% disagree and 17.1% strongly disagree. Only 12.9% remain neutral, showing that perceptions are divided, with a slight tilt toward positive relevance.

The ads or search results I see online are usually relevant to my shopping interests

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	19	27.1	27.1	27.1
	Disagree	14	20.0	20.0	47.1
	Neutral	9	12.9	12.9	60.0
	Strongly agree	16	22.9	22.9	82.9
	Strongly disagree	12	17.1	17.1	100.0
	Total	70	100.0	100.0	

Question 4

I trust ads or search results more when they match what I recently searched or browsed

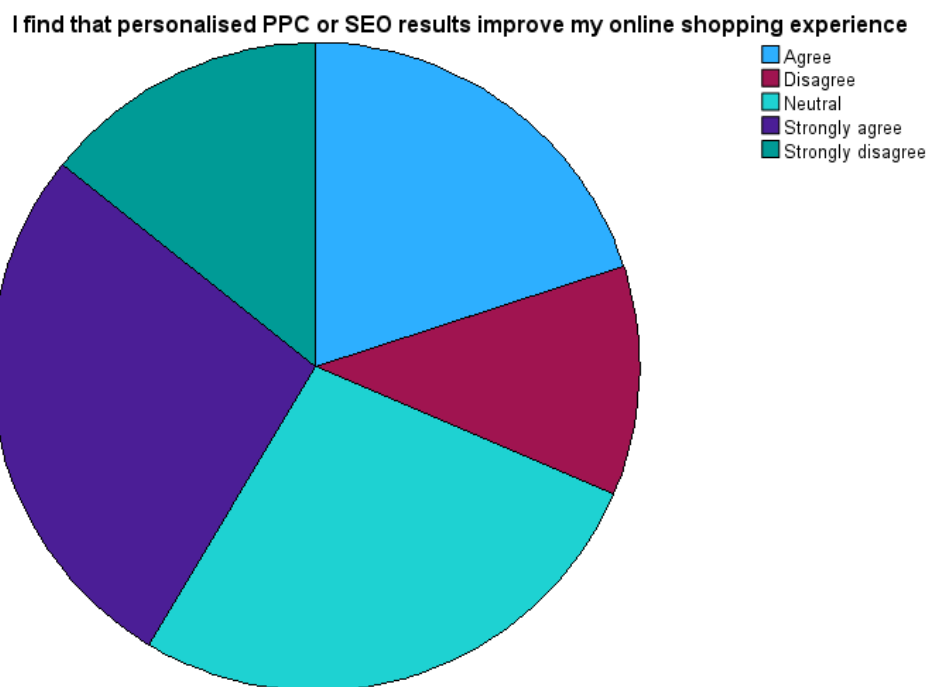


The responses show a balanced yet divided view on trust in ads matching recent searches. About 21.4% agree and 18.6% strongly agree, while 24.3% disagree and 17.1% strongly disagree. Another 18.6% remain neutral. This indicates that while relevance boosts trust for some, a significant portion remains skeptical.

I trust ads or search results more when they match what I recently searched or browsed

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	15	21.4	21.4	21.4
	Disagree	17	24.3	24.3	45.7
	Neutral	13	18.6	18.6	64.3
	Strongly agree	13	18.6	18.6	82.9
	Strongly disagree	12	17.1	17.1	100.0
	Total	70	100.0	100.0	

Question 5



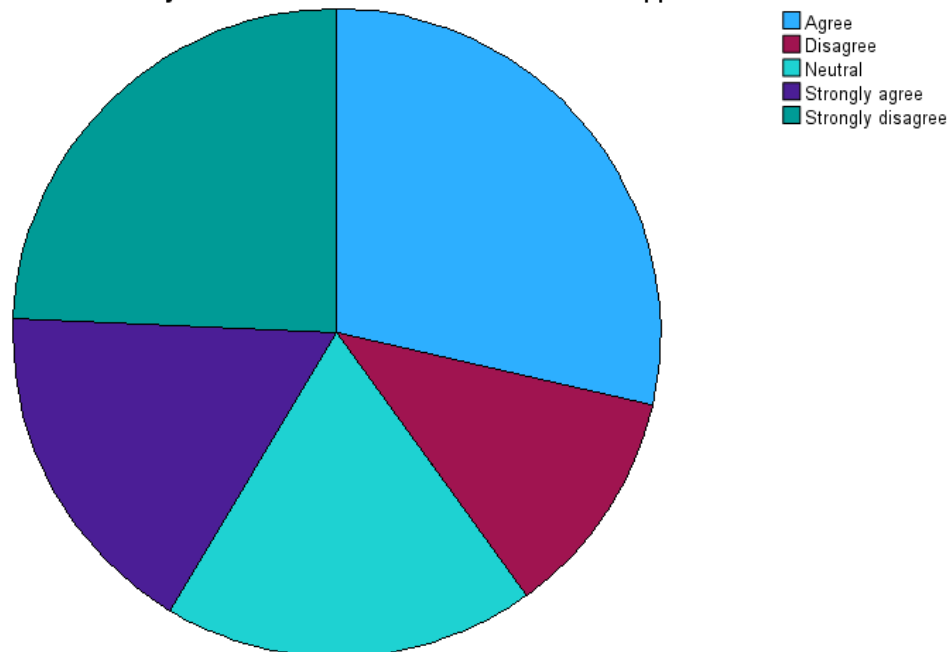
The results indicate that personalized PPC and SEO results have a generally positive effect on online shopping experiences. About 27.1% strongly agree and 20% agree, showing a considerable level of support. However, 27.1% remain neutral, while 11.4% disagree and 14.3% strongly disagree. This suggests that while many value personalization, a notable portion of users remain cautious or indifferent toward its benefits.

I find that personalised PPC or SEO results improve my online shopping experience

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	14	20.0	20.0	20.0
	Disagree	8	11.4	11.4	31.4
	Neutral	19	27.1	27.1	58.6
	Strongly agree	19	27.1	27.1	85.7
	Strongly disagree	10	14.3	14.3	100.0
	Total	70	100.0	100.0	

Question 6

I am more likely to visit a website if the ad or search result appears credible and relevant



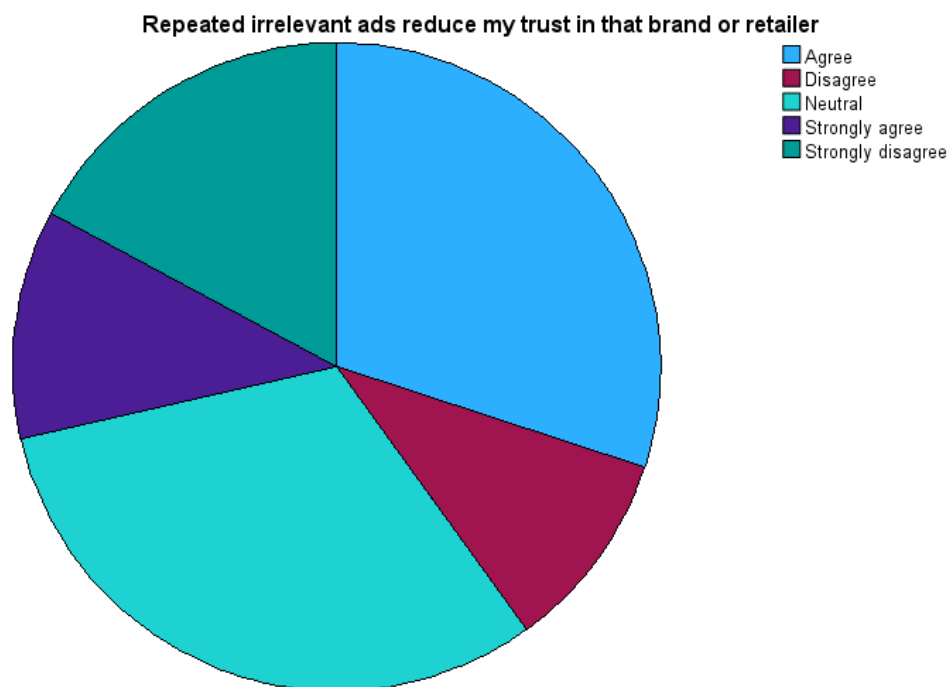
The results show that credibility and relevance strongly influence users' willingness to visit a website. About 28.6% agree and 17.1% strongly agree, while 24.3% strongly disagree and

11.4% disagree. A further 18.6% remain neutral. Overall, most respondents lean toward trusting credible and relevant ads, though a significant share remains doubtful.

I am more likely to visit a website if the ad or search result appears credible and relevant

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	20	28.6	28.6	28.6
	Disagree	8	11.4	11.4	40.0
	Neutral	13	18.6	18.6	58.6
	Strongly agree	12	17.1	17.1	75.7
	Strongly disagree	17	24.3	24.3	100.0
	Total	70	100.0	100.0	

Question 7



The findings reveal that repeated irrelevant ads negatively impact consumer trust. About 30% agree and 11.4% strongly agree that such ads reduce trust, while 31.4% remain neutral.

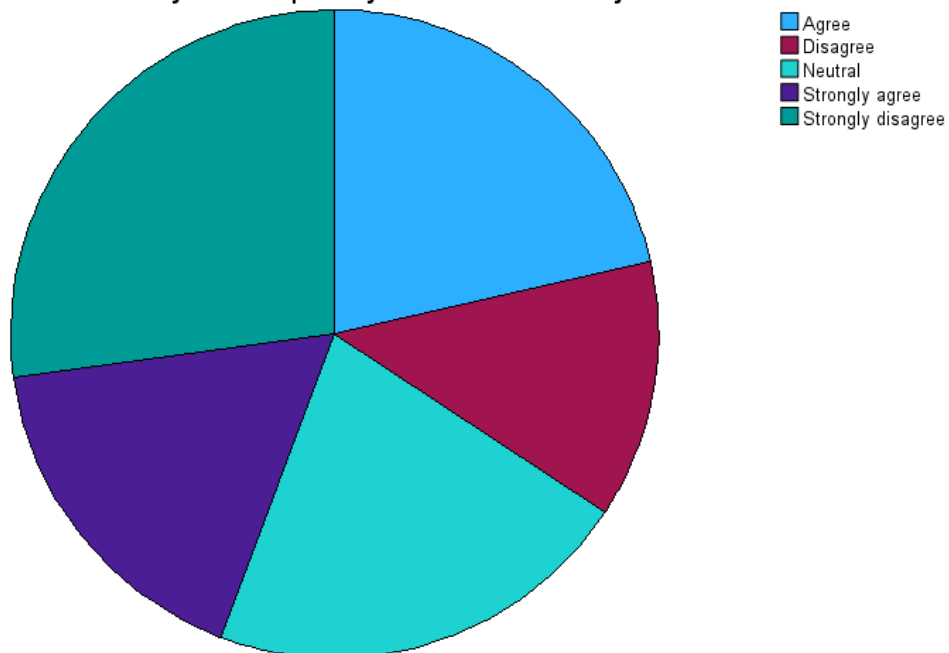
On the other hand, 10% disagree and 17.1% strongly disagree. This indicates that while many shoppers perceive irrelevant ads as damaging, a notable share remains unaffected.

Repeated irrelevant ads reduce my trust in that brand or retailer

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	21	30.0	30.0	30.0
	Disagree	7	10.0	10.0	40.0
	Neutral	22	31.4	31.4	71.4
	Strongly agree	8	11.4	11.4	82.9
	Strongly disagree	12	17.1	17.1	100.0
	Total	70	100.0	100.0	

Question 8

The clarity and transparency of online ads affect my level of trust in a retailer



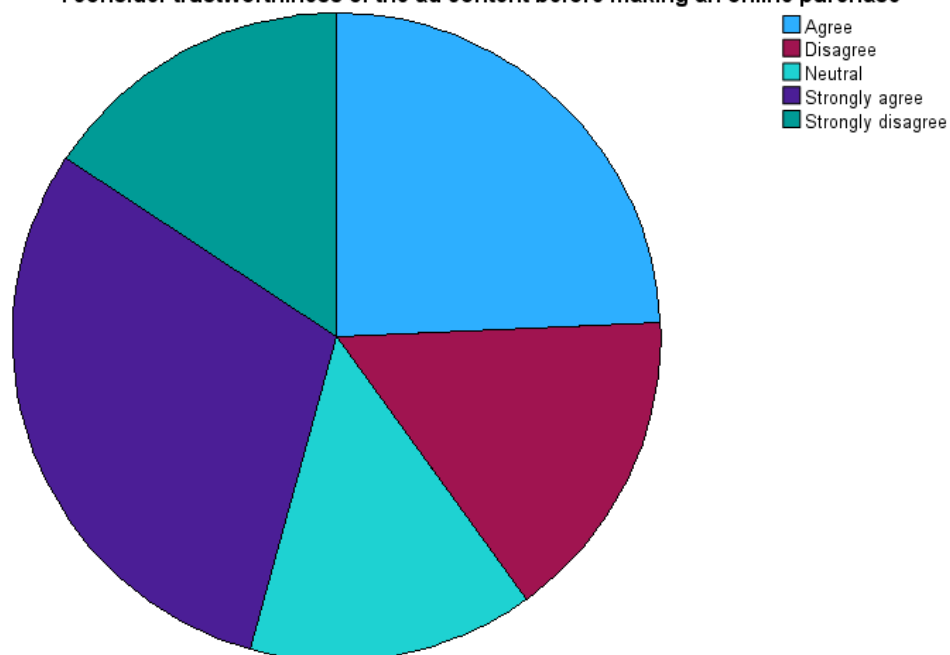
The results highlight the importance of ad clarity and transparency in shaping trust. About 21.4% agree and 17.1% strongly agree that clear ads improve trust, while 27.1% strongly disagree and 12.9% disagree. Additionally, 21.4% remain neutral. This indicates that although many value transparency, a significant portion of respondents are skeptical or unconvinced.

The clarity and transparency of online ads affect my level of trust in a retailer

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	15	21.4	21.4	21.4
	Disagree	9	12.9	12.9	34.3
	Neutral	15	21.4	21.4	55.7
	Strongly agree	12	17.1	17.1	72.9
	Strongly disagree	19	27.1	27.1	100.0
	Total	70	100.0	100.0	

Question 9

I consider trustworthiness of the ad content before making an online purchase



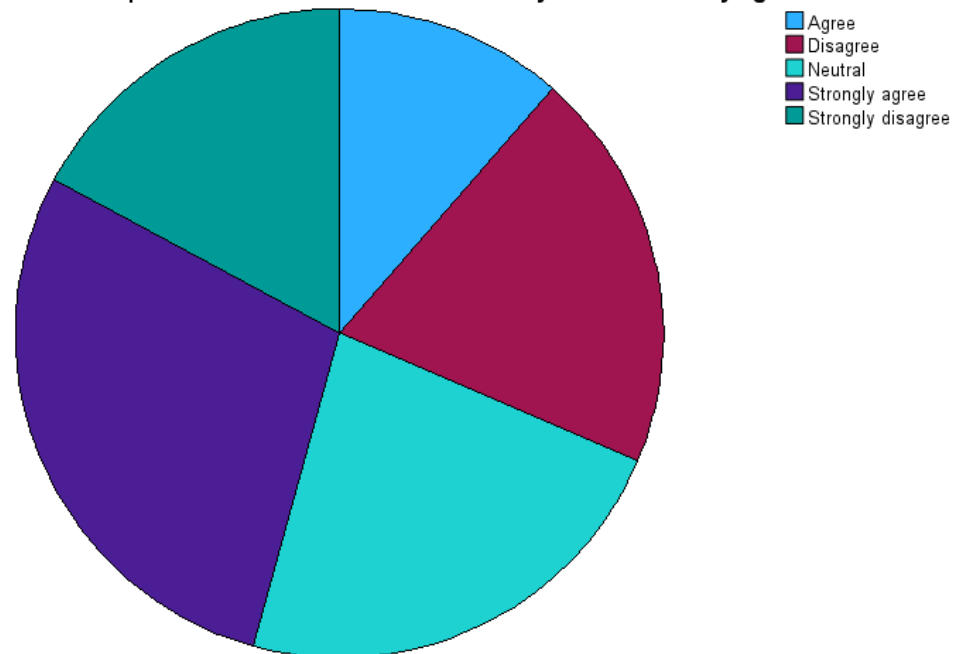
The results emphasize the strong role of trust in online purchase decisions. About 30% strongly agree and 24.3% agree that they consider the trustworthiness of ad content before buying. Meanwhile, 15.7% disagree, 15.7% strongly disagree, and 14.3% remain neutral. Overall, a majority highlight trust as a key factor influencing online shopping choices.

I consider trustworthiness of the ad content before making an online purchase

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	17	24.3	24.3	24.3
	Disagree	11	15.7	15.7	40.0
	Neutral	10	14.3	14.3	54.3
	Strongly agree	21	30.0	30.0	84.3
	Strongly disagree	11	15.7	15.7	100.0
	Total	70	100.0	100.0	

Question 10

Personalised product recommendations increase my likelihood of buying from a retail website



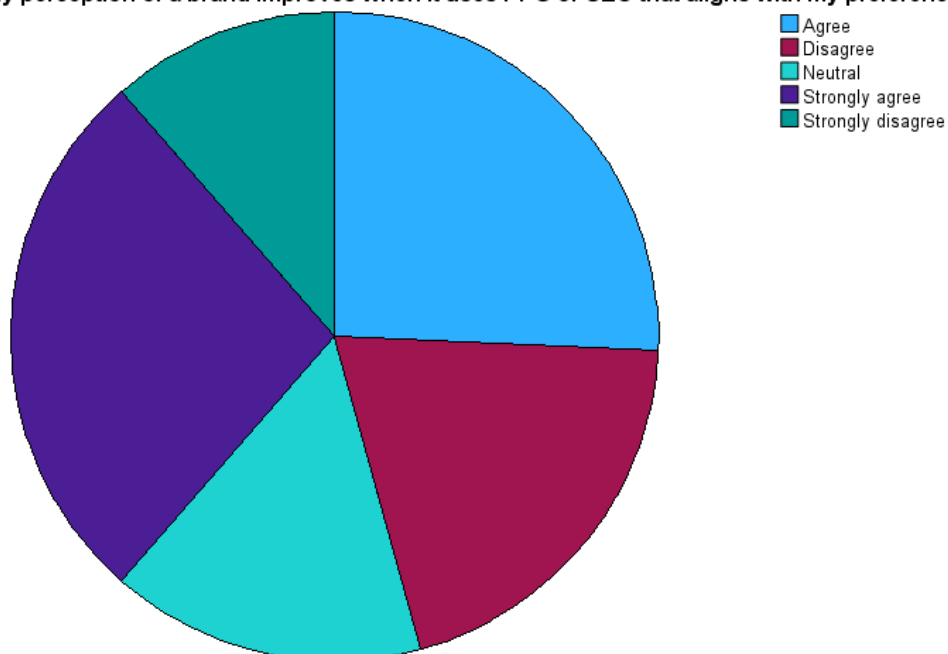
The results show that personalized product recommendations positively influence many consumers' buying decisions. About 28.6% strongly agree and 11.4% agree, while 22.9% remain neutral. On the other hand, 20% disagree and 17.1% strongly disagree. Overall, personalized suggestions appear effective for a majority, though a notable share of consumers remain unconvinced.

Personalised product recommendations increase my likelihood of buying from a retail website

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	8	11.4	11.4	11.4
	Disagree	14	20.0	20.0	31.4
	Neutral	16	22.9	22.9	54.3
	Strongly agree	20	28.6	28.6	82.9
	Strongly disagree	12	17.1	17.1	100.0
	Total	70	100.0	100.0	

Question 11

My perception of a brand improves when it uses PPC or SEO that aligns with my preferences

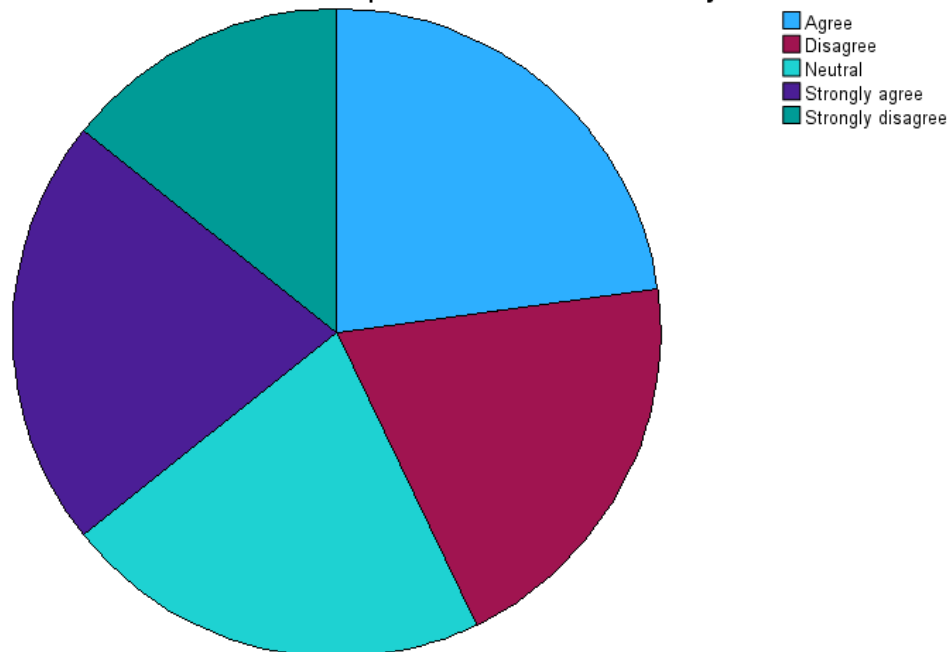


My perception of a brand improves when it uses PPC or SEO that aligns with my preferences

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	18	25.7	25.7	25.7
	Disagree	14	20.0	20.0	45.7
	Neutral	11	15.7	15.7	61.4
	Strongly agree	19	27.1	27.1	88.6
	Strongly disagree	8	11.4	11.4	100.0
	Total	70	100.0	100.0	

Question 12

I often revisit retail websites that provide relevant and trustworthy PPC or SEO content



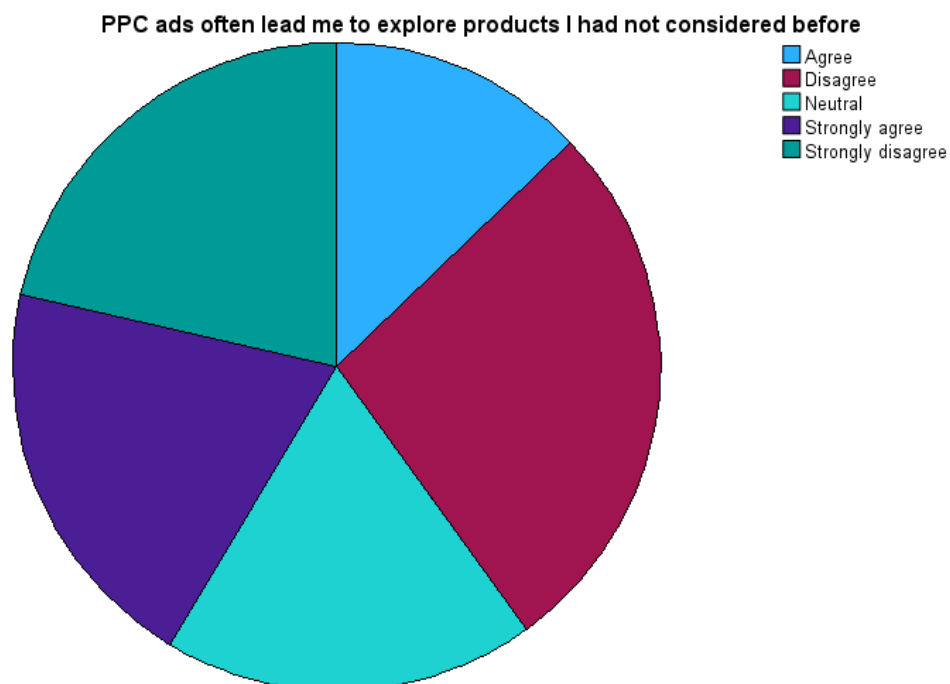
The results indicate that relevant and trustworthy PPC or SEO content encourages repeat visits to retail websites. About 22.9% agree and 21.4% strongly agree, while 21.4% remain neutral. On the other hand, 20% disagree and 14.3% strongly disagree. This suggests that

credibility and relevance play a key role in fostering customer loyalty and repeat engagement.

I often revisit retail websites that provide relevant and trustworthy PPC or SEO content

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	16	22.9	22.9	22.9
	Disagree	14	20.0	20.0	42.9
	Neutral	15	21.4	21.4	64.3
	Strongly agree	15	21.4	21.4	85.7
	Strongly disagree	10	14.3	14.3	100.0
	Total	70	100.0	100.0	

Question 13



The findings show mixed views on the role of PPC ads in product discovery. About 20% strongly agree and 12.9% agree that PPC ads encourage exploring new products, while

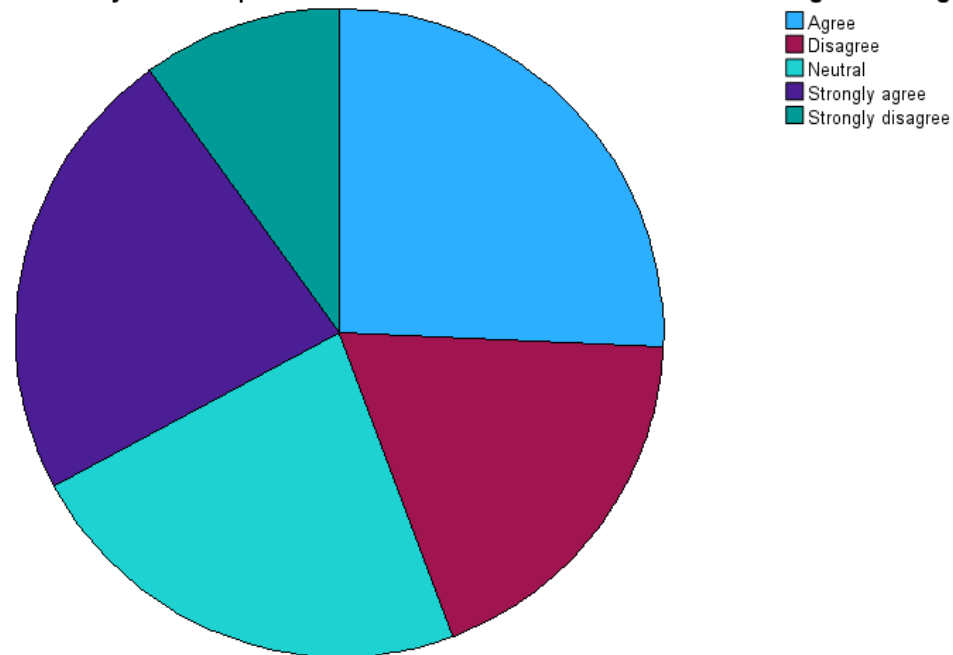
27.1% disagree and 21.4% strongly disagree. Meanwhile, 18.6% remain neutral. Overall, opinions are divided, with a significant portion skeptical of PPC's influence on purchase exploration.

PPC ads often lead me to explore products I had not considered before

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	9	12.9	12.9	12.9
	Disagree	19	27.1	27.1	40.0
	Neutral	13	18.6	18.6	58.6
	Strongly agree	14	20.0	20.0	78.6
	Strongly disagree	15	21.4	21.4	100.0
	Total	70	100.0	100.0	

Question 14

I am more likely to make a purchase if the PPC or SEO result leads to a well-designed landing page

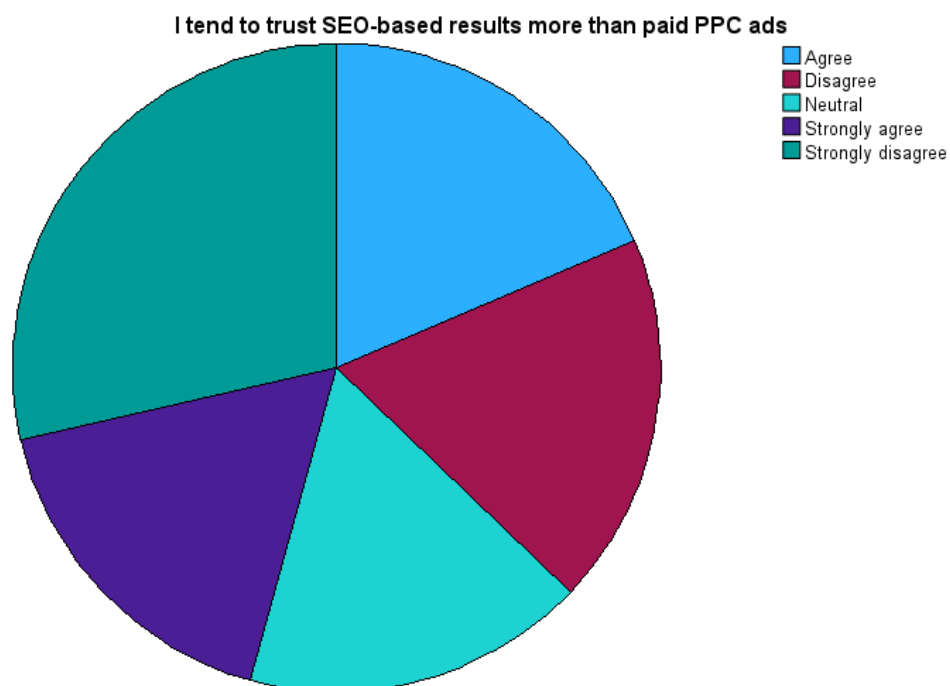


The results highlight the importance of landing page design in influencing purchase decisions. About 25.7% agree and 22.9% strongly agree that a well-designed landing page increases their likelihood of buying. Meanwhile, 22.9% remain neutral, 18.6% disagree, and 10% strongly disagree. This shows that effective landing page design plays a significant role in converting interest into purchases.

I am more likely to make a purchase if the PPC or SEO result leads to a well-designed landing page

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	18	25.7	25.7	25.7
	Disagree	13	18.6	18.6	44.3
	Neutral	16	22.9	22.9	67.1
	Strongly agree	16	22.9	22.9	90.0
	Strongly disagree	7	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	70	100.0	100.0	

Question 15



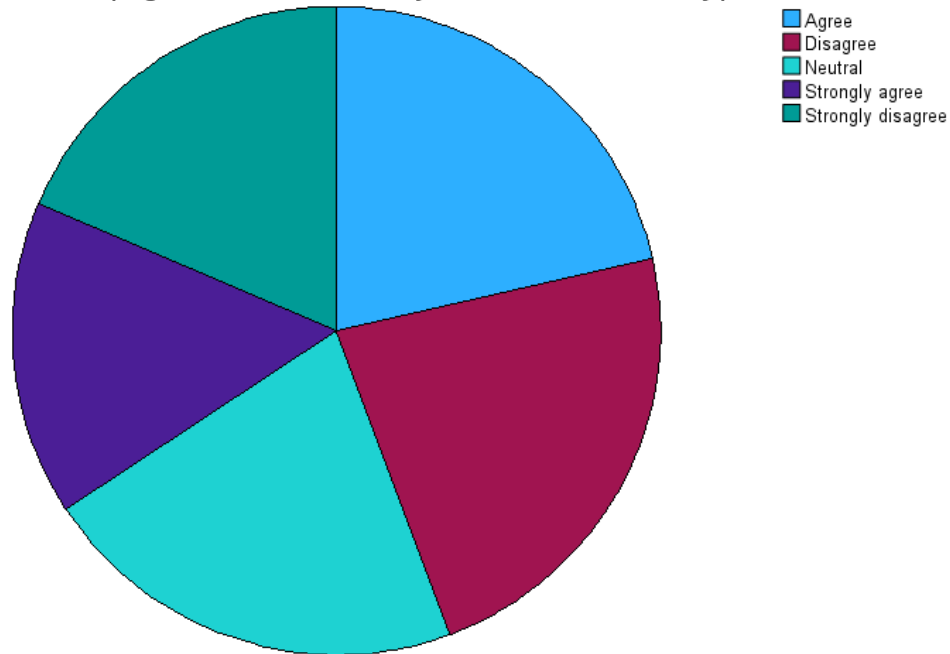
The findings show divided opinions on trust between SEO and PPC ads. About 18.6% agree and 17.1% strongly agree that SEO results are more trustworthy, while 18.6% disagree and 28.6% strongly disagree. A further 17.1% remain neutral. Overall, although many consumers lean toward trusting SEO, a significant portion expresses skepticism or preference for PPC.

I tend to trust SEO-based results more than paid PPC ads

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	13	18.6	18.6	18.6
	Disagree	13	18.6	18.6	37.1
	Neutral	12	17.1	17.1	54.3
	Strongly agree	12	17.1	17.1	71.4
	Strongly disagree	20	28.6	28.6	100.0
Total		70	100.0	100.0	

Question 16

PPC and SEO campaigns that are relevant to my needs have influenced my purchase decisions in the past



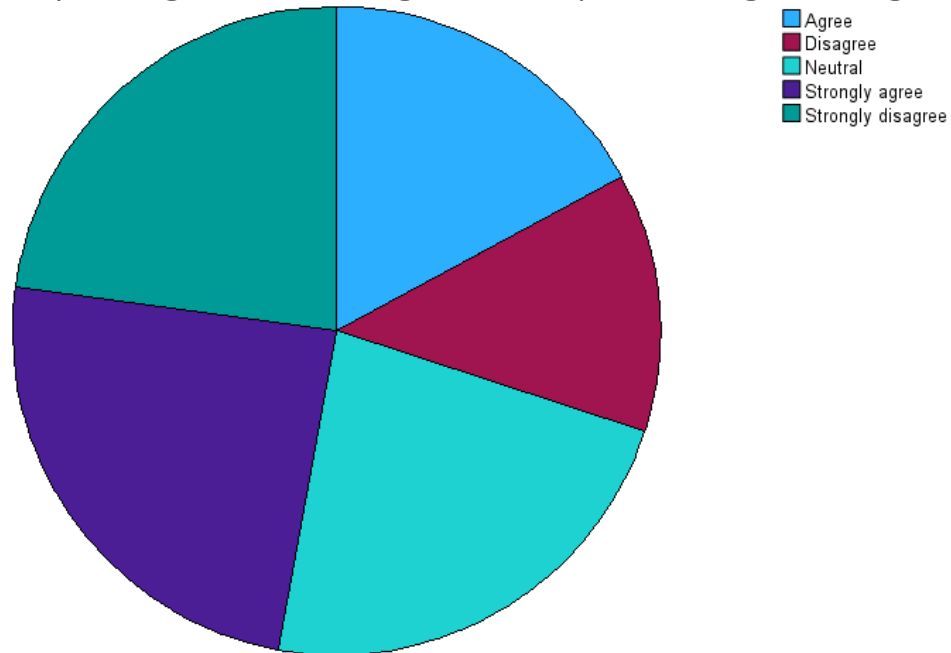
The results indicate that relevant PPC and SEO campaigns hold moderate influence on purchase decisions. About 21.4% agree and 15.7% strongly agree, while 21.4% remain neutral. On the other hand, 22.9% disagree and 18.6% strongly disagree. This shows that while tailored campaigns impact many consumers, a substantial share does not view them as decisive factors in past purchases.

PPC and SEO campaigns that are relevant to my needs have influenced my purchase decisions in the past

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	15	21.4	21.4	21.4
	Disagree	16	22.9	22.9	44.3
	Neutral	15	21.4	21.4	65.7
	Strongly agree	11	15.7	15.7	81.4
	Strongly disagree	13	18.6	18.6	100.0
	Total	70	100.0	100.0	

Question 17

My online purchasing behaviour has changed due to more personalised digital marketing strategies



The findings suggest that personalized digital marketing strategies have a mixed impact on online purchasing behavior. About 24.3% strongly agree and 17.1% agree that their behavior has changed, while 22.9% remain neutral. Conversely, 12.9% disagree and 22.9% strongly disagree. This indicates that while many consumers acknowledge an influence, a significant portion is either unaffected or resistant to such strategies.

My online purchasing behaviour has changed due to more personalised digital marketing strategies

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	12	17.1	17.1	17.1
	Disagree	9	12.9	12.9	30.0
	Neutral	16	22.9	22.9	52.9
	Strongly agree	17	24.3	24.3	77.1
	Strongly disagree	16	22.9	22.9	100.0
	Total	70	100.0	100.0	

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter interprets the survey findings presented in Chapter 4 and evaluates them in the context of the research objectives, hypothesis, and research question. The results are synthesised with the reviewed literature to generate inferences and practical implications for the Indian retail sector. The purpose is not only to describe what the results revealed but also to critically analyse how they confirm, extend, or contradict existing knowledge.

5.2 Linking Findings to Research Objectives

Objective: To analyse the influence of pay-per-click (PPC) advertising and search-engine optimisation (SEO) on consumer perception, behaviour, and trust in the retail sector of India, while cataloguing attendant challenges and limitations inherent to each tactic.

The empirical analysis reveals a bifaceted influence of PPC and SEO across the sample: heightened discoverability and purchase intention manifest when gestured via contextually relevant and personalised content, yet consumer confidence is likewise vulnerable to erosion wherever exposure is perceived as invasive. Within the broader instrument, Question 5 disclosed that 48% of participants regarded personalised listings as a positive catalyst to the shopping journey, whilst 25% indicated the converse view. Quantitative asymmetry therein speaks to the prevailing tension between prospective value and trust depreciation across contemporary digital-stimuli ecosystems.

Associated findings identify trust as a mediating hinge. Question 9 illustrated that 59% of the sample identified the perceived reliability of advertising information as a decisive criterion antecedent to purchase. This condition corroborates the assertion of Alalwan et al. (2017) that the confidence-factor mediates between exposure and conversion within digital marketplaces. Conversely, the data in Question 7 verbatim document that a sequence of irrelevant or repetitive advertisements functions to attenuate trust; these revelations align with the critiques advanced by Sinha et al. (2019) regarding the psychological ramifications of perceived intrusiveness within persuasive communicative frameworks and the necessity of strategic selectivity in message delivery.

Accordingly, the main aim has been achieved by elucidating the dual nature of pay-per-click (PPC) and search-engine-optimisation (SEO) approaches. Both modalities have the capacity to cultivate favourable consumer perceptions, provided that the delivered content is contextually pertinent and manifests explicit disclosure; conversely, when messaging is construed as oblique, algorithmically engineered, or repeatedly intrusive, it is equally capable of instilling profound scepticism.

5.3 Hypothesis Evaluation

Hypothesis (H1): Personalised and relevant PPC and SEO content significantly influence consumer trust and purchase decisions in Indian retail.

The findings broadly support this hypothesis. In Question 10, 40% of respondents confirmed that personalised product recommendations influenced their buying decisions, while about the same proportion disagreed or remained neutral. Similarly, Question 17 showed that

more than 40% of respondents acknowledged behavioural changes due to personalised strategies, though nearly as many reported being unaffected. This pattern indicates that personalisation is effective but not universally persuasive. It supports the claim that PPC and SEO can significantly influence trust and purchase behaviour but also highlights the conditionality of this effect. Meirandari et al. (2024) also stressed that tailored content boosts engagement, but the survey shows that personalisation must be accompanied by relevance and ethical presentation to achieve consistent impact.

Hence, the hypothesis is partially confirmed: personalised and relevant content is influential, but its success depends on avoiding intrusive repetition and aligning with consumer expectations.

5.4 Application of Findings to the Research Question

The present investigation examined the concurrent roles of pay-per-click (PPC) and search engine optimisation (SEO) in shaping consumer perceptions, behaviours, and trust amongst Indian retail shoppers, while also isolating the most pressing challenges linked to each mechanism. Results indicate that perceived message relevance and source credibility, tempered by the level of contextual personalisation and transparency in communication, jointly mould consumer inclination, with trust acting as the moderating locus. Analysis of survey responses affirms that engagement and intention to purchase are markedly higher when the communicated content is both pertinent and verifiably credible, thereby reinforcing the mediating role of message quality. Personalisation generates a salutary effect on purchase intention for a sizeable segment of participants; yet, appreciable scepticism is

also observed, signifying the need for such targeting to coincide with pre-existing consumer norms and preferences. At the same time, interventions characterised by repeated and intrusive presentation patterns are shown to deteriorate trust and, in turn, attenuate the propensity to transact. Comorbid to these processes, three primary challenges are discerned: chronic ad fatigue, doubts regarding source authenticity, and prevailing anxieties related to data privacy.

The evidence substantiates the assertion that pay-per-click advertising and search engine optimisation exert a marked effect on consumer decision-making; nevertheless, their efficacy remains contingent upon the capacity of the mechanisms to cultivate enduring trust and to contrive a presentation that suspends the consumer's perception of systematic manipulation.

5.5 Synthesis with Literature

The present study's results substantiate existing scholarship whilst supplying contextually relevant augmentations applicable to the Indian marketplace. Confirming prior findings, trust continues to mediate the digital engagement pathway, corroborating Alalwan et al. (2017) and Vázquez-Martínez et al. (2021) by attesting that credibility filters exposure into action. The beneficial effect of personalised content, noted in the quantitative survey, proceeds from Meirandari et al. (2024); nevertheless, the heterogeneous appraisal by participants warns that personalisation lacks unqualified persuasiveness. Apprehensions over perceived intrusiveness substantiate Sinha et al. (2019), who contend that excessive targeting erodes trust. Survey data cohere with King (2020) and Yasa et al. (2024) in

recognising transparency and clarity as conditional antecedents, while the variable appraisal illustrates that consumers contest what constitutes transparent presentation. Moreover, attention to contextual sensitivity emerges as a requisite, extending Wuisan and Handra's (2023) assertion that digital conduct is inseparable from situated cultural and contextual norms. Collectively, therefore, the findings reaffirm a sizeable portion of the prevailing literature while augmenting it by evidencing a continuing consumer scepticism in India, even within contexts wherein advertisements purport to be both relevant and personalised.

5.6 Practical Implications for Indian Retailers

The evidence demonstrates that the effectiveness of digital campaigns rests heavily on the ability to foster consumer trust. Retailers must ensure that advertisements and search-driven strategies are transparent, accurate, and ethically presented in order to maintain credibility. Findings also show that personalisation requires careful calibration; while it has the capacity to increase purchase intention, it can equally produce resistance when it appears intrusive or repetitive. The evidence points towards the necessity of balancing strategies. Search engine optimisation was regarded by many respondents as more trustworthy, suggesting its role in building long-term brand credibility, whereas pay-per-click provided immediate visibility and short-term engagement.

5.7 Theoretical Implications

Perceived usefulness operationalised via the relevance and customisation of promotional messages alongside content embodies, collectively orient consumer decision-making. The

data, however, extend the core precepts of the model by elucidating trust as a mediating variable that translates perceived attributes into substantive behavioural dispositions, namely engagement and conversion. Within the heterogeneous Indian market, the evidence categorically positions trust as the decisive intermediary between marketing cues delivered via digital platforms and attendant behavioural responses. This finding further obliges existing and emerging theoretical frameworks of technology adoption, when latently re-contextualised to the sphere of online retail marketing, to perceive trust as an embedded and irreplaceable construct.

5.8 Limitations in Discussion of Findings

Several methodological constraints must be acknowledged to contextualise the results. The final sample of seventy participants was recruited mainly via social media channels, leading to an overrepresentation of digitally engaged consumers relative to rural or digitally less literate segments. Consequently, the subsequent conclusions may not extrapolate reliably to the heterogeneous Indian retail landscape. In parallel, the dependence on self-reported metrics invites bias, as respondents may conflate social desirability with authentic judgment. Such artefacts may exaggerate favourable evaluations of advertising and deflate acknowledged reservations. Furthermore, the analytical strategy focused exclusively on summary statistics, a choice that curtailed interpretive depth; the incorporation of inferential modelling might have elucidated the strength and direction of associations among trust, personalisation, and purchase intention. Notwithstanding these constraints,

the investigation furnishes constructive, context-sensitive insights, fortified by a methodological framework that was, and remains, ethically sound and rigorously applied.

5.9 Conclusion

The research establishes that both exert a considerable and measurable effect on consumer perception, action, and trust within the Indian retail domain. Of the several constructs tested, trust proved to be the singular, decisive mediator, such that the traits of relevance, personalisation, and visibility attain persuasive power in the context of purchase only when trust is first satisfied. The empirical analysis affirmed that campaigns marked by both personalisation and relevance are likely to generate positive consumer engagement; conversely, a dominant or perceived intrusive advertising presence can engender scepticism and prompt disengagement. Findings further indicate that sustained consumer confidence is contingent on three design pillars: transparent disclosures, ethical framing of marketing messages, and sensitivity to cultural context. These results corroborate the prevailing literature while extending its applicability by evidencing that Indian consumers simultaneously appraise authenticity and relevance. The contribution is twofold, offering actionable guidance to retail strategists while reinforcing the role of trust as a mediating construct within an adapted Technology Acceptance Model. The study thus clarifies that digital retail visibility can only be justified if accompanied by ethical accountability, thereby positioning trust as the primary condition for efficacy in India's rapidly evolving digital retail environment.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

The investigation at hand set out to elucidate the contribution of (PPC) advertising and (SEO) to the formation of consumer perception, behaviour, and trust within the Indian retail landscape. Given the accelerated transition of Indian consumers to digital shopping environments, retailers must now understand the combined impact of these mechanisms in order to equilibrate visibility with credibility. Consequently, the study sought to evaluate the manner in which the dual instruments of PPC and SEO shape consumer confidence and subsequent purchase behaviour, simultaneously interrogating the attendant difficulties and constraints these strategies present.

The final chapter assesses the degree to which the articulated objectives have been satisfactorily attained, applies critical appraisal to the study's inherent strengths and vulnerabilities, synthesises primary and secondary evidence, and derives judgements that follow logically from the data. The chapter further explicates the practical and theoretical ramifications of the results, while identifying, in a systematic manner, spheres that warrant further examination, including management practice, regulatory interventions, and scholarly investigation.

6.2 Completion of Aims and Objectives

The primary objective of PPC and SEO on consumer behaviour and trust within the Indian retail domain. A structured methodological deployment, encompassing a

combination of primary survey data gathered from seventy respondents supplemented by a comprehensive examination of secondary literature, has yielded evidence that satisfactorily addresses this central aim.

This investigation aimed to assess the impact of PPC advertising and SEO on consumer perceptions, behavioural intent, and the degree of trust established during the purchasing journey. Empirical evidence corroborates the premise that both channels wield substantial influence over the specified constructs. Engagement levels increased markedly when promotional content exhibited contextual relevance and personalisation, subsequently enhancing the likelihood of conversion. Simultaneously, the data surfaced pronounced scepticism when stimuli were characterised as intrusive or manipulative, thereby positioning trust as the pivotal mediator bridging heightened visibility and observable consumer action. The results consequently align with the initial research objective. The complementary objective centred on identifying systemic challenges and limitations encountered by India's retail ecosystem with respect to PPC and SEO. Analyses disclosed persistent issues such as advertising fatigue, suspicion of content veracity, apprehensions over privacy, and adverse consumer responses to irrelevant or hyper-repetitive targeting. These barriers substantiate and extend prior findings, most notably those delineated by Sinha et al. (2019), which catalogued consumer discomfort with aggressive and invasive digital marketing practices.

The present analysis substantiates that pay-per-click (PPC) and search engine optimisation (SEO) are shaped by differentiated weight in the Indian context, as revealed when cultural, ethical, and digital literacy frames are incorporated. Empirical observations

reveal that consumer engagement is proportionately mediated by the quantifiable effectiveness of the platforms and by latent cultural heuristics, by the normative expectations of regulation, and by the variable distribution of digital competence. Furthermore, the Indian marketplace's pronounced demand for transparency, combined with its reliance on the credibility of digital intermediaries, corroborates the argument advanced by Wuisan and Handra (2023) that processes of digital acculturation are characterised by pronounced heterogeneity. All original research aims and objectives have therefore been met; as a consequence, the data present an integrated account of the mechanisms by which both PPC and SEO concurrently influence the accumulation of consumer trust, and subsequently moderate the antecedents of purchase intention, within the Indian economy at the present time.

6.3 Evaluation of Main Concepts and Issues

PPC exhibited the ability for swift, wide-reaching exposure, whereas SEO yielded sustained authority by achieving elevated organic SERP placements. Nevertheless, a critical vulnerability surfaced: heightened consumer scepticism and an accompanying decline in trust whenever promotional messages appeared redundant or excessive, thereby marking visibility as a necessary, yet insufficient antecedent, to the actual transaction. Consumer trust was recurrently classified as the pivotal determinant. Data substantiated that trust is insufficiently conferred by mere exposure; it is contingent upon the communicative attributes of compared content predominantly perceived authority, transparency, and coherence with the consumer's pre-formed schema. Distinct advantages emerged when the

material was both personalised and contextually pertinent, thereby boosting latent cognitive engagement. Conversely, diabetic trust slendered whenever personalisation transitioned into perceived invasiveness, programs operated opaquely, or overt privacy breaches were implied, illustrating that the cultivation of confidence is predisposed to modalities of both affirmation and attrition.

Buyer intention exhibited a pronounced dependence upon both perceived credibility and carefully calibrated design attributes, including the overall sophistication of landing pages. These findings indicate that the efficacy of a digital marketing strategy rests not merely upon procedural visibility, but upon a presentation that prioritizes user needs and preferences. The empirical strength of the analysis resides in the demonstrable associative pathway that binds authoritative content to the readiness to transact, yet the scope of generalisation is constrained by the heterogeneous and sometimes resistant character of consumer attitudes. A substantial minority of respondents, even when offered personalised materials, exhibited ambivalence or opposition. This study acknowledges that while pay-per-click and search engine optimisation are demonstrable drivers of consumer behaviour, the magnitude of their effect is determined by the marketer's capacity to harmonise algorithmic excellence, ethical standards, and a perspective oriented toward the consumer's welfare.

6.4 Synthesis of Research Findings and Literature

Integrating survey results with the existing body of literature substantively refines and expands the scholarly portrayal of paid-per-click advertising and search engine optimisation

within the Indian marketplace. Prior studies unanimously characterised trust as the pivotal driver of digital marketing engagement, a finding corroborated here, wherein trustworthiness shaped purchasing judgements for more than half the sample. This empirical endorsement parallels the conceptual emphases of Alalwan et al. (2017) and Vázquez-Martínez et al. (2021), which explicitly identified trust as a mediating variable. Furthermore, the literature asserts that effective personalisation has a beneficial impact on user engagement, a position initially advanced by Meirandari et al. (2024) and for which the survey offers conditional endorsement. Personalisation influenced a substantial proportion of the population surveyed; however, its significance was not universal, indicating a contingent relationship. The data thus nuances existing theory articulating that personalisation amplifies perceived relevance, yet may precipitate feelings of intrusion if applied indiscriminately. Such tempered conclusions urge marketers to engineer customised interventions with deliberate restraint, lest perceived surveillance dilute the anticipated effectiveness.

Sinha et al. (2019) documented the emergence of consumer discomfort that arises from repetitively intrusive marketing, a phenomenon that quantitative survey data correlates with a measurable decline in trust when advertisements lack contextual relevance. King (2020) and Yasa et al. (2024) corroborated the necessity of transparency for trust perpetuation, yet their data reveal that, notwithstanding the perceived improvement in a subset of respondents, a residual scepticism persists. This suggests that transparency, rather than a panacea, complicates rather than resolves the attitudinal equation.

The consolidative synthesis observes that, while the existing global corpus offers a robust epistemic base, the Indian environment intensifies the salience of authenticity, data privacy, and perceived ethical stewardship. Consequently, the present inquiry does not merely reaffirm pre-existing theoretical constructs; rather, it extends their scope by situating them within a culturally distinctive lattice of consumer expectations.

6.5 Logical Conclusions from the Research

The analysed data yield five interrelated conclusions. First, PPC and SEO simultaneously mediate and moderate consumer behaviour in the Indian retail space, with trust emerging as the decisive factor. Visibility, while necessary, is ineffective unless channelled through authentic and user-centred narratives. Personalised, contextually relevant, and unambiguously transparent interventions amplify purchase intention, whereas interventions construed as intrusively tailored, manipulative, or unfounded erode engagement and foster disengagement. Second, because SEO is perceived as self-motivated due to its organic delivery, consumers attribute greater credibility to it; conversely, PPC generates immediacy but convinces some consumers of ulterior commercial motive, risking resistance.

Third, the empirical data require the simultaneous orchestration of PPC and SEO. A sequential or siloed approach cultivates antagonism and inhibits cumulative equity. Integration, therefore, is not tactical embellishment, but prerequisite architecture. Fourth, quantitative and qualitative metrics affirm that trust materialises as an exogenous injection, driven by demonstrable ethical comportment, continuous alignment with cultural narratives, and unwavering transparency. Structural ambiguity undermines credibility, whereas explicit

cultural resonance creates affective topology for engagement. Finally, the frameworks affirm that ethical orientation is not peripheral prescription but ontological requirement; credibility and sustainable loyalty in the Indian retail environment are impervious to time, context, or narrative separability. Collectively, the conclusions compel an operative doctrine that PPC and SEO are momentarily effective, but only as contingent constants when ethical responsibility, clarion alignment with consumer norms, transparent processes, and diverse representation are instituted as procedural orthodoxy.

6.6 Potential Applications of Findings

Policymakers are encouraged to advance unequivocal statutory and regulatory codes governing online advertising transparency, data privacy protections, and the specification of consumer entitlements. The pronounced aversion of Indian audiences to intrusive techniques indicates that carefully calibrated regulatory scaffolding could materially strengthen confidence in digital commerce. Essential components of such scaffolding could encompass compulsory disclosure of paid relationships, transparent data-utilisation statements, and augmented surveillance of deceptive promotional strategies.

The study further delineates several promising trajectories for scholarly advance. Subsequent large-sample investigations employing inferential techniques could yield refined specifications of the causal nexus among personalisation, trust, and antecedents of purchase intention. Complementary qualitative investigations may illuminate the cognitive and affective components of advertising scepticism in the digital milieu. Comparative

frameworks could examine differential consumer reception patterns in rural and urban settlements, as well as juxtapose Indian data with that of other emerging market contexts.

6.7 Conclusion

This research has fulfilled its stated aims and objectives by systematically appraising the interrelationship between PPC, SEO, and consumer cognition, conduct, and confidence within the Indian retail landscape. Analytic findings underscored the determinative role of trust as the intermediary linking heightened online visibility to final purchase intent, thus corroborating the dual capacity of digital marketing to persuade and to disappoint. A convergent interpretation of both empirical and bibliographic materials not only corroborated established scholarly positions but, more critically, widened their applicability by interlacing them with the tropes of authenticity, ethical diligence, and consumer wariness paramount in the Indian setting.

The study's terminal affirmations establish that while PPC and SEO can indeed amplify consumer activation and elevation of purchase intent, these gains remain tenuous unless anchored in ethical diligence, contemporaneous cultural acuity, and unambiguous epistemic transparency. Derivative applications encompass actionable directives for retail operators, calibrative bearings for statutory overseers, and rich epistemic portals for progressive scholarly enquiry. By advancing the proposition that trust constitutes the strategic substratum of digital market conduct, the contribution affords Indian retail actors a coherent, normative compass by which to traverse the accelerating digital environ with both efficacy and scrupulous trustworthiness.

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Appendices

Survey Link - [Link](#)

Survey Questions

Survey Questionnaire

1. How often do you shop online using search engines

☐ Daily

☐ Once a week

☐ Once a month

☐ Rarely

2. How often do you click on sponsored or advertised search results

☐ Always

☐ Often

☐ Sometimes

☐ Rarely

☐ Never

3. The ads or search results I see online are usually relevant to my shopping interests

☐ Strongly agree

☐ Agree

☐ Neutral

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly disagree

4. I trust ads or search results more when they match what I recently searched or browsed

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

5. I find that personalised PPC or SEO results improve my online shopping experience

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

6. I am more likely to visit a website if the ad or search result appears credible and relevant

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

7. Repeated irrelevant ads reduce my trust in that brand or retailer

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

8. The clarity and transparency of online ads affect my level of trust in a retailer

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

9. I consider trustworthiness of the ad content before making an online purchase

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

10. Personalised product recommendations increase my likelihood of buying from a retail website

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

11. My perception of a brand improves when it uses PPC or SEO that aligns with my preferences

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

12. I often revisit retail websites that provide relevant and trustworthy PPC or SEO content

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

13. PPC ads often lead me to explore products I had not considered before

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

14. I am more likely to make a purchase if the PPC or SEO result leads to a well-designed landing page

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

15. I tend to trust SEO-based results more than paid PPC ads

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

16. PPC and SEO campaigns that are relevant to my needs have influenced my purchase decisions in the past

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

17. My online purchasing behaviour has changed due to more personalised digital marketing strategies

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

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