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Role of Social Media Marketing in Influencing Purchase Decisions of Indian Consumers

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Abstract

The world is rapidly evolving, and the use of internet-connected devices has become more widespread than ever, making social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, and X (formerly known as Twitter) a part of our lives. These platforms have revolutionized how people communicate, how they access information and how they interact with brands. Social media has not only helped connect people on a social level across distances, but it is also a very powerful marketing space that allows companies to talk about their products, generate brand awareness, communicate with users and make decisions about what they buy. The importance of social media marketing for businesses, as well as for researchers, has grown in the context of the ever-increasing digital engagement of consumers. In this context, the current study focuses on the impact of social media marketing on the buying behaviour of the Indian consumers. Among the dimensions of social media marketing studied are influencer recommendations, content created by the firm, UGC, customer reviews and ratings, promotional offers and discounts, as well as interactive communication with the brand. It aims to explore the effect of such factors on the consumer's awareness, trust building, evaluation of the product, and its intention to purchase. Special focus is dedicated to the Indian context, where the adoption of technology has taken a huge leap and social media has changed the buying trend of the people. The study utilizes primary data obtained from a structured questionnaire which was given to 125 respondents that engage in social media platforms. Results revealed that social media has a pivotal role in product discovery, information search, brand comparison and purchase consideration. The promotional incentives, interactive content and peer generated reviews were identified as factors that impact consumer behaviour, and that influencer marketing was more effective at creating awareness than trust. Overall, the study highlights the significant influence of social media marketing on consumer purchasing decisions in India and offers valuable guidance for marketers looking

to craft successful digital marketing strategies, improve customer engagement, and foster lasting customer relationships.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing, Consumer Behaviour, Brand Awareness, User-Generated Content, Influencer Marketing.

Introduction

Social media has transformed a lot. Originating as a peer-to-peer communication technology into a complex social technical ecosystem where consumers, firms and algorithms can interact in real time. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, X (twitter) and WhatsApp now function as a tool for information, entertainment, social connection and commerce. Social media is no longer a promotional tool, it has transformed into an interface through which consumers can discover products, evaluate alternatives, engage with brands and can make decisions on what to buy.

For India, this transformation is highly significant. When Jio launched in 2015, it brought a wave of affordable smartphones and cheaper data among urban and semi-urban populations in India. Now, Indian consumers have built a habit to use social media platforms to follow brands, make and watch content about products, read online reviews, seek opinions from influencers and peers and search about promotional offers before making a purchase decision. Recent empirical work by Kumar and Mishra (2024) which was based on Stimulus Organism Response (S-O-R) Theory shows that social media marketing activities such as finding information, entertainment, interaction and electronic word of mouth impact the millennial's purchase decisions in Indian states significantly. They also showed that customer experience acts as a key mediating mechanism. However, despite several practices of researchers, the main question still remains about how and under what several conditions does social media influence Indian consumer's purchase decisions.

Literature Review

• Introduction: The Evolution of Digital Marketplace

The modern business environment has drastically changed, shifting from a physical "marketplace" to a digital "marketplace". This shift has completely redefined the relationship between organizations and consumers. As noted by Dwivedi et al. (2015), Social Media Marketing (SMM) is no longer a monologue where brands present to passive consumers, it is defined as a "dialogue" that travels in a circular motion between businesses and consumers. Suggesting that social media marketing has transformed into a two-way communication. This shift represents the most significant transformation in marketing since the industrial revolution, as argued by

Saravanakumar and SuganthaLakshmi (2012), who identify the transition from traditional media (TV, Print) to digital platforms as a move toward global, 24/7 consumer engagement. As a result, marketing communication has shifted from information broadcasting toward participation, dialogue, and co-creation (Felix et al., 2017).

Labrecque et al. (2013) examine this democratization of content and identify four sources of consumer power in the digital age: Network-Based Power (viral dissemination), Crowd-Based Power (co-creation), Information-Based Power (access to prices/reviews), and Demand-Based Power (aggregated buying blocks). This shift has further forced organizations to move from dictating value to collaborating value creation. But Fuchs (2014) offers a pointed caution that such a "public sphere" is increasingly being taken over by corporate interests and state surveillance, undermining the progressive idea of a digitally pure democratic sphere.

The meaning of social media has also shifted and developed over time to align with technology. The definition of social media by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) is Internet-based applications which are developed using the ideology and technology of Web 2.0 enabling the production and sharing of User Generated Content (UGC). It is significant for the Indian scenario, in which millions of people are able to create content because of the emergence of affordable smartphones and internet connection. Bajpai et al. (2012) emphasize that social media is different from traditional advertising because it enables a real time interaction that does not require any prior setup, unlike traditional advertising. Nadaraja and Yazdanifard (2013) stress that the main benefits of SMM for developing economies are its cost-effectiveness and focused reach, which enable companies to avoid costly traditional routes and directly engage consumers.

But the quick uptake of SMM has created an enigma. Barger et al. (2016) identified an "Engagement Gap," pointing out that whereas some marketers have significantly expanded the amount of material they produce on social media, consumer engagement rates (likes, comments, and shares) have frequently decreased as a result of saturation due to availability of content. This is an indication that just being on social media is not enough for marketers. The psychology and the behavior of the consumers who drive the purchasing decisions need to be understood by the marketers.

- **Dimensions of Social Media Marketing**

What constitutes "marketing" on social media? Kim and Ko (2012) and Godey et al. (2016) validated a five-dimensional framework for SMM activities:

- Entertainment: The fun and pleasure derived from content.
- Interaction: The ability to communicate with the brand and other users.
- Trendiness: The latest information and hot topics.

- Customization: Tailored messages and services.
- Word of Mouth (WOM): User-generated endorsements.

This model has been evaluated in four countries: France, Italy, China and India (Godey et al., 2016). Their findings are very important for this study: they found that Indian consumers were the most "enthusiastic" about these dimensions than their European consumers. The higher the scores on the five dimensions, the better the awareness and image of the brand and the brand preference. This links SMM efforts to tangible brand value in the Indian context.

Seo and Park (2018) also tested these dimensions in the airline industry and found that Trendiness was the most critical driver of brand equity, followed by Customization. Meliawati et al. (2023) confirmed this in the context of TikTok, finding that the platform's "Trendiness" combined with "Product Quality" significantly drove purchase intention for food products.

However, Ceyhan (2019) clarifies this, by classifying values as "Functional," "Hedonic," and "Social". In their study of Instagram users, Functional Value (usefulness) and Hedonic Value (pleasure) were significant drivers of purchase intention, but surprisingly, Social Value (status/impression management) was not. This contradicts the assumption that consumers only buy brands on social media to impress others rather than they buy brands that are useful or entertaining and that match their own self-image.

- **The Role of Content Type: Firm vs. User Generated**

Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016) pointed out a difference between Firm-Created Content (FCC) and User-Generated Content (UGC). UGC had a favorable impact on both Brand Equity and Brand Attitude, but FCC only had an impact on Brand Attitude, according to their survey of 504 Polish users. This suggests that although brands can influence people's attitudes, only other users can increase the brand's equity.

Kumar et al. (2016), however, found that Firm-Generated Content does have a tangible sales impact. In their study of a wine retailer, they found that FCC positively affected customer spending and cross-buying, especially when used with email marketing. This suggests a connection that FCC drives sales among loyalists, while UGC builds equity among new users.

- **Traffic vs. Sales**

Dolega et al. (2021) offers a thorough quantitative study of 12 months of retail transactions. Their conclusions provide a stark reality check: Social media activity (posts, likes, reach) can have a significant influence on website traffic, but have a limited direct impact on orders and sales. This difference in sales indicates that SMM is more of a gateway. It entices the customer to go into the store, but other

elements such as price and useability make the difference in the actual purchase. This also reflects the findings of Maria et al. (2019), that for service-based applications, such as UrbanClap, SMM creates brand awareness but doesn't automatically mean that there's direct usage unless there's trust.

- **Impulse Buying**

However, Aragoncillo and Orús (2018) identified that social media is a strong impulse buy cue, especially in the fashion industry where overconsumption is commonplace and can be attributed to a "Sales Gap" for complex products. They say that physical stores are the top impulse buy while social networks are the most powerful online impulse buy. It works on the mechanism of visual stimulation in which high quality images, engaging content and limited time promotions create a sense of urgency that ignores the rational valuation stage described by Voramontri (2019).

- **The COVID-19 Impact**

Mason et al. (2021) provide evidence that the role of SMM shifted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. With the physical stores being restricted, social media moved from being a secondary source of marketing and entertainment to a primary source of information. Consumers began using social platforms for all stages of the decision process: identifying needs, searching for availability, and evaluating options. For the Indian market, which faced severe lockdowns, this suggests that habits formed during the pandemic are highly likely to be permanent which makes SMM an essential utility rather than just a marketing channel.

- **Relationship Quality**

Wibowo et al. (2021) used structural equation modelling to prove that SMM activities do not directly influence purchase intention. Instead of this, they influence Relationship Quality such as Trust and Satisfaction which then influences the Purchase Intention. This effect is crucial to understand. It implies that Indian consumers who are worried about online scams or poor-quality products, first need to feel the sense of relationship before buying. Hajli (2014) supports this by introducing the concept of "Social Commerce Constructs" (Ratings, Reviews, Forums), arguing that these tools build the social trust necessary to overcome the lack of physical touch in online shopping.

- **Traditional vs. Digital**

The most surprising finding relevant to the Indian context comes from Ali et al. (2016). In their study of university students in Pakistan they found that while social media marketing had a positive impact on consumer perception, Door-to-Door Marketing had a significantly stronger impact on the consumers. It indicates that, notwithstanding the digital revolution, face-to-face communication and trust are still the most significant elements in South Asia. Therefore, SMM strategies in India

should attempt to create this closeness by means of service or by attracting customers by creating a sense of personal connection through influencer marketing.

- **Brand Loyalty and Community**

A study by Laroche et al. (2013) examines the relationship of the Brand Communities, and Ismail (2017) takes a closer look at the same. Their research revealed that by interacting with a brand on social media, the sense of community is increased which leads to an increase in Brand Loyalty. Balakrishnan et al. (2014) specifically targeted Generation Y (also known as GEN Y) and determined that online marketing communications (E-WOM and online communities) were extremely successful in fostering brand loyalty among young consumers. This supports the idea of creating "tribes" or communities around businesses rather than merely promoting advertisements in India, a country with a large youth population.

- **Conclusion and Research Gaps**

The papers present a multifaceted view of Social Media Marketing. It is a complex tool that functions differently depending on various situations and variables such as stage of the consumer behaviour, type of product and cultural context. It is not a simple linear cause-and-effect relationship. SMM builds Relationship Quality (Wibowo et al., 2021), reduces risk in complex purchases (Voramontri & Klieb, 2019), and triggers impulse behavior through visual stimuli (Aragoncillo & Orús, 2018). However, its direct impact on sales is often mediated by trust, and in the South Asian context, it still competes with the high trust placed in traditional, face-to-face marketing (Ali et al., 2016). This paper aims to define a relationship between social media marketing and consumer decision making process in India.

Research Methodology

- **Statement of Problem**

Social media has significantly impacted the consumer decision making behaviour, yet some gaps still emerge in understanding how different dimensions social media marketing activities influence purchase intentions particularly in the Indian consumer context. Existing research show that social media marketing dimensions such as entertainment, informativeness and electronic word of mouth have effect on purchase behaviour (Kumar et al., 2016; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016), limited empirical evidence address the role of customer experience as a psychological mechanism through which these stimuli change into behavioural purchase intentions (Kumar & Mishra, 2024).

Indian consumers are particularly very significant but still understudied. With over 450 million active social media users (Statista, 2024) mostly situated in urban areas. India is seen as an early and rapid adopter of digital tools, emerging e-commerce potential and distinct culture and consumption patterns which differentiates it from western context. Despite this significance, research examining

social media marketing effectiveness specially in Indian consumer context remains vague (Bharti, 2024; Kumar & Mishra, 2024).

Furthermore, the Indian market presents a unique "trust deficit" where traditional door-to-door marketing still is more trustworthy and significant (Ali et al., 2016), challenging the effectiveness of digital-only strategies

This research aims to address these gaps by empirically examining the impact of multidimensional social media marketing activities on purchase intention

Research Questions

- **Primary Research Question**

RQ1: How does social media marketing activities influence purchase intentions among Indian consumers?

- **Secondary Research Questions**

RQ2: How frequently do Indian consumers engage with social media marketing content?

RQ3: Which types of social media content most strongly influence their purchase decisions?

RQ4: What role does trust in influencers, friends, or online communities play in shaping purchase intentions?

- **Research Design**

The present study is of empirical type which is used to analyse the relationship between the variables. Structured questionnaire was used to collect primary data to elicit responses from the participants.

The study's target population is the people of India between the ages of 18 to 45 years old who use more than two social media platforms. The number of respondents chosen for the study was 125.

The respondents were chosen using a combination of convenience sampling and snowball sampling because of the given time frame.

The data was gathered by using primary sources, namely structured questionnaire. Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree). The attitudes and perceptions of respondents were assessed using this scale.

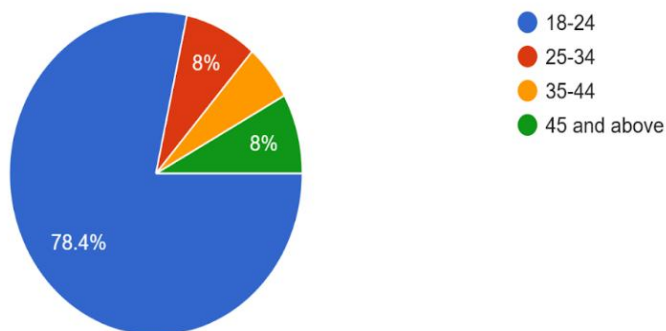
Data Analysis and Interpretation

- **Age Distribution of Respondents**

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
18–24	98	78.4%
25–34	10	8.0%
35–44	7	5.6%
45 and above	10	8.0%

Age

125 responses



Interpretation

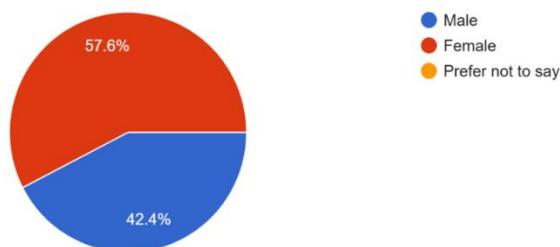
The majority of the respondents are in the age group 18-24 (78.4%) which means that the sample predominantly reflects younger users of social media. The age group 25–34 years old accounts for 8% of the respondents, then there are people aged 45+ and 5.6% in the age group 35–44.

- Gender Distribution**

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	72	57.6%
Male	53	42.4%
Total	125	100%

Gender

125 responses



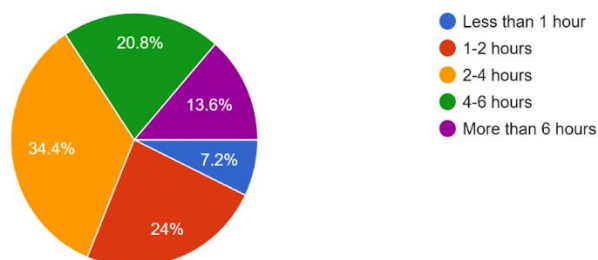
Interpretation

The participants are slightly more female with 57.6% compared to male respondents who make up 42.4%.

- Time Spent on Social Media**

Time Spent Daily	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 1 hour	9	7.2%
1–2 hours	30	24.0%
2–4 hours	43	34.4%
4–6 hours	26	20.8%
More than 6 hours	17	13.6%
Total	125	100%

Time spent daily
125 responses



Interpretation

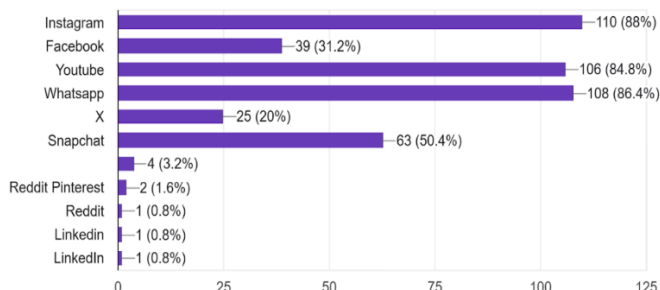
The majority of the respondents (34.4%) visit social media two to four hours per day, then 24% spend one to two hours. A considerable amount (20.8%) spent 4–6 hours, which shows a high level of engagement with social media platforms.

- Social Media Platforms Used by Respondents**

Social Media Platform	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Instagram	110	88.0%
YouTube	103	82.4%
WhatsApp	95	76.0%
Snapchat	62	49.6%
Facebook	48	38.4%
Twitter (X)	32	25.6%
Reddit	21	16.8%
Pinterest	18	14.4%
LinkedIn	15	12.0%

Platforms used

125 responses



Interpretation

The results suggest that Instagram is the most popular social media platform, with 88% of the respondents using it, followed by YouTube (82.4%) and WhatsApp (76%). Snapchat and Facebook are also mentioned as having moderate usage among the respondents. In contrast, a smaller number of respondents use LinkedIn, Pinterest and Reddit. From these findings, it could be noted that most of the respondents use social media apps which are visually oriented and entertainment-focused.

• Frequency of Advertisements Seen on Social Media

Frequency	Frequency	Percentage
Very Often	52	41.6%
Often	41	32.8%
Sometimes	22	17.6%
Rarely	6	4.8%
Never	4	3.2%
Total	125	100%

Interpretation

There is high exposure of social media marketing content with 74.4% of the respondents responding that they saw ads often or very often on social media platforms.

• Influence of Social Media Marketing on Purchase Behaviour

Statement	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
Social media influences what I consider buying	30.4	37.6	32.0
Discounts or offers motivate purchases	64.8	20.0	15.2
Interactive content increases interest	56.5	28.2	15.3

I compare products on social media before buying	56.8	27.2	16.0
Social media plays a major role in purchase decisions	44.0	28.8	27.2

Interpretation

This shows that promotional incentives like discount and offers are significant factors that affect consumers' buying decision, as 64.8% agreed that it is. Furthermore, over 50% of the respondents have also said that they check social media before buying a product, highlighting the role of social media as a product information source.

• Influence of Social Media Influencers

Statement	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
Influencers help me learn about new products	46.4	33.6	20.0
I trust product recommendations made by influencers	28.8	41.6	29.6
Influencers clearly explain product features and benefits	39.2	36.8	24.0
I watch influencer reviews or unboxing videos before buying	39.2	34.4	26.4
Seeing influencers use a product increases my interest in it	35.2	38.4	26.4

Interpretation

Based on the results, the role of the influencers in the consumers' perceptions and purchase decision is at the moderate level. Approximately 46.4% of the respondents said they find new products by following influencers, and 39.2% said they had seen an influencer review or unboxing videos before making a purchase. But confidence in the recommendations of influencers seems relatively low, and there is a large percentage of respondents that are neither convinced nor skeptical. This indicates that influencers can help build awareness, but it is clear that consumers need to rely on other factors like reviews and peer recommendations to finalize their purchase.

Key Findings and Results

The present study analysed the responses of 125 respondents to understand the impact of social media marketing on consumers' purchasing behaviour. The responses received via the questionnaire were analysed through a percentage analysis.

From the demographic analysis, it can be seen that the majority of respondents are in the age group of 18-24 years, which means that the sample

mainly represents younger social media users. 57.6% of the sample comprised women respondents and 42.4 per cent male.

As far as social media usage is concerned, most of the respondents spent a lot of time on social media sites every day. The largest group (34.4%) spend 2-4 hours per day and 24% spend 1-2 hours per day. This indicates that social media is one of the respondents' daily activities.

Based on the platform usage analysis, the majority of the respondents use Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp as their social media platforms. Instagram showed the highest usage rate, indicating that it is a crucial platform for advertising exposure and social media marketing.

As far as the advertisement exposure is concerned, majority of the respondents indicated that they at least saw advertisements on social media very often (41.6%) and often (32.8%) showing that social media is one of the biggest platforms for advertisement communication.

The effect of social media marketing on consumer behaviour was also explored. A significant number of respondents believed that social media facilitates them to discover new products and contrast various brand names prior to a buying choice. Promotions like giving discounts, offering special offers, and engaging in interactive content were found to be significant in increasing the consumer interest in the products.

Analysis of the role of social media influencers was also done. The findings revealed that the role of influencers in shaping interest and consumer awareness is in the moderate category. There was mixed trust in the recommendations of influencers, with many respondents citing the unboxing videos or reviews. The influence of peer reviews, comments and other forms of information influence consumers' decision in their final purchase choices apart from influencers.

The results indicate that the overall social media marketing has a significant effect on purchase considerations through increasing the product awareness, searching information, and engaging consumers.

Conclusion

The objective of this study was to find out the effect of social media marketing on consumers' purchase behaviour of social media users in India. The analysis of the results obtained from 125 respondents revealed the important role of social media in making buying decisions, consumer awareness and product discovery.

Based on the results, most of the respondents are active users of social media where they spend several hours of their time on platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp. These platforms are vital in the realm of digital marketing

because they often display ads and promotions to users. The findings also show that social media is used by consumers to find new products, for comparing brands and to get information about products prior to purchase.

Promotional efforts, like discounts, special offers and interactive marketing material, could be used to gauge a significant increase in consumer interest and purchase intention. Although the respondents have an awareness of the products due to social media influencers, the level of trust in the suggestions of the influencers seems to be moderate, as many consumers search for the reviews, opinions of peers, and their own research before committing to a purchase.

In conclusion, social media marketing has emerged as a powerful business tool to communicate with consumers and influence their purchasing behaviour. But, if it will come to building trust with customers, and fostering long-term relationships, the companies should keep in mind to produce genuine content, to inspire customers to engage with the company, and to offer accurate product details.

Limitations of the Study

Although the present study provides useful insights into the influence of social media marketing on consumer purchase behaviour, it has certain limitations. While the present study offers valuable insights on the effect of social media marketing on consumer purchase behaviour, it does have some drawbacks. However, the study may not be fully representative of the Indian social media user base due to the limited number of respondents (125) in the study. The age group 18-24 years had the highest number of responses, with a smaller number of responses from age 25 years and over although the age range of the target population was 18-45 years. Consequently, the results are primarily based on the actions and thinking of younger social media users. Moreover, the findings of the study can be generalized because the sampling technique used was snowball sampling and convenience sampling, and the respondents were the ones who were easy to access.

The data was collected through a self-administered questionnaire, and therefore the responses depend on the subjective opinions and honesty of the participants, which may introduce response bias. Finally, the scope of data collection and analysis was restricted due to limited time frame in which the study was conducted.

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