

Impact of Social Media on Consumer Behaviour (Special Reference to Urban Consumers in Bhopal)

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Abstract: The present research paper examines the impact of social media on consumer behaviour in the contemporary digital marketplace. Social media has changed the consumer journey by converting the buyer from a passive receiver of advertising into an active participant who searches for information, compares alternatives, observes reviews, follows influencers, reacts to brand content and shares post-purchase experiences. The paper is developed on the basis of the introductory data, which identifies major constructs such as social media engagement, user-generated content, influencer marketing, online reviews and ratings, brand awareness, consumer trust and purchasing behaviour. The paper argues that social media influences consumer behaviour through both psychological mechanisms and behavioural enablers. Psychological mechanisms include perception, motivation, attitude, credibility, social proof and perceived risk, while behavioural enablers include convenience, digital payment, product availability, delivery reliability and return policies. The Bhopal context has been considered important because it reflects the coexistence of traditional market culture and increasing digital adoption. The paper uses a descriptive and analytical design and presents a conceptual analysis of key variables rather than claiming numerical findings in the absence of primary survey data. It concludes that social media is not merely a promotional medium; it is a participatory marketplace where consumers create, validate and circulate market meaning. Trust, authenticity, review quality and digital literacy emerge as central conditions that determine whether social media exposure becomes purchase intention and actual buying behaviour.

Keywords: Social Media, Consumer Behaviour, User-Generated Content, Influencer Marketing, Online Reviews, Brand Awareness, Consumer Trust, Purchase Intention, Electronic Word-of-Mouth, Bhopal.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Consumer behaviour has undergone a major transformation due to the expansion of internet connectivity, smartphone penetration and platform-based communication. Earlier, the consumer decision-making process was largely shaped by physical markets, family influence, salespersons, television advertisements, newspaper publicity and word-of-mouth within immediate social circles. In the present digital environment, consumers interact continuously with social media platforms that combine communication, entertainment, information, persuasion and commercial facilitation. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, X, WhatsApp and similar digital spaces have become important sources of product discovery and decision support. A consumer may first become aware of a product through an advertisement or reel, then read comments, compare alternatives, watch a review video, ask peers for recommendations and finally buy the product online or from

a local retail outlet. Therefore, social media does not operate outside the consumer journey; it is now embedded within every major stage of consumer decision-making.

The study explains that the major distinctiveness of social media lies in interactivity and participation. Unlike traditional media, social media does not keep the consumer as a silent audience. Consumers like, comment, share, save, review, criticize and recommend products. Such actions become visible to other consumers and generate social proof. This paper also highlights that user-generated content, influencer marketing, online reviews, ratings, brand awareness and consumer trust are critical variables through which social media affects buying behaviour. This research paper develops those ideas into a compact academic paper with a conceptual diagram, review of literature, data analysis framework and references. The paper focuses on the broader research theme: Impact of Social Media on Consumer Behaviour, with contextual attention to urban consumers in

Bhopal, where traditional purchasing practices and digital influence coexist.

The relevance of this theme is not limited to marketing alone. It also relates to consumer psychology, digital literacy, ethics, trust, privacy and social influence. Social media creates opportunities for businesses to reach consumers at low cost, but it also creates risks such as fake reviews, misleading advertisements, undisclosed influencer promotions and impulsive buying. Consumers gain access to more information, yet they may also face information overload and confusion. Thus, the impact of social media on consumer behaviour must be examined in a balanced and research-oriented manner, recognising both its empowering and problematic dimensions.

➤ *Objectives of the Paper*

The main objective of this research paper is to analyse the impact of social media on consumer behaviour. The specific objectives of the paper are as follows:

- To examine the impact of social media on consumer behaviour in the digital marketing environment.
- To analyse how social media influences consumer awareness regarding products, services and brands.
- To study the role of social media in the consumer information search process.
- To examine how consumers evaluate different alternatives through social media platforms.
- To analyse the influence of social media on consumer purchase intention.
- To study the effect of social media on post-purchase behaviour, including feedback, reviews, recommendations and sharing of experiences.
- To understand the role of social media engagement in shaping consumer attitudes and buying decisions.
- To examine the importance of user-generated content in influencing consumer trust and decision-making.
- To analyse the role of influencer marketing in affecting consumer preferences and purchase decisions.
- To study the impact of online reviews and ratings on consumer perception, confidence and product selection.
- To examine the significance of brand awareness in social media-driven consumer behaviour.
- To analyse the role of consumer trust in social media-based purchasing decisions.
- To present a conceptual framework showing the relationship between social media exposure and consumer behaviour.
- To provide a qualitative and conceptual analysis of the major variables affecting consumers in Bhopal.
- To understand the relevance of social media as a modern marketing tool in shaping consumer decision-making patterns.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature on consumer behaviour provides a broad foundation for understanding how individuals select, purchase, use and evaluate goods and services. Howard and

Sheth (1969) presented buyer behaviour as a complex process involving inputs, perceptual constructs, learning constructs and outputs. Schiffman and Kanuk (2010) and Solomon (2017) describe consumer behaviour as a dynamic interaction of psychological, social, cultural and economic factors. Kotler and Keller (2016) also emphasise that consumers move through a decision process that includes need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and post-purchase behaviour. In the social media era, these stages remain relevant, but the sources of information and influence have changed significantly.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content. This definition is important because it shifts attention from one-way advertising to participatory communication. Social media users are not merely consumers of information; they also produce and circulate information. Brodie et al. (2013), Hollebeek (2011) and Vivek et al. (2012) further explain customer engagement as a multi-dimensional construct involving cognitive, emotional and behavioural participation. Their work is useful for the present paper because engagement through likes, comments, shares and messages indicates the depth of consumer involvement with brands and digital content.

Electronic word-of-mouth has been widely recognised as a powerful influence in digital markets. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) explain e-WOM as product-related communication shared by consumers through internet-based platforms. Berger (2014) notes that word-of-mouth influences consumer judgement because people often trust interpersonal information more than formal advertisements. Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006) demonstrated that online reviews can affect sales, while Filieri (2015) emphasised that review helpfulness depends on diagnosticity, credibility and relevance. These studies support the argument that reviews, ratings and user-generated experiences reduce perceived risk and affect purchase intention.

Influencer marketing has become another important stream of research. Freberg et al. (2011) describe influencers as individuals who represent a new type of independent third-party endorser shaping audience attitudes through social media. De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders (2017) show that influencer characteristics such as number of followers and product fit influence brand attitude. The effectiveness of influencer marketing depends on trust, authenticity, expertise and perceived similarity. In the context of urban consumers, especially younger consumers, influencers often function as lifestyle models whose product choices affect fashion, cosmetics, food, travel, technology and entertainment consumption.

Brand awareness and trust are also central to the literature. Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993) explain that brand equity depends on awareness, associations, perceived quality and loyalty. Social media contributes to awareness by repeatedly exposing consumers to brand messages, visuals,

hashtags, influencer content and customer experiences. Trust has been studied by Doney and Cannon (1997), Gefen (2000) and Pavlou (2003), who emphasise its importance in reducing uncertainty and perceived risk, especially in e-commerce. Since consumers often make digital decisions without physical inspection, trust in brand content, reviews, influencers, sellers and platforms becomes a necessary condition for purchase.

The Theory of Planned Behaviour proposed by Ajzen (1991) offers a useful theoretical lens. According to this theory, behaviour is shaped by attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control. In social media-based consumer behaviour, attitudes may be shaped by brand content and reviews; subjective norms may emerge from peer opinions, comments and influencer recommendations; and perceived behavioural control may depend on convenience, digital payment, product availability and delivery reliability. Bandura’s Social Learning Theory (1977) is also relevant because consumers observe the consumption experiences of others through videos, reviews and social posts and learn what to expect from products and brands. Thus, the literature collectively indicates that social media influences consumer behaviour through information, social proof, trust, aspiration, convenience and observational learning.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper is descriptive and analytical in nature. It is based on the conceptual content and relevant published literature. Paper provides a theoretical foundation rather than

primary survey tables, the present paper does not fabricate numerical results. Instead, it uses conceptual data analysis by identifying major variables, their indicators and their expected influence on consumer behaviour. The unit of analysis is the consumer who is exposed to product-related content through social media. The geographical context considered is Bhopal, particularly an urban setting where areas such as MP Nagar, Barkheda, Piplani and Awadhपुरi represent commercial and residential consumer environments. The paper also uses secondary literature in the form of books and journal articles on consumer behaviour, social media, e-WOM, influencer marketing, brand equity and trust. The analytical approach followed in the paper is interpretative.

➤ Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of the paper proposes that social media exposure influences consumer behaviour through both psychological and behavioural mechanisms. Social media exposure includes advertisements, influencer content, user-generated content, brand pages, online reviews, peer comments and targeted promotions. Psychological processing includes perception, motivation, attitude, credibility, social proof, perceived risk and trust. Behavioural factors include information search, comparison, convenience, payment security, product availability, delivery reliability and return policy. These factors jointly shape purchase intention and purchasing behaviour. Post-purchase response then becomes new user-generated content, creating a continuous electronic word-of-mouth cycle.

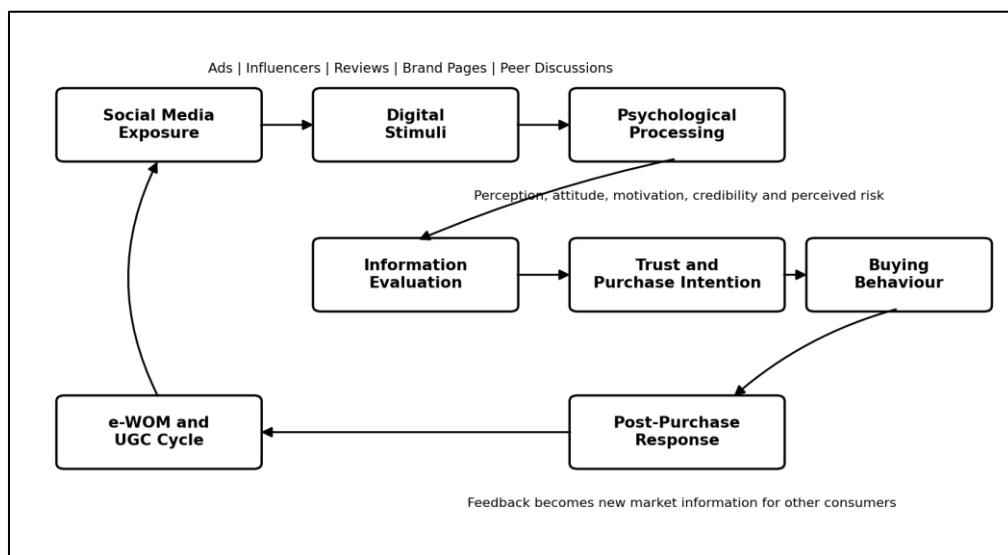


Fig 1 Conceptual Framework of Social Media Influence on Consumer Behaviour

➤ Data Analysis and Interpretation

In the absence of primary survey data, the present analysis is based on the conceptual variables. The paper indicates that social media affects consumer behaviour through engagement, user-generated content, influencer marketing, online reviews, brand awareness and consumer trust. These variables can be treated as analytical categories. Each category contributes differently to the consumer decision-making process. Social media engagement reflects

the degree of interaction between consumers and digital content. User-generated content supplies experience-based information. Influencer marketing provides persuasive recommendations. Online reviews and ratings reduce perceived risk. Brand awareness improves recognition and recall. Consumer trust determines whether the consumer is willing to rely on digital information and move towards purchase.

Table 1 Analytical Relationship between Social Media Variables and Consumer Behaviour

Variable	Main Indicator	Consumer Behaviour Stage	Expected Influence
Social media engagement	Likes, comments, shares, messages and saves	Awareness and involvement	Increases visibility, recall and active consumer participation
User-generated content	Reviews, posts, videos, testimonials and complaints	Information search and evaluation	Provides experience-based information and reduces uncertainty
Influencer marketing	Endorsement, demonstration, product storytelling and lifestyle association	Attitude formation and purchase intention	Creates relatability, aspiration and perceived credibility
Online reviews and ratings	Star ratings, detailed reviews and review recency	Evaluation of alternatives	Reduces perceived risk and supports comparison
Brand awareness	Recognition, recall, repeated exposure and digital visibility	Need recognition and consideration	Makes the brand familiar and increases probability of inclusion in choice set
Consumer trust	Authenticity, transparency, reliability and complaint response	Purchase decision and loyalty	Converts digital influence into purchase confidence and repeat behaviour

The table shows that social media influence is not a single-stage phenomenon. It begins with exposure, develops through engagement and information processing, becomes stronger through trust and credibility, and may finally result in purchase or post-purchase response. A consumer may not buy immediately after viewing an advertisement, but repeated exposure and positive reviews may place the brand in the consumer’s memory. Similarly, influencer recommendations may create interest, but actual purchase may depend on reviews, price, availability and payment convenience. This indicates that social media operates as an ecosystem rather than as a simple advertising channel.

The data analysis also indicates that trust is the most important mediating factor. Without trust, social media exposure may remain superficial. Consumers may see advertisements and influencer posts, but they may avoid purchase if they suspect exaggeration or manipulation. Trust is created when reviews appear genuine, brand communication is transparent, influencers appear authentic and consumer complaints are handled responsibly. Therefore, businesses must not measure social media success only through reach or likes. They must also examine whether engagement is producing credibility, satisfaction and long-term relationships.

Another important interpretation is the emergence of the hybrid purchase pattern. In a city such as Bhopal, social media may influence both online and offline purchases. A consumer may discover a product on Instagram but purchase it from a local store in MP Nagar or a nearby market. Another consumer may check product quality in a physical store and later purchase online because of price or convenience. Thus, social media influence extends beyond e-commerce transactions. It affects awareness, comparison and confidence even when the final purchase takes place offline.

The role of online reviews and user-generated content is especially significant because they reduce information asymmetry between sellers and buyers. Earlier, sellers controlled much of the product information. Now, consumers can observe the experiences of other buyers. This increases

consumer power but also creates the challenge of misinformation. Fake reviews, paid testimonials and manipulated ratings may distort decisions. Therefore, digital literacy becomes an important supporting factor. Consumers need the ability to compare sources, identify sponsored content and evaluate the authenticity of reviews.

IV. DISCUSSION

The discussion of the paper suggests that social media has transformed consumer behaviour by making it more participatory, comparative and socially visible. Consumers are not merely influenced by the content produced by brands; they are also influenced by the reactions of other consumers. A post with positive comments, high engagement and repeated sharing may appear more trustworthy. Similarly, negative comments may discourage potential buyers even when the brand message is attractive. This shows that consumer behaviour is increasingly shaped by public digital conversations.

The effect of influencer marketing is particularly relevant because influencers operate between personal recommendation and commercial promotion. When followers perceive an influencer as honest and relatable, the recommendation can strongly influence attitudes and purchase intention. However, if the endorsement appears artificial or undisclosed, it may damage trust. This dual nature of influencer marketing makes authenticity a critical requirement. For local and regional markets, micro-influencers may sometimes be more persuasive than national celebrities because they appear closer to the everyday life of consumers.

Brand awareness through social media is also different from traditional awareness. In traditional media, awareness often resulted from repeated exposure to advertisements. In social media, awareness is created through a combination of brand content, peer sharing, influencer posts, hashtags, comments, reels and user experiences. This makes brand image more open and more vulnerable. A brand cannot fully control its image because consumers also participate in its

construction. Therefore, social media requires brands to maintain consistency between digital promises and actual product performance.

Consumer trust emerges as the central condition of social media-driven purchasing behaviour. The digital environment offers speed and convenience, but it also contains uncertainty. Consumers may doubt product quality, seller reliability, payment security, delivery performance and data privacy. Trust reduces this uncertainty. It is strengthened by authentic reviews, transparent policies, secure payment options, responsive communication and satisfactory past experience. Therefore, trust is not created by promotion alone; it is created by the total consumer experience.

➤ *Major Findings*

On the basis of the conceptual analysis, the paper arrives at several major findings. First, social media influences every stage of the consumer decision-making process, including need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase intention and post-purchase communication. Second, user-generated content and online reviews are highly important because they provide experience-based information and reduce perceived risk. Third, influencer marketing affects consumer attitudes when the influencer is perceived as authentic, credible and relevant to the product category. Fourth, engagement increases brand visibility and recall, but the quality of engagement is more important than the number of reactions. Fifth, consumer trust mediates the relationship between social media exposure and buying behaviour. Sixth, consumers in an urban setting such as Bhopal are likely to follow a hybrid purchase pattern in which social media shapes awareness and evaluation even when the final purchase occurs offline. Seventh, digital literacy is necessary for responsible consumer decision-making because it helps consumers identify fake reviews, sponsored content and misleading claims.

➤ *Suggestions*

Businesses should use social media as a relationship-building platform rather than only as an advertising channel. They should provide accurate product information, respond to consumer queries, monitor reviews and resolve complaints transparently. Influencer collaborations should be selected carefully on the basis of credibility, product fit and audience relevance. Local businesses in Bhopal can use social media to build trust through customer testimonials, real product demonstrations, transparent pricing, location-specific offers and consistent engagement. However, they should avoid exaggerated claims because such practices may damage long-term credibility.

Consumers should also develop critical digital literacy. They should compare reviews across platforms, check whether content is sponsored, examine return policies and avoid impulsive decisions based only on visual appeal or urgency. Educational institutions and consumer awareness organisations can conduct programmes on responsible social media use, online safety and digital purchasing behaviour. Policy makers and consumer protection agencies should strengthen transparency requirements for digital advertising

and influencer endorsements. Clear disclosure of sponsored content, action against fake reviews and better grievance mechanisms can improve consumer welfare in social commerce.

V. CONCLUSION

Social media has become one of the most powerful influences on consumer behaviour in the modern digital marketplace. It affects consumers not only by providing advertisements but also by creating a participatory environment where information, opinions, experiences and recommendations circulate continuously. The consumer journey has become more interactive and non-linear. A consumer may move from social media exposure to information search, review consultation, influencer observation, peer discussion, purchase intention, actual buying and post-purchase sharing. This process shows that consumers are both influenced by social media and contributors to the influence experienced by others.

The paper concludes that the impact of social media on consumer behaviour depends on the interaction of engagement, user-generated content, influencer credibility, online reviews, brand awareness and consumer trust. Among these, trust is the most decisive factor because it converts digital exposure into purchase confidence. Social media can reduce perceived risk by offering reviews and social proof, but it can also create confusion through misleading content and fake endorsements. Therefore, responsible marketing and digital literacy are equally important. In the context of Bhopal, the study is particularly relevant because consumers may combine traditional market practices with digital information, resulting in a hybrid model of consumer behaviour. The future of consumer research must therefore examine not only how consumers buy, but also how they interpret, validate and circulate digital market information.

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