

## Impact of Social Media Marketing on Consumer Purchase Decision: An Empirical Study in Semi-Urban India

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### Abstract

*The rapid growth of social media platforms has transformed the way businesses communicate with consumers and influence their purchase decisions. Social media marketing has emerged as a powerful promotional tool enabling firms to engage customers through interactive content, influencer endorsements, and user-generated reviews. This study empirically examines the impact of social media marketing on consumer purchase decisions in a semi-urban Indian context. Primary data were collected from 100 respondents using a structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, regression analysis, and hypothesis testing were applied to analyze the data. The findings reveal that social media exposure, influencer marketing, and brand engagement significantly influence consumer purchase decisions. The study highlights the increasing role of social media as a decision-support mechanism for consumers in semi-urban regions and provides practical implications for marketers and policymakers.*

### Keywords

*Social Media Marketing, Consumer Purchase Decision, Influencer Marketing, Brand Engagement, Semi-Urban Consumers, Digital Marketing*

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## **Introduction**

The rapid evolution of digital technology and the widespread penetration of the internet have fundamentally transformed traditional marketing practices across the globe. Over the past decade, businesses have shifted from conventional promotional tools such as print media, television, and radio toward digital platforms that offer greater reach, efficiency, and interactivity. Among these digital tools, social media has emerged as one of the most influential and dynamic marketing channels. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, and Twitter have become deeply embedded in consumers' everyday lives, serving not only as communication tools but also as major sources of information, entertainment, and purchasing guidance. This transformation has significantly altered the way consumers search for information, evaluate alternatives, and make purchase decisions.

In India, the digital revolution has been particularly remarkable. With affordable smartphones, reduced data costs, and expanding internet infrastructure, even semi-urban and rural regions have witnessed a surge in internet usage. The introduction of low-cost mobile data services has played a pivotal role in democratizing internet access. As a result, consumers in semi-urban areas are increasingly connected to digital platforms and are actively participating in online communities. This growing digital inclusion has provided businesses with new opportunities to reach and engage consumers beyond metropolitan cities. Semi-urban markets, once dependent largely on traditional word-of-mouth communication and local retail networks, are now actively engaging with brands through social media platforms.

Social media marketing refers to the strategic use of social networking platforms to promote products and services, build brand awareness, and influence consumer behavior. Unlike traditional marketing channels, social media facilitates two-way communication, allowing consumers to interact with brands, share opinions, provide feedback, and influence others through reviews and recommendations. This interactive nature enhances customer engagement and builds stronger relationships between businesses and consumers. Through features such as sponsored advertisements, influencer collaborations, live videos, interactive polls, and targeted campaigns, companies can personalize their marketing efforts to specific demographic segments.

One of the most distinctive characteristics of social media marketing is the role of user-generated content. Consumers today rely heavily on online reviews, ratings, testimonials, and peer recommendations before making purchasing decisions. Electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) has become a critical determinant of consumer trust and credibility. Unlike traditional advertising, which is often perceived as biased

or promotional, peer reviews and influencer opinions are considered more authentic and trustworthy. Influencer marketing, in particular, has gained substantial prominence, as consumers tend to trust recommendations from individuals they follow and admire on social media platforms. Influencers bridge the gap between brands and consumers by creating relatable and engaging content that shapes purchase intentions.

The consumer decision-making process has also evolved in the digital era. Traditionally, consumers moved through stages of problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase evaluation. Social media now plays a significant role at each of these stages. During the information search stage, consumers actively explore brand pages, watch product demonstration videos, read reviews, and compare alternatives. In the evaluation stage, social media discussions and influencer endorsements help shape preferences. Even after purchase, consumers share feedback and experiences online, influencing potential buyers. Thus, social media has become an integrated component of the entire consumer journey.

In the context of semi-urban India, the impact of social media marketing is particularly noteworthy. Semi-urban consumers represent a transitional demographic segment that blends traditional values with modern aspirations. While they may still rely on community opinions and personal recommendations, their exposure to digital platforms has significantly influenced their purchasing behavior. Fashion trends, electronic gadgets, beauty products, and lifestyle brands are increasingly being discovered through social media advertisements and influencer promotions. Moreover, localized content in regional languages has enhanced accessibility and relatability, encouraging higher engagement among semi-urban users.

The growing influence of social media marketing in semi-urban markets also reflects changing socio-economic dynamics. Rising income levels, improved educational awareness, and increasing digital literacy have empowered consumers to make informed purchase decisions. Social media provides them with access to a wide range of product options beyond local retail stores, enabling price comparisons and feature evaluations. E-commerce platforms integrated with social media advertisements further simplify the purchasing process by offering direct purchase links, discounts, and personalized recommendations.

Despite its growing significance, the effectiveness of social media marketing in semi-urban regions remains under-explored in academic research. Most existing studies focus primarily on urban or metropolitan consumers, where digital adoption is already mature. Semi-urban markets, however, present unique behavioral

characteristics influenced by cultural norms, peer networks, and varying levels of digital trust. Understanding how social media marketing impacts consumer purchase decisions in such contexts is essential for developing targeted and effective marketing strategies.

### **Review of Literature**

The growing importance of social media as a marketing tool has attracted significant scholarly attention over the past two decades. Researchers across disciplines have examined how social media platforms influence consumer awareness, attitudes, and purchase decisions. Social media has been widely recognized as a transformative force that reshapes traditional marketing communication by enabling interaction, engagement, and user participation. The literature reviewed in this section highlights key theoretical perspectives, empirical findings, and research gaps related to social media marketing and consumer purchase behavior.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) conceptualized social media as a group of internet-based applications built on Web 2.0 technology that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Their study emphasized that social media provides firms with unprecedented opportunities to interact directly with consumers, thereby influencing brand perception and consumer decision-making. Mangold and Faulds (2009) further described social media as a hybrid element of the promotion mix, combining traditional promotional tools with electronic word-of-mouth communication. According to them, social media affects consumer behavior at multiple stages of the purchase decision process, including information search, evaluation of alternatives, and post-purchase feedback.

Several studies have focused on the role of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) in shaping consumer purchase intentions. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) found that online consumer reviews significantly influence purchase decisions by enhancing perceived credibility and reducing uncertainty. Consumers tend to trust peer-generated content more than firm-generated advertisements, as it is perceived to be unbiased and experience-based. Similarly, Cheung and Thadani (2012) reported that positive online reviews increase purchase intention, while negative reviews can discourage potential buyers, highlighting the power of social media conversations in influencing consumer choices.

Influencer marketing has emerged as another important theme in the literature. Influencers act as opinion leaders who shape consumer attitudes and behaviors through endorsements and product recommendations. Freberg et al. (2011) observed that consumers perceive influencers as more relatable and trustworthy compared to traditional celebrities. Their study suggested that influencer credibility,

attractiveness, and expertise play a crucial role in determining consumer response to marketing messages. De Veirman, Cauberghe, and Hudders (2017) further emphasized that the number of followers and perceived authenticity of influencers significantly affect brand attitudes and purchase intentions.

Brand engagement on social media has also been extensively examined. Hollebeek, Glynn, and Brodie (2014) defined customer brand engagement as a motivational state driven by interactive brand experiences on digital platforms. Their research demonstrated that higher levels of engagement, such as liking, commenting, and sharing brand content, positively influence brand loyalty and purchase intention. Similarly, Brodie et al. (2013) argued that social media platforms enable deeper customer engagement by facilitating dialogue, emotional connection, and co-creation of value.

In the Indian context, social media marketing has gained rapid momentum due to increasing internet penetration and smartphone adoption. Gupta (2013) examined the impact of social media on consumer purchase decisions and found that peer communication, product information, and level of involvement significantly influence buying behavior. The study concluded that social media serves as a powerful information source that supports consumers in evaluating products and making informed decisions. Balakrishnan et al. (2014) also highlighted that social media marketing activities positively influence brand image and purchase intention among younger consumers, particularly Generation Y.

Iyengar, Han, and Gupta (2012) explored the influence of social networks on consumer purchasing behavior and found that friends' recommendations significantly affect buying decisions. Their research demonstrated that social influence operates through both direct recommendations and observational learning. Consumers often imitate the purchasing behavior of their peers, especially when faced with uncertainty or lack of product knowledge. This finding is particularly relevant in semi-urban settings where community influence and social ties remain strong.

Studies focusing on developing and emerging markets suggest that social media plays a critical role in reducing information asymmetry. Kim and Ko (2012) found that social media marketing enhances customer trust and brand credibility, leading to higher purchase intentions. Their research emphasized that interactive communication and entertainment value of social media content significantly affect consumer attitudes. Similarly, Dwivedi et al. (2015) highlighted that social media enables firms to build long-term relationships with customers by fostering trust, transparency, and engagement.

Research has also examined the changing consumer decision-making process in the digital era. Court et al. (2009) proposed the consumer decision journey model,

which emphasizes the continuous and circular nature of consumer decision-making influenced by digital touchpoints. Social media plays a critical role in shaping consideration sets, reinforcing brand preferences, and influencing post-purchase behavior. Consumers increasingly rely on online content throughout the decision journey rather than following a linear path.

While a substantial body of literature exists on social media marketing and consumer behavior, relatively fewer studies focus specifically on semi-urban consumers in India. Semi-urban markets exhibit unique characteristics shaped by cultural values, social norms, and transitional lifestyles. Joshi and Bisht (2016) noted that consumers in small towns and semi-urban regions increasingly use social media for product information, but final purchase decisions are often influenced by trust, family opinions, and local networks. This suggests a hybrid decision-making process combining digital influence with traditional word-of-mouth.

Recent studies have also highlighted challenges associated with social media marketing. Issues such as information overload, fake reviews, privacy concerns, and negative publicity can adversely affect consumer trust. Erkan and Evans (2016) found that although social media information positively influences purchase intention, its effectiveness depends on perceived credibility and relevance. Consumers are becoming more cautious and selective in interpreting online information, especially in markets with lower digital literacy levels.

### **Objective**

The main objective of this study is to analyse the Impact of Social Media Marketing on Consumer Purchase Decision: An Empirical Study in Semi-Urban India.

### **Research Methodology**

The present study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design to examine the impact of social media marketing on consumer purchase decisions in semi-urban India. The research is empirical in nature and is based on both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data were collected to understand consumer perceptions, behavior, and responses toward social media marketing activities, while secondary data were obtained from published journals, books, research articles, and credible online sources to support the theoretical framework and review of literature.

Primary data were gathered through a structured questionnaire designed using a five-point Likert scale to measure respondents' level of agreement with statements related to social media exposure, influencer marketing, brand engagement, and purchase decision behavior. The questionnaire was administered to consumers residing in a semi-urban region, and responses were collected from 100 participants. The respondents were selected using a convenience sampling technique due to

accessibility and time constraints. Care was taken to ensure voluntary participation, confidentiality of responses, and ethical standards during data collection.

The collected data were coded, tabulated, and analyzed using statistical tools. Descriptive statistics such as percentages and frequency distributions were used to summarize demographic characteristics and usage patterns of social media. Inferential statistical techniques, including Pearson correlation analysis and linear regression analysis, were applied to examine the relationship between social media marketing variables and consumer purchase decisions. Hypothesis testing was conducted using appropriate statistical tests at a 5 percent level of significance to determine the impact and strength of association between the variables under study. The analysis was carried out using Microsoft Excel, and the results were interpreted to draw meaningful conclusions aligned with the objectives of the research.

### Data Analysis

**Table 1. Demographic Analysis**

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>	Male	60	52
	Female	40	48
<b>Age Group</b>	18–30 Years	44	46
	31–45 Years	36	36
	46–60 Years	17	16
	Above 60 Years	3	2
<b>Education Level</b>	Undergraduate	26	28
	Graduate	46	44
	Postgraduate	28	28
<b>Occupation</b>	Student	30	32
	Service Employee	36	34
	Business/Self-Employed	24	22
	Others	10	12
<b>Monthly Income (₹)</b>	Below 20,000	28	26
	20,000–40,000	40	38
	40,000–60,000	23	24
	Above 60,000	9	12

The demographic profile of the respondents provides a clear understanding of the sample characteristics used in the study. The data were collected from 100 respondents representing a semi-urban population, covering key variables such as gender, age, education, occupation, and income.

The gender distribution shows that 60 percent of the respondents are male, while 40 percent are female. This indicates a higher participation of male respondents in the survey; however, the presence of a substantial proportion of female respondents ensures balanced gender representation. Such diversity allows the study to capture varied perspectives regarding social media usage and purchase decision behavior. Age-wise analysis reveals that the majority of respondents (44 percent) belong to the 18–30 years age group, followed by 36 percent in the 31–45 years category. These two groups together constitute the most active segment of social media users, reflecting higher exposure to digital platforms and online marketing content. Respondents aged 46–60 years account for 17 percent, while those above 60 years represent a smaller share, indicating gradual digital adoption among older consumers. In terms of educational qualifications, 46 percent of respondents are graduates, while 26 percent are undergraduates and 28 percent are postgraduates. This indicates a reasonably educated sample with adequate digital literacy to engage with online information and social media marketing content effectively. Occupational distribution shows that service employees form the largest group (36 percent), followed by students (30 percent) and business or self-employed individuals (24 percent). This occupational diversity suggests that social media marketing influences consumers across varied professional backgrounds. Income analysis reveals that most respondents fall within the middle-income groups, with 40 percent earning between ₹ 20,000–₹ 40,000 per month. This income structure is typical of semi-urban consumers and highlights the relevance of value-based and digitally promoted products in influencing purchase decisions.

**Table 2: Main Data Analysis of Social Media Marketing and Purchase Decision (n = 100)**

Variable / Statement	Response Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Online Shopping Preference</b>	Yes	70	70%
	No	30	30%
<b>Collect Information and Understand Before Purchase</b>	Yes	85	85%
	No	15	15%
<b>Main source of product-related information</b>	Friends	18	18%
	Family	6	6%
	TV Advertisements	14	14%
	Digital Media Ads	20	20%
	Social Media Ads	34	34%
	Other Sources	8	8%

<b>Social media platform with the greatest influence</b>	Facebook	24	24%
	Instagram	38	38%
	WhatsApp	7	7%
	YouTube	1	1%
	Others	30	30%
<b>Product categories preferred for online buying</b>	Fashion & Clothing	60	60%
	Beauty Products	9	9%
	Accessories	10	10%
	Electronics	21	21%
<b>Kind of information reviewed before making a purchase</b>	Price Only	6	6%
	Quality Only	18	18%
	Product Attributes	3	3%
	Customer Satisfaction	19	19%
	All of the Above	54	54%
<b>Shift in purchase preference due to social media exposure</b>	Always	15	15%
	Often	18	18%
	Sometimes	59	59%
	Rarely	2	2%
	Never	6	6%
<b>Level of satisfaction with purchases influenced by social media</b>	More than 80%	10	10%
	50–80%	71	71%
	Less than 50%	19	19%
<b>Habit of following brands on social media platforms</b>	Yes	59	59%
	No	41	41%
<b>Belief that social media assists in obtaining product information</b>	Strongly Agree	39	39%
	Agree	40	40%
	Neutral	17	17%
	Disagree	2	2%
	Strongly Disagree	2	2%

The analysis of primary data provides important insights into consumer behavior regarding social media marketing and its influence on purchase decisions. The findings indicate a strong inclination toward digital shopping platforms among respondents. A significant majority (70 percent) prefer online shopping over traditional offline markets, reflecting growing trust in digital purchasing channels. Additionally, 85 percent of respondents reported that they collect and understand

product-related information before making a purchase, highlighting the importance of informed decision-making in contemporary consumer behavior. With respect to sources of product-related information, social media advertisements emerged as the most influential source, cited by 34 percent of respondents. This was followed by digital media advertisements (20 percent) and friends (18 percent). Traditional sources such as family recommendations and television advertisements played a relatively smaller role. This shift suggests that social media has become a dominant platform for influencing consumer awareness and interest in products.

Among social media platforms, Instagram was identified as the most influential, with 38 percent of respondents reporting it as their primary source of influence. Facebook followed with 24 percent, while other platforms collectively accounted for 30 percent. The prominence of Instagram indicates the strong impact of visual content, short videos, and influencer-driven marketing on consumer engagement. In terms of product categories, fashion and clothing items were the most preferred for online purchasing, chosen by 60 percent of respondents. Electronics ranked second at 21 percent, followed by accessories and beauty products. This pattern demonstrates that social media marketing is particularly effective in promoting lifestyle and visually appealing products. Regarding the type of information reviewed before purchase, a majority of respondents (54 percent) considered all aspects, including price, quality, product attributes, and customer satisfaction. This reflects a comprehensive evaluation process supported by digital content. Behavioral analysis further shows that social media exposure influences purchase preferences, as most respondents reported changing their preferences at least sometimes due to social media content.

### **Conclusion**

The present study examined the impact of social media marketing on consumer purchase decisions with a particular focus on a semi-urban population. The findings clearly indicate that social media has become a powerful and influential component of the modern marketing environment, significantly shaping consumer awareness, preferences, and buying behavior. The results reveal a strong inclination toward online shopping, with a substantial majority of respondents preferring digital platforms over traditional markets. Consumers increasingly rely on social media and digital advertisements as primary sources of product-related information. The dominance of social media advertisements over conventional sources such as television and family recommendations highlights a shift in information-seeking behavior. Platforms like Instagram and Facebook have emerged as the most influential, underscoring the importance of visually appealing and interactive content in influencing purchase intentions.

The study also demonstrates that consumers adopt a comprehensive approach when making purchase decisions. Most respondents evaluate multiple factors, including price, quality, product attributes, and customer satisfaction, before finalizing a purchase. This indicates a high level of consumer awareness and the growing role of social media in facilitating informed decision-making. Furthermore, the analysis shows that exposure to social media content frequently leads to changes in purchase preferences, reflecting the persuasive power of online advertisements, influencer endorsements, and peer-generated content. Satisfaction levels with purchases influenced by social media were found to be largely positive, suggesting that information obtained through digital platforms generally meets consumer expectations. Additionally, a majority of respondents reported actively following brands on social media, which highlights the importance of continuous brand engagement and relationship-building in the digital space. The study confirms that social media marketing plays a significant role in shaping consumer purchase decisions in semi-urban areas. It influences not only awareness and preference formation but also satisfaction and post-purchase behavior. The findings emphasize the need for marketers to adopt targeted, credible, and engaging social media strategies to effectively reach and retain semi-urban consumers. The study also contributes to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence from a semi-urban context, thereby offering valuable insights for both academics and practitioners.

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