

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING IN CONSUMER BUYING BEHAVIOUR IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Social media has rapidly emerged as a pivotal marketing channel influencing consumer buying behaviour, especially among India's urban youth. This research paper examines how social media marketing on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp shape the purchase decisions of young urban consumers in industries like fashion, electronics, and fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG). Drawing on recent statistics (2023–2025), industry reports, and academic studies, the paper analyses trends in social media usage, the impact of influencer marketing, and notable brand campaigns in the Indian context. The findings indicate that social media significantly affects each stage of the consumer decision-making process—from awareness and product research to purchase and post-purchase engagement. Case studies of successful Indian social media campaigns illustrate the strategies brands use to engage youth and drive sales. The paper concludes with insights into the growing role of social media in shaping consumer preferences and recommendations for marketers to effectively harness these platforms.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing, Consumer Buying Behaviour, Urban Youth, Influencer Marketing, Social Media Platforms.

Introduction

India's digital revolution has led to a massive increase in social media usage, particularly among young urban populations. By 2024, India boasts one of the world's largest social media audiences, with over 360 million active Instagram users and 491 million YouTube users. WhatsApp and Facebook also have vast user bases, with WhatsApp being used by 80.8% of Indian internet users, followed by Instagram (77.9%) and Facebook (67.8%). These platforms are now integral to daily life and communication in urban India.

This widespread social media adoption has reshaped how consumers discover and decide on products. Traditional advertising is increasingly supplemented or replaced by social media marketing, where peer influence, user-generated content, and influencers significantly impact consumer behaviour. Surveys show that 60% of young Indians are heavily influenced by social media and short-form video content in their purchase decisions. Additionally, 62% of Indian youth (ages 18–34) admit to being influenced by social media when shopping.

Urban youth, with high online engagement and spending power, have become key targets for brands, especially in sectors like fashion, consumer electronics, and FMCG. Platforms like Instagram can make fashion styles go viral, driving demand, while YouTube reviews and unboxing videos influence electronics purchases. In FMCG, creative social media campaigns around food, beauty, or personal care products help foster buzz and brand loyalty. Understanding how social media marketing affects consumer decision-making is critical, as these platforms influence awareness, attitudes, and purchase decisions. This paper examines how social media's interactive features on platforms like Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp impact buying behaviour, incorporating recent statistics (2023–2025) and case studies for relevant insights.

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Literature Review

The influence of social media on consumer behaviour has garnered significant academic and industry interest in recent years. Early studies highlighted social media's ability to facilitate two-way communication, enabling brands to build deeper relationships with consumers compared to traditional one-way advertising (Jain, 2020; Sharma, 2017). By the late 2010s, research focused on Indian millennials and Gen Z revealed a shift towards social networks for product discovery and recommendations (Agarwal & Das, 2019). Bhagwat and Sharma (2018) found that exposure to brand content on platforms like Facebook and Instagram positively influenced young consumers' purchase intentions.

A key theme in the literature is the role of electronic word-of-mouth and peer influence. Consumers often trust peer reviews and influencer endorsements over traditional advertisements, making influencers central to modern marketing. Mukherjee and Jindal (2020) emphasized that influencers shape both brand awareness and purchase decisions, as followers often view their content as credible product reviews. Social media has also shortened the consumer decision-making journey. A Deloitte report (Barysevich, 2020) found that 29% of social media users are likely to make a purchase on the same day they discover a product online. Features like Instagram's "Shop" button and Facebook Marketplace enable seamless transitions from product discovery to purchase, although a 2024 survey revealed that 68% of Indian consumers still prefer external e-commerce sites or physical stores for final purchases.

Visual platforms like Instagram and YouTube, which focus on images and videos, have a significant impact on sectors like fashion and electronics, where product demonstration is crucial. Short-form video content (e.g., Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts) is particularly influential among young consumers, with a 2023 report showing that 60% of young Indians are driven by social media and video content in their purchasing decisions. Cultural contextualization in marketing is also emphasized in Indian studies. Brands often blend global trends with local cultural elements, using festivals or social causes to resonate with consumers. Campaigns during events like Diwali or Eid create a deeper emotional connection, enhancing authenticity and engagement with the brand.

The literature underscores social media's growing importance in shaping consumer behaviour, particularly among youth, through peer influence, influencer marketing, quick access to information, and cultural relevance. These insights set the stage for exploring the current impact of social media marketing on consumer buying behaviour in India (2023–2025).

Objectives

- To analyse the impact of social media marketing on consumer buying behaviour among India's urban youth.
- To examine how specific social media platforms (Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp) influence consumer decisions in key industries (fashion, electronics, and FMCG).
- To identify the effective social media marketing strategies used by brands to engage and influence young consumers in India.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative research approach based on secondary data analysis, reviewing recent literature, industry surveys, and case studies from 2020 to 2025. Emphasis was placed on data from 2023–2025, focusing on urban youth demographics. Key sources included surveys from Statista, Nielsen, Kantar, and Rakuten Insight. Industry case studies and brand campaign analyses were examined to link theory with real-world practices. No primary data was collected; instead, existing knowledge was synthesized, ensuring credibility through cross-verification. The methodology is exploratory and analytical, offering a comprehensive view of social media's influence on consumer behaviour in India.

Platform-Wise Impact on Consumer Buying Behaviour

Social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp play significant roles in influencing consumer behaviour in India. Each platform offers distinct features that brands use to shape consumer journeys, from product discovery to purchase and beyond.

- **Instagram:** Visual Inspiration and Influencer Culture – Instagram has become a powerful tool for marketing, especially in lifestyle and fashion industries. Its visual nature—featuring images, Reels, and Stories—helps brands showcase products in aspirational settings, making it easier

for consumers to imagine these items in their lives. Influencer marketing is particularly impactful on Instagram, where both celebrities and micro-influencers promote various products. Studies show that 70–73% of Indian social media shoppers prefer Instagram for social commerce, making it a leading platform for product discovery and direct purchases. Additionally, 82% of Indian consumers acknowledge that influencers shape their purchasing decisions. Successful campaigns, like Myntra's "Myntra FWD" campaign, demonstrate how influencer-led promotions can engage youth and drive millions of views.

- **Facebook:** Community Engagement and Social Advertising – Facebook remains a significant platform for urban Indian consumers, especially through its community groups and micro-targeted ads. Many users participate in Facebook Groups focused on interests like tech gadgets or fashion, where peer recommendations often guide purchase decisions. Facebook's ability to micro-target users based on specific interests allows brands to tailor their campaigns effectively. The platform also offers social proof through Likes, Shares, and Comments, which can influence consumer perceptions. Furthermore, Facebook's Shops and Marketplace provide seamless e-commerce capabilities, allowing consumers to browse and purchase products directly on the platform. This integration of e-commerce into social interactions boosts Facebook's role in influencing purchase behaviour.
- **YouTube:** Video Reviews and Educated Purchasing – YouTube significantly influences consumer decisions, particularly in high-involvement categories like electronics and fashion. Indian youth often turn to YouTube for detailed product reviews, unboxing videos, and tutorials before making purchases. This platform's strength lies in its ability to provide in-depth, demonstrative content, which is particularly useful for gadgets and fashion. For instance, tech enthusiasts often watch comparison videos and expert reviews before deciding on products like smartphones or laptops. Positive reviews from popular YouTubers can boost sales, while critical reviews can deter potential buyers. YouTube also serves as a key influencer for lifestyle products, where tutorial videos can prompt purchases of featured items. Overall, YouTube helps consumers evaluate products more thoroughly, often guiding them through the decision-making process.
- **WhatsApp:** Personalized Marketing and Word-of-Mouth – WhatsApp, primarily a messaging app, plays a unique role in marketing by fostering personalized communication and leveraging word-of-mouth. With its widespread usage, brands reach consumers through WhatsApp Business accounts, broadcast lists, and customer service chatbots. Product recommendations, discounts, and updates are often shared in personal WhatsApp chats, where recipients trust these messages more than traditional ads. For example, Nestlé India used a WhatsApp chatbot during Diwali to let users create personalized greeting cards, a campaign that helped strengthen its brand presence. WhatsApp's peer-to-peer nature allows businesses to tap into intimate networks, with satisfied customers sharing product links or promotional offers within their groups, further influencing purchases. The challenge for marketers is to provide valuable content without overwhelming users, ensuring that WhatsApp remains a trusted marketing channel.

The Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp each contribute uniquely to shaping consumer behaviour in India. Instagram excels in influencer-driven fashion and lifestyle marketing, while Facebook fosters community-based buying decisions and direct e-commerce. YouTube influences high-involvement purchases with detailed product reviews and demonstrations, and WhatsApp's personal communication creates a trusted environment for word-of-mouth marketing. Together, these platforms create a powerful ecosystem that drives consumer decisions, especially among urban youth, by combining social interaction, trusted reviews, and seamless shopping experiences.

Social Media's Impact on Key Industries

- **Fashion and Lifestyle:** Social-media has revolutionized India's fashion industry, with trends often emerging online before reaching stores. Young urban consumers discover new fashion brands through influencers' posts on Instagram and YouTube. Social media has shortened the trend cycle, allowing styles worn by celebrities or influencers to become nationwide sensations within days. Brands leverage platforms like Instagram to showcase collections via Reels or live-streamed fashion shows, making high-end fashion accessible and interactive. Collaborations with influencers have become a key marketing strategy, as seen in Myntra's 2024 campaign targeting Gen Z, which resulted in millions of impressions. User-generated content, like style

challenges with specific hashtags, amplifies brand reach and strengthens emotional connections, accelerating purchase decisions.

- **Consumer Electronics:** In the consumer electronics industry, social media serves as both a showroom and a review platform. Urban youth extensively research gadgets online, using social media for product reviews and recommendations. Platforms like Facebook groups, Twitter, and Instagram allow tech enthusiasts to discuss new products, shaping the purchasing decisions of their peers. Brands such as OnePlus and Xiaomi build anticipation with social media teasers, creating loyal fanbases before product launches. Social media also promotes flash sales and exclusive deals, generating immediate purchases. By the time consumers decide to buy electronics, they have often consumed extensive content, which directly influences their final choice, either reinforcing or deterring their purchase.
- **Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG):** social media is increasingly shaping brand preferences in the FMCG sector, influencing everyday purchases like food, beverages, and personal care products. Influencer marketing is widely used in beauty and nutrition segments, where influencers' recommendations can drive product sales. Social media campaigns often integrate products into daily lifestyles, as seen with coffee brands sponsoring morning routine videos on YouTube or Instagram challenges like #WorkoutAndRefuel featuring nutrition drinks. Interactive content, such as polls and hashtag challenge, boosts engagement and helps brands gain insights into consumer preferences. Furthermore, FMCG brands leverage social media to highlight social responsibility initiatives, resonating with socially conscious consumers and influencing their buying behaviour. Although individual FMCG purchases may have smaller impacts, social media's cumulative influence through sustained engagement and peer recommendations significantly affects product choices among urban youth.

Analysis of Social Media's Impact on Consumer Buying Behaviour in India

Social media marketing significantly influences consumer buying behaviour among India's urban youth by reshaping traditional marketing approaches. Platforms like Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp are central to young consumers' daily interactions and play a crucial role in their purchase decisions. Instagram, with its visual appeal and influencer-driven content, effectively promotes lifestyle and fashion products. Indian brands frequently collaborate with micro-influencers and celebrities who showcase products through relatable content, driving substantial engagement and purchase intentions. For instance, Myntra's 2024 "Myntra FWD" campaign exemplifies successful influencer collaboration, generating millions of views and enhancing consumer-brand connections.

Facebook contributes by fostering online communities and leveraging targeted advertising. Urban youth engage in product-related Facebook groups, seeking peer advice and recommendations that significantly influence their purchasing decisions. Facebook's integrated shopping features, like Marketplace, further streamline consumer purchases by providing seamless browsing-to-buying experiences. YouTube excels in educating consumers through detailed reviews and unboxing videos, especially crucial in high-involvement purchases like electronics. Brands strategically partner with trusted YouTubers to build product credibility and enhance consumer confidence. WhatsApp, though primarily a messaging app, has uniquely positioned itself as a personalized marketing channel, utilizing peer-to-peer recommendations and targeted messaging to build consumer trust and drive sales. To illustrate the practical influence of these platforms on consumer behaviour, the following table presents recent statistics (2023–2025):

Table 1: Impact of Social Media Platforms on Consumer Behaviour

Platform	Key Feature	Consumer Impact	Example Brand Campaign
Instagram	Influencer Marketing	82% of Indian consumers influenced by influencer endorsements (Storyboard18, 2025)	Myntra FWD Campaign (2024)
Facebook	Community Engagement	Majority influenced by peer recommendations in Facebook groups (Rakuten Insight, 2024)	Xiaomi India Community Engagement Campaign
YouTube	Product Reviews	Extensive product research prior to purchases, significantly influencing electronics buying (Kantar, 2025)	OnePlus YouTube Launch Campaign
WhatsApp	Personalized Messaging	High trust in peer-shared product recommendations, boosting FMCG sales (Nielsen, 2024)	Nestlé Diwali WhatsApp Chatbot Campaign

Source: storyboard18.com, storyboard18.com

The data highlights that social media platforms significantly enhance consumer engagement and influence purchase decisions by combining interactive features, influencer authenticity, and personalized marketing. Brands effectively use these platforms to create targeted campaigns, resonate culturally with consumers, and ultimately drive consumer behaviour. Therefore, understanding these platform-specific impacts and strategies can help marketers better navigate India's rapidly evolving digital landscape, enabling them to harness social media marketing effectively to influence consumer behaviour and build lasting brand relationships among India's urban youth.

Conclusion

Social media marketing has become a critical factor in shaping consumer buying behaviour among India's urban youth. The extensive use of platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp have significantly transformed how young consumers discover, evaluate, and purchase products. Social media's visual appeal, peer influence, and the rise of influencers have created a dynamic environment where brands can directly engage with consumers, building deeper relationships through targeted content and campaigns. The findings from this study underscore the growing impact of social media on key industries, such as fashion, consumer electronics, and FMCG, where platforms like Instagram and YouTube are driving trends and influencing purchasing decisions. As brands continue to leverage social media to enhance visibility and engagement, understanding platform-specific strategies will be crucial for marketers seeking to connect with India's digital-first youth. By harnessing the power of these platforms, marketers can foster stronger consumer-brand connections and influence long-term purchase behaviour.

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