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Social media's role in the new consumer journey - A deep dive into buying behaviour

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Abstract

This study examines how social media affects consumer decisions to buy, emphasizing significant patterns and issues raised by participants. The majority of consumers (95.6%) are between the ages of 18 and 24, according to the study data, which suggests that social media platforms are heavily relied upon for product discovery, reviews, and purchases. Women outnumber men by a small margin, indicating that women are more likely to engage in social media-driven purchasing. Approximately 80% of consumers use social media for shopping, and many of them rely on marketing and product recommendations. These outcomes demonstrate how crucial it is for companies to prioritize openness, fostering trust, and attending to customer issues in order to maximize their social commerce initiatives. To boost customer confidence and boost conversion rates, businesses must take use of social media's power while maintaining a safe and transparent buying environment.

Keywords: Social media, buying behavior, customer confidence

Introduction

With the advancement of technology, social networking sites have become a way for retailers to reach a wider audience with their marketing campaigns.

People now consider social media apps to be an essential part of their daily life and are more likely to move their interactions to online platforms like Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Twitter. Their views and behaviors regarding different types of social media technologies are therefore positively impacted by this.

Social media is widely recognized as a potent instrument that helps organizations achieve their marketing goals and strategy, especially in the areas of communication, customer relationship management, and consumer engagement.

Companies have been keen to use social media in a range of settings to interact with consumers in ways such as advertising, facilitating information search, encouraging dialogue, and enhancing consumer buying habits.

Consequently, companies have developed a variety of interactive strategies and resources to enhance their brand recognition and marketing effectiveness.

"Connecting brands and consumers, [while] providing a personal channel and currency for user-centered networking and social interaction" is the definition of social media marketing.

Since the emergence of social media has drastically changed the tools and techniques available for communicating with customers, businesses must learn how to use social media in a way that complements their overall business plan.

Even though convenience is important, many customers are nonetheless quite concerned about financial danger, especially when making purchases on social media. Customers may view financial risk as the possibility of receiving inferior goods, being unable to return items, or becoming the target of online fraud (Chung & Lee, 2021)^[6]. Since customers frequently rely on peer or influencer reviews and ratings, the credibility of social media ads and influencer endorsements is essential in reducing this perceived financial risk (Khan & Ali, 2020)^[9]. Younger customers, such Millennials and Gen Z, are more receptive to the appeal of social media marketing despite possible financial concerns, suggesting that the influence of financial risk on consumer behavior varies by age group. Compared to older customers, younger generations may be less concerned about financial risk since they are more technologically connected, but they are also more susceptible to peer pressure and social media trends. (Johnson & Kim, 2023)^[7].

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This study looks at the literature that focuses on how a shop creates and uses social media as an extension of their marketing strategy. Given that this phenomena has only just come into being, social media research has mostly focused on (1) defining it by describing the novel concepts and vocabulary that underpin it and (2) investigating the ways in which a business's use of social media influences consumer behavior. First, an explanation of the terminology used to characterize social media marketing is provided. The four main themes-Virtual Brand Communities, Consumer Attitudes and Motives, User Generated Content, and Viral Advertising-that have been found in recent research studies are then examined.

Review of Literature

This study aims describing social media's essential role in marketing, it also tries to illustrate how social media is used to engage people in different marketing initiatives. Majority of the identified marketing initiatives used Facebook to share content information with an attempt to connect with target audience. Social media acts as a channel to communicate and reach the targeted audience however the analysis is limited to the data available in the study. (Alalwan *et al.*, 2017) ^[1].

Due to advancement of technology the retailers have upgraded and compelled to introduce business models on social media as a competitive advantage leading to loyalty by adding value to customer.

Customers may now quickly obtain product information it's all because of the rise of social media marketing, according to a survey of the literature. Social media examination and comparison of options, two-way contact, and customer reviews all influence consumers' decisions to buy. Compiling data on need recognition and information search was one of the many difficulties encountered in conducting this study. Since social media is a relatively new phenomenon, not much research has been done on these topics. In contrast to mass media marketing, social media marketing has made it possible for marketers to interact with and cater to their customers in a more individualized way, which strengthens the study's significance. (Ramanathan, U *et al.*, 2017) ^[2].

This study looks at how social media usage and information sharing affect consumer beliefs, specifically about the reliability of information from e-commerce sellers and the development of consumer trust. The authors have suggested a research approach to look into consumers' happiness with food and beverage (F&B) items, based on surface credibility and trust gained through social media usage. Using survey data collected from Malaysian customers with Facebook accounts, structural equation modeling was used to empirically corroborate the study concept. (Bansal, S. *et al.*, 2020) ^[3].

The study on impulse buying behaviour highlights various factors influencing consumer decisions, indicating the complexity of this phenomenon. Studies show that impulse purchases are often driven by emotional and sensory experiences, particularly in physical retail environments where sensory stimuli, such as store atmosphere and product layout, play a significant role in encouraging spontaneous buying. Research shows that impulse buying accounts for a large portion of total purchases, with estimates ranging from 40% to 80%. The distinction between impulsive and unplanned purchases is crucial, as not all unplanned purchases are impulsive; the latter is characterized by a

desire to buy without prior thinking. Additionally, psychological factors such as self-esteem, emotional state and life satisfaction has an impact on impulse buying tendencies. The influence of advertising and promotional strategies is also crucial as they can effectively impact consumer perceptions and drive impulse buying behaviour. Recent studies have suggested that the COVID-19 pandemic has shifted consumer behaviour towards more planned and rational purchasing, indicating that external factors can modify impulse purchasing patterns. Overall, understanding the interplay of emotional, sensory, and psychological factors is essential for businesses aiming to increase sales (Rodrigues *et al.*, 2021) ^[10].

The study explores the mediating role of consumer buying behaviour in relation to customer satisfaction, particularly focusing on the young generation in Pakistan. With a sample of 567 respondents, the study reveals important insights such as the direct relationship between price and customer satisfaction, and the positive influence of consumer buying behaviour on this relationship. The research focusses on the need for telecom companies to modify their services to meet the preferences of the youth who predominantly use platforms like WhatsApp for communication (Qalati *et al.*, 2019) ^[11].

The study explores the factors determining consumer buying behaviour, classifying them into personal, psychological, social, and economic factors. It highlights the significance of understanding how age and life stages affect purchasing decisions. However, this study has drawbacks including a lack of empirical research and reliance on a single theory of motivation. Future research could benefit from practical applications and a broader theoretical framework to enhance understanding of consumer behaviour (IJSRD-International Journal for Scientific Research & Development| Vol. 8, Issue 2, 2020 | ISSN (Online): 2321-0613, n.d.)

This paper explores consumer buying behaviour towards fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) in India, highlighting the impact of various factors such as price, place, product, and promotion on purchasing decisions. It emphasizes the importance of understanding consumer preferences in a rapidly changing market influenced by globalization. The research methodology involved questionnaires, revealing that consumer behaviour is affected by both psychological and physiological factors, can fluctuate depending on the product and how consumers purchase FMCG goods. The purpose of this article is to determine the elements that influence consumers' purchasing decisions for fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG). A questionnaire was used to gather the study's data, and the results were conceptually presented. The study shows that place, product, price, advertising, and physiological and psychological aspects all have a significant impact on consumer behavior. But the impact of these variables varies from product to product as well. (Vibhuti *et al.*, 2019) ^[12].

This study explores the factors influencing consumer buying behaviour in the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector, focusing on a study conducted in Trichy District. It emphasises on the multidimensional nature of buying decisions and highlights the importance of understanding consumer habits, attitudes, and motivations for effective marketing strategies. The research concludes that value consciousness significantly impacts consumer buying behaviour, providing insights for business houses to enhance their strategies (Gopinath, n.d.).

Objective of the study

- To study the most commonly used Social media among the Marketers/customers.
- To study the influence of social media on consumer buying decision making process.

Background of the Study

Convenience: Most of the consumers are switching to buy goods on social media platforms since they have less time dedicated to shopping, this has resulted in looking for more ways which can save time and also meet the requirements of the customer intended to shop. According to this paper convenience is a critical factor in the interaction between consumer and providers. Consumers are more likely to engage themselves in impulsive buying behavior if everything is conveniently and easily available You Lina *et al.* (2022) [5].

Financial Risk: Consumers consider financial risk while determining whether to buy something. Financial risk may be a significant worry when purchasing online because customers pay for goods and services they are unable to physically inspect. Financial risk are dangerous because they can change consumer behavior and perceptions. Customers' online buying habits are significantly reduced when they suffer any kind of financial loss as a result of a

product's subpar quality, failure to live up to expectations, or credit card fraud. Stated that the uncertainty surrounding e-commerce websites may increase the impression of time risk. Jabeen *et al.*, (2024) [8].

Time Risk: Time spent on the purchase of a product and the time wasted in the case of a poor product or service choice is the definition of time risk. This includes the time needed to locate a suitable website, do informational research, and complete the transaction. Customers are dissatisfied when there are delays in receiving the product, which results in lost time, is often associated with time risk. Consumers are more inclined to stick with companies that provide prompt, excellent customer service

Brand Awareness

Brand Awareness plays a crucial role in influencing consumer behaviour as brand awareness helps consumers recall brand names during purchase decisions. It has also been observed that customers purchase from brands they recognise and feel confident about. When a brand is well known to a customer, they directly purchase from that brand, thereby simplifying their decision-making process. Customer Loyalty is driven by positive experiences with the brand and consumers possess the notion that familiar brands offer high quality goods (Nibsaiya, n.d.).

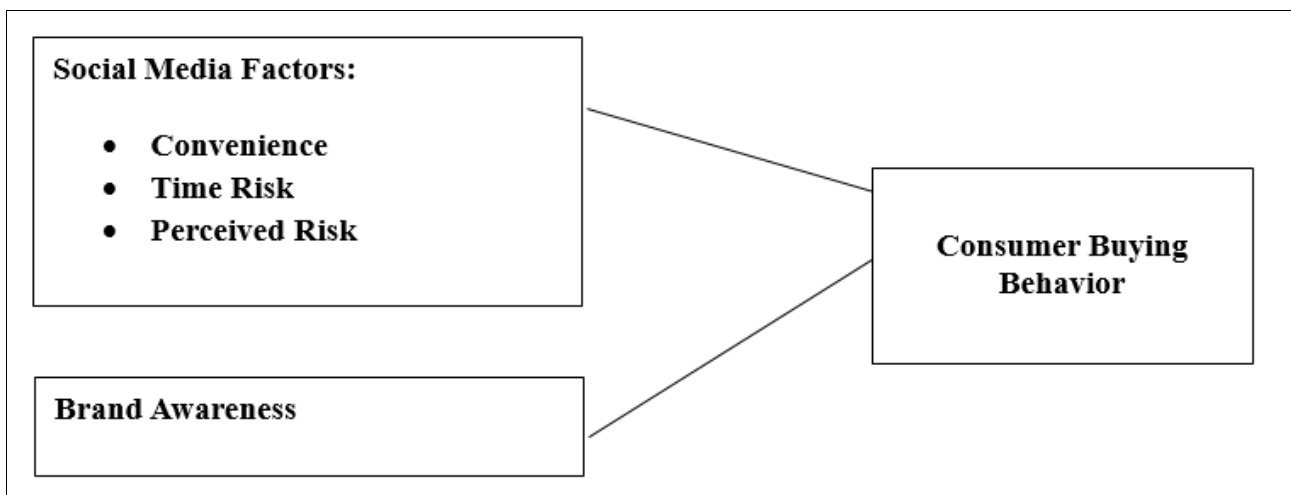


Fig 1: Conceptual Framework

Data & Sample: The data was collected from correspondents who are active social media users ranging in the age group of 18 yrs - 44 yrs, data was collected through

a structured questionnaire using google forms and the collected data was further analyzed using various statistical tools.

Table 1: Data Analysis

Age Distribution		
Criteria	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Under 18	4	0.022
18Yrs-24Yrs	174	0.956
25 yrs - 34 yrs	2	0.011
35 yrs - 44 yrs	2	0.011

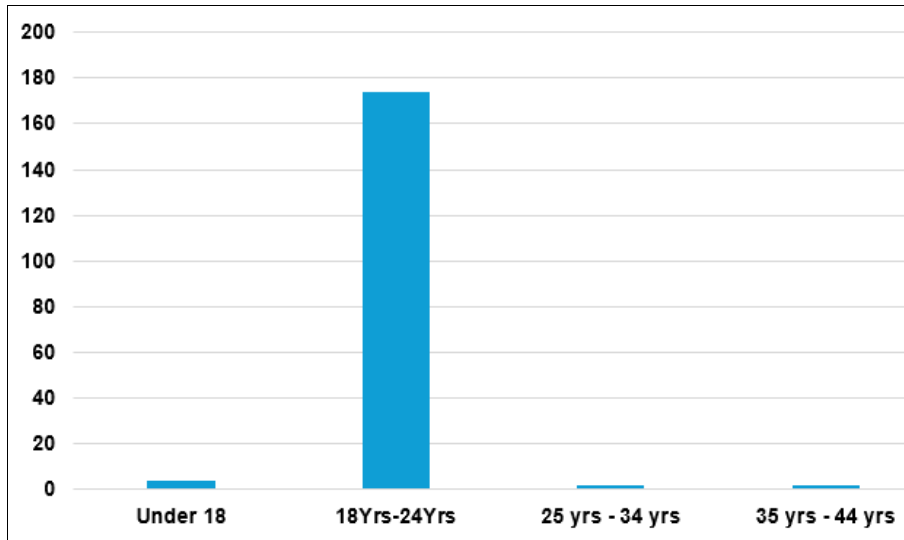


Fig 2: Age distribution of Respondents

According to survey data, the majority of respondents-95.6%-are in the 18-24 age range, which dominates the customer journey. This implies that social media plays a major role in influencing young customers' purchase decisions. They probably use websites like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok to find new products, read reviews, and decide what to buy.

In contrast, the under-18 age group makes up only 2.2% of the responses, and the 25-34 and 35-44 age groups each make up just 1.1%. Due to varying buying patterns, trust

issues, or platform preferences, this discrepancy suggests that older customers use social media less for shopping-related purposes.

Table 2: Gender

Criteria	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Male	84	46.2
Female	98	53.8

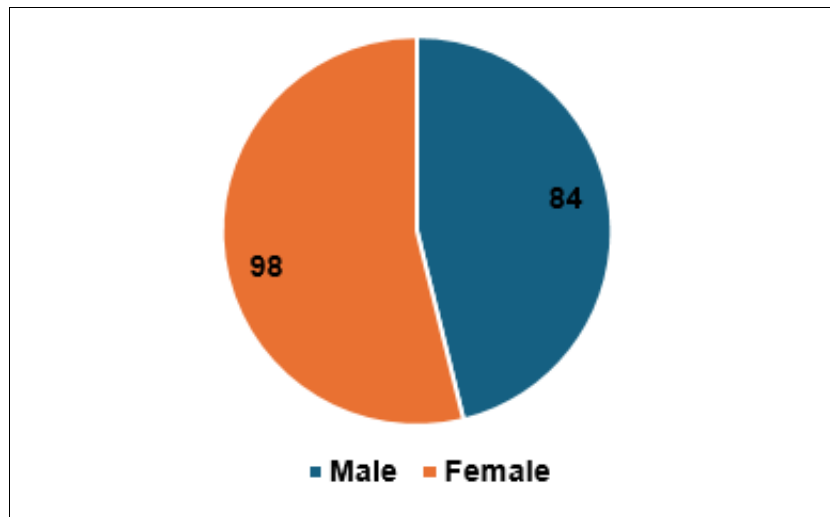


Fig 3: Gender wise distribution

With 53.8% identifying as female and 46.2% as male, the respondents' gender distribution reveals a slight female majority. This implies that women may be more likely to engage in social media-driven buying habits, maybe making more active use of Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok to find products, read reviews, and make purchases.

The pattern indicates that digital marketing tactics,

influencer endorsements, and social media ads may have a greater impact on female customers, even though the difference is not very great. Ad targeting, interaction tactics, and content production should all take gender-based preferences into account for brands trying to maximize their social commerce strategy.

Table 3: How often do you use social media for shopping-related activities (e.g., discovering new products, reading reviews, etc.)

Criteria	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Never	4	2.20
Occasionally	80	43.96
Rarely	34	18.68
Very Frequently	64	35.16

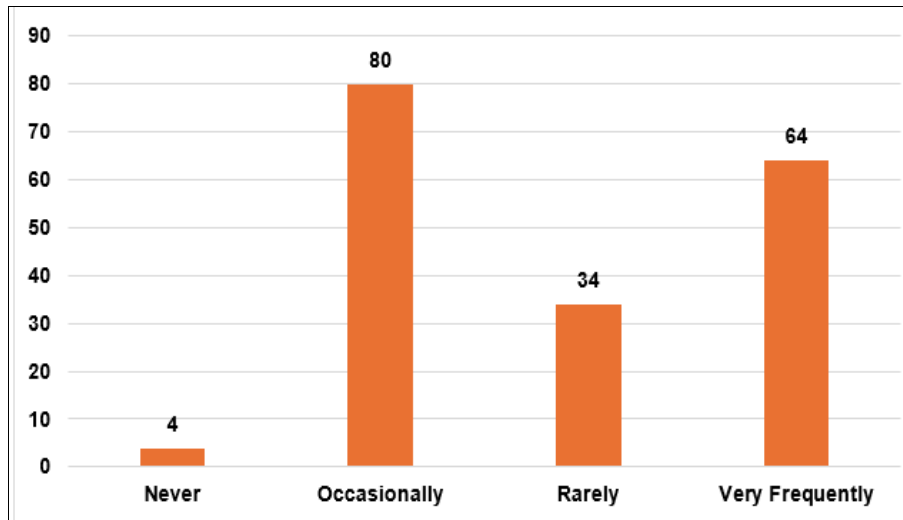


Fig 4: How often do you use social media for shopping-related activities (e.g., discovering new products, reading reviews, etc).

A sizable majority of customers use social media for shopping-related purposes, according to the research, at different degrees. The majority of respondents (43.96%) use social media occasionally, with 35.16% using it quite regularly. This suggests that almost 80% of respondents utilize social media platforms when making purchases. Even fewer people (2.20%) say they never use social media for shopping, while a smaller portion (18.68%) say they use it infrequently. This demonstrates that even if social media plays a significant role in consumer decisions, some shoppers may still rely on conventional means or other sources to find products.

The findings highlight how social media is increasingly influencing consumer behavior, making it an essential tool for companies looking to increase conversion rates, consumer trust, and brand visibility.

Table 4: When considering a purchase how much do you rely on product recommendations or advertisement on social media

Criteria	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Not at All	4	2.20
Not Much	52	28.57
Some What	88	48.35
Very Much	38	20.88

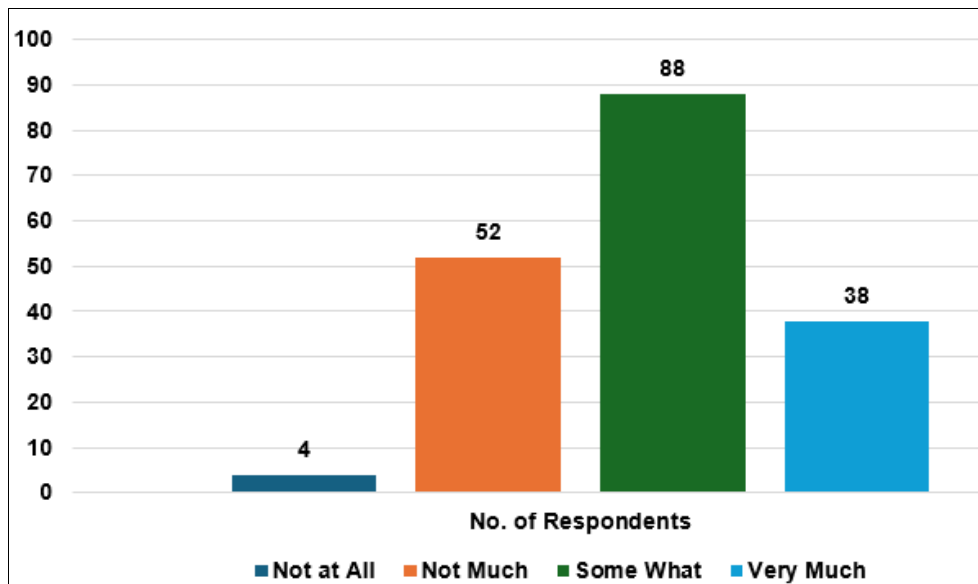


Fig 5: When considering a purchase how much do you rely on product recommendations or advertisement on social media

The majority of consumers, according to the study, base their purchasing decisions on suggestions and ads from social media. According to the survey, 20.88% of participants said they rely on social media suggestions "Very Much," and 48.35% said they rely on them "Somewhat." This indicates that social media is regarded as an influential aspect in the shopping process by about 70% of consumers. However, 28.57% of respondents said they relied "Not Much" on recommendations from social media, while only 2.20 percent said they don't rely on them at all. This shows

that even if social media has a big influence on consumer choices, some consumers still prefer to investigate and validate products using other sources. According to the research, social media has a significant impact on consumer purchases, since the majority of purchasers at least take advertisements and suggestions into account before making a purchase. Businesses should concentrate on establishing trust through genuine content, client endorsements, and well-thought-out influencer partnerships in order to optimize engagement and conversions.

Table 5: When considering a purchase how much do you rely on product recommendations or advertisement on social media

Criteria	No. of Respondents	Percentage
No	70	38.461538
Yes	112	61.538462

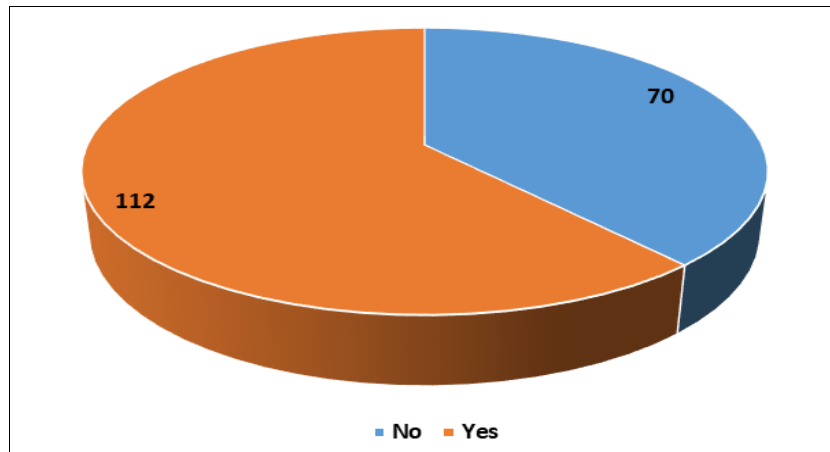


Fig 6: When considering a purchase how much do you rely on product recommendations or advertisement on social media No. of Respondents

61.54% of respondents, according to the research, rely on social media marketing and recommendations when making a purchase decision, compared to 38.46% who do not. According to this, social media is seen by most customers as a reliable resource for product research, validation, and discovery. The vast majority of consumers today rely on advertisements and suggestions, making social media an essential part of their decision-making process. To increase sales and engagement, businesses must carefully use digital marketing. However, marketers should also look into other strategies to establish credibility and trust outside of social

media platforms, given that a significant 38.46% of consumers are still unclear.

Table 6: Do you feel that using social media to shop saves time compared to traditional shopping methods

Criteria	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Agree	64	35.16
Strongly Agree	32	17.58
Neutral	72	39.56
Disagree	10	5.49
Strongly Disagree	4	2.20

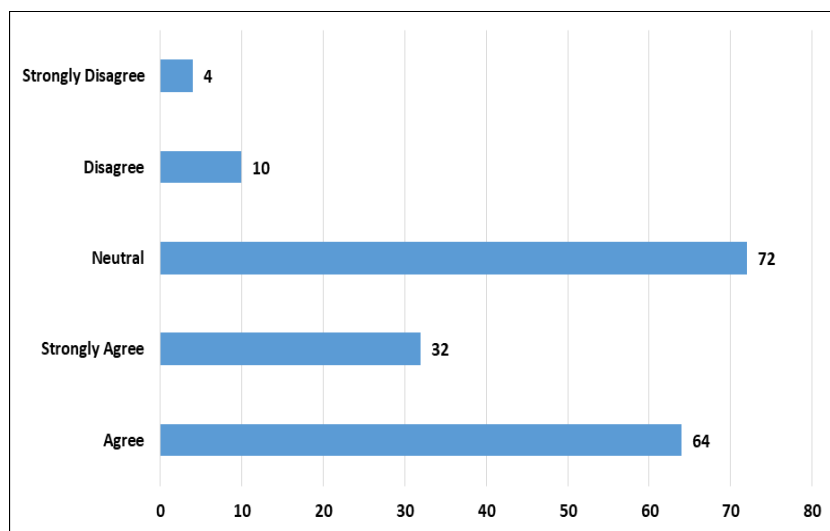


Fig 7: Do you feel that using social media to shop saves time compared to traditional shopping methods No. of Respondents

Regarding whether social media shopping saves time over traditional shopping, the data reveals conflicting opinions. Of those surveyed, 52.74% agree or strongly agree that social media shopping saves time, 39.56% are neutral, and a tiny percentage (7.69%) disagree. Brands ought to take advantage of social media's convenience by making the most of quick checkout options, unambiguous product descriptions, and interactive shopping experiences. For neutral consumers, creating confidence through clear reviews, safe payment choices, and seamless customer

assistance can help shift perceptions. Address concerns of doubters by strengthening the return/refund policies, product legitimacy, and delivery efficiency. While a majority of consumers recognize social media shopping as time-saving, a large neutral segment suggests room for improvement. Brands must focus on enhancing user trust, streamlining the shopping experience, and addressing potential concerns to convert more hesitant shoppers into active buyers.

Table 7: In your opinion, does social media help you make quicker purchasing decisions compared to traditional methods

Criteria	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Agree	64	35.16
Strongly Agree	20	10.99
Neutral	74	40.66
Disagree	18	9.89
Strongly Disagree	6	3.30

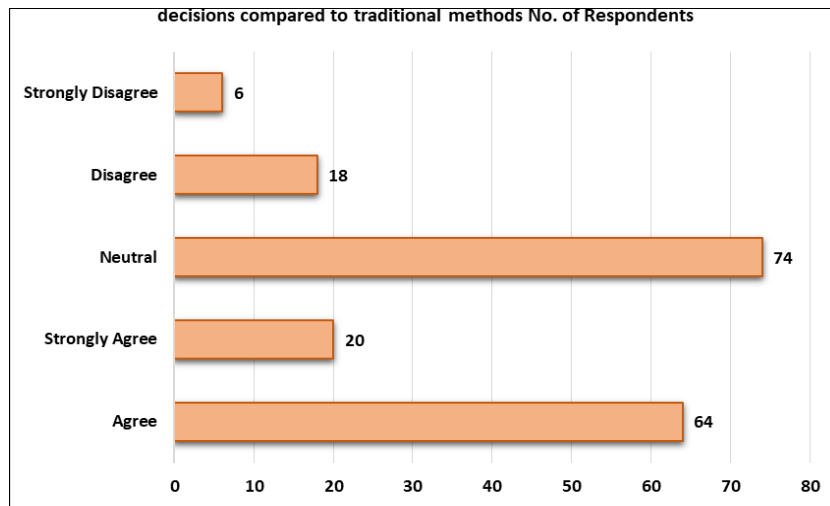


Fig 8: In your opinion, does social media help you make quicker purchasing decisions compared to traditional methods No. of Respondents

The information shows a range of consumer opinions regarding whether social media, as opposed to more conventional shopping methods, speeds up the decision-making process. Although a sizable neutral group (40.66%) indicates hesitancy or mixed experiences, a noteworthy 46.15% (Agree + Strongly Agree) think social media speeds up decision-making. Improving Product Transparency: To assist customers in making prompt, well-informed decisions, brands should offer information that is lucid, succinct, and reliable. Making Use of Reviews & Influencers: Influencer recommendations and real user-generated content can boost confidence and lessen hesitancy to buy. Simplifying the Purchase Process: Tools such as in-

app shopping, time-limited deals, and AI-powered suggestions can help turn apprehensive or neutral customers into speedy purchases.

Table 8: How much do you value time-saving features (e.g., easy navigation, direct purchase options) when shopping via social media?

Criteria	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Neutral	68	37.36
Not at All	2	1.10
Not Much	16	8.79
Some What	58	31.87
Very Much	38	20.88

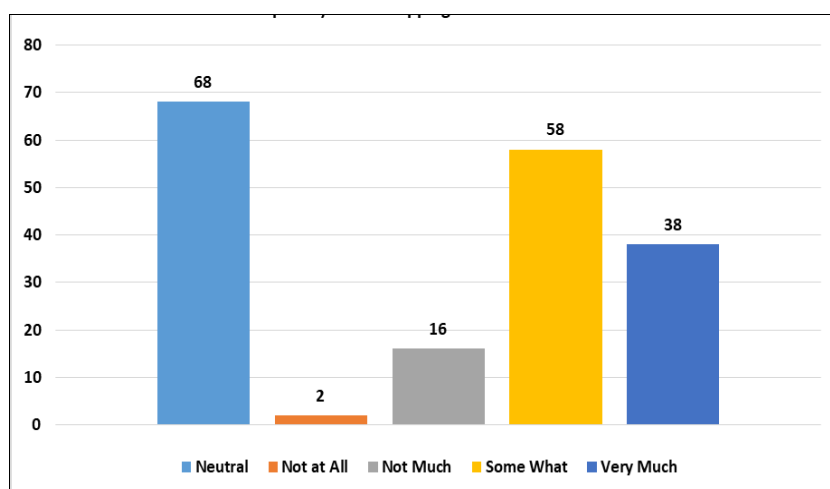


Fig 9: How much do you value time-saving features (e.g., easy navigation, direct purchase options) when shopping via social media?

While a sizable portion (52.75%) value time-saving features like easy navigation and direct purchase options when shopping on social media, a sizable neutral group (37.36%) expresses uncertainty or mixed opinions. Optimize Checkout Processes: Reducing friction in the buying journey, like auto-fill payment details or in-app purchases,

could increase conversion rates. Convert Neutral Consumers: By educating users about the convenience and security of time-saving features, hesitant shoppers may be persuaded to value these options more. A sizable neutral segment indicates a chance for brands to further promote the advantages of efficiency.

Table 9: Do you feel there is a risk in purchasing products you see promoted on social media?

Criteria	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Im not Sure	44	24.18
No	14	7.69
Yes	124	68.13

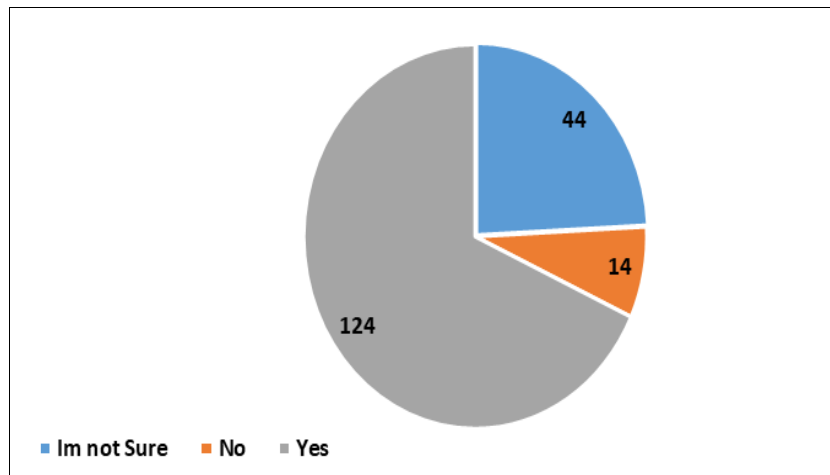


Fig 10: Do you feel there is a risk in purchasing products you see promoted on social media? No. of Respondents

The information demonstrates how consumers are worried about the dangers of buying goods that are promoted on social media. A sizable majority (68.13%) think there is a risk, compared to a smaller percentage who are unsure (24.18%) and only 7.69% who think there is none.

Strategic Consequences for Companies: Boost Transparency: To build confidence, brands should offer thorough product descriptions, validated client testimonials, and unambiguous return policies. Make Use of User-

Generated Content and Influencers: Consumer skepticism might be allayed by collaborating with reliable influencers and displaying authentic client endorsements. Use safe payment methods: Providing buyer protection guidelines and reliable payment methods can boost consumer confidence when making purchases. Talk about consumer education: Uncertainty can be decreased by offering information on how to identify phony promotions, safe buying techniques, and reliable sellers.

Table 10: What factors increase your perception of risk when purchasing via social media?

Criteria	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Concerns over product quality	36	19.78
Fear of fraud or scams	44	24.18
Fear of product not meeting expectation	76	41.76
Unclear product information	12	6.59
Others	14	7.69

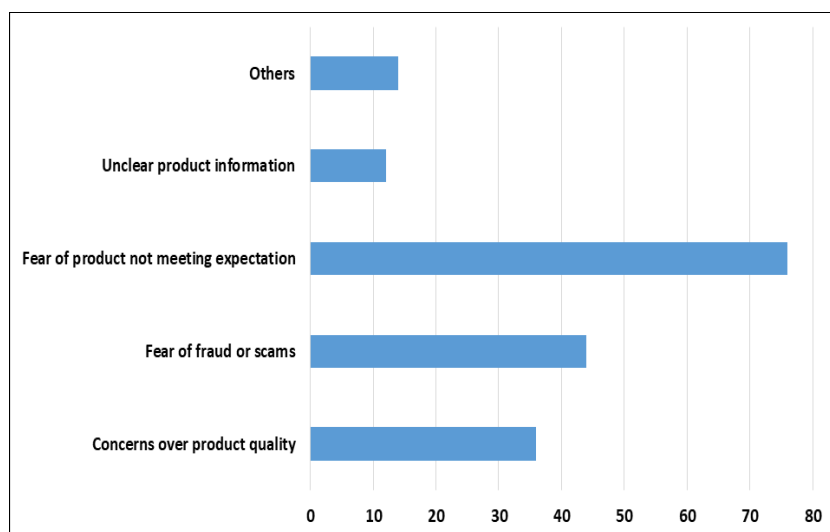


Fig 11: What factors increase your perception of risk when purchasing via social media?

According to the study, there are several major issues that deter people from making purchases on social media. Product quality (19.78%) and fraud/scams (24.18%) are the

next most common concerns, followed by the possibility that the product would fall short of expectations (41.76%). Customers worry that the product they view online could

not be the same as what they buy. Nearly 25% of respondents are concerned about fraud, including fake goods, phony discounts that trick customers, and dishonest sellers who vanish after getting paid. In social media commerce, it is essential to establish transparency and trust. Conversion rates can rise and consumer confidence can be bolstered by addressing concerns about fraud, product quality, and deceptive marketing.

Conclusion and scope for further study

In conclusion, the data highlights how social media is increasingly influencing consumer buying habits, particularly among younger audiences. The vast majority of responders (95.6%) are between the ages of 18 and 24, showing the important influence social media has on their purchasing choices. The fact that there are somewhat more female respondents than male participants raises the possibility that women's purchasing patterns are influenced by social media. Approximately 80% of consumers frequently use social media for shopping-related purposes, and many of them base their selections on product recommendations and ads. Even though social media has been recognized as a time-saving and decision-accelerating tool, a sizable portion of consumers continue to voice worries about the hazards of making purchases using these platforms, specifically with relation to fraud, disappointed expectations, and product quality. A noteworthy 68.13% of respondents acknowledged possible risks associated with social media buying, which reflects these worries.

This data highlights how crucial it is for companies to establish trust via openness, unambiguous product information, and trustworthy consumer feedback. In order to increase engagement and sales, digital marketing tactics should concentrate on resolving consumer concerns around fraud and quality while utilizing social media's convenience and influence. Businesses can improve their social commerce initiatives by improving the buying experience, especially for hesitant and indifferent customers.

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