

## SOCIAL MEDIA RESHAPING CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR IN INDIA

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### ABSTRACT

*In the modern era, the use of Social media platforms by consumers has mostly increased and consequently it has extensively impacted consumers in numerous ways. There are many social media platforms that influence consumer behaviour. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and whatsapp etc. is having many features which attract and influence consumers. Social media has become a strong and effective tool used by marketers to engage consumers in various activities to influence their buying behaviour. Last decade in India has seen enormous growth in social media users. Many factors have contributed to this rise in numbers like, advancements in technology, government initiatives, internet availability across nation and increase in number of mobile users etc. This has resulted in change in consumers' perceptions, attitude and purchase behaviour. The freedom of interaction among consumers themselves and marketers has brought about huge transformation in consumer behaviour. The objective of this study is to understand social media and impact of social media on consumer behaviour in India.*

**Keywords:** Social Media Marketing, Consumer Behaviour, Business Strategy, Mobile Users, Marketers.

### Introduction

#### Social Media: Indian Perspective

Social media usage in India during last few years has increased tremendously and has led to huge transformations in the way people communicate, share, buy and sell products and services. The total number of social media users reported in 2021 is a whopping 448 million which is over 32% of the total population of India (Fig.1). Many factors have contributed to this rise in numbers like, advancements in technology, government initiatives, internet availability across nation and increase in number of mobile users etc. Marketers are well aware of this shift brought about by social media and are quickly adapting to the changed scenario. Social media marketing is now an integral component of the overall marketing strategies formulated by marketers. Most of the organizations, whether big or small, have made their presence on social media platforms like facebook, instagram, twitter and other digital media.



**Figure 1: Social Media Users in India**

(Source: <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-india>)

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Social media is an umbrella term used to describe various platforms that enable individuals to connect and communicate with each other, express their opinions, share their views and experiences and hence create and disseminate information through these platforms. Solis (2007) defined social media as “[...] online tools that people use to share content, profiles, opinions, insights, experiences, perspectives and media itself, thus facilitating conversations and interaction online between groups of people.”

Hoffman et al. (2013) provided another definition of social media “The set of web-based and mobile tools and applications that allow people to create (consume) content that can be consumed (created) by others and which enables and facilitates connections” Social media marketing has become the most effective and influential tool used by marketers to reach out to their customers. Social media has replaced the traditional marketing methods in many ways and has provided new avenues for marketers to engage consumers in effective communication. Social media has transformed the channels, content and ways that marketers and consumers used to communicate with each other. Among the social media platforms used in India, Youtube is the most used platform, followed by facebook, whatsapp, instagram and twitter (Fig.2).

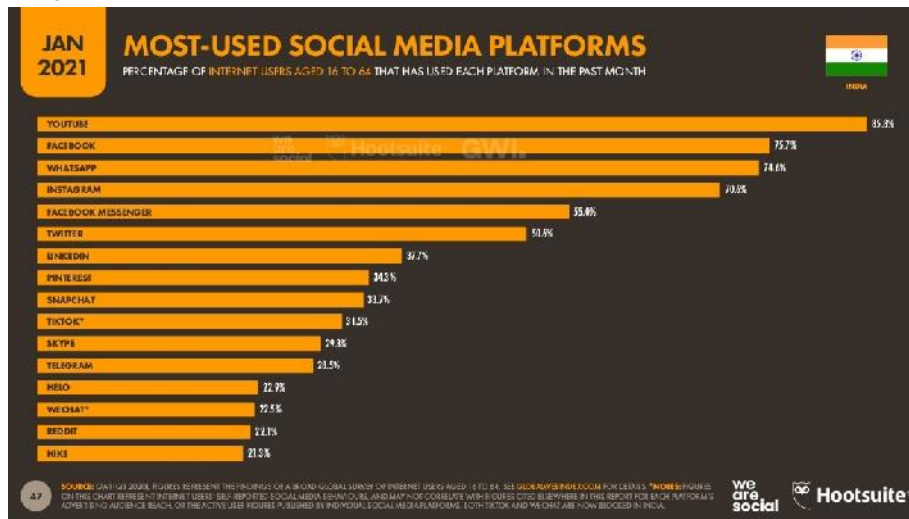


Figure 2: Most Used Social Media Platforms in India

(Source: <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-india>)

**Consumer Behaviour**

Consumer behaviour is the behaviour exhibited by individuals during the purchase journey. This behaviour is governed by various factors such as, demographic factors, geographic factors, psychological factor, personal factors and behavioural factors. All of these factors have combined impact on consumers. Study of consumer behaviour is very critical for marketers to ensure success of their products and to build their brand in the market. Blackwell et al. (2006) defined consumer behaviour as “Consumer Behaviour is defined as the activities people undertake when obtaining, consuming and disposing of products and services.”

According to Solomon (2013) “Consumer Behaviour is the study of the processes involved when individuals or groups select, purchase, use or dispose products, services, ideas or experiences to satisfy needs and desires.” Consumers go through a series of stages during their purchase journey which is called consumer decision making process. Various researchers have defined this process in order to understand and analyse the way consumers behave during pre purchase, purchase and post purchase stages of decision making.



Figure 3: Consumer Decision Making Process (Silvermann, 2001)

### Problem Recognition

When an individual recognizes considerable difference between the desired and actual value derived from product or service that he is presently consuming, it gives rise to problem recognition. This triggers an individual to purchase products that can fill this gap and hence undertake decision making process. A need can be aroused due to both internal or external factors.

### Search for Information

An individual before making a purchase, acquires complete information related to the product he intends buy. A consumer is interested in knowing the available options, their price, quality, different variables available and more such information. This knowledge can be acquired through many sources like advertisements, brochures, magazines, newspapers and very prevalent source in present times is digital media. Various social media platforms are available for a consumer to get updated information about a product or a service.

### Evaluation of Alternatives

After collecting information regarding various options that are available for a consumer, he evaluates these options. Based on consumer's need, previous experiences, attitude and motives an individual makes evaluation to make final decision regarding purchase of a product or service. Social media plays a critical role as consumers now consider likes, reviews and ratings by their peers and other consumers for making evaluation. Any negative review can discourage a consumer for purchasing a product. Hence marketers should make an effort to spread positive word of mouth on their social media platforms.

### Purchase Decision

Consumers after carefully evaluating various available options, decide to make purchase or to delay the decision. This stage is the actual action oriented stage, where the consumer decides whether or not to go ahead with making purchase of a particular product or a service. Social media platforms provide numerous convenient options for consumers to make purchase and payment that encourage them to buy products and services both online and offline.

### Post- Purchase Behaviour

The consumer feels satisfied or dissatisfied based on the experience after consuming the product. This stage determines whether consumer will adapt the product and repurchase it or not. A satisfied consumer will not only repurchase the product himself but will also recommend it to others. Social media provide effective platforms for a consumer to express his satisfaction or dissatisfaction with his friends and other consumers.

### Paradigm Shift in Consumer Behaviour

Digital media has influenced every industry including retail, food, travel, apparel, electronics and furniture. Social media influences the communication ways between marketers and buyers. Various social media platforms influence the consumers significantly in their purchase decision. The information is no longer controlled by marketers. User generated content is now mostly referred by consumers to get information. Social media enables consumers to search the product, get detailed information, compare products, view the reviews and ratings before making purchase of a product or service. Consumer behavior analysis has become a complex process for marketers as most consumers nowadays use digital media for making purchase decisions. Hence it has become necessary for marketers to analyse the influence of social media marketing on consumer behaviour.



**Figure 4: Ecommerce Activity Overview in India**

(Source: <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-india>)

According to a study consumers use social media platforms during all three stages of decision making (pre- purchase stage, purchase stage and post- purchase stage). Figure 3 shows the data of consumers using digital platforms for searching information online, visiting online retail store or purchasing product online. 79.3% consumers used digital media to search for information related to product or service. 95.3% consumers visited online retail store before making a purchase. 76.7% consumers used digital media to make purchase of a product online. These statistics clearly show that digital media has made significantly positive impact on consumer behaviour.

### Conclusion

The present study explores the indispensable role that social media marketing has gained in past few years. Almost all kinds of businesses have made their presence on social media to communicate with their customers and engage them throughout their purchase journey. Consumers and marketers use various social media platforms to attract consumers and influence their preferences. Various studies are being conducted by marketers to understand the transformed consumer behaviour to efficiently formulate effective marketing strategies. Social media platforms are extensively used by both marketers and consumers to share their views and experiences about products and services used by them. With access to nebulous content online at the click of a button, consumers have become more powerful and it has posed challenge for marketers to turn every opportunity in their favour. Thus, by integrating social media marketing with the traditional marketing strategies used by marketers, companies can pave way for a bright future.

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