



CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the impact of social media on consumer behaviour, the factors influencing online purchasing decisions, the role of influencers, emerging trends, challenges, and future implications for businesses and consumers.

This article delves into the influence of social media on consumer behaviour, factors driving online shopping choices, the influence of influencers, emerging trends, issues and future prospects for businesses and consumers. Understanding behaviour includes the psychological, socio-cultural, economic factors that affect customers' buying behaviour. In the past, consumer purchasing decisions were made based on advertisements, word-of-mouth recommendations, and their own experiences. But social media has added a new layer to the decision-making process. The consumer decision making process was traditionally a five-step process: 1. Problem Recognition 2. Information Search 3. Evaluation of Alternatives 4. Purchase Decision 5. Post-Purchase Behaviour All of these stages are impacted by the use of social media, with a quick way to get information, reviews, and recommendations. People are exposed to content online and learn what they need, then research products online, read reviews about them online, buy them online via social commerce and post their feedback online once they have purchased them.

Keywords: Social media, User Generated Content, Customer Perception, FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), Social Proof, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM).

INTRODUCTION

Social media has changed the way people interact, communicate and make purchasing decisions. Purchasing was traditionally a phenomenon of needs and wants. Need for a core product, capable of solving basic needs was the main priority. Some time ago, it was believed that consumers would act a certain way in buying products and it was expressed by many marketers and philosophers. But since the advent of many social media portals the pattern of buying has become unpredictable. The Instagram, X, Facebook, and YouTube platforms have become a part of everyday life and have impacted not only social relations, but also consumer behaviour. With short duration video contents (e.g., Reels) and custom AI algorithms, this results in quicker path-to-purchases and more impulsive purchases. Consumers have a public forum on social media to offer their impressions and opinions regarding the expectation that brands will, at least, be more responsive, transparent and ethics based. As long as they are authentic, consumers trust an authentic recommendation more than conventional brand advertising and value recommendations based on the perspectives of peers and relatives and trusted creators. With better informed, connected and influenced consumers than ever before, social media is a powerful instrument that can influence market trends and business decisions.

Evolution of Social Media and Consumer Behaviour

Social media has revolutionized the entire marketing process. Traditionally, communication was mainly one-sided, with businesses broadcasting messages on television, newspapers and radio. There were not many avenues for consumer input or engagement. Nowadays, social media allows two-way communication. Consumers can leave a written response on an advertisement, communicate with a company's customer service, engage with a discussion, and generate content about brands. This has given consumers more power and less control to the companies' brand narrative. This has only been further driven by the growth of smartphones and high-speed network connections. Social media is a process that never ends – social networks are accessible by consumers anytime and anywhere. As such, social media is a key determinant of awareness, preferences, attitudes and purchasing behaviour.

Factors Influencing Consumer Behaviour on Social Media

- Social media influence people are impacted by the thoughts and behaviour of others. This is magnified by social media platforms, which enable users to see what their friends, family, or online communities prefer, what they buy, and how they experience it. Social proof includes likes, shares, comments and recommendations. Consumers are likely to trust and want a product they see others endorsing. Positive peer feedback can have a large impact on purchase intent.
- Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) Electronic word-of-mouth is the written feedback that comes from online reviews, ratings, information and discussion on products and services. eWOM is different to conventional advertising as consumer-to-consumer information is generally believed to be more credible. Platforms such as Google Reviews, Amazon reviews, and social media comments play a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions. Positive reviews can help drive sales; negative reviews can negative the brand's reputation. People often take around web based reviews before they buy. The large portion of buyers who take online reviews as seriously as they take suggestions from friends and family is something that is consistently seen in research.
- Influencer marketing today influencers have become major influencers within the digital space. These people have a lot of social media followers and can drive sales for that audience. From celebrities to niche content creators including fashion, fitness, tech, travel, beauty and gaming, these are influencers. They tend to be more personable and credible than standard ads. Consumers can see the influencer as an expert and thus trust them, or they feel like they are on their level and share

their lifestyle and values. Influencers are becoming the preferred choice for brands looking to target specific audiences and build trust.

- **Personalisation and targeted advertising.** These social media platforms gather large volumes of information about the user, such as his/her interests, purchasing history, browsing patterns, and demographics. The information generated from the customers help corporates to design the products according to the individual's taste and preferences which ultimately helps in products manufactured according to the greater relevance and engagement. People will be more receptive to advertisements that are relevant to their interests and needs. But there have been some concerns regarding privacy and data safety as well.
- **Visual content consumers' purchases are heavily influenced by visual content.** Images, videos, live streams, interactive content can be more effective at capturing attention than text-based communication. Social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, X and YouTube are very visual. The use of high-quality visuals can improve product appeal, show how the product works and establish relationships with the consumer on an emotional level. Product demonstrations, unboxing videos, tutorials and customer testimonies offer useful information to consumers when they are making their buying decisions.

The Role of Social Media in the Consumer Decision Making Process

Social media plays a pivotal role in today's consumer decision-making process. Social media is a huge factor in the modern consumers' decision-making process.

- **Problem Recognition:** Social media presents to people new products, trends, and lifestyles. Awareness of unmet needs or desires is often raised by influencers, ads and user generated content. If a consumer is looking at Instagram, he might see a new skincare product that he has an issue with. This becomes the beginning phase of problem-recognition stage.
- **Information Search:** There is an increasing tendency for consumers to use social media as a source of information. Before identifying the need, they look for reviews, recommendations, and product comparisons. Social media allows for immediate access to different viewpoints, which helps consumers get information they need in a timely fashion and decreases their uncertainty.
- **Evaluation of Alternatives:** Customers review and rate various products and brands, paying attention to price, features, social media presence, and reviews. User-created content is frequently an essential part to the decision-making process for alternatives. During this phase, brands with positive customer reviews and a wide social media presence stand out.
- **Purchase Decision:** From there, many social media channels now have shopping capabilities, which enable customers to buy products without leaving the social media site. Social commerce has made shopping a lot easier, smoother and more convenient. Limited time offers, and some social proof and influencer endorsements can help drive purchases further.
- **Post-Purchase Behaviour:** Consumers will often post feedback on social media sites after buying a product. They can leave reviews, upload pictures, make videos or join in with conversations. Positive experiences can help to build brand loyalty and drive repeat purchases. Bad experiences can be contagious and impact the viewpoint of possible clients. Negative experiences can go viral and impact those who are potential clients.

The family, culture, advertising and experience were typical influences on consumer behaviour. People used to turn to television, newspapers and word of mouth before buying. But today, the decision-making process has become more dynamic and interactive with the advent of social media. Consumers are now looking for information online, performing real-time comparisons, and heavily using peer reviews and digital content. It has narrowed the gap between being aware of a product and buying it, and sometimes decisions have been made more quickly and impulsively.

The Social Media Buying Journey:

Social media has transformed the old sales cycle into a new and continuous sales cycle:

Awareness – Consumers find products via ads, influencer posts and trending content. 2. Curiosity – with engaging visuals, videos and reviews. 3. Evaluation – Consumers read comments, watch reviews, and compare alternatives. 4. Purchase – Direct shopping features – allows for immediate purchases. 5. Post Buying Behaviour – Consumers' feedback, influencing others.

Influence of Social Media Influencers

Consumers' perceptions and preferences are significantly impacted by influencers. Influencers are perceived as more relatable and trustworthy unlike traditional celebrities. Their recommendations appear more genuine and impact the purchasing decisions. For example, product reviews or tutorials on the YouTube channel or short-form videos on Instagram can provide a brand with credibility. Influencers work with companies to impact a particular community and create a connection.

Power of Social Proof

Social proof has become one of the most important and powerful psychological drivers in this digital age. Likes, shares, comments, and reviews work as the key indicators of a product's popularity, reliability and credibility. When consumers witness endorsing a product or service, they are more likely to trust and purchase the same product or service. User generated review and feedback such as customer photos and testimonials, builds relationship and strengthens the overall effect. It creates a sense of community, social and emotional attachments that classical advertising often lacks.

Rise of Impulse Buying and FOMO

The notion of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and its effective commercial application in flash sales has been conceptualized at length in the social media literature. In the context of shopping, FOMO is deployed through the dynamic combination of time-limited offers, the display of diminishing availability and social proof cues that accompany signs that other consumers are actively buying - mimicking the effects of the experience that inaction amounts to losing out both economically as well as socially.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Cummins et al. (2014) carried out one of the original comprehensive reviews by synthesizing more than 900 studies on online consumers' behaviour published from the year of 1993 to 2012. They identified that the internet technology had altered the traditional consumer decision making process significantly as it enabled consumers to have greater access to information and to interact through the internet. The research found that consumers were increasingly leveraging online communities and digital networks prior to deciding to make a purchase.

Rodríguez-Ardura, Martínez-López, and Luna (2010) examined consumer behaviour in the emerging social web environment and observed that social media has transformed consumers from passive recipients of marketing messages into active and responsive participants who create, and share brand related content. Their reviews highlighted the growing significance of online trust, customers' participation, and social interactions in influencing consumers' decisions.

One of the best literature reviews on consumer behaviour in social commerce was conducted by Hajli (2016). After reading the research articles published on the social commerce website, the author suggested an integrative framework to be based on Stimulus – Organism – Response (SOR) model and the decision-making process of the consumers. The review revealed that trust, social support, social presence, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) and perceived usefulness were the key factors that have a significant influence on online purchasing behaviour. The study highlighted that consumers rely on the recommendations and experiences of other users more and more than on advertising.

Bhukya and Paul (2023) did a systematic literature review, both qualitative and quantitative, to study the past 40 years' worth of research on social influence in consumer behaviour. Their conclusions suggested that peer recommendations, influencer marketing, online communities and social norms have a strong influence on consumers' attitude, buying intentions and post purchase behaviour. The authors highlighted that digital interactions have increased informational and normative social influence over offline interactions.

According to Wolf (2023), researchers have found that the behaviour of customers is different on tablet and desktop computers than smartphone. There are some differences in the decision-making processes, impulsive buying and responsiveness to personalized recommendations of mobile users and desktop users. The decision-making processes, the tendency to impulsive buying and the responsiveness to personalized recommendations of mobile users differ from those of desktop users. The review emphasized the need of creating marketing strategies for platforms.

Budiyanto et al. (2023) reviewed 73 studies to understand how social media can affect the interest in purchasing and purchase intentions. They discovered that quantitative research is widely used in the field and that the most significant elements in the online buying behaviour were attention, quality of communication, interaction, convenience and accessibility. The authors recommended the use of qualitative and mixed method approaches more in order to obtain insight into the motivation of the consumers.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following are the objectives of the study:

1. to gain insight into the nature of consumer behaviour and its changes in response to the emergence of social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, X and YouTube.
2. to understand the impact of social media on consumers' decision making process.
3. to explore the influence of influencers and online communities on consumer preferences and purchases.
4. to find out factors leading to buy impulsively and experience Fear of missing out (FOMO) on social media.
5. to suggest strategies for businesses to effectively use social media for influencing consumer behaviour.
6. to provide insights for consumers to make informed and responsible buying in the age of digital era.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study is descriptive and analytical in nature, aims to describe how consumers' behaviour has changed over time with the use of social media platforms like Instagram, X, FB and YouTube, and to analyse the factors influencing these changes.

Data Collection

(a) Primary Data

Primary data is collected directly from respondents using:

- Questionnaire method (Questions related to usage patterns, purchase behaviour, and influence of social media)
- Survey technique targeting social media users

(b) Secondary Data

Secondary data is collected and used from:

- Books, journals, and research papers
- Trusted websites, blogs, and online publications

Sampling Design:

A population size of 202 respondents (adjusted) is used comprising of social media platform users and the convenience method of sampling technique is used.

Variables of the Study

- Independent Variables: Social media usage, influencer impact, advertisements
- Dependent Variables: Consumer buying behaviour, brand preference, impulse buying

Limitations of the Study

The following are the limitations observed during the course of study:

- Limited sample size may not represent the entire population
- Responses may be biased or inaccurate
- Time constraints and limited resources
- Rapid changes in social media trends

Challenges and Ethical Concerns

While there are its benefits, there are also challenges to social media:

- Information Overload – Excessive information and advertisements are being fed to consumers.
- Misleading information- False and fake feedback may lead to wrong buying decision making and also, there are privacy concerns with respect to use of personalised data collection and its usage.
- Addictive Behaviour – When people are constantly engaged in social media they may develop unhealthy consumption habits.
- The challenges illustrate that the marketing process needs to be managed responsibly and that consumer choices need to be informed.

DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

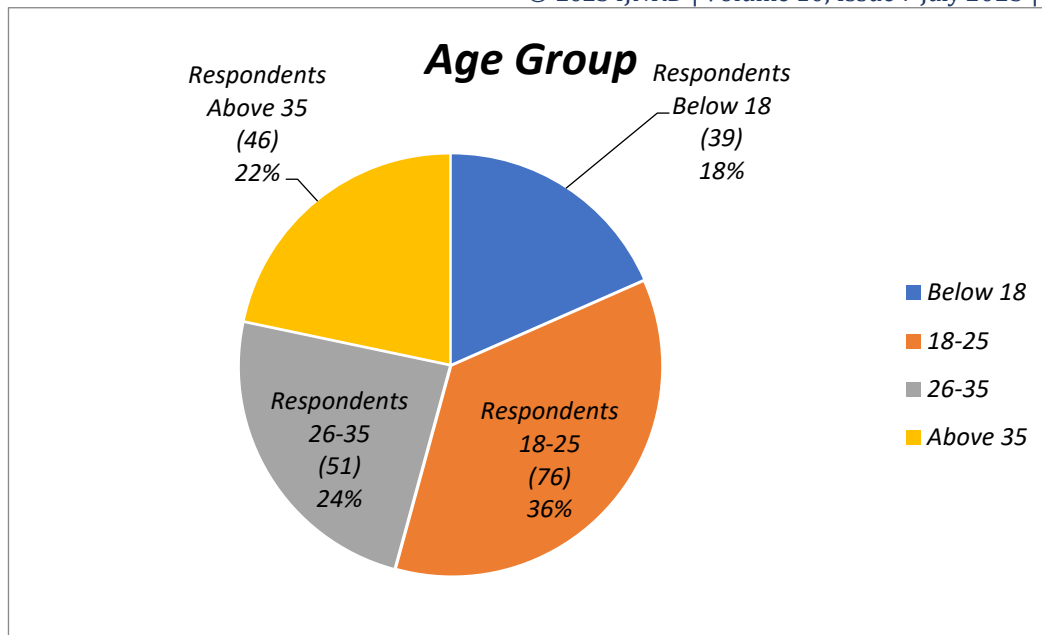
The data was collected from 202 respondents using simple structured questionnaire. consisting of multiple-choice Likert scale questions (e.g., strongly agree to strongly disagree). This is a close-ended questionnaire for easy analysis. Data collected is analysed using the percentage method and depicted through pie charts. These tools will help in identifying trends and patterns in consumer behaviour.

Table 4.1: Age group

Age group	No. of Respondents	%
Below 18	39	18
18-25	76	36
26-35	51	24
Above 35	46	22
Total	212	100

Source: Author Compliance

Table 4.1 shows the age group of respondents. Maximum respondents 76 (36%) belong to the age group of (18-25) years, whereas minimum respondents 39 (18%) belong to below 18 years age group out of total respondents of 212. Further, table depicts that 51 (24%) and 46 (22%) respondents belong to 26-35 years age group and above 35 years age group respectively.



Graph 4.1: Age Group

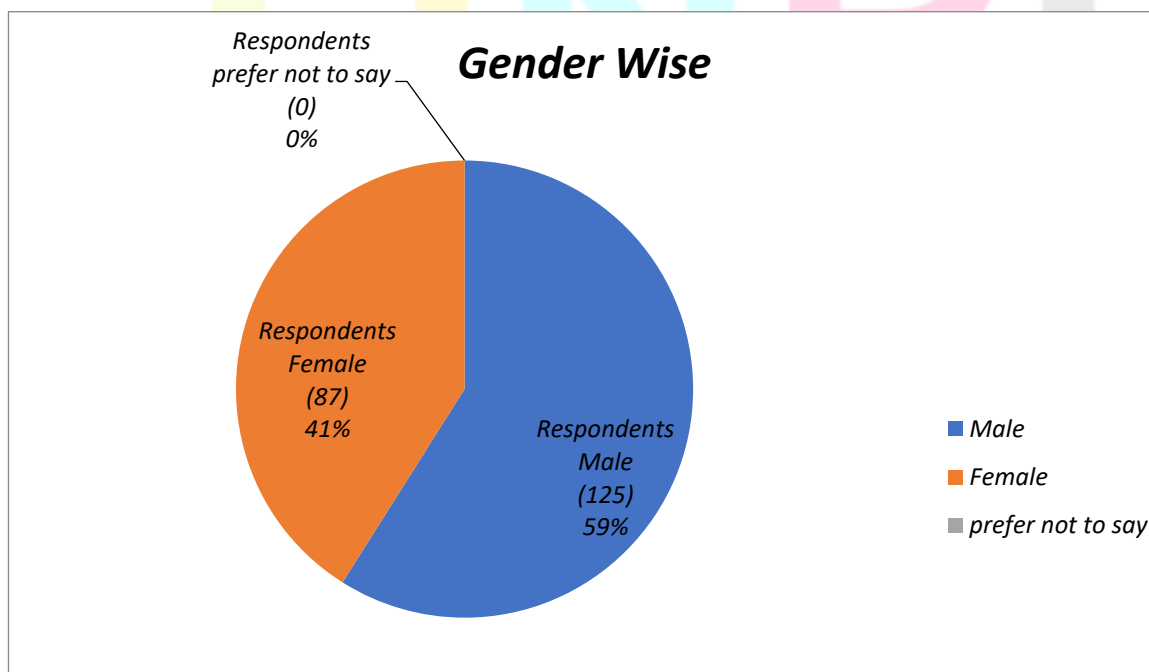
Graph 4.1 depicts the age group of respondents. Blue and Red area depicts the area below the age of 18 years and 18-25 years respectively. Whereas, Grey and Yellow area belong to age group of 26-35 years and above 35 years age group respectively.

Table 4. 2 Gender Wise

Gender	No. of Respondents	%
Male	125	59
Female	87	41
Prefer not to say	0	00
Total	212	100

Source: Author Compliance

Table 4.2 depicts the gender wise respondents. Out of the total 212 respondents 125 belong to Male, whereas 87 belong to female. No one even male and female deny to respond.



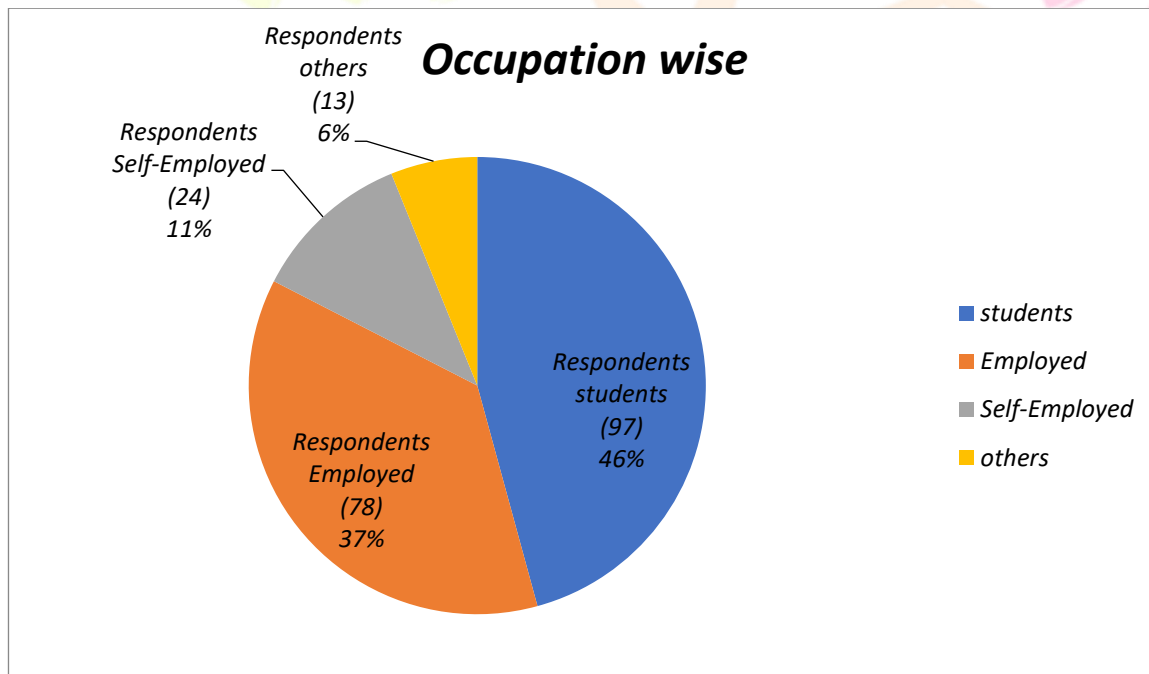
Graph 4.2 depicts the Gender wise respondents. Blue and red area depict the area of male and female respondents respectively. Graph clearly indicates that 59% respondents belong to male, whereas 41% respondents belong to female gender.

Table 4.3: Occupation-Wise

Occupation	No. of Respondents	%
Students	97	46
Employed	78	37
Self-employed	24	11
Others	13	6
total	212	100

Source: Author Compliance

Table 4.3 shows the occupation wise distribution of respondents. Maximum respondents 97(46%) belong to students, whereas minimum respondents 13(6%) belong to other occupations. Further, table depicts that 78 (37%) and 24 (11%) respondents belong to employed and Self-employed occupation.



Graph 4.3: Occupation –Wise Distribution

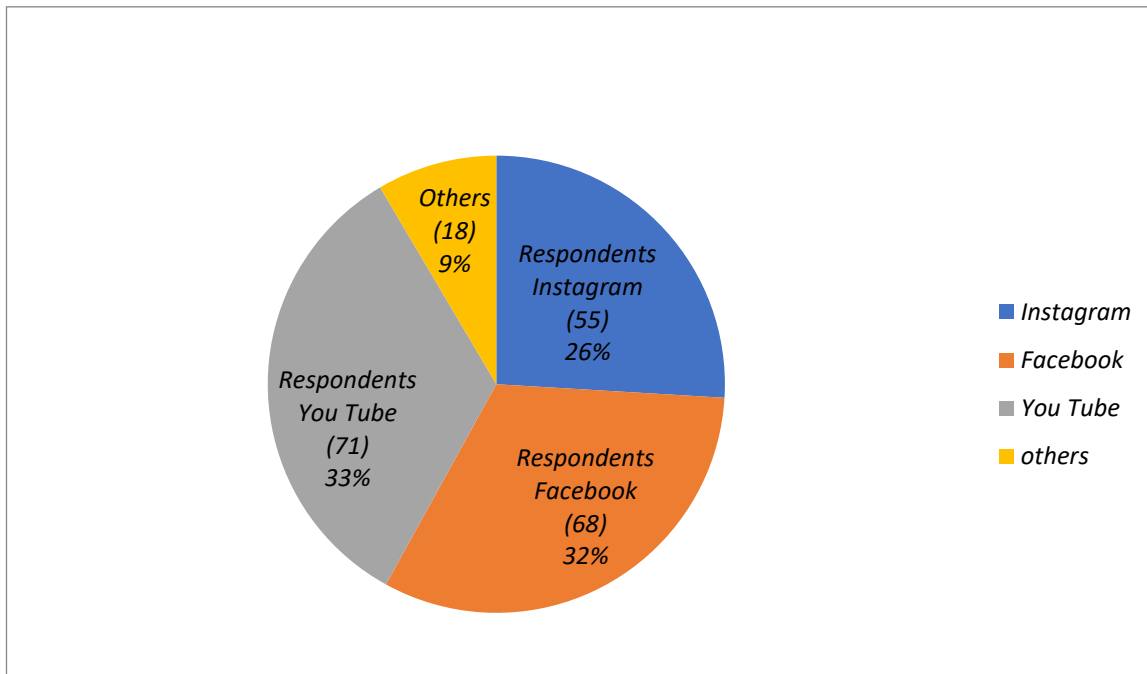
Graph 4.3 depicts the occupation-wise distribution of respondents. Blue and red area depict the area belong to the students and the employed respondents respectively. Whereas, Grey and Yellow area belong to Self-employed and others respondents. Further, graph depicts that maximum respondents belong to students (46%) and minimum respondents belong to others respondents (6%) only.

Table 4.4: Social media platforms used

Social media platforms	No. of Respondents	%
Instagram	55	26
Facebook	68	32
You Tube	71	33
others	18	8
total	212	100

Source: Author Compliance

Table 4.4 shows the social media platforms used by the respondents. Maximum respondents 71 (33%) use you tube platforms, whereas minimum respondents 18 (8%) use other social media platforms. Further, table depicts that 55 (26%) and 68 (32%) respondents use Instagram and Face Book platforms respectively.



Graph 4.4: Social Media Platforms Used

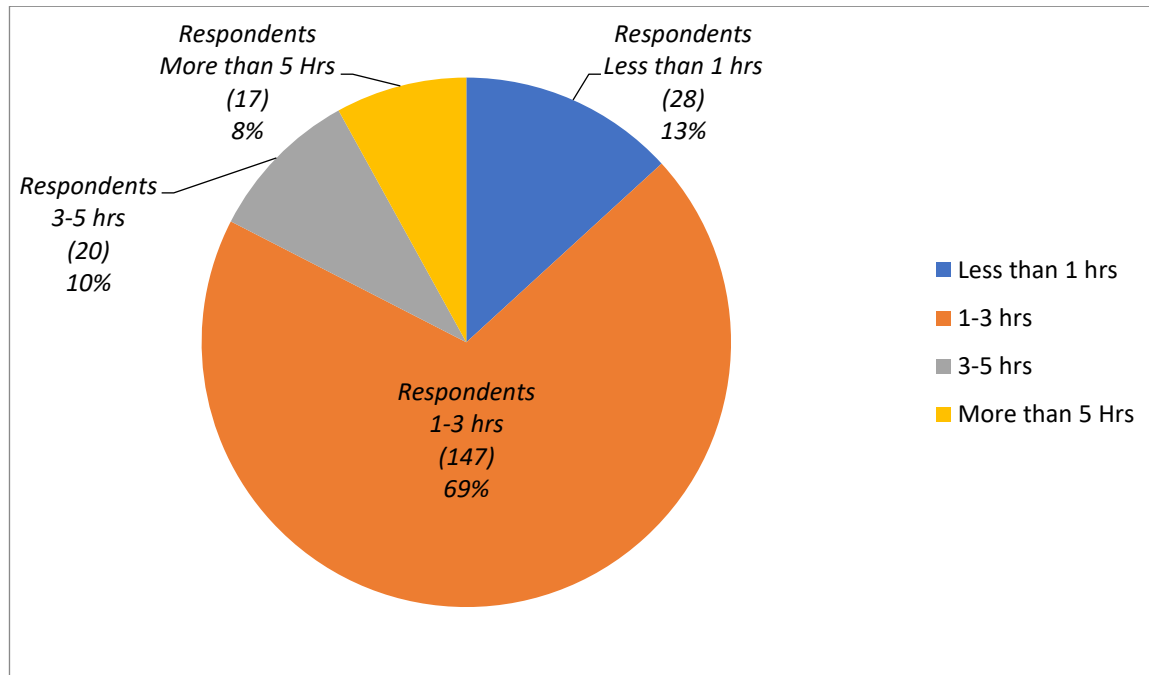
Graph 4.4 depicts the social media platforms used by respondents. Blue and Red area depict the area belong to Instagram and Facebook media used by respondents respectively. Whereas, Grey and Yellow area belong to YouTube and others social media used by respondents respectively. Further, graph depicts that maximum respondents 71 (33%) use YouTube social media platform and minimum respondents 18 (9%) use other social media platforms.

Table 4.5: Time spent daily on social media platforms

Time	No. of Respondents	%
Less than 1 hours	28	13
1-3 hours	147	69
3-5 hours	20	9
More than 5 hours	17	8
Total	212	100

Source: Author Compliance

Table 4.5 shows the time spent by respondents daily on social media platforms. Maximum respondents 147 (69%) spend 1-3 hours on social media platforms, whereas minimum respondents 17 (8%) spend more than 5 hours on social media platforms. Further, table depicts that 28 (13%) and 20 (9%) respondents spend less than 1 hour and 3-5 hours on social media platforms respectively.



Graph 4.5: Time Spent Daily on Social Media Platforms

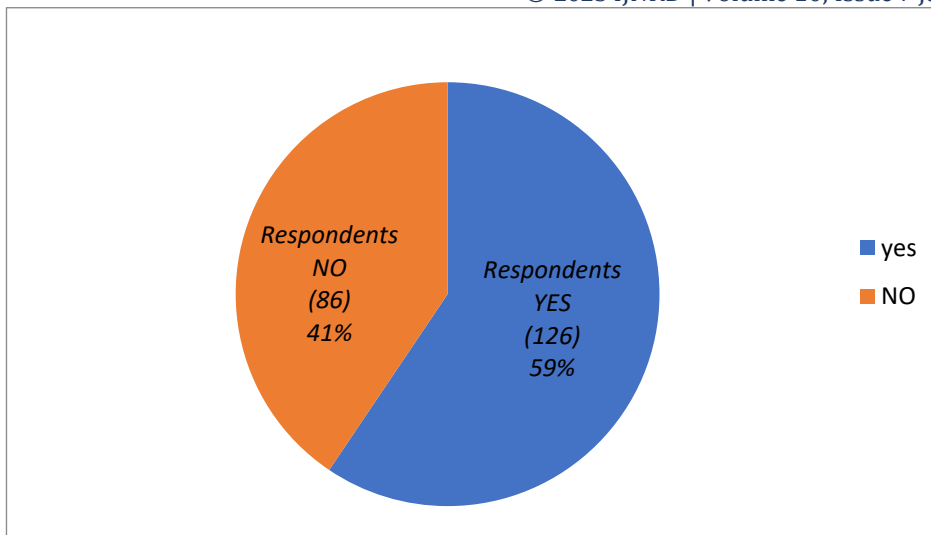
Graph 4.5 depicts the time spent daily on social media platforms by respondents. Blue and Red area belong to 1-3 hours and less than one hour time spent respectively by the respondents on social media platforms. Whereas, Grey and Yellow area belong to 3-5 hours and more than 5 hours' time spent on social media platforms by respondents respectively. Further, graph depicts maximum respondents 147 (69%) spent 1-3 hours on social media platforms, whereas minimum respondents 17 (8%) spent more than 5 hours on social media platforms.

Table 4.6: Product purchased after seeing it on social media

Product purchased	No. of Respondents	%
yes	126	59
No	86	41
Total	212	100

Source: Author Compliance

Table 4.6 depicts the Product purchased after seeing it on social media. Out of 212 respondents 126 (59%) purchased the product, whereas 86 (41%) did not purchase the products.



Graph 4.6: Product purchased after seeing it on social media

Graph 4.6 depicts the Product purchased after seeing it on social media. Blue and Red area depict the YES and NO response of respondents respectively. Graph clearly indicates that 59% respondents say YES to product purchase after seeing it on social media, whereas 41% respondents say NO.

Table 4.7 Purchased decision influence

Purchased decision influenced	No. of Respondents	%
Advertisements	68	32
Influencers	30	14
Reviews and ratings	44	21
Friends/Family	70	33
Total	212	100

Source: Author Compliance

Table 4.7 shows the purchase decision influence. Maximum respondents 70 (33%) purchase decisions are influenced by peers, friends and family, whereas minimum respondents 30 (14%) purchase decision influenced by influencers. Further, table depicts that 68 (32%) and 44 (21%) respondents purchase decision is influenced by advertisements and reviews & rating respectively.

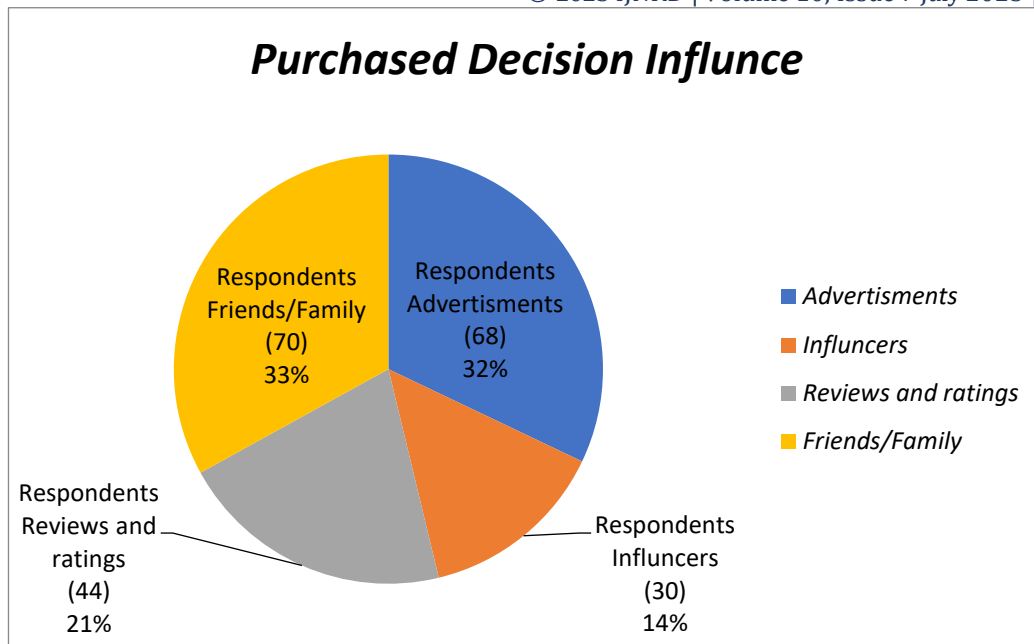


Table 4.7: Purchased Decision Influence

Graph 4.7 depicts the purchased decision influence. Blue and Red area depict the area belong to the 'advertisements' and the 'influencers' respectively which have an influence on the purchasing decisions of the respondents. Whereas, Grey and Yellow area belong to 'reviews & rating', and 'friends & family' respectively. Maximum respondents 70 (33%) purchased decision are influenced by friends and family, whereas minimum respondents 30 (14%) purchased decision are influenced by influencer.

Table 4.8: Relied on online reviews before purchasing products

Relied on online reviews	No. of Respondents	%
Always	40	19
Often	89	42
Sometimes	47	22
Never	36	17
Total	212	100

Source: Author Compliance

Table 4.8 shows the respondents rely on online reviews before purchasing products. Maximum respondents 89 (42%) 'often' rely on online reviews before purchasing products, whereas minimum respondents 36 (17%) never rely on online reviews before purchasing products. Further, table depicts that 47 (22%) and 40 (19%) respondents 'sometimes' and 'always' respectively, relied on online reviews before purchasing products.

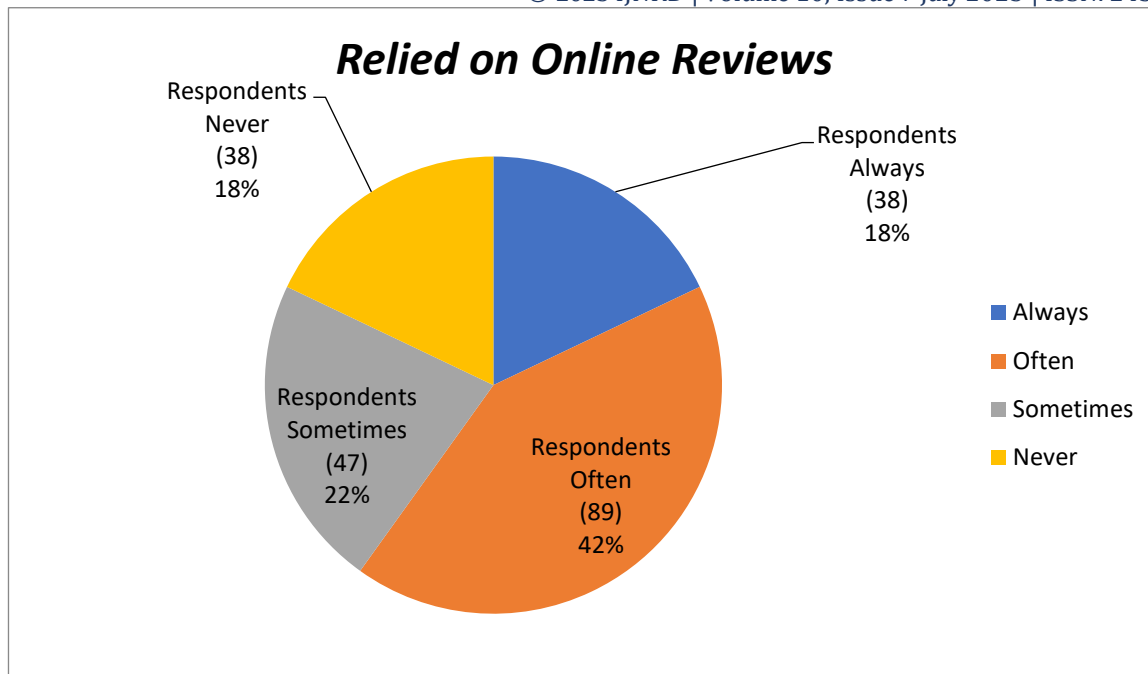


Table 4.8: Relied on online reviews before purchasing products

Graph 4.8 depicts the respondents rely on online reviews before purchasing products. Blue and Red area depict the area belong to respondents 'always' and 'often' respectively. Whereas, Grey and Yellow area belong to respondents 'sometimes' and 'never'. Maximum respondents 89 (42%) 'often' rely on online reviews before purchasing products, whereas minimum respondents 36 (17%) 'never', relied on online reviews before purchasing products. Further, graph depicts that 47 (22%) and 40 (19%) respondents 'sometimes' and 'always' respectively rely on online reviews before purchasing products.

Table 4.9: Social Media Advertisement - Impact on Buying Decision

Social media advertisement impact on buying decision	No. of Respondents	%
Strongly agree	45	21
Agree	40	19
Neutral	47	22
Disagree	49	23
Strongly disagree	32	15
Total	212	100

Source: Author Compliance

Table 4.9 shows the social media advertisement - impact on buying decision of respondents. Maximum respondents 49 (23%) 'disagree' with the impact of social media advertisement on their buying decisions, whereas minimum respondents 32 (15%) 'strongly disagree' with the same. Further, table depicts that 45 (21%) and 40 (19%) respondents 'strongly agree' and 'agree' respectively with the social media advertisement impact on buying decisions. Only 47 (22%) respondents were 'neutral', on the same.

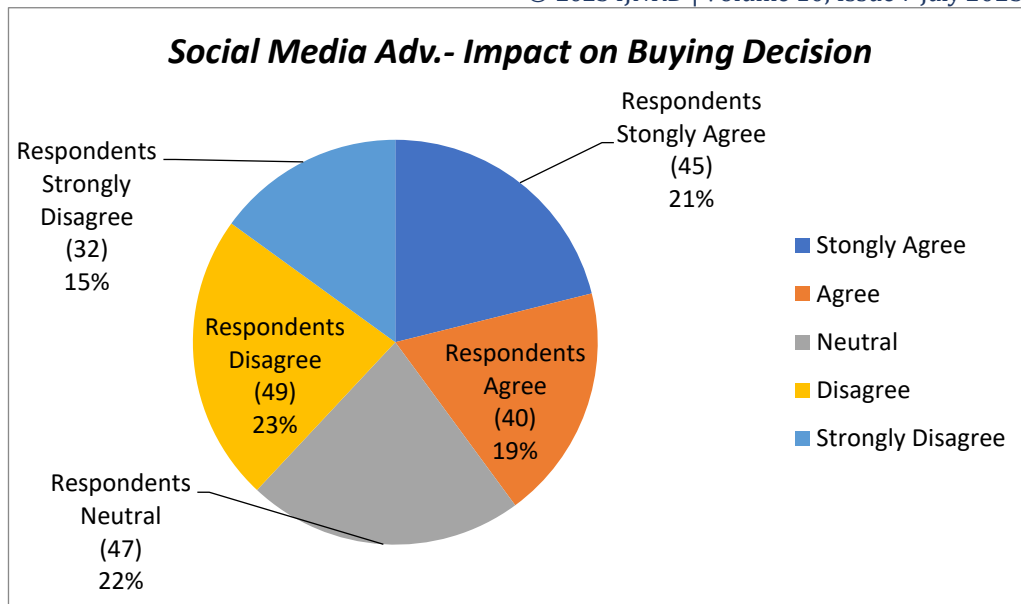


Table 4.9: Social Media Advertisement Impact on Buying Decision

Graph 4.9 shows the social media advertisement impact on buying decision of respondents. Blue and Red area belong to respondents 'strongly agree' and 'agree' respectively on social media advertisement's impact on buying decision. Whereas, Grey and Yellow area belong to 'neutral' and 'disagree' respectively. Further, graph depicts that maximum respondents 49 (23%) 'disagree' with the social media advertisement's impact on buying decisions, whereas minimum respondents 32(15%) strongly disagree with the social media advertisement impact on buying decisions. Further, graph depicts that 45 (21%) and 40 (19%) respondents 'strongly agree' and 'agree' respectively with the social media advertisement's impact on buying decisions. Only 47 (22%) respondents (sky blue) were 'neutral'.

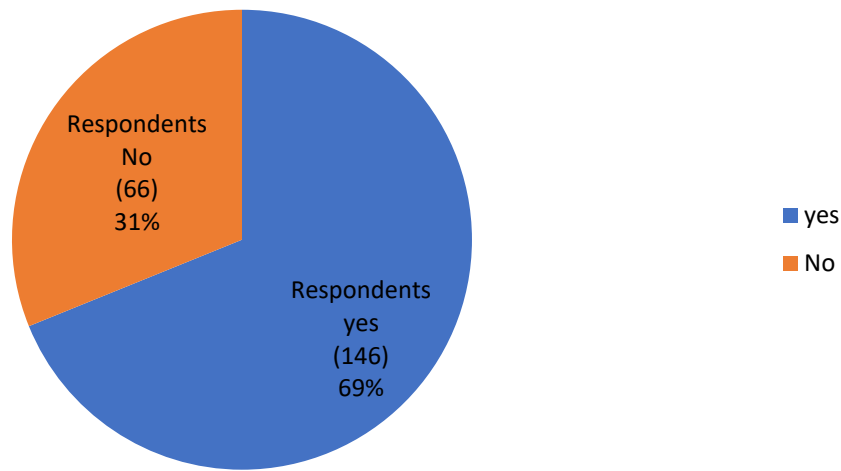
Table 4.10: Follows influencers on social media

Follows influencers on social media	No. of Respondents	%
Yes	146	69
No	66	31
Total	212	100

Source: Author Compliance

Table 4.10 depicts the respondents follow influencers on social media. Out of 212 respondents 146 (69%) says YES, whereas 66 (31%) says NO follows influencers on social media.

Follows Influencers on Social Media



Graph 4.10: Follows Influencers on Social Media

Graph 4.10 depicts the respondents follow influencers on social media. Blue and Red area depict the YES and NO responses of the respondents respectively. Graph clearly indicates that out of 212 respondents 146 (69%) says YES, whereas 66 (31%) says NO.

Table 4.11: Trustworthiness of influencer's recommendations.

Trustworthiness	No. of Respondents	%
Very trustworthy	38	18
Trustworthy	57	27
Neutral	68	32
No Trustworthy	49	23
Total	212	100

Source: Author Compliance

Table 4.11 shows the trustworthiness of influencer's recommendations. Maximum respondents 68 (32%) reveal their interest as 'neutral' trustworthy of influencer's recommendations, whereas minimum respondents 38 (18%) reveal their interest as 'very trustworthy' of influencer's recommendations. Further, table depicts that 57 (27%) and 49 (23%) respondents were 'trustworthy' and 'no trustworthy' respectively of influencer's recommendations.

Trustworthiness

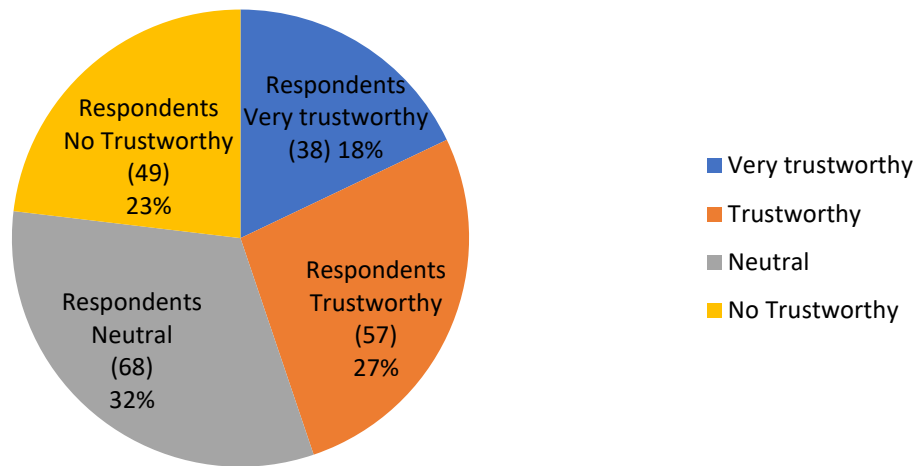


Table 4.11: Trustworthiness of Influencer's Recommendations.

Graph 4.11 depicts trustworthiness of influencer's recommendations. Blue and Red area depicts the area belong to 'very trustworthy' and 'trustworthy' respectively. Whereas, Grey and Yellow area belong to 'neutral' and 'no trustworthy' respectively. Further, graph depicts that maximum respondents 68 (32%) are 'neutral' trustworthy of influencer's recommendations, whereas minimum respondents 38(18%) are very trustworthy of influencer's recommendations. Further, graph depicts that 57 (27%) and 49 (23%) respondents are 'trustworthy' and 'no trustworthy' respectively of influencer's recommendations.

Future Trends in Consumer Behaviour

As technology continues to evolve, consumer behaviour will become even more sophisticated. Emerging trends include:

- Increased use of artificial intelligence in personalization
- Growth of social commerce and in-app purchasing
- Expansion of augmented reality (AR) for virtual product experiences
- Greater emphasis on ethical and sustainable consumption

Businesses must stay adaptable and innovative to meet the changing expectations of consumers.

CONCLUSIONS & SUGGESTIONS

The behaviour of consumers in the age of social media is connected and immediate and influential. Social media has given the consumer a voice, both buying and influencing their perception of the brand. These platforms present great chances for businesses, but also require ethical duty and transparency. Today, in the digital age, there is a need to know the needs of consumers, use technology in a relevant and efficient way, and establish real and sincere relationships. Consumers also need to stay vigilant and critical in order to make informed choices in the ever-evolving online landscape.

The behaviour of consumers in the age of social media is connected, immediate and influential. Social media has enabled the consumer to have a voice, both in the purchase of the product and in their perception of the brand. These platforms present great chances for businesses, but also require ethical duty and transparency. In this digital age, there is a demand for knowledge of consumers' needs, technology usage that is relevant and efficient, and establishment of true and sincere relationships. Consumers should also be vigilant and critical to make informed decisions in the dynamic online environment.

Theoretically this study can be seen as a contribution to the growing literature on digital consumer behaviour as it combines consumer decision-making, social influence theory, relationship marketing and digital marketing. It offers a thorough understanding of the changing nature of the traditional models of consumer behaviour due to technological progress and the use of social networks. The study also showcases how consumer behaviour is constantly evolving and shaped by technological advancements, cultural changes, and shifts in online engagement. With the rise of social media, the way that people look for information, assess products, engage with brands, and make buying decisions are upended. Social media is different from traditional marketing channels because it allows for dynamic communication and real-time content creation, peer recommendations, and influencer marketing, which have a strong impact on consumer perceptions and purchasing decisions. Today's consumers are more informed, connected and empowered, turning to online reviews, social proof and digital communities heavily before making any purchases.

The study also emphasizes the importance of trust, engagement, eWOM, the credibility of influencers, customization of content, and responsiveness of the brand in shaping consumer actions in the digital environment. Companies that are actively involved in social media with their customers, using genuine, honest, and customer-focused methods, can create better relationships, satisfy customers and develop loyalty. The rise in social media use also comes with its fair share of difficulties, such as information overload, privacy concerns, fraudulent reviews, misinformation, and unethical marketing. The issues highlight the importance of ethical digital marketing and the need for consumers to be aware of how they use online information.

Overall, social media has evolved as a great driving force that transformed from being merely a communication platform to a powerful driver of consumers' decision-making. To keep up with evolving consumer expectations, organisations need to continually embrace new technologies, data analytics and interactive marketing approaches, while remaining open and trustworthy. The study of how AI, social commerce, virtual influencers, and new digital platforms affect consumer behaviour among various demographics and cultural contexts could also be researched in the future. This research will help to elucidate consumer behaviour in an online and connected world. Finally, consumer behaviour in today's social media era is one of the biggest shifts in marketing, if not the biggest. Consumers are not simply receivers of marketing messages, but also contributors to the value creation, information sharing and brand reputation management. The results are relevant to marketers, business organizations and policy makers from a managerial point of view. Organizations need to create digital strategies that emphasize the consumer, real communication, personalizing the customer experience, ethical influencer partnerships, and community management. Organizations can also benefit from the investment of artificial intelligence, predictive analytics, social listening tools, and customer relationship management systems, which can help to improve their ability to respond to shifting consumer expectations. At the same time, regulators need to tighten up the rules and regulations that help increase transparency in digital advertising, safeguard consumer privacy, and combat deceptive online behaviour.

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