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Study on the Influence and Impact of Social Media on the Customer Buying Journey

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ABSTRACT: This study explores how social media affects the customer journey. Which include all the steps people go through when they find and buy a product. Now a days more and more number of people are using social media to discover new products so brands are using these platforms to connect with customers in fun and creative ways. By examining how people interact with content on platform forms like Instagram, facebook and tik tok we identify trends and buying decisions. Through surveys and real life examples we show how social media shapes what consumer thinks about the brands, building loyalty, and improves the shopping experience. This study finds the marketing strategies to fit social media helping them to connect better with customer at every stage in journey. This research offers valuable insights for brands looking to engage with customer through social media with marketing examples.

I. INTRODUCTION

Social media became a vital aspect of daily life in the digital age and has changed the way people communicate with brands, products, and services. The growing domination of sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok and LinkedIn has changed not only the way we communicate but also the behavior of consumers. Social media has changed from being a medium of social interaction to an important contributor for influencing purchase decisions, making it vital enough to be studied in the context of the modern customer buying journey.

The traditional customer buying journey comprised of stages like awareness, consideration and decision has further diversified in the digital era, challenging marketers to keep pace. This is where social media comes to play big time, as it opens up possibilities for discovery and shaping how consumers view things. through providing relatively unimagined platforms for discovery and influencing consumer attitudes and decisions. Social media channels have evolved to be strong touchpoints in each step of the buying journey, from user-generated content, reviews and influencer marketing through targeted advertisements and brand communities.

To study the impact and role of social media on customer buying journey, specifically how it impacts consumer awareness, effective manner and decisions. It aims to explore the influence of social media content, comments, and interaction on various points in the buying cycle. from brand discovery through post-purchase behaviors and how businesses can leverage this information for optimal marketing outcomes.

With consumer trust in traditional advertising diminishing and dwindling, social media has transformed into a vibrant. This extended introduction sets up the context for your research paper and lays the groundwork for a deeper exploration into how social media impacts the customer buying journey. It outlines the scope of the research, the significance of the topic, and introduces key concepts that will be explored throughout the paper.

II. OBJECTIVE

1. To assess the effectiveness of different social media platforms in influencing various stages of the customer buying journey
2. To analyze the influence of social media on decision-making and purchase behavior



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[2.1] THE ASSESS THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DIFFERENT SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM IN INFLUENCING VARIOUS STAGES OF THE CUSTOMER BUYING JOURNEY

To assess the effectiveness of different social media platforms in influencing various stages of the customer buying journey. A customer buying journey is typically divided into multiple steps, and the social media platforms can impact each of those steps quite differently. So, these stages can be divided like this.

Stage 1 – Awareness → This is the stage where potential customers realize they have a problem or require something, and then become aware of all possible solutions.

Stage 2: Consideration — Customers look into possible choices for meeting their needs or solving their problems.

Stage 3: Decision: The customer completes their purchasing process, affected by either social proof, feedback or any kind of promotion.

Stage 4: Post-Purchase: This is where businesses hope to retain customers, foster repeat business and advocacy.

Effectiveness of Social Media Platforms by Buying Journey Stage

Awareness (TOFU)

Potential customers are starting to realize they have a need (or problem) in the awareness stage. They want ideas, suggestions or solutions to their problem.

Instagram: A highly visual platform, Instagram works well for brands when creating visually compelling posts (feed), as well as stories and reels. They can increase brand visibility through hashtags and collaboration influencers with branded content.

Facebook manages to reach a wide array of prospective customers, making it much easier for your brand to be introduced to a large audience through organic content, sponsored posts, and paid ads that can target all audience.

YouTube: As the video-first platform, YouTube is superior for long-form content that ranges from explainer videos to brand stories and even educational content. Ads and organic content such as how-to videos and unboxing videos can widen the reach for brands.

Tik Tok: Drop ideas related to viral short form content. TikTok is great for branding especially with younger audiences as it has high reach and visibility due to its algorithm.

Twitter: Due to the nature of short-form content and real-time conversations, Twitter can be effective for trending topics, brand mentions, and two-way chatter. Twitter is less visual than other platforms but the hashtag-based approach to content still help raising awareness.

Consideration Stage (Middle of Funnel)

During the consideration stage, consumers are searching for information to help them compare products and services. All this while, users were hopping between apps but now they are starting to compare brands, products and services and are most likely interacting with the content in a more meaningful way.

YouTube: Consideration stage long-form content (example product reviews, comparisons and tutorials.) Users also use YouTube for research, evaluating their options.

Pinterest: Pinterest is a very visual site, where users can create boards to organize ideas — ideal for product inspiration, DIY and in-depth guides. Its consideration-based search features are a boon for brands in home décor, fashion, and beauty for decision stage users, such as lead generation forms, webinars, and other targeted content.

Instagram: Used for brand discovery, reviews, and content in the form of influencer partnerships, product demos and brand stories Users can also discover products through Instagram's Shopping feature.



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LinkedIn: LinkedIn works best for B2B businesses and drives effective results in consideration phase when the users seek expert insights, case studies and professional recommendations. LinkedIn groups and sponsored content can drive more engaged interest.

Decision Stage (Bottom of the Funnel)

The decision stage means that a customer is prepared to buy. This section begins to turn interest into action with added motivation in the form of guarantees or a short-term offer.

Instagram: Instagram Shopping, Stories with swipe-up links and shoppable posts take customers straight from product discover to purchase. Retargeting ads (ads for people who have already interacted with the brand) will help to convert more leads. And eventually generate more audience and targeted customers

Facebook: As a decision-stage channel, Facebook's marketplace and built-in shopping are critical places to draw in consumers. Finally, Retargeting ads and special offers are another powerful tool that can help lure engaged users to become customers.

TikTok: Users can shop from directly within TikTok through shoppable posts and influencer promotion. It has a simple and engaging approach which pushes the users to act right after seeing a product in action.

LinkedIn: LinkedIn proves effective for product demonstrations, free trials and lead generation. Only if you deal in B2B Branded content showing client success stories or case studies can help demand generation.

Stage after Buying (Loyalty & Advocacy)

Post-purchase (retention of customers, repeat purchase behaviour)

Instagram: Building UGC (User-generated content) can be done via a branded hashtag or reposting the content of your customers helps you to build a community! And Instagram offers ongoing engagement with posts, Stories and live to keep customers consistent.

Twitter: Twitter is great for customer service — when they want to solve a post purchase problem in the moment. Brands might also invite customers to give feedback or share an experience, which bolsters customer loyalty.

Facebook: Many loyalty programs available through Facebook Groups can create a consistent touchpoint for both you and your involved and obtain more value from their purchase, which may also boost reviews and repeat purchases.

LinkedIn: This one is primarily for B2B brands, as you can use LinkedIn to follow up with customers after purchase, network among professions, and notify customers on industry updates or new products

[2.2] TO ANALYZE THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON DECISION-MAKING AND PURCHASE BEHAVIOR

An increasingly important topic for marketing, psychology and consumer research, the impact of social media on decision-making and purchase behavior is complex with its effects felt at both ends. The importance of social media to sales. Social media channels like Instagram, FB, twitter, TikTok and YouTube have changed the way consumers access information, communicate with brands and make decisions in buying products.

HOW THE SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCES CONSUMER DECISION

Social media plays a vital role in the process of consumer decision-making — everything from product exposure to product recommendations by others and interaction with brands and peer groups directly. Here is the breakdown of how social media plays an important role in decision making:

Social Proof and Peer Influence — The other powerful concept that gets amplified through the use of social media is the social proof. People are more likely to make decisions with respect to an action if people around them (peers) are



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doing it. Consumers are usually have eyes on reviews, testimonials, influencer. The positive reviews of peers or well-known people are enough to probably make you buy. Research shows that up 79% of consumers say that user-generated content has a high impact on their purchasing decisions.

Influencer marketing: An influencer is someone who has the ability to influence the minds and actions of a large group of followers. Influencers can directly impact purchasing decisions with their endorsements and reviews of products. Influencers are often the voice of reason and most brands use them to reach a market where potential customers buyers.

Targeted Advertising: Social media collects huge volumes of user data in order to display very directed ads. So when it comes to platforms like Facebook, Instagram and TikTok, they are able to demonstrate the behavior, interests and demography of a specific audience. Ads that are highly targeted to consumers — therefore, more likely to buy. From the consumer's point of view, personalization is one of the elements that most affects decision making; they believe that products or services promoted suit their needs and preferences.

Visual Attraction and Aspiration — many social media channels (Instagram, Pinterest) draw heavily on imagery, and a lot of consumers are influenced by beautiful product photos. These platforms have an aspirational approach which tends to promote impulse buying. Brands take advantage of this and introduce users to the lifestyles, aesthetics, and experiences they crave to forge emotional connections leading up to purchase action.

: Why it Works (Psychological and Behavioral Mechanisms)

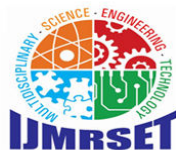
THERE ARE 4 MAIN WAYS SOCIAL MEDIA IMPACTS CONSUMER PSYCHOLOGY AND BEHAVIOR:

1. **FOMO (Fear of Missing Out):** Users can experience a sense of FOMO from the endless stream of curated, often glorified content they consume on social media. When consumers see their peers consuming desirable products, services and lifestyles, it sparks an urgency to purchase before its too late! This is why so many marketers use urgency (limited-time offers, flash sales etc.) to compel the sale.
2. **Emotional Appeal:** Content that triggers emotions — through storytelling, humor or aspirational imagery — can also trigger impulse purchase actions. Brands have identified this opportunity and leverage it to develop brand loyalty and inspire the purchase behavior on social media platforms that are great at building emotion ties between their users.
3. **Dopamine Cycle:** Social media is a never-ending tunnel of stimulated reward. set of options, sometimes causing analysis paralysis. At other times, it creates a paradox of choice in which consumers get confuse into indecision and refuse to buy at all. Brands try to overcome this by either simplifying choices, providing personalized recs or promoting "best-sellers," so consumers have to think less about their purchase.
4. **Reciprocity and Trust Reciprocation** is a built-in feature of social media. When brands send consumers high-value content, discounts or special attention during their consumer journey, expectedly they feel an obligation to make purchases. The notion of reciprocity is a social psychology principle where people feel obligated to return favors.

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Discovery and Awareness: Social-media is incredibly important for the awareness and discovery stages of the buying journey. By opening up direct communication with consumers, brands can gain visibility over competitors through social media (Mangold & Faulds 2009). Further, user generated content like reviews, ratings and influencer endorsements play a significant role affecting consumer awareness & perception of new products (Cheung & Thadani 2012).

Impact of Peer Recommendations- For researchers, one of the best-recognized drivers of our behaviour purchase decisions in particular is word-of-mouth (WOM) see (Kumar et. Al). And, social media take the word of mouth (WOM) to next level by allowing things to be spread more easily among peers. Instead, they rely on other consumers or an influencer they follow on Instagram and YouTube. This phenomenon is supported by the concept of "social proof"



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(Cialdini, 2009), where consumers trust the opinions and behaviors of others, especially those they perceive as relatable.

Purchase Decision: social media not only influences the purchase decision stage in terms of creating urgency and exclusivity. Special promotions, time-sensitive offers, and influencer-driven urgency cause immediate consumer action. Research by Boateng et al. According to (Karma, 2016) social media advertisement by showing targeted ads is one of the main reasons for impulse buying. Moreover, social commerce (the right to buy and sell directly on the social media platform) is rising, showing that consumer purchase can be move simpler faster ways (Lu et al., 2020)

IV. METHODOLOGY

Research design

This is the primary and secondary research of the study on the influence and impact of social media on the customer buying journey it focus on the behaviors of the customers in buying from online and digital media plate form. This survey made the focus toward the customer buying choice based on visuals and audio and images of the product on digital platforms like Instagram and other online platform

Population and sample

The survey aimed at young working employed and college students. The survey drew 94 responses. Most participants were young adults and students only (90% aged between 18-24; 6% aged under 18% and other 4% aged 24++) at time of assessment most of them were students only.

Data collected

Most of the students like to buy and shop through social media platforms only. They prefer to buy and see visuals of the product and images influence them to buy the product. Students use mostly Instagram and you tube for there buying preference. Buying online made and feel them more safe and options it create them loyal and engaged toward their brands.

Buying behavior and preference

Most students like to buy their products through online platforms only easy and engagement create impact on there buying journey. Most female students are more towards the buying from online digital platforms and creating more options for them in buying journey of the customer.

V. CONCLUSION

This report emphasizes the impact social media has had on the customer buying journey and showing that social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and YouTube play a role at every stage of the journey from awareness to post-purchase behaviour. Social media influences consumer discovery of products, enhances product evaluation with peer reviews and influencer endorsements, and affects purchase decisions via targeted ads and social commerce features. In addition to these social media is still influencing the post-purchase behaviour encouraging brand loyalty and further engagement through user generated content and online reviews.

The results indicate the social media changes consumer purchasing behaviour options and also reinforces the peer pressure, social proof and live interactions with brands. With consumer behaviour is increasingly driven by online platforms, enterprises must adopt smart social strategies to convert social media followers into customers. that engage customers across all stages of the buying journey, ensuring personalized and meaningful interactions. The continuous rise of social media tools and features shows that it influence on the customer buying journey will only expand, making it essential for brands to adapt their marketing approaches in this digital age.



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