ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN E-COMMERCE: IT'S INFLUENCE IN CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT AND PURCHASE DECISION WITH REFERENCE TO THE CONSUMERS OF DARJEELING HILLS OF WEST BENGAL, INDIA.

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Abstract: Social media has remodeled the way people connect, communicate and share information. It has transformed various aspects of our lives, including the way we shop and engage in e-commerce. Rather than relying on traditional methods such as magazines, radio and television, consumers are progressively using social networking sites to look for information regarding various products and services. With the rise of platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube, social media has become an integral part of the business landscape, playing a significant role in the growth and success of e-commerce businesses. The convergence of social media and e-commerce has created new opportunities for businesses to reach and engage with their target audience. Social media platforms provides an extensive user base allowing businesses to exhibit their products or services to a vast number of potential customers in unique ways. The study aims to investigate the role of social media in e-commerce, specifically focusing on consumer engagement and purchase decisions. By understanding how social media influences consumer behavior, businesses can optimize their marketing strategies to enhance consumer engagement and drive sales in the e-commerce landscape.

Index Terms **- Social media, E-commerce, consumer engagement, consumer purchase decision.**

I. INTRODUCTION

E-commerce is a method of buying and selling of goods and services over the internet. E-commerce has drastically changed the way of doing business. With the advancement in technology and increased awareness about the use of computer and online communication tools simplifying business procedures and increasing efficiency, e-commerce has become a buzzword over the past few years. It combines a range of processes such as E-mail, World Wide Web and social media that provides ways to exchange information between individuals, companies and countries.

The E-Commerce market is thriving and poised for robust growth in India. There are players who made a good beginning. Their success depends on their understanding of the market and offering various types of

features. In present time many businesses use social media e-commerce strategies to target their audience on social networks (Ravinder Kumar & Dr. Ram Chand Garg, 2018).

Social media has gained a lot of importance over the last decade and continues to do so. It has revolutionized the way people communicate and interact online, creating new opportunities for businesses to engage with consumers. In the context of e-commerce, social media platforms have emerged as powerful tools for consumer engagement and influencing purchase decisions. This study explores the role of social media in e-commerce highlighting its significance in shaping consumer behavior and provide insights into leveraging social media platforms to drive e-commerce success.

Social media and E Commerce

The interconnection between social media and e-commerce has grown significantly over the years. Social media platforms have become integral to the e-commerce landscape, enabling businesses to leverage social interactions and user data to drive sales and brand awareness. The convergence of these two realms has given rise to the term "social commerce."

Several key interconnections between social media and e-commerce include:

i.   Product Discovery: Social media platforms facilitate the discovery of new products and services. Users share posts about products they like, follow brands they are interested in and interact with contents posted in social media, all of which expose them to various products and create potential buying opportunities.

ii. Customer Engagement: Social media allows businesses to engage directly with their customers through comments, messages and interactive posts. This direct communication fosters brand loyalty and helps companies address customer queries and concerns, building trust and credibility.

iii. User-Generated Content (UGC): Customers often share their experiences with products through UGC including reviews, photos and videos. This user-generated content serves as social proof, influencing other potential buyers' decisions and boosting sales.

iv. Social Advertising: Social media platforms offer robust advertising tools that allow businesses to target specific audiences based on demographics, interests and behavior. These targeted advertisements can significantly impact brand awareness, reach and conversion rates.

v.   Shoppable Posts and Links: Many social media platforms now support shoppable posts and links, enabling businesses to tag products in posts or directly link to their online stores. This seamless integration simplifies the purchasing process for consumers and can lead to impulsive buying.

vi. Influencer marketing: Social media influencers with a large following play a crucial role in promoting products, services and brands.

In summary, social media and e-commerce are closely intertwined in the modern digital landscape. The integration of these two spheres has transformed online shopping, making it more interactive, personalized and influential. As technology continues evolving, their interconnection is likely to get strengthened, shaping the future of digital commerce.

Consumer engagement in social media

Consumer engagement on social media platforms in the context of e-commerce can take various forms, each contributing to build a strong brand presence, fostering customer loyalty and driving sales. Here are some of the key forms of consumer engagement in e-commerce on social media:

i.   Likes and Reactions: Users can express their appreciation for a post by clicking the "like" button or using other reaction emojis (such as love, laugh, wow, etc.). While likes are relatively passive forms of engagement, they still indicate interest and can help boost the visibility of a post in a user's feed.

ii. Comments: Comments allow users to directly interact with the content by sharing their thoughts, opinions and feedback. Engaging with comments by responding promptly and meaningfully can lead to conversations and a sense of community around the brand.

iii. Shares and Retweets: Sharing content from an e-commerce brand amplifies its reach to a wider audience. Users who share the posts are essentially endorsing the brand to their own followers, which can lead to increased visibility and potentially new customers.

iv. User-Generated Content (UGC): UGC is content created by the customers that feature the products. It can consist of photos, videos, reviews and testimonials. Sharing UGC on social media profiles not only showcases real-world use of the products but also encourages other customers to engage and share their experiences.

v. Hashtags and Challenges: Creating branded hashtags or challenges encourages users to participate and share their own content related to the products. This can lead to a viral effect as more users join in, contributing to a sense of community and engagement.

vi. Contests and Giveaways: Hosting contests or giveaways on social media can drive engagement by requiring users to like, share, comment or tag friends to enter. This helps spread the brand's reach and generate excitement.

vii. Direct Messaging and Customer Service: Many social media platforms allow users to send direct messages to the brand. Prompt and helpful responses to customer inquiries and issues can improve customer satisfaction and build trust.

viii. Live Streaming and Webinars: E-commerce brands can use live streaming to showcase products, answer customer questions in real-time and provide behind-the-scenes glimpses. Webinars can be used to educate customers about the products or industry.

ix. Interactive Features: Platforms like Instagram and Facebook offer interactive features like polls, quizzes and question stickers that allows to engage directly with the audience and gather insights.

x. Collaborations and Influencer Marketing: Partnering with influencers or other brands for co-branded content or takeovers can introduce the products to new audiences and lend credibility.

xi. Personalized Recommendations: Using data-driven insights, brands can offer personalized product recommendations to users based on their browsing and purchase history, increasing engagement and potential sales.

xii. Augmented Reality (AR) Experiences: Some platforms are integrating AR technology, allowing users to try on or visualize products before purchasing, enhancing engagement and reducing uncertainty.

Influence of social media in purchase decisions:

Social media plays a significant and multifaceted role in the consumer decision-making process. It has become an integral part of people's lives and has revolutionized how consumers gather information, evaluate products or services and make purchase decisions. Here's a comprehensive discussion of the role of social media in the consumer decision-making process:

Information Gathering and Research:

i. Product Discovery: Social media platforms serve as a source of product discovery. Consumers often come across new products, brands or services through advertisements, influencer recommendations or posts from friends and family.

ii. Reviews and Ratings: Users rely on social media to access real-time reviews and ratings from peers, which can greatly influence their perceptions of a product or service.

iii. Comparative Analysis: Consumers can easily compare products or services by reading comments, reviews and discussions on social media, helping them make informed choices.

Building Trust and Credibility:

i. Influencers and Experts: Many consumers follow influencers and experts in specific niches who provide trustworthy recommendations and insights, which can influence their purchasing decisions.

ii. User-Generated Content (UGC): UGC, such as user reviews, photos and videos, adds authenticity to brands and products, building trust among potential buyers.

Engagement and Interaction:

i. Customer Support: Brands use social media for customer support, responding to inquiries, resolving issues and enhancing their reputation for responsiveness.
ii. Community Building: Brands can create communities and engage with customers, fostering a sense of belonging and loyalty that can impact purchase decisions.

Product Information and Education:

i. Tutorials and How-Tos: Social media platforms are often used to share tutorials and educational content about products, helping consumers understand how to use them effectively.
ii. Product Updates: Brands can inform their audience about product updates, features and improvements through social media.

Influence on Brand Perception:

i. Brand Personality: Social media allows brands to showcase their personality, values and culture, which can attract consumers who align with those attributes.
ii. Brand Storytelling: Brands can tell their stories and create emotional connections with consumers, influencing their attachment to the brand.

Social Proof and FOMO (Fear of Missing Out):

i. Trendsetting: Social media can create trends and induce FOMO, pushing consumers to make purchases based on the desire to be part of a trend or community.
ii. Social Validation: Consumers often make decisions based on what others in their social network are doing or buying.

Advertising and Promotions:

i. Targeted Ads: Social media platforms offer highly targeted advertising options, enabling brands to reach specific demographics and interests.
ii. Flash Sales and Promotions: Brands can use social media to announce and promote limited-time offers and discounts, creating a sense of urgency.

Post-Purchase Experience:

i. Feedback and Loyalty: Consumers can provide feedback, share their experiences and engage with brands after a purchase, which can affect their loyalty and advocacy.

In conclusion, social media has become an influential touch point throughout the consumer decision-making process. It not only provides information and fosters trust but also shapes brand perceptions, influences trends and facilitates engagement between consumers and brands. As a result, businesses need to effectively leverage social media as part of their marketing and customer engagement strategies to succeed in the modern marketplace.

II. Literature Review

i. Huang, H. & Benyoucef, M. (2015). This study delves into the design features of social commerce platforms and highlights their influence on consumer behaviour. It elucidates how social media features such as user reviews, recommendations and social interactions impact consumer decision-making processes and purchase intentions.

ii. NimaBarhemmati and Azhar Ahmad (2015). The study focuses on how SNM will influence the ultimate consumer purchase behavior among people who often use social networking websites and investigates the predicted relationships among social network marketing activities, customer

engagement and consumer purchase behavior. In this, a survey was conducted among the 50 people, studying and working in Malaysian National University. The result of the study shows that the social network marketing activities, customer engagement and consumer purchase behavior are directly proportional and has a positive relationship.

iii.   Kabadayi. S. & Price. K. H. (2014). This article reviews the literature on consumer-generated advertising on social media. It highlights the role of user-generated content in shaping consumer perceptions, trust, and purchase intentions. Social media platforms enable consumers to share product experiences, creating a community-driven approach to e-commerce.

iv.   Tsimonis, G. & Dimitriadis, S. (2014). This study examines various brand strategies employed on social media platforms. It emphasizes the importance of authenticity, interactivity and content quality in engaging customers and building strong brand-consumer relationships. The article provides practical recommendations for effective social media marketing in e-commerce.

v.   Hajli, N. (2018). Social Media Marketing Strategies in E-commerce is a cost-effective marketing tool and plays a crucial role in the success of e-commerce businesses. The use of influencers, social media advertisements and viral campaigns has been found to drive website traffic and increase conversion rates.

vi.   Abuhashesh, M., Al-Lozi, E., Alajmi, Q., Aljoumaa, K., & Al-Twairesh, N. (2021). Social media platforms enable consumers to share their experiences, reviews, and product recommendations, influencing the decision-making process of potential customers. The perceived trustworthiness of social media endorsements has been found to impact purchase intentions and increase sales for e-commerce businesses.

vii.   Phua, J., Jin, S. V., & Kim, J. (2017). The ability to communicate directly with customers through social media has enabled businesses to build stronger relationships and gain valuable feedback, contributing to better product development and customer satisfaction.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this research are:

i.   To explore the influence of social media on consumer engagement in e-commerce.

ii.   To examine the impact of social media on consumers' purchase decisions in the context of e-commerce.

iii.   To identify the factors that enhance or inhibit consumer engagement and purchase decisions through social media platforms.

iv.   To propose recommendations for businesses to leverage social media effectively for enhanced consumer engagement and increase sales.

Significance of the research

The study has been undertaken to gather valuable data and insights in order to analyze, interpret and draw meaningful conclusions for academic purpose. The study not only contributes to the existing body of knowledge in the field to further the understanding and facilitate the advancement of scholarly discussions but also offers practical guidance for businesses navigating the complex intersection of social media and e-commerce, aligning their efforts with evolving consumer preferences and behaviors.

III. Research Methodology

The study is based on random sampling of 86 respondents from various parts of Darjeeling district from 6th of January, 2024 to 6th of February 2024 circulated and shared through social media sites like WatsApp, Instagram and Facebook messenger.

Sampling method: Probability sampling method has been used for sampling data.

Data collection: The study was conducted by the means of online questionnaire. Five point Likert scale has been used for the purpose data collection where numerical score 5 represented 'Strongly Disagree', numerical score 4 represented 'Disagree', 3 represented 'Neutral', 2 represented 'Agree' and 1 represented 'Strongly Agree'.

Nominal Scale: A nominal scale is a measurement system that is used to categorize occurrences or things into discrete groups. This scale does not require the use of numeric values or categories ranked by class; instead, each different category is labeled with a unique identity. This scale has been used for questions like age, gender etc.

Collection technique: Primary Data-Questionnaire method.

Data analysis method:
  i. For technical analysis of the data, MS Excel has been used.
  ii. Reliability test- Cronbach's Alpha test has been used for measuring the internal consistency.
  iii. Mean and standard deviation are calculated to interpret the data.

Reliability Test: Cronbach's Alpha
Measure of Internal Consistency
Cronbach's alpha tests to see if multiple question Likert scale surveys are reliable. Normally it ranges between 0-1. It is denoted by 'α'.

$\alpha = K/K-1[1-^{\Sigma s2y/s2x}]$
where K = Number of test item
$^{\Sigma s2y}$ = sum of the item Variance
^{s2x} = Variance of the total score

CRONBACH'S α	Internal Consistency
0.90 and Above	Excellent
0.80-0.89	Good
0.70-0.79	Acceptable
0.60-0.69	Questionable
0.50-0.59	Poor
Below 0.50	Unacceptable

Variables	Description	Values	Internal Consistency
K	≠ OF ITEMS	10	
ΣS2Y	SUM OF THE ITEM VARIANCE	7.05	
S2X	VARIANCE OF THE TOTAL SCORE	26.33	
A	CRONBACHS	0.81	Good

Mean and standard deviation: following table shows the values of mean and standard deviation of each question.

Sl. No.	Particulars	Mean	SD
1.	Social media helps in discovering new products or services.	1.91	0.75
2.	Social media allows comparing products or services before making a purchase.	2.06	0.89
3.	I actively engage with brands or retailers on social media (e.g., commenting, sharing, and liking).	2.60	0.91
4.	More likely to make a purchase from a brand that actively engages with customers on social media.	2.48	0.76
5.	Personalized advertisements or offers that are targeted specifically to my interests and needs increase my likelihood of making a purchase on social media.	2.28	0.86
6.	The ease of making purchases directly through social media platforms increases my likelihood of buying products or services.	2.52	0.83
7.	The use of appealing visuals (images, videos, and graphics) on social media increases my interest in a product or service.	2.10	0.61
8.	Social media influencers play a significant role in shaping my purchase decisions.	2.62	0.98
9.	I trust user-generated content (e.g., reviews, images) on social media when considering a purchase.	2.16	0.88
10.	I am more likely to purchase a product or service if it recommended by someone I follow on social media.	2.65	0.90

The Mean of each question from the table above says that the respondents agree for most of the questions that is being asked. As we look into it, the values of means are lower than 2.5, which means that responses are inclined to "Agree and Strongly Agree" (since, we have assigned "1" as "Strongly Agree" and "2" as "Agree", except on three questions (Question number 3, 8 and 10) in which they are neutral to their answer. The values of standard deviation are lower than 1, which means that the responses given by the respondents do not deviate from one another.
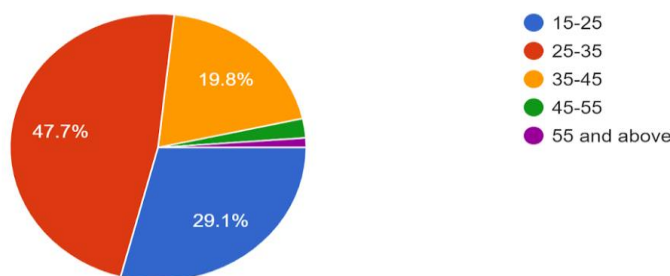
IV. Data Analysis and Interpretation:

The following section presents analysis made on the data collected from the questionnaire. The set of questions were sent to individuals who resides in the hills of Darjeeling, West Bengal, India.
In the upcoming sections analysis and interpretations are presented.
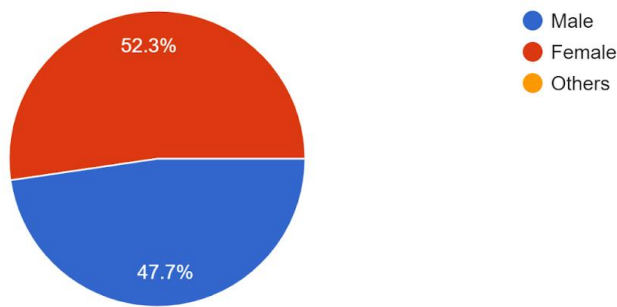
1. Your age?
86 responses

- ➤ Out of 86 respondents, 25 were in the age group of 15-25 years, 41 were in the age group of 25-35 years, and 17 were from the age group of 35-45, 2 within the age of 45-55 years and 1from the age of 55 years and above.

2. Your gender?
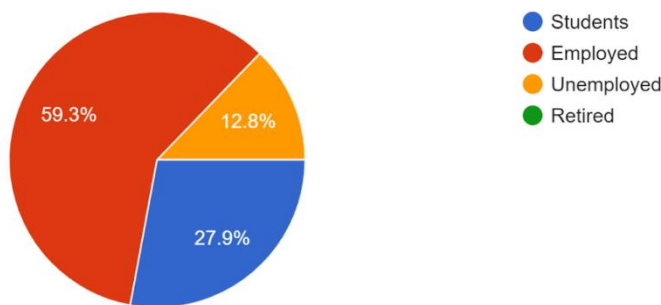
86 responses

- Male
- Female
- Others

52.3%

47.7%

➢ Out of 86 respondents, 41 were male and 45 were female.

By asking these two general questions we are able to identify the diversity of the responses as the collected data covers people from different age groups, preferences and gender, which will help us give a more generalized analysis of the consumers of Darjeeling hills of West Bengal, India.
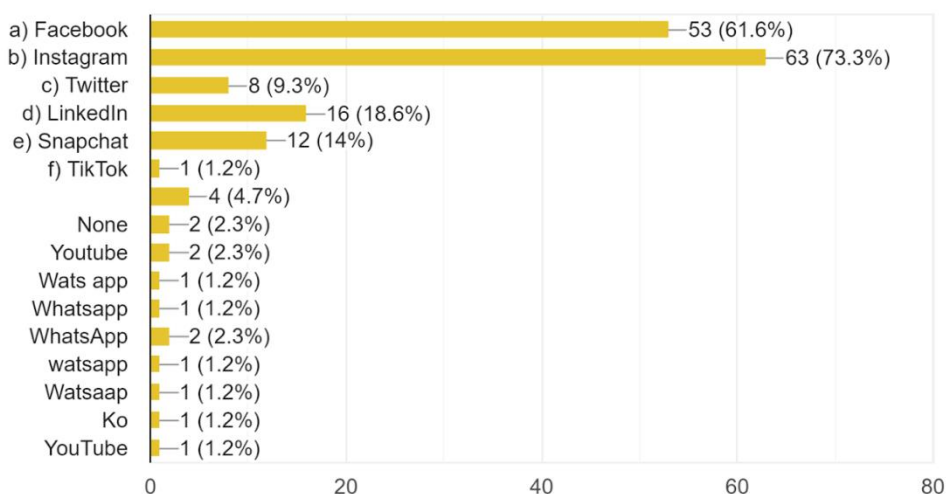
3. Your current professional status?

86 responses

- Students
- Employed
- Unemployed
- Retired

59.3%

12.8%

27.9%

➢ 51 respondents are currently employed, whereas 24 are students and 11 are unemployed.

4. Which social media platforms do you use regularly?

86 responses

a) Facebook	53 (61.6%)
b) Instagram	63 (73.3%)
c) Twitter	8 (9.3%)
d) LinkedIn	16 (18.6%)
e) Snapchat	12 (14%)
f) TikTok	1 (1.2%)
	4 (4.7%)
None	2 (2.3%)
Youtube	2 (2.3%)
Wats app	1 (1.2%)
Whatsapp	1 (1.2%)
WhatsApp	2 (2.3%)
watsapp	1 (1.2%)
Watsaap	1 (1.2%)
Ko	1 (1.2%)
YouTube	1 (1.2%)

➢ It can be observed that Instagram and Facebook is the most preferred social media platform. However, especially the students of age group 15-25 years also preferred for You tube, Twitter, Snapchat, Watsapp and Linkedin as a secondary platform. Therefore, through this collective analysis it is evident that makes Instagram and Facebook the most attractive mediums for companies to market their products and services. Almost 1500 million Facebook and Instagram users engage with e-commerce posts each month.

5. Social media helps me discover new products or services.

86 responses
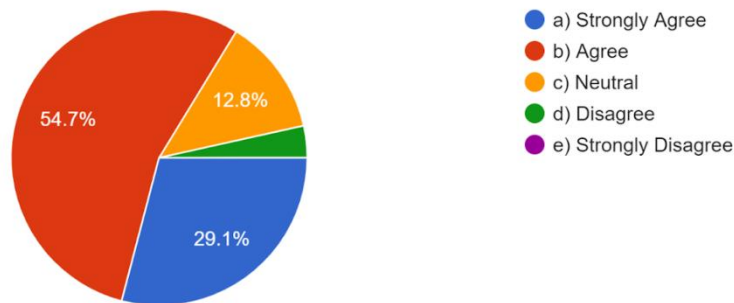
In figure 5, it can be observed that the respondents are in a positive spectrum that social media helps them in discovering new products and services. However, a very small percentage (3.5%) i.e. 3 respondents disagrees to the fact that social media help in discovering new products and services whereas, (12.8%) i.e. 11 respondents are neutral to the question. According to new research by Sprout Social, one in three consumers use social media to learn about or discover new products, services or brands. Additionally, one in four also uses social media to purchase products.

6. Social media allows me to compare products or services before making a purchase.

86 responses
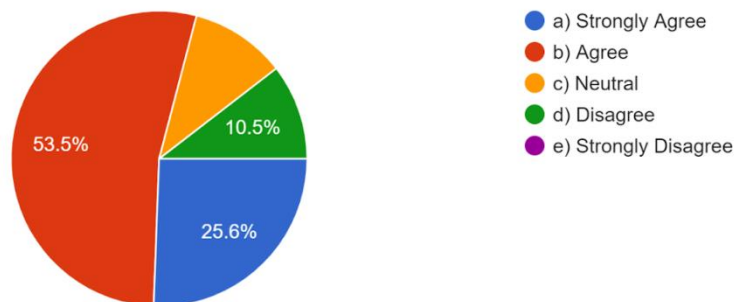
➢ Consumers take social media as a very significant consideration for comparing products or services before making a purchase by reading or watching reviews. A potential consumer can be turned away with just one or two negative reviews.

As per figure 6, it can be seen that the majority of the respondents(53.5%) i.e. 46 respondents agrees to the statement whereas, (25.6%) i.e. 22 respondents asserts with confidence that the social media does help them in comparing products or services before making a purchase. Only (10.5%) i.e. 9 respondents negatively responds to the statement.

7. I actively engage with brands or retailers on social media (e.g., commenting, sharing, liking).
86 responses

- a) Strongly Agree
- b) Agree
- c) Neutral
- d) Disagree
- e) Strongly Disagree
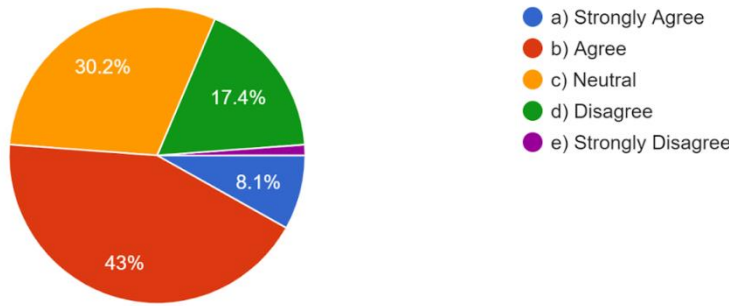
➢ Social media is not just a spoke on the wheel of marketing. It's becoming the way entire bicycles are built." — Ryan Lilly, author and entrepreneur.

Customers' engagement with businesses on social media plays a pivotal role on development of brand's reputation, customer retention and overall success. The suggestions and feedback of the customers through engagement can be very helpful to the business in planning for new products or services.

In figure 7, it can be seen that larger portion of the respondents engages actively with brands on social media, having (8.1%)as 'Strongly Agree' i.e. 7 respondents and (43%) as 'Agree' i.e. 37 respondents, whereas (30.2%) i.e. 26 respondents are neutral, they just tend to passively read the feedbacks and suggestion given by other consumers or watch the advertisement . (17.4%) i.e. 15 respondents 'Disagrees' and (1.2%) i.e. 1 of the respondent 'Strongly Disagrees',they believe mostly in trying the product and service and then judging it.

8. I am more likely to make a purchase from a brand that actively engages with customers on social media.
86 responses

- a) Strongly Agree
- b) Agree
- c) Neutral
- d) Disagree
- e) Strongly Disagree
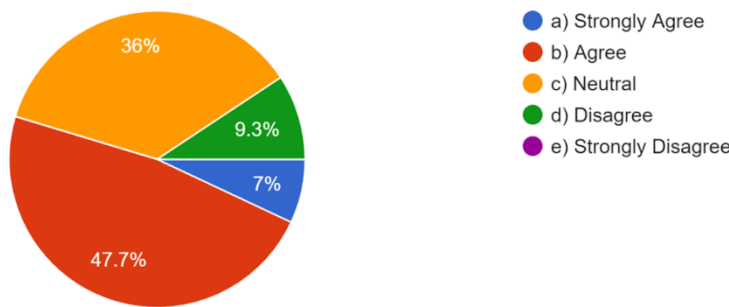
➢ Business promoting their brands through advertisements without actively engaging with the users makes social media merely just a media. People do not use social media platforms for a one-way experience rather they are seeking for connections with people and with brands.

As per figure 8, almost half of the total respondents agree that active engagement of the brands aids in building relationships with the potential customers which cumulatively helps the businesses to expand their reach, increase brand awareness and ultimately make sales.(36%) i.e. 31 respondents are 'Neutral', whereas (9.3%) i.e. 8 respondents 'Disagree' with the statement.

9. Personalized advertisements or offers that are targeted specifically to my interests and needs increase my likelihood of making a purchase on social media.

86 responses
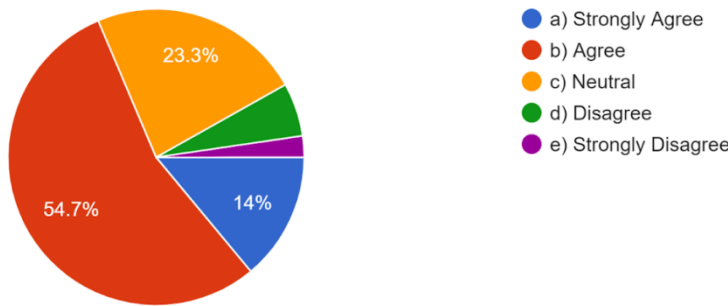
- Personalized advertisement are more effective in generating higher click through rate (CTR) and conversion to sales than that of their counterparts. The consumers benefit by seeing fewer ads which are geared towards their needs and interests at the time.

  (54.7%) i.e. 47 respondents feel that advertisement that are adjusted as per their interest and needs increases the likelihood of getting viewed and acted upon. (14%) of the respondents mostly belonging to the age of 35 years and above strongly believes in the statement, as users tend to click more on the advertisement if they are relevant.

10. The ease of making purchases directly through social media platforms increases my likelihood of buying products or services.

86 responses
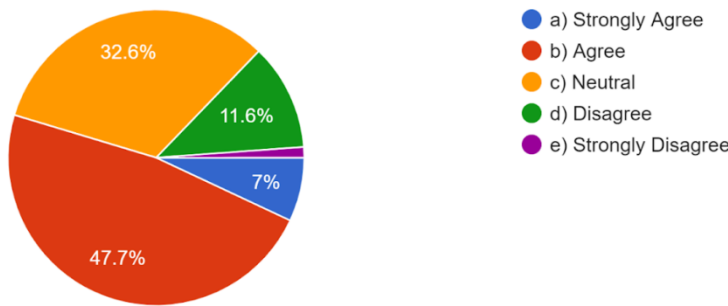
- All kinds of business is turning towards selling their products through social media. Shopping through social media rose in popularity specially post covid era. Social shopping has gained an up scaled advantage as it provides the users to make purchases with ease without leaving the app by including the links of purchase on the product's post itself. Facebook being the most popular platform consumers uses to make in-app social purchases. (47.7%) i.e. 41 respondents among which are mostly millennials and GenZs who agrees to the fact that ease of making purchase increases the likelihood of buying the products or services. (32.6%) i.e. 28 respondents are neutral and (11.6%) i.e. 10 respondents disagrees with the fact since the social media shopping features are fairly new to some of the users or have barely used them. Some might have even been a victim of scams.

11. The use of appealing visuals (images, videos, graphics) on social media increases my interest in a product or service.

86 responses

- a) Strongly Agree
- b) Agree
- c) Neutral
- d) Disagree
- e) Strongly Disagree
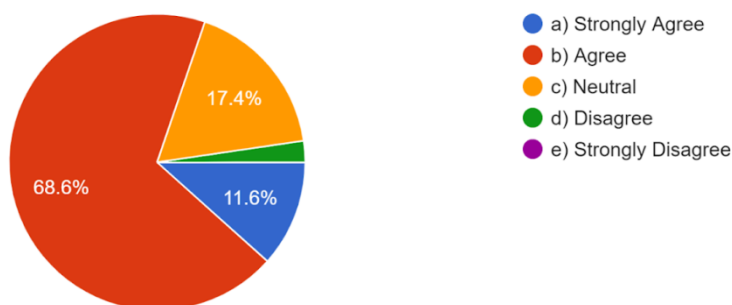
➢ (11.6%) i.e. 10 respondents and (68.6%) i.e. 59 respondents feels that appealing visuals are imperative to grab the user's attention and increase their interest in a product or service. As the saying,a picture is worth a thousand words, in today's digital landscape, creative and compelling visuals helps to evoke emotions and leave deep imprints on the minds of the consumers. Appealing visual contents helps in conveying the message of the advertisement effectively aiding business to create better brand recognition and overall success. It gives the social media users a reason to follow the brand, like, comment and eventually buy the product. But still there are some respondents (17.4%) who are neutral and (2.3%) who disagrees and feels that the visual contents of the products are not as displayed in the posts due to digital alteration giving higher expectations to the consumers.

12. Social media influencers play a significant role in shaping my purchase decisions.

86 responses

- a) Strongly Agree
- b) Agree
- c) Neutral
- d) Disagree
- e) Strongly Disagree
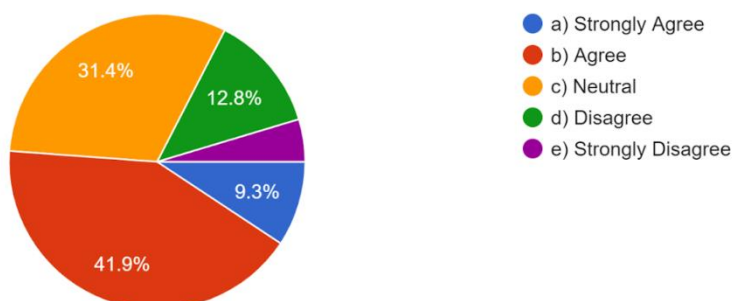
➢ Influencers are those individuals who are digital creators and has built a credibility in a specific niche having a large number of followers or loyal audience, sharing common interest. These influencers have established such a relationship with the audience that they have the power to influence their purchase decisions. Different company brands collaborate with these individuals in order to achieve their marketing objectives. As per the survey it was found that (9.3%) i.e. 8 respondents strongly agrees and (41.9%) i.e. 36 respondents agrees that they get persuaded by the posts/contents of the social media influencers which in turn plays a pivotal role in shaping their purchase decisions. (31.4%) i.e. 27 respondents are neutral in their opinion whereas (12.8%) i.e. 11 respondents disagrees while (4.7%) i.e. 4 respondents strongly disagrees to the fact, as they feel that the influencers promote the brands simply because they get paid for it.

With the increase in digital marketing and promotion, it is becoming more and more difficult for the brand to stand out on social media. Focusing on the right platform, showcasing the products unique features and highlighting its specialties by using up-to-date technologies, building creative social media marketing campaigns are few ideas to differentiate the product from that of the competitors.

13. I trust user-generated content (e.g., reviews, images) on social media when considering a purchase.

86 responses

- a) Strongly Agree
- b) Agree
- c) Neutral
- d) Disagree
- e) Strongly Disagree
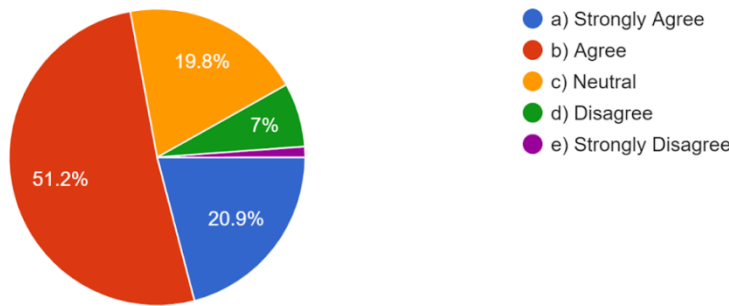
- ➢ User generated content (UGC) is a brand specific content created by the customers in the form of videos, photos, testimonials, etc. It can be said to be an electronic word of mouth. It is an authentic social proof when the audience sees that people like them wearing or using the product, which influences them to buy.

  Due to fierce competition in the market, brands are always striving to stand out to be seen online to grab the audience attention. Since the customers are very much knowledgeable and aware about the market, they have become more selective about the brands that they interact with and purchase from and can quickly find out the false sentiments (UGC paid by the brands) displayed in the posts/ content which could adversely affect the reputation of the brands. Genuity and quality are important aspects of a successful user generated content. Therefore, the business should always ensure that UGC is created by either by customers, brand loyalists or employees.

  With due observation of the chart, it can be seen that (20.9%) i.e. 18 respondents strongly agree and more than half of the total respondents agree that they trust user generated contents or reviews while considering a purchase. (19.8%) 17 respondents are neutral to their answer whereas (7%) 6 respondents disagrees and (1.2%) 1 respondent totally disagrees that UGC should not be considered as a modern day word of mouth.

14. I am more likely to purchase a product or service if it recommended by someone I follow on social media.

86 responses

- a) Strongly Agree
- b) Agree
- c) Neutral
- d) Disagree
- e) Strongly Disagree
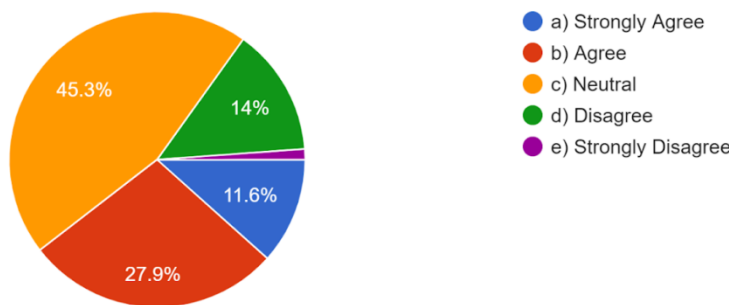
- ➢ People often trust recommendations from individuals they know or follow on social media. The personal connection creates a sense of trust, as users believe that those making recommendations have genuine experiences with the product or service. As per the observation, (11.6%) 10 respondents strongly agree and (27.9%) 24 respondents agrees with the statement. (14%) 12 respondents disagrees and (1.2%) 1 respondent strongly disagree as some individuals may be skeptical about the authenticity of recommendations on social media. They might question the motives behind the recommendations, suspecting biased opinions or undisclosed affiliations between the person making the recommendation and the product or service. Some individuals may have had negative experiences with products or services recommended on social media, leading to a general distrust in such recommendations. (45.3%)

39 respondents are neutral to the fact as people are increasingly aware of the commercial nature of social media platforms and this awareness may lead to a more cautious and neutral stance when it comes to trusting recommendations. Some individuals may rely heavily on recommendations, while others may prefer to conduct thorough research or rely on personal experiences. The neutral stance may indicate a balanced approach to decision-making in considering purchases.

V. Findings and Conclusion:

Findings:

i. The maximum number of the respondents were from the age group of 15-35 as these are the individuals who are often more technologically savvy and have grown up in an era where digital communication and social media are prevalent. This age group is more likely to have integrated social media into their daily routines for communication, entertainment and information consumption.

ii. The observed preferences of social media platform highlights the importance of a multi-platform marketing approach, with Instagram and Facebook serving as key focal points, especially when targeting a younger demographic. Companies that understand and utilize the diverse features of these platforms can create effective and engaging marketing campaigns tailored to the preferences of their target audience.

iii. The majority of respondents express a positive view of social media as a discovery tool for products and services, the presence of dissenting and neutral opinions underscores the need for businesses to remain attentive and responsive to the diverse perspectives of their target audience.

iv. The strong affirmative responses indicates that social media plays a crucial role in the pre-purchase decision-making process for a significant majority of the respondents. Companies should prioritize maintaining a strong and informative presence on social media platforms recognizing the influence of social media in the comparison phase and strategically utilize these platforms to showcase their product's features, reviews and competitive advantages, which should be readily accessible to consumers.

v. As per the data from the survey, some consumers are enthusiastic about interacting with brands online, others prefer a more reserved approach and rely on personal experiences. Striking a balance between informative content and opportunities for active engagement can help e-commerce businesses appeal to a broader audience and build meaningful connections with consumers across different engagement styles. Understanding and respecting the varied preferences highlighted in the survey will be crucial for the business aiming to establish a positive and inclusive online presence.

vi. The survey results emphasize the importance of relevance in advertising, with a majority of respondents expressing a belief that tailored content increases the likelihood of viewership and action. Businesses should take note of these preferences and incorporate personalized strategies in their advertising efforts to effectively connect with their audience and drive meaningful engagement.

vii. The survey findings illustrate a nuanced landscape of opinions, ranging from agreement to neutrality and disagreement, reflecting the diverse attitudes and experiences of respondents regarding the ease of making purchases through social media. Businesses looking to leverage social media for e-commerce should consider addressing concerns related to safety and trust. Implementing secure transaction processes, providing clear information, and establishing a reliable customer support system can help build confidence among users. Educating users about the safety measures in place and showcasing positive experiences of others may also help mitigate concerns and encourage more users to explore and trust social media shopping features.

viii. The survey findings emphasize the crucial role of appealing visuals in digital marketing, with the majority of respondents recognizing their impact on user engagement and brand success. However, concerns about digital alteration and its potential impact on consumer expectations highlight the need for businesses to balance creativity with transparency to foster trust and credibility among their audience.

ix. While a substantial portion of the audience recognizes and is positively influenced by social media influencers, there is a notable segment that remains neutral or skeptical. This indicates the importance for brands and influencers to focus on building trust, authenticity and transparent relationships with their audience to maximize the impact of influencer marketing. Addressing concerns about financial motivations and maintaining genuine connections with followers can contribute to building a more effective and trustworthy influencer marketing strategy.

x. The majority of respondents place a high level of trust in user-generated content, indicating its significance as a contemporary form of word-of-mouth marketing. Brands that effectively harness and promote authentic user experiences can potentially gain a competitive edge in influencing consumer decisions.

xi. Recommendations from friends or family on social media can have a strong impact on purchasing decisions, as individuals are influenced by the preferences of those within their social circles.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the survey results offer a comprehensive overview of the dynamic landscape of consumer behaviour and preferences in the realm of digital marketing and social media. The dominance of respondents within the 15-35 age group underscores the importance of tailoring marketing strategies to a technologically savvy audience immersed in digital communication. The prominence of platforms like Instagram and Facebook highlights the necessity for a diversified, multi-platform marketing approach, particularly when targeting younger demographics. While social media is widely recognized as a powerful discovery tool for products and services, businesses must navigate the varied perspectives expressed, ensuring responsiveness to dissenting and neutral opinions. The affirmative responses affirm the pivotal role of social media in the pre-purchase decision-making process, urging companies to prioritize informative and engaging content on these platforms. Striking a balance between tailored advertising, visual appeal and authenticity, as well as addressing concerns related to influencers and e-commerce safety, becomes imperative in building trust and credibility. In essence, understanding the nuances revealed in the survey is paramount for businesses aiming to establish a positive and inclusive online presence that resonates with diverse consumer preferences and experiences.

Limitations

i. The findings of the research are confined to the area of Darjeeling and may not be fully applicable to all e-commerce industries or regions due to variations in consumer behaviour and cultural factors.

ii. The study has been done considering a total sample of 86 respondents which may limit the generalizability of the findings to broader populations or contexts.

iii. The study is limited by the time frame in which data was collected and analysed. Social media trends and consumer behaviours in e-commerce can evolve rapidly and the research findings may not reflect the most current state of affairs.

iv. All the questions framed for survey is solely based on the objectives of the research and does not include any question touching other aspects related to the topic.

v. Different social media platforms may have unique features, user demographics and engagement mechanisms. The research may not fully capture the nuanced effects of each platform on consumer behaviour and purchase decisions.

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