INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA CHARACTERISTICS ON PURCHASE DECISION: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF INDIAN CUSTOMERS IN THE UTTAR PRADESH REGION

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ABSTRACT

The study aims to examine the influence of social media characteristics on the consumer's purchase decision-making process and whether this influence differs in the different phases of this process. For this study, the method of quantitative research is used. Baseline data was collected from social media users via a structured questionnaire on an appropriate sample of 200 individuals in the Uttar Pradesh region of India. The study found that the impact of social media characteristics varied at different stages of the consumer's purchase decision-making process. The study also revealed implications for marketers who can harness the power of social media.

Keywords: *Consumer behavior, marketing, social media, and decision-making*

1. INTRODUCTION

Recently, social media has become essential to consumers' daily lives, radically transforming their interactions, communication, and purchasing decisions. As digital platforms expand their reach, comprehending the impact of social media on customer behavior has become essential for businesses and marketers. In the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, this investigation aims to examine whether specific social media characteristics affect consumers' final purchasing decisions.

Traditional marketing theory focuses on the five-stage conventional consumer decision-making model, including includes: need recognition, information search, alternative appraisal, buy choice, and post-purchase behavior. Nonetheless, the emergence of social media has contributed novel aspects to this process, potentially altering how consumers traverse these stages. Due to the surge of user-generated content, peer endorsements, and instantaneous interactions, social media platforms have become formidable instruments for information distribution and opinion development.

Although prior studies have examined the overall effect of social media on consumer behavior, a significant gap exists in comprehending how this influence differs across various phases of the decision-making process, especially within the Indian setting. This study aims to fill this vacuum by examining the distinct influence of social media attributes at every phase of the customer purchase decision journey in Uttar Pradesh.

This study utilizes a quantitative research methodology and surveys 200 individuals to elucidate the intricate ways in which social media influences consumer decision-making. The results will enhance the scholarly discussion on digital marketing and consumer behavior while providing practical insights for organizations aiming to utilize social media effectively in their marketing plans.

Understanding the processes by which social media platforms influence customer decisions is crucial as businesses commit more funds to social media marketing. This study seeks to clarify these processes, thereby helping companies to modify their social media strategies to more closely fit digital era customer decision-making processes.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 What is social media?

Social media (SM) is unavoidable in modern human life and business. People use it not only for networking but also for clothes shopping, education, investment, politics, social cause, marketing, and generally, it has become an important part of their lives. Similarly, current corporations see social media as the most successful method of marketing their products to customers. It has been embraced by more than 160 million companies worldwide as a crucial component of their marketing mix since it enables direct communication with customers (Cooper, 2020; Hootsuite, 2020; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). As a result, marketers' dependency on traditional tools (i.e., television and newspapers) has reduced and it has become an advertising frontline for brands.

Social media has formed a new landscape in supporting the socialization of information (Solis 2007), as a result, it has enabled and improved communication flow by making it easier for more people, to blowout useful information with possibly huge online viewers (Smith and Zook, 2011, 10), in which the discussion may be taken place on media locally

but lead to a global impact. According to Cavazza (2010), social media advertising refers to the methods and instruments used to recognize and analyze discussions, as well as to engage in and start social relationships with communities and, therefore, customers. In contrast with traditional media, social media offers more possibilities to marketers to engage with customers and have real interactions with them.

As a result, the marketing industry has changed from a time when marketers had the power of influence to the present, when consumers have more sway over their peers (Jaffe, 2010). According to Weinberg (2009), there are a few reasons to use a strong social media strategy in addition to (or instead of) traditional ones. These include: facilitating the organic discovery of new content; increasing traffic; forging strong relationships; and serving as an affordable substitute for traditional marketing. People in the social media era have access to content that is not necessarily associated with commercial intent (neutral), in contrast to traditional advertising. As a result, if a person likes content, they are likely to recommend it to their friends, families, and other contacts via social media, which will cause the content to spread quickly without interfering with conventional marketing (Weinberg 2009). Social media provides an opportunity to build communities; once a business has established its position as a participant in the community worth paying attention to, eventually others will be interested in what it shares and spread to the appropriate ones (Weber 2009).

2.2 Consumer Decision Process

Consumers pass through different stages of consumption that compose the consumer's purchasing decision-making process (Belch and Belch, 2003, p107-122). Hoyer & MacInnis (2010, p12) and Sternthal & Craig (1982) documented a five-stage model that is Need Recognition, Search for Information, Assessment of Alternatives, Decision Making, and Post-purchase Evaluation. Consumers are influenced by both internal and external influences during the purchasing decision-making process (Belch and Belch, 2003, p112-114).

Today the availability and transparency of information have greatly influenced the decision-making process; therefore, it is very important to inspect what are the hurdles and fiction points that hold prospects from becoming consumers or keep consumers hesitating from re-purchasing. (Silverman, 2001.)

2.3 Need Recognition

In this stage, consumers can differentiate between desire and actual situation but for the decision-making process to be sparked and activated, it is insufficient. (Solomon, Bamossy & Askegaard, 2002) If a consumer is aware of the unfulfilled need, problem recognition occurs (Hoyer & MacInnis, 2010, p12). So those unfulfilled needs might be provoked by internal stimuli but also by external stimuli. What is of interest here is that social media plays a dynamic role in activating those unfulfilled needs through

advertisements displayed on different social media pages for example or through a conversation with a friend that could make consumers diagnose that they have an unfulfilled need.

2.4 Search of Information

If a consumer can recognize the problem, then a certain interest arises in the both product as well as service that can provide a solution, and they tend to go through the following steps before taking any action – they start finding available options, getting information about the available options, and finally judging best options out of available that can most likely deliver the best outcome (Silverman 2001). There are two categories of information sources: internal and external. Internal research suggests that a person's past knowledge and experiences will influence the kind of actions they are likely to conduct in the future (Solomon, Bamossy, and Askegaard, 2002). Even when a consumer is observant of a marketing offer, it does not infer that the offer will be comprehended as intended; therefore, aside from the collected information, any information or message that is generally investigated and encoded in the mind of consumers has specific meanings. will be used in the process of assessment of alternatives. According to Hoyer and MacInnis (2010, p13) After surpassing the stage of recognizing the need, the consumer wants to get more and more information. Social media plays a vibrant role in this information exposition since consumers can get information from their 'friends' but also from brands about products and services through pages they can 'like' on Facebook and 'follow' on Twitter. Consumers conduct both internal as well as external searches when they are in the information search stage, according to Belch and Belch (2003, p112-114). According to the author in the external search, consumers often refer to personal sources when they are searching for information. This means that consumers who are seeking for information about products, services, or brands can utilize different platforms of social media and tools to grasp or ask information from their friends.

2.5 Assessment of Alternatives

If a consumer can find the best alternatives that can fulfil his or her needs after assessing sufficient information, they start evaluating the best available alternatives (Sternthal and Craig 1982, 46). Depending on their objectives or goals, consumers create a criterion for evaluating the best alternative (Sternthal and Craig 1982, 46), to give an example, which alternative offers greater ease of use or to arrange, and how have other users found it, because it is essential to confirm whether the available information is dependable and to verify that the product will deliver the anticipated result as expected (Silverman, 2001.) To validate the outcome according to the expectation, experience plays a significant role in the choices people make. Direct and indirect experiences are vital pointers along the buying cycle. Direct experience is not always ideal since people may misuse the product or have undesirable experiences because they do not know how to use it. Typically, negative experiences are likely to be costly—both in terms of finances

and time—or even detrimental to one's reputation (Silverman, 2001)." Consumers form their opinions after considering the various alternatives regarding the substitutes, which leads to their attitudes, intents, and finally their choice among available options (Sternthal and Craig 1982, 46). Furthermore, it is clear from several studies that when a choice gets more complicated, the decision-maker will look for ways to streamline the review process. (Bruner, Good now and Austin 1956; Association for Psychological Science 2008).

2.6 Final Decision
According to Kotler and Keller (2009) during evaluation, the consumer ultimately develops preferences among the different brands available in the market, But, two factors may intervene between the willingness to purchase and the actual purchase decision – The opinions of others and unexpected situational factors. Attitudes of others are the degree to which another person's negative perception towards the preferred choices or unwillingness to satisfy the requirement of endorsing the purchase intention, this might cause in a modification of the consumer's purchase intention (Kotler and Keller 2009, 172). Similarly, Kotler, (2009) identified that consumers are highly influenced by informed sources that publish reviews such as customer product reviews on Amazon.com, blogs as well as bulletin boards. Unanticipated situational factors these are factors which may occur and alter the purchase intention. To explain, a purchase that may be unexpected but a bit urgent may come up, overtaking the initial purchase which a consumer may have been motivated to do. In other words, preferences and purchase intention cannot always be relied upon as sure guides or predictors of actual purchase behavior (Kotler & Keller, 2009). At this stage, consumers will decide whether they will buy products/services or not.

2.7 Post Purchase Decision
Following consumption, the consumer subsequently feels varying degrees of happiness or discontent and assesses the decision-making process used to choose the alternative. This stage has two possible outcomes: discord or satisfaction. When a consumer feels dissonance towards a purchase, the decision is "devalued" and the consumer starts looking for, learning about, and weighing alternative possibilities for future purchases, which sets off new behavior (Sternthal and Craig 1982). It is a stage where the consumer chooses whether to completely adapt the product rather than just use it once. They also decide whether to repurchase the product. Given that consumers always have a say in which uses, how frequently, and under what conditions they utilize a product. People are more inclined to promote a product to others when they feel at ease using it frequently (Silverman, 2001).

2.8 Social Media and Consumer Decision-Making
The behavior of the people can be inferred from the motives behind their use of social media. Information, entertainment, and social features are the three main consumer motivations for utilizing the Internet as a medium (Heinonen, 2011).

Social media can have an impact on purchasing decisions for any services or goods. Social media influences consumer attitudes towards advertising, brands, and purchasing intentions, as evidenced by the link between social media and consumer decision-making. The connection between consumer decision-making and social media shows that social media has an impact on customer attitudes towards advertising, brands, and purchasing intentions. The behavior of the consumer is impacted by social media at several points in the purchasing decision-making process. It has altered how people behave when making purchases. Consumers are now actively seeking information on social media, as opposed to previously waiting for businesses to push content in their direction. When "surfing" on various social networks like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc. where users can see friends posting photographs of the goods they have purchased or using the "like" button to highlight businesses they enjoy, for instance, consumers can spot new requirements. Social media platforms allow users to collaborate on material and ideas, comment on the performance of businesses, and tell a larger audience than ever before about their positive or negative interactions with those businesses (Brown and Hayes, 2008, p. 179–180). Weinberg (2009) defines social media marketing as "leveraging the social through the media to market the constituents of businesses." To put it another way, it involves the procedure of enabling people to advertise their websites, goods, and/or services through online social channels, allowing them to engage with and reach a much larger community than would have been possible through conventional advertising channels.

There are clear indications that the creation of social networks may influence and alter how each customer purchases (Deutscher, 1955). This is corroborated by the observation that for many years now, an extensive variety of web-based social networks have permitted users to share their personal experiences by posting reviews, leaving comments, and evaluating the reviews of others.

However, it also became evident that customers are more inclined to believe suggestions from friends and family members whom they know and trust than from random strangers or recommender systems (Sinha, 2001). This may assist in explaining why, according to the most current study (Kim, 2007), social networks are increasingly serving as entry hubs for e-commerce as they route users to purchasing websites. Due to the growing use of social media, Constantine, and Fountain (2008) proposed an original Stimuli and Response model derived from Kotler's (1994) paradigm. Social media and Web 2.0 have diffused online marketing mix, e-mails, banners, partner websites, and social media experiences of marketer control. Conversely, traditional shopping experiences are primarily influenced by the traditional marketing mix-radio read-newspaper-television ads and other uncontrollable stimuli-values, societal factors, demographics, and perceptions.

Social impact is crucial in the decision-making process when it comes to purchases. A consumer might use the attributes he has listed as criteria to begin looking for the ideal

product. However, consumers frequently find that exploring, searching, and making a purchase on e-commerce websites takes a lot of time and effort. According to Silverman et al. (2001), more than 80% of online buyers have eventually left e-commerce websites without finding what they're looking for. People frequently turn to their closest friends and family members, whom they trust the most, for advice. But such friends may be largely inaccessible or at the very least out of reach. This metaphor could be utilized to share product experiences even if our friends aren't online because social media connects us to our closest friends and can even provide us asynchronous access to their words and thoughts. Google (2012) did a study on the consumer journey to online purchases in the U.K., U.S., France, Germany, Japan, Canada, and Brazil. The research revealed that various marketing channels affect the client at various stages of the buying process. Social media is a helpful avenue for fostering awareness, consideration, and intent earlier in the purchasing funnel in all the targeted nations. According to Silverman (2009), many companies are vying for consumers' attention. As a result, an engaging blog post or appealing YouTube video may be all it takes for a potential customer to pay attention and gain awareness about a brand's goods or services. During the consumer decision-making process, social media can be used as a prompt (to raise awareness) and as a validation (to verify the purchasing decision has been made) (Evans, 2008).

The classic idea of the buying behavior process has been further confounded by the introduction of social media since the influence of online platforms on purchasing attitudes has expanded beyond traditional channels. The inputs offered by parties outside of the control of internet marketers, such as peer reviews, recommendations, social networks, blogs, and other types of user-generated content, prompt preferences and decision-making.

People's perceptions of their capacity to gather unbiased information, search out, identify, and acquire a larger choice of goods and services, as well as communicate with others about actual experiences both before and after purchases, have all been significantly impacted by the Social Web. The major goal of marketers, especially when using social media, is to encourage people to share their positive experiences to distribute this content more quickly across communities. Social media has also altered consumer behavior, ranging from information-seeking to post-purchase actions like expressing or demonstrating dissatisfaction (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Laroche et al., 2012). Social media websites give businesses, the opportunity to actively participate and communicate with both current and potential customers, to encourage an increased sense of intimacy of the customer relationship, and to build all-important meaningful relationships with consumers in today's business environment, where customer loyalty can disappear at the slightest mistake and can also have online propagation of their unfortunate encounters (Mersey, Malthouse, & Calder 2010).

3. RESEARCH PROBLEM, QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

The progress of the field of communication in today's world has been replicated in the field of advertising, websites, including social networking sites that spread rapidly with amazing speed and started to affect society and behavior. It is found that there is a remarkable lack of research explaining the exact role played by social media at the different stages of consumers' purchase decision-making process. Therefore, the problem of the existing study focused on the fact that many companies in India are still not attentive to the importance and the role of social networking sites in consumer decision-making.

Thus, the research is guided by one central research question: "How does the increasing influence of Social Media on consumers' purchasing decision-making process in India (Uttar Pradesh region) vary according to the different stages?"

3.1 Objectives of the Research

3.1.1 Main Objective

To find out the precise role of the influence of social media plays at the various stages of consumers' purchasing decision-making process.

3.1.2 Sub-Objective

The subsequent research questions focused on the quest of the research objectives:

- To analyze the impact of social media advertising on the need recognition stage
- To measure the role of social media advertising on information-seeking
- To investigate how social media advertising affects alternative assessment
- To understand how social media advertising plays a vital role in buying decision-making
- To find out how social media advertising affects the stage after a purchase
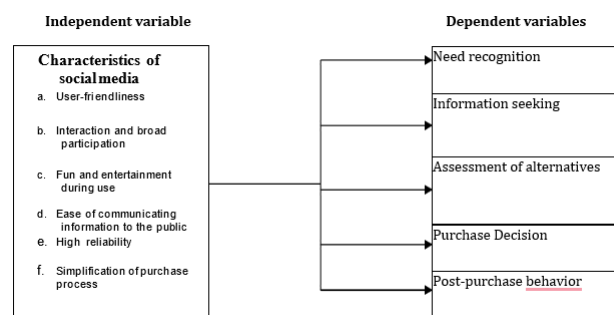
4. RESEARCH MODEL & HYPOTHESIS

Figure 1: Research Model

4.1 Hypotheses

The primary hypotheses of the research are presented in a null format as follows:

H1: Characteristics of social media have no substantial influence on need recognition.

H2: Characteristics of social media have no substantial influence on the search for information.

H3: Characteristics of social media have no substantial influence on the assessment of alternatives.

H4: Characteristics of social media have no substantial influence on purchase decisions.

H5: Characteristics of social media have no substantial influence on post-purchase behavior.

5. RESEARCH DESIGN

The current study aims to explore the influence of social media on the buying decision-making process of consumers. Quantitative research fits to complete this study

5.1 Population
The population of this study comprised all consumers buying shopping goods in the Uttar Pradesh region. The estimated population of this region is about 228,959,599 persons.

5.2 Sample Selection and Data Collection Method
To answer the research, question primary data collection was used. Using primary data collection allowed for addressing specific issues to consumers about their usage of social media platforms and how these media influence their purchase decision-making processes. A questionnaire, distributed to a "convenience sample" of customers who buy goods through online shopping. The researcher distributed 200 questionnaires, 170 ones were retained, and only 120 were chosen for analysis. Questionnaires were distributed taking into consideration having customers from different demographic characteristics in terms of education, age, and income levels.

5.3 Questionnaire Construction
The researcher developed a questionnaire by the research model described previously as well as previous studies. The researcher crosse-checked the questionnaire by many colleagues in the marketing and Business departments. The questionnaire was developed into three parts: the first part describes demographic characteristics, the second part related to social media dimensions, and the third part handles the consumer purchasing decision-making process. A five-point Likert scale (1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree) was used in the second and third sections of the questionnaire to obtain the information to test how social media influences consumer's purchasing decision-making.

6. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

6.1 Sample Profile
The sample used for my research is made up of 120 respondents. 54.17% of respondents are male and 45.83% are female (table-1). As seen in the table below, 68.33% of respondents are between 20 and 34 years old. 39.17% of the sample are bachelor holders, 80% are married, and 57.5%

hold their monthly income ranges between 5000-11000 Rupees.

Table 1: Sample characteristics

Variable		Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	65	54.17
	Female	55	45.83
Total		120	100%
Education	Higher School	25	20.83
	Diploma	32	26.67
	Bachelor	47	39.17
	Post Graduate	16	13.33
Total		120	100%
Age	Less than 20 years	05	04.17
	20-24	33	27.50
	25-29	24	20.00
	30-34	25	20.83
	35-39	15	12.50
	More than 40	18	15.00
Total	Total	120	100%
Marital Status	Married	96	80.00
	Single	24	20.00
Total		120	100%
Income	Less than 5000 INR	15	12.5
	5001-8000	33	27.5
	8001-11000	36	30.0
	11001-14000	22	18.3
	More than 14000	14	11.7
Total		120	100%

6.2 Validity and Reliability
Validity and Reliability checks were performed in several ways. The face validity was checked by some experts, and through a pilot study on (25) persons. The participants were asked to give feedback on the format and appropriateness of questions and to suggest any items that could be included in the current questionnaire.

Given their suggestions, several amendments were incorporated into some questions that improved the clarity. Reliability scores are expressed numerically as a coefficient. A coefficient score will be 1.00 if a test is perfectly reliable. A coefficient of at least .60 is required to indicate an acceptable degree of reliability (Sekaran, 2004). The following is the Cronbach's alpha of all the factors.

Table 2: Reliability scores

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Need recognition	3	0.78
Information Seek	4	0.84
Evaluation	5	0.88
Decision	4	0.89
Post-purchase	5	0.87
User-friendliness	3	0.74
Interaction and broad participation	4	0.72
Fun and entertainment during use	5	0.77
Ease of communicating information to the public	4	0.82
High Reliability	5	0.72
Simplification of purchase process	3	0.84
Total		**0.92**

6.3 Hypotheses Testing

To test hypotheses, multiple regression analysis will be used. The investigation focused on six variables: ease of use, interaction, fun, information communication, credibility, and easy purchase. The variables tested for this study are to validate the influence of these six variables on each stage of the purchase decision.

Table 3: Influence of social media dimensions on each purchase decision

Dependent	Independent	Beta	t	Sig.	R2	F	Sig.
Need	User-friendliness	−.091	−1.058	.290	.36	26.58	.000ᵃ
	Interaction and broad participation	.058	.548	.584			
	Fun and entertainment during use	.192	2.036	.044			
	Ease of communicating information to public	−.155	−1.467	.145			
	High Reliability	.285	3.008	.004			
	Simplification of purchase process	.397	7.469	.000			
Information seeks	User-friendliness	-.012	-.155	.879	0.59	63.28	.000ᵃ
	Interaction and broad participation	.035	.401	.689			
	Fun and entertainment during use	-.017	-.208-	.837			
	Ease of communicating information to public	.035	.389	.699			
	High Reliability	.583	7.525	.000			
	Simplification of purchase process	.254	5.899	.000			
Evaluation	User-friendliness	−.037	-.486-	.638	.55	52.12	.000ᵃ
	Interaction and broad participation	.088	.978	.335			
	Fun and entertainment during use	.069	.848	.399			
	Ease of communicating information to public	.185	2.053	.045			
	High Reliability	.315	3.808	.000			
	Simplification of purchase process	.245	5.333	.000			
Decision	User-friendliness	−.071	-.987-	.326	0.58	58	.000ᵃ
	Interaction and broad participation	.269	3.105	.001			
	Fun and entertainment during use	.015	.167	.872			
	Ease of communicating information to public	-.015	-.155	.885			
	High Reliability	.445	5.606	.000			
	Simplification of purchase	.235	5.275	.000			
Post-purchase	User-friendliness	-.070	-.855	.395	0.43	33.15	.000ᵃ
	Interaction and broad participation	.117	1.165	.245			
	Fun and entertainment during use	.074	.795	.429			
	Ease of communicating information to public	.135	1.325	.186			
	High Reliability	.325	3.575	.000			
	Simplification of purchase	.190	3.760	.000			

Predictors: (Constant), User-friendliness, Interaction, and broad participation, Fun, and entertainment during use, Ease of communicating information to the public, High Reliability, Simplification of purchase.

As shown in table (3) of multiple regression analysis, R-square is equal to (0.36, 0.59, 0.55, 0.58, 0.43 respectively), this signifies that 36% of the variance in the dependent variable (need recognition) is explained by the independent variable (social media), 59% of the variance in information seeking is explained by dependent variable; while 55% of the variance in evaluation, and 58% of the variance in the purchase decision, and 43% of the variance of post-purchase stage were explained by the dependent variable which is the social media. The P-value of all models is 0.000 and it is <0.05, the consequence is that the model is statistically significant. Table 3 elaborates also that the dependent variable (social media) has a significant relationship F= (26.58, 63.28, 52.12, 58, 33.15) with P<.05 with independent variables need recognition, information seeks, evaluation, decision, and post-purchase.

Outcomes of the multiple regressions (table 3) show also the following:

- Fun and entertainment during use, High Reliability, and Simplification of the purchase process have a significant impact on need recognition.
- High Reliability and Simplification of purchase have significant impacts on the information search stage.
- Ease of evaluation communicating information to the public and Simplification of purchase have significant impacts on the stage.
- Interaction and broad participation, high reliability, and Simplification of purchase have significant impacts on the decision stage.
- High Reliability and Simplification of purchase have significant impacts on the post-purchase stage.

From the results, the dimensional factors of social media such as those factors of (High reliability and Simplification of purchase) have a significant impact on all purchase decision stages. This means that these factors are seen by the study sample as crucial factors that influence purchase decisions.

Table 4: Influence of social media in the process of purchase decision

Dependent Variable	R²	F	Sig.	Order
Need	0.36	92.186	0.000	5
Information Seek	0.59	274.244	0.000	1
Evaluation	0.55	266.49	0.000	3
Purchase Decision	0.58	294.6	0.000	2
Post-purchase	0.43	181.03	0.000	4

As per table (4), all hypotheses were rejected, and it is proving that social media as an independent variable has a noteworthy influence on all purchase decision stages. Results showed also that this influence was more on the stage of (decision, followed by (the information search

stage), evaluation, post-purchase, and lastly need recognition stage.

7. DISCUSSION IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The five-stage decision-making model has provided an organized approach in outlining the general stages that consumers engage in all purchase stages. The findings demonstrated that social media has a direct impact on each stage in the consumer decision-making journey, including information gathering, purchasing behavior, post-purchase communication, and evaluation, as well as affecting the creation of general opinions and attitudes. This is consistent with previous literature (e.g., Kaplan and Haenlein, 2009; Mangold and Faulds, 2009).

The study showed that social media appeared to have a significant influence on the information search stage and the purchase decision stage. Before making a purchase, consumers pay close attention to, process, and choose the information. Because consumers can choose their information sources, which determines the kind of information they will be exposed to, information exposure is very selective in its early stages. Personal attitude is an important component that must be considered while gathering and analyzing information. Because of this, not only are judgments about goods or services likely founded on it, but it is also a crucial factor in determining the information customers will seek out, which ultimately influences the degree of information receipt. Unbiased recommendations and customer experiences about the assessment of alternatives stage may cause consumers to choose a different brand. As consumers typically rely more on their friends than on brands, the concept of trust appears to be highly significant.

Due to the accessibility and availability of information on social media platforms, consumers are found to actively participate in the process of information acquisition. Customers have been able to use a variety of comparison tools, recommendations, and reviews that are available on social media to aid in their buying decisions thanks to the implication of social media's involvement in the purchase decision stage.

Compared to the other stages of the consumer's purchasing decision-making process, the impact of social media seems to be less significant and lower at the need recognition and post-purchase behavior stages.

The research's findings have shown India's existing condition regarding post-purchase customer behavior. Many people have observed and concurred that social media allows them to express their ideas and engage with businesses and other customers more efficiently.

Again, though, a lot of them have felt uninspired to share their opinions on social media or to do so with their peers, acquaintances, or family. In response to the buy validation tool (Evans 2008), social media has benefited modern marketing by bridging the deliberation stage of the customer decision process with post-purchase word of mouth, extending the purchase funnel. The "talks" are specifically

able to produce experiential data for prospects because of word-of-mouth and user-generated content on social media; however, the results have shown that word-of-mouth would be insufficient for influence because of the unwillingness to share information via social media. From the standpoint of marketers, this issue could act as a bottleneck regarding social media marketing; as a result, marketers should determine what causes these specific unfavorable feelings among consumers and encourage them to join in the conversations.

In conclusion, these findings point the way for future studies that examine the influence of factors including cultural background, demographic aspects, and usage variations on the impact of social media that may influence consumers' decision-making processes about purchases. The traditional way that consumers make purchasing decisions has changed due to the surge in social media in recent years. Through their recommendations on social media, peers, who have always been a source of influence for consumers, are now exerting an even greater influence. Due to the ease with which peers can now extend their influence, the Need Recognition step could be altered.

The outcomes of this study show that Indian consumers actively utilize social media networking platforms to validate their purchase decisions. However, consumers are found to be inactive in case of spreading their positive word of mouth through the available social media platforms. The consistency of the gathered data, established theories about consumer behavior, and modern frameworks for social media marketing have indicated that the fundamentals of consumer behavior have not changed despite the growth of social media, with people still needing to go through all the steps before deciding rather than doing so, immediately after having a thought of purchasing.

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