Impact of Social Commerce on Consumer Buying Behaviour in India

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Abstract—With the rise of Covid-19, quarantine has highlighted the necessity of having an ecommerce business, and it's now safe to say that if you don't have one, you're losing a lot of revenue. Due to its speedy and simple means of exchanging commodities and regional and global services, e-commerce has significantly grown in popularity over the previous few decades. India is expected to be a hotbed for e-commerce business models. [1] The Indian e-commerce sector is currently rated 9th in the world in terms of cross-border development. Our world is changing, and e-commerce will only grow in importance as time goes on. It will be aided in this endeavour by new technologies. Because consumers are unwilling to risk exposure, the coronavirus pandemic has changed things all around the world, and it's anticipated that buying behaviour will shift toward online ways. [2] The purpose of this research cum survey paper is to investigate the influence of social media in consumers' decision-making processes for complex transactions, which are expensive and rare and are marked by considerable brand variations, strong consumer engagement and risk. The research also explores how the abundance of the content and the user generated information can change the buying pattern of the consumers. A quantitative survey conducted through the medium of survey forms investigates up to what degree experiences are altered for the consumers by the use of social media and e-commerce applications. Consumer satisfaction is impacted by the use of social media platforms during the stages of the data gathering and evaluating alternatives, with satisfaction growing as the customer moves through the cycle toward a final buying decision and post-purchase review. [4][5][23]

Keywords— *Socio-ecommerce, consumer behaviour, branding awareness, customer buying intentions, etc.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The social media revolution has ushered in new ways to find and obtain information about the vast array of products and services available. It has made it possible for consumers to connect and discuss brands with one another in a rapid and easy manner. Strangers in digital environments are rapidly influencing consumer attitudes on products and services, which in turn influences opinions in the offline world. [6][7] Because marketers have little control over the content, timing, or frequency of online interactions among consumers, social media has empowered the user. [6]

The use of social media is getting increasingly popular. The World Wide Web has seen a surge in user-generated web technologies such as blogs, social networks, and social media websites over the previous decade. Overall, this is referred to as social media, and these technologies are the driving force behind the proliferation of user-generated content and the creation of a global community. This social media revolution has opened up new avenues for obtaining information about products and services. Strangers on social media can affect a consumer's opinion and comments on products and services, influencing opinions in the offline world as well. But, without a doubt, social media has empowered consumers by allowing them to create content only through online conversations, implying that customers are the ones who can make or destroy a brand. Marketers attempt to comprehend how consumers use social media and their decision-making patterns based on the content displayed, which has the potential to alter their decision-making process. [3]

Social media is commonly used in businesses to raise awareness about products and services, to promote brands, retain existing consumers, and locate new prospects. In this way, social media marketing maximises the benefits of social networking by raising brand awareness, enhancing brand value, and expanding customer reach. This study's purpose is to determine the impact of social media on consumer purchasing behaviour in India. Without a question, consumers and organisations are now more linked than it's ever been, owing to more internet connections than ever before, and India has overtaken China as the world's largest internet connection user. [8]

According to data gathered from the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI), Mumbai has the highest number of internet users in India, at roughly 13 million. With 11.3 million users, Delhi is ranked second, followed by Bangalore, Kolkata, and Chennai, in that sequence. Companies are now contemplating the potential of social media in moulding consumer perceptions, increasing brand value, and influencing buyer decisions as the use of social media grows. Companies increasingly understand that they can take a strategic approach to using social media to get a competitive advantage over those who do not. The literature review and data analysis on its use and perception by

consumers can be utilised to determine the best techniques for improving consumer engagement through Social media in order to access the impact of social media on consumer buying behaviour. [3]

II. DOMAIN RESEARCH & LITERATURE SURVEY

A. The Indian E-commerce Sector

In India, e-commerce has transformed the way society does business. The Indian E-commerce market is predicted to rise to US$ 200 billion by 2026, from US$ 38.5 billion in 2017, owing to the increasing smartphone penetration, the rollout of 4G networks, and rising consumer wealth. In 2018, online retail sales in India are predicted to increase by 31% to US$ 32.70 billion. The 'Digital India' programme is anticipated to widen the number of internet connections in India to 776.45 million by September 2020. 61 percent of all internet connections were made in metropolitan areas, with 97 percent of those connections being wireless. [9] [10]

The Indian online grocery market is expected to grow at a CAGR of 57 percent from $1.9 billion in 2019 to US$ 18.2 billion in 2024. In the final quarter of 2020, India's e-commerce orders volume surged by 36%, with the personal care, beauty, and wellness (PCB&W) market being the largest beneficiary. Conversion rates have also risen to nearly 8.8%, owing to the vast majority of the population being subjected to stay-at-home orders. Due to its speedy and simple means of exchanging commodities and regional and worldwide services, e-commerce has grown in popularity dramatically over the past several decades. India is expected to be a hotbed for e-commerce business models. The Indian e-commerce sector is currently positioned 9th in the world in terms of cross-border development. [9][10]

B. Role of Social Media in Marketing

The increased emphasis on global development, as well as the widespread use of technology in marketing, advertising, and promotion, have resulted in modifications in how corporations view their customers. Researchers have recognised that technology has become a critical element in growing markets, and have designed entire marketing strategies around worldwide access to technology. Simultaneously, advertising and promotion frequently focus on the psychological, emotional, and social variables that influence consumer behaviour, characteristics that can be incorporated into technology-based marketing. As a result, even in the face of globalisation and new technologies, organizations need to consider the four "Ps" of marketing: product, pricing, position, and promotion. [11][12]

Rather than focusing on short-term promotion via technology, astute businesses are incorporating social media techniques to strengthen their relationships with customers. For product marketing and branding, businesses usually focus on three of the most commonly utilised social media platforms: Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. Companies are understanding the value of using strategies to engage consumers in a way that repeatedly reintroduces the product, boosts the appeal of items, or identifies social components to product experiences more than ever before. Social media

websites have evolved into a hub for product information, including the introduction of new product lines, brand awareness, and customer behaviour shaping techniques. [36][14] Through a large-scale social network, social media platforms provide a unique opportunity to register word-of-mouth marketing to a larger audience, boosting consumer-to-consumer communications and expanding brand awareness. [15]

As social media is not an advertising channel in and of itself, businesses may find it difficult to determine how customer information and involvement affect the branding process which isn't necessarily true for print or television advertising. Positive comments on social media platforms can have a positive influence, but unpleasant remarks can also be a part of the brand discussion and are hard to regulate for businesses who turn to social media for marketing. [16] By fostering consumer engagements, social networking sites like Facebook have created a new way of introducing brand-related material and creating exchanges with consumers. As a result, about 93 percent of companies use social media for marketing and branding. According to Shen and Bissell's 2013 study, there are more than 200 million active online users in the United States who spend more than 29 hours per year exploring, evaluating products, and networking online. With nearly 7 hours per person each week spent on Facebook, it is the most popular social networking site. [36] It's vital to identify businesses' perspectives on branding and marketing processes, their aim to build customer engagement, and the effects of social networking on impacting consumer purchasing decision-making in order to comprehend the role of social media in branding. [12]

C. Branding

Consumers often evaluate brands, make brand comparisons, and purchase products based on their brand affinity. Social perceptions, such as the value that individuals place on the product, and social pressures, such as the moral lessons that others place on brand ownership, both influence branding. Components of the branding process, such as brand message and brand understanding, both determine the value associated with branding. [36]

D. Brand-Related Social Media

When organisations consider the usage of social media, brand loyalty becomes increasingly important. About half of social media users log in to their accounts on a daily basis, either through the web-based platform or through mobile apps. As a result of their broad use, businesses regard social media platforms as the best technology for introducing brand-related material and for promoting band relationships. Companies must acknowledge that the process of integrating advertising and brand-related content on social media entails careful scrutiny of the content and an emphasis on brand-based community building, according to researchers.

Brand communities are frequently formed as a result of strong brand devotion and good reactions to brand-centric content. The formation of this type of community demands a grasp of how social networking works and how brand communities operate via the use of social media when developing a social media presence for a brand. Individuals that choose to engage and demonstrate a connection to the

key information, content, or materials presented in the community make up brand communities.

The development of social connections and the creation of engaging surroundings is a critical component for leaders in the social media sector. This means that activities built into the format may inspire people to engage with the content. The customer is prompted to "Like" (show approval) or "Share" (display approval by publicly passing on information with everyone) the content. These basic tasks engage users in a conversation that enables them to make product decisions and gives advertising feedback. The interactive aspect of social media, unlike static websites in the early days of the Internet, has revolutionised the ways in which customers engage with brands. [17] Consumers that use social media on a regular basis interact with businesses and services in a variety of ways, including reading, writing, watching, commenting, "liking," sharing, and many other alternatives. The growing popularity of social media among consumers and businesses has created a massive research topic for academics. Consumers can leave comments or participate in debates about a product, but there are no counter-elements to the "Like" or "Share" selections that can be used to publicly express disapproval to the material. As a result, content that is "Liked" or "Shared" gains value, which leads to the introduction of more comparable content, although ignoring these options does not always lead to similar content not being presented. [36]

E. Brand Awareness and Buying Intention

The growing usage of social media networks has resulted in a significant shift in the approach to achieving brand recognition and establishing links between brand awareness and purchase intent. The idea that brands are no longer static descriptors or connections, but rather live as part of a social process, is a significant development. Brand awareness and brand value are linked to social interactions and the response within social networks in which value becomes an element of exchange as a part of social mechanisms. Researchers are increasingly aware of the social nature of brands and the importance of brand relationships in creating value and supporting consumer decision-making. [12][29]

Smart businesses know that consumers have a plethora of brand possibilities and choices on a regular basis, and that social media influences how people perceive different brands at the time they make purchasing decisions. Consumers still go through a typical set of processes when making purchasing decisions, even in the face of changing social media dynamics and the increased usage of technology. [19] "The consumer first gains awareness and knowledge about a product, then develops favourable or negative sentiment regarding the product, and lastly acts by buying and utilising or rejecting and avoiding the product," according to the study. Based on the initial awareness of the brand, a user decides whether or not to make a purchase, within the first few moments of viewing the product. If the buyer does not associate the brand with a positive experience, it will never proceed to the next level of decision-making. As that first centre is so important in addressing consumer behaviour,

businesses must acknowledge the importance associated with using social processes as a behavioral tool in the consumer behaviour hierarchy. [29]

F. Consumer Behaviour

Consumer decision-making can indeed be defined as "consumer behaviour patterns that precede, determine, and follow the decision making process for acquiring need-satisfying items, ideas, or services." The study of how individuals and organisations choose and use products and services is known as consumer buying behaviour. This focuses mainly on psychology, motivations and behaviours, such as how individuals pick between companies, research and shop, and how promotional strategies can be enhanced so that brands can effectively impact them. Consumer behaviour is influenced by personal, psychological, and social variables. [20] Personal aspects are the hobbies and attitudes of a person, which are influenced by their demographics. Psychological elements include their ability to grasp knowledge and how they perceive their wants. Finally, social influences include peer groups, socioeconomic strata, and even the effect of social media. [21][22]

The stages of consumer buying behaviour are as follows: 1. Need Recognition: At this level, customers recognise that they have a need for something and that purchasing it will satisfy that need. This proves to be an opportunity for organisations to use various marketing methods to assist prospects in recognising a need or re-evaluating an existing one. 2. Information Search: Prospects are seeking more information about the item they wish to buy at this phase. Product reviews, websites, blog articles, and search adverts can all help in this scenario. 3. Alternatives Evaluation: Because there are so many distinct products that could meet their demands, buyers frequently utilise evaluation criteria based on their priorities. At this point, promotional strategies should seek to persuade prospects that their criteria align with the product's advantages. 4. Purchase Decision: The customer has examined a number of products and compared them using their evaluative criteria. This is the point at which the customer has made the decision to purchase something. 5. Post-Purchase Behavior: The purchasing process does not finish after the item is purchased. Customers' experience with the product will determine whether or not they were happy with the product. Customers frequently distribute good or negative feedback about a product based on whether they are satisfied or dissatisfied. This could be done through online reviews, social media networks, or word of mouth. [20][22]

G. Strategic Approaches

When evaluating how effective social media is in creating competitive advantage, traditional marketing and advertising tactics rarely apply. "Branded social campaigns provide incremental touch points throughout the day to stimulate continued interaction between consumers and the brand story, which can help brands find common themes in consumer feedback and motivate users to engage with online content," says the report. Companies that establish a social media presence and connect with their customers must think about how to manage these relationships, provide more effective

and productive customer service, and guarantee that their marketing strategies build a following.

Social media provides a platform for computer-based word-of-mouth communication to have a substantial impact on the brand image. Because a single customer can reach hundreds, if not thousands, of followers with a single post, businesses must consider how they will manage social media before establishing an online footprint. This happens infrequently before the company is introduced in internet forums. Instead, a lack of positive consumer participation is frequently the first sign that the organisation needs to focus on reducing unfavourable social media responses. [21]

III. OBJECTIVES

In today's world, social media has become an indispensable tool for online shopping. It's no secret that companies of all kinds have gravitated to social media to locate and engage with their target customers. When a product is mentioned to them via social media, people are more likely to purchase it. The generation born in the 2000s is regarded as the generation that spends significant amounts of time on social websites, with social media influencing more than half of their expenditures. The most important channels for implementing successful digital marketing initiatives are social media websites and applications. One of the most remarkable characteristics of current marketing is the impact of social media on consumer behaviour. The goal of this research is to determine why, when, and how social media has influenced consumer decision-making. [24][29] The major objectives of this study are : (1) To investigate the impact of social media on consumer purchasing decisions, (2) To track the change in consumer perceptions as a result of social media content and involvement and (3) To learn how organisations may boost brand value by engaging more customers. [25]

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to study the above objectives, both Primary and Secondary research were conducted.

A. Type of Research Design

a) Qualitative, as well as Quantitative research methods, were used.

b) The research methodology used is Exploratory Research.

c) The research process was flexible and unstructured.

B. Period of Study

a) The entire study lasted for a period of two months, from 1st February, 2021 to 15th May, 2021.

C. Data Collection

1) Primary Research:

a) Primary data was mainly collected through a questionnaire survey by circulating a Google Form to students as well as professionals belonging to different organizations and also through in-depth telephonic interviews.

b) Also, a lot of insights were extracted by attending several webinars concerning the subject of interest.

c) Different demographics were included for unbiased research.

2) Secondary Research:

a) Secondary data was mainly collected through published sources of data, periodicals, newspaper and magazine articles, etc.

b) Past research papers and blogs written by eminent personalities also proved to be very useful for this research.

D. Questionnaire Development

a) The primary data was collected by means of a questionnaire. The questionnaire was created using Google Forms and was floated through the medium of emails, WhatsApp, Facebook, and LinkedIn.

b) The questionnaire contained a total of 24 questions.

c) The total number of respondents was 270 and they were randomly selected.

d) Types of questions included in the questionnaire – Demographic questions, Multiple Choice or Multiple Answer questions, Single Answer questions, Likert Scale questions.

e) Demographic questions included Gender, Age, Occupation, and City.

f) The questionnaire design was kept unstructured so as to avoid any biases.

E. Sampling Techniques

a) The Sampling Plan used is Convenience Sampling due to the current pandemic situation. The survey was conducted online by creating a questionnaire using Google Forms.

b) Sample size / Number of respondents – 270.

c) The respondents included students as well as working professionals belonging to various organizations.

d) The respondents consisted of people belonging to almost all age groups.

F. Fieldwork Details

a) WHAT – To study the current E-commerce and Social Media market preferences and trends.

b) WHEN – The entire study lasted for a period of three and a half months, from 1st February, 2021 to 15th May, 2021.

c) WHERE – The survey was conducted online.

d) WHY – To disrupt the Indian E-commerce business models on the basis of the research conducted.

e) HOW – By conducting a survey online by creating two questionnaires for employers as well as for employees, which was floated through the medium of emails as well as Social Media links, and also by conducting in-depth telephonic interviews.

G. Limitations Of Study

a) The sample size of 270 was used to represent the entire population. The findings may be biased.

b) Equal representation from all age groups wasn't involved as senior citizens and children were partially excluded.

c) As the mode of the research was online, respondents consisted only of people having a smart device and the internet.

V. FINDINGS

A. Demographics of the Respondents

a) The survey consisted of 257 respondents varying from the age group of under 18 to over 53 years, the majority of them being under the age bracket of 18 to 23 years.

b) The study took into consideration 54.1% of men and 45.1% of women.

c) The respondents came under various occupation brackets which included students, working pofessionals, self employed as well as retired professionals.

B. Survey Analysis and Results

a) Fig. 1

How has the current situation of a Global Pandemic affected your methods of buying/selling? How much do you prefer the following methods?
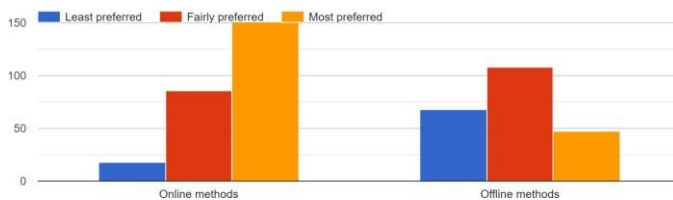
This chart indicates that the online methods of buying are peaking during the adversity of a global pandemic as compared to the local shops, which are less preferred due to the increasing risk of getting contaminated.

b) Fig. 2

How frequently do you use these E-commerce apps/websites?
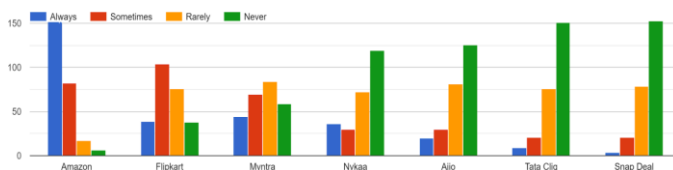
The above graph concludes that people prefer to use apps that are trending such as Amazon, Myntra and Nykaa over the other varieties of online shopping websites.
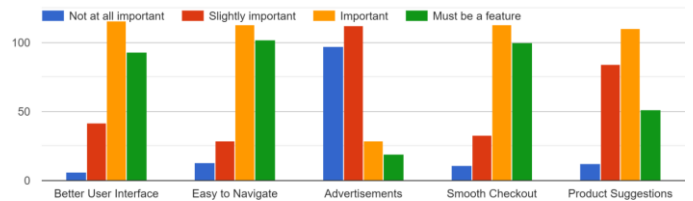
c) Fig. 3

I would prefer my User Interface to look/feel more like

257 responses
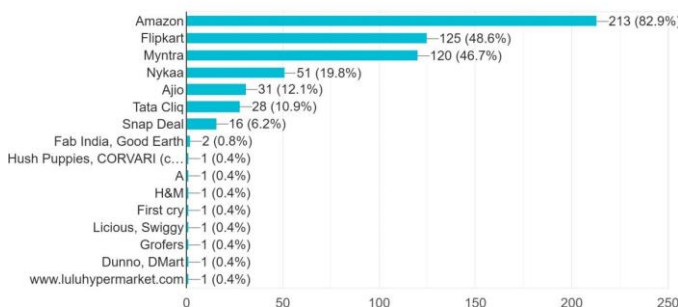
The above chart shows that people usually like and prefer the user interface and experience provided by the applications that they use on a daily basis such as Amazon and Flipkart.

d) Fig.4

Which factors according to you are important for the above E-commerce apps/websites?

The given graph illustrates the major factors which play a key role in attaining a better user experience overall. Better user interface and a smooth checkout process are the most desired whereas advertisements are less preferred by the crowd.

e) Fig. 5

Which mode of Transaction do you prefer?

257 responses
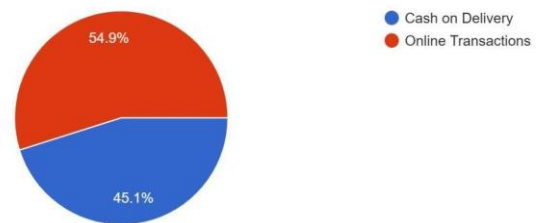
The pie chart given can be used to conclude that the pandemic has affected people's choice when it comes to their preferred mode of transaction. Almost 55%, now prefer to pay using the online mode rather than using hard cash to avoid getting infected by the virus and to maintain social distancing and hygiene.

f) Fig. 6

Choose your preference w.r.t. E-commerce websites/apps?

257 responses
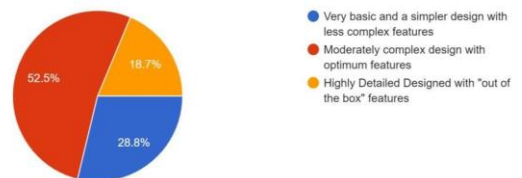
If you look at this graph, you'll notice that more than the majority of the crowd would rather like a moderately complex design with optimum features over a very basic and simple design with less complex features. To our surprise, very few people favour highly detailed designs and out of the box features. To conclude: Simplicity is the key.

g) Fig. 7

Product Information should be...?

257 responses
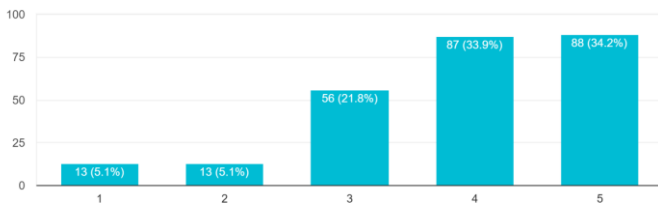
From the above graph, we can infer that people are actually keen on having a very detailed explanation about the product as well as the supplier so that they can be sure of their preferences before they pay for it.

h) Fig. 8

Search results on these e-commerce websites and apps are based on your preferences and past purchase history

257 responses
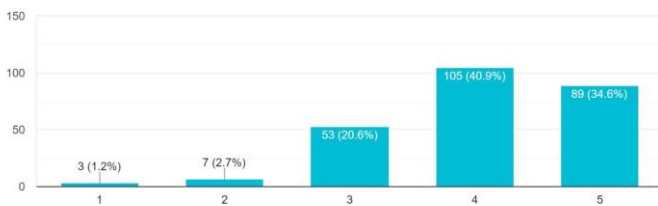
The above rating scale chart gives us the conclusion that most websites in today's time use cookies and the customer's past search history to suggest and recommend products according to their liking as well as to show to them what's currently in demand.

i) Fig. 9

Would you prefer a more personalized feed based on your preferences/past purchases or a standard one which is universal for all?

257 responses
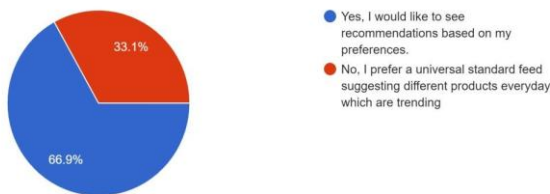
The given pie diagram shows that almost 67% of people would prefer a feed that has been designed for them according to their preferences and would like to see suggestions that have been personalized for them instead of getting recommendations that everyone else receives.

j) Fig. 10

Would you prefer being recommended different products from an individual seller based on your purchase history or similar product from multiple sellers?

257 responses
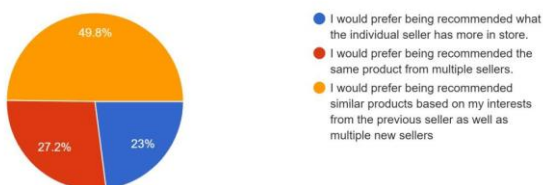
When it comes to getting product recommendations, almost 50% of the crowd would prefer seeing similar products based on their interests from their previous seller and would also explore multiple new sellers selling similar products.

k) Fig. 11

How frequently do you use these Social Media apps/websites?
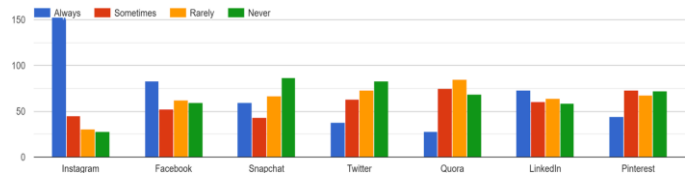
The above graph concludes that people prefer to use social media apps that are trending such as Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn over the other varieties of social media websites.

l) Fig. 12

Which factors according to you are important for the above Social Media apps/websites?
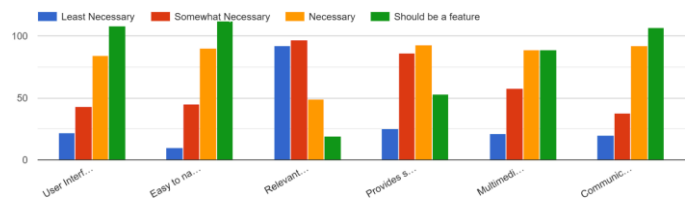
The given graph illustrates the major factors which play a key role in attaining a better user experience overall. Better User Interface, Easy Navigation and a communication medium are the most desired factors and must be a feature. Relevant ads being the least necessary are overshadowed by the multimedia sharing feature. The crowd would prefer getting suitable suggestions/content based on their search history.

m) Fig. 13

I would prefer my User Interface to look/feel more like

257 responses
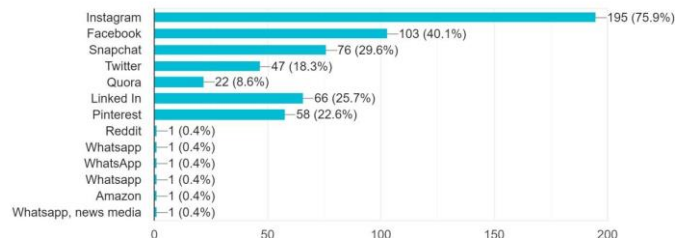
The above chart implies that people usually like and prefer the user interface and experience provided by the applications that they use on a regular basis such as Instagram and Facebook.

n) Fig. 14

Do you prefer buying products on Social Media?

257 responses
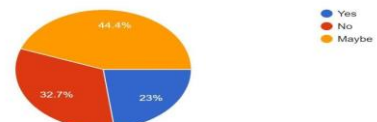
This chart breaks down the individual preferences of the crowd who choose to or refrain from buying products on social media. Around 45% of the crowd is uncertain. 23% prefer buying products from Social Media Applications. 32% refrain from buying products on social media. The uncertainty factors are discussed in the chart given below.

o) Fig. 15

What do you look for the most when buying a product on social media?
257 responses
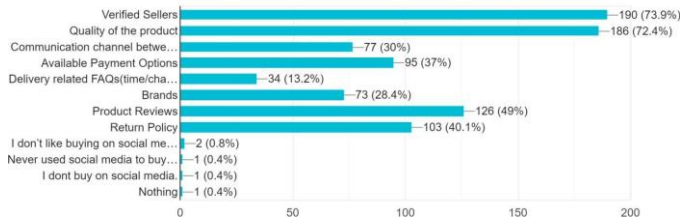
Around 73% of the total look for verified sellers and quality of the product when buying from Social Media. Around 49% of the total crowd believe the product reviews. Another 40% of the total need a better return policy in case of unfulfilled products. Communication Channel, Available Payment Options and the Brands play a role too. Delivery Related FAQs (time/charges) were the least bothering of them all.

p) Fig. 16

Do you prefer buying products from local brands/sellers on social media?
257 responses
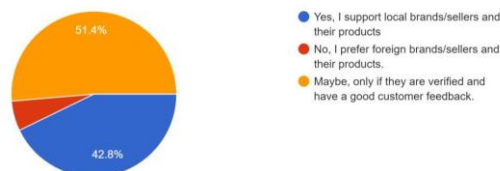
Local brands and sellers are very well appreciated by the crowd with a total of 43% supporting them. 50% of the total need their sellers to be verified and demand good customer feedback. Only 6% of the total crowd prefer foreign brands and sellers who are excluded from the target audience or could be converted to a majority with efficient marketing practices.

VI. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The growing use of social networks around the world has led to the notion that it is an effective instrument for boosting consumer involvement. Companies are always looking for innovative ways to reach out to customers and shape their behaviours, such as brand loyalty and purchase intent. Increased engagement in social network platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter has emerged from the changing technology epoch, all of which have established mechanisms for customers to develop rapport and connect with brand-specific material. Companies who are proficient at combining strategic approaches to the usage of social media platforms are more likely to reach, engage, and retain a customer base in the future. Brand perception and purchase intent are influenced by a variety of factors, including the

social mechanisms that drive customer perceptions and the opinions of others expressed in posts on social media. User-generated content, or material produced by customers in response to specific companies or brand requests and influencing the impressions of other consumers, is becoming an increasing area of strategic focus. This type of strategic strategy necessitates a high level of upkeep, and organisations who use it should be prepared to delegate the management of online client connections to a marketing service.

In the digital age, research has demonstrated that social media has a significant impact on customer purchasing behaviour. Without a doubt, social media has had a significant impact on both businesses and consumers. Consumers are exceedingly cautious when making purchases, according to studies. Despite the abundance of information and data available on social media, the consumer's personal stance plays a significant role in product acquisition. The quality of social media material has a significant impact, thus it should be consumer-relevant. When it comes to social media marketing, it's not mainly about raising consumer awareness or selling the goods.There's more to it, as it also entails maintaining and strengthening existing relationships with potential consumers and businesses. The consumer is now king, with the ability to obtain all relevant information about a product or services by just conversing with one another. As a result, advertisers and organisations should be extremely cautious about poor press on social media, as it can contribute to the company's image being tarnished.

For consumers, social media is an indispensable instrument. Without a question, social media has been used by a variety of businesses to locate and engage with their target audience. Facebook has 2.93 billion active users, Instagram has slightly over 1 billion, Twitter amounts to around 330 million active monthly users, Youtube has roughly over 2 billion, and Snapchat has 361 million active users, according to statistics. On average, people spend about 2.5 hours every day on social media platforms. Every month, more than 28% of visitors across four main social media platforms interact with live streaming. More than 73 percent of marketers believe social media has a positive return on investment. As a result, social media platforms are in a great position to run successful digital marketing initiatives. With the emergence of social media, consumer behaviour has revolutionized, though it is still influenced by personal, psychological, and societal aspects. Businesses must seize every opportunity of being in front of their target audiences, given that they have exposure to a virtually unlimited pool of information at any given time. With the right methods and smart strategies in place, your company can successfully use social media to turn browsers into consumers.

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