Role of Social Media in Shaping Online Shopping Preferences: Analyzing Consumer Trends in Prayagraj

Shahnaz Fatima Kazmi
Lecturer
Hamidia Girls' Degree College, UoA
Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, India.

Abstract

The rise of social media has dramatically altered consumer behavior, notably in online shopping. This study looks at how social media influences customers' online purchasing habits in Prayagraj. This study uses the Technology Adoption Model (TAM) and the Consumer Decision-making Process to investigate the impact of several social media sites, including Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube, on purchasing decisions. A quantitative research design was used, with structured surveys administered to 300 people in Prayagraj. According to the data, Instagram and WhatsApp are the most influential venues for online buying. Furthermore, social media marketing, particularly video and influencer reviews, have a strong influence on consumer engagement and purchasing decisions. Consumers continue to be concerned about trust difficulties, a lack of return procedures, and misleading ads. The study is useful for online retailers, marketers, and policymakers since it emphasizes the importance of social media techniques in e-commerce. It suggests that organizations use a hybrid marketing strategy that includes user-generated content, influencer alliances, and targeted ads to increase consumer trust and engagement. Future research could look into how future technologies such as AI-driven recommendations and augmented reality influence online buying behavior.

Keywords

Social media marketing, Online shopping, Consumer behavior, Technology adoption model, Influencer marketing, and E-commerce.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

The rapid development of the internet and digital technology has transformed how customers purchase and business functions. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp have

become a vital part of consumers' everyday lives, impacting their shopping decisions in several ways. With the growing use of smartphones and affordable internet connection, social media has developed from a simple communication tool to a potent marketing platform for businesses. Social media platforms allow businesses to interact with customers, create trust through reviews and ratings, and use influencer marketing to affect consumer preferences (Tuten & Solomon, 2016).

The rise of social commerce has transformed India's e-commerce business, allowing consumers to interact with brands, find products, and make purchase decisions through social media channels. This trend is also noticeable in smaller places, such as Prayagraj, where digital use is constantly increasing. Given the growing reliance on social media for product discovery and purchasing decisions, it is critical to investigate how these platforms influence customer buying preferences in Prayagraj. Understanding these trends can assist businesses and marketers in developing effective strategies to meet the increasing needs of the region's online buyers (Twin, 2021).

1.2. Importance of Social Media in E-commerce

Social networking has emerged as a major changer in the e-commerce business, connecting firms and customers. According to (Memoria & Jain, 2011), some of the main functions it plays in online buying are:

- **Product Discovery and Awareness**: Consumers discover new items through social media ads, influencer promotions, and peer recommendations. Platforms such as Instagram and Facebook allow businesses to display their products through interesting content, making it easier for buyers to discover new possibilities.

- **Real-time Client Engagement and Interaction**: Social media enable firms to reply to queries, answer problems, and offer personalized recommendations. This builds trust and improves consumer relationships.

- **Influencer Marketing**: Influencers and content creators have a huge impact on consumer choices. Their product evaluations, testimonials, and endorsements affect buying decisions by establishing legitimacy and trust.

- **Social Proof and Reviews**: Online buyers use customer reviews, ratings, and user-generated information to make informed purchases. Positive feedback and suggestions from peers have a big impact on customer preferences.

- **Seamless Shopping Experience:** Social media sites like Instagram Shopping and Facebook Marketplace provide seamless shopping experiences, allowing users to purchase things without leaving the platform. This seamless experience makes internet buying easier. Given these benefits, social media has become an important influence in determining consumers' online shopping behavior, particularly in emerging areas such as Prayagraj.

1.3. Research Problem Statement

Despite the extensive use of social media for online shopping, there has been little research into how it affects customer choices in smaller cities such as Prayagraj. While research has concentrated on urban areas, the purchasing habits of customers in tier 2 and tier 3 cities remain unexplored. Key issues include determining the impact of social media on online shopping decisions in Prayagraj as follows:

- How influencer marketing and peer recommendations shape customer preferences?
- The influence of social media ads on purchase behavior.
- How consumers perceive trust, security, and authenticity in social commerce?

This study seeks to fill a knowledge vacuum by examining how social media platforms effect online purchasing habits in Prayagraj and identifying critical factors that influence consumer behavior in the region.

1.4. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are:

1.4.1 To investigate how social media affects consumers' online buying habits in Prayagraj.

1.4.2 Examine the impact of influencer marketing and peer recommendations on purchasing decisions.

1.4.3 Evaluate the effect of social media advertisements on customer behavior.

1.4.4 Investigate consumer views of trust, security, and authenticity in online shopping via social media.

1.4.5 Advise businesses and marketers on using social media for e-commerce growth in Prayagraj.

1.5. Research Questions

To attain the aforementioned objectives, the study aims to address the following research questions:

- How does social media affect online buying behavior in Prayagraj?
- How do influencers and peer recommendations impact consumer decision-making?
- How efficient are social media ads for recruiting and converting customers?
- What factors influence consumer trust and confidence in social commerce?
- How can organizations optimize social media strategy to increase customer engagement and sales?

1.6. Scope of the Study

- The study focuses on Prayagraj's online buyers who use social media for product discovery and purchase.
- It investigates major platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube to better understand their influence on consumer behavior.
- The research uses both qualitative (consumer interviews) and quantitative (survey) data to provide a full analysis.
- The study will assist firms, marketers, and legislators in developing strategies to increase e-commerce adoption through social media channels.

This introduction establishes the groundwork for the study by highlighting the importance of social media in online buying, defining major research issues, and outlining the study's aims, questions, and scope. The findings will provide significant insights into how social media influences customer preferences in Prayagraj, as well as tips for firms seeking to improve their digital marketing tactics.

2. Review of the Literature

The literature review delves into existing research on social media's impact on online shopping behavior. It establishes a theoretical framework and investigates critical elements such as consumer decision-making, influencer marketing, user reviews, and regional buying trends (Bose, Antony, & Rajan, 2023).

2.1. Theoretical Framework

Understanding the link between social media and online shopping behavior requires a solid theoretical foundation. This study is based on two main theories:

2.1.1. Technology Adoption Model (TAM)

The Technology Adoption Model (TAM) is one of the most extensively used models for studying consumer acceptance of new technologies (Kumar & Dange, 2012). According to TAM, the adoption of a technology-based system (such as e-commerce and social media shopping) is determined by two key factors:

- **Perceived Usefulness (PU):** Consumers' belief that using social media will improve their shopping experience.
- **Perceived Ease of Utilize (PEOU):** It refers to how easy social media purchasing platforms are for consumers to utilize.

Over time, academics have expanded TAM to incorporate important elements such as trust, social influence, and perceived risk in social commerce. For example, (Soundarbai, Sharma, & Beaulauh, 2017) stressed that trust has a substantial impact on online purchase behavior. Consumers who trust a platform are more likely to complete purchases. In the context of Prayagraj, this study will investigate how perceived usefulness and simplicity of use influence consumers' desire to buy things using social media platforms.

2.1.2. Consumer Decision-making Process

The Consumer Decision-making Process is another important paradigm for understanding how buyers make purchasing decisions. (Kotler, 2020) describe a five-step process:

- **Problem Recognition**: Consumers identify a need or desire, such as a new fashion trend on Instagram.
- **Information Search**: Consumers search for knowledge through social media reviews, influencer referrals, and peer discussions.
- **Evaluation of Alternatives**: Consumers evaluate alternatives based on price, quality, and brand reputation.
- **Purchase Decision**: Discounts, marketing, and platform trust all impact the ultimate decision-making process.
- **Post-purchase Behavior**: Customers share their reviews and experiences, influencing future purchases.

In the digital age, social media speeds up each stage of the process by offering rapid access to product information, peer feedback, and direct brand involvement (Elison, 2008). This research will investigate how social media influences each phase of this decision-making paradigm among internet buyers in Prayagraj.

2.2. Influence of Social Media on Consumer Behavior

Social media has revolutionized customer behavior by making buying more participatory and customized. According to (Bose, Antony, & Rajan, 2023), important ways in which social media influences internet shopping include:

- **Product Awareness**: Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp help customers discover new products and trends.
- **Convenience and Engagement**: Social media facilitates direct interaction between brands and consumers, leading to higher engagement and customer satisfaction.
- **Personalized Recommendations**: AI-powered algorithms recommend products based on user behavior, making shopping more personalized.
- **Trust and Credibility**: Consumers rely on social media for genuine evaluations and peer recommendations before making purchases.

This study will look at how these factors influence customer preferences in Prayagraj, where social media is increasing rapidly.

2.3. Impact of User Reviews and Ratings on Purchase Decisions

Consumer trust in online buying is heavily based on feedback and ratings from past customers (TN State Board, 2018).

- Research indicates that 90 percent of buyers examine online reviews before purchasing.
- Products with higher ratings had higher conversion rates.
- Negative reviews lower purchasing intentions.
- User-generated evaluations act as digital word-of-mouth marketing, influencing prospective customers.
- Customers may instantaneously share their experiences on social networking networks, which amplifies the effect.

This study will look into how Prayagraj consumers perceive and use user reviews while shopping online, as well as how fraudulent reviews or bad comments effect their trust in social media based shopping.

2.4. Regional Perspective: Online Shopping Trends in Prayagraj

While most research on social media shopping behavior focuses on major cities, e-commerce is also growing in smaller towns such as Prayagraj (Bandara, 2021). The key elements driving internet purchasing patterns in Prayagraj are:

- **Increased Digital Penetration**: Smartphones and affordable internet have made social media shopping more accessible. Rural areas account

for 55 percent of internet users, who favor regional language content (Howe, 2025).

- **Local Influencers**: Regional influencers promote products based on local preferences. 57 percent of urban users choose regional material, while 98 percent of users consume content in Indian languages (Business Standard, 2025).
- **Cash on Delivery (COD)**: COD is still preferred by many consumers due to security concerns with online payments. COD is used in 75 percent of e-commerce purchases, particularly in Tier-2 and Tier-3 locations (Business Standard, 2025).
- **Social Media Preferences**: Consumers choose trustworthy merchants on social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Instagram over unknown websites. 491 million Indians utilize social media, with Instagram and WhatsApp being the most popular platforms for buying (Howe, 2025).
- **Language and Cultural Preferences**: Localized material and regional language marketing are more effective in smaller cities. Rural areas account for 55 percent of internet users, who favor regional language content (Best Media Info Bureau, 2025).

This study intends to provide insights into Prayagraj's unique e-commerce scene, allowing businesses to customize their marketing efforts to the needs of regional online customers.

While there is substantial research on e-commerce in urban regions, there is less information on smaller cities such as Prayagraj. This study will fill that vacuum by investigating consumer habits in Prayagraj, adding to an increasing body of knowledge about digital commerce in emerging countries.

3. Research Methodology

This section describes the methodology utilized in the study, which includes research design, sample strategies, data gathering methods, and data analysis tools. The methodology guarantees that the study takes a methodical approach to determine how social media influences customer choices for online shopping in Prayagraj.

3.1. Research Design (Quantitative Approach)
- This study uses a quantitative approach to gain a thorough insight into consumer behaviour in Prayagraj.

- A survey is conducted to acquire numerical data from Prayagraj's internet shoppers.
- Several statistical tools were used in this study to efficiently examine the data that was gathered. The demographic profile of the respondents and their preferences for various social media platforms for online shopping were ascertained through the use of frequency distribution and percentage analysis. The central tendency and variability in customer behavior, such as happiness with social media purchases and faith in influencers, were measured with the use of the mean and standard deviation. Significant patterns were found when cross-tabulation was used to examine the association between demographic characteristics and purchasing behavior. Additionally, the data was presented in a way that was visually interpretable through the use of graphical representations such as pie charts and bar charts. Together, these resources made it possible to interpret Prayagraj's consumer trends in a thorough and organized manner.
- The study assessed important factors impacting online shopping behavior using structured rubrics. These included perceived utility and convenience of use (based on the Technology Adoption Model), frequency of social media use for shopping, consumer trust (measured on a 5-point Likert scale), and the influence of user reviews and influencer marketing on purchasing decisions. Accurate analysis of customer preferences and attitudes was made easier by these rubrics, which also guaranteed uniformity in data collecting.

3.2. Target Population

The study focuses on Prayagraj residents who actively use social media platforms for online purchasing. The target respondents are:

- Frequent internet shoppers (who make at least one purchase every month).
- Social media users (on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube).
- Young customers (18 to 40 years old) are the most active online buyers.

3.3. Sampling Technique

- The non-probability purposive sampling method is utilized in this investigation.

3.4. Sample Size

- A minimum of 500 respondents were surveyed for statistical reliability.

3.5. Data Collection Methods

To ensure a comprehensive analysis, the study collects data from both primary and secondary sources.

3.5.1. Primary Data Collection

- A structured questionnaire used closed-ended and Likert scale-based questions to evaluate consumer attitudes and behaviors.
- The majority of the questionnaire's items were modified from proven variables in earlier research on the Technology Adoption Model (TAM) and e-commerce customer behavior. The original TAM by Davis served as the foundation for constructs including Attitude toward online shopping, Perceived utility, and Perceived ease of use.
- Recent empirical research in the literature on digital marketing and social commerce were used to adapt items about the impact of user reviews, the role of influencers, and the influence of social media.
- To gauge the level of customer agreement or experience, each item was scored on a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 denoting "strongly disagree" and 5 denoting "strongly agree."
- The questionnaire was distributed online google forms and social media groups.
- The questionnaire included sections on:
  - Demographics (age, gender, and occupation).
  - Frequency of online shopping.
  - Platforms for internet purchasing.
  - How influencers and marketing impact purchasing decisions.
  - Believe in online reviews.

3.5.2. Secondary Data Collection

For this study, secondary data was gathered from reliable sources, such as scholarly journals about e-commerce and digital marketing, industry publications (KPMG, Statista, Deloitte), and government reports (such those from the Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology). The growth of social commerce platforms, customer interaction with influencers and online reviews, and regional and national changes in internet usage were all covered by these sources.

3.6. Data Analysis Tools and Techniques

Survey results were evaluated statistically to detect patterns and trends. The following strategies are utilized:

- **Descriptive Statistics:** Descriptive statistics (means, percentages, and frequency distributions) was used to summarize consumer demographics and shopping inclinations. Helps identify popular social networking platforms and payment options.
- **Excel for Data Processing:** Excel was used for the purpose of data cleaning and validation. Preparation of graphs and charts for visual representation. Helps in coding and categorizing responses for deeper insights.

4. Analysis and Findings

This section presents the study's conclusions, derived from the data analysis. It investigates consumer demographics, social media's impact on shopping behavior, influencer marketing, ad effectiveness, and a comparison of traditional and social media-driven shopping.

Table 1:- Demographic Insights of Online Shoppers in Prayagraj

Demographic Factor	Categories	Frequency (N=500)	Percentage (%)
Age Group	18-25 years	200	40%
	26-35 years	175	35%
	36-45 years	75	15%
	Above 45 years	50	10%
	Total	**500**	**100%**
Gender	Male	240	48%
	Female	260	52%
	Total	**500**	**100%**
Occupation	Students	150	30%
	Professionals	200	40%
	Business Owners	100	20%
	Others	50	10%
	Total	**500**	**100%**

Source:- Self-constructed
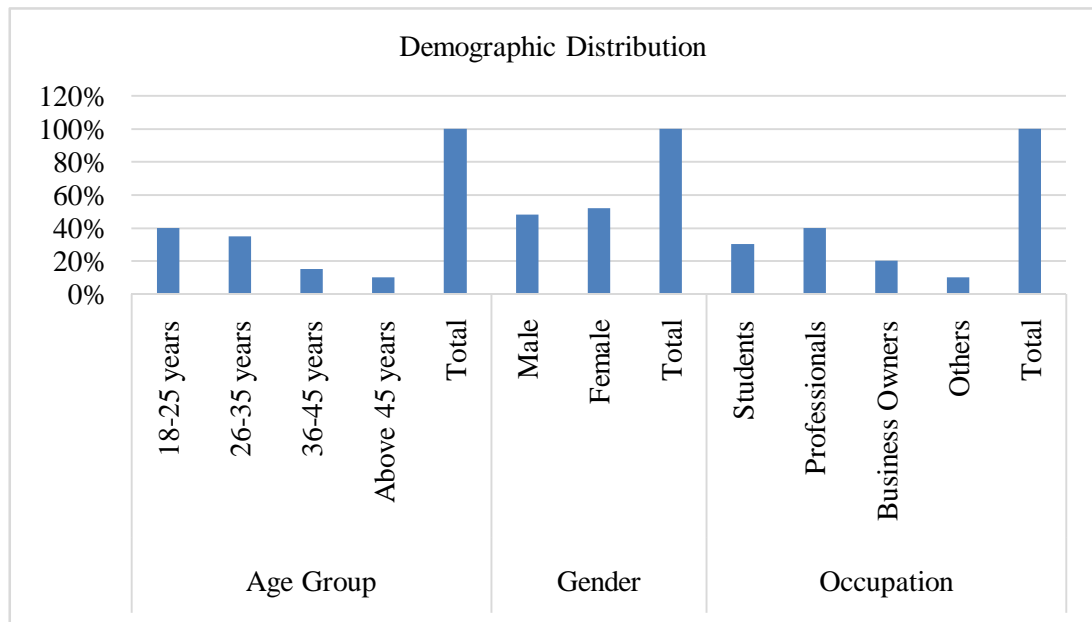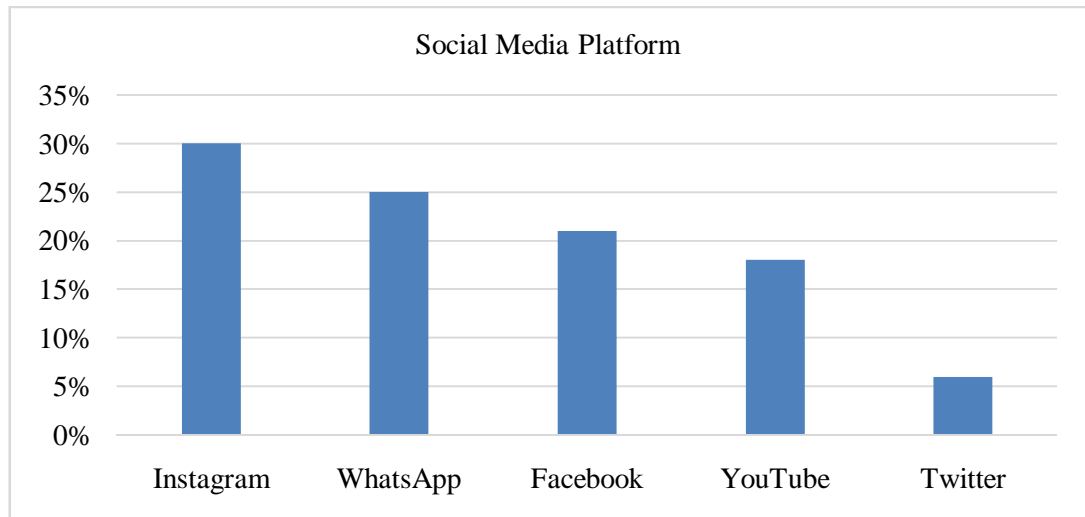
Source:- Self-constructed

Figure 1:- Demographic Insights of Online Shoppers in Prayagraj

According to the demographic study, the majority of respondents (40 percent) are between the ages of 18 and 25, followed by 35 percent between the ages of 26 and 35, 15 percent between the ages of 36 and 45, and 10 percent older than 45. The gender distribution is roughly equal, with 52 percent female and 48 percent male respondents. Professionals make up the largest occupational group, accounting for 40 percent, followed by students (30 percent), company owners (20 percent), and others (10 percent).

Table 2:- Social Media Influence on Shopping Behavior

Social Media Platform	Frequency (N=500)	Percentage (%)
Instagram	150	30%
WhatsApp	125	25%
Facebook	105	21%
YouTube	90	18%
Twitter	30	6%
Total	**500**	**100%**

Source:- Self-constructed
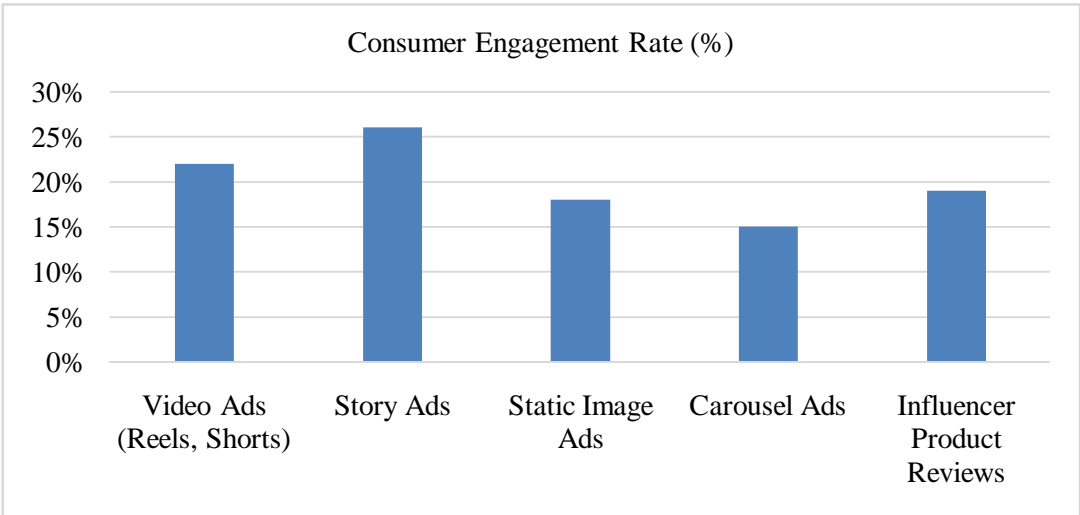
Source:- Self-constructed

Figure 2:- Social Media Influence on Shopping Behavior

According to the respondents, Instagram is the most popular social media network, with 30 percent of respondents using it, followed by WhatsApp (25 percent), and Facebook (21 percent). YouTube accounts for 18 percent of users, while Twitter has the lowest engagement (6 percent).

Table 3:- Effectiveness of Different Social Media Advertisement Formats

Ad Format	Frequency (N=500)	Consumer Engagement Rate (%)
Video Ads (Reels, Shorts)	110	22%
Story Ads	130	26%
Static Image Ads	90	18%
Carousel Ads	75	15%
Influencer Product Reviews	95	19%
Total	**500**	**100%**

Source:- Self-constructed

Consumer Engagement Rate (%)

Source:- Self-constructed

Figure 3:- Effectiveness of Different Social Media Advertisement Formats

The analysis of consumer involvement with various ad forms reveals that story advertising has the highest engagement rate (26 percent), followed by video ads (reels, shorts) at 22 percent. Influencer product reviews engage 19 percent of customers, while static picture advertising reach 18 percent. Carousel advertisements have the lowest interaction rate, at 15 percent.

Table 4:- Traditional vs. Social Media-driven Online Shopping Preferences

Shopping Method	Frequency (N=500)	Percentage (%)
Traditional E-commerce (Amazon, Flipkart)	250	50%
Social Commerce (Instagram, WhatsApp)	175	35%
Hybrid Approach (Discover on Social Media, Buy on E-commerce)	75	15%
Total	**500**	**100%**

Source:- Self-constructed
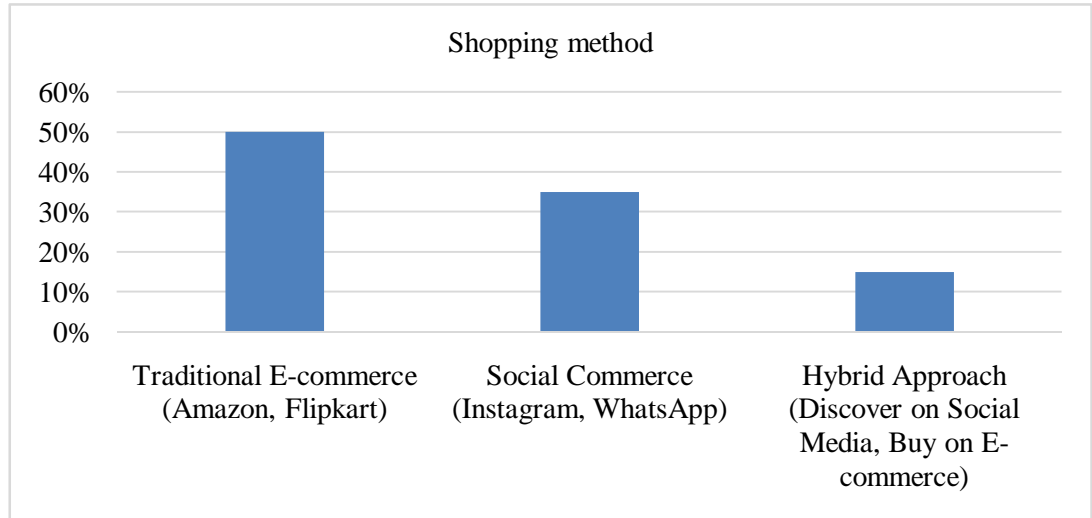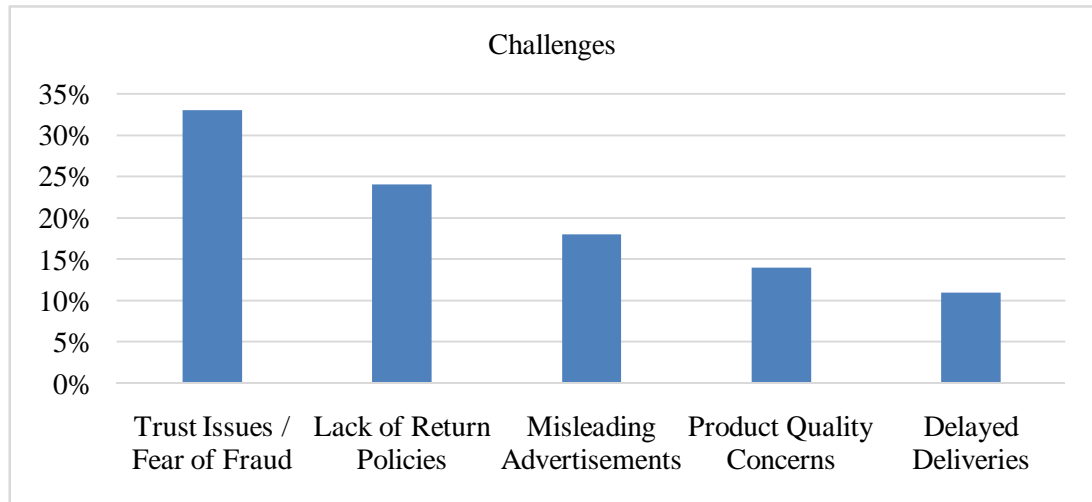
Source:- Self-constructed

Figure 4:- Traditional vs. Social Media-driven Online Shopping Preferences

According to the statistics, established e-commerce platforms such as Amazon and Flipkart are the most popular shopping methods, with 50 percent of respondents using them. Social commerce, which includes Instagram and WhatsApp, follows at 35 percent adoption. Meanwhile, 15 percent of shoppers take a hybrid strategy, finding things on social media but making purchases through e-commerce platforms.

Table 5:- Key Challenges Faced by Consumers in Social Media Shopping

Challenges	Frequency (N=500)	Percentage (%)
Trust Issues / Fear of Fraud	165	33%
Lack of Return Policies	120	24%
Misleading Advertisements	90	18%
Product Quality Concerns	70	14%
Delayed Deliveries	55	11%
Total	**500**	**100%**

Source:- Self-constructed

Source:- Self-constructed

Figure 5:- Key Challenges Faced by Consumers in Social Media Shopping

According to the analysis, the most major problems in online buying are trust issues and fear of fraud, which affect 33 percent of consumers. 24 percent are concerned about a lack of return procedures, while 18 percent are worried about misleading ads. Product quality concerns affect 14 percent of shoppers, while 11 percent experience delivery delays.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This section summarizes the key findings of the study, discusses managerial and policy implications, provides recommendations for online retailers and social media marketers, and outlines the study's limitations and future research directions.

5.1. Summary of Key Findings

The study explored the impact of social media on online shopping preferences in Prayagraj. The key findings are:

5.1.1. Demographic Insights:

- The majority of online shoppers are aged 18-35 years and actively engage with social media platforms like Instagram, WhatsApp, and Facebook for shopping.
- Females prefer fashion and beauty products, whereas males lean towards electronics and accessories.

- Students and young professionals dominate social media shopping, driven by influencer marketing and discounts.

5.1.2. Impact of Social Media on Shopping Behavior:
- Instagram and WhatsApp are the most influential platforms for discovering and purchasing products.
- Consumers rely on peer recommendations (user reviews and ratings) and influencer endorsements when making online purchases.
- Trust issues and lack of return policies on social commerce platforms remain a major concern.

5.1.3. Effectiveness of Social Media Advertisements:
- Video ads and story ads are the most effective ad formats.
- Consumers respond well to personalized, interactive, and visually appealing advertisements.
- Concerns over fake ads and misleading promotions negatively affect consumer trust.

5.2. Managerial and Policy Implications
The recommendations are provided for businesses as well as regulatory government bodies.

5.2.1. Managerial Implications for Businesses and E-Retailers
- Online retailers should actively engage on Instagram, WhatsApp, and Facebook, as these platforms influence consumer behavior.
- Real-time product demonstrations influencer collaborations, and user-generated content can increase engagement and sales.
- Transparency in influencer promotions and authentic product reviews are essential to maintain credibility.

5.2.2. Policy Implications for Regulators and Government Bodies
- Clear policies on refund and return rights should be established for social media-driven purchases.
- Regulations on advertising transparency (disclosing paid promotions and sponsored posts) should be enforced.
- Platforms should introduce strict verification mechanisms for sellers to prevent fraud.

- AI-driven tools can be used to detect misleading advertisements and fake reviews.

5.3. Suggestions for Online Retailers and Social Media Marketers

- Businesses should invest in interactive content such as polls, Q&A sessions, and live product demos.
- User-generated content campaigns can increase brand trust and engagement.
- Offering 24/7 customer support via chatbots on WhatsApp and Instagram can improve customer satisfaction.
- Influencers should be transparent about paid promotions to maintain trust.
- Tracking consumer behavior through Google Analytics, Meta Ads Manager, and CRM tools can help in better targeting.

5.4. Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study include:

- The study is limited to Prayagraj and may not accurately reflect consumption trends in other locations.
- The research uses self-reported data from consumers, which may be biased or inaccurate.
- Rapid changes in social media algorithms and consumer preferences can impact the usefulness of findings over time.
- The study excludes offline shopping behavior and traditional e-commerce platforms that function independently of social media.

5.5. Future Research Directions

To expand upon this study, future research can explore:

- Comparison of online shopping behavior across regions, such as cities or rural vs. urban settings, might yield valuable data.
- Future studies can examine the impact of chatbots and AI on social media and consumer purchasing decisions.
- Examining the influence of virtual and augmented reality (VR/AR) on consumer trust and engagement in online shopping, including virtual try-ons of apparel and makeup.
- Longitudinal Study on Changing Consumer Behavior can examine how social media shopping preferences change over time.

- Researching the effectiveness of video-based content (YouTube, Instagram Reels, TikTok) in generating purchases against image-based content.

6. Conclusion

The study emphasizes the growing influence of social media on online buying choices in Prayagraj. Social media platforms, influencer marketing, and tailored advertisements have a huge impact on customer decisions. However, obstacles like as trust issues, misleading ads, and a lack of established standards must be addressed. Using real influencer marketing, interactive social commerce methods, and AI-driven customization can help businesses and marketers increase engagement and sales. To provide a safe online purchasing experience, policymakers should prioritize consumer protection laws, fraud prevention programs, and digital literacy initiatives.

To have a better understanding of the future of social commerce, future study should look at larger geographic areas, upcoming technology such as AI and VR, and changing consumer behavior patterns.

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