IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE BUYING BEHAVIOR OF CONSUMERS

A Dissertation Submitted to the Panjab University, Chandigarh for the Award of Master of Philosophy in Social Sciences, in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement for the Advance Professional Programme in Public Administration (APPPA)

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CERTIFICATE

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ABSTRACT

This Dissertation aims to look at the Impact of Social Media on the Purchasing Behavior of Consumers and its importance in the economy and also find out if Social Media is a significant driver of Consumerism. This dissertation reviews themes from the literature on the concept of Social Media and its nuances of influence in the various spheres of Human life. It looks at the importance as a visual communication tool and its role in the economy. Additionally, it discusses the ideas of the influence of Social Media over consumption patterns. It also tries to understand the aspect of Consumerism. The Dissertation also includes a primary data analysis through which the above mentioned objectives are discussed and understood. It focused on analyzing modified mannerisms in various fields of lifestyle like shopping, education, relationships, recreation, etc. For this respondents of different age groups were interviewed by preparing a structured questionnaire. Changing psychological tendencies were observed hence proving that this study could be a part of considerable research of how Social Media is restyling social conduct.

Keywords: Social Media, Consumer Behavior, Purchasing, Digital capabilities, Consumerism

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

We live in the age of the web, which is heavily equipped with Social Media. This has led to an exchange of data which has revolutionized in the direction of social networking. Further, this has given rise to large scope for interaction and learning simultaneously. Through the medium of Social Media, people interact with other peoples‘ thoughts online by sharing their own content. This generates a large amount of information and assists the balanced people to form an opinion based on just a couple of hundred comments. A key criterion which makes Social Media like Facebook, Twitter, and What‘s App, YouTube etc. so powerful and influential in the lives of people is the speed and exponential growth of information sharing within minutes of buying. The prompt reaction time of this web of media is what correlates with behavior patterns of individuals.

Social Media is defined as ‒Websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking‖ by the Oxford Dictionary. The definition encompasses the idea that Social Media is the ultimate tool that brings in users and their counterparts – in a common space that is free of boundaries, purely based on choice and is therefore very accommodating and useful. One of the reasons for the high usage of Social Media is that mobile

possibilities for users are constantly improving which makes it increasingly simpler to access Social Media, no matter where you are located.

However this large scale integration of Social Media in our lives has resulted in us slowly becoming Social Media addicts. Social Media has become inescapable whether it‘s scrolling down our bottomless Facebook or Instagram feeds on the subway, or posting perfect brunch photographs on Instagram prior to eating. The Social Media statistics in 2021 showed that an average of 2 hours and 25 minutes is spent per day per person on Social Media.

Looking on the other side of the coin, Social Media addicted consumers are great buyers and thus exactly what sellers need. The users are not only abundantly available, they are now all the more accessible. In the words of Scott Cook - CEO, Founder of Intuit ``A Brand is no longer what we tell the consumer it is – it is what consumers tell each other it is.‖ Online reviews give consumers the impression that the company is authentic and if it offers a genuine product or service. The customers all across the world use these reviews as an important source of information to decide whether to purchase the product or not. They also use these reviews to create an image about the brand in their minds. Even if the reviews are bad, the manner in which the company responds to them will also prove to be very crucial for their brand image. Thus, Social Media is very

important and it is among the most successful tools to exist in the lives of mundane humans who now get to visit a whole new world of choices.

The Aim of this dissertation is to examine how effectively Social Media impacts the economy and affects the final consumer behavior - to find out the forecasted relationships among various Social Media marketing activities, customer activities and behavior of the consumer and to also provide a critique on countless acquiring opportunities offered by Social Media by looking into the idea of Mindless Consumerism and its effect.

1.1 RATIONALE

Social Media has become one of the most popular and thus widely utilized forms of communication. People utilize Social Media to interact with one another all around the world. Social Media has been a pivotal platform to discuss and share experiences, ideas and opinions to a wider audience. This addictive Modern Era tool has had an extensive impact on the consumers in various ways. It not only provides a platform for interaction but also influences consumer behavior. This also includes experiences while using a product or a service or platform. These product reviews posted on Social Media by users across the globe are read by thousands of people every day and they become a source which influences

consumer buying behavior. According to Global Web Index, 54% Social Media user's use Social Media to research products and of which 71% are more likely to purchase goods and services based on Social Media referrals which is a huge number. Prior to making a purchase, almost 77% of the people examine customer evaluations at various Social Media platforms. Social Media provides too many opportunities to reach consumers which businesses cannot afford to ignore as it would be detrimental to them. As of 2020, there were 3.78 billion people using Social Media which equates to about 48% of the world‘s population and this number is likely to grow rapidly in the coming year which makes this an important study.

In today‘s life, Social Media plays a key role in setting up a platform for people to interact not just on a local scale but even on a global scale. This medium of interaction is becoming more popular by the day. Hence modern day living is majorly influenced by Social Media, which in turn is enhancing the evolution of human behavior.

This Dissertation aims to study the Impact of Social Media on the buying Behavior of Consumers and its importance in the economy. It also intends to examine whether Social Media is a significant driver of Consumerism as it looks at the importance as a visual communication tool and its role in the economy. The study

also takes into account the nature/ kinds of problems faced by consumers due to use of Social Media for making purchases. This dissertation reviews themes from the literature on the concept of Social Media and its nuances of influence in the various spheres of consumers buying behavior. Additionally, it discusses the ideas of the influence of Social Media over consumption patterns. It also tries to understand the aspect of Consumerism. The Dissertation also includes a primary data analysis through which the above mentioned objectives are discussed and understood. It has focused on analyzing modified mannerisms in various fields of lifestyle such as shopping, education, relationships, recreation, etc. For this, respondents of different age groups will be interviewed by preparing a structured questionnaire. Changing psychological tendencies were observed thus proving that this study could be a part of considerable research on how Social Media is re-styling social conduct.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions proposed include: -

(a) Is Social Media a significant driver of Consumer Behavior since the onset of COVID 19?

(b) Does Social Media influence Consumer Decisions based on prevalent situations in the country?

(c) Does Social Media Based Influence over Consumption Behavior lead to Mindless Consumerism?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The Objectives of the Study are as follows: –

(a) To examine the evolution of Social Media.

(b) To study the impact of Social Media on the Economic activity of consumers since the striking Pandemic in India.

(c) To assess the power of Social Media to influence buying behavior of consumers.

(d) To analyze the relationship between Social Media and Consumption patterns.

(e) To explore the nature of problems faced by consumers while purchasing from Social Media platforms.

(f) To suggest measures to improve consumer protection and satisfaction while using Social Media for buying.

SCOPE/ LIMITATIONS

Despite the fact that theories were approved by findings from surveys and the research is able to provide a certain degree of new insights in relating to the current situation, however limitations may still continue to exist. Due to the constraint of time, it is not possible to cover the entire population and findings may differ from time to time and circumstances which may change in future. Another limitation is that most of the respondents were focused on India's limited urban society. Further research could focus on the other sections of the society so as to draw statistical conclusions across the country.

CHAPTER 3

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature review is covered in three parts – Consumers, Social Media, as well as the relationship between consumers and Social Media. Decision making process is discussed elaborately so as to provide the components involved in the process before an actual purchase takes place and how consumers can be affected during the course of the information processing before a purchase.

SOCIAL MEDIA THEORY

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) give a general definition of Social Media in consideration of Web 2.0 and User-Generated Content. Web 2.0 came about to be known as the second advanced generation of World Wide Web (www) and it was all about revolutionizing the way of creating, editing and sharing user generated content online. Web 2.0 is one of the series of improved technology rather than a specific version of web and it is characterized specifically as a transition from Static web pages to highly Dynamic web pages or user generated content.

Social Media is a group of internet-based applications which build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and allows the creation and exchange of User Generated Content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, s. 61). Parr

(2010) defines Social Media as ‒the use of electronic and internet tools for the purpose of sharing and discussing information and experiences with other human beings in more efficient ways‖. Jantsch (2008) opines Social Media as ‒the use of technology combined with social interaction to create or co-create value.‖ According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, Social Media is defined as ‒forms of electronic communication through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages and other content. Dykeman (2008) regards Social Media as ―the means for any person to: publish digital, creative content; provide and obtain real-time feedback via online discussions, commentary and evaluations; and incorporate changes or corrections to the original content.

All these distinct definitions help us to identify three fundamental elements that support the existence and prosperity of Social Media - content, communities and Web 2.0. It may be appreciated that without technology, Social Media is just empty talk. The Web 2.0 technology facilitates the users to use various platforms to share, discuss and create contents with each other in the community. Today, a web page is a necessity for the marketing mix of any company and the Social Media content is considered as the King which rules the stage. Through Social Media, viral marketing is developed, which refers to the strategy of urging the visitors of web pages to share information published on the Internet, to their friends, so that they can inform more people about a product or event, through

photos, videos, etc. According to Zarella, there are some types of Social Media, like: Blog, Microblog (Twitter), Social Networks (Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram), Media sharing (YouTube, Flickr), Social News and Bookmarking (Digg, Reddit), Rating and reviews pages (Yelp), Forums and Virtual Worlds. Utilizing the power of Social Media, it can provide many benefits for consumers, such as: saving consumers time, more reliable information, better informing possibilities, reduced cost of informing, better communication with companies and reduced prices and many more. Almost half of the world‘s population is already using the Internet and Social Media, and this trend is on a rapid rise.

CONSUMERS

Consumers are the main contributors on the Market stage. Consumers can be referred to as individuals who purchase or consume products and services. From the early days of modern media, media consumers have been more or less just a plain and simple audience. However, since the development of media and introduction of new technologies, the audience has now become more and more active. In today‘s society, most mobile phone owners not only consume media, they also produce media. Being socially active and participating on online platforms leads to the creation of an online persona for the individuals. The process of creating an identity starts at a very early age, both individually and socially. Social/ collective identity is something we obtain through other people's

perceptions of us and what groups we belong to. Consumer identity is all about belonging in different areas – through merging of similarities and differences with respect to other people. Human beings act and adjust their personality according to the environment and surroundings in order to feel a sense of community or belonging. Whether it is at a workplace, or in this case an online community, the need to belong is fundamental for all human beings. This has been described as a distinct feature of human life. It is human nature to feel a strong need to belong to a group or a community and to feel some sort of a connection between themselves and others. To accomplish this idea, everyone has to have a personal identity that one has to be willing to share with other people. Hence, people often maintain a set of standard norms and rules within group structures to ―fit in because we are fundamentally motivated to belong to these groups (S. Fiske, 2004).

CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

Consumer behavior engages the way individuals, groups or organizations select, buy and use products, services, ideas and experiences, to satisfy their needs and desires. It is a complex and dynamic process. Over a decade, due to globalization and technology development, the way the consumers behave and think is rapidly and continuously changing. John Dewey coined the phrase *"consumer decision-making process"*. Dewey conceptualized the process as a journey that a consumer went on from identifying their problem to deciding to buy a product. There are five stages of consumer decision making process. These include: -

(a) Need/ problem recognition. This occurs whenever the consumer sees a significant difference between his or her current state of affairs and some desired or ideal state. Today people are very concerned about how they are seen by others; a phenomenon recognized as ―social identity‖. That is why Social Media content motivates new consumer needs. Every video, photo, likes, comments, review, and other content posted on Social Media, to which consumers are exposed, plays the role of stimulus (incentives) of recognizing a new need.

(b) In-formation search. This is the process by which the consumer surveys his or her environment for suitable, substantial and appropriate data to make a rational decision. Nowadays, the Internet is among the most commonly used sources of information search, causing a revolution in this stage of the consumer decision making process. "Googlization of search" is called the phenomenon of searching information in the search engine Google, which is the first and most used source of information. Another important and a very credible source, is considered reviews on Social Media.

(c) Alternative evaluation. Today, almost everyone searches for online reviews, and gets more detailed, accurate and reliable information, because

the information is from people who have already tried those alternatives. In this way, consumers contemplate the positive and negative sides of each alternative and decide easier for the best one to buy.

(d) Buying. Different attractive Social Media content and positive reviews of others, very often impacts the buying which turns to be emotional, rather than rational and this is recognized as ―spontaneous shopping‖. Studies reveal that reviews of others tend to change consumers' mind towards a product and push them to buy or not to buy something.

(e) Post-purchase. Social Media presents with numerous alternatives for people to react in case of any dissatisfaction post purchase, such as writing complaints to the company, posting on the Social Media companies accounts, commenting in public posts and writing negative reviews.

VEBLENIAN MODEL OF HUMAN BEHAVIOUR

The Veblenian model of human behavior (published in 2018) is based on the research and findings of Thorstein Veblen, who received his training as an economist and eventually evolved as a social thinker through studying social anthropology. According to this model, man is perceived to be a so-called "social animal", wherein he conforms to the general norms of the larger culture and to the more specific standards of the subcultures in which other similar humans operate. This theory implies that human behavior and human needs are molded greatly by group memberships. One‘s habits, consumption patterns, perceptions etc are all

based on what is deemed appropriate to fit in the group. Based on the theory of this model, Veblen believed that a great amount of economic consumption is influenced and motivated by prestige seeking in a group and not on actual needs or satisfaction. One wishes to engage in consumption purely to fit into the group. This theory proves useful as it suggests that we need to understand the social influences that impact consumers in order to better comprehend product demand.

THE CONSUMER CULTURE THEORY

This Consumer Culture Theory (2005) refers to theoretical ideas that address and acknowledge the dynamic relationships between consumer actions, cultural meaning and ideas and marketplace. Rather than viewing culture as a homogeneous system of collectively shared and understood meanings, ways of life, and ideals shared by members of society, the Consumer Culture Theory tries to comprehend the diversity of the meanings and the multiplicity of cultural ideas that exist within the broader socio-economic frame of globalization and market space. Thus, consumer culture theory talks about a social arrangement in which relations between culture and social resources are mediated and managed through market forces. The study of consumption of commodities and the influence of desire-inducing symbols is important to consumer culture. However, the

reproduction of the system of consumer culture largely depends upon one's personal set of decisions in the personal sphere of one‘s everyday life. The term—consumer culture envisages an interwoven system of commercially

displayed images, objects and texts that groups' use, through practices, and identities, to make collective sense of environments and to influence the members' experiences and lives. These meanings are personified and negotiated by consumers in social and economic situations and relationships. Thus, consumer culture describes a heavy network of global connections wherein local cultures are understood through the forces of global media-scape.

ARISTOTLE'S MODES OF PERSUASION

Aristotle, a Greek philosopher and scientist, is one of the most important thinkers in the field of growth and development of Western thought. In his work, Rhetoric, it is observed that Aristotle's views and ideas pertaining to the art of persuasion. According to him, any phenomenon for example advertising could become a tool of persuasion provided the 3 modes were in play. The three modes of persuasion are:

(a) Logos – Persuasion based on what argument is being presented to the audience.

(b) Ethos – Persuasion based on what impressions or views does the audience have of the speaker's character when hearing the argument.

(c) Pathos – Persuasion based on what the audience's emotional conditions are when hearing the speaker's opinion.

CONSUMERS AND SOCIAL MEDIA - TECHNOLOGY ACCEPTANCE MODEL

Technology Acceptance Model is essential in describing the importance of technological innovation in e-commerce and has been an essential model that most online marketing firms and the information system knowledge used widely. As Davis et al. (1989) mentioned, technology, as the main channel used in transactions in the e-commerce sector, has two particular beliefs, the perceived ease of use and the perceived usefulness. "Perceived ease of use determines the degree at which the person believes that using the system is beneficial for him, and perceived usefulness is the belief at which the person deems the use of the system as free of effort for him". The Technology Acceptance Model has provided the explanations for online behavior at which technology is given adequate emphasis. It has become beneficial in this study as it provides the frameworks as to the extent of technology use in online marketing.

Tang and Chi (2003) tested the empirical significance of the TAM model. The hypothesis they formulated states that "trust is the consequence of the two beliefs in the TAM, perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness". As the study's result, they concluded that "trust and perceived usefulness has similar roles in consumer behavior because perceived usefulness is the consequence of perceived ease of use and the antecedent of attitude". The significance of the model is simply implied by how a consumer sees the use of technology.

It describes the appeal of the technology employed and how it contributes to the

formation of trust. We also have observed the influence and the effects of technological advancement in society. As seen, the use of internet services is perceived as easy to use as well as it is useful. This is true concerning the growth of popularity of using computers, then the Internet as a system. Computers have made such remarkable changes in society. It has made lives easier with regards to performing all tasks.

PSYCHOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

There are different internal factors that impact consumer behavior, known as psycho-graphic variables, such as motivation, perception, learning, memory, attitude and self-conception. Studies show that these variables are highly influenced and tend to change due to Social Media usage.

(a) Perception. It is the process of selecting, organizing and interpreting stimulus/ incentives the individuals are exposed to. The perception process consists of three stages: exposure, attention and interpretation. Marketers attempt to expose their product to their consumers to the extent feasible. Even if these stimuli do not immediately push people to buy, they are memorized in the consumer's mind, and whenever they face a need, that stimulus automatically will come to their mind. According to studies, 1.54 seconds are sufficient to draw the attention of the consumer towards an attractive advertising.

(b) Learning and memory. Frequent exposure of stimuli and learning of

those stimuli, directly affects the ―family branding‖. This means that due to such frequent exposure, the consumer becomes more and more familiar with the brand. Social Media has an impact on ―observational learning, according to which, consumers observe others behavior and learn indirectly from others' experiences. According to psychology, people tend to remember more visual elements, that's why Social Media content is supposed to remain longer in consumers' minds.

(c) Attitudes and interactive communication. Communication through Social Media, and its content, can cause changes in consumers' attitudes toward different products or advertisements.

(d) Self-conception. The beliefs individuals have toward their attributes, and the way they evaluate them. We decide to buy some products to be consistent with the real ourselves, and to help us reach the ideal self. Managing impressions, means that people work hard on managing what others think of them.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND ACT OF BEING CONSUMERS

It is widely acknowledged that decisions made by consumers are a complex and diverse activity subject to various situational and environmental conditions. Such conditions can, for example, be pictorial information, time and money, which can have a systematic and significant influence on human decision-making. The pressure situations that influence consumers' decision-making processes have also been seen in the economic sectors for decades and are used to deliberately push consumers to a positive purchase outcome. These influential practices often take place through the use of pressure/ economic cues, also known as persuasion claims' which refer to signals or cues used by people to persuade or influence other people to buy more. These cues are drivers of commercial pressure. However, very little attention has been paid to the study of these economic pressure cues and their effects in the Social Media contexts, even though several scholars have recently called for more close and detailed investigation of this fundamental phenomenon that is a part of many people's daily lives. Benbasat and Dexter (1986) were among the primary researchers to research the effectiveness of photos, color and

graphical cues utilized in information systems under varying time constraints independent of any particular context. With the aim of examining the effects of commercial pressure cues on users' product choice behavior, one can draw on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model in environmental psychology. The S-O-R model posits that various stimuli within a shopping environment together influence a consumer's cognitive and/or affective processes which in turn determine the consumer's responses. Stimuli are contextual cues external to the consumer that attract his or her attention and may manifest themselves in various forms, such as selfies, price tags, a product display or a visual design. In the context of commercial websites, stimuli pertain to consumer brand selfies, brand posts etc., with which consumers interact, the organism refers to the intermediary intervening processes (e.g., emotive systems) between the stimuli and the reaction of the consumer. Response refers to behavioral responses or reactions, such as the acquisition of products.

Social Media and E-Commerce in the Pandemic

India may have 228 million native social commerce shoppers by the start of 2022, a 45% rise from the present consumer base, as consumers discover new ways of shopping for items online through Social Media apps such as YouTube, What's App, Facebook and Instagram, according to a report by Recogn.

The report by Recogn, WATConsult's analysis division, traced client sentiment and angle in direction of social commerce utilization. The report identifies social

commerce as buying completed or manufacturers found through Social Media platforms such What‘s App, Instagram, Roposo and many others. It doesn‘t personify-selling or video promoting platforms corresponding to Trell, Meesho and many others which have flourished over a period of time. However, the majority of Indian consumers use Social Media platforms such as YouTube, What‘s App, FaceBook and Instagram to buy products online.

As per WATConsult, a part of Dentsu‘s digital company Isobar Firm, currently there are 157 million social commerce consumers, reporting for 53% of complete web shoppers in India. In India, Google-backed YouTube is the leading platform used for social commerce, followed by FaceBook-owned What‘s App and after which is FaceBook. Youthful consumers (Age bracket 15-25 years) in India prefer to buy products being advertised on Instagram and Facebook, while the older prospects choose Facebook and What‘s App. Social commerce customers are very susceptible to make online purchases from Share Chat sooner or later, according to the report. Customers are drawn to such platforms as a result of recommendations and feedback which assist them with buying selections. The report indicates that inexpensive costs and the flexibility to buy on the platform itself rather than switching to various e-commerce apps or web sites are the opposite positives. The report also lists cellular and pill equipment as essentially the most bought merchandise on social commerce platforms, adopted by fashion and equipment, electronics and home equipment, magnificence and grooming merchandise and sports activities, health and out of doors merchandise.

Ms. Heeru Dingra, CEO, Isobar India group has highlighted –Social Media and e-commerce are paving sturdy inroads within the common Indian Web customers‘ every day routine. Because the purchasing atmosphere on Social Media has ripened, there may be large potential to drive gross sales via these platforms.‖

India‘s bulging Smartphone denizens in addition to low-cost information helps shoppers log online and get everything from reasonably priced cosmetics to groceries on-demand with convenience. This might have important consequences for companies as consumers simply uncover newer manufacturers online, make repeat purchases and get swayed by client evaluations. As a result, smaller retailers are already leveraging such platforms, the report has indicated. As an example, Social Media platforms have been the - go-to locations for smaller retailers in India to advertise and promote services throughout the pandemic. These sellers are in fact capable of promoting to first-time online patrons. Small retailers often choose social commerce due to the reach of Social Media platforms and their means to attach immediately with prospects, it mentioned. The report indicates that the pandemic has accelerated the expansion of the e-commerce business by many folds and social commerce has emerged as a well-liked mannequin as it helps in tapping audiences past prime metros.

The report added ―The foremost causes behind the rise in social commerce are the talents of Social Media platforms to have a number of shopping for and promoting teams, in addition to messaging, video sharing and photo-sharing options that

make online socializing and purchasing extremely appropriate. In the meantime, firms have additionally been including a bunch of options to allow manufacturers to promote online and for consumers to find items online. Platforms include live-streaming options in addition to enabling consumers to purchase items on their platform. YouTube has recently launched the Vacation—Stream and Store within the US permitting creators to host shoppable live streams. TikTok, too, has additionally been upping investments in e-commerce over a period of time.

Mr. Sahil Shah, Managing Accomplice, WAT Consult mentioned that —Purchasing was, is and can at all times be social. Platforms, behavior and mediums will preserve evolving whereas increasingly folks will log on to buy.

RESEARCH GAP

The research gap observed while examining the various theories revealed that the authors have limited the research to consumers in general and the Indian context has not been explored. Further considering the pandemic times, there is a new evolution in the behavior of consumers towards purchasing of products. The available theories have not specifically studied the demographic divide of gender and age which can provide a new dimension to the research. Thus the need emerges to examine the consumerism rampage prevalent today.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

This dissertation will focus on examining if people‘s digital practices like online surfing affect their consumption patterns (commercial pressure and consumer vulnerabilities) especially during the course of a pandemic. Along with that, we would also try and see how Social Media influences the shopping behavior, thoughts and patterns of people. Finally, we would also be checking if the rise in Social Media consumption can be a significant driver of commercial pressure. For the purpose of this dissertation, both primary and secondary data collection have been undertaken. In order to understand this phenomenon and profound relation with the economy and mental makeup, secondary research has been done and secondary data has been collated and put forth in the review of literature. For the purpose of finding out how Social Media affects the buying behavior of consumers primary data was collected using a structured questionnaire schedule. The sample size consisted of approx. 350 consumers who have purchased goods through Social Media.

Based upon literature and previously collected information, this dissertation has also used Qualitative personal interviews as means to obtain data with the help of a questionnaire. For the primary data collection, 10 personal interviews have been conducted.

The target audience for primary research ranged from 15 – 65 years mainly with three age brackets – (15-25), (26-50) and (55^{+}). The background of the target hasn't been extensively researched, but in general, all the respondents come from an urban middle class background. These respondents were chosen at random but were picked by the researcher and were known to him. The questionnaire contained 18 questions which were asked to people and thus first hand primary data was collected. Further, the target audience was told the purpose of the questionnaire and was also explained the purpose of the dissertation prior to conducting a personal interview. The interview process was used as a way to gain personal opinions of the respondents on what is their opinion on Social Media as an influential tool, consumption patterns and digital capabilities and how their interaction with Social Media impacts them. By conducting interviews, the respondents were able to express their opinions and feelings without being led to one pre-selected answer, as done through surveys. Participation in this data collection process was purely voluntary and their identity was kept confidential. For the process of primary data collection, previous literature has acted as a foundation to formulate questions for one-on-one interviews. It should be noted that there were several limitations in using this sort of personal interview method of primary data collection. A limitation of the process was that similar questions were asked to all the age groups. In addition to this, the respondents were not chosen at random but were known to the researcher. This could have affected the outcome of the research. A more diverse and unbiased response collection could

have been undertaken in order to understand the perspectives in greater detail. Also, as the respondents were told that the dissertation was about Social Media, this could have made their responses more media oriented and some kind of bias could have been there. Additionally, future researchers should try and diversify the types of participants and respondents included in the study - based on gender, ideas, class, caste, society and so forth. This would be useful in order to add further richness and authenticity to the data collected. It is hoped that these findings will add to the discussions around Social Media as a contemporary social culture.

CHAPTER 5

DATA ANALYSIS

It‘s a firm belief of the researcher that Social Media and consumption are an important part of the online culture. Through the questionnaire put forth, primary data was bought in and analyzed. While going through the responses, understanding them and analyzing them, a strong trend, based on age, was found especially in the second age group i.e., (26-50) age bracket and a minor trend was seen in the first age group i.e. (15-25) age bracket. Thus age became an interesting and important demographic variable of analysis. Along with that conditions of digital enhancements and demands that arose through the pandemic also came through which provided an interesting insight. Additionally, it has been assessed that out of 354 respondents, 231 were male respondents who are considered to have very limited participation towards e-commerce as compared to female gender. This could also be considered as a limitation of the study.

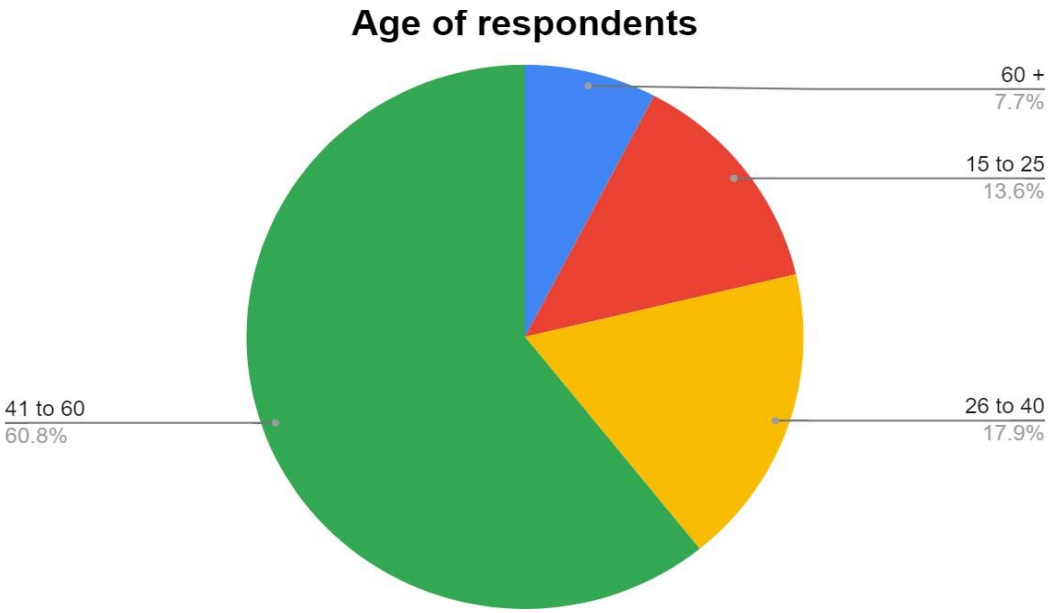

Fig 1: Age of Respondents

Digital and Financial Capabilities

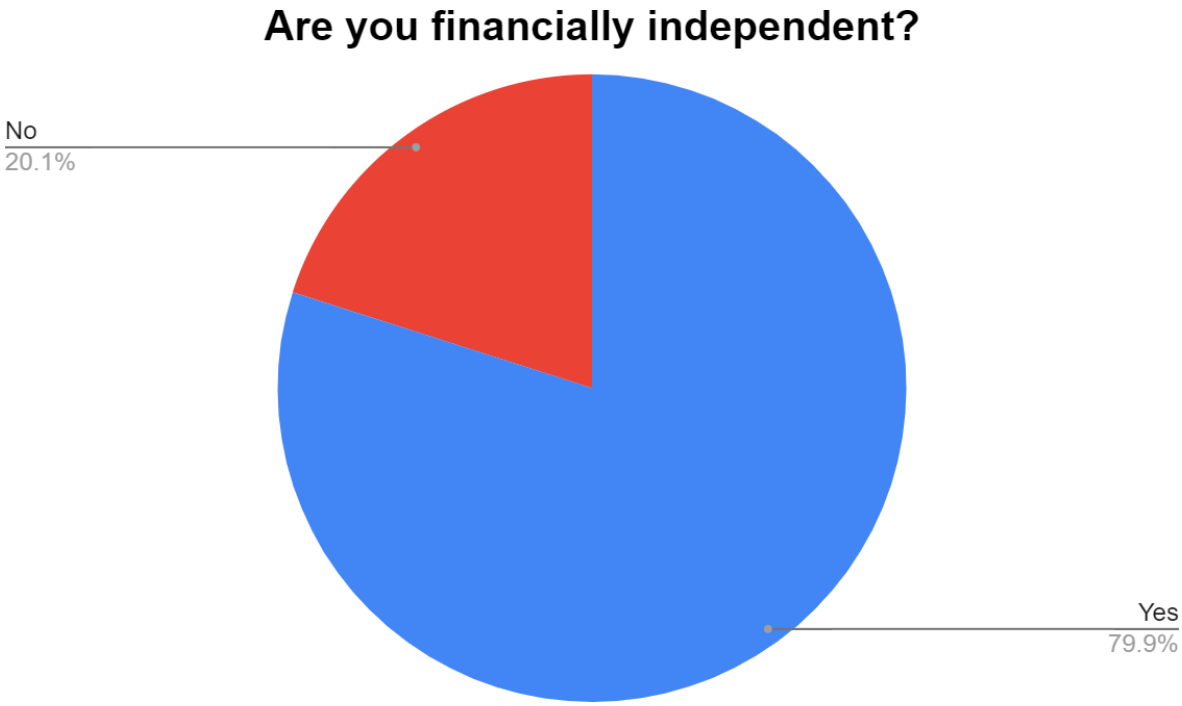

Fig 2: Financial status

The respondents were firstly questioned if they were financially independent. This question was the first step towards categorizing the target group. In terms of financial stability, 80% of the people said that they were in control of all their finances and hence made their decisions with respect to purchases. Most people who agreed with being financially independent fell in the second and third age bracket. The First age bracket (15-25 years of age) majorly fell in the "not financially independent" sample. Subsequently, on being asked as to how frequently they use their Social Media sites, around 85% of the people said that they used it very frequently, which was almost several times a day.

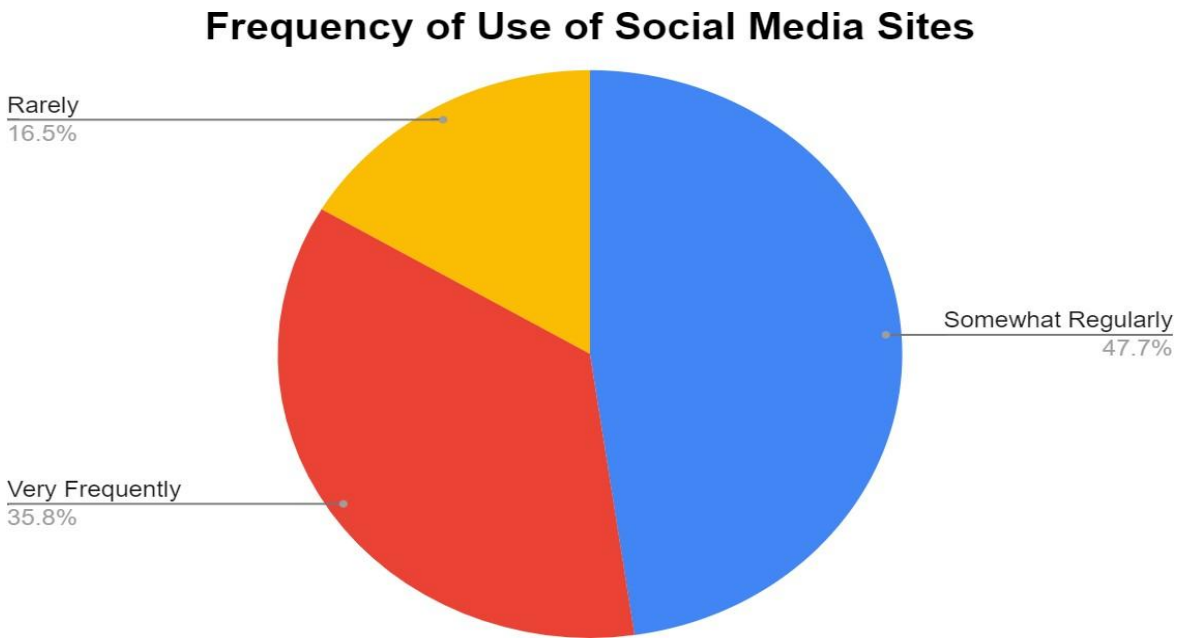

Fig 3: Usage of Social Media sites

Now out of this percentage, the respondents who did use Social Media emerged from both the first and the second age bracket with a slight edge to the first group.

One of the respondents (aged 18) said, "*Social Media sites are a part of my life and I consume a lot of information from these sites and honestly, most of it is in the form of photos*." Another respondent (aged 22) said, "*In today's modern times, information from Instagram has become an important source of information and Social Media is kind of as essential as books*." Thus from the general trend of responses, we can see that for the first age bracket, Social Media is very important and that they are massive users of applications and also consumers of data presented on such applications. Having said, a similar trend can also be seen in the second age bracket wherein respondents are now slowly moving towards intensively using Social Media. One of the respondents from this age bracket (aged 31) mentioned, "*I use Social Media extensively as a lot of information and general perspectives are available on such sites*." An interesting response came from another respondent (aged 51) who said, "*I have now become an avid consumer, the pandemic pushed me to accept and move on to Social Media where I could get news, material things etc. you name it and it was there. And now I think it's very comfortable for me!*"

This extensive usage of Social Media, which even though has been a recent phenomenon, is taking over so many roles and providing so much that it's hard to not use it. The last age bracket saw minimum interaction with Social Media as the majority said that they try to avoid it as much as possible as it's too time consuming and that there are other ways of getting information and interaction.

The responses did play into the Social Media Theory as stated by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010). One can see the unignorable presence of Social Media and its usage has penetrated the society where one and all need it immeasurably.

The responses from the first age bracket had broadly identifiable common ideas about Social Media wherein the platform was very important to them and it helped them put forth their identity, helped them get information about what is “in” or trendy. Majority from the first age bracket and the second age bracket and a hand few from the third engaged in using Social Media.

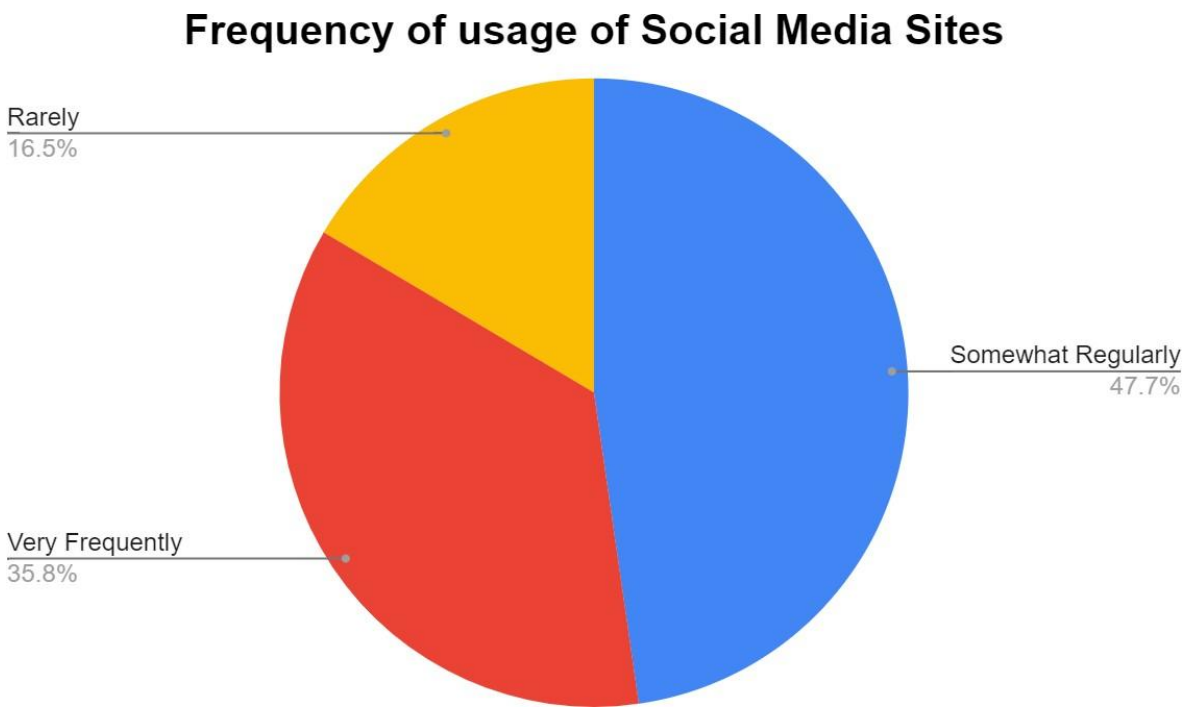

Fig 4 - Frequency of usage of E-commerce sites

The group was also asked if they have access to e-commerce sites and how often they access them and shop online. Around 95% agreed with using e-commerce sites like Amazon, Flipkart, Myntra etc. The First age bracket turned out to be the most active ones. 97% of the first age group, despite the majority of them not being financially independent, has indicated that they visit the Social Media sites at least once a day. However 64% respondents of the group were active on e-commerce sites on a regular basis. One of the respondents explained, "*E-commerce has become such an important part of not only our lives but also the economy. From food to fashion, whenever I need anything - be it actual items or even ideas, I tend to visit them to know that they are within the feasibility range*."

The second age bracket provided very interesting insights that displayed a trend of their growing presence in the Social Media sphere. 81% of this group candidly indicated that they visited Social Media sites on a regular basis and 64% of them visited e-commerce sites frequently. However another aspect which emerged was that respondents would visit e-commerce highly when the need arose or there were promulgated festive discounts/ offers. The ease of being online and getting work done appealed to them. One of the respondents (Age 49) noted, "*I feel the ease factor has played a major role. It has pushed me to understand and take up certain new ways of purchasing items. Also it doesn't hurt to get discounts online, It's actually quite attractive to me now*." Another respondent added, "*It was the pandemic that caused a major issue for me. I had to download the apps, surf and*

order and visit them to keep a track. But after the initial hesitation, the process was pretty convenient." Thus, one can observe that e-commerce sites have massively come up as an alternative source or a major source in some cases of economic activity made accessible by Social Media specially since the striking of pandemic.

In the age group of 44-60 years, 48% of the people indulge in online shopping at least once a week. However, it may be borne in mind that this age group tends to have grown up children and will often have their kids shopping for them and don‘t shop themselves. Hence this data may vary due to this limitation.

The responses cleared one important point and that was that the users of all three age brackets showed a growing affinity towards the act of being engaged users Social Media users performing a multitude of activities ranging from simple surfing to online purchases.

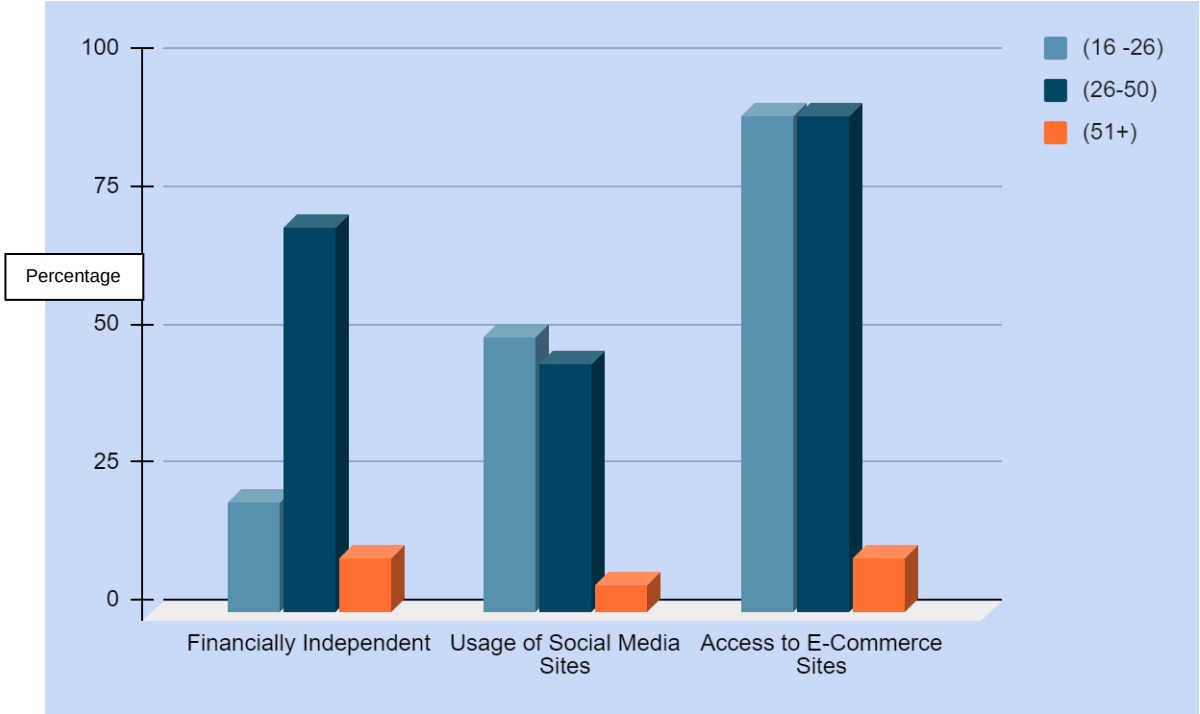

Fig 5: Summary Graph based on Age

Up till here, through the analysis and with the help of responses, we can see that the younger generation definitely has more digital capabilities than the older generation.

A study by communications regulator Ofcom - found that those in their teens have the best understanding of digital technology and have greater understanding. Digital confidence starts declining when people reach their 20s, and culminates in a steep drop at 50 years of age. This study measured the confidence and knowledge of technology to give people a “digital quotient” score. The study showed that those aged between 16-19 years had the highest score at 113, with that

figure dropping to 80 in those aged over 60. The major difference in scores reflected that in the case of younger consumers, they embrace and accept the newer technology quickly and take advantage of what it has to offer. Millennials are the generation that has grown up with technology and the advancement of virtual communication and hasn't had to adapt to technology as it became available, like previous generations. However, changes in social circumstances has also enabled the slightly older generation - second age bracket to also dwell in the areas of technology and Social Media to try and adapt to make life comfortable.

Social Media and its Influence

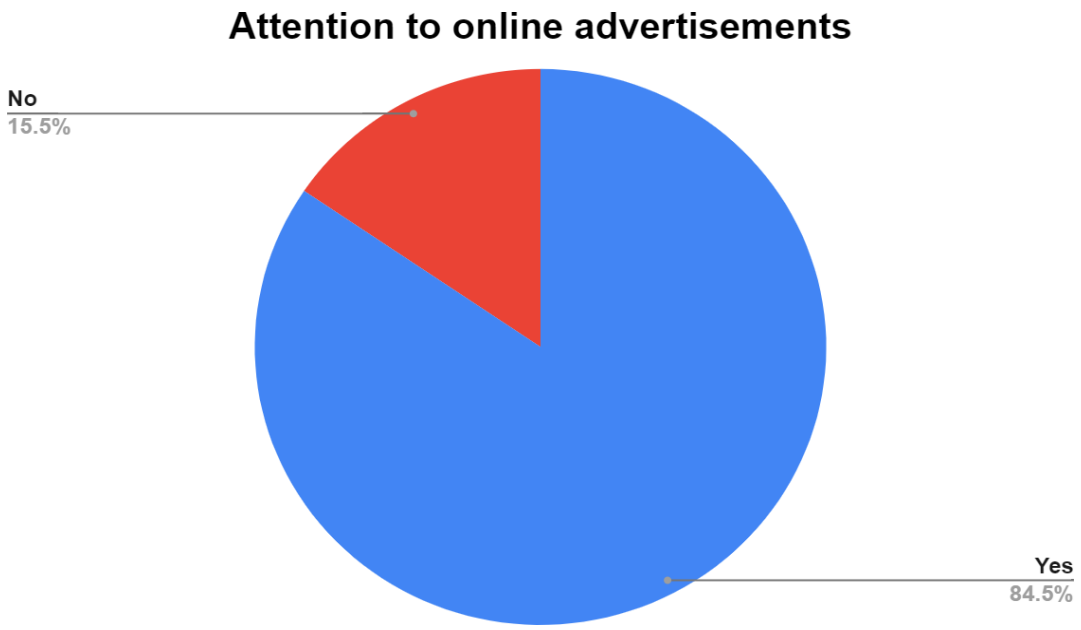

Fig 6 - Attention to online advertisements

Next, the target audiences were questioned if they pay attention to online ads. The

survey analysis indicated that approximately ~65% were affected by online

advertisements and influenced them. 45% of these people had a common idea where they said that online ads were important means through which they were made aware of possible ways in which they could access the internet to get products/ services they needed. Analysis of the survey indicated that the majority of the respondents in all three age brackets paid distinct attention to online advertisement which influenced their buying instincts. One of the respondents said (aged 18), *"I get influenced by ads. Now that I think about it, I consume a lot of online advertisements - be it trends, technology, fashion etc."* Online marketing through ads and quirky taglines was also seen as a major source for the origin of the need for consumer goods. Through these responses, we can see that Social Media does aid the forming commercial desires and consuming this type of content does change consumption patterns of people.

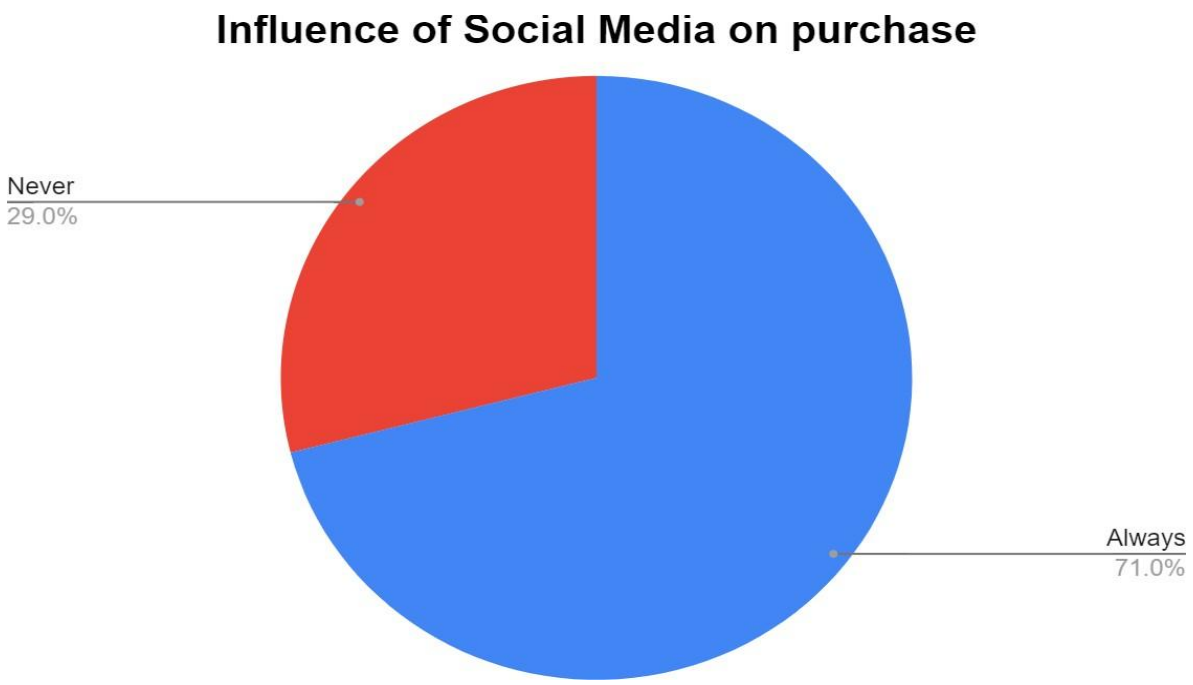

Fig 7 - Influence of Social Media

The Respondents were next asked about whether Social Media influenced their purchases. This was aimed to build on a conversation around 2 factors - Social Media and Economic Transactions. Majority of the respondents brought out this idea that Social Media allowed them to see what was out there, what other people were wearing or using or visiting or eating through conversations, through their Social Media and through photos. One of the respondents said (aged 15), "*I get influenced by my friends, influencers, Brands. They are everywhere. My friends and I talk about trends, technology, fashion etc. They tell me about what all they own, show me posts, photos etc. on Social Media which make me feel tempted to own that thing too*." Online marketing through photos and quirky taglines was also seen as a major source for the origin of the need for consumer goods. One of the

respondents (aged 22) said, –*There are many temptations. Online ads, photos of people, Smart Marketing etc. On seeing them, I just really, really want it!".* Through these responses, we can see that commercial desires are formed on consuming content and this does change consumption patterns of people.

The First age bracket heavily leaned on the involved side with 90% of the respondents being influenced by Social Media when it came to their purchases. 75% of the respondents in the second age bracket group also indicated that they were definitely influenced by Social Media while they indulge in shopping. A respondent stated, *"I believe in being aware of my choices and then purchasing. It allows the whole activity to be more meaningful, and Social Media is that place where I can learn about the choices available. If that counts as influence, then I sure am influenced."* As far as the third age bracket also showed considerable respondents being influenced by Social Media. Thus it can be concluded that Social Media has been a key contributor in deciding the purchase of goods from e-Commerce.

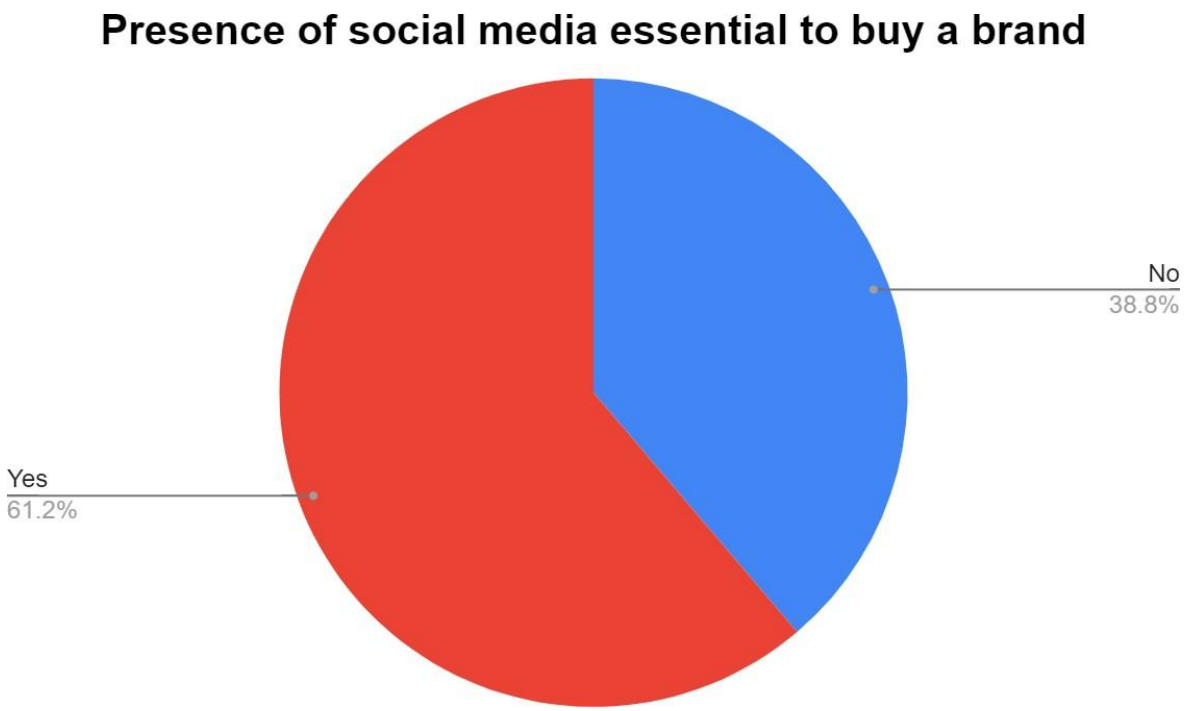

Fig 8 - Social Media presence essential to buy a product

To further get an insight into the audiences' thought process with respect to purchases, they were asked if they would purchase from a brand only if the said brand had a Social Media presence. Approximately 61% of the target group agreed that there needs to be a presence. The audience brought out ideas like the importance of knowing if a brand is reliable and if the product is worthy. The Test of trial was essential for most of the audience who believed that Social Media presence did provide the brand some credibility.

82% of the respondents in the first age bracket agreed to the fact that presence of Social Media was essential to buy a brand. The group agreed that it was the way

that one knew that they could shop and would have an ensured purchase. However, only 73% of the respondents in the age group 26-40 yrs agreed to this. One of the respondents stated, *"I do believe Social Media sort of provides you with this legitimate certificate. One knows if a particular brand is something they can shop from. There are users who give their user experiences and from the whole collective presence helps in the whole purchase."* While the majority did have this notion, some respondents did bring out the importance of the fact that sometimes things put up on Social Media could also be misleading and often do not add to the easy use factor. One could be duped as Social Media often doesn't have a checking system in place.

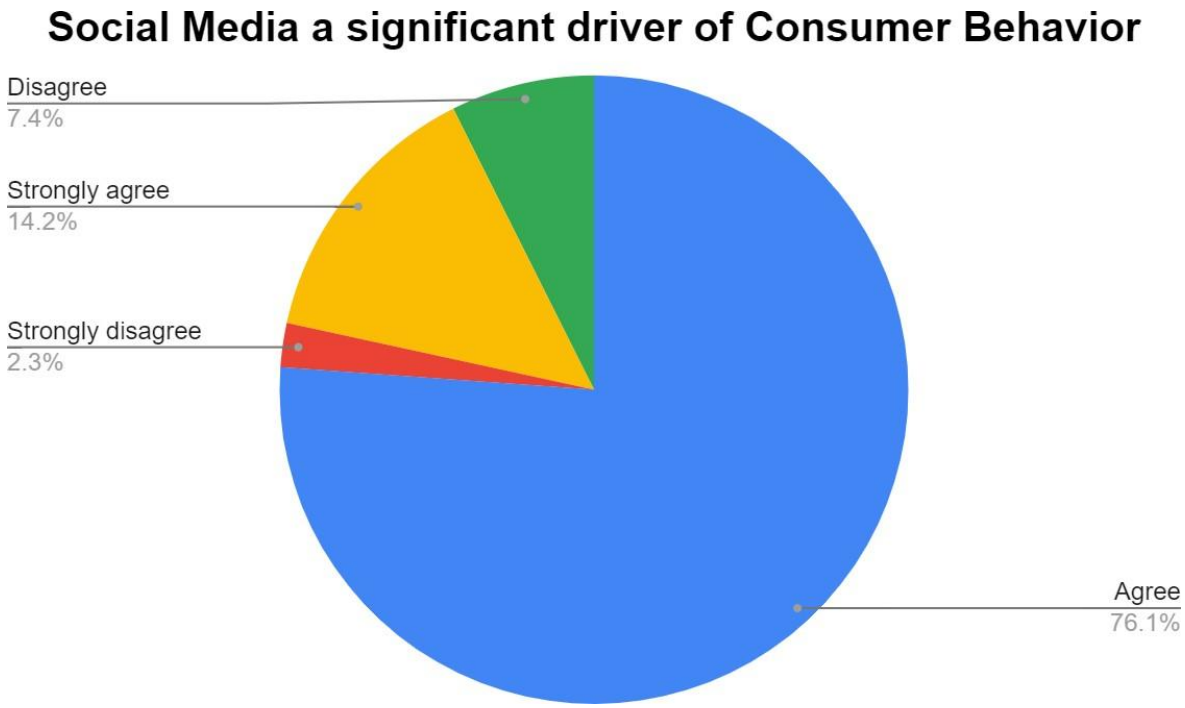

Fig 9 - Social Media driver of Consumerism

Next the respondents were asked if they had indulged in shopping for things they didn‘t need but were bought because they had seen it online on Social Media sites and if Social Media was a significant driver of Consumer Behaviour.

Almost 90% of the respondents said that they had quite a few times indulged in shopping due to such influence from Social Media and 10% of people on the other hand said that they had never been influenced significantly before. They were also asked if Social Media is an influential tool and thus a significant driver of Consumer Behavior that influences the idea of the consumption of a product. Similar response was observed wherein 85% of respondents confirmed the same yes and 15% responded as no. The responses of both the questions again reflected the age specific response with almost all the respondents of the first age bracket and majority of the respondents of second age bracket agreeing with the fact that Social Media had influenced them to purchase them. One of the respondents (aged 31) said, "*I have never thought of Social Media as an influential or persuasive factor. I just knew that I* wanted *that phone or that bag or shoe that I saw online probably in an advertisement or randomly. But when I think about it properly, I do feel that I have gotten influenced so many times. There are times when I purchase things just because I want to fit with the current trends and have the kind of things as my peers or as my favorite bloggers. I do see their posts, observe the outfits etc and. I think it does influence what all I shop for and look for."* The third age

bracket had a completely contrary opinion to that of the first two age brackets. One of the older respondents (Aged 55) commented, "*It is effective with young adults who are just in it for fun and don't understand or think about the consequences (good/bad). They simply get carried away with the Social Media influence"*

Looking at the responses received from the respondents, it can be seen that Social Media is a desire inducing symbol that does lead to the consumption of commodities. Through the review of literature, we have seen that consumer decisions are complex activities that are influenced by various forms of information and cues. In today‘s modern times, Social Media is a major provider of information and information is mostly in the pictorial form of which can have a systematic and significant influence on human decision-making in terms of appreciation and consumption. Information or cues that influence people‘s consumption patterns are called ―persuasion claims‖ which often persuade people to buy. This economic persuasion is termed as "commercial pressure". Stimuli in the form of pictures, content, information, videos etc. with which consumers interact, results in behavioral responses, such as the acquisition of products. Customers can access and share any information they want, as they have an unparalleled platform to contribute, collaborate and share their personal experiences so that they can capture and manage others' impressions instantly with ease. Whatever the content or setting, Social Media helps to create a community

engaged with a common interest. One of the respondents, (aged 22), said "*When I go online and see information in the form of eye grabbing videos and photos or articles, not only from my friends but also brands, I feel that they are communicating to me. I see what the products are. I feel influenced to try them out. Yes! it's working. I can tell you that I for sure feel the pressure, it's not direct but I feel like I should give some things a shot only because I have seen that it looks good on someone."* Through this response it can be seen that this exchange of information on Social Media magnifies B2C and C2C conversations, an extension of traditional word-of-mouth communication. However which party (consumers or brands) leads the pace of such communications in that respect is a highly disputed subject. In order to confirm this notion, we can also apply "Aristotle's –Modes of persuasion theory". According to him, a mode of persuasion needs to cover three aspects. These include: -

(a) *Logos* - The main idea that is being communicated could be seen as the logos. Social Media content that may be funny, creative, artistic, or emotional that puts out a strong idea or showcases an item brilliantly can be a mode of persuasion.

(b) *Ethos*- The attempts to build the perceived credibility in the eyes of the audience is ethos. The audience's reaction to the information published is highly dependent on the perceived trustworthiness of the content. That's

why Social Media presence pushed forth by peers or friends or influencers or brands is credible and is a good mode of persuasion.

(c) *Pathos*- The effort to influence the audience‘s emotional state is its pathos. Humans are emotional creatures and in most cases, we make decisions on an emotional level before we rationalize ourselves into it. An emotional appeal doesn‘t have to be serious. A fine piece of article or image can influence the audience‘s emotional state.

Thus, Social Media can be seen as a mode of persuasion. The individuals can be under commercial pressure which is caused by various commercial pressure cues put forth unintentionally by friends, intentionally by marketing strategies which persuade people to buy much more than needed. Looking through the lens of consumer culture theory, the term consumer culture does include commercially portrayed information which leads to actions that feed into the global market process. Social Media has now become the online culture and people unintentionally use it to influence consumers. Thus, one can deduce that the Web 2.0 is a powerful tool in communication to appeal to the viewer. In years to come Web 3.0 and other versions would only exponentially increase the presence and influence of the virtual sphere.

Consumer Vulnerability during the Pandemic

Next the respondents were asked if they shopped based on inputs and reviews on Social Media during the Pandemic and compared prices. The target group was divided on the question with almost 63% people agreeing but a number of people disagreed as well. People stated that they did prefer to check reviews online, read about the site and also look at user reviews. However, when it came to looking and comparing prices, only 35% of people strongly asserted that comparing prices was extremely essential for them.

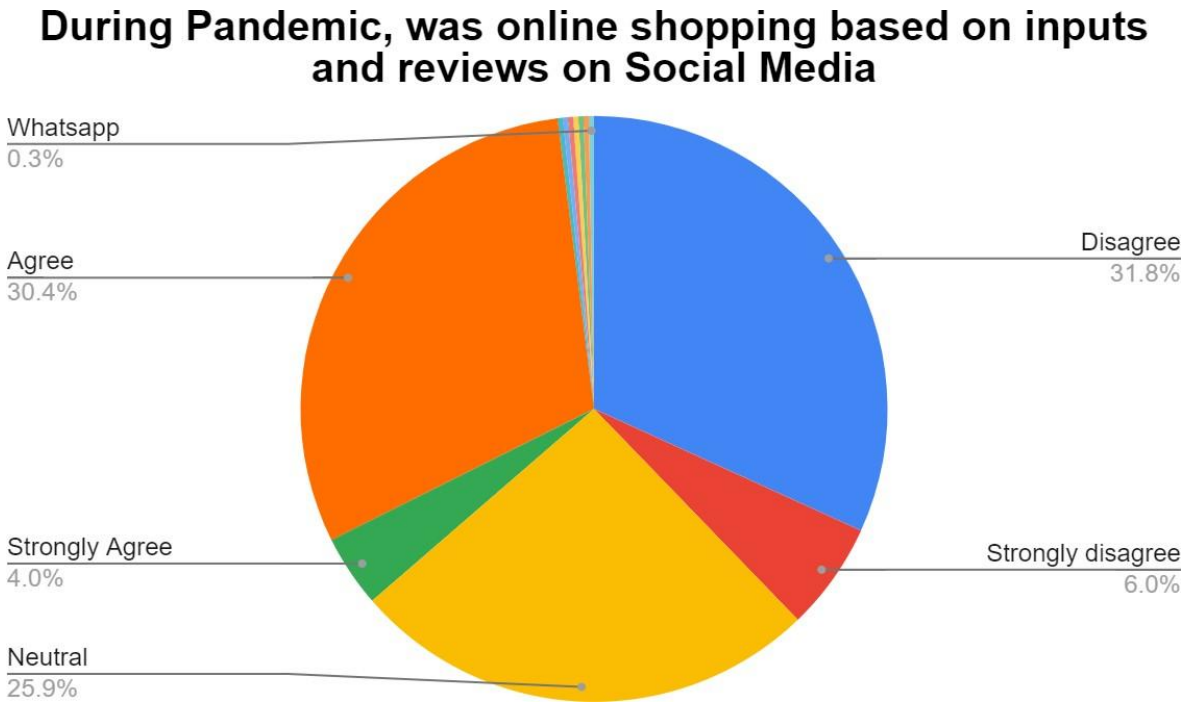

Fig 10 - Effect of Pandemic on online shopping

The first age bracket majorly highly mentioned that they were influenced by the reviews but along with that also had a heavy peer influence apart from Social

Media. Now the second age bracket showed a very heavy influence based on the reviews read online, discussion groups on What‘s App and even user experiences shared by brands. One respondent (aged 49) stated, “*I have a What’s App group with my friends wherein I do speak and share items that I want to purchase. Even my friends do so. If any of us have used it, we give honest opinions. According to me, such reviews just give you more confidence in your purchase and at the same time assure you of quality. The Pandemic had limited our movement and we couldn’t physically go check things out. In these situations, this kind of help was much appreciated. ”* The third age bracket agreed that reviews were important to decide if the item could be purchased. Additionally all brackets were in agreement that Pandemic pushed them to try and experiment with new websites/ e-commerce sites to explore.

The responses for the Comparison of Prices question showed very mixed inputs. The first age group didn‘t see a lot of importance as they were more concerned with the acquisition of the product/ service as compared to the price of the offered product. The Second age bracket majorly included financially independent individuals who did say that checking prices wasn’t a prerogative for them but they liked to be aware. The third age bracket strongly asserted the idea that comparing prices was an absolute necessity.

Lastly, I asked them if they tend to make economical and rational consumer choices while purchasing a product.

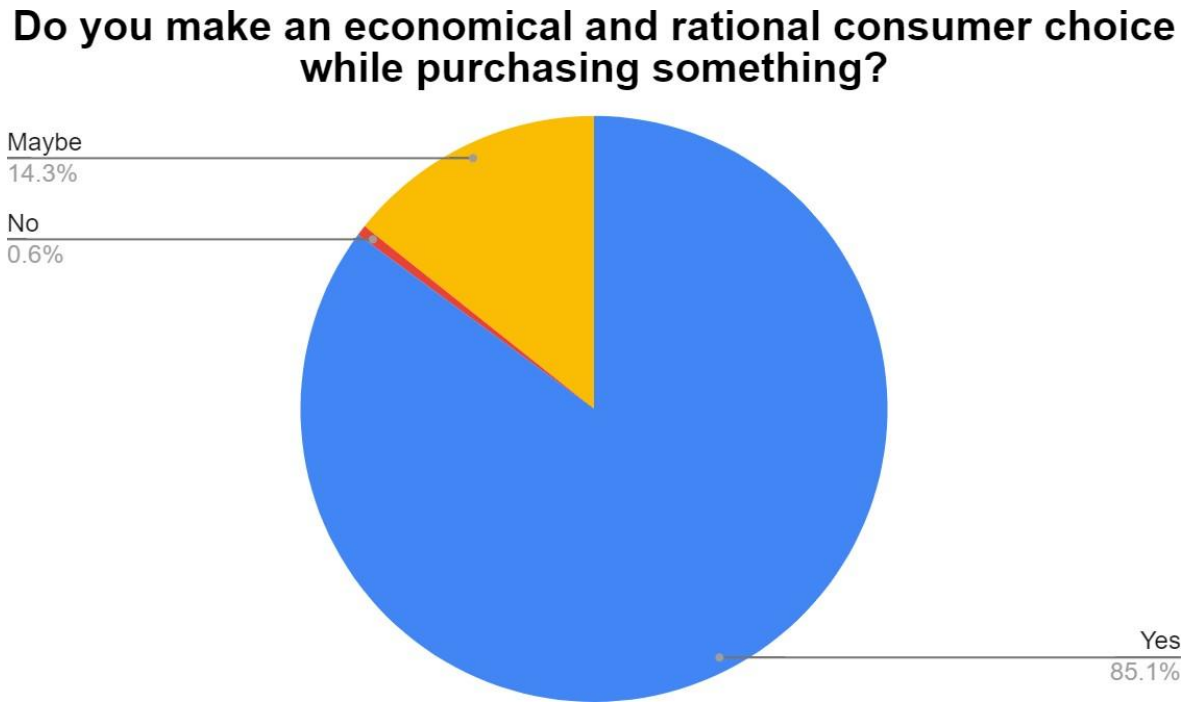

Fig 11- Economical and Rational Choice

85% agreed that they did make rational consumer choices all time whereas 15% believed that they didn‘t. The respondents who felt that they were not concerned about economical and rational choices mainly included the younger generation i.e., the first age bracket and a couple of respondents from the second age bracket. This group also did not engage in comparing prices when buying something online and also did not make the most rational consumer choices. The second age group also didn‘t believe in comparing prices perhaps due to their financial independence and believed that they made rational consumer choices. The Older age bracket

respondents included people who believed in the idea of saving money as many were dependent on their kids for financial aid.

An idea that emerged through the interview was the idea of overconsumption. This idea sprung up during a discussion with one of the respondents of the second age bracket who admitted that being financially independent and having the choice sometimes leads them to over consume. Overconsumption is a simplistic, general variable asking if respondents tend to buy things they do not need. In the interviews, many respondents said that they were in favour of purchasing expensive digital products, branded clothes, designer bags, tattoos, etc. as these things were –in " or "trendy" online and were used by all their friends, peers, bloggers, influencers etc. This showed that both teenagers and financially independent adults nowadays are a major customer group with considerable purchasing power, and their consumption is not confined to meet the level of survival needs, but it reflects more as a group-infected culture under some circumstances. They are more sensitive to the new and increasingly growing trends of fashion which they pursue for manifestation of novelty, fashion, beauty and personality, with the expectation to get recognition and acceptance of others. At the same time, with the development of economy and technology, they are kept being attracted by different new products and are being stimulated by peers and media advertising. Thus, overconsumption does relate to commercial pressure.

SEX BASED ANALYSIS: ALTERNATE APPROACH

While analyzing the survey an important thing emerged that most of the respondents to the survey were males. The researcher then attempted to analyze that difference of views of the two genders as an alternate approach to understand the influence of Social Media on different sexes. The researcher post analyzing the data insights based on the survey and the interview arrived at the notion that the heterosexual cis-gendered male was fairly less engaged in the Social Media led consumer behaviour. On the contrary the heterosexual cis-gendered females were more involved in shopping and keenly followed the Social Media while indulging in shopping. An analysis based on gender is enumerated below: -

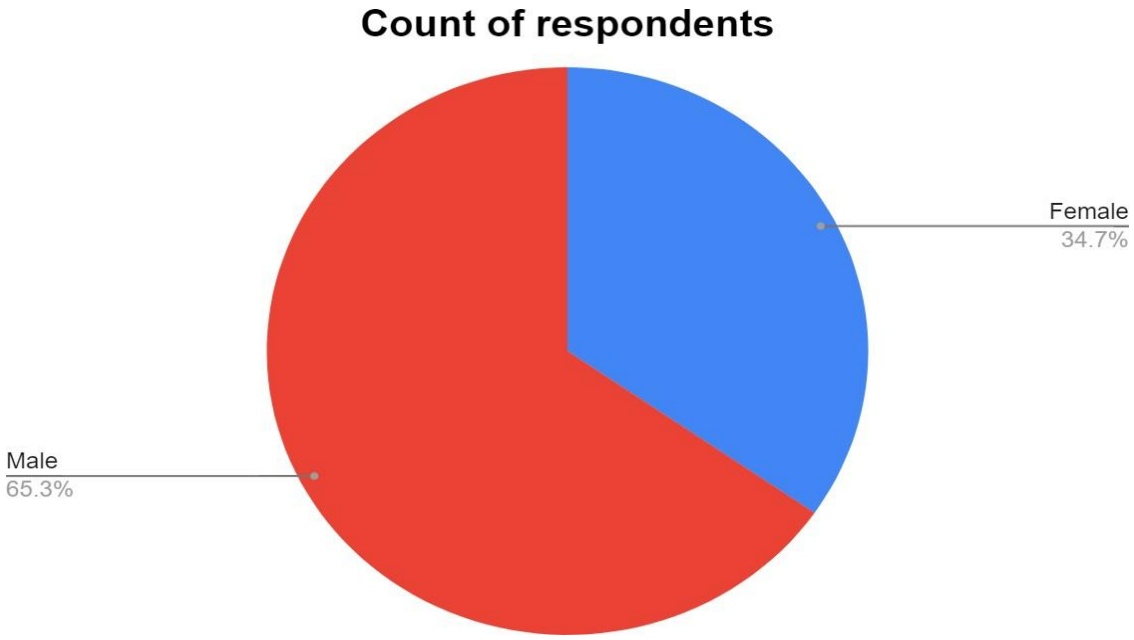

Fig 12- Respondents

Response of Male Respondents

The researcher analysed the responses of heterosexual cis-gendered male respondents to the questionnaire. It emerged that a large number of males were financially independent and often used Social Media and strongly feel that Social Media drives consumerism. However the visit to e-commerce sites and online shopping was very limited. Even during the course of pandemic the male respondents did not indulge in extensive shopping as compared to the women. The men folk however were absolutely upfront in confirming that they would check reviews of products prior buying them but did not need Social Media to buy any brand. They were influenced by peers, relatives, friends and near and dear ones to indulge in online shopping. Almost 100% of the male respondents indicated that they always made economical and rational choices while undertaking purchase of any item on e-commerce websites.

Response of Female respondents

While analyzing the heterosexual cis - gendered female respondents, only 64% were financially independent. However, the majority of women respondents indicated they were extremely active on Social Media and e-commerce websites not only browsing the e-commerce websites but indulged in extensive shopping as well. More than 73% of the women respondents paid distinct attention to online advertisements and 94% believed that it was the Social Media which often drove

people to indulge in consumerism. Though barely 43% have indicated that they were frequently visiting e-commerce sites and indulged in shopping, it appears that the data could be biased keeping in mind the study. 72% of the female respondents agreed that during the course of pandemic, they shopped based on inputs on Social Media since they were all locked in their respective houses. The analysis of responses received from the women, it has emerged that 100% women would check reviews of products prior to purchasing a product and 83% believed that the online advertisements affected them and pushed them towards online shopping. 73% of the women respondents agreed that Social Media would influence them towards buying a specific brand of items. 89% of the respondents agreed that they would change their views about a product if its reviews on Social Media were poor and visual appeal was extremely important for them to indulge in shopping. Lastly, almost 100% of female respondents confirmed that they would be both rational and economical while indulging in shopping for any product.

Thus it has emerged that there exists a variance in response to the survey based on the gender which in itself could be a scope of further study.

Comparison of results obtained vis-a-viz Technological Acceptance Model(TAM)

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), introduced by Davis (1986), is one of the most widely used models to explain user acceptance behavior. Davis (1986, 1989) introduced the constructs in the original TAM (see Figure 13) which is as follows: -

(a) Perceived usefulness (PU)

(b) Perceived ease of use (PEOU)

(c) Attitude and behavioral intention to use.

Among the constructs, PU and PEOU form an end-user‘s beliefs on a technology and therefore predict his or her attitude toward the technology, which in turn predicts its acceptance.

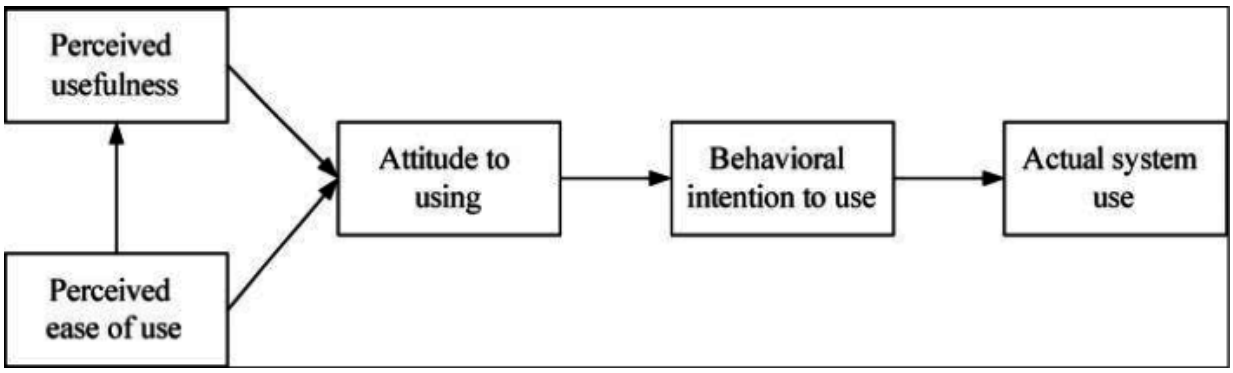

Fig 13: The Original Technology Acceptance Model

Based on the research undertaken, it provides ample evidence to conclude that the people today have willingly accepted the technology and are willing to

intentionally participate in its usage. This has widespread acceptance especially in Urban India wherein people are keen to use Social Media which drives them to mindless consumerism.

The study also proves that the psycho-graphic variables such as motivation, perception, learning, memory, attitude and self-conception play a major role in accepting technology and performing functions leading to accepting the technology as a part of our lives. The individuals are widely affected by these factors and are keen to accept them.

Another observation that came forth during the survey and discussion was there was a lack of knowledge regarding availability of a centralized grievance cell for consumers. Most of the respondents mentioned that they had never approached a formal body and in some cases had not even heard of one. The purpose of the dissertation was to also highlight the need to bring forth a centralized organization that professionally dealt with the consumer matters and was responsible for bringing consumer grievances into the light and providing legal solutions. To understand this requirement, efforts have been made to further look into the working of the National Consumer Helpline and its benefits that have been observed.

Problems faced by consumers while purchasing from Social Media platforms.

National Consumer Helpline (NCH) is an initiative of the Union Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution. It works with the mission to provide telephonic advice, information and guidance to empower Indian consumers and persuade businesses to reorient their policy and management systems to address consumer concerns and grievances adopting world class standards. NCH operates under the Centre for Consumer Studies at Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA). NCH recognizes the need of consumers for a Telephone Helpline to deal with a multitude of problems arising in their day-to-day dealings with business and service providers.

NCH advises consumers on dealing with problems related to defective products, deficiency in services and unfair trade practices. The Helpline follows a three-tier approach: -

(a) First the consumer is informed of his rights in a particular consumer problem and who she/ he should approach in the concerned company or the organization.

(b) If the problem remains unresolved she/ he would be directed to take up the matter with industry level bodies or chambers of commerce, industry

regulators (as they exist in sectors like insurance and banking) or Govt. officials who are in charge of the relevant industrial sector.

(c) As a last resort, the consumers will be advised to take their case to consumer courts under the Consumers Protection Act. This helpline is designed to promote avenues of out of court settlement of consumer disputes and resultantly helps to reduce the burden on consumer courts.

Convergence model of grievance redressal

Under the convergence model, which is an out of court dispute redressal mechanism, NCH partners with companies, who have a proactive approach to efficiently resolve consumer complaints. It shares with them the data of the complainants along with the complaints received at NCH related to their company, to facilitate free, fair and fast redressal through participative cooperation.

Under Convergence process companies are expected to resolve/close the complaints by stating "a gist of the resolution" in the remarks column which is accessible to both - the consumer and NCH. Website Complaints are those which are directly assigned by consumer to that company and CRM complaints are those which are received at the toll free helpline and uploaded by NCH in a predefined frequency.

Thus, NCH acts as a bridge in building symbiotic synergies between consumers and service providers maintaining the confidentiality of consumer complaints within the specific company.

Function of NCH

National Consumer Helpline supports consumers by: -

(a) Guiding consumers in finding solutions to problems related to Products and Services.

(b) Providing information related to Companies and Regulatory Authorities.

(c) Facilitating consumers in filing complaints against defaulting Service Providers.

(d) Empowering consumers to use available Consumer Grievances Redressal Mechanisms, Educating Consumers about their Rights and Responsibilities.

(e) Developing the awareness among Consumers about their Rights and Responsibilities

Based on inputs received, National Consumer Helpline has registered 4,18,931 dockets in which 31,454 dockets of sector are enquiries (Non-CPA) and 3,87,477

dockets are grievances from the period Mar 20 to Jan 22 . The details of grievances under the e-commerce sector in which Social Media is also included is listed in Table-1. The researcher has categorized the Social Media Market Place (Facebook, What‘s App, Twitter, Telegram, Instagram etc.) as separate categories in INGRAM. NCH has registered 5908 dockets out of which 344 are as sector enquiries and 5564 as grievances (Table-2) from Aug 21 to Jan 22. The details of all grievances from Mar 20- Jan 22 are enumerated below.

eCommerce-Nature of Grievances-Mar20-Jan22			
Sr. No.	**Nature of Grievances**	**No. of Dockets**	**%**
1	Paid amount not refunded/Amount debited but not credited to beneficiary.	98360	25
2	Non-Delivery of Product	53416	14
3	Deficiency in Services	51989	13
4	Delivery of Wrong Product	44064	11
5	Delivery of Defective / Damage Product	40069	10
6	Delay in Delivery of Product	24228	6
7	Product / Product Accessories Missing	16524	4
8	Not providing replacement as per policy	11788	3

9	Fraudulent Transaction/Issue	11567	3
10	Wrong Promised/Offered Gift Not Given	9525	2
11	Others	25947	7
	Total	**387477**	**100**

Table-1 - Nature of Grievances for the period from Mar 20 - Jan 22

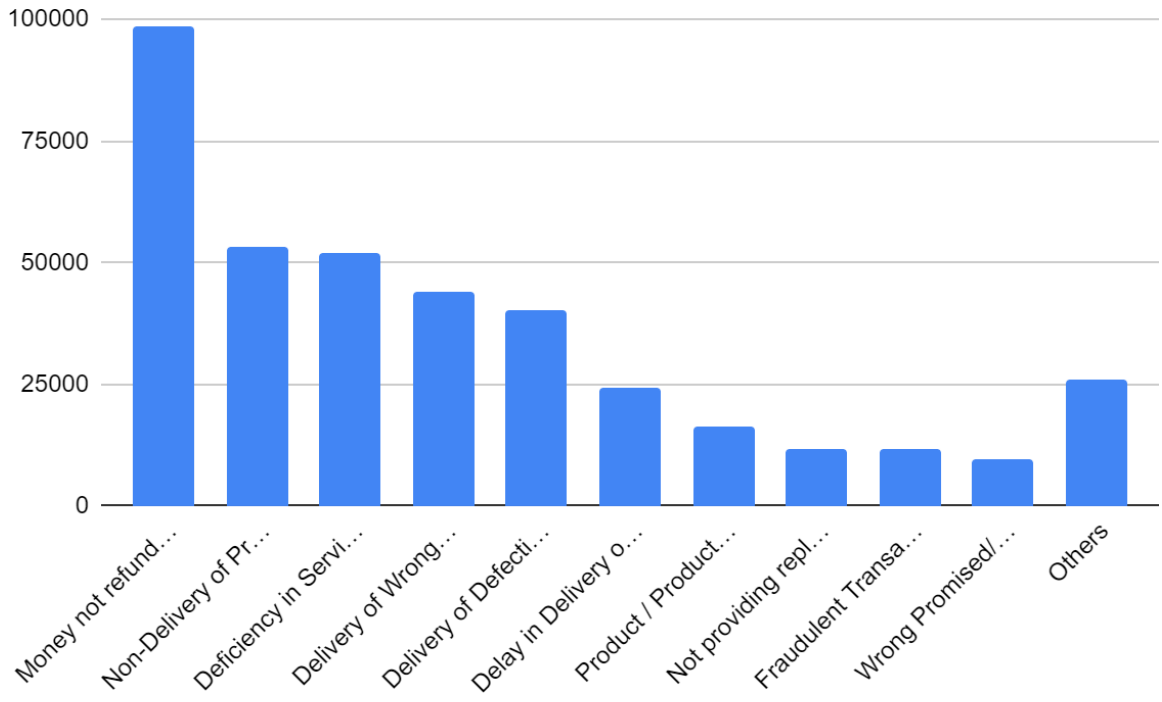

Fig 14 - Nature of Grievances for the period from Mar 20 - Jan 22

Social Media Market Place - Nature of Grievances-2nd Aug 21-31st Jan 22			
Sr. No.	**Nature of Grievances**	**No. of Dockets**	**%**
1	Non-Delivery of Product	1535	28
2	Delivery of Wrong Product	1453	26
3	Fraudulent Transaction	591	11
4	Delivery of Defective / Damage Product	444	8
5	Delay in Delivery of Product	476	9
6	Deficiency in Services	276	5
7	Sale of Spurious / Fake Products	343	6
8	Paid amount not refunded	246	4
9	Product / Product Accessories Missing	106	2
10	Not providing replacement as per policy	52	1
11	Others	42	1
	Total	**5564**	**100**

Table 2 - Nature of Grievances for the period from 02 Aug 21-Jan 22 under Social Media Market Place

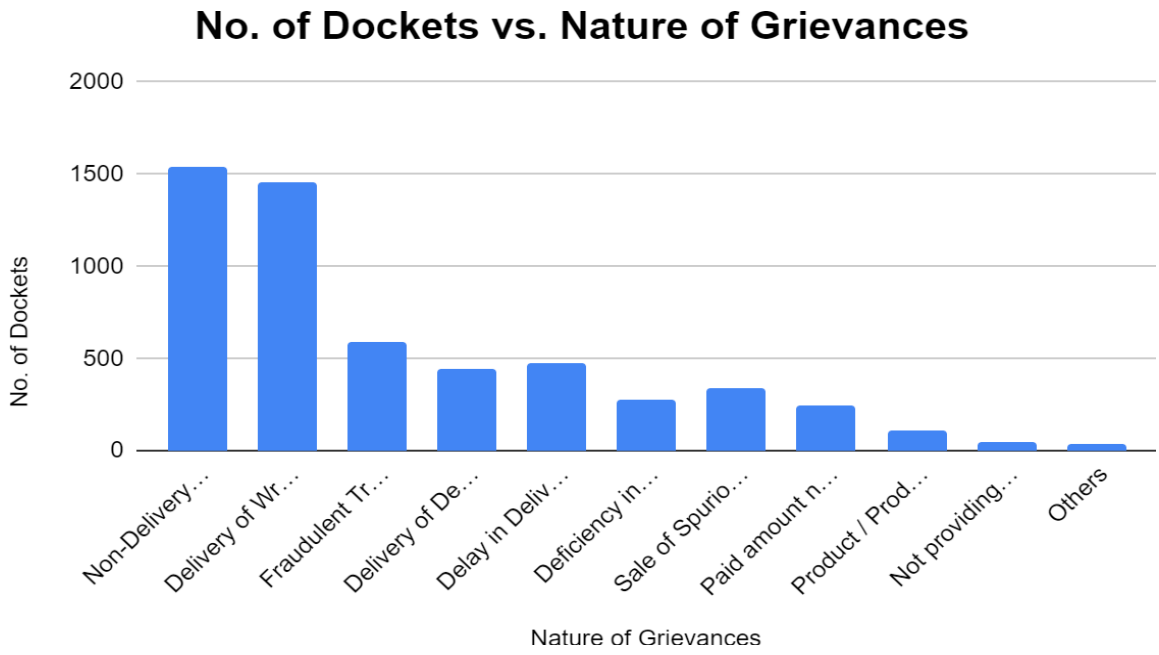

Fig 15 - Nature of Grievances under Social Media Market Place

Analysis of the statistics reveals that the National Consumer Helpline has been responding to numerous grievances and resolving the issues with the various Social Media sites. Considering the number of grievances, it is assessed that the frauds are prevalent across the Social Media sites and the NCH is the via media to resolve the issues of consumers. At an average, 17,612 grievances were registered every month with NCH and all out efforts are made by the Team of NCH to liquidate the grievances by coordinating and guiding the consumers as well as the Social Media giants. There is however a growing need to push this organisation ahead and let the consumers at all levels know that there is a way for them to address their grievances with a government body. However, at times the

consumers need to be guided to approach the Honourable Courts for resolution of certain grievances.

Measure to improve Consumer Protection and Satisfaction

In order to provide excellent customer service, it is essential to understand the customer needs, their experiences with Social Media and of course the pain points. To further understand and improve the idea of Consumer satisfaction, the following suggestions have been added: -

(a) Feedback System. In order to enhance the Consumer Protection and satisfaction it is essential to provide the customers multiple ways to share their feedback. This could be done through telephone surveys or a feedback form sent via email. Besides the surveys, you can also establish a complaint system, which will better enable your customers to raise their issues. This will provide a knowhow about their good, bad and ugly experiences when interacting with the brands in the market. Through this, one can gain real insights into whether a company is doing well and identify the areas which require improvement. Besides this, connecting with customers makes them feel that you value them and are willing to resolve their issues. This will help in establishing trust, and may even prevent them from sharing their concerns or negative comments on Social Media.

(b) Convergence Partnership with National Consumer Helpline (NCH).

The NCH works with the mission to provide telephonic advice, information and guidance to empower Indian consumers and persuade businesses to reorient their policy and management systems to address consumer concerns and grievances adopting world class standards. NCH operates under the Centre for Consumer Studies at Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA). National Consumer Helpline has a convergence partnership with numerous companies. Under the convergence model, which is an out of court dispute redressal mechanism, NCH partners with companies who have a proactive approach to efficiently resolve consumer complaints. These companies are constantly in touch with NCH and have willingness to resolve any dispute arising or being raised by customers during their process of shopping.

It has been observed and brought out by the respondents that most of them use Social media platforms to bring attention towards their grievance. Such platforms include Linkedin, Twitter etc. These platforms have a huge following and are credible platforms wherein most brands want to maintain a proper image. The respondents have mentioned that raising grievances on such platforms not only draws the attention of the concerning brand but also provides awareness to the users. Publicly announcing problems about products from a particular brand can be a concerning matter especially for

the credibility and popularity of a brand. Thus, they tend to be extremely active resolving such issues.

It is proposed that the National Consumer Helpline should look at developing into a full fledged space/ organization collaborating with such Social Media sites to address the issues of Consumer Grievance holistically.

(c) Expeditious resolution of Grievances. Higher waiting time will significantly reduce the customer satisfaction score. It is the brand‘s responsibility to plan for and hire adequate support staff to attend to customers expeditiously and politely. The customer needs to be treated as _King‘ and resolutions to be provided on fast track.

(d) Monitor customer reviews. Apart from leading Social Media channels, there are many websites and portals out there where customers tend to post their reviews. The companies’ needs to monitor these portals to see what customers are saying about your products and services. Efforts should be made to understand the reasons behind these reviews. Once the data gets analysed, you can use that data to increase customer satisfaction significantly.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

The rationale of the research was triggered by individual thought processes to examine how web-based social media impacts the consumers purchasing and focussed on the period involving Pandemic which struck India in Mar 20.

Through the qualitative analysis of the data, the research investigated people‘s digital practices i.e. Social Media engagement affects their consumption patterns (commercial pressure and consumer vulnerabilities). It was observed that Social Media had a major impact on the consumers especially since the striking of the Pandemic in India. It is indeed a brilliant marketing tool and also a significant driver of persuasion and commercial activity. The analysis did answer the research question undertaken.

Through all responses, it was seen that social media is indeed a significant driver of consumer behavior due to its strong influence on the consumer audience. It was also found to be a strong mode of persuasion, hence, a strong desire inducing tool. The idea of consumer protection was also explored and suggested measures that would improve the idea of consumer satisfaction. The demographic of age was used to undertake the analysis and find trends. In short, this dissertation makes

it clear that the concept of Social Media is not entirely new; it has evolved and rapidly proliferated in recent years because of technological advancement. As the themes in the dissertation indicate, the boom of Social Media among the masses has largely contributed to shaping contemporary consumer culture and marketing practice in the social media marketplace.

During the journey of the research, it emerged to be an interesting study wherein it could be assessed that Social Media is here to stay and will be a part of our daily lives. Social Media and its constant involvement in our lives will lead to immense participation of all in e-commerce and result in extensive buying of products. Though it is human nature to be economical and rational while undertaking any purchases, due to frequent advertisements, promotions in Social media/ newspapers/ peer discussions, discounts over festive times, humans will indulge in mindless shopping.

Thus to conclude, I would like to put forth the words of Tim Berners-Lee, Inventor of the World Wide Web, "The Web as I envisaged it, we have not seen it yet. The future is still so much bigger than the past."

These words have inspired me to take on the big bright future where the fascinating presence of social media is only set to grow.

Implications and Future Work

The findings presented offer numerous research implications for social e-commerce. It has been significantly noted that Social Media has an important role to play in boosting purchase intentions. Furthermore, increased trust in Social Media platforms results in greater customer engagement in the process of purchasing. Social Media has enhanced information quality, transaction safety and communications. The research clearly highlights that the act of seeking information in a social commerce platform has positive consequences on customers' purchase intentions. In order to improve e-commerce, increase purchase intentions within the communities, offer easy access to information channels, search engines, information exchange process and improve trust in provided contents.

The current study has been subjected to several limitations and therefore calls for future research. Further a larger spectrum of people being subjected to survey, especially those from rural background, would bring about a better assessment of the issue. Additionally, with the majority of the respondents being males, there is likelihood of incorrect analysis since generally it is the women folk who are involved more in shopping as compared to me.

The scope of the idea of looking at Social Media and its influence is huge. This dissertation has looked at a linear relationship between Social Media and its effect

on consumer behavior. Also this was seen through the demographic factor of age. The thought was to present a relatively objective analysis based on an economic perspective.

Future researchers can look at this relationship from a social or psychological point of view. Social Media can be very well analyzed through a psychological perspective to observe as to why people engage with social media, social presence etc. related to this, future researchers can also see how people create their identities on social media. Future researchers can also analyse how branding through Social Media works. In terms of economic persuasion and consumption patterns and market influence, future researchers could also look at how influencers and bloggers influence people and what is their influence on brands. Also in terms of demographic factors, future researchers can look at this relationship through the demographic factor of gender in order to get a more detailed idea.

This study has been purely based on primary survey and secondary survey conducted with a limited set of people responding to the questionnaire dished out. The measure of data accessible to us increments every day as an outcome, we are overwhelmingly presented and accomplished distinctive parts of data by means of the Social Web. The openness and ease of access to the web-based social networking offers has affected the mindset of the purchasers and the affect on them is unavoidable. In order to fulfill the Research objectives which were

intended to limit the subject and to help the researcher to recognize the clarifications of the issue.

It has been ascertained through the survey, which has a bit of limitations as elaborated above, that online networking has brought significant changes to the shoppers and organizations. The survey clearly indicates that the online networking assumes an essential part in impacting the consumers purchasing choices and the consumers consistently accessed the web to see the commercials which inspired them to undertake purchases. They frequently utilized web-based social networking to get as well as provide inputs about the items/ e-commerce sites they utilize. Social media has reformed the universe of advertisements and has moved distant from conventional publicizing.

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Survey on effects of Social Media on Consumers

Survey on Effects of Social Media on Consumers

* Required

1. Name

2. Sex *

Mark only one oval.

Female

Male

3. Age *

Mark only one *oval.*

15 to 25

26 to 40

41 to 60

60 +

Other:

4. Are you financially independent?

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

5. How Frequently Do You Use Your Social Media Sites

Mark only one oval.

Very Frequently

Somewhat Regularly

Rarely

6. Do you pay any attention to online advertisements?

Mark only one *oval.*

Yes

No

Maybe

7. According to you, Is Social Media a significant driver of Consumer Behavior *

Mark only one oval.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

8. How often do you visit E-Commerce sites? *

Mark only one oval.

Once a day

Multiple times a day

Rarely

Never

Other:

9. How many times shopping is done online

Mark only one oval.

- Once a day
- Once in two days
- Once a week
- Once a fortnight
- Once a month
- Rarely
- Never
- Other:

10. During Pandemic, was your online shopping based on inputs and reviews on Social Media (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Etc.) *

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree
- Other:

11. How much of the purchase do you feel was influenced by Social Media? *

Mark only one oval.

- Always
- Sometimes
- Never

12. Do you ever check the reviews of products prior placing order for the item *

Mark only one oval.

- Always
- Sometimes
- Never

Other:

13. How often do you watch/read the social media that influence your purchase

Mark only one *oval.*

- Daily
- 1-2 times a week
- 3-4 times a week
- Once a week
- Only when needed
- Never

14. Is an advertisement on social media likely to interest you to buy a product *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

15. Do you think social media presence is essential to buy a brand *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

16. Will you change your view if the social media displays poor reviews of the product *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

17. Is visual appeal important in social media advertisement? ”

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

18. Do you make an economical and rational consumer choice while purchasing something?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- Maybe
- No

Appendix 'B'

IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE BUYING BEHAVIOR OF CONSUMERS

Questionnaire for interview

a. Pse state your Name, Age and if you are financially independent.

b. Which is the most popular social media platform that you often access?

c. How often do you access social media in a day? Can you specify time spent also

d. Do you feel that with occurance of Pandemic in the last two years, it has enhanced use of social media by you?

e. On social media what interests you the most? Is it products, services, advice, promotions and offers or general chat?

f. Have you ever shopped through social media?

g. As I assess you are financially independent, do you feel that social media access drives you to buy things which you could have managed without?

h. Do you feel that online shopping has increased ever since striking of Covid 19 which resulted in majority of the people working from home?

i. Do you feel influenced by products being promoted by celebrities such as filmstars, sports personalities, etc

j. Do you indulge in online shopping though branded firm s websites or prefer shopping on Amazon, Flipkart, Snapdeal, Jiomart, etc.

k. Do you feel that our shopping behavior is influenced by our culture?

l. During the course of accessing social media and doing purchases, did you feel cheated by the product delivered to you as what was ordered by you? Did you approach National Consumer Forum to get the issue resolved? Or did the platform accept the mistake and replaced the item or refunded the money?