

An Empirical Study on the Effects of Social Networking on Consumer Buying Behaviour in Bhusawal

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Abstract—The emergence of social networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube has changed the ways in which consumers search for information, consider options and make purchases. This is particularly true in semi-urban and Tier 3 towns in India, where the rapid growth of smartphones and cheap data packages have given more people access to the internet. The study aims at experimentally testing the impact of social networking usage on the consumer's purchasing decision in Bhusawal, a tier-3 town in Jalgaon district of Maharashtra. Sample size was estimated at 140 respondents using convenience and snowball sampling. A structured questionnaire was circulated. The data were analyzed in IBM SPSS and one-way ANOVA, independent samples t-test and descriptive statistics. Two theories were formulated and tested. The findings show that social networking has a statistically significant positive influence on consumer buying behaviour ($p < 0.05$) and age differences are statistically insignificant. The present study contributes to the knowledge about digital consumer behavior in Tier-3 Indian marketplaces and has implications for digital marketing practitioners, small sellers and marketers working in similar socio-economic settings.

Index Terms—Social Networking Sites, Consumer Buying Behaviour, Digital Marketing, Bhusawal, SPSS, Tier-3 Markets, Online Consumer Engagement

I. Introduction

The widespread use of internet-enabled smartphones and inexpensive mobile data has made social networking sites an integral part of daily life in India, even in smaller towns and semi-urban areas. Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube are not only tools for social interaction anymore, but powerful ecosystems for marketing and information exchange influencing how customers find products, compare prices, read reviews and eventually make purchasing decisions. Bhusawal, a big railway and trading town in Maharashtra's Jalgaon district, is a case in point.

A rising pool of young and tech-savvy consumers is driving local companies and national brands to increasingly rely on influencer endorsements, social media ads and peer recommendations to reach target audiences.

Conventional models of consumer behaviour had emphasised price, quality, brand loyalty and word of mouth communication (via personal networks). But these dynamics have changed in the digital environment. Word of mouth now travels quickly, in the form of online reviews, shares, likes and comments, often reaching thousands of potential customers within minutes. In tier-3 towns like Bhusawal,

consumers are not having huge retail showrooms and brand outlets, so social media is the primary source of information for consumers about products.”

Considering this the present study attempts to empirically analyse the extent of impact of social networking sites usage on Bhusawal inhabitants buying decisions. The study also explores whether this effect differs across demographic groups, particularly age groups, to see if digital marketing strategies need to be differentiated across customer age cohorts in such marketplaces.

II. Objectives of the Study

1. To study the pattern and intensity of social networking site usage among consumers in Bhusawal.
2. To examine the effect of social networking usage on consumer buying behaviour in Bhusawal.
3. To analyse whether the influence of social networking on buying behaviour differs significantly across age groups of respondents.
4. To offer practical recommendations for marketers and local businesses to effectively utilise social media platforms for influencing consumer purchase decisions.

III. Review of Literature

The relationship between social media use and consumer behavior in different demographic and geographic contexts has been the subject of a number of studies by several scholars. Many studies mention that exposure to product-related content on social networking sites increases customer awareness as well as brand perception and accelerate purchase intention. Studies have shown that consumer-generated content, like reviews and ratings, had a more credible effect on purchasing decisions than traditional brand-generated marketing, particularly for younger consumers.

Studies on Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities suggest that social media adoption has bridged the knowledge gap between urban and semi-urban consumers in the Indian context. Customers in smaller towns are turning more to platforms such as Facebook marketplace pages, Instagram reels and WhatsApp groups to locate local vendors, compare prices across markets, and get recommendations from friends and relatives in larger cities. Other studies show that influencer marketing and short-form video content are particularly effective ways of reaching younger audiences in these countries.

The literature reports conflicting results about age differences in technology adoption. Some research suggests that social media marketing has a much stronger impact on consumers aged 18 to 35 years than on older groups, but other studies suggest that these differences are gradually disappearing as middle-aged and older consumers become more adept at using smartphones, especially during the pandemic. The variance in findings for empirical testing of the age-related hypothesis in the specific context of Bhusawal justifies the present study.

Although there is a growing body of research on digital consumer behavior, there are very few empirical studies available that focus on Maharashtra's Tier-3 towns such as Bhusawal. This study aims to provide localized empirical evidence to bridge this gap using primary data collected from local customers.

IV. Research Gap and Significance of the Study

The majority of research on social media and consumer behavior has been conducted in large cities or metropolitan areas. These areas differ greatly from smaller towns with respect to internet infrastructure, competition in the retail sector, and consumer exposure to brands. Bhusawal is an important commercial and railway center of the Jalgaon district, but has not received adequate attention in the empirical literature on consumer behaviour. This study fills this gap by producing primary, location-specific data and statistically validated insights and can serve as a resource for academics, marketing professionals and policymakers interested in Tier-3 market dynamics.

V. Research Methodology

5.1 Research Design

The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design based on a quantitative survey method. The design is appropriate as the objective is to describe the current pattern of social media usage and statistically test the relationship between social networking and consumer buying behaviour.

5.2 Population and Sample

The population for the study comprises consumers residing in Bhusawal town who actively use social networking platforms and engage in online or social-media-influenced purchase activities. A total sample of 140 respondents was selected using a combination of convenience sampling and snowball sampling techniques. This sample size was considered adequate for parametric statistical testing, including independent samples t-test and one-way ANOVA, given the exploratory and Tier-3-specific nature of the study.

5.3 Data Collection Instrument

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered both online (Google Forms shared via WhatsApp and Facebook groups) and offline (printed forms distributed in local markets, colleges, and commercial areas of Bhusawal). The questionnaire was divided into three sections: (i) demographic profile of respondents (age, gender, education, occupation, income), (ii) social networking usage pattern (frequency, platforms used, time spent, type of content followed), and (iii) consumer buying behaviour statements measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).

5.4 Reliability of the Instrument

To ensure internal consistency of the Likert-scale items used to measure consumer buying behaviour and social networking influence, Cronbach's Alpha reliability test was conducted. The overall reliability coefficient was found to be 0.812, which exceeds the generally accepted threshold of 0.70, indicating that the scale used in the study possesses good internal consistency and is suitable for further statistical analysis.

5.5 Data Analysis Tools

The collected data were coded and analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 26). The following statistical tools were employed: (i) descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation) to profile respondents and summarise responses; (ii) independent samples t-test to examine the effect of social networking usage on consumer buying behaviour by comparing high-usage and low-usage groups; and (iii) one-way ANOVA to test for differences in the influence of social networking across multiple age groups.

5.6 Hypotheses of the Study

Based on the objectives, the following hypotheses were formulated for empirical testing:

H1 (Alternative Hypothesis): Social networking usage has a significant effect on consumer buying behaviour in Bhusawal.

H0 (Null Hypothesis for H1): Social networking usage has no significant effect on consumer buying behaviour in Bhusawal.

H2 (Null Hypothesis - tested via ANOVA): There is no significant difference in the influence of social networking on consumer buying behaviour across different age groups of respondents in Bhusawal.

Ha2 (Alternative Hypothesis): There is a significant difference in the influence of social networking on consumer buying behaviour across different age groups of respondents in Bhusawal.

5.7 Limitations of the Study

The research is based on personal answers of participants regarding their use of social media and purchasing habits. The study was conducted at a certain point in time. However, social media trends and consumer behavior are always changing and hence the results may not be a true representation of the future trends.

The study involved only 140 participants. Although this quantity was sufficient to perform statistical analysis, the results might not be representative of the behavior of a larger population.

VI. Data Analysis and Interpretation

6.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1 presents the demographic distribution of the 140 respondents in terms of gender, age group, education, and occupation.

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Cumulative %
Gender	Male	78	55.7	55.7
	Female	62	44.3	100.0
Age Group	18 - 25 years	52	37.1	37.1
	26 - 35 years	46	32.9	70.0
	36 - 45 years	28	20.0	90.0
	Above 45 years	14	10.0	100.0
Education	Up to HSC	18	12.9	12.9
	Graduate	74	52.9	65.8
	Post Graduate & above	48	34.2	100.0
Occupation	Student	41	29.3	29.3
	Salaried Employee	49	35.0	64.3
	Business / Self-employed	36	25.7	90.0
	Others	14	10.0	100.0

The demographic profile indicates a generally balanced gender distribution of the sample, with a slightly higher proportion of males (55.7%). Majority of responders (70.0%) are in the age group of 18-35 years of age which is indicative of the comparatively younger and tech savvy population of Bhusawal who regularly use social networking sites. The respondents were graduates or postgraduates in more than 87%, which means that the sample is quite literate and capable of giving meaningful answers to questions on the use of digital media and purchasing decisions. In terms of occupation, salaried workers (35.0%) and students (29.3%) together represent almost two-thirds of the sample. Both categories are likely to reflect high levels of activity on social media.

6.2 Social Networking Usage Pattern

Table 2 summarises the social networking usage pattern of respondents, including platform preference and average daily time spent.

Platform Most Used	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Average Daily Time Spent
WhatsApp	48	34.3	More than 3 hours: 22.1%

Instagram	41	29.3	2 - 3 hours: 35.0%
Facebook	29	20.7	1 - 2 hours: 28.6%
YouTube	22	15.7	Less than 1 hour: 14.3%

Instagram (29.3%) and WhatsApp (34.3%) are the most popular platforms among the Bhusawal respondents. The findings underscore the prevalence of short-form content that is attractive visually and posted in a group message context. It is interesting that more than 57% of respondents say they spend two or more hours a day on social networking sites. This is a high digital engagement – they are exposed to a lot of content from influencers, peer recommendations and commercial advertising.

6.3 Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

The descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) of the main composite variables used in hypothesis testing are shown in Table 3. These are Social Networking Usage (SNU) and Consumer Buying Behaviour (CBB) both scored as a composite mean score from a number of five-point Likert scale items.

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Social Networking Usage (SNU)	140	3.74	0.612
Consumer Buying Behaviour (CBB)	140	3.68	0.589

The average respondents agreed that social networking plays an active role in their lives and has an influence on their purchase related decisions. This is evidenced by the mean scores for both Social Networking Usage (3.74) and Consumer Buying Behavior (3.68) are above the midpoint of the five-point scale (3.0).

The standard deviations are relatively low (below 0.65), suggesting there was no extreme polarization of opinion and that the responses were generally consistent throughout the sample

6.4 Hypothesis Testing

6.4.1 Testing of Hypothesis 1 (Independent Samples t-Test)

The respondents were divided into two groups according to their overall Social Networking Usage (SNU) score: “High Usage” (SNU score above median, n=71) and “Low Usage” (SNU score at or below median, n=69). This was done to examine H1. An independent samples t-test was used to compare the mean Consumer Buying Behavior (CBB) ratings of these two groups.

Group	N	Mean (CBB)	Std. Deviation	t-value / Sig. (2-tailed)
High SNU Usage	71	3.91	0.512	t = 4.872

Low SNU Usage	69	3.45	0.601	p = 0.000
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The independent samples t-test results show that the mean Consumer Buying Behavior scores of the High SNU Usage group (M = 3.91, SD = 0.512) and the Low SNU Usage group (M = 3.45, SD = 0.601) are significantly different in terms of statistical analysis, $t(138) = 4.872$, $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$). We accept the alternative hypothesis (H1) and reject the null hypothesis (H0) because the p-value is much smaller than the significance level of 0.05. This implies that there is a statistically significant relationship between the use of social networking sites and the purchase decisions of the Bhusawal respondents; the more the respondents use social media, the more they are likely to make socially influenced purchase decisions.

6.4.2 Testing of Hypothesis 2 (One-Way ANOVA)

To test H2, respondents were divided into four age groups: 18-25 years, 26-35 years, 36-45 years and above 45 years. A one way ANOVA was then conducted to determine if the mean Consumer Buying Behaviour (CBB) results were significantly different between these age groups.

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-value / Sig.
Between Groups	1.084	3	0.361	F = 1.048
Within Groups	46.912	136	0.345	p = 0.374
Total	47.996	139		

The ANOVA data showed that the F-statistic value is 1.048 and the p-value is 0.374 more than the 0.05 level of significance. We cannot reject the null hypothesis (H2). That is, $p > 0.05$. This indicates that the effect of social networking on the purchasing behavior of consumers is not statistically different across the four age groups studied in this research. That is, the impact of social networking on buying decisions appears to be quite uniform among the various age groups of Bhusawal respondents. This means that digital marketing techniques in this market do not have to be very age specific.

6.5 Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Statistical Test	Result
H1: Social networking usage has a significant effect on consumer buying behaviour	Independent Samples t-Test ($p = 0.000$)	H0 Rejected; H1 Accepted (Significant)
H2: No significant difference across age groups in influence of social networking on buying behaviour	One-Way ANOVA ($p = 0.374$)	H0 Accepted (Not Significant)

VII. Findings

1. The most used apps are WhatsApp and Instagram. Bhusawal respondents are mostly between the age of 18 and 35 (70%) and spend at least two hours a day on social networking sites.
2. The average scores for Social Networking Usage (3.74) and Consumer Buying Behavior (3.68) indicate that people are positive about the influence of social media on their purchase decision.
3. The independent samples t-test shows that heavy users of social networks are significantly more likely to purchase based on what other people say ($p=0.000$) than light users of social networks.
4. The results of One-way ANOVA show that there is no significant effect of age on the relationship between social networks use and purchasing ($p=0.374$), hence the effect of social networks use on purchasing is similar across age groups.
5. Social networking sites have become an important factor influencing consumer purchase decisions, even in Tier-3 towns like Bhusawal.
6. The findings indicate that technology adoption in semi-urban areas has increased significantly, reducing the digital gap with metropolitan cities.
7. A significant positive relationship was found between social networking site usage and consumer purchase behaviour, supporting H1.
8. Advertisements, peer reviews, and influencer content on platforms such as Instagram and WhatsApp positively influence consumers' awareness and trust.
9. Social media exposure helps consumers make faster and more informed purchasing decisions.
10. The study found no significant difference in the influence of social networking sites across different age groups, leading to the rejection of H2.
11. Contrary to earlier studies, social media marketing is equally effective among younger, middle-aged, and older consumers in Bhusawal.
12. The widespread adoption of smartphones and messaging applications has increased social media usage across all age categories.
13. Family recommendations and information shared through WhatsApp play a major role in shaping the buying decisions of middle-aged and older consumers.
14. Businesses should adopt inclusive social media marketing strategies rather than focusing only on younger audiences.

15. Marketing efforts should emphasize community engagement on WhatsApp and visually appealing content on Instagram to reach a wider customer base.
16. The findings suggest that a well-planned multi-platform social media strategy can effectively influence consumers of all age groups in Tier-3 markets.

VIII. Implications of the Study

8.1 Implications for Marketers and Businesses

Marketers in Tier-3 towns like Bhusawal should make social networking platforms, especially WhatsApp and Instagram, a part of their main promotion strategy rather than treating digital marketing as a supplementary activity. Campaigns can be built to appeal to a broad demographic rather than narrowly age-targeted segments, as age does not significantly affect the influence of social networking.

8.2 Implications for Policy and Academic Institutions

Local commerce, academic institutions and skill-development authorities in Jalgaon district might consider integrating digital marketing and social media management modules in their business and commerce curricula, given the established relevance of these tools to local commerce. Policymakers promoting MSME growth in Tier-3 towns may also look at digital literacy programs that help small retailers use social media to acquire customers.

IX. Conclusion

The study was conducted to find out the degree of change in the buying behaviour of 140 persons in Bhusawal, Jalgaon district, Maharashtra by using social networks. The study found strong statistical support for the theory that using social networks has a big effect on how people buy things (H1 accepted, $p = 0.000$) by using the independent samples t-test and one-way ANOVA on SPSS. However, this effect did not appear to differ among people of different ages (H2: null hypothesis held, $p = 0.374$). He added, "Now WhatsApp and Instagram are influencing customer decisions across demographics, especially in semi-urban Tier-3 markets which were earlier considered peripheral to digital commerce. These findings clearly demonstrate that." The present study adds to the research on digital consumer behavior with empirical evidence from a specific location. It offers policy makers, local businesses and marketers useful information on the use of social media for business and development in similar socio-economic settings.

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