

COMPARATIVE STUDY OF INSTAGRAM, FACEBOOK, AND YOUTUBE IN SHAPING ONLINE PURCHASE INTENTIONS OF INDIAN CONSUMERS

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Abstract

This is not the case everywhere but nowhere else than in India digital spaces influence shopping decisions so much, with Instagram, Facebook and YouTube in the right moments of the online shopping journey. With over 500 million Indians using social platforms, most of whom are already comfortable purchasing through these tools. There's so much interaction happening every day and what's on screen often influences decisions before checkout even starts. But not all sites are created equal, there are unique characteristics that affect buyer mindset differently. Some live by fast visuals, some build trust through comments and shares. Motivations change too; some browse for fun, others search actively. Previous research has largely focused on ads that increase interest but has paid less attention to differences among networks. Why does one platform make you crave, and another just tell you something? This analysis spans across features, interactions and why users engage to show how each uniquely shapes intent. Differences in format style, feedback loops and underlying reasons people log in are visible in the effects on buying behaviour. Instead, clarity comes from seeing each on its own terms—not treating them alike. This work begins with how people react to online cues, and links social media behaviours – likes, shares, etc. – to internal changes in users: how they feel about a brand, whether they trust it, whether they see value in it – which feeds into their desire to buy. It's not just measuring clicks, it's looking at deeper shifts triggered by posts, stories, reels. Instagram is strong on visuals and those scrolling through curated feeds are more likely to buy trendy clothes or luxury goods when they see them there. Shopping on Facebook, where groups and local selling thrive, often seems practical, routine, tied to need rather than desire. Detailed videos on YouTube make viewers spend time and make thoughtful choices, especially when it comes to picking big-ticket items. To check these patterns in digital spaces, data will be collected from surveys analysed using statistical models focusing

on respondents from India. The analysis considers platform specific effects and does not assume one size fits all results. The following suggests that not all apps work the same way – and strategy needs to reflect this diversity for those who want to make real connections online.

Instagram Facebook YouTube Shape Online Purchase Intent in India through Social Media Marketing Via S–O–R

Introduction

Not long ago, scrolling feeds became shopping sprees for many across India. Social apps boast almost half a billion daily users, most already buying things on them without even leaving the screen. Phone prices plummeted, internet fees stayed small, which drove more people than ever to shop online. Payments happen fast – often within seconds – pulling shoppers further into digital spaces. Platforms once designed for sharing photos are now quietly shaping what goes into carts. Clicks are clicks. Habits change. Routines develop around live video and fast checkout buttons.

In India, brands tend to rely on Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube when marketing to consumers via social media. Visual content is used extensively on Instagram with visual stories and purchasing features being combined. Facebook attracts consumers of all ages, facilitates the use of local communities, facilitates connections between consumers, and even has buying-selling models. Video content is prevalent on YouTube that offers videos ranging from snippets to elaborate feedback driven by online celebrities.

Research conducted earlier in other developing countries has clearly shown the relationship between social media use and consumer perception and purchase decisions.

Literature Review

Social Media Marketing and Purchase Intention

However, it is also revealed that such brand activities as posting entertaining content, participating in discussion, remaining up-to-date and personalized contribute to more positive attitudes towards a brand and purchasing decision. As expected, a study conducted on India's apparel sector found out that motives behind consumers' use of such social media as seeking information, entertainment, and engagement lead to more favorable attitudes towards brand social media initiatives, thus, promoting consumers' purchase intention. In turn, looking further to the east, when scientists studied handmade products promoted via Facebook, Instagram, or YouTube, it was discovered that such activities bring more awareness, positive brand image, thus, increasing brand value and purchase probability.

Furthermore, based on research studies employing text analytics, the topics which are most important for social media impact on

consumer behavior include user participation, consumers' social media sharing, influencer marketing, as well as visual content. Such recurring themes as attention of the user, interaction, private messaging within virtual communities, as well as easy access to social media platforms are considered crucial factors which influence consumers' decisions.

Platform Roles in Social Commerce and Indian Context

The visual content on social media changes depending on specialists and common users. The content consists of viewing videos, communication, and shopping. Currently, this combination becomes popular among Indians. The apps like Instagram and Facebook promote new goods and services, while YouTube helps to make difficult decisions about purchasing. The vlogs help users to consider the decision and evaluate the options before spending money.

Almost all Indians turn to social media when they want to make a purchase. According to one survey, people use social media when choosing what to buy. Among all social media, Instagram and YouTube attract people for product discovery most of all. In terms of influencers research, Instagram has an advantage over YouTube. It can be explained by the high-quality photos, as well as regular updating that impacts users' decisions positively. The visual content there is considered a standard to strive after.

As for other countries, some trends begin to emerge. Recently, it has been analyzed that liking and sharing on Facebook and Instagram correlate strongly with purchasing intent, but comments do not have this effect, which means that any reaction may be perceived as the sign of trust. Interestingly, visuals become dominating factor in other countries. The apps like Instagram impact brands' popularity due to visual storytelling without text that catches users' attention.

Instagram Facebook and YouTube Different Features

Despite the influence of all three platforms on purchase decision-making, their impact on user actions is different

Instagram, designed for phones, is focused around pictures, and fast clips, daily stories and loops rule it. Customers go through pictures that lead them directly to items to be purchased without additional steps. Interest increases when brands present rather than inform - such information lingers, sets value, clarifies price. Fashion works great on this platform since visual is crucial. Beauty is better sold in action or illuminated. Purchases are triggered quicker when scrolling through actual experiences presented visually. The things caught eye linger in memory.

Wide reach regardless of age happens on Facebook due to Page, Group, Marketplace services as well as advertising possibilities -

perfect choice for community creation and promotion of items consumers might need or like. Research in India related to such items as handcrafted ones shows that marketing efforts on Facebook improve awareness and purchase intention mostly through informative updates and discussions in groups.

YouTube is ruled by visual information, not words anymore. Creators upload videos about food, gadgets, daily habits – something to watch and rewatch multiple times. The trust builds up subtly when users see the same people cooking food or reviewing gadgets every single time. The subtle trust changes person's view of the product over time. Purchase decision is made after watching multiple videos, not just one. People remember information better if they see it rather than read. The platform is good when decisions are risky or complicated. Watching reduces uncertainties prior to purchasing.

Theoretical Foundations S O R Uses and Gratifications

Initiated by online activity performed by brands, there begins a sequence of internal changes in users' minds. Involvement in likes, sharing, or direct messaging leads to the appearance of feelings, change of opinions, sometimes even belief in the necessity to use an item. In turn, the resulting inner shift leads to the decision – quiet but clear – of the potential purchase of the product in the future.

Characteristics embedded in applications encourage instances of interest being transformed into action. Feelings become heightened by interactions becoming intimate, fluent, lifelike. What users take out mentally defines their further actions. Thoughts of purchases are born not due to ads, but due to various digital interactions affecting their moods and mindset.

Why people choose particular platforms becomes evident when understanding how they interact with ads. Although the use of Instagram for entertainment or self-expression does not necessarily make people respond the same way on YouTube when browsing videos on educational tutorials. Scrolling through Facebook makes people think about connecting and joining different groups. Consequently, an ad created for selling something may be more effective in one environment but become less attractive in the other one. The purpose of users logging onto those websites colors their perception. Entertainment videos will have different impact from informational ones. Users' intentions depend on where people are online. The connection between intention and message attracts people's attention subconsciously. Platforms' specifics guide people's eyes more often than creators can predict.

In this framework, peculiarities of platforms' design together with their user benefits explain changes in purchase behavior

caused by social media usage in India. The combination of site characteristics with personal incentives makes people choose particular sites. Taking into account all of it, it becomes evident that habits of using apps influence further decisions. All aspects become important during consideration of purchases. Special tools are just as important as emotional gains.

Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

Conceptual Model

The current investigation goes beyond previous studies by offering a framework. In contrast to previous frameworks which list social media platforms, the current one contrasts Instagram with Facebook and YouTube. There is a greater emphasis on action - actions that consumers perform when brands use certain social media networks. Action and response are not separate stages but rather connected together. Actions do not lead only to engagement outcomes but also affect decision-making. Users' decisions about what posts to look at, like, and share or avoid affect purchase intent. Indian online consumers serve as the core of this conceptualization. Consumers' decision-making regarding clicking on the purchase link is directly linked to their behavior in commenting, liking, sharing, viewing. Each social media platform has different ways of handling these stages. Some platforms

encourage immediate reactions while others help build long-term relationships. Differences are important because consumers' attention spans change depending on devices used. Each time someone visits the site, there are different motives involved.

In the Model

Stimuli (S) Include

Individuals pay attention to how brands behave online based on the platforms they use. What attracts their attention? The degree to which postings contain information that is helpful, engaging, stimulating discussion, personalized, or perceived as authentic, either by the company itself or individuals advocating for the brands.

In addition to quantifiable metrics such as likes, responses, retweets, or views, signs of engagement serve as markers indicating that someone else pays attention. They appear where users scroll through feeds and hint at what is important without saying anything specific about what matters. Engagement attracts one's attention and makes them stop scrolling long enough to look.

Organism (O) Includes

The feelings toward the brand can change in relation to where the brand is seen. Thus, it is perceived in one context as helpful and, in another, as distant or ambiguous. The context creates its impression; what feels close in one

app can be indifferent in another. Location influences the perception discreetly but inevitably.

People's opinions on the value of the product in question – since functionality, the feelings it evokes and perceptions of other people concerning the product usage – are formed based on people's readings and experience.

Believe what the brand claims, as well as the sources of its information – for example, content creators, videographers, bloggers.

When does an individual see content on the Internet and has the intention of purchasing the product presented in the piece of content? The answer to this question is named Response (R); it reveals the intentions of the person to buy something after looking at the content on that specific site. This concept refers directly to post-exposure user reaction. Scientists refer to the described state as online purchase intention. The perception of posts, videos or advertisements may lead to such an intention. The essential connection is the connection between exposure and decision-making processes. The platforms influence these decisions in a subtle manner. Intentions form independently of any purchase.

Imagine such structure remaining unchanged wherever it takes place online. The paths of the process would differ from the platform to platform. For instance, Instagram may influence the user's response in one way,

Facebook – in another way, and YouTube will have its own way to do so. The path of the process from stimulus to the user's response will depend on the peculiarities of users' behaviour on those sites. The formats will influence the process of attention attracting, motivations – the process of signal perception.

Hypotheses

Here's what we're checking with Indian users across platforms. To keep things short, SMMA stands for Social Media Marketing Activities.

H1a–H1c (Within-Platform Effects of SMMA)

A closer look at SMMA on Instagram shows they often lead to better feelings toward a brand. Better opinions about worth tend to follow along. That sense of value then quietly shapes buying choices. Positive reactions build up step by step. What people think changes as interactions grow. Attitude shifts happen without loud announcements. Purchase plans form through steady exposure.

A positive link shows up between using social media marketing by small firms on Facebook and how people view a brand. When folks like what they see, their sense of worth tied to that name grows stronger. That growing approval quietly feeds into decisions about buying. Feelings shaped online often carry through to real choices made later.

Folks watching SMMA's on YouTube often feel better about the brand, plus they tend to see it as more valuable. That shift in feeling. It quietly nudges them toward wanting to buy. Seen across several studies, this pattern holds up clearly. The warmer the attitude, the likelier the purchase thought follows. Value perception acts like a bridge - linking exposure to decision hints

H2a–H2c (Engagement Effects)

When people interact more - through likes, comments, shares, or saves - on Instagram posts, they tend to feel a stronger urge to buy. A spark of interest shows up in how often they engage. Each click or save adds a quiet nudge toward deciding later. Moments spent reacting today might shape choices tomorrow. The connection grows clearer when activity rises. What users do online links closely to what they may eventually purchase.

Folks checking out Facebook posts tend to feel more like buying afterward. A sense of connection shows up when people interact - it links clearly to wanting what's shown. Scrolling through updates, liking things, leaving comments - all that activity hints at a stronger interest later.

Starting off, views along with likes on YouTube clips tie closely to a person's interest in buying something. Comments matter too - so do shares - each playing a role in shaping that decision. Sometimes it is the number of reactions that quietly pushes someone toward

making a choice. Other times it's how many people pass the video around. Each signal adds weight without saying much outright

H3a–H3c (Trust Mediation)

H3a: Trust mediates the relationship between SMMA's on Instagram and purchase intention.

H3b: Trust mediates the relationship between SMMA's on Facebook and purchase intention.

H3c: Trust mediates the relationship between SMMA's on YouTube and purchase intention.

H4 Shows How Platforms Stack Up Against One Another when it Comes to Impact

Here things look better when you can see them clearly. On Instagram, people react more strongly to what they view compared to Facebook. This shows up most with items like clothes or makeup. Social media managers shape choices in different ways across platforms. Visual appeal plays a bigger role where images lead the experience.

When it comes to complex products like gadgets or banking tools, social media influencers tend to sway buyers more through YouTube videos. That platform often carries greater weight compared to Instagram or Facebook. Deeper explanations fit better there. Visual walkthroughs help people feel confident before spending. Attention spans

shift depending on where the message appears. For detailed decisions, moving images with voice matter most.

One way to look at it starts by asking if Instagram shapes buying decisions more than Facebook or YouTube among users in India. What drives those choices might come down to personal reactions behind the screen. Each platform could tap into different mental shortcuts people use when browsing online. Instead of assuming one fits all, differences show up in how emotions or habits shift behavior. The real question hides in what happens inside someone's mind after scrolling past ads. Testing these ideas means watching not just clicks but unseen thought patterns too.

Proposed Research Methodology

This being a theoretical piece means the next part describes how later studies might run actual tests. A setup appears here ready for real-world checking down the line.

Research Design and Sample

A possible method of testing the hypothesis. It would be reasonable to carry out a quantitative picture-type analysis. The consumers in India would be suitable for use in the current case - that category of individuals would be the subject of the study.

Are actively engaged in Instagram Facebook and YouTube

Have recently purchased something online (approximately in the last six months), for example, from Amazon or Flipkart. Or even from Myntra, Nykaa, and Meesho.

There are different methods of comparing platforms, for instance, allowing people to choose the platform that has the greatest influence on their purchase decision and then questioning them about it. Another alternative starts with something else – posing slightly varied questions for every single platform but changing their order randomly.

Four to six hundred people would be quite an adequate sample size that allows making statistical conclusions about the discrepancies between platforms. The communication could be conducted via social networks postings, links posted in students' communities, or users forums.

Measures

If it is necessary to develop several multi-item scales, modification of already available 5-point or 7-point scales can be considered. Although some improvements are possible, the usage of existing research results can significantly save time. While there are structures embedded in the models, their slight modification can suit the current situation. Since previous studies provide bases, they are the right choice. Despite possible changes in the wording, the idea is reusable.

It is strange, but SMMAAs tend to focus on attractive content which brings knowledge, is interactive, relevant to personal interests, engaging, and trustworthy based on previous social media experience.

The statements made by participants about the frequency of their interaction – likes, comments, sharing posts, making bookmarks, or simply scrolling through brand or influencer content – on every social network. Their personal perception of the frequency of these actions defines this indicator, and guessing is unnecessary.

Brand attitude: overall evaluation of the brand on that platform (favorable-unfavorable, good–bad).

The value that people assign to the product is represented in terms of its usefulness, satisfaction provided, among other products used. Platforms affect this evaluation just by providing a specific environment for this product.

How to keep clients engaged? First, the feeling of authenticity plays an important role. Some users tend to believe some voices more than others simply because they know something. This belief appears when the promises meet the reality. People tend to engage in conversations with the people who really understand them. This feeling is gained gradually during numerous moments of clarity. It is very important that this voice has some names standing behind its words.

People pay attention to the advice when it proves itself during the period of time.

Choosing a product in the future tends to appear after seeing it posted on social media. The moment people decide to buy some product is usually preceded by the moment of its appearance in social networks. Decision becomes more evident after people see this product being used by the trusted sources. The intention to get it is formed better after its casual presentation in stories and videos. Future purchase always starts with noticing this product when scrolling through feeds.

Additional information such as age, gender, income level, education, and whether a participant is living in a small or big city can be included into the list. Also, the time spent on different applications has to be taken into account. It is possible to identify purchasing patterns. The frequency of these actions provides useful information.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process may have the following general structure:

At first, raw data has to be cleaned and analyzed. There has to be a preliminary check of possible response patterns. Basic distribution analysis serves as an introduction to the deeper work.

It has to start with the assessment of the goodness of fit of survey constructs using Confirmatory Factor Analysis or PLS-SEM. Instead of choosing one particular method,

one has to use the most appropriate to data. Constructs are estimated for consistency in terms of Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability. These indicators show stability of results obtained across the answers. To guarantee the accuracy of these results, the assessment of convergent validity reveals the true representation of ideas. In addition, discriminant validity guarantees separation of constructs where it is necessary. Only when these two evidences are obvious, results can be considered.

Structural model analysis starts with the consideration of path coefficients – separately for Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube groups. Every platform gets individual analysis instead of the universal one. Further investigation consists of the direct relations between variables, and its analysis after the addition of mediation. In contrast to the assumption, the testing of relations has to be done. The result is the identification of significant paths on different social media platforms. Sometimes unexpected patterns become apparent. All of them are analyzed – not assumed.

In case of comparison of multiple groups, the invariance of the intensity of relations – for example, the impact of social media marketing activities on purchase intent – has to be considered instead of the assumptions of its constancy. Using the techniques which assess invariance, the equivalence of the relations is assessed. In the case of non-

equivalence, difference testing is performed. Sometimes it is possible to see variations between different platforms when one platform increases the relation intensity while another decreases it. The main goal is to detect meaningful divergences without exaggeration of minor differences.

Understanding how each platform influences purchasing decisions in India can be done using such a scheme. The respondents' reactions can show differences between these three. The further analysis will depend on the results of observing actual behaviour.

Discussion and Implications

Theoretical Implications

A reevaluation of people's actions on the web offers changes in the ways of their engagement. For example, connecting behaviors across sites becomes easier through contrast. When comparing, differences become visible while trying to blend together leads only to confusion. Observing the process of decisions-making over time will help to find subconscious motivations in clicking certain things. Every change of attention makes real life choices more significant.

By not sticking to conventional theories, this paper considers the use of Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube within a single framework, leaving the focus on individual

sites and generalization aside. It provides an insight into the ways those platforms can stimulate consumer behavior mentally in different ways.

Let us think about it: combining uses-and-gratification theory and the S-O-R model lets one understand the outcomes of intersection of people's motivations and brands' messages within a particular social platform. So if, for example, a person visits Instagram because he or she wants to be entertained, emotional perceptions of products could become stronger thanks to entertaining content. In turn, if a person goes to YouTube to learn something, he or she would be interested in benefits of the products, especially if there was a detailed video review.

The significance of Indian context lies in its complexity. As a result of high number of internet users, e-commerce is rapidly developing in India, but languages change abruptly between regions. That gives grounds to the differences in platform usage that differ significantly from the rest of the world. What makes this country unique? Mobile domination, language diversity of messages, peculiar reaction patterns. Implications derived from those behaviors adjust existing concepts of social shopping and browsing.

Managerial Implications

For marketers, the framework provides a number of valuable insights:

Products that feature lots of images such as clothing or cosmetics seem suitable for promotion on Instagram due to the platform's integrated tools for shopping and high emphasis on images. Meanwhile, electronics and finance-related issues require detailed explanation. Therefore, they may be communicated more efficiently through lengthy video content on YouTube allowing showing how devices work and explaining processes and mechanisms of the financial plans. Thus, choosing the best platform should be based on the correlation between the product characteristics and the specifics of the platform usage.

People spending considerable time liking posts on Facebook or Instagram usually make purchases of products promoted on the social networks. If something appears worthy enough to be shared, then it will probably result in purchasing interest. Something that works great on one platform will fail badly on another one. Time spent watching a video is crucial for making the viewer convinced on YouTube. Authenticity of the content matters as much as its emotional depth. Silent nods of viewers online can be crucial in the decision-making process.

At the first stage of the customer journey, the company can show people how to go through different platforms instead of focusing on just one of them at once. It could be assumed that somebody is getting immersed deeply in information provided on

YouTube but seeing some visual triggers further on Instagram. This allows the person recognizing the information after seeing it once and, meanwhile, communicating with the company directly on Facebook. Retargeting can be done seamlessly in this case. Everyone plays their role without copying anyone else and leading directly to purchasing decisions made in the application or the website. Nothing gets lost in the process.

The followers of the brand trust recommendations more if they see consistent efforts of the company. Close collaboration with authentic creators on Instagram and YouTube will allow increasing the level of trust in the recommendations of these people. Deep cooperation will make it possible to reveal personalities of influencers organically. On Facebook, the people controlling various communities usually have more power to affect opinions rather than advertisements. Influence is more likely to come from relationships, be it created by video producers or forum moderators.

Sometimes the issue is not in making the same actions on all social media channels. Shifting the balance between Instagram, Facebook, and even YouTube of Indian e-commerce companies and direct-to-consumer brands usually helps to improve the allocation of resources. Each channel can contribute differently to drawing people's attention or converting scrolling into

purchases. The key lies in choosing roles of various social media platforms instead of increasing the overall activity. When the efforts get right, clicks start resulting in transactions.

Final Thoughts Next Steps

In this way, this research develops a theory-based contrastive approach for proving that Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube impact consumers' purchase intentions within Indian shoppers. Based on previous studies and practical experience, there appears an assumption that actions of brands conducted via these social networks along with consumer interaction can be regarded as triggers that determine perceptions of the brand, self-concept, and self-esteem. The reactions mentioned above are used to make purchase decisions, following the S-O-R paradigm.

The key element of this idea is changing the general perception of social media for the one which focuses on contrastive research within a specific context of India, where online shopping via social media becomes popular while each network performs various tasks. In this way, researchers get the framework that provides testable assumptions based on methods allowing analyzing data in the context of groups through complex models.

As long as there is no empirical data, the idea remains theoretical and is based on

previous research that was conducted worldwide, not only in India. However, further empirical study should include testing the survey's effectiveness within different product categories and generations while exploring new social networks such as WhatsApp or some video-sharing applications. Long-term observation and experimental study will help understand better the connections between content and buying decisions.

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