



Decoding Consumer Perception: The Role of Social Media in Shaping Buying Decisions in Bagalkot City

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Abstract

Social media has transformed how consumers interact with brands, seek information, and make purchase decisions, particularly in emerging semi-urban markets like Bagalkot City. This study explores the multifaceted role of social media in shaping consumer perceptions and buying behaviors, with a focus on demographic and occupational variations. Using a descriptive and exploratory research design, primary data was collected from 210 respondents through structured surveys, employing stratified random sampling to ensure diverse representation across age, gender, education, income, and occupation groups.

The findings reveal significant differences in social media usage patterns, with younger age groups and male users demonstrating higher engagement, while females exhibit more selective usage. Peer influence, promotional posts, and online reviews emerge as critical factors driving purchase decisions, particularly among students and professionals. Trust in social media content varies across occupations, with businesspeople and homemakers showing notable skepticism. Income levels also influence content preferences, with lower-income groups favoring discounts and offers, while higher-income groups prioritize product reviews and advertisements.

This study highlights the growing reliance on social media as a source of information, surpassing traditional advertising in perceived value. It addresses gaps in existing literature by focusing on the unique dynamics of a semi-urban setting, emphasizing occupational and demographic differences. The insights provide actionable recommendations for businesses to tailor marketing strategies, for policymakers to promote digital literacy, and for academics to explore emerging trends in social media's influence on consumer behavior.

Through its nuanced analysis, this research underscores the transformative power of social media in shaping consumer perceptions, offering a roadmap for optimizing its potential in semi-urban markets.

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I. Introduction:

Social media has become a significant force in the digital era, transforming consumer interactions, information access, and purchasing decisions. Its role in semi-urban areas like Bagalkot City is particularly significant, as digital platforms bridge the gap between traditional and modern marketing approaches. Understanding how different demographic and occupational groups engage with social media platforms is crucial, as factors such as gender, education, and income play pivotal roles in shaping online behavior, trust in reviews, and purchase motivations.

Research exploring social media's role in semi-urban contexts is limited, often focusing on urban areas or failing to capture the nuanced dynamics of smaller cities. This research aims to bridge this gap by examining how social media influences consumer perceptions and buying decisions in Bagalkot City. The study aims to analyze demographic variations in social media usage, explore gender-based differences in platform usage, assess the influence of social media recommendations and peer opinions, evaluate trust in online reviews and advertisements, understand content preferences across income and occupational groups, and compare perceptions of social media versus traditional advertising.

By addressing these objectives, this study provides actionable insights for businesses, policymakers, and academics, highlighting the unique dynamics of semi-urban consumer behavior and offering a comprehensive understanding of how social media is transforming the consumer landscape in Bagalkot City.

1.1: Research Problem

The rise of social media has significantly impacted consumer behavior, influencing brand interactions, information gathering, and purchase decisions. Understanding user preferences is crucial for businesses, policymakers, and researchers, especially in semi-urban settings like Bagalkot City. However, there is a gap in understanding how demographic factors like age, gender, education, occupation, and income shape online behaviors and the overall impact of social media on purchase intentions.

1.2: Objectives

This study seeks to address this gap by focusing on the following objectives:

1. To examine age, gender, and educational differences in social media usage frequency and online behavior patterns.
2. To analyze the purposes of social media usage and their variation based on gender, occupation, and income levels.
3. To explore the influence of social media recommendations and content preferences on consumer purchase decisions across various demographic groups.
4. To investigate factors that build trust in brands or products promoted on social media, including the roles of education and user perception.
5. To compare perceptions of social media advertisements with traditional advertising as sources of information among different age and occupational groups.

1.3: Significance of the Study

This research examines the impact of social media on consumer behavior in Bagalkot City, a semi-urban area undergoing rapid digital adoption. The study provides insights for businesses, policymakers, and academics studying the socio-economic impact of digital technologies, helping them tailor marketing strategies and promote digital literacy.

1.4: Scope of the Research

The scope of this research extends across demographic dimensions, including age, gender, education, occupation, and income, to provide a comprehensive understanding of social media's influence. It examines patterns of usage, trust in digital content, and the effectiveness of social media as a marketing tool. By focusing on Bagalkot City, the study provides context-specific insights while also contributing to broader discussions on the role of social media in shaping consumer behavior in semi-urban settings.

II. Literature Review:

2.1: Theoretical Framework

The study is grounded in established theories of consumer behavior and social influence. The **Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)** highlights how perceived usefulness and ease of use influence the adoption of digital platforms like social media (Rauniar et al., 2014; Hasni et al., 2021). Additionally, **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs** underscores the role of social media in fulfilling social and esteem needs, such as connecting with peers and gaining recognition (Houghton et al., 2020). The **Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)** explains how consumers process information on social media through central (analytical) and peripheral (emotional) routes, influencing their trust and purchase decisions (Chang et al., 2019).

2.2: Prior Research

Numerous studies have explored the role of social media in shaping consumer behavior. Social media platforms have become integral to communication, entertainment, and shopping, significantly influencing consumer behavior and business marketing strategies. Shop preferences at physical and online retailers like Nordstrom, Walmart, Target, Amazon, and Best Buy are associated with social networking platforms like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Skype (Vithayathil et al., 2020). Consumers value the functional, experiential, and symbolic benefits of social media shopping, which motivate their loyalty and foster positive word-of-mouth (Ryu & Park, 2020). Social media platforms provide a rich source of information, reviews, and user-generated content, which significantly influence consumer purchase decisions and brand perceptions (Anitha et al., 2024; Bahl et al., 2019). Live streaming and online reviews significantly influence millennials' online shopping behavior, while celebrity endorsements have less impact (Geofani et al., 2024). Social media has become a powerful marketing tool, enabling businesses to directly promote products and engage with consumers, fostering brand loyalty and trust through personalized communication and customer service (Xu, 2020; N., 2023). The platforms serve as virtual marketplaces, offering convenience and personalized recommendations that encourage repeat purchases (N., 2023; Josh, 2019). Social media significantly influences e-commerce by influencing consumer decisions and preferences, enhancing the shopping experience through seamless interactions without spatial or

temporal limitations (Irwansyah et al., 2023). Social media significantly influences consumer shopping preferences, influencing purchase decisions and brand loyalty, and its role in e-commerce is expected to grow as it evolves.

Demographic factors such as age, gender, and education significantly influence social media usage patterns and trust in online content. Women tend to use social media more than men and have higher expectations for integrity and empathy in online interactions (Warner-Søderholm et al., 2018; Shahghasemi & Emamzadeh, 2019). Gender differences also affect trust in influencers, with variations in how credible different genders perceive influencers to be (Stümpelová, 2024). Younger users are more active on platforms like Instagram and have higher expectations for trust and integrity in online content (Stümpelová, 2024; Warner-Søderholm et al., 2018). Age influences the type of content consumed and the level of trust in online information, with younger users generally showing more engagement and trust in social media content (Warner-Søderholm et al., 2018; Shahghasemi & Emamzadeh, 2019). Demographic studies often link higher education levels to more critical engagement with online content, despite the lack of detailed insights on education (Chattopadhyay, 2020). Trust in social media content is influenced by demographics, with women and younger users showing higher trust levels, while trust decreases with increased usage in high-information environments (Warner-Søderholm et al., 2018; Kiratli, 2023). Demographic factors like gender, age, and education influence social media usage patterns and trust in online content, influencing marketers and content creators' strategies accordingly.

Research consistently shows peer influence and online reviews significantly influence purchase decisions, especially among younger consumers, across various demographics and product categories. Social media personalities and peer reviews significantly influence Generation Z and millennials' purchasing decisions, with influencer marketing and online customer reviews playing a crucial role in guiding their purchasing behavior. (Wahyuni & Ratnasari, 2024; Agustina & Transistari, 2023). The richness and valence of online reviews also significantly impact the timing and likelihood of purchase decisions, such as booking a restaurant (Zhang et al., 2019).

Adolescents and young adults highly trust peer recommendations, which significantly influences their purchase decisions, as evidenced by frequent discussions and seeking peer approval (Rajeev, 2024; Marjerison & Hu, 2021). Online reviews' influence varies based on consumer characteristics, with lower membership levels being more influenced and higher levels relying more on initial impressions (Chen et al., 2018). Additionally, the perceived quality and consistency of reviews enhance their influence on purchase decisions (Zhao et al., 2018). Peer influence and online reviews significantly influence younger consumers' purchasing decisions, offering marketers valuable insights for engaging this demographic effectively through influencer marketing and consistent online reviews.

Research shows gender differences in social media usage, with males primarily using platforms for information gathering and females prioritizing socializing and shopping. Men tend to use social media for general information gathering, while women focus on relational uses like maintaining social ties and accessing social information (Krasnova et al., 2017; Haferkamp et al., 2012). Women also tend to use social media for self-comparison and information searching (Haferkamp et al., 2012). Men tend to use social media for new connections, while women use it for maintaining existing relationships, academic purposes, and following specific agendas. (Mazman & Usluel, 2011). Both genders perceive social media as impacting their academic performance, but males report a higher perceived impact (Ogundele et al., 2023). Gender differences in social media usage reveal men use for information and networking, while women focus on social connections and self-presentation, suggesting the need for tailored strategies.

Influencers' credibility, including their attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise, significantly impacts consumer purchase intentions. The number of followers also positively influences these perceptions (Weismueller et al., 2020). Transparent advertising disclosure, including labeling content as sponsored, positively impacts influencer trustworthiness, leading to increased purchase intentions and positive brand attitudes (Balaban et al., 2021; Kay et al., 2020). Specific disclosures, like "paid partnership," are more effective in maintaining trust and encouraging purchase intentions compared to generic tags like "#ad" (Balaban et al., 2021). User-generated content (UGC) tends to foster more cognitive trust compared to marketer-generated content (MGC). However, MGC can have a stronger impact on emotional trust (Choi & Lee, 2017). Closed social network services (SNSs) are generally more trusted than open platforms, highlighting the significance of privacy and controlled environments in building trust. (Choi & Lee, 2017). Personal connections are often considered more trustworthy than information from influencers or celebrities, underscoring the long-lasting significance of personal connections in building trust (Cooley & Parks-Yancy, 2019). Trust in social media content is influenced by influencer credibility, advertising transparency, and content source, with personal endorsements and context playing critical roles in shaping consumer trust.

2.3: Research Gaps

This study aims to address gaps in existing literature by focusing on the semi-urban context of cities like Bagalkot, where digital adoption is growing but distinct from urban centers. It also explores how trust in social

media content and advertisements varies across occupations, income levels, and content preferences. The study also focuses on age-based perceptions and trust in digital ecosystems. By addressing these gaps, the study contributes to the existing knowledge by providing insights into demographic and occupational differences in social media usage, trust, and purchase decisions, providing valuable insights for businesses, policymakers, and academics aiming to optimize social media strategies in similar settings.

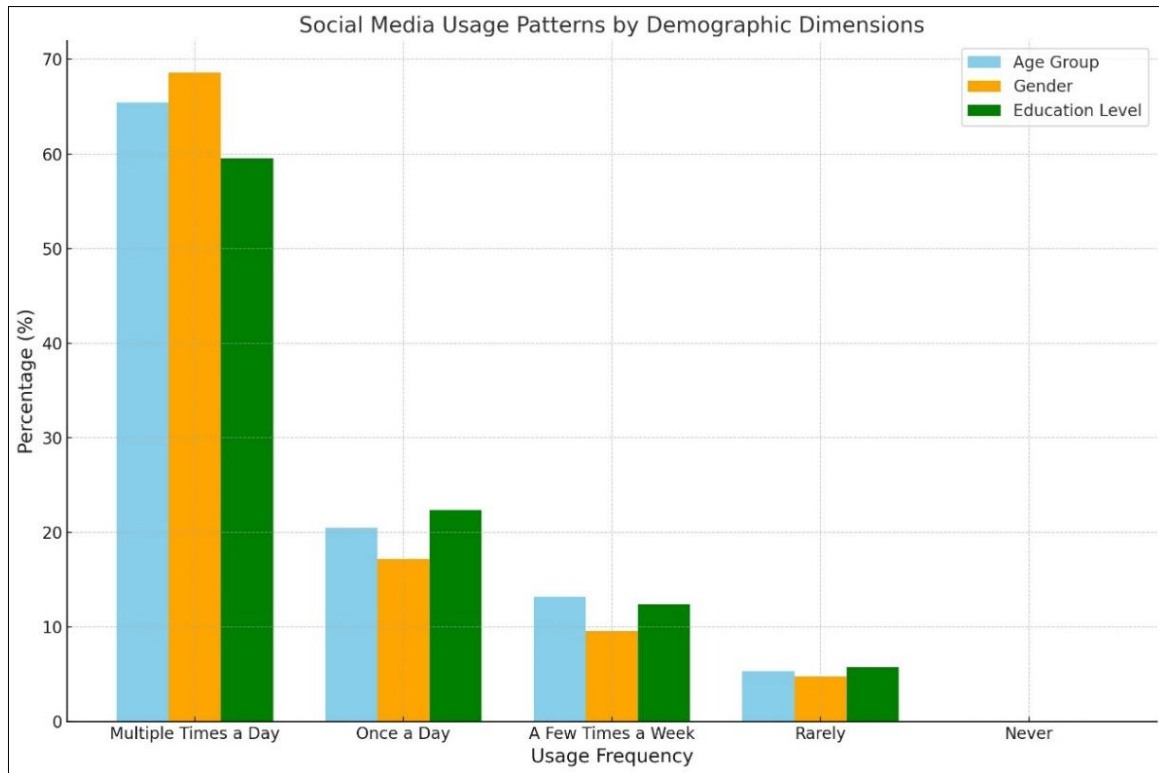
III. Research Methodology:

The purpose of this study is to examine how social media affects consumer behavior in Bagalkot City, with an emphasis on user differences in terms of demographics, occupations, and income. The target population consisted of 210 active social media users, and a stratified random sample technique was employed. Data on purchasing behavior, digital content trust, and consumption trends were gathered using a standardized questionnaire. In order to find patterns and connections, the data was examined using statistical software such as SPSS and Excel, along with cross-tabulation techniques.

IV. Results and Analysis:

Social media usage patterns across demographic groups, focusing on age, gender, and educational levels, and identifying variations in online behavior and frequency of use.

Category	Multiple Times a Day	Once a Day	A Few Times a Week	Rarely	Never	Total
Age Group						
Below 18	15 (71.43%)	3 (14.29%)	2 (9.52%)	1 (4.76%)	0 (0.00%)	21 (100%)
18–25	46 (64.79%)	15 (21.13%)	7 (9.86%)	3 (4.23%)	0 (0.00%)	71 (100%)
26–35	36 (65.45%)	13 (23.64%)	4 (7.27%)	2 (3.64%)	0 (0.00%)	55 (100%)
36–45	21 (46.67%)	11 (24.44%)	9 (20.00%)	4 (8.89%)	0 (0.00%)	45 (100%)
Above 45	7 (38.89%)	5 (27.78%)	4 (22.22%)	2 (11.11%)	0 (0.00%)	18 (100%)
Gender						
Male	83 (74.77%)	21 (18.92%)	4 (3.60%)	3 (2.70%)	0 (0.00%)	111 (100%)
Female	61 (61.62%)	15 (15.15%)	16 (16.16%)	7 (7.07%)	0 (0.00%)	99 (100%)
Education Level						
High School	12 (57.14%)	5 (23.81%)	3 (14.29%)	1 (4.76%)	0 (0.00%)	21 (100%)
Undergraduate	44 (59.46%)	17 (22.97%)	9 (12.16%)	4 (5.41%)	0 (0.00%)	74 (100%)
Postgraduate	49 (59.76%)	18 (21.95%)	10 (12.20%)	5 (6.10%)	0 (0.00%)	82 (100%)
Professional Degree	20 (60.61%)	7 (21.21%)	4 (12.12%)	2 (6.06%)	0 (0.00%)	33 (100%)
Total	144 (68.57%)	36 (17.14%)	20 (9.52%)	10 (4.76%)	0 (0.00%)	210 (100%)



Interpretation: The analysis of social media usage patterns reveals clear trends across demographic dimensions such as age, gender, and education. A significant 68.57% of users access social media multiple times daily, emphasizing its role in modern life. Younger age groups exhibit the highest frequent usage, with Below 18 (71.43%), 18–25 (64.79%), and 26–35 (65.45%) leading, while only 38.89% of users above 45 access social media as frequently. Males dominate this category, with 74.77% accessing multiple times daily compared to 61.62% of females, suggesting greater engagement with professional or leisure content. Frequent usage is consistent across educational levels, ranging from 57.14% to 60.61%, highlighting its ubiquity regardless of education.

Moderate engagement, defined as accessing once daily, accounts for 17.14% of users. This level peaks in the 26–35 age group (23.64%) and declines among younger users like Below 18 (14.29%). Older adults above 45 (27.78%) show relatively higher daily usage, indicating balanced adoption. Gender differences are minimal, with 18.92% of males and 15.15% of females reporting daily usage. High school graduates lead this category (23.81%), possibly due to limited access or time, with postgraduates (21.95%) and professional degree holders (21.21%) closely following.

Occasional usage, defined as a few times weekly, is observed in 9.52% of respondents, particularly older age groups like Above 45 (22.22%) and 36–45 (20%), indicating social media as a secondary tool. Females (16.16%) are more likely than males (3.60%) to engage occasionally, with high school graduates (14.29%) leading among education levels.

Rare social media usage (4.76%) is most common among older users, particularly Above 45 (11.11%). Females (7.07%) report rare usage more than males (2.70%), while postgraduates and professional degree holders show slightly higher rates due to personal or professional constraints.

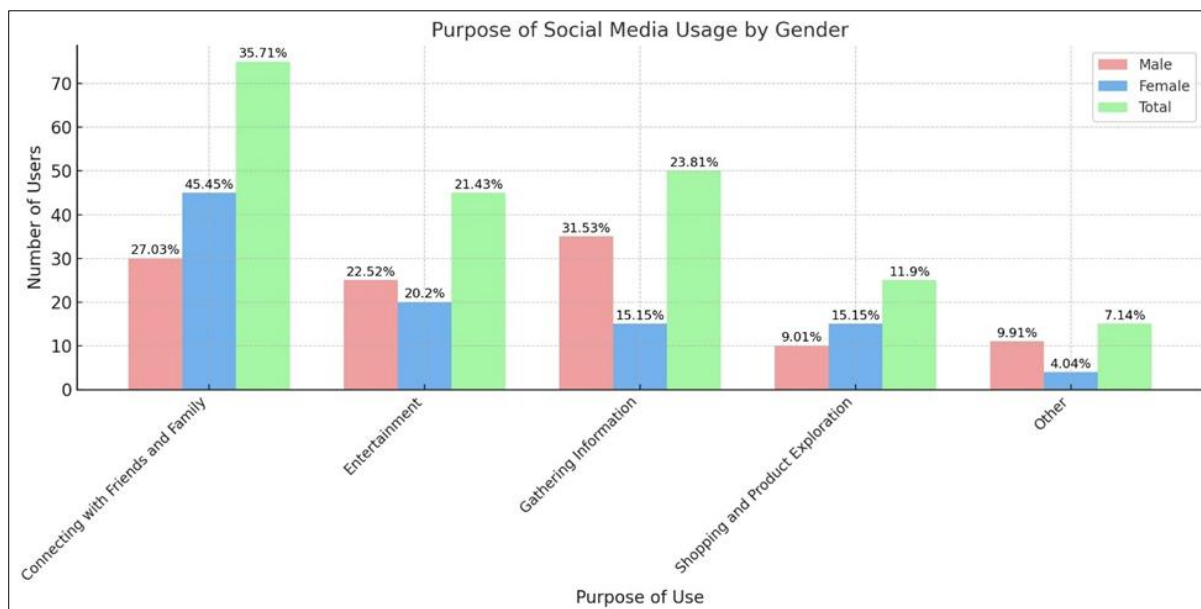
Notably, no respondents reported never using social media, underscoring its near-universal adoption across demographics. Frequent usage is dominated by younger users, males, and all education levels, while moderate and occasional engagement is more common among older adults and females. This analysis affirms social media's integral role across diverse demographics.

Gender-based differences in the purposes for which social media platforms are utilized.

Table showing Purpose of Social Media Use by Gender

Purpose of Use	Connecting with Friends and Family	Entertainment (videos, memes, etc.)	Gathering Information (news, trends, etc.)	Shopping and Product Exploration	Other	Total

Male	30 (27.03%)	25 (22.52%)	35 (31.53%)	10 (9.01%)	11 (9.91%)	111 (100.00%)
Female	45 (45.45%)	20 (20.20%)	15 (15.15%)	15 (15.15%)	4 (4.04%)	99 (100.00%)
Total	75 (35.71%)	45 (21.43%)	50 (23.81%)	25 (11.90%)	15 (7.14%)	210 (100.00%)



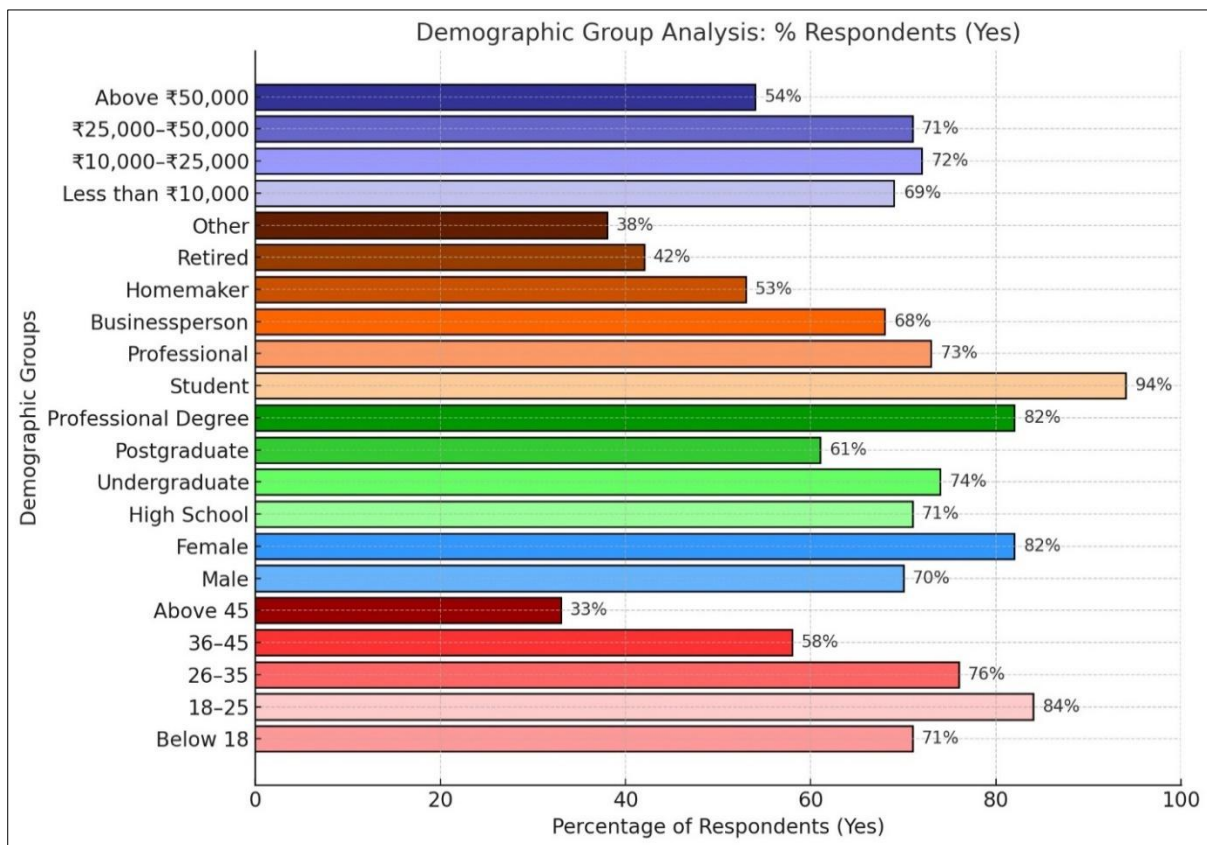
Interpretation: The study reveals that social media usage is primarily used for connecting with friends and family, entertainment, gathering information, shopping, and product exploration. Males use social media for this purpose, with 27.03% using it, while females use it for this purpose. Entertainment is the most common purpose for males, with 22.52% using it, while females use it for videos and memes. Males use social media for gathering information, while females use it for shopping and product exploration. Other purposes are less common. Males are more likely to use social media for information gathering, while females prioritize connecting with friends and family. Shopping trends show that females are more likely to use social media for shopping and product exploration, reflecting the influence of social media in retail and e-commerce. Males are more inclined to use social media for gathering information, while females are less engaged. Entertainment holds a slightly stronger place for males, possibly indicating that they use social media more for casual engagement with memes and videos.

Purchase Based on Social Media Recommendations across various demographic groups

Table showing Purchase Based on Social Media Recommendations across demographic groups

Demographic Group	No of Respondents	Total	% Respondents (Yes)
Age Group			
Below 18	15	21	71%
18–25	103	123	84%
26–35	34	45	76%
36–45	7	12	58%
Above 45	2	6	33%
Gender			
Male	78	111	70%
Female	81	99	82%
Educational Qualification			
High School	15	21	71%
Undergraduate	55	74	74%
Postgraduate	50	82	61%

Professional Degree	27	33	82%
Occupation			
Student	76	81	94%
Professional	43	59	73%
Businessperson	21	31	68%
Homemaker	10	19	53%
Retired	5	12	42%
Other	3	8	38%
Monthly Income			
Less than ₹10,000	35	51	69%
₹10,000–₹25,000	52	72	72%
₹25,000–₹50,000	42	59	71%
Above ₹50,000	15	28	54%

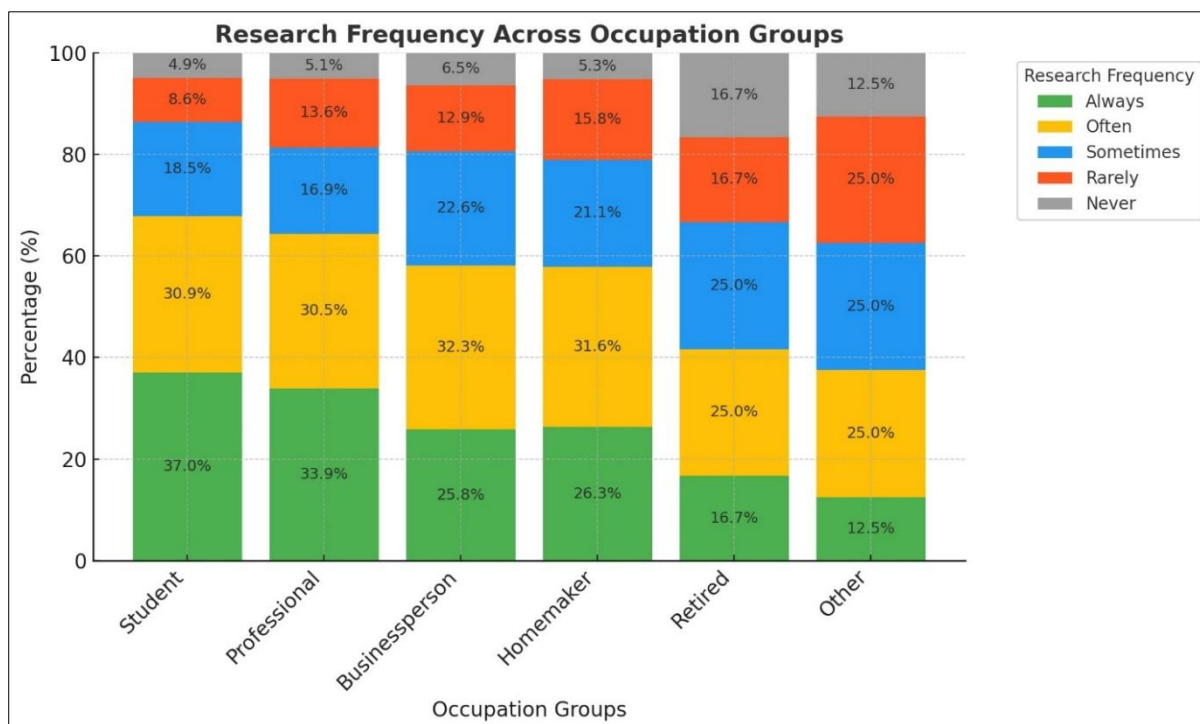


Interpretation: The study reveals that social media influence on purchasing decisions is highest among the 18-25 age group (84%), followed by the 26-35 age group (76%), and the Below 18 group (71%). The influence declines with age, with older generations and above 45 groups showing lower engagement. Females (82%) are more likely to purchase products or services based on social media recommendations than males (70%). Professionals (82%), undergraduates (74%), and high school (71%) respondents show the most influence. Students (94%), professionals (73%), businesspersons (68%), and homemakers (53%) show less reliance on social media. The highest percentage of influence is seen among respondents earning ₹10,000–₹25,000 (71%), suggesting middle-income groups are highly responsive to social media marketing. Education plays a role in influence, with professionals and undergraduates having high influence rates, while postgraduates are more skeptical.

Research Frequency Across Occupation Groups

Table showing Research Frequency Across Occupation Groups

Occupation	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Total
Student	30 (37.04%)	25 (30.86%)	15 (18.52%)	7 (8.64%)	4 (4.94%)	81 (100.00%)
Professional	20 (33.90%)	18 (30.51%)	10 (16.95%)	8 (13.56%)	3 (5.08%)	59 (100.00%)
Businessperson	8 (25.81%)	10 (32.26%)	7 (22.58%)	4 (12.90%)	2 (6.45%)	31 (100.00%)
Homemaker	5 (26.32%)	6 (31.58%)	4 (21.05%)	3 (15.79%)	1 (5.26%)	19 (100.00%)
Retired	2 (16.67%)	3 (25.00%)	3 (25.00%)	2 (16.67%)	2 (16.67%)	12 (100.00%)
Other	1 (12.50%)	2 (25.00%)	2 (25.00%)	2 (25.00%)	1 (12.50%)	8 (100.00%)
Total	66 (31.43%)	64 (30.48%)	41 (19.52%)	26 (12.38%)	13 (6.19%)	210 (100.00%)



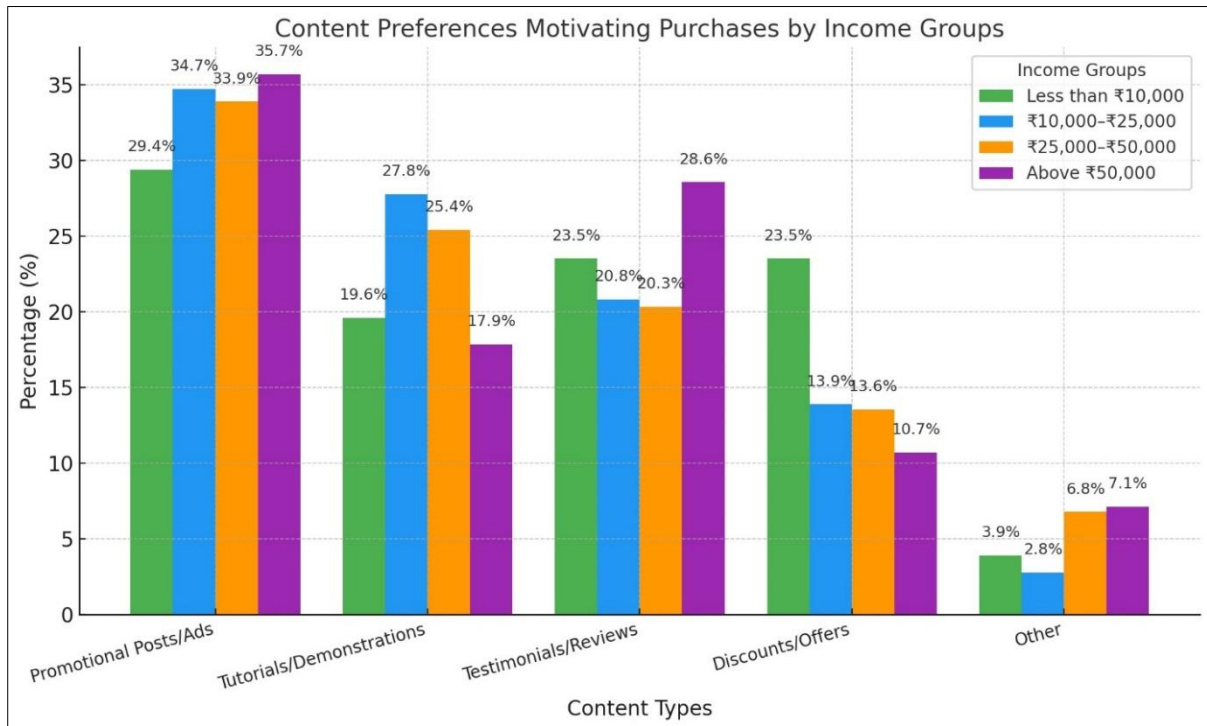
Interpretation: The table highlights social media usage for product research across occupations. Students (30.86%) and professionals (30.51%) frequently research products, reflecting their high digital engagement and busy schedules. Homemakers (31.58%) also lead in frequent research, likely driven by their interest in exploring options, while businesspersons (32.26%) research "Often," motivated by informed decision-making.

In contrast, retired individuals (16.67%) and those in the "Other" category rarely research, indicating lower digital literacy or reliance on social media for purchases. A small group (8 respondents) shows varied behavior, equally distributed across "Often," "Sometimes," and "Rarely" (25.00% each). Overall, students and professionals dominate frequent research, while older and less digitally engaged groups research the least.

Content Preferences (Content Types Motivating Purchases by Different Income Groups)

Table showing Content Preferences (Content Types Motivating Purchases by Different Income Groups)

Monthly Income	Promotional Posts/Ads	Tutorials/ Demonstrations	Testimonials/ Reviews	Discounts/ Offers	Other	Total
Less than ₹10,000	15 (29.41%)	10 (19.61%)	12 (23.53%)	12 (23.53%)	2 (3.92%)	51 (100.00%)
₹10,000–₹25,000	25 (34.72%)	20 (27.78%)	15 (20.83%)	10 (13.89%)	2 (2.78%)	72 (100.00%)
₹25,000–₹50,000	20 (33.90%)	15 (25.42%)	12 (20.34%)	8 (13.56%)	4 (6.78%)	59 (100.00%)
Above ₹50,000	10 (35.71%)	5 (17.86%)	8 (28.57%)	3 (10.71%)	2 (7.14%)	28 (100.00%)
Total	70 (33.33%)	50 (23.81%)	47 (22.38%)	33 (15.71%)	10 (4.76%)	210 (100.00%)

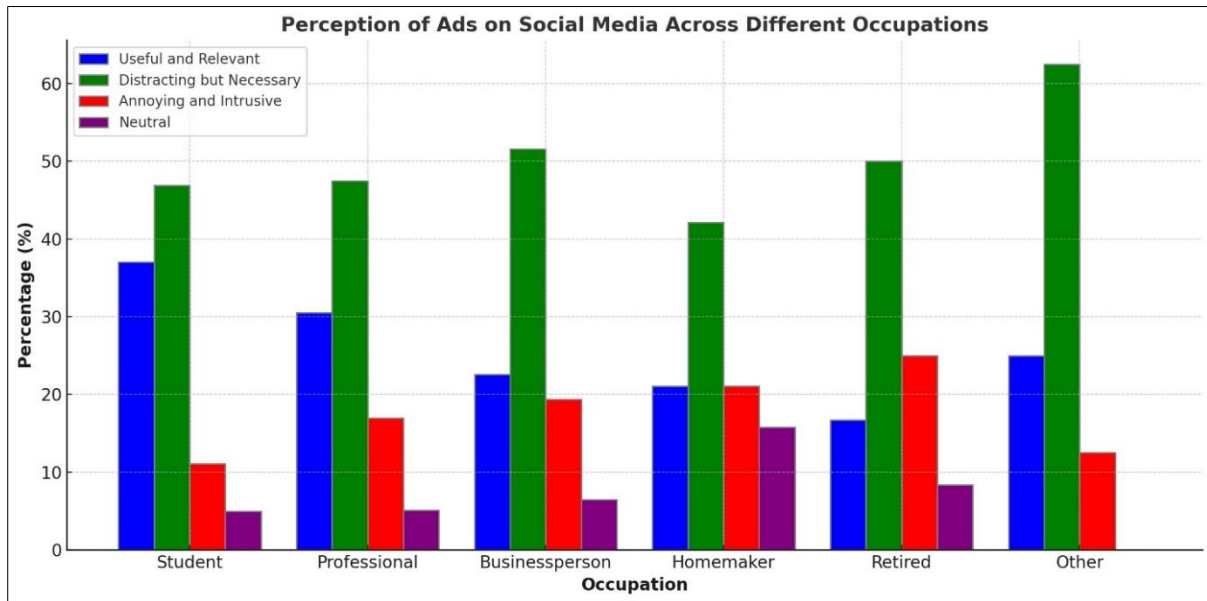


Interpretation: The data shows that promotional posts and ads are the most significant motivators for purchase decisions across all income groups. Higher-income individuals respond more to targeted ads, while tutorials and demonstrations are preferred by 23.81% of respondents. Testimonials and reviews are preferred by 22.38%, with the Above ₹50,000 group relying more on reviews. Discounts and offers motivate 15.71% of respondents, with the Less than ₹10,000 group most motivated by discounts and offers. The "Other" category shows unique motivators for specific groups, particularly middle-income earners. Overall, the data highlights the effectiveness of direct advertising in driving purchase decisions, with higher-income groups responding more to these content types.

Perception of Ads on Social Media Across Different Occupations

Table showing Perception of Ads on Social Media Across Different Occupations

Occupation	Useful and Relevant	Distracting but Necessary	Annoying and Intrusive	Neutral	Total
Student	30 (37.04%)	38 (46.91%)	9 (11.11%)	4 (4.94%)	81 (100.00%)
Professional	18 (30.51%)	28 (47.46%)	10 (16.95%)	3 (5.08%)	59 (100.00%)
Businessperson	7 (22.58%)	16 (51.61%)	6 (19.35%)	2 (6.45%)	31 (100.00%)
Homemaker	4 (21.05%)	8 (42.11%)	4 (21.05%)	3 (15.79%)	19 (100.00%)
Retired	2 (16.67%)	6 (50.00%)	3 (25.00%)	1 (8.33%)	12 (100.00%)
Other	2 (25.00%)	5 (62.50%)	1 (12.50%)	0 (0%)	8 (100.00%)
Total	63 (30.00%)	99 (47.14%)	33 (15.71%)	13 (6.19%)	210 (100.00%)

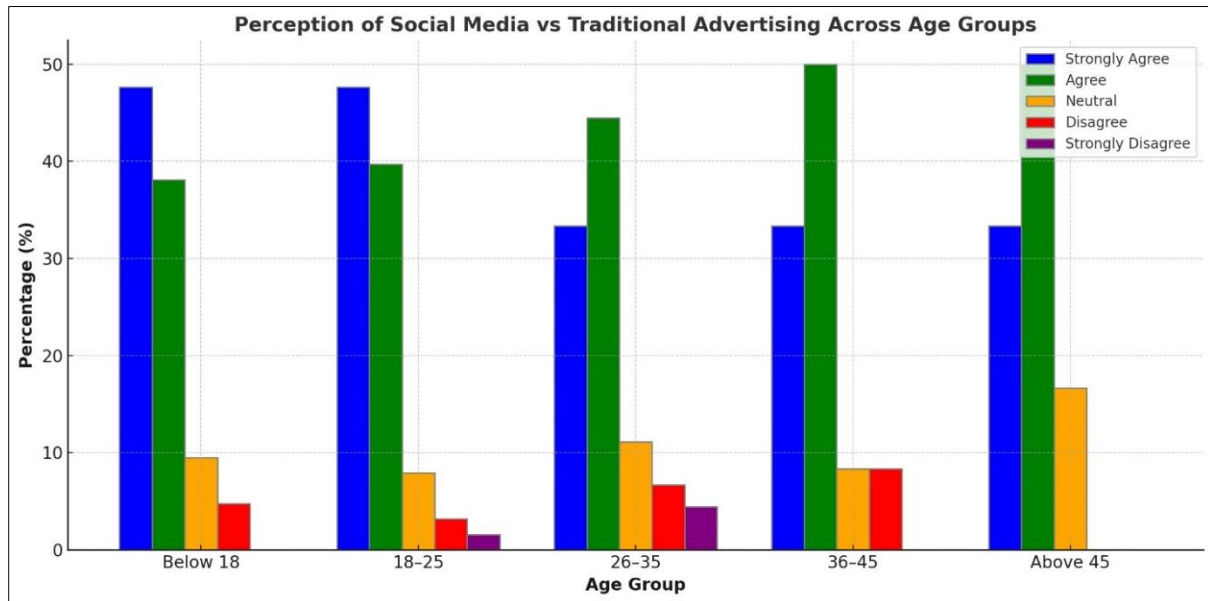


Interpretation: The study reveals that the majority of respondents perceive social media ads as distracting but necessary, with 47.14% believing they are necessary for free access to content. The second most common perception is that ads are useful and relevant to some extent, with 30.0% believing they align with their interests or needs. However, 15.71% find ads annoying and intrusive, indicating a minority feel overwhelmed or bothered by them. A smaller group, 6.19%, has a neutral stance towards ads. Students, professionals, businesspeople, homemakers, retired individuals, and others all perceive ads as distracting but necessary. The neutral category is least common, indicating strong opinions about the nature of ads encountered on social media. Overall, while most respondents find ads distracting but necessary, a significant portion views them as useful and relevant, with a smaller but notable group perceiving them as annoying and intrusive.

Perception of Social Media Providing More Information Compared to Traditional Advertising Across Age Groups

Table showing Perception of Social Media Providing More Information Compared to Traditional Advertising Across Age Groups

Age Group	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Below 18	10 (47.62%)	8 (38.10%)	2 (9.52%)	1 (4.76%)	0 (0%)	21 (100.00%)
18–25	60 (47.62%)	50 (39.68%)	10 (7.94%)	4 (3.17%)	2 (1.59%)	126 (100.00%)
26–35	15 (33.33%)	20 (44.44%)	5 (11.11%)	3 (6.67%)	2 (4.44%)	45 (100.00%)
36–45	4 (33.33%)	6 (50.00%)	1 (8.33%)	1 (8.33%)	0 (0%)	12 (100.00%)
Above 45	2 (33.33%)	3 (50.00%)	1 (16.67%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	6 (100.00%)
Total	91 (43.33%)	87 (41.43%)	18 (8.57%)	9 (4.29%)	4 (1.90%)	210 (100.00%)



Interpretation: The study reveals that a majority of respondents across all age groups strongly agree or agree that social media provides more information compared to traditional advertising. This view is most strongly held by younger age groups, such as those aged below 18 and 18-25, where 47.62% and 47.62% respectively strongly agree. A smaller portion, 8.57%, feel neutral about the statement. Very few respondents disagree (4.29%) or strongly disagree (1.90%) with the statement, indicating that the perception of social media providing more information is widely accepted. The age group breakdown shows that younger age groups, particularly those aged below 18 and 18-25, show a stronger belief that social media provides more information. Older groups, like those in the 36-45 and Above 45 ranges, also largely agree, but their support is slightly less robust. Overall, the data supports the idea that social media is increasingly viewed as a valuable source of information compared to traditional advertising.

V. Discussion:

This study examines social media usage patterns, trust in reviews, and peer influence on purchase decisions among Bagalkot City demographics, revealing key trends for businesses and consumers.

- i. **Social Media Usage Patterns:** Social media is universally used but varies by age. Younger individuals (18-25 and below) are highly active on platforms like Instagram and Snapchat, while older individuals (over 45) use social media less, reflecting reduced dependency.
- ii. **Gender-Based Preferences:** Males (74.77%) engage frequently, favoring informational content, while females focus on shopping, social connections, and entertainment. Gender-specific strategies, such as informational campaigns for males and lifestyle promotions for females, can enhance engagement.
- iii. **Occupation-Specific Insights:** Students and professionals rely heavily on social media for purchase decisions, driven by trust in reviews. Homemakers and businesspeople show moderate trust, influenced by practical and lifestyle needs.
- iv. **Income and Age Trends:** Lower-income groups prioritize discounts, while higher-income groups value quality indicators like reviews. Younger users find social media more informative than traditional ads, though traditional methods remain relevant.
- v. **Regional Trends in Bagalkot City:** High social media penetration highlights its role in information and connection. However, trust issues persist, urging businesses to emphasize transparency and verified reviews.

The study recommends targeting younger demographics, addressing trust concerns, and adopting a data-driven approach for impactful social media marketing.

VI. Recommendations for Businesses:

1. **Target Younger Demographics:** Create visually engaging content for Below 18 and 18-25 age groups using short videos, memes, and gamified interactions on platforms like Instagram and TikTok to cater to their communication, networking, and entertainment needs.

2. **Focus on Authentic Marketing:** Use user-generated content, testimonials, and influencer collaborations to build trust. Highlight verified reviews, ratings, and transparent content to reduce consumer skepticism.
3. **Gender-Specific Campaigns:** Design campaigns tailored to males with news, trends, and product innovations, while females respond better to lifestyle-oriented content like shopping discounts and family themes.
4. **Tailor Strategies by Income:** For lower and middle-income groups, focus on discounts and affordability, while higher-income groups prefer campaigns emphasizing quality, tutorials, and exclusivity.
5. **Enhance Credibility:** Build trust with verified accounts, transparent return policies, and partnerships with local influencers, fostering regional connections and authenticity.

VII. Conclusion:

This study highlights the significant role of social media in shaping consumer perceptions, trust, and purchase intentions, especially in Bagalkot City. It reveals that younger demographics are most engaged with social media, with men showing higher engagement for informational purposes and females more selectively using it for social connections and shopping. Students and professionals show the highest trust in reviews, while homemakers and retirees are more cautious.

Socioeconomic influences on behavior also play a role, with lower-income groups being more influenced by discounts and affordability-focused campaigns, while higher-income groups prioritize quality and authenticity. Social media strategies must address these varying priorities to maximize effectiveness.

Education plays a role in trust and usage, with individuals with higher education placing greater emphasis on trust-building factors like verified accounts, positive reviews, and influencer endorsements.

The findings have implications for businesses, policymakers, academics, and society. Businesses must prioritize transparency, authenticity, and targeted campaigns to build trust and drive engagement. Policymakers should implement digital literacy programs and stricter regulations around online advertising and influencer partnerships to protect consumer interests and promote equitable access to digital platforms. Academics should explore the behavioral nuances of semi-urban populations and their evolving relationship with social media.

In conclusion, this research underscores the growing significance of social media as a tool for engagement, trust-building, and commerce. By aligning strategies with different demographics, stakeholders can harness the full potential of social media to drive meaningful outcomes in Bagalkot City and beyond.

VIII. Limitations and Future Research Directions:

The study's limitations include its geographical scope, small sample size, cross-sectional nature, reliance on self-reported data, and lack of platform-specific analysis. These factors may affect the generalizability of findings to other urban or rural areas. Future research should focus on deepening understanding and addressing gaps, aiming to contribute to academic knowledge, business strategies, and policy frameworks by examining the intersection of social media, consumer behavior, and trust.

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