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Consumer Behavior in the Age of Social Media

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Abstract

The advent of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter has fundamentally reshaped consumer behavior, transforming how individuals discover, evaluate, and purchase products. This article explores the key drivers behind this shift, including the heightened role of peer influence, influencer marketing, and social proof, which have become more significant than traditional advertising methods. It investigates psychological and social factors such as perception, motivation, social conformity, and trust that affect online consumer decisions. The evolving consumer journey in the digital ecosystem—from awareness through purchase to advocacy—is analyzed, highlighting the growing prominence of social commerce where direct buying via apps is rapidly increasing. The article further discusses the impact of various content formats, with short-form videos, stories, and live streams playing vital roles in engagement and purchase behavior. Challenges such as authenticity concerns, data privacy, misinformation, and screen fatigue are examined alongside emerging brand strategies focusing on transparency, personalization, and rapid customer service. Statistical insights and platform preferences illustrate the diverse habits across generations, notably the strong engagement of Gen Z consumers on TikTok and Instagram. Looking forward, advancements in AI, AR, and regulatory frameworks are anticipated to deepen personalization and ethical considerations. This comprehensive examination underscores that succeeding in the age of social media requires brands to navigate a complex, interactive, and fast-evolving landscape where authenticity, technology, and customer-centricity are paramount.

Keywords: Social media consumer behavior | Influencer marketing | Social commerce | Digital consumer journey | Personalized content

INTRODUCTION

The surge of social media has dramatically transformed the landscape of consumer behavior, influencing how individuals discover, evaluate, and purchase products. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter have become major touchpoints for consumer engagement, brand interaction, and purchasing decisions. This article examines the key drivers of consumer behavior in the digital era, investigates the strategies enterprises employ to thrive within this ecosystem, and analyzes trends, challenges, and the evolving role of social commerce^{[1][2][3]}.

The Digital Consumer: Shifts in Behavior From Information to Interaction

Prior to social media, consumers relied on traditional advertising, word-of-mouth, and direct brand input. In the digital age, information-sharing, peer reviews, and social influence drive most purchasing decisions. More than 62% of the world population now holds a social media identity, with 64% of users discovering new brands via these platforms^{[1][4]}.

- **Product Discovery:** Social media is the leading source for new product awareness, with brands

now competing for attention in a crowded digital space^[4].

- **Peer Influence:** Recommendations and social proof carry more weight than corporate messaging. Consumers actively seek out peer reviews, influencer opinions, and user-generated content before making choices^{[5][6]}.

Influencer and Peer Impact

Influencer marketing has reached unprecedented influence, especially among younger consumers. 63% of Gen Z consumers report making purchases influenced by web celebrities and micro-influencers, while 70% of all consumers note that social media played a significant role in a recent purchase decision^{[5][6]}. The rise of social commerce, which enables direct buying through platforms, accelerates this trend, with 42% of consumers purchasing directly from social apps^{[5][7]}.

Psychological and Social Drivers of Online Consumer Behavior

Psychological Factors

- **Perception and Motivation:** Social media taps into consumer aspirations by showcasing

lifestyles, trends, and exclusive offers. Emotional appeals, urgency (Flash Sales, FOMO tactics), and storytelling through short videos spur impulsive purchases^{[5][8]}.

- **Social Proof and Conformity:** Concepts such as Cialdini's "social proof" promote herd behaviors—users imitate visible group choices, displayed through likes, shares, and follower counts^[5].
- **Trust and Authenticity:** 58% of consumers worry about authenticity in influencer content; yet, brands with transparent, authentic messaging foster greater loyalty and repeat purchase behavior^{[5][6]}.

Social and Personal Factors

- **Reference Groups:** Family, friends, and online communities now act as primary reference groups, with online recommendations often outweighing physical world advice^{[11][3]}.
- **Demographics:** Younger generations (Gen Z, Millennials) are not only more active but also more trusting of social commerce, with higher intentions to make purchases via TikTok Shop, Instagram Shop, and Facebook Shop^{[7][9]}.
- **Culture and Localization:** Culturally attuned content and region-specific social media strategies amplify consumer resonance and acceptance^[1].

The Consumer Journey: From Awareness to Advocacy

Stage	Social Media Role
Awareness	Product discovery via ads, influencers, and peer sharing
Consideration	Learning from reviews, comparisons, interactive demos
Purchase	Seamless checkout within platforms, targeted offers
Post-purchase	Sharing experiences, leaving feedback, building loyalty

Impact at Each Stage

- **Awareness:** 75% of consumers report learning about new products through social media, surpassing other channels like TV and search^{[6][4]}.
- **Conversion:** Video ads increase purchase likelihood by 32%, outperforming image ads at 15%^{[10][6]}.
- **Loyalty:** Social media engagement explains 48% of the variance in customer loyalty, underscoring its power for brands^[10].

Social Commerce: The Rise of Buying on Social Media

Over half (56%) of social media users anticipate maintaining or increasing their social purchases in 2025. Men (38%) lead the trend, but 32% of all users expect to buy more this year^[7]. Key platforms:

- **Facebook Shop:** Preferred by 39% of buyers for convenience and wide reach.
- **TikTok Shop:** 54% of Gen Z shoppers use the platform, drawn to short-form videos and viral trends^{[7][8]}.

- **Instagram Shop:** 29% of users, notably in fashion and beauty, cite Instagram as their primary social commerce outlet^{[5][7]}.

Visualizing Platform Preferences

Platform	Overall Preference %	Gen Z Preference %
Facebook Shop	39	26
TikTok Shop	36	54
Instagram Shop	29	44

(Source: Aggregated data from 2025 social commerce trend reports^{[7][8]})

The Role of Content: Videos, Stories, and Engagement

Content format is crucial in shaping consumer responses:

- **Short-form Video:** 73% of consumers prefer TikToks, Reels, or Shorts for product discovery; these formats outperform static visuals and text in engagement and recall^[8].
- **Stories and Live Streams:** Enable real-time engagement, Q&A, and shopping, heightening consumer trust and transparency.
- **Personalization:** Brands that leverage AI for personalized recommendations and dynamic content see conversion rates soar, aligning with consumer desires for relevance and value^[9].

Challenges and Ethical Considerations

- **Authenticity and Transparency:** With concern over fake reviews and sponsored content, brands must disclose partnerships and foster genuine voice^{[5][6]}.
- **Consumer Data Privacy:** 63% of users are cautious or only somewhat trust social media platforms to safeguard their personal information^[9].
- **Misinformation:** Rapid spread of false reviews or misleading endorsements can damage brand credibility and hurt consumer decision-making^[2].
- **Platform Overload and Screen Fatigue:** As content grows, attention spans shrink, requiring brands to craft concise, compelling narratives^[8].

Evolution of Brand Strategies

To succeed, brands are focusing on:

- **Influencer Partnerships:** Embracing micro- and nano-influencers who echo authentic community voices^{[5][8]}.
- **Engagement and Service:** Offering rapid, personalized customer service via direct messaging and real-time support. 69% of consumers expect a response within 24 hours on social media^[9].
- **Targeted, Data-Driven Advertising:** Utilizing behavioral and demographic user data to deliver hyper-relevant advertisements, optimizing ad formats and timing for maximum impact^{[10][11]}.
- **Social Proof and User-Generated Content:** Encouraging satisfied customers to share feedback organically, building trust and amplifying reach^[6].

Statistical Insights: Social Media's Impact in 2025

Key Metric	Percentage
Influence of social media on purchase	70% of consumers ^{[5][6]}
Awareness of new products via social	75% ^[6]
Increased purchase intention from video ads	32% ^{[10][6]}
Users trusting social platforms fully	22% ^[9]
Users buying through social commerce	42% ^{[5][7]}
Brand trust increased by active social media	Statistically significant (p<0.01) ^[6]
Repeat purchases linked to engagement	R ² = 0.48 ^{[10][6]}

Graph: Preferred Social Commerce Platforms by Generation (2025)

	Facebook Shop	TikTok Shop	Instagram Shop
Gen Z	26	54	44
Millennial	39	36	29
Overall	39	36	29

Graph: Purchase Likelihood Increase by Ad Format

Ad Format	Purchase Likelihood Increase
Video Ads	32%
Image Ads	15%

(Source: 2025 Social Media Consumer Trends^{[10][6]})

Future Trends: What Lies Ahead?

- **AI and Automation:** AI chatbots, voice search, and predictive analytics will deepen personalization and interactivity^{[8][9]}.
- **Social Shopping Innovations:** Shoppable posts, AR try-ons, and seamless app integration predict further growth for social commerce^[7].
- **Regulatory Oversight:** Expectations for greater transparency in influencer marketing and platform accountability are rising^{[5][9]}.
- **Consumer Control:** Empowered consumers will increasingly demand both data privacy and personalized experiences.

CONCLUSION

In the age of social media, consumer behavior is shaped by an evolving digital environment where engagement, peer influence, and personalization drive purchase decisions. Social platforms have redefined product discovery, elevated the power of content, and transformed traditional marketing paradigms. As consumer expectations rise for genuine, quick, and relevant brand interactions, organizations must embrace authenticity, ethical standards, and technology-driven strategies to build trust and foster loyalty. The coming years promise further innovation, with social commerce, AI, and influencer culture continuing to reshape how—and why—consumers buy.

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