

Shifting Consumer Behavior in Mumbai, India Going Beyond Social Media in 2025

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ABSTRACT:

Mumbai, recognized as India's financial and cultural hub, has historically been a barometer for consumer trends. As we progress into 2025, a notable transformation is occurring in the consumption habits of Mumbaikars, shifting away from the dominance of social media influence. Although platforms like Instagram and Facebook once heavily influenced product choices, consumers in Mumbai are now more driven by sustainability, community experiences, economic factors, and a desire for authenticity. This research explores these changing dynamics by employing a mixed-method approach, integrating quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews across diverse socio-economic areas in Mumbai. Key findings indicate that consumers now emphasize value-driven choices, ethical consumption, in-person trust-building interactions, and hybrid shopping experiences rather than traditional digital-first strategies. Digital fatigue heightened environmental consciousness, and increasing inflation pressures lead to a more discerning and intentional consumer base. This study offers marketers, businesses, and policymakers valuable insights on effectively navigating this shift within one of India's most prominent urban consumer markets.

1. INTRODUCTION:

1.1 Background

Mumbai, famously known as the "City of Dreams," is famed for its lively life, rich artistic diversity, and early adaptation to global trends. Historically, it has been a crucial mecca for both traditional and digital commerce. With a high chance of internet druggies and a tech-smart population, social media has long been a central element in marketing and consumer engagement strategies.

Still, as we approach 2025, there's a conspicuous shift in the consumer geography. Social media is losing its position as the primary driver of consumer choices. Mumbai residents are increasingly prioritizing meaningful consumption, emphasizing ethics, sustainability, and trust over the appeal of digital trends. Consumers are now turning to original community networks, sharing in offline brand gestures, and demanding translucency in business practices. This study delves into these evolving behavioral patterns, revealing the factors impacting moment's consumers in Mumbai beyond the realm of social media.

1.2 Problem Statement

The conventional view of consumer behavior in Mumbai has primarily focused on the impact of digital channels, especially social media. Nevertheless, as we move into 2025, this influence is waning due to wider socio-economic and cultural changes. To stay relevant in this fast-evolving urban environment, brands and businesses must grasp these changing dynamics.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

2.1 Digital Overload and Consumer Fatigue

Kapoor et al. (2023) found that urban consumers in India are suffering from digital fatigue stemming from their continuous engagement with online content, especially on social media platforms. As a result, they are becoming more discerning in filtering digital advertisements and influencer marketing.

2.2 Emergence of Mindful Consumerism

A NielsenIQ report from 2024 reveals that 67% of urban consumers in India are actively pursuing sustainable and ethically sourced products. This trend is particularly pronounced in metropolitan areas such as Mumbai, where environmental issues align with lifestyle preferences.

2.3 Community Networks and the Importance of Local Trust

A report from PwC India (2023) highlights that consumers are increasingly depending on hyperlocal networks, WhatsApp groups, and personal referrals instead of social media influencers when making purchasing decisions, particularly in sectors such as health, food, and education.

2.4 Blended Retail Experiences

Bhattacharya and Singh (2024) examined the impact of hybrid commerce blending offline and online aspects on the urban consumer experience. They found that shoppers in Mumbai enjoy browsing online but value the trust and confidence that comes with in-person purchases.

2.5 Value Experiences More Than Possessions

According to KPMG's 2024 Urban Trends survey, younger consumers are more focused on experiences like renting clothing or participating in immersive pop-up events rather than on owning products outright.

3. OBJECTIVES:

This study primarily aims to examine and analyze the changing patterns of consumer behavior in Mumbai in 2025, with a particular emphasis on influences beyond social media. While social media has significantly shaped consumer choices in recent years, various societal, economic, and psychological factors have led to notable changes. The research seeks to investigate these underlying influences and their effects on consumption patterns within Mumbai's diverse urban environment.

Main Objectives:

3.1 To analyze the prevailing trends in consumer behavior in Mumbai, excluding the impact of social media.

This involves grasping how consumers make choices influenced by offline experiences, product quality, local recommendations, community trust, and sustainability.

3.2 To determine the essential non-social media factors affecting consumer purchasing choices in 2025.

These factors can encompass environmental awareness, economic inflation, ethical considerations surrounding products, recommendations from others, immersive shopping experiences, brand transparency, and cultural values.

3.3 To examine how hybrid commerce (The integration of online and offline shopping) influences consumer purchasing behavior.

These elements might encompass awareness of environmental issues, economic inflation, ethical considerations of products, recommendations from others, shopping experiences, brand openness, and cultural values.

3.4 To evaluate the dynamics of consumer trust between social media influencers and other sources, including local communities, personal networks, and offline brand experiences. The research will investigate the declining confidence in digital figures and the increasing dependence on local or community-oriented information.

3.5 To assess how post-pandemic economic conditions influence consumer priorities and spending behaviors.

This encompasses grasping how job insecurity, inflation, and increasing living expenses are influencing purchasing choices based on value and necessity.

3.6 To explore consumer perceptions regarding sustainability, ethical shopping, and brand accountability.

The aim is to determine the degree to which consumers value environmentally and socially responsible brands in comparison to convenience or popularity.

3.7 To offer guidance and suggestions for businesses and marketers on how to adjust their strategies in a consumer landscape that has moved beyond social media.

Drawing from the findings, the study seeks to provide practical strategies for businesses in Mumbai to stay relevant and foster lasting trust among consumers.

4. DATA AND METHODS:

This section describes the specific methods and tools employed for gathering, analyzing, and interpreting data to investigate shifts in consumer behavior beyond social media in Mumbai throughout 2025.

4.1 Research Strategy:

Considering the intricate, varied, and dynamic nature of consumer behavior in Mumbai, a city characterized by a rich tapestry of cultures, social classes, and commercial trends a mixed-method research approach was employed. This strategy facilitated a comprehensive analysis encompassing both breadth through quantitative techniques and depth through qualitative insights.

4.2 Data Sources:

4.2.1 Primary Data:

- **Structured Surveys:**

Sample Size: 376 urban respondents

Demographics: A stratified sampling method was utilized to ensure representation across different age groups (ranging from 18 to over 60), income levels (lower, middle, and upper-middle class), as well as geographic areas (South Mumbai, suburbs, and Navi Mumbai).

Data Collection Method: Surveys were administered through both digital platforms and physical forms in shopping malls, local markets, and colleges.

Key Focus Areas: The study examined purchasing behaviors, influencing factors, habits post-pandemic, digital media fatigue, and ethical considerations.

- **In-Depth Interviews:**

Participants: 18 individuals, comprising working professionals, homemakers, Gen Z consumers, small business owners, and brand executives.

Format: Semi-structured to facilitate open-ended conversations about changes in influence, trust, lifestyle, and brand perception.

- **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):**

Conduct three focus group discussions (FGDs) consisting of 6 to 8 participants each, representing various socio-economic backgrounds.

Objective: Investigate consumer thought processes, the impact of cultural factors, preferences for offline versus online interactions, and levels of skepticism towards media.

- **Observational Study:**

Carried out in shopping malls (Phoenix Marketcity, Palladium), street markets (Colaba Causeway, Dadar, Bandra, Andheri, Malad, Borivali), and pop-up events.

Observed Behaviors: Engagement with physical products, brand displays, experiential setups, and factors prompting purchases.

4.2.2 Secondary Data:

- Insights on urban consumer trends (2023–2025) from PwC India, NielsenIQ, KPMG, EY, and Deloitte.
- Articles and commentaries published in The Economic Times, Business Standard, Mint, and India Today.
- Consumer studies conducted by the Ministry of Consumer Affairs and TRAI.
- Scholarly articles in the fields of marketing, urban sociology, and behavioral psychology.

4.3 Data Collection Instruments:

- Comprises rating scales (Likert), ranking queries, checkboxes, and open-ended responses.
- **Interview Guide:** Addressed topics including digital impact, emotional drivers, ethical purchasing habits, and hybrid commerce.
- **Observation Checklist:** Created to document verbal and non-verbal consumer behaviors, duration spent at each stall, and types of interactions.

4.4 Analytical Techniques:

4.4.1 Quantitative Analysis:

- Software: SPSS v28, Excel
- Techniques:

Descriptive statistics: Mean, median, mode, frequency distributions

Cross-tabulation: To analyze relationships (e.g., income vs purchase behavior)

Correlation & Regression Analysis: To investigate the predictive factors affecting behavior not driven by social media

ANOVA: To evaluate behavioral variations among different demographic groups

4.4.2 Qualitative Analysis

- Software: NVivo
- Methods:

Thematic Coding: Both manual and automated methods for identifying themes such as 'digital fatigue,' 'authenticity,' and 'price sensitivity.'

Narrative Analysis: Understanding consumer stories and language

Content Mapping: Visual representation of consumer values and motivations

5. RESULTS AND INTERPRETATIONS:

This section presents the results of the data analysis and provides interpretations through social, economic, and psychological lenses.

5.1 Reducing Dependence on Social Media:

- **Just 58%** of those surveyed indicated that social media was their main influence on purchasing choices.
- **In comparison, 70%** of consumers in Mumbai relied on social media advertising or influencers in 2019.
- **Analysis:** Factors such as excessive exposure, algorithm fatigue, and a perception of inauthenticity have diminished trust in digital influencers.

5.2 Favoring In-Person and Hybrid Shopping Experiences:

- **68% of respondents** preferred to physically interact with products before making a purchase, even if they began their research online.
- **Key Reasons:** Assurance of quality, tactile interaction, immediate possession, and promotions available in-store.
- **Analysis:** Experience-driven shopping is resurging, particularly among Gen Z and middle-aged demographics.

5.3 Trust in Word-of-Mouth and Community Recommendations:

- **58% of participants** identified word-of-mouth or personal referrals as their most trusted sources of influence.
- Local WhatsApp groups, housing society forums, and social circles played significant roles in this trend.
- **Analysis:** Trust is increasingly moving away from mass media toward hyperlocal communities.

5.4 Trends in Ethical and Sustainable Consumerism:

- **79% reported** actively seeking out eco-friendly or socially responsible brands.
- Consumers under 40 were more inclined to boycott brands with unethical practices.
- **Analysis:** Shoppers are more frequently aligning their purchases with their values, even if it results in higher costs.

5.5 Value-Driven Economic Choices:

- **63% mentioned** that they compare prices across different platforms and prefer bundled offerings over established brand names.
- Inflation and increasing living costs in Mumbai have been significant factors in this behavior.
- **Analysis:** Economic practicality is a major influence consumers prioritize value for money over brand loyalty.

5.6 Skepticism Towards Influencers:

- **57% of respondents** indicated a lack of trust in social media influencers, describing them as “scripted” and “sales-oriented.”
- Micro-influencers (local creators with genuine engagement and relatability) have become an alternative option.
- **Analysis:** Individuals value genuine connections and relatability more than popularity and the number of followers.

6. DISCUSSIONS:

The landscape of consumer behavior in Mumbai has shifted away from the overwhelming influence of digital distractions. This change can be attributed to several important trends:

6.1 The Rise of Authenticity: There has been a notable decline in blind faith in influencers and targeted advertisements, signaling a resurgence of consumer skepticism. Today's consumers are prioritizing authenticity, relatability, and genuine interactions. They are turning to personal connections for reviews, favoring recommendations from acquaintances over social media personalities.

6.2 Local is the New Global: Mumbai's vibrant local networks, such as WhatsApp groups, neighborhood markets, and community cooperatives, are becoming trusted sources for purchase recommendations. There is a growing preference for locally-produced goods and brands endorsed by the community.

6.3 Sensory and Experiential Retail: The importance of tactile experiences, touch, taste, and trial has been reestablished as key factors in consumer satisfaction. As social media's influence wanes, physical interactions and sensory experiences are increasingly recognized as the primary indicators of quality and value.

6.4 Ethics, Environment, and Identity: A notable segment of consumers in Mumbai, particularly millennials and Gen Z, now sees their purchasing decisions as reflections of their identity and moral values. Brands that ignore issues related to climate change, fairness, and labor rights risk losing their appeal.

6.5 Media Fatigue: The overwhelming saturation of information, the prevalence of misinformation, and the stress of algorithm-driven content have led to digital fatigue. Consequently, individuals are gravitating towards simpler, more personalized sources of influence, creating opportunities for non-digital, trust-centered marketing approaches.

7. CONCLUSIONS:

The study reveals that consumer behavior in Mumbai in 2025 is experiencing a significant transformation, moving away from social media influence and toward a focus on authenticity, community, ethics, and overall value.

Key Findings:

- The impact of social media has drastically diminished, with consumers now pursuing alternative sources of trust and information.
- Offline experiences and hybrid retail models are gaining importance, blending online convenience with the reassurance of in-person shopping.
- Ethical and sustainable purchasing practices have become a mainstream concern rather than an exclusive preference.
- Micro-local networks are emerging as key influencers, particularly within middle-income and suburban communities.
- Growing digital skepticism is prompting businesses to prioritize authenticity and transparency in their marketing strategies.

Implications:

- Marketers need to shift away from influencer-driven digital campaigns, focusing instead on community engagement, experiential marketing, and ethical storytelling.
- Companies should adopt hybrid strategies that integrate online tools with a physical presence and foster emotional trust.

- Research on consumer behavior in Mumbai must account for cultural values, local dynamics, and the practicality shaped by the post-pandemic landscape.

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