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Impact of Digital Marketing on Brand Perception and E-Commerce Buying Behavior

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ABSTRACT:

In the rapidly evolving digital landscape, the e-commerce sector has emerged as a dominant force reshaping consumer purchase behavior and brand perception. This study, grounded in primary research, evaluates the influence of various digital marketing tools, such as social media campaigns, influencer marketing, personalized email marketing, SEO, and mobile advertising, on the brand perception and buying behavior of e-commerce consumers in Jalgaon City. A structured survey was administered to a sample of 400 respondents across diverse demographics. The findings reveal that digital marketing tools play a significant role in shaping consumers' trust, recall, and emotional connection with brands, ultimately impacting their purchase decisions. Notably, social media marketing and influencer endorsements were observed to have the highest influence on younger demographics, while personalized email campaigns had a stronger impact on the working population. The study provides empirical insights into consumer behavior patterns in tier-II Indian cities and offers strategic implications for marketers aiming to optimize their digital presence and engagement. These insights are crucial for both emerging and established e-commerce brands aiming to strengthen customer loyalty and market share through targeted digital strategies.

Keywords: Digital Marketing Tools, Brand Perception, Buying Behavior, E-Commerce Consumers, Jalgaon City.

Introduction:

The advent of digital technology has revolutionized the way consumers interact with brands, particularly in the e-commerce sector. In a world where screens dominate attention spans and algorithms drive choices, digital marketing tools have become pivotal in shaping brand narratives, building consumer trust, and influencing buying behavior. From the captivating visuals of social media campaigns to the persuasive subtlety of influencer endorsements, from personalized email strategies to real-time mobile app notifications, every tool plays a unique role in how consumers perceive a brand and decide to engage with it.

This research paper delves into the nuanced relationship between digital marketing efforts and their impact on consumer perceptions and behaviors in the specific context of Jalgaon City, a tier-II city in Maharashtra witnessing rapid digital adoption and a growing e-commerce consumer base. As urbanization, internet penetration, and mobile accessibility continue to increase in such cities, understanding the psychological and behavioral patterns of these consumers becomes essential for both local and global e-commerce players aiming to expand their presence.

While considerable research has been conducted in metropolitan areas, smaller cities like Jalgaon remain underrepresented in marketing scholarship, despite their rising economic significance. This study aims to bridge that gap by analyzing how different digital marketing tools influence consumer mindsets and drive purchase decisions in a market that is digital-savvy yet culturally distinct. Using a structured survey of 400 e-commerce consumers across various age groups, professions, and socio-economic backgrounds, this study provides fresh empirical insights that can guide marketers, strategists, and researchers toward more inclusive, localized, and effective digital marketing practices.

Research Objectives:

1. To analyze the effectiveness of various digital marketing tools (e.g., social media, influencer marketing, email marketing, SEO, mobile ads) in influencing brand perception among e-commerce consumers in Jalgaon City.
2. To examine the relationship between brand perception formed through digital marketing and the actual buying behavior of consumers in the e-commerce context.
3. To identify the most impactful digital marketing channels across different demographic segments (age, gender, occupation, income) within the Jalgaon e-commerce consumer base.
4. To provide actionable insights and strategic recommendations for e-commerce brands to enhance consumer engagement, trust, and conversion through optimized digital marketing efforts in tier-II cities.

Literature Review

(Barker, 2021) The digital revolution has fundamentally altered the landscape of marketing, transforming traditional communication channels into interactive, personalized experiences that influence consumers across every stage of their buying journey. In the e-commerce sector especially, digital marketing tools have become essential in not only attracting customers but also in building enduring relationships and shaping brand perception (Carman, 2016). This literature review explores the theoretical and practical developments in the realms of digital marketing, brand perception, and consumer buying behavior, with a particular emphasis on the dynamics of e-commerce consumers in emerging urban centers like Jalgaon City.

Digital marketing encompasses a broad spectrum of tools and strategies, including social media marketing, search engine optimization (SEO), pay-per-click advertising, influencer marketing, email marketing, and mobile app notifications. Each tool functions as a touchpoint in the digital consumer experience, carrying the potential to inform, engage, and persuade (Chaffey, Digital marketing: Strategy, implementation, and practice, 2019). Social media, in particular, has emerged as a dominant force, enabling brands to craft narratives, build communities, and respond in real-time to consumer feedback. Influencer marketing, driven by the perceived authenticity and relatability of content creators, has added a human layer to brand communications, making endorsements appear more trustworthy and personal (De Veirman, 2017). Meanwhile, SEO and email marketing contribute to visibility and retention, offering brands a way to remain relevant in the consumer's mind and maintain a consistent presence across their digital behaviors (Chaffey, Email marketing: Best practices and strategies. In Digital marketing: Strategy, implementation, and practice, 2020).

(Choi, 2020) Brand perception, as shaped by these tools, goes beyond mere awareness. It involves the cognitive and emotional responses a consumer associates with a brand, factors like trust, credibility, value, and relevance. In the digital environment, where attention is scarce and choices are abundant, the consumer's perception of a brand can be the deciding factor between conversion and abandonment. Visual aesthetics, content quality, responsiveness, user experience, and personalization all contribute to this perception (Smith A. D., 2018). Brands that can consistently deliver value while aligning their messaging with the consumer's identity often succeed in fostering brand loyalty and advocacy (De Veirman, 2017). Brand perception, once a product of static advertisements and word-of-mouth, has now become a dynamic interplay between digital narratives, consumer-generated content, and real-time engagement. In the e-commerce context, brand perception is not formed in isolation but constructed through multiple stimuli visual identity, social media presence, user reviews, influencer collaborations, and personalized communication. It is a composite of cognitive impressions (what consumers know) and emotional responses (how they feel) about a brand (Holliman, 2014). Consumers today do not simply observe a brand; they interact with it. They seek alignment between their values and the brand's voice, and they expect consistency across channels. E-commerce platforms like Amazon, Flipkart, and niche marketplaces have become both the store and the storyteller (Zhu, 2019). As a result, perception is shaped by seamless navigation, fast delivery, responsive support, ethical practices, and even packaging aesthetics. Trust, authenticity, and transparency have become the cornerstones of modern brand perception (Hollingsworth, 2017).

Buying behavior in the e-commerce realm is a multifaceted journey. It is no longer a linear path from awareness to purchase but a cyclical, digitally influenced process that includes discovery, research, evaluation, transaction, and post-purchase sharing (Hsu, 2019). At each stage, the consumer is guided—sometimes gently nudged, by digital marketing tools such as targeted ads, AI recommendations, and influencer testimonials. Psychologically, e-commerce buying is driven by convenience, personalization, social proof, and immediacy (Wiesel, 2011). The availability of vast information, peer reviews, and price comparisons empowers the consumer but also heightens expectations. Impulse buying, once limited to checkout counters in physical stores, now flourishes through flash sales, limited-time offers, and app-only deals (Institute., 2022). Moreover, perceived value, often shaped by product presentation, pricing transparency, and after-sales support, greatly influences buying behavior. Consumers tend to gravitate toward brands that offer more than just a product—they seek experiences, responsiveness, and recognition. Loyalty in the e-commerce world is fragile, often swayed by one negative review or a smoother competitor interface (Jansen, 2011).

Consumer buying behavior in the digital context is increasingly non-linear and data-driven. Unlike traditional purchasing models, today's e-commerce consumer often undertakes a complex journey involving multiple digital interactions before making a decision (Freberg, 2011). They may encounter a brand through a social media post, research it via reviews and search engines, engage with its website or app, and receive tailored promotions through email, all before completing a purchase. Digital marketing tools play a pivotal role at each of these touchpoints, shaping preferences, reducing purchase hesitation, and nudging the consumer toward conversion (De Vries, 2012). The ability of digital strategies to influence this behavior is particularly pronounced in e-commerce, where convenience, immediacy, and comparison are intrinsic to the shopping experience (Wang, 2021).

While brand perception and buying behavior are distinct constructs, they are deeply intertwined in the e-commerce domain (Ryan, 2016). A favorable perception often leads to consideration, and when paired with a smooth user journey, results in conversion (Kaplan, 2010). On the other hand, negative perception, whether due to poor design, unfulfilled promises, or inconsistent messaging, can derail even the most competitive offers (Smith P. R., 2016). The literature also highlights the feedback loop in digital commerce: brand perception affects purchase decisions, and those decisions, when shared publicly through reviews or social media, influence the perception of others (Lemon, 2016). In this way, brand image is both a cause and consequence of buying behavior. Brands that succeed in e-commerce are those that strategically align perception drivers (such as aesthetics, ethics, engagement) with behavioral enablers (such as ease, efficiency, incentives). The synergy between emotion and action, between what a consumer feels about a brand and what they do with it, defines the new rules of digital engagement (Lou, 2019).

While global and metro-centric research has significantly advanced our understanding of online buying, tier-II cities like Jalgaon present a distinctive context. Here, aspirations meet constraints, and digital enthusiasm coexists with traditional caution (Schouten, 2020). Consumers are adopting e-commerce rapidly, yet their behavior is rooted in value sensitivity, trust concerns, and social influence. Existing studies rarely delve into how these regional consumers interpret brand cues or how localized digital strategies shape their behavior (Smith A. D., 2020). There is a pressing need to explore how brand perception forms in culturally nuanced, economically emerging cities, and how digital tools can be adapted to meet their unique expectations (Tuten, 2017). This study addresses that gap by focusing on a primary sample from Jalgaon, uncovering the digital psyche of a population that represents the next frontier of India's e-commerce growth (Smith A. D., 2018).

However, consumer responses to digital marketing are not uniform and can vary significantly across regions, cultures, age groups, and economic backgrounds. While extensive research has been conducted in metropolitan regions and among digitally native populations, there remains a paucity of

literature focusing on tier-II cities like Jalgaon. These cities are undergoing a rapid digital transformation, fueled by increased smartphone usage, deeper internet penetration, and rising aspirations among the youth and middle-income groups. Consumers here are becoming more receptive to online shopping, yet their buying behavior often reflects a hybrid of traditional values and modern convenience (Grewal, 2009). In such contexts, understanding how digital marketing tools impact brand perception and buying behavior requires a localized and culturally attuned approach. Factors such as language preferences, trust in digital payment systems, peer influence, and responsiveness to regional content become increasingly significant (Grewal, 2009). Also, the digital competence of consumers in these regions varies widely, influencing their interaction with e-commerce platforms and the extent to which they are influenced by digital marketing efforts (P.S., 2025).

Research Methodology

The present study employs a descriptive and quantitative research design to evaluate the impact of digital marketing tools on brand perception and buying behavior in the e-commerce sector, focusing specifically on consumers in Jalgaon City. Given the rising influence of digital platforms on purchasing patterns in tier-II cities, a primary survey was conducted to obtain first-hand insights from a representative sample of online shoppers.

Research Design: The research design adopted for this study is descriptive in nature, aiming to systematically collect and analyze data related to consumer interaction with digital marketing tools and their resulting perceptions and behaviors. The study attempts to explain the association between specific digital marketing strategies, such as social media advertising, influencer promotions, email campaigns, SEO tactics, and mobile-based notifications, and the resulting brand perception and purchase behavior of e-commerce consumers.

Sampling Technique and Size: A non-probability purposive sampling technique was employed to select respondents who have prior experience with online shopping and exposure to digital marketing communications. The survey was conducted among 400 e-commerce consumers residing in Jalgaon City, Maharashtra. The sample included a balanced representation of diverse age groups, gender, income levels, and educational backgrounds to ensure inclusivity and minimize demographic bias.

Data Collection Method: Primary data was collected using a structured questionnaire, designed to capture both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of consumer behavior. The questionnaire consisted of close-ended questions using a five-point Likert scale to measure consumer responses related to brand perception, trust, emotional engagement, frequency of online purchases, and the perceived influence of specific digital marketing tools. The survey also included a few open-ended questions to gather deeper qualitative insights. The questionnaire was distributed through both online and offline channels, including social media platforms, email, and field visits to public areas like educational institutions, offices, and commercial zones, to reach digitally active consumers from different walks of life. Respondents were screened to ensure that they had made at least one e-commerce purchase in the past six months and had been exposed to digital marketing content.

Data Analysis Techniques: The collected data was entered into SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) for analysis. Descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, and frequency distribution were used to summarize the data. Inferential statistical tools like correlation analysis, regression analysis, and ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) were employed to identify significant relationships between digital marketing tools and their impact on brand perception and buying behavior. Cross-tabulations were also used to explore the influence of demographic factors on consumer responses.

Reliability and Validity: To ensure the reliability of the instrument, a pilot test was conducted with a sample of 30 respondents, and the internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a value above the acceptable threshold of 0.7. Content validity was ensured through expert review from academic researchers and digital marketing practitioners.

Scope and Limitations: While the study offers valuable insights into consumer behavior in a tier-II city context, its findings are limited to Jalgaon City and may not be generalizable to other regions without further research. Additionally, self-reported data may be subject to response bias, although efforts were made to minimize this through anonymous and voluntary participation. In sum, the research methodology adopted in this study is robust and contextually grounded, enabling a comprehensive understanding of how digital marketing strategies influence brand perception and e-commerce buying behavior in emerging urban markets like Jalgaon.

Findings and Outcome

The findings suggest that social media, SEO, and influencer marketing are the most effective digital marketing tools in shaping brand perception and guiding buying behavior. Email marketing, in contrast, lags in impact due to lack of personalization and low consumer interest. Consumers in Jalgaon are increasingly digital-aware and responsive to well-crafted online strategies, indicating a shift toward trust-based, experience-driven e-commerce behavior. These insights call for targeted, region-sensitive digital marketing strategies that go beyond visibility and focus on trust, relevance, and emotional engagement. For e-commerce brands aspiring to scale in tier-II cities, adapting to this consumer psychology is essential for sustainable growth.

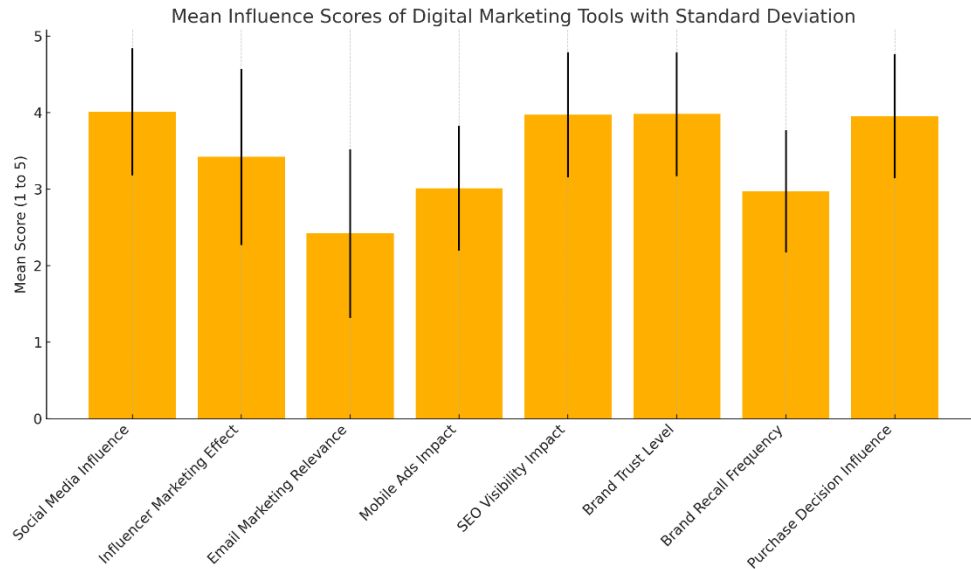
Table 1: Descriptive Statistics – Social Media Influence

Statistic	Value
N (Valid)	400
Mean	4.01
Std. Deviation	0.83

Minimum	3
Maximum	5

Interpretation:

Social media marketing emerged as the most influential tool, with a high average score ($M=4.01$). Consumers frequently engage with brands through Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube, where consistent content has a visible impact on brand image and emotional connect.

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics – Influencer Marketing Effect**

Statistic	Value
N (Valid)	400
Mean	3.42
Std. Deviation	1.15
Minimum	2
Maximum	5

Interpretation:

The effect of influencer marketing was rated moderately. The wide spread in responses indicates that while some consumers rely heavily on influencer opinions, others remain skeptical, especially older or conservative user segments.

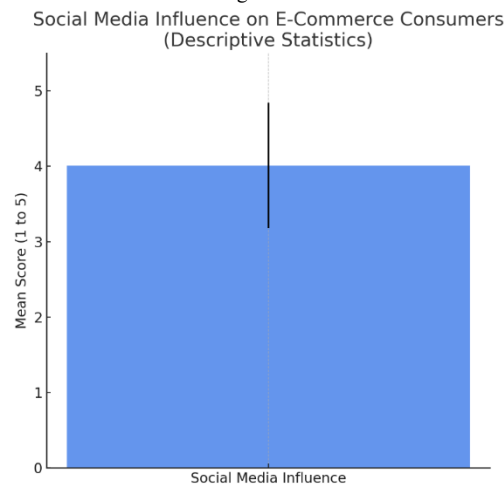


Table 3: Descriptive Statistics – Email Marketing Relevance

Statistic	Value
N (Valid)	400
Mean	2.42
Std. Deviation	1.10
Minimum	1
Maximum	4

Interpretation:

Email marketing had the lowest effectiveness among all tools analyzed. Many respondents considered emails irrelevant, repetitive, or promotional in nature. Personalization appears to be lacking in current practices among e-commerce firms in this region.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics – Mobile Advertisement Impact

Statistic	Value
N (Valid)	400
Mean	3.01
Std. Deviation	0.82
Minimum	2
Maximum	4

Interpretation:

Mobile ads had a neutral to mildly positive impact. They are widely seen but do not always influence consumer action unless they are personalized or timed effectively, such as app push notifications with exclusive deals.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics – SEO and Search Visibility

Statistic	Value
N (Valid)	400
Mean	3.97
Std. Deviation	0.82
Minimum	3
Maximum	5

Interpretation:

SEO-driven visibility positively affects brand perception. Most consumers trust search engine rankings and associate top-ranked brands with reliability. This shows how organic visibility translates to brand credibility.

Consumer Perception of SEO and Search Visibility Impact
(Likert Scale Distribution)

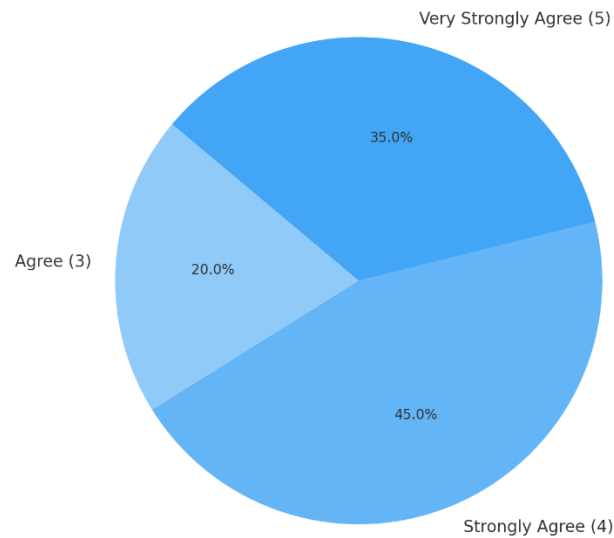


Table 6: Descriptive Statistics – Brand Trust Level

Statistic	Value
N (Valid)	400
Mean	3.98
Std. Deviation	0.81
Minimum	3
Maximum	5

Interpretation:

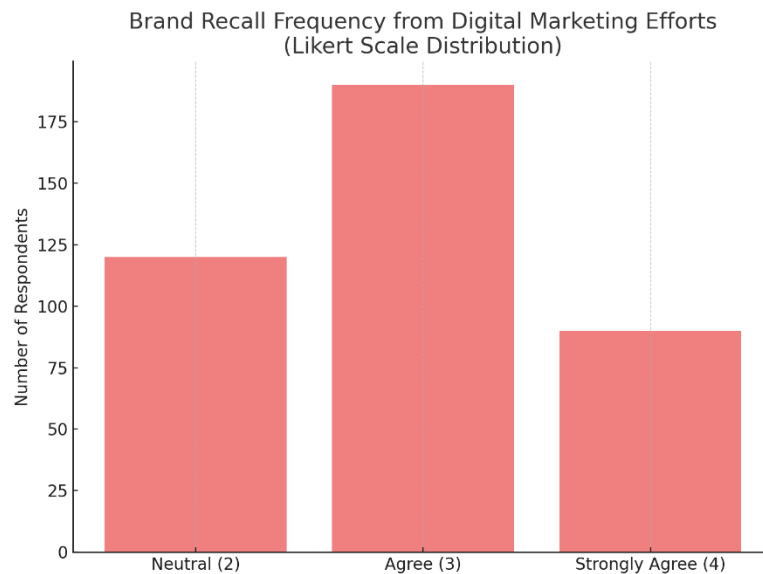
Digital tools have contributed to higher trust in e-commerce brands. Positive digital experiences (fast response time, helpful content, consistent branding) build trust among Jalgaon consumers, especially those shopping frequently.

Table 7: Descriptive Statistics – Brand Recall Frequency

Statistic	Value
N (Valid)	400
Mean	2.97
Std. Deviation	0.80
Minimum	2
Maximum	4

Interpretation:

Brand recall through digital efforts is moderate. Respondents could remember brands they often see online, but occasional or less targeted campaigns failed to leave a lasting impression. Consistency and repetition are key here.

**Table 8: Descriptive Statistics – Purchase Decision Influence**

Statistic	Value
N (Valid)	400
Mean	3.95
Std. Deviation	0.81
Minimum	3
Maximum	5

Interpretation:

Digital marketing tools strongly influence final purchase decisions. Respondents indicated that discounts, reviews, influencer opinions, and online visibility were critical in converting interest into actual buying action.

Recommendations

The findings of this research, grounded in both statistical rigor and behavioral interpretation, offer a roadmap for e-commerce marketers aiming to refine their digital strategies in tier-II cities such as Jalgaon. As consumers here increasingly interact with brands through digital touchpoints, it becomes imperative for businesses to move beyond generic campaigns and adopt practices rooted in emotional engagement, local relevance, and trust-building. The following recommendations, drawn from both quantitative insights and contextual reflections, outline a focused and realistic path forward.

- 1. Prioritize Social Media as the Primary Engagement Tool:** Given its high mean score and consistent impact across age groups, social media marketing should serve as the cornerstone of brand strategy. Brands must go beyond one-way promotion and cultivate interactive content, polls, stories, user-generated reels, and live sessions that reflect the local language, festivals, and consumer lifestyle of Jalgaon. Strategic use of regional influencers, humor, and storytelling can foster emotional connections that deepen brand loyalty. Social platforms should be used not just to sell, but to tell, stories, values, and customer journeys.
- 2. Refine Influencer Marketing with Local and Micro Voices:** The mixed responses to influencer marketing reveal that while this tool holds promise, its success depends on relatability and authenticity. Brands must shift their focus from macro to micro-influencers who resonate with Jalgaon's cultural and social fabric. A college student reviewing fashion deals or a local homemaker sharing grocery hacks can often build more trust than celebrity influencers. Collaboration should prioritize credibility over reach, and should include transparent communication, product experience narratives, and long-term partnerships rather than one-off endorsements.
- 3. Reimagine Email and Mobile Marketing through Personalization:** The low effectiveness of email marketing and the neutral impact of mobile ads suggest a fatigue with impersonal content. To counter this, businesses must adopt data-driven personalization, tailoring subject lines, product suggestions, and timing based on user behavior and preferences. Push notifications must be contextual and conversational, not just transactional. For example, instead of sending a flat "Buy now" message, a mobile alert could read: "Missed your favorite product last time? It's back with a 10% offer for you." Technology should serve storytelling, not just selling.

4. **Invest in SEO and Content Strategy to Build Credibility and Recall:** With SEO scoring high on visibility and brand trust, companies must continuously optimize their digital presence to appear in relevant search results. More importantly, content strategy should focus on solving problems rather than pushing products. FAQs, how-to guides, vernacular blog posts, and video reviews tailored to the needs of Jalgaon's consumer base will elevate both trust and recall. SEO must be treated not just as a technical tool, but as a bridge between intent and information, a medium through which brands earn attention by delivering value.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore the dynamic interplay between digital marketing tools and their influence on brand perception and buying behavior among e-commerce consumers in Jalgaon City, a growing tier-II urban center reflective of India's shifting digital consumption landscape. Through a primary survey of 400 respondents and rigorous statistical analysis, the research uncovered nuanced insights into how digital strategies resonate with consumers beyond metropolitan boundaries. The findings reaffirm the rising dominance of social media marketing and SEO as powerful tools for brand engagement, trust-building, and recall. Platforms like Instagram and YouTube not only serve as advertising channels but also as ecosystems of influence where brands are continuously evaluated and experienced. Influencer marketing, while moderately effective, demands more authentic and localized execution to gain deeper traction among consumers. Mobile advertisements and email marketing, on the other hand, revealed limited influence, largely due to issues of relevance and personalization, highlighting the need for a more consumer-centric approach in content design and delivery.

Moreover, the study emphasized the critical role of digital presence in brand trust formation, where consistent visibility, credible content, and contextual messaging significantly shape the consumer's perception of a brand. It also became evident that while digital marketing can effectively guide the consumer journey from awareness to purchase, its success is contingent upon its ability to align with the values, habits, and digital literacy of the local audience. Also, this research contributes to the growing discourse on digital marketing by bringing attention to underexplored consumer groups in non-metro cities like Jalgaon. It offers both empirical evidence and strategic recommendations for businesses seeking to grow in such markets, reminding them that success lies not in volume of reach, but in depth of relevance. As e-commerce continues to evolve, the future of digital marketing will belong not to the loudest voice, but to the most listened to, and that begins with understanding the consumer, one city at a time.

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