

Dark Social's significance:

What every eCommerce brand needs to know in 2025



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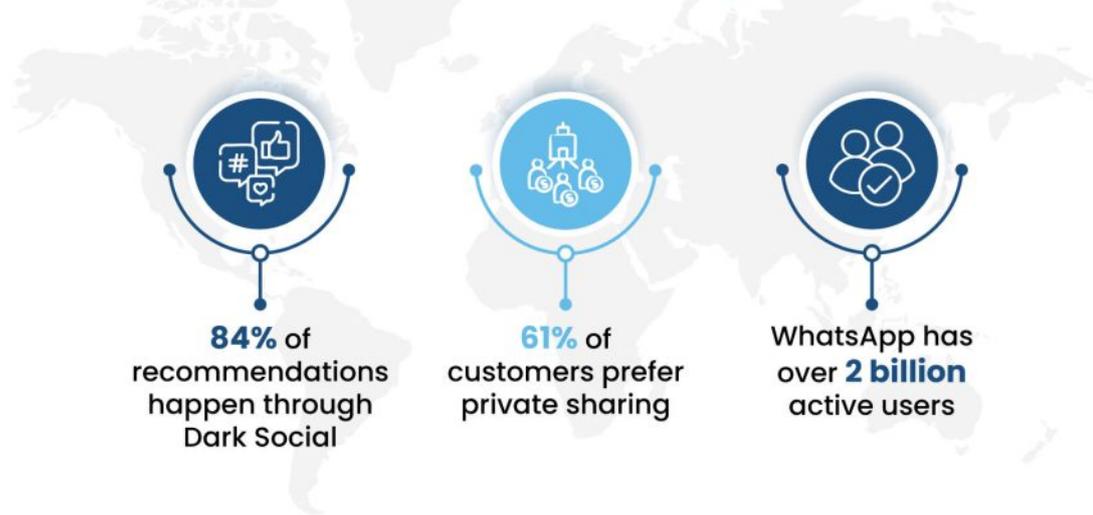
Description

As we move into 2025, the digital marketing landscape for eCommerce brands is more competitive than ever. Traditional analytics tools and public social media metrics often fail to capture a significant driver of online sales and consumer behavior: **Dark Social**. While Dark Social may be invisible to most tracking tools, it plays a huge role in how consumers share, discuss, and ultimately purchase products. If eCommerce brands fail to understand and leverage Dark Social, they risk missing valuable opportunities.

In this blog, we'll explore what Dark Social is, why it matters for your eCommerce business, how to track it, and most importantly, how to use it to fuel growth in 2025.

What Is Dark Social?

Dark Social's Impact



Dark Social refers to any online content sharing that happens outside the scope of traditional, public-facing social media platforms. It encompasses private sharing methods such as emails, direct messaging apps (WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, WeChat, etc.), SMS, and even copy-pasting links into private chats. Unlike public platforms like Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter, these interactions are invisible to standard web analytics tools, making them difficult to track.

Despite being difficult to measure, Dark Social is hugely influential. A study from **RadiumOne** in 2016 revealed that **84% of all online recommendations happen through Dark Social channels**. This highlights the importance of Dark Social in the modern digital marketing ecosystem and its potential to drive conversions and brand awareness.

Why Dark Social Matters for eCommerce Brands

Consumers are increasingly relying on private messaging channels to share product recommendations, opinions, and reviews. According to a **HubSpot survey**, **61% of customers prefer to share product recommendations privately**. This statistic is particularly important for eCommerce businesses, as private recommendations often carry more weight than public posts, which can sometimes be seen as overly commercial.

For eCommerce brands, Dark Social represents a huge opportunity to tap into organic, word-of-mouth marketing—one of the most powerful forms of consumer influence. People trust their friends and family more than strangers online, making private sharing a highly effective way to convert potential buyers. This makes Dark Social an essential part of any modern eCommerce strategy.

How Dark Social Impacts eCommerce Metrics

Traditional eCommerce metrics—like website traffic, social media shares, and conversion rates—only tell part of the story. Since Dark Social traffic is hard to track, it often gets grouped under “direct” or “organic” traffic, which makes it challenging to pinpoint its true source.

For example, when a consumer shares a product link through WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, or email, that action might not be visible in your standard analytics reports. A **Salesforce report** found that **70% of marketers struggle with tracking the full customer journey**, largely because Dark Social traffic skews conventional data models. As a result, businesses may underestimate the true value of Dark Social in their marketing strategies.

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Challenges of Tracking Dark Social



Tracking Dark Social is inherently difficult. Most analytics tools, like Google Analytics and social media insights, are designed to track interactions on public platforms. Dark Social, by nature, operates in private spaces, which makes tracking those interactions elusive.

Consumers using encrypted messaging apps, for example, may share links in a way that even sophisticated tools can't detect. According to a **Statista report**, **WhatsApp** had **over 2 billion active users** globally in 2023, many of whom use the app to privately share content, including product recommendations.

The key challenge for eCommerce brands is finding ways to track these private interactions without violating user privacy. Fortunately, there are strategies that can help you gain insight into how Dark Social is driving traffic and conversions.

How to Leverage Dark Social for eCommerce Growth

Despite the tracking challenges, Dark Social offers huge potential for eCommerce growth. Here's how you can leverage it:

- **Create Shareable Content:** For consumers to share your products privately, your content must be engaging and worth sharing. Examples include creating exclusive product previews, personalized offers, or behind-the-scenes content that feels like a personal recommendation. Brands like **Glossier** have mastered this approach by fostering a community-driven brand that encourages organic sharing.
- **Referral and Incentive Programs:** Rewarding customers for sharing product links is another way to encourage Dark Social engagement. By offering discounts or rewards for referrals, you incentivize private sharing. **Dropbox's referral program** is a prime example, which grew its user base by offering extra storage space to users who referred friends—largely through private sharing channels like email and messaging apps.
- **Build Personal Connections:** Dark Social thrives in environments where relationships are personal. Brands that foster a sense of community—like **Peloton** or **Nike Run Club**—encourage users to share their experiences privately in messaging apps or via email, creating a word-of-mouth effect that boosts brand awareness and sales.

Key Dark Social Channels to Focus On

Several channels dominate the Dark Social landscape, and these are the key areas eCommerce brands should focus on:

- **Messaging Apps (WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Telegram):** These apps are central to Dark Social sharing. In fact, **WhatsApp** alone has over **2 billion active users**, making it a prime channel for private product sharing. Similar platforms like **Facebook Messenger** and **Telegram** also offer great opportunities to drive engagement through private conversations.
- **Email:** Despite the growth of social media, email remains a powerful Dark Social tool. Consumers frequently forward product links or sales promotions to friends and family. A **McKinsey report** revealed that **email marketing continues to be one of the most effective channels**, delivering a **40x return on investment**.
- **Private Forums and Niche Groups:** Consumers often turn to private online communities to discuss products. For instance, **Reddit** has numerous niche subreddits where users privately recommend products. Similarly, **private Facebook groups** and **Discord servers** are other spaces where people share product recommendations in a more intimate setting.

Tools and Strategies to Track Dark Social

While tracking Dark Social can be challenging, several tools and strategies can help eCommerce brands understand its impact:

- **UTM Parameters:** By using **UTM codes** in your product links, you can track where traffic is coming from, even if that traffic originates from private sharing. This won't give you the full picture but will provide valuable insights into referral traffic sources.
- **Shortened URLs:** Use tools like **Bitly** to create custom URLs that can be tracked. This allows you to monitor how often your links are clicked when shared privately.
- **Referral Analytics:** Analyzing your referral traffic sources can help you uncover hidden Dark Social activity. If you notice an increase in direct or organic traffic without clear sources, it may be an indication of Dark Social engagement.
- **Social Listening Tools:** Tools like **Brandwatch** or **Mention** allow you to monitor brand mentions and conversations across private channels. These tools provide insights into how people are discussing your products on messaging apps, forums, and private groups.

The Future of Dark Social in Marketing

As privacy concerns continue to grow, Dark Social will likely become even more prominent in the coming years. Consumers are increasingly gravitating toward encrypted messaging apps and private spaces to share content, making it essential for eCommerce brands to adapt their marketing strategies accordingly.

Advancements in AI and machine learning may offer new ways to track and measure Dark Social interactions in a way that respects user privacy. As the digital landscape continues to evolve, the companies that successfully tap into Dark Social will have a significant competitive edge.

Conclusion

Dark Social is no longer just a trend—it's a key driver of eCommerce success. With **84% of shoppers trusting personal recommendations** more than traditional ads, leveraging private sharing channels is essential for brands looking to boost conversions and build customer loyalty.

Tracking Dark Social may be challenging, but with the right strategies and creative tools, eCommerce businesses can tap into its potential for sustainable growth.

Ready to harness the power of Dark Social? **Reach out to Paxcom's experts** to unlock new opportunities and elevate your eCommerce strategy in 2025.