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Pandemic Induced Neo Business Practices:
Evidences from South Asia

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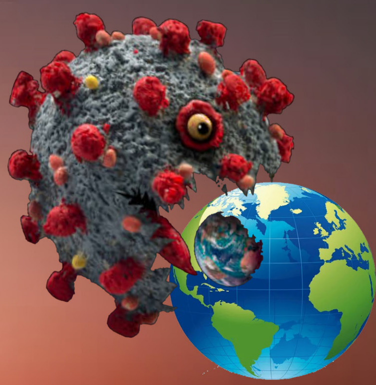

HORIZON
Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences Research

HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH

Editors: Rabi Subudhi & Nayan Kanwal

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Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research

About the Journal

Overview

Horizon Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research (JHSSR) is an open-access academic journal published by BP Services, independently owned, dependent upon donations and run on a non-profit basis for the benefit of the world-wide social science community. It neither accepts nor commissions third party content. It is an online scientific journal and does not impose any publication or page fee on authors intending to publish in the journal. It publishes the scientific outputs.

Recognized internationally as a leading peer-reviewed scholarly journal devoted to the publication of original papers, it serves as a forum for practical approaches to improving quality in issues pertaining to social and as well as the humanities.

JHSSR is currently a **bi-annual** (*July* and *December*) periodical that considers for publication original articles as per its scope. The journal publishes in **English** and it is open to authors around the world regardless of the nationality.

The Journal is available world-wide online.

Aim and scope

Horizon Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research aims to develop as a pioneer journal for the social sciences with a focus on emerging issues pertaining to the social sciences as well as the humanities.

JHSSR is a principal outlet for scholarly articles. The journal provides a unique forum for theoretical debates and empirical analyses that move away from narrow disciplinary focus. It is committed to comparative research and articles that speak to cases beyond the traditional concerns of area and single-country studies. JHSSR strongly encourages transdisciplinary analysis of contemporary and historical social change particularly in Asia, or beyond by offering a meeting space for international scholars across the social sciences.

Scope of the journal includes HUMANITIES– Field of Languages, Linguistics, Literature, and Education. SOCIAL SCIENCES–Anthropology, Economics, Law, psychology, Political Sciences, sociology, music, sport, and Technology Management.

History and Background

A premier journal in its field, JHSSR was established in 2019, and has been in circulation continuously since then. Horizon is an open access scholarly journal that currently publishes *semi-annually*. The journal uses a stringent **double-blind peer-review process** and follows code of conduct stipulated by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

It primarily publishes for dissemination of academic research meant for scholars and scientists worldwide. It publishes on non-profitable basis and does not have any income from subscription or other sources. The journal does not impose any publication or page fee on authors intending to publish in JHSSR.

JHSSR is distributed worldwide to more than 1000 institutions via *e-alerts*, in addition to authors upon request. To provide expert evaluation of the various segments of the broad spectrum of Humanities and Social Sciences research, the editorial office is assisted by scholars who serve as Associate Editors, editorial board members, Emeritus editors and international advisory board members from academic institutions across 35 countries, and ad-hoc reviewers chosen for their expertise. They provide constructive evaluation and, fair and rapid editorial processing. The frequency of citations to articles published in JHSSR by scientists, students, and others increases each year. It therefore aims to achieve its SCOPUS status within 2 years of publication.

To facilitate review, the Editor-in-Chief and the Chief Executive Editor previews all submitted manuscripts and independently or in consultation with an Associate Editor, decides if a manuscript is appropriate for review by members of JHSSR's editorial board and/or ad hoc reviewers. Manuscripts outside of the scope of JHSSR or those articles in poor English are returned without the delay of a full review, generally within a week of submission. Authors may contact the Chief Executive Editor in advance to inquire about the potential suitability of their research topic for review.

Manuscript submissions and inquiries are encouraged. Manuscript style and formatting are described in the "**Instructions to Authors**". Manuscript submissions should be made using JHSSR online manuscript submission system, or manuscripts should be mailed through email to the Chief Executive Editor. Direct inquiries to CEE.horizon@gmail.com

Goal

Our goal is to bring the highest quality research to the widest possible audience. Our objective is "**Today's research, tomorrow's impact**".

Quality

We aim for excellence, sustained by a responsible and professional approach to journal publishing. Submissions are guaranteed to receive a decision within 14 weeks. The elapsed time from submission to publication for the articles averages 3-4 months.

Editorial and International Advisory Board

The editorial and the advisory board of the Horizon has a presence of an international base of renowned scholars from various disciplines of research with diverse geographical background.

Our editorial team is engaged with **universities in 35 countries across the world** including **Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Fiji, Finland, Germany, India, Iran, Jordon, Lithuania, Malaysia, Morocco, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Sweden, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey, United Kingdom, USA,** and **Vietnam**.

Abstracting and indexing of *Horizon*

As is the case with any new journal, indexing in all prestigious relevant databases takes some time, and is heavily dependent upon citations the articles generate.

The Horizon Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research (Online ISSN 2682-9096) is a *high-quality, peer-reviewed* academic journal in its field.

It is a Gold Open Access journal and indexed in major academic databases to maximize article discoverability and citation. The journal follows best practices on publication ethics outlined in the COPE Code of Conduct. Editors work to ensure timely decisions after initial submission, as well as prompt publication online if a manuscript is accepted for publication.

Upon publication, articles are immediately and freely available to the public. The final version of articles can immediately be posted to an institutional repository or to the author's own website as long as the article includes a link back to the original article posted on JHSSR. All published articles are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

The journal has been indexed and abstracted in: SSRN, CrossRef, Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, ProQuest, The journal has been listed in: CiteFactor, Cornel University Library, CrossCheck, DRJI, Journalseek, openaccessarticles.com, Open Access Library, Rubrig, Scirus, Ulrichs. In addition, the journal has been archived in: Academia.edu, National Library of Malaysia.

The journal editors and the publisher are doing their best for this journal to be included in the top abstracting and indexing databases; however, for the journal to be indexed in any indexing body is beyond the Journal's direct control. Nevertheless, the journal ensures that the papers published are of high quality. The publisher from time to time recommends the journal to the indexing and abstracting bodies.

The authors must also ensure that the manuscripts they submit to JHSSR are of top quality and are innovative.

Citing journal articles

The abbreviation for *Horizon* Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research is ***Horizon J. Hum. Soc. Sci. Res****.*

Publication policy

Horizon publishes original work and its policy prohibits an author from submitting the same manuscript for concurrent consideration by two or more publications, and is not under concurrent consideration elsewhere at the time of submitting it to Horizon. It prohibits as well publication of any manuscript that has already been published either in whole or substantial part elsewhere in any language. It also does not permit publication of manuscript that has been published **in full** in Proceedings.

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The author must ensure that when a manuscript is submitted to Horizon, the manuscript is an original work. The author should check the manuscript for any possible plagiarism using any software such as **TurnItIn**, **i-Thenticate** or any other similar program before submitting the manuscripts to the Horizon journal.

All submitted manuscripts must be in the Journal's acceptable **similarity index range**:

< 25%– PASS; **30-40%**– RESUBMIT MS; **> 40%**– REJECT.

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The Horizon Journals takes seriously the responsibility of all of its journal publications to reflect the highest in publication ethics. Thus all journals and journal editors abide by the Journal's codes of ethics. Refer to Horizon's **Code of Conduct** for full details at the Journal's web link https://horizon-jhssr.com/code-of-conduct.php

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In case of any queries, contact the Journal's Editorial office via email to info@horizon-jhssr.com

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Open access publishing proposes a relatively new model for scholarly journal publishing that provides immediate, worldwide, barrier-free access to the full-text of all published articles. Open access allows all interested readers to view, download, print, and redistribute any article without a subscription, enabling far greater distribution of an author's work than the traditional subscription-based publishing model. Many authors in a variety of fields have begun to realize the benefits that open access publishing can provide in terms of increasing the impact of their work world-wide.

Horizon JHSSR **does not impose** any submission fees, publication fees or page charges for those intending to publish their research in this journal. However, as JHSSR is an open access journal, in norms with all open access journals, the journal imposes an Article Processing Charge (APC). To publish in JHSSR, authors are currently required to pay an APC of **USD100 per article**. A waiver to this available for academics with a heavily subsidized fee of USD75 per accepted manuscript.

In addition, this journal offers discount on Article Processing Charges to authors based in any of the countries which were classified by the World Bank as Low-income economies or Lower-middle-income economies. All requests can be sent directly to the journal's Chief Executive Editor.

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However, in case of a print version, if it is necessary for the figures to be reproduced in color, a charge of USD50 per figure will apply.

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An ISSN is an 8-digit code used to identify periodicals such as journals of all kinds and on all media–*print and electronic*. All Horizon journals have an e-ISSN.

Horizon Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research: **e-ISSN 2682-9096**.

Lag time

A decision on acceptance or rejection of a manuscript is reached in 3 to 4 months (average 12 weeks). The elapsed time from submission to publication for the articles averages 4-5 months.

Authorship

Authors are not permitted to add or remove any names from the authorship provided at the time of initial submission without the consent of the Journal's Chief Executive Editor. Requests for changes to authorship must be directed to the journal's chief executive editor. Changes in authorship will only be permitted where valid reasons are provided and all authors are in agreement with the change. Post-publication changes to authorship will typically be made via a published correction and authors may be charged for this additional service.

One author will need to be identified as the corresponding author, with their email address normally displayed in the article. Authors' affiliations are the affiliations where the research was conducted. If any of the named co-authors moves affiliation during the peer-review process, the new affiliation can be given as a footnote. Please note that no changes to affiliation can be made after your paper is accepted.

Manuscript preparation

Refer to Horizon's **Instructions to Authors** at the back of this journal or visit
https://horizon-jhssr.com/manuscript-prepparation.php

A well-formatted manuscript follows all journal instruction. All elements of the manuscript are printed in English with 1-inch margins at top, bottom, and sides. Right margins are unjustified. Horizon journals accept manuscript submissions which uses any consistent text— Format-free Submission! This saves you time and ensures you can focus on your priority: the research.

However, citations/references must be formatted by you as per APA format.

Checklist for Manuscript Submission

- Cover letter
- Declaration form
- Referral form
- Manuscript structure

(Title, Author details and affiliation, Abstract, Keywords, etc. using the **IMRAD** style).

Each submission must fulfil the following criteria and documents listed below must be submitted along with the manuscript for intended publication.

1) Cover letter

Your cover letter should be complete and make a strong pitch. The cover letter should include all these details:

- Author(s): Full contact details (email, institutional address, telephone number, etc.) of all authors listed including who the corresponding author will be [full name(s) written as First Name then Last Name]. Understand the differences between lead author and co-author(s). Lead-author: who has done most of the research and writing; Co-author: Has collaborated with the lead author and contributed some parts.
- A brief explanation of your article's relevance and impact.
- Disclosure of whether you have published this study previously elsewhere or if it is in consideration by another journal.
- Disclosure of any commercial or financial relationship that may be viewed as any potential conflict of interest.
- A brief statement explaining why the journal should publish your study.

(Refer to sample available at https://horizon-jhssr.com/download.php).

2) Declaration form

Do not forget to complete the declaration form and submit it along with your manuscript. Sign the declaration that your manuscript is original, you have NOT published this study previously elsewhere in any language and is not under concurrent consideration elsewhere at the time of submitting it to Horizon.

3) Referral form

The authors are strongly recommended to complete the "Reviewers Suggestion" form along with the manuscript during submission. Authors should suggest up to 3 names of potential reviewers experts in the subject area of the manuscript, and are not the co-authors listed in the manuscript submitted. The suggested reviewers may be from any part of the world. The journal is not, however, bound by these suggestions.

4) Language and flow

A well-written manuscript has greater chances of acceptance. Some tips:

- Avoid long, complicated sentences; keep it simple. Your sentences should be understandable.
- Your ideas should flow smoothly.
- Use correct terminology, avoid excessive jargon and grandiose language.
- Make sure there are no grammatical mistakes.
- It is highly recommended to approach an editing service for help with polishing your manuscript. The journal has a long-term proven affiliation with a good certified editor at Beyond Proofreading Services PLC.

You may contact Dr. Brown at Beyond Proofreading, beyondproofreading@gmail.com at your own discretion.

Language Accuracy

JHSSR **emphasizes** on the linguistic accuracy of every manuscript published. Articles must be in **English** and they must be competently written and argued in clear and concise grammatical English. Contributors are strongly advised to have the manuscript checked by a colleague with ample experience in writing English manuscripts or a competent English language editor.

Author(s) **should provide a certificate** confirming that their manuscripts have been adequately edited. A proof from a certified editing service should be submitted together with the cover letter at the time of submitting a manuscript to Horizon**.**

All editing costs must be borne by the author(s). This step, taken by authors before submission, will greatly facilitate reviewing, and thus publication if the content is acceptable.

Refer to JHSSR's **Manuscript Format guide** at https://horizon-jhssr.com/online-submission.php

Editorial process

Authors are notified with an acknowledgement containing a *Manuscript ID* upon receipt of a manuscript, and upon the editorial decision regarding publication.

JHSSR follows a **double-blind peer-review** process. Authors are encouraged to suggest names of at least three potential reviewers at the time of submission of their manuscript to Horizon using the **Referral form**. The editors are not, however, bound by these suggestions.

The Journal's peer-review

In the peer-review process, three referees independently evaluate the scientific quality of the submitted manuscripts.

Peer reviewers are experts chosen by journal editors to provide written assessment of the **strengths** and **weaknesses** of written research, with the aim of improving the reporting of research and identifying the most appropriate and highest quality material for the journal.

The Review process

What happens to a manuscript once it is submitted to *Horizon*? Typically, there are seven steps to the editorial review process:

1. The Journal's chief executive editor and the editorial board examine the paper to determine whether it is appropriate for the journal and should be reviewed. If not appropriate, the manuscript is rejected outright and the author is informed. Linguistically hopeless manuscripts will be rejected straightaway (e.g., when the language is so poor that one cannot be sure of what the authors really mean).

2. The chief executive editor sends the article-identifying information having been removed, to three reviewers. Typically, one of these is from the Journal's editorial board. Others are external specialists in the subject matter represented by the article. The chief executive editor requests them to complete the review in three weeks.

   Comments to authors are about the appropriateness and adequacy of the theoretical or conceptual framework, literature review, method, results and discussion, and conclusions. Reviewers often include suggestions for strengthening of the manuscript. Comments to the editor are in the nature of the significance of the work and its potential contribution to the literature.

3. The chief executive editor, in consultation with the Editor-in-Chief, examines the reviews and decides whether to reject the manuscript, invite the author(s) to revise and resubmit the manuscript, or seek additional reviews. Final acceptance or rejection rests with the Editor-in-Chief, who reserves the right to refuse any material for publication. In rare instances, the manuscript is accepted with almost no revision. Almost without exception, reviewers' comments (to the author) are forwarded to the author. If a revision is indicated, the editor provides guidelines for attending to the reviewers' suggestions and perhaps additional advice about revising the manuscript.

4. The authors decide whether and how to address the reviewers' comments and criticisms and the editor's concerns. The authors return a revised version of the paper to the chief executive editor along with specific information describing how they have answered' the concerns of the reviewers and the editor, usually in a tabular form. The author(s) may also submit a rebuttal if there is a need especially when the author disagrees with certain comments provided by reviewer(s).

5. The chief executive editor sends the revised paper out for re-review. Typically, at least one of the original reviewers will be asked to examine the article.

6. When the reviewers have completed their work, the chief executive editor in consultation with the editorial board and the Editor-in-Chief examine their comments and decide whether the paper is ready to be published, needs another round of revisions, or should be rejected.

7. If the decision is to accept, an acceptance letter is sent to all the author(s), the paper is sent to the Press. The article should appear in print in approximately three months.

The Publisher ensures that the paper adheres to the correct style (in-text citations, the reference list, and tables are typical areas of concern, clarity, and grammar). The authors are asked to respond to any minor queries by the Publisher. Following these corrections, page proofs are mailed to the corresponding authors for their final approval. At this point, **only essential changes are accepted**. Finally, the article appears in the pages of the Journal and is posted on-line.

SUBMISSION OF MANUSCRIPTS

Owing to the volume of manuscripts we receive, we must insist that all submissions be made electronically using the **online submission system™**, a web-based portal. For more information, go to our web page and click "**Online Submission**".

Please do **not** submit manuscripts to the Editor-in-Chief or to any other office directly. All submissions or queries must be directed to the **Chief Executive Editor** via email to CEE.horizon@gmail.com

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ABSTRACTING/INDEXING

As is the case with any new journal, indexing in all prestigious relevant databases takes some time. Horizon inspires to be a member of: Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

The journal has been indexed and abstracted in EBSCO, DOAJ, Google Scholar, ISC, Rubriq, National Library of Malaysia and MyAIS.

Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research
Vol. 4 (S) Oct. 2022

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FOREWORD

Pandemic Induced Neo Business Practices: Evidences from South Asia

We would like to welcome you to *Horizon Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research's* **special issue of 2022**. JHSSR is a peer-reviewed open-access and broad-scope journal that aims at bringing innovative research to both academics and practicing professionals. It is published rapidly by BP Services. The journal is independently owned, and runs on a ***not-for-profit*** basis for the benefit of the world-wide social science community

A shift has taken place over the last year that is challenging businesses to take a different approach to every aspect of their enterprise.

The pandemic has radically altered how businesses now approach their digital transformation pathways. Indeed, research reveals that the pandemic has permanently accelerated the digital transformation the way businesses now perform.

The new reality

Business transformation is now about collaboration, wellbeing, education and a new way to use the digital tools that have emerged from the pandemic.

A new technology agenda is coming into focus. New ecosystems are rapidly developing that place the customer at the hub where all other products and services orbit. And businesses are pivoting at speed to become new enterprises that are more crisis resilient and use technologies in new ways. "Technology first" became an entrenched mantra.

Business leaders can see they need a new agile culture with unique methods and practices to meet the demands of this brave new world.

It is often said that the change is the only constant in today's changing world. We have seen the gradual process of changes and adaption to changes, as part of both evolution and revolution. But during the COVID-19 phase, the very process and the need for 'change' was totally unprecedented. While every family, every business and every economy had faced enormous, unfathomable difficulties during COVID pandemic, still we moved on, and we managed to change and do the routine things differently, changing the very 'process'. We called it the 'new-normal' way of functioning. The new economic order changed both globally as well as locally. Many businesses disappeared, many of course survived, but quite a few took the crisis into opportunity and could make significant gains, against all odds. Many researchers have tried to gauge, analyse and decipher the immediate effects and long-term after effects of this unique crisis of the millennium. Research is still on to find the learnings, through evidences from different sectors.

In this context, JHSSR has also attempted to bring out a special issue on a burning theme of academic importance, Pandemic Induced Neo Business Practices: Evidences from South Asia.

We are so happy present 10 interesting articles; of which there are 8 research articles, one concept and a case-study, written by subject experts from allied diverse fields. Selection process for this special issue has

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been done subjectively, by invitation to senior scholars and professors, those who were studying pandemic-induced economic issues and affected sectors.

Out of the nine articles, covering pandemic-induced socio-economic issues and challenges, the one by Mahapatro and Subudhi, studies 'Digital Consumption Pattern and Social Impact', particularly during COVID period. Article by Prof. Braja B Kar and Prof. Piyusha highlights how 'website design optimization' was a necessity for effective e-commerce, during pandemic lockdown. Omar Faruq from Bangladesh, with Subudhi, studied the SMEs and their export performance. Article by Saumedra and Venugopal is an interesting study on 'social media habits of rural consumers. Venugopal has also studied the impact of unorganized selling.

A clinical psychologist from UK, Prof. N Kar (who hails from India), along with Prof. Brajaballav has studied a unique issue of 'Worry and Information seeking' by pandemic affected individuals and also the society.

A senior economist and former bureaucrat, Government of India, Prof. Misra, in his article, 'Income Inequality India', critically analyses the various challenges and prospects, relating to the Indian economy.

During the pandemic lockdowns, as net-based activities grew, so was the demand for smart-phones and internet consumption. Naveen, Aiswarya and Smruti, in their article, studied the issues of smartphone retail market during the pandemic.

In the next article, we are happy to present the issues faced by regional print media, during pandemic, as a 'case-study' of 'Anupam-Bharat-Media' by Professor Ratnakar Mishra, a senior faculty from a leading B-School of Bangalore, India.

As the last article, this paper is significant as it examines the concept of due diligence from a human rights perspective which is different from the commonly practiced corporate due diligence. This paper should be of interest to readers in the areas of human rights in the business context, especially in the area of the digital economy and employment law.

We believe this special issue would be intriguing, thought-provoking and useful in reaching new milestones. We would be grateful if you recommend the journal to your peers and students to make this endeavor more meaningful.

All the papers published in this edition underwent the journal's **double-blind peer-review process involving a minimum of two reviewers comprising internal as well as external referees**. This was to ensure that the quality of the papers justified the high ranking of the journal, which hopes to be one at par with one of the renowned and heavily-cited journals not only by authors and researchers in Malaysia and America but by those in other countries around the world as well.

While we hope this issue will have particular appeal to new readers across this region and beyond, I am confident that the articles published will raise interest among our regular readership of scholars and postgraduate students elsewhere, thanks to the relevance and diversity of contributions on a region whose future bears central importance to us all.

We would also like to express gratitude to all the contributing authors for their trust, patience, and timely revisions, who have made this issue possible, as well as the reviewers and editors for their professional contribution. Last but not least, the assistance of the journal's editorial office in Texas, particularly Jessica Whitsitt, Lucy Fernandez, and Judy Meester—staff of JHSSR Editorial Office, is greatly appreciated.

If you are observing other scholarly publishing trends, please do share your thoughts with the Chief Executive Editor! As always, I welcome your feedback and questions at info.jhssr@gmail.com

Thank you for reading JHSSR.

Editors *(Special Issue)*
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About the editors

Dr. Rabi Narayan Subudhi is a Senior Professor and Research Chair, at the School of Management, KIIT University Bhubaneswar, Odisha – India. He is also presently the Chief Editor of peer reviewed, indexed journal, Parikalpana (UGC-CARE listed Management Research journal). Prof. Subudhi was formerly, Professor of Management at VIT University Vellore (Tamil Nadu). He is the former President, Operational Research Society of India (Odisha-Bhubaneswar Chapter) Bhubaneswar.

He has authored many scholarly articles and books. Other than one hundred scholarly research papers, he has also written over 200 popular articles in his regional language, Odia, mostly for the children.

Rabi Narayan Subudhi, Senior Professor
GUEST EDITOR, JHSSR Special Issue, INDIA

https://ssrn.com/author=2292264

Dr. Nayan Kanwal is an experienced senior Executive Editor, Editor-in-Chief, Author, Reviewer and a Professor, with a demonstrated history of working in the publishing industry. Skilled in Academic Publishing, Publications, and Creative Writing.

He has written on a wide range of subjects beyond his area of study, agriculture. He has published numerous articles as well as book chapters in different publications during his long academic and professional career. He has also authored and co-authored several research and development books. The subjects he has written on range from management and administration of research to information technology and Language study.

Nayan Deep S. Kanwal, FRSA, ABIM, AMIS, Ph.D.
CHIEF EXECUTIVE EDITOR, JHSSR, Malaysia/ USA

Prof. Kanwal is described as a man with conviction and commitment, responsible for education of countless postgraduate students from all over the world. He is brilliant and intelligent communicator who has devoted himself for the promotion of academic publications not only for Malaysia, but also for the developing world and for the entire humanity.

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Due Diligence for the Protection of Platform Workers in Malaysia: A Human Rights Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Platform work and platform workers are transforming the present employment landscape in most countries, including Malaysia. A platform-based economy provides various career opportunities with flexible working hours, autonomy and control and the potential for a high income. Despite the economic benefits of the platform-based economy, there are rising concerns about workers' precarious working circumstances and a lack of regulation to protect their human rights. In the platform-based economy, business risks are often passed to platform workers with weak legal human rights safeguards. This study employed a qualitative methodology based on document analysis, a systematic procedure for analysing or assessing printed and electronic documents to elicit meaning, acquire comprehension and produce empirical knowledge. This conceptual article aims to investigate the notion of due diligence as an essential component of corporate responsibility in the business and human rights (BHR) framework. Furthermore, this article examined the concept and application of human rights due diligence in a platform-based economy to protect platform workers' rights. This research discovers that there is a need for corporations of all sizes and sectors to understand the notion of corporate responsibility to respect human rights, and show commitments to incorporating human rights due diligence within their corporate governance, regardless of the method used to conduct business.

Keywords: due diligence, human rights in business, corporate responsibility, platform workers, platform-based economy

Introduction

The platform-based economy is a term used to describe an intermediate decentralised exchange of products and services through digital platforms, where digital technologies are used to externalise most production activities to allow individuals to interact and where transactions are secured and controlled remotely (Acquier et al., 2017; Mäntymäki et al., 2019; Vallas & Schor, 2020). The platform-based economy may also be associated with other terms such as the sharing economy, gig economy or on-demand economy (Kaushal, 2018), though each of these terms may imply different definitions and characteristics. The platform-based economy, especially in the service sector, provides various opportunities with flexible working hours, autonomy and control and the potential for a high income (Ang, 2017; Kaushal, 2018). This economic paradigm has resulted in the emergence of a new type of worker known as the platform worker. Platform workers, often called gig workers, are individuals whose jobs are organised and facilitated by digital platforms (Pesole et al., 2018; Urzì Brancati et al., 2020). The Department of Statistics Malaysia (2020) uses the phrase 'gig worker' to describe those who work independently, in isolation, over geographically vast territories and in direct competition with one another, frequently categorised as independent contractors. Gig employment is often temporary or task-based, with a significant presence on online labour platforms.

Platform work and platform workers are currently transforming the employment landscape in most countries, including Malaysia. The platform work represents alternative and less structured work arrangements, particularly focusing on non-employees working only to complete a specific task for a specific time and payment, without further connection with their employer once the contract ends (Harun et al., 2020). The platform workers are, thus, considered self-employed as they have flexibility in their working hours, can perform work without jeopardizing existing commitments, and have a high possibility of earning good extra income (Berg, 2016; De Stefano, 2016; Domenech, 2018; Hall & Krueger, 2018). Despite the economic benefits of the platform-based economy, there are growing concerns about workers' precarious working circumstances and a lack of regulation to protect their human rights, such as employment security, earnings, working hours, occupational safety and health, social security and other fundamental rights at work (ILO, 2016). Several human rights issues were reportedly unaddressed in the platform-based economy, such as the issue of discrimination, inequality and lack of social protection and security for platform workers (Erickson & Sørensen, 2016; Makela et al., 2018), considered fundamental to the enjoyment of any other rights essential to assuring the dignity of person (Minkler & Sweeney, 2011).

Due to the lack of regulation to safeguard platform workers' human rights, the research is being conducted on the protection of platform workers' rights from the platform companies' corporate responsibility to respect human rights. The notion of corporate responsibility to respect human rights is founded on the principle of horizontal effect of human rights, which states that fundamental human rights are enforceable by individuals against government agencies and private individuals, such as business entities (Drzemczewski, 1979; Jagers, 2005). Based on this theory, it is internationally acknowledged that business entities, such as corporations and companies, have a responsibility to respect human rights, such as contained in various international soft law instruments on business and human rights, notably in the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights 2011.

The concept of corporate responsibility, as articulated in the Guiding Principles, is a core component of business and human rights and entails a demand for business enterprises to respect human rights by preventing human rights violations and, if necessary, addressing any violations of human rights by providing effective remedies (Guiding Principle 11). In the 2010 Report, Prof. John Ruggie suggested that responsibility is defined by the actual and potential human rights generated by a company's business activities and its relationships with other parties (John G Ruggie, 2010). Further, he advocates that the term responsibility to respect, rather than a duty to protect, is meant to specify that respecting rights is not an obligation that current international human rights law generally imposes directly on companies but a standard of expected conduct recognised in the voluntary and soft law instruments related to corporate responsibility. Accordingly, the Guiding Principles require corporate actors to incorporate due diligence mechanisms in addressing human rights impacts in business, in addition to the State's duty to ensure business enterprises avoid themselves from committing human rights violations (Guiding Principle 17). As companies and business enterprises currently do not have a legal obligation under international law and they are considered a non-state actor, the responsibility to ensure that companies and business enterprises do not violate any human rights principles falls on the State by developing regulation or standards to be complied by business enterprises. Commentary to Principle 1 of the Guiding Principles states that States may breach their international human rights obligations if they fail to take appropriate steps to prevent, investigate, punish and redress private actors' abuse.

Therefore, this conceptual paper aims to examine the concept of due diligence as a fundamental component of corporate responsibility for protecting workers' rights. Ebert et al. (2020) proposed that human rights due diligence could be evaluated in the platform-based economy, but it must be precise and provide industry-specific guidelines rather than vague and general assertions. Prior research has not adequately addressed human rights due diligence application in the platform-based companies as part of their corporate governance. For example, Jessica et al. (2020) and Jobin et al. (2019) suggest due diligence from the perspective of artificial intelligence (AI) and find solutions on how AI could be used to design the mechanism, monitor and evaluate the mechanism, impact assessment and provide remedy through an automated decision. Cumming et al. (2019), on the other hand, analysed the role of due diligence in crowdfunding platforms and discovered that crowdfunding platforms have a considerable amount of flexibility of the extent to which due diligence is conducted in order to gain an economic benefit, improve platform performance and mitigate information asymmetries between the entrepreneur and the crowd. According to Aucouturier (2017), business respect for human rights, which includes human rights due diligence, must be achieved through compliance by incorporating it into the company's risk management system. He believes that promoting human rights through corporate social responsibility (CSR) is insufficient to ensure compliance with the Guiding Principles.

Therefore, this article investigates the concept and application of human rights due diligence as one of the mechanisms to be incorporated into a company's corporate governance to protect the platform workers' rights. The purpose of this paper is to impose corporate responsibility to respect human rights onto the platform companies, which then depart from the long-standing legal doctrine that shields platform companies from liability for human rights violations as network intermediaries and market facilitators (Ananny & Gillespie, 2016; Ebert et al., 2020; Jørgensen, 2019; Perren & Grauerholz, 2015; van Dijck & Poell, 2013).

Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative method using document analysis, a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating printed and electronic documents to elicit meaning, gain understanding and develop empirical knowledge (Bowen, 2009). In this paper, the researcher seeks to find meanings of the concept of human rights due diligence in the context of a platform-based economy. Documentary data in books, newspaper articles, academic journal articles and institutional reports were reviewed and analysed (Busetto et al., 2020; Morgan, 2022). This research analysed the texts of the Guiding Principles on Business on Human Rights, the 2018 United Nations Human Rights Special Procedures Summary Report, the OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Business Conduct 2018 and Guidelines on Submission of Corporate and Capital Market Product Proposals 2020. The documentary data provided rich data in the context of the research area as they provided background information and historical insights, contained questions that need to be observed and addressed and provided valuable additions to a knowledge base as a means to track changes and development and verify findings or corroborate evidence from other sources (Bowen, 2009).

Literature Review

Platform Workers and Platform-Based Company; the Complicated Relationship

The platform-based economy is an innovative economy model that emerges due to the rapid development of digitalisation. This economy model has shifted the traditional 'brick-and-mortar' business to a digital platform where all transactions are done online. The platform-based economy can be associated with other terms such as the sharing economy, collaborative consumption, peer-to-peer economy, access-based consumption, on-demand economy and gig economy, though each may have a different character and nature from one another (Botsman & Rogers, 2010; Hamari et al., 2016; Schor & Attwood-Charles, 2017). For example, the sharing economy traditionally refers to the sharing of personal assets that are idle and underutilised, such as the sharing of empty car spaces, personal belongings and vacant spaces in houses (Belk, 2007; Ranjbari et al., 2018). The on-demand economy refers to the idea that allows a transaction of goods and services via an internet platform, and the delivery of those goods and services is by virtual crowd or platform workers (Agote & Pereira, 2017). The gig economy, on the other hand, represents contingent work arrangements facilitated through on-demand digital platforms and markets (Tran & Sokas, 2017). Further, the gig economy refers to flexible short-term tasks where workers are not linked to any definite employment relationship, and payments are made after the task is delivered or performed (Friedman, 2014). The gig economy is predominately based on on-demand work, where workers are hired to perform a specific 'gig' to complete a specific task or project on a short-term contract (Bieber & Moggia, 2020; Prassl, 2018).

The economic benefits of the platform-based economy are significant to a country's sustainable development by reducing environmental risks and promoting human welfare (Kaushal, 2018). The use of technology benefits consumers by lowering costs, increasing options and making it easier to use. Moreover, this efficient and innovative way of utilising resources and conducting business creates new job opportunities, particularly in the product-service sector, known as platform work. Platform work can be classified into two types, (a) cloud work (or crowd work); a web-based digital platform that offers freelance marketplaces where performance is done via the internet, and (b) gig work, location-based digital labour where the work requires physical performances (Berg et al., 2019; Schmidt, 2017). The crowd work represents macro-tasks, high-skilled tasks, such as graphic designers, computer programmers, translators or other professional services and micro-tasks, which represent lower skilled work, such as clerical tasks and copywriting, writing reviews and filling surveys. On the other hand, gig work is mostly low-skilled tasks such as providing services in the accommodation sector, transportation and delivery and personal or household services. The working arrangement has clear benefits in terms of flexibility since workers can choose when and where they work without jeopardising their existing commitments or other constraints (Domenech, 2018). The flexible nature of jobs in a platform-based economy also allows companies to save physical resources and maintain a cost balance that would have, in a traditional setting, including the cost of renting office spaces and hiring staff, while providing workers with task autonomy and control over the tasks they choose to complete (Wu & Li, 2019; Yaraghi & Ravi, 2017). As such, platform work is perceived a part-time work and does not entail real work because it allows workers to retain full-time jobs and, at the same time, secure some extra money (Berg, 2016; De Stefano, 2016; Hall & Krueger, 2016).

The classic employer and employee relationship between the parties in a platform-based economy are not transparent. Platforms assert that they do not employ workers but merely become a network or intermediary that matches the supply (business owners) by offering goods or services with the demand (consumers) and the workers who undertake to perform the task specified by the platform, the time and place of the service and the payment that they will receive (Chen et al., 2020; Juntunen, 2017; Ravenelle, 2017). Notwithstanding, there are circumstances when platforms act as employers rather than a network or intermediary because it controls the workers how to do the work, payment scheme and termination; but using the invisible cloak that is the platform (Aloisi, 2016; De Stefano, 2016). According to Aloisi (2016), virtual platforms are an 'invisible infrastructure', connecting supply and demand of services and facilitating interaction between individuals and platform companies, though, in reality, they are employers who efficiently exploit workers and expropriate work through the platform at the expense of workers' security and protection. The situation is recognised by some workers who take advantage of the flexibility and autonomy that a platform-based economy offers without realising that they trade flexibility with benefits and security (Hall & Krueger, 2018). The misclassification of platform workers as independent contractors is a way for platform companies to lower overhead costs and maximise profit at the expense of workers' wages and labour rights.

In many jurisdictions, platform workers are considered self-employed or independent contractors because the work is generally outsourced or contracted out by a digital platform to a pool of virtual workers; the work arrangement is facilitated by digital platforms and the flexibility and autonomous characteristics of the platform work (Eurofound, 2015, 2018a; Ravenelle, 2017). The Malaysia Employment Act 1955 for example, specifies that an employee is a person who has entered into a contract of service with the employer (section 2). To differentiate 'a contract of service' and a 'contract for service', the court, in the case of *Goi Ah Soong v Kumpulan Wang Simpanan Pekerja & Anor* [2013] 7 MLJ 777, states that a contract of service refers to an undertaking by a person to serve another and obey his reasonable orders within the scope and the duty of the undertaking, while a contract for service refers to a contract to provide work or service to the other, not as a servant but as an independent contractor. Platform workers generally undertake to provide work or service to the platforms, which equate to being an independent contractor instead of an employee, despite having some form of dependency on the platforms in terms of work and payment scheme and is subjected to evaluation mechanism. Nevertheless, the Employment Act 1955 was recently amended to include a provision of presumption of employment, in which it may classify platform workers as employees if they satisfy the requirements under the provision (section 101c Employment (Amendment) Act 2022). However, this provision lacked clarity in its application and is debatable among practitioners, especially for its relevancy to platform workers as it would transform the whole concept of platform work and platform workers (Venugopal & Jalaldin, 2022; Wong et al., 2022).

Generally, working in a platform-based economy does not mean that platform workers earn less than regular employees, but the business risks are shifted to them due to the categorisation of an independent contractor, with a lack of regulatory protection on their human rights, such as on their working conditions, workplace safety and health, security and insurance and the need for collective bargaining rights (Bieber & Moggia, 2020; Erickson & Sorensen, 2016; Eurofound, 2018b; Garben, 2019; Hauben et al., 2020; ILO, 2016). The shift from corporate to private responsibilities has implications for the protection of the fundamental human rights of workers. For example, the rights to security of employment and health insurance protection are avoided by platform companies simply because workers do not fit into the category of employee. For instance, the Malaysia Self-Employment Social Security Act 2017 (Act 789) requires every self-employed person to register and make a contribution for every self-employment activity that he or she is carrying out. The First Schedule of the Act refers to the self-employed person as, inter alia, (a) the service of carriage of passengers using a public service vehicle or motor vehicle owned, managed, maintained or operated by that person, (b) the service of carriage and delivery of goods or foods by any person using any vehicle owned, managed, maintained or operated by that person and (c) the supply of goods or services through a website or in an online marketplace. This requirement suggests that platform workers are independently responsible for their social security in terms of unemployment, accident, sickness or disability. Moreover, hazardous physical work environment, traffic safety risks and workplace harassment, especially in the location-based gig work, are raising human rights issues in a platform-based economy that jeopardises the rights to safe and healthy working conditions of these workers (Ropponen et al., 2020). Therefore, it is essential to recognise that the basic needs and rights of workers have not changed over time, as there are no distinct differences between enterprises in a traditional economy and a platform-based economy in respect of market conduct, except the way a contract is concluded (Dittmann & Kuchinke, 2016).

Unlike traditional companies which are subjected to multiple laws and regulations, the platform-based economy benefits from the ambiguity and lacuna of law since existing law, especially on workers' rights, may not be applicable (Fajar, 2020; Yaraghi & Ravi, 2017). The lack of regulation, particularly for the protection of human rights of platform workers, is concerning because of the increasing number of human rights impacts on them, such as lack of social security protection, irregular payment schemes and lack of negotiating power.

As such, the question of relevancy to imposing human rights due diligence onto the platform companies is necessary in view of the lack of legislative framework on platform companies' responsibility and accountability for human rights violations. The human rights due diligence, as stated in the Guiding Principles, requires human rights risks to be evaluated through human rights lens and not as part of other incorporated due diligence, such as with mergers and acquisitions, contractual discussion or investment decisions which are apparent in the corporate due diligence (McCorquodale et al., 2017; Natour, 2016). Accordingly, the human rights due diligence mechanism could provide a useful structure that platform companies require to adhere to human rights standards by taking comprehensive and proactive human rights due diligence approach (Natour, 2016; Natour & Pluess, 2013).

Analysis and Findings

Due Diligence in the Guiding Principles

Many authors find it rather difficult to define due diligence. This is because understanding the concept and application of due diligence may be different from various perspectives, such as from the perspective of business actors and human rights scholars. According to the Black's Law Dictionary, due diligence means 'the diligence reasonably expected from and ordinarily exercised by a person who seeks to satisfy a legal requirement or discharge an obligation' (Black, 1968). In the business context, due diligence is normally referred to a process of an investigation conducted by a business to identify and manage commercial risks, while human rights scholars approach due diligence as a standard of conduct or a yardstick set up for business actors to prevent them from committing any human rights violations (Bonnitcha & Mccorquodale, 2017; Kulesza, 2016; Martin-ortega, 2013). Moreover, due diligence in corporate governance is grounded in risk management that the business enterprises choose to address, but human rights due diligence imply evaluation of human rights risk to its stakeholders, such as its workers and community, which cannot be derogated by companies (Mares, 2018). In international human rights law, the doctrine of due diligence emerges to complement the positive obligations of a State to exercise management and control the activities of various actors carried out in its territory (Xue, 2009).

To address whether human rights due diligence in the Guiding Principles relate to due diligence as a standard of conduct or as risks management in corporate governance (Bonnitcha & Mccorquodale, 2017), Prof. John Ruggie responded that due diligence is used 'in its broader sense: a comprehensive, proactive attempt to uncover human rights risks, actual and potential, over the entire life cycle of a project or business activity, with the aim of avoiding and mitigating those risks, as explained in the Commentary to Guiding Principle 11 (John Gerard Ruggie & Sherman, 2017). He further states that if the company fails to conduct due diligence, it can neither know nor show that they respect human rights, nor can they credibly claim that they do (Natour, 2016; John Gerard Ruggie & Sherman, 2017). As such, human rights due diligence in the Guiding Principles reflects two core ideas, that is, (a) due diligence as the standard of conduct and (b) due diligence as a process to ensure the standard of conduct is adhered to and a mechanism for corporate governance.

Due diligence as a standard of conduct can be traced from Roman Law with the maxim a *diligens paterfamilias*, which refers to a situation where a person is to be liable for the accidental harm caused to others if the harm resulted from the person's failure to meet the standard of conduct expected of a *diligens paterfamilias* (prudent head of a household) (Bonnitcha & Mccorquodale, 2017). It is an objective standard that allows the conduct of a party to be assessed against an external standard of expected conduct rather than in light of the party's intentions and motivations. This doctrine has been influenced by the development of the tort of negligence or principle of fault in many domestic legal systems where a party's negligent conduct is determined by way of a standard of expected conduct (Cassel, 2016; van Dam, 2011).

The term 'standard' refers to a widely recognised benchmark for determining a state of conduct or behaviour used to interpret the parameters of binding obligations (Barnidge, 2012; Samuel, 2018). The doctrine of due diligence in international law defines and restricts the responsibility of a State concerning the conduct of third parties within its territory or jurisdiction. In the UN Human Rights Committee (HRC), General comment no. 31 (80), paragraph 8 states that,

> 'the positive obligations on States Parties to ensure Covenant rights will only be fully discharged if individuals are protected by the State, not just against violations of Covenant rights by its agents, but also against acts committed by private persons or entities that would impair the enjoyment of Covenant rights in so far as they are amenable to application between private persons or entities. There may be circumstances in which a failure to ensure Covenant rights as required by article 2 would give rise to violations by States Parties of those rights, as a result of States Parties' permitting or failing to take appropriate measures or to exercise due diligence to prevent, punish, investigate or redress the harm caused by such acts by private persons or entities'(UN Human Rights Committee, n.d.).

Suggestively, due diligence is similar to the 'no-harm' principle in the international customary law that recognises the obligation of the State that not knowingly allow state-owned entities or private activities to act contrary to the rights of the people in the territory (Koivurova, 2013). Though States are not generally responsible for the conduct of non-state actors, they are still under the positive obligation to establish an appropriate regulatory framework to ensure that private actors do not inflict harm or injury to others within the territory (Guiding Principle 1). Commentary to General Principle 1, for example, states that a State must protect human rights by establishing a 'full range of permissible preventative and remedial measures, including policies, legislations, regulations and adjudication and ensure that private actors adhere to these laws, though its duty exists independently from the business actors' responsibility to respect human rights (Commentary to Guiding Principle 11).

The notion of corporate responsibility to respect human rights, for which human rights due diligence is established, is global standard of expected conduct for all business enterprises wherever they operate (Commentary to Guiding Principle 11). Principle 11 states that business enterprises should avoid infringing on the human rights of others and address adverse human rights impacts with which they are involved; addressing adverse human rights impacts requires taking adequate measures for their prevention, mitigation and, where appropriate, remediation (Guiding Principle 17). Thus, human rights due diligence applies as a standard of conduct in the context of a negative obligation to prevent foreseeable injury or harm (Buhmann et al., 2018; van Dam, 2011). According to Koivurova (2013) and Xue (2009), human rights due diligence is an obligation of conduct as a means and not an obligation of result. Human rights due diligence also entails due diligence as a process of ensuring the standard of conduct is adhered to or as a mechanism for corporate governance. Principle 17 states the responsibility of business enterprises to carry out human rights' due diligence by way of 'assessing actual and potential human rights impacts, integrating and acting upon the findings, tracking responses and communicating how impacts are addressed'. Further, Principle 17 elaborates human rights due diligence as: (a) 'should cover adverse human rights impacts that the business enterprise may cause or contribute to through its activities or which may be directly linked to its operations, products or services by its business relationships', (b) the process of due diligence could vary in their complexity, depending on the size of the enterprise, the risk of serious human rights violations and the nature and context of the activity and (c) due diligence can be implemented long-term or regularly because human rights risks can change over time. Principle 18 further expands the application of due diligence, which provides that business enterprises should identify and access any actual or potential adverse human rights impact involved in business operations by engaging with the internal or external human rights expertise. This process intends to prevent and mitigate adverse human rights impacts by integrating findings from the impact assessment and taking appropriate action (Principle 19), tracking the effectiveness of the response (Principle 20), communicating the human rights concerns to affected stakeholders and reporting formally on how the business enterprise address them (Principle 21).

In addition to the Guiding Principles, the United Nations Human Rights Special Procedures in its 2018 Summary Report uses the phrase 'corporate human rights due diligence' to represent a process by which business enterprises take proactive measures to manage potential and actual adverse human rights impacts on who are involved (United Nations Human Rights Special Procedures, 2018b). Furthermore, the Companion Note II provides several steps in which corporate human rights due diligence may be taken into action by recognising and evaluating the risk of human rights in which the business may be involved, as well as assessing human rights impact and developing a grievance mechanism to address the adverse effects (United Nations Human Rights Special Procedures, 2018a). The report acknowledges that corporate human rights due diligence has become a norm of expected conduct when incorporated in the OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Business Conduct, which provides guidelines for due diligence in practice (OECD, 2018). The OECD Guidelines refer to human rights risks as the likelihood of adverse human rights impact on people, environment and society that enterprises cause, contribute to or to which they are directly linked as compared to the management risk under the corporate governance aspect.

Generally, the concept and application of due diligence in the Guiding Principles emphasise on both corporate performance and a standard of conduct, obligations, enforceable rights or a liability standard that employs a certain standard of care required of business enterprises (Fasterling, 2017; Grabosch & Scheper, 2015; Tan, 2018). However, the human rights due diligence Guiding Principle approach might result in an overly process-oriented and risk-management approach that allows business enterprises to have too much flexibility and discretion, especially when legal obligations and complaint mechanisms are still significantly absent (Bonnitcha & Mccorquodale, 2017; Martin-Ortega, 2008). In particular, the legal uncertainty of the consequences of human rights violations caused by business enterprises, which the Guiding Principles avoid, has made businesses emphasis only the risks to businesses and not the risk to human rights (Fasterling, 2017; Grabosch & Scheper, 2015). Business enterprises need to understand and appreciate their legal and moral obligations, in particular, to respect human rights, which may contribute to the significant implications for a company's success and the overall corporate culture by enabling human rights to be mainstreamed within corporate thinking and decision-making (Graetz & Franks, 2013; Harrison, 2013).

Due Diligence Requirement in Malaysia

Several instruments on the requirements of due diligence established by the Security Commission of Malaysia ('SC') are applicable to mostly public listed companies. These instruments, however, do not specify human rights due diligence rather due diligence in the risk management process. For example, the SC introduces the Guidelines on Due Diligence Conduct for Corporate Proposals (effective from 1st February 2008) that sets out the obligations and standards expected of the due diligence working group (DDWG) to conduct reasonable inquiries of a particular company to ensure that information submitted to the regulators or the public is not false, misleading or contain any material omissions. The said guidelines are, however, replaced by the Guidelines on Submission of Corporate and Capital Market Product Proposals 2020 (effective 1st January 2021), which provides for SC's expectations in respect of the standards that must be observed by the parties involved in the preparation of proposals made to the SC and the obligations they must comply with. In the 2020 Guidelines, the SC requires the companies to demonstrate and maintain professional knowledge and skill at the level expected and to exercise due care and diligence in carrying out its functions, that is, in respect of the application for the listing and quotation of securities, registration of prospectus, transfer of listing and on the acquisition or disposal of assets (Securities Commission Malaysia, 2020). The 2020 Guidelines lack specification of human rights due diligence.

The Malaysia Companies Act 2016 also provides no legal requirement for companies to conduct a due diligence process. Nonetheless, section 213 of the Act requires the director of a company to act for a proper purpose and in good faith in the best interest of the company that the exercise of his power must be made with reasonable care, skill and diligence, known as the business judgment rule. Significantly, the business judgment rule is a defence mechanism to safeguard the director of a company against any liability from the adverse effect of the decision made by him (Yaacob & Yeon, 2020). The business judgment rule is, however, understood to be a due diligence process that involves a decision-making process of risk evaluation that could be injurious to the company and not on human rights *per se*.

Compared to other jurisdictions on human rights due diligence, section 172 (1) of the United Kingdom's Companies Act 2006 imposes a duty on a company's directors to act in good faith to promote the company's success and benefit of its members. In doing so, directors must consider the interests of the company's employees, the impact of the company's operations on the community and the environment and the company's desirability to maintain a reputation for high business standards of business conduct. Similarly, in France, the Duty of Vigilance Law in 2017 mandates large French companies to publish and implement a vigilance plan to identify and prevent human rights risks linked to their business activities.

The French Law requires that a company which employs at least 5000 employees within the company and its direct and indirect subsidiaries, whose head office is located on French territory, or that has at least 10,000 employees in its service and in its direct or indirect subsidiaries, whose head office is located on French territory or abroad, must establish and implement an effective vigilance plan that includes reasonable vigilance measures to allow for risk identification and the prevention of severe violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms, serious bodily injury, environmental damage or health risks resulting directly or indirectly from the operations of the company and the companies it controls (Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, 2016). On the same note, the European Commission recently released a draft regulation on human rights and environmental due diligence. It requires large EU companies and some non-European companies doing significant business in Europe to assess their actual and potential human rights and environmental impacts throughout their operations and down their supply chains and to take action to prevent, mitigate and remedy identified human rights and environmental harms (Flacks, 2022). Companies that fail to conduct effective due diligence or implement preventative or remediation measures face administrative penalties and civil liability**.**

Human Rights Due Diligence in the Platform-Based Economy

In essence, human rights due diligence in the Guiding Principles can serve as a useful framework for delineating the responsibilities of various actors in addressing human rights concerns, as well as determining how companies can effectively manage human rights risks, and their application can be extended into the digital sphere (Natour, 2016; Samway, 2016). Importantly, the United Nations Human Rights Special Procedures in 2021 notes that the capacity of business to respect human rights, as implied in the Guiding Principles, extends to all business activities, including the 'fast fashion' business model, where increasing human rights risks that lead to online and offline abuses are reported (United Nations Human Rights Special Procedures, 2021; United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2020). From the foundational and operational principles of corporate responsibility as highlighted in the Guiding Principles, the researcher opines that implementing corporate responsibility to respect human rights for platform companies is promising. Principle 14 of the Guiding Principles states,

> The responsibility of business enterprises to respect human rights applies to all enterprises regardless of their size, sector, operational context, ownership and structure. Nevertheless, the scale and complexity of the means through which enterprises meet that responsibility may vary according to these factors and with the severity of the enterprise's adverse human rights impacts.

The basic question in determining whether a certain business model is compatible with the corporate respect for human rights is 'how does the company's business model or the way it operates, link to impacts on people'? (United Nations Human Rights Special Procedures, 2021). It is undeniable that a platform-based economy is inextricably linked to people, and thus issues of human rights and legal risks such as workers' rights, consumer protection, safety and health are inevitable. Platform workers, particularly those participating in transportation and delivery services, have expressed concerns about their irregular payment scheme, working conditions and lack of social security guarantees (Abdul Jamal & Azaman, 2019; Bokányi & Hannák, 2020; David, 2020; Povera & Perimbanayagam, 2022). Though platform companies are generally protected by a long-standing legal doctrine that shields them from liability as network intermediaries and market facilitators (Ananny & Gillespie, 2016; Ebert et al., 2020; Jørgensen, 2019; Perren & Grauerholz, 2015; van Dijck & Poell, 2013), one can argue that platform companies are powerful entities as they wield enormous power over the diverse social and economic activities they facilitate.

Most notably, a platform-based economy could alter the employment relationship between platform companies and their workers, with the former viewing platform workers as part of the human cloud by disintegrating or diffracting tasks into smaller tasks that can be performed anywhere and everywhere as long as they have an internet connection. Consequently, the casualisation of labour in a platform-based economy excludes social security legislation and other human rights safeguards (Schor & Fitzmaurice, 2015). Considerable legal liability has been shifted to platform workers, such as requiring workers to have their insurance policy, no health and safety inspections or no inspection of participants' criminal records, all of which pose apparent human rights risks to workers (Erickson & Sørensen, 2016). Furthermore, because they rely on each other for profit, platform companies have a strong relationship with platform workers. Thus, it makes no sense for platform companies to hide behind 'technological black boxes' when fulfilling their human rights responsibilities (Ebert et al., 2020). For example, Faris Natour (2016), advocates that the essential aspect of corporate responsibility to respect human rights is that businesses know and show how they respect human rights. Currently, there is no regulatory measure to generate the applicability of corporate responsibility and human rights due diligence in a platform-based economy in Malaysia. The present instruments established by the SC have no application onto the platform companies, but if they do, they lack a definitional framework for human rights due diligence, as well as procedural aspects for conducting human rights due diligence. Therefore, this research emphasises the need for corporations of all sizes to understand and commit by demonstrating corporate responsibility to respect human rights by embedding human rights due diligence, regardless of how they conduct business.

In this context, the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM) plays a significant role in addressing concerns on human rights issues in Malaysia. In 2015, SUHAKAM developed and presented a Strategic Framework for a National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights for Malaysia to the Government 2015. The Framework based on the Guiding Principles provides a policy direction for the formulation of a National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights for Malaysia towards promoting greater respect for human rights the State and non-State actors, including businesses, civil societies and individuals, as well as groups affected by adverse business-related human rights impacts. SUHAKAM has urged the Malaysian government to expedite the development of Malaysia's National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights (NAPBHR), which will establish responsibility on the part of business entities to respect human rights and promote accountability of business practices. Though SUHAKAM required private companies to comply with national labour laws and international labour standards to ensure human rights compliance throughout their entire supply chain framework and to demonstrate that they can stand up to comply with international human rights and labour standards (SUHAKAM, 2022), this may be challenging for the innovative and technologically driven economy, such as the platform economy, in the absence of specific guidelines or standards.

Conclusion

It is widely recognised that human rights are independent and indivisible, hence should be respected by all actors, including business enterprises in a platform-based economy. Human rights issues such as discrimination, inequality and exploitation of platform workers become abundant as they are classified as independent contractors whose basic rights protection generally falls outside the scope of employment law. Accordingly, human rights due diligence, as entailed in the corporate responsibility framework, provides useful guidelines for business enterprises to act with due diligence to prevent adverse harm or infringe the rights of others, particularly the workers. The no-harm principle, which becomes the basis of due diligence, requires business enterprises to take a proactive approach to prevent adverse harm to the stakeholders by acting with reasonable care and diligence. Additionally, human rights due diligence could potentially help the platform economy in its sustainability and improve its risk and crisis management in the future (Raja Suzana et al., 2020).

In the platform-based economy, where a substantial regulatory gap exists, especially for protecting the platform workers' rights, a voluntary approach to human rights due diligence may not be sufficient and pose difficulties in its application and implementation. Furthermore, the problems of a voluntary approach or self-regulation are invariably on enforceability mechanism, absence of governmental supervision and non-compliance mechanism and consequences, and is proven to be inefficient to satisfy certain objectives, particularly on the protection of fundamental rights (Castro, 2011; Mensi-Klarbach et al., 2019; Simons, 2004). Therefore, without binding legislation, a business enterprise can choose whether or not to conduct human rights due diligence, and its compliance cannot be appropriately measured without specific standards (Fasterling, 2017). To address the issue, this paper proposes specific industry instrument that could represent a standard of conduct that may be developed and could vary in forms such as guidelines, codes of practice, performance standards and global framework agreements between relevant actors and resolutions. This instrument may provide the definitional context of human rights due diligence and how it can be implemented in the platform-based economy. However, these instruments are intended to encourage relevant actors (states and non-state actors) to improve good governance and self-compliance to the recognised legal norms, but they are not legally binding upon them (Samuel, 2018). Thus, future research may be conducted on developing a framework in which human rights due diligence becomes a standard of conduct establishing a code of conduct or a guideline to be adhered to by the platform companies. To achieve compliance, the code of conduct or guideline is established for a specific sector and must be monitored and enforced by appropriate governmental organisations.

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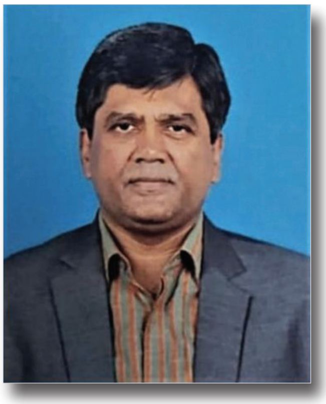

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Digital Consumption Pattern and its Impact on Society: A Study on Semi-Urban Society of Odisha, India

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ABSTRACT

The covid–19 outbreak has changed the social lifestyle of the people significantly. The way people work, they way behave and communicate in the society has changed a lot. All have become more used to online activities and online transactions, during the pandemic spell. The digital dependence and consumption have grown significantly, during last two years, in each country. Many studies, on digital consumption pattern of users located at major cities, confirm this. But there are less studies or literature on the status of internet use in rural areas. Has there been similar growth, or it has much more diversity in the hinterlands, in smaller townships?

Against this background, this paper aims to study the digital consumption pattern and socio-psychological impacts of internet users, during pandemic, in smaller cities, categorized as tier 3, 4, and 5 (or with population of less than 50,000). It studies the digital consumption pattern and diversity and socio-psychological impact, in the context of semi-urban areas of Odisha, in India.

People from the semi-urban areas, as the paper finds, have more or less similar purpose of use and pattern of use. However, they feel, as paper finds, that prevalence of adult content in internet disturbs social life.

Keywords: Digital diversity, digital consumption, digital society, socio-psychological impacts, digital dependence, Semi–urban areas.

Introduction

Earlier the meaning of the word 'literacy' was, 'the ability to understand, interpret, communicate, identify and compute'. But in accordance with time, the meaning of the term literacy got changed. When we talk about literacy, the first thing that comes into our mind is the concept of 'digital literacy'. In that context, discussion on digital divide carries more academic importance than literary or even economic divides. The policy makers have taken this more seriously particularly in the context of under developed and developing countries like India, during this covid–19 pandemic. During the lockdown and shutdowns, when the government and local bodies wanted to reach out electronically to helpless rural poor and migrants to help them with financial assistance, it was then felt that the individuals who really needed the financial assistance, are digitally excluded. During the complete shutdown, when mobility was strictly restricted, it was really challenging situation for the administration to reach out the needy people mostly from the provincial regions.

But we have a high growth of active smartphone users and internet users, total reported to be close to 600 million and 700 million respectively in India (*India's growing data usage, smartphone adoption to boost Digital India initiatives: Top bureaucrat - The Economic Times*, 2021) [8]. Though things look bright in metros and bigger cities, still, advantages of the official internet-based portals and applications has not reached the masses, especially in the semi urban rural India. Because of better network facility, online education has gradually become successful in bigger towns and metros. Recent report suggests majority of students (over 70%) preferring online education to physical mode, even today (*Over 70% Students In Capital Opt For Online Mode Of Examination | Bhubaneswar News - Times of India*, February, 2022) [12], but things are just opposite in rural and semi urban areas where majority students face technical difficulties of online education, because of want of proper electronic device. Thus, students of those areas as a contrast, prefer going back to physical mode of education. This glaring example of digital divide warrants a detail study of the issue.

Digital consumption has increased significantly during this long spell of pandemic lockdown period, in each country. Work–from–home and work–for–home has turned into the new normal. Classes for students now means only the online classes. Shopping for the household now termed as online shopping or e–tailing. As we have moved from physical world to an e–world, it is pertinent to know if the internet consumption pattern has also changed in rural area and smaller cities (categorized as tier 3, 4, and 5)? How diverse is the internet use pattern, among different categories of users of those areas?

It warrants an in-depth academic empirical study, to understand and analyse the associated impacts. This paper, first reviews related literature and conducts an empirical study, in selected areas of Odisha, India.

Literature Review

Numerous literatures are available on investigation of digital consumption pattern across diversified generations, also on its impact. Researches are found on challenges and opportunities of digital technology on cultural diversity. The digital technology acts as an open door in chain of production, distribution and consumption. The authors incorporate entertainment world and book industry to test the impact of digital technology in five nations: Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico and Spain based on social contrasts. They have also concentrated on benefits and drawbacks related with online advertisements. The individuals who have believe on website that internet makes them brand cognizant. They can without much of a stretch remind the brand names posed through inquiries by authors and others give more rating on ads seen through TV and magazines. The internet-based networks are the wellsprings of virtual connections, which assume huge part in recognizing the need of internet-clients and they offer emotional support to them.

Bisen and Deshpande (2018) have examined on both positive and negative perspectives related with internet, which is useful for communication and learning. While at the same time the over dependence on internet welcomes mental turmoil. “Internet has enough power to run and control the entire organization by focusing on storing, transmitting and retrieving data. It influences the perception of members of organization and helps to enhance knowledge with updated information. Internet has converted the old organizational system with new organizational set up and new technology.”

Boulay et al (2014) found on preferences of youngsters (younger than twelve) in regards to shopping from both online and retail stores and their benefits and detriments. They observe that kids from six to twelve years of age prefer brick and mortar stores or offline retail stores, as these comprise off wide range of items and instant gratification. Online retail stores currently likewise embrace this procedure immediately in conveyance of items and with cutthroat costs. The new Generation (5G) is always connected with internet for adaptable method of communication.

People of various ages love to listen variety of music and internet games are exceptionally famous in young generation. Rosenbaum and Wong (2012) had studied on instant messaging, its advantage and adverse consequence on mental well-being state of young adults. Internet is entirely reasonable and need of time for youth. By involving with internet for more times they are addicted and going through a terrible state of mind which likewise impacts the society. As per literature (Griffiths, 2010), internet plays crucial role in working environment as organizations are subject to it, however the addiction and abuses happened because of most extreme utilization of internet can increase working environment related issues. Basically, young generations during office hours are occupied with web-based shopping, diagramming exploitation of friendship and relation (internet abuses) can’t be disregarded. The vast majority of youths invest their free time or leisure with internet and to eradicate boredom there is intensive use of internet and gradually they are in the trap of it which hampers them psychologically. “The young generation are easily converted to SNSs addiction from IT addiction due to technological advancement and high speed of internet.” Video games or online games are extremely well known among individuals rather than conventional games which depend on physical fitness. Simultaneously, traditional games like: soccer, ball and so on are likewise played through internet which attract mass. They feel forlornness, uneasiness and depression with poor access of internet as they consider internet as their closest companion and addiction is hazardous for their physical and mental development. This study is conducted in Poland by taking 505 number of high school students and the investigation is done with ANOVA technique. The students' academic performance is likewise low as a result of maximum time spent in internet rather than studies. The digital communication using smartphones vigorously impact the adults as they have virtual association of friends and it also makes distance of adults from their family members. They have also discussed about the issues related with young people while making online shopping. This study depends on both quantitative and qualitative analysis. Internet provides adequate opportunities for improvement of kids at one side and issues related it with another side. They also focused on the significant role of guardians in beating overcoming internet addiction among youngsters. This study is based on secondary data analysis

Chen, Chen and Yang (2008) have studied on addiction of internet in working environment and internet abuses in industries. Both confidence and locus of control of personality traits play crucial role in misuse of internet or abuses in the work environment. The authors likewise infer that organizations should focus on effective internet policies and the conduct of employees in the organisation should be monitored to control the workplace deviant behaviour. They have distinguished that work fulfilment is positively influenced by emotional stability, consciousness and agreeableness and these have negative impact on internet addiction behaviour. Internet dependence is a major issue for adults. Web based games create internet addictiveness in young generation of China and the academic performance is impacted adversely. 'Internet is helpful in providing accuracy in estimation of corruption, creates awareness towards where to report on corruption and acts as an anti-corruption tool' [5].

Paul and Thompson (2017) found that cultural biasness is a solid hindrance to progress of ladies and proposes middle class Indian ladies can be empowered and employed with the assistance of accessibility of internet or digital technology which would give them affordable education and scope of employment. Opinion | Digitally empowering women in rural India (2018) studied on contribution of internet towards rural India. Digital technology like: access of internet by mobile phone which is reasonable for women of rural area and they can undoubtedly get information of all over the planet and mindful of the current circumstance [11]. Chakraborty (2018) studied on the main obstructions like: discrimination on the basis of gender, education, community and culture. The author also recommends that internet is useful to protect them from such sorts of inequalities and improve their self-confidence and self-esteem. Internet or digital technology makes a bridge in between Personal and Professional life of working women, but it is not completely free from threats or issues. Keeping up with harmony is difficult because of cultural diversity across countries while working in the MNCs and accessibility of internet sometimes bring various sorts of threats like abuses to women. Women are constantly dependent to threats of harassment, blackmail, cyberstalking through online. Online brutality and abuses are increasing towards women.

MacAya et al.(2021) studied the gendered differences while using the e – government services. They investigated that, while using the internet there is no gender differences. But when the time come for using e – government services there is a significant gap among the genders. In their study the authors had also examined that all the surveyed e – government services except those related to publications are dependent on gender.

MacAya (2021) studied the relationship of caste with digital divide. In this study the author has taken the hypothesis that the old and new ICT is spreading differently among members of different caste of Pakistan like; old caste and new caste. With the adaptation micro level data, the author explored the association between the ICT diffusion, type and sociocultural interaction. Also, with the help of data mining, found that digital divides are related to caste levels, which means old and new technology spread differently among the different caste. The author therefore concluded that the diffusion of ICT is not caste neutral.

Ghobadi and Ghobadi (2013) in their study explained the interaction and contribution of the four different access gaps; motivational gap, material gap, skills gap and usage gap to digital divide. They have investigated those Motivational factors such as 'Lack of interest in IT – related things', 'Lack of motivation to learn recent technology', and 'Motivation to get access to ICT, Access factors such as 'Access to ICT', Skill factors such as 'Operating skills', 'Anti filtering skills' and 'Not having IT background' and Usage factors such as 'Active use of ICT' have a major contribution in the digital divide (Ghobadi, 2013).

Subudhi (2021) studied the changing consumption pattern, the digital consumption diversity and the way it impacted the 'socio-psychologically', in Indian context and also discussed the issues of 'sustainability and equity, with respect to 'digital society'. In his study he found that social media (SM) plays a significant role addressing to the social inclusion issue of older adults and senior citizens (together comprising of around 12% of net-users' sample data). As expected, young mass (within age group of 18-40 years) forms the major chunk of net-users (around 80% of target population).

Objective and Scope

Scope of this present study is to understand the dependence and pattern of internet uses in smaller townships of Odisha, in eastern India. Research objective is to study the digital diversity and societal impact of internet use in semi-urban society. Objective is also to understand awareness level of those users on several features and security options of various social media.

Research Methodology

Scope of this present study is to understand the digital consumption pattern and socio-psychological impact on different categories of internet users, in semi-urban areas of Odisha, located in Eastern India. Study period was February–October, 2021, during COVID pandemic, where people were almost confined to their homes, with partial restrictions on mobility and outside gatherings.

This study adopts an empirical survey research method, taking a multi-stage convenient sample from four different geographical regions of Odisha (in India), especially the semi-urban areas and the cities categorized as tier–3, 4 and 5 (with a total population of less than 50,000). A structured, close-ended questionnaire was used for survey, and anybody using an internet-based smartphone was considered to be eligible as a respondent.

Following section gives the details of sampling plan. It has been categorized into four geographical regions of Odisha.

Here the Central-Odisha region includes Khordha, Nayagarh, Chandpur, Odogaon, Pipili, Banki, Dhenkanal, Jajpur, Jatni, Kendrapada. North-Odisha region comprises of Keonjhar, Chandipur (in Balasore), Baripada, Bhadrak, Jaleswar, Keonjhar. South-Odisha region includes Aska, Bhanjanagar, Gopalpur and Parlakhemundi. And the Western-Odisha region includes Bargarh, Burla, Jharsuguda, Jyoti vihar, Attabira, Banei, and Sohela.

A structured questionnaire was canvassed through trained investigators in above mentioned places (small townships), in physical mode. Collected primary data, after editing and coding, were analysed by using standard statistical software (SPSS v-27).

Data analysis

A structured questionnaire was canvassed through trained investigators and primary data collected, using standard scales of measurement. Out of the total respondents of 235 'internet users', 48.94% were female, around 14.04% of respondents were of age of 41 years and above. 77.45% of respondents were unmarried, mostly young 'students' category (68.51%), who used internet most often. Following tables (table 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5), give the detail break-up of demographic profile of sample respondents.

The above table – 1.1 represents the different age group of the total sample. Majority of the respondents are from the 18 - 40 years (i.e. 73.62%) as our target is to focus the young generation because their consumption pattern of digital media is very high. The number of respondents of age group of <18 years and 41- 60 years approximately same (12.34% and 11.91% respectively). Most of the people >60 years not that much tech savvy, so here the percentage is very low i.e. 2.13%.

The table – 1.2 shows that male respondents and female respondents have participated almost equally in this study, where the percentage of participation of male respondents is 51.06% and female respondents is 48.94%.

The above table (Table – 1.3) represents the marital status of the respondents as we have focused the

Table 1 Sample Size

LOCATION	Respondents
Central Odisha	63
North Odisha	30
South Odisha	61
Western Odisha	81
Grand Total (Sample size)	**235**

Table 1.1. Age of respondents

Category	Frequency	Percentage
<18 years	29	12.34%
18– 40 years	173	73.62%
41– 60 years	28	11.91%
> 60 years	5	2.13%
Total	**235**	**100%**

Table 1.2. Gender

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Male	120	51.06%
female	115	48.94%
Total	**235**	**100%**

Table 1.3. Marital Status

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Unmarried	162	77.45%
Married	50	21.28%
Others	2	1.28%
Total	**235**	**100%**

Table 1.4. Profession

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Student	161	68.51%
Service	34	14.47%
Homemaker	13	5.53%
Business	24	10.21%
Others	3	1.28%
Total	**235**	**100%**

younger generation (18-40 years), maximum of the respondents are unmarried i.e. 77.45% . Rest 21.28% respondents are married and only 1.28% respondents are of the other category. Here other category represents engaged, separated, widow etc.

The data in this table (table – 1.4) consist of respondents of different profession. Maximum respondents are students (68.51%). 14.47% belong to service holders. 10.21% are business men, 5.53 % are homemakers. Only 1.28% come on other categories which represents retired personnel.

Above table (table -1.5) portrays the years of experience of the respondents of using the internet. Maximum respondents (44.39%) have the experience of 1- 5 years. 33.17% respondents mentioned, they have been using the internet in the past 5-10 years. Whereas 19.62% said they have been using internet since a long i.e. more than 10 years. Only 2.80% of respondents mentioned that they have been using from the last year and from last few months.

One of the first question was to know, how they connect to internet, that is, the connection source. As shown in Table-2, majority (94.04%) connected through personal mobile data pack.

Table 1.5. Years using internet

Category	Frequency	Percentage
⇐ 1 year	9	2.80%
1 – 5 year	109	44.39%
5 – 10 year	74	33.17%
>10 year	43	19.62%
Total	**235**	**100%**

Table 2. Connection source/ medium: how they connect to internet.

Connection Source	Frequency	Percentage
Personal Mobile Data	221	94.04%
Broadband Connection	44	18.72%
Shared Wi-Fi	64	27.23%
Public Wi-Fi	26	11.06%

[Percentages are calculated by dividing respective frequencies by 235, the sample size.]

Table 3. Purpose of use of internet

Purpose of use	Frequency	%
a. Entertainment	206	87.66%
b. Communication	218	92.77%
c. Video conferencing	79	33.62%
d. Education	140	59.57%
e. Work & Research	154	65.53%
f. Personal Finance	83	35.32%
g. Current Events	146	62.13%
h. Online Booking	117	49.79%
i. Online Shopping	172	73.19%
j. Video-Audio download	146	62.13%

[Percentages are calculated by dividing respective frequencies by 235, the sample size.]

Next, we wanted to know the purpose of using internet. As given in Table-3, most preferred purpose of uses is, for communication (92.77%), for entertainment (87.66%) and for online shopping (73.19%).

Figure-1 depicts the frequency/ cases of net-users (respondents), who exhausted/ exceeded daily data-limit of their net pack. Scales are: 1=not exceeded, 2=exceeded, 3=sometimes and 4=many times exceeded. It shows, many people (63%) had exceeded (when cases are added up). Next we asked if adult contents (pornography sites), which are largely available, would disturb our social life/ relation? As shown in Fig.-2, majority (code 1= strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=can't say, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree) agreed, that yes, it would disturb. Figure-3, was a question to understand the 'urge to check net, even late at night'. Many

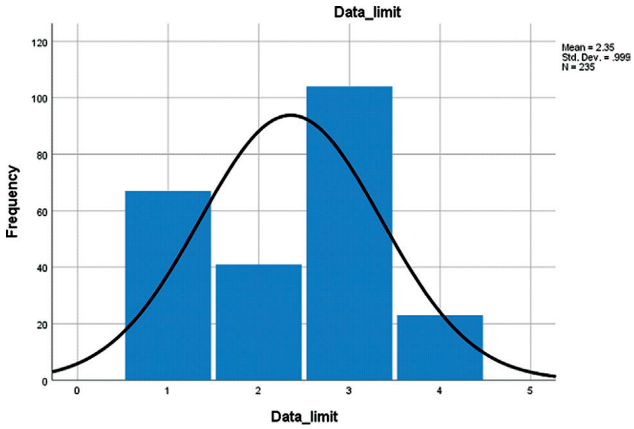

Figure 1. Data limit per day.

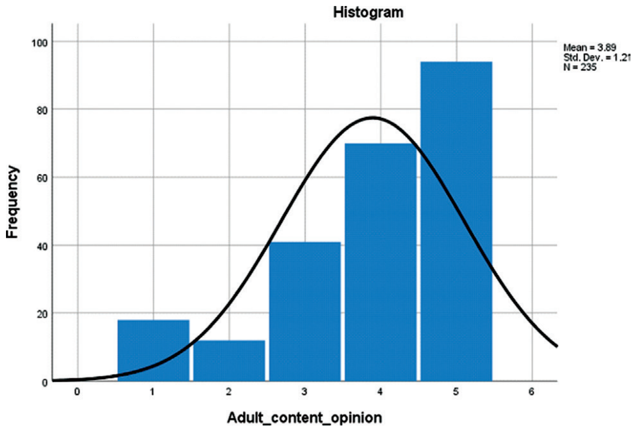

Figure 2. If adult contents would disturb society.

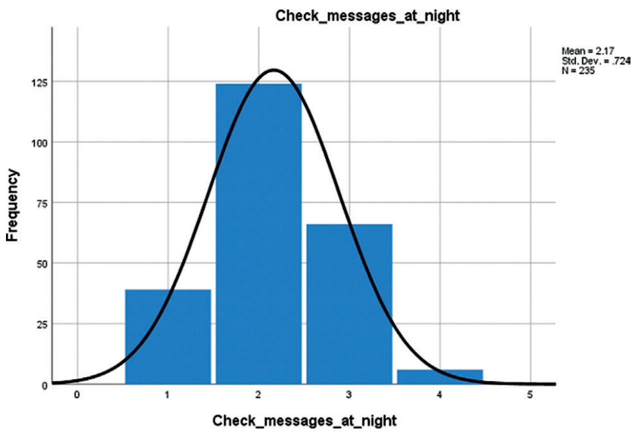

Figure 3. Do you check net, at late-night?

respondents indicated, in conformity. Table-4 is on the proportion of users, who actually knew 'use of privacy settings' while using social media. As the sample is mostly comprised of young students and job seekers, majority of the respondents had 'idea on privacy settings.

Next two questions were related to 'psycho-social inclusion of senior citizens'. Table-5, is on the proportion of respondents who agreed (68.51%) that, yes, 'loneliness

Table 4. If privacy settings known

Do you know?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	179	76.17%
No, I don't feel it's important	34	14.47%
Don't know about privacy setting	22	9.36%
Total	235	100%

Table 5. Loneliness felt by senior citizens

	Frequency	Percentage
Can't say / Don't know	42	17.87%
Strongly disagree	32	13.62%
Somewhat agree	93	39.57%
Strongly agree	68	28.94%
Total	**235**	**100%**

Table 6. Getting emotional support

	Frequency	Percentage
Can't say / Don't know	55	23.40%
Strongly disagree	21	8.94%
Somewhat agree	115	48.94%
Strongly agree	44	18.72%
Total	**235**	**100%**

Table 7. Adult content opinion versus age

		Age		
		⇐40	**>40**	**Total**
Adult content opinions	Strongly Disagree	18	0	18
	Disagree	10	2	12
	Can't Say	40	1	41
	Agree	59	11	70
	Strongly Agree	75	19	94
Total		**202**	**33**	**235**

was an issue with senior citizens', as they don't get sufficient attention (or engagement). Table-6 depicts the agreement by majority of respondents (67.66%), regarding the 'usefulness of social media (SM), where senior citizens get emotional support in virtual world'.

Hypothesis 1. (H1). In smaller cities, the both age group (<40 and >40) has same opinion about adult content.

Table – 7 shows that maximum respondents (69.78%) of the semi urban areas are agreed that the adult contents disturb their social life/relation.

To test the hypothesis- 1 we have done the t – test. The result (Table-8) suggests p value is 0.02, which is less

Table 8.

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances	*Variable 1*	*Variable 2*
Mean	40.4	6.6
Variance	742.3	67.3
Observations	5	5
Pooled Variance	404.8	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
Degree of freedom	8	
t Stat	2.65	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.014	
t Critical one-tail	1.85	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.03	
t Critical two-tail	2.31	

Table 9. Cross-tabulation: Senior citizens loneliness vs Age

		Age				Total
		<18	18-40	41-60	>60	
Senior citizens loneliness	Can't say	10	31	1	0	42
	Strongly disagreed	4	24	3	1	32
	Somewhat agree	9	65	15	4	93
	Strongly agree	6	53	9	0	68
Total		**29**	**173**	**28**	**5**	**235**

than 0.05 (taking 5% significance level). So, it is found significant. Thus, the null hypothesis will be rejected. So it can be concluded that in the smaller cities the opinion of people less than the age group of 40 and above 40 is different about adult content. Which shows all the people in the semi urban cities are not conservative. Some of them are comfortable with the adult content.

Bi-variate Data Analysis

We have studied 'statistical significance' of possible association/ dependence of a few inter-related factors, by using Pearson Chi-square tests.

Hypothesis 2. (H1). Age group has an association with thinking process about the senior citizens loneliness.

Table -9 gives the bi variate table, showing 'very high frequency' of such 'thinking process about senior citizen loneliness', only for 'young adults', within age group of 18 – 40 years. And maximum respondents (93+68) agreed that senior citizens after retirements, they feel loneliness at their home. But in chi – square test the p

Table 10. Cross-tabulation: Senior citizens loneliness vs Marital Status:

		Marital Status			Total
		Single	Married	Others	
Senior citizens loneliness	Can't say	39	2	1	42
	Strongly disagreed	27	4	1	32
	Somewhat agree	67	26	0	93
	Strongly agree	49	18	1	68
Total		182	50	3	235

Table 11. Cross-tabulation: Senior citizens loneliness vs Profession:

		Profession					Total
		Student	Service	Home-makers	Professional/ Business	Others	
Senior citizens loneliness	Can't say	34	3	1	3	1	42
	Strongly disagreed	24	2	2	4	0	32
	Some-what agree	55	21	6	9	2	93
	Strongly agree	48	8	4	8	0	68
Total		**161**	**34**	**13**	**24**	**3**	**235**

value found to be greater than 0.05 (at 5% significance level) i.e. 0.079. Thus 'Age' has no significant' relation/ association with thinking process about the senior citizens.

Hypothesis 3. (H1). Marital status has an association with thinking process about the senior citizens

Following bi-variate table (Table-10) gives data on thinking process about senior citizens loneliness by respondents of different marital status. As the data shows, and as the significance (chi-square) test verifies the p value i.e. 0.03 is less than 0.05(5 % significance level), thus it can be concluded "Thinking process about senior citizens loneliness" is associated with "marital status".

Hypothesis 4. (H1). Profession has an association with senior citizenship loneliness.

Cross-tabulation was done to check (data in Table -11), if there is any significant relationship between 'profession' and 'thinking process about the senior citizens'. Generally the working professional go to the workplaces in their working hours. They can't give time to their parents who are retired and staying at home. That's why we wanted to test statistically that profession has association with the senior citizens loneliness with the help of cross

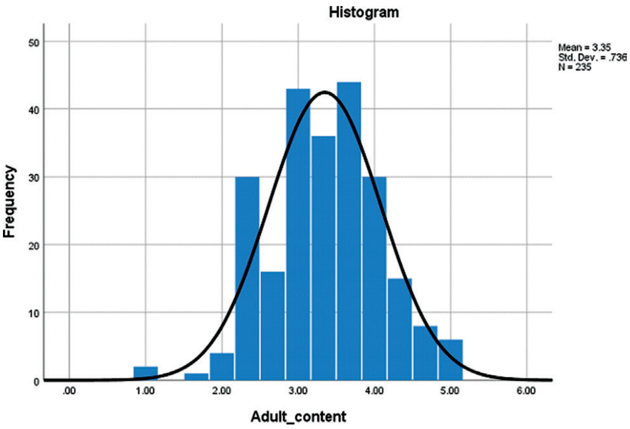

Figure 4. Adult Content Opinion.

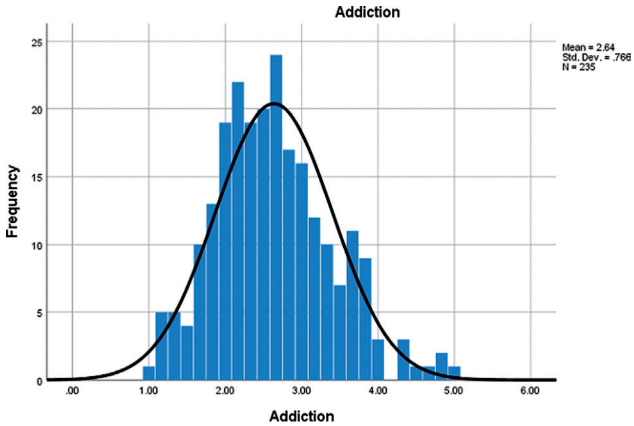

Figure 5. Addiction.

tabulation. But as per availability of data, it could not be found/established to be significant, as 'p' value found 0.30 (30%), exceeded 0.05 (as tested at 5% significance level).

The above histogram (Figure – 4) shows more frequencies on agreement side (towards right). This implies majority of the respondents from small towns feel prevalence of adult content in internet will disturb their own social life and relation. The Figure – 5 represents that more frquenies are on the disagreement side (towards left), which indicates, the respondents from smaller towns of odisha do not feel that they are addicted, they do not feel like, "they spend too much time as told by others", "they feel very much uneasy, when they are without internet for sometime", "they feel restless and irritated, when their messages remain un-read / un-replied", "they feel that they are spending longer periods of time online", "sometimes, they skipped / forgotten their meals, because of using intenet", "going online is the first thought they have, when they wake up in the morning".

Conclusion

In our study we have found that maximum number of people depend on personal mobile data than the other sources. Their main purpose of using internet is communication and entertainment. Our study shows that a large number of respondents (63%) mentioned that they have exceeded their daily data limit, which shows the higher utilization of internet data. So it can be concluded that like Tier-1 and tier 2 cities, also in the cities of tier 3, 4, 5 cities and in semi-urban areas the consumption of the internet has increased significantly, during this pandemic period. If we talk about the technical knowledge like, awareness on privacy-settings, maximum respondents (76.17%) are aware of it, which shows that the technical knowhow in those areas is also increasing. This study finds that the digital connectivity has become an emotional support to the senior citizens who stay more confined at home. This has been accepted by maximum number of respondents (over 67%).

The other important finding of the study is that the people from the small towns and semi-urban areas feel that prevalence of adult content in internet will disturb their own social life and relation. But it is found that most of the internet users of semi-urban areas don't feel that they are addicted towards internet.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article. This article is the sole work of the authors and has not been presented or published elsewhere.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Reducing Income Inequality: India's Challenges and Prospects

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ABSTRACT

The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Target 10 aims at reducing inequalities in different aspects. The Niti Aayog of India has been monitoring progress achieved by different states and sets out a collaborative agenda. This paper specifically looks at the trends in Gini coefficient in different states, impact of high-income inequality on index of health in developed economies and how political ideology and progressive taxation policy can play a decisive role in thwarting the present disturbing trends. The paper brings out how income share of the 40% middle class in national GDP has come down after economic liberalization, while the share of top 10% has gone up significantly. In developed countries, acute income inequality seems to dampen the index of health and general well-being. The paper looks at Kuznet's inverted U curve hypothesis, which contends that after achievement of a high level of per capita income, inequality will come down, was proved to be un-true by Thomas Piketty. The paper brings out, how the Laffer Curve (1986) mooted by Arthur Laffer provided the economic justification for bringing down tax rate on top rich from 71% to 35% in the USA. The paper rebuts the general assumption that high tax rates would disincentive investment. The author recognizes that substantial increase in tax rates and high wealth tax in a market oriented political economy may not be a feasible proposition. In order to achieve distributive justice, greater attention to tools like progressive taxation, increasing investment in merit goods and ensuring shared prosperity must be seriously addressed. Also, a more proactive approach towards tax collection, rather than increasing borrowing would help to reduce income inequality.

Keywords: SDG, Laffer Curve, Inverted U Curve, Merit Goods, Gini Coefficient

Introduction

The Millennium Development Goals did not address the concern of growing inequalities in income in both developed and developing economies. Sustainable Development Goals (Goal 10) attempts to look at the concern of inequalities in different dimensions holistically and set out an action agenda to minimize them drastically by 2030. It includes income inequalities, promotion of universal economic, social and political inclusion (10.2), ensuring equal opportunities and ending discrimination (10.3), adapting fiscal and social policies that promote equality (10.4). Besides it aims at improving regulation of global financial market and institution, enhanced representation for LDCs in financial institutions, and encouraging financial assistance from ODAs and promoting investment (FDI) to least developed countries. This is in the back drop of global realization that the share of bottom 40% of population as a % of total wealth is shrinking in most countries. Socio-political-economic inclusion of vulnerable sectors of the society is not happening at the rate envisaged and absence of equal

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opportunity has been stifling achievement of full human development capability. The Niti Aayog in India has been monitoring progress achieved by different states against the detailed targets and the collaborative effort required.

This paper brings out trends in (a) economic inequality amongst different states and globally, (b) impact of high-income economic inequality on index of health, (c) role of ideology on income inequality and (d) impact of pandemic on inequality amongst the vulnerable.

Trends in Global and Inter State Income Inequality

Modern inequality, many analysts believe, is the byproduct of a freely chosen process, in which everyone has equal access to the market and to property. Such meritocratic narrative is looking more and more fragile. Socio-economic inequality has 'accentuated' in all regions of the world since the 1980s. A high chasm divides the meritocratic discourse from the reality of equal access to education and wealth for society's least advantaged and most vulnerable class. The trend is Global Income Equality since 1980s is plotted below:

The consequential impact of high inequality on human development Index as plotted below:

It would be seen from the above that the increases in wealth have been unequally shared in developed western European countries like France, Germany, USA while the increase in rather modest in case of countries like Norway and Japan. In case of India, the increase in Gini Coefficient is rather sharp after economic liberalization in 1991.

The following table will bring out how the income of bottom 40% varies between 10.4% in Brazil to 23.2% in Sweden, while income share of top 10% is around 30% in countries like USA, China and India. The respective Gini Coefficient has contributed to this hiatus in wealth distribution between top 10% and bottom 40% of the population.

Analysts also look at Palma ratio; i.e. ratio of the richest 10% of population's gross GNI to poorest 40% share of that nation. The position is as under:

It would be seen from the above that while it is less oppressive in countries like Germany and India, it is very high in USA (100 times) and four times in Brazil. India and China are almost at par (1.7).

The trend in share of top deciles of a few countries/ continents is given at Table 2.

Quite clearly the increases are very sharp in India, China, Russia and USA, during (1980-2018), while it is rather modest in case of European countries as a whole as shown in Figure-1 Inequality in share of income in India between bottom 50%, middle 40% and top 10% shows interesting trends in the sense that the middle 40%, (middle class) which had maintained its share around 40% till 1990, after it has pummeled to 30% in 2014. Absence of tax relief to the middle class after economic liberalization is a major reason for this as also income increase not keeping pace with prices rise. The bottom 50% (poor) has become poorer; from a share of around 20% in 1990 it has now come down to 15%. The top 10%, who used to connect 38% of total

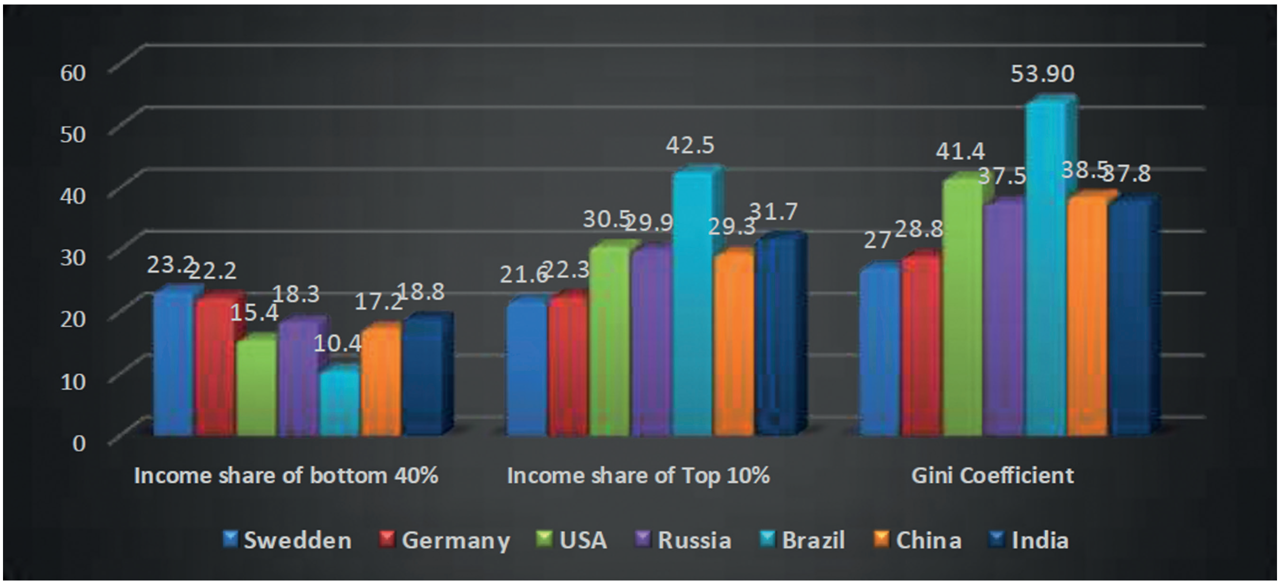

Figure 1: Global Trends in Income Share.
Source: The Great Leveler: Walter Scheidel

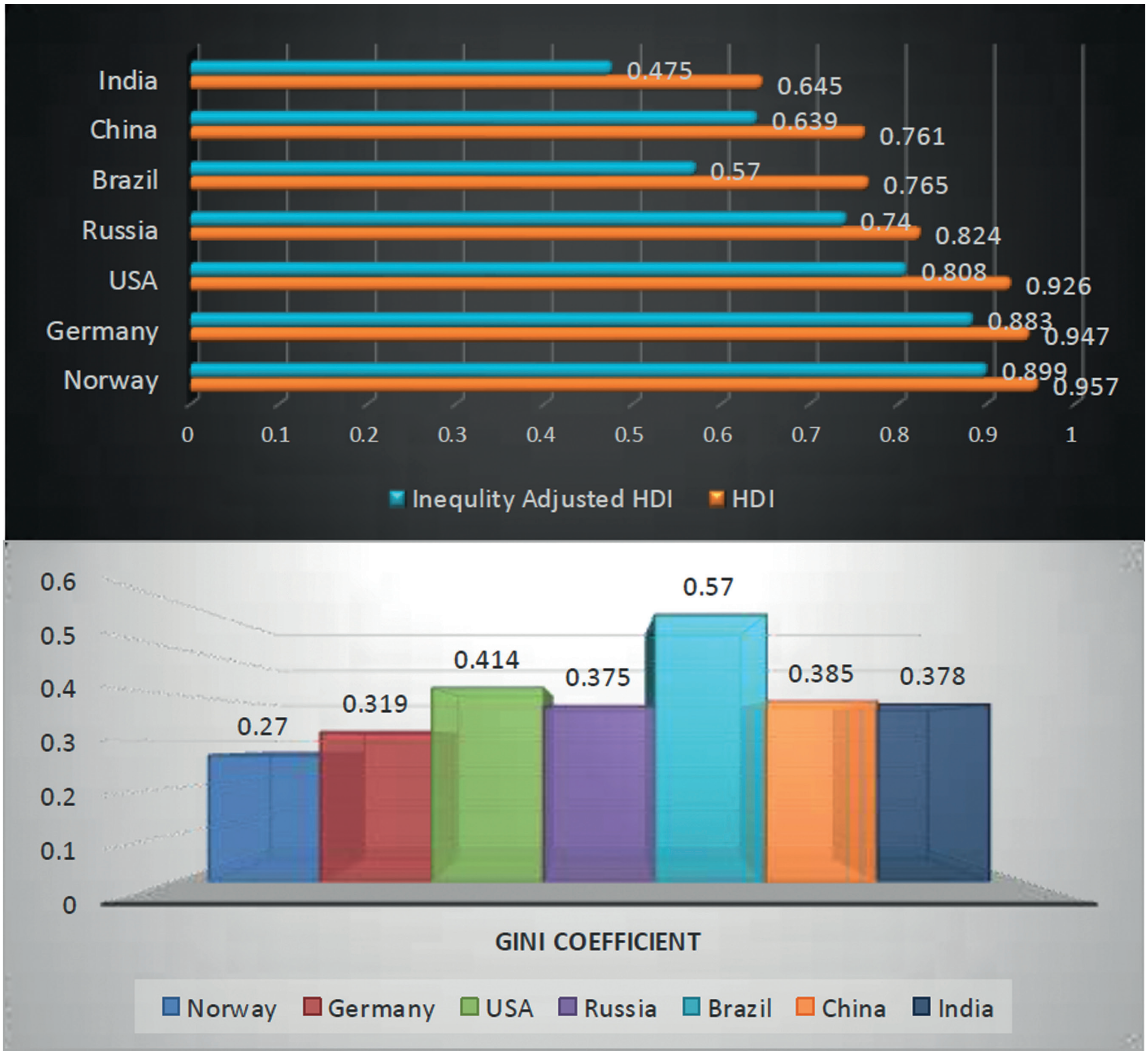

Figure 2: Gini Co-efficient and Human Development Index.
Source: Human Development Report 2021

Table 1: Trends in Global Inequality

Country	1980	1990	2010
France	36.4	42.6	46.1
Germany	34.4	42.2	48.2
Japan	28.3	31.3	36.3
Norway	33.8	36.8	36.9
USA	38.6	43.3	46.9
India	28.9	30.1	36.2

Source: The Great Leveler: Walter Scheidel

national income, account for nearly 55% of national wealth. The pro rich taxation polity, pro-corporate fiscal measures crony capitalism has provided the fuel for such whooping disparity between different economic classes after economic liberalization. Instead of becoming pro-market, the fiscal policy of the Government has tended to become pro-business (Figure-1) inviting a charge of crony capitalism.

However, the income inequality in India reveals sharp dichotomy between rural India that is home to 70% of Indians and Urban India which accounts for 30% of India's population (Figure 5).

It would be seen that the Gini co-efficient has inched up slowly in India (25.8 to 28.8), whereas for Urban Indian's it has been far sharper from (31.9 to 38.2). This is largely due to the stagnancy in income share of rural areas which has seen very little sectoral transformation in terms of provision of higher irrigation facility, industrialization or sharp improvement in agricultural productivity after the green resolution in the 1960s. In contrast, urban India is far more privileged in terms of infrastructure, education

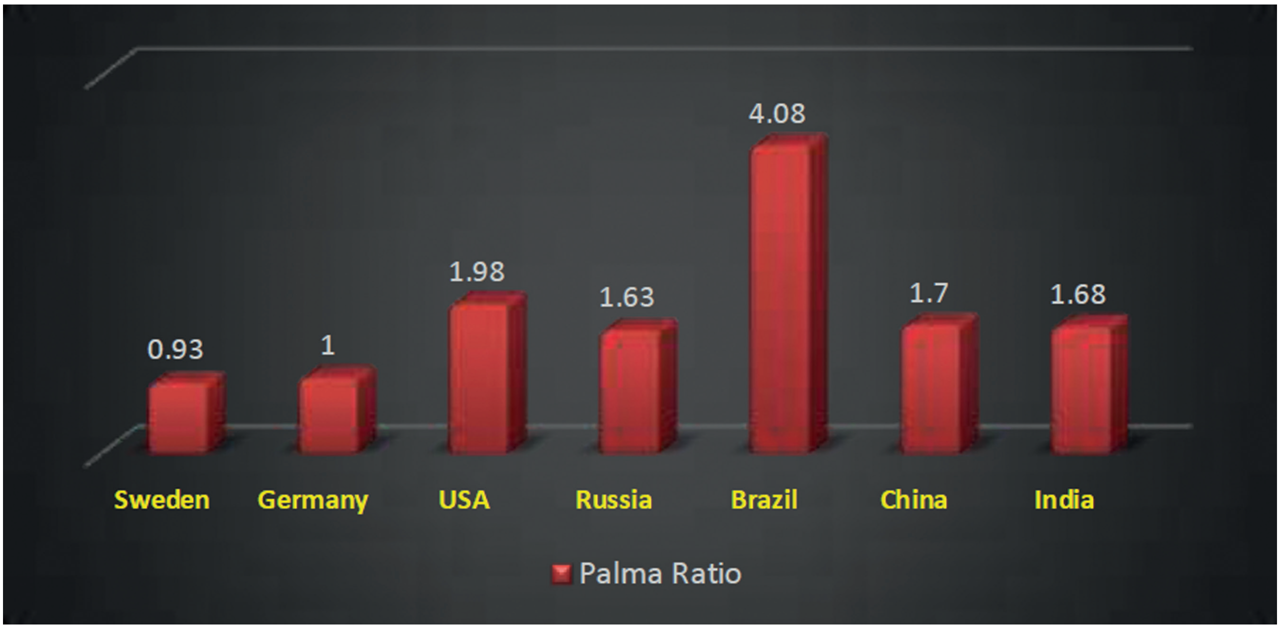

Figure 3: Global Trends in Palma Ratio.
Source: The Great Leveler: Walter Scheidel

Table 2: Share of Top Deciles

Country	1980	2018
India	32	55
China	25	42
USA	34	45
Russia	27	45
Europe	28	34

Source: The Great Leveler: Walter Scheidel

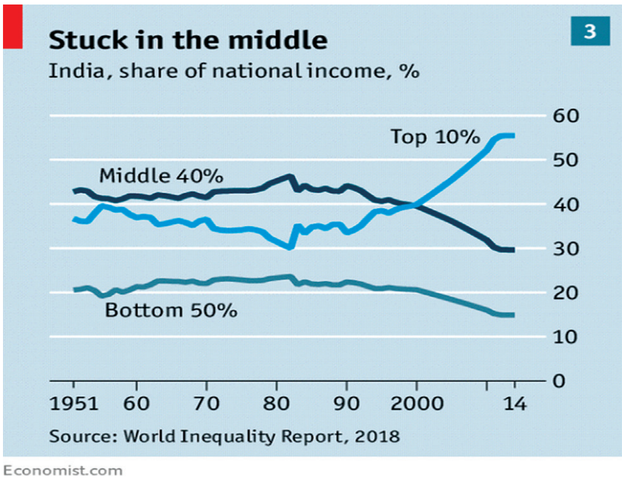

Figure-4: Trends in Income Share (1951–2014).
Source: World Inequality Report 2018

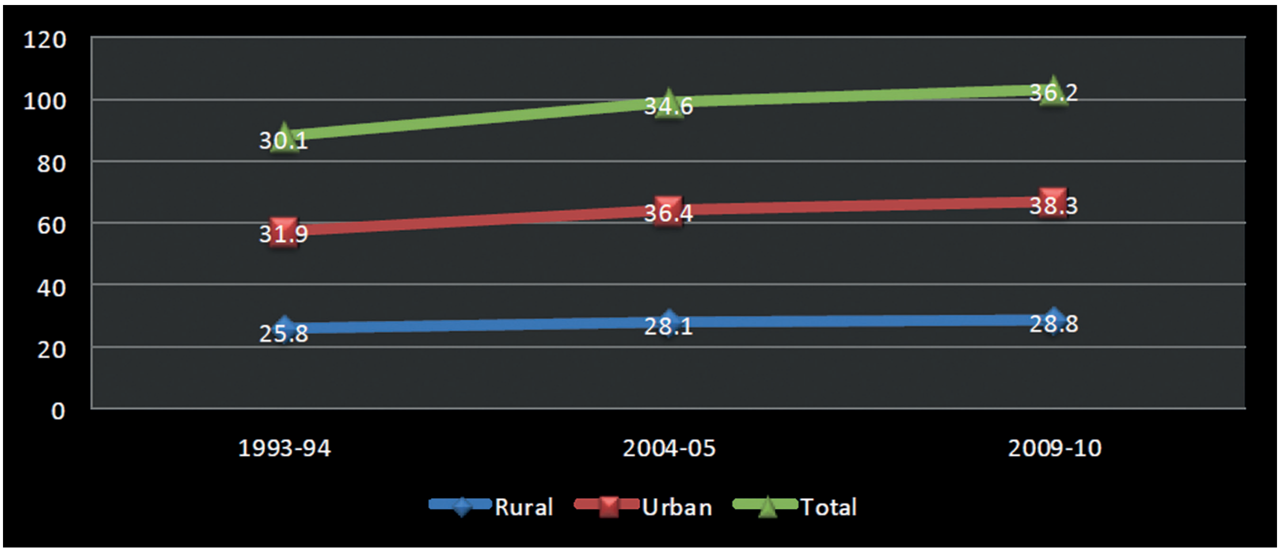

Figure-5: Trends in Income Inequality of Rural and Urban India.
Source: Jean Dreze and Atkinson

and has been naturally attractive place for migration to jobs in industry and services sector engagement ‘which provides better pay offs.

The interstate inequality reveals sharp variations; with states like Kerala and Punjab having very low level of inequality in largest 40% wealth category (3-5%), whereas states like Odisha have the dubious reputation of having close to 64% languishing in the lowest level quintile.

Impact of Income Inequality on Health Index

In a remarkable book “The Spirit Level” Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett brings out how when index of health is linked to GNI per capita, it’s not possible to decipher to what extent index of health like tendency for homicide, trust, mental health are affected by per capita income level.

However, when the same health index is correlated with Gini Coefficient, one clearly notices the very high levels of low health index for countries like USA enjoying high per capita income, while countries like Japan, Sweden, and Netherland with low levels of income inequality have a far better health index. This clearly shows that acute inequality can be deeply corrosive in terms of moral quotient of a society.

Ideology and Inequality

There has been riveting ideological war on the impact of tax rate on income inequality. Prof. Simon Kuznets, the

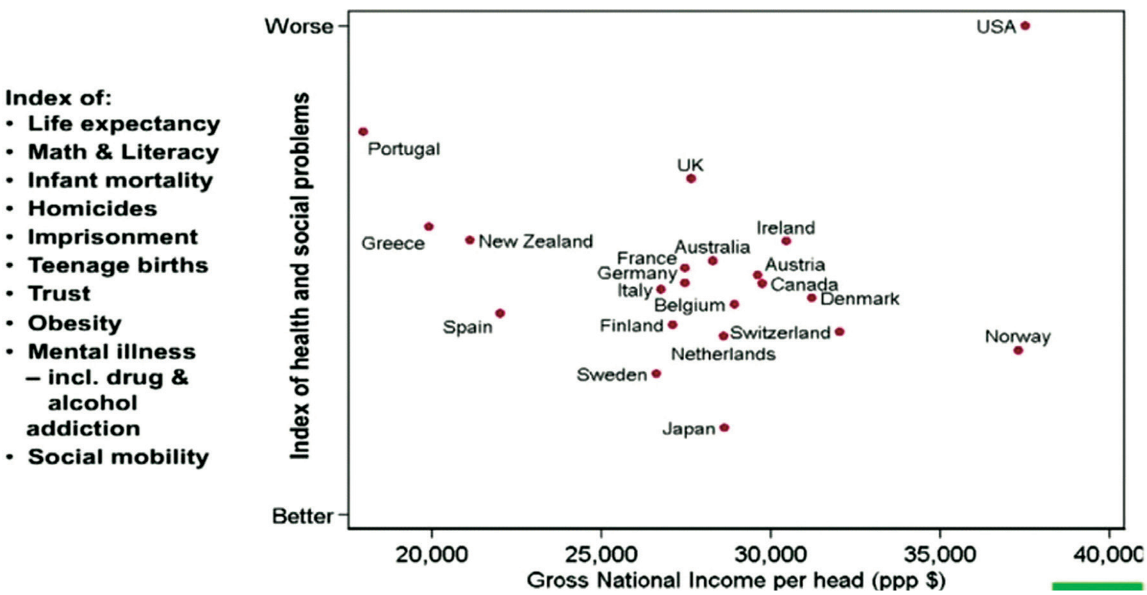

Figure-6: GNI and Index of Health.
Source: The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger

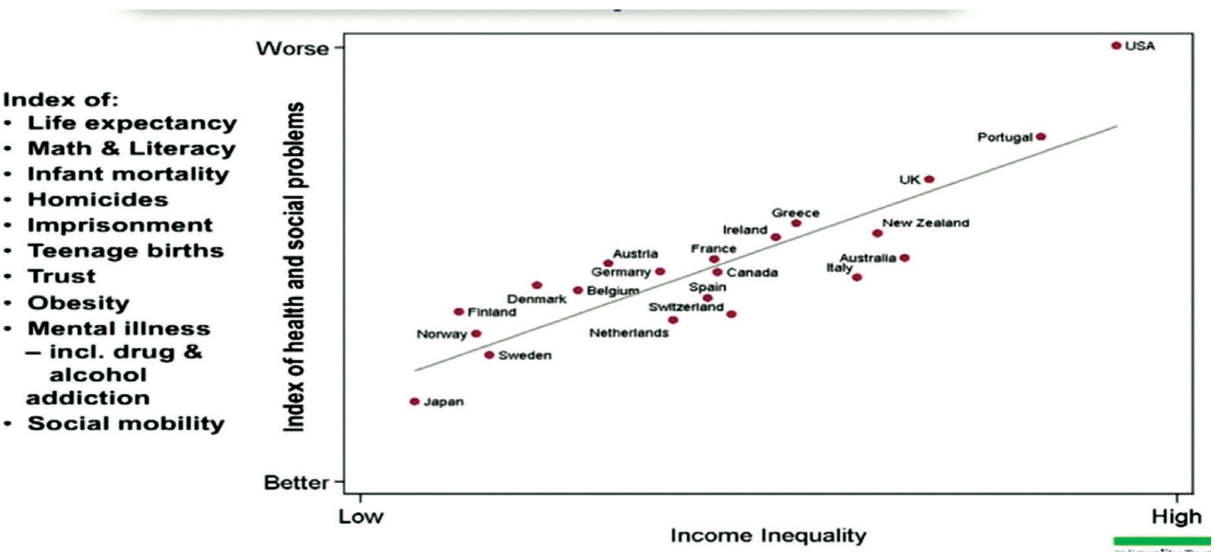

Figure-7: Income Inequality and Index of Health.
Source: The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger

Nobel Laureate brought up at inverted U curve model, as per which as countries move up in terms of per capita income, in equality will increase. However, after a certain point of high per capita income, inequality would start decelerating model is as under:

Prof. Kuznets had observed that "his findings are 5% empirical and 95% speculative, some of it tainted by wishful thinking!" However, Kuznet's inverted 'U' curve provided the intellectual foundation for a widely held view that highly developed economies would be less unequal.

Thomas Piketty provided the counter point to such baneful impact capitalism, when he showed conclusively that during the century spanning (1910-2010), inequality actually decreased during the 1930s and 40s in the USA. This was the time when the New Deal program of FDR provided a slew of employment programs and salvaged the US economy from the quagmire of economic depression and made the society less unequal. FDR introduced key minimum wage law that was struck down by the Supreme Court initially. Subsequently the Court relented and saw the wisdom of FDR's minimum wage law as "a principle of natural justice based on non-regressively. Piketty 'U' curve is demonstrated below:

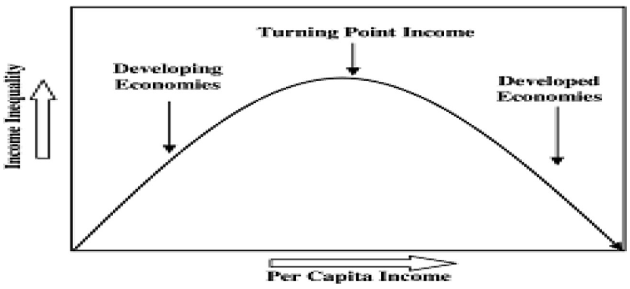

Figure 8: Kuznets Inverted 'U' Curve.
Source: Kuznets Inverted 'U' Curve

It would be clearly seen that after the top tax rates on the rich were significantly reduced from 70% (1980) to 31% in 1981, the inequality sharply increased in the American society till 2011. Such tax policy was also embraced by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in UK, who went in for massive privatization of public sector companies.

Piketty's other concern was in the area of wealth tax where countries like France were soft towards rich inheritors of wealth. He famously observed that a just society is not about regulating the market, but "minimizing lottery by birth" and preventive 'patrimonial capitalism'. Frances Bourguigon had also pointed that tax rate on top 1% had come down from 42% to 27% and wealth tax from 54% to 40% in most European Countries during (1980-2013). This was based on the Lafferian theory that tax rates beyond and certain point (70%) is counterproductive. Aurthur Laffer's contention is presented in the following curve:

The above curve provided the ideological justification for policy makers in the USA and Europe to substantially decrease the tax rates at the top. In India also after economic liberalization in 1991, the top tax rates have witnessed sharp reductions after 1996-97, from 96.5% (1970s) to 30% now.

Prof. Atkinson brings out that a survey in 2005 revealed that a 10% decrease in tax rate leads to significant revenue loss. Further, a survey of 2012 reveals that nearly 70% of the economists disagreed with Laffer's theory. An IMF study (2014) also clearly brings out that increase in tax rate upto say 50% has negligible impact on investment. For Joseph Stiglitz, in his book 'Price of Inequality' avers that Regan's policy of favouring the top income earner and not giving commensurate relief to the middle class have been the prime cause for accentuating inequality in the USA. Paul Krugman, another Novel Laureate, called the 1980s a period of double jeopardy

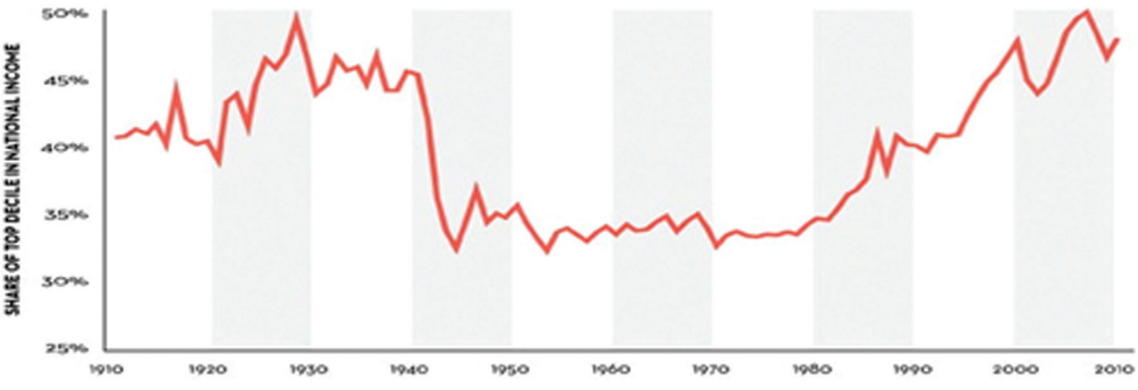

Figure 9: Income Inequality in USA (1910–2010).
Source: Capital in the Twenty-First Century

when tax rates favouring the top corporates and union bashing leading to significant weakening of the bargaining power of labourers to demand a just wage. Thomas Piketty had brought out how in the economic prospects noticed in US and France, the higher gainers were the capitalists and the lowest, the 'wage earners'.

In a significant book 'The Great Leveler' Walter Scheidel has succinctly thumb nailed the major reasons for increased inequality. He discovers that attempts towards land reforms in several countries have been generally unsuccessful in alleviating inequality in land holding. In India also, movements like Bhoodan movement by Binobha Bhave has become a cropper. He cites a study by Acemoglu where they had taken up 184 countries (1960-2010) as per which equalization is impeded, if democracy is captured by powerful constituencies. In the India's context, it would be seen that the corporate lobby and crony capitalism have developed close nexus with the party in power, which has helped in wealth maximization of a few billionaires. The constitution was amended in 1976 providing for a clause Art 38(2) as per which the state to reduce income inequality. As brought out earlier in the Figure-4, the state has shown no inclination to achieve this constitutional mandate of reducing income inequality.

Scheidel opines that after globalization has struck firm roots, elites have trended to benefit disproportionately and there is a premium on skill, particularly in financial globalization. He also observes that there has been a fall in union membership from 34% to 8% in Europe and US in the 1980s; leading to erosion of minimum wage. However, Scheidel has been realistic enough to observe that peaceful policy reforms will not prove equal to the growing challenge of inequality. The Economist in an editorial had observed that one of the reasons why Brexit happened was because the poorer segments of the society believed that liberal democracy has only sub-served the interests of the elite and their access to better schooling, health care and employment has not happened.

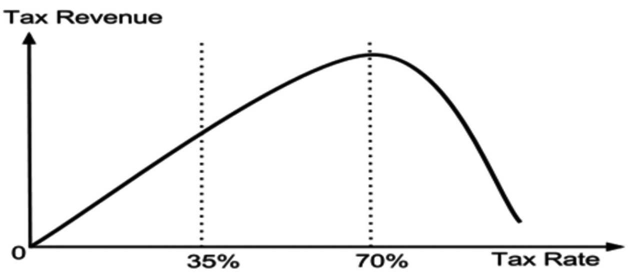

Figure 10: Laffer Curve.
Source: Arthur Laffer

Impact of Pandemic on Inequality amongst the Vulnerable

The Covid-19, as is well known, has devastated life and livelihood, as never before. The digital divide between the haves and have nots has further widened and equal opportunity and ending discrimination of those who are disabled has particularly accentuated significantly. The major goal of Targets 10.3 in SDG is to ensure equal opportunity and end discrimination.

In a study made by ASER-2021 during September 2020 they have found that while 18% of students from private schools attended on time classes, only 4% of poor students had this benefit of outline learning. Education of parents is a major proxy for educational attainment of their children. The ASER survey brings out how children of 23% uneducated parents is being hugely affected during Covid-19.

As per WHO (2011), 1 trillion are disabled, consistently 15% of the global population of the 1.2 lakh school children in Odisha, Dr. Sruti Mohapatra, CEO of Swabhiman in a survey has brought out how 50% of them are struggling and 77% struggling to cope up with on-line learning. Further, Arman Ali, ED, Centre for Employment of the Disabled has brought out how 67% of the disabled children are being deprived of doorstep of essential food stuff.

Table 3: Borrowing, Fiscal & Revenue Deficit: Trends

Borrowing, Fiscal & Revenue Deficit: Trends				
Parameter	**2019-20**	**2021-21 (RE)**	**2021-22 (RE)**	**2022-23 (BE)**
Borrowing (Rs. Lakh Crore)	9.3	18.2	15.9	16.6
Revenue Deficit	3.3	4.8	4.7	3.8
Fiscal Deficit	4.6	9.2	6.9	6.4
Tax Revenue (Rs. Lakh Crore)	13.5	13.4	20.7	22

Source: Budget 2022–23

Covid-19 and Tendency to Borrow Humongous

The Covid-19 pandemic has witnessed significant increase in market borrowing by the government. Table 3 below would reveal the position.

In the FRBM Act (2003), the government set a target to bring down revenue deficit to zero and fiscal deficit to 3% by 2008. However, due to the U.S. financial crisis (2007-08), the targets were slipped. When this was on, Covid-19 forced government's hand to resort to massive borrowing to bail out poor people migrant workers and SMEs out of the quagmire of economic disaster. However, as the economy recovered by 2021-22, with tax collections improving significantly government has set a very target of only 6% increase in tax collection during 2022-23. India's record in tax collection increase in around 15% with GDP growth during 2022-23 likely to increase around 9%, the government should have targeted a much higher tax collection and low borrowing than what has been projected by the Finance Minister in budget 2022-23.

This clearly shows a very soft approach of the state towards IT payers; more so when the tax/GDP has been stagnating around 11% of GDP over the last few years. Prof. Kenneth Rogoff had brought out in a paper titled "Growth in a time of Debt" (2010), that when total fiscal deficit is more 90% of the GDP, the economy is likely to witness low growth and high inflation. Since India's total debt burden (Centre plus States) is around 90% now, there is a need to impose higher marginal tax on the super-rich to reduce income inequality in India

Way Forward

In his book "Capital and Ideology" (2020) Thomas Piketty believes that early intervention in primary education is the best way to correct inequality between students from different backgrounds. He also contends that steep progressive taxation on property, income tax should be used to pay for social insurance expenditure and ensuring universal basic income for all. In an article jointly written with Prof. Abhijit Banerjee (2019), he laments that Indians vote on caste and religious issues and not on adequacy of social spending. To quote "voters seem to be less driven by straight forward economic interests than by sectarian economic interest and cultural priorities. In India, political conflicts have become increasingly focused on identity and religious, ethnic conflict rather than a tangible material benefits and class-based redistribution. The failure of land reforms and redistribution initiatives and quest for Ram Mandir rather than quality education and health care are manifestation of the above assessment."

India thus needs to spend much more on basic foundational education and improve the quality of education and skilling. NEP (2020) strikes the right note by putting premium on "Early childhood care and education", which remains highly neglected, the way it is handled presently in the Anganwadi centres through the ICDS scheme. Provision of merit goods, as Prof. Richard Musgrave had rightly observed, has to be the primary remit of the government. It must provide quality health care at affordable cost, quality public school education for the age 3 to 16 and ensure that sanitation and nutrition which are the real culprits for unacceptably high number of stunted children, and anemic adolescent girls, in contained in a time bound manner. The budget allocation has to be significantly increased for 5% to 10% in various social sector schemes. The Poshan Abhiyan (2018) should not be waylaid by rhetoric but effective action. Progressive IT on the super-rich along with wealth tax, basic minimum income for all, health care, and nutrition as a fundamental right would be the right recipe for reducing income inequality in the long run and usher in just equitable society, based on the principle of shared prosperity. There is a need to abdicate to present tendency of debt fueled growth and instead propel tax collection by increasing marginal tax rates on the superrich. That will go a long way in reducing yawning and increasing trend of income inequality in India.

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Social Media Habits of Rural Consumers Influencing Online Consumption

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ABSTRACT

Digital media are being exponentially developed and expanded to rural places which has become an important part of public lives without being influenced by any geographical discrimination. Besides entertainment, the business activities such as sales promotions, advertising, publicity and public relations are quite evident in all Digital networking sites, blogs, online forums, and discussion boards. Rural consumers are also slowly getting much accustomed with digital media, particularly with certain social media sites i.e. Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, and Instagram. Online shopping being slowly crept to rural places by meeting all challenges, the promotion of products through online can better be fine-tuned through social media since the habitual dexterity is found significant. The objective of the study is assessing the impact of social media on consumer intentions towards online shopping. Methods used for the study were descriptive design, blended approach of both qualitative and quantitative, convenience sampling strategy and cross sectional with multistage sampling. The conclusions were made out of interpretation with respect to the predictors and its strength explaining the rural consumers' intention.

Keywords: Social media, Rural Consumer, Media Habits, Online Consumption, Srikakulam

Introduction

Digitalization, used by the marketers for products' promotion and consumer motivation, is making waves and gaining credibility from time to time. The technological revolution and adaption are seen in this sector, both for urban as well as rural marketing.

Technology adaption was slower in the olden days where telephone took 75 years, radio took 38 years and TV took 13 years to get adapted and be popular but internet has taken only four years and derivatives have been explored with innumerable services. In this race, the transition and technology transfer from traditional channel to digital channels is significantly high. Certain mandatory services to be processed through online alone have enabled most of the rural people getting accustomed with online processes. Nevertheless, the rate of increase of online usage in rural places is not highly significant.

People during pandemic have been habituated to online shopping to some extent major online giants like Amazon and Flip cart have started their logistic service operations rural recently and there is a slight increment which shows that adaption of online services or not completely used. The causes for this slow usage might be the inability knowledge and practice. Many studies reveled that online shopping is much influenced by social media habits of people. It is observed by the researchers that most of the rural people are occupied with traditional medias such as news Papers, Radio and television. The factors which generally influenced to buy any product through online are customer reviews, security assurance, operational efficiency, content presentation, e-WOM communications and exceptional promotions.

There is a research gap of identifying and assessing the factors of social media habits especially by rural to know better how these factors will increase their online shopping behavior. The study area of high rural density was determined as sample unit from Srikakulam district, an economically backward district of Andhra Pradesh.

The study was carried out to fill the gaps of social media habits by rural at the standpoint of their usage pattern of Face book, Whatsapp, Instagram etc. In addition to the commonsense applications, the smart phone holders in rural places are expected to have an account on the above said popular social media but to what extent they watch the reviews, they need security, they evaluate operational efficiency, they attract content presentation, they participate in e-WOM communications and they watch promotions is researched in this study.

Study Objectives

1. To ascertain the social media factors influencing rural consumer behavior in Srikakulam district, Andhra Pradesh.

2. To assess the factors of social media habits influencing on rural online shopping in Srikakulam district, Andhra Pradesh.

Literature Review

Reviews from consumers recommend the product to others by providing complete information about the traits, which could also be considered as one type of e-WOM Communications and most of the new customers follow these online reviews before taking a decision to purchase the product (Lee et al., 2008).

Judgment on the purchase of any product without having personal experience is task some for the consumer who may depend on the reviews of the consumers who have already experienced it. A survey of Opinion Research Corporation revealed that 61 percent of consumers totally rely on the reviews and feedbacks coming from blogs, websites and other sources. Werbler et al. (2008) also expressed the same opinion by emphasizing the Customer Reviews would influence 80 per cent of purchase decision.

Yoo et al. (2009) also acknowledged that the online opinions of the experienced customers have a noteworthy impact on the buying behaviour, conversely, this king of venues may have all the chances to be practiced wrongly and misused for the deception also.

The reviews from consumers can be expressed without any reservations in complaining which could in turn helps the consumers with respect to the expression reliability which is high whether the review is either positive or negative. Since the face-to-face communication can avoid through internet, the mental costs are decreased (Hong et al., 2005). Some researches proclaim that the rating of 5-star is reliable and the anything beyond 4 and below 5 is said to be good. Another study of Womply declared that 4 to 4.5 rated products gain 28 per cent of revenue.

Technology adaption model by Gilbert et al. (2004) as an alteration in the environment of online business includes the extension of technology to the government sector at the stand point of the instrument developed with appropriateness, validity and data operations which all root to the adaption of information security principles.

Besides the benefits of website traits most of the people shop through online by looking into the design, reliability and services of the website with a very important feature of web security. The perception of web security with respect to the buying decision of online hopper is found significant. (Shergill et al., 2005)

Velmurugan (2009) acknowledged certain determinants of website attractions such as appeal, offering, brand and service. Besides the credibility out of transaction, content, product, technology and organization, anticipation of trust and security for the customer is found imperative. Consequently, Szymanski et al. (2000) also emphasized on financial security which plays vital role in the assessment of e-satisfaction.

Rural people have been slowly habituated to online operations. The pace of usage from youth is more than the rest since the operational efficiency is found very less. Most of the villages are confined to the highly relevant deeds of online such as the mandatory transactions of government schemes where they have the least possible chances to get the operational efficiency (Venugopal, 2013).

The causes for the operational efficiency with respect to online shopping are the increased opportunity profile of products, schemes, offers and the great lot of additional services, which are cluttered. Unless the customer is efficient in operating either the website or any other sources, he cannot optimize the order processing inclusive of wholesome benefits (Vakamullu, et al., 2021).

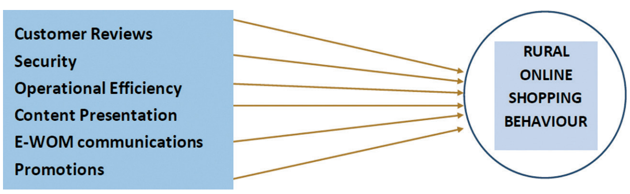
As per Rowley (2006) the digital content incorporated and distributed through electronic channels is managed well with an appropriate matching to customer demands and gain profits. Andaç et al. (2016) stated the quality of content at basic level could be easily sharable, understandable, profitable and accessible. Milhinhos et al. (2015) explored the formats of content that influence and attract the customers by modifying blogs info graphics, decks, cases, videos, memes, e books, images, white papers etc.

Firms try hard for selecting specific media for the promoting their brands with the help of marketing communications prevailing in order to attract the new customers and retain the existed customers. Customers are now a day's looking for the attractive features of the channels of any kind where the companies should focus at. More over the information needed by the customer is to be carried forwarded by the organizations to the extent of their ambiguities ate swept away. The trendy social media can be taken as a vehicle for reaching the targeted customer which can serve better with 24/7 customer support (Korenkova et al., 2020)

Nevertheless, Miller et al. (2010) revealed that social media marketing played a vital role in inducing consumers to purchase online. He observed that 70 per cent of consumers visit Social Media to acquire beneficial information wherein, 49 per cent make the decision to buy certain product and 60 per cent of consumers choose to share their information relating to products with others online. Eventually, only 7 per cent of consumers are accounted for the actual transactions.

Methodology

The study was carried out with the following method mix.



Study Area: Rural places of Srikakulam which have been slowly operative of online shopping.

Research Design: The study is descriptive as well as exploratory with mixed approach of quantitative and qualitative.

Sampling: Convenient sampling of non-probability was adapted since the population is unlisted and very hard to stratify. The size of the sample was determined – to collect the data from the sample unit of rural consumers who access social media.

Data Collection: Primary as well as secondary data was collected. But the data collected majorly was the primary from the respondent target population through a self-administered questionnaire measured with validity and reliability.

Data Analysis: Data was collected through multi stage sampling and ANOVA, Correlation, Factor Analysis (Principal component analysis) were carried out to test hypothesis. Tabulated analysis and interpretation have been carried out and further conclusions were made out of management implications.

Data Analysis and Interpretation:

Comparing Means

The comparing means between the gender and the dependable variable i.e. Increase in online consumption is portrayed in the table with the mean values of 3.67 and 3.57 for male and female respectively.

It is understood that there is not much variance between male and female in the social media habits and the perception of how they will increase the online consumption in rural places.

As shown in the Table 2 the value of The KMO Measure indicates the variance proportion in the

Table 1: Comparing the means of Gender

I believe that my social media habits will increase online consumption

Gender	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Female	3.67	58	.803
Male	3.57	58	.957
Total	**3.62**	**116**	**.881**

variables triggered by underlying factors is 0.755 which is good enough to undergo factor analysis with the data. Significant level of 0.00signs sound to get along with factor analysis which may be useful with the data.

As can be seen in the table, the communalities specified as the variance estimates in all variables accounted for by the components. It can be understood that the communalities are moderately high and thereby shows extracted components representing variables to the considerable extent. Communalities of "Reviews in social media are highly helpful", and "Information about security through social media is reliable", are comparatively low in principal components extraction with 0.455 and 0.477 respectively.

There is a clear understanding that the requested extracted initial eigenvalues greater than 1 has resulted into seven first components extending 66.809 percent of cumulative initial eigenvalues. Among the 23 listed variables, seven components show the variability of 67% approximately. So, the complexity of the dataset can be reduced through these seven components with almost 33% of lost information.

The first rotated factor is highly correlated with habit of forwarding information, product related information to friends, forwarding after usage, buying the product forwarded to me and attractive social media promotions. These variables are not specifically correlated with other components.

Second component correlated with awareness of mobile operations, social media apps, mobile options, search and buy and content presentation

Table 2: Factor Analysis

Factor Analysis

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.755
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1.050E3
	df	253
	Sig.	.000

Table 3: Reviews on Social Media

Communalities		
	Initial	**Extraction**
I search for reviews to buy the products through online shopping	1.000	.790
Positive reviews will lead to purchase	1.000	.553
Negative review for the products will lead to non-purchase behavior	1.000	.552
Most of the reviews are reliable	1.000	.569
Reviews in social media are highly helpful	1.000	.455
Information about security through social media is reliable	1.000	.477
There is clutter of information which creates confusion	1.000	.718
Information relating to security from social media lead to either purchase not to purchase the product	1.000	.667
I am aware of all operations in my mobile	1.000	.696
I don't need to depend on someone to learn about social media apps	1.000	.758
Information about new options in mobile is well known	1.000	.653
My operational efficiency leads to search and buy any product through online.	1.000	.809
Content presented in social media related to products are known to me	1.000	.651
Product related content such as videos and ads are attractive	1.000	.671
The product related content is advantageous to me to know reliable knowledge about the product	1.000	.692
Product related content motivates me to click and leads to purchase the product	1.000	.703
I have a habit of forwarding information	1.000	.691
I forward product related information to my friends	1.000	.740
I forward the product related information after I use it	1.000	.693
I also prefer to buy certain products that are forwarded by someone to me	1.000	.669
Product promotions through social media are attractive	1.000	.762
Promotions through social media are exceptional	1.000	.669
Comparatively promotions through social media are easily accessible	1.000	.730
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.		

Table 4: Principal component analysis of social media impact

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	6.408	27.862	27.862	6.408	27.862	27.862	3.282	14.271	14.271
2	2.381	10.352	38.214	2.381	10.352	38.214	2.775	12.067	26.337
3	1.729	7.516	45.730	1.729	7.516	45.730	2.447	10.638	36.975
4	1.339	5.822	51.552	1.339	5.822	51.552	2.055	8.934	45.909
5	1.254	5.453	57.005	1.254	5.453	57.005	1.761	7.655	53.564
6	1.137	4.944	61.949	1.137	4.944	61.949	1.525	6.629	60.193
7	1.118	4.860	66.809	1.118	4.860	66.809	1.522	6.617	66.809
8	.926	4.028	70.837						
9	.849	3.692	74.530						
10	.686	2.984	77.514						
11	.666	2.897	80.411						
12	.618	2.687	83.098						
13	.583	2.534	85.632						
14	.529	2.301	87.933						
15	.512	2.227	90.160						
16	.459	1.996	92.156						
17	.395	1.715	93.872						
18	.345	1.502	95.373						
19	.282	1.224	96.598						
20	.245	1.064	97.662						
21	.215	.936	98.598						
22	.172	.749	99.347						
23	.150	.653	100.000						

Total Variance Explained

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Third component is correlated with non-purchase behaviour of negative review, helpful reviews, reliability of product related content and motivation of product Related content

Fourth component is correlated with positive reviews r, reliability of reviews and social media security

Fifth component is correlated with videos and ads, exceptional promotions through SMM and accessibility of promotions through SMM.

Component six is correlated with the opinion of searching reviews to buy the products through online shopping.

Seventh component is correlated with information clutter creating confusion and security information from SMM leading to purchase

As shown in the Table 6, R Square value is .232; it means all the levels of items contributing 23.2. Per cent in the increase in online purchase by rural people. The remaining 76.8 per cent is being contributed by other unknown variables

Table 7 shows the relationship among social media habits (Independent Variables) and increase in online purchases (Dependent Variable). The F value between dependent variable and predictors is 5.452, and the p value is 0.00. Which is highly significant at 0.05 and 0.00 level? Contrariwise, we may settle if there is an increase at one level in item, an increase of 68.438 will be observed.

Increase in online Consumption (IOC) = 1.066+ (0.064) SMH1 + (0.110) SMH 2 + (- 0.006) + SMH3+ (0.177) SMH4 + (0.145) SMH5 + (0.232) SMH6

Increase of online consumption by rural consumer being influenced by social media habits with respect to the first variable, SMH1 (Reviews) is 1.130 (1.066+0.064); if SMH1 is increased by one unit, the overall online consumption will be increased by 1.130. Likewise, if the predictors SMH2, SMH3, SMH4, SMH5 and SMH6 are increased by one unit, the level of rural online consumption is increased for

Table 5: Component matrix of Social media habits

Rotated Component Matrix[a]

	Component						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I search for reviews to buy the products through online shopping						.614	
Positive reviews will lead to purchase				.575			
Negative review for the products will lead to non-purchase behavior			.520				
Most of the reviews are reliable				.716			
Reviews in social media are highly helpful			.424				
Information about security through social media is reliable				.592			
There is clutter of information which creates confusion							.811
Information relating to security from social media lead to either purchase not to purchase the product							.501
I am aware of all operations in my mobile		.733					
I don't need to depend on someone to learn about social media apps		.806					
Information about new options in mobile is well known		.697					
My operational efficiency leads to search and buy any product through online.		.357					
Content presented in social media related to products are known to me		.603					
Product related content such as videos and ads are attractive					.531		
The product related content is advantageous to me to know reliable knowledge about the product			.778				
Product related content motivates me to click and leads to purchase the product			.799				
I have a habit of forwarding information	.791						
I forward product related information to my friends	.818						
I forward the product related information after I use it	.740						
I also prefer to buy certain products that are forwarded by someone to me	.711						
Product promotions through social media are attractive	.620						
Promotions through social media are exceptional					.510		
Comparatively promotions through social media are easily accessible					.841		

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

Table 6: Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple Regression Analysis

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.482[a]	.232	.190	.796

a. Predictors: (Constant), Reviews, Security, Operational Efficiency, Content presentation, E-Word of Mouth Communications, Product promotions

Table 7: ANOVA analysis of factors affecting social media habits

ANOVA[b]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	20.727	6	3.455	5.452	.000[a]
	Residual	68.438	108	.634		
	Total	89.165	114			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Reviews, Security, Operational Efficiency, Content presentation, E-Word of Mouth Communications, Product promotions
b. Dependent Variable: I believe that my social media habits will increase online consumption

SMH2 (Security) by 1.116; SMH3 (Operational Efficiency) by 1.060; SMH4 (Content Presentation) by 1.243; SMH5 (E-Word of Mouth Communications) by 1.211 and SMH6 (Product promotions) by 1.298

Increase of rural online consumption is explained by all the independent factors social media habits with almost similar weightings, in which the substance explained by Product promotions is the highest with 1.298 followed by "Content Presentation" with 41.243. It is explained by "Operational Efficiency" with 3.97.

Conclusions

In expectation with the rural consumer behaviour through online increase in a considerable way the research has

Table 8: Coefficients of social media habits determinants

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.066	.539		1.978	.051
	SMH1- Reviews	.064	.094	.061	.685	.495
	SMH2- Security	.110	.098	.105	1.124	.263
	SMH3- Operational Efficiency	-.006	.087	-.007	-.073	.942
	SMH4- Content presentation	.177	.111	.165	1.597	.113
	SMH 5- E-Word of Mouth Communications	.145	.097	.155	1.497	.137
	SMH 6- Product promotions	.238	.111	.227	2.146	.034

a. Dependent Variable: I believe that my social media habits will increase online consumption

been continued in order to identify the influence of mobile usage at the stand point of social media specifically due to the higher site of usage by all in common. The conclusions out of interpretation amalgamated with management implications are as follows.

Reviews pertaining to entertainment zones such as cinemas, videos, TV programs are highly participated by rural people with deterministic involvement. The same could be continued if the product reviews are also given by ambassadors and though leaders through social media channels

Though the security levels of surviving personal data are very low through any mode of online people comparatively feel better secure in social media since there is loss of money and the common people like consumers do not have a chance of getting vulnerable consequences unless someone is either famous or politicised. So social media habits are like addiction and people care the least about security.

People either from rural or urban are found to be the fast learners of mobile operation exceptionally while browsing social media channels. This has lead to have no apprehensions regarding operational efficiency. But, the modified and updates of different channels are not well educated due to communication gap.

Content presentation attracts a lot to the rural consumers since the features are always tried by them. Product promotions with innovative content presentations will lead to attending online clicks and purchases.

Social media channels are set be viral at the stand point of any information specifically the conspiracies in the same way marketers should make the best use of social media channels by making their USP information more viral provided the news should be highly interesting. Even rural people who generally have more leisure time would naturally be attracted to the same.

Product promotions, such as advertisements, publicity, sales promotions and demonstrations are frequently viewed categorically by the rural people. The appropriateness of selecting the rightist channel would be stimulating online buying behaviour.

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Effects of Firm-Level Determinants on Export Performance of SMEs in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

Over the last few decades, international business has experienced steady development all over the globe. Exporting aids the firms with renovations in business capacities which brings much better efficiency by producing extra sources (Chen et al., 2016).To raise the efficiency of SMEs, businesses need to recognize the way to boost their activities in the export market as exporting plays a crucial part to create higher values for them. With comparatively better performance in the export market, the business ultimately improves its efficiency all at once. Dealing with to attain better performance in the export market, SMEs bring added outcomes as well as resources which are extremely vital for their advancement.

For small and medium ventures (SMEs), export plays a major part to create better worth, and also thus, SMEs firms require to know the way to improve export performance and this will ultimately enhance the performance of most of the firms (Maurel, 2009). Identification of determinants, even more specifically, identification of the firm-level controlled determinants of better export performance of SMEs has ended up being critical.

In the economy of Bangladesh, the small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are one of the most important pillars to its continuous developments. The role of SMEs sector is enormous to fulfil the country's plan and actions to reduce the poverty. SMEs in Bangladesh made up more than 99% of economic sector industrial facilities and also developed job chances for 70%–80% of the non-agricultural workforce. The contributions of SMEs to the economy of Bangladesh are still negligible. The role of all SMEs to the GDP is only 20.25 percent in Bangladesh, whereas it stands at 80 percent in India, 60 percent in China and 69.50 percent in Japan. This paper studies export performance indicators of Bangladesh based SMEs, through a structured questionnaire.

Keywords: SME, export performance, Bangladesh economy, garment industry

Introduction

In a publication on SMEs of Bangladesh in 2016, World Trade Organization reported that we know very little about contributions of SME firms in total trade of the country, and what determinants/factors SMEs need to consider during their decisions to start exporting or the benefits SMEs may derive from the process of internationalization (WTO 2016). Exports plays a major role to create greater value for SMEs, and thus, companies need to know how to increase the export performance and this will eventually enhance the performance of the most of the companies

(Maurel, 2009). So eventually, firms need to understand what helps them to perform better in international markets. Firms, especially SME firms, need to identify their controllable factors for this and thus they can enhance their efforts and resources to the appropriate areas.

SMEs are the significant source of job creation as well as they stand as the foundation for future big business as well as companies. SMEs are extra innovative than larger companies, due to their adaptability, flexibility as well as their capability to promptly and successfully integrate inventions in the firms' developmental activities. Studying SMEs can boost our overall understanding of their needs in respect to their as well as social development as a whole. Such understanding would certainly allow SMEs business owners, managers, specialists, policy-makers, and scientists to formulate sound assistance methods for the SMEs firms to sustain and grow. Due to the importance of SMEs to local economic climates, it is needed to research and review their performance, and most importantly the diagnosis of the factors/indicators that effect their performance is crucial.

Scope of the Study

The study is limited to the SMEs firms of Bangladesh, engaged in operations and are registered/controlled under rules of Bangladesh Govt. This research work only categorizes and emphatically studies the internal determinants of export performance of SMEs. It does not include the external factors/determinants of export performance of SMEs. The effects of COVID-19 have not been considered in the research work. Reference period was 2019–20 FY.

Brief Industrial Overview of Bangladesh

The contribution of Industrial Sector to GDP is progressively increasing in Bangladesh. According to the GDP of FY2017-18 the contribution of the manufacturing sector in real GDP is 22.85 percent which was 21.74 percent in FY2016-17. The main industries of the country include textile, pharmaceutical products, electronics, shipbuilding, automotive, bicycle, leather, jute, glass, paper, plastic, food and beverages, cement, tea, rice, natural gas and crude petroleum, iron and steel, etc. In order to accelerate the pace of industrialization of the country the government announced the 'National Industrial Policy-2016' with the goal of sustainable and inclusive industrial growth through generation of productive employment to create new entrepreneurs, mainstreaming women in the industrialization process and international market linkage.

Literature Review

Theoretical Backgrounds & Definitions of the Key Constructs

Export

An export is a function of international trade whereby goods produced in one country are shipped to another country for future sale or trade. Exports are a crucial component of a country's economy, as the sale of such goods adds to the producing nation's gross output. One of the oldest forms of economic transfer, exports occur on a large scale between nations that have fewer restrictions on trade, such as tariffs or subsidies. (SEGAL, 2019). "When a manufacturer exports indirectly, the responsibility for carrying out the foreign selling job is transferred to some other organization. On the other hand, in direct export the responsibility for performing international sales activities is in the hands of the producer." (Albaum et al., 2016)

Exports of goods and services are seen as an engine of economic and social development for a number of reasons, including exports that require companies to innovate and improve to maintain market share. On the other hand, exports ensure increased sales and profits. Alternatively, they reduce dependency on local markets since, in the

Table 1: Volume and Growth Rate of Manufacturing Industry

(In Crore Tk.)
Note: Figures in parentheses indicate growth rate

Type of Industry	2010–11	2011–12	2012–13	2013–14	2014–15	2015–16	2016–17	2017–18
Small and Cottage	21176.0	22569 (6.58)	24558 (8.81)	26113 (6.33)	28342 (8.54)	30909 (9.06)	33945 (11.20)	37456 (13.18)
Medium-Large	88475.3	97998.3 (10.76)	108436 (10.65)	118540 (9.32)	131225 (10.70)	147313 (12.26)	163819 (9.82)	186372 (13.77)
Total	**109651.4**	**120567 (9.96)**	**132994 (10.31)**	**144653.4 (8.77)**	**159568 (10.31)**	**178222 (11.69)**	**197765 (10.97)**	**223827 (10.34)**

Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics & ("Bangladesh Economic Review," 2018)

Table 2: Classification of Cottage, Micro, SME and Large firms by Bangladesh Government.

Type of Enterprise		Fixed assets (Tk) (excl. land and buildings)	No of Employees
Cottage		Below 1 mn	1 to 15
Micro		1 mn to 7.5 mn	16 to 30
Small	Manufacturing	7.5 mn to 150 mn	31 to 120
	Service	1 mn to 20 mn	16 to 50
Medium	Manufacturing	150 mn to 500 mn	121 to 300
	Service	20 mn to 300 mn	51 to 120
Large	Manufacturing	More than 500 mn	More than 300
	Service	More than 300 mn	More than 120

Source: National Industrial Policy 2016, Bangladesh

event of expansion in foreign markets, the market base increases, leading to a reduction in local customers only. According to Jieke Chen, et al (2016), "With the rapid growth of international business, exporting plays a key role in many firms' survival and growth. Exporting activities enhance organizational capabilities, which, in turn, generate additional resources that boost the firms' performance (Filatotchev et al., 2009).

Export Performance

Export performance does not have an unanimously acknowledged definition. Whereas on definition of export performance refers to ''a composite outcome of a firm's international sales, which includes three dimensions: export sales, export profitability and export growth'' (Shoham, 1998). It highlights the multi-dimensionality of the construct but remains quite broad. It represents the variables which will indicate whether the export activity is more or less successful. Literature reviews regarding export performance determinants already exist but are not specific to SMEs. (Maurel, 2009). Export performance has been a central construct in the study of export marketing. Several studies have attempted to identify organizational and managerial antecedents of export performance and assess the relative importance of these antecedents. However, despite these fruitful efforts, there is little agreement in the literature about a conceptual definition of export performance, as well as about its operational definition. (Shoham, 1998).

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)

SME has been defined differently by different countries and institutions. Besides country specific definitions, regional and financial bodies/institutions like World Trade Organization (WTO), European Union (EU) have their own definition and parameters to define and identify SME. Because to variance of various economic parameters worldwide and the differences in the policies for different types of enterprises, it was needed to have a uniform understanding and definition of SMEs in Bangladesh. According to the Bangladesh National Industrial Policy 2016, Bangladesh Bank has reset the definitions of SME as *Table 2*.

Firm Level Determinants of Export Performance

The firm level determinates include the internal factors of the export performance and are classified into three broad categories, namely

(i) Firm Characteristics, Resources and Capabilities

(ii) Management Characteristics and

(iii) Export Marketing Strategy

Each broad area is amplified in the following section through a literature survey.

Firm Characteristics, Resources and Capabilities

(Faruk, O., & Subudhi, R. N., 2019):

a. *Ownership type*

b. *Firm Age*

c. *Firm Size*

d. *Export Experience*

e. *Export intensity*

f. *Export Diversity*

g. *Export Mode*

h. *Firm Resource & Firm Capabilities*

Management Characteristics

a. *Technology Orientation*

b. *Customer Orientation*

c. *Export Commitment*

Export Marketing Strategy

a. *Product Strategy*

b. *Price Strategy*

c. *Promotion Strategy*

d. *Distribution Strategy*

This section deals with the identification of the key internal determinants of export performance and their corresponding variables.

The variables of Company's Export Performance are categorized and then Sub-categorized as 1. Export Sales (*Export Sales Volume and Export Sales Growth)* 2. Export Profitability (*Export Profitability, and Export Profitability Growth)* 3. Export Market Share (*Export Market Share and Export Market Share Growth)* and 4. Other Export Performance Indicators (*Performance Compared to Competitors, Future Prospect, Overall Strategic Goals, and Overall Export Performance).*

The variable covered under firm's objective data are company location, industrial sector, ownership type, enterprise type, employee size, market diversity, exporting destination (continents), product diversity, exporting product diversity, exporting products category, target markets, export mode, sales revenue, export sales revenue, export intensity, loan to start operations, ongoing loan, government subsidy or financial support.

Research Objectives and Methodology

Study attempts to find out the various small and medium enterprises (SMEs) that are operational in the study area. Within those SMEs, the research focuses on the firms which are actively engaged in selling their products to foreign countries for latest 3 years. The various internal factors with special reference to SMEs have been identified through past literature review and their relation with export performance have been studied. The study identified the major factors which contributed to the export performance of the SMEs and suggested ways to improve the performance by focusing on the minor factors which might have been overlooked by the firms till recently. The research would be of importance to the policy makers of Bangladesh as they might be able to reinforce and support the weak areas of SMEs and make necessary procedural changes.

Objectives of the Study

Objective of this study is to identify the relationship of controllable internal determinants with Export Performance of SMEs in Bangladesh, as broad research objective.

For the emerging market, the effect of controllable internal determinants on the firm's export performance has been neglected in the previous literature.

Conceptual Framework

Resource Based View (RBV) of Export Performance

"To develop a more conceptually rigorous and parsimonious model of export strategy and performance, we draw on the RBV of the firm, and an emerging theoretical paradigm in strategic management. RBV focuses on how sustained competitive advantage is generated by the unique bundle of resources at the core of the firm. Early work by Penrose (1959) defined a firm as "a collection of physical and human resources" and pointed to the heterogeneity of these resources. Wernerfelt (1984) suggested that "resources and products are two sides of the same coin" and presented the possibility that by specifying a resource profile for a firm, it would be possible to find the optimal product-market activities. The term "resource" was conceived broadly of as 'anything that can be thought of as a strength or a weakness" of the firm". Dhanaraj, C., & Beamish, P. W. (2003)

Sampling Frame and Population

Although there was an effort to make the sampling frame as exhaustive as possible but as many of the units were not registered with any chamber of commerce or other trade associations tracing them down for the purpose of data collection was a difficult task. Based on convenience and suitability of the study an appropriate sampling frame was prepared from records available with the following institutions:

Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industries (DCCI)
Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industries (CCCI)
Export Promotion Bureau of Bangladesh (EPB)
Bangladesh SME Foundation (BSF)

As the research aimed at knowing the internal organisation factors which influenced the export performance of the firm, only the firms which were in

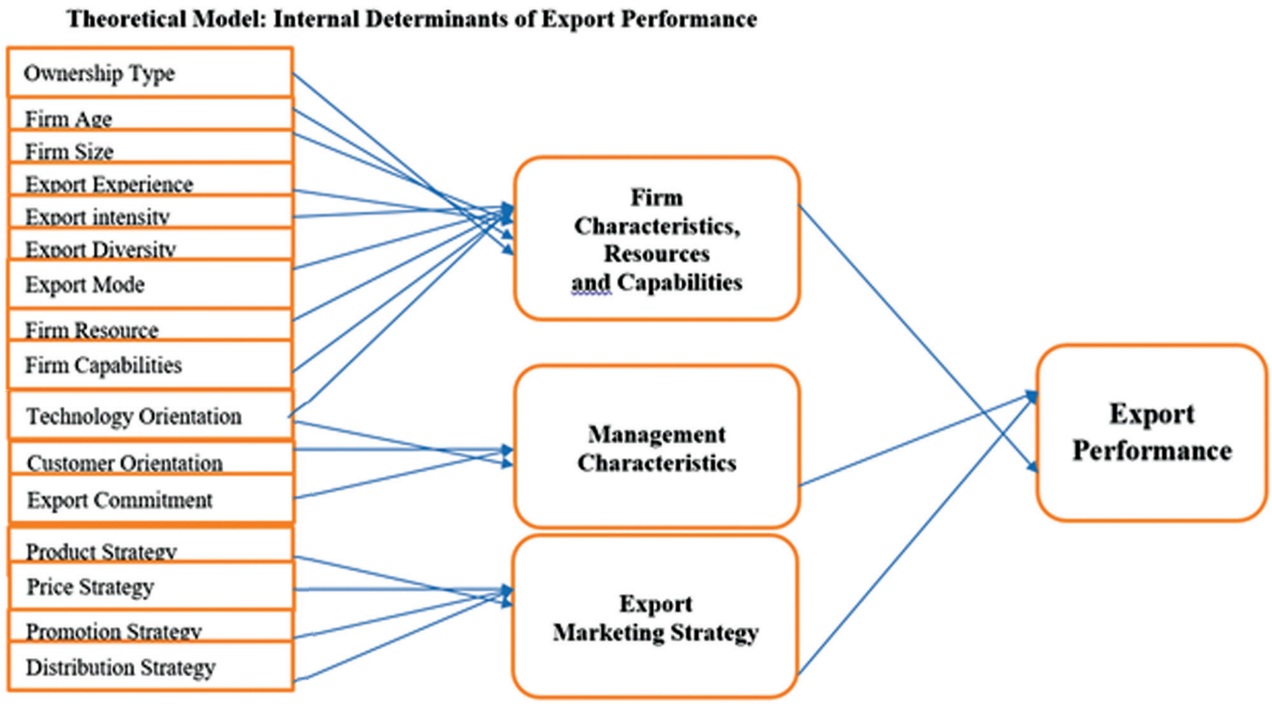

Figure-1:

the export business were taken into consideration. The research criteria demand the direct visit of the researchers to the factory and/or head office of the SME firm, the study only selected the forms whose contact information and address are publicly available. Our research required the direct meeting with Owner/ CEO/ MD/ top level manager of each SME firm, the appointment schedule has to be made contracting with the respondent directly or through the help of a staff of their offices.

From the database of Bangladesh Export Promotion Bureau (2018), the total population which formed part of the sample frame was around 800 exporting SMEs in Dhaka and Chittagong division from various industry sub-sectors. About 15 percent of the target population was chosen for the sample survey. Taking these factors into consideration a sample of 120 exporting SMEs were shortlisted for selection. Finally we ended up with complete useable data from 75 exporting SMEs, selected by convenience sampling.

Though initially 120 units were contacted, because of non-response/ incomplete response, finally the workable sample was reduced to 75. The detail of the workable sample is shown in table 3.

Table 3: Detail of the Sample

Industry Type	Original Sample	Final Sample	% Responded
Readymade Garments	40	36	90.00
Jute and Jute Products	25	10	40.00
Agricultural Products	15	8	53.33
Leather & Leather Goods	15	5	33.33
Pharmaceuticals & Chemicals	10	5	50.00
Other	15	11	73.33
TOTAL	**120**	**75**	**62.5**

Analysis and Discussion

This section covers the analysis of the study. All hypotheses of the study were tested and presented through different statistical tools and techniques. The sections of the chapter is designed as Univariate Analysis of Respondents Information, Univariate Analysis of the Firm's Objective Data, Univariate Analysis of the Firm's Subjective Data, Bivariate Analysis and finally Multivariate Analysis to study the internal determinants of export performance of SMEs in Bangladesh.

Univariate Analysis of Respondents Information

The first section of the data analysis deals with the presentation of the basic information about the respondents of the questionnaire survey done for this research project. Respondent's Age (in years), Respondent's Gender, Respondent's Education and Respondent's Designation are described.

Respondent's Age (in years)

The leading age group of the respondents is 40-49 years, with a percentage of 38.7% among the respondents. 24% of the respondents are from the age group of 30-39 years and 21.3% are from the age group of 50-59. We have 10% respondent from 60 or more years of age and 5.3% from less than 30 years of age. Most of the respondents are the part of the higher management level of the firms, i.e. Owner, CEO, Managing Directors etc. Figure 2 shows the graphical presentation of the respondents age according to the representative age groups.

Respondent's Gender: We have both, male and female representatives in our study, where male respondents are 77.3% and female respondents are 22.7%. Female representation in the ownership and/or in the higher management level of the SMEs are comparatively much lower in Bangladesh.

Respondent's Education: *T*he education level of the respondents shows most of the respondents (69.4%) either have a Masters or Bachelor degree. Where 14.7% has completed HSC level, 9.3% completed SSC level and 2.7% are below SSC level.

Univariate Analysis of the Firm's Objective Data

Company Location: In Bangladesh, there are currently 8 administrative divisions, each is named after the major city within its geographic jurisdiction. Each division is further split into several districts. This is study covers the two major divisions, Dhaka Division and Chattogram Division, which are the two main industry hubs of the country. Out of all the companies we surveyed, 65.3% of the companies are from Dhaka division and 34.7% companies are from Chattogram Division. Table 4 shows the frequency distribution of the division wise company location.

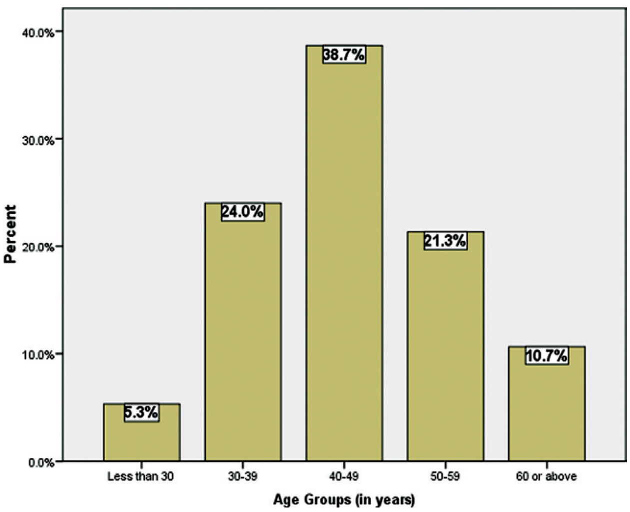

Figure 2: Respondent's Age (in years).

Industrial Sector of the firms: According to the Bangladesh Economic Review (2018), the main industrial sectors of Bangladesh's export earnings are Readymade Garments, Jute and Jute Products, Agricultural Products, Leather & Leather Goods, Pharmaceuticals & Chemicals. The other main industrial sectors include Tea, Frozen Food, Engineering Product, Bicycles, Technological Products (Software), Ceramic etc.

Firms doing the business of Readymade Garments are the leading sector with 48% which has a huge difference from the second most leading sector which is 13.3 % by Jute and Jute Products as shown in *Figure 3*. The main list of the firms was selected from the database of Bangladesh Export Promotion Bureau and the responses came in accordance with the dominance of Readymade Garments sector (almost half of the total responses) which actually provides the major parts of the export earnings of the country.

Ownership Type of the firms: Among the different ownership types of the SME firms in Bangladesh Private (Local) and Joint Venture (Local) comprises 73.3% cumulative percentage of the ownership type where 52% of the firms are Private firms owned by Bangladeshi citizens. As shown in *table 5*, there are 12% of firms are Joint Venture (Local + Foreign ownership) and Private (Foreign Ownership), Public-Private Partnership (PPP), Public Limited Company, State Owned firms holds the percentage of 6.7%, 4.0%, 2.7% and 1.3% respectively.

Enterprise Type of the firms: *Table 6* demonstrates the Enterprise Type of the firms, where 72% of the firms are manufacturing companies and 28% of the firms are service providing companies.

The companies engaged in both types of operations (Manufacturing and Service) in the same time, were not included in the study to maintain the inclusion

Table 4: Company Location

Location	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Dhaka Division	49	65.3	65.3
Chattogram Division	26	34.7	100.0
Total	75	100.0	

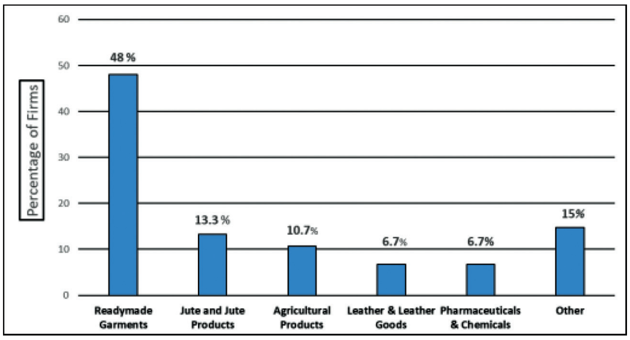

Figure 3: Industrial Sector of the firms.

Table 5: Ownership Type of the firms

Ownership Type	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Private (Local)	39	52.0	52.0
Joint Venture (Local)	16	21.3	73.3
Joint Venture (Local & Foreign)	9	12.0	85.3
Private (Foreign Ownership)	5	6.7	92.0
Public-Private Partnership (PPP)	3	4.0	96.0
Public Limited Company	2	2.7	98.7
State Owned	1	1.3	100.0
Total	**75**	**100.0**	

Table 6 Enterprise Type of the firms

Enterprise Type	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Manufacturing	54	72.0	72.0
Service	21	28.0	100.0
Total	**75**	**100.0**	

Table 7: Number of Countries the firms are exporting their products

Number of Countries	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Less than 5	19	25.3	25.3
5 - 10	21	28.0	53.3
11 - 15	12	16.0	69.3
16 - 20	17	22.7	92.0
More than 20	6	8.0	100.0
Total	**75**	**100.0**	

requirements as a SME in the study because we could not identify any literature about how such a company would be clearly classified as SME or other types such as cottage, micro or large firms.

Employee Size of the firms: According to the National Industrial Policy 2016, Bangladesh the SMEs are categorized with the number of employees they employ. The employee size requirements are different for manufacturing and service companies, respectively. Medium Enterprises are categorized as - Manufacturing firms with 121-300 employees and Service firms with 51-120 employees. Whereas Small Enterprises are categorizing as - Manufacturing firms employ 31-120 employees and Service firms employs 16-50 employees. This study uses employee size groups in consistent with the National Industrial Policy Bangladesh (2016) to easily identify the SME firms.

Number of Countries the firms are exporting their products: Location diversification are demonstrated in *table 7* to show country wise market reach of the firms. Here exporting firms are classified into the groups on the basis of how many countries they cover for their sales outside Bangladesh. 46.7% of the companies reach to more than 10 countries where 53.3% of the companies reach less than or equals to 10 countries.

8% of the companies cover more than 20 countries for their export sales and 30.7% of the companies reach more than 15 countries.

Exporting Destination (Continents) of the firms

68% of the companies cover the markets in Europe where 62.7% of the companies cover North American markets. Australia is the least covered market for Bangladeshi export firms as per the study for this research project. The percentage of the companies that reach to Asian, African and South American countries are 54.7%, 33.3% and 30.7%, respectively.

Total Number of Product vs Number of Exporting Product

We investigated the Total Number of Product that each firm produces and also Number of Exporting Product of each of the firms. 17.3% of the companies produces less than 5 products, 26.7% of the companies produces 5-10 products, 22.7% company produces 11-15 products, 12% of companies produces 16-20 products and 21% produces more than 20 products.

Now, if we look at the export product types, significant percentage of the companies (41.3%) exports only less than 5 products. And, 44.1% (18.7%+ 18.7%+ 6.7%) of

Table 8: Total Sales Revenue During Last Three Years (2019, 2018 & 2017)

Sales Revenue (in BDT)	Percent			Cumulative Percent		
	2019	2018	2017	2019	2018	2017
00–100 cr.	24.0	24.0	24.0	24.0	24.0	24.0
101–200 cr.	21.3	21.3	20.0	45.3	45.3	44.0
201–300 cr.	17.3	21.3	22.7	62.7	66.7	66.7
301–400 cr.	10.7	10.7	13.3	73.3	77.3	80.0
401–500 cr.	10.7	8.0	6.7	84.0	85.3	86.7
>500 cr	16.0	14.7	13.3	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total	**100.0**		**100.0**		**100.0**	

Note: USD 1 = BDT 84; 1cr. = 10 million

Table 9: Export Sales Revenue During Last Three Years (2019, 2018 & 2017)

Export Sales Revenue (in BDT)	Percent			Cumulative Percent		
	2019	2018	2017	2019	2018	2017
00–100 cr.	36.0	34.7	34.7	36.0	34.7	34.7
101–200 cr.	26.7	33.3	34.7	62.7	68.0	69.3
201–300 cr.	14.7	9.3	10.7	77.3	77.3	80.0
301–400 cr.	8.0	9.3	8.0	85.3	86.7	88.0
401–500 cr.	4.0	2.7	2.7	89.3	89.3	90.7
>500 cr	10.7	10.7	9.3	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**		**100.0**	

Note: USD 1 = BDT 84; 1cr. = 10 million

the companies exports 5-20 products type where 14.7% companies export more than 20 products.

Category of the Exporting Products

Majority of the firms (82.7%) export only consumer products, 9.3% of the firms export Industrial Products and 8% of the companies export both category products.

Target Markets of the firms

24% of the companies are fully concentrated on export markets and does not produces any product for local market. But, majority number of the companies (76%) produces products for both local market and export market. The companies who produce products for only local market are not included in this study as this study only focuses on exporting firms.

Export Mode of the firms

Some exporting companies export their products directly to their counterparts whereas some companies use export agents. 16% of the companies export directly, 24% use agents whereas 60% of the companies use both mode of export operations.

Total Sales Revenue During Last Three Years (2019, 2018 & 2017)

Total Sales Revenue earned (from local sales and export sales) of the companies of last three years operations are demonstrated in *table 8*. The companies are divided into six groups according to their sales revenue level. In the year 2019, 62.6% of the companies earned sales revenue ranged BDT 00-300 cr. 21.4% companies earned BDT 301-500 cr and 16% earned more than BDT 500cr. The year wise comparative earnings remain almost same for 2019, 20018 and 2017.

Export Sales Revenue During Last Three Years (2019, 2018 & 2017)

Export Sales Revenue earned (from export sales only) of the companies of last three years operations are demonstrated in table 9. The companies are divided into six groups according to their sales revenue level. In the year 2019, 62.7% of the companies earned sales revenue ranged BDT 00-200 cr. 26% companies earned BDT 201-500 cr and 10.7% of the companies earned more than BDT 500cr of export revenue. There is no significant difference found in the percentage of the companies for 2019, 20018 and 2017 on the basis of their export earnings level.

Average Export Sales as a Percentage of Total Sales (Export Intensity) During Last Three Years

Export Intensity of a company is determined by Average Export Sales as a percentage of Total Sales. A good number of the companies (36%) has Export Intensity between 81%-100% and 4% of the companies has Intensity of 0-20%. 78.7% of the companies has Export Intensity more than 40% and 52% of the companies has more than 60% Export Intensity.

Taken Loan to Start Operations by the Firms: 58.7% of the companies received loan to start their operations whereas 41.3% did not take any loan during their commencement of the business operations.

Any Ongoing Loan of the firms: 68% of the companies has current loans whereas 32% of the companies do not have any ongoing loan.

The Firms Received any Government Subsidy or Financial Support: 62.7% of the companies have received any form of Government Subsidy or Financial Support during the lifetime of the company whereas 37.3% of the companies never received any form of Government Subsidy or Financial Support.

Univariate Analysis of the Firm's Subjective Data

This section demonstrates the Objective Data of the companies collected through questionnaire survey during this research project. The Subjective data collected using Likert Scale are presented regarding Company's Resources and Capabilities; Management Orientation; Export Marketing Strategy and Export Performance.

Company's Resources and Capabilities

The Resources and Capabilities of the company are categorized and then sub-categorized as 1. Resources (Human Resources, Physical Resources, Financial Resources, Technological Resources and Legal Resources), 2. Capabilities (Ease of Exporting, Ability to Improve Products, Ability to Develop New Products, Adopts New Methods and Ideas and Innovation &RnD) and 3. Relationship & Experience (Customer Relations, Customer Connections, International Marketing, Competence in Production Process and Language & Cultural Experiences).

Human Resources: The first variable, Human Resources, identifies, whether company has sufficient Human Resources. 65.3% of the respondent said they are either Agree or Strongly Agree. 14.7% are undecided and 20% are Disagree and none are Strongly Disagree.

Physical Resources: The respondent said they are either Agree or Strongly Agree that the firm has sufficient Physical Resources. 10.7% are undecided and 21.3% are Disagree and none are Strongly Disagree.

***Financial Resources*:** 66.6% of the respondent said they are either Agree or Strongly Agree that the firm has sufficient Financial Resources. 14.7% are undecided and 18.6% are either Disagree or Strongly Disagree.

Technological Resources: 16% of the respondent said they are either Disagreed or Strongly Disagree that the firm has sufficient Technological Resources. 33.3% are Agree and 29.3% are Strongly Agree that the firm has sufficient Technological Resources. Whereas 21.3% are undecided.

Legal Resources: In the Frequency Distribution about the respondents' responses regarding whether the firm has sufficient Legal Resources, 24% are either Disagree or Strongly Disagree and 52% are either Agree or Strongly Agree but 24% of the respondents remained undecided.

Ease of Operation: 18.6% of the respondent said they are either Disagree or Strongly Disagree that Export Operation is Easy for the company. 33.3% agree, 29.3% strongly agree and 1.3% respondents were undecided.

Firms' Ability to Improve Existing Products: 62.6% of the respondent said they are either Agree or Strongly Agree that the firm has the Ability to Improve Existing Products. 20% are undecided and 17.3% are disagree and none are Strongly Disagree.

Ability to Develop New Products: 17.3% of the respondent said they are either Disagree or Strongly Disagree that the firm has the Ability to Develop New Products when required. 44% are Agree and

22.7% are Strongly Agree that the firm has sufficient Technological Resources. Whereas 16% are undecided

Ability to Adopts New Methods and Ideas: 69.4% of the respondent said they are either Agree or Strongly Agree that the firm has the Ability to Adopts New Methods and Ideas. 14.7% are undecided and 16% are disagree and none are Strongly Disagree.

Appreciate Innovation and R&D: 29.3% of the firms are Strongly Agree that the firm Appreciate Innovation and R&D where 38.7% responded Agree. 12% firms are neutral in their responses about it. 20% of the firms are either Disagree or Strongly Disagree.

Customer Relations: The firms were asked whether they take necessary steps to build and maintain Customer Relationship. 45.3% of the respondent said they Agree and 24% are Strongly Agree. 12% are undecided and 17.3% are Disagree and 1.3% responded Strongly Disagree.

Customers Connections: 18.7% of the respondent said they are Disagree to the fact that the key personnel of the firm Create and Maintain Regular Connections with Customers where 65.4% responded either Agree or Strongly Agree. 16% are undecided and none are Strongly Disagree.

Experience to Run Business Process: The key people of the firm have extensive experience in running successful Business Process. 49.3% of the respondent said they Agree and 18.7% are Strongly Agree. 9.3% are undecided and 22.7% are Disagree and none of the firms responded Strongly Disagree.

Experience in International Marketing: 66.6% of the respondent said they are either Agree or Strongly Agree that the key people have required experiences in international marketing. 10.7% are undecided and 22.7% are disagree and none are Strongly Disagree.

Language and Cultural Experiences: 65.3% of the respondent said they are either Agree or Strongly Agree that the key people have sufficient Language and Cultural Experiences. 13.3% are undecided and 20% are Disagree and 1.3% are Strongly Disagree.

Management Orientation

Product Feature as Competitive Advantage: The first variable is Product Feature, which identifies, weather the management of the firm considers Product Feature as a Competitive Advantage. 24% and 32% firms Strongly Agree and Agree respectively to the matter. 21.3% are Neutral to their opinion and 22.6% are either Disagree or Strongly Disagree.

New Technology Use: 62.7% of the respondent said they are either Agree or Strongly Agree that Management Uses New Technology in their operations. 22.7% are Undecided and 13.3% are Disagree and 1.3% are Strongly Disagree.

Technological Edge over Competitors: 20% of the firms are Strongly Agree that the Management has Technological Edge over Competitors where 36% responded Agree to this. 25% firms are Neutral in their responses. 18.6% of the firms are either Disagree or Strongly Disagree.

Awareness on Export Demands: Awareness on Export Demands, which identifies, weather the management of the firm is aware about their Export Demands. 25.3% and 36% firms Strongly Agree and Agree respectively to the matter. 22.7% are Neutral to their opinion and 16% are Disagree and none Strongly Disagree.

Export Customer Relations: 72% of the respondent said they are either Agree or Strongly Agree that Management builds Customer Relationships in Export Market. 18.7% are Undecided and 9.3% are Disagree and none are Strongly Disagree.

Personal Connection with Export Customers: The management of the firms maintains Personal Relationships with Customers/Agents is demonstrated here, where 14.6% of the respondents are either Disagree or Strongly Disagree and 17.3% remained Neutral in their responses. 40% are Agree and 28% are Strongly Agree.

Management Competence: Management Competence, which identifies, weather Management has Competence in International Marketing or not. 16% and 44% firms Strongly Agree and Agree respectively to the matter. 25.3% are Neutral to their opinion and 14.7% are Disagree but non is Strongly Disagree.

Sufficient Manpower for Export Operations: Management employs Sufficient Employees for Export Operations is demonstrated here, where 20% of the respondents are either Disagree or Strongly Disagree and 24% remained Neutral in their responses. 28% are Agree and 28% are Strongly Agree

Sufficient Investments for Export Operations: 20% of the firms are Strongly Agree that Management employs Sufficient Investments for Export Operations where 46.7% responded Agree. 20% firms are Neutral in their responses about it. 13.3% of the firms are Disagree and none responded Strongly Disagree.

Export Marketing Strategy

Product Design: The first variable is Product Design, which identifies, if Products are Designed Before Production Process 29.3% and 38.7% firms Strongly Agree and Agree respectively to the matter. 17.3% are Neutral to their opinion and 14.7% are Disagree and none responded Strongly Disagree.

Quality Criteria of Products**:** 66.6% of the respondent said they are either Agree or Strongly Agree that Products Follow Defined Quality Criteria in the firm. 10.7% are Undecided and 18.7% are Disagree and 4% are Strongly Disagree.

Product Branding: Product Branding is done in Export Markets is demonstrated here, where 17.3% of the respondents are either Disagree or Strongly Disagree and 24% remained Neutral in their responses. 36% are Agree and 22.7% are Strongly Agree

Product Packaging and Labelling: 36% of the firms are Strongly Agree that Packaging and Labelling are done Attentively where 30.7% responded Agree. 12% firms are Neutral in their responses about it. 21.3% of the firms are either Disagree or Strongly Disagree.

Product Adaption Policy: 58.7% of the respondent said they are either Agree or Strongly Agree that Product Adaption Policy is Maintained Regularly in their operations. 21.3% are Undecided and 17.3% are Disagree and 2.7% are Strongly Disagree.

Pricing Strategy: The variable Pricing Strategy, which identifies, weather Pricing Strategy is followed in the International Markets or not. 32% and 37.3% firms Strongly Agree and Agree respectively to the matter 12% are Neutral to their opinion and 18.7% are either Disagree or Strongly Disagree.

Sales Terms: Sales Terms are Used for Exporting Products is demonstrated here, where 17.3% of the respondents are either Disagree or Strongly Disagree and 20% remained Neutral in their responses. 38.7% are Agree and 24% are Strongly Agree

Delivery Schedule are Fulfilled: The variable Delivery Schedule, which identifies, weather the firm fulfill shipping orders or other transactions within the period of time promised to an overseas client or customer. 25.3% and 40% firms Strongly Agree and Agree respectively to the matter. 16% are Neutral to their opinion and 18.6% are either Disagree or Strongly Disagree.

Promotion Policy: Promotion Policy are used International Markets is demonstrated here, where 18.6% of the respondents are either Disagree or Strongly Disagree and 13.3% remained Neutral in their responses. 41.3% are Agree and 26.7% are Strongly Agree.

Export Performance

The variables of Company's Export Performance are categorized and then Sub-categorized as 1. Export Sales (*Export Sales Volume and Export Sales Growth)* 2. Export Profitability (*Export Profitability, and Export Profitability Growth)* 3. Export Market Share (*Export Market Share and Export Market Share Growth)* and 4. Other Export Performance Indicators (*Performance Compared to Competitors, Future Prospect, Overall Strategic Goals, and Overall Export Performance).*

Export Sales Volume: The first variable, Export Sales Volume, which identifies, weather Export Sales Volume is Satisfactory or not. 32% and 26.7% firms Strongly Agree and Agree respectively to the matter. 18.7% are Neutral to their opinion and 22.7% are either Disagree or Strongly Disagree.

Export Sales Growth: Export Sales Growth is Satisfactory, is demonstrated here, where 25.4% of the respondents are either Disagree or Strongly Disagree and 17.3% remained Neutral in their responses. 32% are Agree and 25.3% are Strongly Agree.

Export Profitability: 30.7% of the firms are Strongly Agree that the Export Profitability is Satisfactory where 26.7% responded Agree. 18.7% firms are Neutral in their responses about it. 24% of the firms are either Disagree or Strongly Disagree.

Export Profitability Growth**:**The variable Export Profitability Growth, which identifies, if Export Profitability Growth is Satisfactory. 18.7% and 38.7% firms Strongly Agree and Agree respectively to the matter. 18.7% are Neutral to their opinion and 24% are either Disagree or Strongly Disagree.

Export Market Share: Export Market Share is Satisfactory or not is demonstrated here, where 24% of the respondents are either Disagree or Strongly Disagree and 32% remained Neutral in their responses. 22.7% are Agree and 21.3% are Strongly Agree.

Export Market Share Growth: The variable Export Market Share Growth, which identifies, weather Export Market Share Growth is Satisfactory or not. 22.7% and 25.3% firms Strongly Agree and Agree respectively to the matter. 25.3% are Neutral to their opinion and 26.7% are either Disagree or Strongly Disagree.

Performance Compared to Competitors: Performance is Satisfactory as Compared to the Competitors is demonstrated here, where 28% of the respondents are either Disagree or Strongly Disagree and 18.3% remained Neutral in their responses. 32% are Agree and 21.3% are Strongly Agree.

Future Prospect: 30.7% of the firms are Strongly Agree that the firm is Satisfied with the Company's Bright Future Prospect where 29.3% responded Agree. 14.7% firms are neutral in their responses about it. 25.3% of the firms are Disagree but none responded Strongly Disagree.

Overall Strategic Goals: Overall Strategic Goals are Achieved nor not is demonstrated here, where 25.3% of the respondents are either Disagree or Strongly Disagree and 20% remained Neutral in their responses. 28% are Agree and 26.7% are Strongly Agree.

Overall Export Performance: The last variable is Overall Export Performance, which identifies, weather Overall Export Performance is Satisfactory or not 28% and 29.3% firms Strongly Agree and Agree respectively to the matter. 17.3% are Neutral to their opinion and 25.3% are either Disagree or Strongly Disagree.

Conclusion

The empirical findings suggest that better performance in export market by Bangladeshi SME firms depends on their resources, capabilities, relationship & experience, management's technology development orientation, management's customer orientation, management's export commitment, product strategy, price strategy, distribution strategy, promotion strategy and business characteristics (employee size, market diversity, product diversity, exporting product diversity, exporting products category, target markets, export mode).

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Information Processing Style and E-commerce Website Design: A Clustering-based Conjoint Approach

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ABSTRACT

In a hypercompetitive e-commerce world, the information presented on websites and how prospective customers process such information become highly crucial for subsequent decisions and transactions. Customers differ by their style of information processing. Extant literature indicates a visual or verbal mode of information processing as distinct cognitive styles, which demand a particular mix of website content.

This study designed and developed an orthogonal set of websites and clustered website visitors based on their cognitive style preferences. The website attributes preferences were identified for a distinct segment of customers through a conjoint study.

This research deployed a novel approach to website design using a combined method of clustering (based on Style of Processing scale) and conjoint analysis to design relevant websites for different segments of customers. We find the 'call to action phrase' as the most crucial attribute followed by 'product information, 'search option availability,' and 'product page display' in that order. The importance of these website elements differed significantly by gender. If the customers predominantly used verbal information processing, the product information was more important but if they are visually oriented, then they depend more on 'product page display.'

The findings are expected to help e-commerce retailers to optimize the website design based on the style of information processing of customers.

Keywords: Website Design, Style of Processing, Conjoint Analysis, Cluster Analysis, E-commerce

Introduction

The importance of e-commerce websites as a platform and channel of sales has grown over the years. E-commerce models have successfully challenged the traditional model of commerce and are expected to grow multifold. Different e-commerce revenue models include advertising, subscription, transaction, sales, and affiliate (Traver & Laudon, 2009). This article focuses on e-commerce platforms/websites with sales as a revenue model.

Sales from e-commerce websites have two major obstacles; customers cannot physically evaluate the product, and the information is mainly static. These two constraints and different customer information-seeking aspects significantly alter the sales process requiring closure investigation. Broadly, the e-commerce website has information regarding products and services, website look and feel, policies for sales and returns. There are further sub-divisions of these broad information sets. For example, the product information includes the features and characteristics of the products. Websites also present meta information that helps customers compare past trends and previous buyers' opinions. Customers interact with these aspects to arrive at a purchase or no purchase decision. Nevertheless, the information contained in text, voice, video, and graphics becomes essential to help customers make purchase decisions.

Theoretical Background

Researchers have attempted to develop an integrative model for e-commerce consumer behavior; the role of functional attributes, social factors, experiential aspects of e-shopping, situational factors, consumer traits using the Technology Acceptance Model (Perea y Monsuwé et al., 2004). The websites are designed consistent with the cognitive fit theory, which indicates that the task and information presentation need to enable superior performance (Hong et al., 2004). Similarly, researchers have used Fishbein, and Ajen's Theory of Reasoned Action model, suggesting that attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control determine the behavior (Dennis et al., 2009). The Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework also has been used in several studies indicating that various environmental aspects can become a stimulus to the organism driving a specific response (Chan et al., 2017; H. Kim & Lennon, 2010; Mummalaneni, 2005; Wang et al., 2011; Zhu et al., 2015).

E-commerce consumer behavior and website design elements

Various parameters related to the motivation of a customer to use an e-commerce website have been studied. The informational satisfaction and relational benefit improve users' site commitment and actual purchase behavior (Chung Hoon Park & Kim, 2003). The quantity of information may also cause information load and influence subsequent motivation to purchase (Suri et al., 2003). The website-specific innovativeness and subjective norms influence customer interaction and subsequent decisions (Moshrefjavadi et al., 2012).

Price, discount availability, product details, product availability, delivery time, scarcity or time-limited offer, terms and conditions are essential for customers (Bucko et al., 2018). Furthermore, the information is extended when the customer looks for the social media presence of the product and social proof in terms of product reviews and website reviews (Bucko et al., 2018).

The look and feel, usability, navigation, product availability, and visual appeal influence impulsive online purchase behavior (Liu et al., 2013). The importance of the website on purchasing decisions can be gauged from the fact that the WEBQUAL model was developed similarly to the SERVQUAL model. Webqual 4.0 (Barnes & Vidgen, 2002) was designed to assess e-commerce website quality on five factors under three dimensions (usability, information quality, service interaction quality). Experimental studies have been carried out to design websites/pages based on users' cognitive styles (Belk et al., 2015; Hauser et al., 2009). Website presentation flaws such as poor style, error, and incomplete information adversely affect customers' judgment on website quality (Everard & Galletta, 2005). The relationship between customer shopping style and website attributes has been explored. (Papatla, 2011). Beyond these immediate concerns, customers also have privacy concerns, convenience, and motive of financial gains from using a website (Hann et al., 2007). The logical tradeoff among these factors also influences a customer's decision.

Information processing and decision making by customers

Childers et al.(1985) had developed a 22-item scale to measure visual and verbal style of processing. In a quasi-experimental study, it was observed that users preferred a mix of picture and word descriptions irrespective of the user's style of processing (Lightner & Eastman, 2002). However, in another experimental study, evidence suggested the visual preference heuristics over verbal irrespective of the choice set (Townsend & Kahn, 2014). Information processing strategies adopted by customers in e-commerce environment have been studied; the impact of e-commerce technology in assisting and augmenting customer information processing in an online setting (Punj, 2012), moderating effect of style of processing on the relationship between online product presentation and consumer response (Yoo & Kim, 2014).

The decision-making individual difference inventory (DMIDI) developed by Appelt et al. (2011) lists various scales/measures for consumer decision-making based on risk attitude, cognitive ability, motivation, personality, and other factors. Researchers have studied the consumer decision-making style in an online purchase environment. The decision-making style at the individual level and market level vary (Karimi, 2013). If the customer has been a regular visitor to a specific e-commerce website, the customer can develop a habitual decision-making style compared to rational decision-making in e-commerce set up (Cheung et al., 2015). The moderating effects of decision-making styles (habitual, rational) on the perceived risk in using a website are also studied (Chang & Wu, 2012). It is also understood that consumer decision style is influenced by the knowledge of the product in the online purchase process (Karimi et al., 2015).

Methodology

Websites can be customized for customer segments based on the website customer's Style of Processing (SOP). Hence, we propose the following two research objectives.

1) To understand customer segments based on their Style of Processing of information (Visual vis-à-vis Verbal) using the SOP scale discussed in the previous section

2) To understand the preference of customers (overall and segment-wise) for different attributes/elements of a website.

Using an experimental internet research design recommended in previous studies (Chen et al., 2008; Olivier Furrer & Sudharshan, 2001; Reips, 2002), a set of websites were created, and respondents were asked to visit the websites and provide their preference rating for the websites. Regarding the number of customer segments created and minimum sample size requirement, the study had followed the guidelines in previous research of customer-driven website optimization study (Gofman et al., 2009). One hundred and ten respondents participated in the online survey. After removing the missing data, 106 responses were analyzed.

Orthogonal design for creating websites

Conjoint analysis is used in marketing to predict customer preference for different product/service attributes for designing products/services. The conjoint study method has been used in earlier researches to understand the preference for other website design elements.(Hung et al., 2010; Sebastianelli Rose Tamimi, 2013; Sharma et al., 2019).

However, it becomes difficult to test all the combinations when the number of attributes and elements increases. Hence orthogonal design (Malhotra & Dash, 2010; Shi & Li, 2016) is utilized to create manageable profiles (combination of attributes) which respondents can rate/rank as a part of the conjoint study. Based on earlier research studies (Blake et al., 2017; Constantinides, 2004; Cox & Dale, 2002; Garaus, 2018) and discussions with e-commerce industry experts, the following attributes and levels (Table I) were finalized for constructing different web pages.

Since attribute-level combinations create 36 webpage profiles, which is tiresome for respondents to rank/rate based upon their overall preference, the orthogonal design was utilized to reduce the number of potential profiles to 9 profiles/websites, as shown in Table 2 below.

Based on the nine profiles designed through orthogonal design, nine websites were created that simulate the web environment of an e-commerce website that deals with Mobile phones. On the webpage, ten top-selling mobile phones in India have been displayed.

In the below Picture 1, a snapshot of Website 3 is shown. It includes different website attributes/elements; Image+ Net Price+ Description+ Reviews+ Delivery & Return Policy, CTA: Buy Now, Search option Availability: Yes, Product Page Display: Multiple products at a time.

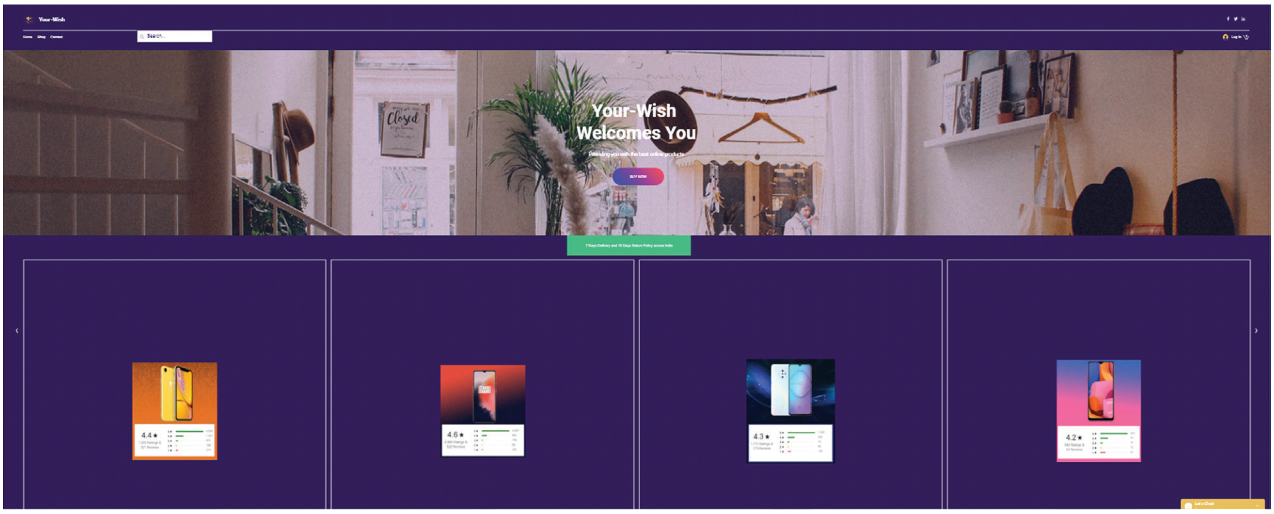
In the below Picture 2, a snapshot of Website 4 is shown. It includes different website attributes/elements; Image+ Net Price+ Description, CTA: Buy Now, Search option Availability: Yes, Product Page Display: One product at a time.

Table 1: Website Attributes and Levels

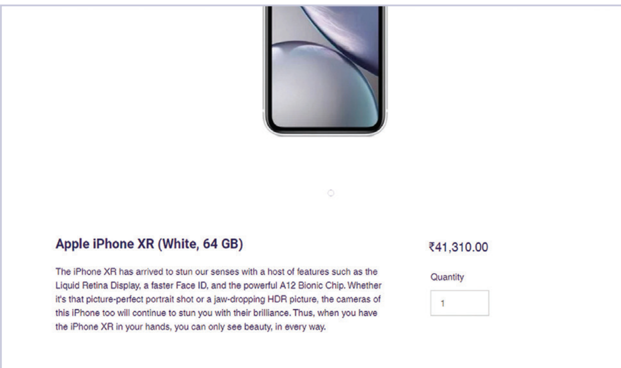
Factors/Website Attributes	**Levels**		
Product Information (3 levels)	Image+ Net Price + Detail description	Image+ Net Price + Detail description +Reviews	Image+ Net Price+ Detail description+ Reviews+ Delivery & Return Policy
Call-to-action (CTA) Phrase (3 levels)	Buy Now	Deal of the day	Save today
Search option availability (2 levels)	Available	Unavailable	
Product Page display (2 levels)	One product at a time	Multiple products at a time	

Table 2: 9 website profiles created using orthogonal design

Website ID	Product Information	Call to Action Phrase	Search option availability	Product page display
1	Image+ Net Price +Description+ Reviews	Deal of the day	Available	One product at a time
2	Image+ Net Price+ Description+ Reviews+ Delivery & Return Policy	Deal of the day	Available	One product at a time
3	Image+ Net Price+ Description+ Reviews+ Delivery & Return Policy	Buy Now	Available	Multiple products at a time
4	Image + Net Price+ Description	Buy Now	Available	One product at a time
5	Image + Net Price+ Description	Save today	Available	One product at a time
6	Image+ Net Price+ Description+ Reviews+ Delivery & Return Policy	Save today	Unavailable	One product at a time
7	Image+ Net Price +Description+ Reviews	Buy Now	Unavailable	One product at a time
8	Image+ Net Price +Description+ Reviews	Save today	Available	Multiple products at a time
9	Image + Net Price+ Description	Deal of the day	Unavailable	Multiple products at a time



Picture 1: Snapshot of Website 3.



Picture 2: Snapshot of Website 4.

Questionnaire

Style of Processing (SOP) scale, developed by Childers et al., is a self-reported questionnaire with 22 items to measure the style of processing (visual and verbal). SOP scale was used, as it is, for our research purpose. The SOP scale span is between 1 to 4 (1=always true, 4=always false). Few negative statements are reverse coded during analysis. The overall scores provide a continuum from verbally oriented (overall low scores on the scale) to visually oriented (overall high scores on the scale). Also, respondents were requested to browse through each of the nine websites and provide a rating on a scale of 1 to 10 (1: Least likely to make any purchase on the website, 10: Most likely to make a purchase on the website).

Additionally, respondents were requested to provide demographic variables such as age, gender, income group, and behavioral variables such as the number of e-commerce websites used, frequency of purchase, and online spend amount (Pandey et al., 2015). For this study, we have considered two Age (in years) groups (up to 25, above 25) and three annual income groups (Less than $ 6500, Between $ 6500 and $ 13000, above $ 13000). The average order value in online shopping is around $ 128 (Ogonowski, 2020). Hence, we considered two levels for average online spend per month (Less than $ 130, More than $ 130). Furthermore, approximately 62% of online buyers shop once a month, whereas 26% shop once a week (Mohsin, 2020). Hence, we considered two levels for purchase frequency in a month (less than five times, more than five times).

Cluster Analysis

Cluster Analysis is a multivariate data analysis method to group elements based upon variables defined in the research, and K-means clustering is the most favored method (Hair et al., 2019). Cluster-based analysis has been used earlier to study purchase patterns/intentions in different consumer groups (Belk et al., 2013; Chang Hee Park, 2017). Based on the clustering analysis, 106 respondents are segmented into two groups (Cluster 1- 75 respondents and Cluster 2- 31 respondents). Cluster 1, with an overall average score of 2.72, represents visually-oriented individuals, and Cluster 2, with an average overall score of 2.48, represents verbally oriented individuals.

Findings and Discussions

SPSS 25.0 software was used to carry out overall conjoint analysis to elicit the importance of various attributes. The high correlation coefficient (Pearson's R, Kendall's tau) indicates a good model fit. As shown below in Figure 1, for all the respondents, the most crucial attribute emerged to be 'Call to Action phrase' followed by 'product information, 'search option availability,' and 'product page display' in that order.

After overall conjoint analysis, we ran the cluster-wise conjoint analysis for different clusters to understand the cluster-specific importance of attributes.

The comparison of attributes by averaged importance score for clusters/segments defined based upon Gender (Male and Female) is shown below in Figure 2.

The attribute importance scores for 'Call to action phrase' and 'product information' is more for Females than Males, whereas importance scores for 'Search option availability' and 'product page display' are more for Males in comparison to Females.

The comparison of attributes by averaged importance score for clusters/segments defined based upon Age (up to 25, above 25) is shown below in Figure 3.

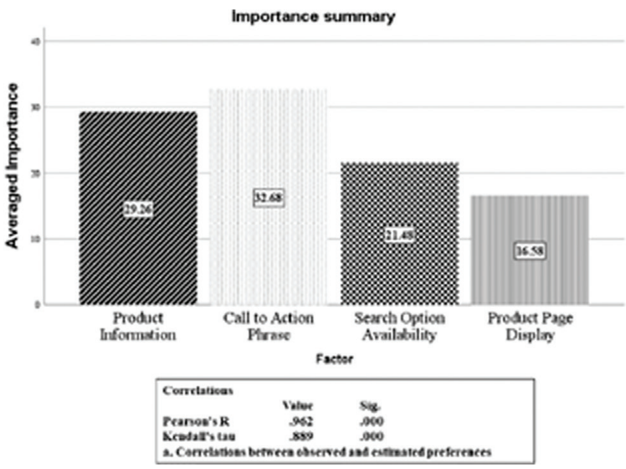


Figure 1: Overall attribute importance summary.

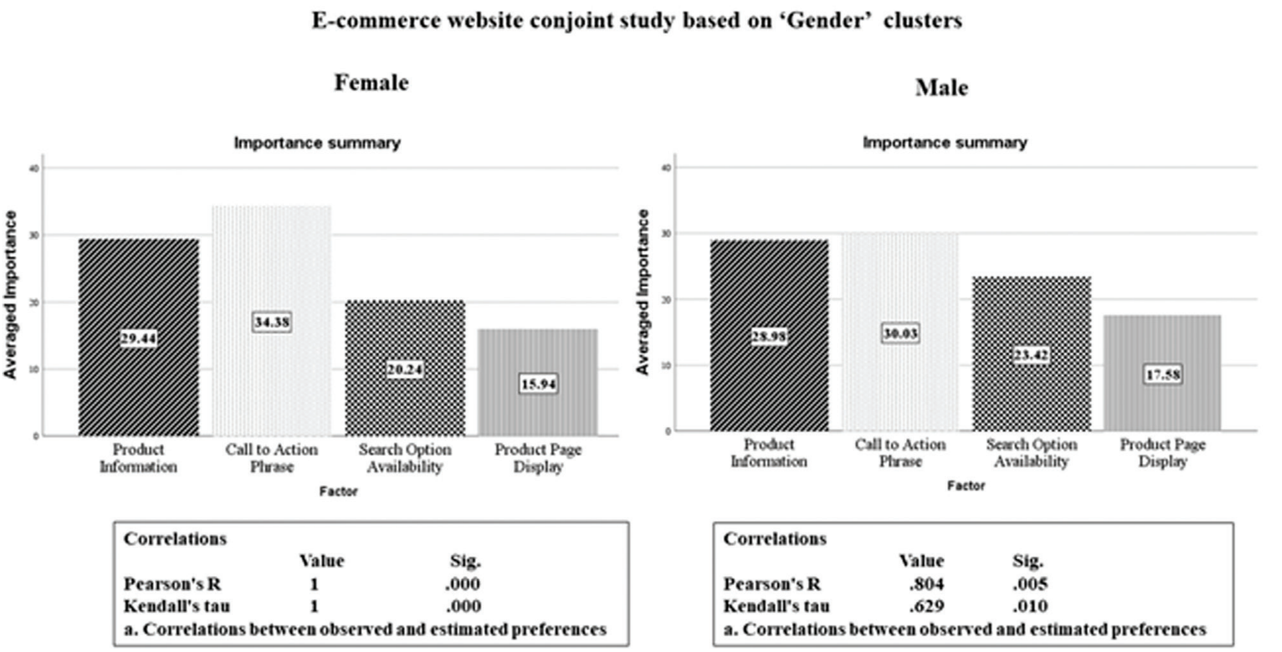


Figure 2: Attribute importance comparison (Gender).

The attribute importance scores for the 'Call to Action phrase' and 'product information' were approximately similar for both the age clusters. In contrast, the importance score for 'Search option availability' was higher for respondents up to age 25, whereas the importance score for 'product page display' was more for respondents above age 25.

The comparison of attributes by averaged importance score for clusters/segments defined based upon annual income groups (Less than $ 6500, between $ 6500 and $ 13000, above $ 13000) is shown below in Figure 4.

For respondents with annual income below $ 6500, 'product information' emerged as the most important attribute followed by 'Call to Action phrase,' 'Search option availability' and 'Product page display.' For respondents with annual income between $ 6500 and $ 13000 and with annual income above $ 13000, 'Call to Action phrase' emerged as the most important attribute followed by 'Product Information,' 'Search option availability' and 'Product page display.'

The comparison of attributes for clusters/segments defined based upon average online spend per month (Less than $ 130, More than $ 130) is shown below in Figure 5.

The attribute importance scores for 'Call to Action phrase' and 'Search option availability' were

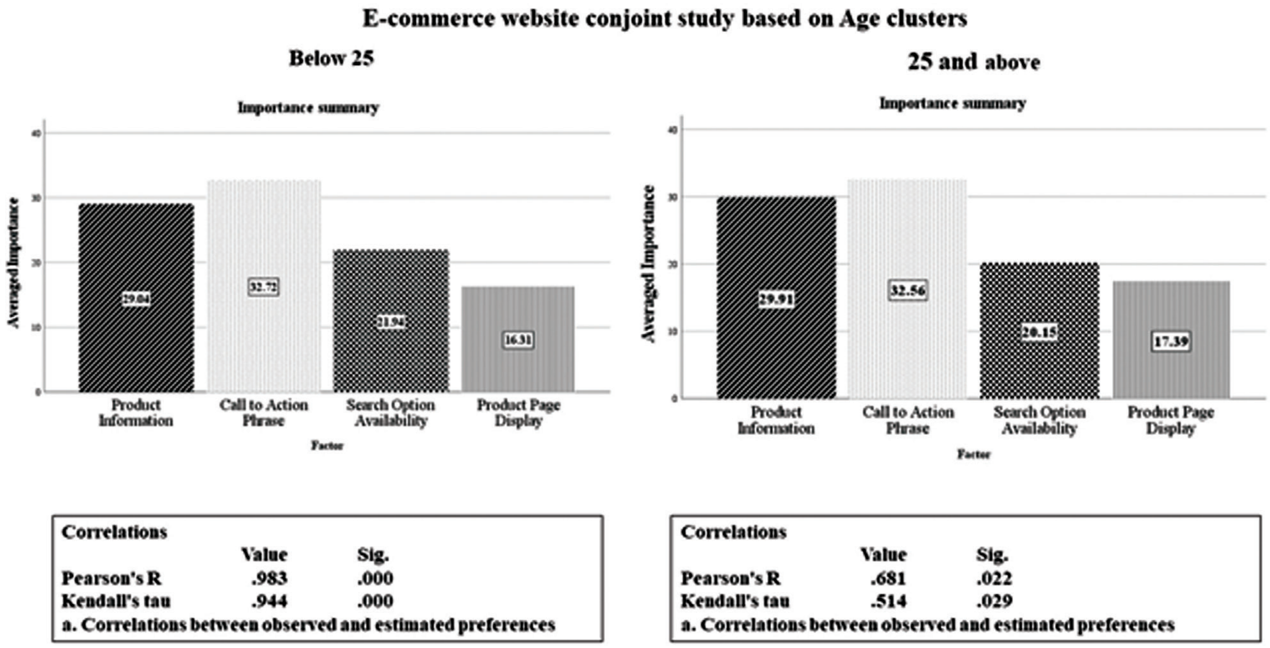


Figure 3: Attribute importance comparison (Age).

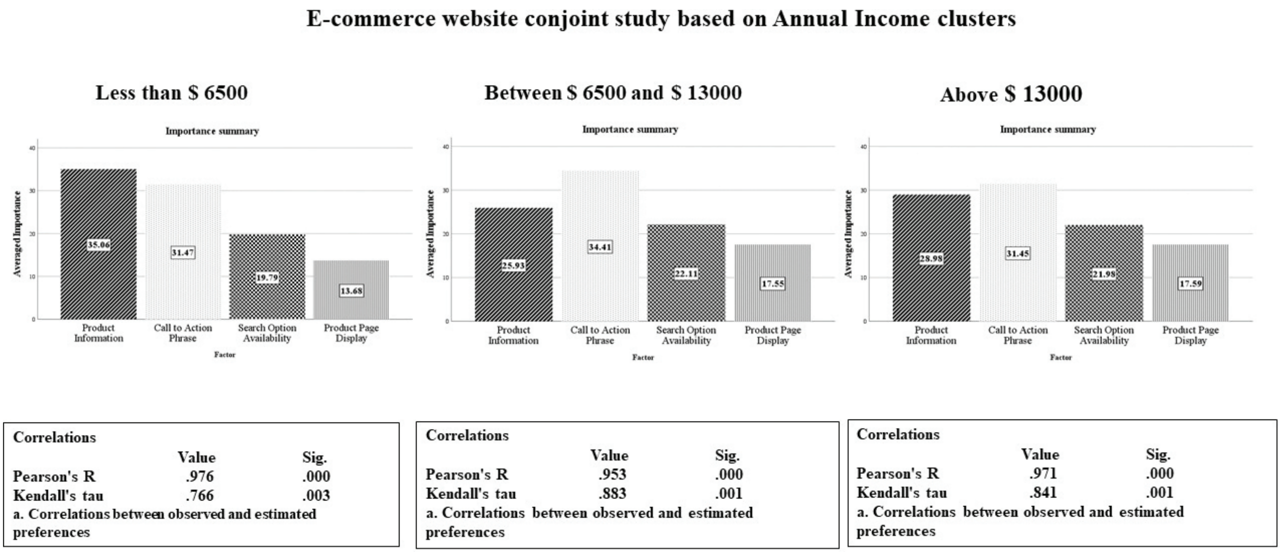


Figure 4: Attribute importance comparison (Annual income groups).

approximately similar for both the clusters, whereas importance scores for ‘product information’ was higher for respondents with a monthly average spend amount less than $130, whereas the importance score for ‘product page display’ is more for respondents with a monthly average spend amount greater than $130

The comparison of attributes by averaged importance score for clusters/segments defined based upon purchase frequency in a month (less than five times, more than five times) is shown below in Figure 6.

The attribute importance scores for ‘Call to Action phrase’ and ‘product information’ were approximately similar for both clusters. In contrast, the importance score for ‘Search option availability’ was higher for respondents with a monthly purchase frequency of less than 5. In contrast, the importance score for ‘product page display’ was more for respondents with a purchase frequency of more than 5.

The comparison of attributes by averaged importance score for clusters/segments defined based upon Style of (information) Processing clusters (Visual, Verbal) created

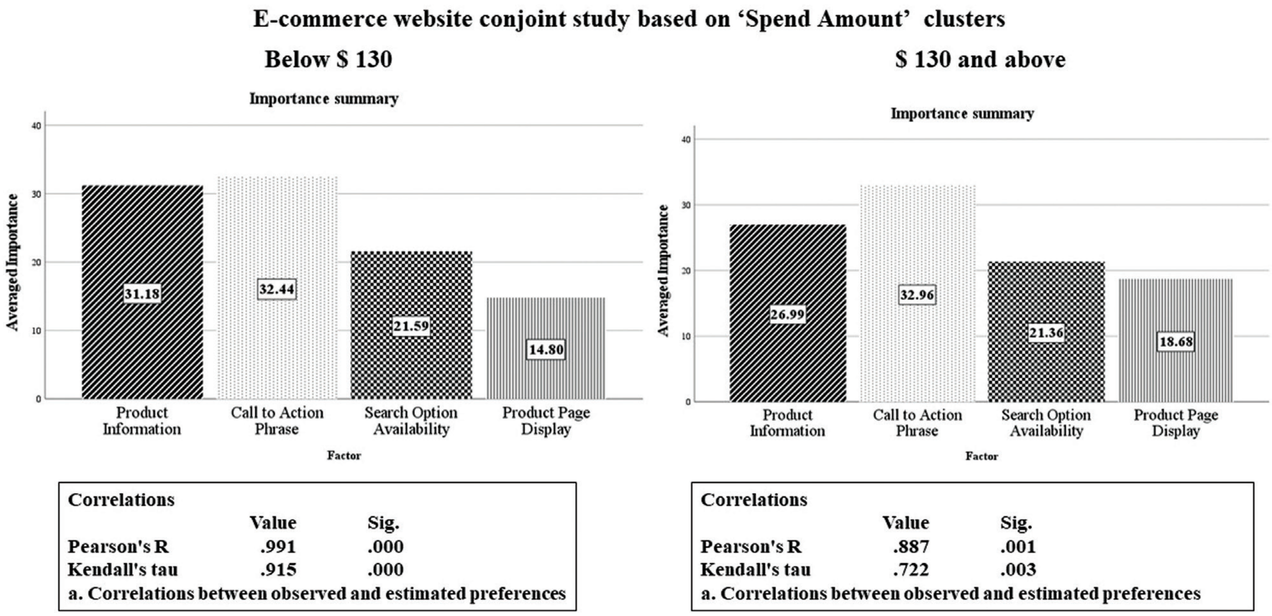


Figure 5: Attribute importance comparison (Average monthly online spend).

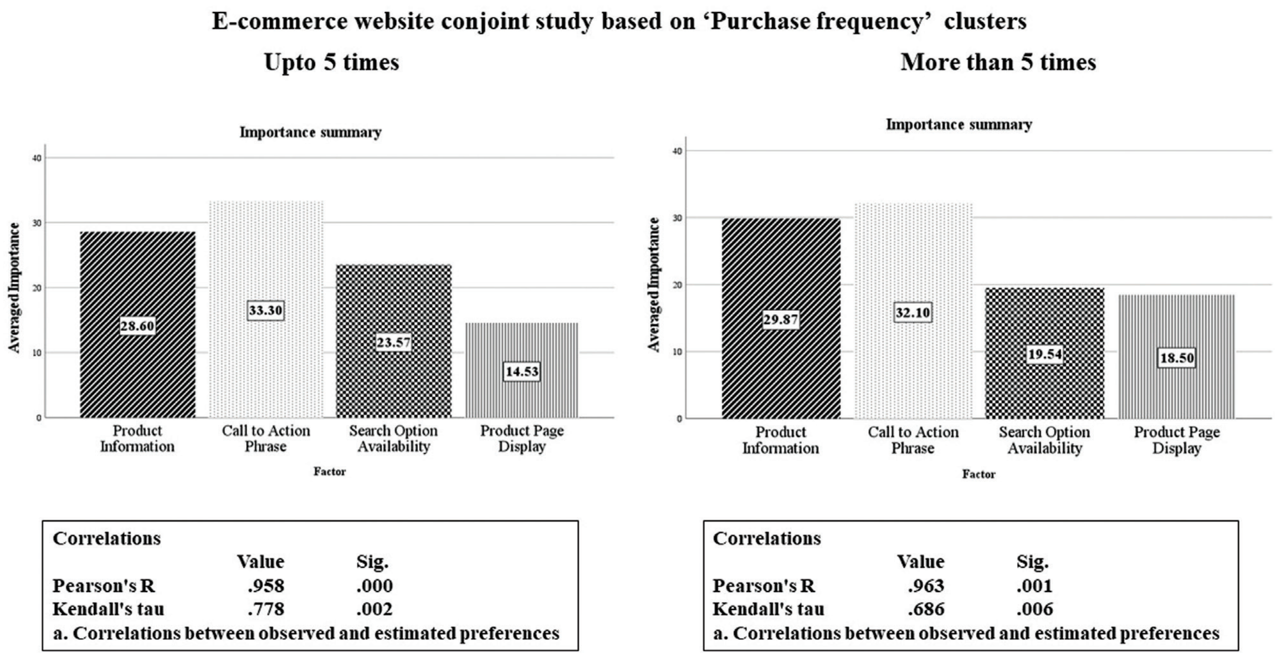


Figure 6: Attribute importance summary comparison (Purchase frequency in a month).

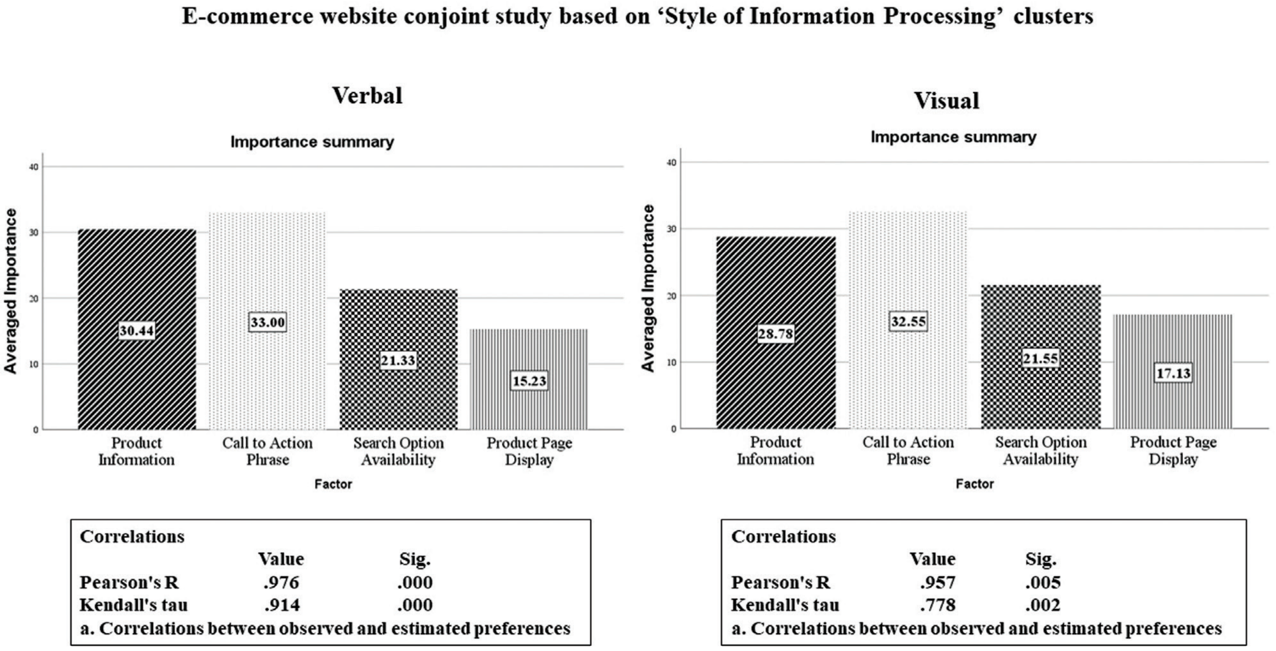


Figure 7: Attribute importance comparison (Style of Processing).

through k-means clustering as explained in the earlier section is shown below in Figure 7.

The attribute importance scores for 'Call to Action phrase' and 'Search option availability' were approximately similar for both the clusters. The importance score for 'product information' was higher for respondents with the verbal style of information processing, whereas the importance score for 'product page display' is more for respondents with the visual style of information processing.

Limitations

In this research, respondents had to fill up the style of processing questionnaire and then rate the attributes of nine websites individually—this introduced respondents' fatigue. Secondly, more sample size could have given better results for conjoint analysis. Thirdly, though the websites were designed around mobile phones as products, the customers did not actually have to buy from this website. Thus, the behavior exhibited on these websites may not represent the behavior when a customer actually decides to purchase from an e-commerce website.

Conclusions and Scope for Future Research

Our study supports the earlier finding that men and women defer in their information processing styles. Hence, the websites need to be designed considering distinct information processing styles of both genders (Arcand & Nantel, 2012). Furthermore, our findings support an earlier study (M. Kim & Lennon, 2008) on the positive influence of detailed product descriptions on the consumer shopping experience. As shown in the earlier section, for customers whose style of information processing is 'verbal,' 'product information' was more important than 'product page display' whereas for customers whose style of information processing is 'visual', the product page display was more important than product information details. Hence, website designs can be optimized to the style of processing of individual website visitors.

The novelty of this paper rests on the usage of the Style of Processing (SOP) scale to create customer clusters/segments and carry out segment-wise conjoint analysis to optimize website design for e-commerce companies. As most companies worldwide are adapting to the online channel of selling, it becomes pertinent that companies design the websites considering the style of information processing of customers

Future research can be carried out with a larger sample of customers, including additional attributes and levels for website elements for conjoint design and other clustering variables to understand customer segments better.

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Retail Format Choice for Smartphone Purchase: Online Versus Offline

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – The purpose of this exploratory study is to identify and examine the buying motivation factors along with socio-demographics characteristics of smartphone buyers with respect to the retail format choice i.e. online and offline.

Design/methodology – The study includes responses from 533 individuals who had purchased smartphone in last one year. Binary logistic regression is employed to create a predictive model to predict the retail format choice of consumers based on the demographic and shopping motivation factors. Other behavioral aspects of smartphone purchase with respect to both set of customers is established using chi-square analysis.

Findings – The predictive model correctly classified 74.7% respondents based on retail format choice for smartphone purchase. Price, offers and discounts, product variety/availability of models, convenience, ease of product comparison and accessibility are the key motivational factors for online consumers. In case of offline buyers' factors like need for touch, salesperson assistance, after-sales service, trust and reliability are the key differentiators.

Research limitations/ implications - This study explored various factors and incorporated them into the predictive model, but there could be other factors which are yet to be explored. The scope of this study was limited to one state in India. Similar studies can be conducted across geographies and other product categories for generalizability.

Practical implications - Retailers and brands may find information on shopping motives in terms of retail format choice behaviour to be significant and valuable in developing strategies for channel diversity and expansion. Hence, this exploratory study can be of great importance from a marketing, sales and distribution perspective.

Novelty - As scarce literature exists on the prediction of store choice behaviour, this paper successfully attempts to provide a predictive model on retail format choice (Online or Offline) for smartphone purchase by differentiating channel users in Odisha, India.

Keywords: Smartphones, online retail, offline retail, Logistic regression

Introduction

India, in the last few years, has seen a tremendous growth in the number of smartphone user. Recent study has shown that close to 760 million people in India use smartphone (Statista Research Department, 2021). With smartphone penetration in India projected to reach 1.1 billion by 2022 (ICEA Report, 2021), it has become a necessity for almost all (Watkins *et al.,* 2012). The smartphone market is estimated to be INR 2 trillion (Business Standard, 2021) which is catching the eyeballs of smartphone brands across the globe. Multinational brands are investing in India to tap the consumers of rural and semi-urban population.

Organised retailing in India which is rapidly evolving has greatly diversified the choices available to consumers (Gupta and Shukla, 2015). The growth in e-commerce market is fueled majorly by the increasing smartphone usage (Richa and Vadera, 2019). The importance of smartphone has enhanced during the pandemic period where most of the classes and professional work shifted to digital medium. In India there are multiple options from where a consumer can buy a smartphone. The traditional mobile shops are no longer the only resort. Recent study shows that an increasing 47% of the Indian buyers prefer to buy smartphones online (*91mobiles Smartphone Buyer Insights Survey 2020: A Summary | 91mobiles.Com*, n.d.). Rest 28% still prefer offline and 25% buyers are not sure about their choice of retail format. Thus, exploration of the factors involved in selection of retail format is important from research perspective.

In the process of shopping (Peterson *et al.,* 1997), the choice of the retail format (Hsiao, 2009) is an important decision taken by consumers. Consumer behaviour is undergoing continuous transformation with the presence of multiple channels (Van Bruggen *et al.,* 2010). With the increasing number of retail format choices for consumers, the competition among retailers is also getting intense in consumer electronics (Carpenter and Balija, 2010). Online shopping has particularly gained popularity among young consumers (Sarkar and Das, 2017). In order to study channel choice behaviour, it is important to understand different retail format attributes because the internet has greatly influenced the buying pattern of consumers in India (Prasad and Raghu, 2018). Therefore, this paper focused on one particular product category (Kushwaha and Shankar, 2013) i.e., smartphones, so that the impact of attributes of different retail formats can emerge (Hsiao, 2009). Researchers have observed that different retail channels involve different shopping motivational values (Wong *et al.,* 2018). Marketing scholars (Mokhlis and Salleh, 2009) and practitioners (Hong, 2015) try to understand and study these shopping motivational values and related buying behaviour. It is believed that this study on consumer channel preferences related to smartphone purchase to come up with better retail and marketing strategies (Rangaswamy and Van Bruggen, 2004). As scarce literature exists on the prediction of store choice behaviour (Choi and Park, 2006), this paper attempts to give a predictive model on retail format choice (Online or Offline) for smartphone purchase by differentiating channel users in Odisha, India.

Literature Review

Smartphone purchase

Product category has an impact on the retail channel choice (Balasubramanian *et al.,* 2005; Prasad and Raghu, 2018; Wong *et al.,* 2018). Although electronics products are generally categorized as utilitarian products by past literature (Haridasan and Fernando, 2018), the current usages of a smartphone make it more than just that. With the fast-growing Indian telecom sector, smartphones have become an essential part in one's personal and business life (Mohan, 2014). The frequency of smartphone purchase has increased overtime. Certain factors were identified as more important than others when customers buy tech-savvy electronic products like smartphone (Mohan and AK*,* 2015).

Salesperson assistance. Customer service in terms of interpersonal (Baker et al., 2002; Haridasan and Fernando, 2018) and information assistance (Haridasan and Fernando, 2018) at the time of purchase plays an important role in retail format selection especially for technically complex products (Bencic, 2017; Carpenter and Balija, 2010) like smartphones. It not only helps the consumer to make an informed decision, but also makes them feel special by catering to their hedonic needs (Haridasan and Fernando, 2018). Customer's loyalty towards an offline store is enhanced by a knowledgeable salesperson (Rabbanee *et al.,* 2012).

Availability of Models and Product Variety. Electronics manufacturers make their products available on specific online portals and not giving channel options to consumers (Sarkar and Das, 2017). Monopoly of certain smartphone brands held by online sellers adversely impact the businesses of offline (Gupta and Shukla, 2015). Online retailers offer a better variety of products (Sarkar and Das, 2017), which is particularly attractive to tier II and tier III cities of India as those products are not easily available in their local offline market (Richa and Vadera, 2019). Online customers seek product variety as compared to Offline customers (Choi and park, 2006; Donthu and Garcia, 1999; Haridasan and Fernando, 2018).

After-sales service. After-sales service plays a crucial role while purchasing smartphone (Kaushal and Rakesh, 2016). Sands *et al.* (2016) found that after-sales service is a deciding factor in the retail channel choice. Issues related to after-sales or post-purchases services deter consumers from online shopping (Richa and Vadera, 2019).

Demographic differentiators – online vs offline

Literature suggests that demographics characteristics have an impact on retail format choice behaviour (Choi and Park, 2006; Gillett, 1976; Jasper and Lan, 1992; Wright, 1996). Although several studies have investigated the relationship between demographics and channel choice behaviour, the findings observed were inconsistent (Choi and Park, 2006) and inconclusive.

Thus, it is important to study the impact of socio-demographic factors on retail choice behaviour for smartphone purchase.

Channel differentiators – online vs offline

Channels working with different modus operandi, attract different consumer groups with not only their products, but with the 'package of services' they offer (Furey and Friedman, 2012). Consumer behaviour studies in retailing have identified relationships between retail format choice and shopping motivations (Dawson *et al.,* 1990). Based on product category consumers look for different benefits from the channel they shop (Haridasan and

Table 1. Literature review of demographic characteristics

Socio-demographic factors	Key-findings	Source
Gender	Women are more inclined to purchasing online	Ding and Lu (2017), Maat and Konings (2018)
	Men are more inclined to purchasing online	Choi and Park (2006), Farag *et al.,* (2006b) & (2007); Crocco *et al.,* (2013); Akhter (2003)
	Men are more likely to choose online channel for purchase of electronics than women	Zhen *et al.,* (2016)
	Gender has no significant impact on online shopping behaviour	Beldona *et al.,* (2011), Lee *et al.,* (2015); Gupta and Shukla (2015)
Age	Age negatively impacts online shopping behaviour	Choi and Park (2006), Farag *et al.,* (2007), Crocco *et al.,* (2013), Zhou and Wang (2014), Ding and Lu (2017), Maat and Konings (2018)
	For electronic goods, higher age group shoppers tend to purchase online	Donthu and Garcia (1999)
	The relationship between age and online shopping behaviour is non-linear	Farag *et al.,* (2006B), Zhen *et al.,* (2018), Beldona *et al.*, (2011)
	Channel choice behaviour across age groups differs significantly with regards to Consumer durables	Gupta and Shukla (2015)
Income	Income positively impacts online shopping behaviour	Donthu and Garcia (1999), Farag *et al.,* (2007), Blasio (2008), Cao *et al.,* (2012) & (2013), Crocco *et al.,* (2013), Zhou and Wang (2014), Zhen *et al.,* (2016) & (2018)
	Income has no significant impact on shopping behaviour	Farag *et al.,* (2006b), Ding and Lu (2017)
Education	Education positively impacts online shopping behaviour	Farag *et al.,* (2006b) & (2007), Blasio (2008), Cao *et al.,* (2012), Zhou and Wang (2014), Zhen *et al.,* (2018)
	Education has no significant impact on online shopping behaviour	Ding and Lu (2017); Beldona *et al.,* (2011)
	Educational qualification has a significant impact on decision making while purchasing	Kizgin *et al.,* (2021)
Occupation	Type of work has a significant impact on online shopping behaviour	Ren and Kwan (2009), Cao *et al.,* (2013)
	Occupation has no significant impact on store choice behaviour	Gupta and Shukla (2015)

Fernando, 2018). This is because of the complex nature of shopping activity (Hsiao, 2009) in various contexts (Dellaert *et al*., 2008).

Price. Price charged against the purchase of a product or service (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010) is a significant factor (Lin & Lin, 2007) which has an impact on customer purchase intention at the time of buying a smartphone (Tran, 2018). Extant literature tends to indicate that the offline prices are higher than online prices (Hsiao, 2009; Rotem-Mindali & Weltevreden, 2013) and hence consumers choose to purchase from online (Jasrotia *et al.,* 2019; Koyuncu and Bhattacharya, 2004).

Offers and discounts. Consumers prefer online channel for the offers and discounts they get (Sarkar and Das, 2017). In Indian online shopping scenario, retailers give offers and discount to gain more market share (Richa and Vadera, 2019). Deep discounts offered by online retails make the competition tough for offline mobile stores (Gupta and Shukla, 2015). Individuals pick online channel due to an assortment of utilitarian and hedonic factors; out of which rebate and exclusive offers is one of the significant factors (Liu and Xiao, 2008).

Need for touch. The experience of touch and feel of the products (Chiang and Dholskia, 2003; Lynch *et al.,* 2001) before purchasing is more important to offline shoppers than online shoppers (Bagga *et al.,* 2013; Choi and Park, 2006; Li *et al.,* 1999). Offline shoppers get a superior multisensory experience of products (Hsiao, 2009; Nelson, 1974). It helps consumers to validate products (Spangenberg *et al.,* 2006). While some researchers argued that the physical verification of the product in offline stores is substituted by the information available by online stores (Athapaththu and Kulathunga, 2018) but no significant evidence was found in case of electronics/smartphone purchase.

Convenience. Robinson *et al.,* (2007) and Chocarro *et al.,* (2013) found that convenience is the most important motivational factor for online purchase due to around-the-clock availability and delivery services. The shoppers who look for saving time (Akaah *et al.,* 1995) and convenience prefer online shopping channels (Beldona *et al.,* 2011; Choi and park, 2006; Donthu and Garcia, 1999; Haridasan and Fernando, 2018; Li *et al.,* 1999). It is more convenient to obtain product information online compared to offline channels and it helps online shoppers to avoid salespersons and hassle of shopping in crowded places (Grewal *et al.,* 2003).

Ease of Product Comparison. Shopping online enables consumers to compare products (Bagga *et al.,* 2013; Farag *et al.,* 2007) and services providing additional information (Huang, 2000). Online channel permits buyers to look for product description, analyse costs, and make fast buys (Beldona *et al.,* 2011).

Accessibility. Although, a few studies in past had shown lack of impact of accessibility on online shopping (Krizek *et al.,* 2004), but a good amount of literature is available which shows that accessibility has an impact on retail choice decision (Farag *et al.,* 2006b; Farag *et al.,* 2007; Srinivasan and Bhat, 2004). With respect to online shopping, novelty, product information, accessibility (Zhang *et al.,* 2010), availability of internet (Cude, 2000) and speed of internet connection encourages purchase (Farag *et al.,* 2006a; Farag *et al.,* 2007; Swinyard and Smith, 2003). Restriction on traditional store opening hours is also a major driver of online purchase decisions (Chocarro *et al.,* 2013).

Social influence. Previous studies found that social influence has a greater impact on consumer's purchase intention (Lin and Lin, 2007). Recommendation from relative, friends and colleagues have a significant impact on attitude, purchase intention in the context of both online and offline buying behaviour. Sometimes it becomes more influential than the other factors (Román and Cuestas 2008). Offline consumers are more likely to be influenced by the recommendation of family and friends (Nelson and McLeod, 2005) than anything else (Kulkarni *et al.,* 2012; Prasad and Raghu, 2018).

Trust and reliability. Trust (Haridasan and Fernando, 2018) and reliability (Athapaththu and Kulathunga, 2018) are common factors anticipated in both the channels. Distrust acts as a barrier for the choice of a particular format (Prasad and Raghu, 2018). Perceived risk due to inability to see the actual product (Bhatnagar *et al.,* 2000) can be a key determinant for retail format choice (Sarkar and Das, 2017). Haridasan and Fernando (2018) found that consumers felt safer paying for electronics products like mobiles in retail stores. Trust and relative advantage between the consumer & retailer are a major determinant of consumers' online or offline purchase decisions (Al-Debei *et al.,* 2015; Wong *et al.,* 2018).

Thus, the determinants of retail format choice should be explored in various contexts (Shi *et al.,* 2019).

Objectives of the Study

1) To identify and assess the motivational factors that influence the purchase of smartphones.

2) To create a predictive model to forecast the likelihood of smartphone buyers seeking online or offline retail platforms.

3) To distinguish the buying benefits looked for by the offline and the online purchaser of smartphones.

Methodology

For the exploratory study a mixed-method approach was adopted. The qualitative approach was considered to triangulate the factors identified from literature review and to generate new factors related to smartphone purchase channel choice behavior. It was then followed by creating a study instrument for quantitative methodology.

Qualitative study

Twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted during the month of June 2021 using an interview guide to understand the process of buying and different factors influencing the retail choice decision. A convenience sampling design was adopted to select the respondents. Out of the 20 respondents, 14 were consumers (online and offline combined) who had purchased a new smartphone within the last 12 months. These respondents were chosen from different genders (10 males and 4 females), age groups (22 to 50 years old), geographies (4 urban, 7 semi-urban, 3 rural) and occupations. Interviews were also conducted with 2 mobile retail shop owners (1 urban and 1 semi-urban), 3 company employees (1 regional sales head, 1 consumer sales trainer and 1 online marketing associate) working with smartphone brands and 1 retail store salesperson. These interviews helped in validation and triangulation of selected factors and identification of one new factor i.e., importance of finance options while buying a smartphone and choosing the retail format which was incorporated in the study instrument.

Quantitative study

The study instrument was designed taking into consideration the factors identified from literature review and semi-structured interviews. The respondents were asked to participate only if they belong to the state of Odisha and had purchased a smartphone within last one year.

The instrument had altogether 34 items which were divided into 4 sections. The first section comprised of 6 socio-demographics related items, followed by second section which had 12 shopping motivation factors designed on 5-point Likert scale where the respondents were asked to rate the importance of the factor during their smartphone purchase on a scale ranging from strongly disagree = 1 to strongly agree = 5. The next section contained 6 items relating to information regarding their last smartphone purchase. And the last section was branched to set of five different questions separately for online consumers and retail store consumers based on their last smartphone purchase channel. The instrument was validated by academic experts for face validity before collecting data from respondents. Pilot study was done with 50 responses to check for multi-collinearity among selected variables.

Sampling and data collection

Non-probability sampling with a convenience sampling technique has been adopted. Collection of data was done through both online and physical form mode. The study instrument was presented in both English and Odia language to eliminate the language barrier among semi-urban and rural respondents. The final sample consisted of 533 responses out of which 260 responses were from online smartphone buyers and 273 were from offline buyers. The collected data was then subjected to analysis.

Data Analysis and results

Profiling the smartphone consumers

Data was collected from 533 respondents and was analyzed for the objectives of the study. Samples were collected from 28 out of 30 districts of Odisha. 243 females and 290 males participated in the survey contributing to 45.6% and 54.45% respectively. Age of the respondents was captured in 4 age brackets i.e., 14-25 years (35.1%), 26-35 years (32.6%), 36-50 years (21.6%) and >50 years (10.7%). Educational qualification and annual family income of the respondents were also captured in the questionnaire and presented in Table 2. Occupation of the respondents was converted to binary variable i.e., job holders and no job holders for analysis. In order to obtain statistical difference between groups of social-demographic variables and retail format choice, chi-square analysis was performed and the result is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Demographic Profiling

Variables	Online		Offline (Retail store)		Total		Chi-square
Retail format choice	**Frequency (n = 260)**	**%**	**Frequency (n = 273)**	**%**	**Frequency (n = 533)**	**%**	
Gender							11.554**
Female	99	38%	144	53%	243	46%	
Male	161	62%	129	47%	290	54%	
Total	260	100%	273	100%	533	100%	
Age							19.320**
14-25	84	32%	103	38%	187	35%	
26-35	108	42%	66	24%	174	33%	
36-50	45	17%	70	26%	115	22%	
>50	23	9%	34	12%	57	11%	
Total	260	100%	273	100%	533	100%	
Educational Qualification							8.471
Primary Education	2	1%	3	1%	5	1%	
Matriculation	4	2%	6	2%	10	2%	
Higher Secondary	24	9%	41	15%	65	12%	
Diploma	4	2%	7	3%	11	2%	
Graduation	106	41%	111	41%	217	41%	
Post - Graduation	104	40%	84	31%	188	35%	
Doctorate Degree	16	6%	21	8%	37	7%	
Total	260	100%	273	100%	533	100%	
Annual Family Income							19.657**
< 2 Lakhs	61	23%	103	38%	164	31%	
2- 5 Lakhs	52	20%	63	23%	115	22%	
5 Lakhs - 10 Lakhs	85	33%	71	26%	156	29%	
5 Lakhs - 10 Lakhs	62	24%	36	13%	98	18%	
Total	260	100%	273	100%	533	100%	
Occupation							12.724**
Not a Job Holder	88	34%	134	49%	222	42%	
Job Holder	172	66%	139	51%	311	58%	
Total	260	100%	273	100%	533	100%	

Note(s): **Significant at 0.05 level

There was no significant difference between groups with respect to educational qualification. However, there was significant difference among the groups with respect to gender (χ^2 = 11.554), age (χ^2 = 19.320), annual family income (χ^2 = 19.657) and occupation (χ^2 = 12.724).

90.1% of the respondents purchased smartphone for themselves and rest (9.9%) purchased for others (their relative, friends and colleagues). And there is no significant difference between online and offline purchase groups (χ^2 = 1.975, $p > 0.05$). Although, 77.1% of the respondents bought one smartphone in last one year and rest 22.9% had bought more than one smartphone in last 1 year. But statistically there is no significant difference between online and offline smartphone buyers (χ^2 = 0.263, $p > 0.05$).

Building a predictive model – Online versus offline smartphone consumers

Binary logistic regression was used to create the predictive model for retail format choice behaviour (Ben-Akiva and Lerman, 1985). The model would classify smartphone consumers into online vs. offline consumers based on socio-demographic factors and 12 shopping motivation factors. Hence, the dependent variable is the place of purchase:

0 – Online consumers

1 – Offline (Retail store) consumers

The independent variables were tested for reliability and multi-collinearity. The results showed that the scale was reliable (Cronbach's α = 0.925). The values of VIF and tolerance levels were well within acceptable range indicating that multi-collinearity was negligible and the independent variables could be used for binary logistic regression.

The expression for logistic regression is:

$$In\left(\frac{p}{1-p}\right)=\alpha_0+\alpha_1X_1+\alpha_2X_2+\cdots+\alpha_kX_k \quad (1)$$

Where P is the probability of the consumer being classified as offline smartphone shopper and (1-P) is the probability of the shopper being an online consumer. The socio-demographic variables used for regression are gender (G), age (A), educational qualification (E), annual family income (I) and occupation (OP). Based on equation (1), along with these socio-demographic variables, twelve shopping motivation factors were taken (X_1 to X_{12}) into consideration to generate the following logistic regression equation:

$$\begin{aligned}In\left(\frac{p}{1-p}\right)&=1.571-0.370G+0.251A-0.022E\\&-0.445I-0.474OP-0.256X_1+0.588X_2+0.286X_3\\&-0.571X_4+0.053X_5-0.052X_6+0.562X_7+0.475X_8\\&+0.570X_9-0.350X_{10}-0.332X_{11}-0.052X_{12}\end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

Table 3. Independent variables – binary logistic analysis

Variables in the equation	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Age of the respondent	0.251	0.122	4.248	1	0.039*	1.285
Gender of the respondent (1)	-0.370	0.215	2.967	1	0.085	0.691
Occupation of the respondent (1)	-0.474	0.232	4.172	1	0.041*	0.622
Educational qualification of the respondent	-0.022	0.097	0.053	1	0.818	0.978
Annual family income of the respondent	-0.445	0.114	15.398	1	0.000*	0.641
X_1-Importance of price of the smartphone	-0.256	0.124	4.284	1	0.038*	0.774
X_2-Importance of Need for Touch and Feel	0.588	0.123	23.047	1	0.000*	1.801
X_3-Importance of Salesperson Assistance while buying a smartphone	0.286	0.116	6.044	1	0.014*	1.331
X_4-Importance of offers and discounts while buying a smartphone	-0.571	0.147	15.121	1	0.000*	0.565
X_5-Importance of financing options while buying a smartphone	0.053	0.112	0.226	1	0.635	1.055
X_6-Importance of Influence of relatives/friends/colleague while buying a smartphone	-0.052	0.105	0.248	1	0.618	0.949
X_7-Importance of after-sales service while buying a smartphone	0.562	0.152	13.661	1	0.000*	1.753
X_8-Importance of Availability of different Models or Product Variety while buying a smartphone	-0.475	0.154	9.483	1	0.002*	0.622
X_9-Importance of Trust & Reliability on the channel from where I am buying smartphone	0.570	0.145	15.446	1	0.000*	1.768
X_{10}-Importance of convenience while buying a smartphone	-0.350	0.169	4.292	1	0.0388*	0.705
X_{11}-Importance of Ease of product comparison while buying a smartphone	-0.332	0.156	4.549	1	0.033*	0.717
X_{12}-Importance of Accessibility of point of purchase while buying a smartphone	-0.052	0.147	0.124	1	0.725	0.950
Constant	1.571	0.645	5.933	1	0.015*	4.810
-2 Log likelihood	552.198	(P<0.001)				
Cox & Snell R square	0.295					
Nagelkerke R square	0.394					

Note(s): *Significant at 0.05 level

Statistical values related to each variable are reported in Table 3.

Based on the above logistic regression equation, if the calculated P value of a particular respondent is > 0.5, then the consumer is more likely to be buying his/her smartphone from a retail store (offline). And, if the probability (P) value is found to be < 0.5, then the respondent is more likely to be an online consumer.

The goodness-of-fit of the model was tested using Omnibus test and Hosmer & Lemeshow test statistics. Both the tests indicated that the model has a good fit.

Among the socio-demographic variables, gender and educational qualification were not found to be significantly impacting the retail format choice decision. Other variables like age (B = 0.251, Exp. B = 1.285), occupation (B = -0.474, Exp. B = 0.622) and family income (B = -0.445, Exp. B = 0.641) were found to be significant predictors in the model. A positive coefficient for age suggests that with increasing age, consumers are more likely to choose offline channels for smartphone purchase. In case of occupation, the coefficient is negative suggesting that a non-job holder is more likely to shop for smartphone online by ($e^{-0.474}$) 0.622 times than a job holder. Similarly, as the annual family income increases the likelihood of purchasing smartphone online increases.

Analysis of shopping motivation factors indicated that X_5 (finance options), X_6 (influence of family, friends and colleagues) and X_{12} (accessibility of point of purchase) were insignificant in predicting the retail format choice. X_2 (need for touch and feel), X_3 (salesperson assistance), X_7 (after-sales service) and X_9 (trust and reliability) were found to be significant predictors with positive coefficient in the model suggesting that when these factors go up by one unit, the odd ratio in favor of offline retail purchase go up by ($e^{0.588}$) 1.801, ($e^{0.286}$) 1.331, ($e^{0.562}$) 1.753 and ($e^{0.570}$) 1.768 units respectively. Contrarily, X_1 (price), X_4 (offers and discounts), X_8 (product availability and variety), X_{10} (convenience) and X_{11} (ease of product comparison) were found to have negative coefficient in the predictive model suggesting that one unit increase in these factors increase the odd ratio in favor of online smartphone purchase by ($e^{-0.256}$) 0.774, ($e^{-0.571}$) 0.565, ($e^{-0.475}$) 0.622, ($e^{-0.350}$) 0.705 and ($e^{-0.332}$) 0.717 units respectively.

The model could correctly classify 74.7% of the observations. 72.7% of online consumers and 76.6% of offline consumers were classified correctly by the predictive model. With significant goodness-of-fit, predictive capabilities and chi-square statistics, the model can be considered as a reliable predictive model.

Analysis of online consumers

The responses from online consumers were separately assessed by a dedicated section in the instrument. 75.4% of the online respondents would prefer buying their next smartphone online. Only 2.7% would like to switch their channel to retail store for their next smartphone purchase and 21.9% respondents are not sure about their next purchase channel. Out of 260 online shoppers of smartphone, only 19 respondents (7.3%) responded by saying that they would have bought their phone from retail store if there was no lockdowns and shutdowns due to covid-19 pandemic. Few statements related to online smartphone purchase driver were asked to respondents and assessed using one-sample t-test to find out their importance to online consumers (Table 4). The important factors identified were online reviews, return & exchange facilities provided by online retailers, special discount

Table 4. Online consumers: n = 260

One-sample statistics	Mean	T
I look for customer review online and it is important to me before purchasing a smartphone	4.485	77.594**
The product exchange and return facility offered by online platforms is important for me while buying my smartphone	4.542	83.656**
I wait for online special discount days/sales offers (e.g., Big Billion Day, Great Indian Festive Sale etc.) to buy my smartphone	4.081	55.866**
I like the overall shopping experience online when I purchase from online platforms	4.404	85.996**

Note(s): **Significant at 0.05 level

Table 5. Offline consumers: n = 273

One-sample statistics	Mean	T
I generally research online about smartphones before purchasing from store	4.366	67.213**
I like the prompt service retail store owners and store sales personnel provide	4.231	67.880**
I know the mobile store owner/sales person personally and I am a regular customer of the	3.117	33.729**
Buying from retail store (offline) gives me a better bargaining power compared to online purchase	3.418	38.590**
I like the overall shopping experience when I purchase from retail store	4.242	68.583**

Note(s): **Significant at 0.05 level days or sales offers like Big Billion Day and the overall online shopping experience.

Analysis of offline (retail store) consumers

When offline buyers were assessed separately, it was found that only 54.6% of the respondents would prefer to buy their next smartphone from a retail store. 15.4% would switch to online channel and 30.0% are not sure about the choice of channel for their next purchase. Responses of five statements related to offline smartphone purchase were collected from retail store buyers exclusively and analyzed using one-sample t-test to find out their importance (Table 5). The test results indicated that all the factors were important for offline smartphone buyers, i.e., researching online before purchase, prompt service of the retailers, personally knowing the retail store owner/being a regular customer, better bargaining power and overall retail store shopping experience.

Discussion and Conclusion

This research study attempted to identify and assess various demographic and shopping motivation factors responsible for choice of online or offline retail format for buying smartphones. It was found that there is a significant difference between motivational factors of different retail channels. The study generated a predictive model to predict the retail format choice of consumers based on the demographic and shopping motivation factors. One of the interesting observations made in the study is that although the retail store buyers like the overall smartphone shopping experience, but close to half of them would either switch to online or not sure about their next smartphone purchase. The implications of the empirical study are discussed below.

Theoretical implications

This paper endeavors to add valuable insights to marketing theory in several ways. Unlike many studies earlier that have attempted to investigate the retail format choice in various product categories viz. Premium brand apparel (Basu and Sondhi, 2021), travel industry (Beldona *et al.,* 2011), grocery shopping (Huyghe *et al.,* 2017), consumer durables (Gupta and Shukla, 2015) this study makes an effort to explore between virtual markets and brick-and-mortar markets when consumers are planning to buy a smartphone. This exploratory study has also outlined the crucial factors based on critical literature review that need to be considered while predicting consumers' behavioural intentions that have a bearing upon their retail channel choice. The demographic factors were found to have some significant contribution in the choice of retail format for smartphone purchase. A handful of channels differentiating behaviour studies about specific products earlier have tried to find the impact of demographics on retail format choice.

The younger buyers are more likely to opt for online channels as they are considered as more tech-savvy (Eastman and Liu, 2012). Job holders are more likely to be inclined to physical in-store smartphone purchase compared to non-job holders (students, home-makers, retired personnel and unemployed consumers). Consistent with various western and Asian studies, income is positively related to online shopping behaviour (Zhou and Wang, 2014). Consumers with higher family income would opt for online channels for smartphone purchase (Blasio, 2008).

The study also explored and examined the shopping motivation factors which differentiate the store choice behaviour across channels. The logit regression model evaluated the purchase triggers for both online and offline channels. Price, offers and discounts, product variety/availability of models, convenience, ease of product comparison and accessibility are the key motivational factors for online consumers which is consistent with previous studies (Farag *et al.,* 2007). In case of offline buyers' factors like need for touch, salesperson assistance, after-sales service, trust and reliability are the key differentiators. These factors were identified from extent literature and their evaluation gave results consistent with global literature. The uniqueness of this study is that these factors were never assessed together in a channel choice behaviour study. Thus, the findings of the study pertinent to smartphone purchase can be extrapolated to a larger Indian consumer and to some extent Asian consumers due to homogeneity in retail market conditions and shopping habits.

Managerial Implications

Information related to shopping motivations with respect to retail format choice behaviour may be important and useful (wong *et al.,* 2018) to retailers and brands for devising strategies pertinent to channel diversification (Fornari *et al.,* 2016) and channel expansion (Hamzah *et* *al.,* 2014). Hence, this exploratory study can be of great importance from a marketing, sales and distribution perspective. Although, in emerging markets like India there is a shift in trend towards online shopping, offline shopping still holds grit among buyers. Online marketers and retailers should focus on developing a trust with consumers by their communications and processes so that consumers across demographics consider it reliable for higher priced consumer durables like smartphones. Given the size of smartphone market in India and increasing frequency in smartphone purchase by consumers, online players can start offline after-sales service centers in demanding places which could serve three purposes i.e., service point, point of smartphone exchange and an informal retail display store where consumers can touch and feel the smartphone before placing their order online. For retailers, the competition from online players can get fierce in coming years (Dixon and Marston, 2002).

Retailers need to maintain a good variety of inventory in order to keep the customer in the store for longer duration. Matching the online price would be a challenge for brick-and-mortar retailers but it can be compensated by a knowledgeable and polite salesperson and good after-sales service. The convenience and accessibility aspects of online can be taken care of to some extent by the extra services like dummy models for touch and feel, providing covers for smartphones, home deliveries in rural markets and below-the-line marketing activities. Smartphone brands should also support and promote the offline retailers to establish and strengthen their presence across demographics.

Limitations and future research

This study explored various factors and incorporated them into the predictive model, but there could be other factors which are yet to be explored. The scope of this study was limited to one state in India. Similar studies can be conducted across geographies and phone categories (basic phones and feature phones) for generalizability. Some finer aspects of smartphone shopping behaviour like searching offline and buying online and vice-verse can be explored in future studies. Including various smartphone brands in the study as channel differentiator is an area of exploration. Lastly, similar studies can be conducted on different product categories like home appliances, grocery, apparel sector and service industry to contribute towards retail format choice behaviour.

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Worry and Media Use Behavior during COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

Background: Information seeking occurs to reinforce existing information, to solve problems, construct meaning, and as a response to alienation. The continual information uncertainty related to COVID-19 pandemic impacted life, livelihood and triggered worry. Information seeking from multiple sources became necessary to allay anxiety and verify authenticity. This research investigated the various sources of information, and its influence on their level of worry.

Methods: An online survey required respondents to indicate their sociodemographic details, different information sources used, awareness of rumors, the ability to check the authenticity of the information, sources, and COVID-19 related experiences. The lowest and highest for worry scale was 1—10.

Results: The median worry during the period was seven, and the number of media accessed was five. Overall worry correlated significantly with other worries (personal and family health, income, job, and lack of growth). Worry differed significantly among age groups, education, occupation, and marital status but not across gender and economic status. Individuals, who self-isolated, experienced issues with rumors, feared infection and death reported significantly more worry. Awareness, fear of infection, and rumors influenced significantly more number of media use.

Conclusions: The extent of worry and the number of information sources showed complex and non-linear 'U' shaped relationship with the lowest at six sources. The article extends the information-seeking behavior literature by indicating that the use of a higher number of media sources is counterproductive. Understanding information exchange and information sources can help address public worry.

Keywords: Anxiety, Behavior, Coronavirus, COVID-19, Information-Seeking, Pandemics

Introduction

Information seeking has a utilitarian perspective and helps reinforce existing information (Atkin, 1973). It is also conceived as a series of events with a constructive effort to derive meaning from information to increase the knowledge on a specific issue (Kuhlthau, 1991). Information alienation theory proposed that the higher degree of alienated feeling (powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement) pushes an individual to mass media to escape the reality of everyday life (Chatman, 1990).

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Everyday life information seeking theory distinguishes between work and non-work related information seeking, which is directed toward problem-solving. It can have cognitive vs affective and optimism vs pessimism dimensions, resulting in four quadrants for information seeking (Savolainen, 1995). Information seeking and processes has also been investigated in different contexts. Using the Internet for information seeking, requires the right skills, effort, and time where experienced users were more successful in finding the right information (Korobili et al., 2011). Cost, time, and effort are required in seeking the right information. Health-related information can be considered from the utilitarian, reinforcement, increase in knowledge, as well as from the problem-solving perspectives.

The advent of social media has changed the dynamics of production, sharing, and searching for information in general, and health information in particular. Researchers have used social support theory and e-adoption paradigms to develop a net valence model to explain an individual's intention to seek and share information related to health in social media (Li et al., 2018). Perceived benefit (perceived usefulness, the credibility of health information, emotional support, and informational support), perceived risk (mental intangibility, privacy risk, time risk, social risk, and psychological risk) determines the intention to seek or share health information (Li et al., 2018). However, they found that the mental intangibility and social risk do not fit in the healthcare and social media context. Another model based on social cognitive theory and perceived interactivity proposed a model to investigate the antecedents of health information exchange in social media. The research demonstrated that human-to-human interaction, human-to-information interaction, outcome expectation of health self-management competence, and outcome expectation of social relationships have a significant impact on health-information-exchange behavior (H. C. Lin & Chang, 2018).

A model considered perceived health risk, health self-efficacy, tangible support, emotional support, esteem support, appraisal support, and practical resources to consider information exchange behavior in social media. The study reported perceived health risk and health self-efficacy to significantly affect health information-seeking intention and health self-efficacy was the moderator. Tangible support and appraisal support influenced perceived health risk whereas emotional support and esteem support, influenced health self-efficacy (Deng & Liu, 2017). The complementarity hypothesis proposed that an addition of media displaces or replaces the use of another within the media repertoire of an individual because of limited resource availability. Though research reported strong support of the hypothesis, it also found that the interpersonal channel and mass media channels do not compete with each other to provide health information (Tian & Robinson, 2008). Individuals prefer various sources for health information.

Literature Review

During the COVID-19 pandemic, sharing appropriate scientific information with the public has been a key element in controlling the spread of the virus. A study on H1N1 flu reported more frequent use of radio, television, and newspaper compared to the internet (Walter et al., 2012). In the case of a new viral illness, many facts continue to evolve. Misinformation and rumors complicated the scenario. Literature suggests that in past pandemics, misleading information was broadcast, e.g. in the 2009 H1N1 pandemic, 23% of the videos were misleading (Pandey et al., 2010). Cynicism and low trust in media information compared to trust in health professionals was reported in flu situation (King et al., 2018). Most of the individuals with chronic diseases were not satisfied with Covid-19 information available online (Kor et al., 2020). Rumors and misinformation shape the behavior of the public during a pandemic. The panic buying of goods, chaos in the travel, and transportation of migrant labors, a drastic reduction of poultry prices, and the rise of the price of fish products, are some examples of public behavior due to rumor during COVID-19 (Bose, 2020; Chattopadhayay, 2020; Cutinho, 2020; Dabhi, 2020; Krar, 2020; G. Pandey, 2020; Pawar, 2020; Shekhar, 2020; Vijayan, 2020).

Information from various social media platforms has a greater reach to the public than the professional scientific channels. Accurate and reliable information is the key as that may change the behavior of people that can help in the management of the pandemic.

Understandably, anxieties may be high for a new illness when there are no known effective treatments or a preventive vaccine. Studies have indicated that the pandemic increased public attention and anxiety though, it was short-lived (Bento et al., 2020; Tausczik et al., 2012). The issues related to information, especially the rumors and misinformation, can affect people, prompting them to search for various sources resulting in possible information overload and inaccurate information. In a pandemic situation, authorities take some control of the information spread to the public and try to improve the information sharing process. However, concerns remain in the acute phase of this pandemic about the information that reaches people and how they search and use these. Information seeking during pandemic indicated gender differences. Women perceived a higher likelihood of infection, willingness to take preventive medications, and engagement in information exchange behavior (Ibuka et al., 2010).

Information seeking has a problem-solving approach and can allay anxiety; however, it should be appropriate, reiterative, holistic, and context-bound (Foster, 2004). Health information-seeking behavior is indicated to be one of the key coping strategies for psychosocial adjustments (Lambert & Loiselle, 2007), and it is relevant in a pandemic situation where anxieties are understandably high. Trust in the source of information, levels of knowledge about the disease, anxiety, repetitive media exposure as well as information-seeking behaviors have been suggested to lead an individual to have an increased chance of using recommended infection prevention measures that may improve the response to pandemics (L. Lin et al., 2014).

Beyond the health concern of an individual for oneself and family members, the COVID-19 posed challenges arising from the loss of income due to job loss or reduced business income, anticipated loss in future income due to lack of economic growth (Sands, 2019). The economic impacts, and effects on daily life are associated with anxiety (Cao et al., 2020; Kar et al., 2021). The negative impact on firm performance in general and small firms in particular has also been documented (Shen et al., 2020). The higher incidence of COVID-19 with lower mean income implied a loss of current income (Baena-Díez et al., 2020). It is also anticipated that people will be pushed back to poverty because of the pandemic (Suryahadi et al., 2020). Given the persistence of the COVID-19 pandemic, the concerns of income, employment, economy are expected to persist as well. The worry about life and livelihood may push individuals to seek more information.

Cockerham (2005) underlined the need and proposed a health lifestyle theory, which included the role of social structure and agency because daily lifestyle practices consider health outcomes (Cockerham, 2005). The need for further research was also emphasized to understand the relative value individuals place on different sources of information (Tian & Robinson, 2008).

Objective

In the above background, we wanted to understand how uncertainty and related worry due to a pandemic relate to information exchange behavior from different media sources. The number of media sources was considered the proxy for the increased information need. The utilitarian perspective of Atkin's information-seeking theory, Kuhlthau's proposition about the construction of meaning from information, information alienation theory, and everyday life information seeking theory for problem-solving provided the basis for this research. Worry was considered the affective dimension proposed in the everyday life information seeking theory.

Based on the review, we considered the broad objective to understand to what extent people used different sources of information and how the use of such information sources along with other demographic and COVID-19 related factors influenced the level of worry. We hypothesized that the level of worry and the number of information sources used, to have significant differences among demographic variables such as gender, age group, education, marital status, occupation, and economic status. We also hypothesized that the level of worry and the number of sources used to access information to have significant differences with awareness, self-isolation, knowing somebody infected, the worry of death, knowledge about rumor, ability to check authenticity, and those who experienced some issues due to rumor. Lastly, we wanted to understand the behavior of worry with respect to the number of sources used in an uncertain environment.

Methodology

The study was conducted as a questionnaire survey method. A questionnaire was developed to evaluate information seeking such as sources of information accessed, awareness of the presence of rumors, the method for verifying the information for its authenticity. As an individual can use different media to gather information, the survey included 11 media choices (such as word of mouth, social media, emails, news, TV, and websites of Government, World Health Organization, and health-related professional bodies) for information. The respondents indicated if they used a particular medium or not, awareness of presence of rumors, and if they faced any issue due to the rumors.

The form captured demographic variables (age, gender, education, occupation, marital status, and economic status). Worry was assessed on a scale of 1 to 10, to questions such as, 'how worried are you regarding personal health, family health, loss of present income, future income, loss of a job, and lack of economic growth'. We also asked about the overall level of worry regarding the COVID-19 situation.

Data collection

The data collection was done through a google survey from the period 29-March to 27-April 2020 within which 758 responses could be collected, three responses were rejected due to incomplete information. Researchers sent the request to fill up the survey to the primary contacts with a request to forward to others. The survey form was shared on various platforms as well requesting responses. Respondents from 22 countries participated in this survey. Seventy six percent were from India, twelve percent were from Nepal, three percent each from UK and USA. More than one respondents were from countries like Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Ethiopia, Japan, Bangladesh, Tanzania, and the United Arab Emirates.

The project was considered a public health survey. Ethical principles were adhered to during the online data collection, no identifying data were collected; respondents were free to withdraw or not submit their responses. Information about the survey was given to the respondents and there was an option to contact researchers for more information if required.

Analysis

It was anticipated that the data distribution in a pandemic situation is not normal. The normality distribution was checked by Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests. For non-normal distribution, non-parametric tests such as Kruskal-Wallis test for more than 2 groups, and both Mann-Whitney U and Kolmogorov-Smirnov (KS) Z were used to understand the difference between the two groups. The KS test being more sensitive to shape, spread, or median (Mdn) in the distribution was used for the confirmatory purposes. The statistically significant level was considered at $p<0.05$. The reported level of worry (scale: 1- least and 10- highest) was considered the outcome variable and other variables were considered independent variables. Data were analyzed in SPSS version 25.

Result

There were 755 respondents with 41.2% female and 58.8% male, mean age 34.7 (SD:13.2) years; 47.8% unmarried, 47.4% married, and 4.8% others (widowed, separated, and in-relationship. A detailed grouping of age indicated 1.2% of the respondents were within 19 years, 65.6% were from 20 to 39 years of age, 31.5% from 40 to 64 years, and 1.7 were over 64 years. There were 1.3% respondents in lower economic status, 26.0% in the lower middle class, 66.0% in the upper middle class, and 6.8% in upper economic status.

Mean ± SD number of information sources used was 4.96 ± 2.55 [95% Confidence Interval (CI) = 4.78 to 5.14, Median= 5.0, Skewness = 0.47]. Responses about various types of worries were taken from the respondents (N = 755): personal health (Mean ± SD: 6.70±2.73), family health (8.00 ± 2.28), loss of present income (6.21 ± 3.16), future income (6.80 ± 3.06), loss of job (5.04 ± 3.52), and lack of economic growth (7.69 ± 2.55). The respondents were asked to indicate an overall perceived worry as well (6.98±2.54). A correlation test among worries about specific factors and overall reported worry indicated that these were highly correlated (Table 1). The six-item reliability statistics (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.874) indicated acceptable internal reliability of different aspects of worry. Since various factors of worry have significant and high correlations; the subsequent analysis was based on the total worry responses.

The test for normality of the distribution for worry (Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistics = .156, df = 755, p = .000; Shapiro-Wilk statistic = .909, df = 755, p = .000) indicated that the distribution is not normal. Similarly, the test for normality for number of information sources (Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistics = .119, df = 755, p = .000, Shapiro-Wilk statistic = .955, df = 755, p = .000) indicate it as a non-normal distribution. Because both worry and the number of sources have a non-normal distribution, we used the non-parametric tests.

Specific medium of information and worry

There was a lack of a significant difference between the user and non-user of a particular medium except Instagram users who reported a higher level of worry than non-users (Non-Users N = 615, Worry Mdn = 7.27; Users N =140, Worry Mdn = 8.14; Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z = 1.882, p = .002). This indicated that there was no exclusivity in the usage of a particular medium or application. Secondly, an individual user is more likely to use a set of applications rather than a specific one or not. In this sense, the user is more likely to be focused on getting more information from a set of applications rather than one additional medium. To factor in this understanding, the number of sources of information was emphasized rather than a specific medium.

Table 1. Correlation between total worry and other factors (N = 755)

Variable	Worry	Personal Health	Family Health	Present Income	Future Income	Job Loss	Lack of Economic growth
Worry	1						
Personal Health	.752**	1					
Family Health	.682**	.760**	1				
Present Income	.413**	.483**	.400**	1			
Future Income	.482**	.499**	.489**	.807**	1		
Job Loss	.424**	.428**	.408**	.627**	.670**	1	
Lack of Economic growth	.450**	.454**	.455**	.523**	.632**	.517**	1

** p<.01

Worry and information use in different demographic and COVID-related categories

The following section reports the level of worry reported by respondents, and the number of information sources used by them, for different demographic variables used in the survey (Table 2). The result indicated that the level of worry and the number of information sources vary with various demographic factors. Twenty to thirty-nine age group was most worried and used the highest number of information sources. Worry did not differ by gender, but females were found to use a greater number of information sources. Professionally educated were less worried; the university-educated were significantly more worried and used a greater number of information sources. Employers were the least worried and students were found to be most worried. Health professionals used more information sources compared to salaried individuals. We found a degree of correspondence between worry and information sources by occupation. Unmarried were significantly more worried, but there was no difference in the number of information sources used. The differences in economic status did not influence the information-seeking behaviors in terms of the number of sources used and the level of worry.

Worry versus the number of sources

The demographic and pandemic related variables were found to be associated with the level of worry and the number of information sources used. Such an association and significant differences prompted an investigation of a direct relationship between worry and the number of media used, for comprehensive understanding.

To understand the distribution of the number of information sources by each level of worry, a graph (Figure 1) was plotted between the count of respondents versus the level of worry, and the number of sources of information. It was necessary to check the distribution pattern indicated in the graph. The test for normality (number of information sources) at each level of worry indicated that the distribution was not normal. The test of homogeneity of variances based on the mean (Levene Statistic= 1.920, df1=10, df2= 744, p=.039) indicated a lack of homogeneity. The test based on median (Levene Statistic=1.390, df1=10, df2=744, p=0.180) indicated homogeneity. Therefore, the distribution of the number of information sources at each level of worry was not normal.

The distribution of the worry and number of media used were non-normal. At each level of worry, the distribution of the number of media used was also non-normal. Therefore, a graphical representation of the relationship was attempted after re-grouping of information sources. Generally, an individual seeking information in a pandemic situation would not stop after exactly one increment in the information sources. The data indicated that the respondents used 4.96±2.6 (Mean and SD) number of sources (five was the median). Thirdly, the triangulation of data, information, method, and theory is a research practice; the design theory also considers information triangulation.(Wijnhoven & Brinkhuis, 2015; Wilson, 2014)

Therefore, the twelve information sources were grouped into triads. Both the mean and median level of the worry level was plotted (x-axis: triad of number of information sources and the y-axis: level of worry) against the triad of information sources (Figure 2). The figure indicates that both the mean and median level of worry decreases until the number of information sources (2^{nd} triad) is six. Beyond which the level of worry increases when the number of sources increases. The median worry remains the same for the number of information sources 9 and 12 whereas, the mean level

Table 2 Median values of worry and number of info-sources used in different sociodemographic and COVID-19 related groups

Variables	Categories	n	Worry	p	No of Info-sources	p
Gender	Female	311	7.51	0.208	5.01	0.008
	Male	444	7.41		4.47	
Age group	⇐19	9	7.6	0.000	4.20	0.012
	20.39	495	7.9		4.96	
	40.64	238	6.5		4.31	
	64+	13	4.67		4.57	
Education	School	5	7.33	0.000	4.00	0 .043
	College	84	7.5		4.43	
	University	390	7.91		4.97	
	Professional	276	6.71		4.48	
Marital Status	Unmarried	361	8.15	0.000	4.73	0.505
	Married	358	6.7		4.62	
Economic Status	Lower	10	8.5	0.112	3.50	0.247
	Lower middle	196	7.52		4.35	
	Upper middle	498	7.5		4.80	
	Upper	51	6.5		5.11	
Occupation	Student	284	8.42	0.000	4.93	0.053
	Not working	32	6.75		4.18	
	Self Employed	34	7.00		4.33	
	Salaried	139	7.54		4.14	
	Professional	85	6.70		4.79	
	Health Professional	142	5.91		5.02	
	Employer	39	7.36		4.17	
Awareness	No	21	7.17	0.380	3.00	0.033
	Yes	734	7.47		4.73	
Self-Isolation	No	654	7.39	0.004	4.80	0.010
	Yes	101	8.00		4.06	
Knowing somebody positive	No	717	7.47	0.719	4.68	0.656
	Yes	38	7.29		4.91	
Worry of Infection	No	290	5.98	0.000	4.38	0.009
	Yes	465	8.01		4.90	
Worry of Death	No	557	6.92	0.000	4.73	0.904
	Yes	198	8.87		4.59	
Rumour	No	153	7.26	0.353	4.17	0.003
	Yes	602	7.50		4.81	
Check Authenticity	No	135	7.40	0.804	4.43	0.244
	Yes	620	7.48		4.77	
Issue due to Rumour	No	478	7.12	0.000	4.41	0.000
	Yes	277	8.02		5.21	

Tests used Mann-Whitney U / Kruskal-Wallis

of worry shows an increase. The higher median values at any given information source also confirm the non-normal distribution. A possible explanation is that additional information sources in a pandemic situation reduces the worry to a limited extent, beyond which the worry increases.

Discussion

We studied information exchange behavior during a pandemic, and its relationship with the level of worry, demography, and pandemic related factors associated with it. To our knowledge, it is the first study linking the

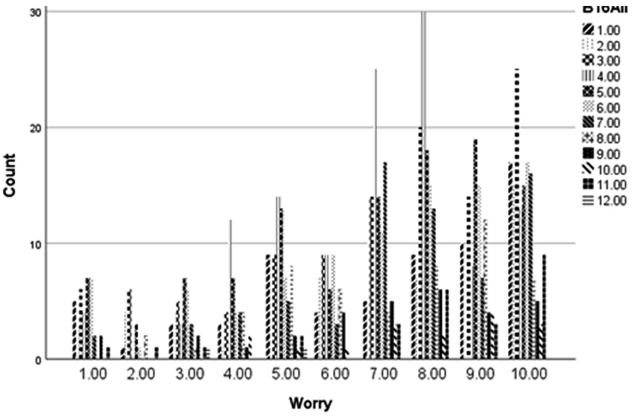

Figure 1: Level of worry and count of number of sources used by respondents.

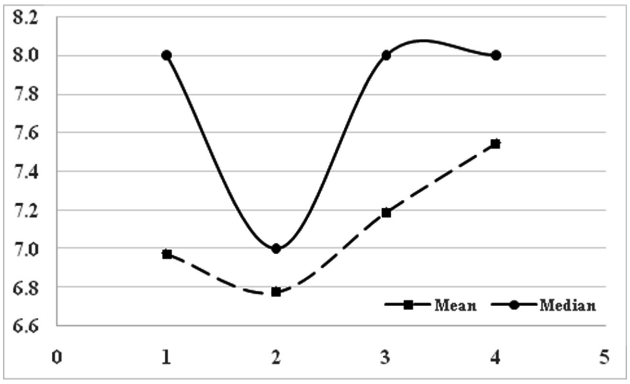

Figure 2: Mean of level of worry and set of three number of information source.

degree of worry and the number of media sources in a pandemic situation. Information seeking in a health care situation is important as it may influence subsequent behavior essential for managing the situation. The study results suggested that there are significant differences in level of worry and information seeking related to various demographic and pandemic variables; and validates the existence of communication inequalities (L. Lin et al., 2014). The findings may be useful for public health education and information dissemination process during public health crises such as epidemics and pandemics.

Given that the level of information exchange is likely to increase on various media, there is likelihood of misinformation and rumors, which has been observed during COVID-19. However, the importance of a specific medium reduces, as individuals are using multiple sources of information, which is around 5 as observed in this study. However, there is a possibility of overload of information from multiple sources causing worry to increase. As observed in this study, worry is comparatively lower while using up to six sources of information and beyond which worry increases. The risk of multiple sources also increases the chance of receiving misinformation, and it may be a concern as only a proportion can evaluate the authenticity of the information and source.

The study reported a higher level of worry to be associated with the use of a greater number of information sources; it could also mean that the use of more information sources is linked to greater levels of worry. It was seen that females were not significantly more worried than men, but examined more information sources. Health professionals accessed a higher number of information sources. Married respondents reported significantly less worry compared to unmarried, probably suggesting the supportive role of companionship, but the number of information sources did not vary. The economic status of the individuals did not matter for worry or the number of information sources, possibly indicating that the worry in a pandemic was evenly distributed in all economic strata.

Worry may trigger information searches from additional sources; or, the overload of information from additional sources without corresponding benefit may increase worry. It has been reported that, for the public, receiving information from medical staff and the internet was associated with, respectively, better and poorer psychological well-being.(Ko et al., 2020)

The relation between pandemic-associated variables and worry indicated that worry did not differ just by the awareness alone, but the number of sources used differentiated those who were aware and those who were not. People who had self-isolated compared with those who had not, showed a difference in their level of worry as well as the number of information sources used. It can be argued that self-isolation by the respondents was prompted by higher worry, and after, thought of having undertaken sufficient action to protect oneself from the pandemic may have subsequently prompted them to search for sources of information less than before.

However, personally knowing or not-knowing someone positive for COVID-19 did not significantly differentiate worry and the number of information sources. A possible explanation is that the information that someone else has been found positive reflects that one is comparatively safe and may use the information to avoid risk behaviors to prevent getting infected. Those who were worried about getting infected used a significantly higher number of information sources than those who were not worried of getting infected.

The awareness of rumors did not differentiate worry levels, but the number of information sources used was significantly different, indicating that individuals using higher numbers of information sources distinguish rumors from fact. Interestingly, the ability to distinguish authentic information did not have any difference concerning worry or the number of sources of information. This could be because most of the respondents used the same set of information sources, or after using different number of sources, there is no significant difference in the ability to check the authenticity further.

As observed in this study, rumor increased the worry of individuals; the number of sources of information used increased in response to issue due to rumor. Rumors have an impact on the public behavior.

Interestingly, worry did not differ by the use or not-use by any specific media (except in the case of Instagram). There could be several reasons for this observation. First, the information sources now have multiple formats e.g., newspapers and TV have web editions; professional and government sites have a presence in social media (e.g. WHO is on Facebook, Instagram, etc.). Second, the information is not exclusive to any specific media, social media applications are interconnected, and information passes from one to the other medium almost without any lag. Even, different media do not have many constraints on the format (text, picture, audio, and video) of the information. Thus, credible information also has a similar chance to percolate and propagate to individuals. This study does not report any significant difference between the users and non-users of a specific medium.

Limitations and Scope for Further Research

Being an online survey, the generalizability of the survey to people not online may be restricted. However, most people are now using the Internet on their mobile and it is expected that the results will be appropriate for them. Many sociodemographic categories were not well represented in the online survey such as those without formal education, laborers, and older adults who could be more vulnerable in a pandemic situation.

This research indicates that worry reduces up to the use of a specific number of media sources and then increases, the role of search engines to push specific information based on search strings are not taken into account. The information exchange has pull or push factor, which is not separated in this research. Individuals also push information in forwarding specific content to their contacts without the information being sought. Thus, there is a possibility of redundancy, information overload, and unspecific content. The possibility of such information increasing worry is not established in this research and calls for a further research study. Similarly, the content generated may have different objectives, targets, and formats. Which specific type of content, format, induce worry among individuals of different personality types needs further investigation beyond the demographic variables. Unsuspecting, gullible individuals may demonstrate more worry due to information in a pandemic situation. Personality type and worry due to different information content may shed deeper insight. This research has indicated an association but the causality remains to be worked upon.

Conclusions

During the COVID-19 pandemic, when information was available from various sources and kept changing or being updated, as would be expected, it was observed that the general worries of people remained at higher levels. People searched multiple information resources and although people were aware of the presence of misinformation and rumors, a proportion of them knew about checking the authenticity. Information seeking and sources may have contributed to the worry in a complex, non-linear way. Public education about searching appropriate sources, identifying misinformation and rumors, and improving the reliability of resources, by the media and authorities, may be suggested. Future studies should investigate whether these measures can decrease the level of worry in the population and increase appropriate health-related behaviors to tackle public health crises such as epidemics and pandemics.

This research contributes to the information exchange theory by establishing the emotion 'worry' to be associated with the number of media access. Secondly, we indicated that the number of media accessed has a limit up to which worry reduces, any further increase in the number of media is associated with a higher level of worry.

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Intricacies between Organised and Unorganised Sellers during Covid Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The drastic changes brought by Covid pandemic with respect to the migrated workers who bounced back to their native places since employment opportunities were narrowed. Most of such rely on unorganised selling since the efforts of work skills, investment and marketing are highly easier. This in turn has become a major problem for organised sellers of all trades, especially micro enterprises. The aim of this study is to assess the factors of unorganised selling influencing on organised selling. A mix of methods of descriptive research design, quantitative approach, convenience sampling technique and cross-sectional survey have been carried out. A self-administered questionnaire was prepared and gathered the data from the customers who buy products from both organised and unorganised sellers. The data was analysed with descriptive and inferential statistics with percentages, ANOVA and Multiple Regression Analysis. The strengths of all variables have been analysed with significance and the level of explaining dependable variable.

Keywords: Organised Selling, Unorganised Selling, Retail Management, Rural Marketing, Multiple Regression Analysis

Introduction

Trading activities being served by the retailers through certain licencing, taxes which include hypermarkets, retail chains, and large retail stores are called as organised sellers whom we can see and enjoy physical shopping with for the alternative exposure and selective profile is extensive.

Contrarily, unorganised retailing is traditional and conventional with respect to its nature of format with low investment of retailing, mobility, flexibility, low range and less offers which include kirana stores, small provision stores and mostly the hand cart and pavement vendors. It may perhaps be a surprise that these petty businesses all together make pretty business by forming crores of business by managing the business without funded externally. The service from this sector is more impressive with personal relationships and efforts such as greeting, smiling, chatting, serving to doorsteps promptly and spending time etc.

The study area Srikakulam having been associated with coastal and expanded to the border of Odisha state, has a huge market area with respect to the number of people and most of the people depend on agriculture and produce agro products from all its rural places. The people here are accustomed to purchase FMCG goods mostly from their local markets and buy the durable products from urban markets. The market is mixed with organised and unorganised sellers but the major share is taken by unorganised sellers who are huge in number. Yet, there are various retail outlets like Vishal mart, Mitra Mart, Sivananda Departmental Stores, Kamayya & Sons, Konark Fashions, SR Fashions, Kalaniketan, Happy Shopping Mall, Big C etc. are gradually capturing the market through its attractive offers and exposure. The people here are habituated to buy through online also which is a major challenge for the organised sellers as stated above. But for the unorganised sellers, there would not be that challenging since the goods of small assortments, credit facility, relationship, physical distribution and mobility are the core competencies of them.

The unorganized retailers have been increased in number than pre-existed. So, it makes a huge effect to the retailers of organized. Most of the unorganized retailers are from migrated who have come from metro cities due to Covid. They had no work during lockdown for they bounced back to their native places which are mostly villages or the rural India. Since the survival has to be aligned with rural work and moreover all the people are not fitted to agriculture, Most of the labour depend on the unorganised selling which is easier with respect to the minimum resources and low investment and does not need any specific skills. In this scenario, the struggle of organised retailers who have been striving in the market for a long period of time face a lot of challenges due to the number increased in unorganised retailing. There is a debate by both parties on the impact is positive or negative. Hence, this study has been conducted in order to assess the impact of unorganised selling practices on the organised selling prospects.

Objectives

1) Identify the prospective and problems of unorganized and organized retailing in Srikakulam district.

2) To assess the impact of unorganized retailing on the performance of organized retailing.

3) To offer the solutions for the problems being faced by organized retailers.

Methodology

This study was conducted in the semi-rural villages of Srikakulam (in AP, India), which is an economically backward district in Andhra Pradesh State. The village markets here in the study area are blended with organised and unorganised retailers by nature with the shandies organised every week at nearing hamlets. Due to corona pandemic, many more people have come up with retail stores unorganised with on the roads and peddlers' paths also.

The research was carried out with the design of descriptive with quantitative approach. The survey method and cross sectional type were followed. In order to achieve the objectives of the study, the researcher prepared an instrument qualified with the measurements of validity and reliability. Nonprobability technique of convenience sampling was adopted since the list of the customer is unavailable. Primary Data was collected from the sample unit i.e. consumers of both organised and unorganised retailers. The determined sample size was 285 and the data collected from them was analysed with Multiple Regression Analysis to know the extent of influencing and explaining.

Literature Review

A theoretical model of unorganized and organized retailing is explained by segregating retailers, consumers, and product characteristics (Jerath et al., 2016). A nested logit approach to the distribution model and its effect on demand for various brands in the market (Sharma. et al., 2019).

The results of the study by Paswan, Pineda and Ramirez (2010) specified that the preferences of customers especially for small and micro stores is accelerated more positively due to its functional advantages and familiarity which is quiet contrary to large stores.

Venkateshwarlu and Rajani (2007) has examines the impact of malls on small shopkeepers of Hyderabad and Secunderabad and the results have been revealed in the terms of Reduction in the margin, Reduction in the turnover, and unethical practices by malls and its counter attack by small retailers

Tazyn Rahman (2012) concluded that the competition from the unorganised sellers is imperative with respect to certain advantages with which organized retailers feel severe competition which is a challenging to compete.

H. Gupta et al. (2012) conducted a survey on the satisfaction of the services rendered by both organised and unorganised retailers at the stand point of certain factors and the results are vary with respect to certain significant variables.

Advantages of unorganised retailing such as loss of jobs as witnessed by the survey of Mukherjee and Patel (2005) and adverse effects of retail modernisation reported by Joseph and Soundararajan (2009) have been highly significant for the study from the survey based studies

Perception-based studies of Guruswamy et al., 2005, Sarma, 2005, and Singh, 2010 revealed that organized retailers may have a destructive impression on the unorganized sector due to the increase in purchase power, job loss, value chain and price competition.

Migration workers from metro Politian cities: The major influencing the organized retailing is the migration workers are returning back to their native places due to Covid 19 affect their works they lose their works so they are searching their livelihood so they are searching their occupations in search of these most of the migration families are started the work from native areas so they are ready to start the major demanded FMCG products major point but in some cases they are roaming all the certain limited areas on their own vehicles to sell their products so that they would gain some products and they are offering at the door steps in this way the organized retailers in the part of that place the sale in order they are gaining losses and customers

while the organized retailers price is little high as compared to the unorganized, because the organized has the other inclusions like building rent, electricity, stock credit, worker payments, etc. are the inclusions of price to their product while coming to the unorganized products they didn't have this type of inclusions only the vehicle and the fuel so which is very less as compared to the organized retailing so the unorganized retail offers the low prices as compared to the organized retail

The credit option is the major factor to sale of goods naturally in the rural India in this factor the organized can afford the credit option while coming to the unorganized cannot becoz their capital is very low and they didn't even give the products for less period also in this matters the credit option is suitable for organized rather than unorganized retailing

While coming to the mobility factor, the organized retail is very hard to move to other places because they are fixed to a particular one place only so they could not offer the products at the customer doorsteps while the unorganized retail they can have the mobility to move everywhere because they didn't have the much stock so they can have the mobility so they have the mobility to unorganized and they can offer the products to customers at their door steps easily.

The customer loyalty is the another major factor in organized and unorganized retailing while in the organized they can have the more loyalty towards their customers becoz they can move with the customers daily they have long time of availability to sell their products, in the cases of unorganized the loyalty would less as compared to organized

It is not an exception even to the rural market that the competition in retailing is challenging enough since the rural consumer have become more quality concerned and the so called giants of retailers making distinguished strategies with modified products customised exceptionally to the rural consumers. Having had a universal coverage of retailers in India, it can be proudly stated that the retail industry is proven to be one of the most contributing industry after agriculture with respect to the employability and a way forward to contribute more to GDP.

The scope of organised selling has been contagious through the technological association through digitalisation of all activities and infrastructure in recent years. IT, IoT, Digital Marketing, Online shopping and AI have been the trending technologies in taking the industry a way forward to the exponential growth. Yet unorganised selling creates and stands on the trust and service elements and covers most of the rural areas. Nevertheless they never code that they compete with organised, in fact they cannot. Their flexible practices are quite intolerable to organised. For example, unorganized retailers don't have the barcode like technology so that it reduces the cost and not involving the technology whereas the some retailers use the technological features.

Analysis and interpretation

To analyse the explaining weightages of each item of all variables, the multiple regression Analysis has been conducted and the results are as follows for each Independent Variable influencing customer satisfaction.

Migration

Satisfaction on unorganized retailing (UR) = 4.107+ (-0.010) Mg 1 + (-0.137) Mg 2 + (- 0.025) +Mg3 Satisfaction on unorganized retailing with respect to the Mg1 (street vendors are huge in number due to migration) is 4.097 (4.107-0.010); if Mg1 increases by one unit, the overall performance is increased by 4.097. Likewise, if the predictors Mg2, Mg3, are increased by one unit, the level of satisfaction on unorganized retailing is increased for Mg 2 (due to corona most prefer to become street vendors) by 3.97; Mg 3 (Setting up unorganized business is easy with less investment) by 4.082

Satisfaction on unorganized retailing is explained by all the factors with good weightage in which weight carried by (street vendors are huge in number due to migration) is highest with 4.097 followed by (Setting up unorganized business is easy with less investment) with 4.087. The least is shown by (due to corona most prefer to become street vendors) with 3.97.

Pricing factors

Satisfaction on unorganized retailing (UR) = 3.759+ (0.149) p 1 + (-0.150) p 2 + (-0.172) p3+ (0.094) p4+ (0.058) p5 Satisfaction on unorganized retailing with respect to the p1 (since street vendors investment is low they can offer less price) is 3.908 (3.759+0.149); if p 1 increases by one unit, the overall performance is increased by 3.908. Likewise, if the predictors p2, p3, p4, p5 are increased by one unit, the level of satisfaction on unorganized retailing is increased for p 2 (less price is always attractive) by 3.609; p 3 (quality product is available with less price at street vendors) by 3.587; p4 (Working capital for street vendors is less so price is reduced) by 3.853; p5 (Bargaining is allowed at street vendors to customer) by 3.817.

Satisfaction on unorganized retailing is explained by all the factors with good weightage in which weight carried by (since street vendors investment is low they can offer less price) is highest with 3.908. Followed by (Working capital for street vendors is less so price is reduced) with 3.853. Followed by (Bargaining is allowed at street vendors to customer) with 3.817.followed by (less price is always attractive) with 3.609. The least is (quality product is available with less price at street vendors) with 3.587.

Mobility

Satisfaction on unorganized retailing (UR) = 2.985+ (0.026) M 1 + (-0.031) M 2 + (0.030) M3 + (0.144) M4 Satisfaction on unorganized retailing with respect to the M1 (street vendors can place the products at customer residence) is 3.011 (2.985-0.026); if M 1 increases by one unit, the overall performance is increased by 3.011. Likewise, if the predictors M2, M3, are increased by one unit, the level of satisfaction on unorganized retailing is increased for M 2 (Mobility of vehicle can gain more customer loyalty) by 2.954; M 3 (Choosy products are distributed to customer segments) by 3.015; M4 (Through stock is less customer prefer choosing at door steps) 3.129.

Satisfaction on unorganized retailing is explained by all the factors with good weightage in which weight carried by (Through stock is less customer prefer choosing at door steps) with 3.129. Followed by (Choosy products are distributed to customer segments) with 3.015. Followed by (street vendors can place the products at customer residence) with 3.011. The least is shown by (Mobility of vehicle can gain more customer loyalty) with 2.954.

Customer Loyalty

Satisfaction on unorganized retailing (UR) = 4.194+ (-0.074) CL 1 + (0.148) CL2 + (0.021) CL3 +(-0.114) CL4 +(-0.234) CL5+ (0.050) CL6 Satisfaction on unorganized retailing with respect to the CL1 (Customers have pity concern on street vendors) is 4.12 (4.194-0.074); if CL 1 increases by one unit, the overall performance is increased by 4.12. Likewise, if the predictors CL2, CL3, CL4, CL5, CL6; are increased by one unit, the level of satisfaction on unorganized retailing is increased for CL 2 (credit is given by street vendors so the customer are loyal) by 4.342; CL3 (Loyalty is there because of they come daily and sell the products) by 4.215; CL4 (customer recommends others also to buy the products) by 4.08; CL5 (Customer have a long time of availability to buy the products) by 3.96; CL6 (Customer are more motivated by street vendors than organized) by 4.244.

Satisfaction on unorganized retailing is explained by all the factors with good weightage in which weight carried by (credit is given by street vendors so the customer are loyal) with 4.342 followed by (Customer are more motivated by street vendors than organized) with 4.244. Followed by (Loyalty is there because of they come daily and sell the products) with 4.215.followed by (Customers have pity concern on street vendors) with 4.12.followed by (customer recommends others also to buy the products) with 4.08.

The least is shown by (Customer have a long time of availability to buy the products) with 3.96.

Rural consumer Psychology

Satisfaction on unorganized retailing (UR) = 4.794+ (0.005) RCP 1 + (-0.165) RCP2 + (- 0.165) RCP3 +(-0.070) RCP4 Satisfaction on unorganized retailing with respect to the RCP1 (Rural customer are attracted to less price and credit facility) is 4.799 (4.794+0.005); if RCP 1 increases by one unit, the overall performance is increased by 4.799. Likewise, if the predictors RCP2, RCP3, RCP4 are increased by one unit, the level of satisfaction on unorganized retailing is increased for RCP 2 (The street vendors offers all products in loose so it is benefited) by 4.629; RCP3 (Street vendors show weight difference for customer benefits) by 4.619; RCP4 (Street vendors don't maintain customer Katha books) by 4.724.

Satisfaction on unorganized retailing is explained by all the factors with good weightage in which weight carried by (Rural customer are attracted to less price and credit facility) with 4.799. Followed by [Street vendors don't maintain customer Katha books] with 4.724. Followed by (The Street vendors offer all products in loose so it is benefited) with 4.629. The least is shown by [Street vendors show weight difference for customer benefits]) with 4.619.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Since it is easy for all migrated with labor to be converted as unorganized retailers and the establishment such tiny business is easier ,the number of unorganized seller in Hiramandalam town as increased and the common minimum profit and common minimum profit is gained by them which is enough for their livelihood .the government should make an alternative employment opportunity for all the migrated people are create certain business opportunity since the development as unorganized sellers is very minimal

Investment and working capital are much lower for unorganized retailers when compared to organized seller. Organized seller should promote the products which should be distinctive as well as to be bargained.

Most of the people like to get the required products at their door steps, more over recent developments of online shopping which is wired spread to be villages has made mode most of the consumer attracted towards unorganized sellers but the choice exposure could be highest and promoted by organized sellers to grab the attention

Organized sellers likewise olden days, should start living credit facility to be none and genuine customer for their sales improvement in competence with unorganized sellers

Organized sellers should also categories the products and better they sell certain upgrade products and leave the substandard products for unorganized sellers

Offering the products in low assessment buy organized sellers is highly advisable to increase the business performance. Since most of the rural people has habit buy the products in single units

Government should facility all the unorganized sellers to be transformed in to organized sellers through registration with modified fees& rules show that the unorganized sellers can work freely without braving to anyone.

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CASE STUDY
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A Predator in a Quagmire: *Anupam Bharat*

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ABSTRACT

It is said '*history repeats itself*'. When we are able to exterminate a potential business upheaval with a soothing solution, a sigh of relief pushes us to think as if the business whipped off the venomous tide but in reality, things usually do not go as per our whims and expectations. Sometimes the same problem once perceived solved permanently resurfaces again in a new incarnation. That exactly happened in this case. The business empire thought to have resolved the issue it faced years ago but in recent past the issues again started showing its ugly fangs pushing the protagonist to scramble the dots again for solutions. To understand the case and its current exigencies we have to comprehend the genesis of the problem germinated 20 years ago.

It was 12th November, 2001 when the newspaper business house of Berhampur city of Odisha state in India lost its dynamic 'Managing Director' Mr. Kalicharan Panda in a fatal road accident leaving her mother and Chairman of "Anupam Bharat" into deep contemplation for finding a suitable substitute to hand over the reins of business. The dooms day brought a bolt from the blue for then70 years old Mrs. Mahadei Panda. She knew the moment she completes the last rites of her son Mr. Kalicharan within no time she has to appoint a new "Managing Director" for her business empire. Ultimately the matter of immediate succession planning was solved and the business house got a suitable successor and business activities went on normal quickly.

Chairman Mrs. Mahadei Panda was probably amused to solve a puzzle but hardly had she known the storm had just started brewing to test her mettle again after 20 years.

Keywords: *Anupam Bharat*, Leadership, Succession Planning, Challenges to sustain.

Introduction

'*Anupam Bharat*', an Odia newspaper (state of Odisha, India) started its operation in 1986 with just 10,000 circulations and was largely confined to Berhampur city of Odisha only. In first year, it had 30 employees including its founding 'Managing Director' Mr. Kalicharan Panda. Alike a typical family-owned business, the Panda family owns all shares and Mrs. Mahadei Panda, the mother of Kalicharan Panda was the 'Chairman'. Gradually the business grew like a 'money plant' and it saw an employee base of 150 in 1998 from 30 at the time of inception and all Odisha coverage by December 2000. The circulation reached 50,000 and the newspaper was simultaneously printed from Berhampur, Bhubaneswar, Cuttack, and Balasore .All other branches were controlled from

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its head office situated at Berhampur city. Berhampur being a southern Odisha city is located on banks of Bay of Bengal and to the 170 km southward from state capital city Bhubaneswar towards neighboring state of Andhra Pradesh.

In this 15 years period from 1986 to 2001, although Mr. Panda saw many hiccups but accolades never left him behind. He was awarded as best entrepreneur in various forums. This helped him to carve a niche in both social as well as political circles in Berhampur and Bhubaneswar. It further helped him to get more Government advertisements, tenders, and employment news printing contracts besides the regular featured private classifieds advertisements. In the year 2001 'Anupam Bharat' was circulated all over the state but a lion's share of 25,000 copies was printed in Berhampur city only. Other 25,000 copies were equally printed by the rest 3 cities. The financial position of the business house showing a sound health at time of his death in year 2001 is displayed as *annexure-1*.

At the time of accident Mr Managing Director was aged 49 and survived by her mother Mahadei Panda (70 years), younger brother Rabindranath Panda (35 years), wife Mrs Sarita Panda (41), son Prasanjeet Panda (21 years) and two daughters Diksha (15 years), Siksha (10 years). The entire family was in shock but despite her age, Mrs. Mahadei Panda thought herself being capable enough to take a decision to move ahead with a new successor.

Younger brother Mr Rabindranath Panda was engaged in a company in the capacity of an engineer far away at Delhi. Mr. Rabindra was well known for his sincerity, empathy towards employees and had a typical managerial intuition for predicting the machine failures. However, Mr. Panda was the 'Mom's boy' and had never been forgetting to enquire about the health of her mother whenever he got free time from his busy schedule.

Grief stricken Mrs. Sarita Panda, B. Com and a Diploma holder in Mass Communication was turned to be a housewife after her marriage to Mr. Kalicharan. Except some ceremonial business celebrations, she never got time to come out of her house. Except obtaining some journalism tips Mr. Kalicharan was never getting any other business-related helps from her. It was a shock to her and she returned from the medical only after spending 5 days after sudden demise of her husband and with a medical note to bed rest for another week or so.

Younger son 'Prasanjeet' an MBA by education was very jovial, upbeat and possessed a suave personality. He was very sincere and meticulous in all his works. He was an avid reader. Entire team of 'Anupam Bharat' employees knew him. He was regularly attending all annual functions of all centers and his subject expertise was helping him to draw crowds in the functions to his advantage.

The untimely demise of founder shocked everybody but Mrs Chairman stood firm not to lose grip over the business empire that her son had built with passion. She obtained consent from all the family members for reaching a final decision to appoint a new 'Managing Director'.

The family rituals and meetings among the stakeholders went on for some days but eventually the reins of business was transferred to younger brother Mr Rabindranath who took over as 'Managing Director cum Editor' of 'Anupam Bharat'. The protagonist 'Chairman' felt relaxed and the employees were relieved. Despite his lucrative job in hand and its promising future prospects Rabindranath vowed to manage the family business left by his beloved brother Kalicharan. The grief-stricken Mrs. Sarita Panda as usual kept herself busy in family chores upbringing her two little princesses Dikshya and Sikshya. Post MBA degree, Prasanjeet got engaged in a job. The entire family got relieved, thinking successfully solved the problem they faced. But hardly had it been known to them a storm just started brewing to test their mettle again in future.

Current Challenges

Often small volume news papers are ridiculed in society for ignoring ethical values and largely perceived as they are using their newspaper as a tool for settling personal scores. But gradually another school of thought also realized, a time has come to protect and promote the genuine small and medium volume circulated newspapers which are in fact trying to maintain Indian values and ethos to strengthen the democracy.

A study was conducted by 'Press council of India' in December, 2020 to assess the problems of small and medium newspapers. Major challenges are identified and documented in the report as below:

1. In comparison to current value, Government should plan to increase its financial support.

2. Machineries and equipments in subsidized rate are needed.

3. Transparency to be maintained in empanelling the newspaper house.

4. Quick clearance of advertisement bills by the DAVP and other advertising authorities
5. Making separate arrangements for input of information, news materials and visuals through Press Information Bureau (PIB) of the Government of India.
6. Subscription support from various agencies to be increased.
7. Organizing workshops to nurture local journalistic talent.
8. Setting up a special focused 'Small and Medium Newspaper Development Corporation (or a small and Medium Newspaper Advisory Committee).
9. Relief to the small newspapers from the burden of GST.
10. Big newspaper launching regional supplements to the main paper to be avoided.
11. Technological advancements and non-availability of the best of personnel due to financial constraints

The country's population today has crossed one billion. Out of them, almost 60% live in rural areas. The literacy rate which was around 17% at the time of independence, now stood at 74.04% as per census of 2021. If the Government released data be trusted then Indian populace are gradually rising above the poverty line and as the times passes by, more educated and self-employed people are included in the mainstream and their contribution leading to higher economic growth are also noticed. This change and progress will expectedly improve newspaper buying and reading capacity. Literacy and consequential growth of potential readers buoyed by the economic growth will obviously help

Annexure-1

Profit & Loss Account of M/S Anupam Bharat for the year ended 31-03-2021 (in INR)

DR. (INR)		CR. (INR)	
To Opening stock	1,25,000	By Sales	43,00,000
To Material	16,00,000	By Closing Stock	1,99,000
To Wages	1,75,000		
To Fright	1,13,275		
To Carriage Inwards	81,375		
To Gross Profit c/d	24,04,350		
	44,99,000		**44,99,000**
To Salary	2,87,567	By Gross Profit b/d	24,04,350
To Printing cost	4,25,458	By Income from Advertising	10,25,000
To Postage Expenses	89,765		
To Repair and Maintenance	45,600		
To Office Expenses	37,000		
To Rent	1,35,000		
To Carriage Outwards	23,000		
To Office lighting	25,000		
To Electricity	2,75,000		
To Advertising Expenses	1,55,000		
To Stationary Expenses	1,75,000		
To Transport Expenses	2,66,500		
To Salesmen Commission	1,43,000		
To Insurance	1,11,000		
To Depreciation	1,50,000		
To Interest Paid	40,000		
To Tax	1,43,000		
To Net Profit c/d	**9,02,460**		
	34,29,350		**34,29,350**

Source: *Balance Sheet released, 31.03.2021*

Annexure -II

LIST OF "A" CATEGORY NEWSPAPERS in ODISHA, INDIA

Sl No	Name of the Newspaper	Circulation
1	Sambad	269988(DAVP)
2	Dharitri	194997(DAVP)
3	Samaj	174732(DAVP)
4	Samaya	163207(DAVP)
5	Pragatibadi	153178(DAVP)
6	Suryaprabha	142586(DAVP)
7	Orissa Baskar	124017(DAVP)
8	Anupam Bharat	122002(DAVP)
9	Sambad Kalika	112725(DAVP)
10	Prajatantra	110516(DAVP)
11	Orissa Express (BBSR)	107770(DAVP)
12	Khabar	96573 (DAVP)
13	Dinalipi	82252 (DAVP)
14	Matrubhasa	75000(DAVP)

DAVP- Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity, Government of India
Source: http://enews.nic.in/pdf/circulation.pdf

small press. Simultaneously the small newspaper business houses must realize this impending high paced change and should act as catalyst of socio-economic and political improvements by extending constructive co-operation to the development of the country while helping the country to root out the malaise of corruption, moral degradation. Forget not, only an independent and responsible media committed to the democratic process will certainly and positively contribute to the nation building.

What Next?

Although the media business in the Odisha state is currently running smoothly but looking to the post pandemic southbound business growth, the owners who earlier were confident now apprehend a bleak future. Challenges are many and the competition is very tough to tide over. If we look towards the circulation scenario of Odia vernacular dailies in *Annexure-2* we can easily comprehend the pitiable conditions of small scale circulated dailies. How far the business can withstand the challenges and with whose support is a big question to get answered. The growth rate of this business house has declined close to 20% in 20 years so how the newspaper will face the rising newsprint cost and other overheads is a question to ponder.

Case Discussion Questions

1. Is the decision of handing over the charge to younger brother wrong because a sharp decline of business to the tune of 20% witnessed in past 20 years?
2. What is the current scenario of media business houses in Odisha state and how the challenges highlighted by the association can be answered for a better sustenance?
3. Can a decision be taken by the same protagonist who is now very old and completely ignorant about the current competition challenges and market scenario? If not, what is the next best possible scenario?
4. What should be the strategies the business house to adopt to wade through the challenges highlighted?
5. What will be the scenario if the rein of business is handed over to son Prasanjeet now?
6. What is the current situation of family-owned business in India?

Anupam Bharat newspaper masthead

Biographical Statement of Author(s)

Ratnakar Mishra, MBA, PhD is in teaching profession since last 24 years. He authored 2 books and several book chapters, Dr Mishra's research area includes 'Organisational Behaviour', 'Industrial displacements and Human Rights'. He is an 'Accredited Management Teacher' of 'All India Management Association, New Delhi'. Currently he is associated with NSB Academy, Bengaluru, Karnataka as Professor cum Domain Chair. He has been a resource person for various staff development programs on leadership, psychometric assessment, management software and analytics in institutions for higher and technical education.

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July – October 2022

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Note

This issue of the JHSSR has been reviewed by many business, finance, economics, management, marketing experts, and social scientists.

These experts provided candid and critical comments, which helped our editorial team pinpoint the specific comments and improved the papers' quality. The JHSSR editorial board is very grateful for the invaluable contributions from all reviewers listed above (in alphabetical order by first name).

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Revised: August 2022

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However, citations/ references must be formatted by you as per APA format.

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- ✓ The submission cites current theoretical and empirically-based literature, including relevant articles published in the Horizon Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research;
- ✓ The submission is written in language that is engaging, lively, and direct, using active voice whenever possible;
- ✓ The submission includes a maximum of four tables and figures uploaded as separate files, if applicable;
- ✓ The submission adheres to word count and APA 7 stylistic and bibliographic requirements; and
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- Declaration form
- Referral form
- Manuscript structure

(Title, Author details and affiliation, Abstract, Keywords, etc. using the **IMRAD** style). See below explanation.

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Aimee Henderson1 and Nayan Kanwal2

1Department of English Studies, Texas University, Dallas, USA., 2Department of the Deputy Vice Chancellor, Texas University, Dallas, USA.

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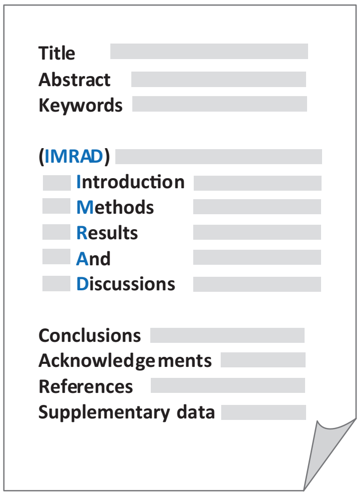

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