

Effectiveness And Challenges in the Adoption of Digital Marketing in The Direct Selling Industry of West Bengal

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effectiveness and challenges of digital marketing adoption in the direct selling industry of West Bengal, based on responses from 120 direct sellers. The majority of participants (41%) use digital media daily, with WhatsApp (97.5%), company portals (80%), and Facebook (65%) being the most preferred platforms. Findings reveal that digital marketing significantly enhances sales performance, customer engagement (59.2%), brand visibility (72%), and after-sales services (66%). However, 67% of respondents expressed the need for more training, highlighting challenges in content creation and digital skill readiness. Chi-square analysis confirmed that age significantly influences adoption levels. While the impact of digital tools is largely positive, the study emphasizes the need for structured support and capacity-building initiatives.

INTRODUCTION

The direct selling industry in West Bengal is witnessing a gradual but impactful transformation as digital marketing tools become increasingly integrated into day-to-day operations. Traditionally, this sector relied heavily on interpersonal connections—door-to-door selling, home demonstrations, word-of-mouth recommendations, and community-based outreach. However, with the widespread use of smartphones, growing internet penetration, and the rising popularity of social media, direct sellers are now reimagining how they connect with consumers.

This digital shift is particularly noticeable among individual distributors, small groups, and MSMEs, who are adopting platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and company-run portals to communicate, market, and build customer relationships in real time. These tools are not replacing the personal touch that defines direct selling but rather enhancing it—enabling sellers to stay connected with a broader audience, provide quicker support, and manage sales more efficiently. Compared to traditional e-commerce models that focus on

impersonal transactions, direct sellers continue to rely on relationship-based strategies, now supplemented by digital engagement.

The adoption of digital marketing in this sector has shown promising benefits. According to the findings of this study, a majority of respondents reported that digital platforms have helped improve sales, customer engagement, brand visibility, and after-sales services. However, the transition is not without its barriers. Many direct sellers face significant challenges in navigating digital platforms, including lack of formal training, limited access to affordable digital tools, and content creation difficulties. Additionally, some consumers—especially in rural and semi-urban regions—still prefer in-person interaction, making full-scale digital adoption uneven across the state.

This study seeks to evaluate the current level of digital marketing adoption among direct sellers in West Bengal and examine its effectiveness in improving core business outcomes like sales performance and customer retention. It also aims to identify demographic influences on adoption patterns and uncover the practical hurdles faced by sellers in this evolving landscape. By focusing on businesses that rely on direct, personalized selling—across and beyond network marketing frameworks—this research offers a grounded and data-driven understanding of how digital transformation is shaping the direct selling sector in the region.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1. To examine the extent of digital marketing adoption among direct selling businesses in West Bengal.
2. To evaluate the effectiveness of digital marketing tools in improving sales, customer engagement, and brand visibility in the direct selling sector.
3. To identify the key challenges faced by direct sellers in adopting and using digital marketing platforms.
4. To analyse the role of age in influencing digital marketing adoption.
5. To understand the perception of direct sellers regarding the impact of digital marketing on customer trust and satisfaction.
6. To suggest practical recommendations for improving digital adoption among direct sellers in the region.

HYPOTHESES:

1. H0: There is no significant effect of digital marketing adoption on sales performance in direct selling.
H1: Digital marketing adoption has a significant effect on sales performance in direct selling.
2. H0: There is no significant difference in customer engagement after using digital marketing methods.
H2: There is a significant difference in customer engagement after using digital marketing methods.
3. H0: There is no significant influence of age on digital marketing adoption.
H3: There is a significant influence of age in digital marketing adoption.
4. H0: There are no significant challenges faced by direct sellers in adopting digital marketing.
H4: Direct sellers face significant challenges in adopting digital marketing.
5. H0: There is no significant impact of digital marketing on after sales services in direct selling.
H5: Digital marketing has a significant impact on after sales services in direct selling.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

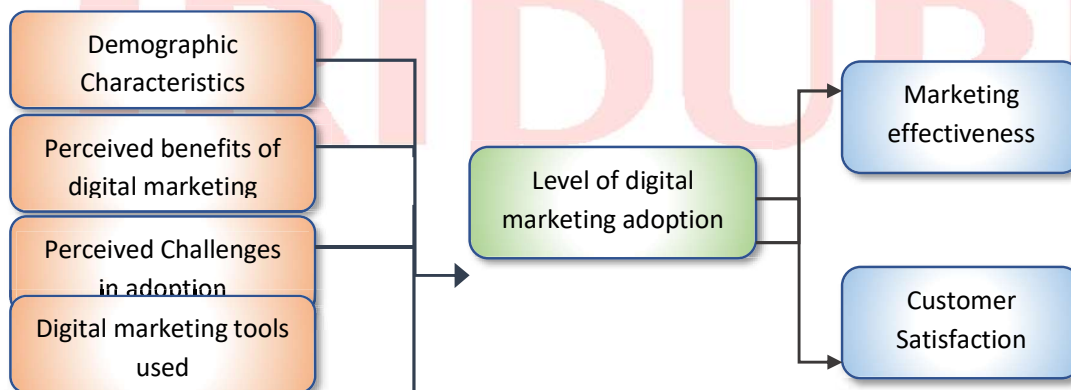


Fig.1.1 represents conceptual Framework

This framework illustrates how these variables affect productivity, AI adoption, client satisfaction, creative perceptions, and concerns about job security. It serves as a guide for the study by linking AI adoption to its practical and professional implications within the industry.

ASSUMPTIONS

1. Respondents are engaged in the direct selling industry, either as business owners, distributors, or marketing professionals.
2. Participants have willingly taken part in the study.
3. Respondents possess basic awareness of digital marketing tools and practices relevant to their business activities.
4. Participants fall within the age range of 21 to 60 years.

LIMITATIONS

1. The study is geographically confined to professionals operating in West, which may limit the generalizability of findings to other regions of India.
2. Data is based on self-reported responses, which may be influenced by personal bias or subjective interpretation.
3. Constraints related to time and resources may restrict the sample size and the diversity of participants across different roles or experience levels.
4. The study includes only respondents aged between 21 and 60, potentially excluding insights from younger or older individuals involved in the industry.

INCLUSION CRITERIA:

1. Participants must be aged between 21 and 60 years.
2. Participants should be actively involved in the direct selling industry in West Bengal, either as individual distributors, sellers, or associated with direct selling companies.
3. Participants must have experience using or exposure to digital marketing tools or strategies in their selling practices.
4. Participants must be willing to participate voluntarily and provide genuine responses for academic research purposes.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Mohammed, Aisha, Thomas, and Shameem (2025) analyse the rise of direct selling formats in India through a heuristic framework combining environmental retail evolution theory, relationship marketing, and Porter's Five Forces. Their study shows how firms adapt to changes in consumer behaviour, competition, policy, suppliers, and technology to sustain profitability and long-term customer ties. Economic liberalization, shifting demographics, regulatory backing, and IT progress have fuelled growth, though legal challenges remain a key obstacle despite a supportive environment.

Patil, Navalgund, and Mahantshetti (2022) investigate digital marketing adoption by start-ups and SMEs in North Karnataka using Diffusion of Innovation and Technology-Organization-Environment models. Employing mixed methods and SEM, they identify technical and environmental factors influencing adoption, revealing disparities in tool awareness and effectiveness. The study underscores digital marketing's vital role for competitiveness but highlights uneven resource access and expertise as barriers for many emerging businesses.

Seow (2022) offers a systematic review of the direct selling model's evolution from traditional distribution to a global strategy, addressing a literature gap by categorizing research at industry, organization, distributor, and consumer levels. Synthesizing recent studies, the paper delivers a comprehensive overview of developments and future research needs, enriching theoretical insights on direct selling's current landscape.

Datrika, Venkata, and Rajeswari (2020) examine digital marketing adoption by MSMEs in India, focusing on inclusive growth. The study emphasizes MSMEs' economic and employment contributions across sectors and highlights online media as a cost-effective way to engage customers and increase visibility. It raises critical questions about digital marketing's impact on smaller brands in tier-2 and tier-3 cities and the tools needed to maximize digital success.

Ivongbe (2015) explores internet privacy concerns and technology use in a global direct sales organization via surveys of 270 salespersons. The study finds significant links between age, technology usage, adoption intentions, and privacy worries, confirming the privacy paradox. It underscores the dual opportunities and challenges digital adoption brings to sales, service, and communication amidst rising data security awareness.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-method approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative techniques to explore the effectiveness and challenges in the adoption of digital marketing within the direct selling industry of West Bengal. The dual approach allows for a comprehensive understanding—quantitative data provides measurable insights into usage patterns, effectiveness, and demographic influences, while qualitative inputs help uncover deeper perceptions, experiences, and contextual challenges faced by stakeholders. Data has been collected through structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with direct selling professionals operating across various districts in West Bengal. This methodology

enables the study to capture both statistical trends and nuanced perspectives, offering a well-rounded analysis of the digital transformation in this sector.

1. **Research Approach:** Qualitative & quantitative mixed method approach
2. **Research Design:** Descriptive Survey
3. **Sampling technique:** Non- probability sampling.

This study used a **combination of purposive and snowball sampling**. Initially, key participants such as direct sellers and independent distributors engaged in digital marketing were selected based on relevance to the research. These participants then referred others in their network, expanding the sample through **reference-based (snowball) sampling**. This approach ensured access to experienced individuals from the direct selling industry across West Bengal.

4. **Setting:** West Bengal
5. **Sample Size:** 120

DATA COLLECTION:

Surveys: A structured questionnaire was designed for both online and offline data collection. The survey aimed to gather insights from individuals engaged in the direct selling industry across West Bengal, focusing on their experiences with and perceptions of digital marketing adoption, effectiveness, and challenges.

VARIABLES AND MEASUREMENTS OF THE STUDY:

- **Independent Variables:** Frequency of digital marketing use, platforms used, type of marketing content, level of digital marketing training or awareness, and perceived ease of use.
- **Dependent Variables:** Perceived effectiveness of digital marketing, improvement in customer engagement, sales performance, brand visibility, and challenges faced during adoption.
- **Demographic Variables:** Age, gender, type of direct selling business (individual distributor/small team/MSME), years of experience, educational qualification, and geographical reach.

TOOLS FOR DATA COLLECTION:

The questionnaire was divided into three parts:

1. **Part I:** Captures socio-demographic details including age, gender, type of direct selling entity, experience, education, and frequency of digital platform usage for business.

2. **Part II:** Contains structured questions related to the adoption and effectiveness of digital marketing practices and the challenges encountered.
3. **Part III:** A 5-point Likert scale was used to assess participant perceptions on how digital marketing impacts their business operations, customer interaction, and sales effectiveness.

RESULTS:

This section presents the findings obtained from the survey responses of direct selling professionals across West Bengal. The data has been analysed to address the research objectives and examine the effectiveness and challenges associated with the adoption of digital marketing practices in the sector. The analysis provides insights into usage patterns, perceived benefits, limitations, and the overall impact of digital marketing on business growth and customer engagement.

DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES:

| SL no. | Demographic variable | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------|--|-----------|------------|
| 1. | Age group in years | | |
| | 21-30 | 19 | 16% |
| | 31-40 | 35 | 29% |
| | 41-50 | 42 | 35% |
| | 51-60 | 24 | 20% |
| 2 | Gender | | |
| | Male | 49 | 41% |
| | Female | 71 | 59% |
| 3 | Education Status | | |
| | Undergraduate | 8 | 6.7% |
| | Graduate | 78 | 65% |
| | Post Graduate | 34 | 28.3% |
| 4 | Type of Direct selling business | | |
| | Individual distributor | 19 | 16% |
| | Small group/team | 62 | 52% |
| | MSME | 39 | 32% |
| 5 | Operation method | | |

| | | | |
|----------|----------------------------|----|-----|
| | Online | 33 | 27% |
| | Offline | 13 | 11% |
| | Both | 74 | 62% |
| 6 | Industry Experience | | |
| | < 1 year | 38 | 32% |
| | 1-4 years | 60 | 50% |
| | >4 years | 22 | 18% |

Table 2.1 represents the socio demographic data analysis

DATA ANALYSIS

Majority of the respondents reported using digital media for their business. Majority of the respondents (41%) reported using some form of digital media daily for their business. Most of the respondents (66%) have been employing digital marketing for less than 4 years.

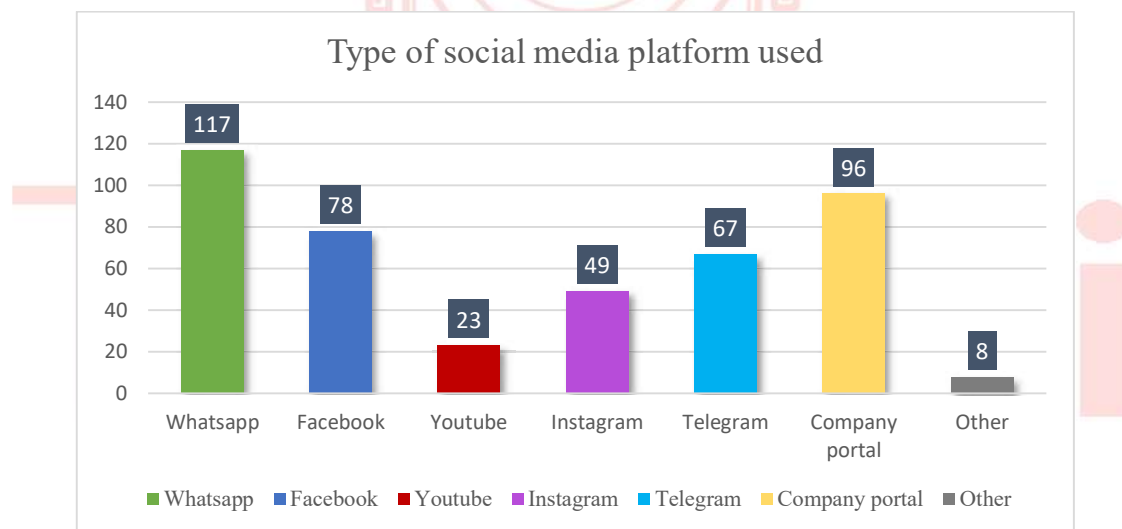


Fig 1.2 represents different types of social media platforms used by the respondents

Among 120 respondents, WhatsApp is the most used platform (97.5%), followed by company portals (80%) and Facebook (65%). Telegram (55.8%) and Instagram (40.8%) show moderate usage. In contrast, YouTube (19.2%) is less preferred for business, indicating lower adoption of content-heavy or paid platforms. Only 6.7% use other tools like LinkedIn, Discord and Google ads.

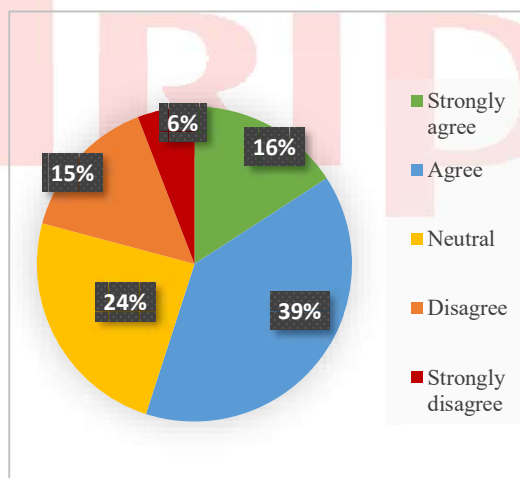
From Likert scale data, it was found that-

1. Majority of the respondents have agreed that digital marketing has increased their sales.
2. Majority of the participants agreed that digital marketing has helped in reaching wider audience.
3. 88% respondents agreed that customer management became easier with digital marketing.
4. 55% direct sellers said customer trust has increased by incorporating digital marketing while 72% agreed that digital media usage has increased the visibility or the respondent's business.
5. While majority of the participants faced issues with content creating, and managing digital platforms.
6. While 67% agreed that more digital marketing training is required, 38% said that adequate materials/ trainings are not being provided by the company.

HYPOTHESIS TESTING:

1. H₀: There is no significant effect of digital marketing adoption on sales performance in direct selling.

To test this hypothesis, respondents' data were analysed.



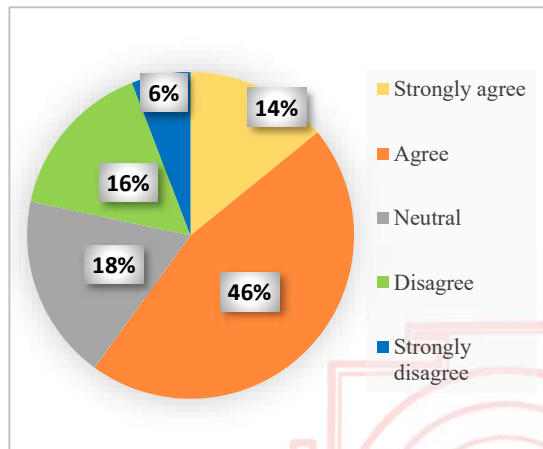
A majority of **55% respondents** agreed that digital marketing has helped increase their sales, while **19% remained neutral**. This suggests that more than half of the respondents perceive a positive impact of digital marketing on sales performance. Based on this data, the null hypothesis is **rejected**, indicating that digital marketing adoption has a **significant**

positive effect on sales performance in direct selling.

Fig. 1.3 represents Likert scale result on Effectiveness of digital marketing in sales.

2. H0: There is no significant difference in customer engagement after using digital marketing methods.

To test this hypothesis percentage analysis was done.



A clear majority of respondents (59.2%) agreed that engagement had improved, while only a small portion disagreed. Based on these findings, the null hypothesis is rejected, indicating that digital marketing has had a significant positive impact on customer engagement

in the direct selling sector.

Fig. 1.4 represents Likert scale result on effectiveness of digital media usage in customer management.

3. H0: There is no significant influence of age on digital marketing adoption.

To test this hypothesis, a chi-square test was conducted using the frequency of digital media usage across different age groups. The result yielded a chi-square value of **11.97** with a **p-value of 0.007**. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is **rejected**.

This indicates that age has a **significant influence** on the adoption of digital marketing among direct sellers.

4. H0: There are no significant challenges faced by direct sellers in adopting digital marketing.

To test this hypothesis, two Likert scale items were analysed :

- Whether respondents face challenges in incorporating digital marketing.
- Whether they require more training in digital media usage.

For the first statement, **26.7%** strongly agreed, **40.8%** agreed, **17.5%** remained neutral, **10%** disagreed, and **5%** strongly disagreed.

For the second statement, **19.2%** strongly agreed, **47.5%** agreed, **18.3%** were neutral, **10%** disagreed, and **5%** strongly disagreed.

In both cases, a **majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed**, indicating clear challenges in both implementation and skill readiness. Based on this data, the **null hypothesis is rejected**, suggesting that direct sellers do face **significant challenges** in adopting digital marketing.

5. H0: There is no significant impact of digital marketing on after sales services in direct selling.

To test this hypothesis, respondents were asked whether digital media improved the ease and frequency of after-sales services.

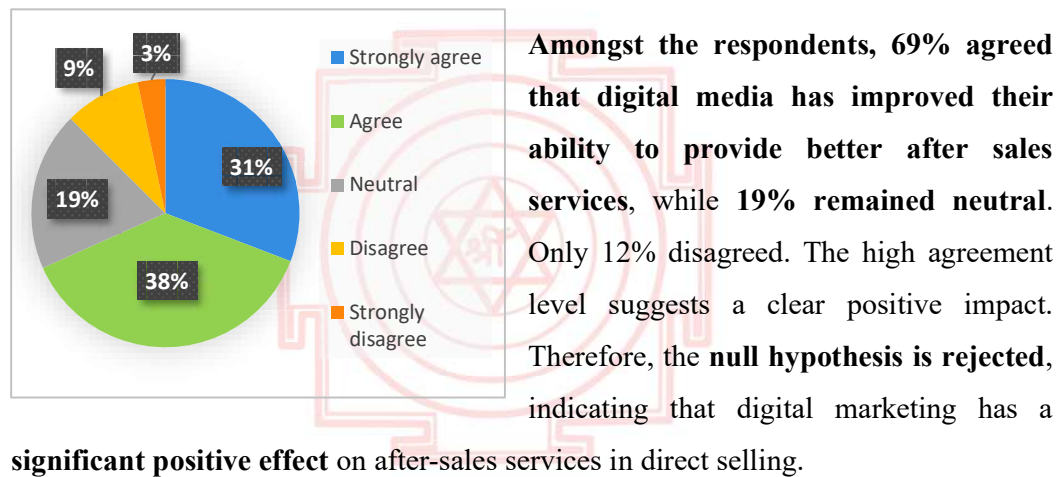


Fig. 1.5 represents Likert scale result on Effectiveness of digital media usage in aftersales services.

CONCLUSION

The study reveals that digital marketing is becoming an essential tool for direct selling businesses in West Bengal. The demographic profile shows that the majority of respondents are between 31 and 50 years old, with women constituting 59% of the sample. Most participants have at least a graduate degree, and a significant number operate their businesses through a combination of online and offline methods, indicating a hybrid approach to sales.

The findings highlight strong adoption of digital media, with WhatsApp being the dominant platform used by 97.5% of respondents, followed by company portals (80%) and Facebook (65%). Moderate usage of Telegram and Instagram also suggests growing diversity in platform preference, while YouTube and Google ads remain less popular, possibly due to the higher content creation effort and costs involved. Despite many sellers having less than four years of experience with digital marketing, 41% reported daily use of digital tools, demonstrating rapid adoption and integration into their business processes. Digital marketing is broadly perceived as effective by the respondents. A substantial majority agreed that it has led to increased sales

(55%), improved customer engagement (59.2%), and easier customer management (88%). Trust levels have also risen, with 55% of respondents acknowledging a positive impact. Additionally, 66% confirmed that after-sales services became easier and more frequent through digital media, and notably, 72% agreed that digital marketing has significantly enhanced their brand visibility. This underscores the role of digital marketing not only in direct sales but also in building lasting brand presence. However, challenges persist. Many respondents face difficulties in content creation and managing digital platforms effectively. Approximately 67% expressed the need for more digital marketing training, while 38% reported insufficient support and resources provided by their companies. The study's statistical analysis further confirmed that age significantly influences digital marketing adoption, emphasizing the need to tailor training and support across different age groups.

In conclusion, digital marketing adoption is positively impacting key performance indicators such as sales, engagement, trust, brand visibility, and after-sales services in the direct selling sector of West Bengal. Nonetheless, overcoming skill gaps and improving training support remain crucial to maximizing its benefits.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Skill Development & Training:** Regular workshops and practical training sessions should be arranged to help direct sellers improve their digital media skills, especially in content creation and platform management.
2. **Company Support:** Organizations should provide more structured digital marketing materials, guidance, and tools to support their sellers in using online platforms efficiently.
3. **Platform-Specific Strategy:** Emphasis should be placed on optimizing the use of WhatsApp, company portals, and Facebook, while also encouraging gradual adoption of content-driven platforms like YouTube and Instagram.
4. **Age-Inclusive Approach:** Since age influences adoption, customized support and training programs should be designed for older age groups who may struggle more with digital tools.
5. **Post-Adoption Follow-up:** Companies should implement systems to monitor the effectiveness of digital marketing usage at the ground level and address seller-specific problems promptly.

LIMITATIONS

1. **Geographical Scope:** The study is limited to West Bengal, and results may not be generalizable to other regions of India.

2. **Sample Size:** With 120 respondents, the sample may not fully capture the diversity of the entire direct selling community in the state.
3. **Self-Reported Data:** Responses are based on self-assessment, which may include biases or over-/under-estimations.
4. **Limited Variables:** The study focused mainly on age, education, and location as demographic influencers; other variables like income or digital literacy level were not included.
5. **Platform Depth:** The study emphasizes platform usage but does not delve deep into specific content strategies or marketing ROI, which could be explored in future research.

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