Women's Clothing Purchase Preferences in WhatsApp: Insights from Social Commerce Business Users

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the clothing purchase preferences of women using social commerce platforms, with a focus on Indian women associated with the business group on WhatsApp. Given the rapid digital transformation in retail, the research examines consumer behavior, preferences for different types of clothing, brand considerations, and motivational factors in social commerce. A survey conducted with 101 women revealed key preferences for ethnic wear, flexible attitudes toward branding, and a strong inclination toward unique designs and discounts. Statistical analyses highlight patterns in frequency of purchases and preferred materials, providing actionable insights for social commerce and similar businesses to enhance customer engagement and satisfaction. This study contributes to understanding consumer decision-making in social commerce and offers strategies for targeting women in the online retail space.

Keywords: Social Commerce Business (SCB), WhatsApp communities, Online platforms, Consumer behavior, Women's clothing preferences, Marketing strategy.

1. INTRODUCTION

With the rise of digital media and e-commerce, traditional retail models are transforming, and social commerce has emerged as a new trend, particularly in India. Social commerce has seen a surge so massive that today it is quite a significant segment, especially among the women consumers. Since social commerce social media and online shopping, consumers get to purchase directly through online platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram and a plethora of other applications. This easy to adopt model has thereby gained traction among small businesses and consumers alike, offering the double benefits of convenience and a community-oriented shopping experience.

If a business wants to thrive in this social commerce landscape, it becomes imperative for them to understand the preferences and patterns of their patrons. This study delves into the demographics, buying preferences, and purchase motivations of Indian women who buy clothes through social commerce platforms. Therefore, the insights provided as a result of this study could go a long way in drafting marketing strategies and tailoring campaigns to achieve maximum benefit from this sector of consumers.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study has several core objectives:

a) To identify key clothing preferences among Indian women in social commerce.

b) To analyse the factors motivating women's purchasing decisions on these platforms.

c) To examine demographic and psychographic characteristics that influence buying behavior.

d) To provide recommendations for Social Commerce Business (SCB) to optimize product offerings and marketing approaches based on customer preferences.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive research design to analyse consumer behavior within the specific context of social commerce. A mixed-method approach was employed, integrating quantitative survey data with qualitative insights.

3.2 Data Collection

a) Primary Data: Data were collected through a structured online survey distributed to 101 women associated with SCB. This sample comprised women from various demographic backgrounds in India and abroad.

b) Secondary Data: Relevant literature, industry reports, and previous studies on social commerce, consumer behavior, and online shopping trends were referenced to support the findings.

3.3 Sampling

Convenience sampling was used to select participants based on their accessibility through the WhatsApp group. This sampling method ensured a representative sample of active social commerce users within the targeted demographic.

3.4 Research Questions

Following are the questions that this study aspires to answer:

a) What are the primary clothing preferences for women on social commerce platforms?

b) How frequently do women purchase clothing through social commerce?

c) What factors influence women's purchase decisions, including branding, material, and style?

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical foundation of this study draws from models of consumer decision-making, particularly in the context of online shopping and social commerce. According to Rhie's concept of 'Fashion Involvement' (1985), consumer behavior is segmented along various dimensions, including fashion innovativeness, interpersonal communication, and product knowledge.

Additionally, 'Theory of Planned Behavior' (TPB) posits that consumer intentions are influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control over their shopping actions. This model aids in understanding how social media and peer influence impact women's clothing choices in a digital marketplace.

5. ANALYSIS OF DEMOGRAPHY AND PREFERENCES

5.1 Tables and Charts

The findings are supported by several tables and charts derived from survey data. Key tables include:

Table 1: Age Distribution of Respondents.

Sl.No	Age	% of respondents
1	18-25	32.7
2	26-35	36.6
3	36-45	24.8
4	Above 46	5.9

Inference:

The age distribution table reveals the following insights:

- **Majority Respondents (26-35 Years):** The largest proportion of respondents falls in the 26-35 age group, accounting for **36.6%** of the total. This indicates that this demographic is highly represented in the survey.

- **Significant Representation (18-25 Years):** The second-largest group is the 18-25 age category, comprising **32.7%** of respondents. This suggests that younger individuals also actively participated.

- **Moderate Representation (36-45 Years):** Respondents aged 36-45 make up **24.8%**, indicating a moderate representation of middle-aged individuals in the survey.

- **Minimal Representation (Above 46 Years):** The least represented age group is those above 46 years, with only **5.9%** of the total respondents. This suggests limited participation from older individuals.

Overall, the survey predominantly reflects the views and opinions of younger and middle-aged individuals, with minimal insights from the older population.

Table 2: Preferred Clothing Type (Indian vs. Western).

Sl.No	Clothing Type	% of respondents
1	Western	16
2	Indian Ethnic	43
3	Both	41

Inference:

The table on preferred clothing types provides the following insights:

- **Preference for Indian Ethnic Wear:** A significant proportion of respondents (**43%**) prefer Indian ethnic clothing, making it the most favoured choice among the respondents.

- **Balanced Preference for Both Styles:** A close second, **41%** of respondents, expressed a preference for both Indian and Western clothing styles, indicating a balanced interest in blending traditional and modern attire.

- **Lower Preference for Western Wear Alone:** It has been observed that **16%** of participants only prefer exclusively Western clothing, showcasing the fact that the majority lean towards Indian ethnic or a mix of both styles.

In summary, it is observed that most consumers predominantly prefer Indian-styled clothes, followed by a balance between ethnic and western styles. However, exclusive western wear was not very popular as seen from the responses.

Table 3: Frequency of Purchases through Social Commerce.

Sl.No	Frequency	% of respondents
1	Clothing	52.5
2	Accessories	30.7
3	Household items	16.8

Inference:

When we studied the frequency of purchases, the following patterns emerged:

- **Clothing Dominates Purchases:** A majority of respondents (**52.5%**) primarily purchase clothing through social commerce platforms, indicating that apparel is the most sought-after category in this domain.

- **Moderate Interest in Accessories:** Accessories account for **30.7%** of purchases, showcasing a significant but secondary interest among consumers.

- **Lower Demand for Household Items:** Household items are the least purchased category, representing only **16.8%** of respondents, suggesting that social commerce is less popular for these types of products.

Overall, the data highlights that clothing is the primary driver of social commerce, followed by accessories, while household items have a comparatively limited presence. This suggests that social commerce platforms may be particularly effective for fashion-related products.

Table 4: Preferred Material (Cotton, Synthetic, Silk, etc.).

Sl.No	Preferred material	% of respondents
1	Cotton only	18.8
2	Synthetic, silk only	14.9
3	Open for materials	66.3

Inference:

The analysis performed on preferred material types revealed the following trends:

- **Majority are flexible with materials:** Most respondents (**66.3%**) are open to various materials, indicating a high level of flexibility and a lack of strong preference for any specific type.

- **Cotton has a notable preference:** 18.8% of respondents prefer cotton exclusively, reflecting a significant interest in this comfortable and breathable material.

- **Lower preference for synthetic and silk only:** Only **14.9%** of the participants were found to be inclined exclusively towards silk and synthetic, which obviously suggests that these materials are not as preferable as cotton or cotton-based clothes.

While most customers seem to be flexible when it comes to the choice of material, a comparison between material preferences suggest that cotton is more preferred to other types of clothing such as silk or synthetic material.

Table 5: Motivational Factors (Designs, Discounts, Community Engagement).

Sl.No	Motivational Factors	% of respondents
1	Unique designs and colours	33.7
2	Discounts and offers	25.7
3	All the above	40.6

Inference:

When asked about the factors (such as innovative and unique designs, offers available etc.) that helped them decide on clothing purchases, the analysis of responses lead to the following insights:

- **Preference for all factors:** It was found that **40.6%** of the respondents are motivated by a blend of parameters such as distinctive designs, choice of colours, availability of discounts, and community engagement, suggesting that a rounded approach appeals most to consumers.

- **Focus on unique designs:** 33.7% of respondents are convinced to buy if the design is unique and colours favourable, thereby showcasing the importance of aesthetic and innovative product offerings.

- **Impact of Discounts:** 25.7% of respondents value discounts and offers more than the other motivational factors, suggesting that cost savings remain a pivotal motivational factor, though obviously less dominant compared to other factors.

In total, the data suggests that a business that has a holistic approach to exposing its customers to a combination of these motivational factors will do well to capture the interest of prospective buyers.
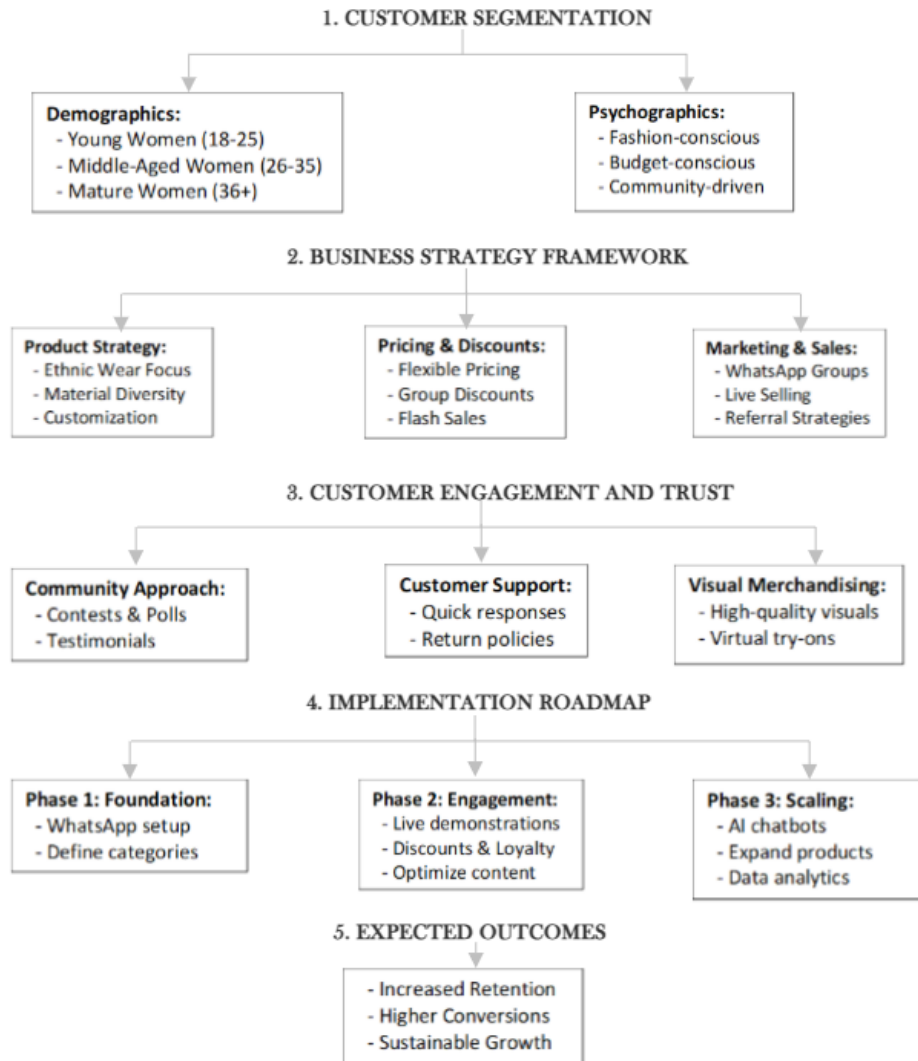
6. STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF CONSUMER PURCHASE BEHAVIOUR

As is customary, Chi-square tests were used to examine associations between categorical variables such as age categories (young adults, adults, pre-middle-age, middle-age), frequency of purchase (high, medium, low), and clothing preferences (ethnic, western etc.)

6.1 Key Findings

- *Age and Frequency of purchase:* It was found that younger participants were more frequent shoppers, with monthly purchases or more, compared to older participants.

- *Preference for Ethnic vs. Western Wear:* The data reveals that a significant portion of participants preferred ethnic wear, particularly kurtis and sarees, reflecting cultural preferences. However, younger age groups showed a stronger inclination toward Western styles, while older participants favoured ethnic attire.

- *Brand and Material Flexibility:* Most women showed flexibility in both brand and material, open to purchasing non-branded clothing and a variety of materials beyond traditional cotton or silk.

7. SOCIAL COMMERCE MODEL (HIERARCHICAL NETWORK GRAPH REPRESENTATION)

1. CUSTOMER SEGMENTATION

Demographics:
- Young Women (18-25)
- Middle-Aged Women (26-35)
- Mature Women (36+)

Psychographics:
- Fashion-conscious
- Budget-conscious
- Community-driven

2. BUSINESS STRATEGY FRAMEWORK

Product Strategy:
- Ethnic Wear Focus
- Material Diversity
- Customization

Pricing & Discounts:
- Flexible Pricing
- Group Discounts
- Flash Sales

Marketing & Sales:
- WhatsApp Groups
- Live Selling
- Referral Strategies

3. CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT AND TRUST

Community Approach:
- Contests & Polls
- Testimonials

Customer Support:
- Quick responses
- Return policies

Visual Merchandising:
- High-quality visuals
- Virtual try-ons

4. IMPLEMENTATION ROADMAP

Phase 1: Foundation:
- WhatsApp setup
- Define categories

Phase 2: Engagement:
- Live demonstrations
- Discounts & Loyalty
- Optimize content

Phase 3: Scaling:
- AI chatbots
- Expand products
- Data analytics

5. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- Increased Retention
- Higher Conversions
- Sustainable Growth

Social Commerce Model for Women's Clothing on WhatsApp

This is a comprehensive model which factors in various elements such as customer preferences, their demographics and psychographics when it comes to purchasing with the help of WhatsApp. It leverages the interactive and community-driven nature of WhatsApp to attract customers to improve business growth and profitability. The model helps us to understand the patterns within each segment and implement strategies accordingly.

With respect to demographics, young women aged 18-25 exhibit a combination of traditional and modern fashion choices, middle-aged women aged 26-35 tend to balance ethnic and Western styles, while mature women aged 36 and above prefer conventional attire. Psychographically, it is no surprise that there is a heterogenous mix of fashion-conscious buyers who prioritize aesthetics and trends over other factors, budget-conscious consumers whose preference is affordable clothing options, and community-driven buyers who rely on peer endorsements and group exchanges.

In the model provided above, the framework for business strategy encompasses product strategy, marketing and sales, and pricing tactics. The first element focuses on different varieties of ethnic wear which can be personalized and customized to suit the different tastes of customers. Marketing and sales capitalize on WhatsApp groups for direct interaction with the customers, conservational and interactive user experience, and once trust is built, referral strategies that lead to a snowballing effect. Pricing and discounts are also used to lure potential customers through flexible pricing, group discounts, and limited-time flash sales.

As we can see clearly, consumer engagement and trust-building are pivotal to the model. Community engagement is carried out through innovative contests, WhatsApp polls, and sharing of testimonials, while visual merchandising ensures high-resolution images and virtual try-on features, some of which could be AI-enabled too, enhancing the overall shopping experience. Effective customer support, characterized by prompt responses and return policies, reinforces trust and customer satisfaction.

The implementation roadmap unfolds in three phases. The foundation phase focuses on setting up WhatsApp groups, defining

product categories, and establishing customer trust. The engagement phase introduces live demonstrations, loyalty incentives, and optimized content strategies. Finally, the scaling phase integrates AI chatbots, product expansion, and data analytics to refine operations and enhance customer insights.

The expected outcomes of this structured approach include increased customer retention through personalized interactions, higher conversion rates driven by community engagement and trust, and sustainable business growth enabled by efficient digital strategies. By leveraging WhatsApp's unique features and focusing on consumer behavior, this model creates a dynamic and effective social commerce ecosystem for women's clothing businesses.

8. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study faced several limitations:

a) The sample was primarily limited to users in Chennai and a few regions outside of Chennai, potentially limiting generalizability across all of India.

b) If the sample size was larger, the analysis may provide more robust conclusions, especially for comparisons between age groups and shopping preferences.

c) Responses may be subject to human biases and ambiguities based on the interpretation and understanding of the questionnaire.

9. SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings, several recommendations can be made for WhatsApp and similar businesses:

a) Given the preference for Indian attire, social commerce-based businesses should increase offerings in ethnic wear.

b) With limited brand loyalty among respondents, the business can focus on affordability without compromising on style and originality.

c) Promotions and exclusive designs can enhance customer engagement, particularly as these are strong purchase motivators.

d) Leveraging social media to create an inclusive community can strengthen customer loyalty and encourage repeat purchases.

10. CONCLUSION

This study contributes to understanding the preferences and motivations of women who purchase clothing through social commerce, specifically in the context of a social commerce business(SCB). Findings highlight a preference for affordable, unique, and culturally resonant clothing, with strong engagement through community-driven social platforms. These insights can help social commerce businesses better cater to female consumers, refine product offerings, and build meaningful customer relationships through platforms like WhatsApp.

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