



Cover Page



## **SOCIAL COMMERCE: CONVERTING SOCIAL MEDIA INTO SALES CHANNELS IN RURAL MARKETING IN INDIA**

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### **Abstract:**

Social commerce, the combination of social media and e-commerce, has emerged as a powerful tool in transforming rural entrepreneurship and rural marketing in India. With the revolutionary increase in internet and smartphone usage in rural areas, social media plays a crucial role in promoting and selling local products directly to consumers. Research on social commerce in rural markets in India is limited. The primary objective of this study is to investigate the role of social media in social commerce, its impacts, factors influencing social commerce in rural markets, and the benefits of social commerce in these markets. Data was generated through descriptive, exploratory, and questionnaire methods in rural markets of Karnataka. The research revealed the demographic aspects, selling patterns, and buying motives of the consumers of rural markets. Research also highlighted the major factors that affect social commerce and the benefits of social commerce in rural markets of India. It is observed that, despite challenges such as digital illiteracy, payment security concerns, and logistical constraints, the scope for growth of social commerce in rural markets is vast. Recommendations were provided to overcome the major challenges of social commerce in rural marketing.

**Keywords:** Social Commerce, Rural Marketing, Social Media Platforms, Digital Literacy, Sales channels.

### **Introduction:**

Social commerce refers to the use of social platforms to promote, sell, and purchase products and services directly. It combines social interactions with online shopping, allowing users to discover, recommend, and buy products without leaving the social platform. Social commerce includes social media-based selling, peer influence, seamless purchase journey, and content-driven marketing. Social commerce is an emerging tool in rural markets as smartphone and internet penetration are rising rapidly, and rural users are increasingly using platforms like Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and other media.

Unlike traditional e-commerce, it thrives on trust, familiarity, and peer recommendation, which align well with the community-centric culture of rural India. This paper explores how social media platforms are being converted into sales channels in the context of rural marketing in India. It examines the potential of social commerce to empower the rural population, challenges it faces, and strategies for sustainable growth.

### **Literature review:**

1. As per a study conducted by Kim S and Park (2013), social commerce highly involves leveraging social media tools such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram to promote and sell products and services throughout the regions. According to the researcher, social commerce is a blend of social interaction and contributions of the users with a buying process that results in an increase in customer trust and engagement.
2. The research of Singh R and Duhan P (2019) highlighted that social commerce helps small and local businesses in rural areas to reach broader audiences with low overhead costs. Researchers argued that social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and marketplace play a major role in direct product promotion and customer engagement in rural areas.
3. A study conducted by Hajli M (2014) highlights that the trust in a message or influencer is a major factor that affects the buying behavior of rural people. According to him, peer recommendations and influencer marketing are more trusted elements than advertisements, and trust-building mechanisms in social commerce significantly improve purchase intentions.



4. The study of Chatterjee S and Rana N P (2020) highlights that low digital literacy, limited logistic support, and lack of trust in online payments are the major challenges in rural markets. They also emphasize that the digital divide is a significant barrier to scaling social commerce in rural areas.

### Objectives:

1. To examine and evaluate the role of social media platforms in facilitating commerce in rural areas of India.
2. To study the impact of social commerce on rural entrepreneurship and self-employment.
3. To identify the important key elements and benefits of social commerce for rural marketing in India.
4. To provide concrete suggestions and recommendations for improving the impacts of social commerce in Indian rural markets.

### Research Methodology:

The study employs a descriptive and exploratory research design to investigate the role and impact of social commerce in rural marketing, aiming to identify current practices, emerging trends, and challenges. The research was conducted in selected districts of Karnataka state of India. Research covered the target population as rural micro entrepreneurs, resellers using platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and other social media, and rural consumers who purchase through social media channels.

Research covered 150 respondents, which included Rural micro entrepreneurs and rural consumers using social media for buying and selling. Research covered three districts of Karnataka, like Dakshina Kannada, Udupi, and Uttara Kannada. 60% of the respondents were males, and 40% of the respondents were females. Research targeted the respondents whose age was between 20 years to 50 years.

Primary data has been collected through a structured questionnaire for rural sellers and consumers. Personal interviews with entrepreneurs have been conducted. Secondary data was collected through published research articles and digital marketing reports.

Despite more research on digital marketing and e-commerce, the research on social commerce in the context of rural markets remains limited. There are limited studies focused on rural India, and a lack of studies on the microentrepreneurs' perspective. This study tries to focus on above highlighted research gap and provide recommendations and suggestions for the challenges faced by social commerce in rural marketing.

### Findings:

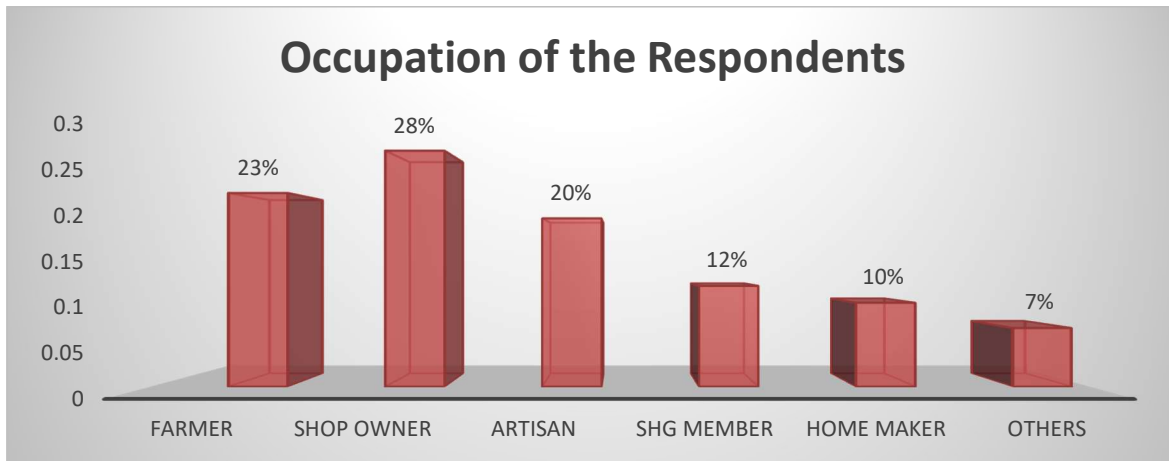
#### I. Demographic Feedback

##### 1. Type of occupation of the respondents

Sl. No	Occupation	Respondents
1	Farmer	23%
2	Shop Owner	28%
3	Artisan	20%
4	SHG member	12%
5	Home Maker	10%
6	Others	7%



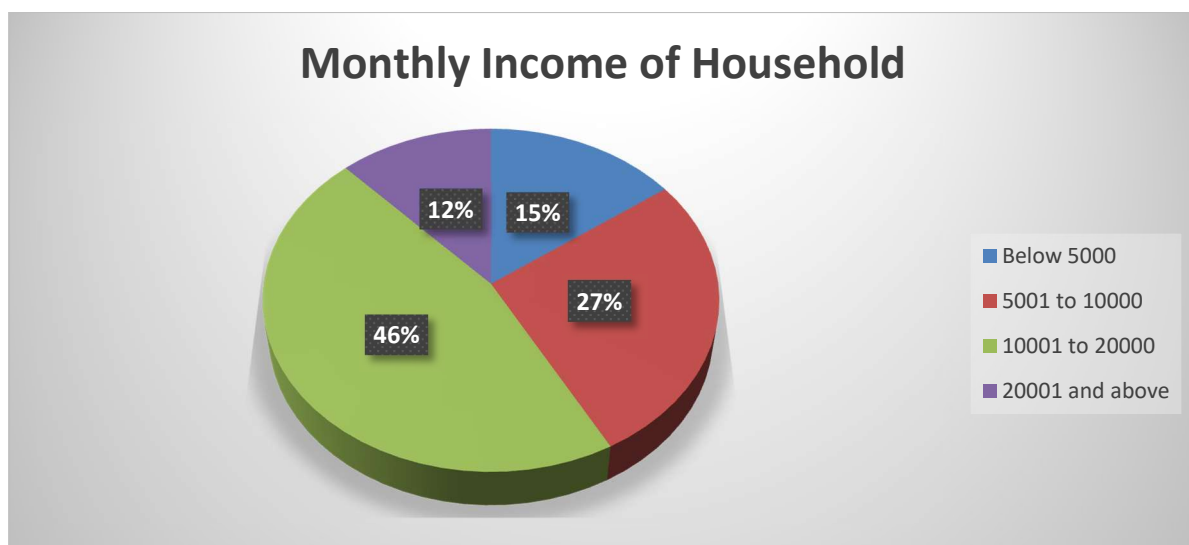
Cover Page



The above diagram shows that 23% of the respondents were farmers, and 28% of them are shop owners. 20% of the respondents are artisans, and 12% of them are SHG members. The remaining 10% and 7% of the respondents are homemakers and others, respectively.

## 2. Monthly income of households

Sl. No	Income	Respondents
1	Below 5000	15%
2	5001 to 10000	27%
3	10001 to 20000	46%
4	20001 and above	12%



The above charts show the monthly income of the households. The chart highlights that 45% of the respondents have income from Rs. 10001 to Rs. 20000, and 27% of the respondents have income from Rs. 5001 to Rs. 10000. 15% of the respondents have an income below Rs. 5000, and 12% respondents have an income above Rs. 20000.

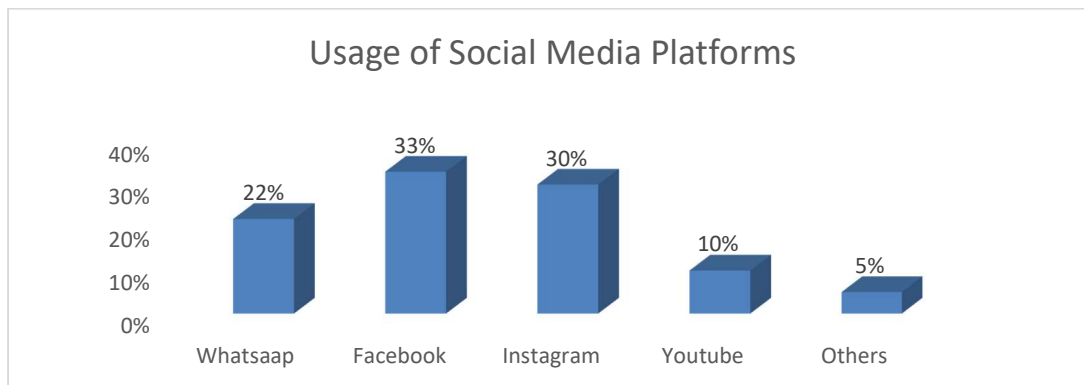


Cover Page



### 3. Usage of social media platforms

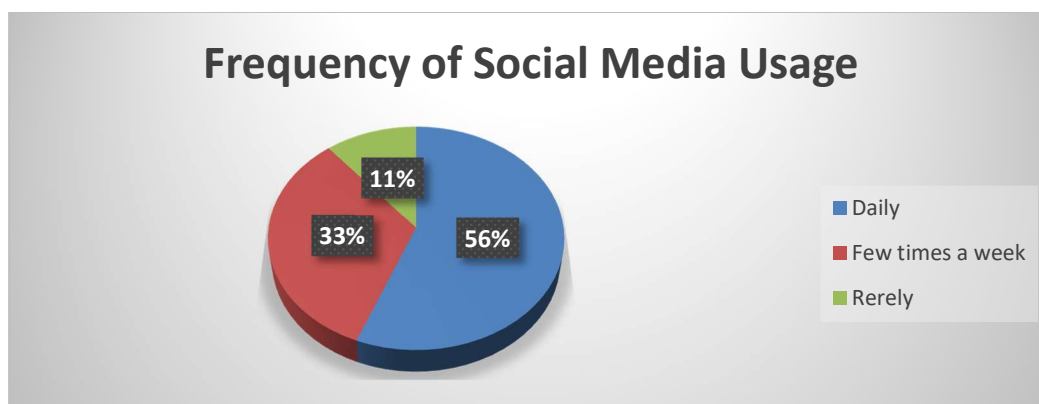
Sl. No	Social Media Platforms	Respondents
1	WhatsApp	22%
2	Facebook	33%
3	Instagram	30%
4	YouTube	10%
5	Others	5 %



The above diagram shows the usage of social media platforms by the respondents in social commerce in rural markets. 33% of the respondents are using Facebook, and 30% of the respondents are using Instagram for social commerce. 22% of the respondents depend on WhatsApp, and the remaining 10% and 5% of the respondents were using YouTube and other modes of social media for social commerce, respectively.

### 4. Frequency of usage of social media

Sl. No	Frequency of social media usage	Respondents
1	Daily	56%
2	A few times a week	33%
3	Rarely	11%





Cover Page

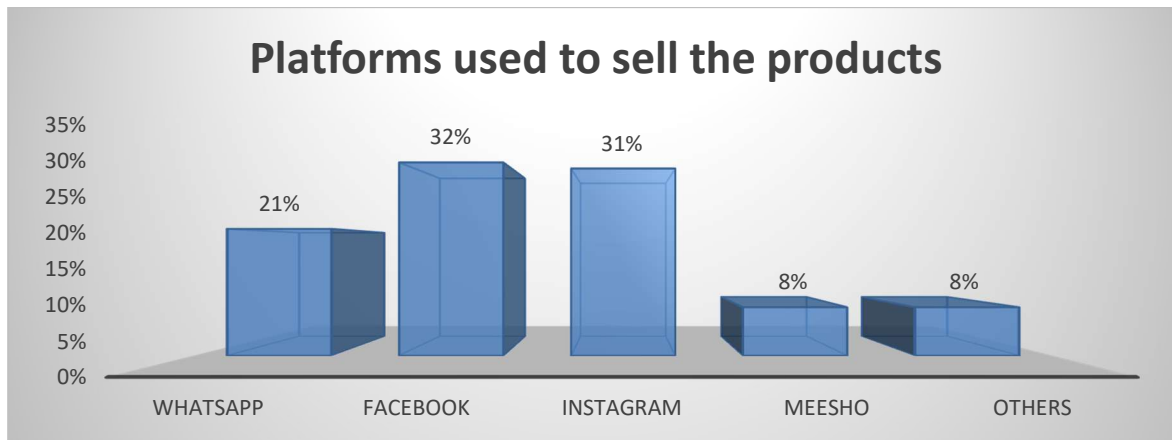


The above charts show how frequently the respondents are using social media for social commerce in rural markets. 56% of the respondents opined that they use social media daily, 33% of them use using a few times a week, and the remaining 11% of the respondents opined that they use social media rarely.

# I. Selling through social media

## 5. Platforms used to sell the products

Sl. No	Platforms used to sell the products	Respondents
1	WhatsApp	21%
2	Facebook	32%
3	Instagram	31%
4	Meesho	8%
5	Others	8%



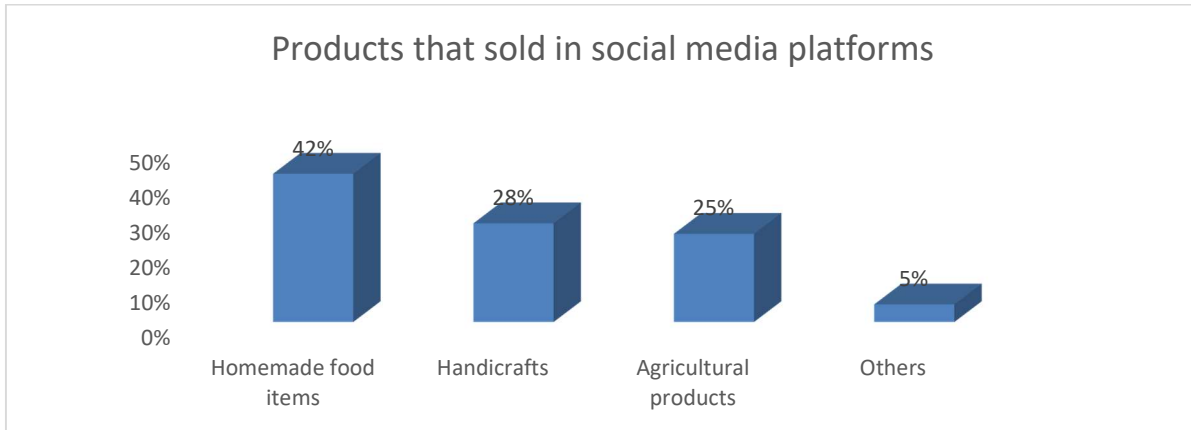
The above diagram shows social media platforms used to sell products by sellers in rural markets. 32% of the sellers are using Facebook, and 31% of the sellers are using Instagram for selling or promoting their products. 21% of the sellers are using WhatsApp, and the remaining 8% of sellers are using Meesho and other modes of platforms to sell their products.

## 6. Types of products sold

Sl. No	Types of Products sold	Respondents
1	Homemade food items	42%
2	Handicrafts	28%
3	Agricultural products	25%
4	Others	5 %



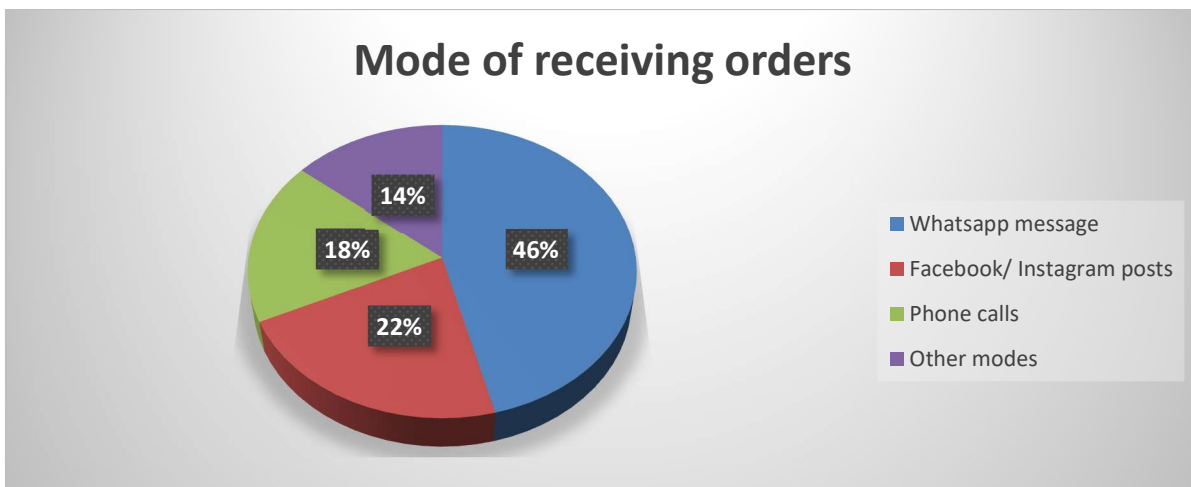
Cover Page



The above chart highlights the type of products sold on social media by the sellers under social commerce in rural markets. 42% of the sellers are selling homemade food items, and 28% of the sellers are selling handicrafts. 25% of the sellers are selling agricultural products, and the remaining 5% of the sellers are selling other types of products and services.

#### 7. Mode of receiving orders

Sl. No	Mode of receiving orders	Respondents
1	WhatsApp message	46%
2	Facebook /Instagram posts	22%
3	Phone calls	18%
4	Other modes	14%



The above diagram shows the mode of receiving orders for their products. 46% of the sellers are getting their orders through WhatsApp, and 22% of the sellers are getting their orders through Facebook posts. 18% of the sellers get phone calls for orders, and the remaining 14% of the sellers get orders through other modes such as mail, SMS, etc.



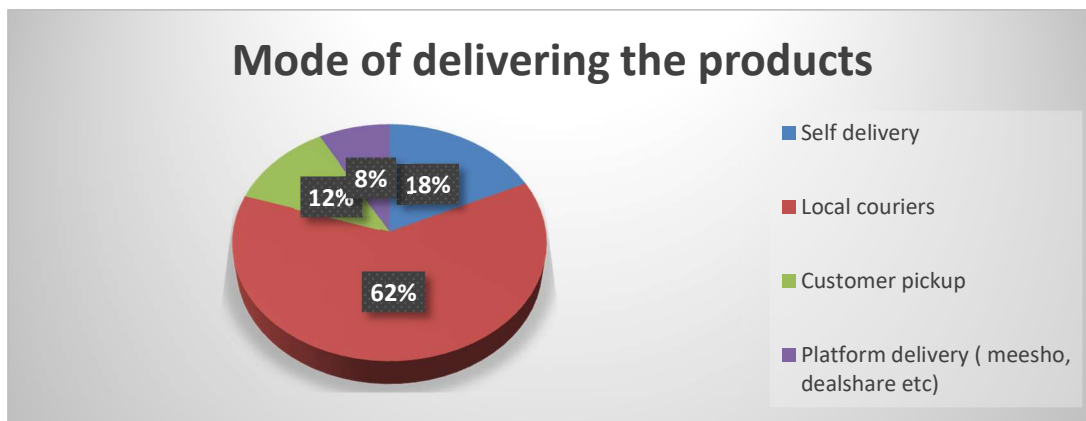


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## 8. Mode of delivering the products

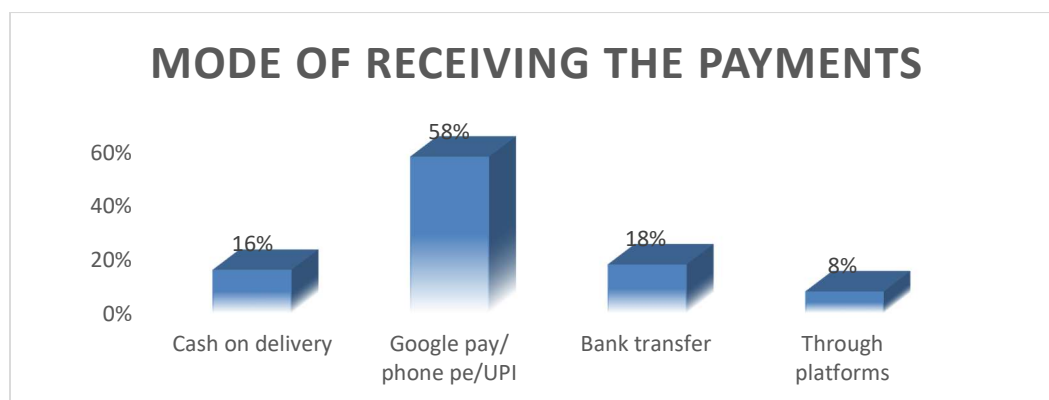
Sl. No	Mode of delivering the products	Respondents
1	Self-delivery	18%
2	Local couriers	62%
3	Customer pickup	12%
4	Platform delivery (Meesho, Deal Share, etc.)	8%



The above diagram shows the type of delivery mode used by the sellers. 62% of the rural sellers use local couriers to deliver the products, whereas 18% of the sellers provide self-delivery service. 12% of the customers pick up their products themselves in rural markets, and the remaining 8% of sellers use different platforms like Meesho, Deal Share, etc.

## 9. Mode of payment

Sl.No	Mode of Payment	Respondents
1	Cash on delivery	16%
2	Google pay/ phone pe/ UPI	58%
3	Bank transfer	18%
4	Through platforms	8%





Cover Page

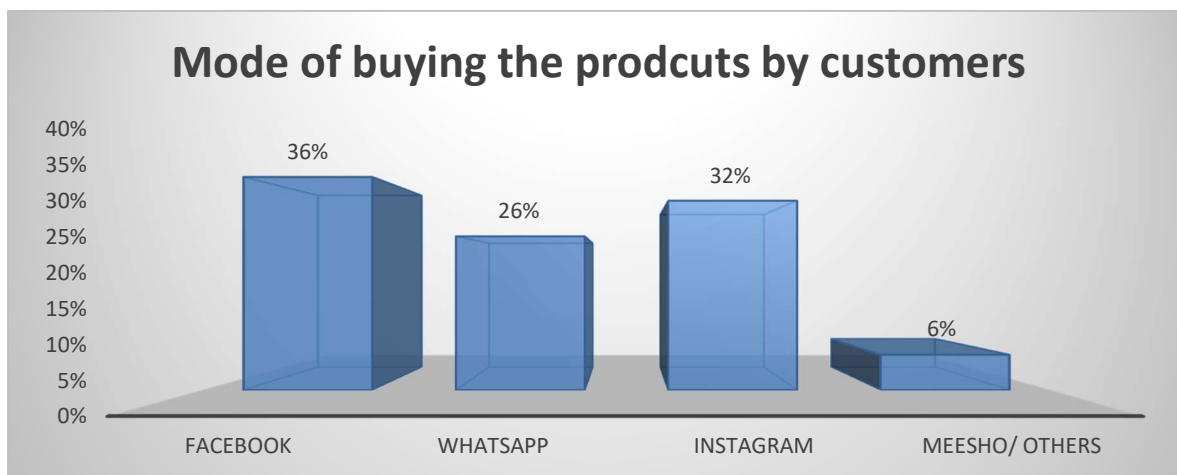


The above chart highlights modes of receiving payments in social commerce in rural markets. 58% of the sellers receive their payment through Google Pay/PhonePe or UPI, and 18% of the sellers receive it through bank transfer. 16% of the sellers provide the service of cash on delivery, and 8% of the sellers receive their payments through particular platforms on which they sell the products.

## II. Buying through social media

### 10. Type of buying platform

Sl. No	Buying platforms	Respondents
1	Facebook	36%
2	WhatsApp	26%
3	Instagram	32%
4	Meesho/ others	6%



The above diagram shows the mode of buying the products in rural markets through social media. 36% of people use Facebook as their mode, and 32% of buyers in rural areas use Instagram as their buying mode. The remaining 26% buyers use WhatsApp, and 6% of the buyers use Meesho or other platforms to buy their products.

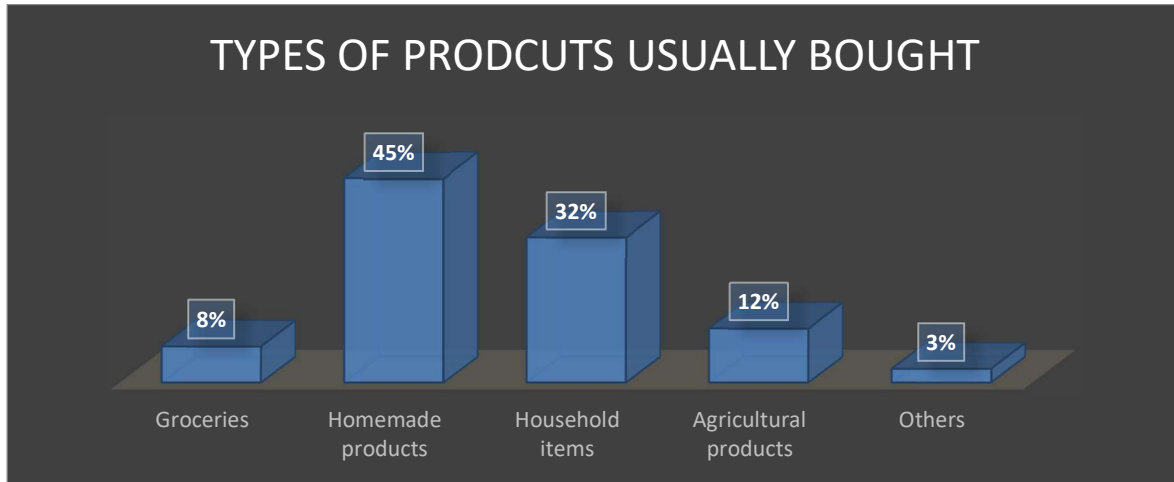
### 11. Types of products that are usually bought by customers

Sl. No	Types of products usually bought by customers	Respondents
1	Groceries	8%
2	Homemade products	45%
3	Household items	32%
4	Agricultural products	12%
5	Others	3%





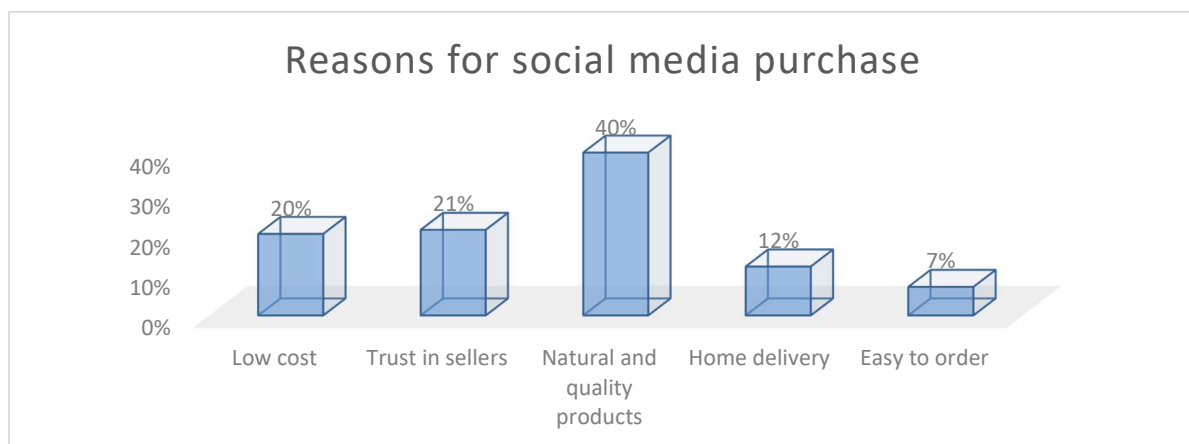
Cover Page



The above diagram shows the type of product usually bought through social media in rural markets. 45% of the customers prefer homemade products, and 32% of the buyers purchase household items. 12% of the buyers purchase agricultural products, 8% of the buyers purchase groceries, and 3% of the rural buyers prefer other elements through social media purchases.

#### 12. Reasons for social media purchase

Sl. No	Reasons for social media purchase	Respondents
1	Low cost	20%
2	Trust in the seller	21%
3	Natural and quality products	40%
4	Home delivery	12%
5	Easy to order	7%

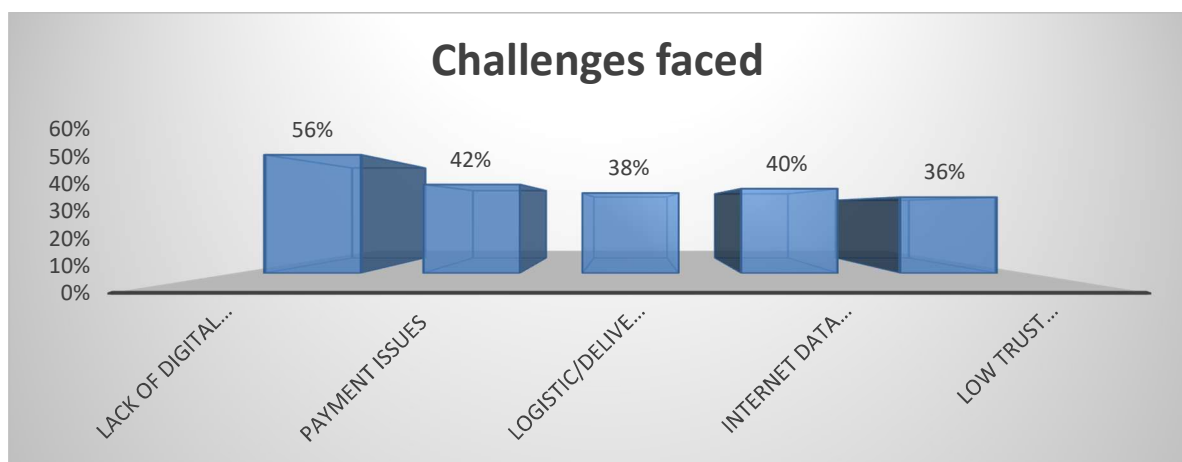


The above diagram shows the reasons for social media purchase in rural markets. 40% of the buyers purchase products because it's natural and its quality, and 21% of the buyers purchase as they have trust in the sellers. 20% of the buyers purchase because of its relatively low cost and 12% of the buyers purchase as they get home delivery, and 7% of the buyers assume it is easy to order.



### 13. Challenges faced in social commerce

Sl. No	Challenges Faced in Social Commerce	Respondents
1	Lack of digital skills	56%
2	Payment issues	42%
3	Logistic/ Delivery problems	38%
4	Internet data issues	40%
5	Low trust from buyers	36%



The above diagram shows challenges faced in social commerce. Respondents reported multiple problems in social commerce, as individuals face multiple problems in a transaction. 56% of the respondents opined that there is a lack of digital skills in rural areas, and 42% of the respondents responded regarding payment issues. 40% of the respondents faced internet and data issues, 38% of the respondents faced logistic or delivery problems, and 36% of the respondents opined that there is low trust from buyers is a major challenge faced in social commerce in rural areas.

#### Key Findings:

1. 28% of the shop owners and 23% of the farmers are engaged in social marketing in rural India.
2. 46% of the respondents had income from 10001 to 20000.
3. 33% of the rural people use Facebook, and 30% use Instagram as their major platform for social commerce.
4. 56% of the respondents use social media daily in rural markets in India.
5. 32% of the sellers use Facebook, and 31% of the sellers use Instagram as their selling tool in rural markets in India.
6. 42% of the sellers sell homemade products through social commerce in rural markets in India.
7. 62% of the sellers use local courier services to deliver their products in rural markets.
8. 58% of the sellers accept payment through Google Pay/Phone Pe and UPI in rural markets.
9. 36% of the customers use Facebook, and 32% use Instagram for their purchase in social commerce in rural markets.
10. 42% of the buyers purchase homemade items, and 32% are purchasing household items in rural markets in India.
11. 40% of the customers depend on social commerce as they trust that the products are natural and of good quality.
12. It is observed that 56% of the respondents face challenges with digital skills, whereas 42% of the people face problems with payment issues.



Cover Page



## Factors affecting the adoption and success of social commerce in rural markets:

### 1. Digital literacy:

Digital literacy is one of the key factors that affects social commerce in rural markets. The majority of rural people may own smartphones but lack the skills to use social media for business purposes. Rural people may face problems like understanding how to create content, manage pages, use hashtags, handle online payments, and engage customers etc. This results in restrictions in the effective use of social commerce tools.

### 2. Internet connectivity and smartphone penetration:

Reliable internet access and smartphone availability are the basic requisites for using social commerce platforms. Penetration of smartphone use is improving in the rural market, but network issues and their cost still affect remote villages. This results in affecting real-time interactions and healthy transactions in rural markets in India.

### 3. Trust and security concerns:

Many people in rural markets lack the knowledge of using social media for safe and reliable transactions. Online fraud, fake profiles, and scams create fear among rural buyers and sellers. Lack of a customer protection mechanism affects credibility in social marketing. Low trust among the rural people always restricts and limits repetitive transactions in rural markets.

### 4. Language and content localization:

Language and content localization an important factor that affects social commerce in rural markets. Most of the platforms use English or Hindi for their content, but many rural users are more comfortable in regional languages like Kannada, Tamil, or Telugu. This barrier affects participation and comprehension.

### 5. Social and cultural norms:

Many rural areas in India restrict women's access to technology or limit business interactions with outsiders, especially men. Traditions, culture, and gender-based restrictions reduce participation in social commerce in rural markets.

### 6. Logistic and delivery infrastructure:

Efficient and effective supply chain and delivery services are still underdeveloped in many rural locations. Poor road networks and the absence of courier services delay the product shipments.

## Benefits of Social Commerce in rural markets:

### 1. Wider market reach:

Social commerce enables businesses to reach rural consumers even in the most remote areas. Traditional marketing channels often failed to reach rural markets. However, with the increasing smartphone and internet penetration, social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram have become accessible, offering businesses a low-cost way to promote and sell products directly to rural consumers.

### 2. Low-cost business models:

Social commerce eliminates the need for expensive physical infrastructure such as stores, warehouses, or showrooms. Social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram are free to use. The seller can create business profiles and post their products, and interact with customers. Rural sellers can also use networks and social referrals to grow their businesses. Social commerce supports business models like reselling, where rural individuals can promote third-party products without maintaining inventory.

### 3. Direct customer engagements:

Social commerce enables rural entrepreneurs to interact directly with customers through chats, comments, and video calls on platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram. Direct communication with customers helps the seller receive instant feedback on products, pricing, and service. By showing video stories on social platforms, sellers can demonstrate product authenticity and quality. It also creates a loyal customer base through follow-ups and personalized offers.

### 4. Empowerment of rural women and youth:

Social commerce offers an opportunity to start their micro businesses with minimal capital to rural women and youths. For rural women, especially homemakers, social commerce provides flexible home-based earning models that allow



Cover Page



them to balance domestic responsibilities with entrepreneurship. It also enables rural people to develop valuable digital skills like online marketing, customer service, etc.

#### 5. **Boosts local products and handicrafts:**

Social commerce platforms enable rural artisans to showcase their unique, locally made products, such as handloom, pottery, bamboo crafts, and herbal goods, to a national audience. By eliminating middlemen, rural artisans can directly engage with customers through social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, marketplace, and WhatsApp Business. Through direct interaction with buyers, artisans can modify or customize their designs based on feedback and trends. Social commerce also empowers rural artisans to build personal or group brands around their products.

#### 6. **Easy product demonstration through videos:**

Videos allow rural sellers to showcase their products in action, like demonstrating features, usage, size, texture, and benefits clearly. These visual builds buyer confidence. Rural sellers can create product videos in regional languages and dialects, making the content relatable and understandable for local customers. This personalized approach strengthens trust and broadens market reach within rural communities. Real-time live demonstrations on platforms allow sellers to interact with viewers, answer questions, and take orders on time.

#### 7. **Reduce dependency on middlemen:**

Social commerce encourages rural marketing personnel such as producers, artisans, and sellers to connect directly with customers through various popular platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook etc. Without middlemen, rural entrepreneurs can retain a large share of the revenue. This results in an increase in profitability and avoids price manipulations.

### **Suggestions and Recommendations:**

1. There should be digital literacy programs tailored for rural entrepreneurs, especially women and youth in rural areas.
2. There should be development of social commerce platforms and training contents in regional languages, and provide customer support services in local dialects to assist sellers and buyers.
3. There should be implementation of a seller verification mechanism and customer review systems, and provide guidelines and best practices on fraud prevention and customer review systems.
4. Government and NGOs should introduce some social commerce incubators or mentorship programs in rural areas.
5. Government and NGOs can try to link social commerce initiatives with rural development programs like NRLM (National Rural Livelihood Mission) and DAY-NULM, and use self-help groups as a base for collective social commerce activities.

### **Conclusion:**

Social commerce is rapidly reshaping the landscape of rural marketing in India by converting social media platforms into effective sales channels. With internet and smartphone penetration, rural opportunities have reached wider markets. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp are becoming powerful enablers of social commerce, helping rural artisans, farmers, and small producers. Social commerce now empowers women and youths of rural areas by reducing operational costs and promoting local craftsmanship. However, the growth of social commerce in rural India still faces challenges like low digital literacy, unreliable logistics, and security concerns on online transactions. To overcome these, targeted interventions in education, good infrastructure, financial inclusion, and policy support are essential. With the right support system and awareness, social commerce can become a powerful tool for rural economic development and bridge the digital divide between urban and rural India.

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