**THE IMPORTANCE OF BUILDING TRUST AS A MEANS TO MAXIMISE THE POTENTIAL OF THE INDIAN E-COMMERCE INDUSTRY**

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**Abstract**

This paper concentrates primarily on Indian case studies while highlighting the vital need of building trust for guarantying the success of e-commerce in developing countries. We have used the instance of India to show situations in which the lack of trust has hampered development in the long run. The factor of trust plays an important role in developing countries due to various reasons, one of which is the lack of technological knowhow. It has been reported that Indians witness identity thefts just as much as in other countries, however only a very small proportion of such cases are actually reported.

We believe that as per the recent trend in the evolution of the legal atmosphere around e-commerce, consumers and organisations need to be well-versed with pertinent laws and of means of redress in cross-border e-commerce transactions. We have analysed the possible methods of awareness raising strategies for the protection of online consumers. We conclude this paper by pointing out certain suggestions related to the Indian policy agenda for managing issues regarding e-commerce and the international trading regime.

*Keywords: developing countries, India, trust in e-commerce, e-payments, legal framework.*

**Introduction**

The Indian e-commerce industry is growing at an astounding stride due to the high penetration of the internet and cosmopolitan electronic devices. However, the rate of growth of e-commerce in India is still straggling much behind its counterpart in develop countries. One of the major problems in this industry is the safety and security of online transactions although several measures have been taken to facilitate a steady growth of the industry however achieving the trust in online transaction as remained one of the biggest hindrances witnessed by the industry.

The apprehension of making online payments is a ubiquitous psychological factor prevalent among Indian customers. The awareness campaigns by banks and other agencies have helped certain customers to gain confidence in online shopping, while the majority still chooses to abstain from it.

Reports have found that the greatest e-commerce security issue is fraud. A lot of fraud commences when somebody steals consumers’ bank information, credentials and other details by placing malware on a person’s device. This gives way to the information being typed by the concerned person, thereby facilitating and easy way to steal such details. Therefore, a lot of money is being lost in the e-commerce industry.

We believe that a joint effort by both consumers as well as online retailers is the need of the hour to combat the security issues which is limiting the colossal growth potential of the Indian e-commerce industry. Consumers have a great role to play in establishing the security of online transactions, like keeping stronger passwords, installing malware cleaner and the like. At the same time, online retailers are expected to ensure that they build enough trust for consumers to transact online on their platform. We will now look at how each one needs to play its role for ensuring the perfect e-commerce growth in India.

The advent and spread of the Internet has altered the ways of life, socialisation, interactions and lifestyles of people at a global level. It has also altered the ways of conducting business.[[1]](#endnote-1)Consumers have the options of buying products 24x7 from irrespective of their location. In spite of such promising advantages offered by the industry, India has witnessed several hindrances in the growth of the e-commerce industry in the nation because of factors such as unreliability, anonymity and the essential dearth of control prevalent in the industry.

Studies have suggested that Indian are unassertive towards online shopping because of their concerns pertaining to online frauds, payment failures, product delivery issues and customer service problems. The Indian Department of Information Technology and the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology has mentioned several instances in its report that states that makes it evident that trust is one of the major factors that stops Indians from utilising the benefits offered by e-commerce ventures in the nation.

The absence of proper payment gateways acts a massive barrier to the use of the industry since there is very low privacy of personal data over the internet since security and confidentiality of data is not yet in place. The survey conducted by us in the paper clearly shows that apart from a very few Indian e-commerce websites that largely dominate the market, Indian customers are not yet decisive about which websites to trust for their online transactions.

The absence of the much- required trust factor leads to irretrievable loss of reputation and ultimately leads to the inevitable loss of revenue as well. Therefore, in order to ensure a steady business for the long term, e-retailers must analyse the possible threats sensed by potential consumers by perhaps stepping into their shoes and analysing a transaction from their point of view.

*The rise of e- commerce frauds in India*

One of the primary reasons why we decided to take up a survey and this study was in context of the rise of e-commerce frauds in India[[2]](#footnote-1).

Electronic Commerce includes all businesses conducted by the use of computer networks. The present value of the Indian e-commerce industry is imprecise at INR 224 billion and an annual growth at the rate of almost 55% has been witnessed. And approximate value of INR 504 billion is expected in the next coming years.[[3]](#footnote-2)

Commercial travel bookings such as flight ticket, rail ticket and hotel bookings form the largest chunk of the e-commerce industry followed by online retail of consumer goods. Statistical records have shown that internet users are on the rise since the beginning of the century. In 2006 there were only 21 million active internet users, whereas in June 2014, there were close to 243 million users.[[4]](#footnote-3) The rapid development of the online marketplaces has obviously been spurred due to the above rise in internet users[[5]](#footnote-4). The survey conducted by us shows that online stock market trading, online payments, procurement of materials have been identified as areas vulnerable to fraud risks.

This is in line with global research which indicates that e-commerce payment fraud is on a rise. US-based research data shows that the value of fraudulent transactions is often four times the value of a regular transaction.[[6]](#footnote-5)

Further, procurement of materials online is likely to be considered dicey in India, due to concerns over the performance, availability and security of the materials purchased.[[7]](#footnote-6) Further, the data pertaining to the quality of product, its quality and legality of use[[8]](#footnote-7) and warranty are not disclosed by the sellers many times and each vendor can follow the contrasting standards for representing product related data, making it challenging for buyers to appraisal the quality and legitimacy of products on sale. Consistently, the peril was mitigated to some extent due to the physical scrutiny of goods prior to purchase, and potent credit based business exemplary that facilitated return of goods if found deficient.

While the above mentioned fraud risks may not deter organizations from e-commerce trade, survey respondents mentioned other fraud risks, such as leakage and loss of confidential data, fraudulent transactions and inadequate security at payment gateways, that could deter their organizations from doing business online. This opinion can be attributed to global media coverage of such issues that highlight the difficulty in tracing the extent of data and fraud loss.[[9]](#footnote-8)

**Prevalent e-commerce in India**

The following are the some of the other prevalent e-commerce related frauds impacting buyers as well as merchants that may deter e-commerce transactions includes the following:

1. *Duplication of website*

To defraud the customers, the fraudsters gather personal information and replicate the original website. Information such as credit card details, bank account passwords and other personal details are unknowingly shared by gullible customers, and the fraudster uses this information for their benefit[[10]](#footnote-9).

1. *Issues with credit card usage*

There is a scenario when a customer bickering the amount charged on his/her credit card and refuses to honour the payment. This can occur in case of identity burglary, when a customer ascertains that they did not authorize/ is unaware of the purchase charged on their credit card.[[11]](#footnote-10) The customer’s bank then refuses to process the transaction and the merchant’s revenue is held-up until the dispute is resolved.

1. *Sale of replicated goods*

Fraudsters may sell duplicate products at significantly cheap prices, causing loss of revenue to the original merchant/manufacturer[[12]](#footnote-11). The customer is duped with an inferior product that does not perform adequately, and is unable to claim a replacement or press charges for damages[[13]](#footnote-12).

**Analysis of our survey results**

An analysis of our survey results shows that the factors that affects an online consumers trust in the Indian e-commerce market can be classified into categories such as website factors, brand factors and consumer factors we will explain each of the factors in details as follows:-

The respondents were asked about the importance of security factor that would likely make them trust ecommerce usage. The questions that were raised to internet savvy people to them include confidentiality, return policy, E-payment, virus communication and relevant official body. Out of the 45 respondents in the below Table 1 shows that 61.5 percent of the respondents feel and strongly agreed in the importance of guaranteed information confidentiality for trust building in online transactions. In addition, 31.2 percent of the respondents were neutral and 7.4 percent of the respondents did not think confidentiality of information as important.

As shown in the table, 69.1percent of the respondents feel and strongly agreed that return policy affected consumer trust and performing online transactions. 7.3 percent of the respondents did not treat the factor as significant, whereas the rest of them were neutral (23.6 percent). About 59.5 percent of the respondents strongly feel and agreed that payments made online is good. Less than 5.0 percent of the respondents disagreed with the statement while 35.5percents were neutral. The majority of the respondents (53.7 percent) agreed that the facility for virus transmission protection while performing transaction online is very important in trust building. 39.7 percent of the respondents were neutral while 6.6percent disagreed with the statement.

The respondents were also asked about the importance of an official body to handle complaints when transactions go wrong. More than 59.5 percent agreed and strongly agreed about the statement that there is a need for a special body as reference whenever needed. 31.4 percent of the respondents were neutral and 10.0percent disagreed with the idea.

*Prevention is better than cure*

 It would be still advisable to take safety precautions and preventions in order to cure the fraud risks deterring corporate from transacting online. Some of the averting measures that merchants and customers can adopt to have a safer e-commerce experience include[[14]](#footnote-13):

1. *Establish anti-fraud policies and procedures*

Every merchant must have a policy on sales, online payments, sales returns, shipping, customer details verification and a fraud manual that identifies potential fraud risks. Buyer organizations can have a similar policy that details how to identify genuine e-commerce websites and guidelines on conducting business online. A section that helps identify and report fraudulent sites must also be included in the policies.[[15]](#footnote-14)

1. *Forming a dedicated team to monitor e-commerce frauds*

 Several companies have identified in-house teams that research on new frauds and communicate it to the organization. Such teams also challenge business processes regularly with an aim to unearth any gaps in controls. This proactive approach to identifying emerging frauds is an effective strategy, given the evolving nature of e-commerce business in India.[[16]](#footnote-15)

1. *Due diligence*

Given the large third party ecosystem that supports e-commerce in India, merchants need to ensure that they conduct adequate due diligence before associating with business partners. Further, this diligence can also be extended to check and verify genuine customers. Buyer organizations can also conduct due diligence on e-commerce service providers, as well as traders who use the platform, to ensure that they are transacting with reliable parties with a good reputation in the market.[[17]](#footnote-16)

The E-commerce business model can help to convert the largely unorganized retail sector to a technologically savvy organized sector. While India is in the process of developing a legislation which can be enforced on either the buyer or seller in terms of a framework within which business needs to be conducted, formation of contracts and the liabilities involved therein, nonetheless, cues can be taken from The United Nations Commission for International Trade Law (UNCITRAL), a model law on e-commerce which serves as a benchmark for national and international legislation and assists contracting parties in formulating their contracts.

The UK’s E-commerce regulation known as Electronic Commerce (EC Directive) Regulations 2002 clarifies and harmonizes the rules of online business throughout Europe with the aim of boosting consumer confidence. While the government is working closely with e-commerce players and manufacturers to develop legislation that addresses the concerns of doing business online, companies should also aim to fortify themselves with adequate safeguards to mitigate the risk of fraud and reputation loss.

**Factors influencing success of Indian e-commerce giants**

E-commerce has lately become a keenly watched sector in India, especially with a handful of home-grown successful ventures being valued at billions of dollars. While domestic players Flipkart and Snapdeal rule the market, the sector has also caught the fancy of global giants like the US’ Amazon and China’s Alibaba — all are competing hard for a bigger share of the cake.[[18]](#footnote-17)

The country’s e-commerce market was worth $2.3 billion in October last year and retail consultancy Technopak has estimated its value will increase more than 10 times to $32 billion by 2020. More, since the online market at present accounts for less than five per cent of India’s retail business, there still is a huge untapped space in e-commerce.[[19]](#footnote-18)

The $15-billion valuation that Flip kart is contemplating in its next round of funding seems to reflect this potential, and endeavour for the existing and start-up e-commerce ventures. But it was not the founders of flip kart or any other e-retail companies that ushered in India’s e-commerce boom. Way back in 2000, a handful of shopping sites like Rediff Shopping, Yahoo! Shopping, and India times Shopping, Sify Shopping and HomeShop18 were doing roughly the same thing.

 It was eBay that brought the concept of online marketplace, where sellers and buyers engage directly. India’s e-commerce retail business potential as we know it today was first spotted by the $18-billion (revenue) US firm eBay, which entered the country in 2004-three years before Flip kart’s low –key start as an online bookseller by provincial set-off platform Bazee.com for about $55milion.

At time when eBay entered India, there were not even 10 million people in the country had access to the internet, and most of them were vigilant of shopping online, for the want of certitude. Withal, neither eBay nor the hit shopping sites of the 2000s could get a first-mover advantage, despite their healthy parents, technology, favourable business model and brand equity they were ahead of their time, say some experts.

All those shopping sites, as well as eBay, continue to operate in India but do not figure among top e-commerce players. All of these companies had lost the plot by the time e-commerce took a shape here.

Details of other shopping sites- Rediff Shopping, Yahoo! Shopping, India times Shopping, Sify Shopping and HomeShop18 were not available, as their parent companies did not give schism of their e-shopping business.[[20]](#footnote-19)

 Today, India has more than 94 million internet users and population of about 300 million are connected to internet. Things seem to have changed dramatically in the past few years —especially after the eBay’s entry in India[[21]](#footnote-20)

There are several reasons why traditional e-commerce firms might have lost out.

*“These sites were positioned more as content providers or at best platforms for digital advertising. They never marketed themselves as e-retailer aggressively. Their product range was limited, because they did not collaborate with a wide range of suppliers and brands. Also, payment options were limited.”*

One of the key reasons for the failure of shopping sites from the pre-boom era was that they were *“more focused on sellers than consumers”.* Other challenges were limited ability to carry out product quality check and very limited product catalogue.

 “There was no control on serviceability and product fulfilment cycle, and the focus was only on getting the user to transact. The actual inventory owners were responsible for shipping but did not have interactions with the user. With the user being directly involved with the website alone, there were increased communication gaps and information leakages. From a business perspective, most of these players were more of technology or internet media companies, with limited exposure to retail, and lacked defined organisational structures to operate intricate retail processes in-house,”

E-retailer like Rediff, India times and Sify did not evolve their business models with the internet-mobile revolution. *“They did not make any investments in understanding the consumer behaviour and adapting their offerings to suit them. Their failure to build an ecosystem around online shopping in terms of suppliers, payment options, logistics, and to understand and target customers effectively, led these companies to losing out to new-age, dynamic, focused e-commerce companies like Flipkart.”*

 Another reason for the huge success of e-commerce companies in India is introduction of the ‘cash on delivery’ option, which helped e-commerce companies gain consumer trust.

*“The television business is profitable and India is recording strong sequential growth of nearly 100 per cent on our mobile platform. The reach of TV in India continues to be 8-10 times that of internet. So, TV Home Shopping will ensure mass reach and high volume sales, while the web business will continue to attract the more discerning digital consumer. In the past decade or so, there have been several changes in consumer behaviour with respect to buying, especially in Tier-II and –III cities. “The convenience of sitting at home and comparing prices, features and products has brought new dynamics to the shopping experience.”*

The increase in disposable income levels has led to bigger online order sizes, and changes in lifestyle. Shoppers prefer online channels to physical ones, for saving time and wider variety.

 At the same time, growth has been driven further by a rapid proliferation of technology -increasing adoption of devices like smart phones and tablets, and access to the internet through broadband and 3G data connections. Another fillip is likely when 4G telephony becomes a reality. These enablers were not there when the original shopping sites had started their operations back in the 2000s.[[22]](#footnote-21) The big difference now is that the competition is too intense and almost all players are capable of spending big. While the first-movers could not reap the benefits of early start, it might still not be too late, given that all of them are still operating.[[23]](#footnote-22)

*The two important perceptions that various websites merchants and individuals must keep in mind are:*

1. Cyber law due diligence in India.

2. Internet intermediary liability in India (must be duly complied with all the e-commerce websites operating in India.

However, e-commerce websites in India are openly flouting the norms and regulations in India. It seems Indian e-commerce players have learnt no lesson from the *Baazee’s case* where the CEO was very lucky to go scot free. But this may not be the case as on date where the law and legal position has changed significantly.[[24]](#footnote-23)

Today in India, the e-commerce websites dealing with online pharmacies, online gaming and gambling, are openly and continuously violating the laws of India, especially the cyber law of India.[[25]](#footnote-24)

They do not comprehend that there are well recognised legal imperatives to start an e-commerce website in India and the legal formalities required for starting e-commerce business model in India. As on date, the e-commerce websites are not following such techno legal requirements.

Cash on delivery may harm e-commerce in India and this may be the reason why many e-commerce players are more interested in online cash payments. However, their supply management and delivery system is not up to the mark. This results in a mismatch between order placement, payment and actual delivery of the product.[[26]](#footnote-25)

Till e-commerce players are able to manage their affairs more efficiently and honestly, they must stick to cash on delivery concept as the element of cheating and non delivery are missing in such a scenario.[[27]](#footnote-26)

However, in the ultimate analysis nothing is better that complying with the e-commerce laws and regulations in India. E-commerce players in India must consult good techno legal professionals of their choice before launching their projects. Further, even if the project has been launched, they must get the same vetted by competent technology lawyers and law firms. Almost all the e-commerce players in India are committing the blunder of not taking essential legal help in this regard.[[28]](#footnote-27)

**Methods of raising awareness of online customers**

Initially it is paramount to remember the obvious that your brand is everything. Your brand is gratifying mat or the looked door to potential customers, and by building up the brand name online and offline arena you will potentially reach more clients and customers.

Firstly it is important to remember the obvious**–**Your Brand is everything. Your Brand is the welcome mat or the locked door to potential customers, and by building up your Brand Name in the online and offline arena you will potentially reach more clients and customers[[29]](#footnote-28).

Below are a few ways where and how promotional items can help your brand.

## *1. Reinforce existing products or services*

Once in a while, strive to improve your products or services. Do this by adding extra features to existing products, or offering extra service in addition to a current one without increasing the price, or a little raise in the price to make it affordable for your clients. This will help increase customer loyalty to your brand, and possibly motivate clients to refer your offers to their peers or colleagues.[[30]](#footnote-29)

## *2. Highlight new products or services*

To increase the awareness of your new products or services, it’s vital that you promote them through various platforms. Promote your new products or services at trade events in your local community. Distributing branded flyers, clothing, and lanyards of your new offers at sporting events in your local area is another effective way to create awareness about your new products or services. Additionally, include a manual or white paper about the new offers in the package of your existing products or services. It will help customers learn about them.[[31]](#footnote-30)

## *3. Promote a good reputation for the business*

A good reputation can be a powerful tool for instilling your brand in the minds of your customers and potential clients. People have the tendency to remember good things that happen to them, or that someone has done. And gifts are no exception. There are various ways to touch lives within your community where you run your business. You can donate writing pads and pens to local schools. Offer gift baskets to newborn babies at various maternity hospitals within your local area. Sponsoring organizations with humanitarian initiatives can also be a good way to build reputation for your business.[[32]](#footnote-31)

*4. Help to retain or recapture current and past customers*

Ideally, you have the contact information of your current customers and past clients, stay in touch with them by sending them promotional items with your brand name boldly printed on them. The items could be clothing such as T-shirts and designer caps, key holders, pens, writing pads, lanyards, or any item that you deem people will utilize on a regular basis. You may also add some of the [promotional products](http://www.brandedpromotionalproducts.com.au/) to the packages of your offers.[[33]](#footnote-32)

## *5. Empower your employees to help spread your brand name*

Your employees can collectively play a major role in spreading the word about your brand. Empower them by giving them some branded promotional items that they can give out to people in their various communities. Events like Expos and conferences can be ideal places for creating brand awareness. If you take part in various events, encourage your employees to give out to participants some of your branded items particularly pens, clothing, and lanyards. People will appreciate it.[[34]](#footnote-33)

Promotional products have had a long and successful history of increasing awareness and building up the trust of a Brand. Because they are so varied in nature, even the smallest of business can take advantage of this marketing resource, as can medium and larger enterprises

**Conclusion**

We have analysed the fact that though trustworthiness of an online retailer is a crucial element in establishing the consumers’ trust to take up the use of e-commerce, it is very vital to pay attention to the consumers’ risk concern on e-commerce. Our survey has highlighted the several factors that have deterred them or encouraged them to take up transactions on an e-commerce platform.

Given that this industry provides ease of access and comfort of accessing the needs of consumers without the trouble of travelling for the same, this should serve as an incentive for consumers. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the online vendors and e-commerce platforms to make the process as transparent and easy as possible in order to encourage consumers and remove the prevailing doubts in their minds. at the same time, consumers should also understand the benefits of using e-commerce and should according install required malware protections and choose wisely before making online transactions with e-commerce companies. A joint effort from the end of consumers, as well as the retailers would ensure the success in bringing out the potential of the already booming Indian e-commerce industry.

Even though security and privacy appear have remained in previous researches, to be the top main apprehensions for consumers’ trust in e-commerce adoption, the empirical results specify that there is a poor connection between perceived security and perceived privacy with consumers’ trust. Since consumers get used to the Internet and to the techniques that can be used to defend themselves online, the security and privacy are becoming less responsive matters over as time.

**Research questions**

1. What are the hindrances being faced by the Indian e-commerce companies? What are the effective solutions to overcome these hindrances, if any?
2. What is the role of building trust in e-commerce in developing countries?
3. What are the measures necessary for adoption of e-payments in developing countries? What are the issues regarding such payments?
4. Is the legal framework in India suitable for the success of e-commerce ventures in India? How can the framework be accommodated to promote faster growth of e-commerce in India?

**Research methodology**

Primary and secondary sources of data have been used to conduct this descriptive research on the factor of trust in the practice of e-commerce in development countries, with special reference to India.

Thorough study of literature is done to collect various parameters of trust which exist in e-commerce market space. After that, many other factors of trust specific to Indian e-commerce market were gathered by interviewing various Indian customers who indulge highly in online shopping. A hierarchy of trust factors was created as in Figure 1. Subsequent to that, ecommerce experts were investigated and were asked to report the preference of one factor over the other. Results were synthesized and analyzed.

An online survey[[35]](#footnote-34) has been conducted for the purpose of this study. The link to this online survey has been circulated amongst 60 people, out of which 45 respondents have participated in this survey. The questionnaire has been divided into two sections- Consumer factor and Brand Factor.

The questions were framed in order to collect information on the use pattern, comfort, choices, intentions and motivations of consumers pertaining to trust in the e-commerce websites. Certain variables such as factors affecting e-commerce security, privacy, and trust as well as risk perceptions were asked.

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