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## **Identifying the Most Preferred Digital Communication Channels During the Buying Journey of Consumers: Evidence from Rohtak**

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### **Abstract:**

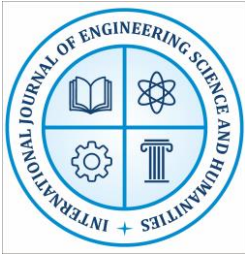
This study examines the adoption and preference for digital communication channels among consumers during their product buying journey. Data was collected from 801 respondents in Rohtak, Haryana. Findings indicate that 75% of respondents used at least one digital channel of communication (such as websites, social networking sites, smartphones and digital TV) alongside traditional media (TV, radio, newspapers, dealer visits), while 25% relied exclusively on traditional channels. Among digital users, websites emerged as the most preferred medium (87%), followed by social networking sites (45%) and smartphones (42%). Emerging channels such as YouTube (41%), digital TV (31%) and digital outdoors (30%) also gained traction, while emails and feature phones were least used. A binomial test confirmed that there was a statistically significant preference for digital channels, with websites being dominant. The study contributes to literature on consumer technology adoption, validating constructs from Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989), Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) and Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), indicating that perceived usefulness and ease of use drive adoption. Insights from this research are valuable for marketers and strategists aiming to optimize multi-channel communication strategies.

**Keywords:** Digital channels; consumer behavior; websites; social media; technology adoption; Rohtak study; marketing communication.

### **Identifying the Most Preferred Digital Channels**

Responses were collected from 801 Respondents from Rohtak. It was found from the study that out of 801 respondents, 603 respondents used at least one of digital channels as an information source during their product buying journey. 198 respondents didn't use any digital channel and used only the traditional channels namely TV, Radio, Newspaper and visiting dealers showroom. Table 1 represents the details of usage of both channels of communication i.e. traditional and digital.

Digital channels are emerging as an important contemporary communication channel. The same was being validated from the results also as three fourth (75%) of the respondents used at least one digital channel of communication while buying a product along with traditional channels of communication. However, a quarter (25%) of the respondents believed only in the traditional channels of communication. Respondents who used only the traditional channels of



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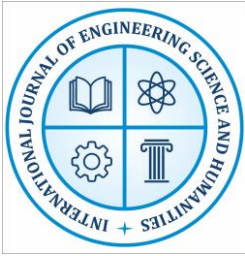
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communication were analyzed separately for understanding the reasons for not using digital channels of communication while buying a product. There are notable studies dealing with technology acceptance (Rogers, 1983; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Ajzen, 1991; Taylor and Todd, 1995) which establish that usage of particular technology results only when user has preference towards salient beliefs of technology. Roger (1983) asserts that when users perceive a technology offering relative advantage over the available alternatives, compatible and easy to understand; they are more likely to adopt it. Davis (1989) in his study established that perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use of a technological medium ensures its actual usage. Ajzen (1991) believes that users' preference towards behavioral, normative and control beliefs lead towards the actual usage of technology. Noteworthy technological acceptance models namely Technology Acceptance Model, Theory of Reasoned Action, Theory of Planned Behavior and Decomposed Theory of Planned Behavior also establish the fact that use of a technology results due to the significant positive impact of consumer's attitude towards salient technological beliefs. So, it can be comprehended that if a technology is used by the respondents, it is likely to be preferred as well. In other words, usage in technology mediated environment can be used as a proxy for preference. Going by the similar logic, most used channel was termed as most preferred. 603 responses were considered for understanding the most preferred channel of communication.

Table 2 and Fig. 1 give the details about use of digital channels of communication while buying a product. It was found from the study that websites was the most preferred digital channel of communication while buying a product used by an overwhelming majority (87%) of respondents. It can also be seen from the table that respondents used traditional channels of communication along with digital channels of communication as there were about two third (67%) of the respondents who used traditional channels of communication along with digital channel of communication. It can also be interpreted from the table that there were 23% respondents who didn't use traditional channels of communication at all while buying a product and relied upon digital channels of communication only.

Website, the digital channel was followed by social networking sites used by less than majority (45%) of respondents and smartphones used by 42% of respondents. Emails used by an insignificant percentage (4%) of respondents, emerged as the least used channel of communication while buying a product.

It is interesting to see that respondents made use of emerging digital channels in India like digital TV (31%) and digital outdoors (30%) for obtaining information about products. You Tube, the video sharing social networking site was used by 41% of the respondents as an information source. Phone (feature) was used by only 18% of the respondents which can be understood from the fact that in India, gradually smart phones are replacing the feature phones. Only 4% of the respondents in the study claimed to access the information about products from other sources



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which included spotting the product, references from friends and family, search engines like Google, Yahoo and Rediff. However, all the information sources mentioned by the respondents in others category, can be accommodated under the broad category of communication channels mentioned earlier i.e. traditional channels and websites.

As data was obtained using population proportion approach resulting in two possible outcomes namely use and no use, a dichotomous distribution was assumed. So, hypothesis was tested with one sample binomial test at 5% level of significance to see if there was a preferred channel of communication used by the customers while buying a product. Since, one sample binomial test is a non-parametric test; assumptions about distributions were not made. Following hypotheses were set for the test:

$H_0$ : There is no preferred channel of communication used by the customers while buying a product.

$H_a$ : There is a preferred channel of communication used by the customers while buying a product.

A significance value of less than .05 (table 3) obtained for all the channels of communication indicates that there was a preferred digital channel of communication, whereby websites emerged as the most preferred channel of communication while buying a product, followed by traditional channels (along with at least one digital channel), social networking sites and smart phones.

## **Conclusion:**

The study highlights a clear consumer shift toward digital channels during the product purchase decision-making process. While traditional media continues to play a complementary role, especially among certain segments, digital platforms dominate as information sources. Websites remain the most trusted and utilized channel, demonstrating their role as a central hub for product information. Social networking sites and smartphones are also gaining prominence, driven by growing internet penetration and mobile adoption in India. Emerging platforms like YouTube and digital TV indicate diversification in consumer behavior, though their reach is still moderate. The minimal use of email and feature phones reflects technological evolution and changing habits. These findings affirm technology adoption theories, showing that perceived ease and usefulness influence preference. For businesses, this study underscores the importance of investing in robust digital infrastructure, optimizing website content, enhancing social media presence and leveraging mobile-friendly solutions. Policymakers and educators can also draw insights to improve digital literacy and access, ensuring equitable participation in the digital marketplace.

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