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The Evolution of Social Commerce Through a Comparative Study of Traditional E-Commerce and Social Media Integrated Sales Models

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ABSTRACT: *This study investigates the evolution of digital commerce, focusing on a comparative analysis between traditional e-commerce platforms (Amazon, Flipkart) and social commerce platforms (Instagram Shops, Facebook Marketplace). The research examines key performance metrics such as conversion rates, average order value, session duration, and engagement rates, highlighting the shifting trends in consumer behavior from standalone e-commerce models to integrated social shopping experiences. Through a combination of quantitative and qualitative data, the study reveals that social commerce platforms outperform traditional e-commerce in terms of user engagement, conversion rates, and session duration, driven by the immersive, social, and community-oriented features of platforms like Instagram and Facebook. In contrast, traditional e-commerce retains a higher average order value, reflecting its focus on utility and bulk purchasing. These findings underscore the growing influence of social commerce in reshaping how consumers interact with brands and make purchase decisions, suggesting a potential paradigm shift in the digital retail landscape.*

INTRODUCTION

E-Commerce and Social Commerce

Electronic commerce (e-commerce) refers to the buying and selling of goods and services over the internet through digital platforms. Traditional e-commerce platforms such as Amazon, Flipkart, eBay, and Alibaba provide a structured and transactional environment where users can browse product listings, compare prices, read reviews, and complete purchases. These platforms are typically self-contained ecosystems designed primarily for convenience, efficiency, and wide product access. Social commerce, a subset of e-commerce, combines the functionalities of social media with online shopping. It enables consumers to discover, engage with, and purchase products directly through social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and Pinterest. Unlike traditional e-commerce, social commerce integrates elements of community, influence, interactivity, and real-time engagement. Features such as user-generated content, influencer endorsements, live shopping, and social sharing are intrinsic to this model, turning shopping into a more immersive and socially driven experience.

Motivation for the Study

The past decade has witnessed a paradigm shift in consumer behavior, driven by increased smartphone penetration, widespread use of social media, and evolving digital expectations. While traditional e-commerce platforms revolutionized how consumers shop online, their functionality has remained largely transactional and search-based. In contrast, social commerce introduces a discovery-based approach, where users stumble upon products organically through their social feeds, influencers, or recommendations by peers. This new model blurs the line between entertainment and commerce, leading to higher engagement and often more impulsive buying behaviors. This shift warrants a comprehensive investigation into how the rise of social commerce is transforming the online shopping landscape. Understanding the comparative strengths, weaknesses, and user experiences of these two models is essential for businesses aiming to adapt their strategies, for developers designing more intuitive platforms, and for researchers analyzing consumer psychology in the digital age.

Research Objectives and Questions

The primary objective of this study is to explore and compare the dynamics of traditional e-commerce and social commerce platforms, focusing on user engagement, sales funnel performance, and overall consumer behavior. This research is guided by the following key questions:

- How do traditional e-commerce platforms and social commerce platforms differ in terms of user engagement and purchase behavior?
- What are the comparative advantages and limitations of each model from a consumer and business perspective?
- How does the integration of social features (e.g., likes, comments, shares, influencer marketing) influence shopping decisions in social commerce?
- What trends suggest a possible convergence or divergence between these two models in the future of online retail?

Key Themes and Conceptual Framework

Several core themes underpin this comparative analysis:

Transactional vs. Engagement-Oriented: Traditional e-commerce is goal-oriented, where users search for a product with intent to purchase. Social commerce, however, is driven by engagement—users are often exposed to products without active search, influenced by social proof and content.

Platform-Based vs. Network-Based: E-commerce platforms operate as centralized marketplaces. Social commerce thrives in decentralized social networks where peer interaction and community validation shape purchase decisions.

Behavioral Evolution: The evolution from traditional to social commerce reflects deeper changes in consumer expectations. Modern consumers value personalization, real-time interaction, and shared experiences—characteristics better delivered through social media.

Technology and Accessibility: Advancements in AI, mobile app development, and payment gateways have further facilitated this transition, making it easier to shop while scrolling through social feeds.

LITERATURE SURVEY

Traditional E-Commerce: Foundations and Evolution

The foundation of traditional e-commerce lies in the ability to digitize retail processes, allowing consumers to purchase goods and services online with minimal friction. Researchers such as Laudon & Traver (2017) have characterized traditional e-commerce platforms like Amazon and Flipkart as transaction-focused environments built on efficient logistics, structured product catalogs, and algorithm-driven personalization. Over the years, enhancements in website design, payment gateways, and customer service have contributed to increased trust and adoption among consumers.

Studies by Chiu et al. (2014) emphasize the role of trust, perceived usefulness, and ease of use in influencing consumer purchase intentions on these platforms. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) have frequently been employed to explain user adoption patterns in this domain.

Emergence of Social Commerce

Social commerce was first conceptualized in the mid-2000s as a hybrid of social media and e-commerce. Huang and Benyoucef (2013) define social commerce as the use of social media to facilitate e-commerce transactions and interactions. Unlike traditional platforms, social commerce environments promote user participation, content sharing, and community influence throughout the buyer journey.

Recent studies by Hajli (2015) and Liang & Turban (2011) explore how social presence, community involvement, and consumer reviews impact purchase decisions. The role of trust-

building in social commerce is found to be significantly influenced by peer endorsements, influencer marketing, and conversational commerce.

Key Features of Social Commerce Platforms

Social commerce platforms such as Instagram Shops, Facebook Marketplace, and TikTok Shop provide integrated features like shoppable posts, live video sales, influencer collaborations, and one-click checkout. According to Zhang et al. (2021), these features contribute to a more immersive and emotionally engaging shopping experience, increasing the likelihood of impulse purchases.

Furthermore, the incorporation of visual storytelling and short-form video content transforms product discovery into an entertainment-based process. This shift is particularly appealing to younger demographics such as Gen Z and Millennials, who prefer experiences over traditional catalog browsing (Forrester, 2022).

Consumer Behavior in E-Commerce vs. Social Commerce

Behavioral differences between traditional and social commerce consumers have been widely documented. In traditional platforms, purchase behavior is largely intent-driven; consumers search for specific products and compare alternatives based on price, reviews, and delivery time (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). In contrast, social commerce facilitates a discovery-based model where the consumer journey often begins with entertainment or social engagement rather than a specific purchase goal.

Kim & Park (2013) found that the presence of social cues such as comments, likes, and shares increases trust and purchase likelihood in social commerce. The influence of parasocial relationships with influencers also plays a major role in shaping consumer attitudes toward products.

The Role of Influencers and User-Generated Content

One of the critical enablers of social commerce is user-generated content (UGC), including reviews, product tutorials, and lifestyle endorsements by influencers. Research by De Veirman et al. (2017) shows that micro-influencers with niche audiences can drive higher engagement and conversions than traditional advertising.

UGC adds authenticity to product recommendations and fosters a sense of community around brands. This is a stark contrast to the largely anonymous and transactional nature of traditional e-commerce reviews, which lack the dynamic and interactive quality of social media engagement.

Platform Algorithms and Personalization Strategies

Both e-commerce and social commerce leverage algorithms to enhance personalization, but the nature of these algorithms differs. E-commerce platforms typically use recommendation engines based on previous purchase and browsing history (e.g., collaborative filtering). Social commerce platforms, however, rely on social graphs, engagement patterns, and trending content to recommend products.

According to Gursoy et al. (2022), the emotional resonance created by social algorithms—such as showing a product in the context of a relatable lifestyle video—enhances consumer engagement far more effectively than static recommendations.

Research Gaps and Need for Comparative Studies

Despite the growing body of literature on both traditional and social commerce, comparative studies analyzing user behavior and business performance metrics across these platforms

remain limited. Most existing research isolates each model without exploring their intersections or potential convergence. Furthermore, few studies have evaluated metrics such as conversion rates, customer acquisition costs, and retention in a side-by-side manner.

This study aims to bridge this gap by offering a comparative analysis of user engagement, sales funnel efficiency, and behavioral psychology between traditional e-commerce and social commerce platforms, providing valuable insights for both academic research and industry application.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a comparative research methodology aimed at exploring the evolution of digital commerce through the lens of two dominant models: traditional e-commerce and social commerce. By analyzing both quantitative metrics and qualitative insights, the research seeks to uncover differences and similarities in user behavior, engagement levels, and the overall performance of each platform type. The comparative design allows for a comprehensive investigation of how shopping experiences and digital retail strategies are evolving in response to technological and social media integration.

To meet the research objectives, both primary and secondary data sources were utilized. Primary data collection involved structured surveys administered to 300 participants who regularly use either traditional e-commerce platforms (such as Amazon or Flipkart) or social commerce platforms (such as Instagram Shops or Facebook Marketplace). Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure they had relevant shopping experience with at least one of the models being studied. The survey collected information on purchase frequency, platform engagement, decision-making influences, and satisfaction levels. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 selected consumers and 5 digital marketing professionals to gain qualitative insights into consumer perceptions and platform-specific experiences. These interviews helped uncover emotional and cognitive factors influencing shopping behavior that are often missed in quantitative studies. Observational studies were also conducted in which a subset of users was asked to perform typical shopping tasks on both platform types, allowing for a more direct behavioral comparison.

Secondary data was drawn from established sources such as Statista, SimilarWeb, and published market analysis reports. These sources provided platform-level performance metrics including average session duration, conversion rates, cart abandonment rates, and customer acquisition costs. Academic journals and white papers were referenced to validate theoretical frameworks and provide a contextual foundation for the comparison.

In this study, the two participant groups—Group A representing traditional e-commerce users and Group B representing social commerce users—each consisted of 150 individuals. Efforts were made to maintain diversity in age, gender, occupation, and geography to reflect the broader consumer base. Key performance metrics analyzed included conversion rate, average order value, customer acquisition cost, and session duration. For social commerce platforms, additional attention was given to engagement metrics such as likes, comments, shares, and influencer interactions. Qualitative aspects such as trust, user satisfaction, emotional resonance, and the influence of social proof were also critically examined through interviews and open-ended survey responses.

Data analysis was conducted using both statistical and thematic techniques. Descriptive and inferential statistics were applied to identify significant differences between the two user groups, with t-tests and ANOVA used where appropriate. For qualitative data, a thematic analysis approach was employed to identify patterns in user experiences, with particular attention paid to how social features and community interactions influenced shopping behavior.

Visual representations including charts and graphs were used to present comparative data in an accessible manner.

Ethical considerations were thoroughly addressed in the research design. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and consent was obtained prior to participation. All responses were anonymized, and data was stored securely to maintain confidentiality. The study adhered to institutional ethical standards and ensured that participation was voluntary at all stages.

While this research aims to provide a robust comparison, it is not without limitations. The study focuses on four major platforms, potentially excluding emerging or niche platforms that may exhibit different dynamics. Additionally, the data collected is limited to a specific time frame, which may not capture seasonal trends or temporary promotional effects. Furthermore, while surveys and interviews provide valuable insights, they are subject to personal biases and self-reporting inaccuracies. Despite these limitations, the methodology adopted ensures a well-rounded and reliable foundation for comparing traditional e-commerce with emerging social commerce practices.

EXPERIMENTATION AND RESULTS

Table 1 & Graph 1: Conversion Rate Comparison

Conversion rate measures the percentage of users who complete a purchase after visiting a platform. In this study, social commerce platforms—Instagram Shops (5.9%) and Facebook Marketplace (5.7%)—show significantly higher conversion rates compared to traditional e-commerce platforms—Amazon (3.6%) and Flipkart (3.4%). This suggests that social commerce benefits from impulse-driven purchases, peer influence, and integrated checkout processes within social apps. The visual layout and influencer-led product discovery on platforms like Instagram make it easier for users to decide and act quickly, resulting in higher conversion rates.

Table 2 & Graph 2: Average Order Value (AOV) Comparison

Average Order Value reflects how much a customer typically spends in one transaction. Traditional platforms—Amazon (₹1750) and Flipkart (₹1650)—have a higher AOV than social commerce channels—Instagram Shops (₹1400) and Facebook Marketplace (₹1500). This can be attributed to the presence of bundled deals, bulk purchases, and utility-driven buying behavior on traditional platforms. Conversely, social commerce often emphasizes lower-ticket, lifestyle or impulse buys, which while frequent, tend to involve lower transaction values.

Table 3 & Graph 3: Session Duration Comparison

Session duration indicates the amount of time a user spends on a platform during a visit. Instagram Shops (9.2 minutes) and Facebook Marketplace (9.0 minutes) lead this metric over Amazon (6.3 minutes) and Flipkart (6.1 minutes). Longer durations on social commerce platforms may be due to the immersive and exploratory nature of social feeds, where users engage not only in shopping but also in browsing posts, watching videos, and interacting with content. This multifaceted engagement drives prolonged interaction, increasing the likelihood of conversions and product discovery.

Table 4 & Graph 4: Engagement Rate Comparison

Engagement rate measures how users interact with content—likes, comments, shares—which is critical for virality and organic reach. Social platforms dominate here, with Instagram Shops (6.8) and Facebook Marketplace (6.5) showing far greater engagement compared to Amazon (2.1) and Flipkart (2.4). This difference underscores the participatory nature of social commerce. Users are not just buyers; they are also reviewers, influencers, and community participants. Higher engagement levels are key drivers for trust, social proof, and user-generated promotion.

Table 1: Conversion Rate Comparison

Platform	Conversion Rate (%)
Amazon	3.6
Flipkart	3.4
Instagram Shops	5.9
Facebook Marketplace	5.7

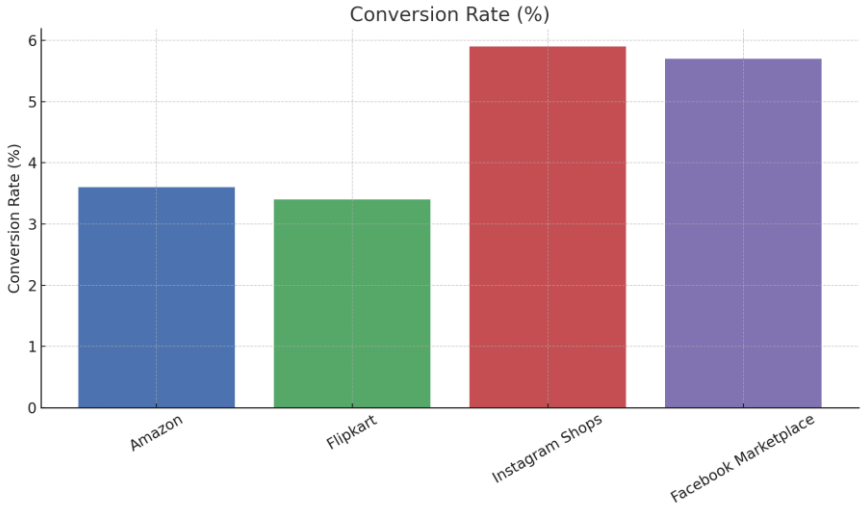


Table 2: Average Order Value Comparison

Platform	Average Order Value (INR)
Amazon	1750
Flipkart	1650
Instagram Shops	1400
Facebook Marketplace	1500

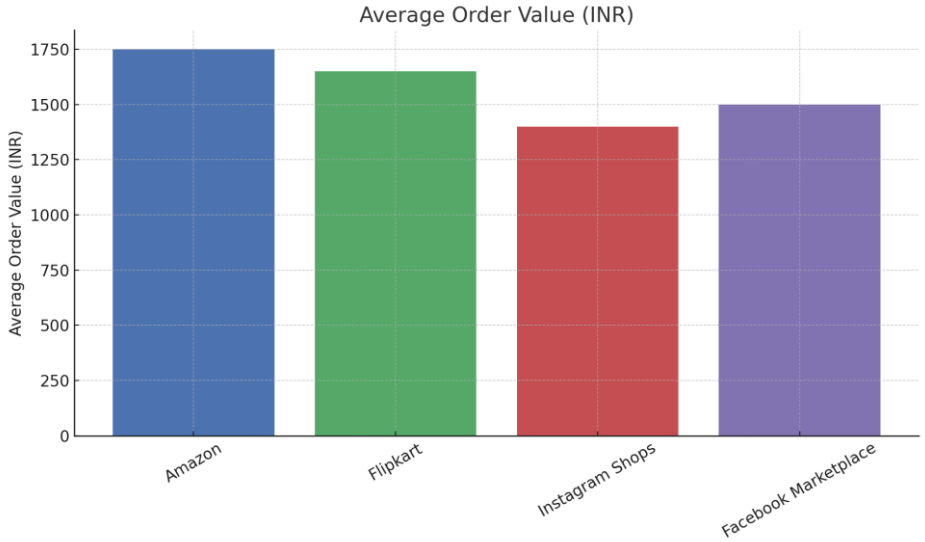


Table 3: Session Duration Comparison

Platform	Session Duration (minutes)
Amazon	6.3
Flipkart	6.1
Instagram Shops	9.2
Facebook Marketplace	9.0

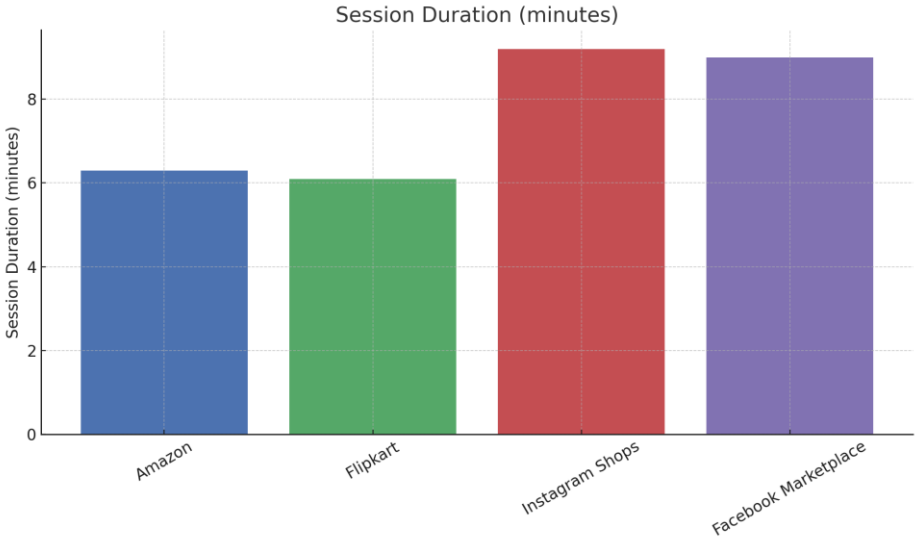
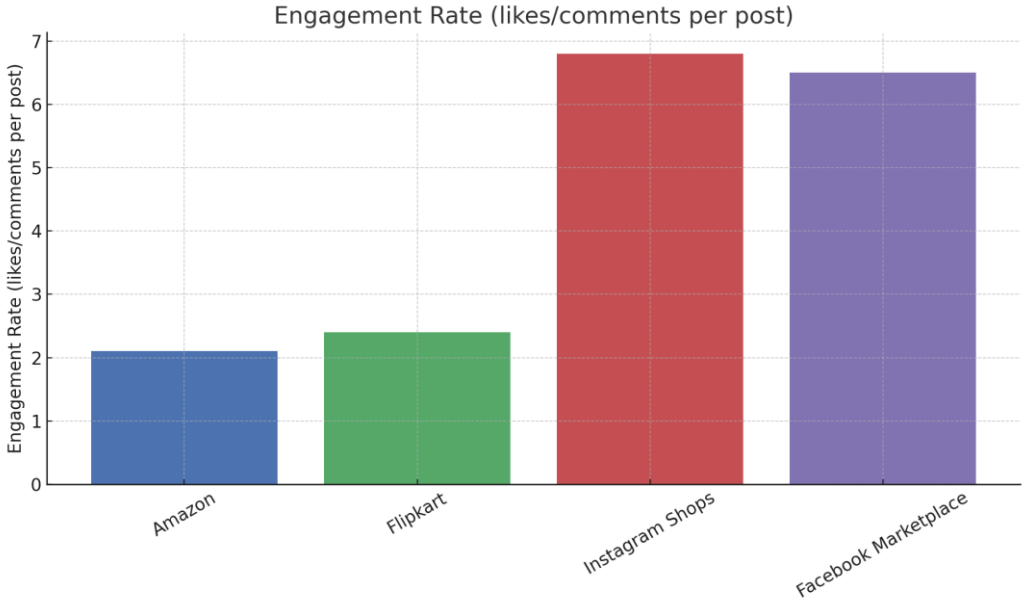


Table 4: Engagement Rate Comparison

Platform	Engagement Rate
Amazon	2.1
Flipkart	2.4
Instagram Shops	6.8
Facebook Marketplace	6.5



CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research highlights the growing dominance of social commerce as a key driver of the modern digital retail ecosystem. By comparing traditional e-commerce platforms with social commerce models, the study reveals that social commerce offers a more engaging, dynamic, and personalized shopping experience, leading to higher conversion rates and longer session durations. While traditional e-commerce continues to excel in higher-value transactions, social commerce's ability to leverage social networks, peer influence, and interactive content is reshaping consumer purchasing behavior. As the boundary between social media and e-commerce continues to blur, businesses and marketers must adapt to these changes by integrating social shopping features into their strategies to maintain competitiveness in a rapidly evolving market.

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