

Digital Adoption Strategies for Delhi's Retail MSMEs

*Social media, websites, and digital marketing
among 34 small retailers in Delhi*

Interviews with 34 Delhi retailers reveal a decisive tilt toward social media over websites — and where digital adoption still lags.

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Overview

E-commerce and social media have reshaped how India's micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) reach customers. This study examines the specific digital activities of small retailers in Delhi — how they market, enable transactions, evaluate outcomes, and integrate physical and digital operations.

Digital marketing has evolved from standalone websites, to aggregator platforms (Amazon, Flipkart, Meesho), to social media (Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube). Social media has become a great equaliser: cost-effective outreach, rapid feedback, and the ability to humanise a brand. The context is large — India's retail market is projected at \$1.3 trillion with traditional "mom-and-pop" stores holding roughly 75% of it, and around 80% of businesses now maintain active social handles.

Study & Sample

The study is qualitative: 34 semi-structured interviews (30–40 minutes each) with small business owners in Karol Bagh, Rajinder Nagar, and Hauz Khas village. The sample spans apparel, accessories, arts, healthcare, gyms, food, electronics, and crockery. Clothing dominates the sample. The small, localised sample limits generalisability, but offers a close view of sector-specific digital engagement.

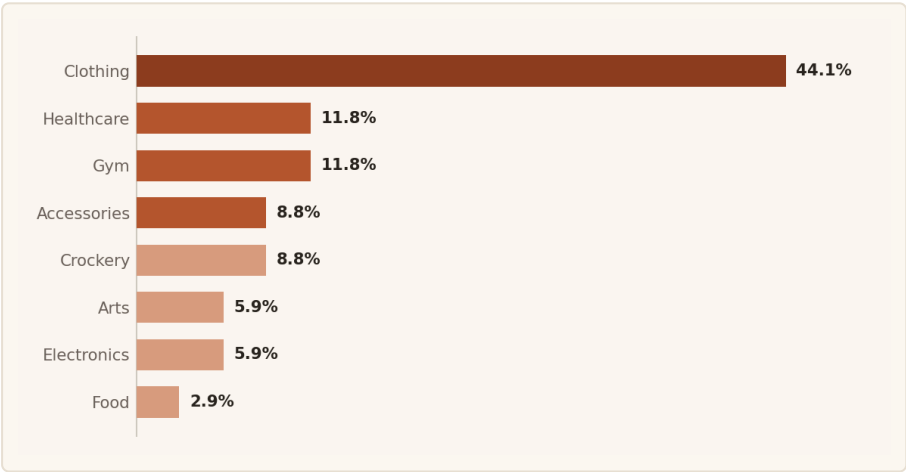
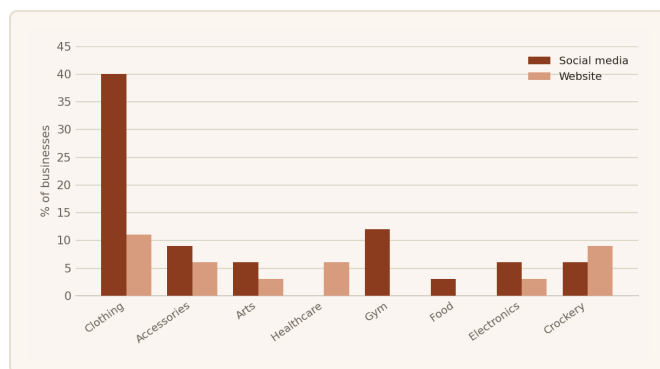


Figure 1. Sample distribution by business type (share of 34 businesses).

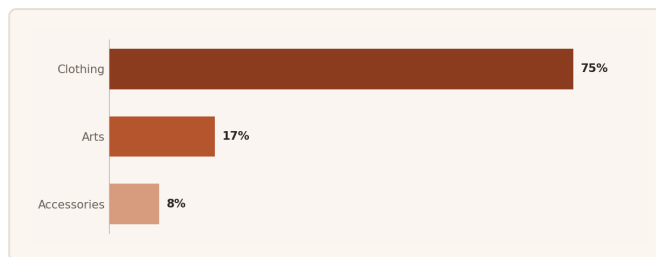
Findings: Digital Presence

Retailers clearly prefer social media to a dedicated website: 22 of 34 are active on social media, while only 11 have a website, and just 26% maintain both — multi-channel digital engagement remains low. Clothing retailers are the most engaged, leading on both social media and website use (websites at 11%). In-person services such as gyms rely solely on social media, while websites are relatively more common for crockery and healthcare.

Paid marketing is limited: about 35% of businesses used influencer marketing and 17% ran paid graphic/poster ads, often reusing the same content across web and social. Paid social media is concentrated in clothing (75%), far ahead of Arts (17%) and Accessories (8%).



(a) Social media vs website presence



(b) Paid social media, by sector

Figure 2. Digital presence and paid marketing: (a) share of businesses with a social-media vs website presence, by sector; (b) share of paid social-media advertising accounted for by each sector.

Small businesses increasingly want a single platform to both advertise and sell — pointing squarely toward social commerce on Instagram and WhatsApp.

Conclusion

MSMEs recognise the importance of social media, but some remain hesitant — citing gaps in knowledge and a sense that it is not relevant to their business. Education and training, through workshops or online resources, can help retailers build strategies suited to their operations.

Owners repeatedly expressed a desire to advertise and sell on a single platform, which points to social commerce — selling directly through Instagram and WhatsApp. In India, direct in-app shopping features have been constrained by the absence of regulation governing commerce on social platforms; clearer rules would let these retailers close the loop from discovery to sale.

References

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