



BUYING BEHAVIOUR AND SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE PATTERNS FOR INDUSTRIAL AUTOMATION PRODUCTS

Mohit Vashistha¹, Dr. Anuj Goel²

¹Research Scholar, NICE School of Business Studies, Shobhit Institute of Engineering & Technology, Deemed to-be University, Meerut

²Professor, NICE School of Business Studies, Shobhit Institute of Engineering & Technology, Deemed to-be University, Meerut

ABSTRACT

The rapid digital transformation of industrial markets has significantly increased the role of social media reviews and online ratings in influencing business purchasing decisions. This study examines the influence of social media reviews and ratings on the purchasing decisions of consumers in the industrial automation sector using a descriptive research design. Primary data were collected from 380 industrial buyers and decision-makers in NCR through a structured questionnaire. The findings reveal that buyers frequently procure industrial automation products and primarily rely on official websites, B2B portals and technically informative digital content during the product evaluation process. Online platforms play a vital role in comparing product specifications, reducing purchase risk and supporting informed purchasing decisions, highlighting the growing significance of digital information sources in industrial buying behaviour.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past 20 years, the quick development of digital technology has completely changed how businesses interact, communicate, and make decisions about what to buy. Social media has become one of the most important channels for information sharing, client interaction, and decision support among these technical advancements (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). What started out mainly as a means of interpersonal contact has developed into an effective tool for companies, allowing them to exchange product details, get client feedback and shape consumer opinions.

Industry 4.0, which is defined by automation, data-driven processes, and interconnected systems, is the term used to describe the rapid digitalisation of industries across the globe. As a key component of this transition, the industrial automation industry has seen notable changes in the assessment and acquisition of goods. Technical standards, vendor reputation, and long-term professional relationships have historically been the main factors influencing purchasing decisions for industrial automation products, including PLCs, SCADA systems, sensors, robotics, and control devices. Engineers, technicians, and procurement specialists used catalogues, technical consultations, industrial expos, and peer recommendations to make decisions. However, industrial customers' purchasing habits have fundamentally changed as a result of the incorporation of digital platforms into business processes. Before making a purchase, industrial purchasers increasingly actively interact with web content by comparing technical details, reading user-generated reviews, and assessing product ratings. Industry forums, specialised B2B review websites, YouTube, Facebook, LinkedIn, and other social media platforms have emerged as vital resources for peer validation and product information.

Online opinions have a greater impact and reach thanks to the growth of influencers, reviewers and industry-specific groups. Social media reviews and ratings are important in this setting because they give industrial buyers real-world experiences, comparative analyses of rival automation technologies, and perceived objective insights. These digital cues affect trust, perceived dependability, and brand credibility in addition to how they view the product. Furthermore, industrial purchasers, who frequently deal with high-value, high-risk transactions, are greatly impacted by the psychological impacts of social validation, including herding behaviour, confirmation bias, perceived expertise, and risk reduction (Cheung & Thadani, 2012).

Therefore, it is critical to comprehend how online reviews and ratings especially affect consumer purchases in the industrial automation industry given the combination of social media growth, digital transformation, and changing B2B purchasing behaviours. For manufacturers, marketers, and distributors looking to improve their interaction with industrial clients and create successful digital marketing strategies in a market that is becoming more and more competitive, this knowledge is essential.

Therefore, given the combination of social media growth, digital transformation, and shifting B2B purchasing behaviours, it is imperative to understand how online reviews and ratings, in particular, affect client purchases in the industrial automation sector. This information is crucial for distributors, marketers, and manufacturers that want to enhance their interactions with industrial customers in an increasingly competitive market.

The foundation of contemporary manufacturing and industrial productivity is the industrial automation sector. It includes a wide range of cutting-edge technologies and systems that increase operational effectiveness, reduce the need for human interaction, and



boost precision, dependability, and safety throughout industrial operations. Fundamentally, industrial automation creates efficient production settings with high precision and reliable output by integrating mechanical systems with electronics, control systems, and intelligent software. Rapid technological advancement over the last 20 years has completely changed the automation industry's nature, expectations, and competitive landscape, especially in embedded systems, advanced sensors, robots, artificial intelligence, and industrial communication networks (Lasi et al., 2014).

Because industrial automation solutions usually have large financial costs, long-term operational repercussions, compatibility issues, and integration complications, this move is especially significant. Therefore, before making purchases, consumers look for reliable, objective, and experience-based information. Peer recommendations, expert comments, and social media evaluations have become effective tools for lowering perceived risk, fostering trust, and assisting with well-informed decision-making in these highly involved purchases.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Cheung & Thadani (2012) explain that when consumers make purchase decisions, they rely on both internal and external influences, as well as their previous experiences with a product or brand, whether favourable or unfavourable. During the information search stage, buyers may explore options in physical stores or use online sources such as search engines or customer reviews to gather relevant details. For brands, the key objective is to ensure that potential customers can easily access the information they require, thereby increasing the likelihood that they will choose the company's product or service.

Fotis (2015) aimed to examine the usage of social media and its influence on consumer behaviour, with a specific focus on holiday travel decisions. The study found that social media plays a role at every stage of the travel-related decision-making process. Through thematic analysis, the researcher identified six key themes that provide diverse insights into how social media is used and how it impacts consumer behaviour in the context of tourism and travel planning.

Elwalda & Lu (2016) investigated the key characteristics of online customer reviews (OCRs) and how they shape consumers' purchasing decisions. Their findings identified several important dimensions that influence consumer responses, including review quality, credibility, perceived usefulness, and emotional tone. The study showed that detailed and trustworthy reviews positively affect customers' attitudes as well as their intention to buy. Overall, the authors concluded that online customer reviews play a crucial role in decision-making by improving information transparency and reducing uncertainty for consumers.

According to Chaney et al. (2017) digital marketing relies on contemporary internet-based technologies to support marketing communication. Through the use of browsing data collection tools such as cookies, firms are able to conduct highly individualized targeting in a largely passive manner. As a result, information about products and services can be delivered to potential customers far more efficiently and rapidly than in traditional marketing approaches.

Alalwan (2018) examined the growing use of social media as a marketing and business tool, focusing on how social media advertising influences consumers' purchase intentions. The study employed structural equation modelling (SEM) and found that factors such as interactivity, hedonic motivation, performance expectancy, informativeness, and perceived relevance significantly affect purchase intention. The findings suggest that these determinants play a crucial role in shaping consumer responses to online advertisements and provide useful insights for marketers to design and implement more effective social media advertising strategies. FitzGerald (2019) explains that although consumer behaviour continues to be shaped by psychological, social, and personal factors, the growth of social media has significantly transformed the way consumers interact with information and make decisions. In today's digital environment, individuals have continuous access to vast amounts of content, prompting businesses to utilize every available opportunity to engage their target audience. The study further emphasizes that organizations can effectively convert online users into customers by implementing appropriate and well-structured social media strategies.

Chou et al. (2020) argued that the growing reliance of younger consumers on social media requires businesses to strategically incorporate these platforms into their marketing communication efforts. The study highlights that social media enables organizations to establish interactive, two-way communication with customers, thereby strengthening relationships and encouraging the creation of user-generated content such as reviews, testimonials, and feedback. The authors further found that blogs contribute positively to sales performance by allowing potential buyers to access product evaluations and share their own experiences. Consequently, online reviews have become a vital component of modern marketing strategies, providing consumers with a platform to express their opinions about products and services while influencing the purchase decisions of others.

Manzoor et al. (2020) argued that advancements in digital technology have enabled organizations to enhance the functionality and effectiveness of their websites, thereby improving their ability to achieve marketing objectives and engage customers more efficiently.

Palalic et al. (2020) examined how consumers' experiences with websites influence their cognitive evaluations and, consequently, their online purchasing decisions. The study found that elements such as website design, visual appeal, functionality, and overall



usability significantly shape consumers' perceptions of a brand. The findings emphasize that maintaining an effective and user-friendly digital presence is essential for businesses seeking to positively influence consumer attitudes and purchasing behaviour.

Păvăloaia et al. (2020) explain that websites function as an important communication medium between consumers and retailers, while also serving as platforms where commercial transactions are conducted. In the current digital environment, websites have become highly flexible marketing tools, offering a wide range of features such as product portfolios, detailed information about goods and services, company profiles, contact information, and even chatbot support for customer interaction.

Wiese et al. (2020) explain that the application of social influence theory in marketing research has provided valuable insights into how consumer behaviour is shaped by interactions with external influences such as advertisements, user-generated content, online reviews, as well as the informativeness and creativity of marketing communications.

Krishen et al. (2021) observed that research on management and technology remains dispersed across several independent disciplines, including information systems, political psychology, and consumer psychology. The authors noted that although scholarly interest in the effects of fake news on consumer behaviour has increased, this area of research is still relatively underdeveloped compared to other domains, indicating the need for more comprehensive investigation into its influence on consumer decision-making.

Rachmad (2022) emphasizes that social interactions facilitated through social media including user participation, comments, and celebrity endorsements have a significant influence on consumers' purchasing decisions and buying behaviour. The study concludes that within online environments, social identity and group-related cues play a more dominant role in shaping consumption choices than individual evaluation or personal judgment.

Kareem et al. (2023) suggest that strong brand credibility encourages consumers to align their attitudes and behaviours with trusted brand endorsements, thereby strengthening social conformity. It also promotes compliance by increasing consumers' willingness to act on recommendations made by social media influencers (SMIs). In addition, credible brands support the process of internalization, whereby consumers embrace the influencer's values and beliefs as their own, ultimately enhancing the influencer's ability to shape consumer intentions.

Sharma (2024) explains that affiliate partners are generally compensated based on actual sales generated through the program rather than for irrelevant actions such as accidental ad clicks or mere ad impressions. Content marketing, on the other hand, involves the use of modern digital technologies to communicate with target audiences in order to attract, engage, and leave a lasting impression on customers.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- To analyze the influence of social media reviews and ratings on the purchasing decisions of consumers in the industrial automation sector.

RESEARCH DESIGN

In the present research study the researcher has implemented descriptive research design.

SAMPLE SIZE: 380 Respondents

PRIMARY DATA

The population comprises industrial buyers and decision-makers involved in the purchase of industrial automation products. This includes engineers, plant managers, automation consultants, procurement professionals and technical decision-makers working in manufacturing and process industries in NCR.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

For the present study, the well-structured questionnaire has been designed to gather the information from the respondents.

ANALYSIS RELATED TO BUYING & SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE PATTERN REGARDING INDUSTRIAL AUTOMATION PRODUCTS

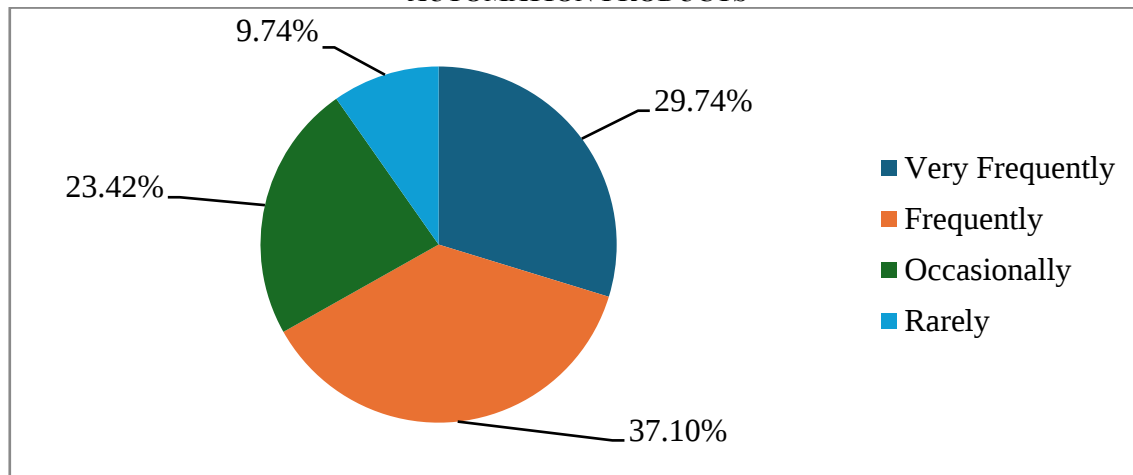


Figure 1: Response to the question “What is the frequency of purchasing industrial automation products?”

Analysis: The analysis reveals a clear inclination toward regular purchasing behavior among the respondents. A significant proportion, 37.10%, reported that they purchase industrial automation products frequently, representing the largest response category. Additionally, 29.74% of respondents indicated that they purchase these products very frequently. When combined, these two categories account for 66.84% of the total responses, 23.42% of respondents stated that they purchase such products occasionally, reflecting a moderate level of demand that may be influenced by project-based requirements, budget constraints, or specific operational needs. A relatively smaller segment, 9.74%, reported purchasing rarely, indicating limited or infrequent dependence on industrial automation products.

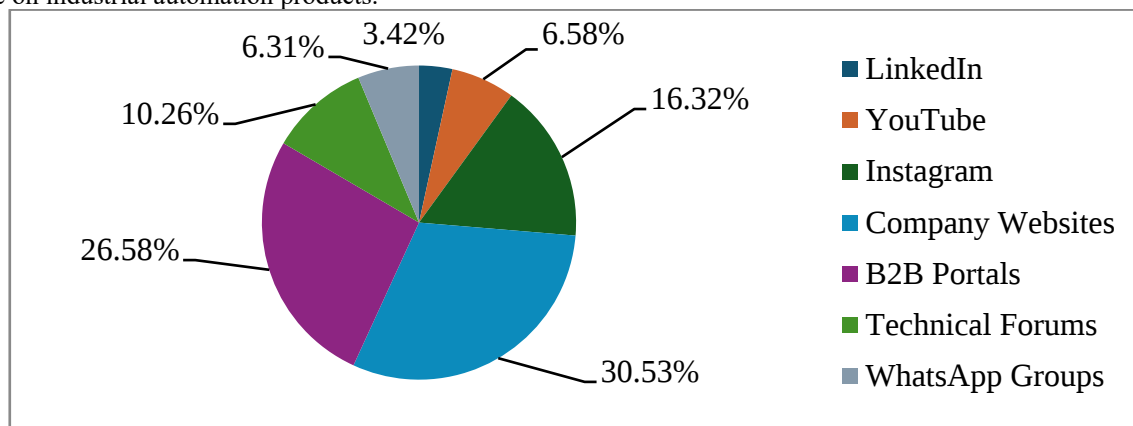


Figure 2: Response to the question “Which social media platforms do you consult more for automation product information?”

Analysis: The highest proportion of respondents, 30.53%, reported that they primarily consult company websites for automation product information. This suggests that respondents rely heavily on official and authentic sources to obtain detailed product specifications, technical documentation, and updated information. The second most preferred source is B2B portals, with 26.58% of respondents indicating their reliance on these platforms. This highlights the importance of structured business-to-business marketplaces in facilitating product comparison, supplier evaluation, and procurement decisions. Among social media platforms, Instagram accounts for 16.32%, indicating moderate usage, possibly for promotional updates and visual product demonstrations. Technical forums are consulted by 10.26% of respondents, reflecting the value placed on peer discussions, expert opinions, and problem-solving exchanges. YouTube is preferred by 6.58%, suggesting that a smaller yet notable segment seeks video-based demonstrations and tutorials. Similarly, WhatsApp groups account for 6.31%, indicating limited but relevant use of informal professional networks for information sharing. Finally, LinkedIn records the lowest consultation rate at 3.42%, which may suggest comparatively lower engagement with professional networking platforms for automation product-specific information.

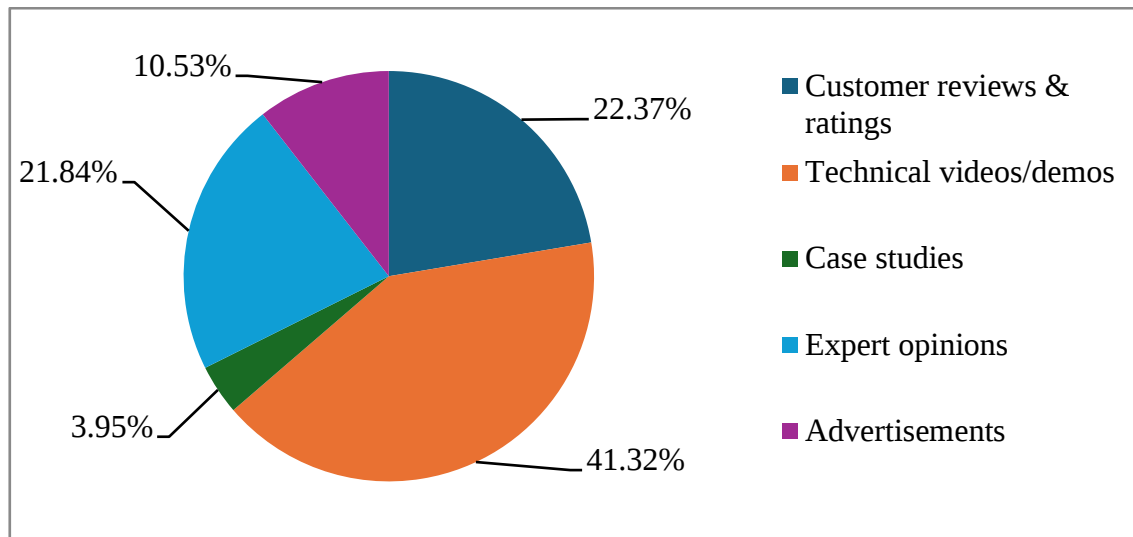


Figure 3: Response to the question “What devices do you primarily use for online shopping?”

Analysis: The analysis indicates that technical and knowledge-driven content plays a dominant role in influencing purchasing decisions related to automation products. A substantial proportion of respondents, 41.32%, reported that technical videos and demonstrations influence them the most. This highlights the importance of practical, visual, and application-oriented content that helps users understand product functionality, performance, and operational benefits before making a purchase decision.

The second most influential factor is customer reviews and ratings, accounting for 22.37% of responses. This suggests that peer feedback and user experiences significantly shape perceptions of product reliability and quality. Closely following this, expert opinions influence 21.84% of respondents, indicating that professional insights and technical expertise are highly valued in the decision-making process.

In contrast, advertisements influence 10.53% of respondents, reflecting a comparatively lower impact of traditional promotional content. The least influential content type is case studies, with only 3.95% of respondents considering them as the primary influencing factor. This comparatively low percentage may indicate limited exposure to detailed case documentation or a preference for more concise and visually engaging formats.

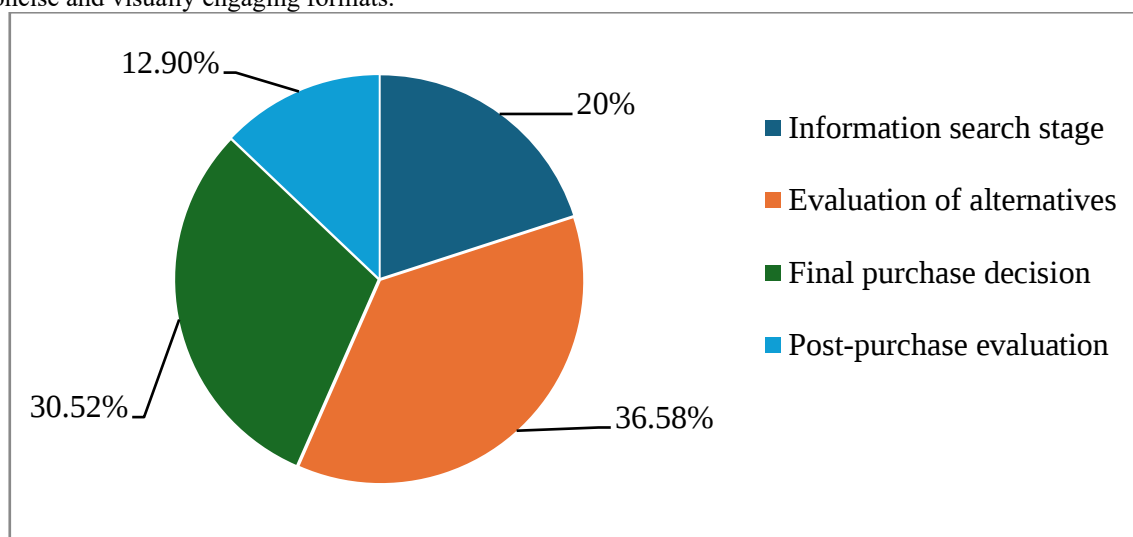


Figure 4.4: Response to the question “Which product categories do you purchase most often online?”

Analysis: The analysis of responses to the question “Which stage of the online buying process do you engage in most often?” reveals that respondents are primarily active during the evaluation of alternatives stage. A significant 36.58% of respondents indicated that they most frequently use online platforms to compare different products, assess specifications, evaluate prices, and analyze features before making a decision. The final purchase decision stage accounts for 30.52% of responses, indicating that nearly one-third of respondents complete their actual transactions online. This reflects growing confidence in digital procurement channels and secure online purchasing systems within the industrial automation sector.



Additionally, 20% of respondents reported using online platforms primarily during the information search stage. This highlights the importance of digital platforms in providing initial awareness, product details, and technical knowledge that initiate the buying process.

Finally, 12.90% of respondents engage most frequently in the post-purchase evaluation stage online, which may include reviewing product performance, providing feedback, or seeking after-sales support. Although this represents the smallest segment, it still indicates a notable reliance on online platforms for post-transaction activities.

CONCLUSION

1. The study concludes that respondents demonstrate a strong tendency toward regular purchasing of industrial automation products. The majority of buyers procure these products either frequently or very frequently, indicating that automation technologies have become an integral component of operational and production activities in industrial environments. Only a small segment shows occasional or limited purchasing behavior.

2. The findings indicate that respondents primarily rely on formal and credible digital sources when searching for information related to industrial automation products. Official company websites and structured B2B portals emerge as the most trusted platforms, as they provide detailed product specifications, technical documentation, and supplier information. Other digital platforms such as social media, technical forums, and messaging groups are used to a lesser extent for gathering supplementary information.

3. The results suggest that technically informative and knowledge-oriented content has the greatest influence on purchasing decisions. Respondents show a clear preference for content formats that demonstrate product functionality, provide expert insights, and present user experiences. In comparison, traditional promotional advertisements and detailed case-based documentation appear to have relatively less influence on decision-making.

4. The study concludes that online platforms play a crucial role during the product evaluation stage of the purchasing process. Buyers extensively use digital channels to compare product features, specifications, and prices before making a final selection. Additionally, online platforms are also used during the final purchase stage, information search, and post-purchase evaluation, indicating the growing importance of digital ecosystems throughout the entire industrial buying process.

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