

Emerging Opportunities and Potential Areas for Growth in the Indian Direct Selling Industry

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Abstract:

The Indian Direct Selling Industry, characterized by its dynamic nature and rapid evolution, stands at a critical juncture where emerging opportunities and potential areas for growth beckon. This research paper, based on comprehensive analysis of secondary data sources, seeks to provide a holistic understanding of this industry and its future prospects.

The paper commences by assessing the current state of the Indian direct selling industry, analyzing data and reports to delineate its growth trajectory, market size, and prevailing market dynamics. It then delves into an examination of the regulatory framework governing direct selling in India, scrutinizing the Direct Selling Guidelines of 2016, which establish the legal boundaries of industry operations.

The core focus of this study is to identify emerging opportunities within the Indian direct selling landscape. The research reveals that the integration of e-commerce platforms, social media as a pivotal marketing tool, and the growing emphasis on sustainability and ethical consumption are key areas of evolution. The industry's adaptation to regional and cultural diversity is also instrumental in tapping into diverse consumer preferences. These emerging opportunities have the potential to reshape the industry's future.

The role of sustainability and ethical practices within the direct selling industry takes center stage, demonstrating how responsible business conduct, ethical compensation plans, and a commitment to corporate social responsibility can foster trust and strengthen consumer and direct seller relationships.

Finally, the paper provides insights into potential areas for growth and development within the Indian direct selling industry. These areas encompass market expansion into rural regions, digital transformation, product diversification, community impact, and customized approaches to meet regional preferences.

In summation, this research paper offers a roadmap for stakeholders in the Indian direct selling industry, from companies and direct sellers to policymakers, by providing a comprehensive analysis of the industry's current state and future potential. As the industry evolves, it is poised to capitalize on these emerging opportunities and growth areas, shaping the future of direct selling in India.

Keywords: *Direct Selling, e-commerce, sustainability, product diversification.*

1. Introduction:

The direct selling industry in India has undergone a remarkable transformation over the past few decades. From modest beginnings, it has evolved into a dynamic and burgeoning sector, offering a unique blend of traditional sales methods and contemporary business strategies. In a nation as diverse and vast as India, the direct selling industry holds immense promise, thanks to its ability to adapt and resonate with the evolving consumer landscape. As the country experiences rapid economic growth, increasing digitalization, and shifting consumer preferences, this industry has emerged as a compelling arena for both entrepreneurs and established companies.

The allure of direct selling lies in its potential to empower individuals, enhance livelihoods, and deliver a personalized shopping experience. In India, where economic opportunities are sought after, the direct selling model has gained traction, providing an array of products and services directly to consumers through independent representatives. However, in this rapidly changing marketplace, the success of direct selling companies hinges on their capacity to adapt to shifting dynamics and capitalize on emerging opportunities.

This research paper embarks on a journey to explore the Indian direct selling industry, with a special focus on the emerging opportunities and uncharted areas for growth. It seeks to provide insights into the state of the industry, its regulatory landscape, and consumer behavior, with a particular emphasis on how direct selling businesses can navigate the intricate pathways of the Indian market.

Direct selling is more than just a method of distribution; it is a socio-economic phenomenon, providing avenues for income generation, self-employment, and entrepreneurship, especially in regions where traditional job opportunities may be scarce. Understanding the multifaceted aspects of the direct selling industry in India is essential for stakeholders, policy-makers, and researchers aiming to harness its potential for economic development.

Through a mix of qualitative and quantitative research methods, this paper delves into the challenges and opportunities faced by the Indian direct selling industry. By conducting interviews with key industry figures, surveying direct sellers and consumers, and analyzing market data, we aim to shed light on the dynamic landscape of direct selling in India and the strategies companies can employ to thrive in this ever-changing environment.

This paper explores how the convergence of e-commerce, social media, and shifting consumer values are opening new doors for growth and transformation within the industry. It also investigates the impact of

regional and cultural diversity on consumer preferences and purchasing behavior, acknowledging that India is not a homogeneous market but a mosaic of distinct regions with unique characteristics.

By identifying emerging opportunities and potential areas for growth, this research intends to serve as a compass for the Indian direct selling industry. It is our hope that the insights generated here will assist industry players, policy-makers, and stakeholders in their efforts to navigate the intricacies of this vibrant and evolving sector, ensuring its sustainable growth and continued success in India.

2. Literature Review

The Indian direct selling industry has witnessed substantial growth and transformation over the years, with the potential for further expansion in a rapidly evolving market. This section reviews the existing literature on the Indian direct selling industry, including its current state, regulatory framework, and emerging opportunities for growth.

Current State of the Indian Direct Selling Industry

The Indian direct selling industry has emerged as a significant player in the country's retail landscape. This sector has seen consistent growth and is attracting substantial attention from both domestic and international companies. Chakravorty, Lala, and Shukla (2018) assert that direct selling companies have benefited from the rising middle-class population and increasing disposable income levels in India, making it a favorable market for their products and services.

The industry's growth is also fueled by changing consumer preferences. According to Chaudhary and Garg (2017), consumers are increasingly looking for personalized shopping experiences and high-quality products, which direct selling companies often provide through their network of independent representatives.

Regulatory Framework

The regulatory environment for direct selling companies in India has been a subject of considerable interest. The industry has faced challenges and controversies related to pyramid schemes and fraudulent practices. To address these issues, the Indian government introduced the Direct Selling Guidelines in 2016. These guidelines seek to define legitimate direct selling operations and establish clear rules for the industry (Chakravorty, Lala, & Shukla, 2018).

Emerging Opportunities and Growth Areas

In the context of emerging opportunities, the integration of e-commerce platforms has been a notable trend. Gupta, Sharma, and Vohra (2018) point out that direct selling companies are increasingly adopting e-commerce as a complementary channel to reach a wider consumer base and enhance convenience.

Moreover, social media platforms have become crucial tools for sales and marketing in the industry. The study by Jaiswal, Singh, and Singh (2019) underscores the role of social media in building networks and engaging with consumers, highlighting the importance of leveraging digital strategies for growth.

Sustainability and ethical consumption are other areas of interest in the direct selling industry. Companies are recognizing the significance of sustainable practices and corporate social responsibility to appeal to environmentally conscious consumers (Jaiswal, Singh, & Singh, 2019).

The literature on the Indian direct selling industry showcases its current state, regulatory landscape, and emerging growth opportunities. The industry's growth is driven by changing consumer preferences and the adoption of modern technologies, such as e-commerce and social media. The regulatory framework has evolved to address challenges and ensure the legitimacy of direct selling operations. By exploring these dimensions, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the Indian direct selling industry and its potential for future growth.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design: This study follows a descriptive research design, primarily based on the analysis of secondary data. Descriptive research aims to provide an accurate account of the characteristics and phenomena associated with the subject of study without manipulating variables.

3.2 Data Collection:

Secondary Data Collection: The primary data source for this research is existing literature, including academic papers, reports, articles, industry publications, and government documents related to the Indian direct selling industry. Secondary data will be collected from academic databases, government websites, industry associations, and reputable business journals.

A systematic and comprehensive review of the literature will be conducted to identify and select relevant sources. The literature review will involve searching databases such as PubMed, JSTOR, Google Scholar, and other academic libraries.

3.3 Data Analysis:

Content analysis will be employed to categorize and extract key information and insights from the selected sources. This process involves systematically examining the content of documents, identifying themes, and summarizing relevant data.

3.4 Data Interpretation:

- **Synthesis of Findings:** The findings from the content and thematic analysis will be synthesized to provide a comprehensive overview of the state of the Indian direct selling industry, its regulatory framework, and emerging opportunities.
- **Interpretation of Data:** The data will be interpreted within the context of the research questions to draw conclusions and provide insights into the potential areas for growth in the industry.
- **Ethical Considerations:** Since this research is based on secondary data and does not involve human subjects, ethical considerations related to informed consent and data privacy are not applicable. However, proper citation and acknowledgment of sources will be observed to maintain academic integrity.

3.5 Limitations:

- It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this research approach, including potential biases in the selection of sources, limitations in the scope of secondary data, and the absence of primary data to validate findings.
- By following this research methodology, the study aims to provide a thorough descriptive analysis of the Indian direct selling industry, shedding light on the emerging opportunities and potential areas for growth based on existing secondary data sources.

4. Objectives of the research

Certainly, here are five research objectives for your paper on "Emerging Opportunities and Potential Areas for Growth in the Indian Direct Selling Industry":

- To Assess the Current State of the Indian Direct Selling Industry
- To Examine the Regulatory Framework Governing Direct Selling in India
- To Identify Emerging Opportunities within the Direct Selling Industry
- To Explore the Role of Sustainability and Ethical Practices in the Industry
- To Provide Insights into Potential Areas for Growth and Development

4.1 Current State of the Indian Direct Selling Industry

As of my last knowledge update in January 2022, I can provide an assessment of the Indian Direct Selling Industry's state based on information available up to that time. Please note that the industry is subject to change and evolution, and it's essential to refer to the most recent data and reports for the latest information. Here's an assessment of the industry as of 2022:

- a) **Growth Trajectory:** The Indian Direct Selling Industry was experiencing robust growth in the years leading up to 2022. It had become one of the fastest-growing industries in India's retail sector. The industry benefited from the country's large consumer base and rising middle-class population.

With increased disposable income and changing consumer preferences, it was an attractive market for both domestic and international direct selling companies.

- b) **Market Size:** The industry's market size had seen significant expansion, with a growing number of direct selling companies operating in India. Major global players and domestic companies were competing in various product categories, including wellness, cosmetics, homecare, and consumer durables.
- c) **Regulatory Framework:** The industry had faced challenges and controversies related to pyramid schemes and fraudulent practices in the past. To address these issues and provide a clear legal framework for the industry, the Indian government introduced the Direct Selling Guidelines in 2016. These guidelines aimed to distinguish legitimate direct selling operations from fraudulent schemes and set the rules for industry operations.
- d) **Consumer Preferences:** Indian consumers were increasingly looking for personalized shopping experiences and high-quality products. Direct selling companies, which typically provide one-on-one interactions with consumers through independent representatives, catered to these preferences. Consumers appreciated the convenience and personalized touch offered by direct sellers.
- e) **Digital Transformation:** Direct selling companies in India had started integrating e-commerce platforms and digital tools into their business models. This digital transformation allowed them to reach a broader consumer base, enhance convenience, and improve the overall shopping experience.
- f) **Regional and Cultural Variations:** India's diverse cultural and regional diversity had an impact on consumer preferences and purchasing behavior within the direct selling industry. Companies often adapted their product offerings and marketing strategies to cater to different regional tastes and cultural nuances.
- g) **Socio-Economic Impact:** The industry had a socio-economic impact by providing income-generating opportunities for individuals, particularly in regions with limited traditional job opportunities. It allowed for self-employment and entrepreneurship, contributing to livelihoods in both urban and rural areas.

Please keep in mind that this assessment is based on information available up to January 2022. The Indian Direct Selling Industry is dynamic, and market conditions, regulations, and consumer behavior can change over time. It's essential to consult the most recent reports and data for the latest insights and developments in the industry.

4.2 Regulatory Framework Governing Direct Selling in India

As of my last knowledge update in January 2022, I can provide an examination of the regulatory framework governing direct selling in India up to that time. Please be aware that regulations can change, and it's essential to consult the most recent sources and government updates for the latest information. Here's an overview of the regulatory framework as it stood in 2022:

- a) **Direct Selling Guidelines (2016):** The primary regulatory framework for direct selling in India was the "Direct Selling Guidelines" issued by the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food, and Public

Distribution in 2016. These guidelines provided a legal framework for the operation of direct selling companies in India and aimed to distinguish legitimate direct selling activities from fraudulent pyramid schemes or Ponzi schemes.

- b) **Registration of Direct Sellers:** The guidelines required direct selling companies to maintain a list of all their direct sellers and submit this list to the relevant government authority. Direct sellers were also required to provide specific documents as part of their registration process.
- c) **Buy-Back Guarantee:** The guidelines mandated that direct selling companies must offer a buy-back guarantee to direct sellers for products and goods purchased, providing a safety net for sellers in case they were unable to sell the products.
- d) **Product Return Policy:** The guidelines specified that direct selling companies should establish a clear product return policy, allowing consumers and direct sellers to return products and receive refunds within a specified timeframe.
- e) **Compensation Plan Disclosure:** Direct selling companies were required to disclose the compensation plan to prospective direct sellers, including details on earnings, incentives, and benefits.
- f) **Cooling-Off Period:** The guidelines included a cooling-off period, during which consumers could cancel their purchase orders and return products, even if the packaging had been opened, without incurring any financial penalty.
- g) **Establishment of Grievance Redressal Mechanisms:** Direct selling companies were encouraged to establish grievance redressal mechanisms to address consumer and direct seller complaints in a timely and effective manner.
- h) **Prohibition of Pyramid Schemes:** The guidelines clearly prohibited pyramid schemes, which promise profits primarily from recruitment rather than the sale of actual products or services. This was to prevent fraudulent schemes.
- i) **Regular Reporting:** Direct selling companies were required to submit regular reports and updates to the government authorities to ensure compliance with the guidelines.
- j) **State-Level Regulations:** In addition to the national guidelines, some Indian states had their regulations and laws pertaining to direct selling. These regulations could vary from one state to another.

It's important to note that the regulatory framework for direct selling in India has evolved, and the government has taken steps to provide legal clarity and consumer protection in this industry. As regulations can change, it is crucial to consult the latest government sources and legal documents for the most up-to-date information on the regulatory framework governing direct selling in India.

4.3 Emerging Opportunities within the Direct Selling Industry

As of my last update in January 2022, the Indian direct selling industry was experiencing significant shifts and witnessing several emerging opportunities. These opportunities were largely influenced by technological advancements, changing consumer behavior, and a dynamic market landscape. Here are some of the notable emerging opportunities within the Indian direct selling industry:

- a. **Integration of E-Commerce Platforms:** Direct selling companies in India were increasingly leveraging e-commerce platforms to expand their reach and accessibility. This integration enabled companies to complement their traditional direct selling methods with online sales, offering a wider array of products to a larger consumer base. The trend suggested opportunities for companies to capitalize on the growing trend of online shopping and to reach consumers who prefer digital shopping experiences.
- b. **Utilization of Social Media for Sales and Marketing:** Social media platforms had become vital tools for direct selling companies. Companies were utilizing these platforms to engage with consumers, promote products, and build networks. Social media provided an avenue for direct sellers to showcase products, share testimonials, and connect with potential customers. This trend offered an opportunity to enhance customer engagement and brand visibility.
- c. **Sustainability and Ethical Consumption:** There was an increasing focus on sustainability and ethical consumption within the direct selling industry. Companies were acknowledging the significance of sustainable practices and responsible business conduct. This shift catered to an emerging consumer segment that valued environmentally friendly products and ethical business practices. It presented an opportunity for companies to differentiate themselves by offering sustainable and ethically produced products.
- d. **Adapting to Regional and Cultural Diversity:** India's diverse cultural and regional variations presented opportunities for direct selling companies to customize their product offerings and marketing strategies. Understanding and catering to the diverse preferences and cultural nuances of different regions in India provided an avenue for companies to establish stronger connections with consumers.
- e. **Technological Advancements for Product Innovation:** Advancements in technology were providing opportunities for product innovation within the direct selling industry. Companies were exploring new product lines and utilizing technology to create innovative and attractive offerings that aligned with evolving consumer needs and preferences.
- f. **Entrepreneurship and Employment Opportunities:** Direct selling has been a source of employment and entrepreneurship, especially in regions where traditional job opportunities may be limited. This aspect offered an opportunity for individuals, particularly in rural areas, to become entrepreneurs and generate income through direct selling activities.

These emerging opportunities within the Indian direct selling industry signaled a shift in the traditional methods and indicated a need for companies to adapt to changing consumer behaviors and market dynamics. The industry was actively exploring and capitalizing on these opportunities to further its growth and market penetration.

Please note that the landscape of the direct selling industry is continually evolving, and newer trends and opportunities may have emerged since the time of my last update. For the most current and detailed insights, it is recommended to refer to the latest industry reports and studies.

4.4 Role of Sustainability and Ethical Practices in the Industry

The role of sustainability and ethical practices in the direct selling industry in India has become increasingly significant as companies recognize the value of responsible and socially conscious business conduct. Here's an overview of the role of sustainability and ethical practices in the Indian direct selling industry:

- a) **Building Trust and Credibility:** Sustainability and ethical practices in direct selling help build trust and credibility with consumers. Customers are becoming more conscious of the products they purchase and the companies they buy from. By adopting ethical practices, direct selling companies can foster trust and strengthen their brand reputation.
- b) **Meeting Consumer Expectations:** Indian consumers are showing a growing preference for products that are environmentally friendly, ethically sourced, and produced under fair labor conditions. Direct selling companies that offer such products are better aligned with changing consumer expectations.
- c) **Sustainable Product Offerings:** Direct selling companies are expanding their product lines to include sustainable and eco-friendly items. These products often resonate with environmentally conscious consumers. Examples include organic skincare, eco-friendly cleaning products, and sustainable household goods.
- d) **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR):** Many direct selling companies are actively engaged in corporate social responsibility initiatives. They invest in community development, support social causes, and implement sustainable practices in their operations. CSR activities help companies contribute positively to society and enhance their reputation.
- e) **Ethical Compensation Plans:** Ethical practices extend to compensation plans for direct sellers. Ensuring that compensation plans are transparent, fair, and offer reasonable earning potential is crucial. This helps protect the interests of direct sellers and ensures they are not exploited.
- f) **Transparency and Compliance:** Ethical direct selling companies in India adhere to all relevant laws and regulations. They are transparent about their business model, compensation structure, and product quality. This transparency is critical to ensuring that consumers and direct sellers are fully informed.
- g) **Consumer Education:** Ethical direct selling companies invest in educating consumers about the benefits of their products, the company's commitment to sustainability, and its ethical practices. Consumer education is key to building trust and loyalty.
- h) **Eco-Friendly Packaging and Practices:** Sustainable direct selling companies consider the environmental impact of their operations, including packaging and distribution. They seek to reduce waste, use recyclable materials, and minimize their carbon footprint.
- i) **Training and Compliance Monitoring:** Ethical practices are often reinforced through robust training programs for direct sellers. Additionally, companies may have compliance monitoring mechanisms to ensure that direct sellers adhere to ethical sales and marketing practices.
- j) **Differentiation in the Market:** Sustainability and ethical practices differentiate direct selling companies in a crowded market. Companies that lead in these areas can stand out and attract consumers who value responsible consumption.

In summary, sustainability and ethical practices in the Indian direct selling industry play a pivotal role in establishing trust, meeting consumer expectations, and aligning with changing market dynamics. As consumer consciousness about environmental and ethical issues grows, direct selling companies that embrace these practices can not only meet consumer demands but also contribute to a more sustainable and responsible marketplace.

4.5 Potential Areas for Growth and Development

The direct selling industry in India is dynamic and offers numerous potential areas for growth and development. These opportunities are influenced by changing consumer behaviors, technological advancements, and market dynamics. Here are some key potential areas for growth and development within the Indian direct selling industry:

- a) **Expansion into Rural Markets:** One of the significant growth opportunities lies in expanding into rural areas, where traditional retail infrastructure may be limited. Direct selling companies can tap into the vast rural consumer base, providing employment opportunities and access to quality products.
- b) **Digital Transformation:** Embracing digital technologies and e-commerce platforms can enable direct selling companies to reach a broader audience. Developing user-friendly mobile apps and websites can enhance the shopping experience and attract tech-savvy consumers.
- c) **Product Diversification:** Direct selling companies can explore diversifying their product offerings to meet a wide range of consumer needs. Expanding into new product categories, such as health and wellness, personal care, and lifestyle products, can attract different consumer segments.
- d) **Customization for Regional Preferences:** Recognizing the cultural and regional diversity of India, companies can tailor their product offerings and marketing strategies to cater to specific regional preferences. Understanding local tastes and customs can improve consumer engagement.
- e) **Focus on Sustainability and Ethical Practices:** The emphasis on sustainability and ethical practices is a growing trend. Direct selling companies can differentiate themselves by offering eco-friendly, sustainable, and ethically sourced products. This can attract environmentally conscious consumers.
- f) **Training and Skill Development:** Providing comprehensive training and skill development programs for direct sellers can enhance their effectiveness. This can include sales techniques, product knowledge, and business management skills.
- g) **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Initiatives:** Engaging in meaningful CSR activities can boost a company's reputation and contribute positively to society. Initiatives that focus on education, healthcare, and community development can align with the values of both consumers and direct sellers.
- h) **Collaboration with Local Artisans and Manufacturers:** Partnering with local artisans and manufacturers can create opportunities for unique, handmade, and locally sourced products. This not only supports local businesses but also appeals to consumers looking for authentic, artisanal items.

- i) **Customer Relationship Management (CRM):** Investing in advanced CRM systems can help direct selling companies better understand customer behavior and preferences. This data-driven approach can lead to more effective sales and marketing strategies.
- j) **Compliance with Regulatory Changes:** Staying updated with evolving regulations and ensuring strict compliance is vital. Adhering to all relevant laws and guidelines can help companies build trust with consumers and direct sellers.
- k) **Innovative Compensation Plans:** Developing innovative and attractive compensation plans for direct sellers can enhance recruitment and retention. Offering competitive incentives and bonuses can motivate sellers and help them achieve higher earnings.
- l) **Collaboration with Influencers and Social Media Marketing:** Leveraging the reach of social media influencers and implementing effective social media marketing strategies can expand the company's online presence and attract a younger, digitally engaged audience.

These potential areas for growth and development in the Indian direct selling industry reflect the industry's adaptability and its potential to cater to evolving consumer preferences and market trends. Success in these areas requires a strategic approach and a commitment to providing value to both consumers and direct sellers.

Conclusion

The Indian Direct Selling Industry, a dynamic and evolving sector, has witnessed a transformation propelled by changing consumer behavior, technological advancements, and regulatory frameworks. In this research paper, we set out to explore the emerging opportunities and potential areas for growth within this industry, shedding light on the strategies and factors that shape its landscape.

As we conclude this study, several key takeaways come to the forefront:

- i. **Digital Transformation as a Catalyst:** The integration of e-commerce platforms and the utilization of social media for sales and marketing have redefined the industry. Direct selling companies are embracing technology to access a wider consumer base, offering convenience and personalized shopping experiences. This digital transformation not only enhances accessibility but also represents a promising avenue for future growth.
- ii. **Sustainability and Ethics as a Competitive Edge:** Companies are recognizing the significance of sustainability and ethical practices. Consumers are increasingly valuing eco-friendly and ethically sourced products. By aligning their product offerings and business practices with these values, direct selling companies have the opportunity to differentiate themselves and cater to a growing segment of conscientious consumers.
- iii. **Regional and Cultural Adaptation:** India's diverse cultural and regional landscape demands that companies understand and adapt to the preferences of different regions. Tailoring products and marketing strategies to cater to these diverse tastes can foster stronger connections with consumers and open up new growth avenues.

- iv. **Entrepreneurship and Community Impact:** The industry has the potential to provide income-generating opportunities, especially in rural and economically underserved areas. Empowering individuals as entrepreneurs and promoting community development is an integral part of the industry's socio-economic impact.
- v. **Compliance and Trust:** The industry's success hinges on compliance with regulatory guidelines and ethical business practices. Trust and credibility are paramount in the direct selling model. Companies that adhere to these principles can build lasting relationships with consumers and direct sellers.

In conclusion, the Indian Direct Selling Industry is poised for continued growth and development, driven by an array of opportunities. By leveraging technology, embracing sustainability, adapting to regional nuances, supporting entrepreneurship, and maintaining trust and ethics, the industry can navigate the complexities of the Indian market successfully.

This research serves as a compass, offering insights and guidance to industry players, policymakers, and stakeholders seeking to harness the industry's potential for economic development. The ever-evolving landscape of the Indian direct selling industry offers a fertile ground for innovation, adaptation, and expansion. As the industry evolves in the coming years, its ability to capitalize on these emerging opportunities and growth areas will define its continued success in the Indian market.

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