

Contribution of 'E-commerce Applications' in augmenting the Professional Image of Auto OEMs and Ancillaries

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Abstract

The Indian Automobile industry is on a growth path since the start of this century. Access to information on technological advancements, having onscreen ready tools and programmes for comparing between available alternatives, empower the customer to be more demanding. Organisations are then compelled to first develop a reliable and trustworthy professional corporate image and then ensure it is sustained and reinforced. In a bid to ensure this, E-commerce applications have a cutting edge advantage over the others in the foray as penetration is more, the reach is wide and the transparency is obvious. The B2B players of the Automobile Industry, comprising the Original Equipment Manufacturers and their ancillary suppliers, also belong to the same genre where utilisation of E-commerce has grown in leaps and bounds. The research is focused to assess the importance of the perceived professionalism in the corporate image of the organisation, by both the Automobile manufacturers and the ancillaries, and the factors of E-commerce contributing to conceive this. The research is also envisaged to explore the connectives between few rationales of the E-commerce phenomenon and if there is any pattern between the individual's personal use of E-commerce and the level of expectations and prospects factored in assessing the level of desired professional standards. After the data analysis it is observed that E-commerce contributes very significantly in

creating and projecting the professional image of the organisation.

Keywords: B2B, E-commerce Applications, Professional image, Automobile industry, OEMs and Ancillary suppliers

1. Introduction:

1. The Indian Auto Industry

SIAM (Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers) has 48 manufacturers as registered members, manufacturing vehicles in the Two, Three and Four Wheelers segments. Over 780 numbers of suppliers are registered with ACMA (Automotive Components Manufacturers Association) as ancillary suppliers of components and aggregates. 2.9Mn vehicles were produced in 2017-18 (Source SIAM).

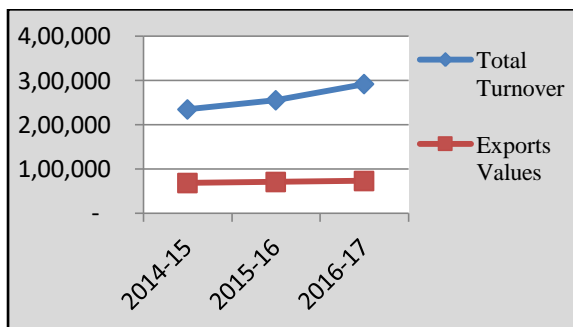
A vision document jointly formulated by the Government of India and the Indian Automotive Industry titled as 'The Automotive Mission Plan 2016-26 (AMP26)' speaks of a envisaged growth (in terms of value) of 3.5 to 4 times of the output in year 2015 (the year before the AMP26 was formulated). In numbers, it means that the cumulative growth has the potential to rise from 464,000 crores of INR to 1,616,000 at an assumed GDP growth of 5.80% (Source SIAM, web url:

<http://www.siamindia.com/uploads/filemanager/47AUTOMOTIVEMISSIONPLAN.pdf>)

Year wise Components turnover for previous three years as per ACMA is as per table 1

Table No. 1: Components Turnover

| Value of Turnover of Parts as per ACMA | | | |
|--|---------|---------|---------|
| | 2014-15 | 2015-16 | 2016-17 |
| Total Turnover | 234,869 | 255,635 | 292,184 |
| Exports Values | 68,522 | 70,916 | 73,128 |



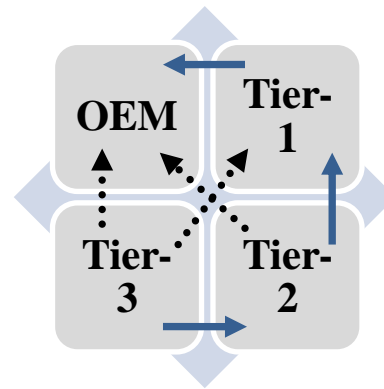
(Source SIAM – All Figures in INR Crores)

2. Auto OEMs and Ancillaries

The OEMs are producers of Two, Three and Four Wheeler vehicles in the passenger and cargo segments and also including the off road vehicles. The Ancillary suppliers are typically categorised as the Tier-1, Tier-2 and Tier-3 suppliers, based on their products and position in the supply chain. This categorisation is more or less figurative and in no way undermines the importance and vitality of any organisation in the supply chain, neither on technological front nor on business competence front. Together the OEMs and the Ancillary suppliers comprise the B2B space of the Auto Industry

A classical example of the supply chain is where Tier-3 supplier will be supplying to Tier-2 and Tier-2 supplies to Tier-1 and Tier-1 supplies to OEM. However the Tier-3 supplier, mostly a raw material supplier can be a simultaneous supplier to the Tier-1 an OEM directly and in that case the supplier's status for that particular case changes to Tier-1 level. The relationship is explained in Figure

Figure No. 1: OEMs & Ancillaries

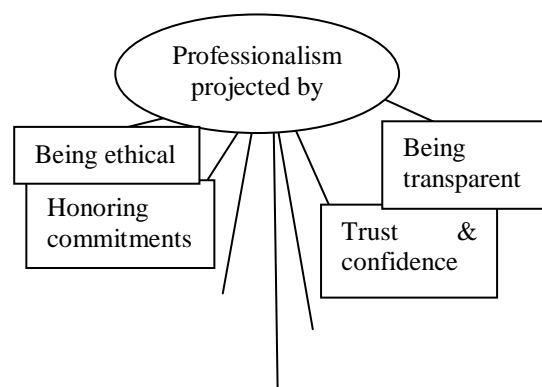


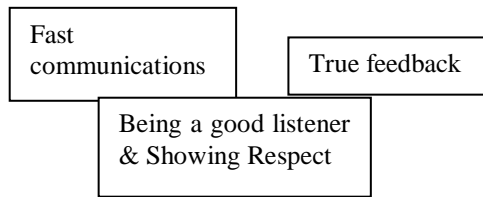
(Source – self interpreted and arranged by the researcher)

3. Professionalism in the Industry

Professionalism is a quality impalpable, invisible and tending to be more intangible. But then still phrases as someone 'is professional' or 'is not at all professional' are widely used about individuals and even about organisations and in nine out of ten cases these comments are subjective and outcome of some immediate preceding experience or some deep-rooted memories and even accompanied with comparisons. In general the perception of professionalism about any industry is derived out of comparing the set of actual responses received by the observer in comparison with the ideal response envisaged. The ideal response expected by different individuals for the same situation may vary on the basis of their own education, past experiences, maturity levels, degree of patience, intensity of needs and many more situational aspects. So perceptions about any organisation being more professional or less professional also may vary. Nevertheless every organisation needs to define some parameters for inculcating some practices to set the levels of displaying professionalism across all work areas and in particular with the external elements as customers, other organisations, government agencies etc. Some attributes that are vital for projecting organisation's image as professional organisation are displayed in the figure no.2

Figure No. 2: Professionalism Attributes





(Source – self interpreted and developed by the researcher)

4. Professionalism & E-commerce

E-commerce has emerged as a favourite tool of all players in the B2B space of the Auto Industry. Any product development from a simple screw to a complex engine assembly passes through the same process practically, though there can be an upsurge in stringency levels depending upon the intricacy of the product design. Crossing all stages of design, development, inspection, testing, certifying and then finally bulk production are at the core of any development.

There is a heavy dependence of all functions on one another within the organisation and also externally with the suppliers and the customers in general. Dependence can be on getting correct acknowledgement of communication, understanding of concern, readiness to contribute and resolve, giving correct and useful feedback, initiating action, giving updates at proper interval, etc. With multiple agencies involved in any concern, the situation aggravates further and needs excellent coordination and cooperation to achieve the desired outcome. Getting fruitful and timely responses displays the professionalism first in the individuals and later cumulatively at the organisational level. Nowadays these actions and responses are driven by the Web-based E-commerce tools like mail communications, interactive portals, access to browsing of data and information at finger tips, access to online problem solving and solutions techniques and applications.

E-commerce can enable user to be equipped with latest tools for handling situations professionally and quality of perceived professionalism can be displayed with proper intent.

2. Research objectives:

1. To ascertain if E-transacting preferences vary proportionately with individual's knowledge of E-commerce.
2. To compare the opinions of OEMs and Ancillaries about influence of personal usage of E-commerce on its professional application.

3. To evaluate if Organisations that regularly update their websites are viewed as more professional.

3. Research question:

How does E-commerce augment the professional image of Auto OEMs and Ancillaries ?

4. Literature review:

There has been a lot of independent research on business professionalism, E-commerce in B2B and overall functioning of the Automobile Industry. However there is little research on aspects binding all these together.

One study discusses about the research in understanding business-to-business marketing, known as the International/Industrial Marketing and Purchasing Group (IMP) perspective and contributes to the growing service quality research literature. This is done by offering an approach to measure the exchange and interaction dimensions of business-to-business professional service quality. It concludes by an IMP perspective on business-to-business relationships in developing a conceptualized model of business-to-business professional service quality. Proposing that the six dimensions of interactions, underlying the IMP works, are dimensions of business-to-business professional service quality, it concludes that the findings enhance the growing service quality research literature by offering an approach which explicitly recognizes and measures both, the exchange and interaction dimensions of business-to-business professional service quality (Woo, K., & Ennew, C. T., 2005).

Another study discusses about knowledge on customer loyalty in professional services in business-to-business markets. The results indicated that there is lot of influence of trust and social bonds on affective commitment, whereas adaptation and knowledge transfers influence the relational benefits. In comparison with both affective commitment and relational, actually emotional motivation seems to be much stronger than rational motivation. The empirical findings led to the theoretical and managerial implications on this. The objective was to examine how the three relationship components, as actor bonds, activity links and resource ties, influence the overall affective commitment and in turn the customer loyalty. The results fell in expected line about the effect of trust and social bonds on affective commitment. There was another finding that customers' affective commitment is positively dependent on trust as well as social bonds. Regarding the rational motivation for customer loyalty, the

conclusion was that customers appreciate if their provider is flexible in all phases of service delivery indicating professionalism is expected at all stages. (Čater, B., & Čater, T., 2009).

One study is concentrated on why family run businesses intend at some point of time to bring in professional managers or try to professionalize their existing management team. It enlists few reasons highlighting the values that such professional managers can bring in with their exposure and experience. The prime reason could be the lack of management talent within the family members, lack of skills as marketing, finance for that matter, Business survival needs to harness such skills and families in particular need not be so versatile to have these within their own group. Another reason for professionalizing can be attributed to the need for changing the norms and values of business operations. Business values of profitability and efficiency cannot be sacrificed for family relationships and ties. Professional managers are expected to be more consistent with organizational efficiency and achieving higher profits and in enforcing stricter controls. The third reason for change is to make an environment conducive to leadership succession. Training needs of family members can be entrusted to some external leadership for some time. The study also emphasizes that the issue of the professionalization extends beyond the set borders of the business and unique challenges to professionalize need careful handling (Dyer, W. G., 1989).

Based on few national and international studies in the field of business and professional services another study aims to reconsider the core question of provider to customer interface. It discusses about the relationships between internal and external business services, their nature and characteristics. It also analyses the interface as in terms of a moment of truth, a moment of trust and a moment of thrust It elaborates the top managements weigh offs of cost of professional consultancy against increase in productivity of the overall business and comments that even if costs are more but if the pay-offs are much higher than the costs then ultimately the business productivity is very high (Gadrey, J., & Gallouj, F., 1998).

In an extensive study conducted among business professionals engaging in global communication, another paper discusses about the communicative competence. It enlists few factors as rapidly changing work environments, advancements in globalization and technology needed for enhancing the knowledge of the elements that constitute the communicative competence in global dealings. The findings indicate that global communicative competence consists of multiple

layers as multicultural competence, the communicator's business know-how etc (Louhiala-Salminen, L., & Kankaanranta, A., 2011).

Commenting about need of new linkages between occupational and organizational domains and difficulty in developing them, another study speaks about the inter-connections of occupational principles and professional standards which may lead to academic and practical dualisms. Like either a return to professionalism is sought as desirable in order to protect occupational spaces, or there is a move beyond professionalism in order to restrict the autonomies. It argues that neither is satisfactory and there is a need for organized professionalism for changing circumstances. It factors some points as professionals develop new work preferences, professionals call for well-organized multi-professional acts to resolve difficult cases and professionals face new risks that have to be managed. It suggests that professionals must take organizing and managing more seriously for developing and increasing organizational capacities. It observes that when people focus on professional services, their analysis, observations and statements are often confined to either professional or organizational features leading to their conclusions which may have a binary, black-and-white character. It also discusses in detail about other changes as occupational change, organizational change focusing on professional working or managerial techniques and at time go to advocate beyond professionalism. (Noordegraaf, M., 2011)

Resembling to the Auto Industry one study discusses the challenges faced by companies where new product development plays an important strategic role wherein it calls for managers to necessarily contend with a portfolio of projects ranging from high technology, truly new innovations to relatively simple improvements and adaptations. Studies indicate that such companies need to adjust their New Product Development (NPD) accordingly. The study focuses on new business-to-business service projects in a bid to gain some insights about the influence of product innovativeness on service success and failure. Results arrived at, indicate that few "global" success factors appear to govern the outcome of new service ventures. These include: meeting customer/needs in best possible manner, involving experts from front line to create values in the new service and educating the customers to appreciate its distinctiveness and benefits (Brentani, U., 2001).

It was investigated in yet another detailed study on the logistics of electronic business constituted by five distinct but vital elements as the creation of a e-logistics vision, interviews of e-business and logistics experts, identification of the

key Research and Development (R&D) topics, a panel workshop to analyse the findings and formulation of a research agenda for future research on e-business logistics that integrated supply network structure with clear visibility and usage of real-time data transfer as an area of great importance (Auramo, J., Aminoff, A., & Punakivi, M., 2002).

Studying customer relationships in professional services the focus was directed towards learning and personnel development services provided to the customer organisations in another study. It included different kinds of courses and personnel development plans provided to the customer organisation and for its personnel. Particularly in business-to-business arena, such services are very complex in nature and need special attention from marketers. The study was intended to propose a framework for managing such professional service relationships assuming that they create value for both the parties and helps the marketer to find also the customer needs, which at times the customer may not even be aware of (Hirvonen, P., & Helander, N., 2001).

Exploring how a professional service firm managed the paradoxical balance between creativity and productivity, another study focused on formulating a conceptual framework to integrate the concepts of creativity and productivity. It observed that the core basics of the service firm are equally applicable to any such competitive environment that faces a challenge to choose between creativity which is most important for growing business and productivity which is equally important for the sustenance of the business (Chang, L., & Birkett, B., 2004).

Websites as 'Industry Buying' (url : <http://www.industrybuying.com/>) carrying a tagline of '1Nation1Market1Platform' is a website which facilitates buying and selling of Industrial raw machine parts, components, testing tools , equipments, automotive maintenance and accessories parts and many more categories of similar parts needed for the Industrial applications. Right from browsing to comparison and selection parts, getting quotes, ordering, paying and tracking orders, everything can be done conveniently on this user-friendly site. Another 'Website Power2sme' (url: <https://www.power2sme.com/>) allows the users to buy and sell Raw material as steel, polymer, chemical material etc on their online platform. Sites like these boost the professionalism in the system and further strengthen the work environment

5. Research methodology

The research is directed towards few specific aspects of the Automobile Industry. It discusses about few independent variables (as given in Table No. 2) that contribute to improve the professional image of the organisations in the B2B space of the Automobile Industry.

The Primary data was collected by administering a survey questionnaire to respondents from the Auto OEMs and the Ancillary suppliers. The secondary data was obtained from SIAM and ACMA websites

- (1) <http://www.siamindia.com/> ,
- (2) <https://www.acma.in>).

The survey was designed to examine:

1. The effect of awareness and knowledge about E-commerce on the preferences of E-transacting.
2. Whether level of personal usage of E-commerce influences its application on professional basis.
3. How the sellers and buyers form opinion about the professionalism of any organisation in the B2B space of the Auto industry.

The questionnaire was designed to:

1. Gauge opinions from different levels in the organisational hierarchy
2. Explicitly ask the respondents about their personal and professional usage of E-commerce.
3. Inquire opinions of respondents of corresponding levels from different work groups.

Based on the objectives, the following Hypotheses were initiated.

H1: Individual's E-transacting preferences vary with the levels of knowledge about E-commerce.

H2: OEMs and Suppliers correspondingly agree that level of personal usage of E-commerce, influences their application in professional life.

H3: Organisations that regularly update their websites are perceived as more professional organisations

A) Research Design and Contributing Variables:

The Research Design for this study is steered towards considering the tangible and intangible effects of E-commerce in building up the corporate image of the organisations.

Few important factors that contribute to enhance this are the focused variables in this study.

Table No. 2: Type of Variables

| Type | Variable | Reasoning |
|-----------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Independent (1) | Knowledge of E-commerce | It is individual's prowess |
| Independent (2) | Preferences of E-Transacting | It is person centric quality |
| Independent (3) | Adopting to E-commerce | It is the individual's trait |
| Dependent (1) | Increase in Professionalism | It is resultant of few factors |

B) Sample Size

The questionnaire was administered on a batch of 200 respondents, 100 from the OEMs and 100 from the Ancillary suppliers in the Automotive clusters in Western and Southern India. The respondents from the Ancillaries comprised of one micro, two small and four medium ancillaries based on the Capital /Turnover classification as per the MSME (Micro, small and Medium Enterprises).

A self-developed Likert scale is used for scaling the responses in the survey and respondents were asked to rate their opinions on a five point agreement scale. For example as for a question on individual's opinions to assess if their personal use of E-commerce influences their pattern of its professional application the scale levels used are: 'Yes, very much', 'Yes, partially', and lastly to 'Not at all'

C) Data Analysis & Results - Statistical Tools Used

a) **Covariance Analysis:** Covariance measures the effect of changes in one variable on the other and whether and how they are related to each other. It is a direct measure of linear relationship between two variables, wherein a positive covariance indicates that the variables change positively together. It means that as first variable

X increases, the other variable Y increases proportionately.

In this study one of the variable (X) is the Knowledge of E-commerce and the other variable is the Preferences in E-Transacting (Y). Test was conducted to examine whether awareness and knowhow of E-commerce influences the order of preferences of E-transacting. The test was conducted on both the OEMs and the Ancillary suppliers

Table No. 3: Covariance Statistics

OEM Respondents (N100) Covariance

| | <i>Knowledge of E-commerce</i> | <i>Preference of E-Transacting</i> |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Knowledge of E-commerce | 3.1056 | |
| Preferences of E-Transacting | 2.0112 | 1.5324 |

Ancillary Respondents (N100) Covariance

| | <i>Knowledge of E-commerce</i> | <i>Preference of E-Transacting</i> |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Knowledge of E-commerce | 2.5076 | |
| Preferences of E-Transacting | 1.7852 | 1.4004 |

Test Results: Results derived from the tests indicate that increase in knowledge of E-commerce positively changes the preferred ways of E-transacting. (Details are discussed in the Results & Analysis section.)

b) **T-Test – Two samples for with unequal variance :** The T-test is used to measure the value of f of the t-output along with the preset alpha. The Single positive (Alternative) Hypothesis is accepted when the derived 'p value' is lesser than the 'pre-set alpha' level.

In this study, the resemblance in the pattern of adoption of E-commerce for professional applications, by both, the OEMs and the Ancillaries is analysed. A hypothesized mean difference of 0.10 is assumed as there will always be a possibility of differences in the opinions of the OEMs and the Ancillaries

Table No. 4: T-Test Statistics

| t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances | | |
|--|---|--|
| | <i>oems - Professional adoption of E-commerce</i> | <i>anc - Professional adoption of E-commerce</i> |
| Mean | 1.45 | 1.57 |
| Variance | 0.4318181 | 0.34858585 |
| Observations | 100 | 100 |
| Hypothesized Mean Difference | 0.1 | |
| Df | 196 | |
| t Stat | -2.4903 | |
| P(T<=t) one-tail | 0.0067963 | |
| t Critical one-tail | 1.6526650 | |
| P(T<=t) two-tail | 0.0135925 | |
| t Critical two-tail | 1.9721411 | |
| Preset Alpha | 0.05 | |

Test Results The singular affirmative hypothesis that there is a resemblance or similarity in the pattern of adoption of E-commerce for professional applications by the Auto OEMs and Ancillary suppliers is very much validated. (Details are discussed in the Results & Analysis section.)

c) Analysis of perception about ‘Professional Image of Organisation’.

This is derived from screening the re-arranged responses from OEMs and Ancillary suppliers in a ascending order to understand their viewpoints on the professionalism of organisations. Details in tabulated form are converted to percentages.

Table No. 5: Opinion Classification in Percentages

| OEMs opinions – in agreeing that the organisations which regularly update their Web-sites are perceived as more professional | | | | |
|---|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
| 38% | 52% | 8% | 2% | 0% |

| Ancillary’s opinions - in agreeing that the organisations which regularly update their Web-sites are perceived as more professional | | | | |
|--|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
| 46% | 48% | 6% | 0% | 0% |

Inference: In both cases of OEMs and ancillary suppliers the opinions indicate that companies updating their Web-sites on a regular basis are perceived as more professional organisations (Details are discussed in the Results & Findings section.)

6. Results & Analysis:

1. Analysis of Hypothesis 1 :

The covariance analysis done in this study is intended towards finding the relationship between the individual’s knowledge of E-commerce and its impact on the individual’s choice of setting the preferences for E-transacting. Results obtained show that in both the cases of OEMs and Ancillary suppliers, there is a definite positive linear relationship between these two factors. The covariance of 2.0112 in OEMs and 1.7852 in Ancillary suppliers indicates that with increase in awareness and knowledge of E-commerce, there is significant increase in tending towards using more functions of E-commerce in a preferred order. Since both resultants are positive, it implies a positive relationship between the variables. This validates the Hypothesis 1

2. Analysis of Hypothesis 2

The T-test conducted is for two samples for unequal variances with an assumed hypothesized mean difference value. The test was conducted to assess the resemblance in opinions about the pattern of adoption of E-commerce for professional applications, by both, the OEMs and the Ancillaries. The hypothesized mean difference assumed here is assumed expecting that there can be some variation in the opinions of the OEMs and the Ancillaries for many reasons of different working environments and cultures. The results derived from the tests indicate that P value (0.0067) is far less than the pre-set Alpha (0.05), meaning the null hypothesis that there is no resemblance in patterns of adoptions stands rejected and the single affirmative hypothesis that there is resemblance in opinions about the pattern of adoption of E-commerce for professional applications, by both, the OEMs and the Ancillaries proves good. This validates the Hypothesis 2

3. Analysis of Hypothesis 3

Any user browsing the Web sites of any organisation expects it to show the latest and updated data and information. OEMs and Ancillary respondents were asked on similar line to offer their comment, as whether they agree that organisations updating their web sites regularly are deemed to be more professional by the visitor (to the website). The findings are that 90% respondents from OEMs agree that if they see the updated information on the website, their first opinion becomes that the company is professional, 8 % preferred to be neutral and only 2% disagreed. Total 94% respondents from Ancillary suppliers comment that if they see the updated information on the website, their first opinion becomes that the company is professional and 6 % preferred to be neutral. This indicates that throughout the B2B space of the OEMs and the Ancillaries, one factor of adjudging the professionalism of any organisation is based on the information visible on their websites This validates the Hypothesis 3.

7. Conclusion:

E-commerce has opened doors to all individuals to explore new experiences and use the E-platform to make life simple and uncomplicated. With penetration of the Web based applications for virtually many important necessities of rural and urban living where time has been as precious as money, it is inevitable that the individuals may crave to seek a trade off between the two. Banking and Bills payments, travel and ticket bookings, are an equally integral part of life and business for the individuals in the Automobile Industry. There is hardly any hair line difference of these needs about their nature as personal or professional, still the initiation of any E-transacting starts with the basic applications as small bill payments and with knowledge and confidence of handling it extends to bigger and bigger spheres. This knowledge leads to setting the preferences of E-transacting based on individuals liking and comfort levels and ultimately the utility value of these types of transactions culminate its extension to the professional usage in wider context. Also this professional usage is more sharpened with increase in knowledge levels and with increase in accessibility. The individual then consciously or unconsciously starts making own opinions about different websites by comparing them on some notional parameters. One such parameter examined in the B2B space of the Auto Industry was to know the opinions of the individuals about their views on the professionalism of the OEMs and

Ancillaries based on their consistency to keep their websites updated. As more than 90% respondents from the OEMs and Ancillaries have agreed that updated websites are the first criterion of the viewer about the levels of professional standards of the Organisation, it is imperative for all the players in the B2B field to consider this point seriously.

8. Limitations :

1. There is a scope to conduct this study on a bigger population and on Pan India basis.
2. Responses from OEM's and Ancillaries' can vary more than the hypothesized mean difference at times. This can be due to differences in their levels of professional exposures and knowledge by virtue of their working environment.
3. OEMs and Ancillaries have their own charter of code of conduct and so there is a difficulty in reaching to all of them.
4. Responses from individuals may vary based on many perceptions and factors Conversion of these to measurable values is difficult.

9. Managerial Implications:

This research is definitely significant for all professionals in the Auto Industry. However as it throws light on perceived professionalism of the organisations, it also is equally important to all other segments and industries operating on E-platforms. Organisations hosting and selling products exclusively through web based applications also can take the findings of this study seriously as there can be a horizontal deployment of all these across the Industry segments. The inter-dependence of personal and professional use of E-commerce can be interesting to the Internet service providers and the related industry as the colossal consumer base shifting the preferences needs to be studied for being future ready.

10. Further research:

This study can be extended to deeply understand more intricate preferences including the frequency of repetitive type of transactions and analysing any shift in their pattern. The study can be made more comprehensive by bringing more parameters of the E-working under one ambit to

assess the expectations of professional standards by the individuals. This study can also be conducted amongst the Dealer and Distributor network of the Automotive Industry as even business within them and by them with the OEMs and the Suppliers falls into the B2B category.

Appendix:

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