

## **Growing Importance of Localisation in E-Commerce Industry**

As one of the largest economies, India is a land of opportunities for businesses to thrive and capture the attention of a large amount of audience. Driven by the rising internet, digital penetration and equally fast-growing economy, India's e-commerce industry is one of the fastest growing markets in the Indian economy.

Despite the growing number of internet users, the majority of users are non-English speakers and consume more of the local language content. According to a Google KPMG report, the non-English internet user base in India has already surpassed English speakers base and will constitute over 70% of the total internet user base by 2021. This saturation of English speaker base has made it a necessity for businesses to expand with a more localised approach.

### **Localised platforms and services**

When it comes to e-commerce industry, it can be argued that languages play an increasingly important role in amplifying their business potential. According to a study by KPMG India and Google, India's local language user base is rapidly increasing and reached the compound annual growth rate of 41% between 2011 and 2016 to 234 million users. In addition to this, it was noted that India's e-commerce market size, estimated to be over \$20 billion, is growing at 25-26% in metro areas and at about 32% in non-metro regions. Thus, expansion into regional languages become essential to reach out to this huge market belonging to tier 2 and 3 cities as well as a significant population even in Tier 1 market such as home-makers, older generations, and so on.

The localised content allows them to explore the platform with a greater level of comfort, thus converting into more purchases. It also allows businesses to approach the tier-2 markets with greater ease resulting in better sales.

Content customisation into Indic languages has captured the attention of various businesses, not limiting to the e-commerce industry. Big tech brands such as Google, Microsoft, Facebook, and Amazon have already taken up Indic languages to empower their outreach. Amazon Prime, is now available in Tamil, Hindi, and Telugu apart from English. Amazon has also successfully launched Amazon Hindi to cater to the non-English user base and is simultaneously working to support Indian languages to be added over time.

Snapdeal too had launched a mobile website in Hindi and Telugu in 2015 and conducted pilot runs for 12 regional languages, but the plan was shelved after six months due to lack of interest.

Another e-commerce giant, Flipkart is also working on catering to non-English speaker base with the use of specialised speech technology in order to reach out to the next 100-200 million customers who are first-time Internet users and speak regional, Indian languages. This technology will be used in areas such as transactions, payments, customer support, interaction with sellers on its marketplace and in its logistics arm, eKart.

It is not just the industry giants, but other companies including Helion Ventures-backed Wooplr and Beenext-backed Elanic are also working on launching platforms in vernacular languages including Hindi, Telugu and Tamil, where their sellers and buyers can engage better.

While the businesses have started exploring Indic languages, the growth for the same in e-commerce has been slow. The developments such as chatbots and voice inputs, available with regional languages would have the ability to help the users search for products they're looking for just by speaking to their devices. The adaption of Indic languages should also be explored to enhance user engagement through SMS notifications, emails, customer services, etc.

### **Challenges**

While the opportunities are many, there are certain challenges that have the power to make the whole process of adaptation, translation and creation of localised content difficult. Lack of awareness about guidelines and norms for proper usage of Indic texts is one of the primary challenges which results in subsequent lack of proper standardisation in terms of universal scripts, fonts or input methods.

The industry players and experts believe that re-cataloging of products in vernacular languages is a massive challenge and a major cost for established ecommerce companies. Even Paytm Mall's platform, whose user interface is available in several vernacular languages, has a lot of its product listings in English. According to the KPMG-Google study, around 44% of Indian language users find it difficult to comprehend product descriptions and customer reviews on ecommerce platforms. The economics for an ecommerce company, venturing into the space of Indic languages is stated to be tough as opposed to a social media platform, which can scale at a lower cost unlike an e-commerce platform.

Inadequate hardware and software support for Indic languages online have also restricted the growth of the sector. While content creation in Indic languages has been

held back owing to the lack of technological support, challenges around integrating Indic languages into payment gateways have limited online commerce.

### **Conclusion**

There is a rapid increase in demand for Indian language based content due to the growing user base of 500 million Indian by 2021 who prefer local language content more than English. Therefore, the localization process for an e-commerce website or app should be tailored to the requirements and preferences of a user base who would potentially use it on a regular basis. By providing them content in regional languages, it would allow the existing users to make the best use of these platforms but also build an immersive end-to-end language experience for them.

**--Thank you--**

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