

Beyond Networking:
Social Commerce as a Driver of
Digital Payments

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Asia Report

Foreword

PayPal is a pioneer of digital payments – creating faster, easier and more secure ways for consumers and merchants to transact. It started when we first helped bring payment platforms online in the 1990s, gained momentum in the 2000s with millions of Internet users buying and selling on e-commerce enabled websites, and has continued over the last few years with the rise of mobile commerce.

The rise of the new economy is giving way to the next big shift in commerce – social commerce – which is not only the buying and selling of goods and services on a social platform, but infusing social elements into the commercial experience.

Strangers to friends, friends to customers. What once used to be a platform to connect with friends and family across the globe has now transformed into a digital marketplace with businesses permeating the platform, selling to customers where they already are rather than trying to entice them to an alternative site. Businesses now have access to an expanded customer base of which they can establish deeper and more meaningful customer relationships.

Social commerce comprises of an expansive list of options including group buying, social shopping, mobile apps, retailers adding social features, and shopping integrated into social media. The concept draws upon the wider trend of contextual commerce, where businesses partner to offer intuitive and connected commerce experiences. Unlike shopping offline, social commerce allows peer recommendations and reviews to take centre stage in purchasing decisions.

The growing ease of conducting commerce is opening up a range of economic opportunities for every member of the community, impacting consumers' and merchants' financial lives.

We want to create a world where anyone and everyone has the ability to sell products or services, monetise their hobby or talent, and reach out to communities beyond their own. Digital payments is and will gradually take on a bigger role as a facilitator of this new world of commerce. With a device and an Internet connection in hand, we want to empower such individuals with the means to improve their financial health.

Unlike decades or even years before, the rise of social commerce and payment innovation allows consumers and merchants to effortlessly seize business opportunities. The impact this presents is limitless and we have only just begun.

Rohan Mahadevan
Chief Executive Officer, PayPal Pte Ltd
Senior Vice President, APAC, PayPal Inc

About the study

PayPal commissioned Singapore-based independent research agency, Blackbox Research, to assess attitudes towards new payment methods and alternative online commerce platforms, to garner insights into consumer and merchant behaviour. In doing so, PayPal hopes to identify opportunities and seek solutions that will better improve the financial health and economic opportunities of both consumers and merchants.

The survey was conducted with 4,000 consumers in seven markets within the Asia region (China, India, Hong Kong, Singapore, Thailand, Philippines and Indonesia).

As new payment technologies offer enterprises (especially small and medium-sized businesses) the potential to transform their operations with new opportunities and solutions at scale, PayPal also spoke to 1,400 merchants across this region. The survey was predominantly distributed online as PayPal seeks to understand how a typical consumer and merchant in Asia with online access thinks about digital payments and e-commerce/social commerce. For a more detailed demographic profile, please refer to the Appendix at the end of the report.

Scope/Methodology

4,000
consumers













Seven markets:
China, India, Hong Kong,
Singapore, Thailand,
Philippines, Indonesia

1,400
merchants

Especially small
and medium-sized
enterprises

Across the region, consumers and merchants were familiar with and adopted a wide range of payment methods. For the purposes of analysis, PayPal has classified the payment methods into three categories: Cash, Traditional Payment Methods and New Payment Methods. Traditional payment methods include credit cards, debit cards and cheques and new payment methods include mobile-enabled payment methods and digital currency.

Classification of payment methods

Cash	Traditional Payment Methods		New Payment Methods	
 Cash	 Physical Prepaid card	 Physical Credit card	 E-wallets/ mobile wallets	 Digital currency
	 Bank transfer/ Internet banking	 Cheque/ Demand draft	 Contactless payment via mobiles	 In-app payment systems
	 Over the counter services at store	 Physical Debit card	 Contactless payment via cards	

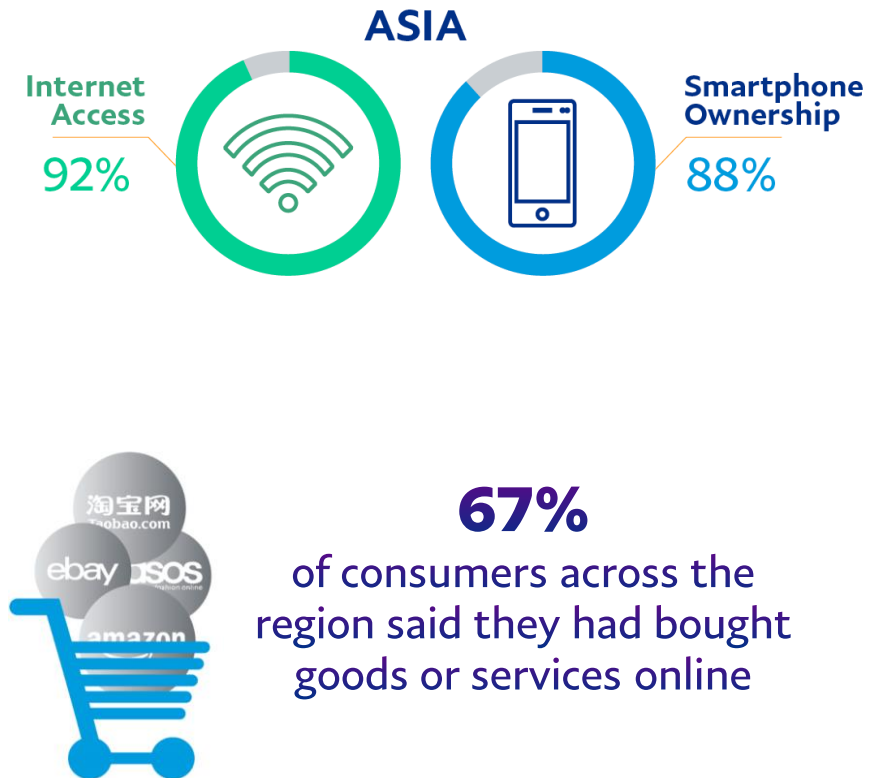
Digital connectivity driving commerce

With nationwide initiatives in the region such as Singapore's *Smart Nation*, Hong Kong's *Smart City*, India's *Digital India* and Indonesia's *Go Digital Vision 2020*, we are seeing a systematic shift towards digital economies in Asia. This is precipitated by growing smartphone ownership and Internet penetration rates that allow the urban population to swiftly enter the new era. For rural communities, governments in the region are investing resources to build infrastructure and implement cost-effective initiatives to more rapidly bring them into the burgeoning digital age.

By 2018, it is expected that the number of social media users in Asia will surpass one billion¹, which is almost double the number of users in 2012. As seen from the survey results, smartphone ownership (88%) and Internet access (92%) across the region is high, so it comes as no surprise that the number of social media users will continue to increase exponentially as social networking sites and messaging platforms dominate the online landscape with expanded offerings.

As part of this digital shift, commerce has also moved online from traditional brick-and-mortar storefronts. The PayPal survey found that two-thirds of consumer respondents in Asia have bought goods and services online. In recent years, online commerce (or “e-commerce”) has evolved to include mobile commerce and social commerce as consumers and merchants ride on ever-evolving trends and discover new marketplaces.

In the region, recent research by Google and investment firm Temasek Holdings² predicts that e-commerce sales will grow at a 32% CAGR from \$5.5 billion in 2015 to \$88 billion in 2025. This promise of growth brings about increased economic opportunities for entrepreneurial individuals as they tap into the growing market.



¹ Source: [Statista: Number of social network users in Asia Pacific from 2012 to 2018 \(in millions\)](#)

² Source: [e-economy SEA by Google and Temasek](#), May 2016

Merchants seeing social media as a viable business platform

Among the merchants surveyed, 80% in the region said that they sell through social media platforms/messengers with the majority in Thailand (95%) and the Philippines (87%).

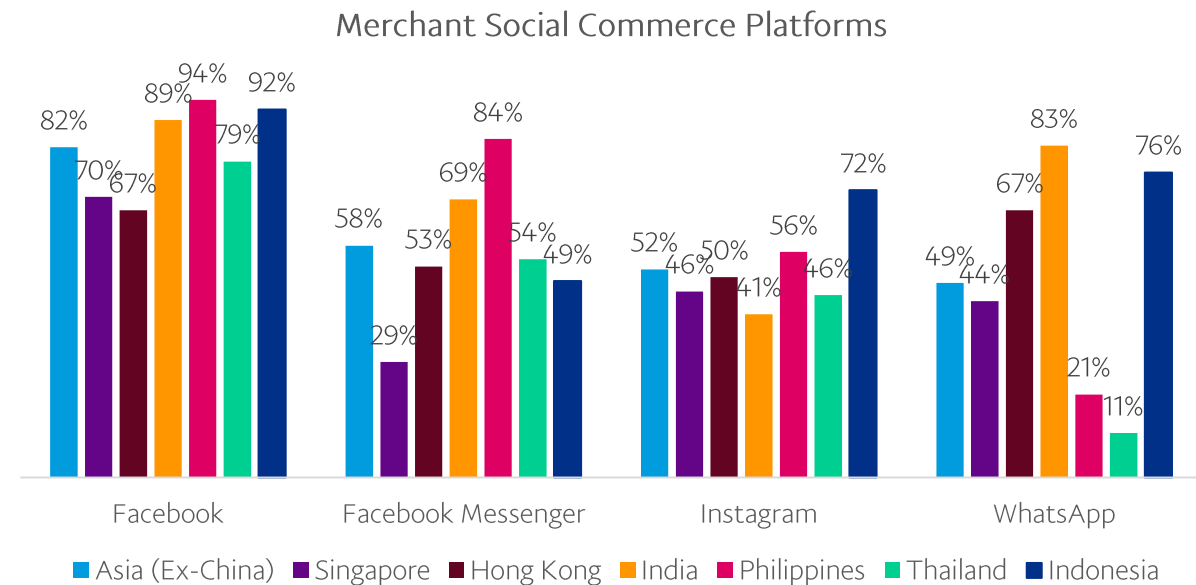
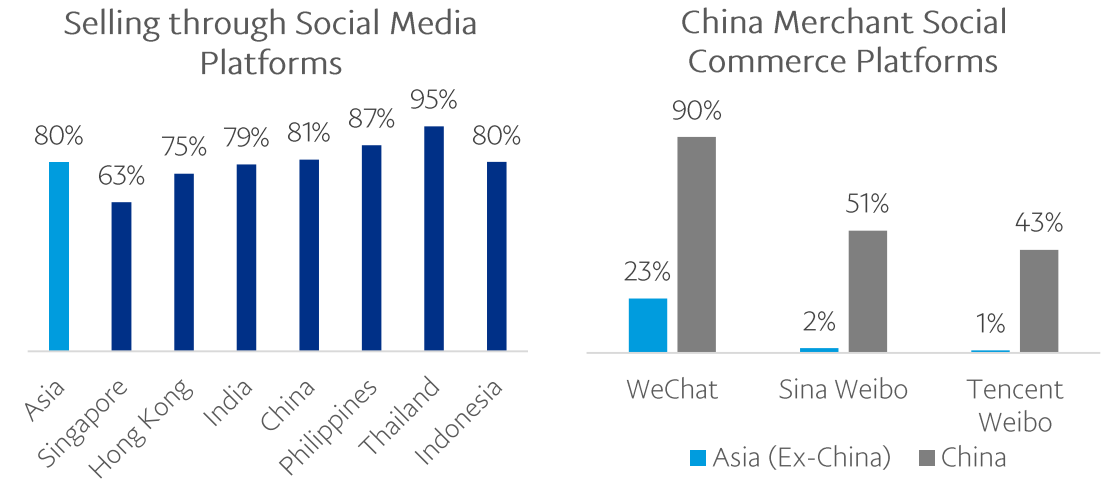
Across the region, with the exception of China, where many international social media platforms are not available, Facebook emerged as the top platform (82%) for merchants to sell their goods and services. This is especially so in India (89%), Indonesia (92%) and the Philippines (94%), superseding the region's average. Facebook Messenger was the next most popular platform (58%) in Asia with a larger majority in the Philippines (84%) using this method. Other fairly newer platforms such as Instagram (52%) and WhatsApp (49%), also owned by Facebook, seem to be catching up with the world's most popular platform.

At the same time, homegrown social media platforms are also taking shape in China. WeChat (90%), Sina Weibo (51%) and Tencent Weibo (43%) remain the top social commerce platforms in the country. A spillover effect for some of these platforms can be seen as Hong Kong catches on with WeChat (45%) being one of the most used platforms for social commerce in the city.

Interestingly, India is showing greater social media savviness with its ability to use a wide array of social networking platforms for commerce to reach potential customers. Among all the markets surveyed, India emerged top in terms of their usage of WhatsApp (83%), Twitter (61%), YouTube (64%), Google+ (50%), Skype (53%) and LinkedIn (33%) for the selling of goods and services.

Aside from social media sites from the West and homegrown platforms, we are also seeing more cross-border influence within Asia, specifically from Japan to Indonesia (50%) and Thailand (74%) with a large percentage of users on LINE.

It is clear that merchants are gradually seeing social media as a viable business platform and are open to exploring various ways and social networking sites to bring their business to the consumer. With increased economic opportunities, we can expect improved financial health for these individuals.



Social commerce enabling the growth of digital payments

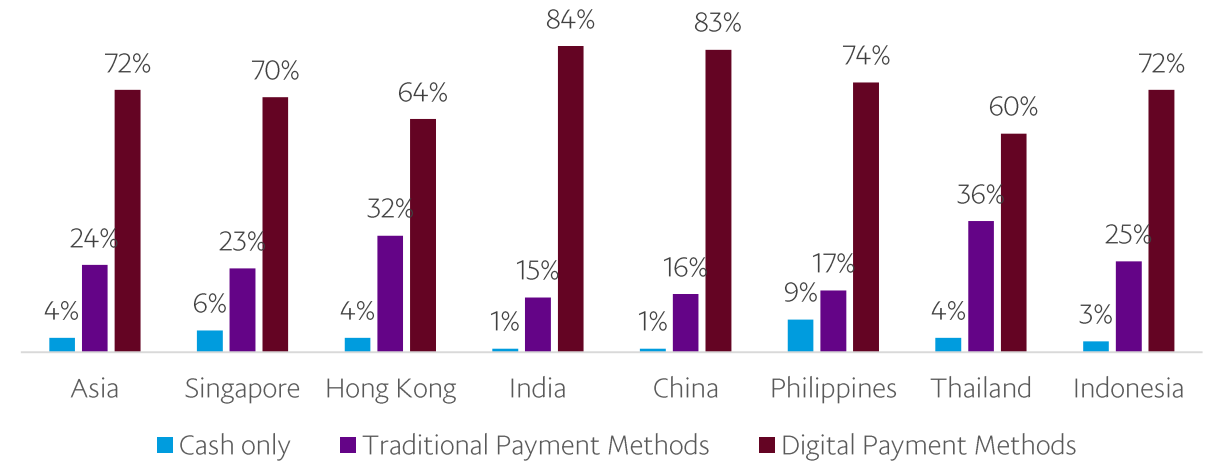
As social commerce continues to grow, there is going to be an even greater demand for more seamless and efficient payment experiences. Buying and selling on social media is part of the wider trend of “contextual commerce”, which allows customers’ purchase opportunities at the point of discovery online, such as buying an outfit directly from a photo album on Facebook.

Among the 80% of merchants surveyed who are selling through social media platforms/messengers, a whopping 72% are currently accepting payments from customers via digital payments, with e-Wallets/mobile wallets being the most popular. This is more prevalent in India and China where 84% and 83% respectively use new payment methods for social commerce transactions.

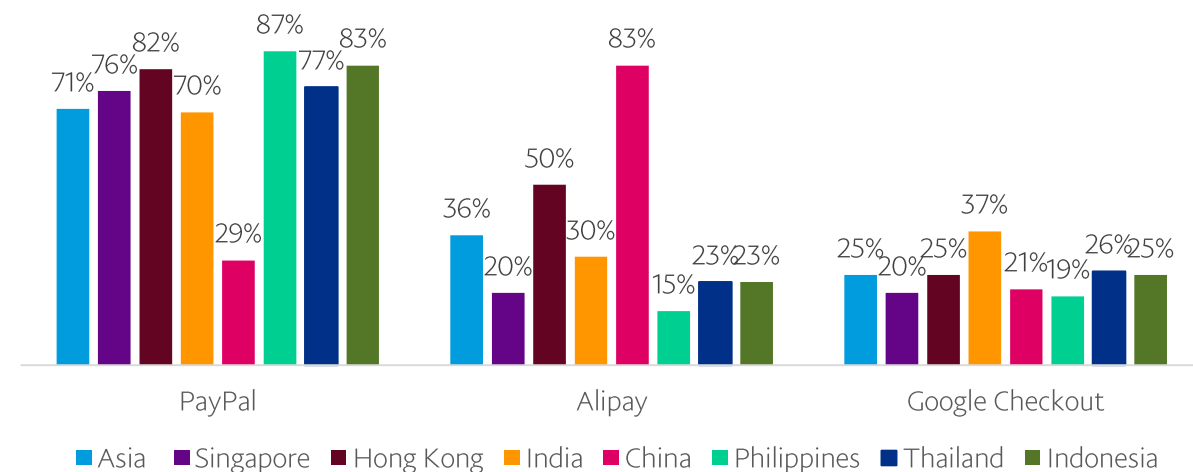
Within the e-Wallets/mobile wallets segment, PayPal (71%) emerged as the most used payment platform in the region by merchants on social media, especially in the Philippines (87%), Indonesia (83%) and Hong Kong (82%). Homegrown platforms are also surfacing as a preferred mode of payment in the Philippines with GCash (54%) and PayMaya (39%) as well as in Singapore with DBSPayLah! (42%) and eNets (32%).

The very nature of social commerce inherently encourages greater digital payment adoption. The next question is – how can we create better payment experiences that benefit both merchants and consumers?

Merchant Payment Acceptance on Social Media



Top 3 E-Wallet/Mobile Wallet Platforms for Merchants on Social Media



Creating a seamless social commerce payment experience

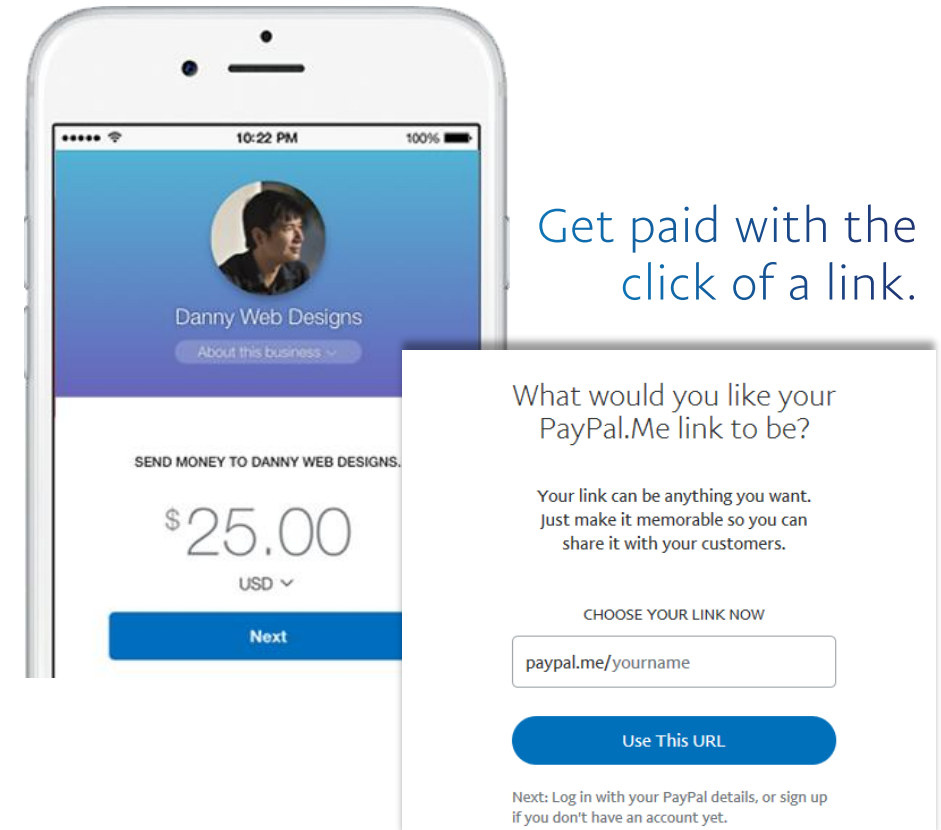
Industry players need to look at ways of creating frictionless social commerce transactions. Having too many steps and platforms to buy a product or service risks losing customers during the purchasing cycle. For social commerce, having a ready pool of customers is half the battle and digital payment providers need to consider ways of shortening the cycle between engagement and purchase to generate more sales.

Digital payment providers should look at developing agile payment solutions that can adapt to the alternative e-commerce platforms (i.e. m-commerce and social commerce) that are emerging. PayPal, for example, has demonstrated its support of social commerce with PayPal.Me for Business, a personalised link that allows for a quick and easy, seamless transaction.

PayPal.Me for Business, which is available in China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam, is a simple, fast, and personal way for freelancers, casual and social sellers, and small businesses to request money from anyone across the globe and get paid with the click of a link. The personalised unique link is instant and works on any devices – text message, email, instant messenger, social media post, blog, or on the web.

In response to the user habits in the Chinese market, PayPal launched the Merchant WeChat Account in September 2017, which allows Chinese merchants to check their PayPal account balance and transaction details on PayPal's official WeChat account's menu, enabling merchants to conveniently monitor their account status at all times.

With more user-friendly, seamless and efficient transaction experiences, we can expect a further boost to online commerce. This presents boundless economic opportunities for consumers and merchants alike that would ultimately improve their financial health.



Social commerce expected to rise

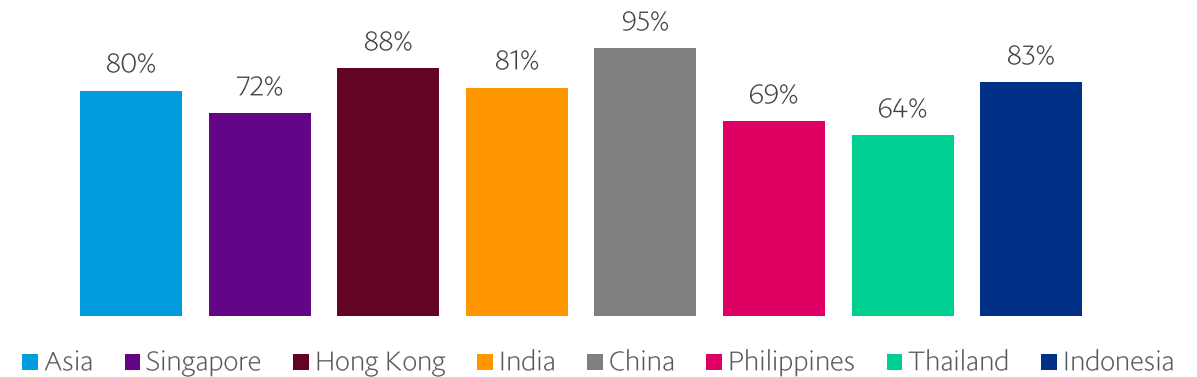
While improved payment experiences is one way industry players can support merchants, we also wanted to understand the reasons behind merchants turning to social media for business and the future potential of social commerce.

Sixty-three per cent of merchant respondents in the region who engage in social commerce said that it is easy to reach a wider group of customers. Fifty-seven per cent said that it is easier to set up their business through social media while 48% liked the idea of leveraging their network of friends and relatives. Similar sentiments were shared across the board by the seven markets.

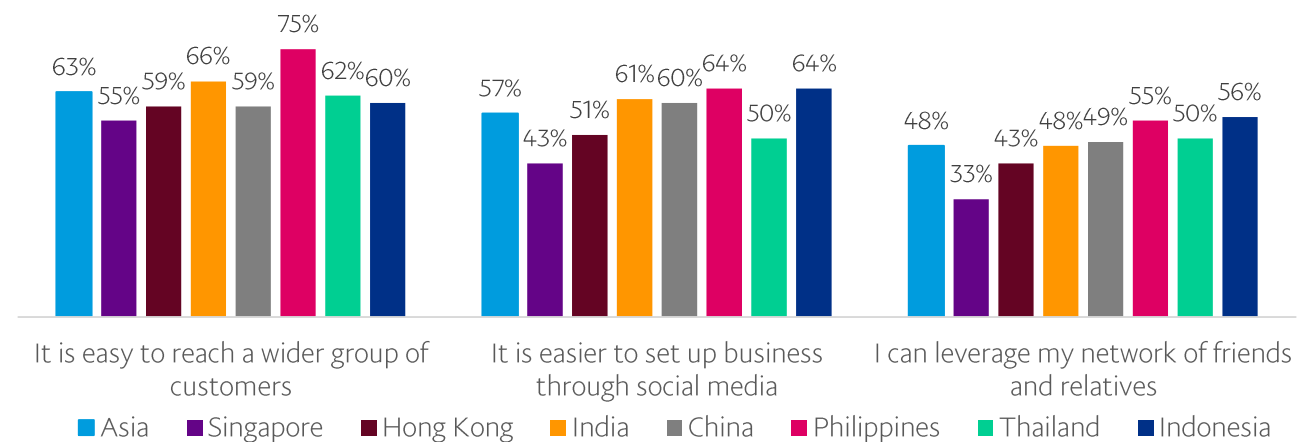
Among the small percentage (11%) of merchants who have yet to incorporate social media into their business model, 80% said that they are very likely or somewhat likely to sell through social media/messenger platforms in the future.

It is clear that low overheads and a large pool of ready customers is very attractive for merchants and we will quite likely see increased usage of social media for commerce in years to come. Along with this lies the potential for financially healthier individuals, with an astounding 92% of current social sellers noting that the availability of social commerce is playing a critical role in the growth of their business. Correspondingly, 93% said that it has allowed them to reach bigger markets and 92% said that social commerce has significantly improved their financial condition.

Potential of Adoption amongst Current Non-Users



Reasons for Selling on Social Media



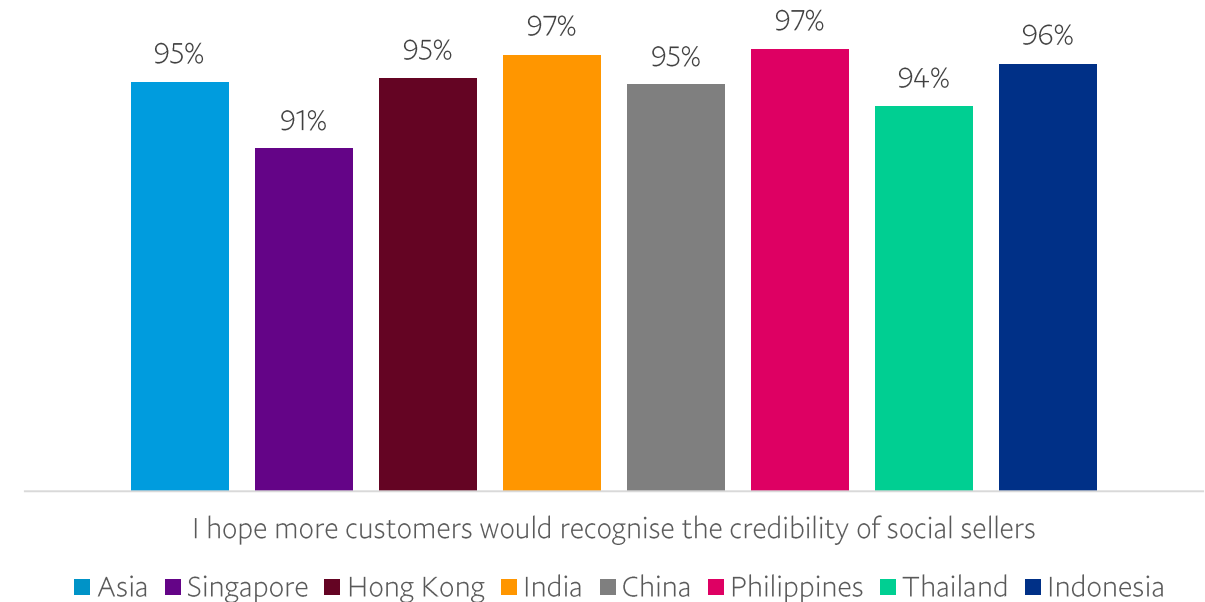
Social commerce as a legitimate business model

Conventionally, consumers are more accustomed to shopping at physical stores where they are able to experience a product first-hand. With the rise of online stores in recent years, 67% of consumer respondents in the region have already made a purchase online. As such, we are slowly seeing a shift of consumers valuing convenience over product experience, demonstrating the trust these platforms and businesses are gaining from customers.

However, with social commerce being a relatively nascent retail channel, there is still a level of scepticism among the general population. In Asia, the survey found that 95% of merchant respondents hoped more customers would recognise the credibility of social sellers. While this includes the trust consumers have in their merchants to deliver what they paid for, there is also a need for merchants or potential merchants to recognise social selling as a legitimate business model to sell their goods and services to consumers.

It is only with greater awareness and education of its benefits that we can legitimise this as a viable full-time or part-time profession. A key objective of this is to attract merchants to expand their retail strategy to include social commerce and separately, draw regular social media users to begin selling goods or services through their accounts. This would allow merchants to easily enjoy real financial benefits and see improvements to their financial health.

Merchants' Views on Social Commerce



Social commerce empowering consumers

In addition to established businesses, the ease of social commerce is giving everyday people the ability to take on the role of merchants by casually selling products and services. Besides being able to earn additional income that improves their financial well-being, social commerce has empowered individuals to embark on their entrepreneurial journey, without the usual risks that are associated with traditional retail models. Thirty per cent of consumer respondents with Internet access have already began transacting on social media.

While the top social media platforms for consumers selling are largely similar to that of merchants, we do see consumers venturing into the other networking sites to push out their goods and services, especially in China and India. In China, we're seeing consumers widening their reach by tapping into social media platforms such as Youku Tudou (33%), Zhihu.com (30%), Douban (30%) and Tianya (27%) for commerce. This is similar in India with consumers exploring Snapchat (24%) and Pinterest (21%) for sales.

Across the region, 21% of consumers said they have used social networking sites to sell goods and services to supplement income, and a similar number used the platforms to dispose of unwanted goods and services. For the latter, Indonesia ranks the highest (31%) while Thailand takes pole position (32%) for the former. Social commerce is a good way for people to recycle and dispose of unnecessary items. One man's junk is another man's treasure, benefitting both buyer and seller.

We see this as an emerging trend across Asia, one that is set to increase as consumers realise the opportunity that social commerce affords them. 93% of consumers who sell goods and services on social media said that social commerce has empowered them to become independent, with 94% saying that it has allowed them to monetise their skills.

With digital payments being increasingly integrated into social networking sites, allowing buyers and sellers to transact seamlessly, we could see a further lowering of barriers against the adoption of new payment methods as consumers become aware of their ease of use, security and overall benefits.

Social commerce improving financial health and economic opportunity for consumers



21-40s are leading social commerce usage

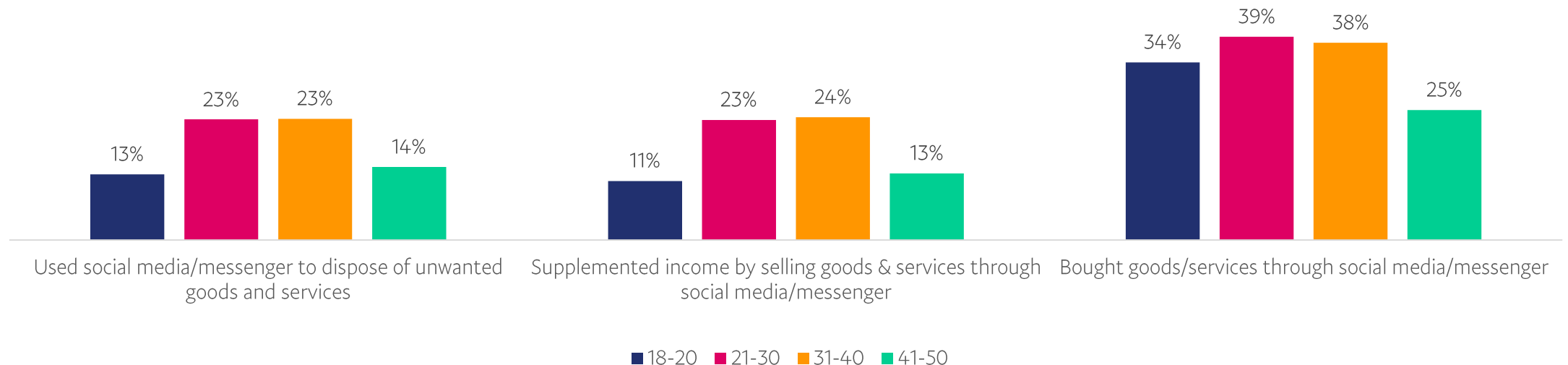
The study highlighted that across Asia, social commerce is being largely driven by consumers aged 21-40. Respondents in these age groups are the most active across all aspects of social commerce: using social media to sell unwanted goods and services, supplementing income by selling goods and services, as well as buying goods and services via social media.

Interestingly, consumers in this age group are also among the highest users of new digital payment methods.

Of those surveyed, 50% of consumers in the 31-40 age group said they use new digital payment methods, while 44% in the 21-30 age group said they do so.

With the number of social media users continuing to increase across the region, we expect social commerce to gain further momentum in the coming years. Given the similarity in age profile of the main drivers of social commerce and the adopters of new digital payment methods, it is highly likely that growth in social commerce will further boost digital payment adoption.

Consumer Social Commerce Trends across Age Groups



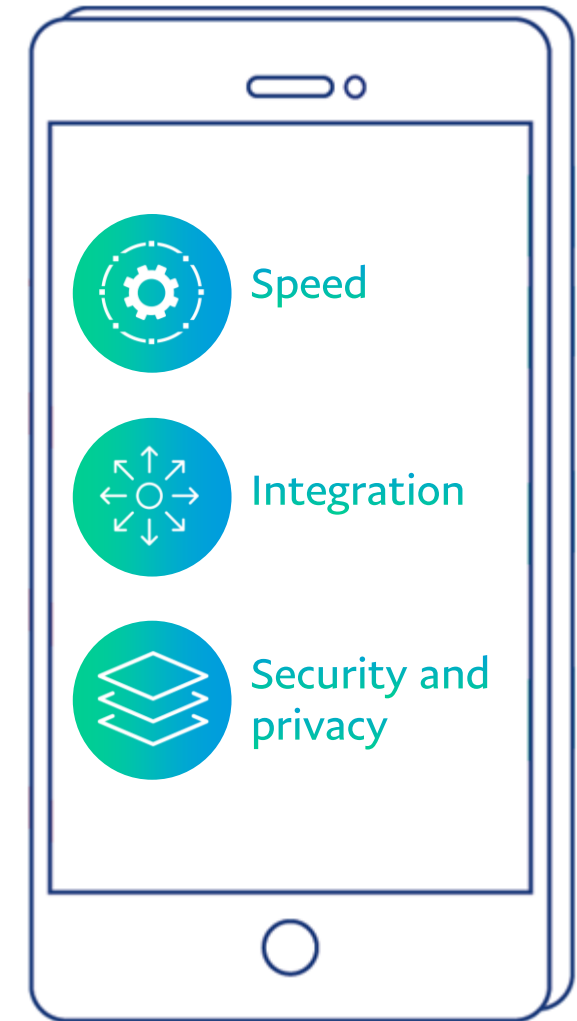
Harnessing the potential of social commerce

Social commerce has the potential to be a key enabler of economic empowerment and greater financial health. But what can we do to increase social commerce usage?

Digital payment providers need to innovate towards seamless systems and satisfy consumers' and merchants' desire for frictionless transactions. Some aspects that are pertinent for social commerce include:

- I. **Speed:** For sales conversions, the speed of completing purchases is a crucial driver. Buyers should be able to pay immediately and correspondingly, sellers will be able to successfully close the purchase cycle and reduce potential of cart abandonment.
- II. **Integration:** We are moving towards the trend of seamless payment systems that facilitate uninterrupted retail checkout flows. Providers should consider products that allow merchants to embed buttons into platforms to offer an intuitive and simplified checkout experience.
- III. **Security and privacy:** Such considerations are a priority for both merchants and consumers transacting digitally. With sensitive billing information personal data involved, it is easy for them to get into the wrong hands. There is also the added risk of unfulfilled orders. Here is where an offering such as PayPal's Buyer and Seller Protection provides both consumers and merchants a peace of mind.

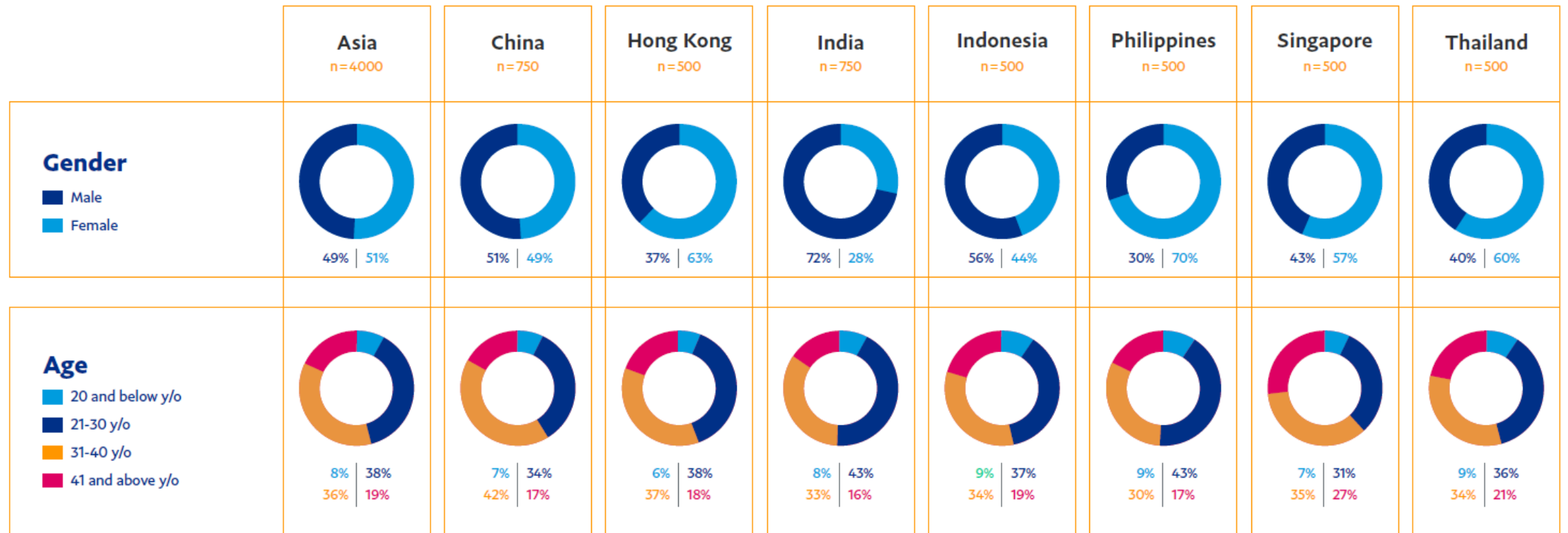
Industry players should maximise the ubiquity of social media platforms and work towards implementing solutions to transform it into a vibrant digital marketplace. Social commerce is an opportunity for industry players to showcase their drive for customer-centric innovation, and in the process allow for the generation of economic opportunities and improved financial health for all.



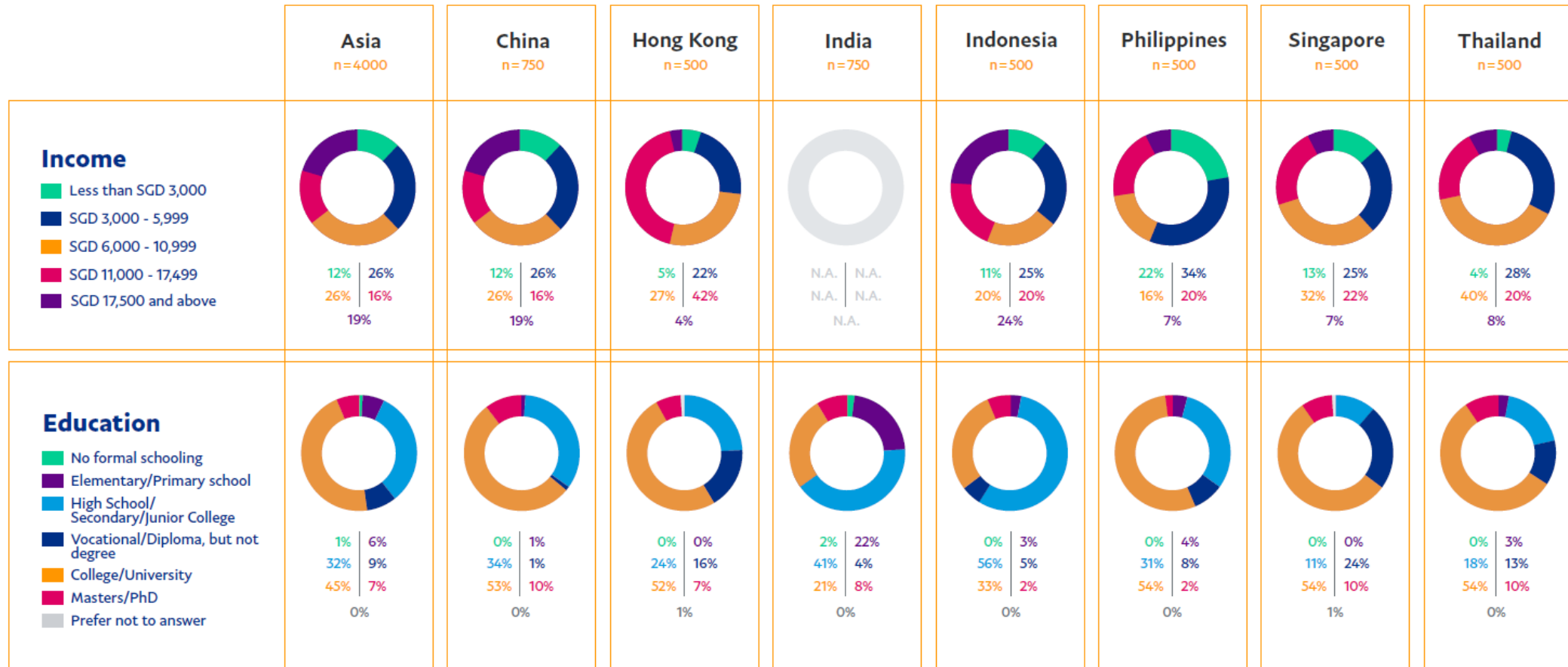
Appendix



Demographic profile – Consumers



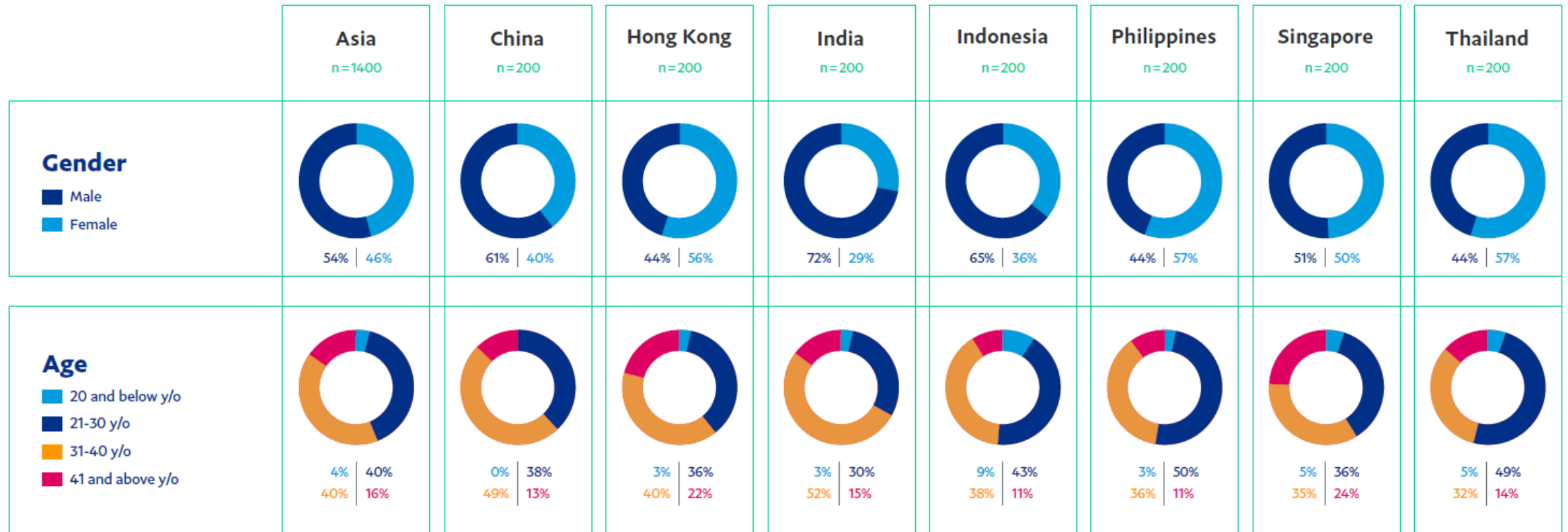
Demographic profile – Consumers



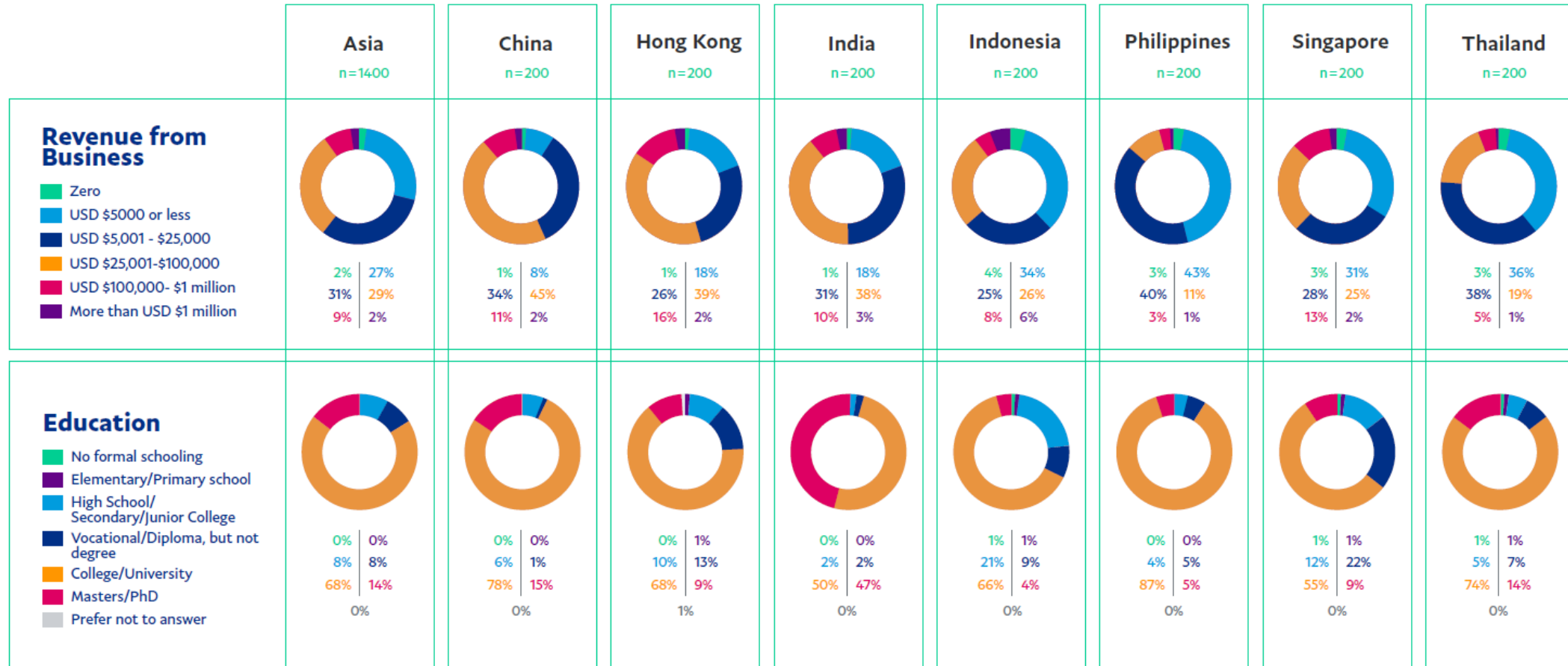
Demographic profile – Consumers

	Asia n=4000	China n=750	Hong Kong n=500	India n=750	Indonesia n=500	Philippines n=500	Singapore n=500	Thailand n=500
Employment Status								
Business Owner/Sole Proprietor/Self Employed	10%	6%	2%	6%	17%	21%	5%	17%
Senior Management	1%	3%	1%	0%	1%	1%	2%	0%
Middle Management	12%	17%	17%	8%	7%	5%	22%	5%
Junior Management	12%	13%	20%	12%	5%	7%	18%	7%
White Collar Non-Management	20%	33%	30%	11%	14%	11%	13%	30%
Professional	6%	6%	7%	2%	3%	5%	11%	6%
Part Time/ Freelance	7%	6%	8%	3%	12%	11%	6%	5%
Home Maker/ Home Duties	8%	2%	3%	13%	18%	11%	4%	2%
Retired	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Student	7%	4%	7%	7%	5%	4%	12%	13%
Blue Collar	5%	4%	2%	17%	2%	3%	2%	4%
Blue Collar Unskilled	6%	1%	1%	14%	9%	6%	1%	6%
In between / looking for jobs	2%	2%	0%	3%	2%	3%	2%	2%
Unemployed	2%	2%	1%	2%	1%	9%	2%	1%
Prefer not to answer	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%	2%

Demographic profile – Merchants



Demographic profile – Merchants



Demographic profile – Merchants

	Asia n=1400	China n=200	Hong Kong n=200	India n=200	Indonesia n=200	Philippines n=200	Singapore n=200	Thailand n=200
Sector of Business								
Manufacturing	9%	22%	7%	8%	9%	4%	7%	7%
Wholesale	10%	5%	8%	11%	19%	13%	9%	7%
Retail	33%	29%	46%	21%	21%	44%	38%	35%
Transportation	3%	4%	3%	2%	4%	2%	3%	3%
Information Service	9%	10%	9%	18%	6%	7%	9%	5%
Finance and Insurance	4%	5%	3%	6%	4%	2%	4%	2%
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	8%	11%	5%	10%	10%	8%	8%	4%
Administrative Services	3%	3%	5%	3%	1%	3%	2%	8%
Education	4%	4%	5%	4%	3%	4%	4%	3%
Health Care	3%	2%	2%	5%	2%	4%	3%	8%
Recreation and Food Services	4%	1%	3%	4%	6%	4%	6%	2%
Others	11%	6%	8%	10%	20%	8%	10%	18%