

# EXCELSIOR PLUS



Lexus, as we know it, might not have been the same if Toyota hadn't smashed it out of the park, or hit a homerun to be more on-brand with the genesis of Lexus, stemming from the LS400 in the USA.

its demeanour from American cars of the period. The R&D team made quite a dent on the budget with the development of the powertrain alone, the all-aluminium, 32-valved, over-engineered 1UZ-FE in all its 8 cylinders of glory. Power and torque figures were class-leading.

Even the outgoing 7 series of the time was running on six cylinders and swapped to a V8 only as a response to the Lexus later. The V8 could school every one of its rivals, while balancing a stack of champagne glasses on top of



The segment-defining land barge called out the euros in English, literally giving its rivals, namely the W140 Benz S-Class and the BMW E32 7 series, a run for their Deutsche marks, and then some.

The LS400 was everything but a land barge. Maybe a luxury hovercraft at best, which wouldn't be terribly inaccurate from the truth since the LS400 rode on air from the factory, as air suspension was a standard feature.

The research and development trip embarked on a lengthy field trip to the golden state of California, which is probably why the LS400 borrows

its hood, as shown by the certified hood classic "Art of Balance" advertisement run by Lexus, demonstrating the buttery attributes of the 1UZ.

The first generation of the LS400 unsurprisingly sold more than its targeted rivals. Mercedes and BMW were quite clearly disturbed, quivering in their boots, with BMW going as far as accusing Toyota of selling the luxury saloon under profit, while general motors and the gang pursued the congress to thwart the second generation of the LS400.

While making big waves not too far from Toyota's home base, the LS400 was sold as the Celsior in the Japanese market, which means Bangladesh did get quite a few of the rebadged LS400.

It really is more than the sum of its parts. Modern cars just don't exude the same aura as a black, two-toned Celsior sitting at a parking lot in Japan. This exact aura held Mohammed Ashrafur Huque's father spellbound, as it must have been love at first sight when his father found a Celsior parked while visiting a Toyota manufacturing plant on a business trip to Japan twenty-one years ago.

Since then, the Celsior grew up alongside Ashrafur, like a faithful family pet. And yet the old faithful still operates like new. I say operates, because of the myriad of switches inside. The rear seat massage still works, the trio of the TEMS buttons beside the four-speed auto gear selector work just like new. The motor would have been the centrepiece, had it not been for the Concorde age interior. The saloon catapults and builds speed and handles like a tuner car, minus the associated commotion of a tuner car.

The Celsior really is a sight to behold on Dhaka's roads as most have either sunk to the road or corroded away, while this particular Celsior is the definition of a time capsule as well as a family heirloom to Ashrafur.

Words and Photos: Abbaar Milky



# Is it time to leave shopping entirely to tech?

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The trend of "Digital Fashion", where one buys clothes to get dressed digitally for a one-time video/photoshoot online to reduce avoidable expenses and escape putting a dent in one's wallet while promoting sustainable goals, is right around the corner. This has a huge possibility in the future despite its shortcomings, where a clothing item is yours for a short while - something general buyers are not used to yet. Putting that on hold, tech is already revving in helping people find the right products online. Today, we get ourselves acquainted with the somewhat impeccable options tech is offering, which is ready to take the world by storm.

## AR-based virtual trialling

Augmented Reality is helping customers to visualise them using their potential purchases. While many regular shoppers are ditching the traditional method of shopping from physical stores due to the pandemic, many have fallen in love with the option of trying out products using AR, replacing the old time-consuming try-out sessions. They have turned to AR, as with its help, one can try out foundations to see which one matches their skin tone or try out shoes with different outfits to check out whether the ensemble looks well or not, and so on. It saves time on both ends and is undeniably more convenient in saving money, and commute time as a trip to the shop is no longer necessary.

The good news is, the deployment of AR transforming customers' shopping behaviours is already here in Bangladesh, where many brands have already introduced this option to their customers, and many more are expected to follow suit soon, as the pandemic has sped up the process of customers inclining towards the trend of shopping online over its other alternatives. Customers can try out products such as clothing, make-up, accessories etc. live or by uploading their own photos through the virtual try-on options. Since they can now try out products in virtual fitting or dressing rooms, it cuts down the cost of making and providing extra samples, which is beneficial for the environment too.

## Websites and apps

There are tens and thousands of brands available to general people to choose from, and unfortunately, what they all claim is not the untainted truth. This leads to consumers being left confused and frustrated deciding which one to trust. As more people are becoming conscious of what they are putting on their skin, they are seeking expert opinions as applying the wrong product can result in dire consequences. A solution to this can be websites like CosDNA and INCIDecoder, which show visitors descriptions of the ingredients of the products they intend to buy. This cross-checking on which ingredients are used, why it is used, and what side-effects one can expect is always helpful, as it can help avoid disastrous outcomes for choosing the wrong product.

Meanwhile, websites like GSMArena, PhoneArena or other e-commerce apps have been scaling up efficiency for the masses when it comes to buying

smartphones or other tech gadgets. People can check out products, the specifications or features, and compare them with other similar products, regardless of their location, with just a few clicks and decide which one is right for them. Moreover, they have the option of scanning products' QR codes and barcodes to have details of different products. We have seen only upward growth in online shopping due to its numerous advantages in the last couple of years. One can also turn into a smart shopper by keeping tabs on the websites of different brands, which can help them learn about the price, latest deals in coupons, discounts on certain products as well as how one product weighs against another from a different brand.

## AI recommending products

We all have different preferences in buying, no doubt. Our individual style changes along with our shopping habits continuously. The revolution becomes even more remarkable with AI, as it has found its way in the realm of shopping

Associates are working to improve Machine learning, AI or the recommendation algorithms to understand consumer behaviours, their evolving interests and meet user expectations as there is still room for progress. We can expect AI to continue to work as our personal styling service in the future. In this remoulded recommendation system, AI can refine the suggestions according to buyers' preferred brands, price range, item sizes, ranking or rating among other customers etc. All of this is based on a series of questions, browsing habits or aggregating their previous purchase-related data. AI is also automating the targeting of digital advertisements curating choices for potential buyers.

## Online reviews

The products customers think of buying come with a price tag that requires consideration before committing to purchase. Hence, people, like the old times, seek reviews even today. Along with their dear ones' opinions, they

These days, shops come right at the screen within our fingertips, and so does expert opinion. Moreover, Social Media Marketing has become a potent option that is predicted to only explode more and more in the coming years. Brands are using social media sites to amplify the promotion of their brands, with daily active users only increasing on these platforms. Influencers interacting with their audiences' appeal to the prospective customers on a different level, increasing customer-brand engagement rate. They give short as well as in-depth reviews of a wide range of products using various online platforms. Brands are ramping up and diversifying social media activities to ensure a prominent online presence, garner more customers and keep their potential as well as their existing customers updated regarding new campaigns and product launches.

These tech services are yet not top-notch and certainly need more upgrading. AR trials are oftentimes inaccurate in providing the in-person feel of how the fabric or material will be comfortable for one or not or what shoe size is the best for one. Websites can lack storage of vast data, where one might find it hard to find information of all their desired products, especially since the availability of products vary from one region to another. AI shopping assistants, being in the development stage, might not always give one the best service due to the limitation of interactions while fake reviews dominate the internet. However, despite those drawbacks, shopping-related innovations are a thing of the present, and hence we look forward to further improvement in this field of tech.

Although it is the pandemic that increased demands and sales of masks, sanitisation products and comfy clothes, people's preferences of buying products are always changing anyway, which is paving the way for integrating tech in their day-to-day shopping sprees, due to which experts remain sceptical that tech can directly dictate our purchase decisions. Yet, undoubtedly, it can influence our choices to some extent through its proper implementation. These technological advancements are not a threat to the regular sales rep job; instead, they are here to change the dynamics in the shopping space, surviving the test of time maximising customers' satisfaction. So, we can hope to get accustomed to the upcoming wave of embracing the digital shopping sphere.



ILLUSTRATION: ZARIF FAIAZ

as well, where AI platforms are designed specifically for learning the preferences of the actual customer base. Artificial Intelligence, helping customers as a virtual assistant, can optimise e-commerce businesses by offering customer-focused services. This is essential for predictive marketing. Many retailers are using AI to interpret data correctly to customise content and web interface to predict what customers will be most likely to buy or wear in the future. This ensures a personalised experience of shopping for the buyers. The utilisation of AI is becoming popular both in digital platforms as well as at physical outlets.

can now evaluate what others, who have already used the products, have to say. It is common for customers to take online reviews into account before purchasing a product to be sure if the potential purchase meets their desire, expectation, and budget. Customers are not accidentally stumbling upon such reviews; instead, they trawl the web to look for others' opinions on their desired products and their competitors. These reviews found online have a great impact on brands' reputations that can make or break revenues and sales. Blogs are also a helpful medium that ensures relevant references reach the respective buyers.