ONLINE SHOPPING FOR GARMENTS IN KANPUR CITY: AN ANALYSIS OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

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ABSTRACT

With increasing internet penetration, all kinds of activity across all classes and regions has spurred on the world wide web. Each day, the internet welcomes new consumers. Needless to say, we are harboring and harnessing a gigantic commercial hub on the internet. Obviously, there are specific consumer behavior patterns in the online industry too. If deciphered, they can help e-retailers and consumers alike make the online buying and selling experience more optimized to industry needs and standards. By studying consumer patterns, the problems faced by consumers will also be exposed. Retailers will thus identify these problems and work towards fixing them. Marketing strategies and user interface of websites will be made better. Sales volume, thus, will possibly increase. This study is aimed at tracing the factors affecting online consumer behavior, especially in the major online retail platforms in India. By means of a local survey held in Kanpur city, the researcher attempts at highlighting the existing trends from the buyers' sides with respect to the respondents' gender, age, income, and marital status.

Keywords: - Online shopping, Consumer satisfaction, Apparel, Website design, E-retailers.

INTRODUCTION

Online shopping (or internet/e-shopping) is defined as purchases made by consumers on the internet, without physical visitation of any store. With growing consumer consciousness, technological developments, and access to the internet, online shopping has become a global phenomenon. The convenience of online shopping makes the practice lucrative. A wide range of buying and payment options are available in online stores. Purchases can be made from home/offices at any hour of the day. Online shopping offers customers heavier discounts and offers, including coupons and vouchers. Product information is detailed, precise, and easily accessible. Moreover, reviews and ratings by other customers enhance the shopping experience. Consumers buy products from various apparel websites and depict a specific kind of behavior that is related to various demographic factors, such as age, gender, income group, marital status, occupation, etc.

Online shopping has gained great momentum in recent years. Online stores and websites have increased in number, as has the number of customers. A study of consumer behavior in the online setting helps us decipher their intentions. We can translate this information in developing better marketing strategies to help convert persisting offline buyers into online buyers.

THE ONLINE CONSUMER: GENERAL BEHAVIOR AND THE FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE IT

The general actions/ buying patterns of the consumer during the process of buying and using products and services can be termed consumer behavior. These patterns may be related to their time of making purchases, preferences in buying (quantity and quality-wise), and the like. Gurunathan & Kumar (2013) studied "the apparel buying behavior of Indian consumers through five dimensions- viz., consumer characteristics, reference groups, store attributes, promotions, and product attributes. The results show that the store attributes promotions and reference groups are important dimensions of apparel buying behavior". Similarly, according to Li & Zhang's study (2002), "there are ten factors that have an impact on online consumer behavior. These ten factors were categorized into five independent variables i.e. external environment, demographics, personal characteristics, vendor/service/product characteristics, and website quality, and five dependent variables that are attitude towards online shopping, intention to shop online, decision making, online purchasing, and consumer satisfaction."

Attitude, motivation, trust, risk, demographics, website experience, etc. are important determinants of online consumer behavior. The attitude of consumers is based on the services provided by the e-retailers in terms of quality of products, customized delivery options, available payment options including cash on delivery, and after-sales services offered by the website. The factors like ease of use, website design, and trust built in the websites make the consumers shop online frequently. Vijayasarathy & Jones (2000) reported that "Internet shopping convenience, lifestyle compatibility, and fun positively influence attitude towards internet shopping and intention to shop online".

Angel et al., (1968) highlight that buying behavior is influenced by three major factors, which are social (like beliefs, culture, family, class, etc.), psychological (internal forces generated in the consumer's psyche), and personal (such as age, gender, lifestyle, family size, income group, etc.)

ENSURING CONSUMER SATISFACTION ON THE WORLD WIDE WEB

Consumer satisfaction is the extent to which a consumer's perceptions of the online shopping experience conform to their expectations. This also determines whether the consumer will return to a particular shopping website or not. Convenience, previous online shopping experience, pricing policy, trust in online websites and payment options, available variety, offers/discounts/vouchers are some of the main factors influencing online shopping satisfaction. Clearly, online shopping offers an edge to shoppers in these respects more often than not. Consumers generally prefer lower prices for products with good quality and are satisfied spending a lesser amount for buying any product. Trust is contingent upon the frequency of buying and experience therein; it is something that is usually built with time. Wish listing is a distinct feature of online shopping which allows consumers to save their products of choice separately for later purchasing. Sending gifts has also been made easier by online shopping services. Lastly, online shopping allows the consumer to compare prices easily before making their buying decisions.

"Consumers cannot physically check the quality of a product or monitor the safety and security of sending sensitive personal and financial information while shopping on the Internet" (Lee & Turban, 2001). It is important to highlight the element of risk involved in online shopping. It is trusted by the vendor that essentially drives customers to buy goods online. The vendor is believed to deliver the promised products or services efficiently. Similarly, there is perceived risk- the uncertainty in the execution of an online transaction. Websites lose their customer's trust if the product that is delivered does not match up to the website description. The personal and financial information of the consumer is also at risk in online buying and selling processes.

Trust can be gained via the website design. Consumers tend to trust websites that are user-friendly, easy to navigate, informative, and visually attractive. Use of professional graphics, branding that meets industry standards, simple layout, and SEO optimization all add to building the consumer's trust.

ONLINE SHOPPING PLATFORMS IN INDIA: THE MAJOR PLAYERS

Today, the internet teems with online shopping services. Websites are top-notch, offering different views of the product via videos, 3-D imaging, zooming facilities, and the like. These features help one make better buying decisions. The table below lists the top online firms in India.

Firm Name	Service
Flipkart.com	It is India's largest online store offering products across almost each imaginable category.
Snapdeal.com	Deals in products like apparel, cell phone, accessories and customer goods.
Amazon.in	It is a global leader, and deals in a wide variety of products like electronics, clothes, etc.
Myntra.com	Based in Bangalore and deals mainly in fashion wear and accessories for men and women.
Ebay.in	Commands global presence. Facilitates consumer-to-consumer and business-to-consumer sales.
Yebhi.com	It offers products like designer clothing, accessories and shoes for men and women. It also deals with jeweler and electronics.
Homeshop18.com	Allied with Network 18. It offers apparel and accessories and deals in all kinds of electronics.
Shopclues.com	It deals in products like women jeweler, apparel and fashion accessories, electronics and books, etc.
Pepperfry.com	It also offers items related to home furnishings and décor.

The study aims to assess consumer attitudes towards online shopping. Factors influencing online shopping were thereby studied. The study also assesses consumers' perception while buying apparel online. For this purpose, five websites, namely, Myntra, Flipkart, Amazon, Snapdeal and Yebhi were taken.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of this study are:
1.   To explore male and female attitudes towards online shopping;
2.   To assess the gendered consumer satisfaction level of males and females;
3.   To identify shortcomings in online shopping services;
4.   To create guidelines for consumers when shopping for apparel online.

METHODOLOGY

The present study was descriptive in nature whereas the methodology comprised two phases. Gendered behavior towards online shopping, consumer satisfaction with special reference to website trust, and perceived apparel quality was explored. The audience was surveyed to this end. Respondents belonged to Kanpur city in the state of Uttar Pradesh. Respondents (200 in number; 90 males and 110 females) necessarily had experience shopping for apparel online. They belonged to the 21-30 years and 31-40 years age brackets. Snowball sampling technique and interview schedule methods were employed.

COLLECTING DATA

Data came from both primary (interview schedule) and secondary (published, unpublished literature) sources. Books, magazines, newspapers, and articles in e-journals related to online shopping served as vital references. The tools used include-
• Attitudes towards online apparel developed by the investigator;
• Consumer satisfaction level with website trust and website design;
• Perceived apparel quality based on online shopping;
• Self-developed attitudes towards online apparel shopping.

UNDERSTANDING THE SCALE

The scale comprises three different major sections (1) Ease of use, (II) Security, (III) User's Relative Advantage.

In Section 1, questions were aimed at identifying consumer attitudes towards the convenience of online shopping.

Section II helped gauge the sense of safety (or lack thereof) felt by online shopping consumers, especially in divulging their personal and banking/finance-related information during the buying process.

Section III enabled us to highlight that consumers were attracted to online shopping due to the convenience it offered.

The three factors were ease of use, security, and user relative advantage, and scales (comprising 15 items) were constructed to measure the same. A five-point Likert Scale has been used to record the responses. Responses included options like 5- Strongly agree, 4- Agree, 3- Neutral, 2- Disagree, I- Strongly disagree.

The Chronbach's alpha reliability of the scale for the three dimensions is given in the following table.

Dimension number	Dimension	Chronbach's alpha reliability
1.	Ease of use	0.70
2.	Security	0.82
3.	User's relative advantage	0.85

The tool consisted of six different items which were: I. Information Design (identified whether the information was logically presented on the website), II. Visual Design, III. Navigation Design (determined if the website was easy to navigate and explore), IV. Trust (assessed the level of security offered by the website), V. Perceived Risk (analysed whether the users are comfortable sharing their personal information on the website/shopping platform), and VI. Purchase Intention (helped identify user satisfaction with the website experience).

Validity and reliability of the measurement scale for the criteria (0.6) and variables respectively was achieved.

ANALYSING THE DATA STATISTICALLY

Statistical techniques like mean, standard deviation, t-test and coefficient of correlation were used in codifying, tabulating and analysing the collected data. All the statistical analysis was done through SPSS 22.0.

The researcher analysed the problems faced by online shoppers during the purchasing process, specifically caused by the shortcomings in the services offered by the shopping website. Following this, the researcher prepared a set of guidelines to help the average consumer make better buying decisions. Using these, the customer's online shopping experience can be vastly improved.

RESULTS AND INFERENCES

Table-4.1: Distribution of online respondents on the basis of gender (N=200)

Gender	N	%
Male	90	45
Female	110	55

The above table shows that 55% of the respondents are female and the remaining 45% respondents are male. Females are more likely to shop for apparels in comparison to males, especially online. Women are more likely to be impulsive buyers when presented with various promotions and offers.

Table-4.2: Distribution of online respondents on the basis of age (N=200)

Age (in years)	Male		Female	
	N	%	N	%
21-30	58	29	70	35
31-40	32	16	40	20

Responses show that female respondents belonging to the 21-30 years of age group prefer online shopping (35%) as compared to their male counterparts (29%). Even in the age group of 31-40 years, females have a higher preference for online shopping as compared to males.

Table-4.4: Distribution of online respondents on the basis of annual income (N-200)

Annual family Income (in Rs.)	Male		Female	
	N	%	N	%
Less than 3,00,000	27	13	23	12
3,00,001-5,00,000	29	14	35	18
5,00,001-7,00,000	09	05	26	1319
More than 7,00,000	14	07	37	

The results show that:
1. Female respondents (19%) earning more than 7 lacs per annum prefer online shopping compared to male respondents (7%).
2. In the 3-5 lacs per annum bracket, 18% females shop more as compared to males (14%).
3. There was hardly any difference between male (13%) and female (12%) respondents of the less than 3 lac rupees per annum income group.
4. Respondents who earn 5-7 lacs per annum exhibit a wide difference in shopping behaviour. In this category, 13% females prefer online shopping compared to 5% males.

Table-4.5: Distribution of online respondents on the basis of marital status (N=200)

Marital status	Male		Female	
	N	%	N	%
Married	47	24	42	21
Unmarried	53	27	64	32

Online shopping is more predominant in unmarried males and females (59% in total) as compared to married couples. Perhaps because of their lack of responsibilities (such as towards children), online shopping is more pervasive in the unmarried group.

Table-4.6: Distribution of frequency of online shopping (N-200)

Frequency of online shopping	Male		Female	
	N	%	N	%
Once a week	10	5	7	4
2-3 weeks	12	6	8	4
Once a month	46	23	64	32
2-3 month	22	11	31	16

Shopping is done once a month by 32% females and 23% males, which is the maximum frequency of the same.

It is concluded that consumer attitudes towards online shopping is highly correlated with website trust, website design and perceived apparel quality.

IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The study helps e-retailers by deciphering consumer behavior patterns while shopping online. Thus, they can develop mechanisms to improve their existing online and offline infrastructure to fill industry vacuums and respond better to consumer needs. E-retailers can, for example, change their website/platform design to make it easier to navigate, more attractive, in line with their overall branding and user-friendly to cater to the consumers' needs. Similarly, this study helps consumers make better buying decisions by enlightening them to the various facets of online shopping and the differences in various shopping platforms. They will be able to compare prices and offers across various platforms and make more informed buying choices. To academicians, this study will help as a reference to buyer behaviour in Kanpur- a tier-2, industrial city with a growing, urbanizing population.

This study is non-exhaustive in scope and extent. Therefore, by no means does it reflect larger consumer behaviour. For instance, only online shoppers have been taken as samples. Only apparel shopping has been analysed. Consumer behaviour may vary across different categories of products, depending on a variety of factors, like urgency of requirement and centrality to daily life, for instance. Other products and services may also have been more gender-neutral, so to say. Moreover, the study examined only five apparel websites. With growing internet penetration and the boom of start-ups in India, every day, new websites and platforms enter the apparel industry and change the game. Lastly, traffic on only websites and not mobile phone applications was surveyed.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Further research may be undertaken on the same topic, but with a larger sample size hailing from other tier-2 cities to obtain more conclusive findings. This will also help verify the consistency in consumer behaviour across similar socio-economic markers. Other categories of products can also be surveyed, including groceries, home appliances, books, etc. Similarly, other websites can be studied to make the findings more extensive and well-rounded.

CONCLUSION

Online shopping is convenient, wide-ranging, accessible and ever-growing. It offers flexibility in browsing, choices, payment options, and the like. Online shopping platforms offer better deals to customers in terms of discounts, offers, and schemes. Detailed product information is also readily available on online shopping platforms. Various factors, which may be social, psychological and personal, for instance, impact consumer attitude towards online shopping.

The study concluded that there is a difference in the online shopping behaviour of consumers based on their respective age, gender, income and marital status. Both male and female shoppers have a positive attitude towards shopping online. Features like website trust, website design and perceived apparel quality enhance or degrade the consumer's shopping experience. Thus, these features impact consumer attitudes to shopping online. Easy navigation of websites, for instance, strongly affects overall proclivity to online shopping. Female shoppers are more concerned about security and privacy as compared to male consumers.

Amazon and Flipkart were also found to be the most satisfactory online shopping platforms to the Indian customer.

In this research paper, News and articles of The Hindu, Danik Jagran, Danik Bhaskar, Umar Ujala, The Indian Express, Business Line, PIB of India, have been analyzed and the various aspects of online shopping for garments, have been discussed. As per the requirement the ideas of various economists have been included.

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