

CONSUMER PREFERENCE TOWARDS ONLINE SHOPPING AND OFFLINE SHOPPING OF APPARELS

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Abstract

This study investigates consumer preferences in the apparel retail industry in Gujarat, focusing on the contrasting dynamics between online and offline shopping platforms. Conducted with a diverse sample of 403 participants from various educational and professional backgrounds, the research reveals a distinct preference for physical stores among consumers who prioritize inspecting product quality before purchase. Conversely, online shopping attracts those seeking affordability and convenience. Key findings indicate that hoardings are more effective in driving offline sales, while discount advertisements are successful in boosting online purchases. The study highlights that offline shoppers face time constraints, while online shoppers are primarily concerned with return/exchange policies and delivery times. Notably, no correlation was found between age or gender and the preferred shopping platform. However, a relationship was identified between payment method and gender, suggesting targeted marketing opportunities.

INTRODUCTION

Since the introduction of online purchasing, the retail environment has changed significantly, resulting in a dynamic interaction between traditional brick-and-mortar stores and online marketplaces. Customers who appreciate being able to physically inspect things and receive personalised attention continue to be drawn to offline shopping due to its tactile experience and instant pleasure. However, due to its unmatched ease, wide selection, and affordable prices, internet shopping has completely changed how consumers behave. This is especially true for time- and tech-conscious consumers. New developments in the retail sector show that these two shopping experiences are becoming more and more similar. For example, augmented reality (AR) allows customers to view products in real time while physical stores are incorporating digital technologies to improve the in-store experience. Additionally, a move towards a more flexible and comprehensive approach to customer involvement is shown in the emergence of Omni channel retailing, which prioritises seamless connection across online and offline platforms. These patterns point to a quickly changing retail landscape in which companies need to keep up with emerging technologies and shifting consumer tastes in order to be competitive.

New developments in online purchasing show how customer expectations and technology progress have impacted the market. At the forefront are Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Augmented Reality (AR), which allow consumers to visually try products and get tailored recommendations. Convenience is further emphasised by the growth of mobile commerce, which enables customers to use their cell phones to purchase from anywhere. The growing demand for individualised and consistent product experiences is reflected in the rise in popularity of subscription services for tailored deliveries. Furthermore, the issue of sustainability is becoming more and more pressing, as internet merchants advocate for environmentally friendly goods and methods. Additionally, voice commerce is growing, providing the ease of using voice-activated gadgets like Google Assistant and Amazon Alexa for purchases.

In the meantime, offline retail is evolving by establishing immersive and engaging storefronts to draw in customers. This entails holding in-store gatherings, using cutting-edge tools like self-checkout kiosks, and offering mobile payment alternatives. Pop-up stores are becoming more and more popular as a way for merchants to explore new markets and build buzz about their brands. Physical retailers also embrace sustainability, emphasising the use of eco-friendly products and minimising waste. Customers are supporting distinctive and regionally produced goods by demonstrating a rising preference for local and artisan products. The Omni channel retailing strategy is helping to close the gap between online and offline buying by providing smooth experiences like BOPIS (purchase online, pick up in-store) and simple return policies at physical stores. These patterns demonstrate how the retail industry is becoming more concentrated.

LITERATURE REVIEW

(Limayem, Khalifa, & Frini, 2000)The study investigates factors affecting online shopping intentions and behaviour, using the Theory of Planned Behaviour. It provides practical implications for web designers and marketers about behavioural control, subjective norms, and perceived consequences of online shopping. The study also emphasizes the importance of considering personal innovativeness in the context. A longitudinal approach to data acquisition provides a stronger causal understanding of factors affecting online shopping intentions and behaviour. However, approximately 64% of the variance remains unexplained. The study has limitations, including being self-reported and only assessed once, and not evaluating the breadth of online shopping behaviour or its change over time. Future research should use actual measures and measure the number of purchases and products bought over time.

(Terblanche & Boshoff, 2004)The study reveals that the impact of merchandise value on retention in supermarkets is highly significant, largely due to price-sensitive consumers. The other elements of ISE and retention are insignificant. Supermarkets are designed to enhance efficiency and speed of shopping, with minimal interaction with personnel and a gridiron layout. The store variety and assortment offering are well-catered for by the supermarket group, offering a wide selection of national and own brands to appeal to price-sensitive and specific brand shoppers. The supermarket also has a toll-free customer care number and a refund and replacement policy to address complaints, providing customers with ample opportunities for redress. Overall, supermarkets cater to the needs of their customers.

(Levin, Levin, & Weller, 2005)The study reveals that individual differences in online/offline shopping preferences are product-specific and can be accounted for by the differential importance placed on product attributes. Large selection and quick shopping are predominant attributes for online shopping, while personal service and ability to see-touch-handle the product are predominant for offline shopping. The study suggests that future researchers should include parameters corresponding to both the value and weight assigned to each key product attribute in their models. It also emphasizes the need to allow parameters to vary as a joint function of product and consumer characteristics. The findings have implications for online retailers, whether they are pure or multi-channel. For electronics products, a no-hassle exchange is considered better offline, while a large selection is considered better online. Individual consumer differences can lead to different marketing approaches for different segments. The study's results are limited by the specific products, product attributes, and samples of consumers selected.

(Jasper, et al., 2007)Research on rural consumers' adoption of online shopping is limited, despite their limited access to basic consumer goods online. This longitudinal study examined the adoption process of online shopping in rural communities with mature individuals, who are the fastest-growing online consumer segment, control substantial wealth, and are heavy apparel purchasers. Previous practice played a significant role in online shopping adoption, but beliefs about compatibility with lifestyles and the Internet began to influence adoption. Online retailers should provide educational resources, detailed instructions, and incentives to encourage rural consumers to make the first online purchase.

(Mittal & Mittal, 2008) The research aimed to evaluate apparel store attributes by Indian shoppers, highlighting the challenges of fitting international formats directly into Indian markets. It suggests that retailers should consider local conditions and buying behaviour before choosing a format. The findings suggest that retailers should consider two sets of attributes: loyalty drivers and shopping experience enhancers. These attributes can be used differently depending on their positioning strategy, but the basic two dimensions remain the same. This research underscores the importance of considering local conditions and buying behaviour when shaping a retail strategy.

(Delafrooz, Paim, & Khatibi, 2010)The study found that utilitarian orientations, convenience, price, and wider selection are important determinants of users' attitude towards online shopping. These factors have a significantly positive impact on users' attitude towards online shopping. Utilitarian shoppers are more likely to shop online to increase shopping productivity, while hedonic shoppers have no significant effect. The study suggests that convenience, price, and wider selection are the most significant advantages of online shopping. Online retailers need to ensure a simple and inexpensive online shopping process, offer a wide selection of products, and provide competitive prices to attract customers. However, intense price competition is expected to increase with the availability of intelligent search engines and comparing shopping agents. Future research should explore these factors and use more elaborate models to examine the causal relationships between factors and consumers' attitudes towards online shopping.

(Simonian, Forsythe, Kwon, & Chattaraman, 2012)The study investigates the impact of product brand image and store image on consumers' online purchase intentions for fashion apparel products. Results show that product brand image influences purchase intentions both directly and indirectly by reducing perceived risks. This is a significant aspect of intention formation, as it serves as a risk reliever in a category where consumers experience greater product risk. The study also found that online store image indirectly impacts purchase intentions through reduced product and financial/time risks. The findings suggest that product risk significantly influences purchase intentions across apparel products, demonstrating that it is likely to be a substantial barrier to purchase intentions in online shopping environments. Online stores can mitigate these

product risks through strong brand name merchandise, which can signal product quality and increase purchase intention and sales.

(Nagra & Gopal, 2013) The study reveals that gender affects internet possession and frequency of online purchases, but not the other variables. The results indicate that respondents perceive online shopping positively, justifying project growth. The frequency of online shopping is relatively low in the country. Online shopping organizations can use the research variables and factors to create strategies and tactics, prioritizing consumer needs in the online shopping environment. The results can also help identify target customer segments for various organizations.

(Ling & Yazdanifard, 2014) The gender role significantly influences online consumer behaviour, which is crucial for marketers to develop effective strategies for profit and consumer satisfaction. Research shows that males have a more positive attitude and willingness to purchase online, as they are more familiar with online purchasing and time-saving. This is due to their utilitarian motivation, which prioritizes convenience and time-saving. Gender plays a crucial role in online purchasing, as consumerism is a complex action involving various factors. Although online consumer behaviour is still a new topic, it is expected to be a concern for marketers as electronic commerce becomes more widely accepted.

(Katarzyna, 2015) The model suggests that despite differences between online and offline stores, positive and multidimensional customer experiences can be created. However, real stores create more positive experiences than offline stores. The success of these experiences depends on the company's activities and the needs and expectations of different customers

(Amubode, Falode, Adegunwa, & Ogunduyile, 2016) The older fashion merchants should learn online marketing techniques and ways to use the social media to bring their business to the online shopping platforms as research has revealed that that Internet technologies have the potential to help small and medium enterprises enhance service quality, reduce costs, improve productivity, gain competitive advantage, and increase profitability, furthermore, the retailers of apparel products should combine online and offline marketing strategies to maximise their competitive advantage.

(Sarkar & Das, 2017) The literature reveals significant differences in consumer purchase styles between online and offline shopping. Despite rapid growth in online sales in India, the majority of consumers still prefer the traditional brick-and-mortar shopping experience. Younger consumers are driving the growth of online shopping in India. The advent of online shopping has hit offline stores hard, with large discounts and the increasing price of the Indian real estate sector putting pressure on their bottom lines. Despite the growing customer base of online retailers, none have broken even yet. The large amount of venture capital and private equity funds used to drive these companies have dried up recently. The concept of Omni-channel strategy has started to take centre stage, with retailers trying to remain present in both online and offline channels to tap into the demands of the maximum number of customers.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

- To highlight pros and cons of online shopping and offline shopping.
- To know which platform is much more preferred for purchasing clothes.
- To understand the satisfaction levels of consumer of their current preferable buying platform.
- To know the issues faced by buyers while buying from their preferred store of clothes
- To know factors and reasons which influences the purchasing behavior of consumers.
- To know the types of advertisement which attracts consumers towards the platform and product.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study consumer perception to buy apparels from online/offline platform.
2. To study factors influencing customer choices.
3. To study which types of advertisements attract consumers to make purchases?
4. To study and find issues of online and offline shopping for apparel.
5. To study association between gender and online/offline shopping of apparels.
6. To study association between age and online/offline shopping of apparels.
7. To study association between age and payment method used for buying of apparels.

Research Design: Descriptive research and Hypothesis testing.

Data Sources:

- ⇒ Secondary Data: Secondary data sources are, Web Portals and past research paper.
- ⇒ Primary Data: Students from various Courses like B.Com, BBA, BSc & BCA and elementary school, employees from various organizations, and owner of certain businesses are the Primary data sources.

Research Approach: Survey method
Research Instrument: Structured questionnaire

Sampling Design:

- Sampling Frame: Students from different colleges and schools, Students from different colleges and schools, employees from various organizations, and owner of certain businesses were taken for the survey.
- Sampling Unit: Students, employees and businesspersons.
- Sample Size: 403
- Sampling Method: Simple Random Sampling Method.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

- The research study is restricted to Gujarat alone; however, additional states and locations may be included in the future, enhancing the study's accuracy and utility.
- The study work includes the examination of clothing for people who are male and female. Gender-specific analysis may be covered in the additional research.
- This study is conducted on apparels. Further research may extend to examine specific product categories within the realm of apparel, such as shoes, upper wear, bottom wear, and accessories.
- Both offline and internet buying platforms were used for this research project. It is possible to conduct additional analyses on a single platform or store, which can yield detailed data that will help merchants improve customer satisfaction and sales.
- This research may aid vendors in comprehending customer perception, allowing them to modify their tactics and offerings to ensure complete client contentment.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- The primary limitation of this study was that we were able to cover only Gujarat.
- Language was also a barrier as not everyone was able to understand and read English as Gujarati is prominent in Gujarat.
- Responses we got were 403 only which are less than expected and if we were able to get more of these responses then the research would be more accurate and detailed.
- We were only able to study about apparels due to time limitation but if there were more time given then it would be possible to do research about other goods being sold online and offline.
- Since we conducted research on both offline and online platforms, we were unable to examine into great detail about any one of them.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Do you shop online or offline?

	Frequency	Percentage
Offline stores	250	63.03%
Online stores	153	37.97%
Total	403	100%

Interpretation: From above pie chart it can be seen that, out of 403 respondents, 250 prefers offline shopping while 153 prefers shopping from online platforms.

Gender analysis

	Offline	Online	Percentage
Female	74	50	30.77%
Male	176	103	69.23%
Total	250	153	

Interpretation: From above bar chart, it can be noted that out of total 403 responses, 176 males are offline buyers and 103 are online buyers while, 74 females are offline buyers and 50 females are online buyers.

Age-Group

	Offline	Online	Percentage
15-25	191	108	74.19%
26-35	21	26	11.66%
36-45	22	12	8.44%

Above 45	16	7	5.71%
Total	250	153	

Interpretation: From the above Bar Graph, it can be seen that out of total 403 respondents, people of age between 15-25 are 299 and of them 108 are online buyers and 191 are offline buyers, people of age between 26-35 are 47 and of them 26 are online buyers and 21 are offline buyers, people of age between 36-45 are 34 and of them 12 are online buyers and 22 are offline buyers finally people of age above 45 are 23 and of them 17 are online buyers and 16 are offline buyers.

Online Shopping

From Which Online Seller You Mostly Prefer to Buy Apparels?

	Frequency	Percentage
AJIO	57	17.17%
Amazon	91	27.41%
Flipkart	72	21.69%
Meesho	50	15.06%
Myntra	62	18.67%
Total	332	

Interpretation: From the above Column Chart it can be noted that out of total, out of 332 respondents, 62 users are of Myntra, 50 users are of Meesho, 72 are users of Flipkart, 91 of Amazon and 57 of Ajio for buying apparels.

What motivates you to shop for clothes online?

	Frequency	Percentage
Convenience of shopping from home	54	21.17%
Time saving	40	15.69%
Wider range of options	65	25.49%
Discounts and offers	96	37.65%
Total	255	

Interpretation: From the above Column Chart it can be noted that out of total 255 respondents 54 shops online because of Convenience of shopping from home, 40 does it for saving time, 65 does it because of wide ranges of option available

What factor influence your choice of online shopping platform?

	Frequency	Percentage
Brand availability	60	20.90%
Consumer service	33	11.50%
Convenience	37	12.90%
Price	90	31.36%
Variety	67	23.34%
Total	287	

Interpretation: From the above Column Chart it can be noted that out of total 287 respondents, 60 uses online platform because of brand availability, 33 because of better consumer service, 37 because of convenience, 90 because of better price and 67 because of better variety.

Types of advertisement mostly attracting you to purchase from online platform

	Frequency	Percentage
Festival Ads	60	30.93%
Promotional Ads	55	28.35%
Discounting Ads	79	40.72%
Total	194	

Interpretation: From the above Pie Chart it can be noted that out of total 197 respondents ,60 are attracted to online platform because of festival ads, 55 are attracted to promotional ads and 79 are attracted to discounting ads.

What are the issues you faced while shopping online?

	Frequency	Percentage
Delivery charge	46	17.29%
Delivery time	40	15.04%

Inaccurate Sizing	25	9.40%
No issue faced	39	14.66%
Payment criteria	23	8.65%
Return/Exchange policy	40	15.04%
Security or privacy concern	21	7.89%
Low quality of products	32	12.03%
Total	266	

Interpretation: From the above Column Chart it can be noted that out of total 266 respondents, 46 doesn't buy online because of delivery charges, 40 doesn't buy because of delivery time it takes, 25 doesn't but because of inaccurate sizing issue, 23 due to certain payment criteria, 40 due to unfavourable return/exchanging policy, 21 due to security issues, 32 due to low product quality while 39 faced no issue.

Rate your satisfaction with the overall shopping experience (online) for apparels.

	Frequency	Percentage
1. Very unsatisfied	15	9.80%
2. Unsatisfied	12	7.84%
3. Neutral	33	21.57%
4. Satisfied	49	32.03%
5. Very satisfied	44	28.76%
Total	153	

Interpretation: From the above Column Chart it can be noted that out of total 153 respondents, 44 is very satisfied, 49 are just satisfied, 33 have neutral opinion, 12 are unsatisfied and remaining 15 are very unsatisfied

HYPOTHESIS TESTING

H_0 : Age Group and Shopping Preference are independent

H_1 : Age Group and Shopping Preference are dependent

Age group * Where do you mainly shop from? Cross tabulation

			Where do you mainly shop from?		Total
			Offline (Retail) store	Online store	
Age group	15-25	Count	191	108	299
		Expected Count	185.5	113.5	299.0
	26-35	Count	21	26	47
		Expected Count	29.2	17.8	47.0
	36-45	Count	22	12	34
		Expected Count	21.1	12.9	34.0
	Above 45	Count	16	7	23
		Expected Count	14.3	8.7	23.0
Total		Count	250	153	403
		Expected Count	250.0	153.0	403.0

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	7.099 ^a	3	0.069
Likelihood Ratio	6.903	3	0.075
N of Valid Cases	403		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 8.73.

As $p(0.069) > 0.05$, we accept H_0 and conclude that Age and Shopping preference is independent.

H_0 : Gender and shopping preference are independent.

H_1 : Gender and shopping preference are dependent.

Gender * Where do you mainly shop from? Cross tabulation

			Where do you mainly shop from?		Total
			Offline (Retail) store	Online store	
Gender	Female	Count	74	50	124
		Expected Count	76.9	47.1	124.0
	Male	Count	176	103	279
		Expected Count	173.1	105.9	279.0
Total		Count	250	153	403
		Expected Count	250.0	153.0	403.0

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Chi-Square Tests									
	Value	df	Asymptotic sided)	Significance (2-	Exact sided)	Sig. (2-	Exact sided)	Sig. (1-	
Pearson Chi-Square	.423 ^a	1	0.516						
Continuity Correction ^b	0.290	1	0.590						
Likelihood Ratio	0.421	1	0.517						
Fisher's Exact Test					0.578		0.294		
N of Valid Cases	403								
a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 47.08.									
b. Computed only for a 2x2 table									

As $p(0.51) > 0.05$, We accept H_0 and conclude that Gender and Shopping preference is independent.

H_0 : Gender's mostly use payment method is independent.

H_1 : Gender's mostly use payment method is Dependent.

Gender * Which payment method do you mostly use? Cross tabulation						
			Which payment method do you mostly use?			Total
			Cards (Credit/Debit)	Cash	UPI	
Gender	Female	Count	18	71	35	124
		Expected Count	20.3	59.1	44.6	124.0
	Male	Count	48	121	110	279
		Expected Count	45.7	132.9	100.4	279.0
Total		Count	66	192	145	403
		Expected Count	66.0	192.0	145.0	403.0

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6.848 ^a	2	0.033
Likelihood Ratio	6.882	2	0.032
N of Valid Cases	403		
a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 20.31.			

As $p(0.033) < 0.05$, we reject H_0 and conclude that Gender and payment method is dependent.

FINDINGS

- This study revealed that consumers prefer to make their purchases from physical stores as opposed to the online shops.
- Based on our research, we discovered that the primary reason customers purchase from physical stores is to inspect the quality before making a purchase, whereas online shoppers do it mostly for affordability.
- According to data based on our research, hoardings draw in more offline business, whereas discount advertisements lure in more online business.
- As per our study, the primary concern offline purchasers faced was that it needed a lot of time, but majority did not encounter any issues while online shoppers' primary concerns were the return/exchange policy and delivery time.
- The results of our research revealed that there is no correlation between age and preferred purchasing platform, and that neither variable depends on the other.
- Our analyses revealed that there is no association between gender and choice of shopping platform, and neither factor depends on the other.
- The research we conducted concluded that there is a relationship between payment method and gender. Thus, a particular payment method might be utilized to draw in clients of a specific gender.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is advised that offline sellers increase their investments in hoarding to draw in more customers, increase the variety of clothing to ensure that clients won't leave disappointed, and finally improve the atmosphere, design, and lighting of their stores to create a welcoming and cozy environment that promotes perusing and discovery.
- It is recommended that online merchants use discounting advertisements to advertise their products and boost sales. They should also modify their current return/exchange policy to give customers peace of mind that the product is genuine and good. Finally, they should implement secure payment gateways and clear return policies to build confidence and trust among online shoppers.
- It is recommended that sellers keep a close eye on customer reviews, industry developments, and rival tactics in order to stay educated, adapt quickly to shifting customer needs and preferences, and be aware of the vital payment methods that people choose.
- This study comes highly recommended to future scholars. This could be used as a resource or manual for people who wish to carry out a similar study on customer satisfaction. If anyone is interested, they can contribute more pertinent data that will enhance and expand the customer satisfaction survey.

CONCLUSION

The study on consumer preference towards online and offline apparel shopping in Gujarat has revealed significant findings about the dynamics of the apparel retail industry. The research, involving 403 participants from various educational backgrounds and professions, found that a significant proportion of consumers prefer online shopping due to factors such as convenience, a wide range of options, and competitive pricing. However, offline shopping remains popular among consumers who value the tactile experience and personalized service offered by physical stores.

Key factors influencing choices between online and offline platforms for apparel purchases include product variety, pricing, brand reputation, customer service, and the overall shopping experience. Discounting advertisements play a crucial role in attracting consumers to online platforms, while the ambiance and visual appeal of offline stores are significant drivers of footfall and sales.

The study also highlighted common issues faced by buyers in both online and offline shopping scenarios, such as concerns about product quality, sizing accuracy, delivery times, and return/exchange policies. Addressing these issues is essential for enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Recommendations for offline and online sellers in the apparel industry include enhancing store ambiance, expanding clothing variety, improving customer service, and leveraging discounting advertisements to create a welcoming and engaging shopping environment. Future research could explore regional variations, gender-specific preferences, and the impact of specific marketing strategies on consumer behaviour.

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