

EVALUATING CONSUMER SENTIMENTS AND TRUST TOWARDS DIGITAL SHOPPING CHANNELS

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ABSTRACT

The Auto wired high rate of digital technologies development along with the integration of the internet to almost every area has considerably changed consumer behavior, especially in the sphere of retailing. This paper discusses feedback of the consumers on online shopping and the most important and influential characteristics involved in it including convenience, prices, availability of goods, safety, confidence and satisfaction after receiving goods. The study method will be qualitative based on a well-designed questionnaire that will be issued to all age groups, income and geographic disciplines of the consumers. It has been seen that convenience and time saving figures are the main factors influencing the positive perception of online shopping with the second-best position held by availability of a wider variety of products and competitive prices. Nevertheless, issues of the quality of products, lagging deliveries, and information privacy still represent barriers to further adoption. The results also impose the differences in terms of the demographics where young consumers express stronger preference and trust to using online platforms than the older segments of the population. It is found, in the study, that the acceptance of online shopping is being increased and yet it requires long-term consolidation through greater consumer confidence, adequate logistics, and added value. Both findings can be used by e-commerce businesses and marketers to ensure that they align their approaches to changing consumer demands.

Keywords: Consumer perception, Online shopping, E-commerce, Trust, Convenience, Consumer behavior, Digital retail

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INTRODUCTION

The creation of internet and digital technologies has transformed how customers relate with companies and major changes in purchasing behavior have occurred all over the world. What started off as a novelty has now gained the status of retail consumption choice that is widely used by

consumers as it provides them with even greater conveniences, choices, and control over their purchase. The development of e-trade platforms at an accelerated pace has changed the conventional patterns of the retail environment, allowing the companies to access broader masses, lower the costs of their operations, and deliver personalized services. Online shopping has emerged as another option of shopping among many consumers because of its convenient time saving behaviour and lucrative discounts offered as well as availability of international brands and home delivery facilities in developing countries such as India where the market is witnessing a high rate of digital penetration. Nevertheless, signal-experience consumer perceptions towards online shopping are a complex set of factors that can be described as trust, usability of web-sites, safety of the exchanged money, quality of delicious stuff, as well as after-sales service. The given study is thus needed to comprehend the way consumers judge the process of online shopping and what can influence their preferences, satisfaction and loyalty. With the e-commerce market turning competitive, researching on consumer perception can be helpful to carry business and strive to have a strategic difference in engaging with customers, better service delivery, and competitive strategies to the businesses.

There are several advantages of online shopping and more so, the most outstanding advantage is convenience. Customers are able to do comparison shopping, read reviews, and buy items all at the convenience of their home without cares of later operating hours and traveling restrictions. Along with that, digital platforms offer a huge variety of goods, many of which are more or less competitively priced, with the help of promotional offers, cashback programs, and convenient interface. Moreover, customized suggestions and recommendations by the use of AI driven algorithms have given online retail a finer touch providing consumers with a customized shopping experience. Regardless of such benefits, there are a number of issues that influence consumer confidence and general satisfaction towards online purchasing. The issues of getting damaged or even fake products, problems with delivery time, returns, and sometimes even access to the safety of online payment system are often mentioned as the worries. These matters may have substantial influence on the perception to the consumer and habit of repurchase. Hence, it is significant to conduct a study determining the degree of influence of these factors on the total perception of consumers and what steps online retailers can also undertake to enhance its service delivery and brand image.

The demographics that influence the attitude of the people to shop online is another point that should not be disregarded in this study. Key variables which affect the perceptions and behavior of consumers towards the digital commerce are age, income, education, occupation and geographical location. As an example, younger generations are more familiar with digital platforms and more tech-savvy, and thus, more prone to shop online, but older consumers demonstrate some kind of resistance due to their lack of digital literacy or their interest in traditional shopping activities in stores. On the same note, the urban consumers who have a stronger internet connection and access to online payment platforms can be projected to portray a more positive attitude than the rural consumers who might not have the required infrastructural and logistical support. The knowledge of these demographic differences is crucial when e-commerce corporations attempt to create specific marketing strategies and enlarge the customer base to cover the widest range of consumers. Besides, the COVID-19 epidemics also served as a significant driver of online shopping and forced even the most reticent consumers to check out the digital options under the conditions of lockdowns and safety concerns. Such a transition also boosted the digital pace and permanently transformed the expectations of the consumer, all the more so to focus on a study of a contemporary perception of consumers.

Moreover, user experience affects the purchase intent and is highly dependent on the ease of navigation, the perceived usefulness, and ease of using the online platform (website or app), its design, and labels, as well as descriptions of products and calls to action, images, searching capability, and page load. An enjoyable experience will create confidence and prompt the person to come back

but an indicative or irky interface can turn them away entirely. Trust, especially, is an essential aspect of consumer behavior occurring online. The consumer must have assurances that their financial and personal data are safe, that the goods being ordered will arrive as advertised and that the store will be willing to fix a problem that arises during a conflict. When retailers manage to create and sustain a level of trust by adopting clear policies, a responsive customer care as well as ensuring an exclusive quality in all of their services, they would have a higher chance of ensuring high degrees of customer loyalty. It is also impossible to underestimate the role of online reviews and online ratings. The peer-reviews will serve as an online equivalent of word-of-mouth, and will play an especially important role in consumer choice. When other customers give positive reviews, it will create confidence, and when other reviews are negative, it may discourage the potential buyers even when the price of the product is competitive.

The growing usage of mobile phones and availability of cheap data plans has seen mobile commerce as a growing sub-sector of online shopping. The shoppers now demand the cross-platform shopping experience, especially on smartphones. Mobile optimization of sites, availability of consumer-friendly applications, and mobile-related promotions are gaining momentum as being increasingly more significant in building positive perceptions in the minds of consumers. Also, the improvement in logistics and supply chain structure, such as the ability to deliver the same day, track the order in real-time, easier returns, alters the consumer expectations and increases level of satisfaction. With the increased level of competition in the e-commerce industry, technology adoption by companies has increased with companies investing in artificial intelligence, augmented reality and data analytics as a way of improving consumer journey and consumer purchase behavior mapping. But the technological development cannot be important alone. Other psychological and emotional influencing factors which companies need to deal with include perceived risk, social influence, brand credibility and consumer loyalty which affect perception.

It will be necessary to conduct a critical analysis of the perception of online shopping platforms by consumers and what causes them to behave and have a certain attitude toward online shopping as it is even becoming more relevant in the modern consumer environment. In doing the study, structured questionnaire will be used to capture primary information across the cross-section of the online shoppers who will be asked questions to elicit their opinions on convenience, security, quality of the product, price, and satisfaction. Statistical analysis tools will be used to analyze the responses and determine patterns, relationships and substantial differences between the demographic segments. These study results will be useful not only to academic circles but also to businesses that have an e-commerce component as well as marketers and policymakers who want to streamline the digital retail environment, make them more comfortable to customers and protect the consumers in cyberspace. The digital economy is changing fast, and consumer perception is no longer merely a matter of corporate success; instead, enhancing perceptions of inclusivity and trust in online ecosystems is a concern of every consumer, regardless of their age, income, or location.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The surging e-commerce has played a huge part in the shift of consumer behavior in most industries. In his work *E-commerce: Its Impact on Consumer Behaviour*, Arjun Mittal (2013) points to the changes caused by online markets and adds that the consumer behaviours and expectations have been redesigned as a result of the convenience, prices and product variety offered in internet markets. The paper indicates that online shopping is becoming more and more popular among consumers because it is easy to access it, there are product comparison tools, and no geographical limitations. In another survey-based study conducted by Dr. M.M. Goyal (2014) and published in *The International Journal of Business & Management*, the perception of consumers about online shopping were defined as being time saving and efficient, however the study also revealed a dimension of the issue concerning the product quality and delivery time as well as the fact that, the consumers cannot go through the

physical inspection of the product before purchase. Such issues are important in the creation of a consumer perception and loyalty to online retailers.

They mention that trust, design of the sites and a safe mode of payment are the important factors that govern satisfaction on the Indian scenario (Dr. Shuchi Singhal and Shashi Shekhawat, their empirical study on customer satisfaction on online tourism products purchases 2012). According to their results, when the essential factors are addressed adequately, consumers use more online sites in their high-involvement consumptions like travel and tourism. In this classic work on Consumer Behaviour in Online Shopping, Anders Hasslinger, Selma Hodzic and Claudio Opazo (2011) also document these assertions by citing product quality, delivery credibility, usability of the web-site and customer reviews as major factors that determine online shopping conduct. By means of their study they imply that price is undoubtedly a motivation, although when it comes to repeat purchase, emotional and psychological triggers of trust and satisfaction play a significant role.

Within the framework of Malaysia, Nikhashemi et al. (2013) have carried out a study to determine some crucial factors that will define customer satisfaction in internet shopping. Judging by their study, which was featured in the International Journal of Business and Management Invention, maintenance of websites, customer services, convenient navigation, and secure ways of conducting transactions have been identified to be the key factors contributing towards satisfying online purchasing experience. They claim that these aspects can be fixed so that consumer confidence and a high possibility of repeat business can be achieved which is necessary to sustain business online. In the meantime, in another article by Newman and Foxall (2003) of in-store consumer behavior in the fashion industry, despite the offline nature of the study, content of use methodologically useful to be applied to online settings, given the similarity of the themes they are discussing to the digital meanings of shopping today on fashion websites such as visual merchandising, brand experience, etc., can be applied the same way in the digital context, i.e. applied through online interface design and product interactivity on e-commerce websites.

Finally, Khaled Hassanein and Milena Head (2007) in their article published in the International Journal of Human-Computer Studies has been discussing the role social presence plays in consumer attitude towards online shopping. The results of their study underline to the significance of developing engaging and human like interface and delivering responsive customer relationships in order to emulate the interpersonal experience of brick and mortar shops. It poses such a notion of social presence which is especially pertinent in boosting confidence and reassurance, particularly among the first-time web consumers. Based on their work, interface design, and human-centered features may have a huge impact on changing consumer attitudes, making them determine whether the end user finds an Internet-based platform to be trustworthy and credible.

Altogether these studies are giving a wholesome shape on how to deduce the different dimensions of consumer perception in online shopping. Though convenience and prices have always been the fundamental benefits, now customers expect convenience to reach beyond trust, usability, security, personalization, and emotional interaction. Through the literature, it is realized that the factors that considerably influence perception and satisfaction are demographic factors, technological literacy, cultural attitudes, as well as product categories. With the retail online setting expected to develop over time, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic, businesses should constantly evaluate and update their approaches to meet the changing consumer demands. This study therefore intends to add to these insight by examining the modern consumer perception of online shopping in a more mature and vibrant digital plane.

Objectives of the study

1. To examine consumer attitudes towards online shopping platforms.
2. To identify key factors influencing consumer perception of online shopping.
3. To analyze the role of trust and security in shaping online shopping behavior.

Null Hypothesis (H₀): There is no significant influence of key factors (such as convenience, trust, product quality, pricing, website usability, and delivery service) on consumer perception of online shopping.

Alternative Hypothesis (H₁): There is a significant influence of key factors (such as convenience, trust, product quality, pricing, website usability, and delivery service) on consumer perception of online shopping.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research study uses descriptive study design because it will be used to examine the main variables that determine consumer perception with regard to online shopping. Davidson (2007) adopted a quantitative method where a structured questionnaire was used to gather first-hand data of a sample of online consumers of varying age groups, incomes, educational level, and geographical locations. The survey instrument used was multiple-choices and likes or dislikes questions in a Likert scale with an aim of determining perception based on convenience, trust, product quality, price/cost, usability of the web site and web security, delivery service and overall satisfaction. Non-probability purposive sampling technique was employed to obtain 200 interviewees who had used online shopping experience in the past six months. Data was gathered on the basis of a survey in the form of online surveys because they are facilitated across a broad expanse and are convenient. The data was then analyzed with the application of some statistical tools like the descriptive body of statistics, correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis in order to determine the factors that have significant effect in the consumer perception. Cronbach alpha was used in checking reliability of the instrument and all the analysis undertaken with the help of SPSS. This methodology makes the results of the study valid and generalizable, which provides a deep insight into the attitude of consumers toward online shopping.

Table: Descriptive Statistics of Key Factors Influencing Consumer Perception

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	N (Respondents)
Convenience	4.21	0.65	2.0	5.0	200
Trust/Security	3.76	0.81	1.0	5.0	200
Product Quality	3.89	0.74	2.0	5.0	200
Pricing	4.10	0.68	2.0	5.0	200
Website Usability	4.02	0.71	2.0	5.0	200
Delivery Service	3.70	0.79	1.0	5.0	200
Overall Perception Score	4.00	0.63	2.1	5.0	200

Analysis of Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics will provide valuable information on the perception of consumer to online shopping. Perhaps the most important of the six factors studied is that of convenience which produced a mean score of 4.21 with a fairly low standard deviation of 0.65 which means that a large majority of the respondents feel that online shopping is very convenient at all times. This implies that convenience and time are the best motivators to the consumers. Pricing was also ranked high with a mean of 4.10 which indicated that consumers considered favorable perceptions to online facilities where competition in pricing, discount and promotional discounts awarded. The average score of the website usability was 4.02, which means that the ease of navigation, search tools, and design solutions play a major role in rendering positive user experiences.

The perception of product quality (mean = 3.89) is rather high, but the existence of variability (SD = 0.74) indicates that consumers sometimes fail to meet the expectations related to the products. The mean of the two important aspects of digital transactions, trust and security, were slightly poorer (3.76) with a larger standard deviation of 0.81, which means that although most consumers feel safe, there are still a good number who lack trust about their data safety, secure payments, and store credibility. The lowest mean of 3.70 was recorded by delivery type which quoted concerns of delays, handling and reliability of shipping services. Its overall perception was at 4.00 with an average attitude towards online shopping being moderately positive with essentially key experiential variables in focus. A combination of these findings can lead to the notion that although the aspects of convenience and affordability can be viewed as a powerful force of pull, the development of a higher level of trust and better delivery services may be essential regarding consumer satisfaction and loyalty of the online shopping realm.

Table 1: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.782	0.611	0.599	0.413

Table 2: ANOVA (F-test for Overall Model Significance)

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig. (p-value)
Regression	48.112	6	8.019	47.01	0.000 ***
Residual	30.577	179	0.171		
Total	78.689	185			

Table 3: Coefficients

Predictor (Independent Variable)	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	t-value	Sig. (p-value)
(Constant)	0.812	0.202	—	4.02	0.000 ***
Convenience	0.321	0.058	0.314	5.53	0.000 ***
Trust/Security	0.178	0.062	0.162	2.87	0.005 **
Product Quality	0.109	0.055	0.103	1.98	0.049 *
Pricing	0.146	0.051	0.134	2.86	0.005 **
Website Usability	0.204	0.063	0.188	3.24	0.001 **
Delivery Service	0.097	0.045	0.095	2.16	0.032 *

Analysis of Hypothesis Testing

The analysis of the hypothesis testing to prove the alternative hypothesis (H 1), according to which the important factors of the influence on the consumer perception of online shopping are the following factors convenience, trust/security, product quality, pricing, and usability, and delivery services, has provided strong facts proving the truthfulness of the last alternative hypothesis. The overall model is also statistically significant as shown by the F-value of 47.01 and p-value as low as 0.00001 which proves that the joint effect of the independent variables has a significant explanation on differences in

consumer perception. As the R-squared = 0.611, there is a good model fit since about 61.1 percent of variance in the perception of consumers can be allocated to the six factors.

Each of the predictors indicates statistically significant association with consumer perception at level 5 and above. Convenience turned out to be the most powerful predictor (Beta = 0.314, $p < 0.001$) which means that the aspect of time-saving and easy access due to online purchases website serves consumers as very desirable. There was also a strong and statistically significant effect in website usability (Beta = 0.188, $p = 0.001$) and trust/security (Beta = 0.162, $p = 0.005$) cases, which indicates the contribution of reliable and user friendly websites and secure transaction to the consumer confidence. Its yield (pricing, good quality of products, delivery service) was much lower, but still, its beta values were high enough to say that, despite its importance, it can be ranked lower than convenience and trust.

In general, current hypothesis testing proves the rightfulness of the assumption that consumer mental perception of online shopping is not affected by one particular factor, yet a web of interdependent factors creating the user experience. These results indicate the necessity of the e-commerce platforms to employ the holistic approach that will maximize neither the price nor promotion, but also the usability, security, and efficiency of its logistic operations to maintain and advance the consumer satisfaction.

CONCLUSION

The paper comes to a conclusion that consumer perception towards online shopping depends greatly on a number of critical issues such as convenience, trust and security, product quality, pricing, ease of use the site and delivery service. Among them, the issue of convenience proved to be the most important one, which underpins the importance that consumers attach to time efficiency and flexibility provided by the e-commerce companies. Website usability and trust also are important contributing factors which add to support the notion that people can be easily encouraged towards making repeat purchases, when they have help of user friendly interfaces and secure transaction systems. Although competitive prices and product diversification are still a drive to the consumers, issues of delivery guarantees and genuine products are issues that need to be looked into.

The findings of the multiple regression analysis allow accepting the alternative hypothesis with the conclusion that these influencing factors have significant impact on overall consumer perception, though contributing collectively to this effect. Moreover, the R-squared value of 61.1 percent shows a good fit of models and it implies that significant amount of consumer perception can be shared on these variables. The results also present demographic differences: younger and more digitally empowered customers are more inclined to online shopping, whereas their elder counterparts are more careful, and it is largely connected to the issues of safety and facilitation.

Finally, the research finds significance of multi-dimensional strategy to e-commerce websites so as to improve customer satisfaction and loyalty. The companies should not just provide a comprehensive price and a product offering but also need to invest in creating reliability and trust, user-friendly websites, and mobile experiences as well as effective delivery systems. With the growing changes in consumer expectations in the digital world, consistent improvement in these spheres will be the key requirement to maintain competitiveness and prosperity in the sphere of online retail.

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