

## **Preferred Shopping Modes: An Analysis of Fashion Conscious Buyers**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The mode of shopping has seen a major shift in consumer preference in the last decade. The introduction of social media and internet not only in metro cities but also in rural areas has lead to a shift in buying behaviour of people. The purpose of the present study was to tap the preferred mode of shopping among the fashion conscious youth. The Fashion Conscious scale was administered on a sample 70 people between the ages of 18-25 years. The sample scoring high on the scale was selected and 5 in depth interviews were conducted to understand the positives and negatives of the preferred shopping modes using the method of thematic analysis. The results indicate there is a shift in preference from offline to online shopping but offline still remains the dominant pathways. Also the consumers are using mixed pathway, where they search products online and buy them offline.*

**Keywords-** *shopping modes, online shopping, offline shopping, fashion conscious*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The last decade has seen a metamorphosis in terms of lifestyle preferences and buying trends among Indian consumers. Urban India has embraced consumerism and a new hunger for branded products has emerged. A young working population is living by the mantra of "work hard and live well", it has drastically changed the way of spending money by them. (Nair,2016). The introduction of the international chains not only in metro cities but also in smaller cities is an example of shifting in buying behaviour of the people. The shift is seen in all the areas marking an appraisal in living standards. However, the change in consumer preferences is most apparent in fashion apparel due to the influence of internet and social media. Nowadays, internet has become as a primary tool for purchasing products and services by consumers. (HBD, 2011).

The media has a great impact on consumers' perceptions of fashion consciousness. Fashion consciousness refers to a person's awareness and interest in fashion (Nam et al., 2006). Indian fashion industry is rapidly growing from designing ornate clothing for wedding to prêt linens, sports as well as casual wear. A report from Indian Fashion Industry indicated an increase its growth from 200crore to 1000crores in coming five to seven years (Judd, 2017). The Indian consumers are using both the channels, online as well as offline to buy their products.

The traditional brick and motor is regarded as the offline shopping while online is the e-commerce regarded as a particular type of retail channel that can be compared with both traditional shopping channels, such as supermarkets, and with other indirect channels, such as telephone and catalogue purchasing (Alreck & Settle, 2002).The internet commerce industry in India has seen a manifold increase in the last couple of years with the total market size increasing from INR 19, 688crores by the end of 2009 to an estimated INR 31, 598 crores in 2010. The net commerce market size is expected to grow by 47% and touch INR 46,52 crores by end of 2011. This was highlighted by a report on the E-commerce released by the Internet and mobile Association of India (IAMAI). Also as in the next couple of months bigwigs like Reliance Retail, Aditya Birla Retail and Tata's Croma are looking at entering the R2,05 crore e-retailing market, growing at over 30% annually.

However it can be said that the prevalence and convenience of online shopping will not necessarily spell the doom of brick-and-mortar stores. While e-commerce experiences a faster growth rate, the majority of retail sales still happens offline. Retailers in 2017 have found ways to integrate technology with showrooms and shelves. These techniques are needed to meet the constant changing demand of the consumers.

The present was thus undertaken to understand the current trends of fashion consciousness in India. Also, the preferences of the highly fashion conscious youth in selecting their modes of shopping. And lastly to develop an insight of what are the characteristics of the channel, to which the consumers get inclined for shopping.

## **Procedure**

The present study is a mixed research using both quantitative and qualitative analysis. The quantitative analysis was used to segregate the highly fashion conscious population from the general population and qualitative analysis was used to further investigate the preferred mode of shopping by fashion conscious people.

Fashion conscious scale was introduced to a sample of 60 people ranging from 18-25 years. College students, is the age group which has shown to have high purchasing power and indicate higher levels of spending in comparison to other demographic groups, particularly in online shopping, and are therefore considered very important consumer groups and an appropriate population for present study (Seock and Bailey, 2008).

The 6 items in Fashion Conscious scale were marked on a 5 point likert- scale, where 5 was given to “Strongly Agree” while 1 was given to “Strongly Disagree”. The total score of each individual were calculated and the one who scored more than 20 was marked as “Highly Fashion Conscious”. Out of the fashion conscious individuals, 5 were interviewed according to the availability of the person. The interview sessions were designed such as to obtain detailed information about what was the preferred mode of shopping and which characteristics of the shopping channel influenced the individual more. Most of the questions were open ended to gather as much information as possible. This data was then qualitatively analyzed using Thematic Analysis. Initial codes were generated from the data which was further used to extract themes.

## **II. DISCUSSION**

The individuals who scored high on fashion conscious scale came up with lots of pros and cons of both online and offline channels of shopping. The main themes derived from all the interviews have been discussed below.

### **Online Positives**

The report released by BCG highlights that online shopping has grown by 8 times from 2013. The first and foremost important of online benefits is the availability of variety in all the products and their excellent customer service. The advantages of getting your products sitting at home, cash on delivery, together with the returning or exchange from home itself are not less for indulging in the online shopping. The innovativeness and variety in online shopping together with providing information about all the products is a huge benefit in the ecommerce (Brian F. Blake,2003).The second in the line is the 24x7 access of consumers to the online market. As quoted by one of the participant, “The best part of shopping online is that you can stream through it whenever you have time, it can be done in the middle of the lectures or even midnight.” The malls and stores in offline market have fixed opening and closing time which is not very convenient. The anytime access provided by online sites seems to be a huge asset for the buyers as well as sellers., said by a report IMRB International (Indian Market Research Bureau), 2006.

Another major factor influencing buyers to shop online is the regular offers and discounts available throughout the year. What attracts customer attention to online stores is the ‘great deals’ ‘best prices’ and ‘better bargains’ (Goswami,2011). The designing of the site also influences the buying behaviour of the consumers. As most of the sites have started showing the products which are bestsellers separately, it is becoming easy for the buyers to select from the popular choices. The last element which makes a pitch for online shopping is the increasing trust of the buyers in the authenticity of the online product. All of the people interviewed have their mixed reactions on the reliability of the online shopping. One of the respondent told that “The online brand stores have now greater authenticity of the products.” This suggests that respondents feel that the benefits offered by online shopping outweigh the risks (Ha & Coghill, 2008).

### **Online Negatives**

While demand of the online shopping is increasing, there seem to be little restraints which hinders the purchase of the product. The process of selecting from the huge variety is cumbersome and time taking, “both online and offline takes same time,” as said by one of the interviewee. Another major problem faced by the buyers on the online fashion products is of the size, fitting and lack of physical contact with the item or salesperson of the item (Bhatnagar, Misra, & Rao, 2000). Many clients complain to have received wrong sizes or the fit of the piece was not proper, which reduces the level of satisfaction a shopper should have got after having the product. One bad experience reduces the trust in the buying medium altogether. According to Lynch et al. (2001) trust in the vendor and positive affect toward the site were the strongest predictors of shopping online. The research also found consumers are comfortable buying only less expensive products online, while the shopping of expensive products is done mostly offline ( Girard, Silverblatt, and Korgaonkar 2002; Kim and Kim 2004) . As one of the interviewee commented, “ I will never buy a jacket costing INR 7000 online.” From this it can be inferred that online products have not yet gained the trust and popularity among the consumers for expensive buying.

### **Offline Positives**

The traditional brick and mortar can never be competed with today's growing ecommerce. There are still number of cities where even today offline market remains the priority. This is because in offline shopping you can use all your senses together. A person, who loves shopping, will always want to see, feel, touch, try and then buy the products. It is impossible for online sites to match up to this attribute of offline market. As one of the interviewee says that, "in stores i can feel the product and know its quality which is a great advantage". Also a survey reports that "when it comes to apparels, 78 per cent of consumers go to a store to see the new styles and try them on" (Satyanarayan,2017). This point towards the necessity of having the offline market even when the online is proving itself more feasible.

It was also found the social outing one gets with the offline buying is equally as important as the buying of goods. The time you spend while shopping is also a family time for some while others call it a picnic or an evening off with friends. As one of the respondent said, "i go out of time just to do my shopping and get a weekend to go out." Through this we can say that not only the product but also the quality of time spend together matters while choosing the channel used for shopping (TSF,2017).

The feeling of gratification also came out to be an important factor while talking about shopping. The shopaholics seem to like more of immediate gratification when they really want to buy some products, rather than waiting for it to get delivered at home in 2-3 days. As said in the interview, "When I saw the Sephora makeup in Delhi I couldn't resist buying it." So this advantage of offline shopping, to get whatever you want immediately is tough to be matched by online. Through this it can be inferred that the industry is in transition. The 'See Now, Buy Now' model is becoming more and more prevalent because of the internet and social media, people seem to grab what they saw their favourite celeb wearing.", says Tina Tihaliani Parikh, executive director of the multi-brand store, Ensemble.

### **Offline negatives**

While comparing between offline and online shopping, the major drawback of offline shopping faced by consumers is, the lack of variety available. As the offline stores have limited space available for display of products, they cannot keep everything at hand, while the online store has everything available until it is out of stock. Delafrooz et al., (2009) studied that convenience, price and wider varieties are the other factors influence the attitude of customers towards online shopping. This lacuna in offline stores is shifting people to online shopping.

Another shortcoming of offline is the lack of regular offers and sales as compared to online offers. The offline channels are able to provide more discounts in comparison to their brick and mortar counterparts (Sarka & Sabyasachi, 2017). Many offers and benefits are given to regular online shoppers which is not available to offline consumers. One of the interviewee said, "When you know you need a new shirt in off season i always order it online." If the offline market has to sustain its credibility, they have to compete with the growing online chains; they have to come up with customer friendly policies and more of the offers and sales which please the consumers.

## **III. FINDINGS**

Hence it can be said that consumers do not have any fixed path or preferred mode for shopping. The mode of buying depends on various reasons discussed above, therefore each company has to develop its market both online as well as offline to sustain. As said by designer Malhotra, "Our strategy so far has been to strike a balance between both worlds. Our newest collections can be found on shelves in-store and online just a couple of days after a show."While a vast majority of his clientele frequent the designer's boutiques for their couture needs, his designs are available on several e-commerce platforms as well(Vaidhya,2016).

Also in the urban cities the youth is indulging itself in mixed pathway, wherein they are searching for products online and then buying them offline. A recent survey has concluded that although 70% of consumers are influenced by online shopping but only 16 per cent make online purchases. The report released by BCG highlights that "5 per cent of purchases, accounting for 16 per cent of the value, are made by consumers following a mixed pathway. Therefore, we can see a shift in the behaviour of consumers towards the shopping mode but the dominant mode is still the offline shopping.

### **Limitations**

The present study was carried out on the small sample population, therefore cannot be generalised. The study has tapped only the age group from18-25, which is not the only population indulged in fashion shopping. Also the results are drawn on the basis of only 5 interviews which might not be sufficient to reach a conclusion. The method of thematic analysis may have certain bias on behalf of the researcher.

## Future Implications

The present study can be used by the marketing managers to develop their strategies according to changing scenario of the youth's buying behaviour. The small as well as large scale companies should divide their budgets for both the shopping channels depending on their capacities. As the consumer is looking for something new each time they visit the offline or online store, there is a constant need to bring innovation as the future of the brand always lies in the hands of its consumers.

## IV. CONCLUSION

Form the above discussion it can be concluded that the online marketing is gaining its pace over offline store but it cannot be said that it has taken over it. The consumers are exploring both the modes but do not have any fixed preferences. The online shopping is new and has not gained trust over the age old bricks and mortar retails. However, a lot of money is being invested on bringing the up the online retail markets as it clearly seems to be the future of our retail industry.

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