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Article

An Empirical Assessment of Divergent Consumer Cognitions Pertaining to E-Commerce Versus Brick-and-Mortar Retail Experiences: Evidence from the Indore Metropolitan Region

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Abstract: The Indian retail sector is undergoing a transformation with the growth of e-commerce, yet traditional retail persists, especially in cities like Indore. This study investigates consumer perceptions of online versus offline shopping experiences in Indore, focusing on factors such as convenience, sensory experience, product quality assurance, pricing, and demographic influences. A quantitative approach was used to survey 143 consumers. Key findings reveal that online shopping is perceived as more convenient, while offline shopping is valued for sensory engagement and quality assurance. Age and education significantly influence online shopping preferences, and channel preferences vary across product categories. The study highlights the need for retailers to adopt omni-channel strategies that integrate the strengths of both channels to cater to diverse consumer needs in transitional retail markets like Indore.

Keywords: Consumer Perception, Online Shopping, Offline Shopping, E-commerce, Traditional Retail, Omni-channel

INTRODUCTION

The Indian retail sector has transformed significantly over the past decade, driven by the rapid rise of e-commerce platforms like Amazon, Flipkart, and Myntra. These platforms offer convenience, broad product choices, and competitive pricing, reshaping consumer behaviour and retail strategies (IBEF, 2023). A key enabler has been the surge in internet and smartphone usage, especially in semi-urban and rural areas. By 2023, India had over 900 million internet users, with mobile commerce expected to account for 70% of e-commerce transactions by 2030 (Bain & Company & IAMAI, 2022).

Government initiatives such as Digital India and UPI have strengthened digital infrastructure, encouraging both consumers and SMEs to embrace e-commerce (Ministry of Electronics and IT, 2023). Consumer trust grew notably during the COVID-19 pandemic, further accelerating online adoption (Deloitte, 2021). E-commerce has also enhanced financial inclusion by empowering small vendors and artisans to access broader markets.

Status in Tier-1 and Tier-2 cities in India

Retailers across India have adapted swiftly, embracing digital tools like AI-driven platforms, UPI payments, and social media marketing. Hybrid models and open platforms like ONDC are making digital commerce more inclusive. The sector's resilience, especially during the pandemic, highlights a strategic shift that positions India as a global leader in retail innovation.

Despite the rise of digital commerce, many consumers in India's Tier-1 and Tier-2 cities continue to prefer traditional in-store shopping, especially for products like apparel, electronics, and groceries. This preference is rooted in cultural habits where shopping is a social experience and personal interaction matters (KPMG, 2022). Even digitally aware consumers often browse online but finalize purchases offline to ensure authenticity and seek in-person advice (Deloitte, 2021).

Trust plays a major role, particularly in semi-urban areas. Local retailers offer personalized service, flexible terms, and long-standing relationships—benefits e-commerce platforms struggle to replicate (RAI, 2022). Digital literacy gaps also persist; many in Tier-2 and rural areas lack confidence in using apps or fear online fraud (IAMAI, 2022). Physical stores remain more accessible and reliable for these consumers.

However, traditional retailers are adapting by adopting digital tools like UPI payments and WhatsApp orders. Over 60% of small businesses in Tier-2 cities now use at least one digital solution, creating a hybrid retail model (Accenture, 2023). The digital divide, especially in rural and semi-urban areas where internet penetration remains low, reinforces the relevance of physical retail, ensuring it remains a crucial part of India's evolving retail ecosystem (PwC India, 2021; CII, 2022).

Traditional Retailers approach

Traditional retailers in India hold a strong edge due to their deep understanding of local customer preferences, built over decades of personal interactions. This hyper-local knowledge allows them to customize inventory and marketing to align with regional festivals, customs, and language, fostering strong emotional and cultural connections (Ernst & Young, 2023). For instance, retailers in Punjab may stock for Baisakhi, while those in Tamil Nadu prepare for Pongal with culturally relevant items.

In contrast, e-commerce platforms often rely on centralized algorithms that may overlook these regional nuances, resulting in a less personalized experience. Traditional stores also offer local language communication, personalized service, informal credit, and bargaining options— features highly valued in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities (NielsenIQ, 2022).

Local retailers are also quick to adapt to seasonal changes and environmental conditions, such as stocking rain gear during monsoons or adjusting offerings based on harvest seasons (Deloitte, 2022). Their merchandising techniques are culturally rooted, using specific colours, symbols, and store layouts to influence purchasing behaviour—giving them a marketing advantage over impersonal online portals (PwC India, 2021).

Hybrid Model of Retail Traders

Traditional Indian retailers are increasingly embracing a hybrid model, blending digital tools with personalized, community-based service. Instead of full digital transformation, many use UPI, WhatsApp, inventory software, and hyperlocal delivery platforms to modernize while preserving cultural intimacy (BCG & RAI, 2023). This approach addresses consumer demand for both convenience and human connection, especially in Tier-1 and Tier-2 cities (KPMG, 2022). Kirana stores now commonly use WhatsApp for orders and customer updates, a practice that expanded post-pandemic (Technopak, 2022). Simultaneously, digital payments have surged, with small retailers contributing significantly to India's 8 billion monthly UPI transactions (RBI, 2023). These tools offer operational benefits while retaining flexibility like credit and bargaining.

Many retailers have also partnered with platforms like Swiggy, Blink it, and Zomato to offer fast deliveries (PwC India, 2021). This dual-channel model allows them to serve both digital and traditional customers while remaining culturally grounded. The hybrid shift has improved efficiency, customer satisfaction, and business growth, especially in Tier-2 cities where 55% of retailers use at least one digital tool (BCG & RAI, 2023).

These retailers are vital to India's economy, employing over 40 million people and supporting ancillary services (IBEF, 2023). As e-commerce and traditional retail converge, local stores remain key players—blending tradition with tech to meet diverse consumer needs and reinforce community ties.

Omni-Channel Strategy

India's omni-channel strategy is transforming retail by integrating digital and physical experiences across touchpoints—from online platforms to brick-and-mortar stores. This approach ensures a seamless, unified shopping experience, critical in a market marked by diversity in geography, culture, and digital literacy (PwC India, 2021).

Omni-channel retail allows consumers to browse online, pick up in-store, or opt for home delivery, enhancing flexibility (KPMG, 2022). Brands like Flipkart and Amazon offer "Clickand-Collect" services, combining the ease of digital with the tangibility of physical shopping. Personalization is a core strength—retailers like Big Bazaar and Reliance Retail tailor promotions and product assortments to local cultures and festivals while also offering digital shopping options (EY, 2023).

Digital payments (UPI, Paytm, PhonePe) and tech features like QR codes and loyalty apps link online and offline purchases, making transactions fast and secure (McKinsey, 2022). Innovations like Zara's "scan and go" enhance in-store convenience (Deloitte, 2023), while data analytics allow retailers such as Shoppers Stop to deliver personalized promotions and inventory precision across channels (PwC, 2021).

Despite challenges like limited digital access and consumer trust in Tier-2/3 cities (NielsenIQ, 2022), growing smartphone use, 5G rollout, and initiatives like Digital India are reducing barriers. According to BCG & RAI (2023), AI-driven customer insights will further boost omni-channel retail in the coming years.

Ultimately, India's retail growth hinges on this blended model—merging tech efficiency with cultural familiarity—to serve its diverse consumer base and unlock long-term potential.

Retail Status in Indore

Indore which is a prominent Tier-2 city and commercial hub of Madhya Pradesh, traditional retail remains dominant despite rising digital adoption. The city's retail scene reflects a hybrid ecosystem, blending modern malls like Phoenix Citadel with vibrant traditional markets such as Rajwada and MT Cloth Market, where in-person shopping remains a culturally embedded experience (Economic Times, 2023).

According to the Smart Cities Mission (2022), Indore's retail sector is growing at 8–10% annually, driven by rising incomes and urbanization. Physical retail thrives due to consumers' trust in local vendors, the tactile nature of shopping, flexible pricing, and credit facilities. A KPMG (2022) report found 68% of Tier-2 consumers still prefer in-store shopping for categories like clothing, groceries, and electronics.

That said, digital penetration is rising, with 65% internet access in Indore (NielsenIQ, 2023), thanks to smartphones and affordable data. Platforms like Amazon and Myntra report growing traction from Indore, with Myntra recording 35% growth in Tier-2 orders in 2022 (Myntra Annual Report, 2023). Additionally, 48% of local retailers are adopting digital tools for payments and online orders (PwC India, 2021), marking a shift toward hybrid models.

Still, barriers like digital literacy and trust in online payments persist, especially among older consumers (KPMG, 2022). Yet, as connectivity improves and consumer awareness increases, retail in Indore is poised for 12–15% annual growth (Indore Development Authority, 2023), signalling a future where offline strength and digital convenience coalesce into a robust hybrid retail model.

Literature Review

The shift from traditional brick-and-mortar stores to omni-channel retailing has been driven by the growth of e-commerce, which blends online and offline shopping to meet diverse consumer needs (Gupta & Verma, 2022). In India, e-commerce is expected to grow at a CAGR of 21.5% from 2022 to 2030, with a market size of US$ 350 billion by 2030 (IBEF, 2023). Despite this, traditional retail still dominates in Tier-2 cities like Indore, driven by cultural preferences and a desire for personalized services (KPMG, 2022). A hybrid model, integrating digital tools into traditional retail, has allowed businesses to modernize without losing their local appeal (BCG & RAI, 2023).

However, digital literacy remains a barrier in smaller cities, hindering e-commerce adoption (Narayan & Kumar, 2021). The future of Indian retail lies in successfully integrating physical and digital experiences, a strategy expected to cater to both urban and rural consumers (Soni & Verma, 2022).

Consumer perception of online shopping in India has shifted from skepticism to acceptance due to convenience, product variety, and price transparency (Gupta & Verma, 2022). Ecommerce platforms offer broader product ranges and allow consumers to compare prices, making online shopping more appealing than traditional retail (Sharma & Gupta, 2021). However, product quality, delivery issues, and trust remain concerns, especially in smaller cities like Indore (Puri & Sharma, 2021).

Trust and security are major deterrents, with consumers in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities often preferring cash on delivery to avoid security risks (Soni & Verma, 2022). Additionally, social influence, such as online reviews and recommendations, significantly shapes consumer trust, especially in categories like electronics and fashion (Sharma & Gupta, 2021).

Mobile commerce has further transformed perceptions, making online shopping more accessible and personalized (Narayan & Kumar, 2021). Despite growing digital adoption, challenges in product quality, delivery, and trust persist, requiring businesses to improve their platforms to build long-term customer trust (Joshi, 2023; Puri & Sharma, 2021).

Despite the rapid growth of e-commerce, traditional retail remains significant in markets like India, where consumer preferences are rooted in cultural norms and longstanding shopping habits (Gupta & Verma, 2022). Physical stores offer advantages that online platforms cannot replicate, such as the ability to inspect products, try items like clothing, or test electronics before purchase (Joshi, 2023). Immediate gratification is another key benefit; consumers can take home products right away, a stark contrast to the waiting times associated with online shopping. This is particularly important for urgent needs like groceries (Puri & Sharma, 2021).

Moreover, personalized customer service and the sense of community that traditional stores provide, especially in smaller cities like Indore, foster customer loyalty (KPMG, 2022). These retailers often offer tailored recommendations and flexible payment options that create stronger emotional bonds between consumers and local businesses. Additionally, trust in product quality and reliable after-sales services remain significant advantages, particularly in regions where digital literacy is low (Puri & Sharma, 2021). Traditional retail also supports local economies by providing jobs in smaller urban areas and rural regions (Soni & Verma, 2022).

Convenience is a key distinction between online and offline shopping. Online platforms offer the ability to shop from anywhere at any time, with the benefit of price comparison, making it highly appealing, especially in urban areas (Gupta & Verma, 2022). In contrast, offline shopping offers instant access to products, the tactile experience of physically interacting with items, and the ability to make impulsive purchases (Joshi, 2023).

While online shopping is perceived as more cost-effective due to frequent sales and price comparisons, traditional retail allows for immediate product ownership (Sharma & Gupta, 2021). Trust is another factor; many consumers, especially in smaller cities, prefer shopping from local stores due to the reliability of dealing with familiar store owners (Soni & Verma, 2022). Personalized service in traditional retail, where staff can offer tailored recommendations, also enhances the shopping experience (Puri & Sharma, 2021).

Additionally, the return and exchange process is often easier in physical stores, providing consumers with immediate solutions, while online returns can be cumbersome (Sharma & Gupta, 2021).

Demographic factors such as age, gender, income, education, geographic location, and family structure significantly shape consumer shopping behaviours, especially in India's diverse market (Sharma & Gupta, 2021). These factors impact preferences, shopping habits, and decision-making processes, influencing both online and offline shopping choices.

Age is a key determinant; younger consumers (18-35) are more inclined to shop online due to higher digital literacy and ease of use (Gupta & Verma, 2022). In contrast, older generations (50+) prefer traditional shopping due to concerns over security and unfamiliarity with online platforms. Gender differences also influence shopping behaviour. Women are more likely to engage in both online and offline shopping for products like clothing, while men often prefer task-oriented shopping for electronics and appliances (Joshi, 2023; Puri & Sharma, 2021).

Income levels influence shopping preferences as well. Higher-income consumers tend to engage in both shopping modes, often seeking premium products online (Gupta & Verma, 2022). Conversely, lower-income consumers may favour offline shopping, where they can negotiate prices and avoid delivery costs (Soni & Verma, 2022). Education also plays a role; educated consumers are more likely to trust and engage with online shopping platforms, using tools to compare prices and reviews (Sharma & Gupta, 2021).

Geographic location significantly impacts shopping behaviour. Urban consumers with better internet access are more inclined to shop online, whereas consumers in rural areas or smaller cities (like Indore) often prefer traditional retail due to internet limitations and lower digital literacy (Joshi, 2023). Additionally, family structure influences shopping decisions. Households with children often combine online shopping for convenience with offline shopping for larger items (Sharma & Gupta, 2021).

We can say that demographic factors strongly influence shopping preferences and behaviours. Understanding these factors is crucial for businesses aiming to cater to India's diverse consumer base (Puri & Sharma, 2021; Soni & Verma, 2022).

Rationale for the Study

The Indian retail ecosystem has undergone a dramatic shift with the rise of e-commerce platforms, offering convenience, variety, and competitive pricing. Despite this, traditional offline retail continues to thrive, particularly in smaller urban centers like Indore, where cultural preferences, personalized interactions, and the tactile shopping experience remain highly valued (Sharma & Gupta, 2021; Gupta & Verma, 2022).

Indore, with its mix of younger, tech-savvy consumers and older generations who favor instore shopping, offers a unique opportunity to study consumer perceptions of online vs. offline shopping. The city's demographic diversity—including differences in age, income, education, and location—necessitates a deeper understanding of shopping preferences and expectations (Joshi, 2023; Soni & Verma, 2022).

This study aims to explore how consumers in Indore engage with both shopping models, particularly addressing the factors of trust, convenience, cultural influences, and technology adoption. While much research has focused on the rise of e-commerce, limited studies have explored smaller urban centers like Indore. By understanding local consumer perceptions, the study will provide valuable insights for both traditional retailers and e-commerce platforms to adapt to consumer needs, integrating digital tools without losing cultural relevance (Sharma & Gupta, 2021).

Research Objectives

The primary objectives of this research are:

1. To analyse and compare consumer perceptions of online versus offline shopping experiences across multiple evaluation parameters in Indore.
2. To identify key factors influencing consumer channel preference when shopping for different product categories.
3. To examine the impact of demographic variables on shopping channel preferences and perceptions.
4. To measure satisfaction levels with both shopping channels and identify specific pain points in each.

Research Hypotheses

Based on the literature review and research objectives, the following hypotheses have been formulated:

H1: Consumer Perception of Shopping Experience

H1a: Consumers perceive online shopping to be significantly more convenient than offline shopping.

H1b: Consumers perceive offline shopping to provide significantly better sensory experience than online shopping.

H2: Product and Price Perceptions

H2a: Consumers perceive significantly higher product quality assurance when shopping offline compared to online.

H2b: Consumers perceive online shopping to offer significantly better prices and discounts compared to offline shopping.

H3: Demographics and Channel Preference

H3a: Age has a significant negative relationship with preference for online shopping.

H3b: Education level has a significant positive relationship with preference for online shopping.

H4: Product Category Influence

H4: Channel preferences vary significantly across different product categories.

Research Design and Sampling

This study adopts a descriptive research design with a quantitative approach, allowing for statistical analysis of relationships between variables and hypothesis testing. The target population consists of adult consumers (18 years and above) from Indore, who have experienced both online and offline shopping in the past year. A stratified random sampling technique is employed to ensure proportional representation across age, gender, education, and income groups. The final sample size is set at 143 respondents after accounting for a 10% nonresponse rate.

Data Collection and Analysis

Primary data is collected through a structured questionnaire, utilizing 5-point Likert scales to assess perceptions and including multiple-choice and ranking questions. Secondary data sources include industry reports and government statistics. The questionnaire covers demographics, shopping behaviour, perception, product preferences, and satisfaction. Data will be analysed using descriptive statistics (e.g., frequency distributions, means) and inferential statistics via tools like SPSS or Excel. Methods include paired sample t-tests to compare shopping experiences, chi-square tests for associations in preferences, ANOVA for demographic differences, and correlation analysis for variable relationships.

The following table is reflecting the demographic details form the survey:

Demographic Factor	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age Distribution	18-24	36	25.2%
Demographic Factor	Category	Frequency	Percentage
	25-34	42	29.4%
	35-44	31	21.7%
	45-54	22	15.4%
	55+	12	8.4%
Gender	Male	76	53.1%
	Female	67	46.9%
Education	Undergrad/Postgrad	122	85.4%
	High School or below	21	14.7%
Income Level	Low (<₹25,000)	31	21.7%
	Middle (₹25,000-₹75,000)	82	57.3%
	High (>₹75,000)	30	21.0%
Occupation	Employed/Self-employed	86	60.2%
	Student/Homemaker/Retired	57	39.8%
Shopping Frequency (Online)	Daily/Weekly	40.6%	
	Monthly/Rarely/Quarterly	59.5%	
Shopping Frequency (Offline)	Daily/Weekly	60.9%	
	Monthly/Rarely/Quarterly	39.1%	

Hypothesis Testing Results

H1: Consumer Perception of Shopping Experience

H1a: Consumers perceive online shopping to be significantly more convenient than offline shopping.

A paired samples t-test was conducted to compare perceived convenience between online and offline shopping:

Convenience Aspects	Online Mean (SD)	Offline Mean (SD)	t-value	p-value	Result
Time saving	4.27 (0.81)	2.95 (0.94)	12.53	<0.001	Significant
Shopping convenience	4.15 (0.86)	3.08 (0.92)	10.74	<0.001	Significant
Overall convenience	4.21 (0.84)	3.02 (0.93)	11.67	<0.001	Significant

The results show that consumers perceive online shopping to be significantly more convenient than offline shopping across all measured aspects (p<0.001). Therefore, H1a is supported.

H1b: Consumers perceive offline shopping to provide significantly better sensory experience than online shopping.

Experience Aspects	Online Mean (SD)	Offline Mean (SD)	t-value	p-value	Result
Sensory engagement	2.47 (0.95)	4.31 (0.73)	-18.34	<0.001	Significant
Product assessment	2.63 (0.98)	4.29 (0.76)	-16.47	<0.001	Significant
Overall experience	2.55 (0.97)	4.30 (0.75)	-17.22	<0.001	Significant

The results indicate that offline shopping is perceived to provide significantly better sensory experience compared to online shopping (p<0.001). Therefore, H1b is supported.

H2: Product and Price Perceptions

H2a: Consumers perceive significantly higher product quality assurance when shopping offline compared to online.

Product Quality Aspects	Online Mean (SD)	Offline Mean (SD)	t-value	pvalue	Result
Quality assessment	2.69 (0.97)	4.42 (0.71)	-17.76	<0.001	Significant
Product authenticity	3.17 (1.04)	4.25 (0.77)	-10.31	<0.001	Significant
Overall quality assurance	2.93 (1.01)	4.34 (0.74)	-14.15	<0.001	Significant

The results show that consumers perceive significantly higher product quality assurance in offline shopping compared to online shopping across all measured aspects (p<0.001). Therefore, H2a is supported.

H2b: Consumers perceive online shopping to offer significantly better prices and discounts compared to offline shopping.

Economic Aspects	Online Mean (SD)	Offline Mean (SD)	t-value	pvalue	Result
Competitive pricing	4.08 (0.87)	3.28 (0.93)	7.83	<0.001	Significant
Economic Aspects	Online Mean (SD)	Offline Mean (SD)	t-value	pvalue	Result
Discount availability	4.32 (0.79)	3.39 (0.97)	9.42	<0.001	Significant
Overall economic benefit	4.20 (0.83)	3.34 (0.95)	8.67	<0.001	Significant

The results show that consumers perceive online shopping to offer significantly better prices and discounts compared to offline shopping across all measured aspects (p<0.001). Therefore, H2b is supported.

H3: Demographics and Channel Preference

H3a: Age has a significant negative relationship with preference for online shopping.

One-way ANOVA was conducted to examine differences in online shopping preference across age groups:

Age Group	Mean Online Shopping Preference (SD)	F-value	p-value	Result
18-24	4.28 (0.75)	12.97	<0.001	Significant
25-34	4.09 (0.81)			
35-44	3.65 (0.92)			
45-54	3.18 (0.98)			
55+	2.75 (1.14)			

Post-hoc Tukey HSD tests confirmed significant differences between all age groups except between adjacent groups (18-24 and 25-34, 35-44 and 45-54). A negative correlation was found between age and online shopping preference ($r = -0.587$, $p<0.001$). Therefore, H3a is supported.

H3b: Education level has a significant positive relationship with preference for online shopping.

One-way ANOVA was conducted to examine differences in online shopping preference across education levels:

Education Level	Mean Online Shopping Preference (SD)	Fvalue	pvalue	Result
High School or below	3.14 (1.06)	9.82	<0.001	Significant
Undergraduate	3.76 (0.94)			
Postgraduate and above	4.12 (0.82)			

Post-hoc Tukey HSD tests confirmed significant differences between all education levels. A positive correlation was found between education level and online shopping preference (r =

0.463, $p<0.001$). Therefore, H3b is supported.

H4: Product Category Influence

H4: Channel preferences vary significantly across different product categories.

Chi-square tests were conducted to analyze channel preferences across product categories:

Product Category	Online Preference	Offline Preference	No Preference	χ^2 value	p-value	Result
Clothing & Accessories	35.7%	58.7%	5.6%	67.35	<0.001	Significant
Electronics & Appliances	63.6%	31.5%	4.9%	83.72	<0.001	Significant
Groceries & Household	23.1%	71.3%	5.6%	112.46	<0.001	Significant

Personal Care Products	39.9%	53.1%	7.0%	51.89	<0.001	Significant
Books & Stationery	65.0%	28.7%	6.3%	89.24	<0.001	Significant
Furniture & Home Décor	27.3%	67.8%	4.9%	97.18	<0.001	Significant

The results indicate that channel preferences vary significantly across different product categories ($p<0.001$ for all categories). Electronics and books are more preferred online, while clothing, groceries, personal care products, and furniture are more preferred offline. Therefore, H4 is supported.

Findings

Based on the analysis of data from 143 respondents in Indore, the study reveals several significant findings:

1. Convenience vs. Sensory Experience: Consumers clearly distinguish between the convenience advantage of online shopping and the sensory experience advantage of offline shopping. Online shopping is perceived as significantly more time-saving and convenient (mean score 4.21 vs. 3.02), while offline shopping offers superior sensory evaluation opportunities (mean score 4.30 vs. 2.55).

2. Product Quality Perception: There is a substantial difference in how consumers perceive product quality assurance between channels. Offline shopping is strongly preferred for quality assessment (mean score 4.34 vs. 2.93), reflecting continued consumer desire to physically evaluate products before purchase, particularly in a market like Indore.

3. Price Advantage: Online shopping holds a significant perceived advantage in terms of pricing and discounts (mean score 4.20 vs. 3.34). This indicates that e-commerce platforms have successfully established a value proposition centered around competitive pricing in the Indore market.

4. Demographic Influences: Both age and education significantly impact online shopping preferences. Younger consumers (18-34 age group) and those with higher education levels show stronger preference for online shopping, with clear negative correlation with age ($r = -0.587$) and positive correlation with education ($r = 0.463$).

5. Product Category Variations: Shopping channel preferences vary significantly by product category. Electronics (63.6%) and books (65.0%) are predominantly preferred online, while groceries (71.3%), furniture (67.8%), and clothing (58.7%) are predominantly preferred offline. This reflects the varying importance of tangibility and immediate possession across product categories.

6. Hybrid Shopping Behavior: A noteworthy percentage of consumers (average 5.7% across categories) indicated no preference for either channel, suggesting emergence of true omnichannel consumers who fluidly move between online and offline shopping based on convenience and circumstances.

Conclusion

The study confirms that consumers in Indore have developed distinct perceptions of online and offline shopping channels, with each offering complementary advantages. Online shopping is valued primarily for convenience, variety, and economic benefits, while offline shopping maintains advantages in sensory evaluation, quality assurance, and immediate possession.

Demographic factors significantly influence channel preferences, indicating market segmentation along generational and educational lines. Younger and more educated consumers in Indore are driving e-commerce adoption, while traditional retail continues to appeal strongly to older generations and those with lower educational qualifications.

Product category remains a critical determinant of channel selection, with certain categories naturally aligning with the strengths of each channel. This suggests that retailers should adopt category-specific channel strategies rather than uniform approaches across their product portfolios.

The findings indicate that Indore represents a transitional retail market where traditional shopping behaviours coexist with growing digital adoption. Rather than complete channel substitution, the market demonstrates complementary channel utilization, with consumers strategically selecting channels based on their specific needs, the product category, and situational factors.

For retailers operating in Tier-2 Indian cities like Indore, the optimal approach appears to be a thoughtfully designed omni-channel strategy that leverages the unique strengths of each channel while providing consistent brand experience across touchpoints.

Suggestions

For retailers and e-commerce platforms, developing custom-made strategies for each product category based on consumer preferences is essential. For product categories such as electronics and books, which are more suited for online shopping, a strong online presence is essential. In contrast, for categories like clothing and groceries, where consumers often value the physical experience, strengthening the offline shopping experience while providing the convenience of online services can create a balanced approach.

To report quality perception gaps in online retail, it is vital to invest in technologies that improve product visualization, such as 360-degree views or increased reality try-ons. Also, providing detailed specifications and authentic reviews will help enhance consumer trust. For brick-and-mortar stores, focusing on creating sensory and social experiences that cannot be replicated online is key. Rather than competing on product availability alone, physical retail should emphasize the experiential aspects of shopping.

Additionally, e-commerce platforms should focus on demographic targeting, especially for older and less educated segments, by offering user-friendly interfaces, building trust, and providing assisted shopping experiences to overcome adoption barriers. Finally, an omnichannel integration strategy should be implemented, offering a seamless experience across both online and offline channels, including options like click-and-collect, to meet the diverse needs of today's consumers.

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