

Perception Towards Online Shopping: An Empirical Study of College Goers in Tirunelveli

Dr.K.Mariammal

Assistant Professor of Commerce, Rani Anna Government College for Women, Tirunelveli- 8

Introduction

Online shopping otherwise called as e-shopping is a form of electronic commerce which allows consumers to directly buy goods or services from a seller over the internet using a web browser. It is a network of linked computers enabling millions of people to communicate and search for information as well as to sell and buy products. Online shopping is done through an online shop, e-shop, e-store, virtual store, web shop, internet shop or online store. All the products in online stores are described through text, with photos and with multimedia files. Many online stores also provide links for extra information about their products. They often make available safety procedures, instructions, manufacturing specifications and demonstrations. Everybody can also search for product reviews that other consumers may have posted. Some online stores have place for these reviews on their own sites. Many allow users to rate their products. Thus, online transactions have certain unique characteristics, such as the extensive use of technology for transactions, the distant and impersonal nature of the online market environment and the implicit uncertainty of using open network infrastructures for transactions. Thus, the internet has changed the way the consumers shop for goods and services. It offers a new environment distinguished from the traditional ways of doing business. Internet shopping is great because people are able to shop 24 hours a day without having to leave their home or work place.

Online shopping is truly catching on in India. A Jewellery piece sells every five minutes, a mobile handset every eight minutes, and a car every nine hours says a popular commodity site eBAY.com. Therefore, online shopping is becoming a well-accepted way to purchase a wide range of products and services like books, electronic gadgets, air and rail tickets, apparel, gifts, mobiles, computer peripherals, audio cassettes, CDs etc.

India is a developing country and its growth in the international market is decided by the adherence of the people especially the educated youngsters to the recent technological changes in the market. Hence the topic entitled Perceptions of College Goers towards online shopping is undertaken for the present research work.

I. Statement of the problem

Today, Internet is not only a networking media, but also as a means of transaction for consumers at a global market. Online shopping has become the third most popular internet activity, immediately following e-mail using or instant messaging and web browsing. As the world adapts itself to the technological advances that have brought us into the next century, people are growing more and more comfortable with searching for products on the net and shopping online. Hence the shopping industry is growing in number as the years progressed, as it is gaining acceptance to people throughout the world.

Until recently, the consumers generally visit online to reserve hotel rooms and buy air, rail or movie tickets, books and gadgets but now more and more off line products like clothes, saris, kurtis, T-shirts, shoes and consumer durables are being purchased online. The capability of purchasing without leaving their place is of great interest to many consumers. The online shopping not only offers really good deals, but also brings optimum convenience to the consumers. Moreover, the use of internet tools for price searching and comparison provides an additional advantage in consumers' final decision, as they can purchase their desired products in the lowest available prices. These inherent benefits induced the people to purchase goods through online. Hence there is a need to analyse the factors that influence the people to choose online shopping.

With nearly half of the Indian population being young and net savvy, there has been an extra ordinary rise in the number of online shoppers. The declining cost of PCs, the development of search engines and the youngsters' growing interest in the internet has enabled online shopping to garner significant attention in recent years. As the youngsters especially the college goers want to be more modern in every part of their life, the study on their perceptions and expectations towards the modern purchases namely 'online purchase' becomes the need of the hour. Hence, there is a need to

examine their perceptions towards online shopping

Tirunelveli is chosen as the study area, since it is a busy business centre gifted with many reputed educational institutions.

II. Objectives

The main objectives of the study are :

- to analyse the various dimensions of online shopping
- to find out the interrelationship between the various dimensions of online shopping
- to compare the online shopping behaviour of the students of arts and science colleges and engineering colleges in the study area and
- to offer suitable suggestions.

III. Review Of Previous Studies

Syuhaily Osman and et al¹ in their article, "Under graduates and Online Purchasing Behaviour", examined the attitude of University Putra Malaysia students towards online purchasing. They concluded that the purchase perception and website quality have direct influence on the attitude towards online purchasing.

Kenwal Gurleen², in his study entitled, "Consumer's Perception towards Online Shopping – The case of Punjab", identified the various reasons for adoption and non-adoption to online shopping. They concluded that the factors namely price consciousness, convenience, product variety and easy payment options are the challenges of online shopping.

Shraddha Sharma and Manish Sitlani³ in their study entitled, "Online shopping among Higher Education Students in Indore" examined the various factors that influenced the decisions to shop online. The results of the study revealed that internet traits, attitudinal traits and convenience significantly affect the online shopping behaviour of the young students.

S.Shalini and D.Kamalveni⁴ in their study entitled, "Online buying

behaviour of Netizens : A Study with reference to Coimbatore, Tamilnadu” examined the impact of demographics in influencing the online buying behaviour of Netizens. They found that significant differences in shopping behaviour could be ascribed to gender, occupation and the internet expertise of the online shoppers

IV. Methodology

This study is compiled with the help of both primary and secondary data. The primary data are collected from the respondents with the help of a structured questionnaire. Secondary data are collected from journals, books and websites.

15 students from five arts and science colleges totaling 75 and 15 students from five engineering colleges totaling 75 in Tirunelveli city are selected as sample respondents by adopting snow ball random sampling method.

Likert’s scaling technique is used to give scores to the dimensions of online shopping. 5 point are given for ‘Strongly Agree’, 4 points for ‘Agree’, 3 points for ‘No Opinion’, 2 points for ‘Disagree’ and 1 point for ‘Strongly Disagree’ for the positive statements and vice versa. Statistical tools like weighted mean, standard deviation, co-efficient of variation, ‘t’ value and Pearson’s Product Moment correlation are used to analyse the data.

V. Analysis And Interpretation Of Data

The data collected with the help of questionnaire are analysed

in three parts.

- Dimensions of online shopping
- Interrelationship between Dimensions of online shopping and
- Dimensions of online shopping – comparison between arts and science colleges and engineering colleges using ‘t’ test

1. Dimensions of Online Shopping

In the globalised competitive era, the technology brought out many innovations even in the day to day environment. Hence it is customary on the part of the people to adhere to the technological changes. Therefore, the factors that influence the respondents to choose online shopping as compared to the traditional shopping are analysed and categorised into five dimensions. They are as follows:

- Price consciousness
- Quality consciousness
- Convenience
- Payment options
- Security

Each dimension comprises of three statements, for which the mean scores, standard deviation and co-efficient of variation are calculated and shown in Table 1.

Table 1 : Dimensions Of Online Shopping

Dimensions of online shopping	Arts & Science Colleges			Engineering Colleges		
	Mean	SD	CV	Mean	SD	CV
I) Price consciousness						
Availability of heavy discount than conventional purchases	3.87	1.09	28.17	4.44	0.93	20.95
Purchases from trusted sites at economical prices	3.41	0.98	28.74	3.52	1.09	30.97
Gain competitive advantage	3.75	1.29	34.4	3.85	1.10	28.57
II) Quality consciousness						
Availability of high quality products	4.07	1.02	25.06	3.99	1.19	29.82
Variety of options to choose	3.85	1.28	33.25	3.52	1.01	28.69
Offering guarantee for the products	3.21	1.27	39.56	3.35	1.55	46.27
III) Convenience						
Ease of online purchase procedure	4.04	0.96	23.76	4.57	0.73	15.97
Save time and money	4.11	0.89	21.65	3.68	1.09	29.62
Relief from psychological discomfort and tension	3.59	1.26	35.09	4.00	1.15	28.75
IV) Payment options						
Availability of various payment options	3.93	1.15	29.26	3.96	1.12	28.28
Payment through credit card	3.76	1.13	30.05	3.48	1.03	29.59
Repayment even for online purchase returns	3.28	1.28	39.02	3.48	1.32	37.93
V) Security						
Ensuring personal data safety through security mechanisms	3.81	1.15	30.18	3.68	1.36	36.96
Security and privacy of online payments	3.37	1.15	30.18	3.56	1.41	39.61
Getting prior permission to send advertisements to customer’s e-mail accounts	3.37	1.28	30.26	3.59	1.39	38.72

Source: Primary data [SD – Standard Deviation ; CV – Coefficient of Variation]

It is found from Table 1 that the mean scores of all the statements under the five dimensions of online shopping are more than the neutral point in both the arts and science colleges and engineering colleges. Hence it may be concluded that the factors namely ‘Price consciousness’, ‘Quality consciousness’, ‘Convenience’, ‘Payment options’ and ‘Security’ have equal influence in motivating

the respondents towards online shopping. However, the factor ‘convenience’ is the most prominent factor induced the respondents to prefer online shopping. This is evident from the top most mean score of 4.11 for the statement ‘save time and money’ under the factor ‘convenience’ in the case of arts and science colleges and 4.57 for the statement ‘ease of online procedure’ under the factor ‘convenience’ in the case of engineering colleges. This is also proved by the lowest co-efficient of variation of 21.65 for the statement ‘save time and money’ in the case of arts and science colleges and 15.97 for the statement ‘ease of online procedure’ in the case of engineering colleges under the factor ‘convenience’.

The factor ‘Quality consciousness’ got the lowest mean score as indicated by the means score of 3.21 for the statement ‘Offering guarantee for the products’ in arts and science colleges and 3.35 in the case of engineering colleges. This is also proved by the highest co-efficient of variation of 39.56 in the case of arts and science colleges and 46.27 in the case of engineering colleges for the statement ‘Offering guarantee for the products’ under the factor ‘Quality consciousness’. Hence it may be concluded that least importance is given by the respondents to the guarantee for the products purchased through online.

2. Interrelationship Between Dimensions Of Online Shopping

In order to assess the interrelationship between the various dimensions of online shopping, Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation is used. The hypothesis framed to analyse the inter relationship between the dimensions of online shopping is, “There exist no significant association between the various dimensions of online shopping”. The results of Pearson’s product moment correlation co-efficient are given in Table 2

Table 2 : Interrelationship Between Dimensions Of Online Shopping

Factors	Arts & science colleges					Engineering colleges				
	Price consciousness	Quality consciousness	Convenience	Payment options	Security	Price consciousness	Quality consciousness	Convenience	Payment options	Security
Price consciousness	1	**0.347*	0.194	0.187	**0.297*	1	**0.299*	**0.329*	**0.412*	0.293*
Quality consciousness		1	0.099	0.255*	**0.304*		1	0.178	**0.415*	0.252*
Convenience			1	0.248*	0.176			1	**0.333*	**0.414*
Payment options				1	0.263*				1	**0.399*
Security					1					1

Source: Primary data [* - Significant at 0.05 level ** - Significant at 0.01 level]

It is found from Table 2 that in both the arts and science colleges and engineering colleges there exist a moderate correlation between almost all the factors influencing online shopping except ‘quality consciousness and convenience’. The correlation co-efficient for the factor ‘quality consciousness and convenience’ is 0.099 for the arts and science colleges and 0.178 for engineering colleges which indicates a weaker relationship between these two factors.

It is also inferred from Table 2 that in the case of arts and science colleges, the calculated values for the pairs of factors ‘quality consciousness and price consciousness’, ‘price consciousness and security’, ‘quality consciousness and security’ are more than the table values both at 0.05 level of significance and 0.01 level of significance. Hence these factors are closely interrelated with each other at 0.05 level and 0.01 level of significance.

The calculated values are more than table values at 0.01 level of significance for the pairs of factors ‘quality consciousness and payment options’, ‘convenience and payment options’ and ‘security and payment options’. Hence these pairs of factors are significantly associated with each other at 0.01 level.

In the case of engineering colleges, all the pairs of factors except ‘quality consciousness and convenience’ are significant both at 0.05 and 0.01 levels of significance. Hence these pairs of factors

are significantly associated with each other both at 0.05 level and 0.01 level.

The pairs of factors ‘price consciousness and convenience’, ‘quality consciousness and convenience’, in the case of arts and science colleges and ‘quality consciousness and convenience’ in the case of engineering colleges are not closely associated with each other either at 0.01 level or 0.05 level of significance.

3. Dimensions of Online Shopping –Comparison Between Arts And Science Colleges And Engineering Colleges Using ‘t’ Test

In order to analyse whether there is any significant difference in the perceptions of the respondents of arts and science colleges and engineering colleges towards the dimensions of online shopping, ‘t’ test is applied.

The hypothesis framed for this purpose is: “There exists no significant difference in the perceptions of the respondents of arts and science colleges and engineering colleges towards the dimensions of online shopping”. The results of ‘t’ test are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 : Dimensions of Online Shopping – Comparison Between Arts And Science Colleges And Engineering Colleges

Dimensions of online shopping	't' value
I) Price consciousness	
Availability of heavy discount than conventional purchases	-4.95
Purchases from trusted sites at economical prices	-0.643
Gain competitive advantage	-0.508
II) Quality consciousness	
Availability of high quality products	0.055
Variety of options to choose	**1.74
Offering guarantee for the products	-1.739
III) Convenience	
Ease of online purchase procedure	**2.58*
Save time and money	**2.63*
Relief from psychological discomfort and tension	-2.06
IV) Payment options	
Availability of various payment options	-0.16
Payment through credit card	1.57
Repayment even for online purchase returns	-0.93
V) Security	
Ensuring personal data safety through security mechanisms	0.63
Security and privacy of online payments	-0.855
Getting prior permission to send advertisements to customer's e-mail accounts	0.08

Source: Primary data [* - Significant at 0.05 level ** - Significant at 0.01 level]

It is found from Table 3 that the constituents 'Variety of options to choose' 'Ease of online purchase procedure' and 'Save time and money' are statistically significant at 0.01 level. In addition to this, 'Ease of online purchase procedure' and 'Save time and money' are statistically significant at 0.05 level thereby indicating a significant difference in the perceptions of the respondents of both arts and science colleges and engineering colleges towards online shopping. No significant difference exists as regards the perceptions of the respondents of arts and science colleges and engineering colleges towards the other constituents of online shopping.

VI. Suggestions

The following are the suggestions made to improve the perception of the respondents towards online shopping:

- The dominant factor induced the respondents to buy products through online is 'convenience and price consciousness' Therefore, the online retailers need to ensure that the online shopping process through their websites is made as simple and as inexpensive as possible for consumers to shop online.
- The online buying in the study area may be further generated by offering gifts and promotional offers, facilitating

comparative information, providing easy, reliable, precise and clear ordering layout, etc.

- Online retailers are induced to create a 'touch-feel-hear' environment as it is in a physical store. This can be done through the creation of novel web designs and portals, sophisticated web atmosphere, e-mail updates, and live interaction over the internet.
- The customers may be motivated to place bulk online orders by sending samples to them so that the physical examination of the product before purchase may be facilitated.
- The e-retailers must introduce the concept of third-party insurance to strengthen the confidence and trust in online shopping.
- The online retailers can outsource the payment processing work to companies providing secure e-payment solutions, so as to avoid the complexities and security issues relating to e-payment solutions.
- Since security of the credit cards is a major concern for many respondents, the e-sellers must give assurance for the security of the credit cards and personal information.

VII. Conclusion

Online shopping has become a popular activity today because of the ease and large populations are using information technology tools and internet. Everyone can online nowadays by using the information technology tools such as notebook, PDA, computer or even hand phone if the hand phone can support the WIFI functions. Since young consumers are easy targets for online marketers, standardized and trendy products will be in demand on the Internet. More over the educated consumers are aware of the buying procedures online which they feel are pretty simple. The only worry of consumers is regarding the trustworthiness of some websites, since they have to give their credit card and other personal details to shop online. In addition to this, the psychology of an Indian consumer is still the same of checking the product physically before purchasing it, which creates a mental hurdle for online shopping. Hence the consumers must be made to feel that online shopping is becoming an important trend in this modern information technology society. Hence the ability to measure and reduce the risk would take Indian Online Vendors to a great height in maximizing both customer satisfaction and profits. Also the perceived risk and problems tend to decrease with internet experience; it is a matter of time that e-retailing would be a booming industry in India.

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