

A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS ON ONLINE SHOPPING PATTERN OF WORKING WOMEN IN INDIA

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Abstract

This paper attempts to explore the online shopping pattern of females who are employed in both public and private sectors in India. Many studies on the general consumer behaviour of online shoppers in India have been done before but developing a systematic understanding on the shopping behaviour of working females would be beneficial for ecommerce companies operating in India to serve their customers with tailor-made offers. As there is an untapped market of female buyers in India, making slight adjustments to the existing ecommerce websites or developing new websites to accommodate the needs of female online shoppers will enable online marketers to improve their reach and revenue.

Introduction

Online shopping is the act of buying products or services over the internet. The most tempting factor about online shopping is that you do not need to wait in long queues or wander from shop to shop in search of a particular item. Internet has revolutionised the lives of people all around the world with its endless possibilities since its inception. Emergence of ecommerce provides the opportunity for consumers to make purchases at online shops simply sitting in front of any device that connects them into the world wide web. Anything and everything - from simple household utensils to highly sophisticated services- are just a click away.

According to Google India, the online shopping in India has witnessed a growth of 128 percent during 2011-12. As compared to 2010 those who make online purchases via mobile phones has doubled in 2011. With around 8 million online shoppers, ecommerce in India is developing at a rapid pace and this trend is expected to continue in the following years (Singh, 2013).

Women and Online Shopping

There is a perceived negative association between women and technology. According to Zhou et al (2007) female buyers, when buying online, are sceptical about the genuineness of products and often eschew making purchases from unknown sellers. They are more likely to get frustrated during browsing as compared to men. It might be sexist to draw such a vague conclusion but the general interface of leading ecommerce websites in India are designed for male users. Electronic and digital products are easily available at first, rather than products that women shoppers are supposedly interested in, such as clothing, jewellery, home furnishing etc (Hansan, 2010). Female internet users, in general, are reluctant to use new or evolving shopping tools which require more effort and time (Herring, 2003).

Objectives

- To understand the online purchase pattern of working women in India.
- To identify the triggering factors of online purchase intention.
- To identify the reasons that discourage female online shoppers.

Method

A quantitative sample survey was conducted using a self-administrated questionnaire containing multiple choice, dichotomised, scaled and multiple option questions among working women in India. The questionnaire used for collecting primary data was modified from similar studies. The research design, primarily was descriptive in nature. The questionnaires were sent to 150+ random respondents working and living in different metro cities in India electronically with the help of SurveyMonkey tool and the responses from those who had no experience in online shopping were eliminated. For the final data analysis the responses from 120 participants were considered.

Table 1: Profile of Respondents

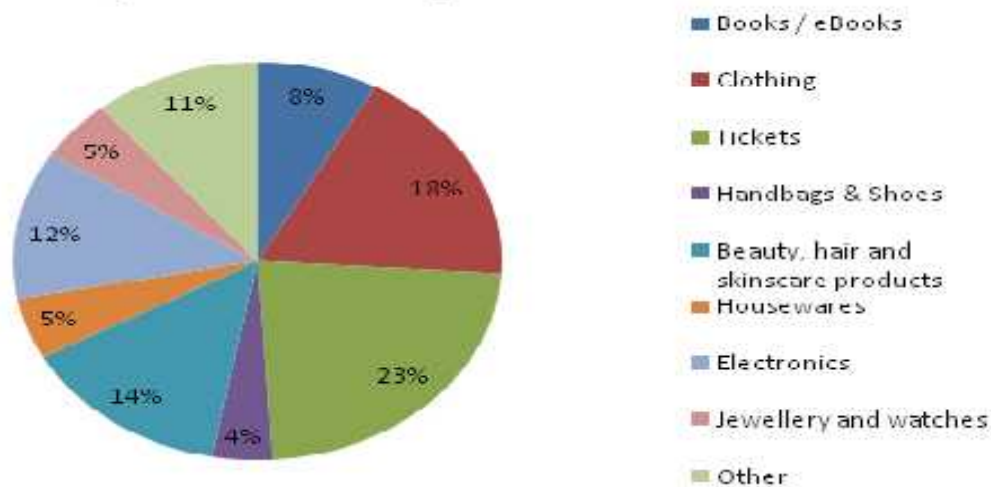
Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
18 - 25 years	79	65.8%
26 - 30 years	24	20%
31 - 35 years	13	10.8%
Above 36 years	4	3.3%
Employment status		
Fulltime employment	98	81.7%
Part-time employment	20	18.3%
Other	2	1.7%

Frequency of online shopping		
Very often	13	10.8%
Often	24	20%
Occasionally	71	59%
Rarely	12	10%

Results and Discussion

As visualised in **figure 1**, tickets and clothing are the most preferred products which constitute 41% of the total online purchase. It has been observed that many respondents use ecommerce websites to buy beauty products (14%), Electronics (12%) and books (8%). Handbags and shoes (4%) and housewares (5%) are the least favoured items - it might be because female shoppers choose to shop those items from physical shops.

Figure 1: Products purchased online



In order to identify the triggering factors of online shopping 5-point Likert scale questions were used in the questionnaire, where 1 denotes not important, 5 denotes very important and the midpoint value 3 indicates no opinion or neutral stance of the respondents. Consolidated responses are provided in **table 2**.

Table 2 : Triggering Factors of Online Shopping

Scale	1	2	3	4	5
	<<< Not important			Very important >>>	
Wide selection of Products	2	7	3	100	8
Website Interface	9	49	35	14	13
Product Reviews	0	2	2	52	64
Brand	22	46	3	17	32
Simplicity of Buying process	8	12	6	38	56
Cost of Delivery	12	5	10	50	43
Tracking Facilities	22	20	16	34	28
Website Response Speed	0	1	13	28	78

The lion's share (90%) of the respondents think wide selection of products is important when it comes to online shopping. Website interface has nothing to do with motivating female shoppers to make purchases online. However 96.7% of the respondents need detailed product reviews to trigger their purchases. Reputation of the brand might not be a motivating factor as respondents have mixed opinion about it. 78% of the respondents do not prefer to shop from a website that takes them through complex buying process. Cost of delivery is an important triggering factor for 77.5% of the respondents. Tracking facilities, to 35% of respondent is not an important factor but 51.7% wish to have a facility to track their orders. Website response speed is a critical triggering factor for 88% of the respondents as spending so much time for the webpage to be loaded can be quite frustrating.

Questions were included in the questionnaire to identify barriers to online shopping as well. Respondents were asked to choose the most important factor that keeps them away from shopping online. Insights gathered from the survey are given in table 3.

Table 3: Barriers to Online Shopping

Barrier	Frequency	Percentage
Payment procedure	32	26.7%
Refund Policy	26	21.7%
Delivery options	14	11.7%
Reputation of the website	18	15%
Network performance	19	15.8%
Delivery issues	11	9%
Grand Total	120	100%

Complexity or uncertainty of payment procedure poses an obstacle to 26.7% of the respondents and refund policies prevents 21.7% of the respondents from purchasing online. Meanwhile respondents are least bothered about delivery issues (9%) and delivery options (11.7%).

Suggestions

The following guidelines can improve the shopping experience of female online shoppers

- Care should be taken to expand the product lines and brand choices on the website as female shoppers love to have many options to choose from. This will increase amount and quality of time spend on websites and sales.
- Clear instructions should be provided to clarify any doubts consumers have regarding the product as the current study indicates that female shoppers find product reviews as a stimulating factor for online shopping. Reviews from other consumers can increase the level of trust and makes the purchase decision easier.
- As compared to male shoppers, females favour simplicity of the buying process. Up-selling and cross-selling options popping up before completing the purchase or having to go through multiple steps before being redirected to the payment page might make female shoppers uncomfortable and some may leave the website halfway through.
- It's important to have free delivery option as most of the female shoppers do not wish to pay more money for the products to be delivered. Free delivery for all the purchases for a specific amount must be ensured to make effective use of the female online-market in India. Cost of delivery and other hidden charges that online shoppers were not agreed to can lose loyalty and repeat purchases.
- Website response speed is a crucial factor as nobody wants to buy from a website that's too slow to load. A fast website can keep online shoppers calm and active thereby improving their shopping experience.

Conclusion

The popularity of online shopping among working females in India is on the rise. Among the 120 respondents, 31% buy things quite regularly online and 59% are occasional shoppers. The results of the study can be used as a direction for ecommerce websites operating in India as it facilitate in developing their content and interface in such a way to encourage female shoppers to shop more frequently online. Although statistical significance of different scales were not evaluated properly the insights collected can provide clear guidelines for ecommerce websites to initiate sales, reinforce loyalty, broaden brand appeal and increase awareness.

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