

A Study on the Consumer Preference towards Online Shopping after the Pandemic with Special Reference to Alanganallur Block of Madurai District

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly reshaped how people shop, with many individuals still favouring online purchases long after physical stores reopened. The ease, security, and adaptability associated with e-commerce platforms have encouraged a lasting move away from traditional brick-and-mortar shopping experiences toward digital alternatives. Despite its many advantages, online shopping also introduces new obstacles for both shoppers and merchants. The effects of the pandemic remain evident in consumer behaviour, as these developments continue to shape their decisions today. In light of these ongoing changes, the researcher aimed to explore post-pandemic online shopping trends within the Alanganallur region of Madurai. To obtain meaningful insights, a questionnaire was administered to 250 residents of the locality.

Keywords: Consumer, Preference, Shopping, Online Shopping, Pandemic

Introduction

Over the past few years, the shopping landscape has undergone drastic changes, a transformation accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Online shopping has surged ahead, often surpassing conventional in-store experiences in popularity. Despite a widespread shift toward digital commerce and the ease it offers, many individuals continue to favour the traditional, personal touch of shopping in physical stores, having never switched to online alternatives during the crisis. Nevertheless, the advantages of e-commerce such as safety, convenience, and accessibility are increasingly drawing in more consumers. To keep up with these evolving preferences, retailers have enhanced their online operations, with a seamless and secure shopping experience that allows customers to make purchases from the comfort of home.

Review of Literature

Prentice et al. (2021), explore how the pandemic accelerated shifts in shopping behaviour, highlighting a long-term migration toward online channels. The study concludes that even after restrictions eased, consumers retained online habits due to perceived safety, ease of comparison, and reduced time costs.

Ali, Khalid & Hussain (2022), consumers who adopted online shopping during lockdowns showed a strong intention to continue, demonstrating a long-term behavioural shift.

Sheth (2021), habit disruption, technological familiarity, and forced experimentation significantly lowered psychological barriers to online shopping. Groceries, apparel, and electronics will sustain high online penetration due to convenience and improved digital infrastructure.

Angelovska (2022), consumers now demand faster delivery, transparent return policies, improved customer service, and enhanced website usability. Post-pandemic online shoppers expect seamless, intuitive, and emotionally engaging digital experiences.

Pantano, Pizzi & Scarpi (2021), post-pandemic shoppers expect personalisation, frictionless checkout, and integrated digital–physical experiences.

Objectives of the Study

- To analyse the factors influencing consumers to shop online.
- To offer suggestions based on the findings.

Research Methodology

The researcher has adopted random sampling, meaning that participants are selected by chance from the entire population to ensure unbiased representation. The sample size for this research is 250. The study was conducted in Alanganallur, a block in Madurai District in Tamil Nadu.

Framework of Analysis

The statistical tools, percentage analysis, Garrett's Ranking Technique, Chi-Square and Factor Analysis are used by the researcher for this study.

Limitations of the Study

- The study was restricted only to Alanganallur block of Madurai District.
- The sample size is 250 which does not represent the whole population.

Analysis and Interpretation

Profile of the Respondents

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Sample respondents		
Demographics	No. of Respondents	% of Respondents
A. Age		
21 - 40	123	49.20
41 - 60	76	30.40
Above 60	51	20.40
B. Marital Status		
Married	136	54.40
Unmarried	97	38.80
Widowed	12	04.80
Divorcee	5	02.00
C. Occupation		
Employed	117	46.80
Business	53	21.20
Home maker	33	13.20
Student	47	18.80
D. Monthly Income		
Upto Rs. 50,000	53	21.20
Rs. 50,001 - Rs. 1,00,000	127	50.80
Rs. 1,00,001 - Rs. 1,50,000	32	12.80
Rs. 1,50,001 - Rs. 2,00,000	25	10.00
Above Rs. 2,00,000	13	05.20
E. Educational Qualification		

HSC	53	21.20
UG	103	41.20
PG	42	16.80
Others	52	20.80

Source: Primary Data

Factors which Influence Shopping Online

The different factors affecting consumers' decisions to shop on online platforms were examined using the Weighted Average Method for analysis.

Table 2: Factors which influence shopping online									
Factors	No. of Respondents							Weights	Ranks
	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total		
Comfortable	48 (288)	107 (535)	41 (164)	19 (57)	28 (56)	8 (8)	1,108	4.432	II
Time Saving	108 (648)	49 (245)	41 (164)	19 (57)	17 (34)	16 (16)	1,164	4.656	I
Usual Habit	16 (96)	16 (80)	14 (56)	34 (102)	27 (54)	143 (143)	531	2.124	VI
Price	19 (114)	18 (90)	29 (116)	109 (327)	51 (102)	24 (24)	773	3.092	IV
Discount & Offers	18 (108)	18 (90)	16 (64)	48 (144)	107 (214)	43 (43)	663	2.652	V
Trustworthiness	41 (246)	42 (210)	109 (436)	21 (63)	20 (40)	17 (17)	1,012	4.048	III

Source: Computed Data

Hypothesis

H₀₁ = There is no significant relationship between Age and online Shopping.

Table 3: Relationship between Age and Online Shopping using Chi-Square Test			
Calculated value	Degree of freedom	Table value	Inference
1.636	2	5.991	Not Significant

Source: Computed Data

H₀₂ = There is no significant relationship between Marital Status and online Shopping.

Table 4: Relationship between Marital Status and Online Shopping using Chi-Square Test			
Calculated value	Degree of freedom	Table value	Inference
5.085	3	7.815	Not Significant

Source: Computed Data

Factors Influencing the Behaviour and Perception of the Consumers

Table 5: Factor Loading					
Statements	Factors				
	1	2	3	4	5
Special rewards and discounts are available while buying online	.865				
Flash sales induce online purchases.	.864				
Free shipping on orders is available.	.854				
Loyalty points for purchase of products online are exciting.	.847				
Product information is available online for shopping.	.846				
Clear return and refund policies.	.810				
Communication style to interact induces online shopping.		.823			
Social norms induce buying online.		.801			
Website Usability contributes to a Seamless shopping experience.			.867		
Visual appeal induces online shopping.			.856		
Bing search functionality encourages online shopping.			.623		
Psychological factors affect online shopping behaviour.				.786	
Fast loading engages the website visitors.					.755
24/7 accessibility is beneficial for busy individuals.					.739
Past experience has an impact on future online shopping.					.696

Source: Computed Data

Table 6: Factor Analytical Structure			
S.No.	Factors	Statements	Factor loadings
1	Promotional & Informational Benefits	Special rewards and discounts are available while buying online	.865
2		Flash sales induce online purchases.	.864
3		Free shipping on orders is available.	.854
4		Loyalty points for purchase of products online are exciting.	.847
5		Product information is available online for shopping.	.846
6		Clear return and refund policies.	.810
7	Social & Interactive Influences	Communication style to interact induces online shopping.	.823
8		Social norms induce buying online.	.801
9	Website Design & Functional Experience	Website Usability contributes to a Seamless shopping experience.	.867
10		Visual appeal induces online shopping.	.856
11		Bing search functionality encourages online shopping.	.623
12	Psychological Drivers	Psychological factors affect online shopping behaviour.	.786
13	Technical Performance	Fast loading engages the website visitors.	.755
14		24/7 accessibility is beneficial for busy individuals.	.739
15		Past experience has an impact on future online shopping.	.696

Source: Computed Data

Findings

- Table 1A shows that the majority of respondents (49.20%) fall in the age category 21 to 40 years.
- Table 1B infers that 54.40% of the respondents are married.
- Table 1C shows that the majority of respondents, 46.80% are employed.
- Table 1D concludes that the majority of respondents, 50.80% fall under the category Rs. 50,000 - Rs. 1,00,000 when categorised according to their monthly income.
- Table 1E infers that the majority of respondents, 41.20% have completed under graduation.
- Table 2 indicates the factors which influence consumers' to shop online. The Weighted Average Method was used, and Time Saving was ranked first, followed by Comfort, Trustworthiness, Price, Discount & Offers, and usual habit was ranked last.

- In Table 3, the χ^2 value is less than the critical value. Hence, the hypothesis is accepted. So, we conclude that there is no significant relationship between Age and shopping online.
- Table 4, the χ^2 value is less than the critical value. Hence, the hypothesis is accepted. So we can conclude that there is no significant relationship between Marital Status and shopping online.
- Tables 5 and 6 show the rotated component matrix, which reveals five distinct factors that drive online shopping behaviour. Each of these factors represents a key area that online retailers can focus on to improve the shopping experience and increase consumer engagement.
 - ✓ Factor 1: Promotional & Informational Benefits, dominated by high loadings on special rewards, flash sales, free shipping, loyalty points, and clear product information—indicating that consumers are strongly motivated by tangible incentives and clarity of details.
 - ✓ Factor 2: Social & Interactive Influences, where communication styles and social norms significantly shape purchase intentions, highlighting the role of social cues and interpersonal engagement in digital buying decisions.
 - ✓ Factor 3: Website Design & Functional Experience, emphasising the importance of visual appeal, usability, and search features, suggesting that a seamless and aesthetically appealing interface enhances consumer confidence.
 - ✓ Factor 4: Technical Performance, where past experience, fast loading, and round-the-clock accessibility show that reliability and convenience are crucial for retaining users and encouraging repeat purchases.
 - ✓ Factor 5: Psychological Drivers, showing that emotional and cognitive aspects still play a meaningful role in shaping online shopping behaviour.

Suggestions

- ❖ Introduce AI-driven personalised rewards, where discounts adapt to user behaviour in real time. Incorporate adaptive communication styles, where chatbot tone matches user preference.
- ❖ Provide interactive product information to deepen user trust. Embed community-driven features such as live Q&A, peer recommendations, or trending-buy insights.
- ❖ Offer tier-based loyalty systems, granting exclusive early access to flash sales for high-engagement users. Launch social shopping events to amplify social proof.

- ❖ Add a minimalist, distraction-free mode for users who prefer a clean, focused browsing experience.
- ❖ Provide a lightweight version of the website for slower networks without compromising core features.
- ❖ Expand 24/7 support using hybrid human and AI systems, ensuring continuous problem resolution.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly accelerated the shift towards online shopping, profoundly altering consumer behaviour and continuing to shape the evolving digital retail landscape. Modern online shoppers are increasingly motivated by financial incentives such as discounts, loyalty rewards, and free shipping, while social influence through reviews and peer recommendations plays a critical role in purchase decisions. The rise of mobile commerce and the expectation for 24/7 accessibility emphasize the importance of seamless website usability, mobile optimization, and fast loading times. Moreover, personalization and interactive communication channels, including live chat and AI-driven support, have become essential for creating engaging, individualized experiences that build customer loyalty. Brands leveraging influencer marketing and aligning with social norms and psychological factors are better positioned to connect with consumers. As online shopping becomes a routine part of life, retailers must remain agile, continually refining strategies to meet demands for convenience, trust, and engagement. While the pandemic hastened e-commerce growth, the future success of online retail depends on delivering personalized, frictionless, and customer-focused experiences that drive sales and foster long-term loyalty in the digital age.

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