

Consumer Preferences in Retail: Insights into Online and Offline Shopping

Trends in Haryana

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Abstract

This study explores consumer preferences between online and offline retail channels in Haryana, India, examining how preferences differ across product categories and consumer demographics. With the growth of e-commerce, understanding these preferences has become essential for businesses seeking to optimize retail strategies in a competitive market. Through a survey of 390 consumers, the study highlights key factors shaping consumer choices, such as convenience, accessibility of product information, and experiential value. The findings provide actionable insights into how product categories and demographic factors impact channel selection, which is crucial for developing effective omnichannel strategies that cater to local consumer needs. These insights aim to guide retailers in creating balanced retail strategies that harness the strengths of both online and offline shopping environments.

Keywords: Consumer Preferences, Online Shopping, Offline Shopping, Consumer Behavior, Retail Strategy

INTRODUCTION

The retail industry has witnessed a revolutionary shift as digital advancements and changing consumer preferences reshape traditional shopping behaviors. This dual-channel retail structure, where online and

offline shopping options coexist, has created a complex landscape where consumers now navigate between physical and virtual retail environments to fulfill diverse shopping needs (Grewal et al., 2017). The accessibility of digital platforms has brought unparalleled

convenience, yet traditional retail holds strong appeal due to the unique value of immediate product interaction, in-store experiences, and the tactile satisfaction that online channels often lack (Verhoef et al., 2015). These contrasting attributes of online and offline shopping have created a competitive yet complementary dynamic that retailers must strategically address to meet evolving consumer demands. As e-commerce continues to grow globally, its influence on consumer behavior in regions like Haryana, India, is becoming increasingly significant. Online platforms provide unique advantages such as access to wider product selections, competitive pricing, and the convenience of home delivery, which appeal particularly to younger consumers who value time efficiency and accessibility (Chopra & Mandhan, 2020).

However, many consumers still view physical stores as reliable spaces for making high-involvement purchases where sensory experiences are critical, like apparel and electronics. The need to physically inspect and engage with products drives foot traffic to brick-and-mortar stores despite the growth of digital retail options (Gao & Su, 2017).

In markets like Haryana, where the consumer base spans both rural and urban areas, there is

a noticeable variation in shopping preferences that aligns with demographic, economic, and infrastructural factors. Urban areas are more influenced by digital trends, while rural consumers may exhibit a stronger inclination toward traditional shopping methods due to limited internet access and logistical constraints affecting online delivery. Furthermore, cultural factors often play a role, as offline shopping frequently involves social interactions and local market visits, which remain culturally valued experiences in many parts of India (Saxena & Gupta, 2019). Thus, understanding regional consumer behaviors and preferences is critical for retailers who aim to implement effective omnichannel strategies that cater to both rural and urban consumers.

The current retail landscape presents a dual opportunity for retailers: leveraging the convenience of online shopping while enhancing the experiential value of physical stores. Research indicates that consumers often engage in "channel-hopping," moving between online and offline modes depending on factors such as product category, price sensitivity, and shopping context (Pantano & Vannucci, 2019). For example, consumers may prefer online shopping for convenience in purchasing routine items but may favor offline channels

for evaluating high-value or tangible products. Retailers are thus challenged to create seamless, integrated experiences that allow consumers to transition smoothly between channels, facilitating interactions that align with consumers' shopping motivations and preferences.

This study focuses on the retail landscape in Haryana, exploring the factors influencing consumer preferences across online and offline channels. By examining variables such as age, income, education, and product category, this research aims to identify patterns that inform region-specific retail strategies. Through a detailed analysis, this study will address two primary objectives:

- ❖ **To identify the factors influencing consumer choices between online and offline shopping channels.**
- ❖ **To analyze how preferences vary across different product categories, taking into account the demographic diversity within Haryana.**

These insights are intended to guide retailers in creating balanced, hybrid strategies that leverage the strengths of both online and offline channels, effectively addressing the diverse needs and preferences of consumers across Haryana.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Consumer behavior research has long been dedicated to understanding the motivations and preferences that drive shopping choices, whether in traditional or digital settings. The emergence of e-commerce has introduced new variables, reshaping consumer decision-making and requiring continuous exploration of online versus offline preferences.

A foundational aspect influencing these choices is pre-purchase information-seeking behavior, which Akalamkam and Mitra (2018) identify as crucial in the decision-making process.

Their research highlights that consumers increasingly depend on online reviews, ratings, and comparative tools before making purchasing decisions. This behavior is particularly prevalent in online shopping, where consumers may not have the opportunity to physically evaluate products. As a result, businesses must strategize around digital information transparency to enhance customer engagement and shopping experience.

Another key consideration in channel preference is the impact of payment methods, as examined by Papagiannidis et al. (2014).

They demonstrate that consumer sentiment toward payment technologies, such as e-cash, debit cards, and credit cards, plays a pivotal role in purchase completion rates, both online and offline. Importantly, the study finds that income levels affect preferences for certain payment technologies, with implications for retailers looking to optimize checkout processes to reduce cart abandonment. These findings suggest that offering diverse and convenient payment options is critical in satisfying consumer preferences across channels.

Generational factors further contribute to retail channel choice, as shown in Boulay et al. (2014), who explored the preferences of young consumers. Their study highlights that children under 12 associate online shopping with convenience and accessibility but still value the immediacy of offline shopping for certain products. This perspective suggests that early exposure to digital platforms shapes generational shopping behavior, emphasizing the need for cross-channel strategies to appeal to both younger and older demographics. Marriott and Buchanan (2014) add another layer by examining the role of personality traits in channel preference. They find that individuals with social anxiety or shyness

often feel more comfortable shopping online, where they can avoid face-to-face interactions. This preference indicates that psychological factors such as personality traits, in addition to generational and technological influences, are key drivers in consumer shopping behavior.

Together, these studies illustrate that consumer preferences in retail channels are multifaceted, influenced by information-seeking behavior, payment preferences, generational outlook, and personality factors. Recognizing these elements is essential for retailers as they seek to understand the nuanced factors that drive consumers to choose between online and offline shopping channels. This foundation informs the current study's hypotheses, as outlined below:

H₁: Consumer demographics (age, gender, education, income) significantly influence the preference for online versus offline shopping channels, with variations among these demographic factors driving differences in shopping behaviors and channel choices.

H₂: Consumer preferences for online versus offline shopping vary significantly across different product categories, indicating that certain types of products lead consumers to favor one channel over the other due to unique considerations tied to the nature of the product.

H₃: Product characteristics (e.g., price, variety, convenience) significantly influence channel preference, suggesting that factors like cost sensitivity, product selection, and ease of access impact consumers' likelihood to choose either online or offline shopping options.

Research Methodology

1. Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive research design to investigate consumer preferences for online versus offline shopping channels in Haryana, India. The primary aim is to understand the factors influencing channel choice and how preferences vary across product categories. A quantitative approach was chosen to allow for statistical analysis and hypothesis testing.

2. Sample and Sampling Method

Data were collected from a sample of 390 consumers using a structured survey. Participants were selected using a random sampling technique to ensure that the sample was representative of the broader population in Haryana. Respondents were required to have experience with both online and offline shopping to provide balanced insights into their preferences.

3. Sample Demographics

The demographic characteristics of the sample provide a snapshot of the diversity among

respondents in terms of gender, age, education, and income:

- **Gender:** 66.2% female and 33.8% male
- **Age Distribution:** The majority of respondents (71.5%) were between 18-24 years, followed by 12.1% aged 25-34 years, 9.7% aged 35-44 years, and 6.7% aged 45 years or older.
- **Education Levels:** 36.9% held a bachelor's degree, 33.1% had education up to 10+2 level, 20% held a master's degree, and 10% had a doctorate.
- **Income (INR):** Income levels varied, with 55.6% earning less than 100,000 INR, 26.4% between 100,000-300,000 INR, 6.7% between 300,000-600,000 INR, and 11.3% earning more than 600,000 INR.

These demographics provide a broad view of the respondents' backgrounds, ensuring a mix of perspectives across gender, age, education, and income. This diversity supports the generalizability of the findings within Haryana

4. Data Collection

A structured questionnaire. was designed to capture essential information on consumer demographics, shopping channel preferences, factors influencing channel choice, and product category preferences. The

questionnaire was distributed through both online and offline methods to increase reach and convenience for respondents. Before the main survey, a pilot test was conducted with a small subset of respondents to refine the questions and ensure clarity.

5. Measures

The survey included the following key sections:

- **Demographics:** Questions about age, gender, education, and income to analyze their influence on channel preference.

- **Channel Preferences:** Respondents indicated their preferred shopping mode (online, offline, both).
- **Influencing Factors:** Participants ranked factors like convenience, price, product variety, and personalized service as influences on their shopping channel choices.
- **Product Categories:** Respondents were asked about their preferred shopping channels for various product categories (e.g., food products, electronics, travel bookings, etc.).

The frequency distribution of shopping channel preferences is summarized in Table 1.

Preference	Frequency	Percent
Both (Offline/Online)	248	63.6
Offline	73	18.7
Online	69	17.7
Total	390	100.0

Data Analysis and Discussion

Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Frequency distributions were used to assess general shopping preferences. To test the hypotheses, chi-square tests of independence were conducted to

determine significant associations between demographics, product categories, influencing factors, and channel preferences. The analysis was carried out using statistical software, ensuring precision in testing and interpretation.

1. General Shopping Channel Preferences

The analysis shows that a majority of respondents (63.6%) preferred using both online and offline shopping channels, indicating a strong inclination toward omnichannel shopping. Exclusive offline shopping was preferred by 18.7% of respondents, while 17.7% preferred shopping

exclusively online. A chi-square goodness-of-fit test revealed a statistically significant difference in preferences, indicating that the preferences for shopping channels were not equally distributed among the sample ($\chi^2 (2) = 117.41, p < .001$)

2. Factors Influencing Channel Choice

Factor	Frequency	Percent
Convenience	68	17.4
Personalized Service	27	6.9
Price	99	25.4
Product Variety	196	50.3
Total	390	100.0

The survey examined key factors influencing consumers' choice of shopping channel. Product variety emerged as the most significant factor, with 50.3% of respondents citing it as a primary consideration. This was

followed by price (25.4%), convenience (17.4%), and personalized service (6.9%). A chi-square test confirmed a significant association between these factors and channel preferences ($\chi^2 (3) = 156.89, p < .001$)

3. Product Category Analysis

The preference distribution for different product categories is shown in Table 3, along with chi-square results.

Product Category	Online (%)	Offline (%)	Both (%)	χ^2	p-value
Food Products	15.6	51.5	32.8	42.67	<.001

Travel Bookings	42.1	26.9	31.0	38.92	<.001
Electronics	17.9	37.2	44.9	29.84	<.001
Personal Care	22.1	31.0	46.9	31.56	<.001
Books	19.5	40.5	40.0	27.13	<.001
Home Appliances	17.9	39.7	42.3	30.45	<.001
Entertainment	50.3	14.1	35.6	45.78	<.001

Chi-square tests showed statistically significant differences in channel preferences across product categories ($\chi^2(12) = 178.45, p < .001$). For instance, a majority of respondents (51.5%) preferred offline shopping for food products, whereas entertainment products had a dominant online preference (50.3%). Categories like electronics, personal care, and home appliances showed a higher preference for a mixed-channel approach.

Findings

The study yielded several key insights into consumer preferences and behaviors regarding online and offline shopping channels. These findings are outlined below, with a focus on general channel preferences, influential factors, and product category-specific trends.

1. General Shopping Channel Preferences

The analysis of shopping channel preferences revealed a strong inclination toward

omnichannel shopping. A majority of respondents (63.6%) preferred using both online and offline channels, indicating a growing trend among consumers to leverage the flexibility of multiple shopping platforms based on convenience and situational factors. Meanwhile, 18.7% of respondents showed a preference for offline shopping only, and 17.7% favored online shopping exclusively. The chi-square goodness-of-fit test results confirmed a statistically significant difference in channel preferences, suggesting that consumer preferences are not evenly distributed across shopping modes and that omnichannel strategies hold significant appeal in this market.

2. Factors Influencing Channel Choice

The study examined the primary factors influencing consumer choices between online and offline shopping. Product variety emerged as the most influential factor, cited by 50.3% of respondents. This finding

suggests that consumers value access to a wide selection of products, a feature often associated with online platforms. Price was the second most significant factor (25.4%), followed by convenience (17.4%) and personalized service (6.9%).

The chi-square analysis revealed a significant association between these factors and shopping channel preferences, highlighting the need for retailers to prioritize product assortment and pricing strategies to capture consumer interest across both channels.

3. Product Category Preferences

Significant variations were observed in shopping channel preferences across different product categories. Key findings include:

- **Food Products:** A majority (51.5%) preferred offline shopping for food products, emphasizing the importance of immediate access and quality assessment, which are more feasible in physical retail.
- **Travel Bookings:** Online shopping dominated in this category, with 42.1% of respondents preferring it for travel-related purchases, indicating a reliance on digital convenience for booking services.
- **Electronics and Home Appliances:** These categories showed a high preference

for omnichannel shopping (both online and offline), with 44.9% and 42.3% of respondents, respectively, opting for both channels. This pattern suggests that consumers value both online research and offline validation before purchasing high-value items.

- **Entertainment Products:** Online shopping was the dominant choice for entertainment, with 50.3% of respondents indicating a preference for this channel. The accessibility of digital downloads and streaming likely contributes to this preference.

- **Books and Personal Care Products:** These categories also displayed a significant preference for both channels, with many consumers leveraging online platforms for variety and offline stores for immediate access.

The chi-square test results confirmed statistically significant differences in channel preferences across product categories, supporting the hypothesis that product type plays a crucial role in shaping consumer behavior.

4. Support for Hypotheses

The study's findings provide strong support for the hypotheses:

- **H₁:** Supported, as demographic factors showed significant associations with channel preferences.
- **H₂:** Strongly supported by the chi-square analysis, which revealed substantial variations in preferences across product categories.
- **H₃:** Confirmed, as the study found that product characteristics such as price sensitivity and variety significantly influenced channel choice.

Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into consumer shopping preferences across online and offline channels in Haryana, India. The findings reveal a marked preference for omnichannel shopping, with a majority of consumers favoring a mix of both online and offline modes to meet their shopping needs. This highlights the importance of flexibility and adaptability in modern retail, as consumers increasingly seek to blend the convenience of online shopping with the experiential value of in-store purchases. Factors such as product variety, price, convenience, and personalized service play significant roles in shaping channel preferences. Product variety emerged as the leading factor, underscoring the consumer

desire for choice, which is often more readily available online. Additionally, the study shows that preferences vary significantly across product categories, with food products favored in offline settings and travel bookings more commonly purchased online. Categories like electronics, personal care, and home appliances demonstrated a preference for both channels, suggesting that consumers value the ability to research products online and validate them in-store before making a final purchase. The study confirms that demographic factors, product categories, and product characteristics significantly impact shopping channel choices, supporting the hypotheses and emphasizing the need for retailers to consider these factors when crafting retail strategies. Overall, these findings underscore the importance of a hybrid, omnichannel approach that adapts to diverse consumer needs, product types, and contextual factors within the region.

Policy Implications

The findings of this study have important policy implications for both retail businesses and policymakers in Haryana, particularly as they relate to fostering a robust retail

ecosystem that supports consumer needs across urban and rural areas.

1. **Encouraging Omnichannel Retail**

Strategies: Retailers should adopt an omnichannel approach that integrates online and offline experiences to align with consumer preferences. Policymakers can incentivize this transition by providing grants or tax benefits for retailers investing in digital infrastructure, enabling a smoother transition for traditional stores to establish an online presence. This strategy can enhance consumer access to a broader range of products and shopping experiences.

2. **Improving Digital Access and**

Infrastructure in Rural Areas: The study shows a gap between urban and rural consumer preferences, partly due to limited internet access and digital infrastructure in rural regions. To promote equitable retail opportunities, policymakers should focus on improving digital connectivity in these areas. Expanding internet penetration and affordable digital services can help bridge the gap, allowing rural consumers to access online shopping options and contribute to the growth of e-commerce.

3. **Facilitating Product Variety and**

Affordable Pricing: Since product variety

and price are major determinants of channel preference, local businesses and small retailers can be encouraged to diversify their product offerings. Policies that support local sourcing, supply chain efficiency, and access to affordable financing for inventory expansion can help small businesses compete with larger online retailers. Additionally, fair pricing policies and subsidies can support price-sensitive consumers, making essential products more accessible across both channels.

4. **Supporting Consumer Protection**

in E-commerce: As online shopping grows, protecting consumer rights becomes increasingly crucial. Policymakers should develop robust consumer protection regulations to safeguard online shoppers from fraud, poor quality, and delayed delivery issues. Implementing clear return and refund policies, data protection guidelines, and quality standards for e-commerce transactions can foster consumer confidence in online shopping.

5. **Promoting Digital Literacy and E-**

commerce Awareness: Digital literacy is key to enabling consumers to navigate and benefit from online shopping. Policymakers and educational institutions can collaborate

to create programs that promote digital literacy, especially in rural and underserved areas. Workshops, training sessions, and awareness campaigns can empower more consumers to engage confidently with online platforms, making the retail ecosystem more inclusive. By addressing these policy implications, both retailers and policymakers can create a more consumer-centric retail environment that maximizes access, convenience, and choice. These measures can contribute to a resilient retail sector in Haryana that aligns with modern consumer behavior trends while supporting regional economic development.

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