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Perception of college students on online shopping

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Abstract

This study explores the perceptions and behaviors of female college students in Kerala toward online shopping, with a focus on factors such as media exposure, social media influence, and peer recommendations. Based on primary data from 120 respondents from three districts the study shows how often people purchase online, what categories they most prefer to buy, and their platform preferences. Analysis of quantitative data showed people are influenced by discounts, product reviews, and ease of use, but trust in product quality and platforms remains neutral. At the same time, the analysis highlights the domination of fashion products and seasonal shopping trends. Among the current challenges are product quality, delivery delays, and return processes, thereby identifying areas for improvement in e-commerce services. These findings present actionable guidelines for customizing experiences consequently to address this demographic's expectations whilst reinforcing quality assurance, personalized marketing and enhanced customer support.

Keywords: Perception, college students, online shopping

Introduction

The online retail boom has altered shopping habits, especially among the younger generations. Offering a vast array of products and services at the click of a button, online shopping with its ease of use and availability, have become a significant aspect of consumer lifestyles. This trend extends to university students, a group of people well-known for their flexibility in using technology and engaging with web platforms. In Kerala, a state famous for its better literacy scores and internet penetration, online shopping is similarly picking up pace, especially among female students in colleges. This study investigated the perceptions and behaviors of this certain segment, the traits that are having an impact on their online shopping behavior. Key elements such as media exposure, social media usage, and peer recommendations are explored to better understand how they influence consumer preferences.

Understanding the factors that influence online shopping choices is essential for e-commerce platforms to develop effective strategies. Similarly, the influence of social media and peer recommendations has been identified as a dominant factor in online purchasing, especially among younger consumers (Chetioui *et al.*, 2020) ^[1]. This research seeks to identify the interplay of these elements in the context of Kerala's college students, highlighting the nuances of their shopping behavior. The study also aimed to explore shopping patterns among female college students, a group that increasingly participates in e-commerce due to its convenience and variety (Gupta & Arora, 2017) ^[2]. By analyzing the frequency of online purchases, the types of products bought, and common purchasing habits, this research provided a granular understanding of consumer preferences.

Statement of the Problem

The rise of e-commerce websites has changed the traditional shopping environment, particularly among younger generations like college students. As one of the most digitally-savvy states with good internet penetration, online shopping has witnessed a huge adoption in Kerala. However, the specific constructs driving online shopping preferences and behaviors in college students are still under studied. Existing literature on e-commerce consumer behavior has primarily addressed non-specific demographics, neglecting to consider the unique perspectives of a target audience such as young females who are college students. Gen Z is a significant contender in this description because of their digital activity like social networking, video, and shopping. While media exposure,

social media influence, and peer recommendations are known to be key determinants of consumer decisions, the relative contribution of these factors is unknown among the group in Kerala. In addition, getting a sense of how often consumers shop online, what products they order, and whether they have recurring purchasing activities will help e-commerce platforms tailor their services. Moreover, although demographic aspects including age, education, and gender are essential, and socio-economic variables like income, lack of distrust towards online platforms, perception of e-commerce quality, and standard of living all play vital roles in determining consumer attitudes, none have been considered in the context of Kerala's unique socio-economic environment. Hence this study.

Research methodology

The study is of quantitative nature, and Survey research design is used to conduct the study. Data has been collected through both primary and secondary sources. A total of 120 female college students as sample are selected based on purposive convenient sampling method. A well-structured questionnaire is used for primary data collection. Primary data was collected from college students from 3 districts (Malappuram, Trissur and Palakkad) via questionnaire through google form. Percentage analysis used for the analysis part and presented with the help of tables and chart.

Objectives of the study

1. Understand the frequency, types of products purchased, and common shopping patterns among female college students.
2. Identify the primary factors influencing online shopping choices, particularly examining the role of media exposure, social media influence, and peer recommendations
3. Investigate perceptions shaped by family income, trust in online platforms, product quality, and overall satisfaction with e-commerce experiences.

Review of Literature

The rise of online shopping among college students in Kerala highlights the importance of understanding the factors shaping their behavior, preferences, and perceptions. The following review presents insights into the primary themes associated with this demographic's online shopping habits, aligning with the study's objectives.

Factors Influencing Online Shopping Choices

Social media has a profound impact on students' purchasing decisions. Platforms like Instagram and Facebook serve as virtual storefronts, showcasing products through targeted advertisements and influencer endorsements. Studies suggest that these platforms are instrumental in driving e-commerce adoption among young adults (Das & Nayak, 2021) ^[4]. Additionally, college students tend to trust reviews and testimonials shared on social media, further influencing their choices (Patil & Singh, 2022) ^[8].

Peer influence plays a pivotal role in shaping online shopping behavior. Friends and classmates often act as sources of information, providing recommendations and feedback on products. This social proof significantly boosts confidence in purchasing decisions, particularly in first-time buyers (Sarkar, 2020) ^[10].

2. Shopping Patterns and Product Preferences among Female College Students: Female students, as a key demographic, exhibit specific preferences and behaviors in online shopping. Apparel, accessories, and beauty products dominate their purchases due to ease of availability, variety, and affordability (Ravi & Joseph, 2022) ^[9]. Studies indicate that convenience and exclusive online discounts are significant motivators for female students to shop online (Kumar & Shetty, 2023) ^[6]. Additionally, patterns such as increased shopping frequency during festive seasons and preference for cash-on-delivery payment methods have been observed (Menon, 2022) ^[7].

3. Socio-Economic Factors and Perceptions of E-Commerce: Family income substantially influences students' online shopping habits. Higher-income groups are more inclined to make frequent purchases, as financial stability enables access to technology and higher discretionary spending (Gupta & Verma, 2021) ^[5]. Conversely, students from lower-income families often exhibit cautious spending, prioritizing necessity over luxury. Perceived trust and product quality are critical in shaping students' satisfaction with online shopping. Concerns over fraud, counterfeit products, and poor customer service are deterrents, while positive experiences with well-known platforms build loyalty (Chatterjee & Sharma, 2022) ^[3]. Satisfaction with online shopping is driven by several factors, including the user-friendliness of websites, delivery efficiency, and after-sales service. Research in Kerala highlights that student's place significant value on quick delivery and hassle-free returns (Rajesh, 2023) ^[11].

Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1: Respondents monthly salary income

Family Income	Respondents	Percentage
Less than ₹10,000	19	15.8
₹10,000 - ₹25,000	28	23.3
₹25,000 - ₹50,000	41	34.2
₹50,000 - ₹1,00,000	27	22.5
Above ₹1,00,000	5	4.2
Total	120	100

Source: Primary Data

The above table shows that the respondents' monthly family income. The majority 34.2% fall within the ₹25,000-₹50,000 range. This is followed by 23.3% earning ₹10,000-₹25,000 and 22.5% earning ₹50,000-₹1,00,000. A smaller proportion of respondents were under lower-income segment and higher-income group.

Objective 1: Understand the frequency, types of products purchased, and common shopping patterns among female college students.

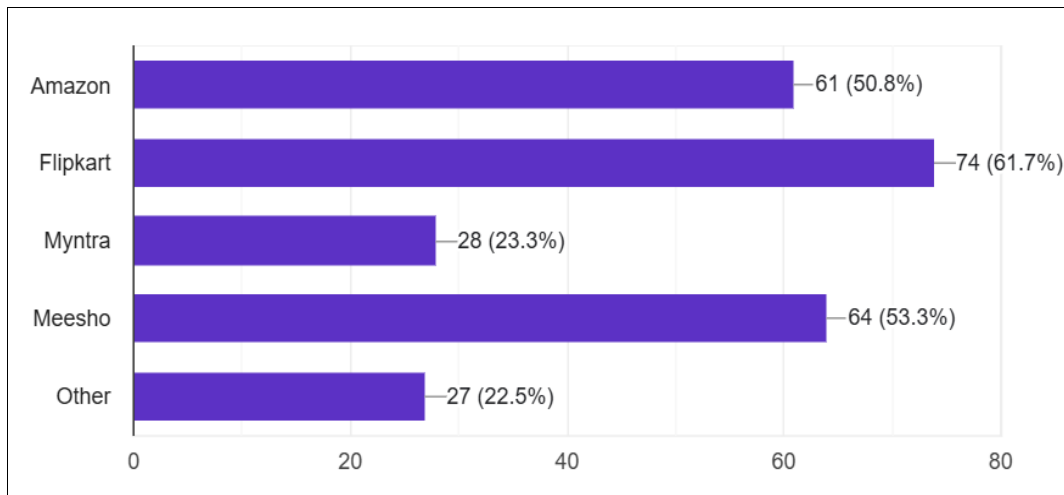
Table 2: Frequency of online shopping

Frequency	Respondents	Percentage
Never	2	1.7
Rarely	44	36.7
Occasionally	55	45.8
Often	15	12.5
Always	4	3.3
Total	120	100

Source: Primary Data

The table 2 shows that the frequency of online shopping. The majority of respondents shop online occasionally

45.8%, followed by a significant portion who do so rarely 36.7%.

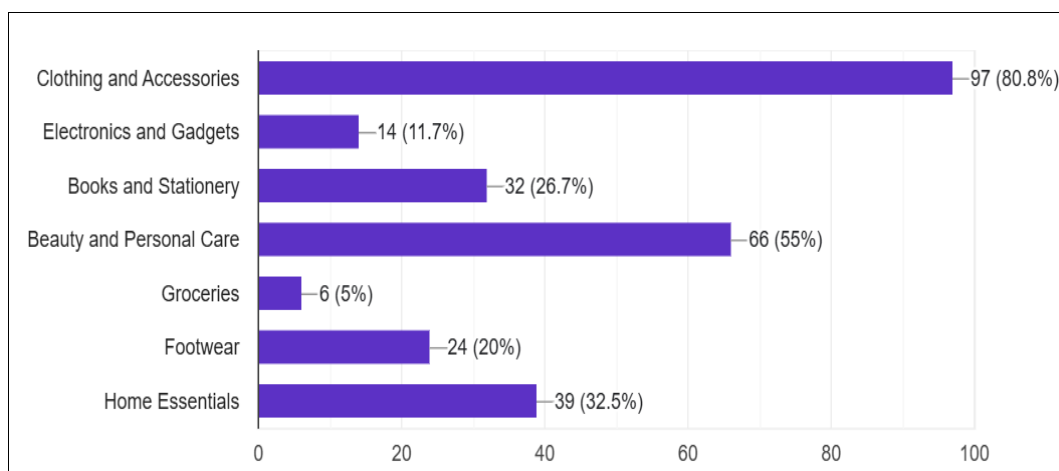


Source: Primary Data

Fig 1: Most often used online shopping platforms

The above figure shows that Flipkart is the most preferred platform, used by 61.7% of respondents, followed by Meesho at 53.3% and Amazon at 50.8%. Myntra is less

popular, with only 23.3% of respondents using it, while other platforms account for 22.5%.



Source: Primary Data

Fig 2: Type of products usually buy online

The figure 2 reveals that clothing and accessories are the most commonly purchased items, with 80.8% of respondents selecting this category. Beauty and personal care products are also popular, purchased by 55% of

respondents. Home essentials rank third, with 32.5%, followed by books and stationery at 26.7% and footwear at 20%. Electronics and gadgets, groceries are the least purchased category.

Table 3: Most used period of online shopping

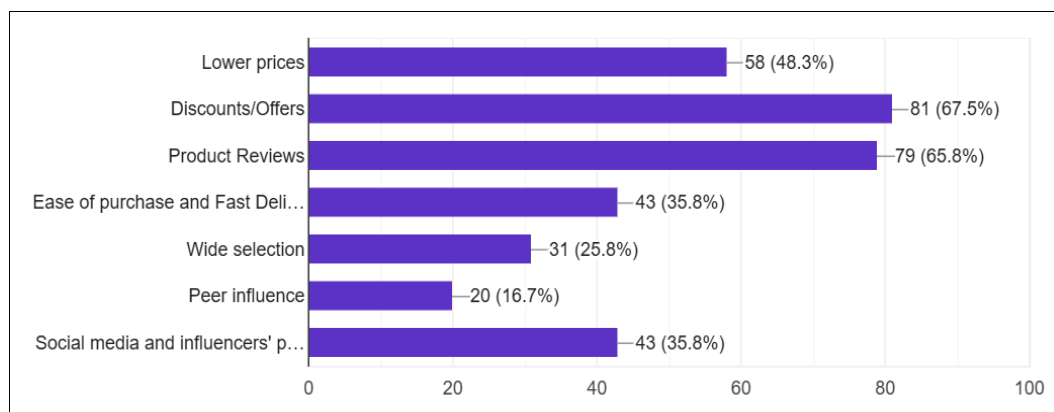
Period	Respondents	Percentage
During festival sales (e.g., Onam, Eid, Christmas)	54	45
During academic year start	2	1.7
During end-of-season sales	12	10
Throughout the year	52	43.3
Total	120	100

Source: Primary Data

The table 3 shows that festival sales are the most popular, with 45% of respondents shopping during these times. A close second, 43.3% of respondents shop throughout the year. End-of-season sales account for 10% of shopping activity, while only 1.7% shop primarily during the start of the academic year.

Objective 2

Identify the primary factors influencing online shopping choices, particularly examining the role of media exposure, social media influence, and peer recommendations.



Source: Primary Data

Fig 3: Factors influencing ONLINE shopping decision

The analysis of factors influencing online shopping decisions shows that discounts and offers are the most significant motivator, influencing 67.5% of respondents. Product reviews also play a crucial role, impacting 65.8%, followed by lower prices at 48.3%. Ease of purchase and fast delivery, along with social media and influencers' promotions, are each important for 35.8% of respondents. A wide selection influences 25.8%, while peer influence is the least significant factor, affecting only 16.7%.

Objective 3: Investigate perceptions shaped by family income, trust in online platforms, product quality, and overall satisfaction with e-commerce experiences.

Table 4: satisfaction from online shopping experiences

Level of satisfaction	Respondents	Percentage
Very satisfied	8	6.7
Satisfied	53	44.2
Neutral	55	45.8
Dissatisfied	3	2.5
Very dissatisfied	1	0.8
Total	120	100

Source: Primary Data

The table 4 shows that most respondents are either satisfied (44.2%) or neutral (45.8%) about their experiences. A smaller percentage, 6.7%, are very satisfied, suggesting that only a few respondents have exceptionally positive experiences. On the other hand, dissatisfaction is minimal, with only 2.5% dissatisfied and 0.8% very dissatisfied.

Table 5: Trust of the quality of products bought online

Quality	Respondents	Percentage
Yes	29	24.2
No	9	7.5
May be	82	68.3
Total	120	100

Source: Primary Data

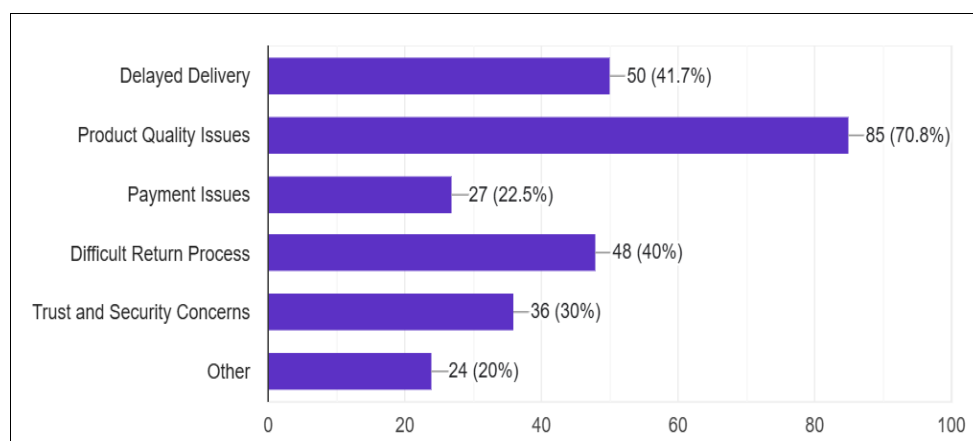
The table 5 shows that a majority of respondents 68.3% are uncertain, indicating a "maybe" response, suggesting hesitancy or lack of strong confidence in product quality. Only 24.2% of respondents trust the quality of online products, while 7.5% explicitly distrust it.

Table 6: Trust towards Online shopping platforms

Level of trust	Respondents	Percentage
Very High Trust	5	4.2
High Trust	11	9.2
Neutral	88	73.3
Low Trust	16	13.3
Very Low Trust	0	0
Total	120	100

Source: Primary Data

The table shows that the majority of respondents 73.3% have a neutral level of trust towards online shopping platforms, indicating neither strong confidence nor skepticism. A smaller proportion exhibits high trust and very high trust. Meanwhile, 13.3% report low trust, and none have very low trust.



Source: Primary Data

Fig 4: Challenges facing while shopping online

The figure 4 shows that product quality issues are the most common problem, reported by 70.8% of respondents. Delayed delivery is the second most frequent challenge, faced by 41.7% of respondents, followed by difficulties with the return process 40%. Trust and security concerns affect 30%, while 22.5% report payment issues. Additionally, 20% face other challenges.

Findings

1. The respondents' monthly family income predominantly indicates a middle-income population, with fewer respondents in both low- and high-income categories.
2. Shopping frequency shows that the majority shop occasionally or rarely. These findings suggest that while online shopping is moderately popular, most respondents use it infrequently rather than as a regular or consistent practice.
3. Flipkart, Meesho, and Amazon are the most preferred platforms due to their strong presence and popularity in the market, while Myntra and other platforms cater to niche audiences.
4. Fashion-related items dominate online shopping preferences, while other categories, particularly groceries and electronics, are less commonly purchased online by female college students.
5. Online shopping is highly influenced by seasonal and promotional events, with a considerable number of users maintaining regular shopping patterns year-round.
6. From the review of literature, we can see that social media and influencer endorsements have a profound impact on female college students' purchasing decisions. Peer influence plays a pivotal role in shaping online shopping behavior. However, our analysis shows that discounts, offers, and product reviews are the primary factors influencing online shopping choices. These findings indicate that monetary benefits and reliable product information are the primary drivers of online shopping, while social and peer-related factors hold comparatively less influence.
7. Most respondents are either neutral or satisfied with their shopping experiences. These findings suggest that while online shopping meets the expectations of the majority, there is room for improvement to enhance customer satisfaction further and convert neutral experiences into positive ones.
8. Some findings highlight a significant gap in consumer confidence regarding the quality of products purchased online, emphasizing the need for online platforms to improve quality assurance, provide detailed product descriptions, and enhance customer reviews to build trust.
9. Trust in product quality and platforms is generally neutral, with many respondents uncertain. There is an opportunity for online platforms to build stronger customer trust through enhanced reliability and transparency.
10. While online shopping is convenient, concerns about product quality, delivery delays, and return processes significantly impact the overall experience.

Suggestions

1. Since most respondents belong to middle-income groups, platforms should focus on budget-friendly deals, student discounts, and cashback offers tailored to this segment.

2. To encourage more regular shopping and motivate occasional shoppers to shop more frequently, platforms can expand loyalty programs, introduce subscription models, offer small incentives like reward points, and provide personalized recommendations based on browsing history.
3. While Flipkart, Meesho, and Amazon dominate, niche platforms like Myntra could boost visibility through collaborations with influencers and targeted campaigns.
4. Since fashion dominates, other categories like groceries and electronics could be promoted through limited-time offers, bundled deals, and targeted advertisements.
5. Enhance seasonal promotions with early access for loyal customers, flash sales, and special discounts during festivals to attract more users.
6. While discounts and product reviews remain key drivers, platforms should balance their strategies by partnering with trusted influencers for authentic product reviews and leveraging peer recommendations for better reach.
7. To reduce concerns about delivery delays and return difficulties, platforms should improve logistics partnerships, offer real-time delivery tracking, and simplify return procedures.
8. Introduce quality assurance seals, transparent return policies, and guarantees to help reduce consumer uncertainty about product quality. Provide clearer product descriptions, more detailed images, and verified customer reviews to boost trust in product quality.
9. Gather feedback through regular surveys and focus on areas like faster delivery, better return policies, quality assurance, user-friendly interfaces, and improved customer support for a smoother shopping experience and to convert neutral experiences into positive ones.
10. Use engaging content to drive customer interest and loyalty. Enhancing transparency and reliability to build stronger customer trust.

Conclusion

This study sheds light on online shopping habits among female college students in Kerala. The survey shows that the majority of respondents come from middle-income families and buy occasionally, primarily have a preference for platforms such as Flipkart, Meesho, and Amazon. Fashion and apparel products are widely purchased, while groceries and electronics are still less favored. The promotion events have the largest impact on the persuading factors, followed by the price discounts and the product reviews, while the impact of peer recommendation is weak. Overall, trust in product quality and online platforms was mixed and suggested a need for better transparency and quality assurance steps. You can improve customer satisfaction by addressing issues including delivery delay and return issues. These outcomes highlight the significance of personalized marketing approaches, enhanced service quality, and trust-building initiatives to effectively address the needs of this demographic.

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