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E-Commerce footprints in Kerala's countryside: A consumer perspective

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Abstract

This study investigates the e-commerce habits of rural consumers in Kerala, focusing on their internet usage patterns, online shopping behaviors, and preferred product categories. With rising digital penetration in rural areas, understanding consumer preferences and challenges is essential for businesses and policymakers. Data collected from 200 rural respondents reveals that while convenience and product variety drive online purchases, factors like digital literacy and trust influence shopping frequency. Groceries and personal care products dominate purchase categories, with platforms like Amazon and Flipkart preferred. The findings provide valuable insights to enhance e-commerce strategies and promote digital inclusion in Kerala's rural markets.

Keywords: Consumer behaviour, internet usage, online shopping, rural consumers, shopping pattern

Introduction

The rapid expansion of digital technology and internet connectivity has transformed the way consumers purchase goods and services, giving rise to a vibrant e-commerce ecosystem in India. While urban areas were the early adopters of online shopping, rural consumers in recent years have begun embracing e-commerce platforms due to improved internet access, affordable smartphones, and increased digital literacy. In Kerala, known for its high literacy rate and growing digital infrastructure, rural consumers are gradually shifting from traditional shopping methods to online purchases for convenience, variety, and competitive pricing. However, their buying behavior, preferences, and trust toward e-commerce platforms differ significantly from their urban counterparts, influenced by factors such as income levels, awareness, and logistical challenges. This study aims to analyze the e-commerce habits of rural consumers in Kerala, focusing on their purchasing patterns, preferred platforms, and the factors driving or hindering their online buying decisions. The findings will help understand the digital inclusion of rural communities and provide insights for businesses to better serve this emerging market segment.

Furthermore, the growth of e-commerce in rural Kerala represents a significant shift in consumer culture, where technology is increasingly bridging the gap between urban and rural markets. With government initiatives like Digital India and improved mobile network penetration, rural consumers now have greater exposure to online marketplaces such as Amazon, Flipkart, and Meesho. However, despite these advancements, challenges such as inconsistent delivery services, limited digital payment adoption, and concerns over product quality and return policies continue to influence rural consumers' trust and participation in e-commerce. Understanding these behavioral patterns and constraints is essential not only for enhancing consumer satisfaction but also for enabling policymakers and businesses to design inclusive strategies that strengthen rural digital participation and ensure equitable growth of the e-commerce ecosystem in Kerala.

Significance of the Study

As internet penetration and smartphone usage continue to rise in rural areas, understanding the purchasing behaviors, preferences, and barriers faced by these consumers becomes crucial for businesses aiming to expand their digital footprint. This research provides valuable insights into the evolving consumer patterns outside urban centers, helping policymakers, marketers, and e-commerce platforms tailor their strategies to meet the unique needs of rural populations. By highlighting the opportunities and challenges in rural e-

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commerce adoption, the study contributes to bridging the digital divide and promoting inclusive growth in the state's digital economy.

Review of Literature

Mani Krishna & Rajeev Sharma (2024) examines how digital infrastructure/connectivity affects perceived usefulness, ease of use, and ultimately purchase intention among rural consumers. It offers empirical data showing that lack of connectivity or poor infrastructure constrains e-commerce uptake, which would be relevant in your study for Kerala: to see whether similar infrastructure or connectivity issues appear, and how strongly they affect rural consumers' e-commerce behaviour. Md Shakir Ali (2023) made an attempt to discuss how digital media (smartphone/internet penetration, social media) is shifting the way rural consumers search for information, form opinions, and make purchases. As digital/media exposure increases, so does awareness, desire, and purchase behaviour even among rural segments. For Kerala, this could help you compare whether digital media is equally influential there, and what the pathways are for rural consumers (word of mouth, social media, ads, etc.). Sania Khan (2023) conducted a study focusing on what barriers (literacy, infrastructure, cultural/traditional constraints, lack of resources) rural markets face during digital transformation, and what opportunities exist (e.g. ICT, expanding markets) in rural India. It's directly relevant for understanding what might prevent or enable rural consumers in Kerala from adopting e-commerce, and what interventions might help. Sanal Kumar Velayudhan (2024)^[6] examines the key drivers and barriers of online shopping in rural Indian settings, focussing on how consumer characteristics (e.g. demographics, digital literacy), product attributes, infrastructure, and comparative advantages of online versus offline retail channels affect rural adoption of e-commerce.

Research Gap

While numerous studies have explored the growth and dynamics of e-commerce in urban India, there is a noticeable lack of region-specific research focused on rural consumer behavior—particularly in Kerala, where high literacy rates, increasing internet penetration, and unique socio-cultural factors distinguish rural markets from those in other Indian states. Existing literature often generalizes rural consumers across India, failing to account for localised differences in digital adoption, trust levels, purchasing power, and product preferences. Moreover, limited empirical data is available on how rural consumers in Kerala discover, access, and engage with e-commerce platforms. This gap underscores the need for a focused study that examines the specific e-commerce habits, motivations, and barriers experienced by rural consumers in Kerala, thereby enabling more targeted strategies for digital inclusion and market development.

Objectives of the study

- To analyze the internet usage patterns among rural consumers in Kerala and their influence on the frequency of online shopping.
- To examine the relationship between the dimensions of

online shopping and the types of goods most frequently purchased by rural consumers through e-commerce platforms.

Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative research approach to investigate the internet usage patterns and online shopping behaviors of rural consumers in Kerala. Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire administered to a sample of 200 rural respondents across selected districts in Kerala namely Malappuram, Calicut and Waynad using stratified random sampling to ensure representation across different age groups, income levels, and internet accessibility. The questionnaire included sections on frequency and purpose of internet use, dimensions of online shopping and the categories of goods most frequently purchased online. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize consumer behavior patterns, while inferential tools such as correlation and regression analysis were applied to examine the relationship between internet usage patterns and frequency of online shopping, as well as between online shopping dimensions and the types of products purchased. The data was analyzed using SPSS to ensure accuracy and validity in the interpretation of results.

Results and Discussion

Status of Internet Connection

The status of internet connectivity in rural Kerala has significantly improved in recent years, driven by increased mobile penetration and government-led digital inclusion initiatives. However, disparities still exist in terms of speed, reliability, and affordability, particularly in remote and low-income areas. The details of the study are given below:

Table 1: Status of Internet Connections

Internet Connections at Home				Visiting Cafes			
Male		Female		Male		Female	
Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
25 (59%)	18 (41%)	36 (23.1%)	120 (76.9%)	40 (90.9%)	4 (9.1%)	146 (93.6%)	10 (6.4%)

Source: Primary Data

It is clear from the table that a good number of male respondents (59%) have internet connections at home, while a smaller proportion of females (23.1%) reported the same, indicating a gender gap in home internet access. However, most males (90.9%) and females (93.6%) prefer visiting internet cafés, suggesting widespread external internet usage among both groups. Overall, the data reveals that although home connectivity is limited—especially among females—public internet access points like cafés play a crucial role in bridging the digital access gap.

Pattern of internet Usage

The pattern of internet usage among rural consumers in Kerala reveals a growing reliance on smartphones for accessing digital services, with social media, entertainment, and messaging apps being the most commonly used platforms. However, usage for e-commerce activities remains comparatively low, often limited to occasional browsing or purchasing, influenced by digital literacy and trust in online transactions. The below table shows the result

Table 2: Internet Usage Pattern of Respondents

Variables	Male	Female	Total
Daily	38 (75%)	122 (82%)	160 (80%)
Twice in a week	5 (22%)	30 (19%)	35 (17.5%)
Weekly	2 (2.8%)	3 (1.9%)	5 (2.25%)
Total	45 (100%)	155 (100%)	200 (100%)

Source: Primary Data

The table depicts that a good number of respondents use the internet on a daily basis, with 75% of males and 82% of females accessing it regularly. This indicates a high level of internet engagement, particularly among female respondents. A smaller proportion of respondents, 17.5% in total, use the internet twice a week, while only 2.25% access it weekly, suggesting limited occasional usage. Overall, the data reflects that daily internet use has become a common habit among both male and female users, highlighting the

growing dependence on digital connectivity in their daily lives.

Frequently used online shopping platforms

Rural consumers in Kerala most frequently use platforms like Amazon and Flipkart for their online shopping needs. These platforms are preferred due to their wide product range, user-friendly interfaces, and reliable delivery services.

Table 3: Frequently used Online Shopping Platforms

Occasions	Amazon	Flipkart	Swiggy	Instamart	Meesho
Very Often	(30%)	(50%)	2(3.3%)	(3.33%)	(20%)
Often	(24%)	(33.3%)	(33.3%)	(3.33%)	(10%)
Rarely	(30%)	(13.3%)	(23.3%)	(20%)	(30%)
Never	(17%)	(3.3%)	(20%)	(75.35%)	(40%)
Total	100%	100 %	100%	100%	100%

Source: Primary Data

The table shows that Flipkart (50%) and Amazon (30%) are the most frequently used online shopping platforms, indicating their dominance and consumer preference among respondents. Meesho is used “very often” by 20% of respondents, reflecting its growing popularity, especially for budget-friendly purchases. Platforms like Swiggy and Instamart are used less frequently, with a significant portion of users reporting “rare” or “never” usage, suggesting that food and grocery delivery services are less preferred compared to e-commerce platforms. Overall, the data

highlights that general e-commerce platforms such as Flipkart and Amazon have stronger user engagement than niche delivery-based apps

Dimensions of Online Shopping

Five dimensions of online shopping consists of Product’s Quality, Timely updates on Product Delivery Status, Product Safety, Behavior of Delivery Person and Availability of Choice. The result of the analysis is given below:

Table 4: Five Dimensions of Online Shopping

Sl, No,	Dimensions	Score
1	Product’s Quality	86
2	Timely updates on Product Delivery Status	92
3	Product Safety	91
4	Behavior of Delivery Person	94
5	Availability of Choice	93

Source: Primary Data

The table highlights that all five dimensions of online shopping received high scores, indicating overall customer satisfaction with online services. Among these, the behavior of the delivery person (94) and availability of choice (93) ranked the highest, showing that consumers value courteous service and diverse product options. Meanwhile, product quality (86), though rated slightly lower, still reflects a positive perception, suggesting that maintaining consistent quality could further enhance the overall online shopping

experience.

Category of goods Purchase

Rural consumers in Kerala predominantly purchase essential goods such as groceries, personal care products, and household items through online platforms. Additionally, there is a growing demand for electronics and apparel, reflecting increasing comfort with diverse product categories in e-commerce.

Table 5: Category of goods Purchase

Sr. No.	Categories	No. of times Purchase
1	Clothes	143
2	Electronics	107
3	Mobile and Mobile Accessories	159
4	Cosmetics care products / Fashion Accessories	61
5	Household Products	42
6	Books	88
7	Foot wares	103
8	Others	32
	Total	735

Source: Primary Data

The table reveals that mobile phones and mobile accessories (159 purchases) are the most frequently bought category, indicating their high demand among online shoppers. Clothes (143) and electronics (107) also rank prominently, reflecting the growing consumer preference for fashion and technology-based products in e-commerce. Categories such as household products (42) and others (32) record the lowest purchases, showing relatively lower online engagement in these segments. Overall, the data suggests that online shopping is primarily driven by technology and lifestyle-related goods, with fashion and gadgets leading consumer interest.

Suggestions

Understanding the e-commerce habits of rural consumers in Kerala is crucial for businesses aiming to expand their reach beyond urban markets. This study explores how factors such as internet accessibility, digital literacy, and trust impact the frequency and nature of online shopping among rural populations. Insights from this research will help e-commerce platforms tailor their services to better meet the unique preferences and challenges faced by rural consumers. The findings can inform policymakers on how to bridge the digital divide and promote inclusive economic growth through enhanced digital infrastructure. By analyzing purchase patterns and preferred product categories, this study highlights emerging trends that could shape the future of rural e-commerce in Kerala.

Conclusion

This study explores the evolving e-commerce habits of rural consumers in Kerala, a region witnessing rapid digital transformation due to increased internet access and smartphone usage. It aims to understand how rural consumers engage with online shopping platforms, the frequency of their purchases, preferred product categories, and the factors influencing their buying decisions. By examining internet usage patterns alongside dimensions such as convenience, trust, and price sensitivity, the research provides a comprehensive view of rural consumers' online behavior. The findings highlight both opportunities and challenges in expanding e-commerce penetration in Kerala's rural areas, offering valuable insights for businesses and policymakers aiming to foster digital inclusion and market growth.

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