

CHANGING DIMENSIONS OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR: A STUDY ON ONLINE CONSUMPTION AND BRAND LOYALTY AMONG THE URBAN YOUTH IN THIRUVNATHAPURAM DISTRICT OF KERALA

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ABSTRACT: Globalisation and liberalisation gave birth to a new generation of consumers. The rising tides of affluence have given today's youth the benefits of technology and the range of opportunities that no generation before them had. Modern world is witnessing lots of trends and fashions relating to consumption pattern among the youth. New trends influence the purchase decisions leading to an existence of non-correlation between income of the consumer and their purchasing power. There has been an enormous growth in consumption and changes in the nature and pattern of consumer behaviour among the youth. Youth have more preferences towards online consumption behaviour due to the impact of network externalities and brand loyalty. The present study enables us to have an understanding of the changing dimensions of consumer behaviour among the youth with a focus on online consumer behaviour and brand loyalty.

Key Words: Consumer Behaviour, Peer pressure, Network Externalities, Online consumption, Brand loyalty

Introduction

Youth of the present era is connected to the cyber world much more than ever. The world of online shopping is on the rise where consumers easily get access to their desirable brands. Online shopping has become the heartthrob of consumers especially among the youth. Taking advantages of brand preferences, online shopping is not limited to a single product but over a wide range of categories. Moreover, for the sake of convenience, these virtual stores have a variety of payment options including cash on delivery and free shipping. This spurs up the online shopping as it saves a lot of time and money. With regard to the products demanded through online, fashion and apparel consumption is mostly selected by the youth because of the availability of all the brands and plenty of options to their choice. Food and grocery is also finding its place in online markets as people live a fast pace of life. Consumer durables and kitchen appliances are charged with promotional prices to attract the online shoppers as this is a segment of price consciousness. Jewellery, gifts and stationery also has a large audience due to the assurance in quality from the part of virtual stores. Thus, the trend of online shopping is on the increase especially among the youths. Similarly, along with online purchasing behaviour, youngsters in the current scenario increasingly prefer branded products and services. Brand loyalty is based upon emotional involvement which is created between the brand and the consumer. Their buying decision can be either conscious or unconscious. However, it is based upon trust that the brand fulfills the consumers. This article is an attempt to analyse the changing dimensions of consumer behaviour among the youth with emphasis on their online consumption behavior and brand preferences. The study is based on the following objectives

- 1) To discuss briefly the recent trends in the consumer behaviour of youth in Kerala
- 2) To analyse the nature and pattern of online consumption behavior among the urban youth in Thiruvananthapuram district.
- 3) To highlight the different aspects of brand preferences among the youngsters.

Data and Methodology

The study is exploratory in nature. It has been designed mainly on the basis of primary data collected through structured questionnaire. The field survey was carried out at Thiruvananthapuram District through a sample survey. 150 samples were randomly collected from youth employees coming under the age group of 21-35. "youth" is often indicated as a person between the age where he/she may leave compulsory education, and the age at which he/she finds his/her first employment (UNESCO). The UN, for statistical consistency across regions, defines 'youth', as those persons between the ages of 15 and

24 years. But higher levels of unemployment in Kerala and the cost of setting up an independent household puts many young people into a prolonged period of dependency. Therefore we fix the age of the youth ranging between 21 and 35. The employees were randomly selected from different spheres of employment such as teaching, banking, IT and other government services.

Urban youth of Thiruvananthapuram district has been selected as sample mainly due to convenience. Moreover, as the study is focused on online consumption behaviour and brand loyalty, this trend is found more among employees and fixed income group. They also have the feasibility in the use of technology and adapting network externalities. As Thiruvananthapuram is the capital city, the availability of these categories are very high.

Organisation of the Study

The discussion has been organised in five sections. The first section presents the recent trends in the consumer behaviour of youth in Kerala. The second section briefly discusses about the trend towards online consumption behaviour. The third section analyses the primary survey made on the nature and pattern of online consumption behavior among the urban youth in Thiruvananthapuram district. The fourth section is about brand loyalty among the youth based on survey analysis and the final section summarises and concludes the discussion.

Section-1: Changing Trend of Consumption Behaviour among Youths in Kerala: A Brief Discussion

Among the other states in India, Kerala has mostly witnessed the new and worldwide inflected patterns of consumption among the youth. The cultural and political terrain of Kerala have greatly influenced the consumer behavior. The young women and men have turned to be the object of commoditization and subjects of consumption. Besides the exogenous factors, the endogenous factors such as one's gender, age, class, cast, and several other factors are also highlighted in the field of consumption. The space of consumption under the phase of globalization has been widened to include the in depth terrains of gender preferences. The changing patterns and trends of the consumerism in Kerala are clearly evident during the last two decades. The urbanization process in Kerala is at a very fast pace. Markets being concentrated at urban areas have made things at the reach of urban people resulting in the scaling up of consumption habits of people.

Migration and globalization has made the access of goods easier. Advertisements also play a very important role especially in influencing the consumption behavior of women, youth and children who purchases things mainly due to peer pressure than to meet their own utility. Moreover, segmentation of households due to frequent divorcee and aging population has led to a structural increase in the consumption pattern of Kerala

Keralites are very much interested in the purchase of modern gadgets and durables. There aroused new trends in housing culture; flats and apartments are filled with foreign appliances and utensils. Shopping malls are strengthening their base in Kerala to create a big space for luxury goods. Even the life events such as marriage, education and medical treatments are swarming with the aspects of consumerism.

Teenager life or lifestyle of the youth is an expensive affair now. The main motivating factor behind the consumption of the youth is the 'peer pressure' although this trend cut across all age groups. People with inferiority complex are the ones which are more prone to this type of pressure. So they spend irrespective of their income as they want to see themselves in a particular group of their peer. The definition of comfortable has now gone beyond the basic needs of food, clothing and shelter, so more demands are to be satisfied to achieve the comforts of today.

Section-2: Trend towards Online Shopping

With increasing consumerism, people are now being adapted to electronic ways of purchase for meeting their day to day needs. Keralites have moved from their conservative character and now especially the youth prefer specialty restaurants and branded clothes. This led to the emergence of international brands into the state. Moreover we live in a world where technology outweighs the traditional factors of production. Geographical distance is no longer a barrier and consumers are able to shop anytime of the day or night in the comfort of their home. (Wolfinbarger, et. al.2001).

The ASSOCHAM -Resurgent joint study states that the annual growth of online shopping exceeds by 115% in 2018 and this is mainly due to the offers provided by various E-Commerce platforms. The study also noted that the demand for accessories and apparels was high through online shopping when compared to the demand of electronic products. This reveals the prominence of youth among the online shoppers. Price promotion schemes in online shopping sites have great role in increasing demand overtime and in adjusting the fluctuations in demand and supply (Monroe, 2003). The main drive of online shopping is that internet is time saving and accessible 24 hours a day (Monswe, Delleart and Ruyter, 2004). But consumer's choice of purchasing through online depends upon the level of security and privacy. (Lee and Turban, 2001).

These factors altogether have paved the way for a new consumer identity. The report by e marketer, a marketing research firm highlighted that the online retail sales in India are led by the online marketers like Flip kart, Amazon and paytm mall. Consumers in Kerala have their preferences towards online shopping complimented with the sense of brand loyalty.

Section 3: Nature and Pattern of Online Consumption among the Urban Youth: Survey Analysis

This section is devoted to the analysis of the nature and pattern of online consumption behaviour among the urban youths of Thiruvananthapuram district. Survey was conducted among 150 sample respondents from the age group of 21-35. Employees from different spheres of employment such as teaching, banking, IT and other government services were included in the survey. The different aspects of online consumption among the urban youths analysed in this section include i) reasons for opting online shopping ii) influential factors in online shopping iii) products purchased through online shopping, iv) average monthly expenditure on online shopping v) preference for payment options vi) online sites preferred vii) online purchase and extravagant consumption viii) consumer satisfaction in online shopping and ix) problems involved in online shopping.

A Statistical summary of the profile of the sample respondents with respect to age, gender and occupation is presented in Table 1. Respondents by gender classification show that male respondents are higher than the female respondents. All the respondents are within the age group of 21-35 years. Among them, more than half of them (52%) are from the age group 26-30. Their occupational status show that majority are working in the IT field.

Table 1: Distribution of the Sample by Age, Sex and Occupation

Age	Sex		Occupation			
	Male	Female	Banking	IT	Teaching	Other Govt. Services
21 - 25	27	24	15	15	12	9
26 - 30	36	42	18	30	18	12
31 - 35	15	6	3	0	6	12
Total	78 (52)	72 (48)	36 (24)	45 (30)	36 (24)	33(22)

Source: Primary Survey

Figures in parentheses represent percentages

i) Reasons for opting Online Shopping

In view of the increasing tendency towards online shopping among urban youths, an attempt has been made to identify the reasons for choosing it. It is seen that online shopping is more convenient and appropriate to the consumers. 46 % of the respondents prefer online shopping because of the availability of different brands under a single umbrella and 30 % select due to availability of products at various prices. Now consumption has become more choice centric among the youths and the ease of finding the products is the main reason for shopping online for many people. Also they could find better prices in the web than in the shop. Online shopping provides a chance to consumers to rate and choose the products with respect to its price and specifications.

Table 2: Various Reasons mentioned for preferring online shopping

Sl.No	Reasons	Frequency	Percentage
1	Quality products	9	6
2	Wide range of prices	45	30
3	Availability of different brands	69	46
4	Convenience of purchase	27	18
Total		150	100

Source: Primary survey

ii) Online Shopping: Influential factors

Apart from the reasons mentioned earlier, there are some external factors that influence online consumption behaviour. An attempt has also made in the study to identify the various factors influencing the online consumption behaviour (See Table 3).

Table 3: Distribution of Factors influencing Online Shopping

Sl.No	Factors	Frequency	Percentage
1	Friends	36	24
2	Family	9	6

3	Advertisement	39	26
4	Self-satisfaction	66	44
Total		150	100

Source: Primary survey

As shown in the table 3, self-satisfaction dominates to be the most influential factor regarding online consumer behavior (44 %). It is followed by advertisement (26 %) and friends (24 %). This analysis makes it clear that the impact of network externalities is lower in this case when absolute utility is taken into consideration.

iii) Products Purchased

With regard to the product categories purchased through online, electronic products (42 %) are the mostly purchased items through online shopping as it does not need much trial as in the case of dresses. Increasing use of mobile phones in recent years has also contributed a surge in the growth of purchase of electronic goods through online. Recently there is a tendency to demand food items through online, and it is noted that 20percent of the respondents buy food items through online markets. 40 percent respondents reported that they purchase all most all items through online shopping.

Table 4: Distribution of the Products purchased through online shopping

SI.No	Products	Frequency	Percentage
1	Dresses	27	18
2	Electronic products	63	42
3	Foods items	20	13.3
4	All of the above	40	26.7
Total		150	100

Source: Primary survey

iv) Average Monthly Expenditure on Online Shopping

How much do people spend for online shopping? Since the advent of the internet, the cyber sphere has morphed from simply an information hub into a digital shopping mall. Now the world is connected by social networks and billions of dollars are digitally transferred daily. Use of credit cards and debit cards has increased the tendency towards online shopping.

Table 5: Average Monthly Expenditure on Online Shopping

SI.No	Monthly expenditure	Frequency	Percentage
1	Less than 5000	112	74.7
2	5000-10,000	24	16
3	10,000-20,000	11	7.3
4	More than 20,000	3	2.0
Total		150	100

Source: Primary survey

The survey revealed that, around 75 percent of the respondents spend only less than Rs 5000/- per month for online shopping. When 7 percent spends between Rs 10000/- and 20000-, only 2 percent spend more than Rs 20,000/-. This implies that even if the income allows for the purchase there are some external factors which affect the online consumer behavior more intensively.

v) Preference for Payment Options

How people are paying for online consumption? There are number of ways that consumers can pay for online consumption. In the survey it is found out that the option 'return if damaged 'is the most attractive one in the case of online shopping according to the majority opinion. This is because of the pickup facility which saves the time and effort in returning the damaged products. When 40 percent prefer 'return if damaged' option, another 36 percent have a preference for 'cash on delivery option'.

Table 6: Percentage Distribution of the Respondents by their Preference for Payment Options

SI.No	Options	Frequency	Percentage
1	Cash on delivery	54	36
2	Return if damaged	60	40
3	Cash back policy	21	14
4	others	15	10
Total		150	100

Source: Primary survey

vi) Online Sites Preferred

The preference for online sites is presented in table 7. Majority (64%) prefer the Amazon site for online purchase. It is followed by flipkart (24%). Only a very few have preference for myntra and others.

Table 7: Online Sites Preferred for Online Shopping

SI.No	Online Sites	Frequency	Percentage
1	Amazon	96	64
2	Flipkart	36	24
3	Myntra	09	6
4	Others	09	6
Total		150	100

Source: Primary survey

vii) Online Purchase and Extravagant consumption

The online buying behaviour is growing and an increasing number of young people seem to be purchasing luxury goods. Increasing popularity of the social media had highly influenced the consumption behaviour of the youth. Consumption has now become a means to show one's social status especially when goods publically displayed are too expensive. Hence the consumerism to a certain extent stems from the availability of new channels for purchase. In the present study perceptions of the youth with regard to the statement that online shopping leads to extravagant consumption were collected and analysed through Likert 5 point scale (See Table 8)

Table 8: Perception of the youth regarding Online Shopping and Extravagant Consumption.

SI.No	Scale of agreement	Frequency	Percentage
1	Strongly agree	6	4
2	Agree	66	44
3	Neutral	48	32
4	Disagree	30	20
5	Strongly disagree	0	0
Total		150	100

Source: Primary survey

The survey revealed that 48 percent of the respondents have the perception that online shopping leads to extravagant spending through undesirable consumer behavior. This mainly occurs due to the impact of demonstration effect and other factors relating to non-functional demand.

viii) Consumer Satisfaction in Online Shopping

From the survey and interview it is more convenient for the young consumers to purchase products through online due to the elements such as time saving, information availability, ease of use, websites navigation, less shopping stress, less expensive and shopping fun. An analysis of the level of customer satisfaction with online shopping is presented in Table 9.

Table 9: Levels of Customer Satisfaction in Online Shopping

SI.No	Extent of Satisfaction	Frequency	Percentage
1	Always	72	48
2	Sometimes	51	34
3	Rarely	27	18
4	never	0	0
Total		150	100

Source: Primary survey

It is found that 48 percent of the young online consumers are satisfied with online purchase and nobody has been dissatisfied with online purchase.

ix) Problems involved in Online Shopping

Even though online shopping is convenient to all consumers, some problems identified in online shopping have been highlighted in Table 10.

Table 10: Problems identified online in shopping

SI.No	Problems	Frequency	Percentage
1	Technical problems	18	12
2	Delay in delivery	42	28
3	Differences in color and model of goods ordered	66	44
4	others	24	16
Total		150	100

Source: Primary survey

Most of the respondents are dissatisfied with the online shopping as the mismatch between the goods ordered and the goods delivered happens very often. Differences in the color and model of the goods are the commonly faced problem while shopping online. Among the technical problems, payment system and privacy or security anxieties have significant impact on online shopping. Unclear warranties and returns policies and lack of personal customer service are the foremost barriers of online shopping.

Section IV: Brand Loyalty and Online Shopping Behaviour

Brand loyalty or brand preference represents which brands are preferred under assumptions of equality in price and availability. A brand is something that is bought by a customer and it plays a key role in enhancing the uniqueness of the product (Aaker, 1991). With increasing trend towards online shopping behaviour, people are opting for popular brands in order to catch up with their peer group. Preference for branded products has now become an important feature of online shopping. In online shopping, brand loyalty is higher for high market share brands and in the traditional shopping brand loyalty is not much related to market share (Peter J Danaher, et.al 2003). Online shopping provides customers with different varieties of branded products. People buy branded products based on brand name, price as well as other variables (Hilgenkamp and Heather, 2009). Social media plays a vital role by creating platforms for business interactions to help out the customers of various brands.

Considering the significance of brand loyalty in online consumption a few questions related to the same were included in the survey. Here, the various aspects discussed are i) Reasons for preferring branded products ii) Product wise-distribution of brand iii) Motivating factors of brand preference iv) Use pattern of branded products and v) Reason for changing brands.

i) Preference for Branded Products: Reasons

Brand is an important tool for difference and use to gain the comparative advantage. The study here explored the reasons of brand preference. Most of the urban youth mentioned high quality of products as the main reason for their brand preference.

Table 11: Reasons mentioned for brand preferences

SI.No	Reasons	Frequency	Percentage
1	Quality	108	72
2	Status symbol	18	12
3	Offers provided	24	16
4	others	0	0
Total		150	100

Source: Primary survey

Other reasons do not have shown any significant impact upon brand preference. Theoretically speaking, the predominance of quality as a reason that most of the urban youth prefer branded products would enable us to think that the 'Veblen effect' outweighs the 'bandwagon effect' and 'snob effect'.

ii) Product wise-distribution of brand Preference

During recent years, it is seen that youths desire brand label in all most all the products. A product wise distribution of the brand preference shows that majority have brand consciousness for consumer durables. This is mainly because consumer durables do not wear out quickly and a high proportion of income is spent on these goods.

Table 12: Product wise-distribution of brand Preference

SI.No	Products	Frequency	Percentage
1	Costumes and cosmetics	30	20
2	Food items	12	8
3	Consumer durables	66	44
4	All of the above	42	28

Total	150	100
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Source: Primary survey

iii) Motivating Factors of Brand Preference

Recently, special emphasize has been placed by marketers upon the preference of youth as they are treated as the major source of market. Moreover, youth are also treated as highly informed and technologically advanced. As there is an increasing preference towards branded products in almost all segments of the market and the purchase behaviour is influenced by various socio-economic, psychological, individual and technological factors, it is essential to identify the motivating factors leading to brand loyalty. Table 13 presents that the brand preferences is highly influenced by own experience of using a particular brand. When 18 % is influenced by peer pressure another 18 % is influenced by advertisement. Only 8 % of the respondents revealed that the brand preference is motivated by their income. When theoretically spoke, the respondents are partly Veblen and partly snobbish.

Table 13: Motivating Factors of Brand Preference

SI.No	Motivating Factors	Frequency	Percentage
1	Own experience	84	56
2	Peer group reference	27	18
3	Advertisement	27	18
4	income	12	8
Total		150	100

Source: Primary survey

iv) Use Pattern of Branded Products

Information about use frequencies of the branded products will enable us to know about the brand love and popularity of certain brands among the youth.

Table 14: Use Pattern of Branded Products

SI.No	Use pattern	Frequency	Percentage
1	Single Brand	48	32
2	Try Different Brands	78	52
3	When New Brand comes up	24	16
4	Never Use Branded Goods	0	0
Total		150	100

Source: Primary survey

Table 14 reveals that when more than 30 percent prefer single brand, fifty percent and above are interested in trying different brands. It is significant to see that throughout the survey we cannot find even a single youth respondent who had never used branded products. This brand affinity itself indicates that brand preferences and brands loyalty is very popular among the urban youth. This results in brand love witch later leads to brand loyalty.

v) Reason for Changing Brands

As we know that the preference for a single brand indicates the popularity of that particular brand and the affinity of the youth towards those particular reasons. The 78 respondents who tried different brands were again asked about the reasons for their preference for various brands (See Table15)

Table 15: Reasons for Changing Brand Preferences

SI.No	Reasons	Frequency	Percentage
1	Price changes	8	10.3
2	Offers provided	18	23.1
3	Peer pressure	16	20.5
4	Upcoming of new brands	36	46.1
Total		78	100

Source: Primary survey

It is seen that upcoming of new brands, offers provided and peer pressure were the various reasons mentioned for changing brand preference. 46 percent of the respondents tried for various brands due to the reason that upcoming of new brands as they expect some novelty from new brands

Section V: Summary and Conclusions

It is observed that consumption has become more choice centric and online shopping is preferred due to the availability of different brands under an umbrella and availability of products at various prices. Goods which do not need much trial are mostly demanded through online. But recently there is a tendency to demand food items through online. Not only income but also some external factors more intensively influence the online consumer behavior. Consumption has now turned out to be a means to show one's social status and became too expensive. Thus, it is seen that online shopping leads to extravagant spending through undesirable consumer behavior. However, the level of satisfaction is higher with regard to online shopping than offline shopping. But technical problems, payment system and privacy or security anxieties are some of the hindrances in online shopping.

Brand loyalty has now become an important feature of online shopping. Urban youth are now more quality conscious that enabled them to develop brand love. Majority have brand perception for consumer durables. Brand preference is influenced by various socio-economic, psychological, individual and technological factors. It is found that, among the youngsters brand loyalty is highly influenced by own experience of using a particular brand. But it is least influenced by income. There is also a tendency among the youngsters to change their brand preferences motivated by offers provided and peer pressure.

The development of technology has affected the nature and pattern of consumer demand and consumer behaviour. Online shopping allows people to sell and advertise their items or buy any things that they need from anywhere and anytime. The implication of increasing trend towards online purchase is that online shopping website may bring good impact to the IT industry in the long run. Online shopping websites need a lot of programmers, such as, analysis programmer, database administrator, security programmer, web designer etc. Therefore, it may help to generate job opportunities in the IT industry. But it is significant to see that as online shopping is becoming more and more popular, there will be much caution to solve issues like privacy, cheating, fraud and security concerns.

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