

ASSESSMENT OF MOTIVATING FACTORS AND BARRIERS IN ONLINE APPAREL BUYING BEHAVIOR AMONG YOUTH OF JAMMU (J&K), INDIA

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Abstract

The population of India is currently witnessing a surge in youth population. As a result of this, technology and digitization have taken over almost every aspect of life. In the present scenario, online buying has become one of the most convenient tools for shopping and an essential part of everyday lifestyle. Online apparel purchasing has become more popular among the younger generation, especially post the COVID-19 pandemic. Youngsters are more inclined to buy products online since they are more adept at using technology than the older generation and due to a greater variety of products. The research reported here has been carried out as a part of a larger project that aims to examine various variables affecting online buying behavior. This paper reports the incidence, motivating factors, and barriers impacting online apparel shopping behavior of sample young adults. The data for this aspect of the study was obtained via an online Google Form developed for this purpose. A quantitative approach to analyze responses was adopted. The role of key motivating factors such as convenience of purchase, product variety, price competitiveness, product return and refund options were systematically analyzed, providing useful insights into their relative importance and influence on youth purchase decisions. Concurrently, this study identifies and analyzes common hurdles such as worries about product quality, fit and sizing issues, security concerns, and delivery challenges, and establishes their importance in driving consumer behavior in the context selected for study. The findings of this study can help consumers, businesses, as well as policy makers by providing deeper insights into online shopping experiences and ultimately, may contribute towards improvement of the existing platforms.

Key words: Online buying, Motivating factors, Barriers, Apparel, Youth, Technology

INTRODUCTION

E-commerce has observed change in the fashion business with increase demand leading to significant shift from offline to online consumer's behaviour. Fashion's digital revolution has introduced a new era of shopping convenience and style accessibility, where a simple click opens the doors to endless wardrobe possibilities. As e-commerce and internet shopping become more prevalent, consumer internet purchase behaviour has increasingly attracted the curiosity and attention of marketers, legislators, and scholars alike.

E-commerce has become a thriving marketplace where buyers and sellers converge, blurring traditional boundaries (Bilovodska and Poretskova, 2023).[1] India stands out as a hub of innovation, India's e-commerce is expanding at a rate of 51% annually, which is among the greatest in the world, and it is predicted that the global e-commerce market will reach US \$200 billion by 2026 (Tasanaiam, 2020).[2] India is quickly catching up to the rest of the globe and developing into a country with strong digital capabilities. The Government of India (GOI) has launched various programmes since 2014. These include the Digital India, Startup-India, Made in India, Skill India, and Innovation Fund programme. The timely and effective execution of these measures has contributed to the expansion of e-commerce in India, which is explained by the rise in internet and smartphone subscriptions (Kaur, 2023).[3] In 2021, India had approximately 185 million yearly internet shoppers. This was a huge increase over the previous year. The annual number of shoppers is expected to rise to 425 million by 2027 (Minhas, 2023: Statista).[4]

Online apparel purchasing has become more popular among the younger generation, especially post the COVID-19 pandemic. Many firms began selling online during the pandemic after realising the possibilities of e-commerce. Individuals with impairments can now take care of their requirements without having to rely on others, all from the comfort of their own homes (CR, 2023).[5] Youngsters are more inclined to buy products online since they are more adept at using technology than the older generation and due to a greater variety of products. Better connectivity and voice note activation purchasing are just two examples of how technology advancements have always contributed to larger online sales. With only one click when purchasing, customers could receive real-time notifications about new product launches, exclusive discounts, promotional offers, and

expedited delivery, which led to a significant boom in the e-commerce industry (Kaur, 2023). [3] Online purchasing promises to be convenient around-the-clock, accessible 365 days a year, and unaffected by holidays, inclement weather, or other unforeseen circumstances. Customers enjoy the ultimate in comfort since they may shop whenever they like, from any location. Customers can purchase more quickly, easily, and pleasurable without having to deal with the hassle of congested traffic or other social interactions when they shop online.

The transformation of the apparel market can be attributed to the influence social media played in making them one of the largest consumer communities. Social networking has given the fashion apparel sector the capacity to reach a massive mass of consumers with a single social media update (Kaur, 2023). [3] Despite the challenges such as touch and feel concerns, the future of fashion e-commerce holds immense potential for growth and innovation (Dhamija, 2013). [6] This paper reports the incidence, motivating factors, and barriers impacting online apparel shopping behavior of sample young adults of J&K.

Existing research Studies indicated that when shopping for clothes online, factors like ease of use, time-saving, product feedback, wide selection, price comparison, installment payment options, and efficient delivery play significant roles (Rao et al., 2018; Sahu, 2020). [7][8] Consumers also prioritize factors such as product price, discounts, payment options, return policies, and product quality (Patodiya & Birla, 2017). [9] Virtual try-on technology further enhances the appeal of online shopping for youth by allowing them to assess fit and appearance without physically trying on clothes. However, several barriers hinder online apparel purchases, including budget constraints, security concerns, website design, and trust issues (Dwivedi and Mathur, 2019; Mahalaxmi & Nagamanikandan, 2016). [10][11] Women particularly focus on fit, color, and size when buying clothes online (Lee and Damhorst, 2015). [12] Some shoppers prefer offline stores for the social experience and perceive it as more enjoyable (Liu et al., 2013). [13] The present research was undertaken to assess the motivating factors and barriers for online apparel purchase undertaken by young buyers from the locale selected for study since no such exercise has been undertaken in this geographical region.

OBJECTIVE

➤ To assess the motivating factors and barriers affecting online apparel buying behaviour among youth of Jammu(J&K) India, so as to determine the role played by these factors in online purchases in the context selected for study.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the motivating factors and barriers for youth in online apparel purchases in the context selected for study.
- Are these factors (as above) same for youth across setting (to be assessed based on available research data).

METHODOLOGY

Sample: The present study targeted a sample of youth from the Jammu district of Jammu and Kashmir, UT of India. The sample consisted of 35 respondents, encompassing both male and female participants, within the age group of 15-29 years. These respondents were actively engaged in educational pursuits at various levels, including school, college, and university.

Data collection Tool: For the purpose of data collection, a Google Form was precisely designed and it was divided into two sections to collect the required information for each, section one regarding motivating factors and section two, barriers in online apparel buying questions concerning motivating factors, influencing factors to make decision, preventing factors, issues faced, etc. for online apparel buying. Initially, the data collection tool was pretested on 5 respondents to identify and rectify any issues. Based on the feedback from the pretest, necessary modifications were made to the tool before final data collection. The Google Form was then distributed through multiple digital platforms included WhatsApp, email, and Instagram. The choice of these platforms was strategic, looking at the high usage rates among the target demographic to maximize response rates. The collection of data was carried out in February 2024. Upon collection, the data was systematically organized and analyzed. The findings were then presented in the form of figures and tables, providing a clear and concise visual representation of the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The respondents of this study primarily resided in urban areas, with the majority belonging to the 19-24 age group, followed by smaller representations from the 25-29 and 15-18 age groups. All respondents engaged in

online shopping. Most of the respondents' mothers were housewives, while their fathers were either private or government employees. Additionally, the majority of the respondents belonged to middle-income households. Online apparel shopping is driven by several motivating factors and hindered by various barriers. The results are effectively communicated by a combination of tables and graphs, offering a comprehensive visual representation of the study's findings.

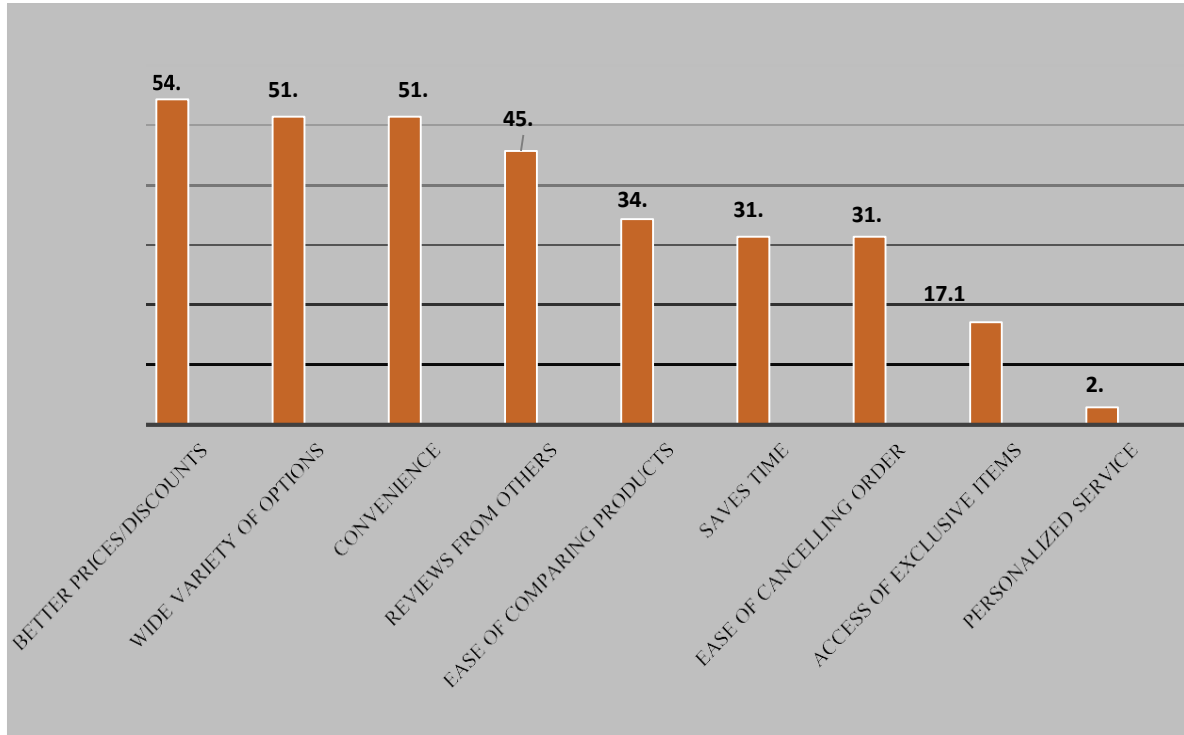


Fig 1: Motivating factors to buy apparel online

The findings from the study in reference to figure 1 indicate that the primary motivations for youth in Jammu district to purchase apparel online are better prices and discounts (54.3%), convenience (51%), and the variety of options available. Online shopping is preferred for its cost-effectiveness, with exclusive deals and discounts that appeal to budget-conscious young consumers. The convenience of being able to shop anytime and from anywhere, without the need to visit physical stores, is highly valued. Additionally, the extensive range of products offered online surpasses that of local stores, allowing consumers to find exactly what they need and explore new options. The ease of placing and canceling orders, coupled with time-saving benefits, further enhances the appeal of online shopping. The availability of offers, discounts, and customer reviews (45.7%) helps young consumers make informed decisions, adding to the attractiveness of online retail. Access of Exclusive items (17.1%) and personalized service (2.9%) considered the least important factors by the youth. These factors collectively highlight the importance of economic benefits, practicality, and variety in driving online apparel purchases among the youth. Retailers that emphasize these aspects are likely to better cater to the preferences of this demographic. During the data collection phase of our research study, a noteworthy motivating factor emerged among respondents regarding online apparel shopping. Specifically, it was highlighted that a significant variety of plus-size clothing, including dresses for pregnant and lactating women, is now readily available online. This development addresses a critical gap, as many physical apparel stores do not offer an extensive range of options for plus-size individuals. Furthermore, respondents noted that large-size shirts and clothing for obese individuals are often exclusively available through certain online brands, making online shopping a crucial resource for these demographics.

Table 1. Influencing factors to make decision for purchase apparel online

Categories (N=35)	Very Important (%)	Important (%)	Neutral (%)	Slightly Important (%)	Not Important (%)
Delivery Time	74.2	20	2.8	2.8	2.8
Designs	74.2	22.8	2.8	-	-

Quality of the apparel	74.2	17.1	5.7	2.8	-
Security	68.5	25.7	11.4	-	-
Price evaluation	65.7	37.4	2.8	-	-
Return and refund policy	65.7	25.7	11.4	-	-
Product availability	62.8	31.4	11.4	-	-
Time saving	54.2	34.2	11.4	2.8	-
Convenience	54.2	31.4	11.4	-	-
Deals and Discount	51.4	42.8	5.7	-	-
Cash on delivery	45.7	22.8	34.2	-	-
Brand Image of the apparel	34.2	48.5	14.2	-	2.8
Website appearance	34.2	51.4	14.2	2.8	-
Virtual try on	28.5	28.5	37.1	2.8	2.8

The above data shown in the table (1) illustrate that a majority of young consumers prioritize prompt delivery (74.2%) when shopping for apparel online, highlighting its crucial role in their purchasing decisions. Alongside delivery speed, design is equally important, with 74% of respondents emphasizing its significance. This underscores the need for retailers to ensure timely delivery to enhance the online shopping experience for youth. Other important factors include price evaluation, security, product availability, time-saving benefits, and overall convenience. Additionally, the brand image of the apparel (48.5%) and the appearance of the website (51.4%) significantly influence purchasing decisions. Interestingly, the study found that the virtual try-on facility is not deemed important by respondents, primarily due to concerns about privacy and the potential misuse of uploaded images. This apprehension suggests that while technological advancements like virtual try-ons are available, trust and privacy issues must be addressed to increase their acceptance. Overall, these insights highlight the multifaceted considerations of young consumers when buying apparel online, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive approach by retailers to cater to their preferences and concerns.



Fig 2: Barriers that prevent online Shopping

The above data graph (figure 2) illustrating the barriers to online shopping reveals several significant obstacles faced by consumers. The most prominent concern is product quality, which affects 65.5% of respondents. Many consumers are hesitant to purchase online due to the uncertainty about whether the product will meet their expectations in terms of quality. Closely related is the concern over product authenticity, impacting 45.7% of respondents, who fear receiving counterfeit or misrepresented items.

Trust issues with online payment methods are also a major barrier. Consumers are wary of potential fraud or security breaches that could compromise their financial information. Additionally, high delivery charges deter many from completing their purchases, as these additional costs can make online shopping less economical compared to in-store purchases. Long delivery times further discourage consumers, as the convenience of online shopping is undermined by the wait for their products to arrive.

Another significant barrier is the difficulty in returning or exchanging products. This logistical challenge

creates uncertainty and inconvenience, making consumers reluctant to buy online. Furthermore, the inability to negotiate prices online, which is particularly relevant for the apparel category, hinders respondents who prefer the flexibility of bargaining available in physical stores. These barriers collectively create substantial hindrances to online buying, emphasizing the need for e-commerce platforms to address these issues to enhance consumer trust and satisfaction.

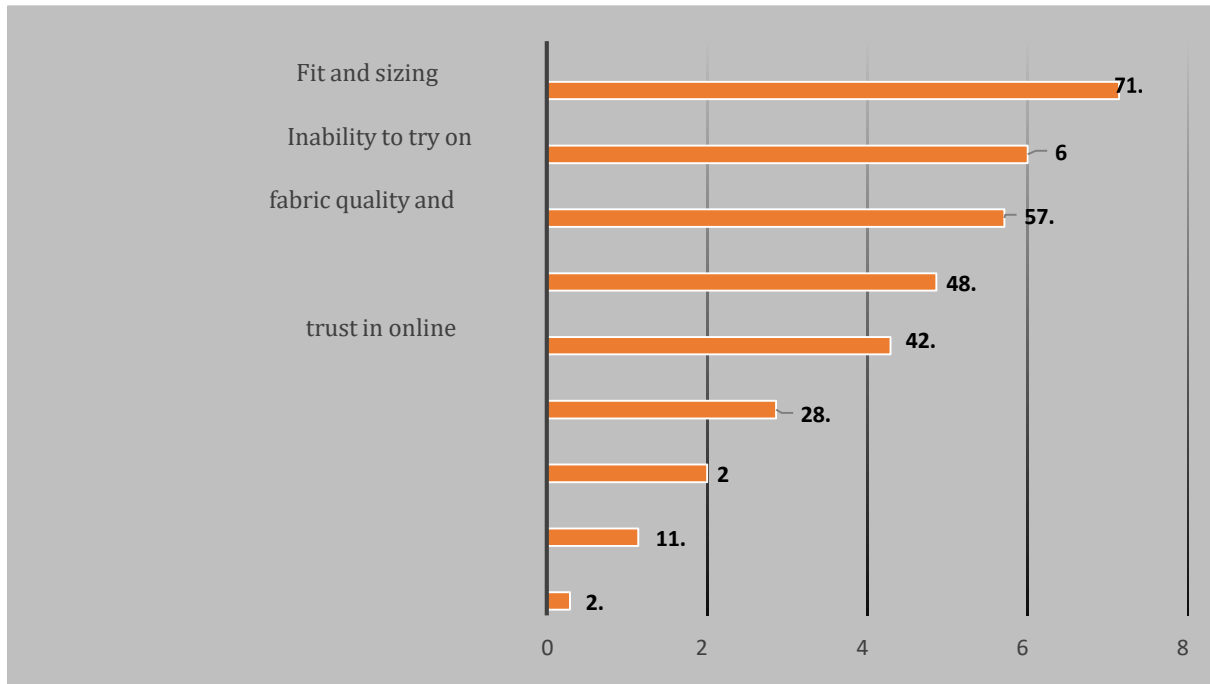


Fig 3: Challenges and concerns which prevent online apparel purchasing

With reference to the figure (3) online apparel shopping presents several significant challenges. A primary issue is fitting and sizing inaccuracies, which affect 71.4% of consumers. The inability to try on items before purchasing, cited by 60% of respondents, exacerbates this problem. Unlike physical stores where customers can directly assess fit and comfort, online shoppers must rely on size charts and product descriptions. This reliance leads to uncertainty, as variations between brands and individual body shapes can result in inaccurate sizing. The lack of a hands-on experience further compounds this uncertainty, preventing customers from adequately evaluating the style, comfort, and quality of items. Consequently, consumers often receive ill-fitting or unsatisfactory products, highlighting a critical barrier to online apparel shopping.

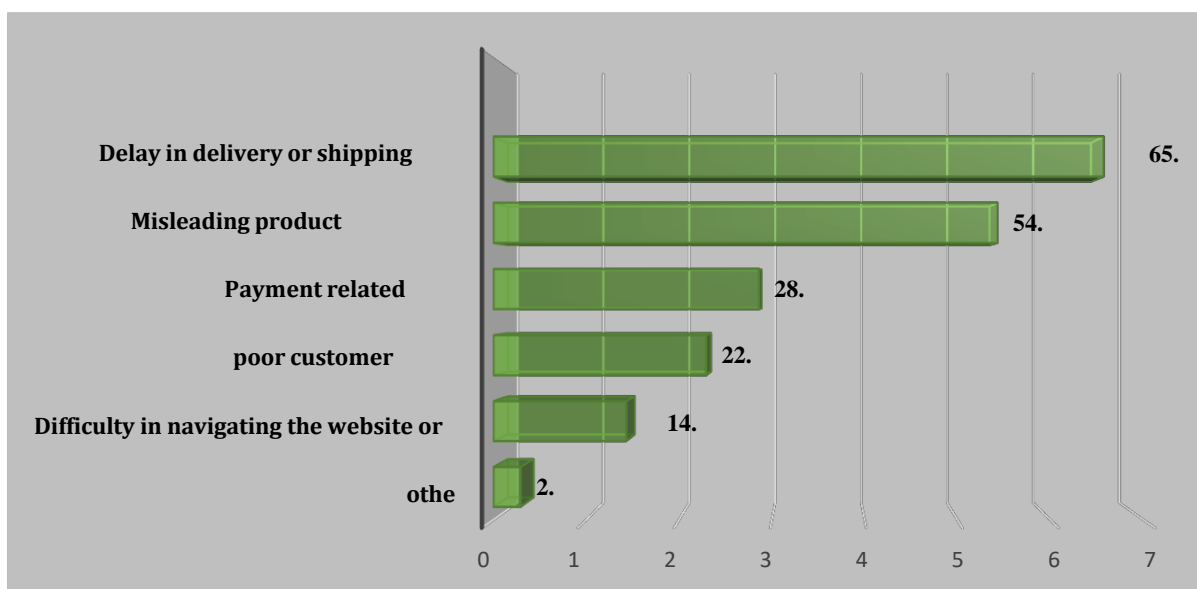


Fig 4. Post online apparel purchase issues experienced by the respondents

The above presented data (figure 4) highlight several key issues that respondents face after purchasing apparel online. Delays in delivery or shipping affect 65.7% of respondents, while 54.3% report encountering misleading product descriptions. Some respondents revealed that sometimes even after buying quality wise the fabric is not appropriate despite of having good reviews. These factors, along with the overall uncertainty of online shopping, have led 31.4% of respondents to abandon their online apparel purchases. Additionally, some respondents' express concerns about the safety and convenience of advance payments, as well as potential inaccuracies in fit, color, or fabric quality. Despite these challenges, 69% of respondents continue to shop for apparel online, indicating that while significant issues persist, a majority still find the benefits of online shopping to outweigh the drawbacks.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this research provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing online apparel shopping behavior among young adults in the Jammu district of Jammu and Kashmir Studying in schools, colleges, and universities, the research utilized Google Forms distributed via email and WhatsApp. As India's youth population grows and technology advances, online shopping has become an integral part of everyday life, especially post-COVID-19. The study reveals that the primary motivations for online apparel purchases include better prices, discounts, convenience, and a wide variety of options compared to physical stores. These factors make online shopping appealing, particularly for budget-conscious youth who value the ability to shop anytime and from anywhere. An additional motivating factor that emerged is the availability of a significant variety of plus-size clothing, including dresses for pregnant and lactating women, which are often lacking in physical stores. These motivations align with the broader trend observed in India's rapidly growing e-commerce market, which is expanding at an impressive annual rate of 51%.

Despite these motivating factors, several barriers hinder the online shopping experience. The most prominent concerns include fitting and sizing inaccuracies, the inability to try on items before purchasing, and misleading product descriptions are major challenges. Delays in delivery, high shipping costs, and concerns over product quality and authenticity further deter consumers. Trust issues with online payment methods and the logistical difficulties of returning or exchanging products add to the complexity of online shopping. Despite these issues, 69% of respondents continue to shop online, indicating that the benefits still outweigh the drawbacks for many.

The findings from this study on online apparel shopping among youth in Jammu district reveal both similarities and differences compared to existing research. Similar to previous studies, better prices, discounts, convenience, and a wide variety of options are significant drivers for online purchases. Common barriers include concerns about product quality, authenticity, and security issues with online payments. However, this study highlights the high importance of prompt delivery (74.2%) and finds that privacy concerns reduce the attractiveness of virtual try-on technology, diverging from earlier research. Additionally, the significance of website design (51.4%) and brand image (48.5%) in influencing decisions is more emphasized. Access to exclusive items and personalized service are considered least important, differing from past studies. These differences suggest that while broad trends remain consistent, specific priorities and concerns vary, highlighting the need for retailers to tailor their strategies accordingly.

This study provides valuable insights for consumers, businesses, and policymakers. Consumers can better navigate the online shopping landscape with an awareness of common challenges. Businesses can improve customer satisfaction by addressing these barriers, ensuring accurate product descriptions, enhancing delivery reliability, and implementing flexible return policies. Policymakers can support the growth of e-commerce by creating frameworks that enhance security and reliability

In conclusion, while online apparel shopping among the youth in Jammu presents numerous benefits and has seen substantial growth, it also faces several critical barriers that need to be addressed. By focusing on improving the overall online shopping experience and addressing the specific concerns highlighted in this study, e-commerce platforms can significantly enhance their appeal and effectiveness, ultimately leading to a more robust and consumer-friendly online marketplace.

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