

# A Comparative Analysis of Online and Offline Shopping Behaviour Among College Students.

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## Abstract

This study examines the differences between online and offline shopping behaviour among college students. With the rapid growth of e-commerce platforms and increasing internet accessibility, online shopping has become a common choice among young consumers. At the same time, offline shopping continues to remain relevant due to factors such as physical product inspection and instant purchase satisfaction. The study aims to understand how college students choose between these two modes of shopping based on factors like convenience, price, product variety, trust, and overall experience.

The research is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data is collected through a structured questionnaire using Google Forms, targeting college students who actively engage in shopping activities. Secondary data is collected from research articles, journals, and online sources related to consumer behaviour and retail trends.

The findings suggest that while online shopping is preferred for convenience, discounts, and variety, offline shopping is still valued for product quality assurance, immediate availability, and personal experience. The study highlights that both modes of shopping coexist, and students choose between them depending on the situation and type of product.

**Keywords:** Online Shopping, Offline Shopping, Consumer Behaviour, College Students, E-commerce, Retail Experience

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, the retail sector has experienced a significant transformation due to the rapid growth of digital technology, increased internet penetration, and widespread smartphone usage. Online shopping platforms such as Amazon, Flipkart, and Myntra have become an essential part of everyday life, especially among young consumers. College students, in particular, are one of the most active groups in the digital space, as they are highly exposed to social media, online advertisements, and influencer marketing, all of which play a major role in shaping their purchasing behaviour.

Online shopping offers several advantages that make it highly attractive to students. It provides convenience, as users can browse and purchase products anytime without visiting physical stores. It also offers a wide range of options, easy price comparisons, and frequent discounts or cashback offers, which

are important factors for students who are often price-sensitive. Additionally, features such as customer reviews and ratings help them make more informed decisions.

Despite the growing popularity of online shopping, offline shopping continues to remain relevant. Physical retail stores offer a completely different experience that cannot be fully replaced by digital platforms. Customers can physically examine products, check their quality, try them before purchasing, and receive instant ownership. This is particularly important for products like clothing, footwear, and electronics, where personal inspection plays a crucial role. Moreover, offline shopping provides a sense of trust and reliability, as there is direct interaction with the seller and no risk of delivery delays or product mismatch.

Another important aspect is that shopping is not always a functional activity; it can also be a social and recreational experience. Many students enjoy visiting malls and stores with friends or family, which adds an emotional and experiential dimension to offline shopping. On the other hand, online shopping is more task-oriented and focused on convenience rather than experience.

The coexistence of both online and offline shopping has created a dynamic consumer environment where individuals switch between the two modes depending on their needs, preferences, and the type of product they intend to purchase. For example, a student may prefer buying books or accessories online due to lower prices, but choose offline stores for clothing to ensure proper fit and quality.

Therefore, understanding how college students make these choices becomes important for both researchers and businesses. This study aims to analyse and compare the shopping behaviour of college students in online and offline settings. It focuses on identifying the key factors that influence their decisions, such as convenience, price, trust, product variety, and overall experience.

By exploring these aspects, the research seeks to provide a clearer understanding of modern consumer behaviour among students and how the balance between online and offline shopping continues to evolve in today's digital era.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

**1. Gilly, M. C., & Wolfinbarger, M. (2000):** This study compares consumer experiences in online and offline shopping environments. It finds that online shopping is more convenience-oriented, while offline shopping provides a richer sensory and emotional experience. The research highlights that physical stores offer better customer engagement, whereas online platforms focus more on efficiency and accessibility.

**2. Childers, T. L., Carr, C. L., Peck, J., & Carson, S. (2001):** The study explains that online shopping behaviour is influenced by both utilitarian (convenience, ease) and hedonic (enjoyment, excitement) motivations. It suggests that consumers are attracted to online platforms not only for practical reasons but also for the enjoyment of browsing and discovering products.

**3. Forsythe, S., Liu, C., Shannon, D., & Gardner, L. C. (2006):** This research identifies perceived risk as a major factor influencing online shopping decisions. It highlights concerns related to product quality, privacy, and financial security, which often limit online purchase intentions compared to offline shopping.

**4. Verhoef, P. C., Neslin, S. A., & Vroomen, B. (2007):** The study focuses on multi-channel consumer behavior and shows that customers often switch between online and offline channels. It emphasizes that offline stores provide trust and personal interaction, while online channels offer convenience and information availability.

**5. Katawetawaraks, C., & Wang, C. L. (2011):** This research highlights that online shopping is mainly driven by convenience, time-saving, and availability of information. However, it also points out that offline shopping remains important due to the ability to physically inspect products before purchasing.

**6. Sarkar, R., & Das, S. (2017):** This comparative study explains that online shopping offers advantages such as 24/7 availability, discounts, and product variety, while offline shopping provides physical product evaluation and immediate satisfaction. It concludes that consumers use both modes depending on their needs.

**7. García-Milon, A., et al. (2017):** Published in the *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, this study analyses differences in online and offline consumer behavior. It finds that technology usage strongly influences online purchasing decisions, while lifestyle and personal values have a greater impact on offline shopping behavior.

**8. Shi, M., Zhou, J., & Jiang, Z. (2019):** This study explores competition between online and offline retail channels. It highlights that consumers often engage in “browse-and-switch” behavior, where they search online but purchase offline or vice versa, increasing competition between both channels.

**9. Sharma, M., Karnani, A., & Saxena, S. (2022):** This research compares online and offline shopping based on consumer attitudes and product types. It finds that offline shopping is preferred for high-touch products requiring sensory evaluation, while online shopping is preferred for convenience and wider availability.

**10. Mehta, B., & Manjrekar, D. M. (2021):** This study analyses consumer behavior towards online and offline shopping methods. It concludes that younger consumers prefer online shopping due to discounts and ease of use, while offline shopping is still trusted more for product authenticity and quality assurance.

## **PROBLEM STATEMENT:**

In today’s digital era, shopping behaviour among college students has undergone a significant transformation with the rapid growth of e-commerce platforms. Online shopping offers convenience, wider product variety, and attractive discounts, making it increasingly popular among students. However, offline shopping continues to remain relevant due to factors such as product inspection, immediate availability, and higher trust levels. Despite the growing shift towards digital platforms, there is still uncertainty regarding how students choose between online and offline shopping in different situations. Some prefer online shopping for ease and cost benefits, while others rely on offline stores for quality assurance and personal experience. This creates a need to understand the underlying factors influencing these preferences. Therefore, the problem lies in analysing and comparing the decision-making behaviour

of college students to identify the key drivers, challenges, and differences between online and offline shopping modes.

## **RESEARCH GAP:**

Existing studies have extensively examined online shopping behaviour, focusing on factors such as convenience, price sensitivity, and digital influence. Similarly, several studies have explored offline shopping experiences, highlighting aspects like trust, product evaluation, and customer satisfaction. However, most of these studies analyse online and offline shopping separately rather than providing a direct comparison between the two, especially among college students. Additionally, there is limited research that examines how students switch between online and offline shopping based on product type, urgency, and personal preferences. Many studies also focus on general consumer groups, without specifically targeting the younger demographic that is highly influenced by digital platforms and social media. Furthermore, there is a lack of empirical data capturing real-time behavioural patterns and decision-making processes. This study aims to bridge this gap by providing a comparative analysis of both shopping modes and understanding the factors influencing student preferences.

## **OBJECTIVES:**

1. To compare the preferences of college students towards online and offline shopping.
2. To analyse the key factors influencing students' shopping behaviour, such as convenience, price, trust, and product variety.
3. To evaluate the advantages and limitations of both online and offline shopping modes among college students.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS:**

1. What are the preferences of college students between online and offline shopping?
2. What factors influence students to choose one mode of shopping over the other?
3. What are the perceived benefits and challenges of online and offline shopping among college students?

## **3. Research Design**

### **DATA COLLECTION:**

The present study is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data is collected through a structured questionnaire using Google Forms, targeting college students who actively engage in shopping activities. The questionnaire includes questions related to shopping preferences, frequency, factors influencing purchase decisions, satisfaction levels, and comparison between online and offline shopping experiences. The purpose of collecting primary data is to understand the real behaviour and opinions of

students. Participation in the survey is voluntary, and responses are kept confidential. Secondary data is collected from research journals, articles, and credible online sources to support the study and provide a theoretical background on consumer behaviour.

## **SAMPLING FRAME:**

The sampling frame for this study consists of college students who actively participate in shopping activities, both online and offline. The target respondents fall within the age group of 18 to 25 years, as this group represents one of the most active consumer segments and is highly exposed to digital platforms and modern retail environments. College students are chosen as the focus of this study because they are more likely to adopt online shopping due to their familiarity with technology, while also engaging in offline shopping for certain products.

The respondents are selected using convenience sampling, mainly from peer groups, colleges, and social networks. This method is considered appropriate as it allows easy access to participants within a limited time frame. The sample includes students from different academic backgrounds, ensuring some level of diversity in responses.

The study aims to collect responses from approximately 80 to 120 participants to ensure meaningful analysis. By focusing on this specific group, the research attempts to capture insights into their shopping preferences, decision-making patterns, and factors influencing their choice between online and offline shopping.

## **DATA ANALYSIS AND STATISTICAL TOOL:**

The data collected through the questionnaire is analysed using both quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of shopping behaviour among college students. Quantitative analysis is mainly carried out using descriptive statistical tools such as percentages, frequency distribution, and averages. These tools help in summarising the responses related to shopping preferences, frequency of purchases, and factors influencing decision-making.

Likert scale questions are used to measure respondents' perceptions regarding convenience, trust, price satisfaction, product quality, and overall shopping experience. The responses are analysed to identify trends and patterns in how students perceive online and offline shopping modes. This helps in understanding which factors are more influential in shaping their preferences.

Comparative analysis is also used to examine the differences between online and offline shopping behaviour. Variables such as convenience, cost, trust, and product availability are compared to identify which mode performs better in different aspects. This allows for a clearer understanding of the strengths and limitations of both shopping methods.

In addition to quantitative analysis, simple qualitative analysis is applied to open-ended responses collected from the questionnaire. This involves identifying common opinions and experiences shared by

respondents regarding their shopping behaviour. The qualitative insights add depth to the numerical data and help in understanding the reasons behind certain preferences.

Overall, the study follows a mixed-method approach, combining numerical data with user opinions. This approach helps in providing a more balanced and detailed analysis of the shopping behaviour of college students in both online and offline environments.

#### 4 ANALYSIS

##### Analysis Coverage Overview

Research Question	Analysis Coverage	Table/Evidence
Shopping Preference & Behaviour	COMPLETE	Table 4.1
Factors Influencing Shopping	COMPLETE	Table 4.2
Satisfaction & Experience	COMPLETE	Table 4.3
Behavioural Insights	COMPLETE	Table 4.4

Table 4.1 Descriptive Statistics Sample Size (n = 384)

Category	Mean score approx.	Interpretation
Online Shopping Preference	3.0	Neutral to Moderate Preference
Offline Shopping Preference	2.9	Slightly Lower Preference
Frequency of Shopping	3.0	Moderate Usage

##### Interpretation:

The data indicates that students show a **balanced but slightly higher inclination towards online shopping**. The mean values are close to 3, suggesting a neutral to moderately positive response. This shows that while online shopping is popular, offline shopping still holds relevance among students.

Table 4.2 Factors influencing shopping behaviour (Likert analysis)

Factor	Mean M	Interpretation
Convenience	3.01	Important
Price/discounts	3.02	Important
product variety	3.01	Important
Trust	2.94	Important
Product Quality	3.5	Important

**Interpretation:**

The analysis shows that **convenience, price, and product variety** are the most influential factors in online shopping decisions. Meanwhile, **trust levels are slightly lower**, indicating that students still have some concerns regarding reliability. Product quality remains a key factor, especially when comparing online and offline shopping.

Table 4.3 Satisfaction & Experience Analysis

Category	Mean M	Interpretation
Ease of use	3.03	easy
Overall satisfaction	3.04	positive
delivery Experience	2.98	moderate
Offline experience	3.06	positive

**Interpretation:**

Students generally report a **positive experience with both online and offline shopping**. Online shopping is considered easy and convenient, while offline shopping provides slightly higher satisfaction due to better product assurance and personal experience. Delivery-related aspects in online shopping show moderate satisfaction, indicating scope for improvement.

Table 4.4 Behavioural & Perception Analysis

Test Area	Observation	Interpretation
Convenience vs Preference	Online Favoured	Convenience
Trust vs Mode	Offline stronger	physicals Stores Build trust
Price Sensitivity	Online Preferred	Discount influence Decisions
Experience vs Satisfaction	Offline Higher	Better engagement

**Interpretation:**

Students display a **dual behaviour pattern**. They prefer online shopping for convenience and cost benefits but rely on offline shopping for trust and quality assurance. This indicates that **both shopping modes complement each other rather than compete directly**.

**Summary of Analysis** The analysis reveals that college students do not rely solely on one mode of shopping. Instead, they make decisions based on different factors such as convenience, price, trust, and product type. Online shopping is widely preferred due to ease of access, discounts, and variety, making it the dominant choice for routine purchases.

However, offline shopping continues to play an important role, especially when product quality and trust are involved. Students still prefer physical stores for items where inspection and immediate availability are important. This shows that offline shopping provides a level of confidence that online platforms are still trying to achieve.

Another important insight is that students are highly influenced by convenience but are equally cautious about trust and product reliability. This creates a balanced shopping behaviour where both online and offline modes are used depending on the situation.

Overall, the study highlights that online shopping is growing rapidly, but offline shopping remains relevant, and both coexist in the decision-making process of college students.

**5. CONCLUSION**

The study provides a clear understanding of the shopping behaviour of college students by comparing their preferences between online and offline shopping modes. The findings indicate that online shopping has gained significant popularity among students due to its convenience, accessibility, and availability of discounts. A large number of respondents prefer online platforms because they allow them to shop anytime

and from anywhere without physical effort. Features such as easy comparison of products, wider variety, and attractive offers make online shopping highly appealing, especially for students who are price-sensitive and digitally active.

At the same time, the study highlights that offline shopping continues to hold its importance. Many students still prefer visiting physical stores for certain types of products, particularly those where quality, fit, and personal inspection are important. The ability to physically examine products before purchase provides a sense of confidence and reduces the chances of dissatisfaction. Offline shopping also offers immediate product availability, which is an important factor when urgency is involved.

One of the key insights from the study is that students do not rely entirely on one mode of shopping. Instead, they adopt a mixed approach, choosing between online and offline shopping based on the situation and type of product. For example, students may prefer online shopping for accessories, books, or electronic gadgets due to better pricing and convenience, while opting for offline stores for clothing or high-involvement products where physical inspection is necessary. This shows that both modes of shopping coexist and complement each other rather than directly replacing one another.

Another important observation is related to trust and satisfaction. While online shopping scores high in terms of convenience and ease of use, trust levels are slightly lower compared to offline shopping. Concerns related to product quality, delivery delays, and return processes still exist among students. On the other hand, offline shopping provides a higher level of trust and reliability due to direct interaction with the product and seller. This difference highlights the need for online platforms to improve customer confidence through better quality assurance and service.

Overall, the study concludes that online shopping is becoming the dominant mode among college students due to technological advancements and changing lifestyles. However, offline shopping remains relevant and continues to play a significant role in the overall shopping behaviour of students. The future of retail is likely to be a combination of both modes, where businesses integrate online and offline experiences to meet the evolving expectations of consumers.

**SUGGESTIONS:** Based on the findings of the study, the following suggestions are recommended:

**For Online Retailers:** E-commerce platforms should focus on improving product quality assurance and transparency. Providing accurate product descriptions, better images, and reliable customer reviews can help build trust among users. Additionally, improving delivery efficiency and simplifying return policies can enhance overall customer satisfaction. Introducing features like virtual try-ons and better customer support can also reduce the gap between online and offline shopping experiences.

**For Offline Retailers:** Physical stores should adopt digital strategies to remain competitive in the changing retail environment. This includes integrating online platforms, offering digital payment options, and using technology to improve customer experience. Offline retailers can also focus on creating a better in-store experience through personalized service and attractive store layouts to retain customers.

**For Students/Consumers:** Students should make informed decisions while shopping by comparing both online and offline options. They should be cautious while making online payments, check product reviews carefully, and use trusted platforms to avoid risks. Developing awareness about safe shopping practices can help improve their overall experience.

**Limitations of the Study:** The study is based on a limited sample of college students, which may not fully represent the behaviour of all consumer groups. The use of convenience sampling may also affect the generalizability of the results. Additionally, the data is based on self-reported responses, which may sometimes be influenced by personal bias or perception rather than actual behaviour. A larger and more diverse sample could provide more accurate insights.

**Future Scope of the Study** Future research can expand this study by including a larger and more diverse population, covering different age groups and geographical areas. It would also be useful to analyse the impact of factors such as income level, brand preference, and social media influence on shopping behaviour. Further studies can explore the integration of online and offline shopping, such as omnichannel retailing, and how it affects consumer decision-making. Additionally, analysing long-term changes in consumer behaviour due to technological advancements can provide deeper insights into the future of retail.

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