

Pre-Purchase Behaviour of Consumers in Digital Ecosystem-A Study among Youth

Abstract

(This study examines the factors influencing consumers' pre-purchasing behaviour in the digital ecosystem among youth in India. The rapid growth of digital technologies has transformed the way consumers search for information, compare alternatives, and make purchase decisions. Factors such as online reviews, social media influence, website quality, price comparison, and consumer trust play a significant role in shaping consumer behaviour before purchase. Although digital platforms provide easy access to information, consumers often face challenges such as information overload and conflicting opinions. The study aims to analyse the impact of key digital factors on consumers' pre-purchase decision-making process. A descriptive research design was adopted, and data were collected from 200 respondents using a structured questionnaire. Both primary and secondary data were used, and the collected information was analysed using various statistical tools, including correlation and regression analysis. The findings of the study are expected to provide valuable insights for marketers and businesses in understanding and influencing consumer behaviour in the digital marketplace.)

Key words: Online Reviews, Social Media Influence, Website Quality, Price Comparison, and Trust in Digital Platforms.

Introduction

Pre-purchase behaviour of customers in the digital ecosystem refers to the activities consumers undertake before making a buying decision. Consumers first identify their needs and then search for relevant product or service information through digital platforms. The widespread use of the internet, smart phones, and social media has transformed the way consumers gather information. Online reviews and ratings play a crucial role in influencing customer perceptions and purchase intentions. Social media platforms provide recommendations, opinions, and experiences that shape consumer attitudes toward brands. Customers also compare prices and product features across multiple websites before making a decision. The quality, usability, and credibility of websites significantly affect consumers' evaluation of alternatives. Trust in online platforms, brands, and payment systems further influences purchasing decisions. These digital factors help consumers reduce uncertainty and make informed choices. Therefore, understanding pre-purchase behaviour in the digital ecosystem is essential for businesses seeking to attract and retain customers in a competitive marketplace.

Literature Review

The study of consumers' pre-purchasing behaviour in the digital ecosystem is supported by several theoretical and empirical contributions. The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) developed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) explains that behavioural intention is influenced by attitudes and subjective norms, while Davis (1989) introduced the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which identified perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use as key determinants of technology adoption. Engel, Blackwell, and Miniard (1995) described consumer decision-making as a process involving need recognition, information search, and evaluation of alternatives, providing a foundation for understanding pre-purchase behaviour.

Research on digital consumer behaviour highlights the importance of information availability and online marketplaces. Bakos (1997) found that electronic marketplaces reduce search costs and improve price comparison, while Degeratu, Rangaswamy, and Wu (2000) and Lynch and Ariely (2000) demonstrated that online environments increase consumers' access to product information and influence price sensitivity and decision-making. Studies by Gefen (2000), McKnight, Choudhury, and Kacmar (2002), Gefen, Karahanna, and Straub (2003), Pavlou (2003), Kim, Ferrin, and Rao (2008), and Thaw, Mahmood, and Dominic (2009) established that trust and perceived risk significantly influence consumers' willingness to engage in online transactions.

Website quality has also been identified as a major determinant of online consumer behaviour. Aladwani and Palvia (2002) emphasized content quality, appearance, and technical adequacy, while Barnes and Vidgen (2002) and Loiacono, Watson, and Goodhue (2007) developed the WebQual framework to measure website usability, information quality, and service interaction quality. Similarly, Wolfinbarger and Gilly (2003), Kim and Stoel (2004), Singh et al. (2020), and Cui et al. (2020) found that website design, usability, convenience, and system quality significantly affect customer satisfaction and purchase intentions.

The influence of online reviews and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has been extensively documented. Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006) demonstrated that online reviews directly affect sales performance, while Chen and Xie (2008) highlighted their role in reducing uncertainty and improving product evaluation. Cheung and Thadani (2012) confirmed that eWOM significantly influences consumer attitudes and purchase intentions, and Erkan and Evans (2016) found that information quality, credibility, and usefulness of social media content strongly shape purchase intentions.

Social media has emerged as an important source of information during the pre-purchase stage. Hajli (2014) reported that social interactions on social media platforms enhance trust and purchase intentions, while Gibreel, AlOtaibi, and Altmann (2018) emphasized the role of trust, familiarity, and word-of-mouth communication in social commerce. Revyathi and Tselios (2017) further highlighted the importance of usability, self-efficacy, and social norms in driving user engagement with digital platforms.

Consumer behaviour scholars such as Kotler and Keller (2016), Solomon (2018), Schiffman and Wisenblit (2019), Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019), and Laudon and Traver (2019) emphasized that digital technologies, social media, online reviews, website quality, and trust have transformed the information search and evaluation stages of consumer decision-making. Recent studies by Pandey and Parmar (2019), Islam et al. (2021), and Kumar and Ayodeji (2021) further confirmed that website quality, information quality, trust, customer engagement, and digital experiences significantly influence consumers' pre-purchasing behaviour. Collectively, these studies indicate that online reviews, social media influence, website quality, price comparison, and consumer trust are critical determinants of consumer decision-making in the digital ecosystem.

Research Gap

The rapid growth of digital technologies has provided consumers with easy access to product information, online reviews, social media content, and price comparison tools before making purchase decisions. While these digital resources help consumers make informed choices, they also create challenges due to information overload, conflicting opinions, and numerous alternatives. Consumers' pre-purchasing behaviour is influenced by various factors such as online reviews, social media influence, website quality, price comparison, and trust in digital platforms. However, there is limited understanding of how these factors collectively affect consumers' pre-purchase decision-making, particularly in the context of youth population. Therefore, the present study seeks to examine the key factors influencing consumers' pre-purchasing behaviour in the digital ecosystem and their impact on purchase decisions.

Objectives of the study

1. To examine the influence of demographic factors on consumers' pre-purchasing behaviour.
2. To analyse the relationship between digital ecosystem factors and consumers' pre-purchasing behaviour.
3. To evaluate the influence of digital ecosystem factors on consumers' pre-purchasing behaviour.

Hypothesis

H₁: There is a significant difference in consumers' pre-purchasing behaviour based on demographic factors.

H₂: There is a significant difference in consumers' preference for digital platforms used to obtain product information before making a purchase.

H₃: There is a significant influence of digital ecosystem factors on consumers' pre-purchasing behaviour.

Research Methodology

The present study adopts a descriptive research design to examine the factors influencing consumers' pre-purchasing behavior in the digital ecosystem among youth in India. The population comprises young consumers who use digital platforms for information search, comparison, and evaluation before making purchase decisions. A convenience sampling technique was employed to select 200 respondents from different parts of the country. The study is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire containing demographic details and statements measured on a five-point Likert scale, while secondary data were gathered from books, journals, research articles, websites, and

other published sources. The collected data were analysed using statistical tools such as percentage analysis, mean, standard deviation, Chi-square test, independent sample t-test, one-way ANOVA, correlation analysis, and regression analysis. In this study, consumers' pre-purchasing behaviour is considered the dependent variable, whereas online reviews, social media influence, website quality, price comparison, and consumer trust are identified as the independent variables.

Analysis and Result

Gender and Pre-Purchasing Behaviour

H_0 = There is no significant difference in pre-purchasing behaviour between male and female consumers.

H_1 = There is a significant difference in pre-purchasing behaviour between male and female consumers.

Table 4.4

Independent Sample T-Test (Gender)

		Statistic	df	p
Pre-Purchasing Behaviour	Student's t	1.26 ^a	198	.210-

Note. $H_a \mu_{\text{Female}} \neq \mu_{\text{Male}}$

^a Levene's test is significant ($p < .05$), suggesting a violation of the assumption of equal variances

Source: Primary Data

Table 1

Gender Wise Descriptive Statistics

	Group	N	Mean	Median	SD	SE
Pre-Purchasing Behaviour	Female	108	4.29	4.4	0.536	0.0516
	Male	92	4.17	4.4	0.798	0.0832

Source: Primary Data

Interpretation: Since the p-value (0.210) is greater than 0.05, the researcher fails to reject the null hypothesis. Therefore, there is no significant difference in pre-purchasing behaviour based on gender.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DIGITAL ECOSYSTEM FACTORS AND PRE-PURCHASING BEHAVIOUR

Correlation Matrix of Digital Ecosystem Factors and pre-Purchasing Behaviour

Table 2

Correlation Matrix

		Online Review	Social Media Influence	Website Quality	Price Comparison	Consumer Trust	Pre-Purchasing Behaviour
Online Review	Pearson's r	—					
	df	—					
	p-value	—					
Social Media Influence	Pearson's r	0.733	—				
	df	199	—				
	p-value	<.001	—				
Website Quality	Pearson's r	0.747	0.794	—			
	df	199	199	—			
	p-value	<.001	<.001	—			
Price Comparison	Pearson's r	0.766	0.747	0.854	—		
	df	199	199	199	—		
	p-value	<.001	<.001	<.001	—		
Consumer Trust	Pearson's r	0.704	0.69	0.746	0.82	—	
	df	199	199	199	199	—	
	p-value	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	—	
Pre-Purchasing Behaviour	Pearson's r	0.718	0.7	0.751	0.776	0.856	—
	df	199	199	199	199	199	—
	p-value	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	—

Source: Primary Data

Interpretation: The results show that all variables have a positive and significant relationship with pre-purchasing behaviour, as all p-values ($p < 0.001$) are less than 0.05. Consumer Trust has the strongest positive correlation with Pre-Purchasing Behaviour ($r = 0.856$), followed by Price

Comparison ($r = 0.776$), Website Quality ($r = 0.751$), Online Review ($r = 0.718$), and Social Media Influence ($r = 0.700$). Since all correlation coefficients are positively significant ($p < 0.001$), the researcher rejects the null hypothesis. Therefore, it can be concluded that the determinants of the digital ecosystem have a significant positive relationship with consumers' pre-purchasing behaviour.

Regression Analysis of Digital Ecosystem Factors and Pre-Purchasing Behaviour

H₀= There is no significant influence in pre-purchasing behaviour based on the determinants of the digital ecosystem (online reviews, social media influence, website quality, price comparison, and consumer trust).

H₁= There is significant influence in pre-purchasing behaviour based on the determinants of the digital ecosystem (online reviews, social media influence, website quality, price comparison, and consumer trust).

Table 3
Regression Model Fit

Model	R	R ²
1	0.878	0.771

Source: Primary Data

Table 4.14
Regression Coefficients

Predictor	Estimate	SE	t	p
Intercept	0.1901	0.1734	1.096	0.274
Online Review	0.1406	0.0641	2.193	0.029
Social Media Influence	0.0726	0.0631	1.151	0.251
Website Quality	0.1516	0.0808	1.877	0.062
Price Comparison	0.0117	0.0851	0.138	0.891
Consumer Trust	0.5815	0.0596	9.759	<.001

Source: Primary Data

Interpretation: The R² value of 0.771 indicates that the digital ecosystem factors influence 77.1% of consumers' pre-purchasing behaviour. Among the independent variables, Consumer Trust has the strongest positive and significant influence on consumers' pre-purchasing behaviour ($p <$

0.001), followed by Online Review ($p = 0.029$). However, Social Media Influence ($p = 0.251$), Website Quality ($p = 0.062$), and Price Comparison ($p = 0.891$) do not have a statistically significant individual influence on consumers' pre-purchasing behaviour. Therefore, the researcher rejects the null hypothesis. Hence, there is a significant influence of the determinants of the digital ecosystem on consumers' pre-purchasing behaviour.

Impact

The study has significant implications for businesses, marketers, and digital platform providers by enhancing their understanding of consumers' pre-purchasing behaviour in the digital ecosystem. The findings highlight the critical role of consumer trust and online reviews in influencing purchase decisions, enabling organisations to develop more effective digital marketing and customer engagement strategies. By identifying the key factors that shape consumer behaviour before purchase, the study helps businesses improve website quality, strengthen customer trust, and create a more reliable online shopping environment. The study also contributes to the existing body of knowledge on consumer behaviour and serves as a useful reference for future research in digital marketing and e-commerce.

Recommendations

Businesses should focus on strengthening consumer trust by ensuring secure payment systems, transparent policies, reliable customer service, and authentic online interactions. Encouraging genuine customer reviews, responding to feedback, and providing accurate and up-to-date product information can help consumers make informed purchase decisions. E-commerce platforms should continuously improve website quality through easy navigation, fast loading speed, mobile compatibility, and user-friendly design. Companies should also adopt effective digital marketing strategies, utilize social media for consumer engagement, and maintain transparent pricing with easy comparison features. Since younger consumers are more actively involved in digital pre-purchasing activities, businesses should design targeted digital campaigns to attract this segment. Furthermore, organisations should regularly monitor online feedback and customer opinions to improve their products and services, while ensuring the authenticity of reviews to enhance consumer confidence. Future research may incorporate additional factors such as brand image, influencer marketing, online advertisements, perceived risk, and customer satisfaction to provide a broader understanding of consumers' pre-purchasing behaviour in the digital ecosystem.

Originality and Value of the study

The originality of this study lies in its examination of consumers' pre-purchasing behaviour by integrating multiple digital ecosystem factors, namely online reviews, social media influence,

website quality, price comparison, and consumer trust, within a single framework. Unlike many previous studies that focused on individual factors, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of how these factors collectively influence consumer decision-making before purchase. The value of the study lies in its practical implications for marketers, e-commerce businesses, and digital platform providers. By identifying consumer trust and online reviews as the most influential determinants of pre-purchasing behaviour, the study offers useful insights for developing effective digital marketing strategies, enhancing customer engagement, and improving consumer confidence in online purchasing environments.

Practical Implications

The findings of the study provide important practical implications for marketers, e-commerce firms, and digital platform providers. Since consumer trust and online reviews were identified as the most significant factors influencing pre-purchasing behaviour, businesses should focus on enhancing website security, protecting customer information, ensuring transparent transactions, and maintaining reliable online services to build trust among consumers. Organisations should also encourage genuine customer reviews and actively manage online feedback to strengthen their brand reputation and credibility. Additionally, improving website quality, providing accurate product information, facilitating easy price comparison, and effectively utilizing social media platforms can enhance consumers' information search and evaluation processes. By implementing these strategies, businesses can positively influence consumer purchase decisions, improve customer satisfaction, and gain a competitive advantage in the digital marketplace.

Conclusions

The analysis revealed that consumers' pre-purchasing behaviour is influenced by several factors within the digital ecosystem. Among the demographic variables only age showed significant differences in pre-purchasing behaviour, while gender, occupation and monthly spending on online purchase did not. The findings also indicated that e-commerce websites are the most preferred platform for obtaining product information. The correlation analysis showed a strong positive relationship between online reviews, social media influence, website quality, price comparison, consumer trust, and pre-purchasing behaviour. Regression analysis further confirmed that these digital ecosystem factors have a significant influence on consumers' pre-purchasing behaviour and together explain a large proportion of the variation in consumer behaviour. Overall, the findings highlight the growing importance of digital platforms in influencing consumers during the pre-purchase stage.

Limitations of the study

The study has certain limitations that should be considered while interpreting the findings. The research was limited to a sample of 200 respondents selected through convenience sampling, which may restrict the generalizability of the results to the entire youth population. The study focused only on selected digital ecosystem factors, namely online reviews, social media influence, website quality, price comparison, and consumer trust, while other relevant factors such as brand image, influencer marketing, online advertisements, and perceived risk were not included. In addition, the study relied on self-reported responses collected through a questionnaire, which may be subject to respondent bias. Since the research was cross-sectional in nature, it captured consumer behaviour at a single point in time and may not reflect changes in behaviour over time.

Scope for future Research

The present study provides several opportunities for further research. Future studies may include a larger and more diverse sample to improve the generalizability of the findings. Researchers can examine additional factors such as brand image, influencer marketing, online advertisements, perceived risk, customer satisfaction, and artificial intelligence-driven recommendations to gain a deeper understanding of consumers' pre-purchasing behaviour. Comparative studies across different age groups, regions, or countries may also provide valuable insights into variations in digital consumer behaviour. Furthermore, longitudinal studies can be conducted to examine how pre-purchasing behaviour changes over time with advancements in digital technology and evolving consumer preferences.

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