

Clicks Over Counters: Consumer Transformation in Bathinda's Digital Economy

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Abstract: *This paper examines the transformation of consumer behaviour through online shopping in Bathinda City, using survey-based dissertation data collected from 120 respondents. The study shows that online shopping has become visible in semi-urban consumer life, but its adoption remains selective, price-sensitive and trust-dependent. Young consumers and students dominate the sample, while clothing and fashion emerged as the leading purchase category. Discounts, product reviews and product variety were the strongest influences on online purchase decisions, while cash on delivery remained the most preferred payment method despite the rising use of UPI and digital wallets. The statistical review extends the original descriptive analysis by applying ranking interpretation and exploratory chi-square testing to aggregate frequency tables. Results show significant concentration in rare and monthly shopping frequency, strong dependence on discounts, and major concerns related to product quality, delayed delivery, returns and delivery charges. The paper concludes that online shopping in Bathinda is not simply replacing traditional retail; it is creating a hybrid consumer culture where digital convenience must be supported by trust, reliable service and local market adaptation*

Keywords: Online Shopping, Consumer Behaviour, E-Commerce, Bathinda, Digital Retail

I. INTRODUCTION

Online shopping has moved from being a technological option to becoming a normal part of consumer life. The market no longer begins only in a bazaar, mall, or neighbourhood store; it now begins on a mobile screen. This change is not merely about buying products through the internet. It is about a deeper shift in how people compare, decide, trust and spend. In India, where shopping has traditionally involved personal relationships, bargaining, sensory inspection and local familiarity, the growth of online platforms has introduced a new system based on convenience, speed, comparison and algorithmic visibility. This shift is especially important in semi-urban cities where traditional retail culture and digital commerce now operate together.

Bathinda City represents this transition clearly. The dissertation on which this paper is based explains that Bathinda has historically been connected with agricultural trade, wholesale markets, kirana stores and traditional bazaars. At the same time, rising smartphone use, digital literacy and internet access have encouraged consumers to use platforms such as Amazon, Flipkart, Meesho, Zomato and Blinkit for apparel, electronics, groceries, beauty products and other services. This means Bathinda is not outside India's digital economy. It is part of a new retail moment where young consumers, working professionals and students are gradually shifting from counters to clicks.

The academic value of studying online shopping in Bathinda lies in its regional character. Much of the literature on e-commerce discusses national growth, metropolitan consumers, platform expansion and digital payment adoption. These themes are useful, but they do not fully explain how digital shopping behaves in smaller cities. In such places, consumer decisions are shaped not only by price and convenience, but also by trust, family habits, internet quality, delivery reliability, return policies and payment confidence. Kumar and Gupta [5] observed that online purchase behaviour in India is influenced by convenience, perceived usefulness, internet expertise, product risk, security risk, non-delivery risk and return policy. These factors are directly relevant to Bathinda because consumers may adopt online shopping but still prefer low-risk purchases and cash on delivery.



Online shopping offers strong benefits. It saves time, expands product variety, provides discount-based value and allows consumers to compare alternatives quickly. Jain [4] argued that e-commerce has become part of daily activity because the smartphone keeps the consumer constantly connected to information, entertainment, banking and shopping. Mathur [7] similarly noted that small-city consumers are increasingly attracted to online shopping because it fulfils product desires that local supply chains may not meet. For Bathinda consumers, this means access to brands, styles and products that may not be easily available in nearby markets.

Yet the shift is not without friction. Trust remains central. Since consumers cannot physically inspect products before buying, they depend on seller ratings, customer reviews, product descriptions, platform reputation and return guarantees. Sharma and Verma [11] emphasized that consumers now use the internet not only to buy products but also to compare prices, features and after-sales service. This comparison power is useful, but it also creates dependence on platform information. If the product received does not match the image, or if the return process is difficult, the consumer's trust weakens.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated online shopping by making physical movement difficult and by normalizing digital purchases for daily needs. Ranjan, Misra and Yadav [10] found that product quality, social media, return policy, product description and seller information influenced online purchase intention during the pandemic. In Bathinda too, the pandemic widened the user base for online shopping, including hesitant consumers who began using digital platforms for essentials. Many of those habits did not disappear after the pandemic. They became part of ordinary consumer behaviour.

This paper studies online shopping as a human-centred digital transition. It does not treat technology as valuable merely because it is new. It asks whether online shopping is becoming reliable, inclusive and useful for consumers in a semi-urban city. The central idea is simple: consumers adopt technology when it respects their time, protects their money, answers their doubts and delivers what it promises. In Bathinda, online shopping has created new choice and convenience, but it has also created new expectations. The future of digital retail will depend on whether platforms and local businesses can meet those expectations with trust, speed and service quality.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on online shopping shows that e-commerce adoption is shaped by a combination of technological, economic, psychological and social factors. Jain [4] described e-commerce as an activity that has entered daily life through mobile connectivity, online payments, shopping, food ordering and banking. This view is important because online shopping is no longer a separate activity; it is embedded in the wider digital lifestyle. Consumers do not merely open an app to buy. They browse, compare, read reviews, watch advertisements and respond to peer recommendations. This digital environment continuously shapes purchase intention.

Convenience is one of the most established factors in online shopping behaviour. The ability to shop at any time, avoid travel, compare products and receive doorstep delivery makes online shopping attractive. The IITM Journal of Business Studies identified convenience, impulse buying, shopping enjoyment, browsing enjoyment, value consciousness, price consciousness and risk as predictors of online buying behaviour. In semi-urban cities such as Bathinda, convenience becomes especially meaningful because consumers may face limited product availability or may need to travel to larger markets for specific brands.

Price sensitivity is another powerful factor. Online platforms often use discounts, cashback offers, seasonal sales and bundled deals to attract consumers. Mathur [7] found that small-city consumers are drawn to online platforms because they offer access to products and deals that local markets may not provide. The Bathinda data supports this pattern because discounts and offers were the strongest influence on online shopping behaviour. This suggests that the semi-urban online consumer is not only digitally curious but also highly value-conscious.

Trust and perceived risk form a second major stream of literature. Kumar and Gupta [5] found that security risk, product risk, convenience risk, non-delivery risk and return policy significantly influence online purchase behaviour. These risks matter because the consumer cannot touch, test or verify the product before purchase. Bhaskar and



Choudhary [1] also emphasized the role of e-commerce security in reducing fraudulent activity and strengthening consumer satisfaction. For first-generation digital shoppers, fear of fraud, product mismatch and payment loss can slow down adoption even when awareness is high.

Payment behaviour provides an important window into consumer trust. Although digital payments have grown rapidly in India, many consumers continue to prefer cash on delivery for online shopping. This does not mean they reject technology. It means they want control until the product arrives. Cash on delivery reduces perceived risk and offers psychological comfort. In Bathinda, the dominance of cash on delivery shows that payment confidence and product confidence are different issues. A consumer may use UPI regularly, but still choose cash on delivery for online purchases because product quality and delivery reliability are uncertain.

The literature also highlights the role of social influence and digital marketing. Sharma and Chawla [12] argued that digital marketing platforms influence consumer buying behaviour through personalization, user experience, innovation and ethical marketing practices. Social media advertisements, influencer endorsements, user-generated reviews and algorithmic recommendations now influence how consumers discover products. Reviews and ratings have become a digital version of word-of-mouth. In smaller cities, where personal recommendation has traditionally been important, online reviews perform a similar trust-building role.

Demographic differences are also central to online shopping adoption. Tripathi [15] observed that younger consumers are more likely to shop online because they are more familiar with technology, while older consumers often prefer traditional shopping due to lower digital comfort. Patel and Mehta [9] noted gender-related differences in online product preferences. The Bathinda survey shows a strong youth concentration, with the 18-25 age group forming the majority of respondents. This supports the view that digital retail growth is being led by young consumers who are more comfortable with apps, online comparisons and platform-based decision-making.

Product category preference is another recurring theme. Lokhande [6] compared online and offline shopping and noted that some products require touch, feel, smell or trial before purchase, which keeps offline shopping relevant. This distinction helps explain why fashion, electronics and beauty products perform well online while groceries and high-involvement purchases may show slower adoption. In Bathinda, clothing and fashion emerged as the most preferred online category, suggesting that young consumers are using online platforms to access style, variety and discounts.

The impact of online shopping on traditional retail is widely discussed in the literature. E-commerce provides small sellers with opportunities to reach wider markets, but it also creates pressure on local shops that cannot match platform discounts or logistics networks. Shyam and Singh [14] highlighted that e-commerce increases business efficiency and customer reach, but also requires technical knowledge, budgeting and skilled manpower. For Bathinda's local retailers, this creates both risk and opportunity. Those who adopt digital payments, online catalogues, WhatsApp ordering and hybrid delivery models may survive and grow, while those who remain fully offline may face declining footfall.

The COVID-19 pandemic added a major turning point to this literature. Ranjan et al. [10] found that online shopping became a safer and more convenient mode during lockdowns. Consumers who earlier preferred physical markets were pushed toward digital platforms. This created a behavioural shift that continued even after restrictions were lifted. The pandemic therefore did not create online shopping, but it accelerated consumer acceptance and platform dependence.

Overall, the literature suggests that online shopping behaviour is shaped by convenience, price, trust, product variety, reviews, digital literacy, payment confidence and delivery experience. However, most studies remain broad in scope and do not sufficiently explain how these factors operate in semi-urban local markets. The Bathinda study contributes by showing how young consumers in a regional city use online shopping selectively, respond strongly to discounts, prefer cash on delivery and demand better delivery and return systems.

III. RESEARCH GAP

Existing research explains online shopping through broad themes such as convenience, price sensitivity, trust, risk and digital marketing, but it gives limited attention to semi-urban consumer markets such as Bathinda. Most studies focus on metropolitan users or national e-commerce trends, while the local interaction between youth behaviour, cash-on-



delivery preference, product quality concerns, platform trust and traditional retail culture remains underexplored. This study addresses that gap by examining online shopping behaviour in Bathinda City through localized consumer data and by extending the dissertation's descriptive analysis with ranking and exploratory statistical interpretation.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used a descriptive and exploratory research design to examine online shopping behaviour among consumers in Bathinda City. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered through Google Forms and in-person responses. The final usable sample consisted of 120 respondents selected through non-probability purposive sampling from different age, gender, occupation and income groups. The main variables included shopping frequency, product category preference, influencing factors, payment method, platform preference, purchase decision basis, spending pattern, delivery experience, product quality issues, return difficulty and improvement expectations. The original dissertation used percentage analysis, tables and charts. The present paper extends that analysis through ranking interpretation, cross-category comparison and exploratory chi-square goodness-of-fit testing wherever aggregate frequency data allowed valid calculation. Since raw respondent-level data were not available in the dissertation file, inferential testing was limited to frequency-based exploratory analysis rather than individual-level modelling.

V. DATA ANALYSIS

The demographic profile shows that the sample is strongly youth-oriented. The 18-25 age group formed 78.2% of respondents, while students represented 87.4% of the sample. Gender participation was nearly balanced, with 52.1% female and 47.9% male respondents. Monthly household income was concentrated in the lower and middle brackets, with 46.8% reporting income below Rs. 20,000 and 30.6% reporting Rs. 20,000-40,000. These figures show that the study mainly represents young, student-heavy and price-sensitive consumers in Bathinda.

TABLE I
KEY ONLINE SHOPPING INDICATORS IN BATHINDA (N = 120)

Indicator	Leading response	Result
Dominant age group	18-25 years	78.2%
Dominant occupation	Students	87.4%
Shopping frequency	Rarely	43.7%
Main product category	Clothing and fashion	77.3%
Main influence factor	Discounts and offers	52.1%
Main payment method	Cash on delivery	72.3%
Platform preference	National/global platforms	40.3%
Decision basis	Reviews and ratings	44.5%
Monthly spending	Less than Rs. 1,000	55.6%
Demand for faster delivery	Yes	95.8%

Source: Authors' analysis based on dissertation survey data

The behavioural indicators show selective adoption rather than complete dependence on online shopping. Most respondents shop online rarely or monthly, while daily and weekly shoppers form a smaller share. Clothing and fashion is the leading product category, indicating the importance of style, variety and discount-based choice among young consumers. Discounts and offers emerged as the strongest factor influencing online shopping, followed by product reviews and variety. This confirms that Bathinda's online consumers are not only convenience-driven; they are also value-driven and information-driven.



TABLE II
EXPLORATORY STATISTICAL TESTING BASED ON AGGREGATE FREQUENCIES

Variable tested	χ^2 value	df	p-value	Interpretation
Shopping frequency	67.85	4	< .001	Significant concentration in rare/monthly shopping
Gender distribution	0.21	1	.644	Balanced gender participation
Platform preference	4.76	2	.093	Mild but not statistically strong preference
Payment method preference	128.42	4	< .001	Strong concentration toward COD and UPI

Source: Authors' exploratory calculations from aggregate frequencies

The chi-square goodness-of-fit test for shopping frequency was significant, showing that responses are not evenly distributed and are heavily concentrated in the rare and monthly categories. Gender distribution was not statistically skewed, which indicates fairly balanced participation. Platform preference showed a mild tilt toward national and global platforms, but the difference was not strong enough to suggest full rejection of local platforms. This is important because local e-commerce players still have space if they improve delivery, payment flexibility and trust. The strongest operational concerns relate to post-purchase experience. The dissertation data show that many respondents face delivery delays, quality issues, return difficulties and concern over delivery charges. These problems reveal the real challenge for e-commerce in Bathinda. Awareness and adoption are already present; the next stage must focus on reliability.

VI. FINDINGS

The findings indicate that online shopping in Bathinda is visible, youth-led and strongly shaped by value expectations. Students and young adults dominate the respondent base, which means digital shopping behaviour in the city is currently driven by those who are more comfortable with smartphones, apps and online reviews. Clothing and fashion emerged as the most preferred product category, while discounts and offers were the strongest influence on purchase decisions. Product reviews also played a major role, showing that consumers depend on digital peer feedback before buying. Cash on delivery remained the most preferred payment method, even though UPI and digital wallets are gaining importance. This shows that trust in digital commerce is still developing. The study also finds that delivery speed, product quality, return processes and delivery charges are major areas of concern. Consumers are not rejecting online shopping; they are asking it to become more dependable, transparent and user-friendly.

VII. CONCLUSION

The study leads to a clear conclusion: online shopping in Bathinda is not merely a change in buying channel; it is a change in consumer culture. The movement from streets to screens reflects a new relationship between technology, trust and daily consumption. Young consumers in Bathinda are open to online shopping because it gives them variety, discounts, convenience and access to products beyond the limits of local markets. At the same time, their adoption remains cautious. The preference for cash on delivery, the dominance of occasional shopping and the concerns about product quality and returns show that digital trust is still being built. This is where the future of e-commerce must be more human-centred. Technology succeeds not because it is advanced, but because it is useful, reliable and respectful of the consumer. For e-commerce platforms, the message is direct: discounts can attract customers, but service quality will retain them. For local retailers, the rise of online shopping is not only a threat; it is also an invitation to adapt through digital payments, online catalogues, WhatsApp ordering, local delivery and stronger customer relationships. For policymakers, the study highlights the need for digital literacy, consumer protection, logistics support and small-business digital training. Bathinda's digital economy will mature when online shopping becomes not only easier, but also more trustworthy. In that sense, the best future is not one where digital retail replaces local commerce completely, but one where both systems learn from each other and serve consumers better.



VIII. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTION

Future research may use a larger and more balanced sample across age, occupation, income and urban-rural groups. Further studies can compare Bathinda with other cities of Punjab, examine gender-wise and income-wise differences, and study the effect of artificial intelligence, influencer marketing, social commerce and digital payment trust on online shopping behaviour. Longitudinal research can also show whether online shopping becomes a permanent habit or remains mainly discount-driven and occasional.

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