



CHANGING CONSUMER BEHAVIOR PARADIGMS IN THE DIGITAL MARKETING ERA: THE ROLE OF THE RISING MALE SHOPPER

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Abstract

Digitalization has led to an increase in the number of men entering the shopping arena which hitherto had been a bastion for women. It has been empirically proven that women enjoy shopping as experience vis-à-vis men. However, the technological revolution and access to digital platforms are more in sync with the psychology of men as consumers who are known to have smaller attention spans and whose shopping behavior needs to be necessarily channeled to bring about a conclusion outcome. Digital platforms enable this by reducing issuance costs, search costs, information asymmetry and other transaction costs. With increasing digitalization, increasing no of blogs and other social media outlets this information asymmetry has vanished and has increased the ease of shopping experience for men. While providing insights about consumer behavior with a special focus on gender the study provides insights about the role of technology and emergence of online e-commerce portals on changing consumer behavior of men in particular. The study draws conclusions from extensive literature review, expert opinion, and primary data sample survey. The study profiles motives, channels used for shopping, reasons for online shopping and provides a segment wise description of products. The study uses a Machine Learning Model, based on the decision tree classifier, to put hard numbers on probability so as to enable managers to target the optimal expected value. This decision tree algorithm is a good framework that marketers can use. This framework helps them not only in recognizing male shoppers but also to effectively target this segment in their marketing campaign and efforts. Marketers need to recognize this primary cohort of male shoppers for improving their product design and innovation or for creating any marketing and communication strategies.

Keywords: Digital Platforms, Consumer behavior insights, male shoppers, Machine learning, online shopping.

Introduction

Any innovation in marketing strategies and re-imagination requires understanding of consumer behaviour. Consumer behaviour has many facets, economic, psychological, emotional, values, and motivation. All these constructs are very important in understanding consumer behaviour, as they explain what, when and how often does a consumer make a purchase (Chandel 2016). There are reams of literature on key drivers affecting consumer behaviour. Among the key drivers gender, is an important construct (Vijay Lakshmi et al 2017). Purchasing decisions depends on products, which were once based on gender types (Solomon 2010). The gender specificity in products created an easy dichotomy for marketers to pitch products and create advertisements, sales promotion. Insurance, Financial and Banking products, Automobiles and Consumer Durables are essentially male dominated. (Belch and Willis 2002) On the other hand many products are “feminine in nature”. It is for this reason globally; women drive a large chunk of consumer spending. (Silverstien 2009). For a long time, the gender gap between shopping behaviour was very wide. Shopping essentially was a female bastion, Majority of mall shopping was designed essentially to attract women Empirical research conducted on footfalls in mall from period of 1986-1991 suggested, that the ratio of female shoppers versus men was 2:1. (Dholakia et al 1987). Hence women being larger in number as shoppers were not merely a stereo typed convention but this fact was backed by empirical research. Are there the increasing trend of male shoppers who are leveraging technology, online platforms and experiencing shopping which was once a domain of women. Our present study bridges this gap by analyzing trends in male shoppers and states their number has grown in India too.

Literature Review

The factors which affect Indians’ online shopping behaviour have been enumerated in a number of studies in the



past. These factors are purchase behaviour from consumer demographics (Korgaonkar, Silverblatt & Becerra, 2004; Park, Lee & Ahn, 2004); cognitive and psychological characteristics (Huang, Schrank & Dubinsky, 2004); risk perceptions and benefits of online shopping (Pires, Stanton & Eckford, 2004) and shopping motivation and orientation for shopping (Johnson et al., 2004). The factors which shape consumers' attitude and shopping intentions on the Internet are geographical distance, lack of mobility, time pressure, attractiveness of alternatives and need for special items. The most important attributes of online shopping happen to be convenience and accessibility to most consumers (Wolfenbarger & Gilly, 2001). For customers to participate in web based commerce, it is essential that there should be trust and an appetite to take risk. The type of product also influences online shopping behaviour. The internet provides a platform for businesses to become relational from a mere transactional activity.

Evolving foraging psychology underlies sex differences in shopping experiences and behaviours, shopping behaviours can be classified into two types: Utilitarian shopping & Hedonic Shopping. The motive for shopping for men is more utilitarian and they tend to prefer "search and retrieve form" of shopping as compared to women who love to browse. It is these emotional differences in the motives for shopping that create shopping a pleasurable experience for women who are clearly in larger numbers. Men being utilitarian shoppers tend to look at shopping as a chore and associate no pleasure with shopping (Barben, Darden and Griffin 1994). In 2013 a study of 2,000 shoppers in the UK found that while men got bored of shopping within 26 minutes, women on the other hand enjoy shopping with no signs of boredom or fatigue. The search costs and 137 processing behaviour of men and women too widely differ. (Darley and Smith 1995) opine men prefer to process objective information whereas women tend to favour more subjective information. These differences in shopping responses have their origins in the evolution of men and women. The gender divides in the early years assigned primary role of hunting to men and gathering to women. Men essentially are programmed to be focused and make a quick kill, while women were gathering and foraging food and it was a part of socialization and was considered to be a leisurely activity.

As civilizations dawned men still remained hunters joining the work force and looked at hedonic shopping with huge search costs and continued a search and retrieve behaviour for shopping, while women preferred to browse and buy. With the rise in consumer capitalism increasingly more and more malls were designed to accommodate women. Shopping malls were constructed to reflect the priorities of women consumers and the entire shopping experience was designed to provide a sense of empowerment and fulfillment to the women. Later in the century, discount retailers, such as Wal-Mart, designed their store services to appeal to women. Digital disruption and use of mobile and internet devices was a game changer as it narrowed the down the gender gap. Online shopping platforms opened new vistas of shopping that once did not exist. The advent of online shopping platforms was a disruptor and started decimating the brick and mortar malls which were designed and fitted more to satisfying the needs of women. Amazon, for instance, in 2016 posted 82.7\$ billion sales turnover in comparison to \$12.5 billion for Walmart. The rise of digital platforms has led to rise in "Male shoppers". Online shopping has provided a great menu of products for men. According to the latest First Insight Inc. report on purchasing behaviour, men are shopping more online as well as on mobile devices. Hence online shopping is breaking the age old stereotype and embracing more number of men who once shunned shopping.

An empirical analysis of the first insights report on buying behaviour of gender showed that men were frequent shoppers on Amazon compared to women. Since men are more savvy in embracing technology as compared to women, they leverage it better to search and browse for the product and their number today is a whopping seventy percent compared to women who stood at merely forty-six percent. This is a huge difference clearly indicates a rising trend of male shoppers. The changing trends will debunk the gender theories which were once used to analyse consumer behaviour; it will also reduce the gap between sex typed products and blur the boundaries between products which were dichotomized as male specific and female centric. Today men are shopping products which were defined purely by women: grocery, luxury items, and footwear. These are some empirical research quoted in the literature and these studies pertain to markets in the developed world. India's total e-commerce retail sales in 2017 were pegged at around \$20 billion and studies have indicated that another \$50 billion of online



e-commerce could be unlocked by adding new users. (TNN Nov, 2019). Would these empirical conclusions hold true for an emerging market like India? There are many factors that influence the e-retail market in India. It is a 672 Million US Dollar worth industry accounting for nearly 10 percent of GDP (McKenzie Consulting 2017). Retail ecosystems comprise communities of consumers, retailers and partners that rapidly reshape the retail landscape. We now look at the research questions and the methodology to adopt for our study of the online habits of male shoppers.

Research Design

Research Questions

1. What is the reason that men are increasingly entering online shopping?
2. Has there been a discernible rise in the number of men shopping?
3. Has the digital platform eased their shopping experience?
4. What are the benefits offered by a digital market vis-a-vis brick-and-mortar?
5. Are the sellers taking cognizance of changing the demographics and tapping the newer customer base?

Methodology

The research is more a descriptive and exploratory in nature and is based on Expert review and on primary data. The study has two aspects, On the basis of related literature the changing paradigm of shopping behaviour has been described in the study. The same have been validated by following:

1. Interviews with experts, from the leading ecommerce, retail space.
2. A sample survey using primary data.
3. Data Science Analysis was carried out using Decision tree from the primary data.

Expert Review

In an attempt to buttress our research, the study sort opinion from experts in the field of e-portal. Ms Shivani Suri a senior official of a leading e-commerce market place opines "If we look at the profile of buyers, majority are men. The sentiment was echoed by the retail portals from retail segment also.

Analysis

1. Primary Data Analysis: Using the method of Convenience Sampling, an increasing role of men on online shopping platform has been observed. The sample of the present study consists of males and female in the age ranged 20 – 60. The sample Size consists of 81 respondents.

2. Tools for Data Collection: The tool used for data collection was a Questionnaire which was divided into two sections. The first section included 5 demographic profiles of respondents. The second section comprised of 11 items stating various aspects of consumer behaviour being perceived by male shoppers.

3. Data Analysis: On the basis of collected responses, descriptive statistics has been interpreted and discussed in the light of collected literature. The respondents were asked questions to gain insights about:

- Motive Behind Shopping
- Channels used for Shopping: Online Vs Offline
- Reasons for Shopping Online
- Segment Wise Description of Shopping
- Impact of Online Platforms on Shopping Expenditure.

4. Data Science Analysis: Since more than eighty per cent of the data was categorical, the methodology that had to be applied around Decision Tree or higher version of Decision Tree like random forest. However, since the sample size was small, the study adhered to first principles, and implemented a decision tree analyses. This framework has been used to determine class probability after encoding (since variables are categorical), The algorithms splits the variables from the root node into sub nodes and leaf. The framework has been used to



determine the probability of a male shopping online via female, so that it can help marketers to target product categories that interest men shoppers.

The Output Comprises of

- A decision Tree Visualization
- Confusion Matrix
- Accuracy of the Model
- The Probabilities

The model created was programmed through the Scikit-Learn Module for decision tree classifier in Python. The accuracy of the model is 74.6%, which ensures there is no over-fit and yet a good predictor. The predictor estimates that 58 per cent probability for man shopping online. These support our finding from primary data that men have started shopping with arrival of online platforms.

Discussions and Implications

This model has huge implications for the E-Commerce segment. Any reimagining of marketing needs to develop based on this model, while innovating, strategizing, offering deep discounts or any other activity in the marketing space.

Limitations and Scope for Future Research

The limitations of the study are: The study was conducted only in Mumbai city and suburbs. The sample size needs to be scaled up to represent a broader picture urban India. The scope of future research in this area would be: Expanding the sample size geographically and across a wider consumer base and more segments to make the data more robust.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The paper seeks to analyse the change in trends in shopping behavior with the advent of e-commerce and on line platform, our pilot research indicated that with the advent of mobile technology and online platforms, more and more men are embracing technology for shopping and their tribe is growing. The online platform has filled the voids by reducing search costs, and has given men an opportunity to combine hedonic and utilitarian motives for shopping merely with a click of a button at far more reduced search costs. Marketers need to recognize this primary cohort of male shoppers not only in product design but also in innovation or while creating any special marketing efforts.

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