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A STUDY ON CONSUMER PREFERENCES AND BUYING BEHAVIOUR FOR BABY CARE PRODUCTS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SOUTH ZONE OF INDIA (KERALA)

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ABSTRACT

The growing use of in-store technologies, along with tech-savvy consumers who actively engage with smart devices and social media, has created both opportunities and challenges for retailers. Recent developments in the retail sector have significantly impacted not only retailers but also suppliers and consumers. In today's environment, consumers increasingly depend on personal data and past experiences to guide future purchase decisions. Advancements in technology have also blurred the boundaries between online and offline shopping. Consequently, understanding consumer buying behaviour has become crucial for identifying their motivations and choices. As each individual is unique, a uniform set of consumer behaviour principles cannot be applied to all customers. This study explores the ongoing shift in consumer preferences from physical stores to online platforms, with a particular focus on baby care products. It examines evolving buying patterns, the role of technology in shaping decisions, and preferred payment methods, with the aim of analysing overall consumer buying behaviour trends for baby care products.

KEYWORDS: Consumer Buying Behaviour, Retailers, Consumers, Technology, Online & Offline Shopping, Retailing.

INTRODUCTION

Since independence, India has emerged as a unique socio-economic model, demonstrating how population growth and economic development can be managed effectively. The Indian economy has gradually transitioned from being predominantly agricultural to one that now draws strength from agriculture, industry, and an expanding service sector. Today, India stands among the world's fastest-growing economies, capitalizing on its demographic dividend despite the challenges of a vast population. A young and dynamic workforce has reduced the dependency ratio, enabling families to meet their essential needs more efficiently.

India is currently in the early phase of its demographic dividend cycle, which is expected

to continue for over three decades. This provides a promising outlook for the baby care products industry, highlighting its potential for long-term growth. The post-globalization era has fostered a more liberal Indian consumer, increasingly open to cultural influences and lifestyle shifts. Rising social awareness and improved economic conditions have made Indian consumers more adaptable, creating favorable conditions for marketers in the baby care sector.

Technological advancements have further reshaped shopping by making it more interactive, engaging, and affordable, thereby strengthening the connection between retailers and consumers through faster and more convenient transactions. While India has successfully balanced population pressures with rapid economic progress, the baby care products market faces certain environmental and regulatory challenges.

The marketing of baby care essentials has often neglected environmental concerns. In 2017, social activists urged the National Green Tribunal (NGT) to frame guidelines for the proper disposal of used diapers, accusing manufacturers of violating environmental safety and waste management standards. The Pollution Control Board of Maharashtra and the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change were also involved in the issue. Although no clear policy exists yet, the need for a dedicated regulatory framework for baby care product manufacturers has been emphasized.

Regulation of the sector currently falls under multiple bodies: the Drug Advisory Authority monitors baby skincare and cosmetic items such as oils, lotions, creams, powders, and fragrances; the Consumer Regulatory Commission oversees the quality and safety of toys and accessories; and the Infant Milk Substitutes, Feeding Bottles, and Baby Foods (Regulation of Production, Supply, and Distribution) Act of 1992 & 2003 governs baby food and nutrition products.

Meanwhile, e-commerce continues to grow rapidly, offering convenience and affordability, though traditional retail stores remain attractive by allowing consumers to physically inspect products before purchase. Against this backdrop, this study seeks to explore the evolving consumer shift from brick-and-mortar outlets to digital platforms, focusing specifically on the baby care products industry.

A consumer is an individual who buys a product based on their requirements, preferences, and financial capacity, with other elements impacting their decision-making. Comprehending evolving customer behaviour is essential for grasping the baby care marketplace. The desire for baby care products in the family is determined by the child's age. This study defined a kid as a baby if they were five years old or less since this is the minimum age necessary for entrance to the first standard in primary schools (Swati, S.G 2018). Parents often buy baby care products for a limited period of five years, starting with the birth of the baby and ending when the kid is five. Parents browse through several baby care products during their shopping trip for baby care products. Research on Baby care products is limited, with the majority of research concentrating on older children and parental behaviour. baby food, parent roles, motherhood, and baby care routines are well-studied, but consumer behaviour is not.

Research on Baby food mostly originates from pharmaceutical and medical sources, whereas research on consumer behaviour is theoretical. Researchers should aim to enhance marketing literature on baby care products independently since this field is gaining importance. Consumer behaviour may be understood via several factors, however, there are special considerations to consider while purchasing Baby care products. Most consumers (about 70%) make purchasing choices after seeing the product Rettie, R., & Brewer, C. (2000). According to Shiffman G., L., & Lazer Kanuk, L. (2014), studying consumer purchase decision-making provides insight into abstract stages, particularly when buying from a new or crowded baby-care product category. Perception of risk in baby care products is vital for consumer decision-making. Parents and marketers both strive to reduce danger by gathering information and ensuring safety. Experts' confirmation that something is "safe to use" may greatly decrease the perceived level of danger. This data aids marketers in enhancing communication to boost trust among consumers in the product. Consumer buying decisions are influenced by interactions with the

environment, marketing strategies, and psychological factors. Integrating this procedure into research on baby care products helps to comprehend consumer opinions and marketers' views.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Vokes, C., & Limmer, H. (2015), Festivals, fairs, and religious rituals are common in India. Early commerce was influenced by event-driven product demand, demographic segmentation, and culture and society. Due to economic growth and industrial advances, retailing is important. In this time, Indian society changed. Lifestyle changes, education, female workforce participation, urbanization, and nuclear families matter. These innovations transformed retail. Store model diversity helped retailers adapt to social needs. Gupta, P (2015), Women buy online more than men. Technology makes 18-to 35-year-olds buy more online. Srivastava, N., et. al., (2015), Indian, and global retailing includes online and offline stores. Plans to overproduce products to cut costs by using full facility capacity have grown retail. Consumers bought overproduction from stores. Manufacturers and retailers form distribution chains for informal retailing. Pradhan, S (2017), Retailers can sell by phone, TV, online, or door-to-door. France retail. Cut or break. Retailers bulk-buy and sell small packs. Even with small purchases, customers can bargain. Moharana, T. R., & Pattanaik, S. (2016), Just-brand stores in India. Stores sell mostly brand clothes. Exclusive stores. Unlike specialty stores, branded stores sell only brands.

Bajaj, Tuli, and Srivastava (2016) that corporate retail shop chains are owned by individuals, partnerships, or joint ventures. Multi-location shops share ownership. Stores manage retail and management. Management is similar at all retailers. Franchises allow foreign retailers to enter countries. Local retailers own these stores but pay international franchisers annually for foreign brands. Franchise models are helping Indian retailers grow as retail grows. Retail store owners run their businesses with franchisor guidance. Schmid, B., & Axhausen, K. W. (2019), Research show that internet cost and customer preferences affect online shopping popularity and reputation. The latest research supports regular online shopping app updates. Online sellers need solid logistics and distribution. Online retail requires a nationwide smartphone and high-speed internet adoption. Online commerce is popular and fast, so consumers like it, according to studies. Retail pros and cons. Example: cybercriminal. Research suggests retailers have offline and online stores.

Hameli, K. (2018), consumer cooperatives run stores. Department stores cooperative. Low prices in these shops. Indian malls have shops. Malls sell various goods and services. Leasing turns malls into 'leased retail outlets'. Pradeepa, V., & Pandurangan, P. (2016), the study recommended that manufacturers and sellers of Baby care products should highlight the inherent risks associated with their use, as many consumers lack familiarity with them. This study identified a pattern of brand trust formation in customers when buying Baby care products. Research indicates that brand trust initially stems from knowledge-based reasoning, while trust after purchase is formed by customers' emotional reactions to the product. Research suggests that meeting initial expectations of newborn care products is essential for establishing trust, which is pertinent to the current study. Brand performance can assist customers in overcoming uncertainties and perceptions of risk, resulting in an emotional response that reinforces initial trust.

Ly, D. (2017), A literature review found that Finland offers suitable care for babies during their early developmental years, under the guidelines. The guidebook is published by the Institute of Health and Welfare for parents who are expecting or have babies. The baby care product industry benefits from resources such as guides and instructional books that inform parents about the importance of proper child-rearing. Rajeswari, P., et. al., (2017). impressions were discovered to affect the decision-making process of baby-care products, with the potential for consumer gender to influence this impact. This study examines women's perspectives on Baby care products. Fowlestone, M., & Crocker, P. (2018, February), Research shows that towels, diapers, mattresses, nail clippers, and soft toys are manufactured in multiple countries. These initiatives support the baby care product market by offering guidance on essential products for children aged 0-4 years. Studies show that consumers prefer Baby care products with uncomplicated, user-friendly

packaging, as well as a focus on safety and creativity. This study is essential because online baby care products are frequently packaged in packets that may pose a danger to the baby if the packaging is inadequate. This factor, though not extensively studied, is essential for the sales of Baby care products Tyagi, V. (2018) publication research study emphasizes the increasing importance of Baby care products for consumers and businesses. This study investigated how competitor factors influence consumers' buying behaviour of private-label Baby care products.

Durgamani, M. K., & Ganesan, M. (2018), Customers are growing more concerned about the environmental repercussions of product consumption, alongside the advantages they receive. Studies show that individuals desire to minimize packaging in retail due to feelings of guilt when unwrapping products and concerns about environmental consequences. Companies that specialize in baby care use packaging as a means to differentiate their brand from competitors. Extra layers of packaging are used for baby care products to increase their attractiveness. This is significant in retail. Retailers should reduce the amount of packaging material used because of the increasing volume of goods. Kumar, V., & Kumari, K. (2014), This study investigated convenience, product alternatives, and value perceptions in online purchasing. The analysis indicates that online retailers should prioritize convenience as a valuable attribute. Singh, P., et., al., (2014), Retail can convert consumers into buyers. Their research analyzed the impact of shop architecture and atmosphere on customer purchasing behavior. Kanchan, U., et. al., (2016) Consumers adjust to changes and strive for increased benefits from online stores. Online sales are increasing quickly, so companies need to comprehend their potential customers, their desires, motivations for purchasing online, and strategies to transition in-store shoppers into online customers to maximise their opportunities.

Kanupriya, R., & Kaur, A. (2016), stated that the internet has altered how people allocate their time and conduct business. This pertains to both retail businesses and retail customers. The emergence of electronic commerce has revolutionized the retail industry and changed consumer preferences from traditional to online shopping. Research in shopping literature emphasizes the advantages of customers being informed about online shopping choices and comparing products from different brands and manufacturers. Solomon analyzed customers' behaviour during the purchasing process. Merchants must take into account the influence of mindset, intention, and behavioral reactions to attract more customers to online commerce. Agyapong, H. (2018), Many Indian consumers prefer online retail because of its convenience, which plays a key role in the shift from traditional to online shopping. The study emphasises the significance of time engagement and enhanced pricing options for online consumers. The study showed that customers purchased tickets for various reasons. The top shopping categories include computer parts, fashion goods, and clothing. Jose, J., & Jose, J. (2017), The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is commonly utilised to explain the impact of technology on consumer variables. This method evaluates customer comfort and satisfaction with technological applications. Researchers have discovered that TAM is easy to use and apply in various fields of study. The second important finding regarding the applicable technology. Consumer purchasing decisions in online retail are influenced by how consumers perceive the benefits of technology Bhalerao, A., & Pandey, R. K. (2017), conducted a study. The study found that online retail businesses offer simplicity, convenience, and other benefits due to technology, which is also found in traditional brick-and-mortar stores. This study investigated the pleasurable benefits of online fashion retail stores for consumers. This technology also enhanced enjoyment and exhilaration. The study determined that this technology is advantageous for online retailers.

Drinkwater, D. (2016) stated that alterations in socio-economic status, globalisation, social media, and other external factors have caused a change in consumer behaviour. To promote Baby care products effectively, traditional and online retailers need to move beyond mere product sales. All formats need to be quick and flexible to ensure secure and knowledgeable transactions for consumers. Jetta, K. (2017), Research on Online Retail shops in the context of Jetta Concerns about the future of online retailing are growing due to closures and lost sales of Baby care products. An example is the shutdown of diapers.com. Amazon owned this online retail company. Despite being

profitable and holding a substantial market share, the company had doubts about the viability of selling Baby care products online following the closure of the store. Conversely, the emergence of firstcry.com gained dominance over time. Baby care products, once a leading category on target.com, have experienced a decline in sales across all sectors. Trend identification is possible, but the length of the trend remains uncertain. Reuters, E (2018), It is essential for online and traditional retailers to comprehend trends and customer attitudes regarding the purchase of Baby care products. Providers of baby care products may experience a rise in expansion and funding for creative initiatives to fulfill customer needs in all sectors soon. A survey of prosperous US retailers revealed that online platforms selling Baby care products experienced a slight increase in market share. The study revealed that although e-commerce revenue has risen with the addition of new merchants, overall sales have decreased. This trend could continue, leading to challenges for online retailers specialising in baby care products. The study investigated various online shopping platforms such as Walmart.com, Amazon.com, Target.com, and Diapers.com.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

This research study examines changing consumer trends in purchasing baby care products. The thesis title outlines the main research areas. This research aims to understand the factors that influence consumers' decision to purchase baby care products online. The research focuses on respondents who are parents, expecting parents, or have children in their families. The research objectives are as follows:

- To identify factors influencing consumers' buying behaviour from traditional to online shopping for baby care products.
- To identify consumers' preferred payment methods for baby care products.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design is a structured plan for conducting research using specific methods and techniques. There are four primary research designs: exploratory, descriptive, causal, and experimental. This study employs an exploratory research design focusing on baby care products because of their diverse and intricate nature. Descriptive research design enables the study of variables using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Data analysis aids in the design process by conducting hypothesis testing and statistical analysis. The goal is to comprehend consumer buying decisions and identify the most favoured payment method. This research design is defined by its restricted scope and emphasis on comprehending consumer factors. This study utilises non-probability sampling because a sampling frame is unavailable, which restricts equal opportunities for all elements of the population. Purposive sampling is utilised to allow researchers to gather data based on their own discretion and selection of samples.

This study investigates the transition in consumer buying behaviour from brick-and-mortar stores to e-commerce platforms by analysing the impact of demographic factors on these trends. The study utilises a range of sources such as published research papers, conference papers, and electronic databases like EBSCO and Science Direct. A survey was carried out on 86 participants, utilising a structured questionnaire that included inquiries about demographics and reasons for purchase decisions. The survey was distributed both online and in face-to-face interviews with participants. The data was revised to identify any missing values and outliers, and coding was applied to prepare it for analysis. The data was analysed utilising descriptive statistical techniques such as percentages, mean, and standard deviation. Factor analysis was conducted to assess the reliability of the 10-item Likert scale regarding shoppers' preferences in multivariate data analysis. The chi-square test was utilised for hypothesis testing, while ANOVA was employed to examine the impact of demographic variables on identified factors.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 1
Demographic profile

S.No.	Demographic Profile	Description	Frequency	Percentage
1	Gender	Male	32	37.21%

		Female	54	62.79%
		18-25 years	35	40.70%
		26-35 years	27	31.40%
		35-45 years	17	19.77%
		Above 45 years	7	8.14%
3	Marital Status	Married	64	74.42%
		Unmarried	22	25.58%
4	Education	Schooling	5	5.81%
		Under Graduates	35	40.70%
		Post Graduates	28	32.56%
		Professional and Others	18	20.93%
	Occupation	Business & Self-employed	21	24.42%
		Private Job	35	40.70%
		Government Job	14	16.28%
		Other	16	18.60%
6	Annual Household Income	Below 5 lakhs	40	46.51%
		6-10 lakhs	27	31.40%
		11-15 lakhs	12	13.95%
		Above 15 lakhs	7	8.14%

Objective 1: Identify the key factors that influence the transition of buyer buying preferences from traditional to online shopping for Baby care products.

Principal Component Analysis is a statistical technique used to reduce and summarize data to reveal the underlying structure of the variables. A factor represents the fundamental features that explain the correlation among the variables making up the factor structure.

Factors are latent constructs that emerge from the combination of variables. Factors in this study are analyzed using Factor analysis in SPSS. The KMO test result indicated that the data is suitable for Factor analysis and the BARTLETT test indicates the appropriateness of the sample size. This study utilizes the Maximum Likelihood technique with varimax rotation.

Table 2
KMO and Bartlett's Test

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.885
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	2222.42
	Df	45
	Sig.	0.000

Factor analysis is conducted by the Maximum Likelihood Method and VARIMAX ROTATION in factor analysis, revealing 15 items loaded on 3 factors that account for 57.605% of the total variance. The factor analysis's results were determined using the Maximum Likelihood approach and Varimax rotation with Kaiser Normalization, based on the Eigenvalue requirements.

The discussion that follows pertains to the organization of these three components. The table below represents the Rotated Factor Matrix values used to extract the structure of the three factors such Convenience, Technical, and Personal factors.

Table 3
Rotated Factor Matrix

Rotated Factor Matrix			
	Factor		
	1	2	3

Wide range of products	0.723	0.204	0.174
Smartphone usage	0.629	0.349	0.164
Record of each billing	0.557	0.272	0.257
Fit to modern lifestyle needs	0.554	0.264	0.357
Growing number of online stores	0.517	0.380	0.218
Availability of digital payment options	0.294	0.945	0.140
Ease in shopping	0.388	0.562	0.342
Ease in comparing products	0.320	0.738	0.218
Help in informed decision-making	0.319	0.833	0.269
transaction tracking	0.376	0.682	0.323
Technology reduces risk perception	0.267	0.572	0.224
Technology raised consumers' expectations for more ease in shopping	0.368	0.670	0.395
Consumer friendliness	0.322	0.261	0.900
Discount	0.471	0.193	0.184
Return Policies	0.459	0.114	0.356

Source: Data Generated from SPSS output

Objective 2: IDENTIFY CONSUMERS' PREFERRED PAYMENT METHODS FOR BABY CARE PRODUCTS.

Table 4
Cross table between payment option preference and gender

Which of the following payment options do you MOSTLY prefer to pay a bill for purchased baby care products? * Gender Cross tabulation				
Count				
		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
Which of the following payment options do you MOSTLY prefer to pay a bill for purchased baby care products?	Digital Wallet	5	7	12
	Credit Card/ Debit Card/ ATM Card	12	27	39
	Net Banking	3	6	9
	COD (Cash on Delivery)	7	14	21
	Cash Payment at the store	2	3	5
Total		29	57	86

Table 5
Chi-Square Tests

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2- sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	16.672	4	0.002
N of Valid Cases	86		

A chi-square test indicated a substantial association between gender and payment option preference. The Pearson Chi-Square value is 16.672, with a significant value of 0.002. If the p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis must be rejected. Thus, it can be inferred that there is a substantial correlation between the payment option preference and the gender of the respondents.

DISCUSSIONS

Convenience Technology is causing a change in customer buying habits from traditional to online shopping for baby care products. There is a moderate correlation between technology and consumer purchasing habits. Technology has simplified the process of decision-making. Transaction tracking and shopping are easy. Technology has simplified the process of comparing products in the market. Furthermore, technology aids in diminishing risk perception.

The analysis revealed that the most favored payment method to date is credit cards or debit cards. However, digital wallets are expected to become a more common payment method in the future. There is an anticipated growth in the demand for infant products in the future, leading to a rise in repeat purchases. Increased personalization of baby care items is expected in the future. E-commerce applications would be developed. Natural, herbal, and organic baby products are predicted to become more popular in the future. Another upcoming development is the potential increase in outsourcing within the baby care business due to the presence of additional external suppliers of baby care items.

The frequency of repeat purchases in the baby care market is expected to rise. The decline in population growth could reduce future sales volume in the baby care industry. In the future, a regulatory agency may be necessary to oversee and regulate the baby care industry.

CONCLUSION

This study intends to investigate the factors that impact the transition of consumer purchasing preferences from traditional to online shopping for baby care items. Factor analysis is utilized to discover two primary elements: convenience and technical factors. Convenience aspects encompass shopping convenience, alignment with contemporary lifestyles, discounts, and a diverse product selection. Technical factors encompass digital payment methods, billing data, increasing online retail outlets, and smartphone utilization. The study compared demographic characteristics including gender, location, occupation, and education. Urban male and female candidates acknowledged a shift in consumer purchasing trends but had differing opinions on the impact of education and career. Semi-urban populations saw rapid transition and had more shopping advantages compared to regular retail outlets.

Technology significantly influences customer purchasing choices by facilitating product comparisons and enabling well-informed decision-making. Many respondents believe that technology allows for transaction tracking and decreases the perceived risk associated with internet purchases. Consumers most commonly prefer using credit cards and debit cards for payment, with cash on delivery and digital wallets being the next popular choices. Some respondents prefer using net banking and cash payment outlets. The use of plastic money, such as credit cards and debit cards, is on the rise, with digital wallets emerging as the preferred method of payment for online transactions. Consumers are transitioning to a digitally literate setting, where the key variable is the one with the greatest mean rating and the lowest standard deviation. The majority of respondents feel that demand for baby care products will rise shortly as parental awareness increases and they believe it is the most important component of their baby's growth and development.

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