

From Store Visits to Screen Choices: A Conceptual Study of Offline Shopping Hesitation in Electronic Product Purchases after COVID-19

Ganga Mohanadasan¹, Dr. Tony C. Mathew², Anu P. Davies³

¹Sahrdaya Institute of Management Studies, Kerala, India

²Assistant Professor, Sahrdaya Institute of Management Studies, Kerala, India

³Assistant Professor, St. Thomas' College (Autonomous), Kerala, India

Abstract: *The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly altered consumer shopping behaviour, leading to noticeable changes in channel preference between offline and online retail formats. While online shopping adoption has increased, consumers' hesitation toward visiting physical stores has emerged as an important behavioural concern, particularly for electronic products that involve higher perceived risk and involvement. This paper aims to explore the concept of offline shopping hesitation in the post-pandemic context by synthesizing existing literature on consumer behaviour, perceived health risk, perceived convenience, impulsive buying behaviour, and in-store engagement. By conceptually integrating these factors, the study seeks to develop a structured understanding of how and why offline shopping hesitation may persist even after the easing of pandemic-related restrictions. The paper contributes by offering a conceptual perspective that can guide future empirical research on offline–online channel choice in the electronic products sector.*

Keywords: Offline shopping hesitation, electronic products, post-COVID consumer behaviour, Perceived health risk, Perceived convenience, Channel choice

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Technological advancement has led to a remarkable transformation in the retail industry over centuries, evolving from simple barter systems in ancient marketplaces to today's sophisticated digital shopping experiences (Grewal et al., 2017). This transformation reflects changes in human behaviour, technological progress, and shifting consumer preferences (Kotler et al., 2019). The story of retail began thousands of years ago when humans started exchanging goods and services through the barter system (Levy & Weitz, 2012). Ancient civilizations, such as those in the Indus Valley, witnessed merchants gathering at designated locations to exchange grains, textiles, and handcrafted items (Shaw et al., 2011).

Traditional markets, or “bazaars” as they are known in India, became the centre of retail activity (Alexander & Doherty, 2009). These markets were not only places for buying and selling but also social spaces where communities interacted, shared information, and built relationships (Belk, 2014). In India, the transformation of retail began during the British colonial period and accelerated after independence (Sinha & Banerjee, 2004). The shift from handicraft-based production to machine-based manufacturing created new opportunities as well as challenges for retailers (Chandra & Sane, 2018).

Department stores represented the first major evolution from traditional retail formats by offering multiple product categories under one roof, significantly changing the shopping experience (Levy & Weitz, 2012). In India, stores such as Spencer's (established in 1863) introduced organized retail formats that allowed customers to browse freely without

immediate sales pressure (Mukherjee & Patel, 2005). The late twentieth century witnessed the emergence of shopping malls and retail chains, where standardized store formats were replicated across locations (Grewal et al., 2017). In the late 1990s, e-commerce emerged globally (Laudon & Traver, 2021). Increased internet penetration, the introduction of smartphones, and digital payment systems created a favourable environment for the growth of online retail (UNCTAD, 2020). As a result of these technological advancements, consumer behaviour has changed drastically (Hoyer et al., 2020).

1.2 Post-COVID Changes in Consumer Shopping Behaviour

Each phase of retail evolution has significantly influenced consumer behaviour (Solomon, 2018). Today's consumers are more informed, demanding, and diverse in their shopping preferences than ever before (Kotler et al., 2019). Consumers conduct detailed research before making purchase decisions by comparing prices, reading product reviews, and seeking recommendations from multiple sources (Flavián et al., 2020). This shift has transferred power from retailers to consumers, forcing businesses to become more transparent and competitive (Grewal et al., 2017). Convenience has become a priority for modern consumers, including easy navigation, multiple payment options, and quick customer service (Seiders et al., 2007).

Although technology has improved significantly, some consumers still do not prefer online shopping due to low digital literacy and trust-related issues (Gefen et al., 2003). Before the COVID-19 pandemic, only a limited group of consumers actively engaged in online shopping, while many preferred offline stores where they could see, touch, and physically experience products before purchasing (Verhoef et

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al., 2015). However, during the pandemic, a sudden shift from offline to online shopping was observed due to lockdown restrictions and safety concerns (Sheth, 2020). Many first-time online shoppers, including older consumers, began purchasing daily necessities through digital platforms, gradually forming long-term shopping habits (UNCTAD, 2021). As a result, consumers now expect smooth and integrated experiences across both online and offline channels.

1.3 Concept of Offline Shopping Hesitation

The growth of technology and increasing digital awareness have further reduced interest in offline shopping. The availability of products across multiple online platforms and the convenience of home delivery have altered consumer buying habits from offline to online shopping. Even after the COVID-19 pandemic, many consumers hesitate to visit physical stores due to fear of diseases and the desire to avoid crowded places.

Offline shopping hesitation does not indicate complete avoidance of physical stores (Kim et al., 2021). Instead, it reflects a cautious, delayed, or selective approach toward visiting offline retail outlets (Sheth, 2020). This hesitation may vary depending on situational factors, perceived risks, and product requirements (Bauer, 1960; Cunningham, 1967). At the same time, some consumers continue to depend on offline shopping, particularly based on the type of product being purchased (Verhoef et al., 2015). Therefore, offline shopping hesitation emerges as an important behavioural outcome worthy of academic investigation (Wang et al., 2022)

1.4 Channel Choice and the Role of Product Type

Consumer decisions regarding offline and online shopping vary across countries and depend largely on the nature and characteristics of the product being purchased (Chiang et al., 2003). Products can be broadly classified based on perceived risk, complexity, and involvement level (Zaichkowsky, 1985). Low-involvement and frequently purchased products are more likely to be bought online due to ease of access and minimal perceived risk (Keeney, 1999). In contrast, high-involvement products, such as electronic goods, involve higher financial investment, technical complexity, and performance-related risk (Bhatnagar et al., 2000). As a result, consumers tend to carefully evaluate whether to purchase such products through online or offline channels (Verhoef et al., 2015).

In the case of electronic products, channel choice is influenced by factors such as the need for product demonstration, assurance of quality, warranty services, and after-sales support (Ratchford et al., 2001). Although online platforms provide detailed product specifications, customer reviews, and competitive pricing (Flavián et al., 2020), some consumers still prefer offline stores to physically examine products and seek expert advice (Childers et al., 2001). However, post-COVID health concerns, convenience, and increased familiarity with digital platforms have contributed to growing hesitation toward visiting physical stores, even for electronic purchases (Sheth, 2020; Wang et al., 2022).

1.5 Offline Shopping Hesitation in Electronic Products

Consumer behaviour has undergone a dramatic shift over the past decade due to the introduction of smartphones, affordable internet access, and the availability of multiple e-commerce platforms such as Amazon and Flipkart (Laudon & Traver, 2021). These platforms allow consumers to search for a wide variety of electronic products and make purchase decisions independently, without direct influence from sales personnel (Flavián et al., 2020). E-commerce platforms frequently offer heavy discounts, exchange schemes, cashback offers, and festival sales, making electronic products more affordable and attractive (Grewal et al., 2017).

Additionally, features such as hassle-free returns, exchanges, warranties, EMI options, and Buy Now Pay Later (BNPL) schemes have increased consumer confidence in online purchases (Pavlou, 2003). While offline retailers have traditionally offered financing options, online platforms have made these services more seamless and accessible (UNCTAD, 2021). However, decisions related to electronic products vary based on the type of gadget (Ratchford et al., 2001). Some consumers prefer purchasing certain electronics offline, while others choose online platforms (Verhoef et al., 2015). Many consumers adopt a hybrid approach, such as researching products online and purchasing offline (ROPO) or examining products in stores before purchasing online for better deals (Verhoef et al., 2007).

1.6 Research Gap

Despite the rapid growth of online shopping for electronic products, there is limited research that clearly explains why consumers hesitate to shop offline for such products in the post-COVID period. Most existing studies primarily focus on online shopping adoption and e-commerce growth, rather than examining the reasons behind reduced offline store visits.

Furthermore, there is a lack of empirical studies that integrate health-related concerns, convenience factors, and product type to explain offline shopping hesitation, particularly in the Indian context. This study aims to address this gap by exploring the key factors influencing offline shopping hesitation in electronic product purchases after the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.7 Research Question

- Is there a hesitation among customers towards offline shopping?
- Has the COVID-19 pandemic influenced consumers' hesitation towards offline shopping?
- What factors influence consumers' hesitation towards offline shopping after the COVID-19 pandemic?

1.8 Objectives of the Study

- To examine factors influencing offline shopping hesitation
- To analyse the mediating roles of perceived health risk and perceived convenience

- To assess the impact of impulsive buying behaviour and in-store dwell time
- To examine the moderating role of age and digital literacy.

1.9 Significance of the Study

This study holds significant academic and practical value in the context of the rapidly evolving retail environment. With the acceleration of digitalization and changes in consumer behaviour after the COVID-19 pandemic, understanding why consumers hesitate to shop offline has become increasingly important. While existing research largely focuses on online shopping adoption, this study shifts attention toward offline shopping hesitation, particularly in the case of electronic products, which involve higher financial and functional risks.

From an academic perspective, the study contributes to consumer behaviour and retail literature by integrating perceived health risk, perceived convenience, impulsive buying behaviour, and in-store dwell time into a single framework. By examining these factors together, the study offers a more holistic understanding of post-pandemic channel choice behaviour. Additionally, by focusing on electronic products, the study highlights the role of product type in shaping shopping hesitation, which has received limited empirical attention in the Indian context.

From a practical perspective, the findings of this study can help retailers, marketers, and policymakers better understand changing consumer expectations. Offline retailers can use these insights to redesign store layouts, improve hygiene standards, and enhance convenience to reduce consumer hesitation. Online and omnichannel retailers can also benefit by understanding how consumers combine online and offline channels when purchasing electronic products. Overall, this study provides valuable insights for developing strategies that align with post-COVID consumer behaviour.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Shopping Hesitation and Consumer Decision-Making

Shopping hesitation has been recognized as an important psychological stage in consumer decision-making. Cho, Kang, and Cheon (2006) were among the early researchers to conceptualize online shopping hesitation, explaining it as a state where consumers delay or avoid purchase due to uncertainty, perceived risk, or lack of confidence. Their study highlights that hesitation arises when consumers experience information overload, fear of making wrong decisions, or lack of trust in online environments.

Further expanding this concept, Demirgüneş (2016) and Külter Demirgüneş (2018) identified multiple factors contributing to shopping hesitation, including perceived financial risk, performance risk, time pressure, and emotional discomfort. These studies emphasize that hesitation is not equivalent to rejection but represents a temporary resistance that can influence channel choice. Such hesitation is particularly relevant for high-involvement products where decision complexity is higher.

2.2 Online vs Offline Shopping and Channel Preference

Consumer preference between online and offline shopping channels depends significantly on perceived benefits and limitations of each channel. Wang et al. (2022) found that many consumers still prefer in-store shopping despite the growth of e-commerce, mainly due to the desire for physical product evaluation and immediate ownership. Their study on online shopping cart abandonment highlights that hesitation often occurs when online platforms fail to provide assurance comparable to physical stores.

Brüggemann and Pauwels (2022, 2025) examined differences between online and offline grocery shoppers and found that while online shopping adoption increased, offline shopping continued to play a strong role for certain consumers. Similarly, Brüggemann and Olbrich (2023) observed that although COVID-19 restrictions accelerated online shopping, many consumers reverted to offline habits once restrictions eased, indicating that the pandemic did not permanently eliminate offline shopping preferences.

2.3 Impact of COVID-19 on Consumer Shopping Behaviour

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly altered consumer shopping behaviour across the world. Several studies documented a sharp increase in online shopping due to lockdowns, health concerns, and movement restrictions (Koch et al., 2020; Hashem, 2020; Gu et al., 2021). Dabija et al. (2024) emphasized that the pandemic reshaped consumer expectations by increasing the importance of safety, convenience, and digital accessibility.

Eger et al. (2021) highlighted generational differences in shopping behaviour during COVID-19, showing that younger consumers adapted more easily to online platforms, while older consumers experienced higher hesitation due to digital literacy concerns. Similarly, Jensen et al. (2021) reported that although online shopping usage increased during the pandemic, many consumers expressed intentions to return to offline shopping post-pandemic, depending on product type and perceived risk.

2.4 Product Type, Risk Perception, and Channel Choice

Product characteristics play a crucial role in determining consumers' channel choice. Moon, Choe, and Song (2021) found that perceived risk and product involvement significantly influence whether consumers choose online or offline channels. High-risk and high-involvement products often encourage offline shopping due to the need for physical inspection and assurance.

Studies focusing on electronics and technology-intensive products suggest that consumers experience higher hesitation due to performance uncertainty and after-sales concerns (Demirgüneş, 2018). While online platforms offer detailed information and price comparisons, offline stores provide reassurance through demonstrations and personal interaction, reducing perceived risk.

2.5 Impulsive Buying and Behavioural Changes During COVID-19

The pandemic also influenced impulsive and compulsive buying behaviour. Nori et al. (2022) and Zhao et al. (2022) reported that psychological stress, uncertainty, and burnout during COVID-19 increased impulsive online shopping behaviour. These behavioural changes were driven by emotional coping mechanisms and increased screen exposure during lockdown periods.

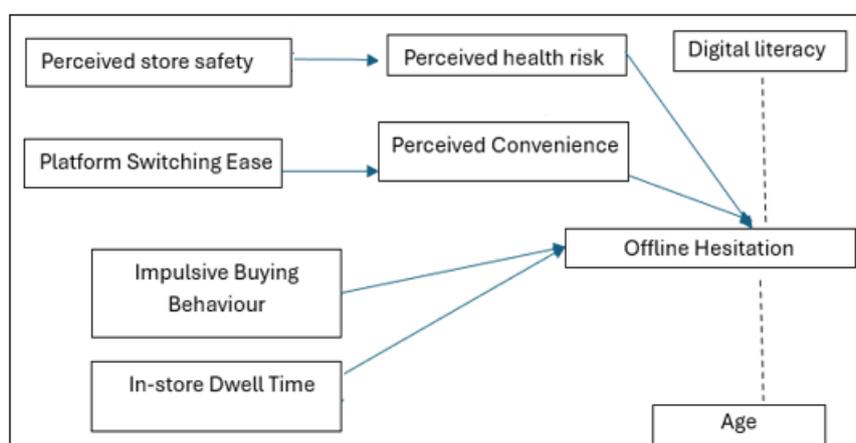
However, impulsive buying tendencies varied across individuals and product categories, suggesting that hesitation and impulse can coexist in consumer behaviour. Huang, Chen, and Sun (2022) further emphasized that online environments can amplify compulsive buying tendencies, especially when trust and ease of transaction are high.

2.6 Health Risk, Convenience, and Post-Pandemic Shopping Patterns

Perceived health risk emerged as a major determinant of shopping behaviour during the pandemic. Chang and Meyerhoefer (2021) and Nguyen et al. (2021) demonstrated that fear of infection significantly increased online shopping adoption, especially for essential goods. Even after the pandemic, health consciousness continues to influence offline store visits (Valaskova et al., 2021).

Several studies indicate that convenience, time savings, and home delivery reinforce online shopping preferences post-COVID (Shen et al., 2022; Truong & Truong, 2022). However, Drummond and Hasnine (2024) noted that many consumers adopt a hybrid approach, balancing online convenience with offline trust and experience.

3. Conceptual Framework



4. Discussion

This conceptual study discusses the growing hesitation toward offline shopping in the post-COVID period, particularly in the context of electronic product purchases. The discussion is grounded in the synthesis of existing literature and observable shifts in consumer behaviour rather than empirical testing. The pandemic appears to have acted as a catalyst that reshaped consumer risk perceptions, convenience expectations, and channel preferences. Even after the relaxation of health restrictions, many consumers continue to show reluctance toward physical retail environments, suggesting that offline shopping hesitation may not be purely situational but partly behavioural.

The literature reviewed indicates that perceived health risk, store safety perceptions, and reduced in-store engagement have altered how consumers evaluate offline retail experiences. At the same time, increased familiarity with digital platforms and ease of switching between channels have strengthened online preference, especially for electronic products where physical inspection is increasingly substituted by reviews, specifications, and virtual demonstrations. Impulsive buying and longer in-store dwell time- once strong drivers of offline purchases- appear to have weakened in relevance under post-pandemic conditions.

Age and digital literacy emerge as important contextual factors shaping this hesitation. Younger and digitally skilled consumers are more comfortable navigating online platforms, while older consumers may experience hesitation driven by both health concerns and technological adaptation. Overall, the discussion suggests that offline shopping hesitation reflects a complex interaction of psychological, situational, and technological influences rather than a simple shift from offline to online channels.

5. Implications of the Study

5.1 Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to consumer behaviour literature by conceptually extending the notion of **shopping hesitation** to the post-pandemic retail context. It integrates perspectives from perceived risk theory, convenience theory, and channel-switching behaviour to explain offline shopping reluctance. By focusing on electronic products, the study highlights how product type can influence the strength and persistence of offline hesitation, offering scope for future empirical validation.

5.2 Managerial Implications

For offline retailers, especially in the electronics sector, the findings imply the need to rethink store formats and engagement strategies. Enhancing visible safety measures, reducing perceived inconvenience, and creating more purpose-driven store visits may help address consumer hesitation. Retailers may also benefit from stronger online–offline integration, such as click-and-collect models, virtual product assistance, and digitally supported in-store experiences.

5.3 Implications for Future Research

As a conceptual study, this paper provides a foundation for future empirical research. Researchers may test the proposed relationships using survey data, experiments, or behavioural tracking, and examine how offline hesitation evolves across regions, age groups, and product categories. The framework can also be extended to study long-term structural changes in retail behaviour beyond the pandemic context.

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