

## CONSUMERS' BUYING BEHAVIOUR OF MEDICINE THROUGH ON-LINE A STUDY IN COIMBATORE

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56293/IJMSSSR.2024.5301>

IJMSSSR 2024

VOLUME 6

ISSUE 6 NOVEMBER – DECEMBER

ISSN: 2582 - 0265

**Abstract:** Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has turned the global market into a short space. E-Commerce, today has developed the online pharmacy, where one can buy his/her required medicines through these virtual stores, some of the drugs are sold without the prescription of the physician, and some of the medicines are sold with the prescription of the physician, even one can get suggestions from the physicians virtually by fixing an appointment, however in some cases, physicians prescribe to visit the local physicians for detailed check-up. This study is undertaken in Coimbatore with a sample size of 457, the study shows that most of the male consumers prefer to purchase medicine through online pharmacy; they are able to compare the price with that of the local sellers and even online pharmacies. Consumers' Buying behaviour is increasing due to the online pharmacies, in India.

**Keywords:** Online Pharmacy, E-Commerce, Medicines, Physician, market place.

### Introduction

Utilizing the internet has turned into an essential part of individuals' lives all over the world. These days, the internet has become vital for all of us. We utilize the internet with the assistance of several electronic gadgets like desktops, laptops, note pads, tabs, cell phones, televisions, smart watches, and so on. Various developments and inventions in the field of information and communication technology (ICT) have made a ready path for electronic trade, internet-based business or e-commerce. The rising utilization of the internet and electronic gadgets permits us to shop on the internet. IT has permitted us to get to the vast majority of the fundamental and luxurious products and services through online shopping without any problem. These days, individuals favour online shopping instead of conventional shopping. online shopping has become well known as of now, particularly with technical progressions and the inescapable usage of the internet. Shoppers can buy goods and services from the comfort of their home without going to a store. This has prompted a remarkable shift in the manner individuals shop and notably affects the retail business as a whole. Official Finnish measurements show that around two-third of the individuals aged 16 to 89 make an internet-based buy at least one time each year. This rate further increments to 96% for the age group from 35 to 44 years (OSF, 2018).

Generally speaking, online shopping has been a distinct advantage for the retail business, giving customers a helpful and open method for shopping from anywhere 24/7. With the ascent of versatile business and arising advances like augmented reality, virtual reality, and artificial intelligence, the fate of online shopping looks splendid. In any case, taking into account the environmental effect of online shopping, particularly by packaging and shipping. Retailers must try to decrease their carbon footprints and execute manageable measures in their activities. Moreover, production network versatility and the effect on the local economy are significant contemplations that should be considered. The scaling of virtual performing and powerhouse showcasing has also altered the manner in which retailers market goods and communicate with consumers, however steps should be taken to guarantee the legitimacy of surveys and the exactness of the data collected.

Buying medication and availing healthcare services is no special case for online shopping. Pharmacies that give drugs and clinical services online are called online pharmacies, e-pharmacies or internet pharmacies. They have turned into a common choice among Indian consumers, particularly after the Coronavirus pandemic. The comfort and access provided by these internet platforms have pursued them the favourite choice for buying medicines. Online pharmacies have reformed the manner in which individuals purchase medical services. With the development of internet business, an ever-increasing number of individuals are going to online pharmacies to purchase medication. In any case, the rise of e-pharmacies has additionally raised worries about the wellbeing and trust of medications sold on the internet. Thus, consumers are progressively worried about the genuineness of online pharmacies, which has led to exceptionally different insights about these pharmacies.

### **Growth of Online Pharmacies**

The first online pharmacy was laid in the US in 1999 by the name of Drugstore.com. From that point, online pharmacies have developed in fame, with numerous stages across the world. The beginning of e-pharmacies can be credited to the rising notoriety of the Web during the 1990s. The Web serves as another medium to organizations to arrive at consumers and sell their items. In any case, it was only after the mid-2000s that e-pharmacies began to realization. Online pharmacies permit consumers to buy doctor prescribed drugs and non-prescription meds through the Web. They permit patients to arrange remedy and non-prescription meds on the web and have them delivered to their doorstep. As per a report by Grand View Research (2023), the online pharmacy market size was esteemed at USD 61.3 billion in the year 2020 and is supposed to extend at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 15.5% from 2021 to 2028. In the US, the online pharmacies are supposed to develop from 4% in 2020 to 10% by 2024 (Medication Channels Establishment, 2023). In Joined Realm, the utilization of online pharmacies expanded by 27% during the Coronavirus pandemic (The Drug Diary, 2023). In India, the online pharmacy market is supposed to arrive at USD 18.1 billion by 2023, up from USD 1.2 billion out of 2018 (Ice and Sullivan, 2023). In China, the online pharmacy market size was valued at USD 24.1 billion in the year 2020 and is supposed to develop at a CAGR of 16.3% from 2021 to 2028 (Grand View Research, 2023).

The future prospects of online pharmacies are promising, with continued growth expected in the coming years. The global online pharmacy market is supposed to develop at a CAGR of 12.8% from 2020 to 2027. This development is being driven by elements, for example, expanded web usage, rising medical services at less expenses, comfort and affordability of online pharmacies, expanding wellbeing cognizance, and the spread of a few new illnesses everywhere. One area of development for online pharmacies is in the sale of generic medications which are less expensive than branded ones, and online pharmacies can offer even lower costs because of their lower overhead costs. Online pharmacies are additionally growing their services to incorporate telemedicine, which would permit people to get clinical discussions and remedies on the web.

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

India as the most populous country in the world, arising as a fastest developing online market on the globe over the recent twenty years. Indians began to buy most of the products through online. Medicines and healthcare services are also now accessible and being consumed online in India. Over 60 online pharmacies present in India. In spite of this much of growth felt in the field of e-pharmacies, many consumers are either not aware of them or not willing to prefer these pharmacies over traditional brick and mortar pharmacies. The availability, accessibility and popularity of online pharmacies had elevated consumers' adoption and usage of these services. Precisely, the purpose of this study is to determine the extent to which consumers in Coimbatore district are aware of and the type and level of perception towards e-pharmacy services. Further, the study also attempts to find the reasons behind why they are consuming or not consuming these services online. Finally, it tries to measure the consumers' satisfaction level with the online pharmacies, and also any concerns they may perceive regarding e-pharmacy services. The study will also observe the impact of demographic profile of the respondents such as age group, gender, income level, and educational qualification on the adoption, preference, usage and behaviour towards online pharmacies in Coimbatore district. The findings of this study may support online pharmacy providers and policymakers to elevate the quality of online pharmacy services.

Review of Literature

Mwencha et al. (2014) looked at what use of online retailing services was meant for by perceived attributes, risk, and value. It was found that apparent qualities affect use example of customer through web-based retailers. The findings demonstrated that the uncertainty and outcomes associated with consumer activities are the focal point of perceived risk. Furthermore, the significant advantage of making an online purchase is its perceived value. Bashir et al. (2015) looked at what online shopping trends mean for how people purchase things. Online shopping behaviour is influenced by trust, protection, convenience, time, and item collection, according to this study. According to Bauboniene and Guleviciute (2015), consumers' online buying decisions are influenced by a variety of electronic commerce factors. These including cheaper and comparable prices, secure and fast delivery, protection, a wider range of choice, and convenience. Sam and Sharma (2015) looked into the variables that influence consumers' decisions to shop online or not. Further, it measured the extent to which the range of products accessibility can influence consumer decisions. A study conducted by Karmakar et al. (2021) observed that consumer awareness was positively associated with variables like age, education, income, and internet usage. The study also discovered that consumers who had used online pharmacies had higher awareness levels than those who had not used online pharmacies. Venkatesh et al. (2021) tracked down that the accessibility of online pharmacies, ease of use, and convenience were huge elements that affected consumer awareness. The study also discovered that consumers who had a positive experience with online pharmacies had higher awareness levels than those who had a negative experience. Age, education, income, and internet usage are some of the variables that positively influence consumer awareness towards online pharmacies. Consumers who have used online pharmacies have higher awareness levels than those who have not used it (Karmakar et al., 2021).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of the study are as follows;

1. To identify the factors that influence consumers' decision to use online pharmacies in Coimbatore.
2. To measure the level of consumer awareness, perception, preference, satisfaction and engaged behaviour towards online pharmacy.
3. To determine the role of demographic profile on purchase decisions of consumer towards online pharmacies.

		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Per Cent</i>
<i>Gender</i>	Male	280	61.3
	Female	177	38.7
<i>Age</i>	Below 20 Years	78	17.0
	Between 20 & 40 Years	158	34.6
	Between 40 & 60 Years	158	34.6
	Above 60 Years	63	13.8
<i>Educational Qualification</i>	Up to High School	63	13.8
	+2 or Diploma	67	14.7
	Bachelor's Degree	174	38.0
	Master's Degree	85	18.6
	Professional Degree	68	14.9
<i>Employment Status</i>	Employed full-time	70	15.3
	Employed part-time	85	18.6
	Self-Employed	122	26.7
	Unemployed	63	13.8
	Student	54	11.8
	Retired	63	13.8
<i>Annual Household Income</i>	Up to 300000	103	22.5
	Between 300000 & 600000	84	18.4
	Between 600000 & 900000	152	33.3

	Between 900000 & 1200000	58	12.7
	Above 1200000	60	13.1
<i>Location</i>	Urban	268	58.6
	Rural	189	41.4

Data Source: **Primary**

**Factors influencing consumers' decisions towards online pharmacies**

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank
Convenience	3.62	.486	2
Affordable price	3.67	.470	1
More options / choices	3.23	.423	10
Faster delivery	3.36	.497	8
User-friendly interface	3.10	.604	11
Available 24x7	3.55	.484	5
Provide required information	3.53	.498	6
Better services	3.43	.500	7
Privacy protection	2.83	.390	12
High quality healthcare products	3.57	.496	4
More payment options	3.29	.694	9
Refill reminders	2.50	.526	13
Customers' reviews & ratings	3.59	.497	3

Data Source: **Primary**

**Level of consumer perception**

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Convenient to use	4.12	.994
Trust the quality & authenticity	3.50	.501
Safe & effective option	3.50	.501
Provide wide range of options	3.79	1.138
Comfortable seeking advices	3.55	.963
User-friendly interface	3.95	.983
Adequately informed	3.60	1.246
Don't sell counterfeit medicines	3.67	1.295
Stringent quality control measures	3.29	1.124
Security & privacy of my personal & health information	3.22	1.046
Prices are reasonable	3.54	1.408
Provide greater customer service	3.81	1.155
Accuracy of information	3.76	1.124
Deliver medicines in a timely manner	3.67	1.295
Easy to compare prices & products	3.64	1.270
Clear & transparent return & refund policies	3.17	1.219
Comply with legal & regulatory standards	2.89	1.174
Timely responses from online pharmacy customer support	2.95	1.259

Data Source: **Primary**

Consumer Perception based on Age

Age	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05			
		1	2	3	4
Above 60 Years	63	2.2575			
Between 40 & 60 Years	158		2.6210		
Between 20 & 40 Years	158			4.3987	
Under 20 Years	78				4.6645
Sig.		1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

a. Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 96.731.

b. The group sizes are unequal. The harmonic mean of the group sizes is used. Type I error levels are not guaranteed.

Consumer Awareness based on Educational Qualifications

Educational Qualification	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05		
		1	2	3
Upto High School	63	2.2333		
+2 or Diploma	67	2.3269		
Bachelor's Degree	174		3.1580	
Masterr's Degree	85			4.0576
Professional Degree	68			4.0941
Sig.		.838	1.000	.994

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

a. Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 79.345.

b. The group sizes are unequal. The harmonic mean of the group sizes is used. Type I error levels are not guaranteed.

Correlation between Consumer Awareness and Consumer Perception

		Consumer Perception
Consumer Awareness	Pearson Correlation	.936**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	457

Data Source: **Primary**

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study reveal that online advertisement and search engine are the primary source of awareness among respondents. As these two sources accounted for more than 50 per cent of respondents gain awareness through these sources. There exist few literatures that supports this result. Consumers use search engines to search for information about specific healthcare products or online pharmacies (Li, Yiming, et al., 2019). Search engine optimization can be used to enhance website visibility which will enhance consumer awareness (Li, Yiming, et al., 2019), further, content marketing might be used to deliver enlightening articles, blogs, vlogs and resources about general health, fitness and wellness (Micklethwaite, Joanne, et al., 2018),targeted advertising can be utilised to focus on specific groups of consumers or specific health concerns, though not direct promoting medicines(Iaquinta, Anthony, et al., 2003). Hence, the result suggests that the online pharmacy marketers must focus on online advertising and search engine optimisation to disseminate information about the healthcare

products and services offered by them.

The analysis found that more than one-third of the respondents use online pharmacies rarely. Further, another one-third of them use them occasionally. Analysis of this study found that the top three factors influencing the consumers' decisions in relation to online pharmacies are affordable price, convenience and reviews and ratings. The analysis of variance exhibit that there exists a significant difference between diverse age group consumers in their awareness level about online pharmacies. The post-hoc test reveals that the awareness level decreases when the consumer's age increases. However, it emphasizes a growing trend of seniors becoming more comfortable with e-commerce due to increased internet access and user-friendly platforms. The perception level of consumers also has significant difference based on their age. The post-hoc test shows that the perception level declines when the age raises. The study reveals that significant difference in the perception of online pharmacies among varied age of the consumers the study also found that elder people, particularly those with chronic health issues, escalate the convenience and accessibility of online pharmacies. Home delivery removes need of travel and simplifies the usage of medicines, seniors are becoming more comfortable using online pharmacies.

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