

Dynamics of Online Shopping Trends for Fashion Products in Himachal Pradesh

Abstract:

The study was conducted on 1500 respondents of Shimla and Solan cities of Himachal Pradesh. The sample size for the study was selected using the convenience sampling technique, and a structured questionnaire was used to collect the data from the sample respondents. The data analysis was divided into two sections: descriptive analysis and inferential analysis. Appropriate statistical tools, e.g., confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), reliability analysis, validity analysis, mediation analysis, moderation analysis, structural equation modelling (SEM), t-tests, ANOVA, etc., were applied in order to achieve the stipulated objectives and hypotheses of the study. It is found that customer awareness of online shopping has a positive influence on their buying behaviour for fashion products, establishing a significant relationship. A positive correlation is identified between customer awareness of online shopping and their satisfaction level with the online shopping experience. Customer satisfaction is found to positively affect customer buying behaviour. Factors influencing online fashion purchases directly impact customer buying behaviour. Moreover, customer satisfaction serves as a mediator between influencing factors and customer buying behaviour.

Keywords: Online Shopping, Fashion Products, Perceived Challenges, Awareness Level, Influencing Factors.

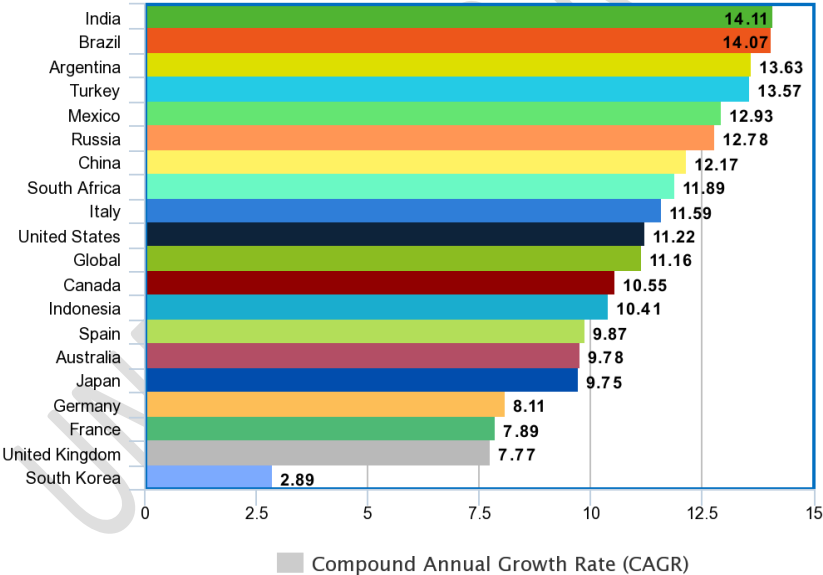
Introduction

India's digital journey is one of exuberance. The country has the world's second-largest internet population, with over 1.2 billion users in 2023. Of these, 1.05 billion users accessed the internet via their mobile phones. Mobile internet has been such a positive development in the country's digital progress, that in 2019, over 73 percent of India's total web traffic coming from mobile phones. But how did this come to be? Two main factors point to the sudden spike in mobile internet penetration in the south Asian country. Firstly, the increased availability of cheap smartphones since 2010 had created a fertile ground for digital adoption and literacy. Along with this, the Indian government understood the vitality of investments in its telecommunications sector and further opened the market with new telecom spectrum licenses (Basuroy, 2023). India's rapid digitization

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is evident through shopping behavior, digital payments, digital ad spending, content consumption on social media, and the growing Direct-to-Consumer (D2C) ecosystem. It already leads in digital ad spending at 22%, ahead of the UK (9.3%), the US (10%), Australia (5.8%), France (11%) and China (3.3%), the report said (Livemint, 2023). According to a recent report, India will rank first among 20 countries worldwide in retail e-commerce development between 2023 and 2027, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 14.11 percent. The Indian e-commerce market is currently valued at 63.17 billion U.S. dollars. Argentina and Brazil are also among the fastest-growing e-commerce markets globally, with a CAGR of over 13.63 percent and 14.07 percent, respectively. The global retail e-commerce CAGR was estimated at 11.16 percent during the same period (Pasquali, 2023).

Figure: 1: Retail E-Commerce Sales Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) from 2023 to 2027 (Forecast) by Country



Source: www.statista.com

Online shopping has grown rapidly in the previous decade, owing to the fact that it is a more cost-effective and easy method of purchase than traditional methods. Nonetheless, the transition from

one to another, more modern purchase method initially caused customers to be concerned about the following: leak of personal information, online fraud, inconsistency between the ordered product quality and the desired quality, unsuccessful shipping, and so on. Today, these fears are substantially smaller as individuals appreciate the benefits of online buying. The need to completely redefine the market role of online consumers has arisen as a result of the rapid advancement of information technology, ongoing digitization, and new market conditions. Online consumers, as market participants, have increased their involvement in the market's operation by assuming a new market role. Consumers are offered a variety of services, including buying, communicating, and creating (Ritzer & Miles, 2019).

Concept of Fashion Products

Fashion products encompass clothing, footwear, accessories, and even cosmetics, that go beyond mere utilitarian functions to express individual identity and embrace the zeitgeist of a particular era. They often reflect the creativity of designers and the desires of consumers to stay in tune with contemporary styles and personal expressions (Breward, 1995). In India, the concept of fashion products and its association with online shopping has undergone a remarkable transformation in recent years. Fashion, as a cultural and social expression, has always been an integral part of Indian society, reflecting its rich diversity, heritage, and evolving trends. Traditionally, fashion products were primarily associated with physical retail stores and local markets, where consumers could engage in a tactile and immersive shopping experience. However, with the advent of e-commerce and the rise of online shopping platforms, the concept of fashion products in India has expanded beyond geographical boundaries. Online shopping has opened up a vast digital marketplace, offering consumers access to a wide array of fashion products from both domestic and international brands. This has empowered consumers with greater choices and the ability to explore a diverse range of styles and designs without leaving the comfort of their homes.

Moreover, the rise of social media and influencer marketing has further shaped the concept of fashion products in India. Social media platforms have become significant avenues for fashion influencers and brands to showcase their latest collections, trends, and styling tips. Consumers are increasingly influenced by these online personalities, which has resulted in a more democratized fashion landscape, where individual tastes and preferences are celebrated. Social media provides a visual and interactive space for fashion brands to showcase their products, connect with

audiences, and collaborate with influencers. Consumer-generated content, such as outfit posts and reviews, plays a pivotal role in shaping trends and building trust (**Batra & Keller, 2016**). The online fashion industry in India has seen exponential growth, with e-commerce platforms dedicated exclusively to fashion products, such as Meesho, Myntra, Jabong, and Nykaa gaining immense popularity. Established e-commerce giants like Flipkart and Amazon have also heavily invested in their fashion segments, making it a crucial component of their overall business (**Joshi & Sahni, 2020**).

The concept of fashion products in India through online shopping has also been instrumental in promoting sustainable and ethical fashion practices. Consumers are now more conscious about the environmental and social impact of their fashion choices, leading to an increased demand for eco-friendly and ethical fashion brands. Despite the numerous advantages, online shopping for fashion products in India also faces certain challenges. One of the significant concerns is ensuring the authenticity and quality of products purchased online, as customers cannot physically examine the items before making a purchase. E-commerce platforms have worked to address these issues by offering easy return and exchange policies and providing detailed product descriptions and customer reviews (**Rai & Vishnoi, 2020**).

In conclusion, the concept of fashion products in India, driven by online shopping, has undergone a significant paradigm shift, offering consumers unparalleled choices, convenience, and accessibility. The combination of e-commerce, social media, and changing consumer preferences has shaped a vibrant and dynamic online fashion industry, contributing to the evolution of India's fashion landscape. As technology continues to advance and consumer behavior evolves, the concept of fashion products in India will continue to change, presenting exciting opportunities and challenges for the industry and consumers alike.

Review of Literature

Multiple research studies have been undertaken on the online buying behaviour of consumers globally from different perspectives, but only a limited number of relevant studies are comprehensively reviewed. This review would allow for a thorough understanding of the subject and the ability to identify knowledge gaps. A concise overview of the existing literature on several aspects of online buying, relevant to the proposed study, has been compiled at both national and international levels. The literature review on different dimensions of the topic is presented below.

The objective of this research is to investigate the purchasing behaviour of consumers in Himachal Pradesh, India, specifically in relation to branded ready-made clothes. The study also attempts to identify the factors that have an impact on consumers' purchasing decisions in this context. This study also aims to assess the level of consumer awareness about accessible brands and examine the variables that influence consumer purchase behaviour. The buying behaviour of consumers is influenced by both internal and external variables. The garment sector in Himachal Pradesh has potential chances for enterprises, since it remains relatively untapped. The proportion of consumers in Himachal Pradesh who exhibit a preference for both multinational and non-branded clothes is substantial. However, when comparing the preference between non-branded and multinational branded apparel, the latter is shown to be more favoured. The notion of multinational branded clothes, which was previously unfamiliar to customers in Himachal Pradesh, is now gaining familiarity (**Thakur et al., 2023**).

This study investigated literary and empirical approaches. The former featured a collective study of 128 source materials, while the latter was performed using a Qualtrics-generated online poll that had 113 legitimate respondents obtained by convenience and snowball sampling. To effectively market the poll, it was posted across several social media sites. The findings also demonstrated that self-discrepancy decreased self-perception by increasing the frequency of internal and outward social comparison. Low self-satisfaction was shown to be associated with increased obsessive-compulsive and impulsive purchase habits (**Rönkä, 2023**).

This confirmatory study focused on customer views about the sustainability of fashion labels as well as how these sentiments impact their purchase choices. The goal was to see whether the difference between attitudes and purchase behaviour existed among Croatian consumers to the same level that earlier research had shown. A study of 263 customers with buying power was performed to explore their perceptions, awareness of, and attitudes towards sustainability and eco-fashion. Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis were used to assess the acquired data. The findings indicate that participants had a favourable perspective regarding the long-term viability of fashion businesses. Furthermore, a favourable relationship was discovered between the significance of fashion brand sustainability and customer choices to purchase sustainable apparel goods (**Mandarić et al., 2022**).

This paper examines the ways in which Instagram offers fashion businesses a platform to launch their online stores and monitor customer feedback. Particularly in the previous ten years, social media has transformed marketing channels and approaches. As a result, a lot of businesses look for these new channels to establish connection with potential start-ups. They see these portals as contemporary, affordable means of connecting with potential customers. This case study is focused on how customers respond to the firms' Instagram marketing tactics and how they buy products depending on their age and gender, respectively. Consumer reactions to the Instagram platform are evaluated, and marketing tactics are looked at. The results imply that a few of the tactics are significantly improving customer perception. The findings also imply that Instagram activity has a beneficial impact on website and online store traffic for the business (Miglani, 2022).

In the context of clothing, the current research examines customers' behavioural intentions during COVID-19. Through a thorough review of the literature and a consumer survey, the research aims to establish connections between the purchasing patterns of consumers for garments in times of crisis or pandemic and during normal times. Through the use of the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) methodology, the study contributed to our understanding of consumers' transition towards online garment purchases. The researchers also looked at the relationship between gender and age groups and the frequency of apparel purchases during COVID-19, in addition to the sociodemographic information of working personnel. The dependent and independent variables do not significantly relate to one another, according to the results. Nonetheless, internet shopping had a beneficial impact throughout the epidemic (Kholiya et al., 2022).

The purpose of this research was to investigate the association between online shopping trends and consumer purchasing behaviour. A cross-sectional design was adopted in the investigation. The study's population included final-year undergraduate students from Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University Bauchi's faculties of Science, Engineering, Environmental Technology, Agriculture, Management Sciences, and Education. The number of students enrolled in the faculties totals 3,332 pupils. The Krejcie and Morgan table was used to generate a sample size of 336 using a simple random approach. After cleaning the data, only the responses of 293 people were utilised for analysis. For data analysis and hypothesis testing, descriptive statistics and Spearman's rank correlation were utilised. Empirical findings support the existence of a considerable positive association between the online shopping trend and consumer purchasing behaviour. The research

demonstrated that the online shopping trend (performance expectation and enabling circumstances) is strongly connected to consumer purchasing behaviour (**Kofoworola, 2022**).

Understanding consumer behaviour during the COVID-19 era was the aim of this research. The economy and consumer behaviour of India have been profoundly affected by the COVID-19 epidemic. The epidemic has caused a change in consumer purchasing behaviour from conventional, or offline, venues to internet platforms. This change aided in e-commerce sales, but they were forced to suspend their home delivery services during the first days of the state-wide lockdown due to the steadily rising number of cases in India. During the lockdown, economic activities were suspended, which had an adverse effect on consumer behaviour. Due to the nationwide requirement that consumers spend their money only on essentials, consumers' perception of money increased. The financial crisis has made customers more cautious when buying commodities on the open market. Through this research, we aimed to assess the effect of COVID-19 on consumer behaviour and purchase patterns as well as the legislative actions made by the federal and state governments to improve the pandemic situation (**S. Kumar et al., 2021**).

The identification of consumers and their purchasing habits is often the focus of research on consumer behaviour in online shopping. Determining who purchases what, where, when, and how is the goal of this research. These studies' findings may be used to solve marketing-related issues. Numerous studies on the buying habits of customers have been presented and applied to actual issues. It is thought that data mining methods are more useful for analysing client behaviour. This research aims to analyse the behaviour of those individuals who frequent online shopping sites and spend their time browsing various products. In addition, the number of individuals present and the proportion of those who are actively shopping would be considered. In this study, several queries are used to mine a certain website's database, leading to an analysis of consumer behaviour about online buying (**Gull & Pervaiz, 2018**).

The purpose of this article is to identify characteristics that influence customers' propensity to buy products from an online shop. The research looked at the characteristics that customers use to make online purchases. The author used main factor analysis to minimise the number of these criteria and came up with seven factors. To ensure that the factors are valid, the author performed confirmatory factor analysis, which demonstrated that the model comprised of the newly constructed factors matches the data well (**Bucko et al., 2018**).

Research Gap

The practice of buying goods online is no longer unusual. It is an established notion in foreign countries and is fast spreading in India too. The assessment of the literature showed that a large portion of the research on online shopping has been undertaken outside the country, and in India, the majority of it has been conducted in the past 5-6 years only. Furthermore, there have been limited research efforts, particularly in the domain of fashion products within the region of Himachal Pradesh. Hence, it is imperative to undertake such a study in Himachal Pradesh. In the various previous studies, the majority of researchers have examined the link between demographic characteristics and consumer behaviour, the relationship between perceived risk and consumer behaviour, and the association between website design and consumer behavior. Therefore, research needs to be conducted to account for the influence of all these relevant factors, including the effect of mediating and moderating variables on customers' mindsets and actions when making online purchases.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the demographic characteristics of customers.
2. To explore the level of customer awareness of online shopping trends towards fashion products.
3. To identify the factors influencing customer buying behaviour for online shopping of fashion products.
4. To investigate the perceived challenges involved in the online buying of fashion products.
5. To analyse the customer satisfaction level with online shopping for fashion products.
6. To ascertain the impact of online shopping on customer buying behaviour towards fashion products.

Research Methodology

The research methodology used for the study covers the research design, universe of the study, sampling technique, sample size, tools and techniques for data collection, and data analysis.

Research Design

A descriptive research design has been adopted in the current study. This kind of research design, as its name implies, describes a population's characteristics. It entails identifying the research problem and developing pertinent research hypotheses. Along with the content, setting, and methodology for the study, it details the goals of the investigation.

Universe of the Study

The study was conducted among the citizens of all 34 wards and 17 wards of the Municipal Corporation, Shimla, and Solan cities, respectively. The data for the study was collected from October to December of 2023.

Sampling Technique

The sample size was selected using the "Convenience Sampling Technique", based on scientific data from previous studies and the specific requirements of the present study.

Sample Size

In order to achieve the objectives of the study, the final sample size was set at 1500 respondents, i.e., 780 from Shimla and 720 from Solan cities. The proportionate participation of male and female respondents in the final sample from both cities was decided on the basis of the ratio of registered male and female populations in both cities.

Data Collection Method

For the present study, the primary data was collected with the help of structured questionnaire administered to sample respondents of Shimla and Solan cities. Additionally, secondary data was collected from books, journals, newspapers, websites, theses, and other government documents.

Research Instrument

The questionnaire was designed in "Google Forms," and the link to it was shared through social media platforms such as WhatsApp, emails, etc. All the variables of the study were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, and the questionnaire was divided into six sections as per the objectives of the study.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was divided into two sections: descriptive analysis and inferential analysis. Appropriate statistical tools, e.g., confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), reliability analysis, validity analysis, mediation analysis, moderation analysis, structural equation modelling (SEM), t-tests, ANOVA, etc., were applied in order to achieve the stipulated objectives and hypotheses of the study.

Results and Findings

- It was found that the majority of participants, i.e., 777 (51.8%), are between the ages of 18 and 25 years.
- Out of the total sample, there are 818 men (54.5%) and 682 women (45.5%).
- The majority of participants, 43.3% (650 individuals), have obtained their bachelor's degree.
- Out of total sample i.e., 695 (46.3%) are students, followed by private employees, i.e., 449 (29.9%), and 185 (12.3%) are businessmen.
- It was found that the majority of participants, i.e., 969 (64.6%), are unmarried.
- Out of the total sample, the majority of participants, i.e., 925 (61.7%), belonged to the nuclear family.
- The data demonstrates that the largest proportion, accounting for 26.80% (402 participants), is associated with households earning a monthly income exceeding Rs. 65000.
- Out of the total sample, the majority of respondents, i.e., 1262 (84.1%), reported using smartphones as their primary means of accessing the internet, indicating a strong preference for mobile connectivity. Laptops are the second most popular choice, with 207 (13.8%) respondents, while desktop computers are the least utilised device, representing only 2.1% (31 respondents) of the sample.
- It has been established that around 609 (40.6%) of the participants spend 2-3 hours online every day, with 474 (31.6%) reporting spending 4-5 hours online.
- The majority of participants, i.e., 714 (47.6%), have been actively shopping online for the past 4-6 years, and 580 (38.7%) for the past 1-3 years.
- It is concluded that the majority of participants reported shopping online on a monthly basis, accounting for 52.3% (785 participants) of the total sample.

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- It is inferred that 450 participants (30%) stated that they visit actual retail stores before buying online, indicating a substantial preference for in-person shopping. 639 participants (42.6%) stated that they occasionally visit physical retail stores before buying online, indicating a mix of buying strategies.
- It can be concluded that the majority of participants have expressed a positive attitude towards WhatsApp (mean value: 4.37), Facebook (mean value: 4.23), and Instagram (4.19), with them being the 'most favourite' social media websites among the rest, whereas Tumblr (mean value: 2.81) has been ranked as the 'least favourite' social media website.
- It was found that the majority of participants, i.e., 1189 (79.3%), strongly agree on the point that they use the Internet for communication purposes.
- It can be inferred that the majority of participants prefer to buy products in the clothing segment (mean value: 4.42), followed by accessories (mean value: 3.83), and footwear (3.79). Whereas, jewelry is considered the least preferred item among the participants, with a mean value of 3.05.
- The majority of participants, i.e., 990 individuals (66%), preferred UPI payments for online shopping.
- It can be concluded that the majority of participants have expressed a positive attitude towards Amazon (mean value: 4.63), Flipkart (mean value: 4.30), Myntra (4.24), Meesho (mean value: 3.72), and Nykaa (3.62) being the top five most favourite online shopping websites among all, whereas Shopclues (mean value: 2.97) has been ranked as the least favourite online shopping website.
- It was discovered that the majority of participants sources of awareness about online shopping websites came from friend recommendations (mean value: 4.21), followed by social media advertisements (mean value: 3.85), and television advertisements (mean value: 3.83). Whereas, email advertisements (mean value: 3.30) have been classified as the least important source of awareness about online shopping websites.
- This research has identified several significant factors that participants consider before doing online shopping. These factors include time savings (mean value: 4.51), exclusive availability of products (mean value: 4.16), price discounts (mean value: 4.15), variety of product choices (mean value: 4.11), easy payment options (mean value: 4.10).

- Although to some extent every factor is considered a perceived challenge while doing online shopping, there are still certain significant factors that are identified and ranked among the top five perceived challenges by the participants, such as the inability to touch, feel, or see the actual product in order to access its actual quality (mean value: 4.57), fear of misuse of personal information entered on the shopping website (mean value: 4.11), fear that the product delivered might differ from what was advertised on the website (mean value: 4.04), fear of online financial fraud (mean value: 3.99), and doubt on the actual performance of the product (mean value: 3.91).
- After the analysis, the five most significant factors in calculating participants' satisfaction level towards online shopping are as follows: ease of using websites (mean value: 4.64), product categories (mean value: 4.19), discount offers (mean value: 4.04), payment options (including UPI, debit card, credit card, EMI, and COD) (mean value: 4.00), and return and cancellation policy (mean value: 3.92).
- Approximately three-quarters of the participants, i.e., 1127 (75.1%), expressed substantial satisfaction with their entire experience of shopping online. The mean total satisfaction score is 4.101, indicating a predominantly high level of contentment among the participants, with most of them expressing positive satisfaction.
- After the analysis, the five most significant factors identified in reference to the impact of online shopping trends on customer buying behaviour towards online shopping are as follows: increase in shopping frequency (mean value: 4.53), easy comparison of price (mean value: 4.22), easy comparison of products (mean value: 4.12), latest product designs (mean value: 4.05), and unplanned purchase (mean value: 4.02).
- Out of the 1,500 participants, most (84.8%) stated that their online buying habits have increased post COVID-19. It suggests a notable shift towards greater online purchasing.
- At least 720 people (48.0%) stated they recommend online shopping to others "Always." A significant portion, 664 (44.3%), said "Sometimes," while 116 (7.7%) said "Rarely." It implies that most respondents recommended online shopping to others regularly or occasionally.
- Out of the 1,500 participants, 959 (63.9%) expressed that online shopping adversely affects the sales of shopkeepers, whereas 176 (11.7%) had a contrary opinion, indicating no such

impact. Moreover, 365 (24.3%) participants expressed uncertainty or neutrality, indicating that the impact could be ambiguous or subject to change.

- Out of the total sample, 75.1% (1127 participants) held a favourable perspective, affirming that online shopping possesses significant potential. Only a small fraction, specifically 7.6% (114 participants), expressed a pessimistic viewpoint, asserting that internet shopping lacks substantial potential in the future. Conversely, a total of 17.3% (259 participants) expressed uncertainty or readiness toward the idea, indicating their response as "May be." The greater frequency of positive replies suggests that most respondents hold an overall optimistic view of the potential of online shopping.

Hypotheses Results

The null hypotheses were formulated for the investigation, and the outcomes obtained are shown below:

Table: 1 Summary of Hypotheses Results

Summary of Hypotheses Results		
Null Hypothesis	Statistical Test	Results
H0₁: Customer awareness of online shopping does not influence their buying behaviour towards fashion products.	Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)	Null Hypothesis Rejected
H0₂: Customer awareness of online shopping does not influence their satisfaction level with online shopping.	Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)	Null Hypothesis Rejected
H0₃: Customer satisfaction has no significant effect on customer buying behaviour.	Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)	Null Hypothesis Rejected
H0₄: Factors influencing online fashion purchases do not have a direct positive effect on customer buying behaviour.	Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)	Null Hypothesis Rejected
H0₅: Customer satisfaction does not mediate the relationship between influencing factors and customer buying behaviour.	Mediation Analysis	Null Hypothesis Rejected

H0₆: Customer satisfaction does not moderate the relationship between perceived challenges and customer buying behaviour.	Moderation Analysis	Null Hypothesis Rejected
H0₇: There is no significant gender-wise difference in customer buying behaviour.	Independent Samples t-Test	Null Hypothesis Rejected
H0₈: There is no significant age-wise difference in customer buying behaviour.	ANOVA Test	Null Hypothesis Rejected
H0₉: There is no significant education-wise difference in customer buying behaviour.	ANOVA Test	Null Hypothesis Rejected
H0₁₀: There is no significant occupation-wise difference in customer buying behaviour.	ANOVA Test	Null Hypothesis Rejected
H0₁₁: There is no significant marital-status wise difference in customer buying behaviour.	Independent Samples t-Test	Null Hypothesis Rejected
H0₁₂: There is no significant family-type difference in customer buying behaviour.	Independent Samples t-Test	Null Hypothesis Rejected
H0₁₃: There is no significant family monthly income difference in customer buying behaviour.	ANOVA Test	Null Hypothesis Accepted

Conclusion

The results of this study reveal several important findings. Firstly, it is evident that customer awareness of online shopping has a positive influence on their buying behaviour for fashion products, establishing a significant relationship. Furthermore, a positive correlation is identified between customer awareness of online shopping and their satisfaction level with the online shopping experience. Customer satisfaction is found to positively affect customer buying behaviour. Factors influencing online fashion purchases directly impact customer buying behaviour. Moreover, customer satisfaction serves as a mediator between influencing factors and customer buying behaviour. However, it does not moderate the relationship between opinion about perceived challenges and customer buying behaviour. The study also highlights significant variations in customer buying behaviour based on gender, age, education, occupation, marital status, family type, and family monthly income. These findings shed light on the complex

dynamics of online shopping trends and their impact on customer buying behaviour in the context of fashion products in Himachal Pradesh.

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