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NICHE E-COMMERCE AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF CONSUMPTION BEHAVIOUR AMONG SEMI-URBAN WOMEN: A FIELD INSIGHT FROM KERALA

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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of e-commerce has greatly changed the consumer behaviour, especially among women. This paper discusses how the niche e-commerce sites have affected the consumption behaviour of women in semi-urban area in Kerala. Niche platforms, which specialise in a specific type of product like fashion, beauty and wellness, provide personalised experiences that influence a purchasing decision. The research will be grounded on the primary data gathered on 100 participants in a purposive sampling. The data were interpreted using analytical tools like percentage analysis, chi-square tests, correlation heatmap etc. The results indicate that women prefers niche because they save time, have a variety of products, convenience, and personalised services. Respondents were found to have high satisfaction and a high future usage intention. The research highlights the increasing role of niche e-commerce in the development of modern consumer behaviour and offers guidance to marketers and researchers.

KEY WORDS*: Niche Sites, e-Commerce, Consumption pattern, Semi-Urban Women*

1. INTRODUCTION

The high growth in digital technology and the availability of the internet has greatly changed consumer behaviour in the whole world. Among the most prominent changes in this transformation is the rise of e-commerce that has changed the face of consumer search, evaluation and purchase of products. Over the past couple of years, the field has developed a new niche, niche e-commerce, which concentrates on narrow product lines and niche consumer markets. In contrast to the general e-commerce sites that sell a wide range of goods, the niche e-commerce sites focus on a particular segment, including fashion, beauty, health and wellness, and maternity products and are therefore able to better meet the particular needs of consumers (Rao, 2014). Women comprise a huge portion of online consumers and are critical in the household and personal purchasing decisions. There are many factors that affect how they consume the products which include quality of the products, their price sensitivity, convenience, brand trust, and information availability (Bhatnagar, 2015). As smartphones and internet services continue to penetrate, women of various ages are involved in online shopping. The latter has particularly become popular with women who prefer to use niche e-commerce websites because they offer them with a personalised shopping experience, information about products, and easy user interfaces (Verma, 2013).

Available literature indicates that niche online stores have a significant impact on the purchasing behaviour of women because they streamline the purchase decision-making process and minimise information overload. The availability of specialised products, customer reviews, and targeted marketing strategies enhances consumer confidence and satisfaction (Singh et al., 2024). Moreover, the ease of returning, secure payment systems, and home delivery are other characteristics that enhance better convenience, rendering these platforms more appealing to women consumers (Agarwal and Gupta, 2022). Consequently, niche e-commerce is not merely shifting buying behaviours but is also transforming consumption patterns due to its tendency to foster more frequent and knowledgeable buying decisions. Although the niche e-commerce is increasingly becoming a significant issue, there is a significant research gap in the current literature. The majority of the previous research has been based on the general online shopping behaviour or has been carried out on a larger national or international scale. There is scanty research that has been conducted to explore localised effects of niche e-commerce sites on women consumption behaviour especially in semi-urban or rural settings. As well, the empirical evidence on the interaction of factors likes convenience, product diversity, trust, and digital awareness contribution to the decision-making of women in particular areas are limited. In this regard, the current study will seek to examine how the niche e-commerce sites

affect the consumption pattern of women in Semi-urban region. The research aims to determine the major reasons behind the preference to use niche platforms, analyse a shift in the purchasing behaviour, and assess the satisfaction rate of women consumers. The study will help fill the current research gap at the local level and understand the dynamic nature of women and consumption behaviour online better and be of great benefit to marketers, researchers, and e-commerce business.

1.1 Research Problem: Although niche e-commerce platform is rapidly growing, there is a lack of research at the regional level particularly in semi-urban locale on the effect that the platform has on the consumption pattern of women. So the research aims at investigating the degree to which such platforms affect purchasing behaviour, preferences, and satisfaction of women consumers.

1.2 Purpose of the study

The main objectives behind the study are:

- To study the understanding and use trend of niche e-commerce sites among women customers.
- To examine the consumption behaviour and critical influencing factors in the purchase choice on niche e-commerce sites.
- To measure the extent of satisfaction and intentions of women consumers to use niche e-commerce sites in the future.

1.3 Scope and limitation of the Study: The study is limited to the women consumers in the Semi-urban area (Nadapuram panchayath in Kerala). It concentrates on their purchasing behaviour, tastes and satisfaction with niche e-commerce sites.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The fast growth of e-commerce has dramatically altered the consumer behaviour specifically among women who are very important in making consumer and personal buying decisions. Over the last few years, niche e-commerce sites have become a specialised niche in online retail and target a niche product and niche consumer markets. These platforms have been receiving growing interest as they can provide personalised experiences, instils trust, and improve convenience, making an impact on the consumption patterns of women. According to a systematic review by Khursheed and Ranjan (2025), women consumers place great importance on personalisation, a secure payment system, and a reliable online experience. Niche platforms are more specialised, and therefore, they make the decision-making process easier and less risky, hence creating a stronger consumer trust. On the same note, Madhura et al. (2024) also highlight the importance of the digital experience as easy-to-use interfaces, the description of the product, personalised suggestions, and customer feedback contribute greatly to consumer confidence. The purchase decision is further influenced by social factors, including peer recommendations, influencer marketing, and online word-of-mouth, but issues of privacy and the safety of payments and validity of the review are still obstacles. Lakshmi et al. (2024) find product customisation, relevance, and payment security as the driving force of preference of niche platforms, with higher levels of satisfaction than in general market places. Poswal and Tanwar (2024) emphasise the role of influencer marketing and expert reviews in purchase intentions in the context of digital marketing. Their results imply that authenticity and product information enhance trust and create brand loyalty. In line with this, Singh et al. (2024) emphasise that individualisation and easy interfaces can not only enhance the satisfaction but also promote repeat purchases and customer loyalty.

Gupta (2024) notes that product offering clarity and specific target marketing strategies help to minimise confusion in the purchase process and Das and Roy (2023) point out that customer engagement and loyalty are increased through personalised experiences and targeted promotions. Likewise, Sharma (2023) observes that niche platforms are effective when it comes to serving specific lifestyle and personal care needs, leading to an increase in the satisfaction of women consumers. These findings are further supported in previous research. According to Nair (2022) and Agarwal and Gupta (2022), time-saving and convenience are the key drivers of women, especially working professionals, to use niche e-commerce platforms. According to Mehta (2021) and Kumar and Anitha (2021), detailed product information, expert advice, and personal recommendations are crucial in boosting consumer trust and interest. A study by Subha and Jeyakumari (2020) and Joseph (2020) highlights the importance of convenience, pricing, and the availability of products, whereas Kaur (2020) highlights the increased impact of social media and targeted advertising on consumer behaviour. Research by Singh et al. (2019), Rani and Kumar (2019), and Suresh and Devi (2019) shows that the quality of a product, its security, and privacy are the key aspects of establishing trust and creating repurchase intention of customers. Early studies by Nazir and Haq (2018), Tamilarasi (2016), and Bhatnagar (2015) determine that the determinants of online shopping behaviour are the critical role of specialisation, ease of use, and perceived usefulness. Previous works by Rao (2014), Verma (2013), Malhotra (2012), and Srinivasan (2011) also emphasise the significance of personalisation, usability, and trust to improve customer satisfaction and loyalty. All in all, it is evident in the literature that niche e-commerce platforms have a substantial impact on the consumption trend of women. The personalisation, trust, convenience, product specialisation, and the digital experience are all important in influencing purchasing behaviour. Such sites offer a more convenient, trustworthy, and pleasing shopping experience than regular e-commerce sites. However, the limited availability of localised studies especially semi-urban contexts highlights an ample research gap, emphasising the need for further empirical investigation, particularly in specific regional contexts.

2.1 Definitions and operational terms: E-commerce refers to online buying and selling of goods and services. Niche e-commerce focuses on specialised markets catering to specific customer segments. Consumption pattern refers to how consumers choose, purchase, and use goods and services. It is influenced by income, lifestyle, preferences, and social factors. Women consumers prioritise quality, convenience, trust, and value for money. The rise of digital platforms has significantly altered their purchasing habits.

3. RESEARCH MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper is based on the descriptive research design which will investigate how niche e-commerce platforms affect the consumption behaviour of women. The study relies on the primary and secondary data sources to make the study

comprehensive in analysis of the topic. The first source of data was a structured questionnaire, which was specially created to gather data on demographic profile, awareness, usage habits, buying behaviour, and levels of satisfaction with women customers who use niche e-commerce sites. The questionnaire also contained close-ended questions and multiple-choice questions to make them easy to analyse and interpret. Secondary data were also collected using appropriate books, journals, research articles and online sources and this gave theoretical support and background to the study. The research was carried out in Semi-urban location (Nadapuram panchayath, in Kerala State) where the focus was on women consumers who are highly active users of niche e-commerce websites.

The study was done with a sample of 100 respondents. Purposive sampling was the sampling method used because it enabled the researcher to focus on a particular group of women that have experience with niche e-commerce websites and thus guarantee the applicability of responses. To analyse data, the percentage analysis, correlation analysis, and chi-square tests were used as the main statistical tools to make a sense of the data. Tables and charts were used to present the results, allowing seeing clearly patterns and trends. This technique assisted to determine the main forces at work to shape consumer behaviour, including convenience, product variety, and satisfaction levels. In general, the methodology offers a logical system of examination of influence of niche e-commerce platforms on consumption pattern of women, which makes the results reliable and clear.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This section provides the analysis and interpretation of primary data gathered on women respondents in Nadapuram Panchayath to explore how the niche e-commerce platforms affect their consumption behaviour. This is done through the analysis of descriptive statistics like percentage analysis and the analysis is backed by tables, charts and graphical representations to make it easy to understand. Major points, such as demographic profile, awareness, usage behaviour, spending patterns, influencing factors, and satisfaction levels, are addressed in a systematic manner. Inferential tests like Chi-square tests and regression analysis are also employed to enhance the findings and thus give a better insight relate to variables and give a significant idea about the consumer behaviour.

4.1 Demographic Profile

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Particulars	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	Below 20	15	15%
	20–30	68	68%
	31–40	14	14%
	Above 40	4	4%
Education	SSLC	17	17%
	Higher Secondary	13	13%
	Undergraduate	43	43%
	Postgraduate	25	25%
	Others	2	2%
Occupation	Student	46	46%
	Employed	25	25%
	Self-employed	3	3%
	Homemaker	22	22%
	Others	4	4%

(Source: Primary Data)

The demography of the respondents gives crucial clues on the nature of women shoppers using the niche e-commerce sites in the semi-urban area. The statistics show that a big proportion of the respondents (68 per cent) are aged between 20 and 30, then 15 per cent under 20, and 14 per cent between 31 and 40. The number of those over 40 years is only a small percentage (4%). This is a clear indication that the young women form the largest customer base of niche e-commerce websites, as they are more digital literate, adaptable, and conversant with technologies of online shopping. Regarding the level of education, a significant percentage of the respondents is well-educated, with 43% of the undergraduates and 25% of the postgraduates. These groups combined make up 68 percent of the total sample, which is a good representation of educated consumers. This indicates that an increase in the educational attainment leads to the rise of the awareness and acceptance of niche e-commerce platform since educated people are more likely to seek and use digital services efficiently. The occupational distribution shows that students constitute the biggest proportion (46%), and then employed women (25%) and homemakers (22%). The superiority of students and working women as the representatives of the target audience emphasises the relevance of convenience and time-saving options provided by niche e-commerce websites since these categories of individuals tend to have a busy schedule. Home makers also take a huge proportion, meaning that online platforms are making more of themselves and are becoming useful in occupational groups. In general, the demographic analysis indicates that young, educated, and digitally conscious women are mostly consumers of niche e-commerce platforms, which underlines the importance of socio-economic factors in influencing online consumption behaviour.

4.2 Semi-Urban Women Consumer behaviour towards Niche e-commerce platforms

This section (table 2) presents a consolidated picture of important aspects of women consumer behaviour towards the niche e-commerce platforms. It summarises women consumers' responses related to the awareness, usage patterns, preferences, the factors influencing, their satisfaction levels, and future behavioural intentions, providing a clear insight for understanding how these platform shapes the consumer behaviour of semi-urban women consumers.

Table2: Summary of Awareness, Behaviour, Influencing Factors, Satisfaction and Future Intentions

Category	Particulars	Percentage (%)
Awareness & Usage	Awareness of niche e-commerce	98%
	Usage period (1–3 years)	60%
	Increased usage	73%
	Popular platforms	Myntra, Purple, Mamaearth
Consumption Behaviour	Fashion preference	42%
	Beauty products	38%
	Spending ₹1000–3000	Majority
	Always compare prices	72%
Influencing Factors	Time-saving	38%
	Product variety	33%
	Convenience	16%
Satisfaction Level	Overall satisfaction	86%
	Product quality	84%
	Delivery & service	88%
	Return policies	81%
Future Behaviour	Continue usage	92%
	Willing to recommend	96%

(Source: Primary Data)

Table 2 presents a comprehensive overview of consumer behaviour toward niche e-commerce platforms. The findings indicate a high level of market penetration, with notable consumer acceptance reflected in strong awareness (98%) and substantial usage (73%). The majority of users having 1–3 years of experience suggests that, while niche e-commerce is relatively recent, it is rapidly emerging as a significant and growing segment in the digital marketplace. The consumption behaviour shows that there is a strong inclination to fashion and beauty products, moderate levels of spending (between ₹ 1000 and 3000) and high levels of price comparison (72%), which points to rational and informed buying behaviour. Among the determining factors, the time-saving and the variety of products come into the foreground, emphasising the consideration of convenience and specialisation. These platforms are operationally efficient as satisfaction levels are significantly high in all aspects, especially delivery and customer service (88%). In addition, high future intentions (92% willing to continue, 96% ready to recommend) are signs of high customer loyalty and positive word-of-mouth. On the whole, the results prove that niche e-commerce sites are effective to meet consumer expectations and have significant influence on purchasing behaviour.

4.3 Testing of hypotheses

There are two hypotheses set for the study:

Ho1: *There is no statistically significant association between age and usage trend of niche e-commerce platforms.*

Ho2: *There is no significant relationship between product reviews and price comparison behaviour*.

4.3.1 Chi-Square Tests 1: Age and Usage trend of Niche platforms

A Chi-square test of independence is applied here to examine whether there existing a significant association between the age of semi-urban women and their usage trend of niche e-commerce platforms. Since both the variables are categorical in nature, this test enables to determine whether the differences in usage behaviour across various age groups are statistically significant or merely due to chance.

Table 3: Chi-Square summery 1

Test	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	0.10	3	0.992
Likelihood Ratio	0.11	3	0.990
Linear-by-Linear Association	0.02	1	0.887
N of Valid Cases	100		

Interpretation: p-value (0.992) > 0.05,

Inference: *There is no statistically significant association between age and usage trend of niche e-commerce platforms.* The Chi-square test result indicates that there is no statistically significant association between age of consumers and the usage trend of niche e-commerce platforms, as the estimated p-value exceeds the 5 per cent significance level. This implies that variations in usage pattern across different age groups are not sufficiently strong to establish a meaningful relationship. Although the descriptive analysis shows that younger women respondents (20–30 years) form the majority of users, this dominance may be attributed to sample composition structure rather than true behavioural differences. Therefore, the usage trends of niche e-commerce platforms appear to be relatively consistent across the various age categories.

4.3.2 Chi-Square Test 2: Reviews and Price Comparison Behaviour

The Chi-square test is applied to examine the association between the importance given to the online product reviews and purchase behaviour, in particular to price comparison practices. This analysis helps to identify whether the reliance on product reviews significantly influences patterns of decision-making among semi-urban women consumers in niche e-commerce platforms.

Table 4: Chi-square summary 2

Test	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	12.48	1	0.0004
Continuity Correction	9.85	1	0.0017
Likelihood Ratio	11.02	1	0.0009
Fisher's Exact Test	—	—	0.001
N of Valid Cases	100		

P-value (0.0004) < 0.05, *Highly Significant.*

Inference: There is a strong statistically significant relationship between online product reviews and price comparison behaviour among women consumers. The Chi-square test results shows a statistically significant relationship between the level of importance attached to online product reviews and buying decisions, particularly price comparison behaviour, as the p-value is less than the 5% significance level. This implies that the respondents who consider product reviews important are more likely to engage in informed buying decision-making, such as comparing product prices before buying. The result highlights the crucial role of product (online) reviews and ratings in reducing the uncertainty and enhancing the trust in online shopping practices. It also suggests that information-based factors strongly influence consumer buying behaviour, reinforcing the importance of transparent and reliable review systems in the niche e-commerce platforms.

4.4 Correlation analysis of key variables influencing women consumer behaviour

The correlation heatmap is employed to examine the strength of association and the direction of relationships among key variables influencing women's consumption behaviour and pattern on the niche e-commerce platforms. By visually presenting correlation coefficients between the variables such as usage trends, spending behaviour, satisfaction level, influencing factors, and reliance on online reviews, the heatmap provides a clear view of how these variables are interrelated. This analysis helps to identify strong associations, supporting the interpretation of the statistical results and provides deeper insights into the patterns underlying women consumer decision-making.

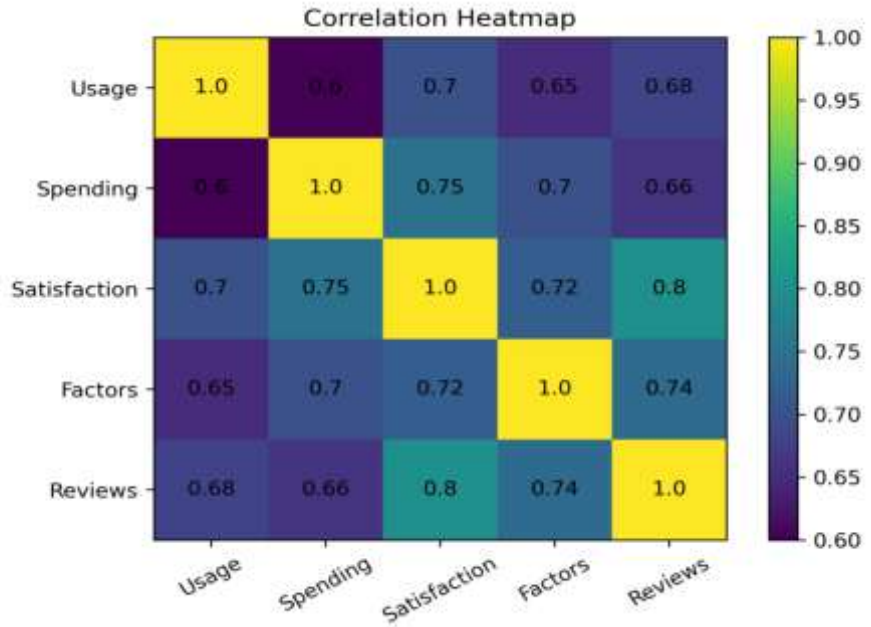


Figure 1: Correlation Heatmap showing relationships among usage, spending behaviour, satisfaction, influencing factors, and review dependence.

The correlation heatmap reveals strong positive relationships among key variables influencing semi-urban women consumption behaviour on the niche e-commerce platforms. Satisfaction level shows a high correlation with product reviews (0.80) and spending behaviour (0.75), shows that informed decision-making and the purchase value significantly enhances user experience. Usage pattern is moderately correlated with the satisfaction (0.70) and the influencing factors (0.65), suggests that convenience and product varieties drives the platform engagement. The strong inter-association among the variables confirms that women consumer behaviour is multidimensional**,** where the functional benefits, information access and availability, and user experience jointly shape

consumer satisfaction and loyalty. This supports the regression results and strengthens the empirical validity of the study.

4.5 Discussion

The data analysis section clearly demonstrates that the niche e-commerce platforms have a strong influence on consumption behaviour of semi-urban women consumers. High awareness levels and increasing usage trends indicate wider acceptance and increasing dependence on these niche platforms. The findings indicates that women consumers prefer niche platforms basically for fashion and aesthetic products, with the moderate and rational spending patterns supported by the active product price comparison. Vital factors such as time-saving, availability of product variety, and the convenience in transactions significantly affects platform preference.

Moreover, the high satisfaction levels across the product quality, timely delivery, and prompt customer service reflect the efficiency and reliability on these niche platforms. The strong behavioural intention to continue the usage and willingness to recommend these platforms and products further highlight the deepest customer loyalty and positive customer experience. Overall, the statistical analysis confirms that niche e-commerce platforms effectively meet consumer expectations and play a vital role in shaping the modern consumption patterns among semi-urban women.

5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study concludes that niche e-commerce platforms have a significant and positive influence on the consumption patterns of women consumers. These results indicate that these platforms are highly aware and are increasingly being used, which means that they are becoming more valuable in the digital marketing environment. Niche platforms are highly favoured by women consumers, especially young and educated consumers, as they provide niche products, convenience and personalised shopping experience. The pre-eminence of fashion and beauty category, as well as moderate expenditure behaviour and regular price comparisons, are indicators of rational and informed consumer decision-making. The analysis also indicates that the elements of time-saving, variety of products and convenience are critical and can determine the decision to make purchases. The fact that consumer satisfaction is high in terms of product quality, delivery services, and customer support implies that niche e-commerce sites are effective when it comes to fulfilling consumer expectations. Moreover, the high customer loyalty and positive word-of-mouth shown by the intense desire to be used again and the intention to recommend such platforms are the keys to the long-term growth.

The research has some significant implications to marketers and e-commerce companies. It posits that firms need to work on improving the level of personalisation, retain product quality and efficient delivery and returns systems to ensure customer satisfaction. Consumer trust can also be enhanced by increasing the effectiveness of review mechanisms and establishing trust by using safe payment methods. Policy-wise, enhanced digital awareness and infrastructure can promote its further use, particularly in semi-urban and rural regions. Generally, the study offers very important information on changing consumer behaviour and forms a basis in future research in the area of niche e-commerce especially in the local and regional context.

Ethical Approval and Consent

Before collecting any data, the institutional ethics committee gave its approval. Participants were told about the reason for the study, its boundaries, and that they could take part willingly. Consent was given by the participants in every case, whether it was written or spoken. Data were protected by anonymity and confidentiality, and they were kept safe in line with the university's data policies.

Disclaimer (Artificial Intelligence)

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc.) and text-to-image generators have been used during writing or editing of this manuscript.

Competing Interests

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

Authors' Contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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