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A STUDY ON ETHICAL ISSUES FACED BY THE CONSUMERS TOWARDS ONLINE SHOPPING IN COIMBATORE

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ABSTRACT

Online shopping has become an important part of modern consumer behaviour due to the rapid growth of internet technology and smartphone usage. Consumers prefer online platforms because they provide convenience, time saving, variety of products, and competitive prices. However, despite these benefits, consumers face several ethical issues while shopping online.

The present study focuses on analysing the ethical issues faced by consumers towards online shopping in Coimbatore. The study examines problems such as misleading advertisements, counterfeit products, hidden charges, delayed delivery, and privacy concerns. The research is based on primary data collected from 131 respondents using a structured questionnaire. Convenience sampling method was used to select the respondents. Percentage analysis and tabular presentation were used to interpret the collected data.

The findings reveal that many consumers have experienced ethical issues while purchasing products online. Misleading advertisements and product quality differences were identified as major concerns. The study concludes that online companies should maintain transparency, follow ethical business practices, and improve consumer protection to enhance customer satisfaction and trust.

KEYWORDS: *Online Shopping, Ethical Issues, Consumer Behaviour, E-Commerce, Consumer Trust*

INTRODUCTION

Online shopping has become one of the most popular methods of purchasing goods and services in the digital era. With the increasing use of internet technology and smartphones, consumers prefer online platforms because of convenience, time saving, and availability of a wide variety of products.

E-commerce platforms provide several advantages such as product comparison, easy payment methods, and doorstep delivery. Due to these benefits, online shopping has gained significant popularity among consumers.

However, several ethical issues exist in online shopping. Consumers often face problems such as misleading advertisements, fake product reviews, counterfeit products, hidden charges, delayed delivery, and difficulties in product return or refund processes. These issues affect consumer trust and satisfaction.
Therefore, it is important to study the ethical issues faced by consumers in online shopping and understand their impact on consumer behaviour.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To identify ethical issues faced by consumers in online shopping.
- To analyse consumer perception towards online shopping practices.
- To examine the impact of ethical issues on consumer trust.
- To suggest measures to improve ethical practices in e-commerce.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- The study is limited to consumers in Coimbatore.
- The sample size is limited to 131 respondents.
- The research is based on respondents' opinions.
- Time constraints limited the scope of the study.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study focuses on consumers who frequently use online shopping platforms. It analyses ethical issues related to product quality, pricing transparency, delivery services, and privacy concerns. The study helps understand consumer perception and suggests improvements in ethical practices.

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STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Online shopping provides many benefits to consumers, but it also creates several ethical challenges. Consumers often face problems such as misleading advertisements, counterfeit products, hidden charges, fake reviews, and delayed delivery.
These unethical practices reduce consumer trust and affect their overall shopping experience. Therefore, it is necessary to analyse the ethical issues faced by consumers and understand their perception towards online shopping.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

- **R. Kumar (2021)** in his article ***"Consumer Trust and Ethical Issues in Online Shopping in India"*** has studied the ethical challenges faced by online consumers. The objective of the study is to examine the impact of privacy concerns, misleading advertisements, and counterfeit products on consumer trust. 250 samples were used for the study and Convenience Sampling method was adopted to select the respondents. The findings are based on percentage analysis and regression techniques. The study concluded that data security and transparent return policies significantly improve consumer confidence in online shopping platforms.
- **S. Priya & M. Lakshmi (2020)** in their article ***"Customer Satisfaction towards E-Commerce Services in Tamil Nadu"*** have analyzed the problems faced by online shoppers. The objective of the study is to identify the major issues affecting customer satisfaction in online purchases. 200 respondents were selected using Simple Random Sampling method. The findings revealed that delayed delivery, refund complications, and poor product quality negatively affect customer satisfaction.
- **Arun Kumar (2019)** in his study ***"Impact of Online Reviews on Consumer Buying Behaviour"*** examined the role of fake reviews and ratings in influencing purchase decisions. The objective is to analyze how manipulated reviews create ethical concerns in e-commerce. 180 samples were selected through Convenience Sampling. The findings showed that many consumers depend on online reviews before purchasing, and fake reviews mislead customers, reducing trust in online platforms.
- **Divya R. (2022)** in her article ***"Data Privacy and Security Issues in Online Transactions"*** studied consumer awareness regarding cyber security risks. The objective was to examine how privacy concerns influence online shopping behaviour. 300 respondents were selected using Stratified Sampling method. The study used SPSS tools for analysis. Findings indicate that fear of data misuse and online fraud significantly affect consumer confidence.
- **Karthik & Nandhini (2023)** in their research *"**Ethical Practices in Indian E-Commerce Sector**"* analyzed the importance of transparency and fairness in online business. The objective was to study unethical practices such as hidden charges and misleading offers. 220 samples were collected using Cluster Sampling method. The findings concluded that strict seller monitoring and clear communication improve ethical standards in online shopping.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is conducted to analyse the ethical issues faced by consumers towards online shopping in Coimbatore. The research design adopted for the study is descriptive in nature. Both primary and secondary data were used for the study.

Primary data were collected from 131 respondents through a structured questionnaire using Google Forms. The respondents were selected using the convenience sampling method. The collected data were analysed using percentage analysis and the results were presented in the form of tables and interpretations.

Secondary data were collected from books, journals, websites, and previous research studies related to online shopping and consumer behaviour. The study helps to understand the major ethical issues faced by consumers in online shopping platforms.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

TABLE NO: 1
AGE OF THE RESPONDENTS

S. NO	AGE GROUP	NO OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE
1.	Below 18 years	6	4.6%
2.	18 – 25 years	44	33.6%
3.	26 – 35 years	72	55.0%
4.	36 – 45 years	9	6.9%
	TOTAL	**131**	**100%**

Source: Primary Data

INTERPRETATION

From the above table, it is observed that 4.6% of the respondents belong to below 18 years, 33.6% belong to 18–25 years, 55.0% belong to 26–35 years and 6.9% belong to 36–45 years.

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INFERENCE

It is inferred that the majority (55.0%) of the respondents belong to the age group of 26–35 years.

TABLE NO: 2

PRODUCTS USUALLY PURCHASED ONLINE

S. NO	PRODUCT CATEGORY	NO OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE
1.	Clothing & Accessories	58	44.3%
2.	Electronics	32	24.4%
3.	Groceries	14	10.7%
4.	Cosmetics	9	6.9%
5.	Others	18	13.7%
	TOTAL	**131**	**100%**

Source: Primary Data

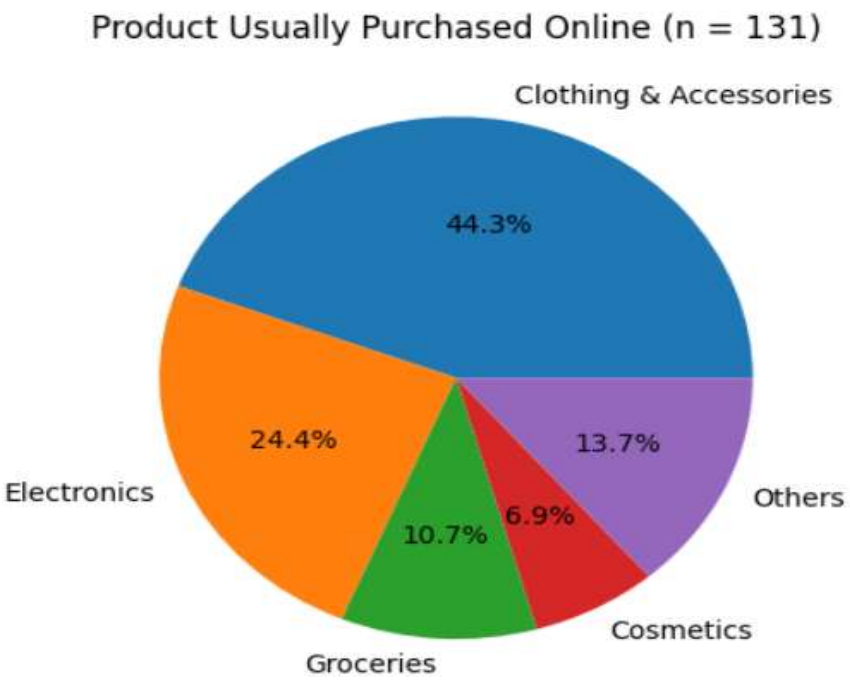
INTERPRETATION

From the above table, it is observed that 44.3% of the respondents usually purchase Clothing & Accessories online. This is followed by Electronics (24.4%), Others (13.7%), and Groceries (10.7%). A smaller percentage of respondents purchase Cosmetics (6.9%) online. This indicates that clothing and accessories are the most commonly purchased products through online platforms.

INFERENCE

It is inferred that Clothing & Accessories are the most preferred product category for online shopping among the respondents. Electronics also hold a significant share, while groceries and cosmetics are comparatively less purchased online. Hence, fashion-related products dominate the online buying behaviour of consumers.

CHART



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TABLE NO: 2
TYPE OF ETHICAL ISSUE FACED

S. NO	TYPE OF ISSUE	NO OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE
1.	Fake/misleading advertisements	8	6.1%
2.	Poor product quality	45	34.4%
3.	Wrong product delivery	14	10.7%
4.	Hidden charges	14	10.7%
5.	Delay in delivery	12	9.2%
6.	Data privacy issue	11	8.4%
7.	Others	27	20.6%
	TOTAL	**131**	**100%**

Source: Primary Data

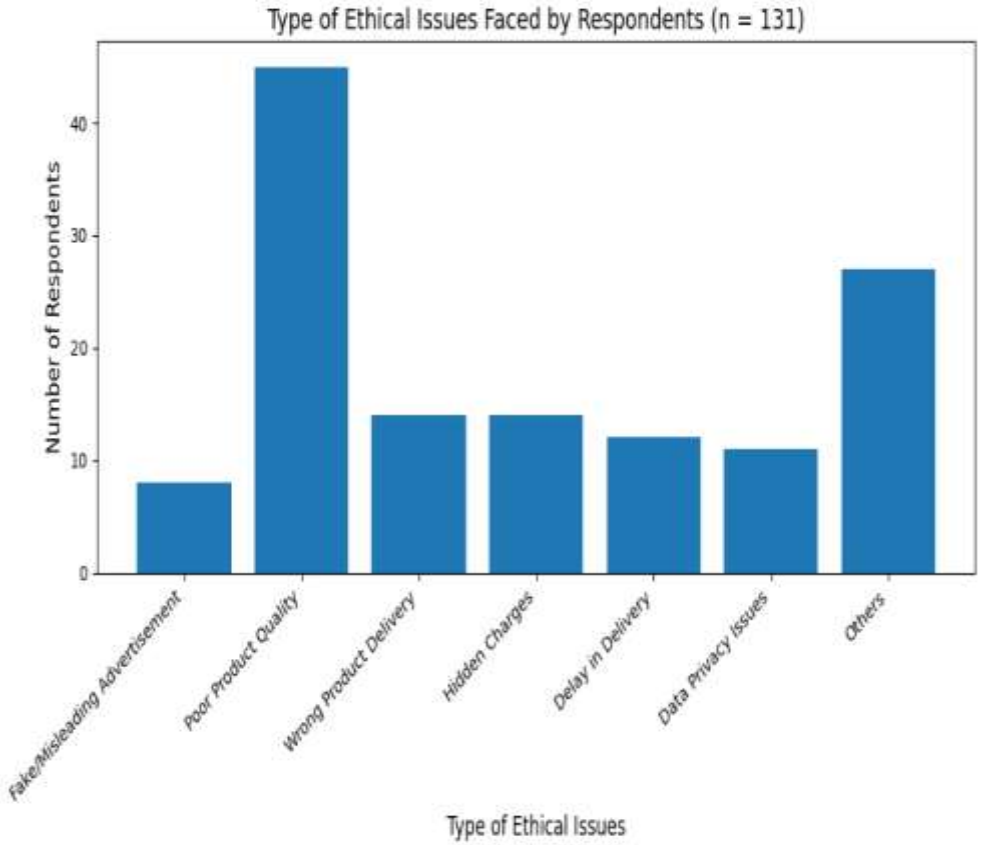
INTERPRETATION

The table shows that 34.4% of respondents faced category 2 ethical issue, followed by 20.6% facing category 7 issues. Smaller percentages experienced other types of issues.

INFERENCE

It is inferred that category 2 ethical issue is the most commonly faced issue among respondents.

CHART



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TABLE NO: 3
AWARENESS OF CONSUMER RIGHTS

S. NO	RESPONSE	NO OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE
1.	Fully aware	35	26.7%
2.	Partially aware	67	51.1%
3.	Not aware	29	22.1%
	TOTAL	**131**	**100%**

Source: Primary Data

INTERPRETATION

The table shows that 51.1% of respondents are not aware of consumer rights related to online shopping, while only 26.7% are aware.

INFERENCE

It is inferred that consumer awareness regarding online shopping rights is comparatively low.

CHART

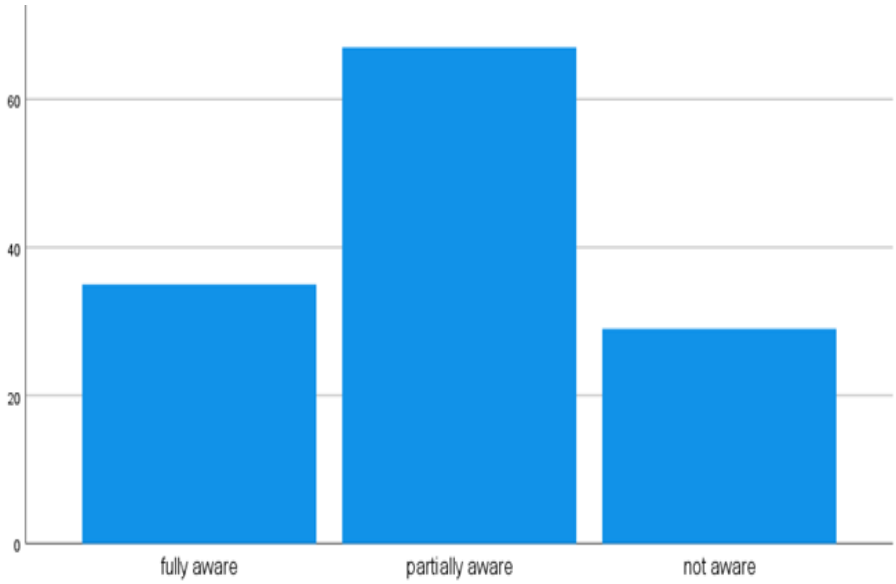


TABLE NO: 4
FACTOR INCREASING TRUST IN ONLINE SHOPPING

S. NO	FACTOR	NO OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE
1.	Safe payment option	42	32.1%
2.	Easy payment option	34	26.0%
3.	Good customer review	32	24.4%
4.	Well-known brand	23	17.6%
	TOTAL	**131**	**100%**

Source: Primary Data

INTERPRETATION

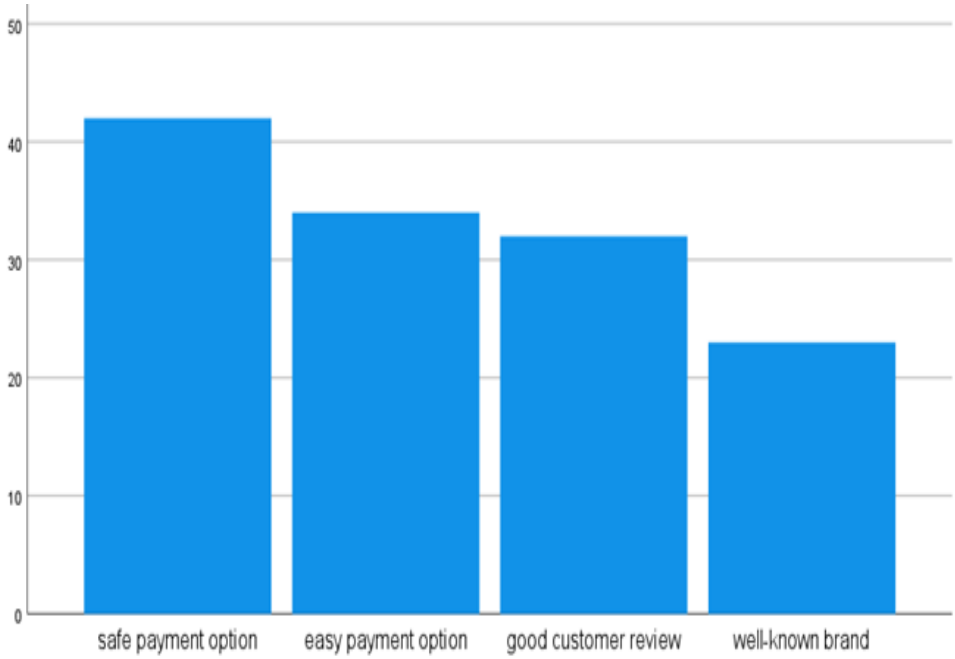
From the above table it is clear that safe payment option (32.1%) is the most important factor for the respondents. Easy payment option accounts for 26% of the respondents. Good customer reviews represent 24.4%, while 17.6% prefer well-known brands.
This shows that safety in payment is the main factor that makes consumers trust an online shopping platform.

INFERENCE

From the above table it is clear that safe payment option (32.1%) is the most important factor for the respondents. Easy payment option accounts for 26% of the respondents. Good customer reviews represent 24.4%, while 17.6% prefer well-known brands. This shows that safety in payment is the main factor that makes consumers trust an online shopping platform.

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CHART



FINDINGS

- Majority of respondents belong to the 26–35 age group.
- Amazon is the most preferred online shopping platform.
- Clothing and accessories are the most purchased products.
- Many respondents experienced ethical issues in online shopping.
- Misleading advertisements and product quality issues are major problems.

SUGGESTIONS

- Online companies should provide accurate product descriptions.
- Transparent pricing policies should be followed.
- Strong security systems should protect consumer data.
- Efficient customer service should support refunds and returns.

CONCLUSION

The study highlights that online shopping has become an important part of consumer behaviour. However, several ethical issues such as misleading advertisements, counterfeit products, hidden charges, and privacy concerns affect consumer trust.
To improve consumer confidence, online companies should adopt ethical business practices, maintain transparency in product information, and strengthen customer service systems. Addressing these ethical issues will help e-commerce platforms build long-term relationships with consumers and achieve sustainable growth.

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