

How E - Commerce Has Changed Customer Preferences?

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Abstract

The rapid growth of e-commerce has significantly transformed consumer behaviour and reshaped customer preferences across global markets. This study examines how the expansion of online retail platforms has influenced purchasing decisions, shopping habits, and expectations of modern consumers. Factors such as convenience, price transparency, wider product variety, personalized recommendations, and digital payment systems have altered traditional buying patterns. The research also highlights the role of technological advancements, including mobile commerce, artificial intelligence, and data analytics, in enhancing customer experience and shaping preference formation. Additionally, changes in trust mechanisms, online reviews, and return policies are analysed to understand their impact on consumer confidence in e-commerce platforms. Using secondary data and existing literature, the study provides insights into the evolving dynamics between consumers and online marketplaces. The findings suggest that e-commerce has shifted customer preferences towards speed, accessibility, and personalization, compelling businesses to adopt customer-centric digital strategies to remain competitive in an increasingly online-driven economy.

Keywords: E-commerce, Customer Preferences, Consumer Behaviour, Online Shopping, Digital Marketing, Personalization, Purchase Decision, Technology Adoption

Introduction

In recent decades, the global business environment has undergone a profound transformation driven by rapid advancements in digital technology. Among the most significant developments has been the emergence and expansion of e-commerce, which has fundamentally altered the way goods and services are bought and sold. E-commerce refers to the buying and selling of products and services through electronic platforms, primarily the internet. What initially began as a supplementary mode of trade has now evolved into a dominant force shaping modern consumption patterns. The widespread adoption of smartphones, improved internet connectivity, and secure digital payment systems has further accelerated the growth of e-commerce, making it an integral part of everyday life.

Customer preferences play a central role in determining market demand and business success. Traditionally, consumer choices were influenced by factors such as physical store location, face-to-face interaction, brand reputation, and limited product availability. However, the rise of e-commerce has redefined these preferences by offering consumers greater convenience, extensive product variety, competitive pricing, and access to information at unprecedented levels. As a result, customers today exhibit preferences that differ significantly from those observed in the era of conventional retailing. Understanding how e-commerce has reshaped customer preferences is therefore crucial for businesses, policymakers, and researchers seeking to analyse changes in consumer behaviour in the digital economy.

One of the most notable ways in which e-commerce has influenced customer preferences is through convenience and accessibility. Online shopping platforms allow consumers to purchase goods and services at any time and from any location, eliminating the constraints of store hours and geographical boundaries. This shift has led customers to prioritize ease of access, quick navigation, and seamless checkout processes. The growing preference for time-saving shopping experiences reflects broader lifestyle changes, where consumers increasingly value efficiency and flexibility. As a result, convenience has emerged as a key determinant of customer satisfaction and loyalty in the e-commerce environment.

Another important factor shaping customer preferences is price transparency. E-commerce platforms enable consumers to compare prices across multiple sellers with minimal effort. The availability of price comparison tools, discounts, and promotional offers has made customers more price-conscious and informed. Unlike traditional retail settings, where price comparisons require physical effort and time, online platforms empower consumers to make rational and cost-effective

decisions. This increased transparency has altered consumer expectations, leading them to demand competitive pricing and greater value for money. Consequently, price sensitivity has become a defining feature of customer preferences in the digital marketplace.

Product variety and information availability have also significantly influenced consumer preferences. E-commerce platforms offer access to a vast range of products that may not be available in local markets. Detailed product descriptions, images, specifications, and user-generated reviews allow customers to evaluate alternatives more effectively. Online reviews and ratings, in particular, have become a powerful influence on purchasing decisions, often replacing traditional word-of-mouth communication. Customers now prefer platforms that provide reliable information, transparency, and peer feedback, as these elements reduce uncertainty and perceived risk associated with online purchases.

Technological advancements have further contributed to changing customer preferences in e-commerce. The use of data analytics, artificial intelligence, and machine learning has enabled platforms to offer personalized recommendations based on browsing history, past purchases, and consumer preferences. This personalization enhances the shopping experience by making it more relevant and engaging for users. Customers increasingly expect tailored suggestions, customized offers, and personalized communication, which were largely absent in traditional retail formats. As a result, personalization has become a critical factor influencing customer satisfaction and repeat purchases.

Trust and security have also emerged as key determinants of customer preferences in e-commerce. Since online transactions involve the sharing of personal and financial information, consumers place high importance on secure payment systems, transparent return policies, and reliable customer service. Over time, improvements in digital security, encryption technologies, and consumer protection regulations have strengthened customer confidence in e-commerce platforms. Customers now prefer platforms that demonstrate credibility, data protection, and accountability, indicating a shift in trust mechanisms from physical presence to digital reliability.

The impact of e-commerce on customer preferences is particularly significant in developing economies, where digital adoption has expanded rapidly in recent years. Increased internet penetration, affordable smartphones, and government initiatives promoting digital payments have brought a large number of consumers into the online marketplace. This has led to a noticeable change in consumption patterns, with customers becoming more comfortable with online transactions and digital interactions. The growing acceptance of e-commerce reflects changing social norms and increasing familiarity with technology among consumers.

In this context, studying how e-commerce has changed customer preferences is essential for understanding the evolving relationship between consumers and markets. Businesses must adapt their strategies to align with shifting expectations, while policymakers must ensure that regulatory frameworks support fair competition and consumer protection in digital markets. This research aims to analyse the key ways in which e-commerce has transformed customer preferences by examining factors such as convenience, pricing, product variety, personalization, and trust. By exploring these dimensions, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of consumer behaviour in the digital age and highlights the broader implications of e-commerce for modern economies

Literature Review

The growth of e-commerce has attracted significant academic attention, particularly in the fields of consumer behaviour, marketing, and economics. Researchers have extensively examined how online retailing has transformed traditional purchasing patterns and influenced customer preferences. Existing literature highlights that the shift from brick-and-mortar stores to digital platforms has not only changed how consumers shop but also altered what they value during the purchasing process. This section reviews key studies related to e-commerce and customer preferences, focusing on convenience, price sensitivity, information availability, trust, and personalization.

Early studies on e-commerce emphasized its role in reducing transaction costs and expanding market access. Researchers observed that online platforms eliminate geographical barriers and enable consumers to access products and services beyond local markets. According to prior literature, this increased accessibility significantly influences customer

preferences by allowing consumers to prioritize convenience and time efficiency. Studies suggest that consumers increasingly prefer online shopping due to its ability to provide round-the-clock access, ease of comparison, and home delivery options. As a result, convenience has emerged as one of the most frequently cited factors driving preference for e-commerce over traditional retail formats.

Several scholars have examined the impact of price transparency on customer preferences in e-commerce. Literature indicates that online platforms empower consumers with tools to compare prices across multiple sellers, thereby enhancing price awareness. Researchers argue that this transparency has increased price sensitivity among consumers, making them more rational and value-conscious in their purchasing decisions. Studies also highlight that the availability of discounts, promotional offers, and dynamic pricing strategies influences consumer expectations. Customers now prefer platforms that offer competitive pricing and perceived value for money, leading to intensified competition among online retailers.

Another significant theme in the literature is the role of product variety and information availability. Researchers have consistently found that e-commerce platforms offer a wider range of products compared to physical stores. This extensive assortment allows consumers to explore multiple alternatives before making a purchase, thereby influencing preference formation. Studies emphasize that detailed product descriptions, images, and specifications reduce information asymmetry between buyers and sellers. Furthermore, online customer reviews and ratings are widely recognized as a critical source of information influencing purchasing decisions. Literature suggests that consumers place greater trust in peer reviews than in traditional advertising, making user-generated content a powerful determinant of customer preferences.

Trust has been extensively discussed in e-commerce literature as a crucial factor affecting consumer adoption and preference. Early research identified lack of trust as a major barrier to online shopping due to concerns related to payment security, data privacy, and product quality. However, subsequent studies indicate that improvements in secure payment gateways, encryption technologies, and consumer protection mechanisms have significantly enhanced trust in e-commerce platforms. Researchers note that return policies, refund mechanisms, and responsive customer service play a vital role in building consumer confidence. As trust levels increase, customers show a stronger preference for online shopping, even for high-value or frequently used products.

The literature also highlights the growing importance of personalization in shaping customer preferences. With advancements in data analytics and artificial intelligence, e-commerce platforms are now able to offer personalized recommendations, targeted advertisements, and customized user experiences. Studies suggest that personalization increases customer engagement and satisfaction by aligning product offerings with individual preferences and past behaviour. Researchers argue that consumers increasingly expect tailored experiences and perceive personalization as a value-added service. As a result, platforms that effectively use customer data to personalize interactions tend to gain higher customer loyalty and repeat purchases.

Mobile commerce has emerged as another important dimension discussed in recent literature. With the widespread adoption of smartphones, researchers note a shift in customer preferences towards mobile-friendly platforms and applications. Studies indicate that ease of navigation, fast loading speed, and user-friendly interfaces significantly influence consumer satisfaction in mobile commerce. Customers prefer platforms that provide seamless integration across devices, allowing them to shop conveniently through mobile phones. This trend reflects broader changes in consumer lifestyles and highlights the role of technology in shaping modern purchasing preferences.

In the context of developing economies, literature points to a rapid transformation in customer preferences driven by increased internet penetration and digital payment adoption. Researchers emphasize that government initiatives promoting digital infrastructure and financial inclusion have contributed to the expansion of e-commerce. Studies conducted in emerging markets reveal that consumers who were previously reliant on traditional retail formats are gradually shifting towards online platforms. This transition has led to increased acceptance of digital transactions and a growing preference for online shopping, particularly among younger and urban consumers.

Despite extensive research, some gaps remain in the existing literature. Many studies focus on specific factors such as price or convenience in isolation, rather than adopting a comprehensive approach to understanding customer preference

changes. Additionally, much of the existing research is concentrated in developed economies, limiting the generalizability of findings to developing countries. Scholars have also noted the need for updated studies that consider recent technological advancements and post-pandemic shifts in consumer behaviour.

Overall, the literature demonstrates that e-commerce has significantly changed customer preferences by emphasizing convenience, price transparency, product variety, trust, and personalization. These factors collectively contribute to a more informed, empowered, and digitally oriented consumer. Building on existing studies, the present research seeks to provide a holistic understanding of how e-commerce has reshaped customer preferences, particularly in the context of evolving digital markets. By synthesizing insights from previous research, this study aims to contribute to the growing body of literature on consumer behaviour in the digital economy.

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework serves as a structured representation of the key concepts, variables, and relationships examined in a research study. It provides a logical foundation for understanding how and why certain factors influence the outcome variable. In the present study, the conceptual framework is developed to explain **how e-commerce has changed customer preferences** by identifying the major attributes of e-commerce platforms and examining their influence on consumer behaviour and preference formation.

The framework is grounded in consumer behaviour theory and digital economy literature, which suggest that technological advancements and market innovations significantly alter consumer expectations and decision-making processes. E-commerce has introduced new ways of interacting with markets by reducing physical constraints, increasing information availability, and enhancing convenience. As a result, customer preferences are no longer shaped solely by traditional retail factors but are increasingly influenced by digital features and online experiences.

Identification of Key Variables

The conceptual framework of this study is based on four main components:

- Independent Variables (E-commerce attributes)
- Mediating Variables
- Moderating Variables
- Dependent Variable (Customer Preferences)

These components together explain the mechanism through which e-commerce affects consumer preferences.

1. Independent Variables: E-commerce Attributes

Independent variables in this study refer to the key characteristics of e-commerce platforms that influence consumer behaviour. These attributes represent the primary drivers responsible for changes in customer preferences.

Convenience and Accessibility

Convenience is one of the most significant attributes of e-commerce that differentiates it from traditional retail. Online platforms enable consumers to shop without restrictions related to time and location. This flexibility has led consumers to increasingly value ease and speed in the purchasing process.

Convenience in e-commerce is reflected through:

- 24/7 availability of online platforms
- Ability to shop from home or any location
- Reduced time and physical effort

- Quick and simple ordering processes

As consumers become accustomed to instant access and minimal effort, their preference shifts toward platforms that offer seamless and efficient shopping experiences.

Price Transparency and Competitive Pricing

E-commerce platforms provide high levels of price transparency by allowing consumers to compare prices across multiple sellers and brands. This feature empowers consumers to make informed and cost-effective decisions.

Price-related aspects influencing customer preferences include:

- Easy comparison of prices across platforms
- Availability of discounts, offers, and cashback schemes
- Dynamic pricing and seasonal sales

This transparency has increased price awareness among consumers and shifted preferences toward platforms that offer better value for money.

Product Variety and Information Availability

Another important attribute of e-commerce is the extensive product variety it offers. Unlike physical stores, online platforms are not limited by shelf space and can provide access to a wide range of products.

In addition to variety, information availability plays a crucial role. Consumers rely on:

- Detailed product descriptions and specifications
- Images and videos of products
- Customer reviews and ratings

This abundance of information reduces uncertainty and perceived risk, thereby influencing consumers to prefer online shopping platforms where decision-making is easier and more informed.

Personalization and Technological Features

Advancements in digital technologies have enabled e-commerce platforms to personalize the shopping experience. Using data analytics and artificial intelligence, platforms can tailor recommendations and content according to individual consumer preferences.

Personalization influences customer preferences through:

- Customized product recommendations
- Targeted advertisements
- Personalized notifications and offers

Consumers increasingly expect platforms to understand their needs and provide relevant suggestions, making personalization a key factor in preference formation.

Trust, Security, and Reliability

Trust is a critical factor in online transactions, as consumers cannot physically inspect products before purchase. Concerns related to payment security, data privacy, and product authenticity influence consumer confidence.

Trust in e-commerce platforms is built through:

- Secure payment systems
- Transparent return and refund policies
- Reliable delivery services
- Responsive customer support

Higher levels of trust reduce perceived risk and encourage consumers to develop a preference for online platforms.

2. Mediating Variables

Mediating variables explain the process through which e-commerce attributes influence customer preferences. In this study, customer satisfaction and perceived value act as key mediators.

Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction arises from positive online shopping experiences. When e-commerce platforms meet or exceed consumer expectations in terms of service quality, delivery, and usability, satisfaction levels increase.

Factors contributing to customer satisfaction include timely delivery, accurate product representation, easy returns, and smooth transaction processes. Higher satisfaction strengthens the likelihood of repeat purchases and long-term preference for e-commerce platforms.

Perceived Value

Perceived value refers to the consumer's overall evaluation of the benefits received relative to the costs incurred. E-commerce platforms often enhance perceived value by combining convenience, competitive pricing, and product variety. When consumers believe that online shopping offers superior value compared to offline alternatives, their preference for e-commerce becomes stronger and more consistent over time.

3. Moderating Variables

Moderating variables influence the strength and direction of the relationship between e-commerce attributes and customer preferences.

Demographic Factors

Demographic characteristics such as age, income, education level, and place of residence affect how consumers respond to e-commerce.

For example:

- Younger consumers are generally more comfortable with digital platforms
- Higher education levels improve digital literacy
- Urban consumers often have better access to internet infrastructure

These factors determine how strongly e-commerce attributes influence customer preferences.

Technological Readiness

Technological readiness refers to the consumer's access to and familiarity with digital tools such as smartphones, internet services, and online payment systems. Consumers with higher technological readiness are more likely to adopt e-commerce and develop strong preferences for online shopping.

Social and Cultural Influence

Social influence plays an important role in shaping consumer perceptions. Online reviews, social media content, and peer recommendations affect trust and adoption of e-commerce platforms. Cultural attitudes toward technology and online transactions also influence preference formation, especially in developing economies.

4. Dependent Variable: Customer Preferences

Customer preferences represent the outcome variable of the conceptual framework. In this study, customer preferences are reflected through changes in purchasing behaviour and attitudes toward online shopping.

These preferences include:

- Preference for online shopping over traditional retail
- Increased frequency of online purchases
- Loyalty toward specific e-commerce platforms
- Higher expectations regarding convenience, speed, and personalization

The framework assumes that sustained exposure to e-commerce attributes, mediated by satisfaction and perceived value, leads to long-term changes in customer preferences.

Summary:

The conceptual framework illustrates that e-commerce influences customer preferences through multiple interconnected factors. E-commerce attributes such as convenience, price transparency, product variety, personalization, and trust directly affect consumer experiences. These effects are mediated by customer satisfaction and perceived value and moderated by demographic, technological, and social factors. Together, these relationships explain how e-commerce has transformed consumer preferences in the modern digital economy

METHODOLOGY

In the present study, the research methodology is designed to examine **how e-commerce has changed customer preferences** by analysing various factors such as convenience, pricing, product variety, trust, and personalization.

This section outlines the research design, nature of the study, sources of data, sampling design, data collection methods, and analytical tools used to conduct the research in a structured and scientific manner.

Research Design

The present study adopts a **descriptive and analytical research design**.

- **Descriptive research design** is used to describe the existing patterns of customer preferences in the context of e-commerce.
- **Analytical research design** is employed to examine the relationship between e-commerce attributes and changes in customer preferences.

This combination of research designs is appropriate as the study aims not only to describe consumer behaviour but also to analyse how various factors of e-commerce influence preference formation.

Nature of the Study

The nature of the study is **quantitative and empirical**, focusing on understanding consumer behaviour through structured data and measurable variables. The study seeks to observe patterns, trends, and relationships rather than establish causal laws.

At the same time, the study incorporates **conceptual and theoretical insights** from existing literature to support the empirical findings. Thus, the research can be classified as **applied research**, as it has practical implications for businesses, marketers, and policymakers in the digital economy.

Data Sources

For the present study on *How E-Commerce Has Changed Customer Preferences*, data has been collected from **three major sources** to ensure reliability, depth, and comprehensive coverage of the research problem. The combination of these sources helps in integrating theoretical understanding with empirical insights.

1. Primary Data

Primary data constitutes first-hand information collected directly from respondents. In this study, primary data is used to understand consumers' perceptions, attitudes, and preferences regarding e-commerce platforms. It provides real-time insights into how customer preferences have evolved due to factors such as convenience, pricing, trust, and personalization.

Primary data helps in:

- Capturing current consumer behaviour and preferences
- Understanding subjective opinions and experiences
- Supporting empirical analysis of the conceptual framework

2. Secondary Data

Secondary data refers to data that has already been collected and published by other researchers, institutions, and organizations. This data forms the theoretical foundation of the study and supports the development of the conceptual framework and literature review.

Secondary data is sourced from:

- Academic journals and research articles
- Books on consumer behaviour, marketing, and e-commerce
- Industry reports and market surveys
- Government publications and official statistics

Secondary data helps in identifying trends, research gaps, and theoretical perspectives related to e-commerce and customer preferences.

3. Online Databases and Digital Sources

Online databases and credible digital platforms serve as an important data source for this study. These sources provide access to recent research findings, global trends, and statistical data related to e-commerce growth and consumer behaviour.

These sources include:

- Online academic databases
- Reputed research portals
- Official websites of organizations and institutions

Such sources ensure the availability of updated and relevant information for the study.

Sampling Techniques

Sampling refers to the process of selecting a subset of individuals from the total population to represent the entire group. An appropriate sampling technique ensures that the collected data accurately reflects the characteristics of the population under study.

Sampling Technique Used

The study adopts **convenience sampling**, which is a non-probability sampling technique. Under this method, respondents are selected based on ease of access, availability, and willingness to participate.

Convenience sampling is suitable for this study because:

- The research focuses on general consumer trends
- Time and resource constraints are present
- Respondents are required to have prior experience with e-commerce

Although convenience sampling has limitations in terms of generalization, it is widely used in exploratory and descriptive studies related to consumer behaviour.

Data Collection Tools

To collect and organize data systematically, multiple data collection tools are used. These tools help in capturing both quantitative and qualitative aspects of consumer behaviour.

Interview Guide

The interview guide focuses on the following areas:

- Experience with using e-commerce platforms
- Reasons for preferring online shopping over offline shopping
- Perceived benefits of e-commerce such as convenience and price advantages
- Trust and security concerns related to online transactions
- Influence of online reviews and ratings on purchase decisions
- Perception of personalization and recommendation systems
- Changes in shopping behaviour before and after using e-commerce platforms
- Overall satisfaction with online shopping experiences

The interview guide helps in capturing in-depth qualitative data that explains how and why customer preferences have changed due to e-commerce.

Document Analysis Template

Document analysis is used to systematically review secondary sources relevant to the research topic. A document analysis template ensures consistency and clarity while extracting information from various documents.

The template includes the following elements:

- Title of the document
- Author(s) and year of publication
- Type of document (journal article, report, book, policy paper, etc.)
- Objectives of the document
- Key findings related to e-commerce and customer preferences
- Factors influencing consumer behaviour discussed in the document
- Relevance of the document to the present study
- Limitations identified in the document

This template enables comparison across multiple sources and supports the development of the conceptual framework and literature review.

Observational Notes

Observational notes are used to record informal observations related to consumer behaviour on e-commerce platforms. These notes focus on visible patterns such as browsing behaviour, response to discounts, and reliance on reviews before purchasing. Observational notes provide contextual support to primary and secondary data by capturing real-world consumer interactions with digital platforms.

Data Analysis

Qualitative Data Analysis

The objective is to identify recurring patterns, themes, and interpretations related to changes in customer preferences due to e-commerce.

The process of qualitative data analysis involves:

- Transcribing interview responses and organizing textual data
- Reading and re-reading data to gain familiarity
- Coding responses based on common ideas and concepts
- Grouping codes into broader themes such as convenience, trust, price sensitivity, and personalization
- Interpreting themes in relation to the research objectives and conceptual framework

Qualitative analysis helps in understanding the underlying reasons behind consumer preferences and complements the findings of quantitative analysis.

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