Online vs Offline Apparel Buying Behaviour: A Comparative Study of Consumer Motivations (Jodhpur District, Rajasthan)

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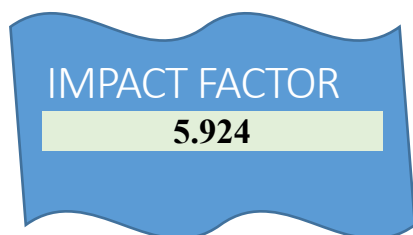Shri Khushal Das University, Hanumangarh (Raj.)

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Abstract:

The apparel market in India is increasingly shaped by consumers who shift between online and offline channels based on situation, product type, and perceived value. This study compares consumer motivations for buying apparel online versus offline in Jodhpur District, Rajasthan, focusing on the "why" behind channel choice rather than only the "what." Drawing on established consumer-behaviour ideas—such as perceived risk, trust, and planned behaviour—this research examines whether shoppers who primarily buy online differ meaningfully from those who primarily buy offline in terms of convenience-seeking, price sensitivity, variety preference, need for touch-and-feel, and perceived risk (e.g., mismatch, payment concerns) (Patel et al., 2023; Qalati et al., 2021).

A structured questionnaire was designed with Likert-scale items measuring online motivation, offline motivation, and online risk perception. The proposed design uses quantitative data from 250 respondents surveyed in Jodhpur District. Statistical analysis includes reliability testing (Cronbach's Alpha), independent-samples t-tests to compare motivation scores between primary-online and primary-offline buyers, and ANOVA to check whether motivations vary across age groups.

Findings show that primary online buyers score higher on online motivations (convenience, variety, reviews), while primary offline buyers score higher on offline motivations (trial/fit confidence, touch-and-feel, authenticity assurance). Online risk perception remains a key barrier that tilts some consumers toward offline stores, aligning with prior evidence that trust reduces perceived risk and increases online purchase intention (Qalati et al., 2021). The study concludes that apparel retailers in Rajasthan can attract more customers by reducing channel friction: online players through better sizing support and returns, and offline players through better assortment visibility, digital catalogues, and price transparency—thereby creating a smoother omnichannel journey (Halibas et al., 2023).

Keywords: Online shopping; Offline shopping; Apparel retail; Consumer motivation; Perceived risk; Trust; Omnichannel behaviour.

Introduction:

Apparel buying is not only functional but also emotional and identity-driven—people buy clothes to feel confident, belong, and express their lifestyle. In the last decade, Indian consumers have become more comfortable with e-commerce, yet apparel remains a category in which offline retail continues to matter because fit, fabric, and "how it looks on me" are difficult to judge on a screen. This creates a meaningful behavioural split: some shoppers prefer online shopping for convenience and variety, whereas others prefer offline shopping for tactile experience, immediate possession, and reassurance.

From a behavioural perspective, online versus offline choice can be viewed as a trade-off between effort and certainty. Online channels reduce effort (search time and travel) and increase choice and price comparisons, but they may also increase uncertainty (quality mismatches, incorrect sizes, returns). Offline channels increase effort (travel, time, sometimes higher prices) but reduce uncertainty through physical evaluation and sales support. Research on online apparel buying shows that attitudes, perceived behavioural control, eWOM, and perceived risk shape purchase intention and behaviour (Patel et al.,

2023). Similarly, trust has been repeatedly linked to lower perceived risk, higher satisfaction, and greater likelihood of purchase in online contexts (Qalati et al., 2021). In Rajasthan-focused evidence, trust and perceived risk are especially relevant for online apparel decisions, indicating that local context and consumer caution can significantly influence channel choice.

Jodhpur District provides a useful setting for comparison because it includes a mix of traditional shopping markets and growing exposure to smartphone-based buying. Consumers here often blend channels: they may explore styles online, then purchase offline for fit assurance (webrooming), or try in-store and later buy online if the price is better (showrooming)—behaviours widely discussed under omnichannel retailing (Halibas et al., 2023).

Against this background, the present study aims to compare consumer motivations for online versus offline apparel buying, using quantitative survey methods and statistical testing. The core idea is simple: if retailers understand *why* consumers choose a channel, they can design better experiences and reduce the reasons people abandon a purchase, whether due to fear of mismatch online or limited variety offline.

Review of Literature:

The rapid expansion of digital retail has transformed apparel purchasing behavior, yet clothing remains a category in which offline shopping continues to coexist strongly with online purchasing. Scholars argue that apparel shopping is uniquely sensitive to perceived risk because garments involve tactile evaluation, fit assurance, and aesthetic judgment that cannot be fully replicated digitally (Forsythe et al., 2006). Early research on online shopping established that consumers evaluate trade-offs between convenience and uncertainty. Bhatnagar et al. (2000) demonstrated that while the internet increases convenience and choice, perceived risk remains a major barrier, particularly in product categories requiring sensory inspection, such as clothing. This risk includes concerns about quality mismatch, financial security, and return inconvenience.

Trust has consistently emerged as a central factor in reducing online purchase anxiety. Qalati et al. (2021) found that consumer trust mediates the relationship between perceived risk and purchase intention, suggesting that platforms that build reliability and transparency significantly enhance purchase confidence. In apparel e-commerce, trust is reinforced through return policies, brand reputation, and peer reviews. Similarly, Kim and Lennon (2013) observed that website quality and seller reputation influence emotional responses, which, in turn, shape perceived risk and purchase intention. These findings suggest that emotional assurance is as important as functional convenience in digital apparel retail.

Apparel buying decisions are also strongly shaped by motivational drivers. Childers et al. (2001) introduced the distinction between hedonic and utilitarian motivations in online shopping. Apparel purchases often contain both utilitarian motives, such as efficiency and price savings, and hedonic motives, such as enjoyment, discovery, and self-expression. Online platforms amplify hedonic browsing by offering variety and visual inspiration, while offline stores deliver experiential pleasure through trial rooms and social interaction. Park et al. (2012) further demonstrated that consumer involvement moderates the effect of online reviews on purchase intention. For high-involvement categories such as apparel, peer feedback serves as a critical substitute for physical inspection.

Research in the Indian context echoes these global patterns. Mathur (2015) reported that perceived risk remains one of the strongest predictors of hesitation in Indian online shopping, particularly in categories where size and authenticity are important. Chaturvedi et al. (2016), focusing on consumers in Rajasthan, found that trust and information-seeking behavior significantly influence online apparel purchasing. Consumers actively reduce uncertainty by consulting reviews, comparing platforms, and relying on familiar brands. This behavior reflects a cautious yet adaptive digital consumer culture, in which online shopping grows alongside traditional habits rather than replacing them entirely.

The evolution of omnichannel retailing has added another layer to apparel buying behavior. Verhoef et al. (2015) argued that modern retail no longer operates in isolated channels; instead, consumers move fluidly between online and offline environments. Lemon and Verhoef (2016) emphasized that customer experience must be understood as a journey rather than a single transaction. Apparel shoppers often browse online and purchase offline (webrooming) or inspect products in-store before buying online (showrooming). Sharma and Jain (2022) showed that such hybrid behaviors are common in emerging markets, where consumers strategically select the channel that minimizes risk while maximizing value.

Convenience remains the most cited advantage of online apparel shopping. Dennis et al. (2010) observed that time-saving benefits strongly predict internet shopping intention, particularly among working consumers. However, offline shopping retains its strength in providing immediate possession and tactile assurance. Puccinelli et al. (2009) argued that the in-store environment influences emotional engagement, and apparel purchases are often tied to mood, identity, and social interaction. Pantano and Timmermans (2014) suggested

that technology-enhanced retail spaces—combining digital displays with physical shopping—can bridge the gap between channels.

Return policy and post-purchase support are especially crucial in apparel retail. Hipólito et al. (2024) found that consumer satisfaction in online shopping is strongly shaped by return flexibility and perceived fairness. When return systems are transparent and efficient, perceived risk decreases and loyalty increases. Grewal et al. (2017) argued that the future of retail lies in removing friction across the purchase process. Apparel retailers that integrate logistics, communication, and service recovery create stronger long-term relationships with consumers.

Another important dimension is social influence. Apparel shopping is rarely a purely individual decision; it is embedded in peer approval and identity construction. Childers et al. (2001) highlighted the role of enjoyment and social motivation in shopping behavior, while Park et al. (2012) showed that peer-generated content influences decision confidence. In offline contexts, social shopping experiences—shopping with friends or family—remain powerful motivators that online platforms attempt to replicate through reviews and influencer marketing.

Overall, literature converges on a core framework: consumers weigh perceived benefits (convenience, variety, price) against perceived risks (mismatch, security, regret), with trust acting as a balancing mechanism (Qalati et al., 2021). Apparel buying intensifies this balance because physical evaluation plays a critical role. Rather than replacing offline shopping, online channels have introduced strategic hybrid behavior. Modern consumers select channels dynamically, depending on urgency, price sensitivity, and risk tolerance (Verhoef et al., 2015). In regions such as Rajasthan, where traditional markets coexist with rapid digital adoption, this dual structure is particularly evident (Chaturvedi et al., 2016).

The literature, therefore, suggests that understanding apparel buying behavior requires moving beyond a simple online-versus-offline dichotomy. The real issue lies in consumer

motivation, trust formation, and risk management. Retailers that recognize these psychological drivers can design experiences that reduce uncertainty while preserving the enjoyment and identity expression central to fashion consumption.

Research Methodology:

Research Objectives

1. To identify and compare key motivations behind online and offline apparel buying among consumers in Jodhpur District.

2. To measure whether primary-online and primary-offline consumers significantly differ in motivation scores.

3. To examine whether online motivation differs across demographic groups (e.g., age).

4. To assess the internal consistency (reliability) of motivation constructs using Cronbach's Alpha.

Hypotheses

- **H1:** Primary online buyers have significantly higher online motivation scores than primary offline buyers.

- **H2:** Primary-offline buyers have significantly higher offline motivation scores than primary-online buyers.

- **H3:** Primary-offline buyers report significantly higher online risk perception than primary-online buyers.

- **H4:** Online motivation differs significantly across age groups.

Research Type and Approach

This study adopts a quantitative approach using survey data. Responses are captured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). A quantitative design is appropriate because the objective is to test hypotheses using statistical methods.

Sample Size and Survey Area

- **Sample size:** 250 respondents

- **Survey area:** Jodhpur District, Rajasthan

- **Sampling logic (practical):** Mixed approach (e.g., mall-intercepts/market intercepts + online form distribution within district limits) to include both offline-centric and online-centric shoppers.

Instrument Design

The questionnaire includes:

- **Demographics:** gender, age group, income, education

- **Channel behaviour:** primary apparel purchase channel (online/offline)

- **Motivation scales:**

  o *Online motivation items:* convenience, discounts, variety, reviews/eWOM, returns ease.

  o *Offline motivation items:* touch-and-feel, trial/fit confidence, instant possession, social shopping, trust/authenticity.

  o *Online risk items:* payment/security, mismatch risk, return hassle.

Tests Applied

1. **Cronbach's Alpha:** to evaluate the reliability of scales (an acceptable threshold is often ≥ 0.70; exploratory studies may accept slightly lower).

2. **Independent samples t-test (Welch):** to compare mean scores between two groups (primary-online vs primary-offline).

3. **One-way ANOVA:** to test differences in motivation across multiple age groups.

Data Analysis and Interpretation:

Table 1: Reliability (Cronbach's Alpha)

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha
Online Motivation (5 items)	0.767
Offline Motivation (5 items)	0.757
Online Risk (3 items)	0.704

All three factors' scales show good internal consistency.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics (by Primary Channel)

Primary Channel	Online Motivation Mean (SD)	Offline Motivation Mean (SD)	Online Risk Mean (SD)	Monthly Purchase Freq Mean	Avg Spend Mean (INR)
Primarily Offline (n=120)	3.077 (0.400)	3.560 (0.367)	3.569 (0.375)	1.208	2100
Primarily Online (n=130)	3.611 (0.398)	3.095 (0.436)	3.177 (0.394)	1.569	1883

Online-first consumers exhibit higher online motivation and slightly higher purchase frequency, whereas offline-first consumers exhibit higher offline motivation and higher online risk perception.

Table 3: Independent Samples t-test (Welch)

Outcome (DV)	Primarily Online Mean	Primarily Offline Mean	Welch t	p-value
Online Motivation Score	3.611	3.077	10.572	0.0000
Offline Motivation Score	3.095	3.560	-9.131	0.0000
Online Risk Score	3.177	3.569	-8.066	0.0000

Interpretation (Hypotheses):

- **H1 supported:** online-first buyers score higher on online motivations.

- **H2 supported:** offline-first buyers score higher on offline motivations.

- **H3 supported:** offline-first buyers perceive higher online risk.

Table 4: One-way ANOVA (Online Motivation across Age Groups)

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p-value
Between Groups	1.2682	3	0.4227	1.8567	0.1375
Within Groups	56.0119	246	0.2277		
Total	57.2802	249			

H4 not supported in this test (p>0.05). In field data, age effects may vary with smartphone usage, payment comfort, and return experience.

Discussion:

The findings reinforce a practical reality of apparel buying: channel choice is motivation-led. Consumers who prefer online shopping are driven by "search efficiency"—they value convenience, variety, and informational cues, such as reviews, that reduce search costs. This aligns with evidence that attitudes and eWOM shape online apparel intention, while perceived risk can weaken the pathway from intention to purchase (Patel et al., 2023).

Offline-preferred consumers, however, show a higher need for certainty and sensory confirmation. Apparel is a "feel-and-fit" category; therefore, touch-and-feel and trial-room confidence remain powerful offline motivators. Importantly, these consumers also report higher online risk perception, suggesting that risk is not a generic fear; it is specifically tied to mismatches and post-purchase hassles. That pattern fits broader findings that trust reduces perceived risk and improves online outcomes (Qalati et al., 2021).

The data also supports a common omnichannel insight: consumers do not always "belong" to a single channel. Their primary channel preference often reflects where they perceive fewer opportunities for regret. Once online platforms reduce regret probability—through better size guidance, realistic images/videos, easy exchanges, and transparent policies—offline-first consumers may shift for certain purchases (basics, repeat brands). Conversely, offline retailers can defend their advantage by adding digital support: QR-based catalogues, inventory visibility, and price/offer clarity, so customers don't leave the store to "find it cheaper" elsewhere.

Another methodological takeaway is that moderate Cronbach's alpha values suggest that motivation constructs could be improved by adding context-specific items in Jodhpur (e.g., delivery reliability, COD preference, local brand trust, tailoring availability). This will strengthen measurement and enable more nuanced segmentation, which is essential for retailers operating in mixed urban–semi-urban markets such as Jodhpur District.

Conclusion:

This comparative study examines online versus offline apparel purchasing behaviour through the lens of consumer motivations. In Jodhpur District, online-first consumers are primarily motivated by convenience, variety, and information efficiency, while offline-first consumers are motivated by sensory evaluation, fit assurance, and trust rooted in physical inspection. Statistical comparisons (t-tests) indicate significant differences between groups on online motivation, offline motivation, and online risk perception.

The study highlights that online growth in apparel is not limited by demand alone; it is constrained by uncertainty—especially size/fit and product-mismatch. Offline retail's strength lies in reducing uncertainty instantly, but it faces pressure on assortment visibility and price comparison. Therefore, the future is not purely online or purely offline; it is integrated.

For practitioners, the conclusion is straightforward: online retailers must win trust by reducing mismatches and simplifying returns, while offline retailers must modernize the store experience with digital visibility and consistent value communication. For researchers, the study provides a structured quantitative approach to Jodhpur-based evidence and suggests stronger scale development and deeper segmentation (e.g., occasion wear vs. daily wear, branded vs. unbranded, high vs. low involvement).

Overall, understanding why consumers choose a channel helps retailers design experiences that align with decision psychology, making apparel purchasing smoother, more confident, and more satisfying across both online and offline environments.

Suggestions:

1. Improve online "fit confidence." Add brand-wise size guidance, body-shape-based recommendations, customer photo reviews, and clear garment measurement charts. Offer "easy exchange for size" as a prominent promise.

2. Strengthen trust signals. Highlight verified reviews, authenticity tags, clear seller information, and transparent delivery timelines. Provide proactive order updates and frictionless refunds.

3. Reduce perceived risk through policies. Simplify return rules, shorten refund timelines, and offer local pickup/drop-off options in Jodhpur for returns/exchanges.

4. Offline stores: digitize discovery. Use QR codes to browse the catalogue, check size availability, and view colour options. Enable "order in-store, deliver home" for out-of-stock sizes.

5. Price and value transparency. Offline retailers can counter showrooming by matching selected online deals, bundling value (e.g., alterations or free accessories), and offering loyalty points that are perceived as immediate.

6. Segment by product type. Encourage online purchases of basics/repeat brands, while maintaining offline strength in fit-sensitive categories (formal wear, ethnic wear, premium fabrics).

7. Omnichannel continuity. Enable unified returns/exchanges across channels (buy online, exchange offline). This is a powerful trust-builder and reduces abandonment.

8. Future research improvements. Increase reliability by expanding scales (7–8 items per construct), including behavioural variables (actual online spend share), and test mediation models using SEM in a larger Rajasthan sample.

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