



# Factors Contributing to Online or In-store Shopping among Academics from a Private Higher Education Institution in South Africa

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of the study was to determine the factors contributing to online or in-store shopping behaviour among academics from a private higher education institution in South Africa. In addition, the study examined types of products or services consumers are likely to purchase in-store and online and particular aspects relating to store atmosphere, as well as the challenges that were experienced using both modes of shopping. The study was conducted at a private higher education institution. A cross-sectional quantitative study was conducted among all the academics in the organisation. The study show that the majority of respondents belonged to generation X and Y and that they are more inclined to purchase from both in-store and online stores rather than a singular mode of shopping. However, there is an element of fear, anxiety and uncertainty that customers face when purchasing online. This is motivated by the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model. Factors that influence the overall purchasing decision for both online and in-store shopping include accessibility, convenience, delivery service, store aesthetics (atmosphere and ambience) and the availability of an assistant. Recommendations for retail marketing managers include the fact that they should consider a hybrid model of both in-store and online shopping. Moreover, invest in enhancing the store image of both physical stores as well as virtual online stores as the subtle atmospheric cues trigger impulse purchasing.

**Keywords:** Consumer Behaviour, Marketing Management, Online Shopping, In-Store Shopping, Management

**JEL Classifications:** M30, M31, M37

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The advancement of virtual social networks together with the Covid-19 pandemic has prompted retailers to re-examine the significance of “web aesthetics and the online store atmosphere” as being a vital causal influence concerning online shopping trends (Republic of South Africa. DoT 2021; Redda, 2021). “Aesthetic appeal” significantly influences online consumers’ buying behaviour. Though, the physical retail “atmosphere” which includes trigger cues such as ambient colour, background music and aromatic scents are favoured (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974). The “physical characteristics” such as the store layout, lights, and sound, has a greater charm for the majority of customers. Results of previous studies show that corporate social responsibility

(CSR) (the awareness of contributing to a greater cause) (Elg and Hultman, 2016) and social media marketing (where groups endorse products) (Duffett, 2015) play an important role in respect of swaying a consumer’s buying choices. The hedonic element (considerations in terms of pleasant or unpleasant sensations) influences a customer’s buying decision (Santini et al., 2015). The notion of “perceived risk” also has an impact on customer buying traits (Santini et al., 2015). “Impulsiveness. materialist consumption, pleasure with the purchase, the perception of hedonic value, income, feminine gender and consumer’s age, store atmosphere, income and utilitarian benefits” contribute enormously towards impulse buying (Santini et al., 2019). Given this backdrop, the article examines whether there is still a preference for the store atmosphere of bricks and mortar, or whether customers enjoy

the experience of online shopping post the Covid-19 pandemic. The ensuing sections present a brief review of past literature and methodological approach used in data collection and finally the conclusions and recommendations for this study are established, based on the findings of the research undertaken.

### 1.1. Rationale for the Study

Shoppers in South Africa (S.A.) are now more inclined to shopping online after the lockdown due to the pandemic (Rawlins, 2020; Moodley et al., 2023). In addition, online shopping is proving to be faster and more effective. Results of previous studies show that corporate social responsibility (CSR) (the awareness of contributing to a greater cause) (Elg and Hultman, 2016) and social media marketing (where groups endorse products) (Duffett, 2015) play an important role in respect of swaying a consumer's buying choices. The hedonic element (considerations in terms of pleasant or unpleasant sensations) influences a customer's buying decision (Kühn and Petzer, 2018). The notions of "perceived value" and "perceived risk" also has an impact on customer buying traits (Santini et al. 2015; Cha and You, 2018). The Covid -19 pandemic has changed the way retailing is being done as many businesses have shifted to online platforms to transact. The value of this study is to provide retailers as well as Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs) with a framework that is based on the SOR model, which is predicated on in-store and online shopping. In addition, it also provides insight into what customers prefer. This enables start-up businesses and retailers to understand the current preference of customers. The findings of the study can assist retailers and SMEs to adopt practices that are more profitable and to gain more customers.

### 1.2. Purpose of Study

The aim of the study is to determine the factors contributing to online or in-store shopping behaviour among academics from a private higher education institution in South Africa. The study aims to gain insight from academics from a private higher education institution in South Africa to ascertain whether there is a preference for in-store or online shopping, post-pandemic. To uncup, what are the driving factors that lead academics to purchase in-store versus online? As we move forward, post-pandemic, this study provides insights for future small and medium enterprises to understand consumer buying behaviour and their preferences towards various purchasing environments. In addition, the study focuses on aesthetics, convenience, and service delivery in relation to in-store and online shopping. This allows the researcher to identify key factors that influence consumer purchase behaviour. Moreover, the study looks at what types of products or services consumers are likely to purchase in-store and online. This provides a clear indication of what businesses should offer either in-store or online. Lastly, the study examines the challenges and opportunities consumers face concerning in-store and online shopping.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Purchase Decisions and Consumer Behaviour

The "consumer purchasing decision-making process" can be defined as the "phases that consumers go through in making a final purchasing decision" (Kotler et al., 2019). Whilst being aware of

the consumer decision process the World Wide Web has influenced and catapulted modifications in the approach and conduct of people globally, regarding their decisions to purchase (Rudansky-Kloppers, 2014). The consumer decision-making processes involves complex stages from the identification of the problem to the post-purchase undertakings. To this end, online shopping evolved, thereby having a positive impact on the lives of regular people (Rahman et al., 2018). There is a systematic logical process, which underpins purchasing progression and assists marketers to aim for the precise target market. The consumer buying process comprises of six stages, hence effective marketing of the product is essential to ensure that a sale occurs (Jones, 2014). Parment et al. (2016) agree that the marketer's duty is to gauge the entire purchase process, from an aerial perspective, rather than honing in singularly on any segment of the purchasing process as consumers go through various stages before reaching a final decision (Parment et al., 2016). To adequately comprehend consumers' purchasing decisions, marketers need to firstly fathom the consumption process and the advantages of an organisation's products and services. When a consumer intends purchasing a certain product they generally go through several phases, which positively affect their purchasing decisions as well as post-purchasing decisions (Kotler and Keller, 2016).

Therefore, according to past trajectories the "purchasing decision process" has been the "decision-making process," which has been used by customers pertaining to transacting prior, during, and after the purchasing of a product or service (Bokunewicz and Shulman, 2017). Decisions are intangible and cannot be "seen". However, one is able to deduce from discernible activities that the potential customer has made a choice and the transaction has been concluded (Maloney, 2017). The potential customer will go through various stages during the "unseen decision" (the stages of search and purchase of the product or service; and the process of evaluation of the product or service in the post-purchase product). The first phase is critical wherein the problem is identified (problem recognition) and there is a dire need to fulfil their wants as well as their basic requirements. The marketer's function during this phase emerges in terms of the use of advertising, personal sales, together with packaging to stimulate the acknowledgment of the desire for the product (Blackwell et al., 2001). Additionally, in the next phase, consumers begin to search for product information from internal sources, (past experiences), or external sources (such as friends, family, relatives, annual reports, publications, packaging, labelling and social media). In the last phase of the purchasing decision process, customers assess the options and choose from brands that are most suitable and gratifying (Kotler et al., 2019).

Levy et al. (2004) offered a convincing model, which can be regarded as a focal point in the progression of a customer's store choice. Purchasing decisions do not take place in a straight-line format. The use of cellular phones is becoming more popular to verify prices as the customer searches through random stores that may fulfil the need. Alternatives are evaluated and the store that may best satisfy the customer's requirements is selected. After selecting the store, the buying process is completed (Levy et al., 2004). In today's effervescent and unpredictable business environment it has become imperative for retail managers to comprehend and predict

how various segments of consumers behave when purchasing different products and services to fulfil their needs (Hanaysha, 2018). To establish a competitive edge in the market, retailers aim to construct promising imageries about their brands in the minds of customers to affect their buying behaviour (Samadi, 2019). Past purchase experience is also noteworthy and is considered as a vital internal source of information that a customer depends on before making a decision (Hanaysha, 2018). The retailer needs to be cognisant of this consumer decision-making process in order to position their products favourably in the market. Online shopping has provided a stress-free solution for a demanding way of life in today's realm. It is vital for retailers, of products or services online, to fully understand the factors which influence the gratification of customers who shop online (Van Scheers and Makhitha, 2016).

### 2.1.1. *The hedonic perception*

Hedonic experience is related to "multisensory, fantasy, escape, pleasure, enjoyment, emotive, and entertaining aspects" of purchasing experiences associated with products or services (Albayrak et al., 2020; Picot-Coupey et al., 2021). "Aesthetics and perceived enjoyment" can also enable hedonic value (Akel and Armağan 2021). Shoppers' hedonic experiences can be triggered by psychological needs like "emotion, satisfaction, prestige, and other subjective feelings" (Widagdo and Roz, 2021). Online shopping aesthetics consist of "shapes, colours, fonts, animation, movements of products and services", and "perceived enjoyment" can be derived from any pleasing routine, which can be deemed as being "fun and enjoyable" and usually aided by technology (Akel and Armağan, 2021:7108). The hedonic sensitivity of products signifies enjoyable sensations or emotions that positively influence the purchasing intent, especially of discounted products (Santini et al., 2015).

More enjoyment is experienced when a customer is aware of a promotion as being a bargain. Pleasing feelings and intellectual traits are frequently connected with judgements made in stores and correspondingly planned and unplanned procurements. Retail therapy is being explored by marketers, which consists of better disposition when buying ordinary items; a craving for unplanned purchases; increased remorse after needless purchasing, and an appetite for incessant spending (Zulauf et al., 2020). Shopping satisfaction can intensify the intention of potential customers but does not guarantee that customers will come back (Vrender, 2016). The authors add that virtual retail outlets that utilise value-added features in their search-engines and offer customers a stimulating experience increases customers' shopping satisfaction. An impulsive purchase is hedonic, multifaceted and is linked to a tough emotive personality. Emotional feelings and hedonism are intensely connected with the stimulus of ones senses, insofar as physical stores are capable of stimulating the senses more effectively than online stores (Aragoncillo and Orus, 2018). Customers place a lot of emphasis on technology and innovation and do not mind standing in extended lines to purchase the latest technological products. Innovation has an impact on the continual intent to acquire new products (for example smartwatches and other smart devices), therefore marketers need to also consider augmenting the utilitarian and hedonic benefits of the products (Pantano et al., 2019).

### 2.1.2. *Perceived value*

Retailers should prioritise their marketing strategies about the tangible elements, such as focusing on the features and variability of products offered as well as the availability of their products in the physical stores and through their online stores. Perceived product quality has more impact than perceived service quality (Sarantidou, 2017). Store image has important cues which has an impact on consumers' perceived quality of brands, especially private labels (Mostafa and Elseidi, 2018). Attitudes to purchase and ultimately willingness to purchase are triggered by these cues

### 2.1.3. *Perceived risk*

Perceived risk refers to anxieties experienced by consumers when making a purchase. These anxieties are particularly higher when buying through online platforms (Van-Rooyen and Amoah, 2021; Bashir et al., 2021). Many people, particularly in Africa find it very risky purchasing online as a result of challenges in terms of distribution of goods and services (Desvaux, 2020). With the growth of online shopping the has also been a lot of apprehension due to "online scams", "perceived risks", "privacy risks", and "website trust" and this leads to a very low conversion rate of sales (Kühn and Petzer, 2018; Malapane, 2019; Clement, 2020). According to Lazaroiu et al. (2020) explains that the impact of perceived risk on purchase intentions or consumer decision making shapes a consumer to shop either in-store or online setting. Guo et al. (2018) states that trust is a vital component when it comes to mitigating perceived risks. Consumer whom trust a platform or brand is more likely to be inclined to purchase, however if there is uncertainly and lack of trust in a brand or platform the consumer will have perceived risk of making a purchase. This is supported by Lazaroiu et al. (2020:4) "Consumers' intention to go shopping online is affected by their confidence in the web retailer. Trust in the Internet retailer represents confidence of a consumer in an Internet retailer's ability, product-related knowledge, performance, marketing sufficiency, integrity, and payment procedures". Thus, it is important to improve the trust to prevent perceived risk. Therefore, the study looks at whether there is an incline to in-store or online shopping to uncap what are factors that drive the buying behavior post-Covid-19.

## 2.2. *Theoretical Foundation*

According to Zhang et al. (2021:1) "The SOR model describes the connection between stimuli (such as external factors) that will affect organisms (cognition and emotion of people) and the response people have to the stimulus (such as behaviour). Stimulus (S) refers to input, which is an external factor related to the environment". The SOR model in marketing indicates how the external environment "stimulus" leads a consumer to form an internal feeling or behaviour "organism" that results in a response (Kishore, 2021). This research will adopt the SOR model as it conceptual framework, with Stimulus being the external factors of in-store and online (Figure 1). Organism will refer to the feeling and behaviour of the consumer and lastly the response being the selection between in-store purchases or online purchases.

## 2.3. *Shopping in Physical Stores in South Africa*

The physical environment is shaped by the store's overall layout, colour, design, decoration, surroundings and aesthetics. The

atmospheric environment in a physical store includes various stimuli such as ambience, colour, sound, scent, taste, layout and space, which are important cues for buyers. The physical environment, especially storefront windows, allows retailers to distinguish themselves from other competitors and influence customer choices (Pantano et al., 2019). Storefront windows are an important tool for communicating information about products and enticing customers to enter the store (Lange et al., 2016). Physical elements of a retail store (interior, layout, point of purchase and human variables) as well as exterior atmospheric variables (entrance, parking, entertainment amenities and restaurants) also play a vital role in attracting customers to the stores (Willems et al., 2017). The store atmosphere of physical retail stores is regarded as being significant in that it contributes towards enticing and fulfilling customers (Mahmood and Khan, 2014). The store atmosphere is also viewed as a fundamental, viable tactic utilised by retailers to facilitate the buying decision process, conclude a sale and increase turnover. The elements of atmospheric environment centres around several stimuli such as colour, music, scene, layout and space, as they have been considered to be essential cues for customers (Mahmood and Khan, 2014). A store's environment augments the perception of brand value and contributes towards creating certain brand associations in the minds of consumers. Research carried out pertaining to store environment in the retail context found that the ambience and store's design are key features that have a major impact on a customer's brand preference, service and product quality and price perceptions (Liu et al., 2019).

People prefer to visit malls and enjoy the atmosphere or environment of the shopping centre for the following reasons:

- The malls have famous and reputable brand stores, that usually offer exclusive and esteemed clothing brands
- Physical surroundings, hygiene, ease of access and secure environs
- The image of the establishment, movie theatres, entertainment, availability of food courts and cafeterias, and ease of access
- Appeal, atmosphere, comfort, service staff, and effortlessness of shopping
- Inner environment, deals and promotions offered by the shopping centre, the level of excitement, the volume of purchases, and the partiality towards customary stores
- Setting aesthetics, ease, a variety of offers, fair value, high-end quality, discernment of extravagance, offer status and indulgence
- Existence of varied viable incentives, parking and shopping atmosphere, and staff proficiency and professionalism; and
- Knowledgeable staff, accessibility and prices (Ortegón-Cortázar and Royo-Vela, 2017).

Physical stores are able to create unforgettable sensory experiences and pleasant store atmospheres, which triggers purchases. Customers prefer shopping in physical stores because of the availability of trained salespersons who guide and assist them and thereby minimise frustrations and facilitate the buying process. The perception of the store image improves, highlighting the store staff as being the key element, providing product knowledge and product specifications, general information and after-sales service

(Maziriri et al., 2019). The authors add that retailers need to take cognisance of the visual (colour, brightness, sizes and shapes); aural (volume and pitch); olfactory (scent and freshness); and tactile (softness, smoothness and temperature) atmosphere aspects. Store atmosphere and retail store choice are intrinsically entwined. The store atmosphere has a strong influence on customer shopping satisfaction in respect of: “the physical time spent browsing and evaluating merchandise; eagerness of customers to communicate with store personnel and using facilities such as the dressing rooms, willingness to spend more money than originally planned and the possibility of future patronage” (Mungania, 2016).

#### **2.4. Shopping Via Online Stores in South Africa**

Online or virtual stores use rich text, high definition photographs, multimedia files as well as links to additional product information to refer to products. However, some online customers are daring, prefer exploration and fun and are shopping-lovers who do not favour technology and the stress of waiting for products to be ‘shipped’ to them (Rahman et al., 2018). During the Covid-19 pandemic customers were impelled to stockpile as a result of long queues in front of stores. The influence of news in the media and the internet and hence this resulted in further online shopping (Zheng et al., 2021). The Covid-19 pandemic has affected the retail sector in so many ways. Increased fear and anxiety resulted in panic buying. People were going less frequently to the stores and have been purchasing online more often for safety reasons (Roggeveen and Sethuraman, 2020). Cultivating customer loyalty is a critical strategy to maintain a competitive edge and develop customer online engagement. Given that the strength of a brand has a positive impact on loyalty, marketing and retail managers should focus their executive decision-making on reinforcing their brand.

The most important contributing factors of brand strength are brand reputation, brand superiority and the emotional closeness and familiarity that a customer has with the actual physical store (Sarantidou, 2017). Changes in shopping behaviour have exhibited various aspects of change for example from offline distribution channels to online distribution channels and changes in the choice of stores to stores that provide a delivery service (Zulauf et al., 2020). Some customers prefer to shop online for a variety of products and services, to save time as well as having the added convenience of the home delivery system, though they are avert to the fact that they cannot touch or feel the product prior to purchasing (Rahman et al., 2018). However, in South Africa, Generation Y consumers have a strong global consumer orientation (Bevan-Dye, 2021). Customers are able to use or consume a product instantaneously when buying from a physical store, and this can be a gratifying process in itself. However, online shopping requires tolerance to wait for the arrival of the product and this can certainly reduce its satisfaction value (Hoque et al., 2015).

“Online Experience Stores” around the world are becoming more popular as they create a sought-after “retail-theatre”, “experience factory” or “immersive retail environment” enabling an unforgettable shopping experience to improve customer satisfaction and loyalty (Laria and Pantano, 2012). Online purchasing of products can lead to more impulse buying- buying on a whim due to generally, free shipping, excellent quality

demonstrations and photographs, and comprehensive information regarding product specifications. However, many shoppers have a tendency to be disappointed with the product quality once they receive the actual goods (Aragoncillo and Orus, 2018). Omni-channel shopping has improved the efficacy of online shopping by means of including a uniform customer experience that is compatible with the mobile application and also matches branded physical environments. Shoppers are now able to purchase in a similar manner online and via their mobile phone as they would purchase in a physical store. “Online only” retailers hinge on functional elements; while Omni-channel websites hinge on emotional elements. Patrons and shoppers appreciate that “online-only” retailers assist in terms of saving time, avoidance of stresses, cost reduction, accessibility, reduced efforts, and simplifying their lives. However, Omnichannel websites are favoured and seen as providing badge-value, allure, sensory appeal, general well-being, self-elevation, and association and connectedness (Almquist, 2016).

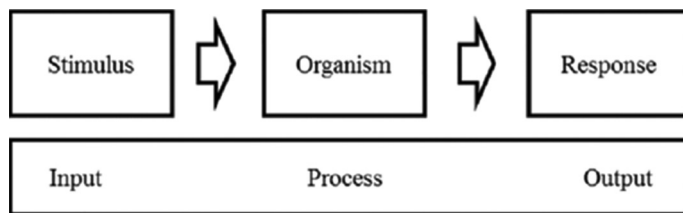
Therefore, based on the literature provided, and research, this study developed a framework based on the SOR model, to ascertain how academics in higher education are influenced by factors to purchase in-store or online.

Figure 2, above, shows how the stimulus is an independent variable that consumers are influenced by. Hence, that results in an organism that is a mediating variable that leads to either customer perceptions, hedonic perceptions or perceived values or risks that result in a response which is a dependant variable which results in a consumer either purchasing in-store or online.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

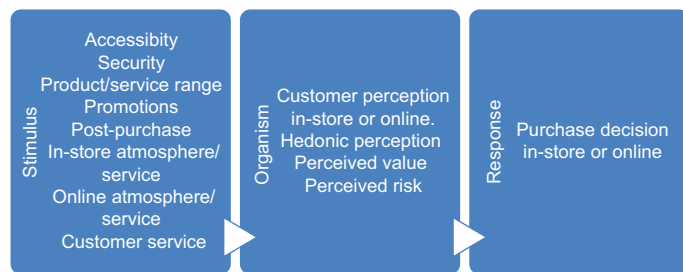
The study was conducted at a private higher education institution (MANCOSA, South Africa-Ethical Clearance number 102/2021). This was a cross-sectional quantitative study conducted among all the academics in the organisation. Census sampling method was used to select the participants. Self-administered questionnaires were used to collect the data. The instrument was distributed to all the participants via an online platform (a link was sent) and they were asked to complete the questionnaire within a week. A reminder was sent to them after a week, if they did not complete the survey. The target sample comprises of internal academics at MANCOSA, employed full or part time. Inclusion and exclusion criteria Inclusion criteria: Internal academics at MANCOSA and are employed on a full/part time basis. Internal academics that have shopped online as well as in-store are included in the study. Exclusion criteria: Academics, which are external to MANCOSA, were excluded. Individuals that have not shopped online or did not have a preference for online shopping were also excluded. The data was collected through an electronic questionnaire which included demographics to ensure a fair representation of the targeted population. The measurement scale that were implemented in the study were a 5-point Likert scale utilizing indicators of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The data was collected through electronic survey (google forms) and distributed via the academic data base. The electronic survey allowed respondents to respond in a natural environment. In addition, allowed flexibility,

Figure 1: Stimulus-Organism-Response Model



Source: Kim, Lee & Jung (2020)

Figure 2: Proposed Framework for marketing managers



Source: Author’s construct (2023)

comfortability and did not create an inconvenience to their work-life. Respondents had to provide consent to participate in the study to which they had to select “yes” to the question which read as follows: “I give consent to participate in study”. The study sample included 24 academics that met the inclusion criteria.

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Ethnic Groups

The ethnic group of the study represented in Figure 3, below indicates 66.7% Asian, followed by 25% Black, Coloured (4.15%) and White (4.15%).

### 4.2. Gender

Figure 4, below, indicates the study population of 54.2% female followed by 45.8% male in the study.

### 4.3. Type of Employment

Figure 5, below, indicates the type of employment of respondents (91.7%) full-time, followed by (8.3%) part-time.

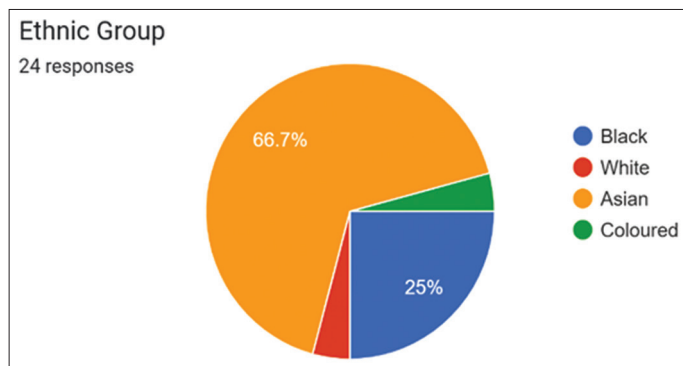
### 4.4. Age Groups

In Figure 6, below, the leading age group is 45-54 (Generation X) followed by 25-34 and 35-44 which is (Generation Y) and lastly 55-64 (Baby Boomers). Therefore, this study is now looking at the Generation X and Y group’s purchase trigger- factors when it comes to in-store and online shopping, post covid-19.

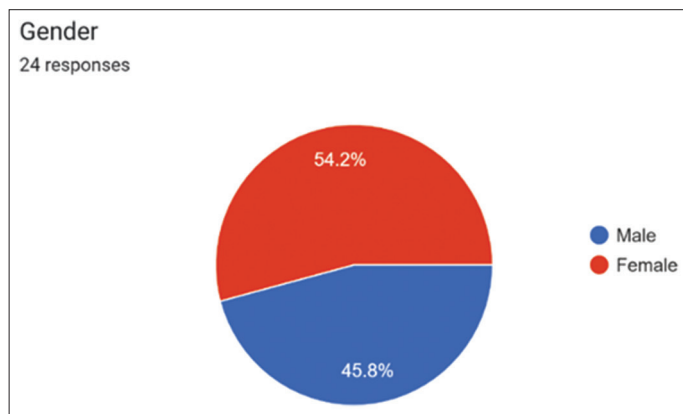
### 4.5. Preference of In-Store or Online Shopping in South Africa

Figure 7, below indicates that the majority of respondents now prefer both in-store and online shopping (71%); whereas there were 21% that had a preference for in-store shopping, followed by 8% that preferred online shopping. This shows that the respondents are more inclined to purchase from both modalities of purchase rather than a singular mode of shopping.

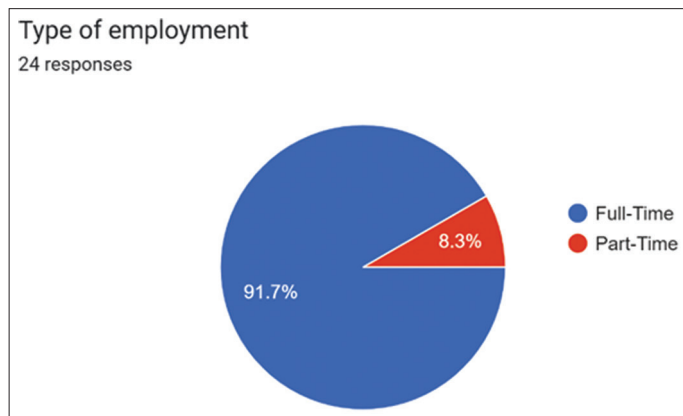
**Figure 3: Ethics Groups**



**Figure 4: Gender**



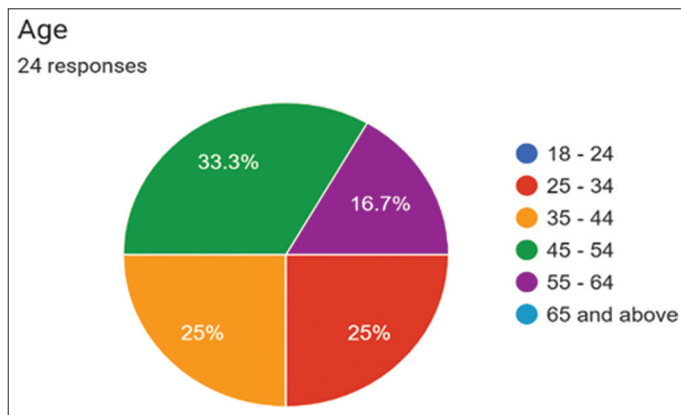
**Figure 5: Type of employment**



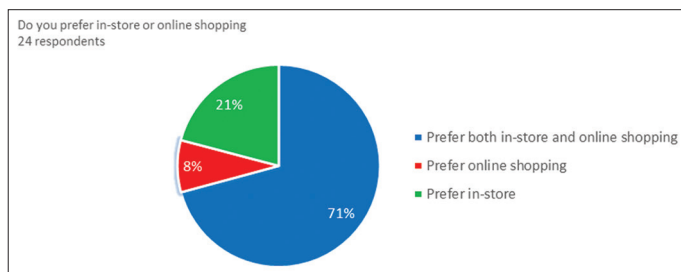
**4.6. Factors Influencing Purchase Decisions In-store and Via Online Shopping**

The finding indicate that from the 24 respondents 17 selected the preference for both online and in-store shopping which represents 71% of the study. From the survey, the respondents favoured the following factors that motivate their purchase for online that includes aesthetics in online store, the convenience, online atmosphere and ambience that allowed longer browsing as well as social media prompted messages. Moreover, academics were inclined to purchase online during the Covid-19 pandemic and prefer to shop online from retailers that provide a delivery service. Factors that did not favour online shopping were returns via online shopping that is easy and hassle free. This factor can be noted as a challenge and an issue that companies should look

**Figure 6: Age groups**



**Figure 7: Preference of in-store or online shopping**



at to motivate consumer behavior towards purchasing online. The finding indicate top 5 factors that have a major influence on the overall purchase decision is illustrated in Table 1, below.

The focus then looks at in-store what are the factors that motivate purchase behavior of those respondent that prefer online and in-store shopping. The findings indicate a strong perception on the following aspects that will motivate the consumer to purchase in-store: these include aesthetics in store, layout, atmosphere, ability to try on branded garments. Physically seeing and feeling the quality of product, the experience of shopping and lastly shopping in-store where customers are going to receive after- sales service and back up. From the findings the top 5 factors that motivate a customer to purchase in-store is illustrated in Table 2, below.

**4.7. Preference for In-store Shopping only in South Africa**

In the study out of the 24 respondents 5 respondents selected they prefer in-store shopping only. That represents 21% of the sample size. These respondents favored in-store shopping due to the following factors: aesthetics, layout, atmosphere, quality, trying on garments, store experience and good after sales service. One factor that was not a vital element that motivates in-store shopping was research of the products online before going in-store.

**4.8. Preference for Online stores Only in South Africa**

The findings indicate that out of the 24 respondents 2 selected online stores as a shopping preference and that represents 8% of the sample size. The respondents were highly influenced by the following factors such as “includes aesthetics in online store”, the “convenience”, and “online atmosphere and ambience that allowed longer browsing as well as social media prompted

**Table 1: Factors that have a major influence on the overall purchase decision**

S. No.	Factors
1	I prefer to shop via online stores that provide a delivery service
2	The convenience of online shopping influences my decision to purchase.
3	Aesthetics of the online store influences my decision to purchase./I am usually prompted via social media to purchase products online
4	The “atmosphere” and “ambience” of the online store results in me browsing longer and influences my decision to purchase./During the pandemic I have become accustomed to online shopping and will continue to shop online
5	Instructor was available and helpful

Source: Table compiled by authors (2023)

**Table 2: Factors that influence purchasing in-store**

S. No.	Factors
1	I prefer to shop in stores that provide good after- sales service and back-up
2	The layout of the in-store influences my decision to purchase
3	The “atmosphere” and ambience of the in-store influences my decision to purchase/I prefer to thoroughly research products online before I purchase in-store/I prefer to know about the quality of the product by seeing it/touching it before I purchase in-store
4	Aesthetics in-store influences my decision to purchase
5	Shopping at an “Experience Store” provides a memorable and credible shopping experience for me and my family

Source: Table compiled by authors (2023)

messages”. Moreover, academics were inclined to purchase online during the Covid-19 pandemic and prefer to shop online with online stores that provide a delivery service. These are interesting findings when compared to those of whom prefer both online and in-store purchasing. The respondents that selected online shopping are motivated by the ease of returns done online (easy and hassle free).

#### 4.9. Challenges for Online Shopping Perceived by Customers

The study finds that there are many perceived challenges that customers face and below are some of the responses that were received.

Fraudulent sellers”; “Prices should appear with the item and not where you need to download the catalogue to view the price”; “Finding the right clothing size”; “Online pictures can be deceiving with photoshopping, the sizes are not always accurate. It's just not the same as being able to touch and feel the product, see how it fits etc.”; “Delivery date and time is not always convenient for me.”; “There should be a platform especially for online stores to be reviewed by users so that potential users are better able to decide on whether to purchase there, based on others' experiences with a particular online store.”; “I am only concerned of the security in purchases rather using my bank cards because of fraudulent activities”, “To make online purchase more safe by having a two stage secure payment getaway.”; “Delivered incorrect products”;

“online can be a threat to privacy and online payments are problematic as you do not receive the goods when you pay for them - may be an un-trustworthy vendor - so don't take the chance to prove that hacking and illegal online trading takes place in SA”; “Convenience shopping, easy parking, polite and helpful team, ease of purchase and good returns and back-up policy i.e. only use reputable traders”; “The most challenging part of shopping online is the return of the item/s. It is quite difficult to get assistance when you want to return an item, there is no balance between the ease of purchasing and the ease of returning. Another challenge to note is that of warranties, this also poses as difficult to put a claim in for those warranties. Some online stores lack the human element completely, making it rather impossible to get assistance as they may be an situation that the “robot” could not assist you with.”; “Based on my previous answer, I would recommend developing a system that is just as efficient as purchasing for returns or claims. Create a department that has a human element and does not take hours to answer a call.”; “Poor quality products ”; “Be sure of the quality before you order”; “The online experience gives me anxiety about whether or not my product will arrive. When it arrives, I worry about whether

Source: Compiled by authors from data collection (2023)

It can be inferred that there is an emotional element such as fear, anxiety and uncertainty that customers face when making a purchase decision online. In addition, issues such as quality, quantity and consumer service demotivates customers when purchasing online.

#### 4.10. Opportunities for Online Shopping Perceived by Customers

The study finds that there are many perceived opportunities that customers face and below are some of the responses that were received:

I only prefer online shopping for grocery shopping.”; “A broader range of product offerings that meet my expectations.”; “Affordability, quality of goods purchased, after sales service, competitive pricing of goods, absence of the human touch, no social connections, no carrying of shopping bags to fill in your goods, might not be able to compare with other retailers like Checkers and Pick and Pay. ”; “It’s absolutely convenient, saves petrol, time energy and effort, services delegated to the store personnel, learning a way of shopping and that is online, compliance and due diligence of all employees, employers, retailers and goods must be maintained and not compromised”.

Source: Compiled by authors from data collection (2023)

It is evident from the responses above that there are major challenges when it comes to online shopping as compared to in-store shopping. This leads to the managerial implications of companies that are offering online services and product offerings. Moreover, it also provides challenges to some small to medium enterprises that may want to start-up with an online store first. Therefore, additionally the study highlights the managerial implications for both online and in-store shopping.

## 5. CONCLUSION, MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS AND DIRECTION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Customers prefer the retail experience at physical stores, especially for private label brands, therefore, retailers need to heed the importance of including web aesthetics, in particular, aesthetic decorum and aesthetic appeal and to improve the hedonic quality of their websites to complement their physical stores. The rapid progression of online social networks as well as the Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in more customers opting for online shopping. Omni-channel websites are seen as providing badge value, attractiveness, sensory appeal, wellness, self-transcendence, as well as affiliation and belonging. Web aesthetics and the online store atmosphere should be enhanced to include a complete virtual shopping experience opposed to just merely being able to view individual items; as this customised experience is currently an important contributing factor towards online purchasing.

Retail marketing managers should consider a hybrid model and should invest in enhancing the store image of both physical stores as well as online stores as the subtle atmospheric cues trigger impulse purchasing. The utilitarian and hedonic values of the product should be augmented on online platforms to keep customers browsing. Actions of marketing with a social dimension make consumers positively assess these companies and result in a willingness to buy their products. Companies should therefore incorporate CSR campaigns in their promotions (in-store as well as online stores) as perceptions of CSR play an important role in consumer decision making. Companies should ensure that there is regular reporting of socially responsible activities to maintain trust, loyalty and commitment towards the company. Retailers should improve their management decisions concerning intrinsic cues to improve customer perceived quality of products by using appealing packaging design, attractive labelling and displaying items on shelves as though there is limited stock available, instead of over-stocking items. Retail stores should always pay attention to the visual (colour, brightness, sizes and shapes); aural (volume and pitch); olfactory (scent and freshness); and tactile (softness, smoothness and temperature) atmosphere dimensions in terms of their product offerings as shoppers place a lot of emphasis on these aspects when shopping in physical stores.

Managerial implications for online shopping: Whilst there is a pivot to online shopping customers still want the look and feel of a physical store. Thus, it is imperative that the look and feel of the online store very closely resembles the actual physical store. Customers want to experience multiple, high resolution images from various angles before they decide to purchase. The consumer's search for information is now being assisted by artificial intelligence (AI). Thus, it is vital for retail businesses to understand the metamorphosed consumer buying process in order to respond accordingly to the needs of the consumer (Erasmus et al., 2022). Together with this, retailers need to take cognisance of the various stages of the product life cycle and ensure that they employ suitable strategies for the introduction and growth stages to ensure stable, long-term customer-engagement.

Timeous delivery; safe and secure payment portals; the ease of returning items; product quality; and delivery costs are major concerns for online shoppers. These concerns can be eliminated if reputable online shopping vendors like Takealot.com or Amazon.com can be partnered with. These reputable online shopping vendors have the infrastructure in place to deliver timeously (at a time negotiated with the customer); ensure that the online payments are secure; and have dedicated staff to handle returns. Because of the huge volumes that they deliver, these online shopping vendors have very reduced rates for delivery. These costs are usually absorbed by the online vendor so that the price that the customer sees online is the price that they pay, with no additional delivery costs. Ultimately, people want to feel secure with the notion that they have received the best possible advice pertaining to a product. The use of ChatBots should be complemented with AI as well as the human element.

New consumer protection legislation in South Africa, in particular the Consumer Protection Act (CPA) has had an impact on marketing and customer-retention strategies for retail businesses in Durban. Retailers are forced to be accountable for the discontent of their customers, at times independently of their suppliers. This can place an added financial burden on the business. Yet, compliance with legislation has the benefit of a positive contribution towards the positioning of the retail business. It is more probable that customers prefer to purchase from a retailer that engages in fair and responsible practices. Whilst the CPA is forcing retailers to be ethical in their business approaches, it is also expensive, but it has competitive advantage that is not immediately apparent. Compliance with the CPA indeed has several benefits and protects brand reputation, brand equity and most importantly the relationship with the customer (Mugobo and Malunga 2015; Moodley et al., 2022).

Monitoring and evaluation systems and processes need to be set up and implemented to ensure that proper vetting and compliance measures are in place; so that customers are dealing with reputable businesses when they transact online. Additionally, industry bodies must vet all organisations before they start to transact online. Third party suppliers should ideally be part of a regulatory chain. If these organisations are using any third party organisations, these organisations will need to be vetted too. More due diligence is required for online rating and review platforms. More liability protection is required for customers purchasing online products. Online platforms are international and need global standardization.

Managerial implications for shopping in physical stores: There are several benefits for retailers that set up consortiums within their industries, whereby all members pay an annual fee and have the auxiliary collective benefit from trade discounts. A central printer can be deployed and all members can benefit from volume printing of common product catalogues. Flyers can be printed at half the cost because all members of the consortium will have the same specials. However, the branding will change accordingly for each retailer. Consortium members will benefit from Just-in-time ordering, which also allows for Total Quality Management (TQM). Group training can be conducted (each one teach one; breakfast training sessions; industry experts can be invited to speak



to the entire group; resulting in transfer of skills and knowledge). Superior brands can be procured for the entire group at reduced rates. Additionally, they will also benefit from bulk SMSs, advertorials and emails that are sent out by the outsourced PR agents. This in turn reduces marketing costs. Trade promotions can be alternated monthly amongst the members. Suppliers cost share with the retailers in respect of marketing costs. Defects and sub-standard products are minimal since the group is supplied excellent quality products as a collective. This is congruent with the views of Moodley and Naidoo (2022).

Rural retailers are disadvantaged because they are geographically isolated and have inflated cost configurations and experience dispersed market segments. To cater for these diverse markets, retailers store more products in large warehouses. This incurs additional insurance costs for the retailer. To counter this, tactical trade promotions with suppliers can assist retailers in respect of drawing stock in small batches, using Just-in-time practices.

Future research can include the trust elements and ease of shopping when shopping via mobile applications (Apps). Researchers can also delve deeper into other factors that trigger purchasing, as this is important for marketers to formulate their marketing communications plans.

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