

Demographic Study of the Consumer Preference Towards Traditional Shopping after the Pandemic

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Abstract

Purpose: The research aims to identify the key factors influencing consumer preferences for traditional shopping, with a particular emphasis on the post-pandemic shift in shopping behaviours, and to find ways to attract consumers to traditional shopping after the pandemic.

Design/methodology/approach: 250 samples were collected using a simple random sampling method. The data consists of the period from 2020 to 2024. The factors influencing consumers were analysed using Garrett's Ranking Method. The factors determining the behaviour and perception of the consumers were analysed using factor analysis using SPSS was used to test chi-square analysis, factor analysis and multiple response analysis.

Findings: From the results, it was concluded that age and marital status have a significant impact on traditional shopping. Among the factors that lead consumers to shop traditionally, trustworthiness was ranked first, followed by time-saving, comfort, discounts and offers, price, and habit. The result of the factor analysis showed that among the psychological factors, emphasis was given to the importance of consumers' ability to evaluate quality in person, Among the external factors, emphasis was given to the economic conditions; in marketing strategy, emphasis was given to advertising and promotions; in social factors, for cultural influences and age and lifestyle in personal factors.

Research Implications: There is a significant relationship between age and traditional shopping. There is a significant relationship between marital status and traditional shopping. Trustworthiness is the first factor that influences consumers to shop traditionally. Among the psychological factors influencing behaviour and perception, the perception of product quality stands out, emphasizing the importance of consumers' ability to evaluate quality in person.

Social Implications: The pandemic triggered a profound shift in traditional shopping, reshaping consumer habits while deeply impacting, social and cultural dynamics of several communities. These changes underscore the necessity for retailers, urban planners, and policymakers to adopt innovative strategies that align with the evolving demands and expectations of modern consumers. This study paves the way for the sellers who sell in-store.

Originality / Value: Online shopping has expanded rapidly during and after the pandemic in response to rising demand. No study was made on consumer preference towards traditional shopping after the pandemic. This study is expected to fill the gap in the literature in terms of period. This study is a unique study on a topic that has not been dealt with in the past.

Keywords: Consumer Preference, Traditional Shopping, Perceived Product Quality, Cultural Influences.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about a dramatic transformation in consumer shopping habits, which significantly reshaped consumer shopping patterns, with a notable shift toward online platforms driven by concerns for safety, convenience, accessibility, and heightened health concerns. Traditional shopping, a practice deeply rooted in history, has

experienced a dramatic shift in recent years, largely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, digital platforms became the preferred choice for many, offering both safety and convenience. As digital shopping became the norm during lockdowns, many consumers grew accustomed to the ease of purchasing products online.

The rise of online shopping has significantly overshadowed in-person retail, with e-commerce seeing a marked increase in popularity. However, with the gradual easing of restrictions and the return to normalcy, several consumers have shown a renewed interest in traditional in-store shopping, suggesting a shift toward physical retail experiences. This resurgence indicates that many consumers are gravitating back to physical stores, seeking experiences that online platforms cannot fully replicate, and raises critical questions about the underlying factors influencing consumer choices in the post-pandemic era.

Understanding the key factors influencing this renewed preference, such as the ability to engage with products through sensory interaction, the social aspect of in-store shopping, instant product availability, and the sense of trust associated with physical transactions, is essential for retailers looking to align their strategies with changing consumer expectations. While many consumers have fully embraced the convenience and safety of shopping online, a substantial group still prefers the familiarity of traditional, in-store shopping. Some never transitioned to digital shopping during the pandemic, sticking with what they know best. However, with a growing number of online shoppers, many prefer traditional shopping due to convenience and safety. In response, retailers have adapted by expanding their offerings to customers to provide a secure and convenient shopping experience that brings the products directly to their doorstep. This study delves into these dynamics, offering insights into the evolving landscape of post-pandemic consumer behaviour.

Statement of the Problem

The core issue revolves around understanding why consumers are gravitating back to physical stores despite the ongoing convenience offered by e-commerce. Factors such as the need for sensory engagement, the desire for social interaction, trust in physical transactions, and the satisfaction of instant product availability are likely to contribute to this behaviour. It was not clear how these preferences varied across different demographic profiles, product categories, and geographic locations. In particular, there has been no research on consumer preference towards traditional shopping in the Alanganallur block of the Madurai district.

Research Questions

This study was made to derive answers to the following questions related to traditional shopping after the pandemic.

1. What are the factors influencing traditional shopping after the pandemic?
2. How can consumers be attracted to conventional shopping after the pandemic?

Research Objectives

1. To analyse the factors influencing consumers towards traditional shopping after the pandemic.
2. To find ways in which consumers can be attracted to traditional shopping after the pandemic.

Traditional Shopping after the Pandemic

The term 'consumer' refers to an individual or group that buys or uses goods and services for personal consumption, rather than for resale or commercial purposes. Preference refers to the inclination or favouring of one option over others. It reflects an individual's or group's tendency to choose certain products, services, behaviours, or ideas based on their tastes, experiences, needs, or values. Consumer preference refers to the inclination of individuals or groups to favour specific products, services, or brands over others when making purchasing decisions. It reflects the choices consumers make based on factors, personal tastes, past experiences, perceived value, and the particular needs or desires they wish to fulfil. Shopping is purchasing goods or services, either in physical stores or through online platforms, to meet personal needs or desires. It involves browsing, selecting, and buying items. Traditional shopping is buying goods and services directly from physical stores rather than through online platforms. This approach requires customers to visit stores in person, explore the available products, engage with staff for assistance, and complete their purchases on-site. A pandemic refers to a widespread outbreak of a disease that affects a large number of people across multiple countries or continents. Unlike localised outbreaks (epidemics), a pandemic involves extensive transmission of a contagious disease, resulting in significant public health, social, and economic consequences.

This study focuses on the Alanganallur block of Madurai District in Tamil Nadu, India, and examines consumers' preference towards traditional shopping following the pandemic. The research aims to identify the key factors influencing consumer preferences for shopping traditionally in this context, emphasising the post-pandemic shift in shopping behaviours in the Alanganallur block.

Review of Literature

A customer behaviour analysis is a detailed observation of how customers interact with a company at various stages of the customer journey (Gordon, 2025). The customer journey is often dynamic and non-linear, characterised by a continuous loop that encompasses cognitive, emotional, and behavioural responses (Grewal & Roggeveen, 2020). From the preference reversals, it was found that Men exhibit a higher tendency toward standard preference reversals when compared to women. Both standard and nonstandard reversals are most frequently observed among individuals from families with average income levels, indicating a concave relationship between preference reversals and family income. However, students perceive themselves as risk-loving and demonstrate risk-averse behaviour in practice (Pervan et al., 2015).

The modern mode of commerce offers numerous advantages for buyers and sellers, making it a mutually beneficial platform (Jabbar, 2019). Yang et al. (2020) claimed that increased engagement with COVID-19 circumstances motivated individuals to prioritise purchasing utilitarian products online. The Internet empowers consumers to compare products and prices across different online stores, making informed purchasing decisions easier than ever (Shivranjani, 2022). Mortimer et al. (2024) suggested that in the post-COVID era, customers have a greater emphasis on utilitarian benefits and transaction value, enhancing their overall functional shopping experience. Job losses lead to reduced consumer spending, triggering a ripple effect that harms other businesses and results in further job cuts. In such economic downturns, value-focused and discount retailers thrived, whereas luxury and high-end brands are more likely to experience setbacks (Roggeveen & Sethuraman, 2020).

Digital transformation has not only changed distribution channels but also influenced consumer preferences, expectations, and habits (Zwanka & Buff, 2021). Online shoppers are often highly price-conscious, but they also prioritise convenience, a wide range of product choices, and speedy delivery, and their purchasing decisions are strongly influenced by reviews and feedback from other customers (D'Cunha, 2023). Fares et al. (2023) analysed the operational factors, revealed that internal factors hold greater significance when compared to external ones. Most of the customers have prioritised online shopping (Poornima & Kanimozhi, 2023). Customers with social experience shop online for goods and services (Nizma & Siregar, 2020). Females prefer online shopping more than males (Kavitha & Inbalakshmi, 2018). When dealing with traditional channel preferences, discounts, and in-store deals, fully mediate the influence of hedonic and user experience. Indian youth tend to favour online channels for purchasing utilitarian products and repeat purchases, while offline channels remain their top choice for availing of in-store discounts (Shah et al., 2022).

Individuals who embraced a positive mindset during the COVID-19 pandemic developed a stronger sense of pro-sustainability and environmental awareness, leading to more eco-conscious consumption habits and a notable shift toward online shopping (Gupta & Mukherjee, 2022). Further, online shoppers have opined that they can avoid a forceful suggestion by a salesman in the case of online shopping (Maheswari, 2018). Product consideration seems to be the new entry point in the digital customer journey (Mikmak, 2025). Online shoppers get the products and feedback online from their doorsteps (Gupta et al., 2013).

Consumers lack trust in online stores (He & Bach, 2014). The consumers felt it was risky to purchase online, as they were uncertain of the hygienic conditions in which the products were packed and delivered (Gao et al., 2020). Existing habits are discarded, and new consumption methods are invented after the pandemic (Sheth, 2020). Indeed, retailers who engage their customers by delivering personalised information and offering genuine value distinguish themselves from the competition, fostering stronger and more lasting customer relationships (Grewal et al., 2016). Retailers must emphasise that safeguarding consumers' health and safety takes precedence over profit while ensuring timely access to essential products and achieving this may require collecting more personal and sensitive customer information, but consumers may be more willing than ever to share such data in exchange for these assurances (Pantano et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic triggered unemployment, economic instability, and recession, which in turn prompted countries to reconsider their reliance on imports, encouraging a shift toward domestic production of goods and services (Verma & Naveen, 2021).

Intention to self-isolate was a strong predictor of unusual purchases, suggesting that the major reason why people made unusual purchases during COVID-19 was to prepare for isolation and quarantine. In hindsight, the panic buying phenomenon was brief, and consumer markets quickly stabilised to unusual purchasing and

then further to the new COVID-19 consumer status quo (Laato et al., 2020). The impact of COVID-19 on consumer behaviour and consumption culture has not been extensively explored. There remains uncertainty about how many customers will return once the pandemic subsides. As consumers navigate through the pandemic, some behavioural changes may endure long after the crisis has passed (Kim, 2020). Consumers' perceived risk of contracting COVID-19 significantly influences their willingness to pay for food reserves. The findings indicate that individuals who feel less in control of the situation are more inclined to spend more on fresh food supplies (Wang et al., 2020).

Research Methodology

A quantitative research approach was employed to investigate the factors influencing consumers to prefer traditional shopping. The population of the Alanganallur block of Madurai District in Tamil Nadu, India, in the year 2021 was 16,000. The sampling technique used is simple random sampling. The sample was calculated at a 95% level of confidence and an 80% population proportion. Hence, the sample size was 250. Hypotheses were framed and analysed in this study; the dependent variable was a preference for traditional shopping, and the independent variables were age and marital status. The questionnaire was framed with demographic details in the first section; the second section contained the factors that influence the respondents to shop traditionally; the third section contained ways to attract the consumers to shop through the traditional mode, and the fourth section sought suggestions for traditional sellers to enhance sales. The data set of the variables consists of the period from 2020 to 2024. The factors influencing consumers to shop traditionally were analysed with the help of Garrett's Ranking Method. The factors that influenced the behaviour and perception of the consumers were analysed using the factor analysis method. Suggestions were collected from the respondents on how traditional sellers can attract buyers to get back the same sales volume as before the pandemic, and multiple response analysis was used to analyze.

Findings

Demographic details are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Characteristics	Frequency	%
AGE		
21 – 40 Years	123	49.2
41 – 60 Years	76	30.4
Above 60 Years	51	20.4
MARITAL STATUS		
Married	136	54.4
Unmarried	97	38.8
Widowed	12	4.8
Divorcee	5	2.0
OCCUPATION		
Employed	117	46.8
Business	53	21.2
Homemaker	33	13.2
Student	47	18.8
MONTHLY INCOME		
Up to Rs. 50,000	53	21.2
Rs. 50,001 - Rs. 1,00,000	127	50.8
Rs. 1,00,001 - Rs. 1,50,000	32	12.8
Rs. 1,50,001 - Rs. 2,00,000	25	10.0
Above Rs. 2,00,000	13	5.2
EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION		
HSC	53	21.2
UG	103	41.2
PG	42	16.8

Others	52	20.8
GENDER		
Male	112	44.8
Female	138	55.2

The ranking question was framed using the factors that influenced consumers to shop traditionally and were analysed using Garrett’s Ranking Method, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Factors Influencing Traditional Shopping

Factors	No. of Respondents						Total Score
	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4	Rank 5	Rank 6	
Comfortable	41	42	109	21	20	17	250
Trustworthiness	108	49	41	19	17	16	250
Habit	16	16	14	34	27	143	250
Price	18	18	16	48	107	43	250
Discounts & offers	19	18	29	109	51	24	250
Time-Saving	48	107	41	19	28	7	250
Total	250	250	250	250	250	250	1500

Table 2 indicates the factors that influence consumers to shop traditionally. Garrett’s Ranking Method was used, and trustworthiness was ranked first with a score of 15,488, followed by time-saving (14,745) with the second rank, comfort (13,786) with the third rank, discount & offers (11,616) secured the fourth rank, price (10,540) with the fifth rank, and habit (8,848) was ranked last.

Hypotheses

The relationship between the independent variable, the preference for traditional shopping, and the dependent variables, age and marital status, was analysed using a chi-square test, which is shown in Tables 3 and 4.

H₀₁ = There was no significant relationship between age and preference for traditional shopping.

Table 3. Crosstabulation between Age and (after Pandemic) Preference

Prefer Age	Prefer Traditional Shopping	Prefer Online Shopping	Total
21 – 40 years	95	28	123
41 – 60 years	30	46	76
Above 60 years	15	36	51
Total	140	110	250

χ^2 value	df	Critical Value	p-value	Inference
61.368	2	5.991	< 0.0001	Significant

From Table 3, it was seen that the χ^2 value (61.368) was greater than the critical value (5.991). Hence, the hypothesis was rejected. It was concluded that there was a significant relationship between age and preference for shopping traditionally.

H₀₂ = There was no significant relationship between marital status and preference for traditional shopping.

Table 4. Crosstabulation between Marital Status and (after pandemic) Preference

Prefer Marital Status	Prefer Traditional Shopping	Prefer Online Shopping	Total
Married	110	26	136
Unmarried	25	72	97
Widowed	3	9	12
Divorcee	2	3	5
Total	140	110	250

χ^2 value	df	Critical Value	p-value	Inference
50.985	3	7.815	< 0.0001	Significant

From Table 4, it was seen that the χ^2 (50.985) value was greater than the critical value (7.815). Hence, the hypothesis was rejected. It was concluded that there was a significant relationship between marital status and the preference to shop traditionally.

The factors that influenced the behaviour and perception of consumers were analysed using factor analysis, which were given in Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5. Factor Loadings

Statements	Factors				
	1	2	3	4	5
Perception of Product Quality	.850				
Emotional Connection	.846				
Brand Loyalty	.843				
Impulse Buying	.837				
Attitude & Beliefs	.826				
Experience	.780				
Economic Conditions		.804			
Trends and Seasons		.788			
Advertising and Promotions			.760		
Cultural Influences				.875	
Peer Influence				.865	
Social Interaction				.501	
Age and Lifestyle					.753
Income Level					.693
Personality and Preferences					.684

Table 6. Factor Analytical Structure

#	Factors	Statements	Factor loadings
1	Psychological Factors	Perceived Product Quality	.850
2		Emotional Connection	.846
3		Brand Loyalty	.843
4		Impulse Buying	.837

5		Attitude & Beliefs	.826
6		Experience	.780
7	External Factors	Economic Conditions	.804
8		Trends and Seasons	.788
9	Marketing and Retail Strategies	Advertising and Promotions	.760
10	Social Factors	Cultural Influences	.875
11		Peer Influence	.865
12		Social Interaction	.501
13	Personal Factors	Age and Lifestyle	.753
14		Income Level	.693
15		Personality and Preferences	.684

The factor analytical structure of traditional shopping highlights key elements that influence consumer behaviour, grouped into various categories based on their significance, as shown in Tables 5 & 6.

Among the psychological factors, the perceived product quality stands out with a factor loading of 0.850, emphasising the importance of consumers' ability to evaluate quality in person. This is closely followed by emotional connection (0.846) and brand loyalty (0.843), which underscore the role of sentiment and trust in shaping shopping preferences. Impulse buying (0.837) and attitudes and beliefs (0.826) also significantly impact decisions, while past experiences (0.780) inform repeat purchases.

External factors, such as economic conditions (0.804) and trends and seasons (0.788), illustrate the influence of broader environmental and temporal contexts on consumer choices. Marketing strategies, including advertising and promotions (0.760), show how targeted efforts can sway purchasing behaviour. Social factors carry notable weight, with cultural influences (0.875) and peer influence (0.865) dominating, though social interaction (0.501) has a relatively lower impact. Personal factors, like age and lifestyle (0.753), income level (0.693), and personality and preferences (0.684), reflect individual differences that affect shopping habits. These insights collectively emphasise that traditional shopping behaviour is shaped by a complex interplay of psychological, external, marketing, social, and personal factors, each contributing uniquely to consumer perceptions and decisions.

Table 7 shows the suggestions to help the traditional sellers to increase their sales, which were analysed using multiple response analysis.

Table 7. Suggestions to traditional sellers to increase their sales

Suggestions	No. of Responses	%
Option to see, touch, and test products	241	14.43
Appealing store ambience	103	6.17
Loyalty programmes, multiple purchase offers, and personalised offers	206	12.34
Highly demanded goods at the entry point	73	4.37
Aligned with current fashion, technology, and seasonal demands, as well as demographic-specific products	231	13.83
Provide detailed information about products, and conduct workshops	217	13.00
Tailor customer-specific products	215	12.87
Premium and budget-friendly products	224	13.41
Customer feedback	147	8.80
Mobile apps for easy purchase	13	0.78
Total	1670	100

The analysis showed that the most significant interest lies in tactile engagement with products, where customers value the ability to see, touch, and test items firsthand, with 14.43 %. This is closely followed by aligned with current fashion, technology, seasonal demands, and demographic-specific products, with 13.83%. Additionally, consumers highly favour a balance between premium and budget-friendly products, with 13.41 %. Shoppers seek informative and engaging experiences through detailed product insights and interactive formats like workshops, with 13 %. Personalised attention is also crucial, as reflected in the strong interest in tailored product recommendations with 12.87 %, loyalty programmes, and individual-specific promotions with 12.34 %. A well-designed store ambience with 6.17 % adds to the overall appeal, and mechanisms like a customer feedback loop with 8.80 % and easy purchase through mobile apps with 0.78 %, though less prioritised, still contribute to a comprehensive and satisfying retail journey.

Summary of findings

- Trustworthiness is a factor that influenced consumers to shop traditionally.
- There is a significant relationship between age and the preference to shop traditionally.
- There is a significant relationship between marital status and the preference to shop traditionally.
- Factor analysis was used to analyse the behaviour and perception of the respondents. The factors were grouped as psychological factors, external factors, marketing and retail strategies, social factors, and personal factors.
- Multiple response analysis was used to analyse the suggestions to help traditional sellers increase their sales, the majority of the respondents chose the option 'to see, touch and test products'.

Conclusion

In conclusion, enhancing the traditional shopping experience requires a holistic approach that includes the diverse factors influencing consumer behaviour. Face-to-face communication with the seller, prompt product inspection, quick transactions, and quick returns make trustworthiness the top priority. Retailers must create a dynamic and engaging shopping environment by addressing psychological elements such as quality perception and emotional connection, leveraging external conditions like trends and economic shifts, and tailoring marketing strategies to individual preferences. Furthermore, integrating social and personal factors ensures the experience resonates with diverse customer groups, fostering loyalty and repeat visits. The above measures will help traditional shopping maintain its relevance and appeal, offering a unique and immersive experience that online alternatives cannot replicate. The respondents were asked to select a few suggestions that would revamp traditional shopping to the older form, and the option of customers being allowed to see, touch, and test the products was chosen mostly by the respondents, as they felt this facility is not available in all the stores. The respondents want the traditional sellers to align with current fashion, technology, and seasonal demands, as well as demographic-specific products, which were chosen next, followed by suggestions, premium and budget-friendly products, providing detailed information about products, conducting workshops, tailoring customer-specific products, loyalty programmes, multiple purchase offers and personalised offers, customer feedback, appealing store ambience and mobile apps for easy purchase. The respondents are sure the suggestions will help the traditional sellers to increase their sales after the pandemic.

Recommendations

- Opportunities should be provided to the customers to see, touch, and test products in-store through product demonstrations, sample stations, and clear labelling.
- A welcoming and appealing store ambience with appropriate lighting, music, and themed decor that resonates emotionally with customers must be created.
- Loyalty programmes and personalised offers must be introduced to encourage repeat visits and maintain customer trust.
- Strategically place high-demand or visually appealing items near checkout counters and entry points.
- Value-for-money deals, discounts, and promotions during economic uncertainty must be offered to retain price-sensitive customers.
- Update inventory regularly to align with current fashion, technology, or seasonal demands, and organise themed sales events.
- In-store displays, interactive ads, and limited-time offers must be used to attract attention and drive purchases. Brand partnerships must be made to create exclusive promotions.
- Provide detailed product information through knowledgeable staff or informational materials to aid decision-making.
- Product selections to be tailored to align with local traditions, festivals, and community preferences.
- Group shopping by offering deals for multiple purchases or creating social spaces in-store must be encouraged.

- In-store events, workshops, or community gatherings must be organised to increase engagement and foot traffic.
- Separate sections or product ranges must be designed to appeal to different age demographics, such as trendy items for younger shoppers and practical goods for older customers.
- A mix of premium and budget-friendly products must be offered to cater to a wider audience.
- Customer feedback and data must be used to stock items that align with local tastes and preferences.
- Past customer complaints must be resolved, and measures to ensure consistency in quality and service can be implemented.
- While focusing on traditional shopping, use digital tools such as in-store kiosks or mobile apps to enhance the convenience and appeal of the physical shopping experience.

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