



Unraveling The Impact Of Cognitive Dissonance On Online Shopping Behavior And Post-Purchase Behavior: A Study Among Young Consumers

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the intricate relationship between cognitive dissonance, online shopping behavior, and post-purchase sentiment, particularly among young consumers aged 16 to 30. Employing an empirical research design, the study explores how cognitive dissonance influences various dimensions of online shopping and subsequent consumer opinions. Utilizing Percentage analysis, Correlation, and Regression analysis, the study reveals a positive correlation between consumer behavior variables (web atmosphere, social factors, situational factors, e-retailer image, and trust) and cognitive dissonance. Furthermore, it identifies a significant impact of cognitive dissonance variables (emotion, wisdom of purchase, and concern over deal) on post-purchase behavior. The findings suggest that marketers can prioritize enhancing online shopping behavioral factors to mitigate cognitive dissonance and foster favorable post-purchase sentiments among consumers.

Keywords: *consumer online shopping behaviour, cognitivedissonance, post purchasebehaviour, customersatisfaction.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Consumer comfort with online shopping continues to grow, prompting retailers to continually enhance their digital experiences and streamline technology for improved usability. Understanding the complexities of online shopping behavior is crucial for any company's marketing strategy, necessitating a comprehensive examination of its various dimensions.

Marketers devote significant attention to strategy execution, yet they are equally concerned about the post-consumer stage, where consumers express their preferences and opinions regarding products and services. Among the multitude of factors influencing repeat purchases, one significant aspect is the level of consonance or dissonance experienced at the time of purchase.

Cognitive dissonance, deeply rooted in social psychology, arises when consumers encounter disparities between their initial expectations and the actual experience during pre-decision or post-purchase stages of the decision-making process. This psychological tension, as elucidated by Festinger's Theory of Cognitive Dissonance (1957), motivates individuals to seek resolution through various means, such as altering evaluations of alternatives, seeking new information, or adjusting attitudes.

The experience of dissonance manifests in distinct ways(Loudon, 1993):

- Logical contradictions within the consumer's cognition

- Inconsistencies between attitudes or behaviors
- Disconfirmation of strongly held beliefs

Consequently, consumers endeavor to assuage this discomfort, significantly influencing their post-purchase behavior. Dynamic psychological shifts occur as customers evaluate products, making their personal characteristics pivotal in shaping post-purchase behavior.

Understanding the role of cognitive dissonance in consumer behavior is pivotal for marketers, who are keen on analyzing post-purchase consumer sentiments. The culmination of the consumer decision-making process, cognitive dissonance profoundly impacts repeat purchases and brand loyalty. Sweeney et al. (2000) introduced a cognitive dissonance scale to measure both emotional and cognitive dimensions during post-purchase and pre-use stages, delineating dimensions such as emotion, wisdom of purchase, and concern over the deal.

In light of these insights, this study endeavors to unravel the intricate relationship between cognitive dissonance, online shopping behavior, and post-purchase sentiments, particularly among young consumers. By delving into this nexus, we aim to offer valuable insights to marketers seeking to navigate the digital retail landscape effectively and foster enduring consumer relationships.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Cognitive Dissonance Theory

The cognitive dissonance theory, pioneered by Festinger in 1957, has been extensively utilized in consumer behavior literature to elucidate the cognitive reassessments individuals undergo post-purchase (Cohen & Goldberg, 1970). This theory posits that individuals possess various cognitive components, including self-knowledge, environmental awareness, attitudes, opinions, and past actions. Key factors identified in this context encompass choice difficulty, emotional elements such as the challenge of decision-making and apprehension about the purchase itself, and confidence in the accuracy of purchase decisions (Keng and Liao, 2013). Additionally, cognitive factors such as the necessity for product knowledge play a significant role (Sweeney et al., 2000). Several researchers have proposed methodologies for gauging the intensity of these precursors that trigger cognitive dissonance (Montgomery and Barnes, 1993; Sweeney et al., 2000). Marketers can give high priority to online shopping behavior factors like web atmosphere, social factors, situational factors, e-retailer image and trust to avoid high level of cognitive dissonance (Initha et al. 2022)

2.2 Online Shopping Behaviour

Yang et al. (2013) elucidated factors influencing the convenience of online shopping, encompassing website visitor convenience, information search ease, product evaluation, transactional processes, and shipping arrangements. Similarly, Jukariya and Singhvi (2018) identified multiple payment options, personal security and privacy, transactional security, post-sales service speed, product quality, and pricing as pivotal factors affecting students' online shopping behavior. Bucko et al. (2018) delineated factors impacting consumer online shopping, including product specifications, terms and conditions, social media engagement, availability, pricing, social proof, and scarcity. Pandey and Parmar (2019) further expanded the spectrum of influences on consumer buying behavior, encompassing computer and internet literacy, online shopping experience, situational factors, delivery logistics, sales promotions, demographic variables, payment options, website design, social media presence, social influences, after-sales services, product attributes, and facilitating conditions. Trust, spanning trust propensity, institutional trust, trusting beliefs, and intention to trust, also emerges as a crucial factor influencing online consumer behavior, as underscored by previous research (Bianchi & Andrews, 2012).

In the context of online shopping, the wealth of information available during product evaluation aids in uncertainty resolution, thereby mitigating the likelihood of cognitive dissonance (George et al., 2010). Conversely, the emphasis on transactional security in online environments suggests that a dependable and secure virtual shopping milieu can assuage consumer anxiety and subsequently reduce the probability of cognitive dissonance (Lin et al., 2018). Hence, considering the impact of online shopping on cognitive dissonance, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: There is a significant influence of online shopping behaviour on cognitive dissonance

2.3 Post Purchase Online Shopping Behaviour

Cognitive dissonance has been linked to dissatisfaction and brand switching (Pieters, 2004). Additionally, Cook et al. (2001) posit that predicting regret alone can effectively alter consumers' subsequent repurchase behavior. Post-purchase regret is characterized by a sense of grief and psychological distress when consumers compare the chosen brand with alternatives they opted against, realizing their decision was flawed (Shanker et al., 2006; Simpson et al., 2008). Contrary to conventional wisdom, studies indicate that complaining behavior may not necessarily diminish overall satisfaction (Nimako & Mensah, 2012). Although

past dissatisfaction can impact the overall satisfaction of a service provider's customers, effective management by the service provider can mitigate its adverse effects. Consequently, cognitive dissonance significantly influences consumers' post-purchase behavior. Thus, we formulate the following hypothesis:
H2: There is a significant influence of cognitive dissonance on post purchase behaviour

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES

Research studies have consistently revealed a significant correlation between regret and satisfaction levels, indicating that higher levels of regret regarding a purchase decision correspond to lower satisfaction with that decision (Heitmann et al., 2007). Moreover, cognitive dissonance has been identified as a factor contributing to dissatisfaction and brand switching in consumer behavior (Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2004). Notably, the mere anticipation of regret has been found to induce changes in consumers' subsequent repurchase behavior (Cooke et al., 2001).

Despite extensive research on post-purchase regret and its ramifications, the underlying causes of such regret remain relatively underexplored. While literature on cognitive dissonance in consumer shopping exists, there is a dearth of studies focusing on cognitive dissonance in the context of online shopping, particularly in the Indian context. This study seeks to fill this gap by providing novel insights that contribute to the understanding of online shopping behavior and its impact on cognitive dissonance.

Given the exponential growth of online shopping, comprehending post-purchase behavior in this domain has become imperative. One crucial aspect influencing repeat purchases is the level of consonance or dissonance experienced at the time of purchase. Therefore, there is a pressing need to investigate the influence of online shopping on cognitive dissonance, particularly among young consumers in Coimbatore city. This study aims to address this need and shed light on the dynamics of online shopping behavior and cognitive dissonance among young consumers.

The objectives of the research are

- To explore the online buying behaviour of young customers and the factors influencing online shopping.
- To analyse whether online shopping behaviour has an impact on cognitive dissonance
- To assess the impact of cognitive dissonance on the post purchase behaviour of consumers.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study Empirical Research Design is used to study the relationship between online shopping behavior and cognitive dissonance and also between cognitive dissonance and post purchase behavior. The primary data is collected through google forms. The final questionnaire consists of five sections as outlined in the following.

Section I - Demographic information (gender, age, education, occupation and income).

Section II - Section II Basic information about Online Shopping. (Online Shopping site, products purchased online, time period of using online shopping, frequency of online purchase, number of products purchased online during the past 12 months, and price of products often bought)

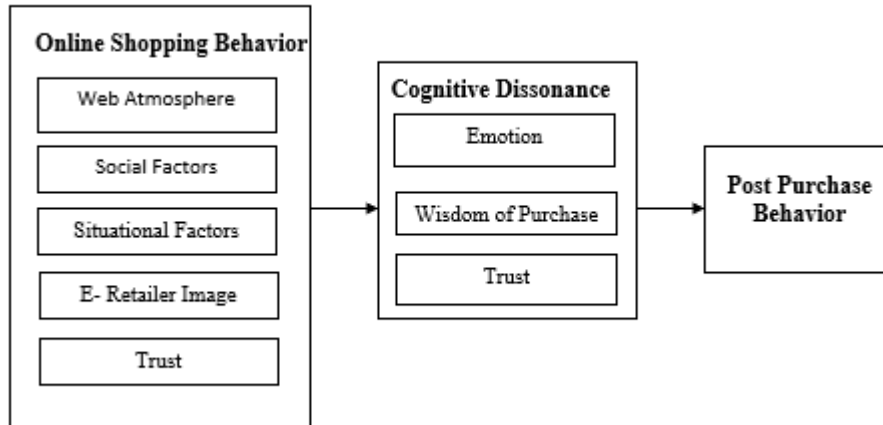
Section II - Online shopping experience [based on Ansari (2019)] 28 item scale based on 5 dimensions Web Atmosphere, E-Retailer Image, Trust, Situational Factors, Social Factors.

Section III - Cognitive dissonance [based on Sweeney et al. (2000)]. The 22-item scale has three dimensions: 15 items measured emotional, 4 items measured wisdom of purchase, and 3 items measured concern over the deal.

Section IV - Post purchase behavior – (Satisfaction, Dissatisfaction).

The research targeted online consumers aged 16 to 30, comprising a sample of 384 (according to Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). Employing snowball sampling, the data collection utilized Google Forms. Analysis methods included Percentage, Correlation and Regression analyses. A preliminary pilot study with 25 participants within the same age range employed a well-structured questionnaire. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha ensured the interrelatedness of questionnaire items, establishing overall repeatability and internal consistency with all variables exhibiting Cronbach's values surpassing 0.76, indicating a high reliability level of 76%. This suggests that the study's data can be confidently considered highly reliable.

5. RESEARCH FRAMEWORK



6. RESULTS

6.1 Demographic profile of respondents

The Demographic profile provides a basic understanding about the respondents of the present study. Age, educational qualification, occupation and gender are taken for the study.

Table 1 Demographic profile of respondents

Demographics		Frequency	Percentage
Age	16-20 years	52	13.54
	21-25 years	285	74.22
	26-30 years	47	12.24
Educational Qualification	Graduation	113	29.43
	Post-Graduation	261	67.97
	Others	10	2.60
Occupation	Student	318	82.81
	Private	35	9.11
	Business	15	3.91
	Others	16	4.17
Gender	Male	171	44.53
	Female	213	55.47

Table 1 illustrates that the predominant proportion of respondents fell within the age bracket of 21-25 years, comprising 74.22% of the sample, while a significant majority held postgraduate qualifications, accounting for 67.97%. The majority of respondents identified themselves as students, constituting 82.81% of the total, with females representing 55.47% of the sample.

6.2 Correlation Between Online Shopping Behaviour and Cognitive Dissonance

Online shopping behaviour variables include web atmosphere, social factors, situational factors, e-retailer image, and trust. The cognitive dissonance variable include emotion, wisdom of purchase and concern over deal. The degree of association between online shopping behaviour and cognitive dissonance was analysed by means of Pearson’s Correlation matrix.

H1: There is relationship between online shopping behaviour and cognitive dissonance

Table 2 Correlation Between Online Shopping Behaviour and Cognitive Dissonance

Variables	Web Atmosphere	Social Factors	Situational Factors	E-Retailer Image	Trust	Emotion	Wisdom of purchase	Concern over deal
Web Atmosphere	1							
Social Factors	.821**	1						
Situational Factors	.833**	.799**	1					
E-Retailer Image	.890**	.827**	.924**	1				
Trust	.799**	.705**	.757**	.844**	1			

Emotion	0.007	0.082	0.066	0.01	0.07	1		
Wisdom of purchase	.794**	.754**	.817**	.873**	.427*	.896**	1	
Concern over deal	0.036	0.126	0.084	0.036	.770*	0.082	.355**	1

Consumer shopping behavior

The analysis of consumer shopping behavior reveals several noteworthy correlations among its various dimensions. Web Atmosphere exhibits significant correlations with Social Factors ($r = 0.821$), Situational Factors ($r = 0.833$), E-Retailer Image ($r = 0.89$), and Trust ($r = 0.799$) in relation to Wisdom of purchase ($r = 0.794$). Notably, there is no correlation observed between the web atmosphere and cognitive dissonance variables, namely emotion and concern over deal.

Social Factors demonstrate significant correlations with Web Atmosphere ($r = 0.821$), Situational Factors ($r = 0.799$), E-Retailer Image ($r = 0.827$), and Trust ($r = 0.705$) with regard to Wisdom of purchase ($r = 0.754$). No correlation is found between social factors and cognitive dissonance variables.

Situational Factors indicate significant correlations with Web Atmosphere ($r = 0.890$), Social Factors ($r = 0.827$), E-Retailer Image ($r = 0.924$), and Trust ($r = 0.757$) concerning Wisdom of purchase ($r = 0.817$). Similar to other dimensions, no correlation is detected between situational factors and cognitive dissonance variables.

E-Retailer Image shows significant correlations with Web Atmosphere ($r = 0.833$), Social Factors ($r = 0.799$), Situational Factors ($r = 0.924$), and Trust ($r = 0.844$) in relation to Wisdom of purchase ($r = 0.817$). There is no correlation between the e-retailer image and cognitive dissonance variables.

Trust displays significant correlations with Web Atmosphere ($r = 0.799$), Social Factors ($r = 0.705$), Situational Factors ($r = 0.757$), and E-Retailer Image ($r = 0.844$) regarding Wisdom of purchase ($r = 0.427$). Similar to other dimensions, no correlation is found between trust and cognitive dissonance variables.

Cognitive dissonance

Emotion shows no correlations observed with Web Atmosphere, Social Factors, Situational Factors, Trust, and Concern over deal. However, a significant correlation exists between emotion and Wisdom of purchase ($r = 0.896$).

Wisdom of purchase demonstrates significant correlations with Web Atmosphere ($r = 0.794$), Social Factors ($r = 0.754$), Situational Factors ($r = 0.817$), E-Retailer Image ($r = 0.873$), and Trust ($r = 0.427$) in relation to Emotion ($r = 0.896$) and Concern over deal ($r = 0.355$). All consumer shopping behavior variables impact the wisdom of purchase.

Concern over deal indicates a significant correlation with Trust ($r = 0.077$) concerning Wisdom of purchase ($r = 0.355$). However, no correlations are observed with Web Atmosphere, Social Factors, Situational Factors, E-Retailer Image, and Emotion. Trust and wisdom of purchase are influential factors affecting concern over deal.

6.3 Correlation Between Cognitive Dissonance and Post Purchase Behaviour

The cognitive dissonance variable include emotion, wisdom of purchase and concern over deal. The degree of association between cognitive dissonance and post purchase behaviour was analysed by means of Pearson's Correlation matrix.

H2: There is a significant influence of cognitive dissonance on post purchase behaviour

Table 3 Correlation Between Cognitive Dissonance and Post Purchase Behaviour

Variables	Emotion	Wisdom of purchase	Concern over deal	Post purchase behaviour
Emotion	1			
Wisdom of purchase	.427**	1		
Concern over deal	.770**	.355**	1	
Post purchase behaviour	.503**	.972**	.521**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Cognitive Dissonance

Emotion exhibits a significant correlation with Wisdom of purchase ($r = 0.427$) and Concern over deal ($r = 0.770$), which in turn correlates with Post-purchase behavior ($r = 0.503$). It is evident that cognitive dissonance variable emotion significantly influences the post-purchase behavior of the respondent, serving as

the foundation for observable behavior. This underscores the crucial role emotions play, especially when consumers express dissatisfaction with a product.

Wisdom of purchase demonstrates a significant correlation with Emotion ($r = 0.427$) and Concern over deal ($r = 0.355$), both of which significantly correlate with Post-purchase behavior ($r = 0.972$). The strong correlation between wisdom of purchase and post-purchase behavior suggests that consumers' future shopping tendencies are intricately tied to their level of wisdom in making purchase decisions.

Concern over deal displays a significant correlation with Emotion ($r = 0.770$) and Wisdom of purchase ($r = 0.355$), both of which correlate with Post-purchase behavior ($r = 0.521$). This correlation highlights the link between concern over deal and post-purchase behavior, emphasizing its impact on consumers' shopping behavior.

Post purchase Behaviour

Post purchase Behaviour has significant correlation with respect to Emotion ($r = 0.503$), Wisdom of purchase ($r = 0.972$) and Concern over deal ($r = 0.521$).

It is concluded that cognitive dissonance variables (emotion, wisdom of purchase and concern over deal) has significant influence on the post purchase behaviour of the respondent.

6.4 Regression Analysis to test the influence of Cognitive Dissonance on Post Purchase Behaviour

Regression analysis is used to examine the relationship between two or more variables of interest. Cognitive dissonance variables influence on post purchase behaviour of respondents is studied using regression analysis. The cognitive dissonance variable include emotion, wisdom of purchase and concern over deal.

Table 4 Testing the influence of Cognitive Dissonance on Post Purchase Behaviour

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square			
.892a	0.795	0.789			
Anova					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	97.588	2	24.455	67.272	<.000b
Residual	94.161	210	0.374		
Total	191.949	212			

R-square is 0.795, a value greater than 0.5 shows that the model is effective enough to determine the relationship. Adjusted R-square is 0.789, the difference between R-square and adjusted R-square is minimum, so it's good. P value is 0.000 which is less than 0.05, so the result is significant. F-Ratio is 67.2, a value is greater than 1, so it's good. As the p-value of the ANOVA table is significance, the hypotheses "There is a significant influence of cognitive dissonance on post purchase behaviour" is accepted

7. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study underscore the significant impact of cognitive dissonance on online shopping behavior and post-purchase sentiment among young consumers. The correlation analysis reveals a strong association between consumer behavior variables such as web atmosphere, social factors, situational factors, e-retailer image, and trust with the cognitive dissonance variable of wisdom of purchase. These results suggest that consumers prioritize factors such as website convenience, social influences, situational context, e-retailer image, and trustworthiness when making online purchase decisions. Previous research by Yang et al. (2013) and Jukariya and Singhvi (2018) supports these findings, highlighting the importance of factors like website convenience, product evaluation, security, and pricing in influencing online shopping behavior.

Interestingly, there is no significant correlation between consumer behavior variables and cognitive dissonance variables like emotion and concern over deal. This suggests that young consumers may not experience strong emotional attachment or regret towards their online purchases. However, the regression analysis confirms a significant influence of cognitive dissonance on post-purchase behavior, indicating that cognitive dissonance plays a crucial role in shaping consumers' observable behavior and purchase decisions. These findings align with previous research indicating that cognitive dissonance can lead to product returns and brand switching (Powers & Jack, 2013), highlighting the practical implications of managing cognitive dissonance in the online shopping context.

Furthermore, the study emphasizes the importance of wisdom of purchase as a key determinant of post-purchase behavior. Consumers' future shopping tendencies are heavily influenced by their level of wisdom in

making purchase decisions, indicating a high correlation with cognitive dissonance. Anticipated regret, as evidenced by cognitive dissonance, not only reflects emotional responses but also informs consumers and impacts their cognitive processes (Li et al., 2021). This suggests that managing cognitive dissonance and promoting wise purchase decisions can contribute to overall customer satisfaction and loyalty, even in the face of past dissatisfaction.

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the complex interplay between cognitive dissonance, online shopping behavior, and post-purchase sentiment among young consumers. While consumer behavior variables significantly influence the wisdom of purchase, cognitive dissonance plays a pivotal role in shaping post-purchase behavior. The absence of strong correlations between consumer behavior variables and emotional variables like regret suggests that young consumers may adopt a rational approach to online shopping decisions. However, cognitive dissonance remains a key determinant of observable behavior, indicating the importance of managing cognitive dissonance to ensure positive post-purchase outcomes. Overall, understanding the impact of cognitive dissonance on online shopping behavior can inform strategies to enhance customer satisfaction, loyalty, and retention in the increasingly competitive e-commerce landscape.

8. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Effective management of cognitive dissonance on online shopping requires marketers to prioritize key factors influencing consumer behavior. By placing emphasis on elements such as web atmosphere, social factors, situational factors, e-retailer image, and trust, marketers can create an online environment conducive to minimizing cognitive dissonance and nurturing positive post-purchase experiences. Clear and transparent communication is paramount in this endeavor, as consumers must easily understand product information and trust the credibility of the online platform. Ensuring a seamless payment process, convenient return policies, and reliable shipping experiences further solidifies consumer trust, thereby reducing the likelihood of cognitive dissonance negatively affecting purchasing decisions. Moreover, marketers must acknowledge the dynamic nature of the online shopping landscape and continuously adapt their strategies, services, and technologies to meet evolving consumer preferences. By prioritizing these strategies, marketers can effectively manage cognitive dissonance, enhance consumer satisfaction, and foster long-term customer loyalty in the competitive online marketplace.

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