

Consumers' Preference and Attitude towards Online Pharmaceutical Services in Erode City

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Abstract

The e-Pharmacy has revolutionized the lives, communication, procurement practices and strategies of medical field. Due to technological advancement, offline shopping has changed to online mode. "Online Pharmacy" will be the next big evolution that will impact billions of lives and bring a healthy behavioral change to safer and more convenient tomorrow. The present study examines the consumers' preference and attitude towards online pharmaceutical services and to identify the factors influencing consumers' purchase decision. The data are analyzed with statistical tools namely Percentage analysis, Chi-Square test and Weighted Average Score Ranking method. The findings of the study revealed that the majority of the respondents prefer online pharmaceutical service because of discount and offers. The study concluded that online marketers have to provide high security for personal information of customers and also the financial transactions must be kept confidential along with good experience of online shopping.

Keywords: Consumers, Online Pharmacy, Pharmaceutical Services and Purchase Decision

1. Introduction

Online pharmacy is one of the fastest-growing services. In the present era, due to many reasons, the life style of the people has seen a remarkable change. This has increased the stress level of the people that leads human to prone to many diseases even in the young age. Apart from this, due to changes in the environment, new diseases affect the health of people. Hence, the sale of medicines has grown up. The new medicines are formulated to save the life of people. Since, the technology has seen its advancement and online marketing has reached its success, the pharmaceutical sector is also not an exception in online marketing. But the Indian e-pharmacy industry is still in its infancy stage. There are many online shopping sites that are selling medicines. In this context, the present study analyses consumers' preference and attitude towards online pharmaceutical services in Erode city.

2. Review of Literature

Salter¹ suggested that proper verification of scanned prescription had to be done at the time of placing order and

the prescription must be re-verified at the time of delivery to stop the misuse of drugs. Anwar and Gupta² found the key factors for accepting e-pharmacy by the common people. It included cost-effectiveness, convenience, availability of less common medicines, and anonymity. Singh, *et al.*³ found that the main aim of e-pharmacy facility was to deliver medicine at an affordable cost to all places quickly. Srivastava and Raina⁴ concluded that the customers largely preferred home delivery of medicines purchased through online and would prefer to order medicines online mainly in case of acute illness.

3. Objectives

- To study the consumers' preference and attitude towards online pharmaceutical services.
- To identify the factors influencing the consumer purchase decision.

4. Research Methodology

The study describes the consumers' preference and attitude towards online pharmaceutical services by adopting

descriptive research. Simple random sampling technique is used for collecting the data. The data is collected from 100 sample customers purchasing pharmacy products through online mode. The study makes use of both primary and secondary data. A well framed questionnaire is used to collect the primary data. The secondary data is collected from all related sources which include books, research journals and internet web sources. The data are then analysed with various statistical tools namely simple percentage analysis, chi-square analysis and weighted average ranking analysis.

5. Hypothesis

H_{01} : The educational qualification does not have a significant association with the attitude of respondents towards security of online pharmaceutical services.

6. Analysis and Discussion

6.1 Profile of the Respondents

Table 1 shows the percentage analysis of profile of the respondents.

Table 1. Profile of the respondents

Profile Category	Classification	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Age (in years)	Up to 20	26	26
	21-30	60	60
	31-40	4	4
	41-50	7	7
	Above 50	3	3
	Total	100	100
Gender	Female	67	67
	Male	33	33
	Total	100	100
Educational Qualification	School Level	4	4
	Under Graduation	45	45
	Post Graduation	36	36
	Professional	6	6
	Others	9	9
	Total	100	100
Marital Status	Married	23	23
	Unmarried	77	77
	Total	100	100
Family Size (Members)	Up to 3	28	28
	4 - 6	68	68
	Above 6	4	4
	Total	100	100
Family Type	Nuclear Family	82	82
	Joint Family	18	18
	Total	100	100
Occupation	Professional	65	65
	Business	4	4
	Agriculture	2	2
	Care taker	2	2
	House Wife	27	27
	Total	100	100

Monthly Income	Up to Rs.15,000	14	14
	Rs. 15,001-Rs. 25,000	58	58
	Rs. 25,001-Rs. 35,000	11	11
	Rs. 35,001-Rs. 45,000	6	6
	Above Rs. 45,000	11	11
	Total	100	100

Source: Computed

It is clear from Table 1 that maximum percentage of the respondents (60%) are in the age group of 21-30 years and are female (67%). Majority of the respondents are Under Graduates (45%) and Unmarried (77%). Majority of the respondents' Family size is 4-6 members (68%) and they are from Nuclear family (82%). Majority of the respondents are Professionals (65%) and most (58%) of them earn a Monthly income of Rs. 15,001-Rs. 25,000.

6.2 Consumers' Preference towards Online Pharmaceutical Services

The preference of the consumers regarding various aspects of the product plays a vital role in deciding its market share. The consumers' preference towards Online Pharmaceutical Services is analysed by using simple percentage analysis and is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Consumers' preference towards online pharmaceutical services

Consumer Preference towards Online Pharmaceutical Services	Classification	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Awareness on Online Pharmaceutical Services	Company website	3	3
	Family and Friends	39	39
	Online advertisement	36	36
	News and articles	5	5
	Promotional e-mails	0	0
	Search engine	8	8
	Others	9	9
	Total	100	100
Repetition of Purchase	Yes	70	70
	No	30	30
	Total	100	100
Frequency of Usage	Always	4	4
	Frequently	52	52
	Rarely	29	29
	Seldom	15	15
	Total	100	100

Table 2 reveals that the high percentage of the respondents (39%) is aware of online pharmaceutical services through family and friends and most of them (70%) prefer repeat purchase. Maximum of 52% of the respondents frequently use online pharmaceutical service. Majority of the respondents (36%) accept 2 days of dispatch period. Most of the respondents (63%) spend Upto Rs.500 per month for medicine. Majority of the respondents (55%) are satisfied with online pharmaceutical services and most of the respondents (70%) are of the opinion that delivery service is fair.

6.3 Respondents' Attitude towards Online Pharmaceutical Services

Table 3 examines the respondents' attitude towards online pharmaceutical services by using simple percentage analysis.

Duration taken to Receive Pharmaceutical Products	One day	30	30
	Two days	36	36
	Three days	21	21
	More than three days	13	13
	Total	100	100
Monthly Expenses on Medicine	Upto Rs.500	63	63
	Rs. Rs.501-Rs. 1000	21	21
	Rs. 1001-Rs.1500	12	12
	Above Rs. 1501	4	4
	Total	100	100
Level of Satisfaction	Highly satisfied	11	11
	Satisfied	55	55
	Neutral	32	32
	Dissatisfied	2	2
	Total	100	100
Opinion about Service	Excellent	12	12
	Fair	70	70
	Good	17	17
	Poor	1	1
	Total	100	100

Source: Computed

Table 3. Respondents' attitude towards online pharmaceutical services

S. No.	Statement	SA	A	N	DA	SDA
1	Online shopping is as secured as traditional shopping	14 (14%)	58 (58%)	24 (24%)	4 (4%)	0 (0%)
2	The information given about the products and services is sufficient	18 (18%)	60 (60%)	16 (16%)	6 (6%)	0 (0%)
3	Wide range of products are available	46 (46%)	28 (28%)	18 (18%)	8 (8%)	0 (0%)
4	The details of products given on the websites are very accurate	25 (25%)	49 (49%)	25 (25%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)
5	Price of the product is less	25 (25%)	43 (43%)	26 (26%)	6 (6%)	0 (0%)
6	Safety on doing money transaction	22 (22%)	53 (53%)	23 (23%)	2 (2%)	0 (0%)
7	Products are delivered to doorsteps	42 (42%)	40 (40%)	14 (14%)	4 (4%)	0 (0%)
8	Better services offered compared to traditional retail stores	55 (55%)	21 (21%)	18 (18%)	6 (6%)	0 (0%)
9	Delivery system (return policy) is good	30 (30%)	51 (51%)	15 (15%)	4 (4%)	0 (0%)

Source: Computed SA – Strongly Agree; A - Agree; N - Neutral; DA – Disagree; SDA – Strongly Disagree

It is clear from Table 3 that majority of 58% of the respondents agree that online shopping is as secured as traditional shopping, 60% of the respondents agree that the information given about the products and services is sufficient, 46% of the respondents strongly agree that wide range of products are available, 49% of the respondents agree that the details of products given on the websites are very accurate, 43% of the respondents agree that price of the product is less, 53% of the respondents agree that it is safe on doing money transaction, 42% of the respondents strongly agree that products are delivered to their doorsteps, 55% of the respondents strongly agree that better services are offered compared to traditional retail stores and 51% of the respondents agree that delivery system (return policy) is good.

6.4 Association between Educational Qualification and Attitude towards Security of Online Pharmaceutical Services

An attempt has been made to study the relationship between educational qualification and respondents' attitude towards security of online pharmaceutical services with a null hypothesis which is tested by using

Chi-Square test at 5% level of significance. Table 4 shows the association between educational qualification and respondents' attitude towards security of online pharmaceutical services.

Table 4 shows that 50% of the respondents who strongly agree and 100% of the respondents who disagree for security of online pharmaceutical services have completed Post Graduation and 51.7% and 41.7% of the respondents who agree and are neutral respectively for security have completed Under Graduation. Table 5 gives the results of chi-square test.

From the Table 5, it is inferred that the chi-square value (27.5128) is greater than the p-value (21.03) at 5% level of significance and hence, the null hypothesis is not accepted. Hence, it can be concluded that education qualification is significantly associated with attitude of the respondents towards security of online pharmaceutical services.

6.5 Factors Influencing Purchase Decision towards Online Pharmaceutical Services

The factors that influence respondents' purchase decision towards online pharmaceutical services are examined

Table 4. Educational qualification and attitude towards security of online pharmaceutical services

Respondents' Attitude / Educational Qualification	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Total
School level	2 (14.3%)	2 (3.4%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	4
Under Graduation	5 (35.7%)	30 (51.7%)	10 (41.7%)	0 (0.00%)	45
Post Graduation	7 (50%)	17 (29.3%)	8 (33.3%)	4 (100%)	36
Professional	0 (0.00%)	2 (3.4%)	4 (16.7%)	0 (0.00%)	6
Others	0 (0.00%)	7 (12.1%)	2 (8.3%)	0 (0.00%)	9
Total	14 (100%)	58 (100%)	24 (100%)	4 (100%)	100

Source: Computed

Table 5. Result of Chi-Square Test

Factor	Calculated Value	Table Value	Degrees of Freedom	Result
Educational Qualification	27.5128	21.03	12	Rejected

Table 6. Factors influencing respondents' purchase decision towards online pharmaceutical services

S.No.	Factors	Weighted Average Score	Rank
1	Privacy protection	681	4
2	Secure payment process	680	5
3	Time saving	675	6
4	Convenience	683	3
5	Previous experience	671	8
6	Reasonable price	684	2
7	Delivery time	661	11
8	Personal online access	674	7
9	Customer service	669	9
10	Detailed product information	659	12
11	Broader variety	666	10
12	Discount and offers	690	1

Source: Computed

with weighted average ranking analysis. The results are given in Table 6.

The Table 6 clearly shows that discount and offers ranked first followed by Reasonable price, Convenience, Privacy protection, Secure payment process, Time saving, Personal online access, Previous experience, Customer service, Broader variety, Delivery time and Detailed product information.

7. Major Findings

- It is opined that the respondents agree to the statement, online shopping is as secured as traditional shopping.
- It is inferred that there is a significant association between education qualification of the respondents and their attitude towards security of online pharmaceutical services.
- It is explored that majority of the respondents ranked discount and offers as the prime factor to prefer online pharmaceutical services.

8. Suggestions

The following suggestions are offered to provide better online services in pharmaceutical industry.

- Online pharmacies can take initiatives by providing promotion campaigns to inform public about the genuineness and safe use of pharmaceutical products purchased through online.
- Online pharmacy platform can design advanced site search to complete the queries of customers automatically.
- Online Pharmacy sites can provide innovative tools to customize search functionality and enable the users to get information as required.

9. Conclusion

The e-pharmacy is a developing model of online healthcare system and will create a great impact in future. It is more efficient and responsible than local

physical pharmacy in remote areas. It provides easy and affordable medicines to the customers at their doorstep in a click and also provides knowledge about the medicinal remedies to the buyers. Online Pharmaceutical Industry has numerous advantages and scope. Hence, the Indian Government could think about better regulations and marketing strategies that would be a boon for the society as well as pharmaceutical industries in upcoming years. The measures that have been suggested would improve the e-pharmacy sector.

10. References

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