



ROPO in Apparel: Unraveling the Impact of Online Research on Offline Purchase Behavior

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ABSTRACT

Due to the advent of internet, online shopping has become inevitable part of our life. Online shopping trend has strongly changed the consumer behavior. There are some typical kind of buyers who explore online shopping sites to acquire newest updates about the products they want to buy and finally they may end up buying it from offline stores. This shift in buying behavior is known as ROPO effect. "ROPO" stands for "Research Online Purchase Offline." ROPO is the recent trend in purchasing behavior, where a prospective consumer explores the internet to acquire product related information and then purchases the item in a physical store. Although, consumers can research all products virtually prior to making a purchase offline, the products like Apparel, Footwear, Electronic items, healthcare items have a stronger impact because of ROPO effect. At this backdrop, the present study is an analysis of ROPO effect on consumer buying behavior of apparels. The study attempts to identify why consumers' want to purchase from offline stores inspite of exploring various online shopping sites. The required primary data for the study has been collected from respondents who have involved in both online and offline shopping. A sample of 200 respondents has been chosen based on Convenience sampling. The study found that e-commerce wave has not fully hit the apparel industry.

Keywords: ROPO, apparel, shopping behavior.

INTRODUCTION

In the present situation, most of the industries are following multi channel strategies to distribute the products and services. In spite of existence of Physical retails outlets, majority of the products are sold through online stores. Further, the advent of internet has many online shopping as an inexorable activity in every one's life. Though online shopping continues to increase and is having an undoubted impact on retailers, all shoppers who access the internet as part of their shopping process may not end up in buying goods online(Ogloba,2017). There exist some distinctive kind of buyers who like to explore internet to acquaint latest additions about the products they want to buy and they may finally buy it from the retailers. There are many reasons for this kind of customer behavior. The main reason is that consumer want to conduct an intensive research on product options before they buy and they do not want to buy the product before trying it. These kind of consumer behavior is called as ROPO (Research Online Purchase offline) behavior. This behavior can also be called as research online, buy offline (ROBO) or Web rooming. The word "ROPO" has gained its cynosure in the recent years due to the advancement of e-commerce. The ROPO effect comes in to the picture when customers check on the Internet before they make the purchase offline and ROPO effect makes visible the interaction between the Internet and the offline sales process (Seitz, 2014). The major reasons why consumers involve in researching online and purchase offline is the convenience to compare the price and varieties of the products and their insecurity about the delivery of the products and online payment limits the online purchase (Zhovtonizhko, 2019).Though, consumers can research all products virtually prior to making a purchase offline, the products like Apparel, Footwear, Electronic items, healthcare items have a stronger impact because of ROPO effect. The consumer buying process is an complex concept where many factors both internal and external have impact on the buying decisions (Rohit & Kriti, 2013). ROPO is a one of the recent trend in buying behavior where customers explore appropriate product information to augment their buying decision before

buying the products from the offline retailers. At this backdrop, the present research has been conducted to study the behavior of ROPO consumers on buying apparel.

ROPO PHENOMENON: A REPRESENTATION THROUGH VENN DIAGRAM

		PURCHASE	
		ONLINE	OFFLINE
RESEARCH	ONLINE	VIRTUAL BUYING	ROPO WEB ROOMING
	OFFLINE	PORO SHOW ROOMING	PHYSICAL BUYING

Figure 1- ROPO Matrix- Representation of buying decision .

Figure :1 depicts the expression of ROPO behavior in two directions i.e. (ROPO and PORO). In case of ROPO, the purchase process begins virtually with intensive research and the acquisition of the products ends in Physical showroom. In this process, the customer searches all the product related information by exploring various online portals before going to physical store to make the purchase. This process is called Webrooming. On the other hand, in case of PORO (Purchase offline Research Online) the whole process happens in reverse direction ,where the initial orientation acquaintance and consultation about the product happens offline in physical showroom but the actual purchase happens digitally. This process is called as showrooming. Though, showrooming behaviour is existing in market since long, new webrooming behavior is trending due to increased access to technology and ease of access to infinite information related to product and services research made by the customers.

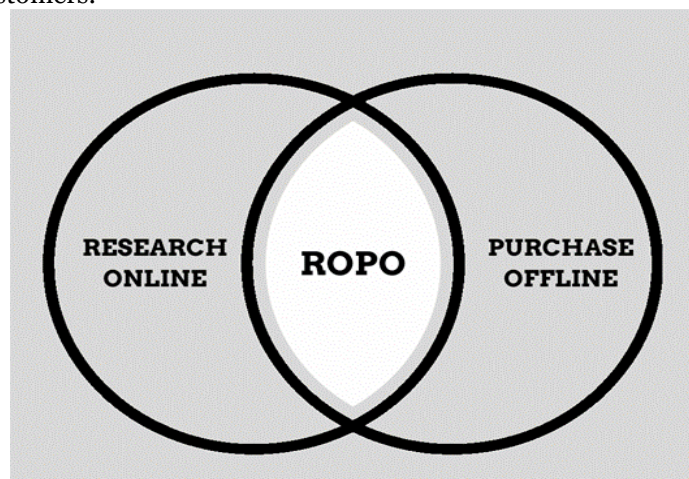


Figure 2: ROPO

Figure: 2 provides the pictorial representation of the ROPO Behaviour (Research Online Purchase Offline). On one side, the customer involves in doing intensive research to gain their understanding about the products to qualify their buying decision. On the other side, based on the acquainted knowledge, the customer may end up buying the products offline. When these two behaviors intersect, the ROPO forms. Research Online Purchase Offline (ROPO) behavior is an important aspect in marketing to tap various marketing opportunities.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The ROPO effect is a major constraint that impedes the development of the e-commerce sector (Mróz-Gorgoń, & Szymański, 2018). Though, internet provides overall view to explore myriad of product categories, consumers prefer to purchase the product through conventional channels as they will be able to physically touch and feel the product and offline buying makes the instant delivery instead of waiting for the products to be delivered (Khandelwal, Yadav, Kumar, 2020). ROPO is a cosmetic and trendy jargon, evolved as a result of

problems in online shopping of apparels. Though, there is no doubt that e-commerce has brought in lot of reforms in the shopping behavior of the individual still many retailers overlook one key component of the contemporary consumer journey (Baldwin, 2019). Across the globe, there is a transition in consumer behavior shopping behavior from swarming offline outlets to online stores but the reality is different in India, where Indian consumers restrain themselves towards an online store due to security and privacy issue. (Vijay and Balaji, 2009). When it comes to online shopping, online shopping of apparels brings our host of problems. It is difficult for the customers to assess the quality and texture fabric. In addition, various brands have various sizes as no standard size is followed resulting in difficulty of finding a fit. The color and shades of the actual product seen on the e-shopping website may be different from actual product delivered to the customer. When it comes to clothing, particularly apparels, the pleasure of trying the variety of apparel in the trial rooms allow the store to assess customer needs or interests in sizes, colors, and styles of clothing. Hence, this study is based on assessing the consumers' behavior towards online buying of apparels and how ROPO can be the new wave of apparel shopping. Research in this area is very elusive, hence this study is undertaken. Since the online wave has gobbled up the Brick and mortar retailers' profit, the study also shows why retailers, especially in the apparel segment, should have their fingers crossed with a renewed hope.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The following session provide the summary of literature regarding the research area

(Khandelwal, Yadav, Kumar, 2020) studied the factors that triggers the consumers to research online and purchase offline. Followed by survey method by employing the principal component factor analysis, it was found that factors like firsthand information about the product, immediate possession, online shopping experience, reduced risk and enjoyable shopping experience are the highly influential ROPO factors among the respondents.

(Mathew, 2015) analyzed the changes in the tendencies in online shopping behavior of consumers while buying apparels. For the purpose of study, a sample of 150 respondents has been selected using non-probability convenience sampling. The data has been collected through a survey conducted using structured questionnaires distributed in the stores and online. The study found that the respondent's family income and striking offers attracts large number of online apparel shoppers. The study also found that the respondents consider product distinction, product availability as an important criteria for apparel online shopping followed by easy navigation for other alternatives.

(Bansal & Garg, 2015) reviewed the important characteristics of online apparel web stores in e-commerce. It was stated in the study that the functional attributes like price of the apparel, product quality guarantee, product's visual images, returns and exchange policy, security and privacy, technical description, information on how to buy contributes a lot for high selection percentages.

(Gurunathan & Krishnakumar, 2013) studied the approaches to escalate the awareness of apparel buying behaviour of Indian consumers and also made an attempt to analyze the factors which influence apparel buying behavior using a measurement model. The study has been conducted in Coimbatore. For the purpose of study, a sample of one hundred (100) respondents were selected based on non-probability convenience sampling technique. The study examined the apparel buying behavior of Indian consumers based on five dimensions viz., Consumer physiognomies, attributes of the product, Attributes of the store, influence of reference groups, product promotion. The study found that attributes of the store, promotional offers and reference groups are the important measurements of apparel buying behavior.

(Malhotra & Chauhan, 2015) made an attempt to understand consumer buying behavior towards online purchases. The core focus of the study was to identify the determinants of consumer behavior towards online shopping. Convenience sampling method was used for the selection of respondents from various locations in Mumbai. A structured questionnaire was developed to collect information about respondents' opinion towards online shopping. The study found that thirty eight percent of online buyers were youth and they lie in the age group between 20-30 years and clothing and apparels were the most frequently purchased items online.

(Farid, 2015) studied the impact of fashion products purchase from online portal from the perspective of Indian Customers. A sample of 170 respondents between the age group of 18 – 60 years from different parts of India with various socio demographic backgrounds were surveyed. It was revealed from the study that offline retail stores are still considered as one of the favorite place for purchase. The other factors like easiness of purchase, extensive product and price range along with sales promotion like discount benefit and product on sale have driven the Indian customers towards purchasing fashion products from online stores.

(Raghunath & Mridula Sahay, 2015) made an attempt to find out the immediate driving factors in decision making process of online customer. The study emphasized on the consumer behaviour in online shopping of electronic goods especially in India. It was also stated that E-commerce has made life simple and innovative of individuals and groups. The study found that the factors like price comparison, convenience, security, extensive offers and availability of the product are the key factors which influence the decision making process of online customer.

Penz & Hogg (2011) made an attempt to identify the ways how consumers mixed emotional feeling influence approach-avoidance clashes in online and offline retail locale. The study revealed that in terms of price

advantage and convenience ,online retail setting wins over offline setting. On the other hand, the factors like enjoyment and pleasantness have gained value over offline setting make offline format better over online. (Hasslinger, Hodzie, & Opazo, 2007) made an attempt to identify the factors which affect the online consumers while purchasing over internet. The study identified the main influential factors as Price, test and convenience. (Amitsaha, 2015) attempted to highpoint the influence of the increasing tendency of online shopping over the various offline retailers. The study gazed into the various aspects about the retail businesses and analyzed how the retail operations are being affected . The study has also stated various recovery mechanisms followed by the retailers to defy those e-stores in their race of survival. The study found that customers enjoy window shopping to have a physical look and idea about the product and buy the same online at a reduced rate with some special offers.

IDENTIFIED RESEARCH GAPS FROM LITERATURE REVIEW

From the careful analysis of the above literature, it is very evident that the majority of the researchers have conducted study to analyze the factors influencing the customers towards the online purchase of apparels. The numbers of studies conducted to understand the consumer buying behavior towards buying apparels online and role of ROPO (Research online, Purchase Offline) in consumer buying behavior of apparels seem to be very limited . Hence the present study has been conducted with an intention to analyze the role of ROPO in consumers' buying behavior of apparels.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the study is to understand the role played by ROPO in consumers buying behavior of apparels.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is mainly based on primary data. The required primary data has been collected from those respondents who involve in both online and offline shopping for buying apparels. The required data has been collected through structured questionnaire pertaining to the variables like Mode of shopping, actuality of purchase, interest towards attractive freebies, getting wrong products etc. The required secondary data has been collected through website, various articles available on the internet, journals etc. Non Probability sampling method –Convenience sampling techniques has been used to collect a sample of 200 respondents.

THE INFLUENCE OF INTERNET & ROPO ON THE PURCHASE BEHAVIOR OF APPARELS

Table 1: Gender of the respondents

Options	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents (%)
Male	110	55
Female	90	45

Table 2: Level of Trust in online shopping of apparels.

Options	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents (%)
High	6	6
Medium	156	78
Low	32	16

Table 3: Prior research before buying apparels.

Options	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents (%)
Yes	98	49
No	60	30
Sometimes	42	21

Table 4: Respondents willingness to touch, feel, try and then buy apparels

Options	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents (%)
Yes	182	91
No	18	9

Table 5: Reason for Research Online and Purchase Offline of apparels

Particulars	High priority(%)	Moderate priority (%)	Neutral (%)	Low priority (%)	Not a priority (%)
To touch and fell the merchandise	94	68	26	6	6
To try the merchandise	194	6	0	0	0
To get the product immediately-cccessibility	98	94	2	6	0
Feeling insecured about payment and delivery option.	36	68	76	14	6

HYPOTHESES TESTING

Null Hypothesis (H_{n1}): There is no difference between the gender of the respondents and their actual usage of ROPO .

Table 6: Gender of the respondents and their actual usage of ROPO .

	Intentionally browsed products online but decided to buy them in the store.(ROPO)		Row Totals
Gender	Yes	No	
Male	48 (48.40)	7 (6.60)	55
Female	40 (39.60)	5 (5.40)	45
Column Totals	88	12	100 (Grand Total)

Chi Square :0.804581

The table value of Chi-Square for 1 degree of freedom at 5 per cent level of significance is 3.841 and the calculated Chi Square Value is less than the table value and hence the results are not significant.

Null Hypothesis(H_{n1}): There is no difference between the respondents' level of trust on online shopping and their opinion towards merging online and offline shopping(ROPO)

Table 6: ANOVA- Level of trust on online shopping and their opinion towards merging online and offline shopping(ROPO)

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance		
Level of trust on online shopping	100	210	2.1	0.212121		
Opinion towards merging online and offline	100	201	2.01	0.31303		
ANOVA						
Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	0.405	1	0.405	1.542412	0.215728	3.888853
Within Groups	51.99	198	0.262576			
Total	52.395	199				

From table 6 results it is very evident that the P value < α value (0.05)and hence we reject null hypothesis and there is significant difference between the respondents' level of trust on online shopping and their opinion towards merging online and offline hopping(ROPO)

KEY FINDINGS

- 78% of the total respondents have a medium trust on online shopping of apparels. It can be concluded that e-commerce wave has not fully hit the apparel industry.
- 49% of the respondents did prior research before buying apparels. This indicates that customers want to be armed with more information before purchasing apparels.
- A massive 91% of the respondents like to touch feel try and then buy apparels. This can happen only in a physical store. Customers would like to go to a store and purchase apparels rather than purchasing them online.
- 79% would prefer buying in a store if prices are the same, online and offline. Hence price is the criteria for many customers to shop online.
- 2/3rd of the respondents look forward to the merge of online and offline shopping. The respondents do not want to compromise quality of a product as 97% vouch for it.
- Half of the respondents want to see touch and try apparels before purchase & 88% of the respondents intentionally browse apparels online but buy them in the store.
- There is significant difference between the respondents' level of trust on online shopping and their opinion towards merging online and offline shopping(ROPO) .
- There is no difference between the gender of the respondents and their usage of ROPO .

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The key important determinant of the study which has influenced the authors to conduct the study was to determine the role played by ROPO in consumers buying behavior of apparels and the aim of the study was inline with the study conducted by (Mróz-Gorgoń & Szymański, 2018) . The study found that 40% of the respondents involve in prior research before buying apparels and this indicates that customers wanted to be armed with more information before purchasing apparels. The Study further revealed the interest of the respondents in merging online and offline shopping and it can be substantiated with the result that 2/3rd of the respondents look forward to the merge of online and offline shopping. The respondents do not want to compromise quality of a product as 97% vouch for it. Analogously the respondents have also opined that they want to see touch and try apparels before purchase and it can be corroborated with the findings of (Mróz-

Gorgoń & Szymański, 2018) that due to the reasons like different standards of size and difference in the shades of color between the computer screen and offline store. Further, the higher level of penetration of the smart phones has augmented the ease of search for product and service related information on the Internet and which in turn largely influenced the consumer purchasing behavior. It is very evident from the study the Information Technology has largely influenced buying behavior of the consumer and before attempting to purchase a product consumers prefer to search for product related information on the internet. In conclusion, it can be affirmed that ROPO effect is one of the most predominant and vigorously developing shopping trends. Exploring various online shopping website is one of the fundamental factor influencing purchasing decisions about traditional shopping. Based on the findings of the study, it can also be concluded that majority of the respondents vouch for quality and there is increasing awareness among customers about the need to touch and feel the product for fulfillment. The customers want to know what is currently available in the retail store. Hence, there must be dedicated staff to ensure that inventory details are updated. Further, the study suggests that reduction of the number of “abandoned baskets,” in the online purchasing will be possible only by providing appropriate solution to this ROPO effect. Finally, the study concludes that Research Online Purchase Offline “ROPO” behavior offers a strategic marketing opportunity to majority of the products which is not being fully exploited by many companies. Hence the researchers suggest that it is very crucial for the marketers to design the promotional messages and the product offerings that appeal to both (ROPO) web rooming and (PORO) showrooming to energize the sales.

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