Marketing Mix and Digital Decisions – A Study on the Online Shopping Preferences among Undergraduate Students

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Abstract
The marketing mix has evolved from the traditional 4Ps – Product, Price, Place and Promotion– to a customer-centric model that considers the changing digital commerce landscape. This study examines the influence of marketing mix attributes on online shopping behaviour among undergraduate students pursuing Commerce and Business Administration degrees at a higher education institution in South India. A sample of 168 students was used for the study. A structured questionnaire was developed using a 5-point Likert scale to collect data from the students. The results of the research study indicate varied degrees of influence among the marketing mix attributes. Product and place attributes showed strong correlations with purchasing behaviour. Amazon and cash-on-delivery were the most preferred platforms and payment methods, respectively. The research findings of this study offer insights into the marketing mix elements and provide a foundation for tailoring marketing strategies to accommodate the needs of consumers, especially students, who form a significant part of the online consumer population that is digitally dependent.
Keywords: Marketing Mix, Online Shopping Preferences, Undergraduate Students, Digital Marketing, Consumer Behaviour, E-Commerce Preferences, Technology Adoption, Artificial Intelligence

Introduction

The marketing mix refers to a set of controllable tactical marketing tools or variables that a company combines to influence the buying decisions of its target market. It is also commonly known as the "4Ps", which stands for Product, Price, Place and Promotion. These elements are strategically blended to meet the needs of target customers and achieve the company's marketing objectives (Dominici, 2009).

Product: Philip Kotler, a renowned marketing expert, defines a product as "anything that can be offered to a market for attention, acquisition, use, or consumption that might satisfy a want or need (Goi, 2009). It includes guarantees and warranties, product comparisons, brands, product quality, and packaging. Kotler's definition underscores the idea that products go beyond physical items and can fulfil various customer needs or desires in different forms.

Price: Philip Kotler defines price as "the amount of money charged for a product or service, or the sum of the values that consumers exchange for the benefits of having or using the product or service." This definition highlights the multifaceted nature of price, including preferred payment modes, perceived benefits of a subscription, refund policies, and the impact of discounts and offers (Kotler, n.d.). This underscores that price is not solely a monetary figure but encompasses the perceived value exchanged between the consumer and the product or service, considering various elements that contribute to the overall value proposition. Nuseir and Madanat (2015) highlighted that this element of the marketing mix plays a major role in product loyalty and customer satisfaction.

Place: According to Philip Kotler, place is defined as "the process of making the product available to the consumer in the right quantity, at the right time, and in the right place." This definition underscores the strategic significance of distribution and accessibility in ensuring the efficient delivery of a product, addressing consumer needs regarding quantity, timing, and location. This highlights the pivotal role of the place in enhancing customer convenience and optimising the overall effectiveness of a marketing strategy (Constantinides, 2006).

Promotion: Philip Kotler, a prominent figure in marketing, defines "Promotion" in the marketing mix as "activities that communicate the merits of the product and persuade target customers to buy it." This definition emphasises that promotion involves various communication strategies and tactics aimed at conveying the value of a product to the target audience and influencing their purchase decisions. It encompasses advertising, public relations, sales promotions, and personal selling to create awareness, build interest, and drive consumer action(Kotler, n.d.). Singh(2012) emphasises that promotion is a powerful element in the marketing mix that mainly determines the positioning of a product in the market.

With the rapid evolution of Digital Commerce, there is an increasing dependence on online shopping platforms among students. Therefore, it is necessary to understand how the elements of the marketing mix influence the buying behaviour of students (Lim et al., 2016). Despite the widespread application of the traditional 4Ps, which has evolved to 12 Ps, there is a lack of focused research exploring the impact of 4Ps among students in South India.

This study aims to examine the relationship between marketing mix attributes and online shopping preferences among undergraduate students in a higher education institution in South India. This research aims to identify the marketing mix components that are most influential and most preferred online shopping platforms and payment methods, and to examine the relationship between the socio-demographic factors (year of graduation and average spending) and the choices of the students in online shopping (platforms and payment methods). The findings of this study are expected to offer insights for marketers aiming to implement strategies tailored to young, digitally active consumers.

Review of Literature
Marketing in the Past

The concept of marketing first appeared in a few textbooks in the early 1900s written by economists describing marketing activities such as wholesaling, pricing, retailing, advertising, and sales force. It emerged as a simple discipline in the 1960s when it was introduced by E. Jerome McCarthy as part of marketing education (Yudelson, 1999). In this concept, organisations, when deciding a price for a product based on its features, focus on the distribution channels to secure a strong position, mostly involving an agency that creates advertisements for the organisation and has a dedicated sales team to achieve the sales numbers (Kotler, 2024). Business school students had the opportunity to choose among various disciplines, including marketing, finance, strategy, and operations. Marketing was the easiest discipline for students to understand as it integrated stories of human interest (Rafiq & Ahmed, 1995). Over time, marketing has evolved into a scientific and sophisticated discipline, with books that help understand customer behaviour and books that strengthen the quantitative aspects of marketing.

Marketing Mix – From 4Ps to 7 Ps and now 12 Ps

Marketing as a scientific discipline and the rapid changes in technology and social aspects of human life were the two main drivers behind the evolution of

the marketing mix, which is a combination of tools, approaches, and strategies used by organisations in the promotion of their products and services in different markets (Dinanta.com, 2017). The 4Ps of the marketing mix – Product, Price, Place and Promotion–were first introduced by E. Jerome McCarthy in 1960. They gained wide acceptance for their effective and structured approach, which helped marketers in the effective planning and execution of their marketing strategies (Murphy, 2024). Khan(2014) discusses that the 4Ps were the primary ingredients of the marketing strategy and were used to translate marketing planning into practice.

The 4Ps of the marketing mix are now referred to as traditional, as modern marketers argue that the 4Ps are not adequate for today's market, with the ever-growing and changing market that is quintessential for brand success (Issock Issock, Mpinganjira & Roberts-Lombard, 2021). With services being marketed, the 4Ps were not adequate, and three more Ps had to be added to the marketing mix (Magrath, 1986). This led to the evolution and extension of the marketing mix to 7Ps, which include an additional three elements to the traditional marketing mix: people, process, and physical evidence, to meet the ever-growing demands of marketing services (Allen, 2020). Now, the marketing mix has further expanded to 12Ps or 14Ps that incorporates psychographics, perceptions, performance, and other essential elements that various marketers deem important for the business needs and their respective marketing vision (Mediummultimedia.com, 2023).

Despite the different elements that have been added to the marketing mix, what is considered significant is the quality of the marketing mix elements to create a positive impression, interactive ability to provide the consumer with the opportunity to contact the representatives regarding any questions or concerns, and provide them with choices to create mass customisation. Lastly, over the past few decades, the mass market has slowly lost its significance, and personalisation has now become a central element in marketing strategy (Dangi & Malik, 2017) Hence, the elements of the marketing mix should ensure personalisation of the relationship accompanied by the consumer's consent, which boosts the consumer's trust and loyalty (Dinanta.com, 2017). Researchers

consider personalisation to be an important element and believe that when used effectively, along with the other Ps of marketing, it can guarantee success for marketers (Goldsmith, 1999). Nevertheless, if a marketing mix can successfully meet all of these, then the number of elements of the marketing mix does not make much difference.

The Digital Era of Marketing – The Present & The Future

Marketing has gone through a revolution from the 'Analogue Era' to the 'Digital Era'. From Mass production to limited production satisfying individual needs. From radio and television to computers and the Internet, marketing has largely transformed. With the emergence of the Internet, consumers no longer visit stores frequently to shop and simply order a product that gets delivered to their doorstep, where Digital Marketing has transformed the way businesses operate and connect with their audiences (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). Machine Learning (ML) has added value to the marketing efforts of organisations by converting consumer data into marketing insights that are useful in helping organisations make the right decisions and marketing actions (Kotler, 2024).

With the digital era of marketing, organisations are more interested in understanding the 5Ds: Digital Data, Digital Technology, Digital Platforms, Digital Media, and Digital Devices (Sutar, 2024). Thanks to the efforts of digital marketing pioneers who laid the foundation for today's digital marketing strategies in the 1990s with the introduction of early search engines, email marketing software, web analytics tools, and instant messaging that served as an innovation and experimentation platform, we have entered a Digital Marketing Era where organisations are serving not tech-savvy but tech-dependent consumers (Shivendra Tiwari, 2018), whose expectations the organisations must aim to satisfy. Organisations worldwide are attempting to keep up with emerging trends and best practices in digital marketing. It is now more important for organisations to understand the customer experience, where customers attempt to interact with organisations through multiple channels (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Social Media marketing, influencer marketing, omnichannel marketing, personalisation, and many more that organisations have tried and

have proven successful in all the mentioned arenas (Hermayanto, 2023).

Apart from developing various metrics and tools to measure the success of marketing efforts on social media, organisations are now using Artificial Intelligence (AI) to improve marketing efforts and make the right decisions. Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI) has become the top agenda for marketers in 2025 with the advent of ChatGPT and other generative AI platforms that can help integrate AI technology in marketing that can prove to be cost-effective, efficient, and adapt to the changing trends (Balaji et al., 2025). Coca-Cola has pioneered AI integration by embracing Open AI using Dall-E and GPT-4 to create the real magic platform allowing users to create AI-generated artwork and the 'masterpiece' generative AI advertisement which communicates brand identity and signals that the organisation is determined to reap the benefits of AI for its marketing efforts (Marr, 2023). This serves as encouragement for organisations to use AI in marketing to analyse customer data, create personalised marketing messages, and automate content creation, thereby saving time and resources while still engaging audiences with relevant content aimed at successful marketing.

This study was conducted to understand undergraduate students' online shopping preferences based on the marketing mix offered on the online platform, with an aim to understand the

- Marketing Mix (product, price, place, promotion) attributes influencing online shopping among undergraduate students.
- The most preferred payment method and the most preferred site for online shopping among the undergraduate students of a higher education institution.
- Relationship between marketing mix attributes and the socio-demographic profile (year of graduation and average amount spent) of the undergraduate students.
- Relationship between product, place, price and promotion attributes.

Methodology

The study follows descriptive research design with no control over variables. The study population comprised students pursuing Commerce and Business Administration at a higher education institution in South India. Population size in 1309. A sample of 350 students filled out the Google Form, of which 28 students were not willing to participate in the study. Responses from participants who did not consent were deleted from the remaining responses. A total of 154 students did not purchase products online; therefore, their responses were also deleted. The remaining 168 students were considered for the study; 12.85% of the total population willingly participated in this study.

Table 1 Distribution of Samples based on Departments and Year of Graduation

Particulars		Number of Respondents	Percentage (in %)
Department	Commerce	89	53
	Business Administration	79	47
Year of Graduation	I UG	53	32
	II UG	40	24
	III UG	75	45

Based on the existing literature, an instrument measuring nine items for each of the marketing mix attributes (Product, Price, Place and Promotion) on a Likert 5-point scale was developed. Descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, percentage, skewness, and kurtosis were used. Inferential statistics, such as one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and correlation, were used. Tables and bar diagrams are used to present the data, and Jamovi Open source software 2.3.21 was used to compute the analysis

Hypotheses

| Hypotheses		Statistical Testing Tool
H_{01}	There is no difference in marketing mix attributes (product, price, place and promotion) with students' year of graduation (I Year, II Year and III Year)	On-way ANOVA
H_{02}	There is no relationship between marketing mix attributes with amount spent on online shopping	Correlation
H_{03}	There is no relationship among marketing mix attributes (Product, Price, Place, Promotion)	Correlation

Results and Discussion

Diagram 1

Average Amount Spent on online shopping (on Monthly Basis)

The diagram shows that 11% of students spend less than Rs. 500 on online shopping, whereas 40% of students spend up to Rs. 1000, and 49% of students spend more than Rs. 1000 on online shopping. This shows that spending more than Rs. 1000 is common among students.

Diagram 2

Frequency of Purchase
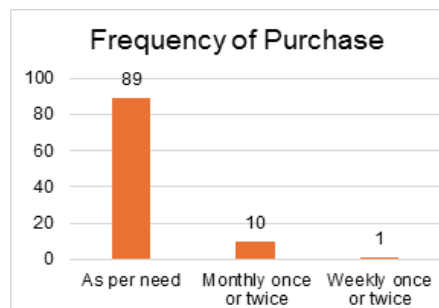
The diagram shows that 89% of the respondents purchased online as per their needs, 10% of the respondents purchased once or twice a month, and 1% of the respondents purchased once or twice a week. This shows that students are sensible in making purchases.
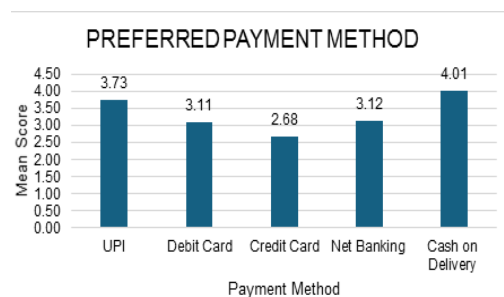
Diagram 3

ITEMS PURCHASED ONLINE
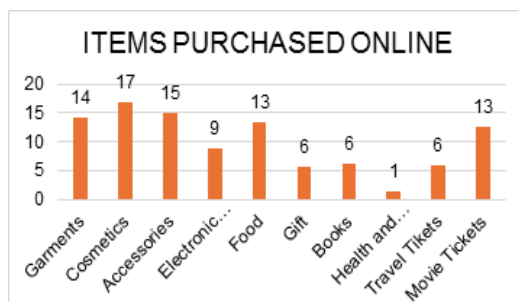
The diagram shows that Cosmetics, Accessories, Garments and Food items are the most commonly purchased items by students.

Diagram 4

PREFERRED WEBSITE FOR ONLINE PURCHASE

Garret's ranking technique was used to understand the preferences of online shopping websites among students. Diagram No. 6 shows that Amazon is Rank 1 as the most preferred website for shopping, followed by Flipkart with Rank 2, Myntra with Rank 3 and Nykaa with Rank 4.

Diagram 5

PREFERRED PAYMENT METHOD

Garret's ranking technique was used to understand the preferences of online shopping payment methods among the students. Diagram 7 shows that cash on delivery is ranked 1 as the most preferred payment method, followed by UPI as Ranked 2, Net Banking as ranked 3, debit card as ranked 4, and credit card as ranked 5.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables

	Product Attributes	Price Attributes	Place Attributes	Promotion Attributes
N	168	168	168	168
Mean	32.6	30.1	39.1	32.7

Standard deviation	7.59	6.71	9.34	8.24
Skewness	-0.304	-0.523	-1.02	-0.682
Kurtosis	-0.445	-0.295	0.526	-0.0745
Cron bach's α (Overall is 0.957)	0.898	0.882	0.938	0.920

The above table shows the calculated values of the skewness and kurtosis tests for the four marketing mix attributes that contribute to the online purchase of the students. As the skewness and kurtosis values are within the permissible limits of +1, the data are considered to be normally distributed.

This scale measures four dimensions: product attributes (9 items; α = .898), price attributes ambiguity (8 items; α = .882), place attributes (10 items; α = .938), and promotion attributes (9 items; α = .920). Cronbach's alphas for the 36 items measuring marketing mix attributes was .957. The marketing mix inventory was found to be highly reliable (36 items; α = .957).

Product Attributes: It observed that 17% of the respondents are highly influenced by product attributes while making online purchases. The influencing product attributes are the ability to compare the product before making a purchase decision, availability of detailed description, vendors maintaining the quality as promised, and privacy being ensured during the purchase. The study also reveals that 17% of respondents are not much influenced by product attributes like the possibility of viewing the product from all directions, some are not satisfied by the quality promised, and they also believe that products do not come in sustainable packages.

Place Attributes: It observed that 21% of the respondents were highly influenced by price attributes when making online purchases. The influencing attributes are the benefits respondents enjoy with shipment cost, discounts, and offers, and they feel the payment system is secure, whereas 16% of the respondents have low influence of price attributes as they feel they have limited and a few feel shipment cost, discounts, and offers are not advantageous.

Place Attributes

The above table shows that 16% of the respondents are highly influenced by place attributes when purchasing online. Some of the influencing attributes are 24/7 accessibility for shopping from the online app, tracking the order, no travel expenses involved, access to the global market, on-time delivery, easy return policies, time saving, and home delivery of goods. Meanwhile, 16% of the respondents had a low influence of place attributes as they felt that 24/7 accessibility for shopping, ease of ordering from the online platform, time saving, and home delivery facilities were important.

Promotion Attributes

The above table shows that 15% of the respondents are highly influenced by promotion attributes. Some of the influencing attributes are reviews and ratings of the selected product, social media influencers, recommendations from a peer, celebrity endorsement, and synchronisation of shipping costs and Wishlist. 17% of the respondents were not much influenced by promotion attributes. They feel that they are not influenced by social media influencers, celebrity endorsements, advertisements, websites with multiple languages, or AI features.

H_{01}: There is no difference in marketing mix attributes (product, price, place and promotion) with students' year of graduation (I Year, II Year and III Year).

Table 3 One Way ANOVA Showing the Difference between Marketing Mix Attributes (Product, Price, Place and Promotion) with Students' Year of Graduation (I Year, II Year and III Year)

	Year of Graduation	N	Mean	SD	F Value	P Value
Product Attributes	I Year	53	53	6.99	0.0903	0.914
	II Year	40	40	9.07		
	III Year	75	75	7.23		

Price Attributes	I Year	53	53	6	0.9312	0.398
	II Year	40	40	7.62		
	III Year	75	75	6.68		
Place Attributes	I Year	53	53	9.6	0.5333	0.589
	II Year	40	40	10.63		
	III Year	75	75	8.45		
Promotion Attributes	I Year	53	53	8.64	2.1599	0.121
	II Year	40	40	9.21		
	III Year	75	75	7.24		

The above table shows the Mean, Standard Deviation, F-value and P-value for the product, price, place, and promotional attributes that influence the respondents while shopping online. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to compare the variance. There was no significant difference in the scores of I, II, and III year students with marketing mix attributes (product, price, place, and promotion) with p=0.914, p=0.398, p=0.589, and p=0.121, respectively. Hence, the hypothesis is accepted, and it can be concluded that irrespective of the year of graduation, students are not influenced by product, price, place, and promotion attributes offered in online shopping.

H_{02}: There is no relationship between marketing mix attributes with amount spent on online shopping

Table 4 Correlation Matrix Showing the Relationship between Marketing Mix Attributes (Product, Price, Place, Promotion) with Amount Spent on Online Shopping

	Product Attributes	Price Attributes	Place Attributes	Promotion attributes
Product Attributes	Price Attributes	Place Attributes	Promotion attributes	

The above table shows a low positive correlation between product attributes and average amount spent by the students at 0.05 level. Whereas correlation does not exist at 0,05 level, 0.01 level and 0.001 level with price, place and promotion attributes

H_{03}: There is no relationship among marketing mix attributes (Product, Price, Place, Promotion)

Table 5 Correlation Matrix Showing the Relationship among Marketing Mix Attributes (Product, Price, Place, Promotion)

	Product Attributes	Price Attributes	Place Attributes	Promotion Attributes
Product Attributes	—			
Price Attributes	0.673***	—		
Place Attributes	0.535***	0.677***	—	
Promotion Attributes	0.421***	0.594***	0.547***	—

The above table shows the correlation matrix among the marketing mix attributes. There is a positive moderate correlation between all the four marketing mix attributes, namely Product, Price, Place, and Promotion, at the 0.001 level. Correlation exists between product and price attributes (r=0.673), product and place attributes (r=0.535), product and promotion attributes (r=0.421), price and place attributes (r=0.677), price and promotion attributes (r=0.594), and place and promotion attributes (r=0.547). Hence, the hypothesis is rejected, and it can be concluded that there is a relationship among marketing mix attributes.

Suggestions

With studies that evidence Artificial Intelligence and its ability to change marketing strategies and consumer behaviours (Davenport et al., 2020), e-commerce platforms should start incorporating AI tools to enhance the shopping experience, and these platforms can provide a multi-angle view with sustainable packaging and buy-back options. AI Chatbots for customer support, tracking, and troubleshooting can be introduced along with blogs and tutorials catering to different age groups. This will help create value and communicate it to customers, driving customer loyalty, satisfaction, and profitability for organisations (Kumar & Reinartz, 2016). Online forums can also be introduced to clarify doubts and testify to products. To boost sales, platforms can adopt bundling price strategies through free shipment models, where delivery cost can be embedded in product pricing (Gümüş, Li, Oh & Ray, 2013).

A disciplinary comparison study comparing humanities, sciences, and professional course students can be conducted to reveal how academic background influences digital buying behaviour of students. Consumer behaviour with online and offline shopping can also be studied, which can help understand the pattern of trust, convenience, and perceived value. A marketing mix integrating AI-driven features can be used to understand customers' digital engagement.

Conclusion

The study's findings highlight the constantly changing expectations of technology-dependent consumers and the critical role that the marketing mix—despite being referred to as "traditional"—plays in influencing online buyers' decisions. This study reveals that the most popular website and customer preference for online shopping is Amazon, which offers cash on delivery. On average, students spent more than Rs. 1000 on Internet purchases. The ability to compare is a characteristic that influences product attributes. Offers are price-based attributes that influence elements. Their online shopping experience is available around the clock, and the review and rating system of promotions aids in product selection. There is a positive correlation between the marketing mix components.

As students from this generation prefer personalised products, managers should consider the following. Limited edition tailor-made options to enhance sales. Managers can focus on student-friendly pricing strategies and integrate technology that helps students visualise through mobile apps. This study helps managers devise student-friendly marketing mix strategies to boost sales.

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