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Exploring the influence of e-marketing on rural customer buying patterns: A case study of Kashmir valley

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Abstract

The rapid development of digital technologies has changed marketing strategies and given companies new ways to connect with clients, even those who live far away. This study investigates how e-marketing affects rural Kashmiri customers' purchasing habits, a location with distinct socioeconomic and cultural dynamics. This study employs a mixed-method methodology to examine the perceptions and responses of rural Kashmiri consumers to e-marketing tactics, such as social media promotions, online ads, and digital purchasing platforms. Surveys and interviews with rural clients and local company owners were used to gather data, which provided insights into purchasing patterns, variables influencing decisions to buy online, and difficulties encountered when implementing e-marketing in rural areas. The results show that although e-marketing is becoming more popular with rural consumers, its efficacy is greatly impacted by challenges with trust, internet accessibility, and low levels of digital literacy. The present study enhances the comprehension of the possibilities of electronic marketing in remote markets and provides suggestions for companies to customise their approaches to the requirements and inclinations of rural customer in Kashmir.

Keywords: E-marketing, rural consumer behaviour, customer buying patterns

Introduction

The swift move of digital technologies has revolutionized marketing practices, extending their reach even into remote and rural areas. E-marketing, defined as the use of electronic platforms to promote goods and services, has become a critical tool for businesses in connecting with consumers across geographical boundaries. In developing economies like India, rural markets are emerging as key areas for growth, where digital platforms hold the potential to reshape traditional consumer behaviors (Sarkar, 2017) ^[35]. However, understanding the unique characteristics of rural customers, especially in regions with limited digital literacy and infrastructure, remains crucial to the success of e-marketing strategies. In Kashmir, a region with its distinct socio-cultural and economic landscape, e-marketing is still in its nascent stage. The region's rural areas, which have historically been dominated by traditional commerce, are beginning to see an influx of online marketing initiatives aimed at tapping into a largely underserved consumer base (Qureshi, 2020) ^[32]. Despite the potential, significant challenges such as limited internet connectivity, lack of digital literacy, and trust issues remain barriers to the widespread adoption of e-commerce in rural Kashmir (Wani & Ahmad, 2021) ^[43]. This research aims to explore how e-marketing influences the buying patterns of rural customers in Kashmir, assessing both the opportunities and challenges of implementing digital marketing strategies in this unique environment. By examining the perceptions and behaviours of rural consumers, this study seeks to provide insights into how businesses can tailor their e-marketing strategies to better engage this demographic. The findings will offer valuable implications for marketers looking to expand into rural markets not only in Kashmir but also in other similar regions.

Research Objectives

1. To study the impact of e-marketing on rural customer buying patterns in Kashmir.
2. To explore the challenges and opportunities associated with e-marketing in rural Kashmir.

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The research is grounded in the understanding that rural consumer behaviour is influenced by various factors, including socio-economic conditions, accessibility to technology, and trust in digital platforms (Hassan & Goyal, 2019) ^[15]. This paper contributes to the growing body of literature on rural marketing and digital transformation, with a focus on the relatively unexplored context of Kashmir.

Literature Review

The evolution of e-marketing has transformed consumer behaviour globally, with rural areas gradually adopting digital tools for shopping and information gathering. While e-marketing has become mainstream in urban areas, its influence on rural consumers, particularly in regions like Kashmir, is still emerging. This literature review examines recent studies on e-marketing's influence on rural consumer behaviour, focusing on adoption, challenges, and opportunities, and situates the findings in the context of Kashmir.

E-marketing is reshaping traditional marketing paradigms by creating opportunities for businesses to engage with rural consumers. Several recent studies have highlighted the growing influence of e-marketing on rural customer buying patterns. For instance, Kumar and Kashyap (2022) ^[21] found that rural consumers are increasingly interacting with e-marketing platforms due to greater smartphone penetration and digital literacy campaigns. These changes have led to a shift in buying behavior, with rural consumers becoming more aware of product choices, pricing, and discounts available online. Additionally, Gupta et al. (2023) ^[14] explored how digital platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook are being used as informal e-marketing channels, allowing businesses to connect with rural customers directly. Their study revealed that these platforms play a crucial role in influencing rural consumers, especially in areas where formal online shopping infrastructure is underdeveloped. Despite the potential, there are notable barriers to e-marketing adoption in rural areas. Siddiqui and Akhtar (2021) ^[39] emphasized the challenges associated with poor internet infrastructure, particularly in remote regions like Kashmir. Their research found that limited connectivity and data affordability hinder consistent access to e-marketing platforms, resulting in lower adoption rates. Patel and Singh (2022) ^[28] discussed trust as a significant barrier to the success of e-marketing in rural areas. Many rural consumers, particularly those with low digital literacy, are hesitant to engage in online transactions due to concerns about payment security and product quality. This trust deficit often pushes rural consumers to stick to traditional brick-and-mortar stores, despite being exposed to online marketing.

The integration of e-marketing in rural economies has the potential to drive economic growth. Sharma et al. (2023) ^[37] argued that e-marketing can empower rural consumers by providing them with access to a wider range of products and services. This increased access to information helps rural buyers make more informed purchasing decisions, potentially leading to better financial outcomes. In regions like Kashmir, where economic development has been constrained due to political and geographical challenges, e-marketing offers a promising avenue for economic diversification.

Qadir and Khan (2023) ^[30] noted that e-marketing enables local businesses in Kashmir to expand their customer base

beyond the immediate geographical region. By utilizing platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in rural areas can market their products to both domestic and international consumers, thereby increasing their revenue potential.

Kashmir, with its unique socio-political and economic environment, presents a distinct case for studying the influence of e-marketing on rural buying patterns. Mir and Dar (2022) pointed out that despite the infrastructural challenges, e-marketing is steadily growing in Kashmir's rural areas. The study found that products related to agriculture, handicrafts, and essential commodities are increasingly being marketed online, with e-commerce giants like Amazon and Flipkart playing a role in the region's digital market expansion.

However, Wani and Bhat (2023) ^[44] highlighted several challenges unique to Kashmir, including intermittent internet shutdowns, which disrupt both consumers and businesses engaged in e-commerce. The uncertainty of internet services impacts the trust and reliability of online platforms, causing reluctance among rural consumers to fully embrace e-marketing. Looking forward, the future of e-marketing in rural Kashmir depends heavily on improvements in infrastructure, digital literacy, and trust-building initiatives. Ahmad and Qureshi (2024) ^[2] suggested that digital literacy programs focused on building consumer confidence in online transactions could accelerate e-marketing adoption in rural Kashmir. They proposed that collaborative efforts between the government, local businesses, and educational institutions could pave the way for a more inclusive digital economy. Furthermore, Malik et al. (2024) emphasized the importance of locally tailored e-marketing strategies that consider the cultural, economic, and technological contexts of Kashmir's rural population. They argued that hyper-localized marketing campaigns, which utilize local languages and culturally relevant content, would resonate more with rural consumers, leading to higher engagement and trust in digital platforms. The literature indicates that while e-marketing has significant potential in reshaping rural buying patterns, challenges such as internet accessibility, trust issues, and digital literacy remain key barriers, especially in regions like Kashmir. However, with strategic interventions in infrastructure development and consumer education, e-marketing could play a transformative role in enhancing rural economies and empowering consumers. This research aims to build on these findings by specifically exploring how rural consumers in Kashmir perceive and engage with e-marketing, contributing to the broader discourse on rural digitalization.

Research Gap

E-marketing has been extensively studied in urban settings, the influence of digital marketing on rural customer buying behaviour remains underexplored, especially in geographically unique regions like the Kashmir Valley. Rural consumers are distinct from their urban counterparts due to differences in internet accessibility, literacy, and exposure to technology. Existing studies on rural marketing have largely focused on traditional marketing channels, overlooking the growing penetration of digital platforms in rural markets (Das, 2020) ^[10]. Furthermore, much of the literature on rural e-marketing is centered on broader regions like India as a whole, without addressing the

specific cultural, economic, and geographic challenges faced by rural consumers in Kashmir (Hussain & Bhat, 2022).

The Kashmir Valley has a unique setting where political instability, coupled with limited infrastructure, impacts consumer access to e-marketing platforms (Rashid & Khan, 2020). However, researchers have conducted very few comprehensive studies to understand how these factors influence the buying patterns of rural consumers in the valley. This research seeks to address this gap by investigating the specific ways e-marketing affects rural

customers in Kashmir, providing a more nuanced understanding of rural consumer behaviour in regions with complex socio-political contexts.

Meta-Analysis Data Table

This table provides a snapshot of how different studies have explored various aspects of e-marketing and its impact on rural buying patterns. It helps in understanding the overall trends and discrepancies in the existing literature, which can inform your research in Kashmir.

Authors	Sample Size	Region	Key Variables	Effect Size	Findings
Kumar & Kashyap (2022) ^[21]	500 (Rural India)	India	E-marketing Exposure, Buying Behavior	$d = 0.45$	Positive correlation between e-marketing exposure and increased online buying behavior.
Gupta et al. (2023) ^[14]	300 (Rural India)	India	Digital Platforms, Purchase Frequency	$r = 0.50$	Significant impact of digital platforms on purchase frequency; WhatsApp and Facebook are most effective.
Siddiqui & Akhtar (2021) ^[39]	400 (Rural Pakistan)	Pakistan	Internet Accessibility, E-marketing Adoption	$\beta = -0.30$	Negative correlation between internet accessibility and e-marketing adoption; poor infrastructure limits impact.
Patel & Singh (2022) ^[28]	350 (Rural India)	India	Trust, E-marketing Effectiveness	$\beta = 0.40$	Trust issues significantly affect e-marketing effectiveness; higher trust leads to increased online purchases.
Sharma et al. (2023) ^[38]	250 (Rural India)	India	E-marketing, Economic Growth	$d = 0.38$	E-marketing contributes positively to rural economic growth by enhancing market reach and consumer choices.
Qadir & Khan (2023) ^[31]	200 (Rural Kashmir)	Kashmir	E-marketing Strategies, Business Revenue	$d = 0.42$	Local businesses in Kashmir see increased revenue from tailored e-marketing strategies despite infrastructure challenges.
Mir & Dar (2022)	300 (Rural Kashmir)	Kashmir	E-commerce Adoption, Challenges	$r = 0.35$	E-commerce adoption is growing but limited by infrastructure and trust issues.
Wani & Bhat (2023) ^[44]	250 (Rural Kashmir)	Kashmir	Internet Disruptions, E-commerce Impact	$\beta = -0.45$	Internet disruptions significantly impact e-commerce effectiveness; irregular connectivity affects consumer trust.

Research Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to explore the influence of e-marketing on rural customer buying patterns in Kashmir, blending both qualitative and quantitative methods. The mixed-methods approach allows for a deeper understanding of complex social phenomena, by integrating the strengths of both methodologies (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017) ^[8].

1. Research Design

The case study method is utilized to focus on the rural areas of Kashmir, given their unique socio-economic and cultural contexts. Case studies are particularly useful in understanding real-life phenomena in depth, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2018) ^[45]. The research also employs both descriptive and explanatory elements, aiming to not only describe current consumer behaviours but also to explain the relationship between e-marketing exposure and buying patterns.

2. Data Collection Methods

Primary Data

Surveys: A structured questionnaire has been distributed to rural consumers across Kashmir. The survey covers variables such as internet access, frequency of online shopping, familiarity with e-marketing platforms, and factors influencing purchase decisions. (Bryman, 2016) ^[7], claims surveys are a commonly used quantitative method to

obtain data from a large sample size.

Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with rural customers, local vendors, and e-commerce businesses operating in the region. Interviews allow for more in-depth data collection, providing context and meaning to the quantitative findings.

Secondary Data: Secondary data sources include existing research on e-marketing, rural consumer behaviour, and regional economic reports. This triangulation strengthens the study's validity (Denzin, 1978) ^[11], providing a broad foundation for analysis.

3. Sampling Techniques

Target Population: The target population consists of rural consumers in Kashmir who have access to the internet and have encountered e-marketing platforms.

Sampling Method: A multi-stage sampling technique has been used. Multi-stage sampling is effective in narrowing down a large population into manageable groups, ensuring that a diverse and representative sample is obtained (Teddlie & Yu, 2007) ^[42].

- In the first stage, districts are selected based on their levels of internet infrastructure.
- In the second stage, random sampling of villages is carried out.
- In the final stage, convenience sampling is used to select individual participants.

Sample Size: A sample of approximately 130 respondents had surveyed, while 30 semi-structured interviews have been conducted. The sample size ensures statistical significance and depth in qualitative analysis (Creswell, 2013) ^[9].

4. Data Analysis Procedures

- **Quantitative Analysis:** Survey data has analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics summarize variables, while inferential statistics such as correlation and regression analysis used to explore relationships between e-marketing exposure and consumer behavior (Field, 2018).
- **Qualitative Analysis:** Interview data has analyzed using thematic analysis, which involves coding data and identifying recurring themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006) ^[6]. The qualitative findings help contextualize the quantitative data, providing deeper insights into rural consumers' emotional and cultural perspectives on e-marketing.

5. Ethical Considerations

The study adheres to ethical guidelines, ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, and the right of participants to withdraw at any point. Research ethics are critical to maintaining the integrity of the study (Babbie, 2015). Data shall be anonymized, and any personal information will be kept confidential.

Conclusion

This research has examined the influence of e-marketing on rural customer buying patterns with a specific focus on Kashmir, a region characterized by unique socio-economic and cultural conditions. The study revealed that while e-marketing has the potential to significantly impact rural consumer behaviour, several challenges limit its effectiveness.

Increased Awareness and Engagement: Rural consumers in Kashmir are becoming more aware of e-marketing channels due to growing smartphone usage and targeted digital campaigns. E-marketing platforms, particularly social media, have started to influence purchasing decisions, though the impact is still emerging.

Challenges in Adoption: Significant barriers to e-marketing adoption include limited internet access, low digital literacy, and trust issues. These challenges inhibit the full potential of e-marketing strategies and affect consumer confidence in online transactions.

Economic Opportunities: Despite these challenges, e-marketing presents valuable opportunities for rural businesses in Kashmir. By leveraging digital platforms, local businesses can reach broader markets and potentially increase their revenue. However, the growth potential is constrained by infrastructural and educational gaps.

Theoretical Implications

This study on the influence of e-marketing on rural customer buying patterns in Kashmir contributes to the theoretical understanding of consumer behavior in emerging markets, particularly rural areas. Traditional models of consumer behavior, such as the Technology Acceptance

Model (TAM) and Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), often focus on urban or developed regions, neglecting the distinct dynamics of rural areas. By focusing on Kashmir, this research provides a localized perspective on how rural consumers engage with e-marketing, thus expanding the applicability of these models. Additionally, it enriches the field of rural marketing by demonstrating the role of digital access in transforming buying behavior, bridging the gap between digital marketing literature and rural consumer studies (Sivakumar & Sarkar, 2019) ^[41].

Managerial Implications

For businesses targeting rural markets, the findings offer practical insights into leveraging e-marketing to shape buying patterns. Companies can tailor their digital strategies to address the specific needs, preferences, and challenges of rural consumers, such as limited internet access or lower digital literacy. The study suggests that personalized and localized marketing campaigns, simple user interfaces, and mobile-friendly platforms can drive engagement and foster loyalty among rural customers (Kumar, 2021) ^[21]. Moreover, it emphasizes the importance of trust-building through transparent communication and reliable service, which are critical in regions with limited access to traditional retail.

Future Recommendations

Efforts should be made to improve internet connectivity and data affordability in rural areas of Kashmir. Investment in digital infrastructure will facilitate smoother e-marketing operations and increase consumer access to online platforms. Implementing educational programs to enhance digital literacy among rural consumers is crucial. Training workshops and awareness campaigns can help build confidence in using e-marketing platforms and online transactions. Build Trust, addressing trust issues through secure payment systems and transparent e-marketing practices is essential. Businesses should focus on creating secure and user-friendly online experiences to build consumer trust and loyalty. Localize marketing strategies—marketing strategies should be customized to reflect the cultural and linguistic characteristics of rural Kashmir. Localized content and culturally relevant promotions can enhance engagement and effectiveness.

By addressing these recommendations, stakeholders can enhance the impact of e-marketing in rural Kashmir and similar regions, fostering economic growth and improved consumer engagement.

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Declarations

Conflict of interest: The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

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