

Editorial

Dear Readers,

We are delighted to present the June 2025 issue of IJRBS, featuring insightful research on contemporary issues in business and management. This edition covers diverse themes such as feminist ethics in management, gender stereotypes in entrepreneurship, discount-driven consumer behavior, nomophobia and academic inefficiency, employee well-being and stress reduction, and the role of social media in online shopping trends. These timely studies reflect our commitment to publishing impactful, interdisciplinary research that bridges theory with practice.

We extend our sincere thanks to the authors, reviewers, and advisory board for their valuable contributions. As we navigate an ever-evolving global business environment, we remain dedicated to fostering impactful research that informs academic dialogue and drives real-world changes.

With regards,

Arun Kumar

Editor-in-Chief

IJRBS

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Interpreting Feminist Ethics as a Way of Doing Management Ethics: A Few Philosophical Reflections

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Abstract

In everyday life, individuals encounter ethical challenges often shaped by traditional ideas about gender roles. These ideas also influence the field of management, affecting how managers make decisions, interact with others, and structure organizations. Management ethics is primarily shaped by a framework that reflects patriarchal values, emphasizing competition, rational control, and authority. Despite the increasing presence of women in management and leadership roles, many organizations' ethical norms and managerial structures continue to reflect male-centric perspectives. This often results in the under representation of values such as collaboration, emotional intelligence, holistic decision-making, care, and empathy, which are integral to a more inclusive approach to leadership. As a result, ethical management practices continue to carry gender biases.

In this paper, we argue that feminist ethics, centered on care, empathy, interdependence, and attention to lived experiences, offers a crucial framework for reimagining management ethics. We apply a feminist lens to examine ethics in management, challenging the traditional reliance on ethical theories predominantly shaped by male perspectives, such as Kantian and Utilitarian ethics. Feminist ethics promotes a more inclusive, relational, and equitable approach to ethical decision-making, one that better reflects the diverse experiences and needs of all members of an organization.

Keywords

Management ethics, Feminist ethics, Care, Lived experiences, Inclusive, and Individuality.

1. Introduction

Ethics is a system of moral principles that guide decision-making and behaviour, focusing on determining what is suitable for individuals and society. Often referred to as moral philosophy, the term "ethics" is derived from the Greek word *ethos*, which encompasses meanings such as custom, habit, character, or disposition. Ethical inquiries address fundamental questions, such as how to live a virtuous life, the rights and responsibilities of individuals, the distinction between right and wrong, and the nature of moral actions. Ethics as a philosophical subdiscipline encompasses various branches, such as metaethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics. However, feminist ethics is not traditionally considered a branch of ethics in the same way. Instead, it offers a distinct way of doing ethics, challenging the assumptions and practices within these established branches. Similarly, Care Ethics¹ is also not an alternative moral theory, but a different way of framing or thinking about ethics (Hamington, M. (2013). Furthermore, care ethics arose out of women's experience and feminist theory, but it is not a "woman's morality." (Ibid.pp.1129) Both feminist ethics and Care Ethics engage with all these areas, questioning and reshaping them from a perspective that highlights the experiences and concerns of marginalized groups, particularly women.

Management ethics is a subfield of business ethics, which falls under applied ethics. It focuses on the practical application of ethical theories to the roles and responsibilities of managers within organizations. Feminist ethics critiques traditional management practices by highlighting that, while management ethics may present itself as rational and holistic, it often fails to account for the experiences and needs of women within the workplace. Despite the increasing presence of women in managerial and leadership roles, many organizations continue to treat women employees as mere participants in the workforce, overlooking their lived experiences as women. Feminist ethics argues that this oversight prevents a truly inclusive and equitable approach to management, where the perspectives and needs of all employees, regardless of gender, are fully understood and addressed.

This paper aims to emphasize the importance of the intersectionality of feminist ethics within business ethics, providing a more expansive understanding of ethics in practice. It argues that management ethics predominantly follows ethical frameworks shaped by a male-dominated, patriarchal context and needs to be redefined and reshaped from a feminist lens.

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1. Here, the term "Care ethics" is used interchangeably with feminist ethics, as both care ethics and feminist ethics demand an inclusive and alternative approach within the ethical framework.

This paper is divided into three sections. The first section will discuss management ethics and ethical theories in depth, exploring their key principles and intersections with feminist ethics. In the second section, we will argue that adopting a feminist lens in management ethics can lead to a more holistic and inclusive ethical framework, fostering harmony and addressing the gendered biases that often shape traditional ethical approaches. Finally, in the third section, we will emphasize that feminist ethics represents a distinct and valuable approach to doing ethics that enriches the broader ethical discourse by prioritizing relational values, care, and inclusivity in organizational settings.

2. Management Ethics and Ethical Theories

Simply put, management is what managers do, and it involves understanding their current actions and evaluating what they should ideally be doing. At its core, management coordinates work activities to ensure that tasks are completed efficiently and effectively, with and through others. This process encompasses key functions such as planning, organizing, leading, and controlling. However, when considering management ethics, it is essential to highlight that these actions must align with moral principles. These Moral Principles or Moral theories are structured, systematic frameworks designed to guide our understanding of how we should live and what actions we should take. These theories aim to explain why certain ways of living or behaving are preferable to others while prescribing specific courses of action. Furthermore, they offer justifications for actions, grounded in different interpretations of what is morally valuable. Since the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries, two prominent moral theories, utilitarianism and Kantian ethics, have been particularly influential in shaping the discourse on ethics, especially in English-speaking countries. These theories have dominated academic discussions and have been widely applied in the managerial world, guiding decision-making and organizational practices. Let us first understand these moral theories in detail.

3. Utilitarianism

David Hume, Jeremy Bentham, and John Stuart Mill were key figures in developing utilitarian ethics, a moral framework based on maximizing happiness and minimizing pain. Bentham introduced the Principle of Utility and the hedonic calculus to assess the moral worth of actions by their consequences. Mill, in *Utilitarianism* (1861), refined the theory by distinguishing between higher (intellectual and moral) and lower (physical) pleasures, arguing that the former possess greater intrinsic value.

Utilitarian principles are highly relevant to management ethics. Like utilitarian thinkers, managers aim to create conditions that promote overall well-being for employees, customers, and stakeholders. Applying Bentham's principle, managers assess decisions, such as hiring, layoffs, or policy changes, based on their impact on collective happiness. Bentham's hedonic calculus guides managers in evaluating the potential benefits and harms of various actions. Incorporating Mill's idea of higher pleasures, ethical management also prioritizes employees' intellectual and moral development through opportunities for learning, meaningful work, and ethical leadership. Thus, utilitarian ethics helps managers balance short-term satisfaction with long-term growth and well-being.

4. Kantian Ethics

Kantian ethics, developed by Immanuel Kant, is grounded in the idea that morality is based on duty and the application of universal moral principles, rather than the outcomes of actions. Kant most systematically presented his ideas on morality in his major work, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785). The central concept in Kant's ethics is the Categorical Imperative, which requires individuals to act only on principles (maxims) that could be made into universal laws for everyone. Kant emphasized that human beings have intrinsic value and must never be treated merely as means to an end, but always as ends in themselves. His Universal Law Formulation suggests that one should act only according to principles that all rational beings can accept. At the same time, the Humanity Formulation stresses respect for the dignity and autonomy of every individual. The Kingdom of Ends formulation presents a vision of a moral community where all individuals act as self-governing legislators of universal laws, respecting the freedom and rationality of others. Managers can apply Kantian ethics to their practices by making decisions based on consistent and universal principles. In hiring, promotions, and performance evaluation, managers should act reasonably, transparently, and impartially, ensuring that every employee is treated equally. Following the Humanity Formulation, managers must respect employees as individuals with their own goals and dignity, and not use them merely to achieve organizational objectives. Kantian ethics also highlights the importance of integrity in management; managers should avoid unethical practices such as manipulating information or applying double standards. Managers can build a "Kingdom of Ends" within the workplace by promoting an environment where all employees are treated as rational agents worthy of respect. In doing so, Kant's ethical framework guides

managers to make decisions rooted in duty and moral principles, fostering fairness, trust, and a strong ethical culture in the organization.

5. Feminist Ethics

Feminist ethics is not about women but about ethics. (Walker, M. U. (2002). However, Feminist ethicists generally agree that a proper starting point for ethical reflection is to engage directly with the concrete realities and lived experiences that shape women's lives. (Robb, C.S. 1981) Feminist ethics encapsulates a wide variety of writings but has at its core a concern about including perspectives, experiences, and reasoning of women into theories of ethics (Derry, 2002). Feminist ethics developed into a distinct area of academic philosophy during the 1980s. It begins with the assertion that traditional ethics have a masculine bias and aims to address this imbalance by rethinking ethical frameworks. Feminist ethics often emerges in response to the marginalization of women within traditional ethical theories. (Borgerson, J. L., 2007) Carol Gilligan (1982) and Nel Noddings (1984) have pointed out that women's experience of morality centers on concrete particulars rather than abstractions, on close, caring relationships, not on abstract rules and impartial norms. (Driver, J., 2005).

Feminist ethics is sensitive to the gender bias implicit in philosophical theories (for instance, philosophers' lists of virtues may be typically manly or culturally masculine), social structures, legal and political procedures, and the general culture. One controversial claim is that women approach practical reasoning from a different perspective from that of men. The difference includes emphasis on community caring and bonding with particular individuals instead of abstract impartiality."² Feminist ethics' primary objective is to demonstrate how traditional ethics have ignored or undervalued women's moral experience. Theoretical ethics, which includes normative and meta-ethics, addresses values, norms, and universal problems that do not require gender discrimination. However, the situation is different when it comes to applied ethics. The opinions of both men and women must be taken into account. It emphasizes the need to dismantle ethical models that inadvertently sustain biases based on gender, sexual orientation, class, race, ability, or moral character. It calls for a more holistic and inclusive approach to managerial ethics.

The management process, particularly the establishment of organizational priorities, significantly influences the achievement of ethical performance by highlighting the values deemed important by management. However, ethical

2. The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy, 2008, p.170

standards are often overlooked or even compromised due to management's primary focus on other elements of the firm's strategy. By emphasizing ethical frameworks that are predominantly male-driven and partial toward gendered practices, managerial planning often creates an environment where considerations related to gender, particularly women's experiences, decision making, opinions are neglected. This gender bias in ethical decision-making disregards women's diverse lived experiences. It perpetuates an organizational culture that fails to recognize the importance of inclusivity, care, and relational values in achieving ethical outcomes.

6. Feminist Ethics Framework for Management Ethics

By incorporating feminist principles into managerial ethics, businesses can foster environments that respect diverse perspectives and prioritize equitable treatment, creating ethical frameworks that consider the complexities of power dynamics, gender, and intersectionality, and not just think from the perspective of universalization. From a feminist ethics perspective, Immanuel Kant's moral philosophy presents significant challenges, particularly his concept of the categorical imperative and the principle of universalizability. While Kant's framework advocates for a universal moral law based on individual autonomy and the application of impartial principles, feminist ethics critiques this emphasis on abstraction, autonomy, and impartiality, arguing that these principles fail to adequately account for relational and contextual aspects of human life, particularly for women and marginalized groups. Feminist ethics fundamentally opposes Kant's focus on the autonomous, individual self, as it prioritizes impartiality and universality over personal relationships and care. Kant's categorical imperative is predicated on treating others as ends in themselves, but in a highly abstract and detached way. For feminist ethicists, such an approach overlooks individuals' nuanced, lived experiences within relationships. Feminist scholars such as Carol Gilligan (1982) argue that moral reasoning for women tends to focus more on concrete situations and relationships, emphasizing care, empathy, and interdependence, rather than universal laws that are disconnected from real-world contexts. Immanuel Kant, the German philosopher, maintained that moral philosophy should be rooted in the principle of autonomy, with individuals obligated to follow a universal moral law they impose upon themselves. He articulated this principle through the "categorical imperative," which posits that each action must be guided by personal principles or rules, referred to as "maxims." Maxims constitute the underlying rationale for one's actions, even when individuals may not be fully

conscious of them. To assess the moral validity of a maxim, Kant proposed the test of universalizability, whereby one must consider whether the maxim could be willed as a universal law applicable to all rational beings. (Marques J (2015) Since Kant's categorical imperative does not take into account any particular characteristics of the individuals involved in a moral action, it is intended to maintain consistency and, to a significant extent, parallels the Golden Rule, which advises that one should treat others as one would wish to be treated. However, the concept of universalizability within Kant's categorical imperatives is precisely the opposite of feminist ethics. While Kant's framework is grounded in notions of justice and abstract principles, feminist ethics emphasizes the importance of relational contexts and interpersonal connections. According to Machold et al. (2008), feminist ethics extends moral considerations beyond Kant's categorical imperative by incorporating an imperative of care for oneself and others within the framework of relationships. In traditional managerial ethics, decision-making is often guided by impersonal, utilitarian frameworks prioritizing efficiency, profit maximization, and shareholder interests. These frameworks tend to neglect the voices of those who may not hold positions of power within the organization, often leading to decisions that perpetuate inequality or disregard the well-being of marginalized employees. Feminist ethics challenges this by introducing a more inclusive approach to ethics that considers abstract principles and the real-world experiences of all stakeholders, including women and other underrepresented groups.

Feminist ethics strongly emphasize care and relationships rather than individualistic notions of autonomy and justice. In a business context, this means that managers should consider the impact of their decisions on both the individuals and the communities within the organization. For example, fostering a supportive, inclusive workplace where employees are valued for their productivity and unique experiences can improve morale, increase employee satisfaction, and reduce turnover. When managers consider their employees' relational needs, they help create a more ethical organizational culture where workers feel heard, valued, and respected. Furthermore, feminist ethics advocates dismantling traditional hierarchical structures in favor of more participatory and democratic decision-making processes. By integrating feminist principles, managers can develop decision-making strategies emphasizing collaboration, mutual respect, and shared responsibility. This would allow managers to make decisions that meet business goals and promote social justice, equity, and care within the organization. For example, feminist

ethics would encourage managers to consider how their policies and actions affect women employees, particularly regarding opportunities for advancement, equal pay, and work-life balance.

7. Feminist Ethics as a Way of Doing Management Ethics

Janet Borgerson (2007) argues that feminist ethics has been consistently overlooked and misapplied within business ethics and corporate social responsibility, a highly relevant critique today. Despite advances, most managerial practices and ethical decision-making processes continue to be grounded in traditional ethical theories formulated by male philosophers, often reflecting patriarchal values. Ming Lim (2018) emphasizes that feminist ethics reorients traditional frameworks to incorporate women's moral experiences, challenging ontological and epistemological assumptions perpetuating women's marginalization and other under represented groups within organizations.

Feminist ethics critiques the essentialist assignment of social and economic roles based on gendered traits (Card, 1991), advocating instead for ethical approaches grounded in inclusivity, relational understanding, and care. Philosophically, feminist contributions have expanded the meaning of “good business” by reshaping stakeholder theories to include a wider array of affected groups beyond shareholders and executives (Carroll, 2004). Freeman and Gilbert (1992) similarly argue that business should be reconceptualized as a system of interconnected relationships founded on principles of cooperation and care, rather than competition and strict justice.

In management ethics, feminist ethics offers a practical framework by emphasizing the importance of relationships, community, empathy, and context in ethical decision-making. It encourages managers to recognize and address diverse employee identities, fostering collaborative and supportive environments (Hamington, 2013). Additionally, Oliner and Oliner (1995) describe “diversifying” as the deliberate effort to engage with groups different from one's own, reinforcing the feminist ethical call for mutual understanding and relational responsibility in organizational life. Unlike traditional ethical models based on abstract, individualistic, and often adversarial notions of rights (such as those proposed by Kantian or utilitarian frameworks), feminist ethics foregrounds care, interdependence, and social responsibility. It moves from legalistic or contractual notions of morality toward a relational approach more responsive to real-world organizational dynamics. Thus, feminist ethics provides a valuable alternative way of doing management ethics, one that

nurtures inclusive leadership, ethical imagination, and a more profound commitment to organizational justice and employee well-being.

8. Conclusion

Feminist ethics offers a critical intervention into traditional moral theories by illuminating how gender operates as a system of social power that influences and often distorts moral and institutional practices. Rather than merely articulating abstract normative ideals, feminist ethicists emphasize the importance of engaging with the concrete realities and lived experiences of women and other marginalized groups, thereby exposing the underlying structures of oppression that conventional ethical frameworks frequently obscure. As Lindemann (2005) observes, feminist ethics is not confined to description; instead, it critically analyzes how power is exercised within societies and insists that moral philosophy must be responsive to these dynamics. Within the domain of management ethics, feminist ethics provides a necessary corrective to dominant models that prioritize shareholder interests, regulatory compliance, and profitability, often at the expense of relational care, inclusivity, and social justice. Through integrating an ethics of care, feminist ethics reconceptualizes management as a relational and community-centered practice, emphasizing empathy, trust, and connection alongside autonomy and rational deliberation. It challenges essentialist and socially constructed gender norms, historically devalued traits associated with care, emotion, and interdependence in organizational leadership and ethical reasoning. Furthermore, feminist ethics privileges lived narratives, biographies, and experiential knowledge as legitimate sources for ethical reflection, offering a richer and more contextually grounded ethical framework for decision-making in organizational contexts. Recent feminist scholarship has significantly expanded stakeholder theory by advocating for the inclusion of a broader array of individuals and communities impacted by business practices, thereby fostering more imaginative, inclusive, and socially responsive leadership. Consequently, feminist ethics emerges not merely as a critique of traditional ethical theories but as a practical and dynamic approach to management ethics — one that demands the active embodiment of ethical principles in ways that address real-world inequalities and power imbalances. In doing so, feminist ethics transforms ethical practice within management from a procedural or compliance-oriented exercise into a robust, relational, and justice-centered endeavor.

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The Influence of Discount Offers on Consumer Purchase Behavior and Brand Loyalty

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Abstract

Discount promotions are one of the most common marketing methods used by firms to attract clients, improve sales, and gain a competitive advantage. These discounts take many forms, including percentage reductions, buy-one-get-one-free (BOGO) deals, seasonal specials, and loyalty-based discounts. This study investigates the influence of discount offers in determining customer purchasing behavior and whether they strengthen or damage brand loyalty. The study uses a questionnaire-based data gathering approach to gather information from customers on their purchasing habits, discount expectations, and brand switching tendencies. The obtained data is analyzed in Excel utilizing frequency distribution, mean, and standard deviation to detect patterns in consumer answers. The findings show that, while discounts have a major impact on consumers' shopping decisions, they can also create a dependency in which customers wait for promotions before making purchases. While discounts assist in clearing inventory and attract new consumers, they can also lower overall profitability if not effectively handled. Many businesses struggle to strike the correct balance between offering discounts to attract new consumers and keeping a consistent price policy that encourages loyalty among existing customers. To summarize, discount offers are a double-edged sword. While they effectively increase sales and purchases, their influence on brand loyalty is ambiguous. Consumers are growing more discount-driven, therefore firms must discover new strategies to keep clients beyond price incentives. In today's competitive economy, a well-balanced discounting strategy that takes into account both short-term sales growth and long-term brand positioning is critical to long-term success.

Keywords

Discount offers, Brand loyalty, Consumer behavior, Marketing strategies, and Brand switching.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

In today's extremely competitive business world, organizations are constantly looking for strategies to attract and keep clients. Discount offers are one of the most popular marketing methods for influencing consumer behavior. Discounts, such as percentage price reductions, buy-one-get-one-free (BOGO) discounts, cash back offers, and seasonal specials, are intended to boost short-term sales, encourage impulse purchases, and improve consumer engagement. While discounts are helpful in increasing short-term sales, their impact on long-term brand loyalty is debatable (Qazzafi, 2020).

Discounts have a big influence on how consumers behave when making purchases, especially when it comes to promoting impulsive purchases and boosting temporary sales. Discounts are well received by customers, particularly when buying expensive, often used, or non-essential goods like electronics, stylish clothing, personal care products, and home appliances. Sales in these categories are frequently seasonal or promotional, which has a big impact on customer choices. The results of the study show that because of their perceived price and abundance of alternatives, fashion, and personal care items are among the most often bought items during sales. Discount-driven promotions are also advantageous for high-value products like electronics since buyers wait for price reductions during holidays or special occasions (Agence France Presse, 2013).

Discounts raise the frequency of purchases, but they don't always result in brand loyalty. Many buyers start to choose products based more on the size of the discount than on prior experience or brand confidence, becoming brand agnostic. This is particularly obvious in the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) and fashion categories, where brand switching is prevalent in reaction to promotional offers. On the other hand, even during sales, some degree of brand preference is maintained in categories like electronics or home appliances where quality, service, or warranty are important considerations (Bose, Antony, & Rajan, 2023).

Price sensitivity, product quality, brand reputation, and psychological variables all have an impact on consumer purchasing behavior. Discounts influence decision-making by changing the perceived value of a product or service. Many firms provide discounts to entice first-time customers, clear out inventory, or compete with competing brands. However, excessive reliance on discounts can have unforeseen repercussions, such as brand

dilution, reduced profit margins, and consumer discount dependency. Some customers develop the habit of only buying when there are discounts available, which might harm a brand's ability to sell at full price (Roy, 2022).

Brand loyalty is defined as a consumer's constant preference for one brand over its competitors, which is typically influenced by characteristics such as trust, product satisfaction, and emotional attachment to the brand. Ideally, firms want clients who are loyal regardless of pricing methods. However, in the context of regular discount offers, many consumers favor price over brand loyalty, resulting in brand switching behavior. This study seeks to determine if discounts genuinely create brand loyalty or simply attract price-sensitive buyers who switch brands based on discount availability (Ramya & Ali, 2016).

1.2 Research Problem

The primary goal of this research is to investigate how discount offers affect customer purchase behavior and brand loyalty. While discounts are commonly utilized to promote sales, businesses are increasingly concerned that over-reliance on them could foster a culture in which customers expect discounts as the norm rather than an occasional promotional advantage (Alem, 2020). This raises important questions:

- Do discounts truly impact customer purchasing decisions?
- Do discounts lead to increased brand loyalty among consumers?
- Do frequent discounts harm brand impression and lead consumers to switch brands?
- How do buyers behave once discount offers expire?

Understanding these issues is critical for firms that want to maximize their discount methods while maintaining a strong and loyal consumer base.

1.3 Research Objectives

The major goal of this study is to investigate the relationship between discount offers, consumer purchasing behavior, and brand loyalty. The study attempts to accomplish the following:

- Analyze how discount offers impact consumer purchasing behavior.
- Determine whether discounting techniques strengthen or undermine brand loyalty.
- Evaluate customer discount expectations and how they affect long-term purchasing decisions.

- Analyze the statistical impact of discounts with Excel (frequency distribution, mean, and standard deviation).

By meeting these objectives, the study will give data-driven insights to assist firms in developing discount strategies that not only increase short-term sales but also improve long-term brand retention.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study has implications for firms, marketers, and scholars investigating consumer behavior. The findings will assist firms in optimizing their discounting programs to balance immediate income creation and long-term brand survival. Understanding how discounts affect purchasing habits and brand loyalty will help organizations make strategic decisions about pricing, promotional programs, and consumer engagement. This study provides marketers with insights into consumer psychology in the context of discount-driven purchasing. Marketers can use the insights to develop promotional strategies that increase consumer satisfaction while maintaining brand equity (Harish, 2022). For researchers, the study adds to the corpus of knowledge about consumer behavior and discounting tactics. The analysis of the frequency distribution, mean, and standard deviation in Excel will provide empirical evidence on how consumers react to discounts and whether they are loyal over time.

1.5 Scope of the Study

The study focuses on customer purchasing behavior and brand loyalty in relation to discount offers. Data is gathered via a standardized questionnaire that addresses various aspects of discount-driven purchases, impulse buying, brand preference, and repeat purchase behavior. The study interprets consumer responses through Excel-based statistical analysis (frequency distribution, mean, and standard deviation).

1.6 Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study are the following:

- **Limited to a Specific Consumer Group:** The study includes 500 respondents who actively shop and respond to discount offers. The findings may not reflect all customer demographics equally.
- **Self-reported Data:** The study depends on survey responses, which may be affected by personal biases or recollection inaccuracies.
- **Limited Geographic Focus:** The study's focus on certain locations or marketplaces may hinder its ability to generalize to worldwide consumer behavior.

Discounts have become an essential component of consumer shopping behavior, impacting how individuals make purchasing decisions. While discounts provide immediate inducements to purchase, their impact on long-term client loyalty is still debatable (Elison, 2008). This study seeks to determine whether discounts genuinely develop brand loyalty or if they promote a transactional connection in which customers follow discounts rather than brands. The study will provide a quantitative view on the success of discounting tactics by assessing consumer responses through questionnaire-based data collecting and Excel-driven statistical analysis. The findings will assist firms in developing sustainable pricing approaches that attract customers while maintaining brand value and long-term profitability.

2. Review of the Literature

The impact of discount offers on consumer behavior and brand loyalty has been extensively researched in marketing and behavioral economics. Businesses offer discounts to attract new consumers, increase sales volume, clear inventory, and compete in price-sensitive markets. However, the long-term impact on brand loyalty is debatable. While some research implies that discounts help customers stay loyal by increasing perceived value, others believe that repeated discounts might lead to brand dilution and price sensitivity among consumers (Kumar & Dange, 2012).

Discount offers occur in a variety of forms, and firms select specific discounting tactics based on their marketing objectives, industry type, and target audience. The main types of discount methods are: Popular promotional methods include price discounts like 20 percent or ₹ 500 off. According to research, percentage discounts are more successful for high-priced commodities, but fixed — amount discounts are better for lower-priced items. Consumers view percentage-based discounts as providing more value when the base price is high, whereas fixed reductions are more obvious for purchases (Bandara, 2021).

Buy one, get one free (BOGO) offerings provide a sense of increased value by providing an extra product at no further cost. BOGO promotions stimulate bulk and spontaneous purchases. However, they may weaken brand distinction because consumers tend to prioritize quantity above brand attributes. Loyalty programs offer savings to repeat consumers, typically in the form of reward points, rebates, or special member discounts. Loyalty-based discounts strengthen emotional connections between consumers and brands, encouraging recurrent purchase behavior (Roy & Datta, 2022).

Seasonal discounts, such as holiday sales, Black Friday specials, and end-of-season reductions, take advantage of shoppers' time constraints. Flash sales create a sense of urgency, leading to impulse purchases. However, repeated seasonal discounts may cause customers to postpone purchases in anticipation of future price reductions. Several psychological theories explain how discounts influence customer behavior and decision-making. Prospect Theory implies that customers assess potential gains and losses in relation to a reference point. Discounts are regarded as a benefit, making customers believe they are getting a better bargain. This often results in higher spending during sales events (Rajan, Sammansu, & Suresh, 2021).

According to the Price Perception Theory, buyers focus their judgment of product quality on pricing. When a product is frequently discounted, buyers may perceive it as poorer quality, which can undermine brand equity. Loss Aversion and the Urgency Effect. Consumers prefer to avoid losses more than they desire profits. Limited-time discounts elicit fear of missing out (FOMO), which increases the risk of impulse purchases (Ramya & Ali, 2016).

Discounts considerably raise purchase intentions, particularly among first-time customers. However, recurrent purchasing behavior is influenced by factors such as product quality and brand reputation. Discount Dependence and Price Sensitivity. Frequent discounts can lead to discount reliance, in which customers postpone purchases until they obtain a price decrease. This behavior is particularly widespread in businesses with predictable sales cycles, such as electronics and fashion. According to research, discounts stimulate unexpected purchases since customers see them as a way to save money. This is particularly visible in internet purchasing, where flash promotions encourage impulse purchases (Qazzafi, 2020).

Discounts entice clients in the short term, but their long-term impact on loyalty is uncertain. Price-sensitive consumers may switch brands once the deal expires, whereas value-driven consumers may remain loyal if the brand provides consistent benefits. Frequent discounts can harm brand image, leading buyers to assume that the company's usual pricing is inflated. Luxury brands frequently shun discounts to maintain exclusivity. Price is not the only factor that influences loyalty; product quality, service, and overall customer experience all play a role. Brands that rely primarily on discounts without improving customer pleasure may struggle to achieve long-term loyalty (Rajan, Sammansu, & Suresh, 2021).

Several empirical research provides insights on how discounting influences consumer behavior:

Personalized discounts based on purchase history outperform general discounts in terms of client retention. Unexpected discounts at checkout result in higher consumer satisfaction than promoted promotions. Analysis of loyalty programs, long-term discounts like cash back and rewards are more successful than transitory price reduction for customer retention. Excessive discounting can negatively impact brand equity and long-term profitability (Roy & Datta, 2022). According to the literature, discounts influence purchasing behavior, boost impulse buying, and improve short-term sales. However, the impact on brand loyalty differs. While some consumers stick with brands that give discounts, others become price-sensitive and switch brands regularly. The efficiency of a discounting strategy is determined by several aspects, including discount frequency, consumer expectations, and product quality. Based on these findings, the purpose of this study is to provide empirical evidence through questionnaire-based data collection and Excel-based statistical analysis (frequency distribution, mean, and standard deviation) to assess how consumers respond to discounts and whether they demonstrate brand loyalty in addition to price incentives (McCombes, 2019).

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study takes a quantitative research strategy, collecting data through a questionnaire survey. Responses are examined in Excel using statistical approaches such as frequency distribution, mean, and standard deviation to determine customer behaviour trends (Taherdoost, 2021).

3.2 Data Collection Method

A standardized questionnaire was created to collect information about consumer behavior in response to discount offers. The questionnaire had 20 Likert-scale items covering:

- Shopping preferences (online/offline, discount expectations).
- Purchase behavior (impulse buying and brand swapping).
- Brand loyalty (repeated purchases and perception of discounts).

3.3 Sample Size and Target Population

The survey was delivered to 500 people from all age groups and income levels. Respondents were chosen based on their usual purchasing habits, both online and offline.

3.4 Data Analysis Method

The data was examined in Microsoft Excel with the following statistical tools:

- **Frequency Distribution:** Identifying the frequency of discount-related activities among respondents.
- **Mean (Average):** Measures central tendencies in customer behavior, such as average expenditure on discounted products.
- **Standard Deviation:** Identifying varying consumer responses and buying trends.

4. Data Analysis

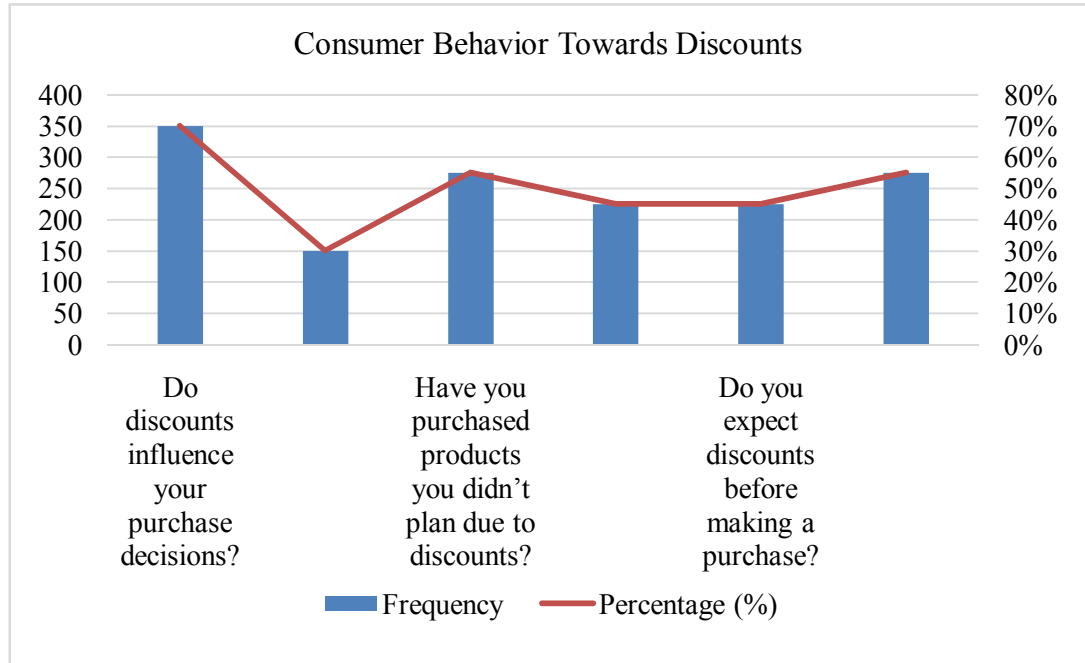
4.1 Frequency Distribution Analysis

The following table presents the frequency distribution of consumer responses regarding discount offers:

Table 1:- Frequency Distribution of Consumer Behavior towards Discounts

Consumer Behavior Question	Response Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Do discounts influence your purchase decisions?	Yes	350	70%
	No	150	30%
Have you purchased products you didn't plan due to discounts?	Yes	275	55%
	No	225	45%
Do you expect discounts before making a purchase?	Yes	225	45%
	No	275	55%

Source:- Self-constructed



Source:- Self-constructed

Figure 1:- Consumer Behavior towards Discounts

Interpretation:

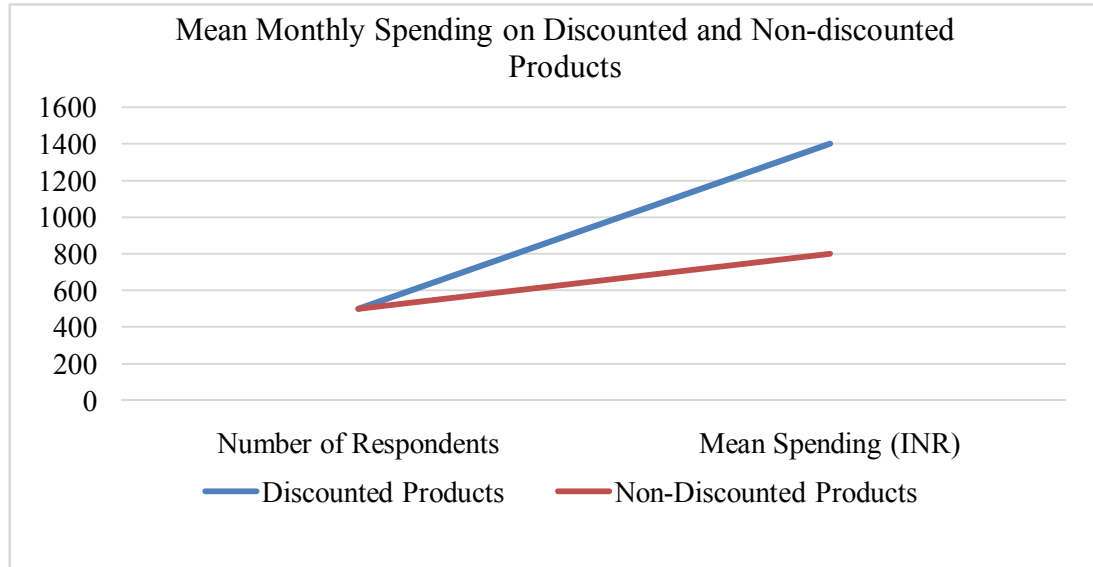
- 70 percent of shoppers say discounts affect their purchases.
- 55 percent of consumers make spontaneous purchases owing to discounts.
- 45 percent of buyers expect discounts before making a purchase, indicating discount reliance.

4.2 Mean Analysis (Average Consumer Spending on discounts vs. Non-discounted Products)

Table2:- Mean Monthly Spending on Discounted and Non-discounted Products

Category	Total Spending by Respondents (INR)	Number of Respondents	Mean Spending (INR)
Discounted Products	7,00,000	500	1,400
Non-discounted Products	4,00,000	500	800

Source:- Self-constructed



Source:- Self-constructed

Figure 2:- Mean Monthly Spending on Discounted and Non-discounted Products

Interpretation:

- Average spending on discounted products is INR 1,400, which is higher than INR 800 spent on non-discounted products. This suggests that discounts significantly increase consumer spending.

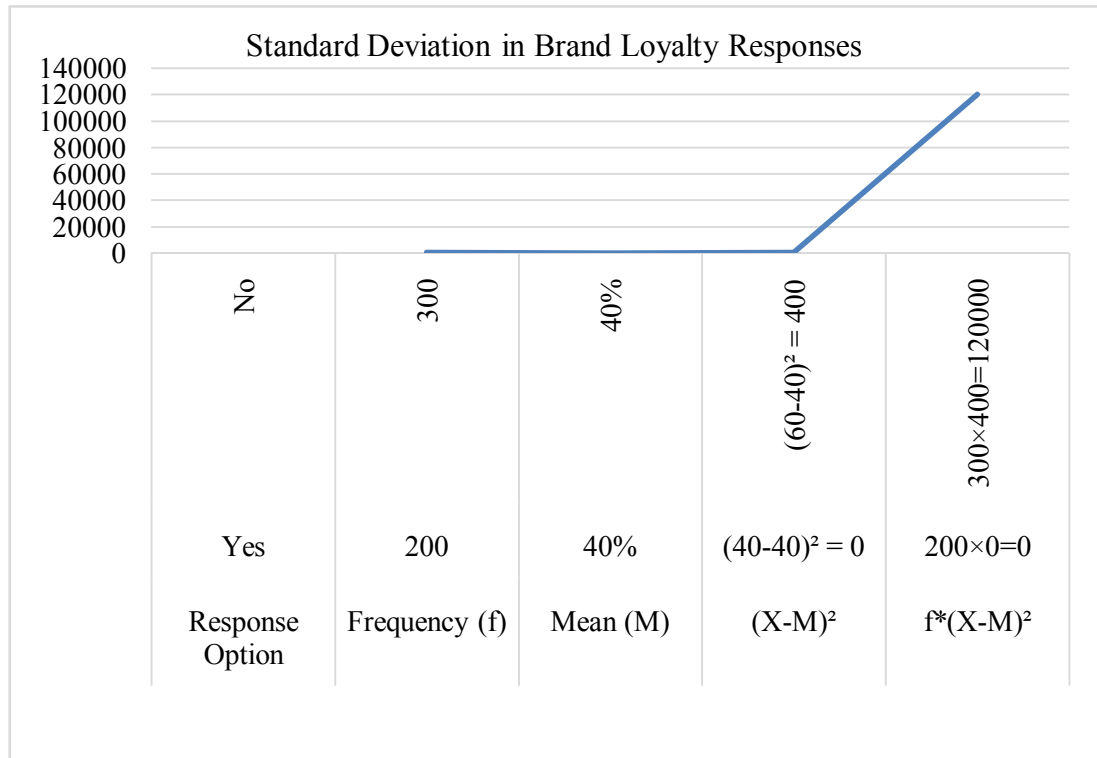
4.3 Standard Deviation Analysis (Variation in Brand Loyalty Responses)

To analyze brand loyalty variations, we calculate the **standard deviation (SD)** for responses on consumer brand-switching behavior.

Table 3:- Standard Deviation in Brand Loyalty Responses

Question	Response Option	Frequency (f)	Mean (M)	(X-M) ²	f*(X-M) ²
Do you remain loyal to brands that offer frequent discounts?	Yes	200	40%	$(40-40)^2 = 0$	$200 \times 0 = 0$
	No	300	40%	$(60-40)^2 = 400$	$300 \times 400 = 120000$
Total		500	40%	400	120000

Source:- Self-constructed



Source:- Self-constructed

Figure 3:- Standard Deviation in Brand Loyalty Responses

Standard Deviation Calculation:

$$SD = \sqrt{\frac{\sum f(X - M)^2}{N}}$$

$$SD = \sqrt{\frac{120000}{500}}$$

$$SD = \sqrt{240}$$

$$SD = 15.49$$

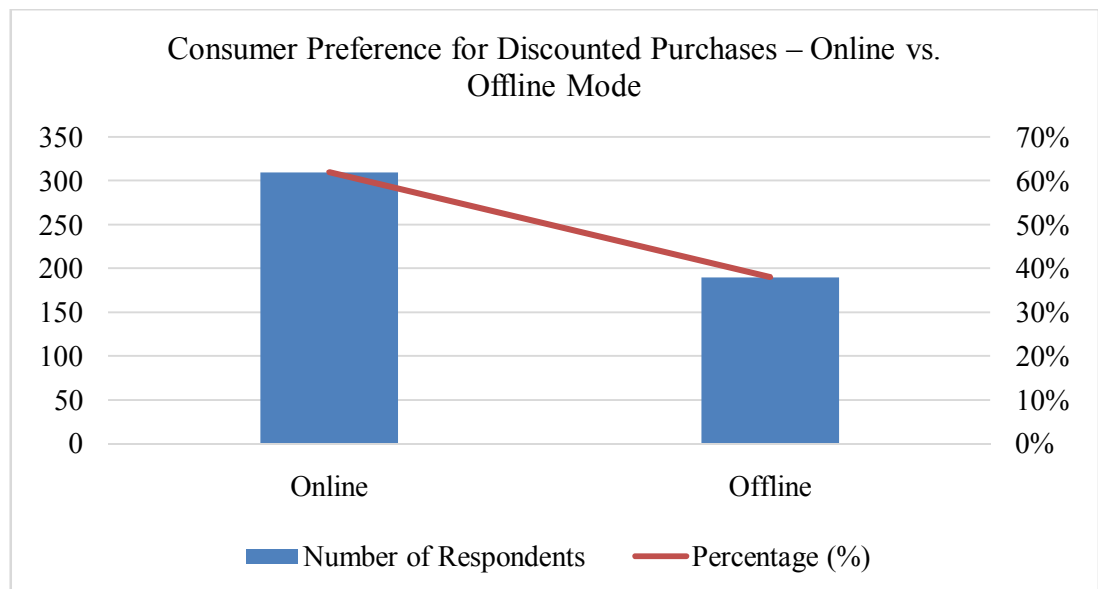
Interpretation:

- The standard deviation (15.49) shows a large diversity in customer brand loyalty.
- Higher SD indicates uneven brand loyalty, as many consumers switch brands once incentives expire.

Table 4:- Consumer Preference for Discounted Purchases – Online vs. Offline Mode

Mode of Purchase	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)	Mean	Standard Deviation
Online	310	62%	4.2	0.85
Offline	190	38%	3.7	1.02
Total	500	100%		

Source:- Self-constructed



Source:- Self-constructed

Figure 4:- Consumer Preference for Discounted Purchases – Online vs. Offline Mode

4.4 Interpretation of Findings

- **Short-term Impact:** Discounts effectively increase sales and stimulate impulse purchases.
- **Long-term Impact:** Frequent discounts lead to low brand loyalty among consumers.
- **Strategic Discounting:** To retain loyal customers, brands should offer targeted discounts rather than excessive markdowns.

4.5 Key Findings

- The majority of customers give discounts a high grade when making purchases, indicating that they have a significant impact on purchasing decisions.
- During sales, consumers are more inclined to purchase gadgets, fashion, and personal care items; essentials are less likely to be impacted.
- Customers frequently sacrifice brand loyalty by switching brands in search of better prices, demonstrating a preference for bargains over brand loyalty.
- Although offline businesses are still significant for some product kinds, online platforms are favored for reduced shopping because they are more convenient and offer a greater range of deals.

4.6 Recommendations

- **Strategic Discounting:** To minimize over-reliance and brand degradation, offer discounts sparingly. To preserve perceived value, concentrate on limited-time deals and seasonal promotions.
- **Targeted Discounts:** To promote loyalty and boost repeat business, tailor discounts according to customer behavior and past purchases.
- **Balanced Approach:** To foster enduring brand loyalty, combine discounts with other value-driven tactics like product quality and customer service.
- **Integration of Online and Offline:** Make use of online channels to reach a larger audience with discounts while keeping a strong offline presence for customers who prefer in-store interactions.

5. Conclusion

According to the study's findings, discounts have a big influence on how consumers behave while making purchases. They promote impulsive purchases and short-term sales, especially in industries like electronics, fashion, and personal care. Offline businesses continue to be important for some product kinds, even though online platforms are preferred for discounts since they are more convenient and offer a wider variety of deals. Since many consumers transfer brands based more on price incentives than on an emotional bond, the study also shows that repeated reductions frequently weaken brand loyalty. Therefore, it is important to deliberately employ discounting techniques to draw in customers without compromising the brand's long-term worth. Businesses should guarantee consistent quality and client happiness while combining discounts and tailored offerings to preserve brand loyalty.

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Analysis of Nomophobia as a Predictor of Cognitive Dysfunction and Academic Inefficiency

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Abstract

Nomophobia, defined as the anxiety or fear of being without a smartphone, is increasingly prevalent among students worldwide. Despite its widespread occurrence, the relationship between nomophobia, smartphone usage patterns, and academic performance remains insufficiently studied, particularly in developing countries such as India, where the proliferation of smartphone use among adolescents are notable.

This cross-sectional study, conducted with 950 University students across fifty-six institutions in India, provides critical insights into this phenomenon. The data reveals that 60.1 percent of participants have been using smartphones for over three years, with a significant average usage time of 5.73 hours daily. The prevalence of nomophobia among the cohort is remarkably high at 99.9 percent, with 23.7 percent of students experiencing severe levels of this condition. Additionally, demographic factors such as age and gender contribute significantly to nomophobia severity, with females and older students displaying heightened levels compared to their male and younger counterparts.

A notable finding of this study is the robust positive correlation between nomophobia and the frequency of daily phone-checking behaviors, underscoring the behavioral dimension of smartphone dependence. These findings highlight the urgent necessity for further exploration into the underlying psychological, social, and cognitive mechanisms driving nomophobia. Such research is essential to develop effective interventions that promote healthier smartphone habits among students, thereby mitigating potential adverse impacts on academic achievement.

This study not only brings attention to a critical issue affecting the academic landscape but also underscores the importance of incorporating technological dependency into educational and psychological frameworks. Future research efforts should focus on longitudinal studies to assess causative factors and intervention efficacy, alongside cross-cultural analyses to understand the global nuances of nomophobia. This could pave the way for evidence-based policies and programs designed to equip students with the tools to navigate their academic responsibilities in a smartphone-dominated world.

Keywords

Smartphones, Nomophobia, Technology, University, and Academic.

1. Introduction

The ubiquitous integration of smartphone technology into daily life has revolutionized communication and interaction patterns, bringing profound changes across societal, educational, and psychological dimensions. The COVID-19 pandemic catalyzed a substantial reliance on digital devices, including smartphones, as remote learning emerged as the predominant mode of education during lockdowns (Singh, 2021). Smartphones have evolved beyond mere communication tools, offering a diverse suite of applications such as social media platforms, GPS navigation, entertainment, psychological interventions, and access to online educational resources (Yilmaz et al., 2023). While these functionalities contribute to convenience and productivity, the excessive use of smartphones has sparked global concerns regarding their psychological impact.

Studies report alarming statistics that highlight smartphone dependency; for instance, over half of Americans experience anxiety if their phone battery depletes below 20 percent, and nearly half admit a compulsive reliance on their devices, perceiving them as indispensable (Lee & Kim, 2022; Wheelwright, 2021). This growing dependence has given rise to a specific psychological condition termed "Nomophobia"—an abbreviation for "NO MO(bile) PHO(ne) (pho)BIA"—which describes the irrational fear of being disconnected from one's smartphone (Bhattacharya, 2019; Yilmaz et al., 2023). Nomophobia manifests through various symptoms, including compulsive smartphone usage, possession of multiple devices, carrying chargers routinely, and heightened anxiety when phone access is disrupted (Bragazzi & Del Puente, 2014; Qutishat et al., 2020).

Educational environments present unique contexts for smartphone utilization. On one hand, smartphones support academic pursuits by facilitating access to learning materials, peer collaboration, and remote task completion (Turkle, 2011). Conversely, excessive smartphone engagement introduces disruptions such as diminished focus, procrastination, and the onset of problematic behaviors, adversely impacting students' academic performance (Rosen et al., 2014). The psychological effects of overuse extend beyond academic challenges, encompassing phenomena like technostress, phantom vibration syndrome, sleep disturbances, and depression, with nomophobia emerging as a significant concern (Demirci et al., 2015; Singh, 2021).

Nomophobia's prevalence among student populations varies widely, ranging from 18.5 percent to 73 percent across studies, with critical determinants identified as age, gender, self-esteem, and personality traits (Abraham et al., 2014; Dixit et al., 2010; Qutishat et al., 2020). Research further indicates that increased smartphone usage frequency correlates strongly with heightened nomophobia risk (Buctot et al., 2020). This excessive dependence demands scrutiny, particularly in regions such as India, where smartphone penetration among adolescents is rapidly increasing (Nguyen et al. 2024) Indian youth reportedly spend 169 minutes daily on their devices, with behaviors linked to negative outcomes like obesity, unsafe practices, and mental health issues (Ali & Matarneh, 2024).

While smartphones are multi-functional tools integral to students' lives, their overuse poses significant challenges, particularly concerning academic performance. Nomophobia is implicated in reduced attention spans, poor time management, and declining motivation, all of which adversely affect educational outcomes (Berdida, 2023). Medical student studies in Saudi Arabia further corroborate these impacts, associating nomophobia with academic underachievement; (Alkalash et al., 2023). In India, however, research exploring the intersection of smartphone usage, nomophobia, and academic achievement remains sparse.

2. Research Gap

This study endeavors to address this research gap by analyzing smartphone usage patterns, nomophobia prevalence, and their correlations with sociodemographic variables and academic performance among India's high school students. The findings will contribute to developing interventions aimed at fostering responsible smartphone practices and mitigating their detrimental effects on academic pursuits, thereby informing educational policies and psychological frameworks.

3. Objectives of the Study

This study aims to address critical research questions by focusing on the unique context of Indian university students, a demographic characterized by rapid technological adoption and evolving educational practices. The research questions are as follows:

- 3.1** What is the frequency of smartphone usage among Indian university students, and how does it vary based on sociodemographic characteristics such as age, gender, academic discipline, and socioeconomic background?

This question seeks to quantify and analyze the intensity and patterns of

smartphone usage among Indian students, acknowledging the diverse sociodemographic factors that influence technology adoption. Given India's heterogeneous population and regional disparities, understanding these variations are crucial for contextualizing the data.

3.2 What is the prevalence of nomophobia among Indian university students, and how does it manifest across different demographic and academic subgroups?

This question explores the extent to which nomophobia affects Indian students, emphasizing its psychological, behavioral, and social dimensions. Considering India's growing dependence on smartphones for communication, education, and leisure, this investigation will highlight the extent of digital anxiety among students.

3.3 Are there significant associations between smartphone usage patterns, nomophobia, and academic performance among Indian university students?

This question delves into the intricate relationships between smartphone usage behaviors, the psychological impacts of nomophobia, and academic achievements. It aims to uncover whether excessive or problematic smartphone use correlates with reduced academic outcomes, while also factoring in variables like motivation, attention span, and time management skills.

4. Research Methods

This study adopts a correlational design targeting Indian university students to explore the research questions.

4.1. Participants

A diverse sample of 950 students were selected from 56 universities across India. The participants, aged between 18 and 25 years ($M = 20.47$; $SD = 2.13$), included a nearly equal representation of male and female students (54 percent female). Initially, 1,140 students were invited to participate, with all returning completed questionnaires. However, after accounting for incomplete responses and significant missing data in the core measurements, 190 responses were excluded, yielding 950 valid responses for analysis (response rate: 83.3 percent). The sampling framework ensured inclusivity, with participants drawn from various academic disciplines, including engineering, arts, commerce, and sciences, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the variables across different educational contexts.

4.2. Measures

Data collection utilized an anonymous self-report questionnaire encompassing core measurements and demographic details such as age, gender, academic stream, family income, and Grade Point Average (GPA). The following describes the core measurement used:

4.2.1. Nomophobia

Nomophobia was assessed using the Nomophobia Questionnaire (NMP-Q), developed by Yildirim and Correia (2015) in the U.S. The NMP-Q measures the fear or phobia associated with being without a smartphone and examines four dimensions:

- Not being able to access information (6 items)
- Losing connectedness (5 items)
- Not being able to communicate (4 items)
- Giving up convenience (5 items)

The NMP-Q comprises 20 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). Total scores range from 20 to 140, with interpretations as follows:

- 20: No nomophobia
- 21–59: Mild nomophobia
- 60–99: Moderate nomophobia
- 100–140: Severe nomophobia

The questionnaire has been translated, validated, and extensively utilized across diverse populations globally, including Spain (Gutiérrez-Puertas et al., 2019), Italy (Adawi et al., 2018), Pakistan (Nawaz et al., 2017), and China (Ma & Liu, 2021). To adapt the NMP-Q for use among Indian students, the questionnaire was translated into Hindi and regionally relevant dialects. A forward-backward translation procedure was employed to ensure semantic compatibility. The psychometric properties of the adapted NMP-Q were evaluated, with Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) indicating that the four-factor structure demonstrated excellent model fit (e.g., $\chi^2/df = 2.41$; RMSEA = 0.05). Reliability analysis yielded Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.73 to 0.91 across dimensions, signifying high internal consistency.

4.2.2. Smartphone Use

A comprehensive questionnaire was developed to investigate smartphone usage among Indian university students. This questionnaire was formed by an extensive review of literature and

previous studies related to smartphone use, particularly those focusing on student populations in India. It includes 14 questions covering multiple dimensions:

4.2.2.1. Duration of smartphone ownership

- How long have you been using a smartphone?

4.2.2.2. Internet accessibility

- Is internet access available on your smartphone?

4.2.2.3. Daily usage time

- How many hours do you spend on your smartphone each day?

4.2.2.4. Frequency of smartphone interaction

- How often do you check your smartphone each day?
- How many times do you check your smartphone each day?

4.2.2.5. Communication activities

- How many calls do you make each day using your smartphone?
- How many calls do you receive each day via your smartphone?
- How many messages do you send from your smartphone each day?
- How many messages do you receive on your smartphone each day?
- How many emails do you send using your smartphone each day?
- How many emails do you receive using your smartphone each day?
- How many apps are currently installed on your smartphone?

4.2.2.6. Purpose of smartphone use

- What activities do you primarily use your smartphone for?

4.2.2.7. Usage context

- In which situations do you typically use your smartphone each day?

4.2.3. Academic Performance

Academic performance was evaluated using a single-item self-assessment question: "What was your academic achievement during

the last semester?" Responses were categorized into five performance levels: "Excellent," "Very Good," "Good," "Average," and "Below Average." This approach provides a straight forward yet effective method for measuring academic achievement, reflecting a wide spectrum of educational outcomes among Indian university students. Including GPA data or other objective measures could further validate academic outcomes.

4.3. Procedure

Participants were recruited using a stratified random sampling method to ensure adequate representation of gender, academic disciplines, and socio-economic groups. Data collection was conducted through in-person surveys administered in academic institutions during regular hours to maximize participation rates. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the university's research ethics committee, and informed consent was secured from all participants. Measures were implemented to ensure anonymity and confidentiality throughout the study.

4.4. Data Analysis

Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS 25.0 software (Pallant, 2013). Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations (SDs), frequencies, and percentages, were calculated to summarize the data. Correlational analysis was conducted using Pearson's correlation coefficients to explore relationships between smartphone use, nomophobia, and academic achievement. Spearman's correlation was employed for non-parametric data to assess associations between smartphone use and academic performance.

4.4.1 Independent t-tests were used to examine differences in smartphone usage and nomophobia across demographic groups (e.g., age, gender).

4.4.2 Multiple linear regression was applied to investigate the unique contributions of smartphone use and nomophobia to academic achievement, controlling for demographic factors such as gender, age, and socioeconomic status.

5. Results

5.1. Smartphone Use among Indian University Students

5.1.1. Time, Duration, and Frequency of Smartphone Use

Survey results indicate that 68.4 percent of Indian university students have been using smartphones for more than three years, reflecting widespread early adoption of mobile technology.

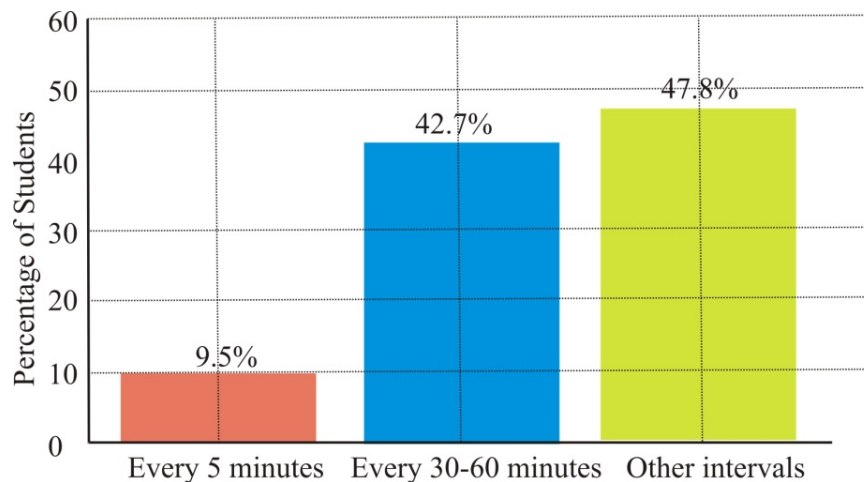
Additionally, 98.1 percent of students reported the ability to access the Internet on their smartphones, showcasing high digital connectivity in this demographic (Table 1). The average time spent daily on smartphones for academic purposes was 6.12 hours, demonstrating a substantial reliance on these devices for educational activities.

Table 1:- Smartphone Usage and Internet Access among Indian University Students

Parameter	Survey Result
Students using smartphones for more than 3 years	68.4%
Students with Internet access on smartphones	98.1%
Average daily use of smartphones for academics	6.12 hours

Source:- Author's compilation

Analysis of smartphone-checking habits revealed varied patterns. A significant proportion of students, 42.7 percent, check their smartphones every 30–60 minutes, while 9.5 percent report checking their phones as frequently as every 5 minutes (Fig. 1). This high frequency of interaction with mobile devices underscores their pervasive role in students' academic and social lives.



Source:- Author's compilation

Figure 1:- Frequency of Smartphone-checking among Students

Key Findings on Smartphone Use among Indian University Students:

Indian university students exhibit significant smartphone adoption and usage:

- **Duration of Use:** A large majority (68.4 percent) have been using smartphones for over three years, indicating early and widespread adoption.
- **Internet Access:** Near-universal internet access via smartphones (98.1 percent) highlights strong digital connectivity.
- **Academic Use:** Students spend a considerable average of 6.12 hours daily on their smartphones for academic activities, demonstrating their importance in education.
- **Checking Frequency:** A substantial portion (42.7 percent) check their phones every 30–60 minutes, with a notable 9.5 percent checking as often as every 5 minutes, suggesting high engagement levels.
- **Multifunctional Use:** Smartphones serve diverse purposes, including academic information seeking (84.5 percent), entertainment (78.4 percent), social media engagement (73.9 percent), communication (69.8 percent), gaming (62.4 percent), and news consumption (55.1 percent).
- **Contextual Use:** Smartphone use is prevalent across various contexts, including waiting times (68.3 percent), feelings of boredom or loneliness (72.9 percent), during transit (35.7 percent), meals (28.1 percent), and even during class (21.6 percent).

Table 2:- Smartphone Usage Characteristics (Summary)

Smartphone Usage Findings	Percentage (%)
Students using smartphones for over three years	68.4%
Students with internet access on smartphones	98.1%
Average daily smartphone uses for academic purposes	6.12 hours
Students checking smartphones every 30–60 minutes	42.7%
Students checking smartphones every 5 minutes	9.5%
Smartphone use for academic information	84.5%
Smartphone use for entertainment	78.4%
Smartphone use for social media	73.9%

Smartphone Usage Findings	Percentage (%)
Smartphone use for communication	69.8%
Smartphone use for gaming	62.4%
Smartphone use for news consumption	55.1%
Smartphone use when bored or lonely	72.9%
Smartphone use while waiting	68.3%
Smartphone use during transit	35.7%
Smartphone use during meals	28.1%
Smartphone use during class	21.6%

Source:- Author's compilation

Table 3:- Smartphone Usage among Students

Characteristic	n	Percentage (%)
Smartphone Usage Duration		
Less than 1 year	105	11.1
1–2 years	132	13.9
2–3 years	151	15.9
3–4 years	183	19.3
4–5 years	142	14.9
More than 5 years	237	24.9
Cannot remember	10	1.1
Total	950	100.0
Internet Access		
No	18	1.9
Yes	932	98.1
Prefer not to say	10	1.0

Source:- Author's compilation

5.1.2. Activities on Smartphones

Students reported engaging in diverse activities on their smartphones, highlighting both academic and non-academic usage patterns:

- 84.5 percent of students use smartphones to search for academic information, such as journal articles and assignments.

- 78.4 percent rely on their devices for entertainment (e.g., watching movies, listening to music).
- 73.9 percent frequently check social media notifications, while 69.8 percent use messaging apps to communicate with family and friends.
- 62.4 percent reported using smartphones to play games, a popular form of recreation.
- 55.1 percent utilize smartphones for reading news or gathering information.

5.1.3. Context of Smartphone Use

Students' smartphone usage contexts further illustrate their embeddedness in various aspects of life:

- 68.3 percent reported using smartphones while waiting for someone or something.
- 72.9 percent used them when feeling bored or lonely.
- 35.7 percent utilized smartphones during transit (e.g., buses, trains).
- 28.1 percent reported using smartphones during meals, while 21.6 percent admitted to checking phones during class.

6. Discussion

This study revealed that smartphone usage is highly prevalent among Indian university students. With 68.4 percent of students having used smartphones for over three years and 98.1 percent having internet access on their devices, it is clear that mobile technology is deeply integrated into students' academic routines. The average of 6.12 hours of daily academic smartphone use, along with frequent checking behavior (42.7 percent every 30–60 minutes and 9.5 percent every 5 minutes), demonstrates a high level of engagement. By this way, first question was answered, showing both the frequency of smartphone usage and its general consistency across the student population.

Although a specific nomophobia scale was not used, several behavioral indicators point toward its likely presence. The use of smartphones in response to boredom or loneliness (72.9 percent), while waiting (68.3 percent), during meals (28.1 percent), and even in class (21.6 percent) suggests psychological dependency on mobile devices. These findings reflect core symptoms of nomophobia such as anxiety and compulsive checking, particularly among frequent users. This addresses question number two, indicating a probable high

prevalence of nomophobia among students, although subgroup analysis is recommended for future studies.

The study also explored the connection between smartphone usage and academic outcomes. While smartphones support learning, especially through academic information access (84.5 percent), excessive or poorly managed use—such as checking during class or meals — may interfere with concentration and academic performance. The frequent non-academic use patterns raise concerns about distraction and overdependence. This addressed question three, suggesting that while smartphones can aid learning, their misuse may have adverse academic effects.

7. Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into smartphone usage patterns among Indian university students, revealing high levels of ownership, internet access, and daily academic use. The findings demonstrate that smartphones are not only essential academic tools but also deeply embedded in students' daily lives through frequent and context-driven use.

Behavioral indicators suggest a strong likelihood of nomophobia, particularly among students who frequently check their phones or use them in emotionally driven situations such as boredom or loneliness. While smartphones enhance access to educational content, their excessive or compulsive use may interfere with academic focus and performance.

Overall, the research highlights both the benefits and challenges of smartphone reliance in higher education. It underscores the need for balanced usage, digital literacy, and awareness programs to support students in managing their smartphone habits effectively.

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Promoting Employees Well-being by Reducing Working Stress to Achieve Sustainability

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Abstract

SDG 3.8.1 (Service Coverage), 3.8.2 (Financial protection) and related indicators calls for a mandate to achieve global well-being through universal health coverage as reaffirmed at the UN high level meeting in 2023, nominating the WHO and the world bank as custodian agencies for UNSD SDG comprehensive review of the revised UHC indicators, its global monitoring report is expected to be released this year. To achieve target SDG 3.8 (Good Health and Well-being) by 2030, it is necessary to take accelerated, proactive, and targeted efforts by all stakeholders without making any further delay.

To nurture employees' well-being by reducing their working stress in the given business environment and resulted burnouts at the work place, it is considered necessary to promote and protect their mental health first, to achieve the sustainability of businesses, since the economic consequence of mental health conditions is highly significant with a huge cost of care and enormous loss of productivity.

720,000 suicide cases are reported per year. 970M of the general public were reported to have mental problems in 2019. A person dies 10-20 years early owing to a mental health condition, which amounts to at least one in six years living with the disability. Mental health conditions affect all aspects of life, increase the suicidal risk of suicide, and cause human rights violations.

This academic research paper qualitatively analyzes the available data and recent publications to focus on the core issue and seek the attention of stakeholders to dedicate themselves to achieving global well-being, where everyone can get quality health without facing hardship.

Keywords

Burn out, Global Well-being, Mental health, Universal health coverage, and Working stress.

1. Introduction

Everyone is quite familiar with the famous English Motto: “Safety-First”, however, the recent pandemic has taught us a lesson to take it differently and say “Health-First” but the prevailing post-COVID-19 working environments has forced us again to change globally and rethink the issues and work very cautiously since “Safety-First, but Mental-Health, A Must for Well Being”! To justify the “Mental Health First” and a must for well-being the illustrious lyrics by Ulrich, James Hetfield Lars have to be recalled, which quite truly reciprocate one’s mental health state, causing impairment in his day today thinking. As owing to stressful working conditions, it may lead to a high risk of triggering self-harm, which may end disastrously and prove fatal without being noticed by others. It says: “Life is ours, we live it, our way, Every day for us, Something new, Open mind for a different view, and nothing else matters, and nothing else matters”. It is worth mentioning that Ulrich’s lyrics to global music rights are patented by creeping death music (1991).

Working stress and burnout at the workplace in today’s business environment have become sine qua non; they can neither be neglected by the employers nor by the employees themselves, since they severely affect one’s well-being. Quoting a recent case of one of my colleagues, who post-graduated from the reputed Harcourt Butler Technical University, India, and was a working chemical engineer at the central government office in Maharashtra, India. Last year, one day he jumped from the top floor of his workplace and ended his precious life, succumbing to the high level of Mental Stress and burnout owing to the work pressure and stressful working environment in the office. His mental health conditions were not noticed by others, and in the absence of his mindfulness and lack of social support, we finally lost him.

Therefore, the mental health condition of an employee at the workplace has to be taken care of and dealt with top most priorities by his employer, which includes arranging counselling for any present mental disorder and recently developed psychosocial disabilities as well as other mental health conditions developed due to a non-encouraging work culture and a highly stressful working environment. Mental Health Conditions have been detailed in the ICD-11, International Classification of Diseases 11th Revision by the WHO (2023). The factor held responsible for deteriorating mental health conditions is also found in detail in the United Nations and APA’s Council Policy Manuals. The prominently visible indicators are acute stress reaction, depression, difficulty in sleeping, experiencing distress, fatigue, feelings of anxiety, hopelessness, irritability, or anger, aches and pains, post-traumatic stress disorder, sadness,

bipolar syndrome, or schizophrenia. Neurological Conditions due to Disability Adjusted Life Years (DALY) account for about 9M deaths per year, and have been reported with an increased rate of 18 percent from 1990. An attempt has been made through this academic research paper by the researcher to showcase the efforts of the global community working on the global well-being issues to achieve sustainability.

2. Objective of the Study

The foremost objective of this research paper is to highlight the importance of employees' wellbeing at the workplace and to create awareness of their mental health conditions arising due to increased working stress and burnout at work, which need to be addressed as the top priority to achieve Sustainable Development Goals.

3. Research Methodology

The qualitative research methodology was adopted to explore the various factors that can affect the mental health condition of an employee at work. Available secondary data were personally compiled from various online sources at the sole convenience of the researcher, with limited funds to save time and energy. To carry forward the legacy of the onward journey to promote and protect the mental health of employees at workplace, a bibliographic approach to the current literature survey of published global studies were carried out to gather the various findings of the researchers across the globe to draw the conclusion for achieving the SDGs (3.8) target (Good Health and Well-being) for all people. Owing to the colossal availability of online literature on the subject domain only post Covid-19, publications were considered for the literature survey since it portrays the post-pandemic working stress and burnouts and found truly exposing the present mental health condition of an individual working in the stressful environment and experiencing daily burnout leading to his self-harm and increased suicidal attempts.

4. Review of the Literature

Owing to the post-COVID-19 business environment witnessed globally, the availability of online publications on the subject domain has no limits, since found increased multifariously in every segment. Thus, only recent papers published in the last year were referred to, which very clearly depicts the literature review of the past years. Hope the future researchers on the subject may explore it further to know the impact of working stress and burnouts on the

mental health condition of an employee at work, which is delaying the achievement of the desired level of sustainability goal.

The notion of UHC is a priority goal for many countries and is now emerging as an achievable SDG target 3.8 (Good Health and Wellbeing) by 2030, through monitoring of the revised SDG UHC indicators SDG 3.8.1 (Service Coverage), and 3.8.2 (Financial protection) under Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan (CMHAP-2030) for improving the mental health conditions of people by strengthening the governance, providing community-based care system, implementing the promotion and prevention-centric strategies, by strengthening the information systems, and conducting evidence-based research for prioritizing mental health promotion and prevention globally.

4.1 Global Studies

The recently published Lancet Neurology (2021) study claims that at least 3 billion people were living with neurological disorders in 2021. The neurological disorders were mainly responsible for disability, illness, and premature deaths. It has now increased by 18 percent since 1990. Nearly 80 percent of neurological deaths and health losses were reported from very low and middle-income countries due to the non-availability of proper treatment from trained neurological professionals, as they are few in number as compared to the affected population of the universe. The Cambridge Prism of Cambridge University Press, on behalf of the Royal College of Psychiatrists UK, has played a very important role by providing open access to the different studies published online globally on mental health and wellbeing issues. In one such CP-CUP publication, CUP on behalf of the Society for Disaster Medicine and Public Health Inc., Linnet Onger, Miriam Nyawira, qualitatively discussed reasons for suicidal behavior and offered their acclaim for the prevention of suicide cases in Kenya. A detailed scoping review done by Florence AC et al. (2023) on mental health issues in Brazil was also published by the Cambridge Prism. Ceren et al. (2023), in their recent research, have successfully established the relationship of depression, anxiety, stress, and PTSD with professional quality of life amongst the healthcare professionals working in the COVID-19 period and observed elevated levels of burnout among the healthcare workers in Turkey. Conservation Science and Practice, has published a very detailed study by researchers Pienkowski, T et al. (2023), on parameters of psychological distress and workplace risk inequalities among conservation professionals to know how the patterns of psychological distress varying between conservation job roles, particularly in three

countries namely India, South Africa and Cambodia. Similarly, Mark, Calra Baez (2023), has compared the mental health challenges faced by the Indian American and native of Alaska students during their cultural-emotional learning. The latest study by Ugwu et al. (2025) on sustainability and healthcare systems resilience, concerning challenges on public health and medicine in the conflict zone, was narratively reviewed by a team of researchers from Uganda and the Netherlands and have recently published in the Medicine Journal by Wolters Kluwer Health, Inc.

Cambridge University Press (CUP) has also launched some very meaningful books, for the benefit of its readers, which have been made available online and are a valuable addition to understanding the concepts of stressful working conditions, related burnouts, and developed mental health conditions. The most liked book by practising health care professionals is “Volunteering in Global Mental Health”: A Practical Guide for Clinicians (2023), edited by Thomson Sophie, Peter Hughes, and Sam Gnanapragasam of Cambridge Medicine. Another publication on Youth Mental Health and Climate Change was found abridged by Haase, Elizabeth of the University of Nevada, Reno, and Hudson Kelsey, of Climate Psychology Alliance North America (2024). The Book: Out of Her Mind, written by Gask, Linda, of the University of Manchester (2024), describes how we are weakening women's mental health and what needs to be changed.

The Toxic Stress: by Wulsin R, Lawson, of University of Cincinnati winner, is the winner of choice awards and highly cited and bestseller book of year (2024), and Adultish: Body image book for life, Popular body image book series, by Markey Charlotte, of Rutgers University, New Jersey (2024). The “Adultish” author, is quoted as saying: “We need to think more about acceptance and contentment and realize that perfection does not exist in real life, we are all really works in progress”. It gives quite a clear message to give up the working stress, move forward, live happily, and enjoy the life ahead. Lawson, R. Wulsin of the University of Cincinnati winner, describes how the harmful stress influences our systems. Due to the worrying rise of high stress-related conditions like depression, heart diseases, and diabetes, we are presently paying the price of highly stressful living, while new factors such as pandemics, global warming, and emerging technological threats like Generative AI, IOT, CC, BC, and ML etc. have brought new kinds of stresses into our present lives.

4.2 Indian Studies

Comparatively very few research studies have been found conducted locally in recent years, however, there are available publications on the farmer's suicide rates due to agricultural losses, coaching institute's student suicidal tendencies due to non-achievement of desired results as per their parent's expectations and other suicide cases due to business losses, debt related financial issues, social issues, and prolonged illness cases, but due to their non-relevance they have not been referred.

An extensive survey of literature was carried out by Mohammad Iqbal (2023), while presenting his research paper on promoting and protecting the mental health conditions of working professionals at work in the present era of global warming. Swami Amrut et al. (2023) studied the outcomes of health-care workers on their increased working hours per day, which were causing exhaustion and fatigue due to their prolonged working hours. Fatima, Gizal of Era University, India, has recently supervised the Magomedova Aminat's comprehensive research, published on 19 Jan 2025 by the renowned International Journal Cureus, which is part of Springer Nature, on mental health and well-being issues of the modern era by critically examining the factors affecting mental health and reviewing the challenges faced and interventions in details and offered quite innovative solutions for reducing the present stigma and suggested the need for fostering resilience through mindfulness activities and a strong social support system (Fatima et al. 2025). A survey on mental health among IT professionals about their job stress and adjustments found that job stress is the stronger contributor to the mental health on the job stress scale: Bell's adjustments and mental health inventories, was conducted by (Tehseen et al. 2023). Blesy Babu (2023) scaled the attitudes concerning mental health problems among the healthcare workers seeking expert advice while in emotional distress. (Aditya Mahindru et al. 2023) have significantly studied the role of regular physical activity in improving the mental health and well-being of working professionals.

An exploratory research on mental health and well-being issues of students was also conducted at higher education institutes of Telangana by Madhavi Bolla et al. (2023), which was published in the Saudi Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences by Scholars Middle East Publishers, Dubai, UAE. Raghu Raghavan et al. (2023), studied the stigma accompanying mental health and gathered the opinions of people having mental health conditions in urban, rural, and tribal areas of the state of Kerala and observed that self-

stigma imitates desperately on their family members as a whole rather than just on the victim with a mental disorder in finding a suitable match for marriages. Shahadevan V et al. (2023), studied the critical impact of urbanization on the mental health of individuals and found that the rapid urbanization was key factor responsible for increasing the risk of anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, and feeling of isolation, Neha A et al. (2023), examined the correlation between well-being, burnout, and coping style of mental health practitioners and highlighted the importance of promoting psychological well-being and effective coping strategies to reduce the high degree of burnout and enhanced ability to provide effective care. To address the present research gap, this detailed qualitative research study was conducted on employees' well-being issues.

5. Statistical Data

The available secondary data used in developing this research study paper was collected from the public domain site of the WHO's official websites as of the 16th April 2025, and were used with due citations and the publishing year of reporting. Since the secondary data is being used for academic purpose only, thus as per the current research practice, no formal written permission was sought from the source organization, as the same is found freely provided in open access mode for awareness and prevention of mental health across the life course for greater well-being and helping the society to generate encouraging societal and financial impact on the mental health issues to achieve the sustainability target (SDG: 3.8), Good Health and Well-being for all people.

Table 1:- Collected Secondary Data

Disorder's Descriptions	Available Worldwide Data	Reported up to the End of Year	Data Source available Online
Suicide: A global occurrence	720 000 People Die/Year	2021	WHO
Suicide accounted for 1.1% of all reported deaths	At least 1 in 100 deaths are caused by the suicide/Year	2021	WHO
Living with mental disorder	At least 970 million people	2019	WHO
Mental disorders account for	1 in 6 years lived with Disability	2021	WHO

Disorder's Descriptions	Available Worldwide Data	Reported up to the End of Year	Data Source available Online
People with severe mental health conditions die early	Die 10-20 years earlier than the general population	2021	WHO
People in warzones for 10Yrs.	At least 22% (1/5) will have Mental depression disorders	2022	WHO
People in Refugee Camps	41% visit for Mental/ Neurological Disorders	2014	WHO
People in Refugee Camps	23% for Psychotic Disorders	2014	WHO
People in Refugee Camps	13% for Pts/anxiety disorder	2014	WHO
Anxiety and Depressive Disorder	26-28% increase in 1 Year/970 Million	2020	WHO
Anxiety Disorder	301M People+58M Child	2019	WHO
Bipolar Disorder	40M People Suffer	2019	WHO
Depression Disorder	280M People + 23M Child	2019	WHO
Depression Care Received	Is received formally by only 1 People at present	2019	WHO
Dissocial Disorder	60 Million people	2019	WHO
Eating Disorder	14 Million People including 3M Child	2019	WHO
Reported Mental Disorders	At least 1 in 8 people	2019	WHO
Mental Health Care Received	Only 29% people with Psychosis receives the formal treatments	2019	WHO
Schizophrenia Disorder	24M people or one in 300 People worldwide	2019	WHO

Sources:- Retrieved as of 16th. April, 2025 from the official website of WHO Head Qtr., Geneva-27, Switzerland; <https://who.int/>

6. Discussions

970 million, or at least one in every eight people, were reported living with a mental disorder till 2019 (WHO), whereas 3 billion people were found to have neurological disorders in 2021 (Lancet Neurology). While in a recent quantitative research conducted across 6 Indian cities in 2023, it was observed that one in every four people exist with mental disorder, means just in a span of merely 4 years the numbers have just doubled and found increased to highly significant level, the 8 prominently noticed neurological conditions were found to be Anxiety, Aggression, Depression, Fatigue, Low Self-esteem, High Degree of Mental Stress, Sleeplessness, and troubled relationships (Mohammad Iqbal, IJRBS, Vol 8(2), Dec 2023). Keeping the above consecutive data recorded after a gap of every 2 years in mind, one can think of oneself, the level of working stress, and the type of mental health condition one has in 2025? Now, just compare it with the scenario of a war zone, like Ukraine, or a refugee camp like the situation presently prevailing in Gaza, or the post-earthquake scenario of Myanmar and Thailand. Imagine what will be the level of depression, anxiety, and sleeplessness of the abducted Israeli people? When will the aggression of the Manipur people engaged in ethnic clashes end? The answer is very clear: we are living and working under highly stressful conditions, we have to keep ourselves mentally strong to face future challenges and move forward to provide our productive contribution to society. Detailed guidelines on mental health at work is available, which facilitates people living with mental disorders to thrive in work. Organizational and individual intervention is required to be taken to improve the mental health conditions of employees at work. As an employer, organizations must inculcate the safety culture and frame policy document to address the well-being needs of an employee facing acute stress at work, take effective steps to reduce burnout, fatigues and take full care of any mental health conditions aroused at work due to discriminations, feelings of inequality, excessive workloads, job insecurities, and stressful working environments, as they are found to jeopardize the mental health conditions of employees at work. Therefore, it must be addressed globally as the top priority for achieving the sustainability target (SDG-3.8), i.e., good health and well-being for all.

7. Conclusions

The SDGs represent a global agenda for promoting human prosperity by respecting the planetary boundaries. However, mental health is a state of mental wellbeing that facilitates people to cope with the stresses of life, to realise their

abilities, to learn well and to work well, and to contribute to their community, thus doing what matters in times of stress. Being a WHO member country within South East Asian Region (SEAR), we have to achieve mental health for all people by the end of the year 2030 with its four major objectives, to reinforce operative leadership for governance of mental health, to provide the inclusive care for mental health in the social community, to implement policies for promotion and prevention of mental health and to reinforce the information system on the present status of mental health. CMHAP–2030 makes several endorsements for action, and shows three paths for transformations that focus on shifting the attitudes towards one's mental health condition, addressing the risks of mental health illness, and empowering the systems for the care and prevention of mental health. It includes taking action for deepening the importance and obligations of mental health, reshaping the environment that influences mental health, including homes, communities, schools, workplaces, health care services, natural environments, and strengthening the mental health care system by changing how mental health care is delivered and received.

Thus it is hitherto neglect for long to promote the robust future extensive research studies on mental health subjects in the present era of stressful working and high degrees of burnouts, so it is highly recommended to allocate sufficient budget for the related research and developmental activities on the ongoing projects related to the mental healths of individuals by supporting the health care professionals, health educators, health care service providers, trainers, entrepreneurs, and startups through the available CSR funds of PSUs, SMEs, BPOs and NGOs to make them dedicate for achieving global well-being, where everyone can get the quality health without facing any hardship. The employer must be made responsible under the laws for not ensuring employees' well-being, he must provide a stress-free working environment, and take actions to reduce employees' burnouts, as it is not merely an HR Manager's portfolio.

It is recommended to start at least a collective meditation session for all employees at work preferably in forenoon sessions and periodicity of networking activities for all employees may also be fixed during a lunch session to facilitate them to freely interact with their colleagues or seniors so that they can share their well-being with other employees of the organization. A counselling request box, or a dedicated email ID or Phone Number for specific purpose may perhaps be displayed at prominent and conspicuous locations at work so that any anonymous employee in need of such type of immediate help may perhaps contact the higher management confidently without being noticed

by others and may request to arrange his mental health counselling or may like to seek expert advice to resolve his mental health issues.

Employees too have to regularly engage themselves in the mindfulness and physical activities (Swamy, Mahindru 2023), like yoga (Singh, Shalini 2023), sports, playing music (Ulrich, Lars 2023), and remaining socially connected (Neha, Arora 2023), must take, healthier and nutritious diet and a sufficient amount of sleep to remain healthy, physically fit, and mentally sound and practice time management to adjust the work-life balance for facing the future challenges and rendering fruitful contributions to society with a high degree of devotion at work (Mohammad Iqbal 2023) and must not hesitate to discuss their mental health issues with family, friends, and colleagues and seek immediate professional help if the problem persists, without feeling any type of associated stigma due to their present mental health conditions and do not bother at all that what the others in the society will say and think about. Since maintaining personal health is one's topmost priority, as safety is first, but mental health is a must for wellbeing! At the last, just summon up the famous dialogue of the J R Tolkien's Fellowship of the Ring: "All we have to decide is what to do with the time, that is given us", or run through the recent Netflix feature film: Don't Look Up and act now, as our mental health is at stake! Act now, as time is running too fast, and we have only five years left on hand for reach the UNSD-SDG target 3.8: (Good health and well-being for all people). Act now, as by effective monitoring of our present system and related indicators working for achieving the SDG 3.8.1 (Service coverage), and 3.8.2 (Financial protection) targets, we can very well achieve the sustainability goal 3.8 good health and well-being for all where everyone can get the quality health without facing any hardship as now being deliberated by the world thought leaders for global well-being and envisaged by the UN.

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to settle this academic research paper highlighting the immediate need for promoting the employees well-beings at works.

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Role of Social Media in Shaping Online Shopping Preferences: Analyzing Consumer Trends in Prayagraj

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Abstract

The rise of social media has dramatically altered consumer behavior, notably in online shopping. This study looks at how social media influences customers' online purchasing habits in Prayagraj. This study uses the Technology Adoption Model (TAM) and the Consumer Decision-making Process to investigate the impact of several social media sites, including Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube, on purchasing decisions. A quantitative research design was used, with structured surveys administered to 300 people in Prayagraj. According to the data, Instagram and WhatsApp are the most influential venues for online buying. Furthermore, social media marketing, particularly video and influencer reviews, have a strong influence on consumer engagement and purchasing decisions. Consumers continue to be concerned about trust difficulties, a lack of return procedures, and misleading ads. The study is useful for online retailers, marketers, and policymakers since it emphasizes the importance of social media techniques in e-commerce. It suggests that organizations use a hybrid marketing strategy that includes user-generated content, influencer alliances, and targeted ads to increase consumer trust and engagement. Future research could look into how future technologies such as AI-driven recommendations and augmented reality influence online buying behavior.

Keywords

Social media marketing, Online shopping, Consumer behavior, Technology adoption model, Influencer marketing, and E-commerce.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

The rapid development of the internet and digital technology has transformed how customers purchase and business functions. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp have

become a vital part of consumers' everyday lives, impacting their shopping decisions in several ways. With the growing use of smartphones and affordable internet connection, social media has developed from a simple communication tool to a potent marketing platform for businesses. Social media platforms allow businesses to interact with customers, create trust through reviews and ratings, and use influencer marketing to affect consumer preferences (Tuten & Solomon, 2016).

The rise of social commerce has transformed India's e-commerce business, allowing consumers to interact with brands, find products, and make purchase decisions through social media channels. This trend is also noticeable in smaller places, such as Prayagraj, where digital use is constantly increasing. Given the growing reliance on social media for product discovery and purchasing decisions, it is critical to investigate how these platforms influence customer buying preferences in Prayagraj. Understanding these trends can assist businesses and marketers in developing effective strategies to meet the increasing needs of the region's online buyers (Twin, 2021).

1.2. Importance of Social Media in E-commerce

Social networking has emerged as a major changer in the e-commerce business, connecting firms and customers. According to (Memoria & Jain, 2011), some of the main functions it plays in online buying are:

- **Product Discovery and Awareness:** Consumers discover new items through social media ads, influencer promotions, and peer recommendations. Platforms such as Instagram and Facebook allow businesses to display their products through interesting content, making it easier for buyers to discover new possibilities.
- **Real-time Client Engagement and Interaction:** Social media enable firms to reply to queries, answer problems, and offer personalized recommendations. This builds trust and improves consumer relationships.
- **Influencer Marketing:** Influencers and content creators have a huge impact on consumer choices. Their product evaluations, testimonials, and endorsements affect buying decisions by establishing legitimacy and trust.
- **Social Proof and Reviews:** Online buyers use customer reviews, ratings, and user-generated information to make informed purchases. Positive feedback and suggestions from peers have a big impact on customer preferences.

- **Seamless Shopping Experience:** Social media sites like Instagram Shopping and Facebook Marketplace provide seamless shopping experiences, allowing users to purchase things without leaving the platform. This seamless experience makes internet buying easier. Given these benefits, social media has become an important influence in determining consumers' online shopping behavior, particularly in emerging areas such as Prayagraj.

1.3. Research Problem Statement

Despite the extensive use of social media for online shopping, there has been little research into how it affects customer choices in smaller cities such as Prayagraj. While research has concentrated on urban areas, the purchasing habits of customers in tier 2 and tier 3 cities remain unexplored. Key issues include determining the impact of social media on online shopping decisions in Prayagraj as follows:

- How influencer marketing and peer recommendations shape customer preferences?
- The influence of social media ads on purchase behavior.
- How consumers perceive trust, security, and authenticity in social commerce?

This study seeks to fill a knowledge vacuum by examining how social media platforms effect online purchasing habits in Prayagraj and identifying critical factors that influence consumer behavior in the region.

1.4. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are:

- 1.4.1** To investigate how social media affects consumers' online buying habits in Prayagraj.
- 1.4.2** Examine the impact of influencer marketing and peer recommendations on purchasing decisions.
- 1.4.3** Evaluate the effect of social media advertisements on customer behavior.
- 1.4.4** Investigate consumer views of trust, security, and authenticity in online shopping via social media.
- 1.4.5** Advise businesses and marketers on using social media for e-commerce growth in Prayagraj.

1.5. Research Questions

To attain the aforementioned objectives, the study aims to address the following research questions:

- How does social media affect online buying behavior in Prayagraj?
- How do influencers and peer recommendations impact consumer decision-making?
- How efficient are social media ads for recruiting and converting customers?
- What factors influence consumer trust and confidence in social commerce?
- How can organizations optimize social media strategy to increase customer engagement and sales?

1.6. Scope of the Study

- The study focuses on Prayagraj's online buyers who use social media for product discovery and purchase.
- It investigates major platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube to better understand their influence on consumer behavior.
- The research uses both qualitative (consumer interviews) and quantitative (survey) data to provide a full analysis.
- The study will assist firms, marketers, and legislators in developing strategies to increase e-commerce adoption through social media channels.

This introduction establishes the groundwork for the study by highlighting the importance of social media in online buying, defining major research issues, and outlining the study's aims, questions, and scope. The findings will provide significant insights into how social media influences customer preferences in Prayagraj, as well as tips for firms seeking to improve their digital marketing tactics.

2. Review of the Literature

The literature review delves into existing research on social media's impact on online shopping behavior. It establishes a theoretical framework and investigates critical elements such as consumer decision-making, influencer marketing, user reviews, and regional buying trends (Bose, Antony, & Rajan, 2023).

2.1. Theoretical Framework

Understanding the link between social media and online shopping behavior requires a solid theoretical foundation. This study is based on two main theories:

2.1.1. Technology Adoption Model (TAM)

The Technology Adoption Model (TAM) is one of the most extensively used models for studying consumer acceptance of new technologies (Kumar & Dange, 2012). According to TAM, the adoption of a technology-based system (such as e-commerce and social media shopping) is determined by two key factors:

- **Perceived Usefulness (PU):** Consumers' belief that using social media will improve their shopping experience.
- **Perceived Ease of Utilize (PEOU):** It refers to how easy social media purchasing platforms are for consumers to utilize.

Over time, academics have expanded TAM to incorporate important elements such as trust, social influence, and perceived risk in social commerce. For example, (Soundarbai, Sharma, & Beaulauh, 2017) stressed that trust has a substantial impact on online purchase behavior. Consumers who trust a platform are more likely to complete purchases. In the context of Prayagraj, this study will investigate how perceived usefulness and simplicity of use influence consumers' desire to buy things using social media platforms.

2.1.2. Consumer Decision-making Process

The Consumer Decision-making Process is another important paradigm for understanding how buyers make purchasing decisions. (Kotler, 2020) describe a five-step process:

- **Problem Recognition:** Consumers identify a need or desire, such as a new fashion trend on Instagram.
- **Information Search:** Consumers search for knowledge through social media reviews, influencer referrals, and peer discussions.
- **Evaluation of Alternatives:** Consumers evaluate alternatives based on price, quality, and brand reputation.
- **Purchase Decision:** Discounts, marketing, and platform trust all impact the ultimate decision-making process.
- **Post-purchase Behavior:** Customers share their reviews and experiences, influencing future purchases.

In the digital age, social media speeds up each stage of the process by offering rapid access to product information, peer feedback, and direct brand involvement (Elison, 2008). This research will investigate how social media influences each phase of this decision-making paradigm among internet buyers in Prayagraj.

2.2. Influence of Social Media on Consumer Behavior

Social media has revolutionized customer behavior by making buying more participatory and customized. According to (Bose, Antony, & Rajan, 2023), important ways in which social media influences internet shopping include:

- **Product Awareness:** Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp help customers discover new products and trends.
- **Convenience and Engagement:** Social media facilitates direct interaction between brands and consumers, leading to higher engagement and customer satisfaction.
- **Personalized Recommendations:** AI-powered algorithms recommend products based on user behavior, making shopping more personalized.
- **Trust and Credibility:** Consumers rely on social media for genuine evaluations and peer recommendations before making purchases.

This study will look at how these factors influence customer preferences in Prayagraj, where social media is increasing rapidly.

2.3. Impact of User Reviews and Ratings on Purchase Decisions

Consumer trust in online buying is heavily based on feedback and ratings from past customers (TN State Board, 2018).

- Research indicates that 90 percent of buyers examine online reviews before purchasing.
- Products with higher ratings had higher conversion rates.
- Negative reviews lower purchasing intentions.
- User-generated evaluations act as digital word-of-mouth marketing, influencing prospective customers.
- Customers may instantaneously share their experiences on social networking networks, which amplifies the effect.

This study will look into how Prayagraj consumers perceive and use user reviews while shopping online, as well as how fraudulent reviews or bad comments effect their trust in social media based shopping.

2.4. Regional Perspective: Online Shopping Trends in Prayagraj

While most research on social media shopping behavior focuses on major cities, e-commerce is also growing in smaller towns such as Prayagraj (Bandara, 2021). The key elements driving internet purchasing patterns in Prayagraj are:

- **Increased Digital Penetration:** Smartphones and affordable internet have made social media shopping more accessible. Rural areas account

for 55 percent of internet users, who favor regional language content (Howe, 2025).

- **Local Influencers:** Regional influencers promote products based on local preferences. 57 percent of urban users choose regional material, while 98 percent of users consume content in Indian languages (Business Standard, 2025).
- **Cash on Delivery (COD):** COD is still preferred by many consumers due to security concerns with online payments. COD is used in 75 percent of e-commerce purchases, particularly in Tier-2 and Tier-3 locations (Business Standard, 2025).
- **Social Media Preferences:** Consumers choose trustworthy merchants on social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Instagram over unknown websites. 491 million Indians utilize social media, with Instagram and WhatsApp being the most popular platforms for buying (Howe, 2025).
- **Language and Cultural Preferences:** Localized material and regional language marketing are more effective in smaller cities. Rural areas account for 55 percent of internet users, who favor regional language content (Best Media Info Bureau, 2025).

This study intends to provide insights into Prayagraj's unique e-commerce scene, allowing businesses to customize their marketing efforts to the needs of regional online customers.

While there is substantial research on e-commerce in urban regions, there is less information on smaller cities such as Prayagraj. This study will fill that vacuum by investigating consumer habits in Prayagraj, adding to an increasing body of knowledge about digital commerce in emerging countries.

3. Research Methodology

This section describes the methodology utilized in the study, which includes research design, sample strategies, data gathering methods, and data analysis tools. The methodology guarantees that the study takes a methodical approach to determine how social media influences customer choices for online shopping in Prayagraj.

3.1. Research Design (Quantitative Approach)

- This study uses a quantitative approach to gain a thorough insight into consumer behaviour in Prayagraj.

- A survey is conducted to acquire numerical data from Prayagraj's internet shoppers.
- Several statistical tools were used in this study to efficiently examine the data that was gathered. The demographic profile of the respondents and their preferences for various social media platforms for online shopping were ascertained through the use of frequency distribution and percentage analysis. The central tendency and variability in customer behavior, such as happiness with social media purchases and faith in influencers, were measured with the use of the mean and standard deviation. Significant patterns were found when cross-tabulation was used to examine the association between demographic characteristics and purchasing behavior. Additionally, the data was presented in a way that was visually interpretable through the use of graphical representations such as pie charts and bar charts. Together, these resources made it possible to interpret Prayagraj's consumer trends in a thorough and organized manner.
- The study assessed important factors impacting online shopping behavior using structured rubrics. These included perceived utility and convenience of use (based on the Technology Adoption Model), frequency of social media use for shopping, consumer trust (measured on a 5-point Likert scale), and the influence of user reviews and influencer marketing on purchasing decisions. Accurate analysis of customer preferences and attitudes was made easier by these rubrics, which also guaranteed uniformity in data collecting.

3.2. Target Population

The study focuses on Prayagraj residents who actively use social media platforms for online purchasing. The target respondents are:

- Frequent internet shoppers (who make at least one purchase every month).
- Social media users (on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube).
- Young customers (18 to 40 years old) are the most active online buyers.

3.3. Sampling Technique

- The non-probability purposive sampling method is utilized in this investigation.

3.4. Sample Size

- A minimum of 500 respondents were surveyed for statistical reliability.

3.5. Data Collection Methods

To ensure a comprehensive analysis, the study collects data from both primary and secondary sources.

3.5.1. Primary Data Collection

- A structured questionnaire used closed-ended and Likert scale-based questions to evaluate consumer attitudes and behaviors.
- The majority of the questionnaire's items were modified from proven variables in earlier research on the Technology Adoption Model (TAM) and e-commerce customer behavior. The original TAM by Davis served as the foundation for constructs including Attitude toward online shopping, Perceived utility, and Perceived ease of use.
- Recent empirical research in the literature on digital marketing and social commerce were used to adapt items about the impact of user reviews, the role of influencers, and the influence of social media.
- To gauge the level of customer agreement or experience, each item was scored on a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 denoting "strongly disagree" and 5 denoting "strongly agree."
- The questionnaire was distributed online google forms and social media groups.
- The questionnaire included sections on:
 - Demographics (age, gender, and occupation).
 - Frequency of online shopping.
 - Platforms for internet purchasing.
 - How influencers and marketing impact purchasing decisions.
 - Believe in online reviews.

3.5.2. Secondary Data Collection

For this study, secondary data was gathered from reliable sources, such as scholarly journals about e-commerce and digital marketing, industry publications (KPMG, Statista, Deloitte), and government reports (such those from the Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology). The growth of social commerce platforms, customer interaction with influencers and online reviews, and regional and national changes in internet usage were all covered by these sources.

3.6. Data Analysis Tools and Techniques

Survey results were evaluated statistically to detect patterns and trends. The following strategies are utilized:

- **Descriptive Statistics:** Descriptive statistics (means, percentages, and frequency distributions) was used to summarize consumer demographics and shopping inclinations. Helps identify popular social networking platforms and payment options.
- **Excel for Data Processing:** Excel was used for the purpose of data cleaning and validation. Preparation of graphs and charts for visual representation. Helps in coding and categorizing responses for deeper insights.

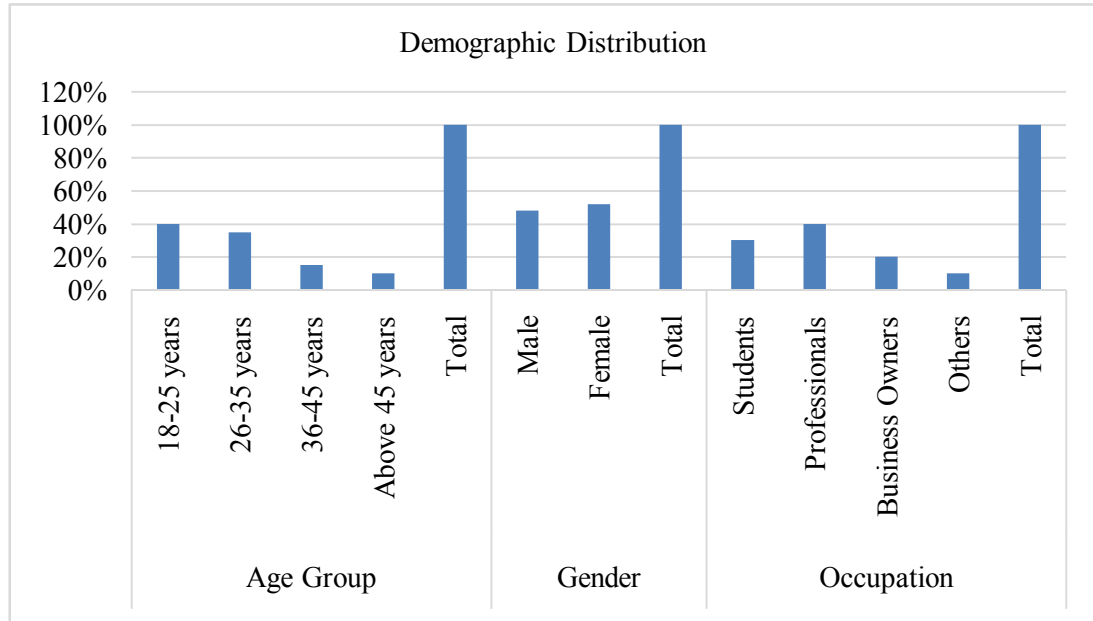
4. Analysis and Findings

This section presents the study's conclusions, derived from the data analysis. It investigates consumer demographics, social media's impact on shopping behavior, influencer marketing, ad effectiveness, and a comparison of traditional and social media-driven shopping.

Table 1:- Demographic Insights of Online Shoppers in Prayagraj

Demographic Factor	Categories	Frequency (N=500)	Percentage (%)
Age Group	18-25 years	200	40%
	26-35 years	175	35%
	36-45 years	75	15%
	Above 45 years	50	10%
	Total	500	100%
Gender	Male	240	48%
	Female	260	52%
	Total	500	100%
Occupation	Students	150	30%
	Professionals	200	40%
	Business Owners	100	20%
	Others	50	10%
	Total	500	100%

Source:- Self-constructed



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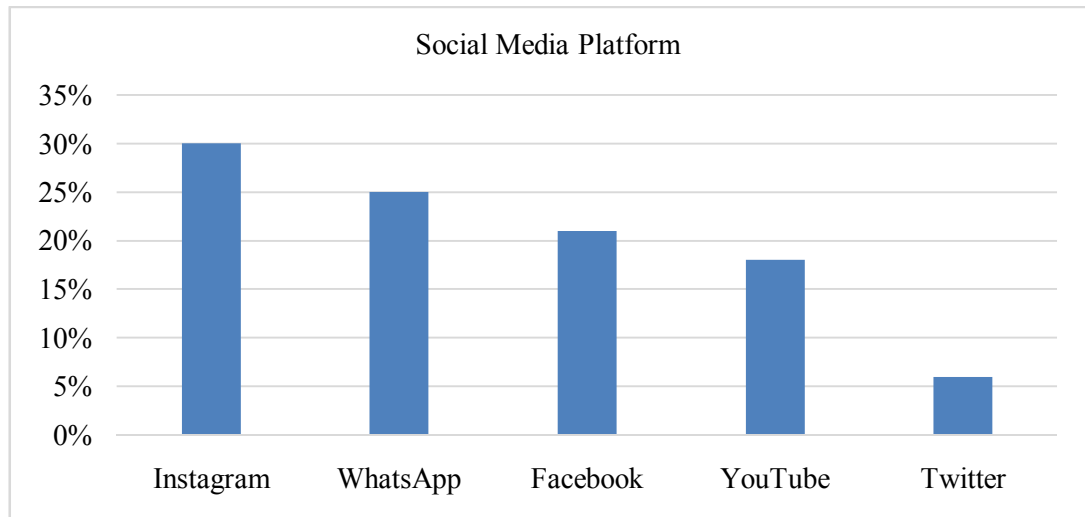
Figure 1:- Demographic Insights of Online Shoppers in Prayagraj

According to the demographic study, the majority of respondents (40 percent) are between the ages of 18 and 25, followed by 35 percent between the ages of 26 and 35, 15 percent between the ages of 36 and 45, and 10 percent older than 45. The gender distribution is roughly equal, with 52 percent female and 48 percent male respondents. Professionals make up the largest occupational group, accounting for 40 percent, followed by students (30 percent), company owners (20 percent), and others (10 percent).

Table 2:- Social Media Influence on Shopping Behavior

Social Media Platform	Frequency (N=500)	Percentage (%)
Instagram	150	30%
WhatsApp	125	25%
Facebook	105	21%
YouTube	90	18%
Twitter	30	6%
Total	500	100%

Source:- Self-constructed



Source:- Self-constructed

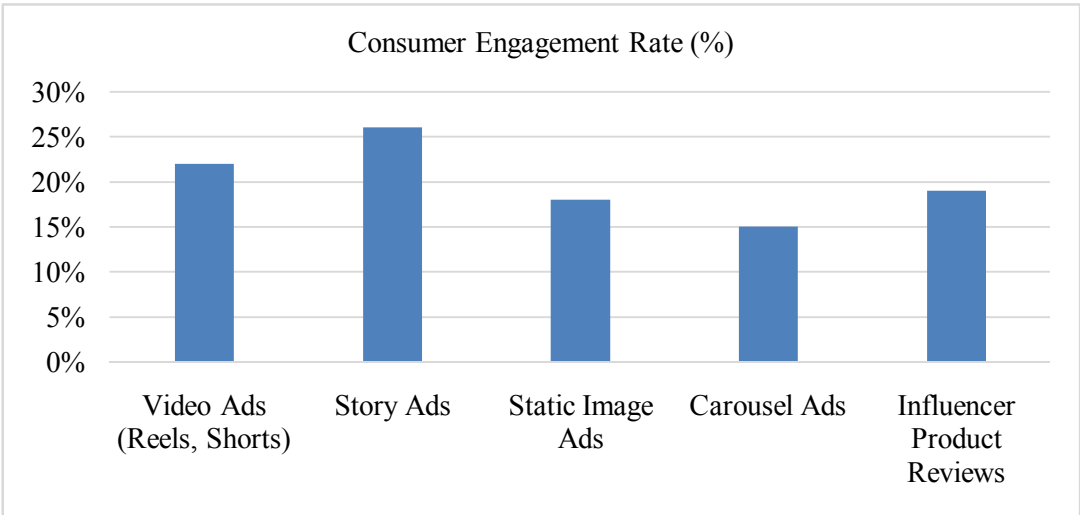
Figure 2:- Social Media Influence on Shopping Behavior

According to the respondents, Instagram is the most popular social media network, with 30 percent of respondents using it, followed by WhatsApp (25 percent), and Facebook (21 percent). YouTube accounts for 18 percent of users, while Twitter has the lowest engagement (6 percent).

Table 3:- Effectiveness of Different Social Media Advertisement Formats

Ad Format	Frequency (N=500)	Consumer Engagement Rate (%)
Video Ads (Reels, Shorts)	110	22%
Story Ads	130	26%
Static Image Ads	90	18%
Carousel Ads	75	15%
Influencer Product Reviews	95	19%
Total	500	100%

Source:- Self-constructed



Source:- Self-constructed

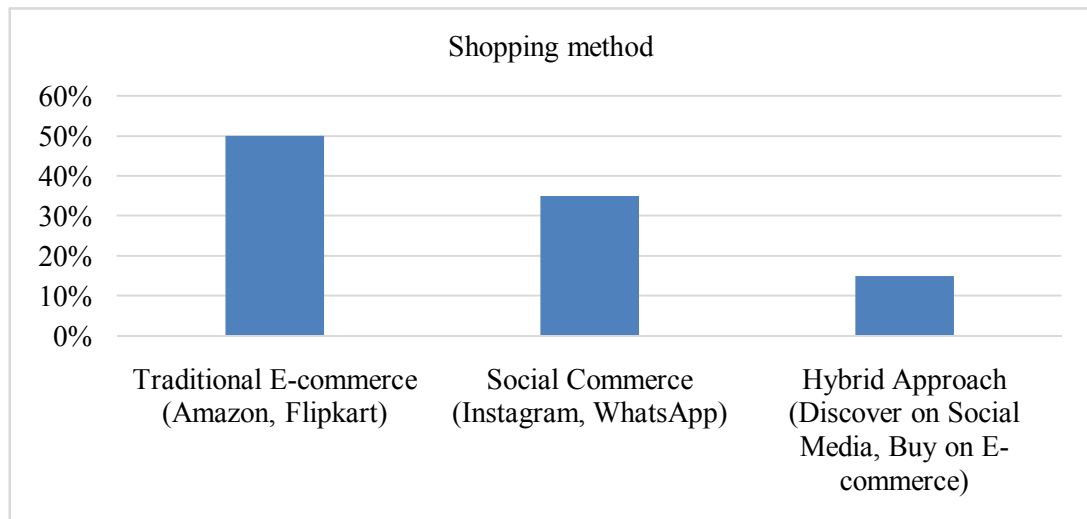
Figure 3:- Effectiveness of Different Social Media Advertisement Formats

The analysis of consumer involvement with various ad forms reveals that story advertising has the highest engagement rate (26 percent), followed by video ads (reels, shorts) at 22 percent. Influencer product reviews engage 19 percent of customers, while static picture advertising reach 18 percent. Carousel advertisements have the lowest interaction rate, at 15 percent.

Table 4:- Traditional vs. Social Media-driven Online Shopping Preferences

Shopping Method	Frequency (N=500)	Percentage (%)
Traditional E-commerce (Amazon, Flipkart)	250	50%
Social Commerce (Instagram, WhatsApp)	175	35%
Hybrid Approach (Discover on Social Media, Buy on E-commerce)	75	15%
Total	500	100%

Source:- Self-constructed



Source:- Self-constructed

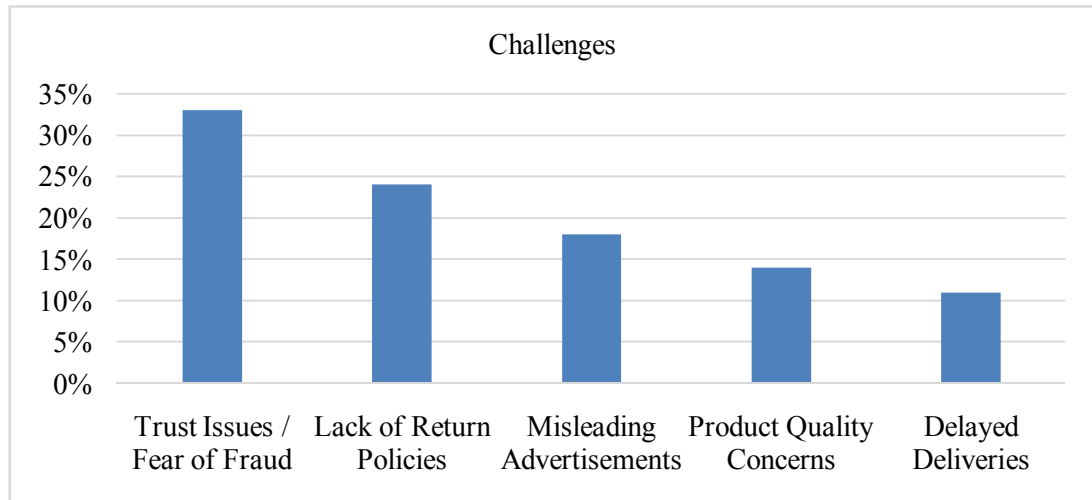
Figure 4:- Traditional vs. Social Media-driven Online Shopping Preferences

According to the statistics, established e-commerce platforms such as Amazon and Flipkart are the most popular shopping methods, with 50 percent of respondents using them. Social commerce, which includes Instagram and WhatsApp, follows at 35 percent adoption. Meanwhile, 15 percent of shoppers take a hybrid strategy, finding things on social media but making purchases through e-commerce platforms.

Table 5:- Key Challenges Faced by Consumers in Social Media Shopping

Challenges	Frequency (N=500)	Percentage (%)
Trust Issues / Fear of Fraud	165	33%
Lack of Return Policies	120	24%
Misleading Advertisements	90	18%
Product Quality Concerns	70	14%
Delayed Deliveries	55	11%
Total	500	100%

Source:- Self-constructed



Source:- Self-constructed

Figure 5:- Key Challenges Faced by Consumers in Social Media Shopping

According to the analysis, the most major problems in online buying are trust issues and fear of fraud, which affect 33 percent of consumers. 24 percent are concerned about a lack of return procedures, while 18 percent are worried about misleading ads. Product quality concerns affect 14 percent of shoppers, while 11 percent experience delivery delays.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This section summarizes the key findings of the study, discusses managerial and policy implications, provides recommendations for online retailers and social media marketers, and outlines the study's limitations and future research directions.

5.1. Summary of Key Findings

The study explored the impact of social media on online shopping preferences in Prayagraj. The key findings are:

5.1.1. Demographic Insights:

- The majority of online shoppers are aged 18-35 years and actively engage with social media platforms like Instagram, WhatsApp, and Facebook for shopping.
- Females prefer fashion and beauty products, whereas males lean towards electronics and accessories.

- Students and young professionals dominate social media shopping, driven by influencer marketing and discounts.

5.1.2. Impact of Social Media on Shopping Behavior:

- Instagram and WhatsApp are the most influential platforms for discovering and purchasing products.
- Consumers rely on peer recommendations (user reviews and ratings) and influencer endorsements when making online purchases.
- Trust issues and lack of return policies on social commerce platforms remain a major concern.

5.1.3. Effectiveness of Social Media Advertisements:

- Video ads and story ads are the most effective ad formats.
- Consumers respond well to personalized, interactive, and visually appealing advertisements.
- Concerns over fake ads and misleading promotions negatively affect consumer trust.

5.2. Managerial and Policy Implications

The recommendations are provided for businesses as well as regulatory government bodies.

5.2.1. Managerial Implications for Businesses and E-Retailers

- Online retailers should actively engage on Instagram, WhatsApp, and Facebook, as these platforms influence consumer behavior.
- Real-time product demonstrations influencer collaborations, and user-generated content can increase engagement and sales.
- Transparency in influencer promotions and authentic product reviews are essential to maintain credibility.

5.2.2. Policy Implications for Regulators and Government Bodies

- Clear policies on refund and return rights should be established for social media-driven purchases.
- Regulations on advertising transparency (disclosing paid promotions and sponsored posts) should be enforced.
- Platforms should introduce strict verification mechanisms for sellers to prevent fraud.

- AI-driven tools can be used to detect misleading advertisements and fake reviews.

5.3. Suggestions for Online Retailers and Social Media Marketers

- Businesses should invest in interactive content such as polls, Q&A sessions, and live product demos.
- User-generated content campaigns can increase brand trust and engagement.
- Offering 24/7 customer support via chatbots on WhatsApp and Instagram can improve customer satisfaction.
- Influencers should be transparent about paid promotions to maintain trust.
- Tracking consumer behavior through Google Analytics, Meta Ads Manager, and CRM tools can help in better targeting.

5.4. Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study include:

- The study is limited to Prayagraj and may not accurately reflect consumption trends in other locations.
- The research uses self-reported data from consumers, which may be biased or inaccurate.
- Rapid changes in social media algorithms and consumer preferences can impact the usefulness of findings over time.
- The study excludes offline shopping behavior and traditional e-commerce platforms that function independently of social media.

5.5. Future Research Directions

To expand upon this study, future research can explore:

- Comparison of online shopping behavior across regions, such as cities or rural vs. urban settings, might yield valuable data.
- Future studies can examine the impact of chatbots and AI on social media and consumer purchasing decisions.
- Examining the influence of virtual and augmented reality (VR/AR) on consumer trust and engagement in online shopping, including virtual try-ons of apparel and makeup.
- Longitudinal Study on Changing Consumer Behavior can examine how social media shopping preferences change over time.

- Researching the effectiveness of video-based content (YouTube, Instagram Reels, TikTok) in generating purchases against image-based content.

6. Conclusion

The study emphasizes the growing influence of social media on online buying choices in Prayagraj. Social media platforms, influencer marketing, and tailored advertisements have a huge impact on customer decisions. However, obstacles like as trust issues, misleading ads, and a lack of established standards must be addressed. Using real influencer marketing, interactive social commerce methods, and AI-driven customization can help businesses and marketers increase engagement and sales. To provide a safe online purchasing experience, policymakers should prioritize consumer protection laws, fraud prevention programs, and digital literacy initiatives.

To have a better understanding of the future of social commerce, future study should look at larger geographic areas, upcoming technology such as AI and VR, and changing consumer behavior patterns.

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The Impact of Gender Stereotypes on Women Entrepreneurs

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Abstract

This research aims to analyze the impact of gender-based stereotypes on female entrepreneurial success, using secondary data. By examining existing studies, reports, and case studies, this analysis seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how these biases affect female entrepreneurs' experiences, particularly in key areas such as funding access, networking, mentorship, and leadership perceptions. A woman entrepreneur poses various issues often stemming from their responsibilities toward family, societal expectations, and household duties. The tradition, customs, socio-cultural values, ethics, motherhood subordinates them to their husbands/men. Physical weakness, feeling of insecurity, in physically demanding roles are some peculiar problems that Indian women are coming across while they jump unto entrepreneurial ventures.

Keywords

Women entrepreneurship, Gender stereotypes, & Discrimination Entrepreneurial orientation, Gender-gap & Hurdles, and Women empowerment.

1. Introduction

The entrepreneurial landscape has been historically shaped by gender dynamics, often placing female entrepreneurs at a disadvantage due to pervasive gender-based stereotypes. These stereotypes, which perpetuate certain beliefs about the inherent abilities of both genders, significantly hinders women's entrepreneurial success. Women in entrepreneurship are often subject to societal expectations that influence how their leadership, decision-making, and business abilities are perceived.

As a result, unique hurdles are faced by women pursuing entrepreneurship, including limited access to funding, networking opportunities, mentorship, and even market recognition, all of which can impact their overall success in the business world. This paper focuses to analyze the effects of these gender-based

stereotypes on female entrepreneurial success, using secondary data. By examining existing studies, reports, and case studies, this analysis seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how these biases affect female entrepreneurs' experiences, particularly in key areas such as funding access, networking, mentorship, and leadership perceptions.

1.1 Overview of the Study

Differences in the human race and gender generally give rise to stereotypes in society. According to social identity theory, it is due to prevailing perceptions that people tend to self-categorize themselves into different categories (Hornsey, 2008). Johnson & Redmond (2000) said that “stereotyping take place when people have expectations that because of some characteristics such as colour, race, age nationality, marital status, education or upbringing, individuals will have particular norms, values and modes of behavior. Bigler and Liben (2006) state that “perceptually discriminable characteristics of individual are more likely to serve as the basis for stereotyping”.

When a particular classification gains prominence, people begin to view new information within that same framework, leading to the formation of stereotypes, suggested in the development intergroup theory by Bigler & Liben (2006). As automaticity theory given by Spencer & Fein, Hilton & Von Hippel (1996) explains that when women employees often face discrimination due to gender-based categorization, it hinders their career progression.

Individual are more likely to engage in stereotyping when their self-esteem is threatened. The finding of Inesi and Cable (2015) used signaling theory strongly suggested that women receive biased evaluation when they exhibit strong competence signals, as evaluators may feel threatened by status incongruence, some supervisors may view strong capability indications as a threat to the gender hierarchy, and, so, give lower performance evaluations. Whereas, female supervisors who exhibit leadership in a traditional feminine manner are less likely to stimulate threat responses in their male subordinates (Williams & Tiedens, 2016). This show that threats to self-worth and esteem can be both an antecedent and a derivative of gender stereotypes. People typically give more weight to observations that align with their stereotypical belief than to those that challenge them when processing information (Ellemers, 2018) stereotypical expectations activate the brain regions involved in recognizing, interpreting, and retaining information from sensory experiences. (Amodio, 2014). Operario and Fiske

(2001) said that stereotyping leads to static generalization of groups, which often results in bias and inequality stemming from categorization.

Supporting this view, Bell (2007) states that stereotyping arises when individuals categorize others and then form evaluations based on those categories. Furthermore, stereotypes are reinforced through various memory processes (Stangor & Duan, 1991; Macrae, Hewstone, & Griffiths, 1993; Von Hippel, Sekaquaptewa & Vargas, 1995).

Employers often judge female candidates based on gender rather than competence, thereby hindering their career advancement.

This process is believed to occur automatically (Hilton & Von Hippel 1996). Once a perceived link between two events is formed unconsciously, an individual may continue to act on that assumption even after the connection no longer exists (Hill, Lewicki, Czyzewska & Boss, 1989). The influence of non-conscious co-variation detection in shaping stereotypes is often sustained by self-reinforcing mechanisms. Canal, Gamham & Oakhill (2015). Similarly found that when specific information is lacking, individuals tend to infer characteristics about others that align with prevailing gender stereotypes.

Family upbringing significantly contributes to the development of stereotypes. Changing such ingrained beliefs can be challenging, especially when they are established during early childhood. Fagot, Leinbach & O'Boyle (1992) propose that gender stereotypes are internalized early in life and are shaped significantly by social interaction and relationships. Similarly, Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson & Sanford (1950) argue that a child's personality primarily develops within the family environment, yet is strongly affected by broader social influences. Parent behavior toward the child, as well as societal expectations, play a major role in shaping both the child's and the parent's behaviors.

According to Endendijk et al. (2014) "Parent often treat boy and girls differently based on implicit gender-stereotypical beliefs. As a result, children are exposed to gender stereotypes early in life and tend to adopt and reflect these behaviors themselves". Through this process, children begin to identify the target groups of stereotypes, a concept supported by developmental intergroup theory (Bigler & Liben, 2006). Parental behavior is influenced by a variety of factors, primarily economic, but also social, ethnic, and religious elements. Therefore, major shifts in social structures and institutions can shape the types of personalities that emerge within a society (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950). A group-

based stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination are closely linked to perceptions of out-group uniformity (Diehl & Jonas, 1991) and priming theory (Bruner, 1957; Sherman, Mackie, & Driscoll, 1990; Smith, Stewart, & Burrum, 1992; Skowronski, Carlston, & Isham, 1993). People often view member of out-group as having fewer desirable traits compared to those in their own group and tend to perceive them as more alike or uniform (Hilton & Von Hippel, 1996).

The women, as a minority group, are often perceived as more homogeneous compared to majority groups. This perception persists even among women themselves, who group as more similar to each other than they actually are (Bartsch & Judd, 1993). It could be the priming, a form of implicit memory, that occurs when current perception and cognition are influenced by past experiences, making certain categories or responses more accessible during the analysis of information (Bruner, 1957). Stapel & Noordewier (2011) discussed about socio-culture factors in which they use the system justification theory to give an account of how people usually stereotype.

Cabrera et al. (2009) suggested that a woman being assigned to household work, whereas men are assigned to paid work roles, women and men actively their role based develop skills. A study conducted by Driscoll & Hunt (2015) in which they discuss about behaviour of teachers during an online course they found that the instructor was identified by a male name instead of a female name.

Culture plays a vital role in the construction of stereotyping. People's perceptions of traits that are linked to each gender and indispensable to get appointed into senior management positions are inclined by culture (Manwa, 2002; Hinton, 2016).

Numerous study done on gender stereotyping of managerial positions and examined in different country such as the USA (Schein et al., 1989), Germany and the UK (Schein & Muller, 1992), Canada (Orser, 1994), Japan and the Peoples' Republic of China (Schein et al., 1996) and New Zealand (Sauers, Kennedy, & O'Sullivan, 2002). Men in these countries tended to view the characteristics deemed necessary for managerial success as attributes more typically ascribed to men than to women. Organizations cultures play an essential role in influencing stereotypes. Operario & Fiske (2001) suggested that a stereotype related to human intent and it lead to personal motivation and social norms creation in the organizations.

While stereotypes originate in childhood and educational experiences, workplaces play a significant role in reinforcing and shaping them through recruitment practices, promotion decisions, and the prevailing organizational culture. Social identity theory (Hogg, 2001; Ryan, Alexander Haslam, & Postmes, 2007) suggests that the social groups feel attachment and consider their group culture as a source of pride and self-esteem. Stereotyping is promoted in the workplace through the division of labour according to gender (Schmitt and Wirth, 2009). This recommends that the gendered division of labour encourage stereotyping to justify the division of labour.

Grobler et al. (2006) identify that stereotypes do not stem from individual experiences but usually come from outside sources. Gilbert, Burnett, Phau & Haar (2010) define that there is differ between male and female professionals in different countries. The imbedded social stereotype of women as intuitive decision-makers is consistent with the expectancy-driven model of behavioural confirmation effects (self-fulfilling prophecies) (Chen & Bargh, 1997). Green & Casell, (1996) argue that women in workplaces are usually perceived as emotional, illogical and intuitive decision-makers.

In spite of considerable development in academics and judiciary principles solve numerous problems at workplace, but women participation in entrepreneurship remains limited. On the bases of this gap requires instant importance and attention,

1.2 Challenges Faced By Indian Women Entrepreneurs

- **Visibility Gap:** Women entrepreneurs frequently face societal pressure related to their work, roles, responsibilities, based on their ambition judged by the family members and inlaws.
- **Safety Gap:** Cities believed much better women entrepreneurs. Accruing women's safety directly related to productive ecosystem.
- **Network System Gap:** Women identify the difficulties and their solution to reform their social network due to marriage and other relations. This change leads to slow career growth and takes time and lots of efforts. 87 percent migration of women due to key factors associated with marriage and stereotypes of inlaws.

- **Care Gap:** Care Gap found in women entrepreneurs related to care responsibilities like pregnancy, maternity leave and other family care can harm their career path and growth.

2. Problem Statement

Gender-based stereotypes often limit women's access to resources, networks, and opportunities in entrepreneurship.

3. Purpose of the Study

To identify how gender stereotypes influence the success of female entrepreneurs in terms of funding, customer perception, and business performance.

4. Objectives of the Study

- 4.1 To study the effects of individual, organizational, and social factors on female entrepreneurial success.
- 4.2 To study challenges that creates barriers among female entrepreneurs in accessing resources essential for business growth.

5. Research Methodology

The secondary data, used for gathering and analyzing this research project, includes academic articles, industry reports, case studies, and surveys on gender-based stereotypes in entrepreneurship.

6. Data Sources

- **Academic Journals and Articles:** Studies on gender bias, stereotypes, and female entrepreneurship.
- **Industry Reports:** Reports from organizations such as (GEM) The Global Entrepreneurial Monitor, World Bank, OECD, and McKinsey, which provide data on female entrepreneurs, funding, and economic participation.
- **Government and NGO Reports:** Data collected by governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations regarding gender and entrepreneurship (e.g., UN Women reports).
- **Case Studies and Survey Data:** Analysis of case studies that explore the experiences of female entrepreneurs overcoming stereotypes.

7. Review of the Literature

The previous studies show how gender-based stereotypes impact the success of female entrepreneurs in accessing resources, funding, networking, and overall business performance.

7.1 The Gender-based Stereotypes in Entrepreneurship: Gender-based stereotypes are deeply embedded in societal norms and expectations, influencing perceptions of gender roles across various sectors, including entrepreneurship.

On the bases of many factors these stereotypes assume that men are more suitable for entrepreneurial roles due to few abilities like risk-taking behavior, assertiveness, courage, and competitive spirit, while traits like nurturing, emotional stability, and patience found in women (Eagly & Carli, 2003). In entrepreneurship, these stereotypes are harmful as they create structural barriers for women, limiting their access to resources, support, and opportunities. Research by Heilman (2001) highlights that women entrepreneurs are often judged through a "double bind" of stereotypes: they must navigate the expectation to be both likable and competent, which is seen as contradictory.

Women who display authority or assertiveness may be penalized for being perceived as "too aggressive," while those who do not take charge are seen as weak leaders. This phenomenon is particularly evident in male-dominated areas like technology, engineering, and finance, where women face greater scrutiny (Gupta, Turban, Wasti, & Sikdar, 2009). Studies have also shown that gender-based stereotypes influence women's self-confidence and decision-making abilities.

These biases can cause women to underestimate their abilities or question their entrepreneurial skills, further perpetuating the cycle of inequality (Langowitz & Minniti, 2007). As a result, these stereotypes impact women's entrepreneurial behavior, limiting their business ventures and preventing them from realizing their full potential.

7.2 Access to Funding:

Studies on Gender Bias in Financing:- Access to funding is a major barrier for female entrepreneurs. Numerous studies have found that women face significant challenges in securing investment, particularly venture capital (VC) funding.

A study by Carter et al. (2007) found that female entrepreneurs receive less venture capital funding rather than males, despite similar business potential. This disparity is primarily due to gender biases that affect investors' perceptions of risk, capability, and leadership. A study by Brush, Carter, Gatewood, Greene, and Hart (2006) explored the reasons behind the funding gap and found that investors tend to favor male entrepreneurs due to their alignment with traditional notions of what an "entrepreneur" looks like.

Male entrepreneurs are considered as most competent and best suited for business, and their businesses as more scalable, primarily due to the gender biases embedded in the investment community. These biases result in women being arbitrated more starkly and facing more rigorous requirements to prove the viability of their business ideas (Huang & Pearce, 2015). Additionally, female entrepreneurs seek funding from family members, relatives and friends, as they are not a part of traditional funding network, (Sohl, 2014).

This conviction on informal funding, may hinder the growth of women-led businesses, as it often leads to lower levels of capital and fewer strategic business connections than those enjoyed by their male counterparts. Some surveys suggested that targeted funding programs or initiatives designed to address these disparities, such as women-focused venture capital firms, could help alleviate some of these issues (Norton & Archer, 2018).

7.3 Networking and Mentorship:

Barriers to Female Entrepreneurial Success:- Networking and mentorship are crucial for entrepreneurial success, yet women often face significant barriers in accessing both.

In entrepreneurial ecosystems, networks are an essential source of information, advice, and opportunities. However, these networks are often male-dominated, isolating women from crucial business connections (Lee & Peterson, 2000). The lack of access to powerful networks can result in women being excluded from high-level business discussions, investment opportunities, and strategic partnerships. Research by Ahuja (2007) has shown that women are not a part of informal networks, which are important for building trust and collaboration in business.

These exclusionary networks hinder women from gaining access to key resources like financing, market access, and business partners. Furthermore women entrepreneurs repeatedly find it difficult to find mentors, especially since many senior executives and successful entrepreneurs are men, who

may be less likely to mentor women (Kommers, 2014). Mentorship is particularly critical for women, as it provides guidance on navigating challenges specific to women in business, such as managing work-life balance, handling gender biases, and building confidence.

However, female entrepreneurs often report having fewer mentors than their competitors and when they do have mentors, these relationships are often less influential (Eisenhardt & Santos, 2002). The lack of mentorship programs for women contributes to the entrepreneurial gender gap. Research suggests that creating women-focused mentorship programs could provide much-needed support and guidance, which would help mitigate the challenges that women face (Raghuvanshi & Gupta, 2017).

7.4 Leadership Perceptions of Female Entrepreneurs: Societal perceptions of leadership are deeply influenced by gender norms, which often result in women being judged more harshly than men in leadership roles. Gendered stereotypes about leadership styles tend to portray women as more collaborative and less authoritative than men. These perceptions often work against women entrepreneurs, particularly when their leadership styles do not align with traditional, male-dominated ideals of entrepreneurship, which emphasize decisiveness, risk-taking, and competitiveness (Eagly & Karau, 2002). It is investigated that female leaders are often perceived as less competent and less capable of running successful businesses compared to male leaders, even when their business performance is comparable (Schein, 2001).

Women in leadership roles frequently face challenges in being taken seriously, and their authority is often questioned. For example, women may be described as "too emotional" or "too soft," even when they display the same leadership behaviors as their male counterparts (Cundiff & Vescio, 2012). These perceptions can impact both the external credibility of women-led businesses and the internal dynamics of female-led teams, making it complex to develop themselves as strong leaders.

Furthermore, these biases can influence customer trust and investment decisions. According to a study by Johnson et al. (2018), investors and customers are not as likely to trust women leaders in certain industries, particularly those that are perceived as "masculine" or "technical," such as finance and technology. This lack of trust can directly affect the growth and sustainability of women-led ventures due to gender stereotypes, this negative impact hinders the position and status of women in an organization. (Koenig et al., Kang 2012).

Researchers have emphasized that leadership traits like self-confidence, practicality, competitive spirit, aggressiveness, and desire for responsibility are associated with men and women. On the contrary, women are known by sympathy, concern, emotional stability, and forgiveness of others (Schein, 1975; Eagly & Carli 2007).

The aforementioned views show the stereotypical views of women as managers. Over more than 40 years, a number of scholars have explored gender stereotypes and requisite management characteristics (Brenner, Tomkiewicz, & Schein, 1989; Heilman, Block, Martell, & Simon, 1989; Schein & Muller, 1992; Orser, 1994; Schein, Mueller, Lituchy, & Liu, 1996; Elsaid & Elsaid, 2012; Berkery, Morley, & Tiernan, 2013) following different paradigms of gender stereotyping to undertake research in different country contexts.

The findings of the relevant studies indicate that the stereotypes identified in earlier research continue to persist.

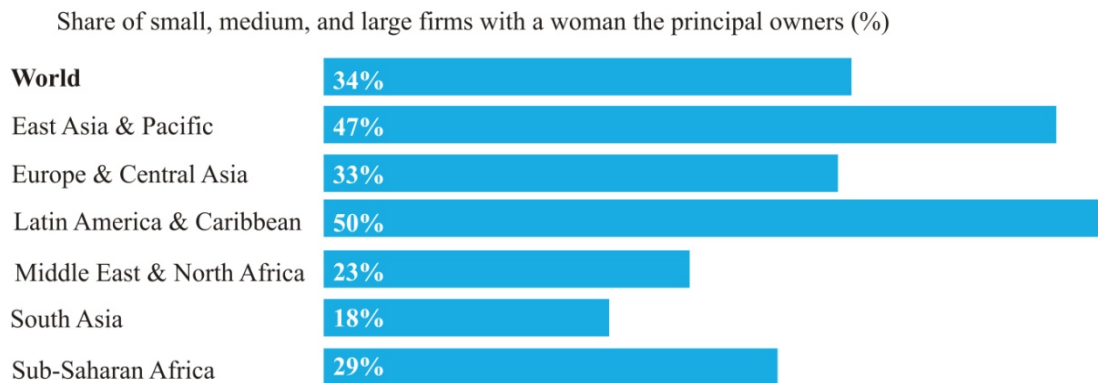
8. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The analysis illustrates the picture very clearly, stating that women's economic participation is not only vital but is a must for the sustainable growth of any nation. Taking the example of India, it could add USD 0.7 trillion to its GDP by 2025 by increasing female workforce participation. Yet, women contribute only 17 percent to India's GDP, that is below the global average. COVID-19 worsened this, with 47 percent of women losing jobs during the first lockdown compared to 7 percent of men.

Some countries in the Central and East Asian region, the pandemic adversely impacted female entrepreneurs in India the most, with two-thirds of the womenfolk assigning recent business closures to the pandemic. If we look at Science and Technology, it is also dominated by the male counterpart.

8.1 Analysis of Individual, Organizational and Social Factors on Female Entrepreneurial Success: According to the study conducted by Dr. Dana Kanze, Assistant Professor of Organizational Behavior at London Business School in 2024, only 6 percent of the S & P 500 firms have a female CEO, while females make up around 80 percent of the workforce. In male-dominated industries, most of the labor market, support, and possibilities for women's progress are extremely limited. For analysis of the world scenario on the above objectives, the data was taken from the World Bank website.

8.1.1 The Gender-wise Analysis of Business Ownership:- Globally, Only 1 in 3 Businesses are Owned by Women



Source:- Enterprise Surveys, Retrieved from The World Bank Gender Data Portal.

Figure 1:- Gender-wise Analysis of Business Ownership

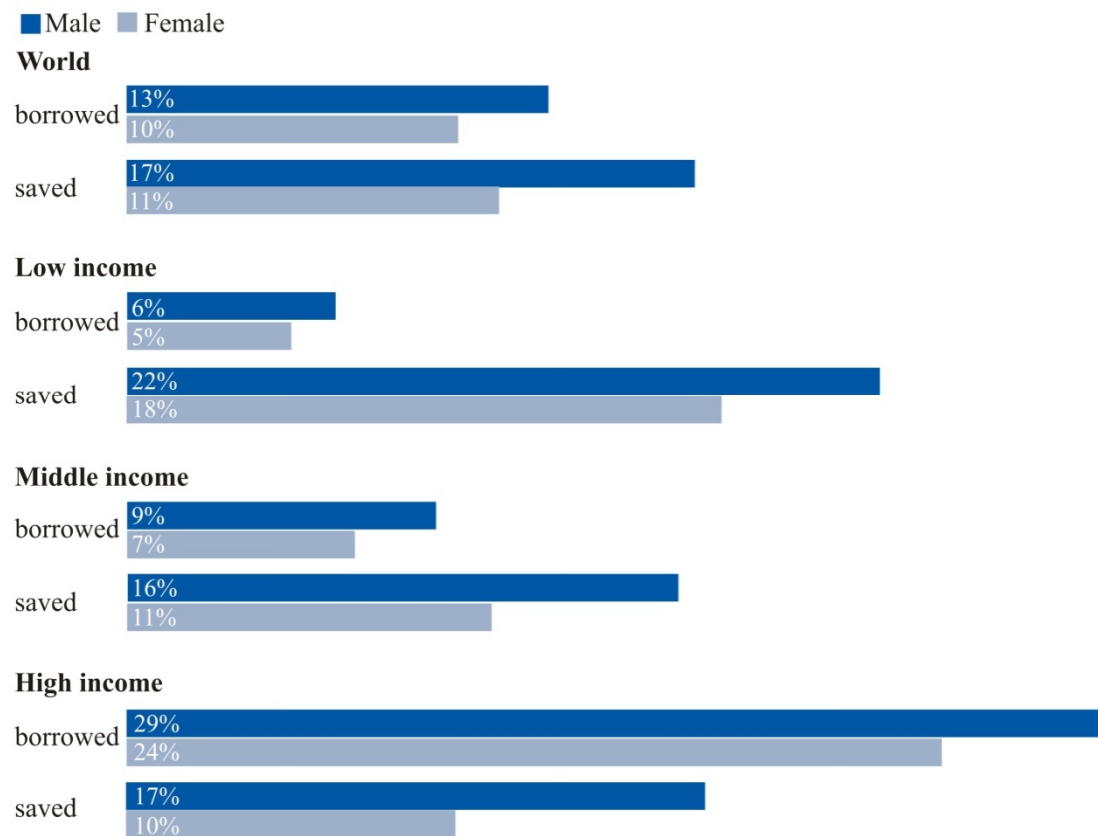
The result shows that globally, only 1 in 3 small, medium, and large businesses are owned by women.

This rate varies across and within regions, from a low of 18 percent in South Asia to a high of 50 percent in Latin America & Caribbean. In East Asia & Pacific, South Korea has the lowest rate of women business owners, with just 19 percent of firms, and the Federated States of Micronesia has the highest, with 87 percent of firms owned by women. Similarly, in the Middle East, it goes from a low of 7 percent in the Republic of Yemen to a high of 49 percent in Tunisia.

Female participation in business ownership is positively correlated with countries' income level (part of individual, organizational, and social factors), but only to a small extent. In low-income countries, only 1 in 4 businesses have any female owners. In middle- and high-income countries, the rates are at 36 percent and 37 percent, respectively. Many things underlie these factors and one of them is access to finance. Here we take a quick glance at this area — though noting it is only one entry point to understanding the gender gaps in entrepreneurship.

Men are more Likely to Borrow and Save to Start, Operate and Expand Businesses than Woman

Proportion of individuals who ... to start, operate, or expand a farm or business (% of age 15+)



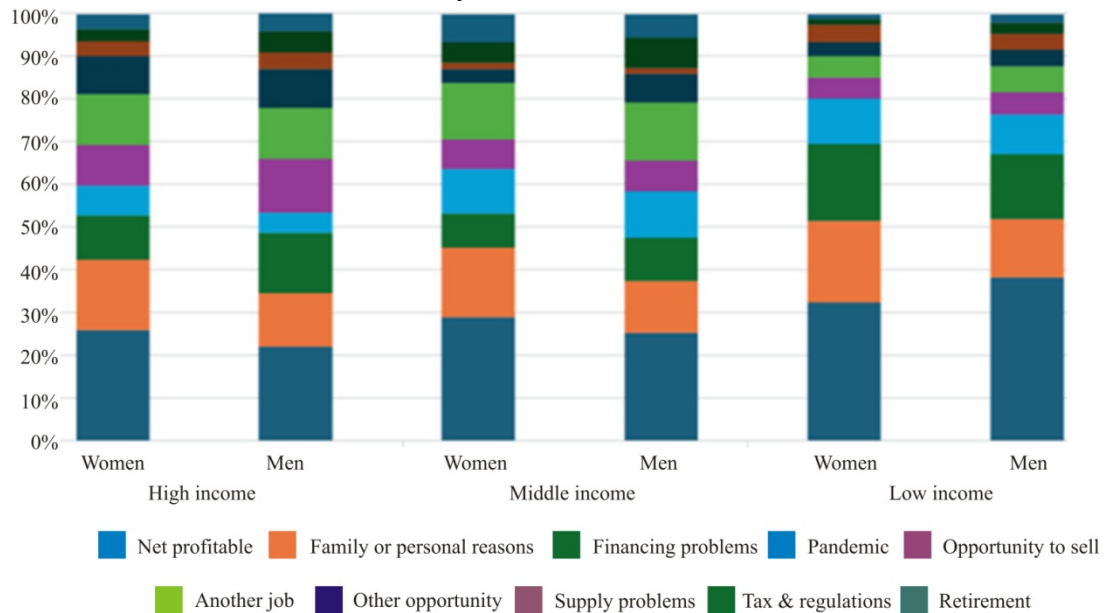
Source:- Global Financial Inclusion Database

Figure 2:- Gap between Men and Women Remains at All Income Levels

Above figure 2 shows that the gap between men and women remains at all income levels, where men have higher rates of borrowing and saving for businesses than women.

We have to work hard at individual, organizational, and socio-cultural levels across the world to increase the inclusion of women in entrepreneurship.

8.1.2 Gender-wise Analysis of Various Factors for Business Exit:-



Source:- GEM Report: 2023

Figure 3:- Gender-wise Analysis of Various Factors for Business Exit

There are a number of factors most often a reason reported by women in 2023 (28.4 percent). Women are much more likely to report business exit for personal or family reasons than men, on the order of 36 percent more often globally. Lack of financing is another reason for business discontinuation. Business exit due to family or personal reasons is a more common explanation for women across all national income levels. Finally, pandemic closures persist three years after the global COVID-19 pandemic. Women remain more impacted than men globally (9.8 percent vs. 8.6 percent), and more so in low-income countries (10.7 percent vs. 9.4 percent). The largest gender gap is found in high-income countries, where women are almost 50 percent more likely to report the pandemic as a reason for business closure.

8.2 Analysis of Challenges that Create Barriers among Female Entrepreneurs in Accessing Resources Essential for Business Growth:

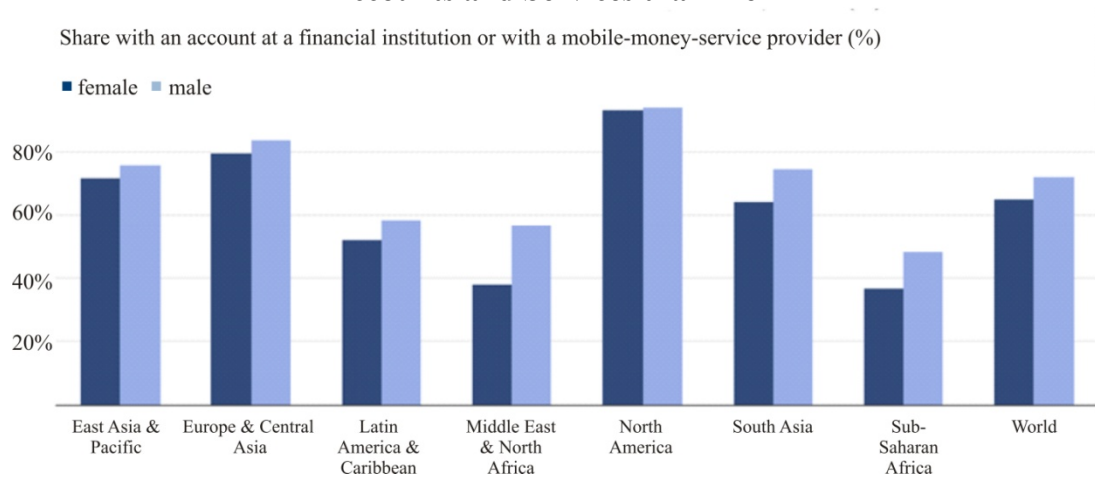
Even though Indian society has evolved, and everyone claims that men and women are equal, gender barriers still exist heavily. Despite the government's efforts to encourage women's leadership and empowerment,

it is still challenging for women to prove their skills and gain recognition for their endeavors. Gender inequality and pay gaps are nuisance that women entrepreneurs face in India. They still need their husbands, brothers', or fathers' approval to go for a job or start a business.

Such blockades prevent female entrepreneurs from scaling the heights they are capable of. Although it might sound unfair, the Indian finance scene has massive gender gaps. Female business owners in India commonly face economic hardships due to investors' biases and other factors. Of all the companies receiving business funding, only a small percentage comprises female entrepreneurs. Many angel investors and venture capital firms are hesitant to invest in women-led companies for various unspecified reasons. Additionally, most women either do not own assets or property in their own names, or lack the authority to mortgage or sell them. Therefore, economic challenges come up as a major problem when applying for private

8.2.1 Gender-wise Analysis of Challenges that Create Barriers to Accessing Resources Essential for Business Growth Financing or Collateral Loans:-

Women Face Greater Challenges in Accessing Financial Accounts and Services than Men



Source:- Global Financial Inclusion Database. Retrieved from the World Bank Gender Data Portal

Figure 4:- Gender-wise Analysis of Challenges that Create Barriers to Accessing Resources Essential For Business Growth

The figure 4 result shows that in all regions except North America, the percentage of women with access to a financial account is abruptly less compared to men. In Europe & Central Asia, men are 4 percent more likely to have a financial account than women. This gap is largest in Middle East & North Africa, where men are 19 percent more likely to have a financial account than women.

Yet a bigger gap remains for full financial inclusion. In Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East & North Africa, less than 40 percent of women have a financial account. Empowering women requires great efforts across many dimensions and promoting women's entrepreneurship is one of the key avenues. And we still have a long way to before the elusive dream of equal opportunity for women entrepreneurs is achieved.

9. Efforts to Overcome the Gender Gap in Entrepreneurship in India

Efforts to overcome the gender gap in entrepreneurship in India have been gaining momentum over the past few decades. The Indian government, along with various organizations and institutions, has been working towards empowering women entrepreneurs and fostering a more inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem. Below are some of the key efforts and initiatives:

9.1 Realization of Significance of Women Entrepreneurs in India:

(a) Economic Significance:-

- **Sustainable Economic Development & Employment Generation:**

By promoting women's entrepreneurship, India could establish over 30 million women-owned enterprises, which have the potential to generate 150 to 170 million jobs (NITI Aayog).

- **Poverty Alleviation:** By bringing 50 percent of women into the workforce, India could boost GDP growth by 1.5 percentage points (World Bank). This would also help sustainably increase family incomes.

(b) Social Significance:-

- **Gender Equality:** Women entrepreneurs have helped narrow gender inequality in the business world. However, only 19.2 percent of Indian women participate in the workforce, compared to 70.1 percent of men, highlighting a significant employability gap of 50.9 percent (ILO).

- **Fuller Utilization of Human Capital:** The female labor force participation rate is merely 41 percent compared to 60 percent LFPR of men according to PLFS for the calendar year 2023.
- **Developing Local Markets:** Women entrepreneurs also tap into global markets using digital and social platforms.
Example: The Splendor of Kashmir: Started by Varuna Anand from Jammu to promote Kashmiri shawl artistry through online sales and exhibitions across India. Her online sales venture helped her connect to a wider audience.
- **Role Models and Agents of Social Change:** Women entrepreneurs inspire other women to initiate their journeys of independence and financial freedom through entrepreneurship.
Example: Maa Bimaleshwari Janhit Karya Samiti: A Self- help Group started by Phool Basan Yadav, empowering 200,000 poor women.
- **Women's Empowerment:** By providing women with financial independence and the authority of their own decision-making.
Example: Usha Jha: Affectionately known as 'Usha9auntie' in Patna, supported women with entrepreneurial aspirations.

10. Government Schemes and Policy

- 10.1 Stand-up India Scheme (2016):** Launched by the Government of India, this initiative aims to facilitate women and SC/ST entrepreneurs. It provides loans between INR 10 lakhs to INR 1 crore for setting up greenfield enterprises in manufacturing, services, or the trading sector.
- 10.2 Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY):** This scheme facilitates funding for micro and small enterprises, particularly benefiting women entrepreneurs. The Mudra scheme offers loans without collateral up to INR 10 lakhs, which has helped many women access credit for starting small businesses.
- 10.3 Udyogini Scheme:** Aimed at women entrepreneurs in rural areas, the Udyogini Scheme offers financial assistance and training to help women start their own businesses in various sectors, including agriculture, handicrafts, and services.
- 10.4 National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW):** The NMEW aims to address issues related to women's economic empowerment. It includes a focus on self-help groups (SHGs), capacity building, and skill development.

- 10.5 Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP)** Launched by NITI Aayog, the WEP serves as a unified platform for women entrepreneurs in India to collaborate, network, and access necessary tools and resources.

11. Financial and Technical Assistance

11.1 Credit Facilities and Subsidies

Several banks and financial institutions offer subsidized loans and easy credit facilities for women entrepreneurs. For instance, the SIDBI (Small Industries Development Bank of India) offers various schemes that aim to support women in starting businesses.

- 11.2 Venture Capital and Angel Investments:** Organizations like the Women's Venture Fund and Angel Networks are dedicated to investing in women-led businesses. Many angel investors now specifically focus on women entrepreneurs, helping them scale their startups.

12. Training and Capacity Building

- 12.1 Skill Development Programs:** The government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) run skill development programs that focus on enhancing women's leadership, technical, and managerial skills.

Skill India Mission is one such initiative that includes training for women to enhance their employability and entrepreneurial capabilities.

- 12.2 Entrepreneurship Development Programs (EDPs):** Various state and central government agencies, such as the National Institute for Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development (NIESBUD), provide EDPs tailored to women entrepreneurs to equip them with the skills necessary to succeed in business.

- 12.3 Self-help Groups (SHGs):** In rural areas, SHGs act as a catalyst for women to come together, pool resources, and engage in small-scale entrepreneurial ventures. The government and NGOs provide support through microfinance, training, and marketing platforms.

13. Promoting Networking and Mentorship

- 13.1 Mentorship Programs:** Programs and platforms like WE Connect International and FICCI FLO (Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry – Ladies Organization) women entrepreneurs connect with their supervisors and mentors who can guide them in their business journey.

- 13.2 Women-focused Business Incubators:** Some incubators, such as the TiE Women initiative, focus specifically on nurturing women-led startups by providing guidance, networking opportunities, and resources to support their growth.

14. Encouraging Education and Awareness

- 14.1 Promoting STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) Education for Women:** Many programs and initiatives are encouraging girls and young women to pursue education in STEM fields, which are pivotal for entrepreneurship innovation. This includes scholarships, internships, and collaborations with universities.
- 14.2 Awareness Campaigns:** Awareness campaigns and media efforts are gradually shifting societal mindsets regarding women's roles in entrepreneurship. These campaigns aim to challenge traditional stereotypes and encourage more women to step into entrepreneurial roles.

15. Supportive Legal and Social Environment

- 15.1 Equal Rights and Protection:** Legal measures such as the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013 have been put in place to protect women in the workplace, including female entrepreneurs. Moreover, some states have implemented policies to support women entrepreneurs, such as exemptions from certain taxes or regulatory relaxations.
- 15.2 Women-friendly Workplaces:** Several organizations and startups are adopting policies that are more inclusive of women, such as flexible working hours, maternity leave, and work-from-home opportunities. These policies help reduce the burden of balancing business and family life.

16. Social Entrepreneurships and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Initiatives

- 16.1 CSR Initiatives:** Many large corporations in India are introducing CSR initiatives aimed at supporting women in entrepreneurship. For example, Microsoft India's initiatives in collaboration with NGOs help to provide women entrepreneurs with access to digital platforms, mentorship, and capital.
- 16.2 Social Entrepreneurship Focused on Women:** Increasingly, social enterprises are focusing on empowering women in underserved

communities. These include efforts in rural and tribal areas where women's enterprises, particularly in agriculture, healthcare, and handicrafts, are being promoted.

- 16.3 Increased Recognition and Role Models:** The increasing visibility of successful women entrepreneurs such as Kiran Mazumdar Shaw, Indra Nooyi, Falguni Nayar, and Vandana Luthra serves as an inspiration for other women to follow suit. These role models are playing a key role in breaking barriers and proving that women can be successful entrepreneurs in various sectors.

17. Conclusion and Findings

The literature on gender-based stereotypes in entrepreneurship underscores the significant barriers that female entrepreneurs face due to societal biases. These stereotypes affect multiple facets of entrepreneurship, including access to funding, networking opportunities, mentorship, and leadership perceptions. While some progress has been made in addressing these disparities, much work remains to be done to level the playing field for female entrepreneurs. The existing literature suggests that targeted initiatives, such as women-focused funding programs, mentorship networks, and societal campaigns to challenge leadership biases, can help mitigate these challenges and foster a more inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem. The finding of this study shows that gender stereotypes significantly hinder female entrepreneurs by:

- 17.1 Limiting Access to Resources:** Women face bias in funding, networking, and support due to stereotypes.
- 17.2 Affecting Self-perception:** Stereotypes undermine confidence, risk-taking, and increase fear of failure.
- 17.3 Impacting Business Growth:** Women are often concentrated in specific sectors with lower growth potential and may have less ambitious growth targets.

18. Recommendations and Suggestions

It is needed at a basal level to counter stereotypes, create interest in this segment, and make potent policy interventions based on available data.

- Promoting the Local Women Role Models who have crossed these milestones plays a significant role in developing an enabling environment.
- New urban infrastructure in Tier 2 India, such as airports or convention centers, can be used to showcase success stories of local entrepreneurs.

- Provide grants to women entrepreneurs and female-focused Venture Capital funds to break the vicious cycle of women-owned businesses not scaling because of lack of funding.
- Fiscal incentives for female-owned businesses for childcare leave and expenses are a potential solution.
- Providing co-working and co-building space as many women are not able to expand their enterprises because they operate from home which often constrains their operations for an extended time period.

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