

Consumerism in Digital Age: A Sociological Exploration of Consumption Relations in Kathmandu.

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Abstract

The consumption behaviors in the urban environment like Kathmandu have changed in the digital age due to the impact of socio-cultural, economic, and demographic forces. The study examines the consumption patterns of residents of Ward No. 16 of Kathmandu Metropolitan City through a mixed-method study. Both quantitative and qualitative data of conducted structured surveys and in-depth interviews show that there is a dynamic consumer environment where both traditional and modern trends co-exist. The economic differences greatly determine the choices of purchases, where the high-income households prefer high-quality products and online shopping, whereas low-income families are inclined to the purchases of essential products in the local markets. The level of education turns out to be one of the most important factors of digital shopping, which shows a digital gap. Consumption is still shaped by cultural practices particularly at festivals. The research highlights the intricacies of the consumer behavior in the cities and how digital shopping is increasingly becoming popular among younger and more educated generations. The findings offer useful information to policy makers and companies intending to meet the varied consumer demands, advance digital accessibility and establish culturally adaptable marketing strategies. This discussion can be linked to the general discussion of the sociology of urban areas as it places the global consumer trends in the local context of Kathmandu.

Keywords: Patterns of Consumption, Kathmandu, Sociocultural, Economic, Demographic, Urban Sociology, Digital shopping.

Introduction

The study of urban consumption pattern has attracted a lot of interest in the sociological studies. This review is the synthesis of the available literature on consumption behaviors with a particular view of urban areas that resemble Kathmandu. It also seeks to put in perspective the results of Ward No. 16 of Kathmandu Metropolitan City making comparisons with the general trends in other urban areas.

Consumption is said to be a cultural and social identity. In her writing, *The World of Goods*, Douglas and Isherwood (1996) opine that consumption is not just an economic practice but a cultural and symbolic practice. Appadurai (1986) in the book, *The Social Life of Things*, argues this point of view by arguing that the meaning of commodities is understood as residing within the social relations and cultural settings. Consumption patterns are strong in the traditional practices and cultural festivals in cities such as Kathmandu. Research by Shakya and Rankin (2008) emphasizes the role of cultural events, in determining the behavior of consumers, in particular, the consumption of goods in certain festivals like Dashain and Tihar.

Economic factors play a critical role in determining the consumption patterns. Bourdieu (1984) in his book, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* states that the consumption patterns are directly associated with the financial capital of the individual. In Kathmandu, the purchasing decisions in the city are largely influenced by income inequality. A study conducted by Pandey et al. (2019) shows that the consumption pattern of better-off households in Kathmandu is not similar to that of poorer households, as they tend to buy high-quality goods and services. This economic gap is also reflected in the access and consumption of digital shopping platforms.

Such demographics as age, gender, and education level are very important in defining the consumption patterns. The research conducted by Ghimire (2017) revealed that young people living in Kathmandu are more oriented to online and digital shopping, which is conditioned by global trends and technological progress. Older generations, on the contrary, like conventional markets. Gender also overlaps with consumption practices as Bennett and Daly (2014) explain that the growing amount of women entering the work force in urban Nepal has changed the household consumption patterns.

The high rate of the urbanization of Kathmandu has brought new consumption trends and problems. In the literature of urban sociology, e.g. Castells (1996) in *The Rise of the Network Society*, the change in consumption patterns in urban areas under globalization and technological advances is stressed. The integration of Kathmandu in the global market has given rise to hybrid culture of consumption in which there are traditional and modern practices that co-exist. A study carried out by Shrestha and Conway (2011) touches upon the expansion of consumer options in Kathmandu in the context of urbanization and the addition of social imbalance to the situation. One of the main trends of consumption in cities is the emergence of online shopping. In Kathmandu, e-commerce sites have reduced the modern purchasing behaviour. A report by Nepal Telecommunications Authority (2020) reports that there has been a significant rise in the number of internet users in the urban regions and this has helped to promote online shopping. According to Kshetri and Acharya (2012), this tendency is especially strong with the young population, as they present the drivers of adopting e-commerce in Nepal.

In order to see the rationales behind consumer behavior in Kathmandu, one can use different theoretical models. According to Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), the intentions induced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perception of behavior control determine the action of an individual. The theory may be useful in examining the effects of social factors and individual attitudes on the consumption decisions in Kathmandu. Also, the Consumer Culture Theory (Arnould and Thompson, 2005) sheds some light on the impact of cultural narratives and practices on the consumer identity and behavior.

The modern digital age has rendered consumption that has not only crossed the conventional economic boundaries, but also is a highly social, cultural, and technological phenomenon. Digital technologies, globalization and urbanization have contributed to a tremendous change in the consumer behaviors, especially in the fast changing cities like Kathmandu. In the process of urbanization where cities transform into centres of economic and cultural interaction, consumption lifestyles are not only a matter of personal taste but also larger social changes dictated by income, education and availability of digital infrastructure (Castells, 1996; Appadurai, 1986). Being the economic and cultural center of Nepal, Kathmandu turns out to be the given intersection of the traditional values and the modern consumerism desires, and, thus, it is a perfect location to conduct sociological research concerning the dynamics of consumerism in the age of digital technologies.

Small businesses have helped improve daily life in communities while also boosting city spending patterns, aiding Kathmandu's growth over time (K.C., 2019). Shifts in how people relate to one another and what they value in cities across Nepal have changed the way older adults versus youth engage with today's buying trends - showing clear differences between age groups when it comes to using online shopping spaces (K.C., 2023a). This consumption may be considered a performative process where people perform their identity, belonging, and status. Douglas and Isherwood (1996) believe that goods are not merely objects of utility but also hold a meaning and as such, they serve as symbols in the social relationships. On the same note, the Bourdieu notion of cultural capital (1984) can explain the processes by which taste and consumption reproduce and reproduce hierarchies in society. Economic stratification is high in urban Nepal and can be used to explain consumption decisions because it is important to note some differences in the availability of high-quality products and online stores (Pandey, Shrestha, and Upreti, 2019).

The way sanitation workers live and do their jobs in Kathmandu shows how deep gaps still exist gaps deciding who really gains from the city's rising shopping culture and progress (K.C., 2023b). Digital buying habits are taking off among young people there, revealing shifting dreams and self-images as they move through old customs while pulled toward tech-filled, worldwide trends (K.C., 2024). More so, the consumer landscape in Kathmandu has been redefined by digitalization. The increased adoption of internet services and mobile technologies has precipitated a transition to online and mobile based consumption (Nepal Telecommunications Authority, 2020). Youth with more schooling now lean toward buying stuff online - shows how global links and tech changes shape fresh spending habits (Ghimire, 2017; Kshetri and Acharya, 2012). Still, this trend reveals a gap in access since those with less cash stick to physical shops due to weak tools and know-how around digital systems (Shrestha and Conway, 2011).

Sociologically, consumerism in Kathmandu represents a cultural mix of both modernistic and traditional values that are in harmony. The continuity of cultural consumption in the festivals like Dashain and Tihar is an indication of the perennial nature of local practices (Shakya and Rankin, 2008) whereas the cultural shift towards consuming global trends signifies the inclusion of Nepal in the global economic relationships. Such a game of continuity and change shows how urban consumers move in the modernity yet become rooted in their cultures. Thus, the analysis of the consumption trends of Kathmandu provides essential ideas on the overall shift of the city life in the digital era, as the local realities are intertwined with the global discourses of the consumer.

Statement of the Problem

In Ward No.16 of Kathmandu Metropolitan City, how people use resources ties closely to social habits, money situations, plus population traits. Although city-based buying behavior matters more these days in social research, actual field info about this area still runs short. These trends are vital to grasp the overall effects of globalization, urbanization, and electronic revolution on local consumer behavior. This research will address this gap by researching the effect of other factors on buying decisions of the residents providing an insight of how traditional and modern practices coexist and develop in an urban Nepali environment.

Research Questions

1. What part does income, educational levels and cultural practices have to play in shaping consumption patterns within the area of study?

2. How has the change in digital shopping habit among various demographic groups in this locality been?

Objectives

1. To investigate how income, education, and culture affect the consumption habits of the societal residents in the study area.
2. To examine the trends in digital shopping in the community.

Significance of the Study

This research can be of great importance to various stakeholders. To urban sociologists, it gives a micro level insight into the consumption pattern of an emerging urban center, which is part of a wider discussion on urban consumption. Understanding of how economic and cultural factors affect consumer behavior can help policymakers in the development of policies that would facilitate fair economic growth and marketing policies that are culturally sensitive. To the business, particularly those that are in e-commerce, this research provides them with a good insight on consumer preferences and trends and thus they can modify their offerings to suit the needs of the diverse consumer population in the local population. Finally, this research aims at closing the gap between the trends of global consumers and global reality, in order to point out the elegant aspects of globalization influencing consumption in urban Kathmandu.

Limitation of the Study

The study has limitations that include the fact that it only considered one ward in Kathmandu and hence the research cannot be generalized to other areas in Kathmandu and also the country. The 68 respondents used as a sample are not enough to represent the whole diversity in consumption patterns in the ward. Also, the surveys and interviews used to deliver data that is self-reported can have biases because a respondent will fail to accurately remember or report on their consumption behaviors. The seasonal changes in consumption also have not been considered in the study, and they may affect the buying patterns. Finally, the digital shopping environment is evolving at a very high pace, so the results in this regard can be out-of-date in the shortest period.

Methodology

The research was a mixed-method study because it involved both quantitative and qualitative information in order to have a broad view of the consumption patterns. The quantitative data was gathered by use of structured surveys of 68 respondents in Ward No. 16 of Kathmandu Metropolitan City. The information gathered from these surveys covered age groups, earnings, schooling, and cultural views - alongside how people shop online. Interviews were done deeply with some participants to uncover what drives their buying choices as well as their mindset around spending. Using both methods helped cross-check findings, leading to solid, layered insights.

Results

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	35	51.5
Female	33	48.5

Age		
18-25	18	26.5
26-35	25	36.8
36-45	15	22.1
46-55	7	10.3
56+	3	4.4
Education		
Primary	10	14.7
Secondary	20	29.4
Higher Secondary	25	36.8
Bachelor's	10	14.7
Master's	3	4.4

Field Survey 2024

Based on table1, the demographic portrait of the respondents showed a relatively equal proportion of gender with a slight majority of males (51.5%). The data of the age were skewed towards the younger population, with the highest number of 26-35 years (36.8%). There was a lack of focus in the educational background, with higher secondary education (36.8%). A significant number have earned the bachelors (14.7%).

Table 2: Income Levels and Consumption Patterns

Income Level (NPR/month)	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Predominant Consumption Pattern
Below 20,000	15	22.1	Basic necessities, local markets
20,001 - 40,000	25	36.8	Mix of local and branded goods
40,001 - 60,000	18	26.5	Branded goods, occasional luxuries
Above 60,000	10	14.7	Luxury items, frequent digital shopping

Field Survey 2024

Based on table 2, the levels of income were discovered to be a significant determining factor in the consumption pattern. The low-income respondents mostly bought simple amenities in the local markets. High-income earners had a taste in branded products and luxurious products and top income earned people were almost always involved in online shopping.

Table 3: Educational Background and Digital Shopping Trends

Education Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Engagement in Digital Shopping (%)
Primary	10	14.7	10
Secondary	20	29.4	25
Higher Secondary	25	36.8	60
Bachelor's	10	14.7	80
Master's	3	4.4	90

Field Survey 2024

Table 3 has shown a definite relationship between the level of education and the level of digital shopping. The people who have a higher education level were also more likely to shop online with 90 percent of individuals who had a master degree or higher degree mostly shopping online as opposed to the only 10 percent holding a primary school education.

Table 4: Cultural Practices and Consumption Behavior

Cultural Practices	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Influence on Consumption
Strong Traditional	20	29.4	High influence, local and festive
Moderate Traditional	30	44.1	Moderate influence, mix of goods
Low Traditional	18	26.5	Low influence, modern preferences

Field Survey 2024

Based on table 4, cultural practices had a great impact on consumption behaviors. Other respondents that had a high traditional influenced favored the traditional goods in their local and festive culture whereas those with low traditional influence inclined towards the modern and branded goods.

Discussion

This study findings provided an insight into the multidimensionality of the consumption patterns in the ward no. 16 of Kathmandu Metropolitan City and the remarkable roles of economic, educational, and cultural factors. The demographic data showed that the population is mostly young with equal gender distribution. This consumer segment indicates that there is a vibrant consumer market, which is receptive to the conventional and the modern modes of consumption. Economic reasons were found to be central in determining the consumption behaviors. The buying behavior of low-income respondents was mostly associated with buying simple things in the local markets, which depicted the purchasing power and concentration in the basic needs. Conversely, brand-loyal and luxurious objects and goods were much more common in the higher-income groups, and online shopping was practiced extensively. This agrees with the theory of Bourdieu (1984) which assumes that economic capital is a major determinant of consumer tastes and behaviors.

The most impressive correlation was between education level and online shopping. The more the education level, the higher the chance of the respondent to be involved in online shopping and those who had master degrees were the highest. This trend can be followed on the fact that more educated people are more digital and have access to technology. Similar conclusions were made by Ghimire (2017), who also discovered that more educated and younger residents of Kathmandu tend to resort to digital shopping due to the trends of the world and the development of technologies.

Consumption behaviors were also largely influenced by the culture. The strong traditional practices of respondents served to value the local and festive goods thus highlighting the role of the culture in consumption in urban Nepal. This observation confirms the fact that Douglas and Isherwood (1996) assert that consumption is a symbolic and cultural practice. On the other hand, individuals who had less traditional influences had modern consumption preferences, who preferred branded goods and electronic products. According to Shakya and Rankin (2008), this split is a representation of traditional and modern practices that coexisted in the Kathmandu urban consumer.

The increasing tendency towards online shopping, mostly among the younger age groups, reflects the wider global trends in the domestic consumption behavior. This shift has been enabled by the growing penetration and access to the internet and the existence of the e-commerce platforms as noted by the Nepal Telecommunications Authority (2020). The above trend is of great importance to policymakers and businesses because it shows a need to have strategies that would not only support the digital consumer market but also the many needs of the population.

Nevertheless, the research has also shown the difficulties related to this digital transition. This is due to the digital divide which is based on economic and educational differences that present an impediment to fair access to digital shopping. Respondents with lower income and low levels of education had less chances of using online shopping, which is why policy supporting digital inclusion and literacy should be implemented. This observation resembles the issues of Kshetri and Acharya (2012) about the poor distribution of e-commerce adoption in Nepal.

The findings of the study have a number of implications to the policymakers and business. To the policymakers, culturally sensitive marketing efforts should be formulated in recognition of the fact that Kathmandu has a diverse consumer base. This also involves facilitating digital literacy and inclusion in order to close the digital divide. In the case of businesses, particularly those in e-commerce field, the demographic and cultural factors that can affect consumer behavior can be used to develop a specific marketing strategy that will appeal to the local consumer market.

In short, this research findings show that money status, schooling level, along with traditions shape buying habits. The increased inclination to online shopping especially by younger more educated populations is symptomatic of the greater globalization on local consumption behavior. Nevertheless, the challenge of the digital divide is there, and it has to be overcome to make the digital shopping equal. The lessons learned in this paper provide a very useful piece of advice to policymakers and companies to formulate strategies that can accommodate the varied demands of the urban population in Kathmandu.

Conclusion

This study on shopping patterns in Kathmandu's Ward No. 16 reveals how urban living affects what people buy. Results suggest customs, learning level, along with income heavily influence choices - spending varies across age brackets or community backgrounds. People with lower incomes and limited schooling usually stick to basics, getting goods from local sellers instead. On the flip side, higher earners who've studied more tend to prefer branded or premium options, while also choosing online shops rather than brick-and-mortar outlets.

The study found that younger, more educated people are more likely to shop online - lines up with global trends as technology moves forward. But this change also brought attention to a current divide in availability, because lower-income individuals or those who didn't go far in school aren't joining e-commerce at the same rate. This outcome shows exactly why balanced policies on internet connectivity and fundamental tech know-how are key, making sure nobody's pushed aside when services go digital.

The outcome's crucial for bosses and businesses. Obviously, decision-makers should shape strategies based on real needs of people living in Kathmandu. Retail spots - particularly web-based stores - can expand reach by tying promotion tactics to age group, culture, and how folks shop.

This study boosts urban sociology by closely examining how worldwide shopping trends are influenced by neighborhood conditions. While focusing on places such as Kathmandu, it reveals how income, education, and cultural background interact to shape consumer choices. Rather than relying only on abstract ideas, the results offer practical understanding of city-based buying patterns.

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