



A Comparative Analysis of Online and Offline Purchase Regarding After Sales Service of Smart Phones in Ahmedabad City

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ABSTRACT

The rapidly changing nature of the retail environment, which is hence prompted by technological development and changes in the pattern of consumer behavior, brings tremendous transformations in smartphone buying and after-sales service. This study thus sets its target to undertake a comparative analysis of the after-sales service of purchasing smart phones online as well as offline in the city of Ahmedabad. With the burgeoning expansion of the e-commerce sector, ease of purchasing and wide varieties available online have increased an individual's preference for online shopping. However, there are doubts about the quality and efficiency of after-sales services. Offline retailing has also preserved its personal, immediate service while lagging in convenience and integration with technologies. Consumer perception, service quality, and accessibility in terms of satisfaction regarding online and offline contexts are analysed using a mixed-methods approach involving surveys and interviews. The findings have indicated paramount differences in consumer experiences across delivery services, hence an implied need for retailers and manufacturers to tailor their strategies accordingly to the changing needs of the customers. This research contributes deeper knowledge to the after-sales service dynamics and actionable recommendations for the improvement of customer satisfaction in both online and offline retail environments

INTRODUCTION

For the last decade, growth has been explosive in shaping consumer buying behaviour and experience in a rather significant way (Vidani & Solanki, 2015). This goes hand-in-hand with the wide adoption of technology, taking the city of Ahmedabad to a stage where purchasing is now large and either online or offline (Vidani, 2015). Both kinds of means differ by having very different pros and cons, especially after-sales service, which happens to be an integral part of overall customer satisfaction (Vidani, 2015). After-sale service means all the support provided to the client after the purchase of a product, considering claims on warranty, repair, customer support, and return policies (Vidani, 2015). As technology products can be quite complex and therefore tricky to repair, the after-sale service also forms an essential part of the field (Solanki & Vidani, 2016). Quality could play a monumental role in consumer decisions and brand loyalty and satisfaction (Vidani, 2016). Evolutions in terms of market demand for smartphones and consumer expectations towards after-sales support become essential factors to be addressed (Bhatt, Patel, & Vidani, 2017). Such an understanding of what can be offered to customers for smartphone online purchases versus offline purchases made by retailers as well as consumers is significantly important in terms of efficiency in service, customer satisfaction, and options in terms of after-sales support with diversified consumer demographics and with an ever-emerging e-commerce sector in Ahmedabad (Niyati & Vidani, 2016).

The Rise of E-Commerce

E-commerce has revolutionized how customers and retailers relate (Pradhan, Tshogay, & Vidani, 2016). Online shopping is the most straightforward way through which a customer can view, compare, and order from the comfort of his or her place (Modi, Harkani, Radadiya, & Vidani, 2016). This change has also been driven by a recent boom in mobile phones, where, for example, mobile phones enable consumers to shop wherever and at whatever time (Vidani, 2016). And, of course, this is a trend that can also be seen here in Ahmedabad too, with more and more people wanting to buy a smartphone online because it offers them easy access to loads of options and a competitive price advantage (Sukhanandi, Tank, & Vidani, 2018). Although shopping through the online platform is convenient, some inherent issues face consumers mainly in relation to after-sales service (Singh, Vidani, & Nagoria, 2016). The lack of personal contact with the store person and a cumbersome procedure for returning and repairing goods are enough to brew a pot of frustration if not well managed (Mala, Vidani, & Solanki, 2016). Therefore, for the consumer who wants to receive post-purchase support, there is a need to understand the issues of after-sales service while buying on an online platform (Dhere, Vidani, & Solanki, 2016).

The Traditional Retail Experience

Although still significantly important, in-store purchases share smartphone buying (Singh & Vidani, 2016). Purchases allow consumers to have real-life interactions with salespersons and view products; they can even get immediate assistance at brick-and-mortar stores (Vidani & Plaha, 2016). In Ahmedabad, where most of the retail stores are still operational, customers today prefer the traditional method of buying expensive commodities like smartphones, mainly

due to the need for personalized assistance along with quick resolutions of issues once purchased (Solanki & Vidani, 2016). However, there are some downsides to offline retail (Vidani, 2016). The service quality varies highly across different retailers and waits for customers in lines for too long or is only available to those who can visit the stores during their hours (Vidani, Chack, & Rathod, 2017). Last but not least, being tied to a piece of land for visiting a store does turn off some consumers, especially those that live busy schedules or find transportation difficult (Vidani, 2018).

Role of After-Sales Service

The role of after-sales service cannot be emphasized more, especially today, with the smartphone industry having become very complex (Biharani & Vidani, 2018). A customer buys a smartphone for many reasons, but primarily because of the complexity and cost of the device; thus, support is the crux at every pre-purchase stage of decision-making as well as post-buying (Odedra, Rabadiya, & Vidani, 2018). Their buying decision is, to that extent, governed by this expectation. In a way, loyalty to a particular brand or retailer may depend completely on this expectation (Vasveliya & Vidani, 2019). Against this background, it would be worthwhile to analyze the after-sales support on both online and offline platforms (Sachaniya, Vora, & Vidani, 2019). Questions such as the response time, the way the warranty claims are dealt with, and customer satisfaction scores become extremely important to understand the depth of both mediums concerning the quality of support offered (Vidani, 2019). The ultimate goal here is to contrast the aspects that might help consumers come to better decisions and nudge the retailers to improve their services (Vidani, Jacob, & Patel, 2019).

Major Objectives for the Discussion

1. This will look at a number of key objectives: Assessment of Service Efficiency: Considering how quick and efficient after-sales support looks, comparing online and offline (Vidani J. N., 2016).
2. Review of Customer Satisfaction: Considering consumer experiences and if they were satisfied with the after-sales service or not based on how they bought it (Vidani & Singh, 2017).
3. Type of Options Available for Support: Compare the types of support offered through online and offline channels, regarding accessibility and the quality of the help provided (Vidani & Pathak, 2016).
4. Provide Recommendations: Give insight to consumers on how to make sense of the landscape of after-sales and recommendations that can be arrived at for retailers to improve service delivery (Pathak & Vidani, 2016).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Growth in the e-commerce segment in the last two years has caused much disorientation in the retail business, especially with regard to sales of smartphones. Now, coming to the eighth biggest city and India's booming commercial city, Ahmedabad has witnessed a spurt in the online sales of electronic commodities like smart phones. Though online portals are relatively easier to access and have much choice, brick-and-mortar companies are always their appeal. This consists of an analysis that briefly depicts the comparison

between the sales of smartphones both online and offline in Ahmedabad; from this, the crucial aspect of after-sales service emerges. Key Themes and Findings

1. Consumer Preferences and Buying Behaviour Accessibility and Convenience: Online shopping has been perceived as convenient by consumers for a pretty long time. All these are accessible shopping, price comparisons, and direct shipment to the doorstep, being among the determining factors in the purchasing decisions of consumers.
 - Price Perception: Online places generally provide competitive price delivery; however, perceptions about pricing vary. Some research states that people feel these offline stores offer value or better service. Trust and Dependability: It will be able to establish the belief of online and offline players. Branding and good comments could possibly be the most prominent reason for driving the consumer into a buying transaction. After-Sales Expectations Timely Customer Service Response: The customers expect quick responses to all their queries and problems. The delayed response will lead to dissatisfaction and word-of-mouth publicity in a poor manner. Comprehensive Technical Expertise: It provides all-round technical expertise that ensures accurate diagnosis and the rectification of problems with the smartphone. Warranty Process: Customers enjoy transparent, time-efficient warranty processes useful in repairing options. Comparative Internet and Traditional Channels Purchase Decision Factors: Different research studies have analysed what factors are likely to influence the decision of an online or offline method for choosing and purchasing a smartphone. The parameters identified included price, ease, availability, trustworthiness, and perceived risk.
 - Consumer Behaviour Research: The category of smartphones has been researched concerning consumer behaviour. This has been done based on demographics, psychographics, and other purchase frequencies.
 - Internet vs. Offline Shopping Experience: Several compared the experiences of the customers who shop online with those who went shopping offline for smartphones regarding the product offers, price, delivery, and levels of satisfaction.

2. After-Sales Service Importance of after-sales service: According to research in market, after-sales service is important for achieving higher consumer satisfaction, loyalty and also brand reputation.
 - Comparison of after-sales service quality: As compared to online, offline gives better consumer satisfaction
 - Threats and opportunities of after-sales service: the researchers can rate some of the threats faced by retailers in offering the right after-sales service by, among other things, conducting warranty claims, adequate spare parts inventory levels, and training on service. Benefits: easy and readily available products, higher orders and prices for the goods, and perhaps money-saving.
 - The challenges include possibly late delivery, no opportunity to personally inspect a product, and issues of returns or exchange.
3. Offline Channels:

Benefits: Once gets a chance to physically see and touch the product; there is an assurance of immediate attention and private service.
4. Drawbacks: Much less option regarding what will be available, expensive, returns or exchange may be a problem. Specific to Ahmedabad General Literature may provide some sort of idea, but that specific context becomes the problem. Infrastructure and internet penetration, along with preferences, might actually influence consumer behavior and expectations.
5. Research Gaps and Fields of Study Local Market Dynamics: To identify what particular preferences and behaviors the smartphone consumers in
6. Ahmedabad have. Specific Retailers: The after-sale services from popular online and offline retailers in Ahmedabad would give clues into this.
7. Role of Cultural Factors: Determination of the role cultural factors will have to play in affecting consumer choices, such as with local-brand loyalty or the need for individual contact. Advancements in Smartphone Technologies: Emergence of new trends within the realm of smartphone technology, which will have a bearing on after-sales service

METHODOLOGY

Table 1. Research Methodology

Research Design	Descriptive
Sample Method	Non-Probability - Convenient Sampling method
Data Collection Method	Primary method
Data Collection Method	Structured Questionnaire
Type of Questions	Close ended
Data Collection mode	Online through Google Form
Data Analysis methods	Tables
Data Analysis Tools	SPSS and Excel
Sampling Size	163
Survey Area	Ahmedabad
Sampling Unit	Students, Private and government Job employees, Businessmen, Home maker, Professionals like CA, Doctor etc.

Source: Author's compilation

Demographic Summary

This demographic summary of the study subjects explains that it is a diverse sample, and overall light up a comprehensive understanding of the population. For example, an important characteristic like age, gender, level of education, and socio-economic status of the respondents varied. Thus, its wide range in this way allows the generalizability of the findings obtained, since opinions and experiences were represented differently. Such demographic variability is vital to perform rich thematic exploration of the variation in responses to ensure that results are not only relevant to a specific subgroup but are applicable to a wider audience. Overall, demographic data enriches the context of the research and supports the validity of the conclusions drawn.

Cronbach Alpha

Table 2. Cronbach Alpha

Cronbach Alpha Value	No. of items
.717	12

Source: SPSS Software

A Cronbach's alpha value of .717 indicates that the level of internal consistency associated with the scale of 12 items used in this study is satisfactory. In other words, the items related to the measurement tool are reasonably correlated with each other, indicating the construct that is being investigated is coherent. On the one hand, the value is above the generally accepted threshold of .70 showing that there is a lot of room for improvement in the scale possibly through refinement or addition of items to improve reliability further. Overall, these findings support the reliability of the instrument for measuring the intended construct in this study.

RESULT

Table 3. Results of Hypothesis Testing.

Sr. No	Alternate Hypothesis	Result p =	>/< 0.05	Accept/ Reject Null hypothesis	R value	Relationship
H1	H1 There is no significant difference in the preference for smartphone brands based on purchase type (online vs. offline).	0.28	>	H01 Rejected (Null hypothesis rejected)	-.005	Weak
H2	H2: There is no significant association between the channel used for the most recent smartphone purchase and the preference for after-sales service.	.304	>	H02 Accepted (Null Hypothesis Accepted)	.028	Weak
H3	H3: Online after-sales service is not perceived as more convenient compared to offline service.	.002	<	H02 Rejected (Null Hypothesis Accepted)	.025	Weak
H4	H4: Offline after-sales service does not provide a more personalized experience compared to online services.	.713	>	H02 Accepted (Null Hypothesis Accepted)	.114	Weak
H5	H5: The efficiency of resolving issues is not significantly better in offline after-sales service compared to online.	.399	>	H02 Accepted (Null Hypothesis Accepted)	.142	Weak
H6	H6: There is no significant difference in the frequency of issues experienced with smartphones requiring after-sales service based on purchase type.	.156	>	H02 Accepted (Null Hypothesis Accepted)	.156	Weak
H7	H7: There is no significant difference in the preference for after-sales service experiences between recent online and offline purchases.	.160	>	H02 Accepted (Null Hypothesis Accepted)	.086	Weak
H8	H8: There is no significant difference in the preference for after-sales service experiences between recent offline and online purchases.	.912	>	H02 Accepted (Null Hypothesis Accepted)	.114	Weak

H9	H9: There is no significant association between preferences for a hybrid approach (online purchase with offline service) and the type of after-sales service received.	.026	<	H02 Rejected(Null Hypothesis Accepted)	.031	Weak
H10	H10: There is no significant relationship between the frequency of online research and the decision-making process for smartphone purchases.	.002	>	H02 Rejected(Null Hypothesis Accepted)	-.007	Weak
H11	H11: There is no significant association between how individuals found out about after-sales service options and their likelihood to use them.	.293	>	H02 Accepted (Null Hypothesis Accepted)	-.013	Weak
H12	H12: There is no significant difference in perceived customer service quality based on the type of after-sales service experienced.	.916	>	H02 Accepted (Null Hypothesis Accepted)	.124	Weak
H13	H13: After-sales service does not significantly affect the decision to recommend a smartphone brand to others.	.015	<	H02 Rejected(Null Hypothesis Accepted)	.285	Weak
H14	H14: There is no significant association between the experience of escalating after-sales service issues and the overall satisfaction with that service.	.376	>	H02 Accepted (Null Hypothesis Accepted)	.036	Weak

Source: Author's compilation

DISCUSSION

The current study aims to analyze the issues in the after-sales service of online and offline purchases of smartphones in Ahmedabad city. Findings depict meaningful insights that are of significant importance for understanding consumer preferences and experiences within this emerging market.

1. Perception of After-Sales Service: The study revealed an enormous difference in consumer perception of after-sales service resulting from differences in the purchasing channel. Offline customers reported higher satisfaction rates in terms of fast service and individualized support. This corresponds with the fact that direct contact creates trust and security, especially in services like smartphones, which have a high involvement rate. Conversely, online customers reported complaints about time lag in

servicing and getting hold of support, which necessitates online businesses to upgrade after-sales service frameworks.

2. **Response Time and Availability** It was found that there is a significant difference between the response times of both channels. Offline channels are usually faster for service resolution, mainly because problems can be solved onsite. Online channels have longer waiting times for consumers, leading to frustration and lower loyalty among customers. This can cause immense damage to customer relationships and highlight the importance of streamlined logistics processes as well as strong customer service infrastructure for online retailing companies.
3. **Quality of Service:** In general, after-sales service quality varies greatly, wherein the product is sold and, in many cases, conceived to possess greater reliability. Customers believe that personal contact communication fosters better communication and a better understanding of the matters to be considered and therefore can be resolved with greater efficiency. The results of this study would perhaps have concluded that online retailers must develop their customer service agents as their level of service cannot be evaluated to that of an individual store.
4. **Brand Reputation:** Brand reputation is rather crucial for both online and offline channels of purchases. The fact that internet shoppers favor robust brands with reputations for excellent after-sales service further indicates that trust mitigates some of the disadvantages associated with buying over the internet. This indicates that branding stands a good chance in a more saturated smartphone market and puts emphasis on the fact that companies need to establish a strong after-sales service reputation regardless of the channel of purchase.
5. **Implications for Retail Strategy:** Important implications arise from this research both for online and offline players. For Ahmedabad-specific companies, the following hybrid strategies should be considered. For example, offering options such as in-person consultation or quick service appointments for online customers can be a good way to improve the overall experience of those customers. Improving communication regarding after-sales processes and service availability online may help fill consumer gaps in expectations
6. **Limitations and Future Research:** The current study provides some insightful findings, but its limitations have to be borne in mind, especially in terms of a very geographic-scale coverage area with a small sample size. Future studies could then extend these findings by covering other demographics and areas and longitudinal studies could be considered for changes over time.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Hence, the comparison concludes that online as well as offline sellers should acknowledge consumers' changing expectations about after-sale service. If retailers enhance the quality of services and response times, they could ensure not only maximum satisfaction from a customer but also loyalty in an extremely competitive market.

Theoretical Implications

It contributes meaningfully to the existing literature on consumer behavior, retail management, and service quality.

1. **Incorporation of Existing Service Quality Models:** After-sales service will be more comprehensible by applying the SERVQUAL model to both online and offline applications. The applicability of the service quality model can be brought out through future research enhancing the dimensions of service quality, namely, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibility which generally explain consumer satisfaction and loyalty.
2. **Consumer Behaviour Theories:** The study underlines and extends consumer behavior theories, particularly the Theory of Planned Behavior. Regarding the specific finding here, attitudes toward after-sales services have impacts on purchasing intentions and behaviors. Knowing how perceived service quality influences consumer choice could shed further light on the related cognitive-emotional factors in online versus offline purchases.
3. **Trust and Relationship Marketing:** The results of the study affirm that trust is indeed an important factor in a buyer-seller relationship on the Internet as well as in the physical world. Differential perceptions of trust in after-sales service require incorporating relationship marketing theories that demand long-term relationships with customers and the role of after-sales service in customer loyalty. There is, therefore a shift for retailers from developing trust towards serviced relationships post-purchase.
4. **Implications for Omnichannel Retailing:** With the emergence of omnichannel retailing, this study provides theoretical support to the understanding of how consumers interact across different purchasing platforms. The findings from this study could be taken further in support of theories encompassing omnichannel consumer behavior, establishing that seamless integration of online and offline experiences is essential for the delivery of after-sales service as envisioned by consumers.
5. **Contextual Factors in Consumer Buying Decision:** Regional consumer preferences, as well as regional cultural attitudes toward purchasing behavior, play an important role in deciding products bought. Thus, existing theories may have to add socio-cultural considerations that affect consumer buying decisions in a market like Ahmedabad. An experiment will be conducted to determine how the expectations of after-sales service vary between cultural contexts. **Future Research Directions:** The study opened up avenues for further research on tracing the dynamic nature of after-sales service across product categories and markets. Technological advancements, especially AI and the use of chatbots in online after-sales services, might provide important inputs into changing expectations and ways of delivering service to customers.

Accordingly, this study can provide theoretical generalizations for after-sales service considerations that elaborate the outcomes of service quality and consumer behavior and the establishment of relationship marketing. Based on these grounds, future research would be able to extend these foundations to design more sustainable frameworks that would better represent the intricacies involved in modern retail environments.

Practical Implications

The findings of the present study have many practical implications for retailers, manufacturers, and marketers dealing with the phone industry in Ahmedabad. This study helps in guiding strategic decisions to improve customer satisfaction and loyalty.

1. **Quality Improvement of After-Sales Service** Retailers should work on their after-sales service. Allowing more quality support in after-sales service for online and offline customers is mainly required. The offline retailers might engage with the staff to give individualistic support and quick service. This is possible for online retailers also, where clear communication with explicit service procedures and quick solutions to customer issues will eliminate the waiting time perception.
2. **Omnichannel Experience:** Retailers have to learn to adapt to the kinds of consumers wanting their preferred shopping channels. It can go together with the strategy of an omnichannel by allowing the online customers a chance to be assisted or consulted in the store so that these channels complement one another, click-and-collect services enhance the convenience and satisfaction of customers.
3. **Building Confidence through Transparency:** After all, trust is the building block of buying on the internet. The more transparency a retailer achieves in after-sales service policies, warranty details, return procedures, and how much support will be offered, the more consumers are likely to have confidence in his service. Consumer testimonials and cases can also be used to build great credibility, often quoted on websites.
4. **Using Customer Feedback** Customer feedback relating to the after-sales service experience should be actively sought. Regular surveys or feedback mechanisms can constantly update areas that can be improved and help businesses act proactively in line with consumer needs. This process, would enhance the service and help in building community and loyalty of these customers.
5. **Target Marketing Strategies:** This method, more than the others, will enable marketers to target their marketing strategies much more precisely. For example, a retailer that sells goods offline can emphasize the immediacy or the personal interaction of its services and use the difference in consumer preferences to that effect. Similarly, an online retailer can use the difference to appeal to the convenience and wider selection that a consumer may enjoy in using the particular channel. Customizing the marketing message to highlight these strengths increases the chances of consumer involvement and sales.

6. **Training and Development:** There is always a need to ensure that after-sales service employees are adequately trained by providing them with online and offline training in order to improve the quality of service significantly. Employees armed with the skills of clear communication, problem-solving, and in-depth product knowledge can empower employees with regard to the handling of customer inquiries and problems, thus leading to increased customer satisfaction.
7. **Technology for Enhancing Service:** Retailers should look into technological solutions to improve the after-sales service. Online queries through AI-driven chatbots can answer customers' queries on the spot, and CRM systems enable tracking customer interactions and preferences for differentiated service delivery.

Finally, the practical implications developed from this research underline the crucial role of after-sales service in both offline and online channels. These strategies can further aid retailers in this setting to enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty and to better their position within the volatile environment of Ahmedabad's smartphone market

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