

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION, OBJECTIVE, SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

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The chapter outlines relevant theoretical concepts in shopping, internet shopping, service quality and electronic service quality. It also gives an overview of the extant literature in these areas. It establishes the criticality of e-service quality (e-SQ) in online shopping. While building up to the research gap, it finally mentions the Objectives, Scope and Limitations of the study.

1.1 Shopping:

Shopping is an age-old activity performed by mankind. Its origin can be traced back to many centuries ago when barter transactions were the norm of business. But it is the late nineteenth century to early twentieth century which saw expansion of this activity primarily because of the growth in the economy coupled with developments in public transport and new forms of mass production (Woodruffe-Burton *et al.* 257). Simultaneously, the domain of shopping saw a spurt of growth in the literature especially regarding the consumer aspects of it (e.g. Holton 53-56, Rich and Jain 41-49, Tauber 46-49, Prus and Dawson 145-64, Woodruffe-Burton *et al.* 256-66). The report of the definitions committee, Journal of Marketing (1948), while differentiating shopping goods from convenience goods, defines it as those consumers' goods which the customer in the process of selection and purchase characteristically compares on such bases as suitability, quality, price, and style (qtd. in Bucklin 50). But in reality, some items which are shopping goods for some consumers may be convenience goods for others (Holton 53). It is, therefore, important to look from the perspective of an individual customer while distinguishing them. Hence, in this context, it would be prudent to define shopping as a set of activities in which consumers seek and obtain information about products and/or

services, conduct a transaction transferring ownership or right to use, and spatially relocate the product or service to the new owner (Nagurney *et al.* 784).

If one searches for the rationales for shopping, an obvious reason is the need for purchasing something. However, such an assertion reflects a marketing myopia (Tauber 46), something that would underline the production concept of marketing orientations (Kotler and Armstrong 12). In an essay written in 1972, Edward M Tauber (47-48) while searching for the reasons of shopping, suggested that people try to fulfill various motives by indulging in shopping: be it *Personal* (role playing, diversion from routine work, self-gratification, learning about new trends, physical activity, sensory stimulation *etc.*) or *Social* (communication with others having similar interest, peer group attraction, status and authority, bargaining pleasure) or *Impulsive* motives. Further, there have been attempts to look at shopping both as a recreational as well as a laborious activity (Prus and Dawson 145-64). Recreational orientations encompass notions of shopping as interesting, enjoyable, entertaining and leisurely activity. In more extreme instances, recreational shopping denotes favorite, exciting, and fascinating involvements. On the other hand, the concept of shopping as laborious activity or work subsumes images of ambiguous, unavoidable, and boring activity. In its more pronounced variants, this signifies forced, rushed, frustrating, wearying, and demeaning shopping experiences (Prus and Dawson 149).

Traditionally shopping requires the shopper to have an encounter with the marketer / seller at a physical place. Be it in the case of the *kirana* shop of our own locality, the old ration shop or the modern day specialty stores, shopping malls, convenience stores, the customer needs to visit the physical marketplace and shop for their requirements. For making a physical visit to the market for shopping requires lot of time and effort. This probably resulted in some people viewing shopping as a work and laborious activity. But for a shopper who doesn't want to visit the physical marketplace, there are opportunities to indulge in distant shopping or in-home shopping via modes like the age old catalogue shopping and teleshopping and the

newly emerging online or internet shopping. There are many advantages for distant shoppers or in-home shoppers. Darian (164) suggested five types of convenience that distant shopping offers: reduction in shopping time, timing flexibility, saving of physical effort, saving of aggravation and the opportunity to engage in impulse buying or directly responding to an advertisement (qtd. in Kau *et al.* 140).

In 1970, Gillett (41) identified three basic sources of in-home or distant shopping: the large general merchandise catalogue houses; stores offering telephone shopping; and firms other than general merchandise catalogue houses selling primarily long distance by mail. Even to this date, such modes of in-home shopping exist in the marketplace. For example, many publication houses produce books and journal catalogues and send them to academic institutions and libraries. A lot of television commercials run where products are sold via teleshopping. But gradually, technological advancements have changed the way we do many things including shopping. The invention of the internet and its penetration among the world population presented another way of how shopping could be done from home in a still more convenient way. It was late into the last decade of the twentieth century that people began to search for products and service over the internet and make transactions online. Thus, a new and significant method of in-home shopping was born: Online Shopping.

While the traditional distant shopping modes are fairly established in non-store retailing formats, Rowley (27) had suggested the apparent possibility of teleshoppers turning into online shoppers. That the possibility of internet shopping displacing the catalogue shopping due to its perceived advantages over traditional distant shopping modes was suggested over a decade ago (Jones and Vijayasarathy 323). Nagurney *et al* (783) highlighted the phenomenal increase in the internet-based shopping over other distant shopping modes. The emergent developments in the realms of internet shopping (Dholakia and Uusitalo 459) are so noteworthy that in the passage of time, online shopping got interchangeably used with distant shopping. In

internet based marketing today, the practice has been such that every relevant term is prefixed with “e”, be it e-commerce, e-transaction, e-shopping or e-retailing / e-tailing. In future, if the recent development is of any indication, it is believed that the “e” would drop from electronic business, making it just part of the way things are done. This means that e-business is just business, and e-shopping is just shopping (Strauss and Frost 11).

1.2 Online Shopping:

1.2.1 The Power of Internet in Shopping:

The Internet has transformed many aspects of life, but perhaps none more so than how people shop for goods and services. While it’s still nice to stop by a store to touch and see products, the convenience of online shopping can’t be beaten (Global Trends in Online Shopping). For the consumer, the internet can help to facilitate communication, controlled search option for products and services, compare options for shopping and receive instant gratification for intangible goods and services (e.g. software) (Jones and Vijayasarathy 322). Transaction costs for the consumer are also reduced as the internet provides direct access to multiple options and eliminates time and space barriers (Aldridge *et al.* 164). From a business perspective, the internet can help firms achieve operational efficiencies by shrinking the distribution channel apart from creating new markets.

The internet, with its minimal access barrier has torpedoed many disadvantages that traditional modes of shopping have. Internet shopping has the potential to challenge the structure of the marketplace. The internet allows easy and low-cost entry to new entrants to a marketplace and has a faster return on investment. Some of the advantages of internet retailing (Timmers 7, Strauss and Frost 13-14, Rowley 30) are enlisted below:

1. Small businesses can extend their reach.
2. Eliminates prohibitive costs of entry to many industries.
3. Hardware and software advances permit improved interfaces and functionality.
4. Online information is current and available 24/7.
5. Market segments can be targeted more effectively.
6. Eliminates cost associated with the store, salespeople and possibly some warehousing cost.
7. Much more extensive advertising coverage can be achieved for a relatively small outlay.

Whilst the above advantages are looked into from the enterprise's point of view, it is the convenience which is the primary appeal for online shopping from the shoppers' point of view (Nielsen Global Online Survey). Shortage of time is a big driver of online shopping in big metros. On the other hand, accessibility to a variety of products makes audiences from smaller towns and cities opt for the online route (Choudhury). Virtual problem solving while providing customer support also reduces customer disadvantages. Stored answers like FAQs – the frequently asked questions as well as the practice of customers helping each other via online community tools add to the convenience of shoppers online (Hanson 156-57). For some services such as booking travel or buying concert tickets, the ability to do so online has made the process much easier and more efficient (Global Trends in Online Shopping).

Online shopping is an example of technology opening up windows of opportunities. Internet is maturing even in developing nations. High adoption rates, heavy web and e-mail use are commonplace. An important norm is the increasing use of user generated media like social media. Therefore, it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that online shopping is the latest in-thing to do. As the traditional physical marketplace is challenged by a virtual marketplace, where the content of a transaction is information about goods or services instead of the goods or services themselves,

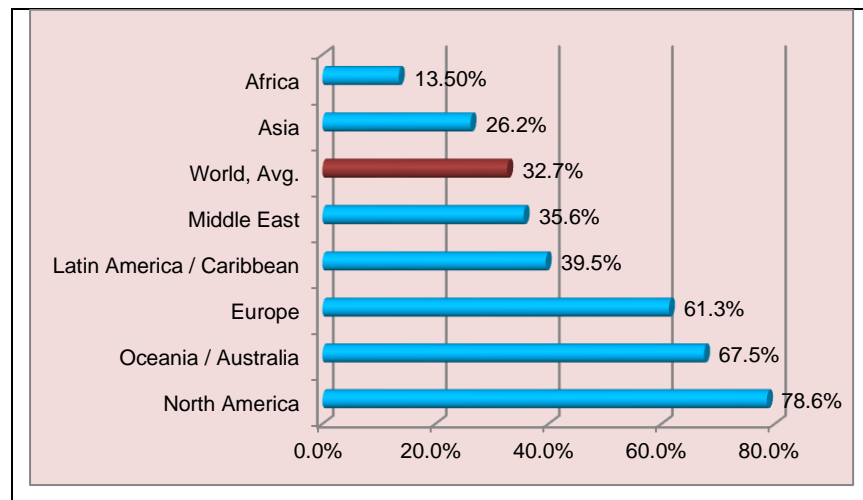
the context of a transaction is electronic, on-screen interactions instead of face-to-face interactions (Gronroos *et al.* 243). Such explosive growth witnessed by internet commerce in consumer goods and services market has necessitated businesses to try attaining a competitive advantage by using e-commerce as mode of interaction with customers (Lee and Lin 161). Internet-only companies have surfaced in many industries while the internet has been employed by lot of other companies to furnish their online services. The internet has been an effective device for the maintenance of superior service offerings and higher standards in retailing by providing customers rapid and convenient completion of the whole procurement transaction cycle (Yang *et al.* 685).

1.2.2 Global Internet Penetration:

The phenomenon called internet is more than four decades old. Commissioned by U.S. Department of Defense’s Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA), it was started as ARPANET in 1969. It was primarily meant for academic and military use. The tipping point occurred when the first web pages and internet browsers appeared in 1993.

Then on, it grew at a pace which was quicker than any other previous media like radio, television *etc.* had grown (Strauss and Frost 10). It is pertinent

Fig 1.1: World Internet Penetration Rates by Geographic Regions- 2011



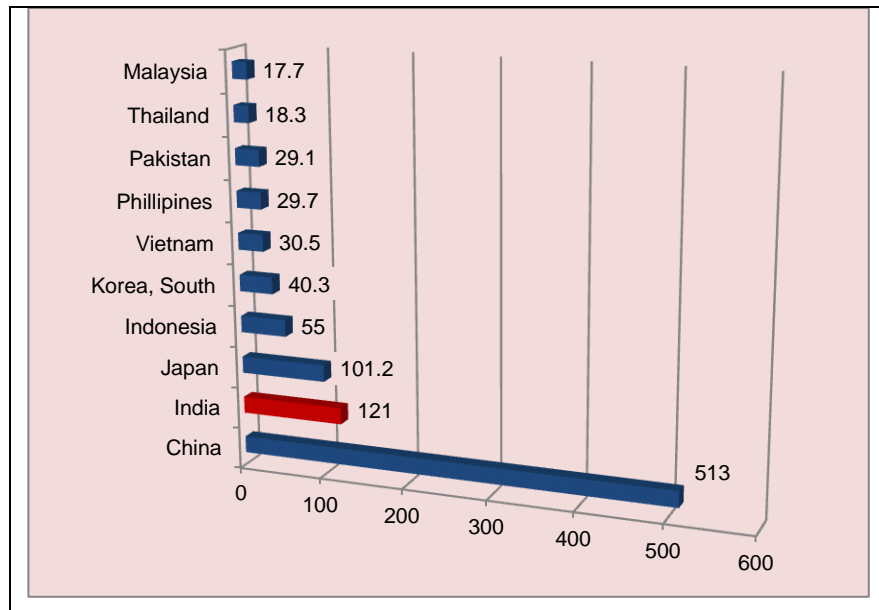
(Source: *internetworldstats.com*)

to note here that at the heart of the growth of online shopping lies the penetration of internet amongst the world population. In 2004, 16% of the world population used the

internet. The usage rate grew up to 19% in 2007. As on 31st December, 2011, internet penetration stands at 32.7% of world population (World Internet Penetration Rates), translating into approximately 2.27 billion people which is a large number throwing numerous opportunities for online marketers. The penetration of internet is highest in North America (78.6% of total population) followed by Oceania / Australia (67.5%) and Europe (61.3%). Quite expectedly, Africa with 13.5% has the lowest internet penetration in the World.

In case of Asia, even though the internet penetration is lower than the world level (Fig. 1.1), the absolute number, which is more than a billion, is significant (44.8% of total internet using world population). The top Asian countries in terms of number of internet users

Fig 1.2: Asia Top Internet Countries December 31, 2011 (figures in millions)



(Source: *internetworldstats.com*)

list China at number one with 513 million users (Fig 1.2). India is a distant second with 121 million users followed by Japan (101.2 million) and Indonesia (55 million) at third and fourth place (Asia Top Internet Countries). China and India, world two leading emerging economies, together account for 634 million internet users in the world which is almost 28% of the total world internet using population. It holds tremendous strategic importance for modern day marketers.

Internet users world over were predicted to cross 3.5 billion in number by the end of 2013. It is, therefore, no surprise that Forrester Research predicts a 10-11% growth for online retailing in the US and European markets until the year 2018. Considering the economic recession in those regions, this is an interesting prediction to note. In fact, the United States remains the world's single biggest e-commerce market followed by the United Kingdom and Japan (Montaqim). Amongst the developing economies, China has the highest growth potential in this sphere (Annesley).

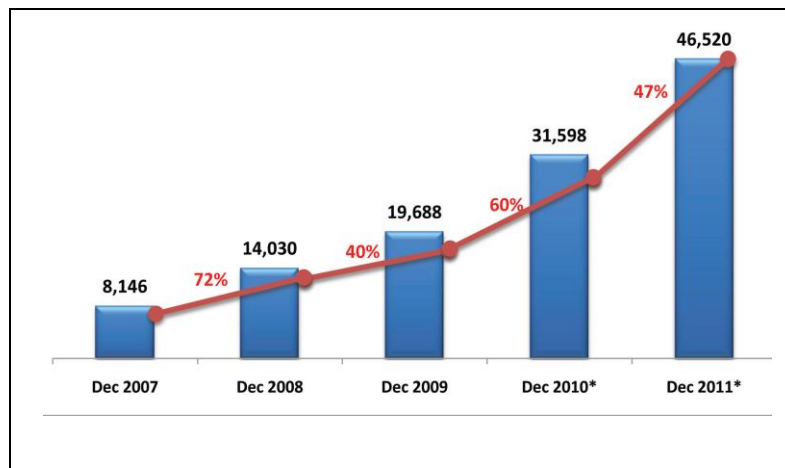
In the meantime, the internet penetration figures for the world as a whole and Asia progressed to 42.3% and 34.7% of the population by the end of mid-2014 (Internet Users in Asia-2014).

1.3 Highlights of the Indian Online Story:

A decade ago, the internet commerce in India wasn't much worth writing about. The adoption and usage of E-Commerce in the country is a function of the overall environment for internet usage in a country (Consumer E-Commerce Market). Even though internet penetration in India, as on December 2011 stands at 10.2% of the population, which is far below the world level 32.7%, the absolute number roughly translates into about 121 million internet users. This figure increased by more than

Fig 1.3: E-commerce Market Growth in India.

Figures in Rs. Crores; *projected



(Source: Digital Commerce, March 2011 (IAMAI))

two-fold at the end of mid 2014 (Internet Users in Asia-2014). With about 50% of this are active internet users, it presents a huge challenge as well as an opportunity at the same time. The internet commerce growth in India over the last few years is a testimony to this. From an INR 8,146 crore industry in 2007 to INR 19,688 crore in 2009, the e-commerce industry was projected to have reached INR 46,520 crore (Fig 1.3) at the end of 2011 (Digital Commerce), largely fuelled by the online travel / ticket industry with about 76% share. This figure almost doubled to INR 81,525 crore by the end of 2014 (Ghosh). For retailers in India, online shopping is gaining recognition as it entails many benefits for them like: absence of any real estate costs, enhanced customer service, mass customization, global reach, niche marketing and specialized stores (Namazi).

The internet penetration figures by the end of mid-2014, stood at 19.7% for India (Internet Users in Asia-2014). By another estimate, every one out of two urban Indian is a computer literate (Internet in India 2013). The rate at which the Indian online market has grown is very impressive. It has largely been facilitated by the path breaking developments in the realms of Information and Communication Technologies represented mainly by the Internet and secure payment gateways.

It is also pertinent to note the reasons behind such phenomenal growth of e-commerce in India. Saving time and effort and convenience ranks among the top two reasons (Table 1.1) why Indians

Table 1.1: Top 6 Reasons given by Shoppers in Buying through Internet	Rank
Saves time and efforts	1
Convenience of shopping at home	2
Wide variety/range of products	3
Good discounts / lower prices	4
Get detailed information of the product	5
Comparing various models/brands	6

(Source: IAMA 2007)

are shopping online. It is significant to note here that barring Rank 4 (relating to discounts and low price), all other triggers of online shopping are non-price related factors. Among the barriers of online shopping, apprehension regarding security of online transactions is one of primary deterrent in the growth of this industry (Consumer E-Commerce Market). Indian online commerce industry has seen progress

in this front with the emergence of more secure payment gateways. Moreover the emergence of Cash on Delivery (CoD) scheme is expected to address transaction concerns to a large extent.

The Internet & Mobile Association of India study of 2007 categorized the Indian e-commerce industry into two broad areas of Online Travel Industry and Online Non-travel Industry with both the categories having unique features and challenges. The key drivers steering the growth of online travel industry has been factors like India's impressive economic growth, increase in the number of internet users, appearance of low-cost airlines, improvement in payment mechanisms and people putting convenience as their priority. Among its barriers, limited inventory and poor enabling infrastructure like low number of personal computer households, broadband connection *etc.* reigns supreme. On the other hand, the Online Non-travel Industry primarily consists of e-tailing (i.e. retailing on the web), digital downloads, classifieds and paid content subscriptions. The e-tailing, which is the major component of online non-travel industry, has been bolstered by factors like the increase in the number of sellers and buyers online, convenience and better bargains, while the lack of touch-feel-try experience and the delivery time acts as roadblocks (Consumer E-Commerce Market).

In another study by Mathur in 2011, regarding the state of e-commerce industry in India, the industry was divided into twenty one broad verticals. The top four verticals include (a) travel, (b) books / electronics / DVDs, (c) apparels and (d) deals. The rest include gifts, cakes, custom memorabilia, sweets and bakery items, artwork auction, baby care, movie ticket booking, airlines portals, horizontal players, movie rentals, footwear, jewellery, lingerie, sports, health, fitness, beauty, wellness, perfumes, groceries, vegetables and fruits.

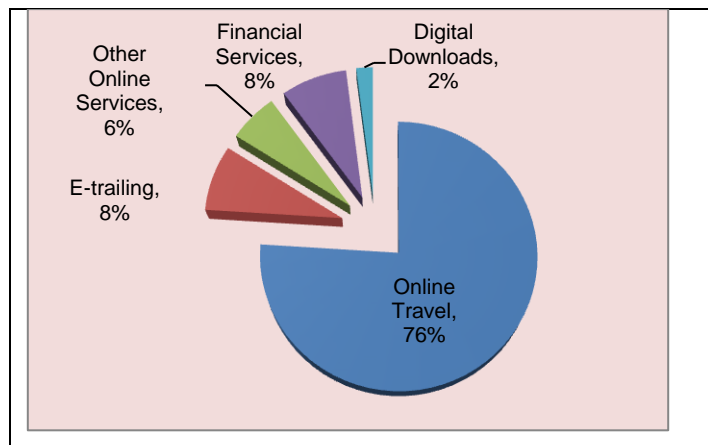
On a world scale, it has been seen that Books are the most popular online purchases. A Nielsen study of 2007 listed the following as the top five most popular online purchases (Nielsen Global Online Survey):

- (a) Books,
- (b) Clothing / accessories,
- (c) Videos / games,
- (d) Airline tickets / reservations,
- (e) Electronic equipments

Three years later, a similar Nielsen study (Global Trends in Online Shopping) puts (a) Books at the top again followed by (b) Clothing / accessories, (c) Airline tickets / reservations, (d) Electronic equipments and (e) Tours / hotel reservations.

In Indian e-commerce market, three-fourth of the market share pie is captured by online travel (tickets / reservations) industry (Fig 1.4). E-tailing that comprises books, personal items, electronic durables, cameras, gifts *etc.* account for only 8% of total market share in 2009. The share of online travel in the Indian digital market pie still remains at around two-third at the end of 2014 (Ghosh). Online transactions for financial services, insurance *etc.* occupies the next spot in the market share pie. Therefore, it can be safely inferred here that, in the

Fig 1.4: Components of e-Commerce Market in India, 2009



(Source: Digital Commerce, March 2011 (IAMA))

global perspective, e-tailing (books, clothing / accessories *etc.*) is the chief mover of internet commerce while in the Indian context online ticket / reservations lead the growth. Overall it can be said that the online shopping basket in India differs from what its global counterpart has.

1.4 Managerial and Theoretical Foundations of the Study:

1.4.1 Issues Beyond the Obvious:

Online shopping, whether it is in the global or the Indian context, has seen remarkable growth, be in terms of revenue or entry into new markets or the variety of products and services bought online. Growth of online retailers has made internet the new shopping battleground (Zeiler). As a result, slowly but steadily, the power has shifted from sellers to the buyers in e-marketing today (Strauss and Frost 13). Both individual and business buyers are more demanding than ever because they are just one click away from a plethora of global competitors.

As price related strategies can only facilitate entry into the market, it may not be sustainable in the long run because they are easily imitated by competitors. Therefore, it is important to introspect into other facets of online shopping like customer orientation, supply chain network and delivery channels (Mathur). Improvement in the supply chain is a vital aspect to keep track with the sky-rocketing growth of the online market. Even though order taking and payment fulfillment is done online, ultimately the product has to be delivered physically. For internet-only companies, here comes the challenge of distribution. As price doesn't rule the web but trust does (Reichheld and Schefter 106), improvement in payment mechanisms and features that reinforces trust also holds prominence.

It is the thrust of modern marketing to build a long term profitable customer relationship. Relationship marketing strategies aims at converting prospects into customers, customers into client and the ultimate goal is to create advocates through

building and maintaining relationship with the customers (Buttle 244). Advocates of an online marketer shall be the most e-loyal and will spread good word of mouth (Srinivasan *et al.* 47) about the online marketer which is very important as a source of brand image building. Word of mouth holds prominence in the realms of e-commerce (Reichheld and Schefter 106) as there are attributes in the whole process which are technical in nature and therefore, the prospective shopper would search for independent evaluations/reviews before taking the buying decision. This will be possible when there is sufficient investment in improving the quality of the shopping experience online.

As large numbers of e-commerce companies are chasing the same customers, some are bound to move ahead of others in the marketplace. The key determinants of success or failure in the realms of internet shopping are, therefore, not merely website presence and low price but also electronic service quality (Yang *et.al.* 685, Parasuraman *et al.* 1). In Indian online shopping context also, it is seen that non-price related triggers are more vital (refer back to Table 1.1) for growth of this mode of in-home shopping. Hence, the criticality of internet retailing in facilitating non-price competitive advantages emanating from superior service quality cannot be undermined. Thus it has become important to know the quality preferences of the online shoppers – the quality parameter where a shopper depends more and where less. Besides, the profile of such shoppers would be vital to learn – the kind of shopper who depends more on a particular quality dimension and the one who depends less on that particular dimension.

1.4.2 Service Quality:

Early scholarly writings on Service Quality (qtd. in Parasuraman *et al.* 2) suggested that Service Quality stems from a comparison of what customers feel a company should offer (i.e. Expectations) with the company's actual service performance (qtd. in Parasuraman *et al.* 42). The concept of Service Quality was

extensively studied for the first time by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry in 1988. They conducted empirical studies in several industry sectors to develop and refine SERVQUAL (qtd. in Parasuraman *et al.* 2), a multiple item instrument to quantify customers' global assessment of a company's service quality (SQ). The SERVQUAL model developed by them has found wide use in measuring customer perceptions of service quality. The initial model contained the following five dimensions (Parasuraman and Grewal 169):

1. *Reliability*: Ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately.
2. *Responsiveness*: Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service.
3. *Assurance*: Knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence.
4. *Empathy*: Caring, individualized attention the firm provides its customers.
5. *Tangibles*: Appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication materials.

In 1994, the number of items in this Model was revised to 21 (qtd. in Seth *et al.* 918) under the five original dimensions.

Quality in internet retailing is conceptually similar to conventional service quality (Gronroos *et al.* 245). Like conventional service quality, internet retailing quality is understood to be a multi-dimensional construct that incorporates the functional aspects of the service process as well as the technical aspects of the service outcome (Gronroos *et al.* 245, Collier and Bienstock 261). The SERVQUAL model has been used by different researchers to study service quality in internet shopping by slightly rewording the scale items. One such endeavor was made by Gefen (27-51) in 2002, where he tried to fit SERVQUAL into an electronic setting. The original dimensions were reduced to three for online service quality: (a) tangibles; (b) a combined dimension of responsiveness, reliability and assurance; (c) empathy. But to

achieve this, items had to be changed into the electronic context. However, it has become increasingly evident that methods of measuring service quality in electronic setting should be significantly different from physical marketplace services (Parasuraman *et al.* 3), because customer perceptions of e-services may not necessarily be same as that of traditional services. The dominance of people-delivered services in using SERVQUAL is a testimony to this. This resulted in many researchers working in the domain of service quality in an electronic setting.

1.4.3 Electronic Service Quality (e-SQ):

Electronic Service Quality (eSQ) has found research attention in the works of Loiacono *et al.* (in the year 2000), who developed the WebQual – a scale for rating Websites on 12 dimensions: informational fit to task, interaction, trust, response time, design, intuitiveness, visual appeal, innovativeness, flow-emotional appeal, integrated communication, business processes, and substitutability (Loiacono *et al.* 3). This scale was evolved after seeking opinion of students who visited websites (Loiacono *et al.* 21) and is primarily focused for utility towards website designers only (Parasuraman *et al.* 4). Similarly, Yoo and Donthu (31-46) in 2001 developed a scale SITEQUAL for measuring perceived quality of an online shopping site with nine factors: competitive value, clarity of ordering, corporate and brand equity, product uniqueness, product quality assurance, ease of use, aesthetic design, processing speed and security (Yoo and Donthu 35). This scale was developed from students' perceptions with samples drawn via convenience sampling (Yoo and Donthu 33). In 2002, Barnes and Vidgen developed another scale to measure an organization's e-commerce offering which they explained with five factors: usability, design, information, trust and empathy (qtd. in Parasuraman *et al.* 4). Again, this scale has received criticism for its utility towards website developers only. The same year saw Madu and Madu putting forward a synthesis of 15 dimensions for assessing the quality of virtual service or operation. They are: performance, features, structures, aesthetics, reliability, storage capability, serviceability, security and system integrity,

trust, responsiveness, product/service differentiation and customization, web store policies, reputation, assurance and empathy (Madu and Madu 250-53). Even though this work presents a long list of dimensions, it applies to virtual operations where transactions are made online.

The unique capabilities of an online medium of shopping in providing interactivity, personalized experiences, community, content, increased product selection and information suggest that the traditional concepts of service and retailing quality would be inadequate in an online context (Wolfenbarger and Gilly 183). They further underlined the importance of developing a complete conceptual framework for defining and measuring online retail quality (eTailQ) from the beginning to the end of the transaction, including information search, website navigation, ordering, customer service interactions, delivery and satisfaction with the ordered product. The eTailQ model developed by them contains 14 items under four factors to measure online retail quality (Wolfenbarger and Gilly 193).

The four factors were defined as follows:

1. *Fulfillment/Reliability* is (a) the accurate display and description of a product so that what customers receive is what they thought they ordered, and (b) delivery of the right product within the time frame promised.
2. *Website Design* includes all elements of the customer's experience at the website (except for customer service), including navigation, information search, order processing, appropriate personalization and product selection.
3. *Customer Service* is responsive, helpful, willing service that responds to customers inquiries quickly.
4. *Security/Privacy* is security of credit card payments and privacy of shared information.

Jessica Santos proposed another model of e-service quality in 2003. Using a focused group study in UK, this model proposed that e-service quality consists of an incubative dimension and an active dimension using time – before and after a website is launched, as the criterion for separating the dimensions (Santos 238). The incubative dimensions include items like content, structure & layout, linkage, appearance and ease of use while the active dimensions consists of items like incentive, security, communication, support, efficiency and reliability (Santos 239). But this model fails to provide any specific measurement scale and also suffers from lack of any statistical analysis (Seth *et al.* 938). In the same year (i.e. 2003) Yang, Peterson and Cai identified 14 dimensions of service quality in internet retailing through an exploratory study. Of these 14 service quality dimensions, the eight most frequently mentioned quality dimensions constitute almost 90% of all mentions (Yang *et al.* 690). They are responsiveness (30% of all mentions); credibility (16%); ease of use (12.4%); reliability (11.4%); convenience (6.1%); communication (5.2%); access (4.6%); and competence (3.9%). The minor mentions consist of dimensions like courtesy, personalization, continuous improvement, collaboration, security/privacy and aesthetics (Yang *et al.* 691-92). It is important to note here that, security concerns form one of the least important service quality dimensions in this model. This is in contrast to what it is in Indian online shopping context (Consumer E-commerce Market).

In the year 2000, a Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Malhotra's study had identified a dozen of website features at the perceptual-attribute level and categorized them into 11 e-SQ dimensions: Reliability; Responsiveness; Access; Flexibility; Ease of navigation; Efficiency; Assurance/trust; Security/privacy; Price knowledge; Site aesthetics; and Customization/personalization (qtd. in Parasuraman *et al.* 6-7). Based on the items of the previous study, Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Malhotra, in 2005, redefined Electronic Service Quality (e-SQ) as the extent to which a Website facilitates efficient and effective shopping, purchasing, and delivery. They developed

the E-S-QUAL scale containing 22 items on four dimensions (Parasuraman *et al.* 8) defined below:

1. *Efficiency*: The ease and speed of accessing and using the site.
2. *Fulfillment*: The extent to which the site's promises about order delivery and item availability are fulfilled.
3. *System availability*: The correct technical functioning of the site.
4. *Privacy*: The degree to which the site is safe and protects customer information.

The study further went on to postulate an e-recovery service quality scale (E-RecSQUAL) for measuring the quality of recovery service provided by websites (Parasuraman *et al.* 8). It had 11 items on three dimensions:

1. *Responsiveness*: Effective handling of problems and returns through the site.
2. *Compensation*: The degree to which the site compensates customer for problems.
3. *Contact*: The availability of assistance through telephone or online representatives.

While earlier researches on e-service quality have primarily focused on the interaction of the consumer and the website, they seem to miss the big picture that e-service quality is composed of more than website interactivity (Collier and Bienstock 260). They have criticized the E-S-QUAL model as being inadequate in capturing all the unique dynamics that take place at the outcome of a service when the buyer and seller are separate as it happens in online shopping. Numerous dimensions may be necessary, for example, to capture the consumer's attitude at the end of a service (Collier and Bienstock 264). Their model, in 2006, postulated e-service quality as three first order dimensions (Collier and Bienstock 268):

1. Process: functionality, information accuracy, design, privacy and ease of use.

2. Outcome: order accuracy, order condition, timeliness.
3. Recovery: interactive fairness, procedural fairness, outcome fairness.

Their e-service quality questionnaire consisted of a comprehensive list of 61 items starting from ease of use to satisfaction and behavioral intentions (Collier and Bienstock 272-73). However, this study, as was the case with several others, was done on college going students in U.S. who had prior shopping experience online.

Lee and Lin (in 2005), while developing a research model to examine how e-service quality leads to satisfaction and purchase intention (Lee and Lin 161), postulated constructs like website design, reliability, responsiveness, trust and personalization (Lee and Lin 171). This was done with the help of modifying the SERVQUAL model to fit into the online shopping context. Again this is a study done on student online shoppers and postulates that personalization is not significantly related to overall service quality. Cristobal *et al.*, in 2007, developed the Perceived e-Service Quality (PeSQ) scale for measuring perceived e-service quality, comprising of four dimensions: web design, customer service, assurance and order management (Cristobal *et al.* 322-23). The study also dealt with how perceived service quality has a bearing on satisfaction, which in turn directly acts on customer loyalty (Cristobal *et al.* 330). Shachaf *et al.*, the following year, gave a model of determining e-service quality in public and academic libraries with the help of three dimensions: timely response, reliability and courtesy (Shachaf *et al.* 11-15). However, this was a limited study without encompassing e-service quality in other realms where online transactions are done.

A more recent study by Stiakakis and Georgiadis (in 2009) tried to provide an extension of the available knowledge of e-service quality (e-SQ) by considering the similarities and differences between providers' perceptions of e-SQ and customers' perceptions of the construct. The e-SQ criteria that service providers should devote importance included security, prompt response, accessibility, information accuracy,

customization/personalization, customer service, correct functioning of the website, website design (appearance and operation), customer's confidence in the company and the use of website tools and technologies (Stiakakis and Georgiadis 425-26). This study, done in case of 152 Greek Small and Medium Enterprises, throws light from the perspective of online service providers only. Another recent study by Jiang *et al.* (191-214) provided five dimensions of online shopping convenience: access, search, evaluation, transaction and post-purchase convenience. This study, however, takes into consideration the convenience aspects only and can be criticized of not being comprehensive so far as different dimensions of e-SQ are concerned.

The evolution of e-service quality literature in the field of online shopping saw primary studies aimed at addressing issues relating to the website only (e.g. WebQual, SITEQUAL *etc.*). There were also attempts to fit traditional SERVQUAL scale into electronic context like the works of Gefen, Lee and Lin *etc.* Later periods have seen improved versions like E-S-QUAL, Pe-SQ *etc.* The maturity of such endeavors can be gauged from the recent works having incorporated comprehensive dimensions of the whole process of online shopping (e.g. Collier and Bienstock).

1.4.4 Profiling Works on the Online Shopper:

It has already been recognized that sellers cannot appeal to all buyers in the marketplace, or at least not to all buyers in the same way (Kotler and Armstrong 238). Therefore, market segmentation has become an element of considerable importance in the case of online shoppers. Researchers have tried to study various consumer aspects of online shopping in the past including profiling and segmentation studies (e.g. Sin and Tse 7-29; Kau *et al.* 139-56; Rohm and Swaminathan 748-57; Bhatnagar and Ghose 758-67; Brengman *et al.* 79-88; Allred *et al.* 308-33; Jayawardhena *et al.* 515-26).

Donthu and Garcia were one of the firsts to examine the significant differences between online shoppers and non-shoppers in 1999. They found out that

both the groups differ significantly in terms of age, income, importance of convenience, risk aversion, impulsiveness, variety-seeking propensity, attitude towards direct marketing and attitude towards advertisement (qtd. in Kau *et al.* 142). Sin and Tse, while working on the internet shoppers in Hong Kong, tried to differentiate online buyers from non-buyers by their demographic (e.g. gender, age, educational level, monthly personal income, monthly household income *etc.*), psychographic (e.g. novelty seeking behavior, self confidence, time consciousness), attitudinal (e.g. security and reliability, convenience, product variety) and experiential (e.g. internet usage rate, in-home shopping experience) characteristics (Sin and Tse 11-15). The study also found out that such characteristics are significant predictors of online shopping behavior (Sin and Tse 23).

Kau *et al.* in 2003 examined the information seeking pattern of internet users as well as their motivation and concern for online shopping. Coupled with demographic characteristics and actual buying behavior, they postulated six different segments of online shoppers. They are On-off shopper, Comparison shopper, Traditional shopper, Dual shopper, e-Laggard and Information surfer (Kau *et al.* 149-50). Similarly, based on the motivations of online shopping like online convenience, physical store orientation, information use in planning and shopping, and variety seeking in the online shopping context, Rohm and Swaminathan presented a typology of online shoppers with four types - labeled convenience shoppers, variety seekers, balanced buyers, and store-oriented shoppers (Rohm and Swaminathan 748).

Validating the internet shopper lifestyle scale of Smith and Swinyard in the cross-cultural environment of U.S and Belgium, Brengman *et al.* segmented the online shoppers on the basis of web usage related lifestyle and found the same six basic dimensions which were found to underlie the scale: internet convenience, perceived self-inefficacy, internet logistics, internet distrust, internet offer and internet window-shopping (Brengman *et al.* 79). Allred *et al.* classified internet users into holiday shopper and non-shopper segments, and profiled the demographic,

psychographic, and computer use characteristics of each segment namely: Online shoppers (socializers, e-shopping lovers, e-value leaders) and Online non-shoppers (fearful conservatives, averters and tech muddlers) (Allred *et al.* 322-23).

In an Internet & Mobile Association of India study regarding e-commerce market in India in 2007, it was presented that internet users can be classified into four categories based on their attitude towards buying online (Consumer E-Commerce Market in India 2006/07). They are: 1. *Conventional* - people who shop in brick and mortar stores, 2. *Looked for Information (LFIs)* - people who browse for information but do not shop, 3. *Apprehensive* - people who will not shop on the net unless their concerns are addressed and 4. *Enthusiasts* - people who are willing to try out.

It is a matter of significance to note here that the profiling studies for online shoppers were initially aimed at differentiating online shoppers from non-shoppers (e.g. Donthu and Garcia 52-58). Gradually, segmentation works were done on online shoppers based on their demographic characteristics and behavioral orientations (e.g. Kau *et al.* 139-56; Rohm and Swaminathan 748-57). Then studies evolved into life style segmentation *etc.* (e.g. Brengman *et al.* 79-88). Diaz-Martin *et al.* (132-46) tried to segment a service market on the basis of quality expectation in the tourism industry in 2000. Hill *et al.* (347-60), in a more recent study in 2013, employed cluster analysis to segment adolescent online shoppers based on shopping motivations. It is, however, surprising that attempts to profile online shoppers based on e-service quality is far too scanty.

Therefore, it is seen that online shopping industry, which is growing with promise in the country, is in need of scholarly research. Avenues for research, critical to the long term sustenance of online shopping lies in the realm of e-service quality (e-SQ). Further, it would be of great interest to explore the characteristics of the online shoppers in terms of the importance they assign to the e-SQ dimensions.

1.5 Rationale for the Study:

Furthering the discussion offered in the previous sections, one interesting feature is seen in the form of similarity between most of the e-service quality literature having their roots in western and developed nations (mostly European nations and US). The pioneering works on e-SQ done by authors like Cristobal *et al.* (317-40), Donthu and Garcia (52-58), Gronroos *et al.* (343-52), Lee and Lin (161-75), Madu and Madu (246-58), Parasuraman *et al.* (1-21), Santos (233-46), Shachaf *et al.* (535-50), Stiakakis and Georgiadis (410-30), Wolfinbarger and Gilly (183-98), Yang *et al.* (685-700), Yoo and Donthu (31-46) etc. have all been done in developed nations. In the meantime, online shopping, having been a technology enabled service phenomena, has percolated into developing nations like India as well. Various industry reports like that of Digital Commerce (IAMA 2010) have highlighted tremendous growth and prospects of online shopping in India.

It is to be noted here that the adoption of online shopping in developed and developing countries may not be similar (Adapa 12). There exist remarkable differences in online shopping in the global vis-à-vis Indian context. For example, as it has been mentioned earlier, security concerns regarding online transactions is a significant barrier to online shopping in India (Consumer E-Commerce Market), whereas the Yang *et al.* study (which wasn't specifically done in India) puts such concerns given very little importance by online shoppers (Yang *et al.* 690). Later studies of Roca *et al.* (96-113) also substantiated the fact of security not being of utmost importance for online traders. Moreover, the online shopping basket differs across global and Indian shoppers. Globally books, clothing are the most shopped items online in contrast to tickets/reservation for Indian shoppers (refer Fig 1.3). This makes for an interesting case to extend e-service quality studies to Indian online shoppers as the concerns and requirements of shoppers are remarkably different.

With the increasing importance of online sales and the growing number of shoppers patronizing online stores, it is imperative for marketers to develop a better understanding of the e-shoppers. Profiling studies in this realm has largely focused on segmenting online shoppers based on their behavioral and motivational aspects. Even in the whole of Asia, where 45% of world's Internet using population resides (Internet Users in the World), there aren't much studies which have tried to profile online shoppers (Kau *et al.* 140).

Notwithstanding the fairytale growth of online shopping in India (refer Fig. 1.2), one struggles to find published studies addressing e-service quality as well as consumer aspects in India. Little is known about service quality perceptions in India (Jain and Gupta 26), let alone in the electronic shopping context.

Some works on online shopping in the Indian context include that of Ramesh (65-72) which dealt with various retailing formats and retail marketing mix in India. Srivastava (714-21) studied the changing retail scene in India in terms of presence of Malls and Supermarkets. The work of Gupta and Gupta (119-35) suggested that Indian urban youth are more e-surfers than e-shoppers. Another study postulated that e-Service Quality (e-SQ) is a direct antecedent of perceived value (Gera 216). Another work (in 2012) by Math *et al.* attributed the success of e-commerce in India mainly to increased number of internet users, middle class with disposable income, improved payment gateways and logistics and user experience.

Some other recent works in Indian context include the works of Gehrt *et al.* (742-58) which identified three shopping orientation segments of online shopping. Further, the service quality in e-government setting was conceptualized to be bi-dimensional in nature involving two separate but interdependent constructs - quality of information and quality of service interaction (Amrithesh 764). Jain *et al.* (104-10) studied the customer perceptions of e-SQ in online shopping in the city of Mumbai. An interactive analysis about the status and scope of online shopping was done by

Kumar and Maan (100-08). The issues and challenges of e-business in India were summarized by Malhotra (11-16) in 2014. Mittal *et al.* (11-23) highlighted the striking dissimilarities with respect to the gender of the shopper in the decision making process of online shopping. The utilitarian motives of young online shoppers were highlighted by Ahmed and Sathish (391-98) in another recent work. However, amongst all these works, one fails to see any segmentation work on Indian online shoppers based on the crucial dimension of e-service quality.

Another observation which is noteworthy in Indian online context is that majority of the internet users (in fact, more than two-third) are urban based (Internet in India 2013). The segment of the population (in absolute number) living in urban areas in India is quite large and affluent and surpasses the total e-commerce markets of many developed countries (Bansal 11). Moreover, the rural - urban digital divide is an impediment towards the equitable growth of rural India (Venkatesh and Sykes 1-22; Rego *et al.* 25-36). As such, the digital revolution has, till recent years, bypassed rural India (Internet Revolution) and the urban internet penetration is far higher, albeit a lower rate of growth as compared to rural India (Prabhudesai). Thus, it may not be prudent to paint both the rural and urban Indian online market with the same brush and therefore, needs to be treated separately.

Thus, considering all the above aspects, the following observations can be summed up – (a) e-service quality research has largely been done in the developed nations (refer page 23, para 1), (b) remarkable differences can be seen in the global vis-à-vis Indian online shopping scenario (refer page 23, para 2), (c) the works done on the Indian online shopper has largely left untouched the e-service quality aspects let alone segmentation based on it (refer page 24, para 2, 3 & 4), and (d) the urban and rural online shopping market may be treated differently (refer page 25, para 2). Therefore, in the light of these observations, it would be interesting to conduct studies for Indian online shoppers especially those based in urban centers on the crucial aspect (as detailed in Section 1.4.1) of e-service quality.

1.6 Statement of the Problem:

Considering the previous literature in this area, it is of vital importance to note here that there exist certain issues to be further probed in the extant literature of e-service quality especially in relation to Indian online shoppers. It has been a well established view (Yang *et al.* 685-700; Wolfinberger and Gilly 183-98; Parasuraman *et al.* 1-21) that the concept of Electronic Service Quality (e-SQ) is critical in the realms of modern retailing. The dimensions of service quality are connected with overall organizational outcomes (Bloise and Tankersley 75). The positive linkages call for investing more by the online practitioners to achieve greater service quality (Sahadev and Purani 605). However, given the constraint of resources, e-service quality dimensions and the target customers need to be prioritized. Moreover, dearth of studies in consumer aspects of e-service quality in India is very much evident. Thus, it raises the following questions in one's mind:

1. Can the existing e-service quality scales also be administered to the Indian online shoppers given the fact that most of scales have been found not being comprehensive (refer page 19, para 2) and being tested on the consumers of a particular country only?
2. How do the Indian online shoppers express preferences for various e-service quality dimensions in view of the fact that online shopping is a fast growing phenomenon for the Indian market?
3. Do e-service quality expectations vary across different demographic and psychographic characteristics of the urban online shoppers in India?
4. Can't urban Indian online shoppers be profiled and segmented based on e-service quality so that marketers and practitioners get a better understanding of the shoppers?

Hence, in the light of the scenario mentioned above, it is perceived that profiling the urban Indian online shoppers on common demographic and

psychographic characteristics based on their relative reliance on e-service quality dimensions is expected to be of immense utility to marketers and practitioners.

1.7 Objectives:

Therefore, the present study is aimed at fulfilling the following objectives:

- 1. To determine the importance of various electronic service quality dimensions in the context of Indian online shoppers.*

The first objective is aimed at determining the prominence attached to the e-Service Quality (e-SQ) dimensions by the urban online shoppers in India. It is aimed at having an understanding of the e-SQ aspects that are most sought after and those that are not.

- 2. Derive segments of online shoppers based on their preference towards the service quality dimensions.*

After the fulfillment of the first objective, the next aim is to derive segments of the online shoppers by taking into consideration the e-SQ preferences they have expressed. It would result in segments of urban shoppers which will differ from one another in having quality preferences for shopping online.

- 3. Profile the shoppers on common demographic and psychographic factors based on their relative reliance on electronic service quality factors.*

The segments of urban shoppers obtained after the second objective, will be profiled on demographic and psychographic lines. Such profiles can describe a shopper segment in terms of its inherent characteristics and help marketers and practitioners in making suitable decisions for addressing the quality concerns of the segment.

1.8 Scope:

The rationale for undertaking this research underscores the academic scope of this study. Given the gap in extant literature, this study delves into understanding the e-Service Quality (e-SQ) preferences of urban online shoppers in India. The e-SQ variables which are more sought after than some others, are a primary focus area of this study. Hence, a total of 43 (forty three) e-service quality variables are administered on the online shoppers to know the importance assigned to each of them (refer to detailed discussion in the Chapter on Methodology, Section 2.3). The study further aims to segment and profile urban online shoppers across demographic and psychographic characteristics based on their e-service quality expectations. Thus, distinguishable segments of urban online shoppers in terms of e-service quality preferences are to be carved out from the representative samples.

A few other scopes of this study are enlisted below:

1. The online shoppers consisted of customers in Business to Customer (B2C) and Customer to Customer (C2C) segments of the e-commerce industry. This meant that the respondents were only end-users or those who had bought items for family use and not for business use.
2. The study probes the e-service quality preferences of urban online shoppers who have purchased online via the web-based shopping sites.
3. The geographical scope of the work includes the urban centers of India. Since pan India studies on online shoppers are very limited in number, taking samples from cities spreading across the length and breadth of the country is thought to be relevant.

1.9 Limitations:

Online shopping is technology driven and as such it experiences the vagaries and uncertainties of the ever changing world of technology driven services. The study samples are representations of urban online shoppers who have purchased online while using the common platforms of web browser based shopping sites. In the meantime, fast changes have taken place in the technology front with the advent of mobile shopping and shopping apps¹. When this study was conceptualized, shopping apps were not in the horizon even, at least in India. However, by the time this report is being prepared, apps have been gaining popularity due to high reach and as such most reputed shopping brands have started promoting it. This study could not consider the shoppers who buy online using apps installed in their mobiles.

However, shopping apps also have their limitations. Being too personalized, it encroaches upon the private space of the online shopper in having access to the users location, personal phone numbers *etc.* Besides, when there is any slight updation of the app features, it requires the app user to upgrade at his end which involves cost in terms of data usage. This is a disadvantage over the web based shopping sites where feature or technology upgradation does not involve any direct cost to the shopper. As the dissimilarities between the web based and app based shopping are too obvious, it would, therefore, not be proper to consider them together while studying the e-service quality preferences of the shopper. Hence, the focus of this study is relevant.

¹ Applications installed in mobile devices that are specifically meant for shopping. This does not require an http based web browser to enter into a shopping site. Instead, one can directly enter the site by clicking on the app icon. Popular online shopping destinations like Flipkart, Myntra offer such apps.

There are a few other perceived limitations of this study which are listed below:

1. The samples taken for the study suffers from the limitation of having geographical representation only. They were not on the basis of any shopping or purchase related behavior.
2. The study deals with online shoppers who have made actual purchase online. Prospective online shoppers were not considered as samples.
3. The study also suffers from the limitation that samples are to be chosen via convenience and snowball sampling. Even then, a certain degree of randomness is there in the process as the referral samples are beyond the choice and control of the researcher.
4. The applicability of this study may not be appropriate in other parts of the world.

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