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# Changes in Consumer Perspective towards Discount at Brick-and-Mortar Stores owing to Emergence of Online Store Format in India

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## ABSTRACT

End-of-season sale (EOSS) has been one of the most important long duration sales promotion/discounting events for brick-and-mortar retailers and consumers in India. But, ever since the online retailing format has emerged in India, consumers now have wider options available for them to buy a product at a discounted price and notably, as online stores in India are following the product discounting as one of the key drivers for consumer acquisition, consumers' perspective towards discount at brick-and-mortar store is expected to have changed. This change in consumers' perspective has put the majority of brick-and-mortar retailers in India into a quandary and they are losing out their market share slowly to online retailers. In this research, authors have attempted to investigate; (a) proof, (b) pattern, (c) magnitude, (d) significance and (e) impact of this change in perspective towards discount across stakeholders and transpired the research outcomes into suggestions to enable brick-and-mortar retailers to design appropriate sales promotions.

**Keywords:** Discount, End-of-season sale, Brick-and-mortar store, Offline store, Physical store, Consumer perspective, Online store, Sales promotion

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## 1. INTRODUCTION:

The e-commerce retailing format undoubtedly making a paradigm shift in the way retailing is done in India. This new retailing format, e-commerce is projected to grow to 62.3 billion US\$ by the year 2023 which is at 32.34 billion US\$ in the year 2019. Such a significant increase in the market share is attributed mostly to the rapidly increasing penetration of smartphones and internet users. This ongoing change in penetration is projected to increase the total internet user base to 657.8 million by the year 2023 which is at 553.7 million as of the year 2019 in India. Share of buyers using e-commerce retailing format in India is expected to increase to 50.03 percent by the year 2020 which is at 23.55 percent as of the year 2016 (Statista) [1]. The overall market size of the Indian Retail industry which is at 950 billion US\$ in the year 2018 might cross 1.1 trillion US\$ by the year 2020 (IBEF) [2].

E-commerce has been able to expand its market consistently in India. Owing to this new retailing format consumers now have the widest product assortment offered to them at discounted prices. E-commerce retailing format has probably crossed a key milestone in revolutionizing Indian retail market, and this trend is expected to continue for many more years. As per one IBEF's December 2019 [2] report on Indian retailing, it is noted that the union government of India is also working on various ways to boost consumption in the rural market of India and e-commerce would play an important role in achieving this. The forecast also indicates that e-commerce retailing will be able to capture 7 percent of the overall Indian retail market by 2021.

In such a short period e-commerce retailing format in India reached to around 3 per cent of overall Indian retail market. Growth rate is more than double as compared to the brick-and-mortar stores. Available literature

indicates to key reasons for this as being capable of building the trust of the consumers in online stores, they have successfully established their brands in the minds of the online shoppers through their 365 days discounts, deals, and low-price strategies. Even though it is very hard to build a sustainable business model using strategies mainly based on price wars, it is inevitable that the Brick-and-mortar stores in India will have to ascertain specific strategies head-on to deal with this increasing loss of market share to online stores. Up till the emergence of online stores in India, Brick-and-mortar retailers were following a season and occasion driven sale promotions prominently known as end-of-season sale and festive sale which accounted for close to 40 percent of their annual revenue. But, post the emergence of online stores in India, the majority of brick-and-mortar retailers in India are bewildered with continuous discounts, deals, sale promotion events, coupons being offered by the online stores throughout the year and they are not able to design appropriate sales promotion programmes.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW:**

We have noted that many the choice of store format was and is one of the important research subjects among many researchers beginning from the 70's of the 20th century. The authors of many of earlier studies - among others: Monroe & Gultinan (1975) [3], Arnold, Oum & Tigert (1983) [4], Mason, Durand & Taylor (1983) [5], Keng & Ehrenberg (1984) [6], Louviere & Gaeth (1987) [7], Spiggle & Sewall (1987) [8], Dawson, Bloch & Ridgway (1990) [9], Burke et al. (1992) [10], Arnold, Handelman & Tigert (1996) [11], have studied to rationalize store choice using different approaches, models and frameworks with respect to internal and external factors to the consumer such as a) store attribute, b) situational factors, c) consumers' households, d) consumers' demographics, e) consumers' shopping patterns, f) consumers' attitudes toward stores, g) implied importance and h) weightage of price levels. It is also noted that most of the above said studies were carried on same store formats (supermarkets and discount stores).

There also exist some studies examining the influence of retail pricing formats on shopping behavior (Bell, Ho & Tang, 1998) [12], often if one store format has in general higher prices than the other one.

Shim et al. (2000) [13], using consumer's shopping behavioural intentions, established the size of three market segments (primarily Internet shopper, product-situation specific cross-shopper and primarily store-oriented shopper markets) for both the cognitive and sensory experiential product categories. One of the key recommendations from the researchers was that the retailers and mall developers should understand the greater importance of social influence on online shoppers and cross-shoppers, as compared to traditional store shoppers. Perhaps a competitive strategy could be utilized whereby promotions portray aspirational and/or peer members of Internet consumers describing their positive experiences as mall patrons.

Peter and Olson (2002) [14], preferences for retail channel and format choice within a particular channel depend on factors external to the consumer and internal ones. Those preferences are subject to change when important factors as changes in the economy (like economic slowdown, fall in consumers income) and retail industry (development of new sales channels and/or formats) become visible for consumers. External factors among others include perceived price level, physical effort to buy, amount of time needed to fulfil shopping tasks – most of the external factors are creating the perceived total cost of buying for the consumer. Among internal factors, there are i.e.: consumer demographics and consumer personality manifesting in decision-making styles and perceived level of cognitive and emotional effort connected with shopping.

Bhatnagar, & Ratchford (2004) [15] represent an interesting approach but limited to non-durable goods. Exploring fixed and variable costs of shopping, including assumption about consumers preferring to shop at the minimum total cost, and different price levels between formats, they found conditions in which the store format choice would be optimal.

Diwakar Gupta et al. (2006) [16]. The problem of setting prices for clearing retail inventories of fashion goods is a difficult task that is further exacerbated by the fact that markdowns enacted near the end of the selling season have a smaller impact on demand. In the research, they have presented discrete-time models for setting clearance prices in such an environment. When demand is deterministic, researchers compute optimal prices and show that decreasing reservation prices lead to declining optimal prices. When demand is stochastic and arbitrarily correlated across planning periods, researchers obtain bounds on the optimal expected revenue and on optimal prices. Researchers have also developed a heuristic procedure for finding near-optimal prices and test its accuracy through numerical experiments. These experiments revealed new insights for practitioners. For example, the penalty for choosing clearance price once and keeping it unchanged for the remainder of the selling season is found to be small when either the mean reservation prices do not change appreciably over time or when they drop sharply after the first period.

Mokhtarian and Tang (2009, 2011) [17], perceived channel characteristics are influencing the choice of channel for both phases of consumer decision making: information search and buying.

Sales promotion techniques are instruments that seek to increase sales of products and brands, usually in a short time (Wierenga & Soethoudt, 2010) [18], because they act in the consumer's mind as a benefit to him, creating thus consumer behavior (Yusuf, 2010 [19]). The effectiveness and the importance of sales promotion in the market can be viewed when presenting the segment numbers. According to Teunter (2002) [20], over 20% of sales of products of some food branches occur through sales promotion activities. In a report quoted by Wierenga and Soethoudt (2010) [21], over 75% of spending on communication in the nondurable consumer goods segment between 1997 and 2004 in the United States were driven by sales promotion activities, while 25% were applied in other communication activities.

In addition to market fundamentals, the importance is attested in the scientific field, whose studies have been conducted for several decades. In 1978, Preston, Dwyer, and Rudelius [22] already demonstrated the effect of sales promotion to convince consumers to open a bank account. In that study, it was found that 50% of the increase in a number of accounts in a bank searched occurred during a promotional campaign. More recently, D'Austous and Jacob (2002) [23] demonstrate the efficiency of this promotional tool to influence the computer purchase, while Boschetti (2012) [24] confirmed the positive linkages, promoting the behavior of purchase of financial services.

As stressed by some authors (D'Austous & Landreville, 2003 [25]; Haans & Gijbrecchts, 2011 [26]; Jones, 2008 [27]) there is still academic and managerial deficiencies on the deeper knowledge of the relationship of sales promotion with consumer behavior and their effectiveness for the companies.

Sangvikar B. v. et al. (2012) [28], In this research paper researchers, focussed on studying consumer behaviour across various retail formats available for them to buy products which includes components such as a) convenience, b) product assortment, c) pricing, d) product quality and e) salesperson services. They concluded that Brick-and-mortar departmental retail format is the most preferred one.

Menal Dahiya (2017) [29], due to e-commerce the turnover of offline retailer has reduced which is a warning signal for the enterprise and on the arrival of online shops in the market offline retailers are suffering from the pricing. The researcher has studied the impact of e-commerce sales format on brick-and-mortar selling format across variety of components such as a) discounts, b) service types, c) pricing, d) product assortment, e) marketing and promotional capabilities and f) inventory levels.

Dhruv et. al (2017) [30]. One of the key components of their organizing framework for 'future of retailing' identified by them was 'visual display and merchandise offer decisions' along with other four components 1) technology and tools to facilitate decision making, 2) consumption and engagement, 3) big data collection and usage and 4) analytics and probability.

Past research carried out in the developed countries where the brick-and-mortar retailers have already gone through a phase of online store formats being made available to consumers and have provided many guidelines to brick-and-mortar retailers on various frameworks for them to create promotional strategies to withstand discount strategies of online stores.

We find a gap in the literature whereby we could not find answers for a) can we implement the recommendations of various researches carried out in developed countries in an Indian context? b) is there any change in the consumer's perspective toward brick-and-mortar store's famous sales promotional event known as an end-of-season sale? c) if there a change, what is the magnitude and significance of it in the Indian context? d) what are the impacts of such changes on other stakeholders across various functions of brick-and-mortar retailing set up such as sales, store operations, category, marketing, supply chain and management/investors. To find answers to these questions we decided to survey all these stakeholders along with consumers, collect empirical data of a brick-and-mortar retailer who has experienced both the phases of pre and post online store emergence and validate all such qualitative findings with actual empirical transactional data to answer our key research questions.

### **3. OBJECTIVES:**

Key objectives of this research were to;

- (a) Qualitatively;
  - i. understand retailer perspective towards discounts pre and post online store emergence.
  - ii. understand consumer perspective towards discounts pre and post online stores emergence.
- (b) Quantitatively;
  - i. analyse past ten years of empirical data of a select retailer.

- ii. determine the correlation among the following variables for pre and post online store emergence independently;
    - i. discount levels and conversions
    - ii. discount levels and average transaction sizes
    - iii. discount levels and average prices
    - iv. discount levels and store's sales and margin productivity
    - v. discount levels and store profitability
  - iii. understand the change in consumer purchase behaviour five years prior to and five years post online store emergence.
- (c) Compare qualitative findings (retailer perspectives and consumer perspectives with the quantitative analysis results of the past 10 years of empirical data.
- (d) Draw conclusion with respect to changes in consumer perspective towards discounts on;
- a. proof of change
  - b. pattern of change
  - c. magnitude of change
  - d. significance and impact of change

#### 4. METHODOLOGY:

**Stage I:** At this stage, primary research was conducted in two phases to understand retailers and consumer perspectives towards discounts.

##### Qualitative phase:

- i. **Retailer perspective:** The entire population (388 employees) across various functions/department such as 1) management and strategy, 2) marketing and communication, 3) category management, 4) supply chain management, 5) finance and accounts, 6) IT and support functions and 7) human resource department and 8) sales and operations and 9) store sales staff of one select Brick-and-mortar retailer having stores all over India across a) mall stores, b) high-street stores c) neighbourhood stores d) tier 1, 2 and 3 cities, e) offering multiple-categories and multiple-brands at mid to high price positioning catering to pregnant women, new moms, babies, infants and kids up to 8 years were interviewed under controlled environment through google sheets to collect information regarding their perspective towards discounts at brick-and-mortar stores pre and post emergence of online stores (*Research instrument 1*).
- ii. **Consumer perspective:** A random sample (2712 customers) of customers of the select Brick-and-mortar retailer pertaining to research instrument 1, representing customers from stores all over India across a) mall stores, b) high-street stores c) neighbourhood stores d) tier 1, 2 and 3 cities, were interviewed under controlled environment through close-ended questions to collect information regarding their perspective towards discounts at brick-and-mortar stores pre and post emergence of online stores (*Research instrument 2*).

**Quantitative phase:** Empirical sales data (over eight million transactions) of five years prior and five years post online store emergence in India is collected from the select brick-and-mortar retailer whose employees and customers were surveyed using research instrument 1 and 2 (*Research instrument 3*).

**Stage II:** In this stage, both qualitative and quantitative findings collected using research instruments 1, 2 and 3 were analysed through data processing and analysis using appropriate statistical methods, tools and software.

**Stage III:** In this stage, insights and inferences from the research findings were used to propose a way forward for Indian brick-and-mortar retailers to enable them to design appropriate sales promotional programmes to effectively deal with the change in consumer's perspective towards discounts at brick-and-mortar stores.

#### 5. KEY FINDINGS AND INSIGHTS:

**Retailers** strongly believe that, before the emergence of online stores, discounts at a brick-and-mortar store were offered basis the age of the inventory that too during specific periods (July and January) widely known as end-of-season sale (EOSS) which was considered to be a shopping festival. But, post-online stores emergence, the discount has become one of the most important tools for converting walk-ins into bills. Without offering a discount it is practically impossible to convince consumers to buy products at their brick-and-mortar store irrespective of the age of the inventory and the type of sale period owing to which the discounts are now offered to consumers throughout the year to ensure the average transaction values are maintained and possibly stop

losing consumers to online store. This significant change in consumers perspective towards discounts is forcing the brick-and-mortar retailer to lose gross margins and in turn store profitability.

**Consumers** strongly believe that, before the emergence of online stores, discounts at a brick-and-mortar store were offered basis the age of the inventory that too during specific periods (July and January) widely known as EOSS which was considered to be a shopping festival for which they used to eagerly await for. But, post-online stores emergence, discounts are available for them throughout the year and hence discount has become one of the most important factors for them to make any buying decisions. It is practically impossible for consumers to buy any products at an original price. This significant change in consumers perspective towards discounts is forcing them to not increase their average transaction values per visit to any brick-and-mortar store thereby making the retailer to lose gross margins and in turn store profitability.

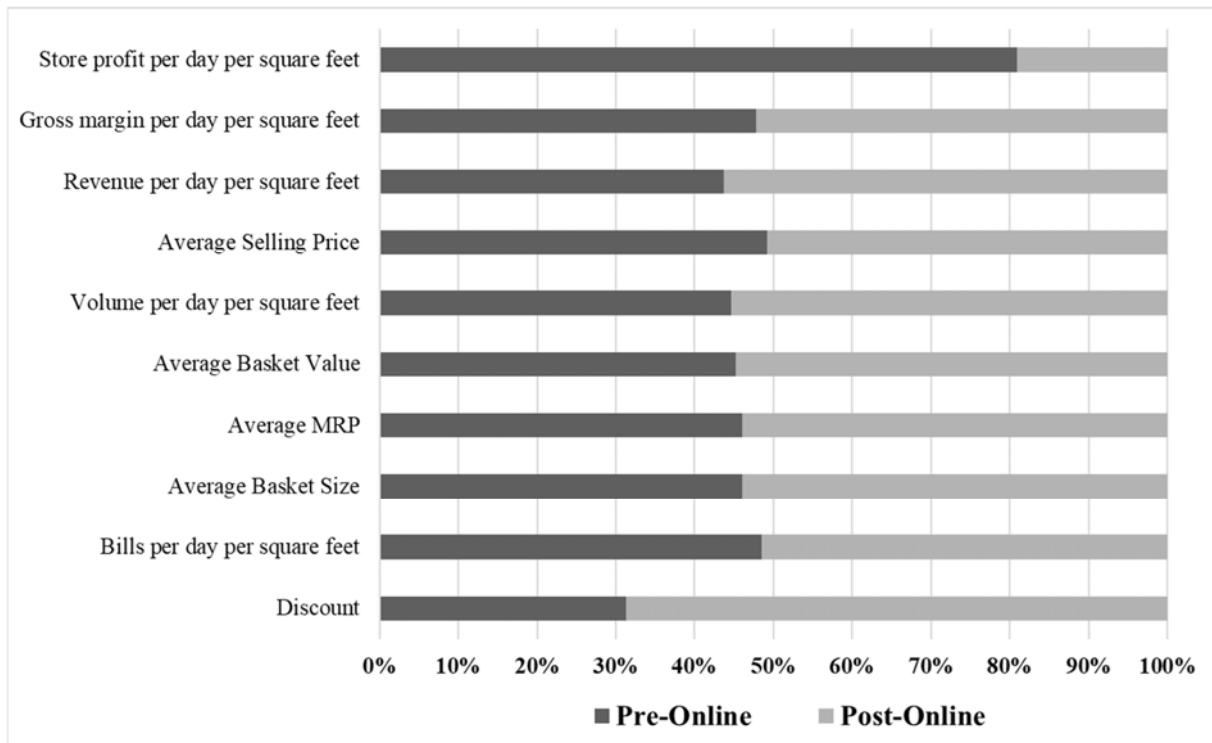
**Empirical data** of ten years of a select brick-and-mortar retailer strongly conforms with most of the beliefs of consumers and retailers (obtained through a qualitative survey) on changes in consumer perspective towards discount post emergence of online stores across. But the data clearly indicates that a) retailer has not followed any strategical way of offering discounts b) retailer is carried away by perceptions/beliefs of store sales staff and consumers, c) discounts have been increased by 2.202 times without any significant improvement in the conversions and average transaction values per consumer. Owing to these changes in consumer perspective towards discount retailer is now making 4.249 times lesser profit as compared to pre-online stores emergence.

**Table 1:** Except average basket size, average MRP and volume per day per square foot all the other factors in the study match with empirical data and conforms to the belief of retailer and consumer on changes in consumer perspective towards the discount.

Variables	Correlation Coefficient			T Test Sig. (2-tailed)		
	Retailer Survey	Consumer Survey	Empirical Data	Retailer Survey	Consumer Survey	Empirical Data
Discount per cent and Bills per day per square foot	-0.621	-0.621	-0.135	0.000	0.000	0.000
Discount per cent and Average basket size	-0.270	-0.940	0.610	0.000	0.000	0.000
Discount per cent and Average MRP	-0.270	-0.940	0.662	0.000	0.000	0.000
Discount per cent and Volume per day per square foot	-0.389	-0.935	0.073	0.000	0.000	0.000
Discount per cent and Average selling price	-0.389	-0.935	-0.831	0.000	0.000	0.000
Discount per cent and Revenue per day per square foot	-0.389	-0.935	-0.250	0.000	0.000	0.000
Discount per cent and Gross margin per day per square foot	-0.286	-1.000	-0.715	0.000	0.000	0.000
Discount per cent and Store profit per day per square foot	-0.286	-1.000	-0.733	0.000	0.000	0.000
Online emergence type and Store profit per day per square foot	-0.621	-0.990	-0.733	0.000	0.000	0.102

**Table 2:** Empirical data comprising of over eight million transactional records strongly conforms to the belief of retailer and consumer on changes in consumer perspective towards discount.

Variables under empirical data analysis	Correlation		Sig. (2-tailed)	
	Pre-Online	Post-Online	Pre-Online	Post-Online
Discount per cent and Bills per day per square foot	0.489	-0.135	0.000	0.000
Discount per cent and Average basket size	0.627	0.610	0.000	0.000
Discount per cent and Average MRP	0.468	0.662	0.000	0.000
Discount per cent and Volume per day per square foot	0.707	0.073	0.000	0.000
Discount per cent and Average selling price	-0.682	-0.831	0.000	0.000
Discount per cent and Revenue per day per square foot	0.450	-0.250	0.000	0.000
Discount per cent and Gross margin per day per square foot	-0.159	-0.715	0.000	0.000
Discount per cent and Store profit per day per square foot	-0.326	-0.733	0.000	0.000
Online emergence type and Store profit per day per square foot	-0.326	-0.733	0.000	0.102



**Figure 1:** Empirical data comprising of over eight million transactional records indicate that the discount level has increased significantly post-online store format emergence and has strong negative impact on the brick-and-mortar store profitability.

**Table 3:** Factor analysis on empirical data comprising of over eight million transactional records indicate that the discount and bills (conversion) components explains the majority of change in store profitability.

Component	Total Variance Explained			Extraction Sums of Squared		
	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
Discount per cent	4.627	46.266	46.266	4.627	46.266	46.266
Bills per day per square foot	3.046	30.46	76.726	3.046	30.46	76.726
Average basket size	1.684	16.844	93.57	1.684	16.844	93.57
Average MRP (INR)	0.578	5.782	99.352			
Average basket value (INR)	0.034	0.343	99.695			
Volume per day per square foot (INR)	0.015	0.147	99.842			
Average selling price (INR)	0.01	0.1	99.942			
Revenue per day per square foot (INR)	0.004	0.037	99.978			
Gross margin per day per square foot (INR)	0.001	0.014	99.992			
Store profit per day per square foot (INR)	0.001	0.008	100			

*Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.*

**Table 4:** Qualitative comparison of change in perspective towards discount of brick-and-mortar retailer.

Bricks-and-mortar retailer perspective towards discount	
Pre-Online	Post-Online
Offering discounts was in our control Offer discounts based on product age Increase average basket size Increase average transaction value Increase in absolute earnings Attract new consumers Increase consumer loyalty Walk-ins conversion was not dependent on discount	Offering discounts is no more in our control Offer discounts irrespective of product age Maintain existing basket size Maintain existing transaction value Protect existing absolute earnings Retain existing consumers Minimise consumer shift to online store Walk-ins conversion is significantly on discount

**Table 5:** *Qualitative comparison of change in perspective towards discount of consumers.*

Consumer perspective towards discount	
Pre-Online	Post-Online
Discount events are designed for a specific occasion Let me buy more now This is my shop and I shall wait for discount events This is my shop and a neighbourhood store I shall wait for offers on my favourite brand Pre-planned shopping for discounted items Majority of my shopping was at original price	Discounts are available throughout the year Just buy what is needed I no more wait for discount events I can shop online, distance to shop is no more a limitation Let me try the new brand (discount is available) Just-in-Time shopping Majority of my shopping is at discounted price

## 6. CONCLUSION:

With reference to data and comments shown in table 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and figure 1, It is practically impossible to change consumers perspective towards a discount in favour of brick-and-mortar store as the same is widely influenced by a paradigm shift in the evolution of various modern retailing formats available now to consumers to buy required products. It is evident from this research that brick-and-mortar retailer will no more be able to convert walk-ins into bills unless the discount is one of the key components of their selling proposition to consumers, but possibly retailer can analyse their sales data on a consistent basis to determine ideal levels of discount which can probably gain a competitive edge over online stores on the discount component and arrest such huge degrowth in their store profitability.

## 7. SUGGESTIONS TO BRICK-AND-MORTAR RETAILERS:

Based on this research outcomes, we would like to suggest few do's and don'ts to brick-and-mortar retailers to overcome this change in consumer shopping behaviour and perspective towards discount;

### Don'ts:

- flat discounts at the product level,
- huge variance in the levels of discount during discount and non-discount periods,
- frequent and continuous spending on any 'above the line' (ATL) advertising activities which are directed towards communicating the discounts,
- irrelevant discounts,
- discounting decisions carried away by the online retailer's discounting frameworks and strategies.

### Dos:

- convert most of the product level discounts to a transaction level discounts,
- offers to be perceived as discounts by the consumers, but they need not be flat discounts on the products,
- run promotions which will be able to hold the customer for a longer period of time and perceived by the consumers as a 'great deal',
- create smart offers which are relevant to consumer life-stage needs



Brick-and-mortar retailers need to clearly understand every other retailer format's key business goals behind offering discounts to consumers. Few may be trying to capture the bigger market share, few may be trying to show exponential growth in the top line to attract more investors, few may be trying to wrap up their business and few may be hoping that all these consumers acquired based on discount as one of their key components of selling proposition are going to be loyal to their store. What is very important is the key business goal of your retailing format and business, clearly understand of your consumers and their needs using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies and make strategies to create your own discounting framework/model to gain a competitive edge over any retailing formats on the discount component.

## **8. LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH:**

The main limitation of this research work is the coverage of the various stakeholders viz., consumers and retailers in understanding their perspectives towards discount pre and post online store format emergence. This might limit the generalizability of the research findings to other set of retailers and consumers. The second limitation would be the empirical validation is restricted to one retail format i.e., multi brand and multi category baby care stores in India and hence the generalizability of the findings and suggestions to other retail formats. However, it provides significant input regarding the ways to utilise these findings as all the qualitative research findings have been validated with actual empirical transactional data.

## **9. SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH:**

It is recommended that this research can further be extended to derive an ideal discounting framework/model for brick-and-mortar retailers to enable them to design appropriate sales promotional programmes to effectively deal with the change in consumer's perspective towards the discount.

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