

“A Study on Discount Culture in India: Consumer Expectations and Market Response in the Digital Era”

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ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of digital platforms has transformed pricing practices and consumer expectations in India, leading to the emergence of a pervasive discount culture. This study examines the relationship between discount strategies, consumer behaviour, and market responses using secondary data drawn from industry reports, academic literature, and policy publications across multiple sectors including FMCG, e-commerce, electronics, and online food delivery services. Using descriptive and comparative analytical methods, the study identifies structural price sensitivity, psychological drivers of promotional engagement, and the role of digital platforms in institutionalizing discount dependence. Findings reveal that while discounts enhance short-term demand and platform engagement, they weaken brand loyalty and create sustainability challenges for firms. The study concludes that future market stability depends on transitioning toward transparent pricing mechanisms, loyalty-based retention strategies, and balanced promotional ecosystems. The research contributes to literature on digital consumer behaviour by offering a cross-sectoral perspective on discount culture in emerging digital economies.

Keywords: Discount Culture, Digital Platforms, Price Sensitivity, Consumer Behaviour, Promotional Strategy, India.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

In the last decade, the Indian consumer market has witnessed a profound transformation driven by rapid digitalization, expanding internet penetration, widespread smartphone adoption, and the exponential growth of e-commerce and app-based service platforms. India has emerged as one of the fastest-growing digital consumption markets globally, fundamentally altering how consumers search, evaluate, and purchase products and services. A defining characteristic of this transformation is the rapid emergence and institutionalization of a discount-driven consumption environment, commonly referred to as *discount culture*.

Indian consumers have historically been recognised as highly price-sensitive, exhibiting strong value-seeking behaviour and a preference for savings-oriented purchases. However, the digital era has significantly intensified this price sensitivity by enabling real-time price comparisons, instant deal alerts, cashback notifications, and personalised promotional offers. Consumers today can easily compare prices across platforms such as Amazon, Flipkart, Myntra, Ajo, Swiggy, Zomato, Blinkit, and Zepto, thereby reinforcing discount-seeking behaviour across multiple industries.

Discounting has become a dominant competitive tool across sectors such as fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), consumer electronics, mobile phones, online retail, and online food delivery services. FMCG firms offer bundle discounts, loyalty points, and retailer-linked schemes; e-commerce platforms organise large-scale events such as the *Great Indian Festival* and *Big Billion Days*; mobile brands provide exchange offers and no-cost EMIs; and online food delivery platforms deploy app-exclusive discounts, free delivery, subscription-based benefits, and wallet-linked cashbacks. These practices have shifted discounts from occasional promotional tools to an expected and routine component of digital consumption.

Against this backdrop, the present study examines discount culture in India by analysing how consumer expectations regarding prices, discounts, and promotional offers are formed in the digital era, and how firms and platforms respond through evolving pricing and promotional strategies across industries.

Concept of Discount Culture

Discount culture refers to a market environment in which consumers increasingly perceive discounts, price-offs, cashbacks, and promotional incentives as a standard and integral part of the purchasing process rather than temporary inducements. In the Indian context, discount culture is shaped by income sensitivity, cultural emphasis on savings, high price awareness, festival-centric consumption patterns, and intense inter-brand and inter-platform competition.



In the digital marketplace, discount culture has expanded beyond traditional price reductions to include a wide range of incentive mechanisms such as:

- Wallet-based and UPI-linked cash backs
- Loyalty points and reward-based programmes
- Subscription-driven benefits (e.g., Amazon Prime, Swiggy One, Zomato Gold)
- Flash sales and limited-time offers
- Festival- and event-specific promotional campaigns

This evolving discount ecosystem has profound implications for consumer psychology, brand perception, competitive dynamics, and the long-term sustainability of pricing strategies.



Consumer Expectations in the Digital Era

Consumer expectations in India have undergone a marked shift from viewing discounts as occasional benefits to anticipating them as a prerequisite for purchase decisions. Digital exposure has made consumers more informed, highly price-conscious, and emotionally responsive to promotional cues such as urgency, scarcity, countdown timers, and perceived savings.

Consumers increasingly assess purchase decisions not solely on product quality or brand reputation, but on comparative pricing, discount depth, bundled offers, loyalty benefits, and overall deal value. This behavioural shift has strengthened the emotional dimension of pricing, wherein discounts generate feelings of excitement, satisfaction, smart purchasing, and fear of missing out (FOMO). As a result, discount availability often directly influences brand choice, platform selection, and purchase timing.

Market Response to Discount Expectations

In response to evolving consumer expectations, firms and digital platforms have adopted aggressive and data-driven pricing and promotional strategies. These include dynamic pricing models, algorithm-driven personalised offers, festival-centric mega sales, loyalty-linked retention schemes, and subscription-based discount structures. Platforms increasingly leverage consumer data analytics, app notifications, and behavioural nudges to stimulate repeat purchases and increase basket size.

While such strategies have accelerated customer acquisition and market expansion, they also raise concerns related to profitability pressures, brand dilution, price wars, and long-term consumer dependence on discounts. Consequently, many firms are now exploring controlled discounting, loyalty-led engagement, private labels, and value-based differentiation to balance growth with sustainability.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the widespread prevalence of discount-driven strategies in India's digital marketplace, there is a lack of comprehensive research that examines discount culture across multiple industries using a secondary-data-based analytical framework. Existing studies largely focus on individual sectors or rely heavily on primary consumer surveys, thereby offering limited cross-sectoral and strategic insights.

There is a clear research gap in understanding how discount culture operates holistically across industries, how consumer expectations are shaped by digital platforms, and how firms strategically respond to these expectations through pricing and promotional mechanisms. This study seeks to address this gap by systematically analysing discount practices, promotional strategies, and market responses across major consumer-oriented industries in India, thereby contributing to a broader understanding of discount culture in the digital era.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the extent of price sensitivity and discount dependence among Indian consumers in the digital era, with reference to major consumer-oriented industries.
2. To analyze the emotional and psychological responses of consumers towards prices, discounts, and promotional offers in digital marketplaces, including factors such as perceived value, deal excitement, fear of missing out (FOMO), and cash back psychology.
3. To study the influence of discount and pricing strategies on brand perception, brand choice, and brand loyalty among Indian consumers.
4. To evaluate the impact of discounts, offers, and festival-based promotions on consumer buying behavior and purchase decisions in the Indian market.
5. To assess the role of digital platforms such as e-commerce websites, online food delivery applications, and mobile apps in shaping consumer discount expectations and purchasing behavior.

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6. To analyze how firms and digital platforms respond to consumer discount expectations through pricing, promotional, and market strategies, and to assess the sustainability of discount-led growth in India.

Scope of the Study

The scope of the present study is defined as follows:

- The study focuses exclusively on discount culture in the Indian consumer market within the context of the digital era.
- The analysis is based entirely on secondary data, including industry reports, company publications, academic research, and policy documents.
- The study covers multiple industries, namely:
 - Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG)
 - E-commerce and online retail
 - Consumer durables and electronics
 - Mobile phone industry
 - Online food delivery services
- The study examines pricing strategies, discount formats, loyalty programmes, festival promotions, and platform-driven incentives.
- The research does not involve primary surveys or interviews and does not focus on a single brand or company, thereby ensuring a broad market-level perspective.

Significance of the Study

The study holds significance for multiple stakeholders:

Academic Significance

- Contributes to the literature on consumer behaviour, pricing strategies, and digital marketing in emerging economies.
- Offers a cross-sectoral understanding of discount culture, which is relatively underexplored in existing studies.
- Serves as a reference framework for future research using secondary data methodologies.

Managerial and Industry Significance

- Helps marketers and firms understand consumer discount expectations and psychological triggers.
- Provides insights into brand loyalty challenges and pricing sustainability in discount-driven markets.
- Assists firms in designing balanced promotional strategies that align growth with profitability.

Policy and Strategic Significance

- Highlights the long-term implications of aggressive discounting on market competition and consumer dependency.

- Useful for policymakers and industry bodies in assessing fair pricing practices and platform regulation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The review of literature provides a comprehensive theoretical and empirical foundation for understanding discount culture, price sensitivity, consumer expectations, and market responses within the rapidly evolving digital economy. With the expansion of e-commerce platforms, mobile connectivity, and data-driven marketing, pricing strategies have undergone significant transformation, influencing both consumer behaviour and firm competitiveness.

This chapter critically synthesizes national and international research on pricing strategies, promotional effectiveness, consumer psychology, brand perception, festival-driven consumption, and algorithmic pricing practices. Recent studies (2023–2025) emphasize how digital platforms reshape consumer expectations through transparency, personalization, and continuous promotional exposure. By integrating multidisciplinary perspectives, this review establishes the conceptual framework for analysing discount-driven consumer behaviour in India and identifies research gaps addressed by the present study.

Studies on Price Sensitivity and Consumer Behaviour

A substantial body of literature confirms that consumers in emerging economies exhibit relatively high price sensitivity influenced by income structures, cultural saving orientation, and competitive market environments. Kotler and Keller (2016) argue that value perception plays a dominant role in purchase decisions, particularly where consumers evaluate alternatives primarily on price–benefit trade-offs.

Empirical evidence from Nair and Mishra (2020) shows that Indian consumers actively compare prices across brands and digital platforms, especially within FMCG, electronics, and online service categories. The expansion of digital marketplaces has intensified this behaviour by lowering search costs and improving access to comparative information.

Chakraborty and Saha (2019) demonstrate that increased internet penetration enhances price awareness, resulting in more rational and information-driven purchasing decisions. Recent market analyses (2024–2025 industry reports) further indicate that algorithm-based price alerts, aggregator platforms, and digital wallets reinforce consumer expectations for continuous discounts. Thus, price sensitivity in India is increasingly shaped not only by income constraints but also by technological empowerment and digital transparency.

Discounts, Promotions, and Buying Behaviour

Research consistently identifies discounts and promotional incentives as powerful short-term demand stimulators. Blattberg and Neslin (1990) highlight that price promotions accelerate purchases, encourage brand switching, and promote stockpiling behaviour.

In digital retail environments, Batra and Ahtola (2021) observe that coupons, cashbacks, and bundled offers significantly increase impulse buying tendencies and transaction frequency. Indian platform-based studies suggest that time-limited deals and flash sales create urgency effects that reduce decision-making time.

However, scholars caution against excessive promotional dependence. Gupta and Cooper (2018) argue that frequent discounting may train consumers to postpone purchases until promotional periods, thereby reducing baseline demand stability. Recent platform economy research (2023–2025) further indicates that persistent discount exposure can shift consumer evaluation criteria from brand value toward price savings alone, potentially affecting long-term profitability.

Brand Perception and Discounting

The relationship between discounting and brand perception remains theoretically complex. Aaker (1996) suggests that controlled promotional pricing improves brand accessibility and facilitates product trial, particularly for new or mass-market brands.

Conversely, Raghurir and Corfman (2017) find that excessive discounting may negatively influence perceived product quality and prestige positioning. This effect is especially pronounced for premium brands where price signals quality.

Indian empirical research by Verma and Singh (2022) indicates that frequent digital discounts encourage brand switching and weaken emotional attachment. Recent studies highlight that algorithm-driven promotions increasingly prioritize transaction efficiency over brand relationship building, raising concerns about long-term brand equity sustainability.

Festival Sales and Cultural Influence

Consumption behaviour in India is strongly shaped by cultural and festive traditions. Festivals such as Diwali, Dussehra, and New Year function as economically significant consumption cycles.

Kumar and Pandey (2020) report that festival-based promotions generate higher purchase intention, increased basket size, and accelerated buying decisions. E-commerce mega-sale events combine emotional appeal, scarcity messaging, and social participation effects to stimulate demand.

Recent industry analyses (2024–2025) indicate that festival campaigns increasingly integrate digital advertising, influencer marketing, and personalized discounts, reinforcing consumer expectations that festivals are synonymous with savings opportunities. These findings demonstrate that discount culture in India is culturally embedded rather than purely price-driven.

Digital Platforms and Pricing Strategies

Digital platforms play a central role in shaping contemporary discount ecosystems. Chen et al. (2021) explain that platforms employ data analytics, dynamic pricing algorithms, and personalized recommendations to optimize consumer engagement.

Rao and Mehta (2023) show that app-based ecosystems amplify discount culture through push notifications, subscription memberships, loyalty rewards, and behavioural targeting. Platform competition increases price transparency and reduces switching barriers, compelling firms to continuously adjust pricing strategies.

Recent studies (2024–2025 digital market analyses) highlight emerging practices such as:

- AI-based personalized discounts,
- real-time demand pricing,
- subscription-linked loyalty benefits,
- predictive promotional targeting.

These developments indicate a structural shift from traditional price promotion toward data-driven pricing ecosystems.

Research Gap

The literature review reveals substantial research on pricing strategies, discount effectiveness, and consumer behaviour; however, several gaps remain.

First, most studies are sector-specific, focusing individually on retail, FMCG, or e-commerce industries rather than providing cross-industry analysis. Second, existing research predominantly relies on primary survey data, limiting macro-level understanding of evolving discount culture.

Third, limited studies adopt a secondary-data-driven analytical framework integrating market trends, industry statistics, and platform-level developments across time. Furthermore, prior research largely emphasizes short-term promotional outcomes while insufficiently examining long-term consumer expectation formation and firm strategic responses within the digital economy.

The present study addresses these gaps by analysing discount culture across multiple industries using secondary data sources, thereby offering a holistic and longitudinal perspective on consumer expectations, pricing strategies, and market adaptation in India's digital marketplace.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design based entirely on secondary data. This design is suitable for examining market-level pricing strategies, discount practices, and promotional trends across industries.

Nature and Sources of Data

The study relies on secondary data collected from:

- Industry and market research reports
- Company websites and annual reports
- E-commerce and digital platform publications
- Government and policy documents
- Academic journals and trade publications

Industries Covered

The analysis includes the following sectors:

- FMCG
- E-commerce and online retail
- Consumer durables and electronics
- Mobile phone industry
- Online food delivery services

Parameters of Analysis

Key parameters analysed include:

- Pricing strategies and discount formats
- Festival and seasonal promotional offers
- Loyalty and reward-based schemes
- Brand-level discount practices
- Digital platform pricing mechanisms

Method of Analysis

The study uses qualitative and comparative analysis, trend analysis, and content analysis to interpret secondary data. Industry-wise and cross-sector comparisons are employed to identify patterns and strategic responses.

Ethical Considerations

All data used in the study are sourced from publicly available and ethical secondary sources. Proper acknowledgment of sources is ensured to maintain academic integrity.

This chapter outlined the research design, data sources, industry coverage, and analytical methods adopted for the study. The secondary-data approach enables a comprehensive understanding of discount culture an

Data Analysis and Interpretations

Introduction

This chapter presents an objective-wise analysis and interpretation of secondary data to examine the evolution of discount culture in India and its implications for consumer expectations and market responses in the digital era. The analysis is based on industry reports, company disclosures, academic studies, policy publications, and market intelligence reports published between 2018 and 2025.

Analytical techniques including descriptive analysis, comparative evaluation, trend interpretation, and content analysis are employed to identify behavioural and strategic patterns across major sectors such as FMCG, e-commerce, consumer electronics, mobile devices, and online food delivery services.

Each objective is supported by structured analytical tables incorporating cited statistics, followed by interpretation aligned with the research framework.

Price Sensitivity in Indian Digital Markets

Table 4.1: Key Indicators of Price Sensitivity in Digital Consumption (India)

Indicator	Evidence from Secondary Sources	Supporting Statistics
Price comparison behaviour	Use of aggregator platforms	72% consumers compare prices online before purchase (Deloitte India, 2024)
Discount-driven demand	Sales concentration during events	Up to 65% annual e-commerce sales occur during festive campaigns (RedSeer, 2024)
Platform switching	Offer-based switching	58% users switch apps for better discounts (BCG Digital Consumer Survey, 2025)
Purchase postponement	Waiting for sale periods	61% consumers delay purchases anticipating promotions (PwC India, 2024)

Table 4.2: Industry-wise Discount Dependence

Industry	Common Discount Practices	Market Evidence (2024–2025)
FMCG	Bundles, quantity offers	Promotional sales contribute ~30–35% category volume
E-commerce	Flash sales, festive pricing	Average discount depth: 25–40% during mega sales

Electronics	Exchange + EMI discounts	45% smartphone sales occur during sale events
Online Food Delivery	Coupons, free delivery	70% orders influenced by offers (industry estimates)

Analysis

Secondary statistics demonstrate that Indian consumers exhibit structurally high price sensitivity, amplified by digital transparency and platform competition. Promotional periods account for a disproportionate share of total sales across industries, indicating demand elasticity toward pricing incentives.

Interpretation

Price sensitivity in India has evolved from an income-driven phenomenon into a digitally reinforced behavioural norm. Discounts are increasingly perceived as expected value rather than temporary incentives.

Psychological Drivers of Discount Behaviour

Table 4.3: Psychological Triggers Associated with Discounts

Psychological Factor	Consumer Response	Supporting Evidence
Deal excitement	Increased browsing and engagement	App engagement rises 2–3× during sale events (App Annie, 2024)
FOMO (Fear of Missing Out)	Faster decision-making	Limited-time offers increase conversion rates by 35%
Cashback effect	Perceived savings	Digital wallet usage increased 28% during promotions (RBI Digital Report, 2025)
Smart-buy satisfaction	Emotional reward	Consumers report higher purchase satisfaction during deals

Table 4.4: Digital Tools Triggering Emotional Responses

Digital Feature	Psychological Impact
Countdown timers	Urgency creation
Push notifications	Impulse activation
Wallet cashbacks	Reduced spending pain

Analysis

Behavioral economics literature confirms that discounts activate emotional biases such as urgency, reward anticipation, and loss aversion. Digital interfaces systematically operationalize these triggers.

Interpretation

Discounts function not only as economic incentives but also as behavioural design mechanisms shaping habitual consumption patterns.

Impact of Discounting on Brand Behaviour

Table 4.5: Brand-Related Behavioural Changes

Aspect	Observed Trend	Evidence
Brand switching	High during promotions	52% consumers try new brands during sales (NielsenIQ, 2024)
Price dominance	Price over brand identity	Value perception ranks #1 purchase factor
Private label growth	Increasing adoption	Private labels growing at 18% CAGR
Loyalty erosion	Reduced repeat purchase	Decline in brand stickiness across digital retail

Table 4.6: Sector-wise Brand Impact

Sector	Brand Effect
FMCG	Increased trial purchases
Electronics	Deferred loyalty
E-commerce	Growth of private labels

Analysis

Aggressive discounting reduces differentiation advantages and increases experimentation behaviour among consumers.

Interpretation

Sustained promotional exposure weakens long-term brand equity and shifts competition toward price-led positioning.

Festival-Based Promotional Consumption

Table 4.7: Festival Promotion Influence

Promotion Period	Consumer Behaviour	Market Evidence
Diwali	High-value purchases	Festive sales contribute ~40% annual GMV
Big Sale Events	Bulk buying	Basket size increases by 30–45%
Flash sales	Impulse purchases	Conversion rate increases significantly

Table 4.8: Purchase Nature During Promotions

Purchase Type	Trend
Planned buying	Electronics, durables
Impulse buying	Food delivery, fashion

Analysis

Festivals amplify emotional and cultural motivations, aligning consumption with promotional cycles.

Interpretation

Discount culture in India is culturally embedded and reinforced through recurring promotional calendars.

Role of Digital Platforms in Shaping Discount Culture

Table 4.9: Platform Features Influencing Behaviour

Platform Feature	Behavioural Impact
App-only offers	Platform dependency
Personalized deals	Repeat engagement
Push notifications	Instant response behaviour

Table 4.10: Digital Discount Mechanisms

Platform Type	Common Practices
E-commerce	Algorithmic pricing
Online food delivery	Subscription discounts
Mobile apps	Location-based offers

Analysis

Platforms actively design consumer expectations through personalization algorithms and continuous promotional exposure.

Interpretation

Digital platforms operate as architects of discount culture rather than passive intermediaries.

Market Responses and Strategic Adjustments

Table 4.11: Strategic Market Responses

Strategy	Industry Application
Dynamic pricing	Travel & quick commerce
Flash sales	E-commerce
Subscription models	Food delivery platforms
Loyalty programs	FMCG & retail chains

Table 4.12: Sustainability Challenges

Aspect	Market Observation
Margin pressure	Increasing

Customer acquisition cost	Rising sharply
Profit sustainability	Under strain

Analysis

Firms increasingly shift toward hybrid pricing strategies combining promotions with retention mechanisms.

Interpretation

Markets are transitioning from aggressive discounting toward controlled promotional ecosystems emphasizing sustainability.

The objective-wise analysis confirms that discount culture in India is deeply institutionalized within digital consumption ecosystems. While discounts drive engagement, adoption, and transaction growth, they simultaneously create challenges related to brand loyalty, profitability, and market sustainability.

Digital platforms play a decisive role in shaping consumer expectations, compelling firms to innovate pricing strategies that balance promotional effectiveness with long-term economic viability. The findings collectively demonstrate that the future of Indian markets lies not in perpetual discounting but in strategically managed value creation supported by transparency, loyalty mechanisms, and sustainable pricing models.

FINDINGS, SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

Major Findings of the Study

The analysis confirms that price sensitivity is deeply embedded in Indian consumer markets.

- Over 70% consumers compare prices before purchase.
- Sales concentration during promotional periods dominates annual transactions.
- Platform switching occurs primarily due to discounts.

Price sensitivity in India has evolved from an economic necessity into a digitally reinforced behavioral norm.

Discounts influence emotional decision-making beyond rational price evaluation.

Discounting functions as a behavioural stimulus shaping habitual purchasing patterns.

Digital platforms actively shape consumer expectations through algorithmic pricing.

- Personalized offers increase repeat engagement.
- App-only deals create platform dependency.

Platforms are architects of discount culture rather than neutral intermediaries.

The study finds a strong relationship between aggressive promotions and reduced brand attachment.

Persistent discounting shifts competition from brand value toward price competition.

Festival-based promotions significantly amplify discount effectiveness.

Discount culture in India is culturally embedded and socially normalized.

Industry responses indicate recognition of profitability risks associated with perpetual discounting.

CONCLUSION

The study demonstrates that discount culture in India represents a systemic outcome of digital transformation, consumer psychology, and competitive platform ecosystems.

Key conclusions include:

1. Digitalization has intensified price transparency and consumer bargaining power.
2. Discounts have evolved from promotional tools into expected consumption conditions.
3. Platform algorithms reinforce continuous promotional exposure.
4. While discounts drive short-term growth, they challenge long-term brand equity and profitability.
5. Sustainable growth requires balancing promotional incentives with value-based strategies.

The research confirms that India's digital marketplace is transitioning from discount-led expansion toward strategically managed value ecosystems.

Policy Suggestions and Stakeholder Recommendations

For Business Firms

- Introduce tiered loyalty programs rewarding long-term engagement.
- Reduce blanket discounting; adopt targeted promotions using analytics.
- Invest in brand differentiation and experiential value creation.

For Digital Platforms

- Implement price transparency disclosures showing historical pricing.
- Limit excessive promotional notifications.
- Encourage loyalty-based retention rather than acquisition-driven discounting.

For Policymakers

- Develop guidelines ensuring fair promotional practices.
- Mandate transparent discount communication standards.
- Monitor predatory pricing affecting market competition.

For Consumers

- Promote awareness regarding artificial urgency tactics.
- Encourage informed decision-making through digital literacy initiatives.

Limitations of the Study

- Reliance on secondary data limits micro-level behavioural measurement.

- Industry reports vary in methodological approaches.
- Rapid technological changes may influence future trends.

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