

Influence of Limited-Period-Surprise-Offers on Customers' Purchase Decisions: With Special Reference to Online Shoppers in India

Ms Nibedita Baruah and Dr. Bipasha Chetiyā Barua

M. Phil Scholar Department of Commerce Dibrugarh University Dibrugarh – 786004 (Assam, India)

Assistant Professor Department of Commerce Dibrugarh University Dibrugarh – 786004 (Assam, India)

Corresponding Author: Ms Nibedita Baruah

Abstract: *Online shopping is, increasingly, becoming a trend in India. Despite being a developing country, India has shown a commendable increase in the e-commerce industry in the last couple of years, thereby hitting the market with a boom. Attractive online websites, user friendly interface, bulky online stores with new fashion, easy payment methods, and a range of tempting offers to suit ones' budget/ urgencies/celebrations.... and so on are just a few of the reasons (amongst many more) that make customers shop online. The nature of the offers made is often found to be the causes of impulsive purchases by many internet surfers viewing these shopping sites. Literature throws light upon a host of offers that are price-based, location-based, product-based, service-based, loyalty-based, time-based, and so on. However, for the purpose of the study conducted, the researchers have concentrated their focus on only the time-based offers; more specifically, those that are valid for not more than a day. Under the context of non-availability of a universally acceptable definition of the offers under study, the researchers have coined the term "Limited-Period-Surprise-Offers (LPSOs)" to indicate the same and have also developed a working definition to define the newly-coined terminology.*

The study has been carried out with a single focal objective, i.e. To understand the influence of Limited-Period-Surprise-Offers on Customers' Purchase decisions; and two supporting Research Questions – (a) Do LPSOs attract customers towards making online purchases? And (b) Are customers' purchase decisions influenced by LPSOs while shopping online?

So as to give an all-India perspective to the findings of the study, primary data has been collected from the respondents residing in the four zones of India -North, South, East and West with the help of an online questionnaire distributed to online shoppers identified through Snowball Sampling Technique.

Key Words: *LPSO, Online Shopping, E-tailers*

Date of Submission: 12-01-2018

Date of acceptance: 03-02-2018

I. The Backdrop: E-Commerce in India

With Liberalization of the Indian Economy in 1991, not only did physical trade and commerce see an increase in trend but also did its virtual counterpart, i.e E-Commerce. *Online shopping* in its early stage was a simple medium for shopping with fewer options. The users could just place an order and pay cash on delivery. However, the world has seen a tremendous development in all facets of online retailing since then till date. There is a whole gamut of user-friendly and tempting tools, techniques and tactics that arrest the continuous and recurring interest of the online shoppers - inducing them to make planned as well as unplanned purchases. And India is only but a modest follower of this global trend. Despite being a developing country, India has shown a commendable increase in the e-commerce industry in the last couple of years, thereby hitting the market with a boom. Though the Indian online market is far behind the US and the UK, it has been growing at a fast pace.

The Key drivers of Indian e-commerce have been:

- Increasing broadband Internet and 3G penetration.
- Growing Living standards
- Availability of much wider product range
- Busy lifestyles and lack of time for offline shopping
- Increased usage of online categorized sites
- Evolution of the online marketplace model with websites like eBay, Flipkart, Snapdeal, etc.

Of the various reasons cited above that have led to an increase in online shopping, one crucial shaper of the online sales graph is marketing offers made by e-tailers.

II. Types Of Offers In Online Retailing

Weekly or Monthly Offers: These types of offers are usually said to be traditional in nature. Weekly or monthly offers help to increase sales. They are generally offered by retailers at the end of a week or a month or after a couple of months to increase revenues and meet the goals.

Prelaunch Offers: These types of offers are introduced by retailers when they are about to introduce a new product in the online market. Offering a new product with special types of discounts and offering free gifts, helps in acquiring new as well as attracting existing customers'. They are used to gather large traffic with the help of promotions in the form of offers.

Holiday or Seasonal Offers: As the name suggests holiday or seasonal offers are those which are made during the off days. Black Friday, Christmas and New years are the big ones. For example: End-of-season offers.

Abandon Cart Offers: Abandoned cart emails are sent to customers who have added products to their cart but failed to check out. It's remarkably effective as a sales recovery tactic. With close to 70% of all people abandoning their carts, abandon cart email offers can be a powerful tactic to bring those people back.

Email/Newsletter Subscription Offer: Building an email list is extremely important for online retailers. By providing an offer in exchange for visitors emails address, this increases the chance of a conversion, but the retailers get their email, providing their customers with the opportunity to market new products and offers to them in the future.

Offers for Liking, Following and Sharing on Social: One of the hardest parts of running a new online store is getting word out. This type of offers are for those who try sharing, liking and following and make others do the same about their site by promoting with the help of word of mouth thus giving visitors and customers an incentive to share about the whereabouts of the store with their social circles.

Referral Offers: People are much more likely to purchase from stores if referred by a friend or family member. This acts as an advantage and use offers to encourage referrals. One can choose to give a deal to the person referring, the person being referred or both.

First Time Shopper Offer: First time offers are for those who are new to the shopping app. These types of offers can encourage other new online shoppers to avail them. Providing a first timers offer could be just the nudge those first-time visitor needs to be converted to a paying customer.

Minimum Purchase Discount: This type of an offer is based on the total value of a shopping cart and is an effective selling tactic to encourage customers to spend more, increasing the average order size. A strategic way to incorporate this into one's online store is to calculate the average order value for the previous few months and then offer a discount or free shipping on all orders of 10-20% over the average order value. These types offer minimum purchase discounts for specific collections and products. If there's a particular collection the customers want to focus on, the offer adds a minimum purchase discount to incentivize the audience.

Exclusive Social Offers: Exclusive offers on social networks is a great way to build a strong relationship with those that follow as well as provide a reason for new people to follow and subscribe to the social channels, which will allow the retailers to market to them in the future.

Customer Loyalty Offers: These offers are particularly for those customers who are loyal and purchases from the same shopping apps online. Rewarding customer loyalty can help to build an even stronger bond by not only providing discounts to customers that already spend money with the online store but also building goodwill for the online store.

Exit Intent Offer: There are basically more visitors than shoppers in shopping online. Sometimes all it takes for to convert a visitor to a customer in a last second offer before they leave. An exit intent offer popup just as the visitor is about to leave the shopping site or is about to close the tab, presenting them with a final offer to purchase.

Retargeting Offer: Retargeting offers are effective because they're only shown to people who are loyal and that have been on the shopping site before so the customers already know about the shopping site. The ads serve as a reminder to come back and the offer serves as a nudge to purchase.¹

RESEARCH GAP:

From the review of literature, the researchers could understand that advertisements and promotions, and particularly discounts and offers, play a vital role in shaping customers' decision to make online purchases. Thus, it is expected of the retailers to be continually innovative and customer-centric in promoting their merchandise online and to relate to every customer on a one-to-one basis considering the customers' needs, conveniences, budgets, etc.; more so because physically distant customers are harder to inform, convince and satisfy. However, the researchers have not come across any such literature that addresses Limited-Period-

¹Lazazzera, R. (n.d.). *Shopify Blogs*. Retrieved November 24, 2017, from 14 ways to use offers, coupons, discounts and deals to drive Revenue & Customer Loyalty: <https://www.shopify.in/blog/15514000-14-ways-to-use-offers-coupons-discounts-and-deals-to-drive-revenue-and-customer-loyalty>

Surprise-Offers (hereafter referred to as LPSOs) in particular or that has looked into promotions and offers in context to a specific time period.

The nature of the offers made is often found to be the causes for impulsive purchases by many internet surfers viewing these shopping sites. Literature throws light upon a host of offers that are price-based, location-based, product-based, service-based, loyalty-based, time-based, and so on. However, for the purpose of the study conducted, the researchers have concentrated their focus on only the time-based offers; more specifically, those that are **valid for not more than a day**. Under the context of non-availability of a universally acceptable definition of the offers under study, the researchers have coined the term “Limited-Period-Surprise-Offers (LPSOs)” to indicate the same and have also developed a working definition to define the newly-coined terminology. Confining focus of the study on particularly LPSOs stand justified as the researchers have practically observed a rise in such type of online offers over the last few years. To name a few, “Happy Hours” by, “Midnight Sale” by....

WORKING DEFINITION:

Limited-Period-Surprise-Offers : Under the context of unavailability of a proper and universally accepted definition of the concept of “Limited-Period-Surprise-Offers” in the literature reviewed till date, the researchers have framed the following working definition to create understanding about the meaning of the afore stated concept for the purpose of the present study:

“Limited-Period-Surprise-Offers” may be defined as those sudden offers made by various e-retailers, from time to time, for a period not exceeding a day, in order to attract existing and prospective customers to make impulsive and unplanned purchases. Primarily, focused on price-related offers, such offers may include any other sales promotion tactic from free gifts to frequent-customer bonanzas.”

OBJECTIVE:

- To understand the influence of Limited-Period-Surprise-Offers on Customers' Purchase decisions

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

Q1. Do LPSOs attract customers towards making online purchases?

Q2. Are customers' purchase decisions influenced by LPSOs while shopping online?

III. Methodology

To give an all-India perspective to the study, Multistage Sampling has been carried out to collect responses - starting with Area Cluster Sampling to divide the country into four zones – North, South, East and West. Thereafter, one metropolitan city from each of the four zones, viz. Delhi, Bangalore, Kolkata and Mumbai respectively have been selected purposively for accessing respondents. The purpose behind selection of the metropolitan cities was that many previous literature and available statistics vouch for better internet support infrastructure, concentration of better educated and higher income population, and a more uptrend lifestyle in these regions that strongly favor a larger existence of online shoppers therein. Finally, as the total number of online shoppers in India remains unknown to the researchers in the absence of any registered record of the same, Snowball Sampling Technique has been adopted to serve an online questionnaire to the online shoppers residing in each of the cities in equal proportion for collecting primary data.

The data so collected has been analyzed using simple statistical tools such as percentage calculation and cross-tabulation for ease of understanding by the reader. The analysis of the collected responses has been done considering two demographic parameters, i.e. age and income, apart from stating distinctive region/zone-based findings.

RESPONDENTS' PROFILE:

Table 1: Respondents' Age Based on the Zones:

	East	West	North	South	Total	%
21-30 years	44	29	32	38	143	85.12
31-40 years	2	4	2	7	15	8.93
41-50 years	1	2	2	2	7	4.17
51 years & above	0	1	2	0	3	1.78
Total	47	36	38	47	168	100

(Source: Survey data)

Interpretation: As seen in Table 1, out of a total of 168 respondents, 47 are from East India, 36 from the West, 38 from the North and 47 from the South. When considered age-wise, while the largest number of respondents, i.e 143 of them, belong to the age group of 21-30 years, a comparatively much lesser 15, 7 and only 3 belong to

the age groups of 31-40, 41-50 and 51years and above respectively. This goes on to show that there are more younger people who shop online as compared to the older ones. The same has been evident in many other previous research works too.

Table 2: Respondents' Income Based on the Zones:

	East	West	North	South	Total	%
Rs. 20,000-35,000	36	11	21	16	84	50
Rs. 36,000-45,000	7	9	10	13	39	23.21
Rs. 46,000 & above	4	16	7	18	45	26.79
Total	47	36	38	47	168	100

(Source: Survey data)

Interpretation: As is evident in Table 2, out of a total of 168 respondents, data could be collected from 84 respondents whose annual monthly income ranges between Rs. 20,000 – Rs. 35,000, 39 of them whose monthly income ranges between Rs. 36,000 – Rs. 45,000 and 45 of them whose monthly income ranges above Rs. 46,000.

IV. Analysing The Objective:

The four zones are denoted as under mentioned in the tables that follow:

East: E, West: W, North: N, South: S, respectively

TABLE 3: Inclination towards Frequency of Purchase during LPSOs based on Age Groups among the Four Zones:

Options	21-30 years (%)				31-40 years (%)				41-50 years (%)				51 years & above (%)			
	E	W	N	S	E	W	N	S	E	W	N	S	E	W	N	S
Yes	71.11	55.17	68.75	50	100	50	100	57.14	0	100	0	50	-	0	0	-
No	28.89	44.83	32.25	50	0	50	0	42.86	100	0	100	50	-	100	100	-

(Source: Survey Data)

Interpretation: From the Table 3 it is seen that, 100% of the respondents in the age group of '41-50 years' are not inclined to purchase frequently during the LPSOs in the East. In the West & North, 100% of the respondents belonging to the age group of '51 years & above' are not inclined to purchase frequently during the LPSOs. But in the South, 50% of the respondents are inclined and 50% are not inclined to purchase frequently during the LPSOs belonging to the age groups of 21-30 years and 41-50 years respectively. A null response is seen among the respondents belonging to the age group of 51 years & above both in the East and South.

TABLE 4: Level of Inclination towards Frequency of Purchase during LPSOs based on Age Groups among the Four Zones:

Age Group	Every time such offers seen (%)				Occasionally (%)				Rarely (%)			
	E	W	N	S	E	W	N	S	E	W	N	S
21-30 years	88.89	50	94.12	83.34	100	100	85.71	72.73	100	-	-	100
31-40 years	11.11	25	5.88	8.3	-	-	14.29	27.27	-	-	-	-
41-50 years	-	25	-	8.3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
51 years & above	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

(Source: Survey Data)

Interpretation: Table 4 shows that 100% of the respondents belonging to the age group of 21-30 years purchase occasionally as well as rarely during the LPSOs in the East. 25 % of the respondents in the West belonging to the age groups of 31-40 years and 41-50 years opined that they tend to purchase every time when such offers are seen. Majority of the respondents belonging to the age group of 21-30 years are inclined to purchase every time when such offers are seen (94.12%) as well as occasionally (85.71%) in the North. In the South, 27.27% of the respondents belonging to the age group of 31-40 years prefer to purchase occasionally during the LPSOs. A null response is obtained from the respondents belonging to the age group of 51 years & above in all the four zones.

According to M.P. Jaiswal et al, a majority of online shoppers are in the age group of less than 35 years. The rest comprise of working executives who do not have time to do traditional shopping. The reason for the above segment to buy online is their familiarity and easy accessibility with the Internet usage also most of the people belonging to the IT sector prefer buying online to an extent, if not complete their needs.² Thus, the findings of the present study also subscribe to a similar scenario.

² M P Jaiswal, V. G. (2002). *e - business Models*. New Delhi: EXCEL BOOKS.

TABLE 5: Inclination towards Unplanned and Impulsive Purchases during LPSOs based on Age Groups among the Four Zones:

Age	Yes (%)				No (%)			
	E	W	N	S	E	W	N	S
21- 30 years	68.18	64.29	71.88	65.79	31.82	35.71	28.12	34.21
31-40 years	50	75	100	71.43	50	25	0	28.57
41-50 years	0	100	0	100	100	0	100	0
51 & above	0	0	50	0	0	100	50	0

(Source: Survey Data)

Interpretation: Table 5 depicts that, 100% of the respondents in the West and South belonging to the age group of 41-50 years are inclined towards unplanned and impulsive purchases whereas 100% of the respondents in the East and North belonging to the same age group are not inclined to make unplanned and impulsive purchases during the limited-period-surprise-offers.

TABLE 6: Categories of Inclination towards Unplanned and Impulsive Purchases during LPSOs based on Age Groups among the Four Zones:

Age	Clothing & Apparel (%)				Electronics (%)				Home Decor (%)				Others (%)			
	E	W	N	S	E	W	N	S	E	W	N	S	E	W	N	S
21-30 years	96.30	76.19	91.67	80.65	95.65	75	88.88	78.57	90.91	6.67	91.67	72.72	93.75	58.33	89.47	76.47
31-40 years	3.70	14.29	8.33	16.13	4.35	8.33	5.56	14.29	9.09	2.22	8.33	18.18	6.25	25	10.53	23.53
41-50 years	0	9.52	0	3.22	0	16.67	0	7.14	0	1.11	0	9.10	0	16.67	0	0
51 years & above	0	0	0	0	0	0	5.56	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Source: Survey Data

Interpretation: From the Table 6 , in all the four zones, it is seen that majority of the respondents belonging to the age group of 21-30 years are inclined to purchase in all the categories, i.e. Clothing & Apparel, Electronics, Home Decor as well as in others. On the other hand, a null response is obtained from the respondents belonging to the age group of 51 years & above from all the categories.

This finding is quite in line with M.P. Jaiswal’s research finding that states - Products such as apparels, books, music, banking & finance, computer spares & software, gifts and electronic items are some of the other products sold mostly on online sites.³

TABLE 7: Inclined to Deviate from Budget during LPSOs based on the Income among the Four Zones:

Occupation	Yes (%)				No (%)			
	E	W	N	S	E	W	N	S
Rs. 20,000 – Rs. 35,000	56.76	63.67	66.67	56.25	43.24	36.36	33.33	43.75
Rs. 36,000 – Rs. 45,000	57.14	18.18	90	46.15	42.86	81.82	10	53.85
Rs. 46,000 & above	66.67	50	42.86	50	33.33	50	57.14	50

(Source: Survey data)

Interpretation: The table 7 depicts that, in the East a positive response is seen from the respondents’ belonging to all the income groups. On ranking, majority (66.67%) of respondents belonging to the income group of Rs. 46,000 & above are inclined to deviate from their budget during the LPSOs. But majority of the respondents in the West (81.82%) and South (53.85%), of the income group Rs. 36,000 – Rs. 45,000 are not inclined to deviate from their budget whereas the North shows a total opposite picture that 90% of the respondents belonging to the same income group are inclined to deviate from their budget during the LPSOs.

³ M P Jaiswal, V. G. (2002). *e - business Models*. New Delhi: EXCEL BOOKS.

TABLE 8: Trend/Pattern of Expenditure during LPSOs based on their Age Groups among the Four Zones:

Age	High (%)				Same (%)				Low (%)			
	E	W	N	S	E	W	N	S	E	W	N	S
21- 30 years	44	54.55	68.18	38.89	48	45.45	31.82	44.44	8	0	0	16.67
31-40 years	0	33.33	50	40	100	66.67	50	60	0	0	0	0
41- 50 years	0	50	0	100	100	50	0	0	0	0	0	0
51 years & above	0	0	0	0	0	0	100	0	0	0	0	0

(Source: Survey data)

Interpretation: From the table 8 it is seen that, 100% of the respondents in the East, belonging to the age groups 31-40 years and 41-50 years opined that their trend or expenditure pattern remains same during the LPSOs. However, in the West 50 % of the respondent's trend/ expenditure pattern takes a higher turn and 50 % of the respondent's trend/ expenditure pattern same during LPSOs. In the North, 100% of the respondents opined that their trend/ expenditure pattern during the LPSOs remains same of those belonging to the age group of 51 years & above. On the other hand, 100% of the respondent's trend/ expenditure pattern tend to go high during the LPSOs in the South.

TABLE 9: Reasons that Influence to Purchase during LPSOs based on Age Groups among the Four Zones:

In the following tables, the age groups are denoted as:

21 years- 30 years = a, 31 years – 40 years = b, 41 years – 50 years = c & 51 years & above = d respectively.

And the reasons that influence have been depicted thus:

- Reason 1: Attractive advertisements
- Reason 2: Heavy Discounts
- Reason 3: Frequent visits to shopping apps
- Reason 4: Easy cancellation
- Reason 5: Easy returns
- Reason 6: Fast delivery of the products
- Reason 7: Multiple payment modes
- Reason 8: Time to time notifications and updates regarding such offers
- Reason 9: Additional discount in form of coupons/lotteries being availed during such offers

Age ⇔ Groups	East (%)				West (%)				North (%)				South (%)			
	a.	b.	c.	d.	a.	b.	c.	d.	a.	b.	c.	d.	a.	b.	c.	d.
R-1	9.50	9.09	-	-	9.87	13.64	9.09	-	9.62	15.39	16.66	-	7.65	10.26	20	-
R-2	15.70	18.19	25	-	16.45	13.64	18.19	-	15.51	15.39	33.33	33.33	18.82	15.39	10	-
R-3	11.16	9.09	-	-	7.89	4.54	9.09	-	8.55	15.39	-	-	8.82	12.82	10	-
R-4	7.44	9.09	-	-	8.55	13.64	9.09	-	9.63	7.69	-	-	10.59	7.69	10	-
R-5	8.27	9.09	25	-	9.87	13.64	9.09	-	9.63	7.69	-	66.67	11.18	10.26	10	-
R-6	11.16	9.09	25	-	11.18	9.09	18.18	-	12.83	15.38	16.67	-	11.76	15.38	10	-
R-7	11.98	9.09	25	-	12.5	9.09	9.09	-	10.70	7.69	-	-	8.82	12.82	10	-
R-8	12.81	18.18	-	-	13.16	4.54	9.09	-	10.70	7.69	16.67	-	7.65	7.69	10	-
R-9	11.98	9.09	-	-	10.53	18.18	9.09	-	12.83	7.69	16.67	-	14.71	7.69	20	-

(Source: Survey Data)

Interpretation: In the table 9 it can be seen that the respondents belonging to the age group of 51 years & above in East, West & South are not inclined to purchase concerning any of the reasons mentioned above. Whereas, respondents (66.67%) in the North of the same age group are inclined to the purchase frequently due to the easy returns during the limited-period-surprise-offers.

TABLE 10: Reasons that Influence to Purchase during LPSOs based on Income among the Four Zones:
 In the tables that follow, the Income groups are denoted as:
A: Rs. 20,000- Rs. 35,000; B: Rs. 36,000 – Rs. 45,000; C: Rs. 46,000 & above, respectively.

Income Groups ⇐	East (%)			West (%)			North (%)			South (%)		
	A	B	C	A	B	C	A	B	C	A	B	C
Reason 1	8.66	14.29	7.14	10.34	9.09	11.11	10.74	8.93	9.38	8.33	9.09	6.17
Reason 2	14.90	17.14	28.57	15.52	12.73	19.45	15.70	16.07	18.75	16.67	18.18	19.75
Reason 3	12.02	8.57	-	6.90	7.27	8.33	6.61	10.72	12.5	9.73	10.61	8.64
Reason 4	7.21	8.57	7.14	12.07	7.27	8.33	9.92	8.93	6.25	8.33	12.12	9.88
Reason 5	8.17	8.57	14.29	12.07	10.91	8.33	9.92	12.5	6.25	11.11	9.09	12.35
Reason 6	11.06	14.29	7.14	13.80	12.73	8.33	14.05	10.71	12.5	12.5	10.61	13.58
Reason 7	12.02	11.43	14.29	10.34	14.54	11.11	11.57	8.93	6.24	11.11	9.09	8.64
Reason 8	12.98	11.43	14.29	8.62	12.73	13.90	9.92	10.71	12.5	8.33	7.57	7.41
Reason 9	12.98	5.71	7.14	10.34	12.73	11.11	11.57	12.5	15.63	13.89	13.64	13.58

(Source: Survey Data)

Interpretation: From the table 10 it can be seen that majority of the respondents (28.57%) in the East belonging to the income group 'C' are inclined to purchase frequently due to the 'Heavy Discounts' being availed by them during the limited-period-surprise-offers. But, majority of the respondents (14.54%) in the West belonging the income group 'B' are inclined to purchase frequently due to the availability of 'Multiple payment modes' during the same.

V. Recommendations

- Simple and user friendly websites should be specially designed for the age group of 50 years and above so that they can easily access to those websites and purchase products of their specific requirements. In context thereto, particularly, the health care and pharma sectors as well as the various essential services may be tapped upon by the e-tailers with both a service and profit motive.
- In case of electronic products, the service centers are absent in various locations other than the metropolis for which the customer faces major issues in connecting with the service centers which are situated at distant places apart from the delivered locations. E-tailers selling such products should ensure prompt and easy customer access to the associated services to increase purchases in these categories.
- It has been found that considering the four zones, the age groups and income groups vary with the difference in reasons preferring for impulsive purchases during LPSOs. So, the e-tailers should adopt innovative advertising and promotional tactics to attract customers' focusing on different age groups as well as of different income groups to increase sales.
- As the influence for purchase during the LPSOs is seen to be high among the respondents' belonging to the Income Group 'C'. The retailers for the purpose should use additional discounts as a tactic in attracting them for purchase of high end products too.

VI. Conclusion

With lifestyles and technology changing fast, the younger generations are rapidly making a transition from physical/real to virtual modes of operations in almost every sphere of life. Be it booking trips, buying meals, making financial transactions, searching for and sharing information,.....or shopping. As we may call it, they are fast becoming "E-trendy". The slightly older ones are gradually picking up pace so as to remain on the same trail as their younger counterparts. Else, they are alienated from the so-called modern world. Moreover, a crowded street and smaller/lonelier families have posed a genuine threat to the very survival strategies of the aged. While e-tailers are working out innovative measures to cater to the requirements of all categories of customers/ prospective customers, more is needed to be done for the older segments. Also, with greater focus on ensuring reliable and prompt linkages with delivery mechanisms and associated services equitably across different locations and products lines, and by devising Customer Relationship Management (CRM) strategies with a more personalized touch, the online shopping sector is expected to grow much more in the coming years.

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IOSR Journal of Business and Management (IOSR-JBM) is UGC approved Journal with SI. No. 4481, Journal no. 46879.

Ms Nibedita Baruah "Influence of Limited-Period-Surprise-Offers on Customers' Purchase Decisions: With Special Reference to Online Shoppers in India." IOSR Journal of Business and Management (IOSR-JBM) 20.1 (2018): PP 52-59.