

A STUDY OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR PATTERNS IN AKOLA (MH30) AND KHAMGAON (MH56), MAHARASHTRA

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Submitted By

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Abstract

This research paper examines consumer behaviour patterns in two mid-sized cities of Maharashtra — Akola (registered under MH30) and Khamgaon (registered under MH56). The study explores how residents of these cities make their buying decisions, what factors influence them, and how their behaviour compares across different product categories. A structured questionnaire was distributed to approximately 150 respondents spread across both cities. The data collected was analysed using simple statistical tools such as frequency distribution and percentage analysis. The findings reveal that while price sensitivity is high in both cities, residents of Khamgaon tend to be more conservative in their brand choices, whereas Akola residents show a relatively stronger inclination toward digital platforms and online shopping. The paper concludes with practical suggestions for businesses and marketers looking to operate in this region.

Keywords: *Consumer Behaviour, Akola, Khamgaon, Buying Patterns, Brand Perception, Price Sensitivity, Maharashtra, Rural-Urban Consumer.*

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Consumer behaviour is essentially the study of how people decide what to buy, when to buy, how much to spend, and why they prefer one product or brand over another. It is one of the most important areas of study in marketing and business management because understanding what drives a customer's purchase decision can help businesses design better products, communication strategies, and services.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in understanding how consumers in smaller cities and semi-urban areas of India behave. Unlike metros like Mumbai or Pune, cities like Akola and Khamgaon have their own unique economic, cultural, and social dynamics that shape how people shop. These cities lie in the Vidarbha and eastern Khandesh regions of Maharashtra — areas that have historically been dominated by agriculture, government employment, and small-scale businesses.

The researcher chose these two cities because they represent an interesting contrast: Akola is a district headquarters with a reasonably developed urban infrastructure, while Khamgaon is a smaller town with a strong trading community and a market heavily influenced by seasonal agricultural income. Studying both cities side by side allows for meaningful comparisons and a richer picture of consumer trends in this part of Maharashtra.

1.2 About the Cities

Akola is located in the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra and serves as the administrative headquarters of Akola district. It is a city with a population of approximately 5–6 lakh people. The city has a diverse economic base, including cotton trading, government services, education, and a growing retail and service sector. In recent years, Akola has seen increased penetration of smartphones and internet connectivity, which has gradually changed the way residents shop and gather information.

Khamgaon, on the other hand, is a city in Buldhana district, registered under the vehicle code MH56. It is known for its strong trading community, particularly in textiles and agricultural produce. The local economy is closely tied to agriculture, and the purchasing power of many residents is seasonal. Despite this, Khamgaon has a vibrant local market culture and a loyal base of consumers who prefer established brands and trust built through word of mouth.

1.3 Problem Statement

While a considerable body of research exists on consumer behaviour in tier-1 cities of India, relatively little attention has been paid to cities like Akola and Khamgaon. Businesses often generalise rural and semi-urban consumer behaviour without understanding the specific patterns, preferences, and motivations unique to these markets. This creates a gap — both in academic literature and in practical marketing strategy. This study attempts to fill that gap by conducting an on-ground survey and presenting data-backed insights on how consumers in these two cities actually behave.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this research paper are as follows:

- To understand the basic consumer behaviour and buying patterns in Akola and Khamgaon.
- To identify the key factors that influence purchase decisions in these two cities.
- To compare online versus offline shopping preferences.
- To study the role of social media and advertisements in shaping consumer choices.
- To analyse brand loyalty, price sensitivity, and post-purchase satisfaction.
- To offer practical suggestions for businesses and marketers operating in this region.

1.5 Scope of the Study

This study is limited to consumers residing in Akola city (MH30) and Khamgaon town (MH56) in Maharashtra. The respondents belong to different age groups, income levels, and occupations. The survey focuses on general consumer behaviour across product categories such as electronics, clothing, FMCG, and two-wheelers. The study does not claim to represent the entire Vidarbha or Marathwada region, but the findings may have some relevance for neighbouring areas with similar socio-economic profiles.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Understanding Consumer Behaviour

Consumer behaviour has been a topic of interest for academics and practitioners for many decades. At its core, it involves understanding the decision-making process that a buyer goes through before, during, and after a purchase. Philip Kotler and Gary Armstrong, in their widely used textbook *Principles of Marketing*, describe consumer behaviour as the buying behaviour of final consumers — individuals and households that buy goods and services for personal consumption. This simple definition conceals considerable complexity, because people's buying decisions are influenced by a wide range of internal and external factors.

One of the foundational frameworks in this area is Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which suggests that people buy things to satisfy their needs — starting from basic needs like food and shelter, and moving toward higher needs like social belonging and self-esteem. While this theory is somewhat simplified, it provides a useful starting point for understanding why people value different products differently. A farmer in Khamgaon buying a two-wheeler might prioritise fuel efficiency and durability (functional need), while a young professional in Akola might be more attracted to design and brand image (aspirational need).

2.2 Factors Influencing Consumer Behaviour

Research consistently shows that consumer behaviour is shaped by four broad categories of factors:

Cultural Factors: Culture plays a significant role in shaping what people buy and how they buy it. In cities like Akola and Khamgaon, strong community and caste-based networks mean that recommendations from family elders

or respected community members carry considerable weight. Sharma (2018) found in his study of tier-2 Indian cities that cultural norms around frugality and value-for-money significantly influenced purchase decisions in smaller towns.

Social Factors: Word of mouth, family opinions, and peer groups are important influences. In a study on rural and semi-urban Maharashtra, Deshmukh and Jadhav (2020) found that over 60% of respondents sought the advice of at least one family member before making a major purchase. Social media has added a new dimension to this — people now look at reviews, ratings, and influencer recommendations on YouTube and Instagram before buying.

Personal Factors: Age, income, occupation, and lifestyle significantly affect what people buy. A young student aged 18–25 in Akola is likely to have very different preferences compared to a 45-year-old farmer in Khamgaon. Income levels in smaller cities are generally lower than in metros, which means price sensitivity tends to be higher.

Psychological Factors: Motivation, perception, learning, and attitude all play a role. A consumer who has had a positive experience with a particular brand is more likely to remain loyal to it. In markets with limited exposure to variety, brand familiarity becomes even more important.

2.3 Online vs. Offline Shopping in Semi-Urban India

The growth of e-commerce platforms like Amazon, Flipkart, and Meesho has transformed the shopping landscape across India, including in smaller cities. However, research suggests that adoption in tier-2 and tier-3 cities has been uneven. Gupta and Singh (2021) found that while smartphone penetration in smaller cities had increased dramatically, consumers still preferred physical stores for categories like clothing, jewellery, and certain electronics, largely due to trust concerns and the desire to physically inspect products before buying.

At the same time, categories such as mobile phones, books, and small electronics have seen growing online purchase behaviour even in semi-urban areas. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this shift, as lockdowns prompted many first-time online buyers to try digital platforms. Post-pandemic, a mixed behaviour has emerged — consumers shop online for price comparison but often complete the purchase offline.

2.4 Research Gap

Most studies on consumer behaviour in Maharashtra focus on Pune, Mumbai, or Nagpur. Very few studies specifically examine the buying patterns of consumers in Akola and Khamgaon. Additionally, most research treats semi-urban and rural consumers as a homogeneous group, ignoring the differences that exist even between two relatively nearby towns. This study attempts to address this gap by providing specific, city-level insights backed by primary data.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study uses a descriptive research design. The goal is to describe and understand the consumer behaviour patterns in Akola and Khamgaon, not to test a hypothesis or establish a causal relationship. Descriptive research is appropriate here because the researcher seeks to capture the current state of consumer behaviour and present it in a systematic manner.

3.2 Data Collection

Both primary and secondary data have been used in this study. Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire survey. The questionnaire was designed to capture information about respondents' buying habits, brand preferences, media habits, and satisfaction levels. Secondary data was gathered from published research papers, marketing reports, and government census data available online.

3.3 Sampling

A total of 150 respondents were surveyed — 80 from Akola and 70 from Khamgaon. The sampling method used was convenience sampling, which is practical for a student-level research project. Respondents were approached in public places such as markets, educational institutions, and commercial areas in both cities. The questionnaires were distributed both in person and digitally (via Google Forms shared through WhatsApp groups).

3.4 Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire consists of five sections. Section A covers the respondent's demographic profile (age, gender, occupation, and income). Section B focuses on buying behaviour and shopping habits. Section C measures customer satisfaction with products and services. Section D captures brand perception. Section E allows respondents to share open-ended feedback. The questionnaire is attached as an appendix to this paper.

3.5 Tools for Analysis

The data collected was analysed using simple statistical tools including frequency distribution, percentage analysis, and comparative tables. No advanced statistical software was used. Charts and tables are presented to make the data easy to interpret. The analysis primarily uses descriptive statistics, as the study is exploratory in nature.

3.6 Limitations

This study has certain limitations that should be kept in mind while interpreting the findings. First, the sample size of 150 is relatively small and may not be fully representative of the entire population of both cities. Second, convenience sampling introduces selection bias. Third, some respondents may not have answered honestly, especially on questions related to income. Fourth, the study was conducted over a limited time period and may not capture seasonal variations in buying behaviour.

4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The following tables present the demographic breakdown of the 150 respondents surveyed across Akola (n=80) and Khamgaon (n=70).

Table 1: Age Distribution of Respondents

Age Group	Akola (n=80)	Khamgaon (n=70)	Total (%)
Below 20 years	14 (17.5%)	10 (14.3%)	16%
20 – 30 years	28 (35%)	22 (31.4%)	33.3%
31 – 45 years	26 (32.5%)	24 (34.3%)	33.3%
Above 45 years	12 (15%)	14 (20%)	17.4%

As seen in Table 1, the majority of respondents (approximately 66%) fall in the 20–45 age group, which is also the most economically active segment. Khamgaon has a slightly higher proportion of older respondents (above 45), which may reflect the town's relatively older demographic compared to the more college-dense city of Akola.

Table 2: Occupation Profile of Respondents

Occupation	Akola (%)	Khamgaon (%)	Combined (%)
Student	22.5%	15.7%	19.3%
Salaried Employee	27.5%	20%	24.0%
Self-Employed / Business	20%	34.3%	26.7%
Farmer	10%	17.1%	13.3%
Government Employee	12.5%	8.6%	10.7%
Homemaker / Others	7.5%	4.3%	6.0%

A notable finding from Table 2 is that self-employed individuals and business owners form a larger proportion of respondents in Khamgaon (34.3%) compared to Akola (20%). This is consistent with Khamgaon’s reputation as a strong trading town. Farmers also account for a higher share in Khamgaon, reflecting the agrarian character of Buldhana district.

4.2 Online vs. Offline Shopping Preferences

One of the central questions in this study was whether consumers in these two cities prefer online or offline shopping, and for which product categories.

Table 3: Shopping Mode Preference by Product Category

Product Category	Online (Akola)	Offline (Akola)	Online (Khamgaon)	Offline (Khamgaon)
Mobile Phones	52%	48%	38%	62%
Clothing & Apparel	28%	72%	18%	82%
Grocery / FMCG	14%	86%	8%	92%
Electronics (TV, AC etc.)	35%	65%	22%	78%
Books / Stationery	40%	60%	20%	80%
Two-Wheelers	12%	88%	6%	94%

The data in Table 3 clearly shows that offline shopping continues to dominate across most product categories in both cities. However, Akola residents show a relatively higher tendency to shop online compared to Khamgaon across all categories. Mobile phones are the category where online shopping is most prevalent — over half the Akola respondents said they have bought or would buy a phone online, compared to 38% in Khamgaon.

For categories like groceries, two-wheelers, and clothing, the preference for physical stores is overwhelming in both cities. Respondents frequently cited reasons such as: the desire to feel and touch the product, concerns about delivery quality, distrust of return policies, and the preference for immediate possession of the product.

4.3 Brand Choices and Brand Loyalty

When asked about their attitude toward brands, respondents gave interesting responses. In Khamgaon, 68% of respondents said they tend to buy the same brand repeatedly once they are satisfied with it, compared to 54% in Akola. This suggests that brand loyalty is stronger in Khamgaon, possibly because exposure to new brands is lower and trust is built gradually over time.

In terms of brand awareness, Akola respondents showed familiarity with a wider range of brands — particularly in the FMCG and electronics categories. This is likely due to higher media exposure (television and digital) and the presence of larger retail outlets and brand showrooms in Akola. In Khamgaon, locally known or nationally established brands with strong dealer networks tend to dominate.

Table 4: Consumer Response on Brand-Switching Behaviour

Behaviour	Akola (%)	Khamgaon (%)
Sticks to one brand always	32%	44%
Switches if discounts are high	38%	28%
Open to trying new brands	22%	16%
Depends on category	8%	12%

Table 4 reinforces the finding that Khamgaon consumers are more brand-loyal but less willing to experiment. A higher proportion of Akola respondents indicated they would switch brands if offered attractive discounts — suggesting that promotional pricing can be an effective strategy in Akola’s market.

4.4 Price Sensitivity

Price sensitivity was assessed by asking respondents how important price is in their final purchase decision. On a scale of 1 (Not Important) to 5 (Extremely Important), the average score was 4.1 in Akola and 4.3 in Khamgaon — indicating that price is a very significant factor in both cities, but slightly more so in Khamgaon.

When asked whether they typically wait for sales or festival offers before making a purchase, 61% of Khamgaon respondents said yes, compared to 53% in Akola. This is consistent with the more seasonal income patterns in Khamgaon, where consumer spending often spikes around festivals such as Diwali and Dussehra, and after the harvesting season.

EMI (Equated Monthly Instalment) options were also found to be an important enabler of purchases, especially for high-value items like smartphones and two-wheelers. Approximately 47% of respondents across both cities indicated they had used some form of instalment payment in the past year.

4.5 Influence of Advertisements and Social Media

When respondents were asked which media source most influenced their purchase decisions, the results revealed an interesting generational divide. Younger respondents (below 30) in both cities cited social media platforms — particularly YouTube, Instagram, and WhatsApp — as the most influential. Older respondents above 40 continued to give more importance to television advertisements and word of mouth from family and friends.

Table 5: Most Influential Source of Purchase Information (Combined, n=150)

Information Source	% of Respondents	Most Dominant Age Group
Word of Mouth (family/friends)	29%	All age groups
YouTube / Social Media	26%	18–30 years
Television Advertisement	20%	31–50 years
Showroom / In-store visit	14%	30–50 years
Online Reviews / Websites	8%	20–35 years
Newspaper / Magazine	3%	40+ years

What stands out from Table 5 is that word of mouth remains the single largest influence across both cities. This has important implications for businesses — in these markets, customer satisfaction is not merely about retention; it also functions as a primary marketing tool. An unhappy customer will share their experience widely within their community.

Social media's influence is significant and growing. However, the researcher observed during the survey that a large proportion of this social media influence came through WhatsApp forwards and local YouTube channels in Marathi, rather than mainstream influencer marketing in Hindi or English. This is an important nuance that businesses must appreciate — content in the local language and dialect resonates far more strongly with audiences in Akola and Khamgaon.

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1 Key Findings

The following are the major findings from this study:

Finding 1 — Offline shopping still dominates: Despite the national growth of e-commerce, offline shopping remains the preferred mode in both Akola and Khamgaon, especially for clothing, groceries, and two-wheelers. Consumers in these cities prefer to physically inspect products and receive them immediately.

Finding 2 — Akola is more digitally inclined: Compared to Khamgaon, consumers in Akola show a higher willingness to shop online, seek information through social media, and try new brands. This can be attributed to the higher concentration of educational institutions, a younger population, and better internet infrastructure in Akola.

Finding 3 — Khamgaon is more price-sensitive and brand-loyal: Khamgaon respondents showed stronger brand loyalty and higher price sensitivity. The seasonal nature of income in Khamgaon (tied to agriculture) means consumers are more cautious with spending and prefer trusted, established brands.

Finding 4 — Word of mouth is king: In both cities, personal recommendations from family and friends are the most trusted source of purchase information. This is consistent with the collectivist social culture of the region, where community opinion carries significant weight.

Finding 5 — EMI and easy finance are important purchase enablers: A significant portion of consumers in both cities use EMI options for high-value purchases. Businesses that offer easy financing or zero-cost EMI options hold a competitive advantage in these markets.

Finding 6 — Local language content matters: The influence of social media in these markets is predominantly through Marathi-language YouTube channels and WhatsApp forwards. Brands that communicate in Marathi or use local dialects tend to build better trust and recall.

5.2 Similarities Between Akola and Khamgaon

Both cities share several common consumer characteristics: price sensitivity is high in both; word of mouth is the dominant source of influence; offline retail is preferred for high-involvement purchases; festival seasons drive significant purchase activity; and brand trust, once established, is difficult to displace.

5.3 Differences Between Akola and Khamgaon

While they share common traits, there are also notable differences. Akola consumers are more open to online shopping and trying new brands. Khamgaon consumers show stronger brand loyalty and are more heavily influenced by seasonal income patterns. The business community in Khamgaon plays a more dominant role in the local consumer economy. Akola has a larger youth population that is more influenced by digital media.

6. Conclusion and Suggestions

6.1 Conclusion

This study set out to understand how consumers in Akola and Khamgaon make their buying decisions, and what factors shape their preferences. The findings reveal that while both cities are classified as semi-urban markets, they have distinct consumer personalities. Akola is evolving toward a more digitally influenced consumer culture, while Khamgaon remains a strongly traditional, community-driven market.

Both cities present significant opportunities for businesses — but these opportunities require localised strategies rather than one-size-fits-all approaches. The era of treating all small-city consumers as a uniform segment is over. Businesses that invest in understanding the specific dynamics of each market will be better positioned to succeed.

From an academic perspective, this study adds to the limited body of research on consumer behaviour in Vidarbha and Khandesh, and provides a foundation for future, more detailed studies using larger samples and more advanced analytical methods.

6.2 Suggestions for Businesses and Marketers

- Focus on local Marathi-language marketing: Brands should create content in Marathi, especially for digital platforms like YouTube and WhatsApp. This significantly improves trust and relatability in both Akola and Khamgaon.
- Invest in strong after-sales service: Given the high brand loyalty and reliance on word of mouth, the quality of the post-purchase experience is critical. A single unsatisfactory service encounter can damage a brand's reputation across the entire community.
- Offer easy EMI and financing options: Since price sensitivity is high and many consumers depend on seasonal income, flexible payment options are a significant purchase motivator.
- Strengthen physical retail presence: Offline shopping remains the dominant mode in these cities. Businesses should ensure strong dealership networks, well-maintained showrooms, and knowledgeable sales staff.
- Leverage festival season promotions: Both cities experience significant spikes in buying during Diwali, Dussehra, and post-harvest seasons. Festival-specific offers and events can drive substantial volume.
- Target digital campaigns differently in Akola vs. Khamgaon: In Akola, Instagram and YouTube-based digital campaigns will be more effective. In Khamgaon, WhatsApp-based community marketing and strong local dealer relationships will yield better results.
- Engage community influencers: In both cities, trusted community members — local teachers, religious leaders, or respected businesspeople — carry more influence than celebrities. Engaging such local voices can effectively build brand trust.

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