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Trends in India's e-commerce industry: Growth and emerging patterns during 2020–2025

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Abstract
The study examines the growth and major transformation in the field of India's e-commerce industry from 2020 to 2025. The study employed secondary data collected from industry reports, government reports, and academic research articles. Findings of the study show that the industry grew due to affordable internet access, higher use of digital payments systems such as UPI, and the growing number of virtual shoppers in smaller cities, towns, and rural areas. During this period, new business models such as quick commerce, direct-to-consumer (D2C) sales, and the Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) also gained importance. However, the e-commerce industry continues to face challenges such as delivery problems, misleading online practices, and the high cost of providing very fast delivery services. This study also points out the importance of suitable government regulations, sustainable delivery systems, and better digital infrastructure for the continued growth of e-commerce in India.

Keywords: E-commerce, digital payments, quick commerce, tier-2/tier-3 markets, consumer protection, ONDC

Introduction

Electronic commerce (e-commerce) is emerging as a major force in India. It is transforming traditional retail, business opportunities, shopping habits, and the wider digital economy. Initially, only a few pioneering companies in major cities engaged in online shopping. Over time, the sector became a large network of specialist online stores, direct-to-consumer (D2C) brands, social media shopping, local delivery services, and quick-commerce apps. This change has revolutionized traditional shopping by connecting customers, producers, small businesses, and service providers through digital platforms. (Koli & Kumar Bhura, n.d.; P & Mohammed Zafeer. n.d.) To understand e-commerce growth today, we need to understand its history. Studies say that online sales in India increased from USD 12.19 billion in 2015 to USD 45.17 billion in 2021. A further study shows that online business went up from USD 3.9 billion in 2009 to USD 38.5 billion in 2017 (Singh, 2023). These early beginnings established the foundation for rapid expansion in later years. Recent estimates suggest the Indian e-commerce market, valued at approximately USD 84 billion in 2024 [9], will surpass USD 350 billion by 2030 (Dr. Ankit Khare *et al*., 2026a). Thus, the past numbers show historical progression, but the period from 2020 to 2025 is essential to study changing market sizes, structures, and shopping patterns.

The period from 2020 to 2025 brought major changes to Indian e-commerce. The COVID-19 pandemic has made people adopt online shopping and digital payments much faster, as customers turned to digital platforms for daily needs. At the same time, improved digital infrastructure, smartphones, affordable mobile internet, and online payment options supported this growth. The period after 2016 was already important because cheaper data costs, 4G networks, and affordable smartphones brought internet services to millions of people. (Jyoti *et al*., 2025; Singh, 2024) [11, 20] These factors became even more important during 2020–2025 as online shopping became a routine part of daily life. Digital payment systems like the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) and mobile wallets made transactions much easier. Government programs like Digital India, BharatNet, and the Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) worked to improve internet connectivity and provide more businesses access to online markets. (Jyoti *et al*., 2025 [11]; Ravi Ranjan, n.d.) Government policies also shaped the sector. For example, the 2016 Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) rules for online marketplaces and the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) in 2017 encouraged new investments, simplified taxes, and improved trade across states. (Akther, 2023) [1] Thus, the growth seen during 2020–2025 was driven by technology, better infrastructure, government policies, new payment methods, and changing customer expectations. Between 2020 and 2025, Indian e-commerce increasingly focused on mobile phones, expanded into smaller towns, and diversified its service offerings. Today, mobile phones account for a significant portion of online orders, prompting companies to develop improved mobile apps and user-friendly payment systems. (Akther, 2023) [1] Demand has also expanded beyond big metropolitan cities. Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities have become key sources of new online shoppers. At the same time, rural producers and artisans use online platforms to sell directly to customers, cutting out middlemen. (Jyoti *et al*., 2025; Ravi Ranjan, n.d.) [11] This shift is crucial because a large portion of India's population lives in rural areas. Research shows that online shopping is changing rural buying habits, and rural shoppers have different levels of digital comfort, price awareness, interest, and hesitation toward online platforms. (Ghosal *et al*., 2021) [5]

The rapid rise of Quick Commerce (Q-commerce) is another clear example of how the industry changed during this period. Q-commerce apps promise to deliver groceries and daily essentials in just 10 to 30 minutes using local

neighbourhood warehouses known as dark stores. While this model gives customers speed and convenience, it also creates big operational challenges. High delivery expenses, steep discounts, low order values, high staff needs, traffic problems, and carbon emissions create doubts about long-term profits and sustainability. (Singh, 2024) [20] Therefore, Q-commerce is one of the most important new trends in India's e-commerce market.

Despite substantial growth in the 2020–2025 period, e-commerce development continues to be uneven among areas. In the rural and isolated regions, the pace of development is still hindered by low digital skills, inadequate internet connectivity, frequent power outages, poor roads and insufficient delivery network systems. (Akther, 2023 [1]; Koli & Kumar Bhura, n.d.; P & Mohammed Zafeer, n.d.) In the online buying environment, the customer's trust and safety are also the key issues. The comfort level of consumers in online purchasing is influenced by factors such as product quality, payment safety, scams, privacy, sluggish delivery and refund difficulties, and data security. Studies have shown that attractive prices, ease of use, variety, personalised offers, social influences, and usefulness all encourage people to shop online. However, differences in adoption rates are due to age, income, and payment habits (Akther, 2023; Singh, 2024) [1, 20]. At the organisational level, the National Customer Helpline's high increase in customer complaints demonstrates that market development has been accompanied by regular service difficulties, such as missed deliveries, inaccurate or damaged merchandise, and delayed reimbursements. "Dark patterns" – interface designs intended to deceive or compel users into actions they didn't want to take – amplify these concerns. Dark patterns are identified as a significant danger to consumers because of their restriction of free choice and the unfair influence they exert on internet platforms (Dr Ankit Khare *et al*., 2026b).

Besides, India has brought vital safety legislation like the Consumer Protection Act 2019 [4], the E-Commerce Rules 2020 and specific recommendations against dark patterns. However, the studies show that compliance and enforcement of standard gaps persist. This means rigorous government legislation monitoring, transparent app design, simple complaints channels and improved platform responsibilities. Therefore, the expansion of Indian e-commerce in 2020–2025 [8] should be seen in the light of both the increasing market potential and the new difficulties. The sector offers great potential to expand market access, support rural enterprises, generate employment, foster technology and increase convenience. But digital divides, delivery issues, market concentration, loss of trust, environmental costs and unfair platform practices could shape how equitable and sustainable this growth will be. (Koli & Kumar Bhura, n.d.; Ravi Ranjan, n.d.)

Against this backdrop, the study explores the major trends, drivers of development, and emerging patterns in India's e-commerce business from 2020 to 2025 [2], with the objective of providing a full and easy-to-understand account of its continuing change against this context.

Review of Literature

The Indian e-commerce industry seen considerable transformation between 2020 and 2025, driven by the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, widespread usage of digital payments, geographical expansion beyond metropolitan cities, and the emergence of new paradigms such as social commerce, quick commerce, and open-network commerce.

Akther (2023) [1] researcher examined trends, growth opportunities and challenges of e-commerce in India, highlighting rapid expansion of internet and smartphone users, while noting cybersecurity, logistics, and trust as challenges.

Balani (2024) [3] in his research, analysed internet penetration and e-commerce expansion across B2B, D2C, C2C, and C2B models, establishing digital connectivity as a core foundation for market expansion.

Koli, Bhura, and Umesh (2023) reviewed e-commerce from a consumer perspective, concluding that technological development and internet usage significantly changed traditional retail patterns.

Karthik J. P. and Zafeer (2025) [12] examined mobile commerce, digital payments, and hyperlocal delivery models, identifying rural market expansion as critical for future development.

Ghosal *et al*. (2021) [5] highlighted rural consumer behaviour and online purchase intention during the pandemic, proving that non-metropolitan consumers represent a vital dimension of online retail.

Chawla and Kumar (2021) [5] explored consumer protection frameworks under the Consumer Protection Act 2019 [4] and E-Commerce Rules2020, emphasizing transparency and accountability.

Misra *et al*. (2022) [16] investigated small business marketplace adoption in Tier-II and Tier-III cities using a survey of 150 sellers, showing how performance expectancy, effort expectancy, and perceived vulnerability influence adoption.

Singh (2024) [20] performed a systematic review on quick commerce, highlighting speed, convenience, and operating challenges such as infrastructure requirements and high operating costs.

Jaiswal and Kumar (2024) [9] analysed the Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC), framing open-network specifications as a structural alternative to platform dependency.

Yadav and Das (2025) utilized a quasi-experimental approach to show how COVID-19 lockdowns accelerated new-age digital payment channels.

Hassan and Basumatary (2025) [8] applied a multinomial logit model to demonstrate how demographic characteristics significantly influence consumer payment choices between cash and digital modes.

Industry reports (such as Bain & Company–Flipkart, 2025) [2] estimate India's e-retail market at approximately US$60 billion in GMV for 2024 [3], placing India as the world's second-largest online shopper base while signaling a transition toward a mature phase of development driven by smaller cities and new business models.

1. Literature Review Matrix

Author(s) & Year	Focus of Study	Methodology / Data	Major Findings	Relevance to Present Study
Sahu, Dubey &Sahu (2019) [19]	Growth of e-commerce and government initiatives	Secondary literature review	Government programs and smartphone penetration support e-commerce development	Explains policy and infrastructure role
Koli, Bhura &Umesh (2023)	Consumer perspective and retail impact	Analytical secondary review	Tech development and internet usage alter shopping behaviour	Basis for consumer pattern analysis
Balani (2024) [3]	Internet penetration and e-commerce models	Secondary data study	Rising usage supports B2B, D2C, C2Cmodels	Links connectivity with industry growth
Ghosal *et al*. (2021) [5]	Rural consumer purchase intention	Empirical survey	Pandemic elevated e-commerce importance for rural consumers	Supports geographical expansion analysis
Chawla & Kumar (2021) [5]	E-commerce consumer protection	Legal/empirical analysis	Growth requires robust consumer protection and transparency	Useful for regulatory trends
Misra *et al*. (2022) [16]	Small business marketplace adoption	Survey of 150 Tier-II/III sellers; UTAUT Model	Performance/effort expectancy and vulnerability influence adoption	Supports seller participation analysis
Singh (2024) [20]	Quick commerce and consumer behaviour	Systematic review	Speed, convenience, and benefits drive Q-commerce adoption	Supports analysis of quick-commerce growth
Jaiswal & Kumar (2024) [9]	ONDC and digital ecosystem	Conceptual study	ONDC offers an open-network alternative to platform-centric commerce	Supports digital commerce models analysis
Yadav & Das (2025)	Digital payment adoption	Quasi-experimental analysis using RBI data	Lockdowns accelerated new-age payment channel adoption	Supports digital-payment/e-commerce relationship
Hassan &Basumatary (2025) [8]	Consumer payment choices	Primary survey &multinomial logit	Demographics significantly influence payment mode choices	Supports payment pattern analysis
Bain & Flipkart (2025) [2]	Indian e-retail growthand models	Industry data and market analysis	E-retail reached US$60 billion GMV in 2024; new models shaping growth	Provides industry-level evidence

2. Research Gap

However, while the existing literature provides robust insights into isolated dimensions (rural adoption, small-business participation, quick commerce, and regulation), a comprehensive, integrated assessment covering the entire 2020–2025 period linking digital payments, Tier-2/3 expansion, quick commerce, and ONDC is still missing. To fill this gap, this study explores the growth route, structural changes, and new trends in the e-commerce industry in India from 2020 to 2025 [2].

Statement of the Problem

Despite significant overall development, India's e-commerce ecosystem is beset by deep regional imbalances, logistical challenges in rural and semi-urban areas, rising consumer protection concerns, and operational sustainability challenges in fast-growing sub-segments such as quick commerce. This understanding of the relationship between macroeconomic conditions, digital public infrastructure, and shifting consumer segments in a dynamic regulatory framework is essential for balanced, equitable, and sustainable industrial growth.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the growth trajectory of India's online retail market during 2020–2025 [2].
2. To analyse changes and expansion patterns in the online shopper base.
3. To examine the expansion and integration of digital payment systems supporting e-commerce.
4. To identify major emerging business models and structural trends.
5. To highlight the growing economic importance of smaller cities and non-metropolitan markets.

Research Methodology

This study uses a descriptive and analytical research design based entirely on secondary data to examine the growth and trends of India's e-commerce sector from 2020 to 2025 [2]. It does not use statistical modelling. Instead, it relies on structured qualitative analysis across three main steps:

a. Source Selection & Data Collection:

Information is gathered from credible secondary sources, including government reports (such as the Reserve Bank of India and the Ministry of Consumer Affairs), industry whitepapers (such as Bain & Company, Statista, and IBEF), and published academic research articles.

b. Thematic and Content Analysis:

The study reviews and organizes data around key themes such as market growth, online shopper behaviour, digital payments (like UPI), quick commerce, and consumer protection issues.

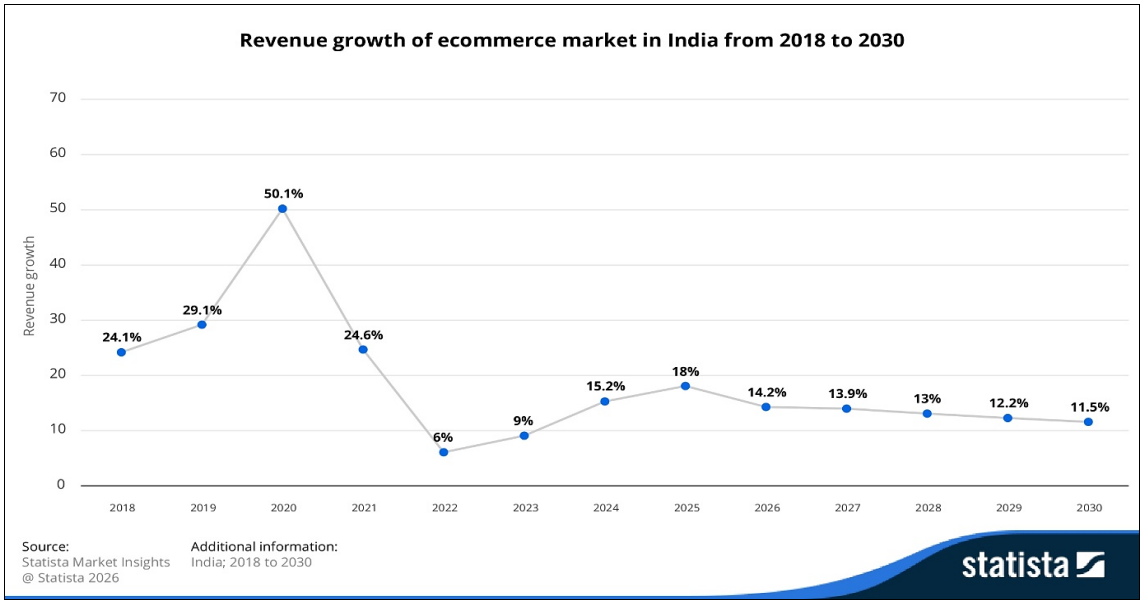
c. Data Cross-Verification (Triangulation):

To ensure accuracy and avoid relying on a single viewpoint, facts and findings from different consulting and government sources are compared against each other before drawing conclusions. Different industry reports define terms like "online retail," "e-commerce," and "GMV" (Gross Merchandise Value) differently. To keep the findings reliable, these figures are examined separately in their original context rather than mixed together into one continuous series.

Growth of India's Online Retail Market

Industry reports have highlighted the growth potential in India's online retail market. According to a report by Jefferies, India's online retail market could hit USD 170

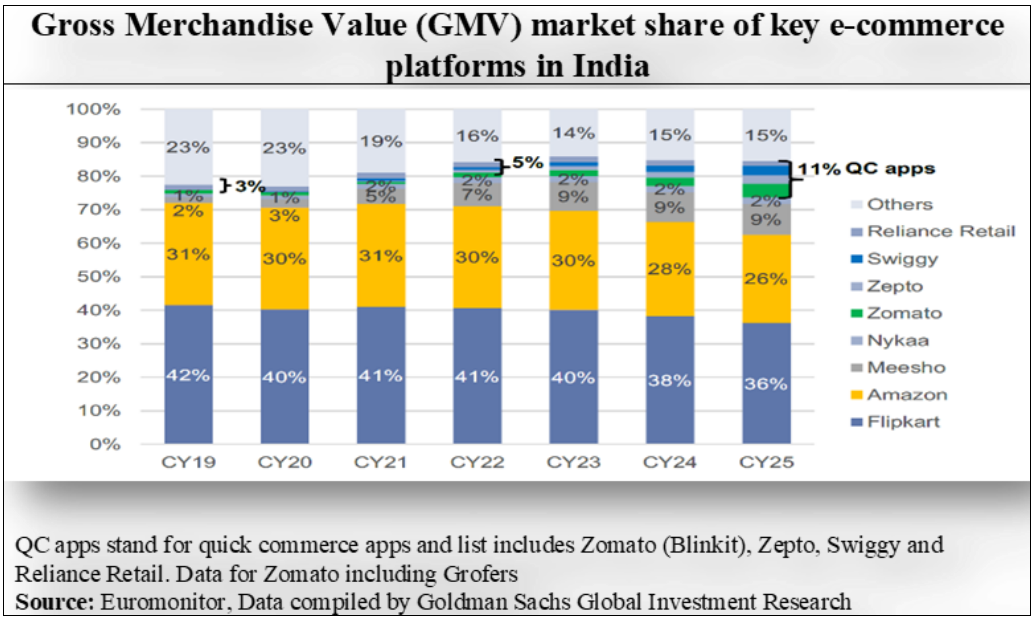
billion by FY30, growing at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 23%. It also projected that the share of online retail in India's organised retail market could increase from around 25% to 37% during the same period. More recent estimates indicate that this growth momentum has continued. report produced by the firm Global Data, e-commerce market in India is expected to grow at a CAGR of 12.4% to reach INR 19.7 trillion (USD 225.9 billion) in 2026, driven by strong public demand for online shopping, increasing digital adoption, and rising trust in digital payment systems



(Note: The 2025 figure represents a projection from historical source models and is treated separately from actual empirical observations).

Year-wise Growth GMV

Gross Merchandise Value (GMV) is an important indicator of the volume and scale of business generated through an e-commerce platform. GMV refers to the total monetary value of goods or services sold through an online platform or marketplace during a specific period, before deducting returns, cancellations, discounts, taxes, or other adjustments, depending on the methodology used.



Recent E-Retail Indicators

Indicator	2021	2024	2025
E-retail GMV (US$ bn)	~40	~60	~65–66
Online shoppers	180–190 million	~270 million	~290–300 million

These figures are from more recent Bain & Company/Flipkart industry reporting and are not directly combined with the historical sales series because the measurement definitions differ.

Growth of Online Shoppers

The online consumer base has expanded substantially. Bain reported 180–190 million online shoppers in 2021 and more than 270 million in 2024. More recent industry estimates place the 2025 base at around 290–300 million. This

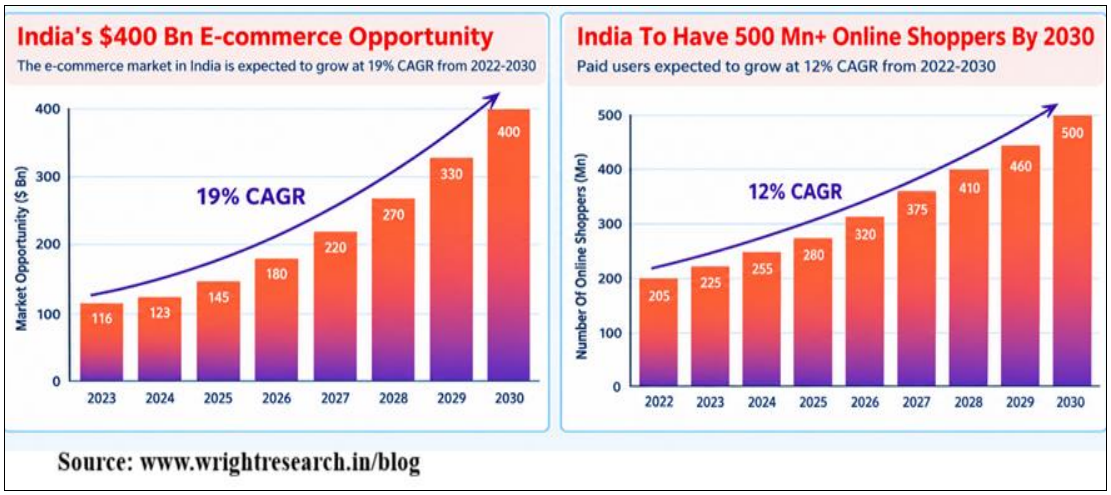
expansion reflects smartphone use, digital payments, wider logistics coverage and greater consumer confidence.

Year	Approx. Online Shoppers	Nature
2020	~135–145 million	Approximate reconstruction*
2021	180–190 million	Industry estimate
2023	230–250 million	Industry estimate
2024	~270 million	Industry estimate
2025	~290–300 million	Industry estimate

*Approximate reconstruction from reported 2021 additions and growth rate.

Expansion of Digital Payments: Exponential growth of digital payment transactions in the last few years is due to the coordinated initiatives of the government, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), and the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI). The total retail digital payment transactions, including their growth rate during the last four financial years, are given below

The exponential growth of digital financial architecture has provided the foundational liquidity
required for modern e-commerce expansion.



Emergence of Quick Commerce

One of the most significant structural transformations in Indian retail in urban areas is quick commerce (Q-commerce). Q-commerce systems provide food, medications, and everyday supplies from local dark shops and micro-warehouses in 10 to 30 minutes. It's redefining consumer convenience and is projected to capture over two-thirds of e-grocery purchases by 2024, but the business is under intense economic examination over delivery unit economics, low average order values, costly fixed dark-store rentals or leases, worker welfare and environmental externalities.

Expansion Beyond Metropolitan Cities

Historically, e-commerce use was limited to Tier-1 cities but has been decentralised considerably. Major demand centers have emerged in Tier-2, Tier-3 and rural areas. Improved access to mobile internet, interfaces in regional languages and localised logistical networks have allowed regional consumers and local craftspeople to circumvent conventional middlemen, but infrastructural challenges in last-mile connection remain.

Emerging Business Models

Pattern / Model	Main Characteristic	Strategic Impact
Quick Commerce	Ultra-fast delivery (10–30 mins)	Reshapes grocery and convenience purchasing
D2C Commerce	Brands selling directly to consumers	Enhances brand loyalty and margin retention
Hyper-Value Commerce	Value-focused, budget merchandise	Captures price-sensitive mass cohorts
Social / Live Commerce	Discovery via social interaction & video	Drives engagement in non-metro segments
Trend-Led Fashion	Rapid inventory cycles matching trends	Captures fast-moving youth preferences
Omnichannel Retail	Blending physical and digital channels	Unifies customer touchpoints for legacy brands
Smaller-City Commerce	Decentralized tier-2/3 participation	Expands the total addressable market footprint

E-Commerce Market Size: A Measurement Issue

A critical methodological challenge in analyzing Indian e-commerce is the divergence in definitions used across institutional reports. Variations in defining "e-commerce," "online retail," "e-retail," and "GMV" mean that figures from different consulting firms (e.g., Bain, Jefferies, Redseer, Global Data) cannot be arbitrarily aggregated into a single continuous time series. Scholars and analysts must evaluate historical retail sales series and modern e-retail GMV benchmarks independently.

Major Findings

1. India's online retail market experienced substantial expansion during 2020–2024, growing from US$122.94 billion at a CAGR of 23.21%.
2. The active online shopper base expanded from 180–190 million in 2021 to approximately 270 million in 2024 and nearing 300 million by 2025
3. Digital payments scaled dramatically, with UPI anchoring retail transaction volume and establishing robust financial interoperability for e-commerce.
4. Pandemic-induced disruptions permanently accelerated digital channel adoption across consumer and merchant segments.
5. Geographic decentralization drove substantial demand from Tier-2, Tier-3, and rural sectors.
6. Quick commerce has changed consumer expectations by enabling faster deliveries while creating challenges in maintaining cost efficiency and profitability.

7. The e-commerce sector diversified through the growth of D2C brands, social commerce, budget-focused retail, omnichannel models, and open digital networks such as ONDC.
8. Logistical vulnerabilities, cybersecurity risks, consumer trust deficits, data privacy concerns, and dark-pattern practices remain prominent industry challenges.

Discussion

The years between 2020 and 2025 were a critical time for the expansion of India's e-commerce business. People's online shopping moved from big cities to smaller towns and rural places. Online shopping started by millions of people, thanks to better internet access, mobile phones, digital payments, and rapid delivery services. Emerging business models, such as quick commerce, social commerce, and direct-to-consumer brands, have opened up doors for both enterprises and consumers.

However, the industry still confronts challenges such as high delivery costs, uneven internet access in remote areas, consumer protection issues, and environmental concerns. So, future expansion will depend on the adoption of novel technology, government regulation, consumer protection, and profitability. Better digital infrastructure and sustainable business practices would lead to long-term growth and economic development of the e-commerce sector in India.

Suggestions & Recommendations

1. **Logistics Enhancement:** E-commerce entities must reinforce last-mile delivery and reverse-logistics frameworks, particularly across rural and remote regions.

2. **Consumer Trust & Cybersecurity:** Strengthen data privacy protocols, eliminate deceptive dark patterns, and ensure transparent pricing to foster consumer confidence.

3. **Digital Inclusion:** Expand regional language interfaces and simplified mobile user experiences to onboard digitally underserved populations.

4. **Sustainable Fulfilment:** Adopt eco-friendly packaging and green logistics practices to mitigate the environmental footprint of high-frequency deliveries.

5. **Infrastructure Support:** Policymakers should continue investing in rural broadband, power reliability, and transport connectivity.

6. **Grievance Redressal:** Streamline consumer grievance mechanisms to handle service failures, failed refunds, and defective product returns transparently.

7. **MSME Support:** Provide digital training to local artisans and small business owners so they can use online platforms like ONDC to reach more customers.

8. **Financial Sustainability:** Focus on controlling costs and maintaining profitability while expanding the market, especially in quick-commerce businesses.

Conclusion

The years between 2020 to 2025 were a critical time for the expansion of India's e-commerce business. Peoples Online shopping moved from big cities to smaller towns and rural places. Online shopping started by Millions of people, thanks to better internet access, mobile phones, digital payments and fast delivery services. Emerging business models, like quick commerce, social commerce, and direct-to-consumer brands, have opened up doors for both enterprises and consumers.

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Limitations of the Study

1. The study relies exclusively on secondary data sources, making findings subject to the reporting methodologies of original publishers.
2. Inconsistent definitions of e-commerce, GMV, and online retail across reports prevent uniform time-series aggregation.
3. Projections for 2025 in historical series represent forecasts rather than finalized empirical observations.
4. The study provides a macro industry-level analysis without primary consumer or merchant surveys.
5. Rapid regulatory and technological changes mean emerging post-study trends require continuous tracking.

Scope for Future Research

Future research might include surveys on purchasing behaviours of consumers and business practices of vendors across various areas. Additional research might look at the long-term profitability of rapid commerce, the influence of ONDC on competition, the role of AI in customising shopping experiences, and the efficacy of government regulations to prevent deceptive online activities.

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