

## Customers' Perception Regarding the Ethical Conduct of Online Retailers during Limited-Period-Surprise-Offers in India

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**Abstract:** The rapidly growing trend of online shopping has not only resulted in an increase in e-tailers (online retailers) but has also seen to an ever-growing number of online customers, who tend to purchase products and services online merely on their face-value and the virtual promises made. Recurring sales of such products and services, therefore, depends largely on the ability of the e-tailers to minimize (if not nullify) the gap between customer expectations and actuals in product/service attributes and in their ability to stand by their promises during delivery and post that. The paper in hand is an attempt of the researchers to study some of the ethical issues relating to online shopping from the customers' perspective. Moreover, owing to the fact that online retailers are many with their respective variety of offers and promotions to woo the online shopping community and make purchase happen, the researchers have specifically concentrated on those offers that are floated for not longer than a day; and have termed them as "Limited-Period-Surprise-Offers (LPSOs)". An online questionnaire has been developed for the purpose of carrying out the survey amongst online shoppers residing in the four metropolis of India -Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru and Kolkata – using Snowball Sampling Technique. This gives the study an all-India perspective covering each of the four zones, i.e. North, South, East and West. The findings of the survey have been analyzed using simple statistical tools like percentages and Impact Index and presented in a lucid manner for easy understanding.

**Keywords:** Ethical Conduct, LPSOs, Online Shopping.

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### I. Introduction

Fast moving lifestyles, nuclear family compositions, globalization affect, technology at fingertips, and a host of allied reasons have fueled up the growth in online shopping worldwide; India being no exception. With this tremendous boost in the virtual market and real customers, came to prominence an issue that has always been the core of any business debate between sellers and buyers, i.e. ethics. The assurance of recurring purchases on the part of customers - who ordered products/services based on their onscreen face-value and virtual promises made by some unknown seller – largely depended upon the fulfilment of their expectations regarding product/service attributes on and post-delivery and the consistent safeguard of promises made.

### II. Ethics: Meaning And Definition

The term, "Ethics" being quite relative by nature is indeed difficult to be specifically defined. What is ethical for one need not necessarily be ethical for another; more so, when this becomes a cross-cultural, across geographical distances implication. Simply put, Ethics denotes moral goodness in values, principles and practices. As it is expected to be present in social behavior, so also it is equally expected to be evident in trade and business. In business, ethics is more than often exhibited in the maintenance of product quality, quantity, performance, guarantee/warranty, pre-andpost-purchaseservices, so on so forth. Customers are found to be influenced about the consistency in ethical conduct of businesses in so far as both their tangible as well as intangible facets are concerned.

Theoretically speaking, the term ethics is derived from the Greek word *ethos* which can mean custom, habit, character or disposition.<sup>1</sup> Ethics is the branch of philosophy that is concerned with all the aspects of human behavior. Theoretical ethics, which is sometimes known as normative ethics, is about depicting right from wrong. It is the reflection of what is right, what is wrong, what is just, what is unjust, what is good, and what is

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<sup>1</sup>What is Ethics? Source and Uses of Ethics? . (2017, October 29). Retrieved April 15, 2017, from 2THEPOINT: <https://www.2thepoint.in/ethics-source-uses-ethics/>

bad in terms of human behavior. It helps to develop the rules and principles (norms) by which one judge and guide meaningful decision-making.

'Business Ethics' can be termed as a study of proper business policies and practices regarding potentially controversial issues, such as corporate governance, insider trading, bribery, discrimination, corporate social responsibility, and fiduciary responsibilities.

Business ethics, also called corporate ethics, is a form of applied ethics or professional ethics that examines the ethical and moral principles and problems that arise in a business environment. It can also be defined as the written and unwritten codes of principles and values, determined by an organization's culture, that govern decisions and actions within that organization. It applies to all aspects of business conduct on behalf of both individuals and the entire company. In the most basic terms, a definition for business ethics boils down to knowing the difference between right and wrong and choosing to do what is right.

### III. Ethical Issues In Online Retailing

Some of the ethical issues often evidenced in e-tailing find mention below:

- **Web tracking-**

E-businesses draw information on how visitors use a site through log files. Analysis of log file means turning log data into application service or installing software that can pluck relevant information from files in-house. Companies track individual's movement through tracking software and cookie analysis. Programs such as cookies raise a batch of privacy concerns. The tracking history is stored on the PC's hard disk, and any time one revisit a website, the computer knows it. Many smart end users install programs such as Cookie cutters, Spam Butcher, and the like which can provide users some control over the cookies.

The battle between computer end users and web trackers is always going on with a range of application programs. For example, software such as Privacy Guardian, My Privacy, etc. can protect user's online privacy by erasing browser's cache, surfing history and cookies. To detect and remove spyware specially designed programs like Ad-Aware are available.

- **Privacy-**

Most Electronic Payment Systems knows the identity of the buyer. So it is necessary to protect the identity of a buyer who uses Electronic Payment System. A privacy issue related to the employees of company is tracking. Monitoring systems are installed in many companies to monitor e-mail and other web activities in order to identify employees who extensively use business hours for non-business activities. The e-commerce activities performed by a buyer can be tracked by organizations. For example, reserving railway tickets for their personal journey purpose can be tracked. Many employees don't want to be under the monitoring system even while at work. As far as brokers and some of the company employees are concerned, E-Commerce puts them in danger zone and results in elimination from their jobs. The manner in which employees are treated may raise ethical issues, such as how to handle displacement and whether to offer retraining programs.

The traditional sales channel will be negatively affected by disintermediation. The services required to support or complement e-commerce are provided by the web as new opportunities for reintermediation. The factors that should be considered here are the enormous number of participants, extensive information processing, delicate negotiations, etc.

- **Legal Issues -**

Internet fraud and its sophistication have grown even faster than the Internet itself. There is a chance of a crime over the internet when buyers and sellers do not know each other and cannot even see each other. During the first few years of e-commerce, the public witnessed many frauds committed over the internet. E-commerce fraud popped out with the rapid increase in popularity of websites. It is a hot issue for both cyber and click-and-mortar merchants. The swindlers are active mainly in the area of stocks. The small investors are lured by the promise of false profits by the stock promoters. Auctions are also conducive to fraud, by both sellers and buyers. The availability of e-mails and pop up ads has paved the way for financial criminals to have access to many people. Other areas of potential fraud include phantom business opportunities and bogus investments.<sup>2</sup>

- **Grouping the Market Audience:**

Unethical practices in marketing can result in grouping the audience into various segments. Selective marketing may be used to discourage the demand arising from these so-called undesirable market segments or to disenfranchise the customers totally.

- **Delivery Channels:**

Direct marketing is one of the most controversial methods of advertising channels, especially when the approaches included are unsolicited. Some common examples include TV and Telephonic commercials and the

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<sup>2</sup> Babu, R. (2011, March 8). *QBurst*. Retrieved May 15, 2017, from E-Commerce Ethical and Legal Issues: <https://blog.qburst.com/2011/03/e-commerce-ethical-and-legal-issues/>

direct mail. Electronic spam and telemarketing also push the limits of ethical standards and legality in a strong manner.

- **Deceptive Marketing Policies and Ethics:**

Deceptive marketing can sometimes go unseen by the public. There are numerous methods of deceptive marketing. It can be presented to consumers in various forms; one of the methods is accomplished via the use of humor. Humor offers an escape or relief from various types of human constraints, and some advertisers may take the advantage of this by applying deceptive advertising methods for a product that can potentially harm or alleviate the constraints using humor.

- **Pricing Ethics:**

There are various forms of unethical business practices related to pricing the products and services. Bid rigging is a type of fraud in which a commercial contract is promised to one party; however, for the sake of appearance several other parties also present a bid. Predatory pricing is the practice of sale of a product or service at a negligible price, intending to throw competitors out of the market, or to create barriers to entry.<sup>3</sup> Of all the above-mentioned forms of ethical issues, advertising and promotion ethics tend to be one of the most influential in case of online shopping as customers tend to be greatly influenced as to buy or not to buy based on what they see onscreen. The section that follows, therefore, highlights some popular ethical issues and practices relating to internet selling and advertising:

- **The Advertisements:**

Advertisements are definitely an important source of information for consumers, and therefore it is expected that brands indulge in honest and ethical advertising. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. The concept of contextual link ads, wherein hyperlinks are concealed within editorial content are also considered unethical.

- **Pop-ups and “misleading” dialog boxes:**

The concept of popup ads was introduced to minimize the obstruction that a viewer faces. However, businesses tend to go overboard with the use of these ads, leading to a user unintentionally clicking on it. Similarly, dialog boxes that look like warning text from the computer also mislead users. The in-app ads on mobiles are another example of accidental click-through.

- **Search Engine Optimization (SEO):**

All digital marketers and publishers recognize the power of SEO, and use it as a single best tactic to organically drive visitors to their site. While search engines are quite strict with their evaluation metrics and keep rolling out updates that curb such malpractices, some webmasters use black hat tricks to unethically raise their search rankings. It is imperative that Internet marketers act more responsibly and in the best interest of the visitors at all points.

- **Content as bait:**

Review sites, online forums and generic content based sites are meant to be a gateway for consumers to gain more knowledge about a product, service or brand. However, publishers use the sponsored content concept and even paid reviews to manipulate user opinions. If the content is biased or strongly opinionated, it should be categorized as an advertisement—in this case, the rules of digital media are same as that for TV or print. Businesses are now also leveraging the power of social networking platforms and using them as grounds for “viral” advertising.

There is a lot that can be labeled as unethical and misleading in the business of Internet selling and advertising. And even with the constant pull and push from the regulatory authorities, advertisers keep finding new ways to con the crawlers and visitors.

#### IV. Taming The Unethical Practice

The new technologies and advanced digital techniques are constantly transforming the advertising and online sales landscape. Today's consumer is digitally connected to a variety of Web-based and mobile platforms. There are a large number of Web associations and regulatory authorities such as **The Institute of Advertising Ethics (IAE)**, **Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB)**, that have laid out clear terms for Web marketers and online businesses to ensure the online space stays clean and trustworthy.

**The Institute of Advertising Ethics (IAE)** lists some concise and pertinent rules that advertisers must follow when selling or marketing on the net. Some of these are:

- All forms of advertising material must share the common goal of maintaining truth and should be a means to serve the public

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<sup>3</sup>*Ethical issues in Marketing.* (2017). Retrieved May 10, 2017, from tutorialspoint: [https://www.tutorialspoint.com/business\\_ethics/ethical\\_issues\\_in\\_marketing.htm](https://www.tutorialspoint.com/business_ethics/ethical_issues_in_marketing.htm)

- They should maintain a clear distinction between corporate communications, press releases, sales collateral and advertisements
- A publisher must disclose every condition upfront and clearly, as the asterisks (\*) and fine print at the end of the document can sometimes go unnoticed by the consumer
- If there are cookies being used to track and detect a user's settings, personal record and online activity, then this must be clearly stated before the user begins browsing the site
- The placement of ads should in no way obstruct the user view, neither should they be disguised as editorial content
- Finally, whether the retailers are selling on the online platforms or offline, advertisers must abide by the federal, state and local advertising laws.<sup>4</sup>

## V. Research Gap

From an extensive and in-depth 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 ethical in promoting their merchandise online and to deliver what is promised; 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-Surprise-Offers in particular or that has looked into promotions and offers in context to a specific time period.

## VI. 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 prices-related offers, such offers may include any other sales promotion tactic from free gifts to frequent-customer bonanzas."

## VII. Objective

The present paper has been developed with a single pre-set objective as follows:

- To analyze the customers' perception regarding the safeguard of ethics in Limited-Period-Surprise-Offers in Online Retailing.

\*\*\* **Limited-Period-Surprise-Offers have been hereafter referred to as LPSOs.**

### RESEARCH QUESTION

**Q1.** What is the customer's perception regarding the ethical conduct of online retailers during LPSOs?

## VIII. Methodology Of The Study

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 Impact Index and have been represented in cross-tables for ease of understanding by the reader. The analysis of the collected responses has been done considering four demographic parameters, i.e. gender, age, income and occupation apart from stating distinctive region/zone-based findings.

The concept of Impact Index was developed by Claes Fornell, which is termed as 'American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) and is a predictor of consumer spending and economic growth at the macro level.

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<sup>4</sup>Doshi, M. (2013, October 21). *Ethics in Internet Selling and Advertising*. Retrieved May 15, 2017, from Langoor: <https://www.langoor.com/ethics-in-internet-selling-and-advertising/>

This index has been used for measuring customer satisfaction in a ten-point scale and has been further modified to five-point scale based on the factors considered by the researcher for measuring the impact level of the study at hand.<sup>5</sup>

The calculation of impact index has been carried out as follows:

First of all,

**Total Weighted Score (TWS)** is calculated as:  $5xSA + 4xA + 3xN + 2xD + 1xSD$ , where:

**SA: Strongly Agree**

**A: Agree**

**N: Neutral**

**D: Disagree**

**SD: Strongly Disagree**

And then,

**Maximum Score = Total no. of respondents\*5**

Therefore, the formula for calculation of Impact Index stands as:

**Impact Index (IT) = Total Weighted Score/ Maximum Score\*100**

After calculation of the impact index in percentages, the different number of levels and the ranges of Impact considered for analysis have been taken as follows:

| NO. OF LEVELS | RANGE      | IMPACT LEVEL    |
|---------------|------------|-----------------|
| Level I       | 0% - 20%   | No Impact       |
| Level II      | 20% - 40%  | Some Impact     |
| Level III     | 40% - 60%  | Moderate Impact |
| Level IV      | 60% - 80%  | High Impact     |
| Level V       | 80% - 100% | Maximum Impact  |

## RESPONDENTS' PROFILE

**Table 1: Respondents' Gender Based on the Four Zones:**

|               | East | West | North | South | Total | %     |
|---------------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| <b>Male</b>   | 27   | 21   | 18    | 21    | 87    | 51.79 |
| <b>Female</b> | 20   | 15   | 20    | 26    | 81    | 48.21 |
| <b>Total</b>  | 47   | 36   | 38    | 47    | 168   | 100   |

(Source: Survey data)

**Table 2: Respondents' Age Based on the Zones:**

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

(Source: Survey data)

As seen in Table 1 & 2, 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 51 years and above respectively. This goes on to show that there are younger people who shop online as compared to the older ones. The same has been evident in many other previous research works too.

**Table 3: Respondents' Income Based on the Zones:**

|                    | East | West | North | South | Total | %  |
|--------------------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|----|
| <b>Rs. 20,000-</b> | 36   | 11   | 21    | 16    | 84    | 50 |

<sup>5</sup>Fornell C. Rust R.T and Dekimpe M.G. (2010), "The Effect of Customer Satisfaction on Customer Spending Growth", Journal of Marketing Research, 47(1), pp. 28-35

|                               |    |    |    |    |     |       |
|-------------------------------|----|----|----|----|-----|-------|
| <b>35,000</b>                 |    |    |    |    |     |       |
| <b>Rs. 36,000-45,000</b>      | 7  | 9  | 10 | 13 | 39  | 23.21 |
| <b>Rs. 46,000 &amp; above</b> | 4  | 16 | 7  | 18 | 45  | 26.79 |
| <b>Total</b>                  | 47 | 36 | 38 | 47 | 168 | 100   |

(Source: Survey data)

As is evident in Table 3, 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.

**Table 4: Respondents' Occupation Based on the Zones:**

|                     | East | West | North | South | Total | %     |
|---------------------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| <b>Service</b>      | 31   | 13   | 13    | 16    | 73    | 43.45 |
| <b>Professional</b> | 8    | 20   | 22    | 27    | 77    | 45.83 |
| <b>Business</b>     | 0    | 2    | 2     | 1     | 5     | 2.98  |
| <b>Others</b>       | 8    | 1    | 1     | 3     | 13    | 7.74  |
| <b>Total</b>        | 47   | 36   | 38    | 47    | 168   | 100   |

(Source: Survey data)

Table 4 depicts the division of respondents among different occupations considering the four zones. It is seen that amongst 168 respondents, majority of the respondents belong to Professionals (77). However, the least number of respondents belong to the Occupation of Business (5) among the four zones.

### IX. Analysing The Objective

The researchers have tried to study the impact of ethical conduct of the purchases made during the LPSOs based exhaustively on 20 select factors.

**The level of impact stands as-**

Level I: 0% - 20% (No Impact)

Level II: 20% - 40% (Some Impact)

Level III: 40% - 60% (Moderate Impact)

Level IV: 60% - 80% (High Impact)

Level V: 80% - 100% (Maximum Impact)

**Table 5 Impact of Ethical Conduct Based on the Four Zones:**

|     | Factors   | Level of Impact (%) |          |           |           |
|-----|---|---------------------|----------|-----------|-----------|
|     |   | East (%)            | West (%) | North (%) | South (%) |
| 1.  | The advertisements displayed regarding LPSOs are reliable to purchase products.           | 79.15               | 72.78    | 77.37     | 73.19     |
| 2.  | The information displayed regarding the products are sufficient and correct during LPSOs. | 79.15               | 70.00    | 77.89     | 70.21     |
| 3.  | The products are very well displayed with regard to the quality and quantity.             | 76.60               | 73.33    | 78.95     | 71.91     |
| 4.  | The delivery of the products is prompt and accurate to the promises made during LPSOs.    | 74.47               | 76.11    | 80.00     | 70.64     |
| 5.  | The shipping charges were appropriate and well defined during those offers                | 76.17               | 73.89    | 76.84     | 72.77     |
| 6.  | There was provision for product verification on receipt of delivery made during LPSOs.    | 70.21               | 70.56    | 77.89     | 66.38     |
| 7.  | There was possibility in tracking of the products during LPSOs.                           | 82.98               | 78.89    | 81.58     | 78.30     |
| 8.  | The returns of the products made during those offers were easy & flexible.                | 72.34               | 76.11    | 75.79     | 70.64     |
| 9.  | There was easy exchange of the products as was promised.                                  | 73.62               | 76.11    | 74.74     | 68.94     |
| 10. | All the payment modes were applicable during LPSOs.                                       | 80.00               | 76.11    | 81.58     | 76.17     |
| 11. | The customer's information was kept confidential during those offers made.                | 80.85               | 76.67    | 80.53     | 75.32     |

|     |   |       |       |       |       |
|-----|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 12. | The products were well safeguarded against damaged during such offers.                            | 77.87 | 73.33 | 81.05 | 73.19 |
| 13. | Even if the damage occurred during dispatch the company took the responsibility of returns.       | 74.47 | 73.33 | 77.37 | 71.06 |
| 14. | Too frequent customer updates regarding LPSOs.  | 78.30 | 76.67 | 78.95 | 73.62 |
| 15. | The necessary updates were aired to the customers to attract and persuade to purchase as well.    | 78.72 | 81.67 | 81.05 | 76.60 |
| 16. | The sizes of the products were accurately delivered as displayed in the description during LPSOs. | 76.17 | 79.44 | 79.47 | 71.91 |
| 17. | The color was appropriate as displayed during such offers made.                                   | 71.91 | 76.11 | 78.42 | 68.09 |
| 18. | The weight of the products was equal to what has been promised during LPSOs.                      | 75.74 | 77.78 | 80.00 | 72.34 |
| 19. | The quality of the products was matched according to promise made during LPSOs.                   | 75.74 | 74.44 | 78.95 | 69.36 |
| 20. | The quantity of the products was accurate in number after delivery during LPSOs.                  | 77.45 | 79.44 | 81.05 | 74.04 |

(Source: Survey data)

**Interpretation:** From the table 5, it is evident that, in all the four zones, the consideration of ethical conduct in ensuring the possibility of tracking of the products during LPSOs has the maximum impact on customers; followed by necessary updates aired to the customers to attract and persuade to purchase. Also, so far as the sizes of the products being accurately delivered as displayed in the description during LPSOs is concerned, it has been observed that this factor has a high impact on customers as well. Moreover, from the pilot survey run by the researcher in Assam, it was found that there exists various delivery related issues such as problems in tracking, inaccessibility of delivery agents at the time of delivery. Thus, it can be stated that the ethical issues vary from place to place.

**Table 6 Impact of Ethical Conduct Based on Gender:**

|     | Factors   | Level of Impact (%) |            |
|-----|---|---------------------|------------|
|     |   | Male (%)            | Female (%) |
| 1.  | The advertisements displayed regarding LPSOs are reliable to purchase products.             | 76.55               | 74.81      |
| 2.  | The information displayed regarding the products are sufficient and correct during LPSOs.   | 74.71               | 74.07      |
| 3.  | The products are very well displayed with regard to the quality and quantity.               | 75.63               | 74.57      |
| 4.  | The delivery of the products is prompt and accurate to the promises made during LPSOs.      | 75.40               | 74.57      |
| 5.  | The shipping charges were appropriate and well defined during those offers                  | 75.40               | 74.32      |
| 6.  | There was provision for product verification on receipt of delivery made during LPSOs.      | 70.80               | 71.11      |
| 7.  | There was possibility in tracking of the products during LPSOs.                             | 80.46               | 80.49      |
| 8.  | The returns of the products made during those offers were easy & flexible.                  | 71.03               | 76.05      |
| 9.  | There was easy exchange of the products as was promised.                                    | 71.49               | 74.81      |
| 10. | All the payment modes were applicable during LPSOs.   | 76.55               | 80.49      |
| 11. | The customer's information was kept confidential during those offers made.                  | 74.71               | 82.22      |
| 12. | The products were well safeguarded against damaged during such offers.                      | 75.40               | 77.04      |
| 13. | Even if the damage occurred during dispatch the company took the responsibility of returns. | 72.87               | 75.06      |
| 14. | Too frequent customer updates regarding LPSOs.  | 77.70               | 75.80      |

|     |   |       |       |
|-----|---|-------|-------|
| 15. | The necessary updates were aired to the customers to attract and persuade to purchase as well.    | 78.85 | 79.75 |
| 16. | The sizes of the products were accurately delivered as displayed in the description during LPSOs. | 77.01 | 75.80 |
| 17. | The color was appropriate as displayed during such offers made.                                   | 73.56 | 72.84 |
| 18. | The weight of the products was equal to what has been promised during LPSOs.                      | 76.09 | 76.30 |
| 19. | The quality of the products was matched according to promise made during LPSOs.                   | 74.25 | 74.57 |
| 20. | The quantity of the products was accurate in number after delivery during LPSOs.                  | 78.85 | 76.54 |

(Source: Primary Data)

**Interpretation:** From the table 6, it is seen that among the Females, the impact is maximum in context to the consideration of the customer's information being kept confidential during Limited-period-surprise-offers. That apart, all payment modes being applicable and tracking possibility are other factors that exhibit second maximum impact during the LPSOs. Again, a high impact is seen in case of necessary updates being aired to the customers to attract and persuade to purchase during LPSOs.

**Table 7 Impact of Ethical Conduct Based on Age:**

|     | Factors  | Level of Impact (%) |                  |                  |                      |
|-----|--|---------------------|------------------|------------------|----------------------|
|     |  | 21- 30 years (%)    | 31- 40 years (%) | 41- 50 years (%) | 51 years & above (%) |
| 1.  | The advertisement displayed regarding LPSO's are reliable to purchase products.                | 80.70               | 72               | 74.29            | 73.33                |
| 2.  | The information displayed regarding the products are sufficient and correct during LPSOs.      | 80.14               | 62.67            | 68.57            | 73.33                |
| 3.  | The products are very well displayed with regard to the quality and quantity.                  | 82.94               | 80               | 65.71            | 73.33                |
| 4.  | The delivery of the products is prompt and accurate to the promises made during LPSOs.         | 81.54               | 69.33            | 77.14            | 80                   |
| 5.  | The shipping charges were appropriate and well defined during those offers.                    | 77.90               | 74.67            | 71.43            | 86.67                |
| 6.  | There was provision for product verification on receipt of delivery made during LPSOs.         | 77.62               | 58.67            | 68.57            | 73.33                |
| 7.  | There was possibility in tracking of the products during LPSOs.                                | 89.37               | 72               | 77.14            | 93.33                |
| 8.  | The returns of the products made during those offers were easy & flexible.                     | 80.14               | 70.67            | 68.57            | 46.67                |
| 9.  | There was easy exchange of the products as was promised.                                       | 82.52               | 76               | 65.71            | 66.67                |
| 10. | All the payment modes were applicable during LPSOs.  | 84.62               | 78.67            | 91.43            | 73.33                |
| 11. | The customer's information was kept confidential during those offers made.                     | 85.59               | 77.33            | 77.14            | 73.33                |
| 12. | The products were well safeguarded against damaged during such offers.                         | 81.40               | 72               | 71.43            | 86.67                |
| 13. | Even if the damage occurred during dispatch the company took the responsibility of returns.    | 82.24               | 64               | 68.57            | 73.33                |
| 14. | Too frequent customer updates regarding LPSOs.   | 83.50               | 70.67            | 65.71            | 80                   |
| 15. | The necessary updates were aired to the customers to attract and persuade to purchase as well. | 87.69               | 81.33            | 77.14            | 73.33                |



|     |   |       |       |       |       |
|-----|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 16. | The sizes of the products were accurately delivered as displayed in the description during LPSOs. | 81.54 | 69.33 | 80    | 86.67 |
| 17. | The color was appropriate as displayed during such offers made.                                   | 78.32 | 69.33 | 80    | 73.33 |
| 18. | The weight of the products was equal to what has been promised during LPSOs.                      | 84.06 | 69.33 | 82.86 | 80    |
| 19. | The quality of the products was matched according to promise made during LPSOs.                   | 78.60 | 65.33 | 71.43 | 73.33 |
| 20. | The quantity of the products was accurate in number after delivery during LPSOs.                  | 85.45 | 69.33 | 71.43 | 73.33 |

(Source: Survey data)

**Interpretation:** Table 7 depicts that, the returns of the products made during those offers were easy & flexible and that has a moderate impact (46.67%) according to the age group of 51 years & above. On the other hand, while ranking, tracking possibility of the products has the maximum impact (93.33%) considering all the mentioned age groups.

**Table 8 Impact of Ethical Conduct Based on Occupation:**

|     | Factors   | Level of Impact (%) |                  |              |            |
|-----|---|---------------------|------------------|--------------|------------|
|     |   | Service (%)         | Professional (%) | Business (%) | Others (%) |
| 1.  | The advertisements displayed regarding LPSOs are reliable to purchase products.                   | 78.08               | 72.73            | 88           | 75.38      |
| 2.  | The information displayed regarding the products are sufficient and correct during LPSOs.         | 75.89               | 73.51            | 80           | 69.23      |
| 3.  | The products are very well displayed with regard to the quality and quantity.                     | 77.81               | 73.51            | 72           | 70.77      |
| 4.  | The delivery of the products is prompt and accurate to the promises made during LPSOs.            | 78.36               | 73.25            | 80           | 64.62      |
| 5.  | The shipping charges were appropriate and well defined during those offers.                       | 78.90               | 71.95            | 80           | 67.69      |
| 6.  | There was provision for product verification on receipt of delivery made during LPSOs.            | 73.15               | 68.57            | 72           | 72.31      |
| 7.  | There was possibility in tracking of the products during LPSOs.                                   | 83.01               | 78.70            | 72           | 80         |
| 8.  | The returns of the products made during those offers were easy & flexible.                        | 76.44               | 69.87            | 76           | 76.92      |
| 9.  | There was easy exchange of the products as was promised.  | 77.26               | 68.31            | 80           | 75.38      |
| 10. | All the payment modes were applicable during LPSOs.   | 80.27               | 77.14            | 76           | 76.92      |
| 11. | The customer's information was kept confidential during those offers made.                        | 80.82               | 76.10            | 76           | 78.46      |
| 12. | The products were well safeguarded against damaged during such offers.                            | 78.90               | 71.95            | 84           | 83.08      |
| 13. | Even if the damage occurred during dispatch the company took the responsibility of returns.       | 78.08               | 69.61            | 76           | 75.38      |
| 14. | Too frequent customer updates regarding LPSOs.  | 78.90               | 74.55            | 72           | 80         |
| 15. | The necessary updates were aired to the customers to attract and persuade to purchase as well.    | 81.37               | 77.92            | 84           | 73.85      |
| 16. | The sizes of the products were accurately delivered as displayed in the description during LPSOs. | 78.08               | 75.58            | 84           | 69.23      |
| 17. | The color was appropriate as displayed  | 73.97               | 72.99            | 80           | 67.69      |

|     |  |       |       |    |       |
|-----|--|-------|-------|----|-------|
|     | during such offers made.   |       |       |    |       |
| 18. | The weight of the products was equal to what has been promised during LPSOs.     | 77.53 | 75.84 | 72 | 72.31 |
| 19. | The quality of the products was matched according to promise made during LPSOs.  | 75.07 | 74.03 | 76 | 72.31 |
| 20. | The quantity of the products was accurate in number after delivery during LPSOs. | 79.45 | 76.62 | 76 | 75.38 |

(Source: Survey data)

**Interpretation:** From the table 8, considering all the different occupations under consideration, the maximum impact (88%) of ethical conduct lies in the advertisement displayed regarding LPSOs that are reliable to purchase products.

**Table 9 Impact of Ethical Conduct Based on Income:**

|     | Factors   | Level of Impact (%)   |                           |                       |
|-----|---|-----------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
|     |   | Rs. 20,000-<br>35,000 | Rs. 36,000-<br>Rs. 45,000 | Rs. 46,000 &<br>above |
| 1.  | The advertisements displayed regarding LPSOs are reliable to purchase products.                   | 76.43                 | 75.38                     | 74.67                 |
| 2.  | The information displayed regarding the products are sufficient and correct during LPSOs.         | 76.19                 | 75.90                     | 69.78                 |
| 3.  | The products are very well displayed with regard to the quality and quantity.                     | 75.48                 | 75.38                     | 74.22                 |
| 4.  | The delivery of the products is prompt and accurate to the promises made during LPSOs.            | 74.29                 | 76.41                     | 75.11                 |
| 5.  | The shipping charges were appropriate and well defined during those offers.                       | 73.33                 | 79.49                     | 73.78                 |
| 6.  | There was provision for product verification on receipt of delivery made during LPSOs.            | 70.48                 | 76.92                     | 66.67                 |
| 7.  | There was possibility in tracking of the products during LPSOs.                                   | 79.05                 | 83.59                     | 80.44                 |
| 8.  | The returns of the products made during those offers were easy & flexible.                        | 72.38                 | 74.87                     | 74.22                 |
| 9.  | There was easy exchange of the products as was promised.  | 73.33                 | 74.87                     | 71.11                 |
| 10. | All the payment modes were applicable during LPSOs.   | 76.90                 | 78.97                     | 80.89                 |
| 11. | The customer's information was kept confidential during those offers made.                        | 79.52                 | 81.54                     | 73.33                 |
| 12. | The products were well safeguarded against damaged during such offers.                            | 76.43                 | 78.46                     | 73.78                 |
| 13. | Even if the damage occurred during dispatch the company took the responsibility of returns.       | 73.57                 | 73.85                     | 74.67                 |
| 14. | Too frequent customer updates regarding LPSOs.  | 76.67                 | 76.41                     | 77.33                 |
| 15. | The necessary updates were aired to the customers to attract and persuade to purchase as well.    | 78.10                 | 76.92                     | 83.56                 |
| 16. | The sizes of the products were accurately delivered as displayed in the description during LPSOs. | 73.81                 | 78.97                     | 79.11                 |
| 17. | The color was appropriate as displayed during such offers made.                                   | 70                    | 75.38                     | 77.33                 |

|     |  |       |       |       |
|-----|--|-------|-------|-------|
| 18. | The weight of the products was equal to what has been promised during LPSOs.     | 74.52 | 77.95 | 77.78 |
| 19. | The quality of the products was matched according to promise made during LPSOs.  | 74.05 | 76.92 | 72.89 |
| 20. | The quantity of the products was accurate in number after delivery during LPSOs. | 76.19 | 79.49 | 79.11 |

(Source: Survey data)

**Interpretation:** Table 9 depicts that the maximum impact (83.56%) based on the income groups lies in the necessary updates being aired to the customers to attract and persuade to purchase. Again, provision for product verification on receipt of delivery made during LPSOs has a high impact (66.67%).

### X. Sumumbonum Of The Findings:

- It has been found that as a whole ethical conduct in the possibility to track products during delivery has the maximum impact on customers across the various demographic parameters of analysis.
- However, the above does not necessarily mean that unethical conduct is the highest in case of tracking delivery of products. Many previous researches rather have shown that maximum unethical conduct is evidenced in many other factors like mismatch of product quality onscreen and actually delivered, insecure payment modes, cumbersome exchange procedures, etc.
- It has been found after the overall analysis that unethical conduct be carried out in whichever stated factor/sphere of functioning in case of LPSOs, it always has a high impact on the customers. The researchers have not evidenced any such variable/sphere of operation where unethical conduct has been considered to be having a low or even moderate impact on customers. This is indicative of the fact that the safeguard of ethics is a very serious issue in online marketing and needs to be sincerely taken up by the e-tailers.

### XI. Recommendations

- The turnaround time (TAT) for delivery of the products should be strictly adhered to.
- E-tailers should ensure that every delivery agent is provided with a functioning POS machine so that the customers can experience a hassle free transaction process as denomination related issues are a serious concern in today's context.
- The customers should tackle and revert back to any issue which is considered to be unethical in nature according to them.
- The customers should be aware of the terms & conditions that have been laid by the e-tailers during the offers, as it seen that various issues arise regarding the return and exchange of the products after being delivered mostly found in case of Apparels.

### XII. Conclusion

In sum, it can thus be said that although ethics is quite relative in nature and hence, also quite debatable – but, e-tailers have to adhere to certain basic principles of conduct while dealing with geographically distant customers. The legal safeguards with regard to ethical conduct of businesses cannot be overlooked or kept undisclosed to customers. Transparency in functioning can, to a great extent, assure the safeguard of ethics. Also, customers need to upgrade their information base regarding the various terms and conditions of purchase/sale during such short duration offers along with being aware of their legal safeguards and protective rights as a consumer/customer. Such two-way alertness regarding ethics can certainly create a more congenial ethical climate in online retailing in general and LPSOs in particular.

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