

## CUSTOMER'S PERCEPTION TOWARDS ONLINE LEARNING/EDUCATION IN INDIAN CITIES

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**Abstract:** *This paper examines customer perception towards online learning in Indian cities, with a focus on preferences between online and offline education, perceived effectiveness, and key advantages and limitations of online modes of learning. Using a descriptive research design and primary data from 115 respondents (students, parents, and teachers) collected through a structured questionnaire, the study analyses attitudes towards online education along dimensions such as flexibility, accessibility, interactivity, employability, and academic integrity. The findings reveal that while awareness of online education is high and a majority consider it an effective mode of learning in terms of flexibility and convenience, offline/physical education remains the more preferred mode due to better real-time interaction, classroom engagement, and perceived depth of learning. Respondents view online education as particularly useful for working individuals and those with financial or time constraints, but express concerns about lack of personal contact, potential quality issues, and unequal recognition in recruitment compared to on-campus degrees. The study concludes that both online and offline modes have distinct roles, and blended learning may offer a balanced way forward.*

**Keywords:** Accessibility, e-learning, Flexibility, Online education, Perception.

### 1. Introduction

The rapid growth of internet connectivity and digital technologies has transformed the global education industry, giving rise to multiple forms of online learning including fully online, hybrid, MOOCs, and various short skill-based modules. In India, the education sector is one of the largest in the world and has increasingly adopted online and distance modes as a complement and, in some cases, an alternative to traditional classroom education. Online education is delivered via the internet using computers and mobile devices, enabling learners to study from home, maintain jobs, or manage family responsibilities while pursuing formal or informal courses.

Globally, the e-learning market has grown significantly; estimates suggest the market size exceeded USD 165 billion in 2015 and was projected to surpass USD 240 billion by 2024, driven by cost advantages and learning flexibility. In India, online education is supported by initiatives such as NPTEL, SWAYAM, and various private edtech platforms, and the online education market is expected to reach over USD 1.96 billion with around 9.5

million users. The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated adoption, as institutions at all levels were forced to shift rapidly to online modes, highlighting both opportunities and structural constraints.

Despite this growth, questions remain about how learners and other stakeholders perceive online education relative to traditional modes: whether they regard it as equally effective, whether it can substitute for offline education, and what factors influence their preferences. This study focuses on “customer perception”—primarily.

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## *2. Review of Literature*

Online education is defined as a form of education delivered and administered using the internet, ranging from fully online to blended learning models. Scholars distinguish between synchronous and asynchronous formats and argue that design, interaction, and learner support significantly shape learning outcomes.

Sofat and Sharma (2020) investigated academicians' perception and challenges regarding online education courses and identified multiple factors shaping perception, including satisfaction levels, perceived performance, instructor abilities, learning from the course, course duration, and economic considerations. They also found that access problems and performance-related issues are major barriers for academicians. Tsai (2016) reviewed online learning performance and behaviour and highlighted the need for appropriate instructional environments and technologies such as handheld devices and collaborative tools.

Sun and Chen (2016) provided a comprehensive review of online education and its effective practice, linking theories of teaching presence, cognitive presence, and social presence to course design, interaction strategies, and online community building. Their work emphasises that effective online pedagogy requires deliberate design to foster interaction and engagement rather than simply replicating face-to-face lectures.

Nguyen (2015) examined the effectiveness of online learning relative to traditional education and noted that a large proportion of studies report comparable or better outcomes for online modes, though methodological limitations and selection biases complicate interpretation. Ni (2011) compared classroom and online learning in teaching research methods and concluded that while academic performance may be similar, some courses are more challenging in an online environment and that online participation may sometimes be less intimidating and more interactive.

Hammond (2013) reviewed research on asynchronous online discussion and found broad agreement that benefits derive from interaction and social constructivist learning, but that student engagement is highly contingent on task design and facilitation. Other studies have examined learner satisfaction, retention, readiness for e-learning, and faculty attitudes, often highlighting the importance of technical infrastructure, support systems, and prior experience with technology.

However, the existing literature reveals relatively fewer empirical studies focusing specifically on customer preference and perception towards online education in Indian cities, especially from the viewpoint of general users comparing online and offline modes. The present study attempts to address this gap by examining perceptions of urban respondents towards online learning and their reasons for preferring one mode over the other.

## *3. Research Objectives*

Drawing from the literature and the context outlined above, the present study sets the following objectives:

1. To identify the most preferred mode of education (online versus offline) among respondents in Indian cities.

2. To examine why people prefer online education over offline education, where such preference exists.
3. To study opinions regarding the effectiveness of online education along dimensions such as flexibility, accessibility, interactivity, and employability.
4. To identify perceived advantages and disadvantages of online education from the perspective of users.
5. To understand whether online learners are perceived as having equal opportunities in recruitment as on-campus graduates/postgraduates.

#### *4. Research Methodology*

##### **4.1 Research Design**

The study employs a descriptive research design with a multiple cross-sectional approach, wherein information was collected once from a sample of respondents representing the population of interest. This design is appropriate for capturing current perceptions and preferences without manipulating any variables.

##### *4.2 Population and Sampling*

The target population comprises individuals involved in educational decision-making—students, parents, and teachers—residing in urban Indian settings. Non-probability convenience sampling was used, with respondents selected based on accessibility and willingness to participate. The sample frame was limited to respondents from Indian cities, and the final sample size was 115.

##### *4.3 Data Collection*

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered online. The instrument included demographic questions (age, gender, qualification, occupation), dichotomous items (awareness of online education), multiple-choice questions, and Likert-scale items measuring perceptions of online learning across multiple statements (e.g., effectiveness, flexibility, interactivity, employability, cheating concerns). Secondary data were obtained from websites, journals, articles, books, and project reports related to online education and the Indian education sector.

##### *4.4 Tools and Analysis*

Data were coded and tabulated using MS Excel, and basic statistical analysis and interpretation were conducted; SPSS was identified as the intended statistical package for further analysis. The study primarily uses descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) to interpret respondents' perceptions towards online education.

##### *4.5 Limitations*

The research is limited to urban respondents and may not generalise to rural populations, where digital access and exposure to online education differ. The study relies on self-reported data provided by respondents and uses

convenience sampling, which may introduce bias. The questionnaire was designed specifically around the stated research objectives, which may limit exploration of broader issues.

## 5. Analysis and Findings

### 5.1 Profile of Respondents

Among the 115 respondents, 60 percent were graduates, 31.3 percent postgraduates, 2.6 percent diploma holders, 0.9 percent PhD/doctorate, and 5.2 percent others. The sample was relatively young: 70.4 percent were aged 18–24, 9.6 percent 25–30, 13.9 percent 31–40, and 6.1 percent 41 and above. In terms of gender, 70.4 percent were female, 28.7 percent male, and 0.9 percent preferred not to state their gender.

These demographics indicate that the sample is dominated by young, educated urban respondents—precisely the segment most exposed to and affected by online education trends.

### 5.2 Perceived Effectiveness of Online Learning

A majority of respondents (74.8 percent) agreed that online learning is an effective way of learning, 19.1 percent were neutral, and only 6.1 percent disagreed. This suggests widespread acceptance of online learning as a legitimate educational mode in principle. However, when asked whether online education is more effective than offline mode, only 20 percent agreed, 49.6 percent disagreed, and 33.4 percent remained neutral. Thus, while online learning is seen as effective, many respondents still consider traditional classroom learning superior overall.

Respondents strongly endorsed specific strengths of online education. For instance, 64.4 percent agreed that online education is effective because students can learn at their own pace, and only 8.7 percent disagreed (the rest were neutral). Likewise, 83.5 percent agreed that online education enables learning at any time and from anywhere, with only 1.7 percent disagreeing, underscoring flexibility and accessibility as key advantages.

### 5.3 Perceived Interactivity and Learning Experience

A significant proportion (61.7 percent) agreed that online education is effective because it offers an interactive mode, while 1.1 percent disagreed and 25.2 percent were neutral. Many respondents thus perceive online platforms as capable of delivering interactive content, especially through features like discussion forums, chat, and multimedia. However, qualitative comments and findings indicate that respondents still value one-to-one interaction and real-time classroom engagement, suggesting that the nature and quality of interaction differ between modes.

Regarding course coverage, 38.3 percent felt that the time allocated in online classes was sufficient to cover all topics, 28.7 percent disagreed, and 33 percent were neutral. This mixed viewpoints to variability in instructional design and execution across different online programmes.

### 5.4 Employability and Certification Perceptions

When asked whether graduates/postgraduates from online education have equal chances of recruitment as on-campus students, 34.8 percent agreed, 25.2 percent disagreed, and 40 percent were neutral. This indicates uncertainty and mild scepticism about parity between online and offline qualifications in the job market. On the

other hand, 51.3 percent agreed that online certification is helpful during recruitment, 3.5 percent disagreed, and

45.2 percent were neutral, suggesting that while standalone certifications are seen as beneficial, full degree equivalence remains contested.

Respondents were also asked whether online education is more conducive to cheating. Here, 17.4 percent agreed, 60 percent disagreed, and 22.6 percent were neutral. Contrary to common concern, most respondents did not perceive online education as inherently more prone to cheating, which may reflect familiarity with proctoring measures or a focus on learning rather than assessment alone.

## 5.5 Overall Preference and Perception

The study's synthesis of responses and qualitative comments reveals that most respondents remain more comfortable with offline/physical education as their preferred mode. Offline education is associated with direct interaction between students and teachers, real-time feedback, classroom atmosphere, and a sense of connection with the institution. At the same time, respondents recognise that online education offers important benefits: ease of accessing information; location and time flexibility; suitability for working individuals; and opportunities to pursue multiple or parallel courses.

The findings highlight that respondents see online education as a good platform for those who could not complete studies earlier or who need to combine work and learning, and as a cost-effective option for low-income groups who cannot afford full-time programmes. However, concerns persist about lack of physical presence, potential limitations in social and emotional development, and varying quality of online content and pedagogy.

## 6. Conclusion

This study set out to assess customer perception towards online learning/education in Indian cities, with a specific focus on preferences between online and offline modes and the factors influencing these preferences. The research, based on responses from 115 largely young and educated urban participants, indicates high awareness of online education and a generally positive view of its effectiveness, particularly in terms of flexibility, anytime-anywhere access, and self-paced learning.

At the same time, the majority of respondents do not regard online education as more effective than offline education; offline/physical classroom learning remains the most preferred mode overall. The preference for traditional education is rooted in perceived advantages such as one-to-one interaction with teachers, real-time feedback, classroom engagement, and a stronger sense of connection to peers and institutions. Respondents appreciate that online education can help overcome challenges in higher education related to cost, infrastructure, and time constraints, and see it as especially valuable for working professionals and those seeking additional skills.

Perceptions regarding employability and recognition of online qualifications are more mixed. While many view online certifications as helpful in recruitment, fewer respondents are fully confident that online degree holders enjoy equal opportunities as on-campus graduates. This suggests that although online education is gaining legitimacy, there remains some scepticism about equivalence in the labour market.

Overall, the findings support the view that online and offline education are not simple substitutes but complementary modes, each with its own strengths and weaknesses. In practice, a blended approach that combines

the flexibility and reach of online learning with the depth and social engagement of face-to-face education may provide the most effective model going forward.

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