Price Dynamics Unveiled: A Comparative Study on Pre-Sale, On-Sale, and Post-Sale Day Prices on Amazon

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Abstract

This study investigates the authenticity of price reductions during sales events on Amazon by analysing the price dynamics of products before, during, and after the sale. The primary objective is to evaluate whether the advertised discounts genuinely translate into significant consumer savings. By comparing pre-sale prices with on-sale and post-sale day prices, the research aims to offer a macro-level perspective on the actual impact of these discounts. It calculates the percentage change in the aggregate price of products to reveal overarching trends in pricing strategies. Furthermore, the study delves into individual product pricing to identify instances of both price reductions and increases, uncovering variations in pricing tactics. This granular analysis highlights discrepancies between perceived and actual discounts, providing valuable insights into the effectiveness and transparency of Amazon's sales strategies. The findings enhance consumer awareness and contribute to the broader discourse on e-commerce pricing ethics and practices.

Keywords: Amazon, Price Dynamics, Sale Events, Real Discounts, Price Reductions, Pre-Sale, On-Sale, Post-Sale Prices, Pricing Analysis.

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Introduction

E-commerce platforms, notably Amazon, have become central to modern shopping, with sales events often featuring prominently advertised discounts to attract consumers. Now and then, we come across E-commerce platforms talking about the Seasons Sale: Diwali Festive Sale, New Year Sale, Wedding Seasons Sale (Patra et al., 2021), and so on across all the E-commerce platforms such as Myntra, Ajio, Flipkart, etc. There are many studies conducted to find whether it is a sale where the platforms are making huge claims that they will be giving up to 50% of sale offers (Express, 2024; India, 2024; Mehta & Kotak, 2024; Solutions, 2024; Today, 2024).

However, there is growing skepticism regarding whether the discounts during these events are as substantial as claimed. This study attempts to address this concern by conducting a comparative analysis of product prices on Amazon, focusing on the pre-sale period versus the on-sale day period and the on-sale day period versus the post-sale day period to evaluate the actual price reductions. By calculating the percentage change in product prices across a diverse set of items, this research seeks to determine the authenticity of the advertised discounts. In addition, individual product price changes are examined to understand variations in pricing strategies. The findings aim to provide a macro-level perspective on price dynamics during major sales events, contributing to transparency in e-commerce pricing and offering valuable insights into the real extent of discounts.

Review of Literature

Research on the changing nature of e-commerce prices, particularly the fiercely competitive Amazon.com sale event structure, has gained prominence (Geradin & Smith, 2023; Today, 2024). These events frequently use price reductions to attract customers and increase sales. Nonetheless, the questionable character of advertised markdowns and customer assessments continues to draw scholarly interest (Kovacheva & Nikolova, 2024). This literature review explores e-commerce pricing techniques appropriately based on pre-sale, on-sale, and post-sale pricing trends.

E-Commerce Pricing Strategies

Price is one of the most important components of any e-commerce strategy. One of the most widely employed is a dynamic pricing strategy (Li & Chen 2024). According to Chen et al. (2023), Ho et al. (2024), and Purnomo (2023), easy-changing dynamic pricing has a feature, *"merchants to adjust prices instantaneously to competition, inventory, or demand changes"*. *"First, dynamic prices are typical for sales events where prices are set to maximize profits.*

Second, it induces the feeling of scarcity, which, according to the theory, helps increase purchase intent.

Sales occasions such as Amazon Prime Day and Black Friday have become staples for e-commerce platforms (Turban et al., 2015). This type of deal pulls in customers using limited-time-only offers and scarcity tactics. However, Leung et al. (2022) state that the effectiveness of such tactics is highly contingent upon the perceived authenticity of discounts being provided. If customers think the cuts are misleading, it may undermine trust and brand loyalty.

Price Anchoring and Consumer Perception

During sales events, price anchoring, a psychological strategy, is crucial in influencing customer perceptions (Tanford et al., 2019). Anchoring, first proposed by Tversky and Kahneman (1974), is the idea that people base a lot of their decisions on the first piece of information (the anchor). The original price acts as the anchor during sales events and the discounted price is measured against it. According to research by Duan et al. (2024) and Simonson & Drolet (2004), customers are more inclined to buy when they perceive a greater discount than the anchor.

However, the accuracy of the anchor price is often debated. Some studies, such as those by Dholakia (2023), suggest that retailers may inflate original prices before sales events to create the illusion of significant discounts. This practice, known as "price puffery," can mislead consumers into believing they are receiving a better deal than they actually are (Thomas 2021).

Pre-Sale, On-Sale, and Post-Sale Pricing

There is a dearth of academic literature examining the differences between pre-sale, on-sale, and post-sale prices in relation to one another. However, the current available research is important for comprehending how these e-commerce platforms' pricing behavior changes over time (Duan et al., 2022; Inoue & Hashimoto, 2022; Necula, 2023). Moriuchi (2021), for instance, pointed out that prices before sales are typically lower than those during ordinary sales, but they are given up before the event itself. This is done on purpose to generate excitement for the next event.

As the main focus of sales events, on-sale prices are intended to draw in as many customers as possible. Although this isn't always the case for all products, research by Chae (2020) and Gandhi and Nevo (2021) shows that on-sale prices

are usually the lowest during the event. Depending on supply and demand dynamics, some products may see marginal price rises or decreases.

Conversely, post-sale pricing offers information about how long the discounts from the sale will last (Liu et al., 2021). Post-sale prices frequently return to their pre-sale levels or higher, according to studies like those by Javed et al. (2020), which could reduce the perceived value of the sale. The genuineness of the discounts and whether they are a genuine representation of value or a short-term sales-boosting ploy are called into question by this trend.

Consumer Trust and E-Commerce Transparency

A key component of e-commerce systems' success is consumer trust. According to Tran and Nguyen (2022), consumer intentions to transact online are influenced by trust. Transparency is essential to fostering confidence when it comes to pricing. Transparent pricing procedures have a favorable impact on customer happiness and loyalty (Rama 2020). On the other hand, misleading pricing tactics may have long-term effects (Cusser et al., 2020). Customers are less likely to make repeat purchases from the same shop if they believe that pricing strategies are unjust (Hufnagel et al., 2022). This research highlights the significance of genuine and open pricing strategies, particularly during high-profile sales occasions.

Price dynamics in e-commerce is a complex topic that takes into account ethical, technological, and psychological factors. A comprehensive grasp of pre-sale, on-sale, and post-sale pricing patterns is still difficult, despite the fact that the literature now in publication clarifies a number of aspects of pricing tactics. By filling in these gaps with thorough research, we can raise consumer awareness and guide more open and fair pricing policies.

Methodology

Data Collection

In order to gather comprehensive data for our comparative analysis of Amazon product prices over distinct periods, two distinct methodologies were employed for data collection. The first approach involved web scraping, wherein relevant information was extracted directly from the Amazon website (i.e. www.amazon.in) by using Selenium WebDriver (Selenium, 2024) for browser automation and BeautifulSoup (Richardson, 2024) for parsing the HTML content. This method allowed us to capture real-time data on product details and pricing. Additionally, the second method leveraged the capabilities of Keepa.com, a reputable platform providing historical data on Amazon products.

By utilising Keepa.com (Keepa GmbH, 2024), we obtained a detailed product history, extracting prices at various dates to facilitate a thorough examination of pricing trends over time. These combined approaches ensure a robust and comprehensive dataset for our analytical evaluation. The methodology adopted for data collection and extraction is explained in Figure 1. For this study, we selected 18 product categories, and for all 18 products, we collected data using web scraping and other sources. The 18 product categories are Bag, Beauty, Books, Cleaning Supplies, Clothing, Electronics, Footwear, Furniture, Garments, Home Appliances, Home Supplies, Kitchen Appliances, Skincare, Sports, Stationary, Toys, Groceries and Others. For data extraction, first the website and the product categories were decided, after understanding the structure of the website, by employing Python and BeautifulSoup, codes were prepared and data was extracted. After extraction of data, the data was cleaned and converted into proper row and column format for further analysis.

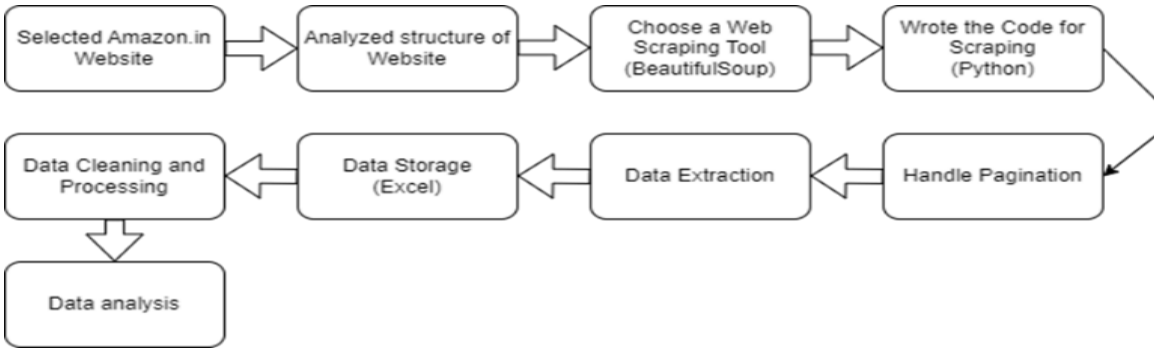

Figure 1: Data Extraction Process

Data Pre-processing

The data collected was processed, and the percentage price difference was calculated. For each product category, the average price difference between the pre-sale and on-sale day prices was calculated. This was done using the following formula:

$$\textit{Percentage Price Difference} = \{\{(\textit{On-sale Day Price}) - (\textit{Pre-sale Day Price})\}/(\textit{Pre-sale Day Price})\} \times 100$$

This calculation was applied across all product categories, providing a clear comparison of price changes between the two periods.

Data Analysis

To understand the effect of sales events on product pricing, we conducted a statistical analysis comparing pre-sale, sale-day, and post-sale prices. The

purpose was to determine if there was a significant difference in product prices across these three time periods. The Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was applied. The null hypothesis was; *"there is no statistically significant difference between pre-sale, sale-day, and post-sale prices across all the categories"*.

Table 1: ANOVA for all the Product Categories

Product	Hypothesis Number	F-Value	P-Value	Decision Null Hypothesis
Overall	H01	0.455	0.634	Supported
Garment - Shirt	H02	0.403	0.671	Supported
Garment - Chinos	H03	0.146	0.864	Supported
Garment - Kurti	H04	1.207	0.314	Supported
Electronics - Massager	H05	0.390	0.680	Supported
Electronics - Trimmer	H06	0.749	0.482	Supported
Skincare - Moisturizer	H07	0.274	0.761	Supported
Skincare - Sunscreen	H08	1.614	0.217	Supported
Skincare - Facewash	H09	0.048	0.952	Supported
Kitchen Appliance - Induction cooker	H10	0.116	0.890	Supported
Kitchen Appliance - Air fryer	H11	0.066	0.936	Supported
Bag - Handbag	H12	0.592	0.559	Supported
Bag - Laptop bag	H13	0.036	0.964	Supported
Bag - Trekking bag	H14	0.259	0.773	Supported
Home Supply - Detergent	H15	0.010	0.989	Supported
Home Supply - Soap	H16	0.006	0.993	Supported
Home Supply - Floor mat	H17	0.031	0.969	Supported
Footwear - Shoe	H18	0.240	0.788	Supported
Footwear - Sandal	H19	0.495	0.614	Supported
Footwear - Block heels	H20	0.627	0.541	Supported
Cleaning Supply - Brush	H21	0.013	0.986	Supported
Cleaning Supply - Mop	H22	0.268	0.766	Supported
Cleaning Supply - Dishwash liquid	H23	0.163	0.850	Supported

From Table 1, it seems that there is no significant difference between any of the product categories between the pre-sale, post-sale, and on-day sales price of the

products. In order to find how much the discount the e-commerce platform is providing across the products; the percentage change is calculated. From the percentage change analysis, we tried to find how much is the percentage change in the prices of the products. The percentage change for each product category is calculated and discussed.

Bag: +2.24% (Increase) Bags experienced a slight price increase, possibly due to high demand or selective discounting where the premium or high-end bags were not significantly discounted. Beauty: -6.65% (Decrease) Beauty products saw a notable price reduction of 6.65%. Despite a slight decrease, beauty is still one of the categories that experienced lesser discounts compared to others. Books: +20.94% (Increase) The books category experienced a sharp price increase of 20.94%. This could be due to limited sales on certain popular titles or minimal discounts, leading to an overall price hike. Cleaning Supply: +14.84% (Increase) Cleaning supplies also saw a significant price increase. This may indicate a lack of discounts in this category, possibly due to steady demand and lower priority for sale pricing.

Clothing: +17.76% (Increase) Clothing prices increased by 17.76%, suggesting that despite heavy promotion, discounts were likely selective, and many items, particularly trending or premium apparel, saw price hikes. Electronics: -6.75% (Decrease) Electronics saw a price decrease of 6.75%, aligning with expectations of discounts during sales events. However, the reduction was relatively modest for a heavily promoted category. Footwear: +2.80% (Increase) Footwear experienced a slight price increase, suggesting that discounts were either minimal or selective. This could indicate higher prices on popular or high-demand footwear. Furniture: +33.59% (Increase) Furniture saw a substantial price increase of 33.59%. This sharp rise suggests limited discounts or even price hikes during the sale event, which is unexpected for a category often marketed with large discounts. Garment: -5.74% (Decrease) Garment prices decreased by 5.74%, offering moderate discounts. While reductions were evident, they were not as deep as expected for such a competitive category. Home Appliances: +2.40% (Increase) Home appliances saw a slight price increase, indicating that discounts were either minimal or restricted to select products. Home Supplies: +3.15% (Increase) A modest price increase in home supplies suggests that discounts in this category were likely limited to a few items, while most products saw marginal increases. Kitchen Appliance: 14.10% (Increase) Kitchen appliances saw a notable price increase of 14.10%. Despite promotions, discounts were likely sparse or absent for premium appliances.

Skincare: +26.16% (Increase) Skincare experienced a sharp price increase, likely due to high demand for premium skincare products. Discounts in this category

were minimal, resulting in an overall price hike. Sports: +17.51% (Increase) Sports-related products saw a substantial price increase, suggesting limited or selective discounting for sports equipment and apparel. Stationary: +9.35% (Increase) Stationery items saw a moderate price increase, indicating that discounts were either restricted or not applied to many products in this category. Toys: -3.28% (Decrease) Toys experienced a small price reduction of 3.28%. While discounts were present, they were not as significant as expected for a popular sales category. Groceries: -15.55% (Decrease) Groceries saw a notable price reduction of 15.55%, indicating that this category offered relatively good discounts, possibly to encourage bulk purchasing or clear out inventory and Other: -19.93% (Decrease) The "Other" category saw a significant price reduction of 19.93%, indicating considerable discounts for miscellaneous products not falling into other main categories.

The analysis revealed that the overall impact of Amazon's sale resulted in a modest average discount of around 6%. This suggests that while the sales event did offer some savings, the magnitude of these reductions was lower than what was heavily promoted. The discrepancy between advertised discounts and actual price reductions raises questions about the transparency of e-commerce pricing strategies.

Discussion, Implications, and Conclusion

This research highlights that Amazon's sales events, while offering tangible discounts in select categories such as furniture, are often marked by strategic price manipulation that limits the overall benefit to consumers. The analysis reveals that although consumers are drawn to these sales with the expectation of substantial savings, the average discount of 6% indicates that the actual financial benefit may be far less impressive than the promotional advertisements suggest. Categories like electronics, beauty, and clothing, which are typically the most popular during sales events, often show either marginal price reductions or even price increases, undermining the perception of widespread savings.

One of the key takeaways from this study is that Amazon, along with other e-commerce giants, employs sophisticated pricing strategies, including AI-driven price adjustments and dynamic pricing models. These tactics enable platforms to maximise profitability by adjusting prices based on consumer behavior, demand, and market conditions in real-time. In certain cases, prices are raised prior to the sale event, giving the illusion of larger discounts on sale day. This practice, while beneficial for the seller, can erode consumer trust when shoppers realise they are not getting the significant savings they were led to believe.

Moreover, the transparency of these pricing strategies is called into question. While it is legal for platforms to adjust prices dynamically, the perception of

fairness plays a crucial role in shaping consumer sentiment. If consumers feel deceived or misled by inflated pre-sale prices and negligible sale-day discounts, it could have long-term implications on their loyalty to the platform and their willingness to participate in future sales events.

Looking ahead, future research should delve deeper into the consumer perception of these pricing tactics, exploring how different demographic groups interpret and react to such practices. Additionally, further studies could investigate the psychological impact of perceived versus actual discounts and how they influence purchasing behavior. The role of AI and machine learning in setting and optimising prices also warrants more attention, particularly in understanding how these technologies are used to create a balance between offering competitive discounts and maintaining retailer profitability.

In conclusion, while sales events like Amazon's 'Great Indian Festival' continue to attract significant consumer interest and spending, the actual benefits for consumers may be far more modest than anticipated. E-commerce platforms' ability to manipulate pricing through sophisticated algorithms raises important questions about fairness, transparency, and consumer trust in online marketplaces. As the e-commerce landscape continues to evolve, a deeper understanding of these dynamics will be essential for both businesses and consumers to navigate the complex world of online pricing.

Insights

The study reveals a nuanced strategy in Amazon's pricing behavior, which involves the selective use of discounts across different product categories, often referred to as "targeted" or "balanced discounting." This approach allows Amazon to capitalise on high-demand sales events like the "Great Indian Festival" by offering significant discounts in some categories, such as furniture, while offsetting those reductions with price hikes in other categories, including electronics and beauty. The result is a strategic balance between attracting consumers through selective, genuine discounts and maintaining profitability by manipulating prices in ways that are less apparent to the average buyer.

Targeted Discounts: A Strategic Approach

Categories like furniture, which recorded a price reduction of 33.59%, serve as prime examples of Amazon's strategy to generate consumer interest and drive traffic to the platform. Large discounts in such categories are often heavily promoted, creating a perception that the sales event is full of lucrative deals across the board. Furniture, being a high-ticket item, can dramatically influence consumer perception, as buyers who secure a significant discount in this category

are likely to feel they are receiving great value. This sense of satisfaction can spill over into other purchases, where discounts may not be as substantial.

However, the research also indicates that other categories like electronics and beauty saw price increases of -6.75% and -6.65%, respectively. This is contrary to the common consumer expectation of price reductions during sales events. Electronics, which is typically a highly sought-after category during these sales, often sees prices manipulated just before the event. A common tactic involves increasing the baseline price prior to the sale, then offering a “discount” that is, in reality, either marginal or non-existent. This tactic allows platforms like Amazon to retain profitability on products that are in high demand without appearing to deceive customers.

Balanced Discounting: Optimizing Profitability

The overall strategy employed by Amazon can be termed "balanced discounting," where the platform provides genuine discounts in certain categories while raising prices or offering minimal reductions in others. This creates a perception of savings across the platform, even though the actual benefit to the consumer is unevenly distributed. By selectively applying discounts, Amazon can maintain a balance between consumer satisfaction and its own profitability goals.

For example, categories such as books (20.94% discount), skincare (26.16% discount), and sports items (17.51% discount) also benefitted from genuine reductions, which added to the perception of overall savings during the sales event. These categories, while not necessarily in as high demand as electronics, help reinforce the idea that the sale is providing broad benefits. The discounts in these categories are often significant enough to encourage impulse buying, further boosting Amazon's sales volumes.

At the same time, categories such as toys (-3.28%), groceries (-15.55%), and kitchen appliances (14.10%) reflect how pricing strategies can vary, with some prices seeing moderate discounts, others witnessing negligible reductions, and some even showing increases. The variation in pricing across these categories points to Amazon’s ability to fine-tune its discounting strategy based on market trends, inventory levels, and consumer demand. For example, grocery items, which are often bought in bulk, might see price hikes during sales events because consumers expect discounts and are more willing to buy larger quantities. In contrast, kitchen appliances and stationery (9.35%) could experience more genuine reductions as these are lower-frequency purchases.

Manipulation of Consumer Perception

The study challenges the assumption that e-commerce sales events uniformly benefit consumers by offering across-the-board discounts. The reality is far more

complex. Through a combination of targeted advertising, dynamic pricing algorithms, and data-driven insights, Amazon is able to manipulate consumer perceptions to its advantage. The perception of deep discounts during sales events is carefully curated, with the company often adjusting prices in ways that optimise both the perceived value to the customer and Amazon's profit margins.

For instance, consumers are bombarded with advertisements showcasing deep discounts on specific items, creating an emotional response that encourages them to explore the platform in search of more deals. However, once they begin shopping, they may encounter products where the discounts are much less pronounced, or in some cases, non-existent. Yet, the initial appeal of the sale often results in consumers making purchases that they might not have considered if the sale had not been advertised so heavily.

The use of AI and machine learning further enhance Amazon's ability to implement these strategies in real-time. The algorithms can track consumer behavior, adjusting prices dynamically based on demand, browsing history, and competitors' pricing. This means that the price a consumer sees during a sale may vary, depending on their past behavior or even their geographical location. Such pricing strategies, while beneficial for the retailer, can undermine consumer trust when buyers realise that the discounts they were promised are either not as substantial or entirely fabricated through pre-sale price hikes.

Implications of Selective Discounting

The implications of this "balanced discounting" approach are significant, particularly for consumer trust and long-term brand loyalty. While short-term profits can be maximised through selective price manipulation, repeated exposure to such tactics may lead to consumer skepticism over time. Buyers who feel misled by inflated pre-sale prices or negligible sale-day discounts may become less willing to participate in future sales events, ultimately harming the retailer's reputation.

Furthermore, this practice raises questions about transparency in e-commerce pricing. While dynamic pricing and targeted discounting are not illegal, they blur the line between ethical marketing and manipulation. Consumers who expect sales events to provide genuine savings across the board may feel deceived when they discover that only select categories offer real discounts. This can lead to a disconnect between consumer expectations and the reality of sales events, potentially damaging trust in the platform.

Limitation

Though due care is taken while extracting the data and the timeline, with which we had extracted the data. There are hundreds of products and each product has a

sub categories. It is not possible to extract the data for all the products and subproducts. The products selected are very common and widely used. The selection of the product might not be the actual representation of the whole Amazon product.

Acknowledgment

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to our mentors, colleagues, and institutions for their continuous support and guidance throughout the research process. This paper is a collaborative effort, and we are grateful for the collective contributions that made it possible.

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