

Indian Consumers' Online Shopping Behaviour Patterns during Covid-19 Pandemic and Post Pandemic: Issues and Challenges

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Abstract

The arrival of the new corona virus on this planet brought about numerous changes to both our lives and the way we spend our lives. During their shopping trip, the consumers saw a major change in the markets they visited, whether it concerned the sale of grocery or stationery, cosmetics or medicines, clothing or gadgets. The use of technology has made the process of connecting to the virtual world much easier than it was in the past because of the physical restrictions existing at that time, which caused the universe as a whole to come to a standstill. The behaviour of consumers changed while they were shopping, including what they purchased, where they purchased it from, and how they purchased it. If we contrast traditional buying with internet buying, we see that the former is becoming less common as people gravitate toward the latter as the more convenient and preferable means of transaction. The goal of this research will be to determine the primary factors that drove consumers to shop online during the COVID-19 epidemic and to identify customers' favourite items that they want to buy more of online after the pandemic has passed. The approach that was employed in the study is descriptive, and it is based on secondary material that was obtained from previously published reports, research papers, and other existing literature about this issue. The findings of the research will be of great use for the companies that offer services related to online shopping in developing improved strategies that will result in increasing levels of consumer satisfaction.

Keywords: pandemic, online shopper, e-commerce.

1. INTRODUCTION

The arrival of the new corona virus on this planet brought about numerous changes to both our lives and the way we spend our lives. During their trip to the store, the consumers noted a significant change in the products they purchased, whether it was a piece of grocery or stationery, cosmetics or medicines, clothing or gadgets. The use of technology has made the process of connecting to the virtual world much easier than it was in the past because of the physical restrictions during pandemic that caused the universe as a whole to come to a standstill. Traditionally, individuals would go to shops, choose the items they wanted, and then purchase them. On the other hand, during the lockdown, e-commerce has made it simpler by presenting a manner that is more convenient and transactional, and that approach is purchasing online. Because of this predicament, the corporate sector had no choice but to modify their business model. Many established consumer goods companies as well as newly established ones are abandoning business models that are shop-centric in favour of ones that are customer-centric and nearly borderless. The epidemic caused by the covid-19 virus has hastened the transition toward a more digital society. "The adjustments that we make right now will have lasting effects as the economy of the world starts to recover," UNCTAD Secretary-General Mukhisa Kituyi made this statement. He continued by saying that the rise of online shopping throughout the world shows how crucial it is for all countries to be prepared to take advantage of the opportunities given by digitalization as the world moves from reacting to pandemic to recovering from them.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The report suggests that the pandemic has had an effect on the lives of consumers and altered their patterns of spending, with the majority of customers restricting themselves to simply making

investments and purchases of necessities during the lockdown (Watconsult Report 2020). According to further research, the first effect of the lockdown was to keep individuals confined, after which many of them continued to work from home. As a result of this shift toward digital consumption, other trends are emerging, such as consumers shopping online to discover the cheapest price, choosing healthier alternatives, and acting more sustainably by making purchases locally whenever possible, as reported by the Global Consumer Insights Pulse Survey conducted in June of 2021. Another key finding from the report was that consumers do not plan to go back to their old ways of shopping after the pandemic has been subdued. According to Kirk and Rifkin (2020) society's response to a crisis may serve as a driving force for profound changes. They advise paying close attention to customer behaviour at each of these three stages: immediate reaction, intermediate coping, and long-term adaptation. They assert if demonetisation was responsible for customers making the transition to cashless payments, the epidemic is responsible for people making the transition to contactless purchases.

3. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The primary purpose of this research will be to identify the factors that are most influential on consumers' decisions to purchase online both during and after an outbreak of the pandemic. The technique that was employed in the study is descriptive, and it is based on secondary material that was obtained from previously published reports, surveys, research papers, and other existing literature on the subject. The findings of the research will help online shopping service providers improve their methods in order to give higher levels of client satisfaction.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Online Purchase Process At the beginning of the shopping cycle, a potential customer has the impression that he is experiencing a problem, and as a result, he continues looking for a solution to fix it. After determining the nature of the issue at hand, he moves on to the next step of the process, which is to compile available data and information that he can find that would be applicable to the resolution. The next step is to conduct an analysis of the several available options, with the goals of lowering the amount of risk involved and increasing the amount of money that may be made. In the last step of the process, the customer chooses one option over another so that he might experience the combination that provides him with the most satisfaction. The last but most crucial phase is the post-purchase assessment, which is when the customer ultimately interacts with himself or herself by posing a number of questions to themselves and attempting to determine whether or not the outcomes have exceeded their anticipations.

Consumers still go through the same phases of awareness, contemplation, conversion, and assessment when making purchases online, despite the fact that the conventional idea of purchase has undergone significant evolution since the emergence of the internet and other forms of digital innovation. The fundamental difference lies in the fact that the old route followed a straight line, but the new one follows more of a cycle or even a web. To put it another way, the process of making a digital purchase is complicated since customers are now more perplexed than ever before because various alternatives are available. At each step, consumers go through the phases and sometimes even back and forth between them, and each stage is impacted by a combination of offline and online elements (KPMG 2017).

Awareness When they first became aware of or had a desire for the product

Consideration When they were researching the product online or offline

Conversion When they were deciding where and when to buy the product

Evaluation After they made the purchase



Source- Online Truth about Online Consumers 2017 Global Online Consumer Report by KPMG

Above figure depicts that consumer behaviour changes are not linear and their stickiness depends on satisfaction of new experiences, ups and downs ahead of customers.

Stickiness = forced behaviour x satisfaction

Major drivers of online shopping behaviour

The present section will explore major drivers of internet buying both during and after the covid-19 epidemic. Since its inception, the digital mode's primary drivers have been its convenience, expanded selection, and cost-cutting potential. However factors like fear, anxiety, quarantine, scarcity, standing in lengthy line ups, panic purchasing et.al. have contributed to an exponential surge in the demand for online shopping. It is expected that because of the increasing popularity of online shopping and the increased level of competition it faces, this will continue into the future. Now the typical ways of shopping have undergone a remarkable transformation. Technology has been playing a crucial role in redefining consumer behaviours, such as buying via a variety of applications such as Amazon, Myntra, Flipkart, et.al, amongst others. Consumers have been avoiding public locations in response to the rising danger of the corona virus, which has increased the consumers' attractiveness towards online buying. These individuals were reportedly exercising social distance and wanted to spend as little time as possible away from their homes. According to research done by Rakuten Insight in May 2020, the things most often bought were food and groceries, personal hygiene products, and domestic cleaning supplies. In the course of initiative during covid-19, there was a meteoric surge in the demand for smart phones all over the world for educational purposes, and this spark led to the adoption of e-commerce platforms. According to Sajal Kohli and her colleagues' research, 62% of the customers' orders originated from market places in tier2 and tier3 cities. This indicates that consumers in these locations are both experienced and novice users of online shopping platforms. We have traversed a "decade in days" in adoption of digital technology, according to a report conducted by McKinsey & Company, which underscores the fact that covid-19 is revolutionizing the lives of consumers. The slowdown in the economy, changes in consumers' preferences, and the development of digital technology are three drivers of change.

Customers' decisions to migrate their buying habits online may be attributed to a number of causes. Huge shift in consumers' purchasing habits during the lockdown was mostly attributable to the product's life cycle, type, and degree of need. There was a sudden and dramatic increase in demand for many different types of products, including mobile phones, consumer electronics, and household appliances. However, high-use areas including groceries, home goods and personal care saw substantial growth and are expected to continue rapid expansion in the wake of the epidemic's end. For these types of online

purchases, it is expected that growth rates will quickly recover to pre-pandemic levels, and then continue to increase in line with long-term trends (Arpan Seth et al. 2021). The rise of more frivolous and non-essential expenditure categories, such as clothing and vacation, was slower than average during the epidemic. Some product categories, including floor cleaners and toilet bowl cleaners, had larger demand compared to the pre-covid-19 period. This increase was seen even among first-time users, most likely because of the value placed on personal hygiene. With the power of habit persistence propelling home care growth in the world's fifth-largest home care market these categories will almost probably continue to expand consumption post covid-19 (Economic Times, 2021)..

E-commerce Revolution and steps to take its full advantages

Even though the covid-19 epidemic is nearly over, the huge economic shifts that took place during this time period are quite likely to endure. It is essential to have a solid understanding of the dynamic nature of the market; hence, the following guidelines should be adhered to in order to take full advantage of the e-commerce revolution (Kirk and Rifkin, 2020).

- 1. Connect with the customers in a multi- or omnichannel way** Businesses need to be able to adjust to the shifting tastes and behaviours of customers in order to survive in today's dynamic and competitive market. Customers now have the option to shop through a variety of different channels, including mobile devices, the internet, social media, and physical stores. As a result, it is necessary for companies to engage with their consumers' multi channel strategies in order to create an experience that is smooth and consistent. By doing so, companies have the opportunity to boost consumer engagement and loyalty that can be used to improve their customers' entire buying experiences. Businesses need to keep ahead of the curve and create strategies that allow them to satisfy the demands of their consumers and offer ease as the usage of technology and e-commerce platforms continues to grow.
- 2. Be transparent** When it comes to gaining the confidence and credibility of consumers, transparency is essential. In today's market, companies confront a variety of hurdles, some of which include problems with their supply chains, shortages of products, and growing expenses. However, keeping this information away from your clients might result in their anger and distrust of business. It is critical for companies to maintain open communication with their clientele and update them on any relevant changes and difficulties. Customers are able to better comprehend the situation and change their expectations as a result of this information. Businesses have the opportunity to develop robust connections with their clientele, founded on honesty and integrity if they demonstrate transparency.
- 3. Be flexible** Customers place a high importance on adaptability and ease of use in the buying experiences they seek out in today's market. Companies have to be able to adjust to the shifting requirements of their clientele and provide a variety of alternatives for customer support, delivery, payment, and other facet of a transaction. For instance, the provision of home delivery services during lockdown was obligatory; but consumers have grown to value the increased convenience and adaptability that this feature affords them. As a result, organizations are able to continue with the provision of these services long after the epidemic. By doing so, companies may improve their customers' experiences, therefore increasing customer loyalty and maintaining their position as competitive players in the market.
- 4. Study of data** Today we are living in a world that is driven by data, it is essential for organizations to study and evaluate data in order to make choices that are well informed. Businesses are able to enhance their marketing strategy and boost client engagement if they have a thorough grasp of name of platforms and channels which are producing the most successful outcomes. It is also essential to

obtain vital information from consumers in a direct manner by means of surveys, contact with customer support representatives, and monitoring of comments and reviews made on social media. Businesses are able to get insights into consumer behaviour, tastes, and wants when they do this, and may then adjust their offers to correspond with those findings (ML2020). This may help companies keep ahead of the competition, improve the customer experience, and boost the number of customers that remain loyal to the brand.

STRATEGIES TO BE FOLLOWED BY E-TAILERS

Every company, organization, and digital agency has been impacted by the pandemic in some way, shape, or form. Isolation at home and sudden lockdowns led to an unavoidable reliance on electronic devices. All this forced them to feel an urgent need to start moving up the digital adoption curve the moment when second wave of covid-19 hit. As a result, digital marketing firms have greater leeway to manoeuvre in the industry. Several businesses have revised and enhanced their goals and approaches to the marketplace as a result of the epidemic (Raghav Bagai, 2021). It's likely that in the not-too-distant future, customers will be able to make purchases in a variety of ways, including in-store and online. If future players are to make the most of the chances given by the ongoing economic revolution, they will need to develop the traits of openness and flexibility. The online shopping giant in recent years, Amazon has experimented with brick-and-mortar stores. New York, Los Angeles, Austin, and Seattle are just some of the places where Amazon has opened brick-and-mortar stores (Ismail et.al.2021). This follows the recent purchase of Whole Foods Market by the same corporation. Walmart, the largest and most profitable retailer in the United States, is quickly expanding its online offerings. Customers may avoid waiting in line by purchasing items online and picking them up at the store. Despite their historical differences and even rivalry, in-store and internet buying are increasingly blending into one another. This suggests that customers, even those loyal to traditional brands offered in traditional locations, may find it appealing to do more research and shopping online.

Although the pandemic had a significant impact on our daily lives, it did prompt businesses to reconsider their marketing strategies from a new angle. In light of the study's results, experts advise e-commerce companies to put in the work required to create effective marketing master plans. Consumer behaviour has been reviewed and altered as a direct result of the inevitable covid-19 epidemic. Companies, in order to maintain their long-term profitability, should thus give careful consideration to modifying their current consumer behaviour models and implementing strategic adjustments. They are making an effort to reduce food waste, are becoming more financially prudent, and are considering making ecologically beneficial choices.

5. CONCLUSION

To be successful in the world that has emerged from the epidemic, business executives need to rethink not just how their organization operates, but also the value that it produces in the digital age. They should use the following tactics in order to ensure the success of their company in the future:

- (1) Rather than concentrating on digitizing what companies currently do, they should first think about where they stand in the world.
- (2) Rather of attempting to accomplish everything by yourself, strive to increase value via the use of ecosystems.
- (3) Instead of asking employees to work in new ways within the confines of an old organizational model, they should reimage their organization so that it can facilitate a new model of value generation. In order to be successful in the increasingly digital world, the companies will need to take use of the new technologies. They shouldn't try to imitate what the other companies in their industry are doing; rather, they should focus on advancing their own mission by making investments in capabilities that set them apart from the competition and enable them to fulfil their purpose.

(4) If they want to take up top position in the world, it may be necessary for them to abandon old forms of commerce, assets, and follow the ideas of value creation that lead to tremendous success.

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