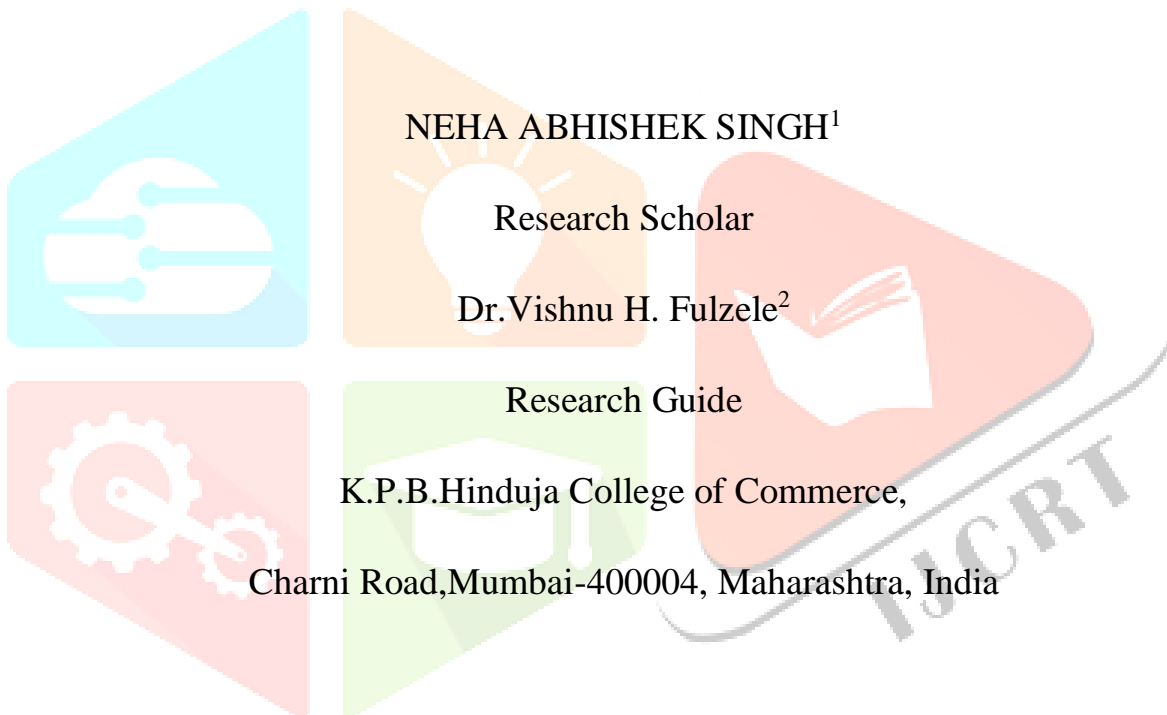




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“CONSUMER PREFERENCE AND BUYING PATTERN OF MEDICINES THROUGH E- PHARMACY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC”



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Abstract:

With the advancement of the internet, the life of a people has changed slowly and gradually. Purchasing medicines online is one of the latest trends which can be seen in an Indian market. People today prefer to shop online rather than offline because it is convenient. In recent years we have seen the upper graph of e-pharmacy. E-shopping helped the consumers to buy the products as per their convenience because now the consumers can order the medicines with just a click or they have to visit the proper website to order the medicines. Today in this busy time the consumers are getting the medicines at their doorstep. The healthcare industry of India is also expanding because of the existence of e-pharmacy. The leading E-pharmacy players are- 1mg, Net meds, MChemist, pharmEasy, Medlife, etc. As per the statistics, the number of internet users in India has risen from 795.18 million at the end of December 2020 to 825.30 million at the end of March

2021. During the pandemic many times consumers used to neglect to purchase many things but they were very strict while buying medicines or other pharmaceutical products. E-pharmacy has reached remote areas too. During a pandemic, the business and the buying pattern of the consumers is changed. This study aims to understand that does e-pharmacy helped in the buying pattern of the consumer. Secondary sources of data are used for analysis as well as for interpretation and to develop the theoretical framework. A deductive approach is used to get the conclusion. This paper discusses the consumer preference and buying pattern of medicines through e-pharmacy.

Keywords:

Buying Pattern, Internet, Healthcare, E-pharmacy, Covid-19

Introduction:

The growth of e-commerce in India has made consumers buy medicines online. Today people has knowledge about computer, having smartphones with the internet which helped them to get the palpable benefits. The outbreak of the coronavirus has led to the biggest disaster in world history where this pandemic has affected almost all the countries within a short period of time. The cases were increasing day by day which led to the increment in death of the people. Many countries were started doing lockdown which means the restriction for the people to come out from their houses, Everything was shut and the lockdown was one of the measures to break the chain of a virus. People started migrating from one place to another as they don't have jobs and it was impossible for them to take care of their livelihood. Many countries imposed total lockdown during the pandemic, but total lockdown is not possible for developing and under developing nations. Medical shops, public and private healthcare services were kept open as people have stayed at home. The term called e-commerce is growing rapidly day by day. Most of the products are available online. From apparel to food, Payment of bills, doing investments everything is possible today online. E-commerce now gave a boost to the pharmaceutical industry especially during the pandemic. As per the reports Pharmaceutical industry is the third-largest industry in India. People love to follow the trend and today the trend is to shop online because it is convenient for everyone. In 1999, Drugstore.com came into existence. Drugstore.com was not the first Online pharmacy but we can say that it is one of the safest and most trusted online pharmacies. In 2015 Indian e-pharmacy has gained the market rapidly. The market size in 2019 was \$0.5 billion – approximately 2-3 percent of the total Indian pharmacy sales. The market is expected to reach \$4.5 billion by 2025. At the time of the pandemic, people were very strict towards safety so they used to buy everything online from groceries to medicine. One of the major reasons behind online pharmacy is it is very convenient. The retail pharmacy was open during the pandemic time but still, people preferred to buy online because of its home delivery option. There were times when the manufacturers were having no problem in selling any product to the consumer, but today the manufacturers have to make the quality product as per the consumers preference. A

report says that over 60 to 70% of the medicines that are ordered through e-pharma platforms are from chronic patients.

Research Methodology:

a) Objectives of the study.

i) To know the factor responsible for buying medicine through online.

ii) To study the buying pattern of the e-pharmacy customers.

b) Data Collection:

The data is being collected from secondary sources. The data has been collected from the articles, published reports, books, Journals and websites.

Online Pharmacy

Online pharmacy is also known as Internet pharmacy, E-pharmacy, mail order pharmacy which is operated with the help of the internet and send orders to customers through mail, shipping companies or online pharmacy web portal. Conventional bricks and mortar pharmacies have controlled the drug distribution systems from the manufacturer.

Consumer preference

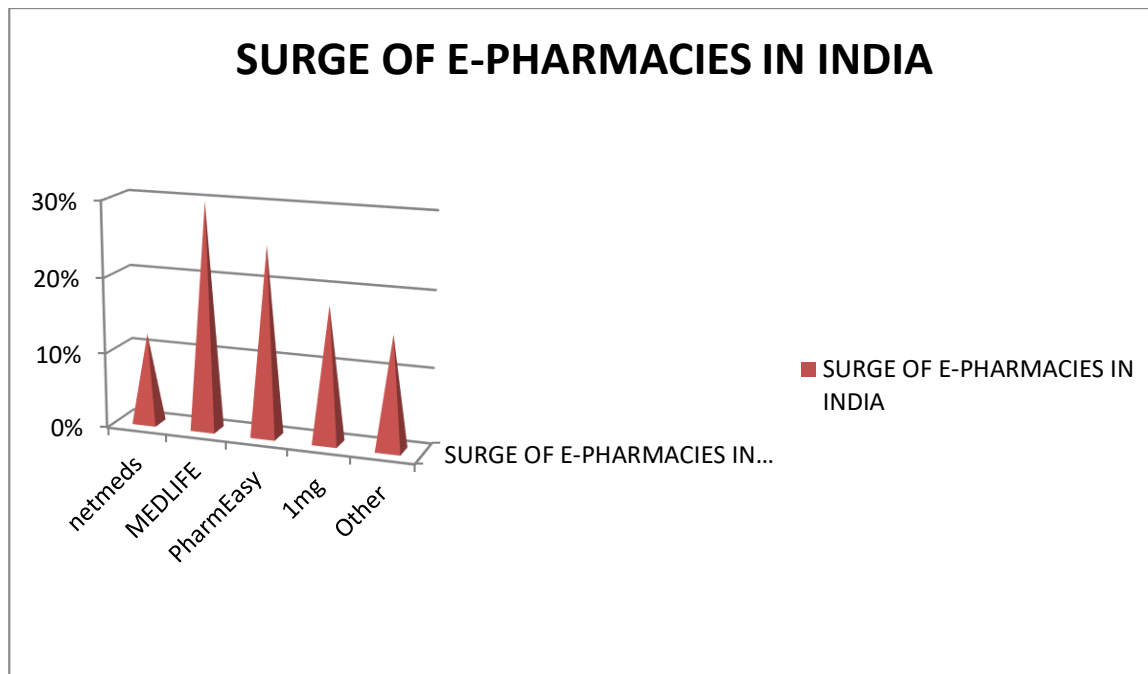
Consumer preference is a set of assumptions that focuses on the taste and choices of an individual. While buying any product the consumer analyzes each and every minute detail about the product and its alternative brands because the individual has ample choices. Consumer preference is generally measured on the grounds of satisfaction, happiness, or its usage.

According to FICCI: It has been observed that after the few months of the lockdown the selling of medicines through e-pharmacies is doubled than the previous year. Earlier these e-pharmacies channels were having three million customers but because of the pandemic it has added more than six million customers. The FICCI report says the main ingredient in the rising of the customers in e-pharmacy are good internet facilities, smartphones for all, chronic diseases and, good income to spend on healthcare.

Regulations for e-pharmacy in India

The Drug and Cosmetics Act, 1940, Drugs and cosmetics rules, 1945, Pharmacy Act 1948, Pharmacy Practice Regulations, 2015 etc. these laws are framed before the existence of the computer. So, in these laws there were no concepts called online pharmacy. The Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, and the Drugs and Cosmetics

Rules, 1945 gave the guidelines about the sale of Schedule H and Schedule X drugs. . Drug and Cosmetic Act, 1940 states that for selling a medicine a pharmacy must have a proper drug license and the medicine can be sold by the shopkeeper only with a proper prescription from the doctor. These drugs are only sold when the consumer have the prescription and it is only available at the counter, certain amendments were made to bring e-pharmacies under the scope of the Drug and cosmetics rules, 1945.



Difference between of E-pharmacy and Retail pharmacy

Sr.no.	E-Pharmacy	Retail Pharmacy
1	It saves time and effort and there is no need to stand in line for medicine.	It is a time consuming because we have to go out to shop.
2	It is convenient because one can shop from anywhere only they require internet connection to buy.	In this consumer have to go to the medical shop to buy the medicine.
3	It gives discounts or offers which help to pay less compared to the printed rate.	There is no discounts or offers because of less profit margins.
4	Range of medicine is more	Range of medicine is less
5	Consumer can place order anytime from anywhere	There is fear of closing down of medical shop.

Literature Review:

Shrivastava and Raina(2021)¹ conducted a study on the Consumers' usage and adoption of e-pharmacy in India. In this paper an attempt has been made to study the benefits of e-pharmacy as consumers are unaware of it. The common man is unaware about the online pharmacy so there is a need to demonstrate and instruct the consumers about its usage. The consumers liked the concept of home delivery of the medicine and they would prefer to purchase the medicines online in near future. The finding depicts the positive outcome that consumers feel that it is very easy to use.

Singh, Majumdar and Malviya(2020)² has concluded how the online pharmacy helped the consumers during the pandemic situation. The author has written many good impacts about online pharmacy. E-pharmacy has made the life of people easier as it can be available at an affordable price but it has some risk like misuse of drugs and self-medication especially for those drugs which comes under the schedule H and X.

Chordiya and Garge(2018)³ has shared their opinion that online pharmacy has played a pivotal role in terms of time, inconvenience, price. When the patient is seriously ill and the medicine is not available in the nearby store so it would be very bad for the person who is suffering from the particular disease. The second most important thing is the price today the medical stores charge more prices compared to the online pharmacy, if the price is more then it is difficult for the patient to purchase the expensive medicines. The patient suffering from chronic disease they are not able to visit medical stores and they find it inconvenient if the store is at a long distance.

Gupta(2020)⁴ the author has conducted a study on the 100 respondents by random sampling method in Jaipur city of Rajasthan. In this article the author found that there was good awareness about the e-pharmacy in consumers. Consumers of Jaipur city buy the medicines in both the manners like online as well as offline. But at the same time local authority is trying to educate the consumers so they are engaging them in public education campaigns about the various risks associated while buying medicines online.

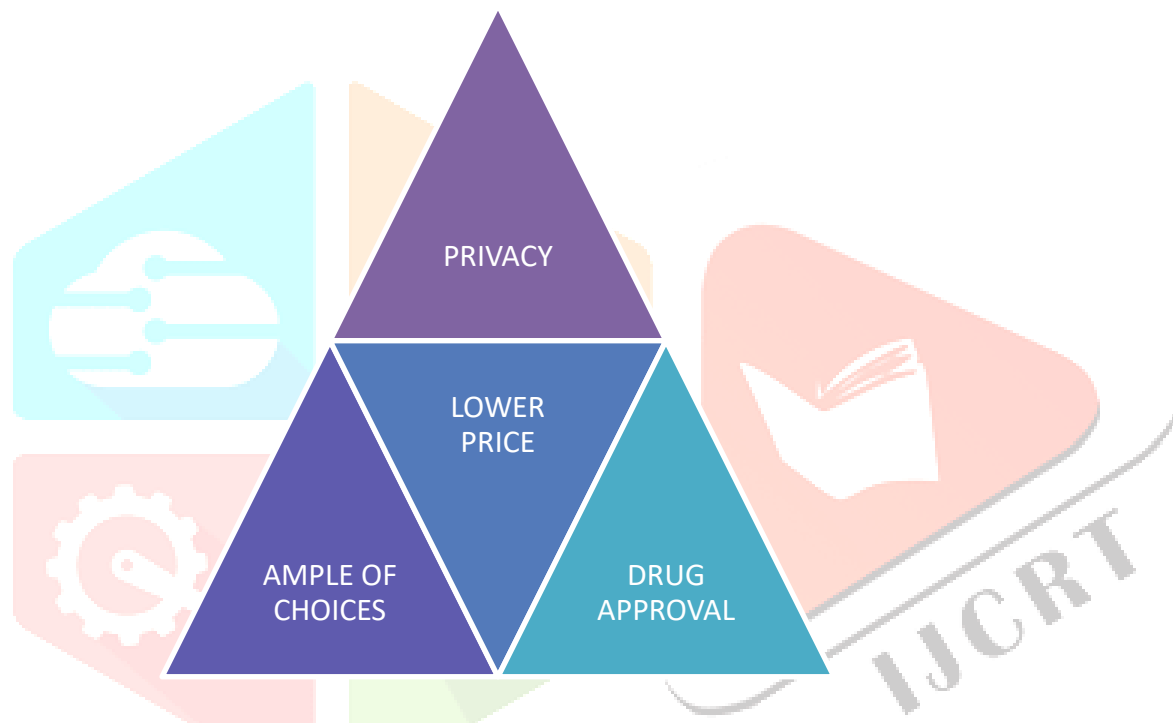
Priyanka and Ashok(2016)⁵ found that the model of e-pharmacy is promising as well as it has a great opportunity for the business. It has some drawbacks and a number of regulatory hurdles in the way of its success.

Pujari(2017)⁶ the study was done with the aim to know the consumers choose their medicine and what are the factors which influence the customers choice. The survey was done with 100 participants. The results were very interesting where only 61% population purchase the medicine as per the physicians advice. The survey also revealed that still, people want to do the medications by their own choice and price.

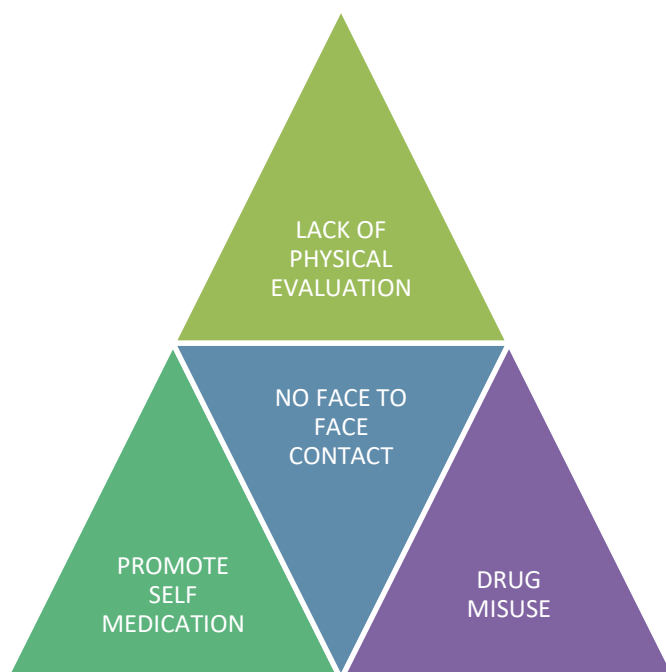
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The survey has done to understand the consumer behavior while buying the online medicine the result shows that 75%+ consumers found the online purchasing of medicine quite good. After the unlock phase the survey says that the purchase of the medicine has either increased or it is same. But the current scenario is like the restrictions were little bit removed from the public but then too still they prefer to shop online. The surprising graph of e-pharmacy has seen in the non-metro cities. It can be seen that the e-pharmacy is slowly and gradually capturing each and every sections.

PROS OF BUYING MEDICINE FROM ONLINE PHARMACY:



CONS OF BUYING MEDICINE FROM ONLINE PHARMACY



Findings/Result:-

- 1)Offers/discount:-Today most of the population goes behind the offers and discounts.Majority of the people like discounts which they get on the medicines while purchasing the product online.
- 2)Technological impact:-Consumers are more technological savvy which helps them to use smartphones as well as the internet which gave them a boost to purchase the product online.Day by day people gets in touch more with the technology which helps them to enhance the knowledge.
- 3)Recommendation:-The role of recommendation plays an important role while purchasing anything. Recommended by a friend, relatives or doctors influence the consumers to shop online.
- 4)Frequency:-The frequency of buying the medicines online is increased after covid-19.Before the pandemic, the consumers used to purchase the medicine online once in a blue moon that too in a small quantity,now they prefer to shop frequently as it has some offers and discounts with it.
- 5)No direct contact:-Covid-19 pandemic has set many restrictions on the consumers. There was no direct contact of the buyer with the seller. E-pharmacy is a contactless delivery that helped the consumers to shop more online. Contactless delivery is one of the most important factors to influence the customer to shop online during the pandemic because it will help to break the chain of the virus.

6) Choices:-In online pharmacy the consumers get a variety of choices because human beings cannot satisfy with the limited resources they need ample options that will help them to pick the best for them. Today one of the most important factors to influence the consumer is to give variety.

7) Customer relationship management:-To survive in the market for the long term one needs to be loyal towards their customers. In the market, there are many competitors. So it is found that the majority of the people are satisfied with the online pharmacy customer relationship management.

8) Detailed information:-Many online websites give detailed information about the medicines like their positive impact, their negative impact, maximum dose. These are the factors to influence consumers to shop online.

9) Lab Tests:-Today not only in medicine this e-pharmacies also provide lab test like the Bilirubin test, Covid-19 RTPCR test, Blood sugar test, etc. now these services are also available at the doorstep of the consumers.

Conclusion:-

E-pharmacy business in India is new it will take more time to mark an impression on the consumers but still people love to purchase medicines online during the pandemic as they have to follow the guidelines which are implemented by the government. E-pharmacy has helped customers with intending to reach everywhere no matter it is urban, rural or remote areas it convenient and it helps to reach to the doorstep with coming out of the house. E-commerce gave a boost to the pharma sector which made the life of the people easier. E-pharmacy has certain drawbacks like drug abuse, illegal selling of medicine, packaging issues, etc. E-commerce has garnered its fame all over India in a very short span of time. 1mg, PharmEasy, netmeds and medlife together contribute more the 80% of the market share in the e-pharmacy market.

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