



AN EXPLORATORY ANALYSIS OF COVID-19 AND CONSUMER SHOPPING BEHAVIOUR FOR GROCERIES

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ABSTRACT: The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly altered many aspects of life, particularly trade and industry. The global consumer buying pattern has undergone significant alterations as a result of this unheard-of economic crisis. Whether they purchase physically or online, consumers each have their own preferences. A few elements that influence whether a consumer chooses to purchase physically or online include the feel and touch of the goods, quick satisfaction, and delivery times. The COVID-19 pandemic outbreak disrupted the whole supply chain, and the virus's modes of transmission, lockdowns, and social distance standards may have changed consumer preferences about grocery shopping practises. By investigating the elements that affect consumers' decisions to buy both offline and online during the pandemic, this research aims to explore the likely shift in consumer preferences brought on by the Covid-19 epidemic. In terms of demographics and other elements that may affect customers' purchasing habits, this study article analysed the substantial differences between consumers' shopping behaviours.

KEYWORDS: COVID -19, Consumer shopping manner, Groceries

INTRODUCTION

The new corona virus epidemic has had a significant influence on people's lives. With the current global economic crisis came both possibilities and difficulties for every area of the economy. The emergence of internet shopping impacted all commercial and industrial activity as customers used digital channels to conduct their purchases. By utilising internet resources, merchants are able to diversify their company into a variety of industries. Most companies have also attempted to offer their items online, which has increased rivalry for offline stores.

The pandemic's impact on the supply chain has caused various new issues for both industry and human life. The supply of necessities is reduced by government officials' ongoing lockdowns to stop the spread of disease. The daily activities of society are impacted, which has an effect on peoples' lifestyles.

On March 21, the Indian government imposed a three-week first lockdown, which was later extended. Only essential items are allowed to operate across the country during lockdown times, according to the authorities. While groceries fall into the essential category, consumers had no choice but to either buy them online or in person at a nearby retail store.

As food was a necessity and consumers' preferences changed as a result of the government restrictions, the nationwide lockdown increases demand for groceries. Consumers want to purchase things that are easily accessible in close proximity to them. Due to the worldwide epidemic, many individuals turned to internet purchasing for the first time and changed their shopping habits to include both offline and online shopping, or what is known as "omni channel retailing."

Many retailers still reach out to potential customers using a multichannel strategy. The omni channel selling approach combines physical stores with internet platforms. Customers may enjoy a smooth shopping experience as a result, while shops can boost sales and profitability.

This research paper aims to explore the consumer preferences in the shopping mode for groceries and to study the probable shift in the shopping manner of the consumers after the global pandemic. The method used for the statistical validation is the descriptive analysis and the findings helps to ascertain the most significant factors which influence the consumers to shift the shopping manner after COVID-19 Pandemic.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Online shopping v/s offline shopping

Retailers are being compelled to consider the value of their recent physical and online presence due to the introduction of the new corona virus. The current COVID phase shown that it is a significant issue for the country's whole commerce and industrial activity. Dr. N. Sivakumar and G. Gavin Prasath (2019) identified a number of variables that affect customers' choices for online and offline buying. Their research showed that ease, which allows customers to purchase remotely to any address and save significant time, is the most important element that affects online purchasing because most consumers are busy with their employment. The tangible nature of the goods, how it feels to the touch, and customer happiness are the aspects that have an impact on offline stores.

Raja Sarkar (2017) also found that the availability of customer reviews, ease of comparing similar products, and ease of delivery are the most significant factors that influence consumers to switch to the online shopping mode. The study came to the conclusion that the majority of Indian consumers still prefer to buy groceries from traditional stores.

Rajdeep Singh (2017) mentioned that the criteria which influence the customers to shop offline are that the goods are available only after the payment which leads the delivery minute. Consumers opt online shopping is that there are variety of products in the platform which they can choose according to their preference. The findings revealed that age of the consumers plays significant role in the preference of the consumer and concludes that the younger generation is more interesting towards online shopping.

According to Iyer and Eastman's (2014) research, customers in the senior age group are less conscious of technical challenges and less knowledgeable about digital platforms. Additionally, consumers in the senior age group who are knowledgeable may prefer both modes and select the best platform. The younger generation is more likely to purchase online since they have the necessary technological competence.

In addition to showing how gender affects consumer behaviour, DR. R. Sivanesan (2017) found that consumers who are tech-savvy are more likely to use online platforms and vice versa. Females are also more likely than men to use online platforms for shopping.

A descriptive and analytical research on Indian consumers' internet buying habits was done by Upasana Kanchan in 2015. He set up seven factors to study how customer behaviour is influenced by internet buying. Gender, age, education, income, concerns about security and privacy, familiarity with technology, and prior online buying experience are the independent factors included in this study. According to the study, factors that positively affect online purchasing preferences include age, gender, income, education, familiarity with technology, and past experience, while factors that negatively affect them include security concerns.

COVID-19 AND CONSUMER SHOPPING PATTERN

Consumers' lifestyles and purchasing habits are disrupted by COVID-19, which has a profound effect on the whole economy.

The effects of the Corona virus on e-commerce in the healthcare industry were investigated by Arfan Shazad in 2020. Five independent factors that fall under the organisational, technical, and environmental viewpoints are identified. Knowledge of e-commerce and supply chain integration, two of the five factors that have an impact on e-commerce usage, were investigated..

In order to investigate customer purchase preferences during the COVID era, Jasper Gracias (2020) carried out research in the USA. The study identifies four shopping characteristics that were related to local corona cases. The study finds that customers prefer home delivery and store pickup during pandemics because they reduce the danger of infection. It also finds that when the number of cases in the area is rising, individuals prefer to buy groceries at home.

L. Laguna (2020) investigates the purchasing habits of Spanish food consumers during COVID-19. The study found that while there was no discernible difference between purchasing methods, there was a noticeable shift in shopping behaviour during the lockdown.

Bilal Celik (2020) examined how the epidemic affected Nigerian consumers' eating preferences. They show that the customer choices in the pre and post pandemic periods differed statistically. Prior to the pandemic, cost and health were the main and secondary consumer preferences, whereas after the pandemic, quality and health have taken precedence. According to the study's findings, there was a significant reduction in grocery store sales because people avoided crowded areas out of fear of contracting COVID-19.

According to Timothy J. Richards (2020), Canadians are becoming anxious about being too close to other people, and this anxiety has prompted the emergence of internet platforms. The percentage of people who purchase for groceries online increased from 1.5% before the pandemic to 9% after it. According to the majority of grocery store owners, internet platforms enhanced their sales.

Additionally, E. Godman (2020) carried out a study in Canada to investigate the impact of the pandemic on consumer behaviour and discovered that there had been a significant change in the way of life of the Canadians, who were now all housebound. This results in more online purchasing and confirms that there was a significant rise in shopping excursions as a result of the high internet traffic.

The pandemic changed consumer food buying habits, according to Junxiong Li (2020). The study conducted in China to examine the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on food shopping habits found that consumers changed from their traditional in-store routines to online purchasing, and in areas where internet delivery were not accessible, they favoured small local retail stores.

OBJECTIVES

1. To compare the shopping habits of different genders and qualifications.
2. To examine what causes consumers to switch from offline to online and online to Omni channel shopping.

METHODOLOGY

Based on primary data gathered using a structured questionnaire, the current study is descriptive and analytical in character. The survey was created using Google Forms and distributed to respondents across the nation. The respondents' demographic characteristics, preferred shopping style, and variables influencing buying behaviour were all included in the questionnaires. The research also gathers information from secondary sources, including reference books, yearly reports, periodicals, and newspapers. The study's target audience consists of all American grocery shoppers. There were 60 respondents in all who answered the survey across the nation. Convenience sampling was employed for the study's sample size.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Objective No 1: Relation between Gender and Mode of shopping

The frequency of the gender variable in connection to consumer buying behaviour is shown in **Table 1**. It shows that following the epidemic, more over half of the respondents chose Omni Channel commerce, which integrates both online and physical channels. Omni Channel commerce has a greater impact on female responders.

Table.1
Gender and Way of shopping

Gender	Way of shopping			Total
	Both	Offline	Online	
Female	19	13	1	33
Male	18	9	0	27
Total	37	22	1	60

(source: primary data)

Table.2 illustrates the link between customers' qualifications and shopping preferences, and it suggests that consumers with post-graduate degrees preferred more offline and omnichannel platforms to buy food. This states unequivocally that informed consumers who are technologically savvy use both online and offline channels to buy food.

Table 2

Qualification and Way of shopping

Qualification	Way of shopping			Total
	Both	Offline	Online	
High School	2	1	0	3
Higher Secondary	7	2	0	9
Graduate	9	6	1	16

Post Graduate	18	11	0	29
Others	1	2	0	3
Total	37	22	1	60

(source: Primary data)

Objective No 2: Factors influencing Shift in consumer shopping manner due to the effect of COVID -19

Table. 3

Factors influencing offline shopping after COVID

Factors	N	Mean	Rank
Rate of Infection	60	2.8833	1
Convenience	60	2.3333	5
Touch and feel	60	2.1833	6
Satisfaction	60	2.4000	4
Variety	60	2.7167	2
comparison	60	2.4500	3

(source: Primary data)

Table 3 lists the numerous elements that affect how consumers buy and their preferences. It demonstrates that the rate of infection and diversity of items are the most significant factors influencing the offline retail mode. Customers believe that choosing an offline shopping pattern at this time of corona contributes to infection and reduces product choice since COVID-19 has disrupted the supply chain for the food retail industry.

Table 4

Factors influencing online shopping after COVID

Factors	N	Mean	Rank
Rate of infection	60	2.5500	4
Delivery time	60	2.5500	5
Convenience	60	2.4833	6
Satisfaction	60	2.7333	3
Price	60	2.7500	2
Ease of comparison	60	2.8500	1

Table 4 demonstrates that the ease of comparison and pricing are the two most significant elements influencing online buying following the epidemic when comparing the mean score. By using online platforms, customers may compare items quickly based on their preferences, and the cost will be considerably less than in an offline store. Although there are opportunities on the online platform, because of convenience and satisfaction, most customers prefer O2O (online + offline).

IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTION

The findings clearly show that consumers' buying habits have changed significantly as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Prior to the outbreak, consumers prioritised in-store shopping due to convenience and the ability to touch and feel the product, but in the post-pandemic era, consumers prefer to buy their groceries through an Omni channel platform. Customers feel more at ease buying when both channels are together. The current situation demonstrates that customers are quite conscious of the technology limitations, and as a result, they are prepared to prefer online platforms, even if they can also pick offline platforms for their convenience and higher levels of pleasure. Herein lies the significance of the multi-channel retailing approach known as omni-channel. Omni Channel becomes the game-changer for commercial and industrial activity in this digital age. Customers may place online orders for products and pick them up from a local retail location.

The government's rules and laws to combat the virus have influenced consumers to consider using several channels for buying. This survey only included 60 respondents and focused on the manner of grocery shopping. The population size may be increased to perform similar studies, and future researchers could strive to learn more about the emerging idea of Omni Channel retailing techniques. It would be more intriguing if future research focused on how consumers see Omni Channel commerce.

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