



New Norm in Consumer Buying Pattern: Online Shopping Swing amid the Coronavirus Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

A drastic shift in the market environment was observed with the pandemic situation spread all around the world. The number of people at the workplace or marketplace also shrunk from thousands to hundreds, tens, and one-digit numbers with the thought of avoiding the crowd and being in isolation or separations to avoid contact. This rapid change in situation has brought huge overnight changes in the shopping behaviors of the customers from bulk buying in a physical market or family shopping to online shopping of all fast-moving consumer goods. There are beginnings of a shift in this approach in India. The study emphasizes the factors influencing online shopping, benefits, and challenges faced by the customers, and the preferred mode of buying for listed products along with the mode of payment. Suggestive measures to bring positive change are also discussed in the paper.

Keywords: Consumer Buying Pattern, Isolation, Online Shopping, Pandemic

INTRODUCTION

The year 2020 was a year of a pandemic for the first time in this decade. Humans have faced such a situation and acknowledged words like *pandemic*, *isolation*,



quarantine to great extent. Ripples from the pandemic can be seen all around the world as nothing is untouched and no sector of the business world is unaffected from the supply chain, trade, to management. From big business conglomerates to small vendors, they all faced huge losses, they needed to improvise their strategy and hence they did. As the consumer was unable to go to the business, they came to doorsteps by prominently working on an online mode of selling. Every business introduced the concept of online shopping and doorstep delivery so that the consumer feels safe and gets the required goods.

The Covid-19 has fundamentally changed the patterns of living, thinking, and buying although online shopping has dramatically grown up over recent years (Althafairi, Alhoumaida, Saxena, & Almsri, 2019). The merchants are cutting themselves off from the market and the consumers across the globe are looking at new products and brands through an entirely new lens. Consumer priorities are focused on the foremost basic needs (Shah, 2020), sending demand for hygiene, cleaning, and staple products soar, while non-essential categories slump. Digital commerce is also amplified as new consumers migrate online for grocery shopping (Meyer, n.d.) – a rise that is likely to be sustained post-outbreak. A country is going under more lockdowns, non-essential businesses are shut down and consumers are generally avoiding public places while limiting shopping for but necessary products are the new normal. At the same time, there has been significant contradictory thinking in consumers namely crowd mentality. Seeing other people buying up the shelves and noticing the inevitable scarcity of essentials is validating the need to stock as no one wants to be left behind without any resources. Furthermore, not only the buying patterns are affected by this outbreak but also the payment patterns are inexorably altered. The rapid espousal of contactless payment channels has been a significant lifestyle change in this pandemic. Contactless payment is the red-carpet trend that is likely to continue in the future as people are gradually moving away from cash transactions. The pandemic has also witnessed a significant fall in the usage of debit and credit cards as customers are more willing to pay online through different UPI options available due to their cashbacks and reward points which help people save more.

The present paper is an attempt to illustrate the significant change in the buying pattern of the consumer, factors considered for adapting to the new modes of shopping, and the preferred mode of payment. The further research paper is also focusing on the benefits and challenges experienced by the buyer in this shifted mode of buying.



Considering the recent changes in the lifestyles of consumers, their buying habits have differed greatly as compared to the pre-pandemic situations. Understanding such changes are of utmost importance to grasp the market trends. The transition of merchandise bought has changed from lifestyle goods such as cosmetics, and other non-essentials to stocking or piling up of essentials, sometimes in excessive numbers.

The Covid-19 case numbers have soared exponentially since the first cases were reported in China in December 2019. By early April 2020, the world had recorded one million cases, with the tally hitting 10 million cases less than three months afterward. The currently confirmed caseload has surpassed 30 million. This trend has continued till date and greatly affected the buying trend of the consumers.

Nestle's food and drink giant said e-commerce grew 49% in the first six months of the year to reach 12.4% of sales compared to 8.5% of sales in 2019. Despite the closure of their Espresso boutiques, the Espresso brand was up mid-single digits in the first half, driven by surging e-commerce sales that offset stores decline.

This paper aims to understand the change in consumer buying patterns and preferences for shopping amid the coronavirus pandemic. In this broader framework, an attempt is made to analyze the change of consumer buying patterns, the frequency of their online shopping, the demand of online shopping, preferred payment mode while buying online, and the measures to shop online with minimum risk.

The research is to understand and interpret the upcoming trend of shopping patterns, how the pandemic has become revolutionary for online service. It has created the necessity of consumption as the existence of online shopping has been in decades yet the essential is realized now. Goyal (2020) examined the theoretical contribution in understanding the present status of online shopping and provided insights into consumer online shopping behavior and preferences.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research is based on primary data and secondary data to achieve the objectives of the project. We have gathered the primary data by surveying the google form. We have received 344 responses across the country. For secondary data collection, we have browsed the latest articles, newspaper, and other research papers,



RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The opinions of our respondents have been analyzed in terms of (1) preferred mode of online shopping, (2) frequency of online shopping, (3) the average amount spent on online shopping, (4) frequently used portals, (5) factors influencing online shopping, (6) challenges and benefits of online shopping, and (7) most preferable payment mode.

Figure 1. Preferred Mode of Shopping

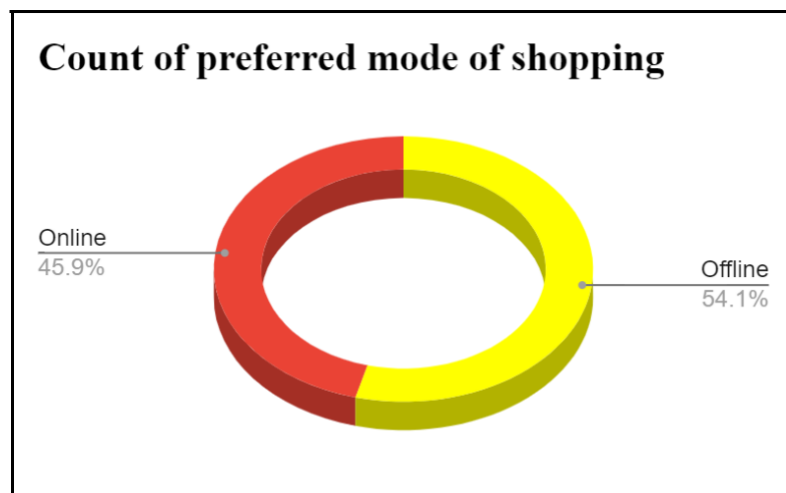
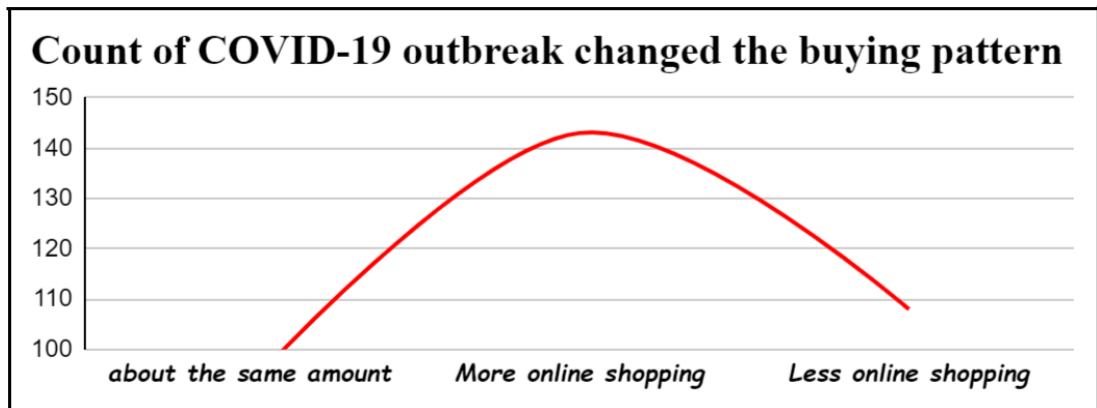


Figure 1 illustrates that 186 respondents out of 344 still prefer offline shopping mode despite an incredible increase in internet users daily. However, there is a thin line between the preferred mode of shopping, and if the Covid-19 keeps on increasing there will be a shift of consumers from offline to online.



Figure 2. Buying Pattern Changes



There is no doubt that Covid 19 has been termed as a revolutionary era. When the 1st lockdown was declared and people had stocked up the groceries and essentials for survival. As time passes and people are realizing it is more difficult to go out and buying things is not safe, they are switching from bulk-buying to online shopping (see Figure 2).

Figure 3. Online Shopping Frequency

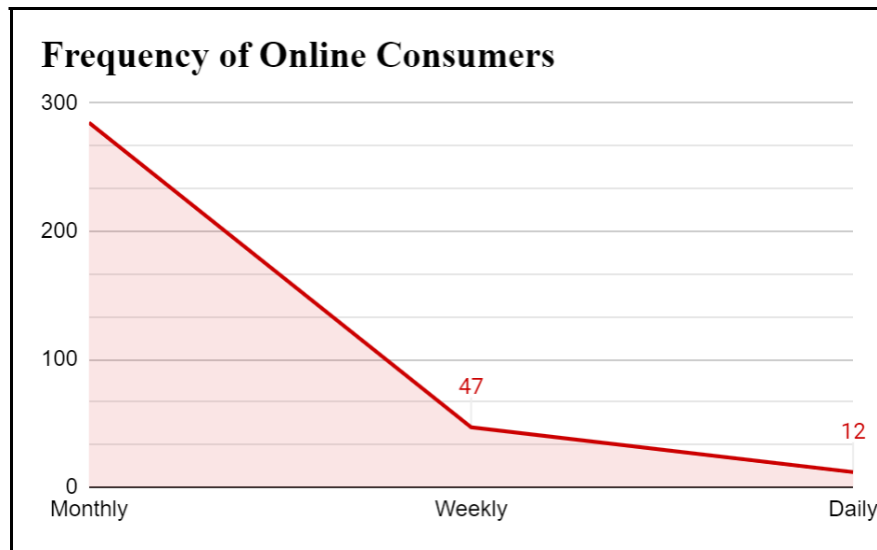




Figure 3 implies that 82.8% of people shop online monthly and only 13.6% shop weekly. We can also say that necessity is the mother of consumption. In the earlier years, we had the facilities and many things yet the pandemic has changed the mindset of consumers.

Figure 4. Average Money (₹) Spent for Online Shopping in the Last 12 Months

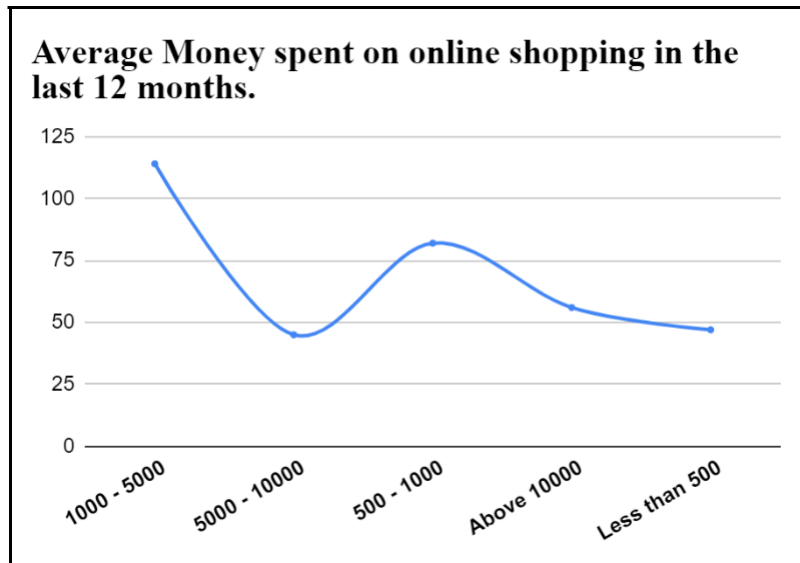


Figure 4 shows that 114 respondents out of 344 have spent between ₹1000 to ₹5000 in the last 12 months. It has been observed that there is more tilt of purchase in this range. Only 45 respondents have purchased in the range of ₹5000 to ₹10000. Also, 82 respondents have spent ₹500 to ₹1000. Whereas 56 respondents have spent more than ₹10000 and only 13% respondents have spent less than ₹500. This indicates that the majority of consumers do not prefer expensive shopping online. Assuming that the number of online users will keep increasing, there will be one time that every person will shop from an online store as it has many benefits compared to offline shopping.



Figure 5. Components Affecting Consumer Buying Patterns

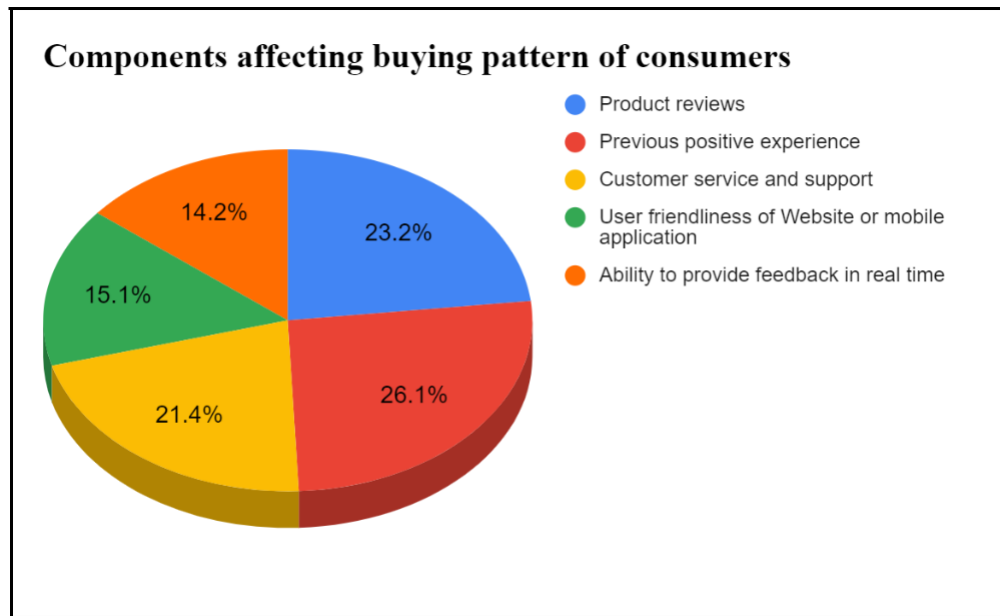


Figure 5 signifies that the most affecting factor is previous positive experiences since money is a limited resource and online stores have a wide range of products of different categories, varieties, and sizes. Hence to get more satisfaction, consumers are more concerned about previous experiences, product reviews, and customer services and supports compared to the user-friendliness of websites or mobile applications.



Figure 6. Preferred Mode of Shopping for Listed Products

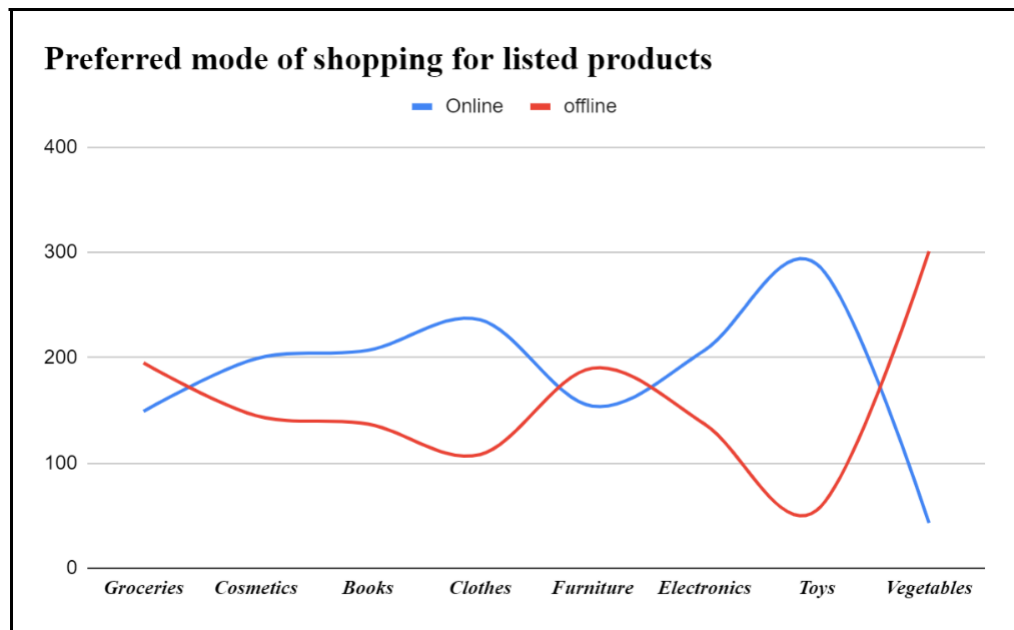


Figure 6 highlights that consumers are gradually moving towards online shopping, as we can see a very short distance between online & offline preference for grocery shopping. Also, consumers prefer online cosmetic shopping, such as on Nykaa, NewU, Kamaayurveda, Vedix, Skincraft, LakmeIndia. Besides, the demand for books is also increasing. Even in e-commerce, the books are divided into two categories: online reading books & online ordering books. Kindle or Kobo collected increasing demands for e-books which provide benefits like reading it anytime without light, more than 100 books could fit in one gadget. However, even after the majority of people are in favor of physical books, they are ordered online since it has a wide range of publishers, and particular topics to purchase.

As for clothes, consumers have many more options (Myntra, Ajo, Shein, Amazon, Reliance) and better services on online stores such as easy returns, cashback offers, sales, discount offers, and shopping anytime & anywhere. For furniture, people still believe in offline shopping to experience that physical touch. However, Pepper Fry, Rentomojo, and Flipkart allow people to shift towards online furniture shopping. Also, our survey results show that purchasing toys is more preferable from online stores. Due to the Covid-19, mothers are more concerned about their



children to ensure their safety as the products delivered are hygienic, sanitized, and untouched. As for vegetables, they are not suitable for online shopping as a total of 300 respondents prefer offline vegetable shopping. There can be many more reasons like no fresh vegetables are delivered as vegetables or fruits can be adulterated. If they are found damaged, the replacement may take a long time. This indicates that vegetables will take more time to participate in the online trend.

Figure 7. Preferred Mode of Payment

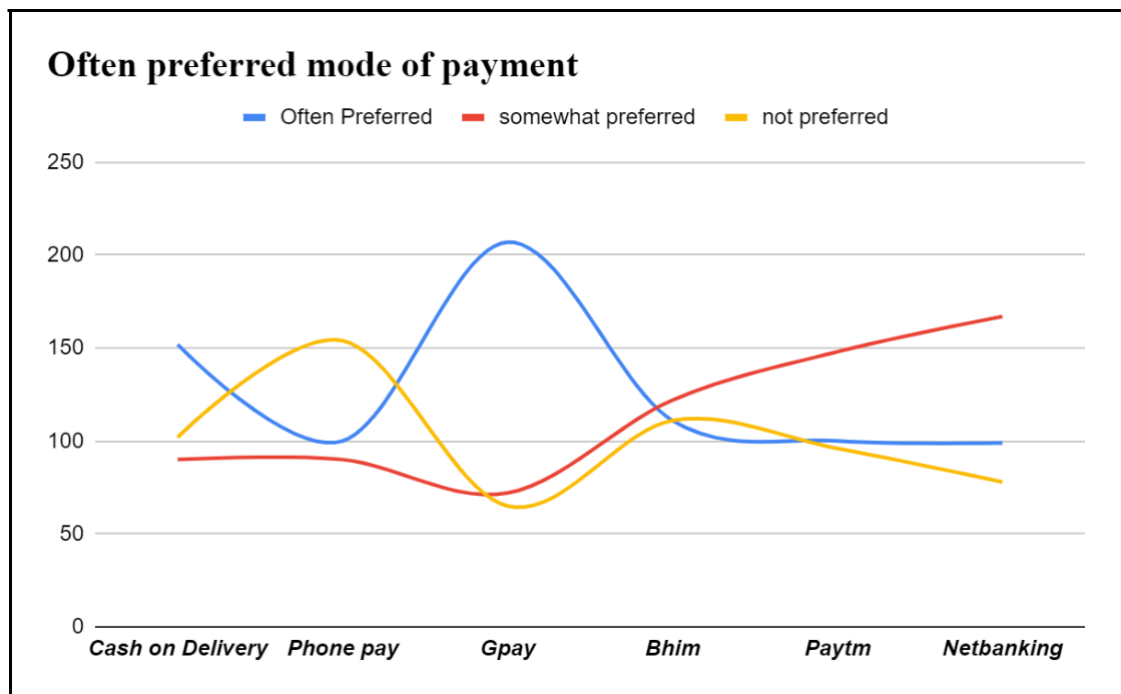


Figure 7 signifies that 60.2% of respondents are using Gpay more frequently due to its ease of payment and safety. A diminishing slope can be seen on cash on delivery due to the increase in the Covid cases and consumers are willing to pay with social distancing. Even in offline stores, people prefer Gpay, BHIM, Paytm, Phone pay as the payment mode. Net banking is often used by businessmen and entrepreneurs since the majority of respondents were students and teachers, thus 48.5% of respondents did not prefer the net banking method.

The findings suggest e-traders increase the level of quality service like accurate delivery time, fast loading websites, time to time customer service, provide real-time



chat, send some gift cards or vouchers to potential & loyal customers. to advertise, they should include customer reviews as it is more trusted than any other marketing strategy. As there is a high-level competition, they should be also active in marketing on every platform.

For traditional/offline retailers, they should provide new facilities, such as one can take orders through calls or Whatsapp. Since the revolution is heading towards online, there will be no place for offline stores in near future.

As for customers, before using a new portal for shopping, virtual safety is of importance. They should not give access or permission to any portal or app without reading the terms and conditions. When using a public network is unavoidable, they ought to protect it with a Virtual Private Network (VPN). It creates an encrypted tunnel between the device and the server. Also, strong passwords should be chosen for the login by using a complex set of lower and upper case numbers, letters and symbols, or a phrase. They should look for a lock icon in the browser bar of a site to verify its SSL (secure sockets layer) encryption. The URL also should start with "https" rather than just "http". Also, one-time passwords should not be shared with anyone.

CONCLUSIONS

With the spread of covid-19 across the globe, the consumers started stockpiling groceries, household essentials, and medicines. Safety & Health products, food, shelf-stable goods, and beverages were being preferred by the customers. However, slowly and gradually with the change in time, the existence of the coronavirus still affecting the health of the people makes buyers realize that there is a need to adapt to strange times recently known as "The New Normal") (Singh, 2020), without a lot of footholds in the retailing market. Thus, preference moved on to online shopping over brick-and-mortar shopping . To maintain a competitive edge, the companies and retailers must anticipate the behavior of customers through regular research and analysis on their buying patterns and preferences. Bringing them the right product assortment, experiences, and pricing will entice them to spend both in-store as well as online.

Our work clearly has limitations. The primary data have been collected by forming a questionnaire with 344 samples. Hence, the research is based on limited perceptions and opinions. The majority of respondents were students who were below the age of 26, and the shopping is mostly done by their parents affecting the



data in Figure 4. Also, as the questionnaire was circulated in particular cities, a larger scale might differ the results.

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