

A STUDY OF COVID-19 : IMPACT ON ONLINE BUYING BEHAVIOUR OF CONSUMERS IN NAGPUR CITY DURING THE PERIOD OF MARCH, APRIL & MAY 2020

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Abstract: *This paper attempts to investigate the impacts of COVID-19 on online buying behaviour of consumers in Nagpur City during the period of 3 months i.e. March, April and May 2020. In order to control and stop the spread of the deadly corona virus in the city, government had to impose strict rules for lock downs i.e. forced shutting down of the shops around the city for quite a few months. Due to this, consumers were not able to acquire goods easily which could have been done otherwise. After government declared the lockdown, the daily alerts, warnings and news from various television channels and social media had a drastic effect on the behaviour of people. A common man started having a fear and insecurity in his mind. As a result, in order to stay safe, people readily accepted the rules of social distancing as a way to help slowdown the spread of the pandemic. This certainly contributed to an increase in online shopping as people have made a turn to e commerce to purchase the items they might have otherwise purchased in person. In order to stay safe from the deadly virus, many consumers preferred to stay at home and switched over from physical shops, supermarkets, and shopping malls to online portals and shopping sites for the purchase of all kinds of products, ranging from basic commodities to branded goods.*

There are multiple benefits that are associated with e-commerce such as ease in selection, and convenience. Companies are dealing 24/7 due to online services so consumers can buy anything, anytime, anywhere by staying indoors. Selection of products has also become easier such as customers can choose any product from a wide variety. It allows consumers to exchange services and goods electronically with no barrier of distance or time. According to many studies, e-commerce industry is now growing in a remarkable way due to the use of sophisticated electronic devices. E-commerce has given many options to customers so they can buy goods online and save their plenty of time. There are numerous reviews about products and services so customers can easily compare and choose a product that seems best.

Keywords: *Covid-19 pandemic, E-commerce, consumer behaviour, social distancing, lockdowns, human curfew.*

Introduction:

Corona virus came into notice on December 12 in Wuhan city of China, and it was found out that people are infected very seriously by this deadly disease. Within a week, millions of people got infected with this virus in China. Furthermore, at present, 205

countries are infected with this virus disturbing their economies very badly. The world has never witnessed global health crises of this intensity, one that is killing people and spreading human sufferings causing economic and social crisis. Covid-19 pandemic outbreak has affected all segments of population right from the rich to the poor. It is an extremely challenging situation for the global economy, and it has resulted into new changes and impacts on the e-commerce trends.

This pandemic has disturbed the international trade and the supply chain in more than 100 countries as their national border were forced to close. Hence, all the forms of businesses came to a pause. Its impact can be seen almost on every sector but more heavily on automobiles, tourism industry, aviation, electronic, IT sector and so on.

The emergence and prevalence of COVID-19 has significantly transformed consumer buying behavior from the luxury to the basic needs, from leisure to survival stuff. This certain shift in online buying behavior is for the essential products which are needed most in this lockdown, restrictions and period of human curfew. India was not an exception. The virus caught the entire nation in its viscous circle. The Covid-19 pandemic has permanently changed the consumer behaviour in India and nearly 90 percent of those surveyed have adopted a changed behaviour towards how they live, work and shop.

In order to control and stop the spread of the deadly corona virus in the city, government had to impose strict rules for lock downs i.e. forced shutting down of the shops around the nation for quite a few months. Due to this, consumers were not able to acquire goods easily which could have been done otherwise. Same was the case for Nagpur City.

After government declared the lockdown, the daily alerts, warnings and news from various television channels and social media had a drastic effect on the behaviour of people. A common man started having a fear and insecurity in his mind. As a result, in order to stay safe, people readily accepted the rules of social distancing as a way to help slowdown the spread of the pandemic. This certainly contributed to an increase in online shopping as people have made a turn to e commerce to purchase the items they might have otherwise purchased in person.

The World Trade Organization indicated that it is the right time for e-commerce to save the world economy and that it is to intervene with vigor and vitality and prove e-commerce of its importance and effectiveness in the field of trade and online shopping (WTO,2020).

This deadly pandemic gave us a new category of goods called “new essentials.” New essentials are the products which make the consumers feel more comfortable indoors during the periods of lockdowns and human curfews. People were asked to stay at home and follow the “Work from home rules”. The category of goods here included health & hygiene, wellness product, office supplies, fitness equipment, cosmetics, home maintenance, toys, and hobby-related products and not to forget grocery, vegetables and fruits.

Aims and objectives:

- To study the various factors which have affected the online buying behaviour of consumers in the pandemic situation that has arisen due to Covid-19.

- To analyse the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the online buying behaviour of consumers in Nagpur City.
- To study about the various categories of products bought online by the consumers specially during the period of pandemic.
- To analyse the influence of Covid-19 pandemic on the lifestyle of the consumers in Nagpur City during the lockdown period.

Research Methodology:

For understanding the online buying behaviour of consumers during COVID-19 pandemic, the researcher has used an explanatory research design. The present study is based on the behaviour of the consumers in pandemic situation.

Sample Design:

For the selection of sample, the researcher has used an empirical investigation survey which was conducted through Google Forms. These forms were prepared with dichotomous questions and were sent through mail to the selected samples. The researcher has used a non-probability convenience sampling technique for the present study.

Sample Selection:

For conducting the survey, the researcher has decided to select 50 online respondents as they can be easily handled so that the objectives of present research can be fulfilled.

Hypothesis of the study :

H0- Pandemic situation has arisen due to Covid-19 and Nagpur City has witnessed a remarkable increase in the demand for online products during this period.

H1- Pandemic situation has arisen due to Covid-19 and Nagpur City has not witnessed any remarkable increase in the demand for online products during this period.

Scope of the study:

The main focus of the researcher while writing this paper was on the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the online purchases made by the consumers in Nagpur City. The researcher has also made an attempt to understand the various factors that have affected the online buying behaviour of the consumers. This study is only related to the pandemic situation arisen due to COVID-19 and how the buying behaviour of the consumer was changed/ altered. The data collected for the research is of the periods of lock downs and public curfew during the months of March, April and May 2020.

Limitations of the Study :

- This study is limited to the period of lockdown and public curfew of 3 months declared in Nagpur City due to COVID-19 pandemic.

- Extensive literature relationship on COVID-19 and online buying behaviour of consumers was not available for in-depth reviews.
- Due to strict rules laid down for lockdown and public curfew the researcher was unable to visit the consumers personally so google forms for the questionnaire were designed and sent to the respondents through e-mails.
- The study concerned only COVID-19 disease and online buying behaviour of consumers during the lockdown period. The researcher has not considered other aspects of the market like demand and supply of goods, transportation facilities etc. that could have could have given more comprehensive results.
- The time is an important constraint and there may be a chance for sample error.

Collection of Data:

To observe the impact on the online buying behaviour of consumers during the period of public curfew and lockdown due to COVID-19 pandemic, the following sources of data collection were used-

Primary Data:

The following techniques were used to collect primary data.

- Discussion- A discussion was done with all the respondents on cell phones to understand their varied buying behavior and they were also asked to fill up the questionnaire designed through Google Form.
- Observation- Personal observation was carried out by the researcher in order to understand the changes in the buying behaviour of the consumers.

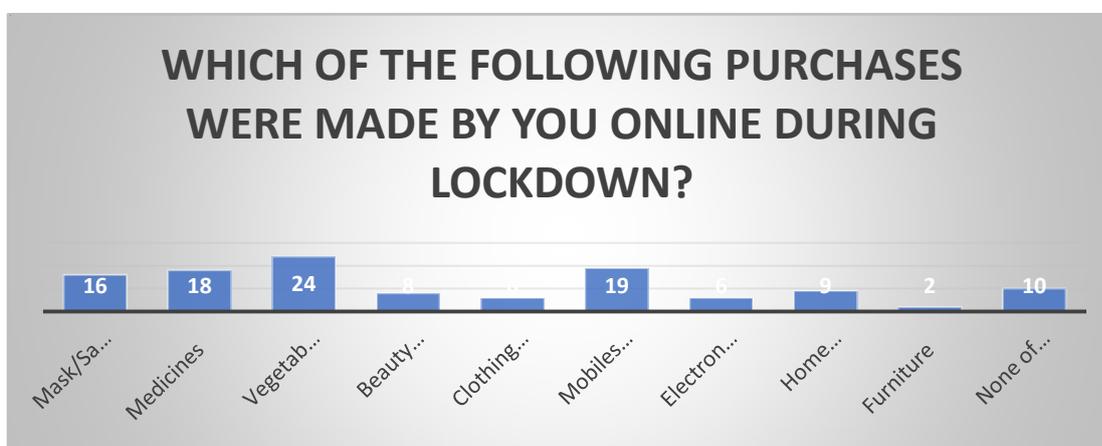
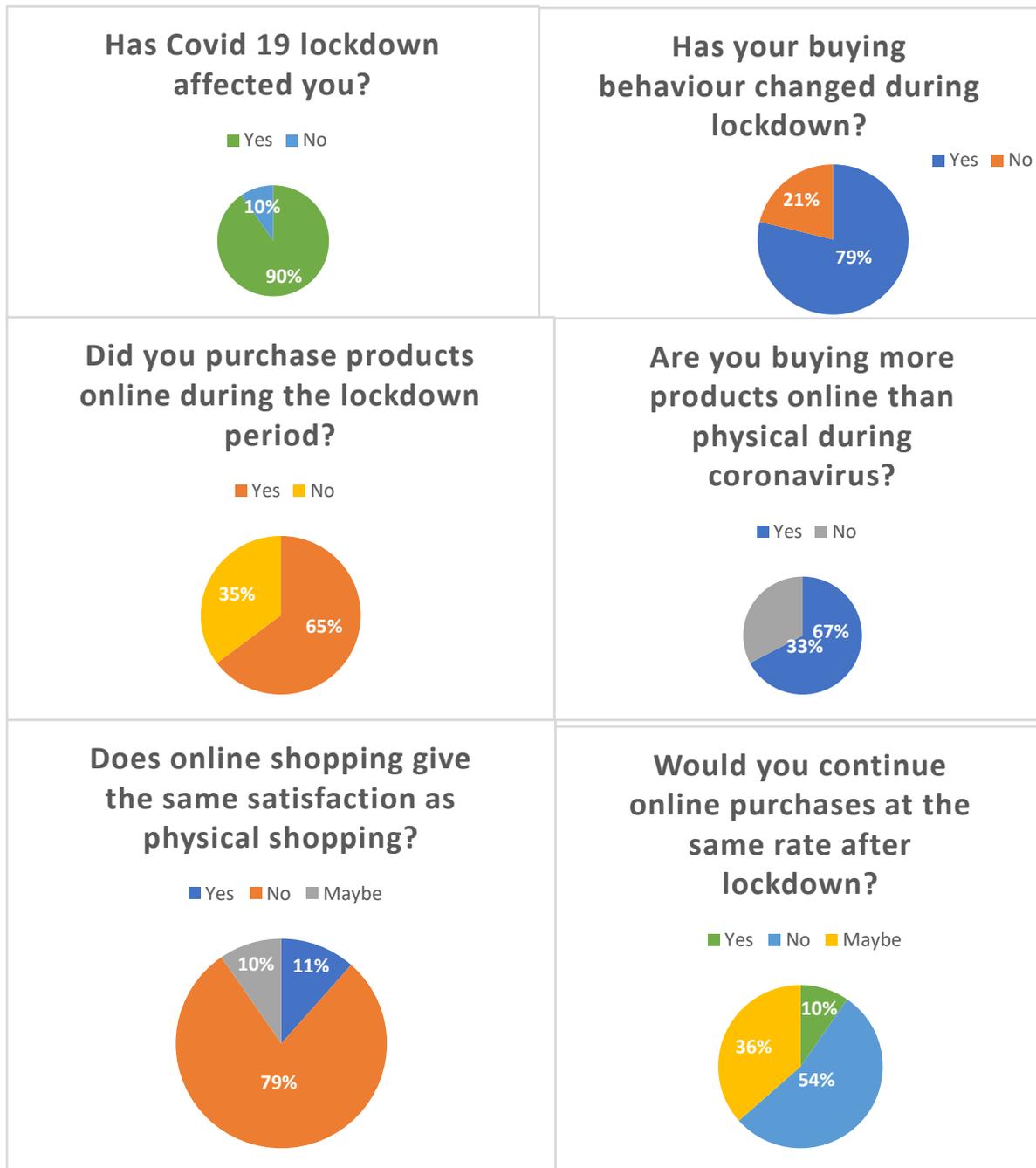
Secondary Data:

Secondary data was collected through the following sources which are very useful tools-

- Government publications
- Published reports and survey
- Published sources collected from research papers, periodicals and newspapers.
- Web sites related to COVID-19 and buying behaviour of consumers.

Data Analysis:

Following diagrams and graphs reflect the data collected analysed for the research-





Findings of the study:

- From the data received from the research, it is clear that Covid-19 pandemic has affected the consumers emotionally and created frustration and insecurities.
- From the present research, it was learnt that the conditions of strict lockdown and human curfew which was made compulsory has pushed many consumers to switch over from physical shopping to Online purchases.
- It was observed that social distancing was one of the basic safeguards for a common man against the COVID-19 pandemic. It has surely helped to break the chain of spread of disease.
- During the research it was found that in lockdown period consumer behaviour was highly susceptible.
- From the research it was found that online purchasing of fruits and grocery, masks and sanitization, medicines, mobile phones and laptops has gone up considerably during the lockdown period.

- From the study it was found that consumers were readily and happily accepting the products bought online as they felt it to be a safer method.
- Among all the various online sites in the market, Amazon was the most preferred one.
- The simple reason behind this being that buying products online is a convenient and reasonable affair providing a very large variety to choose from all over the world at the fingertips.

Suggestions:

- From the researcher's point of view, it is suggested that in order to stop the spread of the deadly virus, consumers should be motivated towards online purchases.
- From the research, it is suggested that appropriate precautionary measures should be taken by the consumers while buying fruits, grocery and other perishable items online.
- From the research, it is suggested that consumers can take online subscription of various services that would give convenience and cost savings.
- From the researcher's point of view, the consumers must be cautious about various fraudulent online sites that have appeared to sell necessities like face masks, sanitizers and medicines.
- From the research, it is suggested that the consumers should be very cautious while making online payments and also check bank account statements for any deviant transactions.

Conclusions:

The worldwide spread of the deadly coronavirus has altered how people prefer to buy products and services and how they perceive e-commerce. The standardized lockdown rules and human curfews being imposed across India and the growing fear among consumers to go out of their homes and shop for essential goods have tilted the nation towards e-commerce.

Our results confirm the hypothesis that Pandemic situation has arisen due to Covid-19 and Nagpur City has witnessed a remarkable increase in the demand for online products during this period. As the COVID-19 pandemic has reshaped our lives, more consumers have begun shopping online in greater numbers and frequency.

The time in lockdown has caused an e-commerce boom, with the pandemic accelerating the shift away from physical stores by roughly five years. Department stores, as a result, are seeing significant declines. Consequently, consumers are more determined to place online orders of fresh vegetables, groceries, medicines, sanitization and likewise directly delivered by producers.

Mr. Rajesh Mishra, Founder Director of Thinking Hats Consumer Insights, with over 20 years' experience in building brands with insights & strategy, throws light on the current complexity- "Humans respond to crises in different ways. When faced with an uncertain,

risky situation over which we have no control, we tend to try whatever we can to feel like we can regain some control.”

It is very important to understand the evolving consumer motivations in this context. Buying behaviour is being driven by 3 motivators - Survival needs, Prevention needs, and FOMO needs.

This study has also revealed which categories of goods the consumers feel are essential. Clothing, for example, declined in importance as more consumers had to follow the rule of “Work from Home” as well as social distancing under government lockdowns. However, the other categories of goods including necessities like fruits, groceries, sanitization and healthcare products showed a hike.

As the world was forced into human curfews and complete shutdown, it can be concluded that e-commerce helped towards contributing to the economy and saving millions of lives by making people stay home and avail the delivery facilities at their doorstep.

“Customers want to avoid stepping out unless it’s very critical. We are helping customers who are stuck in that situation, and we are able to play a small part in helping (cater) to their needs,” – Gopal Pillai, Vice President for Seller Services at Amazon India.

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