

IMPACT OF HEDONIC SHOPPING ON CONSUMER BUYING IN COVID-19 PANDEMIC

1. **VENKATA NAGA SIVA KUMAR. CHALLA** (CORRESPONDING AUTHOR)

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR
DEPT. OF BBA, KL BUSINESS SCHOOL
KONERU LAKSHMAIAH EDUCATION FOUNDATION
VADDESWAREM, GREEN FIELDS, INDIA

2. **RAJ JAIN**

RESEARCH SCHOLAR
DEPT. OF BBA, KL BUSINESS SCHOOL
KONERU LAKSHMAIAH EDUCATION FOUNDATION
VADDESWAREM, GREEN FIELDS, INDIA

3. **ANUMALASETTY. SOWMIKA**

RESEARCH SCHOLAR
DEPT. OF BBA, KL BUSINESS SCHOOL
KONERU LAKSHMAIAH EDUCATION FOUNDATION
VADDESWAREM, GREEN FIELDS, INDIA

4. **BACHIGARIBALA RANGA JEEVAN SAI**

RESEARCH SCHOLAR
DEPT. OF BBA, KL BUSINESS SCHOOL
KONERU LAKSHMAIAH EDUCATION FOUNDATION
VADDESWAREM, GREEN FIELDS, INDIA

5. **VUGGIRALA. SREEYA SARAN**

RESEARCH SCHOLAR
DEPT. OF BBA, KL BUSINESS SCHOOL
KONERU LAKSHMAIAH EDUCATION FOUNDATION
VADDESWAREM, GREEN FIELDS, INDIA

Abstract

The goal of this study is to learn more about how the Covid-19 pandemic has changed how people shop in the retail sector. This research investigates and analyses the impact of Covid-19 on the choosing of internet channels. The scope of this research is confined to the purchasing habits of Indians in relation to the choosing of online retailers for the purchase of fashion items. Specifically, this research aims to find and evaluate novel behavioral characteristics that impact Indian customers' selection of online businesses for browsing and purchasing fashion items. Due to the restrictions that the Covid-19 epidemic put on society, samples from the identified population have been looked at for changes in how people buy things. Using focus groups and a web-based poll, this research was done from the perspective of consumers.

Key words: Covid-19, Customers, behavioral patterns, web-based survey.

1.0 Introduction

Covid 19 pandemic has changed our way of life unpredictably. Consumer buying behaviour towards necessities and non-necessities has been impacted differently by the two-year prolonged pandemic situation.

Spending patterns of an individual in both categories got influenced by the income uncertainties, personal traits, perceived economic stability and psychological status of the consumers. Anxiety, fear, lack of social gathering, short and long term full or partial lockdowns, closure of office spaces etc. severely impacted our way of shopping, what we buy, how frequently and where we buy. The influences of the Covid 19 pandemic on our consumption and purchase patterns are discussed here. For example, some products like cosmetics were hardly purchased by consumers in the last two years whereas OTT subscriptions had multifold incremental growth. The impact of the pandemic on consumer behaviour was different in utilitarian shopping and hedonic buying.

While buying utilitarian goods, the buyer acts as a rational decision-maker and wants to maximize utilities and tangible benefits. Convenience, variety and affordability are the primary motives in utilitarian shopping and researchers have described the utilitarian buying process as a logical problem-solving activity. Purchase of most of the necessary items comes under this category of shopping. Hedonic shopping acts as an excitement arousal shopping experience, often occurring for high involvement products, mostly purchased on impulse.

1.1 Impact of Covid-19 pandemic on hedonic shopping

During the Covid period, consumer expenditure on the necessary items was increased especially in the categories of grocery items, wellness, hygiene products and pharmaceutical products. Expecting sudden lockdown panic buying of groceries, staples, household items, cleaning products and CPG items was observed at multiple periods over the last two years. Higher expenditure on all the above categories has resulted in consumption-led growth in both urban and rural India. Consumers mostly preferred trusted brands to purchase those items, though local and private brands also found space in the consumer basket. Either very large or very small packages were sold in both online and physical stores. Since on-the-go consumption has declined due to restricted movement and safe shopping, e-commerce is embraced by people and the growth of the e-commerce industry has accelerated multifold in the past two years. Many retailers opted for Omni channel presence, changed store layouts, offered longer store operating hours and provided a safe hygienic store environment. At the same time, Kirana stores selling grocery items did good business due to their proximity to residential places. Packaging, especially hygiene packs, was valued by consumers and acted as a differentiator for many CPG goods. McKinsey has reported that there has been a decrease in the frequency of shopping, the density of shoppers and a decrease in customer satisfaction. Brand loyalty was at stake as many times customers were forced to try new products due to supply chain disruption.

1.2 Hedonic shopping

Consumers responded to the pandemic in a variety of ways- the majority were anxious and reduced the purchase of hedonic goods. Some consumers took the crisis in a normal way and

remained indifferent. Psychological orientation, perceived economic uncertainties and personal mental stability acted as negative influencers in the purchase of hedonic products. Many of them restricted their purchases only to necessary items and frugal spending on hedonic products resulted in a decline in discretionary spending. Fashion products, apparel, and cosmetics which are normally bought as hedonic shopping products showed negative growth. Restrictions in social gatherings like weddings, cultural events, absence of physical workplaces and tours acted strongly as negative influencers for hedonic purchases. Due to lockdowns, and the closure of malls and stores, consumers who usually enjoy shopping and mostly engage in impulse buying refrained from buying hedonic non-necessity goods. Contrary, for a small segment of customers, the covid crisis even influenced the purchase of hedonic products in a positive manner. They spent more on hedonic shopping mainly on digital shopping platforms due to multiple reasons like defending boredom, restoring the sense of self and alleviating the state of anxiety and stress.

A plethora of research and discussion is being conducted to analyse whether the emerging changes in consumer behaviour due to the Covid crisis are temporary or permanent. Research indicates that normally it takes about 66 days to form a new habit. People adopt a new habit relatively quickly if that does not differ much from existing routine behaviour and the new experience is rewarded by incremental value. Consumer behaviour is a complex phenomenon and is shaped by people, places, culture and time. Due to multiple waves of the pandemic, consumers are exposed to newer influences and adapted to the new behavioural patterns for a prolonged period of 2 years. Further study is needed to anticipate and analyse whether the covid 19 induced behavioural changes are temporary or permanent.

2.0 Literature Review

Before Arnould and Thompson's Consumer Culture Theory came out in 2005, most research focused on economic and psychological factors to explain shopping behaviour (CCT). Purchasing theory is a field of consumer research that looks at how social and cultural factors affect how people choose what to buy. Arnould and Thompson (2005) thought that all the theories about consumer behaviour were confusing, so they made the CCT, "A family of theoretical ideas addressing the dynamic linkages between consumer behaviour, the marketplace, and cultural significance," they characterised it as (pp. 868-869). The CCT doesn't believe that individuals intentionally consume. When it comes to sociocultural activity, it views it as a way for individuals to express their feelings, such as why they purchase goods for enjoyment. There are four main areas of concentration for the CCT's research: (Hungara & Nobre, 2021). A good place to start is with the Consumer Identity Projects, which examined customers as active participants in the market. The second topic, "Marketplace Cultures," looked at how social and cultural factors affect the way people buy things. Sociohistorical Patterning of Consumption is the third topic. It looks at how structural and historical patterns affect how people consume. Market Ideologies and Customers' Interpretive Strategies: Mass Mediated We've learned a lot about how consumers read, respond, decipher, and resist marketing messages via the use of the CCT. In the past, CCT has been used to study consumer involvement and the factors that influence it (e.g., Hook et al., 2018; Kamboj & Rahman, 2017).

Jin and Kim (2003) said that the reasons people buy things are "what drives them to go to the market to meet their own needs" (p. 399). Hedonic and utilitarian motivations, which are important parts of the buying experience and the basis of buying motivation, can be used to explain why people buy things (Babin et al., 1994; Batra and Ahtola, 1991; Crowley et al., 1992; Helm et al., 2013; Scarpi 2012). Also, hedonic and utilitarian buying incentives are seen as a key part of understanding the consumer's choices and behaviour after a purchase (Jones et al., 2006; Overby & Lee, 2006). In the past, people have focused on the useful parts of shopping. Before, shopping was seen as a chore, but now people do it because they like it. The experience of shopping has become more emotional and exciting. So, the hedonic factor is much more important than it used to be (Babin et al., 1994; Langrehr, 1991; Roy, 1994; Wakefield & Baker, 1998).

There are three types of bad behaviour by consumers: norms and expectations, labelling, and the purpose of the behaviour. First, Fullerton and Punj (2004) said that misbehaviour is when someone acts in a way that goes against social norms and expectations and is seen as wrong and bad. Consumer bad behaviour can only be understood if one understands the sociology of deviant behaviour, which explains why certain behaviours are accepted and others are not. The label "deviant" takes into account what is right and what is wrong. Misbehavior doesn't always mean doing something illegal or wrong. Third, behavioural intentions may be significant in determining whether or not a behaviour is deviant.

2.1 The Structure of Hedonism and its features

It was in the 18th century that Western Europe, particularly England, saw a boom in hedonistic spending habits. Consumerism is examined by several academic fields, and research in this area suggests that the modern consumer demonstrates more than just mental and economic consuming tendencies. Under the impact of motivations and emotions, the customer consumes. (Hedonic products are multisensory and facilitate experience consumption, enjoyment, pleasure, and excitement. Similar needs and pleasure are not the same. Everything from flowers to fine clothing to music to sports cars to pricey watches falls under this umbrella. On the other side, utilitarian things tend to be more practical, and consumers choose to purchase them for this reason. Home security systems and personal laptops are only a few instances of what we're referring to when we say "microwave". The distinction between utilitarian consumption and hedonistic consumption is a question of degree or perspective. Thus, hedonic spending may be viewed as comparatively more discretionary than utilitarian consumption. Different goods may be both high and poor in hedonic and utilitarian qualities simultaneously. In reality, most of the evaluations in our consumption profile depend on how well different choices meet utilitarian and hedonic goals.

3. Purpose

The purpose of this research is to discover how Covid-19 impacts consumer purchasing behaviour in the retail sector. This study looks at how Indians choose between buying fashion items online and in person. Specifically, this research intends to find and evaluate novel behavioural factors that impact Indian people' choice between online and offline businesses for fashion product purchase and acquisition. This research is done from the perspective of the

client using focus groups and an online poll. Based on the current theories of how people buy things, this study will look at the buying habits of Indian millennials to figure out how much Covid-19 affects the way people choose between online and offline businesses. But it is expected that this research will come up with some new patterns of behaviour that will help theorists better understand how clients buy things now.

3.1 Research Design

In this investigation, qualitative data will be gathered first, followed by quantitative data. In the first step, the qualitative data analysis approach will be used to look at the data that was collected through focus group interviews. During the qualitative data analysis, the authors will put the data in order, type up the focus group discussions, and put the materials in the right order. The common data will be categorised in order to assist the coding procedure that will be used to present the data in a manner acceptable for understanding. Following the process of data collection, the qualitative data will be analysed. Along with the coding, the writers will give a detailed description of the data based on themes that have already been chosen to show the most important results of the conversations. Quantitative data (second phase) with additional variables and information, which may enhance overall results and help accomplish the study's purpose, will be announced here, along with the final qualitative findings, which add value to the research. Quantitative data will be collected and analysed after the development process in order to get the necessary knowledge and outcomes to accomplish the aim. After identifying and summarising the data from the prepared surveys (quantitative data collection), we will begin the second step by showing the participants' sample size. So, the descriptive quantitative phase analysis in this study will be looked at to emphasise measurements that are based on numbers. In this study, the quantitative data will be interpreted using different methods to find data that is backed up by evidence.

3.2 Analysis

The people who wrote this study have set up four focus group meetings with a total of five people at each meeting. Table 1 shows how the focus group meetings are set up. There are a total of twenty contestants, eleven of whom are female and nine of them are male. All contestants are between the ages of (24-39 years). All of the focus group sessions included both men and women. Prior to the outbreak of Covid-19, all participants are Indians. Participants were recruited via the researchers' contacts in India (friends, relatives and colleagues). All of the participants have willingly accepted to participate in the focus groups after being contacted through SMS or phone calls by the researchers.

Table 1: Illustration of the design of focus groups session

	Group A	Group B	Group C	Group D	Total
<i>Number of participants</i>	5	5	5	5	20
<i>Male participants</i>	3	2	2	2	9
<i>Female participants</i>	2	3	3	3	11
<i>Date of session</i>	16/04	18/04	19/04	20/04	

General motivations for shopping at online stores

However, 12 of the respondents cited the ease of searching for and comparing items across several dimensions, such as price and features, as their primary motivation for buying online. In addition, 11 respondents indicated that internet retailers enable them to look for items based on particular tastes that are difficult to search for in physical stores. In addition, eleven individuals have indicated that internet businesses provide a greater range of products than traditional stores. However, only eight respondents noted the time and effort savings of online purchasing, and only five indicated that marketing activities lure them to online shopping.

Table 2: General motivations for shopping online

General motivations for shopping online					
	Group A	Group B	Group C	Group D	Total
<i>Easy to search and compare</i>	3	3	3	3	12
<i>The ability to search products according to specific preferences</i>	3	2	3	3	11
<i>Provide wider variety & unique options</i>	4	2	2	3	11
<i>Saving time & effort</i>	2	2	2	2	8
<i>Online campaigns</i>	0	2	2	1	5

In addition, eleven of the respondents mentioned that the lack of availability of certain items in nearby physical shops or the absence of a certain brand in their location is what drives them to buy from online retailers.

General deterrents for shopping/buying online

In addition, 12 respondents indicated that the inability to assess the product's size and quality used to dissuade them from purchasing online. In addition, ten respondents claimed that excessive delivery times discourage them from shopping online. However, just four interviewers across all categories said that the internet shopping process is very complicated in terms of sizing, examining the product's materials, and the return procedure.

Table 3: General deterrents for shopping/buying online

General deterrents for shopping/buying online					
	Group A	Group B	Group C	Group D	Total
<i>Inability to check sizes/quality</i>	3	3	3	3	12
<i>Long delivery time</i>	2	2	3	3	10
<i>Process of pick up/return points</i>	1	2	1	0	4

4. Conclusion

We want to discover more about how the Covid-19 epidemic affects consumer behaviour in retail settings at the conclusion of this study. This research investigates the influence of Covid-19 on the selecting process for internet channels. This research is confined to the purchase habits of Indians in relation to the choosing of online fashion retailers. In particular, the goal of this research is to find and evaluate new patterns of behaviour that affect how Indian customers choose online businesses to shop and buy fashion products. Due to the restrictions that the Covid-19 epidemic put on society, samples from the specified demographic have been looked at for changes in how people buy things. Focus groups and an online poll were used to conduct this study from the perspective of the customer.

In this study, it was found that the shift to online channels has led to a decrease in the total amount of fashion that the study samples buy. The real-world results of this study show that the majority of online fashion purchases are driven by real customer needs.

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