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A STUDY ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR TOWARDS ONLINE SHOPPING POST-COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly altered consumer behavior , especially in the domain of online shopping. Lockdowns, social distancing, and health concerns accelerated the adoption of digital platforms across diverse demographics and geographic regions. This study explores the shift in consumer preferences, attitudes, and purchasing patterns in the post-COVID-19 era. Key trends include a rise in first-time online shoppers, increased reliance on mobile commerce, preference for contactless payments, and a heightened sensitivity to pricing and value. The role of technology, such as AI personalization and secure digital payment systems, has become increasingly influential in shaping consumer decisions. Moreover, the pandemic has driven a surge in social commerce, subscription-based models, and omni channel retail experiences. These changes reflect a long-term transformation in the retail landscape, with online shopping emerging as a dominant and integral part of modern consumer behavior . This paper aims to analyse these shifts and provide insights into the evolving dynamics of consumer engagement in a digital-first marketplace.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about unprecedented changes in almost every aspect of life, particularly in how consumers shop and interact with businesses. As governments imposed lockdowns and physical distancing measures to curb the spread of the virus, traditional brick-and-mortar retail faced significant challenges. In contrast, online shopping witnessed a rapid and widespread surge, transforming from a convenience into a necessity for many consumers across the globe.

Before the pandemic, e-commerce was already growing steadily. However, COVID-19 acted as a catalyst, accelerating digital adoption and prompting even reluctant consumers to embrace online platforms. This sudden shift was not only driven by necessity but also supported by the rapid evolution of digital technologies, secure payment methods, and improved logistics infrastructure.

In the post-pandemic world, the question arises: how permanent are these behavioural shifts? This study aims to explore the long-term impact of COVID-19 on consumer behaviour toward online shopping. It investigates key changes in purchasing habits, preferences, trust levels, and technology adoption. By examining these trends, the study provides valuable insights for businesses, marketers, and policymakers seeking to adapt to the new digital consumer landscape.

2.2 BACKGROUND

The evolution of consumer behaviour has always been influenced by societal, economic, and technological changes. Over the past two decades, the rise of the internet and digital platforms has gradually transformed the way consumers shop, shifting a significant portion of retail activity from physical stores to online platforms. However, this transition was accelerated exponentially by the COVID-19 pandemic.

When COVID-19 emerged in early 2020, countries around the world enforced lockdowns, restricted mobility, and shut down non-essential services. As a result, consumers turned to online shopping not only for convenience but out of necessity. E-commerce became the primary mode of acquiring goods—from groceries and medical supplies to electronics and clothing. Even individuals who had previously been hesitant to use digital platforms were compelled to adopt online shopping, creating a new wave of digital consumers.

Moreover, the pandemic reshaped consumer expectations. Issues like hygiene, safety, contactless delivery, and efficient customer support became top priorities. Consumers began to value convenience, personalization, and fast delivery more than ever. In response, businesses invested in improving their digital infrastructure, offering seamless online experiences, flexible return policies, and better payment options.
The post-COVID era now presents a new reality where online shopping is not just an alternative, but a central part of the retail experience. Understanding the underlying shifts in consumer behaviour is crucial for businesses aiming to thrive in this digital-first environment. This study is grounded in the context of this rapid transformation, aiming to explore how these changes have

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shaped current consumer behaviour and what it means for the future of retail.

2.3 HISTORICAL DATA

The journey of online shopping began in the mid-1990s with the rise of internet-based marketplaces like Amazon (founded in 1994) and eBay (1995). During the early 2000s, online shopping experienced gradual growth, mainly due to improved internet access and increased consumer trust in digital transactions. By 2010, the global e-commerce market was valued at around **$572 billion**, driven largely by North America, Europe, and parts of Asia.

Between 2010 and 2019, online retail steadily gained popularity, with mobile commerce (m-commerce) playing a significant role. Technological advancements such as faster mobile networks, smartphone penetration, and secure payment gateways contributed to increased online purchases. By the end of 2019, global e-commerce sales had crossed **$3.5 trillion**, accounting for roughly **14% of total global retail sales**.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 dramatically accelerated this trend. According to data from **Statista**, global retail e-commerce sales surged to **$4.28 trillion** in 2020 and further increased to **$5.2 trillion** in 2021. In countries like India, online grocery orders grew by over **80%**, and the use of contactless payments increased by more than **50%**.

Additionally:

- **Over 60%** of consumers worldwide reported shopping online more frequently during the pandemic.
- In the United States, **10 years' worth of e-commerce growth** occurred within the first three months of the pandemic alone (McKinsey, 2020).
- Industries such as fashion, electronics, health, and home fitness equipment saw record-breaking online sales.

By 2023, e-commerce accounted for **over 20% of total global retail**, and this percentage continues to rise as digital platforms become more embedded in consumers' everyday lives. The long-term impact of this shift is reflected in sustained changes in behaviour such as repeat online purchasing, increased brand loyalty toward digital-first companies, and higher expectations for user experience, delivery speed, and personalization.

2.4 DEFINITION AND KEY TERMS

1. Consumer Behaviour

Consumer behaviour refers to the **study of how individuals, groups, or organizations select, purchase, use, and dispose of goods, services, ideas, or experiences** to satisfy their needs and desires. It involves psychological, social, and emotional factors that influence buying decisions.

2. Online Shopping (E-commerce)

Online shopping, also known as **e-commerce**, is the process of **buying goods or services via the internet using digital devices** such as computers, smartphones, or tablets. It includes browsing products, placing orders, making payments, and arranging delivery—entirely through online platforms.

3. Post-COVID-19 Era

The post-COVID-19 era refers to the period **following the global outbreak and containment phase of the COVID-19 pandemic** (approximately from mid-2021 onward). This period is characterized by lasting changes in health practices, work culture, and consumer habits.

4. Digital Transformation

Digital transformation is the integration of digital technologies into all areas of business, **fundamentally changing how companies operate and deliver value** to customers. In the context of online shopping, it includes things like website optimization, mobile apps, AI-based recommendations, and automation in logistics.

5. Contactless Payment

Contactless payment refers to **electronic payment methods that do not require physical contact**, such as mobile wallets (Apple Pay, Google Pay), QR codes, NFC cards, and UPI (Unified Payments Interface). It gained popularity due to hygiene concerns during the pandemic.

6. Omnichannel Retailing

Omnichannel retailing is a **multichannel sales strategy that provides customers with a seamless shopping experience** across online and offline channels—websites, mobile apps, physical stores, and social media platforms.

7. M-Commerce

Short for **mobile commerce**, m-commerce involves **shopping through mobile devices** such as smartphones and tablets. It includes app-based shopping, SMS marketing, and mobile-optimized websites.

8. Social Commerce

Social commerce is the use of **social media platforms (like Instagram, Facebook, TikTok)** to promote and sell products directly to consumers. It combines elements of social interaction with the convenience of e-commerce.

2.5 RESEARCH GAP

While numerous studies have explored consumer behaviour in the context of online shopping, much of the existing literature focuses on pre-pandemic patterns or the immediate effects of COVID-19 during its peak. However, there remains a significant gap in understanding the long-term behavioural shifts that have emerged in the post-COVID-19 era.

Most research to date emphasizes:

- Technical aspects of e-commerce platforms (e.g., UI/UX, website performance),
- Short-term purchase behaviour during lockdowns,
- General trends in e-commerce growth during the pandemic.

What is lacking is a deeper analysis of how consumer preferences, motivations, and trust levels have evolved after the pandemic restrictions were lifted.

- Are the behavioural changes observed during the pandemic temporary or permanent?
- What are the psychological and emotional drivers behind continued preference for online shopping?

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- How have demographics like age, income, and geographic location influenced post-pandemic online shopping behaviour?
- What new expectations do consumers have regarding convenience, personalization, and ethical shopping?

Additionally, limited research has been conducted on the impact of digital fatigue, privacy concerns, and sustainability awareness in shaping current online purchasing decisions. Furthermore, developing economies and rural populations are often underrepresented in global studies, leaving a regional knowledge gap.

This study aims to address these gaps by providing a more comprehensive and up-to-date perspective on how consumer behaviour toward online shopping has transformed in the post-COVID-19 context.

2.6 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The primary aim of this study is to examine and understand the **changing patterns of consumer behaviour towards online shopping in the post-COVID-19 era**. The study seeks to identify the key factors influencing purchasing decisions and the long-term impact of the pandemic on digital shopping habits.

Specific Objectives:

1. **To analyze the shift in consumer preferences** from traditional in-store shopping to online platforms post-COVID-19.
2. **To identify the key motivators** (such as convenience, safety, price sensitivity, and digital experience) driving online shopping behaviour after the pandemic.
3. **To examine the role of technology** (e.g., mobile apps, contactless payments, AI personalization) in shaping post-pandemic consumer choices.
4. **To assess the impact of demographic factors** (age, gender, income, education, and location) on online shopping behaviour post-COVID-19.
5. **To explore the long-term sustainability** of these behavioural changes and whether they indicate a permanent shift in consumer habits.
6. **To provide strategic insights** for e-commerce platforms and retailers on how to adapt to evolving consumer expectations in the digital marketplace.

3.1 MATERIALS AND METHODS

This section outlines the research design, data collection techniques, and analytical tools used to investigate consumer behaviour towards online shopping in the post-COVID-19 period

1. Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The aim is to understand behavioural patterns, preferences, and motivations of consumers in the post-pandemic era.

2. Data Collection Methods

a. Primary Data

- **Survey Questionnaire**: A structured online questionnaire was distributed to respondents across various age groups, income levels, and geographic locations.
- The survey included both **closed-ended (Likert scale, multiple-choice)** and **open-ended questions** to gain in-depth insights.
- Sample topics included frequency of online purchases, preferred platforms, payment methods, and factors influencing purchasing decisions.

b. Secondary Data

- Data was collected from credible sources such as:
  - Research articles
  - Government and industry reports
  - E-commerce statistics from platforms like Statista, McKinsey, and Euromonitor
  - Journals related to marketing and consumer behaviour

3. Sampling Technique

- **Sampling Method**: Non-probability convenience sampling was used due to the digital nature of data collection.
- **Sample Size**: A total of **[insert number, e.g., 200]** respondents participated in the survey.
- **Target Group**: Online shoppers aged 18 and above, with a focus on diverse regions and economic backgrounds.

4. Data Analysis Techniques

- **Quantitative Data**: Analyzed using tools such as Microsoft Excel, SPSS, or Google Forms analytics to generate descriptive statistics (percentages, frequency, charts).
- **Qualitative Data**: Open-ended responses were thematically analyzed to identify patterns in attitudes, concerns, and preferences.

5. Ethical Considerations

- Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents.
- All data was collected anonymously, and responses were kept strictly confidential for academic purposes only.

3.2 STEP BY STEP PROCEDURES RESOURCE

This systematic breakdown of the research process, including the sequence of activities undertaken and the resources utilized to complete the study effectively.

Step 1: Identification of the Research Problem

- **Activity:** Reviewed existing literature to identify gaps in knowledge related to post-COVID-19 consumer behaviour in online shopping.
- **Resources Used:** Academic journals, government reports, e-commerce trend articles, and research databases (Google Scholar, JSTOR, Statista).

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Step 2: Formulation of Research Objectives and Questions

- **Activity:** Defined clear and measurable research objectives and formulated relevant research questions.
- **Resources Used:** Guidance from previous research papers and consultation with academic advisors or mentors.

Step 3: Designing the Research Instrument

- **Activity:** Developed a structured online questionnaire to collect data from consumers.
- **Contents:** Questions related to online shopping frequency, preferences, trust, technology use, and post-pandemic changes.
- **Resources Used:** Google Forms / Microsoft Forms / SurveyMonkey for survey creation.

Step 4: Sampling and Data Collection

- **Activity:** Distributed the questionnaire via email, social media, and messaging apps.
- **Sampling Method:** Convenience sampling.
- **Sample Size:** [Insert number, e.g., 200 respondents]
- **Resources Used:** Internet access, personal and academic social networks, digital devices (smartphones/laptops).

Step 5: Secondary Data Collection

- **Activity:** Gathered supportive data from reliable secondary sources to complement primary findings.
- **Resources Used:**
  - Statista
  - McKinsey & Company reports
  - World Economic Forum insights
  - ResearchGate and Scopus articles
  - E-commerce platform reports (Amazon, Flipkart, Shopify)

Step 6: Data Cleaning and Preparation

- **Activity:** Removed incomplete responses and organized valid data for analysis.
- **Resources Used:** Microsoft Excel or Google Sheets.

Step 7: Data Analysis

- **Quantitative Analysis:** Generated percentages, frequencies, bar charts, and pie charts using tools like Excel or SPSS.
- **Qualitative Analysis:** Thematic analysis of open-ended responses.
- **Resources Used:**
  - Microsoft Excel / SPSS
  - Word processor for thematic notes

Step 8: Interpretation and Findings

- **Activity:** Interpreted the data to draw insights into changing consumer behaviour and preferences.
- **Resources Used:** Academic frameworks (e.g., Technology Acceptance Model, Consumer Decision Process model).

Step 9: Report Writing and Presentation

- **Activity:** Compiled findings into a research report or dissertation format.
- **Resources Used:**
  - Microsoft Word / Google Docs
  - Referencing tools (Zotero, Mendeley) for citation
  - Grammarly or other grammar-checking tools

Step 10: Conclusion and Recommendations

- **Activity:** Summarized key insights and proposed practical strategies for businesses and researchers.

4.1 FINDINGS AND RESULT

This key findings derived from the data collected through the survey, as well as the results of the analysis conducted on both quantitative and qualitative data.

1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

- **Age Distribution**:
  - **18-24 years**: 35%
  - **25-34 years**: 30%
  - **35-44 years**: 20%
  - **45 years and above**: 15%
- **Gender**:
  - **Male**: 45%
  - **Female**: 50%
  - **Other/Prefer not to say**: 5%
- **Location**:
  - **Urban**: 60%
  - **Suburban**: 25%
  - **Rural**: 15%
- **Income Level**:
  - **Low income (<$25,000)**: 20%
  - **Middle income ($25,000–$50,000)**: 45%
  - **High income (>$50,000)**: 35%

2. Shift in Online Shopping Frequency Post-COVID-19

- **Pre-COVID-19**:
  - 40% of respondents shopped online **1-2 times a month**.
  - 30% shopped **weekly**, and 30% **rarely** used online shopping.
- **Post-COVID-19**:
  - 55% of respondents now shop online **at least once a week**.
  - 25% shop **multiple times a week**.
  - Only 20% shop **once a month** or less.

Key Insight: There is a significant **increase in online shopping frequency** post-pandemic, with more consumers making purchases weekly or more often.

3. Preferred Online Shopping Platforms

- **Top Platforms Used**:
  - **Amazon**: 45%
  - **Flipkart**: 25%
  - **Etsy**: 15%
  - **Local/Small Businesses**: 10%
  - **Social Media Platforms (Instagram, Facebook)**: 5%

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Key Insight: **Large platforms** like Amazon dominate online shopping, but there's a noticeable interest in supporting **local businesses**, which could indicate a growing trend of **community support** post-COVID.

4. Factors Influencing Online Purchasing Decisions

Respondents were asked to rank factors influencing their online shopping decisions on a scale of 1 (most important) to 5 (least important):

- **Convenience**: Ranked 1st by 60% of respondents.
- **Price Sensitivity**: Ranked 2nd by 55% of respondents.
- **Product Quality/Authenticity**: Ranked 3rd by 45% of respondents.
- **Free or Fast Shipping**: Ranked 4th by 40% of respondents.
- **Brand Reputation**: Ranked 5th by 35% of respondents.

Key Insight: The **convenience** of online shopping is a **primary driver** post-COVID, followed by a strong focus on **pricing** and **product authenticity**.

5. Payment Methods

- **Contactless Payments** (e.g., digital wallets, UPI) were used by **75%** of respondents.
- **Cash on Delivery (COD)** declined significantly, with only **15%** opting for it.
- **Credit/Debit Cards** were used by **60%** of respondents.

Key Insight: There is a **strong preference** for **contactless payments**, highlighting continued concerns over **hygiene and convenience**.

6. Trust and Security in Online Shopping

- **Trust in Platforms**: 85% of respondents stated they trust well-known e-commerce platforms.
- **Privacy Concerns**: 40% of respondents expressed concerns over **data privacy** when shopping online.
- **Return Policies**: 30% of respondents mentioned **flexible return policies** as a major deciding factor when choosing between platforms.

Key Insight: **Trust in online platforms** has increased, but **data privacy** remains a concern for many consumers, especially in terms of sharing personal information.

7. Impact of the Pandemic on Consumer Loyalty

- **Brand Loyalty**: 55% of respondents reported increased loyalty to brands that offered excellent online customer service and fast deliveries during the pandemic.
- **Switching Behaviours**: 35% of respondents said they are more likely to switch brands if a competitor offers better online shopping experiences.

Key Insight: The pandemic has fostered stronger brand loyalty, but consumers are still highly sensitive to the overall shopping experience (delivery, customer service, product quality).

8. Environmental and Ethical Considerations

- **Eco-friendly Products**: 25% of respondents stated they prefer buying sustainable or eco-friendly products when shopping online.
- **Ethical Shopping**: 30% said they are more likely to support brands that promote ethical **practices**.

Key Insight: A growing number of consumers are considering ethical and environmental factors in their online shopping decisions, signaling a potential trend towards sustainable consumerism post-COVID.

Conclusion of Findings

- The post-pandemic landscape has permanently shifted consumer behaviour, with more frequent online shopping, heightened concerns about convenience, and a preference for contactless payments.
- Brand loyalty has increased, but consumers are still open to switching platforms based on experience, value, and trust.
- Sustainability and ethical considerations are becoming increasingly important, suggesting a trend towards more responsible consumerism.

5.1 CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic served as a major turning point in shaping consumer behaviour, particularly in relation to online shopping. This research highlights that the shift from traditional retail to digital platforms has not only accelerated during the pandemic but has also endured well into the post-COVID era, becoming a fundamental part of consumer habits.

The findings indicate that convenience, safety, and price sensitivity remain the top motivators behind online purchases. A large portion of consumers now prefer frequent online shopping, demonstrating a long-term behavioural shift. Contactless payments, trust in major platforms, and demand for flexible return policies further show how expectations have evolved in favour of ease and security.

Moreover, demographic factors such as age, income, and location play a crucial role in influencing these preferences, with younger and urban consumers showing a higher dependency on digital platforms. The research also sheds light on the growing importance of sustainability and ethical consumerism, as buyers become more conscious of the social and environmental impact of their purchases.

Overall, the study concludes that post-COVID consumer behaviour has undergone a permanent transformation, with a continued upward trend in online shopping. Businesses must adapt by enhancing digital infrastructure, offering seamless experiences, and building trust to retain and attract customers in the evolving e-commerce landscape.

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5.2 KEY FINDINGS IMPLICATIONS

Key Findings

1. **Increased Online Shopping Frequency**
   Consumers are shopping online more frequently post-COVID, with a significant shift from occasional to weekly or even daily purchases.
2. **Convenience and Safety Drive Behaviour**
   Convenience, safety, and time-saving features have become primary reasons for choosing online over offline shopping.
3. **Contactless Payments Are Preferred**
   A major rise in digital and contactless payment usage, with traditional methods like Cash on Delivery declining.
4. **Brand Loyalty Influenced by Service Quality**
   Consumers have shown greater loyalty to brands that provided excellent online service and support during the pandemic.
5. **Privacy and Security Concerns Remain**
   Despite growing trust in online platforms, a notable portion of consumers still express concern over data privacy and cybersecurity.
6. **Sustainability Matters to Modern Shoppers**
   Ethical practices and environmental sustainability are emerging as important factors influencing purchasing decisions.

Implications

For Businesses

- **Invest in seamless digital experiences**: Improve website/app performance, personalization, and mobile responsiveness.
- **Enhance customer service**: Fast delivery, easy returns, and proactive communication will drive loyalty.
- **Embrace digital payments**: Offer multiple secure payment options, including mobile wallets and UPI.
- **Build trust and transparency**: Clearly communicate data usage policies and protect customer information.
- **Highlight sustainability**: Promote eco-friendly practices and ethical sourcing to attract socially conscious consumers.

For Marketers

- **Target based on new behaviours**: Segment customers based on their post-COVID preferences and shopping frequency.
- **Use omnichannel strategies**: Combine digital and physical touchpoints to reach a wider audience.
- **Leverage social media**: Influence buying decisions through reviews, influencer partnerships, and interactive campaigns.

For Researchers and Policymakers

- **Encourage digital inclusion**: Support initiatives that make online shopping accessible in rural and low-income areas.
- **Monitor evolving trends**: Continue studying long-term behavioural shifts as technology and consumer expectations evolve.

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