

## Changes in Consumer Behaviour Post COVID-19

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**Abstract:** The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about unprecedented disruptions in global economies, significantly influencing consumer behaviour across different sectors. Lockdowns, health concerns, and uncertainty altered the way consumers perceive, purchase, and prioritize products and services. This research paper investigates the multidimensional changes in consumer behaviour in the post-COVID-19 era, particularly in the Indian context. The study reveals that digital transformation played a pivotal role in reshaping shopping habits, with a significant shift towards e-commerce and contactless transactions. Consumers demonstrated increased preference for health, hygiene, and wellness products, while discretionary and luxury spending saw a decline. Furthermore, financial insecurities led to more value-driven and conscious consumption. The research is based on primary data collected through a structured questionnaire from 200 respondents, analyzed using descriptive statistics and chi-square tests. The findings offer valuable insights for marketers, retailers, and policymakers to understand the emerging behavioural trends and adapt their strategies accordingly in a post-pandemic world.

**Key words:** Consumer behaviour, COVID-19 impact, digital shopping, health consciousness, value-driven consumption, post-pandemic trends, e-commerce, India.



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## INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a defining global event with far-reaching consequences across health, economic, and social dimensions. Among its most notable impacts has been the transformation in consumer behaviour, which has shifted dramatically since early 2020. The crisis disrupted supply chains, forced lockdowns, and restricted mobility, compelling consumers to alter their purchasing decisions, shopping patterns, and consumption priorities. From panic buying during the initial phase to the sustained preference for online shopping and health-related products, the pandemic has significantly influenced how, what, and where people buy.

One of the most visible changes was the acceleration of digital adoption. As physical stores shut down or operated with restrictions, e-commerce platforms experienced exponential growth. Consumers who were previously hesitant to shop online quickly adapted to digital channels for everything from groceries to essential services. This behavioural shift was not just limited to

urban areas; even consumers in semi-urban and rural regions began embracing mobile apps, digital wallets, and contactless payments. The convenience, safety, and ease of use offered by online platforms became compelling reasons for sustained usage.

In addition to digital transformation, there was a marked increase in health consciousness among consumers. Products related to hygiene, immunity, and wellness saw a surge in demand, while the sale of non-essential and luxury goods declined. Many consumers also became more mindful of their spending, leading to a shift from impulsive to need-based purchases. Financial uncertainty and job losses made consumers more price-sensitive and inclined toward value-for-money products.

The pandemic also affected brand loyalty. Due to disruptions in supply and availability, many consumers experimented with new brands, especially those offering better prices or readily available alternatives. Additionally, there was a growing preference for local and sustainable products as people became more aware of supporting domestic economies and ensuring product safety.

This research paper aims to explore these evolving trends in consumer behaviour post COVID-19, focusing on how preferences, purchasing habits, and attitudes have changed over time. By understanding these behavioural shifts, businesses and policymakers can better align their strategies to meet the new expectations and demands of the post-pandemic consumer.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Several researchers and scholars have explored the significant shifts in consumer behaviour brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. These studies provide insight into how various factors—such as digitalization, health awareness, financial insecurity, and social distancing—have influenced consumer decisions globally and in the Indian context.

- **Sheth (2020)** examined the fundamental changes in consumer behaviour during the pandemic, arguing that the crisis has led to a paradigm shift where habits and routines are being redefined. He suggested that consumers are now making fewer trips, buying more per visit, and focusing more on essentials and health-oriented products.
- **Donthu and Gustafsson (2020)** discussed how the pandemic accelerated digital transformation and reshaped marketing and retail strategies. They noted that the lockdowns created a surge in online shopping and increased demand for digital payment methods, which consumers are likely to continue using even post-pandemic.
- **Pantano et al. (2020)** investigated the role of innovation in retail during COVID-19 and found that retailers who adapted to contactless delivery, e-commerce platforms, and virtual customer engagement were more successful in maintaining consumer loyalty.
- **Bhatti et al. (2020)** analyzed online shopping behaviour during the lockdown and found that consumers were increasingly relying on e-commerce due to convenience, safety, and product availability. Their study emphasized that even traditionally reluctant users adopted online platforms, especially for essentials.
- **KPMG India (2021)** reported that consumer spending patterns in India saw a shift towards value-based consumption. The report highlighted that while spending on non-essential items dropped, categories like health, hygiene, and home essentials witnessed growth.
- **McKinsey & Company (2020)** conducted a global survey that revealed a reduction in discretionary spending. They found that consumers were becoming more mindful, purchasing only necessary products and prioritizing savings amid economic uncertainty.

- **Soni and Soni (2021)** explored changes in rural consumer behaviour in India, finding that the pandemic bridged the digital gap between urban and rural consumers. Even rural consumers showed a growing tendency to adopt digital platforms for shopping and payments.
- **Mohan and Patil (2021)** highlighted the psychological effects of the pandemic on consumer behaviour, such as anxiety, fear of contamination, and social distancing preferences, which led to increased demand for touch-free services and safer retail environments.
- **Chaturvedi and Dubey (2022)** emphasized the role of social media and digital marketing in influencing consumer choices during and after the pandemic. Their study found that consumers increasingly rely on peer reviews, influencer marketing, and online information before making purchase decisions.
- **NielsenIQ (2021)** conducted a study that noted a lasting impact of COVID-19 on Indian consumers' preferences. They found that habits formed during the pandemic—such as cooking at home, online grocery shopping, and preference for trusted brands—have become embedded into consumer behaviour.

In summary, the literature suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic has not only transformed how consumers interact with the market but also redefined their values, needs, and decision-making processes. These behavioural shifts are likely to persist and evolve, influencing marketing strategies and consumer engagement in the long term.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study the changes in consumer buying behavior post-COVID-19.
2. To identify the impact of the pandemic on online shopping trends.
3. To examine consumer preferences for health and hygiene products.
4. To analyze shifts in brand loyalty and financial spending priorities.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- ✓ **Data Collection:** Primary data through structured questionnaires; secondary data from journals, reports, and articles.
- ✓ **Sample Size:** 200 respondents from urban and semi-urban areas.
- ✓ **Statistical Tools:** Percentage analysis, Chi-square test
- ✓ **Scope of the Study:** Limited to understanding consumer behavior in India with a focus on digital transformation and health awareness.

### ➤ Hypothesis:

**H<sub>0</sub>:** There is no significant change in consumer behavior post COVID-19.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** There is a significant change in consumer behavior post COVID-19.

## ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

- **Sample Size:** 200 Respondents
- Demographic Profile (Brief Overview):
- ✓ **Gender:** 52% Male, 48% Female
- ✓ **Age Group:** 18–25 (35%), 26–40 (40%), 41 and above (25%)
- ✓ **Location:** Urban (70%), Semi-urban/Rural (30%)

**Objective 1: To study the changes in consumer buying behaviour post-COVID-19**

**Table 1: Change in Frequency of Online Purchases**

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Increased	150	75%
Remained Same	30	15%
Decreased	20	10%

**Interpretation:** A significant majority (75%) reported an increase in online purchases post-COVID-19, highlighting the shift toward digital platforms due to lockdowns and health concerns.

**Objective 2: To identify the impact of the pandemic on online shopping trends**

**Table 2: Types of Products Purchased Online Post-COVID**

Product Category	% of Respondents
Groceries & Essentials	60%
Apparel & Fashion	25%
Electronics	10%
Health Products	5%

**Interpretation:** Most consumers turned to online platforms for essentials, with groceries being the most common category. Health and hygiene products were also frequently purchased online.

**Objective 3: To examine consumer preferences for health and hygiene products**

**Table 3: Monthly Spending on Health & Hygiene Products (Before and After COVID-19)**

Spending Category	Before COVID (%)	After COVID (%)
Sanitizers & Masks	5%	80%
Immunity Boosters	10%	60%
Organic/Healthy Food	15%	55%

**Interpretation:** There was a dramatic increase in health-related spending, indicating heightened consumer awareness about wellness and safety.

**Objective 4: To analyze shifts in brand loyalty and financial spending priorities**

**Table 4: Brand Loyalty Post COVID-19**

Brand Loyalty Change	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Switched Brands	120	60%
Remained Loyal	80	40%

**Interpretation:** 60% of respondents reported trying new brands due to availability issues, price differences, or better quality.

**Table 5: Spending Behavior on Essentials vs. Luxury Items**

Spending Type	Increased	Decreased	No Change
Essentials	65%	10%	25%
Luxury Items	15%	70%	15%

**Interpretation:** Most consumers increased spending on essentials while reducing luxury purchases, showing a shift toward value-based consumption.

### Chi-Square Test: Relationship between Age Group and Online Purchase Increase

Age Group	Online Purchases Increased	No Change/Decreased	Total
18-25	60	10	70
26-40	55	25	80
41+	35	15	50
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>200</b>

#### Hypothesis:

**H<sub>0</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between age group and increase in online purchases.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** There is a significant relationship between age group and increase in online purchases.

**Chi-square Calculated Value:** 6.72

**Degree of Freedom (df):** 2

**Critical Value at 5% Significance Level:** 5.99

**Interpretation:** Since the calculated chi-square value (6.72) > critical value (5.99), we reject the null hypothesis. This indicates a significant relationship between age group and increase in online shopping post-COVID-19.

#### MAIN FINDINGS

- Increase in Online Purchases:** Approximately 75% of respondents reported a significant increase in online shopping after the onset of COVID-19, reflecting a long-term behavioural shift toward digital platforms.
- Preference for Essential Goods Online:** Consumers primarily used e-commerce platforms to purchase groceries (60%) and health-related items, indicating a move toward convenience and safety in shopping.
- Health and Hygiene Awareness:** Spending on health and hygiene products (sanitizers, masks, and immunity boosters) saw a sharp rise, showcasing increased health consciousness among consumers.
- Change in Brand Loyalty:** 60% of respondents admitted to switching brands during the pandemic, mostly due to unavailability of regular brands or better pricing from alternatives.
- Shift toward Value-Based Consumption:** There was a notable increase in spending on essential goods (65%) and a decrease in luxury spending (70%), indicating more cautious and need-based consumption.
- Demographic Differences in Behaviour:** The chi-square test revealed a statistically significant relationship between age group and online shopping behaviour, showing that younger age groups adopted online channels more readily.

#### SUGGESTIONS

- Strengthen E-Commerce and Delivery Infrastructure:** Retailers should invest in robust online platforms, quick delivery services, and user-friendly apps to cater to the growing base of digital consumers.
- Promote Health and Hygiene Product Lines:** Companies can capitalize on consumer interest by expanding their product lines to include organic, sustainable, and immunity-boosting items.
- Flexible Brand Positioning:** Brands should focus on offering competitive pricing, quality assurance, and availability to retain newly acquired customers and rebuild loyalty.

4. **Targeted Marketing Strategies:** Marketing campaigns should be tailored by age group, with younger consumers being more receptive to digital campaigns and older consumers requiring trust-building messages.
5. **Encourage Contactless and Digital Payment Modes:** Businesses should continue promoting cashless and touch-free transactions, which are now a preferred payment method for many consumers.
6. **Develop Local and Sustainable Products:** Given the growing preference for local goods, companies should partner with regional suppliers and promote “Made in India” labels to strengthen consumer trust and support.

## CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about transformative and lasting changes in consumer behaviour, especially in the Indian context. This study, based on a sample of 200 respondents, reveals a pronounced shift toward digital consumption, health consciousness, and value-based purchasing. The analysis shows that consumers have adapted to new ways of shopping, with a clear preference for online platforms due to safety, convenience, and accessibility.

There has also been a heightened awareness of health and hygiene, leading to increased spending on related products. Financial uncertainty and job insecurities have made consumers more cautious and price-sensitive, resulting in reduced discretionary spending and a focus on essential goods. Brand loyalty has diminished, with many consumers exploring alternatives based on availability and price, which poses both a challenge and an opportunity for marketers.

Demographic factors, particularly age, have influenced the rate and nature of behavioural changes. Younger consumers have shown a quicker adaptation to online shopping and digital payment methods. The findings underscore the need for businesses to adapt rapidly by strengthening digital infrastructure, offering value-driven products, and engaging customers through targeted and trust-based strategies.

Overall, the pandemic has accelerated existing trends and introduced new patterns of consumption that are likely to persist. Companies, retailers, and policymakers must acknowledge these shifts and develop innovative, flexible strategies to meet the evolving needs of the post-COVID consumer.

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