

A Study on Consumer Product Buying Behaviour during the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract: The field of consumer behaviour is huge and it basically deals with studying how the consumers behave towards the products and services they utilize that are available in the market. Many factors are influencing consumer behaviour especially in terms of purchasing and recent times such as the Covid-19 pandemic has shown us how drastically it can change consumers' perception leading to the change in their buying habits. The purpose of this study is to find out how much influence the pandemic have made on the consumers living in Chitlapakkam, Chennai, India in their product purchasing practices with structured questionnaires and the findings from the survey result helps us to determine whether they will continue the same purchase practices when the pandemic gets over or not.

Keywords: Buying habits, consumer behaviour, Covid-19 pandemic, influencing, products and services, product purchasing.

1. Introduction

The study which is trying to understand customers' actions in matters of selection, purchase, usage and disposal of products and services whether they are in groups, or alone or in organizations for satisfying their wants and needs. Marketers try to analyse the motives behind the customers towards the goods and services in the marketplace and in turn they can display those goods in ways consumers will be satisfied. It is assumed that consumers play the role of actors in the marketplace like the actors playing their parts in films and movies. Those roles can be of an information searcher, a user, a purchaser or a disposer in various consumptions scenarios. The nature of consumer behaviour is influenced by factors such as variations in customers, product varieties, geographical locations, and personal components like perception, motivation, needs and wants. Consumer behaviour is constantly changing with time and information also keeps upgrading. The study on consumer behaviour is generally used by marketers of various organizations, respective governments, and researchers to inspect the attitude of customers in the marketplace. To understand the expectations of customers, consumers' buying behaviours are analysed by the marketers to see what actions they take in regards to buying a product to quench their needs, their likes and dislikes, their motives, how often they purchase and the time of their purchase. The Covid-19 pandemic hit the world suddenly and has dramatically changed the way people

Perceive things where they have become more health conscious than before. The lives of the people are impacted in a way that their living situation, what they bring, and how often they have physical communication also changed. Consumers are very deeply concern about their health and economy which are influencing their purchasing habits too and they are not willing to adapt also. The crisis created an unease and panic among the customers that they are panic-buying food, hygiene and essential products for themselves and their families and friends. And if they don't purchase from physical stores, they are using online applications for buying goods. Thus, the producers now gradually understand how to adapt to the present crisis scenario to meet customers' needs and wants.

Chitlapakkam is a small sub-urban area located just outskirts of Chennai and comes under Kancheepuram district. Just like the rest of the world, that small location is also affected by the Covid-19 crisis. People were panic-buying from the local grocery shops and supermarkets to have bulk products for themselves. This study is conducted to understand in what way the crisis impacted on the customers residing there.

2. Problem Statement, Objectives and Need of the Study

1) Statement of Problem

Covid-19 pandemic has a change that it is difficult to comprehend them. There is huge amount of fear among people from contracting the virus with increasing number of Covid-19 cases in the world. That in turn drastically changed the consumer behaviour pattern especially in terms of buying products and questions have been raised in regards to that. How much impact did the pandemic have on the customers? What factors are responsible for that? What steps they have taken for product purchases during lockdown, restrictions and quarantining? And will they follow the same pattern after the crisis gets over or will they return to their old buying habits?

2) Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to understand in what way the crisis impacted on the consumers residing in Chitlapakkam, Chennai in regards to their purchasing behaviours. The other objectives are to find out the factors that influenced the buying habits and to analyse the scenarios the outbreak had on those buying habits.

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3) Need of the Study

The need to do this study is that it can give an internal visibility on the characteristics displayed by the customers with their recent change in their consumption patterns, to understand the impact of the outbreak on them and what type of products they are consuming more and their need to continue the same buying habit or not.

3. Review of Literature

A. Ludvik Eger, Lenka Komárková, Dana Egerová, Michal Mičík “The effect of COVID-19 on consumer shopping behaviour: Generational cohort perspective”

This study deals with the changes in consumer behaviour concerning the people living in Czech Republic through generations of X, Y and Baby Boomers during the second wave of COVID-19 pandemic. They used a multiple regression analysis model to see how the fear factor has influenced the shopping activities of the customers. They found similarities and differences that influenced all the generations and the study seems to support the cohort theory of changes in consumer behaviour in the crisis of Central European area.

B. Muhammad Naeem “Do social media platforms develop consumer panic buying during the fear of Covid-19 pandemic”

Panic buying by customers have created an unwavering effect on the world due to Covid-19 pandemic and one of the main reason behind are the usage of social media for spreading fear among consumers. This research papers deals with understanding what factors were responsible for social media to make people panic buy during the crisis. They found that factors like persuasive buying, unavailability of goods, uncertainty, experts’ opinions and communication by authorities are the reason behind the people trying to stockpile products in hurry in the pandemic.

C. Mary Loxton, Robert Truskett, Brigitte Scarf, Laura Sindone, George Baldry, Yinong Zhao “Consumer Behaviour during Crises: Preliminary Research on How Coronavirus Has Manifested Consumer Panic Buying, Herd Mentality, Changing Discretionary Spending and the Role of the Media in Influencing Behaviour”

This study deals with analysing the consumer buying behaviour during the Covid-19 pandemic using Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs to understand people’s panic buying mentality, herd behaviour and patterns seen during the crisis with the consumers of the American and Australian markets. They found that similar to other global crisis that happened before Covid-19, the behaviours of consumers is aligned with history when they analysed the timings of consumer spending pattern, volume in which they spend, high demand of goods and distribution level of those goods.

D. Micheal Keane, Timothy Neal “Consumer panic in the COVID-19 pandemic”

This research paper talks about the day-to-day index they built using keywords found on Google search for 54 countries from 01/01/2020 to 30/04/2020 related to Covid-19 crisis and they generated an econometric consumer panic behaviour

model. They found through the index that the panic behaviour is widely spread in almost every country and the increase in cases, restrictions are the reasons behind consumer panic behaviour.

E. Acee-eke, Beatrice Chinyere (Phd) and Dr.Ogonu, Gibson Chituru “Covid-19 effects on consumer buying behaviour of departmental stores in rivers state”

This study examines the consumer buying behaviour during Covid-19 pandemic of the departmental stores in Rivers State, Nigeria. They used correlation statistical research method with staffs of the departmental stores as the respondents. They used a 4-pointer scale for the study and they found regression coefficient of 0.813 after the data analysis which revealed that border closing and market shutdown with 51.6% and 44.8% constituted a change in consumer buying behaviour in the area. There is a significant relationship between consumption pattern in regards to Covid-19 pandemic and consumer buying behaviour with 57.8% interactions. They recommended that stores should make their online presence more and revitalize for meeting customers’ needs and wants during crisis period.

4. Research Methodology

The research design used for this study is a descriptive and empirical research design. Both primary and secondary data sources such as journals, internet and Google form are used. The population for this study focuses on the students, working professionals and individuals, and homemakers. The sample size is 37 respondents. Non-probability sampling technique is used based on the responses on the Google form. Online research and structured questionnaires are used for data collection. Percentage analysis is used as the data analysis tool.

5. Data Analysis and Interpretation

Structured questionnaires are used for the percentage analysis purpose to evaluate the data of the respondents and fresh data tables and graphs are gathered which are shown in the below images.

A. Age

Table 1
Age

Age Range	Percentage	Number of Responses
15-25	56.80%	21
25-35	29.70%	11
35-45	5.40%	2
45-55	0%	0
56 and above	8.10%	3
Total	100%	37

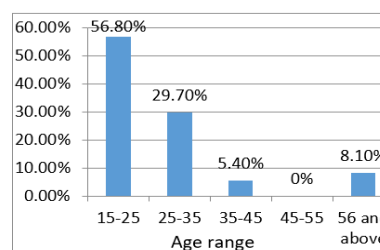


Fig. 1. Age graph

1) Inference

The highest number of people who responded is in between the age from 15 years to 25 years old with 21 responses. The second highest are between 25 years old to 35 years with 11 responses. The age between 45 to 55 years old don't have any responses.

B. Gender

Table 2
Gender

Gender	Percentage	Number of Responses
Male	43.20%	16
Female	54.10%	20
Other	0%	0
Prefer not to say	2.70%	1
Total	100%	37

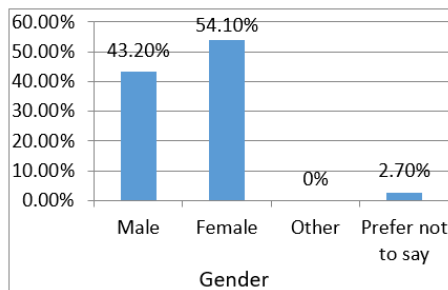


Fig. 2. Gender graph

1) Inference

The highest numbers of responses were by female in 54.1% with 20 responses. The second highest were the male in 43.2% with 16 responses. Only one person prefers not to say his or her gender.

C. "Are you employed?"

Table 3
Employed or not

Employed	Percentage	Number of Responses
Yes	35.10%	13
No	65.20%	23
Maybe	2.70%	1
Total	100%	37

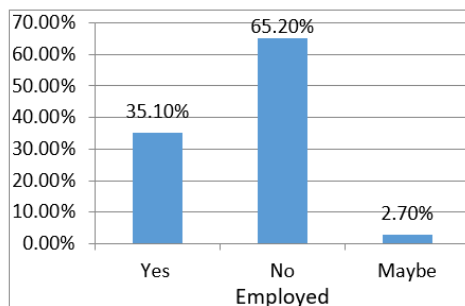


Fig. 3. Employed or not graph

1) Inference

The highest number of people who responded is not employed in 65.2% with 23 responses. And then only 13 people who responded are employed in 35.1%.

D. "What is your feeling during this pandemic time?"

Table 4

Feelings

Feelings	Percentage	Number of Responses
Worried	54.10%	20
Anxious	40.50%	15
Frustrated	54.10%	20
Bored	56.80%	21
Irritated	40.50%	15
Calm	27%	10
Lonely	37.80%	14
Productive	16.20%	6
Happy	13.50%	5
Unbothered	10.80%	4
Inspired	2.70%	1
A little of everything	2.70%	1

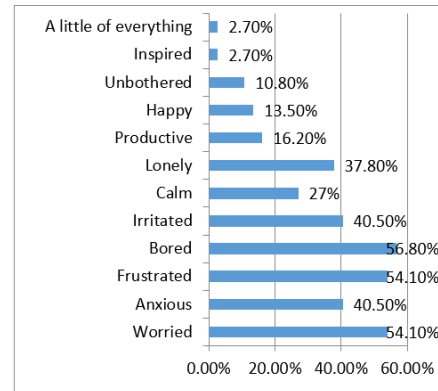


Fig. 4. Feelings graph

1) Inference

Maximum people are feeling worried, bored, frustrated, anxious and irritated. Only a few has any positive feeling in this pandemic.

E. "If you are employed, then has it been affected by Covid-19?"

Table 5
If employed, affected by Covid-19

If Employed	Percentage	Number of Responses
Yes	26.70%	8
No	26.70%	8
Maybe	40%	12
Not employed	6.60%	2
Total	100%	37

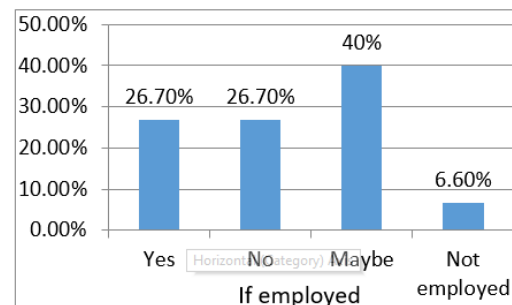


Fig. 5. If employed affected by Covid-19 graph

1) Inference

Majority of the people are may be sure or may be not that their employment is affected by Covid-19 with 40% responses. And 26.7% responses for sure are affected in employment and 26.7% are not affected.

F. "What type of shopping do you normally prefer?"

Table 6
Shopping preference

Preference	Percentage	Number of Responses
Online	24.30%	9
Going outside	24.30%	9
Both	51.40%	19
Total	100%	37

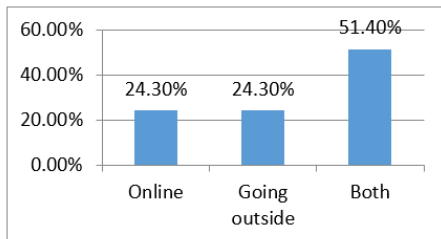


Fig. 6. Shopping preference graph

1) Inference

It is seen from above that in a normal situation; people prefer both shopping online and going to the marketplace with the highest percentage at 51.4%. Only 9 people prefer online fully, and 9 people prefer going outside fully.

G. "During lockdown period or quarantine period or generally in this pandemic, from where did you buy your products?"

Table 7
Buying preference

Preference	Percentage	Number of Responses
Online	73.00%	27
Going outside	24.30%	9
Both	2.70%	1
Total	100%	37

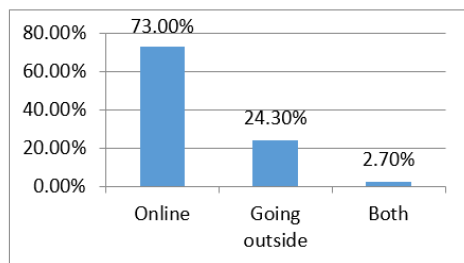


Fig. 7. Buying preference graph

1) Inference

From the above graph, we see that during the pandemic there has been a huge increase in people preferring to buy products online with 73% rather than going outside to any shops or marketplace.

H. "How has the virus outbreak affected your shopping?"

Table 8
Shopping outcome

Consequence	Percentage	Number of Responses
No effect	35.10%	13
Increased shopping	16.20%	6
Decreased shopping	51.40%	19

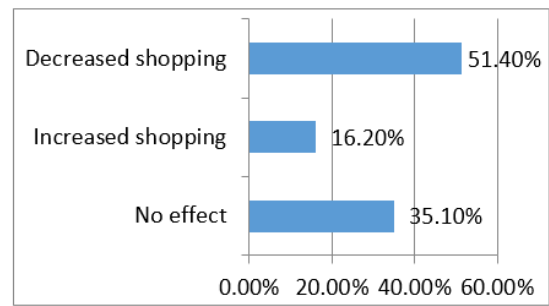


Fig. 8. Shopping outcome graph

1) Inference

It is seen that people has seen a slight decrease in preference of shopping of items in 51.4% with 19 responses. 13 people have stated that they had seen no effect and 6 people had seen an increase in their shopping.

I. "What affect did this outbreak bring into for you to buy groceries?"

Table 9
Buying groceries outcome

Consequences	Scale of 10
Increased greatly	9
Decreased greatly	7
Stay the same	9
Decreased slightly	7
Increased slightly	6

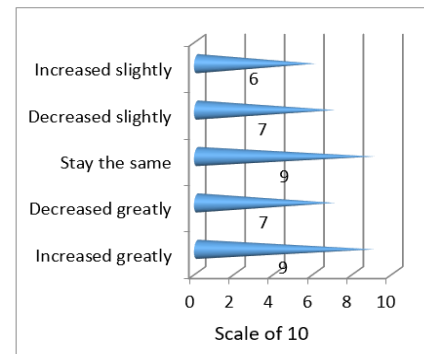


Fig. 9. Buying groceries outcome graph

1) Inference

In terms of buying groceries, it is seen that people either had kept the same habit or the habit has increased a bit. Only in few instances, it decreased a bit from the normal routine in this pandemic.

J. "Apart from groceries, which type of product did you purchase?"

Table 10
Other product buying outcome

Consequence	Percentage	Number of Responses
Clothes/Accessories	32.40%	12
Household items	27%	10
Personal Care products	29.70%	11
Gifts/luxury items	0%	0
Electronics	8.10%	3
Books	2.70%	1
Total	100%	37

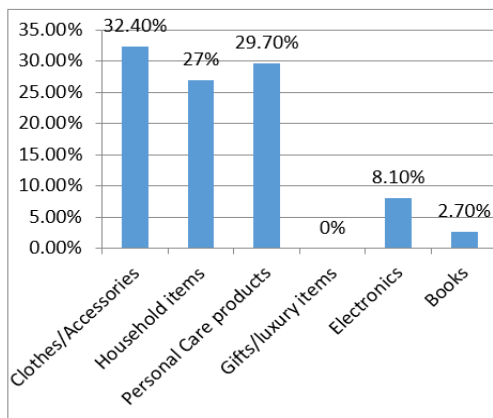


Fig. 10. Other product buying outcome graph

1) Inference

From the above graph, apart from buying groceries, people have bought more clothes/accessories 32.4%, personal care products in 29.7% and household items in 27%. The least types of people bought were books, no gifts and electronics.

K. "Since the corona-virus outbreak, why did you increase in purchasing products online?"

In this questionnaire, people had given reasons on why they increased purchasing products online in this Covid-19 pandemic. The most common reasons are as follows:

- Safety
- Social distancing
- Lack of mobility
- Avoiding coming in human contact

L. "Which element do you look for when you buy a product?"

Table 11
Buying element

Elements	Percentage	Number of Responses
The store reputation	2.70%	1
The product reputation	62.20%	23
Price	29.70%	11
Quality	2.70%	1
All of the above	2.70%	1
Total	100%	37

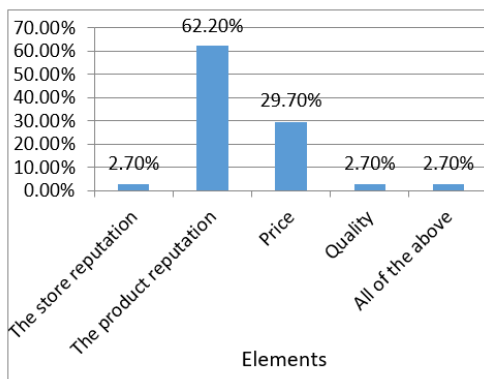


Fig. 11. Buying element graph

1) Inference

It is seen from the above majority of the people prefer the product reputation in 62.2% before checking for any other

elements to buy a product. The second highest element is the price factor in 29.7%. The store reputation and quality don't really matter by people.

M. "While shopping for a product, do you prefer checking out competing/other shops for a lower price?"

Table 12
Checking out other shops

Preference	Percentage	Number of Responses
Yes	62.20%	23
No	8.10%	3
Maybe	29.70%	11
Total	100%	37

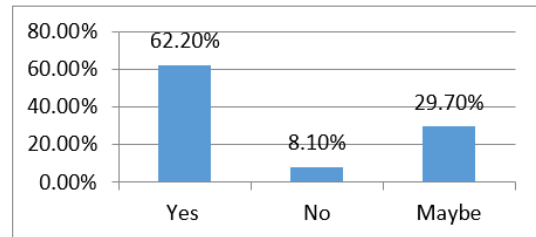


Fig. 12. Checking out other shops graph

1) Inference

Here, majority of the people prefer checking out other shops for less prices of the same product in 62.2%. And other majority may be or may not be checking out other shops at 29.7%

N. "Would you still continue the practice of purchasing products that you acquired during Covid-19 even after the pandemic?"

Table 13
Practice continue after Covid-19

Preference	Percentage	Number of Responses
Yes	51.40%	19
No	5.40%	2
Maybe	43.20%	16
Total	100%	37

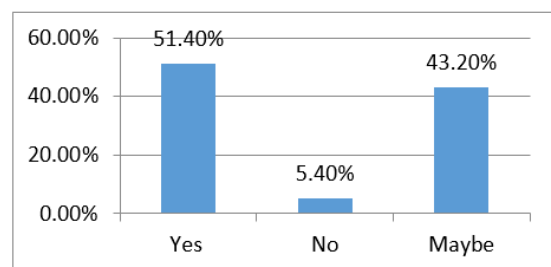


Fig. 13. Practice continue after Covid-19 graph

1) Inference

When asked if they would continue to have the same habit of shopping followed in this pandemic, majority said yes in 51.4% and other in 43.2% said may be.

6. Findings

Below are the results that are found after the data analysis.

- Maximum numbers of respondents are between the age ranges 15-25 years.
- Highest numbers of respondents are female at 54%.
- Maximum respondents are not employed at 65%.

- People are mostly worried, bored, frustrated, anxious and irritated.
- Respondents who replied they are employed maybe or may not be sure if the pandemic has affected their employment.
- The normal method for shopping of products for respondents are hybrid, i.e., online and offline at 51%.
- But, in the Covid-19 crisis, online method of shopping has increased considerably by about 73%.
- And due to the fear during the pandemic, there has also been considerable amount of decrease in shopping by about 51%.
- In buying groceries, shopping has increased in a great amount.
- Other than groceries, people also bought clothes, personal care products and household items more.
- The reason respondents have when asked why they increase purchasing products online are safety, social distancing, avoiding human contact and lack of mobility.
- Respondents say that they look for the product reputation more than other elements when they purchase a product by about 62%.
- And when they purchase a particular product, they do check out others/competitive shops for lower prices.
- Lastly, respondents say that they will continue to carry on the same habit of buying products online even after the Covid-19 crisis by about 51%.

7. Suggestions

It can be said that consumers are gradually becoming the important factor in determining companies' existence in the market or not. They can have more focus on that element. When crisis occurs, companies can adopt in fulfilling customers' needs and wants and that is what is seen is happening when eventually relaxations were given during the pandemic. Discounts, rewards and offers are a good way to attract the customers more if they don't want to venture to check out the competitors. Companies can apply hybrid methods of shopping for targeting their customers or maybe they can provide fully online services for their products as it is where the future is going. More emphasis can be given on essential and health related product to be displayed as people are becoming more conscious on health related lifestyles than luxury items procurement.

8. Strengths and Limitations of the Study

The first strength is that it helped to understand how the different consumers living in the small region of Chitlapakkam, Chennai, India behaved during the pandemic. The second strength is that the study gives a clear picture for companies to see how they are going to meet customers' needs and wants when a crisis comes in the future with changing consumer buying behaviour. The first limitation is that due to the study being conducted for such a small area in Chennai city, there

isn't opportunity for an extensive study is not possible because of only 37 responses. The information quality is highly dependent on the responses that are gathered. Also due to the pandemic, the study process is done totally online and time period of the study is focused only on the year 2020-21.

9. Conclusion

This study mainly focuses on seeing how the behaviour of consumers changes in matter of buying products from the normal routine to this Covid-19 pandemic situation. Many journals are used for this study and percentage analysis method is used to do the research using primary and secondary sources focusing on the various categories of population and gathering responses using non-probability sampling method. Based on the data analysis, it is seen that employed people's income had some kind of effect but they are not sure about it. People are frustrated, worried and anxious. The youngsters are specifically conscious about the situation and females are more aware of everything going on. They prefer online shopping rather than hybrid method because the pandemic changed their perception towards the crisis due to safety, social distancing and lack of mobility. There is more essential products purchase than luxurious products and shopping habits also slightly decreased. Hence, it is studied that how online shopping has improved people's lives and they prefer this method of shopping more convenient and suitable for them to continue it even in the future

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