



AN STUDY OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOR TOWARDS ONLINE BUYING IN PANDEMIC COVID-19 SITUATION WITH REFERENCE TO ICHALKARANJI CITY

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Abstract:

Today Internet marketing has become a hot topic in every business sector and it plays a truly vital role in any company's multi-channel marketing strategy. Consumers have become very smart and are increasingly adopting electronic channels for purchasing many products. We can see it very clearly that, consumers have started showing keen interest in e-shopping. In these pandemic COVID 19 situations it seems that people are preferring online shopping to avoid the risk of visiting shops personally. The globalization, competition and development of information technology has enhanced customer awareness and created a situation where people prefer online shopping as it provides quality products, saves cost as well as saves time. Also now on line shopping is providing safety for the people. However, how to apply and utilize internet marketing to attract more visitors to a certain online site is still a big question for a number of advertisers. But this present situation has become an opportunity to attract the customers for online purchase. It is very interesting to know the consumers behavior towards on line buying in this COVID 19 Situation. Though it is the world of on-line marketing it hasn't acquired the market at the most. Keeping this in sight researcher in this paper has tried to know the opinion of consumers on online buying particularly in this present situation of pandemic COVID 19 with reference to Ichalkaranji city by designing a close-ended questionnaire to collect the data.

Key Words: Consumer Behavior, Internet Marketing, Online Shopping, Globalization, COVID 19

I.INTRODUCTION

Today Internet has changed the way in which consumers shop and buy goods and services, and has rapidly developed into a global phenomenon. Many companies have started adopting the internet with the aim of reducing marketing costs, with that reducing the price of the products and services in order to run the business in highly competitive market. Companies use the Internet for many reasons as to convey and communicate the information, to sell the product, to advertise,

to take feedback from the consumes and also to conduct satisfaction surveys amongst consumers. The Internet is used not only to buy the products online, but also to compare the prices, the product features and to check with after sale service facilities etc. Today online marketing has provided the safety too as CORONA is spreading like anything and people are afraid of going for shopping out the online purchasing has become the safe, comfortable and best option for the people.



In addition to the tremendous strength of the E-commerce market, the Internet facilitates a unique and wonderful opportunity for companies to reach existing and potential customers more efficiently. To add to the present situation has become an opportunity for the e retailers to expand their business. Although it is true that most of the revenue of online transactions comes from B to B commerce, the practitioners of B to C commerce should not be neglected. It has been more than ten years since business-to consumer E-commerce first started up. Scholars and practitioners of E commerce continuously strive to gain an improved insight into consumer behavior. With the development of E-retailing, researchers continue to explain E-consumers' behavior from various angles. In the situation of COVID 19 the behavior of the consumers towards online purchasing has become very positive. Many of their studies have posited new factors that are based on the old traditional models of consumer behavior. Online shopping is definitely a great choice to shop with many things available on the websites. From garments, gift items, food items, home needs, medicines etc, this way of shopping allows one to shop conveniently and comfortably without burden of spending hours in a supermarket or shopping malls. Also it enables to avoid crowd which is the major cause of spreading CORONA. The Internet with its wide range of information gives a great chance to the customer to have various reviews of the product or service before actually going for purchases.

However, it is true that all the consumers are not participating in online activities and transactions as part of the internet boom. As much as businesses have continued to establish their online presence, they have found that still many consumers are much reluctant to shift in that online purchasing direction though it is very safe for everyone to buy online in the present situation. For many consumers there are still fear of security and also passing personal information over the internet. On the contrary the threat of getting infected by CORONA is so high that people are becoming positive towards online buying. There is a great difference between the number of consumers visiting the sites and the number of actual buying being made.

Companies before using effective and prominent marketing strategies make analysis of various factors to be considered to convert potential customers into actual ones. Safety has become a major cause with which the e retailers today can convince the people to buy online. Some dominant factors which have impact on consumer behavior of online shopping are Information availability, Easy way of use, Motivational factor, Security/Privacy, discount offers etc. In this paper researcher tries to identify the behavior of the consumers towards on line shopping in general as well as in this pandemic situation of COVID 19 in a small city Ichalkaranji.

II. CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

Marketing:

Marketing is defined by the American Marketing Association as "the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large."

There are four activities, or components, of marketing:

1. Creating -The process of collaborating with the suppliers and customers to create offerings that have value and much more.
2. Communicating- Broadly, describing those of ferings, in simple way as well as learning from customers.
3. Delivering- Getting those offerings to the consumer in such a way that it adds some value.
4. Exchanging - Trading value in terms of money for those offerings.

E-Commerce

E-Commerce or Electronics Commerce is a methodology of modern business, which addresses the need of business organizations, vendors and customers to reduce cost and improve the quality of goods and services where in the speed of delivery, is increased. E-commerce refers to the paperless exchange of business information using many ways as follows:

Electronic Data Exchange (EDI)

- Electronic Mail (e-mail)



- Electronic Bulletin Boards
- Electronic Fund Transfer (EFT)
- Other Network-based technologies

E-Marketing

E-Marketing (Electronic Marketing) is also known as Internet Marketing, Web Marketing, Digital Marketing, or Online Marketing etc. E-marketing is the process of marketing a product or service using the Internet in a wide range. It not only includes marketing on the Internet, but also includes marketing which is done via e-mail and wireless media. It uses a range of technologies to help connect businesses to their customers.

There are two reasons for building the concept of e-marketing around consumer experiences. First, this approach actually forces marketers to adopt the consumer's point of view. Second, it forces most of the managers to pay attention to all aspects of their digital brand's interactions with the consumer, from the design of the product or service to the marketing message, the sales and fulfillment processes, and the after-sales customer service effort. The Internet is like one big point-of-sales display, with easy access to products and the ability for impulse shopping. Impulse shoppers have found really a true friend in the Internet and connect the world. As opposed to the 4 Ps of brick-and-mortar marketing, the changing outlook in the area of e-marketing can be explained on the basis 7 Cs of e-marketing which are as listed below.

- 1) Contract
- 2) Content
- 3) Construction
- 4) Community
- 5) Concentration
- 6) Convergence
- 7) Commerce

Consumer behavior towards on line buying in general as well as in this situation of CORONA threat.

Consumer behavior is the study of individuals, or organizations and the processes consumers use to search, select, use and dispose of products, services, experience, or ideas to satisfy needs and its impact on the consumer and society. With the emergence of the Internet, and its developments provide individuals to gather information about products and services very easily. Commercial

companies have moved to use the Internet for their promotional campaigns and have started to offer the facility of online purchasing. Today innovations 'online shopping' have become a part of our lives. There are many factors which influence consumer behavior to buy online. Chang, et al. (2004) studied on categories of variables which influence online shopping .

The consumer behavior towards online purchasing has drastically changed because of the present situation. People have started becoming sensitive towards buying health related products. Also purchasing online is being preferred. Online purchasing has become a way of life in this situation of COVID 19. People who didn't have the knowledge of online buying have started showing interest in online purchase and have started taking efforts to learn online purchasing.

According to the study, features are divided into four main categories.

- First one is perceived characteristics of the web sale channel which include risk in online buying, advantages and online shopping experience, quality of service given, trust etc
- Second category is belief in web site of online shopping and not actually experiencing the product features.
- Last category is consumer characteristics. Consumer characteristics are influenced by many factors.
- Consumer need of shopping, demographic factors, computer and internet knowledge, psychological factors Consumers' perception, effect of advertisements, online shopping offers etc.
- Very importantly now the threat of having health issues particularly because of COVID 19 has created a strong category of consumers who now will be with online purchase for life time.

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literatures so far reviewed relate to the research work which has been carried outside India especially in the United States where the



online shopping is a true big hit. As taken the case of Indian scenario where the online shopping has entered into the market but the rate of growth is very slow, It is interesting to know the customers perception on this.

Susan Rose, Neil Hair and Moira Clark (2011) found that online purchase continues to rise, as adoption and levels of penetration of Internet technology continuously increase. By 2007, European Internet penetration stood at 43% of the population with a usage growth of 231% year on year. In North America, penetration was at 71% of the population with 120% growth (Internet World Stats 2007). In the US the on line sales reached US\$128.1bn in 2007 and were projected to reach US\$165.9bn by 2009 (source: US Census Bureau 2009).

Haver (2008) found that today's younger, more 'green' buyers won't go to waste precious money, going from store to store looking for the right item. They shop online whenever they can, thereby narrowing their choices to one or two items then go to the store to touch, feel, bounce and check out the actual product to make sure if it looks the way it was represented online.

K.Vaitheeswaran (2013) studied the convenience of online shopping and found that with the product getting standardized, specifications getting fixed and the concept of service getting eroded, the post sale responsibility of the retailer has reduced drastically. Hence now days customers go to stores to experience the product physically but buy online at a cheaper rate. Heavy discounts are given by the companies as there is no question of adding warehouse charges which stimulates the customers buy online.

Archana Shrivastava, UjwalLanjewar, (2011) in India in online buying, the rate of adoption of the online buying amongst consumers is still much low in India. In view of above issue an empirical study of online buying behavior was carried on. Four predominant psychographic parameters such as attitude, motivation, personality and trust were studied with respect to online purchasing. The online buying decision process models based on the four parameters were created. It is found that the psychological factors make huge difference and

make a strong impact on online buying.

J.Sinha 2010 The number of people engaged in various online activities is increasing day by day. Though the number of on-line shoppers has increased, the rate at which it is growing is less. Researcher has tried to compare online shopping to the physical shopping format. Rea

sons for the lower level of Internet sales have been found as being perceived risk in carrying out an online transaction and some socio-psychological factors.

IV. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To find the consumer awareness and perception towards online buying.
2. To study the factors influencing online buying.
3. To analyze the relation between age and on line buying.
4. To know the overall behavior of consumers towards online buying.
5. To know the type of products purchased by consumers through online shopping.
6. To know the change in behavior towards online buying because of COVID 19.
7. To explore the reasons of positive behavioral changes towards online buying in the situation of COVID 19.

V. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The theoretical scope of the study includes the popularity of online shopping, the need of virtual markets, their role in influencing the consumption pattern and habits, advantages and disadvantages of e-markets, etc. Also the present situation of COVID 19 and the online buying behavioral changes seen in the consumers has a wide range of scope. The Study was conducted among most of the Internet users and also with those who are health conscious and have turned positively towards online buying because of COVID 19. . The Geographical area covered was Ichalkaranji.

VI. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Maximum care has been taken by the researcher with regard to the collection and analysis of data.



Care was also taken to avoid face to face meeting to collect data. Still, the study is subjected to the following limitations:

1. There were very less studies on the topic and it was a little difficult to deal with this topic.
2. Less sample size, as it is just survey with 100 respondents only.
3. The research is basically based on primary data, hence it cannot be argued that the research is applicable in each condition, time& place.
4. The research is done in short time duration, within such short span of time it is too much difficult to analyze the topic.
5. Lack of customer support, was one more limitation.
6. The study is conducted in the situation of COVID 19 and it may be the temporary behavioral change of the consumers towards online buying and may change when the situation becomes normal.

VI. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

An empirical study was carried out using a survey method, which contains the close-ended type of questions.

Sample Design: Research was conducted in Ichalkaranji city in Kolhapur District of Maharashtra State and on line buying consumers as well as others who use internet but not for online buying, were considered as the universe of the study. The sample design helped the researcher to conduct the research in a proper way.

- The universe of the study (Total Population): Universe of this research is unknown.
- Sample Unit: Mostly consumers who buy online
- Sample Size: The actual sample size was 150 consumers but unusable responses were 50 among total population and usable responses were 100. Hence, final sample size is 100.
- Sampling Method: The researcher has used simple Random Sampling method to carry out research.

Data Collection:

- Primary data: The researcher has used structured questionnaire to collect the primary data.
- Secondary Data: The researcher has used many sources to collect secondary data like Books, Journals, Magazines, and Internet.

Statistic used: Chi-square test, Graphs, Tables etc.

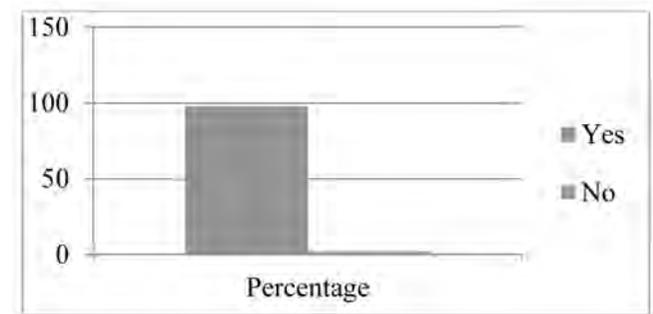
Validity of Questionnaire: To study the given research problem and stated hypothesis, data is collected through questionnaire. The researcher intended to study the relationship between consumers' age and frequency of online buying.

Here, the researcher has assured the validity of statements through extensive literature survey and consultation with experts from both industry and academics.

VII. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table.1- Use of Internet

Response	No of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	98	98
No	2	2



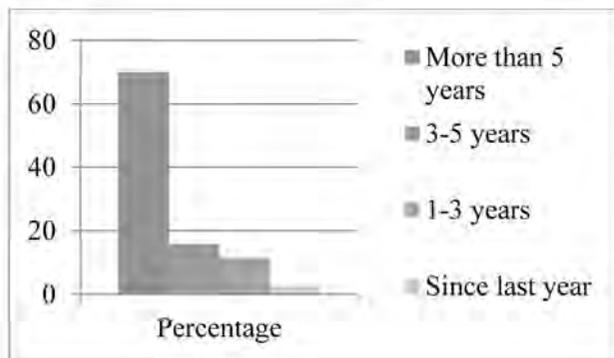
INTERPRETATION: From the above table and chart it is depicted that, 98% of total respondents use internet. It can be stated that the use of internet has become so important that today most of the people have started using it. Also the situation of COVID 19 has made consumers to buy online. The influence of social media and mobile internet has made the use of internet more popular. Life security has become prime priority and hence to



avoid CORONA people have started using internet for many puposes. From the table it is noticed that only 2% of the respondents never use internet for any work.

Table. 2- Longevity of Using the Internet

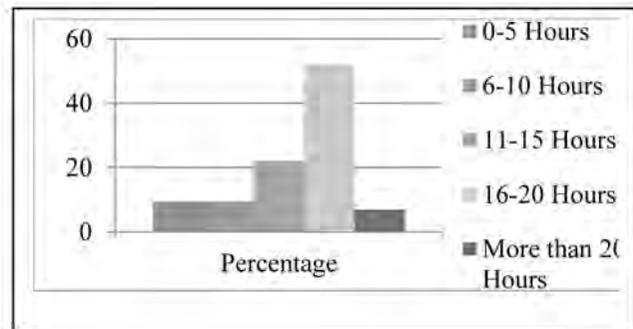
Years	No. of Respondents	Percentage
More than 5 years	70	70
3-5 years	15	16
1-3 years	11	11.5
Since last year	2	2.5



INTERPRETATION: From the above graph it is clear that 70% of the respondents have been using internet from more than 5 years, 16% of them are using from 3-5 years, 11.5% of them are using from 1-3 years and very few i.e. only 2.5% of the respondents have started using internet since last year. Because of COVID 19 situation the internet using longevity also has increased

Table.3- Time spent on surfing the web (Per Week)

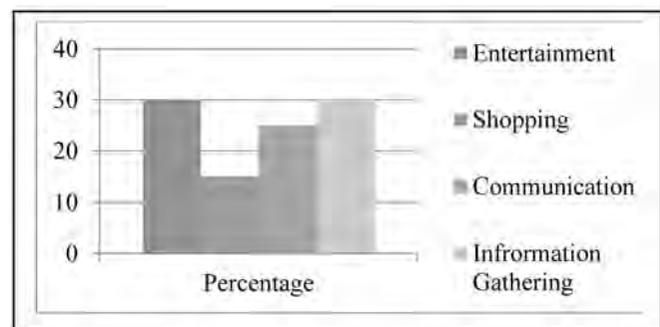
Time Spent	No of Respondents	Percentage
0-5 Hours	9	9.5
6-10 Hours	9	9.5
11-15 Hours	22	22
16-20 Hours	51	52
More than 20 Hours	7	7



INTERPRETATION: With the increasing use of internet people have started contributing in surfing web. From the above table it is clear that 52% of the respondents spend 16-20 hours/week in surfing the web, 22% of them spend 11-15 hours/week, 9.5% of them spend 6-10 hours/week and less than 5 hours/week each. And 7% of the respondents spend more than 20 hours/week in surfing the web. The respondents who spend more time on web surfing are more young ones than the old ones. It can be said that present generation is well versed with internet. Also these young generation is teaching the old one the use of internet for the benefit purpose and to avoid going out of homes in this situation of COVID 19. To safeguard against the CORONA infection people have started working online and hence the use of internet has increased.

Table.4- Major Reason for surfing internet.

Particulars	No of Respondents	Percentage
Entertainment	29	30
Shopping	15	15
Communication	25	25
Information Gathering	29	30

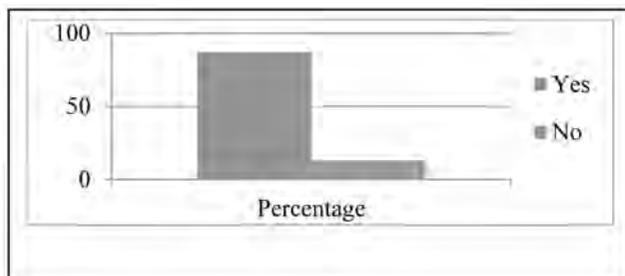




INTERPRETATION: From the survey it is found that 30% of the respondents say most of the time the reason for using internet is to gather information, 25% of the respondents use it more for communication purpose, 30% of them use it mainly for the purpose of entertainment and 15% of them use it primarily for shopping purpose. It shows that there are significant numbers of people who use internet for the major reason of online shopping. The present threatening situation of COVID 19 has made people purchase online. It shows that with the advent of technology and internet services e-shopping has become a major source of purchase even in small towns of India.

Table.5- Number of respondents who have done online purchasing

Particulars	No of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	85	87
No	13	13



INTERPRETATION: With the increasing awareness of internet online purchase habit also has increased. From the above graph it can be seen that 87% of the respondents have done online purchase and rest 13% of them have never done any online purchase. Most of the respondents said that because of COVID 19 they have switched to online purchasing. In a small town like Ichalkaranji if 87% of the sample units have done online purchase before then it means there has been quite a good awareness and habit of online shopping amongst the people.

Table.6- Age and frequency of online shopping.

Age	Monthly	Half Yearly	Yearly	Total
16-25	08	07	05	20
26-35	12	08	06	26
36-45	10	06	07	23
46 and above	05	05	06	16
Total	35	26	24	85

Ho: There is no relationship between consumer's age and online buying habits.

H1: There is significant relationship between consumer's age and online buying habits.

Hypothesis Testing:

Let us first calculate the degrees of freedom (DF) using the formula, $DF = (r - 1) * (c - 1)$

Where 'r' is the number of levels for one categorical variable and 'c' is the number of levels for the other categorical variable.

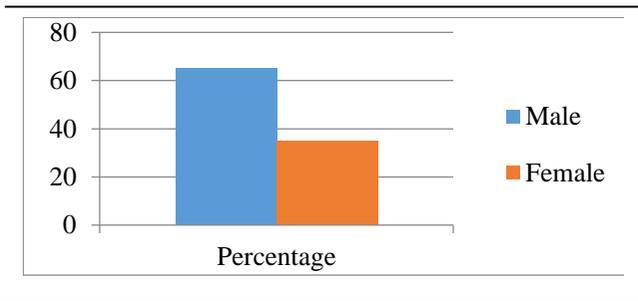
$$\begin{aligned} \text{Therefore, } DF &= (4 - 1) * (3 - 1) \\ &= 3 * 2 \\ DF &= 06 \end{aligned}$$

The chi-square value for the given data is found to be 1.7 which is less than table value at 5% significance level for degree of freedom 6 and hence we accept the null hypothesis. So we can say that there is no relationship between age and online buying habits.

INTERPRETATION: From the survey it is clear that there exists no relation between age of consumers and their online buying habits. With the growth of internet and advancement in technology, also with the awareness of advantages of online shopping and because of COVID 19 situations consumers of all age classes prefer on line shopping.

Table.7- Relation between online shopping and gender.

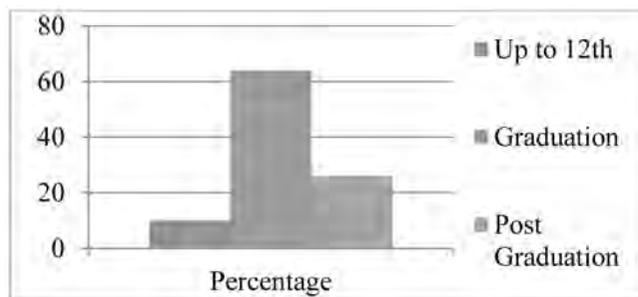
Gender	No of Respondents	Percentage
Male	55	65
Female	30	35



INTERPRETATION: From the above graph it is depicted that majority of respondents who do online shopping are males. That is, the survey indicates that out of online shoppers 65% are males and rest 35% are females. It can be stated from the survey that female customers prefer to physically touch, feel and see the product and its demonstration to take the purchase decision whereas male customers are observed to be quick decision makers while online purchasing. Though being like this many females have turned to online purchase in this COVID 19 situation.

Table.8- Relation between online shopping and Educational qualification.

Qualification	No of Respondents	Percentage
Up to 12 th	08	10
Graduation	54	64
Post Graduation	23	26

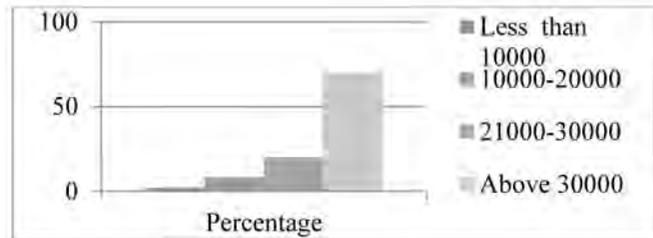


INTERPRETATION: From the survey it is observed that there is a bit of relation between habit of online purchasing and educational qualification of people. The behavioral pattern of respondents here indicate that, more they are educated they tend to purchase online more than the uneducated

ones. The survey here shows that amongst those who prefer online shopping 90% of them are either graduates or post graduates or professional degree holders whereas 10% of them are having qualification 12th or less than it. These educated now a days are helping the uneducated to buy online in this threatening COVID 19 situation.

Table. 9- Relation between online shopping and Monthly Income.

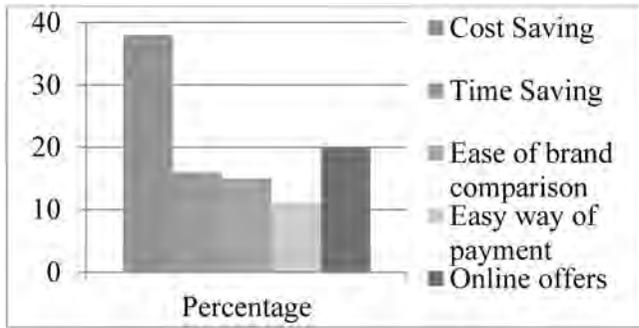
Monthly Income (In Rs)	No of Respondents	Percentage
Less than 10000	2	2
10000-20000	7	8
21000-30000	17	20
Above 30000	59	70



INTERPRETATION: From the above graph it is found that monthly family income of 70% of online purchasers' is above 30000Rs, for 20% of purchasers it is in the range of 21000Rs-30000Rs, for 8% of them it is in the range of 10000Rs-20000Rs and monthly family income of rest 2% of purchasers is less than 10000Rs. It is also found that irrespective of what the income is people are preferring online purchase in this situation to safe guard the healths.

Table.10- Relation between online shopping and Motivational factor.

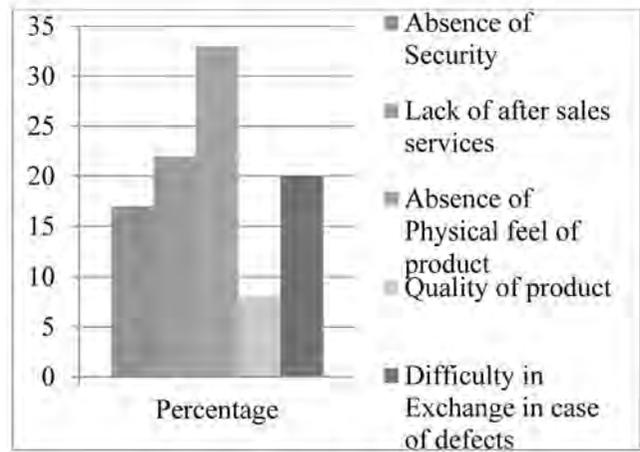
Motivational Factor	No of Respondents	Percentage
Cost Saving	32	38
Time Saving	14	16
Ease of brand comparison	13	15
Easy way of payment	9	11
Online offers	17	20



INTERPRETATION: From the above graph it can be concluded that 38% of respondents consider cost saving to be important factor to purchase online, 16% consider time saving, 15% consider ease of brand comparison, 11% consider easy way of payment and 20% of them consider online offers as motivating factors to purchase online. Many respondents added that COVID 19 situation has become motivation to buy online. It has become safety motivation for the people to go online.

Table.11- Respondents opinion about most severe drawback of online buying.

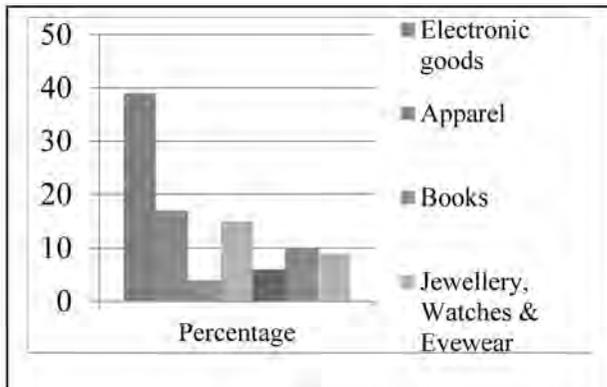
Drawbacks	No of Respondents	Percentage
Absence of Security	17	17
Lack of after sales services	21	22
Absence of Physical feel of product	33	33
Quality of product	8	8
Difficulty in Exchange in case of defects	19	20



INTERPRETATION: The current survey reveals that 33% of respondents who buy online consider absence of physical feel of product as major drawback, 22% of them consider lack of after sales services, 17% of them consider absence of security as major drawback, 8% of them are worried about quality of product and 20% of respondents believe that difficulty of exchanging defective products is a major hurdle in online purchasing at times. Though the drawbacks are there respondents are positive towards online buying only because of COVID 19 situation.

Table.12- Products mostly preferred for online purchase.

Products	No of Respondents	Percentage
Electronic goods	33	39
Apparel	14	17
Books	3	4
Jewellery Watches & Eyewear	13	15
Toys and Baby products	5	6
Sports, fitness and outdoors	9	10
Others	8	9



INTERPRETATION: From the above graph it can be stated that electronic goods are mainly preferred to be purchased online amongst various category of products. From the survey it is observed that 39% of online purchasers responded that they prefer electronic goods for online purchase, 16.5% prefer apparel, 4% prefer books, 15.5% prefer either jewellery, watches or eyewear, 6% prefer toys/baby products, 10% of purchasers prefer sports/fitness, outdoor products and rest 9% of them prefer other products while purchasing online. In given situation of COVID 19 people are preferring all type of products to be purchased online.

VIII.FINDINGS

1. The use of internet has become so important that today most of the people have started using it. The influence of social media and mobile internet has made the use of internet more popular. The situation of COVID 19 has made people use more internet.
2. It is found that use of internet has increased drastically from the last 5 years. COVID 19 has given rise of more use of internet in these last 6-8 months.
3. The respondents who spend more time on web surfing are more young ones than the old ones. It can be said that present generation is well versed with internet. Young generation also is teaching use of internet to the old on to safeguard ones against COVID 19.
4. There has been quite a good awareness and habit of online shopping amongst the people. It has increased with the situation of COVID 19.

5. It is found that there are significant numbers of people who use internet for the major reason of online shopping. It shows that with the advent of technology and internet services e-shopping has become a major source of purchase even in small towns of India. Particularly the pandemic situation of COVID 19 has made people purchase every small thing online to avoid physically going out of home.
6. It is found that males prefer online shopping more than the females. Normally female consumers prefer to physically touch, feel and see the product and its demonstration to take the purchase decision whereas male customers are observed to be quick decision makers while online purchasing. But it is found that even females have switched to online purchasing to avoid being in crowd and making purchases. It is very clear that males as well as females prefer safety first to everything else.
7. It is observed that there is a bit of relation between habit of online purchasing and educational qualification of people. The behavioral pattern of respondents here indicates that, more they are educated they tend to purchase online more than the uneducated ones. But in the situation of COVID 19 educated are teaching uneducated the ways of online buying.
8. It is found that, as the income of the consumers' increase, they tend to go for more online purchasing. But now the situation has made people buy online in spite of whatever their income is.
9. It can be concluded that people consider safety factor, avoiding crowd and cost saving to be important factor to purchase online.
10. People consider physical feel of product as major drawback followed by factors like lack of after sales services, absence of security, quality of product and difficulty of exchanging defective products while purchasing online.
11. It is found that electronic goods, health related products and regular use products are mainly preferred to be purchased online amongst various categories of products. COVID 19



situation has made people buy online almost everything.

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