

Digital Marketing's Impact On Consumer Behavior Amidst The COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a disruption of consumer purchasing patterns, leading to notable transformations in the realm of digital marketing. During the period of lockdown, the majority of non-essential production activities were suspended and commercial enterprises were shuttered, while the demand for fundamental and indispensable commodities experienced a persistent increase. The consumer population experienced a state of shock, leading to a surge in panic purchasing and stockpiling of essential groceries and health and safety products. The sudden shift in consumer demands has led to a transformation of existing market trends, resulting in the expansion of digital marketing. Furthermore, it appears that consumers exhibit a strong interest in the promotional content of products that are displayed on electronic media. Amidst the lockdown period, the unavailability of printing and advertising media necessitated a reliance on digital marketing as the sole avenue for online marketing. The current investigation endeavours to examine the phenomenon of panic buying and the influence of digital marketing on the promotion of essential health and safety products. A survey was conducted among consumers to investigate the impact of digital marketing on consumer purchasing behaviour during the Covid-19 pandemic. Data was gathered from 247 individuals residing in Patiala city, and statistical methods were utilised to determine the statistical significance of the relationships. The study's results indicate that digital marketing has had a favourable impact on consumer purchasing behaviour by stimulating their interest in preferred products.

Keywords: Buying behaviour, Panic buying, COVID-19, Digital Marketing, Consumer Buying Behaviour.

1. INTRODUCTION

Digital marketing has become a crucial strategy for promoting businesses in contemporary times and is a commonly referenced term in the field of marketing. The strategy encompasses a diverse array of methods, such as digital branding via electronic mail, promotional materials, and social networking platforms including Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. In order to thrive in the current competitive market, marketers must possess proficiency in digital marketing

techniques to align with prevailing market conditions. Individuals allocate a significant portion of their time utilising digital technologies and social networking platforms, which can serve as a viable avenue for corporations to advertise their products and services. Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the utilisation of digital technology has experienced a significant surge. Since the onset of the previous year, the global community has been grappling with the outbreak of the Coronavirus, which rapidly disseminated across the globe and resulted in significant human fatalities. In order to mitigate the transmission of Covid-19, a comprehensive lockdown was enforced, which restricted individuals to their respective residences exclusively. The general populace was solely permitted to venture outside for the purpose of procuring indispensable commodities such as sustenance and medication. Brodeur and colleagues (2020). Undoubtedly, the measure of imposing confinement upon individuals within their residences has proven effective in mitigating the widespread transmission of the virus. However, this approach has also resulted in a psychological burden upon the populace. The individuals experienced emotions of fear, depression, lack of knowledge, and panic in response to the unavailability and scarcity of essential resources. Li and colleagues (2020). The current circumstances of confinement, isolation, and social distancing have had an impact on individuals' purchasing patterns. According to Hevia (2020), during the lockdown period, conventional marketing channels such as visually appealing billboards and printed advertisements were largely unaffected due to the fact that a significant proportion of the population refrained from leaving their homes. Consequently, individuals resorted to utilising web browsing as a means of procuring essential commodities and seeking amusement through online platforms. The prominence of digital marketing has escalated in recent times, serving as the primary marketing channel for marketers to connect with their customers (Jasniewski, 2020). In order to transition into the digital realm, companies have altered their marketing tactics to include social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and other similar channels to engage with potential customers.

2. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of this study is to examine the impact of Digital Marketing on Consumer purchasing behaviour during the Covid-19 pandemic.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Yasmin, A. et al. (2015) emphasised the efficacy of digital marketing in the contemporary period. The research findings suggest that companies employ innovative skills and strategies to promote their products or services. To enhance the effectiveness of these efforts, companies need to implement appropriate actions and exert efforts.

Singh, S.N. et al.(2016) pertains to the essential requirements and tactics involved in digital marketing. The findings suggest that India is experiencing a swift transition towards digitization, driven by a growing population of technologically adept individuals who are increasingly inclined to allocate a significant portion of their leisure time to digital platforms. The current market conditions present a favourable opportunity for retailers to enhance brand recognition and consumer awareness. The study has concluded that individuals' purchasing behaviours are undergoing a transformation as they progressively transition from traditional

brick-and-mortar shopping to e-commerce. In order to remain competitive in the market, it is imperative for marketers to embrace digital marketing strategies.

Sathya, P. (2017) conducted an investigation that brought to light the effects of digital marketing on small enterprises. The research findings indicate that small businesses can derive greater benefits, cost savings, and advantages from utilising digital marketing strategies. The statement elaborates that digital marketing can potentially enhance a company's success, provided that it places utmost importance on meeting the needs and wants of its consumers.

Bala, M. et al. (2018) conducted a study with the aim of conducting a critical analysis of current and future trends in the field of digital marketing. The research findings suggest that digital marketing can facilitate the growth of any enterprise due to its various advantages, including e-commerce marketing, e-books, e-mail direct marketing, and search engine optimisation. The researchers additionally exhibited that individuals who utilise social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram exhibit a favourable disposition towards digital marketing. Due to its cost-effectiveness, it proves advantageous for small businesses.

Gibson, C. (2018) conducted by the author disclosed the most efficacious approaches and strategies of digital marketing in business enterprises, educational establishments, and non-profit organisations. The primary platform for businesses to advertise their products is the internet, as it enables them to utilise various strategies such as e-mail marketing, search engine optimisation (SEO), search engine marketing (SEM), online advertising, and other similar techniques. This assertion can be drawn from the available evidence. Furthermore, the comparative analysis conducted between traditional and modern marketing approaches provided a comprehensive understanding of the advantages associated with digital marketing.

Patel, J. et al. (2020) The study was conducted with the aim of comprehending the most recent developments and impacts of the pandemic on e-marketing. The objective was to furnish academicians, marketers, and organisations with insightful reviews of e-marketing, thereby enabling them to stay abreast of the recent changes in e-marketing that have taken place globally. The research revealed the necessity for constructive communication with clientele via digital channels. Moreover, it was found that there is a requirement to embrace novel devices that facilitate electronic transactions. The study was constrained by its narrow focus on the initial effects of digital marketing.

Vijai, C. et al. (2020) According to the author's findings, a significant number of respondents shifted their purchasing behaviour during the pandemic to prioritise essential goods such as fruits and vegetables over branded products. The individuals exhibited a preference for remaining in their residences and utilising electronic payment methods for their purchases. Through reducing their expenses, they were able to augment their savings, resulting in a transformative impact on their overall lifestyle.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The objective of this research is to examine the impact of digital marketing on consumer purchasing behaviour, with a particular focus on the Patiala district of Punjab. A survey was administered utilising a randomised sampling methodology via a questionnaire and Google Form. A total of 247 responses were obtained and subsequently subjected to analysis using SPSS. Factor Analysis has been utilised to investigate latent factors linked to consumer purchasing behaviour.

5. DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

The analysis of demographic information indicated that among the 247 participants, 102 were identified as male and 145 were identified as female. Regarding their marital status, 107 individuals were unmarried while 140 were wedded. The age group of 18-25 years and 26-30 years constituted the largest proportion of the respondents. In relation to educational attainment, a majority of 66% of the participants held professional certifications, while 39% of the respondents were engaged in entrepreneurial pursuits. The analysis of the demographic data indicated that the participants were predominantly youthful, with a majority of them engaged in business-related activities.

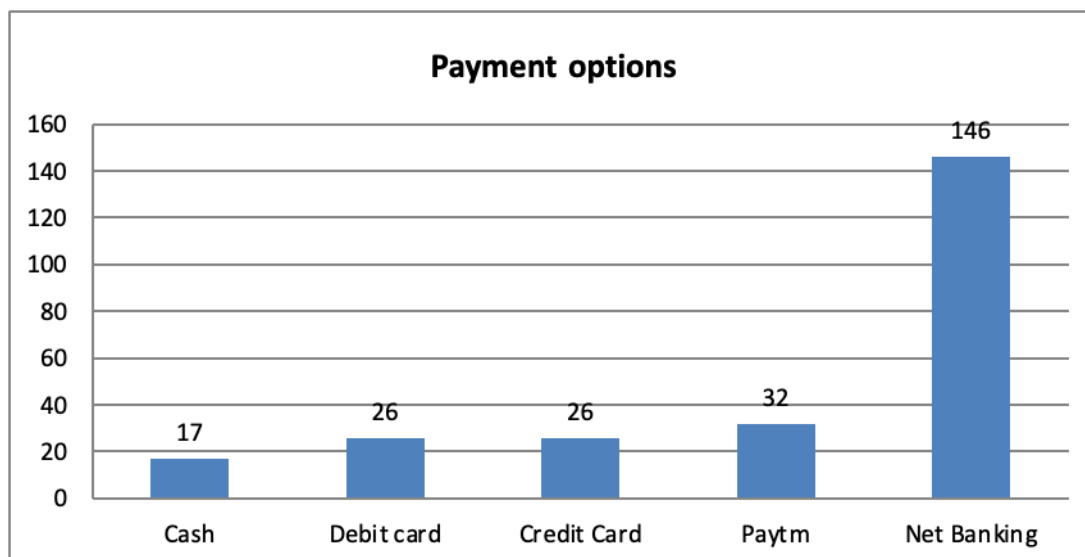


Figure1: “During lockdown, I preferred to make payment through”

Further, it was also revealed from the study that while making payments of goods, maximum respondents preferred Net Banking instead of paying in cash.

6. DATA ANALYSIS

To study the buying pattern of respondents, they were asked questions regarding the frequency of their purchases, shopping experience, preferences about the mode of payment and nature of purchasing, etc. The following tables show the responses related to the above-cited issues.

Table1: Responses regarding the frequency of purchasing

| Frequency of Purchasing | | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------|---------|--------------------|
| Response | Frequency | Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| NO | 13 | 5.3 | 5.3 |
| Yes | 234 | 94.7 | 100.0 |
| Total | 247 | 100.0 | |

The table 1, provides information on the frequency of purchasing as reported by the respondents. The responses are divided into two categories: "NO" and "Yes."

According to the table, out of the total 247 respondents, 13 individuals (5.3% of the total) answered "NO" when asked about the frequency of their purchasing. This indicates that these respondents did not engage in purchasing during the given period or had very infrequent purchasing habits.

On the other hand, the majority of the respondents, 234 individuals (94.7% of the total), answered "Yes" to the question, indicating that they engaged in purchasing activities during the specified period. This group represents the individuals who made regular or frequent purchases.

The cumulative percent column shows the accumulation of percentages as we move down the table. It reveals that the "Yes" responses account for the entire 100% of the cumulative percent, indicating that all respondents participated in purchasing to some extent.

Overall, the table suggests that a significant majority of the respondents (94.7%) reported engaging in purchasing activities during the given period, while a small proportion (5.3%) did not make any purchases or had very infrequent purchasing habits.

Regarding the frequency of purchasing, 94.7 percent responded that they purchased more frequently.

Table2: Responses regarding cosmetic and branded products

| "I avoided cosmetic and branded products during lockdown" | | | | |
|--|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Response | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Yes | 88 | 35.6 | 35.6 | 35.6 |
| No | 159 | 64.4 | 64.4 | 100.0 |
| Total | 247 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

The table 2, presents responses related to the avoidance of cosmetic and branded products during the lockdown period. The responses are divided into two categories: "Yes" and "No."

According to the table, out of the total 247 respondents, 88 individuals (35.6% of the total) answered "Yes" when asked if they avoided cosmetic and branded products during the lockdown. This indicates that these respondents consciously chose to refrain from purchasing or using such products during that time.

On the other hand, the majority of the respondents, 159 individuals (64.4% of the total), answered "No," indicating that they did not avoid cosmetic and branded products during the lockdown. This group represents individuals who continued to purchase and use such products despite the prevailing circumstances.

The "Percent" column indicates the proportion of each response category in terms of the total number of respondents. For example, 35.6% of the respondents answered "Yes" and 64.4% answered "No."

The "Valid Percent" column represents the percentage distribution after excluding any missing or invalid responses. In this case, it aligns with the "Percent" column, as there are no missing or invalid responses.

The cumulative percent column shows the accumulation of percentages as we move down the table. It indicates that the "Yes" responses account for 35.6% of the cumulative percent, while the "No" responses account for the remaining 64.4%, resulting in a cumulative total of 100%. In summary, the table reveals that a significant proportion of the respondents (35.6%) consciously avoided purchasing or using cosmetic and branded products during the lockdown period. However, the majority of the respondents (64.4%) did not avoid such products and continued to engage with them.

So, The results revealed that 64.4 percent avoided buying cosmetic and branded products during the time of Lockdown. Therefore, the results from the above two statements revealed that residents were involved in the frequent purchase of essential goods only.

6.1 BUYING BEHAVIOUR PATTERN

Respondents were asked various questions regarding buying behaviour and their responses were received on 5 points Likert scale i.e. Strongly Disagree(SD), Disagree(D), Uncertain(U), Agree(A), Strongly Agree(SA).The following table shows the result of their buying behaviour during lockdown period.

Table3: Responses on buying Behaviour Pattern of respondents

| | Statement | SD | D | U | A | SA |
|----|---|----|----|----|-----|-----|
| 1 | Experience Product shortage at Store | 0 | 32 | 9 | 30 | 176 |
| 2 | Stocking up products during Pandemic | 8 | 3 | 22 | 50 | 164 |
| 3 | Prefer online purchase as compare to the local store | 0 | 22 | 20 | 112 | 82 |
| 4 | I prefer to delay purchase any unnecessary products | 0 | 12 | 2 | 14 | 219 |
| 5 | During Pandemic I prefer to buy more eatables & grocery | 14 | 16 | 19 | 100 | 98 |
| 6 | I prefer to store medicine i wouldn't store otherwise | 2 | 6 | 2 | 21 | 216 |
| 7 | I prefer to purchase Herbal Products during Pandemic | 2 | 24 | 12 | 91 | 118 |
| 8 | I have to pay more for buying many products | 69 | 71 | 71 | 27 | 9 |
| 9 | Online mode of effective advertisement is Online SNS | 0 | 15 | 9 | 26 | 197 |
| 10 | I suspend my order due to Pandemic | 17 | 26 | 34 | 31 | 139 |

The participants were queried on diverse aspects of their purchasing behaviour. The participants were queried regarding the accessibility of merchandise at retail establishments, and a significant proportion of the sample (176 individuals) reported encountering a dearth of products at these locations. The participants exhibited a high level of agreement regarding the importance of product stocking as a means of preventing inventory shortages. Therefore, both statements are complementary to one another. In previous inquiries pertaining to consumer preference for purchasing methods, a total of 219 participants expressed a strong inclination towards utilising online platforms for both purchasing and payment transactions, as opposed to traditional cash-based methods. The findings presented in Statements 4, 5, 6, and 7 indicate that during the specified period, there was a greater inclination towards essential goods such as groceries, medicines, and herbal products, while non-essential items did not experience significant demand. The exclusive means of advertising utilised in this study was social digital media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, among others, which were found to exert a significant impact on the decision-making process of the respondents.

6.2 FACTOR ANALYSIS

Factor analysis is a statistical method employed to identify latent factors among variables that exhibit shared characteristics and strong correlation. The method of principal components analysis was employed to identify the salient factors. The subsequent table presents the Total Variance Explained (TVE) and Eigenvalues of components. **Table3: Total Variance Explained (TVE)**

| | Initial Eig. value | | | Ext. Sums of Sqr. Loadings | | | Rotation Sums of Sqr. Loadings | | |
|----|--------------------|---------------|---------|----------------------------|---------------|--------|--------------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| | Total | % of Variance | Cum. % | Total | % of Variance | Cum. % | Total | % of Variance | Cum. % |
| 1 | 2.373 | 23.731 | 23.731 | 2.373 | 23.731 | 23.731 | 2.113 | 21.133 | 21.133 |
| 2 | 1.563 | 15.629 | 39.360 | 1.563 | 15.629 | 39.360 | 1.492 | 14.919 | 36.051 |
| 3 | 1.358 | 13.585 | 52.945 | 1.358 | 13.585 | 52.945 | 1.475 | 14.751 | 50.802 |
| 4 | 1.028 | 10.277 | 63.221 | 1.028 | 10.277 | 63.221 | 1.242 | 12.419 | 63.221 |
| 5 | .957 | 9.571 | 72.793 | | | | | | |
| 6 | .904 | 9.039 | 81.832 | | | | | | |
| 7 | .730 | 7.297 | 89.129 | | | | | | |
| 8 | .435 | 4.348 | 93.476 | | | | | | |
| 9 | .406 | 4.065 | 97.541 | | | | | | |
| 10 | .246 | 2.459 | 100.000 | | | | | | |

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

The Eigenvalues serve as an indicator of the relative importance of the latent variables. The table above indicates that solely four factors exhibit noteworthy Eigenvalues, surpassing the value of 1. The cumulative contribution of the four factors is 63.221%, indicating their substantial impact. This observation suffices to account for the significant contribution of these factors. Four factors have been identified based on data analysis. **FACTORS INFLUENCE CONSUMER FOR BUYING**

Factor-1 (Stocking Up): The onset of the pandemic caused widespread concern among consumers regarding potential price increases and product shortages, leading to a surge in the stockpiling of essential goods. The act of stockpiling goods was a prevalent occurrence among the participants. The investigation uncovered that marketers have effectively capitalised on this trend by leveraging digital marketing strategies to incentivize consumers to increase their purchases. Stocking up accounts for 23.133% of the total variance.

Factor-2 (Prefer to Buy Essential Products): The findings of the study indicate that consumers exhibited a preference for purchasing essential items such as groceries and medicines, while displaying a tendency to avoid luxury and cosmetic products. This factor accounts for 14.91% of the total variance. During the Covid-19 outbreak, digital marketing was utilised to promote the consumption of essential products.

Factor-3 (Online preference): The sole advertising medium accessible to reach customers during the lockdown period was digital marketing. The data indicates that a significant proportion of customers exhibited a preference for purchasing products and remitting payment through digital channels. This factor accounts for 14.75% of the total variance.

Factor-4 (Buying Medicated products): The purchase of medicated products by consumers has significantly contributed to a sudden shift in demand, resulting in a shortage of goods in the market. Furthermore, digital media has had a beneficial impact in promoting the purchase of medicinal items such as immunity-boosting products, vitamins, medicated soaps, and sanitizers among consumers. This variable accounts for 12.419% of the overall variance.

The holistic perspective of these factors illustrates that the marketing strategy for consumers amidst the pandemic has emphasised the promotion of online purchasing of essential goods, medicinal items, and life-saving products. The consumer behaviour observed a preference for stockpiling essential products while refraining from purchasing non-essential items.

7. CONCLUSION

The global economy has been significantly impacted by the outbreak of COVID-19, resulting in a state of uncertainty and instability. Production and manufacturing operations were suspended, and individuals were compelled to remain in their residences and adhere to social distancing measures. The government enforced a comprehensive lockdown for a period of several months in order to mitigate the transmission of Covid-19. The aforementioned decision caused a state of panic among the populace, resulting in a sudden surge in demand for essential and medicinal commodities, ultimately leading to a scarcity of said goods in the market. The present study observed a sudden shift in consumer purchasing behaviour during this period, and concluded that this change was attributed to panic buying of products. The present study employed exploratory factor analysis to investigate four factors, with the aim of formulating a

theoretical framework positing that consumers prioritised the purchase of essential goods during the lockdown period, while avoiding non-essential items. The act of storing goods for future consumption by consumers has been observed to lead to an increase in both price and demand. It has been disclosed that the price of items does not play a significant role in purchasing behaviour during a pandemic-like scenario. Digital marketing provides marketers with the opportunity to effectively promote their products to their target audience.

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