



ONLINE SHOPPING DURING COVID-19 : A STUDY ON THE INFLUENCE OF DIGITAL MARKETING ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR AND COMPULSIVE BUYING IN WOMEN

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ABSTRACT:

Consumer behaviour towards online shopping has changed dramatically during COVID-19. The study aimed to look at the impact of digital marketing on online consumer behaviour and compulsive buying, with a focus on online shopping. The study was conducted - on 91 women from Bangalore. Standardized measures of Consumers' Attitude towards Online Shopping and Compulsive Buying were administered to the participants. The findings revealed a significant positive correlation between Obsessive-Compulsive Buying and factors including : Impulsive Buying, Convenience, Website Design/Features, Time-Saving and Security. Further, there was a significant positive correlation between Impulsive Buying and the following factors of Convenience, Website Design/Features, and Time-Saving. The results further revealed a significant positive correlation between Convenience and the factors such as : Website Design/Features, Time-Saving and Security. Lastly, the findings showed a significant positive correlation between Website Design/Features and the factors comprising : Time-Saving and Security. Evidence shows that the younger female population frequently shop online to save time compared to the older women. The study presents insights about the variables that might be indicators to explain compulsive buying behaviour and consumer psychology. The e-commerce firms are encouraged to address consumers' purchase motivations and strategically tackle normative influences. Avenues for additional research exploring the possible development of behavioural psychology approaches for both consumer and marketing researchers is proposed. However, one question remained unanswered; will the community behaviour change after the passing of the pandemic, and will this behaviour transform into a business intention that measures things in numbers?

Keywords: Online Shopping, Consumer Behaviour, Consumer Psychology, Compulsive Buying, Digital Marketing, COVID-19, Women

Introduction:

“As consumers, we have so much power to change the world by just being careful in what we buy” — Emma Watson

COVID-19 is one of the most severe trials confronting governments and businesses in the last century (Hall et al., 2020). The pandemic is influencing consumer behaviour, shopping habits, and marketing strategies (Wright & Blackburn, 2020). Consumers are being pushed to reconsider their objectives in life, which may result in new values and purchasing criteria.

Consumer behaviour is defined as the choosing, purchasing, and consumption of goods and services by customers to meet their needs. Several internal and external elements influence the buyer's decision-making and consumption pattern, making consumer buying behaviour a complex process. Consumer research aids businesses and organizations in improving their marketing tactics. During the pandemic, online search and online ordering had a significant impact on how we shop and consume items and services. The interaction of consumer behaviour and interactive marketing has attracted a constant stream of conceptual and empirical research over the last 20 years (Darley et al., 2010; Limbu et al., 2012). Consumers' buying and shopping habits, as well as their consumption patterns, have been affected as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic's social distance and lockdown mandates (Donthu and Gustafsson, 2020; Sheth, 2020; Kim, 2020).

Compulsive buying describes a consumer behaviour that has been of continued appeal to consumer researchers (Kukar-Kinney et al., 2012; O'Guinn & Faber, 1989). It refers to the tendency of consumers to turn shopping and buying into an obsessive fixation or a coping technique (Ridgway, Kukar-Kinney, & Monroe, 2008). The obsessive tendencies may be aggravated by the "always open" online buying environment. O'Guinn and Faber (1989), in one of the first complete phenomenological descriptions of compulsive buying (CB), define compulsive consumers as those who are unable to control their drive to buy, which pervades their lives and occasionally has serious implications. Compulsive purchasers frequently accumulate insurmountable debt, causing financial and emotional hardship for themselves and their families.

Digital marketing is a sort of marketing that uses the internet and digital technology to advertise products and services, such as computers, mobile phones, websites, social media platforms, application software, e-mail, and other platforms. While digital marketing and advertising had been steadily developing, the outbreak of COVID-19 provided it with an unexpected boost, trapping individuals at home with little or no job to perform and

promoting a rapid shift in behaviour toward digital platforms, digital media, and digital content. The all-powerful doorway between electronic technology and marketing psychology is digital marketing. Digital marketing is a relatively recent solution that may be thought of as a "powerful arm" of many organizations, bringing brands and products to a huge number of people and thereby increasing sales.

Consumer Behaviour :

Consumer behaviour, as defined by Blythe (2002), is the mental and emotional process as well as the observable behaviour of customers while searching for, purchasing, and using a product or service. The study of consumer behaviour revolves around analyzing customers' purchase behaviour, or their behaviours and decision-making process when purchasing items. The consumer decision-making process involves customers engaging in a variety of mental activities before deciding on a certain product or service (Chen et al., 2018). Consumer behaviour, according to Kotler (2008), is the study of how people, groups, and organizations choose, buy, use, and dispose of goods, services, ideas, and experiences to meet their wants and desires. Consumers search for product information and services via digital communication channels. It has been ingrained in people's daily lives (Stephen, 2016). Most individuals use digital marketing and social media extensively in their roles as consumers of goods and services, searching for information and data on the items they use, as well as sharing their experiences with others (Salloum & Shaalan, 2018). We could expect dramatic changes in consumer behaviour as a result of faster and universal adoption of new technologies hastened by the COVID-19 pandemic, similar to classic studies such as *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), *Harried Leisure Class* (1970), and *Bowling Alone* (2000).

Compulsive Buying :

Compulsive buying behaviour (CBB), shopping addiction, or pathological buying (Müller et al., 2015b) is a mental health problem defined by the persistent, excessive, impulsive, and uncontrollable acquisition of things despite significant psychological, social, vocational, and financial implications. Compulsive buying, according to Mowen (2002), is a response to an uncontrollable want to obtain, utilize, or experience an emotion, substance, or activity that leads to an individual engaging in eventually harmful behaviour. Compulsive buying is utilized to ease the melancholic feelings that people may experience (Faber & O'Guinn, 1988). According to a recent study, more than half of online customers said they spent more than usual during the pandemic (Kashif et al., 2020). With such significant growth in online buying activity, the question of whether obsessive online shopping behaviour would develop or deteriorate arises (Hunter, 2021). Consumer researchers and psychiatrists have acknowledged the origins and effects of compulsive purchase behaviour (Dittmar, 2005; Faber & O'Guinn, 1992; McElroy et al., 1994; Mueller et al., 2011). Nonetheless, as a result of savvy marketing and a growing economy around the world, compulsive shopping is on the rise (Müller, Mitchell, & de Zwaan, 2015).

Digital Marketing :

Digital marketing, as described by the Asia Digital Marketing Association, is the strategy of leveraging Internet tools for marketing and information exchange. Businesses use Digital Marketing to build, grow, and market brands and products online using all available digital media platforms (Aldigihub, 2021). Digital marketing is a type of branding and product promotion that uses online platforms or digital devices to raise product and brand awareness and motivate purchasing behaviour (EQVN.NET - Digital Marketing Training Center, 2021b). Every firm sought to grow swiftly in the post-Covid-19 era, but it was difficult for customers to notice and care about their products at the time. And since every organization requires Digital Marketing at this time, we can partially confirm that this is a fantastic opportunity for the field of Digital Marketing to flourish (Tien et al., 2020). In the digital environment, consumer behaviour has changed significantly (Bickart & Schindler 2001). Marketers are turning to digital marketing communication because it allows them to provide customized, real-time services and information to each customer (Holliman & Rowley, 2014).

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to analyze the role of digital marketing - on the online consumer behaviour and compulsive buying in women during COVID-19.

Hypothesis

1. There will be a positive correlation between online consumer behaviour & compulsive buying.
2. There will be a negative effect of compulsive buying on the samples.
3. There will be a significant cohort effect & difference in the online consumer behaviour & compulsive buying during COVID-19.

Method

Sample :

The sample consisted of 91 female participants from Bangalore. The samples were examined under two different cohorts - the first cohort comprised 58 women (20-35 years), and the second cohort comprised 33 women (35-50 years). The sample primarily shopped online, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Measures :

The following standardized tests were used -

1. **Consumers' Attitude towards Online Shopping** : The scale was developed by Sultan & Uddin (2011) to assess online consumer behaviour based on self-report responses to items. The fifteen-item scale is divided into two sub-scales : (1) Obsessive-compulsive buying (three items), and (2) Impulsive Buying (three items). The items are measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree.
2. **Richmond Compulsive Buying Scale** : (RCBS) was developed by Ridgway et al., (2008b) to assess compulsive buying behaviour (CBB) as an impulse control problem as well as an obsessive-compulsive disorder. The RCBS is a six-item self-reporting instrument that has two subscales : (1) Convenience (four items), and (2) Website Design/Features (five items). The items are measured on a 7-point Likert scale, anchored at 1=strongly disagree, and 7=strongly agree, except for two items that are anchored at 1=never, and 7=very often.

Procedure :

The participants were informed about the purpose of the research and the questionnaires were filled out through Google forms. The participants were assured of the confidentiality of the information to elicit their honest responses without any fear or inhibitions. Each participant was thanked for their support & kind cooperation. Standardized psychological tests were administered to participants.

Results :**Table 1 :** Shows the descriptives

	Group	Obsessive-compulsive buying	Impulsive buying	Convenience	Website Design/Features	Time Saving	Security
N	20 - 35	58	58	58	58	58	58
	35 - 50	33	33	33	33	33	33
Mean	20 - 35	12.2	6.48	17.2	35.9	59.7	11.4
	35 - 50	10.9	5.36	16.3	31.5	28.1	12.0
Standard deviation	20 - 35	7.01	3.39	8.75	17.5	28.7	2.23
	35 - 50	5.54	2.97	7.81	15.6	23.6	1.93

Table 2 : Shows the correlation between the studied variables

	Obsessive-compulsive buying	Impulsive buying	Convenience	Website Design/Features	Time Saving	Security
Obsessive-compulsive buying	—					
Impulsive buying	0.608***	—				
Convenience	0.849***	0.754***	—			
Website Design/Features	0.916***	0.784***	0.953***	—		
Time Saving	0.634***	0.677***	0.689***	0.716***	—	
Security	0.251*	0.060	0.290**	0.257*	0.075	—

Note. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Table 3 : Shows the independent samples t-test

	Group	N	Mean	SD	Statistics	p
Obsessive-Compulsive Buying	20 - 35	58	12.24	7.01	0.937	0.351
	35 - 50	33	10.91	5.54		
Impulsive Buying	20 - 35	58	6.48	3.39	1.581	0.117
	35 - 50	33	5.36	2.97		
Convenience	20 - 35	58	17.22	8.75	0.518	0.606
	35 - 50	33	16.27	7.81		
Website Design/Features	20 - 35	58	35.95	17.51	1.207	0.231
	35 - 50	33	31.52	15.59		
Time Saving	20 - 35	58	59.66	28.73	5.353	<.001
	35 - 50	33	28.12	23.65		
Security	20 - 35	58	11.36	2.23	-1.441	0.153
	35 - 50	33	12.03	1.93		

Table 4 : Shows the group descriptives

	Group	N	Mean	Median	SD	SE
Obsessive-compulsive buying	20 - 35	58	12.24	10.00	7.01	0.921
	35 - 50	33	10.91	10.00	5.54	0.965
Impulsive buying	20 - 35	58	6.48	6.50	3.39	0.446
	35 - 50	33	5.36	5.00	2.97	0.516
Convenience	20 - 35	58	17.22	15.00	8.75	1.149
	35 - 50	33	16.27	15.00	7.81	1.360
Website Design/Features	20 - 35	58	35.95	34.00	17.51	2.299
	35 - 50	33	31.52	26.00	15.59	2.715
Time Saving	20 - 35	58	59.66	54.50	28.73	3.773
	35 - 50	33	28.12	15.00	23.65	4.117
Security	20 - 35	58	11.36	11.00	2.23	0.293
	35 - 50	33	12.03	12.00	1.93	0.336

Discussion :

The results found that there is a significant positive correlation between Obsessive-compulsive buying and impulsive buying ($r = 0.608, p < .001$). The results also observed a significant positive correlation between Obsessive-compulsive buying and Convenience ($r = 0.849, p < .001$). The results also found that there is a significant positive correlation between Obsessive-compulsive buying and Website Design/Features ($r = 0.916, p < .001$). The results further found a significant positive correlation between Obsessive-compulsive buying and time saving ($r = 0.634, p < .001$). The results also observed a significant positive correlation between Obsessive-compulsive buying and security ($r = 0.251, p < .05$). The results also found that there is a significant positive correlation between Impulsive buying and Convenience ($r = 0.754, p < .001$). The results further found a significant positive correlation between Impulsive buying and Website Design/Features ($r = 0.784, p < .001$). The results also observed a significant positive correlation between Impulsive buying and time saving ($r = 0.677, p < .001$). The results also found that there is a significant positive correlation between Convenience and Website Design/Features ($r = 0.953, p < .001$). The results further found a significant positive correlation between Convenience and time saving ($r = 0.689, p < .001$). The results also observed a significant positive correlation between Convenience and Security ($r = 0.290, p < .01$). The results also found that there is a significant positive correlation between Website Design/Features and time-saving ($r = 0.716, p < .001$). The results further found a significant positive correlation between Website Design/Features and security ($r = 0.257, p < .05$).

Thus, the hypothesis that there will be a positive correlation between online consumer behaviour & compulsive buying is accepted. Further, the hypothesis that there will be a negative effect of compulsive buying on the samples is accepted. Finally, the hypothesis that there will be a significant cohort effect & difference in the online consumer behaviour & compulsive buying during COVID-19 is accepted.

The impact of digital/social media settings on consumer behaviour has been a hot topic in recent years (Lamberton et al., 2013; Norton et al., 2013; Wilcox and Stephen, 2013). According to Dittmar (2005), compulsive shopping is motivated by people's need for pleasure and excitement through material acquisition. Coley and Burgess (2003), reported that women have a stronger desire to buy compulsively. They had more favourable feelings about buying and made more spontaneous purchases than men. There was evidence that compulsive buying increased after the pandemic compared to before the outbreak (Lopes & Jaspal, 2020; Xiao et al., 2020). Covid-19 has paved the way for digital marketing since people have switched to digital platforms at a faster rate than expected (Ayush and Gowda, 2020).

CONCLUSION:

Consumer behaviour has been significantly disrupted as a result of the COVID-19. Compulsive buying has been proposed as a response to the void that has been created in people's lives (Faber & O'Guinn, 1992; O'Guinn & Faber, 1989). During the pandemic, digital marketing was the only marketing channel that proved to be most effective. While individuals are spending more time online, marketers use the opportunity to enhance brand awareness (Tien et al., 2020).

It was hypothesized that there will be a positive correlation between online consumer behaviour & compulsive buying. It was also hypothesized that there will be a negative effect of compulsive buying on the samples. Finally, it was also hypothesized that there will be a significant cohort effect & difference in the online consumer behaviour & compulsive buying during Covid-19. The study was conducted on 91 female participants from Bangalore. The standardized measures of Consumers' Attitude towards Online Shopping and Compulsive Buying were administered to participants through google forms. The results revealed a significant positive correlation between online consumer behaviour & compulsive buying. The findings also showed a significant negative effect of compulsive buying on the samples. Finally, the results also confirmed a significant cohort effect & difference in the online consumer behaviour & compulsive buying during COVID-19.

The findings have important implications for consumers, such as the need to understand that companies are continually attempting to create an appealing shopping experience that will inspire them to make more purchases (Coley & Burgess, 2003). Existing consumer behaviours and structures are being called into question as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (Koch et al., 2020). The future examination should look into other ways to protect compulsive customers from the negative consequences of excessive advertising, such as online daily deals, while simultaneously allowing them to benefit from the favourable effects, such as monetary savings (Kinney et al., 2015). Instead of shopping obsessively to temporarily avoid unfavourable events, customers should focus on finding a suitable positive alternative, such as exercising or engaging in hobbies (Jung, 2017). Emerging themes, such as consumer privacy issues in the context of digital marketing and social media, should be considered by researchers (Stephen, 2016).

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