



Consumer Preferences of Grocery E-Tailing in India

Dr. Meeta Multani

Principal, Shri Parasamal Bohra Netraheen Mahavidyalaya Jodhpur, Rajasthan (342006), India

ABSTRACT-

1. Introduction: "Online grocery shopping is gradually evolving from a niche activity to a day-to-day affair of most people's lives, and a silent revolution is underway that is empowering consumers". (Doherty & Ellis-Chadwick, 2010)¹ With the emergence of first-generation start-ups and big traditional grocery chains extending to the digital platform, India's online grocery business has acquired a lot of traction in recent months. Consumers' purchasing intentions for online grocery shopping are influenced by a variety of factors, which online retailers must investigate to make the best use of the opportunities available. India is the sixth-largest grocery market in the world and is expected to touch US\$ 1 trillion by 2020. (Sinha & Ali, 2020)²

2. Objectives: The paper aims to study the SWOT analysis of grocery e-tailing by determining consumer preferences in the dynamic market conditions which identify the variables that influence or obstruct the consumer purchase behaviour towards online grocery shopping. The research intends to ascertain the evolution of the online grocery market in India with special emphasis on the Covid-19 pandemic and the market's outlook for the future.

3. Sources: The study is based on an analysis of primary and secondary sources.

4. Conclusion: The goal of this paper is to derive a conclusion to understand the future of grocery e-tailing. It can be observed that the opportunities and benefits of online grocery outweigh its disadvantages and challenges.

5. Addition to the existing knowledge: I took the opportunity to monitor consumer behaviour patterns during the time of the pandemic because this period witnessed various changes. We have taken a multi-dimensional approach (SWOT) that exclusively covers India's status concerning online grocery.

Keywords: *Consumer behaviour, E-Commerce, Grocery E-tailing, Online grocery shopping, SWOT analysis*

(1.1) INTRODUCTION

Grocery e-tailing, commonly known as online grocery shopping, is referred to as the online selling of food items, beverages, and supplies for use at home. It enables the consumer to use websites to buy supermarket goods by a simple phone click, or by pressing the mouse button for the items that they need which can be delivered at their doorsteps. This concept is still in its nascent stage but has attained momentum in recent years with the advent of e-commerce.

Developing markets lead to a change in consumers' demands, making it tough to comprehend and fulfill their needs and wants. Recent studies suggest that there is a vast difference between consumer choices towards brick-and-mortar stores as compared to grocery e-tailing websites. Despite being a recent concept, there is still a long way to go, considering the relentless number of opportunities that this concept holds.

(2.1) REVIEW OF LITERATURE

- **Meshram (2020)**³ examined the customer buying behaviour concerning the fear and hesitation of the consumers during the time of the pandemic.

¹ Doherty, N., & Ellis-Chadwick, F. (2010). *Consumer Attitudes towards Online Grocery Shopping*. Sweden: Jonkoping International Business School.

² Sinha, S., & Ali, M. (2020). *Consumer behaviour for E-grocery Shopping in India - An Overview*. Mohanpur, India: Science for Agriculture and Allied Sector.

³ Meshram, J., (2020). *How COVID 19 affected the online grocery buying experiences: A study of select cities of Mumbai and Pune*. Uzbekistan: International Journal of Latest Technology in Engineering, Management & Applied Science.

- **Sinha and Ali (2020)**⁴ reviewed the statistical data of the grocery business with the perspective of start-ups and traditional grocery chains branching out to the advanced digital medium. It also talked about the history, consumption pattern of India, and the global scenario of e-grocery.
- **Rajesh (2019)**⁵ penned down the different attributes like product choice, availability of products, and delivery time options which impacted the e-grocery purchasing behaviour.
- **Droogenbroeck & Hove (2017)**⁶ portrayed the socio-demographic feature of the age. The research was undertaken on two grounds: personal level factors and household level factors.
- **Budhiraja & Mittal (2016)**⁷ undertook a customer-centric approach by analysing customer satisfaction levels. The paper also sheds light upon the stiff entry barriers in the grocery market.
- **Benn et al., (2015)**⁸ used the eye tracker approach to understand how individuals find the products and focused on how the determinants of packaging and labeling impacted the buying behaviour of consumers.
- **Blomqvist et al., (2015)**⁹ test the relationship between attitudes and intentions. The paper evaluated consumer barriers and linked them to economic concepts like the theory of planned behaviour and perceived behavioural control.
- **Anesbury et al., (2015)**¹⁰ penned down the comparison between brick & mortar stores and e-tailing grocery business. The outcome of the paper was deriving a conclusion that time spent on online and offline shopping is mostly similar.
- **Schulz (2004)**¹¹ reflected upon the comparison between customer attitudes towards the traditional and online grocery market. The book also aimed at discovering the method to increase the utility of grocery e-tailing.
- **Morganosky & Cude (2000)**¹² described practices of online food retailers and online shopping behaviour patterns. It majorly focused on factors like income and age.

(3.1) RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1.1) **Methods** - The behavioural study has been done by collecting and analysing both primary and secondary data that reflects consumer choices

3.1.2) **Data** - Primary data was conducted for analysing behaviour of online retail grocery shoppers. Secondary data compiled in the survey has been taken from reputed journals, research papers, articles, books, websites, reports, and case studies.

3.1.3) **Sample Size** - The sample size of the survey comprises 203 people from all over India. The form catered to four age groups (below 18, 18-25, 25-40, above 40). Graphic representation has been used.

⁴ Sinha, S., & Ali, M. (2020). *Consumer behaviour for E-grocery Shopping in India - An Overview*. Mohanpur, India: Science for Agriculture and Allied Sector.

⁵ Rajesh, R., (2019). Assessing the impact of online grocery shopping in Mumbai, India: Vivekanand Education Society Institute of Management Studies and Research.

⁶ Droogenbroeck, E., & Hove, I. (2017). *Adoption of online grocery shopping: Personal or household characteristics*. United States: Journal of Internet Commerce.

⁷ Budhiraja, H., & Mittal, K. (2016). *Consumer's purchase intentions for e-grocery shopping in India*. Rajpura, India: Journal of Business and Management.

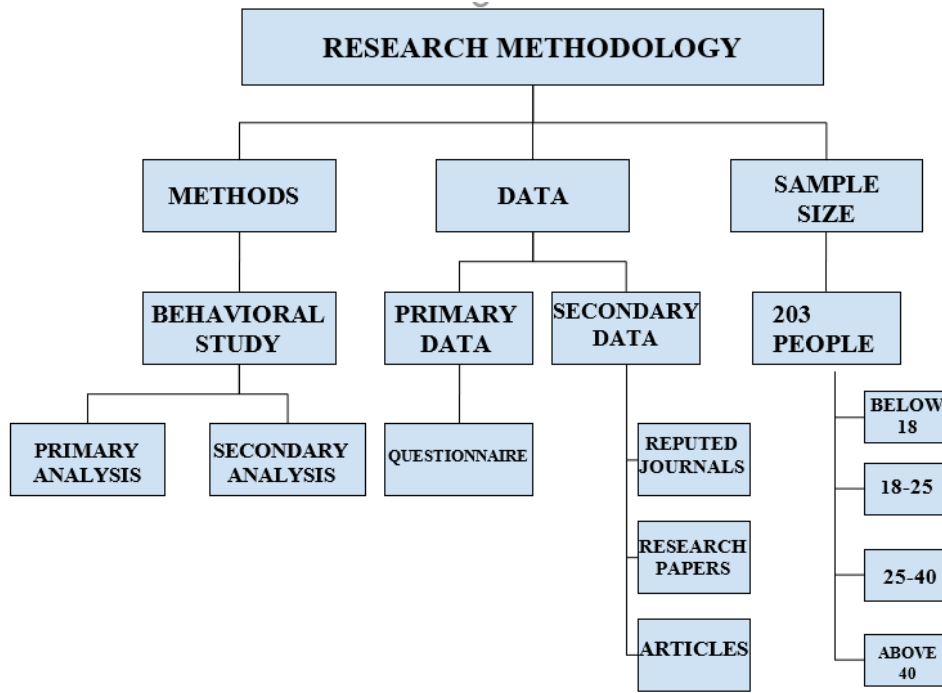
⁸ Benn, Y., Webb, T., Chang, B., & Reidy, J. (2015). *What information do consumers consider, and how do they look for it, when shopping for groceries online?* Netherlands: Elsevier.

⁹ Blomqvist, A., Lennartsson, F., Nyman, L. (2015). *Consumer attitudes towards online grocery shopping*. Sweden: Jonkoping International Business School.

¹⁰ Anesbury, Z., Nenycz-Thiel, M., Dawes, J., & Kennedy, R. (2015). How do shoppers behave online? An observational study of online grocery shopping. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*.

¹¹ Schulz, S. (2004). *E-food and the Online Grocery Business*. Business Economics - Offline marketing and Online marketing.

¹² Morganosky, M., & Cude, B. (2000). *Consumer response to online grocery shopping*. United Kingdom: International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management.



(4.1) OBJECTIVES

- Determining the parameters that influence customer’s preferences towards online grocery shopping in India.
- Identifying the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on grocery e-tailing business.
- Exploring the opportunities and challenges faced by online grocery retailers in India.

(5.1) BRICK AND MORTAR STORE V. GROCERY E-TAILING

BASIS	ONLINE GROCERY STORES	BRICK AND MORTAR STORES
LOCATION	-do not have a physical store -operate on website -orders are placed remotely -goods are home-delivered through mail	- physical locations available in the form of single or chain of stores -Most stores are incorporating a dual approach-physical & e-commerce
TRANSACTION	-accept credit cards and most online payment mechanisms	-mostly prefer cash, but are moving to digital payment options.
MARKETING	-Extensive use of social media and digital advertising	-Often engage in traditional forms of advertising such as television, radio commercials, newspapers, and billboards
OPERATING COST	-Huge operating costs (return charges, price of new customer acquisition, high shipping, lost clients to a near competitor)	-Incur costs like rent, inventory warehousing, employee labour, and property taxes

(6.1) EVOLUTION OF ONLINE GROCERY STORE IN INDIA

The economic system started with the barter system, evolved into trade, and now e-commerce. Globalization, liberalization, and FDI encouraged a digital leap that spread across all industries- including e-grocery. Online grocery shopping was initially a trend in foreign countries. Indians preferred approaching the stores physically, analysing their choices, negotiating for prices, and making grocery shopping a weekly affair.

Even after its introduction, it was only considered to be a fad of the 'rich cities'. The underlying assumption is still true because metropolitan cities account for most sales of e-grocery websites. However, the evolution of e-grocery has still not faded. It took a global crisis for the consumers to realize the importance and benefits of the concept of Online Grocery shopping.

In March 2020, WHO declared the most severe health emergency which brought multiple countries to a deadlock. The entire world was witnessing a horrific manifestation that perturbed the loyalty and contentment of the customers, causing panic buying too. With the advent of the pandemic, online shopping has become a requirement. This paved the opportunities for an ample number of food companies like supermarkets, food hubs, etc. to re-introduce themselves by providing all e-commerce services. So, the constant rise of E-commerce is changing the different domains about how to think, search, perform, and generate revenue. The quicker the shopper adopts the new advanced technology; the faster people will consider them keeping in mind all the relevant factors. The evolution of e-grocery during the pandemic is a classic example of how a crisis can become an opportunity for people who are open to changes.

(7.1) FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

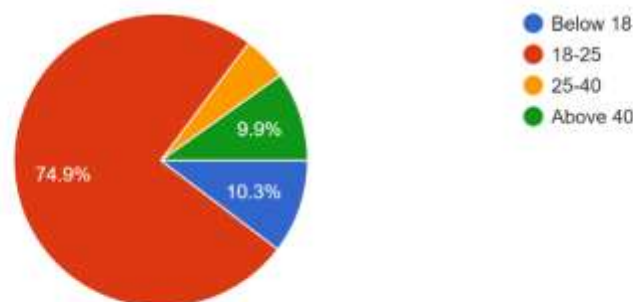
(7.1.1) DEPICTION OF DATA

Question 1: Name of the Participants

Question 2: Age of the Participants

Q.2 What is your age group?

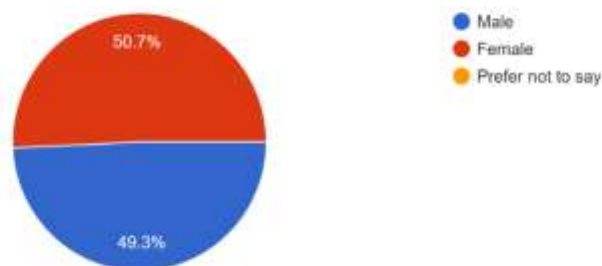
203 responses



Question 3: Gender of the Participants

Q.3 What is your gender?

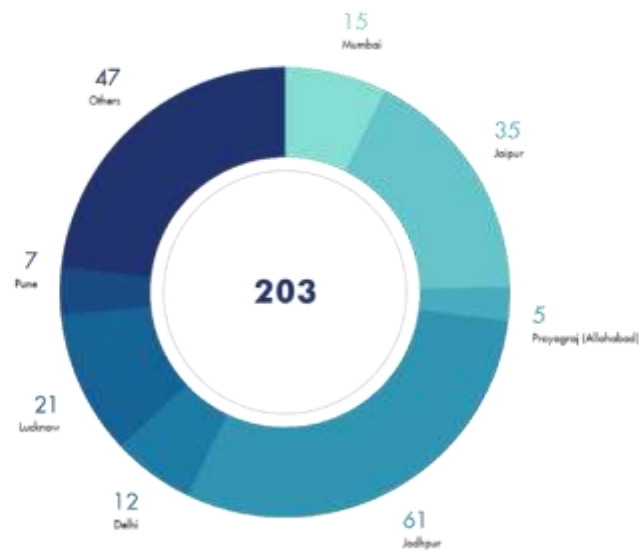
203 responses



Demographic profile of Respondents

Demographic profile	Response
Gender	
Male	100
Female	103
Total	203
Age	
Below 18	21
18-25	152
25-40	10
Above 40	20
Total	203

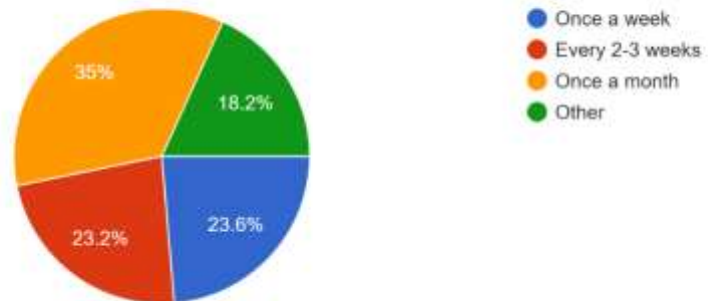
Question 4: City of the Participant

Q.4. Which City do you belong to ?

Question 5: Frequency of Online Grocery Shopping

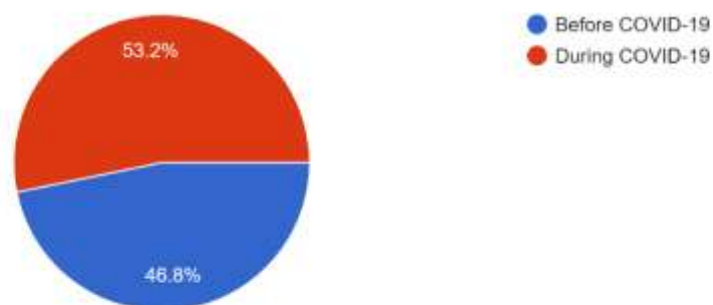
Q.5 How frequently do you shop for groceries products online?

203 responses

**Question 6: Online Grocery Shopping- Pre and During Pandemic**

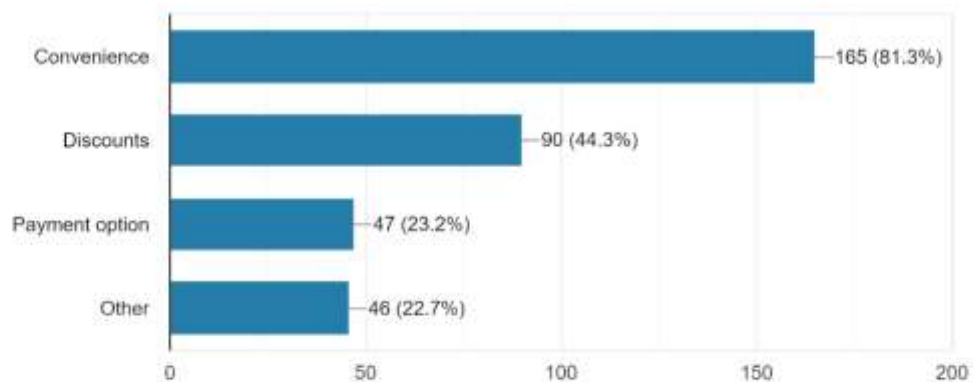
Q.6 Did you shop for groceries online from the beginning or have you switched to this due to COVID-19?

203 responses

**Question 7: Positive Influencers behind Online Grocery Shopping**

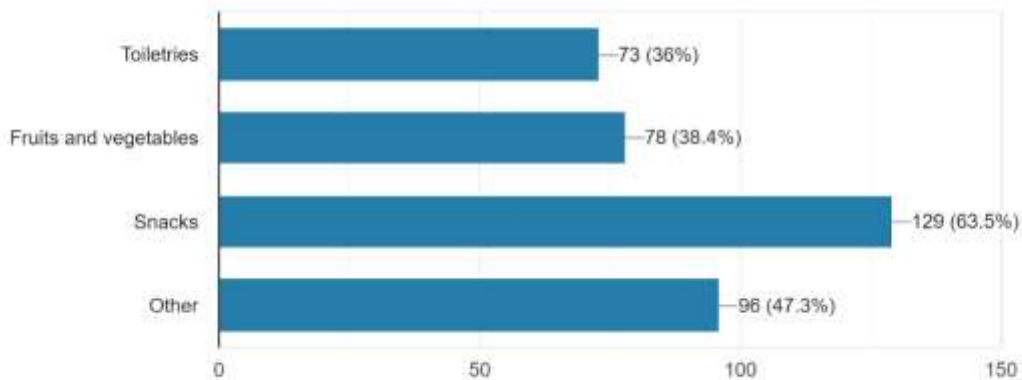
Q.7 Reasons you tend to buy groceries online

203 responses

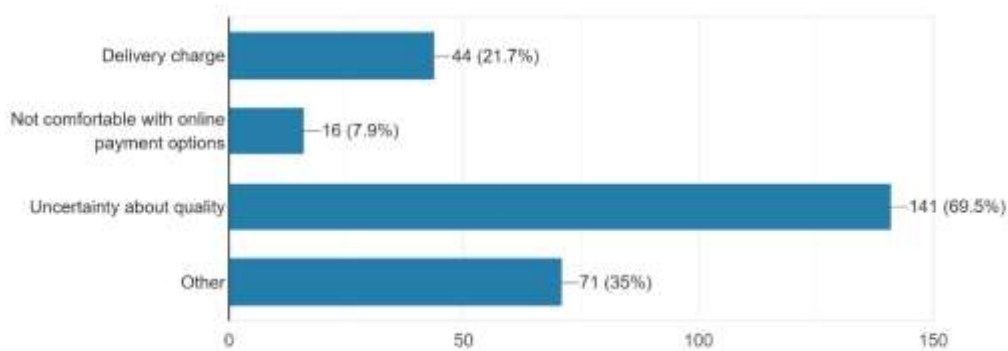


Question 8: Types of groceries bought online**Q.8 What type of grocery products do you typically buy online?**

203 responses

**Question 9: Negative Influencers behind Online Grocery Shopping****Q.9 Reasons you avoid buying groceries online:**

203 responses

**(7.1.2) ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA****Question 1: Name of the Participant****Question 2: Age of the Participant**

Analysis: A survey was conducted of nearly 203 people out of which 74.9% belong to the age category of 18-25 years old which shows that most of the respondents were youths in their early working age. Rest 25.1% belongs to the category of Below 18 (10.3%), Above 40 (9.9%) who are adults of mature working age, and 25-40 (4.9%) who are adults of prime working age. This segmentation represents that GenZ has the most inclination towards online shopping. This indicates that this generation is relatively more tech-savvy and uses this skill optimally.

Question 3: Gender of the Participant

Analysis: It was also found out that 50.7% of 203 people were females and the rest 49.3% were males. The higher number of women candidates reflects that women are now working and are in professional jobs, and choose convenient options. Also, the higher percentage of women represents the socio-cultural dynamics of the society which associates chores and grocery responsibilities on females.

Question 4: City of the Participant

Analysis: Most of the candidates were from metropolitan cities such as Jaipur, Jodhpur, Mumbai and they were more comfortable purchasing groceries online as offline grocery shopping is very time-consuming and it is very difficult to move around and go shopping in these cities due to dense population and heavy traffic.

Question 5: Frequency of online grocery shopping

Analysis: It was discovered that most of the people (35%) purchase grocery products online once a month. In addition to that 23.2% of people purchase every 2-3 weeks, and 23.6% claim to shop once a week. The frequency of people buying grocery products online entirely depends on the different factors that affect the buying behaviour of consumers.

Question 6: Online Grocery Shopping- Pre and During Pandemic

Analysis: It was deduced that 53.2% of people started purchasing grocery products online during COVID-19 and the rest 46.8% used to purchase before it. According to economists, the online grocery market grew by 76 percent last year due to pandemic and lockdown. (IANS, 2021)¹³

Question 7: Positive Influencers behind Online Grocery Shopping**Analysis:**

Option (a) was Convenience and 81.3% chose this option as one can quickly search for products and order them without having to physically walk through expansive aisles in online shopping. It saves the customers travelling expenses and time.

Option (b) was Discounts and 44.3% of survey takers chose this option. Online stores often put discounts on the products to grab the attention of the public and they seem successful in doing so as a considerable number of people have chosen this option.

Option (c) was the Payment option and 23.2% chose this option. There is a need for moving towards a cashless society. The convenience of easy payments, no need to carry a wallet, etc. are some options that come with online shopping.

Option (d) was Other and 22.7% of survey takers chose it which can include factors like comparison of price, better quality, diverse products, and no geographical barrier.

Question 8: Types of groceries bought online

Analysis: We observed that about 63.5% of people usually buy snacks from online grocery stores as many products i.e., Quinoa Chips which are mostly available on online stores, followed by 47.3% of people who purchase other products such as baby items, pet items, batteries, etc. In addition to that 38.4% of people were those who buy fruits and vegetables online and 36% those who usually purchase toiletries.

Question 9: Negative Influencers behind Online Grocery Shopping**Analysis:**

Option (a) was 'Delivery Charges' and only 21.7% of the people have chosen this option.

Often consumers are reluctant to shop online because of a delivery fee that the online grocery stores charge when a small number of products are purchased. Users often switch between websites to find one which has a minimum to no delivery charge.

Option (b) was 'Not comfortable with the payment options and a mere 7.6% of the survey takers have chosen this option. Online payment options like Debit and Credit cards are options people may refrain from using as they feel it is unsafe and they have not frequently used such methods.

Option (c) was 'Uncertainty about quality' and more than half the people i.e., 69.5% chose this option as checking the quality of goods at the time of placing an order in an online purchase is not possible. Delivery of unsatisfactory goods is a common occurrence and surely an unpleasant one.

This implies the existence of 'perceived internet grocery risk'.

Option (d) was Other chosen by 35% of the survey takers. The options in others could be non-accessibility in smaller cities, absence of bargaining power, not gaining proper shopping experience.

8.1) SWOT ANALYSIS OF GROCERY E-TAILING IN INDIA

SWOT stands for Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats.

In this research paper, we have used the SWOT approach to cover two stakeholders of a business: Consumers and Retailers.

The analysis of 'Strengths and Weakness' of Grocery E-tailing in India refers to the advantages and disadvantages of online grocery shopping from the point of the consumer.

- The advantages of grocery e-tailing- strengths
- The disadvantages of grocery e-tailing- weaknesses

This approach has been undertaken to conclude that the choice of the consumer determines the benefits and pitfalls of any industry.

¹³ IANS., (2021). *Online Grocery to grow 8 times in 5 years in India, Jio Mart big gainer*. India: Business Standard.

The analysis of 'Opportunities and Threats' of Grocery E-tailing in India represents the point of view of the retailers, i.e., whether or not the online grocery market will sustain in the industry.

- Opportunities behind grocery e-tailing- Prospects for the retailer to expand
- Threats behind grocery e-tailing – Challenges for the retailer in the e-grocery business

(8.1.1) STRENGTHS OF GROCERY E-TAILING

OR

ADVANTAGES OF GROCERY E-TAILING TO THE CONSUMER

(i) Saving Time and Efforts:

Consumers are always on the lookout for ways to maximize their time as they lead busy lives. Purchasing groceries saves time. Online Grocery Shopping saves efforts as it is convenient, gives easy navigation options, and provides a wide choice range.

(ii) Shoppers can Read Reviews:

While buying groceries online, consumers get the opportunity to read ratings and reviews. 93% of consumers will read the reviews available on the online grocery store at least occasionally. (Melton, 2017)¹⁴

(iii) Avoiding negative aspects of shopping in a physical supermarket:

Some negative aspects of shopping in a physical supermarket are tiring experience, crowded, shopping alone. These can be avoided while shopping online.

(iv) Avoiding impulse buying:

Grocery e-shopping can reduce impulse buying because consumers will stick to their budget.

(v) 24*7 service

It provides 24*7 customer-friendly service where goods are provided at the doorstep at any time of the day.

(8.1.2) WEAKNESSES OF GROCERY E-TAILING

OR

DISADVANTAGES OF GROCERY E-TAILING TO THE CONSUMER

(i) Delivery charges:

Consumers are hesitant to shop online due to the delivery fee that the online grocery stores charge. Users often switch between websites to find one which has a minimum to no delivery charge.

(ii) Inaccessible in the smaller city:

Generally, metropolitan cities have e-grocery options. In India, most of the small cities have their local markets.

(iii) Lack of Experience of Shopping:

People in small towns prefer to buy from local markets to achieve a personalised experience and to bargain with sellers. They can touch, feel and evaluate the product, which encourages trust-building. This undermines the customer's control over the selection of the product.

(iv) Unavailability of a preferable grocery item:

Usually, online portals do not include local brands that are the most popular in the consumer community. The local market comes to the rescue when a customer has to find a specific local commodity.

(v) Uncertainty about quality

Checking the quality of goods at the time of placing the order in an online purchase is not possible. Delivery of unsatisfactory goods is a common occurrence and surely an unpleasant one.

¹⁴ Melton, J., (2017). *Most food shopping still happens in stores, but digital's influence is high*. Chicago, United States: Digital Commerce 360.

(8.1.3) OPPORTUNITIES FOR E-GROCERY RETAILERS

(i) Young Population:

India has a large youth customer base who live alone and hence rarely have time to go food shopping due to which the demand for grocery stores is increasing.

(ii) The right time for grocery e-tailing:

In today's era, everything works with the internet and India is witnessing a sharp rise in smartphone users, and hence, e-grocery can spread its wings. According to Redseer; the online grocery sector in India is expected to reach over \$10 billion in sales by 2023.

(iii) Turning crisis into opportunity:

Online Platforms have benefited from the COVID-19 lockdown that forces Indian consumers to change their purchase habits. While these companies have dabbled in food and grocery delivery in the past, the pandemic has resulted in an unprecedented increase in supermarket deliveries.

(iv) Global Reach:

Retailers can expand to the global horizon since e-grocery is still in its introductory phase.

(v.) Grocery being a necessity:

Unlike other food industries, grocery is essential and has a high repeat rate. Therefore, it can never go out of trend.

(8.1.4) THREATS TO E-GROCERY RETAILERS

(i) Inventory Management –

Consumers live in an environment where everything is available online, from ordering food to having drugs shipped to having salon services performed at home. It becomes incredibly challenging to keep stock of multiple commodities.

(ii) Consumers not willing to pay delivery charges –

Online grocery businesses incur huge costs when it comes to shipping. When the transaction is for a small amount, it is unlikely that buyers will pay delivery fees. This can also lead to losses for the business.

(iii) Costs associated

Maintaining perishable item quality, successfully meeting high demands, incurring substantial maintenance and transport costs can take up a colossal amount of money. Due to the intense competition, retailers are bound to expand their horizons which costs them a lot of money.

(iv) Breaking age-old habits –

Providing effective, customer-satisfying services and breaking people's age-old habits when it comes to supermarket shopping are the most important goals for any online grocery store. This calls for a huge amount of investment in marketing operations and promotional events.

(v) Risk –

The delivery personnel had to work during the COVID outbreak which was a risky affair.

(9.1) ONLINE GROCERS OF INDIA

(a) Big Basket-

Big Basket delivers in metropolitan cities like Bangalore, Mumbai, Delhi, and 20+ Indian cities. The company aims to expand its services to all major cities in India by building its market capital plans.

Main features:

- Availability of all grocery products
- Easy user interface.
- Multiple payment modes.

(b) Grofers-

Grofers plans to expand in tier-2 cities and is currently operational in 20+ cities. Grofers offers thousands of products on its platforms to shop online in India.

Main Features:

- Cashback on different delivery slots.
- 100% return and exchange policy.
- Easy search options.

(c) ZopNow-

ZopNow specializes in efficiency and time-saving as it delivers the product within 3 hours at the doorstep. It is currently operational in only 9 cities but plans to expand soon.

Main features:

- Extremely fast service.
- Quick Online returns
- Easy to purchase and easy to pay.

(10.1) CONCLUSION

The strength of a business is reflected by its capability to adapt to change. The market of e-grocery not only brilliantly acclimatised to this revolution but turned a crisis into an opportunity. The market has various benefits and pitfalls to the consumers and the retailers, but this segment of e-commerce is here to stay. Grocery e-Tailing is presumed to be doubled in the upcoming 10 years where three-fourths of the consumers will buy 25 percent of their groceries online in 2025. (Nielsen, 2015).¹⁵ Overall, after evaluating Online Grocery shopping from a SWOT approach, it is safe to say that the future of online shopping is extremely secure because, in this age, customers will choose convenience over anything.

(11.1) LIMITATION & FUTURE SCOPE

The study is solely based on the Indian aspect of e-grocery shopping and does not focus on the global picture. Also, owing to the pandemic constraints, the survey was conducted online where behaviour of only 200 respondents could be assessed. Mostly, the study covered candidates from urban cities of India.

There is a significant gap in the research regarding e-grocery because it's a relatively new concept. Therefore, future researchers can contribute to the existing literature by undertaking a multi-faceted study of the topic.

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¹⁵ Nielsen, A.C., (2015). *The Future of Grocery*. New York, United States : The Nielsen Company.

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13.1) APPENDIX

(13.1.1) SURVEY – QUESTIONNAIRE**Q.1 Name****Q.2 What is your age group?**

- a. Below 18
- b. 18-25
- c. 25-40
- d. Above 40

Q.3 What is your gender?

- a. Male
- b. Female
- c. Prefer not to say

Q.4 Which city do you belong to?**Q.5 How frequently do you shop for groceries products online?**

- a. Once a week
- b. Every 2-3 weeks
- c. Once a month
- d. Other

Q.6 Did you shop for groceries online from the beginning or have you switched to this due to COVID-19?

- a. Before COVID-19
- b. During COVID-19

Q.7 Reasons you tend to buy groceries online

- a. Convenience
- b. Discounts
- c. Payment option
- d. Other

Q.8 What type of grocery products do you typically buy online?

- a. Toiletries
- b. Fruits and vegetables
- c. Snacks
- d. Other

Q.9 Reasons you avoid buying groceries online:

- a. Delivery charge
- b. Not comfortable with online payment options
- c. Uncertainty about quality
- d. Other

(13.1.2) GLOSSARY

1. **Behavioural Research** - A form of research that focuses on the behaviour of an individual/individuals.
2. **Brick and Mortar** - Brick and Mortar store refers to the business which resembles the physical store of the organisation.
3. **Foreign Direct Investment** - An entity based in a different country that controls the ownership of a business of one country is referred to as 'Foreign Direct Investment'.
4. **GenZ**- Also known as Generation Z or Zoomers are individuals born around 1999-2012.
5. **Globalization** - Expanding trade and commerce across the national borders of a country is referred to as Globalization. This reflects the interdependence of nations around the globe.
6. **Grocery e-tailing** - Grocery e-tailing is the sale of grocery products through online transactions.
7. **Liberalization** - The economic practice of elimination or a significant decrease in trade restrictions is known as liberalization.
8. **M-Commerce** - These are commercial transactions that are conducted electronically with the help of mobile phones.
9. **Perceived internet Grocery Risk** - It can be viewed as a risk of pessimistic beliefs in an e-commerce transaction.

Tier-2 Cities - These are cities that have a population from 50,000 to 1,00,000 such as Pune, Ahmadabad, Chandigarh, etc.