

Changing Purchasing Perceptions/Behavior/Attitude Of Customers: Impact Of Covid-19 Pandemic

Pankaj Kumar Sinha¹, Prof. Manmeet Nag², Prof Sanjay Srivastava³

¹Ph.D Scholar, Manav Rachna University.

²Professor, Manav Rachna University.

³Professor, Manav Rachna International Institute of Research & Science.

ABSTRACT

The retail sector has grown substantially in recent years. Businesses are spending more time and wealth to deliver a flawless multi-channel experience. These changes influenced customer behaviour. Customers' shopping habits and product selections changed, as did retailers'. The newest development was owing to an unexpected global pandemic of Covid-19. Customers start using digital web channels for most of their demands and desires. Covid-19 caused new customer behaviour patterns to arise. This research is both exploratory and productive. Its goal is to gain a better understanding of the impact of Covid-19 on client purchase behaviour in the retail industry. The study's goal is to find and evaluate new behavioural patterns that will affect shopping and purchasing decisions between online and offline businesses.

KEYWORDS: Business Intelligence, Data Analysis, OLAP

I. INTRODUCTION

Constant technological advancements are influencing consumer behavior all across the world. Consumers now have become smarter, more informed, connected, updated, and empowered as a result of widespread, low-cost, compatible, simple, and advanced technology. In the socially connected era, customers have evolved into "prosumers," where they are actively participating in co-creating, personalizing, and passionately pushing marketing content. Marketers have indeed acknowledged and embraced the transition wrought by innovation, which has expanded its awareness among customers. This shift is having a tangible impact on the lives of both marketers and customers. The "internet," which has significantly impacted how people communicate, exchange and get information, and conduct business, is the most obvious example of transformation. In recent times, the consistent and rapid integration of the internet with a wide range of devices, as well as the expansion of digital technology, has fueled the transition. This online communication has expanded beyond the limitations of a standard computer screen, embracing a range of digital devices, (Dahiya, 2013, Gay et al., 2007).

The internet, in particular, has altered every element of a business's. The application of technology in business has contributed to the reduction of several business costs while also

providing a competitive edge. Digital media platforms provide a large platform for acquiring new customers and meaningfully engaging with them, which aids in brand awareness, brand image building, and brand placement in the minds of target customers. Customers can be profitably targeted via digital media as a result of the resulting accurate customer profile. Better client relations can be maintained with the assistance of cutting-edge technical instruments that reveal to marketers the specific wants of their customers.

Finite and unchanging data transfer method is what we mean by the word "digital". Analog is a technique that transmits data in bursts, while digital refers to a single data transfer. A direct contact between a corporation and its consumers or prospects is established via the use of digital transmission in digital marketing, Brar (2021). The word "medium" here refers to the channels, instruments, applications, methods, and gadgets that utilize digital codes in order to perform their functions. Online communities, search engines, social networking sites, and blogs are all examples of digital media, as are portable devices like smart phones, digital TVs and digital outdoor screens, all of which rely on the internet and mobile technologies to provide their information. Instead of using a real-time internet connection, online marketing makes use of non-internet channels such as digital billboards and digital outdoor advertising as well as mobile applications, MMS, and ring tones for on-hold and call-back mobile phones, as well as digital ebooks and games using an offline digital platform, Gandhi et al. (2021). It utilizes digital devices, channels, and platforms, whether they are online or offline. It is also becoming increasingly common for digital marketing to expand its horizons to include wearable technologies and augmented reality. Thus, internet marketing might be considered a subset of digital marketing, rather than an independent discipline.

1.1 India's Digital Statistics

India's digital atmosphere is shifting and it has prospective to become the global leader in digital environment. With each passing year, an increasing number of individuals, both urban and rural, connect to the internet, Brar (2022). The digital revolution in India is being fueled by a widening internet user base, lowered costs of digital devices and data plans, expanded connectivity, better internet compatibility of multiple digital devices, a perceived need for the internet, and a higher level of awareness, all of which are driving the digital revolution.

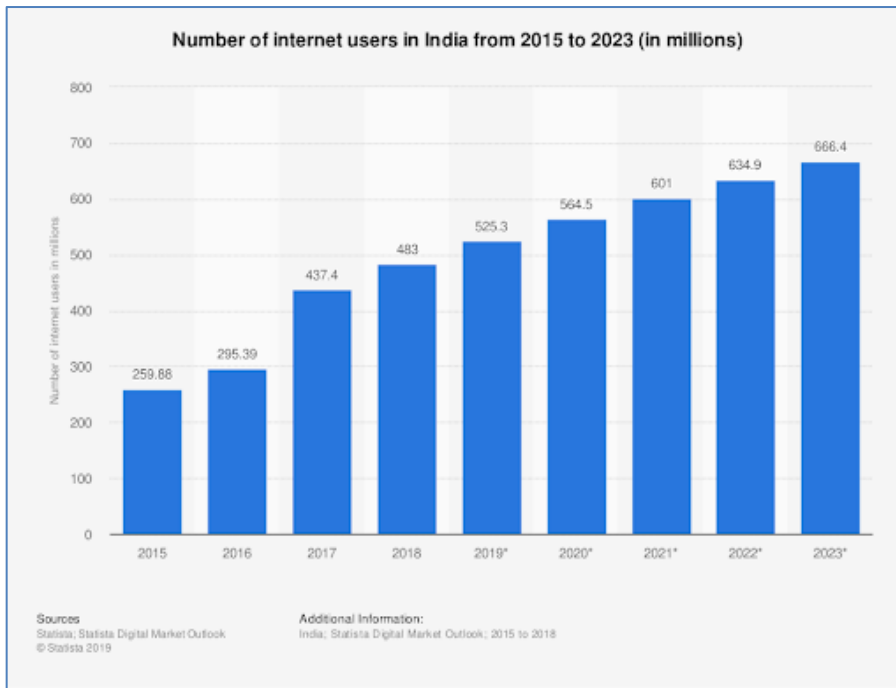


Figure 1: Internet Users in India, Source: Shah (2020)

According to Shah (2020), India's total advertising revenue will be INR 75,952 crores by 2020. That's a 10.9 percent yearly growth rate. These are the global digital advertising projections for 2020, 2021, and 2022. With approximately 560 million internet users, India is the world's second largest online market. By 2023, China will have over 650 million internet users. Because of the country's enormous internet user base, the country's internet penetration rate should exceed 50% by 2020. In that year, about half of India's 1.37 billion people got online. Internet penetration has risen from roughly 27% five years ago to roughly 50% presently.

Digital marketing's scope has expanded dramatically between 2020 and 2021. Even with the epidemic afflicting us for two consecutive years, growth has been nothing short of remarkable. With new innovations and variants such as Omicron and Delta, the industry's trend patterns are undergoing tremendous volatility, yet digital marketing continues to thrive. Additionally, it is anticipated to increase even further in 2022.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Consumer behaviour has shifted dramatically in the digital age (Kotler, 2000). Digital technology and channels have grown and improved. Consumers today do research, evaluate, and purchase anything. This is owing to the belief that, regardless of product category, the internet, mobile, and social media educate clients in a way that is informative, amusing, engaging, and participative.

Today, digital is often regarded as the leader in marketing communication on a global scale, thanks to its unique properties that serve both consumers and marketers. Almost all prominent academics and researchers agree on the critical characteristics of digital marketing communication, which include being interactive, measurable, customizable, informative,

relevant, personal, rapid, amusing, compatible, convenient, and cost efficient. Digital marketing communication is thought to be less expensive than traditional marketing (Kierzkowski et al. 1996; Verma and Varma, 2003). Ferrar (2010) highlighted the cost effectiveness of digital media as the primary reason for its replacement of pricey and less quantifiable conventional media in his study. According to Charan and Dahiya (2015), the internet has emerged as the cheapest mode of communication in their study on mobile banking. Saluja and Singh (2014) concluded in their study on social media that it is far more cost efficient than its conventional equivalent, which contributes to its widespread and diversified use by marketers.

Online marketing has a noteworthy impact on the customer purchasing decision-making process (Gay et al. 2007). The consumer purchasing decision-making process may be summarised in five stages: need awareness, information gathering, alternative evaluation, selection and purchase, and post-purchase behaviour (Kollat et al. 1970). Digital marketing communication that is relevant, customised, interactive, and contains a large amount of information has an impact on all phases of the customer decision-making process, from need identification through post-purchase behaviour.

According to Jonathan (2012), social media influences all phases of the consumer purchasing decision-making process, but it has the most impact on the information search and post-purchase stages. According to Funde and Mehta (2014), 65 percent of customers utilise social media to meet their informational demands, owing to perceived ease, efficacy, and credibility. Customers interact via social media by leaving comments and ratings on blogs, news articles, photographs, and videos. Additionally, they participate actively in internet forums and vote for their favourite companies. Social media has also been discovered to have a substantial impact on consumer attitudes (Muthiah and Kannan, 2015). According to a Nielsen research (2014), social media content satisfies 54% of customer information demands for making a purchase choice. Consumers place a higher premium on third-party material, expert evaluations, and non-branded content than they do on marketing content during the purchasing decision-making process.

Numerous researches have also attempted to ascertain the causes for non-use of digital channels of communication throughout the purchasing process. Maklan et al. (2001) acknowledged in their study that internet communication methods lack human interaction and quick pleasure. Google India (2013) identified a number of hurdles to online purchasing, including fraudulent tactics, substandard items, the inability to haggle, touch, and test the product before purchase, and the sharing of personal and financial information. Additionally, a study done by eMarketer (2015) mentioned the inauthentic and technological aspect of digital communication as a barrier to using digital communication for purchasing. According to a Forrester and Google India survey published in 2014, main deterrents to e-shopping include slow internet speeds, unsatisfactory customer service, and a complicated return process. Ioanas and Stoica (2014) also identified information overload via digital media as a significant barrier that contributes to consumer uncertainty. Additionally, the study suggested that customers may cease looking for all accessible information due to rising search costs and uncertainty and instead rely on old

rule of thumb to make a decision. According to Charan (2014), the biggest reason inhibiting the usage of digital communication is false, offensive, and harmful material. Song (2002) concluded in his analysis that the primary worry of mobile banking consumers is the security and protection of their information.

Post-purchase assessment via digital platforms begins immediately following the completion of the transaction. Consumers begin to anticipate receiving an e-mail/SMS confirming their order. Numerous factors, such as prompt order confirmation, timely delivery, and the quality of the supplied goods, all contribute to customer satisfaction (Gay et al. 2007). Chiu et al. (2009) examined online repurchases and argued that customer trust and satisfaction are critical determinants of ongoing purchase. The growth of virtual communities, as per Bismo & Putra (2019), promotes buyers to identify and publicize their post-purchase behaviour.

Consumers' behaviour in the digital world is changing significantly, as evidenced by the existing literature. Due to the inherent possibilities of digital mediums, marketers are also utilising them. One might anticipate an increase in total usage in the next few years as our country's digital statistics improve. In such competitive environments, digital marketing positions itself as a unique and cost-effective medium that provides marketers with an unparalleled advantage over their conventional counterparts. It was deemed vital to investigate a subfield of marketing communication that outperforms traditional communication not just in terms of cost effectiveness, but also in terms of advantages to marketers and customers alike.

Theses and publications on Internet Marketing provide detailed information. Internet marketing is "achieving marketing goals through digital technologies" (Hoffman& Novak, 2018). Digital marketing is the use of technology to help marketing activities identify and meet consumer needs (Chaffey, 2013). Digital marketing has been recognised by businesses worldwide. To succeed, businesses will need to mix online and offline methods to better serve their customers (Luma Partners, 2020).

With the introduction of new technology, marketers now have new business chances to manage their websites and fulfill their company goals (Kannan & Hongshuang, 2017). Online advertising is a significant marketing tool for creating brands and driving traffic in order for businesses to succeed (Song, 2001). Expectations in terms of providing outcomes and assessing success for ad money invested, digital marketing is more cost-effective for monitoring ROI on advertising (Pandey et al. , 2020).

Digital marketing has supplanted old-fashioned advertising and marketing tactics. Furthermore, it is so strong that it has the potential to help revitalize the economy and generate enormous opportunity for governments to work more efficiently (Zahay, 2020). Firms in Singapore have shown the effectiveness and utility of digital marketing techniques in obtaining objectives. Teo (2005) defines formalized growth in digital marketing as fueled by rapid technological advancements and shifting industry dynamics (Mort et al., 2002). Businesses need digital content that is easy to find, navigate, and move quickly in order for digital marketing to help them make money (Kanttila, 2004). WOM, or word-of-mouth, is also a good way to get people to spread the word about your business on social media and make your

website popular (Trusov, 2009). In addition, word of mouth is linked to getting more people to join and more people to visit the website, which in turn makes the company more visible in terms of marketing.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Problem Statement

These days, retailers are trying to give a similar experience across numerous platforms. Clientele behaviour shifted substantially due to changes in retail with an emphasis on online channels. Similarly, the Covid-19 epidemic imposed new standards that hampered social connection. Their effects were felt both online and offline. On one side, the epidemic may help the retail business by increasing demand for online stores. As a result, businesses may have suffered. However, client behaviour drives channel selection. Given the epidemic's constraints, buying patterns are likely to have shifted. It also lacks scholarly studies on how to alter client purchase behaviour to Covid-19. The paucity of previous literature prompted the researchers to fill the study's gap.

Online businesses have grown rapidly in recent years, despite merchants' efforts to deliver a smooth experience across multiple platforms. Customers' behaviour has altered dramatically due to changes in retail, with a clear shift in activity to online channels. Similarly, the Covid-19 pandemic came from nowhere enforced new standards that made social interaction difficult. These obstacles had far-reaching effects both online and offline. The epidemic has raised demand for internet stores, which may assist the retail business. Conversely, the outbreak may have reduced demand for physical outlets, negatively impacting companies. Client behaviour, on the other side, guides channel selection. Given the epidemic's constraints, it's possible that purchase habits have shifted. It's also hard to discover research material on how to affect Covid-19 client buying behaviour. The researchers identified a vacuum in the current literature due to a lack of current material, which prompted the investigation.

3.2 Sample Size

When a population is more diverse, the sample size necessary is greater. As the researcher sought to determine the influence of digital marketing on numerous groups with varying educational backgrounds and vocations within the NCR area, the population for the study was diverse in composition. Keeping in mind the normal lack of response to surveys, a questionnaire was sent to 770 persons. The researcher collected 580 completed surveys with a response rate of 75.3 percent. Following data cleansing, 545 replies were determined to be suitable for inclusion in the research.

Delhi, Faridabad, Ghaziabad, Gurugram, and Noida are prominent cities in the NCR, and samples were gathered only from these metropolitan areas. The researcher arbitrarily selected locations within each district. Samples were taken easily from the selected metropolitan regions. Table 3.3 shows the proportion of responses from each district in the sample. The research obtained a total of 545 answers from the study's sample sites. For each location, the

percentage of responders in the sample was maintained at the same level as in the population. When the designated number for a region was reached, the researcher ceased accepting and collecting replies in order to preserve the required percentage in the sample. Table 3.3 contains information on the sample.

Focus group sessions were constructed by the researchers for this study, each with a varied number of participants, according to their findings (see table 1). Table 1 depicts the layout of the focus group sessions. Table 2 depicts the layout of the focus group sessions. There are a total of 545 people that are taking part. All of the candidates are between the ages of 18 and 25. (20-45 years). Males and females participated in equal numbers in all of the focus group sessions. The participants were contacted by the researchers by email, WhatsApp, SMS, or phone calls, depending on their location.

Table 1: Area Wise Proportionate

Sr. No	District	Population	Proportion in sample	Groups
1	North Delhi	4,203,923	56	G1
2	South Delhi	3,140,899	70	G2
3	West Delhi	2,923,966	55	G3
4	East Delhi	2,636,214	80	G4
5	New Delhi	163,262	78	G5
6	Gurgaon	1,726,452	98	G6
7	Noida	2,809,346	59	G7
8	Ghaziabad	1,910,118	49	G8
			545 (Sample Size)	

As shown in Table 1, the authors have prepared eight focus group sessions with a different number of participants in each, as part of this investigation. The design of the focus group sessions is depicted in the Table 1. There are a total of 545 participants in this event. All of the participants are from a variety of age ranges (20-45 years). The focus group meetings were all mixed, with a mix of males and females participating. The researchers communicated with the participants by email, whatsapp, SMS, and phone calls, among other methods.

Table 2: Purchase motivations

Before Covid-19									
General motivations for shopping at online stores	G 1	G 2	G 3	G 4	G 5	G 6	G 7	G 8	Tota 1
Searching and comparing is simple.	10	12	11	15	10	18	10	16	102
The ability to search for products based on individual interests	10	11	11	10	10	18	11	18	99
Options are many	12	18	16	15	10	18	16	15	120
Time saving	11	19	18	14	13	19	18	16	128
Less efforts	10	15	11	18	10	11	11	10	96
General deterrents for shopping/buying online	G 1	G 2	G 3	G 4	G 5	G 6	G 7	G 8	Tota 1
Quality or size cannot be checked	23	29	20	16	30	22	27	22	189
more time for delivery	25	25	25	19	27	16	28	19	184
Return process is not so friendly	19	24	20	12	25	30	18	24	172
Covid-related Motive and Deter Factors									
Change in purchase habits during COvid-19	G 1	G 2	G 3	G 4	G 5	G 6	G 7	G 8	Tota 1
Less unnecessary purchases	35	40	35	32	30	45	30	35	282
Awareness of overconsumption is raised	25	38	45	30	36	25	28	36	263
Factors affecting offline shopping/buying	G 1	G 2	G 3	G 4	G 5	G 6	G 7	G 8	Tota 1
Retailers and the government are putting restrictions on social distancing.	30	22	27	22	25	30	29	20	205
Entertainment is less	25	25	19	24	20	12	28	19	172
Contact with members of the high-risk category	23	18	24	16	25	19	27	16	168
Factors promoting online shopping/buying	G 1	G 2	G 3	G 4	G 5	G 6	G 7	G 8	Tota 1
Online campagins	18	20	24	15	15	18	12	22	144
More time spent at home Changes in Personality (woking, studieng, socialising online)	19	12	12	15	10	21	13	27	129
Alternative options	10	20	19	16	15	13	14	15	122
Social media influncers	15	19	18	20	19	19	18	22	150
Post-Covid Expectations									
Expectation of returning to offline stores (after Covid-19)	G 1	G 2	G 3	G 4	G 5	G 6	G 7	G 8	Tota 1
Yes, definetly	10	18	10	10	12	11	10	16	97
Less visits to physical stores for the purpose of making a purchase	17	8	18	16	15	19	18	16	127
Try, touch, & see the product	13	14	16	18	11	17	18	14	121
Will vary depending on the nature of the goods	18	12	11	18	12	11	11	11	104
Concerning Shopping/Buying from Stores In-person									

What drives you to shop in-person?	G 1	G 2	G 3	G 4	G 5	G 6	G 7	G 8	Tota 1
Shopping is a social activity that I enjoy.	20	19	20	20	19	09	18	16	141
I generally go shopping alone for fun.	15	10	20	15	10	21	11	16	118
I shop to touch, feel, and see.	14	20	15	16	25	18	24	19	151
Due to assistance from customer sales executives	12	20	22	15	15	13	19	19	135
What keeps you from purchasing in person?	G 1	G 2	G 3	G 4	G 5	G 6	G 7	G 8	Tota 1
COVID limits cause chaos.	12	20	22	14	20	15	16	15	134
I wish to avoid getting Covid.	15	20	19	19	18	16	11	16	134
Smaller selection than online stores	15	15	13	19	19	18	24	19	142
It is time consuming.	20	19	20	10	20	15	10	21	135
Regarding the expectation of returning to offline stores (after Covid-19)	G 1	G 2	G 3	G 4	G 5	G 6	G 7	G 8	Tota 1
Will go to shopping for fun and social interaction.	20	20	19	19	19	18	11	16	142
Less physical store visits or purchases	12	15	19	13	23	16	24	19	141
I shop to touch, feel, and see.	15	19	22	10	20	15	16	21	138
Depending on the product's nature.	15	20	20	14	15	15	10	15	124
What keeps you from shopping/buying online?	G 1	G 2	G 3	G 4	G 5	G 6	G 7	G 8	Tota 1
I miss the social connection aspect of purchasing online because it is less entertaining compared to shopping in actual locations.	15	20	20	10	20	15	16	21	137
The inability to physically touch, try, and inspect the quality of the products	12	19	18	11	16	16	24	19	135
Delivery will take a long time.	20	20	19	19	15	19	13	23	148
Picking up and returning items is a time-consuming process.	15	19	22	14	15	15	10	15	125
What makes you shop online?	G 1	G 2	G 3	G 4	G 5	G 6	G 7	G 8	Tota 1
Online stores are just an alternative to traditional brick-and-mortar stores.	15	11	20	10	20	12	16	24	128
Campaigns conducted on the internet	16	14	19	19	15	15	19	23	140
COVID has caused a shift in one's way of living.	15	19	18	10	16	20	21	13	130
Cheaper alternatives are available on the internet platform.	19	19	22	20	15	15	17	15	142
Concerning the Migration from Offline to Online Stores									
Do you think Covid-19 has influenced your internet shopping habits?	G 1	G 2	G 3	G 4	G 5	G 6	G 7	G 8	Tota 1
Not exactly	35	40	35	32	25	38	45	30	280
Yes, definetly	30	45	30	35	36	25	28	36	265

What are your expectations for a future in which physical stores and shopping malls are less in number?	G 1	G 2	G 3	G 4	G 5	G 6	G 7	G 8	Tota l
Purchases of necessities will be made as soon as possible.	15	11	20	10	16	20	21	24	137
The ability to interact with others will be compromised.	15	19	18	20	15	14	19	19	139
The level of satisfaction will be lower.	16	15	10	13	15	15	19	23	126
Unemployment will rise as a result of this.	19	19	22	20	20	12	16	15	143

- However, time savings is the most compelling reason for purchasing online, according to 128 respondents, while choice is the most compelling reason for 120 respondents. Searching for and comparing products is easy, say 102 respondents. On the other hand, only 96 people claimed online shopping saves them time, while 99 said it saves them money.
- Additionally, 189 respondents stated that they were discouraged from shopping online since they were unable to check the sizes and quality. In addition, 184 respondents claimed that extended delivery delays discourage them from shopping online. A total of 172 interviewees from across all categories reported that the internet buying process is hard because of size matching, product material inspections, and return procedures, among other factors. During Covid-19, 282 of the participants reported that they had reduced their consumption. 263 respondents, on the other hand, stated that they were more conscious of overconsumption.
- 205 respondents identified company or government-imposed social separation as a major impediment to shopping in stores. However, 172 said shopping in stores and malls is no longer pleasant. En outre, 168 respondents claimed that being in touch with high-ranking officials of high organisations dissuades them from shopping in crowded stores.
- 144 reported online marketing campaigns became more active throughout the pandemic, prompting them to shop online more. 129 said their lifestyle has changed, with more time spent at home and behind computers, increasing their interest in online shopping. 122 respondents saw online shopping as a feasible alternative to offline shopping.
- When asked if they anticipated to return to offline retailers after Covid-19, 97 of the participants said yes, largely for entertainment and social connection. 121 respondents said they would return to physical shopping to sample, see, and inspect things. Also, 127 respondents intend to shop less in brick-and-mortar retailers. However, 104 stated that they will shift back based on the product.

- The following are the participants' responses to what motivates them to purchase offline: 151 chose to shop offline to touch, feel, and see the product. 141 identified it as a social activity, 118 as an entertainment activity, and 135 as a customer service activity.
- Participants said the following things deter them from shopping/buying offline: COVID limits produce pandemonium and respondents desire to avoid receiving COVID, according to 134 respondents.
- When asked if they would return to offline retailers after Covid-19, 142 of the participants said they would do so for leisure and social connection. 138 respondents said they would return to physical shopping to try, see, and inspect things. Also, 141 respondents intend to shop less in brick-and-mortar retailers. However, 124 stated that they will move back based on the product.
- Participants said the following things deter them from shopping/buying offline: Inability to touch, try, and verify the product, 148 long shipping time, 125 complex return process, 137 less fun than buying offline.
- Participants said the following influenced their online shopping decisions: Online retailers are cheaper than physical stores, according to 142 respondents. Online advertisements impacted 140 respondents, according to 128 respondents.
- When asked which of two possibilities Covid-19 played in persuading them to buy online, 280 participants chose Nothing changed, they bought online before Covid-19, while 265 participants chose Covid-19 did not play a role. Yes, thanks to Covid-19, they are more inclined to buy online.
- Participants' responses to a future with fewer physical stores were as follows: 137 said it would effect purchases of urgent and immediate requirements, 143 said it would raise unemployment, 126 said it would reduce satisfaction, and 139 said it would reduce social skills.

4. CONCLUSION

To summarise, this study seeks to better understand how the Covid-19 outbreak has influenced retail customer behaviour. This study examines how Covid-19 affects the choice between online and offline outlets. This study's scope is confined to NCR respondents' shopping preferences between online and physical stores. Goal of this study is to discover and assess innovative behavioural patterns that influence shoppers' decisions to buy from both online and offline businesses. The effects of the Covid-19 outbreak on societal limitations were studied on samples from the designated population. This study used focus groups and a web-based poll to get client feedback. The investigation produced key findings that will be used to build a conceptual model in the future.

5. LIMITATIONS

The survey's small sample size (by region) impacted the study's findings. The survey would have been more accurate if it had been distributed to other Indian states.

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