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A STUDY OF CUSTOMERS' PREFERENCE TOWARDS ONLINE SHOPPING IN PANDEMIC

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Abstract:

Adjusting with new or one can say next normal during the Covid19 pandemic there is momentous change in consumer behavior and sentiments across the globe. Persisting uncertainties from Covid19 has affected globe with varying impact across countries. This has led to significant changes in response of consumers to adjust to next normal. In this pandemic, technology is a real blessing for all the sectors. Technology is constantly evolving at a rapid speed and so is the way of living and tackling this pandemic. This evolution during the pandemic has led to operational changes in every sector and retail is no exception to these changes. Gone are the days where one had to step out of house to buy something. The customers' expectations are mounting with the changing scenario and today's customers' are always in search for the ease, convenience, availability and immediate response which is feasible only through technology. Today everything is available at our doorsteps. There is no constraint of time. The stores are open 24/7. Everything is available at a click. Considering the Covid19 pandemic and growth of technology in retail sector, in the present study, an attempt is made to analyze the customers' preference towards online shopping in pandemic. The data for this research was collected from 50 sample respondents in Nashik city, India. From the study it is found that customers' prefer to pay Cash on Delivery as they are hesitant about online payment system. Customers' always save time while shopping online and prefer online shopping over in store shopping during pandemic and will also prefer online shopping over offline in post pandemic scenario as one of the reasons may be exciting offers to save money.

Keywords: Customers, Preference, Online, Shopping, Pandemic.

Introduction:

Adjusting with new or one can say next normal during the Covid19 pandemic there is momentous change in consumer behavior and sentiments across the globe. Persisting uncertainties from Covid19 has affected globe with varying impact across countries. This has led to significant changes in response of consumers to adjust to next normal. In this pandemic, technology is a real blessing for all the sectors. Technology is constantly evolving at a rapid speed and so is the way of living and tackling this pandemic. This evolution during the pandemic has led to operational changes in every sector and retail is no exception to these changes. Customers' in this pandemic are becoming techno savvy where they look forward to save time and money on every activity. Before pandemic there were many buyers who preferred online shopping but pandemic has changed views of other group of buyers who preferred shopping from market, mall or stores. Gone are the days where one had to step out of house to buy something though the major reason to bring this change is lockdown. The customers' expectations are mounting with the changing scenario and today's customers' are always in search for the ease, convenience, availability and immediate response which is feasible only through technology. Retail Industry today has gone digital where everything is available online. Digitalized retail industry is booming because of the response from the customers. Online shopping is done through various mobile applications (apps) or through web-portal where all the products or services are displayed on screen with complete description about it and customers' buy the same from anywhere and anytime by having the choice to pay immediately or on arrival of the products. All the brands have online stores and today everything is available at our doorsteps. There is no constraint of time. The stores are open 24/7. Everything is available at a click. The awareness amongst the consumers is augmented because of technology, whatsoever information is vital is accessible on the internet and opinion or feedback about the product or service is also available on one click, so one gets peer review as well. The competition has resulted in better offerings. Considering the pandemic and growth of technology in retail sector, in the present study, an attempt is made to analyze the customer preference towards online shopping in pandemic.

Review of Literature:

Laukkanen (2007) has discussed various attributes of multi-channel electronic banking to know the diverse retail channel preference of online bank customers by examining their channel attribute preferences in electronic banking. The study concluded that banks and producers should diversify consumer group so that the use of electronic banking techniques and services could be increased.

Liao and Wong (2007) in their study, "The Determinants of Customer Interaction with Internet Enabled E-Banking Services", explored the major considerations associated with internet-enabled e-banking systems. They found that perceived security, responsiveness and convenience were the primary avenues which influence customer interactions. During pandemic in March 2020, BigBasket - a major player in online grocery in India had message "We'll be back soon! We are currently experiencing unprecedented demand. In light of this, we are restricting access to our website to existing customers only. Please try again in a few hours." Grofers - a competitor, had a alike message "Due to the sudden rush, we have stopped servicing many locations, but we are working to increase capacity and will be resuming operations shortly." Amazon - major ecommerce player, had announced on its site that "the customers are relying on them like never before in their social distancing and self-quarantine efforts". This pandemic has brought change in shopping habits of those who do not purchase frequently online.

Objectives of the Study:

The following objectives were undertaken for the research paper:

1. To know customers' preference towards online shopping during pandemic period.
2. To know opinion of customers' whether they will prefer to continue online shopping after pandemic.

Hypotheses of the research study:

Following hypotheses were tested for this study:

Null Hypothesis:

- H_{0a}: Customers' do not prefer online shopping over in-store shopping during pandemic.
- H_{0b}: Customers' prefer offline shopping through retail store/ mall over online shopping in post pandemic period.

Alternative Hypothesis:

- H_{1a}: Customers' prefer online shopping over in-store shopping during pandemic.
- H_{1b}: Customers' prefer online shopping over offline shopping through retail store/ mall in post pandemic period.

Research Methodology:

For the research study, the following methodology was adopted and conclusions were drawn accordingly.

Research Type: Analytical and Descriptive methods were adopted.

Methods of Data Collection:

For the present study both primary and secondary methods were adopted. Primary data was collected through structured questionnaire. Secondary data was collected from published books, internet, newspapers, journals, magazines, etc.

Sample Design: The present study is based on the primary data. The primary data was collected from 50 Units (sample respondents) residing in Nashik city, India, using convenience sampling technique.

Area and Period of the Study:

This study is confined to Nashik city, Maharashtra, India. The study was conducted in the month of September 2020.

Data Analysis:

The following is the analysis based on the responses given by 50 Units (sample respondents).

Demographic Analysis of the Respondents:

1. 64 percent of the respondents were females and 36 percent were males.
2. 32 per cent of respondent were between 26-40 years of their age, 22 per cent were between 41-60 years of their age, 34 per cent between 18-25 years of their age, and 12 per cent above 60 years of their age.
3. 70 per cent of the respondents were married, 30 per cent were single.
4. 34 per cent of the respondents under study were HSC qualified, 44 per cent were graduates, 18 per cent were up to SSC qualified and 4 per cent of the respondents were post graduates and above.

The Researcher has Measured Following Perspectives of the Respondents:

1. All the respondents were aware about online shopping.
2. 90 percent of the respondents have done online shopping and 10 per cent have never tried for online shopping. All the further responses were taken from 90 per cent respondents who have experienced online shopping.
3. 54 percent of the respondents have done online shopping before pandemic and 46 per cent have started online shopping from pandemic period.
4. 85 percent prefer to buy groceries/ essentials online during pandemic period whereas 15 per cent do not prefer.
5. 68 percent of the respondents find online shopping easy whereas 32 per cent face some difficulties.
6. 94 percent prefer to pay Cash on Delivery and 6 percent prefer paid delivery.
7. All the respondents feel little hesitant for online transactions and prefer mobile apps then website for online shopping.
8. 62 percent of the respondents feel they always save time, 22 percent feel sometimes, 16 percent feel most of the times they save time while shopping online.
9. 78 percent of the respondents' always prefer online shopping over in store shopping during pandemic. 12 percent said they will prefer sometimes, whereas 10 per cent said most of the times they prefer online shopping as compared to in-store shopping during pandemic. Difference in the proportions of responses is highly significant, at $p = 0.0001$, Chi-Square value-216.400. Degrees of Freedom (df)-4.

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10.58 percent of the respondents' would always prefer online shopping over in store shopping post pandemic, 14 percent said rarely, 12 percent said they will prefer sometimes, whereas 04 per cent said most of the times and 12 percent said never they would prefer online shopping as compared to in-store shopping post pandemic. Difference in the proportions of responses is highly significant, at $p = 0.0001$, Chi-Square value- 93.200, Degrees of Freedom (df)-4.

Testing of Hypothesis:

H_{0a}: Customers' do not prefer online shopping over in-store shopping during pandemic. As observed (the perspectives measured No: 9); difference in the proportions of responses is extremely significant, Hence H_{0a} is not accepted at $p = 0.0001$, by applying Chi square test to test the homogeneity of proportions of responses of the respondent college students.

H_{1a}: Customers' prefer online shopping over in-store shopping during pandemic. Hence, the alternative hypothesis, H_{1a}: Customers' prefer online shopping over in-store shopping during pandemic is accepted.

H_{0b}: Customers' prefer offline shopping through retail store/ mall over online shopping in post pandemic period. As observed (the perspectives measured No: 10); difference in the proportions of responses is highly significant, Hence H_{0b} is not accepted at $p = 0.0001$, by applying Chi square test to test the homogeneity of proportions of responses of the respondent college students.

H_{1b}: Customers' prefer online shopping over offline shopping through retail store/ mall in post pandemic period. Hence, the alternative hypothesis, H_{1b}: Customers' prefer online shopping over offline shopping through retail store/ mall in post pandemic period is accepted.

Findings:

1. All the respondents were aware about online shopping.
2. Most (90 percent) of the respondents have done online shopping.
3. Most (54 percent) of the respondents have done online shopping before pandemic period.
4. Most (85 percent) of the respondents prefer to buy groceries/ essentials online during pandemic period.
5. Most of the (68 percent) of the respondents find online shopping easy.
6. Customers (94 percent) prefer to pay Cash on Delivery.
7. All the respondents are hesitant for online transactions.
8. Customers' (62 percent) always save time while shopping online.
9. Customers' (78 percent) always prefer online shopping over in store shopping during pandemic
10. Customers' (58 percent) would always prefer online shopping over in store shopping post pandemic.

Conclusions:

Customers are aware about online shopping and most of them have some experience of online shopping. Most of the customers have done online shopping before pandemic period. Most of the customers prefer to buy groceries/ essentials online during pandemic period. It is easy to shop online. Customers prefer to pay Cash on Delivery as they are hesitant about online payments system. Customers always save time while shopping online and prefer online shopping over in store shopping during and post pandemic as one of the reasons may be exciting offers to save money.

Suggestions:

1. There should be exciting offers other than cash back such as extra 10 percent OFF for paying online instead of Cash on Delivery.
2. Online shopping App should have 4D effect to give actual in store shopping feel which would increase the preference rate.

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