

# Impact of COVID-19 on Consumer Buying Behaviour: A Study Among Employed Consumers in Malappuram District

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## Abstract

The global spread of COVID-19 created unprecedented disruptions in economic activities and daily life, leading to significant changes in consumer purchasing behaviour. This study examines how the pandemic influenced consumers' buying behaviour, with particular reference to employed individuals in Malappuram district. The research aims to identify the major factors that affected purchasing decisions during the pandemic, analyze changes in household-goods consumption patterns compared to the period before the pandemic, and understand the difficulties consumers experienced when purchasing essential items. The study is descriptive in nature and is based on both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data were collected from 160 respondents through a structured questionnaire using convenience sampling. Various statistical tools, such as mean, standard deviation, coefficient of variation, and non-parametric tests, were used to analyze the collected data. The results indicate that the pandemic significantly influenced consumer priorities and purchasing behaviour. Consumers increased their spending on essential and hygiene-related products while reducing purchases of non-essential goods. Lockdown restrictions, health concerns, supply shortages, and income uncertainty were found to be major factors affecting consumer decisions. The study highlights that crisis situations such as pandemics can reshape consumption patterns and accelerate shifts toward safer and more necessity-driven purchasing behaviour.

**Keywords:** Consumer Behaviour, Online Buying, COVID-19 Impact, Consumer Priorities, Household Consumption, Pandemic Purchasing.

## 1. Introduction

Consumer behavior refers to the process of selecting, purchasing, and using products and services to satisfy individual needs and desires. It is influenced by various factors such as social, economic, cultural, and psychological elements. These factors play an important role in shaping the buying decisions of consumers. In December 2019, a new virus known as COVID-19 was first identified in Wuhan, China, and it rapidly spread across the world. In March 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. To control the spread of the virus, the Government of India imposed a nationwide lockdown, which significantly affected the daily lives of people and the functioning of markets. During the lockdown period, consumers rushed to purchase essential goods, which led to shortages of several items such as face masks, sanitizers, and household necessities. The pandemic also changed consumers'

spending patterns, with people reducing expenditure on non-essential goods and focusing more on necessities. At the same time, online shopping and digital payment methods increased as consumers preferred safer and contactless purchasing options.

This study aims to analyze the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on consumer buying behavior by identifying the factors that influenced purchasing decisions, changes in household spending patterns, and the challenges faced by consumers during the pandemic. It is important to note in mind that worldwide customers are already evolving at a high speed. That process is now playing out faster than anyone imagined. Consumer optimism has declined as the COVID-19 crisis has progressed. The importance of consumer buying behavior plays a critical role in stabilizing the demand in an economy. It's to be updated consistently with the requirements and preferences of various customers. With the increase in the pandemic situation, the behavior change was unforeseeable. So it's significant to research the changes that came within the buying behavior of consumers. The pandemic atmosphere, as well as the daily routine of everyone around the world, has brought tremendous changes to life. The unforeseen arrival of the pandemic has already changed consumers' behaviors. Any part of culture has been influenced by the lockdown and other complex causes related to the pandemic. Consumers are taking various steps to comply with these situations. Therefore, this study is an effort to understand and analyze the various consequences of the pandemic on the customer's buying behavior in terms of the impact and changes while shopping.

## 2. Review of literature

Bharat Patil and Nerita Patil (2020) observed that the Indian market was significantly affected during the lockdown period. Consumers rushed to purchase essential goods due to fear of shortages, which resulted in panic buying and even black market trading of products such as masks, sanitizers, and medicines. Media coverage and social media information also played a major role in shaping consumer behavior.

According to Jagdish Sheth (2020), COVID-19, social distancing, and lockdown measures disrupted normal shopping habits. Consumers began stockpiling essential goods and increasingly adopted digital technologies such as online shopping and virtual communication platforms due to movement restrictions. Liu Taixing, Pan Beixiao, and Yin Zhichao (2020) studied the effect of the pandemic on Chinese household consumption using the China Household Finance Survey. Their findings revealed a significant decline in household consumption, particularly in urban areas, while rural households were comparatively less affected. The use of mobile payment systems helped support consumption in urban regions.

Similarly, Sanna Laato and colleagues (2020) analyzed unusual consumer purchasing behaviors such as hoarding essential items during the pandemic. Their research showed that exposure to excessive online information increased anxiety and uncertainty, which influenced consumers to make unusual purchases and practice voluntary self-isolation.

A study by Simona Stanciu and others (2020) on Romanian consumers indicated that lockdown measures reduced social activities and shifted consumer focus toward necessities. Many consumers who previously preferred traditional shopping were forced to adopt online shopping methods.

Research by Oliver Wright and Blackburn (2020) suggested that the pandemic permanently influenced consumer attitudes and purchasing habits. Consumers became more conscious about spending, preferred local products, and increasingly adopted digital commerce and online communication tools.

Further studies by Laguna L. and colleagues (2020) showed that during the pandemic, people searched online for information related to COVID-19 and food consumption. Changes in food purchasing habits were observed, with consumers buying more non-perishable and health-related food items.

According to Anupam Sharma and Deepika Jhamb (2020), the lockdown had a strong impact on online shopping and digital marketing trends in India. Social media platforms became an important source of information and influenced consumers' product choices.

Earlier studies on consumer behavior, such as those by Amaresh Tyagi (2018) and N. Ramya with S. A. Mohamed Ali (2016), highlighted that consumer buying decisions are influenced by cultural, social, personal, and psychological factors, including lifestyle, income, motivation, and perception.

### 3. Objectives Of The Study

- A. To identify the factors that are affecting consumers' buying of products during the pandemic period.
- B. To identify and compare the changes in consumption patterns of household goods with the pre-pandemic period.
- C. To know the challenges faced by consumers in purchasing due to covid 19.

### 4. Hypothesis Of The Study

H0: There is no significant difference between the factors affecting buying during the pandemic with respect to age

H1: There is no significant difference between the challenges while buying during the pandemic with respect to age

### 5. Research Methodology

The present study is descriptive in nature. Both primary and secondary data were used for the study. The survey method was adopted to collect primary data from respondents. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire. A 5-point Likert scale was used to measure respondents' opinions regarding factors affecting buying behavior and challenges faced by consumers during the pandemic. The convenience sampling method was used for selecting respondents. The total sample size consists of 160 employed individuals from Malappuram district.

### 6. Data Analysis and Interpretations

**Table 1: Age-Wise Classification Of Respondents**

Age	No. of Respondents	Percentage
below 30	10	6.3
30-40	34	21.3
40-50	40	25
above 50	76	47.5
Total	160	100

Source: Primary survey

**Table 2: Gender -Wise Classification Of Respondents**

Gender	No. of Respondents	Percentage
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Male	102	63.8
Female	58	36.3
Total	160	100

Source: Primary data

**Table 3: Occupation-Wise Classification Of Respondents**

Occupation	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Government employee	58	36.3
Private employee	40	25
Self employed	62	38.8
Total	160	100

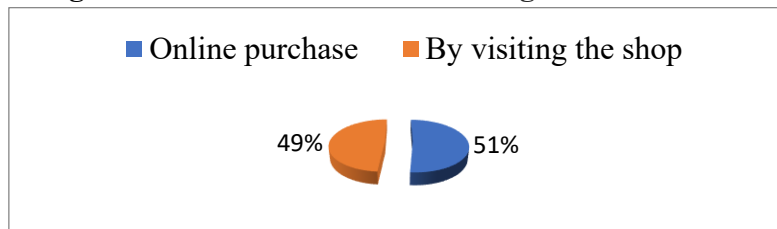
Source: Primary data

**Table 4: Monthly Income-Wise Classification Of Respondents**

Monthly income	No. of Respondents	Percentage
below 15000	22	13.8
15000-25000	32	20.0
25000-35000	38	23.8
35000-45000	22	13.8
above 45000	46	28.8
Total	160	100

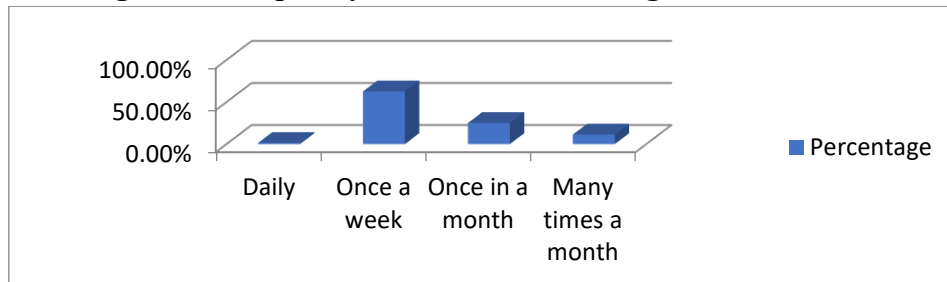
Source: Primary data

**Figure 1: Mode Of Purchase During Pandemic Time**



Source: Primary data

**Figure 2: Frequency Of Purchases During Pandemic Time**



Source: Primary data

**Table 5: Factors Affecting Consumers' Buying During Pandemic Time**

Factors	Mean	Std.Deviation	Variance
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Lockdown and social distancing	4.38	0.75	0.563
Fear of catching the virus	4.23	0.977	0.955
Shortage of essential goods	3.64	1.21	1.465
Income during the pandemic	3.7	1.283	1.645
Free Government grocery kit	3.76	1.079	1.163
Online advertisement	3.4	1.333	1.776
Price of the product	3.9	1.035	1.072

Source: Primary data

The table reveals that all the items shown in the table were the factors that affected buying during the pandemic. The variance of items reveals that lockdown and social distancing were the main factor affected consumers, because it has the lowest variance.

**Table 6: Change In The Consumption Pattern Of Household Goods When Compared To The Pre-Pandemic Period**

Item	Gender	Increase in buying		Decrease in buying	
		Total numbers	Percentage (%)	Total numbers	Percentage (%)
Personal hygiene product	Male	100	98.03	2	1.96
	Female	54	93.1	4	6.89
Cleaning product	Male	100	98.03	2	1.96
	Female	56	96.55	2	3.44
Tinned food	Male	44	43.13	58	56.86
	Female	8	13.79	50	86.2
Fresh food	Male	84	82.35	18	17.64
	Female	50	86.2	8	13.79
Frozen food	Male	14	13.72	88	86.27
	Female	6	10.34	52	89.65
Online entertainment	Male	90	88.23	12	11.76
	Female	54	93.1	4	6.89
Wellness products	Male	54	52.94	48	47.05
	Female	46	79.31	12	20.68
OTC Medicines	Male	86	84.31	16	15.68
	Female	54	93.1	4	6.89
Pet care products	Male	86	84.31	16	15.68
	Female	54	93.1	4	6.89
Non-alcoholic beverages	Male	26	25.49	76	74.5
	Female	6	10.34	52	89.65
Toys and games	Male	80	78.43	22	21.56
	Female	42	72.41	16	27.58
Beauty products	Male	62	60.78	40	39.21

	Female	42	72.41	16	27.58
Household electronics	Male	22	21.56	80	78.43
	Female	15	25.86	43	74.13
Home décor and equipments	Male	30	29.41	72	70.58
	Female	10	17.24	42	72.41
Clothing	Male	26	25.49	76	74.5
	Female	6	10.34	52	89.65

**Source: Primary data**

Table 6 shows changes in household consumption patterns compared to the pre-pandemic period. Consumption of personal hygiene products (96.25%), cleaning products (97.5%), fresh food, online entertainment, wellness products, OTC medicines (87.5%), pet care items, toys, and beauty products increased, reflecting greater health and hygiene awareness. Conversely, consumption of tinned foods, frozen foods (87.5%), non-alcoholic beverages, household electronics, home décor, and clothing (83.75%) decreased, with females showing a larger reduction in clothing and frozen food purchases.

**Table 7: Challenges Faced By The Consumers During The Pandemic**

Challenges	Mean	Std.Deviation
Lack of knowledge about online purchasing	2.3	1.233
Lack of transportation	3.29	1.338
Stoppage of service of online marketing platforms like Amazon,flipkart etc during lockdown	3.94	1.114
Closed shops	4.04	1.092
Reduction in income due to job loss/ salary cut/loss of business	3.86	1.256
Shortage of essential goods	4	1.283

**Source: Primary data**

Table 7 shows the challenges faced by consumers during the pandemic. Lack of knowledge about online purchasing was not a major issue, while limited transportation was a moderate hindrance. Major challenges included the closure of shops, stoppage of online services, reduced income, and shortage of essential goods.

#### Testing Of Hypothesis

##### Hypothesis 1:

H0: There is no significant difference between the factors affecting buying during the pandemic with respect to age

H1: There is a significant difference between the factors affecting buying during the pandemic with respect to age

**Table 8: Age-Wise Analysis Kruskal-Wallis H Test**

	Chi-Square	Df	P value
Lockdown and social distancing	8.270	3	0.041
Fear of catching the virus	14.104	3	0.003
Shortage of essential goods	18.161	3	0.000

Income	22.810	3	0.000
Free government grocery kit	23.408	3	0.000
Online advertisements	21.173	3	0.000
Price of the product	14.402	3	0.002

Source: Primary data

All the factors have a p-value less than .05 indicating that there is an association between gender and factors affecting buying during the pandemic. So accepted the alternative hypothesis in this case.

Hypothesis 2

H0: There is no significant difference between the challenges while buying during the pandemic with respect to age

H1: There is a significant difference between the challenges while buying during the pandemic with respect to age

Table 9: Age-Wise Analysis Kruskal-Wallis H Test

	Chi-Square	Df	P value
lack of knowledge about online purchasing	27.141	3	.000
lack of transportation	9.062	3	.028
stoppage of service of online marketing sites	24.249	3	.000
closed shops	22.523	3	.000
reduction in income due to job loss/salary cut/loss of business	6.839	3	.077
shortage of essential goods	17.824	3	.000

Source: Primary data

All of the statements have a p-value less than .05 suggesting that there is a substantial association between challenges faced by the consumer during the pandemic and age. So accepted the alternative hypothesis in this case.

7. Findings Of the Study

Factors Affecting Consumer Buying During the Pandemic

The declaration of lockdown and social distancing norms restricted movement and adversely affected consumer purchasing activities. Fear of contracting the virus, Nationwide lockdown, and restrictions on transportation disrupted supply chains and created shortages of essential goods. Many individuals experienced job loss, salary reductions, or business losses, leading to reduced income and lower purchasing capacity. Government initiatives such as the distribution of free grocery kits, Online advertisements and promotions through social media platforms, and the price of products remain important factors influencing consumer buying behavior during the pandemic.

Challenges Faced by Consumers While Purchasing

Transportation restrictions limited access to markets and forced consumers to purchase from nearby stores. Temporary suspension of services by online platforms such as Amazon and Flipkart created difficulties in online purchasing. Closure of shops such as textile stores, electronics shops, salons, and shopping malls restricted consumer access to various goods and services. Reduced income due to job loss, salary cuts, or

business losses affected consumers' purchasing power. Shortage of goods caused by panic buying, transportation restrictions, and supply disruptions created further difficulties for consumers.

### **Changes in Consumption Pattern of Household Goods**

**Products with Increased Consumption:** Personal hygiene products such as masks, sanitizers, gloves, and handwash saw a significant increase in consumption. Household cleaning products were purchased more frequently due to increased concern about hygiene. Fresh food items consumption increased as people became more health-conscious. Online entertainment usage increased during lockdown due to more time spent at home. Wellness product consumption increased as people focused more on improving their health. Over-the-counter (OTC) medicines, including vitamins and immunity boosters, were purchased more frequently. Pet care products, toys and games also experienced increased consumption during the lockdown period. Beauty product consumption increased, especially among female respondents.

**Products with Decreased Consumption:** Consumption of tinned food products declined during the pandemic. Frozen food product consumption also decreased compared to the pre-pandemic period. Non-alcoholic beverage consumption reduced during the pandemic. Purchase of household electronic goods declined significantly. Consumption of home décor and equipment decreased during the lockdown period. The purchase of clothing has reduced considerably compared to the pre-pandemic period.

### **Hypothesis Testing**

Based on hypothesis testing, it was found that there is a significant relationship between age and both the factors affecting consumer buying behavior and the challenges faced by consumers during the pandemic.

## **8. Limitations Of the Study**

The study is limited to the lockdown phases 1.0, 2.0, and 3.0 declared in India due to the COVID-19 disease. Extensive literature review on COVID-19 and consumer buying behavior was not available for in-depth reviews. The study concerned only COVID-19 disease and consumer buying behavior in the lockdown period. Time is an important constraint, and there may be a chance for sample error.

## **9. Suggestions**

Promote and encourage online transactions among consumers to reduce physical contact and minimize the risk of infection. Consumers should take necessary precautions while purchasing essential items such as groceries, vegetables, milk, medicines, and LPG cylinders, and be careful while using services at banks, post offices, and public transportation. Maintain a proper diet and nutrition to enhance immunity and support both physical and mental health. Implement strong financial and food security schemes for unorganized and vulnerable workers to protect low-income consumers. Ensure the care and support of homeless people and beggars by providing shelter and food during nationwide lockdowns. Recognize and respect the contributions of healthcare workers, police, and essential goods sellers, and develop a cooperative attitude as responsible citizens. Avoid relying on rumors or unverified information, which can create panic and hesitation in the market. Strictly maintain social distancing while purchasing goods in markets to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Take strong administrative action against black marketing, adulteration of food, sale of prohibited goods, overpricing, and fraudulent measures to protect consumer rights.



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