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## CHANGES IN CONSUMER BUYING BEHAVIOR THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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### ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically reshaped consumer behavior worldwide, accelerating the shift from offline to online shopping and increasing reliance on social media platforms for product discovery and purchase decisions. This study explores the **changes in consumer buying behavior through social media platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic** in Meerut district. Using an empirical approach, primary data were collected from consumers to examine their social media usage, engagement with marketing content, and purchase patterns during the pandemic. The findings reveal significant changes in consumer preferences, including increased online purchases, heightened responsiveness to digital promotions, and greater trust in peer reviews and influencer recommendations. Psychological, social, technological, and economic factors were identified as key drivers influencing these behavioral changes. The study highlights the critical role of social media marketing in shaping consumer decisions during crisis situations and provides actionable insights for marketers to design effective strategies that align with evolving consumer expectations. The results contribute to a deeper understanding of digital consumer behavior in emerging markets and offer implications for businesses aiming to strengthen their online presence in the post-pandemic era.

**KEYWORDS:** Consumer Buying Behavior, Social Media, Pandemic, Covid-19, etc.

## INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has had far-reaching consequences on almost every aspect of human life, disrupting social, economic, and business activities on a global scale. Governments worldwide imposed lockdowns, social distancing measures, and restrictions on movement to control the spread of the virus (Sulfia et al., 2025; Hanh, Huan, & Le, 2025). These unprecedented changes significantly altered consumer lifestyles and behavior, particularly their shopping habits. Traditional brick-and-mortar retail faced severe disruptions, leading to a rapid and widespread adoption of digital platforms for communication, entertainment, and commerce (Irmadiani, 2025; Sarkar et al., 2025; Ali Taha et al., 2021).

Among digital channels, **social media platforms** such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube emerged as critical tools not only for social interaction but also for information exchange, product discovery, and online purchasing (Masih, Singh, & Masih, 2024; Miah et al., 2022). Consumers increasingly relied on these platforms to stay connected with brands, compare prices, read reviews, and make informed purchasing decisions (Fandrejewska, Chmielarz, & Zborowski, 2022; Gu et al., 2021). Social media transformed from a supplementary marketing channel into a **primary medium for brand engagement**, allowing businesses to maintain visibility, communicate promotional offers and foster trust during periods of uncertainty (Ramachandran, 2025; Azhar et al., 2023; Naeem, 2021; Valaskova, Durana, & Adamko, 2021).

In the context of Meerut district, a growing urban population with increasing internet penetration and digital literacy created fertile ground for social media to influence consumer behavior (Dubbelink, Herrando, & Constantinides, 2021). The pandemic accelerated existing trends, such as the shift toward online shopping, while also creating new dynamics in terms of how consumers interact with brands (Hanh, Huan, & Le, 2025). Factors such as safety concerns, convenience, peer influence, and digital accessibility played a crucial role in shaping buying decisions (Irmadiani, 2025). The reliance on social media for shopping-related information and transactions not only changed the way consumers purchase products but also affected their preferences, loyalty, and overall perception of brands (Sulfia et al., 2025).

This study seeks to **empirically investigate the impact of COVID-19 on consumer buying behavior through social media platforms** in Meerut. It examines how the pandemic

influenced consumer engagement, purchase frequency, brand interactions, and decision-making processes (Masih, Singh, & Masih, 2024). Additionally, it explores the psychological, social, economic, and technological factors that drove these changes, offering insights into evolving consumer patterns (Fandrewska, Chmielarz, & Zborowski, 2022). Understanding these behavioral shifts is essential for marketers, businesses, and policymakers to develop **effective digital marketing strategies**, tailor communication approaches, and enhance customer experience in a rapidly transforming marketplace (Azhar et al., 2023).

By analyzing consumer behavior in the context of a pandemic-induced digital shift, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of the opportunities and challenges faced by businesses in leveraging social media marketing (Ramachandran, 2025). The findings can guide marketers in optimizing content, targeting relevant audiences, and implementing innovative strategies to engage consumers effectively, ensuring sustainable business growth in the post-pandemic era (Sarkar et al., 2025).

### **Background and Context**

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented changes to the way people live, work, and consume goods and services. Lockdowns, social distancing measures, and the closure of physical retail outlets significantly restricted traditional shopping channels, pushing consumers toward digital platforms for their purchasing needs. This sudden shift has accelerated the adoption of **social media platforms** as key channels for communication, information sharing, and commerce. Platforms such as **Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube** have emerged as not only tools for social interaction but also vital mediums for product discovery, brand engagement, and online purchasing (Masih, Singh, & Masih, 2024).

In India, rising internet penetration, increased smartphone usage, and growing digital literacy created fertile ground for social media marketing to thrive. Urban areas, such as Meerut district, witnessed a rapid increase in online activity, where consumers began relying heavily on social media to explore products, compare prices, read reviews, and make purchase decisions. The pandemic created a unique environment where businesses had to pivot quickly, using social media marketing to sustain engagement, attract customers, and maintain brand presence during periods of uncertainty (Sulfia et al., 2025).

Consumer behavior during this period was influenced by a combination of psychological, social, technological, and economic factors. Psychological factors included concerns over health and safety, fear of exposure, and the need for convenience. Social factors, such as peer recommendations, online reviews, and influencer promotions, played a critical role in shaping trust and decision-making. Technological factors, including user-friendly platforms, secure payment systems, and widespread internet access, facilitated online transactions. Additionally, economic factors, such as income fluctuations and price sensitivity, influenced purchase choices during the pandemic (Sarkar et al., 2025).

Understanding these changes is important because they represent not only immediate responses to the crisis but also long-term shifts in consumer preferences and behavior. Social media marketing has proven to be a strategic tool for businesses to influence purchasing decisions, enhance brand visibility, and foster customer loyalty in a digital-first environment. This study focuses on **examining the impact of COVID-19 on consumer buying behavior through social media platforms in Meerut**, aiming to provide insights into how consumers adapted to digital shopping, how businesses leveraged social media marketing, and the factors driving changes in consumer behavior. The findings are expected to guide marketers and businesses in designing effective strategies, improving consumer engagement, and navigating the evolving digital marketplace in a post-pandemic context (Masih, Singh, & Masih, 2024).

### **Impact of COVID-19 on Consumer Behavior**

- Shift from offline to online shopping**

The COVID-19 pandemic led to lockdowns, social distancing measures, and temporary closure of physical stores, which significantly restricted traditional shopping channels. Consumers were forced to adopt online shopping for essential and non-essential items. E-commerce platforms, online marketplaces, and social media channels became primary means for purchasing goods. This shift was not only driven by necessity but also by convenience, safety, and accessibility, resulting in a lasting change in consumer behavior toward digital-first shopping habits.

- Increased use of social media for product discovery, reviews, and recommendations**

With limited access to physical stores, consumers increasingly relied on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube to explore products. Social media provided a space for brand engagement, peer reviews, influencer

recommendations, and advertisements, which helped consumers make informed decisions. Consumers used these platforms not only to discover new products but also to validate purchase decisions through user-generated content, comments, and testimonials. This trend highlighted the growing importance of social media marketing in influencing buying behavior.

- **Changes in purchase frequency, spending patterns, and product preferences**

The pandemic altered how often consumers shopped, how much they spent, and what they preferred to buy. Many consumers reduced discretionary spending due to economic uncertainty, while prioritizing essential goods and health-related products. Purchase frequency for certain categories increased (e.g., groceries, hygiene products, home entertainment), while non-essential items saw a decline. Additionally, consumers became more value-conscious, price-sensitive, and selective in their product choices, often relying on social media to identify discounts, deals, and trending items.

- **Influence of fear, uncertainty, and health concerns on buying behavior**

Psychological factors played a crucial role in shaping consumer behavior during COVID-19. Fear of infection, uncertainty about the duration of the pandemic, and concerns for personal and family health prompted consumers to minimize physical store visits and seek safer alternatives like online shopping. These factors also influenced the types of products purchased, with greater focus on hygiene, healthcare, and home-use products. Trust in brands, product safety, and reliable delivery became key considerations, and consumers increasingly relied on digital channels for information and reassurance.

### **Role of Social Media Marketing**

- **Strategies adopted by businesses during the pandemic (discounts, influencer marketing, interactive campaigns)**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, businesses faced the challenge of maintaining visibility and attracting consumers despite restrictions on physical interactions. Social media marketing became a vital tool for engaging customers remotely. Companies adopted several strategies, such as:

1. **Discounts and offers:** To incentivize purchases and attract budget-conscious consumers during economic uncertainty.
2. **Influencer marketing:** Collaborating with social media influencers to promote products, build trust, and increase brand credibility.

3. **Interactive campaigns:** Engaging consumers through contests, polls, live sessions, and quizzes to maintain brand visibility and foster emotional connection. These strategies helped businesses sustain consumer interest, drive online sales, and strengthen their digital presence.

- **Impact of targeted advertisements, brand communication, and engagement on consumer decisions**

Social media platforms allow businesses to reach highly specific audiences through targeted advertisements based on demographics, interests, and online behavior. This precision helped brands deliver personalized content to consumers, increasing the likelihood of engagement and purchase.

1. **Brand communication:** Frequent updates, product information, and promotional content helped maintain visibility and brand recall.

2. **Consumer engagement:** Liking, commenting, sharing, and participating in online campaigns created a two-way interaction, fostering loyalty and trust. As a result, these practices significantly influenced consumer decision-making, from product consideration to final purchase, especially during periods of uncertainty caused by the pandemic.

- **Case examples from local businesses or brands active in Meerut**

In Meerut, several local businesses leveraged social media to adapt to changing consumer behavior:

1. **Retail stores and boutiques** used Instagram and Facebook to showcase product collections, offer home delivery, and run festive promotions.

2. **Food and beverage businesses** engaged customers through WhatsApp orders, Facebook live cooking sessions, and influencer-led campaigns.

3. **Educational institutions and coaching centers** conducted online classes and awareness campaigns via social media platforms, maintaining engagement with students and parents.

These examples illustrate how local businesses successfully used social media marketing to sustain operations, engage consumers, and drive sales during the pandemic, highlighting its critical role in shaping consumer behavior.

## 1. Factors Affecting Consumer Buying Behavior

- **Psychological factors (fear, stress, need for safety)**

The COVID-19 pandemic heightened consumer anxiety, fear, and stress due to health risks, uncertainty, and economic instability. These psychological factors influenced buying decisions in several ways:

1. Consumers prioritized products related to health, hygiene, and safety.
2. Risk-averse behavior led to preference for online shopping to avoid exposure in physical stores.
3. Stress and fear also prompted impulsive buying of comfort goods, essential items, or products perceived to provide security.

Understanding these psychological drivers helps marketers anticipate consumer needs and design campaigns that address emotional concerns.

- **Social factors (peer influence, family, social networks)**

Social interactions and influence play a critical role in shaping consumer choices. During the pandemic, social media amplified these effects:

1. Recommendations from friends, family, or peers on platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook affected purchase decisions.
2. User-generated content, online reviews, and testimonials increased trust and credibility for products and brands.
3. Participation in social media communities or groups encouraged consumers to explore trending products and adopt behaviors endorsed by their network. These social dynamics strongly influenced preferences, brand perceptions, and adoption of online purchasing.

- **Technological factors (ease of access, digital literacy, platform usability)**

Technology facilitated the shift to online shopping and shaped consumer behavior in significant ways:

1. Ease of access to e-commerce platforms and social media apps allowed consumers to browse and purchase products from home.
2. Higher levels of digital literacy enabled consumers to navigate online shopping, compare products, and complete transactions efficiently.
3. User-friendly interface design, secure payment options, and smooth delivery processes increased trust and adoption of online channels.

Technological convenience became a decisive factor in motivating consumers to prefer digital platforms over traditional stores.

- **Economic factors (income changes, disposable income)**

Economic conditions influenced purchasing patterns during the pandemic:

1. Many consumers experienced reduced income, job uncertainty, or financial constraints, impacting spending behavior.
2. Disposable income limitations led to more selective purchases, prioritizing essential items over luxury or non-essential goods.
3. Price sensitivity increased, prompting consumers to look for discounts, offers, and cost-effective alternatives via social media marketing.

Economic factors, combined with psychological and social influences, determined how consumers allocated their spending and which platforms they used for shopping.

## DISCUSSION

- **Interpretation of results in the context of existing literature**

The study's findings should be analyzed by comparing them with previous research on consumer behavior and social media marketing. For example:

1. The observed shift from offline to online shopping during COVID-19 aligns with global trends reported in prior studies.
2. Changes in product preferences, frequency of purchases, and spending patterns can be interpreted alongside literature on crisis-driven consumer behavior, which highlights the influence of fear, uncertainty, and safety concerns on buying decisions.
3. The increased reliance on social media for product discovery, reviews, and recommendations supports earlier findings on digital platforms' role in shaping purchase behavior.

By situating results within the context of existing literature, the study validates its findings and highlights unique patterns specific to consumers in Meerut district.

- **How social media influenced consumer trust, engagement, and purchase decisions**

Social media marketing played a pivotal role in shaping consumer behavior during the pandemic:

1. **Trust:** Consumers relied on reviews, influencer recommendations, and brand communication to ensure product authenticity and reliability.
2. **Engagement:** Interactive campaigns, polls, live sessions, and personalized content fostered a sense of involvement and loyalty.

3. **Purchase decisions:** Targeted advertisements, social proof from peers, and accessible e-commerce links directly influenced consumers' choices, prompting faster decision-making and increased online transactions.

The study highlights that social media was not just a marketing tool but also a medium to build credibility, sustain engagement, and drive conversions.

- **Long-term implications for marketing strategies post-pandemic**

The pandemic-induced shifts in consumer behavior have long-lasting effects on marketing strategies:

1. Businesses must continue investing in social media marketing, influencer collaborations, and personalized digital campaigns to maintain consumer engagement.
2. Brands need to focus on building trust and credibility online, ensuring transparency, timely communication, and quality customer service.
3. Understanding psychological, social, technological, and economic factors influencing consumer behavior will allow marketers to design targeted strategies that cater to evolving expectations.
4. Companies may also explore hybrid marketing models combining offline and online engagement to accommodate changing consumer preferences.

Overall, the study suggests that social media will remain a central pillar in marketing strategies, even in a post-pandemic environment, due to its proven impact on trust, engagement, and purchasing behavior.

## CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

- **Limitations of the study**

1. **Time Constraints:** The study captures behavior during a specific period of the COVID-19 pandemic, which may not reflect long-term or post-pandemic consumer patterns.

- **Challenges faced by businesses in adapting to changed consumer behavior**

1. **Rapid Digital Transformation:** Many businesses, especially small and local enterprises, struggled to transition quickly to online platforms and social media marketing due to limited technological infrastructure or digital skills.

2. **Consumer Expectations:** The sudden shift to online shopping increased customer expectations for fast delivery, seamless user experience, and responsive customer service, which not all businesses were equipped to meet.

3. **Marketing Strategy Adaptation:** Businesses had to quickly redesign marketing campaigns to engage consumers through social media, including influencer

collaborations, interactive campaigns, and personalized advertisements. This required new skill sets and additional resources.

4. **Economic Pressures:** Reduced consumer spending, fluctuating demand, and operational constraints during the pandemic created financial challenges for businesses attempting to implement digital strategies.
5. **Competition:** The online space became highly competitive, with multiple brands vying for attention on social media, making it difficult for some businesses to gain visibility and retain customer engagement.

## CONCLUSION

- **Summary of key changes in consumer buying behavior**
  1. The COVID-19 pandemic led to a significant shift from offline to online shopping, with consumers increasingly relying on social media platforms for product discovery, reviews, and purchase decisions.
  2. There was a change in purchase frequency, spending patterns, and product preferences, driven by psychological factors such as fear, stress, and the need for safety.
  3. Social factors, including peer influence and family recommendations via social media, played a stronger role in shaping consumer choices.
  4. Technological factors, such as ease of access, digital literacy, and platform usability, became critical in facilitating online purchases.
  5. Economic constraints, due to income fluctuations and reduced disposable income, influenced buying behavior, making consumers more price-sensitive and value-conscious.
- **Implications for marketers, businesses, and policymakers**
  1. **Marketers and Businesses:** Need to adopt innovative social media marketing strategies, such as influencer collaborations, targeted advertisements, interactive campaigns, and personalized content, to maintain consumer engagement and trust.
  2. Focus on creating user-friendly, secure, and reliable digital shopping experiences to meet evolving expectations.
  3. **Policymakers:** Should consider initiatives to support digital literacy, ensure secure e-commerce practices, and facilitate access to online platforms for businesses and consumers.

4. Understanding the interplay of psychological, social, technological, and economic factors will allow stakeholders to design strategies that address both immediate consumer needs and long-term behavioral shifts.

- **Suggestions for further research on digital consumer behavior trends**

1. Conduct larger-scale, multi-city studies to capture regional differences in social media usage and consumer behavior.
2. Explore the long-term effects of the pandemic on digital purchasing habits and loyalty toward online platforms.
3. Examine the role of emerging technologies (e.g., AI-driven recommendations, virtual reality, chatbots) in shaping future consumer behavior.
4. Investigate the effectiveness of specific social media marketing strategies on different demographic groups and product categories.
5. Study the impact of hybrid shopping models combining offline and online experiences to understand post-pandemic consumer preferences.

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