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Changes in the consumer behavior in the post pandemic era: FMCG products

Krishna VM and Ambily AS

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly altered consumer behavior across various sectors, including Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG). This research investigates the shifts in consumer preferences and purchasing habits for FMCG products in the post-pandemic era. Through a multi-methodological approach incorporating primary and secondary data, this study aims to analyze the lingering effects of the pandemic on FMCG consumer behavior. Key objectives include examining present market conditions, understanding changes in consumer behavior post-pandemic, and proposing strategies for enhanced performance in the FMCG sector. The findings highlight evolving trends such as increased focus on hygiene, health consciousness, and the growing impact of e-commerce on traditional retail formats.

Keywords: Consumer behavior, goods, health consciousness, pandemic, post pandemic

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted consumer behavior across all sectors including the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector. Fast Moving consumer goods are those goods that are consumed every day by the average consumer and are replaced or fully used up over a short period of days, weeks, or months, and within one year. The Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG), also known as Consumer-Packaged Goods (CPG), is products that have a quick turnover and relatively low cost. Though the absolute profit made on FMCG products is relatively small, they generally sell in large numbers and so the cumulative profit on such products can be large. Fast moving consumer goods have a short shelf life, either because of high consumer demand or because the product deteriorates rapidly.

Some Fast moving consumer goods - such as meat, fruits and vegetables, dairy products and baked goods - are highly perishable. Other goods such as alcohol, toiletries, pre-packaged foods, soft drinks and cleaning products have high turnover rates. Fast moving consumer goods are products that have a quick shelf turnover, at relatively low cost and don't require a lot of thought, time and financial investment to purchase. The margin of profit on every individual Fast moving consumer goods product is less. However the huge number of goods sold is what makes the difference. Hence profit in Fast moving consumer goods always translates to number of goods sold. Fast Moving Consumer Goods is a classification that refers to a wide range of frequently purchased consumer products. Examples of FMCG generally include a wide range of frequently purchased consumer products such as toiletries, soap, cosmetics, teeth cleaning products, shaving products and detergents, as well as other nondurables such as glassware, bulbs, batteries, paper products and plastic goods.

Covid-19 caused a drastic change in the consumption pattern. As the specific vaccines for Covid-19 were yet to be found, lockdown was seen as the most effective way to curb the spread of the virus. Lockdown aimed at reducing the graph by social distancing. People were requested to stay at home. Schools and colleges were closed, work from home option was given to employees (Shah *et al.* 2020) ^[15]. This compelled people to go out only for essential activities. Thus, the term 'lockdown' creates a psychological fear that stops consumer from spending (Mehta, 2020) ^[10]. 'Janta curfew' marked the first initiative towards lockdown and was accepted by all with equal fanfare. But when the actual lockdown happened, people panicked for the lack of preparation. "The Prime minister of India announced the nationwide lockdown for 21 days, limiting movement of the entire 1.3 billion population as a preventive measure against the Covid-19 pandemic giving Indians a less than four-hour notice"

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(Schultz, 2020) ^[11]. Consumers tend to purchase in unusually large quantities in anticipation of a unavailability or price rise due to a fear of an approaching disaster. With the lockdown, there was hysteria on travelling, unlike the previous epidemics in history, instilling fear among the consumers. As stated in Cambridge dictionary, panic buying is "a situation in which many people suddenly buy as much food, fuel, etc. as they can because they are worried about something bad that may happen". Most of those food purchase is also due to closure of restaurants, cafés, bars, and hotels also people are working from home

One of the reasons why the effect of the corona virus felt more in the FMCG sector is because this sector is directly driven by people. Any changes in this sector would impact all the people at large. It is imperative to understand that the FMCG requires constant adaptation and innovation to stay relevant and attract new consumers while also retaining existing ones in the ever-changing sector.

This paper aims to study as to how a consumer reacts in a situation of the epidemic, where there are impending threats of supply chain disruption, income shocks and an undefined uncertainty. This study sheds light into the consumer behavior pattern for FMCG products after the impact of the corona virus outbreak in the whole world.

Materials and Methods

Statement of Problem

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted consumer behavior across all sectors, and Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) were no exception. While demand for FMCG products remained high, the way consumers purchased and viewed these essentials underwent a significant shift.

A key challenge lies in the uncertainty surrounding the effects of the pandemic on FMCG consumer behavior. New trends may become more prevalent and traditional buying habits may not completely return.

Several areas highlight this uncertainty. Firstly, consumer priorities may have permanently shifted towards hygiene, health, and value. Secondly, the pandemic accelerated the e-commerce boom for groceries, impacting traditional brick-and-mortar stores. Overall, the lack of a clear understanding of the "new normal" for FMCG consumer behavior presents a significant problem. This confusion acts as a barrier for FMCG companies from effectively strategizing for the future and meeting evolving customer needs. By addressing this knowledge gap, we can understand the behavioral pattern of the consumers after the pandemic. This can be applied in the future business strategies.

Objective of the Study

- This study aims to investigate the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on consumer behavior for Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG).
- To Analyze the Present Scenario and identify whether the market has recovered from the pandemic period
- To Understand the Changes or Improvements in the consumer behavior in the post pandemic era.
- To offer suggestions for the better performance of FMCG sector

Literature Review

Dr. Yogesh D. Mahajan - 2020, study emphasizes the severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on India's FMCG sector,

highlighting significant disruptions in labor availability as migrant workers returned to their hometowns. To address these challenges, FMCG companies implemented stringent protection measures, enhanced sanitation protocols, diversified sourcing strategies, streamlined product portfolios, and bolstered supply chain resilience.

Dr. Shathaboina Raju - 2022 ^[12] study conducted in Telangana State, this study explores shifts in consumer behavior regarding FMCG products during the pandemic. It identifies income levels as a crucial determinant influencing purchasing frequency. The research underscores a preference for local retail shops over larger malls, with a notable transition towards online shopping due to COVID-19. Health and FMCG sectors are predicted to dominate consumer spending in the foreseeable future.

R. Prema and M. Rajakrishnan - 2021 study focused on Coimbatore District, this study examines customer preferences in response to the pandemic's impact on the FMCG market. It predicts a sustained growth in e-commerce, attributing it to the increased adoption of online grocery shopping. The study also highlights a pronounced demand for food and beverage products over healthcare and personal care items during the pandemic.

Bansal's analysis (2020) anticipates a significant shift in consumer behavior post-COVID-19, foreseeing increased reliance on online platforms for FMCG purchases. The pandemic heightened awareness of health and hygiene, reducing foot traffic in physical stores while boosting demand for online grocery and FMCG platforms. This shift reflects a broader trend towards convenience and safety in consumer preferences.

Euromonitor International - 2020 ^[13], this report discusses the redefinition of essential goods by consumers during the pandemic, with masks and sanitizers becoming critical items. Non-essential FMCG products like beauty items and clothing saw reduced demand compared to packaged foods and groceries. The study highlights a shift in consumer priorities towards essential and health-related products during crises.

Gupta and Mukherjee's (2022) ^[14] study explores the long-term impacts of the pandemic on consumer behavior, distinguishing between positively and negatively affected consumers. It identifies a trend towards sustainable consumption and increased online shopping among positively impacted consumers, while negatively impacted consumers exhibited herd behavior and also shifted towards online channels.

Nguyen Hoang Tien and Nguyen Minh Ngoc - 2020, focusing on Vietnam, this study identifies consumer responses post-COVID-19, including increased stockpiling behaviors and reduced offline shopping in favor of online alternatives. There is a noted rise in health-conscious consumer behavior and growth in convenience store sales due to proximity advantages. These findings suggest evolving consumer habits shaped by pandemic experiences. Himgiri Chaudhary - 2020, Chaudhary's research highlights the paradigm shift towards e-commerce during the pandemic lockdown in India. It observes a surge in first-time FMCG online purchases and rising consumer satisfaction with digital shopping experiences. The study underscores the expanding role of e-commerce in India's retail landscape, driven by rapid digital adoption and internet accessibility.

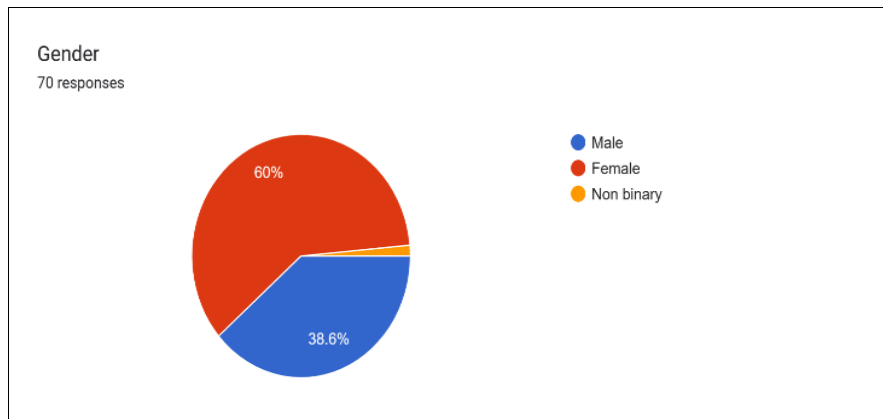
These literature reviews collectively illustrate the

multifaceted impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the FMCG sector and consumer behavior. They emphasize shifts towards online shopping, heightened health awareness, and changing consumer priorities that are likely to shape the post-pandemic FMCG market dynamics globally.

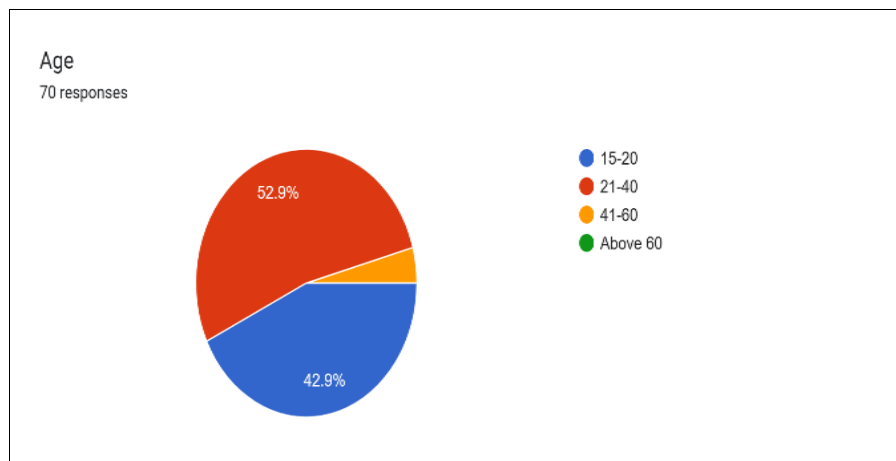
The study is purely descriptive in nature. This research uses both primary data and secondary data for the study. The primary data was collected from 70 respondents from

Kerala. This includes a mix of students, adults, working category and some middle aged public. Random sampling has been used to collect the data from the public. Gathered data has been analyzed by frequency and percentage analysis method which has arrived at many findings and results.

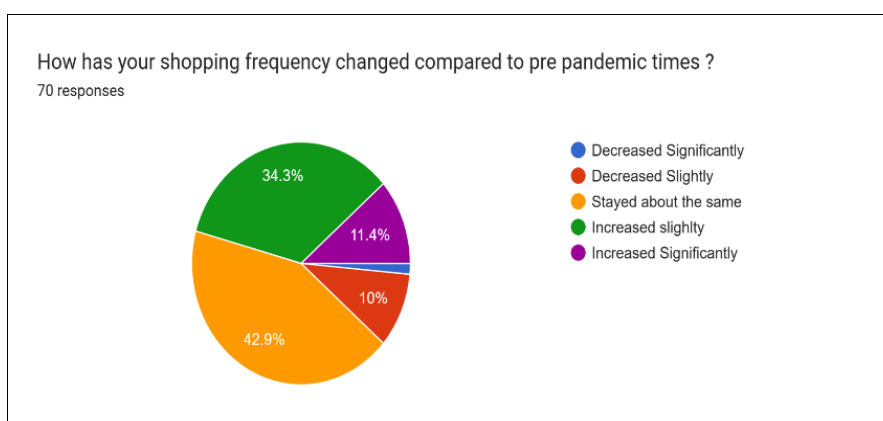
Gender of the participants



Age of Respondents



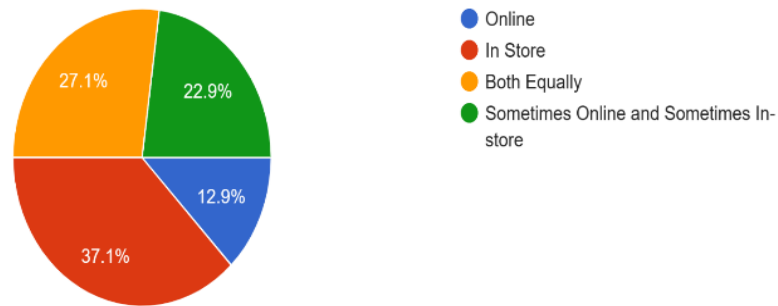
Change In Shopping Frequency



Shopping Platform Preference

Which shopping platform do you prefer for purchasing FMCG products post-pandemic?

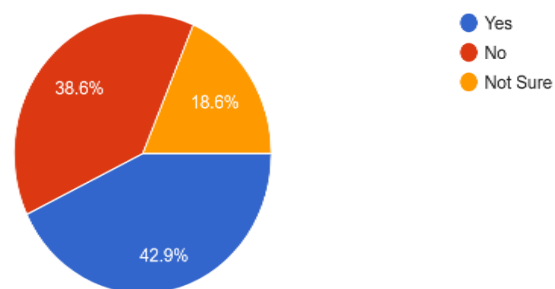
70 responses



Shopping Channel Influence

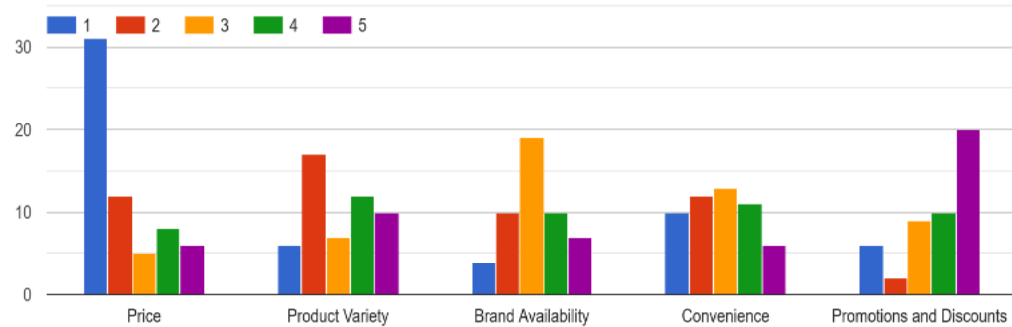
Did the pandemic influence your preferred shopping channels for FMCG products?

70 responses



Consumers prioritization factors

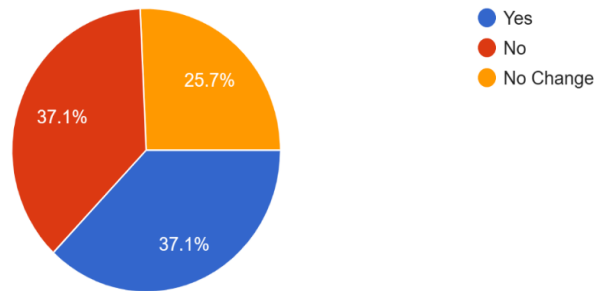
How important are the following factors when choosing where to shop for FMCG products? (Rank 1-5, with 1 being most important.)



Likelihood of Stocking Up Goods

Are you more likely to stock up on essential FMCG products now compared to pre-pandemic times?

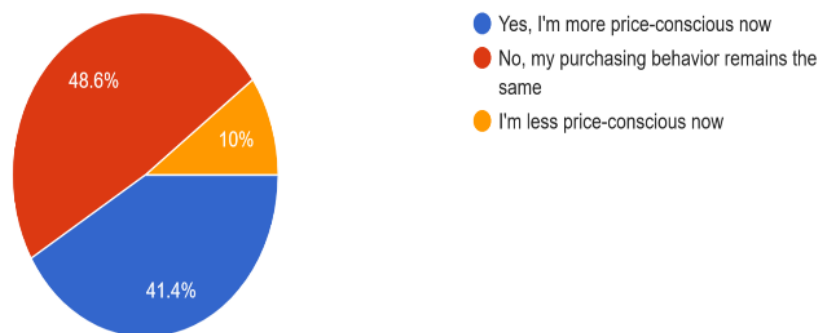
70 responses



Price Sensitivity

Has the economic impact of the pandemic affected your FMCG purchasing behavior?

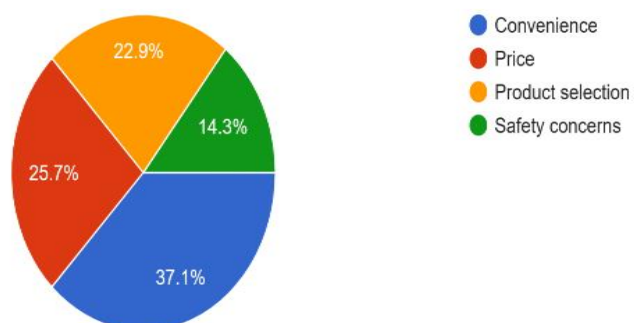
70 responses



Instore Vs Online

What factors influence your decision to shop in-store versus online?

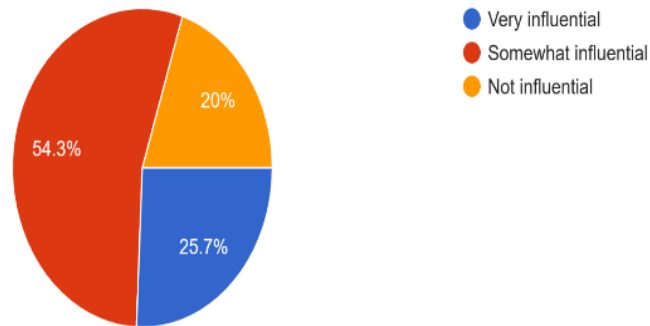
70 responses



Digital and Social Media Influence

How influential are digital and social media platforms in your FMCG purchasing decisions post-pandemic?

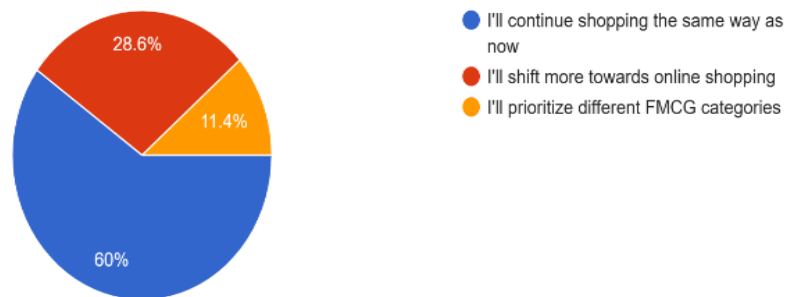
70 responses



Future Behavior

How do you anticipate your FMCG shopping habits to evolve in the near future?

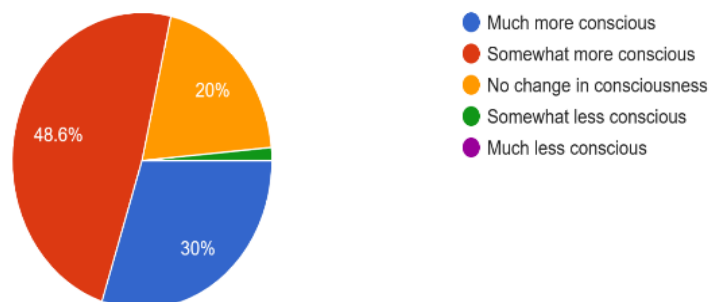
70 responses



Health and Safety Concern

Have you become more conscious of health and safety measures when making purchasing decisions?

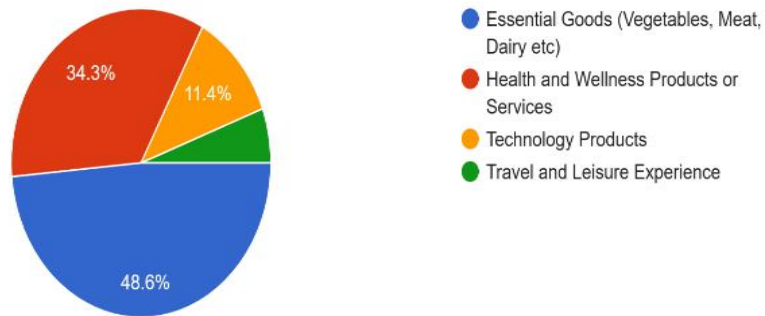
70 responses



Product Prioritization

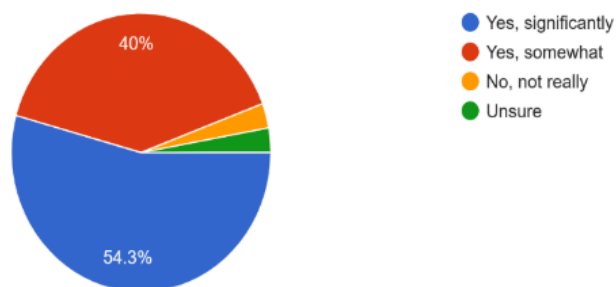
What types of products or services do you prioritize purchasing post-pandemic?

70 responses



Have you noticed any shifts in the way businesses market their products or services since the pandemic ?

70 responses

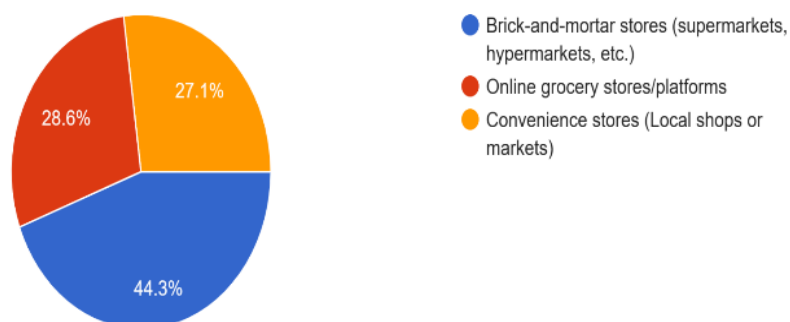


Business Marketing

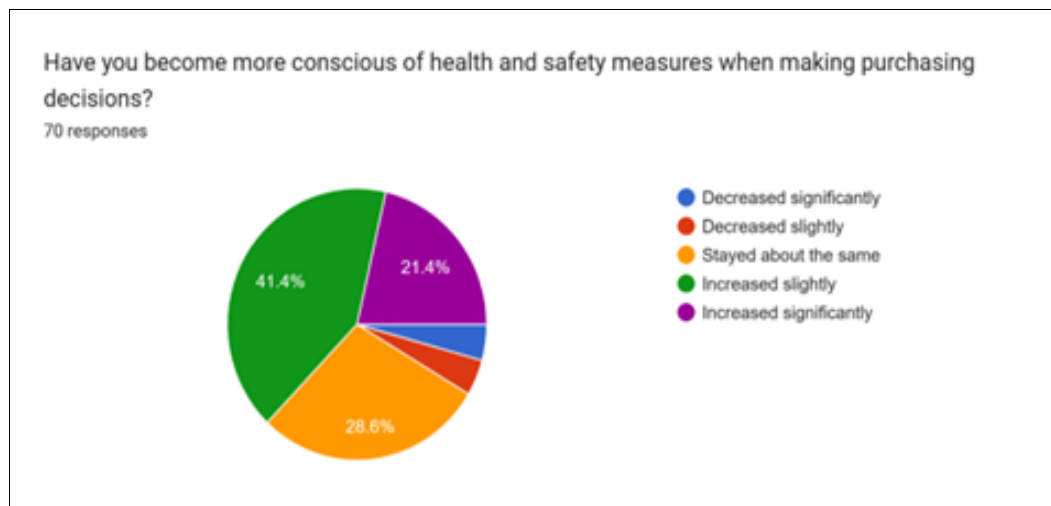
Shopping Channel

Where do you usually shop for FMCG products?

70 responses



Health Conscious Behavior



Analysis and Interpretations

Demographic Profile

Age of Respondents

The respondents in the study were divided into four age groups. The largest proportion of respondents (52.9%) falls within the age group of 21-40, followed by another 42.9% in the age group of 15-20. This suggests that a significant portion of the respondents are young adults. This indicates that a notable portion of the study participants consists of young adults and adults. Limited Participation of Older Age Groups like old adults and old age: The data provided does not indicate any respondents beyond the age of 60. This suggests that the study primarily focuses on Adult age groups and may not provide a comprehensive representation of the entire population.

Gender of Respondents

Gender of respondents: The study included a majority of female respondents, comprising 60% of the total participants. On the other hand, male respondents accounted for 38.6% of the sample. Additionally, a small portion, 1.4% of the respondents was included in the Non Binary Category.

Objective wise Analysis

Objective 1 - To Analyze the Present Scenario and identify whether the market has recovered from the pandemic period
The variables that are used to identify whether the market has recovered from the pandemic in the present scenario is: Change In The shopping Frequency,

Change in The Shopping Frequency: It is found that 42.9% of the respondents have concluded to shop in the same frequency when compared to the pre pandemic times. 34.3% has shown a slightly increasing purchasing behavior along with 11.4% as significantly increasing. Thus the shopping frequency of the consumers have come back to normal. The effects of the pandemic has created only a small increase in the purchasing frequency which is not clear whether it was due to the pandemic only.

37.1% of the respondents have been shopping in store while 27.1% respondents are shopping equally on in store and online. Only 12.9% have opted for online purchases. This suggests that customers still prefer to shop instore for FMCG goods even after the technology growth and pandemic issue.

The inference from the ranking question have concluded that consumers in the present scenario have concentrated on Price followed by convenience and Product Variety. Brand availability and the promotional discounts are weighted less among the variables provided. This is the present behavior of the consumers in the preference.

Panic Buying is a behavior where stocking up of necessary goods are being done by the consumers during pressure situations. The respondents have opted to stock up goods (37.1%). Same proportion of the respondents also responded as not likely to stock up goods (37.1%). 25.7% of the population responded as no change which from the pre pandemic era. This thus leads to a confusion in the conclusion related to the stocking up of goods.

The price sensitivity has also remained the same during the pre-pandemic and post pandemic for 48.6% of the respondents. 41.4% of the population has showed an increased price sensitivity due to the economic impact of the pandemic while 10% were less price conscious. This can conclude that the economic impact has expired and the consumers were behaving similar to pre pandemic era.

The results have also showed that consumers are more focused on pricing and convenience when taking the purchase decision. 48.6% and 30% of the respondents have concluded that they were "somewhat more conscious" and "much more conscious" respectively of health and safety measures. This is a sign of pandemic effect as health and safety is now considered as one of the key factor before buying FMCG by the consumers.

Objective 2: To Understand the Changes or Improvements in the consumer behavior in the post pandemic era

The impact of the pandemic has led to customers being still choosing shopping channel based on the covid period.

Price, Product variety and Brand Variety is the prioritization given by the majority of consumers when choosing the FMCG products. Entrepreneurs focusing on this aspects while manufacturing their products in the market.

Consumers used to stock up goods due to panic and pressure situations. But this study has shed light into this type of behavior as the same number of respondents responded as "Yes" and "No". Remaining respondents has replied as "No change" which can be concluded that there is only a small proportion of the population who are stuck with the impact of the pandemic. Rest of them have moved on and stocking up is not continued.

The population relies on convenience and price as the main factor behind shopping in store versus online shopping post pandemic era. The technology advancements and shift to digital era along with the pandemic situation have not made the consumers lose their traditional method of consumer behavior. They are still considering purchasing from the offline stores like supermarkets and convenience stores for FMCG products. This is a bigger change in the consumer behavior now. But Social media plays a crucial role in their decisions as majority of respondents replied as “somewhat influential” and “Influential” for this question.

Consumers are now health more health conscious when compared to the pre pandemic times. This has also a major role in deciding the choice and channel of FMCG product.

Consumers are also focused on the shifts in the marketing methods used by the organizations. They are closely watching everything in the industry.

Objective 3: To offer suggestions for the better performance of FMCG sector

Consumers are choosing the products wisely based on price, convenience, health and safety etc. The behavior of stocking up has also reduced meaning they are almost used to the pandemic and shifting back to the pre pandemic style. Essentials goods are prioritized first among the FMCG category. Supermarkets and convenience stores are in the focus for these purchases. Better availability and price could attract more consumers. The purchasing power of consumers is high as the prices for the products are provided at a lower rate. Therefore the organizations must maintain good marketing strategy along with the latest trends being followed. According to the study the chances of consumers shifting to online stores for essential goods are less. Therefore brick and mortar system won't be outdated for a long time in this era of digital and technological advancements. Supermarkets are the most preferable mainly due to the price factor and availability of A to Z products under one umbrella.

Conclusion

The study examined the changes in the consumer behavior post the pandemic period for FMCG products. The arrival of pandemic has caused many changes in the consumer behavior especially for essential and daily goods industry like FMCG. This study focusses on whether those consumers have recovered from the impact of the pandemic. The literature review was conducted which resulted in finding the research gap necessary to set the objectives for the research. The objectives set are limited but are relevant to today's world. The volume of sales in this type industry is much much higher than other types since these are fast moving and essential consumer goods. Therefore their behavior needed to be analyzed to provide the best products that are required by each consumers. Its been almost 3 years post pandemic and consumers are well aware of the conditions they faced during a pressure situation. Since this is a health issue, the priority of health and safety needed to be analyzed to find about the consumers mind when purchasing the essential products. Their purchasing power of consumers for these products are much higher than the supplier. Therefore suppliers must provide regular and fresh products that cater to the needs of the changing consumers in this changing world and economy. The pandemic has also economically impacted most of the consumers around the

globe. Many have lost their job or got a reduction in the pay they were currently receiving. This study also analyzes this perspective of the consumer.

It appears that the FMCG market has largely recovered from the initial impact of the pandemic, with consumer behavior showing signs of returning to pre-pandemic norms in many aspects. The market analysis reveals that the majority of consumers have resumed their shopping frequency to levels similar to pre-pandemic times, with only a slight increase observed in purchasing behavior for a minority. Despite advancements in technology and the convenience of online shopping, a significant portion of consumers still prefer in-store shopping for FMCG goods, indicating a persistent preference for traditional shopping methods. Price remains a key determinant in consumer decision-making, closely followed by convenience and product variety. This suggests that entrepreneurs and FMCG companies should prioritize these factors in their marketing and product development strategies to meet consumer demands effectively. The phenomenon of panic buying, prevalent during the pandemic, seems to have diminished, with a nearly equal proportion of respondents indicating both a likelihood and unlikelihood to stock up on goods. This indicates a normalization of consumer behavior post-pandemic, with fewer instances of excessive stockpiling. Furthermore, consumers exhibit heightened health consciousness, emphasizing the importance of health and safety measures in their purchasing decisions. This trend underscores the need for FMCG companies to prioritize health considerations in product development and marketing strategies. While online shopping continues to grow, particularly influenced by social media, traditional brick-and-mortar stores, especially supermarkets and convenience stores, remain favored by consumers for FMCG purchases. This suggests that the offline retail sector remains resilient, offering opportunities for companies to capitalize on consumer preferences for in-store experiences.

Conflicts of Interest

The author(s) declare(s) that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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