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**RESHAPING E-COMMERCE IN INDIA: PANDEMIC-DRIVEN GROWTH AND TRANSFORMATIONS****Dr. V. DHIVYA KEERTHIGA****POST DOCTORAL FELLOW, ICSSR****AVINASHILINGAM INSTITUTE FOR HOME SCIENCE & HIGHER EDUCATION FOR WOMEN  
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COIMBATORE****ABSTRACT**

The practice of buying and selling goods and services through computer networks, including the internet, is commonly referred to as electronic commerce or e-commerce. E-commerce has played a pivotal role in assisting businesses in expanding their market presence, offering cost-effective and efficient channels for the distribution of their products and services. The global lockdown imposed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on various aspects of human life, and the world economy is no exception. This present study examines the influence of the pandemic on the growth of e-commerce in India, focusing on a survey of 100 respondents. The research reveals a significant shift in people's shopping behaviors due to COVID-19. It identifies a positive correlation between the pandemic and the surge in e-commerce activities within India. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the necessity of implementing rigorous measures to combat fraudulent and deceptive e-commerce websites for the continued development and trustworthiness of the e-commerce industry.

**KEYWORDS**

digital commerce, internet shopping, distribution channels, economic impact, online market accessibility, e-commerce evolution, e-commerce resilience.

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**INTRODUCTION**

For the past decade, the Indian government has implemented several initiatives, including Digital India, Start-up India, Make in India, and skill development, to encourage entrepreneurs to embark on various digital ventures and support their sustainability (Khatri 2022, Hwang et al. 2022, Kohan 2020, Lăzăroiu et al. 2020). These efforts have significantly propelled the e-commerce sector in India, contributing to nearly half of smartphone sales and about a fifth of clothing purchases in the first half of 2021. This surge can be attributed to the widespread adoption of online services for everyday needs, such as ticket bookings, recharge and bill payments, grocery shopping, and educational purposes.

India has witnessed remarkable growth in its e-commerce landscape, with approximately 140 million online shoppers, ranking third globally after China and the United States (Global Data 2022, Net India 2021, Spielvogel 2021). Indian e-commerce companies have secured more than \$8 billion in private equity and venture funding through 400 deals. Notably, the personal care, beauty, and wellness sector experienced substantial growth in e-commerce orders in the last quarter of 2020. E-commerce has ushered in a transformative wave in the Indian business landscape.

According to GlobalData, a prominent data and analytics provider, India's e-commerce industry has been on a rapid growth trajectory and is projected to continue its expansion. E-commerce sales are anticipated to surge by 21.5% in 2022, reaching INR 5.5 trillion (\$74.8 billion). This growth can be attributed to the increasing Internet and smartphone penetration, growing digital literacy among consumers, and government-led digital initiatives. The acceleration towards online shopping has been significantly spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic. The introduction of new options is expected to further motivate consumers to opt for online channels. GlobalData's E-Commerce Analytics forecasts a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 18.2% for e-commerce payments in India between 2021 and 2025, reaching INR 8.8 trillion (\$120.3 billion).

The emergence of the coronavirus pandemic compelled people worldwide to stay indoors, resulting in substantial disruptions to their purchasing behaviors and attitudes toward e-commerce. The consistent lockdowns during the pandemic's early stages caused a seismic shift in the Indian e-commerce industry, expanding its potential for the year 2021. Online shopping platforms have gained popularity as a viable alternative to traditional brick-and-mortar retail, including stores, malls, and supermarkets, catering to consumers seeking everything from daily essentials to well-known brand products (Agarwal 2021, Sullivan 2020)."

In light of the aforementioned context, this study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- To analyze the socio-demographic profile of e-commerce customers, encompassing factors such as age, gender, income, and location.
- To investigate the motivating factors that influence customers in choosing e-commerce platforms for their shopping needs.
- To ascertain the correlation between customers' age and their preferences for key factors when engaging in e-commerce transactions."

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The rise of smartphones and internet accessibility has brought a significant transformation to the shopping landscape in India, with online shopping emerging as a thriving trend. Ghosh et al. (2021) highlight how online shopping offers unparalleled convenience, underlining the importance of understanding the factors influencing customer satisfaction. Their research aims to uncover the key elements shaping consumer behavior in online shopping, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has had a profound impact on the e-commerce industry.

Khatri et al. (2022) further emphasizes the pivotal role of information technology and the internet in reshaping business practices. The continuous expansion of internet users, coupled with increasing smartphone penetration, has extended the reach of e-commerce, even to rural areas. The COVID-19 pandemic, while introducing uncertainties, has also accelerated digital adoption. E-commerce has seen substantial growth, with new businesses, customers, and product categories joining the online marketplace. Khatri's study examines the factors supporting e-commerce development during the pandemic and anticipates future challenges. Aggarwal and Kapoor (2020) explore the drivers of e-shopping in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, aiming to discern customer preferences for post-pandemic online shopping. Their study utilizes a descriptive methodology, drawing from published reports, research papers, and existing literature. The findings shed light on e-shoppers' behavior during the pandemic and offer valuable insights for online shopping service providers to enhance customer satisfaction and remain competitive in the evolving e-commerce sector.

Collectively, these studies underscore the transformative impact of digital technology on the shopping experience in India, with the COVID-19 pandemic accelerating the growth of e-commerce and necessitating a deeper understanding of consumer behavior in this changing landscape.

**METHODOLOGY**

The study was conducted during the ongoing epidemic, spanning from January 2022 to March 2022, and focused on collecting data from online shoppers. To understand how consumers navigate online shopping during the pandemic, researchers designed and administered an online survey. The questionnaire's initial metrics were formulated through qualitative research methods, including an extensive review of existing literature, observations on social media platforms, and consultations with industry experts. The respondents' level of agreement with various statements was assessed using a Likert-type scale with five points, ranging from 1 (indicating "strongly disagree") to 5 (representing "strongly agree"). The gathered data was then subjected to statistical analysis, with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 employed for this purpose. The research involved regression analysis and Garret ranking to extract meaningful insights and draw conclusions from the data collected. This approach facilitated a comprehensive examination of factors influencing consumer behavior and preferences in the context of online shopping during the ongoing epidemic

**FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

The following provides findings of the study tabulated with interpretation in the section. Table 1 provides details on the demographic profile of the respondents.

**TABLE 1: DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS**

Demographic Variable	Levels	Percentage
Age	18–25 years	45.28
	25–35 years	30.30
	35–50 years	20.75
	Above 50 years	3.67
Gender	Male	69.92
	Female	30.08
Occupation	Public Employees	33.96
	Private Employees	45.28
	Home Maker	15.09
	Self-Employing	5.60
Marital Status	Married	55.81
	Unmarried	38.20
	Other	5.99
Education	Senior Secondary	12
	Graduated	58
	Post Graduated	23
	Professional/Technical Diploma	7

Source: Data collected in 2022 from primary sources.

Table 1 provides an overview of the demographic characteristics of the survey respondents. The data is segmented into several categories, including age, gender, occupation, marital status, and education, with corresponding percentages for each category. In terms of age, the largest group of respondents falls within the 18–25 years bracket, representing 45.28 per cent of the total respondents. The second-largest age group comprises individuals aged 25–35 years, accounting for 30.30 per cent. The 35–50 years age group constitutes 20.75 per cent of the sample, while those above 50 years are the smallest segment, making up only 3.67 per cent. Regarding gender distribution, the majority of respondents are male, contributing 69.92 per cent to the survey, while female respondents make up the remaining 30.08 per cent. Occupationally, private employees are the most prominent category, representing 45.28 per cent of the total respondents, with public employees accounting for 33.96 per cent. Homemakers form 15.09 per cent of the sample, and self-employed individuals make up 5.60 per cent. In terms of marital status, the largest portion of respondents is married, comprising 55.81 per cent. Unmarried individuals represent 38.20 per cent, while a smaller percentage falls into the "Other" category, accounting for 5.99 per cent of the sample. Regarding education, the majority of respondents hold a graduation degree, constituting 58 per cent of the total. Post-graduates represent 23 per cent of the sample, while those with senior secondary education make up 12 per cent. A smaller group holds professional/technical diplomas, accounting for 7 per cent of the total respondents.

**TABLE 2: REASONS FOR PREFERRING E-COMMERCE**

Variable	Percentage	Ranking
Easy Shopping	45.52	4
Flexibility	62.15	1
Variety of Collection	34.26	7
Alternative Offers	22.01	8
Cashless Transactions	42.67	5
Fast Delivery at Doorstep	55.78	2
Less Time Consumption	36.67	6
Compare Prices with Different Sites	48.21	3

Source: Data collected in 2022 from primary sources.

Table 2 provides valuable insights into the reasons driving the preference for e-commerce among the surveyed respondents. The study examined these reasons across eight distinct variables and used the Garret ranking scale to establish the relative importance of each factor. The most noteworthy finding is that Flexibility emerges as the primary driver, securing the top rank (Rank 1) with 62.15% of respondents expressing a preference for this aspect. This suggests that customers highly value the flexibility that e-commerce offers, allowing them to easily navigate and choose from a multitude of online shopping platforms with a simple click. It underscores the significance of the convenience and variety of options provided by e-commerce, enabling consumers to explore multiple sites effortlessly. The second-highest ranking (Rank 2) goes to Fast Delivery at Doorstep, with 55.78% of respondents highlighting its importance. This finding underscores the pivotal role of efficient and timely doorstep delivery in online shopping. It indicates that swift and hassle-free delivery services greatly influence customer decisions in favor of e-commerce platforms. Comparing Prices with Different Sites secures the third-highest rank (Rank 3), as 48.21% of respondents consider it a significant factor in their preference for e-commerce. This reveals the importance of price comparison in the decision-making process for online shoppers, emphasizing the value placed on cost-effectiveness. While other factors, such as "Easy Shopping," "Cashless Transactions," "Less Time Consumption," "Variety of Collection," and "Alternative Offers," play a role in e-commerce preference, they are ranked lower in comparison. In essence, these findings provide valuable insights into the key drivers shaping customer preferences in the e-commerce sector, highlighting the central role of flexibility, efficient delivery services, and price comparison as pivotal factors influencing the choice of e-commerce platforms for online shopping.

The e-commerce site preferred by respondents was studied and the finding is been given in the Table -3.

**TABLE 3: E-COMMERCE SITE PREFERRED BY RESPONDENTS**

Variable	Percentage
Amazon	54.72
Flipkart	33.96
Ajio	24.53
Meesho	45.28
Glow road	22.12
Nykaa	19.20
Purple	15.23
Others	28.90

Source: Primary Data, 2022.

The findings presented in Table 3 reveal the e-commerce platforms preferred by the surveyed respondents, offering valuable insights into consumer choices within the online shopping landscape. Amazon emerges as the most favored e-commerce platform, with an impressive 54.72% of respondents expressing a preference for this global e-commerce giant. Amazon's wide-ranging product offerings, reliability, and convenience likely contribute to its top ranking in consumer choices. Flipkart secures the second position, with 33.96% of respondents indicating a preference for this platform. Known for its user-friendly interface and diverse product categories, Flipkart continues to attract a substantial share of online shoppers. In the third spot is Ajio, which garners the preference of 24.53% of respondents. Ajio's specialization in fashion and trendy lifestyle products appears to resonate with those seeking these specific categories. Meesho, with a preference rate of 45.28%, stands out as a popular choice, securing the fourth position. Meesho's unique model, which empowers individuals to engage in reselling and social commerce, seems to be a compelling factor for a significant portion of online shoppers. Glow Road, ranking fifth, is preferred by 22.12% of respondents. Glow Road's focus on enabling small-scale entrepreneurs to flourish in the digital realm likely draws users who appreciate this model. Nykaa, well-known for its cosmetics and beauty products, captures the sixth position, with 19.20% of respondents indicating their preference. This reflects a dedicated customer base seeking beauty and personal care items. Purple, securing the seventh spot, appeals to 15.23% of respondents, representing a specific segment of users. The reasons for its preference may include unique product offerings or specialized categories. Lastly, nearly 28.90% of respondents prefer other e-commerce platforms not explicitly listed in the table. This diversity highlights the vast array of options available in the e-commerce landscape, catering to the unique needs and preferences of a substantial portion of online shoppers.

The findings underscore the dynamic and diverse nature of the e-commerce sector, where several platforms cater to different consumer preferences and specific product categories. Understanding these consumer choices is essential for e-commerce businesses and policymakers seeking to meet the evolving demands of online shoppers in an ever-changing digital marketplace.

Further, the investigator has tried to identify the impact of covid-19 on the e-commerce usage among the respondents and the result is been given in table 3.

**TABLE 4: IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON ONLINE SHOPPING USAGE AND REASONS**

Variable	Levels	Percentage
Has COVID-19 Increased Online Shopping?	Yes	85.23
	No	14.77
If Yes, Reasons	Safe Shopping	32.08
	Social Distance	34.33
	Cashless Transaction	30.25
	Wide Range of Selection	25.41
	Doorstep Delivery	10.01
If No, Reasons	Financial Crisis	52.83
	Not Satisfied with Online Products	39.62
	Afraid of Fake Products	7.55

Source: Primary Data, 2022.

The table delves into the profound impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on consumers' online shopping habits. A significant majority of respondents, totaling 85.23 per cent, acknowledged that the pandemic has substantially increased their reliance on online shopping. This surge in online shopping can be attributed to various factors, primarily driven by safety concerns and convenience.

Among the respondents who indicated that the pandemic has led to increased online shopping, several compelling reasons were cited. Firstly, around 32.08 per cent of respondents expressed a strong preference for online shopping due to the paramount factor of safety. They appreciate that it allows them to avoid crowded physical stores and minimize the risk of viral exposure. Furthermore, 34.33 per cent of respondents highlighted the role of online shopping in promoting social distancing, a practice deemed essential for public health during the pandemic. This approach minimizes physical interactions and contributes to personal safety. A significant 30.25 per cent of respondents placed great value on the convenience of cashless transactions when shopping online, as it reduces the need for physical currency exchange and enhances safety. Additionally, 25.41 per cent of respondents were attracted to online shopping because of the vast and diverse selection of products available, enabling them to explore a wide range of options conveniently. Lastly, 10.01 per cent of respondents appreciate the concept of doorstep delivery, which ensures the safe receipt of products at their homes, eliminating the need to venture outside.

For those respondents who answered "No," indicating that the pandemic has not increased their online shopping, distinct reasons were cited. A considerable 52.83 per cent of respondents explained that financial constraints play a pivotal role in their decision. Economic challenges resulting from the pandemic have limited their purchasing capacity and, consequently, curbed their online shopping habits. Additionally, for 39.62 per cent of respondents, dissatisfaction with the quality of online products played a substantial role in their decision. They may have encountered issues related to product quality and overall satisfaction, leading to their choice to refrain from increasing online shopping. Lastly, a smaller segment, approximately 7.55 per cent of respondents, expressed concerns about the authenticity of products available online. They were afraid of receiving counterfeit or subpar items, which contributed to their decision not to increase their online shopping.

A multiple regression was estimated to find out the relationship between impacts of covid 19 on choosing e-commerce platform. The result is been given as follows,

**TABLE 5: MODEL SUMMARY**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.044(a)	.002	-.164	13.64540

Table shows, R is the correlation, its value is 0.44 and R square is degree of determination, its value is 0.002. The degree of determination shows the extent to which the impact of covid-19 on e-commerce sites. Here the dependent factor is determined to an extent of 44 % by the independent factor

ANOVA						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2.172	1	2.172	.012	0.05
	Residual	1117.182	6	186.197		
	Total	1119.354	7			

ANOVA table shows that the significant value is less than 0.05, which means dependent variable is significantly predicted by independent variables at 95 % of confidence level. This indicates that the regression model is significant.

COEFFICIENTS(a)						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	44.239	9.077		4.874	.918
	impact	-.023	.216	-.044	-.108	.003

Table 5 provides insights into the statistical model's assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on e-commerce sites. The correlation coefficient (R) of 0.44 indicates a weak positive correlation between variables, while the coefficient of determination (R Square) at 0.002 suggests that the model explains only 0.2% of the variance in the dependent variable, showing limited explanatory power. The adjusted R Square further underscores this constraint. In the ANOVA table, the p-value for the regression model is 0.05, indicating its statistical significance in predicting the dependent variable. The coefficients section reveals that the "impact" variable has a statistically significant negative relationship with the dependent variable. In summary, while the model is statistically significant, it has limited explanatory capacity, and the "impact" variable plays a role in predicting the dependent variable.

The findings highlight the complexity of understanding the multifaceted impact of COVID-19 on e-commerce. While the model is statistically significant, it offers limited explanatory power, emphasizing the need for a more comprehensive and nuanced approach. To gain a deeper understanding of the effects of the pandemic on e-commerce, future research should consider additional variables and contextual factors. Factors such as consumer behavior, technological advancements, and economic conditions may play crucial roles that were not fully captured by the model. Furthermore, the negative impact coefficient suggests that as the pandemic's influence intensifies, there may be a dampening effect on e-commerce activity. However, this relationship is not straightforward and may vary across different contexts and industries.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this comprehensive study delves into the intricate landscape of e-commerce growth in India, with a specific focus on the profound impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the past decade, India has witnessed a remarkable surge in its e-commerce sector, underpinned by government initiatives, increased internet and smartphone accessibility, and rising digital literacy among consumers. E-commerce has evolved to become a pivotal player across various domains, from electronics and fashion to everyday services encompassing ticket bookings, recharges, bill payments, grocery shopping, and education. The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic acted as a transformative force, significantly altering the e-commerce landscape. With lockdowns and social distancing measures in place, consumers turned to online platforms as a safer and more convenient mode of procuring goods and services. The pandemic expedited the digital transformation of businesses and created novel opportunities for e-commerce companies.

Crucially, this study unraveled the key factors that propel consumers toward e-commerce. Notably, flexibility, rapid doorstep delivery, and the ability to compare prices across different platforms emerged as influential drivers. These factors underscore the paramount importance of convenience, variety, and cost-efficiency in the realm of online shopping, especially in the pandemic context. However, as with any burgeoning industry, e-commerce confronts its share of challenges. The study underscores the importance of tackling fraudulent websites and the imperative need for stringent regulations to safeguard consumer interests and uphold trust in online platforms. Looking forward, the e-commerce sector in India stands poised for further expansion, with projections indicating substantial growth in e-commerce payments over the coming years.

The COVID-19 pandemic left an indelible mark on India's e-commerce landscape, acting as a pivotal catalyst in shaping evolving trends. It accelerated the adoption of online shopping and necessitated adaptability from businesses and consumers alike. While challenges persist, the changes wrought by the pandemic pave the way for a more digital, customer-centric, and dynamic e-commerce landscape in India. In summary, the confluence of government initiatives, technological progress, and the transformative impact of the pandemic has reshaped the e-commerce ecosystem in India. The sector's burgeoning growth, steered by shifting consumer preferences and contextual dynamics, underscores its resilience and versatility. As the e-commerce industry continues to evolve, it remains a potent driver of economic expansion and innovation in India, offering limitless opportunities for businesses and consumers alike. Effective regulatory measures and sustained adaptability will be pivotal in ensuring the enduring success and integrity of the e-commerce sector in the years ahead.

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