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An Empirical Analysis into Sentiments, Media Consumption Habits, and Consumer Behaviour during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Outbreak

Dr. Vilas Chauhan* and Ms. Heer Shah**

ABSTRACT

There's no doubt that the crisis caused by the global Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has created an incredibly difficult business climate. Businesses are being presented with many new challenges as international borders close, bricks-and-mortar businesses shut their doors, and people are told to isolate at home. Many companies face temporary or even permanent closures, with staff facing months of financial uncertainty and worry. Consumers across the global market demonstrate varying degrees of confidence in the prospects for economic recovery. These sentiments are likely to be influenced both by their awareness of the disease, recently announced government contingency measures such as movement restrictions and business rescue plans, and other news events. Consumer behaviour has been forced to immediately change, and change on a massive scale. Those in isolation or under lockdown can't perform their usual routines, especially since many local shops have been forced to close their doors for safety reasons. Concerns about the availability of goods have encouraged panic buying of items in bulk. Financial uncertainty and the prospect of a severe and long-term recession would have a significant impact on consumer outlook, perceptions and behaviours.

The present study attempts to explore and gauge the sentiments, expectations, income spending, and behaviors of Indian consumers during coronavirus crisis. Further, the study focuses on the change in the media consumption habits i.e., types and usage of media since the COVID-19 outbreak and also the various ways in which they are using social media to stay connected, informed, and entertained. Finally, the study tries to determine the COVID-19-induced changes in the behaviour of Indian consumers for over a month now. The differences in media consumption habits and consumer behavior across gender and age are also explored. Since the study undertaken is quite elaborative in nature, the major findings of the study are presented and discussed at the end.

Keywords: Coronavirus, COVID-19, Consumer Behavior, Consumer Sentiments, Consumer Concerns, Media Habits and Outbreak.

* Sr. Assistant Professor, Faculty of Commerce, The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara, Gujarat, India
E-mail: vilrag7176@rediffmail.com

*** Assistant Professor, Samarpan Science and Commerce College, Gandhinagar, Gujarat, India*
E-mail: heer19shah@yahoo.in

1. INTRODUCTION

In late December 2019, a pneumonia outbreak of unknown etiology took place in Wuhan, Hubei province, China, and spread quickly nationwide. Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CCDC) identified a novel beta-coronavirus called 2019-nCoV, now officially known as severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) (Gorbalenya et al., 2020), that responsible for the pandemic. This was the third zoonotic coronavirus breakout in the first two decades of 21st century that allowing human-to-human transmission and raising global health concerns. The pandemic escalated exponentially at the beginning of 2020, which might only be the tip of the iceberg due to delayed case reporting and deficiency in testing kits (Li et al., 2020).

Coronaviruses are a large group of viruses known to cause illnesses that vary between the common cold and more severe diseases to include severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS). A novel coronavirus was identified in December 2019 in Wuhan city, Hubei province, China. However, phyllo-epidemiologic analyses suggested that Huanan market was not the origin of 2019-nCoV. The virus was imported from elsewhere and boosted in the crowded market (Yu et al., 2020). This virus represents a new strain that has not been previously identified in humans. The virus is now known as the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) and the resulting disease is called coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). Chinese government had taken immediate, transparent and extraordinary measures, and reached initial achievements to control the outbreak. World Health Organization (WHO) deeply concerned the unprecedented swift global spread and severity of the outbreak, and by ignorance and inaction of some countries. Therefore, World Health Organization (WHO) declared the novel coronavirus outbreak a global pandemic in March 2020.

India recorded the first case of the disease on January 30, 2020. Since then the cases have increased steadily and significantly. Given the nature of the disease which is highly contagious, the ways to contain the spread include policy actions such as imposition of social distancing, self-isolation at home, closure of institutions, and public facilities, restrictions on mobility and even lockdown of an entire country. These actions can potentially lead to dire consequences for economies around the world. In attrition to it, to curb the spread of the virus, the government of India announced a three week long nationwide lockdown starting March 25, 2020. All non-essential services and businesses,

including retail establishments, educational institutions, places of religious worship, public utilities and government offices across the country will stay closed during this period and all means of travel have been stopped. This is by far the most far-reaching measure undertaken by any government in response to the pandemic. Despite rigorous global containment and quarantine efforts, the incidence of COVID-19 continues to rise, with more than 1,948,617 laboratory-confirmed cases and over 121,846 deaths worldwide. Currently, no specific medication is recommended to treat COVID-19 patients. The first COVID-19 vaccine is not expected to be ready for clinical trials before the end of the year. However, governments and pharmaceutical companies are struggling to quickly find an effective drug to defeat the coronavirus.

2. CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS- A BIRD'S EYE VIEW

In a sense, the Covid-19 pandemic has changed the way we work, shop and communicate with people more than any other disruption (including technological ones) in the recent past. As more people start working from home, they are sticking to basics, stepping outside only to buy essentials and are constantly worried about the risks of getting infected in crowded places like malls and supermarkets. Coronavirus presents a number of challenges to brands and policy makers. As consumers take protective actions against the virus, their health/financial concerns and behavioral adjustments will continue to have an enormous social and economic impact. In affected areas, we are already observing drastic changes in consumer behavior such as bulk-buying, a surge in low contact commerce, and crowd avoidance/cocooning.

As retail marketers continue to brainstorm their way through this unprecedented crisis, it's a good time to evaluate what consumers are thinking—what they're buying now, how they're buying it, what they're *not* buying, and how long they think the crisis will last.

New research conducted across the globe, during this coronavirus outbreak will certainly offer new insights on the effects that coronavirus is having on consumer behavior and sentiments of people.

Spurred on by a trifecta of smartphone penetration, cheaper 4G networks and increasing consumer wealth, the Indian ecommerce market was expected to grow to US\$ 200 billion by 2026. That projection was based on customer and market research in a Pre-Covid 19 world. But in the last 2 months, both the market landscape and consumer behaviour has altered beyond recognition and there is clear indication that the ecommerce industry will hit the US\$ 200 billion mark much sooner.

According to a survey by NRF, following reveal some key consumer behaviour changes:

- 9 in 10 consumers have changed their traditional shopping habits.

- More than 50% of consumers have ordered products online that they would normally purchase at the store
 - Nearly 6 in 10 consumers say they are worried about going to the store due to fear of being infected
- While some of these changes are no doubt temporary, others will be permanent. As the community moves beyond the survival mode, the digital-adoption momentum is likely to carry forward and become permanent. This inflection point will be primarily shaped by two major shifts in customer behaviour - the reluctance to mingle in crowded public places and higher propensity for digital adoption.

As the recent McKinsey study in China suggests, consumers are likely to opt for online shopping even after the outbreak ends, especially for categories such as groceries and personal care. This trend is likely to continue long after the lockdowns are called off as people would still be apprehensive to visit crowded areas like malls or supermarkets.

A survey by eMarketer revealed that nearly 60%-85% of internet users across China and South-east Asia have avoided crowded public places to mitigate the risk of contracting the virus. While this will certainly come down to in favour of offline, we expect it will not go back to old normal of majority thronging to brick and mortar shopping aisles.

Online, the world is changing just as fast as offline. *In early March 2020, The Drum reported* on research that shows that, while annual advertising growth rates in China are predicted to fall from 7% growth in 2020 to 3.9%, ecommerce advertising spend is predicted to grow by 17.7% and social media spending to rise by 22.2%.

For the businesses that remain active at this time, questions are inevitably being asked about how best to cope with the prevailing trading conditions, and how best their strategies should adapt. This is a difficult question to answer since the Coronavirus pandemic is so new that the circumstances are changing fluidly and on a daily basis. Defining a strategy now is difficult as there is limited evidence or precedent to base assumptions on. Initial indications about what might happen to businesses and the economy could be gauged by looking at the data from the countries which first suffered from the effects of COVID-19. While there's no guarantee that others will follow the same trajectory, analysis of these countries can reveal useful patterns and insights.

3. STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM:

The speed and scale at which the Covid-19 pandemic has hit the world is something that we have seen so far only in doomsday movies. As we are seeing it today, this is way more frightening than fiction. The costs are going to be unimaginably high and the worst, it's going to end up having a long

tail too. The world order is changing and changing dramatically. Consumers are living in unprecedented times. Consumer behavior has been forced to change and change on a massive scale. Physical, social distancing has led to phenomenal growth in virtual social togetherness with almost 20% increase in the time spent per user on chats, social media and news during the lock down period. Consumers are expected to be bearish on discretionary spending such as movies and restaurant visits, luxury brands and leisure travel, and defer spending on fashion, personal grooming and home decor even in the coming months after the magnitude of the outbreak lessens. The focus on health and hygiene products, healthy organic food, medical needs, fitness, mediclaim, education and financial investments may be some of the key shifts in consumer behaviour. Grocery essentials such as atta, rice, pulses, oil, ghee, personal hygiene items, laundry products, hand sanitizers etc. are likely to be out of stock.

Given the above context, it is important to understand the sentiments and the evolving consumer trends, hence, this research focuses on the problem statement “An Empirical Analysis into Sentiments, Media Consumption Habits and Consumer Behaviour during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Outbreak.”

4. RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY:

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) that has been spreading worldwide since December 2019 has sickened hundreds of thousands of people, shut down major cities, prompted unprecedented global travel restrictions, and influenced the global spread of misinformation and panic. Majority of people have taken to work from home just as the Indian Government imposed the lockdown to control the spread of COVID-19 in the country. Living in cities and towns, the primary consumption behavior of almost everybody has seen a sudden and paradigm, but meaningful shift. Right from the moment, people start their day, their consumption patterns are defined by the rules and regulations of the Government. Being avid newspaper readers, people now miss to read them and have taken to news apps. Now, one can hardly order his/her favourite food from his/her favourite outlet. No moving out to public places and no air travel for at least a few months, not even a business trip, cancellation or postponement of vacation trips etc. While the pandemic severely impacts the rich and the middle-class, the weaker section of people is facing an entirely different scenario- scrambling for food and essentials.

Hence, it has become imperative to explore and understand the demographics, sentiments, change in media consumption habits and consumer behavior in context of the coronavirus COVID-19 outbreak.

5. SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH STUDY:

This study focuses on analysing consumer sentiments, change in media consumptions habits and consumer behavior of Indians amid the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. Primary data for the said research is collected by connecting and surveying people who were in close contacts of the researchers. From among the total respondents of this study, majority of respondents belonged to Vadodara and Gandhinagar.

6. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

In light of coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, the current research focuses on following objectives:

- 1) Determine the level of awareness and concern of people towards coronavirus outbreak
- 2) Explore the sentiments and experiences of consumers during coronavirus outbreak
- 3) Determine the overall change in the media consumption habits in general, and social media in specific.
- 4) Determine and analyze the shift in consumer buying behavior in response to coronavirus outbreak.
- 5) Analyze the differences in media consumption habits and consumer behavior across age and gender.

7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The present study is descriptive in nature. Convenience method of sampling was adopted and accordingly, primary data was collected by surveying people who were in close contacts with the researchers. Primary data was collected in the fourth week of the first lockdown period starting March 25, 2020. A structured non-disguised questionnaire was prepared and then administered as a Google Form. The link of this Google Form was shared with the people known to the researchers. The Google link of the questionnaire was shared with around 375 targeted respondents. However, 353 people responded to the Google link questionnaire. The final data analysis of 353 respondents is presented in the study. From among the total respondents surveyed, majority of the respondents belonged to Vadodara and Gandhinagar. However, people from cities like Ahmedabad, Surat, Anand, Rajkot, Mumbai, Jaipur etc. too responded in fairly good numbers.

The questionnaire consisted of four sections: Demographic details, concerns and sentiments, media consumption habits, and behavior of Indian consumers amid the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. Change in media consumption habits were measured by 12 items scale. Impact of COVID-19 on consumer behavior was measured by using 5 point Likert scale anchored with (1) Strongly Disagree to (5) Strongly Agree. A pilot test was conducted locally, on 25 respondents before administering the final questionnaire to the targeted respondents. Some minor changes were made in the first draft of

the questionnaire to improve the accuracy of the responses. The internal consistency of scales was verified with Cronbach's Alpha and all scales showed satisfactory scores ranging between 0.65 to 0.79.

The primary data collected was analysed through IBM SPSS Statistics - Trial Subscription Package. Descriptive statistics, average mean, and standard deviation were calculated. T-test was conducted to explore the differences in change in media consumption habits and impact on consumer behavior, across age. One-way ANOVA was performed to explore the differences in change in media consumption habits and impact on consumer behavior across different age groups.

8. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS:

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Gender				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Female	175	49.6	49.6	49.6
Male	178	50.4	50.4	100.0
Total	353	100.0	100.0	

Age (in Years)				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<20	21	5.9	5.9	5.9
21-30	180	51.0	51.0	58.6
31-40	73	20.7	20.7	79.3
41-50	43	12.2	12.2	91.5
51-60	30	8.5	8.5	100.0
>60	6	1.7	1.7	7.6
Total	353	100.0	100.0	
Family's Annual Income				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
< 1 Lakh	43	12.2	12.2	12.2
1 Lakh - 5 Lakhs	121	34.3	34.3	72.0
5 Lakhs - 10 Lakhs	99	28.0	28.0	100.0
> 10 Lakhs	90	25.5	25.5	37.7
Total	353	100.0	100.0	

Table 1 presents a brief on the demographic profile of the surveyed respondents. From among the total respondents (353) surveyed, 175 (49.6%) were females and 178 (50.4%) were males. The convenience sampling method coincidentally resulted into almost an equally divided respondents among both the genders. Almost half (51%) of the total respondents surveyed, belonged to the age group of 21-30 yrs. 73 respondents belonged to the age segment of 31-40 yrs. Regarding the family's annual income, 121 respondents (34.3%) belonged to the income segment between one lakhs to 5 lakhs. Whereas, 99 respondents (28%) belonged to the income group of 5 lakhs to ten lakhs. Thus, it can be concluded that this research study resulted into deriving some important insights on consumer behavior of young adults and adults.

LEVEL OF CONCERNS AND SENTIMENTS TOWARDS COVID-19 OUTBREAK

Based on the analysis of questions put in this section of the questionnaire, following are some major findings of the study:

Table 2: Level of Concern Regarding Coronavirus Outbreak

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Somewhat concerned	58	16.4	16.4	16.4
Unconcerned	18	5.1	5.1	21.5
Very much Concerned	277	78.5	78.5	100.0
Total	353	100.0	100.0	

- As revealed in Table 2, 78.5% (277 respondents) rated themselves as “Very much concerned”, and 16.4% (58 respondents) rated themselves as “Somewhat concerned”. Very meagre i.e., around 5% showed no concern regarding the coronavirus outbreak.
- From among the total responses obtained for each source of information, the top three major source of information related to coronavirus are television, internet, and social media. Surprisingly, Newspaper emerged as a considerable source of information, but not a major one. During the initial period of lockdown, consumers shifted from newspapers to alternative sources of information like television and internet.
- Economic impact of COVID-19 was the primary concern cited by the highest number of individuals. Self and family becoming infected and inability to see family/friends/relatives are the next most widely cited primary concerns. The third level of primary concerns revealed by the respondents are the closing down of schools/colleges/universities and being more careful on spending.

- Indian Consumers' confidence regarding the country's economic recovery after COVID-19 outbreak, around 67 % (238 respondents) are very optimistic. However, 27% (96 respondents) are unsure regarding the revival of Indian economy, and 5.4% (19 respondents) are pessimistic in their approach.
- Consumers when asked about the time likely to be taken by them to adjust their routines, before actually returning back to normal life, 34.3% (121 respondents) voted for 2-3 months. 100 respondents (28.3%) felt it would take around one month to get back to normal routine. Somewhat less than around one-fourth (82 respondents) expected around four to six months returning back to normal.
- Interestingly, when respondents asked about their belief regarding personal household finances getting affected by COVID-19, 98 respondents (27.8%) from among the total respondents denied having any impact of COVID-19. Almost an equal number of respondents i.e., 93 respondents (26.3%) felt that their household finances will be affected for around two to three months. As per Figure3, 55 respondents (15.6%) thought that the impact will felt for around a month or so. Only 14 respondents (4%) believe that it will take almost a year for the COVID-19 effect to fade away.
- With limited activities out of home, consumers are reportedly reading, contributing and influencing social media quite more than before. Out of the total respondents surveyed, 134 respondents have started preferring online studies for self-learning, whereas 60 respondents have started using online platforms as learning for their children. Majority of the respondents are noted to be using digital applications for video chats for personal or professional use. Applications like Tik-Tok, Wellness App Tele-meditation didn't gain much response. Playing of video-games too seemed to be out-of-fashion. When consumers were asked about how much time do they expect to spend over the next two weeks on the activities as compared to normally spent, there was a considerable hike in all aspects like spending time in watching live new, movies or shows, videos, reading and texting, chatting, messaging etc.

CHANGE IN MEDIA CONSUMPTION HABITS AMID COVID-19 OUTBREAK

Following are the highlights of findings related to the change in media consumption habits amid COVID-19 outbreak:

- The study undertaken reveal some interesting findings about the change in the usage of media since COVID-19 outbreak. From among the total respondents surveyed, 95 respondents agreed that their usage of social media has increased very significantly. Where else, there is no change noted in playing games on a console or laptops and watching CDs and DVDs.
- Due to the coronavirus outbreak, there is a major change in the pattern of using social media sites/applications. Consumers were asked to reveal the average number of hours they spent using such sites and the main purpose for visiting such social media sites. The data revealed

that the maximum used social media applications are WhatsApp, Facebook and YouTube, which on an average are used for 2-5 hours by large number of respondents. Out of total 353 responses, 288 respondents use WhatsApp to stay connected with family, friends, and relatives. Facebook too, was mainly used to connect with family, friends, and relatives. Whereas, You Tube was primarily used for the purpose of entertainment followed by the need for information. Like You Tube, Instagram too was primarily used for entertainment purpose. The Analyzed data further revealed that majority of respondents do not use applications like LinkedIn, Twitter, Pinterest, Snap-Chat or Tik-Tok.

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON CONSUMER BUYING BEHAVIOR

The current study reveal some interesting findings related to the impact of COVID-19 on consumer behavior:

- Coronavirus (COVID-19) has spread all across the world and millions of people are forced to change their habits and lifestyle until things get better. Challenges arising from this outbreak are likely to accelerate the use of existing and new technologies and tools as people enter lockdowns and are quarantined. Masses of the consumers around 76.5% (270 respondents) believed that the pandemic breakdown has affected their shopping behaviour. Whereas, 83 respondents (23.5%) feel no impact of COVID-19 outbreak on their shopping behavior.

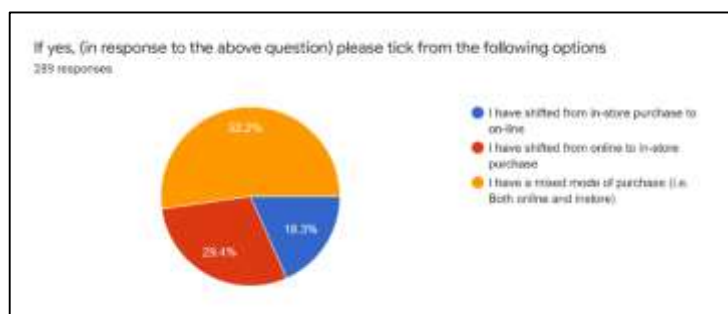


Figure 1: Shift in Types of Purchases due to the Impact of COVID-19 Outbreak

In response to the change in pattern of shopping behaviour, 52.2% (151 respondents) of those whose shopping behavior was affected, agreed that they have adopted a mixed mode of purchases (both, Online and In-store). However, 29.4% (85 respondents) have now shifted from online to in-store purchases. The remaining 18.3% (34 respondents) have shifted to on-line purchases.

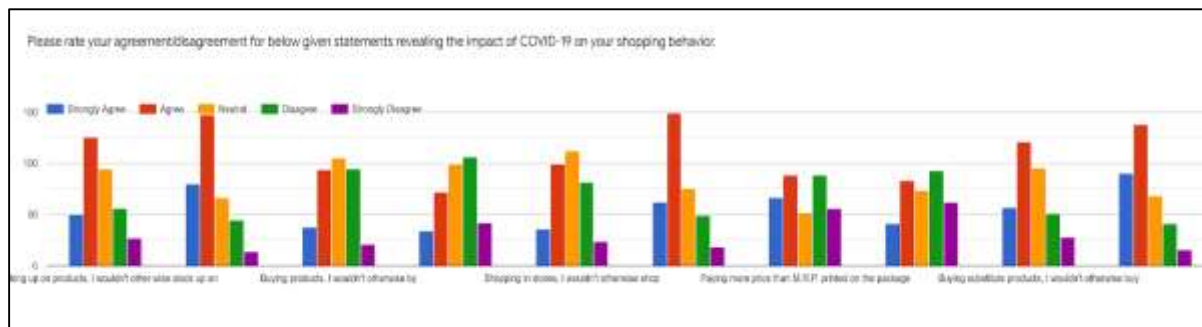


Figure 2: Agreement/Disagreement on statements revealing the impact of COVID-19 on Shopping Behavior

From among the individual i.e., 353 responses for each identified statement, 228 consumers believed in delaying their purchases and services. Whereas, 227 respondents experienced product shortages at stores from which they were trying to buy. Also, 211 respondents had to compromise on brands due to non-availability of their preferred brands. 175 consumers ended up stocking products which they wouldn't have done if it wasn't for COVID-19. Looking to the above figures, we can conclude that the primary impact of coronavirus outbreak was visible on people delaying their purchases, experienced product shortages at stores from where the purchase was intended, compromising on brands due to non-availability of preferred brands, and piling up the stock of products to avoid deficiency for the future.

- Regarding the change in the number of trips/visits for various types of purchases, from the first week of lock down to the fourth week of lockdown, it was found that majority of consumers, the number of trips for online as well as in-store purchases have significantly decreased in the fourth week of lockdown as compared to the number of trips in the first week of lockdown. This was obvious because the first week of lockdown created a panic situation among consumers and all of a sudden people started piling up the stocks for essentials and groceries. Also, it is worthy to note that as compared to in-store purchases, the online purchases decreased significantly. In spite of the fear of getting infected by the coronavirus, people continued with in-store purchases as there also was an equivalent fear of getting virus-infected goods through online purchase. However, as compared to in-store, online continued to remain the preferred mode of purchase even during the fourth week of lockdown.
- The change in the consumer behaviour can be largely seen for Grocery products, Health-care products, Medicines, Entertainment services and Fruits and Vegetables. From the first week of lockdown to the fourth week of lockdown, the size of consumption i.e., the demand for medicines, dairy products and religious channels remained more or less the same. Further, it

was observed that from the first week to fourth week of lockdown, the demand for vegetables and fruits, groceries, and entertainment services increased, whereas the demand for electronic gadgets, beauty products, and dairy products declined. The demand for social media and entertainment services was all-time high. Along with the essential physical goods, certain essential services like healthcare and entertainment were always in demand.

- From among the total 353 respondents, approximately 88.7% (313 respondents) have made their purchases in the month of March 2020. These purchases were already planned before the coronavirus outbreak. Out of these 313 respondents, 229 respondents purchased major and small household appliances along with computers. Purchases of mobile phones, computers and laptops, gardening and lawn care, and video games were mainly because of COVID-19 outbreak. However, Toys, video games, and T.V./Home theatre systems etc. topped the list of items which would have never purchased in next six months if it wasn't for COVID-19.

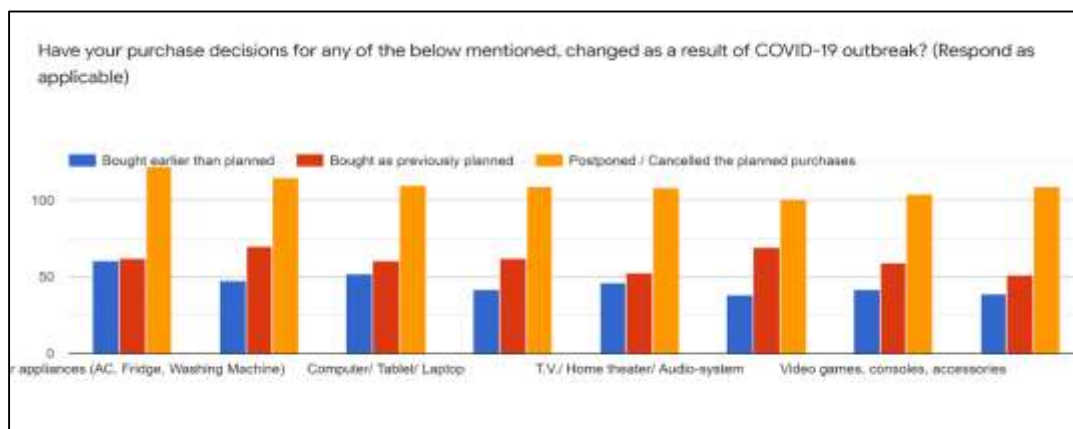


Figure 3: Products for which purchase decisions have changed due to COVID-19

(Bought earlier than planned / Bought as previously planned / Postponed or Cancelled the planned purchases)

Figure 3 reveals that the postponement / cancellation of the planned purchases happened for major appliances (like air conditioner, refrigerator, washing machines etc.) and small household appliances like ceiling fans, mixers and grinders, premium brands of mobile phones etc. Further, heavy investment items like computers, television, video games, home theatres also were postponed or cancelled. The top items in the list of actual purchases as previously planned consisted of items like mobile phones and lawn care. Also, considerable number of people bought major appliances and computers, earlier than planned. Two different behavior patterns observed for major appliances (purchase as planned and postponement/cancellation) must be an outcome of satisfying an immediate need or money-saving attitude and inability to purchase because of lockdown.

DIFFERENCES IN MEDIA CONSUMPTION AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOR (INFLUENCED BY COVID-19) ACROSS GENDER AND AGE

T-Test and Oneway ANOVA results are presented only for those variables where significant differences across gender and age groups are observed.

• **MEDIA CONSUMPTION & GENDER**

1) Differences in Media Consumption Habits (influenced by COVID-19) Across Gender

Table 2: Differences in Media Consumption Habits Across Gender

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Games-Mobiles/Tablets	Equal variances assumed	4.566	.033*	-.785	351	.433
	Equal variances not assumed			-.785	349.169	.433
Games-Computer/Laptop	Equal variances assumed	4.049	.045*	-.972	351	.332
	Equal variances not assumed			-.973	349.314	.331

T-test was conducted in order to validate differences of respondents' media consumption (influenced by COVID-19) across gender. As per above table, (for both, playing games on mobile/tablet and playing games on computer/laptop) the Levene's Test for Equality of Variances is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), which indicates that the group variances are unequal in the population. This indicates the violation of assumption of homogeneity of variances. We correct for this violation by not using the pooled estimate for the error term for the *t*-statistic, but instead using an adjustment to the degrees of freedom using the Welch-Satterthwaite method. Surprisingly, SPSS Statistics hides this information and simply labels the two options as "Equal variances assumed" and "Equal variances not assumed" without explicitly stating the underlying tests used.

The effect of not being able to assume equal variances is evident in the second-last column of the above table where we see a slight reduction in the degrees of freedom (df) (for playing games on mobile/tablet - from 351 to 349.169; and for playing games on computer/laptop – from 351 to 349.314). The two-tailed significance values (last column) for both the cases is $p > 0.05$. This has the effect of increasing the *p*-value above the critical significance level of 0.05. Hence, in such cases (with unequal variances in population), we accept that there are no statistically significant differences between means since $p > 0.05$. The media consumption mean (playing games on mobile/tablet) for males is 3.57, which is slightly lower than that for females i.e., 3.70. Also, the media consumption mean (playing games on computer/laptop) for males is 3.86, which is slightly lower than that for females i.e., 4.01. The differences in media consumption for other activities too, are insignificant.

Hence, we finally conclude that there are no significant differences in media consumption across males and females. This would not have been our conclusion had we not tested for homogeneity of variances.

Note: Same explanation for similar findings, if observed for other variables while exploring the differences in media consumption across gender and age is not be repeated henceforth.

2) Differences in Types & Usage of Social Media Applications (influenced by COVID-19) Across Gender

Table 3: Differences in Types & Usage of Social Media Applications Across Gender

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
You Tube	Equal variances assumed	18.676	.000	1.444	351	.150
	Equal variances not assumed			1.447	334.771	.149
Linkedin	Equal variances assumed	7.772	.006	1.340	351	.181
	Equal variances not assumed			1.343	335.263	.180
Twitter	Equal variances assumed	52.487	.000	3.843	351	.000
	Equal variances not assumed			3.859	286.375	.000
Snap Chat	Equal variances assumed	5.611	.018	-1.345	351	.179
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.343	336.111	.180

As reflected from the above table, You Tube, Linkedin, and Snap Chat the findings are similar to the ones presented earlier. Also, for other social media applications like WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, and Tik Tok, $p > 0.05$. Hence, it is concluded that there are no significant differences in the types and usage of social media applications (influenced by COVID-19) across males and females. However, with unequal variances, for Twitter $p < .05$. Hence, differences for using Twitter as a social media are significant across males and females.

3) Differences in Purpose for Using Social Media Applications (influenced by COVID-19) Across Gender

Regarding the purpose for using various social media applications (influenced by COVID-19), above table shows that for Instagram, based on the significance value ($p < .029$) of t-test for equality of means, we conclude that there are significant differences regarding the use of Instagram, across males and females.

Table 4: Differences in Purpose for Using Social Media Applications Across Gender

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Instagram	Equal variances assumed	14.354	.000*	2.190	267	.029
	Equal variances not assumed			2.185	250.571	.030
Linkedin	Equal variances assumed	5.664	.018*	.198	220	.843
	Equal variances not assumed			.199	219.644	.842

For other social media applications like Linkedin, WhatsApp, Facebook, You Tube, Twitter, Pinterest, Snap Chat, and Tik Tok, it is observed that $p > 0.05$. Hence, it is concluded that overall there are no significant differences in the purpose for using social media applications (influenced by COVID-19) across males and females.

- MEDIA CONSUMPTION & AGE GROUPS**

1) Differences in Media Consumption Habits (influenced by COVID-19) Across Different Age Groups

Table 5: Differences in Media Consumption Habits Across Age Groups

ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Stream Audio/Video Free	Between Groups	30.502	5	6.100	2.691	.021
	Within Groups	786.636	347	2.267		
	Total	817.139	352			
Recorded Programmes	Between Groups	34.379	5	6.876	3.209	.008
	Within Groups	743.559	347	2.143		
	Total	777.938	352			
Games-Mobiles/Tablets	Between Groups	67.630	5	13.526	6.002	.000
	Within Groups	781.956	347	2.253		
	Total	849.586	352			
Online Mag/Newspaper	Between Groups	24.048	5	4.810	2.397	.037
	Within Groups	696.219	347	2.006		
	Total	720.266	352			
Games Console	Between Groups	23.621	5	4.724	2.392	.037
	Within Groups	685.240	347	1.975		
	Total	708.861	352			

As observed in the above table, for Streaming Audio/Video (Free), Recorded programmes, Playing Games on Mobiles /Tablets, Reading Online Magazines/Newspaper, and Playing Games Console, the p value is less than 0.05. Hence, we conclude that there are significant differences in the media consumption habits across different age groups.

2) Differences in Types & Usage of Social Media Applications (influenced by COVID-19) Across Different Age Groups

Table 6: Differences in Types & Usage of Social Media Applications Across Age Groups

ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Apps Usage-You Tube	Between Groups	11.396	5	2.279	3.958	.002
	Within Groups	199.811	347	.576		
	Total	211.207	352			
Apps Usage-Instagram	Between Groups	69.742	5	13.948	19.918	.000
	Within Groups	243.001	347	.700		
	Total	312.742	352			
Apps Usage-Linkedin	Between Groups	5.174	5	1.035	2.382	.038
	Within Groups	150.775	347	.435		
	Total	155.949	352			
Apps Usage-Snap Chat	Between Groups	10.177	5	2.035	6.375	.000
	Within Groups	110.791	347	.319		
	Total	120.969	352			
Apps Usage-Tik-Tok	Between Groups	17.300	5	3.460	9.272	.000
	Within Groups	129.493	347	.373		
	Total	146.793	352			

Table 6 indicates that for You Tube, Instagram, Linkedin, Snap Chat, and Tik Tok, $p < 0.05$. Hence, it is concluded that there are significant differences in the Usage of Social Media Applications across different Age Groups.

3) Differences in Purpose for Using Social Media Applications (influenced by COVID-19) Across Different Age Groups

Table 7: Differences in Purpose for Using Social Media Applications Across Age Groups

ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Instagram	Between Groups	73.601	5	14.720	3.437	.005
	Within Groups	1126.533	263	4.283		
	Total	1200.134	268			
Linkedin	Between Groups	68.773	5	13.755	2.687	.022
	Within Groups	1105.767	216	5.119		
	Total	1174.541	221			
Twitter	Between Groups	68.435	5	13.687	2.611	.026
	Within Groups	1069.546	204	5.243		
	Total	1137.981	209			

Pinterest	Between Groups	90.701	5	18.140	3.286	.007
	Within Groups	1070.979	194	5.521		
	Total	1161.680	199			
Snap Chat	Between Groups	88.356	5	17.671	2.959	.013
	Within Groups	1194.246	200	5.971		
	Total	1282.602	205			

As observed in the above table, for Instagram, Linkedin, Twitter, Pinterest, and Snap Chat, p value are less than 0.05. Hence, we conclude that there are significant differences in the purpose of using social media apps across different age groups.

• CONSUMER BEHAVIOR & GENDER

Differences in Impact of COVID-19 on Shopping Behavior, No. of Trips, Size of Consumption, Reasons for Purchases in the month of March, and purchases of specified products across Gender

Table 8: Differences in Shopping Behavior, No. of Trips, Size of Consumption, Reasons for Purchases in the month of March, and purchases of specified products across Gender

Independent Samples Test						
(Observation:1) Impact of COVID-19 on Shopping Behavior Across Gender		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Stock Products	Equal variances assumed	4.374	.037	-1.981	351	.048
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.983	345.410	.048
Experience Product Shortage	Equal variances assumed	11.308	.001	-2.575	351	.010
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.578	345.853	.010
Compromise on brands	Equal variances assumed	.013	.908	-2.141	351	.033
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.141	350.950	.033
(Observation:2) Impact of COVID-19 on Change in No. of Trips Across Gender						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Online	Equal variances assumed	.785	.376	1.893	351	.059
	Equal variances not assumed			1.893	350.596	.059
In-store	Equal variances assumed	1.277	.259	1.882	351	.061
	Equal variances not assumed			1.882	350.763	.061
Both, Online & In-store	Equal variances assumed	.004	.952	3.367	351	.001
	Equal variances not assumed			3.370	348.846	.001

(Observation:3)		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Impact of COVID-19 on Size of Consumption Across Gender						
Medicines	Equal variances assumed	4.517	.034	.692	343	.490
	Equal variances not assumed			.692	339.758	.489
Beauty Products	Equal variances assumed	4.847	.028	1.261	340	.208
	Equal variances not assumed			1.261	336.620	.208
(Observation:4)		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Impact of COVID-19 on Reasons for Purchase in the Month of March						
Video Games /Console /Accessories	Equal variances assumed	5.138	.024	-1.268	249	.206
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.271	247.774	.205

Observation:1 Except for behaviour of compromising on brands, behaviour regarding stocking of products and experiencing product shortages, the Levene's Test for Equality of Variances as well as t-test for equality of means both, are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). However, neglecting the Levene's Test for Equality of Variance (due to the violation of assumption of homogeneity of variances), based on the significance level of t-test for equality of means, we conclude that there are significant differences observed in these two behaviours for males and females. Regarding the behaviour of compromising on brands, as per Levene's Test value for equality of variances, $p > 0.05$, leading to conclusion that there are no significant differences between males and females.

Observation:2 Regarding number of trips, as per Levene's Test, for online trips, in-store trips, and both online and in-store $p > .05$. Thus, equal variances in sample lead to conclusion that there are no statistical differences observed between males and females.

Observation:3 Regarding consumption behavior of medicines and beauty products, the findings are very similar to that of Observation. Hence, with same explanation, we conclude that there are no significant differences observed between males and females. Similar findings are observed for grocery, healthcare, electronic gadgets, vegetables/fruits, dairy, bakery, social media, entertainment, religious channels, and gaming services ($p > .05$ for all).

Observation:4 Neglecting the Levene's Test for Equality of Variance (due to the violation of assumption of homogeneity of variances) which shows $p < 0.05$, based on the significance level of t-test for equality of means, we conclude that there are no significant differences observed in the

behaviour for purchase of games, consoles, and accessories between males and females. For other products too, same conclusion is accepted.

Observation:5 Regarding the effect of COVID-19 on purchases of all specified products, the Levene's Test for equality of variances show $p > 0.05$. Hence, we conclude that there are no significant differences in the effect of COVID-19 on specified purchases across males and females.

- CONSUMER BEHAVIOR & AGE GROUPS**

Differences in Impact of COVID-19 on Shopping Behavior, No. of Trips, Size of Consumption, Reasons for Purchases in the month of March, and purchases of specified products across Age Groups

Observation1: Regarding the impact of COVID-19 on the shopping behavior of consumers across different age groups, there are no significant differences observed ($p > 0.05$) - *Tables not shown*

Observation2: The findings of the study reveal that there are no significant differences observed ($p > 0.05$) regarding the impact of COVID-19 across different age groups. – *Tables not shown*

Table 9: Differences in Shopping Behavior, No. of Trips, Size of Consumption, Reasons for Purchases in the month of March, and purchases of specified products across Age Groups

ANOVA						
(Observation:3) Impact of COVID-19 on Size of Consumption of Various Products Across Age Groups		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Grocery Products	Between Groups	7.972	5	1.594	3.487	.004
	Within Groups	156.407	342	.457		
	Total	164.379	347			
Health Care Products	Between Groups	8.049	5	1.610	3.385	.005
	Within Groups	162.170	341	.476		
	Total	170.219	346			
Dairy Products	Between Groups	6.233	5	1.247	3.503	.004
	Within Groups	121.721	342	.356		
	Total	127.954	347			
Bakery Products	Between Groups	7.267	5	1.453	2.498	.031
	Within Groups	198.353	341	.582		
	Total	205.620	346			
Entertain Services	Between Groups	10.879	5	2.176	4.154	.001

	Within Groups	176.527	337	.524		
	Total	187.405	342			
Gaming Services	Between Groups	14.921	5	2.984	5.707	.000
	Within Groups	174.641	334	.523		
	Total	189.562	339			
(Observation:4)						
Impact of COVID-19 on Purchases in March across Age Groups		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Toys/Video Games	Between Groups	7.587	5	1.517	2.937	.014
	Within Groups	128.129	248	.517		
	Total	135.717	253			

Observation3: As observed in above table, for grocery, health care, dairy, bakery products, entertainment, and gaming services, p value are less than 0.05. Thus, we conclude that there are significant differences in the size of consumption of various products across different age groups.

Observation4: Regarding the impact of COVID-19 on the purchases of products/services in the month of March, significant differences are observed for the purchase of toys and video games ($p < 0.05$).

Observation5: Finally, regarding the impact of COVID-19 on the purchase decisions of the specified products, no significant differences are observed across consumers of different age groups ($p > 0.05$). Hence, we conclude that the purchase decisions between different age groups were more or less the same.

9. DISCUSSION:

The current research study was conducted in the fourth week of the first lockdown period announced on 20th March. We are on the verge of ending of the second stage of the corona virus pandemic and now entering the third stage, which is expected to be more sensitive and dangerous, if we don't follow social distancing. Had we monitored the impact of coronavirus on consumer behaviour right from the first week of lockdown till date, we could have certainly derived more important insights on the change in consumer behaviour over the period of lockdown. Also, if this study is continued further till the end of the second lockdown period and so, some more different could have been obtained. However, given the fast-changing nature of the outbreak, we anticipate seeing fluctuations in behavior, impact and levels of concern in the coming weeks. Hence, the findings of this study are limited to the impact of COVID-19 outbreak on sentiments, media consumption habits, and consumer behaviour visible during the fourth week of lockdown.

- ***Sentiments and Concerns:***

In spite of entering the fifth week of lockdown period, the consumer sentiments through the crisis seems to be very optimistic. Indians have always shown high level of optimism in all periods of crisis. The past history of Indian epidemics, pandemics, and disasters is an evidence to the current findings also. Around 80% of consumers surveyed showed a high level of concern over coronavirus. This high level of concern had a significant impact on media consumption habits of people. Majority of consumers say they have increased their usage of T.V., internet, and social media since the pandemic started. These three media have become the major source of information regarding coronavirus. Surprisingly, Newspaper didn't emerge within the top three of the list since they were not printed due to lockdown. People initially shifted to online news to stay informed about the impact of coronavirus on the lives of people. Hence, consumers switched on to alternative sources of information i.e., television and internet. However, newspapers are now available.

As many individuals enter into their fourth week of social distancing and stay-at-home measures, economic impact of COVID-19 is now the overall primary concern. Whereas, self and family becoming infected, and inability to see family/friends/relatives are the next most widely cited primary concerns. We are sure, that these current findings must have been the same as during the first week of lockdown. It is worth noting that the closing down of educational institutions (schools and universities) was definitely a concern cited by reasonably good number of respondents, but not primary. This finding, definitely endorses the concern for education even during the period of crisis. Indians being the most optimistic people around the world, the consumer confidence of majority of Indians regarding the country's economic recovery after COVID-19 outbreak, is also found to be very high. After passing through the four weeks of lockdown period, majority of people are now hopeful of returning back to their normal routines in next two to three months. Though, a considerate number of those surveyed are more optimistic of returning back to normal life within a span of a month. This really seems to be doubtful. Further findings of the study regarding the impact of coronavirus pandemic on the personal household finances, reveal some important insights. Around 28% denied having any such impact on their household finances. Perhaps, these are the salaried class people (who were assured by the central govt. that their salaries will not be deducted) and/or those who owned shops/businesses (which were listed under essential goods/services) and hence functioned routinely. Whereas, around 4% of pessimists believed that it will take almost a year for the COVID-19 effect to fade away. With limited activities out of home, consumers are reportedly reading, contributing and influencing social media quite more than before. Online learning for self as well as for children; use

of digital applications for video chats (both, professional and personal) etc. are the new switchover activities during this crisis period. These activities do justify the genuine responses given by the surveyed respondents since they match with the sample of young adults and adults. Being at home, during the crisis period led to spending more time on watching live news, movies or shows, watching videos, chatting and texting messages etc. keeping oneself busy at home was clearly visible in the responses of the young adults and adults surveyed.

- ***Change in Media Consumption Habits:***

As India grapples with a new way of life, it is impossible to not see the impact on digital media consumption. Consumer have had to change their lifestyles significantly as social distancing, working from home, closed schools and cancelled travel/events disrupt daily routines. Regarding the media consumption habits, there are some interesting findings derived out of this research study.

Visits to websites and mobile applications consumed significant hours throughout a day's routine. Much of the website visits were noted because of people interested in general news, business/finance related information, and health information. Majority of consumers have shifted to government sites for getting authentic information to know latest number of COVID-19 positive cases and the most updated guidelines issued by the central/state government. This certainly helped in avoiding the spread of rumours and thereby the panic created among people. Regarding the usage of different social media sites, it was found that the maximum used social media applications are WhatsApp, Facebook, and You Tube. The overall usage of these social media sites ranged between 2-5 hours per day. WhatsApp and Facebook were primarily used to stay connected with family, friends and relatives. Whereas, You Tube and Instagram were primarily accessed for the purpose of entertainment. Applications like LinkedIn, Twitter, Pinterest, Snap-Chat, Tik-Tok etc. were not much used.

- ***Impact on Consumer Behavior:***

Coronavirus (COVID-19) has spread all across the world and millions of people are forced to change their habits and lifestyle until things get better. Challenges arising from this outbreak are likely to accelerate the use of existing and new technologies and tools as people enter lockdowns and are quarantined. Around 77% of the total sample believed that the pandemic breakdown has significantly affected their shopping behaviour. It means, around 8 in 10 consumers have changed their shopping behavior, either willingly or forcibly. Half of the respondents surveyed agreed that they have adopted a mixed-mode (i.e., both, in-store and online) of purchases. The fear of getting infected from

coronavirus has resulted into changing the mode of purchases. It was found that the shift from online to in-store purchases was more compared to the shift from in-store to online.

During the fourth week of lockdown, the most frequently cited impact on shopping behavior continues to be delaying purchases of non-essential goods/services, product shortages at stores from which they were trying to buy, compromising on brands due to the non-availability of preferred brands, and stock-up behaviours. Worth noting, stock-up behaviours continued in anticipation of the further extension in the lockdown period. All of these behaviors are indicative of the new - albeit temporary - normal in which we see consumers stepping back from non-essential activities and purchases. Regarding the change in the number of trips/visits for both, in-store as well as online purchases, majority of consumers significant reduced their number of trips/visits. This was an outcome of piling up the stocks of essentials and groceries (due to panic situation) in the first week itself and also delaying the purchase of non-essential items. Also, it is worth mentioning that the online purchases decreased significantly due to the fear of receiving delivery of virus-infected goods. Still, reasonably good number of people preferred buying online anticipating high degree of risk of becoming infected as compared to in-store purchases.

As India moves through the contagion curve, the findings of the current research study has noted some increased momentum in consumer spending across select product/service categories. As anticipated, even during the fourth week of lockdown consumers are found to spend more on basics like groceries, health-care products, medicines, fruits and vegetables, entertainment services etc. these spending endorses the primary concern of surviving amid the coronavirus crisis. Further, right from the first week to the fourth week of lockdown, the demand for medicines, healthcare services, entertainment services, and religious channel services have remained more or less the same. Consumers have dramatically started pulling down discretionary spending on products like electronic gadgets, beauty products, dairy products etc. Further, most of the purchases (app. 89% of the total respondents) taking place in the month of March 2020 were planned purchases before the coronavirus outbreak. Such purchases consisted of major and small household appliances. However, products like computers, premium brands of mobile phones, gardening and lawn care products, video games were purchased mainly because of COVID-19 pandemic. However, Toys, video games, and T.V./Home theatre systems etc. topped the list of items which would have never purchased in next six months if it wasn't for COVID-19. After the coronavirus outbreak, consumers have significantly pulled down their spending for discretionary products. This was visible even in planned purchases (genuine need) for major appliances (like air conditioner, refrigerator, washing machines etc.) and small household

appliances (like ceiling fans, mixers and grinders, premium brands of mobile phones etc.). Heavy investment items like computers, television, video games, home theatre systems were also postponed or cancelled reflecting the money-saving attitude of people during the period of crisis. Further, it is very interesting to note that in spite of becoming aware of the coronavirus outbreak, sizeable purchases took place (fear of closing down of shops anticipating the announcement of lockdown) for major appliances and computers, earlier than planned. Thus, two different behavior patterns were observed for certain purchases like major appliances and small and small household appliances.

10. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY:

- 1) The sample of respondents selected for the study may not truly represent the whole population of the selected cities of Vadodara and Gandhinagar.
- 2) Convenience method of sampling was adopted, which has its own limitations.
- 3) The responses obtained from the survey are subject to various types of biasness.
- 4) Time and cost constraints do remain as limiting factor in most of the researches in social sciences.

11. SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH:

Future study could replicate the current study, with large number of respondents covering the major cities of Gujarat. More importantly, an on-going analysis into consumer behavior and sentiments by conducting a weekly survey of verified buyers will lead to more significant consumer insights related to the fluctuations in behavior, impact and levels of concern in the coming weeks. Rather than a conducting a general study on the impact of COVID-19 on the selected three variables, a separate and more detailed study can be designed for each of these variables leading to more specific and interesting consumer insights.

12. CONCLUSION:

As COVID-19 becomes a global pandemic, governments and organizations continue to work toward containing COVID-19 and stemming the growing humanitarian toll it is exacting. Meanwhile, globally as well as locally, consumers are feeling its economic effects. The Union government imposed a 21- day lockdown on March 24, which has since been extended till May 3. Consumer industries have been among the hardest hit as restaurants and malls are shut and retail, except essential

grocery stores and medicine shops, also shuttered. In line with global consumers, Indians too are highly concerned about the coronavirus outbreak, and have undoubtedly displayed high optimism. Amid this lockdown and social distancing measures in place, more consumers are now spending across select and essential products like buying groceries through mixed-mode of purchases (both, in-store and online) and sales of hand sanitisers, soaps and home cleaning products have risen. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a slight shift in the paradigm of what we consider to be essentials; hygiene products have entered this category, whereas industries like apparel have shifted to discretionary. There is a rising demand for healthcare supplements as well, as more people look to boost their immunity supplements, including Ayurvedic medicines and products, as consumers pursue different ways to combat the virus. However, with the implementation of the lockdown and companies facing disruptions across manufacturing and supply chain, there is a considerable slowdown in growth of Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG). The disruptions in supply chain and logistics is leading to drying up of inventory levels at retailers which may significantly impact the supply of FMCG products to consumers. Further, the COVID-19 impact is expected to be felt acutely in the consumer durable sector as it has a high dependency on China for imports of consumer durable components along with half of the completely built units. Hence, consumer durables and electronics will soon see an increase in prices. Also, a significant shift is noticed towards social media sites and digital channels, products, and services across categories. But, that shift has not come close to offsetting the overall reduction in spending, though consumers are still pulling back dramatically on discretionary spending. This change in consumption patterns and in consumer behaviour will be more because of substantially diminished purchasing power in the hands of the consumer, and not so much because of being under lockdown for 3-4 weeks (or a bit more). In the longer run, the COVID-19 recovery is likely to result in a more permanent shift in consumers' attitudes and shopping behaviour, especially in urban areas, with increased usage of home and personal hygiene products and an accelerated shift to digital purchases. Finally, on a positive note, it's time for we consumers to realize, acknowledge, and learn to live with coronavirus (COVID-19).

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