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Research Paper

Online Apparel Consumer Behavior During Covid-19 Lockdowns

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ABSTRACT: *Covid19 lockdowns led to increases in the frequency and volume of clothes bought online. Since the Covid19 lockdowns were in many ways life changing experiences, this study aims at reassessing the perceptions and preferences of apparel consumers based on their Covid19 lockdown experiences. The study finds that there are only a few who expect a decline in their online apparel shopping after the Covid19 restrictions are lifted. It also reveals that the lockdowns have helped many shoppers to understand the benefits of online shopping. The study also shows that convenience and trust remain as the most important deciding factors for online apparel shoppers.*

KEYWORDS: *Apparel ecommerce, Consumer Preferences, Covid19 lockdowns, Indian online shoppers, Online apparel shopping*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The global outbreak of Covid19 in 2020 not only caused the deaths of so many people but also affected the economic and social lives of everyone. People were least prepared for a pandemic of this nature. The precautionary restrictions imposed by governments on people's movements and physical contacts had significant adverse effects on their unavoidable day-to-day activities like shopping. This study attempts to assess the impact of the lockdowns on the online shopping behavior of Indian consumers with a view to understand the future prospects of apparel ecommerce in India. It is based on a survey conducted in Delhi in September, 2021 by which time, the total number of new Covid19 cases began to recede significantly and the vaccination program had gathered significant momentum. It is assumed that the respondents were by then in a position to visualize the likely trend in their online apparel shopping once normalcy returned.

Apparel e-commerce has grown rapidly over the last decade the world over and in India - belying all apprehensions. Currently, it is among the top 3 items sold online. If we exclude travel, apparel is among the top 2 items sold online in different regions of the world [1] as of 2021. In India, it was tied at the top with consumer electronics - with a 40% share in the total online sales of all items [2] in 2021. A better understanding of its prospects would be helpful for the Indian apparel industry as a whole and the online apparel sellers in particular.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A review of extant research work was done to understand the approaches adopted by the different researchers in analyzing the online consumer behavior as well as the factors considered by them. Zhou et al. [3] have built a reference model called the online shopping acceptance model after evaluating several related studies which helped in identifying the consumer-side factors influencing their online shopping. This model provides a contrast against the website related factors that are studied under the online technology adoption model. Their survey of studies brings out both the demographic and behavioral factors considered by various studies. According to them, the demographic factors covered by the surveyed studies included 1) gender, 2) age, 3) income, 4) education, and 5) culture. They have also identified 1) online shopping experience, 2) psychological perception of risks and benefits, 3) shopping orientation and motivation, as well as 4) personal traits and beliefs as the factors on which several studies focused on. Another study [4] provides an overview of the several theoretical models adopted by different researchers for analyzing online consumer behavior. They discuss among others: 1) Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), which uses behavioral intentions as the basis for understanding and predicting consumer behavior; 2) Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which extends the TRA theory to include personal attitudes as well as social pressures as factors influencing the reasoned consumer intentions; 3) Technology Adoption Model (TAM), which specifically focuses on perceptions and attitudes towards online shopping technology interfaces as determinants of online consumer behavior; 4) Innovation Diffusion Theory (IDT), which extends TAM to include both the technological and attitudinal challenges faced by consumers such as complexity, compatibility, trial ability, communicability and the perception of relative advantage; 5) Motivational Model, which considers motivation along with other psychological factors as a significant factor influencing consumer behavior and 6) Social Cognitive Theory, which treats environment, cognition and behavior as interactive factors that influence online shopping. Research papers relating to the Indian ecommerce context were also consulted to make the study relevant to Indian conditions. One 2018 study observes that online shopping in India is here to stay and will increase in the coming years [5]. The Indian e-commerce industry has undergone a considerable transformation in recent years. Some of the areas of significant changes include personalization, improved return policies, and payment options, among other things. As a result, customers have every motive to shop online [6]. They identify 1) increased mobile based shopping, 2) growth in the number of young shoppers, 3) use of multiple payment choices, 3) increasing influence of the social media, 4) environmental consciousness, 5) introduction of voice and visual shopping interfaces, 6) personalization, 7) Augmented Reality, 8) Subscription ecommerce, 9) chat-bots, 10) Omni channel shopping, 11) Customer feedback, and 12) use of artificial intelligence (AI) as the most important recent trends influencing online shopping in India.

A number of studies have also been done in several parts of India at the city or district level to understand the profile of Indian online shoppers. One of the main characteristics of these studies is that they present a mixed picture about the characteristics of Indian online shoppers. A study conducted [7] in Chandigarh and Panchkula 2016 concludes that age and employment have a significant influence on online shopping intention while education does not. A study conducted [8] in 2019 in Bangalore showed there is a significant relationship between income levels and social media mediated online purchases. In a study[9] done in Bareilly district in 2015, it was found that males do more online shopping than females and that the age group of 30-45 was more interested in online shopping than other age groups. This study also found income, education level, and prior experience in online shopping to be positively correlated with online shopping. It was also found that those who are more security conscious are less likely to shop online. A study done in Mumbai city [10] in 2018 found that there were no significant differences in the perception of males and females with respect to convenience, trust, risk, customized services and price advantages of online shopping. The same was the case with married and unmarried online shoppers. This study also found that only price related perceptions differed significantly according to the income levels of online shoppers. A study done in Dehradun and Haridwar districts of Uttrakhand in 2017 [11] compares the profiles of online shoppers with the non-online shoppers based on consumer, marketing and technology oriented factors and finds that consumer factor showed a strong relationship in predicting the 'online purchase intention' while marketing and technology factors did not. The consumer factor covered variables such as age, gender, family size, family life cycle stage, education, income and occupation. A study of consumer behavior towards online shopping carried out in Ratnagiri, also in 2017 [12], observed that most shoppers are more or less satisfied with online stores and use smartphones for online shopping. Most popular among the items shopped online were clothes, electronic goods and fashion accessories. A study done in Raipur in 2016 [13] found a strong relationship between the intention to buy online with demographic, product and website factors. However, the study does not find any strong relationship between the merchant factor and the intention to buy online.

Studies relating to the international context were also considered to evaluate their relevance to Indian conditions. Brashear et al. [14] make an interesting comparison of Internet shopper profiles across England, the United States, New Zealand, China, Bulgaria, and Brazil. They study factors like 1) risk aversion, 2) innovativeness, 3) brand consciousness. 4) price consciousness, 5) desire for convenience, 6) desire for variety, 7) impulsiveness, 8) attitude towards advertising and 9) attitude towards direct marketing of online shoppers in these countries and conclude that there are some commonalities in the profile of online shoppers in these countries. According to their study, convenience seeking is a common trait. Online shoppers were also found to be more innovative in most countries. Internet shoppers in these countries except New Zealand were found to be more impulsive than offline shoppers. They conclude that the influence of demographic factors and some online shopping preferences may vary across different countries. A study by Sonia San Martín et al [15] in 2009 compared online shopper perceptions in Japan and Spain and concluded that online shoppers in these countries had 'heterogeneous behaviors and attitudes towards e-commerce'. These studies underscore the need for assessing online shopper perceptions in a culture or country specific context. The differences in the outcomes of these studies only show that online shopping in India is still evolving and underlines the need for fresh studies to have an up-to-date understanding of the profile of online shoppers. A number of studies have identified the significant factors affecting the purchase intention of online shoppers. These are as follows:

- **Convenience:** Consumers generally have less time for shopping because of extended professional responsibilities, which generally tend to consume extra time. 35.7% of the people use online shopping because it is very convenient and time saving [16]. Consumers prefer online shopping because of the convenience to shop from home at any time, day or night, and with added time, and cost savings [17]. When selecting whether to shop online or offline, convenience appears to be a major consideration. Aside from the enhanced convenience, the consumers appear to prefer the increased privacy that comes with shopping online [18].
- **Price and discounts**: Apart from the attractive discounts offered by online stores, online shoppers also prefer the facility for finding the online store offering the best price before purchasing anything [19]. As compared to offline stores, online stores often offer more discounts and rates, as well as a wider range of products [20].
- **Trust:** Trust is known to be the basis of every trade, whether online or offline. When it comes to the younger generation, trust is regarded as the most important factor influencing their purchasing behavior when it comes to online shopping. Consumers agree that Online Trust influences their online buying decision for fashion products. Consumers opt to shop for online fashion products because they are certain that online fashion products will always suit their needs [21]. Some of the factors which contribute to the trust in online shopping are reviews, testimonials, including those coming from family and friends [22].
- **Brand:** Every company aims to maintain its brand image to ensure that its consumers will associate it with the highest quality. This is because the perception of a good brand image can help improve consumer perceptions about the product's quality. For online fashion products, the online brand image has a considerable positive impact on the buying decision [23].

Several studies have also attempted to gain insights into the profile online apparel shoppers. A study by [24] revealed that the profile of online apparel shoppers differed depending upon whether they are occasional or regular shoppers of apparel online and that their key traits were as follows:

- **Occasional apparel online shoppers**: They shop online only a few times a year when necessary do not enjoy it. They also face difficulties with online shopping and feel uncertain about sizes and materials. Their opinion can be changed if the order meets their expectation. They do not do adequate research before shopping but bad reviews affects their decisions. They are not very influenced by the website look but appreciate a good a good searching system. They are also very careful with their privacy.
- **Regular apparel online shoppers**: They shop online, many times a month and enjoy the process. They rely on returns to deal with issues and find online stores trustworthy. They are also open to new technologies and do pre-purchase research by browsing relevant websites, reviews and feedbacks. They prefer the ease of navigation and a modern website design.

Cowart and Goldsmith [25] in their 2007 study point out that shoppers with hedonistic, recreational and impulsive orientation are most likely to buy apparel online. Since impulsive buyers are more inclined to buy apparel online, such purchases are likely to be unplanned. This study also observes that value-conscious consumers would adopt online apparel shopping less readily than others. Mahalaxmi and Manikandan [26] in their 2016 survey of literature relating to online apparel shopping provide a comprehensive description of the factors influencing online shopping for apparel, which was found useful in developing the survey instrument for this research. Kawaf and Tagg [27] in their 2012 literature survey provide insights into the social, psychological and emotional aspects of online apparel buying behavior. They also recommend qualitative research to improve the outcomes of online apparel shopping related research.

Sivanesan et al [28] in their 2017 study of online apparel shoppers in the Kanyakumari district of Tamil Nadu point out that people in the age group of 20 to 30 shopped online more than others. This study further brings out that the respondents considered the quality of the apparel as the most important factor influencing their online shopping for clothes. A study by Nethravathi and Vijaya [29] in 2017 brought out that most online shoppers were satisfied with the quality of fashion apparel brands sold by online stores and that their online purchase of fashion apparel has increased during the pandemic period.

The literature survey also covered studies specifically dealing with the impact of Covid19 lockdowns. A nine-nation survey covering Brazil, China, Germany, Italy, Russia, Korea, South Africa, Switzerland and Turkey conducted by NetCom Suisse under the auspices of United Nations Conference on Trade and Development[30] confirmed that significantly larger number of people had shopped online during the Covid19 pandemic than before. The highest shift was in China with a total of 78% either agreeing or strongly agreeing that they are shopping more often online than before”. Switzerland had the lowest change, with only 30% agreeing. Overall, women outnumbered men, 51% to 46%. 58% of these shoppers had tertiary education i.e., above school including college and university. The product categories with the largest increase in active online shopping included consumer electronics & ICT products, gardening & do-it-yourself tools, and pharmaceutical & healthcare products. Cosmetics & personal care and food & beverages also saw a significant increase in online buying, Active online shoppers for fashion and accessories increased by only 2%. An important finding of the survey is that the average consumer spending has fallen significantly across all product categories. The least level of decrease was – 11% in the case of agro food products and beverages with travel and tourism suffering the maximum fall of -75%. The decline in the consumer spending for fashion and accessories was -48%.

In 2021, Shengyu GU Et Al [31] carried out an online global survey covering 3042 online shoppers spread across 10 countries (China, the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, Germany, France, South Korea, Canada, Russia, and Brazil). This survey was repeated four times. The authors note changes in online shopping patterns over time. In the beginning, the shift to online shopping was through mobile phones mostly out of compulsion and the products bought included mainly luxury goods, clothing, beauty products, travel services, food, auto parts and accessories, and household items. However, as time passed, by January 2021, "Internet users became more confident when shopping online and more interested in buying high-quality products at lower prices. At the same time, shoppers tended to prefer online stores with a broad range of items."

Research conducted in Hanoi in Vietnam found that the work from home compulsion during the Covid19 pandemic encouraged people to shop online more frequently. At the same time, it also found that a drop in personal income limits the capacity for online shopping [32].

In India also, the outbreak of Covid19 has dramatically affected the consumers' choice of shopping channel. A survey done by Statista in India in May, 2020 provides data regarding the likely return of people to offline shopping after the pandemic scare is over. Although only 10 to 16% are dissatisfied with their online shopping experience, more than 50% overall and 66% of those above 45 years of age say they prefer to shop offline because of the opportunity it gives for inspecting the goods before buying. About a quarter of them prefer the joy of online shopping. About a quarter of them also prefer patronizing locals (COVID-19 Impact on Online Purchases in India 2020 by Age - Statista, 2021).

The Facebook Boston Consulting report published in June 2020 claims that "COVID-19 has accelerated E-commerce adoption in India by 2-3 years". This report also expected the total number of online shoppers in India to double between 2019 and 2023 and reach 300 to 320 million because of Covid19. Pre-Covid19 estimates had pegged the total number of online shoppers in India around 240 to 260 by 2023. The Facebook-BCG study claims that 90 % of consumers who have purchased apparel online during the lockdown are willing to continue. They found that digital influence could increase up to 70 per cent for mobiles, up to 60% for apparel and up to 25% for non-food consumer packaged goods (CPG) categories.

Some studies have also examined the impact of Covid19 on online shopping in India. Bharti Aggarwal & Deepa Kapoor [33] in their descriptive research point out that increase online shopping resulted from the fear of Covid19 infections on the one hand and the shortage of stocks in the physical retail stores. They also cite the availability of smartphones as a major enabling factor for increased online shopping [34] conducted an online survey covering 439 respondents in India to assess the impact of Covid19 on online shopping. Their findings showed that 1) social media, 2) product quality, 3) post shopping experience such as easy returns and refunds, 4) product description and 5) seller information positively affected online buying intention.

III. OBJECTIVES, METHODS ABD MATERIALS

3.1 Objectives

The primary objective of this research is to assess the impact of Covid19 lockdowns on the apparel buying perceptions and behaviours of Indian online shoppers with the help of a sample survey conducted among the college students and faculty members in Delhi. The specific aims of the research are as follows:

1. To reassess the preferences of online apparel shoppers in the context of Covid19 lockdowns
2. To reassess the future prospects Indian online apparel stores based on the experiences of online apparel shoppers of India and their inclinations towards the future
3. To make recommendations useful to the Indian apparel industry in general and the online apparel stores in particular.

3.2 Sample Survey Questionnaire

A Likert scale questionnaire was framed using a 5 point scale with 5 indicating strong agreement and 1 representing strong disagreement to capture responses relating to the perceptions of the respondents. Additional questions were included to gather demographic data. The questionnaire was pilot tested before administration. It was also approved by a duly constituted ethics committee

3.3 Sample Size and Demographics

This study used a convenient sample of 105 respondents. The questionnaire was distributed online using Google Forms. The participants were predominantly in the age group of 18 to 34. The sample was composed of a little over 70% of females and nearly 30% of males. The demographic profile of the respondents is summed up in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Gender	Male	Female		
	29.52%	70.4%		
Age Group	18-24	25-34	35-49	50-60
	79.9%	19.04%	3.8%	0.9%
Education Level	School Level	Graduate Level	Post Graduate Level	More than Post-Graduation
	2.85%	41.9%	52.38%	2.85%
Online shopping experience	Less than 1 year	Almost 2 years	2-5 years	More than 5 years
	8.57%	18.09%	43.8%	29.52%
Mobile shopping experience	Less than 1 year	Almost 2 years	2-5 years	More than 5 years
	10.47%	23.8%	42.85%	22.8%
Online apparel purchase (2020-21)	Less than Rs 3000	> Rs.3000 but < Rs.10000	> Rs.10000 but <Rs.20000	More than Rs. 20000
	46.6%	31.42%	14.28%	7.61%
Monthly family income before lockdowns (2019)	Less than Rs. 50 thousand	More than Rs. 50 thousand up to Rs. 1 Lakh	More than Rs. 1 Lakh up to Rs. 5 Lakhs	More than Rs. 5 Lakhs
	33.33%	37.14%	22.85%	6.66%
Monthly income during lockdown (2020-21)	Less than Rs. 50 thousand	More than Rs. 50 thousand up to Rs. 1 Lakh	More than Rs. 1 Lakh up to Rs. 5 Lakhs	More than Rs. 5 Lakhs
	29.52%	35.23%	26.66%	8.57%

In terms of education, almost 95% of the respondents were either graduates or post graduates. Their family income ranged from less than Rs.50 thousand/month (30%), between Rs.50 thousand and one lakh (35%) and between Rs.1 lakh and 5 lakh (27%). The rest (8%) had a monthly family income of over Rs.5 lakh a month.

Additional demographic information was also gathered with respect to their experience of using the Internet and smartphones for online shopping. Only 9% had less than one year experience in shopping online while 18% had almost two year experience in shopping online. A majority (44%) had 2-5 years of experience followed by nearly 30% having more than 5 years of online shopping experience. Keeping in view of the growing importance of mobile ecommerce applications, the survey also gathered data relating to their use of mobile phones for online shopping. A majority of (43%) had between 2 to 5 years of using mobile apps for online shopping along with 22% who have been online ecommerce apps for more than 5 years.

Data was also gathered from the respondents about the types of apparel they usually bought online. Analysis of the data revealed that most of them (88%) bought daily wear clothes online. The second most bought category is ethnic wear (44%) followed by designer wear at number 3 (36%). Only fewer people bought other types of clothes; 27% bought kids wear; 22% inner wear, and 16% sportswear. Only 8% bought special occasion clothing. There was no response from anyone with respect to the clothing accessories category.

IV. PARAMETER WISE FREQUENCY ANALYSIS

4.1 Perceptions relating to convenience offered by online apparel stores

Table 2: Responses regarding convenience

Convenience Related Questions	Strongly Agree%	Agree%	Neutral%	Disagree%	Strongly Disagree%	All Agree%	All Agree + Neutral%
Online apparel stores are convenient for shopping as they save time and travel							
	30.48	49.52	16.19	3.81	-	80.00	96.19
The wide variety of clothes offered by online apparel stores make shopping very convenient							
	29.52	47.62	17.14	4.76	0.95	77.14	94.29
Home delivery provided by online apparel stores make them very convenient for shopping							
	41.91	49.52	7.62	0.95	-	91.43	99.05
Online apparel stores provided a convenient option for buying clothes during Covid-19 lockdowns							
	41.91	46.67	9.52	1.90	-	88.57	98.10

Online apparel stores make it easier to compare price and quality of clothes from multiple sellers							
	34.29	42.86	15.24	6.67	0.95	77.14	92.38

Home delivery is considered by the respondents as the most important convenience provided by online apparel shoppers with 91.3% of the respondents agreeing with this proposition i.e. 41.9% strongly agreeing and 49.5% agreeing. 88.5% also agreed that online apparel stores provided a convenient option for buying clothes during Covid-19 lockdowns i.e. 41.9% strongly agreeing and 46.7% agreeing, there was also an almost equal agreement on the proposition that online apparel stores are convenient for shopping as they save time and travel – with 30.5% strongly agreeing and 49.5% agreeing with a positive affirmation from a total 80% of respondents. 77.14% of the respondents also concurred with the two propositions that 1) Online apparel stores make it easier to compare price and quality of clothes from multiple sellers and that 2) they made shopping convenient by offering a variety of clothes.

4.2 Perceptions relating to trust in online apparel stores

Table 3: Responses regarding trust

Trust related Questions	Strongly Agree%	Agree%	Neutral%	Disagree%	Strongly Disagree%	All Agree%	All Agree + Neutral%
I trust online apparel stores that provide efficient customer service and dispute resolution							
	30.48	52.38	12.38	4.76		82.86	95.24
I trust online apparel stores that provide accurate product images and detailed information							
	34.29	43.81	15.24	5.71	0.95	78.10	93.33
I trust online apparel stores that have easy return policies							
	41.91	45.71	8.57	3.81		87.62	96.19
I trust online clothing stores, which provide cash-on-delivery option							
	37.14	40.95	19.05	2.86		78.10	97.14
I prefer to shop from the online stores of the retail stores from where I usually shop otherwise							
	16.19	46.67	25.71	10.48	0.95	62.86	88.57
I find most online apparel stores trustworthy							
	11.43	37.14	30.48	20.00	0.95	48.57	79.05

Although only less than half (48.6%) of the respondents agreed with the general proposition that most online apparel stores are trustworthy, the survey shows significant degree of agreement on quite a few specific aspects of trust. Most respondents (87.6%) agreed on the proposition that they trust online clothing stores, which provide cash-on-delivery option. 78.1% also agreed on two other propositions that they trust online apparel stores: 1) that provide accurate product images and detailed information and 2) which provide cash-on-delivery option. The analysis also brought out that there are 62.8% respondents who like buying from the online stores of the physical stores where they usually shop for clothes.

4.3 Perceptions relating to the prices and discounts offered by online apparel stores

Table 4: Responses regarding Price and Discounts

Price & Discount Related Questions	Strongly Agree%	Agree%	Neutral%	Disagree%	Strongly Disagree%	All Agree%	All Agree + Neutral%
I shop for clothes more during the mega sales events of online stores							
	20.00	51.43	21.91	4.76	1.91	71.43	93.33
My online shopping for clothes depend on the level of discounts offered							
	18.10	47.62	26.67	5.71	1.91	65.71	92.38
I buy more from online apparel stores which offer lower prices than the physical stores							
	22.86	44.76	24.76	7.62		67.62	92.38
I buy more from online apparel stores that offer attractive cash back							
	20.95	40.00	26.67	10.48	1.91	60.95	87.62

The analysis shows that lower prices and discounts are important to a significant percentage of online apparel shoppers. 71.4% respondents agreed that they shop for clothes more during the mega sales events of online stores, while 67.6% stated that they buy more from online apparel stores which offer lower prices than the physical stores. While 65.7% said that their online shopping for clothes depend on the level of discounts offered. 60.9% also stated that they more from online apparel stores that offer attractive cash back.

4.4 Perceptions relating to the advertising and marketing of online apparel stores

Table 5: Responses regarding Advertising & Marketing

Advertising & Marketing Related Questions	Strongly Agree%	Agree%	Neutral%	Disagree%	Strongly Disagree%	All Agree%	All Agree + Neutral%
I buy from online apparel stores that are popular and well-advertised							
	20.95	52.38	22.86	2.86	0.95	73.33	96.19
I buy from online apparel stores that are promoted through emails and websites							
	7.62	35.24	32.38	20.95	3.81	42.86	75.24
I also buy from independent online apparel who promote their websites through the social media							
	6.67	49.52	25.71	17.14	0.95	56.19	81.91
I believe that digital marketing is an important way of promoting online apparel stores							
	37.14	48.57	11.43	1.91	0.95	85.71	97.14
I find it difficult to rely only on advertisements to select online apparel stores							
	17.14	47.62	29.52	4.76	0.95	64.76	94.29

Analysis of the responses shows that there is a significant agreement of 85.7% supporting the proposition that digital marketing is an important way of promoting online apparel stores. A majority of 73.3% also affirmed that they bought from apparel stores that are popular and well-advertised' On the contrary there was far less agreement of only 42.9% in support of the statement that the respondents bought from online apparel stores that are promoted through emails and websites. 64.76% have also said that they I find it difficult to rely only on advertisements to select online apparel stores. At the same time, more than half of the respondents (56.2%) confirmed that they bought from independent online apparel who promote their websites through the social media.

4.5 Perceptions relating to apparel and online apparel store brands

Table 6: Responses regarding Brands

Brands Related Questions	Strongly Agree%	Agree%	Neutral%	Disagree%	Strongly Disagree%	All Agree%	All Agree + Neutral%
I prefer to buy clothes from well-established brands than lesser-known clothing brands							
	18.10	38.10	36.19	5.71	1.91	56.19	92.38
I rely more on the brand reputation of the online store for buying clothes online							
	16.19	45.71	28.57	7.62	1.91	61.90	90.48
I believe brands indicate better quality of clothing							
	18.10	47.62	28.57	4.76	0.95	65.71	94.28
I believe that the online apparel stores offer better collection of branded clothes than the physical stores							
	16.19	30.48	42.86	10.48		46.67	89.52
I prefer to buy latest styles of clothes than branded clothes							
	16.19	48.57	30.48	2.86	1.91	64.76	95.24

While there is a significant (65.7%) agreement on the general proposition that brands indicate better quality, there is an almost equal (64.8%) preference for buying latest styles of clothes than branded clothes. However, 56.2% of the respondents also support the proposition that they would prefer to buy online well-established brands than lesser-known clothing brands. At the same time, there are also 61.9% of the respondents who rely more on the brand reputation of the online store for buying clothes online. A little less than half (46.7%) agree with the proposition that the online apparel stores offer better collection of branded clothes than the physical stores, What is notable in the response data in this case is that a very large (42.8%) percentage of the respondents remain undecided. The analysis also shows that there are lots of mixed preferences with respect to brands. Both apparel brands and online store brands are influencing buying preferences. Customer interest also remains divided between brands and latest styles.

4.6 Perceptions relating to the usefulness of online apparel stores during lockdowns

Table 7: Responses regarding the Usefulness of Online Apparel Stores during Covid19

Likert Scale Question	Strongly Agree%	Agree%	Neutral%	Disagree%	Strongly Disagree%	All Agree%	All Agree + Neutral%
I found online stores ideal alternative for shopping clothes during the Covid-19 lockdowns							
	27.62	50.48	19.05	1.91	0.95	78.10	97.14
I would continue to buy clothes from online apparel stores even after the Covid-19 lockdown is lifted							
	20.95	47.62	24.76	5.71	0.95	68.57	93.33

A little over three quarters (78.1%) of the respondents said that they found online stores ideal to be alternatives for shopping clothes during the Covid-19 lockdowns. A little over two thirds (68.6%) also confirmed that would continue to buy clothes from online apparel stores even after the Covid-19 lockdown is lifted. These responses clearly show that a majority of the respondents have no problem in relying on online apparel stores.

4.7 Perceptions relating to the online purchase of apparel during locksowns

Table 8: Responses regarding their Online Apparel Purchases during Covid19 Lockdowns

Lockdown-Specific Questions	Strongly Agree%	Agree%	Neutral%	Disagree%	Strongly Disagree%	All Agree%	All Agree + Neutral%
Heavy price discounts offered by online apparel stores during lockdowns motivated my online purchase of clothes							
	15.24	42.86	29.52	11.43	0.95	58.10	87.62
I bought clothes online during the Covid-19 lockdowns just to fulfill the pent-up desire for shopping							
	7.62	32.38	26.67	25.71	7.62	40.00	66.67
I became aware of the advantages of buying apparel from online stores during the Covid19 lockdowns							
	16.19	41.91	29.52	10.48	1.91	58.10	87.62
I bought clothes from online stores during lockdown since access to physical stores was limited							
	20.00	50.48	20.00	8.57	0.95	70.48	90.48
While buying from online stores during lockdowns, I missed the pleasure of shopping from physical apparel stores							
	25.71	37.14	28.57	7.62	0.95	62.86	91.43
Uncertainties about overall family income restricted my online apparel shopping during the Covid-19 lockdowns							
	16.19	39.05	29.52	14.29	0.95	55.24	84.76

A significant majority (70.5%) agree that they bought clothes from online stores during the lockdowns since access to physical stores was limited. Nearly two thirds (62.9%) also agreed that they missed the pleasure of shopping from physical apparel stores while buying from online stores during the Covid-19 lockdowns. At the same time, more than half (58.1%) also agreed that they became aware of the advantages of buying apparel from online stores during the Covid19 lockdowns. The same percentage of respondents (58.1%) also agree that heavy price discounts offered by online apparel stores during the Covid-19 lockdowns motivated their online purchase of clothes. About 52.2% of the respondents also agreed that uncertainties about overall family income restricted their online apparel shopping during the Covid-19 lockdowns. However, only 40.0% of the respondents agreed with the proposition that they bought clothes online during the Covid-19 lockdowns just to fulfill the pent-up desire for shopping. It may thus be interpreted that a majority of people bought clothes online as part of their regular shopping.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the research several valuable insights for the Indian online apparel stores, which are summarized below:

- *Future Prospects:* What augurs well for the online apparel stores catering to Indian consumers is that 45.6% of the respondents stated they expect to shop for apparel online after the lifting of the lockdowns, while 46.6% expected no change in their level of online apparel buying after the lockdowns. Only 8.7% of the respondents expected their online purchase of apparel to go down after the lockdown. The sudden increase online shopping of apparels during Covid19 lockdowns cannot be treated as a one-off event. Since 68.6% of the respondents have clearly said that they would continue to buy clothes from online apparel stores even after the Covid-19 lockdown is lifted, the online apparel stores can be expected to increase their sales in future as well. This study thus finds merit in the predictions made earlier by commercial research agencies pointing out that ecommerce will grow in the post Covid19 period also.

- *Influence of convenience and trust*: The variables directly related to the convenience and trust aspects of online apparel stores received maximum positive affirmation with 3 out of 4 respondents agreeing with their importance and only less than 5% of the respondents disagreeing (except 5.7% in one case). Home delivery is the anchor variable with a positive affirmation of 91.43% followed by 88.57% finding them to be a convenient option during covid19 lockdowns; 87.62% trusting stores having easy return policies; 82.86% trusting stores providing efficient customer service; 80% agreeing with the time and travel saved; 78.10% prefering stores providing accurate product information and 77.14% preferring online apparel stores because of the wider variety of clothes they offer. Combining these results with the findings relating to the types of clothes bought online, daily wear, ethnic wear and kids wear online outlets would stand to benefit by focusing on wider variety, easy return, efficient customer service and accurate product information.
- *Preferences relating to price and discounts*: The influence of price and promotions appear to have significant influence too. Around 2 out of every 3 respondents prefer to shop during shopping festivals and they also prefer shops that offer lower prices/discounts as compared to physical stores. What it means is that they are looking for net price advantage while shopping from online stores.
- *Brands and Marketing*: Nearly two thirds of the respondents not only affirm that they equate brands with quality but also confirm that they would prefer style over brands and that the brand name of the store also matters. The message for brands is that they must strive to meet the quality and style expectations of consumers. Only 46.67% agree that online stores offer wider brand collection. This calls for greater focus on offering wider brand collections. Around three fourths also prefer stores using digital marketing and advertising. About 56% are also receptive to independent stores promoted through social media. Newer brands and stores would be better off by focusing on advertising through social media and brand building.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

What is obvious from the results of this research is that the commercial aspects of ecommerce stores have come to the fore and proving to be decisive factors in online buying decisions. Consumers do expect the online apparel stores to be trustworthy in terms of reliable product information, hassle free returns and net price advantage over physical retail outlets. There is a greater focus on styles and brands should rise up to the style expectations of online apparel shoppers.

This study is, however, based on a limited convenient sample of mostly graduate and post graduate students in Delhi. The findings of the study must be used with caution in the case of general population whose demographic profile may be different.

Since the influence of lifestyles and local culture on online apparel buying preferences vary not only from country to country but also from city to city, there is need for more and more of similar research to create a deeper understanding online apparel shopping preferences and perceptions.

While this study helps reassess the impact of Covid19 lockdowns on online apparel shopping, it would also be necessary to reassess consumer preferences as and when newer technologies like artificial intelligence, virtual reality, 3D body scanning, mass customization and the like get integrated into online apparel stores.

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