

# An Analytical Study of COVID-19 Impacts on Consumer Buying Behaviors for FMCG products in India

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of article is to identify and analyze all the impacts of COVID-19 on consumer buying behavior for Fast Moving Consumer Goods in India and significant changes that takes place post- covid-19. The awareness and understanding of changing consumer behavior can help brand marketers future-proof their operations in the post COVID period. The current situation currently prevailing in global markets is mainly influenced by external factors- the COVID-19 pandemic and the effects of political and governmental steps and the economic situation. This paper mainly aims to identify changes in consumer behavior when buying basic products - food, clothing drugstore goods, and footwear and electronics during the pandemic of COVID-19.

**Keywords:** Consumer behavior, Pandemic, Covid-19, FMCGs, Food & beverages, Households

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Acquaintance of consumer behavior is an important factor in the success of business. Understanding how the consumer behaves and what factors influence him enables marketing firms, especially FMCGs companies to manage *the marketing mix, branding and communication more effectively* with their customers. Identifying correctly the factors that affect consumers is sometimes very difficult because very often they are internal factors. COVID-19 was caused by a virus called SARS CoV 2 and W.H.O has declared the novel corona virus (COVID-19) outbreak a global pandemic on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2020.

The business conditions currently prevailing in global markets is mainly influenced by external factors- the COVID-19 pandemic (1<sup>st</sup> wave, 2<sup>nd</sup> wave and 3<sup>rd</sup> Omicron wave) and the effects of political and governmental steps and the economic situation. The outbreak of corona virus at the end of year 2019 (Covid-19) has changed the world of retail and the customer. It has necessitated manufacturers to consider developing alternate supply chain systems and distribution networks in every market. The pandemic has changed the *consumer habits and preferences* with a clear focus on only purchasing the essential goods & services, and a reassessment and careful consideration of discretionary spends. In these circumstances, the brands have realized the value and importance of devising new ways of interacting with consumers. There are clear findings on how the ongoing market conditions have impacted and shaped consumers socially and economically. Presently, COVID-19 poses both health and humanitarian challenges to people in both urban and rural areas. The crisis has redefined *how people live, how people work and how people engage with others*. The awareness and understanding of changing consumer behavior can help brands future-proof their business operations in the post COVID-19 period.

Based on the comparison with the previous period spends, i.e. in Pre-Covid era, there was a *rise in average spending* of people and a decrease in the *frequency* of purchases. Consumer confidence has fallen; people were worried about the future. Retailers have invested Crores of rupees in anti-coronary measures and E-commerce is breaking records. The corona virus pandemic has changed customers' shopping behavior in addition to the pandemic itself, there were also influences based on political, legislative, and economic factors. The shopping basket has changed. The routine of running households, the reasons for purchasing and the availability of goods and services have changed. Whether the changes will be permanent, or everything will return to its original state will be realized in the coming period. The impact of such changes on FMCG products will be the subject of research that will follow the research mentioned in this article.

FMCG sector is one of the key sector and fourth largest contributor to India Economy. It is poised to grow to 220 billion dollars by 2025 from present 110 billion dollars in 2020 at a CAGR of 14.9 percent. These products are regularly and frequently used by the people i.e. day-to-day usable products. These products are sold quickly and at low cost. Lets define FMCGs marketing concept terms as "Fast Moving Consumer Goods are those goods that

move through the value chain very quickly – from *production, distribution and marketing to final consumption*. These relatively low-priced goods are sold quickly because either they are always in high demand (sanitizers, cold drinks, etc.) or because they are perishable (confectioneries, dairy products, packaged foods, etc.)”. FMCG industry is one of the fastest developing sectors in Indian economy. FMCG goods are categorized into five kinds- *Home care, Personal care, Food and Beverages, Alcohol & cigarettes, and Off-the-Counter (OTC) goods*. FMCG is a classic case of low margin and high-volume business and very relative to the changes in consumer buying behavior.

On breaking down the FMCG sector in India broadly into 3 segments, the Food & Beverages segment accounts for *19 percent*, Health care segment accounts for *31 percent* and finally, Households & personal care segment accounts for *50 percent*. On geographical Segment-wise, Rural India is contributing for *45 percent* and urban segment is contributing *55 percent* for overall FMCG market in India. One reason that FMCG industry is different from other industries is that it is oriented with an average common man. As the pandemic COVID 19 has severely affected the life of a common man to a great extent in all the ways right from his working, earning, eating, clothing, or movement, the common man had also changed his behavior on *spending power* definitely on his needy things. It is, therefore, important for FMCG players to study consequential changes in *supply and demand side* of FMCG products for their survival in post-pandemic period.

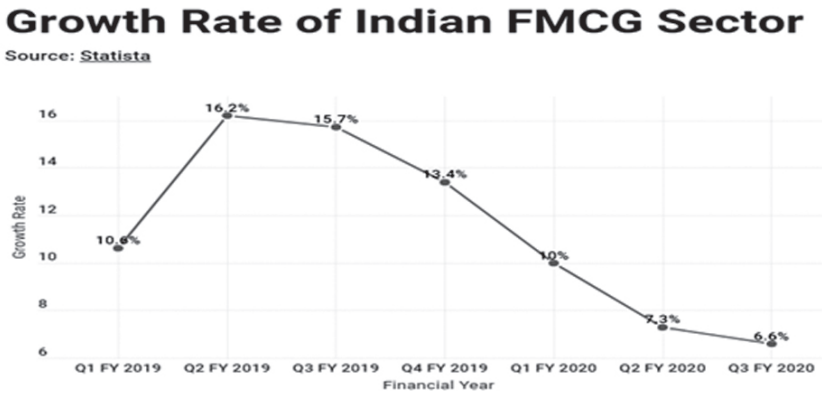
The FMCG companies which markets the products such as foodstuffs, processed food and distilled water, are influenced by failures in the supply chain, distribution and inventories. The pandemic of COVID-19 has contributed to a minor change in the definition of what people find *essential*, with items for grooming in this area whereas businesses like garments have shifted to *choose*. In other words, pandemic has taught people the *differentiation between essentiality and optionality* of requirements for life. In pandemic, the disposable goods have taken a backseat. Clothes and clothing, household items, alcoholic drinks and cigarettes in FMCGs were seriously impacted because several businesses ceased or slowed back during the lockdown in India. However, several businesses have turned their facilities into goods that help the government and the population in battling the pandemic, for example masks, gloves, hand sanitizers, ventilators, etc.

With the restriction of mobility of labor, across the country, and due to return of labor to their home town, employment condition has suffered a lot. People lose their jobs leaving no earning activity for them, which severely affected the *income and spending* levels of people during all the time of lock down and well as even after ending of lock down period in India. As per reports, in 2020, that is after COVID 19, the global revenue growth for food items is *15.4%*, for Personal care items is - *4.2%*, and for Alcohol & Cigarettes is - *10.3%*.

The growth rate of FMCG industry in India between two waves of COVID-19 pandemic is shown below

**Figure 1**

*Growth Rate of Indian FMCG Sector*



Post-pandemic, the consumers *attitudes, behaviors & purchasing habits are changing*—and many of these new ways will remain post-pandemic. People are shopping more consciously, buying local and are embracing digital commerce, while purchases are currently centered on the most basic needs. Consumers are using digital to connect, learn and play, to manage isolation, —and they will continue to. Moving forward, we will see an increase in the virtual workforce as more people work from home and enjoy doing so. People are confining towards for savings of their earning, and spending optimum of saving for purchasing their needy requirements, particularly for food and health items. People are not spending for luxury items like jewelry, SUV cars unless they need & feel it essential. During pandemic and post pandemic, *Hygiene factor, Social distancing, Masking, Sanitization*, etc are become more impartment for consumers from personal point of view as well as legislative point of view for Government & States, after post- COVID-19.

Thus, briefly, it can presume that the outbreak of pandemic COVID-19 has tremendously impacted the buying behavior of consumers and especially it has shown *noticeable impact* on all categories of FMCG Goods due to the governmental restrictions, such as lockdowns, movement restriction, sectoral restrictions, etc. Based on the above understanding, the statement of problem for research can be written as COVID-19 has changed the Consumer Buying Behavior, preferences, selective spending, etc. and the such change has impacted the FMCG sector in India remarkably. It is therefore important to identify those factors impacted consumer buying behaviors and analyze the same for post COVID-19 impacts. The aim of article is to identify and analyze all the impacts of COVID-19 on consumer buying behavior for Fast Moving Consumer Goods products in India and the significant changes that takes place post-pandemic covid-19.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Douchova et al. (1993) considers the most important factors influencing consumer behavior as- *objective* conditions of consumer behaviour (individual economic environment and objective economic situation) and *consumer personality*, his *social environment* and *situational* tuning. Zamazalová (2008) presented internal and external factors influencing consumer behavior. Among the external factors, the marketing macro environment is mentioned, which influences the implementation and development of marketing activities that are aimed at target customers. The environment is constantly changing very fast. External factors that influence consumer behavior create the following groups of factors: *social factors* (further divided into demographic and cultural factors), *technical* and *technological* factors, *economic* factors, *political and legal* factors (legislative framework) and *natural* factors.

Sulekha and Kiran (2013) concluded that in India more than 72 percent population lives in villages and FMCG companies are famous for selling their products to the middleclass households; it implies that rural India is a profitable and potential market for FMCG producers and Rural consumer's spending capability is rising for food and home care products due to experiences learnt by Pandemic Covid 19. The FMCG companies have to design unique marketing strategies exclusively for rural consumers through understanding the rural consumer buying behavior which may differ geographically (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020). Pantano et al. (2020) stated that the pandemic of COVID-19 has significantly dramatically changed both the businesses acting and consumers behaving. This turbulent situation has huge impact on everyday consumers' life. Laato et al., (2020) underline that the government prepared lockdown by closing schools, restaurants, some shops, and public services, which may have spread fears of what will happen in future. Due to this fact, it is also possible to consider that customers will change their shopping habits in the long run.

Sheth (2020) claim that there are four major contexts which govern or disrupt consumer habits. They are *social* context (e.g., changes in the workplace and in interaction with neighbors and friends), the implementation of *new technology* (including online shopping and delivery), the impact of *consumption habits* due to new rules (the COVID-19 pandemic regulations), and less *predictable* context (the development of the global COVID-19 pandemic). Kirk and Rifkin (2020) stated that history shows that a period of crisis can be and is often perceived as an impetus for significant transformations in society, and recommend paying attention to consumer behaviors in each of these three phases: reacting, coping, do-it-yourself behaviors', and then also longer-term adapting. Joshi et al., (2020) explained the impact of COVID-19 and the ways in which the various sector in the country not only was affected but also suggested appropriate measures to control the negative impacts.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The study is conducted with the use of secondary data along with the use of previous studies and latest researches done focusing on the impact of COVID-19 on the consumer behavior in FMCG sector. The study method is descriptive analysis. The whole study is based on systematic reviews of Journals, Magazines, Newspapers, and Business Statistical data, available on this particular subject area.

#### 3.1 Data Analysis

All the data needed for the study, based on secondary data available in News papers, Journals, Magazines, and Business Statistical data available various websites, is gathered and presented below:

The Corona virus/COVID-19 pandemic has exhibited a significant impact on business across the globe, including FMCG and retail. The pandemic has led to a *recession* in many countries. People of all income levels got affected with outbreak of Corona virus.

During End of the year 2019, Born and spread of Corona virus, penetration into all countries of world, declaration of COVID-19 as pandemic by WHO has created pandemic Covid-19 as a major threat to human life from individual point of view and danger to economy by every country, which have followed Restricting of countries borders, lock downing of States, etc. India is not exception of imposing these restrictions. In fact, India has strictly followed lock down restrictions to safeguard its citizen, and only essential sectors were made for mobility such as *Medical & Hospitals, Law & order, Cleaning, Sanitation & Municipalities, Essential commodities Supplies, Agriculture, etc.* In India, Central Government, led by Prime Minister, Mr. Narendra Modi, had monitored situations daily through Corona testing, isolation, National Monitoring System, etc.

People become more health conscious as a consequential effect of Covid-19. Demand for essential goods such as Food item has increased. Due to restriction of mobility of people, online purchases were rapidly increased and people were forced to utilize these online markets or e-commerce platforms to meet their essential needs. This trend has seen both in Urban and rural areas on India, however, in Urban it was higher. As a result people spending is limited only to essential needs and health care items. In service sector, health insurance market has picked up rapidly as each and every family has become most conscious of health.

As mobility of essential goods is allowed to fulfill basic needs of people in the country, the market players in the supply of essential goods, i.e. Food category items of FMCG sector and of consumer health care & OTC items, in particular fever, cough, cold and allergy treatments, as well as immunity booster products such as Ayurvedic medications, Chawanprash, etc. have gained a lot by supplying in line with demand. Still customers expected a potential short-term supply shortage, and stock were piled up which has led to a situation of shortages. Thus, the COVID-19 epidemic has intensified demand for food items (broadly Food category items of FGMGs) & consumer health goods. The consumers buying at counter of retailer has

been completely shifted to online ordering, on-call buying and home delivery systems.

The COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to the changes and improvements in public habits via relying increasingly on preventive healthcare. Demand for immunity-based treatments, like Ayurvedic goods and medications have been growing as customers are finding numerous ways to fight the virus. The established Ayurvedic FMCG companies such as Patanjali Ayurveda, Dabur India, and Himalaya Wellness etc. have seen a strong demand for items like Chyawanprash, Septilin, Guduchi, Giloy, etc. Certain Over-the-Counter (OTC) category drugs of enhancing immunity, such as vitamin C, fish oils, multivitamins and mineral supplements would undoubtedly see market bang as customer preferences are a holistic emphasis on health well-being.

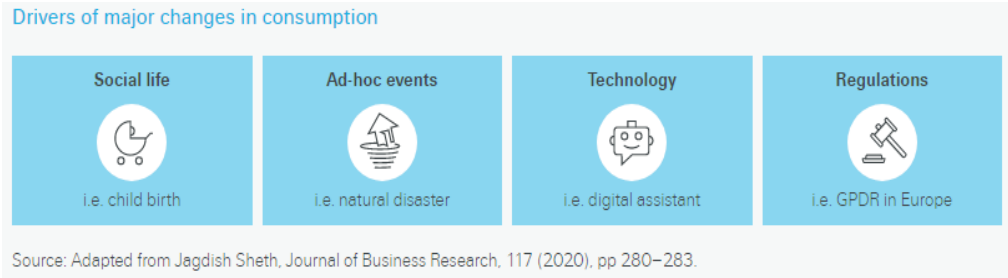
Purchasing of Consumer packed goods or FMCGs through Online Platforms or e-commerce has tremendously increased and people adopted it quickly to meet their needs and survival in the pandemic situation. Some of the online Platforms or e-commerce grown or came in lime light rapidly after Pandemic are – Flipkart Grocery, Amazon Grocery, Heritage online, Big Bazar, Sanpadeals, Reliance JioMart, Easyday, More shoppers, etc. They meet daily thousand of orders of consumers utilizing the mobility allowed for their essential category goods.

Home delivery of grocery is a major impact consequent to increasing online purchasing of consumers, and it is preferred by every consumer. This *home delivery* culture has raised with a new add on strategy of online marketer, namely- “*contact less*” **home delivery**, which consumers feel very safe of pandemic situation and habituated to the same. This tendency has been seen during 2<sup>nd</sup> wave of COVID-19 particularly for ready-to-eat products catered by Zomato, Swiggy, etc. This major impact has changed the consumer buying preferences and buying behavior in purchase decision making.

Post Covid 19, most of Countries, Companies, Organizations, have allowed employees for Work from Home (WFH) and restricting their mobility only on necessities. This has also impacted tremendously on demand & supply side of essential products, necessitating online purchasing and home delivery as a basic requirement for people. All above transformation and developments have definitely affected the consumer behavior, which is enunciated below:

### **3.2 Transformation of consumer behavior post-pandemic COVID-19**

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed how people interact, behave, eat, work, travel, communicate, shop and more but which of these new habits are likely to stick permanently is the main concern for marketers, particularly those who are in FMCG industry. To understand consumer behavior, it is felt to identify and understand the drivers of changes of consumption first as a basic concept. The following Fig. 2 presents all the drivers of major changes in Consumption pattern, as on approach of Sheth (2020)

**Figure 2***Drivers of Major Changes in Consumption*

The shopping behavior of consumers is also set to change in two broad ways:

- Consumers will try as hard as possible to trim down their trips to supermarkets. This would mean that the average amount an individual would pay out on each trip is likely to increase as they would want to avoid making frequent trips to the supermarket.
- Online shopping will be going to be the *new norm*. Initiatives like ‘no-contact delivery’ by key players such as Amazon, Flipkart, Zomato, Swiggy, JioMart, etc. are going to accelerate this trend in online shopping and people will have the luxury of purchasing the goods from the comfort of their homes.

After Pandemic COVID-19 outbreak, the following five key trends were seen in behavioral changing which were emerging from the impact of COVID-19. These can be referred as major impacts of pandemic Covid-19 that are the main intension of this study:

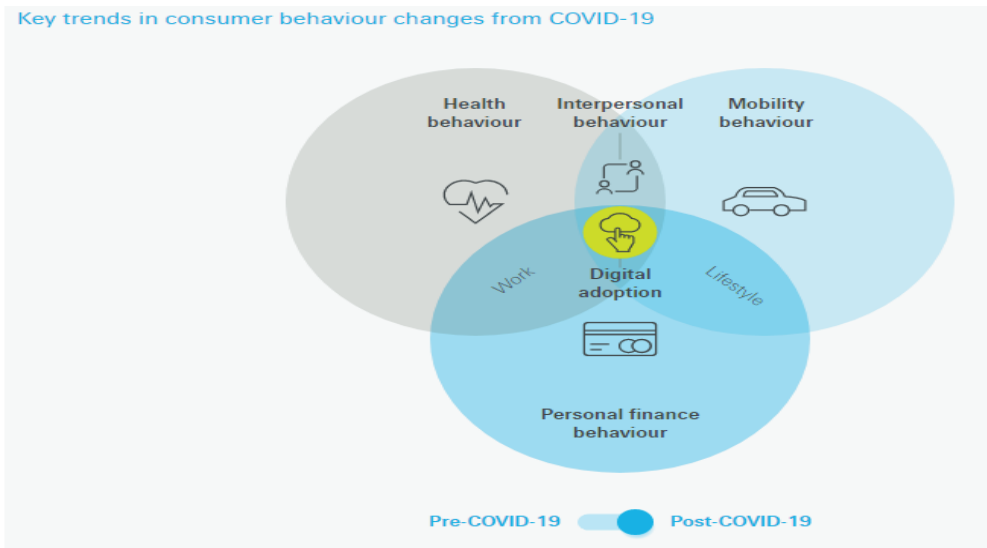
- **Increased awareness on Health and hygiene factors:** People’s awareness towards *hygiene* aspects such as cleaning hands, sanitizations, and usage of masks, social distance, etc. and healthy eating products, is increased and learnt as a habit, at all levels of people, either be higher or middle or lower income levels.
- **Increased Digital Adaptation and Smart technology:** People are shifting to *e-commerce* or *digital Platforms* for buying their day-to-day needs instead of earlier traditional mode of purchase of counter purchases or offline purchases. Online ordering through Smart phones has rapidly increased.
- **Change in Mobility patterns:** People are habituating for less using of *public transport*, increased use of personal utilities, remote working or work from home (WFH), etc.
- **Change in Purchase preferences and behavior:** People move to fulfill only needy requirements and value-based purchasing, online shopping and getting home deliveries. Though spending is there but it is for essentials and keeping money on hand for meeting future emergencies.
- **Changes in interpersonal behavior:** Bonding among family, friends & society has increased. However, increased pet adoption, increased divorce, etc. were also observed on account of getting self confidence during Corona living times by people.

- **Availability & Usage of Social & Digital media:** The technological advancements in social or digital media has made people closer to each other, such as WhatsApp, Telegram, Facebook, Instagram and other mobile apps, and this facilitated people for faster spread of information and discussions, whether it may be on health, or Food or person or fact s or even fictitious. On the other hand, the marketers are also adopted to utilize these social and digital media for advertising and marketing of their goods & services and penetration of their brands into Public. Off course, this has caused negative impacts also, which is worth to remember.

The pandemic Covid-19 has increased people’s usage of digital tools in life and business to stay connected in a world that is physically disconnected. Increased use of digital tools is blurring the lines between work, lifestyle and social interaction and between domains like mobility, health and finance. It is expected that this trend adopted is to continue in the post-covid-19 world. The Fig. 3 below showing the key trends in consumer behavior changes from Covid-19, which is adopted from Swiss Re Institute approach.

**Figure 3**

*Key Trends in Consumer Behavior Changes from COVID-19*



Our Past experiences evidence clues to how consumers may behave once the pandemic ends. World has seen many epidemics and pandemics. For example, in 2003, the spread of SARS has left a lasting impact on people who have lived through the event. Some anecdotal evidences suggests that people are still follow habits picked up during the crisis, such as washing hands, using toothpicks to press elevator buttons, tissue paper to open doors of public washrooms and even carrying spare masks in their handbags. In the similar ways, post pandemic shall also offer lasting impacts on people like wearing marks, usage of liquid soaps for hand sanitization, etc. In contrast to this, the service of air travel business has

quickly bounced back from a sharp decline immediately after the 9/11 terrorist attack in 2001, as people were reassured by tighter security. Air travelers who may have previously raised privacy concerns around security checks were more willing to accept stringent measures including body scanning in exchange for greater security.

### 3.3 Permanent or Temporary Induced Behavior Changes

The Anticipated permanent or temporary induced behavior changes of consumers due to the COVID-19 are depicted in Fig. 4 below, that are important for subject point of study:

**Figure 4**

*Expected Consumer Behavior Changes from COVID-19*

Fig. 4 Expected consumer behaviour changes from Pandemic COVID-19						
	Health aspects	Mobility of people	Digital Adoption	Personal Finance	Interpersonal behavious	Usage of Social Media
Temporary	Waering Masks	Lesser usage of public transport	Online purchases & shopping	Value based purchasing	Increase in Pet adoptions	Conatcs in Social Groups
	Sanitization				Increase in divorce	
	Social Distancing				Increase in Family Bonding and Values	
Permanent	Increased Hygiene	Integrated Mobility	Home deliveries	Shifting of Brand Loyalty	Exchange of Information	Social Media Marketing
	Healty eating bahits	Remote work	Online Education	On-Line shopping		
	Tele-medicines	Changes in Commercial & real estate Usage	Work From Home	Online crediting		
	On demand Well-being	Digital payments, like Bhim, PhonePay, PayTM	Zoom / Vedio Conferencing	Move to cashless society		
	Health Insurances		Usage of Food delivering apps like Swiggy, Zomato			
			Digital entertainments (OTT)			

Source: Based on Swiss Re Institutes' insight from Foresight Academy & McKinsey

In the longer-run, the COVID-19 recovery is likely to result in a more permanent shift in consumers' attitudes, preferences and shopping behavior, especially in urban areas, with increased usage of home and personal hygiene products and an accelerated shift to digital purchases.

Digitizing Kirana stores is one of the biggest trends that are sweeping across a host of industries including FMCG – Digital India. This initiative has far-reaching consequences for the FMCG industry. The skyrocketing penetration of Smart phones in the country, coupled with the decreasing lowest data charges in the world, has helped bring India online. This has

changed the face of consumer behavior in the country. With the majority of the population expected to be online, the e-commerce sector is flourishing. While Covid-19 has accelerated the pace at which India adopts digital means of buying FMCG products, with e-commerce expected to contribute to about 11 percent of FMCG sales by 2030. Therefore, India stands to immensely benefit from the power of the internet.

The novel corona virus will be around for a while with its different versions in different waves, presently being Omicron in 3<sup>rd</sup> wave. It has established that life and people approach towards it will never be the same again. Unsurprisingly, such a change impacts some of businesses adversely while giving impetuses to some others.

In log-run one can see a lot of changes in consumer behavior, due to which FMCG companies will be forced to adapt their strategies for customer acquisition and retention. The composition of the consumption basket has changed due to COVID-19 and some of these changes will be more permanent than others, as already elaborated in the above.

### **3.4 New NORM of Normal**

An increased focus on health and hygiene will become the norm and it will be the new norm for normal post pandemic. Demand in the discretionary categories may likely to come back slowly but not immediately. For an average consumer, a surge in demand can be seen for products that enhance personal hygiene in and around homes and workplaces. Products such as soaps, hand washes, sanitizers, disinfectants, wipes, masks, home cleaning products such as floor cleaners, kitchen cleaners, toilet cleaners are seeing a surge in demand and this trend is expected to continue into the future as cleanliness and hygiene are going to be the new mantras. FMCG companies servicing these requirements are likely to do well. Similarly, companies which focus on food staples and convenience foods such as instant noodles, biscuits, frozen foods, flour, cooking oils, instant mixes, and nutrition are going to be in demand. Products that help in building immunity against illnesses are also in significant demand from the consumers.

Having said that, some categories within the FMCG sector are likely to take a back seat for a while; it will be wise for companies to shift their focus from non-essential categories such as deodorants, fragrances, skincare and other cosmetics, gourmet foods, etc. It will also be imperative to manage inventory better to avoid concerns surrounding freshness and expiry of products.

Post pandemic, the overall recovery in demand for the FMCG sector was already visible in the second half of last fiscal, post easing of lockdowns, with 15 large listed FMCG companies posting revenue growth of 10% in the second half (on-year) as against a revenue de-growth of 1% in the first half in FY 2020.

#### 4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study reveals that consumer behavior towards the buying of FMCG product was significantly impacted due to Covid-19 pandemic situation. Penetration of digitalization in India, which in turn penetrated due to cheaper internet data charges, has increased online shopping through e-commerce platforms substantiating the changes in tastes and preferences of consumers. Shifting to online buying for health and hygiene products shall be the new normal. Consumers' shifting towards selective approach for essential needs (food items) and health products over other categories FMCGs has strongly evidenced and this decision making in consumer buying behavior has been changed the paradigm of marketers in FMCGs industry. Normalcy of demand for all categories of FMCG goods other than health care and food categories may be seen only in long run. The purchase decisions of consumers towards FMCG products were heavily impacted due to cultural factors and financial conditions also as pandemic has taught families to live together with bonding to certain extent in India, which is a renowned country for cultural and bonding values over the Globe.

Further the findings for the study were:

- The consumer's behavior has changed since start of pandemic COVID-19 from normalcy of pre-COVID period to post pandemic period significantly.
- The demand for FMCG products got reduced during pandemic due to the economic crises during the lockdown imposed in India.
- Exceptions that were allowed for Food and other essential category items by Governments have caused heavy demands which got affected because of **supply chain disruptions**.
- For most of the FMCG products, the growth rate has fallen from 15.7 percent in Q3 of Nov 2019 (before start of Covid-19) to 6.6 percent in Q3 of Nov 2021 (end of both 1st & 2nd waves of Covid-19) **which clearly indicating that consumers are preferring to buy only needy items of needy quantity**.
- **The alternative purchasing mode**, i.e., online shopping, home delivery, on call services, etc have increased due to restriction of mobility of people in the country and people tend to habituate these buying preferences post pandemics also, especially avoidance of going to physical shopping.
- **Peoples' Selective approach** of spending income may continue among essential, needy health products and luxury items, which is an indication that Food & health care categories of FMCG may have high demand and other categories like home care, personal care & Alcohol & cigarette etc. have lower demand than pre-pandemic era.
- **Savings of earning** has got more preference by people and this new learning of people shall affect their future buying behavior (in analyzing every purchase decision and spending on it) as consumers.

The pandemic Covid-19 has affected tremendously the buying behavior of consumers, through impacting the consumer needs, preferences and spending levels. This study revealed all the affects particularly on FMCG products that are essentially needed bare minimum to an average customer. The marketers or researcher can understood these affects in designing their marketing strategies in selling their produced FMCG products through understanding all the changes in consumer behaviors post pandemic. Further, research is suggested to research scholars or marketers in FMCG industry to study affects on demographic segmentation. As online shopping has preferring by most of consumers, home delivery and logistic aspects can be further studies for improvements and further opportunities in these areas.

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