

# FINDING OUT THE FACTORS INFLUENCING BEHAVIOR OF CUSTOMERS FOR ESSENTIAL ITEMS IN THIS PARTIAL LOCKDOWN SITUATION

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## ABSTRACT

This present scenario of partial lockdown is quite different from the nationwide lockdown. Presently people basically have access to almost everything but they have to follow some rules and regulations as imposed by the Government of West Bengal. As a result, the behavior of customers will also be different from the past scenario, thus to find out this difference author had carried out this research to find out factors that influence the behavior of customers. For achieving this objective to make it more specific and to fill a gap, the author had used essential products. Data were collected by using the convenience sampling technique and before collecting data a pilot study was conducted to check the reliability of the data collection instrument. Data was collected from 225 respondents from Khardah, West Bengal, India. For finding out the factors, Exploratory Factor Analysis was used and 4 major factors had been identified and based on these factors, recommendations had been made which have practical implications.

**Keywords:** *Customer Behavior; Essential Products; COVID-19; Partial Lockdown*

## INTRODUCTION

We have already seen the wrath of this pandemic upon the entire world. The world has been fighting incredibly hard against this pandemic from the very beginning. The novel Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) is generally spread from people to people; many countries had been adopting various types of techniques to break the chain. Techniques like social distancing, social isolation, lockdown, curfew, quarantine, self-quarantine etc. Humanity almost got out from this situation then again, a 2<sup>nd</sup> wave had come to India. We faced complete lockdown because we didn't know about the preventive measures of COVID-19, but at present, we know and still some states are facing partial lockdown. From March 2021 West-Bengal government imposed partial lockdown and currently the West Bengal government extends this partial lockdown up to July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021, with some restrictions e.g. all government, private and corporate offices will be open from 10am to 4pm with not more than 25 per cent employees, transportation by private cars will remain suspended except for emergency, fruits, vegetables, grocery stores etc. will be open from 7 am to 11 am only etc. For the satisfaction of the basic needs of the citizens, only essential items were kept out of the scope of this partial lockdown. Under this present scenario, it is expected that the stockpiling thinking of the buyers will stay much longer and usage of virtual ordering system for their benefits will be long

lasting (Sheth, 2020). When people purchase and store extra quantity of goods for their safety, this led to the shortage of goods in the market for other people (Corkery & Maheshwari, 2020; Prentice, Chen & Stantic, 2020). However, a sudden increase in demand for essential goods has resulted into unethical consequence like unethical price hike, black-marketing etc. As a result, intervention by government in terms of strict corrective measures are much needed (Patil & Patil, 2020). There were reports that customers were not only buying soap and hand sanitizer, but also basic products including food items. In a study on stockpiling among American consumers, respondents reported that they bought more basic supplies including food items during the earlier two weeks than usual (Columbus, 2020).

By keeping all these in mind, this study is focused and intends to find only the important factors that influences perception of customers for essential product so that companies might get some ideas for fighting this awful situation. For achieving the objectives of this study, empirical research is used and study is divided into various parts - literature review, problem identification, methodology, empirical study, data analysis and practical solution to marketers.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Wang & Na (2020) have found that people were very

concerned about themselves and the family members from getting infected by COVID-19, and panic buying motives broadly existed either from the herd effect or the desire of control effect. Also, some of the other factors that influence the effect of food hoarding including education, income and online store shopping. They also found that hoarding needs for foods that are perishable in nature, such as vegetables and fruits, are more important than comparatively nonperishable food such as ready to eat noodles.

A research by Butu et al. (2020) found that the pandemic changes the behavior of the customers for purchasing fresh vegetables and they are switching to online frequently for ordering fresh vegetables. Among the respondents 60% intend to buy from short food supply chains (SFSCs). They reveal that pandemic completely shifted consumer behavior from offline to online preference. Also, they have stated that marketers must develop their distribution instruments by keeping into account the preferences shown by customers.

Tyagi & Pabalkar (2021) found that markets like food, fitness etc. are still out of business. Strategies which have been made for improving the market is still not performing as expected and results are still awaited. It can be stated that purchasing behavior of customers will not be same compared to pre-pandemic and post-pandemic, thus businesses need to change accordingly. All the single customers are having different perspective for every other business, so it is becoming very hard to predict the behavior of customers.

A study by Vijai & Nivetha (2020) has unfolded that most people strongly agree that COVID-19 impacted the buying behavior (48.8%), and the majority of the respondents spending the money only on essential goods (50.0%) during COVID-19 and changed the brand preference the respondents say maybe (46.9%). The majority of the respondents purchasing more fruits and vegetables during COVID-19 (40.6%). COVID-19 changed food behavior (38.7%), and most of the respondents prefer to use online payment for purchasing (39.5%). COVID-19 reduced the expenditure (40.2%) and saved income (30.5%), and finally most of the respondents strongly agree (37.5%) that COVID-19 has changed their entire life.

Pham, Thi & Ha Le (2020) brought out the views that benefit of online shopping has changed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors have found that COVID-19 plays a moderator role on buyers' awareness about

products and their utilities, motivating marketers to cater the market digitally. But they have also found that buyers are neglecting the use of digital market due to the society. They also found that consciousness of COVID-19 does not negatively influence the benefits that marketing policies bring to buyers during the pandemic.

Shishpal et al. (2021) found that essential supplies, price, packaging & labeling, stock and supply shortage, smooth delivery, digital support, and product freshness and authenticity of the concerned product has been contributing positive impact upon purchase behavior and creation of positive image during COVID-19 lockdown period. The complete lockdown impacted the buying behavior of the customers regarding essential items and their important aspects like price, packaging, labeling, smoothness of product or services and timely delivery etc.

### **Problem Statement and Research Gap**

After identifying a problem i.e., buying behavior of customers in this partial lockdown situation and after identifying the research gap i.e., till now no study has been conducted for finding out factors that might influence the perception of customers for essential goods in this partial lockdown situation especially in West-Bengal, the problem had also been identified by the author from his real-life experience and after going through a lot of literatures available on this particular topic (keeping limitations in mind) research gap has also been found out. It is still a question that what factors might influence the consumer behavior for partial lockdown with rules and regulations.

### **Research Question**

Which factors influences the perception of the customers in this partial lockdown situation among customers of West Bengal for essential products?

### **Objective of this Study**

In order to make this study more effective this study intends:

1. To find out factors that influences the perception of the customer behavior in this partial lockdown situation for essential products.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Empirical research was conducted for achieving the purpose of this study and for collection of data

convenience sampling was used from 225 residents of Khardah, West Bengal, India. For collecting data from respondents and finding out the factors, a questionnaire with 23 items was developed. Questionnaire consisted only close ended questions and Likert's Five scale used (ranging 1=Strongly Agree and 5 = Strongly Disagree). The knowledge which was required for forming this questionnaire with 23 items was acquired from past studies on COVID-19 and national lockdown.

Statistical Software: For analysing the data and achieve the objective of study Microsoft Office Excel 2007 and statistical package for the Social Sciences v.25 was used.

### Data Analysis

Before collecting data from a large sample, a pilot test was conducted to check the reliability of the instrument. Author has measured the reliability by using Cronbach's Alpha. As we can see in table 1, pilot test was conducted on 63 respondents, and in table 2, we can see the value was satisfying and more than the threshold of 0.7. Therefore, this instrument was used for conducting this study.

**Table 1: Case Processing Summary**

		N	%
Cases	Valid	63	100
	Excluded <sup>a</sup>	0	0
	Total	63	100
a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure			

Source: Primary Data, SPSS Analysis

**Table 2: Reliability Statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	No of Items
0.879	0.929	23

Source: Primary Data, SPSS Analysis

### Exploratory Factor Analysis

Before starting exploratory factor analysis, it is very important to check whether this correlation matrix is factorable or not. For doing so Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was checked. The Bartlett's value is (0.00) and it is significant with the approximate chi-square value- 2382.621 with a degree of freedom 253 which indicates that the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix (Bartlett, 1954). For checking sample adequacy Patil-Meyer-Olkin was used, and the value is 0.819 which is more than the threshold limit of 0.60, which is indicating that factor analysis can be utilised for a given dataset (Kaiser, 1974) (See table 3).

**Table 3: KMO and Bartlett's Test**

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.819
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	2382.621
	df	253
	Sig.	0.000

Source: Primary Data, SPSS Analysis

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After confirming that the correlation matrix is factorable, Principle Component Analysis (PCA) was used with varimax rotation of oblique rotation and applied on 23 items to find out factors affecting consumer behavior for essential items in this partial lockdown situation. Hair et al. (2014) recommended the importance of factor loadings based on the size of the sample and suggested that factor loading must have to be more than 0.40 is enough for a sample of 200 or more. So, factor loading >0.40 has been taken, while identifying important factors for this study had a sample size of 225 respondents. By conducting this process 4 major factors have been identified and that might influence the perception of customers in this partial lockdown (See table 4 and table 5).

**Table 4: Total Variance Explained**

Component	Initial Eigen Values			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	7.369	32.040	32.040	7.369	32.040	32.040	4.085	17.763	17.763
2	1.824	7.932	39.972	1.824	7.932	39.972	3.386	14.723	32.486
3	1.566	6.808	46.779	1.566	6.808	46.779	2.919	12.690	45.176
4	1.360	5.912	52.692	1.360	5.912	52.692	1.729	7.515	52.692
5	1.297	5.637	58.329						
6	1.109	4.820	63.149						

7	1.099	4.779	67.928						
8	1.009	4.389	72.317						
9	0.850	3.695	76.012						
10	0.790	3.434	79.446						
11	0.665	2.893	82.339						
12	0.591	2.572	84.910						
13	0.529	2.299	87.210						
14	0.441	1.917	89.127						
15	0.426	1.854	90.981						
16	0.397	1.727	92.708						
17	0.387	1.684	94.392						
18	0.290	1.263	95.655						
19	0.242	1.050	96.705						
20	0.237	1.032	97.737						
21	0.194	0.843	98.580						
22	0.176	0.765	99.345						
23	0.151	0.655	100.000						

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis

Source: Primary Data, SPSS Analysis

Table 5: Rotated Component Matrixa

	Component			
	1	2	3	4
In this partial lockdown, the respondents usually buy from offline market because they know how to protect myself from COVID-19. (x2)	0.873			
In this partial lockdown, the respondents are more aware about COVID-19 (x1)	0.784			
In this partial lockdown, the respondents usually buy from offline market because they know about the remedy of COVID-19 (x3)	0.745			
In this partial lockdown also, the respondents only prefer to purchase <b>basic amenities</b> only. (x8)	0.629	0.364		
In this partial lockdown, the respondents prefer <b>online shopping</b> only (x9)	0.606		0.361	
<b>Availability</b> of items at local stores that are necessary for their basic need is enough (x7)	0.519	0.487		
In this partial lockdown, the respondents, and their family stock <b>up food and medicines</b> (x12)		0.751		
When the respondents are visiting a local shop/ kirana they always check for its safety measures against COVID-19 (gloves, plastic shields, social distancing etc (x5)		0.654		
In this partial lockdown, the respondents do not get what they <b>want (whether it is online or offline)</b> (x13)		0.612		
During this third lockdown, still the waiting time at the <b>local store</b> is long (x6)	0.449	0.536		
In this partial lockdown, the respondents, and their family can make cash payment even if they have the option of paying online. (x21)		0.528		
In this partial lockdown, the respondents would like to pay <b>high price</b> for a product to get it from online. (x20)		0.496		
In this partial lockdown, the respondents also buy items <b>that are not essential items</b> (x11)		0.421	0.31	
In this partial lockdown, the respondents only make <b>e-payment</b> while purchasing product online or offline (x19)	0.397	0.408		
x18				
In this partial lockdown, the respondents can <b>get home delivery of essential products</b> very easily without delay (x16)	0.335		0.791	

In this partial lockdown, the respondents prefer to maintain <b>safe distance</b> while purchasing a product or receiving a product. (x17)			0.726	
In this partial lockdown, while ordering online the respondents always check <b>delivery policies</b> of the company (wearing gloves, masks, and sanitizer) (x15)	0.36		0.702	
In this partial lockdown, the respondents are ordering online so that they can <b>avoid public gathering</b> (x14)		0.38	0.445	
In this partial lockdown, the respondents always check packaging of a product (x22)	0.411		0.444	
In this partial lockdown, the respondents check <b>labeling, seal of</b> a product (x23)			0.441	
In this partial lockdown, the respondents prefer to buy from offline stores (kirana) like pre-pandemic period (x4)				0.793
In this partial lockdown, the respondents <b>budget spending</b> has become normal. (x10)				0.746
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.				
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. <sup>a</sup>				
a. Rotation converged in 5 iterations.				

Source: Primary Data, SPSS Analysis

Factor 1 includes variables such as, in this partial lockdown, the respondents became more aware about COVID-19 (x1). In this partial lockdown, the respondents usually buy from offline market because they know how to protect themselves from COVID-19 (x2). In this partial lockdown, the respondents usually buy from offline market because they know about the remedy of COVID-19 (x3). Availability of items at local stores that are necessary for their basic need is enough (x7). In this partial lockdown also, the respondents only prefer to purchase basic amenities only (x8), In this partial lockdown, the respondents prefer online shopping only (x9). Therefore, it can be named as 'concern for COVID-19 and type of preferred products.'

Factor 2 includes variables with high factor loadings such as, in this partial lockdown, the respondents also buy items that are not basic amenities (x11), in this partial lockdown, the respondents and their family stock up food and medicines (x12), in this partial lockdown, the respondents do not get what they want (whether it is online or offline) (x13), in this partial lockdown, the respondents only make e-payment while purchasing product online or offline (x19), in this partial lockdown, the respondents would like pay high price for a product to get it from online (x20), in this partial lockdown, the respondents and their family can make cash payment even if they have the option of

paying online (x21). Therefore, it can be named as 'concern about payment mode, price, product and store'.

Factor 3 includes variables with high factor loadings such as, in this partial lockdown, the respondents are ordering online so that they can avoid public gathering (x14), in this partial lockdown, while ordering online the respondents always check delivery policies of the company (wearing gloves, masks and sanitizer) (x15), in this partial lockdown, the respondents can get home delivery of essential products very easily without delay (x16), in this partial lockdown, the respondents prefer to maintain safe distance while purchasing a product or receiving a product (x17), In this partial lockdown, they always check packaging of a product (x22), in this partial lockdown, they check labeling, seal of a product (x23). Therefore, it can be named as 'receiving and packaging of a product'.

Factor 4 includes variables with high factor loadings such as, in this partial lockdown, the respondents prefer to buy from offline stores (kirana) like pre-pandemic period (x4), in this partial lockdown, their budget spending has become normal (x10). Therefore, it can be named as 'expense budget and mode of buying'.

A clear arrangement of factors and its variables has given in table 6.



Table 6: Description of Exploratory Factor Analysis

Concern for COVID-19 and type of preferred products	Factor Loadings	Eigen values	Variance Explained	Cronbach's Alpha	
In this partial lockdown, the respondents usually buy from offline market because they know how to protect myself from COVID-19. (x2)	0.873			0.831	
In this partial lockdown, the respondents are more aware about COVID-19 (x1)	0.784				
In this partial lockdown, the respondents usually buy from offline market because they know about the remedy of COVID-19 (x3)	0.745				
In this partial lockdown also, the respondents only prefer to purchase <b>basic amenities</b> only. (x8)	0.629				
In this partial lockdown, the respondents prefer <b>online shopping</b> only (x9)	0.606	7.69	32.04		
<b>Availability</b> of items at local stores that are necessary for their basic need is enough (x7)	0.519				
<b>Concern about payment mode, price, product, and store</b>					
In this partial lockdown, the respondents, and their family stock <b>up food and medicines</b> (x12)	0.751			0.692	
When the respondents are visiting a local shop/ kirana they always check for its safety measures against COVID-19 (gloves, plastic shields, social distancing etc (x5)	0.654				
In this partial lockdown, the respondents do not get what they <b>want (whether it is online or offline)</b> (x13)	0.612				
During this partial lockdown, still the waiting time at the <b>local store</b> is long (x6)	0.536				
In this partial lockdown, the respondents and their family can make cash payment even if they have the option of paying online. (x21)	0.528				
In this partial lockdown, the respondents would like to pay <b>high price</b> for a product to get it from online. (x20)	0.496				
In this partial lockdown, the respondents also buy items <b>that are not essential items</b> (x11)	0.421				
In this partial lockdown, the respondents only make <b>e-payment</b> while purchasing product online or offline (x19)	0.408	1.824	7.9		
<b>Receiving and packaging of a product</b>					
In this partial lockdown, the respondents can <b>get home delivery of essential products</b> very easily without delay (x16)	0.791				0.759
In this partial lockdown, the respondents prefer to maintain <b>safe distance</b> while purchasing a product or receiving a product. (x17)	0.726				
In this partial lockdown, while ordering online the respondents always check <b>delivery policies</b> of the company (wearing gloves, masks, and sanitizer) (x15)	0.702				
In this partial lockdown, the respondents are ordering online so that they can <b>avoid public gathering</b> (x14)	0.445				
In this partial lockdown, the respondents always check packaging of a product (x22)	0.444				
In this partial lockdown, the respondents check <b>labeling, seal of</b> a product (x23)	0.441	1.6	6.8		
<b>Expense budget and mode of buying</b>					
In this partial lockdown, somewhat the respondents prefer to buy from offline stores (kirana) like pre-pandemic period (x4)	0.793			0.6	
In this partial lockdown, the respondents' <b>budget spending</b> is still restricted. (x10)	0.746	1.4	5.9		

Source: Primary Data, SPSS Analysis

## CONCLUSION

This study is completely focused on finding the factors that influence behavior of customers for essential products in this partial lockdown situation among customers of Khardah, West Bengal. After seeing the results of Exploratory Factor Analysis, it can be said that major factors which might influence the behavior

of customers for essential products in this partial lockdown situation are concern for COVID-19 and type of preferred products, concern about payment mode, price, product and store, receiving and packaging of a product and expense budget and mode of buying. This study is really very important for marketers whether startup or established and for researchers also, because

previously when it was a national lockdown, a lot of work had been conducted for analysing panic behavior of customers. However, the situation in this partial lockdown situation is completely different thereby it automatically makes very important to understand the trend of customers.

## RECOMMENDATION

Finally, it can be recommended to both the online and offline marketer, that marketers should be very carefully follow these points:

1. Now-a-days, customers are very aware and conscious about COVID-19 therefore, they must take precautions so that they don't lose any customers. Since this study was specifically conducted for essential products thus, local or online marketers should keep more stocks of essential products.

2. Another recommendation can also be made that the customers are also concerned about the mode of payment they are using, price of the product and hygiene factors of a store they are visiting. So, it must be desirable from the marketers that they should become very concerned about their hygiene, maintenance of store and they must not manipulate the price of a product because customers are very sensitive in this factor. If they do so, they might lose their existing as well as potential customers and vice-versa. Also, every marketer should provide customers online mode of payment because customers prefer cashless payment more.

3. Third recommendation can be made about packaging and labeling of the product. No matter if the marketer is online or offline, they should provide proper labeling, packaging with the purchased product because situation in this partial lockdown is completely different, and as a result behavior of customers also. Another recommendation can also be made about delivering the purchased products. In this situation majority of customers always check about delivery policy of the concerned company. Thus, they should create an efficient delivery policy which consist of COVID-19 precautions like using of gloves, maintaining safe distance while delivering the product etc.

4. Last but not the least recommendation is that customers are still spending their money with restriction like they did in nationwide lockdown. Therefore, if possible, only marketers should use attractive sales promotional strategy for attracting customers and customers are still not completely

accepting offline stores for essential products like they used to do in before COVID-19. Thus, it would be better for marketers that they should emphasise more on opting for online selling.

## Conflict of Interests

The author declares that he has no conflict of interest.

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