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E-Grocery Shopping: The changing consumption pattern of Indian consumers in the pre and post Covid-19 period

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Abstract:

Consumption on food is one of the biggest expenses incurred by individuals all over the world, being one of the basic necessities for survival and growth of human life. The global food retail market figures for 2024 indicate a value estimated at USD 12.49 trillion. Future trends indicate a compound annual growth rate of around 3.6% during the period from 2026 to 2033. Food retailing is a challenging task facing constant competition from players new and old. The latest threat before traditional food retailers today is online grocery shopping, fuelled greatly by the lock downs imposed during the pandemic situation. Although online shopping in all sectors was picking up pace due to the fast paced life and other contributing factors such as time saving and convenience, the impetus of Covid 19 on digitalization and use of technology in various areas cannot be undermined. This is a primary data based research paper that attempts to study and analyze the changing consumption pattern of Indian consumers in the pre and post Covid-19 period with reference to E- grocery shopping.

Key Words: E- grocery, Consumption, Covid-19

Introduction:

Although the local "kirana" shop still continues to attract the local customers, online apps are gradually capturing the market, specially the segment of middle class and upper middle class families. Online shopping was already catching the fancy of Indian consumers especially in the electronics and apparel market segments when Covid-19 made its appearance in 2019. The gradual aftermath in the form of lock downs and other restrictions was unforeseen and unexpected. The entire spectrum of activities right from education to banking, entertainment, communication, meetings shifted to the virtual world and grocery shopping was not far behind. The initial hesitation of people who preferred physical examination of grocery products before purchase was surpassed by the need of the hour. A lot of people ventured into e-grocery shopping as a compulsion but stayed due to other benefits that arose from using the online platforms.

Research Methodology:

This study used a self- administered Google form for collecting responses from consumers belonging to different age demographic right from millennial to Gen Z. The secondary data was collected from multiple sources including research papers, newspapers, white papers etc.

Trajectory of online grocery shopping:

Covis-19 pandemic provided a major thrust to online grocery shopping as consumers migrated quickly to the online platforms (Virginia Simmons, 2022). What started as a compulsion or necessity, changed to convenience and time saving for the consumers, motivating them to stay put on the online mode. As per reports by Redseer Consulting conducted in the year 2021, the online grocery sector in India is estimated to grow at a Compound annual growth rate of over 50% (The News Minute, 2021). This upward trajectory can be attributed to a number of factors especially in the Indian context. A few of these are discussed below:

1) Internet and smartphone availability: One of the biggest requirements for seamless online grocery shopping is the availability of unconstrained internet connection and smartphone. Smartphones and affordable data packages have penetrated the Indian urban and rural markets to the extent of being affordable to the lowest strata of the society. Digital literacy has also increased manifold making it convenient for all to use the on line applications.
2) Changing consumer preferences: Consumer preferences are fast evolving with majority of consumers preferring the convenience of online shopping including groceries. Some of the demographic factors like nuclear families, working women, increased family income, apart from factors like time saving, discounts are majorly contributing to the changing consumer preferences.
3) Wide spread adoption of digital payment: India has witnessed a substantial surge in digital payments since its introduction in the Indian market, transforming the way business is done. Online payment platforms and initiatives like Unified Payments Interface (UPI) have placed India at the fore front in real time digital transactions. Thus, rapid advent of digital payment methods is another catalyst to the growth and popularity of E –grocery shopping in India.
4) Personalized services: Customers can enjoy personalized suggestions and services on the E-commerce platforms due to technological innovations and use of artificial intelligence. Options like

last ordered items and suggestions of similar items as desired provide added convenience to customers enriching their shopping experience.

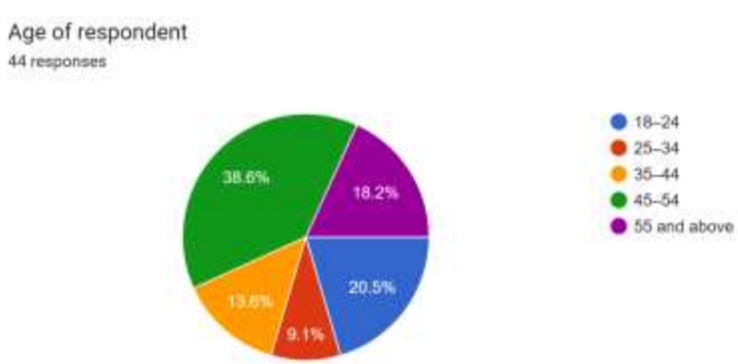
5) Integration of offline and online channels: The strategy of integrating offline and online channels in E-grocery shopping also known as Omni channel retail is considered to be the future of E grocery shopping (Instagrocer, 2025). The objective of this strategy is to allow the consumer to shift smoothly between the online platforms and offline physical stores. This meets the customer's need to physically examine certain products for e.g. fruits before purchase.

6) Sustainability in focus: As sustainability concerns continue to rise, online grocery deliveries including eco-friendly or reusable packaging and optimum delivery routes can help in reducing the carbon footprints (Kayode Sheriffdeen, November, 2023). This too is a major reason for many people committed to the cause of sustainability to shift to online purchases in different areas including their routine grocery requirements.

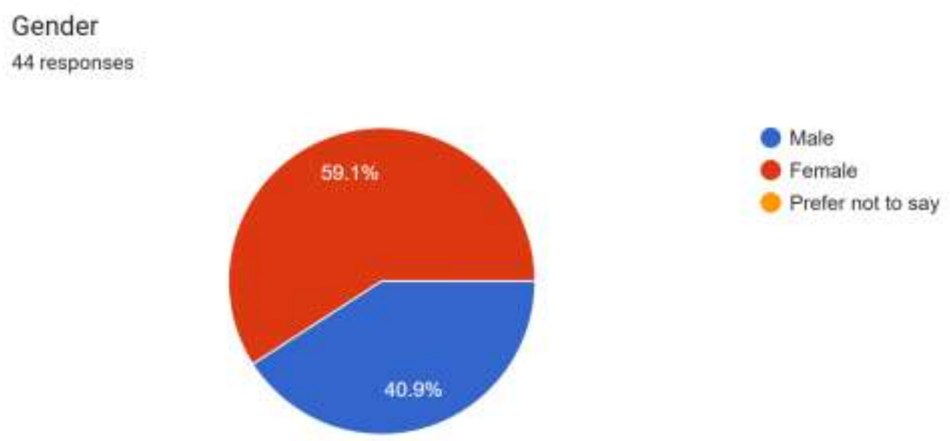
Research findings & Data Analysis:

Research Design :	Descriptive Research
Source of Data :	Primary data
Data collection method :	Survey Method
Sample size :	44
Sampling method :	Convenience Sampling
Data collection instrument :	On Line Questionnaire (Google Forms)

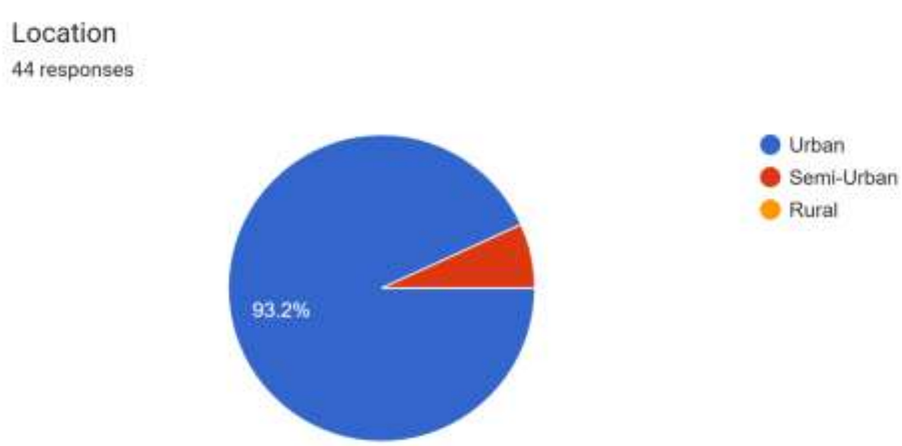
Google form was used as the tool for primary data collection. The questions were framed after reading research papers and news related to the topic. The first five questions were with respect to the demographics of the respondents and intended to collect an inclusive response data from consumers belonging to different age groups, gender, locations, employments, and income groups.



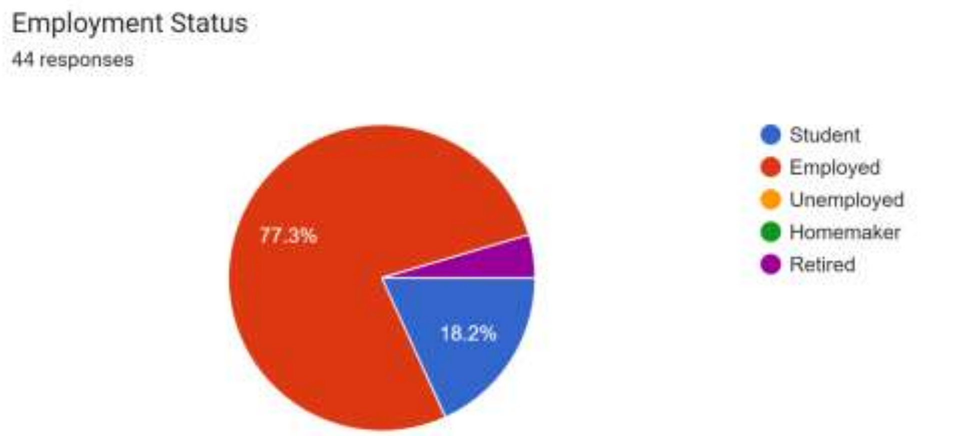
The first demographic question covered the age of the respondents. Majority of the respondents were in the age group of 45-54 followed by 18-24 age groups. 18.2% of the respondents belonged to the age group of 55 years and above. Responses were received in all the age groups ensuring minimum age bias in responses.



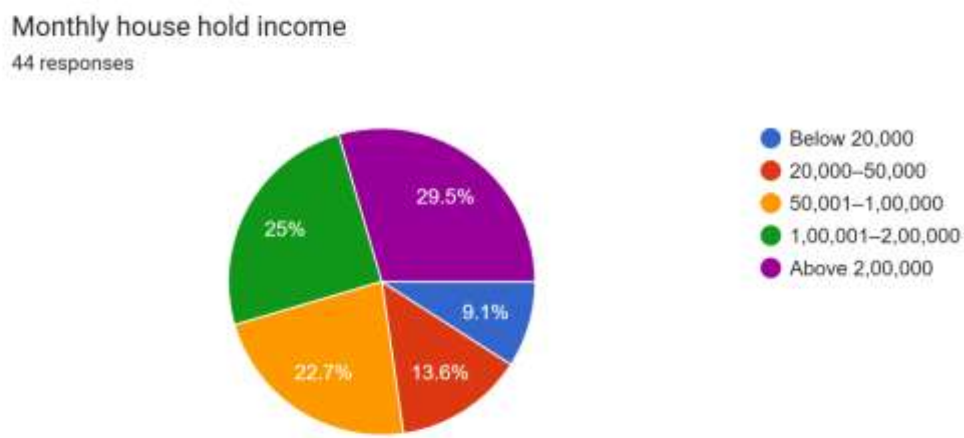
The percentage of male respondents was around 41 and that of female respondents was around 59, leveraging gender opinion on the topic. Since grocery shopping is no longer only a female domain and an almost equal number of men are also involved in grocery shopping both online and offline.



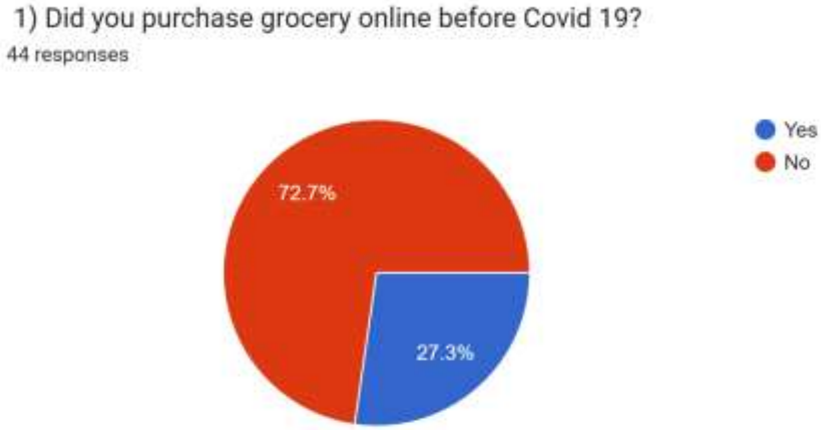
The location of respondents was mainly concentrated to urban with 93.2% and remaining respondents from semi-urban areas. None of the respondents belonged to rural areas.



Most of the respondents were from the employed category 77.3%, followed by students at 18.2% and remaining respondents being retired. None of the respondents belonged to the unemployed and only home maker categories.



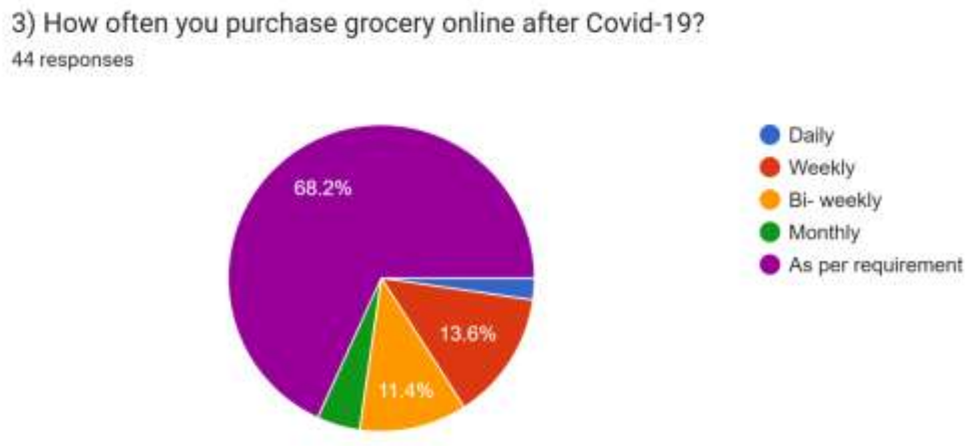
The monthly household income of 29.5% respondents is above Rs. 200000 per month followed by 25% of the respondents earning between 100000 to 200000 lakhs. 22.7% of the respondents earned between 50000 to 100000 lakh followed by respondents earning 200000 to 500000. Around 9% of the respondents in the survey earn less than Rs. 20000 per month. A balanced response chart in this category ensures equal representation of responses based on the monthly household income.



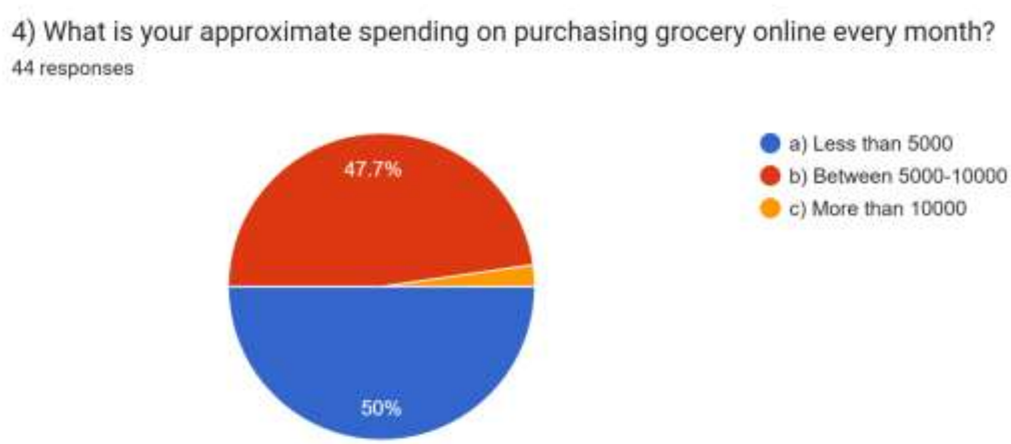
The response to the first question shows that majority of the respondents, 72.7% did not purchase grocery online before covid-19. 27.3% of the respondents had already been making online grocery purchases prior to the

pandemic.

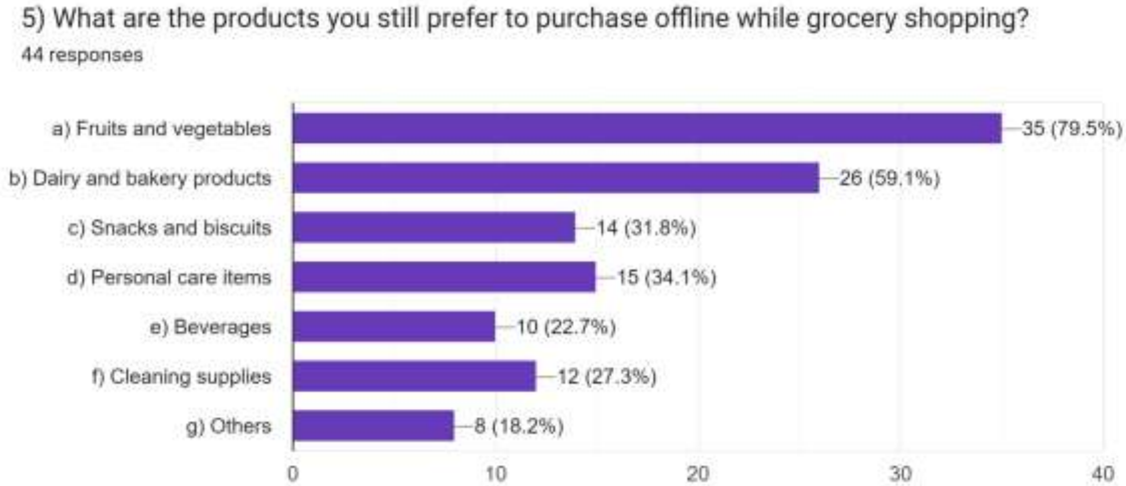
The respondents in response to whether they started E- purchase of grocery only post the pandemic responded by 63.6% in affirmative and 36.4% in negative. This shows that majority of the respondents at 63.3% started online grocery purchase only post the pandemic situation.



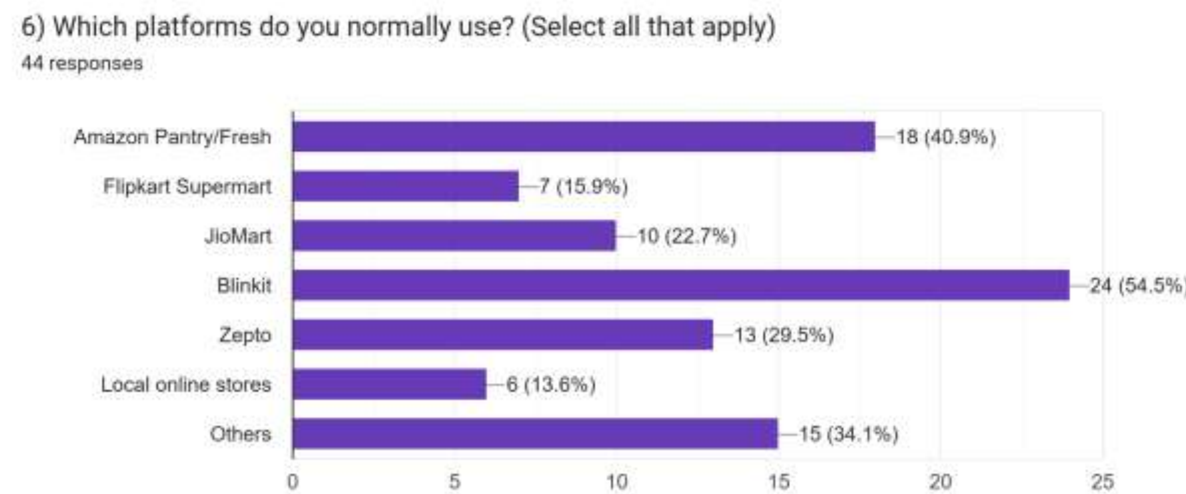
Question number three attempts to assess the regularity of online grocery purchase post covid-19. 13.6% of respondents purchase their groceries online weekly followed by 11.4% doing so twice a week of Bi- weekly. A few respondents prefer to shop for their groceries, monthly and daily in the electronic mode. However, majority of the respondents 68.2%, prefer to purchase their grocery requirements as per need in the online mode.



Half or 50% of the respondents to the survey spend less Rs. 5000 on purchasing grocery online every month. 47.7% of the respondents spend anywhere between 5000-10000 every month and only a small percentage i.e. 2.3% spend more than Rs. 10000 on their monthly online grocery purchases. This indicates a moderate spending by the respondents on online grocery purchases every month.

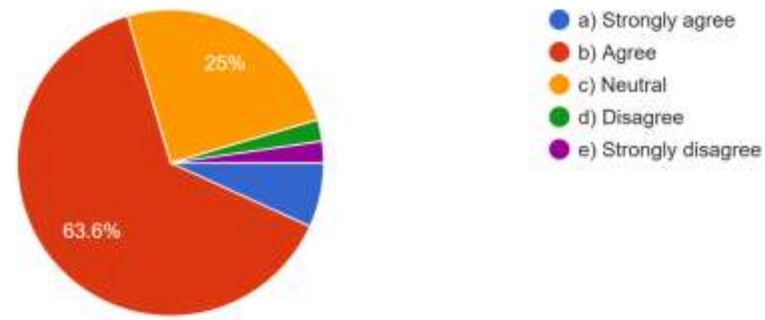


There are still some grocery items that people still prefer to purchase offline. In order to understand this inclination, question number 5 specified certain common categories and recorded the responses on a bar chart. As per the responses recorded 79.5% of the respondents still prefer to purchase fruits and vegetables in the offline mode. 26% of the respondents prefer to buy their dairy and bakery requirements from the local sellers. The responses in the other categories showed responses between 14 to 8% .



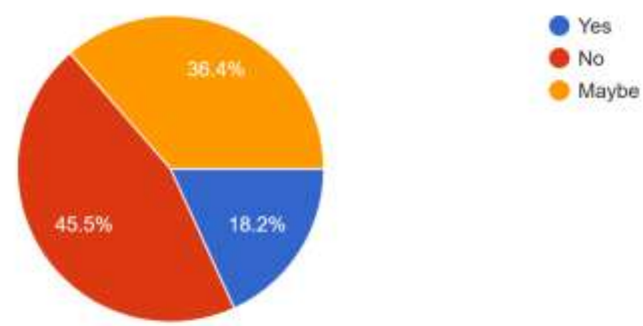
There are different platforms popular today for e-purchase of grocery items. Blinkit was selected by majority of the respondents 54.5% as their preferred platform for grocery purchase. Blinkit was followed by Amazon pantry/fresh with 40.9%, Zepto at 29.5%, and Jio mart at 10%. Rest of the platforms included Flipkart supermart with response percentage 7 and local online stores at 6%. 34% of the respondents also preferred other platforms apart from the ones mentioned in the survey as their preferred choice of online e grocery platform.

7) The quality of grocery products purchased online is satisfactory.
44 responses

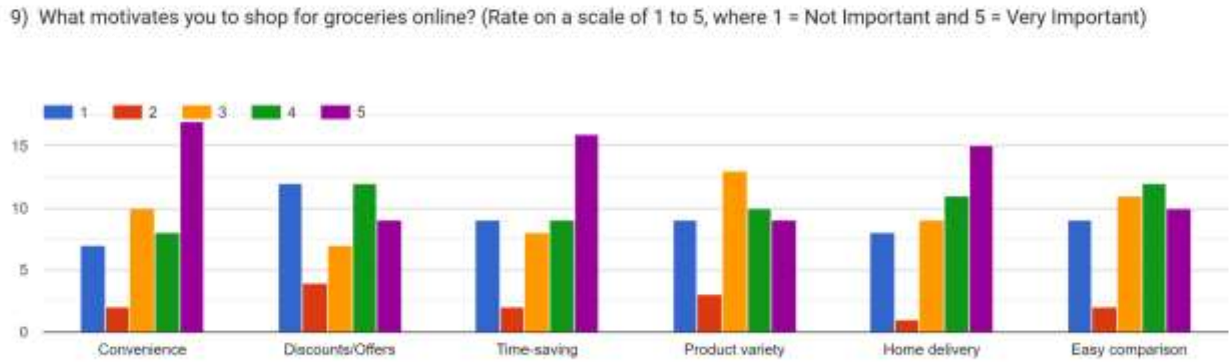


The seventh question was with respect to the quality of the products sold online being satisfactory or not. Majority of the respondents agree that the quality of groceries purchased online is satisfactory and 25% of the respondents replied in neutral to the question. Only a small percentage 6.7%, strongly agree to being satisfied with the quality of the groceries purchased online and only one respondent each selected disagree and strongly disagree as their selected responses.

8) Do you see yourself going back to completely shopping offline in future?
44 responses



In response to whether the respondents apprehended going back completely to offline shopping in future only 18.2% replied positively. 45.5% of the respondents replied in negative while 18.2% replied in neutral.



The ninth question involved rating on a scale of 1 to 5 with the following parameters
1 - Not important
2 - Slightly important
3 - Neutral
4 - Important
5 -Very important

Responses indicate convenience, time-saving and home delivery as the most prominent motivating factors for shopping their groceries online. Discounts or offers are voted equally by respondents as ‘Not important’ and ‘Important’, which indicates that buyers are no more tempted by the same. Product variety again does not greatly influence the choice of online shopping platform against offline markets. The responses to easy comparison are almost equal indicating that this factor again is not a great motivator among consumers for online grocery shopping.

Limitations:

1) The study did not find any respondents from the rural areas; hence the opinion of the consumers from rural areas could not be included in the above study.
2) The survey was conducted with a sample size of 44 participants; a larger data size may provide a greater insight into the topic of study.
3) The method of data collection used was online through Google forms, so the limitation of selection bias cannot be ruled out.
4) The filling of survey forms can be subject to the personal beliefs and attitude of the respondents.

Conclusion:

The study indicates that online grocery shopping in India has gone through a major transformation, significantly so after the pandemic. The Indian consumer market is embracing a more convenient and time saving model of grocery purchase. However, issues pertaining to product quality and the traditional Indian mindset of physical inspection of products continue to impact the consumer mind and will play an important role in shaping the future of online grocery shopping. Continuous research is required for understanding the preference inclinations through diverse social and economic parameters.

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