


# Customer Behavioral Trends in Online Grocery Shopping During COVID-19

Victor Chang, Aston University, UK

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8012-5852>

Ou Liu, Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, China\*

Kiran Vijay Barbole, Aston University, UK

Qianwen Ariel Xu, Aston University, UK

Xianghua Jason Gao, Aston University, UK

Wendy Tabrizi, Aston University, UK

## ABSTRACT

The evolution of online shopping started when big players like Amazon began selling all types of merchandise. Customers understood the ease of shopping online, so the trend grew even stronger. It is therefore essential to conduct a study of online shopping usage and the perception of customers during COVID-19, especially in the grocery sector. In this study, approximately 28 respondents from 50 specifically targeted groups were surveyed, and data collection was undertaken through a structured questionnaire. The regression method was conducted to analyze the collected data. Additionally, 5 interviews were conducted to validate and support the findings. Customers definitely preferred online grocery shopping (OGS) services during COVID-19 due to safety, convenience, and government restrictions. The influential factors were very important in this case, like delivery times, good discounts, and the quality of products. Secondly, OGS services were more stable and alert during the pandemic situation, following the government's rules and restrictions. Customers were extremely satisfied with the safety precautions during COVID-19, the assistance provided through helplines for support, and the increased customer reach to make groceries as accessible as other reputable online departments.

## KEYWORDS

Consumer Behavior, COVID-19, Online Grocery Shopping, Pandemic, Theory of Fear

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic caused many large businesses worldwide to be heavily impacted by negative effects, especially the food industry. According to Aday and Aday (2020), the percentage of food purchases from offline supermarkets and use of food service is 50% of what it was before the outbreak. Farmers have limited access to the resources and labor needed for farming due to road constraints, leaving more than 40% of Africa's agricultural land uncultivated. Moreover, the COVID-19 crisis has caused some governments to change their food trade policies, shifting toward promoting imports

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\*Corresponding Author

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and restricting exports. In the UK, the highest record made in the online shopping sector was around 87% of people in the UK, which was 10% higher than in 2018 (Aashind, 2022). This shows us the increased number of users moving toward the online shopping industry. Customers chose online shopping more frequently than compared to offline methods.

The start of 2020 introduced a series of events that largely affected the online sector and the majority turned out to be difficult for sales of the daily essentials like groceries, as there were lockdowns imposed on populations of every city in the UK. There were different types of lockdown laws imposed by the UK government in response to the coronavirus pandemic, like gathering, movement and business restrictions (Ferguson and Brown, 2022). Any kind of contact within a crowd of people was something people became scared of. So, everyone had to stay home and avoid outside contact. Hence, people preferred to stock up on goods at home so that they would last long enough without the need to go out to purchase necessities. There was a change in behavior from normal to panic buying/ impulsive buying (Aljanabi, 2021) during the early stages of COVID-19. This change was the motivation in the first place for this research. It showed that customers were turning more towards online grocery shopping and preferring it for daily household goods as well and not just for clothing or accessories. As customers shifted towards OGS services, a new pattern of customer behavior emerged in this sector. This study was mainly directed toward understanding that pattern and the factors influencing customers. OGS services are not a new thing, but due to the pandemic, there was a whole new group of people who became inclined towards it, and to reduce the gap between this new relationship, the OGS respondents took new steps to reach their customers and provide help/support 24/7 (Mathew, 2022).

## **1.1 Aims and Objectives**

The main purpose of this project is to analyze the change in customer behaviors and the influential factors that made customers more comfortable with OGS during COVID-19. Prior to the pandemic, even though the same items were available online, people preferred to go out and buy them themselves due to the difficulty of adapting to the new behavior. Whereas during the pandemic phase, customers were able to shift to this new change, which in turn created a new buying behavioral pattern.

The main underlying objective of this research is to study the changing landscape and understand the influential factors in the behavior of customers of online grocery shopping amid a pandemic due to the growing choice for cashless shopping options for groceries and daily items. This study is focused on researchers' motivation to understand whether there were any positive impacts on OGS services during COVID-19 using the real time feedback from customers. The main research points are mentioned below:

1. To perform an evaluation of verifiable methods to inspect and learn about the majority of factors responsible for customer behavior.
2. To examine and verify customer perception from the data collected for buying groceries online during COVID-19.
3. To clearly provide a heuristic approach to the positive and negative experiences of customers while online grocery shopping, in order to understand what factors customers care about?

## **1.2 Research Questions**

The aim and objectives lay the foundation for this research project and after carefully understanding them both, the main questions/problems that this research paper will focus on are below. The below questions also outline the tasks that define this project:

1. What are the main influential factors responsible for customers choosing online grocery shopping during COVID-19?

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