

## Study of Post-Pandemic Consumer Online Apparel Buying Behaviour in India

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### Abstract

This work intends to examine the Indian consumer's post-pandemic apparel buying behaviour. The influence of factors such as serviceability, operability, trust, and hedonic motivation on consumer's attitude for apparel e-shopping and their online apparel buying intention in post-pandemic is studied. A sample of 518 Indian apparel e-shoppers during the post-pandemic was used for the study. Conceptual framework is suggested using SEM and Regression. The analysis was done using AMOS and SPSS. It was observed that perceived operability, trust and hedonic motivation impacted consumer's attitude and buying intentions for online apparel in the post-pandemic period. However, it was noted that perceived serviceability did not show any significant impact. The study also presents many interesting insights for Indian apparel e-tailers for designing strategies in post-pandemic times.

**Keywords:** Pandemic, Post lockdown, Apparel, Attitude, Intention, Behaviour

### Introduction

Globally, the increase in internet users has changed many aspects of society. The internet has transformed the way consumers communicate, learn, transact, and shop. As a platform, the Internet supports and helps create/build commerce models and innovations. There are 4.9 billion people in the world, and 69% of them are active internet users in the year 2022. According to these developments, the number of internet users is growing by 4% every year, which means nearly 196 million new users access the internet every year (Bardus, et. al, 2022).

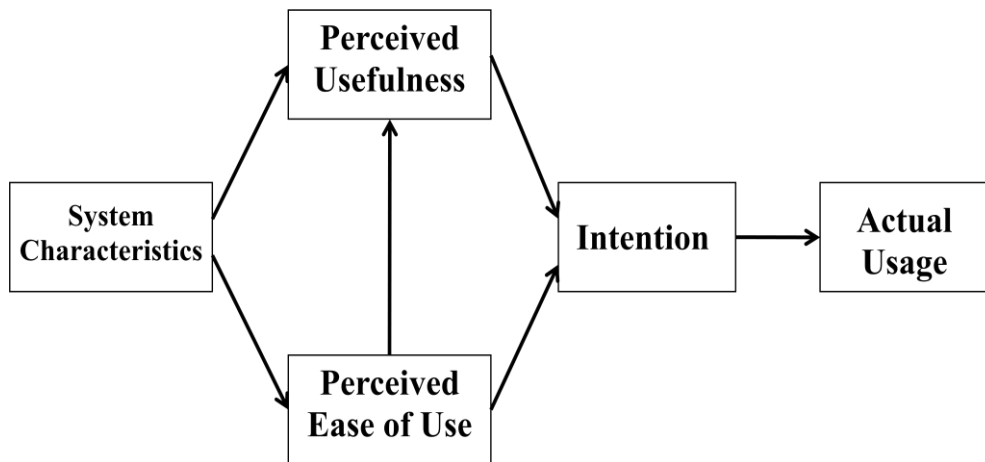
Internet and growth in technology has helped to create new business and new business models. It has also helped to companies to make them distinct in market (Kietzmann et. al, 2011). For creating ground-breaking commerce models and business innovations companies often have to take decisions that may prove to be risky. Such decisions may impact their affect the competitive position of companies and in turn impact business, profits, market share and customers base (Davis & Venkatesh, 1996). Hence, it becomes necessary to study consumer purchasing decisions.

Spread of corona viruses became a worldwide phenomenon in 2019 and soon became a pandemic. This pandemic impacted the society, economy and psychology of the consumer's across globe. Fear, suspicion, and anxiety continued to grow every day as the infections increased every day. Several official rules were placed such as physical distancing, caps on larger gathering and local quarantine. These rules resulted in alterations of consumer's buying behaviour, which directly changed the business across the world. During Covid-19 pandemic, people worked and studied from home and minimized interaction outside so as avoid infection. People had more leisure time and they spend most of their time on digital platforms (Kemp, 2020). With restrictions in place during the pandemic and consumers spending more time on online platforms, the online sales grew. Companies started investing in digital-media and

digital-platforms to make it easy, simple, effective and accessible (Kim, 2020). Offline fashion stores were hit the most by the Covid-19 pandemic as people were forced to stay home and there were no social gatherings and interactions (Sumarliah, Khan, & Khan, 2021). However, when restrictions were eased people started buying online. People started buying as they found online apparel shopping enjoyable. They also found it entertaining and stress relieving. Some consumers bought apparel online for their future needs while some bought casual and comfort wear online as they were spending major time at home. Consumers also engaged in revenge buying as they had not bought anything for long due to the restriction. Due to these factors it was seen thought there was major economic impact during the pandemic, technology platform Unicommerce reported that the online fashion industry in India registered a growth of 45% in the financial year 2020-21, compared to the previous year (Business Standard, 2021). This data is an indication that there is a huge potential for growth of online apparel platforms. According to Kim (2020), pandemic changed consumer's consumption habits and digitally transformed the market. According to Sheth (2020), the pandemic impacted on consumer buying behaviour. It transformed the entire market culture during post-pandemic. It had an effect on consumer's decisions and formed new buying habits and behaviours. Hence, it is crucial to understand which factors impact consumer's attitudes and online apparel buying intention in the post-pandemic era.

### **Theoretical Background**

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is mostly deployed and popular in behavioural studies. Lately, it is widely used to describe and understand shopper's wiliness to adopt technology related to apparel e-shopping (Wang & Cho 2010; Kim et al. 2009). TAM was effectively deployed to predict e-shopping behaviour and intentions (Shim & Lee, 2011). TAM has two major factors that impact shopper's intentions to adopt new technology viz. perceived operability and serviceability (Davis, 1989). The TAM model lays stress on the perceptions of the probable user. Several researchers have adopted TAM for analyzing e-shopping by adding up trust and established that trust has a substantial impact intention of using websites for purchasing. Hedonic motivation is a recent addition to the TAM model in the enjoyment construct (Heijden, 2004). In the TAM framework enjoyment represents the hedonic value of shopping. Some consumers may shop for instrumental purposes and for enjoyment (Babin, Dardin, and Griffin, 1994). The hedonic attributes is meant for shoppers seeking entertainment while shopping. Hedonic attributes of the shoppers are for consumers looking for emotional desires with pleasurable shopping atmosphere (Celobi, 2015; Escabar-Rodreguez & Bunsón-Fernández, 2016).



**Fig 1. Technology Acceptance Model**

### **Perceived Serviceability**

In relation with the e-shopping, perceived serviceability can be explained as shopper's perception that his/her performance enhances by shopping online. Perceived serviceability is the utilitarian feature that impacts online shopping (Davis, 1989). According to TAM, customers use those website which considerably affects their shopping effectiveness and efficiency (Davis, 1989). As per Zhou et. al, (2007), shoppers believed that e-shopping would boost their shopping efficiency. Bhattacharjee, (2001) explains that shopper's get hooked to the product or service if they perceive it as useful. Many studies have reported a positive association among perceived serviceability and consumers' behavioural intentions of e-shopping (Ashraf, Thongpapanl, & Auh, 2014). Perceived serviceability is a well determined fact that consumer's e-shopping intention has a substantial influence from perceived serviceability (Gefen et. al, 2003). Prior studies have reported noteworthy and constructive relationship among perceived serviceability along with online purchase intention (Fang et. al, 2016; Moslehpaour et. al, 2018; Sukino & Riquolme, 2019) and attitudes for online shopping (Çelik, et. al, 2011). Consumers perceive websites to be serviceability if the e-shopping was quick, effective and efficient. Consumers moved to e-shopping as it was the safe and convenient method of shopping during pandemic situation. Based on their positive experience they are likely to continue with online apparel shopping post pandemic. Therefore, it is hypothesized

***H1: Perceived Serviceability has positive influence on Consumer Attitude towards online shopping post pandemic.***

### **Perceived operability**

As per Davis (1989), "operability" is a condition where a consumer has a belief that the system he/his uses is effortless. Operability optimistically affects consumer's attitude and their purchase intentions of adapting technology in the future (Fang et. al, 2016). As per the study by Chen & Teng, (2013) the web platforms that have good operability and offer valuable information, are able enhance their purchase intention. The main reasons why people don't shop online are the trust variables in the shopping site and the ease of using the shopping site (Baba & Siddiqi, 2016). As per Gunawan (2019), perceived operability was noted to impact purchase decisions. Operability was also noted to impact on el-purchase intentions

(Moslehpour et. al., 2018). It was noted to have a significant impact on e-shopping decisions in COVID-19 pandemic (Almajli et. al, 2021). During pandemic due to social distancing, consumers looked for channels like online stores, where minimum effort is required to purchase items. Serviceability of the web-technology motivated people to purchase in post pandemic period.

***H<sub>2</sub>: Perceived operability would influence consumer attitude towards online shopping post pandemic.***

### **Trust**

Trust has significant role in generating customer satisfaction. Trust is created when the product or service meets the desired outcomes (Pavlou, 2003). Trust helps to build and sustain long-lasting relationship which affects e-shopping (Sugandini et. al, 2018). The study by Yuliansyah, Rammal & Rose, (2016) noted trust to have a constructive effect on the shopper's intentions to buy products and services online. Thus, trust impacts consumer's e-shopping behaviour and also impacts their present and future buying intentions.

Trust is a powerful factor that has substantial impact on shopper's e-shopping intention. Absence of trust was the main reason that lead to hesitation among consumer's to adopt web based shopping (Jarvanpaa et. al, 2000). If trust is absent, online transactions may not be performed (Winch & Joycei, 2006). Thus, consumers trust on the online retailer is the foundation for online transactions (Chen & Chou, 2012). Numerous researchers have studied how trust impacts the consumers purchase intention on online platforms. However, there is no consensus between the studies. The study by Hahn and Kim (2009) establish trust to negatively impacts consumer online shopping intention. According to Winch & Joyce (2006), trust considerable impacts consumer shopping behaviour on online and traditional shopping platforms. During the pandemic consumers felt that online websites are trustworthy. This feeling of trustworthiness would enhance their attitude towards e-shopping post pandemic.

***H<sub>3</sub> : Trust has positive influence on consumer attitude towards online shopping post pandemic.***

### **Hedonic Motivation**

Hedonic attributes are the consumer's experience while seeking and evaluating entertainment and enjoyment. Previous hedonic experience will influence consumers shopping attitude towards in the future. In the past many researchers have explored the hedonic value of online shopping. The study by Overby, Kim, & Eastin, (2011) showed that hedonic motivation is certainly connected to online purchase intention. As the pandemic forced people to stay indoors, they spend lot of time online and found shopping to be a great pastime and entertaining activity. The customers would probably continue e-shopping in future because of the hedonic benefits. Thus it can be hypothesized that

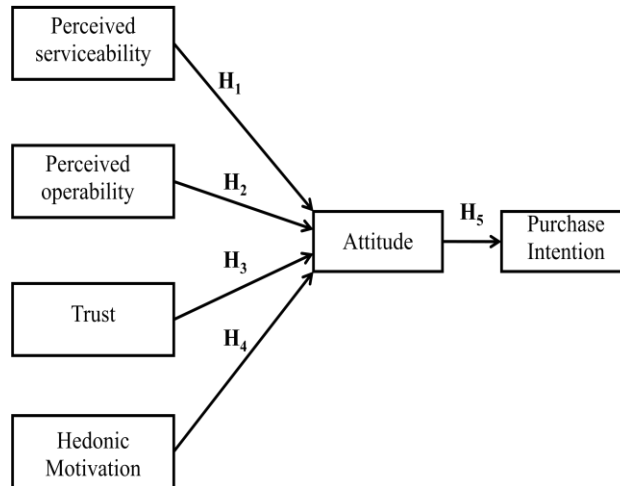
***H<sub>4</sub>: Hedonic motivation would positively influence consumer attitude towards online shopping post pandemic.***

### **Attitude Influences on Purchase Intention**

Behavioural intention refers to user's likelihood of exhibiting a certain behaviour (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). Chen (2007) asserted that the user's behavioural intention leads to purchase intention. According to studies conducted by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) person's attitude, behavioural as well as subjective norms dictate consumer's shopping intention. To put this in different words, an individual's intention is the determinant of his/her behaviour. As per

Biel & Thøgersen, (2007) attitude is considered to be predictor towards intention. In the perspective of virtual shopping, shoppers attitude towards e-shopping influences his/her shopping intention (Pardeshi, & Khanna, (2021).

***H5: Consumer Attitude would influence their online purchase intention post pandemic***



**Fig 2. Conceptual Framework**

Based on the review of literature 5 hypotheses were framed and summarised in table 1. Thus, it can be proposed that the four independent variables perceived serviceability and operability, trust, hedonic values have direct impact on dependent variable attitude. Attitude will further have influence on purchase intention.

**Table 1:- Hypotheses**

Independent Variables	Dependent Variables	Hypotheses	Outcomes
Perceived Serviceability	Attitude	H1	Perceived Serviceability influences attitude
Perceived operability	Attitude	H2	Perceived operability influences attitude
Trust	Attitude	H3	Trust influences attitude

Hedonic Motivations	Attitude	H4	Hedonic Motivations influences attitude
Attitude	Intention	H5	Attitude influences purchase intention

## Research Methodology

For measuring the identified variables, a survey form was designed. After checking for the appropriateness of the constructs some items were modified. Perceived serviceability was assessed using four items developed using the scale designed by Davis et al. (1989). The questions were: online apparel shopping is useful, quick, effective and easy. Perceived ease-of-use consisted of 5 items on online apparel shopping. The items included were online shopping is easy for me, clear and understandable, less prone to error, easy to remember, increase in confidence. These scales were adopted from Davis et al. (1989). To measure trust 4 questions were used viz. adequate security features, policies easy to understand, clear terms and conditions. The scales used for trust were taken from study by Pardeshi, & Khanna, (2020). The hedonic items included items such as, enjoyment, entertainment, past-time and stress buster. The scales used for hedonic values were adopted from previous work by Venkatesh et.al, (2013). The attitude constructs included three variables such as wise option, sensible and safe and smart. The question were taken from Lim (2003). The purchase intention constructs included six items that were: try to use, plan to use, decide to use, will buy maximum, will continue to use, will not switch to other medium. The question were taken from Lim( 2003). A 5 point Likertscale was deployed [“strongly disagree”(1) and “Strongly Agree” (5)].

**Table 2. Scales**

Constructs	Studies
Perceived Serviceability and Perceived operability	Davis et al. (1989)
Trust	Gelen et. al, (2003)
Hedonic intention	Venkantesh et. al, (2013)
Attitude	Lim (2003)
Intention	Lee et. al, (2003)

## Sample

The intent of the work was to understand post pandemic online apparel buying intentions of Indian shoppers. The pretesting of questionnaire was done on a sample of 125 respondents. After pre-testing, the questionnaire was revised and a final questionnaire was prepared. A structured self-administered questionnaire was circulated online to 498 members in India over a period of two months. The respondents who shopped for apparel online during era of pandemic were selected. Care was taken while choosing samples and proper representation of

Indian population was ensured. After screening the responses, a total of 200 response forms were noted to be suitable. Valid response rate was 86% which is considered reasonable in statistical analysis (Hair et. al, 2010). Quota Sampling was used for analysis.

**Table 3. Respondents demographics**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Frequencies</b>	<b>Percentages</b>
<b>Gender/Sex</b>		
Male	68	34%
Female	132	66%
<b>Age</b>		
25 or below	2	1
25 or below	185	93%
26-35	13	7%
36-45	0	0%
46-55	0	0%
56 or above	0	0%
<b>Annual Income</b>		
5 Lakhs or below	4	2%
5-10Lakhs	12	6%
10-20 Lakhs	44	22%
21 Lakhs or above	140	70%
<b>Educational Qualification</b>		
High School or below 5.8%	26	13%
Graduate	117	58%
Post Graduate	39	20%
Doctoral or higher	18	9%
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Married	355	68.5%
Unmarried	163	31.5%
<b>Did you purchase apparel online during the pandemic</b>		
Yes	186	93%
No	14	7%

### **Data Analysis**

The SPSS AMOS software was used for analysing the data. SEM was deployed to identify, estimate, and test the causal associations among the latent constructs. AMOS-22 with max. likelihood approach was employed to find the causal associations of the proposed hypotheses variables. The Goodness of Fit measures of SEM were : Incremental fit index = 0.92, Tucker–Lewis index = 0.90, Comparative fit index= 0.91, Goodness of fit index = 0.85, Adjusted goodness of fit index = 0.81, Root mean square error = 0.066.

**Convergent and Discriminant Validity**

Convergent validity and discriminant validity were used to prove the construct validity (Table 4).

**Table 4: Factor Loadings**

Factor	Item	Factor Loadings	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Cronbach's Alpha	Construct Reliability (CR)
1. Perceived Serviceability	1. Useful	.801	0.62	0.87	0.87
	2. Easy life	.776			
	3. increase effectiveness	.831			
	4. improve efficiency	.741			
2. Perceived Ease of Use	1. Easy to learn	.626	0.55	0.84	0.83
	2. Clear & understandable	.657			
	3. less prone to error	.165			
	4. easy to remember	.845			
	5. confidently shop	.811			
3. Trust	1. Adequate security features	.806	.74	.92	.92
	2. Policies easy to understand	.906			
	3. Clear terms and conditions	.895			
	4. Secure payment methods	.832			
4. Hedonic Motivation	1. Enjoyed	.782	.58	.88	.87
	2. Satisfying	.759			
	3. Entertain	.756			
	4. Past time	.719			
	5. Stress buster	.789			
5. Attitude	1. Wise option	.834	.75	.89	.90
	2. Sensible	.909			
	3. Safe and Smart	.850			



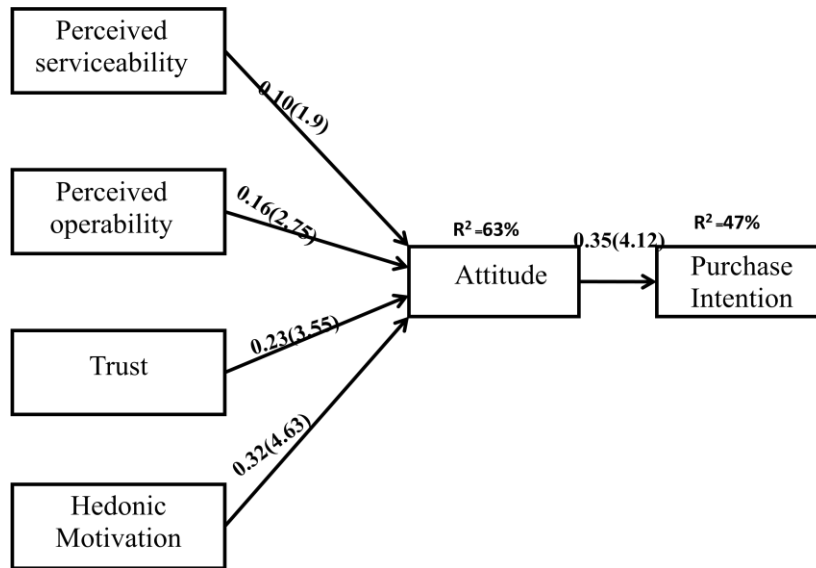
6. Purchase Intention	1. Try to use online apparel	.831	.91	0.91	.89
	2. Plan to continue to use online apparel	.828			
	3. Decided to use online apparel	.886			
	4. Will shop maximum	.600			
	5. Will continue to use	.698			
	6. Will not switch to other platforms	.66			

The factor loadings for all items linked with each of the six constructs was noted to be > 0.60 and significant. The high values of loading for all cases indicated convergent validity (table 4). To verify reliability & validity the construct average variance (AVE) extracted was calculated and the construct reliability for each factor. The suggested value for AVE is 0.50. In this study the AVE values were between 0.55 to 0.75. This suggests good reliability for unobserved variables. Discriminant validity was checked to understand whether any two factors are dissimilar or distinctive.

**Table 5: Discriminant Validity**

Construct	Perceived Serviceability	Perceived Operability	Trust	Hedonic Motivations	Attitude	Purchase Intention
Perceived Serviceability	.787					
Perceived operability	.417	.741				
Trust	.436	.635	.860			
Hedonic Motivations	.522	.345	.55	.823		
Attitude	.505	.606	.676	.595	.866	
Purchase Intention	.436	.437	.45	.463	.625	.754

The summary of t values,  $\beta$  values and p values for testing the hypothesis is shown in Table 6.



**Figure 3: Structural Model**

**Table 6: Hypothesis**

Hypothesis	Path	Estimate	P<	t-Values	Decision
H1	Perceived Serviceability ---> Attitude	0.10	0.058	1.9	Rejected
H2	Perceived operability ---> Attitude	0.16	0.006	2.75	Accepted
H3	Trust → Attitude	0.23	0.001	3.55	Accepted
H4	Hedonic---> Attitude	0.32	0.001	4.63	Accepted
H5	Attitude → Purchase Intention	0.35	0.061	4.12	Accepted

From the results it can be comprehended operability, trust, hedonic value had a positive and substantial impact on shopper’s attitude for apparel e-shopping post pandemic. Hence, hypotheses 2 to 4 are accepted. The first hypothesis perceived serviceability was rejected. Consumer’s attitude for e-shopping had a major influence on their purchase intention. Thus, a hypothesis 5 was also accepted. To examine the impact of serviceability, operability, trust and hedonic value on consumer’s attitude and purchase intention the direct-indirect effect of latent and predictor constructs were also examined. In above research model four exogenous variables had 63% of total variation in purchase intention (figure 3). The above model

explained 47% variation in attitude via purchase intention. All the variables had direct/indirect effect on the latent construct. Hedonic value exhibited the highest direct effect ( $\beta=0.32$ ), trust exhibited ( $\beta=0.23$ ), perceived operability ( $\beta=0.16$ ) while perceived serviceability exhibited the least influence on consumers attitude ( $\beta=0.10$ ). Attitude showed strongest impact on e-purchase intention ( $\beta=0.35$ )

### **Discussion, Conclusion and Implications**

This study provides numerous theoretical contributions to existing literature on shopper's online shopping attitude and post pandemic purchase intention. The pandemic brought changes in the human behaviour. It also changed the way people shop. However, research on consumer's e-shopping attitude and post pandemic purchase intention needs to be studied. As consumers in India have moved to online shopping during pandemic, most likely they will continue to use e-shopping post pandemic. Hence, it is vital to design strategies that creates positive attitude for e-shopping and in turn increases their current or future purchase intentions. The goal of this work was exploring the constructs that impact consumer's attitude and purchase intention. The uniqueness of this work lies in finding the factors that impacts e-shopping attitude among of Indian consumers during and post pandemic.

Out of the five variables only four variables were reported to have influence on online shopping attitude post pandemic. The importance of perceived serviceability to had a weak effect on online shopping attitude. Online shoppers during the pandemic focused on operability, trust and hedonic value. Hence, it is imperative to concentrate on developing website attributes that makes website easy-to-use, trustworthy and enjoyable.

The study showed that operability had an influence on consumer's attitude and purchase intentions. The above result is supported by previous studies (Meilatinova, 2021; Wilson, Alvita, & Wibisono, 2021). These studies also found that trust had optimistic influence on attitude. This was also further confirmed by studies done by Zhu et.al, (2011); Hassanein, Head & Ju, (2007).

Hedonic value showed a optimistic impact on consumer's e-shopping attitude. This is as per the prior work that showed a optimistic effect of hedonic motivation on attitude (Mosunmola, Omotayo & Mayowa, 2018; Chiu et. al, 2014). However, some studies exhibited no influence of hedonic value on purchase intentions (Novela, et. al, 2020).

The results are useful to e-tailers for improving consumer's footprints on online apparel shopping platforms post pandemic. The results can benefit online retailers to design strategies for attracting new consumers and retaining existing consumers for increasing their sales.

This work would help e-tailers to comprehend shopper's e-shopping behaviour during catastrophic situations and may assist in formulating strategies to enhance shopper's experience by emphasizing factors such as operability, serviceability, hedonic value and trust on the e-shopping platform. Hedonic value most crucial factor during the pandemic as it helped the consumers enjoy the shopping. The e-tailers should focus on designing website attributes that help the consumers to enjoy the entire shopping process. They should focus on making shopping entertaining, stress reviling, satisfying and also help the consumers spend their leisure time. Trust was the second important factor influencing consumers shopping attitude during the pandemic. During the pandemic some consumers used and experienced online shopping of apparel for the first time. Hence it was very important for e-tailers to ensure that consumers feel and experience the trustworthiness of the online shopping platform as it influences consumer's attitude for online shopping. The third key factor was the perceived operability. Many consumers where first time online shoppers during the pandemic. Thus, it was important for e-tailers to easy-to-use website layout and interface. If consumers find website easy-to-use, it is predicted that shopper's will have favourable attitude towards e-shopping platform.

The results showed that perceived serviceability did not influence consumer's attitude towards online shopping. It is well-known that online shopping is useful as it saves time, products are competitively priced, delivery is quick, shopping process is hassle free and almost all the website have these features Hence consumers do not feel any novelty as it taken for granted that online shopping is useful and effective.

The study found that a favourable attitude towards e-shopping increases consumers purchase intention. A positive intention may lead to future purchases. Hence, it becomes imperative for the e-tailers to focus on factors that generate an optimistic attitude towards e-shopping which may influence consumers buying intention. `

Few Practical tips/suggestions can be suggested to the e-tailers. The key findings of the study were operability, trust hedonic value influence consumer's attitude and buying intention. It is decisive for e-tailers to make the website easy for use. To do this e-retailer must pay attention on user flow, that is on the navigation path the user is going to follow to search and select the products. Website design is not just webpages that are attractive; it is also about creating a flow or the path by which the visitor will navigate through the website. It is vital to create simple design instead of complex design. A complex design can create confusion among visitors. A user would not like to revisit the website if its complex. A simple and easy-to-navigate website helps to enhance user experience. Focus should be on designing websites that are simple yet attractive.

The study established trust as a vital factor influencing e-shopper's attitude and their purchase intentions. To enhance trust value, e-tailers can add trust badges; trust seals include features like SSL, Digital verification and signatures. These features enhance the trust among the online shoppers and enhance their attitude.

To enhance the hedonic value of the website, online retailers can design website by creatively embedding videos and vlogs to grab the attention of the shopper as these multimedia features are creative as well as relatable. To make the shopping process immersive and to enhance the experience virtual reality and augmented reality can be used. To put it simply, the focus should be on creating entertaining experiences that focus on enticing and delighting the consumer.

Thus, ensuring websites that are easy to use, trustworthy, entertaining, enjoyable will increase the consumers e-shopping attitude. A optimistic attitude will lead to increase purchase intention in the future.

### **Limitations and Future Scope**

The present work had some shortcomings that may be tackled in future research. The data consisted of Indian shoppers who purchased for apparel online during the pandemic. Future research may select different economic environments, markets, geographics, different demographic and varied product categories. Studies focussing on understand consumer's attitude and intention across different shopping platforms can also be carried out. The study did not examine several other factors such as impact of different web atmospherics and other factors that impact the attitude towards online apparel shopping. Further study can analyze the impact of moderating and mediating effect of different variables.

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