

## *Emotional Impacts of Online Purchasing Behaviour During the COVID-19 Pandemic*

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The European Conference on Media, Communication & Film 2022  
Official Conference Proceedings

### **Abstract**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the routine daily habits of individuals have changed. For example, remote working has become a much more common concept, pupils carried out their classes online and various socialization habits have been moved to digital platforms. In this period, a vast number of people have become digitized. This study aimed to investigate the impact of emotions on people's buying behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic in Northern Cyprus. More specifically, we investigated whether emotions affected the consumer's decision-making process. A total of 203 participants aged between 18 to 54 participated in the study. An online survey method was utilised and the PAD scale was conducted for data collection. The results revealed that dominance had a positive impact on both pleasure and arousal. Similarly, arousal showed a significant positive impact on pleasure toward online purchasing. The positive effect of pleasure on attitudes also indicated a positive impact on future purchasing intention. In this context, positive feelings about consumption led to re-buying and positive attitudes. During purchasing, on online shopping, emotional experiences are identified as a significant factor for consumers. Thus, consumer emotions were used to create an impact on the consumer and to explain the experiences of consumption. This study pinpoints that there is a gap in the literature regarding studies based on emotion in web-based shopping using further purchasing intentions on customers.

Keywords: Emotion, Online Purchasing, Online Shopping, Consumer Behaviour, COVID-19

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## **Introduction**

With the growth of the internet and the rising number of digitalized users, online purchasing has become more popular. Famous brands and local retailers (i.e., groceries, home appliances, clothing, etc.) moved their products to online (electronic) businesses (e-business). Due to an increasing number of internet users, it has become easier to meet the needs and demands of consumers by reaching consumers in a short time (Leinbach & Reyhle, 2015). The most indicator of changes in consumer behaviour as shopping has become a tedious activity for some consumers. Thus, the rapid change of the Internet and the popularity of internet marketing has also become an alternative for consumers. With the increased use of online platforms, people have also started to utilise web-based shopping rather than in-store shopping.

In November 2019, the initial Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) case was reported in Wuhan, China and spread all over the world in a short time period. Therefore, the daily lives of people have been affected, changed, and transformed rapidly due to the COVID-19 outbreak. For instance, people started to work from home, students started to take online classes and most people started to use online shopping sites in order to keep social distance and reduce the number of COVID-19 cases. Moreover, considering the restrictions by the government, online purchasing has become more attractive and safer during the pandemic. In addition to changing routines, our emotions may differ. In line with varied emotions during the pandemic, shopping habits may have also been affected.

In the marketing literature, particularly on online shopping behaviour, studies based on consumer emotion have not been studied thoroughly by using further purchasing intentions on the consumer. With the changing emotions and habits during the pandemic, it is important to work on the effects of emotions on online purchasing behaviour. However, studies with respect to emotion on online buying behaviour during the pandemic still lack in the literature. By considering this issue, this study will contribute and fill in a gap in the literature.

The aim of the present study is to investigate the impact of emotions on online purchasing behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic in Northern Cyprus. The objectives of the study are to reveal the demographic differences in online shopping behaviour, to examine the differences regarding products purchased before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, to identify one's emotions and intentions regards to future online buying behaviour, to investigate if consumers find online more secure during the pandemic, and to also find out the most preferred social networking sites (SNSs) among consumers.

To be able to reveal the aims of this study the following research questions are posed:

1. What are the attitudes of consumers while purchasing online during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. To what extent has the buying behaviour of consumers been affected during the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. How have consumers emotionally changed their behaviour due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Based on the review of literature, the following hypotheses have been developed:

H1: Arousal has a positive impact on pleasure on online buying behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic.

H2: Dominance has a positive impact on arousal on online buying behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic.

H3: Dominance has a positive impact on pleasure on online buying behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic.

H4: Pleasure has a positive impact on attitude on online buying behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic.

H5: The attitude toward the online purchasing experience has a positive effect on future intentions.

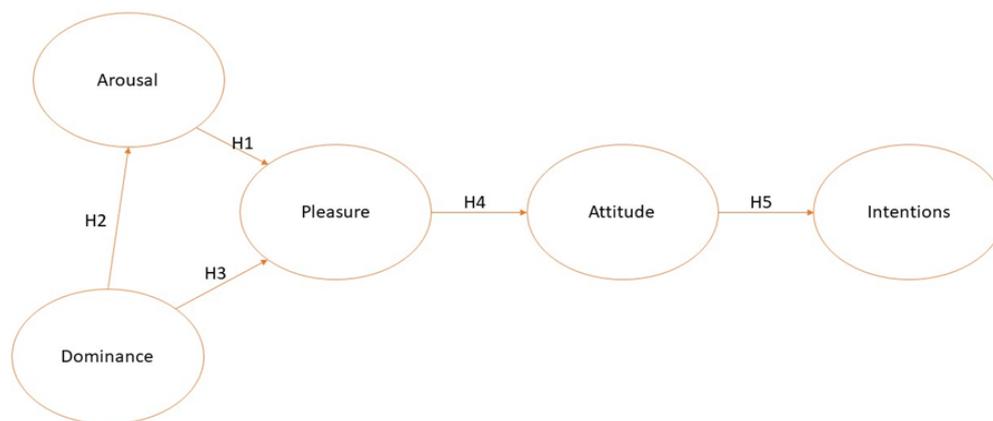


Figure 1: Proposed Hypothesis Model

## Literature Review

Emotion is a “mental state of readiness that arises from cognitive appraisals of events or thoughts; has a phenomenological tone; is accompanied by physiological processes; is expressed physically (e.g., in gestures, posture, facial features); and may result in specific actions to affirm or cope with the emotion, depending on its nature and meaning for the person having it” (Bagozzi, Gopinath, & Nyer, 1999, p.184). It is known that emotions have a particular referent (e.g., a consumer becomes unpleasant when a whitening toothpaste has not whitened his or her teeth; he or she can be happy by delivering their order on time). Indeed, emotions arise as a response to evaluations (interpretation and appraisal judgment) of a person’s well-being to make for something relevant. Usually, emotions are not controllable – people may exhibit different emotions during the same event and may also not have emotions at all.

In the marketing literature, emotions were investigated on behavioural trends (Hicks et al., 2005), pleasure (Alcaniz et al., 2005), decision-making process (Stayman & Batra, 1991), retailing (Babin et al., 2005), and advertising (Stayman & Aaker, 1988). According to Bagozzi and his colleagues (1999), emotions particularly affect the consumer and decision-making process.

During purchasing, either in-store or online, emotional experiences have been identified as a significant factor for consumers. Thus, to create an impact on the consumer and to explain experiences of consumption, consumer emotions were made use of. Cacioppo and Gardner (1999) emphasized that to achieve success in marketing strategies, identifying emotions was required and effective in every part of consumption. Moreover, consumption emotions can also be defined as gained emotions, moods, or feelings throughout the consumption of the service or the product (Richins, 1997). In fact, consumer emotions were conceptualized as varied fundamental emotions such as interest, happiness, entertainment, and sadness. In the Consumption Emotion Set (CES), previous scholar Richins (1997) stated that there were 16 consumption emotions and the set of emotions was only used to assess direct emotions regarding product consumption and not assess indirect feelings regarding advertisement in the marketing literature. The previous scholar also dealt with a combination of these emotions like optimism, shame, astonishment, dissatisfaction, romantic love, fun, anxiety, jealousy, fear, freshness, unhappiness, tranquillity, affection, loneliness, and enthusiasm (Richins, 1997).

One recent study examined what kind of emotion should be satisfied with the purchasing behaviour in web-based shopping (Cinar, 2020). Moreover, as sub-objectives of the previous study, “the difference between online purchasing and demographic variables and revealing the factors affecting the consumer’s emotions in online shopping” (Cinar, 2020, p. 230) was investigated. As a result of the study, it was revealed that both negative and positive emotions had an impact on online purchasing behaviour. In addition to this, when the positive emotions of the online consumer increased, the frequency of online purchasing also increased. However, when the negative emotions of the online consumer increased, the frequency of online purchasing decreased. The study also demonstrated a statistically significant difference between demographic variables and online purchasing behaviour. Therefore, the effect of monthly income and age on online purchasing behaviour was found as a significant factor (Cinar, 2020).

Similarly, previous research has illustrated consumers’ affective states (i.e., arousal and pleasure) influenced behavioural responses (Das & Varshneya, 2017). For instance, one of the past studies revealed that both arousal and pleasure had positive effects on approach shopping behaviour (e.g., browsing and unplanned purchasing) (Menon & Kahn, 1995). Eroglu, et al. (2003) pinpointed that both arousal and pleasure had a strong positive impact on both avoidance/approach and satisfaction behaviours. Koo and Ju (2010) showed that both arousal and pleasure had a positive effect on purchase intention.

In recent years, in the field of information technology, considerable progress has been made specifically related to the Internet as purchasing channel (Diaz, Gomez & Molina, 2017). Some previous studies have analysed the differences between offline and online channels (Hwang & Jeong, 2016). To analyse Internet use and levels of knowledge most studies have utilised the differences in socioeconomic and demographic factors (Hirunyawipada & Paswan, 2006). A previous study showed that individuals who purchase offline and online maintain different lifestyles and values that affect their intentions and behaviours (Swinyard & Smith, 2003). For purchases, some researchers investigated the differences between people on the basis of frequency (i.e., more or less) of Internet use.

According to previous scholars, differences and tendencies of companies appear when consumers use offline and online channels (Chen et al., 2014; Levin et al., 2003; Levin et al., 2005) and showed differences in behaviour when consumers search for information offline

and online with regard to diversified types of products such as clothing, airline tickets, computers, electronic products, and books. Some researchers have also demonstrated the differences between the preferences and attitudes of consumers when using offline and online channels (Kwon & Lennon, 2009; Diaz et al., 2017). These researchers emphasized the differences between both forms of media in contexts of tourism and retail services, however, results on companies had positive impacts on multichannel collaboration. Gultas and Yildirim (2016) stated that the investigation of consumers' online buying behaviour has become important due to an increased number of online shoppers.

## **Research Methodology**

The current study utilised a quantitative research design. Data were collected from a total of 203 participants aged between 18 to 54 from Northern Cyprus. Of the sample of participants, 57.1% (N=116) were female, 41.9% (N=85) were male, and 1% (N=2) who did not want to specify their gender. Regarding age of participants, 18-24 were 25.6% (N=52), 25-34 were 52.2% (N=106), 35-44 were 14.3% (N=29) and 45-54 were 7.5% (N=16). Generally, participants were well educated, with 37.9% (N=77) having an undergraduate degree, obtained 35.5% (N=72) obtaining a master's/Ph.D. degree, 20.2% (N=41) possessing a high school degree, and 6.4% (N=13) having an associate degree, respectively. Referring to the occupancy of participants, 28.6% (N=60) were working in the private sector, 20.6% (N=42) were students, 20% (N=40) were civil servants, 16% (N=31) were working in other sectors (i.e., lawyer, psychologist, teacher, photographer, dietitian, physiotherapist, doctor), 5.9% (N=12) were academicians, 3.9% (N=8) were freelancers, 3% (N=6) were housewives, 1.5% (N=3) were unemployed and 0.5% (N=1) was retired. Vast number of participants were from Nicosia (capital of Cyprus) 36.5% (N=74), Famagusta 23.2% (N=47), Kyrenia 22.2% (N=45), Trikomo 10.3% (N=21) and Morphou 7.9% (N=16).

In this study, a demographic information questionnaire was employed in order to provide some characteristic information about the participants including gender, age, education level, occupancy, and city of residence. Furthermore, the Pleasure Arousal and Dominance (PAD) Scale that was introduced by Mehrabian and Russell in 1974 was utilised in the study. To define perceptions of physical environments, by using three emotional aspects of the PAD (Hall, Elliot, & Meng, 2017). Pleasure interests whether the person deems the environment pleasurable or not, whereas arousal reveals how much the person is stimulated by their environment. Also, dominance comprehends whether the person perceives control or not in the surrounding (Hall, Elliot, & Meng, 2017). The PAD constructs were assessed by using a six-item scale from Kulviwat et al. (2007). Attitude toward online shopping was measured four-item scale (Kulviwat et al., 2007). Furthermore, intentions regarding future online shopping behaviour were assessed by using a three-item scale as developed by the current researcher. The PAD Scale and future intention questions were rated by participants on a 5-point Likert Scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Furthermore, additional questions about their social media use, online shopping behaviour and also, and products they preferred to purchase before and during the COVID-19 pandemic were asked of participants. The questionnaire consisted of 16 questions (i.e., demographic and basic questions about the SNSs & online shopping) followed by 25 items (to assess emotions, future intentions, and attitudes).

The original questionnaire was translated into Turkish language and adapted to the current study. This study was conducted using an online self-administered questionnaire. All participants were invited to take part in the current study through SNSs (i.e., Facebook and

Instagram). Data collection was carried out for approximately 2 weeks during the strict restrictions for COVID-19 implemented by the government in Northern Cyprus, 2020. The participants spent approximately 10 minutes completing the questionnaire. Data were collected anonymously and participation was totally voluntary.

## Data Analysis

### *Reliability of the PAD Scale*

According to Mehrabian and Russell's PAD scale, the internal consistency of the three factors of the scale was well established. However, for the Turkish PAD, it was required to approve the unemotionality of the three scales. As shown in Table 1, Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) reliability result demonstrated a good internal consistency,  $\alpha = 0.73$  lining between the values 0.60 and 0.88 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.735	18

Table 1. The Cronbach's alpha value

### *Model Fit Tests (MFT)*

In order to check the accuracy of the proposed model, three types of information were conducted. The model fit is presented in Table 2. Chi-square is the first proposed theory for Model Fit Testing (MFT). The measurement errors used in this study: The Root Mean-Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) and the Root Mean-Square Residual (RMR). The other fit measurements used to check the model fit are the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Incremental Fit Index (IFI), and Normed Fit Index (NFI). As shown in Table 2, the results of the study approved the validity of the model. Although the Chi-Square p-value was significant at the 1% level, the measurement error (RMR) was relatively low with a value of 0.05. In addition, all the fit indices, including CFI = 0.92, IFI = 0.92, NFI = 0.90 were all above the acceptable cut-off values. The fit indices were all acceptable, indicating that the proposed theoretical model was a good fit.

	Chi-Square	DF	Probability	RMSEA	RMR	CFI	IFI	NFI	Decision
Overall Model	23.5	5	0.000	0.105	0.05	0.917	0.919	0.90	Acceptable

Table 2. Model Fit Tests

### *Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)*

The Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was then performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences Analysis of a Moment Structures (SPSS AMOS) to study the relationship between the hypotheses. The path analysis was conducted to test the relevance of

the hypothesis. The path analysis results are illustrated in Table 3. The first hypothesis stated that arousal has a positive impact on pleasure on online buying behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results provided in Table 3 supported the H1 ( $\beta = 0.44$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). The second hypothesis stated that dominance has a positive impact on arousal on online buying behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results shown in Table 3 supported the H2 ( $\beta = 0.32$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Also, the third hypothesis postulated that dominance has a positive impact on pleasure on online buying behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic. As shown in Table 3, H3 was also supported ( $\beta = 0.14$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The fourth hypothesis proposed that pleasure has a positive impact on attitude on online buying behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic. As demonstrated in Table 3, H4 was supported ( $\beta = 0.88$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). The fifth hypothesis stated that the attitude toward the online purchasing experience has a positive effect on future intentions. Similarly, H5 was also supported ( $\beta = 0.32$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). The results presented in Table 3 supported all the hypotheses in the study.

		Dominance	Arousal	Pleasure	Attitude
<b>Arousal</b>	Path Coefficient	0.322***			
	T-Value	(4.815)			
<b>Pleasure</b>	Path Coefficient	0.140**	0.441***		
	T-Value	(2.003)	(6.973)		
<b>Attitude</b>	Path Coefficient			0.880***	
	T-Value			(27.468)	
<b>Intention</b>	Path Coefficient				0.322***
	T-Value				(4.826)

\*\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \* $p < 0.1$

Table 3. Path Analysis

## Conclusion

To sum up, the purpose of the current study was to explore the effects of emotions on online purchasing behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was revealed that participants purchased online regularly before the COVID-19 outbreak. However, for some of them, online shopping behaviour started after the pandemic. The results of the study showed that most people had pleasure (i.e., happy, satisfied, contented, and hopeful) from the first item of PAD. It was further revealed that most people had arousal (relaxed, excited, frenzied) from the second item. People also had dominance (aroused, in-control, controlling, influential, and

autonomous) while online shopping during COVID-19. These results illustrated those positive emotions toward online purchasing affect consumers' buying behaviour positively. By evaluating the attitudes of consumers on online shopping, it can be said that consumers have positive attitudes indicating good, pleasure, and favourable towards online shopping. Thus, from the results of the study, a link between emotions and attitudes toward online shopping was revealed.

This study specifically revealed that most of the active social media users preferred to use Instagram (57.1%), Facebook (35%), YouTube (4.9%), Twitter (1.5%), and LinkedIn (1.5%), respectively. For further online shopping behaviour, this study also investigated their future intentions about online shopping. As a result, most of them were planning to visit websites more frequently and plan to buy more products from online websites. However, most of them were not sure if they spend less or more time on online shopping after the COVID-19 pandemic. Out of 203 people, 85.7% of the participants found that online shopping is more secure during COVID-19.

Interestingly, the participants were buying electronic goods, home appliances, accessories and fashion products mostly before the pandemic. Although these products remained the same, hygiene and personal care products and, food and beverages purchasing behaviour increased significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, COVID-19 had a positive effect on the consumers to encourage them to shop online by affecting their emotions positively. In fact, positive emotions regarding online shopping behaviour also affected their attitudes and future intentions to buy positively.

In the current study, there are some limitations that should be addressed in future research. First, this study is limited to individuals ages 18-54 who are currently living in Northern Cyprus. Therefore, this study lacks active internet users aged under 18 who are also known as Generation Z (Gen Z), and also, active internet users below age 54. Second, only Turkish speakers were able to participate in the study. Further research could be carried out to reveal results of more participants from different ethnic groups as well as having balanced samples in terms of demographic characteristics (i.e., age, gender, education level, income level) for comparison is suggested.

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