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# THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS IN THE PANIC BULK BUYING OF GROCERY ITEMS AND SANITARY PRODUCTS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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## Abstract

The Coronavirus, or COVID-19, is a global pandemic that has taken millions of lives all around the world and put all the world's economies on the brink of collapse. A major factor in causing this panic situation was Social Media Platforms because people around the world started sharing news related to COVID-19 on Social Media Platforms without fact-checking it, and by doing so, created fear and panic among people around the world, it caused many people to go in a frenzy situation, people started taking impulsive decisions, and that is the reason people all rushed towards the nearest grocery stores, supermarkets, pharmacies, and medical equipment stores to stock up on essential and non-essential grocery items and sanitary products. The sample size was 436 individuals, and the data was gathered through Google Forms. Data collection was done in the cities of Karachi, Islamabad, and Lahore. Questionnaires were designed with the help of a five-point Likert scale and dichotomous questions from previous research. The reliability of this model showed the strong consistency of the responses. SPPS software was used for testing the data by applying regression and correlation tests, and the results signified that there is a significant impact of social media platforms on panic bulk buying of grocery items, panic bulk buying of sanitary products, and herd mentality in the presence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Keywords:** COVID-19 Pandemic, Social Media Platforms, Panic Bulk Buying, Grocery Items, Sanitary Products, Herd Mentality.

## Introduction

COVID-19, or coronavirus, is a crisis that has put all of humankind in danger; with danger, fear is synchronized, and this fear is not just the health concerns among the people but also the economic downfall of the countries. Social media platforms are a great essential of the modern era through which study can gather relevant knowledge about almost everything, but still, every bean has its black. (Naeem, 2020), social media is a very dangerous place for some emotionally charged people; it is human psychology that people like and engage with the content.

This can create misinformation and deception among people, and the same happened when the COVID-19 pandemic started. Many people started sharing false information about the COVID-19 virus, which caused panic around the world, and bulk buying panic began around the world (Sharma et al., 2020). This crisis has been covered globally due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and this has caused a drastic change

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in people's buying behavior, which is also affecting the world economy because of uncertainty and fear. (Ali, 2020) To get proper control over it, the governments of many countries have started to implement lockdowns so that the situation can be controlled. (Loxton, et al., 2020) Social media plays a great role as people have started bulk purchases of the necessary things, which include general groceries, baby supplies, and sanitary items and ext. It is because of the easy access to big social media platforms that people can share any information they get without even fact checking it which is a big concern for not just the people but also the governments because people then ignore the official guidelines of their representative governments and start to take some steps impulsively. (Ahmed & Murad, 2020). Due to social media platforms, fear and panic related to COVID-19 have increased significantly, which can impact the mental health and well-being of a person. According to the study, the most misinformation was spread through the world's biggest social media platform, Facebook, which caused fear and panic among the people of Iraq.

Turner (2020) reveals that in many countries like the UK, due to social media's misinformation and the UK's Prime Minister's speech, people panicked and placed so many online grocery orders that online grocery sites like Morrison's, TESCO, and ASDA's crashed. To understand the scale of bulk buying (Staff, 2020), there were approximately 79 million more grocery orders as compared to last year (in a month in Great Britain). In Malaysia, the sales of medical masks and hand sanitizers reached a record high of 800% increase as compared to last year (2019) (Bakalis et al., 2020; Lufkin, 2020; Naz, 2020). In Pakistan, the situation was quite the same when the first case of COVID-19 was detected. The government took all the necessary actions by implementing a smart lockdown in the country and by closing all the public gathering places like malls, marriage halls, education institutions, parks, places of worship, markets and ext. but still, the reaction from the general public indicated responsiveness and recklessness which was a big concern for the government because people ignored all the COVID-19 guidelines prescribed to them by the government. They all rushed to different retail stores to buy the essentials in bulk, and this caused more panic because the people who could not reach the supermarket were met with surprise when they saw empty shelves in the retail stores. This all implies that there is a lack of empathy among the people. The rich get all the essentials that they need, and the poor do not get it and are faced with a food crisis. Choi (2020) had a similar view. It stated that upper-class people have a herd mentality and that they do not associate themselves with the people below their status, and this could cause fear and pain in an outbreak of disease of some kind.

In Pakistan, the upper class (income group) normally consumes about three times more than that of the lower middle class and the lower class (income group). If the upper-class people started panic buying, then it would have a very negative impact on the lower middle class and the lower-class people. It might be a bigger problem for the representative government than the COVID-19 pandemic. Studies found that more than half of their respondents have faced difficulty with the shortage of items while shopping at retail stores and, more than 40% have faced difficulty in finding essential and non-essential items, only 30% of people said that they did not have any difficulty in finding necessary and non-essential items (Hammonds et al., 2020).

However, despite social media being one of the main reasons for creating fear and panic among people, the study cannot ignore the fact that due to social media,

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studies are aware of online grocery stores, which have helped not only people but all around the world but also the governments by providing all the necessary items at the doorsteps (Redman, 2020). Online grocery store sales have tripled, and there was an overall increase of more than 300% in the starting stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Online grocery sales were on such a rise that different retailers had to hire more employees to handle the online grocery orders, and they also hired more delivery drivers to deliver those online orders; the people of the capital of Pakistan, Islamabad, have started to buy online groceries because they fear that if they go out, they could contract the COVID-19 virus and even though the local online groceries store are slow at delivery that is two days but still they follow all the necessary COVID-19 guidelines (SOPs) (APP, 2020).

**Problem Statement**

- This study is done to find the impact of social media on the panic bulk buying of grocery items and sanitary products in the critical situation of the COVID-19 pandemic and how the government of Pakistan is tackling this situation. In this situation, the panic bulk buying of necessary grocery goods has increased due to the fear of shortage of the necessity items, and this has garnered the attention of all the researchers because they are confused about the fact that whether the psychological toll this situation has on the minds of the people or is it because of the social media and the non-authentic news on it.

- Much research has been done on COVID-19. Still, none of the researches were conducted simultaneously in Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad, three major metropolitan cities of Pakistan, and neither were these specific variables taken into consideration, which are social media, panic bulk buying and herd mentality in accordance with a moderator COVID-19 (Chawla, 2020).

- This research was done to understand the mentality of the people of Pakistan and how they had to cope with the COVID-19 situation under the panic created by social media about COVID-19.

- One of the main concerns in the COVID-19 situation is electronic word of mouth. It played a vital role in the bulk purchases of necessary items, and this has caused much distress for some emotionally charged people. It has increased in this COVID-19 situation because unnecessary traveling has been reduced. The government has banned the congregation and has advised the people to stay in their homes. (Nicola, et al., 2020)

- Some factors that are causing bulk buying During the COVID-19 pandemic are the website's advertisements, especially the pop-up ads; in the COVID-19 pandemic, people searched for different essential grocery items and medical supplies online, which caused Search Engine Optimization (SEO) to work its magic. It started showing different package deals on the different sites that users visited as pop-up ads, which caused people to buy those items impulsively (Lomas, 2020).

## Research Questions

1. What is the impact of social media platforms on bulk buying of grocery items during the COVID-19 pandemic?

2. What is the impact of social media platforms on bulk buying of sanitary products during the COVID-19 pandemic?

3. Did panic buying develop through social media during the COVID-19 pandemic?

4. Does panic bulk buying happen due to herd mentality?

## Scope

The research is done to investigate the people of Lahore, Islamabad and Karachi. This study aims to find out the role of social media platforms (Independent variable) in the panic bulk buying of grocery items, panic bulk buying of sanitary products and herd mentality (Dependent variable) during the COVID-19 pandemic (Moderator).

- **Sample:** Quantitative research is being conducted for primary data collection. The rotation of questionnaires in the form of Google forms is done with some specific questions in it; the data is being collected from about 350-400 people, both male and female, living in Lahore, Islamabad and Karachi, which is taken into account.

## Significance of Research

The study is done to provide the marketing field with additional information about the impact of social media platforms on the panic bulk buying of grocery items and panic bulk buying of sanitary products (herd mentality) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Limitations

This research has some limitations, which are as follows:

- The study had a short duration of research, which was months.
- The study did not have any financing for the research.
- The study had to follow all the COVID-19 restrictions while conducting this research.

## Panic Bulk Buying of Grocery Items

The role of social media platforms in the bulk buying of groceries during the COVID-19 pandemic is indicated by the trending of hashtags related to the shortage of grocery items on all of the big social media platforms across the world; this all adds up to the fact that due to social media fear is created among the people and because of fear the buying behavior of the people have changed drastically. Fear of COVID-19 has created panic across the consumers of the world, which has resulted in the immense bulk buying of groceries around the globe. According to Muhammad Naeem, social media is a place that can be quite dangerous for some people because people usually

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believe everything that is shown on the internet and do not even bother to even fact check the information, and this all creates panic and fear among some sensitive or emotional people (Naeem, 2020).

The hoarding of groceries and essential items was a common site all around the world at the start of the pandemic. According to A.K.M. Najmul Islam, Ali Farooq, Amandeep Dhir and Samuli Laato, it was not only the fear of being quarantined and health concerns but also the fact that due to this COVID-19 virus, the whole world was shutting down everything was getting close and which sparked the fear among the people that if the factories close down, then there would be a disruption in the supply chain. They might hold back the essential grocery items, so this caused the people of the world to go into a state of frenzies, and they all started to stockpile every essential item that they could get their hands on (Laato, Islam, islam, & whelan, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has turned into a major crisis around the world, and this pandemic has affected the global economy. Some would say that it has introduced a new world order, which the changing buying behavior can be seen by the people of the world (Sharma & Jhamb, 2020). The survival instinct kicked in due to the fear of the COVID-19 pandemic, and people around the world started to stock-pile essential medical supplies like masks, gloves and sanitizers and long-lasting grocery items like pasta and canned food. They did so because of uncertainty and fear caused by the COVID-19 virus, and this panic has disrupted the world economy (Sharma, et al., 2020).

The coronavirus is a very deadly virus and is a great threat to humankind; the outcome and the containment measures are largely unknown, and up till now, there has been no proper vaccine to prevent the COVID-19 virus. The purchase of essential products like medical supplies and sanitization products is reasonable, but it will increase a lot in the upcoming months. According to Arteaga & Park (2020), when panic is increased among consumers, they stop thinking reasonably and start taking impulsive or immature actions, and this is caused when the feeling of anxiety overrules a consumer's sense of decision-making. The consumers then begin to make decisions without proper reasoning, which can be harmful to them or others.

According to Dolgui, Ivanov, & Sokolov (2020), Panic buying is a phenomenon in which a change can be seen in the buying behavior of the customer, which causes a person to buy extraordinarily large quantities of products or different varieties of products (generally grocery items) because of some disaster, panic buying can occur before a catastrophe when the warning about the catastrophe is issued, in the presence of a disaster or after the disaster, these disasters can be anything an earthquake, a tsunami, a hurricane, a global pandemic or an epidemic of a virus of some sort. Panic buying can also be caused by an anticipated large increase in the price or an unexpected shortage of goods.

**Panic Bulk Buying of Sanitary Products**

According to Spectra (2020) and Lufkin (2020), stockpiling of sanitary products such as medical masks and sanitizers has been on such a rise that there has been a global shortage of such essential sanitary products, and there is no indication as to when these hygienic products would be in stock. In Malaysia, the sales of hand

sanitizers increased by more than 800% in a week as compared to last year (2019), when the total sales of hand sanitizers were valued at $237,176 or RM 1 million.

Due to COVID-19, many retail stores were out of stock for all the necessary sanitary products like masks, sanitizers, gloves, hazmat suites and many other products which help in the prevention of COVID-19 virus and which led to people searching for these sanitary products on online sites like Amazon, eBay and many more. Still, the problem was that prices of such products were increased vastly; it was found that the cost of products like masks and hand sanitizers were selling for about 582% more profit, and people were also spreading false information to sell more of such products they were claiming more than what the actual product can do. This led to some online retailers taking some action; Amazon removed about one million sanitary products from its site, which were claiming bogus COVID-19 facts and going against their website's policies (DiResta et al., 2020).

Research conducted by Yuen, Wang, Ma, & Li (2020) regarding the COVID-19 virus has been well-praised. In this research, the main factors that cause panic buying behavior in people have been identified. Those factors are (1) fear of the unknown, (2) perception, (3) social psychology and (4) coping behavior. In the research, it was found that humans are naturally curious, and when they get to know about a disaster or an upcoming disaster then, they like to take matters into their own hands. Similarly, it happened in the situation of the COVID-19 virus; when people analyzed the probability of contracting the coronavirus high, they were inclined to take action in their own hands and started making impulsive decisions, which resulted in panic buying behavior among the people; they so to minimize the risk of contracting the COVID-19 virus.

**Social Media Platforms**

The spread of fake news and misinformation has caused a lot of damage to the worldwide businesses of both the print and digital media. On social media platforms, false news regarding any topic spreads like wildfire, and this spreading of fake news causes a lot of real-world problems. This false news can have an adverse impact on the minds of millions of emotional users. Recently, many steps have been taken on a global forum to counter the spread of false news so that there is not as much panic and fear created among the people (Islam et al., 2020).

According to Lunn et. at (2020), whenever a new form of crisis is disclosed on the global forum, panic among people starts to increase organically. Still, the media, whether it be traditional media or social media, contributes a lot to the creation of panic and anxiety by putting out news headlines and news stories that will gain much attention. The attention these news headlines get is due to the fact that these news channels and news pages play with the fear among the people, and this garners much attention. The study can take the practical example of the Ebola outbreak of 2014-2015 or the H1N1 Swine flu of 2009 when these news outlets created so much panic among the people with their fear-inclusive headlines and news stories.

The study done by Araz Ramazan Ahmad and Hersh Rasool Murad further indicates that due to social media misinformation, fear of COVID-19 was generated among the people of Iraq Kurdistan. This fear can have a very negative impact on the

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mental health of people, and according to them, the most misinformation about COVID-19 was spread through the world's biggest social media (Ahmed & Murad, 2020).

According to Laato, Islam, Islam, and Whelan (2020), COVID-19 is a serious threat to humankind. According to the director of WHO, this is a great "INFODEMIC," which means that due to this COVID-19 virus, there is a huge amount of false news and misinformation which is being circulated on online platforms. People are forwarding this fake and misleading information without even fact-checking it. This misinformation is one of the main causes of fear and pain among the people of the world. It has become a huge task for the governments of the world to counter this fake news so this spreading of misinformation can be stopped.

Social media is now working on generating social content to promote the content, which generates more views and creates more engagement among the people. The risk of COVID-19 has created uncertainty in the people and the content, which has a negative topic and that will create much criticism spread easily throughout the different social media platforms. Due to the increasing number of users of social media during the pandemic, the spread of sensationalism has increased drastically (Laato, Islam, islam, & whelan, 2020).

## COVID-19 Pandemic

According to Ali (2020), governments all around the world have started to implement lockdowns to get proper control of the COVID-19 virus situation. They did so by closing all the public gathering places like malls, marriage halls, educational institutions, parks, places of worship, markets, ext. Some countries have also imposed smart-lockdowns, which means they do not impose lockdowns on all of a country or a city but only put those areas of the city in lockdown which have the most amount of people infected with the COVID-19 virus they did so that the country's economy does not collapse totally and also so that the COVID-19 situation can be controlled.

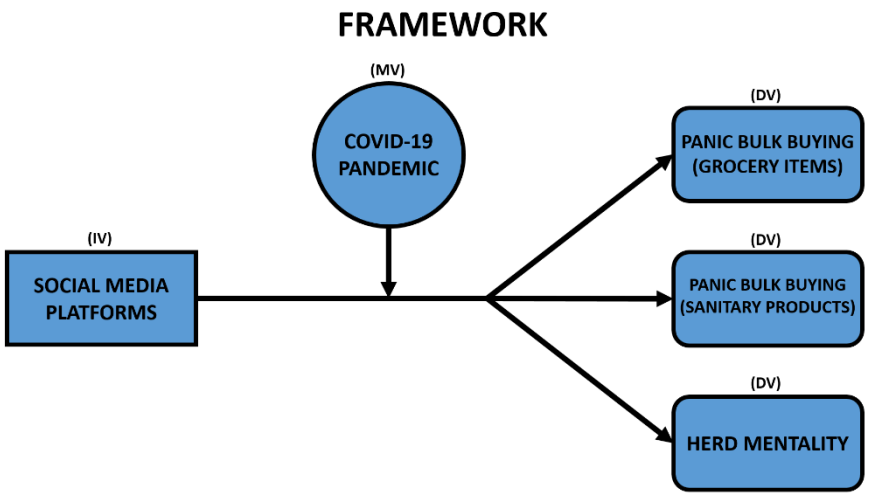
In the event of an emergency or crisis, food stockpiling behavior emerges. Disasters like tsunamis, hurricanes and earthquakes impact the direct supply chain and all those who are included in it, like vendors, producers, retailers and distributors; in a pandemic, this supply chain is not directly disrupted. However, most people have started online grocery shopping in contrast to physical shopping in the current COVID-19 pandemic (Laato, Islam, islam, & whelan, 2020).

## Herd Mentality

Herd mentality has been defined by Gazali (2020) as the behavior and alignment of thoughts of individuals in a specific group that is not generated by some authority, a government, or a leading public figure; instead, it is generated through the local interactions among the group's people or the agents of that specific group. This all indicates that the people or the group who have heard mentality do not even bother to look into an issue if that issue is not directed at them. They only care about themselves and the people associated with their group, and they do not care about these people whom they perceive have a lower status than them.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a great increase in the herd mentality among the consumers of the world; the herd mentality ages consumers to stock-pile grocery items or consumer goods, and this all indicates that they only think about themselves and do not think about others and collective society that someone might need it more than me. Coronavirus has threatened the sense of security among the people of the world. When this happens, the upper-class people who are used to living an upper-class life do not want to compromise on the essentials of their lives even if they have to get those essential things at the expense of others (below their status) and this has caused the unequal distribution of basic rest ces, or in other words, overconsumption caused by herd mentality has led to a depletion of basic rest ces (Loxton, et al., 2020).

**Research Framework**




**Hypotheses**

$H_{o1}$: There is no significant impact of Social Media Platforms on Panic Bulk Buying Of Grocery Items.

$H_1$: There is a significant impact of Social Media Platforms on Panic Bulk Buying Of Grocery Items.

$H_{o2}$: There is no significant impact of social media platforms on Panic Bulk's buying of sanitary products.

$H_2$: Social media platforms have a significant impact on Panic Bulk's buying of sanitary products.

$H_{o3}$: There is no significant impact of Social Media Platforms on Herd Mentality.

$H_3$: Social media platforms have a significant impact on Herd mentality.

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$H_{o4}$: COVID-19 does not moderate the relationship between Social Media platforms and Panic Bulk Buying Of Grocery Items.

$H_4$: COVID-19 positively moderates the relationship between Social Media platforms and Panic Bulk Buying Of Grocery Items.

$H_{o5}$: COVID-19 does not moderate the relationship between social media platforms and Panic Bulk's buying of sanitary products.

$H_5$: COVID-19 positively moderates the relationship between social media platforms and Panic Bulk's buying of sanitary products.

$H_{o6}$: COVID-19 does not moderate the relationship between Social Media platforms and Herd Mentality.

$H_6$: COVID-19 positively moderates the relationship between Social Media platforms and Herd Mentality.

## Literature Review

Consumer behavior in the form of panic buying, herd mentality and discretionary spending, as anticipated by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, appears to align with behaviors exhibited during shocks and crises of the past (Loxton et al., 2020). Consumer behavior has changed the response because of the pandemic, which is impacting local and global online shopping (Ali, 2020; Ozturk, 2020). Social media can play an active role in developing consumer panic buying during the COVID-19 pandemic (Naeem, 2020). The pressing issues and global challenges of solid waste management for making the air clean were identified with this research. (Sharma et al., 2020). Work to educate media consumers on what constitutes good and reliable information and how to think critically through this information is done (Ahmed & Murad, 2020). The research is done to suggest the examination of the 2014 Ebola crisis on the newspaper coverage and news on the social media platform. There is uncertainty surrounding Ebola (Lunn et al., 2020). The research used the system to prevent the creation of fake news collides with many democratic (Islam et al., 2020).

Hao, Wang, & Zhou (2020). Identified the downside that e-commerce brings to society. When e-commerce plate forms have a food run under extreme situations.

## Research Gap

After analyzing the previous research study, we have found multiple research gaps. Some of the most prominent gaps the study found were that in most of the research articles, the research was done in those countries that were less impacted by active COVID-19 cases. The research is based in Pakistan, where there are significantly more active COVID-19 cases than in countries where previous research was conducted. Laato, Islam, Farooq, & Dhir's (2020) study focused on Pakistan because in previous research, these variables are (Indirect Variable) Social Media Platforms (Dependent Variable), Panic Bulk Buying of Grocery Items, Panic Bulk Buying of Sanitary Products and Herd Mentality and (Moderating Variable) COVID-19 Pandemic were not used together in a study in these specific cities of Pakistan (Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad).

## Methodology

The main reason for conducting this research is to find the role of Social Media Platforms in the Panic Bulk Buying of grocery items and Panic Bulk Buying of Sanitary Products during the COVID-19 Pandemic. A quantitative study was conducted, and primary data was collected from 436 respondents from Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi through online questionnaires in the form of Google Forms. The scales for the questionnaire were drafted through previous research articles. Moreover, the deductive approach and non-random convenient sampling are used for this study. The variables used in the study have been further divided into their dimensions and have been thoroughly studied by reviewing previous literature and by referring to previous literature studies that were able to find out the relationships between the selected variables.

The hypothesis is tested through SPSS software, and the reliability test of the data (responses of questionnaires) is going to be analyzed using Cronbach's alpha analysis, correlation, and regression analysis.

## Research Design

### Research Approach

This study uses the Deductive approach because it is quantitative and less risky, and the study has also developed the hypothesis on the basis of existing theories. According to the analysis, this research is highly recommended by the previous researchers because nothing new specific is being discovered in the research. Rather, an existing theory is being worked upon. This is one of the main reasons that the Deductive approach is less risky than the Inductive approach, which is the opposite as it is based on finding something new.

The data collected from 436 respondents (memon, hwa, ting, & ramayah, 2020) from Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad through online questionnaires is being tested by using a Statistical tool (SPSS software) and through the Statistical tools, the study is able to find the role of independent variables (Social et al.) on the dependent variable (Panic et al. of Grocery Items, Panic Bulk Buying of Sanitary Products and Herd Mentality) in the presence of a moderator (COVID-19 Pandemic).

### Research Strategy

Studies are conducting quantitative research to investigate the impact that social media platforms have on panic bulk buying of grocery items, panic bulk buying of sanitary products and herd mentality in the presence of the COVID-19 pandemic. The study will collect responses through online questionnaires (Google Forms), which will be considered primary data. The study has constructed the questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale and dichotomous scales from previous research.

### Data Collection Techniques

The study collected data for the research through online questionnaires using Google Forms, and the study used the scales from different previous researchers in the

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questionnaire (Lins & Aquino, 2020; Kaya, 2020; Ahmed et al., 2020; Ahmed & Murad, 2020).

## Unit Of Analysis

The study used an Individual unit of analysis in the research as the respondents who filled out the questionnaire were individuals.

## Data Analysis Techniques

The hypothesis of the research is tested using SPSS software because it is a highly recommended software in statistics. The reliability test of the data (responses to questionnaires) is going to be analyzed by using Cronbach's alpha analysis, correlation analysis, and regression analysis, and this will also help determine their impact and relation. The results that the study has extracted from running these tests are also shown in the form of tables and graphs for better understanding.

## Credibility and Reliability

The credibility and reliability of the research by reporting Cronbach Alpha and making sure not to go below the minimum value of Cronbach Alpha, which is 0.6, because that will not be acceptable for the reliability and credibility of the data and to make the research more accurate and credible study has used a big sample size because if the same results are coming in again and again, then this also increases the researches credibility and reliability.

## Ethical Considerations

The study collected the data while keeping ethical considerations as the utmost priority. The study informed every respondent about the circulation of the questionnaire, and the study also mentioned to every respondent that it was for the final year of academic research. The university and study conduct had not asked the respondents to mention their names and email addresses so that their identity could be anonymous. The study did not force any of the respondents in any way to fill out this questionnaire within the maximum time available to them. The study made sure to the respondents that this data would be used only for the research article and would not be used for any other purpose, and this is done to keep the personal data of the respondents safe while maintaining privacy.

## Data Analysis

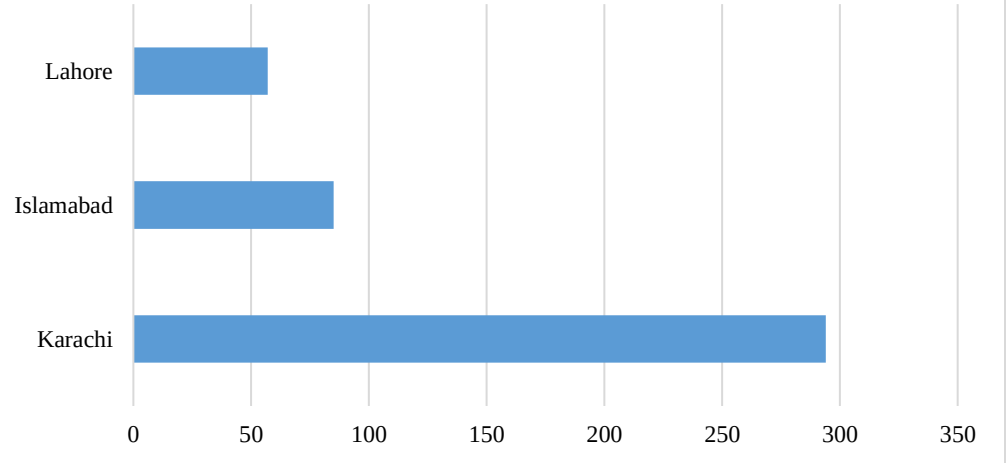
## Demographics

The study used descriptive testing on demographics such as location, gender, age, education level, and income group (Household Income), and the study used bar graphs to show the results/summary of the collected data.

## Bar Graphs and Interpretations

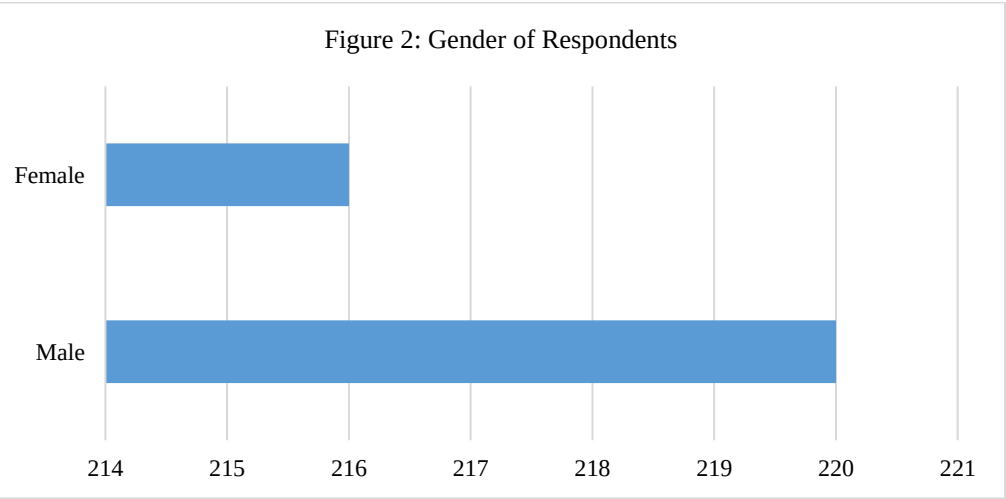
### Interpretation

Figure 1: Location of Respondents




The above bar graph represents the location of the 436 respondents; there are three location categories, which include Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad. It is indicated in the graph that the highest number of responses were from Karachi, with 294 (67.4%) responses and 85 (19.5%) responses from Islamabad. Lastly, the least number of responses came from Lahore, which is 57 (13.1%) responses.

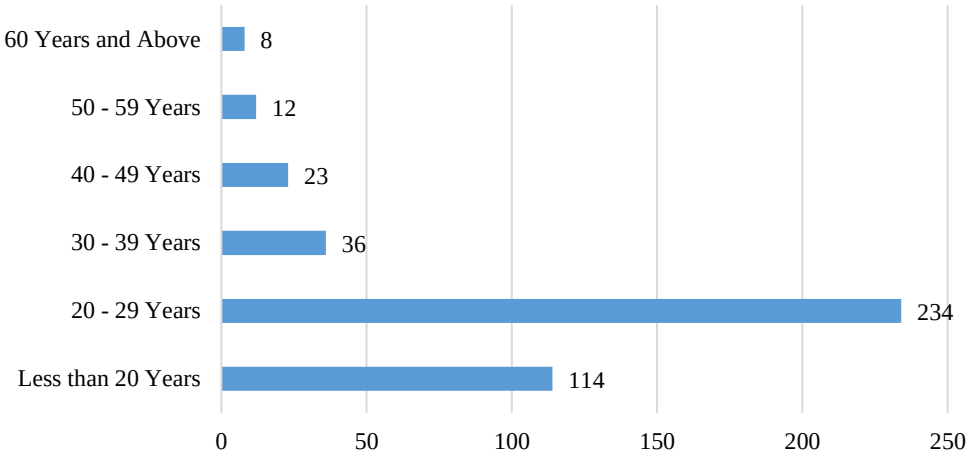
Figure 2: Gender of Respondents




In the above gender bar graph, there are two respective genders (male and female). The study collected data from 436 respondents, and among them, the majority of the respondents were male, which is 220 (50.5%), and the rest were female respondents, which was 216 (49.5%).

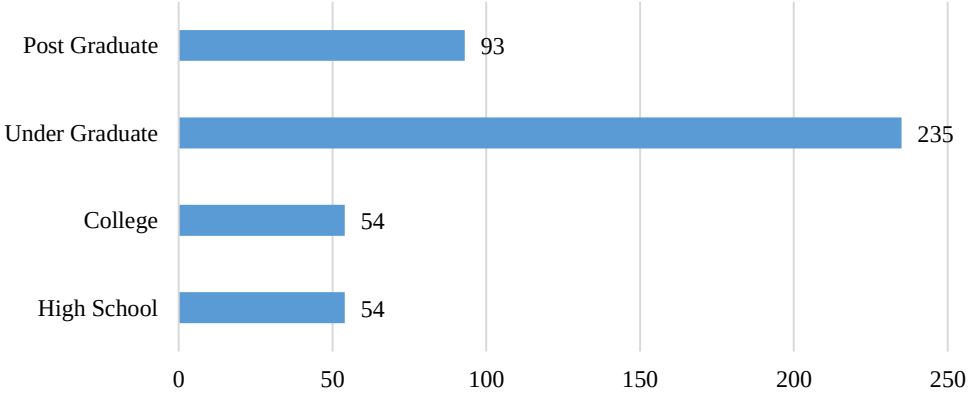
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Figure 3: Age of Respondents




The graph above represents the age of the respondents. Six age sections start from less than 20 years, 20-29 years, 30-39 years, 40-49 years, 50-59 years and lastly, 60 years and above. The data collection from 436 respondents shows us that the highest number of respondents that is (55.7%) of the total respondents were present in the age bracket of 20-29 years, which is 243 respondents. One hundred fourteen respondents that are (26.1%) of the total respondents fall under the age bracket of fewer than 20 years, 36 respondents that are (8.3%) of the total respondents fall under the age bracket of 30-39 years, 23 respondents that are (5.3%) of the total respondents fall under the age bracket of 40-49 years, 12 respondents that are (2.8%) of the total respondents fall under the age bracket of 50-59 years, and lastly, eight respondents that are (1.8%) of the total respondents fall under the age bracket of 60 years and above.

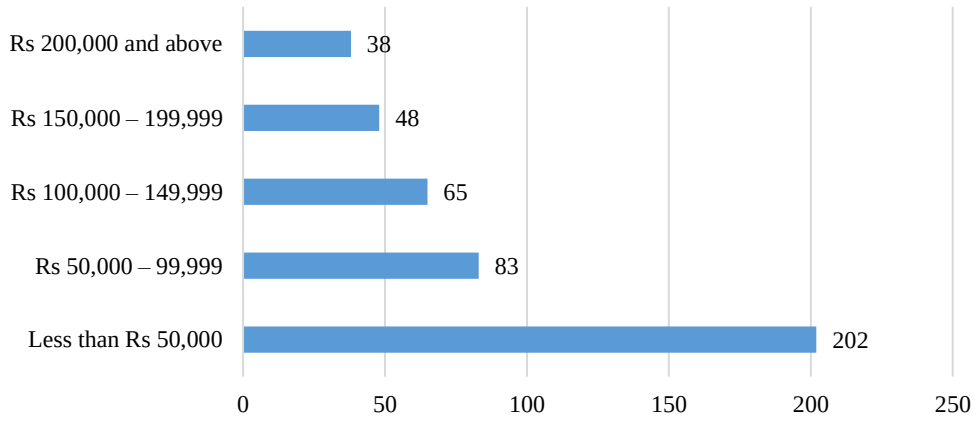
Figure 4: Level of Education of Respondents




The above graph represents the educational level of the respondents, and it has four categories, which include (High School, College, Undergraduate and Post Graduate). After analyzing the data, the study came to know that the highest number of respondents fall under the Under Graduate category, which is 235 (53.9%) respondents as their education level, 93 (21.3%) respondents fall under the category of

Post Graduate as their education level, 54 (12.4%) respondents fall under the category of College and High School both as their education level.

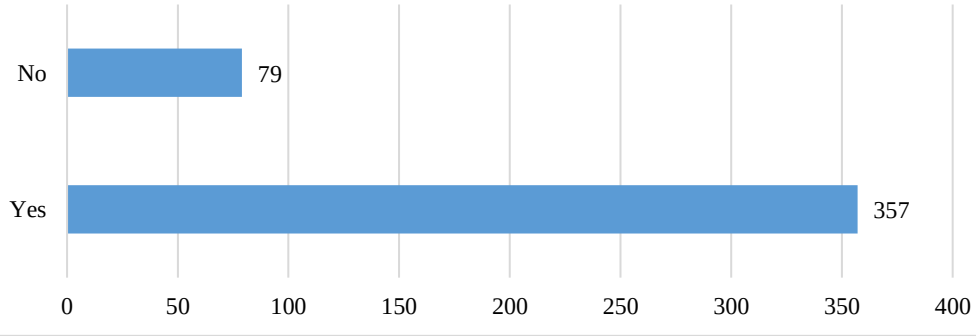
Figure 5: Income group categories for Household of Respondents




In the above bar graph, there are five income group categories, which include less than RS.50000, RS.50000 – RS.99999, RS.100000 – RS.149999, RS.150000 – RS.199999 and RS.200000 and above. Four hundred thirty-six responses were taken and out of which the maximum amount of respondents fall under the income group category of less than RS.50000, which is 202 (46.3%) respondents, 83 (19%) respondents fall under the income group category of RS.50000 – RS.99999, 65 (14.9%) respondents fall under the income group category of RS.100000 – RS.149999, 48 (11%) respondents fall under the income group category of RS.200000 and above and lastly with least number of respondents 38 (8.7%) respondents fall under the income group category of RS.150000 – RS.199999.

Dichotomous Yes/No Questions (Disciptives):

Figure 6: Does panic buying behavior develops through social media during the Covid-19 pandemic

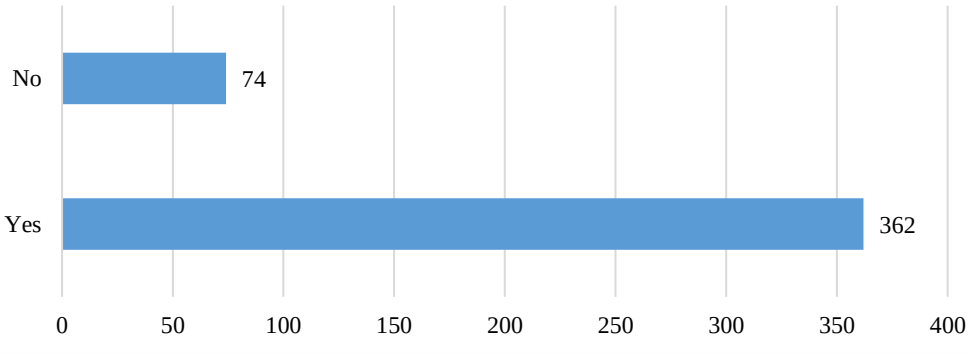



In the above bar graph study, we asked the respondents if panic buying behavior develops through social media during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the respondents provided us with their opinion in the form of either Yes or No (Yes being

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they agree with the statement and No being, they disagree with the statement). Out of 436 responses, 357 (81.9%) responses were Yes that they agree with the above statement, and 79 (18.1%) responses were No that they disagree with the above statement.

Figure 7: Generally get news related to Covid-19 pandemic on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc




In the above bar graph, the study asked the respondents whether they generally get news related to the COVID-19 pandemic on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc. The respondents have provided us with their opinion in the form of either Yes or No (Yes being they agree with the statement and No being they disagree with the statement). Out of 436 responses, 362 (83%) responses were Yes that they agreed with the above statement, and 74 (17%) responses were No that they disagreed with the above statement.

## Quantitative Study

### Reliability

To check if the gathered data was consistent or not, a reliability test was applied, as well as to check if the measurements were repeated several times or not.

The study has run a reliability analysis on every variable separately to check the consistency of responses and the acceptability of the scale.

**Table 1: Reliability Analysis of Variables**

| Variables | Cronbach's Alpha | Number Of Items |
|---|---|---|
| COVID-19 | 0.664 | 5 |
| Panic Bulk Buying Of Grocery Items | 0.745 | 4 |
| Panic Bul Buying Of Sanitary Products | 0.811 | 6 |
| Social Media Platforms | 0.537 | 6 |
| Herd Mentality | 0.811 | 4 |

### COVID-19

The reliability test showed that Cronbach's Alpha for COVID-19 was 0.664, which signifies that the scale has moderate reliability and all of its items are closely related and have moderate consistency; the number of items is five and are unidimensional.

### Panic Bulk Buying Of Grocery Items

On applying the reliability test to PANIC BULK BUYING OF GROCERY ITEMS, Cronbach's Alpha came out to be 0.745, which signifies that the scale is strongly reliable. As the value is greater than 0.6, it indicates that the dimensions are all closely related items. There is a strong consistency; there are other items in this dimension, and it is unidimensional.

### Panic Bulk Buying Of Sanitary Products

On applying the reliability test to PANIC BULK BUYING OF SANITARY PRODUCTS, Cronbach's Alpha came out to be 0.811, which signifies that the scale is strongly reliable, and as the value is greater than 0.6, indicates that the dimensions are all closely related items. There is a strong consistency; there are six items in this dimension, and it is unidimensional.

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## Social Media Platform

The reliability test showed that the Cronbach's Alpha for SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS was 0.537, which signifies that the scale has moderate reliability and all of its items are closely related and have moderate consistency, the number of items is six and are unidimensional (the study has shown general data results for this variable, study can further improve the value of Cronbach's Alpha for SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS by removing one or more items from this variable).

## Herd Mentality

On applying the reliability test to HERD MENTALITY, Cronbach's Alpha came out to be 0.811, which means there is a strongly reliable and acceptable scale. As the value is greater than 0.6, it indicates that the dimension has all closely related items. There is a strong consistency; there are other items in this dimension, and it is unidimensional.

## Correlation analysis

**Table 2: Correlation Analysis**

| | | AVG COVID | AVGPBBGI | AVGPBBSP | AVGSMP | AVGHM |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| AVG COVID | Pearson Correlation | 1 | 0.498 | 0.494 | 0.438 | 0.354 |
| | Sig (2-tailed) | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 |
| | N | 436 | 436 | 436 | 436 | 436 |
| AVGPBBGI | Pearson Correlation | 0.498 | 1 | 0.758 | 0.467 | 0.692 |
| | Sig (2-tailed) | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 |
| | N | 436 | 436 | 436 | 436 | 436 |
| AVGPBBSP | Pearson Correlation | 0.494 | 0.758 | 1 | 0.461 | 0.746 |
| | Sig (2-tailed) | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 |
| | N | 436 | 436 | 436 | 436 | 436 |
| AVGSMP | Pearson Correlation | 0.438 | 0.467 | 0.461 | 1 | 0.442 |
| | Sig (2-tailed) | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 |
| | N | 436 | 436 | 436 | 436 | 436 |
| AVGHM | Pearson Correlation | 0.354 | 0.692 | 0.746 | 0.442 | 1 |
| | Sig (2-tailed) | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 |
| | N | 436 | 436 | 436 | 436 | 436 |

a. Correlation is significant at 0.01

A correlation analysis was done on all the hypotheses mentioned above, which helped us analyze the relationship between these variables. The correlation value is anywhere from +1 to -1. If the value came out to be near +1, it indicated that the relation between the two variables is strong and positive, but if a value is towards 0, it shows that the relation is weak. A -1 value shows a negative relationship between the two variables. Pearson correlation value tells us about the degree of relationship among variables.

Alpha's value = 0.05

N = 436

Significance value = 0.000

- **COVID-19 And Panic Bulk Buying Of Grocery Items**

  Pearson Correlation = 0.498

  The value of Pearson correlation indicates that COVID-19 and Panic Bulk Buying Of Grocery Items are moderately correlated; the above table highlights the value of sig as 0.000, which is less than 0.05. This implies that both variables have a significant relationship.

- **COVID-19 And Panic Bulk Buying Of Sanitary Products**

  Pearson Correlation = 0.494

  The value of Pearson correlation indicates that COVID-19 and Panic Bulk Buying Of Sanitary Products are moderately correlated; the above table highlights the value of sig as 0.000, which is less than 0.05. This implies that both variables have a significant relationship.

- **COVID-19 And Social Media Platforms**

  Pearson Correlation = 0.438

  The value of Pearson correlation indicates that COVID-19 and Social Media Platforms are moderately correlated; the above table highlights the value of sig as 0.000, which is less than 0.05. This implies that both variables have a significant relationship.

- **COVID-19 and Herd Mentality**

  Pearson Correlation = 0.354

  The value of the Pearson correlation indicates that COVID-19 and Herd Mentality are weakly correlated; the above table highlights the value of sig as 0.000, which is less than 0.05; this implies that both variables have a significant relationship.

- **Panic Bulk Buying Of Grocery Items And Panic Bulk Buying Of Sanitary Products**

  Pearson Correlation = 0.758

  The value of Pearson correlation indicates that Panic Bulk Buying Of Grocery Items and Panic Bulk Buying Of Sanitary Products are strongly correlated; the above table highlights the value of significance as 0.000, which is less than 0.05. This implies that both variables have a significant relationship.

- **Panic Bulk Buying of Grocery Items and Social Media Platforms**

  Pearson Correlation = 0.467

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The value of the Pearson correlation indicates that Panic Bulk Buying Of Grocery Items and Social Media Platforms are moderately correlated; the above table highlights the value of sig as 0.000, which is less than 0.05. This implies that both these variables have a significant relationship.

- **Panic Bulk Buying of Grocery Items and Herd Mentality**

Pearson Correlation = 0.692

The value of the Pearson correlation indicates that Panic Bulk Buying Of Grocery Items and Herd Mentality are moderately correlated; the above table highlights the value of sig as 0.000, which is less than 0.05. This implies that both these variables have a significant relationship.

- **Panic Bulk Buying of Sanitary Products and Social Media Platforms**

Pearson Correlation = 0.461

The value of the Pearson correlation indicates that Panic Bulk Buying Of Sanitary Products and Social Media Platforms are moderately correlated; the above table highlights the value of sig as 0.000, which is less than 0.05. This implies that both variables have a significant relationship.

- **Panic Bulk Buying of Sanitary Products and Herd Mentality**

Pearson Correlation = 0.746

The Pearson correlation value indicates that Panic Bulk Buying Of Sanitary Products and Herd Mentality are strongly correlated; the above table highlights the value of sig as 0.000, which is less than 0.05. This implies that both variables have a significant relationship.

- **Social Media Platforms and Herd Mentality**

Pearson Correlation = 0.442

The value of Pearson correlation indicates that Social Media Platforms and Herd Mentality are moderately correlated; the above table highlights the value of significance as 0.000, which is less than 0.05. This implies that these variables have a significant relationship.

## Regression Analysis

A regression test is applied to check if the hypothesis is accepted or rejected based on the coefficient. A regression test is also used to depict the nature of the relationship among dependent and independent variables.

**Table 3: Model Summary**

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R square | Std Error of the Estimate |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 0.467 | 0.218 | 0.216 | 0.721 |

| |
|---|
| a. Predictors: (Constant) AVGSMP |

## Panic Bulk Buying of Grocery Items

As in the above table, the value of R Square is 0.218, which indicates that there is a 21.8% variation in the independent variable (Panic et al. Of Grocery Items) due to the independent variable (Social et al.).

| Table 4: Model summary | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R square | Std Error of the Estimate |
| 1 | 0.461[a] | 0.213 | 0.211 | 0.697 |
| a. Predictors: (Constant) AVGSMP | | | | |

## Panic Bulk Buying of Sanitary Products

As in the above table, the value of R Square is 0.213, which indicates that there is a 21.3% variation in the independent variable (Panic et al. Of Sanitary Products) due to the independent variable (Social et al.).

| Table 5: Model summary | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R square | Std Error of the Estimate |
| 1 | 0.442[a] | 0.196 | 0.194 | 0.806 |
| a. Predictors: (Constant) AVGSMP | | | | |

## Herd Mentality

As in the above table, the value of R Square is 0.196, which indicates that there is a 19.6% variation in the independent variable (Herd Mentality) due to the independent variable (Social et al.).

| Table 6: Analysis of variance Analysis (ANOVA) | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Model | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig |
| Regression | 62.882 | 1 | 62.882 | 120.816 | 0.000[b] |
| Residual | 225.887 | 434 | 0.520 | | |
| Total | 288.769 | 435 | | | |
| a. Dependent Variable: AVGPBBGI | | | | | |
| b. Predictors: (Constant) AVGSMP | | | | | |

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## Panic Bulk Buying of Grocery Items

$H_{o1}$: There is no significant impact of Social Media Platforms on Panic Bulk Buying Of Grocer Items.

$H_1$: There is a significant impact of Social Media Platforms on Panic Bulk Buying Of Grocery Items.

As the above table shows, the significance value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05 this, means H0 will be rejected, and on the opposite, H1 will be accepted to conclude study can say that there is a significant impact of Social Media Platforms on Panic Bulk Buying Of Grocery Items.

**Table 7: Analysis of variance Analysis (ANOVA)**

| Model | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Regression | 57.108 | 1 | 57.108 | 117.355 | 0.000[b] |
| Residual | 211.196 | 434 | 0.487 | | |
| Total | 268.35 | 435 | | | |
| a. Dependent Variable: AVGPBBSP | | | | | |
| b. Predictors: (Constant) AVGSMP | | | | | |

## Panic Bulk Buying of Sanitary Products

$H_{o2}$: There is no significant impact of social media platforms on Panic Bulk's buying of sanitary products.

$H_2$: Social media platforms have a significant impact on Panic Bulk's buying of sanitary products.

As the above table shows the significance value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05 this means $H_{o2}$ will be rejected and on the opposite, H1 will be accepted to conclude study can say that there is a significant impact of Social Media Platforms on Panic Bulk Buying Of Sanitary Products.

**Table 8: Analysis of variance Analysis (ANOVA)**

| Model | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Regression | 68.715 | 1 | 68.715 | 105.534 | 0.000[b] |
| Residual | 282.585 | 434 | 0.651 | | |
| Total | 351.300 | 435 | | | |
| a. Dependent Variable: AVGHM | | | | | |
| b. Predictors: (Constant) AVGSMP | | | | | |

## Herd Mentality

$H_{o3}$: There is no significant impact of Social Media Platforms on Herd Mentality.

$H_3$: Social media platforms have a significant impact on Herd mentality.

As the above table shows the significance value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05 this means H0 will be rejected and on the opposite H1 will be accepted, to

conclude study can say that there is a significant impact of Social Media Platforms on Herd Mentality.

| Table 9: Coefficients of [a] | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardize Coefficients | t | Sig |
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| (Constant) | 0.527 | 0.154 | | 3.427 | 0.001 |
| AVGSMP | 0.452 | 0.065 | 0.305 | 6.964 | 0.000 |
| AVG COVID | 0.561 | 0.065 | 0.394 | 8.600 | 0.000 |
| Interaction_Term | -0.043 | 0.019 | -0.092 | -2.221 | 0.027 |
| a. Dependent Variable: AVGPBBGI | | | | | |

**Social Media Platforms and Panic Bulk Buying of Grocery Items**

$H_{o4}$: There is no significant impact of Social Media Platforms on Panic Bulk Buying of Grocery Items.

$H_4$: There is a significant impact of Social Media Platforms on Panic Bulk Buying Of Grocery Items.

In the above table the significance value is 0.000 which is less than 0.05 so this indicates the acceptance of $H_1$ and rejection of $H_0$. In short, the study can say that social media platforms have a significant impact on Panic Bulk's buying of grocery items.

**COVID-19: (Moderator)**

$H_{o5}$: COVID-19 negatively moderates the relationship between Social Media platforms and Panic Bulk Buying Of Grocery Items.

$H_5$: COVID-19 positively moderates the relationship between Social Media platforms and Panic Bulk Buying Of Grocery Items.

In the above table the significance value of the Interaction Term is 0.027, which is less than 0.05, so this indicates the acceptance of H1 and rejection of H0. In short, study can say COVID-19 positively moderates the relationship between Social Media platforms and Panic Bulk Buying Of Grocery Items.

**Regression Equation**

Panic Bulk Buying of Grocery Items = 0.452 (Social Media Platforms) -0.043 (Social et al. * COVID-19) + 0.527

As the sig value is 0.000, which tends to be less than 0.05 this means that Social Media Platforms are also significant.

As the sig value is 0.000, which tends to be less than 0.05, this means that the interaction term is also significant.

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One unit increase in Social Media Platform will result in increase in Panic Bulk Buying Of Grocery Items by 0.452 units.

**Table 10: Coefficients of [a]**

| | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardize Coefficients | t | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| (Constant) | 0.560 | 0.149 | | 3.758 | 0.000 |
| AVGSMP | 0.430 | 0.063 | 0.301 | 6.831 | 0.000 |
| AVG COVID | 0.529 | 0.063 | 0.386 | 8.363 | 0.000 |
| Interaction_Term | -0.033 | 0.019 | -0.073 | -1.755 | 0.080 |
| a. Dependent Variable: AVGPBBSP | | | | | |

**Social Media Platforms and Panic Bulk Buying of Sanitary Products**

H0: There is no significant impact of social media platforms on Panic Bulk's buying of sanitary products.

H1: Social media platforms have a significant impact on Panic Bulk's buying of sanitary products.

In the above table, the significance value is 0.000, which is less than 0.05, so this indicates the acceptance of H1 and rejection of H0. In short, the study can say that social media platforms have a significant impact on Panic Bulk's buying of sanitary products.

**COVID-19: (Moderator)**

H0: COVID-19 negatively moderates the relationship between social media platforms and Panic Bulk's buying of sanitary products.

H1: COVID-19 positively moderates the relationship between social media platforms and Panic Bulk's buying of sanitary products.

In the above table, the significance value of the Interaction Term is 0.080, which is more than 0.05, so this indicates the acceptance of H0 and rejection of H1. In short, study can say COVID-19 negatively moderates the relationship between Social Media platforms and Panic Bulk Buying Of Sanitary Products.

**Regression Equation**

Panic Bulk Buying Of Sanitary Products = 0.430 (Social et al.) -0.033 (Social et al. * COVID-19) + 0.560

As the sig value is 0.000, which tends to be less than 0.05, this means that Social Media Platforms are also significant.

As the sig value is 0.000, which tends to be less than 0.05, this means that the Interaction Term is also significant.

One unit increase in Social Media Platform will result in an increase in Panic Bulk Buying Of Sanitary Products by 0.430 units.

| Table 11: Coefficients of [a] | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardize Coefficients | t | Sig |
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| (Constant) | 0.832 | 0.181 | | 4.602 | 0.000 |
| AVGSMP | 0.576 | 0.076 | 0.352 | 7.534 | 0.000 |
| AVG COVID | 0.374 | 0.077 | 0.238 | 4.877 | 0.000 |
| Interaction_Term | -0.061 | 0.023 | -0.119 | -2.699 | 0.007 |
| a. Dependent Variable: AVGHM | | | | | |

**Social Media Platforms and Herd Mentality**

$H_0$: There is no significant impact of Social Media Platforms on Herd Mentality.

$H_1$: Social media platforms have a significant impact on Herd mentality.

In the above table, the significance value is 0.000, which is less than 0.05, so this indicates the acceptance of H1 and rejection of H0. In short, the study can say that social media platforms have a significant impact on herd mentality.

**COVID-19**

$H_0$: COVID-19 negatively moderates the relationship between Social Media platforms and Herd Mentality.

$H_1$: COVID-19 positively moderates the relationship between Social Media platforms and Herd Mentality.

In the above table the significance value of the Interaction Term is 0.007, which is less than 0.05, so this indicates the acceptance of H1 and rejection of H0. In short, the study can say COVID-19 positively moderates the relationship between Social Media platforms and Herd Mentality.

**Regression Equation**

Herd Mentality = 0.576 (Social et al.) -0.061 (Social et al. * Herd Mentality) + 0.832

As the sig value is 0.000, which tends to be less than 0.05 this means that Social Media Platforms are also significant.

As the sig value is 0.000, which tends to be less than 0.05, this means that the interaction term is also significant.

One unit increase in Social Media Platforms will result in an increase in Herd Mentality by 0.576 units.

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## Analysis and Discussion

The findings of the research are well aligned and consistent with the literature review as the literature review of the research shows that there is a significant role of social media platforms in the panic bulk buying of grocery items and panic bulk buying of sanitary products (herd mentality) in the COVID-19 pandemic and it is because in humanitarian crises like COVID-19, the main the use of information for the people around the world became the different social media platforms and on these platforms, people tend to post/share panic inducing content which has an adverse effect on the mental health of the people because they then start to take some impulsive actions which can be harmful to them and others and which is the case when the COVID-19 pandemic started people started panicking and rushed towards the grocery stores to stock up on essential and non-essential items and which resulted in the shortage of essential and non-essential items all around the world. The results and findings of the research conclude the following essential findings that are aligned and consistent with the existing literature:

- A significant amount of people which is 357 respondents out of 436, believe that panic buying behavior developed through social media platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- A significant number of people, 362 respondents out of 436, said that they generally get news related to the COVID-19 pandemic on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.

- Majority of people believe that there is a significant impact of social media platforms on panic bulk buying of grocery items in the presence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- A moderate amount of people believe that there is a significant impact of social media platforms on panic bulk buying of sanitary products in the presence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Majority of people believe that there is a significant impact of social media platforms on herd mentality in the presence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Conclusion

The purpose of conducting this research is to find the role of independent variables (Social et al.) on the dependent variable (Panic et al. Of Grocery Items, Panic Bulk Buying Of Sanitary Products, and Herd Mentality) in the presence of a moderator (COVID-19 Pandemic) and the findings that are obtained from this research are contributing to the body of literature review in a number of ways firstly it can be concluded that at the start of this humanitarian crisis known as COVID-19 pandemic, there was a huge amount of panic among the people of the world and which is large because of the panic-inducing content shared social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Etc. People usually do not fact check the content which they post on such social media platforms and these fake news/content just ignite the flames even more which is panic among the people and it was the same panic which caused the people all around the world to rush towards their nearest grocery stores to bulk buy

grocery items, sanitary products and other essential and non-essential items because they feared that due to the COVID-19 lockdown situation they might not get all these essential and non-essential grocery items and this is the reason why there was shortage of grocery items and sanitary products all around the world and if the governments all around the world had put out some sort of policy which restricted or censored/filtered the sharing of COVID-19 related content on social media platforms then their won't be as much panic created among the people and the governments around the world would have had handled the situation much better and global economy would have been much more stable then what it was a the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Recommendations

The results that the study gained after analyzing the data state that when the COVID-19 pandemic started, a lot of people started sharing news related to the COVID-19 pandemic on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Etc. Without fact-checking the news, this resulted in panic among people due to panic, people rushed toward the nearest grocery stores, supermarkets, pharmacies and medical equipment stores to stock up on the essential and non-essential items which indicated herd mentality among the people and in order to reduce this panic created on the social media platforms in the COVID-19 pandemic, the government should introduce some sort of policy regarding the sharing of panic-inducing content on social media platforms in humanitarian crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and by censoring/filtering the panic-inducing content there won't be any panic created by such social media platforms, and then the governments can handle the situation much better and study won't see the same global crisis as study saw on the starting of the pandemic.

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