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Study of consumer buying behaviour towards e- pharmacies in India

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ABSTRACT

Consumer buying behaviour towards e-pharmacies in India is gaining traction as more people are realizing the convenience and safety of online pharmacies. With the growth of internet penetration, many Indian consumers are now turning to online retailers for their medical needs. Consumers often have reservations about making purchases online, especially related to the security of their personal and financial information. E-pharmacies must be able to provide a secure platform for customers to make payments, as well as clearly communicate their privacy policies in order to build customer trust and increase sales. This study helps to understand the various factors that influence the choice of online pharmacy. Age is one factor that can have a profound effect on consumer buying behaviour in this sector. Younger consumers tend to be more tech-savvy and comfortable with making purchases online than their older counterparts, while older generations may feel uncomfortable using digital payment methods or lack access to technology altogether. It is important to consider the age factor when studying consumer buying behaviour in E-pharmacies, as it may shape the way consumers perceive and interact with E-pharmacies.

Keywords: E-Pharmacy, Consumer Behaviour, Awareness, Online Pharmacies.

1. BACKGROUND

Consumer buying behaviour towards e-pharmacies in India is gaining traction as more people are realising the convenience and safety of online pharmacies. With the growth of internet penetration, many Indian consumers are now turning to online retailers for their medical needs. Consumers often have reservations about making purchases online, especially related to the security of their personal and financial information. E-pharmacies must be able to provide a secure platform for customers to make payments and communicate their privacy policies to build customer trust and increase sales. This study helps to understand the various factors that influence the choice of online pharmacy. Online survey questionnaires were filled out by 116 respondents and were circulated using different media platforms. According to our data it was found that the majority of respondents still prefer buying offline medicine and the age range of those who purchase medicines online is from 20 to 30 years of age. There are various factors such as the availability of the prescribed drug, substandard medicine, and uncertainty of delivery time which contribute to people still buying medicine offline. In conclusion, E-Pharmacies have grown rapidly in India over the past few years. However, factors such as trustworthiness, convenience, and age should all be taken into account when developing strategies for E-Pharmacy success. With the right approach and customer engagement, E-Pharmacies can leverage their advantages over traditional pharmacies to become a successful option for consumers in India.

2. INTRODUCTION

India has come a long way in advancing its technology, with the introduction of the internet in India and being accessible to the public. This advancement has led to digitalization in every aspect of our daily life or can be said that the world is at the tip of our fingers, even our doctors are a phone call away and not just doctors our medicines are also at the tip of our fingers. The nature of the economy and the healthcare sector have both transformed as a result of e-commerce¹.

The launch of E-pharmacies in India is relatively recent, starting from around 2015. Despite this, the sector has made significant progress in recent years. India's e-pharmacy industry is expected to grow at a CAGR of 63% and reach a market value of US \$3,657 (25,000 Crores) by 2022, up from an estimated US \$512 million (3500 Crores) in 2018². Due to this growing market, many e-pharmacies, such as Medlife, Netmeds, and 1mg, have been introduced to the market. However, the growth of the e-pharmacy sector

has led to increased competition among pharmaceutical companies, who are now competing with each other to have their products sold.

Pharmaceutical companies have come out with various techniques to grab the public's or physicians' attention. A Canadian study revealed that doctor's prescribing practices are unsatisfactory due to the link with pharmaceuticals³ In the pharmaceutical industry, it is still difficult to understand consumer behaviour because the influencer, or doctor who writes the prescription, is the target customer rather than the end user⁴. The use of OTC drugs by patients is significantly influenced by pharmaceutical advertising⁵. Before buying any medication, customers either directly ask for the medication by describing their health issue or ask for it by the brand name.⁷

3. CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

This project aims to study and understand the factors that influence consumers in their decision-making process when purchasing medicines online. The rise of e-commerce has revolutionized the way people purchase goods and services, including medicines. With the increasing availability of e-pharmacies, consumers now have the convenience of ordering medicines from the comfort of their homes. However, the trend of buying medicines online raises concerns regarding the authenticity of the medicines, privacy and security of personal information, and the reliability of the delivery process. In this project, we will explore consumer perceptions and attitudes towards e-pharmacies and identify the key factors that drive consumer behaviour in this area. Our goal is to provide insights and recommendations for e-pharmacies to improve their services and better meet the needs and expectations of consumers. The results of this study will be valuable for e-pharmacies, healthcare providers, and policymakers in understanding consumer behaviour and creating strategies to meet the needs of consumers in the digital age.

4. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This is a quantitative survey research study. It is concerned with consumer buying behaviour towards the E-Pharmacies in India.

Sources of Data

Data were obtained by circulating an online survey form designed by the authors of this study.

Data Collection Method

The data for the research was collected by distributing the questionnaire using personal emails, WhatsApp, social networking sites like Facebook, and by one-to-one questionnaire requests.

Population

The population of research includes the people residing in India.

Sample frame

The sample size consists of 116 respondents.

Statistical Method

The sample collected was analyzed using Microsoft Excel to find percentages and plot graphs of the result.

5. RESULTS & DISCUSSION:

GENDER-WISE CLASSIFICATION:

Table 1 - Gender-wise Distribution

GENDER	NO OF RESPONDENT	%
Male	73	62.9
Female	43	37.1

As depicted there are more male respondents than female respondents.

AGE WISE CLASSIFICATION:

Table 2 - Age-wise Distribution

AGE GROUP	NO OF RESPONDENT	%
15-20	10	8.6
20-25	79	68.1
25-30	11	9.5
30-35	9	7.8
35-40	4	3.4
40+	3	2.6

Maximum no. of respondents was from age group 20-25 years followed by 25-30 years.

REGION OF RESIDENCE:

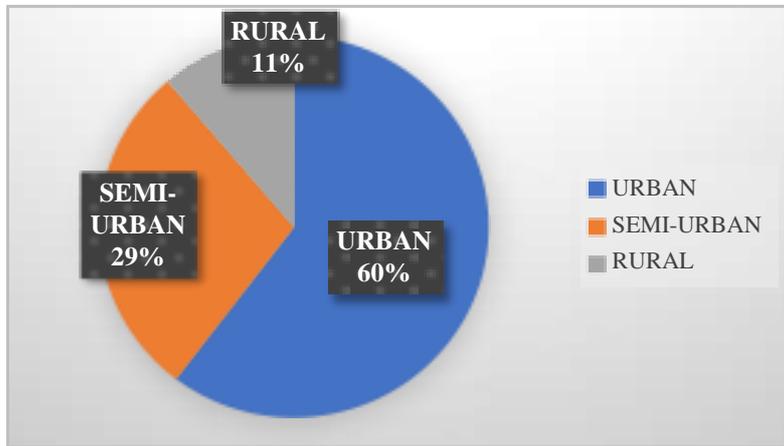


Figure 1 – Region of residence

REGION	NO OF RESPONDENT	%
URBAN	70	60.3
SEMI-URBAN	33	28.4
RURAL	13	11.2

Most respondents were from the urban region as per our data i.e 60.3%(n=70)

EVER PURCHASED ONLINE MEDICINE:

Table 4 - Online purchasing

RESPONSE	NO OF RESPONDENT	%
YES	53	45.7%
NO	63	54.3%

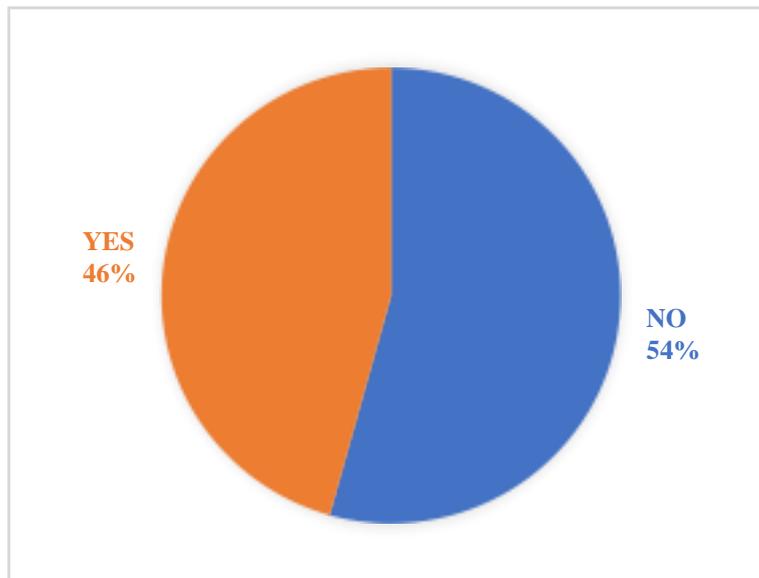


Figure 2- Online Purchasing

It was observed that the maximum no of respondents 54.3% (n=63) have not purchased from E-pharmacy.

AWARENESS OF E-PHARMACY

Table 5 - Awareness of E-pharmacy

RESPONSE	NO OF RESPONDENT	%
HIGH	37	31.9
MEDIUM	67	57.8
LOW	12	10.3

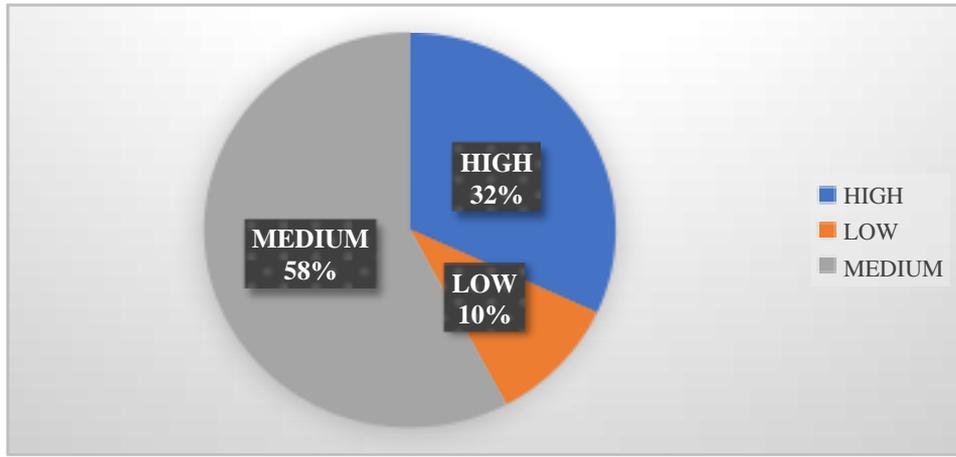


Figure 3 - Awareness of E-pharmacy

When asked to rate their awareness about E-pharmacy 57.8 % chooses medium awareness level.

INTRODUCTION TO E-PHARMACY

Table 6 - Introduction to E-pharmacy

RESPONSE	NO OF RESPONDENT	%
FAMILY	21	18.1
FRIENDS	40	34.5
SOCIAL MEDIA	68	58//
NEWS PAPER ADS	17	14.7
DOCTORS	5	4.3
COMMERCIAL ADS	47	40.5
SELF	2	1.8

Majority of our respondents were introduced to E-pharmacy by social media advertisements 58% (n=68), followed by commercial advertisements and only 4.3% (n= 5) were introduced by doctors or physicians.

REASON FOR AVOIDING E-PHARMACY:

Table 7 - Reason for avoiding E-pharmacy

RESPONSE	NO OF RSPONDENT	%
ONLINE PAYMENT	10	8.6
DELIVERY TIME	47	40.5
QUALITY	25	21.6
PRICE	18	15.5
AVAILABILITY	18	15.5
LACK OF AWARENESS	39	33.6
AFRAID OF TALKING MEDICINES WITHOUT PRESCRIPTION	42	36.2
OTHERS	2	1.8

When asked about our respondents' reason to avoid using E-pharmacy 40.5% (n=47) choose that they were unsure about the delivery time that whether the medicine will be delivered on time or not. 36.2% (n=42) are afraid to take medicines without a prescription. Only 18 respondents (15.5 %) worry about the price and availability of medicine.

PREFERRED E-PHARMACY:

Table 8 - Preferred E-pharmacy

E-PHARMACY	NO OF RESPONDENT	%
NETMEDS	33	28.4
PHARMEASY	41	35.3
IMG	38	32.8
DAWA INDIA	8	6.9
APOLLO PHARMACY	52	44.8
MEDKART	17	14.7
NONE	24	20.8

From our 116 responses maximum of respondents 44.8% (n=52) prefer using Apollo Pharmacy. Second on the list was Pharmeasy 35.3% (n=41). Only 6.9% (n=8) preferred Dawa India.

TYPE OF PHARMACEUTICAL PRODUCTS PURCHASED THROUGH E-PHARMACY:

Table 9 - Product purchased

PRODUCTS	NO OF RESPONENT	%
OTC	18	15.5
PRESCRIPTION MEDICINE	44	37.9
COSMETICS	30	25.9
NUTRACEUTICALS	21	18.1
WELLNESS	27	23.3
BABY PRODUCTS	26	22.4
BLOOD SUGAR TESTING STRIPS	1	0.9
NONE	33	28.5

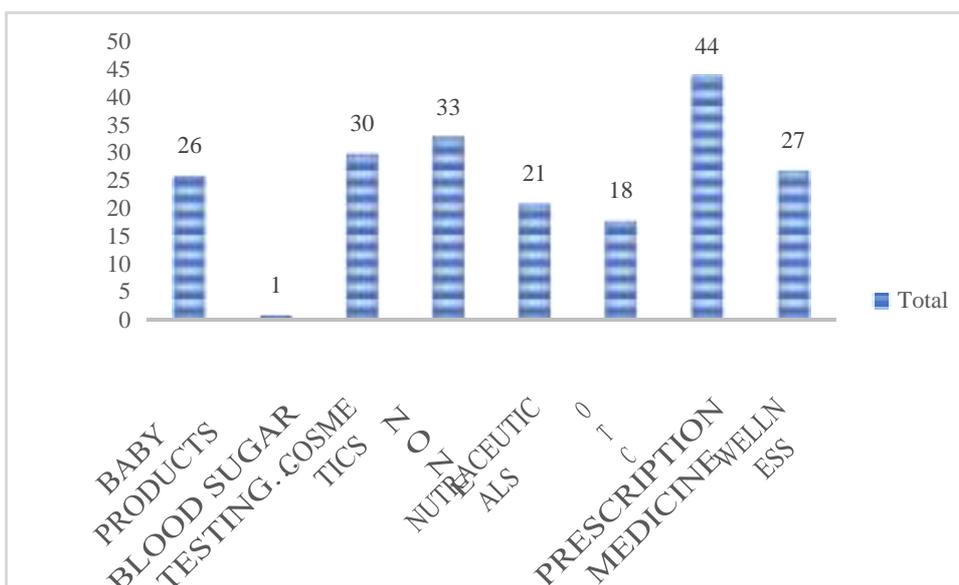


Figure 4 - Products purchased

The majority of buyers 37.9% (n=44) bought prescribed medicine from E-pharmacy as per our survey.

FOR COMMON COLD, CUTS OR INJURIES AND STOMACH PROBLEM WHAT IS PREFERRED:

Table 10- What is preferred

PREFERENCE	NO OF RESPONDENT	%
PRESCRIBED MEDICINE	61	52.6
AS PER PHARMACIST SUGGESTION	27	23.3
SELF MEDICATION	37	31.6
HOME REMEDY	54	46.6
NONE	7	6

The data revealed that 52.6% (n=61) prefer visiting a doctor and taking prescribed medicine and the other half i.e 46.6% (n=54) settle with home remedy treatment. Only 23.3% (n=27) prefer suggestions from pharmacists. The % of self- medication is 31.6% (n=37).

REASONS TO PREFER E-PHARMACY:

Table 11 - Reason to prefer E-pharmacy

REASONS	NO OF RESPONDENT	%
DISCOUNTED PRICE	68	58.6
AVAILABILITY OF BRANDS	41	35.3
EASY TO ORDER	59	50.9
HOME DELIVERY	83	71.5

MULTIPLE PAYMENT OPTION	26	22.4
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The majority of responses 71.5% (n=83) prefer E-pharmacy because they can get their medicine without much hustle while staying at home. 58.6% (n=68) choose E pharmacy because of the discounted price. The third opted reason for preference was because the medicines are easy to order which consist of 50.9% (n=59) of our data.

FREQUENCY OF BUYING MEDICNE ONLINE:

Table 12 - Frequency of buying medicine

FREQUENCY	NO OF RESPONDENT	%
WEEKLY	3	2.6
MONTHLY	13	11.2
TWICE A MONTH	6	5.2
OCCASIONALLY(in a span of 3 months to years)	57	49.1
NEVER	36	31
RARE	1	0.9

49.1% (n=57) of our respondent bought medicines occasionally (in a span of 3moths to a year) and 31% (n=36) has neverbought online medicine.

CHANCES OF REFERRING E-PHARMACY TO OTHERS:

Table 13 - Chances of referring others

CHANCES OF REFERRING	NO OF RESPONDENT	%
HIGHLY LIKELY	9	7.8
LIKELY	57	49.1
LESS LIKELY	36	31
NOT LIKELY	14	12.1

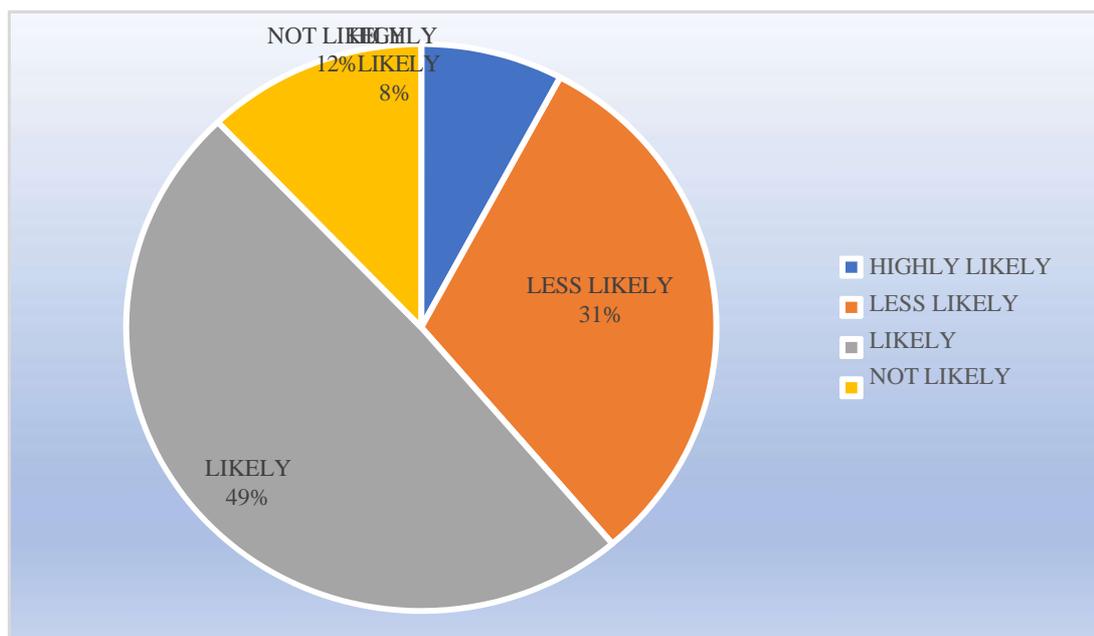


Figure 5- Chances of referring to others

Almost half of our respondents 49.1% (n=57) will refer others to use E-pharmacy.

SOURCE OF ANY PHARMACEUTICAL PRODUCTS BROUGHT:

Table 14 - Source of pharmaceutical product information

SOURCE OF INFO	NO OF RESPONDENT	%
DOCTORS	66	56.9
GOOGLE	56	48.3
FRIENDS/RELATIVES	36	31

PHARMACIST	49	42.2
PAMPHLETS	6	5.2
ADVERTISEMENT	43	37.1

When asked about their source of information on the medicine bought via E-pharmacy 56.9% (n=66) stick to their doctor’s suggestion. While 48.3% (n=56) use Google to drive information. 42.2% (n=49) prefer their pharmacist choice.

REASON OF CHOICE FOR PURCHASED MEDICINE:

Table 15 - Reason of choice for purchase

REASON	NO OF RESPONDEWHEN NT	%
AS ADVISED BY DOCTOR	88	75.9
AS ADVISED BY PHARMACIST	17	14.7
COST OF MEDICINE	8	6.9
BRANDED DRUGS	3	2.6

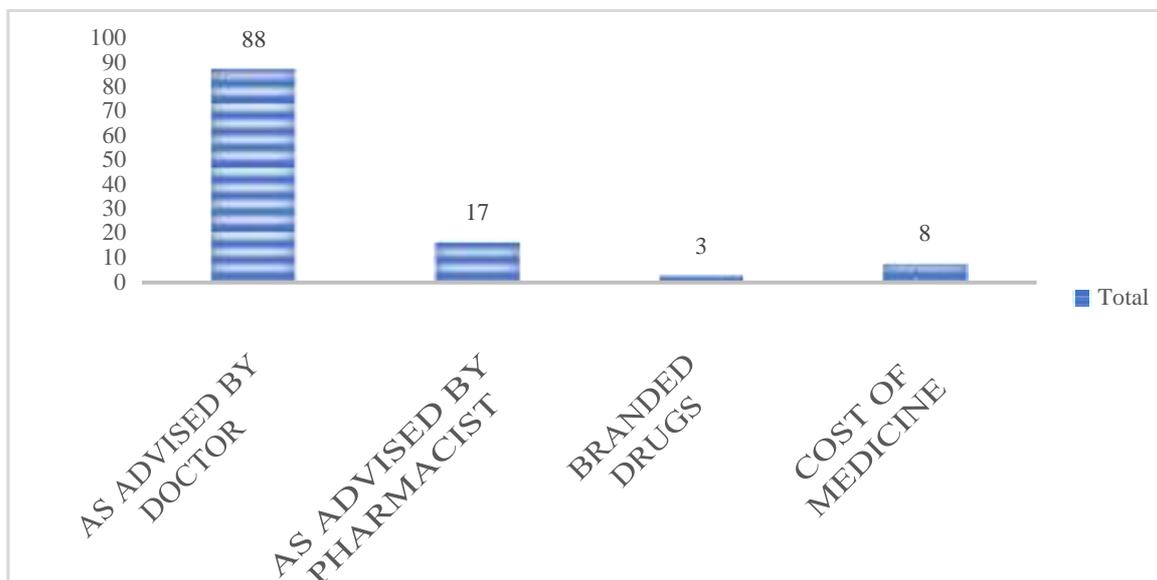


Figure 6 - Reason of choice for purchase

As the data suggest i, e 75.9% (n=88) buy medicines as advised by doctors. 17.7% (n=17) prefer Pharmacist's choice of drug. Only 6.9 % (n=8) look for the cost of medicine before buying.

6. PROBLEMS FACED BUYING ONLINE MEDICINE

1. Substandard medicine: A total of 116 responses were collected out of which 62% (n=72) people agreed that they might receive substandard quality and only 9.4 % (n=11) people disagreed with this question.
2. Misleading information: It was observed that 53.4% (n=62) agreed about receiving misleading information and 15.5%(n=18) of respondent fear information being misleading.
3. Security issues in payment: About 42.2 % (n=49) agreed that they might face payment or payment-related securitiesissues only 21.5 % (n=25) disagreed.
4. Returned and refund issues: 53.4% (n=62) agreed that they might face problems during return and refund while 12 % (n=14) disagreed to face problems during their return and refund.
5. Non-availability of prescribed drugs: 64.6% (n= 75) agreed that they might face problems regarding the non-availability of prescribed drugs whereas only 10.3% (n= 12) disagreed with the problem.
6. Uncertainty about delivery time: In more than 50% of responses i.e. 67.2 % (n=78) are uncertain about delivery timewhereas only 10.3 % (n=12) disagreed with this reason.
7. Chances of ordering or receiving the wrong medicines: 56.8% (n=66) agreed about receiving the wrong medicine at the time of delivery and only 11.2% (n=13) disagreed on receiving the wrong medicine.

Out of all the problems faced, this survey revealed that buyers fear that they might not receive medicine on time; the next problem is that the E-pharmacy market would not have the prescribed drug with them. On the other hand, buyers are least worried about receiving substandard medicine at the time of delivery.

What are the problems you think you can face buying online medicines?

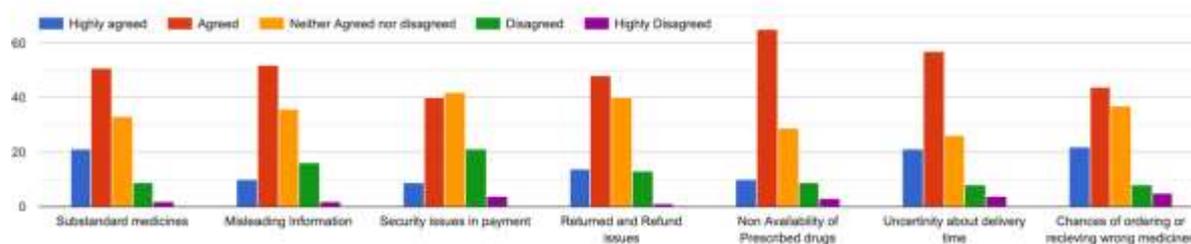


Figure 7 - Problem faced buying medicine

7. LIMITATIONS

1. The respondents' 20–30-year-old age bracket may not accurately reflect the main demographic of people who use pharmaceuticals and medicines.
2. Geographical restrictions lead to the conclusion that the research findings cannot be applied to a larger population set.

8. CONCLUSION

From our results and discussion, it can be noted that the majority of our respondents were male users, and the age group that usually prefers buying online medicine can be considered the age group 20 to 30. Considering our data online users, usually prefer buying their prescribed medicines and subsequently followed by cosmetics, baby products and wellness products. Their main reason for opting Pharmacy is that the medicines are delivered to their doorsteps and no hassle for going out, discounted prices and availability of different brands to choose from. Our users usually buy medicines as advised by doctors or by pharmacists. On the other hand majority of our respondents, buying medicines via online pharmacies was not a common habit or can be said that still Indians still prefer going to the pharmacy and buying medicines. They avoid online pharmacies because they are worried about the delivery time followed by fear of taking medicines without a prescription and their lack of awareness. So our consumers need to be informed about the advantages and disadvantages of using e-pharmacy platforms to purchase medications.

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