

Lockdown means business in socially distanced Pakistan: Google survey

KARACHI: Lockdown-driven social distancing has catalysed digital transition in Pakistan unfolding economic opportunities for people to make lemonade from lemons, according to a survey by Google.

Google, the world's top search engine, said Pakistani people are flocking online "to discover new things to watch, read, learn, and buy".

"Understanding the needs and expectations of this growing number of digital consumers is important for brands to remain agile and relevant, especially during these unprecedented times," it said in its first report "What is Pakistan searching for?"

While the survey expanded over the last 12 months, its findings also concentrated on implications of the Covid-19 lockdown on behaviour of 78 million internet users.

"Before the lockdown, Pakistanis were increasingly interested in the use of online payments and safe, secure investment options discovered through digital investigations. As the current situation evolves, this trend is gaining momentum," it said. "Since the advent of COVID-19, there has been an increase in generic searches for internet banking and e-banking. Further, queries about financial management options without an attachment to brand loyalty are also on the rise."

There has been 1.4 times growth in searches for both generic and brand-specific online banking options, 134 percent increase in searches related to brand-specific banking apps and 14 percent growth in searches for online banking and e-banking in comparison to 2019, according to the survey. Google found 1.3 times growth in generic searches related to delivery services due to restrictions on movement. Over last year, use of the search term increased 1.1 times, according to its finding.

There has been 1.6 times growth in 'food delivery' searches, 162 percent growth in searches for food delivery apps like Foodpanda, 340 percent rise in searches for food delivery service Eat Mubarak and 324 percent jump in queries for new apps like delivery app Careem Now.

In the \$1 billion ecommerce market with predominant cash-on-delivery preference, there has been 1.5 times rise in searches for generic and brand-specific mobile wallet and e-wallet options and 1.6 times growth in searches for specific online payment apps.

Following the lockdown, there has been a humongous 2,200 percent increase in searches for meeting app with 1.8 times increase in searches for conference calls.

The Google survey found that 81 percent of connected Pakistani consumers search products online before purchasing. Consumers are showing greater interest in video on demand and subscription services. There has been 82 percent growth in Netflix searches, 111 percent rise in Amazon Prime video queries, 67 percent increase in Goonj TV searches 100 percent rise in Jazz TV queries. "With the rapid influx of consumers coming online, businesses with a primarily-digital presence will surge ahead," said the report. "Simple and intuitive product design, a more comprehensive range of choice, prompt order fulfillment, and customer education will drive success in this particular sector."