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This essay below aims to decipher the effects of COVID-19 also known as coronavirus on consumer buying behavior but before we acknowledge this issue, what is consumer behavior? Before tackling this issue, who is a consumer? The simplest definition of a consumer is a consumer is one who consumes. A consumer is any individual who purchases products or services for his personal use and not for manufacturing or resale. A consumer is also the one who is the decision maker whether or not to buy an item at the store, or someone who is influenced by advertisement and marketing. A consumer can also be defined as an individual who pays some amount of money for the thing required to consume goods and services. A consumer is a person or a group who intends to order orders or uses purchased goods, products, or services primarily for personal, social, family, household and similar needs, not directly related to entrepreneurial or business activities so basically consumers play a huge and vital role in the economic system of a nation because without a consumer, there wouldn’t be consumer demands which means producers would lack one of the key motivations to produce and to sell to consumers. Now, what is behavior? This is basically a way of behaving. When put together, we get consumer behavior which is a whole new topic. Has it ever been a thought or wondering; two twin brothers or sisters would walk into a restaurant and order two different meals? It is expected that they are to order the same but on the contrary it isn’t and this is because consumers have different reasons for buying and also to satisfy varieties of needs and these needs differ from each other based on different factors according markets, societies, cultures, economic situations and perceptions. The most currently marketing abstraction or idea is whereby the marketer tries to understand the consumer in his contact with his desired products and services and once this is understood, the marketer is able to assist by giving the manufacturer advice on what to produce so as to please the consumer. This gives the consumer the upper hand because the marketer’s failure or succession depends on if the consumer wants to buy or not and the marketer can only be satisfied when cash transaction is made. This brings us to what consumer behavior is: it focuses on consumer’s interaction with the products. It digs deeper into the reasons why he decides to buy a product instead of a different product that has similar effects, and also the factors which affect the consumer’s choice of selection, purchase and usage to be able to give the consumer’s what they need or desire.

Consumer behavior can hereby defined ‘’as the study of how consumers select, purchase, use and dispose of goods and services to satisfy personal needs, household needs or industrial needs’’. It can also be referred to the buying behavior of the ultimate consumer. It is seen as those acts of individuals and organizations ‘’directly involved in obtaining and using economic goods and services, including the decision processes that follows and determines the acts. ‘’This motion encompasses those act of before purchase and after sales of both intermediate and final users’’. One other definition is consumer behavior is a body of knowledge or discipline and the study of the decision making processes and all the acts of both the immediate and final users in the purchase and consumption of goods and services. The American Marketing Association defines consumer behavior as the dynamic inter-function of effects and cognition, behavior and the environment by which beings conduct the exchange aspect of their lives and in other words understanding the consumer’s behavior when interacting with goods and services. It is also accepted as the thoughts and feelings of people’s experience and the action they exhibit, perform during the process of consumption. In order to fully understand consumer behavior, the factors that influences it have to be tackled. Some of these factors are; the consumer’s personal mind e.g. their own thinking, feelings and desire for the said product and environmental factors which include personal or reference group, culture, family, social influences, opinion leader, psychological and perception. Culture is defined as the set of values, beliefs, ideas, norms and attitudes that holds a certain group of people or society together, and it can be transmitted down to generations and it is dynamic. The simplest definition of culture is ‘the way of life’. It is an umbrella term which encompasses the social behavior and norms found in human societies, as well as the knowledge, beliefs, arts, laws, customs, capabilities and habits of the individuals in these groups. The best definition of culture so far is: an integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, behavior, attitudes and beliefs and customs shared by a society. It is a widely known concept in a large society in which smaller concepts are built within and one is Subculture. What is a subculture? It can be defined as consisting of small specifications of a big culture which includes diverse people with the same nationalities, religion racial groups and geographical areas. It can also be defined as a similar group within societies that have their own models of behavior defined by ethnically, race, region, age, religion, gender, social class or profession. Culture comes in when the marketers have reached the point where they must come up with design specific marketing strategies to satisfy them because strategies that proves successful in one society or country, often cannot be extended to another country and expect the same success. A type of strategies could be in designing specialized goods and programs to suit their taste and demands. Social class can be indicated by ones occupation, level of income, wealth, education, achievements. Every single consumer belong to a social class. The earliest form of social class starts with the family. People within the same class tend to behave more alike than persons from different groups than persons from different groups or social class. This is called Group membership and this is what influences ones buying behavior. The members and individuals in the group must adhere and cooperate to and with the groups’ norms, values, attitudes and behavior by buying what the group likes and adheres to the group and this affects consumer buying behavior. These are some of the factors affecting consumer buying behavior.

What is COVID-19? It is a disease caused by the new coronavirus that emerged in China in December 2019. Coronaviruses are a types of virus. There are many different kinds, and some cause disease. It is a newly identified type that has a caused a recent outbreak of respiratory illness now called COVID-19. This new coronavirus can be spread from person to person. The symptoms include cough, fever, and shortness of breath, muscle aches, sore throat or unexplained loss of taste or smell. It is diagnosed with a laboratory test and there is currently no coronavirus vaccine yet. As of now, there is not a specific treatment for the virus. People who become sick from COVID-19 should be treated with supportive measures. Researchers have found out that the new coronavirus is spread through droplets released into the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes. The droplets generally do not travel more than a few feet, and they fall to the ground (or onto surfaces) in a few seconds and this is why social and physical distancing is effective in preventing it from spreading. It appears that symptoms are showing up to people within 14 days of exposure to the virus. In rare cases, COVID-19 can lead to severe respiratory problems, kidney failure or death.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 virus has had a major impact on daily life and consumer behavior in china. When the now known as pandemic started in china at the beginning of march, it led to the lockdown of regions and cities with a total population of 500 million people quarantined and a concurrent decline in production. The challenges facing the world right now are shaking up global economies, pushing healthcare systems to their limits, and upheaving people’s daily lives. Even with the negative social and economic impact, the outbreak quickly led to an adjustment in people’s behavior; from fear to action, to cope with the unexpected situation, and a shift in daily activities from offline to online. The preventive measures such as school closures, travel bans, and the need for social distancing have impacted communities nationwide. Celebrity announcements sharing that they’ve contracted Coronavirus have also added to the urgency of the situation and influenced the shopping behavior of the majority. Currently, more than one-third of the world’s population is under some form of lockdown. To put it simply: there isn’t a business, government, or person that hasn’t felt the effects of coronavirus, even to some degree. The most noticeable impact of the outbreak is its influence on how and what people purchase. This is having a knock-on effect on various industries and key groups. Globally, purchase behaviors are changing amid the crisis and what this means for brands. Most of us are now familiar with the sight of empty supermarket shelves, devoid of the essentials we usually buy. Fear has undoubtedly taken over consumer’s usual shopping behaviors. A very frivolous effect is bulk shopping. There is increased online shopping, decreased store visits and first signs of strain on the supply chain. The unpredictable nature of the coronavirus outbreak is compelling shoppers to stock-up and buy in bulk. Prior to the coronavirus outbreak, consumers were accustomed to getting anything they needed within a day or two. However, the situation is not the same anymore. Major online stores are not accepting new grocery orders for now as they are facing exceptionally high demand for delivery slots and spaces. As a result, the trend of placing large orders seems to be on the rise. Pasta, toilet rolls, hand sanitizer, and other long-life foods are just some of the products that consumers have been loading up on in recent weeks.

Also, the trust for products; as the pandemic continues to spread worldwide, consumer buying behavior is moving away from a cost saving nature. Consumers are becoming more concerned about the quality and safety of the products. This is compelling industries to communicate their safety measures clearly to consumers. This majorly applies for baby care and food companies where customers demand the highest safety. Another tangible effect of the virus is spike in shelf-stable products and depleting markets for fresh and exotic foods. The demand for fresh and exotic food items are declining and there is a rising demand for packaged or canned food products. This is because consumers are not willing to take the risks of consuming items that may have travelled long distances and exchanged many hands with little or no way to prove their hygiene quotient. Instead, consumers are increasingly opting for packaged food items which are risk free so basically consumers have an increased interest in the acquisition of products that maintain well-being or health. Another effect is that PPE and medical supplies are in high demand. There are now higher purchases of shelf=safe products and increased store visits. Face masks and hand sanitizer gel are the top items globally that consumers are struggling to purchase. The prices have gone so high up because everyone needs to have one. Most pharmacies and stores have sold out because everyone bought everything out. With the increased demand, most sellers have also been criticized for price gouging. Basically, there would be possible price gouging due to limited supplies and deterred online fulfilment.

It’s still too early to tell how much consumer behavior will change due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It will be a while until it is known if these changes in consumer behavior will be long term. If the clear trends which can be seen, if sustained, could lead to significant shifts and changes in how consumers shop in the future.