**HOW HAS THE PANDEMIC AFFECTED CONSUMER BUYING BEHAVIOUR**

**Introduction**

The present pandemic, Coronavirus which is affecting the whole world and bringing it to a standstill has had a great impact on Consumer behavior all over the world. It has affected the way people do things; the way they purchase items, our preferences, the way we skate with people. The virus has affected the whole world in a way that it has put the world to a stand still. It’s shaking the global economy and the GDP of various nations. The Corona virus has induced a Compulsory lockdown in most 70% of states around the world which has had various effects on people and on their buying behavior.

Before I go into the topic, I would like to define what Consumer buying behavior is, Consumer buying behavior is the mix of a consumer attitudes, preferences, and decision-making process when the consumer is acting in the marketplace to buy a good or service. Consumers are really complex in needs and expectations. Consumer behavior is affected by so many things, like the age of a consumer and stage in the life cycle, personal occupation, economic circumstances and lifestyle of a person and also behaviour is affected by personality and self concept. Consumer buying behavior refers to the selection, purchase and consumption of goods and services for the satisfaction of their wants. There are different processes involved in the consumer behavior. Many factors, specificities and characteristics influence the individual in what he is and the consumer in his decision making process, shopping habits, purchasing behavior, the brands he buys or the retailers he goes to. The consumer behaviour or buyer behaviour is influenced by several factors or forces. They could either be Psychological factors, Social factors Cultural factors, Economic factors, Personal factors. There are different categories of people that have been affected by the induced lockdown in good ways and also in bad ways.

I would also like to briefly discuss the so-called Pandemic that is bringing all activities to stop. The Pandemic is known as Coronavirus. We can’t discuss all these without knowing what is bringing so much change to consumer buying behaviour. Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus which has caused a recent outbreak of respiratory illness called COVID-19. COVID-19 appeared in Wuhan, a city in China in December 2019. Although health officials are still tracing the exact source of the new coronavirus, early hypotheses thought it may be linked to a seafood market in Wuhan, China. The best way to prevent and slow down transmission is to be well informed about the COVID-19 virus, the disease it causes and how it spreads. Protect yourself and others from infection by washing your hands or using an alcohol based rub frequently and not touching your face. The COVID-19 virus spreads primarily through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected person coughs or sneezes, so it’s important that you also practice respiratory etiquette (for example, by coughing into a flexed elbow). At this time, there are no specific vaccines or treatments for COVID-19. However, there are many ongoing clinical trials evaluating potential treatments. The first case of coronavirus in Nigeria came through an Italian citizen who works in Nigeria and returned from Milan, Italy to Lagos, Nigeria on the 25th of February 2020. He was confirmed by the Virology Laboratory of the Lagos University Teaching Hospital. We presently have hundreds of cases in Nigeria right now and this is what induced the lockdown which has had a large impact on consumer behaviour.

The impact of the lockdown starts with **Panic buying then increase in prices of goods, later scarcity of goods and finally scarcity of money in circulation.** Below, I would be stressing these points one after the other and explaining their impacts one by one.

In this period of the pandemic, consumer behaviour tends to be high because everybody is basically panic shopping, everybody wants to buy something, everybody is stocking up, not caring about their preferences, they just want to make sure they have something at hand, whatever it is, whether they use it or not, their words are ‘it may be useful, it’s better to have it than have nothing’. There are a lot of luxury things that are no longer on sale so they are all out buying up the stores and stocking up. Due to the pandemic and the lockdown, individuals are now buying what they need in large quantity that they would usually not buy and what they do no need in a bid to save for the rainy day.

Normally, people always want to have a choice, choice of producers, brands, substitutes, etc., but now they buy what they can get because nobody knows what tomorrow is looking like, the world can run out of food for all we know. People are just buying things in bulk out of panic that they would not leave their homes anytime soon. This is in turn affecting consumer buying behaviour. For instance, in my house, I never buy the green sea nestle water because according to them it contains Zinc and it is more expensive but now, it is the only thing available at the moment and I cannot afford to not get it because water is a necessary commodity whether is I more expensive or not you have to have it. It has changed how people shop and purchase goods and services.

Using Lagos as a case study, another way the Pandemic has affected consumer buying behavior is that due to the lockdown, markets for edibles have been given days (Monday, Wednesday, Fridays and Saturdays) to sell with allocated curfews (10am-2pm) and this makes it difficult or people to get items because there is limited time for it. In the markets which are under limited curfews, there are personnel who try to institute the system of social distancing among all the people willing to buy goods. There is usually a line and the people are given numbers and are to enter one by one and till the individuals are done you cannot enter. This has affected consumer behaviour a lot because all the people scrambling to buy good to fill their homes are a lot and the system of people entering one by one is slow and all customers who came from their homes to buy good may not get to buy because by exactly 2pm, the government officials enforce the closure of the markets and all the individuals who came loaded with cash ended up buying nothing.

Also, unlike before, the prices of some goods are now high because of the scarcity in production. All factories are closed due to the lockdown so there is no longer labor. Some retailers have decided to make gain from this development especially with necessary products like Sanitizers, bottle water, face masks, soap, etc. The retailers are now using the excuse that exchange rates have gone up, they say this with even goods that are not even imported. There is now an unnecessary increase in Price of commodities because the retailers know that at this period people would buy what they can get at any price as long as it is edible. In Nigeria people always find a way to gain from every situation no matter how bad it is. For instance, last week, due to the lockdown the Federal government had not yet announced that markets could be opened so my neighbour who sells food stuffs decided to make extra money from her sales. Everybody in the estate came to her house to come and purchase all their commodities and do their panic buying. Unknowing to all of us, she had increased the price of rice and yams because according to her farms have been closed because the government has asked farmers to stop their business as they can spread the virus through their tedious deliveries. The prices of goods have gone up as far as people know that these commodities would be needed, we struggle with the availability of products.

After all the prices have been increased, the next thing would be the scarcity of money. There would be little or no money in circulation at some point because all banks have closed down, no ATM is dispensing and there is no availability of cash because there is nobody to refill the machines and also the banks are trying to avoid the spread of this disease through transfer of money.

Consumer buying behaviour is supposed to have increased due to the stock buying but most families can’t buy because most of them are left jobless. We have a lot of people who are daily salary earners. The carpenters, the forcinizers, the bricklayers, the cleaners, the plumber, the welders, the electricians, the garbage men, the truck pushers. They are all low income earners. It's not like with what they get they can save millions, they may have little or nothing in a day and they still manage to hustle. Now that their hustle has been put on pause what next? These people may have been eating from hand to mouth and now they can no longer afford to stock up like other families. They can barely afford to get the necessaries now to talk of the minor goods. Consumer behaviour is influenced largely by economic factors. Economic factors that influence consumer behaviour are; Personal Income, Family income, Income expectations, Savings, Liquid assets of the Consumer, Consumer credit, etc. The personal income of a person is determinant of his buying behaviour. The gross personal income of a person consists of disposable income and discretionary income. If the individual's pay is relatively low, after the tax has been deducted and he/she has gotten his basic necessities (discretionary personal income) the money left would barely be enough to take him through. He may not be able to stock up on goods and other services.

Another category of people that their consumer behaviour has been affected are the people who have sworn not to go out for any reason. They think they already have what they need and they would manage what they have. They are not risking anything for their lives and that of their families. These individuals are now practicing their management skills as they are not going outdoors or even taking online delivery as they do not know where the goods or the individuals have been. This is from the Psychological factor coming into play. Individuals now think that the outside world is dangerous. They have all created a new mindset. It has put in peoples minds that the important thing is wellbeing and not your ability to purchase market goods. The Pandemic has put all human activities to a standstill.

During this period of the pandemic, there is also a need to stock food and necessities in houses but there are no means for this due to the continuous interruption of power supply and so people are not able to buy food in bulk as they should and store. This has affected consumer buying behaviour as people are supposed to be stocking up and saving for the rainy day but they can’t because they fear that their goods won’t go bad because of the lack of appliances to preserve them.

Study of consumer buying behavior is most important for marketers as they can understand the expectation of the consumers. It helps to understand what makes a consumer buy a product. It is important to assess the kind of products liked by consumers so that they can release it to the market. The producers know what people want on demand so now in a bid for scarcity of goods as warehouses are closed, there are a lot of people getting bad products, people would be selling fake things and the consumers have no other choice.

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