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Course: Consumer Behaviour ll

The global pandemic as it was declared by The World Health Organisation (WHO) on March 11, 2020; novel Corona Virus (Covid-19), has changed the world as we know it. What started in China early November 2019 has put the whole world to a standstill. This pandemic has effortlessly put the world economy in shambles, emptying the cities of famous countries. The world tourist attractions are suddenly not teeming with crowds, the streets are empty, across cities like Milan, Paris, New York, Berlin and a host of others. It can be said succinctly that the world has been conquered, as countries all over the world including these proud cities bow to the effect of the Covid-19.

Indeed, for the Generation Z who never witnessed the world war two, the lockdown and panic buying that characterises most countries presently is like a daily rerun of a horror science fiction, only that this time around it is our reality.

Early on in the year 2020 we witnessed the United States of America go into panic mode, as citizens of the USA emptied out malls. This stocking up of an excessive number of specific products, mostly essential products were tagged panic buying. One strange phenomenon that arose was the fact that a lot of Americans stocked up on rolls of toilet papers, which did not have any direct relation to surviving the pandemic. Well, except for toilet purposes during the pandemic. Malls were emptied of toilet papers, hand sanitizers, liquid hand wash, gloves and nose masks in the bid for survival. Other goods excluding food and water still stood tall and abandoned on the shelves of malls and shops.

Going along the lines of desperate times calls for desperate measures, customers were fighting openly in malls , throwing every atom of ‘civility’ out of the window in order to secure their possession of these otherwise ordinary products which have been upgraded to the value of pure oxygen in the face of a (the) pandemic that is threatening to wipe humans off the face of the planet. The behaviour of consumers in the face of this crisis is only expected in the case of the survival of the fittest, ironically, it appears younger people with higher immune systems are likely to survive the blow of this pandemic and heal if ever infected. This scenario is in tandem with the Scarcity Principle, an economic theory in which a limited supply of a good, coupled with a high demand for that good results in a mismatch between the desired supply and the demand equilibrium. Ordinarily, these goods aren’t scarce but their need having changed they are suddenly not enough. In reaction to this, the government in more recent times have started importing these essentials especially nose masks to meet up with the needs of their citizens and medical practitioners. Across Europe the scramble for this suddenly essential and lifesaving products to the point of survival of the fittest is a common consumer behaviour defining these trying times.

As Nigeria recorded its first case of the Corona Virus in Lagos and the numbers increase daily, there are several displays of panic buying. The most evident is the spike in prices of these essential products for surviving the pandemic. However, consumers in Nigeria are not panic buying toilet paper probably because of the difference in toilet hygiene cultures. On the other hand, the prices of hand wash, hand sanitizers, nose masks and gloves have increased very outrageously in some instances tenfold. The suppliers in Nigeria seem to fully utilize the Economics law of demand, knowing consumers have no choice but to buy. In couple of weeks some of these essentials are bought despite their outrageous prices. Ironically, although fruits aid in the boost of immune system, the prices of fruits remain relatively the same because surprisingly very few Nigerians are panic buying fruits. It wouldn’t be known if this lack of interest in buying fruits is ignorance or lack of awareness as the only people panic buying fruits are people who ordinarily believe in strict diets and healthy eating.

Another thing whose status has been upgraded by the pandemic and is the victim of panic buying but which might not readily come to mind is thermometers. Before the lockdown of organisations and trading centres, thermometers were featured at entrances of buildings to alleviate the fear of clients and consumers, pertaining to their safety health wise.

The influence of the pandemic on consumer behaviour does not end in the buying of safety essentials. There is an upsurge in the use of delivery services. To illustrate, Online shopping delivery service Ocado suspended its website last week, telling customers demand exceeded its capacity to deliver. People who normally will go out to buy these things especially food or don’t buy such ‘luxury’ foods in the first instance, for example ice cream or pizza now buy a lot of such and even pay delivery fees. This development might be largely linked to the stay at home orders to curb and control the spread of the virus. On the other hand, some consumers do this with the mentality that if the pandemic wipes the human race out, they will die having enjoyed their lives.

A lot of people are acting out of character, as their psychology is being greatly affected by the lockdown and boredom from lack of activities and being indoors and as such, there is an increase in the patronising of social media platforms. People are spending their whole days watching *TikTok* performances, being on *Instagram* and contributing to the online content out there. *Tiktok* especially has seen a prodigious growth in recent times as social media superstars and influencers have joined the rave of posting *TikTok* videos and some quarantine/isolation inspired “challenges”. This is bringing in millions for social media platforms and social media content creators are getting views and income like never before. Church services are being hosted online; some churches even encourage their followers to pay tithes online. More now than ever, a lot of people are funding charities and helping out the poor with survival aids. Also, on the social connection front is the fact that a lot of people are spending hugely on airtime in order to keep up with family and friends during this lockdown period when they could have formerly visited. There are two sides to this coin as commercial drivers and petroleum suppliers lose out, telecommunication companies are raking in the money in millions. An analysis from CSL Limited of one of the leading telecommunication companies in Nigeria, MTN estimates a 50% increase in data revenue, this projection is anchored by the outbreak of Covid-19 and increased use of social media for communication. In addition, movie download sites and stations, for instance, Netflix are greatly profiting during this period as there is a great upsurge in music and movie downloads.

Before the lockdown, the pandemic had brought about a drastic reduction in the buying of flight tickets across the country, especially international flights. People are wary of travelling outside Nigeria. This is a very strong departure from the former culture of the upper echelon of the Nigerian society which includes showing off wealth and enjoyment of life by flaunting vacations abroad or even simply a visit abroad. This culture has ended as fresh returnees from abroad are being looked at with the side eye and social stigma, as they are being suspected of being infected with the Covid-19. This change in consumer behaviour in Nigeria due to the pandemic has accrued a lot of loss to the airports, flight travel agencies, hotels where tourists lodge, tourist sites etc. This is not a phenomenon within Nigeria alone, it is all over the world as international flights are being cancelled for the time being, citizens and tourists alike are stuck in their present location.

Another group of consumers that should be considered during this period are the drug or substance addict. In this class, to be considered is the specific class of people who take drugs or liquor which are age restricted and thus not illegal so far the age restriction is met. Consumers of liquor have been seen panic buying their favourite brands. Some, who were not lucky enough to stock up before the pandemic or have exhausted their stock have been seen to go to drastic lengths to track alcohol suppliers to their houses, much like a black-market maze. In other worlds for peddlers and suppliers of liquor, customers who were social drinkers are conveniently doing without liquor within this period since there are no social gatherings like clubs, parties, owanbes and the likes that will necessitate drinking.

The demand of alcohol from the customer base as greatly reduced, consequently also reducing the influx of income to alcohol companies. However, in the situation of alcoholics there is a higher increase in quantity bought as they fear not being with liquor during the lockdown so the alcohol companies may not be losing out. The same can’t be said for luxury outfit suppliers, clubs, bars etc. as the need for merriment and gatherings has been greatly reduced, these suppliers are at a loss because their usual consumers are ignoring their favourite pastimes to keep safe and also not fall out with the law enforcement agencies for disregard of laws of social distancing.

Fashion shows all over the world are being cancelled all because of the pandemic, designers’ collections are lying fallow without buyers except the once in a while online buying and delivery. As suddenly, due to the lock down people no longer have to put their best feet forward or put together outfits for the outside world. People are quite comfortable being in pyjamas or casuals all day long; after all they are not going outdoors. This is evidently shown on social media under the popular Instagram hashtag; “Quarantine and chill”. Suddenly, people no longer have the need for clothes as they would rather save their money for safety essentials and food.

Academics, in these pandemic times are being greatly affected as schools have been shut down. Students are forced to take online courses, submit assignments to meet up the exam requirements. If all things were equal this could have been seen as a rip off and not getting value for their money as fees required for virtual learning are lower than the ones paid for the physical learning system. However, they say hard times call for trying solutions, that is why parents paying for the children fees who would have protested about this as consumers on normal circumstances are mute as this indeed are trying times. In the present development of the popularity of virtual schooling all over the world, internet service providers are greatly profiting.

Sport enthusiasts are another group of consumers to be considered. The football enthusiasts are a curious group who so much support ‘their’ teams to the extent that millions of enthusiasts’ money goes into enriching sport bets like betnaija and its counter parts. Yearly, hundreds of thousands of sport enthusiasts fill up stadiums to the brim to watch these shows live but as sport activities have been cancelled worldwide, local restaurants, hotels etc. around the sport venues are at a loss. Athletes, their clubs, managers are at a loss for income and generally countries which would have been preparing to embrace the influx of sport tourists and the accompanying tourist income, have to count their losses in the shadow of the pandemic.

Following the outbreak of Covid-19, global oil consumption continues to decline rapidly. The pandemic having reduced movement to the minimum, people no longer frequent petrol stations to buy fuel and other crude oil products. This of course has a large effect on countries that are heavily dependent on oil income. Africa’s largest economy might be in a precarious position as regards to the continuous fall in oil price.

In conclusion, the pandemic has brought many companies to their kneels as employees are increasingly losing their jobs, companies are running at a loss as their products are going into waste, consumers are exhibiting buying patterns which would have never seemed possible in light years. The pandemic, Covid-19 is what dictates the consumer behaviour in these present times.