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**The effects of the Pandemic (COVID-19) on consumer buying behavior**

Firstly, before one can talk about consumer buying behavior, one must address the meaning of the words consumer and consumer behavior. A consumer is any individual who purchases products or services as an end user, and for his personal use and not for manufacturing or resale. In addition to that a consumer could be a person, an organization, or a corporate body of any nation. Whereas, consumer behavior is the study of individuals, groups, or organizations and all the activities associated with the purchase, use and disposal of goods and services, consumer buying behavior is limited to the purchase of goods and services. Hence, consumer buying behavior refers to the actions taken by consumers before buying a product or service and the buying behavior of the ultimate consumer.

There are many factors that determine the choices a consumer makes when buying products and services. These factors affect consumer buying behavior ranging from ones’ preferences to certain environmental factors. Some of these factors include; culture, social class or group, reference groups, opinion leaders, the family, the media and the internet, consumers’ preferences and environmental factors which is what this article will be centered on.

By environmental factors, I mean certain climate changes, seasons, weather, outbreak of diseases, outbreak of war and so much more. These situations play a vital role in determining the choices a consumer will make while buying and purchasing certain products and services.

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 caused by the Corona virus worldwide which has been termed a Pandemic by the World Health Organization, and the idea of prolonged indoor stay imposed upon consumers by the Government, the choices a consumer makes when purchasing goods and services and their general behavior have been drastically affected by the situation.

First and fore most consumers in countries heavily impacted by COVID-19 and other countries as well such as Nigeria have responded to the pandemic and lockdown order by bulk-buying and online shopping hence, **purchase trends are changing**, people are changing what they are buying, when and how. A lot of consumers have purchased items of necessity in bulks hence they stock up their pantry, stores and house as a whole, this was the first reaction consumers had to the news of the pandemic. The idea of most consumers making trips to stores and purchasing items they deem necessary and fit in their fight against the COVID-19 has led to other consumers doing the same, in a bid not to feel let out or unprepared to fight the situation at hand and this is known as **the crowd mentality or in this case consumers’ mentality**. Bulk buying is seen by the consumers as a way to avoid going to crowded places to purchase items, therefore they rather buy in large amounts that will sustain them for a very long time before the need to take the risk of going out.

Similarly, most consumers have resulted to online shopping in a bid to maintain social distancing. Statistics have shown that online shopping has been on the rise globally, since the advent of the COVID-19. When consumers are faced with shopping restrictions, they find and adopt new ways to shop through technology, this is especially true when it comes to health and essential items and as such due to the pandemic, consumers are starting to see online shopping as a valid and safe option to purchase products as they do not need to leave their houses and as well continue maintaining social distancing. However, because of how infectious COVID-19 is, a lot of consumers have raised questions about the safety of receiving their online orders and research has shown that it is unlikely that the COVID-19 would survive on your purchased items from the time they were packed to the time you received your package.

In line with people changing what they are buying, when and how, most of the consumers are no longer considering the purchase of big ticket items such as homes, cars, trips, luxury goods instead consumers are focusing on consumable goods which could be deemed as survival goods or as Matt Britton the founder and CEO of consumer insights platform “Suzy” puts it “Survival” tier and the “Sanity” tier. By survival products he means more people are buying food and beverages, personal care items, household cleaning items and over the counter (OTC) medicine and sanity products he was referring to alcoholic beverages, entertainment, beauty products and electronics, this in my opinion, is a means to keep them occupied and sane during the lockdown period. In addition to that, where consumers are buying their products has also changed, people fear crowding and lack of inventory and as such they are shopping less at wholesale and big box retailers which has led to the increase of online shopping as was mentioned in my previous point and paragraph.

Research has shown that in this time of crisis, the general public which are the consumers go through six behavioral changes based on their awareness of the COVID-19 spread in their communities and these changes are the build up to how the disease has affected consumer buying behavior;

1. **Proactive health-minded buying**: this is the first stage and as it is well known that the symptoms of the disease is similar to that of common cold, there has been and will be increased interest in the acquisition of products that maintain well-being and health as well as products and medications that prevent the common cold by the consumers.
2. **Reactive health management**: at the second stage, there is prioritization of products for infections containment such as face masks, gloves, sanitizers. As health awareness programs release new information on how to curb the COVID-19, consumers react to that information and are quick to prioritize the purchase of such products that have been suggested by these health personnel.
3. **Pantry preparation**: the third stage involves higher purchases of shelf-safe products and increased store visits. This is the stage of bulk buying and stockpiling, consumers purchase all the necessary items which have been prioritized at stage two and have been deemed as survival products. They stock up in preparation for the next stages.
4. **Quarantined living preparation**: at the fourth stage, there is increased online shopping, decreased store visits and first signs of strain on the supply chain. In preparation for isolation, most consumers turn to online shopping and as such visits to local stores and supermarkets drastically decrease. Also with demand being on the rise, at this stage there are strains on the supply chain that is, supply is on the low.
5. **Restricted living**: as a result of limited supplies and deterred online fulfilment, there may be possible price gouging, that is sellers may increase the prices of their goods, services or commodities to a level much higher than is considerable reasonable or fair. However, there will most definitely be an increase in the price of goods as that is what is obtainable at the moment in countries like Nigeria, where the prices of goods have been inflated with the excuse of COVID-19 being the reason for such inflated prices.
6. **Living a new normal life**: this is the sixth final stage, here there is increased health awareness even as people return to their typical daily activities. However, the only country that its consumers have been able to transition into this sixth and final stage is China while some countries are still at the early stages such as Nigeria and others have been lucky enough to be corona virus free, the United States of America has begun to move towards restricted living which is the fifth stage.

In line with the behavioral changes the consumer faces, certain factors have been identified that have affected the consumer buying behavior and these factors shall be explored explicitly.

With the media and internet releasing information on certain pre-cautionary measures to take in a bid to curb the spread of COVID-19 some of which include using alcohol based sanitizers, washing hands regularly with soap, wearing of face masks and gloves while coming in contact with people, avoid touching of ones face, mouth and eyes and maintaining social distancing as a whole by staying indoors. This information has led to increased purchase of hand sanitizers, hand wash, face masks and gloves. The demand for these products are on a rise, as every consumer is on a quest to purchase those products. Amidst purchasing these products certain other factors come into place that affect consumer buying behavior and they include price, quality, quantity and durability. Many consumers prefer to purchase cheaper products as they may be on a budget, others prefer high quality no matter the price, some may prefer products of large quantity and some of a small quantity and many are also looking for products that are durable and have a long life span.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 has led to inflation in many countries and as a result consumer buying behavior has been affected. Inflation refers to the sustained increase in the general price level of goods and services in an economy over a period of time. Inflation exists when prices rise but purchasing over falls over a certain period. Demand, supply and expectations about goods affect inflation rates, with the pandemic globally, demand for certain goods are on the rise and as a result there is scarcity of such goods. With the demand for such goods being high, the prices of those goods are skyrocketing and although, many consumers still purchase such goods (as there are seen as a necessity) defiling the theory of demand which states that, the lower the prices the higher the demand and the higher the prices the lower the demand, the increased prices of goods have affected and taken a toll on the low income earning consumers. High inflation rates leads to economic instability and recession which is another factor.

With many funds going towards the fight against COVID-19 (which are unexplainable in Nigeria) and the rise in the prices of goods and services, the economy is at risk. Economic instability refers to the presence of excessive fluctuations in the economy and it involves a shock to the usual workings of the economy. The effect of COVID-19 leading to inflation which could further lead to economic instability can affect consumer buying behavior in the long run as recession continues. Recession being “a significant decline in economic activity” as the National Bureau of Economics Research defines it. **In Nigeria**, the Minister of Finance, Budget and National Planning, Zainab Ahmed stated that the global economy would go into recession in 2020 as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic. She also said that the prediction of the International Monetary Fund that Nigeria would go into a negative growth of 3.4 percent (%) next year is based on an assessment of the National Bureau of Statistics. With recession being caused by high inflation rates as mentioned earlier, it is safe to say that this definitely has its effects on consumer buying behavior. In a situation where recession is caused by the widespread of inflation, consumers tend to cut out things like leisure spending. They also save more, spend less on things they usually buy for their free time, and budget more carefully than they did. This answers the questions of how and what consumers buy. As a result of this unemployment percentage rises because companies start terminating contract of workers to cut down more costs, because consumers and customers spending are not the same as they were because must consumers stick to buying only the essential and survival products during this period. Furthermore, with the shutdown of businesses and some terminating the employment of their workers, consumer buying behavior is affected.

In conclusion, the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic (globally) has been a great factor and determiner in the buying behavior of consumers. It has been one of the most augmenting factors of consumer buying behavior, as it has affected all aspects of the consumer’s behavior while purchasing goods and services as the end users of them. Therefore, from the above points one can tell that it has played a major role in determining **what consumers buy** (sanitizers, face masks, hand wash), **where consumers buy** (online shopping, reduced visits too local stores), **why consumers buy** (in a bid to prevent themselves from the virus) and **how consumers buy** (bulk-buying, stockpiling, no leisure spending and essential goods and services only).

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