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**QUESTION:** In not less than 2000 words, explain explicitly how the pandemic (COVID 19) has affected consumer buying behavior.

ABSTRACT

This paper elaborates the topic of this research work which is giving an insight on how the pandemic (COVID 19) has affected consumer buying behavior. The study of this research was carried out using a textbook written by two scholars and also with the aid of the internet. This research also shows in many ways that the pandemic (COVID 19) has affected consumer buying behavior when it comes to the way we think and even act. This work also goes ahead to shed some light on what the ongoing pandemic is and how it affects our day-to-day lives. This researcher then concludes this paper by listing some ways that our consumer buying behavior can improve at this period in our lives.

INTRODUCTION

This writer before delving deep into the topic at hand, would like to shed some light on what we refer to as a ‘consumer’ and ‘consumer behavior’.

Who is a consumer?

A consumer can be referred to as a private person, a corporate body of any organization, who as an end user buys a product from a seller or uses goods and services bought through an agent. A consumer can also be seen as the individual who sees the product, has the cash or a means to make payments, and the willingness to buy and consume the product.

 In a nutshell, the consumer is the one who pays to consume the goods and services produced. As such, consumers play a vital role in the economic system of a nation. In the absence of their effective demand, the producers would lack a key motivation to produce, which is to sell to consumers

What is consumer behavior?

Consumer behavior can be defined “as the study of how consumers select, purchase, use and dispose of goods and services to satisfy personal needs, house hold needs or industrial needs”.

In another light, consumer behavior can be seen as a body of knowledge or discipline and the study of the decision making processes and all the act of both the immediate and final users in the purchase and consumption of goods and services.

In essence, what we mean by consumer behavior is that it is the study of how consumers make decisions about what they need, want, and desire and how do they buy, use, and dispose of goods.

Taking a cursory look at the discussion at hand which is looking at how the ongoing pandemic (COVID 19) has brought fear into the hearts of so many people today, has affected consumer buying behavior. In order to understand how the corona virus affects consumer buying behavior, we need to know what exactly can affect our consumer buying behavior.

A consumer buying behavior and choice is influenced and moved by lots of factors that surround her and her immediate environment which actually is an interesting fact. These factors may be cultural, social, opinion leaders, a reference group, one’s family, personal or even psychological influences.

However, this writer will give a synopsis of what exactly the coronavirus is before one can understand how this can affect our consumer buying behavior. COVID-19 actually is the disease caused by the new coronavirus that emerged in China in December 2019. COVID-19 symptoms include cough, fever, shortness of breath, muscle aches, sore throat or unexplained loss of taste or smell. COVID-19 can be severe, and some cases have caused death. The new coronavirus can be spread from person to person if for example, a person wants to sneeze that is already contacted the virus, and they don’t do it in their elbow or carefully, it can be contracted. It is diagnosed with a laboratory test. There is no coronavirus vaccine yet. Prevention from contracting the virus involves frequent hand-washing, coughing into the bend of your elbow and staying home when you are sick. Based on the available evidence according to WHO, the COVID-19 virus is transmitted between people through close contact and droplets, not by airborne transmission. The people most at risk of infection are those who are in close contact with a COVID-19 patient or who care for COVID-19 patients.

In the midst of the pandemic going on, the government has advised citizens to indulge in some preventive measures such as;

* Quarantine: This can be seen as the separating and restricting the movement of people exposed (or potentially exposed) to a contagious disease.
* Self-isolation**:** Isolation, as opposed to quarantine, is what someone who is confirmed to be ill with a communicable disease has to do to separate themselves from healthy people around them. Although it is advised that if one feels symptoms of the coronavirus, once should get in contact with any of the help lines.
* Self-quarantine: This can be seen as the act of Staying at home and away from other people as much as possible after exposure or potential exposure to an infection.
* Social distancing: This out of many other preventive measures is the most advised. Any number of measures taken to increase the physical space between people to slow the spread of the virus. They include staying home more often, catching up with loved ones online instead of in person, strictly limiting the number of visitors to your home, and staying away from other people when you are in a public space. The World Health Organization recommends being more than one meter (three feet) away from the nearest person, while some health experts have suggested maintaining a distance of at least two meters from others.

We can see that all of these precautions that the government has advised on us restricts our ability to go out to purchase items and influences our consumer buying behavior. As we have seen from this writer’s definition of consumer behavior, that it is basically the buying behavior of the ultimate consumer. The World Health Organization has advised people that in prevention of the contagious virus, we should guard ourselves with what was explained as ***PPE:*** Personal Protective Equipment, it includes, but is not limited to, medically approved gowns, aprons or coveralls, gloves, respirators, face shields and masks. Preventive and mitigation measures are key in both healthcare and community settings. The most effective preventive measures in the community include:

* Performing hand hygiene frequently with an alcohol-based hand rub or sanitizer if your hands are not visibly dirty or with soap and water if hands are dirty; avoiding touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
* Practicing respiratory hygiene by coughing or sneezing into a bent elbow or tissue and then immediately disposing of the tissue in a closed bin.
* Wearing a medical mask if you have respiratory symptoms and performing hand hygiene after disposing of the mask in a closed bin of course.
* Maintaining social distance (a minimum of 1 m) from individuals with respiratory symptoms.

Now when we look at the way this can have an effect on what we buy and how we buy things. We find ourselves panic buying in the time of the ongoing pandemic called coronavirus. This is due to the quarantine that the government have advised citizens to engage in. This quarantine simply means in order to slow down or stop the spread of the coronavirus, we should go out less and stay at home more. The truth about this is that none of us needs more panic in our lives right now. If there’s one thing psychologists can agree on, it’s that panicky behavior is contagious. This in turn affects our consumer buying behavior in the sense that every time we read an article or even as little as an Instagram post telling us not to be selfish and ransack the supermarkets, it triggers the thought in our minds that food is running out in our local super markets and we must urgently get to the nearest super market and buy seven packets of pasta and as many tinned tomatoes and toilet papers as we can carry because of the panic we find ourselves in.

These are certainly unsettled times in which to feed ourselves. Over the past month, we have been exposed to an eerie sight that has been almost unknown in many countries for decades: empty supermarket shelves. When you are not used to it, this sight as an indigent person does a lot to you because you’re a person that cannot afford to panic buy like others are doing. What is generally called panic buying – a common human response to crisis – is not caused by food shortages per se, but by fear. At its root is a fear of scarcity, and this fear is self-fulfilling, because the more people anxiously stockpile, the more others get infected by the panic and the faster the food runs out. According to Steven Taylor, a clinical psychologist and author of The Psychology of Pandemics, which was published last year, there are parallels between the ways people are behaving now and the way they behaved during earlier pandemics such as the Spanish flu of 1918, when there was panic buying of Vicks Vapor Rub, and the 1968 flu pandemic, when food was looted from restaurants. In a nutshell, a way that the pandemic (COVID 19) has affected consumer buying behavior is through people panic buying.

Another way that the pandemic (COVID 19) has affected consumer buying behavior is through people panic buying personal protective gear (PPE) such as; gloves, medical masks, respirators, goggles, face shields, gowns, and aprons. Unsurprisingly amidst a pandemic, consumers are also focusing their spending on health products. Thermometers are up 498%; cold and flu remedies 159% and vitamins 93%. According to some studies during this pandemic, it has been shown that For virus protection, sales of gloves, masks and hand sanitizer surged a staggering 817%. Over the last two months, over-the-counter drug purchases increased by 198% for cold and flu medications and 152% for pain relievers.

Though hand sanitizer is very much in high demand (up 208%), there are also signs that people are trying to make their own versions at home. Two ingredients used in DIY recipes, hydrogen peroxide and rubbing alcohol, are up 212% and 277% respectively (although consumers may also be using them for other cleaning purposes). Other cleaning products, especially aerosol disinfectants, up 519%, and multi-purpose cleaners, up 243%, also saw strong increases in demand.

 The ongoing pandemic has engulfed us in so much fear that individuals are buying items such as sanitizers in order to protect ourselves against the virus. As much as this seems like a good thing to do in order to protect ourselves, it’s really not the best for the doctors and nurses that put their lives on the line every day. Healthcare workers rely on personal protective equipment to protect themselves and their patients from being infected and infecting others. But shortages are leaving doctors, nurses and other frontline workers dangerously ill-equipped to care for COVID-19 patients, due to limited access to supplies such as gloves, medical masks, respirators, goggles, face shields, gowns, and aprons. So, with this, we can see that we’re putting the lives of the real heroes at this time at great danger just because we think we’re doing what is right.

Another way that this pandemic has influenced our consumer buying behavior is through individuals engaging in online shopping. We all know the government and healthcare workers have advised citizens to go out and stay at home to prevent the spread of the virus. Not surprisingly, online sales during the coronavirus pandemic jumped 25% in just two days (March 13–15) compared to the first 11 days of the month. According to Adobe Analytics, research on over a trillion web visits, that spike was driven by online grocery shopping, which saw a more than 100% increase in daily sales. States like California, New Hampshire and Oregon saw the biggest boost in web sales.

CONCLUSION

It is no news that the ongoing pandemic COVID-19 has brought a lot of changes to our lives and our consumer behavior is certainly one of them. It is the opinion of this writer which suggests that regardless of the pandemic, which will want to make a lot of us buy so much items, we should also extend that hand and give to the poor who cannot afford much at this time. Also, we should try to be engage in more productive stuff rather than online shopping everyday.

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