NAME: Odjuvwu Georgina

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The new pandemic, COVID-19, came up at a time the world was least expecting it and took most of the world by surprise. Many instructions, rules, regulations, and practices have been put in place to help minimize the spread and effects of the virus including self-isolation and social distancing. This has affected the masses in more ways than one including their restricted movement and their changed consumer purchasing behavior. People worldwide are still trying to adapt to the idea of prolonged indoor stays. How has this changed our approach in purchasing goods? Furthermore, will these adjustments establish new and lasting habits?

According to a shopper behaviour research conducted by Nielsen1 that started during the beginning of the pandemic of China and extended to other countries that have also been affected, consumers go through six behavioural stages based on their awareness of the COVID-19 spread in their communities. The first being Proactive health-minded buying which has to do with the increased interest in the acquisition of products that maintain well-being or health. The second stage is the Reactive health management in which products for infection containment like face masks are prioritized. Third is the Pantry preparation which has to do with higher purchases of shelf-safe products and increased store visits. The fourth stage simply has to do with increased online shopping, decreased store visits and first signs of strain on the supply chain; this stage is named Quarantined living preparation. The last two stages, Restricted living and Living a new normal, are self-explanatory. These six behavioural stages will be seen to permeate all through the text.

The two driving factors behind the changes in consumer behavioural patterns are the two psychological factors, control and uncertainty. Consumers feel out of control about many aspects of the pandemic, but they do have control when they choose to stock up on things, so they exercise that control to feel better about the situation. There is tremendous uncertainty, and people worry about regretting not buying something, so this anticipation of possible regret leads them to buy, as regretting buying too much is not something they are too concerned about, compared to the regret of buying too little. Providing stuff can be used to express concern or caring for themselves and their family, so they buy items to show they are trying to keep their family safe. And there are various other factors. Perhaps the best way to reduce this cycle of panic buying is for people to feel like there are downsides to buying too much, such as keeping that stuff from others who need it more. This provides a reason for moderation, which is less likely to come to mind spontaneously as consumers are thinking less about the additive effects of everyone hoarding then they are about the immediate effects of having more stuff for their own family.

When consumers are faced with shopping restrictions, they find and adopt newer ways to shop through technology. This is especially true when it comes to health and essential items. It is quite expected for E-commerce sales to surge as shoppers stay home during crisis. However, grocery sales are where the biggest long-term impact could occur as food and beverages used to be one of the smallest e-commerce categories. In the US online purchases of shelf-stable grocery items have grown substantially in the last few days, including Rice (+432%), Flour (+423%), Canned & Jarred Vegetables (+337%), Canned & Prepared Beans (+433%), and Canned & Dry Milk (+378%) compared to the first four weeks of January. And it makes sense: These items are made for tough times when people may need to hunker down. They have a long shelf life, are versatile, and are frequently offered in large formats, making it easy to stock up on ingredients that last. online transactions in the Fashion & Luxury category—which includes items like designer clothes, watches, jewelry, and handbags—have largely stayed above their 2019 numbers despite being in the face of a worsening COVID-19 outbreak. Furthermore, the older generations never saw online shopping as a reliable means of transaction (daily or occasional), however, they are starting to see online shopping as a valid and safe option to obtain goods especially groceries.

Exempting the rise in online sales of food, it is quite expected that the demand of food will increase all through. The diffrent types and clases of food will all be stock-piled regardless of its expiration date and perishability. It is only normal for that to happen because humans are programmed to be selfish and think only of ways to survive in a crisis. As long as they stock up enough food, they’ll have no reason to have contact with the outside world, thereby preventing contacting the virus. As earlier evidence has shown, online purchases of shelf-stable grocery items grew substantially in the US including Rice (+432%), Flour (+423%), Canned & Jarred Vegetables (+337%), Canned & Prepared Beans (+433%), and Canned & Dry Milk (+378%) compared to the first four weeks of January. In superstitious countries like Nigeria, some food types have become sold out faster than others and this is simply due to the superstitious beliefs that they can “prevent” or “cure” the coronavirus. Popular examples of these food types are garlic, onions, and pineapples. Increased demands for these consumable goods and food generally all over the world will only lead to an increase in price and an increase in the supply of those goods. However, this may not be the case in some countries with illiterate or ignorant citizens. An example is Kano state of Nigeria, Africa, where the citizens do not believe in the existence of the coronavirus. They live freely as though they are not affected by the virus and turn deaf ears to the world’s plea of practicing safety measures. These places may exhibit a constant position in their demand and supply curves however, when they finally become aware, a rapid shift will occur (even faster than other countries).

Similar to the rise in food consumption patterns, there has been a rise in the demand of medical supplies, household cleaning supplies, and products for infection containment. It is not surprising that people will stockpile this category of goods as they will want to go through any means to protect themselves including using face masks and hand gloves or using sanitizers or hand soaps very frequently. Medical supplies including chloroquine, which is believed to be a possible cure to the coronavirus, paracetamol, cough syrups will be stocked up in houses to treat any symptom as they come up. In some developed countries like China, face masks have been mass produced to be sold at sometimes lower prices and sometimes higher prices. Lower prices by companies that are trying to help with relief and higher prices by companies that seek to gain profit from the whole crisis. Among consumers, these product types have been highly prioritized which is why sales of face masks and household cleaning supplies, which can be used to reduce the chance of contracting or spreading the virus, also shot up in early March compared to the first week in January—before running out of stock; in Italy, people prepared to take good care of themselves at home after a partial lockdown on February 25th. Sales of Medical Supplies spiked by +286% in early March and; France, which has enacted a country-wide quarantine, saw sales of medical supplies outpace even food products in early March, rising by nearly +600%.

Without forgetting the fashion and luxury industry, one would expect that transactions in fashion and luxury would decrease since everyone is locked up at home, with nowhere to go to showoff their flashy, classy, or designer clothes. However, we see hat the opposite is true. People still want to feel good about themselves by dressing up in lovely attires; people want to wear lovely clothes to hop on the trending challenge on social media and look classy while doing it; people still wear clothes to take personal video calls or attend Voice Over the Internet Protocol meetings. Some people just play dress-up, have fashion parades all by themselves all because of boredom and to remove the heavy burden they believe has been placeed on their shoulders; some people take the lockdown as a personal indoor holiday time and want to dress to fit the role. Therefore, the fashion and luxury industry plays vital role in the lives of the consumers and this is why its demand doesn’t reduce, neither does it emain stagnant, but increases. Since the top of the year, online transactions in the Fashion & Luxury category—which includes items like designer clothes, watches, jewelry, and handbags—have largely stayed above their 2019 numbers. The growth trend that we saw in January 2020 continues unabated, even in the face of a worsening COVID-19 outbreak in the US.

One vital sector of the economy that is often times overlooked and unnderestimated is the entertainment and media sector which continues to boom even more during the pandemic crisis. Although, some shows which have already been planned get cancelled due to the crisis and musicians will not be able to make money from shows and concerts, it still booms during this period especially for upcoming artistes. The music industry especially booms, without leaving out other sectors in the entertainment and media sectors, because of idleness, loneliness, and boredom of people in their houses. These services produced go a long way in keeping people company, keeping them busy, and keeping them entertained. Online games and social media apps will definitely have gotten more users by the end of the lockdown as people are more open to new ideas and things they’ve never tried before. On a positive note, staying home increases the amount of content people watch by 60%. Video games and video-game internet traffic have seen a 75% increase since restrictions were imposed in the US. Of course, not everyone is seeing increases in traffic or purchases, in fact travel sites are experiencing the opposite.

As offices close and employees are encouraged to work from home, many may be outfitting their spaces with items that let them work comfortably and efficiently. In the US, sales of home improvement, gardening, and interior design products—which includes things like office furniture, lamps, and area rugs—were up +13% in early March and still up by +8% late March, compared to January 2019. Therefore, this is yet another area of the economy that faces a rise, even though it is only a slight rise, at least it doesn’t decrease from previous points from previous years. Although it is sure that home furnishing is not an essential need for the consumers. However, it is not a problem for people who just want to make their houses look great since they are going to be in it all day everyday anyway. The transactions involved in home furnishing cannot be said to be a waste because people may need to refurnish their home offices to make them look more like home offices to increase the maximum attainable comfort they get while working from home.

Trust and loyalty is necessary. Consumers will continue to be loyal to some retailers and manufacturers and even after the pandemic has been contained. This is where it is shown that habits will be formed dring these times of lockdown and crisis and will be carried out even when the lockdown has finally come to an end and people have already started to move back to their normal lives. This then leads to the concluding paragraph.

In conclusion, there are various ways in which the pandemic has affected consumer behaviour. These include the changes in behavioural patterns and demand of food, medical supplies, clothing, entertainment and media, and home furnishing. It is expected for many habits to be formed during this period of crisis. However, both producers and consumers have to keep in mind that the period is temporary and not all the effects will be longlasting. Some effects will only show in the long- run while some in the short-run but will also die off after some time. Meanwhile, some of these practices will have no effect at all. This really should be a s strong signal for many to be prepared for something similar to happen in the future.