NAME: ORIOLOWO-NIYI ADEBOLA

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

To begin with, what is Consumer buying behavior?

Consumer buying behavior can be defined as the actions involved and taken by consumers before buying a product or service. Consumer buying behavior is closely related to consumer behavior itself, as consumer behavior is also referred to as the buying behavior of the ultimate consumer. Basically, consumer buying behavior refers to those acts of individuals and organizations directly involved in obtaining goods and services including the decision processes that follows and determines these acts. In essence, what we, as consumers, do before buying and using goods and services, including factors that influence this behavior.

There are several factors that influence a consumer’s buying behavior. Some are: the consumer’s personal preferences, environmental factors such as social influences (family, culture, psychological influences, etc.), the popularity of the good (which is an effect of great advertising), the economic condition, etc.

However, this essay shall be focused on the prevailing factor which currently influences all buyers globally, and this is none other than the pandemic, the Corona Virus also known as (COVID-19). This pandemic has affected all the countries in the world and as such, the buying behavior of consumers everywhere is very similar. The virus and the methods for staying safe from it, has greatly shook and is still shaking markets and is influencing how and what people buy. As we shall see below, some businesses have skyrocketed while some are on the line and some, are on the brink of collapse; all this can be traced back to how consumer think, buy, and make decisions during this pandemic.

The focus of this essay will be on both businesses that are thriving and businesses which are at a loss because of the buying behavior of consumers due to the pandemic. To explain this, I shall focus on the strong link between the key methods of preventing the virus and consumer buying behavior. This will be explained below. These key methods are:

a) Washing our hands with soap and water or using a hand sanitizer: On 27th February 2020, the first Corona Virus cases was recorded in Nigeria. That same day, by 10 am in Lagos State, hand sanitizers were out of stock in almost all markets. People were rushing and buying tons and tons because it was well-popularized that the alcohol-based hand sanitizers would kill the virus. Disinfectants, tissue and other cleaning items also became low in stock in countries like the United States of America. Ordinarily, these products, especially the sanitizers were ignored by people. However, as the virus continued to spread, some shops even inflated the process of these items and people still continued to buy- before these items became out of stock. This alone, shows, the shift in buying behavior of consumers.

Another important item people are buying are faces masks. Formerly, face masks were used mainly by doctors and other health care workers. Today, the demand for face masks is very high. Face masks and gloves are like compulsory attachments to one’s outfits especially when going outside or working in food or grocery stores and hospitals.

Site search provider, Bloomreach, found out that online sales for medical and health-care related items had increased in the United States of America. From February 22nd to February 29th masks sales increased by 590%, hand sanitizers sales increased by 420%, disinfectants sales increased by 178%, gloves sales increased by 151%, hand soap increased by 33%, and toilet paper and paper towel sales increased by 26%.

This goes to show that people are now buying and focusing on protective equipment, which prior to this period, were just normal items people did not bother buying. This is one of the effects of the pandemic on the buying behavior of consumers.

b) Social distancing and travel bans: Apart from the first person who contacted the virus possibly, every other infected person contacted it either directly or indirectly from people who were also infected. This is why social distancing is preached, advised, and enforced by the media and the government every single day. This means that public places like clubs, parks, and even religious places have been closed down in areas where the number of infected people is high. This has led to the cancellation and postponement of many big annual events like Coachella, Tony Awards, Emmy Awards. NBA All Stars program, etc. Restaurants are also affected as they have been closed down in many majorly affected cities. People are also scared of buying food outside their homes because the only way to ensure your food is a very hygienic way is to cook yourself. Even large markets are not left out of this as only food sellers are allowed to operate. This is a very important point which will be explained below.

Only food and other essentials’ sellers are allowed to operate. This means that other items such as clothes, jewelry, electronics, etc., are not allowed to be sold. Even if they were, most these items would be shunned by some consumers, except they are sold at a much lower price. Why? People are no longer buying to enjoy, or impress, or all of that. People are buying to live, especially in this dire time. They are focusing on needs than wants and have become more practical and realistic in what they purchase. And in doing this, they are creating a mental scale of preference even though they are not aware. Protective items and food top this scale while every other thing comes under.

Also, prices of food stuff have drastically increased because the pandemic has disrupted supply chains. People are being quarantined and made to stay at home. And as such, work is halted in most factories and producing companies. Therefore, sellers are now selling the food stuff they have in stock at higher prices. Another reason for the high increase in price of food is the lack of importation and transportation as lockdown and travel bans have been imposed as a preventive measure against the virus. Food is essential to life and that is why the food business is thriving in a sense. Furthermore, people who can afford the price hike are panic buying in order to sustains themselves pending the end of this pandemic. Food items are like the one thing that consumers (who can afford it) will keep buying until after this is over and even after the pandemic ends.

Airlines have also been shut down because travelling is one of the main ways through which the virus spread like wildfire. As people are cancelling flights and government is imposing bans or restrictions on airlines, the airline industry is suffering. Recently, the World Economic Forum reported that the combinations of trip cancellations by consumers and country-specific restrictions or outright bans of international flights cost the industry a whooping Eight hundred and Eighty billion dollars ($880 billion).

Prior to the pandemic, some people were flying all around the world for vacations, work-related purposes and all. It was a booming time for airlines. Today, however, due to the reasons mentioned above, people are at home. Consumers are shifting their focus to sustaining themselves at home and many intending travelers have cancelled their flight plans and tickets.

c) Medical supplies: Medicines are in great demand in a time like this and as such Pharmacies have been busy. Also, hospitals are now the major role players in combating the virus. Essential medical supplies are in great demand. Supplies like ventilators, oxygen, and the like are needed to treat the infected patients and have proved useful in helping recovered patients. People are stocking up on medicines used for minor health problems as hospitals have become a no-go area for patients who are not affected by the pandemic.

In fact, just recently, to show how much medical supplies are needed in affected countries, The Federal Ministry of Finance had to solicit or “beg” (as many embarrassed Nigerians put it) on Twitter for ventilators, after Elon Musk announced that he would be giving out ventilators to hospitals within Tesla delivery areas. Other countries also joined to ask for these ventilators to aid the fight against the pandemic. However, it did not end well for the Ministry of Finance because Nigerians dragged them and the government for ignoring the Health Sector in Nigeria. The Ministry was forced to deleted its tweet. Currently, we have less than five hundred (500) ventilators in Nigeria as the infected cases rise day by day. You will agree with me that this is the best time for company supplying medical supplies to boom as many nations are in need of it.

Another effect of the pandemic is the increase in use of virtual apps like Zoom, Jitsi Meet App, Skype, etc. This is because people are prevented from meeting physically and so these apps provide a platform for conduct meetings and used to get work done, as possible as it can be done online. Also, since schools are closed down, these apps are also helpful in conducting online classes and giving out assignments and tests, in order to keep students engaged during the break. As such, people are downloading, subscribing and using these apps to meet their goals or wants.

Online shopping is yet another area that cannot be overlooked. Since people are not allowed to move about in many cities in the world, online shopping has even gained more prominence in these times. In the United States of America, studies show that online grocery sales are going up in this period. The Retail Customer Experience, a website and news outlet which provides information on the retail business, reported that online shopping in the United States of America has increased by 74% since March 13 in response to the virus. Grocery delivery platforms such as Walmart, Instacart and Shipt are seeing dramatic spikes in sales which is attributed to new costumers who are trying online shopping for the first time since it is advised to stay at home as best as you can. Online shopping is also a little more advantageous than going out to get products because in places like Lagos where food stores are opened for just a limited period of time in a day, there is bound to be a lot of people in these stores. These are the reasons why some consumers have resorted to shopping online for their essentials and other items.

Meanwhile, online apps like Netflix, TikTok, Thriller, and the like are growing largely. This is because some consumers are using their free time to do fun stuff like making funny dance videos or watching movies. The pandemic is increasing the popularity of these apps. It is quite normal to see people saying things like “Stay at home, watch Netflix and chill” or seeing different Tiktok videos and all on people’s timelines. Some people are using this compulsory stay-at-home break to rest and have fun. It is expected that Netflix will accumulate seven (7) million more subscribers in this first quarter due to the virus. In some ways, the virus is aiding these online apps grow.

In conclusion, we have studied the different ways in which the pandemic has affected consumer buying behavior. People are still buying good and services, yes. But there has been a change in how they make decisions on what to buy because the pandemic has bought changes and disruptions to almost every aspect of life most especially the market. Therefore, we have seen an increase in the sales of certain goods, like protective equipment and medical supplies and food items, and a decrease in the sales of other items besides those aforementioned as market bans and travel bans are imposed and as people shift their focus to essential items. To sum it up, essential products that can be consumed at home will spike in sales while non-essential products and services will be the worst affected by the Corona Virus Pandemic.

References

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