Abstract

This assignment seeks to explain how the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has affected races and countries round the whole world, disrupting the routine areas of life especially economic activities with reference to consumer buying behaviour in particular, its stages and its control on the economic activities of consumers in the world as a whole.

The reality of this new pandemic took the world by surprise. People all over the world are still trying to adapt to the idea of prolonged indoor stays while some remain stubborn and continue public movement instead of heeding various warnings. In a bid to make an effort to adapt rapidly to social distancing and other health advice that have been proffered by various health authorities and the government so as to avoid contacting and further spreading of the disease, a lot of areas of life have been affected amongst them being educational programmes and calendars, religious services and other solemn gatherings, transportation as well as business and economic activities. On a worldwide scale, business and economic activities are the most affected, even in countries that do not report having high numbers of coronavirus victims. Borders have been closed. Other changes have occurred also, with some being very extreme and unpredictable. In the midst of all these one area which has been adversely influenced is consumer behavior specifically, consumer buying behavior. It has been greatly altered within the shortest period of time and this has caused a chain reaction generally on economies.

Before going into any more discussions about consumer buying behavior and how it has been affected by the raging coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic prevalent at this time, it would be good to cover surface ground on what consumer buying behavior entails. Consumer buying behavior is a scope of consumer behavior.

Consumer behavior is the study of consumers and the processes they use to choose, use (consume), and dispose of products and services, including consumers’ emotional, mental, and behavioral responses.

Marketers understand what influences consumers’ buying decisions using the study of consumer behavior By understanding how consumers decide on a product they can fill in the gap in the market and identify the products that are needed and the products that are obsolete. Studying consumer behaviour also helps marketers decide how they can present their products in a way that generates maximum impact on consumers.

**Types of consumer behavior**

There are four main types of consumer behavior

**1. Complex buying behavior**

This type of behavior is encountered when consumers are buying an expensive, infrequently bought product. They are highly involved in the purchase process and consumers’ research before committing to invest. Imagine buying of a house or land to build a house or a car; these are examples of a complex buying behavior.

**2. Dissonance-reducing buying behavior**

The consumer is highly involved in the purchase process but has difficulties determining the differences between brands. ‘Dissonance’ can occur when the consumer worries that they will regret their choice.

Imagine you are buying a lawnmower. You will choose one based on price and convenience, but after the purchase you will seek confirmation that you’ve made the right choice.

**3. Habitual buying behavior**

Habitual purchases are characterized by the fact that the consumer has very little involvement in the product or brand category. Imagine grocery shopping: you go to the store and buy your preferred type of bread. You are exhibiting a habitual pattern, not strong brand loyalty.

**4. Variety seeking behavior**

In this situation, a consumer purchases a different product not because they weren’t satisfied with the previous one, but because they seek variety. Like when you are trying out new shower gel scents.

Consumer behavior is often influenced by different factors.  There are three categories of factors that influence consumer behavior:

**1. Personal factors**: An individual’s interests and opinions in consuming a particular good and services that can be influenced by demographics (age, gender, culture, etc.).

**2. Psychological factors**: An individual’s response to a marketing message will depend on their perceptions and attitudes.

**3. Social factors**: family, friends, education level, social media, income, they all influence consumers’ behavior.

Consumer buying behavior refers to behavior of the ultimate consumer when he purchases a good or a service. Consumer buying behaviour is the sum total of a consumer's attitudes, preferences, intentions, and decisions regarding the consumer's behavior when purchasing a product or service. Consumer buying behaviour consists of sequential steps that consumers have been found to follow in arriving at final buying decisions.

**1.** **Problem Recognition (awareness of need)**

This is when the buyer senses a difference between the desired state and the actual condition (physical and mental) he is in at the moment. To explain this in a simpler manner, before a purchase can ever take place, the customer must have a reason to believe that what they want, where they want to be or how they perceive themselves or a situation is different from where they actually are. The desire is different from the reality – this presents a problem for the customer. This desire is a source or force of buying behaviour. The desire can be triggered by internal or external stimuli. Internal stimuli include basic or normal needs – hunger, thirst, sex, or comfort while external stimuli include external forces, for instance, when an individual watch a commercial of a brand new car, he desires to buy it or a commercial for a new pair of shoes stimulates a woman’s recognition that she need a new pair of shoes.

## 2. Information Search

Once a problem is recognized, the interested customer’s search process begins. He knows there is an issue and he is looking for a solution. Now, they will try to seek information. Now, he will read newspapers and magazines, watch television, visit showroom or dealer, contact salesman, discuss with friends and relatives, and try all the possible sources of information.

Mostly, the consumer can try one or more of following sources of information: personal sources e.g. family members, friends, package, colleagues, and relatives; commercial sources e.g. advertising, salesmen, dealers, package, trade show, display, and exhibition ; public sources e.g. mass media (radio, TV, newspapers, magazines, cinema, etc.), consumer- rating agencies, etc.; experimental sources e.g. examining, testing, or using the product.

A successful information search enables the consumer to learn about different products and brands available in the market.

**3. Evaluation of Alternatives**

In the former stage, the consumer has collected information about certain brands. Now, he undergoes evaluation of brands. He cannot buy all of them. Normally, he selects the best one, the brand that offers maximum satisfaction. Here, he evaluates competitive brands to judge which one is the best, the most attractive. Evaluation calls for looking at various alternatives with certain choice criteria.

Following criteria are considered while evaluating alternatives: benefits offered by the brands, qualities, features or attributes, and performance, least but sensible price charged by various brands, history of brands, popularity, image or reputation of brands, product-related services offered by the brands, such as after-sales services, warrantee, and free installation, availability of brands and dealer rating.

The brand that meets most of the above conditions reasonably is more likely to be preferred.

**4. Purchase Decision**

Somewhat surprisingly, the purchase decision falls near the middle of the six stages of the consumer buying process. At this point, the customer has explored multiple options, they understand pricing and payment options and they are deciding whether to move forward with the purchase or not. At this point they could still decide to walk away. They usually remind themselves of why they wanted to make the purchase in the first time.

**5. Purchase**

This is the stage when the consumer prefers one, the most promising band, out of several brands. The former stages helps consumers recognize and evaluate various brands in the choice set. A need has been created, research has been completed and the customer has decided to make a purchase. All the stages that lead to a conversion have been finished. The brand that offers maximum benefits or satisfaction is preferred

6. **Post purchase evaluation:** Satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Cognitive Dissonance, have you made the right decision. This can be reduced by warranties, after sales communication etc.

After eating an Indian meal, you may think that really you wanted a Chinese meal instead.

People manage the resources that they have because they don’t have money and to avoid going to purchase more resources thereby risking contacting the virus.

**6. Post-Purchase Evaluation**

Just because a purchase has been made, the process has not ended. In fact, revenues and customer loyalty can be easily lost. After a purchase is made, it’s inevitable that the customer must decide whether they are satisfied with the decision that was made or not. They evaluate.

If a customer feels as though an incorrect decision was made, a return could take place. This can be mitigated by identifying the source of dissonance, and offering an exchange that is simple and straightforward. However, even if the customer is satisfied with his or her decision to make the purchase, whether a future purchase is made from your brand is still in question. Because of this, sending follow-up surveys and emails that thank the customer for making a purchase are critical.

Take the time to understand the six stages of the consumer buying process. Doing this ensures that your marketing strategy addresses each stage and leads to higher conversions and long-term customer loyalty.

### 5. Post-purchase Decisions:

Consumer buys the product with certain expectations. Though he decides very systematically, there is no guarantee of a complete satisfaction. There is always possibility of variation between the expected level of satisfaction and the actual satisfaction.

The larger the gap between expectations and performance, the greater the consumer’s dissatisfaction will be. Obviously, the level of the consumer’s satisfaction with the product affects his subsequent behaviour/action. The consumer is satisfied when product meets or exceeds all the expectations and vice versa. If he is satisfied reasonably, he buys the product again, and talks favourably to family members, friends, relatives, and co-workers. A dissatisfied consumer responds differently. He may abandon product, complain to the company for compensation, resort to the court and warn other organisations, friends, relatives and co-workers to avoid product.

Now that the groundwork has been covered, it is easier to understand the effects of coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on consumer buying behavior.

Firstly, during this time of panic, most consumers, if not everyone, did not take their time to think about personal, psychological or social factors. They also did not calmly settle down and take out time to look for alternatives among products. As soon as they recognized that there was a problem at hand, they gathered sufficient but genuine information and began to make purchases of things to prepare for the pandemic. At first, demand for goods and items like food, tissue, facemasks, gloves, hand sanitizers increased with the most purchased good being food. The rate at which food-especially foods which come in big quantities, foods that are versatile in use, and can last for a long time i.e. have a long shelf life- was sold for the first few days of the lockdown was triple of what was purchased before the outbreak of the pandemic. Consumers did this in readiness for the lockdown and to avoid any incidence of shortage of food. Also, some services were increasingly patronized like transport services, whether by air or by road, to stay with families or friends during the lockdown.

Later on, when the lockdown was being fully operated in different parts of the world and as it had been well broadcast to all nook and crannies that more social distancing such as not attending or requesting social gatherings, less movements, both within and outside the country would be a step to limiting the disease, the demand for goods and patronization of services will decrease significantly especially in restaurants, markets and supermarkets. Consumers’ freedom to purchase and choose among varieties as much as they would have liked is now limited to a very large extent. Also, they are not searching for what will give the greatest amount of utility or to recommend to family and friends – though they might pass on what health advice they can and what foods can be eaten or actions carried out to be protected from the virus. They have been restricted, though without force, to purchasing only the few necessities they can gather in the shortest period of time.