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**COURSE: CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR**

**Introduction**

What is consumer behavior?

Wikipedia defines consumer behavior as the study of individuals, groups, or organizations and all the activities associated with the purchase, use and disposal of goods and services, including the consumer's emotional, mental and behavioural responses that precede or follow these activities. Consumer behaviour emerged in the 1940s and 50s as a distinct sub-discipline in the marketing area. It examines how emotions, attitudes and preferences affect buying behaviour. In the light of this, Corona virus disease is a pandemic that is ranging the world at large, it is known to cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). This virus has no cure or vaccine and it has killed thousands of people across the world. As a red of this the World Health Organisation (WHO) has prescribed some guidelines to be followed in other to prevent the spread of the virus and avoid contracting it and they are;

* Wash your hands regularly for 20 seconds, with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub
* Cover your nose and mouth with a disposable tissue or flexed elbow when you cough or sneeze
* Avoid close contact (1 meter or 3 feet) with people who are unwell
* Stay home and self-isolate from others in the household if you feel unwell
* Don't touch your eyes, nose, or mouth if your hands are not clean.

The study of consumer behaviour assumes that the consumers are actors in the marketplace. The per­spective of role theory assumes that consumers play various roles in the marketplace. Starting from the information provider, from the user to the payer and to the disposer, consumers play these roles in the decision process.
The roles also vary in different consumption situations; for example, a mother plays the role of an influencer in a child’s purchase process, whereas she plays the role of a disposer for the products consumed by the family.

My reason for writing this report is to state examine the effects of the corona virus on consumer behaviour world-wide. I also intend to talk about the consumer behaviour before the outbreak of the virus, current consumer behaviour with the outbreak of the virus and, I would also attempt a prediction of how consumer behaviour will be like after the outbreak of the virus.

**Consumer behavior before the outbreak of the virus.**

Consumer behaviour is the study of how individual customers, groups or organizations select, buy, use, and dispose ideas, goods, and services to satisfy their needs and wants. It refers to the actions of the consumers in the marketplace and the underlying motives for those actions.

Marketers expect that by understanding what causes the consumers to buy particular goods and services, they will be able to determine which products are needed in the marketplace, which are obsolete, and how best to present the goods to the consumers. The study of consumer behaviour assumes that the consumers are actors in the marketplace. The per­spective of role theory assumes that consumers play various roles in the marketplace. Starting from the information provider, from the user to the payer and to the disposer, consumers play these roles in the decision process. The roles also vary in different consumption situations; for example, a mother plays the role of an influencer in a child’s purchase process, whereas she plays the role of a disposer for the products consumed by the family.

**Nature of Consumer Behaviour:**

Influenced by various factors:

The various factors that influence the consumer behaviour are as follows; marketing, personal, psychological, situational, social and cultural factors.

**Undergoes a constant change:**

Consumer behaviour is not static. It undergoes a change over a period of time depending on the nature of products.

**Varies from consumer to consumer, from region to region and country to county:**

All consumers do not behave in the same manner. Differ­ent consumers behave differently and the consumer behavior varies across states, regions and countries.

**Information on consumer behaviour is important to the marketers:**

Marketers need to have a good knowledge of the consumer behaviour.

**Leads to purchase decision:**

A positive consumer behaviour leads to a purchase decision. A consumer may take the decision of buying a product on the basis of different buying motives.

**Consumer behavior and Corona virus**

The reality of this new pandemic took the world by surprise. People worldwide are still trying to adapt to the idea of prolonged indoor stays. So, now that we are all trying to avoid going out to shop in brick and mortar stores, how has this changed our approach in purchasing goods?  Furthermore, will these adjustments establish new and lasting habits?

Due to this pandemic governments all around the world to come up with various strategies to try and prevent the virus from spreading any further. Some of these strategies include call for social distancing, suspension of major sporting events, suspension of commercial flights, closing of schools amongst others. All these have been put in place in order to ensure the safety of the general public. Scientists and researchers have been working tirelessly to try and find a cure for the dreaded disease. While they are doing this, the rest of the world is basically on hold.

**Consumer behavior with the outbreak of the Corona virus**

Due to the outbreak of the virus and the fact that the duration of this virus is unknown, and movement has been restricted most people want to get necessary items that would last them throughout the lock down period. In other words, people are engaging in what is called ‘panic buying’ which have greatly changed the behavior of consumers all around the globe. The World Health Organisation has made some statements about precautions to take which include: washing hand regularly with soap or with alcohol based rub, avoid touching the face especially the eyes, nose and mouth, covering ones face with elbow or disposable tissue when sneezing or coughing, wearing masks covering ones face when coming in contact with other people. In following all these precautions, demand for some particular products like face masks, hand soap, hand sanitizers, tissue paper, disposable gloves amongst others will be high.

**Behavioral trends of consumers during the Corona virus pandemic.**

In countries heavily impacted by COVID-19, consumers are stockpiling food and other essential items, while isolating themselves from crowds. To find out how and when consumers started showing these behavioral changes, Nielsen conducted shopper behavior research that started during the beginning of the pandemic in China and extended to other countries that have also been affected. They monitored consumer trends, as COVID-19 news reached the general public and found out that consumers go through six behavioral stages based on their awareness of the COVID-19 spread in their communities:

1. Proactive health-minded buying: Increased interest in the acquisition of products that maintain well-being or health

2. Reactive health management: Prioritization of products for infection containment (e.g. face masks)

3. Pantry preparation: Higher purchases of shelf-safe products and increased store visits

4. Quarantined living preparation: Increased online shopping, decreased store visits and first signs of strain on the supply chain

5. Restricted living: Possible price gouging due to limited supplies and deterred online fulfillment

6. Living a new normal: Increased health awareness even as people return to their typical daily activities.

The study also found out that consumers typically moved from one stage to another in a period of two weeks in areas close to the initial outbreak. However, this happened much faster in other countries where the outbreak started later, such as Italy and the US.

Currently, the only country where consumers are starting to transition to the sixth stage is China, while the US has begun to move towards restricted living. So, what kind of possible long-lasting consumer behavior shifts can we expect as a result? It’s still too early to tell, but clear trends can be seen, which, if sustained, could lead to significant shifts in how consumers shop in the future.

Novel ways to shop

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. In 2019, the online grocery shopping market generated about $28.68 billion or a 20% increase from 2018. Despite this growth, food and beverage were still one of the smallest e-commerce categories. Last year, it was mostly the younger population segment that tried online grocery shopping, with 55% of 25 to 34-year-olds considering themselves likely to purchase groceries online, in contrast to only 35% of 45 to 54-year-olds expressing the same sentiment.

However, due to the pandemic, older generations are starting to see online shopping as a valid and safe option to obtain groceries. For example, Alibaba reported that in China, online grocery orders placed by people born in the 1960s were four times higher than normal during the Spring Festival or the period were China was still discovering new cases of COVID-19 each day.

Relying on manufacturers

As the population of most countries starts to move from quarantine preparations to restricted living, online fulfillment will be challenging due to strains in the supply chain. This has prompted many consumers to turn to Direct to Consumer (D2C) manufacturers to order and receive goods within a normal timeframe.

These D2C manufactures are a growing segment that caters directly to consumers by bypassing standard distribution channels, effectively gaining direct access to consumers.

Trust and loyalty

The task of continuing to entice consumers to shop online, for both retailers and D2C manufacturers, is grounded on trust in order to foster lasting loyalty. However, building trust, especially in these extreme situations, means more than meeting expectations, but exceeding them. To do so, here are some important approaches to keep in mind;

Ease the transition: Make it as seamless as possible for consumers to switch to online shopping.

Manage expectations: Display accurate stock level information especially for sought-after goods.

Foster comfort: Ensure that customers feel confident that their goods will be delivered on time.

**Consumer behavior after the outbreak of the virus**

In this situation we can only speculate what behavioral changes the consumer can exhibit after the outbreak of the virus worldwide since its only one country that has recently overcome the pandemic and the name of that country is China. On the 4th of April 2020 China recorded zero death and zero cases from the corona virus. Therefore we can only use China experimentally to determine what might likely be consumer behavior after this deadly pandemic.

Chinese consumers are gradually regaining their confidence as the COVID-19 crisis subsides, suggesting the majority will resume higher levels of spending in some categories over the coming months, according to McKinsey’s latest survey of consumer attitudes. A significant minority, however, is less confident about the future, suggesting many consumer brands will need to work hard to get back to normal. Stronger appetite for online shopping, meanwhile, could persist as the crisis abates, albeit with variations across categories.

Around 2,500 Chinese consumers have been interviewed by sociologists in two waves (the first between February 21 and 24 and again between March 20 and 23), enabling us to gauge consumer attitudes across eight product categories: alcohol, makeup, skincare, snacks, home cleaning, personal care, fresh food, and baby care. Still, the sentiments expressed should be viewed as directional rather than conclusive (partly because severely affected regions such as Hubei were difficult to survey) and should not be interpreted as an indication of wider economic trends.

**Conclusion**

Corona virus has shut down large parts of the economies of different countries in the early part of the year and continues to do so in other countries. It’s still too early to tell how much consumer behavior will change due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We’ll learn more and more about the immediate impact on stores and e-commerce as soon as additional countries move through the different stages and into restrictive living. However, it will be a while until we know if these changes in consumer behavior will be long term. I hope I have been able to cover all aspects of the changes in consumer behavior as a result of outbreak of the corona virus in Nigeria and across other countries that are affected by the virus.

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