

Impact of COVID-19 on Consumer Behavior

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Abstract: *The Coronavirus pandemic has created different operational dynamics such as social distancing protocols which have been utterly disruptive to consumer purchasing behavior. Consumers are therefore bound to accept these government-imposed sanctions as they are meant to protect everyone. For instance, consumers today have limited shopping time as stores are closing early nowadays unlike the previously prolonged operating hours. A business that previously operated 24/7 is now limited in terms of operating hours and consequently, lower their profits. Some businesses have transitioned from brick-and-mortar to adopt online platforms so that they can lower interactions. Others have embarked more on an online delivery system such that one does not head to the store, but the store comes to you. Ideally, most businesses that have shifted their businesses online use technology as an auxiliary tool to enhance their markets. Even after the pandemic, organizations using platforms such as Zoom will continue as it is ideal to assist in lowering operational costs. Even as the pandemic's effects decline and businesses start resuming to normalcy, the sellers will already have modified their operational structure; and while some protocols will have to be eliminated, those deemed beneficial will remain consequently influencing consumer behavior.*

Keywords: Coronavirus, Consumer behavior, lockdown

1. Introduction

New Consumer Behaviors will be Transformative to the Future of the Industry

Coronavirus or COVID-19 has created fundamental changes to the world as we earlier knew it. People are living differently, thinking and making purchasing decisions differently as they have to adapt to the new changes. A considerable level of global supply chains has been tested and some retailers are even closing shop due to the detrimental impacts of Coronavirus. The virus has created a paradigm shift in the consumer goods industry with a hasty transformation of the prevailing trends within a short time. Evidently, most of these new habits formed are highly likely to outlast the virus, and profoundly transform how people shop, work, and live.

It is hence imperative to understand the underlying changes occurring due to Coronavirus so that they can forecast the near-future and comprehend best strategies for business (Sheth, 2020, p. 282). One of the ways of understanding these changes is seeking to understand the consumer during the crisis. For example, consumers harbor concerns about the COVID-19 impact from an economic and health perspective. Evidently, they respond to these changes with different attitudes and purchasing behavior. Others are afraid of tuning to the new normal as they are fearful of what the crisis means to them, their families, and the society at large. For instance, at the start of the crisis, a majority of the people were into bulk buying to ensure that they stock up for the future since they did not know what it holds.

According to research, consumers are more wary of the economic effects of Coronavirus than their health. 64% of the respondents expressed fear for their health while 82% were fearful for other people's health. 64% were also worried about the effects of Coronavirus on their job security while 88% were worried about the pandemic's effect on the economy ("COVID-19: Fast-changing consumer behavior," 2020). In the long-run, even after the crisis, some people will be wary of another impending one, and hence will continue making bulk

purchases of their staples. On the other hand, there are some businesses that did not shift their operational structure and hence continue running their businesses as usual, particularly those that were already in online business.

Reduced Demand on Non-Essential Items

Today, most of the consumers' priorities have shifted as they are currently concerned about basic needs and hygiene. This situation has resulted to an upward shift in the demand for hygiene and food products as the rest, non-essential products decline.

Localization of Brands and Establishment of Online Platforms

Imperatively, there has been a strong advocacy for local brands, leading to localization of products consumed. This localization or rather emphasis on local products emanates from the limitations experienced during Coronavirus lockdowns, whereby supply chains were destabilized to the extent of internationally shipped products being considerably reduced as planes became grounded among other lockdowns. Therefore, there has been a mobility shift and mobility shortage. For instance, shopping, schooling, and working have all shifted and are now operationalized from a localized context; at home. However, there is increased flexibility as consumers are not bound to follow schedules previously necessary for working, shopping, or schooling ("COVID-19: Fast-changing consumer behavior," 2020). Therefore, digital commerce has also been on an increase as new consumers opt for online shopping to reduce their interaction with people hence curbing the spread of the virus. This trend is likely to become a permanent situation as businesses have made heavy investments towards its operationalization. The fact that consumers will be wary of interacting with the public even after the crisis ends shows that online business platforms are likely to become permanent features of businesses.

Increased Concerns about Health

Some brands have realized the importance of making health a priority and hence have increasingly become supportive of their stakeholders' healthy lifestyles. They have therefore

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introduced a healthy strategy, which significantly creates unique differences within the near-future. People with underlying conditions are more susceptible to Coronavirus. This situation has necessitated a considerable number of people to not only get tested for Coronavirus, but to also test for any pre-existing conditions they previously were not concerned about.

Increased Awareness During Purchasing

Previously, people were not concerned about the purchases they made. This situation was due to the normalcy of the supply chain networks. One was guaranteed of stockpiles of products within any given store and hence there was no need for concern about supply shortages 1088295:22092471. Consumers could hence buy any item they wanted, apart from basic commodities. However, upon hearing of the news about the spread of COVID-19 in other nations, people braced themselves for vital changes. First, they no longer made blind purchase decisions due to the limitation of existence of basic commodities. This situation led to panic buying of vital commodities such as food supplies and health and hygiene products. The most basic of commodities were the key target for every shopper; they were no longer concerned about auxiliary products such as computer games or farm tools (Haq, 2020, p. 210). This increased awareness in purchasing has been done consistently for more than six months now, and is gradually adapting to inherently become part of the purchasing decision-making process (Alexander et al., 2020, p.445).

2. Conclusion

The novel Coronavirus has necessitated a myriad of changes in the way of doing business and hence influenced a paradigm shift on consumer behavior. Consumers today have limited shopping time, and hence opt to shop online. A considerable number of businesses have also established online outlets and introduced shipping to lower human interaction. There have also been increased concerns by consumers about health as more people get tested for Coronavirus and any other pre-existing diseases. Further, consumers have become more self-aware during shopping and hence lowered their penchant for impulse buying. Consequently, even as the pandemic's effects decline and businesses start resuming to normalcy, the sellers will already have modified their operational structure; and while some protocols will have to be eliminated, those deemed beneficial will remain consequently influencing consumer behavior.

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