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## CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR IN COVID ERA

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### ABSTRACT

COVID came an important health challenge for humanity since 2020. As a result, every aspect of mortal life changed during the COVID period. So, consumer gets also changed. Increased operation <sup>2</sup> of technology, reduction in buying of luxury products, hike in buying of healthcare related products, online buying, frequency of wrong buying opinions, rise in planned buying and domestic hoarding were some of the changes in consumer gets of this period. The reasons behind this can be listed as penetration of technology, single decision timber, increased fatigue and internal stress, fear of death and break down of distribution channels. As a result of these changes in consumer gets, comprehensions changed about products and their significance. therefore, it was delicate to prognosticate demands. That told product and advertising. The COVID period created changes in consumer gets which were abrupt. These changes didn't have any relation with the history. So, man was not educated enough to handle these changes. therefore, similar changes have also handed with ample compass of exploration. These changes may be anticipated to bring fermentation in the world of business, indeed in the forthcoming times. The investigator has recommended helping consumers in their buying opinions by erecting physical substantiation. Also collection of journal feedbacks from consumers will help the entrepreneurs to understand their desire, demand and changes in these. This is the phase when numerous new rules and regulations will get framed and also enforced.

key Words: Consumer behaviour, COVID, change, pandemic, demand, marketing, distribution, Customer Preference

## INTERNOUCTION

The Corona contagion was first detected in China in December, 2019. Within a many months, this contagion spread across the world, thereby initiating a epidemic. At one point of time, the contagion that caused this epidemic literally turned the world upside down. The <sup>5</sup> former British Prime Minister, Liz Truss said that this contagion may represent the biggest health extremity any of us would witness in our continuances. Hensher( 2020) wrote that COVID- 19 has disintegrated humankind in a manner that wasn't seen ahead. Chriscarden( 2020) editorialized <sup>2</sup> that while the loss of life, occupation, and livelihood are well - articulated impacts of COVID - 19, the loss of routine, social and profitable life over a prolonged period is having long - continuing goods on people. Witteveen( 2020) stressed on the impact of tone insulation and social lockdown. COVID - 19 assessed ' tone - insulation and social lockdown had increased internal stress and foisted cerebral and behavioural changes.

<sup>1</sup> The current consumer behaviour is nothing new but is a result of crisis, which brought for the different facets of consumer behaviour. The fear of unknown and lockdown forced people to stock essentials at home. It appears that panic and fear are significant factors for consumers to purchase only essentials and delay the other purchases such as apparels, cars, and travel. In line with this notion, Dholakia (2020) indicates that COVID-19 has made abrupt and drastic consumer behaviour change, in which customers focus on priority items such as hand sanitizers, hair dye, Netflix, while disregard things like cars, business travels, movie tickets, and expensive products.

In the context of COVID-19 not only the preference of buying has changed but also the amount that a customer wants to purchase, has also changed. As Tam (2020) adds that "56% of consumers prefer to spend less and are only buying what they need, given the current landscape." One of the most important findings is that consumers are more concerned with meeting their daily needs than with purchasing luxurious items. Food and hygiene products are at the top of the consumer's priority list in the current pandemic. Brand purchases have taken a back seat in current purchasing behaviour, with general

decisions dominating the consumer's purchasing choices and preferences. In normal times, many consumers are rigid in their behaviour because they care about quality, quantity, brand, and confidence in what they buy, but this is not the case during COVID-19, which is similar to other crises. Consumers all over the world exhibit similar shopping and purchasing behaviours.

## ELEMENTS OF THE CHANGE OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

Change is the mantra of life. So, it is natural to expect changes. Still, people find it difficult to adapt to changes. And, that is the reason that so many studies and researches are being pursued on change and change management. There have been changes in every era. But, <sup>3</sup> the changes that were observed during the COVID era have been revolutionary changes and that is why, so much has been said and written about these changes. Consumer behaviour saw some of the most gigantic changes in these times.

These changes can be defined by saying that they were 'too fast', 'unexpected for the mankind' and 'sometimes had no connection with the past'. These changes just arrived and shocked the entire world. There were times during this period when mankind had to struggle to adapt to these changes. The entire human race was left with no choice.

Previously also, technology was the biggest friend of man in the developed nations. But, COVID introduced the rise of this bond between man and technology opened new horizons for online buying and marketing. These were periods when the social life of man was disturbed. Man was alone. Man was cut off from the rest of the world. Thus, there was nobody beside him. This 'phase of tranquillity' initially was puzzling. This was the case more in case of people living in urban areas. Thus, there was confusion everywhere. To understand anything, man did not have a teacher/ guide/ coach/ mentor/ instructor. Here, every individual was the teacher and the student. This was one of the most difficult phases in the history of the human civilization. Not every man can be expected to be a good teacher for herself/ himself. So, many doubts were not cleared. Answers of questions were not found. Misinterpretations and wrong understandings became common. So, every

decision taken by man in this phase was a solo decision. Man did not have anyone beside her/ him. So, in many cases the decisions taken by individuals were wrong, confusing, unwanted and untimely. It was a phase when the hierarchy of needs propounded by Maslow was altered. Even people from the upper sections and elite classes concentrated mostly on the basic needs, instead of the higher level needs. It is because of this sort of buying decision that luxury products started to lose their importance in the market economies. Technology usage even in developing nations.

## REASONS FOR THE CHANGE OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

One of the most important reasons for the change in consumer behaviour during this period was the use of technology. Prior to this, a consumer or customer would go to the market, see the products by their eyes, put the product into a test (based on physical touching or observation) and then choose to buy it or discard it. In developed nations, people indulged in online buying before also. But, when the pandemic commenced, in most cases (be it a developed or a developing nation), there was no possibility of going to the markets. Man was forced to get going with online buying. Thus, there was no possibility of physically testing a product and choosing to buy it or discard it. Man's decision to buy or not to buy a product was based on the online reviews of the product, the necessity and availability of it. This was a tectonic shift in consumer behaviour around the world. The decision to buy the product during the COVID era was a solo decision in most cases. In Asian countries, where people have long and extended families, the decision to buy something was being taken by consulting the family members only. There were no sales personnel trying to influence buying decisions. After a long time in History, this was happening for the first time. Urban life had created an environment where man was never alone. He was always surrounded by many people around him. So, his decisions were not solo decisions. Social Isolation, quarantine, lock down and social distancing had spread their tentacles and reached human psychology, thereby making man aloof from others. So,

an environment was created where man was forced to take solo decisions.

The COVID era saw a fear of death at a national and global level. This was a phase when this fear ruled man's behavioural patterns. Thus, it catered into consumer behaviour also.

Since a long time, man had been making an effort to organize everything. This effort reached the market economy also. There was effort put into developing and organizing the distribution channels. Thus, mere production of the product was not a business challenge.

A bigger challenge was to make the products reach the consumers and customers.

Unfortunately, the COVID era saw a devastation of the distribution channels that were slowly and gradually being constructed for the last five or six centuries. Thus, products were not reaching the consumers and customers. So, lack of availability of products was a reason for the changes in consumer behaviour. This was a phase, when man was

struggling to meet his basic needs despite having the funds in hand in many cases. The

COVID era saw an entirely different cost management in businesses. Usually, large businesses have large fixed costs and small businesses have small fixed costs. Due, to disturbances in production and selling, sales was getting affected. It was difficult to meet the large fixed costs and so big business organizations were finding the situation

challenging. On the contrary, small businesses were finding it relatively easier to manage their small fixed costs. So, this was an era when small businesses were flourishing.

Moreover, small businesses were finding it relatively easier to reach the buyers, than their big counterparts with a brand name.. These were businesses with small numbers of staffs and so decision making was fast. So, consumer behaviour was forced to change. Demand was created for products sold by small businesses, rather than big businesses. Well-known brands suffered as a consequence.

#### IMPACT OF THE CHANGES IN CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

The sudden change in consumer behaviour due to COVID has some serious impact on business. It can be seen that perceptions have changed about products and

their importance. For example, there were times when sanitizers were in limited use.

But, since the pandemic initiated, sanitizers became a FMCG. Sanitizers were no

more sold in drug stores only, Sanitizers were being sold in grocery shops, book stores etc. As a result of such perception-oriented changes, production and resource allocation for production also went through changes.

## 1 Factors Influencing Consumer Buyer Behaviour

It has been engineered up that the {buyer, the patron} shopping for behaviour is that the results of requirements} and desires of the client and that they buy to fulfil these necessities and desires. Despite the very fact that it sounds basic and clear, these necessities may be completely different relying upon the individual factors, for instance, age, science, and private character. Likewise, there square measure another external component that square measure on the far side the buyer's ability to manage. Consultants do varied studies and researchers on recognizing and breaking down those elements influencing the consumer's shopping for behaviour and later on, very different varieties of components are distinguished. These variables are ordered into varied sorts and classifications in varied manners by varied researchers. For instance, Wiedermann et al. (2007), characterized them into internal and external factors. Then again, 7 Winer (2009) divided them into social, individual, and psychological factors.

The private factors incorporate style inclinations, individual financial conditions, and connected elements. The result of individual factors on purchase dynamic is generally cared-for by organizations 4 throughout market segmentation, targeting, and positioning by grouping individuals supported their own conditions aboard different criteria and making things and administrations that oblige these conditions within the best approach.

## 1 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For this research, an online questionnaire survey was the main tool for understanding consumer behaviour during COVID-19 pandemic. The study has focused on understanding the behaviour of consumer during COVID-19 pandemic. The study was majorly focussed on understanding how consumer choose, prefer, and decide to buy the products during

COVID-19 outbreak. The study was focussed on understanding the changes in their purchase pattern and the impact of the situation on their purchase decision that the consumers have made.

The research method was exploratory in nature in the sense that there is no previous academic research about consumers' attitude towards CSR in Georgia to guide this study. The quantitative research method was used. Data were gathered by means of survey. Nonprobability purposive sampling was chosen for this research due to its low costs, flexibility and simplicity. In addition, it allows collection of much information quickly, however, the result cannot be generalized to the whole population. The respondents participating in the research were more or less informed about the corporate social responsibility, and expressed their interest in CSR issues, they all are residents of the capital city of Georgia, have education, job, and access to the Internet. The survey was conducted through self-administrated questionnaires sending by Email. The major benefits of an email survey include the speed of distribution, quick response time, and lower costs.

#### 1 Quantitative Approach

All participants have completed the consumer behaviour during COVID-19 outbreak questionnaire through an online survey-questionnaire. The survey was created by the authors and incorporated a question for each measure that influences a potential buyer to perform a purchase containing 30 inquiries estimating fundamental choices and affecting elements. The study was conducted with a well-structured self-developed questionnaire with a sample size of 500 participants. The study is emphasized on heterogeneous group in terms of the age, gender, occupation, educational qualification and the country of origin. The data was collected for a period of 6 weeks from more than 40 countries around the world

#### RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study is to identifying the factors that influence buying attitude during COVID-19, assess the source of information and level of awareness among the people about COVID-19 and to determine whether consumer behaviour towards purchasing is



being affected due to COVID-19. The study is focuses to evaluate if the pandemic has given rise to panic purchase and to examine the impact of COVID-19 consumers' personal attitudes during panic period.

### Survey Participants

As mentioned earlier, the data was collected from 500 respondents from more than 40 countries. The sample size was considered appropriate considering 90% confidence level. The respondents belonged to age group of 15 to over 70 years. Figure 3.1 shows the conceptual model developed by authors, which depicts the significant relationship between the various factors, which influences consumer behaviour during COVID-19 outbreak. The 5 Endogenous (Independent) variables considered are Irrational purchases, Panic purchases, Hoarding of essential goods for future, Fear of running out of available stock, Hoarding due to fear of shortage which impacts on the exogenous (dependent) Variable Consumer purchase behaviour during COVID-19 Outbreak.

### DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

As it is mentioned, earlier 500 people have responded for this survey, in which 59% are male, 40% are female and 1% preferred not to mention. 30% of the respondents are from 21 to 30, 25% are from the age group of 31-40, 20% of the respondents are from 15 to 20 and remaining are from above 50 years of age. Educational qualification holds very important in terms of the buying behaviour, 50% of the respondents are graduates, 35% are undergraduates, 11% are doctorates and remaining are high school qualified individuals. It is observed that 39% of the respondents are employed, 35% are students, 14% are professionals and others are salaried, homemaker, students. It is observed that 60% of the respondents are single, 37% are married. this phase of pandemic where essentials are; masks, gloves, hand soap, sanitizers and food. As the media has become a permanent voice in the communities in crisis's situation, drawn from the collected data, majority of respondents agreed that media has hyped the impact of COVID-19, which has

promoted people to buy products for their maintenance, health and wellness, because COVID-19 is about life and safety of individuals. Moreover, people as consumers from our study indicated that food supply, sanitizers, toilet papers during this pandemic are their top priority needs.

## FINDINGS

Based on a clear understanding of consumer buying behaviour in this study, few interesting findings are available. The consumer buying behaviour has changed drastically due to the effect of few key aspects during COVID-19 pandemic such as <sup>1</sup> fear of running out of available stock, irrational purchases, hoarding of essentials, panic purchase and fear of shortage. Consumer participants have shown that stockpiling and hoarding essentials and basic food items including bottled water, necessary grocery, cleaning products, toilet paper, and essential medicines have been their priority shopping items since the outbreak. This finding indicates that during February 2020, majority of respondents of the study have just purchased products including; sanitizers, soup, gloves and mask.

Another crucial finding <sup>1</sup> from this study is associated with consumer buying behaviour in shifting offline shopping to online shopping to avoid visiting stores, and keep their isolation for their health well-being. The data indicates that consumers encountered other restrictions such as fear of access, quality, and receiving them in a proper time during lockdown period. In considering travel risks during COVID-19, approximately 419 participants of the survey emphasized that COVID-19 has created travel risk and people avoid travelling alongside social distancing.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

On analysis of the data, it has been concluded that the world is going through a strange phase. So, it is a tough time for the entrepreneurs and practicing professionals of this field. Consumers are worried about the returns of their buying decisions. This is a time when consumers are never sure that they are taking the right decisions. So, entrepreneurs and practicing professionals need to help them with their decision making. Building physical

evidence is a way that can be practiced. Moreover, communication of the sales personnel will play an important role in this. Sales people have to be friendlier and aim at winning the trust of the consumers. It will be important to collect the feedback from the consumers. On the basis of these feedbacks, researchers will have to track every small change in consumer behaviour, every minute change in their moods and requirements. The entire human civilization is just starting to gain some strength and build further. This opportunity has been created

because of the retarded growth of the pandemic in the last 2/ 3 months. Under such circumstances, trade and commerce will be competitive. To be patient, in these trying times is the most important task of the concerned people.

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#### CONCLUSION

Consumer behaviour is going through a change. It had always been going through a change. It was never constant. But, every time that a change was observed in consumer behaviour, it was seen that the change originated from some point. The change was not abrupt. In the COVID era, consumer behaviour changed. There was no surprise element in that. What was interesting to note is the changes were not having any linkage with the point when they started to occur. Thus, it was difficult to tackle the changes. These were fast and not anticipated. Thus, these changes shocked mankind. It took the market economies by a surprise. Since, the changes in consumer behaviour in the COVID era was unanticipated, there are scope for new researches in this area. <sup>2</sup> These new researches can be expected to frame new protocols for these new set of consumer behaviour. As a result of the changes in consumer behaviour, turmoil can be expected.

Businesses will require time to get used to these changes. Hence, new organizations who

do not have a past memory, will find it easier to handle the situation. Moreover, small businesses who have a fast decision <sup>1</sup> This study shows that there were significant factors influencing consumer buying behaviour associated with COVID19, such as fear, irrational, lack of access, shortage of essentials, and their health. Our findings indicate that consumers have been concerned about their necessities during COVID-19. Thus, they indicated that they purchased products such as sanitizers, masks, gloves, soup and food as their perennial needs. Besides, consumers in this study similar to the other people around the world were concerned about access, and availability, while price and quality for many people was not a problem. Indeed, it can be said that in the different phases of COVID-19, it has been difficult for consumers to easily define their priorities where safety, access and financing the needs have been identified as the most important factors that have affected their purchasing decisions, as our study has confirmed earlier.

Making process may thrive more than big businesses in the coming times.

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