



IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON CONSUMER BUYING BEHAVIOR (Case Study Cameroon)

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Abstract

The outbreak of the coronavirus (Covid-19) has brought about significant changes in the behaviour of consumers. In general, the aim of this study was to investigate the Impact of covid-19 on consumer buying behaviour. Specifically this study sought to answer questions like; what is coronavirus? What is consumer buying behaviour? How does the coronavirus (Covid-19) spread? And how is it affecting the behaviour of consumers in Cameroon? Findings gotten from consumers reveal that the coronavirus has caused numerous changes on the buying behaviour which have all been mentioned in this paper.



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INTRODUCTION

Pandemics are not exactly a novel phenomenon strictly related to the current modern societies as they were recorded since ancient times. Each pandemic triggered major changes

in economics, regional and global policies, social behaviour, and citizens' mentalities as well. The most significant changes (which have been preserved over the medium term and long term) have been those institutionalized (Brodeur A et al., 2020).

By contrast, the changes which were least preserved are related to mentalities and social behaviour as the institutionalized modifications, through public policies, were not sufficiently coupled and consolidated with the psychosocial changes. Like any other pandemics, COVID-19 has caused significant changes on all levels of contemporary society including the buying behaviour of consumers. All states; continents; regions; urban and rural communities; families; and ultimately, thinking and lifestyle of each individual have been impacted by the pandemic, and we may never return to the normality previously experienced before COVID-19 (Harris, 2020).

At the same time, each pandemic in recorded history had immediate effects on the primary reactions of the social human, because they affected directly health, financial security, life quality and food security (LeMay M.C, 2020). For instance, when cholera or the Spanish flu hit, the economic balance and food supply systems broke and caused famine as an immediate effect. The COVID-19 pandemic has largely fit the same profile, although there are specific differences. This time there has not been major negative effects on food security recorded, except for the underdeveloped and developing countries. Meanwhile, developed economies have not faced serious problems in terms of global food security (Zurayk R, 2020). Inherently, there were individual problems, especially in the case of quarantined people with low and very low income. Nevertheless, the concern for food security has turned into concern for food safety as the public focus of developed countries transitioned to issues such as healthy eating.

However, all pandemics share the demographic vector of disease spread. During the Middle Ages, the pandemic would be transmitted from one part of Europe to another by the people who fled the outbreak. The Amerindian population were decimated by the diseases brought by the European explorers, as they lacked any inherited immunity to the infectious diseases of Europe (in this case, Tzvetan Todorov says that the first globalization was the spread of the viruses (Todorov T, 1984). The Spanish flu spread mainly due to the movement of soldiers from the WWI (as they came home back in 1918, they spread the pandemic globally). The COVID-19 pandemic has been largely triggered by population density, high degree of mobility of humans, and mass socialization, as well as cultural, social, and tourism events (McCloskey B et al., 2020).

Consequently, the measures taken by most world states have addressed issues such as quarantine and isolation, more precisely the enforced social isolation of the population along with the economic isolation between various states or regions as well as between different economic sectors (Diele-Viegas L., 2020). Hence, this lockdown has impeded the interactions among food systems incorporating every stage of food production and delivery.

If we are to look into Cameroon's case, several differences between COVID-19 and the other pandemics should be emphasized. For instance, the Cholera out-break , by its direct and indirect effects (which are quite difficult to assess), overlapped the lack of organizational deficiencies of the primary sector, at that time the fundamental branch for achieving the national income (a statistical indicator of the period which is equal to GDP) (Dobos, 2016)

In March 2020, the president of Cameroon signed the Decree that enforced into law the “state of emergency” for a period of 14 days. In this context, the travel sector was the first being targeted which drastically limited the activities of public alimentation. Additionally, during

the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of clients has significantly diminished in hypermarkets and supermarkets, while the convenience stores, butcher shops, and grocery stores have gradually gained more popularity. At the same time, the small producers have seized the opportunity of home delivery for reaching their final customers.

The current social and economic crisis generated by COVID 19 pandemic has surprised the world. The fear and concern caused by this are visibly affecting social behaviour in general, and purchasing behaviour in particular. It was so sudden and unpredictable that the forecasting was almost impossible. This pandemic has brought humanity to the brink of a major challenge, that of dealing with human reaction. Although, compared to 100 years ago, we achieved another level of technological advancement, when it comes to behaviour; the reaction of the public has not radically changed.

This study however seeks to answer the following questions;

1. What is coronavirus?
2. What is consumer buying behaviour?
3. How does the coronavirus (Covid-19) spread?
4. How is it affecting the behaviour of consumers in Cameroon?

WHAT IS CORONAVIRUS?

According to WHO (2020), Coronaviruses are a family of viruses that can cause respiratory illness in humans. They get their name, “corona,” from the many crown-like spikes on the surface of the virus. Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) and the common cold are examples of coronaviruses that cause illness in

humans. The new strain of coronavirus, COVID-19, was first reported in Wuhan, China in December 2019. The virus has since spread to all continents (except Antarctica).

WHAT IS CONSUMER BUYING BEHAVIOR

Consumer behavior 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 (Chand, 2020)

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 behavior 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.

HOW DOES THE CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) SPREAD?

It is worth mentioning that, consumer buying behavior is changing because of the mode of spread of the coronavirus.

COVID-19 is likely to spread:

- When the virus travels in respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs, sneezes, talks, sings or breathes near you (within six feet). This is thought to be the main way COVID-19 is spread.
- When the virus travels in small respiratory droplets that linger in the air for minutes to hours from an infected person who is more than six feet away or has since left the space. This method of spread is more likely to occur in enclosed spaces with poor ventilation.
- From close contact (touching, shaking hands) with an infected person.
- By touching surfaces that the virus has landed on, then touching your eyes, mouth, or nose before washing your hands. (Not thought to spread easily by this method.)

COVID-19 enters your body through your mouth, nose or eyes (directly from the airborne droplets or from transfer of the virus from your hands to your face). The virus travels to the back of your nasal passages and mucous membrane in the back of your throat. It attaches to cells there, begins to multiply and moves into lung tissue. From there, the virus can spread to other body tissues (Sauer, 2020)

Governments, health agencies, researchers and healthcare providers are all working together to develop policies and [procedures to limit the spread](#) of this virus both globally and from individual to individual.

HOW IS CORONAVIRUS AFFECTING THE BEHAVIOUR OF CONSUMERS IN CAMEROON?

With the coming of the coronavirus, consumers fear that it will affect the economy more than their health. Consumers are more fearful of the economic impact of COVID-19 than for their health



Figure 1: consumer survey of the impact of covid-19

Source: Accenture COVID-19 Consumer Research, conducted April 2–6. Proportion of consumers that agree or significantly agree

Figure above illustrates that more respondents are fearful about the impact of corona virus to the society than to their personal health.

PRE-COVID-19 CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

- Consumers use to have this direct contact with the products they want to purchase

Before the outbreak of the corona virus, consumers had built this connection between themselves and the products they purchase. They could touch products freely to make sure it

is what they actually want. You could see, touch and feel your product before purchase most especially when buying commodities like fruits and vegetables.

- **Consumers prefer on the spot purchase to online purchasing**

Also, consumers usually prefer to make purchases on the spot where the product is being sold. Just few consumers were able to make online purchases but now a lot more people make online purchases because of the corona virus.

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON CONSUMER BUYING BEHAVIOUR

Overall, consumers are dramatically reducing most discretionary spending, which has grave consequences for some industries, such as restaurants, apparel, footwear, accessories, travel and entertainment out of home. As many consumers are under stay-at-home or shelter-in-place orders around the nation, they are likely to continue reduced spending patterns in these and other product categories. We can see from other countries that are ahead of the United States, in terms of progress along the contagion curve, that shopping habits before, during and after the COVID-19 peak indicate that spending in a number of categories remains low for months or possibly even longer. For example, consumption for apparel and in department stores has not yet picked up significantly in China and some other countries that reportedly consider themselves to be "past peak." This is in line with consumers' expectations that we may have to wait for several more months, if not longer, before routines can go back to normal, and many households expect their income to be negatively impacted for a long time.

- **Move towards online shopping**

The outbreak of the coronavirus brought about a travel bans and lockdown by several governments so as to curb the spread of the virus. This lockdown made movement difficult and hence people could not go out to do their shopping. This gave rise to an increase in online

shopping all over the world. In terms of behaviour changes, the rise in online buying, specifically for groceries, is noteworthy. Among all age groups, there is a large segment of consumers who tried online grocery buying for the first time in March, and many will likely continue to buy groceries online, at least as long as the pandemic continues. Of course, it is impossible to foresee whether a large share of consumers will remain loyal to online shopping or go back to the brick-and-mortar store experience once we feel safe to do so. Most of us have missed the social experience of shopping for many weeks now, and the convenience of the online channel may not make up for this.

- **Stockpiling food supply**

Another way in which consumer behaviour has changed is in terms of stockpiling. In Cameroon, household consumers usually buy foodstuffs to stock at home but not as much as now in this period of coronavirus for fear of having shortages during the lockdown. Groceries and other food items are stocked in houses to last for the entire lockdown period. Many American households did not store food and household items in an amount necessary to overcome even short supply shortages. Most American consumers grew up with well-stocked, if not overstocked, shelves and a wide variety of brands to choose from at all price levels. Some older consumers or those living in areas struck by natural catastrophes may remember a time when they could not simply go to the store and get whatever they wanted. Until very recently, it was not conceivable that staple products such as diapers, soap or the infamous toilet paper would not be readily available in any quantity one wanted to purchase. This experience of scarcity and under-preparedness for disasters likely will impact our consumer behaviour going forward, and it may also make many consumers consider keeping safety stock inventory at home on an on-going basis.

- **Reduced spending**

The outbreak of the covid-19 caused a lot of job losses in Cameroon causing financial hardship for many consumers, which will require many to reduce their spending for possibly some years. Also, it is conceivable that, as a consumerist society, we learn a lesson from the current crisis in that certain products might not always be available to us, that we can't always just go to the store and get what we want or that we have to curb our mobility and associated consumption. The longevity of behaviour change probably depends on how long we will have to live with shutdown scenarios. This collective experience may enable us to look at consumption reduction as something we can learn and adjust to, instead of perpetuating our consumption-heavy lifestyles, which accelerate climate change. I am cautiously optimistic that we will have some momentum with consumers, industry and the government to address the need for continued consumption restraint to meet the challenge of climate change, but I also see potential for rebound in that consumers once again free to roam the stores will simply try to go back to business as usual.

Also, with the outbreak of the coronavirus, consumers have lost connection with the products they want to purchase. In the past consumers could touch certain products before making a choice but due to corona virus, certain product restrictions have been placed such that consumers do not have direct contacts with these products anymore. Examples of such products include fruits and other food items.

Conclusion

It is no doubt that coronavirus (Covid-19) has affected the society in general and consumer behaviour in particular. The behaviour of consumers of different products have changed significantly from the normal. However, consumers are beginning to adapt to the new changes that come with buying goods and services. Online markets are gaining grounds as most consumers now make use of the internet when they are in search of a product and even when they want to buy the product. This has given rise to the growth in e-marketing channels.



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