

MARKETING IN THE AGE OF CORONA VIRUS - UNDERSTANDING THE CONSUMER MINDSET FOR EFFECTIVE MARKETING STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to assess the impact that the Covid -19, the epidemic has on the consumption behavior of consumers and to suggest some changes in marketers' strategies to sustain in the long run despite consumer panic about the corona crisis.

Design/methodology/approach – Findings were derived by analyzing both secondary and primary data. Information from newspapers, academic journals as well as reports, briefs, and presentations were analyzed. A questionnaire was designed to investigate the impact of Covid – 19 on buyers and to understand changes in their mindset during these times.

Findings – Provides information on how consumers have altered their consumption and buying habits to deal with Covid – 19. Research implications – The paper concentrates on the sustainable marketing strategies that can be adopted by marketers by aligning their messages and market mix in line with consumer panic during times of corona virus fear.

Practical Implications – Brands in today's world have a major role & responsibility to play, especially in times of public health challenges like the current CoV crisis. Brands which communicate factually and with empathy at this time have the chance to resurface from the crisis with deeper consumer and customer connection. This paper therefore provides an insight on how marketers should develop strategies taking into consideration the corona pandemic and its impact on consumer behavior, media consumption and the use of social platforms so that they can reconsider how they relate to consumers. This paper summarizes and offers strategic tips to marketers to remain relevant and overcome the future crisis with suitable strategies.

Key words : *Consumer Behavior , Covid -19, consumer mind set, marketing strategy.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

With the roll around of 2020, the business world is shaken by the outbreak of the international pandemic, the corona virus. The number of people infected by the Corona Virus continues to grow globally, Governments across the world are working tirelessly to contain the spread of the virus. As with many crises, the repercussions of the corona virus can also be felt in the global economy and the

financial markets. The stock market has entered a new wave of volatility, prominent business networking events have been canceled or postponed, cross-border travel restrictions are complicating or canceling people's international travel plans.

As the impact of COVID-19 continues to unfold, marketers experience the need to track the shift in consumer buying behavior driven by COVID-19. During times of inventory shortage and precautionary social distancing, there is a need for marketers to alter their marketing strategies and efforts to respond to changing consumer mindset. Market research firm Numerator, has published a weekly Numerator Shopping Behavior Index tracker to provide needed visibility into consumer buying behavior shifts driven by COVID-19. The implication is that marketers should be prepared to find and respond to new opportunities that emerge as a result of change in consumer decision making purchase patterns.

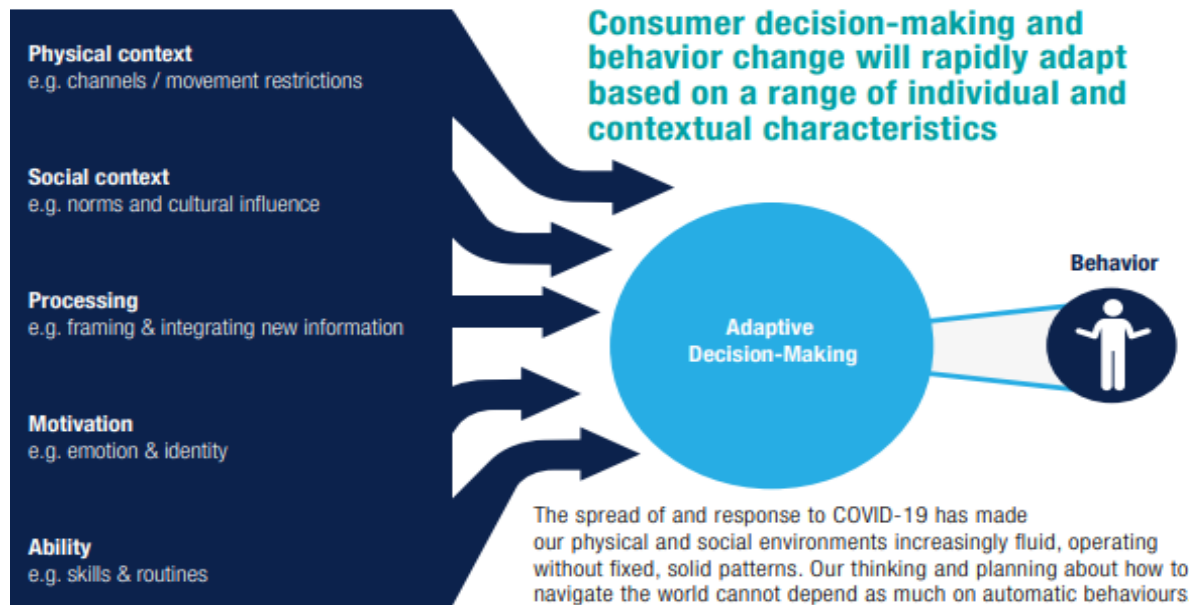
Customer Experience is about knowing and responding to customer expectations and needs to improve customer satisfaction, loyalty, and advocacy. In typical times, it can difficult to understand what drives satisfaction and dissatisfaction and encourages loyalty and disloyalty. But in those rare moments in time when unexpected, profound, and significant changes are thrust upon the world (so-called "black swan events"), your customers needs and expectations can evolve in rapid and surprising ways. (*Ray, 2020*). Traditional resilience plans may not be adequate to address pandemic-related disruptions in consumer behavior and marketing efforts have to be innovative and adaptable to changing market conditions.

2. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Brands in today's world have a major role & responsibility to play, especially in times of public health challenges like the current CoV crisis.

With CoV virus spreading at an increasing pace, there has been a major change in consumer buying habits which is of great significance for marketers of various brands. The virus has led to our environment becoming increasingly 'liquid', subject to change and operating without familiar context and predictable patterns. With these shifts in consumer behaviour, how can brands stay relevant to want their customers want? (*Chris Murphy, 2020*)

Figure 1 Coronavirus means fluid times: COVID-19 and behavior change



Source :Global Science Organization :IPSOS

While circumstances continue to evolve each day, the greatest challenge for brands is to stay relevant among consumers despite the epidemic outbreak. The marketing mix is being reworked upon to connect with the target segment presently. For example Coors withdrew the launch of its ad titled “Official beer of Working Remotely” over concerns that the message could come across as insensitive in the present situation as more companies enforce or encourage remote work. KFC in the U.K. hit the brakes on a "Finger Licking' Good" effort that encouraged people to lick their fingers after eating its chicken — this may be interpreted as something unhygienic amid serious messages for thorough hand washing.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Nielsen (2020) investigation has identified six key consumer behavior threshold levels that tie directly to concerns around the novel Corona Virus (COVID-19) outbreak. The thresholds offer early signals of spending patterns, particularly for emergency pantry items and health supplies, and we are seeing these patterns being mirrored across multiple markets. There is a noticeable shift in buying patterns of consumers

Kantar World Panel (2020) epidemic outbreak has an impact on consumer behavior changes which might bring new challenges and opportunities for manufacturers and retailers.

Hojin Jung, Minjae Park, Kihoon Hong and Eunjung Hyun (2016) in their paper on Impact of an Epidemic Outbreak on Consumer Expenditures: An Empirical Assessment for MERS Korea present empirical evidence that outbreaks cause considerable disruption in total consumer expenditures

with significant heterogeneity across categories. Our findings strongly imply that customers alter their behaviors to reduce the risk of infection.

Madelon Hutjens(2009) in the paper titled the influence of fear on the buying behavior of consumers in case of an animal disease outbreak has developed a framework for the relation between an epidemic and a change in behavioral intention. The results emphasize that there is indeed a strong relation between risk perception, fear and consequently behavioral intention.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

- ∞ The purpose of this study is to investigate how consumers have altered their consumption and buying habits to deal with Covid-19
- ∞ To analyze the marketing strategies that can be used by marketers to remain relevant and overcome the future crisis with suitable strategies.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

This study is based on descriptive research method and analytical in nature. Both primary and secondary source have been used for data collection for the current study. Primary data is collected through questionnaires which comprised of closed ended questions. The sample size for the survey is 100 and the respondents are confined to the city of Bengaluru. Convenience Sampling has been used. Secondary data was collected through research journals, bulletins, books, published reports, and online resources.

6. DATA FINDINGS:

- The age group of the respondents ranged from 20% than 25, 27% between 25-35, and 40% - 36-45 13% 46-55 above 55. 73% of the respondents were married with families and 26% were single.
- Almost 73% of the respondents strongly agree or agreed to the fact that they had experienced a noticeable change in their shopping habits.
- Purchases through online sites have increased in the last few weeks 66 percent of the respondents while the remaining 34% disagreed
- 40% of the respondents agreed that along with their usual shopping they buy a couple of things extra ,15% of the respondents preferred buying items in bulk now.
- 40% of the respondents said Amazon was their favorite online site for purchasing household products followed by Flipkart which was preferred by 27% .Big Basket and Groffers were preferred by 20 % and 13.3%

- Almost 40% of the respondents agreed that they now spend more time on their smart phone using social media and searching for products.
- Among the list of products on the shopping list of respondents in the last few purchases, 47% named Personal hygiene (sanitizers, soaps, etc), 20% listed Corona virus protection masks, Fruits and Vegetable were listed by 20% and 13.3%
- Majority of the respondents (50%) trusted Dettol as the safest for their family, followed by a Lifebuoy (43%), Savlon and Himalaya were next as the trusted brand.
- 73% of the respondents were aware of features like “Zero Contact Delivery “offered by online service providers
- Almost 54% of the respondents were of the opinion that “Zero Contact Delivery” would have lesser risk of spreading corona virus?
- 61% of the respondents expressed that in present times of crisis due to spread of virus the best way marketers inspiring confidence in the brand by communicating through SMS, Emails, Social Media. 24% of the respondents felt that providing special offers during this time would help build Good will among customrs.16% of the respondents said that providing "Stay inside gifts" such as Games/CD etc would be novel way to engage with customers who are forced to remain indoors most of the time due to fear of virus spread.

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

The outbreak has already caused an array of changes in shopping behavior. Marketers have to address these changes and adopt marketing strategies that would ensure consumer attention and ensure their brands continue to connect with the target segment even during times of crisis such as the Covid -19. Based on the findings of this research, few suggestions have been laid down to provide insight to marketers on tuning marketing activities to meet changed expectations and mindset of consumers due to the panic surrounding corona virus.

Some of the suggestions that can be provided based on the research include:

- ∂ **Make products available online:** With a decrease of footfall in physical retail stores, is understandably decreasing due to social distancing measures, this is a rise in online buying. Among the ecommerce companies Amazon undoubtedly enjoys
- ∂ **Rise in volume buying** - a surge in bulk purchases of products is expected under present circumstances of growing fear of virus spread especially those that support overall personal hygiene and safety of health. Marketers must be equipped with regular updates from suppliers to overcome the problem of inventory shortage and ensure consumer demand for products is met adequately.

- ∂ **Increase investment on on-line and social media Advertising:** As users stay home and this trend grows, in-home online and TV activity will increase and advertisers can reach their target users during this time by investing more heavily in television (traditional or Connected TV), digital, and direct mail advertising over in-store, out-of-home, and physical advertising due to decreases in public foot-traffic.
- ∂ **The “Zero Contact Delivery”-** offered by online service providers is a delivery model that fits very well with consumer needs when advised to stay at home.
- ∂ **Product Communication and Positioning** - marketers should adopt a customer listening strategy. Communication and advertising that revolves around compassion and desire for consumer well being will be critical in ensuring brands remain in positive light even during times of epidemic. This would ultimately lead to creating long-term trust and customer loyalty.
- ∂ **Suggestions for further research**
- ∂ The present literature available on how epidemics can trigger shift in consumer behavior causing change in marketing strategy is very limited .This research attempts to make a significant contribution in the area of how marketers can sense opportunities even in times of crisis such as the corona virus spread. The future study can focus on specific sectors which have been affected by the epidemic and can further explore the innovation in marketing adopted by marketers to remain relevant among consumers.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

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