

Consumer Response to COVID- 19: A Thematic Analysis of Behavioural Shifts in Unstable Environments

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Abstract:- COVID -19 has unleashed unprecedented crisis to both consumers and marketers. The uncertainty brought about by the crisis has important implications for marketers and consumer researchers as behavioural shifts, which otherwise would have taken decades to set in have been accelerated. The main goal of this research article is to examine consumer response to unstable environments such as the one brought by COVID-19 pandemic. Our findings give rise to major themes that put the spotlight on behavioural changes as the response to the 'new normal' gave rise to ephemeral and temporal consumer choices and decisions. Consumer adaptations also point to the possibility of permanent behavioural shifts such as the growing acceptance of gig economy and a ubiquitous adoption of virtual life. This study has implications for brands and marketers as it will help them to navigate the new landscape in the consumer acquisition and retention journey with long term consequences.

Keywords:- Consumer Response, Unstable Environments, Covid-19, Behavioural Shifts.

I. INTRODUCTION

The goal of this study article is to investigate the consumer response to COVID- 19 A thematic analysis of behavioural shifts in unstable environments. Will consumer's consumption habits be permanently altered as a result of the global crises' social isolation and lockdown, or will they revert to their previous habits once the crises have passed? Will new laws affecting air travel, shopping in retail malls and attending concerts and sporting events lead to new habits among consumers? Will customers visiting a store or attending an event is person is too inconvenient, and that it is thus preferable to have the store or event come to them? This has been happening in sports contests and entertainment for a long time, with broadcasts on the radio and television.

All consumption is time and location constrained. Consumers acquire routines about what they eat, when they consume it, and where they consume it over time.([Sheth, 2020a](#), [Sheth, 2020b](#)). Of course, this isn't just about consuming. It also applies to purchase, information seeking, and post-consumer trash disposal. And because consumer behaviour is extremely predictable, based on previous recurrent purchasing behaviour at the individual level, we have a variety of reliable predictive models and customer insights.

Not only is a regular intake, however, there is a context. Consumer habits are governed or distributed by discourse, and there are four major contexts. The basic is alteration in societal circumstance brought about by existence outcome such as like marriage, having children and self-propelled from one metropolis to some other. Workplace, community, neighbour, and friends are all part of the social context. Technology is the ordinal circumstance. And as new subject area arises, they disrupt existing patterns. The most significant technological breakthrough in recent year have been smart phone, internet and e-commerce. The manner we shop and consume goods and services has changed tremendously as a result of online search and online ordering.

Rules and regulations, particularly those relating to state-supported and communal areas, as good as the avoidance of creaky products, constitute a third context that influences consuming behaviours. Consumption of tobacco, alcohol, and guns, for example, is regulated by locality. Of course, government policy can promote the adoption and service like solar energy and electric vehicles auto and home insurance, as well as immunisation of children are also necessary. Natural disaster such as geological phenomenon, storms and world-wide pandemic such as, the current Covid-19 pandemic, constitute the fourth and less predictable context. Regional conflicts civil war, and real-world battles, such as World War II, the cold war, the great depression of the late 1990s, and the great recession, which lasted from 2008 to 2009, are all examples of regional tensions internal wars, as well as a really global conflicts. The purpose of this article is to look at both the short-term and long-term effects of Covid-19 on consumption and consumer behaviour.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

- Sheth Jagdish, Sisodia R, as they deal with their always changing company difficulties, marketing professionals are eager for new insights that will bring clarity. As the marketing function undergoes fundamental changes, we envisage the marketing academic community having a key role in influencing the form of the function for years to come. The potential for joint work that brings academic rigour and market realities together in new and creative ways is particularly exciting.
- Sheth Jagdish N, Data-driven marketing has a promising future. It will adjust in accordance with the new databases and domains. It will be a true opportunity to focus on policy studies and socioeconomic subjects such as

poverty, emerging markets, sustainability, wellness, and education. To put it another way, data-driven marketing has the potential to make a real difference by extending beyond the company's economic goals.

- Sheth Jagdish N, much of the buyer's behaviour is more or less predictable, and he builds purchase cycles for specific things that dictate how frequently he will buy. This cycle is long for some things, such as durable appliances, and purchases are infrequent. Many other things, such as food and personal-care items, have a short purchase cycle and frequent purchases.
- Putnam Robert D. Simon & Schuster, the collapse of bowling leagues across the country suggests that the United States is losing its sense of community and association. These organizations have traditionally provided the "social capital" upon which society has been formed. Is social media contributing to the decline of community and neighbourhood associations, or is it helping to develop them? Many say that electronic communication lacks the tactile and intimate aspects of face-to-face connection that true communities require.
- Reisman David, Nathan Glazer, Denney Reuel, many people consider *The Lonely Crowd* to be the twentieth century's most impactful novel. Its now-classic interpretation of the "new middle class" the psychological, political, and economic issues that individuals confront in modern American society in terms of inner-directed and other-directed social character opened up exciting new views on the psychological, political, and economic difficulties that individuals face.
- Linder Steffan B, Linder connects This comment relates to what he believes has been happening to patterns of time usage, or lifestyle, as productivity has increased. Wages have risen to such levels, he claims, that even the average earner in a wealthy country is under time pressure. Unless products and time spent on them must be combined in fixed proportions, which is an extreme example, the ratio of things purchased to consuming time will grow over time as pay rates rise.

III. IMMEDIATE IMPACT ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

As previously stated, each consumption and user behaviour are time location dependent. Since World War II, an increasing number of women have worked, resulting in a loss in free time. According to estimates, more than 75% of all mothers with children at homework full-time currently. As a result, there is a shortage of time, as well as a shift in family and personal consumption patterns. No one is at home between the time period of 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday to Friday, so service experts may do appliance install and maintenance, as well as repairs to defective heating and cooling systems. To ensure that someone will be available to open the door, the supplier must schedule appointments with the homeowner.

There is also a time constraint, as the homemaker's discretionary time has become non-discretionary due to her employment. Due to the lack of time, people are ordering things online and having them delivered to their homes. Likewise, Holidays are no longer limited to two or three

weeks, but rather are planned Easter, Christmas, and New Year's Day are all big holidays. Thanksgiving, Memorial Day, and Labour Day all have prolonged weekends.

Consumers' options for shopping are limited due to lockdown and social alienation. As a result, there is a scarcity of available locations. We are seeing a mobility shift as well as a mobility shortage. Working, learning, and buying have all altered and become more localised at home. In the meantime, customers have more time freedom because they are not bound by pre-determined schedules for the purpose of getting to and from work or school.

Due to a lack of room in the family, new conflicts and concerns have arisen over who does what and where in the house. As homo sapiens, we're all fighting for privacy and convenience in our consumption. We're more territorial as a species, and every one of us requires our own personal space.

[Fig. 1](#) summarizes eight immediate effects of Covid-19 pandemic on consumption and consumer behavior.



[Fig. 1](#) Covid-19's Immediate Effect on Consumer Behaviour.

1. Hoarding consumers are stockpiling necessities for everyday usage, resulting in shortages and stockouts on a regular basis. Example products include toilet paper, bread, water, meat, disinfectants, and cleaning supplies.

When faced with the uncertainty about future supplies of basic requirements, hoarding is a common reaction. Hoarding is a common practise in countries experiencing hyperinflation, such as Venezuela. Aside from hoarding, the grey market has evolved, in which unaccredited middlemen hoard the commodity and boost prices. PPE (personal protective equipment) for health care professionals, such as N95 masks, has been a victim of this. Finally, hoarding enhances the selling of counterfeit items by temporarily increasing demand. We haven't done nearly enough empirical research on consumer hoarding's economics and psychology.

2. Improvisation. When consumers are presented with constraints, they learn to improvise. Existing habits are abandoned in favour of the development of new consumption patterns. The coronavirus released the resourcefulness and endurance of customers for traditional activities such as weddings and burial rites. Traditional location-centric events are being replaced by Weddings on the street and funerals at Zoom. This held true for church services as well, particularly on Easter Sunday.

Improvising to deal with product or service shortages is another potential study issue. It promotes innovative thinking and frequently leads to non-location-based consumption options such as telemedicine and online education. There is no systematic Improvisation research, whether empirical or scientific, yet again. In India, Juggad is the closest research on improvisation. It entails creating solutions that work by transcending societal norms or government policy limits. Juggad also refers to doing more with less, looking for opportunities in hardship, and thinking and behaving in a flexible manner, as well as following one's heart. ([Radjou, Prabhu and Ahujo, 2012](#)).

3. Demand that has been stifled. The usual tendency during moments of crisis and ambiguity is to put off something the acquisition and use of discretionary goods and services. This is frequently Big-ticket items are related with items like cars, houses, and appliances. Concerts, sports, bars, and restaurants are examples of discretionary services. As a result, demand will shift from now to the future. When it comes to services like parks and leisure, access to the market is important, movies, and pent-up demand is a common outcome when entertainment is limited for a short period of time. While economists have looked at the influence of pent-up demand on GDP growth, there has been little research into the nature and scope of pent-up demand in consumer behaviour.

4. Embracing Digital Technology is an important step in the right direction. Consumers have enthusiastically adopted a wide range of new technology. And applications out of necessity. Zoom video services are an obvious example. Most internet-connected homes have figured out how to participate in Zoom meetings only to stay keep in touch with relatives and acquaintances. It has, of course, been extended to home-based programmes for schools and universities, as well as to Telehealth allows patients to consult with doctors and other health care providers through the internet.

Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, WeChat, and LinkedIn are some of the most popular social media platforms. The internet is a rich media with a worldwide audience. China and India are no longer the world's most populous countries Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp are three of the most popular social media platforms. Each has a billion or more users and subscriptions. The nature and scope of word-of-mouth guidance has radically changed as a result as well as sharing information and suggestions. Influencer marketing is one of the fastest expanding fields. Some of them have tens of millions of fans. Social media, in particular, and digital technologies in general, in particular, have a tremendous impact on consumer behaviour and are prevalent in consumers' daily lives. It will be fascinating to see if

technological advancements may help people break old habits. We've studied the spread of invention for phone, television, and the internet, but we haven't seen a worldwide acceptance of social media in a short period of time.

5. The Shop Is Open. Because of the total lockdown, consumers in nations like India, South Korea, China, Italy, and others are unable to visit a supermarket or a shopping centre. Rather than coming to you, the store comes to you. Workplace and educational factors are also important. As a result, everything flows in the opposite direction: work, education, health, and acquiring and consuming. Everything, even streaming services like Disney, Netflix, and Amazon Prime, may now be delivered to your home, breaking the strange habit of physically travelling to places. As a result, consumer behaviour is becoming more convenient and personalised. We need to undertake an empirical study to see how "In-home everything" affects impulsive purchases and planned vs. unplanned consumption by customers.

6. Boundaries between work and personal life are blurring. Consumers are captives in their own houses, with limited space and a plethora of separate activities such as working, learning, buying, and socialising. It's the same as having too many wants and needs and not enough money. As a result, the distinctions between work and home, as well as between responsibilities and tasks, are becoming increasingly blurred. To make your home more than efficient and successful, you'll need a timetable and division of responsibilities are required.

7. Friendship and family get-togethers. One of the most notable consequences of the coronavirus is the ability to communicate with distant friends and relatives, both to check in on them and to share stories and experiences. High school and college reunions, as well as family weddings, are examples of this. What started off as impromptu get-togethers to stay in touch has evolved into regular and structured meetings where people may exchange their skills and experiences. We're all sitting on our porches, symbolically conversing with our global neighbour. The worldwide reach of social events through social media platforms such as Zoom, and WhatsApp is incredible. Consumption practices must be studied from a sociological and cultural perspective. Similar to the classic studies such as [Reisman et al., 1950](#), [Linder, 1970](#), [Putnam, 2000](#), As a result of the more quickly and efficiently widespread adoption of new technology spurred by the Covid pandemic, we could expect significant changes in consumer behaviour.

8. Talent is discovered. Recipes have been tried out by customers, honed their skills and experimented with new and inventive methods to play music, exchange knowledge, and buy more creatively on the internet with more free time at home. As a result of some of them becoming viral, customers are becoming producers with economic potential. There are numerous YouTube videos and their competitors that have the potential to go viral for commercial success and creativity.

IV. WILL OLD BEHAVIOURS PERISH OR RESURFACE?

The majority of routines are likely to revert to normal. However, certain habits will inevitably die as a result of the consumer discovering a more easy, economical, and accessible option while under lockdown. Streaming services. Customers are likely to avoid going to the movies because of them. Like Netflix and Disney are two examples. They are likely to divert customers away from going to the movies. This is analogous to ride-hailing services like Uber, which are more convenient than phoning a taxi. Because of the coronavirus, customers may find it simpler to work, learn, and buy from home. In other words, what was once a tangential alternative to an existing habit has now become the core, while the previous habit has become the tangential.

Consumer behaviour is governed by the law of the universe. When it becomes a routine or a requirement is abandoned, it is always replaced with a recreational or pastime activity. Hunting, fishing, gardening, bread baking, and cooking are just a few of the activities available. It will be fascinating to see whether established habits that are abandoned in favour of the new approaches resurface as hobbies. Will shopping, to put it another way, become more of an outside interest, pastime, or recreation?

Habits that have been altered the new norms and requirements such as the use of masks and maintaining a societal separation, would most likely change existing food shopping and delivery routines. This is visible in Asia, where people masks should be worn before a trip to the store or a ride on the bus. In the services industry, particularly in personal services such as beauty salons, fitness and physical therapy centre, modified habits are more prevalent. It will also be possible to visit museums, parks and recreation facilities, as well as to mention a few venues, there are concerts and social gatherings.

New Ways of Thinking Three elements are likely to lead to the formation of new habits. The first is government policy. We've become accustomed to airport security checks after 9/11, There will be further screenings as well as boarding protocols such as taking a temperature, testing for the virus's existence and boarding the plane. All of the major airlines have adopted this policy. Implementing new procedure for passenger embarkation and disembarkation, as well as food preparation. As previously stated, policies of the government aimed at discouraging or encouraging spending in critical in shaping future consumption pattern.

Technology, as previously said, is a second important influencer of consumer behaviour. Automobiles, appliances, and aeroplane were invented., it has profoundly changed consumer behaviour since the Industrial Revolution. The telephone, television, the internet, and more recently, social media and user-generated content have all come after that. Wants are becoming necessities as a result of digital technology. For example, we didn't miss our cell phones when we first got them, but nowadays you can't live without them. The internet is becoming as crucial as power, if not

more so, than television. The way technology changes want into needs has a big influence on the development of new habits like Shopping, dating, and everything else can be done online. More significantly, it has an equal impact on the family budget for conventional requirements (food, shelter, and clothes) as well as modern necessities (education, transportation, and healthcare) (phone, internet, and apps).

The third factor that influences new behaviours is changing demographics ([Sheth and Sisodia, 1999](#)). A few examples will be provided to demonstrate this. There is no need to preserve one's health (fitness) or one's money (retirement) emerge as sophisticated economies age. Furthermore, the elderly population is concerned about their personal safety as well as the safety of their belongings. Finally, when compared to the younger generation, their want to have fun (both active and passive) shifts. As more women get into the work force, the family is becoming to resemble that of roommate family. It is no longer possible to eat meal together at home every evening. Getting everyone to eat great together is more of a chore that needs to be completed as soon as feasible. Following supper, to each one family member retires to their own personal space or place to participate in text messaging, YouTube, or television viewing. Individual consumption, at the convenience of each family member, is gradually supplanting shared consumption.

In addition, there is an increasing trend of people choosing to live alone. Single adult households now account for more than a third of all households in the United States. This is owing to the fact that from the ages of eighteen to twenty-nine, initial marriages are postponed. With the population ageing, many senior individuals, especially ladies, prefer to live alone. As a one-person household, new habits regarding what to purchase, how much to buy, and where to buy are formed. Finally, shifting demography, public policy, and technology all play a role in the development of new habits as well as the abandonment of old ones.

V. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Covid-19 has three effects on consumer behaviour managerial implications. First, just as customer have learnt to adjust, businesses must innovate and become more resident amid pandemic crises. Companies, unfortunately, are controlled by established procedures, which they are frequently unable to modify rapidly. The government's failure to process PPP contracts is an example of this (payroll protection programme) loans and unemployment assistance applications in the United States.

Fortunately, as many large businesses have moved to cloud computing, improvising has become easier. Supermarkets and huge shops such as Walmart and Target have been affected in this way. In any event, the latter were merging their physical stores and online buying and were equal capable of omnichannel delivery. In summary, Businesses may be able to learn how to make their infrastructure more sustainable and procedures more resilient, and in the course of dealing with worldwide crises like the Covid-19.

Demand and supply matching is a second managerial implication. There were chronic shortages at every outlet, from supermarkets to hypermarkets to drugstores, due to consumer stockpiling and the "run on the bank" mentality during a crisis. Operational responsibility such as supply chain, logistics, and warehousing must be connected with demand volatility. To put it another way, rather than stocking goods on the shelf with back-up inventories in the shop, stimulate online procurement, and reverse the process from products sitting on the shelf for the consumer to the consumer places the order initially, and the grocery warehouse assembles it afterwards and delivering the order to the client will become increasingly necessary. As previously said, the shop is not the same as the store visiting the consumer.

A third takeaway for managers is that until people learn to use technologies such as Zoom video services and online ordering, causes significant changes in their life, consumers will revert to their old patterns. Customers' virtual global experiences, as well as after-sales strategic investments will be made in services (customer support).

VI. RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

Because the social isolation and lockdown had an impact on the entire spectrum of consumer behaviour (from problem awareness to search to information to purchase to transfer to consumption and trash disposal), a slew of new research opportunities arose. These areas of empirical research, as well as certain theoretical concerns like hoarding, blurring the distinction between work and personal life, and the usage of social media, are all being investigated.

Academic research into consumers' adaptability and creativity is a socially important topic. It's a relatively new topic of study, and the Covid-19 incident has highlighted it as a prospective research area. Is there, for example, a difference in improvisation between cultures? What are the various methods that people around the world employ to protect oneself against infection?

Finally, Covid-19 has improved its social media utilisation throughout Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter, and Zoom. Word-of-mouth is creating a huge amount of data. Current analytic methods aren't as effective with video talks. We will need to develop new techniques for evaluating video material in the same way that we created Natural Language Processing (NLP) for analysing text data. These approaches will almost certainly be based on machine learning and artificial intelligence. (Sheth, 2020a, Sheth, 2020b). As evidenced by video games and virtual sports, consumers are becoming more engaged in the virtual world than in the physical. Will the fictitious become real? Is a relationship with a chatbot girlfriend, for example, more than comfortable and joyful than a relationship with a real girlfriend or boyfriend? Parmy Olson presents many tales of people interacting with chatbots in an article published in the Wall Street Journal recently. The Microsoft XiaIce social chatbot, according to the author, has over 660 million users in China alone. In a nutshell, the artificial has taken on a life of its own.

VII. CONCLUSION

Because of the lockdown and social separation required to combat the covid-19 virus, consumer behaviour has been substantially affected. All usage is time and location limited. With time flexibility but geographical restriction, consumers have learnt to improvise in novel and innovative ways. People increasingly work, study, and unwind at home, blurring the distinction between work and personal life. Because the customer cannot come to the business, the store must come to the consumer.

Customers who have been under house arrest for a lengthy period of time are more likely to accept modern technology that makes work, study, and consumption easier. Adoption of digital technology is likely to result in a shift in established routines. Finally, new consumption patterns will be enforced by public policy, notably in public places such as airports, concerts, and public parks.

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