



**THE CHANGES IN CONSUMER BEHAVIOR AND OFFLINE STORES
UNDER THE EPIDEMICS**



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Abstract

Although different scenarios can be drawn, either more optimistic or more pessimistic, no one can really predict when the world will return to normal after the COVID-19 pandemic. During the epidemic and under the restrictions of various government systems, people could not go out and could only work and study from home. Although online behavior has become common, it still causes distress for consumers, which led to changes in consumer behavior. The epidemic also caused people to buy less, travel less, consume less, and invest less. It had a great impact on tourism, catering, transportation and other traditional industries, and many offline stores risk closure down due to the reduction of a large number of economic activities.

This paper examined consumer behavior and purchasing patterns in the COVID-19 epidemic, as well as the effects of changing consumer behavior on offline stores, by reviewing and synthesizing the literature produced by domestic and international academics. It also suggested countermeasures for businesses and some offline stores.

Keywords: epidemics, consumer behavior, offline stores



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1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

In February 2020, a Novel Coronavirus infection broke out in China, and the Chinese people responded to the country's call. They are giving up the traditional way of visiting the home to celebrate the Spring Festival, family as a unit, and staying at home to celebrate the Spring Festival. During this period, the offline consumption scene has been sharply reduced, and the physical industry has almost come to a standstill. Online industries and consumption have seen explosive growth. As of February 11, 2020, a total of more than 70,000 new coronavirus infection cases have been reported in mainland China, including more than 44,000 confirmed cases, more than 16,000 suspected cases, more than 10,000 clinically diagnosed cases, and 889 asymptomatic infections (Yanping, 2020). Consumers are being persuaded to spend more on online marketplaces as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic's global lockdown, social isolation, and other measures (Alessa, 2021). According to the Statistical Report on The Development of the Internet in China, as of March 2020, the number of Internet users in China was 904 million, and the Internet penetration rate reached 64.5%. The vast Internet users constitute the booming consumer market in China and also lays a solid user base for the development of the digital economy.

We must consider how the epidemic in this social setting encouraged the promotion of the Internet, which altered consumer behavior (Jensen,2021).

Researchers that looked into how consumer attitudes and behaviors affected online purchases following COVID-19 discovered that information technology was crucial to e-commerce since it reduced costs and facilitated network transactions. The results then demonstrated that, under the present COVID-19 pandemic condition, the majority of consumers switched to internet shopping (Al-Hattami, 2021) And further analysis regression, observed that there is a positive relationship between consumer attitude and behavior towards online shopping/purchasing (Sanaullah, 2021).

As it turns out, increase online shopping has turned out to be the Covid-19 outbreak. To ascertain how online buyers respond to their purchasing patterns concerning perceived benefits during COVID-19 (Pham, 2020).

Because of this, the corporate environment underwent quick changes throughout the quarantine. In the end, the Corona Crisis sped up the growth of digital trade. Globally, a new digitally immersed consumer has emerged, a more selective one, with financial difficulties. Reduced

supplier activity due to income losses, restricted transportation options, and pandemic mitigation strategies have driven B2B producers and sellers to lower production and marketing costs, identify new suppliers both domestically and internationally, and hasten decision-making. (Wanasida, 2021). The food service sector has been severely impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak and the ensuing lockdown. Food service companies have experienced a severe decline due to the COVID-19 epidemic, forcing players throughout the whole food service supply chain to reconsider their business plans. Beyond stricter product safety regulations, the pandemic necessitates an all-encompassing strategy to risk management (Daniel,2022). Massive losses have been incurred by the global economy in general and international trade in particular as a result of the coronavirus epidemic. The level of uncertainty that enterprises and end users are experiencing is made worse by several things. These include a loss in income, limits on international travel, evolving consumer demand, and the shifting actions of market participants, to name a few (Berube, 2020).

1.2 The problem to be investigated

Many consumers have been compelled to reconsider their long-standing purchasing behaviors or perhaps pick up brand-new ones due to the current state of affairs following the first wave and the start of the second wave of the COVID-19 epidemic around the world. (Sheth, 2020). Therefore, we propose the following questions:

From the perspective of consumers, have their behavior, and primary consumption demands changed significantly after the impact of the epidemic?

During the COVID-19 crisis (Taha et,2021) confirmed that interest in online shopping increased significantly, and the contactless shopping process made e-commerce the first choice for people when shopping. For instance, Chang & Meyerhoefer (2020) argued that various products, such as frozen food and fresh vegetables, have been sold online more than in previous years. Roggeveen & Sethuraman (2020) indicated that the requirement of emergency medical supplies and hygiene products has also been found to be highly popular on online shopping platforms because buyers have positive purchasing attention due to their concern for safety during the pandemic (Eger et al.2020). To understand the changes in dietary and food purchasing patterns during the COVID-19 pandemic, numerous studies have been done. Additionally, a number of studies have been conducted to ascertain the COVID-19 pandemic's effects on food supply chains and panic buying

by consumers (Hobbs, 2020). Celik and Dane (2020) examined how the COVID-19 pandemic epidemic affected dietary preferences. According to their survey, people are now more likely to choose fruits and vegetables as their first food choice rather than meat and pastries.

From an offline store's perspective, people are encouraged to use shopping apps such as Taobao or Amazon during the epidemic. How has offline shopping been impacted? (Nguyen, 2020) illustrated the impact of the coronavirus disease pandemic on the publishing industry. The primary purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of COVID-19, practical motivation, and hedonistic motivation on consumers' willingness to buy books online. As a result, physical bookshops were shut down, there were health risks involved with visiting them, there were changes in online shopping habits, and there were additional marketing effects of online bookstores during the epidemic (Akhtar, 2020). Online retailers offer a wide range of goods, including toys, apparel, footwear, accessories, home appliances, and more. Customers in wealthy nations are embracing the internet buying craze. Particularly children and the younger generation have supported and valued this novel idea. This creates a dilemma for the offline industry (Aktaş, 2020).

1.3 Objective of the study

To examine consumer behavior and buying behavior in the face of COVID-19

Changes in consumer behavior impact offline stores and put forward countermeasures for enterprises and stores

1.4 Scope of the study

This paper mainly studies the collection of relevant data through network channels. It uses the literature research method to summarize and analyze the research data of domestic and foreign scholars, and study the trend analysis of residents' consumption behavior and the trend. The impact on enterprise stores, and put forward that enterprises should take development countermeasures such as cultivating new consumption hot spots and transforming new business models after changing consumer behavior patterns.

1.5 Research Significance

Studying the changes in consumer behavior under the new crown pneumonia epidemic will help to determine the future trend of people's consumption behavior and the measures of new business models, which will help to tap the market thoroughly and revive residents' consumption. It is worth noting that the epidemic has had a profound impact on people's shopping habits, which is of great significance to brands operating in China and even the global market.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Epidemics

In December 2019, Wuhan announced the first case of the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) virus, which has since spread throughout China and even to neighboring nations. A beta coronavirus infection like SARS and MERS is COVID-19. People can get infected, and it appears as viral pneumonia (Barth,2021).

To maintain social, economic, and political life while avoiding direct human contact and containing the virus's spread, the COVID-19 pandemic's outbreak put national and international authorities' methods to the test, disrupted daily routines, and abruptly forced the acceleration of digitalization (Schilirò, 2020). The fast shift to online learning in education has caused an exceptional separation between teachers and students, which is made up for by screens on phones, tablets, laptops, and computers. This has altered the dynamic between the parties involved in the educational process (Di Pietro et al., 2020).

As of April 10, 2020, there are around 100,000 cases of coronavirus illness worldwide, affecting 1.6 million people. People will spend 2 billion minutes per day in online meetings. Similar to how Google Meet reports on conferences, online movies, Zoom reports, etc (Kim, 2020).

The 130 respondents who participated in the survey on a five-point Likert scale at the Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University's Campus Naushahro Feroze were the data's primary source. The results further demonstrated that amid the current covid-19 pandemic crisis, most consumers switched to online shopping. Additionally, it was found through regression analysis that there is a correlation between consumer behavior and attitudes toward online shopping (Sanaullah, 2021).

Everyone may agree that the COVID-19 pandemic had impacted work, play, family life, and public involvement based on scientific literature, media coverage, and personal experiences. In

light of this, a professor of communication sciences addressed students' stress, worries, and coping mechanisms by talking to them about their interests in various subjects and connecting the seminar topics to their expectations and experiences. After getting together with friends and traveling, people listed shopping and going to malls as things they didn't get to do in the first half of 2020. They served as the inspiration for our study, especially in light of official data indicating a 75% increase in Romanian online shopping in the first half of 2020 compared to the same period in 2019 (Pătrulescu, 2020).

Zeng Yu, CNNIC director, pointed out the digital economy has become a new driving force for economic growth, with new business forms and models emerging endlessly. The digital economy has played an essential role in ensuring consumption and employment and promoting the resumption of work and production, demonstrating strong growth potential.

Strong and continuous growth in the number of Internet users, increased awareness of online shopping, increased number and activity of online product launches, low prices as a result of mass purchases, and other factors are factors influencing online consumer behavior during the COVID-19 pandemic. (Barbu, 2021).

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, most Chinese people have started to live at home. Even consumers in third - to fifth-tier cities have become enthusiastic about online shopping. According to the GfK China Consumer Confidence Study in February 2020, the number of first-time online shoppers during the pandemic was twice that of consumers in first-tier cities.

2.2 Consumer behavior

"The pandemic has led to unprecedented, and rapid changes in consumer behavior and preferences," said Terence Scroope, vice president of insights at Unruly. More than 40% of consumers use online shopping more regularly, which has led to an increase in demand for online shopping and home delivery, according to the February 2020 GfK China Consumer Study. Additionally, more and more customers make their first purchases on platforms like WeChat groups, brand websites, and independent third-party apps. Offline consumption dropped to roughly 37% of normal levels at the outbreak's height (Daniel Zipser, 2020).

A 500-person simple random sample was asked online questions concerning their consumption habits. The study's findings demonstrated that during the lockdown and quarantine

periods caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, consumer behavior changed to depend increasingly on internet purchasing and e-payment options (Hashem, 2020).

Since most people are required to eat at home during the lockdown, the food and beverage business has experienced an upsurge in online sales. Many internet buyers mention their earnings are dropping (Hobbs, 2020). There is no doubt that affordable brands were favored at that time (Cai, 2020). If various commodities and services had been included in the prior consumption basket, the pandemic's focus would have been on essentials like delivery services, preservatives, and medications (Rai, 2021). Holiday-specific shopping habits have also undergone significant shift. Due to the typical holiday budget being lower than in years past due to the epidemic, many consumers of all generations are turning to contactless shopping (Khan, 2020). Price, availability, and convenience are still the main deciding factors when purchasing, but a new norm has emerged: hygiene (Lyu W, 2020). Sales of food, sporting goods, children's products, and medical supplies have all soared as a result of the pandemic (Király, 2020).

2.3 Offline stores

People often prefer to come to a store in person than ordering online for a variety of reasons, the most prominent being concerns about the quality of goods buy online. This is what they say they are actually buying (Akbank., 2020).

However, the COVID-19 pandemic altered both the global and offline systems' operations (Michal,2022).

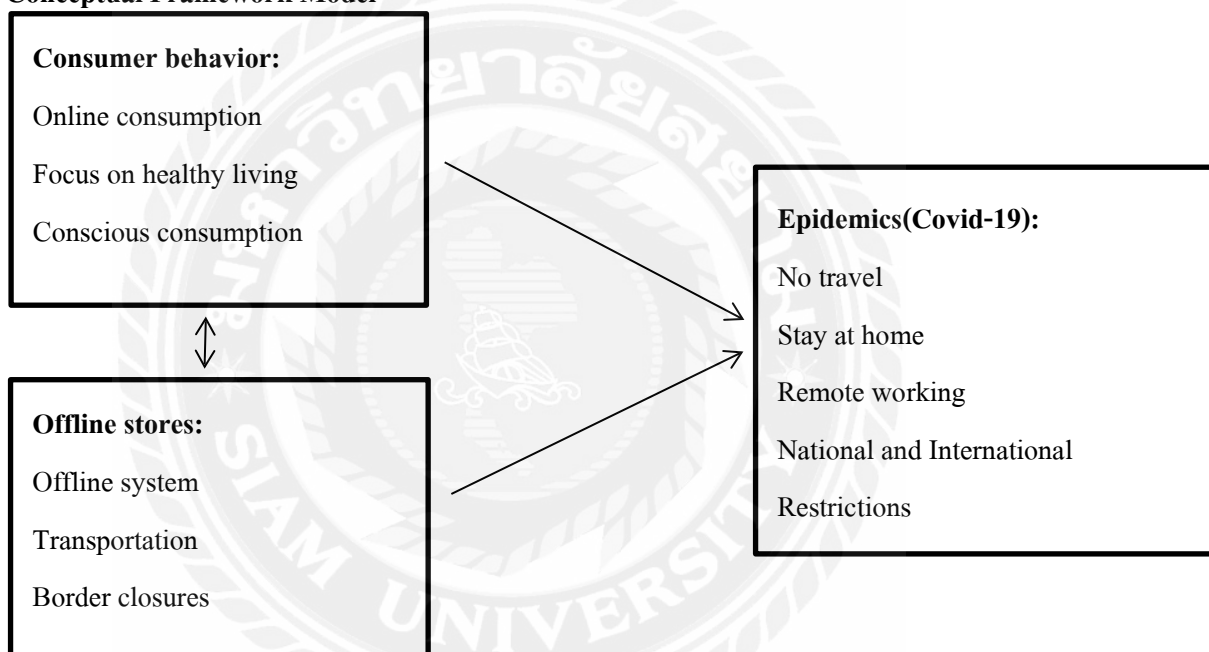
The original (COVID-19) interferes with many people's daily lives. The COVID-19 disaster has altered how much people create and consume in the border region. According to the United States, domestic eating in food delivery, expenditures on air travel, and public transportation, as well as the initial week-by-week stage of COVID-19, were also observed (Grashuis et al., 2020). Border closures have had a significant impact on commercial operations or the transfer of commodities in China. Entire industries have stopped producing as a result of government actions (Barter, 2020).

Companies have recently positioned their supply chains following various techniques. Lean or flexible systems, for instance, have been implemented to improve coordination or visualize them

to find flaws and reduce expenses. However, putting the recommendations into practice hasn't been enough to stop the pandemic's detrimental effects (Oloruntoba, 2020).

Border closures significantly increased transportation costs. Some of the raw materials are requested by air. Due to the pandemic, many flights could not take place, and new ways of procurement were needed. This resulted in a worldwide increase in costs. In addition, new safety measures and regulations affected costs and delivery times (Zhu et al., 2020)

Conceptual Framework Model



(Kumar & Managi, 2020); (Oloruntoba, 2020); (Michal,2022); (Zhu et al., 2020); (Parson, 2020); (Corsten & Gossinger 2001); (Pfohl,2004); (Kugeler, 2002); (Barter, 2020); (Keller & Kro1,2004); (Wallentowitz et al.,2009);(BMWi, 2021);(Kords,2021)

3. Conclusion and Recommendation

According to the above research, we can find the impact of COVID-19 on consumer behavior and buying behavior:

First, people's awareness of safety and health has increased, and their consumption of epidemic prevention and control supplies, such as masks, goggles, disinfectants, and alcohol, has

expanded to a certain extent, as has their consumption of medical care products and insurance. From January 19 to 22, 2020, A total of 126 million masks, 310,000 bottles of disinfectant, and 1 million bottles of hand sanitizer were sold on the JD platform, among which electronic thermometers, cold medicine, VC effervescent tablets, goggles, and other related products were also increased to a certain extent.

Secondly, residents' online consumption objects continue to expand, from goods with a high degree of standardization and easy express delivery to non-standardized and low-frequency goods such as fresh food and medicine. During the Spring Festival, the sales volume of the Jingdong Home Shopping platform increased by 470% compared with the same period last year, and the vegetable supply of Hema Fresh was six times as much as usual. Meituan Waimai's sales of chronic prescription drugs increased by 237%.

Many consumers canceled their travel plans during the Spring Festival due to the epidemic's impact, and the tourism industry suffered a significant blow. After the epidemic ended, major scenic spots adopted certain forms of free travel to attract consumers, but the total tourism expenditure of residents still decreased significantly.

Finally, residents' consumption of digital culture and entertainment services has significantly increased, such as online video membership, games, online education, office, and other users. Online consumer groups have rapidly expanded, and elderly residents and school-age children have also started online shopping.

And for offline stores and businesses, although the situation has been unpredictable, and decisions are not always easy to make, the current changes cannot be called fundamentally new. Real-time analysis of changing consumer behavior, integration of online and offline channels, automation, flexibility, and attention to community values have all been discussed. The pandemic caused a rise in interest among scientists in these pursuits. In the modern era, internet analysis plays a much more significant role because user behavior reflects complete quarantine. Companies cannot plan their future operations without knowing precisely what has changed (Masaeli, 2021).

Here are my suggestions for offline stores :

1. Forecast the changing trend of consumption and explore new business opportunities

Not affected by the more significant cause of shutdown of production enterprises, in response to new outbreaks in consumer behavior patterns change, should be active to predict consumer trends, do an excellent job in security under the premise of prevention and control work and fulfill the social responsibility, digging a new opportunity, and about the residents for the safe, healthy and convenient consumption demands a rapid response, a series of measures to meet them. And according to the changing trend in the future forecast, the enterprise adjusts the next development goal and plan.

2. Integrate new marketing channels, and innovate business models

Residents' consumption shows a trend of merging online and offline consumption. Enterprises should upgrade their marketing according to the change in consumption, integrate new marketing channels, and realize the integration of online and offline. On the one hand, enterprises can adopt the modes of combining online and offline to improve the work efficiency of employees and facilitate the creation of value for employees who are not available. On the other hand, when providing products and services for customer groups, enterprises can also open the online and offline integration modes to seize the needs of customer groups and obtain more excellent benefits. At the same time, enterprises can also take the opportunity in market integration, optimize the allocation of resources, and better meet consumer demand changes.

3. Seize the outlet of consumption and expand the market

Enterprises should seize the opportunity of COVID-19 to understand the market after the change in consumer behavior, expand market areas, reposition new target customer groups, and new contactless consumer demand, and put forward targeted development measures. Enterprises should firmly grasp the new opportunities brought by the epidemic to the pharmaceutical, education, entertainment, and other industries, open up new development areas, and formulate sustainable development strategies.

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