



The New Profile of the Online Consumer Behaviour in a Post-Pandemic World

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected shopping behaviour: consumers are more attentive to finding products customized to their needs and desires. Even the most suspicious people in this health emergency have overcome the cognitive barriers to digital purchasing to shop in total safety. This chapter aims to contribute to an understanding of how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected Online Consumer Behaviour (OCB). The theoretical contribution on OCB appears useful for managers and practitioners to define appropriate strategic actions for customers to enhance value in a digital context. The chapter presents three sections devoted to the literature on online consumer behaviour during COVID-19, the factors affecting the OCB and decision-making process, and online retailing in the COVID-19 era. Based on this theoretical background, this chapter proposes a new categorization of online consumer behaviour by considering the habits that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Introduction

In 2020 COVID-19 affected almost all countries and more than 50 million people around the world (OECD, 2020). Beyond the health and human tragedy of the coronavirus, it is now widely recognised that the pandemic triggered several changes in consumer habits and business models (Kalkinma *et al.*, 2020). Many economies will not recover their 2019 output levels until 2022 at the earliest (OECD, 2020). The nature of the crisis is unprecedented: beyond the short-term repeated health and economic shocks, the long-term effects on human capital, productivity and behaviour may be long-lasting. The COVID crisis has massively accelerated some pre-existing trends, in particular digitalisation (McKinsey, 2020). It has shaken the world, setting in motion waves of change with a wide range of possible trajectories (OECD, 2020). The retailing industry is being reimagined and transformed at breakneck speeds due to new technologies and changes in consumer purchasing behaviour resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. This dynamic retail marketplace is forcing retailers to strategize how to best position themselves to survive and flourish in this environment. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused several profound modifications (Eger *et al.*, 2021; Donthu and Gustafsoon, 2020; Pantano *et al.*, 2020) to the everyday lives of consumers, such as isolation, community containment, avoidance of social contact and practising social distancing (Wilder-Smith and Freedman, 2020). More specifically, consumer habits changed significantly, bearing in mind the usual situation before COVID-19 and several restrictions and lockdowns (Sheth, 2020; Hale *et al.*, 2020) applied during the virus's spread. According to Pantano and Willems (2022), a crisis can reveal the essence of people. Indeed, during the pandemic, unusual consumer behaviour increased (Laato *et al.*, 2020), for example, people have started storing large amounts of toilet paper, rice and flour, which in turn has increased awareness of their rarity and instils fear in others (Studdert and Hall, 2020). In addition to hoarding, impulse purchases have increased as a response to negative emotions (especially after the reopening of the store), in some cases having negative consequences from a financial point of view. However, this has allowed consumers to reflect on their behaviour and evolve towards more sustainable choices. Tran (2021) stated that the Covid-19's impact on sustainable consumption is reflected in: "*purchasing products and services from e-commerce platforms to satisfy needs and wants, and to increase health safety for selves and community during a pandemic period (pp. 2-3)*". Hence, the pandemic has changed the attitudes and behaviours of purchasing and consuming, especially in the FMCG market. During the lockdown, the consumption of specific product categories increased (i.e., long-lived foods, raw materials and household disinfectants) but nowadays this trend stopped. On the other hand, the increasing use of e-commerce channels reveals an attachment and loyalty of consumers to these shopping habits (Anna, 2020). Based on the above-mentioned motivations and the studies scholars carried out in the last few years on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the retail industry (Roggeveen and Sethuraman, 2020; Guthrie *et al.*, 2021; Eger *et al.*, 2021; Islam *et al.*, 2021), it appears helpful to investigate consumer behaviour and consumer relationships with purchasing processes. This chapter aims to contribute to an understanding of how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected online consumer behaviour (OCB), with a specific focus change in terms of marketing stimuli and online platforms. The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected shopping behaviour: consumers are more attentive and demanding, and above all, they have become accustomed to finding what they need online. Even the most suspicious people in this health emergency have overcome the cognitive barriers to digital purchasing to shop in total safety. The theoretical contribution to online consumer behaviour appears useful for managers and practitioners to address appropriate strategies for customers to enhance value in a digital context. The chapter presents in the next three sections a review of literature on Online Consumer Behaviour in the COVID-19 era, what factors affecting the OCB and decision-making process and online retailing in the COVID-19 era. Based on the analysis of the theoretical framework, this chapter proposes a new categorization of online consumer behaviour by considering the previous habits and the new ones that emerged during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Key Terms in this Chapter

[Branding and Firms' Strategies](#): In the new pandemic scenario retailers will face challenges across multiple dimensions. In sales, marketing mix and assortment strategies.

[Online Shopping After COVID-19](#): Online shopping was the predominant way to shop and consumers became more familiar with several services, such as home deliveries, cashless payment and the use of social media.

[Post-COVID-19 Retailing World](#): This is a new environment where a human being can express their past needs and desires with the new one developed after several restrictions imposed by governments all over the world.

[COVID-19 Pandemic Modifications](#): The pandemic caused by COVID-19 has produced several modifications to consumer behaviour and, in general, in the daily life of people who are adapting to new changes such as the lockdowns and quarantine restrictions in several countries worldwide.

[Issue About Data Privacy Information](#): In the new digital environment intensification by the pandemic, the problems and liability of managing personal data and their use are becoming more and more problematic.

[Online Shopping Before COVID-19](#): Online shopping was one of the possibilities to shop. People could indifferently choose if and how to make their purchases using the channel that was easier to access.

[New Online Consumer](#): Is a consumer fully expert on the interactive technologies and online platforms, able to easily switch from online to offline and vice versa. The new consumer doesn't waste time and considers his/her health as a priority to preserve during the shopping process.