

CONSUMPTION, CONSUMER BEHAVIOR AND NEW HABITS ACQUIRED BY CONSUMERS AS A RESULT OF COVID-19 MEASURES



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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to address the changes in consumer behavior due to the political, legal and economic factors caused by the COVID-19 process by reviewing the literature. It was not expected that this epidemic, which first appeared in Wuhan, China, would make such radical changes in the world's living conditions and bring heavy consequences. For this reason, it has been started to investigate what kind of changes this epidemic will create in consumer behavior and whether these changes will be permanent. Consumer behavior knowledge is an important factor in the success of businesses. Knowing how the consumer behaves and what factors affect him enables businesses to manage their marketing mix, branding and communication with customers more effectively. Consumer buying behavior shows a complex trend and can change. The current financial downturn has a huge impact on the economic and social aspects of consumers around the world. Therefore, by emphasizing the fundamental changes in consumer purchasing behavior, this article provides some important information for the immediate decision-making and management of businesses in times of crisis and the transformation of consumers in the face of the epidemic.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Until the understanding of product, production, sales and marketing, which are the development stages of marketing, the wishes and desires of the consumer were not given much importance. As a result of the globalization of the world and the intensification of competition, trying to understand customer satisfaction and therefore consumer behavior has been the focus of businesses. Businesses have begun to understand that an unsatisfied, deceived and deceived customer will be lost and will go to



rival businesses. As a result of this, the phase of marketing understanding, in which customer satisfaction is prioritized, has begun. While both the developments in the understanding of marketing and the trend of change in consumer behavior continued, the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic differentiated the trend in consumer behavior.

The world first became aware of the Covid-19 outbreak when it reported to the World Health Organization that a mysterious respiratory illness of unknown origin emerged in the city of Wuhan, Hubei province, on December 31, 2019, China. As the epidemic, which was initially perceived as a regional "epidemic" affecting China and its surroundings, crossed the borders of Asia and started to threaten public health globally in the following days, the world was locked in virus-related developments, and measures to control and prevent the epidemic became the main agenda of all countries. Sade, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has emerged as one of the most dangerous events in world history due to its physiological, psychological, economic and social effects on consumers. The psychological impact of COVID-19 may harm the physiological, social and economic well-being of consumers [Başyazıcıoğlu \(2020\)](#). Consumer behavior changes significantly during crises or epidemics that develop on a global or country basis. The periods when needs such as food, shelter and health are the highest are the crisis periods. Both working and non-working consumers are often concerned with basic needs such as food, shelter and health. Therefore, consumer spending shifts from an arbitrary impulse to purchase existential needs. In general, consumers form the strategy of determining their priorities according to basic needs in the expenditures of limited financial resources [Divanoğlu and Çelik \(2020\)](#). An increase in the tendency of consumers to stock up, especially regarding food and hygiene items, is observed, and with the increase in stocking behavior, there is an instantaneous increase in the retail sector. an increase in demand also emerges [Baltacı and Akaydin \(2020\)](#). For this reason, this research is to make inferences according to the results of the research by including a literature review to understand how Covid-19 affects consumer behavior in our geography, where it continues to expand its influence.

2. LITERATURE RESEARCH ON THE EFFECT OF THE COVID-19 PROCESS ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

Consumer behavior; It is defined as a process that affects decisions such as choosing, purchasing, using and disposing of goods, services and ideas that individuals or others think to meet their wishes and needs, and the activities of consumers and society related to these [Durmaz and Jabłoński \(2012\)](#). In addition, consumer purchasing behavior is explained as the sum of decision processes and subsequent behaviors determined by various factors (Sharma and Sonwalkar, 2013: 34). Therefore, consumer behavior is defined as a field that studies how individuals, groups and orga-

nizations choose, buy and use goods, services, experiences or products to meet their needs and wants [Kotler \(2000\)](#).

Pandemics, which have spread to many geographies from the beginning of humanity to the present, have caused mass deaths and many health problems. Pandemics such as the 664 plague, the Plague of Justinian, the Antoninus Plague, the Plague of Cyprus, the Plague of Ambros, the Black Plague, Cholera, Spanish Flu, Hong-Kong Flu, Smallpox, Swine Flu, Bird Flu have created shocking effects on the world [Aslan \(2020\)](#), [Paksoy et al. \(2020\)](#). In crisis environments where the risks posed by such epidemics are perceived, consumer behavior is driven by different factors for different consumer segments [Pennings et al. \(2002\)](#), [Turunç and Yetkin \(2021\)](#), [Pradhan \(2020\)](#). The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered significant changes in the habits of consumers around the world. Due to its contagious nature, the epidemic causes significant changes in consumers' purchasing and consumption behaviors due to quarantine, social distance and uncertainty about the future [Akter et al. \(2021\)](#). This causes changes in the behavior of businesses and consumers [Donthu and Gustafsson \(2020\)](#). In the face of these epidemics, understanding the lives of consumers becomes much more important for marketers, business and public officials [Kirk and Rifkin \(2020\)](#).

By creating conditions that affect people's lives [Baum and Hai \(2020\)](#), [Abigail and Zheng \(2021\)](#), [Villi et al. \(2021\)](#), [Duygun \(2020\)](#), Covid-19 is changing the behavior of consumers [Russell et al. \(2021\)](#), [Majercakova and Rostasova \(2021\)](#), [Çakıroğlu et al. \(2020\)](#), [Kılıç et al. \(2020\)](#) and show two different effects on human behavior. The first is that it has effects on consumer behavior and the second is that it affects the demand for health services [Laato et al. \(2020\)](#). Depending on the first behavior, during the Covid-19 epidemic, many people started to rethink their lifestyles and focus on physical and mental well-being [Y. Jiang and Wen \(2020\)](#) and the eating habits of consumers also changed [Aldaco et al. \(2020\)](#). Different behavioral patterns have been developed with an increase in the consumption of snacks and processed food. Due to the stress / discomfort caused by being closed, some consumers emphasized their behaviors related to emotional or restrictive attitudes and stated that they may have behaved differently than normal [Romeo-Arroyo et al. \(2020\)](#). The measures taken during the Covid-19 epidemic have seriously affected the daily life of consumers, leading to urgent purchasing situations. Perceived product scarcity affects consumer choices and, depending on the scarcity effect, consumers have stated that unsatisfactory results occur by shopping differently [Pantano et al. \(2020\)](#). In another study, it was stated that the perceived product scarcity during the pandemic period significantly affected consumer choices [Hamilton et al. \(2019\)](#), and it was stated that consumers deviated from their usual shopping behaviors and exhibited stocking behaviors [Eger et al. \(2021\)](#). The reasons for the emergence of the stocking behavior are explained as the concern of contagion, restrictive orders and the push of most people to spend in terms of ensuring continuity in basic household goods due to staying at home [Abigail and Zheng \(2021\)](#). Covid-19 shows that there are some thresholds

in shopping behavior. The first threshold represents global proactive health-focused purchasing. The second threshold indicates that consumers are focused on stocking the necessary products (disinfectants, face masks) to ensure health safety. The third threshold is seen as the stocking of groceries and other essential products. The fourth threshold is considered as the accompaniment of online shopping to consumer behavior. Fifth threshold, supply chain challenges make customers less sensitive to the prices of packaged products that are in high demand or those that guarantee hygiene standards. The sixth threshold means life in new living conditions [Majercakova and Rostasova \(2021\)](#).

Consumer behavior in crises is evaluated in terms of risk perceptions and risk attitudes. Consumers are divided into segments as “Panicked Consumers”, “Prudent Consumers”, “Anxious Consumers” and “Rational Consumers” [Amalia and Ionut \(2009\)](#). In crises, the panicked consumer tends to overreact and cut their spending drastically; The prudent consumer carefully plans spending and delays major purchases. Worried consumers also plan their spending carefully by sticking to certain brands, but may be ready to try new and innovative products despite tough times. Rational consumers, on the other hand, are not risk-averse and their behavior remains essentially unchanged [Eriksson and Stenius \(2020\)](#). Although the effects of crises on consumer behavior are different, purchasing patterns may emerge differently in routine operation. Conscious (planned) or subconscious (impulsive) buying patterns are mainly driven by hedonic (emotional) and utilitarian (practical) stimuli [Ahmed et al. \(2020\)](#), [Leverin and Liljander \(2006\)](#). In times of crisis, these purchasing patterns may change depending on a number of factors. For example, [Laato et al. \(2020\)](#) state that restraint measures increase fear, and this may make it possible for consumers to change their shopping habits in the long run. Again, [Ahmed et al. \(2020\)](#) examined impulse buying models during the Covid-19 pandemic and reported that the fear-inducing Covid-19 phenomenon significantly increased impulse buying behavior. Research results confirmed that fear of complete curfew, peer buying, scarcity of essential products on the shelves, limited supply of essential goods, and panic buying have a compelling and positive effect on the sharp fluctuations of impulse buying patterns [Ahmed et al. \(2020\)](#). In yet another study, they stated that they reduced the visits of consumers to stores, restaurants and markets, and stated that it led to changes in consumer behavior [Hesham et al. \(2021\)](#).

The Covid-19 crises have serious effects on people’s purchasing behavior and consumption patterns, as well as their well-being. Consumers show changes in attitudes and behaviors by showing a basic reaction against their freedom due to threats exhibiting psychological processes [Goswami and Chouhan \(2021\)](#). Depending on these psychological processes, in a previous study on SARS, it was stated that the psychological effects of SARS, combined with travel restrictions, reduced travel behavior [Wilder-Smith \(2006\)](#). In our world, where Covid-19 continues to increase its negative impact, studies investigating these psychological effects are increasing rapidly [Ahmed et al. \(2020\)](#), [Eriksson and Stenius \(2020\)](#), [Laato et al.](#)

(2020), [Romeo-Arroyo et al. \(2020\)](#), [Pantano et al. \(2020\)](#), [Eger et al. \(2021\)](#). [Paksoy et al. \(2020\)](#) stated that the anxiety experienced by people due to Covid-19 has an effect on consumer behavior. Consumers tend to collect more information about the manufacturer and distributor, depending on their high anxiety about the future and life. In the Covid-19 period, consumers are turning into a situation that examines prices more, is more economical and frugal, more inquisitive, makes more comparisons, and tries to meet most of their needs with their own methods. Consumers start to give more importance to their basic needs compared to the past, and they become more anxious about life safety and health [Paksoy et al. \(2020\)](#).

In the early stages of the Covid-19 global epidemic, panic buying has shown its effect on consumer buying behavior. Although panic buying behavior has encouraged some consumer purchases, it is unlikely that all panic buying is of this type. Some people have taken a health protective behavior to stay healthy against Covid-19 with a proactive approach. Moreover, it remains unclear which psychological factors are key in motivating such purchases [Clemens et al. \(2020\)](#). However, in a study, it is stated that the psychological effects of the Covid-19 pandemic are fear, anxiety, panic, stress, depression and stigma. It is stated that these effects of the pandemic have changed the behavior of consumers, and it is explained that consumers start to behave selfishly and harm themselves and other people economically, socially and physically [Başyazıcıoğlu \(2020\)](#). Uncertainty, perceived violence, perceived scarcity and anxiety between panic buying behavior show that these factors can affect consumer panic buying behavior. It has been stated that these psychological factors of stocking and hoarding act as precursors of consumer panic buying [Omar et al. \(2021\)](#). The increased panic with the signs of famine during the COVID-19 pandemic has led to increased demand as well as purchasing and hoarding. In the study on people's consumption habits [Özdemir \(2013\)](#), modern consumption theories, which try to explain consumption with known macroeconomic variables, are insufficient at a few points. The possibility that the most important variable behind consumption might be "psychological factors" is emphasized. In times of uncertainty, purchasing behaviors lose their clarity and become unstable. The consumer tends to reduce all non-vital products and services in ambiguous situations. Studies on this subject [Çelik \(2010\)](#), [Güneş and Çelik \(2009\)](#) state that consumer confidence is sensitive to financial market variables and the current outlook of the economy in countries that tend to develop like Turkey. The study published by McKinsey & Company (2020) states that as some countries progress in the Covid-19 curve, an atmosphere of optimism is created and expenditures increase [Yıldız \(2020\)](#). At the same time, it is stated that it is not surprising that consumers accept price increases during such epidemic periods [Pantano et al. \(2020\)](#). The price increases and the situation created by the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic affect consumer spending by causing decreases in personal income. Depending on the measures, consumers are forced to react in various ways to their spending and lifestyles, affecting the income and prices of goods and services [Abigail and Zheng \(2021\)](#)

For example, [Sheth \(2020\)](#) claims that there are four main contexts that govern or disrupt consumer habits. These include social content (for example, changes in the workplace and interaction with neighbors and friends), the implementation of new technology (including online shopping and delivery), the impact of consumption habits due to new rules (Covid-19 pandemic regulations), and less predictable content (global content). development of the Covid-19 pandemic). Again, [Eger et al. \(2021\)](#), on the other hand, emphasize three factors that are likely to create new consumer habits. These are public policy, digital technology and demography carried out in the country. It is emphasized that especially the young people who have a high interest in technology are advantageous during the pandemic period. Due to the effects of Covid 19, it shows that consumers are focusing on the most basic needs, people are shopping more consciously, buying locally and adopting digital commerce. Consumers use Information and Communication Technologies more intensively to connect and learn in order to alleviate the negative effects of Covid-19 and to overcome the isolation carried out [Eger et al. \(2021\)](#). Pandemics and new diseases have long had a transformative impact on environments and societies [Hall et al. \(2020\)](#). Consumers are developing new habits by adopting technology more than ever [Rahimzhan and Irani \(2020\)](#) to protect themselves from all aspects and consequences of isolation. Covid-19 enables consumers who want to cope with the blurring of the boundaries of work, entertainment and education to learn new habits by improvising. Consumers show a transformation by developing new behaviors by adopting many new technologies and their applications they need in this period [Sheth \(2020\)](#). [Majercakova and Rostasova \(2021\)](#) state that in the early stages of a pandemic, purchasing patterns during a crisis will accelerate the adoption of a new, fundamental change in consumers' shopping behavior [Majercakova and Rostasova \(2021\)](#).

[Kirk and Rifkin \(2020\)](#), it is said that such a crisis period can be important transformations in society and may go through some stages. It is mentioned that attention should be paid to consumer behaviors (such as responsiveness, coping, DIY behaviors, and then longer-term adaptation) in each of these stages. Covid-19 also allows the emergence of a new sustainable consumer model by breaking the resistance of consumers due to their old habits. The Covid-19 epidemic, which forces us to rethink every aspect of our lives, is shaking our usual habits. Due to this uncertainty, consumers have already started to make major changes in their consumption habits. Among the most important changes are more prudent purchasing decisions, increased interest in discounted prices, increased probability of purchasing locally, and an increased preference for buying fresh products over processed or semi-processed products [Orîndaru et al. \(2021\)](#).

In addition, there is an increase in the types of positive behaviors caused by social distance. People have begun to build nests, develop new skills, and take better care of where they live. For example, by learning to cook, trying to stay fit, doing puzzles or reading more, more garbage has begun to be recycled [Donthu and Gustafsson \(2020\)](#).

However, at the same time, the epidemic is stimulating the creativity of all people in responding to emergencies. The transformation and updating of consumer services, the internet industry and other related industries has accelerated. It is stated that e-commerce, e-government, home office, virtual business, online teaching and other new forms of business will lead a new round of development opportunities [Z. C. Jiang et al. \(2020\)](#).

3. CONCLUSION

In times of crises such as Covid 19, consumer behavior changes. Due to the economic factors in the market, consumers tend to save more and be pushed to different expenditures. These changes are not of the same intensity in all national markets and for all consumers. Therefore, it is crucial for businesses to understand the behavior change of their customers as the first step in planning to get out of the crisis. It is important for the business to measure consumer behavior in order to increase its growth and market share [Goswami and Chouhan \(2021\)](#). It is possible to say that businesses that are aware of this situation and are prepared for this situation by showing us that there will be permanent changes in consumer behavior and some aspects of marketing responses due to the Covid-19 pandemic will emerge stronger from the epidemic [Shaikh \(2020\)](#). In summary, this qualitative research provides various information for both consumers and administrations. In this challenging time, companies and managers need more than ever to use the results of literature research. As crises affect consumers and businesses, there is a need to help discuss these issues together and provide consumer empowering solutions.

Due to Covid-19, people have been exposed to effects in many areas of their lives. It seems inevitable that consumer behavior will not be affected by this. Consumer behavior, Covid-19 etc. as a complex structure determined by various factors. It creates a sum of changes in the purchasing preferences of consumers by causing changes in the decision processes of consumers during epidemics and crisis periods. In periods of such crises, the risk perceptions of consumers have an impact on what kind of consumer category they will enter. Particularly, panic purchases made by anxious consumers are moving away from rationality by showing stocking behaviors. The Covid-19 epidemic is changing our consumption habits by forcing us to question some habits that have taken place in our lives. These consumption habits create different habits for different consumers, depending on the psychological factors of restrictions and closure in the crisis environment. Some consumers show more prudent purchasing decisions, while others give up their usual consumption habits due to anxiety and show impulse buying behaviors. Due to the stress situation, some consumers also change their eating habits by exhibiting behaviors related to emotional or restrictive attitudes. In such periods, it remains valid to consider changes in consumer behavior from a psychological point of view. During Covid-19, consumer expenditures may go out of rationality, and expenditures may increase significantly

with the expectation that product supply will be insufficient.

Due to the pandemic process, the effect of the world's consumers staying at home and the active role of information and communication technologies in online sales in consumer preferences affect consumer behavior. It is possible to say that adopting digital technology can change existing habits. Covid-19, which causes us to rethink many areas in our lives, is considered as a trigger for a transformation in society as well as changing consumption habits. Widespread use of information and communication technologies provides more digitalization by playing an intermediary role in this transformative effect. From shopping for food through online applications, business, entertainment, sports and arts practices with virtual applications have led to serious changes in the habitual behavior of consumers.

Therefore, it is understood that Covid-19 has made some positive transformations on consumer behavior. Consumers have begun to focus on developing new skills, physical and mental well-being to protect their health. Taking various measures to respond to emergencies in the face of consumers' problems has increased their creativity. Consumers have exhibited a transformation by adopting many new technologies they need and their applications in this period. In addition, digital service provider businesses have been forced to reorganize and redesign their service offerings under the epidemic conditions, accelerating the transformation and updating of related industries. This information obtained through literature review can enable businesses and managers to develop specific strategies. In future studies, it is recommended to conduct quantitative studies based on the literature.

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