

Shifts in Consumer Behaviour during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Short-Term Adjustments or Long-Term Changes?

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic caused major changes in the buying behavior of people as well as uses the goods and services. Some reactions, such as panic buying and stockpiling, were short-term responses to uncertainty. On another side the growth of online shopping, higher health awareness, and more focus on sustainable choices, show signs of being long-term changes. This paper examines whether these shifts in consumer behaviour are temporary or permanent. Use of secondary data, industry reports, and academic studies, it looks that how different sectors like retail, food, healthcare, travel, and digital services were affected. The findings show that while some habits returned to normal after restrictions ended, deeper changes, such as the wide use of digital platforms, stronger reliance on e-commerce, and changing consumer values, are likely to remain. By separating short-term reactions from lasting transformations, this paper helps businesses, policymakers, and researchers to understand the consumer behaviour and plan better strategies for the post-pandemic period.

Keywords: Consumer Behaviour, COVID-19 Pandemic, Short-Term Adjustments, Long-Term Behavioural Changes, Panic Buying, Digital Platforms, Health Awareness

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic emerged as a global crisis that changed societies, economies, and daily life. It's began health crises, but it reshaped how people and households interacted with markets, shifted consumption priorities, and increased the use of digital technologies. Restrictions such as lockdowns, travel limits, and social distancing disrupted normal ways of shopping and forced both consumers and businesses to adapt quickly to new conditions. Sheffi, Y. (2020).

During pandemic period, people started panic buying and store a lot of essential items due to fear. At the same time, online shopping increased quickly. This showed that while consumers sometimes panic, they can also adjust to new situations easily. A key debate among researchers and professionals is that, whether these changes were only short-term reactions to the crisis or permanent shifts that will continue shaping consumer behaviour in the future. Mehta *et al.* (2020).

Consumer behaviour influenced by social, psychological, and economic factors, that always shown sensitivity to uncertainty. Past crises such as wars, epidemics, and financial downturns typically led to short-term caution, risk avoidance, and changes in spending patterns. Aigner, K. (2009). However, COVID-19 was different because it affected the whole world at the same time. It broke supply chains, increased the use of digital technology, caused health worries, and changed people's incomes everywhere. Unlike earlier crises that affected only certain places or industries, this pandemic disrupted everything globally and made people's spending habits an important topic of study. Yu, Z., *et al.* (2022).

One of the most visible changes was the digitalization. Online shopping platforms, digital payments, and delivery services became essential for people of all ages group, income levels, and regions. Consumers who never used digital tools before pandemic were pushed to adopt them, while demand for health and hygiene products grew sharply. Galhotra *et al.* (2020, October). At the same time, spending on travel, entertainment, and hospitality declined. As restrictions eased, some old habits returned, highlighting which behavioural changes faded and which continued as long-lasting shifts. Sheth, J. (2020).

This question has practical importance beyond academic debate. For businesses, knowing the difference between temporary and permanent consumer changes is necessary to design strong strategies, rebuild supply chains, and improve marketing. For policymakers, it helps in developing consumer protection measures, improving digital infrastructure, and addressing inequalities in access to goods and services. For researchers, the pandemic offers a rare chance to test existing theories and develop new models of consumer behaviour during crises.

Although research on COVID-19 and consumption is growing, some gaps remain. Most early studies focused on immediate responses such as panic buying, food storage, or the quick use of digital platforms, but gave less attention to whether these behaviours lasted after restrictions ended. Industry-specific studies in retail, healthcare or tourism also remain fragmented, with limited cross-sector analysis. Also, even though the crisis affected the whole world, there are not many studies comparing different countries and regions. This paper fills that gap by studying how consumers behaved during the pandemic, showing the difference between temporary changes and long-term habits.

The paper is organized as follows: *Section 1* discuss in above introduction. *Section 2* reviews of literatures on consumer behaviour, crisis-related consumption, and studies on the pandemic. *Section 3* discuss the research gap and objectives of the study. *Section 4* explains the research methodology. *Section 5* presents the results, findings, focusing on the difference between temporary and permanent changes in behaviour. *Section 6* discusses these results in relation to earlier studies and theoretical perspectives. Finally, *Section 7* provides the conclusion by summarizing the key insights, outlining practical implications, and suggesting directions for future research.

Literature Review

The COVID-19 pandemic open various path for researchers to explore on its effects across economies, societies, and consumer behaviour. This crisis is unique not only because it spread worldwide but also because it disrupted health, mobility, employment, and consumption simultaneously. Studies suggest that consumer behaviour during COVID-19 followed two main paths: short-term 'reactive changes' and long-term 'structural shifts'. Mehta *et al.* (2020). Research highlights trends such as panic buying, rapid digital adoption, rising health awareness, sustainability concerns, and sector-specific changes, while also questioning whether these shifts are temporary or permanent. Gürpinar *et al.* (2023).

Panic buying and stockpiling is one of the most common topics in the literatures during pandemic. Consumers rushed to buy essentials like food, toilet paper, and sanitizers due to fear and uncertainty. Taylor, S. (2021). Psychologists link this behaviour to scarcity perception, herd mentality, and risk aversion. Rook *et al.* (2006). Similar patterns were seen in other crises and disasters, suggesting these behaviours were short-term and situational. Quarantelliet *al.* (1985). Panic buying faded once as supply chains recovered, showing it was a temporary reaction. Khanet *et al.* (2022).

Another significant pattern was the reduction in non-essential spending. Studies show that households reduced expenses on travel, luxury goods, and entertainment, while saving more and spending mainly on necessities. Frank *et al.* (2001). This cautious spending is explained by the precautionary savings theory. Lugildeet *al.* (2017). However, once restrictions eased, discretionary spending bounced back, indicating this behaviour was also short-lived. Still, in lower-income households, income losses and debt created longer-term effects on spending power. Atkinson *et al.* (2024).

A major and lasting impact was the shift toward digital consumption. COVID-19 sped up the use of e-commerce, online groceries shopping, digital payments, and subscription services. Galhotraet *al.* (2020, October). For many those were new to online shopping, lockdowns acted as a turning point. According to the Diffusion of Innovation Theory by Kaminski (2011), this crisis helped consumers move from merely trying digital platforms to using them regularly. However, studies also show differences among young and urban group of people mostly continued online shopping, while older or rural consumers went back partly to offline buying. Bansale *et al.* (2022).

COVID-19 also increased awareness about health and wellness. People became more conscious in preventive healthcare, healthy diets, immunity boosters, and fitness. Monyeet *et al.* (2020). Unlike panic buying, this trend shows long-term persistence, with higher demand for organic food, supplements, and fitness apps.

The pandemic further strengthened interest in sustainability and ethical consumption. Consumers paid more attention to eco-friendly products, ethical sourcing and local businesses. Gaziet *et al.* (2024). These change shows that people becoming more aware of environmental issues and the weaknesses in global supply chains.

Another one transformation was the home-centred lifestyle. Remote work and mobility restrictions created new demands for home offices, internet services, entertainment, and food delivery. Bakardjievaeet *al.* (2022). Money that people used to spend on travel and transport was now spent on household needs and online services. Research shows that hybrid work models are likely to remain, which means home-based consumption will stay as a long-term trend. Jin, Z. (2025).

Sector-specific studies provide more insights. In retail, physical stores struggled, while online and multi-channel and digital apps formats grew strongly. Velderset *et al.* (2020). If talk about food, people cooked more at home and used online grocery services, though it is unclear if these habits will last. Pitts *et al.* (2018). The travel and hospitality industry was among the hardest hit, with long-term changes such as a shift toward domestic travel and flexible booking options. Dutta *et al.* (2024). In healthcare, services like telemedicine and digital diagnostics, which started as temporary solutions, have now become part of the mainstream. Shenet *et al.* (2021).

Demographic and regional factors also influenced consumer behaviour. Younger generations quickly adopted digital tools and sustainable practices, while older groups used them mainly out of

necessity. Khanet *et al.* (2023). Developed countries experienced smoother digital transitions, whereas developing nations faced challenges of cost and access, but still achieved rapid growth in digital use. Dahlmanet *et al.* (2016). This shows that COVID-19 created a 'leapfrogging effect,' helping some regions advance faster in digital inclusion.

The psychological and social studies of consumer behaviour are also important. Research shows that during the pandemic, people became more anxious, careful about risks, and trusted more in reliable brands. Jianet *et al.* (2020). Social identity theory helps to explain why many people chose to support local businesses and farmer cooperatives, as it gave them a sense of solidarity in difficult times. Ham *et al.* (2022). The theory of planned behaviour also explains how people's attitudes, social influence, and sense of control affected their move toward online shopping and sustainable choices. Yanget *et al.* (2018).

Although these literature offers many useful insights, it also has some gaps and debates. One challenge is must knowing which behaviours that are permanent and which are temporary. For example, digital adoption appears to be long-lasting, but sustainability efforts may decline if people face financial problem. In the same way, health awareness is strong now but could weaken as health risks decrease. Another issue is that most research is based on short-term surveys done during the height of the pandemic, not on long-term studies. Because of this, scholars suggest using longitudinal and cross-cultural research to better understand which changes will be permanent.

In conclusion, the literature shows that COVID-19 led to both short-term and long-term changes in consumer behaviour. Temporary behaviours, such as panic buying and cutting back on non-essential spending, disappeared once conditions improved. However, long-lasting shifts like digital adoption, health consciousness, focus on sustainability, and home-based lifestyles are expected to continue. These changes differ across various sectors, age groups, and regions. Overall, consumer behaviour after the pandemic is shaped by a mix of psychological, economic, technological, and cultural factors.

Research Gap and Objectives

Although research on COVID-19 and consumer behaviour has expanded rapidly, several important gaps remain. Most studies focus only on how people reacted immediately during the pandemic but do not study how long these behaviours lasted. Because of this, it is hard to know which changes were temporary and which became permanent. Also, much of the research looks at single industries instead of giving a full picture that connects different sectors and compares short-term changes with long-term ones. Another limitation is that only a few studies use consumer behaviour theories to explain people's actions during the global pandemic. Another gap is that only a few studies have used consumer behaviour theories to explain people's actions during the global pandemic. To fill this gap, this study uses a simple framework that divides consumer behaviour into two main types. **Short-term changes** include actions like panic buying, storing extra goods, and buying substitutes during the crisis. **Long-term changes** include increased use of digital platforms, more focus on health, and interest in sustainable products. This framework helps to clearly understand which consumer habits will go back to normal and which will continue even after the pandemic.

Objectives of the Study

- To study the short-term changes in consumer behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- To assess which behavioural changes are likely to be long-lasting.
- To highlight the key implications of these changes for businesses, policymakers, and researchers.

To achieve these objectives, the study uses secondary data from academic research, industry reports, and international surveys on consumption. A thematic framework is applied to classify changes in consumer behaviour into two categories: *short-term adjustments* and *long-term transformations* across different sectors.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study uses a qualitative, exploratory research design to examine the change in consumer behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially to identify the difference between short-term and long-term changes. Because the pandemic had global reach and varied effects across sectors and regions, a qualitative approach is well-suited to explore patterns and themes in depth using diverse secondary data sources.

An exploratory design is appropriate when the research problem is relatively new and not fully theorized, as in the case of pandemic-driven consumption changes. While quantitative studies can show useful statistical trends, they often miss the complex motivations and implications behind consumer behaviour during crises. Therefore, this study applies thematic synthesis to identify, classify, and interpret behavioural shifts.

4.2 Data Sources

This study relies entirely on secondary data, collected from a variety of sources to ensure validity, comprehensiveness, and cross-contextual insights. Key sources include mostly academic literature, consisting of peer-reviewed articles and indexed in Scopus and Web of Science. Relevant studies were identified using keywords such as COVID-19, consumer behaviour, consumption patterns, digital adoption, panic buying, and sustainability. In addition, industry reports from market research and consulting firms like McKinsey, Deloitte, Nielsen, and PwC were consulted to gain sector-specific insights into consumer behaviour during and after the pandemic. Furthermore, policy and institutional reports from organizations like the World Bank, OECD, UNCTAD, and IMF offered macro-level perspectives on household economics and broader consumption trends. Finally, surveys and databases from institutions such as statista, the pew research center, and national statistical agencies provided empirical evidence of behavioural changes across different demographics and regions. Together, these sources provide a comprehensive foundation for analysing short-term adjustments and long-term changes in consumer behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic.

By triangulating academic, industry, and policy sources, the study enhances the reliability of its findings and reduces the risk of bias that might result from relying on a single type of data.

4.3 Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process followed a structured and systematic approach. First, relevant literature and reports were retrieved from databases such as Scopus, Science Direct, JSTOR, Google Scholar, and institutional repositories to ensure the studies focused on the COVID-19 context. Next, inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied: studies focusing on consumer behaviour, consumption patterns, digital adoption, and panic buying were included, whereas those dealing solely with macroeconomic indicators without direct links to consumer activity were excluded. This process ensured that the study relied on high-quality, pertinent secondary data to analyse shifts in consumer behaviour during the pandemic.

4.4 Analytical Approach

The study employed thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns in consumer behaviour and to distinguish between short-term adjustments and long-term changes. The analysis was guided by six-

3446

step framework. Braun *et al.* (2006). The data was familiarized by carefully reading and summarizing the selected studies and reports. Key observations, such as panic buying, growth of e-commerce, and increased sustainable consumption, were then extracted as initial codes. These codes were subsequently grouped into broader themes, distinguishing short-term adjustments from long-term behavioural changes. The themes were reviewed and compared with existing literature and sectorial evidence to ensure consistency and reliability. Each theme was then clearly defined and labeled, for example, health and hygiene awareness, digital acceleration, and travel avoidance. Finally, the findings were presented in a structured narrative supported by secondary data. This systematic approach allowed a clear classification of consumer behaviour and helped identify which pandemic-driven changes are likely temporary and which may become permanent.

4.5 Conceptual Framework

Based on the literature review and thematic analysis, this research applies a dual-lens conceptual framework to examine consumer behavior during the COVID-19 pandemic. The framework separates short-term adaptations, immediate reactions based on uncertainty, fear, and pandemic-linked confinement; examples include hoarding and temporary cuts in discretionary expenditure and long-term transformations, structural changes in consumer tastes and tendencies, such as digital take-up, health-concerned lifestyles and sustainable choice. This is based on proven theories of consumer behaviour, including the Engel-Kollat-Blackwell (EKB) model and Maslow's needs hierarchy, and crisis management thinking, providing a solid foundation of theory for examining what consumption habits are likely to be short-term and what will be long-lasting post-pandemic.

4.6 Reliability and Validity

To enhance reliability, the research triangulated different sources of secondary data. Peer-reviewed journals provided scholarly depth, industry reports offered current market information, and policy papers provided international perspective. Validity was enhanced by incorporating research from diverse regions and sectors to avoid the possibilities of cultural or industry bias.

4.7 Limitations of Methodology

In spite of numerous strengths, the approach has some weaknesses. Firstly the study relied on secondary data and might not be able to represent consumer behaviour shifts post-2024. Secondly, due to shortage of primary source, it is not possible to gather data through direct surveys or interviews among consumers. Thirdly, while cross-regional data sources were used, the heterogeneity of the global COVID-19 experience leaves the possibility that certain local variations may not be adequately represented.

These constraints are recognized when interpreting the results. Future studies would be able to extend this methodology by adding longitudinal primary data in order to track changing consumer behavior.

5. Results and Findings

The thematic analysis of secondary data indicates that consumer behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic evolved in two distinct phases: (1) short-term adjustments driven by fear, uncertainty, and restrictions, and (2) long-term changes reflecting deeper structural shifts in values, habits, and technology adoption.

5.1 Short-Term Adjustments in Consumer Behaviour

Short-term adjustments were reactive responses to lockdowns, health risks, and supply chain disruptions. These behaviours reached their highest point during the peak of the pandemic and generally declined after the restrictions were removed.

Panic Buying and Stockpiling: The early months were marked by widespread panic buying of staples such as food, sanitizers, and toilet paper and others fast moving consumer goods. Keanee *et al.* (2021). This behaviour was largely driven by scarcity perceptions, fear of shortages, and herd behaviour. As supply chains stabilized, panic buying declined, confirming its temporary nature.

Reduced Discretionary Spending: Households curtailed spending on non-essential goods such as apparel, travel, and entertainment, redirecting budgets to essentials, debt repayment, and savings. Asuamahet *et al.* (2024). This shows past crisis responses where financial conservatism prevails. As economies reopened, discretionary spending gradually recovered, particularly in tourism and fashion.

Substitution of Consumption Channels: During lockdowns people accelerated depend on digital platforms for groceries, apparel, and household goods. But this change was not the same for everyone. Many older people went back to shopping in stores once the lockdowns ended, even though they had learned how to shop online. This means people started online shopping out of necessity during the lockdown, but it later made them feel more confident using it regularly.

Home-Based Consumption: As the restaurants and gyms closed, consumers turned to home cooking, fitness apps, and streaming platforms. After things reopened, some of these habits, like home cooking, became less common. However, others; especially watching movies and online shows remained popular. This shows that some changes were temporary, while others became more lasting.

5.2 Long-Term Changes in Consumer Behaviour

Unlike short-term adjustments, long-term changes represent structural reorientations of consumer values and practices reinforced over the prolonged pandemic period.

Digital and E-Commerce Acceleration: E-commerce emerged as the most significant long-term shift. McKinsey (2021) reported that digital adoption advanced by 5–7 years in just six months. Online grocery shopping, digital payments, and subscription models became entrenched, with hybrid models such as “click-and-collect” now integral to retail. Even post-pandemic, e-commerce retained an elevated share of retail spending.

Health and Hygiene Consciousness: Increased awareness of wellness, hygiene, and preventive healthcare reshaped consumption pattern. Demand for organic foods, fitness apps, and immune-boosting products remained high beyond the crisis indicating health consciousness as a lasting consumption driver. Khattaret *et al.* (2025).

Sustainability and Ethical Consumption: The pandemic strengthened preferences for eco-friendly, locally sourced, and ethically produced goods. Gaziet *et al.* (2024). Consumers increasingly evaluated brands not only on price and quality but also on sustainability and social responsibility. Though adoption varies by region, this trend reflects a durable reorientation of consumer values. Purcărea et *al.* (2022).

Remote Work and Home-Centric Consumption: Remote and hybrid work models transformed spending patterns. Households invested in digital infrastructure, home offices, and domestic leisure while reducing expenditure on commuting and business travel. These changes persist, embedding home-centric lifestyles into post-pandemic consumption. Annamalahet *et al.* (2023).

Digital Entertainment and Learning: Lockdowns triggered a surge in streaming, gaming, and e-learning platforms. Unlike panic-driven behaviours, these became regular habits. Online education grew to include professional courses, and subscription-based entertainment stayed popular, showing that digital activities have become a lasting part of how people learn and relax. McHaney *et al.* (2023).

5.3 Sector Wise Variations in Consumer Behaviour

Retail and Consumer Goods: Traditional physical stores faced major disruptions, while online retailers grew rapidly. After the pandemic, physical shops recovered to some extent, but businesses now focus on combining online and offline channels, changing how retailers compete. Hyvärni, A. (2023).

Food and Groceries: People focused on buying essential items, often in bulk, and preferred cooking at home. Many turned to local farmers and community-supported agriculture, which showed both an immediate need and a lasting shift toward self-reliance. Online grocery platforms, though reduced from pandemic peaks, remain significantly stronger than before. Gaddiset *et al.* (2020).

Travel and Hospitality: Travel dropped by more than 70% in 2020 Saha *et al.* (2021). The recovery has been slow and uneven, as people now prefer domestic trips, outdoor holidays, and flexible booking options. Business travel is still much lower than before, as many meetings now happen online, showing a permanent change in travel behavior. Jäggiet *et al.* (2022).

Healthcare and Wellness: Telemedicine, digital diagnostics, and online wellness platforms expanded rapidly and remained mainstream due to convenience. Investment in personal health continues to be a durable priority. Unanahet *et al.* (2025).

Entertainment and Leisure: Although, personal events have resumed, the overall consumption pattern remains hybrid, blending digital and physical experiences. Chodor, B. (2020).

5.4 Regional and Demographic Variations

Developed and Developing Economies: Consumers in developed economies were better positioned to manage the disruptions caused by the pandemic due to robust social safety nets, diversified employment opportunities, and well-established supply chains. Their consumption shifted toward digital services, home improvement, and health-related products. In contrast, developing economies faced sharper declines in income and employment, limiting their ability to sustain consumption levels. Constraints of affordability and internet access further widened economic disparities, although gradual recovery and digital adoption have since helped bridge some gaps. Banga *et al.* (2020).

Urban vs. Rural Consumers: Urban consumers adapted more speedily to changing market dynamics through online shopping, home delivery systems, and flexible work arrangements. Rural consumers, meanwhile, relied more heavily on local supply chains, traditional markets, and community networks for essential goods and services. These different patterns show differences in income, infrastructure and facilities, which may cause different long-term effects on society and the economy. Timet *et al.* (2021).

Generational Differences: Younger people adapted more easily, using digital tools and choosing eco-friendly and experience-based ways of spending. Older people, who were first slow to change,

gradually started using digital services, enjoying activities at home, and spending more on health. This change shows that over time, both generations are becoming more similar in their spending habits. Theochariset *al.*(2025).

5.5 Summary of Findings

Overall, the results indicate that COVID-19 reshaped consumer behaviour through both temporary and permanent mechanisms. Short-term adjustments, such as panic buying and reduced discretionary spending, were largely reactive and diminished as conditions stabilized. In contrast, long-term transformations including digital acceleration, health consciousness, sustainability, and home-centric lifestyles that represent structural shifts in consumer values and everyday practices.

This contrast highlights that crises can generate both ephemeral behavioural shifts and enduring structural changes, with lasting implications for markets, policies, and consumer culture.

6. Discussion

The study shows that COVID-19 was both a sudden shock and a turning point in how people buy and live. Some changes were quick reactions and faded with time, while others have stayed and reshaped markets and daily life.

6.1 Short-Term Changes

The beginning of COVID-19 triggered several immediate changes in household behaviour and consumption. Panic buying was widespread in the early days, as people rushed to secure essentials such as food, sanitizers, and medicines, driven by fear and uncertainty. Families also adopted cautious spending habits, cutting back on luxury goods and focusing on basic necessities due to income insecurity. However, once restrictions eased and the economic situation stabilized, discretionary spending gradually returned. Another significant short-term shift was the rapid move to online shopping. Many consumers, including first-time users, turned to digital platforms during lockdowns. While some reverted to traditional in-store shopping once markets reopened.

6.2 Long-Term Changes

The pandemic initiated several long-term changes that continue to influence household consumption. Digital adoption accelerated, with online shopping, e-commerce platforms, and digital payment methods becoming routine aspects of daily life. Health and hygiene gained greater importance, as consumers consistently prioritized wellness products, fitness-related purchases, and preventive healthcare items. Sustainability awareness also grew stronger compared to past crises, with more consumers showing preference for eco-friendly, ethical, and socially responsible products. Additionally, the rise of home-based lifestyles transformed household spending. With work-from-home and hybrid job models becoming mainstream, households invested more in home offices, online entertainment, and digital services, while reducing expenditure on commuting, dining out, and other outside activities.

6.3 Implications for Businesses

The findings of the study offer several practical lessons for businesses navigating a post-pandemic marketplace. A multi-channel strategy has become essential, as consumers increasingly expect seamless integration between online and offline platforms. Companies must also align their product and service that emphasize on wellness, hygiene, and immunity to ensure responsiveness to evolving health priorities. Sustainability awareness also grew stronger compared to past crises, with more consumers showing preference for eco-friendly, ethical, and socially responsible products. Additionally, the rise of home-based lifestyles transformed household spending. With work-from-home and hybrid job models becoming mainstream, households invested more in home offices, online

entertainment, and digital services, while reducing expenditure on commuting, dining out, and other outside activities.

6.4 Implications for Policymakers

For policymakers, the main task is to keep consumers safe and healthy as their behaviour changes quickly. Everyone should be able to use digital platforms so that all people can get equal access to markets, services, and opportunities. At the same time, strict rules are needed to stop unfair activities during crises, like charging extra money during panic buying. Helping local businesses and supply chains can make the economy stronger and more stable in global problems. Regular public health campaigns should promote good habits like cleanliness, exercise, and preventive care. Finally, policies should motivate people to use products and services that are good for the environment and help reduce climate change.

6.5 Theoretical Contributions

This study also adds several new ideas to the understanding of consumer behaviour. First, it shows that crises do not just cause short-term changes, they speed up existing trends like digital adoption and sustainable living. Second, it introduces the concept of two types of consumer behaviour during crises: short-term reactions and long-term changes. This helps to understand how people behave in difficult times. Third, the study highlights that behaviour varies greatly depending on region, age group, and industry. These findings show that future theories should consider such differences to better explain how consumers act during disruptions.

6.6 Limitations and Future Research

Although this study uses a wide range of existing data, it has some limitations. First, depending on published surveys and reports might leave out certain groups of people or regions. Second, since the long-term effects of the pandemic are still changing, it is too early to draw final conclusions. Future studies should include long-term research to track lasting behavioural changes, cross-cultural comparisons to understand differences between regions, and data-based models to measure how these behavioural shifts affect the economy.

7. Conclusion and Suggestions

7.1 Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic was one of the biggest global crises of the 21st century that change the economies, societies, and people's daily lives work. One major effect was the change in how people buy and consume goods. Some of these changes happened quickly because of the crisis, while others have continued even after it ended. This study looked at whether these changes were short-term reactions or long-term shifts by reviewing different studies, surveys, and reports.

The results show two types of consumer behaviour. First, short-term reactions like panic buying, storing extra goods, and cutting down on non-essential spending happened due to fear and uncertainty. As things improved and markets reopened, these behaviours faded. Second, some changes became permanent; people started using digital platforms, focused more on health and wellness, preferred sustainable and ethical products, and got used to home-based lifestyles.

In short, the pandemic was not just a temporary challenge but a turning point that changed consumer habits for the future. It made people try new technologies, rethink what really matters, and develop new habits that continue to influence the market even today.

7.2 Suggestions for Businesses

Businesses seeking to thrive in the post-pandemic landscape must internalize the structural shifts in consumer behaviour and adapt strategies accordingly.

Adopt Multi-channel Strategies: The pandemic demonstrated that consumers want flexibility between online and offline channels. Firms should integrate e-commerce, mobile apps, and physical retail into seamless ecosystems.

Prioritize Health and Safety: Hygiene and wellness are now central to consumer decision-making. Businesses in food, retail, and hospitality should continue emphasizing safety protocols, health-oriented offerings, and transparent communication.

Promote Sustainability: People now prefer brands that care about the environment and act responsibly. Businesses should make eco-friendly products, use sustainable materials, and show that protecting the planet is a key part of their brand, not just an extra feature.

Cater to Home-Centric Consumers: With hybrid work and home-based leisure becoming permanent fixtures, businesses in technology, fitness, and entertainment should design offerings that align with home-oriented lifestyles.

Build Crisis Resilience: The ups and downs in demand during COVID-19 proved that businesses must stay flexible. Companies should build strong supply chains, use digital tools, and be ready to adapt quickly to any future disruptions.

7.3 Suggestions for Policymakers

Policymakers have a critical role in shaping an inclusive, sustainable, and consumer-friendly post-pandemic economy.

Promote Digital Inclusion: To ensure equitable access to markets and services, governments must invest in digital infrastructure, reduce affordability barriers, and enhance digital literacy, especially in rural and vulnerable communities.

Strengthen Consumer Protection: Crises often expose consumers to risks such as unfair pricing and provide wrong information. Robust regulatory frameworks are essential to safeguard consumer rights during emergencies.

Support Local and Resilient Economies: Encouraging local production and short supply chains can reduce vulnerability to global disruptions and support community-based resilience.

Encourage Healthy and Sustainable Consumption: Governments can use awareness campaigns and rewards to encourage people to eat better, stay active, and make eco-friendly choices that benefit both individuals and society.

Plan for Future Shocks: Policymakers should use the lessons learned from COVID-19 to plan better for future emergencies. This includes strengthening supply chains, improving healthcare systems, and ensuring strong consumer protection.

7.4 Suggestions for Future Research

While this study provides a comprehensive synthesis, the rapidly evolving nature of consumer behaviour warrants further exploration.

Long-Term Studies:

Studying consumer habits over several years can better show which changes are short-term and which are lasting. Long-term analysis also helps researchers observe how economic recovery, technological adoption, and demographic transitions influence behaviour. Tracking shifts across different life stages—such as youth, working-age adults, and senior citizens—can reveal deeper patterns that short-term studies often miss.

Cross-Country Comparisons:

Comparing how people in different countries and cultures react to crises can help understand how social and economic conditions influence behaviour. Such comparisons highlight how policies, digital access, and cultural values shape decisions differently across regions. This approach can also reveal successful strategies adopted by certain countries, offering useful lessons for improving consumer protection, market stability, and social welfare during future disruptions.

Use of Data Models:

Building data-based models can help measure how new spending habits affect the economy and guide better decisions for businesses and governments. Advanced tools like predictive analytics, machine learning, and behavioural modelling can capture emerging trends more accurately. These models can also simulate different crisis scenarios, enabling organisations to plan responses, manage risks, and allocate resources efficiently.

Industry-Specific Research:

Future studies should look more closely at how specific sectors like education, healthcare, and tourism have changed due to shifts in consumer behaviour. Each industry faced unique challenges during the pandemic, leading to new service delivery methods, customer expectations, and technology adoption. Sector-specific insights can help organisations redesign their strategies, improve customer satisfaction, and remain resilient during future crises.

Psychological Factors:

Researchers should also explore the mental and emotional reasons behind consumer actions during crises, such as how people build trust, cope with stress, and assess risks. Understanding these psychological elements can explain why some individuals adopt safety-oriented behaviours while others do not. It also helps in designing effective communication strategies, promoting responsible consumption, and supporting public well-being during uncertain times.

7.5 Closing Reflection

The COVID-19 pandemic was not the first crisis to change how people spend, and it won't be the last. But its worldwide impact and long duration made it special in speeding up changes in consumer behaviour. For businesses, the challenge is to tell which changes are temporary and which will last. For policymakers, the goal is to create fair, safe, and sustainable systems in an uncertain world.

Overall, the pandemic tested the strength of consumer markets but also showed their ability to adapt and innovate. Today's consumers are more digital, health-focused, and value-conscious. Understanding these changes is essential for building stronger and more sustainable markets in the future.

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