

Theoretical Perspective Of Unusual Purchasing Tendencies During Pandemic Situation Of Covid-19

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Abstract; During the emergence of COVID-19 an unusual consumer behavior were noticed. Individuals and groups were seen with unusual behavior. Present study conceptualized the behavior of consumers during pandemic situation of COVID-19. Further the study has suggested the framework and considered five (5) constructs with five hypotheses. Pandemic situation is considered as the antecedent, online information source exposure considered as mediator between perceived severity & Cyberchondria and pandemic situation of COVID-19. Intention to make unusual purchases suggested as consequence of the considered framework. Study is purely based on concepts and suggestions. Study further provided with extensive and holistically relevant literature.

Keywords: *Coronavirus (Covid-19), Cyberchondria, Consumer Behavior, Unusual Purchases, Perceived Severity*

1. INTRODUCTION

Globally fear is existed due to the outbreak of novel corona virus called COVID-19 in short form. These pandemics are repeating with interval of 10-50 years (Potter, 2001). Since, population increasing globally and interaction with humans and animals are growing; it is likely to boost the transfer of virus very frequently (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020; Kassahun et al., 2020). Every individual is responsible to take preventive measures to stop the spread of virus COVID-19. Globally we are in the middle of this outbreak and predictions for the long term-effect are very difficult to guess. Although, historically world faced challenges like COVI-19 previously.

Previous researches on consumer behavior during pandemics are linked with individual's behavioral change as consequently with the outcome motivation of these individual's restrictions implemented by the authorities (Wen et al., 2005). Safer precautions will be adopted by individuals upon the novel, greater and ambiguity of the pandemic (Brug et al., 2009). Consequently, abundant sources of information have played a main role in the behavior of consumer during this pandemic situation of COVID-19 (Laato et al., 2020). We therefore draw the framework of this study and suggested to understand the pandemic situation on online information sources and its exposure, further online information sources exposure impacts on perceived severity and Cyberchondria, further perceived severity impacts on intention to make unusual buying and Cyberchondria impacts on intention to make unusual buying and purchases. Study has suggested five hypotheses and assumed the impacts on each construct. Several studies in the past have been conducted on COVID 19, but mainly focusing on protection and health measures (Gamma et al., 2017; Rubin et al., 2009; Seale et al., 2009; Timpka et al., 2014) but not on consumer behavior. In addition, very limited information has

been provided in these studies to examine the individual behavior after and during the pandemic situation (Laato et al., 2020). These limitations allowed us to uncover the consumer changed behavior that is changed through the broadcast online media.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Pandemic Situation Of Covid-19

Globally, health and other official authorities have asked the society to keep up and maintain social distancing in order to avoid spread the novel corona virus (COVID-19). As humans, we are used to each other and attached emotionally in other aspects, due to this fact isolation and quarantine are not healthy and maybe even harmful in some dimensions (Cacioppo & Hawkley, 2009). Isolation and quarantine lead individuals to loneliness, poor cognitive skills, depression, and to social threats (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020). Including with negativity there is a positivity seen as well, for instance cleaning is seen in purchased products very carefully, and more trash is being recycled. Individuals and groups were seen for panic purchasing to stock goods at their convenience (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020). This clearly shows, something is happening to society that makes the behavior more complex, and further this will open the opportunities for more studies (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020). In addition, lockdown period also extends the interests of individuals in more participation in the use of internet and online buying and surfing on social media. Additionally, past studies also witnessed those individuals who feel loneliness are tend to use internet surfing and specifically social media (Nowland, Necka, & Cacioppo, 2018). Plenty of rumors and fake news are circulating on social media since the forum is open to share everyone's opinion. Generally, in reality this does not damaging the world, but to some extent it has some impacts on society. Through this perception we individuals and societies can distinguish what should be the consequences in the long run (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020). In addition, due to current circumstances social media and internet media used as a source to socialize with others such as contacting friends, colleagues, jobs etc.

These behaviors lead ones to rely on social media and internet and life adjusted with bundle of limitations. Limited option for interacting and socializing, thus mainly depends on virtual world.

Many businesses around the globe has shuttered due to this pandemic outbreak (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020). Different brands and retailers faced and facing challenges, in shape of work force, supply chain, demands, declined sales, and other marketing activities. The only hope and fantasy in current situation is online and virtual dealings such as entertainment, communication, buying and selling, these are seen with extra-ordinary growth. We therefore, theoretically theorize that pandemic situation has some impacts on online information sources. Thus we postulated the following hypothesis.

H1: Pandemic situation positively influences online information sources.

Online Information Source Exposure

Through different media channels society is filled with plenty of news that is broadcasted through social media, newspaper, transistors (radio), mails & emails. Among these various sources, however in recent times the internet is getting famous very rapidly and growing steadily (Laato et al., 2020). One reason for increasing the use of internet is COVID-19 (Abd-Alrazaq et al., 2020; Farooq et al., 2020).

Exposure the online information sources mentioning the counts of virtual sources where people get information and news (Laato et al., 2020). Since multiple sources are utilized to get updates and news, therefore these sources are not clear and mostly this information's are conflicting, uncertain and since a common man can approach therefore could be fake (Laato et al., 2020; Talwar et al., 2019, 2020).

Since, society faced sometimes unusual events such as current pandemic situation of COVID-19, the uniqueness of situation doesn't allow to rely on existing emotional and cognitive structures and knowledge, which can upsurge doubtful/fake news (Ahmed et al., 2020; Laato et al., 2020). In addition, cyberchondria is also considered as a serious health threat during pandemic of COVID since it is exposure to online information sources (Laato et al., 2020). The term cyberchondria is a situation where individuals get anxious in health perspectives and get over stressed, that further leads to boost anxiety fear and stress (Starcevic and Berle, 2013). Due to enormous media sources, access is click-away for individuals to browse for the plenty and specific information they are seeking, for instance getting information for contemporary situation like COVID-19 information and symptoms (Jokic-Begic et al., 2019). Due to huge and excessive availability of information, the acquisition of it all is impossible (Laato et al., 2020). In addition, the authenticity of these available information can also be questioned whether its complete, incomplete, comprehensive, incomprehensive and sometimes even ambiguous, that further can be a cause of distress in individual's life, which ultimately leads to cyberchondria at individuals (Jokic-Begic et al., 2019; Vismara et al., 2020).

Past studies clearly mentioned the reasons and comprehensiveness the newly health information and its counter measures to mitigate cyberchondria (Aiken et al., 2012). However, in pandemic situation like COVID-19, it's hard for individuals to organizing all the information accurately and clearly (Balinska and Rizzo, 2009). Additionally, different media companies and others are dynamic to publish stories and concerns. Since, it's too early to authenticate the news and available information, that leads to increase the rush and at last concluding with the increasing of cyberchondria (Laato et al., 2020).

We thus therefore could say, sources of information are increased/increasing, and social media is the important contributor among these news sources and carried the information and situation to people. Apparently if several communication channels are communicating with the same pace and approach, this will increase the perception and believe towards the authenticity of information. We therefore, theoretically theorize that the more the number of sources of information, the more severs the perception of the situation. We therefore based on past recommendations and discussion above postulated the below two hypotheses.

H2. Exposure to online information sources positively influences perceived severity.

H3. Exposure to inline information sources positively influences cyberchondria.

Perceived Severity

The novel corona virus short form COVID-19 can be transmitted from individual to other individuals, therefore safety measures identified to prevent individuals from each other's (Farooq et al., 2020). According to (Wilder-Smith and Freedman, 2020), these safety measures are classified in four (4) categories (1) Isolation, (2) quarantine, (3) social distancing and (4) community containment.

Isolation; is a form of measure where individual remove himself from society for specified

and recommended time. *Quarantine*; quarantine refers to either group or individuals where avoiding social contact and traveling that intend to prevent the disease or fear of spreading disease. *Social distancing*; social distancing includes more radical measures, such as closing of educational institutions, schools, colleges, universities and libraries to minimize and maintain the social distances among individuals and groups (Wilder-Smith and Freedman, 2020). *Community containment*; this refers the full lockdown/shutdown of specified areas/surroundings, and out of access from individuals control. Mostly implemented by government with strict rules such as curfew situation in some countries.

In community containment category, somehow this behavior can be painful for all those who are active individuals, but not necessary a painful behavior for all. In addition, past studies suggested, the protective measurements for individual's threat (Rogers, 1975). Plenty of past studies verified it empirically that perceived severity leads to adopt safety and health protective measures (Gamma et al., 2017; Rubin et al., 2009).

According to the S-O-R framework presented by (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974), consumer behavior is the stimuli ultimately, the cognition and affection of individuals, and ultimately the response to these states (Xu et al., 2014). Previous studies empirical proven that consumers are changing behavior when stimuli change (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974; Xu et al., 2014). This further leads to overload the cognitive ability due to fast and radical environmental changes and ultimately emotions influenced responses very rapidly. Due to this fact an individual's boost in panic purchasing (Leung et al., 2020).

During the period of novel corona virus (COVID-19) the unusual purchasing were observed in several reports, studies and practically. This activity leads in some part of the world resulting the disappear of grocery and daily use products such as hand sanitizers, food containers (long life), milk etc. (Miri et al., 2020). This happened due to the past experience that was faced such as other viruses and diseases (Miri et al., 2020). Many factors could behind it, however a general perception could lead some facts that includes "fear without basic products" and there is no harm since purchase it now or later. In addition, previous studies identified that environment has an influence on consumer behavior (Joshi and Rahman, 2015). Thus in order to match the previous research findings and suggestion with contemporary pandemic of COVID-19, perceived severity may have impact on intentions to make unusual purchases. Based on these discussion present study postulated the below hypotheses.

H4. Perceived severity increases the intention to make unusual purchases.

Cyberchondria

Past and latest studies associated the term cyberchondria with health anxiety, disorder in compulsiveness and trouble making while using the internet (Vismara et al., 2020), and most of the time relevant to cyberchondria the users of internet are surfing to collect information about health and its concerns (Jokic-Begic et al., 2019). In order to extend and share present research contribution, present study considered cyberchondria as another behavior, that is adopted by individuals during the pandemic situation and in addition this behavior boost the load of cognition in a very short run and in a long run it could be contrary (Laato et al., 2020). It depends on different sources where the information existed, and cyberchondriac's capabilities and procedure to understand the available information. It was certainly March 2020, when the novel virus (COVID-19) spreading, and the scenario of future prospects were very unclear and unpredictable, that was cyberchondriac's that were caught in the earlier times of pandemic as the individuals were anxious about one's health and browsing for the

information through clicking (Laato et al., 2020).

Logically and also studies suggested that individual’s self-isolation has probably the impact to curb and minimize the pandemic situation (Farooq et al., 2020), in addition; cyberchondria merged with the action and behavior of individuals. Since different virtual sources are communicated about the future of health disasters, therefore, cyberchondriac’s are felt to prepare for unusual buying. Based on this discussion, this study postulated the following hypotheses.

H5. Cyberchondria increases intention to make unusual purchases.

Conceptual Framework

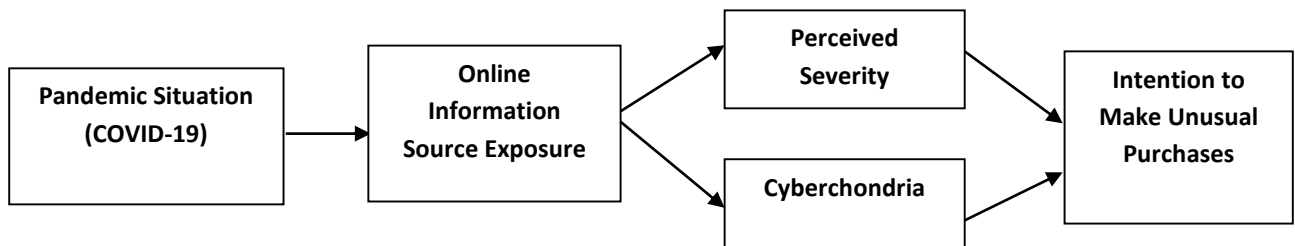


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Intention To Make Unusual Purchases

In some contexts, theoretically past studies tied consumer behavior with other behavior (Laato et al., 2020). During the pandemic situation of a novel corona virus (COVID-19), individuals get the opportunity to quarantine themselves for some period of time, as health and government officials warned them a serious consequence of avoiding the instructions (Parmet and Sinha, 2020). Studies and earlier discussion were predicted the unusual purchasing before one’s isolating him/herself. In addition, also social influence and global fear could have increase it (Kelman, 1958). Thus, based on this discussion present study proposed that single level responses and behavior are linked during the pandemic situation, individuals were conducting unusual purchasing during the isolation period.

Study Hypotheses

Hypotheses	Statement
H1	Pandemic situation positively influence online information sources
H2	Exposure to online information sources positively influences perceived severity
H3	Exposure to inline information sources positively influences cyberchondria
H4	Perceived severity increases the intention to make unusual purchases
H5	Cyberchondria increases intention to make unusual purchases

Figure 2: Hypotheses of study

3. DISCUSSION

New challenges faced by organization; from education to health and from businesses to industries. Every organization during pandemic situation in some perspectives however shrink. This pandemic situation however changed the behavior of consumers due to a huge involvement in using computer and other smart electronic devices. Studies suggest that change behavior occurs when environment change, from physical shopping and business activities to e-shopping and e-businesses.

This study contributes in terms of theoretical and practical aspects. Theoretical perspectives include addition to the literature in terms of new constructs and new hypotheses. Past studies on novel corona virus is mostly discussed its spreading and how to protect individuals from the out-break. Whereas, this study clearly mentioned about the change behavior of consumers. It could be considering as a novelty in the contemporary running issues. In addition, study considered five (5) constructs namely; pandemic situation, online information source exposure, perceived severity, cyberchondria and intention to make unusual purchases. Pandemic situation of COVID-19 considered as the antecedent of study, online information source exposure considered as mediator between pandemic situation and perceived severity & cyberchondria. In addition, perceived severity and cyberchondria considered as mediator between online information source exposure and intention to make unusual purchases. Intention to make unusual purchases is considered the consequences of the considered framework. These constructs were mainly picked from the past relevant studies. Core novelty of the model includes the pandemic situation and its impacts on intentions to make unusual purchases through some mediation process.

Further this study also can contribute in practical perspectives. Since, cyberchondria correlates with a huge use of internet, in this regards individuals should stick to reliable sources with limited time of frame. Another perspective is unusual purchasing during the out-break of COVID-19, this may increase the sales of grocery retailers. Since, then staying home and spending more on unusual items such as food items etc.

Consequently, in retail market, it is to understand that what drives and actions are important to change the behavior of consumer (Watne and Brennan, 2011).

4. STUDY LIMITATIONS

As of my understandings limitations are healthy part of every research. Since it provides the future directions for the prospective researchers. Like other research, indeed present study also mentioned some key limitations of this study. First of all, the future study should consider empirical approach due to its pure conceptual approach, although the literature is consisting of heavy and extensive past reviews but empirical approach can come up with quantitative data. Next, the future studies should consider more or less constructs, it totally depends on the requirements of the research. Another limitation could be that this study did not consider S-O-R Theory (Stimulus – Organism – Response) theory presented by (Russell and Mehrabian, 1974), future studies can have considered S-O-R theory if the approach is empirical.

5. CONCLUSION

Present study was based on some concepts. Five (5) hypotheses were considered based on past recommendations and extensive literature review. Discussion initiative was from introduction of novel corona virus and its spreading and its effects on society. The focus mainly in literature review was the use of electronic and other smart devices and their use

and impacts on consumers. Imposed strict rules and their implementations from the authorities leads consumers to stay at home for long and thus consumer utilizing more internet for multiple activities and this heavy use of internet leads consumers towards cyberchondria and perceived severity, which concluding ends up with intentional unusual purchases. This basically change the consumer behavior and called it changed consumer behavior.

6. REFERENCES

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