

Habits, Consumption and Marketing During the Pandemic and Beyond

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"The world has enough for everyone's need, but not enough for everyone's greed."

The above quote, credited to Mahatma Gandhi, is more meaningful and relevant in the time of [COVID-19](#), especially considering the peculiar buying habits observed recently. Call it panic buying triggered by human psychology under the influence of dire circumstances. However, the bottom line is that many essential supplies have been going out of stock on supermarket shelves. Other buying habits that could be noted are shopping on weekdays rather than weekends, making fewer shopping trips, bulk buying and online buying of non-essential items. As the pandemic is still spreading and lockdown measures are still tight in many parts of the world, some of these buying habits may well stay in the market for an extended period. This contention is supported by a study in habit formation that any behaviour repeated consistently for around sixty-six (66) days becomes an automatic behaviour, by [Phillippa Lally](#), a behavioural scientist. The above trends, therefore, have the potential to become routine buying habits, and if so, would have a tremendous impact on buyer behaviour and marketing. This short paper discusses the customer buying behaviour, and some plausible approaches to counter the adverse effects of panic buying habits.

Customer Buying Habits

Among the newly acquired consumer trends, not all are detrimental. For example, changes in the day, length of time and mode of buying might mean minor adjustments to the way supermarkets and other brick and mortar retailers' function. Strengthened digital marketing drives and online selling would only intensify already expanding e-commerce/e-business trends. These trends could make the physical presence of many brick and mortar retail businesses redundant.

However, irrational and panic buying habits may remain problematic to marketers, retailers and the whole of the supply chain mechanism, as we have observed since the pandemic was declared worldwide. Many customers swiftly began panic buying, particularly toilet rolls and pasta, which influenced others to emulate the behaviour. The panic buying trend is continuing, but interestingly, the target products have not always been the same. For example, hand sanitiser seems to be no longer on the panic buyer's shopping list, but cake mix is a new addition. One would

assume that an uncertain situation in the future, be it flash flood, bushfire, hurricane, epidemic or pandemic, would trigger similar buying behaviour. As we have learned during the pandemic, this would massively impact the supply chain and marketing system of Australia and abroad. Panic or selfish buying habits under the current conditions could continue for no apparent logical reason. How could we discourage it? The following two approaches offer some possible remedies.

Mindful Consumption

Self-disciplined and mindful consumption is not a quixotic idea. The idea of [mindfulness](#) emanated from Eastern Buddhist philosophy and Western psychology and spread a broader awareness of the present realities, and the wisdom of acting wisely and non-judgementally. Applying this idea to the context of buyer behaviour would mean buying what you need and being considerate of others' needs and satisfaction at the same time. In other words, avoiding excessive over-consumption. [Jagdish N. Sheth](#) and associates defined mindful consumption as "a consumer mindset of caring for self, for community, and for nature, that translates behaviorally into tempering the self-defeating excesses associated with acquisitive, repetitive and aspirational consumption." The act of compassion in buying would leave resources available to the needy and the underprivileged. Businesses also can play a role here. For example, many businesses have already adopted strategies to ensure that customers are allowed to buy only a certain quantity of a product, which would force customers to reflect on others' needs. [Philip Kotler](#), the father of modern marketing, has already made a clarion call for more socialistic approaches by businesses, policymakers, marketing organisations and customers that would help build a better post-pandemic world. We argue that mindful consumption by customers and businesses can play a key role in that post-pandemic, egalitarian world order.

Demarketing Drives

Mindful consumption, as mentioned above, would be effective with the support from proactive marketing practices. In support of mindful consumption, marketing, however, has a reverse role to play. De-marketing is a concept proposed by [Philip Kotler and Sidney Levy](#); they defined it as "... that aspect of marketing that deals with discouraging customers in general or a certain class of customers in particular on a temporary or permanent basis." There could be many reasons for choosing [de-marketing strategies](#), but, in the current context of COVID-19, de-marketing would encourage customers to buy an alternative product for a particular purpose. For example, we have noticed that some supermarkets have started stocking and selling baby wipes as an alternative to regular toilet rolls. De-marketing also could discourage customers from buying an excess number of a product. For example, some businesses are now selling one bottle of hand sanitiser for \$5, while the price of two is \$100. This way, wasteful and unsustainable consumption habits are discouraged. De-marketing does not necessarily mean reduced sales and profit for the marketing organisation. On the contrary, it would ultimately result in more sales as more people could afford to buy essential products and services. In that sense, we would like to consider this a proactive marketing technique, 'pro-marketing' for short.

In closing, we suggest desperate times call for mindful consumption by customers and proactive measures taken by businesses – clearly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic period, and still valuable when the crisis has passed.



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