

CHAPTER 4

EXAMINATION OF CONSUMER PURCHASING BEHAVIORS AND CHANGES IN MARKETING STRATEGIES OF BUSINESSES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC PROCESS

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 virus, first identified in the 1960s, resurfaced on December 31, 2019 in Wuhan, China's Hubei region, with infectious and deadly properties. To defend against the virus and prevent its spread, all nations took different precautions, including canceling scientific meetings, sports contests, theater performances, and concerts, as well as suspending instruction at schools and universities (Öztunç, 2021). It has caused sectors, businesses and individuals to new behaviors that offer practical and solutions in adapting to the process. Consumers who can make much more realistic decisions before the start of COVID-19, restrictions that are expected to last for a few more years triggered by the COVID-19 process, and repetitive restrictions, fear and panic affect people psychologically, whether they will be brought under control in the future (Kayabaşı, 2020). Conflicting statements made by almost all health institutions have caused severe psychological traumas on societies, and consumers, who cannot make a clear decision about what to do, have minimized their consumption expenditures for a certain period of time, except for their obligatory basic needs. It is observed that most of the people, along with this process, generally turn to online shopping to meet their needs. The reality that technology is an indispensable necessity of life, the shift of commerce to the virtual environment, a significant part of business owners have started to take steps to strengthen their trade infrastructure in the electronic environment and to meet the demands from here. In the coming period, we may witness that consumers make their needs from the internet or virtual stores instead of traditional commerce (Yavuz, 2020). Along the global epidem-

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ic, there is almost a “Digital Migration” as businesses encourage their employees to work remotely and many people prefer to go to a quieter rural area from the cities. As a result of many people working from home, a working system that can be called “Turtle Style Life” has emerged. It has been found that the worry that customers would not be able to purchase many of the items they desire, along with the COVID-19 process, speeds decision-making processes (Sian and Sarah 2020). Many successful firms noticed the change in consumer purchase behavior induced by the worldwide pandemic and swiftly built their infrastructure to fulfill these demands. It is because it was expected that this new consumer purchasing behavior would drive people to purchase online as a consequence of the need for a quick procurement procedure.

E-COMMERCE DURING COVID-19

Discrepancies that have nearly completely altered people’s lifestyles, as well as the question of how long the COVID-19 virus would persist, have led internet commerce to grow popular and ubiquitous (Güven, 2020). It was explored that it climbed from 52 percent to 76 percent when compared to the same period last year (Van Deel, 2020). While customers’ demands were changing, new areas of interest began to develop, and it was noticed that consumers’ purchasing behavior began to become virtual day by day. As of April 21, there was an impressive 129% year-over-year growth in US and Canadian e-commerce orders and 146% in all online retail orders (Columbus, 2020). It has been observed that electronic commerce has increased by close to 150% in the process from March to May 2020 in the USA, England and some European countries. In Turkey; the first case was seen on March 11, 2020, and after this date, an increase of nearly 200% was recorded in electronic commerce in April 2020. When we arrived in the last week of May 2020, there was a sudden decrease, but in June, figures reaching 200% in electronic commerce expenditures were determined (Erdoğan, 2020). More than 66 thousand people were surveyed in the Netherlands, Germany and Norway to find out how effective consumer behavior is on electronic commerce, an e-commerce analysis platform called After Pay Insights. According to this survey, it can be observed how much consumer behavior has changed in 2020. With the effect of the virus and digital applications that make our lives easier, the number of consumers who shop online is increasing. Again, looking at the data of this research, it was observed that the most online shopping in Europe increased by 69% in March and 83% in December in Germany. In the same period, this rate was determined as 64% in March in the Netherlands and 80% in December. According to the data

of the research, an increase of 55% in March and 74% in December was recorded in Norway, which is one of the northern Baltic countries, compared to other European countries. Another interesting finding from this poll is that consumers between the ages of 45 and 64 who are used to conventional trade are increasingly purchasing online. According to the study data, customers aged 45-64 who shop electronically throughout the COVID-19 procedure have grown by 36% in the Netherlands, 31% in Germany, and 37% in Norway (Ermiş, 2021). Many companies responded to the worldwide pandemic by developing quick and short-term solutions to satisfy the requirements of customers.

The ease with which organizations may obtain solutions has resulted in the acceptance and increased usage of the digital process (Carolyn and Müguel 2020). After 2021, we will be able to see company store tabs or comparable buying choices on social media sites. In general, the global effect of electronic commerce via the internet and social media networks is rising. Various assessments were done in a research by evaluating the 11 websites with the highest visits in Turkey. According to the study, although the total number of visitors in the first three months of 2019 was about 841 million, it was predicted that it would grow to 868 million in the first three months of 2020 (Erdoğan, 2020). It is predicted that online shopping will grow by 30 percent annually until 2027. It is also estimated that the sector will turn into a 600 billion dollar market in the next 5 years (Sharafli, 2021). Yet, in this process, the contradiction between what consumers see and like on the internet and social media and the quality of the product or service offered causes a behavioral change for the customer. No matter how famous or branded a product or brand is, the first contact with the customer is the approach of the employee to the customer, and the emotional satisfaction that the customer receives from the product changes the brand's reputation in the opposite direction. The next choice of the customer, who cannot achieve the desired benefit and emotional satisfaction, is to turn to a different product. It has been observed that businesses that have prepared the digital infrastructure that can respond quickly and accurately to the demands and needs of consumers during the Global Pandemic, give confidence, prioritize their customers, and provide the best experience, have established superiority in the market compared to their competitors and increased their market shares in this period. In other respects, the impression and experience generated by a new brand's service given on the internet of customers purchasing in an electronic environment sets an expectation level that is higher than the previous best experience. Customers want to feel secure when purchasing. He wants to be treated as though he were doing face-to-face shopping, as in conventional commerce, in addition to receiving great service (Nerlich, 2021)



78% of prosumers and 59% of general consumers want to easily connect with people through chat or video interaction, even when there is no physical store

Figure 1: Prosumer survey, 2019

Source: Havas Worldwide/Market Probe International, Prosumer survey, 2019.

Depending on the research, most of the consumers suppose that the products and services of the businesses operating in the virtual environment should be cheaper than the businesses that are operating in physical places. He does not positively perceive paying too much money for the service or product he will receive from here. In the research, 91% of the prosumers, 84% of the general consumers, free returns, 89% of the prosumers, 85% of the general consumers, 86% of the general consumers, 86% of the general consumers, 74% of the general consumers, shopping from brands that offer fast delivery found to be more likely. 81% of prosumers and 59% of general consumers expect businesses to be more secure and accelerate digital shopping time. 73% of prosumers and 56% of general consumers want help while shopping online, real-time contact with their interlocutors and guiding advice.

According with research, loyal customers who like the brand's products and purchase more frequently online want to be recognized and offered additional benefits. According to the research, this rate is 88% for prosumers and 75% for general consumers. According to the results of the research, it is concluded that the privacy of personal information is very important for many of the consumers. In the research, the rate of those who want to finish the shopping process of the company's website quickly, away from the complexity, was determined as 92% among the prosumers and 78% among the general consumers. One of the most important results of the research in terms of business is that consumers can complete the payment in the easiest and fastest way without any security problems. As for payment, 92% of prosumers and 83% of general consumers want a fast and easy payment process (Nerlich, 2021)



For 92% of prosumers and 78% of general consumers, your website or app needs to be fast and easy to be surfed.

Figure 2: Prosumer Survey

Source: Havas Worldwide/Market Probe International, Prosumer survey, 2019.

According to Raffaella Stratta and David Voxlin's November 2020 research, 30% of consumers who started on mobile did not acquire any goods at the end of the study. Over 20,000 customers from 15 different countries in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia were polled in a study done by the research firm SKIM, which covered categories such as fashion, electronics, personal care, and home and garden. It has been found that he did not acquire the item because it was too tough or frustrating for him. The rate of customers who do not shop due to their personal preferences is only six percent (6%). This means that some consumers choose to buy only through their preferred channels, no matter how good your mobile retail site is. It has been determined that users who have never shopped on their smart phones during the coronavirus epidemic are turning to mobile shopping. When the overall results are examined, it has been determined that missed opportunities in the mobile environment have the potential of billions of dollars in annual revenue. According to research, there are 10 trouble spots in the mobile shopping space. Businesses can seize an important opportunity by eliminating only the first five of them. Businesses can have the opportunity to grow their businesses by improving the feature of the website, making it easier to compare it with other brands and products, and giving customers all the information they are looking for, without tiring the consumers. As long as the increase in the volume of electronic commerce continues, it is thought that the businesses that offer the best user experience from the login to the last payment page will have more market share than their competitors (Stratta and Voxlin, 2020). According to a study examining the websites of 37 European and American brands, brands were determined from four different themes and accordingly; Mobile site loading times were monitored hourly for 30 days. According to the results of the research, it is revealed that there are important opportunities for businesses that speed up their websites and that just being on the mobile platform is not enough. Improving the speed of the website leads to a positive result of the online purchasing stages from

the beginning to the end of the sale. It has been revealed that consumers prefer the products of brands with fast websites. It has been found that speeding up the loading times of the website by only one tenth of a second provides huge gains. According to this research, it was determined that the average order value grew by 9.2% only in retail. An 8% increase has been detected in the average number of views per person on the websites of some businesses. Accordingly, the rate of consumers leaving the page is much lower on sites with faster websites than others. According to the study, the rate of leaving the homepage instantly improved by 0.6 percent in retail items and by 0.2 percent in one-fifth (5/1) of the websites of select premium companies. In this study, the sales completion rate was shown to be considerably higher for companies. The outcome of 50 percent of online shopping sites in the study was a finding that should be considered. It has been established that among such sales-oriented websites, a quick website that provides accurate information to the user decreases the rate of desertion by 8.3 percent (Boulte, 2020).

ECONOMY IN PROCESS OF COVID-19

The lowering effect of COVID-19 on economic activity has a negative impact on nearly all industries, causing decision-makers to modify their plans. The worldwide pandemic has compelled all governments throughout the world to enact measures that expand the world's money supply. Many countries have abandoned austerity measures. In the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, some economic managers referred to special economic strategies, while others stated that new economic policies are required for this moment (Noble, 2020). The COVID-19 global epidemic is pulling down the financial structure of businesses and its effects on the economy to a bad result that will occur months, maybe years later. Looking at Turkey, the capacity utilization rate in the manufacturing industry decreased by 13.7 points in April 2020 compared to the same month of the previous year and decreased to 61.6%. This is the lowest capacity utilization rate we have seen since 2007. The lowest value before that was 62% in April 2009 during the global economic crisis, the effects of which started in 2008 and continued in 2009 (Sözcü, 2020). In this process the affected fields are; tourism, aviation, hotel management, entertainment sector, restaurants, cafes, automotive industry, oil and natural gas, energy sector, agriculture sector, consumer products and manufacturing industry. Almost all of the people who made travel plans with the epidemic had to cancel their programs. Almost all of the countries in the world closed their borders and canceled flights within the scope of epidemic measures.

With the epidemic, the tourism sector has taken the biggest blow in its history and has been one of the biggest reasons for the contraction in the world economy. The impact of the tourism sector, which has a transaction volume of approximately 3 trillion dollars directly and 11 trillion dollars indirectly to the world's gross product in 2019, on the world's gross product is 3.3%, indirectly, approximately 10.4% (Yorulmaz and Kaptan, 2020). As long as the global epidemic continues in the coming period, it will continue to affect the world economy negatively. At the beginning of the economic measures taken by the governments against the epidemic, as soon as the epidemic started, it was to give direct financial support to the individuals and businesses affected by the epidemic. Social assistance to families and financial support to businesses acted as a lever to keep the economy alive and businesses afloat. Otherwise, it could lead to social traumas that can lead to the bankruptcy of many businesses and the breakdown of the family, and to the possibility of creating problems that will cause the collapse of social psychology. The second priority was to produce solutions for the sectors, which are a kind of incentive that will ensure the operability of the public in the medium term (Loayza and Pennings, 2020). In a study realized in the USA, the relationship between household consumption and the epidemic was examined using household financial data. As the number of cases increased, it was determined that consumer spending habits underwent a structural change, and there was a high increase in retail, credit card expenditures and food expenditures during the first periods of the virus. However, it was determined that there was a precautionary decrease in people's expenditures. It has been shown that the curfews imposed by the governments and the closure of the service sector are the reasons for the decrease in the spending tendency of consumers. According to the research, it is predicted that the US economy will shrink by 11-20% at the end of 2020 due to the uncertainty caused by the epidemic (Baker, Bloom, et al. 2020). According to the OECD 2021 March Interim Economic Outlook Report, it is guessed that additional financial supports will help a high level of recovery in the global economy, together with successful vaccine studies in some countries, especially the USA. According to this report, the growth forecast for the global economy, which was announced as 4.2% for 2021 in December, was revised again as 5.6%. This figure was revised from 3.7% to 4% for 2022. The 2021 growth forecast of the US economy was increased from 3.2% to 6.5%, and the 2022 growth forecast was increased from 3.5 to 4%. The 3.6 percent growth forecast for 2021 in Europe was revised to 3.9 percent, and for 2022 it was increased from 3.3 percent to 3.8 percent. The growth forecast for the UK economy for 2021 was increased from 4.2% to 5.1%, and the growth forecast for the next year was increased from 4.1% to 4.7%. In the same

study, the growth forecast of the Turkish economy for 2021 was revised from 2.9% to 5.9% (OECD, 2021).

CHANGINGS IN CONSUMER BEHAVIOURS

In order to review the changes in consumer behavior with COVID-19, four distinct consumer profiles were established in a research performed in April 2020 with the involvement of a total of 4859 persons from countries such as America, Canada, England, France, and Germany. (Rogers and Cosgrove, 2020) According to the study, 35% of customers who are concerned about themselves and their family and feel that the epidemic process would be difficult and unclear restock. The most distinctive features of the consumers in this profile were determined as the consumer profile that generally spends food. A second consumer profile that emerged in the same research is the consumers aged 45 and over; who we can name the middle age group, who have experienced the global epidemic period and are the most hopeless consumers against the process. The most prominent feature of the consumers in this profile, which is 27% in the survey, is that most of them lose their jobs and make purchases only for obligatory expenses. These are called the consumer profile, which is called the consumers who take precautions. Approximately 33% of the consumers in this profile stated that after the epidemic, the brand did not matter to them and that they turned to products that meet their instant needs as a purchasing behavior. The third consumer profile that we come across in this research is the stable consumers group. It has been specified as consumers who are not affected by the global epidemic, where there is no change in their consumption and purchasing behaviors, but who are against stocking and stocking. In the research, their ratio to the total consumer was determined as 26%. Considering this rate, it can be stated that 26% of the society does not have much concern about the process. Ultimately, the proportion of consumers aged 18-44 who were not concerned about the future, which was found to be the most optimistic cohort during the worldwide pandemic phase, was 11 percent. The guarantee customer is a person who is concerned about the pandemic but does not give up hope. One of the most intriguing findings for this group is that it is the group that has drastically modified their shopping habit, with around 46 percent indicating that brands have become more important to them throughout the pandemic.

It is believed that with the digital transformation experienced as a result of the epidemic process, a positive process in trade and the economy may be experienced, and the economy will rise again with the driving power of stagnant

electronic commerce and have a good influence on economic growth. It is predicted that electronic commerce, which has been widely embraced in the pandemic process, would also cause a shift in enterprise consumer transportation routes. It is determined in the analyses that digital applications enable businesses to grow, but the experience offered by businesses in this regard is very important for customers. It is thought that there will be significant changes in purchasing behaviors in international trade during and after the epidemic. It is predicted that customer trends will be at the center of business planning after the COVID-19 pandemic. While a new virus mutation every day increases the uncertainty, it is considered that it is very important for businesses to analyze the changes in consumer behavior well and to finish the infrastructure works for these changes in terms of their survival and growth in the next year. It is thought that the first step to be taken in terms of businesses should be to answer the question of what are the changes in consumer behavior and how can I respond to these changes in the fastest way. Therefore, businesses should understand consumer behavior changes by making use of analysis. It is thought that the first priority for businesses should be to create consumer trust, to make personal information feel safe, to meet the requested product or service in the fastest way and to ensure customer satisfaction. It is thought that it is necessary to give the right information to the customer at the right time and to protect the privacy of the customer (Moneta and Sinclair, 2020). It is thought that in the next period, consumers will make more online shopping. The electronic platform has turned into a kind of shopping center for many consumers during the epidemic process. According to the researches, it has been determined that since the first quarter of 2020, there has been an increase of nearly 100% in online purchasing initiatives. According to another result of the same research, it was determined that only in the UK, online shopping increased by 22% and constituted 30% of all sales in April. It is observed that the rate of traditional shoppers in countries such as England, Sweden and Italy in 2020 is lower than in previous years. According to the results of this research, most of the consumers adopt online shopping (Scott, and Avalos, 2020).

It is expected that automation, which has become increasingly prevalent in our lives as a result of the pandemic process, would also result in a shift in corporate practices. In this context, thoughts are expressed that workers would shift to working from home or remotely, and that this will be permanent, resulting in a reduction in the enterprise's marketing expenses. The global pandemic phase may help businesses by introducing them to the digital world and allowing them to capitalize on technology. This might be viewed as an opportunity for businesses (Moneta and Sinclair, 2020).

CHANGING MARKETING STRATEGIES IN COVID-19 PROCESS

Businesses in many nations are unable to continue operating regularly owing to government-ordered quarantines. As a result, a shift in consumer behavior is unavoidable. This involves how people spend, save, and access their money. In times of uncertainty, it is critical to reassure consumers or customers about their financial condition and allay their fears. Corporations that focus on developing empathy/empathy with customers, giving trustworthy and real-time information, and providing flexibility to clients began to be favored during this phase. Many consumers began to worry about how they would pay their bills and fulfill their other financial obligations. In these unprecedented times, financial services brands can leverage their strengths and experience to guide struggling consumers and help them improve their financial situation. Businesses that do this can not only benefit, but also gain the trust necessary to establish cordial and long-lasting relationships with consumers (Arthur and Henry, 2020). As the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to increase around the world, different people and communities face different challenges. However, the common point is; Concern about their financial situation as well as the health of themselves and their family, friends and loved ones. These concerns include paying taxes, accessing cash for essential needs, making digital payments, sending money to loved ones, and managing investments, as well as daily mandatory expenses such as rent or grocery shopping. It should be considered that the smartest thing to do for businesses in an environment where competitors are stagnating or withdrawing is activities to increase advertising and marketing activities. Investing during periods when many investors postpone their investments can be evaluated to seize opportunities. In such periods, many of the businesses tend to withdraw from the field and gain superiority against their competitors and become stronger. When the stagnation period is over, the party that is more prepared compared to its competitors can become the preferred brands by meeting the demands and differentiating in the market. Some businesses have difficulty in responding to the demands. Among these causes are the effects of the limitations, employee sickness, and a decline in the workforce. Businesses that continue to advertise to safeguard their workers throughout this moment, on the other hand, will grow their market share in the coming period (Mawdsley, 2020) It may be an ideal moment to plan and invest, as well as develop consumer analysis tactics for beyond 2021 (Kaushik, 2020). During the pandemic era, the following consumer tactics of firms can be utilized;

- Supports that will contribute to consumers and citizens during the crisis,
- To act customer-oriented and to produce solutions for consumer communication,

- Addressing customer concerns and being with the consumer (Tolay, 2020).

In such unstable circumstances, businesses require a blueprint to handle the crisis and implement it. Throughout the pandemic, it has been seen that many firms swiftly adapt to the digital environment and develop new solutions. Digitalization may be a beginning point for organizations during times of fluctuating demand and can be beneficial in creating client demand.

- Real-time understanding of client behavior,
- Being quick and adaptable,
- Thinking about it from both a digital and a physical standpoint,
- Imagining a new business model,
- Keeping in contact with customers and communities (Scott, 2020).

Corporations must be responsive by assessing their current condition. Businesses that understand the customer and appropriately handle the purchase process of the consumer can be successful in the branding process. Businesses should continue to keep up with the process when good or bad conditions in the process evolve, take appropriate steps, transform, and adapt. Businesses should adopt a proactive approach to analyzing changes in such unforeseen events, learning from the process, and adapting their customer behavior appropriately (Davies and Davies, 2020).

RESULTS AND SUGGESTIONS

In times of uncertainty, businesses should have the expertise and tools to make and implement rapid choices. They should think about what actions they can take in the face of change and unexpected circumstances.

By monitoring shifting consumer habits, businesses may improve their customer-oriented thinking abilities in product creation and service delivery.

Businesses should develop answers to the challenge of product scarcity in relation to consumer demand and exercise caution in communicating.

Businesses must constantly monitor customer needs and interact with them. An authoritarian and forceful attitude might drive customers away from a company.

Businesses who wish to maintain consumer trust amid extreme circumstances should be able to tell customers that they can reach their items.

Businesses should assist customers in making purchase decisions by providing comparable recommendations. As marketing reasons, they should exploit various

characteristics of their own products. This will make firms more competitive and raise their preference coefficients.

Businesses should deliver their thoughts to customers in as few words and as clearly as possible. The message in their advertising should be clear and concise, with no superfluous words or sentences.

Consider yourself a responsible individual with the ability to assist millions of others. Then behave in accordance with the shared interests of business and society.

Businesses must understand how their advertisements are received. A single incorrect statement may have a long-term negative impact on brand image.

The significance of accurately forecasting market performance has been demonstrated time and again. We also propose retesting creatives used previous to COVID-19 to verify they are still successful and relevant while avoiding misleading findings.

Businesses should make their customers feel sympathetic and helpful during difficult times. They should be able to sympathize with their consumers.

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