

The Impact of Safety Concerns and Convenience on Consumer Consumption Channels under the Epidemic

Zhou Zhou*

Adam Smith Business School, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, G12 8QQ, Scotland, UK

* Corresponding Author Email: 2664213Z@student.gla.ac.uk

Abstract. The outbreak of COVID-19 has seriously affected people's lives and health, as well as economic development in the global market. To control the health hazards and spread of diseases leads to the restriction of movement and lockdown of commercial areas. Such restrictions however are important, but they tend to change the trends in consumer consumption and buying behaviors with retailers, wholesalers and other markets. The research is about identifying the impact of safety concerns and convenience on consumption of consumer channels in an emergency or pandemic situation. The analyses show that changes in consumption channels during a pandemic are extremely relevant to people's needs for safety and convenience. Consumers prioritise products that comply with safety, and increasingly, when shopping online, convenience becomes the primary selection criterion for customers as they try to simplify the process of consumption. The literature highlights the importance and influence of these factors arising in pandemic situations, as well as scenario analyses of consumption channels in an epidemic.

Key Words: COVID-19, Pandemic Safety, Concerns, Consumption, Channels Convenience.

1. Introduction

Epidemics have caused significant losses to the world economy and to international trade, and these problems still exist today. Many factors have contributed to the uncertainty that firms and customers confront, such as decreased income, travel limitations, changes in consumer demand, and modifications in market behaviour [1]. B2B producers and sellers have been forced to make quick adjustments due to the consequences, which include decreased revenue, fewer shipping options, and pandemic-related precautions that result in fewer supplier activity. This includes finding new suppliers both locally and abroad, reducing the cost of production and marketing, and hastening the decision-making process. National businesses have taken advantage of chances to broaden their product offerings in an effort to replace imports and provide vital resources to other businesses and overseas branches [2]. Concerning business-to-consumer transactions, markets have encountered difficulties with cross-border mobility and a reduction in purchasing power. Prioritizing health and safety, consumers have demonstrated a preference for reasonably priced goods and services [3]. Additionally, there has been a discernible movement in favor of goods that improve living areas' comfort and convenience. Some of the demands made by customers have been delayed due to the general uncertainty. The critical need to expedite digitalization has been acknowledged by both the consumer and industrial markets. The focus lies in enhancing the ease of searching and buying products through internet channels. This reaction is a reflection of how the situation's unpredictable nature has forced changes in the dynamics. For that purpose the study has the following research question:

How do safety concerns during lockdowns and the emphasis on convenience impact consumer consumption channels in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic?

The research question is essential for addressing the multifaceted challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. It spans economic, business strategy, supply chain management, consumer preference, digitalization, public health, and social aspects, making it highly relevant and valuable for a comprehensive understanding of the current global landscape.

2. The Impact of Safety Concerns on Consumer Consumption Channels

The surge in safety concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic has exerted a profound influence on consumer consumption channels, reshaping the way individuals engage with the market. This impact can be elucidated through several dimensions.

The move to online platforms has been the main effect of safety concerns on consumer consumption. The move to internet consumption channels has been expedited by lockdowns and the fear of contamination. Reluctant to visit physical establishments, consumers are now relying on e-commerce platforms to meet their needs. This shift is consistent with research findings from the literature, including a study by Rejeb et al in 2020 [4], which showed that worries about safety during the pandemic contributed to a significant rise in internet shopping. The factors influencing the intention to purchase a coffee shop during the pandemic were examined by Shim et al. in 2021 [5]. The findings demonstrated that health, convenience of use, and hygiene all had a substantial impact on purchasing intention. Caso et al. discovered that following the COVID-19 epidemic in 2022, people's dietary habits were altered by structural limitations including lockdown procedures and social-psychological variables, and food intake patterns improved in this scenario [6]. The increased awareness of safety concerns and the restrictions on movement have led to a boom in consumer demand for contactless services. Regarding payment methods, customers choose contactless delivery in order to reduce interaction with unreliable third-party services and lower the chance of infection, in accordance with safety concerns [7]. With this technique, users can maintain their everyday routines while successfully reducing internal anxiety. In response, companies have introduced cutting-edge solutions like online payments, contactless deliveries, and virtual consultations. As a result, the research demonstrated a significant influence on establishing a seamless and secure customer experience.

The respiratory system is the primary target of the disease, and while the majority of symptoms are mild, there are certain population subgroups that are more susceptible to severe illness and death, including the elderly, obese people, and people with underlying medical conditions like type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and hypertension [8]. Governments all throughout the world have put policies in place to slow and manage the disease's rapid spread in accordance with WHO recommendations. The implementation of procedures to promote behaviors like hand washing, keeping social distance, and donning face masks is the major goal of these interventions. A balanced diet and frequent exercise are key components of a healthy lifestyle, which has been highlighted in health promotion programs which lead to change the consumer buying and eating habits. According to Willems et al. research in 2021, lockdowns that restrict foot traffic have presented physical establishments with hitherto unheard-of difficulties [9]. Traditional retailers must now re-evaluate the way they do business and look for ways to combine online and offline experiences. Understanding the importance of maintaining an omni-channel presence has become crucial for companies trying to reduce the impact of human interaction.

In addition, businesses, recognizing the shift in consumer behavior, have adapted their models to cater to safety concerns. This entails establishing contactless delivery choices, implementing thorough hygiene protocols, and developing virtual purchasing environments. The results of a study by Acciarini et al. in 2021 highlight how important it is for companies to be flexible in order to satisfy changing customer expectations, particularly during health emergencies [10].

Moreover, safety concerns influence the consumer consumption with Product Preferences aligned with Safety. At the moment, consumers give priority to goods that meet safety and hygiene regulations. As a result, there is now a greater market for hygiene-related goods like sanitizers, disinfectants, and health-conscious merchandise. The importance of product qualities that address safety concerns in influencing consumer decisions is shown by the Ma et al. in 2023 study [11]. Every element of daily life was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which in turn had an impact on food consumption, eating habits, food purchases, and perceptions of food safety [12]. Food disruptions to the supply chain, limitations on groceries import and export, market limitations, price inflation, and restricted access to supermarkets have all been shown to have an impact on attitudes and behaviors

surrounding the purchase and consumption of commodities [13]. All of these changes had an impact on food-related behaviors such as eating and buying, and because people were more worried about getting COVID-19, food safety precautions were given more consideration.

Furthermore, security concerns also have an impact on the operations of traditional retail channels., especially those that depend on in-person encounters. The decline in foot traffic to physical stores has forced businesses to become more creative in order to stay in business. The difficulties faced by traditional retail are highlighted by Bonfanti in 2021, who highlights the necessity of reevaluating tactics to satisfy the changing demands of customers who are concerned about safety [14]. In addition, a rise in home baking and cooking activities was brought on by the closure of cafes and restaurants. Notably, a major US survey on grocery shopping found that 20% of Americans experiment with new recipes and foods, 41% cook more, and 27% of Americans now plan their meals. When combined, these modifications might have a favourable effect on eating habits and promote better eating habits [12]. According to Ben Hassen et al.'s research in 2020, people in Qatar are cooking more meals at home and taking pleasure in trying out new recipes, which is causing a shift in dietary habits towards healthier options [15]. According to Gao et al. in 2020, customers are concerned about the possibility of food handlers and couriers carrying the virus [16]. According to Xu et al. in 2021, customers' migration to online purchasing is impeded by their impression that online shopping carries higher infection risks compared to physical shopping [17]. Online food orders surged during the pandemic, raising concerns about food packaging hygiene, delivery quality, and environmental safety. Health and safety precautions have to be prioritized more during lockdowns due to the increased worries about public safety. Companies needed to establish a trusting environment for customers by communicating and putting clear safety procedures in place. This transition to safer operations becomes a differentiator for decisions made by customers.

Therefore it has been evident that, safety concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic have intricately woven themselves into the fabric of consumer behavior, prompting a reconfiguration of consumption channels. The impact includes problems for traditional retail, a move towards online platforms, a preference for contactless transactions, adjustments to business structures, and changes in product preferences. A comprehensive understanding of these transformative dynamics is achieved by incorporating insights from pertinent literature, which also offers useful advice for firms and policymakers navigating the intricacies of the post-pandemic consumer world.

3. The Impact of Convenience on Consumption Channels

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the convenience-driven shifts in consumer behaviour and purchasing channels are especially relevant. As a trigger, the pandemic has intensified and accelerated current patterns while also calling for new adaptations. The following explains how the aforementioned factors connect to the pandemic situation.

The pandemic brought about heightened restrictions within cities and commercial spaces, creating a notable shift in consumer behavior towards contactless transactions and digital payments. Customers aggressively sought out convenient and safe payment alternatives due to their increased awareness of the possible risks connected with physical contact [18]. This resulted in the widespread adoption of digital wallets and other contactless payment solutions. Customers were more reliant on the ease of e-commerce and online buying when physical access to traditional brick-and-mortar establishments was restricted by lockdowns and other measures. This development was prompted by the need to adjust to the effects of the pandemic as well as the need for a more convenient and safe manner for people to browse and buy both necessary and non-essential things from the comfort of their homes. Convenience and time-efficiency play a major role in the decision to buy products online, according to Assadi Moghaddam and Fedak in 2022 [19]. Customers discover that their lives are made easier when they have the option to compare multiple products at their convenience. The ease with which one can now turn on a laptop and surf the web has become a deciding factor, highlighting the significance of user-friendly online platforms. In addition, the pandemic-related worries have

prompted a faster digitization of consumer consumption channels. Companies have poured a lot of money into technology, realizing that customers' tastes are changing and using it to improve online experiences and streamline supply chains. As part of this transition, personalized and contactless services will be offered, in line with the shifting demands of customers. Technology adoption not only solves safety concerns but also puts companies in a position to prosper in a world where online interactions and transactions are becoming a bigger part of the total customer experience. Therefore, the epidemic has not only sped up the acceptance of digital payments and contactless transactions, but it has also fundamentally changed consumer behaviour to favor e-commerce's convenience. The significance of digitalization in improving customer experiences, streamlining processes, and satisfying the desire for customized, contactless services emphasizes this change even more.

The pandemic significantly enhanced the convenience of mobile commerce by enabling remote access to a range of demands. Due to a significant rise in remote work and increased time spent indoors, mobile devices have become indispensable for managing several areas of everyday life from a distance, as well as for accessing services. Because of the government's home isolation laws, consumers faced difficulties while making purchases through offline channels. As a result, the frequency of online purchases has increased [20, 21]. Notably, consumers are increasingly using the internet to place orders for daily necessities. Concurrently, social media's quick development has made buying much more convenient for users. As a result, customers may quickly choose their desired products when they shop on social media platforms like WeChat [22]. Consumer presence at offline venues declines in proportion to the growth of customers on social media platforms. The amount of offline purchase has decreased, but customers are now pickier about where they do their offline shopping. When making offline purchases, customers give safety, convenience, and the standing of retailers top priority in an attempt to reduce the danger of infection [23]. As a result, there has been a notable change in the inclinations and actions of customers with regard to the locations where they make purchases.

Additionally, doorstep collection and same-day delivery services have become more popular as a result of the emphasis on reducing physical contact and exposure to congested areas. Customers enjoyed the convenience of quick, contactless product access without having to be concerned about the possible hazards of traditional in-store buying. Technological advancements encourage consumers to view time as valuable while making purchases. Customers' perception of time has sharpened due to the new buying habits they have developed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Shoppers are more efficient because they anticipate the quickest method of obtaining products and services [24]. The proliferation of mobile terminals and the advancement of Internet technology have made it possible for customers to fulfil their desire to purchase whenever and wherever they choose. Customers therefore favor a shopping experience that allows them to buy products whenever they want and requires less time overall.

It's evident that as interactions shifted to the internet, companies concentrated on personalization and customization to improve the digital customer experience. Comprehending personal preferences has become essential for offering customized online services, ranging from curated subscription boxes to personalized product recommendations. Furthermore, as consumers desired smooth transitions between online and offline channels, Omni channel tactics became more popular. Shops changed to provide unified experiences across several touch points, giving customers the ease and flexibility to move between channels according to their preferences and the situation at hand.

4. Situational Analysis

The epidemic has led to a sharp increase in the use of new marketing techniques like community involvement, live streaming, and short documentaries. These strategies have not only been adopted by a large number of e-commerce sites, but they have also drawn certain brand retailers into the live streaming space. Studies show that customers are very enthusiastic and interested in these new

marketing models. Meanwhile, customers are becoming more interested in the unmanned retail concept, as noted by Lee and Lee in 2020 [25].. Smart parcel lockers, contactless distribution, and unmanned convenience stores are just a few examples of the intelligent retail goods and services that have been launched. These two model types have developed quickly in response to the pandemic environment, which forces managers to think carefully about the skills and resources of their organizations as they quickly innovate and roll out these new strategies. In these changing times, it becomes imperative for businesses to retain a crisis management mindset while cautiously introducing new industries and carefully implementing different business strategies.

When pandemics strike and more people shop online, functional convenience rises to the top of customers' priorities as they try to save time and simplify their shopping processes. It is useful since it addresses a number of topics that help customers make the most of their purchasing experience. According to Vytet al. in 2022 [26], this includes possession convenience, which emphasizes the simplicity and speed of obtaining desired objects, and search convenience, which makes it easy and quick for buyers to find and choose products. According to Pernot in 2021, functional convenience essentially gives customers access to a wide variety of products, removing the need for them to visit various establishments for everyday purchasing [27]. Vasile et al. in 2021, who showed in an Italian setting that Click and Collect consumers are willing to pay for a broader selection of products, highlight the importance of having a broad product range [28]. Finding a balance between the large selection offered by digital shopping models and the additional logistical expenses connected with a rich assortment is a major difficulty in online purchasing. In the context of Click and Collect, this problem becomes even more complex because the objective is to guarantee consistency in assortments across channels while allowing customers to easily move between various touch points. In addition to effective checkouts, store layout, ease of finding desired products, promotions requiring little effort, and facilities like the time range or lead time, which represents the interval between order placement and order delivery, the breadth and depth of the assortment emerge as critical components of this convenience [26]..

5. Conclusion

After the detailed discussion, it has been concluded that impact made during the epidemic are closely related to the requirements of efficiency, safety, and convenience. During an unprecedented period of disruption, businesses who embraced and prioritized these movements towards ease found themselves in a better position to meet the changing needs of their customers. Insights from these adjustments should have a long-lasting effect on post-pandemic consumer expectations and spending habits. In contemporary business environment, internet services are a getting exposure in the retail industry. Although these services were once a retailer and wholesalers lifesaver in situations where in-store buying was impractical, their general availability marks a major advancement in terms of convenience. They combine the convenience and speed of online shopping with quick pick-up choices for customers in the area. It is expected that this trend will continue even as in-store shopping begins to make a resurgence. Now that new expectations of convenience and safety have been established, merchants must maintain agility, flexibility, and a consumer-centric attitude since they will be crucial considerations in navigating the retail landscape.

References

- [1] Leach, M., MacGregor, H., Scoones, I., & Wilkinson, A. (2021). Post-pandemic transformations: How and why COVID-19 requires us to rethink development. *World development*, 138, 105233.
- [2] Gu, S., Ślusarczyk, B., Hajizada, S., Kovalyova, I., & Sakhibieva, A. (2021). Impact of the covid-19 pandemic on online consumer purchasing behavior. *Journal of Theoretical and Applied Electronic Commerce Research*, 16(6), 2263-2281.

- [3] Guthrie, C., Fosso-Wamba, S., & Arnaud, J. B. (2021). Online consumer resilience during a pandemic: An exploratory study of e-commerce behavior before, during and after a COVID-19 lockdown. *Journal of retailing and consumer services*, 61, 102570.
- [4] Rejeb, A., Rejeb, K., & Keogh, J. G. (2020). COVID-19 and the food chain? Impacts and future research trends. *LogForum*, 16(4).
- [5] Shim, J., Moon, J., Song, M., & Lee, W. S. (2021). Antecedents of purchase intention at Starbucks in the context of COVID-19 pandemic. *Sustainability*, 13(4), 1758.
- [6] Caso, D., Guidetti, M., Capasso, M., & Cavazza, N. (2022). Finally, the chance to eat healthily: Longitudinal study about food consumption during and after the first COVID-19 lockdown in Italy. *Food Quality and Preference*, 95, 104275.
- [7] Larios-Gómez, E., Fischer, L., Peñalosa, M., & Ortega-Vivanco, M. (2021). Purchase behavior in COVID-19: A cross study in Mexico, Colombia, and Ecuador. *Heliyon*, 7(3).
- [8] Chen, N., Zhou, M., Dong, X., Qu, J., Gong, F., Han, Y., ... & Zhang, L. (2020). Epidemiological and clinical characteristics of 99 cases of 2019 novel coronavirus pneumonia in Wuhan, China: a descriptive study. *The lancet*, 395(10223), 507-513.
- [9] Willems, K., Verhulst, N., & Brengman, M. (2021). How COVID-19 could accelerate the adoption of new retail technologies and enhance the (E-) servicescape. *The Future of Service Post-COVID-19 Pandemic, Volume 2: Transformation of Services Marketing*, 103-134.
- [10] Acciarini, C., Boccardelli, P., & Vitale, M. (2021). Resilient companies in the time of Covid-19 pandemic: a case study approach. *Journal of Entrepreneurship and Public Policy*, 10(3), 336-351.
- [11] Ma, F., DiPietro, R. B., Li, J., & Harris, K. J. (2023). Memorable dining experiences amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 35(3), 871-892.
- [12] AlTarrah, D., AlShami, E., AlHamad, N., AlBesher, F., & Devarajan, S. (2021). The impact of coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic on food purchasing, eating behavior, and perception of food safety in Kuwait. *Sustainability*, 13(16), 8987.
- [13] Béné, C. (2020). Resilience of local food systems and links to food security—A review of some important concepts in the context of COVID-19 and other shocks. *Food security*, 12(4), 805-822.
- [14] Bonfanti, A., Vigolo, V., & Yfantidou, G. (2021). The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on customer experience design: The hotel managers' perspective. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 94, 102871.
- [15] Ben Hassen, T., El Bilali, H., & Allahyari, M. S. (2020). Impact of COVID-19 on food behavior and consumption in Qatar. *Sustainability*, 12(17), 6973.
- [16] Gao, X., Shi, X., Guo, H., & Liu, Y. (2020). To buy or not buy food online: The impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on the adoption of e-commerce in China. *PloS one*, 15(8), e0237900.
- [17] Xu, J., Gao, M., & Zhang, Y. (2021). The variations in individual consumption change and the substitution effect under the shock of COVID-19: Evidence from payment system data in China. *Growth and Change*, 52(2), 990-1010.
- [18] Kim, C., Tao, W., Shin, N., & Kim, K. S. (2010). An empirical study of customers' perceptions of security and trust in e-payment systems. *Electronic commerce research and applications*, 9(1), 84-95.
- [19] Assadi Moghaddam, P., & Fedak, T. (2022). The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on consumer buying behavior towards online shopping in Sweden.
- [20] Zhang, W., Leng, X., & Liu, S. (2020). Research on mobile impulse purchase intention in the perspective of system users during COVID-19. *Personal and Ubiquitous Computing*, 1-9.
- [21] Lu, M., Wang, R., & Li, P. (2021). Comparative analysis of online fresh food shopping behavior during normal and COVID-19 crisis periods. *British Food Journal*, 124(3), 968-986.
- [22] Tao, H., Sun, X., Liu, X., Tian, J., & Zhang, D. (2022). The impact of consumer purchase behavior changes on the business model design of consumer services companies over the course of COVID-19. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 818845.
- [23] Butu, A., Brumă, I. S., Tanasă, L., Rodino, S., Dinu Vasiliu, C., Doboş, S., & Butu, M. (2020). The impact of COVID-19 crisis upon the consumer buying behavior of fresh vegetables directly from local producers.

- Case study: The quarantined area of Suceava County, Romania. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 17(15), 5485.
- [24] Seo, K., Go, S., & Kim, B. (2020). Pricing strategies under markets with time gap between purchase and consumption. *Journal of Business Research*, 120, 312-320.
- [25] Lee, S. M., & Lee, D. (2020). "Untact": a new customer service strategy in the digital age. *Service Business*, 14(1), 1-22.
- [26] Vyt, D., Jara, M., Mevel, O., Morvan, T., & Morvan, N. (2022). The impact of convenience in a click and collect retail setting: A consumer-based approach. *International Journal of Production Economics*, 248, 108491.
- [27] Pernot, D. (2021). Internet shopping for Everyday Consumer Goods: An examination of the purchasing and travel practices of click and pickup outlet customers. *Research in Transportation Economics*, 87, 100817.
- [28] Vasile, V., Panait, M., & Apostu, S. A. (2021). Financial inclusion paradigm shift in the postpandemic period. digital-divide and gender gap. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 18(20), 10938.